INTRODUCTION TO THEATRE TEXTBOOK



Brenda Eppley
HACC



Introduction to Theatre

Brenda C. Eppley

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Introduction

Theatre is a socially embedded and collaborative art form through which individuals and communities represent, interpret, and interrogate human experience. By bringing performers and audiences together within a shared space and time, theatre creates an immediate encounter in which cultural values, historical conditions, social identities, and ethical conflicts can be examined collectively. It functions not only as entertainment, but also as a means of preserving cultural memory, challenging established assumptions, fostering empathy, and imagining alternative social possibilities. Because each performance is shaped by the interaction among text, performers, designers, space, and audience, theatre remains a dynamic form of cultural expression that reflects and influences the societies in which it is produced.

Introduction to Theatre is an open educational resource designed for introductory college theatre courses. The book examines theatre as both an art form and a collaborative process, introducing students to dramatic literature, performance, directing, design, technical theatre, stage management, and production practices. It also traces the development of theatre from ancient ritual and the classical traditions of Greece and Rome through the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Restoration, realism, modernism, and contemporary performance.

Theatre does not develop in isolation. Throughout this book, theatrical movements and practices are placed within broader historical, political, scientific, technological, and cultural contexts. Original timelines, maps, diagrams, production photographs, historical images, and examples from Western and non-Western traditions help students understand how theatre both reflects and influences the societies in which it is created.

The text is designed to be flexible, accessible, and adaptable. Chapters may be used sequentially or selected individually to meet the needs of a particular course. Complex images and timelines include text alternatives, headings are organized to support screen-reader navigation, and openly licensed materials are clearly attributed. Instructors may revise, reorganize, and remix the book in accordance with its Creative Commons license. Students are encouraged to approach theatre not only as a subject of study, but as a living art shaped by artists, audiences, communities, and changing historical circumstances.



Brenda C. Eppley, Professor Emeritus of Theatre

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1: Chapter One - Theatre Defined



War Horse, 2013. Eva Rinaldi, CC BY-SA 2.0. Wikimedia Commons

What is the basic appeal of theatre?

Theatre reflects what is taking place in any given society or culture. As customs, manners, and lifestyles change, theatre mirrors that change. In the future, anthropologists will examine our contemporary theatre as a cultural artifact to help them understand our human experiences and interactions with all aspects of the real and unreal including who we were, how we saw ourselves, and what we aspired to be. The human impulse to perform is a fundamental aspect of our nature. When we examine the many ways performance shapes our daily lives, we recognize that theatre and theatrical behaviors exist all around us. Performance ranges from simple, informal expressions such as using gestures, facial expressions, and body movements to emphasize a story being shared with friends or family to more structured and formal events, including celebrations, rituals, and communal ceremonies.



Angels in America, Harrisburg Area Community College, 2024. Photograph by Brenda C. Eppley. Licensed under **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)**

Many everyday social activities contain elements of performance. Religious ceremonies, weddings, political events, and court proceedings all follow recognizable structures that shape how participants communicate meaning. Although the specific details of each event may vary, their overall forms, traditions, and practices are often consistent within a culture and may even share similarities across different cultures. From childhood, humans engage in performance through role-playing, imagination, and make-believe. As adults, we continue to use performance as a way to explore identities, experience different perspectives, and understand the world around us.

Fine Arts and Performing Arts

Traditionally, the Fine Arts are defined as forms of artistic expression created primarily for aesthetic experience rather than practical or utilitarian purposes. Their purpose is the creation and appreciation of art itself rather than the fulfillment of another human need. Historically, the Fine Arts have included visual forms such as drawing, painting, and sculpture, as well as the Performing Arts: theatre, dance, film, opera, and music.

A defining characteristic of the Performing Arts is that they are dynamic rather than static. Unlike a painting or sculpture, which remains essentially unchanged after completion, a performance exists only through the act of being performed. Each performance is a unique artistic event created in a specific moment in time.

This distinction separates live performance from recorded media such as film. Once a film or digital performance is recorded, it becomes a fixed artistic work. Although it remains a form of fine art, it no longer possesses the changing, immediate quality that defines live performance. In theatre, every performance is different. Even when the same actors perform the same script, with the same music, choreography, and design elements, each performance will vary because of the unique interaction between performers, space, audience, and moment.

In addition to their temporary and ever-changing nature, the Performing Arts share several other important characteristics. One of the most significant is that they involve the interpretation of an existing artistic source, such as a script, musical score, or dance composition. This source originates with a creator such as a playwright, composer, choreographer, or other artist who develops the themes, ideas, and concepts that form the foundation of the work.

However, unlike a novel or other written work that an individual reads and interprets independently, a performing artist serves as an intermediary between the creator and the audience. Performers, along with the entire production team, interpret the original material and communicate its meaning through the specific elements of their art form, such as acting, movement, music, dance, voice, design, and collaboration. Through this process, each performance becomes both an interpretation of the original work and a unique artistic experience shared between performers and audience members.

Elements of Theatre

Before exploring the foundations of theatre, it is important to understand several key concepts and terms that will provide a foundation for studying the many aspects of theatrical production and performance. The essential elements of theatre include the following:

1. **Audience –** The audience is an essential component of the theatrical experience. Without an audience, theatre cannot exist because there is no receiver of the artistic communication. More importantly, theatre depends on a shared exchange of meaning between performers and audience members.

2. **Performers –** Performers are the actors who bring written characters to life. Through their voices, bodies, emotions, and interpretations, they allow audiences to connect with the humanity of the story and experience the world of the play.

3. **Play/Script –** The script is the primary source of the play's ideas, themes, and dramatic action. It provides the foundation that is interpreted and communicated by the collaborative team of performers, designers, technicians, and artistic staff.

4. **Director –** The director interprets the script and develops an artistic vision for the production. This vision guides the work of the performers, designers, and technicians as they communicate the meaning and purpose of the play to the audience.

5. **Theatre Performance Space –** The performance space is the physical environment in which the play takes place. Although theatre is often presented in spaces specifically designed for performance, such as theatres or auditoriums, any location can be adapted into a performance space.

6. **Design and Technical Elements –** The visual and auditory elements of a production, including scenery, costumes, makeup, lighting, and sound, work together to support the director's vision. These elements create the world of the play and shape the audience's experience and understanding of the performance.

Many of the elements of theatre have found their way into our everyday lives. A few examples include:

- museums that use dioramas and theatrical "sets" for exhibits
- sports teams include tremendous spectacle
- live-action role-playing clubs and organizations
- holiday and religious celebrations often include costumes to portray a character
- Cosplay events
- virtual reality games

The Theatre Tradition

An enduring element of theatre's history, extending from the ancient Greek and Egyptian worlds to the present day, is the scripted play. Although the context of plays has evolved, including the cultures they represent, the languages they use, and the social issues they explore, the fundamental nature of the play has remained largely unchanged for more than 2,500 years.

Plays continue to reflect the people and societies for whom they are created. They explore human ideas, values, goals, conflicts, and experiences. Storytelling, whether shared orally, recorded in writing, or presented through performance, is a fundamental part of human nature. Through theatre, we recognize ourselves and our experiences reflected onstage.

Our humanity is revealed through the performers who bring characters to life. Actors portray fictional individuals with human emotions, desires, struggles, and relationships that connect to the audience's own cultural experiences and values. However, theatre does not attempt to recreate every moment of everyday life. The ordinary details and routines of human existence would rarely hold an audience's attention. Instead, theatre focuses on carefully selected moments: those significant events that reveal character, create conflict, and illuminate the human experience.

As audience members, we witness some of the most meaningful and transformative moments of human life: the experience of falling in love, the loss of love, moments of joy and triumph, or the darkest aspects of human behavior. Theatre's power comes from our natural curiosity about others and its ability to provide a safe space where we can explore experiences beyond our own.

Theatre and the Concept of Otherness

The concept of otherness recognizes that, no matter how deeply we know another person, there will always be aspects of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences that remain unknown to us. Human beings cannot fully become someone else or completely experience another person's reality. Theatre, however, provides a temporary opportunity to bridge that separation.

Within the theatrical experience, audiences become observers of carefully selected moments in the lives of others. Like a "fly on the wall," the audience is invited to witness experiences that would otherwise remain private or inaccessible. The relationship between performer and audience is carefully structured within a controlled and safe environment. Unlike real life, theatre provides certain assurances:

- The length of the experience is controlled and predictable.
- The characters exist within the boundaries of the performance; when the play ends, the performers leave the fictional world without actual emotional or physical harm.

By reducing the distance created by otherness, theatre allows us to explore the mysteries of human experience in a safe and shared environment. Theatre artists take fragments of human life and shape them into meaningful stories that help audiences understand themselves and others. Through this collective experience, theatre transforms the complexities of being human into something relatable, accessible, and meaningful.

Summary

Perhaps the most important understanding of theatre is that it provides a way to explore and celebrate the human condition which refers to the shared experiences, emotions, challenges, and aspirations that define what it means to be human. The human condition connects us across time and place: past, present, and future; here and around the world.

Theatre creates a space where we can examine, reflect upon, and seek to understand ourselves and one another. For more than 2,000 years, performers and audiences have gathered to explore the full range of human experiences, from moments of joy and connection to conflict, loss, and transformation.

The power of theatre comes from experiencing stories through living, breathing performers in the same shared moment as the audience. This immediacy distinguishes theatre from other art forms and gives it a unique quality, coherence, and vitality. Theatre is a collaborative art form created through the combined efforts of performers, directors, designers, technicians, and audiences who collaboratively bring a shared artistic vision to life.



The Jungle Book, Harrisburg Area Community College, 2014. Photograph by Brenda C. Eppley. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

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2: Chapter Two - The Elements of Theater



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The Theatre Audience

There are several things to consider when trying to understand the role of the audience in theatre. It has been mentioned previously that theatre would not exist without an audience. It is entirely dependent upon the shared experience between the audience and the performers for its meaning and its purpose.

Every performance and production is unique. It is organic: a thing alive if you will. Since it is live, there is no pause button, and no repeat function. What happens live, exists and then moves on and into the next moment. If a play is seen on two successive nights using the same script with the same cast performing on the same set, the performance will differ each night. A line may be forgotten, or a light or sound cue will be missed.

Remember, too, that the audience differs for each performance. Every audience member brings his or her own experience and understanding to what is happening. The shared experience will be different. The energy in the room will be different. A moment that received a laugh one night might not receive the same kind of laughter the next night, if at all. That unique element, the shared energy between the audience members and the performers, is one of those “magical” aspects of theatre. Since the performance takes place live and directly in the presence of the performers, an energy connection is developed. The performers “feel” the energy from the audience as they react to the play. In turn, the audience “feels” the human connection of the live performance, which then impacts the energy they share with the performer. If you have never experienced this for yourself, consider the following parallel. Even though we can hear our favorite musician’s music on the radio or via the internet, we still go to the musician’s concerts when feasible. Why? We want to personally experience the presence of the artist while sharing in the creation of the music in real-time. The experience is more impactful because we are part of the live process of creating the work of art (the music). It is this same bond that audience members share with the performers on stage during a play.

A well-known critic in the 20th century, Walter Kerr, made this observation about this dynamic interaction between the audience and the performers:

It doesn’t just mean that we are in the personal presence of the performers. It means that they are in our presence, conscious of us, speaking to us, working for and with us until a circuit that is not mechanical becomes established between us, a circuit that is fluid, unpredictable, ever-changing in its impulses, crackling, intimate. Our presence, the way we respond, flows back to the performer and alters what he does, to some degree and sometimes astonishingly so, every single night. We are contenders, making the play and the evening and the emotion together. We are playmates, building a structure.[1]

This interaction is what makes theatre special and unique. It is the “magic” that actors and others who have been participants in theatre often speak of. Therefore, audience members become participants in the creation of the theatrical event. How do they do this?

1. The audience participates with the performance **vicariously**. That is, they are not actually going through the actions of the characters in the play, but by observing that action and attempting to understand that action, the audience can share the experience with the actors. This kind of emotional investment is what the audience member makes when he or she is participating in the action vicariously. Notice that this is not a physical participation, nor only intellectual participation. It is an *emotional participation*. Remember that a play is meant to be a conversation, a sharing of ideas about the message the playwright included in the script, as interpreted by the director. So, it is important to understand that the audience is expected to engage the play emotionally as well as intellectually. It goes beyond just sitting and watching a play for pure entertainment. The audience, in order to truly share the artistic experience of the performance, is expected to engage and think about what is being shared and to connect to the experience emotionally.

2. The audience makes a choice when watching a play, to **suspend their disbelief**. This means that each member of the audience knows intellectually that he or she is sitting in a chair in an auditorium or other venue while watching a play that is being performed by actors who are not really the characters they are portraying. As a rational and thinking individual, the audience member knows that what is happening on stage is NOT real. However, in order to join into the emotional experience of the performance, the audience member chooses to disregard the awareness that what he or she is watching is not real and instead chooses to assign a reality to the observed actions and react “as if” they are real. This act of choosing to ignore the “reality” of the performance and to accept the “reality of the pretense” is what we call the **willing suspension of disbelief**.

Performers

The craft of acting is deceptively simple. It starts with childhood experiences of “make-believe.” Because imitation and role-playing are such a natural extension of human social behavior, it is easy to assume that the craft and profession of acting retain the simplicity, freedom, and intuitive nature of childhood games. At its best, acting appears effortless. It invites an audience to forget that actors are in any way different from the characters they impersonate. With the support of an audience, an actor becomes another person who occupies their place within the confines of a story, imagined circumstance, or scene. This imaginative exercise is such an ingrained feature of human social behavior that we often forget that it is based on a shared acceptance between audiences and actors, and that they are both willing to play the game in order to collectively believe in and relate to a **performance**.

When we role-play, whether it is in a childhood game, a story related to friends of past events, or a fully fictional representation in a theatre, the **persona** that is created is normally referenced as the character, typically with distinctive, and often fictional features, viewpoints, and life experiences that differ from those of the actor. We may admire particular actors and wish to emulate their work. Sometimes this admiration is rooted in the qualities of a character they have played, or the charisma of the actor. Often, we relate to something the actor has artistically expressed, or a quality we wish we were able to project ourselves. There is no uniform definition of “great acting.” We are equally willing to appreciate a chameleon and a movie star. Many great character actors can disappear completely into a role without leaving a celebrity footprint behind. They create characters that are fully believable and relatable for an audience. Numerous famous actors make careers playing their own projected personas over and over again but do so with such charisma and investment that we admire and enjoy their work even though we recognize consistent features in every character they play. The unifying feature in both of these examples is our readiness to believe in the character we are presented with and to relate to the immediate experiences of that character in the story being enacted.

Play/Script

You are likely familiar with reading a novel, a short story, an article in a magazine, or many other forms of narratives. Plays are a different beast, and unless you are in the theatre business, the chances of you reading a play are rather small. Unlike any other form of fiction, plays are exclusively written through dialogue (what the characters say) and stage directions (the movement of the characters on stage).

Every play of every genre has a **protagonist.** The protagonist is the character who carries the story and pushes it forward. It is the protagonist who changes the most during the course of the play. The protagonist is the character who needs to solve the main conflict and overcome the main obstacle.

The **antagonist** serves as an obstacle to the protagonist. The antagonist is necessary because the character drives the conflict that makes the action of the story interesting.

Note

Excerpt from *The Importance of Being Earnest*

ALGERNON. Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

JACK. May I ask why?

ALGERNON. My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.

JACK. I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

ALGERNON. I thought you had come up for pleasure? . . . I call that business.

JACK. How utterly unromantic you are!

ALGERNON. I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact.

JACK. I have no doubt about that, dear Algy. The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted.

ALGERNON. Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject. Divorces are made in Heaven—[Jack puts out his hand to take a sandwich. Algernon at once interferes.] Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. [Takes one and eats it.]

JACK. Well, you have been eating them all the time.

ALGERNON. That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. [Takes plate from below.] Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendolen. Gwendolen is devoted to bread and butter.

JACK. [Advancing to table and helping himself.] And very good bread and butter it is too.

ALGERNON. Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat as if you were going to eat it all. You behave as if you were married to her already. You are not married to her already, and I don't think you ever will be.

JACK. Why on earth do you say that?

ALGERNON. Well, in the first place girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right.

JACK. Oh, that is nonsense!

ALGERNON. It isn't. It is a great truth. It accounts for the extraordinary number of bachelors that one sees all over the place. In the second place, I don't give my consent.

The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People. Oscar Wilde. Public Domain. Source: Project Gutenberg.

The Director

Like everyone else involved in a theatrical production, the directors need to know the script in great detail. Directors are required to read the script several times and research anything that supports their understanding of the plot and characters. Script analysis is crucial as well; it is vital to know how the play functions in its entirety and how the characters develop, interact with each other, and how their individual roles push the story forward. It is of the utmost importance that a director respects the script for what it is and serves to tell the **playwright's** story.

When the director has developed a strong knowledge of the script, he/she/they start working on their own artistic construct. At this stage, the director interprets the script by answering these questions:

· **What does this mean to me?**

· **What does the playwright intend to say?**

· **What is the meaning behind this story?**

· **Why is it important to tell this story?**

· **When the audience leaves the theatre, what do I want them to think about?**

The moment that the director re-tells the story and recreates the narrative, their interpretation of it plays a decisive role. That is what makes each production of a script unique: each director will have a different reaction to the text, which results in varying interpretations of the same story. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has had many thousands of productions since it was first produced in 1599. Yet, each production is different due to unique interpretations and their resulting artistic choices.

The director is responsible for creating a cohesive production through which everything the audience sees fulfills a specific artistic concept. It's a bit like a recipe for some delicious dessert: the ingredients must be of the greatest quality, of course, but what makes it successful is the balance among the ingredients. The director's job is to establish that balance. The director is like the captain of a ship: he/she/they need to have leadership qualities while also being a great collaborator.

Directors come from different artistic paths. It's unusual to start off as a director. It's rather something you *become* as you develop your theatrical career. Some directors come from acting, others from playwriting, and others from producing. Although nowadays there are undergraduate and graduate programs devoted to training theatre directors it is hands-on experience combined with training that always what makes the difference. You may have the best ideas, but they are useless if you can't translate them to the stage. Directors need to have a certain knowledge of all aspects of a theatrical production, from script analysis to acting, as well as technical and design elements, because although the director will not actively work exclusively in those distinct areas, he/she/they must know how they function and the common terminology that is associated with each area. Otherwise, the director and designers will speak a very different language that will negatively impact the production concept by creating many obstacles along the journey. Of utmost importance, directors need to possess leadership qualities and be effective communicators and collaborators.

You may be surprised to learn that the role of the director appears late in the historical timeline of theatre and is mostly aligned with modern theatre history.

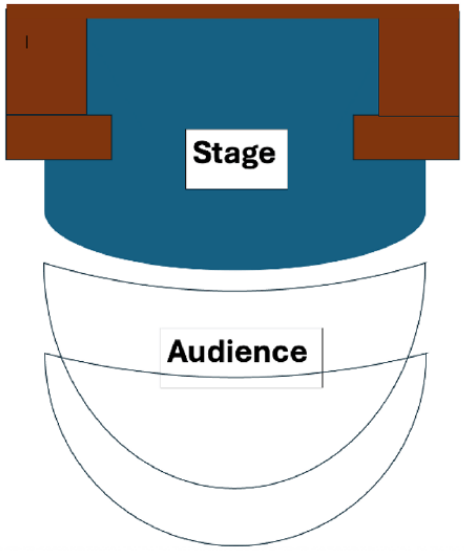
Theatre Spaces

As we dive into the major periods of theatre history in later chapters, you will be able to trace the architectural elements first seen in ancient theatres through to the modern period. As mentioned in Chapter One, theatre simply requires an actor and an audience member who occupy a space together. While any space can be transformed into a theatre space, it will be helpful for you to become familiar with a few key terms.

The most popular theatrical space is the **proscenium theatre**. If you have ever been to the theatre in your life, the odds of your being in a proscenium-style theatre are quite high. In a proscenium theatre, the stage directly faces the audience. As the physical stage is conceived exclusively for theatrical performances, there is a distinct division between the spaces that are accessible to the audience from the spaces that serve the production itself.

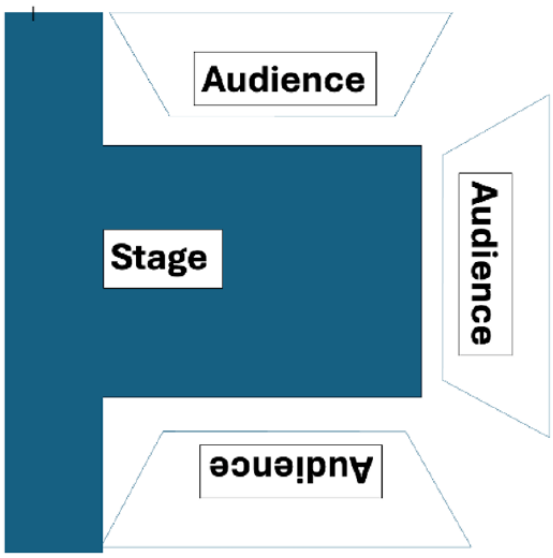
The audience enters the building, and usually, there is a lobby with a ticket office, a cloakroom of some sort, restrooms, and at times a cafeteria or a bar. The lobby gives access to the house which is where the audience is seated and can be arranged in several ways. Seating in the house can be on a main floor with seats arranged in rows right in front of the stage. There may also be levels of seating in the house which may include a mezzanine and balcony, both of which are accessed via stairs from the lobby.

When it comes to the space dedicated to performances, the proscenium theatre highlights the division between actors and the audience. The stage is framed with a **proscenium arch** that creates the window, or frame, through which the audience experiences the production. That frame generates what is also known as the **fourth wall**. When we talk about actors "breaking the fourth wall", we mean that during the production the actors directly address the audience, breaking the illusion of separation between what is happening on stage and the "real" world.



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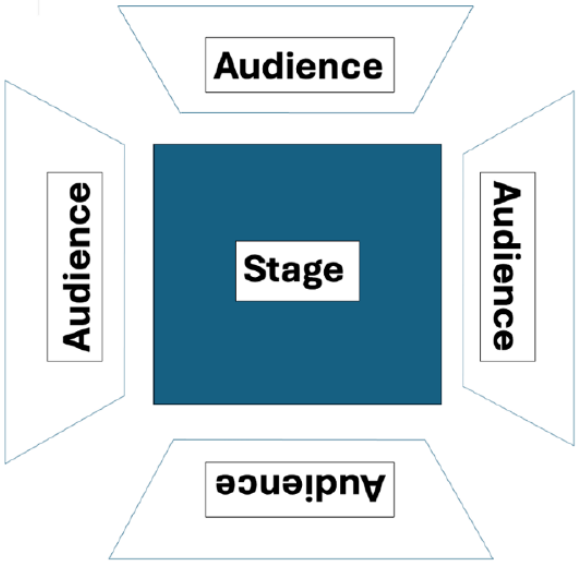
Another modern theatrical space that is very popular is the **thrust stage**. The majority, although certainly not all, thrust stage theatres call for more intimate and less technically demanding design-heavy productions. They also tend to be smaller venues, with fewer seats in the house. In a thrust theatre, the stage extends into the audience, so if an actor is standing in the middle of the stage, the audience is sitting on the actor's right and left sides and in front. Acting on a thrust stage requires different abilities of the actors. In a proscenium stage, the actors need to keep in mind that the audience is facing them, so unless they intentionally turn their backs to the audience, they can maintain an unobstructed view of the audience, and vice versa. In a thrust stage, with the audience arranged on three sides of the stage, there will be times when the actors have their backs to the audience. It simply cannot be avoided. In order to minimize this issue, the director and the actors have to "block" the show in a more dynamic way. **Blocking** refers to the movement of actors on the stage. In a thrust stage, the entrances and exits of the actors can happen from the back of the theatre or directly from the aisles where the audience is seated.



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The third kind of theatrical space is the theatre-in-the-round, or **arena-style theatre**. In this case, the stage is in the middle of the house, with the audience surrounding it on all sides. It is considered the most challenging space by actors, directors, and designers alike, mostly because everything really happens in plain sight. There is no way of hiding anything or of getting something (or someone) on and off stage without passing through the audience or without the audience seeing it. This kind of

stage doesn't really allow big scene changes or even big pieces of scenery, as they would inevitably block some considerable part of the audience from seeing the action. In terms of acting, the arena calls for an even more dynamic staging as this is another space where actors would be at any point giving their backs to some section of the audience. The theatre-in-the-round is utilized most successfully for small, intimate productions or for productions that rely on dialogue rather than spectacle.



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The fourth type of modern theatre space is the **black box theatre**. This space is the smallest theatrical space but provides the most flexibility. The black box is usually a wide-open rectangular space that is painted black and is fully equipped to function with every possible configuration of audience seating and stage. A black box theatre can be arranged as a proscenium theatre, a thrust theatre, an arena, or many other configurations, according to the needs of the production. Similarly to the two previous theatrical spaces, the black box does not allow the technical elements to be concealed from the audience's view, and given the size of the space itself, it is best utilized when producing small, intimate shows. This space allows close proximity between the actors and the audience, creating a very unique experience

Basic Design and Technical Elements

➡️ *Costumes*

While many love costumes for their beauty and creativity, the main purpose of costumes within a theatrical production is to communicate necessary information about the time period and characters to the audience. Costumes provide us with a glimpse into a character before they have a chance to speak. They allow us to use our knowledge of the world to make assumptions about where we are and who a person is without having to be told. Costumes may be used to communicate a character's personality, wealth or social status, age, sex or gender, confidence level, employment, and more. Costumes can also work with other design elements to reveal important details about the world of the play, including time period, region or location, weather, time of year, time of day, living conditions, and other important details.

Wigs and makeup are most commonly the responsibility of the costume designer unless a special effect requires the addition of an SFX makeup artist.

Costumes add a unique element of spectacle to every theatre production, but their success is measured not by how pretty they are but by how effectively they help the audience to understand the characters in the play. Costumes must work with scenery and lights to ensure that the entire production design feels unified and supports the story being told.

➡️ *Lighting*

The role of the lighting designer is simultaneously complex, and quite rudimentary. Simply put, the job of a lighting designer is

to *"put light when and where it is needed to support and enhance the story being presented."* However, it is an art form that demands the specificity and skill of a surgeon and at times, the brute strength of a bodybuilder. It is an incredibly influential and manipulative design element as it relates to live entertainment. In the historical timeline, lighting design is a more recent addition to the ever-growing list of collaborators that contribute to mounting a live theatre production. Aside from using candlelight and gas lighting fixtures, the primary role lighting played was simply to illuminate the actors so the audience could see what was happening on stage. It wasn't until the late 19th Century with the introduction of electric light that we began to see the full potential of just how powerful lighting would become in the enhancement of storytelling on the stage. If you have attended a very large concert, you will quickly observe the impact of lighting. Imagine if the only use of lighting was white fluorescent lights without any color or movement!

Fundamentally speaking, stage lighting is any source that emits light. This can come from any electric lighting fixture that is equipped with either LED or incandescent lamps. It can also come from any natural light source as well, such as a candle, the sun, or a torch. The lighting designer's purpose is to light the actor, and in some cases the scenery, in the most appropriate way that enhances the themes, actions, and dramatic arc of a particular piece of theatre. This can be achieved in a myriad of ways utilizing many design elements: color, texture, intensity, shape, and movement, to name a few. The ability to appropriately incorporate a combination of design elements to shape a scene is the foundational skill a lighting designer must develop on her way to becoming a true artist of the theatre. Ultimately, a lighting design becomes another character in relation to the script. Light is a living entity on the stage as it moves and changes color, shape, texture, and tempo. These traits become the visual vocabulary of the play to help both the actors as well as the audience members "track" or follow the storyline in a way that enhances the actors while they convey the storyline. Simply stated, a lighting designer is an artist who paints with light.

➡️ *Scenic*

Throughout much of theatre's history, scenery has played a role in telling the story, defining the story's location, and creating a world in which the story can live for an audience. The periods in history that shaped our understanding of theatre in the West have had some form of scenery or scenic element as part of the presentation styles. These elements are used to illustrate time, place, social status, and other visual communications. Scenic design has grown into an art form that allows artists to imagine, create, invent, and discover new ways of communicating location, time, and space. In the theatre of the 21st Century, our scenic design toolkit includes a wide variety of technologies including computer automation, motorized curtains, and video and image projection. A scenic designer takes on the role of an artist, engineer, carpenter, painter, plumber, computer programmer, visionary, and research historian. Scenery can be real, imagined, projected, symbolic, representational, and take on many other forms, but it is just one small part of the whole. Scenic designers create a world in which the story can be told, allowing an audience to have a sense of what it was like to live in that world during that time and gain a greater understanding of who the characters are in their lives at this moment.

Scenic design and all theatre design is an ever-evolving art form that serves an intended purpose within a production. It contributes to contextual understanding of the production's environment, creates visual interest and intrigue, and often provides visual spectacles that capture our imaginations in the process. The scenic designer is the artist who imagines the possibilities of the world of the play and creates the needed artifacts to make those ideas a reality.

➡️ *Sound*

We can all agree that sounds and music impact the way we perceive and experience something, so it should come as no surprise how much sound influences the audience's reception of a theatre production. Sound design as a profession is a relatively new field in theatre although its contribution can dramatically impact all elements of a performance. Ultimately, the sound designer is responsible for everything that the audience hears coming from the stage. Similarly to costumes and sets, sounds need to be consistent with the style of the production. Sounds can define the timeframe of a play. Most ordinary, everyday sounds have changed tremendously through time. A doorbell in the 18th century sounded very different from our modern day doorbell tones. The same can be said for phone ringtones, announcements, radio advertisements, train sounds, car sounds....and so much more.

The sound designer's job is to produce and implement sounds that are accurate and consistent with the overall design and concept of the production. At times, music is also required in the production to underscore a scene and provide atmosphere, and music usually plays as the audience enters the theatre space and at the end of the production. Selecting the music or composing the specific music that is also a task that falls to the sound designer.

Additional Members of a Production Team

You may be wondering about other roles within theatre that have not been mentioned, yet each play an important function in the production of the theatre experience.

➡️ Producer

In a theatre production, the producer is the one person that “makes it happen” financially. Depending on the kind of production, the number of producers and the roles they take on may differ, but generally speaking, they are in charge of finding and providing the necessary funds to put the show on its feet for a run. In contrast to directors, producers are not involved in the artistic process.

➡️ *Stage Manager*

A stage manager plays a crucial role in the production that requires them to possess the skills of keen organization, clear communication, attention to detail, while highly collaborative.

They coordinate rehearsals, take notes at rehearsals and production meetings, work closely with the director and all members of the technical team while ensuring everyone is on the same page to support the director’s vision. Once the production is up and running, it is the stage manager who runs all performances. Inherent to the qualities of stage managers is an affable and dependable nature who is highly dedicated and task oriented.

➡️ *Playwright*

Unlike a novelist who writes for the page or a screenwriter who writes for film or television, playwrights write for the stage. As a student, you may first encounter a play as words on a page, but this is only the beginning of the journey. Plays are meant to live in a three-dimensional form. Because a play is a live experience with a new audience each time, it can never be repeated in exactly the same way. Playwrights are not fully satisfied until their plays move off the page and are embodied by actors on a stage in some way, shape, or form. When playwrights are writing, they understand they are in collaboration with actors, directors, and designers as they all build the play for an audience to encounter.

➡️ Musical Director and Choreographer

Musical directors are tied to musical theatre productions and run musical rehearsals with the cast and musicians while supporting the director’s vision. They must be extremely familiar with the musical score, providing vocal coaching to the actors as needed. During rehearsals and performances, they oversee the orchestra or pit musicians.

Working closely with the director and musical director, the choreographer is responsible for the dance and movement elements of a production which they create and effectively stage. They teach the actors the movements sequences that are tied to the production’s music.

➡️ Combat Choreographer

Anytime you see fighting on stage, it should have been staged by a combat/fight choreographer who designs the sequence of movements that safely convey fighting that, again, supports the director’s vision. A combat/fight choreographer receives certification to teach actors how to work with various weapons while always maintaining safety. They must have an ability to visualize the choreography through the perspective of the audience so that the movements of the actors appear to be real.

➡️ Intimacy Coach

An intimacy coach in theatre is a professional who ensures that sensitive scenes are approached respectfully with both actors and directors. They establish safe and supported boundaries for the actors in scenes where their characters may be violent, kissing, nude, or sexually intimate. Their primary purpose is to build trust so that the actors can play their roles as truthfully as possible without fear of psychological or physical injury.

➡️ *Voice Coach*

Regardless of the level of talent that an actor may possess, their performance will lose impact if their vocal quality is weak. A voice coach's task is to make certain that actors can be heard and understood while maintaining a healthy vocal instrument. They support the actors diction and projection, teach dialects when needed, lead vocal warm-ups, and help actors to create characters with a voice that reflects nuances and believability.

Summary

In Chapter Thirteen, you will gain a deeper understanding of the various roles of the technical positions in theatre.

The directors, designers, and all members of a production team work collaboratively to deliver to the audience a successful theatrical experience. Each team member greatly impacts the other. If one member of the production team fails to complete a task on time and as planned, the effect on the other tasks within the production team may fall behind schedule. Timelines in theatre require very specific deadlines since every element is interwoven.

There is a creative synergy within theatre that joins together the actors and production team who prioritize the delivery of an artistic vision. Theatre artists do not work in silos. Rather, they have tremendous problem-solving skills, work efficiently under pressure, are deadline oriented, communicate well and effectively, are highly adaptable, and understand the elements of teamwork.

Helpful Tips!

When Reading Plays

By approaching play reading with curiosity, engagement, and an open mind, you can enrich your appreciation for the art form and gain valuable insights into the human experience. However, reading a play differs quite a bit from how you approach and read a novel.

1. Format and Structure

- Plays are typically written in a format that includes dialogue, stage directions, and sometimes character descriptions. The text is often broken into acts and scenes, with each scene representing a specific location or moment in time.
- Novels, on the other hand, are prose narratives that are usually divided into chapters. They often contain descriptive passages, internal monologue, and narration that provide insight into characters, settings, and events.

2. Dialogue vs. Narration

- Plays rely heavily on dialogue to convey character development, plot progression, and themes. The dialogue serves as the primary means of communication between characters and is often supplemented by stage directions that provide guidance for actors and directors.
- Novels use a combination of dialogue, narration, and description to tell the story. While dialogue is still important, novels also allow for more extensive exploration of characters' thoughts, feelings, and surroundings through narration.

3. Visual Imagination

- Reading a play requires the reader to use their imagination to visualize the characters, settings, and action based on the text alone. Stage directions provide cues for how the play should be performed, but the reader must still interpret and imagine the visual aspects of the production.
- Novels provide more detailed descriptions of characters, settings, and events, which can help readers to create vivid mental images of the story. The prose style of novels allows for a more immersive and descriptive reading experience.

4. Performance vs. Privately Reading

- Plays are primarily written to be performed on stage, in front of an audience. The text serves as a blueprint for actors, directors, and designers to bring the story to life through performance.
- Novels are typically consumed privately, allowing readers to engage with the text at their own pace and in their own space. While novels can be adapted into other forms of media, such as films or television shows, the reading experience is generally a solitary one.

Because of the skills needed to read a play with the greatest possible enjoyment, take note of these tips:

1. **Set the Scene:** Before diving into the text, take a moment to familiarize yourself with the background of the play. Learn about the playwright, the time period in which the play was written, and any historical or cultural context that may be relevant to understanding the themes and characters.

2. **Read Actively:** Approach the text with an active mindset, engaging with the dialogue, stage directions, and descriptions. Pay attention to how the characters interact with each other and how the playwright uses language to convey emotion, tone, and subtext.

3. **Visualize the Setting:** As you read, try to visualize the setting and imagine how the play would unfold on stage. Consider how the stage directions and descriptions contribute to the overall atmosphere and mood of the play.

4. **Analyze Characterization:** Take note of how the playwright develops the characters through their dialogue, actions, and interactions with other characters. Consider their motivations, conflicts, and relationships, and how they evolve over the course of the play.

5. **Explore Themes and Symbols:** Look for recurring themes, symbols, and motifs that run throughout the play. Consider how these elements contribute to the overall meaning and message of the work.

6. **Consider Dramatic Structure:** Pay attention to the structure of the play, including the organization of acts and scenes, as well as any narrative or dramatic techniques employed by the playwright. Consider how the structure enhances the pacing and tension of the story.

7. **Read Aloud:** If possible, consider reading the play aloud or listening to an audio recording. Hearing the dialogue spoken can help bring the characters to life and provide a better sense of rhythm and pacing.

8. **Take Notes:** Keep a notebook handy to jot down any observations, questions, or insights that arise as you read. Taking notes can help you track important plot points, character developments, and thematic elements.

9. **Discuss with Others:** Consider discussing the play with friends, classmates, or fellow enthusiasts. Sharing perspectives and interpretations can deepen your understanding of the text and lead to new insights.

10. **Read Widely:** Don't limit yourself to one genre or style of play. Explore a variety of playwrights, time periods, and cultural traditions to broaden your understanding of the theatrical landscape.

When Seeing Live Theatre

Attending live theatre can be a wonderful experience, offering the opportunity to immerse yourself in storytelling, performance, and artistry. Here are some helpful tips to enhance your enjoyment:

1. **Arrive Early:** Give yourself plenty of time to find parking, locate your seats, and settle in before the performance begins. Arriving early also allows you to explore the theater and possibly purchase refreshments or merchandise.

2. **Dress Appropriately:** While there is no strict dress code for attending the theatre, it's generally a good idea to dress neatly and comfortably. Consider the venue and the type of production you'll be seeing when choosing your attire.

3. **Turn Off Electronic Devices:** Before the performance begins, silence your cell phone and any other electronic devices. Avoid texting, taking calls, or using your phone during the show, as it can distract both performers and other audience members.

4. **Respect the Performers:** Show appreciation for the actors and crew by refraining from talking, eating loudly, or rustling

wrappers during the performance. Remember that live theatre requires concentration and focus from everyone involved.

5. **Follow Theater Etiquette:** Be mindful of theater etiquette, such as refraining from talking or whispering during the performance, avoiding excessive movement or fidgeting, and keeping disruptions to a minimum.

6. **Observe Intermissions:** Many theater productions include intermissions, during which you can stretch your legs, use the restroom, and possibly purchase additional refreshments. Be sure to return to your seat promptly when the intermission ends.

7. **Applaud Appropriately:** Show your appreciation for the performers by applauding at appropriate moments, such as the end of a scene or act, or after particularly impressive performances. Avoid applauding during serious or emotional moments unless it's clearly intended as part of the performance.

8. **Stay Engaged:** Pay attention to the performance and immerse yourself in the story being told. Live theatre offers a unique opportunity to connect with the performers and the material in a way that is different from other forms of entertainment.

9. **Be Respectful of Others:** Remember that you're sharing the theater space with fellow audience members, so be considerate of their experience as well. Avoid disturbing others by talking, unwrapping candies, or making unnecessary noise.

10. **Enjoy Yourself:** Above all, relax and enjoy the experience! Live theatre can be a magical and transformative experience, so allow yourself to be swept away by the performances and the artistry on stage.

By following these tips, you can make the most of your experience attending live theatre and ensure that both you and your fellow audience members have an enjoyable time.

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[1] Kerr, Walter, “We Call It ‘Live Theater,’ but is it?” New York Times, 2 Jan. 1972.

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3: Chapter Three - The Classical Period of Theatre



Marble Pinax Relief with Theatre Mask and Temple from Pompeii. Anonymous Roman artist, 1st century CE. Photographed at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples. Public domain.

TIMELINE: ANCIENT EGYPT THROUGH THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

DATE	THEATRE	HISTORICAL CONTEXT
c. 2600 BCE	Meydum Passion Play and Osiris rituals in Egypt.	Early Dynastic Period in Egypt • Advances in irrigation Great Pyramid of Giza completed
c. 2100 BCE	Religious festivals in Egypt and Mesopotamia.	Rise of City-States in Mesopotamia • Bronze tools widespread
c. 1700 BCE	Religious rituals in Egypt.	Code of Hammurabi in Babylon • Writing in use across Mesopotamia (cuneiform)
c. 1539–1300 BCE	Sacred ritual performances continue.	Hittite Empire flourishes • Iron tools in wider use
c. 1300 BCE	Performance traditions continue across the Near East.	New Kingdom Egypt • Rameses II • Minoan Greece
c. 1000–600 BCE	Oral storytelling traditions flourish in Greece.	Iron Age begins in Mediterranean world
c. 900–500 BCE	Writing of the *Vedas* in India.	Writing of the *Vedas* in India • Early Indo-Aryan culture
c. 776 BCE	First Olympic Games in Olympia.	First Olympic Games in Olympia • Rise of Greek culture
c. 750–550 BCE	Homeric epics (*Iliad*, *Odyssey*) composed.	Homeric epics (*Iliad*, *Odyssey*) composed • Hesiod's Works and *Days* composed
c. 561–481 BCE	The Golden Age of Greek Theatre in Athens.	Solon's reforms in Athens • Persian Wars begin
c. 550–479 BCE	The *Poetics* by Aristotle is written.	Aristotle writes *The Poetics* on drama
c. 6th century BCE	Greek tragedy emerges in the 6th century BCE with playwrights such as Thespis; Thespis becomes the first recorded actor;	Rise of Tyrannies in Athens • Zoroastrianism founded in Persia (c. 6th century BCE)
c. 531 BCE	Greek tragedy takes shape.	Confucius born in China • Zhou Dynasty declines
c. 5th century BCE	Greek drama (Aeschylus) during the Persian Wars.	Persian Wars • Greek city-states often in conflict
c. 5th century BCE	Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes create major dramatic works.	Golden Age of Athens • Parthenon constructed (447–432 BCE) Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta
c. 4th century BCE	Theatre becomes a subject of philosophy and criticism.	Socrates (470–399 BCE); Plato (427–347); Aristotle (384–322)
c. 336–323 BCE	Greek theatre spreads throughout Alexander's empire.	Alexander the Great creates a vast empire; Hellenistic culture spreads across Europe, Asia, and Africa
331 BCE	Roman theatre develops: Livius Andronicus, Plautus, and Terence.	Roman Republic • Punic Wars • Greek civilization influences Rome
c. 3rd century BCE	The *Mahabharata* epics composed in India. The *Bhagavad Gita*, part of the *Mahabharata*.	The *Mahabharata* epics composed • The *Bhagavad Gita* (c. 2nd century BCE)
c. 200 BCE– 27 BCE	Roman theatre flourishes under Augustus.	Roman Empire begins • Pax Romana (Roman Peace)
		Vikings begin raiding and exploring across Europe
c. 1 BCE–50 CE	Roman theatre remains popular.	Life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth • Spread of Christianity begins
70 CE	Eruption of Mount Vesuvius; cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum buried.	Eruption of Mount Vesuvius (79 CE); Pompeii and Herculaneum destroyed
105 CE	Public theatre begins to decline.	Paper invented in China by Cai Lun
313 CE	Classical drama traditions end in the Western Empire.	Constantine issues the Edict of Milan • Christianity legalized in the Roman Empire
476 CE		Fall of the Western Roman Empire • Beginning of the Middle Ages in Western Europe

Literature • Inventions & Technology • History & Politics • Philosophy & Religion • Art & Architecture • Vikings

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The Earliest Forms of Theatre: Ancient Egyptian, Greece, and Roman

When we watch a play, or virtually any other type of dramatic or theatrical event, we are taking part in an activity that has been occurring without much significant change for nearly 2600 years. Walking into the theatre, finding a seat, sitting down, waiting for the performance to begin, watching the actors, listening to the lines they speak, and reacting to them with emotions and applause are experiences shared by our ancestors since the dawn of theatre. Theatre spaces are where we instinctively gather together to share in a collective event.

But where did theatre begin? The roots of theatre can be traced to ancient storytelling, myths, and religious ceremonies. Until quite recently, the origins of theatre in a format that is recognizable is usually associated with Ancient Greece. However, more recent scholarly research has unveiled evidence that early Egyptians told religious stories through scripted material.

Between 3100 BCE – 332 BCE ancient Egyptian civilization flourished along the Nile River. Egyptian plays were usually performed as part of religious festivals that were intended to honor the gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt. These plays typically involved the reenactment of mythological stories and were performed by priests and other members of the religious elite. The performances were usually held in temple courtyards or other sacred spaces, and the audience consisted of worshippers who had come to participate in the festival. The plays were often accompanied by music and dance, and the performers wore elaborate costumes and masks to represent the characters they were portraying.

One of the most famous examples of Egyptian drama is the Passion Play of Osiris, which tells the story of the god Osiris, his murder by his brother Seth, and his resurrection by his wife Isis. The play was performed annually as part of the Osiris Festival and was a central part of Egyptian religious life for many centuries.

Unlike later periods of theatre history, we do not have archaeological evidence that has unveiled Egyptian theatre buildings or structures that are dedicated to performing plays. While the Egyptian form of theater may have been quite different from the more familiar Greek tradition, it played an important role in religious life and ritual of the ancient Egyptians.

The Beginning of Greek Theatre

Like the Egyptians, the ancient Greeks also gathered together for the telling of myths and participation in rituals.

In ancient Greece, religion played a major role in society. Because the gods influenced nearly every aspect of Greek civilization, Greek citizens celebrated, worshiped, and made appropriate offerings to the gods in the hope of controlling a particular outcome. Festivals that included ritual worship of the gods were often held throughout Greece, and none were more popular than the government-sponsored festival held each spring to celebrate Dionysus, the God of Wine and Fertility.



Terracotta Head of Dionysos, 1st century CE. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. CC0, via Wikimedia Commons.



Dionysus, 2nd Century CE. Department of Greek, Etruscan,and Roman Antiquities of the Louvre. Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen. CC BY 2.5 Wikimedia Commons

The festival became a prominent event in Athenian culture and religious life, and it was officially instituted as an annual festival. The roots of theatre are traditionally traced to the 6th century BCE during the Festival of Dionysus when the citizens of the City of Dionysia and the surrounding countryside would convene on the side of a hill just outside the city to observe a ritual sacrifice. The sacrifice of a goat was performed by male priests at the base of the hill in honor of Dionysus.

Why a hill? A hillside would provide a natural viewing space for a large group of spectators who could sit on the hill and observe the sacrifice that was happening below them on flatter ground. Joining together, the chorus of priests, often numbering 50 men, praised and honored the god through the performance of dithyrambs which were passionate hymns that were performed through improvised singing, chanting, and rhythmic movement. Our modern word “chorus” derives from the dancing, singing, and chanting that performed the dithyrambs. These collective events on a hillside were very popular and so well attended that the City of Dionysus instituted an annual play contest in 534 BCE. Tradition tells us that at some point in the 6th century BCE, one of the priests stepped out of the chorus and began a spoken and unsung dialogue with the chorus. History suggests that this priest was named Thespis and his action was the birth of dialogue in a performance space. To this day, theatre people are known as thespians and this moment in theatre history marks the beginning of dialogue in plays.

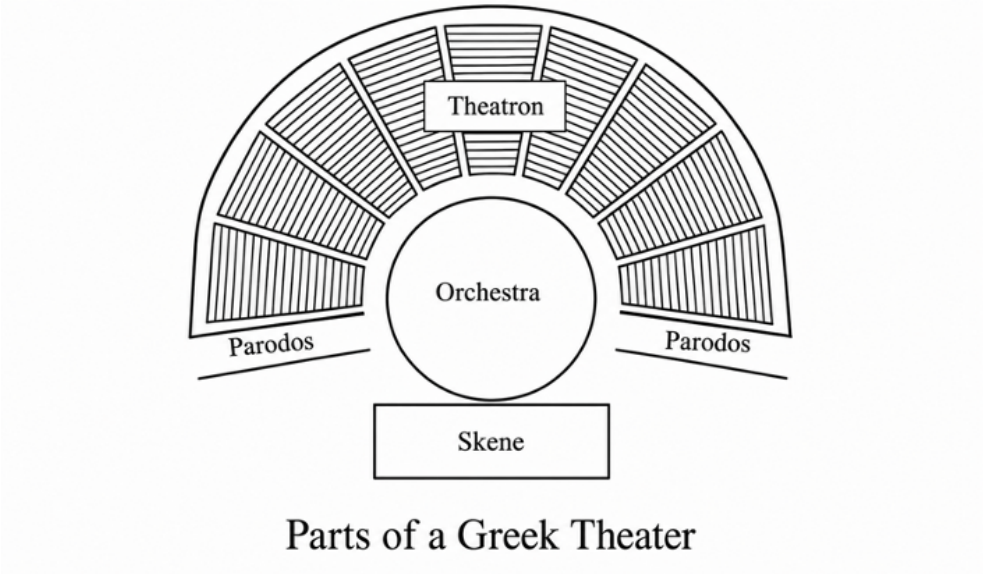
This festival event became so popular that it evolved into dramatic competitions in which three men would be chosen to write, produce, and organize the performance of three tragedies, as well as a satyr play (a vulgar comedy mocking a heroic subject). Comedies were added in the latter part of the 5th century BCE, and five writers of comedy were selected who would each enter one play into the enormously popular competition.

Audience

Because theatre was an important part of civic life, the performances were attended by a wide range of people, from wealthy aristocrats to the poorest citizens. Audience members came from all walks of life and included men, women, and children.

The seating area was divided into different sections based on social class, with the best seats reserved for the wealthiest members of society. However, there were no restrictions on who could attend the performances, and anyone who could afford the admission fee could enter the theatron (seeing place).

One notable feature of the ancient Greek theater audience was their active participation in the performance. Unlike modern audiences, who are expected to sit quietly while observing the play, ancient Greek audiences were expected to engage with the performers, reacting to the action on stage with cheers, applause, and even heckling. This interaction between the audience and performers was an important part of the theatrical experience, and it helped to create a sense of community among the audience members.



Parts of a Greek Theatre. Public domain.

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4: Chapter Four - Theatre of the Middle Ages



Hell Mouth. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

TIMELINE: THE MIDDLE AGES (c. 500–1500 CE)

DATE	THEATRE	HISTORICAL CONTEXT
c. 500 CE	Church dramatic liturgies, religious dramas begin to reemerge.	Fall of the Western Roman Empire · Christianity becomes dominant in Europe The Rule of St. Benedict written · Monasticism and literacy follow monastic rules
c. 566 CE	Liturgical drama tropes and sequences performed in churches.	Byzantine Empire under Justinian · Maya kingdoms established (250 CE) Feudalism written code of customs/law (Rome-style)
c. 632 CE	—	Prophet Muhammad (570–632) and the founding of Islam · Expansion of Islamic Caliphates (Rashidun and Shia) Advances in algebra, medicine, astronomy, and optics in the Islamic world
c. 750–900	Epic storytelling and performance traditions thrive in many cultures.	The Age of Charlemagne preserved · Development of Manors in Britain Paper spreads from China through the Islamic world to Europe (c. 800)
c. 750 CE	—	Abbassid Caliphate establishes Baghdad as a center of learning · Translation of Greek works into Arabic · Advances in science, medicine, and mathematics
c. 860 CE	Vernacular storytelling and minstrelsy flourish in Europe.	Christianization spreads (Baptism of 860) · Runic script used · Mechanical clocks developed Carolingian Renaissance in art and learning
c. 950–1000	—	The *Tale of Genji* (Japan) written · Goryeo dynasty founded in China Vikings explore and settle across Europe and North America
c. 1000 CE	Mystery plays and folk dramas performed in village settings.	Feudal system strengthens in Europe · Feudal society based on land and loyalty Romanesque architecture develops · Windmill appearance in Europe
1095–1291	Allegory cycles and miracle plays performed in churches and at pilgrim centers.	The Crusades · Christianity and Islam in long conflict Ottoman & Europe in al long conflict
c. 1170–1200	Secular theatre troupes, jugglers, and troubadours, and voyager entertainers perform and travel.	The *Poetry of Beowulf* · Rise of autonomous communes (Paris, Oxford) Gothic architecture begins (Chartres Cathedral, 1190)
c. 1260–1300	—	The *Travels of Marco Polo to Asia* (c. 1295 completed) · Eyeglasses invented Mongol Empire unites much of Asia
1325 CE	—	Tenochtitlan founded by the Mexica (Aztec) in Mesoamerica.
1347–1351	—	The Black Death (Bubonic) devastates Europe and Asia Social and feudal systems disrupted
c. 1380–1400	Morality (moralité) plays teach Christian ethics.	The Renaissance in Florence initiates · Printing, revivalism, and lobby books Gothic cathedrals reach their height
c. 1400–1420	Secular drama grows in popularity; early Renaissance influences theatre.	Johannes Gutenberg's Bible (1445) · The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer Monarchs gain power; arts flourish in Europe (c. 1400)
1453 CE	—	Fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans; end of the Byzantine Empire Start of the Early Modern Period
c. 1450–1500	Late medieval drama transitions toward Renaissance theatre.	Johannes Gutenberg's printing press spreads knowledge · Renaissance begins Renaissance art emerges in Italy (Milan, Florence, Venice)

Literature · Invention & Technology · History & Politics · Philosophy & Religion · Art & Architecture · Religion · Global Events

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INTRODUCTION

The Roman Empire was expansive and enduring, lasting for over 500 years and encompassing a significant portion of the Western world, including regions of Europe, Asia, and Africa. At its zenith in the 2nd century CE, the Roman Empire covered approximately 2 million square miles and boasted a population estimated by historical accounts as 60 million inhabitants. This vast territory included much of modern-day Western Europe, the Mediterranean basin, parts of the Middle East, and North Africa.

Following the collapse of Rome in the 5th century CE, the former provinces of the Roman Empire fragmented into smaller territories governed locally by kings and nobles. The Middle Ages, also known as the medieval period, is generally understood as

the era between the ancient and early modern worlds. In European history, it is often dated from the 5th century CE, following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, to the 15th century CE, when the Renaissance, overseas exploration, and major political and technological changes began reshaping European society. This period witnessed the development of feudal systems, the expansion of Christianity and Islam, the growth of towns and trade, the founding of universities, and major achievements in literature, architecture, philosophy, and the arts. However, the term “Middle Ages” is primarily a European historical framework and does not apply equally to all regions of the world. In the Byzantine Empire, the Islamic world, Africa, Asia, and the Americas, different political, cultural, and artistic developments followed their own timelines. For this reason, the beginning, end, and defining features of the medieval period vary according to geographical location and historical context.

During this millennium-long epoch, Europe was predominantly characterized by agrarian societies with localized languages and customs. The majority of individuals were engaged in farming, which served as the primary economic pursuit. Agricultural techniques were relatively rudimentary compared to contemporary practices, and farming often proved challenging due to adverse weather conditions, limited technological advancements, and the prevalence of diseases.

Warfare and conflict were commonplace during the Middle Ages, with many communities living in constant apprehension of invasions and raids from neighboring factions. The Crusades, a series of religious conflicts between Christian and Muslim forces, marked a significant aspect of medieval history. Medical knowledge was rudimentary at best, resulting in widespread suffering from illnesses and infections, including several devastating outbreaks of the Bubonic Plague that decimated a substantial portion of the population.

Note

What was the Bubonic Plague?

The **bubonic plague**, caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, was one of the deadliest pandemics in human history. It is an infection of the lymphatic system that is primarily spread through the bite of infected fleas, which were commonly carried by rats and other rodents. Once transmitted, the bacteria spread rapidly through the bloodstream, causing fever, severe pain, hemorrhaging, tissue death, and swollen, painful lymph nodes called **buboes,** which could rupture. As the disease progressed, many victims suffered organ failure and died. Although the disease still exists today, it is rare and can usually be treated successfully with antibiotics if diagnosed early. During the Middle Ages, the plague likely reached Europe through merchant ships arriving from Asia at Mediterranean ports. Between 1346 and 1352, the epidemic—known as the **Black Death**—killed an estimated one-third of Europe's population. Entire families and communities were devastated, villages were abandoned, and many towns isolated themselves in an attempt to slow the spread of the disease.

The widespread loss of life profoundly altered medieval society, weakening the feudal system, creating labor shortages, and causing many people to question the authority of the Church, which was unable to explain or stop the epidemic. These social and religious changes contributed to shifting worldviews and helped shape the evolution of medieval theatre that explored faith, suffering, sin, death, and salvation.



Mass grave from the time of the Black Death. S. Tzortzis, Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

This era has sometimes been referred to as the "Dark Ages," a term coined in the 14th century by scholars who perceived this period as one characterized by ignorance and stagnation compared to the cultural and intellectual achievements of the ancient Greeks and Romans. However, contemporary historians generally eschew the term "Dark Ages" due to its pejorative connotations and its oversimplification of the complexities of medieval society.



The burial of the victims of the plague in Tournai, 14th century. Public domain, Wikimedia Commons.

THEATRE: THE MIDDLE AGES

Theatre persevered throughout the approximately 1000-year period of the Middle Ages despite the Church's attempts to suppress it, adapting and evolving to meet the changing needs and desires of society. During this time, theatrical entertainment persisted in various forms, including storytelling, jesting, juggling, circus acts, and troubadour performances.



Czechoslovakia, 1417 A.D. - The Olomouc Bible, Part I. Public Domain. Wikipedia Commons.



Heinrich Bogtherr the Younger. Public domain. Wikipedia Commons.

Ironically, although the Church sought to abolish theater in 692 due to its association with pagan rituals deemed sinful by ecclesiastical authorities, it was within the Church's own confines that theater experienced a revival. In the Middle Ages, theater initially emerged as a means of conveying religious stories and messages to a largely illiterate populace. Much of the Church's services were conducted in Latin, a language inaccessible to the common person. Consequently, **liturgical drama** emerged to engage congregants with biblical teachings more effectively.

Liturgical dramas, originating in Germany around 900 CE, initially focused on retelling Christ's resurrection but gradually expanded to encompass other biblical narratives as the genre gained popularity. By the conclusion of the Middle Ages, theater had transcended the confines of the Church and its oversight, embracing **secular** subjects and themes in theatrical performances.

Note

What happened to the large Greek and Roman theatres that were built during the classic periods?

Great question! Ancient Greek and Roman theatres largely fell out of use during the Middle Ages because the governments, economies, and urban populations that had maintained them had weakened or disappeared. Theatres were costly to maintain. It was not uncommon to repurpose the stones, columns, and blocks from architectural structures that were no longer in use to build houses and public buildings. Many ancient theatres became overtaken by vegetation to be uncovered by archeologists several centuries later.



Ancient Theatre of Sparta. Photo by George E. Koronaios, CC0. Wikimedia Commons

Play/script

As liturgical dramas became more popular and flourished under the Church's attentive censorship, they evolved into various forms known as **miracle plays**, **mystery plays,** and **morality plays**.

• **Miracle Plays**: Originating in the 10th century and remaining popular until the 16th century, miracle plays centered on the lives of saints and their purported miracles, viewed as divine interventions. These dramas aimed to educate the predominantly illiterate populace about saintly lives and Christian principles. Because church services were conducted in Latin, reenactments of stories about the saints became very popular as a tool for communicating ideas and teachings to the congregants while enjoying the blessings of the Church.

• **Mystery Plays**: Focused on historical figures and biblical narratives, mystery plays were performed in the **vernacular** language of the people, rather than Latin, making them more accessible to the general populace. They provided entertaining and educational experiences, shedding light on religious stories and characters.

• **Morality Plays**: Emerging in the late 14th century and gaining prominence in the 15th and 16th centuries, morality plays were **allegorical** in nature, aiming to impart moral lessons consistent with Church teachings. Featuring characters such as *Everyman, Pride, Good Deeds,* and *Death,* these plays personified virtues, vices, and aspects of the human condition. The primary purpose of allegorical characters was to symbolize the human condition while exploring the struggle between good and evil. Allegorical characters were very relatable to the largely illiterate audience.

It was the morality plays which were often performed in town squares or marketplaces, organized by local communities or guilds. The plays were relatively brief to maintain audience engagement and combined entertainment with moral instruction. One notable example is ***Everyman***, a powerful allegory exploring the transient nature of life and the significance of virtuous conduct.

Morality plays were integral to medieval culture, shaping the trajectory of European theater. While eventually supplanted by Renaissance theater and other forms of drama, their influence endures in modern theatrical traditions, illustrating the enduring power of storytelling and moral instruction through performance. It is the morality plays of the Middle Ages that provide the bridge between liturgical dramas sanctioned by the Church and the secular theatrical forms of the Renaissance.

Audience

Early theatrical performances in the Middle Ages often took place within church settings, particularly during religious festivals and celebrations. Individuals who were non-religious or practiced other religions were largely frowned upon and persecuted by

Christian authorities. Therefore, performances held within the confines of the church were heavily attended. When theatre moved beyond the physical building of the church and into public spaces, performances could be viewed by everyone, regardless of religious beliefs, economic demographics, educational background, or social status.

Performers

Liturgical dramas performed in churches during the Middle Ages were typically scripted in Latin and enacted by members of the **clergy** and **choir**, who assumed the roles of biblical characters. These performances often incorporated choral music, blending dialogue and song to convey religious narratives. However, as liturgical dramas gained popularity, they were performed in the vernacular and moved beyond the confines of church settings, finding their way into market squares situated in the heart of towns and cities. Here, under the careful scrutiny of the church, **tradespeople** and **commoners** would enact stories rooted in biblical themes. The actors involved in these plays were amateurs, recruited from local **guilds** who represented and regulated various trades and professions, and communities. They lacked formal training and were not professional actors as understood in modern terms. Rather, they were individuals driven by a passion for performance and a desire to contribute to their community's cultural and religious life. These performers brought religious teachings to the masses through a variety of entertainment forms, including acrobatics, juggling, storytelling, and traditional theatrical performances. Music played a vital role in these spectacles, enhancing the festive atmosphere and enriching the overall experience for the audience.



The Resurrection Drama in a Cathedral Painting] by Anonymous / Creator Unknown is available under the **Public Domain (CC0 / PD-US)**.

The Director

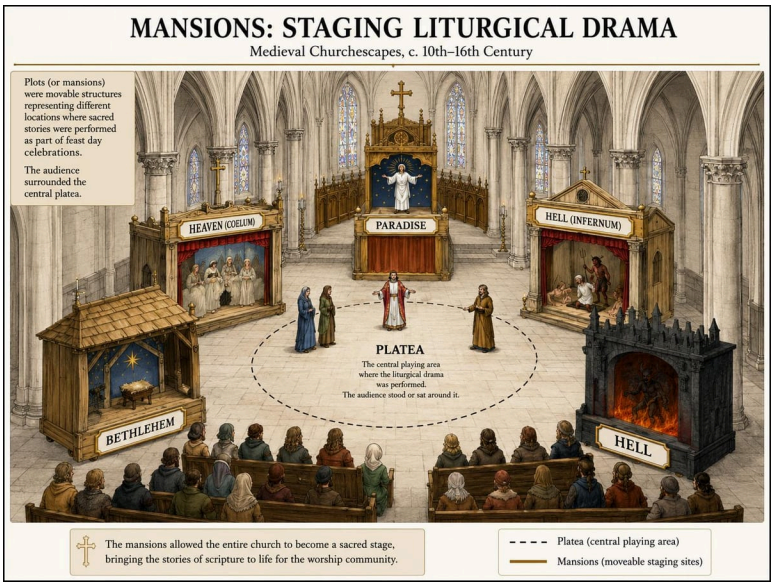
In the theater practices of the Middle Ages, the role of the director as it is understood in modern theater was absent. Instead, oversight and management were typically handled by bishops, priests, and other Church officials for dramas performed within church premises. They would also supervise the content of entertainment that extended beyond the church's confines, ensuring that content aligned with Christian values.

Often, guilds sponsored plays as part of their social and cultural activities. They would engage playwrights, actors, and other performers, overseeing the production and performance of plays to ensure adherence to quality standards and the guild's values.

In essence, authority and supervision over theatrical endeavors during the Middle Ages were distributed among ecclesiastical figures, guilds, and other community leaders, with no distinct role that paralleled the modern director.

Theatre Performance Space

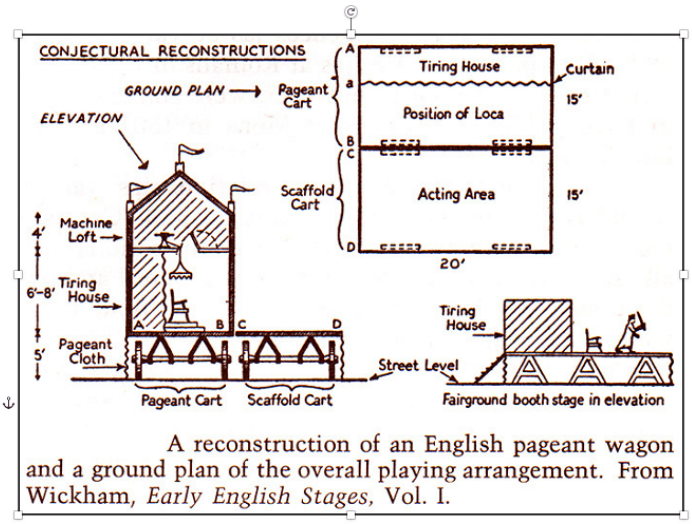
The staging of drama in the Middle Ages involved two primary locations: within the church and in external public spaces. Initially, dramas performed inside the church were situated near the altar. However, as these performances grew in length, complexity, and popularity, raised platforms within the church building were constructed for the performers to ensure visibility for the entire congregation. These raised platforms were called **mansions**. Mansions were small, designated staging areas that represented individual locations in a religious story. As the drama progressed, performers moved between the mansions, thereby indicating a change in location or time.



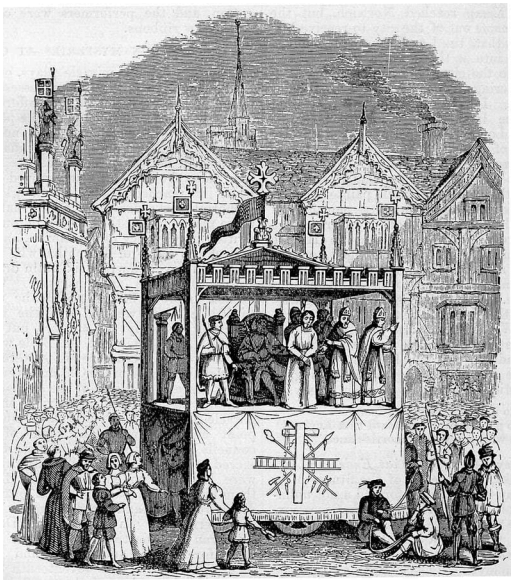
“Mansions: Staging Liturgical Drama,” created by Brenda C. Eppley using OpenAI, 2026. (CC BY 4.0)

Liturgical dramas were very appealing to church attendees and very well attended. With an increase in the size of the congregation, performances expanded beyond the confines of the Church to accommodate larger audiences. The platforms used within the Church were repurposed for outdoor settings, such as marketplaces, with with additions like curtained-off spaces for changing or storing props and set pieces. Over time, wheels were affixed to these platforms, transforming them into **pageant wagons** capable of traveling the countryside.

Pageant wagons would be pulled into town squares or positioned outside inns and taverns, drawing crowds for performances. Their portability allowed for flexibility in venue selection, enabling performances to take place in various locations. Pageant wagons served as crucial predecessors to the performance spaces of **Elizabethan**-era theaters like Shakespeare's **Globe Theatre**, bridging the gap between church platforms of the Middle Ages and the theatrical stages of subsequent periods.



A reconstruction of an English pageant wagon and a ground plan of the overall playing arrangement. From Wickham, *Early English Stages*, Vol. I.



David Gee, Public domain.Wikimedia Commons



David Gee, Public domain. Wikimedia Commons



Triumph of Archduchess Isabella, Brussels. Denis van Alsloot, Public domain. Wikimedia Commons

Design and Technical Elements

The staging of liturgical drama in churches during the Middle Ages was characterized by a degree of variation influenced by the specific play being performed and the resources available to the church. While some churches boasted elaborate sets and costumes, others relied on simpler staging methods. Nevertheless, the overarching emphasis remained on the religious message conveyed by the drama and its significance in communicating essential biblical narratives to the congregation.

