

# Theatre Appreciation Terms

**Above** - Upstage or away from the audience. A performer crossing above a table keeps it between himself/herself and the front of the stage.

**Abstract Art** - Art which seeks to imitate some aspect of nature with a minimum of recognizable references. Nonrealistic art is often referred to as abstracted because it contains fewer references to observable reality.

**Absurdism** - See Theater of the Absurd.

**Act** - As a verb, to perform in a play. As a noun, a major division in the acting of a play. Most plays from the Elizabethan era until the nineteenth century were divided into five acts by the playwrights or by later editors. In the nineteenth century many writers began to write four-act plays. Today one-, two-, and three-act plays are most common.

**Action** - What happens in a play; the events that make up the plot.

**Acting area** - One of several areas into which the stage space is divided in order to facilitate blocking and the planning of stage movement.

**Actor proof** - Said of a script or role which is practically certain to be effective even if badly acted.

**Actors Equity Association** - (AEA) The professional union for actors, stage managers, dancers, and singers. The union controls contracts on Broadway and in the professional regional theaters. It classifies theaters, sets a minimum wage scale, and prescribes the percentage of actors and stage managers who must be members of AEA for any show within a given professional theater. The union also prescribes conditions for auditions, working conditions, and sets down rules for becoming an "Equity" actor.

**Actor's Studio** - A theatre workshop founded in 1947 in New York by Elia Kazan and Lee Strasberg. It exercised enormous influence as a place where professional actors could study and experiment with the Method acting technique.

**Ad lib** - To improvise lines of a speech, especially in response to an emergency, such as a performer's forgetting his/her lines.

**Aesthetic Distance** - Physical or psychological separation or detachment of the audience from the dramatic action, regarded as necessary to maintain the artistic illusion in most kinds of theater.

**Affective memory** - An aspect of the Method theory of acting. The technique involves the invocation of past experiences in an actor's life in order to help him to recreate genuine emotion on stage.

**Agitprop** - Pertaining to a kind of drama and dramatic technique of social protest with a Marxist outlook -- 1930s. From "agitation" and "propaganda."

**Agon** - In classical Greek Old Comedy, a scene with a debate between the two opposing forces in the play, each representing an antithetical side of a social or political issue.

**Alienation effect** - See verfremdungseffekt.

**Allegory** - The representation of an abstract theme or themes through the symbolic use of character, action, and other concrete elements of a play. In its most direct form -- as, for example, the medieval morality play -- allegory uses the device of personification to present characters representing abstract qualities, such as virtues and vices, in an action which spells out a moral or intellectual lesson. Less direct forms of allegory may use a relatively realistic story as guise for a hidden theme. For example, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* can be regarded as an allegory of the McCarthy congressional investigation in the United States after World War II.

**Alternative Theatre** - A term used to identify any production company which does not produce "mainstream" drama. Many times, it is groups such as these which one would label "avant garde."

**Amateur** - A person who acts without pay; sometimes used in ridicule to mean "note of high caliber"; in full, amateur actor; hence, such combinations as amateur company; amateur performance, amateur theatre, etc.

**Amphitheater** - A large oval, circular, or semicircular outdoor theater with rising tiers of seats around an open playing area; an exceptionally large indoor auditorium. The form developed in ancient times as a venue for gladiatorial contests and similar events, but later for theatrical performances. The Coliseum in Rome, built by 80 AD, could seat 87,000 people.

**Anachronism** - When used in drama, refers to placing a person or event outside the proper time sequence: for example, having characters from the past speak and act as if they were living today.

**Angel** - A person who invests in a prospective production; a backer. Also, to make such an investment. Has come to mean any person who contributes money to theatrical activities.

**Antagonist** - The chief opponent of the protagonist in a drama. In some cases, there may be several antagonists.

**Applied arts** - Art which is valued primarily for its practical uses rather than its aesthetic qualities. Also called useful arts.

**Apron** - The stage space in front of the curtain line or proscenium; also called the forestage.

**Archon** - The Athenian government official appointed to oversee the staging of drama at the classical City Dionysia.

**Arena stage** - A type of stage which is surrounded by the audience on all four sides; also known as theater-in-the-round. The word arena comes from the Latin for the blood-absorbing sand in the Roman amphitheaters.

**Artistic director** - The producer in the not-for-profit professional theater who has responsibility for artistic choices including carrying out the creative mission of the theater, choosing the season of plays, auditioning actors, choosing the directors and designers for each production, and overseeing the artistic quality of the productions.

**Aside** - A theatrical convention in which a character speaks lines directly to the audience ostensibly without the other characters being able to hear or notice.

**At rise** - An expression used to describe what is happening onstage at the moment when the curtain first rises or the lights come up at the beginning of a play.

**Audition** - A format in which actors try out for roles by performing brief prepared monologues and songs, dancing, or reading from the play.

**Avant-garde** - A French term that literally means the "advance guard" in a military formation. It has come to stand for an intellectual, literary, or artistic movement in any age that breaks with tradition and appears to be ahead of its time. Avant-garde works are usually experimental and unorthodox. In twentieth-century theater, such movements as expressionism, surrealism, absurdism, and the theories of Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski have been considered avant-garde.

**Backdrop** - A large drapery or painted canvas which provides the rear or upstage masking of a set.

**Backstage** - The stage area behind the front curtain; also, the areas beyond the setting, including wings and dressing rooms.

**Basic situation** - The specific problem or maladjustment from which a play arises; for example, Romeo and Juliet come from families with a strong mutual rivalry and antipathy.

**Batten** - A pipe or long pole suspended horizontally above the stage, upon which scenery, drapery, or lights may be hung.

**Beam projector** - A lighting instrument without a lens which uses a parabolic reflector to project a narrow, nonadjustable beam of light.

**Beat** - The elapsed time between the inception of an objective/intention, and its completion or deflection. Also referred to as a "unit of action," a beat is the smallest division of a monologue or scene. The term is part of the system of acting developed by the Russian director and teacher, Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938).

**Bedroom farce** - A broad comedy in which much of the action centres about one or more bedrooms. Such farces commonly exploit mistaken identity, lost clothing, and sexual innuendo for comic effect and have proved an important part of the staple diet of the commercial theater in the 20th century.

**Below** - Opposite of above; toward the front of the stage.

**Biomechanics** - An experimental acting system, characterized by expressive physicalization and bold gesticulation, developed by Russian playwright Vsevolod Meyerhold in the 1920s.

**Blackout** - To plunge the stage into total darkness by switching off the lights; also the condition produced by this operation.

**Blocking** - The arrangement of the performers' movements onstage with respect to each other and the stage space.

**Book** - (1) The spoken (as opposed to sung) portion of the text of a musical play; (2) To schedule engagements for artists or productions.

**"Book" musical** - A term used to identify a musical show that has a story, or "book", which traces the fortunes of the main characters through a series of adventures with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

**Border** - A short curtain or piece of painted canvas hung parallel to the front of the stage and in a series from front to back; used to mask the overhead space. Strip lights mounted behind the borders are called border lights.

**Boxes** - In certain theaters, as well as concert halls and opera houses which have the proscenium arrangement, there are horseshoe-shaped tiers of seating which ring the auditorium for several floors above the orchestra floor. In Columbus, The Springer Opera House has three tiers of three boxes on either side of the proscenium opening.

**Box set** - An interior setting using flats to form the back and side walls and often the ceiling of a room.

**Broadway** - The most famous theater district in the world. It encompasses a section of midtown Manhattan in which 32 theaters are located. "Broadway" is also a contractual designation of commercial theaters with a capacity of at least 200 seats. Although the artistic merits of Broadway productions are debated, the symbolic importance of Broadway as a measure of theatrical success remains unquestioned.

**Burlesque** - A ludicrous imitation of a dramatic form or a specific play. Closely related to satire, it usually lacks the moral or intellectual purposes of reform typical of the latter, being content to mock the excesses of other works. Famous examples of burlesque include Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and, more recently, such burlesques of the movies as *Dames at Sea*. In the United States, the term has come to be associated with a form of variety show which stresses sex.

**Business** - Obvious and detailed physical movement of performers to reveal character, aid action, or establish mood (e.g., pouring drinks at a bar, opening a gun case).

**Callbacks** - Follow-up auditions for a play that are held after the initial tryouts. Callbacks usually involve readings from the script.

**Call board** - A noticeboard situated in the backstage area, upon which messages for the cast and stage crew are displayed.

