The Origins Of Western Theatre

Pre-Classical Antiquity

Ritual Beginnings

Notwithstanding its great diversity of styles, forms, themes, and functions, the theatre of today has its roots in a basic need to give meaning to the workings of the universe. This suggests that theatre is a social art based on doubt and questioning. From earliest times, man has sought to understand the cycle of nature, the progression from birth to death, and the forces that drive him. Indeed, this understanding has been necessary to man's survival on Earth, particularly when his environment has become hostile or he has had to face natural cataclysms.

The lack of documentary evidence makes it impossible to determine exactly how theatre began, though it is generally believed to have evolved from religious rituals. But it is difficult to decide at which point ritual became theatre. Important clues as to the nature of theatre in prehistoric times can, however, be found by examining the many patterns of drama and ritual that exist throughout the world today, especially in primitive societies.

Nature Worship

The most widely held theory about the origins of theatre is that it evolved from rituals created symbolically to act out natural events, thereby bringing them down to human scale and making the unknown more easily accessible. Individuals would express themselves through rhythmic movement using some kind of adornment to depersonalize the body. The earliest known evidence of this is in the cave paintings and engravings at Les Trois Frères in southern France. Dating from the Late Paleolithic Period (about 40,000-10,000 BC), these ancient manifestations of art depict half-human, half-animal figures in animated poses. The figures appear to be dancers wearing the heads and skins of animals, suggesting the early use of mask and costume. Certainly the mask has been one of the most potent means of transcending one's own being or of representing other planes of existence, and in many parts of the world it holds great power and fascination to this day.

The natural elements were given personalities, which were in turn abstracted as spirits and gods. By wearing masks and moving in certain patterns, individuals could impersonate these deities. Sacred dances were performed to influence the course of nature—to bring rain, to facilitate a good harvest or a hunt, and to drive out evil. But one of the most important patterns was the enactment of the cycle of the seasons, dramatized by a battle in which winter gave way to spring. A year-king figure was ritually killed and supplanted by a new king. At first this was probably a human sacrifice of propitiation; later the killing was mimed. In a further development of this theme, the two kings were reduced to a single figure who underwent a process of repeated death and resurrection. This interpretation is used to explain the mock battles in such continuing folk traditions as the European mummers plays or the multiple deaths and rebirths of such figures as the Padstow Horse in Cornwall, England.

Shamanism

A second theory proposes that theatre evolved from shamanistic rituals that manifested to the audience a
supernatural presence, as opposed to giving a symbolic representation of it. In this case the shaman, as actor/priest, was able to put himself into a trance and become a medium with the other world. He was believed to travel in the spirit world or be actually possessed by spirits. One of the main activities of shamanism, which is still practiced today, is the exorcism of evil spirits, and this can often involve trance dances in which the shaman performs acrobatics, juggling, or vigorous dancing for long periods, demanding a facility and stamina that would not normally be possible. Fire-walking, fire-eating, and other acts of apparent self-torture, performed while in a trance, are taken as further demonstrations of the supernatural. They represent the opposite pole from illusionism, in which such acts are achieved by trickery. Sometimes puppets are used by shamans as manifestations of supernatural forces in the giving of divinations or oracles. Masks also are an important part of shamanism: it is believed that by putting on a mask the dancer becomes possessed by the spirit represented and takes on the functions of that spirit. The use of body paint and elaborate costumes helps further in the personification of the spirit or demon.

These ritual elements gave rise to an archetypal genre known as the demon play, a primitive dance drama in which the force of good exorcises the force of evil. The demon play is still performed in various guises in parts of Asia. An interesting component, which also occurs in later Western theatre, is the use of clowns--often deformed--to parody the more serious figures.

The residue of both functions--impersonator of natural forces and medium with the other world--can be detected in the role of the Western actor today. Shamanism emphasizes the special skills that actors have traditionally developed and that set them apart from the rest of society. It also shows the way the actor’s techniques can help to transport imaginatively the audience beyond the actual space where the performance takes place. The "nature worship" theory expresses the idea that disguise is one of the fundamental aspects of the actor’s art. Indeed, when an individual addressing a gathering modifies his manner, voice, or appearance, the event becomes theatrical rather than actual. This also conforms to Aristotle's definition of theatre as "an imitation of an action"; i.e., not the action itself. Shamanism, on the other hand, is not an imitation but a direct manifestation.

In cultures where the ritual elements of theatre have remained intact--in South India and Bali, for example--the performances of plays and dance dramas have acquired an aura of deep respect and almost awesome power over their audience. However, where the ritual has continued in empty form long after the full significance of its content has been lost, as in modern performances of mummers plays or the Padstow Horse, it becomes little more than a quaint entertainment. The development of Western theatre lies between these two extremes and polarizes into its two primary types of experience--tragedy and comedy.

**Ancient Egypt**

In ancient Egypt, religious ritual moved toward a more explicitly theatrical enactment. The pantheon of animal-headed gods and the stories of the soul’s journey after death into the other world provided rich material for ceremonies and rituals in which priests were thought to have impersonated the deities by wearing stylized masks and reciting hymns and prayers. Carvings depicting masked dancers, dated at 3500 BC, have been found in Egypt.

The so-called Pyramid Texts have been assembled from fragments of prayers found carved on the walls of royal tombs of the Old Kingdom (from c. 2686-c. 2160 BC). The most important of these involved the god Osiris. He was the subject of what was known as the Abydos passion play, a yearly ritual performed during the period of the Old Kingdom and until about AD 400. The Abydos passion play depicts the slaying of Osiris and his followers by his brother Seth, the enactment of which apparently resulted in many real deaths. The figure of Osiris, symbolically represented in the play, is then torn to pieces by Seth, after which his remains are gathered by his wife Isis and son Horus, who subsequently restore him to life. The play thus follows the pattern of birth, death, and resurrection, and it also echoes the cycle of the seasons.

Ritual dramas like this were performed to ensure the fertility of women, cattle, and crops and to invest the spirit of the community and its leaders with vitality for the new year. Myths relating to Osiris and Horus were especially important because the pharaoh, while alive, was believed to be an incarnation of Horus, and, after his death, he was believed to be Osiris. By the time the Greek historian Herodotus saw the Abydos passion play on a visit to Egypt in 450 BC, he could record that there was also a tradition of popular drama that used
comic elements (e.g., Horus, born as a baby but growing to enormous size and developing a voracious appetite), though it still confined itself to religious themes.

Investigators have discovered another text preserved on papyrus scrolls. Known as the Book of the Dead (from about 1800 BC), it reads very much like an oratorio. Although there is no evidence that it was actually performed, the ritual is full of theatrical elements. It describes the journey of the soul, brought after death by the jackal-headed god Anubis into the Hall of Truth, where the dead man’s heart is weighed against a feather. If the heart, made light by goodness, does not outweigh the feather, then the soul is brought before Osiris and granted immortality.

Ancient Greece

Dramatic Genres

The first time theatre truly freed itself from religious ritual to become an art form was in Greece in the 6th century BC when the dithyramb was developed. This was a form of choral song chanted at festivals in honor of Dionysus, the god of wine, fruitfulness, and vegetation. Originally, it celebrated his rejuvenation of the earth; later, it drew on Homeric legends for its subject matter. According to Greek tradition, the actor and playwright Thespis invented the drama when he augmented the chorus of the dithyramb with a single actor who wore masks to portray several different characters. With the possibility of dialogue between the actor and the chorus, more complex themes and modes of storytelling could be developed. In 534 BC, at Athens' first dramatic festival, one of Thespis' tragedies won the prize. (Derived from the Greek tragos, meaning "goat," the term tragedy may have referred to a goat as the prize or as an animal sacrifice made at the festival.) Thereafter, tragedies were performed annually as part of the festival of Dionysus.

The earliest surviving texts of plays are seven tragedies by Aeschylus dating from the first half of the 5th century BC. Adding a second actor and reducing the chorus from 50 to 12, Aeschylus laid the foundation for an aesthetics of drama that was to influence subsequent plays for well over 2,000 years. Tragedy, it was considered, should deal with illustrious figures and significant events. The plays, which were based on legends or remote history (though given the appearance of truth), were interpreted so as to convey some religious, moral, or political meaning. The entire cosmos was depicted in the drama, represented on a vertical structure: above was the seat of the gods, below was the place of exile and punishment, and in the middle was the flat circle of the Earth, represented by the circular stage, where the action unfolded.

The universal scale of Greek drama was reflected in one of its most characteristic features, the interaction between chorus and protagonist. The function of the chorus was to generalize the particular events by observing and interpreting the action of the play as a kind of ideal spectator. It provided, as it were, the social background, which in turn gave resonance to the actions of the main characters. Sometimes the chorus would have a particular point of view (as in Bacchae, where it represents the followers of Bacchus), while at other times it could be the mouthpiece of the poet. Long speeches and songs made up much of the plays, though these were made more dramatic by the dancing of the chorus. The visual aspect of Greek tragedy was very important, a fact that is easily forgotten as only the words survive.

The conventions Aeschylus developed were refined by Sophocles, who brought the chorus up to 15 and added a third actor, thereby making possible a much larger number of characters. Euripides, in his turn, brought greater realism to characterization and strengthened dramatic action by reducing the role of the chorus. The dramatic unities of time, place, and action were usually observed in Greek tragedy by attempting to make the action complete in itself, without superfluities, within a single circuit of the Sun, and in one location. The lack of scene change and the limited number of actors available meant that much of the action, particularly murders and other deaths, took place offstage.

In time, the masks worn by the actors and chorus became more expressive, and their conventionalized representation of character types (old king, young king, old nurse, etc.) meant that each character was instantly recognizable when he entered. The masks also helped to make the portrayal of female characters by male actors more plausible, as well as to make the facial features clearly discernible by the large audience.
The principle occasion for drama was the Great Dionysia (or City Dionysia), a spring festival devoted mainly to tragedy. The archon, a city official, chose the poets who were allowed to compete, and for each of them there was a choregos, a wealthy man who as part of his civic duties would pay for and organize the production. The actors were paid by the state. Each poet was required to offer three tragedies and a satyr play (a bawdy comic comment on the main theme of the tragedies). The tragedies could be separate plays on a linked theme or a trilogy on one theme. The only surviving complete trilogy is Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*. The poet directed his plays, composed the music, and arranged the dances. In the early tragedies, he was also the main actor.

Comedy (from Greek *komos*, meaning "revel") was presented competitively in Athens from 486 BC at the Lenaea winter festival, though it fused much earlier traditions of popular entertainment, mime, phallic rites, and revelry in honor of Dionysus. Ancient shamanistic ceremonies also may have influenced its development. Old Comedy, of which Aristophanes was the chief exponent, was highly satirical. It was characterized by wildly imaginative material (in which the chorus might represent birds, frogs, wasps, or clouds) that was blended with a grotesque, vulgar, and witty tone, which could still accommodate poetry of great lyrical beauty. The bawdiness of the plays was emphasized by the actors’ costumes, which featured jerkins with padded stomachs and large phalli. As in tragedy, masks were worn, though exaggerated for comic effect.

With the decline of tragedy after Euripides' death in 406 BC and the defeat of Athens in 404 BC, comedy increased in popularity. It began to evolve through the transitional Middle Comedy to the style known as New Comedy, established about 320 BC during the time of Alexander the Great. Only fragments by one writer, Menander, survive from this period, but they indicate a swing away from mythological subjects toward a comedy of manners, concentrating as they do on the erotic adventures of young Athenians and centering on urban family life. Gone were the boisterousness, the religious influence, and the long choruses of the earlier drama. The new, gentler style was reflected in the use of more realistic costumes and masks and in the increasing use of scenery.

**The Theatre**

The outdoor setting for performances of Greek drama traditionally comprised three areas: a large circular dancing floor (*orchestra* in Greek) on which the action took place and in the center of which was an altar to Dionysus; behind this, a scene-building and dressing room (*skene* in Greek, whence “scene”), a low architectural facade to which painted scenery could be fitted, sometimes on revolving panels (*periaktoi*); and around the *orchestra*, a semicircular auditorium cut into a hillside and fitted initially with wooden benches and later with stone or marble seats. The steep rake and layout of the auditorium enabled audiences of from 10,000 to 20,000 to sit in reasonable proximity to the players. They also enhanced the acoustics. An important stage device used in tragedy during the 5th century BC was the crane (*mechane*), which served to fly in the gods (*deus ex machina*) at the end of the play.

**Rome**

If the quality of theatre is reflected in the values of the civilization out of which it grows, then this is vividly illustrated by the fate of theatre in Roman times. Suffering from vulgarized public taste and a complete lack of originality, nearly all of the Roman plays were imitations or loose translations of Greek dramas, even to the extent of their being performed in Greek costume. Eventually, after 400 years of competing with chariot races, gladiatorial fights to the death, and the spectacle of criminals and Christians being torn apart by wild animals, theatre came to an apparent end.

Several factors must be taken into account in explaining why this happened, but perhaps the main reason lay in the political cynicism with which Roman authorities used circuses and public games, at which theatrical performances took place, to divert the public from economic and political dissatisfaction. The number of official festivals proliferated. In 240 BC, when drama was first included, the games lasted less than a week. By the 1st century AD there were 60 days of games throughout the year, and 300 years after that, 175 days were devoted to games, with plays being performed on 100 of them. Most of these festivals were secular, and
theatre soon lost its close ties with religious ritual, degenerating into theatricality and crude spectacle for its own sake.

Native Traditions

In spite of the lack of originality shown by dramatists, there were in Italy a number of native comic traditions that helped to shape the style of Roman comedy. The Fescennine verses (*fescennia locatio*) were bawdy, improvised exchanges sung by clowns at local harvest festivals and marriage ceremonies. These are thought to have combined with a tradition of performances by masked dancers and musicians from Etruria to form *saturae*, medleys consisting of jests, slapstick, and songs. The historian Livy says that in 364 BC these Etruscan players were summoned to Rome at a time of pestilence to appease the gods with their dancing and music.

From the areas of southern Italy and Sicily settled by the Greeks came the *phlyax* plays in the 4th century BC. Named for the Phlyakes (literally "Gossip Players"), these were burlesques and travesties of mythology and daily life and probably improvised. They were performed on a raised wooden stage with an upper gallery, and the actors wore grotesque costumes and masks similar to those of the Greek Old Comedy. Acrobatics and farcical scenes were a major ingredient of the *phlyax*. The Oscan inhabitants of Campania, in the Neapolitan region of Italy, also had a long tradition of farces, parodies, and political satires influenced by Greek models, which became popular in Rome during the 3rd century BC. This genre was known as *fabula Atellana* ("Atellan play," Atella being the name of a Campanian town). The significance of the *fabula Atellana* is that it introduced a set of stock characters, such as Maccus and Bucco, which were thought to be the direct ancestors of many of the Italian commedia dell'arte characters. The actors wore masks, improvised their dialogue, and worked slapstick routines and other buffoonery into the plots.

Imitation Of Greek Models

In the literary theatre, plot invention and characters were largely taken from Greek plays. Livius Andronicus, a Greek living in Rome, was the first to adapt Greek plays (in 240 BC), and his example was followed in 235 BC by the poet Gnaeus Naevius, a native of Campania. Naevius can be regarded as the first native Italian playwright, and the genre of comedies he founded was called *fabula palliata* ("play in Greek dress"). His less successful tragedies on Roman history were known as *fabulae praetextae* ("plays in the Roman toga"). Naevius' attempts at satire were audacious enough to land him in prison, which is probably why the noted poet Quintus Ennius, who followed him as a dramatist, limited himself to safe adaptations of Greek tragedies, mostly those of Euripides.

In the 2nd century BC, the two most important comic writers of the Roman theatre, Plautus and Terence (who came from lower class backgrounds), were both influenced by the New Comedy of the Greeks, and their plays retained the Greek setting and costume. Plautus, who had few literary pretensions but a sharp sense of wit and wordplay, blended the comic style of Menander with the *fabula Atellana* to produce vigorous farces about mistaken identities, sexual intrigues, and the mischief of household servants. His 21 surviving plays (of a total of about 130) were in turn to inspire playwrights for centuries to come, including Shakespeare. The braggart soldier, Miles Gloriosus, became one of Plautus' most imitated characters. Terence, who closely followed the style of Menander, aimed at a more discerning audience. His comedies are noted for their grace and delicacy, and they avoided the buffoonery that attracted Plautus.

Seeds Of Decay

The audience that followed Terence's plays was a small and exclusive one. From the start Roman theatre was dependent on popular taste in a way that had never been known in Greece. If a play failed to please, the manager of the festival was obliged to return part of the subsidy from public funds. Thus, even in Republican times, there was some anxiety to give the public what it wanted, and this proved to be the sensational, the spectacular, and the crude. Huge amphitheatres such as the Colosseum in Rome were built throughout the empire as evidence of the power and grandeur of Rome, but not of its artistic life and energy. The general public preferred boxers, beasts, and mock sea battles to drama. Actors and dramatists were tempted to adapt
their style of presentation accordingly. Where it had once been subtle, the acting became coarse and declamatory. The actors took to wearing built-up shoes (cothurni) and bigger masks in order to make themselves appear larger than life. Some of the small number of tragedies that were staged were filled out with long processions of animals, gaudy costumes, and elaborate effects, all emphasizing the hollowness of both theatre and audience.

Theatre buildings themselves became grander in the 1st century BC. Erected on flat ground, the raked semicircular auditorium was a freestanding structure of great engineering complexity. With the elimination of the chorus from plays, the orchestra was no longer needed other than as a space for important guests to sit, and the action took place on a wide, raised stage backed by an imposing architectural facade, the scaenae frons, which was often two or three stories high. A drop curtain at the front of the stage facilitated scene changes, and the audience could be protected from harsh sunlight by a huge awning. The comfort was unrivaled, but it came too late; what took place on these stages had become trivial and degrading. It is not surprising that serious people avoided the theatres and writers were alienated from them.

One reaction against the excesses of the theatre was the custom of reading tragedies aloud to select gatherings of intellectuals. It is thought that this was the purpose behind the tragedies of Seneca, a Stoic philosopher and statesman under the emperor Nero in the 1st century AD, for there is no record of any of his works having been produced. While his plays lack the craftsmanship of the Greeks, Seneca's importance lies in the fact that he was the principal medium through which Renaissance writers became acquainted with Greek tragedy. His division of the plays into five acts, his exaggeration of the melodramatic and violent aspects of the originals, his emphasis on rhetoric, and his preoccupation with the conflict between passion and reason helped to shape the Elizabethan drama and French Neoclassical tragedy that followed more than a millennium later.

