INTRODUCTION

The object of this book is to offer students an introduction to Anglophone theatre. Spanning four centuries of diverse theatrical creations, it leads its readers on an in-depth exploration of seminal texts. Theatre is considered from the perspectives of the text, the stage and the audience in order to give the student an understanding of theatre grounded in multiple vantage points which, taken as a whole, encompass the experience of the theatre as it has developed within English speaking cultures.

The book is thus organized around three central axes: generic questions (tragedy and comedy), dramaturgy (through the notions of metatheatre and character), and the mutually dependent relation of staging and audience. These key critical notions are gates to an in-depth study of the theatre that presents both its historical trajectory and the critical context that has developed around it. Through the use of a cross-referential system and a glossary, this introduction to Anglophone theatre is also a tool for personal investigations into one of the world’s great theatrical traditions. English speaking theatre has not only given the world a playwright – Shakespeare – who has had a unique influence on world literature and drama, but has also generated a very rich and characteristic repertoire of plays, styles, and theories that seems infinitely adaptable. As global media bring other traditions into contact with it, the English-speaking theatre culture has absorbed and hybridized these influences, thus evidencing its continued vitality.

The authors have chosen key authors from the Anglophone literary scene whose works are presented along with a selected bibliography to help further research. Through both in-depth studies and general presentations as well as close-ups on notions or authors, the book offers a panorama which allows for a concise and illuminating introduction. Students will find here the tools to master essential concepts and texts. The authors have designed the book with the user in mind: the question we always asked about our themes and
presentation was whether the text was clear and comprehensible to the student just setting out to experience this world. The result, we hope, is useful for any student of theatre or literature looking for easy and enjoyable access to the authors and the concepts that have been the fabric of Anglophone theatre.

The authors are theatre specialists who are also teachers of Anglophone theatre to undergraduate and graduate students. They offer the material and answers that, in their experience, students commonly need to get a grasp on the subject. Particular attention has been paid to the language of theatre in order to provide readers with the linguistic tools necessary for them to approach and discuss theatre. Having explored all the facets of theatre, we hope the glossary and the cross-reference system of the book will help its readers become critics of their own, exploring the vast range of Anglophone theatre.

British director Peter Brook has suggested: “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.”¹ It is the engagement of the audience with the text and the stage that this book aims at analyzing and bringing to its readers. It looks at the theatre as text, stage and space and in so doing brings forward the specificities of these authors’ worlds. Bringing in keys for analysis and giving readers tools for their own readings, this book presents Anglophone theatre while letting its readers come up with their own explanations: “Theatre is always both a search for meaning and a way of making this meaning meaningful for others. This is the mystery.”²

². Brook P., There are no Secrets: Thoughts on Acting and Theatre, London, Methuen Drama, 1995, p. 76.