**Caricature** A character portrayed very broadly and in a stereotypical fashion. Ordinarily objectionable in realistic dramas.

**Casting** - Obviously derived from the phrase "casting a mold," the word casting in the theater means fitting performers into roles. Casting takes place at auditions.

**Casting against type** - Purposely choosing for a role in a play an actor who is opposite in characteristics from the role described in the playscript.

**Catharsis** - A Greek word, usually translated as "purgation," which Aristotle used in his definition of tragedy. It refers to the vicarious cleansing of certain emotions in the members of the audience through their representation onstage.

**Catwalk** - A narrow bridge above the stage from which scenery and lighting equipment can be manhandled.

**Center stage** - A stage position in the middle acting area of the stage or the middle section extended upstage and downstage.

**Character** - A person depicted in a play. In structural terms, characters are the agents of the action. The performer playing a character is an actor. Aristotle's second element of drama.

**Characterization** - The playwright's means of differentiating one personage from another by assigning them physical, sociological, psychological, and moral traits.

**Choragus** - A wealthy person who underwrote most of the expenses for the production of an individual playwright's works at an ancient Greek dramatic festival.

**Chorus** - In ancient Greek drama, a group of performers who sang and danced, sometimes participating in the action but usually simply commenting on it. Also, performers in a musical play who sing and dance as a group rather than individually.

**City Dionysia** - The principal Athenian festival (held in honor of the god Dionysus) at which plays were performed.

**Claptrap** - Concluding a speech or scene with such a great vocal or physical display that it would inspire or "trap" the audience into applauding. The technique was popular among lesser actors in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.

**Climax** - See crisis.

**Closet drama** - A play meant for reading rather than for performance.

**Comedy** - As one of the oldest enduring categories of western drama, comedy has gathered under its heading a large number of different subclassifications. Although the range of comedy is broad, generally it can be said to be a play that is light in tone, is concerned with issues tending not to be serious, has a happy ending, and is designed to amuse and provoke laughter. Historically, comedy has gone through many changes. Aristophanic or Greek Old Comedy was farcical, satiric, and nonrealistic. Greek and Roman New Comedy, based on domestic situations, was more influential in the development of comedy during the Renaissance. Ben Jonson built his "comedies of humors" on Roman models. In Jonson's plays, ridicule is directed at characters who are dominated to the point of obsession by a single trait, or humor. The comedy of manners became popular in the late seventeenth century with the advent of Molière and the writers of the English Restoration. It tends to favor a cultivated or sophisticated milieu, witty dialogue, and characters whose concern with social polish is charming or ludicrous, or both. The twentieth century has seen an expansion in the territory covered by comedy as well as a blurring of its boundaries. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, George Bernard Shaw used it for the serious discussion of ideas, while Chekhov wrote plays variously interpreted as sentimental and tragicomic. Since then the horizon of the comic has been expanded by playwrights such as Pirandello and Ionesco, whose comic vision is more serious, thoughtful, and disturbing than that found in most traditional comedies.

**Comedy of character** - In comedy of character, the discrepancy or incongruity lies in the way characters see themselves or pretend to be, as opposed to the way they actually are. Comedy of character is a basic ingredient of Italian *comedia dell'arte* and all forms of comedy where stock characters, stereotypes, and characters with dominant traits are emphasized.

**Comedy of humors** - Developed by Ben Jonson in Elizabethan theater in the early seventeenth century. It is based on Roman comedy and stresses ridicule directed at characters who are dominated by a single trait (or "humor") to the point of obsession. Named after the medieval concept of the body holding four liquids (or humours), the balance of which decided a person's character.

**Comedy of manners** - A form of comic drama that became popular in the latter half of the seventeenth century in France and among English playwrights during the Restoration. It emphasizes a cultivated or sophisticated atmosphere, witty dialogue, and characters whose concern with social polish is charming, ridiculous, or both.

**Comic premise** - In the writing of comedy, the comic premise is an idea or concept which turns the accepted notion of things upside down and makes this notion the basis of a play.

**Comic relief** - Humorous episodes in tragedy that briefly lighten the tension and tragic effect. Scenes of comic relief often deepen rather than alleviate the tragic effect. One such scene of comic relief is the gravedigger's scene in Hamlet, which, despite its jocularity, calls attention to the common end of all humanity -- death and the grave.

**Commedia dell'arte** - A form of comic theater which originated in Italy in the sixteenth century, in which dialogue was improvised around a loose scenario calling for a set of stock characters, each with a distinctive costume and traditional name. The best known of these characters are probably the zannis, buffoons who usually took the roles of servants and who had at their disposal a large number of slapstick routines, called lazzi, which ranged from simple grimaces to acrobatic stunts.

**Complication** - The introduction into a play, at inopportune moments, of a new force which creates a new balance of power and makes a delay in reaching the climax necessary and progressive. It is one way of creating conflict and precipitating a crisis.

**Community theater** - Nonprofessional theater that is produced and staged by and for the benefit of the local community. In America, community theater is the most popular participation art in the country.

**"Concept" musical** - In place of "book" musicals, there have been other approaches, one being the "concept" musical, in which a production is built around an idea rather than a story. Two examples, both by Stephen Sondheim, have been Company, which centers on the life of a New York bachelor, and Follies, about former stars of the Ziegfeld Follies who look back on their lives.

**Confidant(e)** - A minor character in whom the protagonist confides.

**Conflict** - Tension between two or more characters that leads to crisis or a climax. The basic conflict is the fundamental struggle or imbalance underlying the play as a whole. May also be a conflict of ideologies, actions, etc.

**Constructivism** - A post-World War I scene-design movement in which sets were created to provide greater opportunities for physical action. The sets, which were frequently composed of ramps, platforms, and levels, were nonrealistic. The Russian director Meyerhold employed many constructivist settings.

**Continental seating** - An arrangement of audience seating without a center aisle.

**Convention** - See Stage Convention.

**Costume** - The clothing worn on stage by an actor or other performer. Pioneered by the ancient Greeks, who developed specific costumes for each character in both tragedy and comedy, the art of costume revived in medieval times and culminated in the fabulous costumes of the court masques, as well as in the more formalized outfits of the commedia dell'arte. During the 17th century, most actors appeared in contemporary dress, although there was a gradual movement towards more elaborate clothing in the early 18th century that eventually led to a reversion to contemporary styles by Garrick and others. The 19th century saw the first authentically costumed versions of Shakespeare and, with the advent of realism, a demand for historical accuracy. The 20th century has seen increasingly imaginative designs ranging from the completely naturalistic to the highly symbolic as well as the linking of costume with lighting and other aspects of theatrical design so that it is no longer considered in isolation.

**Counterweight** - A device for balancing the weight of scenery in a system which allows scenery to be raised above the stage by means of ropes and pulleys.

**Cover** - (1) In acting, to take a position so as to conceal another actor or an object from clear view of the audience; (2) To canvas, hence covering; (3) A property man stationed in the wings to fire a cover gun; (4) In acting, concealing from the audience that some mistake has been made in the performance.

**Crew** - The backstage team assisting in mounting a production.

**Crisis** - The culmination of the plot in a play when the primary conflict is at the point of highest tension. Also called climax or turning point.

**Cross** - A movement by a performer across the stage in a given direction.

**Cue** - Any prearranged signal, such as the last words in a speech, a piece of business, or any action or lighting change that indicates to a performer or stage manager that it is time to proceed to the next line or action.

**Cue sheet** - A prompt book marked with cues, or a list of cues for the use of technicians, especially the stage manager.

**Curtain** - (1) The rise or fall of the physical curtain, which separates a play into structural parts; (2) The last bit of action preceding the fall of the curtain.

**Curtain call** - The staged bows at the end of the play in which both actors (through their presence and bows) and the audience (through their applause) acknowledge their mutual appreciation and participation in the theatrical event.

**Cycle plays** - In medieval England, a series of mystery plays that, performed in a series, relate the story of religion, from the creation of the universe to doomsday.



**Cyclorama** - A large curved drop used to mask the rear and sides of the stage, painted a neutral color or blue to represent sky or open space. It may also be a permanent stage fixture made of plaster or similar durable material.

**Deadwood** - Collectively, the tickets for a given performance which have not been sold, when the box-office sale stops.

**Denouement** - The moment when final suspense is satisfied and "the knot is untied." The term is from the French and was used to refer to the working out of the resolution in a well-made play.