Mime And Pantomime

After Seneca, serious dramatic literature in Rome virtually ceased, and the newly erected stone theatres were taken over by mime (Latin mimus) and pantomime (pantomimus) as the level of public taste steadily fell. Pantomime grew out of the wreckage of tragedy as a kind of burlesque ballet in which a chorus chanted the story to musical accompaniment, while a solo actor used mime, gesture, and dance to portray the various characters in a succession of masks. Particular emphasis was placed on the erotic elements of the story.

Of more interest is the mime, which was derived from the Greek mime traditions and the fabula Atellana. By the 2nd century BC, it had a large following in Rome. Mime was characterized by great diversity: sometimes the shows were tragicomic dramas, but most often they were indecent burlesques on the gods in which female performers also took part. They featured acrobatics, songs, and slapstick routines. Companies ranged from itinerant groups of six players to the troupe of 60 actors recorded in AD 169. Although the performers were highly skilled (some of them achieved widespread fame), mime contented itself with easy targets, pandering to the taste of the emperor. By the time of the Christian persecutions under Nero and Domitian, mimes were used to ridicule the Christian faith on stage. In Centunculus, for example, a clown was baptized and martyred, being grotesquely crucified in a way calculated to burlesque his faith. Sometimes the shows were spiced with sexual acts and real executions on stage. At the end of the Roman era, mime actors were performing throughout the empire, but after the triumph of Christianity the theatre of the day was abominated by the Church Fathers as an art so debased as to have lost any relevance to the general good of society. In the 5th century all performers of mime were excommunicated, and in the following century the theatres were closed.

The old Roman Empire was Christianized and became divided in two: one based in Rome, the other in Constantinople (modern Istanbul). There being no other outlet for the expression of the supernatural and the cycle of the seasons, semi-theatrical religious festivals, magnificent rituals, and processions became once more the principal means of community celebration. These were particularly elaborate in the Byzantine Church, centered in Constantinople. Meanwhile the mimes dispersed. Though the church did its best to prohibit them through the Middle Ages, they managed to carry on their intriguing art illicitly, finding audiences wherever they could. Mime, therefore, preserves the only dramatic continuity between the classical world and modern Europe. The texts and theoretical treatises of the classical world were all to lie largely unused for more than 900 years. The failure of the Roman theatre was that it had lost its seriousness of
purpose; the surviving plays were comparatively tired and unimaginative imitations that did not carry the
dramatic forms forward to create an important theatrical movement. Yet, in what survived, sufficient
elements were present to stimulate a new and powerful theatre during the Renaissance.

**Medieval Theatre**

**Popular Traditions And Secular Theatre**

During the Middle Ages, theatre began a new cycle of development that strangely paralleled the emergence
of the theatre from ritual activity in the early Greek period. Whereas the Greek theatre had grown out of
Dionysian worship, the medieval theatre originated as an expression of the Christian religion. The two cycles
would eventually merge during the Renaissance, but for centuries before that the theatre was left to grope its
way blindly through the Dark Ages. It meant a completely fresh start. The decadence of what remained of the
Roman theatre had so offended the upright barbarian invaders, who had no sophisticated culture of their own
with which to replace it, that their reaction was to try to prohibit it. Their efforts, however, were not wholly
successful.

Between the classical and the medieval periods, theatre was kept alive by the slenderest of threads—the
popular entertainers who had dispersed to wander, alone or in small groups, throughout Europe. These were
the mimes, acrobats, dancers, animal trainers, jugglers, wrestlers, minstrels, and storytellers who preserved
vital skills that survive in the theatre today. They also brought a duality to theatre that still exists: popular
theatre and the literary theatre were to grow side by side, feeding off and nourishing each other. During the
late Middle Ages these popular entertainers found a more secure place at royal courts and in the households
of the nobility, where they acted, sang, and played music at their masters' festivities. The written texts that
they developed for performance were, especially in France, literate and often sharply satirical.

A further, though minor, influence on the development of theatre was the folk play. This dramatic form had
two main sources. One was the symbolic ritual dramas of the seasons such as the Plow Monday play (English
Midlands), in which a plow was decorated and pulled around the village (thought to have originally been a
fertility god carried around the fields on a plow), or the European folk drama of the Wild Man of the Woods,
in which a figure covered with leaves, representing winter, was ritually hunted and "killed." The other source
was the mimetic elements in dances held at village feasts. The Morris dance (probably Moorish in origin;
from Spanish morisco), famed in England but also performed in medieval continental Europe, was strongly
mimetic and had dramatic elements in its use of the fool or clown character. It can also be linked with ancient
trance dances in its occasional use of the hobbyhorse. The various forms of sword dance found in Europe are
another example.

Both ritual and mimetic dance came together in the mummers plays that emerged during the late Middle
Ages. The essential elements were some kind of fight in which one of the combatants was killed and the
revival of the fighter by a healer or doctor. This pattern also reflects the cycle of death and rebirth, which
suggests that the origin of the plays may be much older. Later versions of the mummers plays used the figure
of St. George fighting a dragon, and they employed more dialogue to balance the action.

When Christianity spread through Europe, missionaries had great difficulty discouraging the wealth of local
folk traditions that flourished in rural communities. Eventually, the reforming bishops decided that it was
better to regulate than to prohibit them, so the Roman Catholic Church began incorporating pagan festivals
into its own liturgical calendar and re-mythologizing local rituals. The spring cycle of festivities centering on
fertility rituals and the rebirth of summer was adapted to the Christian version of death and resurrection,
while Christmas absorbed celebrations around the winter solstice such as the Saturnalia and the Yule Fest,
the Teutonic New Year celebration. Christian churches were built on the sites of pagan temples, and folk
plays were even organized as part of the village church activities.

Typical of this tolerance was the Feast of Fools, first recorded in France at the end of the 12th century, in
which the lower clergy took over the church building, wearing grotesque masks, dressing as women or
minstrels, electing a mock bishop, censing with stinking smoke by burning the soles of old shoes, and
generally burlesquing the mass. The inversion of status that took place in the Feast of Fools was
characteristic of the folk festivals held at the time of carnival (just before the fasting of Lent) and the New Year's Saturnalia. Most of these centered on a mock king, or Lord of Misrule, who guided the follies.

Folk theatre was not a literary genre; its prime concern was to fulfill a communal function in the village. However, its significance in the development of theatre was that, being a style with which everyone was familiar, it could provide a rich stimulus for the more serious theatre that supplanted it. Many farcical scenes from folk dramas were included as interludes in the later religious plays, making them more vigorous and balancing entertainment with didacticism. Divorced from their validating mythology by the domination of Christian myths, the pagan celebrations soon began to lose their primary function, and eventually their true meaning was forgotten.

A consequence of the Roman Catholic Church's choice of Latin as the language of the liturgy was that classical texts continued to be read, and Terence, whose moral tone made him the least offensive of the Roman dramatists, acquired new popularity among a small scholarly elite. During the 10th century, at a convent in Gandersheim, Ger., a nun called Hrosvitha wrote six short plays modeled on Terence's style but in modified and Christianized form so as not to corrupt the sisters. Terence's bawds, slaves, and foolish old men were replaced by chaste Christian maids, honest men, and constant Christian martyrs. The plays were never publicly performed, though they may have been privately staged in the convent.

**Liturgical Drama**

The tradition of medieval religious theatre stems directly from the mass itself, a complex ritual containing many theatrical elements in its function as a visible reflection of the invisible world. Because it was believed that harmony expressed religious values, an attempt was made from the 9th century to increase the musical effectiveness of the plainsong of the Roman Catholic Church by developing antiphonal singing in which the choir was divided into two parts. From this came the trope, a musical addition or embellishment to certain parts of the liturgy, as, for example, to the final syllable of the Alleluia.

It was in the trope of the Easter mass, recorded in a 10th-century manuscript from the Monastery of St. Gall in Switzerland, that the union of action, impersonation, and dialogue originated. Taken from various sources in the Bible, it dramatizes the visit of the three Marys to the tomb where Christ's body had been buried. They find the sepulcher empty and an angel guarding it. One section of the choir, representing the angel, asks, "Quem quaeritis?" ("Whom do you seek?"), to which the other half responds, and a short dialogue follows. In later versions the angel was represented by the priest in white robes and the Marys by three choirboys. Directions were added, dictating particular actions and precisely how the performers should move. In turn, a spice merchant (the first secular character, who was strikingly similar to the doctor figure of mummers plays and folk dramas) was added to haggle with the three Marys about the price of the ointment. The Quem quaeritis? soon spread throughout Europe (more than 400 versions survive), and by the end of the 10th century it had become a self-contained liturgical drama.

During the 11th and 12th centuries, the Nativity, along with other biblical themes, received similar treatment. To accommodate these dramas, the playing areas were extended from the altar to various locations throughout the church. Sometimes scenes were suggested by raised platforms, and machinery was developed to facilitate effects, such as angels descending. The clergy's intention of making the key episodes of the liturgy as vivid and accessible as possible to uneducated congregations was so successfully realized that by the end of the 12th century the plays incorporated spoken dialogue, partly in the vernacular, and were moved outside in front of the church to be performed independently of the liturgical service. One of the first such plays was *Adam*, performed before a French cathedral about 1170.

**Mystery Cycles**

Once the theatre had been moved outside the church, production of the plays was gradually taken over by the laity, and performances were given entirely in the vernacular. (Liturgical dramas, however, continued to be presented inside the church until the 16th century.) The number of short plays proliferated until they were organized into great cycles covering the whole biblical story from the creation to the Last Judgment, though centering on the Passion and designed to express the humanity as well as the divinity of Christ. In France
they become known as mystères (from Latin ministerium, "service"), in Italy as sacre rappresentazioni, in Spain as autos sacramentales, in Germany as Mysterienspielen, and in England as mystery plays (later mystery cycles). Comprising up to 50 short plays, these cycles were sometimes performed over two or three days. In England the cycles of York, Wakefield, Coventry, and Chester survive, but on the Continent there are many more. As the presentation of these plays grew more elaborate, they became a civic affair, and special organizations took over their staging; e.g., in France it was the confréries, while in England, the trade guilds. Each guild would take responsibility for a particular play, usually related to its work: the building of Noah's ark, for example, would be staged by the shipwrights. Church vestments were replaced by appropriate contemporary costumes, and, because many of the plays called for complex and realistic effects—e.g., scenes of torture and execution or appearances from Hell's mouth—sophisticated properties and machinery were devised to achieve them.

Initially, in the 12th century, the cycles were presented on a series of decorated platforms known as houses or mansions, following the type of layout established in the liturgical drama, with each representing a particular location. These mansions were usually arranged in a straight line or a semicircle with the audience in front. In Italy stages were placed around a city square with the spectators in the center. An alternative presentation, used in England from the 14th century (and later in Spain), was processional staging on pageant wagons. This is thought to have grown out of the elaborate Corpus Christi processions (from 1311), in which decorated carts displaying religious tableaux were used. The tradition of tournaments and the pageantry set up for royal entries also had an influence. Each play was mounted on a "pageant," or cart, often built and decorated to suggest the scene depicted. These mobile stages were paraded around the town, stopping at various stations where the actors repeated their performance in front of a group of spectators, who then waited for the next cart to appear.

Although both audience and players were united by a common faith strong enough for the actors to rehearse months in advance and for the spectators to stand all day watching the plays, the factor of entertainment became increasingly important. This was, the religious theme notwithstanding, secular theatre. It was the comic characters, especially the devils, who were most popular, and it was here that there may have been an element of professionalism, with the minstrels and jongleurs adding their own skills and brand of humor. Furthermore, once the mystery cycles had abandoned the uniformity of Latin, national differences became accentuated when local customs, idioms, and folk traditions were incorporated into the plays. In England the juxtaposition of solemnity and humor helped to flavor the spirit of the great Elizabethan theatre that was to follow.

Morality Plays

After the earthy humor and simple devotion of the mystery cycles, the morality plays that appeared during the 15th century show theatre taking what at first seems to be a step backward. These plays, however, reflect the darker worldview of a people that had experienced recurrent plagues and had begun to regard human destiny as "worm's meat," where the skeleton figure of death was a potent emblem constantly alluded to in sermons. Morality plays were virtually sermons dramatized through allegory. They portrayed the span of human life in abstract terms, with Mankind or Humanum Genus setting out on a pilgrimage in which he encountered a whole range of vices and virtues such as Ignorance, Humility, and the Seven Deadly Sins who contended for possession of his soul. The principal themes were the choice between good and evil, the transitory nature of life, and the immediacy of death, all of which reflect a medieval preoccupation with the conflict between the spirit and the flesh. Such concerns were particularly relevant at a time when trade and finance were rapidly expanding, offering merchants the prospect of great personal wealth and a life of material luxury.

Morality plays probably originated in England, the earliest known text being The Castell of Perseverance (c. 1405-25). However, one of the best of the genre, Everyman, began in the Netherlands, and moralities were frequently performed in France. Performances initially took place in churches, then on simple outdoor stages, though without the visual extravagance that the mystery cycles demanded. Although the plots were stereotyped and the abstract characters allowed little scope for development, morality plays achieved considerable sophistication—they were intended for an educated, middle-class audience—and moved a long way toward secularization, thus forming a significant link between the medieval and the modern theatres. Nevertheless, in the 16th century, at the height of their aesthetic achievement, morality plays were
suppressed in England, primarily because religious drama was beginning to become an instrument of politico-religious propaganda under successive Roman Catholic and Protestant governments.

**Interludes**

As a development of the morality play that drew on the legacy of the minstrel, interludes (from Latin *interludium*) were performed in Europe by small companies of professional actors during the 15th and 16th centuries. The term covers a wide range of entertainment, from simple farces performed on small stages in public places to dramatic sketches performed at banquets in the halls of the nobility. In both cases the plays were purely secular and more concerned with ideas than with morals. They were called *Fastnachtsspiele* in Germany and *kluchtspelen* in the Netherlands; they were also performed in Italy and Spain, but most interludes came from France, where they were known as *soties*, and from England. These pieces usually dealt with the antics of foolish or cunning peasants, exploring the relationship between master and servant or husband and wife. In England the move toward professionalism was accelerated by a law that subjected "all players of farces, minstrels and other entertainers" to be whipped if they did not belong to a member of the nobility.

**The Renaissance**

**Classical Revival**

By the early 15th century, artists in Italy were becoming increasingly aware that, while Rome had once been the center of the Western world, its power and prestige had steadily declined since the invading Germanic tribes broke up the empire. The belief that art, science, and scholarship had flourished during the classical period stimulated the desire for a revival of the values of that period. Both architecture and painting found new inspiration in Greek and Roman models, and the discovery of perspective added new possibilities, which in turn were to have a profound effect on stage scenery. At the same time classical literature was reexamined: new texts were found and old ones edited. The capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 resulted in an exodus of Greek scholars to Italy, and they brought with them their knowledge of Greek literature. The invention in Europe of the printing press made the new learning more widely accessible and revolutionized the whole educational system. Increased commerce encouraged exploration, and the discovery of the Americas by Columbus in 1492 brought about a new outlook on the world. Whereas learning had traditionally been sought in the seclusion of monasteries, the new learning of the Renaissance was more widespread and dynamic. Scholars were not satisfied with merely understanding the ideals of antiquity; they wanted to re-create them. This also gave man new dignity and confidence. The world was regarded not as something to be overcome in order to have a life in the next world, but as something to be enjoyed. The spirit of the Renaissance was epitomized in the words of the Greek philosopher Protagoras: "Man is the measure of all things." Even though this humanist view sometimes clashed with Christian doctrines, the papacy reached, if somewhat reluctantly, a modus vivendi with the new learning. Indeed, the Vatican Library amassed works of classical culture from all over the Christian world. The popes and the wealthy families of Italy became patrons of the arts, gathering scholars and artists in their courts.

**The Renaissance Stage**

The printed Latin texts of Terence, Plautus, and Seneca were widely read. By the end of the 15th century attempts were made to stage their works, first in Rome, sponsored by Pomponius Laetus, and then in Ferrara. At first the stages resembled classicized versions of the mansions used for mystery plays, though compressed onto a single raised stage with curtained entrances between pillars to represent various houses. Later efforts concentrated on re-creating the form of the classical stage inside large halls.

One of the greatest influences on the development of theatre buildings in the Renaissance was the discovery in 1414 of *De architectura* of Vitruvius, a Roman architect of the 1st century. This 10-volume treatise contained valuable information on the scenery used for classical tragedy, comedy, and satyr plays, along with detailed descriptions of the Roman theatre with its auditorium, orchestra, and stage backed by the *scaenae*
Vitruvius' work, translated and published all over Europe, was provided with woodcuts showing ground plans and front elevations of classical stages. Various reconstructions of the Roman theatre were built, culminating in the beautiful Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza, designed by the Venetian architect Andrea Palladio and completed in 1585 by Vincenzo Scamozzi. It is Europe's oldest surviving indoor theatre. Palladio had created a magnificent scena fons, but Scamozzi added three-dimensional perspective vistas of street scenes behind the archways. It was this preoccupation with perspective that characterized future developments of the Renaissance stage and indeed the modern theatre, though the effects were usually achieved through painted backdrops and wings. Sebastiano Serlio's influential Second livre de la perspective (1545; The Second Book of Architecture), generally referred to as "Architettura," outlined three basic stage settings, suggesting an impressive arrangement of palaces and temples for tragedy, complex street scenes for comedy, and idealized landscapes with trees and cottages for pastoral plays.

Major Theatrical Styles, Tendencies, And Forms

Italian Neoclassicism

Ironically, while all the innovations seemed to originate in Italy and then spread through Europe, the plays that were first performed on the new stages were extremely dull. Far from liberating the creative mind, the classical ideals had only constricted it. Partly to blame was the adoption of the so-called Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action, which became, in the hands of theorists, a set of rules so rigid that they strangled drama by forcing it into a framework where the action had to take place in a single location in the space of a single day. At a time of expansion and change, such rules only created a disharmony between form and content and between the stage and the play. A further reason was that this theatre took place inside the palaces of isolated and parochial cities in the presence of a privileged elite. Cut off from the public, lifeless tragedies and limp comedies resorted to philosophical discourse as a substitute for the passion that was meanwhile animating the theatre in England and Spain.