Costumes

During the performance of liturgical dramas in churches, the clergy and choir boys adorned themselves with basic costume pieces complemented by props symbolically representing characters. For instance, those portraying Jesus in resurrection narratives might wear a crown of thorns, while Moses could be depicted carrying the Ten Commandments, and so forth.

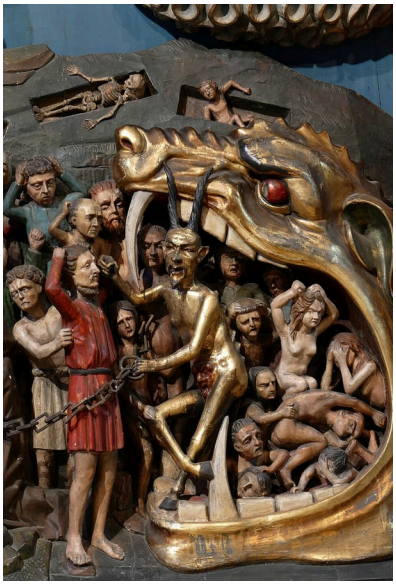
As dramas transitioned beyond the confines of the Church, performers crafted simplistic costumes to portray their characters. Since costumes were self-provided by the performers, historical accuracy was not a primary concern. Instead, the focus remained on effectively conveying the essence of the characters and their roles within the narrative.

Scenery

Initially, scenery was usually limited to a few simple props and items, such as a cross, a table, or a throne. These items were used to suggest the setting and provide some visual interest to the performance.

Special effects were also used to some degree in liturgical dramas, although these were usually quite simple. For example, smoke from incense might be used to suggest the presence of God or angels, or a simple lighting effect might be used to suggest a supernatural occurrence.

A notable exception was the use of the **Hell Mouth,** an iconic feature of medieval liturgical drama. This large, grotesque wooden structure resembled a terrifying mouth, representing the entrance to Hell. Positioned at the back of the stage or in the center of the playing area, it played a pivotal role in conveying the consequences of sin.



Woodcarving of Hell Mouth, 1496, Photo by Ralph Hammann. CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

During the performance of a liturgical drama, actors portraying demons would often emerge from the Hell Mouth, dragging “sinners” into Hell as part of the dramatic representation of the consequences of sin. Sometimes, the Hell Mouth would also emit smoke, flames or other effects to create an even more dramatic and terrifying effect. The use of the Hell Mouth in liturgical drama served a religious and moral purpose. It was intended to teach the audience about the consequences of sin and the importance of leading a virtuous life. The Hell Mouth was a vivid and visceral representation of the horrors of Hell, and its presence on stage underscored the importance of avoiding sin and seeking salvation.

Over time, the Hell Mouth became a popular and iconic feature of medieval drama, and its image was often reproduced in paintings, sculptures, and other artwork. Even today, the Hell Mouth is a well-known and recognizable symbol of medieval drama and the morality plays of the Middle Ages.

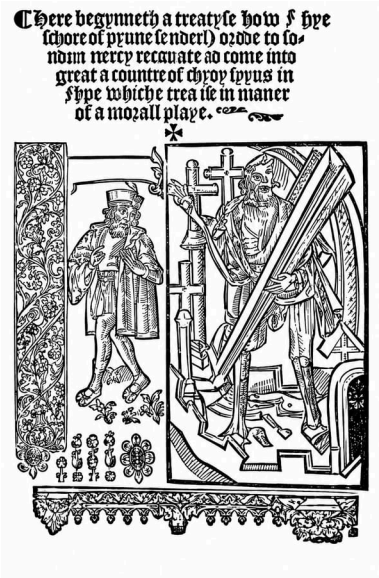
Conclusion

Despite the Church's efforts to exert control over theater during the Middle Ages, the art form persisted, developed, and flourished, ultimately becoming a significant aspect of cultural expression and entertainment. Over time, theatre in the Middle Ages evolved to include more elaborate staging and costumes, as well as the introduction of professional actors and playwrights. After 1300 CE, the Church’s dominant role throughout Europe was weakened and challenged due to internal conflicts. Growing criticism of religious authority gradually weakened the Church’s dominance. The shift to more secular writings and away from predominantly religious themes occurred as a result of the Reformation period. While liturgical drama still influenced writers, drama of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries became increasingly focused on humanism to include such subjects such as philosophy, history, politics, love and human behavior.

Supplement: *Everyman*

Everyman, written in the late 15th century, is usually considered the most significant play that emerges from the Middle Ages, serving as a crucial link between religious and professional theatrical traditions. Though its author remains anonymous, its precise religious references suggest that it was written by a member of the clergy.

E*veryman* has a concise, accessible structure and features recognizable allegorical characters such as Death, Good Deeds, Beauty, and Strength. Its protagonist, Everyman, represents all humanity. When Death unexpectedly summons him to account for his life and begin his journey to the afterlife, Everyman realizes that his wealth, possessions, and worldly accomplishments cannot help him. He is therefore forced to confront his sins and consider how he has lived.



Frontpiece from Everyman, 1520. Public domain. Wikipedia

Throughout the play, Everyman seeks companionship and support from his family, friends, and other figures he trusted during his life. One by one, however, they abandon him as he faces his mortality. Ultimately, Good Deeds agrees to remain with him and accompany him on his final journey.

As Everyman prepares for divine judgment, he learns that a virtuous and humble life, expressed through good deeds, has greater value than wealth, status, beauty, or physical strength. The play emphasizes the temporary nature of worldly possessions and the importance of spiritual preparation. Although Everyman's fear of death reflects a universal human emotion, his eventual acceptance of death represents a triumph of Christian faith and submission to God's will.

Despite its age, *Everyman* continues to resonate as a **didactic play**, imparting timeless moral teachings. Its exploration of universal themes like the fear of death and triumph of spiritual faith ensures its enduring relevance, with frequent performances staged worldwide.

Note

Search on your favorite listening app for HACC's sponsored free audio performance of *Everyman!*

Thumbnail: Everyman fighting with Death. Woodcut. 1520-1530. Public domain.

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5: Chapter Five - The Renaissance



Italian Masks of the Commedia dell'Arte by Unknown Artist, 17th Century. Public domain. Museo Teatrale alla Scala.

TIMELINE: THE RENAISSANCE (c. 1400–1700 CE)

DATE	THEATRE	HISTORICAL CONTENT
c. 1400 CE	Histrionic scholars in Italy revive interest in classical Greek and Roman drama.	Italian city-states compete with each other. · Florence becomes wealthy. · Portugal explores Africa; sugar trade brings influence.
1451 CE	–	Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman empire. · Byzantine scholars flee westward.
c. 1460–1455	Court entertainments and humanist plays gain popularity in Italy.	Columbus despises non-white people; he's more skills possible. · Books become more accessible.
1492 CE	–	Columbus reaches the Americas. · Spain recognizes the Reconquista.
c. 1500 CE	Scholar dramas expands in courts, universities, and cathedrals.	High Renaissance art flourishes in Italy · Spanish power grows in West Africa with Titian and Leonardo.
1527 CE	–	Martin Luther begins the Protestant Reformation. · Religious conflict
1534 CE	–	Ottoman forces capture Baghdad, reshaping Mesopotamia.
1543 CE	–	Copernicus publishes *On the Revolution of the Heavens.* · Muslims advance the early Ottoman ambitions.
1545 CE	*Commedia dell'arte* troupes emerge as professional actors performing in Italy.	Council of Trent begins. · The Catholic Reformation gathers force.
1558 CE	The Theatre opens in London, becoming England's first permanent public playhouse.	Elizabeth I supports a vibrant court culture. · English commerce and exploration expand.
1585 CE	Earliest Shakespearean comedies, featuring bright plots and prominent women.	Andrewes develops a theological influence shapes the arts. · Council of the church grows.
1595 CE	The Globe Theatre opens, and Shakespeare's company stages major plays there.	Spanish Armada fails to invade. · The Dutch Rebellion unfolds – colonial trade grows. · Virginia.
c. 1600–1610	English Renaissance drama and Spanish Golden Age theatre flourish.	Tensions sharpen between Japan (edicts to close to the Japanese 1610–1630) and the West. · Jamestown is founded in Virginia. · Galileo's telescope discoveries
1610–1648	–	Thirty Years' War devastates central Europe. · Political and religious shifts intensify. 1600).
1623 CE	English theatres are closed by the Puritans.	The English Civil War begins. · Science grows over certainty and religion.
1664 CE	English theatre reopens in the Restoration, and women begin appearing on the professional stage.	Charles II restored to the English throne. · Court culture and entertainment revive.
c. 1690–1700	Opera houses and festival and theatre spectacle come Europe.	Newton's *Principia* (1687) explains gravity and motion. · The Scientific Revolution takes root. · Late 17th France seeks religious and cultural unity.

Literature · Invention & Technology · History & Politics · Philosophy & Religion · Art & Architecture · Religion · Global Events

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INTRODUCTION

The **Renaissance**, meaning "**rebirth**", was a period of European history that began in the 14th century and lasted until the 17th century. It was characterized by a renewed interest in classical learning, humanism, and artistic and cultural expression. First beginning in Italy, scholars, artists, and scientists of the late 14th century looked to the ancient Greeks and the Romans in awe for inspiration into the wonders and capabilities of humanity. The Roman Empire had achieved tremendous growth and development of its culture and power, building on the even earlier Greek models. The Renaissance gave a rebirth to those ideas to update them to reflect their own "modern" sensibilities that had grown out of a millennium of Church dominated culture. This shift in perspective led to a reevaluation of the Church's authority. Because theatre had moved beyond the confines of the Church, plays

and plotlines became much more secular. The Renaissance is often seen as a period of great change, expansion, and transition from the Middle Ages to the modern era.

The Renaissance saw the emergence of the middle class in society. Prior to this period, European society was largely divided between the wealthy, land-owning nobility and the illiterate peasantry who worked the land. However, the devastating waves of the bubonic plague drastically reduced the population, creating a shortage of labor. The scarcity of manpower led to a push for greater efficiency and innovation in labor aimed at enhancing productivity. In response, a new class of non-noble, non-landowning individuals emerged: merchants, traders, and craftsmen. This burgeoning middle class, driven by entrepreneurial spirit, seized upon opportunities for economic growth and innovation. Wealthy patrons, including members of the middle class, supported artists, scholars, and thinkers, enabling them to pursue their creative endeavors. This patronage facilitated the production of iconic works of art, literature, and scientific discoveries that defined the Renaissance.

There were several factors that gave rise to the Renaissance, including:

1. **Rediscovery of Classical Learning**: During the Renaissance, scholars became interested in the study of ancient Greek and Roman literature and philosophy. The works of classical authors were rediscovered and translated into European languages, sparking a renewed interest in classical learning and culture.

2. **Humanism:** Humanism was a philosophical and intellectual movement that emphasized the value and potential of human beings and sought to reconcile humanism with Christian theology.

3. **Scientific Advancements:** The Renaissance was a period of great scientific advancement, with many new discoveries and innovations in fields such as mathematics, astronomy, and medicine.

4. **Economic and Political Changes:** The Renaissance was also a time of significant economic and political change, as the rise of trade and commerce created new opportunities for wealth and social mobility. This led to the growth of powerful city-states and the emergence of new forms of government and political organization.

5. **Patronage of the Arts:** The Renaissance was marked by a significant increase in the patronage of the arts, with wealthy patrons commissioning works of art and literature as a means of demonstrating their wealth and prestige. This led to a flourishing of artistic and cultural expression, with artists and writers creating some of the most iconic works of the period.

6. **Religious Upheaval**: The **Protestant Reformation** challenged the authority of the Catholic Church and led to the emergence of new religious movements and denominations.

7. **Age of Discovery**: European explorers began to explore the world beyond Europe, with voyages of discovery that led to the discovery of new lands, cultures, and peoples. This period of exploration and colonization had a major impact on world history, shaping the political and economic landscape of the modern world.

The Renaissance was a period of immense social, economic, and cultural transformation, characterized by a flourishing of **human creativity** and **intellectual curiosity**. Its impact reverberated across Europe and laid the foundation for the modern world. Originating in the relative tranquility and prosperity around Rome in Italy, it then spread outward gradually, encompassing most of Europe.

Theatre of the Renaissance

An Overview

As we begin to move forward in theatre history, it is important to remind ourselves that periods in history don't arise and happen overnight. While we may look to a single location or event as the start of a new period in history, it took time for the rest of the world to catch up! There were certainly important cultural and intellectual developments that occurred in other parts of the world during this time, such as the Islamic Golden Age in the Middle East and the Ming Dynasty in China. However, these developments are typically studied and understood within the context of their own unique historical and cultural circumstances, rather than being grouped together under the term "Renaissance." As students of theatre history, the Renaissance represents a very important period in the historic development of theatre. It is within the Renaissance that we find the first indoor theatres, Commedia del Arte, and Elizabethan Theatre which gave rise to Shakespeare.

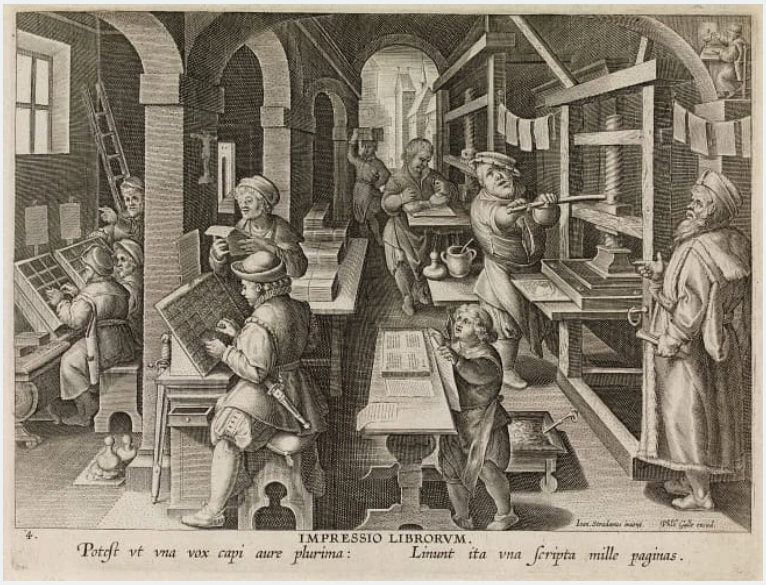
Note

Critically Important Invention: **The Printing Press**

The invention of the printing press is generally credited to Johannes Gutenberg, a German goldsmith and printer, who is believed to have invented the mechanical movable type printing technology approximately1450-1455. Gutenberg's printing press was a revolutionary invention that greatly improved the efficiency and speed of printing, allowing for the mass production of books and **plays**, which could be distributed more widely and affordably. This facilitated the preservation and dissemination of plays, ensuring that they reached a broader audience and were more likely to be remembered and studied over time. The ability to print and distribute plays also enabled playwrights to gain greater recognition and reach beyond their local audiences. The printing press played a crucial role in the survival of many plays from the Renaissance period, including those written by William Shakespeare. This invention had a profound impact on communication and the spread of knowledge and is considered a key development in the history of human civilization.



The Printing Press. Amfeli, CC BY 4.0 Wikimedia Commons



16th Century CE Flemish Book Printer. The British Museum CC BY-NC-SA by Mark Cartwright

For the purposes of clarity, it is helpful to discuss the major theatrical innovations during the Renaissance by country:

ITALY

Italy is often primarily associated with the birth of the Renaissance due to the period's commonly recognized advancements in architecture and fine art. However, in the realm of theater, significant introductions and innovations also took place, profoundly influencing the evolution of theater and leaving a lasting impact on modern theatrical practices. The Italian Renaissance saw a significant growth in the popularity of theatre that also included important innovations and an entirely new genre of performance.

1. **Proscenium arch:** The proscenium arch was invented during the Renaissance in Italy and became a standard feature of theatre design. The arch separates the stage from the audience and frames the action on the stage.

2. **Perspective scenery:** Perspective scenery allowed for the creation of three-dimensional scenery that appeared more realistic to the audience.

3. **Trapdoors:** Trapdoors provided entrances and exits from below the stage floor, adding a new level of theatricality to performances.

4. **Flying machinery**: Flying machines were developed during the Renaissance in Italy and allowed actors to "fly" across the stage or perform aerial stunts.

5. **Professional actors**: Professional actors began to emerge, and theatre became a respected profession. The first professional theatre companies were established, and actors began to receive salaries for their performances.

6. **Scriptwriting**: The Italian Renaissance also saw the rise of professional playwrights, who wrote plays specifically for the theatre. The works of these writers, such as Niccolò Machiavelli and Giovan Battista Giraldi, helped to establish theatre as a legitimate art form.

Of great importance to the development of theatre, Italy was home to **commedia dell'arte** which is a form of Italian theatre that emerged in the mid-16th century and captivated audiences throughout Europe until the 18th century. Commedia troupes typically journeyed in wagons equipped with a stage that could be easily transported into market squares. These acting troupes traversed from town to town, entertaining audiences in exchange for food, lodging, and monetary compensation. The props and set pieces were minimalist and provided by the acting troupes and contributed to the delightful charm of the performances. Alongside the central storyline, shows frequently incorporated musical interludes, acrobatic displays, and pantomime, enriching the overall spectacle.

The term "commedia dell'arte" means "**comedy of the professionals**" and refers to a style of theatre characterized by improvised performances and stock characters. In a typical commedia dell'arte performance, actors would use pre-established scenarios as a starting point of the plot, but the dialogue and actions would be **improvised** based on the reactions of the audience and the other actors on stage. The performances were famous for their physical comedy, acrobatics, and use of masks. Known for its exuberance, physicality, and irreverence, this theatrical tradition combined simplistic narratives, **stock** characters, and spontaneous **improvisation** to create uproarious entertainment.

Working from a basic plot outline, the action in commedia was broadly physical and included characters that were easily recognized based on their behavior and costume. **Stock characters** are very one dimensional and predictable. A modern-day example of a "geek" drawn from popular television series would be Sheldon Cooper from the Big Bang Theory, or Steve Urkel from Family Matters. In commedia, popular stock characters across plot lines include:

- Arlecchino (Harlequin)
- Pulcinella (Punch)
- Columbina
- Pantalone
- Dottore (Doctor)

- Il Capitano (The Captain)



Images of commedia characters by Maurice Sand, Public domain. Wikimedia Commons



Images of commedia characters by Maurice Sand, Public domain. Wikimedia Commons

Characters in commedia were typically uncomplicated, embodying recognizable archetypes such as the pompous, wealthy patriarchs; the wily servants; the star-crossed lovers; the lust-filled old man; and the zany, comedic personalities. Although commedia troupes traveled throughout Europe's many countries, and despite linguistic barriers, audiences could readily follow the action, thanks to the exaggerated gestures, distinct **stock character** types, and universally recognizable scenarios portrayed on stage. Standardized masks and costumes were instrumental in delineating these characters, enabling actors to seamlessly transition between roles. By utilizing the same mask and costume design to portray the same character, audiences throughout Europe could quickly identify commedia characters based on appearance. Language differences were eliminated when an audience recognized the characters because of what they were wearing.



Commedia performance on an outdoor stage. Peeter van Bredael, Public domain. Wikimedia Commons

Professional players who specialized in playing one role developed an unmatched comic acting technique, which contributed to the popularity of the traveling commedia troupes. It was the actors who gave commedia its impulse and character, relying on their wits and comic abilities to create atmosphere and convey character.

The incorporation of **lazzi**, meaning a planned comic "bit", was a key feature of commedia. Picture a character with higher status, such as a Captain, who tries to drink wine from a cup. Unbeknown to him, the Captain's servant is on the ground and uses a straw that pierces the bottom of the Captain's cup to drain and drink the wine. Another lazzi was the "accidental" yet planned slipping on a banana peel.

Commedia dell'arte troupes typically comprised approximately 10-12 members, consisting of 7-8 men and 3-4 **women**. These groups of actors traveled throughout Europe from city to city, performing their comedy in marketplaces, town squares, and for nobility in their private residences. Audience members were from all classes of people, including commoners and wealthy patrons. It is within commedia that we first see **women performing on stage**.



Commedia characters. Hieronymous Francken I, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Much of the humor was derived from physical comedy and typically included the use of a **slapstick** which was a prop that was

used to exaggerate the impact of comic moments. This device consisted of two pieces of wood hinged together, allowing for a loud slapping sound to be produced when the handle was swung, even with minimal force. As a result, a gentle tap could be made to sound like a forceful blow. The slapstick became integral to the comedic routines of the era, and its usage popularized the term “slapstick” to describe various forms of physical comedy across different contexts. Modern entertainment still identifies slapstick comedy as a specific style of performance.

Lacking a director, this actor-driven theatre emphasized ensemble work. The basic plot outline of commedia dell'arte typically involved a group of stock characters who find themselves in various comedic situations. The plot often centered around a romantic storyline, with characters falling in love and attempting to overcome various obstacles to be together. The servants, or **zanni**, are usually the ones who cause chaos and confusion, while the elders, or vecchi, try to maintain order and uphold social norms. The brief performances began badly, became hopelessly complicated, and ended happily. The style of humor was bawdy, vulgar, cruel, outrageous, absurd, and very physical. Commedia dell’arte also introduced a style of physical humor that resonated with audiences.

Commedia dell'arte had a significant influence on European theatre and has been credited with the development of many modern theatrical techniques, such as improvisation and the use of stock characters. Influences of commedia can be found in television programs such as *The Three Stooges*, *Mr. Bean*, *I Love Lucy*, *Seinfeld*, *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, *Monty Python*, and *Saturday Night Live*, as well as in films such as *Bullet Train*, *Bridesmaids*, *It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad World*, and *Shaun of the Dead*.

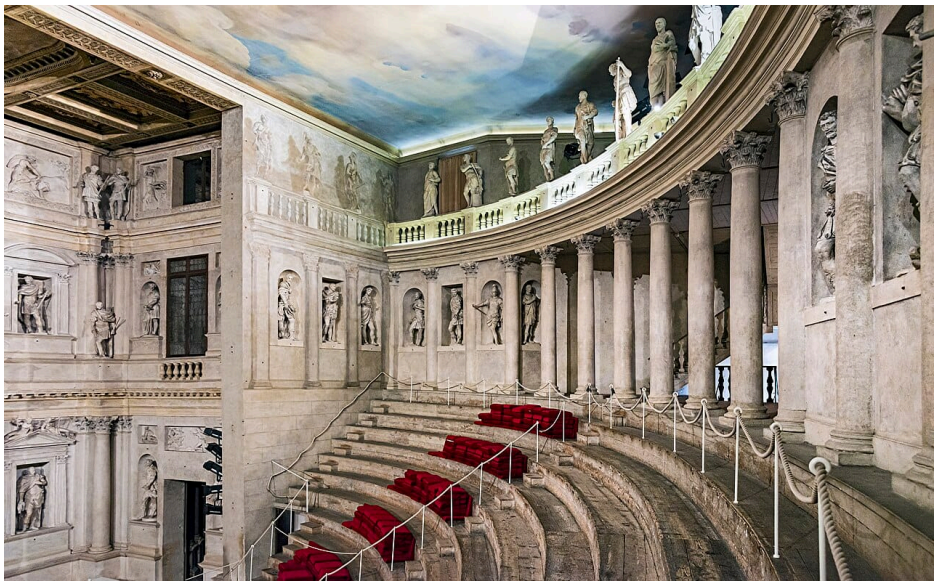
Note

Fun fact: The word “pants” originates from the stock character of Pantaloon in Commedia dell’Arte who was portrayed as an old, lecherous man who wore red, tight-fitting trousers!

Women performed in commedia dell'arte, which was a significant departure from the conventions of traditional Italian theater. In commedia dell'arte, female performers were known as "commedia actresses" or "commedia donne." They played both female and male roles, and their performances were essential to the success of the genre. However, actresses faced challenges and criticism. They were often objectified and subjected to harassment, and some critics believed that their performances were immoral. Their contribution to commedia dell'arte should not be overlook as it paved the way for women to become professional actors in later centuries.

In contrast, in traditional Italian plays (not improvised) of the Renaissance, women were generally not permitted to perform on stage. Instead, male actors would often play female roles. This was a convention of the time that was common across Europe in theatre buildings and was influenced by the idea that it was inappropriate for women to appear in public on a stage. Female characters in Italian plays of the Renaissance were typically portrayed in two ways: as either idealized, chaste figures or as seductresses who were morally corrupt. This reflected the patriarchal society of the time, which placed strict expectations on women's behavior and roles

While commedia performances were touring the country and expanding beyond the borders of Italy, the first indoor theatres were being built in Italian cities. The early indoor Renaissance theatres in Italy bore a resemblance to the ancient outdoor Roman theatres, many of which had survived through the Middle Ages and remained structurally intact. While these Italian theatres were constructed on a smaller scale, they replicated many of the same features, incorporating a roof that necessitated the use of candles for interior lighting. One of the oldest extant Italian Renaissance theatres is the **Teatro Olimpico**, built in 1584-5 in Vicenza, Italy, which continues to be in use today. The first performance of a play in the Teatro Olimpico was of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*. The Teatro Olimpico inspired other architects throughout Europe to design large permanent and indoor theatre buildings. Unlike the temporary outdoor performance spaces that were common at the time, such as Pageant Wagons, new theatres allowed for much greater flexibility in size and scope and increased the potential audience size.

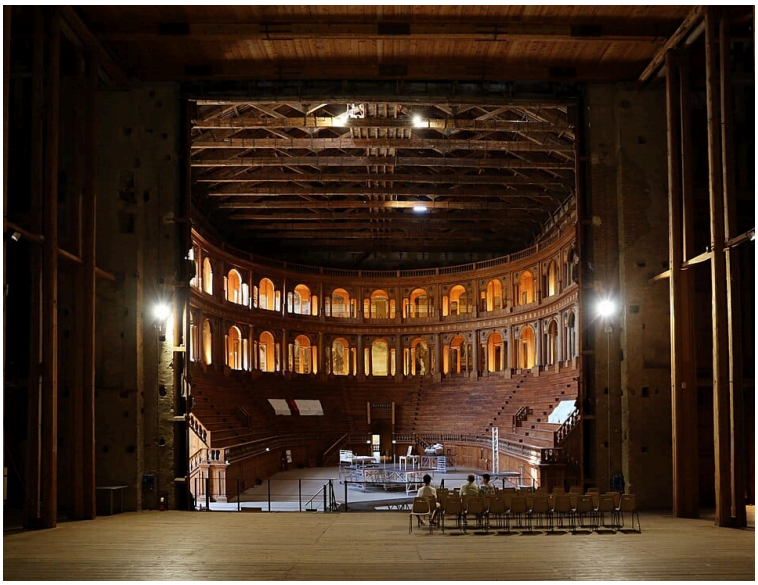


Olympic Theatre, CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons



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The **Teatro Farnese,** constructed in 1618 in Parma, Italy was the first theatre to feature a **proscenium** arch. Proscenium theatres, characterized by a large frame or arch that separates the audience from the stage, have become the most prevalent form of theatre architecture in the modern world. Essentially comprising two distinct spaces—the auditorium for the audience and the stage for performances—these theatres are connected by a wall with a picture frame opening known as the proscenium arch. Often elaborately decorated, this arch serves to focus the audience's attention on the performance area while concealing backstage areas, preserving the "magic" of the presentation. Proscenium theatres are the most common theatres in the modern world and we owe their invention to the artists of the Renaissance!



Teatro Farnese. View from backstage. Photo by Sailko, CC BY-SA 4.0 Wikimedia Commons.

Furthermore, the design of new Renaissance theatres often featured a raked stage, sloping upward from the audience at the front to the backdrop at the rear. This elevated rear stage improved sightlines, allowing audience members to view action occurring in the rear of the stage more easily. Scenery in Italy during the Renaissance was a development of the artistic styles growing throughout the various arts in Renaissance Italy. It cannot be denied that Italianate scenic developments pushed the design world forward. The techniques employed by Renaissance artists had a profound impact on scenic design and architecture, particularly in the realm of **perspective.** Renaissance painters utilized the newly developed technique of perspective, which employs a vanishing point to create the illusion of depth and distance. In proscenium theatres, the rear stage was adorned with elaborately painted backdrops that used perspective to suggest, for instance, a receding village street or forest. This artistic approach gave the impression that the scene extended far beyond the actual confines of the stage, replacing the need to physically depict the location where the action transpired.

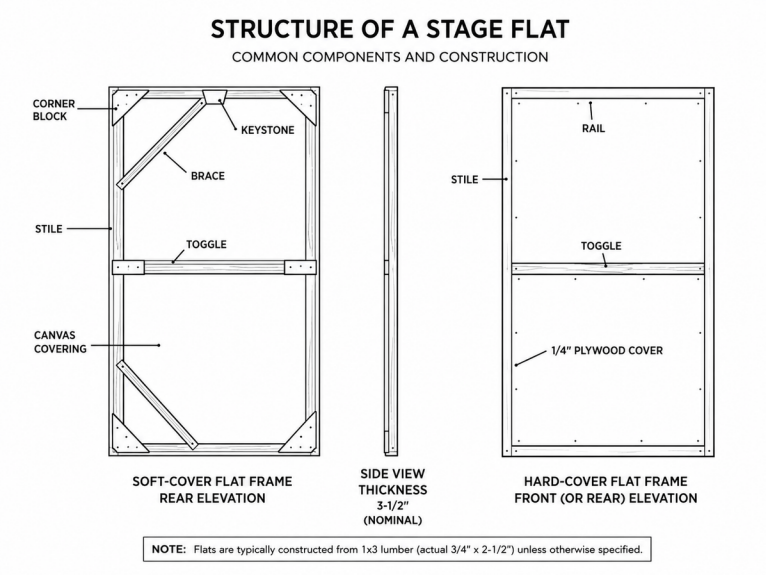


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Scenic elements were painted on very large canvases, or flat panels known as **flats** which are still the most common scenic device found in theatres in the modern world.

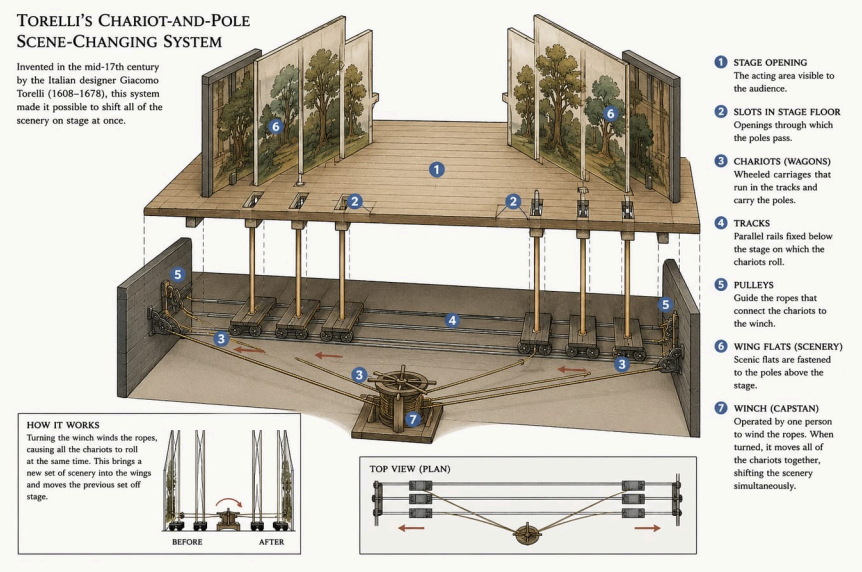


Structure of a Stage Flat. Original illustration created by Brenda C. Eppley using OpenAI 2026.



Image of flats used in a modern production of *Hedda Gabler* at Indiana University. Image by Editofchaos, CC BY-SA 4.0 Wikimedia Commons

The **chariot and pole system** was also a scenic technique that was widely used in the large indoor theatres throughout Europe during the Renaissance. Used to move piece of scenery and large props, the chariot and pole system was a series of wagons or platforms, called chariots, that were mounted on poles and moved along tracks that were built into the stage floor. Scenery, such as painted flats, were attached to the side of the chariot that faced the audience. The chariots, attached to poles, would move smoothly and quickly across the stage, thereby providing an element of spectacle and the opportunity to create elaborate special effects.



Torelli's Chariot-and-Pole Scene-Changing System. Original illustration by Brenda C. Eppley, created with the assistance of OpenAI. Licensed under **CC BY 4.0.**

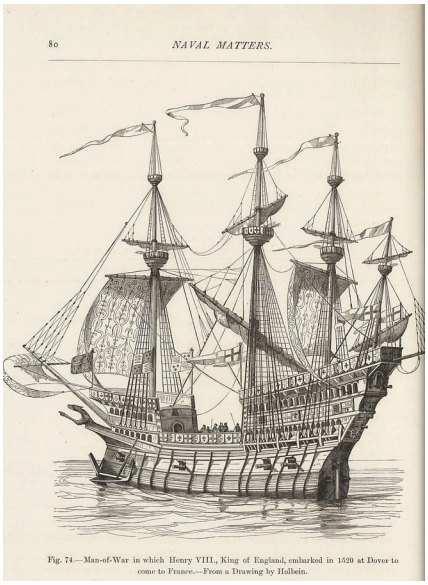
Indoor theatres of the Renaissance also typically included a **fly space**, which is the area above the stage where scenery and lighting equipment are housed during a performance. If you stand on the stage of a proscenium theatre and look up, you are peering into the fly space. It is accessed by a system of ropes, pulleys, and rigging that allows technicians to raise and lower scenery and equipment quickly and safely.

Note

Trivia question:

What is the origin of numerous words that we use to identify the rigging in theatre spaces?

Answer: a **significant portion of stage rigging vocabulary is historically rooted in shipbuilding and sailing technology** because sailors were employed to build the rigging for indoor Renaissance theatres!



Public domain. Wikipedia Commons.

Lighting in indoor theatres was created through the use of candles that were on the walls of the theatre in the forms of sconces, and suspended above the audience in chandeliers.. The number and placement of the candles varied depending on the size and layout of the theatre, as well as the needs of the production. In some cases, additional candles were placed on the stage itself to provide extra illumination for the actors. The use of candles in theatres had some disadvantages, such as the risk of fire, the need for frequent replacement, and the fact that they produced smoke and soot. Fire was a common concern and is the primary reason why many Renaissance theatres did not survive into the modern period. Because safety regulations were not in place during the Renaissance, fires that begin on stage or in the audience were devastating and included the loss of lives since adequate exit doors did not exist.

It is in the indoor theatres of the Renaissance that we first see galleries and boxes that were used in theatres to accommodate different social classes. Private boxes were reserved for the wealthiest patrons who were separated from the general audience

While the role of the costume designer as a distinct and specialized profession emerged much later in theatre history, costumes began to take on greater importance during the Renaissance. Complimenting the elaborate architectural elements and beautifully painted backdrops of indoor theatres, costumes were often elaborate and visually striking. This required the employment of seamstresses and tailors to support the new “business” of theatre. However, the role of a professional costume designer did not yet exist, so no attempt at historical accuracy was evident in the costumes of the Renaissance period.

Inspired by the great cultural and artistic flourishing in Europe from the 14th to the 17th centuries, the Renaissance also gave birth to opera in 1598 as a musical and theatrical form that was primarily performed in the courts of aristocrats and nobles. Its birthplace is often attributed to Florence, Italy. It was often used as a means of celebrating weddings, coronations, and other grand events. The performances were elaborate, featuring ornate costumes, stage machinery, and complex set designs. The earliest known opera, "Dafne," was performed in Florence in 1597. Although opera quickly spread throughout Europe, Italy remained a central hub for opera production and innovation, with composers such as Claudio Monteverdi, Antonio Vivaldi, and Giuseppe Verdi making significant contributions to the genre. What opera came to be was a dramatic performance set entirely to music. As opera gained popularity in the latter part of the Renaissance, the increased number of actors in casts made the raked stage mentioned earlier even more popular. Overall, the Renaissance marked a turning point in the development of opera as a

distinct art form. It laid the foundations for the many great works of opera that followed in the centuries to come, and established opera as a central element of European culture.

Note

What is the difference between opera and musical theatre?

Opera is a theatrical form in which the drama is expressed primarily through continuous classical singing with orchestral accompaniment. Musical theatre tells a story through music and performance as well, but it belongs to a popular theatre tradition that may include spoken or sung-through text, uses amplified voices, and draws on a broader range of vocal styles.

While Commedia performances were originally accessible to everyone, by the middle of the 17th century, there was a noticeable shift in audience preferences. Theatre evolved into more of a business venture, increasingly catering to audiences with financial means. To distinguish between the lower and upper classes, permanent indoor theatres were constructed to host operas and plays. As the wealthier classes became the predominant audience, playwrights began to craft plays featuring situations and characters that centered on the affluent upper classes, often neglecting the lower classes.

These new operas and plays, coexisting with traveling Commedia troupes, necessitated new theatre venues, leading to technological innovations in Italy and the development of indoor proscenium theatres.

ENGLAND

The Renaissance in England was delayed by the War of the Roses, a civil war that took place roughly between **1455 and 1487** between two rival branches of the royal family

· The **House of Lancaster**

· The **House of York**

King Henry VII from the House of Lancaster came to power in the early 16th century, and married Elizabeth of York, thereby bringing England into a relatively peaceful period and ready for the new cultural and social shifts that had already taken place in other European countries. As a result, the **English Renaissance** began during the reign of Henry VIII who ruled from 1509 to 1547, but flourished under his daughter's reign, Elizabeth I (1558-1603). The Elizabethan era was marked by a flourishing of the arts, with performance arts making a particularly enduring contribution to English and global culture. Queen Elizabeth I was a keen admirer of plays, performances, and spectacles. Owing to Elizabeth's significant influence on the cultural and artistic development of England, this period is commonly referred to as the **Elizabethan Period**. The term "Elizabethan" is used to describe the cultural and artistic movement under Elizabeth, which was characterized by a flowering of literature, theatre, music, and art. The Elizabethan Period is considered a significant era in English history, as it saw the rise of England as a major world power and the emergence of English literature and drama that continue to influence art and culture to this day. Many of the most famous works of English literature, including the plays of **Christopher Marlowe** and **William Shakespeare**, were written during this time.

The first purpose-built permanent theatre in London dedicated to public performances was constructed in 1576, and others quickly followed suit, transforming drama into a booming entertainment industry. Unlike the new theatre spaces that were developed in Renaissance Italy, in England, the theatres retained many of the elements of the Medieval stages. Most of what we know about Elizabethan theatres comes from a few illustrations, (most made at a later date) some descriptions from builders' records, a few legal documents, and excavations. England saw a mix of **public outdoor theatres ,** which were theatres with covered seating and open-to-the-sky yards for **"groundlings"** (audience members who paid a small price and stood to watch the performance), and **private houses**, which were indoor theatres for a select audience.

The introduction of daily performances led to the formation of permanent acting companies. These companies no longer had to tour, allowing them to invest more time and resources in captivating audiences from all social classes and both genders.

Public: Elizabethan theatres were all built outside of London's city limits because the law prohibited public theatres inside the city. Although theatre was very popular in England, the profession as a whole was not looked upon favorably by the Puritans whose influence was growing throughout Shakespeare's lifetime. Most of the public theatres were built on the south bank of the Thames River, just across the London Bridge from central London. Extending from the roof at the top of the theatre, a flag was displayed

on performance days, with its color indicating the type of play being presented (comedy, tragedy, etc).

Public theatres were built in open-air venues, such as the **Globe Theatre** built in 1599, which was a circular, three-story building with a stage in the center and a roof that opened up to the sky to allow natural lighting into the space. Like the Medieval stages, these theatres had a platform stage that was usually a type of thrust stage. A trap door was built into the stage floor that could be used for surprise entrances and exits, and a second story behind the stage housed a balcony that could serve as the musicians' gallery, the staging of certain scenes (such as the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*), or the mechanical apparatus that created special effects.

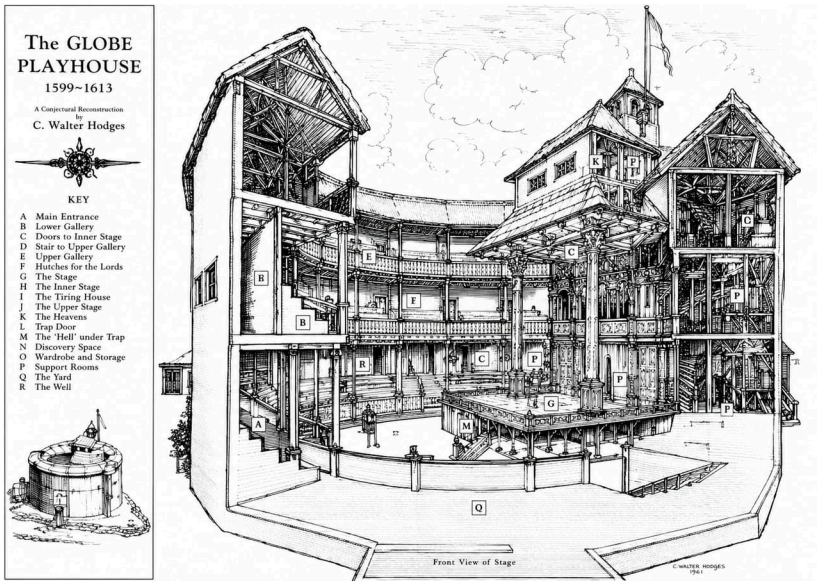


Image by C. Walter Hodges/Folger Shakespeare Library. CC BY-SA 4.0.

These theatres varied in size but typically accommodated between 1,500 and 3,000 spectators. Individual gallery spaces were the more expensive seats where audiences could sit and were undercover from the elements of the rain or son. The open space around the protruding stage was the standing-room-only area known as the pit where the **groundlings** stood throughout the performance. In Elizabethan theatre, the term "groundlings" referred to the lower-class spectators who stood in the pit or yard in front of the stage during performances. These individuals paid a lower admission fee compared to those who sat in the more expensive gallery seats or boxes. The groundlings were known for their rowdy behavior, which often included heckling the actors, making noise, and sometimes even throwing objects at the stage. While they would be out of place at a modern theatre performance, and despite their sometimes-disruptive behavior, groundlings were an important part of the Elizabethan theatre audience. Their presence provided a source of immediate feedback for the actors, and their enthusiastic engagement with the performances contributed to the lively and interactive atmosphere of the open-air theatres.

Our understanding of what it would have been like to attend a play in a public theatre during the Elizabethan period has been significantly enhanced by the construction of a replica of the original Globe Theatre in London. Constructed in the 1990s near the site of the original Globe, which stood until it was destroyed by fire in 1613, this replica closely mirrors the design of its predecessor. Audience members are still permitted to stand in the pit during performances, and the theatre features gallery and box seating arranged in three tiers around a thrust stage, creating a nearly three-quarters round configuration. Many modern visitors to London place the Globe Theatre on the top of the list of places to visit in England. Based on historical records, the new "Shakespeare's Globe Theatre" was constructed with traditional early-17th century methods and materials, with only a few concessions to modern safety regulations, and offers performances year-round to visitors. Performances are staged very much in the same way that they were 400 years ago in a space that used craftsmen and women to duplicate the same skills that were used to build the original theatre. If a visit to London is in your future, be certain to place a visit to the Globe Theatre on hour to-do list!



Modern reconstruction of the Globe Theatre, London. Public domain. Wikipedia Commons.



Inside the reconstructed Globe Theatre, London. Image by Tohma, CC BY-SA 4.0 Wikimedia Commons



The Globe Theatre, London, by Kirkland, M., Flickr. CC BY-NC 4.0.

The original Globe Theatre, built in 1599 is particularly renowned as the initial stage for many of Shakespeare's most famous works. Shakespeare was not only a playwright but also an investor **(shareholder)** in the Globe, sharing profits with other investors, cast members, and the management team. The establishment of permanent theatres like the Globe provided traveling actors with a more stable financial foundation, enabling them to produce a greater number of plays with higher production values. Constructed primarily of wood, the theatre derived its name from the large globe situated atop its roof, inscribed with the Latin phrase corresponding to Shakespeare's famous line, "All the world's a stage."

Theatres were owned and managed by individual actors or theatrical companies. For example, the Globe Theatre was owned by the **Lord Chamberlain's Men** which included **William Shakespeare** as a member. The company was responsible for financing the construction of the theatre and managing its day-to-day operations. Theatre was a business in Elizabethan England, and well-run theatres could turn a profit for shareholders and the acting company. Overall, the management of Elizabethan theatres was often a collaborative effort involving a group of individuals, including housekeepers, actors, and theatrical companies, who worked together to ensure the success of the theatre and the productions staged within it.

Regarding scenery, much of the illusion of the play had to be created in the audience's imagination. For example, an elaborate chair could suggest a throne room, or the sound of a cannon would be used to transport the audience to the center of a battlefield. Playwrights in this period primarily conveyed location and time of day through dialogue, allowing the audience's imagination to fill in the rest, such as in Shakespeare's ***Twelfth Night***, Acting I, Scene ii:

Viola: What country, friends, is this?

Captain: This is Illyria, lady.

The audience would have been very familiar with Illyria, so elaborate scenery was unnecessary.

Special effects were used to the delight of the audience. Because Elizabethans in particular were superstitious and commonly believed in the supernatural, a few theatrical techniques were used to enhance the performances and engage audiences. These included:

- **Trapdoors:** The Globe Theatre had trapdoors on the stage, which allowed for characters to appear or disappear suddenly, adding an element of surprise and magic to the performances.

- **Flying Machinery**: Basic flying machinery was sometimes used to lift actors playing gods or spirits onto the stage, giving the impression of flying or floating. The second story area above the stage, known as the "heavens," housed various machinery for flying characters onto the stage.

- **Sound Effects:** Music, drums, and cannons were used to create sound effects. For instance, cannons could simulate the sound

of thunder or a battle.

• **Props:** Various props were used to enhance the realism of the plays. These could include swords, goblets, scrolls, or any other objects relevant to the story.

• **Language and Imagery:** The language itself was used as a special effect. Shakespeare's rich and poetic language could transport audiences to different places and times, allowing them to visualize scenes and characters without elaborate sets or special effects.

Unfortunately, timber beams and thatch were the common materials to build the public theatres, which made them highly susceptible to fire. In 1613 during a performance of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, a cannon that was used during the performance ignited the thatched roof and burnt the Globe Theatre to the ground.

Costumes in both the public and private theatres were seldom specific to a particular time period or location. Instead, actors typically wore the attire of their contemporary period, with perhaps a few pieces to indicate their social status or character. During this time, the role of a dedicated costume designer had not yet been established in theatre. As a result, the costumes often reflected the financial resources of the actor, as they were largely responsible for providing their own wardrobe.

Professionally **licensed troupes/companies of actors** during this period were typically composed of twelve or more permanent main actors, along with a number of bit-part players, boys, and apprentices. Actors were typically **male**, and female roles were played by young boys. During the Elizabethan period, it was common for male actors to play both male and female roles, as women were still not permitted by law to perform on stage. Young boys often portrayed female roles before their voices changed at puberty. Additionally, theatre companies employed musicians, writers, artists, and copyists. These companies usually included a mix of veteran actors and young apprentices who were learning the craft and the business of running an acting company.

Actors in Elizabethan England were paid, although the structure and amount of their compensation varied based on several factors, including the success and reputation of the theatre company, the popularity of the play, and the individual actor's role and experience. Leading actors, known as "sharers," were part-owners of the theatre company and received a share of the profits from ticket sales. These individuals often earned more than the other members of the company.

Because it was possible to make a living as an actor, some degree of skill was necessary. Improvisational skills were required of both commedia dell'arte and Elizabethan actors who could deal with the unexpected in any given moment. Hecklers, who often interrupted performances to add comments, had to be dealt with in an artful manner. The groundlings in particular spoke directly to the actors during a performance as mead, an alcoholic drink, was the audience's preferred beverage.

Acting, by modern standards, was not realistic. In theatres that used scripted material, a prompter was often placed directly on stage with the actors so that, should an actor forget their lines, a prompt could be given to the actor. Acting schools were still nonexistent in the Renaissance, so actors learned the craft from observing other actors.

Note

Trivia question: What is the origin of the word "role"?

Answer: Translates from a roll or scrap of paper. **Actor's lines were originally written on rolled paper.** Overtime, the word role became associated with the character an actor was performing. In the Elizabethan theatre, actors were only given rolls of their lines as opposed to the entire play.

Copyright laws also did not yet exist, and it was not uncommon for original plays to be stolen with someone else taking credit for the work. For this reason, actors were never provided with a full copy of a play out of fear that another playwright could steal the script, reproduce it, and sell it as their own. In Elizabethan theatre, the **prompter** was known as the "book-holder" or "book-keeper" who was given a copy of the play. The prompter's role was to follow along with the script and prompt actors if they forgot their lines or missed cues. This was especially important in the absence of formal rehearsals as we know them today. The book-holder would sit near the side of the stage or sometimes just offstage, and their job was to ensure the smooth running of the performance by assisting actors as needed. If the actor forgot a line, the prompter would prompt them with what to say. In our modern world, this would seem very out of place!

During the Elizabethan period, plays were typically not directed in the way that we understand modern theatrical direction. Instead, the company's leading actor, known as the "principal actor" or "leading player," often took on the role of what we would

now consider the director. This individual was responsible for organizing rehearsals, blocking scenes, and guiding the overall performance.

The concept of a director as a separate and distinct role from the leading actor did not exist during this period. The collaborative nature of Elizabethan theatre meant that actors, playwrights, and even the audience were instrumental in shaping the performance.

Over time, as theatre evolved and became more complex, the responsibilities of the director began to emerge more distinctly, but during the Elizabethan period, the responsibilities typically associated with directing were largely undertaken by the principal actor or shared among the company members**.**

Elizabethan public theatres attracted all classes of people. Unlike the indoor proscenium theatres of the Italian Renaissance, the Elizabethan theatres made plays accessible to everyone in society.

Private Theatres

Private theatres were constructed within existing spaces, typically large rooms in private residences or other establishments within the city limits of London. Because these venues were more exclusive and selective about their audiences, they did not face the same restrictions as public theatres and were less likely to contribute to the spread of diseases like the plague.

Since the private theatres were not open to the sky, candles were utilized along with natural light from windows to illuminate both the stage and the audience. While generally smaller in size, the capacity of these theatres varied. One of the most renowned private theatres of the Elizabethan era was Blackfriars Theatre, constructed in a former monastery, which could accommodate approximately 750 people. Due to the higher cost of admission, attendance was largely limited to the upper classes and affluent members of the merchant class.

Similar to public theatres, private theatres typically featured a thrust platform stage with the audience on three sides, and the stage at one end of the room. A second story was often included that could serve various purposes, such as housing musicians, storage, or additional performance space. Limited gallery seating was usually constructed along the walls, and while the pit might have some benches, it also offered standing room for spectators.



Seventeenth-Century English Indoor Playhouse. Created by Brenda C. Eppley with ChatGPT (OpenAI), 2026. AI-generated represented reconstruction; not a depiction of a specific historic theatre. CC BY 4.0.

Shakespeare and Marlowe

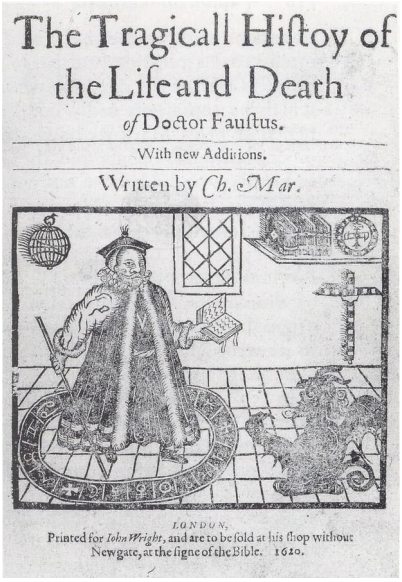
Just who wrote the plays required to sustain what became known as the **Elizabethan Golden Age of Theatre**? You are probably

familiar with William Shakespeare, playwright, actor, and part owner of the Globe Theatre, but there were many others writing at this time as well. Elizabethan theatre was known for its use of poetic language and complex, multi-layered plots, which required careful attention and interpretation by the audience. Playwrights who had their plays produced during the period were highly skilled in language and plot structure. If their plays were not produced, they received zero income, so there was a high incentive to write plays that were valued and popular in a very competitive and discerning market.

Although there are others who existed and whose work survived, there are two significant playwrights from this period in England that are notable for their skill in terms of writing poetry and dialogue. The first is **Christopher Marlowe** (1564-1593) who is most famous for his updated versions of many of the morality plays and stories from the earlier Medieval period of English plays. One of his most famous is a version of ***Doctor Faustus*****,** the German morality tale that is still widely performed today.



Image of *Christopher Marlowe*. Corpus Christi College, Public domain. Wikimedia Commons



Front cover of the *Play The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*. Image by John Wright, Public domain. Wikimedia Commons

The most celebrated playwright of this period was **William Shakespeare** (1564-1616). Entire textbooks and college courses exist that focus on the life and works of a man who is arguably the most famous playwright known to the modern world. What follows are the highlights of Shakespeare's life and work.

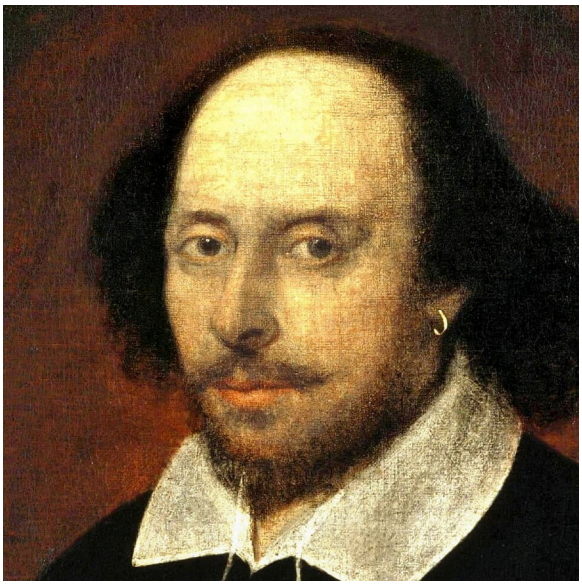


Image of William Shakespeare. Buaidh, CC BY-SA 4.0 Wikimedia Commons

liam Shakespeare, the son of a merchant in the small town of Stratford-on-Avon, England, was baptized April 26, 1564. Most scholars assume he was born a few days earlier, by tradition, on April 23. Shakespeare was the son of John

Shakespeare, glover and moderately successful businessman, and Mary Arden. Surprisingly, very little is known of Shakespeare's life. What few details we have are derived from church records, land titles, and his plays. It is widely assumed that he attended the Stratford Grammar School, although no proof of doing so exists. Scholars make an educated assumption that he attended because the curriculum included Latin, classical literature, rhetoric, and the study of the classics, each of which is prominent in his writing. At the age of eighteen he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior. Their marriage produced three children, Susanna and twins Hamnet and Judith.

Shakespeare seems to have left Stratford (and his family) for London in 1587. Most of what we know of Shakespeare's life from 1592 through his death in 1616 derives from the plays themselves, as well as dramatis persona list of the plays in which he acted, and records of appearances at court. By 1595, Shakespeare was sufficiently successful to be named as one of the more senior members of the Lord Chamberlain's men, an acting company that performed frequently before court and in the public theatres of London. This was no small honor; this prominent theatre company later became the royal company called the **King's Men,** meaning the King of England who was the company's chief patron.

By 1596, Shakespeare was so successful as a playwright that his family was granted a Coat of Arms. Shakespeare became a ten percent owner of the new purpose-built theatre in London, the famous **Globe Theatre** where so many of his plays would later be performed.

While the majority of writers throughout history excel in one specific genre of writing such as comedy or tragedy or drama, Shakespeare wrote plays that explore the full range of human experience, from love and comedy to despair. He created an unmatched range of complex characters and explored universal human emotions with extraordinary depth and insight. His language, storytelling, and influence on drama and the English language itself have shaped literature and theatre for over 400 years across cultures and generations. His works include some of the most famous plays in the English language, such as *Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night,* and *Much Ado About Nothing.*

Shakespeare was also a poet, and his sonnets are among the most widely read and studied poems in the English language. In total, 38 plays and 154 sonnets are attributed to Shakespeare.

Note

Did you know that quoting Shakespeare is common? When you say these phrases, you are quoting Shakespeare!

"**Eaten out of house and home"** *Henry IV, Part II*

“Break the ice” *The Taming of the Shrew*

“Tis now the very witching time of night” *Macbeth*

“Wild-goose chase” *Romeo and Juliet*

“Heart of gold” *Henry V*

“Wear my heart upon my sleeve” *Othello*

“The world is my oyster” *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

“In a pickle” *The Tempest*

“Love is blind” *The Merchant of Venice*

“Too much of a good thing” *As You Like It*

“Foregone conclusion” *Othello*

“We are such stuff as dreams are made on” *The Tempest*

“Double, double toil and trouble” *Macbeth*

“Good riddance” *Troilus and Cressida*

“Laughing stock” *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

“Too much of a good thing” *As You Like It*

“Cruel to be kind” *Hamlet*

In England, religious tensions continued to deepen over the next century, eventually contributing to the rise of more radical Protestant groups, including the Puritans. Puritans argued that stage plays were morally harmful, encouraging idleness and exposing audiences to what they viewed as vice and corruption. They associated theatre with disorderly behavior and questioned its value as a legitimate form of public instruction or entertainment. In a climate of religious and political reform, and the rise of the English Civil War, Puritan leaders in England influenced English Parliament to order the closure of all theatres in 1642. Symbolically, these events are associated with the end of the Renaissance in England.

Ironically, this position stood in contrast to the earlier role of the Christian church in medieval England, which had helped foster the development of theatre through religious drama intended to educate the public. In this sense, theatre in England moved from being a religious teaching tool in the Middle Ages to a form of popular entertainment that was later condemned and suppressed by a different set of religious and political authorities in the 17th century.

Conclusion

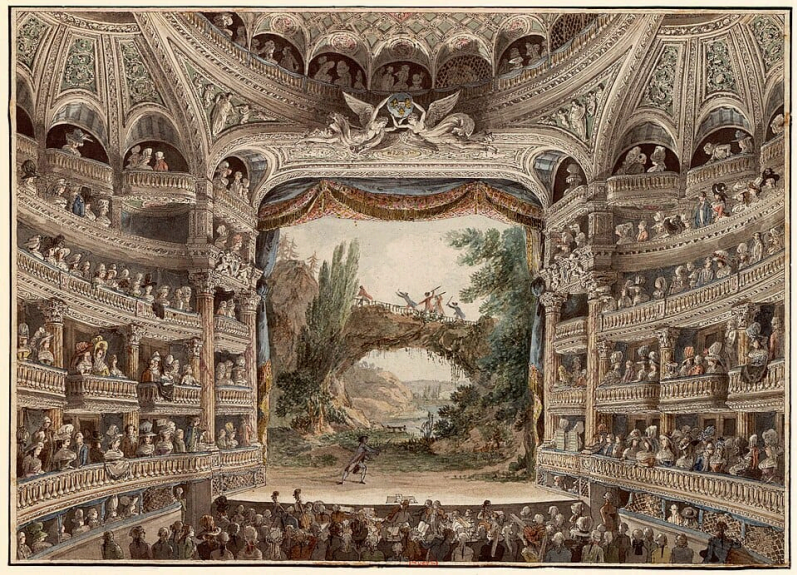
When discussing theatrical innovations of the Renaissance, Italy and England are often the primary focus. However, theatre was not confined to these regions. *Commedia dell’arte* troupes traveled widely throughout Europe, and the invention of the printing press helped circulate plays across national borders, allowing dramatic works to reach new audiences and influence theatrical practices elsewhere.

At the same time, several key elements of modern theatre practice had not yet emerged. There were no formal professional training institutions for actors, and the roles of the director and designers as understood in contemporary theatre, did not yet exist as distinct professions.

Thumbnail: Bankside, in South-wark near the Bear Garden Theatre, 1956. Public Domain. Library of Congress.

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6: Chapter Six - The Restoration and Neoclassicism



Comedie-Francaise, Paris. Antoine Meunier, Public domain. Wikimedia Commons

TIMELINE: THE RESTORATION & NEOCLASSIC PERIOD (c. 1660–1800 CE)

DATE	THEATRE	HISTORICAL CONTEXT
1660 CE	Theatres reopen in England after the Puritan closure; women appear on the English stage.	Restoration of Charles II in England. • Qing dynasty consolidates rule in China. • King's laws (1662), early permissions to revive plays.
1660–1663	King's Company and Duke's Company receive royal patents; John Dryden becomes a major and influential literary figure.	Royal Society founded (1660), • English and Spanish colonies • Hooke's *Micrographia* (1665) spreads in the Americas. expand in the Americas.
1673 CE	Molière's late comedies help define French neoclassical theatre.	Louis XIV's court culture shapes Europe; • Mindel Beha mission • Leibniz develops a major imperial power. strong. calculus (1670s).
1677 CE	Racine's *Phèdre* exemplifies neoclassical tragedy.	Tokugawa Japan maintains centralized rule; • Transatlantic slave • Leeuvenhoek's microscopes reveal era of peace. trade accelerates. microbial life (1670s).
1680 CE	Comédie-Française is founded in Paris.	Pueblo Revolt in New Spain (1680– • French dominate commerce • Huygens studies light 1696) in aliens. in the spice islands. and lenses (1678).
1689 CE	Opera and oratorio grow in England; Handel (also active later) is prominent.	English Bill of Rights limits royal power. • Kangxi era stabilizes • Newton publishes *Principia* Qing China. (1687); laws of motion.
1698 CE	Jeremy Collier attacks the immorality of the English stage.	Moral reform movements gain strength in England, • Atlantic trade • Hadley calculates orbits; including Fetter, Miles, and the Associates. networks expand. prints of the stars (1690).
c. 1700–1720	Comedy of manners and heroic drama gradually give way to a more sentimental style.	*Enlightenment* ideas spread through salons, print culture, and philosophy. • Asian powers grow in influence. • Newtonian ideas influence natural philosophy.
1728 CE	John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* premieres; ballad opera becomes popular.	Coffeehouses culture and print culture expand in Britain; • New instruments improve astronomy; colonies deepen in the Americas. • New instruments new era emerges.
1737 CE	Lessing's *Art* plays; British theatre under government censorship.	Pragmatism increases across European politics as • Qing and Tokugawa • Linnaeus presents states reform and rival. Japan stable. classification system (1735).
1741 CE	David Garrick rises to fame and later reshapes acting and Shakespearean production.	War of the Austrian Succession begins • The Great Awakening • Benjamin experiments in influence British America. spreads in the Americas. electricity and science.
1750–1763	Goldoni reforms Italian comedy; reducing improvisation and emphasizing scripted plays.	*Encyclopédie* begins publication (1751), • Seven Years' War reshapes • Improvements in scientific spreads in Europe, India, and North America. exploration expand knowledge.
1767 CE	Lessing's Hamburg National Theatre and *Handel's Devisenkor* advocate criticism and reform ideas.	Enlightenment ideas of liberty, rights, and philosophy; • Lavoisier advances modern Early industrial change underscores in Britain. • Improved steam engine (1760s–1770s). chemistry (1770s).
1773–1775	Goldsmith's *The Shepp in Compes* and Smollett's *The Rivals* revive marketploce comedies.	Boston Tea Party (1773). • American Revolution begins (1775). • Gas lighting experiments begin.
1784 CE	Beaumarchais's *The Marriage of Figaro* stirs outrage and is acted theatrically.	Treaty of Canton links China to global commerce; • Postrevolutionary • Hot air balloons and scientific westward growth in Europe. changes in French society. instrumentation advance.
1789–1800	Theatre responds to revolution; melodramas and Romantic tendencies begin to emerge.	French Revolution begins (1789). • Haitian Revolution begins (1791). • Japan's seclusion restrictions Napoleon rises by 1799. (1720s) come under review.

Literature · Invention & Technology · History & Politics · Philosophy & Religion · Art & Architecture · Religion · Global Events

Timeline created by Brenda C. Eppley (2026). Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

INTRODUCTION

Because historical periods do not end abruptly but instead overlap and evolve into one another, Renaissance theatre gradually gave way to the Restoration period in England and the Neoclassical period in France. Each of these theatrical periods was shaped by specific historical events, as well as broader social and cultural changes within each country.

As a result, while Renaissance theatre continued to develop in some regions, Restoration theatre in England and Neoclassical theatre in France emerged during overlapping timeframes, each reflecting distinct national influences and artistic priorities. For this reason, the two periods will be examined separately.

The Restoration Period in England

The end of Elizabethan theatre in England resulted from a combination of political, religious, and social changes rather than a single event. King Charles I believed in the divine right of kings, the doctrine that a monarch's authority came directly from God rather than from Parliament or the people. His efforts to expand royal authority brought him into increasing conflict with Parliament, many of whose members were influenced by Puritan religious beliefs. These political and religious tensions eventually erupted into the English Civil War (1642–1651).



Portrait of Charles I. Workshop of Anthony van Dyck, Public domain. Wikimedia Commons

Although Charles I was executed in 1649 and England became a republic, the theatres remained closed throughout the Commonwealth under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell, a committed Puritan. Puritan values emphasized religious devotion, moral discipline, and simplicity, and theatre was viewed as a source of temptation, vice, and distraction from godly living.

In 1649, Charles I was captured, tried, and convicted of high treason. He was subsequently executed, marking the first and only time an English monarch has been executed by his own subjects. His son, Charles II, fled to France, where he remained in exile during the years that followed. Once Charles I was executed, England became a republic known as the Commonwealth.

Oliver Cromwell emerged as its leader and later assumed the title of Lord Protector. Cromwell's government embraced strict Puritan values that viewed theatre as immoral and a distraction from religious life. As a result, theatres throughout England were closed, bringing public theatrical performances to a halt. Cromwell ruled until his death in 1658, but by that time his government had become increasingly unpopular and politically unstable.

In 1660, the monarchy was restored when Charles II returned from exile and reclaimed the English throne. His willingness to grant amnesty to many of his former opponents helped ease the transition back to monarchical rule. This return of the monarchy gave rise to the term **Restoration**, and the period that followed became known as the **Restoration Period**. The reopening of the theatres under Charles II marked the beginning of a new era in English drama and performance.



King Charles II in Coronation Robes. By John Michael Wright. **Public domain**. Wikipedia Commons.

While residing in France, Charles II attended performances of French theatre. His return to the English throne marked the reopening of theatres in England and the revival of theatrical performances. Charles II's patronage and personal interest in the arts played a crucial role in the development and flourishing of Restoration theatre in England.

He is noted for:

- The reopening of theatres that provided a springboard for the flourishing of English drama and theatre. Charles II was key in the establishment of new theatres in London, including the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, and the Theatre Royal Covent Garden, which became prominent venues for theatrical productions during the Restoration period.
- Charles II's reign is often associated with the rise of the **Comedy of Manners,** a new genre of comedy that satirized the manners and morals of the Restoration court and society. He encouraged the development of new plays and promoted the growth of English drama. Playwrights wrote witty and sophisticated comedies that reflected the intrigues, seductions, and social games of the Restoration era. Comedy of Manners looked at the foibles and shortcomings of the upper classes through the eyes of the lower classes. It often satirized the excesses and eccentricities of the upper classes and was often filled with witty dialogue and sexual innuendo. It was a popular and influential form of entertainment, and playwrights used it as a platform to comment on and critique the society in which they lived.
- Charles II's reign saw a significant change in the English theatre with the introduction of **actresses** on the stage. Previously, female roles were played by male actors. Actresses like **Nell Gwyn** became popular and influential figures in the Restoration theatre, and their presence contributed to the development of more complex and nuanced characters in plays. Nell was an actress and mistress of Charles II, which no doubt weighed heavily on his decision to allow females to appear on stage.