**Designer** - One who undertakes the design of the costumes, scenery, lighting, and other technical aspects of a particular production, usually working in close collaboration with the director.

**Deus ex machina** - Literally "the god from the machine," a resolution device in classic Greek drama. A term used to indicate the intervention of supernatural forces -- usually at the last moment -- to save the action from its logical conclusion. Denotes in modern drama an arbitrary and coincidental solution.

**Dialogue** - Conversation in a play between two or more characters in which short speeches, sentences, and phrases are alternated.

**Diction** - Patterned words intended to be spoken by characters. Aristotle's fourth element of drama (also called language).

**Didactic drama** - Drama dedicated to teaching lessons or provoking intellectual debate beyond the confines of the play.

**Dimmer** - A device which permits lighting intensities to be changed smoothly and at varying rates.

**Dim out** - To turn out lights with a dimmer, the process usually being cued to a predetermined number of seconds or counts.

**Dinner theater** - A theater which offers an audience the opportunity to eat and see a theatrical performance in one location.

**Director** - In American usage, the person who is responsible for the overall unity of the production and for coordinating the efforts of the contributing artists. The director is in charge of rehearsals and supervises the performers in the preparation of their parts. The American director is the equivalent of the British producer and the French *metteur-en-scène*. As late as the middle 1800s, there was no such thing as a "director". Someone had to officiate, of course, but this was invariably an actor-manager or the playwright, who was often an actor himself. The first director, in the modern sense, was George II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, a true amateur who in the late 1800s developed the Meiningen Company.

**Directorial concept** - The director's personal vision of the play which must be conceived with a clarity and completeness that can be conveyed to other artists who render it in concrete, living form.

**Dithyramb** - In ancient Greece, a choral ode performed by a Chorus of approximately fifty men at festivals honoring Dionysus, the god of wine and the reproductive force of life.

**Documentary drama** - Drama that presents historical facts in a nonfictionalized, or only slightly fictionalized, manner.

**Domestic comedy** - Domestic comedy usually deals with family situations, and is found most frequently today in television situation comedies -- often called sitcoms -- which feature members of a family or neighborhood caught in a series of complicated but amusing situations. In contemporary theater, the form has been regularly explored by American playwright Neil Simon.

**Domestic drama** - Also known as bourgeois drama, domestic drama deals with problems of members of the middle and lower classes, particularly problems of the family and home. Conflicts with society, struggles within a family, dashed hopes, and renewed determination are frequently characteristics of domestic drama. It attempts to depict onstage the lifestyle of ordinary people -- in language, in dress, in behavior. Domestic drama first came to the fore during the eighteenth century in Europe and Great Britain when the merchant and working classes were emerging. Because general audiences could so readily identify with the people and problems of domestic drama, it continued to gain in popularity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and remains a major form today.

**Double cast** - A common practice in which more than one actor is cast to perform a single role in a play. (For example, when a character is shown at various ages during the play.)

**Doubling** - A common practice in which an actor plays more than one role in a play.

**Downstage** - The front of the stage toward the audience.

**Dramatic action** - The play's all-encompassing purpose and its animating force. It is that which is to be fulfilled in performance.

**Dramatic irony** - Audience understanding of the significance of something that the character does not. (For example, Oedipus vowing to hunt down the murderer of his father when the audience knows that he himself is that person.)

**Dramatis personae** - The characters in a play as listed in the front of the script or in the program. The cast of characters.

**Dramaturg(e)** - The dramaturg's profession, which was created in eighteenth century Germany, has only recently been instituted in American regional theaters. Most often called a literary manager in this country, the dramaturg is a critic in residence who performs a variety of tasks before a play opens. The dramaturg selects and prepares playtexts for performance; advises directors and actors on questions of the play's history and interpretation; and educates audiences by preparing lectures, program notes, and essays. To accomplish all this, the dramaturg serves as script reader for new scripts, theater historian, translator, play adaptor, editor, director's assistant, and critic of the work in progress. The commitment to producing new plays by our regional theaters has given rise to the dramaturg's employment by a number of not-for-profit regional theaters, including the Yale Repertory Theater in New Haven, the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, and the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge.

**Dress rehearsal** - A final rehearsal of the play in which every element of production is in place. The object is to duplicate the same conditions of the first performance before an audience.

**Drop** - A large piece of fabric, generally painted canvas, hung from a batten to the stage floor, usually to serve as backing.

**Eclectic** - A theater artist who works in a variety of modes and does not identify with one particular artistic movement.

**Educational theater** - Academic programs featuring coursework and productions for the purposes of educating and training students and producing plays for campus and community audiences.

**Embodiment** - A term in acting which generally refers to the process of penetrating the psychological or internal aspects of a character.

**Emotional recall** - Stanislavsky's exercise which assists the actor in presenting realistic emotions. The actor thinks of an event which led to an emotion similar to that which the character is supposed to feel in the play. By recreating the circumstances in his or her mind, the performer will feel the emotion.

**Empathy** - The act of identifying so closely with someone else that the observer actually participates in the emotional life of that person. In the theater, audience members empathize when they project themselves into the character or situation from the play and share those experiences.

**Ensemble playing** - Acting which stresses the total artistic unity of the performance rather than the individual performances of specific actors and actresses.

**Entrance** - The manner and effectiveness with which a performer comes into a scene as well as the actual coming onstage; also, the way it is prepared for by the playwright.

**Environmental theater** - A term used by Richard Schechner and others to refer to a branch of the avant-garde theater. Among its aims are the elimination of the distinction between audience space and acting space, a more flexible approach to the interactions between performers and audience, and the substitution of a multiple focus for the traditional single focus.

**Epic theater** - A form of presentation which has come to be associated with the name of Bertolt Brecht, its chief advocate and theorist. It is aimed at the intellect rather than the emotions, seeking to present evidence regarding social questions in such a way that they may be objectively considered an intelligent conclusion reached. Brecht felt that emotional involvement by the audience defeated this aim, and he used various devices designed to produce an emotional "alienation" of the audience from the action onstage (see *verfremdung*). His plays are episodic, with narrative songs separating the segments and large posters or signs announcing the various scenes.

**Epilogue** - A speech addressed to the audience after the conclusion of the play and spoken by one of the performers.

**Existentialism** - A set of philosophical ideas whose principal modern advocate is Jean-Paul Sartre. The term existentialism is applied by Sartre and others to plays which illustrate these views. Sartre's central thesis is that there are no longer any fixed standards or values by which one can live and that each person must create his or her own code of conduct regardless of the conventions imposed by society. Only in this way can one truly "exist" as a responsible, creative human being; otherwise one is merely a robot or automaton. Sartre's plays typically involve people who are faced with decision forcing them into an awareness of the choice between living on their own terms and ceasing to exist as individuals.

**Exit** - A performer's leaving the stage, as well as the preparation for his or her leaving.

**Exodus** - In classical Greek drama, the final scene in which all the characters exit from the stage.

**Exposition** - The imparting of information necessary for an understanding of the story but not covered by the action onstage. Events or knowledge from the past, or occurring outside the play, which must be introduced for the audience to understand the characters or plot. Exposition is always a problem in drama because relating or conveying information is static. The dramatist must find ways to make expositional scenes dynamic.

**Expressionism** - A movement which developed and flourished in Germany during the period immediately preceding and following World War I. Expressionism was characterized by the attempt to dramatize subjective states through the use of distortion, striking and often grotesque images, and lyric, unrealistic dialogue. It was revolutionary in content as well as in form, portraying the institutions of society, particularly the bourgeois family, as grotesque, oppressive, and materialistic. The expressionist hero or heroine was usually a rebel against this mechanistic vision of society. Dramatic conflict tended to be replaced by the development of themes by means of visual images. The movement had great influence because it forcefully demonstrated that dramatic imagination need not be limited to either theatrical conventions or the faithful reproduction of reality. In the United States, expressionism influenced Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* and many of O'Neill's early plays. The basic aim of expressionism was to give external expression to inner feelings and ideas; theatrical techniques which adopt this method are frequently referred to as expressionistic.

**False proscenium** - A framing construction, placed within the proscenium opening, usually to reduce its dimensions temporarily. It is called hard when built of flats, soft when made of cloth, as by shifting the positions of the teaser and tormentor.

