

EDWIN WILSON

*The* **THEATER  
EXPERIENCE**



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FOURTEENTH EDITION

# The Theatre Experience

# The Theatre Experience

FOURTEENTH  
EDITION

**EDWIN WILSON**

Professor Emeritus

Graduate School and University  
Center

The City University of New York





## THE THEATRE EXPERIENCE, FOURTEENTH EDITION

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## About the Author

Teacher, author, and critic, Edwin Wilson has worked in many aspects of theatre. Educated at Vanderbilt University, the University of Edinburgh, and Yale University, he received an MFA from the Yale School of Drama, as well as the first Doctor of Fine Arts degree awarded by Yale. He has taught at Yale, Hofstra, Vanderbilt, Hunter College, and the CUNY Graduate Center. At Hunter, he served as chair of the Department of Theatre and Film and head of the graduate theatre program. At CUNY, he was executive director of the Center for the Advanced Study of Theatre Arts, later known as the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center. Edwin Wilson served as theatre critic for *The Wall Street Journal* for twenty-three years. In addition to *The Theatre Experience*, he is coauthor with Alvin Goldfarb of *Living Theatre: A History*, published in its first six editions by McGraw-Hill and in its seventh edition by W. W. Norton. He is also coauthor of *Theatre: The Lively Art* and the *Anthology of Living Theater*, both also published by McGraw-Hill. In addition he edited the volume *Shaw on Shakespeare*.

Wilson was president of the New York Drama Critics Circle and served for several terms on the Tony Nominating Committee and the Pulitzer Prize Drama Jury. He is on the board of the John Golden Fund and for thirty years was on the board of the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. He served for many years on the board of the Theatre Development Fund, of which he was also president. Before turning to teaching and writing, Edwin Wilson was assistant to the producer for the film *Lord of the Flies*, directed by Peter Brook, and the Broadway play *Big Fish, Little Fish*, directed by John Gielgud. He produced several off-Broadway shows and coproduced a Broadway play directed by George Abbott. He also directed in summer and regional theatre, serving one season as

resident director of the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia, and was executive producer of the film *The Nashville Sound*. As a playwright, Wilson has had successful stage readings or productions of a farce, a history play, a musical revue, and a musical version of Dickens's *Great Expectations*, for which he wrote book and lyrics. He also authored a murder mystery, *The Patron Murders*.

To the memory of my wife, Catherine.



# Contents in Brief

## **Part 1 The Audience**

---

- 1 The Audience: Its Role and Imagination
- 2 Background and Expectations of the Audience
- 3 Theatre Spaces

## **Part 2 The Performers and the Director**

---

- 4 Acting for the Stage
- 5 The Director and the Producer

## **Part 3 The Playwright and the Play**

---

- 6 Creating the World of the Play
- 7 Dramatic Structure and Dramatic Characters
- 8 Theatrical Genres

## **Part 4 The Designers**

---

- 9 Scenery
- 10 Stage Costumes
- 11 Lighting and Sound

## **Part 5 The Theatre Today**

---

- 12 Theatre Today: Traditional, Musical, Nontraditional, and Political Theatre
- 13 Theatre Today: Diverse and Global

Plays That May Be Read Online

Glossary

Notes

Index



---

# Contents

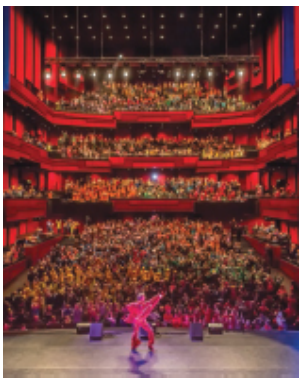
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## PART 1

## The Audience

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### Chapter 1 The Audience: Its Role and Imagination



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The Mediated Arts: Film and Television  
The Contrast between Theatre and Film  
Theatre Is Transitory and Immediate  
Human Beings—The Focus of Theatre  
The Chemistry of the Performer—Audience Contact  
Theatre as a Group Experience  
*Psychology of Groups*  
*How Audience Composition Affects the Theatre Experience*  
The Separate Roles of Performers and Spectators  
*How Should the Audience Be Involved?*  
*Audience Participation through Direct Action*  
The Imagination of the Audience  
*Tools of the Imagination: Symbol and Metaphor*

*The “Reality” of the Imagination*  
The Imaginary Worlds of Theatre  
*Realistic Elements of Theatre*  
*Nonrealistic Elements of Theatre*  
*Combining the Realistic and the Nonrealistic*  
*Distinguishing Stage Reality from Fact*  
Summary