Painting of Nell Gwyn. Workshop of Peter Lely, CC BY-SA 4.0 Wikimedia Commons

- Charles II and his government were involved in the regulation and licensing of theatres and theatrical performances. **The Licensing Act of 1662** imposed strict regulations on theatrical productions and required plays to be approved by the Master of the Revels before they could be performed publicly. This ensured that plays did not promote any specific political or religious agenda. The power of theatre in terms of its influence upon an audience was widely understood. The Licensing Act of 1662 was a form of government censorship that controlled the sharing of political and religious ideas. In 1695, the Licensing Act was not renewed, which was an important step towards freedom of the press in England.

Overall, King Charles II's patronage and personal interest in the arts were instrumental in the development and flourishing of the Restoration theatre. His reign marked a vibrant and innovative period in English theatre, producing some of the most enduring and influential works in the history of English drama. Play-going, in England, became even more of an “event” in which the well-to-do sought opportunities to “see and be seen” in a social environment, and the theatres provided a perfect venue to do so.

The Neoclassical Period in France

The Neoclassical period in France spanned from the late 17th century to the late 18th century, roughly corresponding to the reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715) to the French Revolution (1789-1799). This period was characterized by a revival of interest in the art, literature, and architecture of classical antiquity and was influenced by the ideals of **reason, order,** and **restraint.** The French readily embraced cultural influences from Italy during the Renaissance, adopting and expanding upon Italian ideas in art, architecture, literature, and court life. France also participated in the broader European movement toward exploration, overseas expansion, and the pursuit of economic and political influence. As French maritime power increased, the nation entered into competition with other European powers, particularly Spain and England, for territory, trade, and international influence.

By the seventeenth century, France had become one of Europe’s dominant political and cultural powers under King Louis XIV, known as the “Sun King.” Louis selected this title to symbolize his view of himself as the central source of order and authority within the kingdom. Court culture became increasingly elaborate and theatrical, and fashion reflected this emphasis on display and status. He supported the construction of large public theatres in Paris, all of which had the proscenium arch that had been first created in Italy during the Renaissance.

In the 1630s, an educated class of playwrights began to emerge, and at the request of Cardinal Richelieu, a powerful French statesman and Catholic cardinal who served as chief minister to King Louis XIII, they established the **Académie Française (French Academy),** a group limited to forty writers and intellectuals. Cardinal Richelieu became a major contributor to the creation of policies that governed French theatre during the period. These policies form the framework of the Neoclassical Period in France.



Photo of Institut de France (Académie française), Paris. Photo by **Britchi Mirela**, licensed under **CC BY-SA 4.0**. Wikimedia Commons

The term **Neoclassicism** comes from combining two parts: **"neo"** (meaning "new") and **"classicism"** (referring to the art, literature, and philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome). So, *neoclassicism* literally means **"new classicism"** as a revival or reworking of classical ideals in a later historical period. It is called "new" because it is **not a direct continuation of ancient theatre,** but rather a **reconstruction of classical rules through a new lens.** Neoclassical writers studied ancient Greek and Roman texts and applied them to elevate the writing of the period.

Neoclassical theorists emphasized **purity of genre**, insisting that tragedy and comedy remain distinct rather than blended within a single work. They also prioritized **verisimilitude**, meaning that dramatic events should appear believable and follow a logical, probable sequence rather than rely on implausible or sensational action.

A central concern was **decorum**, the expectation that characters behave in ways appropriate to their social rank, gender, and profession, and that onstage representation remain morally and aesthetically "proper." Neoclassical drama was also shaped by formal **structure**, most commonly the five-act format, which helped impose order and clarity on dramatic action.

Finally, neoclassical theory stressed **purpose**, often summarized in the idea that drama should "teach and please" (*docere et delectare*). Theatre was expected not only to entertain but also to reinforce moral values, social stability, and rational understanding, aligning artistic expression with broader civic and educational goals.

The Académie Française did not simply "ban" or "approve" plays in a modern censorship sense. Instead, it shaped what counted as *good writing*, creating a cultural framework that encouraged playwrights to self-regulate. Combined with royal patronage under Louis XIV, this helped establish the disciplined, rule-based style we associate with French neoclassical theatre.

When studying theatre history, a small number of playwrights consistently stand out for their lasting influence and artistic achievement. For example, in England, William Shakespeare is essential and cannot be overlooked due to his extraordinary impact on dramatic literature and performance.

In France, the most influential playwright of the seventeenth century is **Molière** (1622–1673), often identified as the "**father of comedy",** whose comedies shaped the development of French theatre and continue to be widely performed and studied today. Born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin at a time when acting and playwriting were still considered to be somewhat disreputable professions, he adopted the stage name Molière to help protect his family's social standing and avoid scandal. Raised in a privileged household, his education would have included classical literature and exposure to dramatic traditions that shaped his later work.

Early in his career, Molière worked as an actor and toured extensively across France with a traveling troupe, an experience that significantly influenced his artistic development and understanding of popular performance. He no doubt had exposure to commedia dell'arte troupes as evidenced in his later writings. In 1658, his company performed before King Louis XIV in Paris.

The performance proved pivotal: Louis XIV became his patron, granting the troupe royal support, financial stability, and a degree of artistic protection. 17th century French theatre operated under political, financial, and legal vulnerability, especially for writers of controversial subjects such as Molière. Royal patronage allowed him to experiment as a writer and criticize the society and religious institutions, all of which would have been quite risky without the support of the king.



Moliere. Pierre Mignard I, CC BY 4.0 Wikimedia Commons

While Molière was not directly controlled by the French Academy, his work was sometimes criticized for its use of colloquial language and for addressing topics considered inappropriate or lacking in formal decorum according to neoclassical ideals.

Molière went on to become one of the most important playwrights of the French stage, known for challenging social boundaries through comedy. His works satirized contemporary society, often exposing the hypocrisy of religious figures, physicians, and members of the aristocracy—subjects that were frequently controversial in his time. This was especially striking given that his primary audiences often included the very social elites he was critiquing. He was a brilliant **social satirist** whose comedy challenged norms and influenced how people thought about society, government, and religion.

Molière's bold comedic style transformed French theatre and had a lasting influence on the development of modern comedy. Often regarded as one of the greatest comic writers in theatre history, his play ***Tartuffe*** remains one of his most famous and controversial works.



Engraving of “Tartuffe and Elmire” by Carl Hoff and J. Ballin. 1892. Public domain. Wikimedia commons.

Note

Why is *Tartuffe* regularly performed by professional, educational, and community theatres, and continues to inspire new translations and contemporary adaptions?

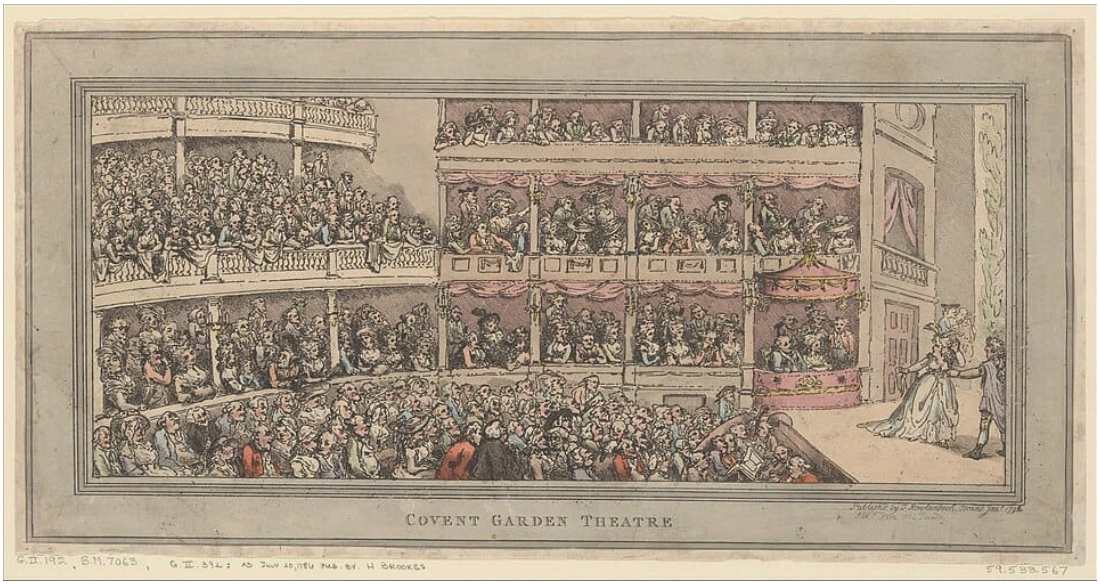
1. **Masterful Satire**: "Tartuffe" is a brilliant satire of religious hypocrisy. Molière exposes the dangers of deceit and the gullibility of those who fall for false piety. The play's critique of hypocrisy and pretense in society is both sharp and relevant, transcending its original context to remain pertinent across different times and cultures.
2. **Complex and Memorable Characters**: The characters in *Tartuffe* are richly developed and memorable. Tartuffe, the titular character, is a masterful portrayal of deceit and manipulation. Orgon's blind faith in Tartuffe highlights human folly, while characters like Dorine and Elmire bring wit, intelligence, and moral clarity to the narrative.
3. **Brilliant Dialogue and Language**: Molière's use of language in *Tartuffe* is exceptional. The dialogue is witty, sharp, and full of irony. Molière's clever use of rhymed verse (Alexandrines) adds a musical quality to the play, enhancing its literary and theatrical value.
4. **Engaging Plot and Structure**: The play's plot is well-crafted and tightly structured. The use of dramatic irony, where the audience knows Tartuffe's true nature while Orgon does not, creates tension and engagement. The twists and turns of the story keep the audience captivated, culminating in a satisfying resolution.
5. **Moral and Social Critique**: *Tartuffe* offers a profound moral and social critique, addressing issues such as the abuse of religious authority, the importance of reason and discernment, and the need for critical thinking. The play encourages audiences to question appearances and be wary of those who exploit faith and trust for personal gain.
6. **Historical Significance**: The controversy surrounding *Tartuffe* and its initial ban by the Church and the court add to its significance. Molière's perseverance in defending the play and ultimately succeeding in having it performed reflects its importance in challenging authority and pushing artistic boundaries.
7. **Enduring Popularity**: *Tartuffe* has enjoyed enduring popularity since its first performance in 1664. Its themes, characters, and humor continue to resonate with modern audiences, and it remains a staple in the repertoire of theatres worldwide.
8. **Theatrical Innovation**: Molière's integration of comedy with serious themes and his ability to entertain while provoking thought highlight his mastery of the craft. His innovative approach to blending farce, wit, and social critique set a new standard for theatrical comedy.

Tartuffe is celebrated for its incisive satire, complex characters, brilliant dialogue, and enduring relevance, making it one of Molière's greatest works and a landmark in the history of theatre.

Theatre Innovations

By the end of the 1700's, these attributes were commonly found in theatres across Europe:

- Theatres are indoor
- Candles are used to light the audience, stage, and backstage areas
- Audience size is commonly 1500 – 3000 spectators
- Proscenium theatres that framed the stage are the norm
- Theatre architecture maximized the visibility of both the action on the stage and the audience. Theatre was a social event, and attending theatre was as much about seeing the performance as seeing each other
- The layout of the house included private boxes and balconies
- Audiences are seated on chairs or benches
- The use of perspective is common in scenery and included painted backdrops or flats
- Stage floors contain trapdoors under the stage and fly space above the stage



Covent Garden Theatre. Hand colored etching published in 1792 by Thomas Rowlandson, CC0, Wikimedia Commons



Teatro Argentina, Rome. 1747 **Public domain**. Wikimedia Commons.

A few theatres that were built in the 1700's still survive to this day. They include:

- Margravial Opera House, Bayreuth, Germany: Click here to view.
- Teatro San Carlo, Naples, Italy: Click here to view.
- Teatro alla Scala, Milan, Italy: Click here to view.

Conclusion

Neoclassicism in France gradually declined as writers and audiences began to reject the strict rules associated with the French Academy and neoclassical dramatic theory. By the time of the French Revolution in 1789, artistic priorities had shifted significantly alongside the collapse of the traditional political order.

The Enlightenment, an intellectual movement spanning the late 1600s through much of the 1700s, emphasized reason, scientific inquiry, and the questioning of established authority. Across Europe, these ideas reshaped cultural production, including theatre.

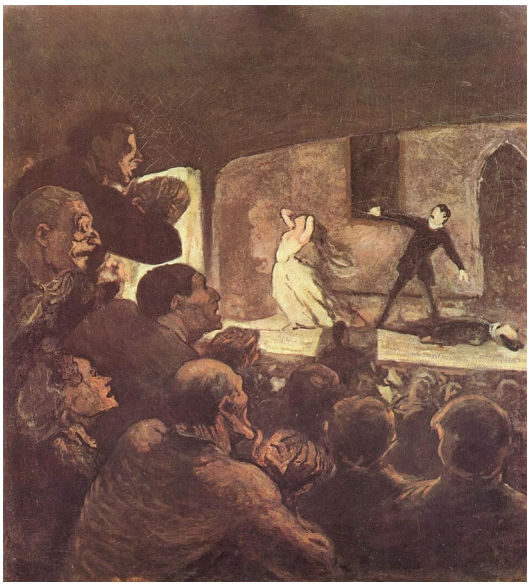
Dramatic writing during this period became less focused on purely aristocratic entertainment and more concerned with instruction and moral improvement. Plays increasingly aimed to influence society by promoting virtue, encouraging emotional engagement, and portraying the lives and concerns of the growing middle class.

Opera also flourished during the Enlightenment as a major theatrical form. However, it remained largely accessible to the aristocracy and the upper bourgeoisie, reflecting the continued social stratification of European cultural life.

Thumbnail: "Tartuffe as a Puppeteer," created by Brenda C. Eppley using ChatGPT (OpenAI), 2026. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

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7: Chapter Seven - 19th Century and Romanticism



Painting of *The Melodrama* by Honoré Daumier, approx. 1860 Public domain. Wikimedia Commons

TIMELINE: THE 19TH CENTURY

DATE	THEATRE	HISTORICAL CONTEXT
c. 1800	Romanticism begins to influence European theatre.	Napoleon Bonaparte becomes First Consul of France.
1804	–	Napoleon crowned Emperor of France.
1808	Johann Wolfgang von Goethe directs the Weimar Court Theatre.	Peninsular War begins in Spain.
1815	Congress of Vienna reshapes Europe after the Napoleonic Wars.	Battle of Waterloo ends the Napoleonic Era.
1821	Victor Hugo emerges as a leading Romantic playwright.	Greek War of Independence begins.
1829	*Hernani* (*Hernann*) by Alexandre Dumas premieres.	Steam locomotive begins transforming transportation.
1830	Victor Hugo's *Hernani* premieres, igniting the "Battle of *Hernani*" and establishing Romantic drama in France.	July Revolution in France.
1837	–	Queen Victoria ascends the British throne, beginning of the Victorian Era.
1843	Charles Dickens publishes *A Christmas Carol.*	Industrial Revolution expands rapidly.
1848	European Revolutions influence artists and playwrights.	Revolutions sweep across Europe.
1850s	The loss of illusions increasingly common in realistic staging.	Telegraph networks expand communication.
1859	–	Charles Darwin publishes *On the Origin of Species.*
1860s	Melodrama dominates popular theatre.	American Civil War.
1857	Mélodrames Ensemble begins influencing production practices.	Canada becomes a nation (Confederation).
1874	Dale , Cong IF's Meiningen Players begin international tours.	Second Industrial Revolution accelerates.
1879	Henrik Ibsen publishes *A Doll's House.*	Thomas Edison develops the incandessont light bulb.
1887	André Antoine establishes the Théâtre Libre in Paris.	Eiffel Tower built; expostvation.
1891	Konstantin Stanislavski begins directing in Moscow.	Carnegie Hall opens in New York.
1896	Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* shocks audiences.	Modern Olympic Games revived in Athens.
1898	Moscow Art Theatre founded by Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko.	Spanish–American War.
1899	Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* produced by the Moscow Art Theatre.	End of the nineteenth century approaches.

LEGEND: Theatre · Politics & Government · Inventiom & Technology · Literature & Ideas · Monarchy & Royalty · Industry & Transportation · Music & Culture · Sports & Society · Nations & Wars · Exploration & War · End of Era

Timeline created by Brenda C. Eppley (2026). Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

INTRODUCTION

In Europe, the end of the 18th century and into the early 19th century brought the French Revolution (1789-1799) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) which depleted European economies and resulted in a massive loss of life and human suffering. As you have learned, theatre is a mirror of society and is a reaction against the movement and genre that proceeds it. Theatre that arose in the early 1800s was a reaction against the strict rules of Neoclassicism and rationalization of the Enlightenment, instead reflecting the desire to explore heightened emotions and heroism. This period is referred to as **Romanticism.**

Before turning our attention to the Romantic Period, we must pause to look across the globe to theatrical developments from

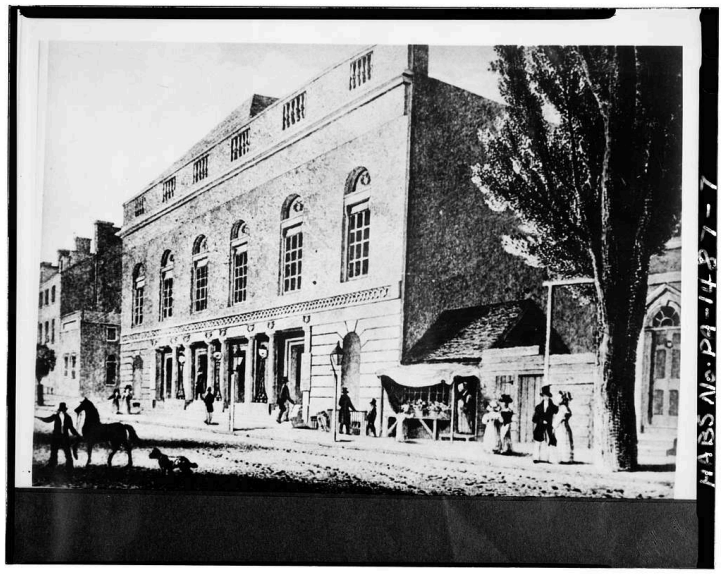
another continent that has not yet been touched upon.

America

The development of theatre in the American colonies progressed more slowly than in Europe, as early colonial societies were primarily focused on survival and the establishment of stable settlements. In addition, Puritan influence, particularly in New England, placed significant cultural restrictions on theatrical activity and continued to shape attitudes toward performance and literary production.

One of the earliest recorded instances of English-language drama in the colonies dates to 1665 with William Darby's *Ye Bare and Ye Cubb*, often cited as the first known English play presented in the New World. While limited in scope and lacking any great depth, such early performances reflect the transplantation of English dramatic traditions into colonial settings.

By the early eighteenth century, Shakespearean drama had begun to appear on colonial stages, signaling increasingly strong cultural ties between the colonies and Britain. In 1730, *Romeo and Juliet* was reportedly performed in New York, representing one of the earliest known productions of Shakespeare in North America. As theatrical culture expanded, the construction of dedicated performance spaces followed; in 1766, the Southwark Theatre in Philadelphia was built and is often identified as the first permanent theatre building in the American colonies, marking an important step toward institutionalized theatre practice. The oldest surviving and continuously operating theatre in the United States is the **Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia**. Built in 1809, it currently hosts professional theatre and dance performances.



Walnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia" (1831) by Charles Burton (artist) and Fenner, Sears & Co. (engraver) is in the **Public Domain**.



Walnut Street Theatre, Pennsylvania's State Theatre, today. Ajay Suresh, CC BY 2.0 Wikimedia Commons



Burlesque dancer, 1900. Lucien Waléry, Public domain. Wikimedia Commons



"*Le Quadrille de la Goulue au Moulin Rouge*" by unidentified photographer/artist, 1898. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

Other entertainment included wild west shows, travelling circuses, and medicine shows.

However, America developed a uniquely distinctive form of theatrical entertainment that emerged directly from the growth of towns along major rivers. Showboats appeared in the early 1800s, when river travel was one of the most efficient and widely used means of transportation and communication across inland regions.

These floating theatres were typically built on riverboats outfitted with small stages, seating areas for audiences, and backstage spaces for performers. Their programming was largely popular in nature, featuring music, singing, dancing, and short melodramas designed to appeal to a broad and often rural audience. The popularity of showboats began to decline in the late nineteenth century with the expansion of railroad travel, which provided faster and more reliable transportation, as well as the increasing establishment of permanent theatre buildings in growing towns and cities. Interestingly, performances can still be seen on a few showboats in America that have undergone rehabilitation:



"*Goldenrod Showboat*" by unknown photographer (c. 1909–1920s), historical archive image via the University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries Digital Collections. Public Domain.



Showboat Majestic. Nyttend. 1923. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons

Musical theatre is often the gateway experience for newcomers to the world of theatre. Combining all three of the performing arts (dance, music, and theatre) as a heightened emotional experience, it provides an opportunity for escapism in a world that is much larger than life in a shared experience. The razzle-dazzle of the spectacle, powerful soaring voices, snazzy memorable tunes, and impeccable dancing seduce even the most reluctant of theatregoers. Audiences sit in wonder before the show begins, gazing at the often elaborate scenic design, and waiting on bated breath to be captivated by this compelling art form. The stories, including the new, the newly adapted, and the old, appeal to audiences from across generations.

It has been said, in fact, that musical theatre is the one original theatrical genre solely contributed by America. However, this assumption is not purely factual. Open five different theatre textbooks and you will likely find five different starting points for tracing the origins of the musical. Some historians will link it all the way back to the Greeks' use of music and dance in plays, while others point to Britain's Gilbert and Sullivan, or Irish immigrants, and still, others begin with 18th and 19th Century comic opera, vaudeville, and burlesque. While the inclusion of music and dance in theatre has indeed existed for thousands of years and has certainly influenced the creation of musical theatre, a production in New York of *The Black Crook* in 1866 is most often distinguished as the "first" musical, but even this title has now been categorized as musical comedy by today's standard. Key tenants of musical theatre include:

· Songs integrated into storytelling

· Spoken dialogue and music together (although this has evolved with recent productions of *Hamilton* and *Les Mis*)

· Dance and movement

As a reminder, opera places the focus on the music which is the primary dramatic engine, while musical theatre places the focus on the characters and is dialogue-driven. Musicals that were produced in the 1800s include *H.M.S. Pinafore, The Pirates of Penzance, The Mikado*.

Suffice it to say that although musical theatre did not originate in America but instead grew out of earlier European traditions such as opera, modern commercial musical theatre is closely associated with the United States as a highly popular form of entertainment.

What about the rise of Broadway?

The beginnings of Broadway are best understood as a gradual development rather than a single starting point. New York City was first settled in the area now known as Lower Manhattan. As the population grew, the city expanded northward along the island of Manhattan. Entertainment venues developed alongside this expansion, following the movement of population and commerce.

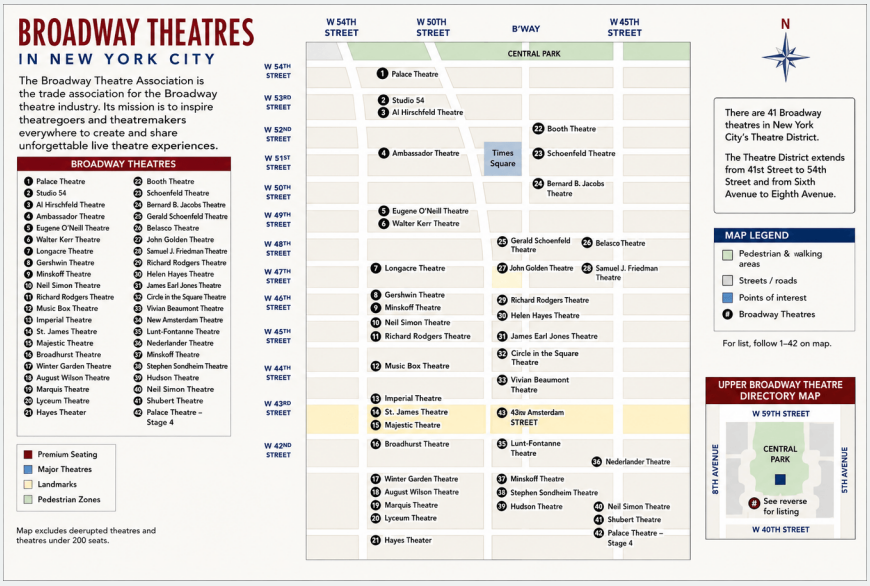
Broadway itself was a major north–south commercial thoroughfare in Manhattan. Because it was heavily trafficked and centrally located, theatre buildings began to be constructed along and near this corridor. Over time, however, theatres also spread beyond the original street as the entertainment district shifted further uptown.

Despite this geographic expansion, the name “Broadway” remained in use to describe the growing concentration of professional theatres. Eventually, it came to refer not just to a street, but to the commercial theatre district centered in Midtown Manhattan near Times Square. By the 1880’s, New York became the theatrical center of the United States.

Note

What is Broadway in the modern sense?

The most well-known avenue for professional and commercial theatre in the U.S.A. is without a doubt located in New York and is known as Broadway theatre. The term is actually tied to something very specific: the number of seats in the house. A Broadway theatre is a theatre that can seat more than 500 people. An Off-Broadway venue is a theatre that can seat between 100 and 499 people. Off-off Broadway theatres can seat less than 100 people. **The term isn’t really connected to the geographical location of the theatre: not all Broadway theatres in New York are, in fact, on the avenue named Broadway!** Aside from some notable exceptions, most of the Broadway theatres are in the so-called Theatre District, the area within 6th and 9th Avenue and 40th and 59th Street. Off-Broadway theatres are scattered throughout Manhattan, with quite a number of them located downtown. As of 2026, there are 41 Broadway theatres in New York. This number can shift when theatres are closed or new theatres emerge.



Broadway theatre map created by Brenda C. Eppley (2026). Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

Europe

It is not surprising that, following the devastation of the Napoleonic Wars, theatre audiences increasingly gravitated toward works that offered escapism. After experiencing widespread economic hardship, political instability, and personal loss, many audiences were less drawn to stark or realistic depictions of suffering on stage and instead preferred stories that provided emotional release and imaginative distance from everyday life. This shift in audience preference contributed to the rise of **Romanticism.**

Romanticism placed primary emphasis on the emotional experience of characters and their responses to events. Emotion was valued over reason, imaginative settings that were often historical, medieval, or exotic were favored, and the experiences of the individual were elevated above strict adherence to rules or institutional authority. This perspective gave rise to the Romantic hero: a protagonist who is typically misunderstood, socially isolated, and engaged in a struggle against oppressive forces or fate itself.

Romantic drama often generated strong emotional identification between audience and protagonist, with viewers encouraged to sympathize with the hero and anticipate the downfall or punishment of opposing forces. In this sense, Romantic plays could feel somewhat predictable in their emotional trajectory, if not in their specific plot details. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, when daily life was marked by uncertainty and upheaval, audiences often found comfort in narratives that offered emotional clarity and a sense of moral resolution.

Melodrama is an outgrowth of Romanticism and derives its name from a combination of the Greek *melos* ("music") and the French *drame* ("drama"). Melodrama emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in France as inspired by Romantic drama. It builds upon the long-standing relationship between music and theatrical performance, particularly the idea that music can intensify and clarify emotional meaning for an audience.

In early French melodrama, music was frequently incorporated as an accompaniment to spoken dialogue. Producers and composers believed that musical underscoring would enhance the audience's understanding of emotional states, heighten dramatic tension, and guide responses to key moments in the narrative.

A useful modern parallel to this practice can be found in early 20th-century **silent film.** In the absence of recorded dialogue (because the technology had not yet been invented), films were often accompanied by live piano or small ensembles performing instrumental music. These musical accompaniments served a similar function to stage melodrama by reinforcing mood, signaling character presence, and shaping audience interpretation of events.

Structurally, melodramas typically employ clear, linear plots with strong climactic organization. They often incorporate elements of both tragedy and comedy but tend to prioritize heightened emotion and suspense. Narrative tension is frequently driven by mystery, danger, or moral conflict, designed to maintain audience engagement and anticipation.

Characters in melodrama are often constructed as recognizable types rather than psychologically complex individuals. Common figures include the virtuous hero, the imperiled or morally pure victim (often a woman in need of rescue), and the clearly defined villain. A recognizable melodramatic scenario in early silent film features a young woman (the heroine) tied to railroad tracks by a villain who stands above her in triumph. The sequence typically alternates between shots of the villain, the endangered woman, and a train rapidly approaching in the distance, creating escalating suspense through visual montage. Just as the train appears moments away from impact, a heroic figure (often a handsome man on horseback) arrives in time to rescue her. The entire sequence is underscored by live or synchronized dramatic music, which heightens emotional intensity and compensates for the absence of recorded dialogue. This structure exemplifies the clear moral opposition, suspense-driven pacing, and heightened emotional cues characteristic of melodramatic storytelling.



Poster advertising a romantic melodrama. The H.C. Miner Litho. Co., N.Y., 1897. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons

You can view several early silent films through the Library of Congress here.

Although melodrama originated in the theatrical traditions of the 19th century, its conventions continue to shape modern popular

media. Contemporary television genres such as soap operas, crime dramas, action films, Westerns, and science fiction frequently employ melodramatic structures, particularly in their use of heightened emotion, moral polarization, and musical underscoring. For example, in the *Star Wars* film series, character identification is strongly supported through identified music; Darth Vader's associated musical themes immediately signal his role as an antagonist, demonstrating the enduring influence of melodramatic technique in modern cinematic storytelling. You can listen to the composition here.

Romanticism arrived from Europe into America in the 1800's. As cities grew and more theatres were built, audiences in America had access to touring companies from European theatres who travelled across the pond to perform, and every genre of theatre mentioned thus far, including Romanticism and the musical works of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Acting Styles

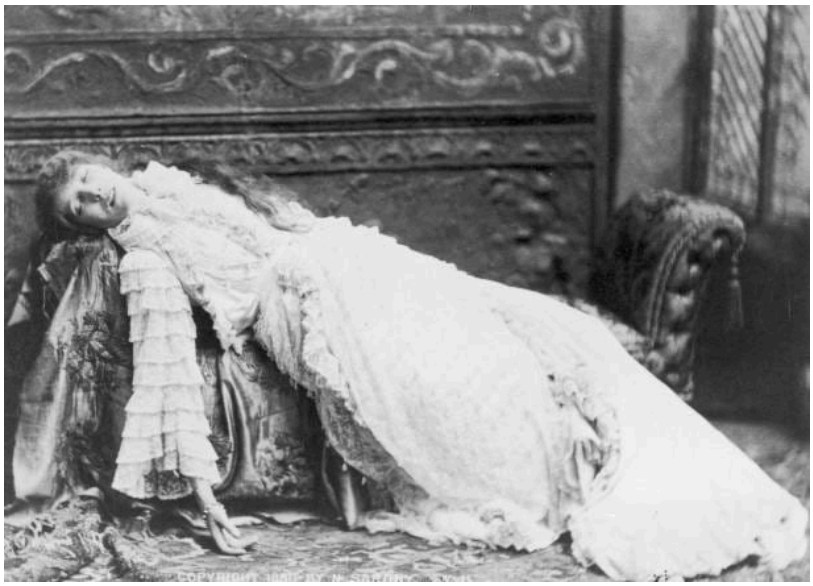
From the early development of theatre through the Romantic period, formal professional actor training programs did not yet exist. Acting technique, as was the case for centuries, was learned primarily through apprenticeship and imitation rather than through standardized institutional training.

During the Romantic period in particular, highly expressive and often exaggerated performance styles were the norm. To modern audiences, these approaches may appear overly dramatic or artificial; however, this perception is shaped by contemporary expectations of natural and what is considered believable acting. In their original context, such performance styles were widely accepted and considered effective means of communicating emotion to large audiences.

In the 19th century, these expressive performances also contributed to the rise of the "**star system**." Individual actors developed significant public followings and often became the primary attraction of a production. It was not uncommon for actors to acknowledge the audience during a performance and address them directly in an attempt to increase their likability factor. As a result, theatrical works were frequently marketed around star performers rather than ensemble-based storytelling or tightly integrated dramatic structure. Theatres benefited economically from the popularity of these actors, even as this emphasis sometimes shifted attention away from plot and overall cohesion.

Actors of this period relied on highly physical performance techniques, including exaggerated facial expressions, strong vocal projection, and expansive bodily movement to convey emotion. While such approaches may seem artificial to contemporary audiences accustomed to more natural acting styles, they were both culturally normative and highly effective throughout much of the 19th century.

Famous actors and actresses from this period include:



Sarah Bernhardt as Marguerite Gautier in La Same aux Camelias by Napoleon Sarony. 1880. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

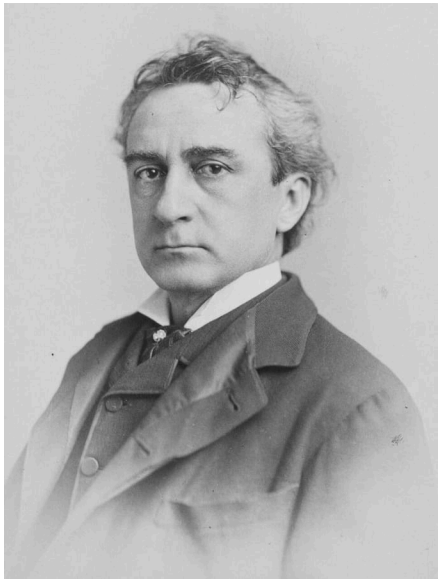
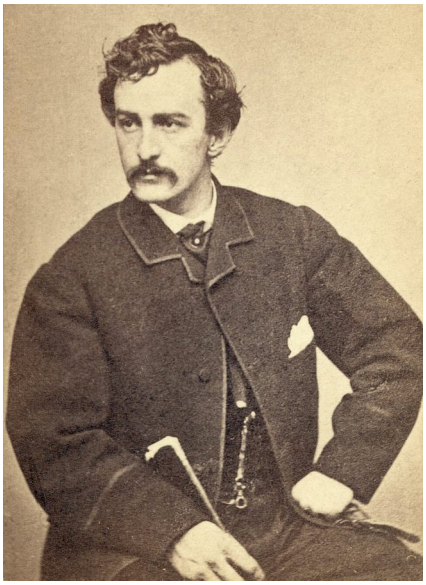


Photo of Edwin Booth, older brother of John Wilkes Booth. Unknown author. 1886. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.



John Wilkes Booth (assassinated President Lincoln in 1865). Alexander Gardner, 1865. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons

Theatrical Innovations

By the 1800s, much of the world was undergoing the Industrial Revolution. Agriculture had previously been the dominant use of land and resources, even during the early stages of expanding trade and commerce. However, growing demand for goods and raw materials accelerated industrial production, and societies in Europe and the United States worked to keep pace with rapid technological and scientific development.

As global trade and communication expanded, cultural differences between regions became more visible and more widely recognized. Prior to the late 18th century, most people rarely traveled more than a short distance from their place of birth. In the 19th century, however, advances in transportation and communication made travel, migration, and the exchange of information far more accessible. Exploration and movement across regions were no longer limited to a small number of adventurers but became increasingly common for broader segments of the population. Theatre innovations capitalized on a rapidly changing and industrialized world.

A significant turning point in theatre history was the transition away from candles as a primary source of indoor stage lighting. Fires were a major and recurring hazard in theatres, particularly before the introduction of gas and electric lighting systems. In large performance spaces, thousands of candles were required to illuminate both the stage and the auditorium. These were commonly placed above the audience, along the walls, and around the stage area.

Theatres were especially vulnerable to fire due to the extensive use of combustible materials. Wood was the primary structural material, and nearly all scenic and decorative elements, including stage scenery, curtains, and costumes, were highly flammable. In addition, audience members often wore clothing made from highly flammable fabrics. The open flames of candles could be easily knocked over, wax could drip onto surrounding surfaces, and there were few standardized fire regulations or safety protocols in place to mitigate these risks.

Several catastrophic theatre fires underscore the dangers of this environment. The Brooklyn Theatre fire in New York (1876) resulted in approximately 280 deaths. The Ringtheater fire in Vienna (1881) claimed between 450 and 500 lives. In England, the Théâtre Royal fire (1887) resulted in 186 deaths. These tragedies were not isolated incidents, but part of a broader pattern of theatre-related fire disasters during the 19th century. High casualty rates were often the result of multiple contributing factors, including limited or poorly marked exits, locked or inward-opening doors, highly flammable materials, the absence of effective warning systems, and panic combined with crowd congestion.

The introduction of gas lighting in the early 19th century did not eliminate the risk of theatre fires; however, it did represent a significant technological improvement. Gas lighting provided brighter and more controllable illumination, allowing for greater manipulation of mood, atmosphere, and stage environment. In this sense, gas lighting served as a transitional technology between candlelit theatres and the later development of electric lighting.

A major milestone occurred in 1881, when the Savoy Theatre in England became the first theatre to be fully lit by electricity. Electrical lighting proved revolutionary not only because it significantly reduced the risk of fire, but also because it allowed for unprecedented control over staging and scenic design. Lighting could now shape mood, establish time of day, and support more nuanced storytelling. For the first time, house lights could also be dimmed completely, focusing audience attention entirely on the stage.

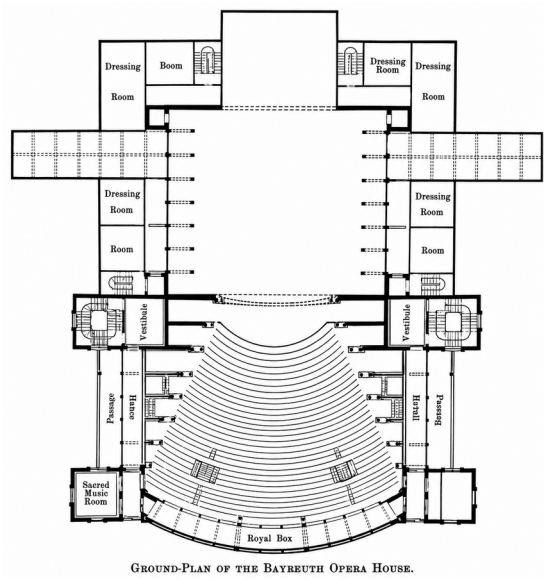
Electric lighting further transformed stage aesthetics through the use of multiple light sources, including footlights, which helped eliminate harsh shadows and created a more three-dimensional appearance of actors on stage. To visualize this effect, imagine holding a flashlight under your chin while in a dark room. Turn it on. Consider the difference between lighting a face from below with a single light source versus illuminating it evenly from multiple angles. When the actor is lit from above, to the sides, and from the front, they are fully illuminated and appear three-dimensional.

Additional innovations in the 19th century included the use of hydraulic lifts below the stage floor to raise and lower scenery, and the turntable that allowed large pieces of scenery to revolve. Fly systems were further developed above the stage floor to allow the lifting and lowering of heavy scenery.

In 1876, **Richard Wagner** opened a theatre in Bayreuth, Germany that incorporated certain aspects that are readily identified with our modern theatre, thereby strongly influencing our modern theatre architecture:

- Fan shaped seating: Wagner's theatre eliminated the boxes and galleries so popular at the time that had divided audiences by class. In this way, his theatre was "classless" and ensured all seats had an excellent view of the stage. In the theatres with boxes and galleries, the sight lines create limited viewing. Audiences had been more concerned with being seen by other audience members and less concerned with having the ability to view everything that was happening on stage. Wagner placed the audiences focus on the staged action.
- Indoor theatres prior to this time placed the orchestra on the same level as the audience, thereby frequently obstructing their view to the stage. Wagner sunk the orchestra pit so that it was lower than the audience's seating.
- Wagner's theatre darkened the house fully during the performance.

As you look at Wagner's theatre, compare it to modern day theatres:



Ground-Plan of the Bayreuth Opera House.

Ground-Plan of the Bayreuth Opera House, published in *Art, Life, and Theories of Richard Wagner* by Edward L. Burlingame 1875. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

Each of these elements supported the idea of creating total immersion and illusion from the audience's perspective. He also discouraged applause during performances, which effectively eliminated a focus on the ego of the star performers so popular in this period. Wagner wanted his audience to forgot that what they were seeing was artificial, instead placing the audience's suspension of disbelief within the reality of the world of the production. Wagner's impact upon the development of theatre was to create a fully integrated artistic experience into a unified production with all elements supporting the theatrical story.

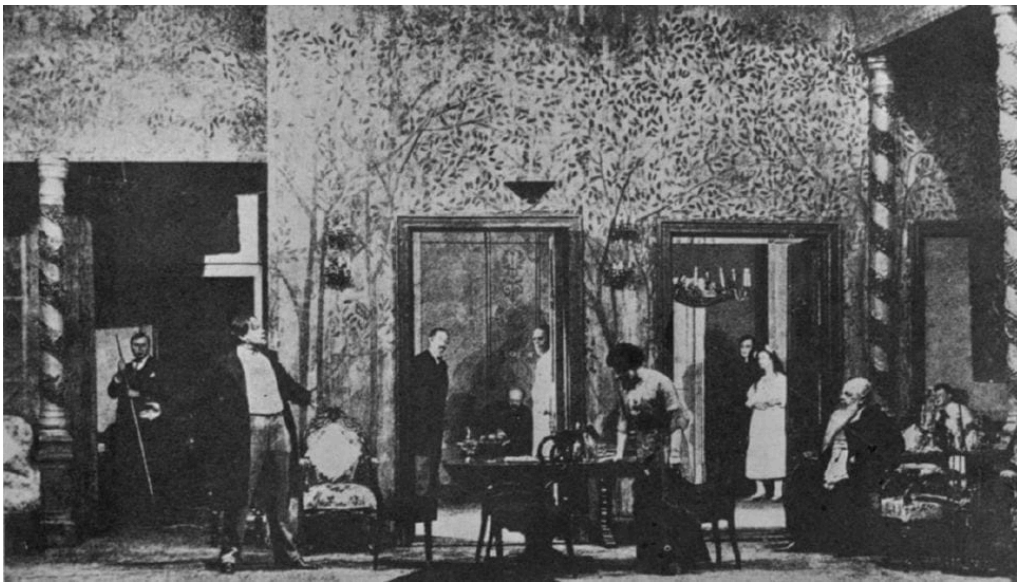
Conclusion

By 1879, audiences could choose from a wide range of theatrical genres. Advances in technology and stagecraft were increasingly incorporated into theatrical productions, enhancing the overall audience experience. These developments cemented the foundation for emerging modern theatre movements that would soon significantly reshape theatre history through the introduction of new approaches to dramatic storytelling and performance. A new genre never seen previously, was about to emerge.

Thumbnail: Anonymous. (c. 19th Century). *For Vengeance; or, The Doom of Russian Tyrants* [Engraving]. Released under Public Domain Mark 1.0.

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8: Chapter Eight - Modern Theatre and the Rise of Realism



Scene from *The Cherry Orchard* directed by Stanislavski. Moscow Art Theater. Alexander Bakshy, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

TIMELINE: REALISM TO THE START OF WORLD WAR I (c. 1850–1914 CE)

DATE	THEATRE	HISTORICAL CONTEXT
1850 CE	Shift begins away from artificial melodrama toward a more truthful approach to drama.	Taiping Rebellion reshapes Qing China; industrialization expands.
1859 CE	—	Darwin publishes *On the Origin of Species.*
1865 CE	—	The American Civil War ends; Abraham Lincoln is assassinated.
1868 CE	—	The Meiji Restoration begins in Japan.
1874 CE	The Meininger Players begin unified ensemble productions and historically detailed staging.	Impressionism rises in France.
1876 CE	Realist playwrights emphasize ordinary speech and social detail.	Alexander Graham Bell patents the telephone.
1878 CE	Naturalist ideas continue influencing the stage.	Muybridge's *The Horse in Motion* pioneers motion pictures.
1879 CE	Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* premieres.	Thomas Edison demonstrates the practical light bulb.
1881 CE	The Savoy Theatre becomes the first theatre lit entirely by electric light.	Electric lighting advances rapidly in Europe and the United States.
1884 CE	The American Academy of Dramatic Arts opens in New York.	—
1885 CE	Realist and naturalist drama spread internationally.	The Berlin Conference accelerates the Scramble for Africa.
1887 CE	August Strindberg writes *The Father.*	Social and labor unrest grows in industrial societies.
1888 CE	August Strindberg writes *Miss Julie.*	Cultural and political change intensify across Europe and beyond.
1890 CE	Realism dominates much European theatre.	The Wounded Knee Massacre marks a tragic turning point in U.S. history.
1896 CE	Chekhov's *The Seagull* premieres.	At the Battle of Adwa, Ethiopia defeats Italy.
1898 CE	The Moscow Art Theatre is founded by Konstantin Stanislavski and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko.	The Fashoda Incident heightens imperial rivalry in Africa.
1903 CE	Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* premieres at the Moscow Art Theatre.	The Wright brothers achieve the first powered flight.
1905 CE	Stanislavski continues refining his system at the Moscow Art Theatre.	The Russo-Japanese War and the Russian Revolution of 1905 reshape world politics.
1910 CE	Realism helps prepare the way for modern theatre movements.	Japan annexes Korea; anti-colonial nationalism grows.
1914 CE	The outbreak of World War I disrupts European theatre and marks the end of the era.	The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand sparks World War I.

Theatre · Science & Technology · Politics & War · Arts, Ideas & Society

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INTRODUCTION

As you have learned, romanticism and melodrama use heightened emotions to convey storytelling in a way that is artificial and lacking in truth. A few playwrights in the mid 1800s began experimenting with less of a focus on spectacle and exaggerated performance styles in favor of more believable scenarios of everyday life and societal problems. One writer, however, is cited as the first to fully crystallize a new dramatic form that became the launching foundation for the modern theatre movement, thereby profoundly revolutionizing all aspects of theatre production. What followed was tremendous experimentation that gave rise to theatrical "isms" that transformed the landscape of modern theatre. Together, these new genres reshaped all aspects of theatre.

Realism

By the mid-nineteenth century, many playwrights began to recognize the impact that plays had upon the audience in terms of creating work that examined the human condition. This required a departure from the artificial situations, heightened emotions, and idealized portrayals often found in Romanticism. The groundbreaking playwright who established a new approach to drama by challenging audiences to examine human existence with honesty and realism was Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen.

Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* (1879) shocked audiences with its psychological realism, complex characters, and familiar domestic setting. Rather than presenting idealized versions of life, Ibsen held a mirror up to society, exposing uncomfortable truths through his exploration of subjects such as alcoholism, religious hypocrisy, sexual morality, disease, euthanasia, and women's rights. While contemporary audiences may view these topics as common subjects for dramatic exploration, nineteenth-century society was far more conservative and reluctant to acknowledge such issues publicly. Personal struggles and social problems were often hidden rather than openly discussed, particularly within a strongly patriarchal culture where women were largely confined to domestic roles and men held the majority of social and decision-making power. By revealing the tensions and injustices hidden beneath the surface of everyday life, *A Doll's House* challenged accepted social norms and provoked controversy, including protests and calls for censorship. The debates surrounding marriage, gender roles, and individual freedom reflected the very social issues that motivated Ibsen's work and demonstrated theatre's growing power as a force for social examination and change.



Photo of Henrick Ibsen, 1878. Nasjonalbiblioteket, CC BY 2.0 Wikimedia Commons

A Doll's House is often recognized in theatre history as a critically significant work in the development of modern realism rather than simply "the most important" play in the theatrical timeline. **Its impact on the evolution of theatre was profound, as it challenged traditional dramatic conventions and demonstrated the power of theatre to examine social issues, human psychology, and the complexities of everyday life.** Its realistic dramatic structure required the creation of a believable world on stage through all elements of production, including scenery, costumes, lighting, sound, and, most importantly, acting. The highly expressive and exaggerated performance styles common in earlier nineteenth-century theatre did not effectively support the goals of realism. Instead, realistic acting sought to mirror everyday human behavior through natural speech, movement, and interactions, reflecting the ways people communicate and respond within ordinary social environments. Realism moved away from highly stylized conventions such as poetic declamation, musical interruptions, fantasy elements, and supernatural events, replacing them with a sustained illusion of real life on stage. To depict realism on stage, nearly every aspect of theatre production needed to transform to reflect the realistic world of the new genre. All elements of production needed to be unified within a cohesive artistic vision, a level of integration that elevated the director's role as the person responsible for shaping and guiding the overall production.



A Doll's House, German production, 1904. Public domain. Source: University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries Digital Collections, via Wikimedia Commons. Digitally restored by the author

The Director

The director is a relatively new profession in the theatre business. For centuries, the playwright, theatre manager, or the leading actor would be tsked with presenting the script in the best possible way. Historically, there is no mention of a director in the modern sense until the second half of the 19th century in Europe. Why? And what is the role of the director in the modern sense?

In the 1870s in Europe, a nobleman named Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, introduced a fundamentally different approach to theatrical production. Georg II was a passionate supporter of theatre and had the financial resources to invest heavily in his artistic interests. He established an ensemble of actors, with a formal theatre company, to pursue a more naturalistic aesthetic and create productions unified in every respect around the script's overarching theme.

Historical accuracy and attention to detail became central to the process. If a play was set in another historical period, actors rehearsed in period-appropriate clothing to support authenticity and remain faithful to the script. Scenic design also became more elaborate and historically accurate, reflecting the world of the play with greater realism.

Georg II's commitment to artistic unity and attention to detail had a profound impact on the theatrical environment of the time, and his productions gained recognition and influence throughout Europe. With the emergence of realism, a unified production concept became essential to ensure that all elements of the production including acting, scenic design, costumes, lighting, and other technical components, worked together to create a believable and realistic world of the play.

Earlier periods in theatre history did not typically emphasize this level of artistic integration across all production elements. Realism, however, transformed the theatrical landscape by prioritizing cohesion, historical accuracy, and psychological authenticity, ultimately contributing to the emergence and necessity of the modern director. This coordination of all performance elements to create a unified style and artistic vision remains the primary purpose of the director today. With the rise of realism in nineteenth-century theatre, productions became increasingly complex and required an external perspective to assess and coordinate everything occurring both onstage and offstage.

Although actors are "the face" of a production, they cannot fully perceive all aspects of the performance environment while acting and therefore may not have a complete understanding of the audience's experience. Designers, meanwhile, contribute from a different perspective and do not typically attend rehearsals regularly. The director serves as the central coordinator, overseeing the production to ensure cohesion and to make certain that every element presented to the audience supports the director's artistic vision.

Directors need to have a certain knowledge of each aspect of a theatrical production, from script analysis to acting, as well as technical and design elements. Although the director will not actively work exclusively in those distinct areas, he/she/they must know how they function and work together. Directors need to possess leadership qualities and be effective communicators and collaborators. Directors deal with crises of all sorts but must maintain a clear and objective perspective in terms of what is

happening on and off stage.

There are as many approaches to directing a play as there are directors directing plays today. Despite this great variety in contemporary directing practices, there are some overarching steps to directing that are, if not universally shared, at least generally agreed on. Of these practices, arguably the most important aspect is the development of the director's concept. The director brings their concept of the play to the actors and designers as a starting point for their collaboration. A director's concept is the central interpretation of a play that connects its dramatic action to a unifying idea that is presented in some form to the audience. At a fundamental level, the director needs to interpret what happens in the play and be able to communicate that interpretation to the actors and designers in a visual way.

Like everyone else involved in a theatrical production, the directors need to know the script inside and out. This phase requires the director to read the script several times and research anything that isn't familiar. Script analysis is crucial as well; it is vital to know how the play functions in its entirety and how the characters develop and interact with each other, and how their individual roles push the story forward. Having a clear understanding of the play will facilitate the director's interactions with virtually everyone else involved in the production.

The Actor

Believability in acting refers to the audience's willingness to accept the characters as real, even though they know the characters are fictional and portrayed by actors. The actors, too, must fully immerse themselves in the reality of world created by the playwright and production team. This is a very difficult challenge to overcome. However, in the late 19th/early 20th century, a Russian actor and director, **Constantin Stanislavski**, realized that many of the actors he encountered did not know how to portray believable characters. Instead, they relied on the earlier acting in which performers delivered their lines to the audience with exaggerated emotion. Stanislavski was an eager actor as an amateur, preoccupied with analyzing and evaluating what he believed were his failures as an effective and believable performer. He was motivated to convey a truthful performance. Stanislavski did what came natural to him: he observed and analyzed human behavior.



Photo of Konstantin Stanislavski by Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-18073-0003. CC-BY-SA 3.0, CC BY-SA 3.0 DE Wikimedia Commons

One touring company that greatly influenced Stanislavski was the **Meiningen Company**, which is discussed later in this chapter. Exposure to this ensemble, along with other touring productions, inspired Stanislavski to reform Russian theatre and develop a new theatrical model that bridged earlier theatrical traditions with the emerging demands of realism.

In 1898, Stanislavski, together with playwright/director/producer Nemirovich-Danchenko, founded the world-renowned Mos**cow Art Theatre.** Unlike most theatres of its time, the MAT uniquely developed an ensemble of actors supported by professional designers and production staff, all working collaboratively to create unified production concepts. Actors studied a variety of subjects and trained extensively in pursuit of performances that appeared **truthful, psychologically believable,** and **realistic.**

One challenge remained: there were no established blueprints, textbooks, or systematic guides for teaching actors how to perform truthfully and consistently.

Stanislavski immersed himself in observing actor's and their behaviors. In his observations, Stanislavski noticed that some actors were much more successful at making characters that seemed to move and speak like "real people." He researched those successful actors' processes and techniques and developed a system of methods that he began to teach to his own actors. This **method,** or system, has been developed and modified in the last century, but his ideas remain the basis for almost all believable acting in the 21st century. If you ever hear an actor referred to as a "method actor," then it is a clear indication that the actor uses Stanislavski's techniques to create believable characters on stage.

His books are written as personal accounts, similar to journals, from the perspective of a student learning his craft under the guidance of a teacher with fellow students. The books embed the key ideas of Stanislavski's observations about the art and craft of acting, including the need for actors to pursue objectives on stage to overcome obstacles while living truthfully in the imaginary world of the play. His method includes the following seven elements:

- **Relaxation:** Relaxing for the actor means to let go of physical and mental stress and tension in order to be able to call upon the body, mind, and spirit to work clearly on developing and manifesting (bringing to life) the character that is being called for in the script. It usually involves a series of practices using breathing exercises, stretching, centering, and meditation to rid oneself of personal issues and stress.
- **Concentration and observation:** Most modern actors are keen observers of human behavior. In fact, that is one way that actors develop a "repertoire" of physical actions and emotional responses to a wide variety of possible experiences. Not everyone reacts the same way in a particular situation, and an actor observes others to identify and select a variety of possible ways that the character might react. This toolkit of various reactions, both physically and emotionally, becomes quite useful when an actor wants to differentiate the character from the actor more distinctly. An actor must develop keen concentration to keep focus on the character's reality in the scene while still being aware of and reacting (if necessary) to what is going on in the actor's real world on stage.
- **Specificity:** The skill needed to bring about a realistic character involves making very specific choices in actions and mannerisms. When we think of people, we usually think of those traits and actions that make this person unique among all the people we know. An actor has to make those kinds of specific choices to animate the character to make it stand out from a stereotype or cartoonish character instead of a realistic character.
- Inner truth (**The "Magic If"):** An actor can make a character more believable if he or she can not only portray the character's actions and behaviors but also make the character's feelings believable. After all, we can usually detect when someone is "just going through the motions" and not being true to their own feelings. The same is true of an actor on stage. To have an inner truth means that the actor's feelings match the character's actions and what the character would be feeling in any given moment. Stanislavski realized that isn't always an easy task, especially if the actor has not actually personally experienced what the character is experiencing. How then can the actor create a sense of inner, emotional truth? Stanislavski calls the method he taught, the magic if. This basically gives the actor an opportunity, during character development, to ask the question, "What would I do if I were in this same situation as the character?" The playwright only gives the actor the details that make the character unique. The actor has to add those to his or her own persona to make the character fully developed. As a result, when an actor asks the "magic if" question, it brings the actor's self to bear in making the character believable.
- **Purposeful action:** This trait is one that seems pretty simple on the surface, but it requires a deep self-understanding on the part of the actor. The idea of purposeful action refers to the notion that nothing an actor does on stage should detract from the character's purpose and goals. That means the actor's own nervous twitches, swaying, other kinds of motions, or facial expressions should not make an appearance in the character unless they help the character to be believable.
- **Through-line of the character:** We all have motivations for what we do. We have short-term and long-term goals that we use to help us make choices. Ideally, whenever we are faced with a choice in life, we consider which option will take us closer to our goals. That then motivates us to make considered choices that will help us get closer to those goals. The same is true for the life of the character. Even though the character is fictional, to make it realistic, the actor must analyze the character to determine what goals the character uses to guide the choices the character makes. Those goals and their impact on the character's choices and actions are what Stanislavski referred to as the through-line of the character.
- **Ensemble playing:** All the elements up to this point have been centered on the individual actor and his or her character. However, it is a rare moment when a character in a play is on stage alone for any length of time. Since most actors work in groups and thus have groups of characters on stage at the same time, an awareness on the part of each individual actor of the believability and realness of the other actors' characters is necessary.

Stanislavski's system has grown and adapted since it was first developed. The novelty of Stanislavski's approach and the broader impact of **psychological realism** was that actors were challenged to not only express the outward behavior and gestures of a character accurately but also to take ownership of inward thoughts and intentions. Thinking from within the characters' experience stimulates spontaneous physical and emotional reactions and a realistic belief in the immediate circumstances of a scene

or situation. For more than thirty years, Stanislavski explored ways of describing the psycho-physiological transformation of acting. Along the way, he collaborated with remarkable playwrights (Anton Chekhov, Maxim Gorky), toured Moscow Art Theatre productions throughout Europe and the United States with influential productions that ignited interest in his work, and attracted students and imitators from across the globe.

Famous teachers of what become known as “The Method” included **Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner,** and **Uta Hagen.** Many of these teachers were artists in their own right who influenced the growth of American theatre, television, radio, and film by opening their own schools or training programs in America. They also helped to train a generation of actors and directors around whom a certain level of hype and mystique was established. American audiences became enamored of the deeply invested, emotionally potent performances of actors like Marlon Brando, Anne Bancroft, Montgomery Clift, Ellen Burstyn, James Dean, Al Pacino, Daniel Day Lewis, and Robert De Niro. Actors trained in “The Method” seemed to have a vibrancy and emotional depth unmatched by other actors in film and television, and the industry took note.

What is true and adaptable from this approach is the importance of developing any performance from the internal realities of the actor. The emotional investment of the character belongs to the actor, and the communicated thoughts of the character are expressed by the actor, so any contemporary performance that is believable begins from the actor’s ability to reveal a vulnerable part of themselves and react to the truth of that experience. The challenge for the actor is to balance the emotional and physical demands of an invested performance against the practical challenges of consistent and reliable collaboration with others in an artistic process.

Theatrical Innovations

In addition to a need for truthful acting and the vision of a director, realistic plays required realistic scenic elements. Professional scenic, costume, and lighting designers developed in tangent with the rise of realism. We will address their specific contributions in a later chapter.

Thumbnail: Nora from *A Doll's House,* 1904. Е. Л. Мрозовская, Public domain, Wikimedia Commons

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9: Chapter Nine - Early Twentieth Century Theatre



Waiting for Godot set at Theatre Royal Haymarket 2009.KlickingKarl, CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons

TIMELINE: THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

DATE	THEATRE	HISTORICAL CONTEXT
c. 1900	Symbolism, Realism, and Naturalism shape modern theatre; new stagecraft experiments emerge.	Freud publishes *The Interpretation of Dreams*.
1899–1902	Boer War influences British theatre; patriotic drama and imperial themes appear.	Boer War reshapes imperial politics and ends British dominance in South Africa.
1903–1905	Stanislavski continues developing his system; Chekhov's plays influence modern drama.	The Wright brothers achieve first powered flight; Einstein publishes special relativity.
1905	Appia and Craig revolutionize staging with new concepts of space, light, and production.	Einstein's theory of relativity (1905); Russian Revolution of 1905 shakes empire.
1908	New theatres and vaudeville houses proliferate in urban centers.	Automobiles expand; Model T introduced; assembly-line production transforms industry.
1910–1913	Expressionist and innovative productions gain visibility across Europe.	Public-health vaccination campaigns against smallpox dramatically reduce disease.
1914	World War I disrupts European theatre and marks the end of the prewar era.	World War I begins after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.
1917	The Moscow Art Theatre and Stanislavski's system gain wider influence worldwide.	Russian Revolution reshapes politics and culture.
1920	New theatres open across Europe and America; Yiddish theatre and avant-garde troupes flourish.	Women gain the vote in the United States; Jazz Age culture expands.
early 1920s	Dada and Surrealism challenge realism; avant-garde theatre grows.	Modernist experimentation spreads across the arts and literature.
1923	Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* becomes a landmark of Expressionism in the United States.	Radio broadcasting begins; popular culture and new media expand.
1924	Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* gains international influence.	Indian Citizenship Act grants U.S. citizenship to Native Americans.
1927	Show *Boat* signals a new era in American musical theatre.	Modernist art, architecture, and literature flourish.
1928	Brecht and Weill's *The Threepenny Opera* premieres, advancing epic theatre.	Sound film ("talkies") becomes established in popular culture.
1929	The Group Theatre forms in the United States, committed to socially relevant drama.	First Academy Awards (Oscars) are presented in Hollywood.
1929	Federal Theatre Project begins, producing new work and bringing theatre to audiences nationwide.	Radio and recorded entertainment reach mass audiences.
1931	O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* premieres.	The Great Depression reshapes social and political life worldwide.
1932	Orson Welles's *Voodoo Macbeth* and the *Living Newspaper* tradition gain national attention.	New Deal programs transform public life in the United States.
1935	Politically engaged theatre responds to the threat of war; exile and censorship increase.	Radio reaches millions worldwide; global tensions intensify.
1937	*Oklahoma!* reshapes the book musical with integrated story, music, and dance.	World War II begins in Europe with the German invasion of Poland.
1939	Theatre mobilizes for war; USO tours and morale-building productions thrive.	The Holocaust; systematic persecution and genocide of six million Jews.
1941–1945	Postwar theatre explores new forms and themes of disillusionment and renewal.	World War II ends; the United Nations is founded; atomic age begins.
1945	First Tony Awards are presented: Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* premieres.	ENIAC, the first general-purpose electronic computer, is unveiled.
late 1940s	Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* premieres, examining the American Dream.	Early Cold War tensions reshape global politics; Marshall Plan begins.
1948	New voices emerge in theatre addressing social justice and human rights.	Apartheid is formally established in South Africa.
1949	Broadway and regional theatres expand; dramatic experimentation continues.	Postwar consumer culture expands; suburbs and shopping malls grow.
1950	Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* premieres, helping define Theatre of the Absurd.	Television becomes a dominant cultural force in homes and society.
late 1940s	New American and international playwrights explore postwar themes.	Polio vaccine research and development advance in the late 1940s.

LEGEND: Theatre · Music & Culture · Social Change · Politics & Society · Science & Technology · War & Global Conflict · Media & Communication · Contemporary/ Subsequent Developments

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INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century was a period of dramatic change and upheaval. The expansion of ideas and innovations during the nineteenth century led to increasingly rapid advances in technology. It was also a time marked by frequent conflict and warfare. While not all wars were global in scale, armed conflicts occurred somewhere in the world with regularity. These struggles reflected political, social, economic, and religious differences and reshaped societies across the globe.

At the same time, and sometimes as a direct result of war, technology advanced at an unprecedented pace. After millennia of relatively gradual development, the twentieth century witnessed extraordinary growth in transportation and communication

technologies.

Twentieth-century theatre reflected the many new ideas and technological developments shaping society. During this period, theatre increasingly came to be viewed as a mirror of reality: a means through which audiences could reflect on the world around them. Playwrights, directors, and performers embraced emerging philosophical movements and explored new approaches to representing human experience on stage.

One significant shift was the declining influence of religion as a dominant force in both theatre and society. At the same time, new ideological perspectives emerged, and the growing fields of psychology and the study of human behavior increasingly influenced theatrical practice. Questions about how people think, feel, and respond became central concerns for many artists.

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Economic theories and changing social structures also shaped theatrical content and production practices. In addition, science became an important influence on twentieth-century theatre. Scientific discoveries and technological innovations not only transformed the practical aspects of theatrical production but also informed the themes, ideas, and perspectives presented on stage. Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species,* for example, shaped intellectual inquiry and discussions across cultures about human evolution. This naturally inspired the questioning of our origins as a species, which no doubt influenced artistic output. As a result, twentieth-century theatre became a dynamic artistic form that reflected and responded to the rapidly changing modern world.

Our previous chapter introduced the realistic genre. In parallel with Realism, an intensified form often referred to as **Naturalism** emerged. Naturalism pushed realistic representation further, aiming not merely to mirror reality or its appearance, but *to reproduce reality itself on stage*.

This approach is sometimes described as "slice-of-life" theatre. In practical terms, this means that production design strives for complete authenticity, even in details that may never be seen by the audience. For example, a kitchen set might include fully stocked drawers with silverware, even if those drawers are never opened during the action of the play.

Naturalism seeks to create a photographic or scientifically observed version of reality, emphasizing the material conditions of existence. Plays written in this style often focus on working-class or lower-class characters and tend to explore the harsher or more deterministic aspects of human behavior, frequently with an unsentimental or critical perspective.

Why didn't the naturalistic movement in theatre gain ground in popularity? Audiences attend theatre to see a heightened slice of life as opposed to an exact duplicate. They want selected moments of our humanity, when we are at our worst or best, depicted on the stage. Why pay to see real life unfold before you when you could see the same occurrence in your daily life? Realism, on the other hand, selects those heightened moments from our lives, typically our most comic or tragic. Our everyday life is simply not as interesting!

If theatre merely reproduces everyday life without selection or emphasis, it risks losing the sense of purpose that distinguishes performance from ordinary experience. After all, audiences can observe real life unfolding in their daily environments without purchasing a ticket.

Realism, by contrast, does not simply replicate life; it selects and structures meaningful moments, often emphasizing the most comic or tragic aspects of human experience. In this way, it heightens reality rather than merely copying it, making it more engaging for theatrical presentation.

Again, theatre reflects what is happening in society, and a new genre or movement in theatre is a reaction against the movement that proceeds it. The 20th century theatre was filled with explorations of new ideas and new genres and forms. Many of these arose out of the psychological and sociological stresses of the early 20th century, with its many wars and the development of nuclear power and nuclear weapons. They include the following forms:

Modern Theatrical Styles Post-Realism

Most nonrealistic modern theatre can be classified as **stylized** theatre. Rather than attempting to reproduce everyday life exactly as it appears, stylized theatre draws its techniques from a wide range of sources, including historical traditions, distant cultures, contemporary influences, and imagined futures shaped by technology and ideology. Characters in stylized works typically are non-realistic and represent more than individual people; they often embody larger forces and abstract ideas such as fate, death, justice, the earth mother, the tyrannical father, or the prodigal child. Likewise, the conflicts portrayed are not simply personal disputes but expressions of enduring tensions within the human condition itself. Yet stylized theatre is not inherently bleak or pessimistic. Although **antirealism** emerged during a period marked by uncertainty, disillusionment, and social upheaval, it ultimately moves beyond frustration to celebrate the triumph while overcoming despair. Rather than offering simple solutions, stylized theatre invites audiences to see the complexities of human experience with greater clarity.

Expressionism

Expressionism emerged in Germany in the early twentieth century and reached its height between 1910 and 1945, although many later plays continue to incorporate expressionistic elements. Influenced by the social upheaval of industrialization and the devastation and disillusionment surrounding World War I, Expressionist drama developed as a protest against authority, rigid systems of order, and the dehumanizing effects of modern life. Expressionist playwrights viewed industrialization and materialism as forces that could reduce individuals to victims and diminish human freedom and connection.