**Farce** - One of the major genres of drama, usually regarded as a subclassification of comedy. Farce has few, if any, intellectual pretensions. It aims to entertain, to provoke laughter. Its humor is the result primarily of physical activity and visual effects, and it relies less on language and wit than do so-called higher forms of comedy. Violence, rapid movement, and accelerating pace are characteristic of farce. In bedroom farce, it is the institution of marriage that is the object of the fun, but medicine, law, and business also provide material for farce.

**Fine arts** - Works of art that are valued for their aesthetic, associational, or symbolic rather than functional values. The fine arts are contrasted with the applied or useful arts in which the art object is valued for its practical function.

**Flashback** - Commonplace in the writing of modern drama, as well as a familiar technique in films like *Back to the Future*, *Peggy Sue Got Married*, and *Stand by Me*, flashbacks are abrupt movements back and forth in time, from the present to the past and back again. Many science-fiction stories are exploring flash-forwards!

**Flat** - A single piece of scenery, usually of standard size and made of canvas stretched over a wooden frame, used with other similar units to create a set.

**Flexible staging** - Any system of staging that can be readily adapted to provide a variety of acting areas. Most modern theaters have favored such systems rather than conventional proscenium arch designs.

**Floodlight** - A lighting instrument without lenses which is used for general or large area lighting.

**Flying** - A technical function in which stage scenery can be raised out of the sight of the audience. A system of ropes, pulleys, or other devices are used to permit backstage technicians to "fly" props, scenery, and even people on and off stage.

**Fly loft, or flies** - The space above the stage where scenery may be lifted out of sight by means of ropes and pulleys when it is not needed.

**Follow spot** - A large, powerful spotlight with a sharp focus and narrow beam which is used to follow principal performers as they move about the stage.

**Footlights** - A row of lights in the floor along the edge of the stage or apron; once a principal source of stage light but now only rarely used.

**Foreshadow** - To hint, in dialogue or by other means, that some later dramatic action will occur; hence also (dramatic) foreshadowing.

**Forestage** - See Apron.

**Fourth wall convention** - The idea that the audience in a proscenium theater observes the events on the stage through the invisible fourth wall of a room on stage.

**Freeze** - To remain motionless onstage; especially for laughs.

**Fresnel** - ("fruh-NEL") A type of spotlight used over relatively short distances with a soft beam edge which allows the light to blend easily with light from other sources; also, the type of lenses used in such spotlights.

**Front of the house** - The portion of the theater reserved for the audience, as opposed to the stage and backstage areas; sometimes simply called the house.

**Gel** - A thin, flexible color medium used in lighting instruments to give color to a light beam. Properly speaking, the word applies only to such material made of gelatin, but is often applied to similar sheets made of plastic.

**Genre** - A distinctive category or class of plays such as tragedy, comedy, melodrama, or tragicomedy. The word comes from the French for "category" or "type".

**Gesamtkunstwerk** - Richard Wagner's theory of the unified operatic work of art, in which all elements -- music, words, story, scenery, costumes, orchestra, etc. -- form a total piece.

**Given circumstances** - The who, what, where, and when of any given dramatic situation.

**Gobo** - An item of lighting equipment, used to alter the shape or pattern of a light beam. It consists of a cut-out masking device and is commonly used to achieve atmospheric lighting effects.

**Green room** - A room in the theater where all the actors and crew members can assemble to relax or receive instructions.

**Grid** - A metal framework above the stage from which lights and scenery are suspended.

**Ground plan** - A scale drawing of the top view of a stage, showing placement of furniture, large props, and other scenic elements. Commonly referred to as a floor plan.

**Groundrow** - A long low piece of scenery, basically a small flat, which is often painted to suggest an horizon. The upper edge can be shaped to represent mountains, waves, or other features.

**Hand props** - Small props carried onstage or offstage by actors during the performance. See Props.

**Hamartia** - See tragic flaw.

**Heads up!** - A warning call by a flyman who is moving scenery overhead.

**Heroic drama** - A form of serious drama, written in verse or elevated prose, which features noble or heroic characters caught in extreme situations or undertaking unusual adventures. In spite of the hardships to which its leading figures are subjected, heroic drama -- unlike tragedy -- assumes a basically optimistic worldview. It has either a happy ending or, in cases where the hero or heroine dies, a triumphant one in which the death is not regarded tragically. Plays from all periods, and from Asia as well as the west, fall into this category. During the late seventeenth century in England, plays of this type were referred to specifically as heroic tragedies.

**High comedy** - A comedy which is subtle and articulate, giving rise to thoughtful laughter; also collectively. Sometimes limited to the comedy of manners; hence, high comedian.

**History play** - In the broadest sense, a play set in a historical milieu which deals with historical personages, but the term is usually applied only to plays which deal with vital issues of public welfare and are nationalistic in tone. The form originated in Elizabethan England, which produced more history plays than any other comparable place and time. Based on a religious concept of history, they were influenced by the structure of the morality play. Shakespeare was the major writer of Elizabethan history plays. His style has influenced many later history plays, notably those of the Swedish playwright Strindberg.

**House** - The audience portion of the theater building.

**Hubris** - The concept of pride and its consequences as depicted in ancient Greek tragedy. Heroes guilty of such presumption were portrayed as having offended the gods and thus deserving of their own inevitable downfall.

**Hypokrite** - Greek term for "actor".

**Impressionism** - A style of painting developed in the late nineteenth century which stressed the immediate impressions created by objects -- particularly those resulting from the effects of light -- and which tended to ignore details.

As such, its influence on the theater was primarily in the area of scenic design, but the term impressionism is sometimes applied to plays like Chekhov's, which rely on a series of impressions and use indirect techniques.

**Improvise** - To invent lines or business not in a script, to ad-lib; hence, improvisation, etc.

**Inciting incident** - The occurrence that sets in motion the action of the play. Also known by the term point of attack.

**Ingénue** - The role of a sweet, naive girl; an actress who plays such a role or roles.

**Inner stage** - An area at the rear of the stage which can be cut off from the rest by means of curtains or scenery and revealed for special scenes.

**Intermission** - A pause in the action, marked by a fall of the curtain or a fade-out of the stage lights, during which the audience may leave their seats for a short time, usually ten or fifteen minutes.

**Irony** - A condition the reverse of what we have expected or an expression whose intended implication is the opposite of its literal sense. A device particularly suited to theater and found in virtually all drama.

**Juvenile** - The role of a boy or young man; an actor who plays such a role or roles. Sometimes also the role of a young girl or young woman; an actress who plays such a role or roles. Hence also juvenile lead.

**Juxtaposition** (Contrast) - The act of placing two or more things side by side, for comparison.

**Kill** - To eliminate or suppress, as to remove unwanted light or to ruin an effect through improper execution (e.g., to "kill a laugh").

**"Kitchen-Sink" Theater** - A label pasted on British "angry young man" and social problem plays in the late-1950s and 1960s, because so many of them took place in rundown one-room apartments. The term was used by approvers and detractors alike, the former neutrally, as a useful shorthand denoting productions following the trend begun by John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, and the later reprovingly, as if theater must be beautiful rather than honest.

**Left stage** - The left side of the stage from the point of view of a performer facing the audience.

**Libretto** - The text of a musical comedy or other dramatic piece chiefly composed of sung dialogue. Plural, librettos or libretti; hence also librettist.



**Lighting** - The illumination of the stage by artificial light. Early methods of lighting, which was first recognized as an important feature of theatrical production when indoor performances were first given during the Renaissance, included the use of candles and containers of flammable liquids. Crucial innovations during the early history of lighting technology included the introduction of footlights, the use of reflectors to increase the intensity of light beams, and -- after much resistance from those who came to the theater to be seen as much as they did to see -- the dimming of the lights in the auditorium (customary since 1876). The development of gas lighting in the early 19th century represented a major advance despite the dangers involved. The use of electrical lighting was pioneered at the California Theatre in San Francisco in 1879. Lighting is controlled in the modern theater by highly sophisticated computerized dimmer boards, which can coordinate the illumination of an entire set; other recent innovations have included experiments with ultraviolet light, lasers, and holography.

**Literary drama** - Dramatic works, collectively or individually, which are considered to possess value as literature (in contradistinction to the popular drama), or which are intended primarily for reading rather than for stage production, or which exhibit ignorance of practical stagecraft; or written drama (in contradistinction to improvisation or drama without dialogue).

**Low comedy** - A comedy which is obvious, elementary, or crude, such as that involving slapstick and knockabout business; also collectively; hence low comedian, low-comedy parts, etc.

