



The American Stage: Writing on Theater from Washington Irving to Tony Kushner (Library of America, No. 203)

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Here is the story, told firsthand through electric, deeply engaged writing, of America's living theater, high and low, mainstream and experimental. Drawing on history, criticism, memoir, fiction, poetry, and parody, editor Laurence Senelick presents writers with the special knack "to distill both the immediate experience and the recollected impression, to draw the reader into the charmed circle and conjure up what has already vanished." Through the words of playwrights and critics, actors and directors, and others behind the footlights, the entertainments and high artistic strivings of successive eras come vividly, sometimes tumultuously, to life.

Observers from Washington Irving and Fanny Trollope to Walt Whitman and Mark Twain evoke the world of the 19th-century playhouse in all its raucous vitality. Henry James confesses his early enthusiasm for playgoing; Willa Cather reviews provincial productions of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and "Antony and Cleopatra." The increasing diversity and ambition of the American theater is reflected in Hutchins Hapgood's account of New York's Yiddish theaters at the turn of the century, Carl Van Vechten's review of the Sicilian actress Mimi Aguglia, Alain Locke's comments on the emerging African-American theater in the 1920s, and Ezra Pound's response to James Joyce's play *Exiles* and theatrical modernism. Enthusiasts for the New Stagecraft, such as Lee Simonson and Djuna Barnes, are matched by champions of pop culture such as Gilbert Seldes and Fred Allen. S. J. Perelman lampoons Clifford Odets; Edmund Wilson acclaims Minsky's *Burlesque*; Harold Clurman explains Stanislavski's Method; Gore Vidal dissects the compromises of commercial playwriting. A host of playwrights-among them Thornton Wilder, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Lorraine Hansberry, Edward Albee, Wendy Wasserstein, David Mamet, and Tony Kushner-are joined by such renowned critics as Stark Young, George Jean Nathan, Brooks Atkinson, and Eric Bentley. "A dazzling collection of the greatest writing on theater ever assembled in one book."

-Andre Bishop, Artistic Director, Lincoln Center Theater

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Kenton Marshall:

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