Unlike realism, which seeks to represent life as it appears externally, Expressionism emphasizes subjective experience and attempts to reveal emotional, psychological, and spiritual truth. Rather than presenting objective reality, Expressionist theatre externalizes and exaggerates internal states, making thoughts, emotions, and inner conflict visible on stage. Ideas may take grotesque or symbolic physical form, and internal struggles are transformed into external conflict. Expressionist principles extended across artistic disciplines and can also be seen in visual art, literature, and other modern movements.

Expressionist productions are often characterized by bold, forceful dialogue, exaggerated scenery, dramatic lighting, heavy shadows, piercing sound effects, vivid colors, and highly visible symbolic imagery. Scenes are frequently short, episodic, and disjointed, with images and events juxtaposed rather than connected through realistic continuity. These techniques create an atmospheric and sometimes nightmarish quality that reflects the emotional intensity of the characters' experiences and builds toward a powerful climax.

Although Expressionism originated in Germany and was particularly popular in the 1920's, American Expressionist playwrights adapted the style to critique the consequences of rapid industrial and economic growth, exploring concerns that modern society was eroding individuality, freedom, people's rights, and human connection. Ultimately, Expressionist theatre seeks to move beyond surface appearances and provide audiences with greater clarity about the human condition by exposing truths that realism alone cannot reveal. Playwrights and their work that are excellent examples of Expressionism include:

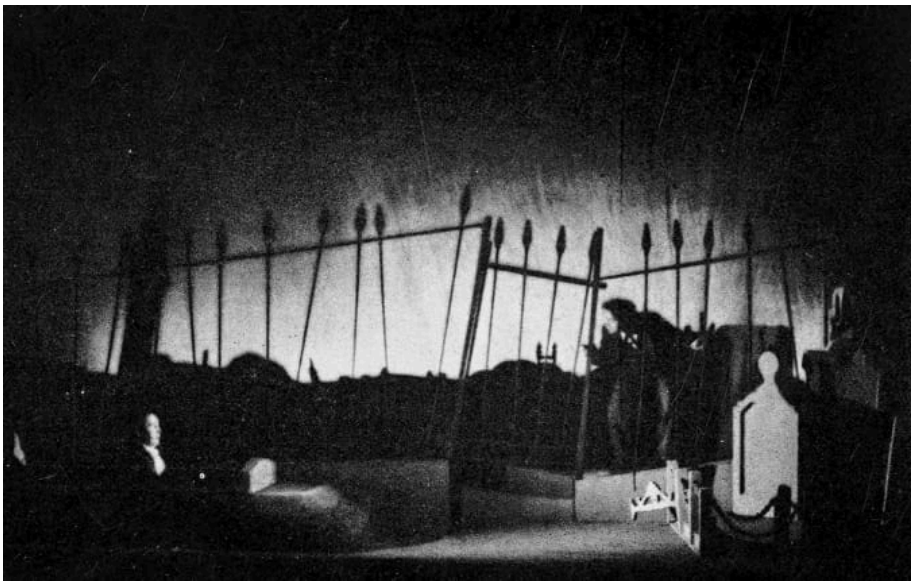
- ***From Morn to Midnight* by Georg Kaiser** (1912) A bank clerk impulsively steals money and embarks on a frantic search for meaning and fulfillment. Through a series of fragmented encounters, he discovers that wealth and modern life fail to provide genuine purpose.
- ***The Adding Machine* by Elmer Rice** (1923) Mr. Zero, an office worker in accounting, loses his job to the invention of the adding machine and confronts the emptiness of his existence. The play critiques industrial society and the loss of individuality.
- ***The Hairy Ape* by Eugene O'Neill** (1921): A ship worker experiences an identity crisis after encountering social class divisions. The play uses Expressionist techniques to explore alienation and belonging. James Abbe, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons
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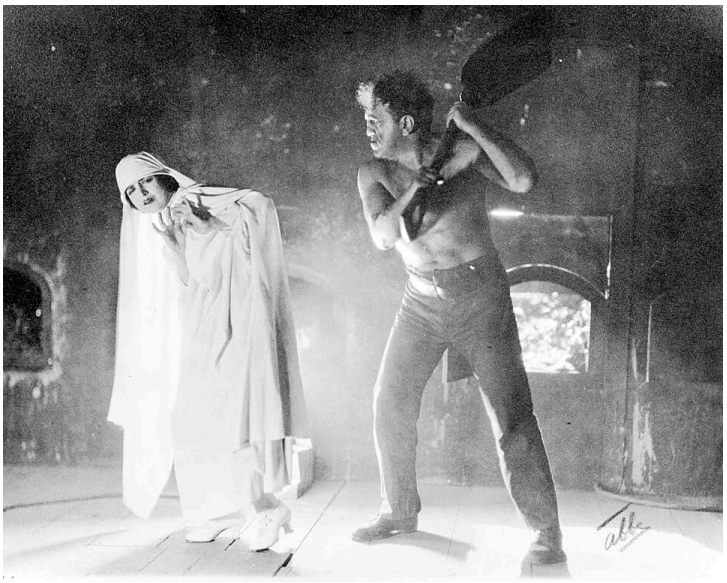
Ernst Deutsch as the Cashier, *From Morn to Midnight*. Karlheinz Martin. 1920. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons



The Adding Machine (1923). Photograph by Vandamm. Public domain. Source: Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library Digital Collections. Image digitally restored by the author



The Adding Machine (1923). Photograph by Vandamm. Public domain. Source: Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library Digital Collections. Image digitally restored by the author



The Hairy Ape (1922) James Abbe, Public domain. Wikimedia Commons

Theatre of Cruelty

Perhaps the most radical reaction against realism was the **Theatre of Cruelty,** a concept developed by Antonin Artaud (1896–1948), a French actor, playwright, and theorist. In his influential book *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud called for a decisive break from realistic, text-based theatre in favor of "spectacles" that were primal, poetic, and sensory-driven, using a "unique language half-way between gesture and thought" to directly assault the audience's senses. He also sought to eliminate the physical and psychological separation between performers and spectators by removing the traditional "fourth wall" that was the architecture of proscenium theatres, which he believed acted as a barrier to genuine theatrical experience. Removing the fourth wall broke the imaginary barrier between the world on stage and the audience, allowing actors to engage directly with the audience. Emerging in France around 1930, Theatre of Cruelty is highly experimental and often characterized by violence, chaos, and illogical structure, rejecting coherent narrative in favor of sensory impact. Artaud's vision does not attempt to answer questions or provide resolution, reflecting his belief that life itself offers no clear escape or solution. Despite, or because of, its extremity, his rejection of dominant aesthetic traditions made him one of the most influential theatrical theorists of the twentieth

century. Playwrights and their work that are excellent examples of the Theatre of Cruelty include:

- ***The Cenci* by Antonin Artaud** (1935) Artaud's most significant theatrical production explores violence, oppression, and rebellion through intense sensory effects and ritualized performance. Rather than psychological realism, the production emphasized sound, movement, and emotional impact.
- ***The Balcony* by Jean Genet** (1957) Set within a house of illusion and performance, the play examines authority, identity, and social roles through symbolic and theatrical imagery.
- ***Marat/Sade* by Peter Brook** (1964 production) Brook's influential production emphasized physicality, sensory intensity, and audience confrontation in ways strongly connected to Artaud's ideas.

Theatre of the Absurd

Theatre of the Absurd is a post–World War II theatrical movement that emerged primarily in Europe as writers and artists attempted to respond to the devastation and disillusionment caused by the horrors of the war. It reflects a deep skepticism toward traditional systems of meaning, particularly the belief that language, logic, and rational structures can fully explain or stabilize human experience.

At its core, Theatre of the Absurd can be understood as a form of extreme tragicomedy. Its comic dimension arises not from lighthearted humor, but from the recognition of life's contradictions: human beings are fundamentally social yet often profoundly alienated, and the world appears to operate without clear logic, justice, or coherence. In this sense, Absurdist theatre draws heavily on a wide range of comedic techniques, including physical comedy, situational humor, and language-based humor, often marked by irony and incongruity.

Common techniques used in Theatre of the Absurd include:
• Illogical plots and unexpected or nonsensical events, often symbolic or metaphorical
• Fragmented or nonsensical language that resists linear meaning
• Existential characters who exist primarily in the present moment, often lacking clear backgrounds, motivations, or defined objectives

Characters are commonly and hopelessly trapped without any clear understanding or awareness of why they are trapped. Through these techniques, Absurdist theatre invites audiences to confront uncertainty and the instability of meaning itself, often blending humor and despair in equal measure. Playwrights and their work that are excellent examples of the Theatre of the Absurd include:

- ***Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett** (1953): Two characters wait endlessly for someone named Godot who never arrives. The structure is circular, repetitive, and deeply symbolic of uncertainty, waiting, and meaninglessness.
- ***Rhinoceros* by Eugène Ionesco (1959):** A town slowly transforms into rhinoceroses, symbolizing conformity and the spread of irrational mass behavior.
- ***The Bald Soprano* by Eugène Ionesco (1950):** A foundational Absurdist text that dismantles logical conversation. Dialogue breaks down into clichés, nonsense, and repetition, exposing the emptiness of everyday communication.
- ***The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee (1958):** A confrontation between two strangers in a park reveals isolation, alienation

Existentialism

Although existentialism as a philosophy developed in the early 18th century**, Existentialist** theatre is first associated in the late 1940s with **Jean-Paul Sartre,** emerging in the aftermath of World War II as a response to widespread devastation and uncertainty. It is grounded in the idea that life has no inherent meaning and that the universe is ultimately irrational, with no guiding cosmic design. Within this framework, human beings possess free will, but identity is not fixed; instead, it is created through individual choices and actions. As a result, individuals are responsible for constructing meaning and purpose in their own lives, and every choice carries consequences.

Characters in existentialist drama often grapple deeply with questions of identity and freedom, revealing significant psychological depth even as they appear to exist within realistic settings. These environments, however, are frequently claustrophobic and inescapable, reinforcing the tension between perceived freedom and actual entrapment. Dialogue is often intellectual and probing, reflecting the characters' attempts to understand their condition. Although existentialist theatre may appear realistic on the surface, its situations often reveal a sense of confinement, emphasizing both human agency and the limits of that agency within an indifferent universe. Playwrights and their work that are excellent examples of Expressionism include:

- ***No Exit* by Jean-Paul Sartre (1944):** Three tortured souls are trapped in a single room from which there is no escape. They

soon realize that they are in hell, and that “Hell is other people.”
- ***Caligula* by Albert Camus (1944):** Explores nihilism, power, absurdity, and the search for impossible freedom through tyranny.

Theatre Innovations

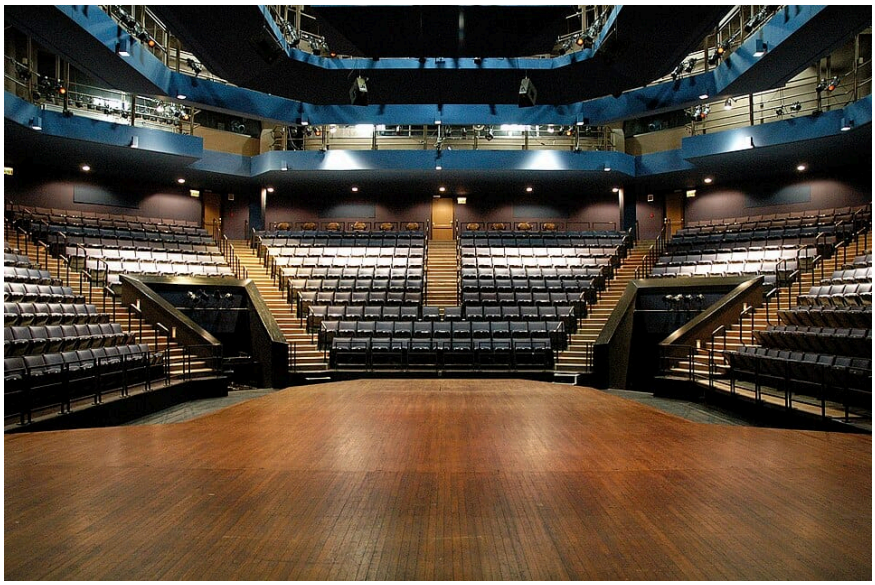
Because the proscenium theatre’s fourth wall that separated the world of the play from the audience was conceptually removed to provide greater contact, and sometimes interaction, with the audience, these “isms” of the 20th century required new theatre spaces and an alternative approach to the traditional proscenium theatre.

- **Black Box Theatre**: A black-box theater is typically a small, plain, open room with capacity for 50-200 people. As its name suggests, the space is usually painted entirely black. It is well suited to experimental theater and provides an intimate theatrical experience; audience members might only be a few feet from the actors. Because the seating is not fixed permanently to the floor, the space can be reconfigured as needed for a production.



Black box theatre. Rustaveli Theatre, CC BY-SA 3.0 Wikimedia Commons.

- **Thrust Stage or Three Sided**: A thrust stage projects into the audience space and is surrounded on 3 sides by seating. This can create a more immediate, personal connection between the actors and audience because they are sharing the same space. This configuration can also make staging more challenging, as now, actors are projecting to multiple areas instead of one audience direction. (After all, who wants to see the actor’s back for an entire performance!)
-



Depiction of a thrust theatre. Pastant Theatre, Wharton Center, CC BY-SA 3.0 Wikimedia Commons

- **Arena Stage or In the Round**: An arena stage is an old idea (think of The Colosseum in Rome!) This type of stage is surrounded on all sides by the audience and carries with it many of the same challenges as that of a thrust stage in terms of staging and acting a scene. There are also additional technical considerations: Walls or anything that blocks the audiences view cannot be used. In addition, audiences on all four sides need to be treated equally in terms of what they see. Lighting can be challenging because while a lighting designer makes sure the stage is lit appropriately, they must also make certain that lights don't "bleed" into the audience. However, this type of space allows for the greatest possible audience immersion thereby creating strong immediacy.



The Thomas Theatre In the Round. Photo by Amy Richard CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

Conclusion

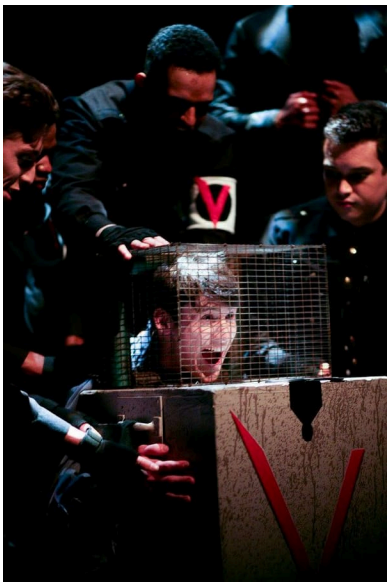
The rapid pace of human development and increasing connection to the global economy and world cultures led to significant innovation in theatre during the first half of the twentieth century. Psychology emerged as a major field of scientific inquiry, encouraging new ways of questioning human identity, consciousness, and our place in the universe. At the same time, traditional class boundaries became less rigid, education became more widely accessible, and social movements challenging established

norms began to reshape national identities. In response, theatre embraced experimentation more than ever before, expanding artistic expression across a wide range of styles and forms.

Thumbnail: Film still from *From Morn to Midnight* (1920), directed by Karlheinz Martin, set design by Robert Neppach. This work is in the **Public Domain**

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10: Chapter Ten - Contemporary Theatre



1984, Harrisburg Area Community College, Photograph by David Olmsted Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

TIMELINE: CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

DATE	THEATRE	HISTORICAL CONTEXT
1947	The first Tony Awards recognize achievement in American theatre.	Postwar U.S. culture expands; Broadway thrives in a period of economic growth.
late 1940s–1950s	Off-Broadway becomes established, offering smaller, more affordable alternatives to Broadway and helping launch new plays and musicals.	Television becomes a household staple, changing entertainment habits and theatre economics.
1950s	Rise of television impacts theatre audiences, but live performance thrives.	Civil Rights activism intensifies; *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–56).
1958	Off-Off-Broadway begins in New York with *Caffe Cino*, helping spark experimental, intimate, and alternative theatre.	Cold War tensions, the space race, and political conformity shape national life.
1959	Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* premieres on Broadway.	
1960s	Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) continues to resonate; Miller's *The Crucible* (1953) reflected McCarthy-era tensions.	Vietnam War protests, counterculture, and the Summer of Love influence youth culture.
1967	*Hair* premieres, signaling the rise of the rock musical and a new era of youth-oriented theatre.	Social movements, antiwar activism and demands for artistic freedom grow.
1968	*Hair* shocks Broadway with rock music, counterculture themes, and the first nudity on a Broadway stage.	Economic challenges (stagflation, oil crisis) impact the arts; philanthropy and public funding become vital.
1960s–70s	Off-Off-Broadway emerges in Greenwich Village and other studios—*The Living* Theatre, La Mama Experimental Theatre Club, and *Café Cino* foster innovation.	Second-wave feminism and LGBTQ+ rights movements gain momentum.
1970s	Off-Broadway theatres established: The Public Theater (1967, NY) and Second Stage Theater (1979) champion new American playwrights.	Reagan era politics; globalization begins to accelerate.
1970s	Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) remain stage staples.	MTV launches (1981); pop culture and theatre intersect.
1980s	New Playwrights and regional theatres flourish; experimental and physical theatre expands.	HIV/AIDS crisis deeply affects communities and the arts.
1983	*A Chorus Line* wins the Pulitzer Prize for Drama; the modern musical takes center stage.	The internet becomes mainstream; the end of the Cold War (1991).
mid-1980s	*Les Misérables* opens and becomes a major global megamusical phenomenon.	Conversations about race, gender, sexuality and identity reshape society.
late 1980s–90s	Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991–92) addresses AIDS, politics and identity; large-scale epics return.	Digital technology transforms communication, marketing and daily life.
1990s	*Rent* opens Off-Broadway (1996) and on Broadway (1996), bringing contemporary rock musical to mainstream audiences.	Social media amplifies voices; global movements for justice and equality grow.
1990s	Diverse voices and stories gain visibility: August Wilson's plays, Paula Vogel, Suzan-Lori Parks and others are widely produced.	COVID-19 pandemic disrupts live performance worldwide; social, political and climate concerns shape the decade.
2000s	New technology, projections and multimedia integrated into staging and design.	
2001	Broadway shuts down briefly after September 11; theatre responds with renewed documentary, political, and socially engaged work.	The bombing/attacks on the World Trade Center reshape U.S. culture and close Broadway temporarily after September 11.
2000s–2010s	*Hamilton* (2015) redefines the modern musical; Lin-Manuel Miranda brings hip-hop to Broadway.	War in Iraq and Afghanistan; economic recovery followed by new debates about inequality and national direction.
2020s	Theatre adapts through streaming, hybrid performances and reimagined spaces; renewed focus on inclusion, access and community.	Climate change urgency, social justice movements, and evolving technology shape the 2020s and beyond.

LEGEND: Theatre · Music & Culture · Politics & Society · Science & Technology · Social Change · War & Global Conflict · Media & Communication · Contemporary Development

Timeline created by Brenda C. Eppley (2026). Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

INTRODUCTION

Realism has had the most long-lived effect on contemporary theatre and remains the most common genre found in American theatre. However, all theatrical forms continue to be produced today, ranging from early ritualistic dances to newly evolving experimental styles. Theatre itself is inherently multifaceted to be, at times, religious, social, political, educational, and both visually and emotionally dynamic while reflecting a wide spectrum of human experience across time and cultures.

Contemporary Theatre

Contemporary theatre generally refers to the period from the mid-twentieth century to the present. It reflects an expanding diversity of ideas, perspectives, and socio-cultural developments that continue to evolve in real time. In an era shaped by social media, high-budget visual effects, and twenty-four-hour on-demand entertainment, theatre remains relevant. One reason may be its immediacy: theatre feels real, even though it is artificially constructed. Unlike screen media, it has no edits, no filters, and no algorithmically generated content. Its pacing is also different: slower and more sustained than the rapid rhythm of digital culture. Even the most energetic or satirical performance requires attention and presence in a way that contrasts sharply with the speed of scrolling media on our personal devices.

Theatre asks audiences to pause and engage. It continues to astonish because human beings are fundamentally mimetic creatures. Long before written or spoken language, imitation and embodied performance were central to communication and survival. In this sense, theatre can be understood as a continuation of an ancient form of symbolic interaction—a "memory machine" that preserves, reactivates, and reshapes cultural meaning. It is simultaneously ancient and continually renewed, deeply connected to storytelling, ritual, politics, religion, and social identity.

Contemporary theatre is also shaped by rapid global, social, and political change. In recent decades, the world has experienced the fall of Communism in the former Soviet Union, the unification of Germany following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the rise of global terrorism, including the events of September 11, 2001, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which profoundly disrupted theatrical production and transformed the ways artists and audiences create and experience performance. Ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, the emergence of groups such as ISIS, increasing incidents of domestic and international terrorism and mass violence, and shifting political climates characterized by growing polarization, nationalism, and debates over democracy, equity, and human rights continue to influence cultural production. These global events and societal changes contribute to theatre's ongoing engagement with themes of instability, resilience, identity, justice, and collective anxiety.

Contemporary theatre is marked by increasing stylistic and structural diversity. Much of it continues in mainstream commercial and regional contexts. In the United States, **regional theatre** has expanded access to professional performance beyond Broadway centers, with major hubs in cities such as Atlanta, Chicago, Minneapolis, Dallas, Houston, Philadelphia, and Denver. In New York, **Off-Broadway and Off-Off-Broadway** theatres provide lower-cost alternatives to Broadway, often serving as developmental spaces where new works are tested before potential commercial transfer to Broadway.

Contemporary theatre is also shaped by ongoing struggles for representation and equity. African American theatre provides a clear example of this evolution. In the early twentieth century, Black performance was often restricted by segregation and racial stereotypes, including the use of blackface in white-produced productions. Despite these barriers, Black theatre artists created their own companies and found limited entry into mainstream theatre. After 1950, African American theatre experienced significant growth, driven in part by returning Black soldiers after World War II and the broader Civil Rights Movement. This period saw an expansion of Black playwrights, performers, and audiences in mainstream theatre, gradually transforming the industry and increasing representation across stage and screen. For example, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) is a landmark in American theatre history because it was the first Broadway play written by an African American woman, **Lorraine Hansberry,** and offered an authentic, realistic portrayal of a Black family confronting racism, economic hardship, and the pursuit of the American Dream. Premiering during the Civil Rights era, the play challenged long-standing stereotypes, brought Black experiences to mainstream audiences, and demonstrated that stories centered on African American lives could achieve both critical and commercial success. Its influence helped broaden the American theatrical canon and paved the way for later generations of diverse playwrights.



A Raisin in the Sun. Friedman-Abeles, New York,1959. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

More broadly, contemporary theatre continues to diversify through works centered on cultural, ethnic, and social identities, including Latino/Latina theatre, Asian American theatre, Native American theatre, feminist theatre, LGBTQIA+ theatre, and other forms of identity-based performance. These developments reflect theatre's ongoing responsiveness to specific communities and lived experiences, serving as a mirror to all peoples and cultures.

In addition to its artistic evolution, theatre continues to expand its applications beyond traditional performance spaces. It plays a significant role in education, healthcare, science communication, and business training. Actors are used as standardized patients in medical education, while drama therapy employs performance techniques for psychological healing. Theatre-based methods such as role-play, storytelling, team building, improvisation, and ensemble collaboration are widely valued for developing creativity, communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills.

Ultimately, contemporary theatre is defined not by a single style but by multiplicity. It is at once global and local, traditional and experimental, political and personal. Its ongoing adaptability ensures its survival and continued relevance in a rapidly changing world.

Musical Theatre

The development of American musical theatre reflects shifting historical, cultural, and economic conditions. In the late 1920s, ***Show Boat*** (1927) by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II marked a turning point in the form. It is widely considered the first modern musical because it integrated music and narrative more fully than earlier works and addressed serious social issues, including racial injustice, at a time when segregation remained a defining reality in the United States. Its structure, combining song, character, and story in a unified dramatic arc, helped move musical theatre toward musical drama and set the stage for future innovation.



Show Boat, original Broadway production, 1928. Promotional photograph by White Studio. Public domain. Source: *Theatre Magazine*, February 1928, via Wikimedia Commons.



Showboat, Meetmeatthemuny, 2010 CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

The 1930s and 1940s were shaped by the Great Depression and World War II, periods of profound national hardship that increased the public's desire for entertainment and emotional escape. During this time, some of the most influential American musical theatre composers and lyricists emerged. **George and Ira Gershwin** achieved major success with *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), the first musical to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. This era also saw the rise of the landmark collaboration between **Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II**. Their groundbreaking musical *Oklahoma!* (1943) transformed the art form by integrating story, music, and choreography into a unified whole and is widely considered the beginning of the **Golden Age of Musical Theatre.**



Oklahoma!, Theatre Guild production, 1943. **Public domain.** Library of Congress, via Wikimedia Commons.

The Golden Age continued through the 1950s and early 1960s with major works such as *Guys and Dolls* (1950), *My Fair Lady* (1956), *West Side Story* (1957), *The Sound of Music* (1959), and *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964). During this period, television also began to influence musical theatre by expanding audience access to songs and stories, increasing the cultural reach of Broadway productions. *Guys and Dolls* in particular became emblematic of the era, celebrated for its memorable music and its stylized portrayal of urban life and relationships.



West Side Story, photo by Heyszilard0. CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.



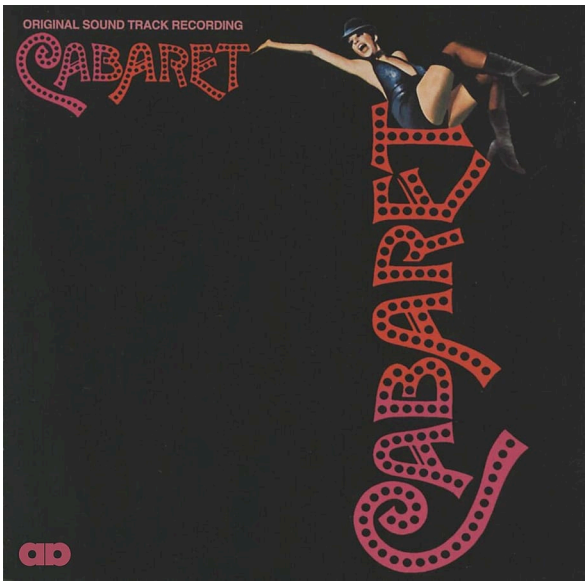
Fiddler on the Roof, The Muny (St. Louis), 2016. Photograph by Meetmeatthemuny, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons



My Fair Lady. Richard Maney/Photo by Friedman-Abeles, NYC, 1957. Public domain, Wikimedia Commons

By the late 1950s and 1960s, musicals began to shift in tone and subject matter as American society experienced significant social and political upheaval, including the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War. Audiences increasingly responded to works that reflected social critique or challenged traditional musical forms. This period produced satirical and innovative works such as *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (1961), which lampooned corporate culture, and *Hello, Dolly!* (1964), which maintained traditional musical values while featuring a strong, independent central character.

At the same time, influential directors such as **Harold Prince** and choreographers like **Bob Fosse** reshaped the aesthetics and structure of musical theatre. Productions such as *Cabaret* (1966) and *Hair* (1967) introduced darker themes, political commentary, and rock music influences. These innovations paved the way for the rise of the concept musical and the rock musical in the 1970s. This era also included influential works such as *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971), *The Rocky Horror Show* (1973), *Chicago* (1975), and *A Chorus Line* (1975), which further expanded the boundaries of what musical theatre could be.



Album cover of Cabaret. Photo by mmxcpiny75, CC BY-SA 2.0



Chicago. Image by Jef Kratochvil, 2011. CC BY-SA 3.0 CZ via Wikimedia Commons

The late twentieth century saw the emergence of the “megamusical,” characterized by large-scale production values and global commercial appeal, including works such as *Cats* (1981), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986), *Les Misérables* (1987 in the U.S. transfer), *Beauty and the Beast* (1994), *Rent* (1996), and *The Lion King* (1997). These productions helped solidify Broadway as a central hub in the global entertainment economy.



Cats, Manchester production, 2013. Photograph by [Photographer's Name], licensed under CC BY 3.0 (or CC BY-SA 3.0, depending on the file). Wikimedia Commons



Rent, Otterbein University Theatre & Dance production, 2015. Photograph by Otterbein University Theatre & Dance, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

The twenty-first century has continued this trajectory of innovation and expansion. Major works such as *Wicked* (2003), *In the Heights* (2008), *The Book of Mormon* (2011), and *Hamilton* (2015) reflect an increasingly diverse and stylistically hybrid art form. *Hamilton*, in particular, redefined the musical by blending hip-hop, R&B, and traditional musical theatre structure while intentionally casting actors of color in the roles of America's founding figures, reframing national history through a contemporary cultural lens.

Today, musical theatre remains a gateway experience for many audiences. Combining music, dance, and drama, it offers multiple forms of engagement and emotional access. Its spectacle, vocal power, memorable scores, and choreography attract broad audiences, while its stories whether new, adapted, or classic, span generations. Audiences continue to be drawn to its immediacy and emotional impact, often experiencing it as a uniquely immersive form of live performance.

Musical theatre is one of the most powerful and commercially significant forces in the global entertainment economy and remains one of the most popular forms of theatrical performance worldwide. It is also one of the most expensive live art forms to produce.

According to CNBC, the 2025–2026 Broadway season was the highest-grossing on record, generating approximately $1.91 billion in ticket sales. However, despite this success, the industry continues to face significant financial hurdles. The average cost to open a Broadway musical range from $17 million to $23 million, while Broadway plays typically cost between $3.5 million and $5 million to produce. Because of these high stakes, it is unusual for a new musical to open directly on Broadway; most are first developed elsewhere as a form of testing and refinement. Many productions premiere in regional theatres or in London's West End, which is the United Kingdom's equivalent of Broadway, where they can build audiences and prove commercial viability before transferring to New York if successful. Major examples of West End-to-Broadway transfers include *Les Misérables, The Phantom of the Opera, Mamma Mia!,* and *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, reflecting the increasingly global and commercial nature of contemporary musical theatre. This system highlights both the artistic and economic realities of the industry. At the same time, the structure of Broadway, Off-Broadway, and Off-Off-Broadway venues reflects a layered ecosystem shaped by both creativity and financial access. Increasing production costs continue to influence how and where musicals are developed, reinforcing the importance of regional theatres and international collaborations in sustaining the art form.

Ultimately, musical theatre is often described as one of the most distinctive contributions of American theatre to global culture. Whether viewed as a commercial industry, an artistic form, or a cultural mirror, it continues to evolve in response to social change, technological innovation, and shifting audience expectations.

In Conclusion

Why does theatre continually exist, and why is it most likely to always remain part of the human experience?

Theatre is likely to continue existing because it is deeply rooted in human nature and social behavior. Performance is not something separate from everyday life: it is something people already do. Across cultures and throughout history, individuals "perform" versions of themselves in daily interactions, shaping how they speak, dress, and behave depending on context. A job interview, for example, involves rehearsal, presentation, and careful self-awareness, much like a staged performance. In this sense, theatre is an extension of a fundamental human instinct to communicate meaning through action, image, and behavior.

This immediacy of live theatre creates a unique sense of presence and emotional engagement. Because the action unfolds in real time, viewers are invited to enter the story alongside the performers rather than observing it at a distance. This shared experience fosters empathy, as audiences are asked to imagine themselves in the lives of the characters and to emotionally engage with their struggles and choices. It also builds community, as spectators collectively witness and respond to the same unfolding event.

While film and digital media can also tell compelling stories, theatre's live and unedited nature creates a different level of engagement. The absence of editing and digital distance encourages a more focused and embodied form of attention. Theatre allows us to become a "fly on the wall," observing selected moments of human life unfold before us in a safe environment. Our daily life is far less predictable and generally absent of safety barriers. Research has also shown that experiencing live theatre can improve comprehension, vocabulary development, human understanding, and empathy, particularly among students, as they actively interpret meaning and interconnectivity in real time.

For these reasons, theatre is more than an art form, it is a reflection of human social behavior and a tool for understanding ourselves and others. As long as people continue to communicate through presence, embodiment, and shared experience, theatre is likely to remain a vital part of human culture.



And Then They Came for Me: Remembering the World of Anne Frank. Harrisburg Area Community College. Photo by Brenda C. Eppley, 2015. Licensed CC BY-NC-SA

Thumbnail: *Reasons to Be Pretty,* Harrisburg Area Community College. Photo by Brenda C. Eppley, 2015. Licensed CC BY-NC-SA

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11: Chapter Eleven - Non-Western Theatre Traditions



The Nightingale. Harrisburg Area Community College. Photo by Brenda C. Eppley, 2012. Licensed CC BY-NC-SA.

INTRODUCTION

The theatre of our world reflects the growing diversity of ideas, viewpoints, opinions, and socio-cultural developments that are happening every day. Although modern theatre is largely reflective of the traditions that grew out of western perspectives and experiences, theatre traditions can be found globally across cultures.

All theatre originated in ritual, and the forms it has taken throughout history have been shaped by the circumstances of the artists who created it and the societies in which they lived. Theatre is an elevated expression of humanity's struggle to understand and confront conflict. Playwrights and theatre artists create their work in response to specific conflicts arising from particular historical, cultural, and social circumstances, and they do so for a particular audience. Keeping this in mind is essential when studying plays from other cultures. Their understanding of conflict, their social context, and their intended audience may differ significantly from your own.

Understanding theatre as a global and cultural practice requires us to ask critical questions: Who decides what counts as theatre? Whose stories are preserved and passed down? Whose performances are studied, funded, and celebrated, and whose are ignored, marginalized, or erased?

Theatre history is assembled from only a fraction of the performances that once existed. Much of what survives does so because it was valued by the dominant culture of its time. Yet some evidence survives by chance, as when colonial observers documented indigenous ritual performances they neither understood nor appreciated. New discoveries also continue to reshape our understanding of theatre history. In 1963, for example, researchers recovered approximately 400 lines of a lost comedy by the Greek playwright Menander from a papyrus that had been reused to wrap an Egyptian mummy.

As students and scholars of theatre, we must attend not only to the creative forces that shape a performance but also to the forces of power that determine what is remembered, preserved, and studied. Theatre history is shaped by cultural values, political institutions, economic priorities, and historical circumstance as much as by artistic achievement.

The influence of globalization on theatre continues. Theatre exists in virtually every culture worldwide, and as a result, many of those cultural traditions get shared across cultural and national boundaries. There are many influences of various global theatrical traditions in every aspect of theatre performances today, from acting techniques, settings, costuming, play scripts, etc. The theatre of our world reflects the growing diversity of ideas, viewpoints, opinions, and socio-cultural developments that are

happening every day.

To study theatre from a global perspective is to enter into a conversation across cultures. It requires us to recognize both differences and shared human experiences, to question inherited narratives, and to broaden our understanding of what theatre has been, what it is, and what it can become.

Some highlights of non-Western theatre include:

AFRICA

Although Africa encompasses hundreds of distinct theatrical traditions, languages, and cultures, some broad characteristics can be identified when discussing precolonial performance practices and later postcolonial developments. One of the most important is the central role of performance in community life. Across many societies, theatrical expression was closely connected to storytelling, spirituality, ceremonies, celebrations, commemorations, and the affirmation of cultural identity. Viewed from this perspective, the emphasis was often on the process and transformative power of performance rather than on the creation of a finished artistic product. The value lay in the communal experience itself.

In many traditions, there was little distinction between performers and audience members. Spectators were frequently active participants, responding to performers through call-and-response, song, dance, and other forms of interaction. Music, movement, masks, costumes, body painting, and symbolic objects were often integral elements of performance, creating theatrical experiences that engaged multiple senses.

Beginning in the fifteenth century and accelerating during the nineteenth century, European colonization profoundly affected theatrical traditions across much of the continent. Colonial governments and missionaries frequently discouraged or suppressed indigenous performance practices while introducing European theatrical forms through schools, churches, and colonial institutions. As a result, some local traditions declined or were lost, while others adapted by incorporating new influences or continued in modified forms.

During the twentieth century, particularly as African nations gained independence, many playwrights, directors, and performers sought to reclaim and revitalize Indigenous performance traditions. Rather than simply reconstructing the past, they blended traditional practices with contemporary themes and theatrical techniques, creating new forms of theatre that reflected both cultural heritage and the social and political realities of modern Africa.

Note

Read **“The Roots of African Theatre Ritual and Orality in the Pre-Colonial Period”** (Diakhaté, Ousmane, and Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh. “The Roots of African Theatre Ritual and Orality in the Pre- Colonial Period.” Critical Stages/Scènes Critiques. The IATC (International Association of Theatre Critics) Journal, Issue 15, March 5, 2017. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Click here to watch.

Note

Theatre as Resistance: *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead by Athol Fugard.*

Theatre can reveal uncomfortable truths, even when speaking openly is dangerous. During apartheid in South Africa, laws enforcing racial segregation made interracial collaboration difficult and often illegal. In the early 1970s, Black actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona secretly worked with white playwright and director Athol Fugard, who officially employed them as gardeners to conceal their meetings. Together, they developed the protest play *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* through improvisation and rehearsal.

The play was inspired by a photograph of a well-dressed Black man smiling while holding both a cigarette and a pipe. The collaborators asked why a Black man living under apartheid might appear so pleased and concluded that he must have his passbook in order. Passbooks controlled where Black South Africans could live, travel, and work, and anyone without the proper documents risked arrest.

The play follows Sizwe Banzi, who cannot find work because his passbook lacks the required permit. After discovering the body of a man named Robert Zwelinzima, Sizwe assumes the dead man's identity and uses his passbook to obtain employment. In effect, Sizwe Banzi must "die" so that Robert Zwelinzima can live. The play ends with Sizwe, now living as Robert, proudly posing for a photograph in a new suit purchased with his wages.

Sizwe Banzi Is Dead premiered at Cape Town's Space Theatre in 1972 and toured despite censorship and the threat of police raids. It later transferred to London and Broadway, where Kani and Ntshona received Tony Awards in 1975. After returning to South Africa, they were arrested during a performance and held in solitary confinement until international pressure secured their release.

By exposing the cruelty of the passbook system and creating rare multiracial spaces for performance, *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* became an important work of resistance. It remains widely studied and performed as part of South Africa's cultural memory.

JAPAN

Noh theatre is a traditional Japanese performance form that reached its artistic maturity during the fourteenth century and remains actively performed throughout Japan today. The word *Noh* roughly translates as **"skill"** or **"accomplishment,"** reflecting the rigorous discipline required of its performers, who traditionally begin training in early childhood. Rather than emphasizing realistic action or elaborate scenery, Noh tells its stories through a highly stylized combination of movement, music, poetry, masks, and symbolism. Because performers often wear masks that conceal facial expressions and elaborate costumes that are both heavy and restrictive, they rely on precise movement, posture, and gesture to convey emotion and meaning. Movements are typically slow, deliberate, and carefully choreographed, with individual gestures carrying symbolic significance. Noh plays often draw upon historical events, legends, and classical literature, exploring themes of memory, loss, redemption, and the relationship between the human and spiritual worlds.

The performance space reflects Noh's emphasis on symbolism and ritual. Unlike a proscenium theatre, a traditional Noh stage is a square wooden platform with a roof supported by four pillars, resembling a Shinto shrine. A covered bridgeway (*hashigakari*) connects the backstage area to the main stage and serves both practical and symbolic purposes, representing the passage between the spiritual and human worlds. Scenery is intentionally minimal, allowing the audience to focus on the performers and the poetic narrative. Props are used sparingly; the folding fan, for example, can symbolize a wide variety of objects depending on the needs of the performance. Musicians and a chorus remain visible on stage throughout the performance, shaping its rhythm, atmosphere, and emotional tone.

Noh profoundly influenced the development of later Japanese theatrical traditions, including **kabuki**, although the two forms differ significantly in style and presentation. Traditionally, Noh was performed exclusively by men, who played both male and female roles. Today, women also perform professionally, and while the art form remains rooted in centuries-old traditions, it continues to evolve while preserving its distinctive aesthetic.



Noh Theatre. Photo by J. Cuatrocasas, CC BY-SA 4.0 Wikimedia Commons



Oldest Noh Theatre dating to approx. 1581. Arcimboldo, CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons



A Venerable Old Man. Scene from a Noh play. CC BY-SA 3.0 Wikimedia Commons



Kurama Tengu, from the series *One Hundred Noh Plays* (*Nōgaku hyakuban*), by Tsukioka Kōgyo; National Noh Theatre, Tokyo, JapanKōgyo Tsukioka, Public domain. Wikimedia Commons

Noh Masks:



During the **Meiji Restoration** (beginning in 1868), Japan underwent rapid modernization and Westernization. Kabuki faced new competition from Western-style theatre and changing public tastes, yet it also adapted by reforming aspects of its staging and repertoire. Rather than disappearing, it remained one of Japan's most important theatrical traditions while gradually attracting international attention.

Kabuki continued to evolve during the twentieth century. After World War II, performances were temporarily restricted during the Allied Occupation because of concerns about militaristic themes and prewar nationalism. These restrictions were gradually lifted, and kabuki soon experienced a revival. Today it is recognized as one of Japan's greatest cultural traditions and is performed regularly both in Japan and around the world. In 2005, **UNESCO** recognized kabuki as an **Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**, affirming its enduring artistic and historical significance.



The interior of a kubuki theatre. Torii, Kiyotsune, artist, 1765. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons



藤崎智也, Kubuki actress. CC BY-SA 3.0 Wikimedia Commons



Kabuki Acrobats, Sadler Wells, London 2010. Flickr user: GanMed64 CC BY 2.0 Wikimedia Commons



Kubuki actor. Toyohara Kunichika, 1866. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons



Izumo no Okuni, the creator of kubuki theatre. By Unknown author - Tokugawa Art Museum. Public Domain



Utagawa Kunisada, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

BRAZIL

Theatre of the Oppressed is a theatrical methodology developed by Brazilian theatre practitioner and activist **Augusto Boal (1931–2009)**. Although Boal began his career as a more conventional director and playwright, he became a passionate advocate for socially engaged theatre during his tenure as artistic director of the Arena Theatre of São Paulo, where he championed the work of Brazilian playwrights. In 1964, a military coup overthrew Brazil's democratic government, ushering in a dictatorship that viewed Boal's politically engaged theatre as a threat. He was arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and eventually forced into exile in Argentina. It was during his years in exile that Boal developed **Theatre of the Oppressed** and wrote his influential book of the same name (1974). Drawing on the educational philosophy of his friend and colleague **Paulo Freire**, particularly *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Boal conceived a form of theatre that empowers ordinary people to analyze, rehearse, and challenge systems of oppression through performance.



Theatre of the Oppressed. Original graphic created by Brenda C. Eppley with assistance from ChatGPT, 2026. Dedicated to the public domain under CC0 1.0.

PUPPET THEATRE

Puppet theatre is one of the world's oldest and most widespread performance traditions, found in cultures across Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Its many forms are distinguished by the way the puppets are manipulated, including **rod**, **string (marionette)**, **glove**, **shadow**, and **hand** puppets. Although puppet theatre is sometimes given less attention in theatre history textbooks than actor-centered performance, it shares the same fundamental dramatic elements of character, conflict, storytelling, and spectacle.

Like masks, puppets represent specific characters, but unlike masks, they exist as independent figures animated by a performer. Whereas a mask transforms the physical presence of the actor who wears it, a puppet becomes the physical embodiment of the puppeteer's intentions. Through precise manipulation, gesture, rhythm, and timing, puppeteers create the illusion of thought, emotion, and life. Music, narration, visual spectacle, and stagecraft further enrich the performance and bring dramatic stories to life.

In many Western countries, puppetry is often associated with children's entertainment. However, it has long been used to tell sophisticated stories for adult audiences as well. Contemporary productions such as *Avenue Q* and *War Horse* demonstrate the expressive power of puppetry in addressing complex themes on the modern stage.

In many parts of the world, puppet theatre remains a highly respected classical art form.

Puppetry: Japan

Bunraku is Japan's traditional puppet theatre, which developed in the bustling city of Osaka during the seventeenth century.

A bunraku performance combines five essential elements: **the puppets**, **the puppeteers the dramatic text, the chanter,** and **the shamisen**, a three-stringed musical instrument. Unlike many forms of Western theatre, bunraku does not attempt to conceal the mechanics of performance. Rather than diminishing the illusion, the puppeteers remain visible on stage. The audience's awareness of these individual artistic contributions enhances appreciation of the remarkable coordination required to bring the performance to life.

The puppets themselves are the visual centerpiece of bunraku. Carefully carved from wood and elaborately dressed in traditional Japanese clothing, they are remarkably lifelike. Their intricately crafted heads contain movable eyes, eyebrows, and mouths that allow for a wide range of expressive gestures. Although the puppets range from about one to four feet in height, they convey

extraordinary emotional depth through subtle movement and precise manipulation.

Each puppet is operated by **three puppeteers** working in perfect coordination. The **master puppeteer** controls the head and right hand, the **second puppeteer** manipulates the left hand, and the **third puppeteer** controls the legs and feet. All three performers remain visible throughout the performance. The second and third puppeteer traditionally wear black robes and hoods to minimize their visual presence, while the master puppeteer appears uncovered but maintains a calm, expressionless demeanor, allowing the puppet—not the performer—to communicate emotion. Mastering bunraku requires decades of apprenticeship, with performers gradually advancing over the course of their careers.

Throughout the performance, the chanter is accompanied by the **shamisen**, whose music establishes atmosphere, underscores dramatic tension, and reinforces the emotional rhythm of the play.

Originally popular entertainment for common audiences, bunraku has evolved into one of Japan's most highly respected classical performing arts. In 2003, it was recognized by **UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**. By leaving every component of the performance visible—the puppeteers, chanter, musicians, and puppets—bunraku invites audiences to appreciate not only the story itself but also the remarkable collaboration and discipline required to create the illusion of life. Rather than breaking the audience's suspension of disbelief, this transparency deepens admiration for the artistry and precision of the performance.



Awa Jurobe Yashiki puppet theater and museum in Tokushima, Japan. Dunphasizer from United Kingdom, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons



Bunraku puppet with puppeteers. Leo Rodman, CC BY-SA 2.0. Wikimedia Commons

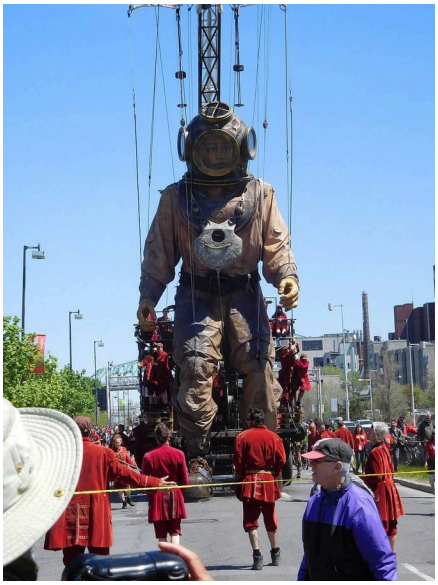
Bunraku puppetry was transformed into many of the puppets from Broadway and the West End's production of *War Horse*. The puppeteers were fully in view of the audience at all times:



Life-sized puppet Joey from the National Theatre's production of *War Horse*. Eva Rinaldi, CC BY-SA 2.0. Wikimedia Commons



Joey, the puppet from *War Horse* at the National Theatre. Eva Rinaldi, CC BY-SA 2.0 Wikimedia Commons



"Le Scaphandrier" (The Diver), a massive marionette created by the French street theatre company Royal de Luxe. Photo by Jeangagnon - Own work, 2017, CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons



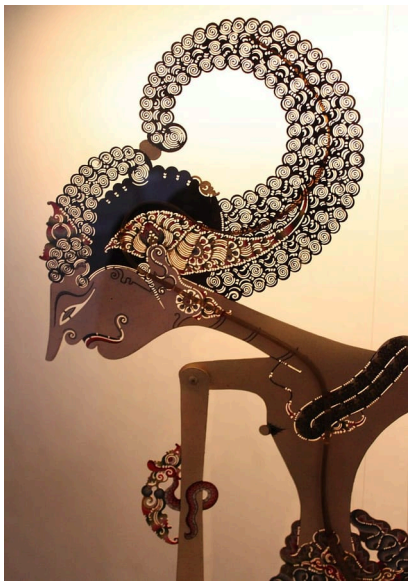
"Little Giant Girl" marionette by the renowned French street theatre company Royal de Luxe. sw77, CC BY-SA 2.0 Wikimedia Commons

Puppetry: Indonesia

Wayang is a traditional form of Indonesian puppet theatre that originated on the island of Java more than a thousand years ago. The word *wayang* means **"shadow,"** reflecting the performance style for which the tradition is best known. Recognized by **UNESCO** as an **Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**, wayang remains one of Indonesia's most celebrated performing arts and continues to be performed throughout the country. Its stories are drawn primarily from the ancient Indian epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, as well as from Javanese legends and local folklore. These narratives frequently explore themes of duty, justice, morality, and the triumph of good over evil.

The most famous form, **wayang kulit** ("shadow puppetry"), features intricately carved puppets made from cured water buffalo hide. Skilled artisans cut delicate patterns into the leather and paint the puppets with vivid colors and elaborate designs. Each puppet is mounted on a central rod with movable arms controlled by additional rods, allowing for remarkably expressive and precise movement.

During a performance, the puppeteer sits behind a translucent screen illuminated by an oil lamp or electric light. The audience traditionally watches from the opposite side of the screen, where the puppets' shadows are projected to create the illusion of animated figures. At the same time, for some performances, spectators seated behind the puppeteer can observe both the colorful puppets and the extraordinary skill required to manipulate them. A **gamelan** orchestra, comprised of flutes, percussion and string instruments, and vocalists accompany the performance, providing music, sound effects, and songs that shape the rhythm, atmosphere, and emotional impact of the drama.



Tradition wayang kulit puppet. Amelia Guo, 2011. CC BY 3.0. Wikimedia Commons



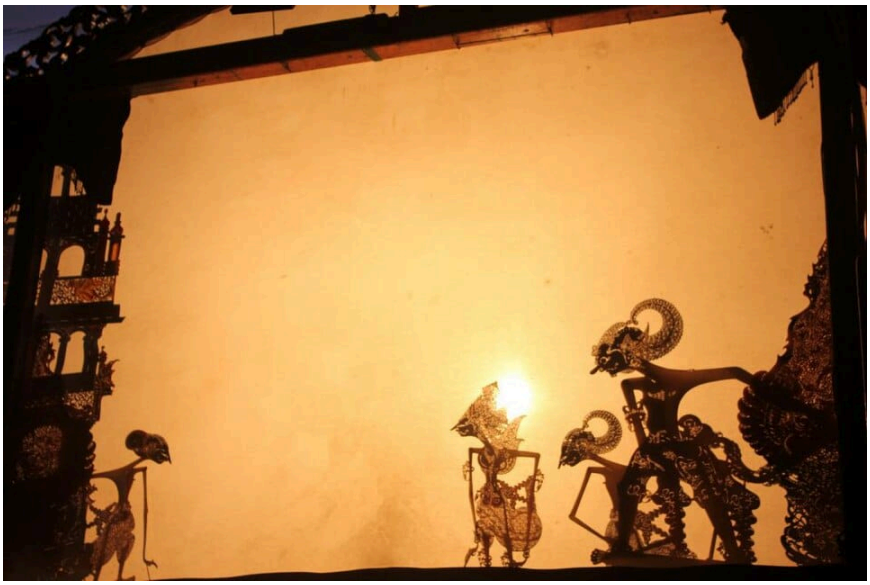
Wayang Kulit figure. Antapurwa, 2008. CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons



Collectie Wereldmuseum (v/h Tropenmuseum), part of the National Museum of World Cultures, CC BY-SA 3.0 Wikimedia Commons



Rear of projection screen for shadow puppet performance. Herusutimbul, CC BY-SA 4.0 Wikimedia Commons



From the audience perspective: Anggita Gloria, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

There are many splendid and varied versions of shadow puppet theatre. To expand your understanding of the evolution of this unique art form, visit the performance page for Feathers of Fire: A Persian Epic and watch a trailer. Or better yet, view the performance in its entirety!

Thumbnail: Bunraku puppet head for young male, 1600-1700. Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

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12: Chapter Twelve - Technical Theatre and Production



The Boy Who Tricked the Moon, Harrisburg Area Community College. Photograph by David Olmsted.2012 Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

INTRODUCTION

As we continue exploring the world of theatre, we now turn to the work that begins long before the curtain rises. **Technical theatre** brings together a wide range of specialized skills that transform a stage into another time, place, or world. Although theatre can exist in its simplest form with only one performer and one audience member, most productions aim to create a richer and more immersive experience.

Unlike many other art forms, theatre is inherently collaborative. Every production depends on artists, technicians, and craftspeople working toward a shared artistic vision. Like members of a successful sports team, each person contributes distinct knowledge and skills, and no single role is more important than the others. Directors, designers, stage managers, technicians, and performers all play essential parts in creating a unified production.

Successful collaboration requires clear communication, mutual respect, active listening, and a willingness to balance individual ideas with the needs of the production. In smaller schools and community theatres, one person may take on several responsibilities. Professional theatre companies, however, usually rely on teams of specialists whose combined expertise brings a production to life. This chapter introduces the people and technical disciplines that work behind the scenes to create the theatrical world audiences experience on stage.

How Theatre Collaborations Work

Whether produced by a professional company, school, or community theatre, every production results from collaboration among many artists and technicians. Organizational structures may differ, but the goal is the same: to unite many individual talents in support of one artistic vision.

The process begins when a theatre selects a play or musical. A production may be chosen for its educational value, audience appeal, artistic goals, or financial potential. Once the script is selected, the director and creative team which may include designers, choreographers, music directors, managers, and marketing staff develop the production concept, the unifying vision that guides all major creative decisions.

The creative team then designs the scenery, costumes, lighting, sound, props, projections, and other production elements. As these plans are finalized, budgets are set, construction begins, auditions are held, and rehearsals start. Clear communication and collaboration help ensure that every element supports the production concept.

As rehearsals continue, actors, designers, technicians, musicians, choreographers, and stage management refine the production. The director oversees the artistic vision, while the stage manager serves as the central communication hub, coordinating rehearsals and keeping the production team informed.

Once the technical elements have been built and installed, technical rehearsals begin. During these rehearsals, scenery, lighting, sound, costumes, props, projections, and special effects are integrated with the actors' performances. Crews rehearse scene changes and cues until they can be completed safely, accurately, and consistently. For musicals, the sitzprobe brings the actors and orchestra or band together for the first time without staging or choreography.

Common types of technical rehearsal include:

- Dry tech: Crews rehearse technical cues, such as the movement of sets, light cues, and sound cues without performers.
- Wet tech: Performers join the rehearsal so technical elements can be integrated with the action.
- Cue-to-cue: The cast and crew rehearse only technical cues and transitions, skipping most dialogue to use rehearsal time efficiently.

Technical rehearsals are followed by dress rehearsals, preview performances, and opening night. After the production opens, the director's work is largely complete, and the stage manager becomes responsible for maintaining the artistic quality and consistency of each performance.

Depending on the size and complexity of the production, the process often lasts eight to twelve weeks. About four to six weeks may be devoted to rehearsals, with the remaining time divided among preproduction, technical rehearsals, and performances. Large, complex productions, such as Broadway musicals, may begin planning as much as two years in advance.

Who works in the Theatre Business?

Administration

- *Board of Directors:* Steers and guides the organization. Provides funding and leadership.
- *Producer (commercial theatre):* Secures the performance rights to stage a production, hires the artistic staff, secures the performance space, and provides financial backing for the production.
- *Artistic Director/Head of Theatre:* Provides artistic guidance, chooses the plays that will be performed during the season, hires production directors, and is responsible for the artistic vision and direction of the theatre or organization. Reports to board of directors.
- *Executive Director/Managing Director:* Responsible for the operation and development of the organization. Oversees the day-to-day operations of the theatre including outreach or educational programs, finances, and community relations. Reports to the board of directors.

Production Management

- *Production Manager:* Responsible for the overall technical operation of a theatre company and maintains season budgets and resource allocations. Supervises all technical staff. Reports to the artistic director and executive director.
- T*echnical Director:* Responsible for the oversight of technical operations of a theatre, including scenery, lighting, sound, projections, and construction. Works with designers to ensure requirements are achievable, safe, and within budget parameters. Supervises scene shop staff. Dual reporting relationship with both the artistic director and production manager or managing director.
- *Master/Lead Carpenter:* Oversees scene shop and show build.
- *Carpenters:* Construct scenery.
- *Costume Shop Manager:* Responsible for the day-to-day operation of the costume facilities. Supervises costume shop workers. Reports to the technical director or production manager.
- *First Hand:* Assists the costume shop manager in day-to-day operations and builds costumes.
- *Cutter:* Cuts fabrics, plans patterns, and builds costumes.
- *Draper:* Drapes garments and builds costumes.

- *Stitcher:* Builds costumes.
- *Master/Lead Electrician:* Responsible for the day-to-day operations of the electrical department. Supervises electricians. Reports to the technical director or production manager.
- *Electricians:* Hang, focus, and maintain lighting equipment.
- *Prop Master/Lead:* Responsible for the construction or acquisition of all show props. Works with prop designer, scenic designer, stage manager and performers. Reports to director and production manager.
- *Prop workers/carpenters:* Build and maintain show props.
- *Scenic Artist:* Responsible for all painted scenic finishes. Works with scenic designer and technical director. Supervises painters.

Creative

- *Playwright:* Creates and develops the play script. For an original production, may assist the director in interpreting the work and may supply rewrites of script elements.
- *Production Director:* Sets a vision for and brings together the many complex aspects of a theatrical production, including the script, performers, design, and music into a unified production. Reports to the artistic director and executive director.
- *Assistant Director:* Facilitates the director's work on a production. This may include research, blocking notation, taking notes, and working with an ensemble or chorus. Reports to the director.
- *Musical Director:* Responsible for the arrangement and reproduction of live music for a production. Reports to the production director.
- *Choreographer:* Responsible for creating the style and form of dance and movement routines in a production. Works under the production director.
- Fight Choreographer: Responsible for creating safe and repeatable action and fight sequences. Works under the production director.
- *Scenic Designer:* Responsible for the development and design of all scenic elements of a production. Reports to the production director and production manager.
- *Costume Designer:* Responsible for the design of all costume elements for a production. Works with the costume shop manager. Reports to the production director and production manager.
- *Lighting Designer:* Responsible for the design and cueing of lighting for a production. Works with the master electrician. Reports to the production director and production manager.
- *Sound Designer:* Responsible for all audio production elements. Reports to the production director and production manager.
- *Projections Designer:* Responsible for all projected elements of a production. Reports to the production director and production manager.
- *Prop Designer:* Responsible for the design of all properties for a production. Works in concert with the scenic designer. Reports to the production director and production manager.

Show Management

- *Production Stage Manager:* Supervises all stage management activities including management personnel and interns. Maintains master schedules for the company. Provides practical and organizational support for a production team, including the director, designers, actors, and technicians. Facilitates productive rehearsals, runs technical rehearsals, and represents the director's vision throughout a production's run. Reports to the production manager.
- *Assistant Stage Manager:* Provides production support to the stage manager. Reports to the stage manager.

Crew

- *Wardrobe Crew:* Responsible for the preparation and maintenance of production wardrobe. Works with costume shop manager. Ultimately reports to the technical director. Directly reports to stage manager during production run.
- *Shift Crew:* Responsible for the movement and daily maintenance for show scenery. Works with scenic designer. Ultimately reports to technical director. Directly report to stage manager during production run.
- *Props Crew:* Responsible for setup, storage, and maintenance of prop elements for a production. Works with prop designer and scenic designer. Ultimately reports to technical director. Directly reports to stage manager during production run.
- *Dressers:* Responsible for setup and assistance of costume dressing and quick changes for performers. Work with wardrobe crew, costume designer, and performers. Ultimately reports to technical director. Directly reports to stage manager during production run.
- *Board Operators:* Responsible for the running of cues during performances via lighting, sound, and video consoles. Works with designers. Ultimately reports to technical director. Directly reports to stage manager during production run.

- *Follow-Spot Operators:* Operate moveable spotlights during a production. Works with lighting designer and master/lead electrician. Ultimately reports to technical director. Directly reports to stage manager during production run.



Costume shop fitting. Harrisburg Area Community College. Photograph by Brenda C. Eppley. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).



Sound and light board operators. Harrisburg Area Community College, 2021. Photograph by David J. Olmsted. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

Front of the House

Those who organize, manage and interface with the audience:

- The public relation office – the people who promote the show in the media
- The marketing office – the people who strategize the advertisement for the show
- The literary department - it includes the people in charge of sorting script submissions
- The box office manager – the person in charge of ticket sales

- The house manager – the person in charge of managing the house when it is open for a production and who deals with issues regarding the audience
- The ushers – the people who are in charge of seating the audience

The Purpose of Designers

Of all the artists involved in theatre, designers may initially appear less essential than playwrights, actors, or directors. A play clearly needs a story and performers, but it may seem possible to produce one without scenery, costumes, lighting, or sound. In practice, however, every production includes design. The actors' clothing becomes costume, the performance space becomes the scenic environment, available light shapes what the audience sees, and every sound contributes to the production. Even leaving these elements unchanged is a deliberate design choice.

Designers are both artists and craftspeople, but their work is created to support the play rather than stand alone. Their responsibility is to translate the script and the director's concept into a visual and sensory world that helps communicate the story.

The design process begins with close script analysis and research. Designers study the play's setting, characters, themes, historical context, and dramatic action before developing ideas. Inspiration is important, but effective design also depends on observation, technical knowledge, aesthetic judgment, and a structured creative process.

Because theatre is collaborative, designers do not work independently. They meet with the director and other members of the creative team to establish a unified production concept. Ideas are communicated through sketches, renderings, models, fabric samples, sound recordings, projection samples, ground plans, and lighting plots. These materials allow the team to evaluate, revise, and coordinate each element before it is built or installed.

Design continues to evolve throughout rehearsals. Changes may be required because of discoveries made by the actors, limitations of the performance space, budget restrictions, safety concerns, or technical challenges. Theatrical design is therefore an ongoing process that combines imagination, collaboration, and practical problem-solving to shape the audience's experience and serve the story.

Elements of Theatrical Design

Before a design can be built or installed, it must first be communicated through drawings, documents, digital images, models, or sound samples. These materials allow the director, other designers, and technical staff to understand and evaluate the concept. Technicians in the scene, costume, lighting, sound, and prop departments then use the designer's plans to create the finished production elements.

Each design discipline communicates its ideas differently. Lighting designers prepare light plots that show the placement of lighting instruments, along with cue lists, supporting paperwork, and digital pre-visualizations. Sound designers create cue sheets, audio samples, and plans showing how sound will function within the performance space. Costume designers produce renderings, fabric swatches, and costume plots that track what each performer wears throughout the production. Scenic designers develop ground plans, elevations, perspective drawings, and three-dimensional scale models. Although these materials differ, they share one purpose: to turn an abstract idea into a practical proposal that can be discussed, revised, budgeted, and built.

Designers develop their ideas through two related types of research: practical research and emotional, or mood, research.

Practical research focuses on the factual world of the play, including its historical period, location, architecture, technology, climate, and social customs. Each designer studies this information from the perspective of their discipline. Scenic designers investigate architecture, spatial relationships, materials, and construction methods. Costume designers research fashion, textiles, occupations, and social class. Lighting designers examine the light sources available during the period and the visual qualities they produced. Sound designers study the music, machinery, voices, and environmental sounds associated with the setting.

For a play set in 1930s Chicago, for example, a scenic designer might study photographs of apartments, storefronts, factories, schools, and public buildings from the period. A costume designer might research contemporary fashions and determine what a factory worker, teacher, or grocery-store employee would have worn. This factual research helps create a believable world and ensures that the production's visual and sound elements are consistent.

Emotional research focuses on how the world of the play should feel rather than how it literally appeared. Designers collect images, colors, textures, shapes, sounds, and atmospheric references that express the production's emotional tone. Inspiration may come from painting, photography, sculpture, architecture, music, film, nature, or other works of art. These references help the creative team develop a shared understanding of the audience experience the production is intended to create.

Scenic Design

Scenery creates the physical world in which a play takes place. That world may be presented through detailed scenery that realistically recreates a location, or it may be suggested with only a few carefully chosen elements that allow the audience's imagination to complete the setting.

Sets can take many forms. A realistic set may reproduce a specific location, such as a living room, office, or street. A minimalist set may use only a few objects, such as a bench or stylized tree, to suggest a place without fully defining it. An abstract or nonrealistic set may rely on color, shape, texture, or symbolic imagery to express ideas and themes rather than depict an actual location. Whatever its style, the scenery helps shape the audience's understanding and experience of the play.

Objectives of Scenic Design

A scenic designer typically works to:

1. Establish the production's tone, mood, and visual style.
2. Identify the location and historical period of the play.
3. Support the director's overall production concept.
4. Develop a central visual image or metaphor.
5. Coordinate the scenery with costumes, lighting, sound, projections, and other design elements.
6. Meet the practical needs of the performers and ensure that all scenic elements function safely and effectively.

Elements of Scenic Design

Scenic design requires both artistic and technical skill but designing a stage environment is different from designing an actual building or room. A stage set does not need to reproduce every detail of a real location. Instead, it selects and arranges visual elements that communicate the world of the play clearly and effectively.

Like other visual arts, scenic design uses color, line, shape, texture, scale, balance, and composition to create meaning. Because the scenery reflects the director's interpretation and the designer's artistic choices, two productions of the same play may look entirely different while still serving the script successfully.

The Scenic Design Process

Scenic designers usually develop their work through several stages.

- Preliminary Sketches: The designer begins with rough drawings that explore the basic arrangement and appearance of the scenery. These may include a ground plan, which shows the stage from above, or an isometric drawing, which presents a three-dimensional view.
- Rendering: A rendering is a detailed drawing or digital image showing how the completed set is expected to look. It usually includes color, texture, architectural details, and human figures to demonstrate scale and proportion.
- Model: For large or complicated productions, the designer may create a three-dimensional scale model. The model allows the director and production team to examine sightlines, entrances, levels, dimensions, and spatial relationships before construction begins. Models may be built from materials such as mat board, foam board, or craft paper, or created digitally with three-dimensional design software.
- Construction: After the design is approved, the scenery is built, painted, installed, and tested. Adjustments may still be necessary during construction and rehearsals, but careful planning helps reduce expensive changes and prevents practical problems.

The scenic design process moves from simple, low-cost ideas toward increasingly detailed and expensive stages. This allows the director and designer to identify problems before construction begins. All scenic choices, materials, and labor must remain within

the production's established budget.



Set design for *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo* by Georg Friedrich Händel.Teatro Regio Torino. 2009.CC BY-SA Wikimedia Commons



Set design for *A Streetcar Named Desire* by André Previn: Act I scene 2. Teatro Regio Torino. Teatro Regio Torino, CC BY-SA 4.0 Wikimedia Commons



Spring Awakening, Harrisburg Area Community College. Photograph by David J. Olmsted. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)



Scene design for *Chicago* by Christopher Rhoton for Indiana State University. Editofchaos, 2013. CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons

Properties

Stage properties, usually called props, are the movable objects that help create the world of a production. They are generally separate from the scenery and are not considered part of an actor's clothing, although some objects may overlap with costume design. Props may establish the setting, reveal information about a character, support the action of a scene, or become central to the plot.

The range of possible props is nearly unlimited. A prop may be as ordinary as a coffee cup or as complex as a mechanical device designed to perform a special effect. Because of this variety, the properties department combines research, design, construction, craftsmanship, organization, and problem-solving.