**Magic "if"** - Stanislavsky's acting exercise which requires the actor to ask, "How would I react if I were in this character's position?"

**Make-up** - The use of cosmetics in altering an actor's physical appearance in order to suit him for a certain role or to compensate for the blanching effects of stage lighting. Dating from the earliest forms of ritual drama, the art of make-up was revolutionized by the introduction of gas and electric lighting and has now developed into a highly technical practice.

**Malaprop** - Close to the pun, the malaprop is a word which sounds like the right word but actually means something quite different. The term comes from Mrs. Malaprop, a character in *The Rivals* by the English playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan. See Page 196 in Wilson text, Sixth edition, for additional illustration.

**Managing director** - The person in charge of the business of "not-for-profit" theaters including staff administration, facilities management, contractual negotiations, ticket sales, fund raising, and audience development.

**Mask** - (1) To cut off from the view of the audience by means of scenery the backstage areas or technical equipment, as to mask a row of lighting instruments; (2) A face covering in the image of the character portrayed, sometimes covering the entire head.

**Masking** - Scenery or draperies used to hide or cover.

**Mechane** - An item of stage machinery used in the ancient Greek theater. It consisted of a large crane from which actors could be suspended in mid-air, as if in flight.

**Medieval drama** - There is only meager evidence of theatrical activity in Europe between the sixth and tenth centuries, but by the end of the fifteenth century a number of different types of drama had developed. The first of these, known as liturgical drama, was sung or chanted in Latin as part of a church service. Plays on religious themes were also written in the vernacular and performed outside of the church. The mystery plays (also called cycle plays) were based on events taken from the Old and New Testaments. Many such plays were organized into historical cycles which told the story of humanity from the creation to doomsday. The entire performance was quite long, sometimes requiring as much as 5 days. The plays were produced as a community effort, with different craft guilds being responsible for individual segments. Other forms of religious drama were the miracle play -- which dealt with events in the life of a saint -- and the morality play. The morality play was a didactic and allegorical treatment of moral and religious questions, the most famous example being Everyman. The medieval period also produced several types of secular plays. Other than the folk plays, which dealt with legendary heroes like Robin Hood, most were farcical and fairly short.

**Meininger Company** - A theater company founded in 1874 by George II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (1826-1914). Run by the duke and his wife, Ellen Franz, with the help of the actor Ludwig Chronegk, the troupe made significant innovations in emphasizing the role of the director and the importance of good ensemble playing, particularly in crowd scenes. It was also influential in its use of historically accurate costume and scenery and experimental stage lighting, its ideas being spread throughout Europe during its many tours (to thirty-eight cities between 1874 and 1890) of Shakespearean and other classic works.

**Melodrama** - Historically, a distinct form of drama popular throughout the nineteenth century which emphasized action and spectacular effects and employed music to heighten the dramatic mood. Melodrama employed stock characters and clearly defined villains and heroes. More generally, the term is applied to any dramatic play which presents an unambiguous confrontation between good and evil. Characterization is often shallow and stereotypical, and because the moral conflict is externalized, action and violence are prominent, usually culminating in a happy ending meant to demonstrate the eventual triumph of good. Literally, "a play with music," denoting the nineteenth century's fondness for performing plays with full-scale scores of incidental accompaniment, dances and songs.

**Melody** - The total sound of the production, from actors speaking the dialogue, to any musical component or sound effects that are required; Aristotle's fifth part of drama. (Some critics refer to this element as "music".)

**Metaphor** - When we use a metaphor, we announce that one thing is another, in order to describe it or point up its meaning more clearly. The art of theater operates on the level of a metaphor, in that we are asked to accept the imagined world on the stage as reality.

**Method acting** - The Stanislavsky system of acting as practiced in the United States where the emphasis has been placed on the truthful portrayal of the emotional life of the character. Two primary training philosophies have dominated the teaching of the American "method". The first grew out of the work of Lee Strasberg and the Actors' Studio and places emphasis on the emotion-memory aspect of Stanislavsky's work. The second, which is popular in Great Britain, concentrates on Stanislavsky's concept of physical action.

**Mimesis** - The Greek word for imitation. Aristotle used the term to define the role of art as an "imitation of nature".

**Mise-en-scène** - The arrangement of all the elements in the stage picture, either at a given moment or dynamically throughout the performance.

**Monologue** - Related soliloquy, this form of stage address is delivered by a character who is usually, though not always, alone on stage. The material does not represent the character's thoughts, however, but is clearly what the character wishes to communicate, primarily to the audience.

**Morality play** - An allegorical medieval play form, in which the characters represent abstractions and the overall impact of the play is moral instruction.

**Moscow Art Theatre** - Established by Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938) and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (1859-1943) in 1898, this theater and its practices, especially those of Stanislavsky, exerted great influence on the total development of Western theater practice. The adoption of Anton Chekhov as house playwright gave the troupe a solid grounding in composition; and Stanislavsky's direction (and acting) of Chekhov's four masterpieces, *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*, introduced their unique ensemble style, realistic as opposed to the melodramatic noises raised by more conventional groups.

**Motivation** - That which can be construed to have determined a person's (or character's) behavior. Since Stanislavsky, actors have been encouraged to study the possible motivations of their characters' actions. See objective.

**Multiple setting** - A form of stage setting, common in the Middle Ages, in which several locations are represented at the same time; also called simultaneous setting. Used also in various forms of contemporary theater.

**Muses** - A group of nine Greek goddesses, of whom three were associated with the theater. Melpomene, often depicted holding a tragic mask, was the Muse connected with tragedy, Terpsichore with dancing and lyric poetry, and Thalia, usually holding a comic mask, with comedy.

**Musical theater** - A broad category which includes opera, operetta, musical comedy, and other musical plays (the term lyric theater is sometimes used to distinguish it from pure dance). It includes any dramatic entertainment in which music and lyrics (and sometimes dance) form an integral and necessary part. The various types of musical theater often overlap and are best distinguished in terms of their separate historical origins, the quality of the music, and the range and type of skills demanded of the performance. Opera is usually defined as a work in which all parts are sung to musical accompaniment. Such works are part of a separate and much older tradition than the modern musical, which is of relatively recent American origin. The term musical comedy is no longer adequate to describe all the musical dramas commonly seen on and off Broadway, but they clearly belong together as part of a tradition that can easily be distinguished from both opera and operetta.

**Mystery play** - A term describing medieval plays that developed from church drama and treated biblical stories and themes. See cycle plays.

**Myth** - A story or legend handed down from generation to generation largely by word of mouth. Frequently the subjects of myths are attempts to explain natural and human phenomena, with many myths dealing with extreme family situations.

**National Endowment for the Arts** - (NEA) United States federal agency which disperses government funds (approximately \$175 million annually) to various arts organizations.

**Naturalism** - A special form of realism. The theory of naturalism came to prominence in France and other parts of Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The French playwright Emile Zola advocated a theater that would follow the scientific principles of the age, especially those discovered by Charles Darwin. Zola was also impressed by the work of Auguste Comte (1778-1857) and a physician named Claude Bernard (1813-1878). According to Zola's theory of naturalism, drama should look for the causes of disease in society the way a doctor looks for disease in a patient. Theater should therefore expose social infection in all its ugliness. Following Darwin, theater should show human beings as products of heredity and environment. The result would be a drama often depicting the ugly underside of life and expressing a pessimistic point of view. Also, drama was not to be carefully plotted or constructed but was to present a "slice of life": an attempt to look at life as it is. Very few successful plays fulfilled Zola's demands. Some of the works of Strindberg, Gorki, and others came closest to meeting the requirements of naturalism. In the contemporary period, the term naturalism is generally applied to dramas that are super-realistic, that is, those which conform to observable reality in precise detail. Naturalism attempts to achieve the verisimilitude of a documentary film, to convey the impression that everything about the play -- the setting, the way the characters dress, speak, and act -- is exactly like everyday life.

**Neoclassicism** - The set of rules, conventions, and beliefs that dominated much drama and theater from the Renaissance to the end of the eighteenth century. Neoclassicism recognized only two legitimate forms of drama (tragedy and comedy), arguing that the two forms should never be mixed. Tragedy should develop serious stories of kings and nobles, while comedy should treat the domestic world of the middle or lower classes. According to the neoclassicists, plays should be written in five acts, observe the unities, and uphold poetic justice in their endings.

