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978-0-521-67223-8 - The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies

Christopher B. Balme

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*The Cambridge Introduction to
Theatre Studies*

Providing thorough coverage of the methods and tools required in studying historical and contemporary theatre, this introduction examines the complexities of a rapidly changing and dynamic discipline. Following a cross-cultural perspective, the book surveys the ways theatre and performance are studied by looking initially at key elements such as performers, spectators and space. The central focus is on methodology, with sections covering theatre theory, historiography, and textual and performance analysis. The book covers all the main theatrical genres – drama, opera and dance – providing students with a comparative, integrated perspective. Designed to guide students through the academic dimension of the discipline, the volume emphasizes questions of methodology, research techniques and approaches, and will therefore be relevant for a wide variety of theatre studies courses. Informative textboxes provide background on key topics, and suggestions for further reading are included at the end of each chapter.

Christopher B. Balme is Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Munich.

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Preface

Students embarking on the discipline of theatre studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century are confronted by a wealth of perspectives that the founders of the discipline at the beginning of the twentieth century could have scarcely imagined. They will find themselves situated in an academic discipline that is unique in a number of ways. Firstly, it links practice and theory in a manner that is still unusual within university study but which is slowly becoming a model for other subjects. Secondly, it offers a choice of perspectives and emphases ranging from the historical to the philosophical, from the purely aesthetic to the explicitly political. Thirdly, the student will find a subject that is by definition comparative and international in outlook.

The potential flipside of such variety is of course disorientation and lack of focus. Because the discipline of theatre studies has developed in so many different directions, it is often difficult to orientate oneself and situate what one is actually studying within the 'wider picture'. It is the aim of this introduction to provide an initial orientation. It is structured in such a way that will be of interest to students at different levels of study, both undergraduate and graduate. It seeks to provide information and answers to questions that may be posed at various stages of university study.

The first point to be emphasized is that this book focuses on theatre studies as an academic university discipline. It does not address issues of purely practical relevance such as acting skills, voice training, lighting technology, etc. The second point is that it will emphasize questions of methodology, research techniques and approaches, rather than provide in-depth information and facts on the subjects themselves. The reader will search in vain for a detailed discussion of Greek or political theatre, but will find information on the sort of sources theatre historians consult to create their accounts of the subject. In addition, there can be found at the end of each section numerous directions for further reading.

The book is structured so that it approximates very generally the way the subject is taught and researched at English-speaking universities. However, because all academic disciplines are in a constant state of (mostly productive) flux,

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any attempt to delineate sharply specific subject areas is ultimately doomed to failure. Shifts in accentuation and the redefinition of disciplinary focus are unavoidable and indispensable. Departments are forever changing course structures to keep up with perceived shifts in research, or simply in response to local administrative exigencies. What is attempted here is a cross-section or a set of broadly defined common denominators that will probably not mirror any departmental course structure but rather resonate in many different places.

Like any discipline, theatre studies has and is being subjected to processes of differentiation and specialization, which force university courses to find a happy medium between imparting normative, canonized knowledge on the one hand, and following the vagaries of contemporary research trends on the other. The structure of the book also tries to define basic fields of knowledge in Parts I and II, and provide perspectives on current research in Part III. Theatre studies is today no longer synonymous with the study of dramatic texts in various periods of European history, and this book tries to take account of different theatrical practices in a variety of cultural and historical contexts.

The book is divided into three parts, preceded by an introduction. In the introduction, I argue for the necessity of an *integrated* approach to theatre, meaning the incorporation of intercultural and interdisciplinary perspectives on drama, music theatre, dance, puppet theatre and performance art. Within each part, the order of the chapters is not binding. It may be useful for students to tackle the chapters on theatre theory quite early on, as a number of terms and concepts are explained that are used throughout the book. Each chapter concludes with suggestions for further reading. From the huge number of books and articles potentially available, I have focused on up-to-date English-language publications that are most probably readily available in a university or departmental library. The main body of the text contains, of course, many more references, which are listed in the bibliography. The book concludes with a list of reference works, periodicals and websites that students should find useful for pursuing more specific questions.

A book of this kind is principally indebted to the scholars of the field, past and present, whose endeavours have made theatre studies into one of the most vibrant disciplines in the humanities. On a more personal note, I would like to thank those colleagues who read the book or parts of it at different stages. Peter Boenisch (University of Kent), Martin Revermann and Stephen Johnston (both at the University of Toronto) all took the trouble to read most of the manuscript at a late stage, making many valuable comments and drawing my attention to many errors, some more egregious than others. Nicola Shaughnessy (University of Kent) also provided constructive feedback on a field not my own, for which

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I am very grateful. At Cambridge University Press, Vicki Cooper supported the project from the outset and Rebecca Jones kept me on track throughout. Most of this book was written at the universities of Amsterdam and Munich. The superb departmental libraries of both institutions made what at times appeared to be a Sisyphean task much more manageable. At Amsterdam, Peter Eversmann and Nienke Meeter helped expedite the project in ways they are probably not aware of. At Munich, Julia Friedenberger provided efficient assistance in the final stages.