---

## Chapter 2 Background and Expectations of the Audience



(©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux)

Background of Individual Spectators  
Background Information on the Play or Playwright  
Background of the Period  
*Theatre and Society*  
*Modern Theatre and Culture*  
Expectations: The Variety of Experiences in Modern  
Theatre  
*Broadway and Touring Theatre*

x

---

*Resident Professional Theatre*  
*Alternative Theatre: Off-Broadway and Elsewhere*  
*Young People’s and Children’s Theatre*  
*College and University Theatre*  
*Community and Amateur Theatre*  
The Critic, the Reviewer, and the Blogger  
*The Critic/Reviewer*  
*Fact and Opinion in Criticism*  
*Critical Criteria*  
The Dramaturg or Literary Manager  
The Audience’s Relation to Criticism  
*The Audience’s Independent Judgment*  
Summary

---

## Chapter 3 Theatre Spaces



(©T Charles Erickson)

### Creating the Environment

#### Theatre Spaces

*Proscenium or Picture-Frame Stage: History and Characteristics*

*Arena Stage: History and Characteristics*

*Thrust Stage: History and Characteristics*

*Created and Found Spaces*

*All-Purpose Theatre Spaces: The Black Box*

Special Requirements of Theatre Environments

*Evaluating the Theatre Space*

Summary

---

## PART 2

## The Performers and the Director

---

### Chapter 4 Acting for the Stage



(©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux)

#### Acting in Everyday Life

*Social Roles*

*Personal Roles*

Acting in Life versus Acting Onstage

Three Challenges of Acting  
*Making Characters Believable*  
*Physical Acting: Voice and Body*  
*Synthesis and Integration*  
Evaluating Performances  
Summary

xi

---

## Chapter 5 The Director and the Producer



(©Boston Globe/Getty Images)

The Theatre Director  
The Traditional Director  
*The Director and the Script*  
*The Director's Collaborator: The Dramaturg*  
The Auteur Director and the Postmodern Director  
*The Auteur Director*  
*The Postmodern Director*  
The Director and the Production: The Physical  
Production  
The Director's Work with the Performers  
*Casting*  
*Rehearsals*  
*The Director as the Audience's Eye*  
*Movement, Pace, and Rhythm*  
*Technical Rehearsal*  
*Dress Rehearsal*  
*Previews*  
*The Director's Collaborator: The Stage Manager*  
The Director's Power and Responsibility  
The Producer or Managing Director  
*The Commercial Producer*  
*Noncommercial Theatres*

*The Producer's and Director's Collaborator: The  
Production Manager*  
Completing the Picture: Playwright, Director, and  
Producer  
*Evaluating Directing*  
Summary

---

**PART 3**

**The Playwright and the Play**

---

**Chapter 6 Creating the World of the Play**



(©Joan Marcus)

The Subject and Verb of Drama: People and Action  
Structural Conventions: The Rules of the Game  
*Limited Space*  
*Limited Time*  
*Strongly Opposed Forces*  
*A Balance of Forces*  
*Incentive and Motivation*  
Creating Structure  
*Plot versus Story*  
*The Opening Scene*  
*Obstacles and Complications*  
*Crisis and Climax*  
Point of View

xii

---

*The Dramatist's Point of View*

*Society's Point of View*  
Summary

---

**Chapter 7** **Dramatic Structure and Dramatic Characters**



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**Dramatic Structure**

*Characteristics of Climactic Structure*

*Characteristics of Episodic Structure*

*Combinations of Climactic and Episodic Form*

*Rituals as Dramatic Structure*

*Patterns as Dramatic Structure*

*Serial Structure*

*Structure in Experimental and Avant-Garde Theatre*

*Structure in Musical Theatre*

**Dramatic Characters**

*Extraordinary Characters*

*Representative or Quintessential Characters*

*Stock Characters*

*Minor Characters*

*A Narrator or Chorus*

*Nonhuman Characters*

*The Audience and Character Types*

*Juxtaposition of Characters*

*Orchestration of Characters*

Summary

---

**Chapter 8** **Theatrical Genres**





(©T Charles Erickson)