Significantly, the bawdy comedies of Plautus provided inspiration for two of the most interesting dramatists of the Italian Renaissance in the early 16th century. Ludovico Ariosto, a poet at the court of Ferrara, was the first to break away from the strict imitation of classical models and produce a truly Italian flavour in his work. The second figure was Ruzzante (the stage name of Angelo Beolco), who acted in his own farces about rustic life written in the Paduan dialect. Through his use of everyday situations and distinctly Italian character types, Ruzzante introduced a more natural style of acting, drawn from life and observation of people.

As a relief from the severity of classical plays, intermezzi were introduced between the acts as lighthearted and spectacular diversions, usually dealing with mythological subjects. These rapidly became more popular than the plays themselves and were often performed as independent entertainments at weddings and banquets in the courts of Italian princes. As the scenic aspects of the intermezzi grew more elaborate, changeable scenery was developed, as was complicated machinery with which to mobilize clouds, waves, and sea monsters. Five basic settings were established: heaven, hell, the countryside, the sea, and a city street or square.

Courtly Entertainments

During the 15th and 16th centuries, some of Italy's finest painters and musicians were employed to organize entertainments at court. Leonardo da Vinci, who designed a revolving stage in 1490 (it was never built, however), arranged the settings, masks, and costumes of Festa del Paradiso, an entertainment given during the wedding celebrations for Lodovico Sforza, duke of Milan. Raphael also painted much admired stage settings. Equestrian ballets and triumphal processions were a spectacular feature requiring careful preparation, and they became the highlight of these displays of power and wealth. Princes, dukes, and monarchs were invited to such festivals and rode on horseback or in ornate carriages in processions of allegorical floats. Sometimes their entrances were choreographed as they passed under specially constructed triumphal arches or towers and open stages with tableaux vivants. In France the entrées solennelles--entrance processions of great pomposity--were developed to a peak of elaborate ceremonial display. Aquatic pageantry also became popular in the 17th century, with the monarch surrounded by a collection of ornate barges, sea monsters, scallop shells, and ships.
A popular new genre among the Italian nobility in the latter half of the 16th century was the pastoral. It was a sophisticated form of entertainment dramatizing classical themes in the romantic but highly artificial setting of an Arcadian landscape peopled with gentle nymphs, shepherds, magicians, and satyrs.

**Opera**

One of the most enduring products of the Renaissance theatre was the opera. It grew out of experiments by the Florentine Camerata at the end of the 16th century to revive Greek tragedy. The men who formed the Florentine Camerata believed that the Greeks had originally recited or chanted their plays to music, and in setting out to recreate these conditions, the Camerata used music to heighten the poetic qualities of the dialogue. Heavily influenced by the intermezzi that were currently in fashion, the first attempts were on mythological subjects (Daphne, Orpheus, etc.). The opera was an immediate success. The novelty impact of the music meant that the libretto diminished in importance. By 1607 Claudio Monteverdi had composed his masterpiece, *Orfeo*, which placed the emphasis squarely on music and established the basic form that European opera was to take for the next 300 years.

At first, opera was performed on special occasions intended to display the patron's status and wealth; thus it was politically important. Great care was lavished on the visual aspects of the opera, and the librettos gave ample opportunities for scene painters and stage engineers to exploit their new mastery of perspective. As the scenery became more opulent, so the shape of the theatre was altered to accommodate it. The proscenium arch was developed to frame the setting and facilitate changes of scenery, while the auditorium was extended to a horseshoe shape. The earliest example of this type of theatre was the Teatro Farnese in Parma (1618-28), the prototype of the modern opera house. From its exclusive beginnings, the appeal of opera broadened, and in 1637 the first opera house was opened to the general public in Venice. By this time, the form had also caught on in Vienna.

**Commedia dell'arte**

Around the mid-16th century, there emerged in Italy a lively tradition of popular theatre that fused many disparate elements into a vigorous style, which profoundly influenced the development of European theatre. This was the legendary commedia dell'arte ("theatre of the professionals"), a nonliterary tradition that centered on the actor, as distinguished from the commedia erudita, where the writer was preeminent. Although the precise origins of the commedia dell'arte are difficult to establish, its many similarities with the skills of the medieval jongleurs, who were themselves descendants of the Roman mimes, suggest that it may have been a reawakening of the *fabula Atellana*, stimulated and colored by social conditions in Italy during the Renaissance.

In spite of its outwardly anarchic spirit, the commedia dell'arte was a highly disciplined art requiring both virtuosity and a strong sense of ensemble playing. Its special quality came from improvisation. Working from a scenario that outlined the plot, the actors would improvise their own dialogue, striving for a balance of words and actions. Acrobatics and singing were also used, as well as the *lazzi* (special rehearsed routines that could be inserted into the plays at convenient points to heighten the comedy). Because the actors stayed together in permanent companies and specialized in playing the same role for most of their professional lives, they achieved a degree of mastery that had been hitherto unknown on the Italian stage and that must have made the rest of the theatre seem all the more artificial. Another reason for the impact of the commedia dell'arte was that it heralded the first appearance in Italy of professional actresses (the best known being Isabella Andreini), though the female characters were never as sharply developed as their male counterparts. Most of the characters were defined by the leather half-masks they wore (another link with the theatre of antiquity), which made them instantly recognizable. They also spoke in the dialect of their different provinces. Characters such as Pantalone, the miserly Venetian merchant; Dottore Gratiano, the pedant from Bologna; or Arlecchino, the mischievous servant from Bergamo, began as satires on Italian "types" and became the archetypes of many of the favorite characters of 17th- and 18th-century European theatre.

From humble beginnings, setting up their stages in city squares, the better troupes--notably Gelosi, Confidenti, and Fedeli--performed in palaces and became internationally famous once they traveled abroad.
The commedia dell’arte swept through Europe. It was particularly popular in France, where resident Italian troupes were established before the end of the 16th century. Local variations on the characters appeared in the 17th century. The cheeky servant Pedrolino became the melancholy Pierrot in France, while Pulcinella became Punch in England. By the 18th century the commedia dell’arte was a lost art, though its spirit lived on through the work of the dramatists it inspired, among whom were Molière (stage name of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin), Carlo Goldoni, and William Shakespeare.

Jesuit Theatre And School Drama

A reflection of the humanist tradition in Europe was the emergence of the school drama in the second half of the 16th century. This was an amateur movement in which Latin plays were performed as part of the curriculum. Soon after the Society of Jesus was founded in 1540 to combat the heresies of the Reformation, it was realized that theatre could be an excellent means of glorifying the Roman Catholic Church and showing the evils of free thought. Consequently, the school play became an important activity in the Jesuit colleges that were established all over the Continent. While retaining both the language and techniques of the classical writers, the Jesuit dramatists turned to biblical themes and the lives of the saints and martyrs for their subject matter. Since part of the educational purpose of this type of drama was to teach pupils how to behave and express themselves in accordance with the requirements of the upper classes, tragedies were preferred to comedies, because the latter were considered unsuitable in their levity and crudeness. In spite of its severity of tone, the Jesuit theatre flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries by adapting to local customs and turning the latest theatrical innovations to its own use. Thus music and singing were incorporated in the plays, which were eventually expanded to include some of the elaborate scenic effects used in contemporary opera. The Jesuit theatre produced no plays of lasting consequence, yet princes took part in its college performances and Roman Catholic emperors attended them. Also, some of the most important dramatists of the European theatre, including Pierre Corneille, Molière, and Goldoni, were educated in Jesuit schools and may have been influenced by their theatrical activities.

Although the movement did not reach England for politico-religious reasons, school plays accounted for the first secular comedies in English during the first half of the 16th century—namely, *Ralph Roister Doister* and *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*. And, in 1560, Elizabeth I decreed that the scholars of Westminster School should perform a Latin play every Christmas. This practice has endured until the present day, making it perhaps the longest continuous acting tradition in Europe.

Spain's Golden Age

Because the Reformation, which divided Europe in the early 16th century, had not affected Spain, the long tradition of religious drama continued there throughout the Renaissance in the form of *autos sacramentales*. Usually one-act allegories, these plays were performed as part of the Corpus Christi celebrations in which the king participated. As the prudent Spanish clergy had purged religious drama of those elements that laid it open to ridicule in other European countries, *autos* became a serious art form cultivated by some of the finest poets of the Spanish Golden Age.

The vigor of the secular theatre was offset by a lack of permanent playhouses. In the early 16th century, the first professional companies, like that of Lope de Rueda, had to travel about as strolling players, carrying their own equipment with them. They were so poor that, in the words of Cervantes, “their whole baggage would go into a single sack.” Lope de Rueda was noted for the lively use of colloquial speech in his short comic sketches known as *pasos*. These were performed between the acts of more serious dramas. Plays were sometimes presented in palace halls, but most often they were performed in *corrales*, where an improvised stage was set up at one end of the square formed by the walls of adjoining houses.

When the first permanent theatres were built, they were not patterned on the Italian model, but rather they incorporated features of the *corrale*. The audience stood in a rectangular courtyard (*patio*) or sat in galleries, with the women having to sit apart in a special gallery of their own. The stage stretched across one end of the square with an inner stage at the back. Very little scenery was used, though there were trapdoors in the floor and machinery above for "flying" people or objects. The theatre was open to the sky, but an awning could be drawn over the audience to provide protection against sunlight and rain. It was a stage well adapted for
rhetoric and poetry, where the imagination of the audience could be stimulated. Furthermore, it was a theatre for all social classes. By the end of the 16th century, permanent theatres were established in Seville, Valencia, and Madrid, where two of the first were the Corral de la Cruz (1579) and the Corral del Príncipe (1582). In addition to the main play, programs included short comic sketches, musical interludes, ballads, and dances.

The strength of the Spanish theatre of the Golden Age was that, while embracing some of the Italian innovations in staging and acting (commedia dell'arte troupes exerted a strong influence in Spain from 1574), it was never restrained by the rules of Classicism. Instead, it developed a robust national style that was passionate, romantic, and lyrical and that could weave together comedy and tragedy in a way that was never possible in Italy or France. This style found rich expression in the work of Lope de Vega. His prodigious output of more than 1,000 plays, about 400 of which survive, gives an idea of the audience's insatiable demand for new works. Drawing on a wide variety of materials for tragedies, comedies, pastorals, histories, and the distinctly Spanish genre of comedias de capa y espada (cloak-and-dagger plays), Lope portrayed a rigid society divided into three estates: the king, the nobles, and the common people. Entertainment was his first concern, and his depiction of peasant characters, both comic and tragic, was particularly vivid.

In the first half of the 17th century the Baroque style of theatre, with its elaborate scenery and stage machinery, was used to great advantage by Pedro Calderón de la Barca. Attached to the Spanish court, he was not under as much pressure as Lope to be prolifically inventive, yet he wrote nearly 200 plays. While lacking the sheer vigor of Lope's works, Calderón's plays are more refined and philosophical, even though many of his characters appear to be rigidly bound by the idea of the pundonor ("point of honour"). In later life, Calderón wrote many fine autos sacramentales and other plays on religious themes. The idea that "all the world is a stage" was expressed in El gran teatro del mundo (c. 1635; The Great Theatre of the World) through the hierarchical concept that every man plays his part before God. This theme was also reflected in Calderón's finest play, La vida es sueño (1635; Life Is a Dream).

Elizabethan And Jacobean Theatre

In England the influence of the Italian Renaissance was weaker, but the theatre of the Elizabethan Age was all the stronger for it. Apart from the rediscovery of classical culture, the 16th century in England was a time for developing a new sense of national identity, necessitated by the establishment of a national church. Furthermore, because the English were more suspicious of Rome and the Latin tradition, there was less imitation of classical dramatic forms and an almost complete disregard for the rules that bound the theatre in France and Italy. England built on its own foundations by adapting the strong native tradition of medieval religious drama to serve a more secular purpose. When some of the continental innovations were blended with this cruder indigenous strain, a rich synthesis was produced. Consequently, the theatre that emerged was resonant, varied, and in touch with all segments of society. It included the high seriousness of morality plays, the sweep of chronicle histories, the fantasy of romantic comedies, and the irreverent fun of the interludes.

At the same time, the theatre had to contend with severe restrictions. The suppression of the festival of Corpus Christi in 1548 as a means of reinforcing the Protestant Church marked the rapid decline of morality plays and mystery cycles. Their forced descent into satirical propaganda mocking the Catholic faith polarized the audience and led to riots. By 1590, playwrights were prohibited from dramatizing religious issues and had to resort to history, mythology, allegory, or allusion in order to say anything about contemporary society. Flouting these restrictions meant imprisonment. Nevertheless, playwrights managed to argue highly explosive political topics. In Shakespeare's histories, for instance, the subject of kingship is thoroughly examined in all its implications: both the rightful but incompetent sovereign and the usurping but strong monarch are scrutinized--a most daring undertaking during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). The situation for actors was not helped by the hostile attitude of the City of London authorities, who regarded theatre as an immoral pastime to be discouraged rather than tolerated. Professional companies, however, were invited to perform at court from the beginning of the 16th century (though on a smaller scale than on the Continent), and public performances took place wherever a suitable space could be found--in large rooms of inns, in halls, or in quiet innyards enclosed on all sides with a temporary platform stage around which spectators could gather while others looked out from the windows above. But such makeshift conditions only retarded the development of the drama and kept it on an amateurish level.
The Elizabethan Theatre

These conditions were considerably improved during Elizabeth's reign by the legitimizing in 1574 of regular weekday performances and the building of the first playhouse in 1576 by James Burbage. Called simply the Theatre, it was erected in London immediately outside the City boundary. Others followed, including the Curtain, the Rose, the Swan, and the Globe, where most of Shakespeare's plays were first staged. Just as the Spanish playhouse reproduced the features of the corrale it had grown out of, so the Elizabethan playhouse followed the pattern of the improvised innyard theatre. It was an enclosed circular structure containing two or three galleries with benches or stools and had an unroofed space in the middle where spectators could stand on three sides of the raised platform stage. Behind the stage was a wall with curtained doors and, above this, an actors' and musicians' gallery. Large numbers of people could be accommodated, and the price was kept low at between one penny and sixpence. This type of stage allowed for fluid movement and considerable intimacy between actors and audience, while its lack of scenery placed the emphasis firmly on the actor interpreting the playwright's words. Such sheer simplicity presented a superb challenge for the writer: the quality of both language and acting had to be good enough to hold the attention of the spectators and make them use their imaginations.

This challenge was quickly taken up by a generation of playwrights who could carry forward the established dramatic forms and test the possibilities of the new stage. Christopher Marlowe was the major innovator, developing a vigorous style of tragedy that was refined by his contemporary, William Shakespeare, who began writing for the theatre about 1590. At this time, professional companies operated under the patronage of a member of the nobility. In Shakespeare's company, the Chamberlain's Men (later renamed the King's Men), the actors owned their playhouse, prompt books, costumes, and properties, and they shared in the profits. Other companies paid rent to the patron and received salaries from him. There were very few rehearsals for a new play, and because the texts were not immediately printed (to avoid pirating by rival companies) each actor was usually given only his own lines, with the relevant cues, in manuscript form. No women appeared on the Elizabethan stage; female roles were taken either by boy actors or, in the case of older women, by adult male comedians. As in Italy, all the actors had to be able to sing and dance and often to make their own music. The great actors of the day were Richard Burbage, who worked in Shakespeare's company, and Edward Alleyn, who was mainly associated with Ben Jonson. In spite of the fact that theatres such as the Globe played to a cross section of London's populace, audiences seem to have been attentive and well behaved.

An alternative to the outdoor public playhouse was the private indoor theatre. The first of these was an abandoned monastery near St. Paul's Cathedral, converted in 1576 by Richard Farrant and renamed the Blackfriars Theatre. Others included the Cockpit, the Salisbury Court, and the Whitefriars. Initially these theatres were closer to the Spanish model, with the bare stage across one end, an inner stage at the back, benches in front for the audience, and galleries all around. Later, they made use of more elaborate scenery and featured the Italian-style proscenium arch. Because of the reduced size of the audience, higher prices had to be charged, which excluded all but the more wealthy and learned segment of the public. This in turn affected the style of writing; these private theatres were mostly used by boy companies that presented a more refined and artificial type of drama. One of their chief dramatists was John Lyly, though Ben Jonson wrote many of his plays for them. Growing rivalry between the boy and adult companies, exacerbated by hostility from the increasingly powerful Puritan movement, resulted in James I imposing even tighter controls and exercising heavy censorship on the theatre when he came to the throne in 1603.

Jacobean Theatre

Although the Italian influence gradually became stronger in the early part of the 17th century, the English theatre was by then established and confident enough to take over foreign ideas without losing any of its individuality. Jonson became increasingly preoccupied with the dramatic unities, while other writers of the Jacobean period such as John Webster, Thomas Middleton, and John Ford favored a more definite separation of comedy and tragedy than had been the case in Elizabethan drama. They were given to sensationalism in their revenge plays, finding inspiration in the darker moods of Seneca and often setting them in Italy.
Meanwhile, at court the pastoral was finding new popularity, partly because it provided opportunities for spectacular scenery, and with it came the revival of the masque—a allegorical entertainment combining poetry, music, dance, scenery, and extravagant costumes. As court poet, Ben Jonson collaborated with the architect and designer Inigo Jones to produce some of the finest examples of the masque. Having spent a few years in Italy, Jones was greatly influenced by the Italian painted scenery and its use of machinery. On his return to England he did much to bring scenic design up to date, introducing many innovations. Members of the court had thorough training in dancing, fencing, singing, instrumental music, and courtly ceremonial. They were therefore well prepared to perform in the masques, even to take solo parts and to appear in the chorus. Masques became even more elaborate under Charles I, but in 1634 Jonson angrily withdrew his contribution when he saw that the visual elements were completely overtaking the dramatic content. When the Civil War broke out in 1642, the Puritans closed all the theatres and forbade dramatic performances of any kind. This created an almost complete break in the acting tradition for 18 years until the Restoration of Charles II, after which the theatre flourished once more, though on quite different lines.

German Theatre

While England and Spain were developing their own national styles of theatre, the German-speaking countries lagged well behind, embroiled in constant warfare and religious upheaval and lacking a unifying capital city as a cultural focal point. Classical plays had little more than academic interest, and the tradition remained indigenous albeit crudely medieval. The most notable writer was the Meistersinger Hans Sachs, who transformed the bawdy Fastnachtsspiele into more acceptable farces with which to entertain Shrovetide carnival crowds. He also established Germany's first theatre building inside a church in Nürnberg in 1550, though there were no truly professional companies to fill it.