Props are commonly grouped according to how they are used:

- **Set props or furnishings** are large movable objects that help define the setting. They may be used by the actors but usually remain in the same location for most of the performance. Examples include tables, chairs, sofas, beds, desks, cabinets, and floor lamps.
- **Set dressing** consists of decorative objects that make the environment appear complete and believable. These items are generally not handled by the actors. Examples include books on shelves, framed photographs, dishes in a cabinet, plants, clocks, rugs, and ornaments.
- **Hand props** are objects handled, carried, or used by performers during the action of the play. A hand prop might be a telephone, letter, drinking glass, newspaper, weapon, tool, suitcase, or book. Because actors interact directly with these items, they must be durable, easy to use, and placed consistently before every performance.
- **Costume props** are accessories worn or carried by actors but are not usually considered part of the basic costume. Examples include eyeglasses, hats, canes, purses, wallets, jewelry, umbrellas, and pocket watches. Responsibility for these objects is often shared by the costume and properties departments.

Props may also be identified by special requirements:

- **Practical props** must operate as they would in real life. A practical lamp must turn on, a telephone may need to ring, and a faucet may need to produce water.
- **Consumable props** are used up, damaged, or replaced during each performance. Food, beverages, cigarettes, torn letters, and broken objects are common examples.
- **Breakaway props** are constructed to break safely and predictably. Bottles, furniture, and dishes used in scenes of violence may be specially made so they appear realistic without injuring performers.
- **Special-effects or trick props** create an illusion or perform a concealed action. Examples include a knife that appears to draw blood, an object that vanishes, or a book that produces smoke.
- **Rehearsal props** are temporary substitutes used before the finished props are available. They allow actors to practice movements and stage business early in the rehearsal process.

The prop designer, prop master, or properties supervisor is responsible for researching, locating, building, modifying, organizing, and maintaining these objects. Props may be purchased, rented, borrowed, selected from storage, or constructed specifically for the production. Each item must support the production concept, suit the historical period and setting, function reliably, and be safe for performers to use.

Before every performance, the props crew places each object in its assigned location and checks that all practical and special-effects props are working correctly. After the performance, props are collected, cleaned, repaired, replenished, and returned to storage. This careful tracking is essential because a misplaced or malfunctioning prop can disrupt the action of a scene or create a safety hazard.

Although props may appear to be small details, they often play an important role in storytelling. A single object can reveal a character's occupation, wealth, habits, memories, relationships, or emotional state. In some plays, a prop becomes so important that it helps drive the entire plot.

Costumes

Long before a character speaks, the audience begins forming impressions based on appearance. An actor's posture, movement, and facial expressions communicate important information, but costumes, hairstyles, and makeup often provide the first clues about a character's age, social status, occupation, personality, culture, health, and historical period. **Costume and makeup design** use clothing, accessories, hair, and cosmetic effects to support the story and reveal character.

Costume designers determine the overall appearance of each character, including clothing, footwear, accessories, wigs, hairstyles, and makeup. In some productions, makeup is designed by a separate makeup designer or special effects makeup artist. All of these choices must support the production concept while allowing performers to move, speak, and perform comfortably and safely. Successful designers combine artistic creativity with knowledge of fashion history, textiles, garment construction, tailoring, cosmetics, hairstyling, anatomy, and theatrical makeup techniques.

The design process begins with a careful study of the script and research into the play's period, culture, setting, and style. Costume designers create full-color renderings that show each character's appearance and often include fabric swatches to indicate color, texture, and weight. Makeup designers may create face charts, sketches, photographic references, or digital renderings that show skin tone, facial features, aging, injuries, or other visual effects. These materials help the creative team understand how costumes and makeup will look under stage lighting and how they will contribute to the production's overall visual

style.

Costumes and makeup communicate far more than appearance. Choices involving color, silhouette, texture, fabric, hairstyle, and cosmetics can suggest a character's age, occupation, social class, personality, health, marital status, and emotional condition. Makeup may subtly enhance an actor's features so they remain visible under stage lighting, or it may significantly transform the performer into someone older, younger, ill, injured, supernatural, or nonhuman. Every design choice should contribute to the story presented on stage.

Special effects makeup, often called SFX makeup, creates more complex physical transformations. These may include wounds, scars, burns, bruises, aging effects, deformities, blood effects, prosthetic features, or fantasy creatures. Artists may use materials such as latex, silicone, gelatin, wax, adhesives, and molded prosthetic appliances. These effects must appear convincing from the audience's viewing distance while remaining safe, durable, and practical for the performer.

Once the designs are approved, the costume shop determines how each garment will be obtained. Costumes may be built from scratch, altered from existing stock, rented, or purchased. The costume shop manager supervises construction, assigns work, orders materials, and manages the production schedule. Makeup and SFX artists also gather materials, prepare prosthetics, test products, and determine how long each application and removal will take. During rehearsals, designers work closely with performers and production staff to ensure that the completed costumes, wigs, makeup, and prosthetics match the artistic vision and function properly.

The costume and makeup teams maintain these elements throughout the production. Costumes must be cleaned, repaired, pressed, organized, and prepared for every performance. Wigs must be styled and maintained, while makeup supplies and prosthetic pieces must be cleaned, replaced, or reset as needed. Actors share responsibility by storing costumes properly, reporting damage, caring for personal items such as undergarments, and following instructions for makeup application and removal.

Some productions require costumes and makeup to withstand stage blood, food, rain, sweat, physical combat, or other special effects. Costume, makeup, prop, lighting, and scenic designers must collaborate to ensure that these effects appear realistic while allowing garments, prosthetics, and performance areas to be cleaned, repaired, or reset quickly and safely.

Costume and makeup design combine artistry, craftsmanship, research, and practical problem-solving. Together, they help audiences understand who the characters are while supporting the production's overall visual storytelling. Like scenic construction, all costume, makeup, wig, and special effects choices must remain within the production's established budget.



Milliner. Harrisburg Area Community College, 2019. Photograph by Brenda C. Eppley. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).



Special effects makeup by Michele Mulkey. Harrisburg Area Community College, 2017. Photograph by Michele Mulkey. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).



Special effects makeup by Michele Mulkey. Harrisburg Area Community College, 2017. Photograph by Michele Mulkey. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).



The Importance of Being Earnest, Harrisburg Area Community College, Photo by Paul Foltz (designer) and Brenda C. Eppley. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

Lighting

When the house lights dim, everything the audience sees is shaped by the work of the **lighting designer.** Stage lighting does far more than make the performers visible. It establishes mood, suggests time and place, directs the audience's attention, reveals form and texture, and supports the visual storytelling of the production.

Like all designers, the lighting designer begins with the script. References to location, season, time of day, weather, and emotional tone provide clues for developing the lighting concept. The design is also influenced by the scenery, costumes, architecture of the theatre, available hanging positions, and the technical capabilities of the lighting system. Whether creating the brightness of an afternoon, the coolness of moonlight, or the flicker of a fireplace, the designer draws on an understanding of how light behaves in the real world while deciding whether the production should appear realistic, stylized, or somewhere in between.

One of the lighting designer's most important responsibilities is controlling focus. Because the eye is naturally drawn to areas of greater brightness, contrast, movement, and color, lighting can emphasize important performers, actions, and scenic details while reducing visual distractions. It also helps model the bodies of actors and the surfaces of scenery, creating depth and preventing the stage from appearing flat.

After developing the design, the lighting designer creates a light plot, a scaled drawing that shows the location and type of every lighting instrument, along with information about color, accessories, circuitry, and control. Supporting paperwork may include channel hookups, instrument schedules, color lists, and cue sheets. The head or lead electrician supervises the hanging, cabling, circuiting, and focusing of the equipment according to these plans.

Once the instruments are installed and focused, the designer works with the lighting console programmer or operator to create a sequence of lighting cues. Each cue records a specific combination of instruments, colors, intensities, beam shapes, and timing. The console allows the lighting to shift smoothly or abruptly from one cue to the next in response to the action of the play.

Lighting cues may indicate the passage of time, establish mood, emphasize a dramatic moment, reveal a new location, support a musical transition, or create a blackout between scenes. They may also work with projections, moving lights, practical fixtures, and special effects. During the performance, lighting functions in close coordination with scenery, costumes, sound, projections, and the actors' movement to shape the audience's visual and emotional experience.

Lighting design combines artistic imagination with technical precision. Like a painter working with color and shadow, the lighting designer shapes what the audience sees, reveals the world of the play, and transforms an empty stage into a dynamic theatrical environment.

Functions of Stage Lighting

· **Provide Visibility** – Ensures the audience can clearly see the actors, scenery, and action while using shadow to conceal less important elements.

· **Reveal Shape and Form** – Uses highlights and shadows to create depth and define the three-dimensional appearance of performers and scenery.

· **Establish Mood and Style** – Uses color, intensity, angle, and movement to create emotional atmosphere and support the production's artistic style.

· **Establish Time and Place** – Simulates natural and artificial light sources to suggest the time of day, season, location, weather, or historical period.

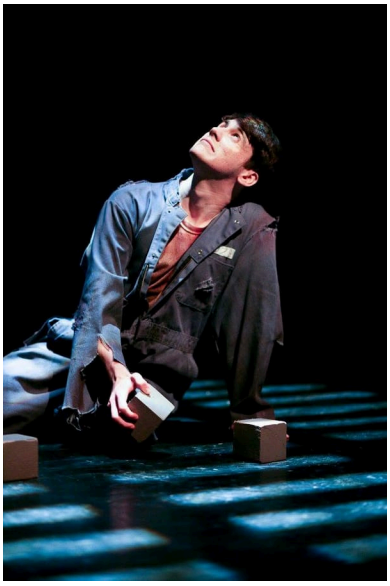
· **Create Rhythm and Movement** – Reinforces the pacing of the performance through fades, blackouts, cue changes, and moving light.



Angels in America, Harrisburg Area Community College, 2009. Photograph by Brenda C. Eppley Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).



Musicals in Ahoy, Rotterdam, Netherlands. 2004. Sander 198, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons



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The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, Harrisburg Area Community College, 2016 Photograph by Brenda C. Eppley Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

Sound Designer

Sound designers create the **auditory world of** a production. They select or compose music, create sound effects, design soundscapes, and plan the systems that allow dialogue, music, and effects to be heard clearly throughout the theatre. Working closely with the director, performers, musicians, and other designers, they use sound to establish setting, shape mood, support dramatic action, and deepen the audience's emotional response.

Like other designers, the sound designer begins with the script and the production concept. References to location, time period, weather, technology, and offstage action may suggest specific sounds. The designer also considers the size and acoustics of the theatre, the placement of the audience, and whether the production requires live music, recorded sound, microphones, or amplification.

Contemporary sound designers often use digital audio software to compose original music, edit recordings, and build layered soundscapes. Custom-created material can be shaped precisely to match the rhythm, style, and emotional tone of a production. It may also reduce licensing concerns associated with using copyrighted commercial recordings, although original music and borrowed material must still be properly credited and licensed when required.

Sound design generally includes three areas:

· **Music** – Live or recorded music used as background, transitions, or emotional underscore. Music may establish period, location, character, or mood.

· **Sound Reinforcement** – The use of microphones, mixing consoles, and speakers to amplify actors, musicians, and other live sound while maintaining an audible and natural listening experience.

· **Sound Effects** – Recorded or live sounds such as weather, footsteps, doors, telephones, crowds, or ambient environments that help establish setting, atmosphere, and dramatic action.

The sound designer also determines where sound should appear to originate. Speakers may be positioned around the theatre so that a voice seems to come from offstage, thunder appears to move across the space, or music surrounds the audience. Volume, direction, tone, duration, and timing all influence how a sound is perceived.

Most theatrical sound is now controlled through computer-based playback and mixing systems. These systems allow music, effects, and microphone levels to be coordinated precisely with the action onstage. Individual sounds are organized into cues that may begin on a line of dialogue, a movement, a lighting change, or a stage manager's command.

During technical rehearsals, the sound designer adjusts timing, volume, balance, and speaker placement while listening from different areas of the theatre. The designer must ensure that dialogue remains understandable and that sound supports rather than overwhelms the actors and other production elements.

By combining artistic imagination with technical expertise, sound designers create an audio environment that may be subtle or spectacular. Even when the audience is barely aware of it, sound helps define the world of the play and brings the production to life.

Stage Management

Stage management may be an ideal career for someone who enjoys **organization, problem-solving, collaboration, and clear communication.** Stage managers must be able to manage many details at once while remaining calm, flexible, and attentive to the needs of the entire production. They are often among the first people assigned to a production and serve as its central organizational and communication hub from the beginning of rehearsals through the final performance.

One of the stage manager's most important responsibilities is coordinating communication among the director, designers, technicians, performers, producers, musicians, and front-of-house staff. Like the hub of a wheel connecting its spokes, the stage manager helps ensure that information reaches the right people at the right time. They may create rehearsal schedules, maintain contact lists, organize auditions and meetings, track conflicts, record attendance, and distribute rehearsal reports so that each department remains informed and the production stays on schedule.

Before rehearsals begin, the stage manager gathers information from the director and design team and prepares the rehearsal space. Scenic plans are often used to tape the floor so that walls, doors, platforms, furniture, and other important features are represented before the actual scenery is built. The stage manager also prepares the prompt book, sometimes called the production book, which contains the working script, blocking notes, schedules, contact information, reports, cue information, and other documents needed to manage the production.

During rehearsals, the stage manager records blocking, tracks script revisions, times scenes and transitions, schedules breaks, and notes any issues involving scenery, costumes, props, lighting, sound, projections, or special effects. They also help maintain a safe, respectful, and productive rehearsal environment. When questions or problems arise, the stage manager identifies which department needs the information and follows up to ensure that the issue is addressed.

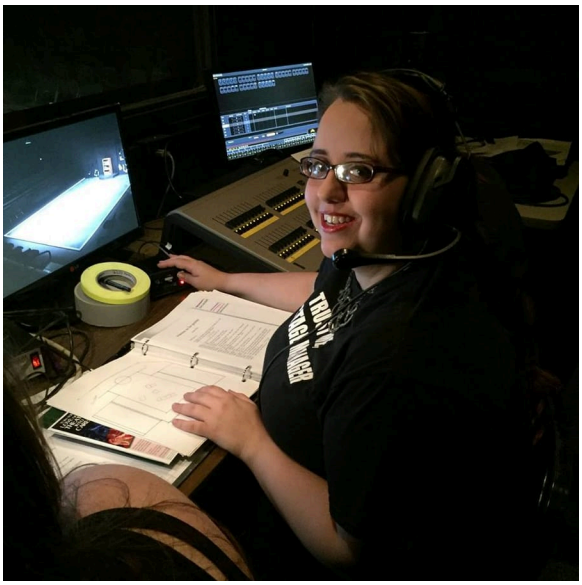
As the production develops, the stage manager becomes the primary link between the rehearsal area and the production shops. Rehearsal reports summarize the day's work and document changes that may affect other departments. For example, a new piece of blocking may require a prop to be moved, a costume to allow greater movement, or a lighting cue to be adjusted. Accurate reporting helps designers and technicians respond before these changes create larger problems.

The stage manager also plays a major role in planning technical rehearsals. Working with the director and production team, they help organize the sequence of work, identify complicated transitions, and ensure that enough time is available to rehearse scene changes, effects, and technical cues safely. During technical rehearsals, all cue information is added to the prompt book.

During performances, the stage manager calls the show. From the prompt book, they give precise verbal cues for lighting, sound, projections, automation, scene changes, special effects, and other technical events. They also confirm that performers and crew members are ready, communicate with front-of-house staff, respond to unexpected problems, and determine whether a performance can begin or continue safely.

Once the production opens, the director's work is largely complete, and the stage manager assumes responsibility for maintaining the show. They monitor the consistency of performances, give notes when necessary, coordinate rehearsals for replacement performers, and help preserve the timing, staging, and artistic choices established during rehearsal. Their goal is not to reinterpret the production but to ensure that it remains faithful to the agreed-upon artistic vision throughout the run.

The stage manager is often described as the **organizational leader** of a production. By managing communication, schedules, records, rehearsals, cues, and performance logistics, they allow the work of every department to come together in a coordinated and reliable way. Much of their work may be invisible to the audience, but it is essential to creating a smooth and consistent performance.



Stage Manager, Harrisburg Area Community College. Photograph by Brenda C. Eppley, 2019. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

Thumbnail: *Junglebook,* Harrisburg Area Community College, 2013 Photograph by Brenda C. Eppley Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

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13: Addendum - Everyman

EVERYMAN: A MORAL PLAY

by Anonymous

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DOCTOR.

'This moral men may have in mind;
Ye hearers, take it of worth old and young,
And forsake pride, for he deceiveth you in the end,
And remember Beauty, Five Wits, Strength, and Discretion.
They all at the last do Everyman forsake;
Save his Good Deeds there doth he take:
But beware, and they be small,
Before God he hath no help at all.'

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

MESSENGER

KNOWLEDGE

GOD CONFESSION

DEATH

BEAUTY

EVERYMAN

STRENGTH

FELLOWSHIP

DISCRETION

KINDRED

FIVE WITS

GOODS

ANGEL

GOOD DEEDS

DOCTOR

HERE BEGINNETH A TREATISE HOW THE HIGH FATHER OF HEAVEN SENDETH DEATH TO SUMMON EVERY CREATURE TO COME AND GIVE ACCOUNT OF THEIR LIVES IN THIS WORLD, AND IS IN MANNER OF A MORAL PLAY.

MESSENGER.

I Pray you all give your audience,
And hear this matter with reverence,
By figure a moral play;
The Summoning of Everyman called it is,
That of our lives and ending shows,
How transitory we be all day:
This matter is wonders[75] precious,
But the intent of it is more gracious,

And sweet to bear away.
The story saith: man, in the beginning
Look well, and take good heed to the ending,
Be you never so gay:
Ye think sin in the beginning full sweet,
Which in the end causeth thy soul to weep,
When the body lieth in clay.
Here shall you see how Fellowship and Jollity,
Both Strength, Pleasure, and Beauty,
Will fade from thee as flower in May;
For ye shall hear, how our Heaven King
Calleth Everyman to a general reckoning:
Give audience, and hear what he doth say.

GOD *speaketh*.

I perceive here in my Majesty,
How that all creatures be to me unkind,
Living without dread in worldly prosperity:
Of ghostly sight the people be so blind,
Drowned in sin, they knew me not for their God;
In worldly riches is all their mind,
They fear not my rightwiseness, the sharp rod;
My law that I showed, when I for them died,
They forget clean, and shedding of my blood red;
I hanged between two, it cannot be denied;
To get them life I suffered to be dead;
I healed their feet, with thorns hurt was my head:
I could do no more than I did truly,
And now I see the people do clean forsake me:
They use the seven deadly sins damnable,
As pride, covetise, wrath, and lechery,
Now in the world be made commendable:
And thus they leave, of angels the heavenly company,
Every man liveth so after his own pleasure,
And yet of their life they be nothing sure:
I see the more that I them forbear
The worse they be from year to year;
All that liveth appaireth[77] fast,
Therefore I will in all the haste
Have a reckoning of every man's person;
For, and I leave the people thus alone
In their life and wicked tempests,
Verily they will become much worse than beasts;
For now one would by envy another up eat;
Charity they do all clean forget.
I hoped well that every man
In my glory should make his mansion,
And thereto I had them all elect;
But now I see, like traitors deject,
They thank me not for the pleasure that I to them meant,
Nor yet for their being that I them have lent;
I proffered the people great multitude of mercy,
And few there be that asketh it heartly;
They be so cumbered with worldly riches,
That needs on them I must do justice,
On every man living without fear.

Where art thou, Death, thou mighty messenger?

DEATH.

Almighty God, I am here at your will,
Your commandment to fulfil.

GOD.

Go thou to Everyman,
And show him in my name
A pilgrimage he must on him take,
Which he in no wise may escape;
And that he bring with him a sure reckoning
Without delay or any tarrying.

DEATH.

Lord, I will in the world go run over all,
And cruelly out-search both great and small;
Every man will I beset that liveth beastly,
Out of God's laws, and dreadeth not folly:
He that loveth riches I will strike with my dart,
His sight to blind, and fro heaven to depart,
Except that alms be his good friend,
In hell for to dwell, world without end.
Lo, yonder I see Everyman walking:
Full little he thinketh on my coming:
His mind is on fleshly lusts and his treasure;
And great pain it shall cause him to endure
Before the Lord, heaven's King.
Everyman, stand still; whither art thou going
Thus gaily? hast thou thy Maker forgot?

EVERYMAN.

Why askest thou? Wouldest thou wit?

DEATH.

Yea, sir, I will show you; in great haste I am sent to thee
Fro God out of his Majesty.

EVERYMAN.

What! sent to me?

DEATH.

Yea, certainly:
Though you have forgot him here,
He thinketh on thee in the heavenly sphere;

As, ere we depart, thou shalt know.

EVERYMAN.

What desireth God of me?

DEATH.

That shall I show thee;
A reckoning he will needs have
Without any lenger respite.

EVERYMAN.

To give a reckoning longer leisure I crave;
This blind matter troubleth my wit.

DEATH.

On thee thou must take a long journey,
Therefore thy book of count with thee thou bring,
For turn again thou cannot by no way:
And look thou be sure of thy reckoning;
For before God thou shalt answer and show
Thy many bad deeds, and good but a few,
How thou hast spent thy life, and in what wise,
Before the chief lord of paradise.
Have ado that[78] we were in that way,
For, wit thou well, thou shalt make none attorney.

EVERYMAN.

Full unready I am such reckoning to give:
I know thee not; what messenger art thou?

DEATH.

I am Death, that no man dreadeth;
For every man I 'rrest, and no man spareth,
For it is God's commandment
That all to me should be obedient.

EVERYMAN.

O Death, thou comest, when I had thee least in mind;
In thy power it lieth me to save;
Yet of my good will I give thee, if thou will be kind,
Yea, a thousand pounds shalt thou have,
And [thou] defer this matter till another day.

DEATH.

Everyman, it may not be by no way;
I set not by gold, silver, nor riches,
Ne by pope, emperor, king, duke, ne princes;
For, and I would receive gifts great,
All the world I might get;
But my custom is clean contrary;
I give thee no respite, come hence, and not tarry.

EVERYMAN.

Alas! shall I have no lenger respite?
I may say Death giveth no warning:
To think on thee it maketh my heart sick;
For all unready is my book of reckoning:
But, [for] twelve year and I might have abiding,
My counting-book I would make so clear,
That my reckoning I should not need to fear.
Wherefore, Death, I pray thee for God's mercy,
Spare me, till I be provided of remedy.

DEATH.

Thee availeth not to cry, weep, and pray:
But haste thee lightly, that thou wert gone this journey;
And prove thy friends, if thou can;
For, wit thou well, the tide abideth no man,
And in the world each living creature
For Adam's sin must die of nature.

EVERYMAN.

Death, if I should this pilgrimage take,
And my reckoning surely make,
Show me, for Saint Charity,
Should I not come again shortly?

DEATH.

No, Everyman, and thou be once there,
Thou mayest never more come here,
Trust me verily.

EVERYMAN.

O gracious God, in the high seat celestial,
Have mercy on me in this most need.
Shall I have no company from this vale terrestrial
Of mine acquaince,[79] that way me to lead?

DEATH.

Yea, if any be so hardy,
That would go with thee, and bear thee company:
Hie thee that thou were gone to God's magnificence,
Thy reckoning to give before his presence.
What, weenest thou thy life is given thee,
And thy worldly goods also?

EVERYMAN.

I had ween'd so verily.

DEATH.

Nay, nay; it was but lend thee;
For, as soon as thou art gone,
Another awhile shall have it, and then go therefro,
Even as thou hast done.
Everyman, thou art mad, thou hast thy wits five,
And here on earth will not amend thy life;
For suddenly I do come.

EVERYMAN.

O wretched caitiff, whither shall I flee,
That I might escape this endless sorrow!
Now, gentle Death, spare me till to-morrow,
That I may amend me
With good advisement.

DEATH.

Nay, thereto I will not consent,
Nor no man will I respite;
But to the heart suddenly I shall smite
Without any advisement.
And now out of thy sight I will me hie;
See thou make thee ready shortly,
For thou mayest say, this is the day
That no man living may 'scape away.

EVERYMAN.

Alas! I may well weep with sighs deep:
Now have I no manner of company
To help me in my journey, and me to keep;
And also my writing is full unready.
How shall I do now for to excuse me!
I would to God I had never be got;[80]
To my soul a full great profit it had be;
For now I fear pains huge and great.
The time passeth: Lord, help, that all wrought!
For though I mourn, it availeth nought:

The day passeth, and is almost ago;
I wot not well what for to do.
To whom were I best my complaint to make?
What, and I to Fellowship thereof spake,
And showed him of this sudden chance!
For in him is all mine affiance;
We have in the world so many a day
Be good friends in sport and play,
I see him yonder certainly;
I trust that he will bear me company,
Therefore to him will I speak to ease my sorrow,
Well met, good Fellowship, and good morrow.

FELLOWSHIP *speaketh*.

Everyman, good morrow, by this day:
Sir, why lookest thou so piteously?
If anything be amiss, I pray thee, me say,
That I may help to remedy.

EVERYMAN.

Yea, good Fellowship, yea;
I am in great jeopardy.

FELLOWSHIP.

My true friend, show to me your mind;
I will not forsake thee, to my life's end,
In the way of good company.

EVERYMAN.

That was well spoken and lovingly.

FELLOWSHIP.

Sir, I must needs know your heaviness;
I have pity to see you in any distress:
If any have you wronged, ye shall revenged be,
Though I on the ground be slain for thee;
Though that I know before that I should die.

EVERYMAN.

Verily, Fellowship, gramercy.

FELLOWSHIP.

Tush! by thy thanks I set not a straw;
Show me your grief, and say no more.

EVERYMAN.

If I my heart should to you break,
And then you to turn your mind fro me,
And would not me comfort, when ye hear me speak,
Then should I ten times sorrier be.

FELLOWSHIP.

Sir, I say as I will do in deed.

EVERYMAN.

Then be you a good friend at need;
I have found you true here-before.

FELLOWSHIP.

And so ye shall evermore;
For in faith, and thou go to hell,
I will not forsake thee by the way.

EVERYMAN.

Ye speak like a good friend, I believe you well;
I shall deserve it, and I may.

FELLOWSHIP.

I speak of no deserving, by this day;
For he that will say and nothing do,
Is not worthy with good company to go:
Therefore show me the grief of your mind,
As to your friend most loving and kind.

EVERYMAN.

I shall show you how it is:
Commanded I am to go a journey,
A long way, hard and dangerous;
And give a strait account without delay
Before the High Judge Adonai;[81]
Wherefore, I pray you, bear me company,
As ye have promised in this journey.

FELLOWSHIP.

That is matter indeed; promise is duty;
But, and I should take such a voyage on me,
I know it well, it should be to my pain:
Also it make[s] me afeard certain.
But let us take counsel here as well as we can,

For your words would fear a strong man.

EVERYMAN.

Why, ye said, if I had need,
Ye would me never forsake, quick ne dead,
Though it were to hell truly.

FELLOWSHIP.

So I said certainly;
But such pleasures be set aside, the sooth to say,
And also if ye took such a journey,
When should we come again?

EVERYMAN.

Nay, never again till the day of doom.

FELLOWSHIP.

In faith, then will not I come there:
Who hath you these tidings brought?

EVERYMAN.

Indeed, Death was with me here.

FELLOWSHIP.

Now, by God that all hath bought,
If Death were the messenger,
For no man that is living to-day
I will not go that loath journey,
Not for the father that begat me.

EVERYMAN.

Ye promised otherwise, pardy.

FELLOWSHIP.

I wot well I said so truly,
And yet if thou wilt eat and drink, and make good cheer,
Or haunt to women the lusty company,
I would not forsake you, while the day is clear,
Trust me verily.

EVERYMAN.

Yea, thereto ye would be ready;

To go to mirth, solace and play,
Your mind will sooner apply
Than to bear me company in my long journey.

FELLOWSHIP.

Now, in good faith, I will not that way;
But, and thou will murder, or any man kill,
In that I will help thee with a good will.

EVERYMAN.

Oh, that is a simple advice indeed:
Gentle fellows[hip,] help me in my necessity;
We have loved long, and now I need,
And now, gentle Fellowship, remember me.

FELLOWSHIP.

Whether ye have loved me or no,
By Saint John, I will not with thee go.

EVERYMAN.

Yet, I pray thee, take the labour, and do so much for me,
To bring me forward, for Saint Charity,
And comfort me, till I come without the town.

FELLOWSHIP.

Nay, and thou would give me a new gown,
I will not a foot with thee go;
But, and thou had tarried, I would not have left thee so:
And as now God speed thee in thy journey!
For from thee I will depart, as fast as I may.

EVERYMAN.

Whither away, Fellowship? will you forsake me?

FELLOWSHIP.

Yea, by my fay; to God I betake thee.

EVERYMAN.

Farewell, good Fellowship; for this my heart is sore:
Adieu for ever, I shall see thee no more.

FELLOWSHIP.

In faith, Everyman, farewell now at the end;
For you I will remember that parting is mourning.

EVERYMAN.

Alack! shall we thus depart in deed,
O Lady, help, without any more comfort,
Lo,[82] Fellowship forsaketh me in my most need:
For help in this world whither shall I resort?
Fellowship here before with me would merry make;
And now little sorrow for me doth he take.
It is said, in prosperity men friends may find,
Which in adversity be full unkind.
Now whither for succour shall I flee,
Sith that Fellowship hath forsaken me?
To my kinsmen I will truly,
Praying them to help me in my necessity;
I believe that they will do so;
For kind will creep, where it may not go.[83]
I will go say; for yonder I see them go:
Where be ye now, my friends and kinsmen [lo?]

KINDRED.

Here be we now at your commandment:
Cousin, I pray thee, show us your intent
In any wise, and do not spare.

COUSIN.

Yea, Everyman, and to us declare
If ye be disposed to go any whither;
For, wot ye well, we[84] will live and die together.

KINDRED.

In wealth and woe we will with you hold;
For over his kin a man may be bold.

EVERYMAN.

Gramercy, my friends and kinsmen kind,
Now shall I show you the grief of my mind.
I was commanded by a messenger,
That is an high king's chief officer;
He bad me go on pilgrimage to my pain,
But I know well I shall never come again:
Also I must give a reckoning strait;
For I have a great enemy that hath me in wait,
Which intendeth me for to hinder.

KINDRED.

What account is that which ye must render?
That would I know.

EVERYMAN.

Of all my works I must show,
How I have lived, and my days spent;
Also of ill deeds that I have used
In my time, sith life was me lent,
And of all virtues that I have refused:
Therefore, I pray you, go thither with me
To help to make mine account, for Saint Charity.

COUSIN.

What, to go thither? Is that the matter?
Nay, Everyman, I had liever fast bread and water,
All this five year and more.

EVERYMAN.

Alas, that ever I was bore!
For now shall I never be merry,
If that you forsake me.

KINDRED.

Ah, sir! what, ye be a merry man!
Take good heart to you, and make no moan.
But one thing I warn you, by Saint Anne,
As for me ye shall go alone.

EVERYMAN.

My cousin, will you not with me go?

COUSIN.

No, by our lady, I have the cramp in my toe:
Trust not to me; for, so God me speed,
I will[85] deceive you in your most need.

KINDRED.

It availeth not us to tice:[86]
Ye shall have my maid with all my heart;
She loveth to go to feasts, there to be nice,
And to dance, and abroad to start:
I will give her leave to help you in that journey,
If that you and she may agree.

EVERYMAN.

No, show me the very effect of your mind;
Will you go with me, or abide behind?

KINDRED.

Abide behind! yea, that will I, and I may;
Therefore farewell till another day.

EVERYMAN.

How should I be merry or glad?
For fair promises men to me make;
But, when I have most need, they me forsake;
I am deceived, that maketh me sad.

COUSIN.

Cousin Everyman, farewell now;
For verily I will not go with you:
Also of mine own life an unready reckoning
I have to account, therefore I make tarrying;
Now God keep thee, for now I go.

EVERYMAN.

Ah, Jesu, is all come hereto?
Lo, fair words maketh fools fain;[87]
They promise, and nothing will do certain.
My kinsmen promised me faithfully,
For to abide with me steadfastly;
And now fast away do they flee:
Even so Fellowship promised me.
What friend were best me of to provide?
I lose my time here longer to abide;
Yet in my mind a thing there is:
All my life I have loved riches;
If that my Good now help me might,
It would make my heart full light:
I will speak to him in this distress:
Where art thou, my Goods and Riches?

GOODS.

Who calleth me? Everyman? what, hast thou haste?
I lie here in corners trussed and piled so high,
And in chests I am locked so fast,
Also sacked in bags, thou mayest see with thine eye,
I cannot stir; in packs, lo, where I lie!
What would ye have, lightly me say.

EVERYMAN.

Come hither, Good, in all the haste thou may;
For of counsel I must desire thee.

GOODS.

Sir, and ye in the world have sorrow or adversity,
That can I help you to remedy shortly.

EVERYMAN.

It is another disease that grieveth me;
In this world it is not, I tell thee so,
I am sent for another way to go,
To give a strait account general
Before the highest Jupiter of all:
And all my life I have had my pleasure in thee,
Therefore I pray thee now go with me;
For, peraventure, thou mayest before God Almighty
My reckoning help to clean and purify,
For it is said ever among,
That money maketh all right that is wrong.

GOODS.

Nay, nay, Everyman, I sing another song;
I follow no man in such voyages,
For, and I went with thee,
Thou shouldest fare much the worse for me:
For because on me thou diddest set thy mind,
Thy reckoning I have made blotted and blind,
That thine account thou cannot make truly;
And that hast thou for the love of me.

EVERYMAN.

That would grieve me full sore,
When I should come to that fearful answer:
Up, and let us go thither together.

GOODS.

Nay, not so; I am too brittle, I may not endure:
I will follow no man one foot, be ye sure.

EVERYMAN.

Alas! I have thee loved, and had great pleasure
All my life-days on my good and treasure.

GOODS.

That is to thy damnation without lesing,
For my love is contrary to the love everlasting;
But if thou had me loved moderately during,
As to the poor give part for the love of me,
Then shouldest thou not in this dolour have be,
Nor in this great sorrow and care.

EVERYMAN.

Lo, now was I deceived, ere I was ware,
And all, I may wete, mis-spending of time.

GOODS.

What, wenest thou that I am thine?

EVERYMAN.

I had went[88] so.

GOODS.

Nay, Everyman, I say no:
As for a while I was lent thee;
A season thou hast had me in prosperity;
My condition is man's soul to kill,
If I save one, a thousand I do spill:
Weenest thou that I will follow thee?
Nay, not fro this world, verily.

EVERYMAN.

I had weened otherwise.

GOODS.

Therefore to thy soul Good is a thief,
For when thou art dead, this is my guise,
Another to deceive in the same wise,
As I have do thee, and all to his soul's reprefe.

EVERYMAN.

O false Good, cursed may thou be,
Thou traitor to God, thou hast deceived me,
And caught me in thy snare.

GOODS.

Marry, thou brought thyself in care,
Whereof I am right glad:
I must needs laugh, I cannot be sad.

EVERYMAN.

Ah, Good, thou hast had long my hearty love;
I gave thee that which should be the Lord's above:
But wilt thou not go with me indeed?
I pray thee truth to say.

GOODS.

No, so God me speed;
Therefore farewell, and have good day.

EVERYMAN.

Oh, to whom shall I make my moan,
For to go with me in that heavy journey?
First Fellowship he said he would with me gone;
His words were very pleasant and gay,
But afterward he left me alone.
Then spake I to my kinsmen all in despair,
And also they gave me words fair,
They lacked no fair speaking;
But all forsake me in the ending.
Then went I to my Goods that I loved best,
In hope to have found comfort; but there had I least:
For my Goods sharply did me tell,
That he bringeth many in hell.
Then of myself I was ashamed,
And so I am worthy to be blamed:
Thus may I well myself hate.
Of whom shall I now counsel take?
I think that I shall never speed,
Till that I go to my Good Deed;
But, alas! she is so weak,
That she can nother go nor speak:
Yet will I venter on her now.
My Good Deeds, where be you?

GOOD DEEDS.

Here I lie cold in the ground;
Thy sins have me so sore bound,
That I cannot stir.

EVERYMAN.

O Good Deeds, I stand in great fear;
I must you pray of counsel,

For help now should come right well.

GOOD DEEDS.

Everyman, I have understanding,
That thou art summoned account to make
Before Messias of Jerusalem King;
And you do by me, that journey with[89] you will I take.

EVERYMAN.

Therefore I come to you my moan to make:
I pray you, that ye will go with me.

GOOD DEEDS.

I would full fain, but I cannot stand verily.

EVERYMAN.

Why, is there anything on you fall?

GOOD DEEDS.

Yea, sir, I may thank you of all;
If ye had perfectly cheered me,
Your book of account full ready now had be.
Look, the books of your works and deeds eke!
Behold how they lie under the feet,
To your soul's heaviness.

EVERYMAN.

Our Lord Jesus help me,
For one letter herein can I not see.

GOOD DEEDS.

Here is a blind reckoning in time of distress!

EVERYMAN.

Good Deeds, I pray you, help me in this need,
Or else I am for ever damned indeed;
Therefore help me to make my reckoning
Before the Redeemer of all thing,
That king is, and was, and ever shall.

GOOD DEEDS.

Everyman, I am sorry of your fall,

And fain would I help you, and I were able.

EVERYMAN.

Good Deeds, your counsel, I pray you, give me.

GOOD DEEDS.

That shall I do verily:
Though that on my feet I may not go,
I have a sister that shall with you also,
Called Knowledge, which shall with you abide,
To help you to make that dreadful reckoning.
[*Enter Knowledge*.

KNOWLEDGE.

Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide,
In thy most need to go by thy side.

EVERYMAN.

In good condition I am now in every thing,
And am wholly content with this good thing,
Thanked be God my Creature.[90]

GOOD DEEDS.

And when he hath brought thee there,
Where thou shalt heal thee of thy smart,
Then go thou with thy reckoning and thy good deeds together.
For to make thee joyful at the heart
Before the blessed Trinity.

EVERYMAN.

My Good Deeds, I thank thee heartfully:
I am well content certainly
With your words sweet.

KNOWLEDGE.

Now go we together lovingly
To Confession, that cleansing river.

EVERYMAN.

For joy I weep: I would we there were;
But I pray you to instruct me by intellection,[91]
Where dwelleth that holy virtue Confession?

KNOWLEDGE.

In the house of salvation;
We shall find him in that place,
That shall us comfort by God's grace.
Lo, this is Confession: kneel down, and ask mercy;
For he is in good conceit with God Almighty.

EVERYMAN.

O glorious fountain that all uncleanness doth clarify,
Wash from me the spots of vices unclean,
That on me no sin may be seen;
I come with Knowledge for my redemption,
Redempt with heart and full contrition,
For I am commanded a pilgrimage to take,
And great accounts before God to make.
Now I pray you, Shrift, mother of salvation,
Help hither my good deeds for my piteous exclamation.

CONFESSION.

I know your sorrow well, Everyman:
Because with Knowledge ye come to me,
I will you comfort as well as I can;
And a precious jewel I will give thee,
Called penance, voider[92] of adversity:
Therewith shall your body chastised be
With abstinence and perseverance in God's service;
Here shall you receive that scourge of me,
Which is penance strong that ye must endure,
Remember thy Saviour was scourged for thee
With sharp scourges, and suffered it patiently:
So must thou, ere thou pass thy pilgrimage.
Knowledge, keep him in this voyage,
And by that time Good Deeds will be with thee;
But in anywise be sure of mercy,
For your time draweth fast; and ye will saved be,
Ask God mercy, and he will grant truly:
When with the scourge of penance man doth him bind,
The oil of forgiveness then shall he find.

EVERYMAN.

Thanked be God for his gracious work;
For now I will my penance begin:
This hath rejoiced and lighted my heart,
Though the knots be painful and hard within.

KNOWLEDGE.

Everyman, look your penance that ye fulfil,
What pain that ever it to you be;
And I shall give you counsel at will,

How your account ye shall make clearly.

EVERYMAN.

O eternal God, O heavenly figure,
O way of rightwiseness, O goodly vision,
Which descended down in a virgin pure,
Because he would Everyman redeem,
Which Adam forfeited by his disobedience,
O blessed Godhead, elect and high Divine,
Forgive me my grievous offence;
Here I cry thee mercy in this presence:
O ghostly treasure, O ransomer and redeemer!
Of all the world hope and conduyter,
Mirror of joy, foundation of mercy,
Which enlumineth heaven and earth thereby,
Hear my clamorous complaint, though it late be,
Receive my prayers of thy benignity,
Though I be a sinner most abominable,
Yet let my name be written in Moses' table.
O Mary, pray to the Maker of all thing
Me for to help at my ending,
And save me from the power of my enemy;
For Death assaileth me strongly:
And, Lady, that I may by mean of thy prayer
Of your son's glory to be partiner.
By the mean of his passion I it crave;
I beseek you help me my soul to save.
Knowledge, give me the scourge of penance,
My flesh therewith shall give acquittance;
I will now begin, if God give me grace.

KNOWLEDGE.

Everyman, God give you time and space!
Thus I bequeath you in the hands of our Saviour;
Now may you make your reckoning sure.

EVERYMAN.

In the name of all the Holy Trinity,
My body punished sore shall be,
Take this body for the sin of the flesh;
Also thou delightest to go gay and fresh;
And in the way of damnation thou did me bring,
Therefore suffer now strokes and punishing:
Now of penance I will wade the water clear,
To save me from purgatory, that sharp fire.[93]

GOOD DEEDS.

I thank God, now I can walk and go,
And am delivered of my sickness and woe;
Therefore with Everyman I will go, and not spare,
His good works I will help him to declare.

KNOWLEDGE.

Now, Everyman, be merry and glad;
Your Good Deeds cometh now, ye may not be sad:
Now is your Good Deeds whole and sound,
Going upright upon the ground.

EVERYMAN.

My heart is light, and shall be evermore;
Now will I smite faster than I did before.

GOOD DEEDS.

Everyman pilgrim, my special friend,
Blessed be thou without end;
For thee is prepared the eternal glory:
Ye have me made whole and sound,
Therefore I will bide by thee in every stound.

EVERYMAN.

Welcome, my Good Deeds, now I hear thy voice,
I weep for very sweetness of love.

KNOWLEDGE.

Be no more sad, but evermore rejoice,
God seeth thy living in His throne above;
Put on this garment to thy behove,
Which with your tears is now all wet,
Lest before God it be unsweet,
When ye to your journey's end come shall.

EVERYMAN.

Gentle Knowledge, what do ye it call?

KNOWLEDGE.

It is the garment of sorrow,
From pain it will you borrow;
Contrition it is,
That getteth forgiveness,
It pleaseth God passing-well.

GOOD DEEDS.

Everyman, will you wear it for your hele?[94]

EVERYMAN.

Now blessed be Jesu, Mary's son;
For now have I on true contrition:
And let us go now without tarrying.
Good Deeds, have we clear our reckoning?

GOOD DEEDS.

Yea, indeed, I have here.

EVERYMAN.

Then I trust we need not to fear;
Now, friends, let us not depart in twain.

KINDRED.

Nay, Everyman, that will we not certain.

GOOD DEEDS.

Yet must thou lead with thee
Three persons of great might.

EVERYMAN.

Who should they be?

GOOD DEEDS.

Discretion and Strength they hyght,[95]
And thy Beauty may not abide behind.

KNOWLEDGE.

Also ye must call to mind
Your Five Wits[96] as for your councillors.

GOOD DEEDS.

You must have them ready at all hours.

EVERYMAN.

How shall I get them hither?

KINDRED.

You must call them all together,
And they will hear you incontinent.

EVERYMAN.

My friends, come hither, and be present,
Discretion, Strength, my Five Wits and Beauty.

BEAUTY.

Here at your will we be all ready;
What will ye that we should do?

GOOD DEEDS.

That ye would with Everyman go,
And help him in his pilgrimage:
Advise you, will ye go with him or not in that voyage?

STRENGTH.

We will bring him all thither
To help and comfort him, ye may believe me.

DISCRETION.

So will we go with him altogether.

EVERYMAN.

Almighty God, loved may Thou be;
I give Thee laud[97] that I have hither brought
Strength, Discretion, Beauty, Five Wits: lack I nought:
And my Good Deeds, with Knowledge clear,
All be in my company at my will here;
I desire no more to my business.[98]

STRENGTH.

And I Strength will by you stand in distress,
Though thou wouldest in battle fight on the ground.

FIVE WITS.

And though it were thorow the world round,
We will not depart for sweet ne for sour.

BEAUTY.

No more will I unto death's hour,
Whatsoever thereof befall.

DISCRETION.

Everyman, advise you first of all,
Go with a good advisement and deliberation;
We all give you virtuous monition
That all shall be well.

EVERYMAN.

My friends, hark what I will you tell;
I pray God reward you in His heavenly sphere:
Now hearken all that be here;
For I will make my testament
Here before you all present:
In alms half my good I will give with my hands twain
In the way of charity with good intent,
And the other half still shall remain:
I it bequeath to be returned there it ought to be.
This I do in despite of the fiend of hell,
To go quit[99] out of his peril[100]
Ever after this day.

KNOWLEDGE.

Everyman, hearken what I will say;
Go to priesthood, I you advise,
And receive of him in any wise
The holy sacrament and ointment[101] together,
Then shortly see ye turn again hither,
We will all abide you here.

FIVE WITS.

Yea, Everyman, hie you that ye ready were:
There is no emperor, king, duke, ne baron,
That of God hath commission,
As hath the least priest in the world being;
For of the blessed sacraments pure and benign
He beareth the keys, and thereof hath cure
For man's redemption, it is ever sure,
Which God for our soul's medicine
Gave us out of his heart with great pain,
Here in this transitory life for thee and me:
The blessed sacraments seven there be,
Baptism, confirmation, with priesthood good,
And the sacrament of God's precious flesh and blood,
Marriage, the holy extreme unction, and penance;
These seven be good to have in remembrance,
Gracious sacraments of high divinity.

EVERYMAN.

Fain would I receive that holy body,
And meekly to my ghostly father I will go.

FIVE WITS.

Everyman, that is the best that ye can do;
God will you to salvation bring,
For good priesthood exceedeth all other thing;
To us holy scripture they do teach,
And converteth man fro sin heaven to reach;
God hath to them more power given
Than to any angel that is in heaven:
With five words he may consecrate
God's body in flesh and blood to take,
And handleth his Maker between his hands,[102]
The priest bindeth and unbindeth all bands
Both in earth and in heaven;
He[103] ministers all the sacraments seven:
Though we kiss thy feet, thou wert worthy:
Thou art the surgeon that cureth sin deadly,
No remedy may we find under God,
But all only priesthood.
Everyman, God gave priest[s] that dignity,
And setteth them in His stead among us to be;
Thus be they above angels in degree.

KNOWLEDGE.

If priests be good, it is so surely,
But when Jesu heng on the cross with great smart,
There he gave us out of his blessed heart
The same sacrament in great torment.
He sold them not to us, that Lord omnipotent;
Therefore Saint Peter the Apostle doth say,
That Jesus' curse hath all they,
Which God their Saviour do buy or sell,
Or they for any money do take or tell,
Sinful priests giveth the sinners example bad,
Their children sitteth by other men's fires, I have heard,
And some haunteth women's company,
With unclean life, as lusts of lechery;
These be with sin made blind.

FIVE WITS.

I trust to God, no such may we find:
Therefore let us priesthood honour,
And follow their doctrine for our soul's succour;
We be their sheep, and they [our] shepherds be,
By whom we all be kept in surety.
Peace! for yonder I see Everyman come,
Which hath made true satisfaction.

GOOD DEEDS.

Methink it is he indeed.

EVERYMAN.

Now Jesu Christ be your alder[104] speed!
I have received the sacrament for my redemption,
And then mine extreme unction;
Blessed be all they that counselled me to take it:
And now, friends, let us go without longer respite;
I thank God that ye have tarried so long.
Now set each of you on this rod your hand,
And shortly follow me;
I go before, there I would be:
God be our guide.

STRENGTH.

Everyman, we will not fro you go,
Till ye have gone this voyage long.

DISCRETION.

I Discretion will bide by you also.

KNOWLEDGE.

And though this pilgrimage be never so strong,
I will never part you fro:
Everyman, I will be as sure by thee,
As ever I was by Judas Maccabee.

EVERYMAN.

Alas! I am so faint I may not stand,
My limbs under me do fold:
Friends, let us not turn again to this land,
Not for all the world's gold;
For into this cave must I creep,

BEAUTY.

And turn to the earth, and there to sleep.

EVERYMAN.

What, into this grave? Alas!

BEAUTY.

Yea, there shall ye consume more and less.

EVERYMAN.

And what, should I smother here?
Yea, by my faith, and never more appear;
In this world live no more we shall,
But in heaven before the highest Lord of all.

BEAUTY.

I cross out all this: adieu, by Saint John;
I take my cap in my lap, and am gone.

EVERYMAN.

What, Beauty? whither will ye?

BEAUTY.

Peace! I am deaf, I look not behind me,
Not, and thou wouldst give me—all the gold in thy chest.

EVERYMAN.

Alas! whereto may I now trust?
Beauty doth fast away hie:
She promised with me to live and die.

STRENGTH.

Everyman, I will thee also forsake and deny,
The game liketh me not at all.

EVERYMAN.

Why then ye will forsake me all:
Strength, tarry, I pray you, a little space.

STRENGTH.

Nay, sir, by the rood of grace,
I will hie me from thee fast,
Though thou weep till thy heart brast.

EVERYMAN.

Ye would ever bide by me, ye said.

STRENGTH.

Yea, I have you far enough conveyed:
Ye be old enough, I understand,
Your pilgrimage to take on hand;
I repent me, that I hither came.

EVERYMAN.

Strength, you to displease I am to blame;
Yet promise is debt;[105] this ye well wot.

STRENGTH.

In faith, as for that I care not:
Thou art but a fool to complain;
Thou spendest thy speech and wasteth thy brain:
Go, thrist[106] thee into the ground.

EVERYMAN.

I had ween'd surer I should you have found:
But I see well, he that trusteth in his Strength,
Is greatly deceived at the length;
Both Strength and Beauty hath forsaken me,
Yet they promised me steadfast to be.

DISCRETION.

Everyman, I will after Strength be gone;
As for me, I will leave you alone.

EVERYMAN.

Why, Discretion, will ye forsake me?

DISCRETION.

Yea, in faith, I will go fro thee;
For when Strength is gone before,
Then I follow after evermore.

EVERYMAN.

Yet, I pray thee, for love of the Trinity,
Look in my grave once piteously.

DISCRETION.

Nay, so nigh will I not come.
Now farewell, fellows everichone.[107]

EVERYMAN.

Oh, all thing faileth, save God alone,
Beauty, Strength, and Discretion;
For, when Death bloweth his blast,
They all run fro me full fast.

FIVE WITS.

Everyman, of thee now my leave I take;
I will follow the other, for here I thee forsake.

EVERYMAN.

Alas! then may I both wail and weep;
For I took you for my best friend.

FIVE WITS.

I will no lenger thee keep:
Now farewell, and here an end.

EVERYMAN.

Now, Jesu, help! all hath forsaken me.

GOOD DEEDS.

Nay, Everyman, I will abide with thee,
I will not forsake thee indeed;
Thou shalt find me a good friend at need.

EVERYMAN.

Gramercy, Good Deeds, now may I true friends see
They have forsaken me everychone;
I loved them better than my good deeds alone:
Knowledge, will ye forsake me also?

KNOWLEDGE.

Yea, Everyman, when ye to death shall go;
But not yet for no manner of danger.

EVERYMAN.

Gramercy, Knowledge, with all my heart.

KNOWLEDGE.

Nay, yet I will not from hence depart,
Till I see where ye shall be come.

EVERYMAN.

Methinketh, alas! that I must be gone
To make my reckoning, and my debts pay;
For I see my time is nigh spent away.
Take ensample, all ye that this do hear or see,
How they that I loved best now forsake me;
Except my Good Deeds, that bideth truly.

GOOD DEEDS.

All earthly things is but vanity,
Beauty, Strength, and Discretion do man forsake,
Foolish friends and kinsmen, that fair spake;
All fleeth save Good Deeds, and that am I.

EVERYMAN.

Have mercy on me, God most mighty,
And stand by me, thou mother and maid Mary.

GOOD DEEDS.

Fear not, I will speak for thee.

EVERYMAN.

Here I cry, God mercy!

GOOD DEEDS.

Short our end and minish our pain:
Let us go, and never come again.

EVERYMAN.

Into thy hands, Lord, my soul I commend,
Receive it, Lord, that it be not lost;
As thou me boughtest, so me defend,
And save me fro the fiend's boast,
That I may appear with that blessed host
That shall be saved at the day of doom:
In manus tuas, of might most,
For ever *commendo spiritum meum*.
[*Everyman dies*.

KNOWLEDGE.

Now hath he suffered that we all shall endure:
The Good Deeds shall make all sure;
Now hath he made ending,
Methinketh that I hear angels sing,
And make great joy and melody,
Where Everyman's soul shall received be.

THE ANGEL.

Come, excellent elect spouse to Jesu,
Here above thou shalt go.
Because of thy singular virtue:
Now thy soul is taken thy body fro,
Thy reckoning is crystal clear;
Now shalt thou into the heavenly sphere,
Unto the which all ye shall come
That liveth well, after the day of doom.

DOCTOR.

This memory all men may have in mind;
Ye hearers, take it of worth, old and young,
And forsake pride, for he deceiveth you in the end,
And remember Beauty, Five Wits, Strength, and Discretion,
They all at last do Everyman forsake,
Save his Good Deeds; [them he] there doth take:
But beware, for, and they be small,
Before God he hath no help at all;
None excuse may be there for Everyman:
Alas, how shall he do then?
For after death amends may no man make,
For then mercy and pity doth him forsake;
If his reckoning be not clear, when he doth come,
God will say, *Ite, maledicti, in ignem aeternum*;
And he that hath his account whole and sound,
High in heaven he shall be crowned;
Unto which place God bring us all thither,
That we may live body and soul together;
Thereto help the Trinity:
Amen, say ye, for Saint Charity.[108]

FINIS.

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14: Addendum - Tartuffe

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TARTUFFE

by Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Moliere
Translated by Jeffrey D. Hoeper

Characters

MADAME PERNELLE, Orgon's mother--(the mother-in-law)
ORGON, Elmire's husband--(the dupe)
ELMIRE, Orgon's wife
DAMIS, Orgon's son, Elmire's stepson--(the hot-headed youth)
MARIANE, Orgon's daughter, Elmire's stepdaughter, and Valere's lover--(the ingenue)
CLEANTE, Orgon's brother-in-law--(the raisonneur)
TARTUFFE, the hypocrite
DORINE, Mariane's maid--(the impertinent maid)
M. LOYAL, a bailiff
POLICE OFFICER
FLIPOTE, Madame Pernelle's servant
LAURENT, Tartuffe's servant

The Scene is at Paris

ACT I
SCENE I

Madame Pernelle and her servant Flipote, Elmire, Mariane, Dorine, Damis, Cleante

Mme. Pernelle. Let's go, Flipote, let's go. I hate this place.

Elmire. I can't keep up, you rush at such a pace.

Mme. Pernelle. Peace, my dear, peace; come no farther.
I don't wish to cause you any bother.

Elmire. What duty demands, I insist on giving.
But, mother, what has caused your hasty leaving?

Mme. Pernelle. I just can't stand the way your household runs . . .
And no one cares what I wish to have done.
Oh, yes, I leave your household quite dissatisfied
For all my wise advice has been defied . . .
And nobody respects me, and everybody shouts,
And truly this is a home for the king of louts!
Dorine. If . . .

Mme. Pernelle. You, my dearie, are a bold lassy,
A little brazen and very sassy,
You butt into everything to speak your mind.

Damis. But . . .

Mme. Pernelle. You, grandson, are a fool of the worst kind.
It is I, your grandmother, that pronounce this edict
And to my son, your father, I have oft predicted
That you'll turn out to be a worthless wastrel,
And give him in life a foretaste of Hell.

Mariane. I think . . .

Mme. Pernelle. My lord, his sister! You seem so discreet
And so untainted, so very sweet,
But the stillest waters are filled with scum,
And your sly ways earn my revulsion.

Elmire. But . . .

Mme. Pernelle. Daughter, my views may make you mad,
But your conduct in all things is all bad.
In your family's eyes you should be an example-setter;
In that respect their late mother did far better.
You are extravagant, and it wounds me, I guess,
To see you sashay about dressed like a princess.
A woman who wishes only to please her mate,
Dear daughter, need not primp and undulate.

Cleante. Madam, after all . . .

Mme. Pernelle. And her brother, as for you,
I respect you, love you, and revere you, too,
But finally, if I were my son, her spouse,
I would at once beg you to leave this house.
Without cease you teach your rules and mottos
Which decent people should never follow.
I now speak frankly, but it is my part;
I never spare the words that stir my heart.

Damis. Your man Tartuffe is satisfied, no fear . . .

Mme. Pernelle. He is a holy man whom all should hear,
And I cannot bear, without great rue,
To hear him mocked by a fool like you.

Damis. What? Am I myself to bear a carping critic,

A base usurper with a power tyrannic,
Such that we can do nothing for diversion
Without hearing about that creep's aversion?

Dorine. If we were to hear and obey his whims,
We couldn't do anything without sins
For he forbids all, this false Capuchin.

Mme. Pernelle. And everything he forbids is well forbidden.
He strives to guide you on the road to heaven,
And it's my son's duty to make you love him.

Damis. No, grandma, neither dad nor anyone else
Can oblige me to wish for his good health.
I'd be false to myself if I didn't say this:
When I see him around, I begin to get pissed.
I can smell the outcome, and soon this coot
And I will find ourselves in a grand dispute.

Dorine. It's certainly a clear cause for remark
When a nobody acts like a patriarch,
A beggar who was barefoot when he came hence
And whose whole wardrobe wasn't worth two cents!
And he's gone so far as to forget his past for
He opposes everything and plays the master.

Mme. Pernelle. Ah! mercy on me! Things would be better,
If you'd only follow his holy orders.

Dorine. He passes for a saint in your fantasy,
But, I swear, he acts with hypocrisy.

Mme. Pernelle. Watch your tongue!

Dorine. Not to him nor his man Laurent
Would I trust my honor without good warrant.

Mme. Pernelle. I don't know what his servant's like at heart,
But for the man himself, I'll guarantee his part.
You only treat him with hate and aversion
Because he truly strives for your conversion.
He hurls his heart up against each sin
And the glory of God is all he hopes to win.

Dorine. Yes. But why, especially during some
Time past, must he ban all guests from our home?
Can a courtesy call offend Heaven
Enough to merit a huge commotion?
Would you like it explained, just between us? [*Gesturing toward Elmire.*]

Of Madam there, on my oath, he's jealous!

Mme. Pernelle. Be quiet, and think before you speak.
Others, too, condemn the company you keep.
All this bustle from the people who arrive,
The carriages ceaselessly parking at curb-side,
And the servants in a circle chattering,
Makes noise that your neighbors find nerve-shattering.
I'd like to think there's no harm meant,
But when gossips talk, they're malevolent.

Cleante. How can you hope to stop people talking?
It would truly be most irritating
If, for the sake of idle, foolish chatter,
We must renounce the friends that really matter.
And even if we could resolve to do it,
How could you hope to keep the whole world quiet?
No castle wall can defend against lies,
So let's ignore the fools who criticize,
And strive to live in innocence and ease,
Letting gossips gossip as they please.

Dorine. Daphne, our neighbor, and her petty spouse--
Weren't they the ones who slandered this house?
Those whom the whole world finds ridiculous
Are always first in line to stick it to us.
They never fail to sniff out and swiftly share
The earliest rumor of a love affair,
Sowing seeds of scandal with eager expedition
And twisting truth past all recognition.
In their own colors, they paint all others,
Brazenly calling all men their brothers;
In the faint hope of finding some resemblance,
They try to give a gloss of innocence
To their schemes or to make others share
The burden of blame that is only theirs.

Mme. Pernelle. All this hair-splitting is off the subject.
Orante lives a life that is perfect
With all her thoughts on heaven, and I hear
That she deeply mourns the way you live here.

Dorine. The lady herself is quite an example!
You want a chaste life? She's a nice sample.
But old age has stuck her in this zealous mood,
And everyone knows she's a reluctant prude.
'Cause as long as she could snare a man's heart,
She was more than willing to play her part.
But now that her eyes have lost their luster,
She leaves the world that already left her
And uses a pompous veil of phony wisdom
To hide the fact that her looks are gone.
It's the last resort of the aging flirt,
So peeved at having no man at her skirt

That, alone and abandoned to solitude,
Her only recourse is to become a prude.
And these good women censure all with such
Great severity; nor do they pardon much.
They biliously blame immorality
Not from charity, but only from envy
That others are drinking in that pleasure
From which old age now drains their measure.

Mme. Pernelle [*to Elmire*]. Such idle tales form a silly song.
In your home, my dear, I've been silenced too long
Because, like a crap-shooter with the die,
Madame won't give up her turn; but now my
Chance has come. I applaud my son's great wisdom
In opening his home to this holy person
Who's been heaven-sent to meet your needs
In turning from evil to God's holy deeds.
For your soul's salvation, please pay attention:
What he reprehends, merits reprehension.
These visits, these balls, these conversations
Are flawless signs of Satanic possession.
In them you never hear the holy Credo--
Just songs, chatter, gossip, malice, and innuendo.
Often the neighbors get stabbed to the heart
By vicious lies from the third or fourth part.
So good people suffer real anxiety
From the sad confusion spread at your party.
A slew of slanders are spread along the way
And, as a doctor told me the other day,
This is truly the Tower of Babylon
Because everyone babbles on and on;
And, to tell a story that now comes to mind . . .
Now look at him and how he laughs! [*Indicating Cleante.*] Go find
Some snickering fools. They are just your kind!
[*To Elmire.*] Adieu, my daughter. I'll say no more.
But I don't intend to darken your door
For a long, long time. You've fallen from grace.
[*Slapping Flipote.*] Hurry up, there! Don't stand staring into space!
Lord Almighty! I'll slap your silly face.
Go on, you slut, go on.

SCENE II
Cleante, Dorine

Cleante. I'm not following;
I'm sure there'd only be more quarrelling.
How that old harridan . . .

Dorine. Oh, how I regret
That she can't hear you use that epithet.
She'd tell you at length what she thinks of your wit,
And that she's not old enough to merit it.

Cleante. What a fuss she made about nearly nothing!
And what a passion for Tartuffe, her darling!

Dorine. Oh! Really, she's normal compared to her son,
And if you could see him, you'd say, "Here's one
Who's nuts!" During the war, he seemed quite sage,
And in serving his prince, showed some courage,
But now he's become an absolute fool
Since he gave himself up to Tartuffe's rule.
He calls him his brother and the love of his life--
More dear than mother, daughter, son, or wife.
He's the sole confidant of all his secrets
And the sole director of all his projects.
He caresses him, kisses him, and could not show a mistress
More love and affection than he gives to this
Leech. At dinner he gives him the highest place
And watches with joy as he stuffs his face
With cakes and tarts and often the best part
Of a pig, and if he should happen to hiccup or fart,
Says, "God be with you!" He's mad about him--
His honey, his hero. He always quotes him
And admires his deeds. His smallest acts are miracles
And even his stupidest words are oracles.
Tartuffe, who uses his dupe to make a buck,
Knows a hundred wily ways to pluck this duck;
He rakes off great sums with his biblical bull
And demands the right to censor us all.
His foolish footman has such presumption
That even he dares to give us instruction.
Madly preaching, he scatters with eyes afire
Our ribbons, our rouge, and our best attire.
Last night he ripped up with his own bare hands
A kerchief left lying in *The Holy Lands*,
Claiming our crime was truly gigantic
In mixing what's holy with what's Satanic.

SCENE III
Elmire, Mariane, Damis, Cleante, Dorine

Elmire [*to Cleante*]. You should be glad you missed the dreadful chore
Of attending her lecture beside the door--
Here comes my spouse! Since he doesn't see me,
I'm going upstairs to rest quietly.

Cleante. Then I'll remain with no pleasure on my part
To tell him hello and then quickly depart.

Damis. Ask him about the marriage of Mariane.
I think Tartuffe will oppose it if he can,
For he sets up so many prerequisites,
And you know what an interest I take in it.
The heat that inflames my sister and Valere
Has made his sweet sister so very dear
To me that if . . .

Dorine. Shh, he's here.

SCENE IV
Orgon, Cleante, Dorine

Orgon. Hello, brother!

Cleante. I'm glad you've returned before my departure.
The countryside isn't quite blossoming yet.

Orgon. Dorine . . . One second brother, please! Just let
Me set my heart at ease and soothe my fear
Concerning the things that have happened here. [*To Dorine*.]
For these past two days, how have things gone on?
What has happened? And how is everyone?

Dorine. The first day your wife had a bad fever
And a headache that just wouldn't leave her.

Orgon. And Tartuffe?
Dorine. Tartuffe? He's in splendid shape,
Fat and flabby, with red lips, and a shining face.

Orgon. Poor fellow!

Dorine. That night, your wife felt so sick
And so feverish that she could only pick
At her dinner and scarcely ate a bite.

Orgon. And Tartuffe?

Dorine. He alone ate with all his might,
And devoutly devoured a pair of pheasants
And a leg of lamb in our lady's presence.

Orgon. Poor fellow!

Dorine. The whole night passed before she
Could even close her eyes to fall asleep;
Shivers and chills beset her in bed,
And right up till dawn we watched her with dread.

Orgon. And Tartuffe?

Dorine. Drowsy from all that he'd consumed,
He left the table, went straight to his room,
And fell quickly into his nice, warm sack
Where he slept all night flat on his back.

Orgon. Poor fellow.

Dorine. At last your wife began heeding
Our good advice that she needed bleeding,
And she began to recover soon thereafter.

Orgon. And Tartuffe?

Dorine. He couldn't have been any better.
To fortify himself against every ill
And to regain the blood that Madam spilled,
He drank at brunch four great glasses of wine.

Orgon. Poor fellow!
Dorine. Both of them are now quite fine;
I'll now be going up to tell your wife
Of your deep concern at this threat to her life.

SCENE V
Orgon, Cleante

Cleante. She's making fun of you to your face, brother;
And, though I don't intend to be a bother,
I must frankly admit that there's some justice
In what she says. What a crazy caprice
You have for him! And how could he exert
Such charm that you'll even let your wife be hurt?
After taking this pauper into your heart,
You go so far . . .

Orgon. Stop there! Or we must part!
You don't know the man to whom you refer.

Cleante. Okay. Say I don't know him if you prefer,
But then to know what sort of man he might be . . .

Orgon. Brother, you'd be charmed if you could only see
Him, and your glee would be . . . gargantuan!
He's a man who . . . who . . . a man . . . well, a man!
Learn from him a peacefulness most exquisite,
That lets you drop your woes like . . . dried horseshit!
Yes, I've been reborn because of his preaching:
He teaches me that I shouldn't love anything,
From every earthly passion he has freed my life;
I'd watch my brother, mother, children, and wife
Drop dead without caring so much as that! [*He snaps his fingers*.]

Cleante. You've sure got humane sentiments down pat!

Orgon. Ah! If you'd seen him as I did at first,
Your eyes would have feasted on him with a spiritual thirst!
Each day he came to church smiling with sweet peace
And threw himself down before me on both knees.
He drew upon himself the eyes of everyone there
By the holy fervor of his pious prayer.
He sighed and wept with a most saintly passion
And humbly kissed the earth in a fetching fashion;
And when I was going, he rushed out front
To bless me with water from the holy font.
His servant (matching his master to a T)
Then informed me of his identity--
And his poverty. So I made a donation,
But then he tried to return a portion.
"It's too much," he said. "You're too generous;
I don't merit your pity and kindness."
And when I refused to take it back, he gave
It in alms to the poor right there in the nave.
Then God bade me take him into my home
And now life is sweet as a honeycomb.
He governs us all, and to protect my honor
Bids my wife grant his godly rule upon her.
He forewarns me of men who might give her the eye,
And he really seems far more jealous than I!
Why, you wouldn't believe his fear of Hell!
He thinks himself damned for the least bagatelle.
Such trifles suffice to scandalize him
That he even accused himself of sin
For having slain with a bit too much wrath
A flea that just happened to cross his path.