**Non sequitur** - A Latin term meaning "it does not follow"; it implies that one thing does not follow from what went before, and it perfectly describes the method of Theater of the Absurd, including the use of language.

**Nontraditional casting** - Choosing the most talented actor for a part regardless of the actor's race, gender, physical condition, or cultural heritage. A similar concept is what is called color-blind casting.

**Obie Awards** - Awards given annually to actors, playwrights, designers, and productions of Off-Broadway theaters.

**Obligatory scene** - A scene that the playwright leads the audience to expect, without which the audience would be disappointed. Sometimes called *scène-à-faire*.

**Objective** - Stanislavsky's term for that which is urgently desired and sought by a character, the desired goal which propels a character to action.

**Obstacle** - That which delays or prevents the achieving of a goal by a character. An obstacle creates complication and conflict.

**Off Broadway** - New York City commercial and not-for-profit theaters with a capacity of no more than 199 seats. Because of lower operating costs, the Off-Broadway movement was experimental in nature. In recent years, Off Broadway has become an increasingly commercial, mainstream venue.

**Off-Off Broadway** - New York City not-for-profit theaters with a capacity of no more than 99 seats and prescribed limited budgets. These experimental theaters use many found and converted spaces for their sparse productions and are exempt from many union rules and pay scales that apply to larger houses. In Chicago, non-traditional theaters are called Off-Loop theaters, in Los Angeles, they are referred to as Equity Waiver theaters, and in London, they are called fringe theaters.

**Offstage** - The areas of the stage, usually in the wings or backstage, which are not in view of the audience.

**Onstage** - The area of the stage which is in view of the audience.

**Open** - To turn or face more toward the audience.

**Opera** - A dramatic composition for the stage, in which all or most of the lines are sung, a musical drama more elaborate than a musical comedy or the like, hence operatic, etc. A drama set entirely to music.

**Operetta** - A light dramatic entertainment with much singing and little speaking; sometimes now, equivalent to musical farce. Typically, operettas are set in exotic or far-off locales, and are obsessed with romantic intrigue, romantic chases, and the like.

**Orchestra** - (1) The ground-floor seating in an auditorium; (2) In the Greek theater, the space in which the chorus sang and danced; from the Greek meaning "dancing place."

**Pace** - The rate at which a performance is played; also, to play a scene or an entire play in order to determine its proper speed.

**Pantomime** - An ancient Roman dramatic performance featuring a solo dancer and a narrative chorus. Any of various dramatic or dancing performances in which a story is told by expressive bodily or facial movements of the performers.

**Parabasis** - A scene in classical Greek Old Comedy in which the chorus directly addresses the audience members and makes fun of them.

**Paradoi** - The spaces at either side of the orchestra between the skene and the auditorium in the Greek theatre, used primarily as entrances and exits (parados and exodus) for the performers, especially the chorus.

**Pastoral** - A genre of drama, popular from the 15th to the 17th centuries, that evoked an idealized world of rustic shepherds and nymphs free from the corruption of contemporary urban existence. It evolved in Italy, was subsequently imitated in France, and, to a lesser extent, in England. The genre had a marked influence on Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, for example.

**Performing arts** - The time arts of music, dance, drama, and their attendant delivery systems such as theatre, film, video, and opera. Performing arts are the only art forms that must be decoded and delivered to the audience by other artists.

**Periaktoi** - The earliest known examples of the use of scenery, as used in the ancient Greek and Roman theater. They probably consisted of painted prisms, which revolved to suggest a change in setting and also helped to project sound from the stage into the auditorium. Subsequently they were further developed on the Renaissance stage.

**Period** - A term describing any representation onstage of a former age, as period costume, period play.

**Peripetia** - The reversal of the protagonist's fortunes that, according to Aristotle, is part of the climax of a tragedy.

**Perpetual present tense** - The source of the theater's immediacy. Unlike a novel in which the past is reported in the present, our experience in the theater always takes place in the present tense. This phrase is attributed to the American playwright, Thornton Wilder.

**Personality actors** - Actors who reproduce their natural physical and psychological attributes for every role they play. The character is conformed to the personality of the actor.

**Perspective** - The illusion of depth in painting, introduced into scene design during the Italian Renaissance.

**Picturization** - The director's visual interpretation of each moment of the play realized through the arrangement of scenic units and actors on the stage.

**Pin spot** - A spotlight capable of throwing a very small, precise beam of light onto the stage.

**Pit** - Historically, the area closest to the stage in which there were no seats, although eventually backless benches were provided. The pit gradually developed into the orchestra, which now contains the most expensive seats.

**Platform** - A raised surface on the stage floor serving as an elevation for parts of the stage action and allowing for a multiplicity of stage levels.

**Platform stage** - An elevated stage without a proscenium.

**Playbill** - A theatre program, giving details of a particular production, or a poster advertising the show in production or forthcoming attractions.

**Play of ideas** - A play whose principal focus is on the serious treatment of social, moral, or philosophical ideas. The term problem play is used to designate those dramas, best exemplified in the work of Ibsen and Shaw, in which several sides of a question are both dramatized and discussed. It is sometimes distinguished from the pièce à thèse or thesis play, which makes a more one-sided presentation and employs a character who sums up the "lesson" of the play and serves as the author's voice.

**Plot** - As distinct from story, the patterned arrangements of events and characters for a drama. The incidents are selected and arranged for maximum dramatic impact. The plot may begin long after the beginning of the story (and refer to information regarding the past in flashbacks or exposition). Aristotle's first element of drama.

**Poetic justice** - Making the outcome of a play fit an idealized vision of justice by punishing the wicked and rewarding the good.

**Poetics** - Aristotle's influential fourth-century B.C. treatise on the nature and structure of tragic drama. The six parts of drama -- plot, character, thought/theme, language/diction, music, and spectacle -- are discussed in detail in this "terminology."

**Point of attack** - The moment in the story when the play actually begins. The dramatist chooses a point in time along the continuum of events which he or she judges will best start the action and propel it forward.

**Polishing** - The directorial process of "fine-tuning" a production. The process usually comes after the blocking (staging) is completed and the actors have thoroughly studied and committed their roles to memory. As in the polishing of furniture, the process brings out all the details of the script in an effort to communicate its intent most effectively to an audience.

**Popular drama** - Drama which has its origin in folk ritual; drama which has little value as literature; drama which succeeds with the public, whatever its merit or lack of merit; hence popular theater.

**Postmodernism** - Term used to describe certain contemporary artistic tendencies, among them the blurring of distinctions between dramatic forms and the mingling of elements from disparate styles, periods, and cultures.

**Preparation** - The obvious arranging of circumstances, pointing of character, and placing of properties in a production so that the ensuing actions will seem reasonable; also, the actions taken by a performer getting ready for a performance.

**Presentational** - Said of a dramatic work, or of a style of acting and staging: anti-naturalistic; direct; using the artifices of the theater instead of attempting to represent actual life realistically in every outward detail; hence presentationalism.

**Producer** - The person responsible for the business side of a production, including raising the necessary money. In British usage, a producer is the equivalent of an American director.

**Prologue** - An introductory speech delivered to the audience by one of the actors or actresses before the play begins.

**Prompt** - To furnish a performer with missed or forgotten lines or cues during a performance.

**Prompt book** - The script of a play indicating performers' movements, light cues, sound cues, etc.

**Props** - Properties; objects used by performers onstage or required to complete the set.

**Proscenium arch** - The arch or frame surrounding the stage opening in a box or picture stage.

**Proscenium theater** - A theater featuring a stage with a proscenium arch, the architectural framing device which separates the audience from the main playing area. The arch "frames" the stage and focus the attention of the audience on the often illusionistic events happening in front of them. This type of theater was introduced in the seventeenth century and is still prevalent today.



**Protagonist** - The principal character in a play, the one whom the drama is about.

**Psychological gesture** - According to the twentieth-century Russian acting theorist Michael Chekhov, a characteristic movement or activity which would sum up a character's motives and preoccupations.

**Pun** - Usually considered the simplest form of wit -- is a humorous use of words with the same sound but different meaning. A man who says he is going to start a bakery if he can "raise the dough" is making a pun.

**Rake** - To position scenery on a slant or angle other than parallel or perpendicular to the curtain line; also, an upward slope of the stage floor away from the audience.