An unexpected stimulus came from touring English troupes that had firmly established themselves in Germany by the end of the 16th century. Although there was a good deal of cross-fertilization between England and the Continent, many English actors chose exile as an escape from monopolies, suppression, and the withdrawal of playing licenses at home. They gave public performances in towns or at rural fairs and private ones in the halls of nobles. Robert Browne's company was the first, arriving in Frankfurt in 1592. In a country where local theatre was weighed down by excessive moralizing, these actors made an immediate impact through their robustness and vivid professionalism. Their repertoire consisted mainly of pirated versions of Elizabethan tragedies and comedies, performed in English, though heavily cut and padded with enough music, dancing, acrobatics, and dumb show to overcome the language barrier. In between the acts a clown figure, combining the English fool and the German Narr (from the Fastnachtsspiel), took over with improvised antics in pidgin English sprinkled with Dutch and German phrases. Thomas Sackville created one of the first of such clown figures in the character Jan Bouschet. Similar English creations were Hans Stockfisch and Pickelherring--prototypes of the totally German character Hanswurst, who found his way into all the improvised comedies of the day. As the proportion of German actors in the English companies increased, a more indigenous drama developed known as Haupt-und-Staatsaktionen. As this term implies, such plays dealt with the intrigues of high characters in high places and abounded with blustering rhetoric and gory sensationalism. The last English troupes left Germany in 1659, by which time the Italian style of staging, with its perspective scenery, had become the fashion in spectacular court operas and the elaborate productions of Jesuit school plays.

Dutch strolling players also visited Germany, performing vertoonige ("living tableaux") and contemporary plays. Spanish drama being much favored. Italian traveling players presented puppet theatre in Austria and southern Germany as an offshoot of the commedia dell'arte, which itself was widely imitated, particularly in Austria. While the strolling players did little to elevate German theatre to the level of the highest art, they did at least establish vital links with neighboring European cultures, helping to inject new ideas into backward traditions and precipitating the emergence of the professional actor.

French Neoclassicism

Theatre companies in France in the early 16th century were playing a mixed fare of moralities, miracle plays, farces, and soties. The most important company was an amateur guild called the Confrérie de la Passion, which held a monopoly on acting in Paris. In 1548 it opened its own theatre, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, a long
narrow room with the stage filling one end, a pit for standing spectators, and two galleries around the walls. Both auditorium and stage were lit by candles. Soon after the theatre opened, the Confrérie was forbidden by decree to perform religious plays for fear that they could be used to debase Roman Catholicism. The feeble traditions of indigenous secular drama in its repertoire were soon overpowered by the Renaissance influence, and dramatists began looking to classical antiquity for inspiration. Civil war, however, halted the appearance of any truly great drama until well into the 17th century. The new plays that appeared in Paris—mainly pastorals and tragically--were written by classical scholars as imitations of the Italian commedia erudita, but the French love of order resulted in the intensification of the dramatic unities of time, place, and action. The first fully professional company, which included women, was that of Valleran-Lecomte; it took over the Hôtel de Bourgogne toward the end of the century, performing its plays on the medieval-style multiple setting stage. The acting in these Neoclassical plays was not given to realism: each actor stood at the front of the stage to declaim his lines and then stepped back to allow the next actor to speak.

National unity came in the early 17th century under Louis XIII and his brilliant adviser, the cardinal de Richelieu, and with unity came the desire (similar to that in Tudor England) to create a strong national culture. Theatre companies were active in the provinces, but Paris, the center of cultural life, was the goal for which they all aimed. In 1634 the Théâtre du Marais was opened in an indoor tennis court, and in 1641 Richelieu built his own Italian-style theatre (complete with all the latest machinery), which after his death became the Théâtre du Palais-Royal. Richelieu, who took an active interest in theatre, had also tried to purify comedy and tragedy by discouraging what he considered the formless tragicomedy. His efforts, however, were thrown into confusion by the arrival of the first French play of any real worth, Pierre Corneille's Le Cid (1637), a tragicomedy that ignored the revered unities. Working smoothly within the rules, Corneille's rival, Jean Racine, took French Neoclassical drama to its greatest heights with his nine tragedies, of which Phèdre (1677) is regarded as the pinnacle.

Both Racine and Corneille were overshadowed by Molière, who is considered the world's greatest comic dramatist. After 13 years of touring France with his company, the Illustre-Théâtre, Molière was accepted at the court of Louis XIV in 1658 and began to elevate the crude farce to the level of sophisticated social comedy, placing it on a par with tragedy. For several years he shared the Petit-Bourbon theatre with a troupe of commedia dell'arte actors led by Tiberio Fiorillo and was much influenced by their realistic style of playing. Later he moved to the Palais-Royal. Far from imitating foreign plays, Molière created distinctly French characters based on an acute observation of social manners. After Molière's death, Louis XIV amalgamated the Illustre-Théâtre with two other companies in 1680 to form Europe's first national theatre, the Comédie-Française, which continues to further the cultural aims of France to the present day.

Spread Of National Theatres

In the course of the succeeding centuries, national theatres were established in many other European countries but not necessarily for the same reasons. German national theatres fought to shake off the infiltration of French culture and to develop native traditions. It was the aim of the Austrian emperor Joseph II to institute national theatres for all the peoples of his empire so that they might become acquainted with the works of world literature in their own tongue. After establishing a national theatre for the German-speaking population of Austria, Joseph II then supported the Czechs and Slovaks in their efforts toward their own national theatre. Later, one was founded in Budapest for the Hungarians. Gustav II created the Swedish national theatre. Catherine the Great of Russia also set out to introduce her people to the dramatic works of world literature performed in the Russian language.

There was no court theatre in the Netherlands. The performances of plays and the organization of theatre festivals had, since the 15th century, been in the hands of the Rederijkerkamers—societies of amateur enthusiasts similar to the French confréries. The plays—both serious religious pieces and farces—were usually presented outdoors on a raised platform with a curtained facade. The curtain could be closed for scene changes, though the settings themselves were very simple. In 1617 the first Dutch Academy was opened, and one of its priorities was to foster a higher standard of theatre developing at the time under a strong French influence. This eventually led to the construction of the first indoor theatre in Amsterdam, the Schouwburg. It opened with Gysbrecht van Aemstel (1638), a patriotic play in the classical tradition by the Netherlands' major dramatist, Joost van den Vondel. The Schouwburg, which had a semi-permanent setting, was remodeled in 1665 along Italian lines, though this did nothing to stem the general decline in Dutch drama.
Ballet And Opera-Ballet

If there was a lack of great theatre in France before Corneille, it was well compensated for by extravagant court ceremonials in which dance featured prominently. These reached a high level of sophistication in the later 16th century, stimulated by the presence of Italian dancing masters invited to the French court by Catherine de Médicis. A product of this collaboration was the *ballet comique*, a courtly dance entertainment with words. Another Italian import was changeable-perspective scenery, which was brought to Paris in 1645 by the designer Giacomo Torelli, who completely refurbished the Petit-Bourbon. The staging of court ballets was accordingly adapted to show off the possibilities of the new machinery. Louis XIV often took part in these and earned the title Le Roi Soleil (The Sun King) when he performed as the Sun in *Le Ballet de la nuit* in 1653. Molière was called upon to provide texts for elaborate court festivities at Versailles involving ballets, plays, fireworks displays, and theatrical banquets.

Louis XIV also organized the teaching and presentation of music and dance by setting up academies. The Académie Royal de Musique (1669) was officially given the exclusive right to present operas, which led to a new genre, the opera-ballet, initiated by the composer Jean-Baptiste Lully, which combined vocal scenes with danced interludes. Following the developments in Italian opera, composers made new demands on singers, who had to study for years in order to be able to meet them successfully. After the mid-17th century, singers exerted considerable influence on the structure of new works because they demanded showpiece arias at certain places in the text. The dramatic technique of Baroque opera followed set rules: arias were to be sung at the front of the stage, facing the audience; the chorus was directed as a static body; and the ornate setting was an elaborate decoration with which to please the eye rather than a functional definition of the acting area. One effect of the academies was to transfer dance activities from the court to the professional stage, and in 1681 the first professional dancers appeared in *Le Triomphe de l'amour* (*The Triumph of Love*), choreographed by Charles-Louis Beauchamp to Lully's music.

Restoration Theatre

One of the first gestures of Charles II upon his Restoration in 1660 was to reverse Puritan sobriety by encouraging the kind of entertainment and theatrical activities that he had seen during his years of exile at the French court. Within months of his return to London he granted royal patents to Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant to establish two theatre companies, the King's Players and the Duke's Players, respectively. Significantly, they chose to follow the French example and convert two indoor tennis courts as temporary premises rather than take over one of the surviving Elizabethan playhouses. In 1671 Sir Christopher Wren built the Duke's Theatre, Dorset Garden, for Davenant, and three years later he built the first Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, for Killigrew. These theatres combined continental innovations with some of the features of the Elizabethan stage. A curved "apron" stage extended beyond the proscenium arch from which entrance doors opened, indicating that most of the action was played toward the front of the stage with the scenery as a mere background. Stock sets of changeable flats were used, and lighting was provided by candles. The greatest impact, however, came from the introduction of actresses to the English stage, the most famous being Nell Gwyn.

The first productions were re-workings of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, tailored to suit the tastes of the new aristocratic audience composed almost exclusively of courtiers and their attendants. (The majority of the populace, still under the influence of Puritanism, stayed away and probably could not have afforded it anyway.) Values had changed since Shakespeare's day; the new audience consisted of fashionable young cynics and dilettantes, self-indulgent rakes and wits who prized glittering conversation and were interested only in seeing themselves on stage, however satirical the portrait. Thus came about the bawdy comedy of manners, heavily influenced by Molière but chilled with the dry wit of the London aristocracy. Romance and feeling gave way to intellect in sophisticated plays about cuckoldry, gossip, intrigue, and sexual license, yet tempered with a strong sense of decorum. Although most dramatists of the time did not consider themselves professional writers, George Etherege and William Wycherley developed an elegant style of prose drama that was refined by Sir John Vanbrugh and later William Congreve, whose *Way of the World* (1700) is the finest example of Restoration comedy. At the beginning of the 18th century there was a softening of cynicism in the comedies of George Farquhar, which brought the period to a close.
As the late 17th century was not a heroic age, tragedy fared less well in England. The poet John Dryden tried unsuccessfully to combine the merits of Racine and Shakespeare in a genre of rhymed heroic tragedy. His blank-verse tragedy *All for Love* (1677) was more lasting. The weakness of Restoration theatre was that, by concentrating on its aristocratic audience, it excluded most of the populace and was therefore not representative of the various levels of English society. Not surprisingly, the theatre was always struggling to survive, and after the 1670s audiences dwindled. In 1682 the King's Players and the Duke's Players merged to form the United Company, and for 13 years London supported only one theatre.

**The Rise Of A Middle-Class Theatre**

**The 18th Century**

A general decline in the level of playwriting during the 18th century was offset in large part by the emergence of some excellent actors and the building of hundreds of theatres throughout Europe. A new audience also emerged at this time. Inflation and the studied carelessness of the aristocracy had left many noble families impoverished, while middle-class merchants and financiers prospered. Intermarriage became a necessity for the nobility and a means of increasing social status for the middle class, whose members constituted the greater part of the new theatre-going public. Eager to enjoy its hard-won privileges but at the same time unable to cultivate the same tastes as the nobility, the middle class demanded something less artificial and formal than the theatre of the late 17th century--something more realistic and genteel. This audience was not prepared to labor over aesthetic subtleties; it wanted sensation.

**Middle-Class Drama**

In France, there was no one to carry forward the genius of Racine, and Neoclassical tragedy gave way to the *drame bourgeois* of Denis Diderot, whose moralizing domestic plays made a heavy appeal to the emotions. Voltaire, however, managed to sustain the form of Racine while widening the content to include historical subjects, sometimes exploiting the exoticism of Eastern settings in plays such as *Zaïre* (1732). Voltaire was fortunate to have some of the greatest actors of the period appear in his plays, among them Henri-Louis Lekain. In England George Lillo made tragedy more domestic by using middle-class characters in *The London Merchant* (1731). His example was followed in Germany by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in *Miss Sara Sampson* (1755), an attempt to shake off French Neoclassical influence and produce a truly German genre--the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* ("middle-class tragedy"). A similar attempt to be rid of the delicacy of Racine came from the Italian dramatist Count Vittorio Alfieri. In plays such as *Oreste* (1778), he went back to the Greeks for inspiration, filling the old stories with strong passions.

A more accessible genre for conveying high tragic sentiment was the opera. Kings and princes in nearly every European country built court theatres to house it, and when the composition of the audience widened, huge opera houses were constructed. Milan's Teatro alla Scala (1778), for example, seated more than 2,000 people. Notwithstanding national variations--Henry Purcell and George Frideric Handel in England, Christoph Gluck and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in the Germanic countries--opera remained essentially Italian. The Bibiena family of Bologna reigned as the supreme masters of scenic design, exerting influence throughout Europe. The family's most famous innovation was the *scena per angola*, in which the lines of perspective seem to move to vanishing points on either side of the scene rather than in the center of the scene. The comic side of opera was expressed in the French *opéra-comique* and the Italian *opera buffa*, in which there was more balance between the music and the libretto. This was particularly the case in the popular English ballad opera, which was more like a play with songs. The best known example of English ballad opera is John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728).

Smaller playhouses also abounded to accommodate the growing number of plays. At the beginning of the century, Paris had three theatres, but by 1791 there were 51. The growth of playhouses in London was discouraged by the Licensing Act of 1737, which gave the lord chamberlain extensive powers to censor all plays and to uphold the monopoly of the two patent theatres in London. Theatre managers, however, found a way around this by filling out their programs with musical items. (Similar laws in Paris were evaded by unlicensed actors who played in *forains*, the illegal theatres of the fairgrounds.) Outside London, the spread
of theatres royal in provincial towns gave new importance to the touring circuits, which became valuable training grounds for young actors. It was in this way that the century's greatest actor, David Garrick, gained his early experience. In both tragedy and comedy, Garrick developed a more natural style of acting that became widely influential. As manager of the Drury Lane Theatre, he introduced concealed stage lighting and stopped the practice of spectators sitting on the stage. (Voltaire did the same in France.) It is interesting to note that at a time when Garrick was buried in Westminster Abbey, French actors, under penalty of excommunication, still had to be buried in unconsecrated ground.

Some of the most important dramatic contributions in the 18th century were in the field of comedy. Dominated at first by the tearful comedies of Colley Cibber and Sir Richard Steele in England and the comédie larmoyante of Nivelle de La Chaussée in France, the form spluttered to life as a reaction against sentimental drama. Oliver Goldsmith evoked the Elizabethan mood and signaled a return to hearty laughter in *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773); Richard Brinsley Sheridan tried to revive the comedy of manners in *The School for Scandal* (1777).

In France and Italy, the most interesting developments were literary applications of the commedia dell'arte. Banished by Louis XIV, the Italian actors were back in 1716 under the name Comédie-Italienne. This time they softened their style to suit prevailing taste and found a sympathetic writer in Pierre Marivaux, who developed a more refined expression of the commedia dell'arte spirit. In Italy, where the commedia dell'arte was already becoming lifeless, two rival playwrights, Carlo Goldoni and Carlo Gozzi, tried to reform it in different ways. Goldoni replaced the improvised dialogue with fully written texts, and, although he achieved popularity with *Il servitore di due padrone* (c. 1745; *The Servant of Two Masters*), he faced bitter opposition from the profession. Gozzi, on the other hand, allowed his actors plenty of opportunity for improvisation. He mixed fairy-tale fantasy and realism in a type of play he called *fiabe*, the best known example being *L'amore delle tre melarance* (1761; *The Love for Three Oranges*). Comedy reached an exuberant peak in two plays by the French dramatist Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais: *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775; *The Barber of Seville*) and *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1784; *The Marriage of Figaro*).

A curious offshoot of the commedia dell'arte in England was introduced in 1717 by the actor John Rich. Under the stage name of Lun, he played Harlequin in a new form he called pantomime. The entertainment began with a familiar story or classical legend in verse, then the characters were transformed into commedia dell'arte figures for the harlequinade in which their tricks and adventures were mimed to music. Rich produced a pantomime annually until 1760. The form continued after him and became even more popular in the 19th century.

**Beginnings Of American Theatre**

The strongly Puritan sentiments of settlers in North America prohibited the development of theatre until the early 18th century when a number of English actors arrived in the South and began staging plays in temporary venues. The first theatres were built in Williamsburg, Va. (c. 1716), and Charleston, S.C. (1730). By the mid-1730s a number of theatres had opened in New York, and the first visiting company from London performed in Williamsburg in 1752. In the absence of any local dramatists, the repertoire in America consisted mainly of successes from the London stage. After independence (1782), several of the new states tried to prohibit theatrical performances on moral grounds. To combat this, one touring company announced its presentation of Shakespeare's *Othello* as "a moral dialogue in five acts." By the end of the century, however, professional theatre was well established and such groups as the American Company were giving regular seasons.

**The Romantic Theatre**

The last decades of the 18th century were characterized by a breakaway from the cool reason of Neoclassicism and an urge to reassert freedom and national consciousness. The French and American revolutions were the most notable consequences of this, but there were stirrings throughout Europe. The theatre became an important means of arousing patriotic fervor, a function that was to continue well into the 19th century. At the same time, the doors were opened to the lower classes, who swelled the audience and imposed their own tastes on the theatre. More and more playhouses were built to accommodate the demand.
A spirit of Romanticism swept through all the arts. In the theatre, formalized rules were cast aside to allow for much more individualistic and passionate expression. The emphasis on detail, as opposed to the Neoclassical preoccupation with the general and representative, led toward naturalism on the one hand and a drama of the subjective imagination on the other. Almost every major poet turned his hand to writing plays. The source of inspiration for them all was Shakespeare, who enjoyed a new wave of appreciation in numerous translations and productions all over Europe.