## Types of Drama

### Tragedy

*Traditional Tragedy*

*Modern Tragedy*

### Heroic Drama

### Bourgeois or Domestic Drama

### Melodrama

### Comedy

*Characteristics of Comedy*

*Techniques of Comedy*

*Forms of Comedy*

### Tragicomedy

*What Is Tragicomedy?*

*Modern Tragicomedy*

### Theatre of the Absurd

*Absurdist Plots: Illogicality*

*Absurdist Language: Nonsense and Non Sequitur*

*Absurdist Characters: Existential Beings*

### Summary

xiii

---

## PART 4

# The Designers

---

## Chapter 9 Scenery



(©Geraint Lewis)

The Audience's View  
The Scene Designer  
A Brief History of Stage Design  
Scenic Design Today  
*The Scene Designer's Objectives*  
*Elements of Scene Design*  
*The Process of Scene Design*  
The Scene Designer's Collaborators and the  
Production Process  
*Designing a Total Environment*  
Evaluating Scene Design  
Summary

---

## Chapter 10 Stage Costumes



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Costumes for the Stage  
*Objectives of Costume Design*  
*The Process of Costume Design*  
*The Costume Designer at Work*

*The Costume Designer's Resources*  
*The Costume Designer's Collaborators*  
Related Elements of Costume Design  
*Makeup*  
*Hairstyles and Wigs*  
*Masks*  
*Millinery, Accessories, and Crafts*  
Coordination of the Whole  
Evaluating Costume Design  
Summary

---

## Chapter 11 **Lighting and Sound**



(©blanaru/iStock/Getty Images)

Stage Lighting  
*A Brief History of Stage Lighting*  
*Objectives and Functions of Lighting Design*  
*The Lighting Designer*  
Sound in the Theatre  
*Amplification*  
*The Sound Designer*  
*Understanding Sound Reproduction and Sound*  
*Reinforcement*  
*Sound Technology*

xiv

---

Special Effects in Lighting and Sound  
Evaluating Lighting and Sound Design  
Summary

---

## **PART 5**

# The Theatre Today

---

## Chapter 12 Theatre Today: Traditional, Musical, Nontraditional, and Political Theatre



(©Carol Rosegg)

Traditional Theatre  
The American Musical  
Nontraditional (Experimental or Alternative) Theatre  
*Happenings*  
*Multimedia Theatre*  
*Environmental Theatre*  
*Postmodernism*  
*Performance Art*  
Political Theatre  
Summary

---

## Chapter 13 Theatre Today: Diverse and Global



(©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux)

Feminist Theatre and Women Playwrights

Lgbtq Theatre

Diverse Multicultural Theatre

*African American Theatre*

*Asian American Theatre*

*Latino/a Theatre*

*Native American Theatre*

Global Theatre

*Theatres in India, China, and Japan in the Modern Period*

*Theatres in the Middle East*

*African Theatres and Drama*

*Russia and Eastern Europe*

*Western Europe, Britain, and Ireland*

*Latin American Theatres*

*Australia and Canada Since World War II*

Summary

Plays That May Be Read Online

Glossary

Notes

Index

## Preface

### ACTIVE AUDIENCE PARTICIPANTS, ACTIVE CLASS PARTICIPANTS

*The Theatre Experience* prepares students to be well-informed, well-prepared theatre audience members. With an audience-centered narrative that engages today's students, a vivid photo program that brings concepts to life, and features that teach and encourage a variety of skill sets, students master core concepts and learn to think critically about theatre and the world around them. As a result, students are better prepared for class, and better prepared for theatregoing.

#### Engage with Your Role

- True to its original vision—to focus on the audience's experience of attending a live theatre performance—the 14th edition of *The Theatre Experience* **opens with three chapters that focus on the student as an audience member**. Topics include the difference between being at a live performance and watching a dramatic performance on film, TV, or an electronic device; the enhancement of the experience aided by the proper preparation and background; and the awareness of the role of the audience in live theatre.



(©VisitBritain/Eric Nathan/Getty Images)

xvi

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- **Play Links** allow you to read many of the plays mentioned in the text online. Any play referenced in the text that can be found online is highlighted in **blue typeface** when first mentioned in a chapter. Should you want to read one of these plays, you can refer to the list that precedes the Glossary at the end of the book and find its URL. Titles are listed alphabetically.

The plays can be used to highlight key concepts and to complement the discussions found in *The Theatre Experience*, 14th edition. In addition, many of the new “Thinking about Theatre” and “Experiencing Theatre” exercises can also be supplemented and enhanced with examples from these plays.

## Master the Basics

**Parts Two, Three, and Four** cover the important elements of **theatre**: acting, directing, playwriting, and design. The authors’ efficient structure and succinct style set up students for a clear understanding of the basic concepts, freeing up valuable class time for deeper discussions and more personal engagement with course concepts.

