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Collecting to the Core-Drama and Theater

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Collecting to the Core — Drama and Theater

by **Dr. Kornelia Tancheva** (Director, John M. Olin Library and Uris Library, Cornell University; Drama and Theater Editor, *Resources for College Libraries*) <kt18@cornell.edu>

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Column Editor's Note: The "Collecting to the Core" column highlights monographic works that are essential to the academic library within a particular discipline, inspired by the *Resources for College Libraries* bibliography (online at <http://www.rclweb.net>). In each essay, subject specialists introduce and explain the classic titles and topics that continue to remain relevant to the undergraduate curriculum and library collection. Disciplinary trends may shift, but some classics never go out of style. — AD

When I first started as the subject editor for *Resources for College Libraries*' Drama and Theater section in 2004, I had to grapple with a few challenging questions: how to define a core that had changed considerably since the 1988 publication of the third edition of *Books for College Libraries* (BCL3) and was continuing to change; how to construct a taxonomy that not only reflected curricular changes but also accommodated both the study of textual art like dramatic works and the study of theatrical art such as dramatic productions; and how to identify and select only those resources that can be considered core or essential in the discipline, an ongoing challenge. This essay showcases my responses to these challenges and explores how the undergraduate curriculum in drama and theater has shifted and the ways in which the RCL subject taxonomy reflects these shifts. It also identifies selected monographs across the discipline.

The study of drama and theater in American higher education institutions has evolved considerably over the past thirty years, effectively redefining the scope of a core subject collection. It now includes greater emphasis on minority drama and theater, including female-authored and feminist drama, as well as Native American, Latino, Asian American, and gay and lesbian theatrical works and productions. Research and publications in these areas join the somewhat better-established scholarship of African American and Jewish drama. Additionally, there continues to be a growing interest in non-Western, non-European theatrical productivity that extends beyond the Chinese or Japanese traditions. However, the task remained to determine which of these emerging fields and new scholarship merit inclusion in RCL's collection of essential titles for undergraduate collections.

To represent these curricular changes, RCL's subject taxonomy for Drama and Theater required a radical shift from the traditional **Library of Congress (LC)** classification scheme. The taxonomy used to describe drama and theater in the LC classification system places the discipline squarely in the language and literature category, giving inadequate atten-

tion to the performative aspects of theater. It also identifies only four major periods (ancient, medieval, Renaissance, and modern), includes a subclass for Jewish drama as the lone ethnic group, and lumps all "special regions or countries" together at a single heading, displaying a Western bias and a very European focus. Older taxonomies and classification schemes are notorious for the gaps between the contemporary state of subject knowledge and the codification that they reflect, and theater and drama are not unique in this respect. While this and other RCL subjects may draw in part from LC classification schemes, many depart from it in favor of unique disciplinary taxonomies that offer greater flexibility and can better reflect the current teaching and research in a field.

As I looked to comprehensively update content from BCL3, I also then faced the major task of reimagining the taxonomic organization. The RCL Drama and Theater subject taxonomy reflects the primary dichotomy in the current discipline — it breaks the resources into Western and Non-Western Drama and Theater, as well as Theater Production. The latter category was needed to accommodate the much more specialized study of theatrical production than the breakdown of dramatic representation in the LC classification scheme suggests. In the RCL subject taxonomy, Theater Production is further subdivided into Performance Studies and Performance, which includes Actors and Acting; Designers and Design; Lighting, Sets, and Scenery; Management and Production; Costume and Make-up; Directors; and Buildings and Spaces. This finer detail in the taxonomic organization allows for the inclusion of resources in areas that are often conflated in more traditional subject schemes. Classic works found in the Theater Production section are **Richard Schechner's** *Ritual, Play, and Performance* and **Lee Simonson's** *The Stage Is Set*, as well as the new essential title on performing arts in the digital age — **Steve Dixon's** *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*.¹⁻³

Other tensions in the taxonomy address a number of ambiguous or conflicting concepts, in addition to the longstanding issues librarians and publishers face regarding resource identification and discovery. Thus, it is somewhat difficult to strictly divide content between genres, styles, and types of drama on the one hand and dramatic periods on the other. This problem is particularly persistent

in the Western Drama and Theater section. For example, does Greek tragedy represent a genre, a period, or both? Ultimately, the periods of Western Drama and Theater included in the subject scheme are Ancient Greek, Roman, Medieval, European Renaissance, Restoration, Neoclassical, Romanticism, Realism, Modernism, the Avant-garde, and Postmodernism, and anyone familiar with these historiographical and critical constructs can easily question their relative granularity and specificity. Expansive in scope, **Philip G. Hill's** six-volume series *Our Dramatic Heritage* covers many of these time periods.⁴