The English poets, among them Lord Byron, John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley, failed in their attempts to create a drama that suited prevailing tastes, partly because they were not prepared to descend to a level that they considered vulgar and partly because they were overshadowed by the weight of their own dramatic heritage, having very little to add to it. By contrast, the influence of Shakespeare in Germany proved liberating. The breakaway from French Neoclassical drama, which had been heralded by Lessing in the 1760s, found full expression in the Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress) movement that began with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's tempestuous first play, Götz von Berlichingen (1773; Eng. trans., Götz von Berlichingen). Its medieval theme led to a wave of historical writing and "gothicism" (a preoccupation with an idealized and melodramatic past that later became especially popular in England) and with it a new interest in the visual aspects of theatre production. The greatest exponent of the genre was Friedrich von Schiller, whose first play, Die Räuber (1781; The Robbers), left audiences stunned. Goethe and Schiller were both involved with the court theatre at Weimar. When Goethe, as director of the theatre, saw that the Sturm und Drang movement was leading to excess and absurdity, he reverted to a more Classical style of theatre. Heinrich von Kleist, best known for his play Prinz Friedrich von Homburg (1821; The Prince of Homburg), is considered by some the only dramatist of real merit at the time.

**Melodrama**

The reduction of Schiller's poetic style of Romanticism to a level of popular entertainment for unsophisticated audiences resulted in the melodrama that, in spite of its lack of literary merit, became one of the most popular forms of the 19th century. For example, August von Kotzebue, whose work Goethe was reluctantly forced to stage at Weimar, wrote more than 200 melodramas and exerted an enormous influence in England and France. The French dramatist Guilbert de Pixérécourt also enjoyed wide popularity. His play Coelina, ou l'enfant du mystère (1800) was translated into English (without acknowledgement) by Thomas Holcroft as A Tale of Mystery and became in 1802 the very first melodrama to be seen in England.

Both Kotzebue and Pixérécourt used a great variety of subjects with historical and exotic locations. They took every opportunity to incorporate sensational or terrifying effects, such as floods, fires, and earthquakes, and made use of live animals on stage. In their works, characters tended to be stock types and words became secondary to lively action. Much of the dialogue was accompanied by incidental music in an effort to heighten emotional impact. Even the best actors of the day, including John Philip Kemble and his sister Sarah Siddons, were compelled to appear in melodramas as an alternative to Shakespeare.

**The Early 19th Century**

While Shakespearean tragedy remained the main inspiration for serious Romantic drama in Russia, Poland, Hungary, and the Scandinavian countries during the early 19th century, little of true merit was produced. After the French Revolution had settled, Napoleon reconstituted the Comédie-Française in 1799 under the actor François-Joseph Talma, who introduced many reforms and encouraged a less declamatory style of speech. In England, after a triumphant debut at Drury Lane in 1814 as Shylock in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, Edmund Kean went on to become the greatest actor of the age, specializing in classic villain roles.

The most influential contributions, however, were in the field of popular theatre. Joseph Grimaldi created the much loved clown character in the harlequinade section of the English pantomime, appearing annually at Covent Garden until his retirement in 1823. At about this time, Jean-Gaspard Deburau rekindled interest in the art of mime through his portrayals of the white-faced Pierrot at the Théâtre des Funambules in Paris. Both men became living legends.
A strain of fantastic comedy, influenced by Gozzi in its juxtaposition of the fairy-tale world and reality, was developed in Germany and Austria in the plays of Johann Nestroy and Ferdinand Raimund. In England this found expression in the extravaganza (similar in spirit to the pantomime) mainly through the fairy plays of J.R. Planché. His example was followed later in the century by Sir W.S. Gilbert, who became famous for the satirical operettas he wrote with Sir Arthur Sullivan, notable among which was *Iolanthe* (1882). The English burlesque (a more satirical version of the extravaganza) and the *burletta* (a farce with songs) were also popular forms of the time, as was their French counterpart, the vaudeville, which paved the way for the operetta.

**Rise In The Number Of Theatres**

A sharp increase in the number of theatre buildings matched the rapid growth in urban development. During the London winter season of 1807, for example, only 10 theatres were operating; by 1870 there were 30. Drury Lane was rebuilt on a huge scale in 1794, designed to seat 3,600 people. This made audiences difficult for actors to control, and naturalistic acting became almost impossible. Most of the new theatres, however, were much smaller.

In 1803 London's Lyceum Theatre substituted gas for candles and oil lamps as a source of illumination, and other theatres were quick to follow suit. This meant that the brightness of light on stage could be controlled to a degree never before known. The disadvantages, however, were an appalling smell and a greatly increased danger of fire from the naked jets of flame. Faced with the prospect of a much wider theatre-going public, theatres became more specialized, catering to particular classes and their corresponding tastes. For middle-class audiences, changes in the auditoriums of European public theatres brought about greater comfort and respectability, with the result that spectators became quieter during the performance. In England, for example, soft seats were installed in the pit by the late 1820s. Galleries with their open boxes were divided into closed boxes near the proscenium arch, allowing for privacy, with the rest of the gallery open and known as the "dress circle." For the poorer sections of the English populace, there were the small "penny theatres" (of which more than 80 existed in London during the 1830s), where patrons paid a penny to see short, crudely mounted productions. Some individuals began to exploit their special talents as singers, dancers, mimics, and jugglers, giving solo performances in ale houses and taverns. These forms of entertainment became so popular that a great chain of provincial and metropolitan theatres sprang up from the music room annex of the public saloon during the second half of the 19th century. In England these forms came to be known as music hall and in the United States as vaudeville.

**Romantic Realism**

The visit to Paris of an English Shakespearean company in 1827 had an immediate effect on French drama and acting techniques, inspiring Victor Hugo to write *Hernani* (1830), which signaled the beginning of a more distinctly literary Romanticism in France. Although this play eventually put an end to Neoclassicism, its first performance caused riots in the Comédie-Française. Historical dramas with a strong nationalist spirit began appearing in nearly every country, finding particularly stirring expression in the opera. In Germany Richard Wagner worked to create a more unified presentation of poetry, music, dance, and scenery in historical and mythic operas such as *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868; *The Mastersingers of Nuremburg*), culminating in the first full production of the mighty *Ring des Nibelungen* (1869-76; *The Ring of the Nibelungen*) in the specially constructed Bayreuth Festspielhaus. This theatre, which departed from the Baroque opera house, set a pattern of theatre production that is still followed today: its fan-shaped auditorium was the first to be darkened during the performance to encourage the sharpest concentration on what was happening on stage. Opera of a different style reached a peak in Italy through the works of Giuseppe Verdi.

The main trend in Europe around the middle of the century was toward Romantic realism and the development of a theatre of ideas. It was at this time that the Russian theatre began to take on new life in Nikolay Gogol's biting satire *Revisor* (1836; *The Inspector General*) and with more delicate comic realism in the plays of Aleksandr Nikolayevich Ostrovsky and Ivan Turgenev. Edward George Bulwer-Lytton wrote one of the first English plays on a contemporary theme (*Money* [1840]), and the Irish writer and actor Dion Boucicault, best known for *London Assurance* (1841), had great success in both London and New York City
with his melodramas. It was Boucicault who helped to establish author's copyright in the United States (1856) after he became the first dramatist in Britain to receive a royalty payment for his plays. Lord Lytton gave his name to the Act of 1833, which established author's performance copyright in England.

Eugène Scribe dominated the French stage with his 400 "well-made plays"; through which he developed a formula for creating highly commercial theatre wherein plot rather than character was the main concern. Eugène Labiche carried such techniques into farce, and another Scribe disciple, Victorien Sardou, became the leading French dramatist of the second half of the century. In spite of the shallowness of his plays, Sardou provided some memorable roles for the great French actress Sarah Bernhardt. A more serious type of drama, developed by Alexandre Dumas fils, was the thesis play (also called problem play), in which social problems were debated.

The Actor-Manager

If contemporary plays were of a poor standard, the deficiency was partly hidden by flamboyant productions and bravura performances by star actors, many of whom managed their own companies. The 19th century was the heyday of the actor-manager. Star, licensee of the theatre, and arranger of the performance, he dominated the forestage while his fellow actors were relegated to the background as a sort of mobile dressing.

Although the actor-managers chose plays for good acting parts rather than for their dramatic value, they introduced many reforms. In England William Charles Macready, one of the great tragedians of the century, was among the first to introduce full rehearsals for his company. After the monopoly of the patent theatres was removed in 1843, Samuel Phelps staged nearly all of Shakespeare's plays at Sadler's Wells, including many of the lesser known ones. The greatest actor-manager was Henry Irving, who first made his name in a melodrama by Leopold Lewis called The Bells (1871). Although he devoted much time to touring, the Lyceum became London's principal theatre under his management. Irving also helped to raise the status of actors, becoming in 1895 the first English actor to be knighted.

Because of the technical difficulties of manipulating complicated scenic effects (e.g., storms, forest fires, and earthquakes), the star actor was eventually obliged to hand over artistic control to a neutral observer, the stage manager, who could coordinate all aspects of the production. Thus the stage manager's function became increasingly important until he was eventually elevated to the status of régisseur, or director.

Movement Toward Realism

The Romantic movement at the beginning of the 19th century had stimulated an interest in historical plays, which in turn gave rise to an almost obsessive preoccupation with authentic settings and costumes. In England Charles Kean's productions of Shakespeare crowded so much archaeological detail onto the stage that new scenes were often invented to make full use of the designer's research. In Kean's production of Hamlet in 1858, for instance, the recurring stage direction "a room in the castle" was represented by at least four different settings. Needless to say, this did incalculable damage to both the pace and fluidity of the play. In such impressive surroundings crowd scenes reached new peaks of popularity and spectacle. Large numbers of exotic animals were also used whenever an excuse could be found. One of the most sensational effects, however, was the "racing drama" in which live horses galloped on moving belts set into the stage floor. In this way, the chariot race of William Young's Ben Hur could be staged in New York City in 1899. Realism found its way into domestic dramas, too, one of the earliest innovations being the box set that replaced the perspective backcloth and wings depiction of a room with three solid walls and a ceiling. This feature was introduced to the English stage in 1832 by the actress and singer Madame Vestris at the Olympic Theatre.

A move toward ensemble acting was perhaps the logical continuation of efforts to achieve scenic realism. Madame Vestris demanded a more natural style of playing from her actors, and her example was followed by Charles Kean in his handling of crowd scenes: the extras were divided into small groups, each led by an experienced actor. But the most decisive move toward ensemble playing under the guidance of a modern theatre director was made by II, duke of Saxe-Meiningen. The Duke was influenced by the stagings of Kean,
which he had seen on visits to London. Assisted by the actor Ludwig Chronegk, he assumed control of his state theatre company as director and designer in 1866 and achieved an unrivaled harmony and discipline of playing. The company's extensive European tours between 1874 and 1890 had a considerable impact on actors and actor-managers. On the level of domestic drama, an attempt at contemporary realism was made by the English dramatist T.W. Robertson in the 1860s in both the writing and production of his plays. The style came to be known as "cup-and-saucer" drama because of the meals that were eaten on stage.

The introduction of electricity in theatres allowed for much brighter lighting on stage, providing yet another reason for eliminating exaggerated acting. The first experiments with electric stage lighting were at the Paris Opéra in 1846, but full systems were not installed until about 1880. In England the first use of electric stage lighting was in 1881 at the Savoy Theatre.

The advances in stage production eventually helped to stimulate a higher level of drama. The tradition of the French "well-made play" was carried forward in England on a more serious note in Arthur Wing Pinero's *Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) and with a brilliance of wit that evoked the Restoration comedy of manners in Oscar Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).

The full impact of realist drama in the final decades of the 19th century came from northern Europe, first in the plays of the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen and later in the work of the Russian playwright Anton Chekhov. Together, though in different ways, they exerted a strong influence on the course of acting and writing that has lasted to the present day. Ibsen achieved international recognition through his verse dramas, *Brand* (1865; Eng. trans., *Brand*) and *Peer Gynt* (1867; Eng. trans., *Peer Gynt*), though his reputation rests mainly on the realistic contemporary plays that set out to expose social evils. *Samfundets støtter* (1877; *Pillars of Society*), *Et dukkehjem* (1879; *A Doll's House*), and *Hedda Gabler* (1890; Eng. trans., *Hedda Gabler*) are among the best known of such works.

**Naturalism**

As early as 1867, the French novelist Émile Zola had called for a rejection of all artifice in the theatrical arts, as in the novel, demanding that plays be faithful records of behavior--namely, scientific analyses of life. *Thérèse Raquin*, an 1873 dramatization of his own novel (written in 1867), represents the first consciously Naturalistic drama.

Zola's "slice-of-life" technique found fuller expression in Sweden in August Strindberg's *Fröken Julie* (1888; *Miss Julie*), which heralded a new generation of writers whose plays dealt with themes centering on real contemporary society, treated in action and dialogue that looked and sounded like everyday behavior and speech. These writers included Gerhart Hauptmann in Germany, Henry Becque in France, and Maxim Gorky in Russia. Partly because their plays often dealt with the gloomier side of life, audiences were at first small. In spite of the lack of commercial success, sympathetic productions were made possible by a number of independent "free" theatres that appeared throughout Europe.

**Théâtre-Libre**

In 1887 André Antoine, an enthusiastic amateur actor, formed a small company in Paris, which he called Théâtre-Libre. His intention was to provide a showcase theatre for young playwrights of the new Naturalistic drama, from both France and abroad, who could find no other opportunity of bringing their work before the public. Antoine's first production was a group of one-act plays that attracted the attention of leading avant-garde theatre intellectuals such as Zola and Becque. The following year, Leo Tolstoy's *Vlast tmy* (1888; *The Power of Darkness*) was presented, and Théâtre-Libre took on an international significance. Apart from the work of such French writers as Becque and Eugène Brieux, Théâtre-Libre also introduced the plays of Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann, and the Norwegian Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. Because of financial difficulties the theatre closed in 1896, but by then it had already exerted an enormous influence on playwriting, direction, and acting and had helped to liberate French theatre from the artificiality in which it had been steeped. Antoine encouraged his actors to behave as if they were unaware of the presence of the audience, while his settings aimed to achieve in meticulous detail the impression of real life. He became famous for hanging real carcasses of meat in the stage setting of a butcher's shop.
Freie Bühne

Disturbed by the stagnation of theatre in Germany during the 1880s, young intellectuals tried to promote the revolutionary Naturalistic drama by opening the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, but they soon ran into trouble with the censors. In 1889, a group of writers headed by the theatre critic Otto Brahm formed a private theatre club called the Freie Bühne after Antoine's Théâtre-Libre. Its earliest productions were of Ibsen's *Gengangere* (1885; *Ghosts*) and Hauptmann's first play, *Vor Sonnenaufgang* (1889; *Before Dawn*), and it also staged the latter's better-known *Weber* (1892; *The Weavers*). When Brahm became director of the Deutsches Theater in 1894, the Freie Bühne was attached to it as an experimental division, though by this time the new drama was being accepted throughout Germany in similar theatres dedicated to bringing serious plays to the working class at reasonable prices. Other so-called free theatres in Berlin were the Freie Volksbühne ("Free People's Theatre") and the Schiller Theater.

The Independent Theatre

Dissatisfaction with established systems of theatre, including the all-powerful actor-manager and the indulgence in scenic spectacle, also existed in England. Critics had long deplored the lack of worthwhile modern English drama, and toward the end of the century William Archer was one of many writers who called for an equivalent of the Théâtre-Libre that would bring the "theatre of ideas" to England. Inspired by Antoine's example, Jacob Grein, a Dutchman living in England, organized the Independent Theatre Club. The theatre opened in 1891 with Archer's translation of Ibsen's *Gengangere*, provoking a storm of moral fury. One champion of the new group and its policies was the theatre critic George Bernard Shaw; his first play, *Widower's House* (1892), which dealt with the subject of slum landlordism, was produced there the following year. The theatre was supported by a small group of subscribers, many of them distinguished writers. Although it ceased activity in 1897, the Independent Theatre Club prepared the way for the Stage Society, founded in 1899. For the next 40 years the society arranged private Sunday performances of experimental plays at the Royal Court Theatre in London.

Moscow Art Theatre

The movement toward Naturalism that was sweeping Europe reached its highest artistic peak in Russia in 1898 with the formation of the Moscow Art Theatre (later called the Moscow Academy Art Theatre). Its name became synonymous with that of Anton Chekhov, whose plays about the day-to-day life of the landed gentry achieved a delicate poetic realism that was years ahead of its time. Konstantin Stanislavsky, its director, became the 20th century's most influential theorist on acting. In the early 19th century Russian theatre had been one of the most backward in Europe, content to play a repertoire of stock theatrical pieces, mainly French comedies and farces, or Russian imitations of them. Little time was spent on rehearsal; the plays were so similar that the same performances and sets could be used time and again. However, the Meiningen Company, which had visited Russia during the late 1880s, had pointed the way to reform with its exemplary discipline.

During a 17-hour conversation in a Moscow restaurant, Stanislavsky, an amateur actor of considerable experience, and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, a playwright, teacher, and drama critic, talked over their vision of an ideal theatre company, its artistic policy, and its production methods. On the basis of their discussion, they formed a group they called the Moscow Art Theatre Company. No great stir was made until, later that year, they revived Chekhov's *Chayka* (1896; *The Seagull*), which had failed badly in its incompetent first production in St. Petersburg. An instant success, the new production established the reputation of both Chekhov and Stanislavsky. The intimacy and truthfulness of the acting were something entirely new. Through his stagings of several of Chekhov's other plays, *Dyadya Vanya* (1897; *Uncle Vanya*), *Tri sestry* (1901; *Three Sisters*), and *Vishnyovy sad* (1904; *The Cherry Orchard*), Stanislavsky developed a style of infinitely detailed production, the result of long and methodical rehearsals, to achieve an almost perfect surface naturalism.
The American Theatre

Although there was no lack of enthusiasm in developing an indigenous American theatre at the end of the 18th century, the plays that appeared proved lifeless and derivative, often little more than adaptations of English successes. It was not until the early 20th century that actors had a chance to portray American characters in well-written roles that were comparable to those of the European theatre. The first play by a native American was Thomas Godfrey's Neoclassical tragedy *The Prince of Parthia* (1767), but recognizable American characters did not appear on stage until Royall Tyler's comedy *The Contrast* (1787). This work introduced a favorite theme of early American drama: the triumph of native honesty and worth over foreign sham and affectation.

The growth of American theatre owed more to its actors than to its dramatists. In the early decades of the 19th century, the finest English actors, notably Edmund Kean, William Charles Macready, and Charles Kemble, visited the United States and provided a stimulus for the local actors they worked with. Before long, the gesture was returned when such American actors as Edwin Booth, Edwin Forrest, and Charlotte Cushman appeared with some success on the London stage. Forrest, whose acting was characterized by muscular strength and great vocal power, was perhaps the first to popularize the virile outdoor image cultivated by many American actors ever since. His most famous role, Spartacus in Robert Bird's *Gladiator* (1831), was specially written for him. The Booths were an eminent acting family: Junius Brutus Booth had acted with Edmund Kean, and his son Edwin with Irving, but they achieved notoriety when another son, John Wilkes Booth, assassinated Abraham Lincoln in 1865.

