

## DEMOCRACY, THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

Democracy, argues David Wiles, is actually a form of theatre. In making his case, the author deftly investigates orators at the foundational moments of ancient and modern democracy, demonstrating how their performative skills were used to try to create a better world. People often complain about demagogues, or wish that politicians might be more sincere. But to do good, politicians (paradoxically) must be hypocrites – or actors. Moving from Athens to Indian independence via three great revolutions – in puritan England, republican France and liberal America – the book opens up larger questions about the nature of democracy. When in the classical past Plato condemned rhetoric, the only alternative he could offer was authoritarianism. Wiles' bold historical study has profound implications for our present: calls for personal authenticity, he suggests, are not an effective way to counter the rise of populism.

DAVID WILES is Emeritus Professor of Drama at the University of Exeter. He has written and edited many books, including *Greek Theatre Performance* (2000), *Theatre and Citizenship* (2011), *The Players' Advice to Hamlet* (2020) and *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre History* (2013), all published by Cambridge University Press.

# DEMOCRACY, THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

*From the Greeks to Gandhi*

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## *Acknowledgements*

I realised in 2019 that because of the times this was the book I had to write, the question I had to solve. There are often institutional pressures not to straddle disciplines. When I chose to stray beyond the formal boundaries of my parent discipline, Theatre Studies, and the normal territory of its promiscuous offspring ‘Performance Studies’, in order to enter into dialogue with Political Science, I knew that I would have few fellow travellers on my journey. Writing proved an unusually lonely process because of Covid lockdown, and I discovered just how much library work can be done remotely. I build, nevertheless, on a multitude of conversations, academic and non-academic. I’m especially grateful to Jim Davis for helping me convene an occasional reading group, where participants offered me valuable pointers and objections. In this context I thank Michael Bachmann, Tracy Davis, James Harriman-Smith, Fiona Macintosh, Elaine McGirr, Willmar Sauter, Pat Smyth and Anne Varty. I received further helpful feedback when I spoke at Wolfson College Oxford, at the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR) in Shanghai and Reykjavík, and as a visiting professor at the University of Malta. I’m grateful to Edward Davenport, Stephe Harrop, Emma Van Imwegen and Ellen Wiles for their scrutiny of short sections, which helped me pitch my prose. During Covid I engaged in practice-based research via local environmental activism, which reinforced my understanding that, left to its own devices, the conviction of being right proves deeply unpersuasive.

All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.