**Photo Essays and a dynamic art program** allow students to visualize the core theatrical concepts introduced in each chapter. Topics include modern domestic drama ([Chapter 8](#)), forms of comedy ([Chapter 8](#)), costumes and masks ([Chapter 10](#)), uses of stage lighting ([Chapter 11](#)), and others.

### Think Critically and Engage Actively

Based on feedback from instructors and students, the 14th edition of *The Theatre Experience* offers both time-tested and newly revised text features that help students deepen their understanding and appreciation of the theatrical experience.

- **“Playing Your Part”** is a feature in each chapter that includes two distinct sets of questions and activities that emphasize thinking and engaging critically.
- **“Experiencing Theatre”** activities help students actively engage with the concepts of the text. These exercises ask students to undertake activities within the classroom or to understand how aspects of their everyday lives connect to core concepts discussed in the text.



## PLAYING YOUR PART: EXPERIENCING THEATRE

1. If you were to write a play about your life, what would you choose as your opening scene? What would some of your complications be? Would there be a climactic moment?
2. If you were to write a play about a family you know (your own or another), what point of view would you take? Why? Are there strongly opposed forces or balanced forces in this family?
3. If you were told you were going to have to attend a play that lasted over four hours, what would your reaction be? Why? What are your traditional expectations about the space and time of a play?
4. After watching a popular film, describe how the opening scene aids in setting the action. Describe one or two of the



complications in the film. Can you discuss the film's point of view?

xvii

- **“Thinking about Theatre”** questions challenge students to analyze and examine elements of a theatre experience.



## PLAYING YOUR PART: EXPERIENCING THEATRE

1. Think of a play you have read or seen where the main character encounters one impediment or roadblock after another. Describe the various obstacles that must be overcome before the end of the play.
2. Think of a play or musical you have seen or read where two major characters are in conflict with one another. Describe the two characters and explain the source of their conflict. How does it play out?
3. Think of a situation some people saw as very serious, but another person viewed as humorous. Explain what you believe led different people to see it so differently. What was your own feeling—was the incident funny or sad?

- **“In Focus”** boxes, also appearing in every chapter, help students understand and compare different aspects of theatre. They address historical perspectives on theatre, contemporary applications of technology, issues of theatrical structure, and global and other current issues in theatre, such as color-blind and nontraditional casting. Theatre artists such as Peter Brook and Josef Svoboda are also featured.

## WHAT'S NEW IN THE 14TH EDITION OF *THE THEATRE EXPERIENCE*

The 14th edition of *The Theatre Experience* has been updated, taking note of new talent that has appeared on the scene as well as new approaches to writing, directing, acting, and design presented in previous editions. New plays, new productions, new approaches, and new subject matter have all been recognized and explained. At the same time, well-established forerunners in the theatre universe, whether Greek, Roman, Elizabethan, or later, have been looked at anew.

The most significant changes in the 14th edition appear in [Part Five](#), “The Theatre Today.” This has been condensed to two chapters from three, and detailed information on history has been edited and reduced. This movement away from extensive theatre history in [Part Five](#) has allowed more space for what is suggested in the title of this section—the theatre today—therefore making this edition of *The Theatre Experience* more relevant to today’s instructors and learners alike.

All elements of today’s theatre are covered more thoroughly and clearly. Subjects such as women’s theatre, LGBTQ theatre, global theatre, and theatre of diversity are dealt with in more detail and depth than in previous editions.

xviii

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### Selected Chapter-by-Chapter Changes

In addition to the major changes outlined earlier, we have included significant new material throughout the text, including the following:

#### **Chapter 1: The Audience: Its Role and Imagination**

- The opening section of [Chapter 1](#) has been completely revised. In addition, a section titled “The Mediated Arts: Film and Television” has been introduced.

#### **Chapter 3: Theatre Spaces**

- New description of the transformation of the Broadway Imperial Theatre for the musical *Natasha, Pierre & the Great*

*Comet of 1812* as an example of how space is a key element of a production.

- The discussion of stage directions has been moved to this chapter from the chapter on scenery to help students better understand the proscenium theatre.

#### **Chapter 4: Acting for the Stage**

- More extensive discussion of contemporary acting techniques and actor training.
- New “In Focus” box on technology and the actor.

#### **Chapter 5: The Director and the Producer**

- Extensive discussion of the responsibilities of the stage manager and the casting director.
- New “In Focus” box on color-blind and nontraditional casting.