By the middle of the 19th century, the number of theatres in the United States had multiplied. Many of them were based on English models and offered a high standard of comfort and luxury. Detailed historical accuracy in setting and costume first attracted attention in Charles Kean's visiting production of Shakespeare's *King John* (1846), and the new box settings (three solid walls to suggest a room instead of the traditional side wings and backcloth arrangement) began to be used in Edwin Booth's theatre from 1869, after which realistic staging became increasingly popular. This trend was stimulated by the introduction of gas lighting about 1825 and of electric lighting about 1885.

Styles of acting also leaned increasingly toward realism as the century advanced. Joseph Jefferson, whose career spanned 71 years, was the leading comic actor of his day, best remembered in the title role of Dion Boucicault's version of *Rip Van Winkle* in the 1860s. One of the great actress-managers was Mrs. John Drew, who was famed for her frequently revived portrayal of Mrs. Malaprop in Sheridan's *Rivals*. Black American actors were rarely seen on the 19th-century stage; Negro roles were usually played by white actors with black makeup, giving rise to shallow and stereotyped portrayals. One of the first playwrights to treat the American Negro seriously was Boucicault in *The Octoroon* (1859). After a surfeit of melodrama, a more distinctly American style of drama began to evolve through the work of Bronson Howard, whose first play, *Saratoga* (1870), helped to make him the first to earn his living solely by playwriting.

As the population spread westward and southward, spurred by the gold rush and the expansion of the railways, so the demand for theatre became more widespread. In the South showboats on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers provided floating entertainment, mostly melodramas. Most of the leading actors of the time made visits to California, where the first theatres were built in the 1850s. Initially, star actors would work with local resident companies, but the majority of these were eventually overtaken by full touring productions that originated in New York City. By the 1870s, these companies were providing entertainment throughout the country. Booking agencies were formed to liaise between companies and theatres, and from this activity a group of theatre owners, producers, and agents formed the first Theatrical Syndicate in 1896. Although its original aim was to streamline the organization of entertainment and prevent exploitation, it soon gained a monopoly on theatre by controlling bookings in New York City and in key cities on the touring circuits. Because its blatant commercialism discouraged high artistic standards, the monopoly was fiercely resisted by the more innovative producer-directors such as David Belasco, who helped to introduce to the American stage the European fashion for scenic naturalism. Making use of the latest stage machinery, he devised many spectacular effects and used a real flock of sheep on stage in one production of a Passion play.

**Popular Entertainment**
Alongside the developments in "legitimate" theatre, the last decades of the 19th century saw the rise of several forms of popular entertainment that often reached much larger audiences and created a new range of star performers. In these traditions lay the seeds of the 20th century's most popular theatrical genre, the musical comedy.

One of the greatest showmen of the time was P.T. Barnum. Founder of the American legend of "show business," he promoted melodrama, exhibited the midget Tom Thumb in the United States and England, and finally merged with James A. Bailey in 1881 to form "The Greatest Show on Earth," a three-ring circus, which was taken over in England by the Ringling Brothers after Barnum's death. The American brand of spectacular entertainment achieved international fame through Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West shows, which featured a large cast of cowboys, Indians, and animals, as well as the famous sharp-shooter Annie Oakley. Another form that enjoyed enormous popularity in the United States and England throughout most of the century was the minstrel show, inspired by Thomas Dartmouth Rice. The performers were at first white men with black makeup, though later Negroes appeared in the shows. Sitting in a semicircle and playing banjos, tambourines, bones, and fiddles, they sang comic songs and sentimental ballads interspersed with soft-shoe dances and snatches of cross-fire dialogue.

By the 1880s, the music hall was at the height of its popularity in England, with a proliferation of newly constructed halls all over London and in the main cities. As the audience widened from predominantly male working-class spectators to include middle-class men and women, the layout of the auditoriums changed. The old-style intimate halls with their drinking facilities and tables gave way to larger, more theatre-like buildings, one of the most luxurious of which was the London Pavilion. An evening's bill could feature more than 20 different acts, including jugglers, acrobats, conjurers, ventriloquists, dancers, slapstick comedians, and singers ranging from vulgar to light classical. Two of the most famous performers of the 1880s were Marie Lloyd, who specialized in risqué songs, and the comedian Dan Leno, who, like many music-hall stars, made annual appearances in pantomime as well. Vesta Tilley, the male impersonator, created the character Burlington Bertie; Sir Harry Lauder was the finest Scottish comedian; Little Tich was famed for his short stature and elongated boots; Jules Léotard and Charles Blondin achieved international fame as acrobats; and Grock (original name Charles Adrian Wettach), the greatest clown after Grimaldi, played 20 instruments and delighted London audiences from 1903 until 1924. By then, the music hall was in decline, unable to compete with the new forms of mass entertainment into which many of its performers were drifting--revue, musical comedy, cinema, radio, and, later, television. There was a similar form of entertainment in France, while in the United States vaudeville retained many of the features and acts of the English music hall. It was first presented in New York City in 1881 as an attempt to provide "clean" entertainment for respectable family audiences.

On a more sophisticated level, light opera was developing in Europe out of the German Singspiel and the French opéra-comique. Early examples were Jacques Offenbach's classical burlesque, Orphée aux enfers (1858; Orpheus in the Underworld), Johann Strauss's Fledermaus (1874; The Bat), and the satirical operas of Gilbert and Sullivan. These led to the romantic operettas of Victor Herbert in the United States and Franz Lehár in Austria. But it was Jerome Kern who in the early 20th century first developed a genuinely American sound from ballad and ragtime musical forms that helped to forge the particular identity of the American musical comedy.

20th-Century Theatre

The achievements of Realism at the end of the 19th century have continued to the present day, but the most influential innovations in early 20th-century theatre came from a vigorous reaction against Realism. Just as the visual arts exploded into a chaos of experiment and revolt, generating numerous styles and "isms," so the theatre seized upon anything that came to hand in an effort to express the contradictions of the new age. Inspiration was sought in machines and technology, in Oriental theatre, Cubism, Dada, the psychoanalysis of Freud, and the shock of a world war that spawned widespread disillusionment and alienation. The results of this eclecticism were often anarchic and exhilarating: designers and directors were as influential as playwrights, though relatively little theatre of lasting value was produced. Nevertheless, such early experiments set the tone and widened the theatrical vocabulary for all the innovations that have followed.
The beginnings of the revolt against Realism were already hinted at before the 19th century was over, sometimes in the works of the Realist writers themselves. Ibsen, for example, turned increasingly toward Symbolism in his later plays such as *Bygmaster Solness* (1892; *The Master Builder*) and *Naar vi døde vaagner* (1899; *When We Dead Awaken*), though still in the Realist mold. Frank Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen* (1891; *Spring Awakening*) began its study of adolescent love in the slice-of-life Naturalistic mode and ended in the realm of ghosts and dreams, foreshadowing Expressionism, which was to preoccupy other German dramatists during the 1920s. Strindberg also is regarded as one of the fathers of Expressionism by virtue of his later works such as *Ett Drömspel* (1902; *A Dream Play*) and *Spöksonaten* (1907; *The Spook [Ghost] Sonata*). In France the marionette play *Ubu roi* ("King Ubu"), written in 1888 by Alfred Jarry at the age of 15, created a scandal when it was later performed with live actors in 1896. Its use of puppet techniques, masks, placards, and stylized scenery was to be taken up decades later in French avant-garde theatre.

**Beyond Realism**

**The New Stagecraft**

Since Naturalistic scenery had led to an excessive clutter of archaeologically authentic detail on stage, the reaction against it favored simplicity, even austerity, but with a heightened expressiveness that could convey the true spirit of a play rather than provide merely superficial dressing. One of the first advocates of this view was the Swiss designer Adolphe Appia, who used the latest technology and exploited the possibilities of electric lighting to suggest a completely new direction in stage design. Appia believed that the setting should serve to focus attention on the actor, not drown him in two-dimensional pictorial detail. The imaginative use of light on a few well-chosen forms--simple platforms, flights of steps, and the like--was sufficient to convey the changing mood of a play.

Because his views were so radical, Appia had few opportunities to realize his theories. They were, however, carried forward at the beginning of the century by the English designer and director Edward Gordon Craig, who used strong lighting effects on more abstract forms. He felt that a suggestion of reality could create in the imagination of the audience a physical reality: a single Gothic pillar, for instance, designed to stand alone and carefully lit, can suggest a church more effectively than a cardboard and canvas replica faithful to the last detail. But, like Appia, Craig became better known as a theorist than a practitioner. In his book *The Art of the Theatre* (1905) he outlined his concept of a "total theatre" in which the stage director alone would be responsible for harmonizing every aspect of the production--acting, music, color, movement, design, makeup, and lighting--so that it might achieve its most unified effect. More controversial were Craig's ideas on the depersonalization of the actor into what he called the *übermarionette* ("super-marionette"), based on a new symbolic form of movement and gesture (not unlike that of the Oriental actor) in which the actor's ego would not obtrude on the symbolic design. While they may not have found a practical way of achieving their visions, both Appia and Craig exerted an enormous influence on the next generation of directors and stage designers, particularly in their principle of painting with light.

The Austrian director Max Reinhardt came close to achieving many of Craig's ideals, especially in the power he exerted over every aspect of theatrical production. Beginning as an actor in Otto Brahm's company at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, Reinhardt won acclaim for his inventive staging of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1905 and thereafter devoted himself entirely to directing: he dominated the theatre of central Europe for 25 years. His flair for bold theatricality made him many enemies among the Realists, but it also returned a sense of color and richness to the theatre of the time. Reinhardt was pragmatic in his approach to acting: rejecting the idea of "one style," he demanded for modern plays a style realistic in feeling but avoiding the drab exactness of Realism. In productions of the classics, he demanded lively, supple speaking in place of the slow, ponderous delivery of the traditionalists. He always made his actors think afresh about their characters instead of assuming ready-made characterizations.

In his endeavors to break down the separation of stage and auditorium, Reinhardt often took his actors out of the theatre to play in unconventional settings. He produced Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in a circus arena in Berlin, and for his production of Karl Gustav Vollmöller's *Mirakel* (performed in 1911 and published in 1912; *The Miracle*), he transformed the huge Olympia exhibition hall in London into a cathedral with the audience as part of the congregation. In 1920 he helped to found the Salzburg Festival and directed Hugo von
Hofmannsthal's morality play *Jedermann* (1911; *Everyman*) in the cathedral square. Although he was a master of spectacle, his versatility was such that he directed subtle and intimate plays in small theatres with equal skill.

**Russia**

At the beginning of the century, Russia was surging toward revolution, which makes it less surprising that some of the first attacks on Naturalistic theatre should have originated there. While continuing in the Realistic vein of his productions of Chekhov's plays and Gorky's *Na dne* (1902; *The Lower Depths*) at the Moscow Art Theatre, Stanislavsky also recognized the need to find new artistic paths. In 1905 he set up a studio for experimental theatre and appointed one of his former actors, Vsevolod Meyerhold, as its director. Influenced by Craig, Meyerhold immediately began to implement his own ideas involving the total supremacy of the director, so that his actors became little more than puppets. So much did this contradict everything the Moscow Art Theatre stood for that Stanislavsky closed the studio and thought further about the function of the actor. Determined that the actor should not in future be subordinated to the director's will, he began to train his company in an approach based on "emotional memory." This emphasized the self-expression of the actor who, in collaboration with the director, should achieve a unified interpretation of the play. After the Revolution in 1917, Stanislavsky allowed himself to become involved in the new plans for the arts that the revolutionary government had conceived, but he refused to allow his theatre to become a platform for spreading propaganda. He believed that his mission was to maintain a high standard of acting that other theatres might emulate when the initial excesses of the Revolution abated. He did, however, achieve a much bolder style in nonrealistic plays such as Maurice Maeterlinck's *Oiseau bleu* (1908; *The Blue Bird*) and in some of the productions toward the end of his career.

Curiously, it was the avant-garde that Lenin's government entrusted to guide the Russian theatre into the new revolutionary era. Meyerhold was back in vogue, declaring that the principles of propagandist theatre conformed with those of Marxism because they attempted to underline the "unindividuality" of man. In 1918 he stage the first Soviet play, *Misteriya-buff* (1921; *Mystery-Bouffe*) by Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky. With Aleksandr Tairov, director of the Kamerny Theatre, Meyerhold developed the Formalist style, in which representative types replaced individual characters amid Constructivist settings of gaunt scaffolding supporting bare platforms, with every strut and bolt exposed to view. The aggressive functionalism of this type of setting was regarded as having considerable propaganda value when the Soviets were being taught to revere the machine as part of their training to become a great industrial nation. Meyerhold sought to eliminate the actor's personality even further through a system he called "biomechanics." Placing emphasis on the physical and athletic aspects of the actor's body, Meyerhold's system drew on a variety of influences, including commedia dell'arte, Kabuki theatre, and the ideas of Craig and the physiologist Ivan Petrovich Pavlov.

As director of one of the studios of the Moscow Art Theatre from 1920, the more moderate Yevgeny Vakhtangov tried to bridge the gap between Realism and the avant-garde. In place of Stanislavsky's inner realism, he wanted what he called "outer technique." While preserving a deep respect for the actor's art--something he learned from Stanislavsky--he brought bold gesture and vivid colour to his productions, the best of which were a Yiddish performance of *Der Dybbuk* (1920; *The Dybbuk*) by S. Ansky (pseudonym of Solomon Zanvel Rappoport) and *Turandot* (1762; Eng. trans., *Turandot*) by Carlo Gozzi, both staged just before his death in 1922.

The experimentation of the 1920s came to an abrupt halt under Stalinist rule with the imposition of Socialist Realism on the arts in 1932. It was decreed that all theatre should be adjusted to the level of the worker-audience with the aim of educating the public in the ideals of the Communist revolution. In practice, this resulted in a wave of simplistic and old-fashioned propaganda plays in which theatrical artistry was sacrificed to party dogma. Theatre virtually ceased to progress, since any originality was condemned as decadent. Scenery became more and more laboriously realistic, for a setting that was in any way impressionistic was condemned as belonging to "abstract art." One of the most successful directors of the time was Nikolay Pavlovich Okhlopov, who was put in charge of the Realistic Theatre (formerly one of the Moscow Art Theatre studios) in 1932. There, he tried to find new ways of presenting plays by using multiple stages and generally breaking away from the constrictions of the proscenium-arch format. In 1938, however, the Realistic Theatre was closed on grounds that its work appealed too exclusively to intellectuals. As part of the
reaction against Formalism, Meyerhold was dismissed in 1934, and Tairov, rebuked for being out of touch with his audience, was relieved of his directorship of the Kamerny Theatre and forced to work under a committee.

Italy

As in Russia, the new technology provided a stimulus for the revolt against verismo ("realism") in the Italian theatre at the beginning of the century. The most important movement was Futurism. Initiated by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in 1909, it embraced painting, sculpture, and poetry, as well as theatre, and it prefigured most of the non-Realistic approaches to the theatre that were to follow: Dada, Surrealism, Constructivism, the Theatre of the Absurd, and even the "happenings" of the 1960s. In theatres and art galleries the Futurists devised performances that celebrated the ecstasy of speed, explored states of madness, depicted man as a machine, and had performers moving among the spectators to provoke the audience in a general smashing down of the "fourth wall" and, with it, the illusionary power of theatre.

In 1921 Anton Giulio Bragaglia founded the Teatro Sperimentale degli Indipendenti, which borrowed from the Futurists but subordinated mechanics and technology to the play itself. He aimed to restore theatricality to the drama, using light, multidimensional space, masks, and costumes to Surrealist effect. He also wished his actors to master the acrobatic aspects of the commedia dell'arte as an antidote to cerebral acting. Another movement was the Teatro Grottesco, which explored the contradictions between outward appearance and inner reality. This became a central theme in the work of the dramatist Luigi Pirandello, whose plays questioned the very basis of realism on a stage that was itself artifice. After his best known play, Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore (1921; Six Characters in Search of an Author) brought him international fame, he founded in 1925 his own company, the Teatro Odeschalchi, in Rome. After the rise of Mussolini, much of the avant-garde theatre of the late 1920s became aligned with Fascism. Until the 1930s, there was no state support for the theatre, and even then those writers and directors opposed to Fascism were excluded.

Expressionism in Germany

The term Expressionism was coined at the beginning of the 20th century to describe a style of painting that reacted violently against late 19th-century Naturalism and Impressionism. Applied to the theatre, it represented a protest against the existing social order. Initially it was concerned with spirit rather than with matter, and typically sought to get to the essence of the subject by grossly distorting outward appearance or external reality. This "subjective" first phase of Expressionism began in Germany about 1910, though its forerunners had appeared earlier in the plays of Wedekind and in Strindberg's Ett Drömspel, which put Realistic drama onto a supernatural plane. The leading exponent of early Expressionism in Germany was Georg Kaiser, whose themes centered on the struggle of the individual to fulfill himself in a hostile civilization. After World War I, the movement gained momentum from the social and political upheaval into which Germany was plunged. This later "activist" phase became more directly political and was represented by the plays of Ernst Toller, which called for a socialist revolution. Die Maschinenstürmer (1922; The Machine Wreckers) is Toller's best known play.

The language of Expressionist drama was stark and exclamatory, often overthrowing the conventions of grammar. Short scenes took the place of longer acts. Shafts of light picked out figures on a darkened stage, and scenery was limited to one or two symbolic forms. Characters were symbols instead of people. All this called for highly stylized acting, and directors looked for inspiration to the world of dance: German cabaret dancers, the eurythmy of Rudolf Steiner, and Rudolf von Laban's system of eukinetics were all important influences. The most notable director of the German Expressionist theatre was Erwin Piscator. Later in the 1920s, when steel, timber, and other materials once again became plentiful, Piscator directed a series of productions using elaborate and expensive machinery. The front of his stage was constructed on a conveyor-belt principle so that the actors appeared to walk from one location to the next. In the center, a cantilever bridge moved up and down, while slides and films were projected onto different surfaces. Above the prosenium, slogans blazed in lights, and the gigantic shadows of pulsating machines were thrown onto gauzes.
Another director, Leopold Jessner, also made full use of building materials once postwar restrictions on their use had been lifted. His favorite setting was a vast flight of steps extending the entire width of the stage, rising steeply to a platform at the back. Like so many directors of the time, Jessner was greatly influenced by the new stagecraft of Craig and by the work of the Soviet directors of the post-revolutionary Constructivist theatre. Partly because of its abstract nature, Expressionist theatre was exciting but rarely artistically successful. By 1925 the movement was over, giving way to the epic theatre developed and cultivated by Piscator and Bertolt Brecht (see below). Further experiment in the German theatre was cut short by the accession to power by the Nazis in 1933.