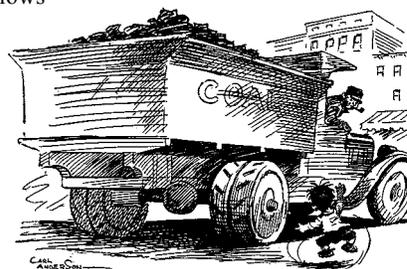
It is also nearly impossible to strike the right balance in selecting among theory, history, criticism, and practical resources, which can vary widely based on specific programs and faculty specializations. In RCL, these types of works can be found in the General category within Drama and Theater, further subdivided by Theory and History headings in order to subsume the criticism from various genres, periods, or specific geographic locations. The seminal work covering theater history remains **Oscar Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy's** *History of the Theatre*, now in its 40th Anniversary edition.⁵ Arguably the most indispensable theater history book, every academic library should retain at least the newest edition. **Marvin Carlson's** *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* is a valuable, comprehensive survey that introduces introductory college students to theory and critical engagement, while **Allardyce Nicoll's** *The*

Theory of Drama provides an alternative approach to analyzing works based on genres like tragedy and comedy.⁶⁻⁷

The geographic location category brings about another decision point — what global regions to include in a taxonomy meant to present core resources

for theater and drama study in American colleges and universities. Again, the organizational distinction between Western and Non-Western Drama and Theater provides a clear delineation, with the former including Europe and specific European countries, the United States, Canada, Latin America, and Australia, and the latter covering Africa and Asia, with specific Asian countries represented. Two reference works that every drama and theater collection should hold are *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* and *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*.⁸⁻⁹

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The first is broad-ranging and provides students with general context to Asian theater, while the latter offers an in-depth and advanced examination of Indian theater across performance types and linguistic groups. The level of taxonomic granularity for these geographic regions is guided by the current state of theater arts studies in the United States, but for programs with a more dedicated focus in any of these countries, it may be entirely too general, requiring additional local collection development efforts.

Echoing the evolution of area studies across the academy, theater monographs that explore works by and about ethnic and minority groups are now a substantial subdiscipline requiring taxonomic representation. This section includes Female-Authored, African American, Native American, Latino, Gay and Lesbian, and Jewish Drama and Theater. For example, Sue-Ellen Case's *Feminism and Theatre* remains the definitive work on feminist theory in theater; however, it is not for the novice reader since it assumes some exposure to feminist criticism.¹⁰ With over 100 core resources across the subheadings, this new section aims to be the largest contribu-

tion to redefining the subject content and is a further indication of ethnic and area studies' prominence in the contemporary drama and theater curricula.

While the curriculum has changed, choosing both foundational resources and those that expose college students to new theories, scholarship, or traditions requires a balance of older classics with proven historiographic value in addition to more recent works in newer areas like feminist theater. It also requires the inclusion of in-depth and advanced critical, theoretical, or practical monographs together with encyclopedic works that offer basic understanding. In this case, the multivolume *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre* is a tremendous help in transcending one of the inherent pitfalls of survey theater history courses, namely devoting only one or two lectures to contemporary theater (often meaning everything everywhere since the 1950s-1960s).¹¹ This balance between new and classic core works, as well as introductory and advanced texts, is one to strive for in any academic library's collection, but is the particular aim of a core bibliography like *Resources for College Libraries*. The result is a selection of materials and a subject taxonomy that offer undergraduates studying theater essential entryways into the disciplinary scholarship. 🐾

Endnotes

1. **Schechner, Richard**, and **Mady Schuman**. *Ritual, Play, and Performance: Readings in the Social Sciences/Theatre*. New York: Seabury Press, 1976.*
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5. **Brockett, Oscar G.**, and **Franklin J. Hildy**. *History of the Theatre*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2002.*
6. **Carlson, Marvin**. *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.*
7. **Nicoll, Allardyce**. *The Theory of Drama*. New York: Ayer Publications, 1972.*
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11. **Rubin, Don**, ed. *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*. New York: Routledge, 1994-2000.*

Editor's note: An asterisk () denotes a title selected for *Resources for College Libraries*.