Cleante. My goodness, brother! I think you're crazy!
Are you mocking me with sheer lunacy?
And how can you pretend that this pure rot . . . ?

Orgon. Dear brother, your words reek of that free thought
With which I find you more than a bit impeached,
And, as ten times or more I have clearly preached,
You will soon find yourself in a wicked bind.

Cleante. Now this is the normal jargon of your kind.
They want everyone to be as blind as they are.
To be clear-sighted, is to be in error,
And one who rejects their vain hypocrisy
Has no respect for faith or sanctity.
Go on, all your tart sermons scarcely smart;
I know what I'm saying, and God sees my heart.
I'm not a slave to your silly ceremony.
There is false piety like false bravery;
Just as one often sees, when honor calls us,
That the bravest men never make the most fuss,
So, too, the good Christians, whom one should follow,
Are not those who find life so hard to swallow.
What now? Will you not make any distinction
Between hypocrisy and true devotion?

Would you wish to use the same commonplace
To describe both a mere mask and a true face?
To equate artifice with sincerity
Is to confound appearance and reality.
To admire a shadow as much as you do
Is to prefer counterfeit money to true.
The majority of men are strangely made!
And their true natures are rarely displayed.
For them the bounds of reason are too small;
In their shabby souls they love to lounge and sprawl.
And very often they spoil a noble deed
By their urge for excess and reckless speed.
But all this, brother, is idle chatter.

Orgon. Without doubt you are a renowned teacher;
With all the world's knowledge in your coffer.
You're the only oracle, the wisest sage,
The enlightened one, the Cato of our age;
And next to you, all other men are dumb.

Cleante. Brother, I know I'm not the wisest one
Nor the most learned man in Christendom
But in moral matters my greatest coup
Is to differentiate false from true.
And since I know of no heroes about
More to be praised than the truly devout
And nothing at all with greater appeal
Than the holy fervor of saintly zeal,
So too nothing could be more odious
Than the white-washed face of a zeal that's specious,
Or these frank charlatans, seeking places,
Whose false and sacrilegious double faces
Exploit our love of God and make a game
Of our reverence for Christ's holy name.
These people who, with a shop-keeper's soul,
Make cheap trinkets to trade on the Credo,
And hope to purchase credit and favor
Bought with sly winks and affected fervor;
These people, I say, whose uncommon hurry
On the path to Heaven leads through their treasury,
Who, writhing and praying, demand a profit each day
And call for a Retreat while pocketing their pay,
Who know how to tally their zeal with their vices,--
Faithless, vindictive, full of artifices--
To ruin someone they'll conceal their resentment
With a capacious cloak of Godly contentment.
They are doubly dangerous in their vicious ire
Because they destroy us with what we admire,
And their piety, which gains them an accolade,
Is a tool to slay us with a sacred blade.
There are many men in this false disguise,
But those with pure hearts are easy to recognize.
Our age, my friend, has brought into plain sight
Many glorious examples of what is right.
Look at Ariston, or Periandre,
Oronte, Alcidamus, or Clitandre;

Their title is one that all agree to.
They decline any fanfare for their virtue;
They don't indulge in vain ostentation;
Their humane faith finds form in moderation;
They never censure all of our actions,
For they sense the vain pride in such transactions.
And, leaving boastful rhetoric to others,
By their own actions they reprove their brothers.
The appearance of evil is no concern of theirs;
They cast the best light on others' affairs.
They plot no intrigues; seek no one to fleece;
Their only concern is to live at peace.
They don't seek to cause any sinner chagrin;
Their abhorrence is directed only at sin.
And they don't take the side of God more extremely
Than God himself--who could act supremely!
These are my models, and these are their ways;
Such examples are the ones that most merit praise.
But your man, in truth, is not made from such steel.
In good faith, perhaps, you praise his great zeal,
But I think you're dazed by his meaningless
Glitter.

Orgon. Dear brother-in-law, are you finished?

Cleante. Yes.

Orgon. Your humble servant. [*He begins to leave.*]

Cleante. Pardon me. One word, brother.
Let's drop this discussion. You know that Valere
Has your word that he'll be Mariane's spouse.

Orgon. Yes.

Cleante. And you've announced this fact in your house.

Orgon. That is true.

Cleante. Then why postpone the event?

Orgon. I don't know.

Cleante. Do you intend to recant?

Orgon. Perhaps.

Cleante. How could you go back on your word?

Orgon. I didn't say I would.

Cleante. I hope no absurd
Hitch could make you retract your own promise.

Orgon. We'll see.

Cleante. Why do you speak with such finesse?
Valere sent me to ask you this verbatim.

Orgon. Praise God!

Cleante. But what shall I report to him?

Orgon. What you please.

Cleante. But it is essential
To know your plans. What are they?

Orgon. To do all
That God wishes.

Cleante. Stick to the point. I know
Your promise. Will you keep it? Yes, or no?

Orgon. Farewell.

Cleante. I fear his promise will be withdrawn,
So I'd better report what's going on.

ACT II

SCENE I
Orgon, Mariane

Orgon. Mariane.

Mariane. Yes.

Orgon. Come here. We need to speak
Privately.

Mariane. Father, what is it you seek?

Orgon [*looking in the closet*]. I'm seeing if anyone can overhear us.
This is a perfect place for such a purpose.
There now, it's okay. Mariane, I find
You endowed with a heart that's sweet and kind
And you have always been most dear to me.

Mariane. A father's love brings true felicity.

Orgon. Well said, my child! And to earn it fully
You should devote yourself to contenting me.

Mariane. That's how my devotion is put to the proof.

Orgon. Good. Now what do you think of our guest, Tartuffe?

Mariane. Who me?

Orgon. You. Think well before you reply.

Mariane. Oh my! Tell me what to say . . . and I'll comply.

[*Dorine enters quietly and hides herself behind Orgon without being seen.*]

Orgon. That's sensibly spoken. Now tell me, girl,
That his merit shines like a gleaming pearl,
That he warms your heart, and that you would rejoice
To have him be your husband by my choice.
Eh?

[*Mariane recoils in dismay.*]

Mariane. Eh?

Orgon. What's that?

Mariane. Please?

Orgon. What?

Mariane. Am I in error?

Orgon. Why?

Mariane. Whom do you wish that I should now swear

Touches my heart--and who would rejoice me
If we joined, by your choice, in matrimony?

Orgon. Tartuffe.

Mariane. Out of the question, father, I assure
You! Why urge on me such an imposture?

Orgon. But, my dear, I wish it to be true,
And it should be enough that I've chosen for you.

Mariane. What? Father, would you . . .?

Orgon. Yes, I intend, you see
To unite in marriage Tartuffe and my family.
He will be your husband. I do declare it!
Since you have promised . . .

SCENE II
Dorine, Orgon, Mariane

Orgon [*perceiving Dorine*]. What do you stare at?
You must be eaten up with curiosity
To eavesdrop on my daughter and me.

Dorine. I don't know whether the rumor I hear
Is sly conjecture or a wicked smear;
But I've just heard word of this marriage,
And I trust it is only verbiage.

Orgon. Why? Is the idea itself so very absurd?
Dorine. I wouldn't believe it, sir, if you gave your word!

Orgon. I will make you believe it by-and-by.

Dorine. Yes. You're going to tell us a bald-faced lie.

Orgon. I am only saying what you will soon see.

Dorine. Nonsense!

Orgon. What I say, dear girl, will soon be.

Dorine. Go on. Don't believe him! It's too bizarre!
He's joking.

Orgon. I say . . .

Dorine. No, you've gone too far,
And no one believes you.

Orgon. Damn you, you shrew . . .

Dorine. Well, I believe you then; the worse for you.
What? Monsieur, can you pose as one who's sage,
Gravely stroking your bearded visage?
And still be fool enough to wish . . .

Orgon. Hear me!
I have given you too much liberty,
And it no longer gives me any pleasure.

Dorine. Monsieur, please. Keep your anger within measure.
Are you mocking us with your silly plot?
Your daughter is no match for a bigot;
He has other schemes to worry about.
And what would you gain if she wed this lout?
With your wealth, what benefit would it bring
To pick a bum . . .

Orgon. Ssh! Say he has nothing;
For that reason, you should revere him the more.
He is a holy man and nobly poor.
It raises him up to greater grandeur
That he has renounced all wealth by his pure
Detachment from the merely temporal
And his powerful love for the Eternal.
But my assistance may give him the means
To restore his lands and remove his liens.
He is a man of repute in the land of his birth,
And, even as he is, he's a man of worth.

Dorine. Yes, so he tells us, but his vanity
Does not sit so well with true piety.
A man pleased with a simple sanctity
Needn't vaunt his name and his dignity,
And the humility born of devotion
Suffers beneath such blatant ambition.
What good is his pride? . . . But perhaps I digress:
Let's speak of the man--not his nobleness.
Can you bestow, without feeling like a rat,
A girl like this on a man like that?
And shouldn't you think of propriety
And foresee the end with anxiety?
We know that some girls cannot remain chaste
If their husband's tush is not to their taste,
And that the best-laid plans for an honest life
Are somewhat easier for the best-laid wife,

And that many a man with a horned head
Has driven his wife to another man's bed.
It is entirely too much to ask
That a wife be faithful to a flabby ass.
And one who gives a girl to a man she hates
Is guilty before God for all her mistakes.
Consider the perils you expose yourself to.

Orgon. So you think I should learn how to live from you!

Dorine. You could do worse than follow my lead.

Orgon. Dear daughter, do drop this maid's daffy creed;
I know what's best for you in this affair.
It's true I betrothed you to young Valere,
But I hear he likes his dicing and drinking
And even worse is inclined to free-thinking.
I note with regret we don't see him at mass.

Dorine. Must he be there the same moment you pass
Like those who attend only to be seen?

Orgon. Your advice isn't wanted. Don't intervene.
Tartuffe is on the path to salvation,
And that is a treasure past calculation.
This wedding will bring blessings beyond measure,
And be crowned with great sweetness and pleasure.
Together you will live, thriving on love
Like new-born babes, or a pair of turtledoves.
You will never be found in angry debate
For you will find all that you wish in this mate.

Dorine. She'll only make him a cuckold, I'm sure.

Orgon. What?

Dorine. He looks just like a caricature,
And his fate, monsieur, will make him an ass
No matter how much virtue your daughter has.

Orgon. Don't interrupt me and remember your place
And quit sticking your nose up in my face!

Dorine. I'm only trying, sir, to protect you.

[*Hereafter she always interrupts him at the moment he begins speaking to his daughter.*]

Orgon. You're too kind, but do shut up--please do!

Dorine. If I didn't like you . . .

Orgon. I don't need liking.

Dorine. But I will like you, sir, despite your griping.

Orgon. Oh?

Dorine. Your honor is dear and I'd be provoked
To find you the butt of some smutty joke.
Orgon. Can't you keep quiet?

Dorine. In all good conscience,
It's a shame to foster such an alliance.

Orgon. Shut up, you viper, with your brazen traits . . .

Dorine. What? You've been reborn, yet you give way to hate?

Orgon. Yes, your twaddle has made me quite high-strung,
And I now insist that you hold your tongue.

Dorine. All right. But I'll think in silence nonetheless.

Orgon. Think if you wish to, but strive for success
At shutting your mouth . . . or beware. [*Turning to his daughter*] Let's see,
I have weighed everything quite maturely.

Dorine [*aside*]. I hate this silence. [*She falls quiet every time Orgon turns toward her.*]

Orgon. Without being smug, I'll
Say Tartuffe's face . . .

Dorine. Yes, he has a fine muzzle!

Orgon. Is so fine that even if you forgot
His other traits . . .

Dorine [*aside*]. And they're a sorry lot!

[*Orgon turns toward Dorine and, with his arms folded, listens while staring in her face.*]

If I were in her place, most assuredly
No man would wed me with impunity,

And I'd prove to him right after the wedding
That a wife's vengeance lies in the bedding!

Orgon [*to Dorine*]. So you refuse to obey me, is that true?

Dorine. What's your beef, sir? I'm not speaking to you.

Orgon. Then what are you doing?

Dorine. Soliloquizing.

Orgon. Very well. [*aside*] To give her a good chastising,
I think she needs a taste of the back of my hand.

[*He prepares to slap her, but each time Dorine sees him looking at her, she stands silent and erect.*]

Child, you should approve of all I have planned . . .
And have faith in the spouse . . . who's my designee.
[*To Dorine*.] Speak to yourself!

Dorine. I've nothing to say to me.

Orgon. Just one little word.

Dorine. I'm not in the mood.

Orgon. Because I was ready!

Dorine. What ineptitude!

Orgon. Now, daughter, let's see some obedience.
Accept my choice with complete deference.

Dorine [*running away*]. I'd thumb my nose at such a silly spouse.

[*Orgon tries to slap Dorine and misses.*]

Orgon. Daughter, your maid is a pest and would arouse
Vice in a saint--she's an absolute shrew!
I'm so upset that I can't continue.
Her taunts have nearly driven me to swear,
And I need to calm down in the open air.

SCENE III
Dorine, Mariane

Dorine. Have you entirely lost your voice and heart?

Why must I continue playing your part?
To think you allow such a mad proposal
Without voicing even a meek refusal!

Mariane. How can I resist such a harsh patriarch?

Dorine. By any means! Don't be an easy mark!

Mariane. But how?

Dorine. Tell him you can't love on command,
That you marry for yourself, not by demand,
And since you are most concerned in these affairs
You'll choose for yourself the sire of his heirs,
And that, if Tartuffe is so charming to him,
He can wed him himself--if that's his whim.

Mariane. A father, I'm sure, has absolute power;
Before him I can only cringe and cower.

Dorine. Use your head. Valere wants to tie the knot.
Do you really love him, I ask--or not?

Mariane. Your injustice to me has a mortal sting!
Dorine, how can you ask me such a thing?
Haven't I poured out my whole soul to you,
And don't you know yet that my love is true?

Dorine. How do I know that your heart echoes your voice
And that this love is truly your own choice?

Mariane. Your doubts, Dorine, wrong me greatly;
My real feelings are shown far too plainly.

Dorine. You love him then?

Mariane. Yes, with the strongest passion.

Dorine. And he seems to love you in the same fashion?

Mariane. I think so.

Dorine. And both of you burn equally
For this union in marriage?

Mariane. Certainly.

Dorine. And about this other man, what's your intention?

Mariane. I'd die before I'd submit to coercion.

Dorine. Fine! I hadn't thought of that recourse.
Death would give you such a forcible divorce.
What an ingenious remedy! Geez!
I hate to hear such stupid ideas.

Mariane. Good Heavens! What a rotten mood you're in!
You have no pity for my pain, Dorine!

Dorine. I have no sympathy for foolishness
And those who meet a crisis with such weakness.

Mariane. But what do you want me to do? I was born frail.

Dorine. A woman in love needs a heart of steel.

Mariane. But haven't I kept it free for my lover
Whose task it is to win me from my father?

Dorine. What! If your father is a mad fanatic
Whose love for Tartuffe is completely lunatic
And who has blocked the match you are now bewailing,
Is your lover to be damned for failing?

Mariane. But am I to display how deeply I'm bitten
By rejecting Tartuffe like one who's love-smitten?
Am I, because of Valere's strength and beauty,
To renounce my modesty and duty?
And would you have me show my heart to all . . . ?

Dorine. No, no, not at all. I'm wrong to forestall
Your marriage to Tartuffe, and my defiance
Is apparent in barring that alliance.
What reason have I for my outrageous
Attempt to stop something so advantageous?
Tartuffe! Oh! Isn't he something to behold?
Surely Tartuffe is not made from such a mold,
If rightly viewed, as to make a person laugh;
'Twould be an honor to be his better half.
The whole world already crowns him with glory;--
Both in physique and character he's laudatory;
He has red ears and a florid, flushing face
With him for a mate you'd live in joyful grace.

Mariane. Dear God!

Dorine. What delight you will feel within
To know that you're wed to a man like him.

Mariane. Oh! Please stop talking, and show me the way
To avoid this marriage. I will obey,
You've said enough, and I'm ready to be led.

Dorine. No. A good daughter must obey her dad--
Even if he wishes her to make love
To an ape. What are you complaining of?
You will proceed to his little villa
Where you will get your absolute fill of
Uncles and cousins to be entertained.
Right away you'll move among the most urbane
Of hicks. First you will make some overture
To the wives of the judge and the tax assessor,
Who will kindly seat you on a folding chair.
During Carnival, you may hope to have there
A ball with two bagpipes for an orchestra
And maybe some puppets and a tame gorilla.
But if your husband . . .

Mariane. Oh! You're killing me.
Please help me avoid this catastrophe.

Dorine. I am your servant.

Mariane. Oh! Dorine, mercy . . .

Dorine. To punish you, I ought to leave things be.

Mariane. My dear girl!

Dorine. No.

Mariane. If I declared my love . . .

Dorine. No. Tartuffe is your man; that's sure enough.

Mariane. You know that I've always trusted that you'd
Help me . . .

Dorine. No. I'm sure you will be tartuffed.

Mariane. All right! Since my fate no longer moves you,
Henceforth you may leave me alone and blue;
From deep sorrow my heart will draw relief,
And I know an absolute cure for my grief.

[*She starts to leave*.]

Dorine. Whoa! I'm not really angry. Come back,--do.
In spite of everything, I pity you.

Mariane. If I'm to be the one you crucify,
You'll see, Dorine, how quickly I shall die.

Dorine. Don't torture yourself. We can easily
Block them. . . . But look! I think that's Valere I see.

SCENE IV
Valere, Mariane, Dorine

Valere. Gossip is singing a little ditty,
My dear,--news to me and very pretty.

Mariane. What?

Valere. That you will marry Tartuffe.

Mariane. It's true
That my father has such a plan in view.

Valere. Your father . . .

Mariane. Has altered his inclination.
Through him, all this has come to my attention.

Valere. What? Seriously?

Mariane. Yes, seriously.
He wants this wedding--quite decidedly!

Valere. And how does your heart respond to this plan,
Madam?

Mariane. I don't know.

Valere. Your response is plain.
You don't know?

Mariane. No.

Valere. No?

Mariane. What do you recommend?

Valere. I recommend that you accept this husband.

Mariane. You recommend that?

Valere. Yes.

Mariane. Really?

Valere. I do.
A wonderful choice, well worth attending to.

Mariane. Very well! That's advice, sir, that I accept.

Valere. I doubt that taking it causes you regret.

Mariane. No more regret than giving it causes you.

Valere. I gave it thinking pleasure would ensue.

Mariane. And I, I'll take it--simply to please you.

Dorine [*moving upstage*]. Let's see what comes of this hullabaloo.

Valere. So that's your love for me? And did you lie
When you . . .

Mariane. Please, let's not speak of days gone by.
You've told me quite plainly that I must embrace
As my mate the man they've chosen for that place,
And now I say that I promise to obey
Since you so kindly advise me that way.

Valere. Don't excuse yourself through circumlocution:
You've already made your own resolution,
And you've seized upon a frivolous excuse
To justify this lamentable ruse.

Mariane. Quite true and well said.

Valere. No doubt, and your soul
Never lost, for love of me, its self-control.

Mariane. Alas! Alas! You may as well think so.

Valere. Yes, I may think so, but my broken heart
Foresees you, too, suffering from Love's dart;
I know to whom I'll take my heart and hand.

Mariane. No doubt, and the love that merit can command . . .

Valere. Dear God, let's leave merit to one side.
I haven't much of it, as you have signified,
But I know where there's a woman, soft-eyed
And open-hearted . . . and this double-cross
May make her more inclined to recompense my loss.

Mariane. The loss isn't great; and your fickleness
Will soon lead you to find a new mistress.

Valere. I'll do my best--of that you may be sure!
When one is forgotten, it's hard to endure,
And so I, too, must struggle to forget.
If I can't do it, I'll fake it . . . and yet
I could never forgive my own servility
If I kept loving one who abandoned me.

Mariane. What a noble, uplifting sentiment!

Valere. Quite so. Everyone should give it their assent.
What? Do you think that I should perpetuate
The flame of love that I have felt of late,
And see you pass into another's arms
Without letting my heart seek other charms?

Mariane. No, indeed. It's what I want, and I vow
I wish the thing were to happen right now.

Valere. You do?

Mariane. Yes.

Valere. That's enough insults from you,

Madam, and now I will bid you adieu.

[*He starts to leave; each time he does so, he quickly comes back.*]

Mariane. Very well.

Valere [*coming back*]. At least remember that you
Are the one who forced me down this avenue.

Mariane. Yes.

Valere. And that I am doing nothing more
Than following the path you took before.

Mariane. So be it.

Valere [*leaving*]. Fine. I'm doing what you want.

Mariane. Good.

Valere [*returning again*]. I'm leaving forever--not some short jaunt.

Mariane. The sooner the better.

[*He begins to leave and, when he is near the door, he returns.*]

Valere. Eh?

Mariane. What?

Valere. You called?

Mariane. Me? No.

Valere. Ah. Well then, I'll soon be abroad.
Adieu, madam. [*He slowly starts to leave.*]

Mariane. Adieu.

Dorine [*to Mariane*]. I think, perchance,
You've lost your mind through extravagance,
And I've only allowed you to go on
Like this to see what folly you might spawn.
Hey! Valere!

[*She grabs him by the arm and he makes a show of resistance.*]

Valere. Huh? What do you want, Dorine?

Dorine. Come here.

Valere. No. I'm too mad. Don't intervene.
She wishes me to drain this bitter cup.

Dorine. Stop.

Valere. No, can't you see that my mind's made up?

Dorine. Ah!

Mariane [*aside*]. My presence pains him, I drive him away.
I think it would be best if I didn't stay.

Dorine [*She leaves Valere and runs after Mariane*]. Now where are you going?

Mariane. Let go.

Dorine. Then return.

Mariane. No, no, Dorine. It's none of your concern.

Valere [*aside*]. I see that my presence causes her pain;
It would be best if I freed her again.

Dorine [*She leaves Mariane and runs to Valere*].
Wait! May you both be damned if I want this mess!
Come here you two and settle this fracas.

[*She pulls them both together.*]

Valere [*to Dorine*]. But what's your plan?

Mariane [*to Dorine*]. What do you wish to do?

Dorine. To patch things up a bit between you two.
[*To Valere*]. Are you out of your mind to fight in this way?

Valere. Did you hear her treat me like a popinjay?

Dorine [*to Mariane*]. Are you mad to have gotten so enraged?

Mariane. Did you see what happened? It can't be assuaged.

Dorine. You're both dunces. [*To Valere*] She wants nothing more
Than to be the one woman you adore.
[*To Mariane*] He loves you alone, and to make you his wife
Is his only desire--I swear on my life!

Mariane [*to Valere*]. How, then, could you give me such bad advice?

Valere. And how could you demand it? Was that wise?

Dorine. You're both insane. Now give your hands to me.
[*To Valere*] Come on.

Valere [*giving his hand to Dorine*]. What for?

Dorine. There. [*To Mariane*] Now yours, don't you see.

Mariane [*giving her hand as well*]. What's the point of all this?

Dorine. Lord! Quick! Come on!
Your love for each other can't be withdrawn.

[*Valere and Mariane hold hands for awhile without looking at each other.*]

Valere [*turning toward Mariane*]. Don't react so painfully by the book.
Try giving a fellow a civil look.

[*Mariane turns her gaze on Valere and gives him a shy smile.*]

Dorine. All lovers are crazy! It's sad, but true.

Valere [*to Mariane*]. Am I not right to complain about you?
And to tell the truth, weren't you rather unkind
To delight in trying to unsettle my mind?

Mariane. What about you? Aren't you the bigger ingrate . . . ?

Dorine. Let's wait until later for this debate
And try instead to stop this marriage.

Mariane. Tell us, then, what we can use for leverage.

Dorine. We will wage warfare on every front.
Your father is bluffing and playing a stunt.

[*To Mariane*] But it might be better for you to seem
To sweetly consent to his crazy scheme
So that, whatever the future may bring,
You can postpone and postpone this wedding.
By gaining time, we gain our remedy.
Sometimes you will feign a strange malady
Whose sudden onset will bring some delay;
Sometimes an ill-omen will cause you dismay:
You saw a corpse and never felt queerer,
Dreamt of muddy water, or broke a mirror.
The point above all is that no one, I guess,
Can force you to marry unless you say, "Yes."
But our ship would sail in fairer weather
If you were never seen talking together.
[*To Valere*] Go, and without delay employ each friend
To keep him on course toward what we intend.
[*To Mariane*] We are going to seek help from his brother
And we'll also recruit your step-mother.
Farewell.

Valere [*to Mariane*]. Whatever we attempt to do,
In truth, my greatest hope resides in you.

Mariane [*to Valere*]. Although I cannot answer for my father,
I vow I'll never belong to another.

Valere. How happy you have made me! If they ever . . .

Dorine. Fie! You young lovers prattle forever!
Be off, I say.

Valere [*going a step and then returning*].
Finally . . .

Dorine. What blather!
You go off that way, and you go the other.

ACT III

SCENE I
Damis, Dorine

Damis. May a bolt of lightning now strike me dumb,
May everybody treat me like a bum
If either respect or force can hinder me
From blowing my top at this calamity!

Dorine. For heaven's sake, control your displeasure.
Your father has merely mentioned this measure.
No one does everything he proposes.
How something opens may not be how it closes.

Damis. I need to stop this vulgar coxcomb's plot
And in two little words tell him what's what.

Dorine. Whoa now! Why don't you let your stepmother
Manage him just as she does your father.
Over Tartuffe she has her own little ways
Of making him welcome all that she says,
And perhaps she makes his heart go pitter-patter.
Pray God it's true! That would be a fine matter.
In fact she has summoned him for your sake
In order to learn exactly what's at stake,
To find out his feelings, and to let him know
What really rotten results would flow
From any pretensions he might have to marry.
His valet says he's praying, and I should tarry--
That he'll descend after he meditates.
Be off then, I beg you, and let me wait.

Damis. I demand to be here the whole time they meet.

Dorine. No. They must be alone.

Damis. I won't even speak.

Dorine. You're kidding yourself. You're so quick to anger,
And that would surely put us all in danger.
Go.

Damis. No. I'm going to watch--without getting cross.

Dorine. How tiresome you are! Here they come. Get lost!

[*Damis hides himself in a closet.*]

SCENE II
Tartuffe, Laurent, Dorine

Tartuffe [*observing Dorine*]. Laurent, lock up my hair shirt and my scourge,
And pray for freedom from each carnal urge.
If anyone comes calling, say I have gone
To share my alms with the poor souls in prison.

Dorine [*aside*]. Such affectation and boastful behavior!
Tartuffe. What do you wish?

Dorine. To say . . .

Tartuffe [*taking a handkerchief from his pocket*]. Wait! By our Savior,

Please! Before you speak take this handkerchief.

Dorine. Why?

Tartuffe. Because seeing your bosom causes me grief.
Through one's eyes one's soul may be wounded,
And then sinful thoughts may grow unattended.

Dorine. Then you are quite ready for temptation,
And bare skin makes on you a big impression.
I truly don't know why you feel such passion;
I myself think lust is out of fashion,
For I could see you nude from top to toe
Without your pelt setting my cheeks aglow.

Tartuffe. Put a little modesty in your discourse
Or I must leave you instantly perforce.

Dorine. No, it is I who will leave you here in peace,
And I will just say this before I cease:
Madam is coming down to visit you
And demands the favor of a rendezvous.

Tartuffe. Oh yes! Most willingly!

Dorine [*to herself*]. Isn't he sweet!
I'm even surer now that dog's in heat.

Tartuffe. Will she soon come?

Dorine. I think I can hear her.
Yes, there. Now I will leave you two together.

SCENE III
Elmire, Tartuffe

Tartuffe. May Heaven forever in its great bounty
Grant you good health both in soul and body,
And bless your days as much as he desires
Who is the humblest of those your love inspires!

Elmire. I'm much obliged for your pious wishes, but please,
Let us be seated and put ourselves at ease.

Tartuffe [*sitting down*]. Have you quite recovered from your illness?

Elmire [*sitting as well*]. Yes, my headache quickly lost its sharpness.

Tartuffe. My prayers haven't enough value to buy
Such grace from the Heavenly One on High,
But most of my recent prayers have in essence
Been mainly focused on your convalescence.

Elmire. Your concern for me is somewhat disquieting.

Tartuffe. I dearly cherish your precious well-being,
And to restore it I would have given my own.

Elmire. Such Christian charity is overblown,
But I am much obliged for all your care.

Tartuffe. I try to do as much for you as I dare.

Elmire. I wish to speak of some private business
And am pleased there's no one to overhear us.

Tartuffe. I, too, am delighted, and *entre nous*
It's very sweet being one-on-one with you.
For this also have I begged the Deity,
But only now has he granted it to me.

Elmire. I myself want an encounter between us two
Where your whole heart is opened through and through.

[*Without exposing himself and in order to better hear the conversation, Damis opens the door of the closet in which he is hiding.*]

Tartuffe. In exchange for this unique blessing, I
Desire only to reveal to you my
Whole soul, and to swear that all my preaching
About your guests--though perhaps over-reaching--
Was not caused by any anger or hate
But rather by a zeal that's passionate
And pure . . .

Elmire. I wholly understand and declare
My belief that you seek only my welfare.

Tartuffe [*pressing the tips of her fingers*]. Yes, madam, it's true; my devotion is such . . .

Elmire. You're hurting me.

Tartuffe. Passion pushes me too much.
I never wanted to hurt you, I swear,
And I would rather . . .

[*He puts his hand on her knee.*]

Elmire. Why is your hand there?

Tartuffe. I'm feeling your dress. Such fine dimity!

Elmire. Oh! Please let me go. You're tickling me.

[*She pushes her chair back, and Tartuffe moves his forward.*]

Tartuffe [*putting his hand on her lacy collar*].
Dear Lord! But this workmanship is marvelous!
Lacework nowadays is miraculous.
I've never seen anything quite so fine.

Elmire. That's true. But let's speak of this concern of mine.
I hear that my husband may be breaking his word
And giving you his daughter. What have you heard?

Tartuffe. In truth, madam, some such words did transpire,
But that is not the joy to which I aspire,
And I see elsewhere those splendid attractions
Which I seek to attain through all of my actions.

Elmire. Then all your earthly love has been overthrown?

Tartuffe. My breast does not hold a heart made of stone.

Elmire. I'm sure that all your thoughts are on salvation,
And nothing less holds any fascination.

Tartuffe. The love that attracts us to what's eternal
Does not stop our love for the merely temporal.
Our senses can be quite easily charmed
By the perfect Earthly works that God has formed.
His glory is mirrored in those like you,
But in you yourself we see its rarest hue.
He has molded your face with such sublime art
That it surprises the eye and transports the heart,
And I can't gaze upon you, you perfect creature,
Without worshipping in you both God and nature,
And sensing in my soul an ardent love
For this, the most beautiful portrait by God above.
At first I feared that my secret passion
Might be a tricky trap laid by Satan,
And I even resolved to flee from your eyes
As if you were something to exorcise.
But I finally learned, oh beauty most lovable,
That my ardor for you could never be culpable,
That I should even consider it right,
And so I submit to my heart's delight.
I confess that I'm playing an audacious part

In presenting to you the gift of my heart,
But I place all my faith in your kindness
Like a beggar-man hindered by blindness.
In you I seek peace, hope, and happiness;
On you depends my torment or my bliss.
And through you alone I will finally be
Happy if you will, or sad if you please.

Elmire. That declaration is very urbane,
But in a man of God it's a bit profane.
You ought to protect your heart a bit better
And reflect more deeply on such a matter.
A saint like you whom we all hail . . .

Tartuffe. I may be holy, but I'm nonetheless male,
And when one sees your heavenly charms,
It's time for reason to throw up its arms.
I know such words from me may seem strange--though,
Madam, after all, I am not an angel,
And if you condemn the confession I'm making,
Admit nonetheless that your beauty's breath-taking.
From the first time I set eyes on your supreme
Splendor, my heart became yours and you my queen.
The ineffable sweetness of your divine gaze
Shattered my stout heart and set it ablaze.
That look conquered all--fasting, prayers, duty--
And turned my vows into praise of your beauty.
My eyes and my sighs have often shown my choice
But to make it still clearer I now add my voice.
If you should look down with a kindly eye
Upon the base woes of a slave such as I
And if your great kindness should happen to lead
You to stoop down and grant what I need,
I should always have for you, oh precious one,
A love that beggars all comparison.
With me your honor will never be damaged;
No disgrace can attend an affair I have managed.
All these gallants at court, for whom wives act absurd,
Are reckless in their deeds and rash in their words.
They endlessly brag about every success.
Each favor they receive, they quickly confess,
And their wagging tongues, on which you rely,
Dishonor the shrine before which they lie.
But men like me burn with a discreet fever,
And we keep your sweet secrets safe forever.
The concern we have for our good reputation
Will also preserve you in your own station;
In us you will find, if you wish it, my dear,
Love without scandal, pleasure without fear.

Elmire. I have heard your words, and your rhetoric
Leaves your point clear--though you lay it on thick.
Aren't you afraid that I could be in the mood
To tell my husband of your solicitude,
And that a sudden knowledge of that sort

Might set back your hopes of his lasting support?

Tartuffe. I know that you are only too gracious
And that you will forgive my audacious
Deeds since they spring from a human failing
In that passionate love that you are bewailing,
And that you will reflect when you view things afresh
That I am not blind, and a man's only flesh.

Elmire. Others might take things differently, I suppose,
But discretion prevails, and I won't expose
This matter to my spouse. In return, it's true,
I do want one little favor from you:
To push forward without any sly snare
The wedding of Mariane and Valere,
To renounce on your own the unjust power
That would enrich you with another's dower,
And . . .

SCENE IV
Elmire, Damis, Tartuffe

Damis [*coming out of the closet in which he was hiding*].
No, madam, no. All this must be exposed.
By hiding here I've heard all he proposed,
And God in His goodness has guided me
To confound this noisome bastard's treachery,
To discover a way to take my vengeance
For his hypocrisy and insolence,
To wake up my father, and to justly screw
This scumbag who wants to make love to you.

Elmire. No, Damis. It's enough if he has striven
To reform and merit the pardon I've given.
Don't make me retract what I have avowed.
I don't choose to discuss scandal out loud:
A woman laughs at these masculine foibles,
And never plagues her mate with paltry troubles.

Damis. You have your own reasons for acting so,
And I have reasons for my *quid-pro-quo*.
The very thought of sparing him is a joke,
And the insolent pride of this base bloke
Has triumphed too often over my just wrath,
And has sown too much trouble along my path.
For too long that liar has ruled my old man
Blocking both my love and that of Mariane.
His perfidy must be brought to light of day,
And for that God gives us a ready way.
For this occasion I thank the good Lord;
It is far too lucky to be ignored.
The only way to deserve to lose it
Is to have it in hand and not to use it.

Elmire. But Damis . . .

Damis. No, please, my mind is made up.
It is time to rejoice and fill up the cup,
And you're trying in vain to obligate me
To give up the pleasure of my victory.
I'm going to expose this affair without delay;
This is just the thing that will make my day.

SCENE V
Orgon, Damis, Tartuffe, Elmire

Damis. Father, it may surprise . . . and amuse you greatly . . .
To hear the news of what's gone on lately.
You're being well paid for all your caresses
By your friend's response to those tendernesses.
His great love for you has shown its hold
Through his eagerness to make you a cuckold.
And I heard him here confess to your bride
A love that has made him heart-sick and dove-eyed.
At all costs she wants to remain discreet
And preserve his secret--because she's sweet--
But I cannot bear the man's impudence.
Besides, my silence would cause you offense.

Elmire. Yes, I would never disturb my husband's rest
By reporting the words of silly pest.
My honor does not depend on such a thing
Since I'm well able to resist flattering.
You wouldn't have spoken out against my view
If I had any power over you.

SCENE VI
Orgon, Damis, Tartuffe

Orgon. What do I hear? Good God! Is it credible?

Tartuffe. Yes, brother, I'm wicked and culpable,
A sorry sinner, full of iniquity,
As great a wretch as there ever could be.
My entire life has been soiled with evil;
It's nothing but a mass of sinful upheaval.
And I see that God has, for my punishment,
Chosen to mortify me with this event.
Let them connect any crime with my name;
I waive all defense and take all the blame.
Believe what they tell you, stoke up your wrath,
And drive me like a felon from your path.
The shame that I bear cannot be too great,
For I know I deserve a much worse fate.

Orgon [*to his son*]. Traitor! Do you dare, by your duplicity,
To taint both his virtue and purity?

Damis. What? Can the false meekness of this hypocrite
Cause you to belie . . .

Orgon. Shut up, you misfit.

Tartuffe. Oh, let him go on. You are wrong to scold,
And you'd be wise to believe the story he's told.
In light of his claims, why should you favor me?
What do you know of my culpability?
Why put your faith in my exterior?
Why should you think that I'm superior?
No, no, appearances are fooling you,
I am the kind of man you should eschew.
The whole world thinks that I have earned God's blessing,
But the plain truth is . . . that I'm worth nothing.

[*Addressing Damis*]

Yes, my dear son, speak. And don't merely chide.
Accuse me of treason, theft, and homicide.
Call me every foul name you can recall.
I deny nothing. I merit it all.
And I beg on my knees to bear this chagrin
As the shameful result of my life of sin.

Orgon [*To Tartuffe*]. That's too much, brother. [*To his son*] Why can't you let go,
Scoundrel?

Damis. What! Have his words seduced you so . . .

Orgon. Keep quiet, you bum! [*To Tartuffe*]. Brother, please arise.
[*To his son*]. Shame!

Damis. He can . . .

Orgon. Silence!

Damis. Damn! Do you surmise . . .

Orgon. If you say one word, I will break your arm.

Tartuffe. In the name of God, brother, do no harm.
I would rather face a ravening beast
Than that your dear son should be harmed in the least.

Orgon [*to his son*]. Ingrate!

Tartuffe. Leave him in peace. On my two knees
I beg you to give him your grace . . .

Orgon [*throwing himself to his knees and embracing Tartuffe*]. Don't! Please!
[*To his son*] Wretch, see his goodness.

Damis. Then . . .

Orgon. Shhh!

Damis. I . . .

Orgon. Cease, I say.
I'm aware of your motive in this foray:
You all hate him, and now I see how my wife,
Children, and maid conspire against his life.
You impudently try every trick you can
To alienate me from this holy man,
But the harder you try to drive him away,
The harder I'll try to get him to stay.
And I'll hasten his marriage to Mariane
To demolish the pride of this whole clan.

Damis. So you will force her to marry this fellow?

Orgon. Yes, this very night, to see you bellow.
I defy you all, and stand here to say
I am the master and you must obey.
Come now. Retract your words, oh foul pollution!
Throw yourself down and demand absolution.

Damis. Who, me? Of that villain, by whose pretense . . .

Orgon. So you refuse, you scum, and your impertinence
Persists? [*To Tartuffe*] A stick! A staff! Don't hold me back.
[*To his son*] Get out of my house and don't even pack,
And never again let me see your face.

Damis. Yes, I will go, but . . .

Orgon. Quickly! Leave this place.
I am cutting you off and what is worse
I am leaving you with my heart-felt curse.

SCENE VII
Orgon, Tartuffe

Orgon. To offend in that way a saintly man!

Tartuffe. Heavenly Lord pardon him if you can.
[*To Orgon.*] If you only knew with what pain
I see them trying to blacken my name. . . .

Orgon. Alas!

Tartuffe. The mere thought of this ingratitude
Makes me suffer from a torture so crude . . .
The horror I feel . . . My soul longs to cry . . .
I can't even speak, and I'm sure I will die.

Orgon [*He runs weeping to the door through which he had chased his son.*]
Villain! How I regret that I held my hand
And that I did not crush you where you stand.
[*To Tartuffe.*] Calm yourself, brother and try not to fret.

Tartuffe. Let's stop these squabbles that end in regret.
The great friction I have caused makes me grieve,
And I believe, brother, that I should leave.

Orgon. What? Surely you jest?

Tartuffe. They hate me and I see
That they want you to doubt my integrity.

Orgon. Who cares! Do you think I'll listen to them?

Tartuffe. No doubt they'll continue their stratagem;
And the same tales that you reject today
You may find credible some other day.

Orgon. No, brother, never.

Tartuffe. Ah, brother, a man's mate
Can easily make her spouse speculate.

Orgon. No, no.

Tartuffe. Let me leave here at once and so
Escape the threat of another low blow.

Orgon. No, please remain. I can't live without you.

Tartuffe. Well! I suppose I will suffer if I do.
Still, if you wish . . .

Orgon. Oh!

Tartuffe. All right! It's a pact.
But in future I know how I must act.
Honor is tender, and friendship engages
Me to prevent gossip--however outrageous.
I'll avoid your wife and you will not see me . . .

Orgon. No, in spite of everyone, you and she
Must often meet. I love to make a stir,
So day and night let them see you with her.
No, that's not enough, but this will make them stew:
I don't want to have any heir but you,
And I'm going to legally designate
You as the owner of my whole estate.
A frank and true friend, whom I take as my son,
Is dearer to me than my wife or children.
Will you accept the offer I am making?

Tartuffe. May God's will be done in this undertaking!

Orgon. Poor man! Let's quickly put it all in writing,
And let their envy choke on its own spiting.

ACT IV
SCENE I
Cleante, Tartuffe

Cleante. Yes, the whole town is talking about it,
And they don't think it does you much credit.
And I've sought you out, sir, just for the sake
Of telling you bluntly what I think's at stake.
I'm not going to dredge up the whole dispute;
The fact is Damis is in disrepute.
Supposing that he did act like a fool
And that you are unfairly being called cruel,
Shouldn't a Christian pardon the offense
And purge his soul of desire for vengeance?
And should you permit him, for this one goof,
To be driven away from his father's roof?
I'll tell you again, and I'll be bold:
You are scandalizing both young and old.
If you take my advice, you will seek a truce
And not be a party to this boy's abuse.
Make an offering to God of your acrimony,
And restore the son to his patrimony.

Tartuffe. Alas! As for myself, I seek that solace:
I do not have for him the slightest malice;
I wholly forgive him of any blame,
And long to restore him to his good name.
But in the service of God I can't permit

It, for if he remains I shall have to quit
This house. No prior offense holds a candle
To his. Our meeting would cause a huge scandal.
Lord only knows what people would assume!
They would impute it to cunning, I presume,
And say that my guilt has made me pretend
To excuse him of any intent to offend,
And that I fear him and wish to placate him
As a crafty move in my plan to checkmate him.

Cleante. I think you are making up excuses,
And your arguments, monsieur, seem like ruses.
Must you assume the role of the Deity?
Does He need us to punish the guilty?
Leave it to Him to take care of vengeance;
He bids us to forgive every offense
And not to consider human judgments
When we follow God's sovereign commandments.
What? Should the petty fear of what some may say
Prevent you from doing this good deed today?
No, let us always follow God's commands,
And leave all other matters in His hands.

Tartuffe. I've told you already that I forgive
Him, and that, sir, is God's directive.
But after such scandal and vituperation
God doesn't demand our cohabitation.

Cleante. And does He demand that you lend your hand
To the pure caprice of the father's command
And accept the gift of his whole estate,
Which you cannot justly appropriate?

Tartuffe. Those who know me will not believe that I'd
Do anything selfish or unjustified.
I hold worldly goods in quite low esteem.
I can't be dazzled by their phony gleam.
And if in the end I decide to take
The gift that the father wishes to make,
It is only, I swear, because I fear
That it could be left to a false profiteer,
Or that it could be shared by those who would
Use it to do evil rather than good,
And who would not use it, as I'm sure I can,
For the glory of God and one's fellow man.

Cleante. Oh, sir! Don't put on that scrupulous air
While your actions injure a rightful heir.
Don't feel uneasy or risk your good health
By fretting about the perils of his wealth.
It is better spent on a young man's whim
Than that you be accused of defrauding him.
I only wonder why you aren't ashamed
By this proposal in which you are named.

In true religion is there some dictum
That says it's okay to make an heir your victim?
And if God has put some obstacle in place
Against you and Damis sharing the same space,
Wouldn't you prefer to be more discrete
And leave this house in a noble retreat
Than to sit and see the son of the house
Thrust from his home like a beggarly louse.
Believe me, it would prove your probity,
Monsieur, . . .

Tartuffe. It is now, Monsieur, half past three:
Certain religious rites demand my presence,
And you must excuse me for my absence. [*He leaves.*]

Cleante. Ah!

SCENE II
Elmire, Mariane, Dorine, Cleante

Dorine [*to Cleante*]. Please, sir, help us help her, for pity's sake.
Her suffering is such that her heart may break,
And the pact her father made this evening
Is the cause of all this awful grieving.
Here he comes. Let's join forces, I beg you,
And try through skill or cunning to undo
The vicious scheme that's left us all so troubled.

Scene III
Orgon, Elmire, Mariane, Cleante, Dorine

Orgon. Ah! I'm pleased to see you all assembled.
[*To Mariane*] This contract here should make you very gay;
I'm sure you know what I'm about to say.

Mariane [*kneeling*]. In the name of God, who knows how I hurt,
And of everything which might move your heart,
Forgo, for now, the rights of paternity
And release me from my vow of docility.
Do not reduce me by some brutal rule
To asking God why you've grown so cruel.
And this life, alas, that you gave to me--
Do not make it a life of misery.
If, contrary to all my sweet hopes of
Joy, you forbid me to wed the man I love,
Hear me at least--on my knees I implore
You not to give me to a man I abhor,
And don't push me past the point of despair
By using your full force in this affair.

Orgon [*to himself, sensing himself weakening*].
Be firm. This is no time for humanity!

Mariane. Your fondness for him doesn't bother me.

Indulge it, and if it's not enough to consign
Your whole estate to him--then give him mine!
I freely consent and will sign on demand,
But please, please, do not offer him my hand,
And allow me to live in a convent where I
May count the sad days till God lets me die.

Orgon. Young girls always play such religious pranks
When their fathers hobble their lusty flanks!
Get up! The harder you have to work to bear it,
The greater the virtue and the merit.
Let this marriage mortify your senses
And quit bothering me with your meek defenses.

Dorine. But . . .

Orgon. Keep quiet, and stay out of this matter.
I completely forbid you to add to the chatter.

Cleante. If you will allow me to offer some advice . . .

Orgon. Brother, your advice is worth any price:
It is thoughtful and I truly respect it,
But I hope you don't mind if I reject it.

Elmire [*to her husband*]. What can I think about what you're saying
Except that your blindness is quite dismaying!
You must be besotted and led astray
To refuse to believe what has happened today.

Orgon. My dear, I only call 'em as I see 'em.
You favor my son, that worthless young bum,
And I think that you are afraid to condemn
His dirty trick on this most saintly of men.
You are, in fact, too calm to be believed;
You ought to have seemed a bit more aggrieved.

Elmire. When a love-sick man makes a foolish mistake
Must we take up arms as if honor's at stake?
And should we always respond to small slips
With fire in our eyes and abuse on our lips?
For myself, I laugh at these signs of lust;
It doesn't please me at all to grow nonplussed.
I seek wisdom tempered with charity,
And I'm not one of those prudes whose asperity
Is such that they fight for virtue tooth and nail,
And scratch a man's eyes out for being male.
Heaven preserve me from that kind of virtue!
I am an honest wife, but not a shrew,
And I believe that a calm, icy glance
Is quite enough to rebuff an advance.

Orgon. I know what I know and I won't change my mind.

Elmire. I'm again amazed that you could be so blind.
But would you keep that incredulity
If I made you see that we have spoken truly?

Orgon. See?

Elmire. Yes.

Orgon. Fantasy!

Elmire. But if I found a way
To make you see it all in light of day?

Orgon. Fairy tales!

Elmire. What a man! At least reply.
I don't ask you to believe me, but I
Do wonder what you will say of your good man
If I bring you to a place where you can
Clearly see and hear these things? What then?

Orgon. In that case I would say . . . nothing again,
For it cannot be.

Elmire. You've been blind too long,
And in calling me a liar, you're wrong!
So for your pleasure, but with modesty,
I'll make you witness my veracity.

Orgon. Good. I take you at your word. Now let's see
How in the world you will prove this to me.

Elmire [*to Dorine*]. Bid him come to me.

Dorine [*to Elmire*]. He's a crafty one
And perhaps he won't easily be undone.

Elmire [*to Dorine*]. No, we're easily duped by our affection,
And vanity aids in our misdirection.

[*Speaking to Cleante and Mariane*]

Send him down here to me. And you can go.

SCENE IV
Elmire, Orgon

Elmire. Bring the table here, and then crouch down low.

Orgon. Why?

Elmire. Hiding you well is to be desired.

Orgon. Why under the table?

Elmire. Just do what's required!
I've made my plans and we'll see how they fare!
Get under the table, and when you're down there,
Don't let him see you and try not to grunt.

Orgon. I really think I'm far too tolerant,
But I'll stay through the end of your stratagem.

Elmire. You won't, I'm sure, have a thing to condemn.

[*To her husband, who is now under the table.*]

Mind you, I'm going to have strange things to say
And you must not be shocked in any way.
Whatever I may say, you must allow;
I only wish to convince you, anyhow.
I'm going to use sex, since I'm reduced to it,
To strip off the cloak of this hypocrite;
I'll stoke up the fires of his insolent heart
And give a free field to this base upstart.
For your sake, and to deepen his disrepute,
I'm going to pretend to welcome his suit.
I'll quit just as soon as you've heard enough.
Things needn't go farther than you wish, my love.
And you must stop them from becoming bizarre
When you think his mad love has gone too far.
Spare your wife and don't leave me in his hands
Longer than reaching your conviction demands.
This is your concern and you are in command.
Here he comes. Keep still! Keep down! Understand?

SCENE V
Tartuffe, Elmire, Orgon (*under the table*)

Tartuffe. You wish to speak with me in here, I'm told.

Elmire. Yes. I now have some secrets to unfold,
But shut the door before I say a word
And look around--we mustn't be overheard.

[*Tartuffe closes the door and returns.*]

I don't want another fracas to ensue
Like the one that overtook us hitherto.
Never before have I been so dismayed!
Damis startled me and made me afraid
For you. You must have seen that I did my best
To disrupt his plan and soothe his unrest.
It is true that I was so filled with shame
That I never thought of denying his claim,
But by the grace of God, I'm nearly sure
All is for the best and we're now more secure.
The prestige of your name has dispelled the storm,
And my husband will never suspect you of harm.
Defying those with rumors to foment,
He wants us together at every moment.
And that is why without blame I can
Be alone with you although you're a man,
And that allows me to open my heart
Willingly to the sweet thoughts you impart.

Tartuffe. I find it odd that you have kind words to say;
Earlier you treated me in a different way.

Elmire. Ah! If you're angry about that rebuff,
You know nothing about a woman's love!
And how little you know about our intent
If you think a weak defense is really meant!
At such times our modesty must contend
With the tender feelings that triumph in the end.
No matter how strongly you make love's claim,
In embracing it we always feel some shame.
We resist at first, but in our faces
It's clear that we'll soon yield to your embraces.
Our words and our wishes are often opposed:
A refusal may mean we accept what's proposed.
No doubt I am making too free a confession
And I may be committing an indiscretion,
But since my attempt at silence has gone awry,
Ask yourself why I sought to pacify
Damis, and what made me listen so long
And so kindly to your sweet love song?
Would I have reacted as you saw me do
If the offer of your heart didn't please me too?
And what should you be able to conclude
From my fervent desire to preclude
The marriage that has been announced just now?
Isn't it that I'd hate for a wedding vow
To come between us, and that I care for you
And want nothing at all to split us in two?

Tartuffe. There is no pleasure in Heaven above
Sweeter than such words from the lips I love;
Their honeyed sound flows richly through my senses

With the sweetness of the purest essences.
The pleasure of pleasing you is my one goal,
And my heart finds happiness in that role,
But that heart also takes the slight liberty
Of daring to doubt this felicity.
Perhaps these sweet words are a decorous ruse
Designed to disrupt my hymeneal news;
And, if I may speak quite freely with you,
I won't believe that all you say is true
Until I'm assured that you couldn't lie
By a few of those favors for which I sigh.
Such favors would make me your devotee
And a true believer in your fondness for me.

Elmire [*she coughs to warn her husband*].
Do you demand to push on with such great speed,
And drain my heart dry by your burning need?
I risk my life in proclaiming my love,
And for you even that is not enough!
Can't you be satisfied with what I say?
Must you force me into going all the way?

Tartuffe. The less one merits, the more one desires.
Mere words will never quench our raging fires.
A promised gift is often suspected;
We rarely believe it, until we inspect it.
I, who so little merit your favors,
Doubt the happy outcome of my labors.
And I will not believe a thing, my dear,
Until you ease my pain to prove you're sincere.

Elmire. Good God, your love is too oppressive;
It troubles my soul and becomes obsessive!
What a crazy power it has on the heart!
With what fierce passion it tears me apart!
What! Is there no way to stave off your desire?
Won't you give me a moment to respire?
Do you think it is fair to be so firm,
To demand everything and watch me squirm,
To take what you want, pushing and pressing,
And abusing my weakness in acquiescing?

Tartuffe. If you look on me with a kindly heart,
Then prove how you feel by playing your part.

Elmire. But how can I give you the things you seek
Without offending that God of whom you speak?

Tartuffe. If it's only God that opposes my desire,
I'll think up a way to make him conspire,
And that need not restrain your heart, my dear.

Elmire. But the decrees of God scare me to tears.

Tartuffe. I can dispel your foolish fears, madame,
For I know the art of quashing each qualm.
Though God forbids certain gratifications,
With him one can reach one's accommodations.
It is a science to stretch out the strings
Of conscience in the service of diverse things
And to rectify an evil action
With the purity of our intention.
Regarding these secrets, I shall instruct you;
You need only allow me to conduct you.
Satisfy my desire and have no fear;
I'll assume the sin and leave your soul clear.

[*Elmire coughs more loudly.*]

That's quite a cough, madame.

Elmire. Yes, it's a torment.

Tartuffe [*offering Elmire a piece of candy*].
Would it help to have a licorice or mint?

Elmire. It's an obstinate illness, and I see
That all the mints in the world won't help me

Tartuffe. It's certainly troublesome.

Elmire. That's for sure!

Tartuffe. Your scruples at least are easy to cure:
You can be sure that I will keep things quiet--
A deed is evil only if men spy it.
The noise of scandal is the source of offense;
There is no sin if one sins in silence.

Elmire [*after having coughed and knocked on the table*].
At last I see I'm forced to go astray,
And I must consent to let you have your way,
And that I cannot hope that short of the deed
You will be content and willing to concede.
It is very hard to be forced to do it,
And in spite of myself to stoop down to it;
But since you persist in making me obey,
Since you refuse to believe what I say,
And since you demand more convincing proof,
I'll have to give in and quit acting aloof.
If this action causes anyone grief,
The blame be on him who refused all relief.
The fault most certainly is none of mine.

Tartuffe. Yes, madame, I agree and that is fine . . .

Elmire. Peek out of the door and see, I beg you,
If my spouse is spying on our rendezvous.

Tartuffe. Why do you care what he sees or where he goes?
He's a man who loves to be led by the nose.
Our trysts are something he's proud of achieving,
And he'd watch us go to it without believing.

Elmire. No matter. Please, go have a look outside;
I'd hate to think he's found some place to hide.

SCENE VI
Orgon, Elmire

Orgon [*coming out from under the table*]. There, I swear, is an abominable man!
I can't get over it. What is his plan?

Elmire. How now? Come out so soon? Were you having fun?
Get back down there. We've only just begun.
Wait till the end to be completely sure,
And don't put your faith in mere conjecture.

Orgon. No man more evil has been spawned in Hell.

Elmire. Dear Lord! Don't believe the lies people tell.
Be wholly convinced before you concede:
Cautious men shun the slips that come with speed.

[*She pushes her husband behind her.*]

SCENE VII
Tartuffe, Elmire, Orgon

Tartuffe [*without seeing Orgon*]. All things conspire, madame, for my contentment:
I've closely examined the whole apartment;
No one is around, and my heart's delight. . .

[*Just as Tartuffe comes forward with open arms to embrace Elmire, she steps back and Tartuffe sees Orgon.*]

Orgon [*stopping him*]. Hold on! Your desires are too quick to ignite,
And you mustn't let passion be overdone.
Oh! Man of blessings, you wished to give me one!
How temptation has taken over your life!
You'd marry my daughter, and covet my wife!
I've doubted your word for quite a long while,
And I've always believed you'd change your style;
But this is enough to give me my proof:
I am fed up and want no more, Tartuffe.

Elmire [*to Tartuffe*]. It was against my will to act this way,
But I was forced into the part I play.

Tartuffe [*to Orgon*]. What? You think . . .

Orgon. Come, please, let's have no to-do.
Get out of my home without more ado.

Tartuffe. My intent . . .

Orgon. This is no time for sly repartee;
You must leave my house immediately.

Tartuffe. You must leave, you who speak as the master:
The house is mine, and you'd better learn fast or
I shall show you that it's senseless to pick
A fight with me using this cowardly trick,
That it will get you nowhere to insult me,
And that I will punish your falsity,
Avenge God's wounds, and make you grieve
For talking here about forcing me to leave.

SCENE VIII
Elmire, Orgon

Elmire. What is he saying and what is he after?

Orgon. I'm ashamed to say this is no time for laughter.

Elmire. Why?

Orgon. I see my error by what he said;
I gave him my lands. What was wrong with my head?

Elmire. You gave him . . .

Orgon. Yes and they can't be restored,
But there's something else that troubles me more.

Elmire. What is that?

Orgon. I'll tell you soon, but first there's
A certain box I want to find upstairs.

ACT V
SCENE I
Orgon, Cleante

Cleante. Where are you rushing?

Orgon. Who knows?

Cleante. It might make sense
To begin by having a conference
About everything that has happened lately.

Orgon. That box of papers troubles me greatly;
More than all the rest, it's cause for distress.

Cleante. Why are those papers important to possess?

Orgon. My unfortunate friend Argus, when he
Put them into my hands, swore me to secrecy.
He chose to rely on me as he fled,
And these papers, according to what he said,
Are crucial to both his life and his wealth.

Cleante. Then why didn't you keep them to yourself?

Orgon. It was a matter of conscience, you see,
So I consulted Tartuffe in secrecy,
And his arguments came to persuade me
That he should keep the box for security,
So I could deny having it on hand.
And thus I'd have a subterfuge on demand
With which my conscience might muddle through
In swearing to things that I knew weren't true.

Cleante. You're in trouble, judging by appearances;
Both the deed of gift and these confidences
Are, to tell you my thoughts quite honestly,
Measures that you took very thoughtlessly.
They might put you in jail with such evidence,
And since that man has it, it makes no sense
To drive him away through your imprudence;
You need to regain his full confidence.

Orgon. With what a fair appearance and touching zeal
He hides a wicked soul and a heart of steel!
And I, who received him begging and broke . . .
That's it, I renounce all such pious folk.
Henceforth, I will hold them as wholly evil
And do my best to send them to the devil.

Cleante. It's just like you to get carried away!
You can never stick to the middle way.

To reason rightly is too much bother;
You always rush from one excess to another.
You can see your error and now you know
That by a false zeal you were brought low.
But to redeem yourself does logic demand
That you embrace an error that's even more grand?
And must you confuse the heart of a shill
With the hearts of all the men of good will?
Because a rascal had the luck or grace
To dupe you with his austere and shining face,
Must you believe everyone acts that way
And no true church-man can be found today?
Leave to libertines these foolish deductions.
Seek true virtue, not a false deconstruction.
Never rush into hasty admiration,
And strive instead for moderation.
If possible, don't admire false pretense,
But also don't give true zeal cause for offense,
And if you must fall to one extreme,
Err in being too free with your esteem.

SCENE II
Damis, Orgon, Cleante

Damis. Father, is it true that this cad threatens you,
That he has forgotten the gifts that bound you two,
And that his shameful pride, maddeningly,
Has repaid your kindness with tyranny?

Orgon. Yes, son; he's brought me to the verge of tears.

Damis. Leave him to me. I'll cut off his ears.
You must not flinch before his insolence
For I'll soon restore your independence,
And, to end the matter, I'll slice him like toast.

Cleante. That's exactly like a bratty boy's boast.
Please make your angry words more moderate.
We live during a time and in a state
Where violent acts are clearly unlawful.

SCENE III
Madame Pernelle, Mariane, Elmire, Dorine, Damis, Orgon, Cleante

Madame Pernelle. What's happening? The tales I'm told are awful.
Orgon. Novel things have been happening to me,
And for all my kindness, this is my fee.
I lift the man out of his misery;
Like a brother, I take him home with me;
Each day I treat him with greater largesse;
I give him my daughter and all I possess;
And at the same time the lying low-life
Looks for the best way to seduce my wife,
And, not fully content with what he's achieved,
He threatens me with the gifts he's received,

And he wishes to use, in ruining me,
Those profits he gained from my foolish bounty
To drive me from the home that I gave to him
And reduce me to the state that he was in.

Dorine. Poor man!

Madame Pernelle. Son, I don't believe he'd allow
Himself to take part in actions so foul.

Orgon. How's that?

Madame Pernelle. People always resent holy men.

Orgon. Mother, what were you trying to say just then?

Madame Pernelle. That in your home one sees the strangest things;
Among them is the hate that envy brings.

Orgon. How is it hate when I've told you the truth?

Madame Pernelle. I warned you often when you were a youth:
In this world virtue is oppressed forever;
The envious may die, but envy never.

Orgon. But what does this have to do with today?

Madame Pernelle. People are telling you lies and hearsay.

Orgon. I've already said that I myself saw it.

Madame Pernelle. The malice of gossips is infinite.

Orgon. You'll make me damn myself, Mother. I tell you
I saw with my eyes just what he would do.

Madame Pernelle. Some tongues always have some poison to spit,
And nothing on earth is safe against it.

Orgon. I do not know what these words of yours mean.
I've seen it, I say, seen, with these eyes seen--
Do you know the word, seen? Must I shout it
In your ears a hundred times and still you doubt it?

Madame Pernelle. Dear Lord! Appearances may be deceiving:
You shouldn't judge based on what you're perceiving.

Orgon. I'll go mad!

Madame Pernelle. People are prone to suspicion;
Misjudgment is part of the human condition.

Orgon. So I must interpret charitably
His desire to cuckold me?

Madame Pernelle. Don't you see
That to accuse a man you need just cause,
And until you're quite sure, you ought to pause.

Orgon. To be more certain, what would you advise?
Should I have waited until before my eyes
He had . . . You'll make me say something quite lewd.

Madame Pernelle. I'm sure that a holy zeal has imbued
His soul, and I can't begin to believe
That he would be willing to cheat or deceive.

Orgon. Leave me . . . I'm now so angry that if you
Were not my mother, I'm not sure what I'd do.

Dorine [*to Orgon*]. This is fair payment, sir, for what we received.
You wouldn't believe us; now you're not believed.

Cleante. We are wasting time on foolish pleasures
That would be better spent in active measures.
We should not ignore this swindler's threats.

Damis. What! Does his boldness have no boundaries yet?

Elmire. For myself, I don't believe it's possible;
His ingratitude would be too visible.

Cleante [*to Orgon*]. Don't put your faith in that. He will find ways
To gild with reason all the things he says;
And with less than this the people in power
Have forced their foes to cringe and cower.
I tell you again: well-armed as they are,
You should never have pushed him quite so far.

Orgon. True, but what could I do? Facing that bastard,

I felt resentment that I never mastered.

Cleante. I deeply desire to arrange between you
Some shadow of peace, however untrue.

Elmire. If I had known that he possessed such arms,
I would never have set off these alarms,
And my . . .

Orgon [*to Dorine, seeing Monsieur Loyal enter*].
What does this man want? Go and see.
I don't wish to have anyone meet with me!

SCENE IV
Monsieur Loyal, Madame Pernelle, Orgon, Damis, Mariane, Dorine, Elmire, Cleante

Monsieur Loyal [*to Dorine*]. Hello, my dear sister. Could you please see
If your master is in?

Dorine. He has company,
And I doubt he'll be able to see you now.

Monsieur Loyal. I have not come here to cause a row.
I don't think that my presence will displease
Him; I come, in fact, to put him at ease.

Dorine. Your name?

Monsieur Loyal. Tell him only that I've come here
For Monsieur Tartuffe, and to give him cheer.

Dorine [*to Orgon*]. It's a man who has come quite civilly,
On behalf of Monsieur Tartuffe, to see,
He says, to your pleasure.

Cleante [*to Orgon*]. You'd best find out
Who he is and what he has come here about.

Orgon [*to Cleante*]. Perhaps he has come here to reconcile us.
How should I act and what should we discuss?

Cleante. Don't let any of your anger appear,
And if he speaks of a deal, make him be clear.

Monsieur Loyal [*to Orgon*]. Greetings, sir. May God destroy all your foes
And favor you as much as I propose!

Orgon [*aside to Cleante*]. This civil start meets my approbation
And foreshadows some accommodation.

Monsieur Loyal. At one time I was your father's employee,
And this whole house is very dear to me.

Orgon. I ask your pardon, sir, but to my shame
I'm totally ignorant of your name.

Monsieur Loyal. My name is Loyal. I come from Normandy.
I'm the bailiff here, in spite of envy.
For the last forty years, thanks be to God,
I've done my duty and retained by job.
And I've come to you, with your permission,
To serve this notice of your eviction.

Orgon. What! You're here . . .

Monsieur Loyal. Let's have no irritation.
This is nothing more than notification,
An order to evict both you and yours,
Put your furniture out and lock the doors,
Without pardon or delay to fulfill . . .

Orgon. Me! Leave this place?

Monsieur Loyal. Yes, monsieur, if you will.
This house now belongs, I have ample proof,
To your very good friend, Monsieur Tartuffe.
He is master and lord of all your wealth
By virtue of a deed he showed me himself.
It is in due form and cannot be doubted.

Damis [*to Monsieur Loyal*]. What impudence! I'm amazed about it.

Monsieur Loyal [*to Damis*]. You and I, sir, have no business and you'd
Best leave things to this man [*pointing to Orgon*], who's civil and shrewd,
And knows too well the duties of my office
To wish to oppose himself to justice.

Orgon. But . . .

Monsieur Loyal [*to Orgon*]. I know that not even a million
Dollars would make you cause a rebellion,
And that you will be an honest citizen
And let me fulfill the orders I'm given.

Damis. You may soon feel upon your black soutane,
Monsieur Bailiff, the heavy weight of this cane.

Monsieur Loyal [*to Orgon*]. Command your son to be quiet or depart,
Monsieur; I would regret to have to report
All this and make these matters more official.

Damis [*aside*]. This Monsieur Loyal seems quite disloyal!

Monsieur Loyal. For all worthy men there's a place in my heart,
And I would not have wished, sir, to take part
In this, except to lift some of your burden,
By preventing the chore from falling to one
Who might not share my opinion of you
And who wouldn't proceed as gently as I do.

Orgon. And what could be worse than the evil crime
Of evicting me?

Monsieur Loyal. I'm giving you time,
And until morning I'll hold in abeyance
The execution of this conveyance.
I shall only come here with ten of my boys
To spend the night, without scandal or noise.
For the sake of form please bring to me, before
You go up to bed, the keys to your door.
I'll take care not to disrupt your repose
And not to do anything you would oppose.
But tomorrow morning you must get set
To empty the house, down to the last brochette.
My boys will assist you. Each one's a strong lout
And will do all he can to help move you out.
I'm doing my best to use common sense,
And, since I'm treating you with such indulgence,
I beg you, sir, to act the same way to me.
Let no one bar me from doing my duty.