Avant-Garde In France

At the beginning of the 20th century, France was the international center for innovation in the visual arts, but such was not the case with the theatre. In Paris theatres were dominated by wealthy patrons eager for the farces of Georges Feydeau and the boulevard tradition of well-made plays about sexual adventure and adultery. However, when the reaction against Realism did come, it had more lasting results than Constructivism, Futurism, or Expressionism, possibly because in France it centered on efforts to dignify the art of the actor rather than to exploit or devalue it. The reaction was initiated by the literary critic Jacques Copeau, who in 1913 set up his own company, the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier. Although Copeau was influenced by the Naturalistic acting style that Antoine had demanded, he disliked Realistic theatre; yet, he also had an aversion to artificiality. Like Reinhardt, he sought to break down the barrier between the actor and the audience. His stage did away with the front curtain (for the first time on the modern French stage), and it extended out from the proscenium arch to surround the audience on three sides. Decor was used sparingly; the atmosphere for each play was created almost entirely by lighting. The intimate scale (Copeau's theatre seated only 200) allowed for natural delivery and movement, though even in contemporary plays gesture was used selectively to give every action particular significance. Copeau staged plays by a few new authors, but the main thrust of his work was in classics. His productions of Shakespeare and Molière were notable for their lightness, grace, and gaiety, as well as for their strong sense of ensemble playing. In 1921 Copeau opened a theatre school at the Vieux-Colombier that recognized the importance of body movement and vocal expression. One of his pupils, Étienne Decroux, continued this work to become the father of modern mime. Both company and school closed in 1924.

In 1927 the "Cartel" was formed to revitalize French avant-garde theatre and offer a viable alternative to boulevard plays. It comprised four directors, each with his own style: Louis Jouvet and Charles Dullin (both former actors with the Vieux-Colombier) and Georges Pitoëff and Gaston Baty. Jouvet's productions of Molière were his most important contribution; he freed the plays from the weight of tradition that was stifling them. Dullin's productions, which were less subjugated to the text, revealed a flair for movement, music, and bright colours. They stood in sharp contrast to the ascetic productions of Pitoëff, who believed that the director's primary aim should be to focus attention on a play's central idea, eliminating all details of decor and acting that might obscure it. Pitoëff's great contribution was the number of foreign dramatists he introduced to Parisian audiences. Baty, who had served his apprenticeship under Reinhardt, possessed a strong pictorial sense: his groupings and movement were beautifully composed, but they often existed for themselves rather than for the play.

Copeau's nephew, Michel Saint-Denis, formed the Compagnie des Quinze in 1930 with members of the defunct Vieux-Colombier and produced several of André Obey's plays, including Noé (1931; Noah). By the time the Compagnie des Quinze disbanded in 1934, it had become internationally famous for its lively productions. In the same year, Jouvet, Dullin, Baty, and Copeau were appointed as directors of the Comédie-Française in an effort to revive its flagging morale and declining artistic standards. In place of indulgent star performances, they introduced a more unified approach to production that clarified the text; thus they restored the theatre's high reputation.

Ireland

The establishment of an Irish national theatre during the early years of the 20th century was not a reaction against existing forms of theatre. Rather, it was a nationalist movement to establish an indigenous theatre, independent of European fashion, which could displace the sentimental and imitative plays that dominated
the Irish stage. The first step was taken in 1898, when the poet William Butler Yeats and the playwright Augusta, Lady Gregory, founded the Irish Literary Theatre to encourage poetic drama. They soon developed a recognizable company style, and after performances in London Annie Horniman (pioneer of the British repertory movement) provided them with a permanent home in 1904 at the rebuilt Abbey Theatre in Dublin. The brilliant work of the group became world famous; it included the performances of many fine native actors as well as the contributions of outstanding dramatists, most notably J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey. Several of these writers became interested in innovative techniques and forms. O'Casey, for one, was attracted to the Expressionist theatre and incorporated some of its techniques in *The Silver Tassie* (1929). During the 1920s, Yeats too tried his hand at experimentation, composing poetic dance plays based on the Japanese No theatre.

**Great Britain**

British theatre paid very little attention to the anti-Realistic movements that characterized experimental theatre in the rest of Europe. The domination of the actor-manager was effectively challenged by Harley Granville-Barker and John E. Vedrenne at London's Royal Court Theatre; between 1904 and 1907 they staged numerous new plays by British and continental writers. The major dramatist at the Royal Court--indeed the most important British dramatist of the century--was George Bernard Shaw. With plays such as *Man and Superman* (1903), he made theatre a lively platform for the discussion of social and philosophical issues, usually through the medium of laughter. Shaw availed himself of a wide variety of styles and models, including mythology in *Pygmalion* (1916) and history in *Saint Joan* (1924), but he always transformed his models to make them relevant to his own age.

The staging of Shakespeare's plays was revolutionized by Granville-Barker's productions at the Savoy Theatre, which were admired for their simplicity, fluidity, and speed. Equally significant for the British theatre was the founding of the first provincial repertory theatre in 1908 by Horniman at the Gaiety, Manchester. It not only provided opportunities for promising British playwrights but also presented works by important continental dramatists. Other repertory theatres followed: Liverpool in 1911 and Birmingham in 1913. For years the repertory movement continued with distinction, but after World War II it was regarded largely as a training ground where actors gained experience before making an assault on London--an attitude that was not rectified until the 1960s.

In London a repertory-style theatre was established by Lilian Baylis at the Old Vic in 1914, but it became most famous as a home for Shakespeare's plays, all of which were staged there over the following nine years. In 1931 Baylis reopened Sadler's Wells Theatre as a center for opera and ballet. This theatre eventually became the base for the Royal Ballet and the English National Opera. After World War I, production costs and theatre rents rose so sharply that many West End theatres could not afford to remain open. They were taken over by commercially minded impresarios who favoured musical comedy, farce, and melodrama. Because of this situation, serious plays were left to the small theatre clubs.

During the 1930s, experimentation that went beyond straightforward Naturalism increased. Noël Coward revived the comedy of manners in *Private Lives* (1930); J.B. Priestley explored the cyclic concept of time in *Time and the Conways* (1937); and T.S. Eliot found a modern idiom for the poetic drama in his verse play *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), originally performed in Canterbury cathedral. British acting and directing were stimulated by Theodore Komisarjevsky, who in 1919 emigrated to Britain from the Soviet Union, where he had been director of the Russian imperial and state theatres. His direction of plays by Chekhov and other Russian writers set new standards in English theatre, but his Shakespearean productions at Stratford-upon-Avon in the 1930s often infuriated audiences accustomed to conventional productions. His renderings were full of invention, sometimes brilliant, amusing, and illuminating, sometimes merely wayward. Equally influential was the French director Michel Saint-Denis. After his Compagnie des Quinze disbanded, he settled in England, where he directed several classical productions. Moreover, in 1935, he opened the London Theatre Studio to train young actors in the tradition that Copeau had begun in Paris.

**United States**
American theatre at the beginning of the 20th century was so heavily dominated by commercialism that some kind of revolt was to be expected. An attempt to establish a European-style art theatre in New York City was made in 1909 with the opening of the New Theatre, but the building was so cavernous and unsuited for experimental work that the venture collapsed after two seasons. Visits by the Abbey Theatre group in 1911, Reinhardt's *Sumurum* in 1912, Granville-Barker's company in 1915, and Copeau's Vieux-Colombier in 1917 provided exciting glimpses of the work of Europe's art theatres and stimulated a large number of "little theatres" in provincial cities. Dedicated to producing the best of European and classical drama and to fostering new American plays, these groups were staunchly amateur, with their memberships organized by subscription, so that true experiment could be conducted without commercial pressure. One of the first such companies in New York City was the Washington Square Players. From a similar group, the Provincetown Players, emerged the first American dramatist of international stature: Eugene O'Neill. His first full-length play, *Beyond the Horizon*, was successfully produced in 1920. Most of O'Neill's subsequent work represented a restless search for theatrical style: he tried Expressionism in *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *The Hairy Ape* (1922), masks in *The Great God Brown* (1926), and allegory in his updating of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy, *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), before he found a suitable idiom for modern tragedy in his autobiographical play *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1941; produced 1956).

Art theatre was established on a commercially successful basis by New York City's Theatre Guild in 1918. During the next two decades it became the most important platform for American drama, encouraging such playwrights as Robert Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson, and Elmer Rice, in addition to O'Neill and European writers. The Theatre Guild's success quickly spurred independent Broadway producers to follow its example. The artistic challenge was also taken up by various designers, including Lee Simonson, Norman Bel Geddes, and Jo Mielziner, who provided distinguished settings that were realistic, symbolic, or expressionistic as required. The psychological depth of the new drama called for refinements in acting styles: Alfred Lunt, Lynn Fontanne, Helen Hayes, John Barrymore, Katherine Cornell, and Tallulah Bankhead were among the finest actors of the period, combining virtuosity with truthfulness. When the Moscow Art Theatre company visited New York City in 1923, two of its members were so impressed as to stay on and form the American Laboratory Theatre through which to teach the techniques of Stanislavsky. In 1927 *Show Boat* by Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern set new standards in the musical theatre, and in spite of competition from the expanding motion-picture industry, the number of productions on Broadway grew from 150 in the 1920-21 season to 280 in 1927-28.

The stock market crash of 1929 heralded the end of the unparalleled prosperity of both the theatre and the nation. The nation recovered from the ensuing economic depression, but the theatre, under increasing competition from motion pictures, radio, and television, did not. During the next 30 years, traveling companies all but disappeared, and productions on Broadway shrank to 60 in 1949-50, thereafter averaging between 50 and 60 a year. No new theatres were constructed. Nevertheless, live theatre continued to attract talented writers. From the social protest movement of the 1930s came Clifford Odets, Sidney Kingsley, Lillian Hellman, Thornton Wilder, and William Saroyan. So far, little attention had been paid to actor training, but in 1931 Harold Clurman, Cheryl Crawford, and Lee Strasberg formed the Group Theatre (an offshoot of the Theatre Guild) to develop new writers and evolve a style of acting, influenced by Stanislavsky's system, that sprang from a fresh observation of life rather than from the repetition of familiar clichés. From 1935 to 1939 the WPA Federal Theatre Project, established and funded by the Works Project Administration of the U.S. government to provide employment for out-of-work actors, presented hundreds of productions of all sorts throughout the country and showed that a large untapped audience existed for live theatre at low prices.

**Theatre Since World War II**

Efforts to rebuild the cultural fabric of civilization after the devastation of World War II led to a rethinking of the role of theatre in the new society. Competing with the technical refinements of motion pictures, radio, and television (all of which were offering drama), the live theatre had to rediscover what it could give to the community that the mass media could not. In one direction, this led to a search for a "popular" theatre that would embrace the whole community, just as the Greek theatre and the Elizabethan theatre had done. In another, it brought to fruition a new wave of experiments that had started before the war and was not to subside until the early 1970s—experiments that sought more radically than ever to challenge the audience, breaking down the barriers between spectators and performers.
Epic theatre of Brecht

Although Bertolt Brecht's first plays were written in Germany during the 1920s, he was not widely known until much later. Eventually his theories of stage presentation exerted more influence on the course of mid-century theatre in the West than did those of any other individual. This was largely because he proposed the major alternative to the Stanislavsky-oriented realism that dominated acting and the "well-made play" construction that dominated playwriting.

Brecht's earliest work was heavily influenced by German Expressionism, but it was his preoccupation with Marxism and the idea that man and society could be intellectually analyzed that led him to develop his theory of "epic theatre." Brecht believed that theatre should appeal not to the spectator's feelings but to his reason. While still providing entertainment, it should be strongly didactic and capable of provoking social change. In the Realistic theatre of illusion, he argued, the spectator tended to identify with the characters on stage and become emotionally involved with them rather than being stirred to think about his own life. To encourage the audience to adopt a more critical attitude to what was happening on stage, Brecht developed his *Verfremdungs-effekt* ("alienation effect")—i.e., the use of anti-illusive techniques to remind the spectators that they are in a theatre watching an enactment of reality instead of reality itself. Such techniques included flooding the stage with harsh white light, regardless of where the action was taking place, and leaving the stage lamps in full view of the audience; making use of minimal props and "indicative" scenery; intentionally interrupting the action at key junctures with songs in order to drive home an important point or message; and projecting explanatory captions onto a screen or employing placards. From his actors Brecht demanded not realism and identification with the role but an objective style of playing, to become in a sense detached observers.

Brecht's most important plays, which included *Leben des Galilei* (The Life of Galileo), *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (Mother Courage and Her Children), and *Der gute Mensch von Szechwan*, or *The Good Woman of Setzwan*), were written between 1937 and 1945 when he was in exile from the Nazi regime, first in Scandinavia and then in the United States. At the invitation of the newly formed East German government, he returned to found the Berliner Ensemble in 1949 with his wife, Helene Weigel, as leading actress. It was only at this point, through his own productions of his plays, that Brecht earned his reputation as one of the most important figures of 20th-century theatre.

Certainly Brecht's attack on the illusive theatre influenced, directly or indirectly, the theatre of every Western country. In Britain the effect became evident in the work of such playwrights as John Arden and Edward Bond and in some of the bare-stage productions by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Western theatre in the 20th century, however, has proved to be a cross-fertilization of many styles (Brecht himself acknowledged a debt to traditional Oriental theatre), and by the 1950s other approaches were gaining influence.

Theatre of Fact

A more uncompromising method of bringing social issues to the stage has been Documentary Theatre, or the Theatre of Fact. In this case, the presentation of factual information usually takes precedence over aesthetic considerations. Out of the social protest movement that arose during the years of depression in the 1930s, a unit of the WPA Federal Theatre Project in the United States (see above) adopted what it called a Living Newspaper technique, taking inspiration from motion pictures (especially in the use of short scenes) to present highlighted versions of contemporary problems. The technique has since had varying degrees of success on stage. Real events are reconstructed and interpreted, either through fictional revisions or through the use of authentic documentary materials (e.g., transcripts of trials, official reports, and lists of statistics). The form became popular in the 1960s through works such as Rolf Hochhuth's *Stellvertreter* (1963; *The Representative*), Peter Weiss's *Ermittlung* (1965; *The Investigation*), Heinar Kipphardt's *In der Sache J.R. Oppenheimer* (1964; *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*), and in the Royal Shakespeare Company's *US* (1967). It has been used in Scotland in the 1980s by John McGrath's group called 7:84.

Theatre of the Absurd
The war mood of disillusionment and skepticism was expressed in bizarre terms by a number of foreign playwrights living in Paris. Although they did not consider themselves as belonging to a formal movement, they shared a belief that human life was essentially without meaning or purpose and that valid communication was no longer possible. The human condition, they felt, had sunk to a state of absurdity (the term was coined by the French Existentialist novelist and philosopher Albert Camus). Some of the first plays of the Theatre of the Absurd, as the school came to be called, were concerned with the devaluation of language: Eugène Ionesco's *Cantatrice chauve* (The Bald Soprano, or The Bald Prima Donna) and Arthur Adamov's *Invasion* (The Invasion), both produced in 1950, and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, first produced in French as *En attendant Godot* in 1953. The spirit of Absurdism, however, can be traced back to Alfred Jarry's anarchic *Ubu roi*, produced in 1896. Logical construction and rationalism were abandoned in the Absurd school to create a world of uncertainty, where chairs could multiply for no apparent reason or humans turn inexplicably into rhinoceroses. Later Absurdist writers included Harold Pinter of Great Britain and Edward Albee of the United States, though by the 1960s the movement had nearly burned itself out.

**Theatre of Cruelty**

During the early 1930s, the French dramatist and actor Antonin Artaud put forth a theory for a Surrealist theatre called the Theatre of Cruelty. Based on ritual and fantasy, this form of theatre launches an attack on the spectators' subconscious in an attempt to release deep-rooted fears and anxieties that are normally suppressed, forcing people to view themselves and their natures without the shield of civilization. In order to shock the audience and thus evoke the necessary response, the extremes of human nature (often madness and perversion) are graphically portrayed on stage. Essentially an anti-literary revolt, the Theatre of Cruelty usually minimizes the text by emphasizing screams, inarticulate cries, and symbolic gestures. Artaud tried to achieve these ideals in his production of *Les Cenci* (1935), but his real influence lay in his theoretical writings, notably *Le Théâtre et son double* (1938; The Theatre and Its Double). Only after World War II did the Theatre of Cruelty achieve a more tangible form, first in the French director Jean-Louis Barrault's adaptation of Franz Kafka's *Prozess* (The Trial), produced in 1947, and later through the plays of Jean Genet and Fernando Arrabal. The movement was particularly popular during the 1960s, in part due to the success of Peter Brook's 1964 production of Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* for the Royal Shakespeare Company.

**Poor Theatre**

In terms of furthering the actor's technique, the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, together with Stanislavsky and Brecht (see above), are the key figures of the 20th century. Grotowski first became internationally known when his Laboratory Theatre, established in Opole, Pol., in 1959, triumphantly toured Europe and the United States during the mid-1960s. His influence was further enhanced by the publication of his theoretical pronouncements in *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968). Grotowski shared many ideas with Artaud (though the connection was initially coincidental), especially in the conception of the performer as a "holy actor" and the theatre as a "secular religion." Theatre was to go beyond mere entertainment or illustration; it was to be an intense confrontation with the audience (usually limited to fewer than 60). The actors sought spontaneity within a rigid discipline achieved through the most rigorous physical training. Rejecting the paraphernalia of the "rich theatre," Grotowski stripped away all nonessential scenery, costumes, and props to create the so-called poor theatre, where the only focus was the unadorned actor. His productions included adaptations of Calderón's *Príncipe constante* (1629; The Constant Prince) and the Polish writer Stanislaw Wyspianski's *Akropolis* (1904; Acropolis).