#### **Chapter 7: Dramatic Structure and Dramatic Characters**

- Updated “In Focus” box on writing for theatre, film, and television as well as extensive coverage of dramatic structure in all its forms and variations. Also, detailed analysis of dramatic characters, both human and nonhuman. Included as well are such matters as the orchestration and juxtaposition of characters.

#### **Chapter 8: Theatrical Genres**

- New “In Focus” box on additional forms and the debate over categorization.

#### **Chapter 9: Scenery**

- Enhanced discussion of video and projection design.
- New “In Focus” box on projection design.
- Enhanced discussion of the use of technology to assist the scene designer.

#### **Chapter 10: Stage Costumes**

- New “In Focus” box on technology and costume design.

#### **Chapter 11: Lighting and Sound**

- New “In Focus” box on rock concert and theatre lighting.
- New discussion of assistive listening devices for audience members who are hearing impaired.

## **Chapter 12: Theatre Today: Traditional, Musical, Nontraditional, and Political Theatre**

- A complete, thorough revision of both [Chapters 12](#) and [13](#) (reduced from three chapters in previous editions to two in this edition).

xix

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- This chapter includes revised coverage of traditional theatre in today's theatre as well as musical theatre. In addition, it covers new material on nontraditional and political theatre.

## **Chapter 13: Theatre Today: Diverse and Global**

- Covers a wide range of contemporary theatre, including new material on feminist and women playwrights, continuing with LGBTQ, African American, Latino/a, and Native American theatre, and concluding with global theatre covering theatrical activity in six continents.
- Questions on how to evaluate a production of a historic play as well as how to evaluate a production of a new or contemporary play.

## **CONNECT: ENHANCING THE THEATRE EXPERIENCE**

Connect combines the content of *The Theatre Experience* with award-winning adaptive tools that help students prepare for their time in class with you. The tools in Connect help students understand and retain basic concepts: parts of the theatre, the creative artists and technicians who make it happen, and the tradition and historical background from which theatre springs. When students successfully master concepts using McGraw-Hill's Connect, you can spend more class time discussing theatre and theatrical performances, fostering a greater appreciation for the course and inspiring students to become lifelong audience members. Connect is reliable, easy to use, and can be implemented on its own or paired with your school's learning management system. Contact your McGraw-Hill Higher Education representative to learn more or to speak with an instructor who already uses Connect for his or her theatre courses.

## Homework & Adaptive Learning

- Contextualized assignments
- SmartBook
- Time-saving tools
- Customized to individual needs

## Robust Analytics & Reporting

- Easy-to-read reports
- Individual and class performance data
- Auto grading



## Quality Content & Learning Resources

- eBooks available offline
- Custom course content
- Resource library
- Consolidated resources
- Easy course sharing
- Customized to-do list and calendar
- Lecture capture

## Trusted Services & Support

- Seamless LMS integration
- Training
- In-product help and tutorials
- 1:1 or group help

xx

Connect for *The Theatre Experience* now includes two ways to read: an eBook and SmartBook. The eBook provides a simple, elegant reading experience, available for offline reading on a tablet. SmartBook creates a personalized online reading experience by highlighting the most impactful concepts that a student needs to learn. Students periodically test their knowledge as they read, and SmartBook adapts accordingly, highlighting content based on what the student knows and doesn't know. Real-time reports quickly identify the concepts that require more attention from individual students—or the entire class.



## SmartBook

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### DESIGNED FOR

- Preparing for class
- Practice and study
- Focusing on key topics
- Reports and analytics

### SUPPORTS

- Adaptive, personalized learning
- Assignable contents
- Tablet iOS and Android apps

## eBook

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### DESIGNED FOR

- Reading in class
- Reference
- Offline reading
- Accessibility

### SUPPORTS

- Simple, elegant reading
- Basic annotations
- Smartphone and tablet via iOS and Android apps



**SMARTBOOK™**

## Support for Instructors and Students

*The Theatre Experience* offers a wealth of supplemental materials to aid both students and instructors, including the Instructor's Manual and both computerized and print versions of the Test Bank.

For students, resources keyed directly to this edition include:

- The Theatre Goer's Guide, which is an excellent introduction to the art of attending and critiquing a play. This guide will assist students in everything from making theatre reservations and knowing when to applaud to evaluating a performance and doing web research.

xxi

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- Detailed explanations and examples of major theatrical forms and movements.
  - Synopses of plays.