Orgon [*aside*]. With a happy heart I would at once pay
The last hundred francs that are mine today
For the power and pleasure of hitting his snout
With one absolutely sensational clout.

Cleante [*quietly, to Orgon*].
Go easy, don't make things worse.

Damis. My hand itches
To get in a fight with these sons of bitches.

Dorine. Monsieur Loyal, I think it might become you

To have your broad back beaten black and blue.

Monsieur Loyal. These wicked words deserve condemnation,
And women, too, may earn incarceration.

Cleante [*to Monsieur Loyal*]. Let's end it now; that's enough for today.
Hand over the paper, and be on your way.

Monsieur Loyal. Until later, then. Heaven keep you in joy!

Orgon. May it confound you, and your employer!

SCENE V
Orgon, Cleante, Mariane, Elmire, Madame Pernelle, Dorine, Damis

Orgon. There! You now see, mother, that I was right,
And you can judge of the rest by this writ.
Do you admit at last that he can lie?

Madame Pernelle. It's as if a bolt has struck from the sky.

Dorine [*to Orgon*]. You're wrong to complain, and wrong to blame him.
These things show the grand plans of your seraphim.
His neighborly love finds consummation
In proving that wealth causes degradation,
And from pure charity he wants to remove
Every obstacle between you and God's love.

Orgon. Shut up. . . . I'm always saying that to you.

Cleante [*to Orgon*]. Let us consider what we ought to do.

Elmire. We must expose this man's insolent acts.
His deeds invalidate all the contracts.
And his disloyalty will seem too plain
If he tries to use them for personal gain.

SCENE VI
Valere, Orgon, Cleante, Elmire, Mariane, Madame Pernelle, Damis, Dorine

Valere. I'm sorry, sir, that I've come to distress you;
But certain dangers may soon oppress you.
A friend, whose love for me is deep and true
And who knows how much I care about you,
Has had enough courage to violate
The secrecy of affairs of state
And has just now sent me word that you might
Be well-advised to take sudden flight.
The villain who has been imposing on you
Has gone to the Prince to accuse you too,

And put into his hands, like a blade of hate,
The vital papers of a traitor of State,
Which he says that you've kept in secrecy
Despite the duties of aristocracy.
I don't know the details of the alleged crime,
But a warrant against you has been signed,
And he himself is assigned to assist
Those who will soon come to make the arrest.

Cleante. Now his claims are well-armed; and the ingrate
Seeks to become master of your estate.

Orgon. I swear, that man is a vile animal!

Valere. The slightest trifling could well be fatal.
My coach is right here to take you away
With a thousand louis that I've pledged to pay.
Don't lose any time; the arrow has sped,
And this is one blow that ought to be fled.
I myself will guide you to a safe place
And will stay with you to be sure there's no chase.

Orgon. I owe you much for your solicitude!
But there isn't time for my gratitude,
And I pray to God to grant what I need
So that one day I may repay this good deed.
Farewell. The rest of you take care . . .

Cleante. Go on.
We'll look after everything when you're gone.

Final Scene
Police Officer, Tartuffe, Valere, Orgon, Elmire, Mariane, Madame Pernelle, Cleante, Damis, Dorine

Tartuffe [*stopping Orgon*]. Slowly, slowly, sir. You needn't run there.
You won't have to go far to hide in your lair.
In the Prince's name we will shackle you fast.

Orgon. Traitor, you've kept this final shaft for last.
This is the blow with which you dispatch me,
And this is what crowns all your perfidy.

Tartuffe. Your scorn causes me scant irritation;
I bear it as a holy obligation.

Cleante. This is scant sign of your moderation.

Damis. How impudently the wretch mocks veneration!

Tartuffe. None of your outbursts mean a thing to me,
For I think of nothing but doing my duty.

Mariane. Your pretense to honor is all a fake,
And this is just the right job for you to take.

Tartuffe. The task can only shower me with grace
Since our Prince's command has sent me to this place.

Orgon. But don't you recall how my charity
Raised you, you ingrate, from your misery?

Tartuffe. Yes, I know that I once received assistance,
But my duty to the Prince demands this persistence:
'Tis a sacred duty of such fortitude
That it has suppressed all my gratitude,
And I would sacrifice to this powerful force
Friends, wife, parents, and myself, of course.

Elmire. The hypocrite!

Dorine. How well he can create
A treacherous cloak from all we venerate!

Cleante. But if this zeal which drives you, and with which
You plume yourself, lifts you to a holy niche,
Why is it that it didn't come to life
Until after he caught you with his wife,
And why did you only denounce him today
After honor made him chase you away?
I don't claim that the gift of all his estates
Ought to distract you from duty's dictates,
But if you planned to reveal his treason here,
Why were you willing to take his wealth back there?

Tartuffe [*to the Officer*]. From all this noise, sir, please deliver me,
And be so kind as to enforce your decree.

Police Officer. Yes, I've been rather slow to issue it.
Your own mouth aptly invites me to do it;
And so it will be done if you will come
Straight to the jail that will be your new home.

Tartuffe. Who? Me, sir?

Police Officer. Yes, you.

Tartuffe. But why to prison?

Police Office. I need not explain to you my reason.
[*To Orgon.*] Calm yourself, sir, after passions of such heat.
We're ruled by a Prince who's a foe to deceit,
A Prince whose eyes can read what the soul has writ,
And who can't be fooled by a hypocrite.
Blessed with a fine discernment, his great heart
Always sees the whole picture, not just each part.
Nothing can drive him to exaggeration;
His firm reason clings to moderation.
He confers on men of worth immortal glory;
But that zeal is not blind or peremptory,
And his love for what's true does not turn his eye
From the power of falseness to horrify.
This man here was unable to entrap him;
His defenses are sound when such snares enwrap him.
From the start, he pierced with his perceptive sight
Through the veils that hid this evil from light.
Tartuffe betrayed himself by accusing you,
And, in divine justice, revealed his true
Colors to the Prince as an infamous cad
Whose deeds under another name were so bad
That the record they made was wholly black
And Satan might use them as his almanac.
In short, this king was revolted to see
His ingratitude to you and disloyalty;
To his other crimes, he has joined this one
And has only allowed it so everyone
Could see his audacity's evil ends
And then see him required to make amends.
All your papers, which the wretch has pawed through,
Are here taken away and returned to you.
With his sovereign power he will abrogate
The contract by which you gave away your estate,
And finally he pardons that secret offense
Which you once committed through benevolence.
This is the reward for the courage you showed
In support of his rights in the late episode,
And to demonstrate that, when least expected,
One's past deeds may be recollected,
That he will never forget a good deed,
And that good outweighs evil in time of need.

Dorine. Heaven be praised!

Madame Pernelle. We're no longer distressed.

Elmire. What a happy ending!

Mariane. Who could have guessed?

Orgon [*to Tartuffe, whom the Officer is leading away*].

Good. There you go, traitor . . .

Cleante. Ah! Brother, cease,
And don't degenerate to indignities.
Leave to himself this miserable clown,
And don't add to the remorse that weighs him down.
Hope instead that his heart may one day
Make a happy return to the virtuous way,
That he'll reform his life and lament his past,
And cause our great Prince to temper justice at last.
You should throw yourself on your knees in praise
Of the kindness and lenience shown these days.

Orgon. Yes, that's well said. Let us kneel down with joy
And praise the kind deeds of his envoy.
Then, having acquitted part of our duty,
Let's turn to address the claims of beauty,
And by a fine wedding crown in Valere
A lover who's both generous and sincere.

THE END

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15: Addendum - A Doll's House

A DOLL'S HOUSE by Henrik Ibsen (1828 - 1906)

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Torvald Helmer.
Nora, his wife.
Doctor Rank.
Mrs Linde.
Nils Krogstad.
Helmer's three young children.
Anne, their nurse.
A Housemaid.
A Porter.

[The action takes place in Helmer's house.]

ACT I

[SCENE.—A room furnished comfortably and tastefully, but not extravagantly. At the back, a door to the right leads to the entrance-hall, another to the left leads to Helmer's study. Between the doors stands a piano. In the middle of the left-hand wall is a door, and beyond it a window. Near the window are a round table, arm-chairs and a small sofa. In the right-hand wall, at the farther end, another door; and on the same side, nearer the footlights, a stove, two easy chairs and a rocking-chair; between the stove and the door, a small table. Engravings on the walls; a cabinet with china and other small objects; a small book-case with well-bound books. The floors are carpeted, and a fire burns in the stove. It is winter.

A bell rings in the hall; shortly afterwards the door is heard to open. Enter NORA, humming a tune and in high spirits. She is in outdoor dress and carries a number of parcels; these she lays on the table to the right. She leaves the outer door open after her, and through it is seen a PORTER who is carrying a Christmas Tree and a basket, which he gives to the MAID who has opened the door.]

NORA.
Hide the Christmas Tree carefully, Helen. Be sure the children do not see it until this evening, when it is dressed. *[To the PORTER, taking out her purse.]* How much?

PORTER.
Sixpence.

NORA.
There is a shilling. No, keep the change. *[The PORTER thanks her, and goes out. NORA shuts the door. She is laughing to herself, as she takes off her hat and coat. She takes a packet of macaroons from her pocket and eats one or two; then goes cautiously to*

her husband's door and listens.] Yes, he is in. *[Still humming, she goes to the table on the right.]*

HELMER.
[calls out from his room]. Is that my little lark twittering out there?

NORA.
[busy opening some of the parcels]. Yes, it is!

HELMER.
Is it my little squirrel bustling about?

NORA.
Yes!

HELMER.
When did my squirrel come home?

NORA.
Just now. *[Puts the bag of macaroons into her pocket and wipes her mouth.]* Come in here, Torvald, and see what I have bought.

HELMER.
Don't disturb me. *[A little later, he opens the door and looks into the room, pen in hand.]* Bought, did you say? All these things? Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again?

NORA.
Yes but, Torvald, this year we really can let ourselves go a little. This is the first Christmas that we have not needed to economise.

HELMER.
Still, you know, we can't spend money recklessly.

NORA.
Yes, Torvald, we may be a wee bit more reckless now, mayn't we? Just a tiny wee bit! You are going to have a big salary and earn lots and lots of money.

HELMER.
Yes, after the New Year; but then it will be a whole quarter before the salary is due.

NORA.
Pooh! we can borrow until then.

HELMER.
Nora! *[Goes up to her and takes her playfully by the ear.]* The same little featherhead! Suppose, now, that I borrowed fifty pounds today, and you spent it all in the Christmas week, and then on New Year's Eve a slate fell on my head and killed me, and—

NORA.
[putting her hands over his mouth]. Oh! don't say such horrid things.

HELMER.
Still, suppose that happened,—what then?

NORA.
If that were to happen, I don't suppose I should care whether I owed money or not.

HELMER.
Yes, but what about the people who had lent it?

NORA.
They? Who would bother about them? I should not know who they were.

HELMER.

That is like a woman! But seriously, Nora, you know what I think about that. No debt, no borrowing. There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt. We two have kept bravely on the straight road so far, and we will go on the same way for the short time longer that there need be any struggle.

NORA.
[moving towards the stove]. As you please, Torvald.

HELMER.
[following her]. Come, come, my little skylark must not droop her wings. What is this! Is my little squirrel out of temper? *[Taking out his purse.]* Nora, what do you think I have got here?

NORA.
[turning round quickly]. Money!

HELMER.
There you are. *[Gives her some money.]* Do you think I don't know what a lot is wanted for housekeeping at Christmas-time?

NORA.
[counting]. Ten shillings—a pound—two pounds! Thank you, thank you, Torvald; that will keep me going for a long time.

HELMER.
Indeed it must.

NORA.
Yes, yes, it will. But come here and let me show you what I have bought. And all so cheap! Look, here is a new suit for Ivar, and a sword; and a horse and a trumpet for Bob; and a doll and dolly's bedstead for Emmy,—they are very plain, but anyway she will soon break them in pieces. And here are dress-lengths and handkerchiefs for the maids; old Anne ought really to have something better.

HELMER.
And what is in this parcel?

NORA.
[crying out]. No, no! you mustn't see that until this evening.

HELMER.
Very well. But now tell me, you extravagant little person, what would you like for yourself?

NORA.
For myself? Oh, I am sure I don't want anything.

HELMER.
Yes, but you must. Tell me something reasonable that you would particularly like to have.

NORA.
No, I really can't think of anything—unless, Torvald—

HELMER.
Well?

NORA.
[playing with his coat buttons, and without raising her eyes to his]. If you really want to give me something, you might—you might—

HELMER.
Well, out with it!

NORA.
[speaking quickly]. You might give me money, Torvald. Only just as much as you can afford; and then one of these days I will buy something with it.

HELMER.
But, Nora—

NORA.
Oh, do! dear Torvald; please, please do! Then I will wrap it up in beautiful gilt paper and hang it on the Christmas Tree. Wouldn't that be fun?

HELMER.
What are little people called that are always wasting money?

NORA.
Spendthrifts—I know. Let us do as you suggest, Torvald, and then I shall have time to think what I am most in want of. That is a very sensible plan, isn't it?

HELMER.
[smiling]. Indeed it is—that is to say, if you were really to save out of the money I give you, and then really buy something for yourself. But if you spend it all on the housekeeping and any number of unnecessary things, then I merely have to pay up again.

NORA.
Oh but, Torvald—

HELMER.
You can't deny it, my dear little Nora. *[Puts his arm round her waist.]* It's a sweet little spendthrift, but she uses up a deal of money. One would hardly believe how expensive such little persons are!

NORA.
It's a shame to say that. I do really save all I can.

HELMER.
[laughing]. That's very true,—all you can. But you can't save anything!

NORA.
[smiling quietly and happily]. You haven't any idea how many expenses we skylarks and squirrels have, Torvald.

HELMER.
You are an odd little soul. Very like your father. You always find some new way of wheedling money out of me, and, as soon as you have got it, it seems to melt in your hands. You never know where it has gone. Still, one must take you as you are. It is in the blood; for indeed it is true that you can inherit these things, Nora.

NORA.
Ah, I wish I had inherited many of papa's qualities.

HELMER.
And I would not wish you to be anything but just what you are, my sweet little skylark. But, do you know, it strikes me that you are looking rather—what shall I say—rather uneasy today?

NORA.
Do I?

HELMER.
You do, really. Look straight at me.

NORA.
[looks at him]. Well?

HELMER.
[wagging his finger at her]. Hasn't Miss Sweet Tooth been breaking rules in town today?

NORA.
No; what makes you think that?

HELMER.
Hasn't she paid a visit to the confectioner's?

NORA.
No, I assure you, Torvald—

HELMER.
Not been nibbling sweets?

NORA.
No, certainly not.

HELMER.
Not even taken a bite at a macaroon or two?

NORA.
No, Torvald, I assure you really—

HELMER.
There, there, of course I was only joking.

NORA.
[going to the table on the right]. I should not think of going against your wishes.

HELMER.
No, I am sure of that; besides, you gave me your word— *[Going up to her.]* Keep your little Christmas secrets to yourself, my darling. They will all be revealed tonight when the Christmas Tree is lit, no doubt.

NORA.
Did you remember to invite Doctor Rank?

HELMER.
No. But there is no need; as a matter of course he will come to dinner with us. However, I will ask him when he comes in this morning. I have ordered some good wine. Nora, you can't think how I am looking forward to this evening.

NORA.
So am I! And how the children will enjoy themselves, Torvald!

HELMER.
It is splendid to feel that one has a perfectly safe appointment, and a big enough income. It's delightful to think of, isn't it?

NORA.
It's wonderful!

HELMER.
Do you remember last Christmas? For a full three weeks beforehand you shut yourself up every evening until long after midnight, making ornaments for the Christmas Tree, and all the other fine things that were to be a surprise to us. It was the dullest three weeks I ever spent!

NORA.
I didn't find it dull.

HELMER.
[smiling]. But there was precious little result, Nora.

NORA.
Oh, you shouldn't tease me about that again. How could I help the cat's going in and tearing everything to pieces?

HELMER.
Of course you couldn't, poor little girl. You had the best of intentions to please us all, and that's the main thing. But it is a good

thing that our hard times are over.

NORA.
Yes, it is really wonderful.

HELMER.
This time I needn't sit here and be dull all alone, and you needn't ruin your dear eyes and your pretty little hands—

NORA.
[clapping her hands]. No, Torvald, I needn't any longer, need I! It's wonderfully lovely to hear you say so! *[Taking his arm.]* Now I will tell you how I have been thinking we ought to arrange things, Torvald. As soon as Christmas is over—*[A bell rings in the hall.]* There's the bell. *[She tidies the room a little.]* There's some one at the door. What a nuisance!

HELMER.
If it is a caller, remember I am not at home.

MAID.
[in the doorway]. A lady to see you, ma'am,—a stranger.

NORA.
Ask her to come in.

MAID.
[to HELMER]. The doctor came at the same time, sir.

HELMER.
Did he go straight into my room?

MAID.
Yes, sir.

[HELMER goes into his room. The MAID ushers in Mrs Linde, who is in travelling dress, and shuts the door.]

MRS LINDE.
[in a dejected and timid voice]. How do you do, Nora?

NORA.
[doubtfully]. How do you do—

MRS LINDE.
You don't recognise me, I suppose.

NORA.
No, I don't know—yes, to be sure, I seem to—*[Suddenly.]* Yes! Christine! Is it really you?

MRS LINDE.
Yes, it is I.

NORA.
Christine! To think of my not recognising you! And yet how could I—*[In a gentle voice.]* How you have altered, Christine!

MRS LINDE.
Yes, I have indeed. In nine, ten long years—

NORA.
Is it so long since we met? I suppose it is. The last eight years have been a happy time for me, I can tell you. And so now you have come into the town, and have taken this long journey in winter—that was plucky of you.

MRS LINDE.
I arrived by steamer this morning.

NORA.
To have some fun at Christmas-time, of course. How delightful! We will have such fun together! But take off your things. You are not cold, I hope. *[Helps her.]* Now we will sit down by the stove, and be cosy. No, take this armchair; I will sit here in the rocking-chair. *[Takes her hands.]* Now you look like your old self again; it was only the first moment—You are a little paler, Christine, and perhaps a little thinner.

MRS LINDE.
And much, much older, Nora.

NORA.
Perhaps a little older; very, very little; certainly not much. *[Stops suddenly and speaks seriously.]* What a thoughtless creature I am, chattering away like this. My poor, dear Christine, do forgive me.

MRS LINDE.
What do you mean, Nora?

NORA.
[gently]. Poor Christine, you are a widow.

MRS LINDE.
Yes; it is three years ago now.

NORA.
Yes, I knew; I saw it in the papers. I assure you, Christine, I meant ever so often to write to you at the time, but I always put it off and something always prevented me.

MRS LINDE.
I quite understand, dear.

NORA.
It was very bad of me, Christine. Poor thing, how you must have suffered. And he left you nothing?

MRS LINDE.
No.

NORA.
And no children?

MRS LINDE.
No.

NORA.
Nothing at all, then.

MRS LINDE.
Not even any sorrow or grief to live upon.

NORA.
[looking incredulously at her]. But, Christine, is that possible?

MRS LINDE.
[smiles sadly and strokes her hair]. It sometimes happens, Nora.

NORA.
So you are quite alone. How dreadfully sad that must be. I have three lovely children. You can't see them just now, for they are out with their nurse. But now you must tell me all about it.

MRS LINDE.
No, no; I want to hear about you.

NORA.
No, you must begin. I mustn't be selfish today; today I must only think of your affairs. But there is one thing I must tell you. Do you know we have just had a great piece of good luck?

MRS LINDE.
No, what is it?

NORA.
Just fancy, my husband has been made manager of the Bank!

MRS LINDE.
Your husband? What good luck!

NORA.
Yes, tremendous! A barrister's profession is such an uncertain thing, especially if he won't undertake unsavoury cases; and naturally Torvald has never been willing to do that, and I quite agree with him. You may imagine how pleased we are! He is to take up his work in the Bank at the New Year, and then he will have a big salary and lots of commissions. For the future we can live quite differently—we can do just as we like. I feel so relieved and so happy, Christine! It will be splendid to have heaps of money and not need to have any anxiety, won't it?

MRS LINDE.
Yes, anyhow I think it would be delightful to have what one needs.

NORA.
No, not only what one needs, but heaps and heaps of money.

MRS LINDE.
[smiling]. Nora, Nora, haven't you learned sense yet? In our schooldays you were a great spendthrift.

NORA.
[laughing]. Yes, that is what Torvald says now. *[Wags her finger at her.]* But "Nora, Nora" is not so silly as you think. We have not been in a position for me to waste money. We have both had to work.

MRS LINDE.
You too?

NORA.
Yes; odds and ends, needlework, crotchet-work, embroidery, and that kind of thing. *[Dropping her voice.]* And other things as well. You know Torvald left his office when we were married? There was no prospect of promotion there, and he had to try and earn more than before. But during the first year he over-worked himself dreadfully. You see, he had to make money every way he could, and he worked early and late; but he couldn't stand it, and fell dreadfully ill, and the doctors said it was necessary for him to go south.

MRS LINDE.
You spent a whole year in Italy, didn't you?

NORA.
Yes. It was no easy matter to get away, I can tell you. It was just after Ivar was born; but naturally we had to go. It was a wonderfully beautiful journey, and it saved Torvald's life. But it cost a tremendous lot of money, Christine.

MRS LINDE.
So I should think.

NORA.
It cost about two hundred and fifty pounds. That's a lot, isn't it?

MRS LINDE.

Yes, and in emergencies like that it is lucky to have the money.

NORA.
I ought to tell you that we had it from papa.

MRS LINDE.
Oh, I see. It was just about that time that he died, wasn't it?

NORA.
Yes; and, just think of it, I couldn't go and nurse him. I was expecting little Ivar's birth every day and I had my poor sick Torvald to look after. My dear, kind father—I never saw him again, Christine. That was the saddest time I have known since our marriage.

MRS LINDE.
I know how fond you were of him. And then you went off to Italy?

NORA.
Yes; you see we had money then, and the doctors insisted on our going, so we started a month later.

MRS LINDE.
And your husband came back quite well?

NORA.
As sound as a bell!

MRS LINDE.
But—the doctor?

NORA.
What doctor?

MRS LINDE.
I thought your maid said the gentleman who arrived here just as I did, was the doctor?

NORA.
Yes, that was Doctor Rank, but he doesn't come here professionally. He is our greatest friend, and comes in at least once every day. No, Torvald has not had an hour's illness since then, and our children are strong and healthy and so am I. *[Jumps up and claps her hands.]* Christine! Christine! it's good to be alive and happy!—But how horrid of me; I am talking of nothing but my own affairs. *[Sits on a stool near her, and rests her arms on her knees.]* You mustn't be angry with me. Tell me, is it really true that you did not love your husband? Why did you marry him?

MRS LINDE.
My mother was alive then, and was bedridden and helpless, and I had to provide for my two younger brothers; so I did not think I was justified in refusing his offer.

NORA.
No, perhaps you were quite right. He was rich at that time, then?

MRS LINDE.
I believe he was quite well off. But his business was a precarious one; and, when he died, it all went to pieces and there was nothing left.

NORA.
And then?—

MRS LINDE.
Well, I had to turn my hand to anything I could find—first a small shop, then a small school, and so on. The last three years have seemed like one long working-day, with no rest. Now it is at an end, Nora. My poor mother needs me no more, for she is gone; and the boys do not need me either; they have got situations and can shift for themselves.

NORA.

What a relief you must feel if—

MRS LINDE.
No, indeed; I only feel my life unspeakably empty. No one to live for anymore. *[Gets up restlessly.]* That was why I could not stand the life in my little backwater any longer. I hope it may be easier here to find something which will busy me and occupy my thoughts. If only I could have the good luck to get some regular work—office work of some kind—

NORA.
But, Christine, that is so frightfully tiring, and you look tired out now. You had far better go away to some watering-place.

MRS LINDE.
[walking to the window]. I have no father to give me money for a journey, Nora.

NORA.
[rising]. Oh, don't be angry with me!

MRS LINDE.
[going up to her]. It is you that must not be angry with me, dear. The worst of a position like mine is that it makes one so bitter. No one to work for, and yet obliged to be always on the lookout for chances. One must live, and so one becomes selfish. When you told me of the happy turn your fortunes have taken—you will hardly believe it—I was delighted not so much on your account as on my own.

NORA.
How do you mean?—Oh, I understand. You mean that perhaps Torvald could get you something to do.

MRS LINDE.
Yes, that was what I was thinking of.

NORA.
He must, Christine. Just leave it to me; I will broach the subject very cleverly—I will think of something that will please him very much. It will make me so happy to be of some use to you.

MRS LINDE.
How kind you are, Nora, to be so anxious to help me! It is doubly kind in you, for you know so little of the burdens and troubles of life.

NORA.
I—? I know so little of them?

MRS LINDE.
[smiling]. My dear! Small household cares and that sort of thing!—You are a child, Nora.

NORA.
[tosses her head and crosses the stage]. You ought not to be so superior.

MRS LINDE.
No?

NORA.
You are just like the others. They all think that I am incapable of anything really serious—

MRS LINDE.
Come, come—

NORA.
—that I have gone through nothing in this world of cares.

MRS LINDE.
But, my dear Nora, you have just told me all your troubles.

NORA.
Pooh!—those were trifles. *[Lowering her voice.]* I have not told you the important thing.

MRS LINDE.
The important thing? What do you mean?

NORA.
You look down upon me altogether, Christine—but you ought not to. You are proud, aren't you, of having worked so hard and so long for your mother?

MRS LINDE.
Indeed, I don't look down on anyone. But it is true that I am both proud and glad to think that I was privileged to make the end of my mother's life almost free from care.

NORA.
And you are proud to think of what you have done for your brothers?

MRS LINDE.
I think I have the right to be.

NORA.
I think so, too. But now, listen to this; I too have something to be proud and glad of.

MRS LINDE.
I have no doubt you have. But what do you refer to?

NORA.
Speak low. Suppose Torvald were to hear! He mustn't on any account—no one in the world must know, Christine, except you.

MRS LINDE.
But what is it?

NORA.
Come here. *[Pulls her down on the sofa beside her.]* Now I will show you that I too have something to be proud and glad of. It was I who saved Torvald's life.

MRS LINDE.
"Saved"? How?

NORA.
I told you about our trip to Italy. Torvald would never have recovered if he had not gone there—

MRS LINDE.
Yes, but your father gave you the necessary funds.

NORA.
[smiling]. Yes, that is what Torvald and all the others think, but—

MRS LINDE.
But—

NORA.
Papa didn't give us a shilling. It was I who procured the money.

MRS LINDE.
You? All that large sum?

NORA.
Two hundred and fifty pounds. What do you think of that?

MRS LINDE.
But, Nora, how could you possibly do it? Did you win a prize in the Lottery?

NORA.
[contemptuously]. In the Lottery? There would have been no credit in that.

MRS LINDE.
But where did you get it from, then? Nora *[humming and smiling with an air of mystery]*. Hm, hm! Aha!

MRS LINDE.
Because you couldn't have borrowed it.

NORA.
Couldn't I? Why not?

MRS LINDE.
No, a wife cannot borrow without her husband's consent.

NORA.
[tossing her head]. Oh, if it is a wife who has any head for business—a wife who has the wit to be a little bit clever—

MRS LINDE.
I don't understand it at all, Nora.

NORA.
There is no need you should. I never said I had borrowed the money. I may have got it some other way. *[Lies back on the sofa.]* Perhaps I got it from some other admirer. When anyone is as attractive as I am—

MRS LINDE.
You are a mad creature.

NORA.
Now, you know you're full of curiosity, Christine.

MRS LINDE.
Listen to me, Nora dear. Haven't you been a little bit imprudent?

NORA.
[sits up straight]. Is it imprudent to save your husband's life?

MRS LINDE.
It seems to me imprudent, without his knowledge, to—

NORA.
But it was absolutely necessary that he should not know! My goodness, can't you understand that? It was necessary he should have no idea what a dangerous condition he was in. It was to me that the doctors came and said that his life was in danger, and that the only thing to save him was to live in the south. Do you suppose I didn't try, first of all, to get what I wanted as if it were for myself? I told him how much I should love to travel abroad like other young wives; I tried tears and entreaties with him; I told him that he ought to remember the condition I was in, and that he ought to be kind and indulgent to me; I even hinted that he might raise a loan. That nearly made him angry, Christine. He said I was thoughtless, and that it was his duty as my husband not to indulge me in my whims and caprices—as I believe he called them. Very well, I thought, you must be saved—and that was how I came to devise a way out of the difficulty—

MRS LINDE.
And did your husband never get to know from your father that the money had not come from him?

NORA.
No, never. Papa died just at that time. I had meant to let him into the secret and beg him never to reveal it. But he was so ill then—alas, there never was any need to tell him.

MRS LINDE.
And since then have you never told your secret to your husband?

NORA.
Good Heavens, no! How could you think so? A man who has such strong opinions about these things! And besides, how painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly independence, to know that he owed me anything! It would upset our mutual relations altogether; our beautiful happy home would no longer be what it is now.

MRS LINDE.
Do you mean never to tell him about it?

NORA.
[meditatively, and with a half smile]. Yes—someday, perhaps, after many years, when I am no longer as nice-looking as I am now. Don't laugh at me! I mean, of course, when Torvald is no longer as devoted to me as he is now; when my dancing and dressing-up and reciting have palled on him; then it may be a good thing to have something in reserve—*[Breaking off.]* What nonsense! That time will never come. Now, what do you think of my great secret, Christine? Do you still think I am of no use? I can tell you, too, that this affair has caused me a lot of worry. It has been by no means easy for me to meet my engagements punctually. I may tell you that there is something that is called, in business, quarterly interest, and another thing called payment in installments, and it is always so dreadfully difficult to manage them. I have had to save a little here and there, where I could, you understand. I have not been able to put aside much from my housekeeping money, for Torvald must have a good table. I couldn't let my children be shabbily dressed; I have felt obliged to use up all he gave me for them, the sweet little darlings!

MRS LINDE.
So it has all had to come out of your own necessaries of life, poor Nora?

NORA.
Of course. Besides, I was the one responsible for it. Whenever Torvald has given me money for new dresses and such things, I have never spent more than half of it; I have always bought the simplest and cheapest things. Thank Heaven, any clothes look well on me, and so Torvald has never noticed it. But it was often very hard on me, Christine—because it is delightful to be really well dressed, isn't it?

MRS LINDE.
Quite so.

NORA.
Well, then I have found other ways of earning money. Last winter I was lucky enough to get a lot of copying to do; so I locked myself up and sat writing every evening until quite late at night. Many a time I was desperately tired; but all the same it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man.

MRS LINDE.
How much have you been able to pay off in that way?

NORA.
I can't tell you exactly. You see, it is very difficult to keep an account of a business matter of that kind. I only know that I have paid every penny that I could scrape together. Many a time I was at my wits' end. *[Smiles.]* Then I used to sit here and imagine that a rich old gentleman had fallen in love with me—

MRS LINDE.
What! Who was it?

NORA.
Be quiet!—that he had died; and that when his will was opened it contained, written in big letters, the instruction: "The lovely Mrs Nora Helmer is to have all I possess paid over to her at once in cash."

MRS LINDE.
But, my dear Nora—who could the man be?

NORA.
Good gracious, can't you understand? There was no old gentleman at all; it was only something that I used to sit here and imagine,

when I couldn't think of any way of procuring money. But it's all the same now; the tiresome old person can stay where he is, as far as I am concerned; I don't care about him or his will either, for I am free from care now. *[Jumps up.]* My goodness, it's delightful to think of, Christine! Free from care! To be able to be free from care, quite free from care; to be able to play and romp with the children; to be able to keep the house beautifully and have everything just as Torvald likes it! And, think of it, soon the spring will come and the big blue sky! Perhaps we shall be able to take a little trip—perhaps I shall see the sea again! Oh, it's a wonderful thing to be alive and be happy. *[A bell is heard in the hall.]*

MRS LINDE.
[rising]. There is the bell; perhaps I had better go.

NORA.
No, don't go; no one will come in here; it is sure to be for Torvald.

SERVANT.
[at the hall door]. Excuse me, ma'am—there is a gentleman to see the master, and as the doctor is with him—

NORA.
Who is it?

KROGSTAD.
[at the door]. It is I, Mrs Helmer. *[Mrs LINDE starts, trembles, and turns to the window.]*

NORA.
[takes a step towards him, and speaks in a strained, low voice]. You? What is it? What do you want to see my husband about?

KROGSTAD.
Bank business—in a way. I have a small post in the Bank, and I hear your husband is to be our chief now—

NORA.
Then it is—

KROGSTAD.
Nothing but dry business matters, Mrs Helmer; absolutely nothing else.

NORA.
Be so good as to go into the study, then. *[She bows indifferently to him and shuts the door into the hall; then comes back and makes up the fire in the stove.]*

MRS LINDE.
Nora—who was that man?

NORA.
A lawyer, of the name of Krogstad.

MRS LINDE.
Then it really was he.

NORA.
Do you know the man?

MRS LINDE.
I used to—many years ago. At one time he was a solicitor's clerk in our town.

NORA.
Yes, he was.

MRS LINDE.
He is greatly altered.

NORA.

He made a very unhappy marriage.

MRS LINDE.
He is a widower now, isn't he?

NORA.
With several children. There now, it is burning up. [Shuts the door of the stove and moves the rocking-chair aside.]

MRS LINDE.
They say he carries on various kinds of business.

NORA.
Really! Perhaps he does; I don't know anything about it. But don't let us think of business; it is so tiresome.

DOCTOR RANK.
[comes out of HELMER'S study. Before he shuts the door he calls to him]. No, my dear fellow, I won't disturb you; I would rather go in to your wife for a little while. *[Shuts the door and sees Mrs LINDE.]* I beg your pardon; I am afraid I am disturbing you too.

NORA.
No, not at all. *[Introducing him]*. Doctor Rank, Mrs Linde.

RANK.
I have often heard Mrs Linde's name mentioned here. I think I passed you on the stairs when I arrived, Mrs Linde?

MRS LINDE.
Yes, I go up very slowly; I can't manage stairs well.

RANK.
Ah! some slight internal weakness?

MRS LINDE.
No, the fact is I have been overworking myself.

RANK.
Nothing more than that? Then I suppose you have come to town to amuse yourself with our entertainments?

MRS LINDE.
I have come to look for work.

RANK.
Is that a good cure for overwork?

MRS LINDE.
One must live, Doctor Rank.

RANK.
Yes, the general opinion seems to be that it is necessary.

NORA.
Look here, Doctor Rank—you know you want to live.

RANK.
Certainly. However wretched I may feel, I want to prolong the agony as long as possible. All my patients are like that. And so are those who are morally diseased; one of them, and a bad case too, is at this very moment with Helmer—

MRS LINDE.
[sadly]. Ah!

NORA.
Whom do you mean?

RANK.
A lawyer of the name of Krogstad, a fellow you don't know at all. He suffers from a diseased moral character, Mrs Helmer; but even he began talking of its being highly important that he should live.

NORA.
Did he? What did he want to speak to Torvald about?

RANK.
I have no idea; I only heard that it was something about the Bank.

NORA.
I didn't know this—what's his name—Krogstad had anything to do with the Bank.

RANK.
Yes, he has some sort of appointment there. *[To Mrs Linde.]* I don't know whether you find also in your part of the world that there are certain people who go zealously snuffing about to smell out moral corruption, and, as soon as they have found some, put the person concerned into some lucrative position where they can keep their eye on him. Healthy natures are left out in the cold.

MRS LINDE.
Still I think the sick are those who most need taking care of.

RANK.
[shrugging his shoulders]. Yes, there you are. That is the sentiment that is turning Society into a sick-house.

[NORA, who has been absorbed in her thoughts, breaks out into smothered laughter and claps her hands.]

RANK.
Why do you laugh at that? Have you any notion what Society really is?

NORA.
What do I care about tiresome Society? I am laughing at something quite different, something extremely amusing. Tell me, Doctor Rank, are all the people who are employed in the Bank dependent on Torvald now?

RANK.
Is that what you find so extremely amusing?

NORA.
[smiling and humming]. That's my affair! *[Walking about the room.]* It's perfectly glorious to think that we have—that Torvald has so much power over so many people. *[Takes the packet from her pocket.]* Doctor Rank, what do you say to a macaroon?

RANK.
What, macaroons? I thought they were forbidden here.

NORA.
Yes, but these are some Christine gave me.

MRS LINDE.
What! I?—

NORA.
Oh, well, don't be alarmed! You couldn't know that Torvald had forbidden them. I must tell you that he is afraid they will spoil my teeth. But, bah!—once in a way—That's so, isn't it, Doctor Rank? By your leave! *[Puts a macaroon into his mouth.]* You must have one too, Christine. And I shall have one, just a little one—or at most two. *[Walking about.]* I am tremendously happy. There is just one thing in the world now that I should dearly love to do.

RANK.
Well, what is that?

NORA.
It's something I should dearly love to say, if Torvald could hear me.

RANK.
Well, why can't you say it?

NORA.
No, I daren't; it's so shocking.

MRS LINDE.
Shocking?

RANK.
Well, I should not advise you to say it. Still, with us you might. What is it you would so much like to say if Torvald could hear you?

NORA.
I should just love to say—Well, I'm damned!

RANK.
Are you mad?

MRS LINDE.
Nora, dear—!

RANK.
Say it, here he is!

NORA.
[hiding the packet]. Hush! Hush! Hush! *[HELMER comes out of his room, with his coat over his arm and his hat in his hand.]*

NORA.
Well, Torvald dear, have you got rid of him?

HELMER.
Yes, he has just gone.

NORA.
Let me introduce you—this is Christine, who has come to town.

HELMER.
Christine—? Excuse me, but I don't know—

NORA.
Mrs Linde, dear; Christine Linde.

HELMER.
Of course. A school friend of my wife's, I presume?

MRS LINDE.
Yes, we have known each other since then.

NORA.
And just think, she has taken a long journey in order to see you.

HELMER.
What do you mean?

MRS LINDE.
No, really, I—

NORA.
Christine is tremendously clever at book-keeping, and she is frightfully anxious to work under some clever man, so as to perfect herself—

HELMER.
Very sensible, Mrs Linde.

NORA.
And when she heard you had been appointed manager of the Bank—the news was telegraphed, you know—she travelled here as quick as she could. Torvald, I am sure you will be able to do something for Christine, for my sake, won't you?

HELMER.
Well, it is not altogether impossible. I presume you are a widow, Mrs Linde?

MRS LINDE.
Yes.

HELMER.
And have had some experience of book-keeping?

MRS LINDE.
Yes, a fair amount.

HELMER.
Ah! well, it's very likely I may be able to find something for you—

NORA.
[clapping her hands]. What did I tell you? What did I tell you?

HELMER.
You have just come at a fortunate moment, Mrs Linde.

MRS LINDE.
How am I to thank you?

HELMER.
There is no need. *[Puts on his coat.]* But today you must excuse me—

RANK.
Wait a minute; I will come with you. *[Brings his fur coat from the hall and warms it at the fire.]*

NORA.
Don't be long away, Torvald dear.

HELMER.
About an hour, not more.

NORA.
Are you going too, Christine?

MRS LINDE.
[putting on her cloak]. Yes, I must go and look for a room.

HELMER.
Oh, well then, we can walk down the street together.

NORA.
[helping her]. What a pity it is we are so short of space here; I am afraid it is impossible for us—

MRS LINDE.

Please don't think of it! Goodbye, Nora dear, and many thanks.

NORA.
Goodbye for the present. Of course you will come back this evening. And you too, Dr. Rank. What do you say? If you are well enough? Oh, you must be! Wrap yourself up well. *[They go to the door all talking together. Children's voices are heard on the staircase.]*

NORA.
There they are! There they are! *[She runs to open the door. The NURSE comes in with the children.]* Come in! Come in! *[Stoops and kisses them.]* Oh, you sweet blessings! Look at them, Christine! Aren't they darlings?

RANK.
Don't let us stand here in the draught.

HELMER.
Come along, Mrs Linde; the place will only be bearable for a mother now!

[RANK, HELMER, and Mrs Linde go downstairs. The NURSE comes forward with the children; NORA shuts the hall door.]

NORA.
How fresh and well you look! Such red cheeks like apples and roses. *[The children all talk at once while she speaks to them.]* Have you had great fun? That's splendid! What, you pulled both Emmy and Bob along on the sledge? —both at once?—that was good. You are a clever boy, Ivar. Let me take her for a little, Anne. My sweet little baby doll! *[Takes the baby from the MAID and dances it up and down.]* Yes, yes, mother will dance with Bob too. What! Have you been snowballing? I wish I had been there too! No, no, I will take their things off, Anne; please let me do it, it is such fun. Go in now, you look half frozen. There is some hot coffee for you on the stove.

[The NURSE goes into the room on the left. NORA takes off the children's things and throws them about, while they all talk to her at once.]

NORA.
Really! Did a big dog run after you? But it didn't bite you? No, dogs don't bite nice little dolly children. You mustn't look at the parcels, Ivar. What are they? Ah, I daresay you would like to know. No, no—it's something nasty! Come, let us have a game! What shall we play at? Hide and Seek? Yes, we'll play Hide and Seek. Bob shall hide first. Must I hide? Very well, I'll hide first. *[She and the children laugh and shout, and romp in and out of the room; at last NORA hides under the table, the children rush in and out for her, but do not see her; they hear her smothered laughter, run to the table, lift up the cloth and find her. Shouts of laughter. She crawls forward and pretends to frighten them. Fresh laughter. Meanwhile there has been a knock at the hall door, but none of them has noticed it. The door is half opened, and KROGSTAD appears, he waits a little; the game goes on.]*

KROGSTAD.
Excuse me, Mrs Helmer.

NORA.
[with a stifled cry, turns round and gets up on to her knees]. Ah! what do you want?

KROGSTAD.
Excuse me, the outer door was ajar; I suppose someone forgot to shut it.

NORA.
[rising]. My husband is out, Mr. Krogstad.

KROGSTAD.
I know that.

NORA.
What do you want here, then?

KROGSTAD.
A word with you.

NORA.
With me?—*[To the children, gently.]* Go in to nurse. What? No, the strange man won't do mother any harm. When he has gone we will have another game. *[She takes the children into the room on the left, and shuts the door after them.]* You want to speak to me?

KROGSTAD.
Yes, I do.

NORA.
Today? It is not the first of the month yet.

KROGSTAD.
No, it is Christmas Eve, and it will depend on yourself what sort of a Christmas you will spend.

NORA.
What do you mean? Today it is absolutely impossible for me—

KROGSTAD.
We won't talk about that until later on. This is something different. I presume you can give me a moment?

NORA.
Yes—yes, I can—although—

KROGSTAD.
Good. I was in Olsen's Restaurant and saw your husband going down the street—

NORA.
Yes?

KROGSTAD.
With a lady.

NORA.
What then?

KROGSTAD.
May I make so bold as to ask if it was a Mrs Linde?

NORA.
It was.

KROGSTAD.
Just arrived in town?

NORA.
Yes, today.

KROGSTAD.
She is a great friend of yours, isn't she?

NORA.
She is. But I don't see—

KROGSTAD.
I knew her too, once upon a time.

NORA.

I am aware of that.

KROGSTAD.
Are you? So you know all about it; I thought as much. Then I can ask you, without beating about the bush—is Mrs Linde to have an appointment in the Bank?

NORA.
What right have you to question me, Mr. Krogstad?—You, one of my husband's subordinates! But since you ask, you shall know. Yes, Mrs Linde is to have an appointment. And it was I who pleaded her cause, Mr. Krogstad, let me tell you that.

KROGSTAD.
I was right in what I thought, then.

NORA.
[walking up and down the stage]. Sometimes one has a tiny little bit of influence, I should hope. Because one is a woman, it does not necessarily follow that—. When anyone is in a subordinate position, Mr. Krogstad, they should really be careful to avoid offending anyone who—who—

KROGSTAD.
Who has influence?

NORA.
Exactly.

KROGSTAD.
[changing his tone]. Mrs Helmer, you will be so good as to use your influence on my behalf.

NORA.
What? What do you mean?

KROGSTAD.
You will be so kind as to see that I am allowed to keep my subordinate position in the Bank.

NORA.
What do you mean by that? Who proposes to take your post away from you?

KROGSTAD.
Oh, there is no necessity to keep up the pretence of ignorance. I can quite understand that your friend is not very anxious to expose herself to the chance of rubbing shoulders with me; and I quite understand, too, whom I have to thank for being turned off.

NORA.
But I assure you—

KROGSTAD.
Very likely; but, to come to the point, the time has come when I should advise you to use your influence to prevent that.

NORA.
But, Mr. Krogstad, I have no influence.

KROGSTAD.
Haven't you? I thought you said yourself just now—

NORA.
Naturally I did not mean you to put that construction on it. I! What should make you think I have any influence of that kind with my husband?

KROGSTAD.
Oh, I have known your husband from our student days. I don't suppose he is any more unassailable than other husbands.

NORA.
If you speak slightingly of my husband, I shall turn you out of the house.

KROGSTAD.
You are bold, Mrs Helmer.

NORA.
I am not afraid of you any longer. As soon as the New Year comes, I shall in a very short time be free of the whole thing.

KROGSTAD.
[controlling himself]. Listen to me, Mrs Helmer. If necessary, I am prepared to fight for my small post in the Bank as if I were fighting for my life.

NORA.
So it seems.

KROGSTAD.
It is not only for the sake of the money; indeed, that weighs least with me in the matter. There is another reason—well, I may as well tell you. My position is this. I daresay you know, like everybody else, that once, many years ago, I was guilty of an indiscretion.

NORA.
I think I have heard something of the kind.

KROGSTAD.
The matter never came into court; but every way seemed to be closed to me after that. So I took to the business that you know of. I had to do something; and, honestly, I don't think I've been one of the worst. But now I must cut myself free from all that. My sons are growing up; for their sake I must try and win back as much respect as I can in the town. This post in the Bank was like the first step up for me—and now your husband is going to kick me downstairs again into the mud.

NORA.
But you must believe me, Mr. Krogstad; it is not in my power to help you at all.

KROGSTAD.
Then it is because you haven't the will; but I have means to compel you.

NORA.
You don't mean that you will tell my husband that I owe you money?

KROGSTAD.
Hm!—suppose I were to tell him?

NORA.
It would be perfectly infamous of you. *[Sobbing.]* To think of his learning my secret, which has been my joy and pride, in such an ugly, clumsy way—that he should learn it from you! And it would put me in a horribly disagreeable position—

KROGSTAD.
Only disagreeable?

NORA.
[impetuously]. Well, do it, then!—and it will be the worse for you. My husband will see for himself what a blackguard you are, and you certainly won't keep your post then.

KROGSTAD.
I asked you if it was only a disagreeable scene at home that you were afraid of?

NORA.
If my husband does get to know of it, of course he will at once pay you what is still owing, and we shall have nothing more to do with you.

KROGSTAD.

[coming a step nearer]. Listen to me, Mrs Helmer. Either you have a very bad memory or you know very little of business. I shall be obliged to remind you of a few details.

NORA.
What do you mean?

KROGSTAD.
When your husband was ill, you came to me to borrow two hundred and fifty pounds.

NORA.
I didn't know anyone else to go to.

KROGSTAD.
I promised to get you that amount—

NORA.
Yes, and you did so.

KROGSTAD.
I promised to get you that amount, on certain conditions. Your mind was so taken up with your husband's illness, and you were so anxious to get the money for your journey, that you seem to have paid no attention to the conditions of our bargain. Therefore it will not be amiss if I remind you of them. Now, I promised to get the money on the security of a bond which I drew up.

NORA.
Yes, and which I signed.

KROGSTAD.
Good. But below your signature there were a few lines constituting your father a surety for the money; those lines your father should have signed.

NORA.
Should? He did sign them.

KROGSTAD.
I had left the date blank; that is to say, your father should himself have inserted the date on which he signed the paper. Do you remember that?

NORA.
Yes, I think I remember—

KROGSTAD.
Then I gave you the bond to send by post to your father. Is that not so?

NORA.
Yes.

KROGSTAD.
And you naturally did so at once, because five or six days afterwards you brought me the bond with your father's signature. And then I gave you the money.

NORA.
Well, haven't I been paying it off regularly?

KROGSTAD.
Fairly so, yes. But—to come back to the matter in hand—that must have been a very trying time for you, Mrs Helmer?

NORA.
It was, indeed.

KROGSTAD.

Your father was very ill, wasn't he?

NORA.
He was very near his end.

KROGSTAD.
And died soon afterwards?

NORA.
Yes.

KROGSTAD.
Tell me, Mrs Helmer, can you by any chance remember what day your father died?—on what day of the month, I mean.

NORA.
Papa died on the 29th of September.

KROGSTAD.
That is correct; I have ascertained it for myself. And, as that is so, there is a discrepancy *[taking a paper from his pocket]* which I cannot account for.

NORA.
What discrepancy? I don't know—

KROGSTAD.
The discrepancy consists, Mrs Helmer, in the fact that your father signed this bond three days after his death.

NORA.
What do you mean? I don't understand—

KROGSTAD.
Your father died on the 29th of September. But, look here; your father has dated his signature the 2nd of October. It is a discrepancy, isn't it? *[NORA is silent.]* Can you explain it to me? *[NORA is still silent.]* It is a remarkable thing, too, that the words "2nd of October," as well as the year, are not written in your father's handwriting but in one that I think I know. Well, of course it can be explained; your father may have forgotten to date his signature, and someone else may have dated it haphazard before they knew of his death. There is no harm in that. It all depends on the signature of the name; and that is genuine, I suppose, Mrs Helmer? It was your father himself who signed his name here?

NORA.
[after a short pause, throws her head up and looks defiantly at him]. No, it was not. It was I that wrote papa's name.

KROGSTAD.
Are you aware that is a dangerous confession?

NORA.
In what way? You shall have your money soon.

KROGSTAD.
Let me ask you a question; why did you not send the paper to your father?

NORA.
It was impossible; papa was so ill. If I had asked him for his signature, I should have had to tell him what the money was to be used for; and when he was so ill himself I couldn't tell him that my husband's life was in danger—it was impossible.

KROGSTAD.
It would have been better for you if you had given up your trip abroad.

NORA.
No, that was impossible. That trip was to save my husband's life; I couldn't give that up.

KROGSTAD.
But did it never occur to you that you were committing a fraud on me?

NORA.
I couldn't take that into account; I didn't trouble myself about you at all. I couldn't bear you, because you put so many heartless difficulties in my way, although you knew what a dangerous condition my husband was in.

KROGSTAD.
Mrs Helmer, you evidently do not realise clearly what it is that you have been guilty of. But I can assure you that my one false step, which lost me all my reputation, was nothing more or nothing worse than what you have done.

NORA.
You? Do you ask me to believe that you were brave enough to run a risk to save your wife's life?

KROGSTAD.
The law cares nothing about motives.

NORA.
Then it must be a very foolish law.

KROGSTAD.
Foolish or not, it is the law by which you will be judged, if I produce this paper in court.

NORA.
I don't believe it. Is a daughter not to be allowed to spare her dying father anxiety and care? Is a wife not to be allowed to save her husband's life? I don't know much about law; but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such things as that. Have you no knowledge of such laws—you who are a lawyer? You must be a very poor lawyer, Mr. Krogstad.

KROGSTAD.
Maybe. But matters of business—such business as you and I have had together—do you think I don't understand that? Very well. Do as you please. But let me tell you this—if I lose my position a second time, you shall lose yours with me. *[He bows, and goes out through the hall.]*

NORA.
[appears buried in thought for a short time, then tosses her head]. Nonsense! Trying to frighten me like that!—I am not so silly as he thinks. *[Begins to busy herself putting the children's things in order.]* And yet—? No, it's impossible! I did it for love's sake.

THE CHILDREN.
[in the doorway on the left]. Mother, the stranger man has gone out through the gate.

NORA.
Yes, dears, I know. But, don't tell anyone about the stranger man. Do you hear? Not even papa.

CHILDREN.
No, mother; but will you come and play again?

NORA.
No, no,—not now.

CHILDREN.
But, mother, you promised us.

NORA.
Yes, but I can't now. Run away in; I have such a lot to do. Run away in, my sweet little darlings. *[She gets them into the room by degrees and shuts the door on them; then sits down on the sofa, takes up a piece of needlework and sews a few stitches, but soon stops.]* No! *[Throws down the work, gets up, goes to the hall door and calls out.]* Helen! bring the Tree in. *[Goes to the table on the left, opens a drawer, and stops again.]* No, no! it is quite impossible!

MAID.
[coming in with the Tree]. Where shall I put it, ma'am?

NORA.
Here, in the middle of the floor.

MAID.
Shall I get you anything else?

NORA.
No, thank you. I have all I want. [Exit MAID.]

NORA.
[begins dressing the tree]. A candle here-and flowers here—The horrible man! It's all nonsense—there's nothing wrong. The tree shall be splendid! I will do everything I can think of to please you, Torvald!—I will sing for you, dance for you—*[HELMER comes in with some papers under his arm.]* Oh! are you back already?

HELMER.
Yes. Has anyone been here?

NORA.
Here? No.

HELMER.
That is strange. I saw Krogstad going out of the gate.

NORA.
Did you? Oh yes, I forgot, Krogstad was here for a moment.

HELMER.
Nora, I can see from your manner that he has been here begging you to say a good word for him.

NORA.
Yes.

HELMER.
And you were to appear to do it of your own accord; you were to conceal from me the fact of his having been here; didn't he beg that of you too?

NORA.
Yes, Torvald, but—

HELMER.
Nora, Nora, and you would be a party to that sort of thing? To have any talk with a man like that, and give him any sort of promise? And to tell me a lie into the bargain?

NORA.
A lie—?

HELMER.
Didn't you tell me no one had been here? *[Shakes his finger at her.]* My little songbird must never do that again. A songbird must have a clean beak to chirp with—no false notes! *[Puts his arm round her waist.]* That is so, isn't it? Yes, I am sure it is. *[Lets her go.]* We will say no more about it. *[Sits down by the stove.]* How warm and snug it is here! *[Turns over his papers.]*

NORA.
[after a short pause, during which she busies herself with the Christmas Tree.] Torvald!

HELMER.
Yes.

NORA.
I am looking forward tremendously to the fancy-dress ball at the Stenborgs' the day after tomorrow.

HELMER.
And I am tremendously curious to see what you are going to surprise me with.

NORA.
It was very silly of me to want to do that.

HELMER.
What do you mean?

NORA.
I can't hit upon anything that will do; everything I think of seems so silly and insignificant.

HELMER.
Does my little Nora acknowledge that at last?

NORA.
[standing behind his chair with her arms on the back of it]. Are you very busy, Torvald?

HELMER.
Well—

NORA.
What are all those papers?

HELMER.
Bank business.

NORA.
Already?

HELMER.
I have got authority from the retiring manager to undertake the necessary changes in the staff and in the rearrangement of the work; and I must make use of the Christmas week for that, so as to have everything in order for the new year.

NORA.
Then that was why this poor Krogstad—

HELMER.
Hm!

NORA.
[leans against the back of his chair and strokes his hair]. If you hadn't been so busy I should have asked you a tremendously big favour, Torvald.

HELMER.
What is that? Tell me.

NORA.
There is no one has such good taste as you. And I do so want to look nice at the fancy-dress ball. Torvald, couldn't you take me in hand and decide what I shall go as, and what sort of a dress I shall wear?

HELMER.
Aha! so my obstinate little woman is obliged to get someone to come to her rescue?

NORA.
Yes, Torvald, I can't get along a bit without your help.

HELMER.
Very well, I will think it over, we shall manage to hit upon something.

NORA.
That is nice of you. *[Goes to the Christmas Tree. A short pause.]* How pretty the red flowers look—. But, tell me, was it really something very bad that this Krogstad was guilty of?

HELMER.
He forged someone's name. Have you any idea what that means?

NORA.
Isn't it possible that he was driven to do it by necessity?

HELMER.
Yes; or, as in so many cases, by imprudence. I am not so heartless as to condemn a man altogether because of a single false step of that kind.

NORA.
No, you wouldn't, would you, Torvald?

HELMER.
Many a man has been able to retrieve his character, if he has openly confessed his fault and taken his punishment.

NORA.
Punishment—?

HELMER.
But Krogstad did nothing of that sort; he got himself out of it by a cunning trick, and that is why he has gone under altogether.

NORA.
But do you think it would—?

HELMER.
Just think how a guilty man like that has to lie and play the hypocrite with every one, how he has to wear a mask in the presence of those near and dear to him, even before his own wife and children. And about the children—that is the most terrible part of it all, Nora.

NORA.
How?

HELMER.
Because such an atmosphere of lies infects and poisons the whole life of a home. Each breath the children take in such a house is full of the germs of evil.

NORA.
[coming nearer him]. Are you sure of that?

HELMER.
My dear, I have often seen it in the course of my life as a lawyer. Almost everyone who has gone to the bad early in life has had a deceitful mother.

NORA.
Why do you only say—mother?

HELMER.
It seems most commonly to be the mother's influence, though naturally a bad father's would have the same result. Every lawyer is familiar with the fact. This Krogstad, now, has been persistently poisoning his own children with lies and dissimulation; that is why I say he has lost all moral character. *[Holds out his hands to her.]* That is why my sweet little Nora must promise me not to plead his cause. Give me your hand on it. Come, come, what is this? Give me your hand. There now, that's settled. I assure you it would be quite impossible for me to work with him; I literally feel physically ill when I am in the company of such people.

NORA.
[takes her hand out of his and goes to the opposite side of the Christmas Tree]. How hot it is in here; and I have such a lot to do.

HELMER.
[getting up and putting his papers in order]. Yes, and I must try and read through some of these before dinner; and I must think about your costume, too. And it is just possible I may have something ready in gold paper to hang up on the Tree. *[Puts his hand on her head.]* My precious little singing-bird! *[He goes into his room and shuts the door after him.]*

NORA.
[after a pause, whispers]. No, no—it isn't true. It's impossible; it must be impossible.

[The NURSE opens the door on the left.]

NURSE.
The little ones are begging so hard to be allowed to come in to mamma.

NORA.
No, no, no! Don't let them come in to me! You stay with them, Anne.

NURSE.
Very well, ma'am. *[Shuts the door.]*

NORA.
[pale with terror]. Deprave my little children? Poison my home? *[A short pause. Then she tosses her head.]* It's not true. It can't possibly be true.

ACT II

[THE SAME SCENE.—THE Christmas Tree is in the corner by the piano, stripped of its ornaments and with burnt-down candle-ends on its dishevelled branches. NORA'S cloak and hat are lying on the sofa. She is alone in the room, walking about uneasily. She stops by the sofa and takes up her cloak.]

NORA.
[drops her cloak]. Someone is coming now! *[Goes to the door and listens.]* No—it is no one. Of course, no one will come today, Christmas Day—nor tomorrow either. But, perhaps—*[opens the door and looks out]*. No, nothing in the letterbox; it is quite empty. *[Comes forward.]* What rubbish! of course he can't be in earnest about it. Such a thing couldn't happen; it is impossible—I have three little children.

[Enter the NURSE from the room on the left, carrying a big cardboard box.]

NURSE.
At last I have found the box with the fancy dress.

NORA.
Thanks; put it on the table.

NURSE.
[doing so]. But it is very much in want of mending.

NORA.
I should like to tear it into a hundred thousand pieces.

NURSE.
What an idea! It can easily be put in order—just a little patience.

NORA.
Yes, I will go and get Mrs Linde to come and help me with it.

NURSE.

What, out again? In this horrible weather? You will catch cold, ma'am, and make yourself ill.

NORA.
Well, worse than that might happen. How are the children?

NURSE.
The poor little souls are playing with their Christmas presents, but—

NORA.
Do they ask much for me?

NURSE.
You see, they are so accustomed to have their mamma with them.

NORA.
Yes, but, nurse, I shall not be able to be so much with them now as I was before.

NURSE.
Oh well, young children easily get accustomed to anything.

NORA.
Do you think so? Do you think they would forget their mother if she went away altogether?

NURSE.
Good heavens!—went away altogether?

NORA.
Nurse, I want you to tell me something I have often wondered about—how could you have the heart to put your own child out among strangers?

NURSE.
I was obliged to, if I wanted to be little Nora's nurse.

NORA.
Yes, but how could you be willing to do it?

NURSE.
What, when I was going to get such a good place by it? A poor girl who has got into trouble should be glad to. Besides, that wicked man didn't do a single thing for me.

NORA.
But I suppose your daughter has quite forgotten you.

NURSE.
No, indeed she hasn't. She wrote to me when she was confirmed, and when she was married.

NORA.
[putting her arms round her neck]. Dear old Anne, you were a good mother to me when I was little.

NURSE.
Little Nora, poor dear, had no other mother but me.

NORA.
And if my little ones had no other mother, I am sure you would—What nonsense I am talking! *[Opens the box.]* Go in to them. Now I must—. You will see tomorrow how charming I shall look.

NURSE.
I am sure there will be no one at the ball so charming as you, ma'am. *[Goes into the room on the left.]*

NORA.

[begins to unpack the box, but soon pushes it away from her]. If only I dared go out. If only no one would come. If only I could be sure nothing would happen here in the meantime. Stuff and nonsense! No one will come. Only I mustn't think about it. I will brush my muff. What lovely, lovely gloves! Out of my thoughts, out of my thoughts! One, two, three, four, five, six— *[Screams.]* Ah! there is someone coming—. *[Makes a movement towards the door, but stands irresolute.]*

[Enter Mrs Linde from the hall, where she has taken off her cloak and hat.]

NORA.
Oh, it's you, Christine. There is no one else out there, is there? How good of you to come!

MRS LINDE.
I heard you were up asking for me.

NORA.
Yes, I was passing by. As a matter of fact, it is something you could help me with. Let us sit down here on the sofa. Look here. Tomorrow evening there is to be a fancy-dress ball at the Stenborgs', who live above us; and Torvald wants me to go as a Neapolitan fisher-girl, and dance the Tarantella that I learned at Capri.

MRS LINDE.
I see; you are going to keep up the character.

NORA.
Yes, Torvald wants me to. Look, here is the dress; Torvald had it made for me there, but now it is all so torn, and I haven't any idea—

MRS LINDE.
We will easily put that right. It is only some of the trimming come unsewn here and there. Needle and thread? Now then, that's all we want.

NORA.
It is nice of you.

MRS LINDE.
[sewing]. So you are going to be dressed up tomorrow Nora. I will tell you what—I shall come in for a moment and see you in your fine feathers. But I have completely forgotten to thank you for a delightful evening yesterday.

NORA.
[gets up, and crosses the stage]. Well, I don't think yesterday was as pleasant as usual. You ought to have come to town a little earlier, Christine. Certainly Torvald does understand how to make a house dainty and attractive.

MRS LINDE.
And so do you, it seems to me; you are not your father's daughter for nothing. But tell me, is Doctor Rank always as depressed as he was yesterday?

NORA.
No; yesterday it was very noticeable. I must tell you that he suffers from a very dangerous disease. He has consumption of the spine, poor creature. His father was a horrible man who committed all sorts of excesses; and that is why his son was sickly from childhood, do you understand?

MRS LINDE.
[dropping her sewing]. But, my dearest Nora, how do you know anything about such things?

NORA.
[walking about]. Pooh! When you have three children, you get visits now and then from—from married women, who know something of medical matters, and they talk about one thing and another.

MRS LINDE.
[goes on sewing. A short silence]. Does Doctor Rank come here everyday?

NORA.
Everyday regularly. He is Torvald's most intimate friend, and a great friend of mine too. He is just like one of the family.

MRS LINDE.
But tell me this—is he perfectly sincere? I mean, isn't he the kind of man that is very anxious to make himself agreeable?

NORA.
Not in the least. What makes you think that?

MRS LINDE.
When you introduced him to me yesterday, he declared he had often heard my name mentioned in this house; but afterwards I noticed that your husband hadn't the slightest idea who I was. So how could Doctor Rank—?

NORA.
That is quite right, Christine. Torvald is so absurdly fond of me that he wants me absolutely to himself, as he says. At first he used to seem almost jealous if I mentioned any of the dear folk at home, so naturally I gave up doing so. But I often talk about such things with Doctor Rank, because he likes hearing about them.

MRS LINDE.
Listen to me, Nora. You are still very like a child in many things, and I am older than you in many ways and have a little more experience. Let me tell you this—you ought to make an end of it with Doctor Rank.

NORA.
What ought I to make an end of?

MRS LINDE.
Of two things, I think. Yesterday you talked some nonsense about a rich admirer who was to leave you money—

NORA.
An admirer who doesn't exist, unfortunately! But what then?

MRS LINDE.
Is Doctor Rank a man of means?

NORA.
Yes, he is.

MRS LINDE.
And has no one to provide for?

NORA.
No, no one; but—

MRS LINDE.
And comes here everyday?

NORA.
Yes, I told you so.

MRS LINDE.
But how can this well-bred man be so tactless?

NORA.
I don't understand you at all.

MRS LINDE.
Don't prevaricate, Nora. Do you suppose I don't guess who lent you the two hundred and fifty pounds?

NORA.
Are you out of your senses? How can you think of such a thing! A friend of ours, who comes here everyday! Do you realise what a

horribly painful position that would be?

MRS LINDE.
Then it really isn't he?

NORA.
No, certainly not. It would never have entered into my head for a moment. Besides, he had no money to lend then; he came into his money afterwards.

MRS LINDE.
Well, I think that was lucky for you, my dear Nora.

NORA.
No, it would never have come into my head to ask Doctor Rank. Although I am quite sure that if I had asked him—

MRS LINDE.
But of course you won't.

NORA.
Of course not. I have no reason to think it could possibly be necessary. But I am quite sure that if I told Doctor Rank—

MRS LINDE.
Behind your husband's back?

NORA.
I must make an end of it with the other one, and that will be behind his back too. I must make an end of it with him.

MRS LINDE.
Yes, that is what I told you yesterday, but—

NORA.
[walking up and down]. A man can put a thing like that straight much easier than a woman—

MRS LINDE.
One's husband, yes.

NORA.
Nonsense! *[Standing still.]* When you pay off a debt you get your bond back, don't you?

MRS LINDE.
Yes, as a matter of course.

NORA.
And can tear it into a hundred thousand pieces, and burn it up—the nasty dirty paper!

MRS LINDE.
[looks hard at her, lays down her sewing and gets up slowly]. Nora, you are concealing something from me.

NORA.
Do I look as if I were?

MRS LINDE.
Something has happened to you since yesterday morning. Nora, what is it?

NORA.
[going nearer to her]. Christine! *[Listens.]* Hush! there's Torvald come home. Do you mind going in to the children for the present? Torvald can't bear to see dressmaking going on. Let Anne help you.

MRS LINDE.
[gathering some of the things together]. Certainly—but I am not going away from here until we have had it out with one another.

[She goes into the room on the left, as HELMER comes in from the hall.]

NORA.
[going up to HELMER]. I have wanted you so much, Torvald dear.

HELMER.
Was that the dressmaker?

NORA.
No, it was Christine; she is helping me to put my dress in order. You will see I shall look quite smart.

HELMER.
Wasn't that a happy thought of mine, now?

NORA.
Splendid! But don't you think it is nice of me, too, to do as you wish?

HELMER.
Nice?—because you do as your husband wishes? Well, well, you little rogue, I am sure you did not mean it in that way. But I am not going to disturb you; you will want to be trying on your dress, I expect.

NORA.
I suppose you are going to work.

HELMER.
Yes. *[Shows her a bundle of papers.]* Look at that. I have just been into the bank. *[Turns to go into his room.]*

NORA.
Torvald.

HELMER.
Yes.

NORA.
If your little squirrel were to ask you for something very, very prettily—?

HELMER.
What then?

NORA.
Would you do it?

HELMER.
I should like to hear what it is, first.

NORA.
Your squirrel would run about and do all her tricks if you would be nice, and do what she wants.

HELMER.
Speak plainly.