The poor theatre became a worldwide fashion during the late 1960s and early 1970s, even though most groups who attempted it produced only self-indulgent imitations that tended to exclude the audience. Significantly, this sense of reduction was evident in Grotowski's own work: from 1976 he excluded the audience altogether, preferring to work behind closed doors. The spirit of poor theatre has been more theatrically conveyed by Peter Brook. After leaving England in 1968 to establish the International Center of Theatre Research in Paris, Brook created a series of vivid productions that included *Ubu roi* (1977), a scaled-down version of Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen* (1982), and *Le Mahabharata* (1985), a nine-hour version of the Hindu epic *Mahabhalata*. 
**United States**

By the beginning of the 1950s the vitality of American theatre was acknowledged around the world. The international reputation of Eugene O'Neill was complemented by two potent young dramatists: Arthur Miller, who turned the ordinary man into a figure of tragic stature in *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and *The Crucible* (1953), and Tennessee Williams, who created a world festering with passion and sensuality in plays such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947). At the same time, the director Lee Strasberg, together with Elia Kazan, was codifying the teachings of Stanislavsky into "the Method," which generated both controversy and misunderstanding. Although the Actors Studio, founded by Kazan in 1947, produced many fine actors, including Marlon Brando, Geraldine Page, and Paul Newman, the Method proved inadequate as an approach to acting in classical plays; it was best suited to the realism of the new American plays and films.

**Off-Broadway**

This phenomenon developed as a reaction to the commercialism of New York theatre. More experimental plays could be presented in smaller buildings outside the main theatre district. The artistic success of many of these productions meant that some writers (Edward Albee, for example), could graduate to Broadway. Off-Broadway also enabled black playwrights such as James Baldwin and Leroi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka) to dramatize racial issues with a frankness that had not previously been seen on the American stage.

During the 1960s, a strong avant-garde theatre movement known as "Off-Off-Broadway" emerged. Among the most influential groups were Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre, Richard Schechner's Performance Group, Julian Beck's and Judith Malina's Living Theatre, and Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre. These groups sought to smash the barriers between the actor and the audience, exploring ritual, sexuality, nudity, and primitivism. They also signaled, however, a movement away from literary values: coherent speech and concise dialogue were in most cases replaced by improvisations, grunts, and shrieks. As with the British "fringe theatre," this movement generated great excitement and vitality, but at its worst it produced gratuitous violence, self-indulgence, and ultimately the alienation of the very audience that it set out to embrace. The political wing of the avant-garde was street theatre, or "guerrilla theatre," where short agitprop ("agitational propaganda") plays were performed on city streets or in parks. In this manner, the San Francisco Mime Troupe combined political protest with the techniques of the commedia dell'arte to reach a non-theatre-going public. By the late 1970s, the wild experiments had dissolved into conventional playwriting, mostly of mediocre quality; Sam Shepard and David Rabe were exceptions. Even by the mid-1980s, very little had emerged to replace the exuberance of that period when theatre seemed to have found a new immediacy and a fresh way of involving all segments of the community.

**Government Subsidy**

In spite of state aid from organizations such as the New York State Council on the Arts, created in 1960, and the National Endowment for the Arts (1965), the running of American theatre has remained strongly commercial. The most consistently successful American playwright from the 1960s to the 1980s has been Neil Simon, whose comedies such as *The Odd Couple* (1965) and *Plaza Suite* (1968) have fared very well. On Broadway theatre management, because of economic factors, has been reluctant to stage serious new plays unless they have been proven successes in London. A notable exception to this situation has been the New York Shakespeare Festival, founded by Joseph Papp in 1954 under the name Shakespeare Workshop. From 1962 it has occupied a permanent site--the outdoor Delacorte Theatre in Central Park--where it offers free entertainment. Since 1981, it has received a regular subsidy from New York City. Outside New York City, regional theatre has continued to expand with resident professional companies being established in many cities--the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, Minn., for example. Such companies offer both commercial and experimental theatre as an alternative to touring Broadway hits.

**The Musical Comedy**
After Rodgers and Hammerstein breathed new life into the musical comedy with *Oklahoma!* (1943), the form acquired more sophistication with such Broadway successes as *Guys and Dolls* (1950) and *My Fair Lady* (1956), and it broke new ground in *West Side Story* (1957), which conveyed much of the plot through dance. The range of subjects widened: hippie culture was introduced in *Hair* (1967); religion was popularized in *Godspell* (1971) and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971); and dance became the central element in shows such as *A Chorus Line* (1975) and *Dancin’* (1978). By the 1980s, Stephen Sondheim had become the most innovative force in the musical theatre, combining the roles of lyricist and composer in such works of immense technical sophistication as *Company* (1970), *A Little Night Music* (1973), and *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984).

**University Theatre**

Another major source of theatre in the United States is supplied by the drama departments of colleges and universities. The American Educational Theatre Association (AETA) was established in 1936 with 80 members, but by the 1980s, as the American Theatre Association (ATA), it included about 1,600 U.S. college and university drama departments. All of these have their own theatre; some are as well equipped as Broadway and regional theatres. In addition to promoting work by local student groups, many university theatres from time to time employ professional actors and directors for summer stock productions.

**Great Britain**

World War II had left British theatre in a precarious state. In London's West End, about a fifth of the theatres were destroyed or damaged by bombing. Furthermore, production costs multiplied, an entertainment tax of 10 percent of gross receipts was imposed by the government, and theatre managements—many of them controlled by a monopoly known as The Group—tended to choose thrillers, light comedies, revues, and Broadway musicals over more demanding plays. In the early 1950s the star system dominated the theatre, and one of the most prominent dramatists was Terence Rattigan. The classics, however, were kept robustly alive by the last of the actor-managers: Sir Donald Wolfit, Sir Laurence Olivier (later Lord Olivier), and Sir John Gielgud. Olivier and Gielgud were supported by a generation of outstanding actors, many of whom had begun their careers in the 1930s and were able to adapt changes in the theatrical climate (as well as to the growth of motion pictures and television) through to the 1980s. These actors included Sir Ralph Richardson, Sir Michael Redgrave, and Dame Peggy Ashcroft.

By the mid-1950s, the influence of Brecht was becoming apparent. The director Joan Littlewood was one of the first to use his techniques; in 1953 she moved her company, the Theatre Workshop (formed in 1945 in Manchester for working-class audiences), to the Theatre Royal, Stratford, in the East End of London. There she encouraged young writers and evolved a series of highly successful collective productions, many of them (e.g., *Oh, What a Lovely War!* [1963]) developed through improvisation. After observing the Berliner Ensemble at work in Germany, George Devine set up the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre in 1956 to encourage new playwrights and promote foreign drama. That year marked a turning point in British theatre, with Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (in his own translation) introducing the Theatre of the Absurd and John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* initiating a new wave of antiheroic, "kitchen-sink" dramas. Other young writers at the Royal Court were Arnold Wesker and John Arden. The wider distribution of higher education grants after World War II meant that by the mid-1950s a new breed of actors was coming out of drama schools to perform these new plays. The rise of actors such as Peter O'Toole, Albert Finney, Tom Courtenay, Joan Plowright, and Alan Bates brought fresh energy to the theatre and marked a transition away from the elegant actors of the late 1940s who exuded upper-class sophistication.

**Alternative Theatre**

A vigorous reaction against the mainstream of theatre erupted in the late 1960s, stimulated by a wave of political protest around the world, visits by French and American avant-garde companies, an upsurge of "alternative culture," and an abolition of the lord chamberlain's powers of censorship (1968). Following the example of the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, a profusion of "fringe" theatres sprang up in converted cellars, warehouses, and the back rooms of pubs. Rock music, Dada, and Artaud were inspiration for groups such as The People Show, Pip Simmons Theatre Group, and Ken Campbell's Road Show. Other companies—Foco
Novo, Portable Theatre, 7:84, Belt & Braces, and CAST--were more politically motivated. From these came several major dramatists, including Howard Brenton, David Hare, Trevor Griffiths, and David Edgar, all of whom had been assimilated into mainstream theatre by the end of the 1970s. Although most fringe plays quickly disappear without a trace, several have successfully transferred to the West End. Indeed, the fringe continues to provide an important stimulus for the British theatre.

National Theatres

Since the early 1960s, Britain's theatrical reputation had rested mainly on the work produced by its two national companies. Peter Hall formed the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1961 as a reorganization of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon. The following year, he was supported by two co-directors, Peter Brook and Michel Saint-Denis, and the company opened a permanent London base at the Aldwych Theatre to explore modern and classical plays while concentrating on Shakespeare at Stratford. During this period, Brook established himself as one of the finest directors of the century, two of his most memorable productions being *King Lear* (1962) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970). In 1982, under the artistic directorship of Trevor Nunn and Terry Hands, the company left the Aldwych and moved into the newly built Barbican arts complex in the City of London, while retaining the Stratford theatre.

The first attempts to set up a permanent national theatre in London were made in the 19th century, though it was not until 1962 that Sir Laurence Olivier formed the National Theatre company, which was temporarily housed in the Old Vic. After delays by successive governments, work began in 1969 on the National Theatre building (housing three separate theatres), situated on the south bank of the Thames not far from the site of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. It finally opened in 1976 under the directorship of Peter Hall (later knighted).

The importance of these two companies is that, apart from providing lavish reassessments of classical plays featuring the best actors of the day, they have been able to commission large-scale works that no one else could have afforded: John Whiting's *Devils* (1961) and Peter Shaffer's *Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964) both broke away from the "well-made play" construction, leaning toward the Epic Theatre of Brecht; and David Edgar's 8 1/2-hour dramatization of Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* (1980) proved a huge success in London and in New York City. Notwithstanding the emphasis on classical work, both companies have retained a strong commitment to contemporary drama and have nurtured Britain's leading dramatists of the 1970s and 1980s, including Harold Pinter, Edward Bond, Tom Stoppard, Alan Ayckbourn, David Hare, and Howard Brenton.

Government Subsidy

One of the major changes in British theatre since World War II has been that state subsidy plays an increasingly vital role in its development and survival. While the subsidy has helped to shield the theatre from commercial pressures, it has left the theatre vulnerable and over-dependent on continuing grants.

State aid began with the formation of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) in 1940. From this developed the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1946 with the aim of providing "State support for the arts, without State control." It has encouraged new writing and supported fringe, touring, community, and repertory theatres, including the two national companies, besides subsidizing Regional Arts Associations and other artistic ventures. By keeping ticket prices artificially low, the Arts Council has helped to make serious drama accessible to most of the population and thereby provides a widespread alternative to commercial theatre.

From the early 1960s, the sums given to the Arts Council by the government increased substantially. By the end of the 1970s, however, the rate of expansion had outstripped the supply of money, and most subsidized theatre companies were facing serious cutbacks, some actually closing. As a consequence, in the 1980s the government and the Arts Council adopted a policy of encouraging theatres to seek additional sponsorship from industry.

Regional Theatre
In the provinces theatre is divided into touring, repertory, and amateur companies. Large theatres in the main cities are visited by touring companies, and at Christmastime most of them stage an elaborate pantomime that often runs for three or four months. After a lean period in the 1950s when it competed with television, repertory theatre (now also known as regional theatre) found new life in the 1960s with the building of many fine civic playhouses, some even equipped with additional studio theatres for experimental work. Improved conditions, longer runs, and increased subsidies resulted in higher artistic standards. The repertory theatres remain a valuable testing ground for actors, directors, and dramatists, often supplying new plays and productions for the West End. The vast amateur-theatre movement in Britain (there were about 17,000 groups by the mid-1980s) is coordinated by the British Theatre Association, formerly called the British Drama League. The association also runs many training courses throughout the country. Although there is little movement from amateur to professional status, the National Youth Theatre has given many prominent actors their first experience in theatre. Most professionals graduate from drama schools, some of the most reputable being the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), the Central School of Speech and Drama, and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

**Australia, New Zealand, and Canada**

From the early 1970s, a characteristic style of theatre emerged in Australia, spawned mainly by smaller companies. Typical examples of such companies are the Australian Performing Group in Melbourne and the Nimrod Theatre in Sydney, both of which are dedicated to promoting the work of new writers. New Zealand has witnessed similar efforts. Most of the plays have been produced in Auckland's Mercury Theatre and Wellington's Downstage, with very few being performed outside New Zealand. Canadian drama has been equally slow to reach the international stage in spite of vigorous efforts to encourage new plays. More prestigious is the annual Shakespeare Festival at Stratford, Ont. Founded in 1953 by Tyrone Guthrie, it has produced a consistently high standard of work and has attracted some of the finest Canadian and British actors.

**France**

Although France has produced a number of outstanding dramatists since World War II, including Jean Anouilh, Jean-Paul Sartre, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, and Marguerite Duras, the development of the theatre has been dominated by directors. A leading force, and one of the greatest actors of the century, has been Jean-Louis Barrault, who excelled in both classical and modern plays. As a mime (trained by Decroux), he achieved international fame for his re-creation of the pantomimes of Deburau in the film *Les Enfants du paradis* (1945; “The Children of the Gods”), and as a director he became the foremost exponent of the poetic dramas of Paul Claudel. In 1946 he left the Comédie-Française with his wife, the actress Madeleine Renaud, to form the Compagnie Renaud-Barrault, which has remained one of France's finest and most innovative companies.

Mime found another champion in Marcel Marceau. He developed the character Bip in 1946 and has since toured the world many times with his solo performances.

An attempt to widen the appeal of theatre was made in 1951, when Jean Vilar was appointed director of the Théâtre National Populaire (TNP). At the huge Palais de Chaillot in Paris (seating nearly 3,000), Vilar brought together new audiences by presenting a repertoire of mainly classical plays at ticket prices that students and workers could afford. As part of a policy to decentralize French theatre by setting up provincial companies, the TNP was moved to Villeurbanne in 1972 under the directorship of Roger Planchon. A move toward collective creation in the late 1960s precipitated a wave of vigorous avant-garde companies such as Ariane Mnouchkine's Théâtre du Soleil and Jérôme Savary's Grand Magic Circus. By the mid-1980s, however, the absence of gifted new writers shifted the emphasis in French theatre to reassessments of classical plays, particularly those of Molière. Two of the most prominent directors have been Antoine Vitez at the Théâtre National de Chaillot and Patrice Chéreau at the Théâtre des Amandiers at Nanterre.

**Germany**
Few dramatists of distinction appeared in Germany after World War II in spite of the stimulus created by the return of Brecht, the rebuilding of theatres, and the large amounts of money poured into the theatrical arts by both the East and West German governments. Consequently, German classics and foreign plays dominated the stage. The two notable German-speaking dramatists of the 1950s, Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt, were both Swiss. Outstanding work, however, was achieved by the Austrian-born actor, Fritz Kortner, who returned to West Germany from the United States in 1947 to direct a series of productions imbued with meticulous realism. Throughout the 1960s, there was more sense of experiment in plays by Peter Weiss (living in Sweden), Peter Handke, and Günter Grass. Peter Stein, director of the Schaubühne in Berlin from 1970 to 1985, earned international acclaim through his innovative interpretations of foreign plays, especially Gorky's *Dachniki* (1905; *Summerfolk*) in 1974 and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in 1981. In East Germany, where the theatre was heavily controlled by the state and geared toward educating the workers on farms and in factories, Socialist Realism proved a deadening influence.

**Soviet Union**

After Stalin's death in 1953, the heavy restrictions on Soviet theatre began to loosen, signaling a slow and cautious return to experiment. The influence of Meyerhold (rehabilitated in 1955) was discernible in productions by the veteran Nicolay Okhlopkov, who remained the most original and stimulating director of his day. The scale of the Soviet theatre was gigantic: companies played in more than 50 languages; there were vast numbers of theatres, many with huge and superbly equipped stages; companies of 100 actors or more were not unusual, and they maintained extensive repertoires. Yet, the security derived from enormous state subsidies, combined with the vast output of work, tended to give rise to mediocre standards.

So large was the theatre-going public that the professional theatre could not satisfy the demand for dramatic entertainment, and every encouragement was given to the amateur movement. Most companies accepted responsibility for at least one amateur group, the members of the company giving much time to advising and training it. Amateur companies of outstanding merit were given the title "people's theatre." The close relations between amateurs and professionals were mutually beneficial, for professionals found that the contact infused freshness and reality into their work.

In the 1960s, the theatre gradually began to free itself from ideology, placing more emphasis on entertainment value. Socialist heroes gave way to ordinary citizens on the stage; farce and vaudeville were revived; and absurd, grotesque, and fantastic elements reappeared in new plays. By the late 1970s, one or two of the experimental companies could once more take their place alongside the best in Europe. The Rustavelli Company from Georgia was acclaimed during its visits to Britain in 1979 and 1980. Yury Lyubimov, director of the prestigious Taganka Theatre, successfully reproduced his adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *Prestupleniye i nakazaniye* (1866; *Crime and Punishment*) in London in 1983 with English actors. In search of even more artistic freedom, he defected to the West the following year.

**Other European Countries**

Of all the eastern European countries, Poland has produced the most exciting theatre, but because of heavy censorship this has come from directors rather than from writers. Experiment was long encouraged within the state-subsidized system, and in the 1960s several Polish dramatists of the pre-World War II period, including Stanislaw Wyspianski, Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz, and Witold Gombrowicz, were rediscovered in powerful productions that commented on contemporary issues. Apart from Jerzy Grotowski, prominent directors included Andrzej Wajda, Józef Szajna, and Tadeusz Kantor. The latter was the founder of the Cricot 2 theatre group, and his production in 1975 of *Umarla klasa* (*The Dead Class*), mixing puppets and actors, recalled Gordon Craig's concept of the *übermarionette*. A strong mime company was led by Henryk Tomaszewski. In Czechoslovakia mime had another gifted exponent in Ladislav Fialka, and at the National Theatre in Prague during the 1950s Josef Svoboda was widely regarded as the world's leading stage designer.

In Italy theatre was stimulated by the establishment of permanent regional companies (*teatri stabili*) immediately after World War II. The first of these, the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, was controlled by Giorgio Strehler, Italy's finest director. His production of Carlo Goldoni's aforementioned play *Servitore di due padrone*, frequently revived since 1947, became world famous. The abolition of censorship in 1962 opened
the way for more adventurous experimental theatre, though once again directors overshadowed playwrights. The exception has been Dario Fo, a brilliant actor, mime, director, and dramatist whose political farces evoked the spirit of the commedia dell'arte. One of his most widely translated plays is *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* (1970; *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*).