**Raked stage** - A stage which slopes upward away from the audience toward the back of the set.

**Raisonneur** - The term which means "author's mouthpiece." The raisonneur in a play is that character who seems to speak about the author's ideas and/or themes.

**Realism** - Broadly speaking, realism is the attempt to present onstage people and events corresponding to those observable in everyday life. Examples of realism can be found in western drama -- especially in comedies -- in the Greek, Roman, medieval, and Renaissance periods. Sections of plays from these periods show people speaking, dressing, and acting in the manner of ordinary people of the time. Certain landmark plays are considered forerunners of modern realism. These include *Arden of Feversham* (ca. 1590), an English play about greed and lust in a middle-class family; *The London Merchant* (1731), about a young apprentice led astray by a prostitute; *Miss Sara Sampson* (1755), a German version of *The London Merchant*; and *The Inspector General* (1836), exposing corruption in a provincial Russian town. It was in the latter part of the nineteenth century, however, that realism took hold as a major form of theater. As the middle class came more and more to dominate life in Europe and the United States, and as scientific and psychological discoveries challenged the heroic or romantic viewpoint, drama began to center on the affairs of ordinary people in their natural surroundings. The plays of Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov showed that powerful, effective drama could be written about such people. The degree of realism varies in drama, ranging from slice-of-life naturalism to heightened realism. In the latter, nonrealistic and symbolic elements are introduced into a basically realistic format. Despite frequent challenges from other forms during the past hundred years, realism remains a major form of contemporary theater.

**Recognition** - The moment of truth-facing which must take place in order for the protagonist to achieve success.

**Regional theater** - (1) Theater whose subject matter is specific to a particular geographic region; (2) Theaters situated in theatrical centers across the country. Also called Resident theaters.

**Regisseur** - Continental term for theater director; it usually denotes a dictatorial director.

**Rehearsal** - The preparation by the cast for the performance of a play through repetition and practice.

**Renaissance drama** - European drama of the period roughly between the 14th and early 17th centuries, when the influence of classical drama combined with a revival of intellectual aspirations effectively laid the foundations of the modern theater.

**Repertory, or repertoire** - A kind of acting company which, at any given time, has a number of plays which it can perform alternately; also, a collection of plays.

**Representational** - Said of a dramatic work, or of a style of acting and staging: naturalistic; using the theater to represent life realistically in every outward detail; hence representationalism.

**Resolution** - That point in the play when the conflicts are resolved; also, the method used to solve the conflicts within the play.

**Restoration drama** - English drama after the restoration of the monarchy, from 1660 to 1700. Presented for an audience of aristocrats who gathered about the court of Charles II, drama of this period consisted largely of heroic tragedies in the neoclassical style and comedies of manners which reflected a cynical view of human nature.

**Return** - A flat used at the right and left wings, which can run offstage behind the tormentor. Sometimes the flat, or return, can serve as the tormentor.

**Reversal** - A sudden switch of circumstances or knowledge which leads to a result contrary to expectations. Called peripeteia or peripety in Greek drama.

**Revolving stage** - A large turntable on which scenery is placed in such a way that, as it moves, one set is brought into view while another one turns out of sight.

**Revue** - A musical entertainment in which a team of performers presents a program of unrelated songs, dances, and sketches in quick succession. Such shows are often enlivened with an element of satire or topicality.

**Right stage** - The right side of the stage from the point of view of a performer facing the audience.

**Rising action** - In dramatic structure, the escalating conflict; events and actions that follow the inciting incident.

**Romanticism** - A literary and dramatic movement of the nineteenth century which developed as a reaction to the confining structures of neoclassicism. Imitating the loose, episodic structure of Shakespeare's plays, the romantics sought to free the writer from all rules and looked to the unfettered inspiration of artistic genius as the source of all creativity. They laid more stress on mood and atmosphere than on content, but one of their favorite themes was the gulf between human beings' spiritual aspirations and their physical limitations.

**Royalties** - Contractual fees that are paid to playwrights for each production of their plays.

**Satire** - Dramatic satire uses the techniques of comedy, such as wit, irony, and exaggeration, to attack and expose folly and vice. Satire can attack specific public figures, as does the political satire *Macbird*, or it can point its barbs at more general traits which can be found in many of us. Thus, Moliere's *Tartuffe* ridicules religious hypocrisy; Shaw's *Arms and the Man* exposes the romantic glorification of war; and Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* attacks the English upper classes.

**Satyr play** - One of the three types of classical Greek drama, it was usually a ribald takeoff on Greek mythology and history and included a chorus of satyrs, mythological creatures who were half-man and half-goat.

**Scene** - (1) A stage setting; (2) The structural units into which the play or acts of the play are divided; (3) The location of the play's action.

**Scrim** - A thin, open-weave fabric which is nearly transparent when lit from behind and opaque when lit from the front.

**Script** - The written or printed text, consisting of dialogue, stage directions, character descriptions, and the like, of a play or other theatrical representation.

**Selectivity** - See page 1 in Wilson text, Sixth edition, for discussion of the concept.

**Set** - The scenery, taken as a whole, for a scene or an entire production.

**Set piece** - A piece of scenery which stands independently in a scene.

**Sightline** - Line of vision from any audience seat to any point on stage. Often used to indicate how much of the stage action can be seen from any part of the house.

**Skene** - The scene house in the Greek theater, placed opposite the theatron. Literally, a hut or tent, the name probably derives from the structure used as an offstage place where actors could change costumes. It is the source of our word scene.

**Slapstick** - A type of comedy or comic business which relies on ridiculous physical activities -- often violent in nature -- for its humor.

**Soliloquy** - A speech given by a character who is alone onstage, conventionally representing the character's inner thoughts.

**Spectacle** - The visual elements of a play, including the settings, costumes, lighting effects, properties, the actors and their movements. Aristotle's sixth element of drama.

**Spill** - Light from stage-lighting instruments which falls outside of the areas for which it is intended, such as light that falls on the audience.

**Spine** - In the Stanislavski method, the dominant desire or motivation of a character which underlies his or her action in the play; usually thought of as an action and expressed as a verb. The "through-line" of action that holds the play together.

**Spotlight** - A lighting unit, capable of producing a bright, narrow, beam. Spotlights are one of the standard lighting units of the modern stage.

**SRO** - Standing Room Only. A notice that all seats for a performance have been sold and only standees can be accommodated.

**Stage convention** - (1) An understanding established through costume or stage usage that certain devices will be accepted or assigned specific meaning or significance on an arbitrary basis, that is, without requiring that they be natural or realistic; (2) Agreed upon rules to enable to accept the world of the play as reality.

**Stage door** - An outside entrance to dressing rooms and stage areas which is used by performers and technicians.

**Stage house** - The stage floor and all the space above it up to the grid.

**Stage manager** - The individual responsible for running the show during performances, making sure that everything functions as intended.

**Stanislavski "method"** - A set of techniques and theories about the problems of acting which promotes a naturalistic style stressing "inner truth" as opposed to conventional theatricality.

**Street Theater** - A generic term which includes a number of groups that perform in the open and attempt to relate to the needs of a specific community or neighborhood. Many such groups sprang up in the 1960s, partly as a response to social unrest and partly because there was a need for a theater which could express the specific concerns of minority and ethnic neighborhoods.

**Strike** - To remove pieces of scenery or props from onstage or to take down the entire set after the final performance.

**Subplot** - A secondary plot that is intertwined with the main plot so as to reflect or comment on it. Also known as parallel plot.

**Subtext** - A term referring to the meaning and movement of the play below the surface; that which is implied and never stated. Often more important than surface activity.

**Summer stock** - Theater companies which operate outside of major theatrical centers during the summer months (usually June through August) and have an intensive production schedule, often doing a different play each week.

**Surrealism** - A movement attacking formalism in the arts which developed in Europe after World War I. Seeking a deeper and more profound reality than that presented to the rational, conscious mind, the surrealists replaced realistic action with the strange logic of the dream and cultivated such techniques as automatic writing and free association of ideas. Although few plays written by the surrealists are highly regarded, the movement had a great influence on later avant-garde theater -- notably the theater of the absurd and the theater of cruelty.

**Symbolism** - A movement that emerged in the late nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth, symbolism was the first of several that sought to counter the influence of realism and naturalism. Rather than seeking truth through direct observation of the world around them, symbolists argued that truth can only be intuited and that these intuitions can only be expressed indirectly through symbols. Hoping to restore the religious and spiritual significance of theater, symbolism used myth, legend, and symbols in an attempt to reach beyond everyday reality. The plays of Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) are among the best-known symbolist dramas.