NORA.
Your skylark would chirp about in every room, with her song rising and falling—

HELMER.
Well, my skylark does that anyhow.

NORA.
I would play the fairy and dance for you in the moonlight, Torvald.

HELMER.
Nora—you surely don't mean that request you made to me this morning?

NORA.
[going near him]. Yes, Torvald, I beg you so earnestly—

HELMER.
Have you really the courage to open up that question again?

NORA.
Yes, dear, you must do as I ask; you must let Krogstad keep his post in the bank.

HELMER.
My dear Nora, it is his post that I have arranged Mrs Linde shall have.

NORA.
Yes, you have been awfully kind about that; but you could just as well dismiss some other clerk instead of Krogstad.

HELMER.
This is simply incredible obstinacy! Because you chose to give him a thoughtless promise that you would speak for him, I am expected to—

NORA.
That isn't the reason, Torvald. It is for your own sake. This fellow writes in the most scurrilous newspapers; you have told me so yourself. He can do you an unspeakable amount of harm. I am frightened to death of him—

HELMER.
Ah, I understand; it is recollections of the past that scare you.

NORA.
What do you mean?

HELMER.
Naturally you are thinking of your father.

NORA.
Yes—yes, of course. Just recall to your mind what these malicious creatures wrote in the papers about papa, and how horribly they slandered him. I believe they would have procured his dismissal if the Department had not sent you over to inquire into it, and if you had not been so kindly disposed and helpful to him.

HELMER.
My little Nora, there is an important difference between your father and me. Your father's reputation as a public official was not above suspicion. Mine is, and I hope it will continue to be so, as long as I hold my office.

NORA.
You never can tell what mischief these men may contrive. We ought to be so well off, so snug and happy here in our peaceful home, and have no cares—you and I and the children, Torvald! That is why I beg you so earnestly—

HELMER.
And it is just by interceding for him that you make it impossible for me to keep him. It is already known at the Bank that I mean to dismiss Krogstad. Is it to get about now that the new manager has changed his mind at his wife's bidding—

NORA.
And what if it did?

HELMER.
Of course!—if only this obstinate little person can get her way! Do you suppose I am going to make myself ridiculous before my whole staff, to let people think that I am a man to be swayed by all sorts of outside influence? I should very soon feel the consequences of it, I can tell you! And besides, there is one thing that makes it quite impossible for me to have Krogstad in the Bank as long as I am manager.

NORA.
Whatever is that?

HELMER.
His moral failings I might perhaps have overlooked, if necessary—

NORA.
Yes, you could—couldn't you?

HELMER.
And I hear he is a good worker, too. But I knew him when we were boys. It was one of those rash friendships that so often prove an incubus in afterlife. I may as well tell you plainly, we were once on very intimate terms with one another. But this tactless fellow lays no restraint on himself when other people are present. On the contrary, he thinks it gives him the right to adopt a familiar tone with me, and every minute it is "I say, Helmer, old fellow!" and that sort of thing. I assure you it is extremely painful for me. He would make my position in the Bank intolerable.

NORA.
Torvald, I don't believe you mean that.

HELMER.
Don't you? Why not?

NORA.
Because it is such a narrow-minded way of looking at things.

HELMER.
What are you saying? Narrow-minded? Do you think I am narrow-minded?

NORA.
No, just the opposite, dear—and it is exactly for that reason.

HELMER.
It's the same thing. You say my point of view is narrow-minded, so I must be so too. Narrow-minded! Very well—I must put an end to this. *[Goes to the hall door and calls.]* Helen!

NORA.
What are you going to do?

HELMER.
[looking among his papers]. Settle it. *[Enter MAID.]* Look here; take this letter and go downstairs with it at once. Find a messenger and tell him to deliver it, and be quick. The address is on it, and here is the money.

MAID.
Very well, sir. *[Exit with the letter.]*

HELMER.
[putting his papers together]. Now then, little Miss Obstinate.

NORA.
[breathlessly]. Torvald—what was that letter?

HELMER.
Krogstad's dismissal.

NORA.
Call her back, Torvald! There is still time. Oh Torvald, call her back! Do it for my sake—for your own sake—for the children's sake! Do you hear me, Torvald? Call her back! You don't know what that letter can bring upon us.

HELMER.
It's too late.

NORA.
Yes, it's too late.

HELMER.
My dear Nora, I can forgive the anxiety you are in, although really it is an insult to me. It is, indeed. Isn't it an insult to think that I should be afraid of a starving quill-driver's vengeance? But I forgive you nevertheless, because it is such eloquent witness to your great love for me. *[Takes her in his arms.]* And that is as it should be, my own darling Nora. Come what will, you may be sure I shall have both courage and strength if they be needed. You will see I am man enough to take everything upon myself.

NORA.
[in a horror-stricken voice]. What do you mean by that?

HELMER.
Everything, I say—

NORA.
[recovering herself]. You will never have to do that.

HELMER.
That's right. Well, we will share it, Nora, as man and wife should. That is how it shall be. *[Caressing her.]* Are you content now? There! There!—not these frightened dove's eyes! The whole thing is only the wildest fancy!—Now, you must go and play through the Tarantella and practise with your tambourine. I shall go into the inner office and shut the door, and I shall hear nothing; you can make as much noise as you please. *[Turns back at the door.]* And when Rank comes, tell him where he will find me. *[Nods to her, takes his papers and goes into his room, and shuts the door after him.]*

NORA.
[bewildered with anxiety, stands as if rooted to the spot, and whispers]. He was capable of doing it. He will do it. He will do it in spite of everything.—No, not that! Never, never! Anything rather than that! Oh, for some help, some way out of it! *[The door-bell rings.]* Doctor Rank! Anything rather than that—anything, whatever it is! *[She puts her hands over her face, pulls herself together, goes to the door and opens it. RANK is standing without, hanging up his coat. During the following dialogue it begins to grow dark.]*

NORA.
Good day, Doctor Rank. I knew your ring. But you mustn't go in to Torvald now; I think he is busy with something.

RANK.
And you?

NORA.
[brings him in and shuts the door after him]. Oh, you know very well I always have time for you.

RANK.
Thank you. I shall make use of as much of it as I can.

NORA.
What do you mean by that? As much of it as you can?

RANK.
Well, does that alarm you?

NORA.
It was such a strange way of putting it. Is anything likely to happen?

RANK.
Nothing but what I have long been prepared for. But I certainly didn't expect it to happen so soon.

NORA.
[gripping him by the arm]. What have you found out? Doctor Rank, you must tell me.

RANK.

[sitting down by the stove]. It is all up with me. And it can't be helped.

NORA.
[with a sigh of relief]. Is it about yourself?

RANK.
Who else? It is no use lying to one's self. I am the most wretched of all my patients, Mrs Helmer. Lately I have been taking stock of my internal economy. Bankrupt! Probably within a month I shall lie rotting in the churchyard.

NORA.
What an ugly thing to say!

RANK.
The thing itself is cursedly ugly, and the worst of it is that I shall have to face so much more that is ugly before that. I shall only make one more examination of myself; when I have done that, I shall know pretty certainly when it will be that the horrors of dissolution will begin. There is something I want to tell you. Helmer's refined nature gives him an unconquerable disgust at everything that is ugly; I won't have him in my sick-room.

NORA.
Oh, but, Doctor Rank—

RANK.
I won't have him there. Not on any account. I bar my door to him. As soon as I am quite certain that the worst has come, I shall send you my card with a black cross on it, and then you will know that the loathsome end has begun.

NORA.
You are quite absurd today. And I wanted you so much to be in a really good humour.

RANK.
With death stalking beside me?—To have to pay this penalty for another man's sin? Is there any justice in that? And in every single family, in one way or another, some such inexorable retribution is being exacted—

NORA.
[putting her hands over her ears]. Rubbish! Do talk of something cheerful.

RANK.
Oh, it's a mere laughing matter, the whole thing. My poor innocent spine has to suffer for my father's youthful amusements.

NORA.
[sitting at the table on the left]. I suppose you mean that he was too partial to asparagus and pate de foie gras, don't you?

RANK.
Yes, and to truffles.

NORA.
Truffles, yes. And oysters too, I suppose?

RANK.
Oysters, of course, that goes without saying.

NORA.
And heaps of port and champagne. It is sad that all these nice things should take their revenge on our bones.

RANK.
Especially that they should revenge themselves on the unlucky bones of those who have not had the satisfaction of enjoying them.

NORA.
Yes, that's the saddest part of it all.

RANK.

[with a searching look at her]. Hm!—

NORA.
[after a short pause]. Why did you smile?

RANK.
No, it was you that laughed.

NORA.
No, it was you that smiled, Doctor Rank!

RANK.
[rising]. You are a greater rascal than I thought.

NORA.
I am in a silly mood today.

RANK.
So it seems.

NORA.
[putting her hands on his shoulders]. Dear, dear Doctor Rank, death mustn't take you away from Torvald and me.

RANK.
It is a loss you would easily recover from. Those who are gone are soon forgotten.

NORA.
[looking at him anxiously]. Do you believe that?

RANK.
People form new ties, and then—

NORA.
Who will form new ties?

RANK.
Both you and Helmer, when I am gone. You yourself are already on the high road to it, I think. What did that Mrs Linde want here last night?

NORA.
Oho!—you don't mean to say you are jealous of poor Christine?

RANK.
Yes, I am. She will be my successor in this house. When I am done for, this woman will—

NORA.
Hush! don't speak so loud. She is in that room.

RANK.
Today again. There, you see.

NORA.
She has only come to sew my dress for me. Bless my soul, how unreasonable you are! *[Sits down on the sofa.]* Be nice now, Doctor Rank, and tomorrow you will see how beautifully I shall dance, and you can imagine I am doing it all for you—and for Torvald too, of course. *[Takes various things out of the box.]* Doctor Rank, come and sit down here, and I will show you something.

RANK.
[sitting down]. What is it?

NORA.

Just look at those!

RANK.
Silk stockings.

NORA.
Flesh-coloured. Aren't they lovely? It is so dark here now, but tomorrow—. No, no, no! you must only look at the feet. Oh well, you may have leave to look at the legs too.

RANK.
Hm!—

NORA.
Why are you looking so critical? Don't you think they will fit me?

RANK.
I have no means of forming an opinion about that.

NORA.
[looks at him for a moment]. For shame! *[Hits him lightly on the ear with the stockings.]* That's to punish you. *[Folds them up again.]*

RANK.
And what other nice things am I to be allowed to see?

NORA.
Not a single thing more, for being so naughty. *[She looks among the things, humming to herself.]*

RANK.
[after a short silence]. When I am sitting here, talking to you as intimately as this, I cannot imagine for a moment what would have become of me if I had never come into this house.

NORA.
[smiling]. I believe you do feel thoroughly at home with us.

RANK.
[in a lower voice, looking straight in front of him]. And to be obliged to leave it all—

NORA.
Nonsense, you are not going to leave it.

RANK.
[as before]. And not be able to leave behind one the slightest token of one's gratitude, scarcely even a fleeting regret—nothing but an empty place which the first comer can fill as well as any other.

NORA.
And if I asked you now for a—? No!

RANK.
For what?

NORA.
For a big proof of your friendship—

RANK.
Yes, yes!

NORA.
I mean a tremendously big favour—

RANK.
Would you really make me so happy for once?

NORA.
Ah, but you don't know what it is yet.

RANK.
No—but tell me.

NORA.
I really can't, Doctor Rank. It is something out of all reason; it means advice, and help, and a favour—

RANK.
The bigger a thing it is the better. I can't conceive what it is you mean. Do tell me. Haven't I your confidence?

NORA.
More than anyone else. I know you are my truest and best friend, and so I will tell you what it is. Well, Doctor Rank, it is something you must help me to prevent. You know how devotedly, how inexpressibly deeply Torvald loves me; he would never for a moment hesitate to give his life for me.

RANK.
[leaning towards her]. Nora—do you think he is the only one—?

NORA.
[with a slight start]. The only one—?

RANK.
The only one who would gladly give his life for your sake.

NORA.
[sadly]. Is that it?

RANK.
I was determined you should know it before I went away, and there will never be a better opportunity than this. Now you know it, Nora. And now you know, too, that you can trust me as you would trust no one else.

NORA.
[rises, deliberately and quietly]. Let me pass.

RANK.
[makes room for her to pass him, but sits still]. Nora!

NORA.
[at the hall door]. Helen, bring in the lamp. *[Goes over to the stove.]* Dear Doctor Rank, that was really horrid of you.

RANK.
To have loved you as much as anyone else does? Was that horrid?

NORA.
No, but to go and tell me so. There was really no need—

RANK.
What do you mean? Did you know—? *[MAID enters with lamp, puts it down on the table, and goes out.]* Nora—Mrs Helmer—tell me, had you any idea of this?

NORA.
Oh, how do I know whether I had or whether I hadn't? I really can't tell you—To think you could be so clumsy, Doctor Rank! We were getting on so nicely.

RANK.

Well, at all events you know now that you can command me, body and soul. So won't you speak out?

NORA.
[looking at him]. After what happened?

RANK.
I beg you to let me know what it is.

NORA.
I can't tell you anything now.

RANK.
Yes, yes. You mustn't punish me in that way. Let me have permission to do for you whatever a man may do.

NORA.
You can do nothing for me now. Besides, I really don't need any help at all. You will find that the whole thing is merely fancy on my part. It really is so—of course it is! *[Sits down in the rocking-chair, and looks at him with a smile.]* You are a nice sort of man, Doctor Rank!—don't you feel ashamed of yourself, now the lamp has come?

RANK.
Not a bit. But perhaps I had better go—for ever?

NORA.
No, indeed, you shall not. Of course you must come here just as before. You know very well Torvald can't do without you.

RANK.
Yes, but you?

NORA.
Oh, I am always tremendously pleased when you come.

RANK.
It is just that, that put me on the wrong track. You are a riddle to me. I have often thought that you would almost as soon be in my company as in Helmer's.

NORA.
Yes—you see there are some people one loves best, and others whom one would almost always rather have as companions.

RANK.
Yes, there is something in that.

NORA.
When I was at home, of course I loved papa best. But I always thought it tremendous fun if I could steal down into the maids' room, because they never moralised at all, and talked to each other about such entertaining things.

RANK.
I see—it is their place I have taken.

NORA.
[jumping up and going to him]. Oh, dear, nice Doctor Rank, I never meant that at all. But surely you can understand that being with Torvald is a little like being with papa—*[Enter MAID from the hall.]*

MAID.
If you please, ma'am. *[Whispers and hands her a card.]*

NORA.
[glancing at the card]. Oh! *[Puts it in her pocket.]*

RANK.
Is there anything wrong?

NORA.
No, no, not in the least. It is only something—it is my new dress—

RANK.
What? Your dress is lying there.

NORA.
Oh, yes, that one; but this is another. I ordered it. Torvald mustn't know about it—

RANK.
Oho! Then that was the great secret.

NORA.
Of course. Just go in to him; he is sitting in the inner room. Keep him as long as—

RANK.
Make your mind easy; I won't let him escape.

[Goes into HELMER'S room.]

NORA.
[to the MAID]. And he is standing waiting in the kitchen?

MAID.
Yes; he came up the back stairs.

NORA.
But didn't you tell him no one was in?

MAID.
Yes, but it was no good.

NORA.
He won't go away?

MAID.
No; he says he won't until he has seen you, ma'am.

NORA.
Well, let him come in—but quietly. Helen, you mustn't say anything about it to anyone. It is a surprise for my husband.

MAID.
Yes, ma'am, I quite understand. *[Exit.]*

NORA.
This dreadful thing is going to happen! It will happen in spite of me! No, no, no, it can't happen—it shan't happen! *[She bolts the door of HELMER'S room. The MAID opens the hall door for KROGSTAD and shuts it after him. He is wearing a fur coat, high boots and a fur cap.]*

NORA.
[advancing towards him]. Speak low—my husband is at home.

KROGSTAD.
No matter about that.

NORA.
What do you want of me?

KROGSTAD.

An explanation of something.

NORA.
Make haste then. What is it?

KROGSTAD.
You know, I suppose, that I have got my dismissal.

NORA.
I couldn't prevent it, Mr. Krogstad. I fought as hard as I could on your side, but it was no good.

KROGSTAD.
Does your husband love you so little, then? He knows what I can expose you to, and yet he ventures—

NORA.
How can you suppose that he has any knowledge of the sort?

KROGSTAD.
I didn't suppose so at all. It would not be the least like our dear Torvald Helmer to show so much courage—

NORA.
Mr. Krogstad, a little respect for my husband, please.

KROGSTAD.
Certainly—all the respect he deserves. But since you have kept the matter so carefully to yourself, I make bold to suppose that you have a little clearer idea, than you had yesterday, of what it actually is that you have done?

NORA.
More than you could ever teach me.

KROGSTAD.
Yes, such a bad lawyer as I am.

NORA.
What is it you want of me?

KROGSTAD.
Only to see how you were, Mrs Helmer. I have been thinking about you all day long. A mere cashier, a quill-driver, a—well, a man like me—even he has a little of what is called feeling, you know.

NORA.
Show it, then; think of my little children.

KROGSTAD.
Have you and your husband thought of mine? But never mind about that. I only wanted to tell you that you need not take this matter too seriously. In the first place there will be no accusation made on my part.

NORA.
No, of course not; I was sure of that.

KROGSTAD.
The whole thing can be arranged amicably; there is no reason why anyone should know anything about it. It will remain a secret between us three.

NORA.
My husband must never get to know anything about it.

KROGSTAD.
How will you be able to prevent it? Am I to understand that you can pay the balance that is owing?

NORA.
No, not just at present.

KROGSTAD.
Or perhaps that you have some expedient for raising the money soon?

NORA.
No expedient that I mean to make use of.

KROGSTAD.
Well, in any case, it would have been of no use to you now. If you stood there with ever so much money in your hand, I would never part with your bond.

NORA.

Tell me what purpose you mean to put it to.

KROGSTAD.
I shall only preserve it—keep it in my possession. No one who is not concerned in the matter shall have the slightest hint of it. So that if the thought of it has driven you to any desperate resolution—

NORA.
It has.

KROGSTAD.
If you had it in your mind to run away from your home—

NORA.
I had.

KROGSTAD.
Or even something worse—

NORA.
How could you know that?

KROGSTAD.
Give up the idea.

NORA.
How did you know I had thought of that?

KROGSTAD.
Most of us think of that at first. I did, too—but I hadn't the courage.

NORA.
[faintly]. No more had I.

KROGSTAD.
[in a tone of relief]. No, that's it, isn't it—you hadn't the courage either?

NORA.
No, I haven't—I haven't.

KROGSTAD.
Besides, it would have been a great piece of folly. Once the first storm at home is over—. I have a letter for your husband in my pocket.

NORA.
Telling him everything?

KROGSTAD.
In as lenient a manner as I possibly could.

NORA.
[quickly]. He mustn't get the letter. Tear it up. I will find some means of getting money.

KROGSTAD.
Excuse me, Mrs Helmer, but I think I told you just now—

NORA.
I am not speaking of what I owe you. Tell me what sum you are asking my husband for, and I will get the money.

KROGSTAD.
I am not asking your husband for a penny.

NORA.
What do you want, then?

KROGSTAD.
I will tell you. I want to rehabilitate myself, Mrs Helmer; I want to get on; and in that your husband must help me. For the last year and a half I have not had a hand in anything dishonourable, amid all that time I have been struggling in most restricted circumstances. I was content to work my way up step by step. Now I am turned out, and I am not going to be satisfied with merely being taken into favour again. I want to get on, I tell you. I want to get into the Bank again, in a higher position. Your husband must make a place for me—

NORA.
That he will never do!

KROGSTAD.
He will; I know him; he dare not protest. And as soon as I am in there again with him, then you will see! Within a year I shall be the manager's right hand. It will be Nils Krogstad and not Torvald Helmer who manages the Bank.

NORA.
That's a thing you will never see!

KROGSTAD.
Do you mean that you will—?

NORA.
I have courage enough for it now.

KROGSTAD.
Oh, you can't frighten me. A fine, spoilt lady like you—

NORA.
You will see, you will see.

KROGSTAD.
Under the ice, perhaps? Down into the cold, coal-black water? And then, in the spring, to float up to the surface, all horrible and unrecognisable, with your hair fallen out—

NORA.
You can't frighten me.

KROGSTAD.
Nor you me. People don't do such things, Mrs Helmer. Besides, what use would it be? I should have him completely in my power all the same.

NORA.
Afterwards? When I am no longer—

KROGSTAD.
Have you forgotten that it is I who have the keeping of your reputation? *[NORA stands speechlessly looking at him.]* Well, now, I have warned you. Do not do anything foolish. When Helmer has had my letter, I shall expect a message from him. And be sure you remember that it is your husband himself who has forced me into such ways as this again. I will never forgive him for that. Goodbye, Mrs Helmer. *[Exit through the hall.]*

NORA.
[goes to the hall door, opens it slightly and listens.] He is going. He is not putting the letter in the box. Oh no, no! that's impossible! *[Opens the door by degrees.]* What is that? He is standing outside. He is not going downstairs. Is he hesitating? Can he—? *[A letter drops into the box; then KROGSTAD'S footsteps are heard, until they die away as he goes downstairs. NORA utters a stifled cry, and runs across the room to the table by the sofa. A short pause.]*

NORA.
In the letter-box. *[Steals across to the hall door.]* There it lies—Torvald, Torvald, there is no hope for us now!

[Mrs Linde comes in from the room on the left, carrying the dress.]

MRS LINDE.
There, I can't see anything more to mend now. Would you like to try it on—?

NORA.
[in a hoarse whisper]. Christine, come here.

MRS LINDE.
[throwing the dress down on the sofa]. What is the matter with you? You look so agitated!

NORA.
Come here. Do you see that letter? There, look—you can see it through the glass in the letter-box.

MRS LINDE.
Yes, I see it.

NORA.
That letter is from Krogstad.

MRS LINDE.
Nora—it was Krogstad who lent you the money!

NORA.
Yes, and now Torvald will know all about it.

MRS LINDE.
Believe me, Nora, that's the best thing for both of you.

NORA.
You don't know all. I forged a name.

MRS LINDE.
Good heavens—!

NORA.
I only want to say this to you, Christine—you must be my witness.

MRS LINDE.
Your witness? What do you mean? What am I to—?

NORA.
If I should go out of my mind—and it might easily happen—

MRS LINDE.
Nora!

NORA.
Or if anything else should happen to me—anything, for instance, that might prevent my being here—

MRS LINDE.
Nora! Nora! you are quite out of your mind.

NORA.
And if it should happen that there were some one who wanted to take all the responsibility, all the blame, you understand—

MRS LINDE.
Yes, yes—but how can you suppose—?

NORA.
Then you must be my witness, that it is not true, Christine. I am not out of my mind at all; I am in my right senses now, and I tell you no one else has known anything about it; I, and I alone, did the whole thing. Remember that.

MRS LINDE.
I will, indeed. But I don't understand all this.

NORA.
How should you understand it? A wonderful thing is going to happen!

MRS LINDE.
A wonderful thing?

NORA.
Yes, a wonderful thing!—But it is so terrible, Christine; it mustn't happen, not for all the world.

MRS LINDE.
I will go at once and see Krogstad.

NORA.
Don't go to him; he will do you some harm.

MRS LINDE.
There was a time when he would gladly do anything for my sake.

NORA.
He?

MRS LINDE.
Where does he live?

NORA.
How should I know—? Yes *[feeling in her pocket]*, here is his card. But the letter, the letter—!

HELMER.
[calls from his room, knocking at the door]. Nora!

NORA.
[cries out anxiously]. Oh, what's that? What do you want?

HELMER.
Don't be so frightened. We are not coming in; you have locked the door. Are you trying on your dress?

NORA.
Yes, that's it. I look so nice, Torvald.

MRS LINDE.
[who has read the card]. I see he lives at the corner here.

NORA.
Yes, but it's no use. It is hopeless. The letter is lying there in the box.

MRS LINDE.
And your husband keeps the key?

NORA.
Yes, always.

MRS LINDE.
Krogstad must ask for his letter back unread, he must find some pretence—

NORA.
But it is just at this time that Torvald generally—

MRS LINDE.
You must delay him. Go in to him in the meantime. I will come back as soon as I can. *[She goes out hurriedly through the hall door.]*

NORA.
[goes to HELMER'S door, opens it and peeps in]. Torvald!

HELMER.
[from the inner room]. Well? May I venture at last to come into my own room again? Come along, Rank, now you will see— *[Halting in the doorway.]* But what is this?

NORA.
What is what, dear?

HELMER.
Rank led me to expect a splendid transformation.

RANK.
[in the doorway]. I understood so, but evidently I was mistaken.

NORA.
Yes, nobody is to have the chance of admiring me in my dress until tomorrow.

HELMER.
But, my dear Nora, you look so worn out. Have you been practising too much?

NORA.
No, I have not practised at all.

HELMER.
But you will need to—

NORA.
Yes, indeed I shall, Torvald. But I can't get on a bit without you to help me; I have absolutely forgotten the whole thing.

HELMER.
Oh, we will soon work it up again.

NORA.
Yes, help me, Torvald. Promise that you will! I am so nervous about it—all the people—. You must give yourself up to me entirely this evening. Not the tiniest bit of business—you mustn't even take a pen in your hand. Will you promise, Torvald dear?

HELMER.
I promise. This evening I will be wholly and absolutely at your service, you helpless little mortal. Ah, by the way, first of all I will just— *[Goes towards the hall door.]*

NORA.
What are you going to do there?

HELMER.
Only see if any letters have come.

NORA.
No, no! don't do that, Torvald!

HELMER.
Why not?

NORA.
Torvald, please don't. There is nothing there.

HELMER.
Well, let me look. *[Turns to go to the letter-box. NORA, at the piano, plays the first bars of the Tarantella. HELMER stops in the doorway.]* Aha!

NORA.
I can't dance tomorrow if I don't practise with you.

HELMER.
[going up to her]. Are you really so afraid of it, dear?

NORA.
Yes, so dreadfully afraid of it. Let me practise at once; there is time now, before we go to dinner. Sit down and play for me, Torvald dear; criticise me, and correct me as you play.

HELMER.
With great pleasure, if you wish me to. *[Sits down at the piano.]*

NORA.
[takes out of the box a tambourine and a long variegated shawl. She hastily drapes the shawl round her. Then she springs to the front of the stage and calls out]. Now play for me! I am going to dance!

[HELMER plays and NORA dances. RANK stands by the piano behind HELMER, and looks on.]

HELMER.
[as he plays]. Slower, slower!

NORA.
I can't do it any other way.

HELMER.
Not so violently, Nora!

NORA.
This is the way.

HELMER.
[stops playing]. No, no—that is not a bit right.

NORA.
[laughing and swinging the tambourine]. Didn't I tell you so?

RANK.
Let me play for her.

HELMER.
[getting up]. Yes, do. I can correct her better then.

[RANK sits down at the piano and plays. NORA dances more and more wildly. HELMER has taken up a position beside the stove, and during her dance gives her frequent instructions. She does not seem to hear him; her hair comes down and falls over her shoulders; she pays no attention to it, but goes on dancing. Enter Mrs Linde.]

MRS LINDE.
[standing as if spell-bound in the doorway]. Oh!—

NORA.
[as she dances]. Such fun, Christine!

HELMER.
My dear darling Nora, you are dancing as if your life depended on it.

NORA.
So it does.

HELMER.
Stop, Rank; this is sheer madness. Stop, I tell you! *[RANK stops playing, and NORA suddenly stands still. HELMER goes up to her.]* I could never have believed it. You have forgotten everything I taught you.

NORA.
[throwing away the tambourine]. There, you see.

HELMER.
You will want a lot of coaching.

NORA.
Yes, you see how much I need it. You must coach me up to the last minute. Promise me that, Torvald!

HELMER.
You can depend on me.

NORA.
You must not think of anything but me, either today or tomorrow; you mustn't open a single letter—not even open the letter-box—

HELMER.
Ah, you are still afraid of that fellow—

NORA.
Yes, indeed I am.

HELMER.
Nora, I can tell from your looks that there is a letter from him lying there.

NORA.
I don't know; I think there is; but you must not read anything of that kind now. Nothing horrid must come between us until this is all over.

RANK.
[whispers to HELMER]. You mustn't contradict her.

HELMER.
[taking her in his arms]. The child shall have her way. But tomorrow night, after you have danced—

NORA.
Then you will be free. *[The MAID appears in the doorway to the right.]*

MAID.
Dinner is served, ma'am.

NORA.
We will have champagne, Helen.

MAID.
Very good, ma'am. *[Exit.]*

HELMER.
Hullo!—are we going to have a banquet?

NORA.
Yes, a champagne banquet until the small hours. *[Calls out.]* And a few macaroons, Helen—lots, just for once!

HELMER.
Come, come, don't be so wild and nervous. Be my own little skylark, as you used.

NORA.
Yes, dear, I will. But go in now and you too, Doctor Rank. Christine, you must help me to do up my hair.

RANK.
[whispers to HELMER as they go out]. I suppose there is nothing—she is not expecting anything?

HELMER.
Far from it, my dear fellow; it is simply nothing more than this childish nervousness I was telling you of. *[They go into the right-hand room.]*

NORA.
Well!

MRS LINDE.
Gone out of town.

NORA.
I could tell from your face.

MRS LINDE.
He is coming home tomorrow evening. I wrote a note for him.

NORA.
You should have let it alone; you must prevent nothing. After all, it is splendid to be waiting for a wonderful thing to happen.

MRS LINDE.
What is it that you are waiting for?

NORA.
Oh, you wouldn't understand. Go in to them, I will come in a moment. *[Mrs Linde goes into the dining-room. NORA stands still for a little while, as if to compose herself. Then she looks at her watch.]* Five o'clock. Seven hours until midnight; and then four-and-twenty hours until the next midnight. Then the Tarantella will be over. Twenty-four and seven? Thirty-one hours to live.

HELMER.
[from the doorway on the right]. Where's my little skylark?

NORA.
[going to him with her arms outstretched]. Here she is!

ACT III

[THE SAME SCENE.—The table has been placed in the middle of the stage, with chairs around it. A lamp is burning on the table. The door into the hall stands open. Dance music is heard in the room above. Mrs Linde is sitting at the table idly turning over the leaves of a book; she tries to read, but does not seem able to collect her thoughts. Every now and then she listens intently for a sound at the outer door.]

MRS LINDE.
[looking at her watch]. Not yet—and the time is nearly up. If only he does not—. *[Listens again.]* Ah, there he is. *[Goes into the hall and opens the outer door carefully. Light footsteps are heard on the stairs. She whispers.]* Come in. There is no one here.

KROGSTAD.
[in the doorway]. I found a note from you at home. What does this mean?

MRS LINDE.
It is absolutely necessary that I should have a talk with you.

KROGSTAD.
Really? And is it absolutely necessary that it should be here?

MRS LINDE.
It is impossible where I live; there is no private entrance to my rooms. Come in; we are quite alone. The maid is asleep, and the Helmers are at the dance upstairs.

KROGSTAD.
[coming into the room]. Are the Helmers really at a dance tonight?

MRS LINDE.
Yes, why not?

KROGSTAD.
Certainly—why not?

MRS LINDE.
Now, Nils, let us have a talk.

KROGSTAD.
Can we two have anything to talk about?

MRS LINDE.
We have a great deal to talk about.

KROGSTAD.
I shouldn't have thought so.

MRS LINDE.
No, you have never properly understood me.

KROGSTAD.
Was there anything else to understand except what was obvious to all the world—a heartless woman jilts a man when a more lucrative chance turns up?

MRS LINDE.
Do you believe I am as absolutely heartless as all that? And do you believe that I did it with a light heart?

KROGSTAD.
Didn't you?

MRS LINDE.
Nils, did you really think that?

KROGSTAD.
If it were as you say, why did you write to me as you did at the time?

MRS LINDE.
I could do nothing else. As I had to break with you, it was my duty also to put an end to all that you felt for me.

KROGSTAD.
[wringing his hands]. So that was it. And all this—only for the sake of money!

MRS LINDE.
You must not forget that I had a helpless mother and two little brothers. We couldn't wait for you, Nils; your prospects seemed hopeless then.

KROGSTAD.
That may be so, but you had no right to throw me over for anyone else's sake.

MRS LINDE.
Indeed I don't know. Many a time did I ask myself if I had the right to do it.

KROGSTAD.
[more gently]. When I lost you, it was as if all the solid ground went from under my feet. Look at me now—I am a shipwrecked man clinging to a bit of wreckage.

MRS LINDE.
But help may be near.

KROGSTAD.
It was near; but then you came and stood in my way.

MRS LINDE.
Unintentionally, Nils. It was only today that I learned it was your place I was going to take in the Bank.

KROGSTAD.
I believe you, if you say so. But now that you know it, are you not going to give it up to me?

MRS LINDE.
No, because that would not benefit you in the least.

KROGSTAD.
Oh, benefit, benefit—I would have done it whether or no.

MRS LINDE.
I have learned to act prudently. Life, and hard, bitter necessity have taught me that.

KROGSTAD.
And life has taught me not to believe in fine speeches.

MRS LINDE.
Then life has taught you something very reasonable. But deeds you must believe in?

KROGSTAD.
What do you mean by that?

MRS LINDE.

You said you were like a shipwrecked man clinging to some wreckage.

KROGSTAD.
I had good reason to say so.

MRS LINDE.
Well, I am like a shipwrecked woman clinging to some wreckage—no one to mourn for, no one to care for.

KROGSTAD.
It was your own choice.

MRS LINDE.
There was no other choice—then.

KROGSTAD.
Well, what now?

MRS LINDE.
Nils, how would it be if we two shipwrecked people could join forces?

KROGSTAD.
What are you saying?

MRS LINDE.
Two on the same piece of wreckage would stand a better chance than each on their own.

KROGSTAD.
Christine I...

MRS LINDE.
What do you suppose brought me to town?

KROGSTAD.
Do you mean that you gave me a thought?

MRS LINDE.
I could not endure life without work. All my life, as long as I can remember, I have worked, and it has been my greatest and only pleasure. But now I am quite alone in the world—my life is so dreadfully empty and I feel so forsaken. There is not the least pleasure in working for one's self. Nils, give me someone and something to work for.

KROGSTAD.
I don't trust that. It is nothing but a woman's overstrained sense of generosity that prompts you to make such an offer of yourself.

MRS LINDE.
Have you ever noticed anything of the sort in me?

KROGSTAD.
Could you really do it? Tell me—do you know all about my past life?

MRS LINDE.
Yes.

KROGSTAD.
And do you know what they think of me here?

MRS LINDE.
You seemed to me to imply that with me you might have been quite another man.

KROGSTAD.
I am certain of it.

MRS LINDE.
Is it too late now?

KROGSTAD.
Christine, are you saying this deliberately? Yes, I am sure you are. I see it in your face. Have you really the courage, then—?

MRS LINDE.
I want to be a mother to someone, and your children need a mother. We two need each other. Nils, I have faith in your real character—I can dare anything together with you.

KROGSTAD.
[grasps her hands]. Thanks, thanks, Christine! Now I shall find a way to clear myself in the eyes of the world. Ah, but I forgot—

MRS LINDE.
[listening]. Hush! The Tarantella! Go, go!

KROGSTAD.
Why? What is it?

MRS LINDE.
Do you hear them up there? When that is over, we may expect them back.

KROGSTAD.
Yes, yes—I will go. But it is all no use. Of course you are not aware what steps I have taken in the matter of the Helmers.

MRS LINDE.
Yes, I know all about that.

KROGSTAD.
And in spite of that have you the courage to—?

MRS LINDE.
I understand very well to what lengths a man like you might be driven by despair.

KROGSTAD.
If I could only undo what I have done!

MRS LINDE.
You cannot. Your letter is lying in the letter-box now.

KROGSTAD.
Are you sure of that?

MRS LINDE.
Quite sure, but—

KROGSTAD.
[with a searching look at her]. Is that what it all means?—that you want to save your friend at any cost? Tell me frankly. Is that it?

MRS LINDE.
Nils, a woman who has once sold herself for another's sake, doesn't do it a second time.

KROGSTAD.
I will ask for my letter back.

MRS LINDE.
No, no.

KROGSTAD.
Yes, of course I will. I will wait here until Helmer comes; I will tell him he must give me my letter back—that it only concerns my

dismissal—that he is not to read it—

MRS LINDE.
No, Nils, you must not recall your letter.

KROGSTAD.
But, tell me, wasn't it for that very purpose that you asked me to meet you here?

MRS LINDE.
In my first moment of fright, it was. But twenty-four hours have elapsed since then, and in that time I have witnessed incredible things in this house. Helmer must know all about it. This unhappy secret must be disclosed; they must have a complete understanding between them, which is impossible with all this concealment and falsehood going on.

KROGSTAD.
Very well, if you will take the responsibility. But there is one thing I can do in any case, and I shall do it at once.

MRS LINDE.
[listening]. You must be quick and go! The dance is over; we are not safe a moment longer.

KROGSTAD.
I will wait for you below.

MRS LINDE.
Yes, do. You must see me back to my door...

KROGSTAD.
I have never had such an amazing piece of good fortune in my life! *[Goes out through the outer door. The door between the room and the hall remains open.]*

MRS LINDE.
[tidying up the room and laying her hat and cloak ready]. What a difference! what a difference! Someone to work for and live for—a home to bring comfort into. That I will do, indeed. I wish they would be quick and come—*[Listens.]* Ah, there they are now. I must put on my things. *[Takes up her hat and cloak. HELMER'S and NORA'S voices are heard outside; a key is turned, and HELMER brings NORA almost by force into the hall. She is in an Italian costume with a large black shawl around her; he is in evening dress, and a black domino which is flying open.]*

NORA.
[hanging back in the doorway, and struggling with him]. No, no, no!—don't take me in. I want to go upstairs again; I don't want to leave so early.

HELMER.
But, my dearest Nora—

NORA.
Please, Torvald dear—please, please—only an hour more.

HELMER.
Not a single minute, my sweet Nora. You know that was our agreement. Come along into the room; you are catching cold standing there. *[He brings her gently into the room, in spite of her resistance.]*

MRS LINDE.
Good evening.

NORA.
Christine!

HELMER.
You here, so late, Mrs Linde?

MRS LINDE.

Yes, you must excuse me; I was so anxious to see Nora in her dress.

NORA.
Have you been sitting here waiting for me?

MRS LINDE.
Yes, unfortunately I came too late, you had already gone upstairs; and I thought I couldn't go away again without having seen you.

HELMER.
[taking off NORA'S shawl]. Yes, take a good look at her. I think she is worth looking at. Isn't she charming, Mrs Linde?

MRS LINDE.
Yes, indeed she is.

HELMER.
Doesn't she look remarkably pretty? Everyone thought so at the dance. But she is terribly self-willed, this sweet little person. What are we to do with her? You will hardly believe that I had almost to bring her away by force.

NORA.
Torvald, you will repent not having let me stay, even if it were only for half an hour.

HELMER.
Listen to her, Mrs Linde! She had danced her Tarantella, and it had been a tremendous success, as it deserved—although possibly the performance was a trifle too realistic—a little more so, I mean, than was strictly compatible with the limitations of art. But never mind about that! The chief thing is, she had made a success—she had made a tremendous success. Do you think I was going to let her remain there after that, and spoil the effect? No, indeed! I took my charming little Capri maiden—my capricious little Capri maiden, I should say—on my arm; took one quick turn round the room; a curtsey on either side, and, as they say in novels, the beautiful apparition disappeared. An exit ought always to be effective, Mrs Linde; but that is what I cannot make Nora understand. Pooh! this room is hot. *[Throws his domino on a chair, and opens the door of his room.]* Hullo! it's all dark in here. Oh, of course—excuse me—. *[He goes in, and lights some candles.]*

NORA.
[in a hurried and breathless whisper]. Well?

MRS LINDE.
[in a low voice]. I have had a talk with him.

NORA.
Yes, and—

MRS LINDE.
Nora, you must tell your husband all about it.

NORA.
[in an expressionless voice]. I knew it.

MRS LINDE.
You have nothing to be afraid of as far as Krogstad is concerned; but you must tell him.

NORA.
I won't tell him.

MRS LINDE.
Then the letter will.

NORA.
Thank you, Christine. Now I know what I must do. Hush—!

HELMER.
[coming in again]. Well, Mrs Linde, have you admired her?

MRS LINDE.
Yes, and now I will say goodnight.

HELMER.
What, already? Is this yours, this knitting?

MRS LINDE.
[taking it]. Yes, thank you, I had very nearly forgotten it.

HELMER.
So you knit?

MRS LINDE.
Of course.

HELMER.
Do you know, you ought to embroider.

MRS LINDE.
Really? Why?

HELMER.
Yes, it's far more becoming. Let me show you. You hold the embroidery thus in your left hand, and use the needle with the right—like this—with a long, easy sweep. Do you see?

MRS LINDE.
Yes, perhaps—

HELMER.
But in the case of knitting—that can never be anything but ungraceful; look here—the arms close together, the knitting-needles going up and down—it has a sort of Chinese effect—. That was really excellent champagne they gave us.

MRS LINDE.
Well,—goodnight, Nora, and don't be self-willed any more.

HELMER.
That's right, Mrs Linde.

MRS LINDE.
Goodnight, Mr. Helmer.

HELMER.
[accompanying her to the door]. Goodnight, goodnight. I hope you will get home all right. I should be very happy to—but you haven't any great distance to go. Goodnight, goodnight. *[She goes out; he shuts the door after her, and comes in again.]* Ah!—at last we have got rid of her. She is a frightful bore, that woman.

NORA.
Aren't you very tired, Torvald?

HELMER.
No, not in the least.

NORA.
Nor sleepy?

HELMER.
Not a bit. On the contrary, I feel extraordinarily lively. And you?—you really look both tired and sleepy.

NORA.
Yes, I am very tired. I want to go to sleep at once.

HELMER.
There, you see it was quite right of me not to let you stay there any longer.

NORA.
Everything you do is quite right, Torvald.

HELMER.
[kissing her on the forehead]. Now my little skylark is speaking reasonably. Did you notice what good spirits Rank was in this evening?

NORA.
Really? Was he? I didn't speak to him at all.

HELMER.
And I very little, but I have not for a long time seen him in such good form. *[Looks for a while at her and then goes nearer to her.]* It is delightful to be at home by ourselves again, to be all alone with you—you fascinating, charming little darling!

NORA.
Don't look at me like that, Torvald.

HELMER.
Why shouldn't I look at my dearest treasure?—at all the beauty that is mine, all my very own?

NORA.
[going to the other side of the table]. You mustn't say things like that to me tonight.

HELMER.
[following her]. You have still got the Tarantella in your blood, I see. And it makes you more captivating than ever. Listen—the guests are beginning to go now. *[In a lower voice.]* Nora—soon the whole house will be quiet.

NORA.
Yes, I hope so.

HELMER.
Yes, my own darling Nora. Do you know, when I am out at a party with you like this, why I speak so little to you, keep away from you, and only send a stolen glance in your direction now and then?—do you know why I do that? It is because I make believe to myself that we are secretly in love, and you are my secretly promised bride, and that no one suspects there is anything between us.

NORA.
Yes, yes—I know very well your thoughts are with me all the time.

HELMER.
And when we are leaving, and I am putting the shawl over your beautiful young shoulders—on your lovely neck—then I imagine that you are my young bride and that we have just come from the wedding, and I am bringing you for the first time into our home—to be alone with you for the first time—quite alone with my shy little darling! All this evening I have longed for nothing but you. When I watched the seductive figures of the Tarantella, my blood was on fire; I could endure it no longer, and that was why I brought you down so early—

NORA.
Go away, Torvald! You must let me go. I won't—

HELMER.
What's that? You're joking, my little Nora! You won't—you won't? Am I not your husband—? *[A knock is heard at the outer door.]*

NORA.
[starting]. Did you hear—?

HELMER.
[going into the hall]. Who is it?

RANK.
[outside]. It is I. May I come in for a moment?

HELMER.
[in a fretful whisper]. Oh, what does he want now? *[Aloud.]* Wait a minute! *[Unlocks the door.]* Come, that's kind of you not to pass by our door.

RANK.
I thought I heard your voice, and felt as if I should like to look in. *[With a swift glance round.]* Ah, yes!—these dear familiar rooms. You are very happy and cosy in here, you two.

HELMER.
It seems to me that you looked after yourself pretty well upstairs too.

RANK.
Excellently. Why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't one enjoy everything in this world?—at any rate as much as one can, and as long as one can. The wine was capital—

HELMER.
Especially the champagne.

RANK.
So you noticed that too? It is almost incredible how much I managed to put away!

NORA.
Torvald drank a great deal of champagne tonight too.

RANK.
Did he?

NORA.
Yes, and he is always in such good spirits afterwards.

RANK.
Well, why should one not enjoy a merry evening after a well-spent day?

HELMER.
Well spent? I am afraid I can't take credit for that.

RANK.
[clapping him on the back]. But I can, you know!

NORA.
Doctor Rank, you must have been occupied with some scientific investigation today.

RANK.
Exactly.

HELMER.
Just listen!—little Nora talking about scientific investigations!

NORA.
And may I congratulate you on the result?

RANK.
Indeed you may.

NORA.
Was it favourable, then?

RANK.
The best possible, for both doctor and patient—certainty.

NORA.
[quickly and searchingly]. Certainty?

RANK.
Absolute certainty. So wasn't I entitled to make a merry evening of it after that?

NORA.
Yes, you certainly were, Doctor Rank.

HELMER.
I think so too, so long as you don't have to pay for it in the morning.

RANK.
Oh well, one can't have anything in this life without paying for it.

NORA.
Doctor Rank—are you fond of fancy-dress balls?

RANK.
Yes, if there is a fine lot of pretty costumes.

NORA.
Tell me—what shall we two wear at the next?

HELMER.
Little featherbrain!—are you thinking of the next already?

RANK.
We two? Yes, I can tell you. You shall go as a good fairy—

HELMER.
Yes, but what do you suggest as an appropriate costume for that?

RANK.
Let your wife go dressed just as she is in everyday life.

HELMER.
That was really very prettily turned. But can't you tell us what you will be?

RANK.
Yes, my dear friend, I have quite made up my mind about that.

HELMER.
Well?

RANK.
At the next fancy-dress ball I shall be invisible.

HELMER.
That's a good joke!

RANK.
There is a big black hat—have you never heard of hats that make you invisible? If you put one on, no one can see you.

HELMER.
[suppressing a smile]. Yes, you are quite right.

RANK.
But I am clean forgetting what I came for. Helmer, give me a cigar—one of the dark Havanas.

HELMER.
With the greatest pleasure. *[Offers him his case.]*

RANK.
[takes a cigar and cuts off the end]. Thanks.

NORA.
[striking a match]. Let me give you a light.

RANK.
Thank you. *[She holds the match for him to light his cigar.]* And now goodbye!

HELMER.
Goodbye, goodbye, dear old man!

NORA.
Sleep well, Doctor Rank.

RANK.
Thank you for that wish.

NORA.
Wish me the same.

RANK.
You? Well, if you want me to sleep well! And thanks for the light. *[He nods to them both and goes out.]*

HELMER.
[in a subdued voice]. He has drunk more than he ought.

NORA.
[absently]. Maybe. *[HELMER takes a bunch of keys out of his pocket and goes into the hall.]* Torvald! what are you going to do there?

HELMER.
Emptying the letter-box; it is quite full; there will be no room to put the newspaper in tomorrow morning.

NORA.
Are you going to work tonight?

HELMER.
You know quite well I'm not. What is this? Someone has been at the lock.

NORA.
At the lock—?

HELMER.
Yes, someone has. What can it mean? I should never have thought the maid—. Here is a broken hairpin. Nora, it is one of yours.

NORA.
[quickly]. Then it must have been the children—

HELMER.
Then you must get them out of those ways. There, at last I have got it open. *[Takes out the contents of the letter-box, and calls to the kitchen.]* Helen!—Helen, put out the light over the front door. *[Goes back into the room and shuts the door into the hall. He holds out his hand full of letters.]* Look at that—look what a heap of them there are. *[Turning them over.]* What on earth is that?

NORA.
[at the window]. The letter—No! Torvald, no!

HELMER.
Two cards—of Rank's.

NORA.
Of Doctor Rank's?

HELMER.
[looking at them]. Doctor Rank. They were on the top. He must have put them in when he went out.

NORA.
Is there anything written on them?

HELMER.
There is a black cross over the name. Look there—what an uncomfortable idea! It looks as if he were announcing his own death.

NORA.
It is just what he is doing.

HELMER.
What? Do you know anything about it? Has he said anything to you?

NORA.
Yes. He told me that when the cards came it would be his leave-taking from us. He means to shut himself up and die.

HELMER.
My poor old friend! Certainly I knew we should not have him very long with us. But so soon! And so he hides himself away like a wounded animal.

NORA.
If it has to happen, it is best it should be without a word—don't you think so, Torvald?

HELMER.
[walking up and down]. He had so grown into our lives. I can't think of him as having gone out of them. He, with his sufferings and his loneliness, was like a cloudy background to our sunlit happiness. Well, perhaps it is best so. For him, anyway. *[Standing still.]* And perhaps for us too, Nora. We two are thrown quite upon each other now. *[Puts his arms round her.]* My darling wife, I don't feel as if I could hold you tight enough. Do you know, Nora, I have often wished that you might be threatened by some great danger, so that I might risk my life's blood, and everything, for your sake.

NORA.
[disengages herself, and says firmly and decidedly]. Now you must read your letters, Torvald.

HELMER.
No, no; not tonight. I want to be with you, my darling wife.

NORA.
With the thought of your friend's death—

HELMER.
You are right, it has affected us both. Something ugly has come between us—the thought of the horrors of death. We must try and rid our minds of that. Until then—we will each go to our own room.

NORA.
[hanging on his neck]. Goodnight, Torvald—Goodnight!

HELMER.
[kissing her on the forehead]. Goodnight, my little singing-bird. Sleep sound, Nora. Now I will read my letters through. *[He takes his letters and goes into his room, shutting the door after him.]*

NORA.
[gropes distractedly about, seizes HELMER'S domino, throws it round her, while she says in quick, hoarse, spasmodic whispers]. Never to see him again. Never! Never! *[Puts her shawl over her head.]* Never to see my children again either—never again. Never! Never!—Ah! the icy, black water—the unfathomable depths—If only it were over! He has got it now—now he is reading it. Goodbye, Torvald and my children! *[She is about to rush out through the hall, when HELMER opens his door hurriedly and stands with an open letter in his hand.]*

HELMER.
Nora!

NORA.
Ah!—

HELMER.
What is this? Do you know what is in this letter?

NORA.
Yes, I know. Let me go! Let me get out!

HELMER.
[holding her back]. Where are you going?

NORA.
[trying to get free]. You shan't save me, Torvald!

HELMER.
[reeling]. True? Is this true, that I read here? Horrible! No, no—it is impossible that it can be true.

NORA.
It is true. I have loved you above everything else in the world.

HELMER.
Oh, don't let us have any silly excuses.

NORA.
[taking a step towards him]. Torvald—!

HELMER.
Miserable creature—what have you done?

NORA.
Let me go. You shall not suffer for my sake. You shall not take it upon yourself.

HELMER.
No tragic airs, please. *[Locks the hall door.]* Here you shall stay and give me an explanation. Do you understand what you have done? Answer me! Do you understand what you have done?

NORA.
[looks steadily at him and says with a growing look of coldness in her face]. Yes, now I am beginning to understand thoroughly.

HELMER.
[walking about the room]. What a horrible awakening! All these eight years—she who was my joy and pride—a hypocrite, a liar—worse, worse—a criminal! The unutterable ugliness of it all!—For shame! For shame! *[NORA is silent and looks steadily at him. He stops in front of her.]* I ought to have suspected that something of the sort would happen. I ought to have foreseen it. All your father's want of principle—be silent!—all your father's want of principle has come out in you. No religion, no morality, no sense of duty—. How I am punished for having winked at what he did! I did it for your sake, and this is how you repay me.

NORA.
Yes, that's just it.

HELMER.
Now you have destroyed all my happiness. You have ruined all my future. It is horrible to think of! I am in the power of an unscrupulous man; he can do what he likes with me, ask anything he likes of me, give me any orders he pleases—I dare not refuse. And I must sink to such miserable depths because of a thoughtless woman!

NORA.
When I am out of the way, you will be free.

HELMER.
No fine speeches, please. Your father had always plenty of those ready, too. What good would it be to me if you were out of the way, as you say? Not the slightest. He can make the affair known everywhere; and if he does, I may be falsely suspected of having been a party to your criminal action. Very likely people will think I was behind it all—that it was I who prompted you! And I have to thank you for all this—you whom I have cherished during the whole of our married life. Do you understand now what it is you have done for me?

NORA.
[coldly and quietly]. Yes.

HELMER.
It is so incredible that I can't take it in. But we must come to some understanding. Take off that shawl. Take it off, I tell you. I must try and appease him some way or another. The matter must be hushed up at any cost. And as for you and me, it must appear as if everything between us were just as before—but naturally only in the eyes of the world. You will still remain in my house, that is a matter of course. But I shall not allow you to bring up the children; I dare not trust them to you. To think that I should be obliged to say so to one whom I have loved so dearly, and whom I still—. No, that is all over. From this moment happiness is not the question; all that concerns us is to save the remains, the fragments, the appearance—

[A ring is heard at the front-door bell.]

HELMER.
[with a start]. What is that? So late! Can the worst—? Can he—? Hide yourself, Nora. Say you are ill.

[NORA stands motionless. HELMER goes and unlocks the hall door.]

MAID.
[half-dressed, comes to the door]. A letter for the mistress.

HELMER.
Give it to me. *[Takes the letter, and shuts the door.]* Yes, it is from him. You shall not have it; I will read it myself.

NORA.
Yes, read it.

HELMER.
[standing by the lamp]. I scarcely have the courage to do it. It may mean ruin for both of us. No, I must know. *[Tears open the letter, runs his eye over a few lines, looks at a paper enclosed, and gives a shout of joy.]* Nora! *[She looks at him questioningly.]* Nora!—No, I must read it once again—. Yes, it is true! I am saved! Nora, I am saved!

NORA.
And I?

HELMER.
You too, of course; we are both saved, both you and I. Look, he sends you your bond back. He says he regrets and repents—that a happy change in his life—never mind what he says! We are saved, Nora! No one can do anything to you. Oh, Nora, Nora!—no, first I must destroy these hateful things. Let me see—. *[Takes a look at the bond.]* No, no, I won't look at it. The whole thing shall be nothing but a bad dream to me. *[Tears up the bond and both letters, throws them all into the stove, and watches them burn.]* There—now it doesn't exist any longer. He says that since Christmas Eve you—. These must have been three dreadful days for you, Nora.

NORA.
I have fought a hard fight these three days.

HELMER.
And suffered agonies, and seen no way out but—. No, we won't call any of the horrors to mind. We will only shout with joy, and keep saying, "It's all over! It's all over!" Listen to me, Nora. You don't seem to realise that it is all over. What is this?—such a cold, set face! My poor little Nora, I quite understand; you don't feel as if you could believe that I have forgiven you. But it is true, Nora, I swear it; I have forgiven you everything. I know that what you did, you did out of love for me.

NORA.
That is true.

HELMER.
You have loved me as a wife ought to love her husband. Only you had not sufficient knowledge to judge of the means you used. But do you suppose you are any the less dear to me, because you don't understand how to act on your own responsibility? No, no; only lean on me; I will advise you and direct you. I should not be a man if this womanly helplessness did not just give you a double attractiveness in my eyes. You must not think anymore about the hard things I said in my first moment of consternation, when I thought everything was going to overwhelm me. I have forgiven you, Nora; I swear to you I have forgiven you.

NORA.
Thank you for your forgiveness. *[She goes out through the door to the right.]*

HELMER.
No, don't go—. *[Looks in.]* What are you doing in there?

NORA.
[from within]. Taking off my fancy dress.

HELMER.
[standing at the open door]. Yes, do. Try and calm yourself, and make your mind easy again, my frightened little singing-bird. Be at rest, and feel secure; I have broad wings to shelter you under. *[Walks up and down by the door.]* How warm and cosy our home is, Nora. Here is shelter for you; here I will protect you like a hunted dove that I have saved from a hawk's claws; I will bring peace to your poor beating heart. It will come, little by little, Nora, believe me. Tomorrow morning you will look upon it all quite differently; soon everything will be just as it was before. Very soon you won't need me to assure you that I have forgiven you; you will yourself feel the certainty that I have done so. Can you suppose I should ever think of such a thing as repudiating you, or even reproaching you? You have no idea what a true man's heart is like, Nora. There is something so indescribably sweet and satisfying, to a man, in the knowledge that he has forgiven his wife—forgiven her freely, and with all his heart. It seems as if that had made her, as it were, doubly his own; he has given her a new life, so to speak; and she has in a way become both wife and child to him. So you shall be for me after this, my little scared, helpless darling. Have no anxiety about anything, Nora; only be frank and open with me, and I will serve as will and conscience both to you—. What is this? Not gone to bed? Have you changed your things?

NORA.
[in everyday dress]. Yes, Torvald, I have changed my things now.

HELMER.
But what for?—so late as this.

NORA.
I shall not sleep tonight.

HELMER.
But, my dear Nora—

NORA.
[looking at her watch]. It is not so very late. Sit down here, Torvald. You and I have much to say to one another. *[She sits down at one side of the table.]*

HELMER.
Nora—what is this?—this cold, set face?

NORA.
Sit down. It will take some time; I have a lot to talk over with you.

HELMER.
[sits down at the opposite side of the table]. You alarm me, Nora!—and I don't understand you.

NORA.
No, that is just it. You don't understand me, and I have never understood you either—before tonight. No, you mustn't interrupt me. You must simply listen to what I say. Torvald, this is a settling of accounts.

HELMER.
What do you mean by that?

NORA.
[after a short silence]. Isn't there one thing that strikes you as strange in our sitting here like this?

HELMER.
What is that?

NORA.
We have been married now eight years. Does it not occur to you that this is the first time we two, you and I, husband and wife, have had a serious conversation?

HELMER.
What do you mean by serious?

NORA.
In all these eight years—longer than that—from the very beginning of our acquaintance, we have never exchanged a word on any serious subject.

HELMER.
Was it likely that I would be continually and forever telling you about worries that you could not help me to bear?

NORA.
I am not speaking about business matters. I say that we have never sat down in earnest together to try and get at the bottom of anything.

HELMER.
But, dearest Nora, would it have been any good to you?

NORA.
That is just it; you have never understood me. I have been greatly wronged, Torvald—first by papa and then by you.

HELMER.
What! By us two—by us two, who have loved you better than anyone else in the world?

NORA.
[shaking her head]. You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me.

HELMER.
Nora, what do I hear you saying?

NORA.
It is perfectly true, Torvald. When I was at home with papa, he told me his opinion about everything, and so I had the same opinions; and if I differed from him I concealed the fact, because he would not have liked it. He called me his doll-child, and he played with me just as I used to play with my dolls. And when I came to live with you—

HELMER.
What sort of an expression is that to use about our marriage?

NORA.
[undisturbed]. I mean that I was simply transferred from papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as you—or else I pretended to, I am really not quite sure which—I think sometimes the one and sometimes the other. When I look back on it, it seems to me as if I had been living here like a poor woman—just from hand to mouth. I have existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it so. You and papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life.

HELMER.
How unreasonable and how ungrateful you are, Nora! Have you not been happy here?

NORA.
No, I have never been happy. I thought I was, but it has never really been so.

HELMER.
Not—not happy!

NORA.
No, only merry. And you have always been so kind to me. But our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was papa's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been, Torvald.

HELMER.
There is some truth in what you say—exaggerated and strained as your view of it is. But for the future it shall be different. Playtime shall be over, and lesson-time shall begin.

NORA.
Whose lessons? Mine, or the children's?

HELMER.
Both yours and the children's, my darling Nora.

NORA.
Alas, Torvald, you are not the man to educate me into being a proper wife for you.

HELMER.
And you can say that!

NORA.
And I—how am I fitted to bring up the children?

HELMER.
Nora!

NORA.
Didn't you say so yourself a little while ago—that you dare not trust me to bring them up?

HELMER.
In a moment of anger! Why do you pay any heed to that?

NORA.
Indeed, you were perfectly right. I am not fit for the task. There is another task I must undertake first. I must try and educate myself—you are not the man to help me in that. I must do that for myself. And that is why I am going to leave you now.

HELMER.
[springing up]. What do you say?

NORA.
I must stand quite alone, if I am to understand myself and everything about me. It is for that reason that I cannot remain with you any longer.

HELMER.
Nora, Nora!

NORA.
I am going away from here now, at once. I am sure Christine will take me in for the night—

HELMER.
You are out of your mind! I won't allow it! I forbid you!

NORA.
It is no use forbidding me anything any longer. I will take with me what belongs to myself. I will take nothing from you, either now or later.

HELMER.
What sort of madness is this!

NORA.
Tomorrow I shall go home—I mean, to my old home. It will be easiest for me to find something to do there.

HELMER.
You blind, foolish woman!

NORA.
I must try and get some sense, Torvald.

HELMER.
To desert your home, your husband and your children! And you don't consider what people will say!

NORA.
I cannot consider that at all. I only know that it is necessary for me.

HELMER.
It's shocking. This is how you would neglect your most sacred duties.

NORA.
What do you consider my most sacred duties?

HELMER.
Do I need to tell you that? Are they not your duties to your husband and your children?

NORA.
I have other duties just as sacred.

HELMER.
That you have not. What duties could those be?

NORA.
Duties to myself.

HELMER.
Before all else, you are a wife and a mother.

NORA.
I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are—or, at all events, that I must try and become one. I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them.

HELMER.
Can you not understand your place in your own home? Have you not a reliable guide in such matters as that?—have you no

religion?

NORA.
I am afraid, Torvald, I do not exactly know what religion is.

HELMER.
What are you saying?

NORA.
I know nothing but what the clergyman said, when I went to be confirmed. He told us that religion was this, and that, and the other. When I am away from all this, and am alone, I will look into that matter too. I will see if what the clergyman said is true, or at all events if it is true for me.

HELMER.
This is unheard of in a girl of your age! But if religion cannot lead you aright, let me try and awaken your conscience. I suppose you have some moral sense? Or—answer me—am I to think you have none?

NORA.
I assure you, Torvald, that is not an easy question to answer. I really don't know. The thing perplexes me altogether. I only know that you and I look at it in quite a different light. I am learning, too, that the law is quite another thing from what I supposed; but I find it impossible to convince myself that the law is right. According to it a woman has no right to spare her old dying father, or to save her husband's life. I can't believe that.

HELMER.
You talk like a child. You don't understand the conditions of the world in which you live.

NORA.
No, I don't. But now I am going to try. I am going to see if I can make out who is right, the world or I.

HELMER.
You are ill, Nora; you are delirious; I almost think you are out of your mind.

NORA.
I have never felt my mind so clear and certain as tonight.

HELMER.
And is it with a clear and certain mind that you forsake your husband and your children?

NORA.
Yes, it is.

HELMER.
Then there is only one possible explanation.

NORA.
What is that?

HELMER.
You do not love me anymore.

NORA.
No, that is just it.

HELMER.
Nora!—and you can say that?

NORA.
It gives me great pain, Torvald, for you have always been so kind to me, but I cannot help it. I do not love you any more.

HELMER.

[regaining his composure]. Is that a clear and certain conviction too?

NORA.
Yes, absolutely clear and certain. That is the reason why I will not stay here any longer.

HELMER.
And can you tell me what I have done to forfeit your love?

NORA.
Yes, indeed I can. It was tonight, when the wonderful thing did not happen; then I saw you were not the man I had thought you were.

HELMER.
Explain yourself better. I don't understand you.

NORA.
I have waited so patiently for eight years; for, goodness knows, I knew very well that wonderful things don't happen every day. Then this horrible misfortune came upon me; and then I felt quite certain that the wonderful thing was going to happen at last. When Krogstad's letter was lying out there, never for a moment did I imagine that you would consent to accept this man's conditions. I was so absolutely certain that you would say to him: Publish the thing to the whole world. And when that was done—

HELMER.
Yes, what then?—when I had exposed my wife to shame and disgrace?

NORA.
When that was done, I was so absolutely certain, you would come forward and take everything upon yourself, and say: I am the guilty one.

HELMER.
Nora—!

NORA.
You mean that I would never have accepted such a sacrifice on your part? No, of course not. But what would my assurances have been worth against yours? That was the wonderful thing which I hoped for and feared; and it was to prevent that, that I wanted to kill myself.

HELMER.
I would gladly work night and day for you, Nora—bear sorrow and want for your sake. But no man would sacrifice his honour for the one he loves.

NORA.
It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done.

HELMER.
Oh, you think and talk like a heedless child.

NORA.
Maybe. But you neither think nor talk like the man I could bind myself to. As soon as your fear was over—and it was not fear for what threatened me, but for what might happen to you—when the whole thing was past, as far as you were concerned it was exactly as if nothing at all had happened. Exactly as before, I was your little skylark, your doll, which you would in future treat with doubly gentle care, because it was so brittle and fragile. *[Getting up.]* Torvald—it was then it dawned upon me that for eight years I had been living here with a strange man, and had borne him three children—. Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I could tear myself into little bits!

HELMER.
[sadly]. I see, I see. An abyss has opened between us—there is no denying it. But, Nora, would it not be possible to fill it up?

NORA.
As I am now, I am no wife for you.

HELMER.
I have it in me to become a different man.

NORA.
Perhaps—if your doll is taken away from you.

HELMER.
But to part!—to part from you! No, no, Nora, I can't understand that idea.

NORA.
[going out to the right]. That makes it all the more certain that it must be done. *[She comes back with her cloak and hat and a small bag which she puts on a chair by the table.]*

HELMER.
Nora, Nora, not now! Wait until tomorrow.

NORA.
[putting on her cloak]. I cannot spend the night in a strange man's room.

HELMER.
But can't we live here like brother and sister—?

NORA.
[putting on her hat]. You know very well that would not last long. *[Puts the shawl round her.]* Goodbye, Torvald. I won't see the little ones. I know they are in better hands than mine. As I am now, I can be of no use to them.

HELMER.
But some day, Nora—some day?

NORA.
How can I tell? I have no idea what is going to become of me.

HELMER.
But you are my wife, whatever becomes of you.

NORA.
Listen, Torvald. I have heard that when a wife deserts her husband's house, as I am doing now, he is legally freed from all obligations towards her. In any case, I set you free from all your obligations. You are not to feel yourself bound in the slightest way, any more than I shall. There must be perfect freedom on both sides. See, here is your ring back. Give me mine.

HELMER.
That too?

NORA.
That too.

HELMER.
Here it is.

NORA.
That's right. Now it is all over. I have put the keys here. The maids know all about everything in the house—better than I do. Tomorrow, after I have left her, Christine will come here and pack up my own things that I brought with me from home. I will have them sent after me.

HELMER.
All over! All over!—Nora, shall you never think of me again?

NORA.
I know I shall often think of you, the children, and this house.

HELMER.
May I write to you, Nora?

NORA.
No—never. You must not do that.

HELMER.
But at least let me send you—

NORA.
Nothing—nothing—

HELMER.
Let me help you if you are in want.

NORA.
No. I can receive nothing from a stranger.

HELMER.
Nora—can I never be anything more than a stranger to you?

NORA.
[taking her bag]. Ah, Torvald, the most wonderful thing of all would have to happen.

HELMER.
Tell me what that would be!

NORA.
Both you and I would have to be so changed that—. Oh, Torvald, I don't believe any longer in wonderful things happening.

HELMER.
But I will believe in it. Tell me! So changed that—?

NORA.
That our life together would be a real wedlock. Goodbye. *[She goes out through the hall.]*

HELMER.
[sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands]. Nora! Nora! *[Looks round, and rises.]* Empty. She is gone. *[A hope flashes across his mind.]* The most wonderful thing of all—?

[The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.]

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK 2542 ***

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