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Collecting to the Core-Drama and Theater

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When I first started as the subject editor for "Collecting to the Core" column 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 LC classification scheme suggests. In the RCL subject taxonomy, Theater Production is a subclass for Jewish drama as the lone ethnic category within 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 and Mady Schuman’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.

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.

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 Resources for Drama and Theater section, 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. 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.

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.

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Collecting to the Core — Drama and Theater

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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. With over 100 core resources across the subheadings, this new section aims to be the largest contribution 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). 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


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