**Teaser** - A border that is just upstage behind the front curtain. It masks the flies and may be used to adjust the effective height of the proscenium opening.

**Technical** - A term referring to functions necessary to the production of a play other than those of the cast and the director, such as functions of the stage crew, carpenters, and lighting crew.

**Technical director** - The person responsible for implementing the scenery designer's plans: purchasing materials, supervising the building, assembling and painting of sets, and overseeing the crews that run the shows.

**Technical rehearsal** - One of the final rehearsals, usually immediately preceding dress rehearsals, devoted primarily to making sure that all the technical elements (scenery, costumes, makeup, lighting, sound, and properties) are ready and functioning as planned. More specifically, there are "Paper" techs, "Dry" techs, and "Wet" techs, which will be explained fully in class lectures.

**Theater of cruelty** - Antonin Artaud's visionary concept of a theater based on magic and ritual which would liberate deep, violent, and erotic impulses. He wished to reveal the cruelty he saw as existing beneath all human action -- the pervasiveness of evil and violent sexuality. To do this, he advocated radical changes in the use of theatrical space, the integration of the audience and actors, and the full utilization of the affective power of light, color, movement, and language. Although Artaud had little success implementing his theories himself, he had considerable influence on other writers and directors, particularly Peter Brook, Jean-Louis Barrault, and Jerzy Grotowski.

**Theater of the absurd** - A phrase first used by Martin Esslin to describe certain playwrights of the 1950s and 1960s who expressed a similar point of view regarding the absurdity of the human condition. Their plays are dramatizations of the dramatist's inner sense of the absurdity and futility of existence. Rational language is debased and replaced by clichés and trite or irrelevant remarks. Repetitious or meaningless activity is substituted for logical action. Realistic psychological motivation is replaced by automatic behavior which is often absurdly inappropriate to the situation. Although the subject matter is serious, the tone of these plays is usually comic and ironic. Among the best-known absurdists are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Edward Albee.

**Theatricalism** - A style of production and playwriting which emphasizes theatricality for its own sake. Less a coherent movement than a quality found in the work of many artists rebelling against realism, it frankly admits the artifice of the stage and borrows freely from the circus, the music hall, and similar entertainments.

**Theatron** - "Seeing place"; the Greek term for auditorium.

**Theme** - The central thought of the play. The idea or ideas with which the play deals and which it expounds. Aristotle's third element of drama.

**Thespian** - A synonym for "actor"; the term is derived from Thespis, who is said to have been the first actor (and playwright) in the ancient Greek theater.

**Thrust stage** - A type of theater with audience seating arranged around three, or occasionally two, sides of a raised platform. Sometimes called an open stage. This form of theater is said to combine the best elements of the proscenium stage with those of the arena stage.

**Thymele** - The altar in the center of the ancient Greek orchestra.

**Tony Awards** - Awards given annually for outstanding achievements in the Broadway theaters. Short for "Antoinette Perry" Awards.

**Tormentors** - Flats at right and left wing areas, close to the proscenium opening, that mask the backstage area.

**Tragedy** - The oldest form of drama, presenting a serious action and maintaining a serious tone, although there may be moments of comic relief. Tragedy raises issues about the nature of human existence, morality, or human relationships. The protagonist is usually one who arouses the audience's sympathy and admiration but who encounters disaster through the pursuit of some goal, worthy in itself, conflicting with another goal or principle. The disastrous outcome of a tragedy should be seen as the inevitable result of the character and his/her situation, including forces beyond the character's control. Traditionally, tragedy was about the lives and fortunes of kings and nobles, and there has been a great deal of debate about whether it is possible to have a modern tragedy -- a tragedy about ordinary people. The answers to this question are as varied as the critics who address themselves to it; but most seem to agree that although such plays may be tragedies, they are of a somewhat different order.

**Tragic flaw (hamartia)** - The factor which is a character's chief weakness and which makes him/her most vulnerable; often intensifies in time of stress. An abused and often incorrectly applied theory from Greek drama.

**Tragicomedy** - During the Renaissance the word was used for plays that had tragic themes and noble characters yet ended happily. Modern tragicomedy combines serious and comic elements. Tragicomedy is, in fact, increasingly the form chosen by "serious" playwrights. Sometimes comic behavior and situations have serious or tragic consequences -- as in Durrenmatt's *The Visit*. At times, the ending is indeterminate or ambivalent -- as in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. In most cases, a quality of despair or hopelessness is introduced because human beings are seen as incapable of rising above their circumstances or their own nature; the fact that the situation is also ridiculous serves to make their plight that much more horrible.

**Trap** - An opening in the stage floor, normally covered, which can be used for special effects, such as having scenery or performers rise from below, or which permits the construction of a staircase which ostensibly leads to a lower floor or cellar.

**Treadmill** - A moving belt or band, usually between 3 and 5 feet wide, that moves across the stage, on which scenery props, or performers can move on or off stage. Generally moves across the stage parallel to the front edge of the stage. Operated electronically today, with safety devices to avoid injuries to performers.

**Type casting** - Choosing actors who by age, physique, ethnicity, and attitude most closely resemble the roles they are to play. Casting against type is purposely choosing someone who is opposite in characteristics from the role described in the playscript.

**Understudy** - An actor who learns the part of another, so that he is able to replace the latter in the case of an emergency.

**Unities** - A term referring to the preference that a play occur within one day (unity of time), in one locale (unity of place), and with no action irrelevant to the plot (unity of action).

**Unity** - A requirement of art; an element often setting art apart from life. In drama, refers to unity of action achieved in a play's structure and story; the integrity and wholeness of a production which combine plot, character, and dialogue within a frame of time and space to present a congruous, complete picture.

**Universal** - When we speak of art as being "universal," we mean that the art of an earlier age still speaks eloquently to contemporary audiences, primarily because explored themes are still relevant. William Shakespeare's plays continue to be the most frequently produced scripts even though they are five centuries old.

**Upstage** - At or toward the back of the stage, away from the front edge of the stage. (The word dates from the time when the stage sloped upward from the footlights.)

**Verfremdungseffekt** - An idea formulated by the German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956). Using numerous techniques and theater effects, Brecht sought to estrange, to distance, the audience from the performance rather than cause them to identify with it. Rather than suspend our disbelief and identify emotionally with the characters, we are to retain our intellectual awareness and allow the players to identify the author's theme for us. He did this out of the conviction that the world would not become a better place until human beings would look at the familiar in their lives with a critical and detached view.

**Verisimilitude** - The degree to which a play in performance approximates an appearance of reality as we experience it with our senses.

**Wagon stage** - A low platform mounted on wheels or casters by means of which scenery is moved on and off stage.

**Well-made play** - A term used to describe logically constructed plays following the pattern of careful exposition and preparation, a series of complications that create growing suspense and build to a climactic moment, after which all important questions are resolved. Although most of these features can be found in plays from the time of the Greeks onward, the term well-made play is associated with Eugene Scribe, the popular nineteenth-century French playwright who reduced these traditional playwriting techniques to a formula. Although "Well-made play" is now often used condescendingly, Scribe's practice has supplied the postern for much realistic playwriting since his time. Ibsen, among others, used the techniques of the well-made play.

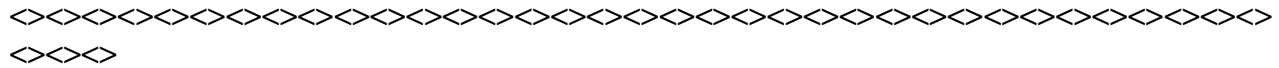
**Wiggle lights** - A piece of lighting equipment which can change direction, focus, color, and the shape of the lighting beam by remote control. Made possible by advances in electronics and computerization.



**Willing suspension of disbelief** - The imaginative agreement between actors and audience whereby the audience agrees not to disbelieve the dramatic fiction of the events, characters, and places depicted on stage. This imaginative connection allows the audience to become emotionally involved in the action without losing their own sense of what is real. First identified by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

**Wings** - Left and right offstage areas; also, narrow standing pieces of scenery, or "legs," more or less parallel to the proscenium, which form the sides of a setting.

**Work lights** - Lights arranged for the convenience of stage technicians, situated either in backstage areas and shaded or over the stage area for use while the curtain is down.



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