



## **The Oxford Handbook of American Drama (Oxford Handbooks)**

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When one thinks of American Drama, names like Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams readily come to mind. However, as The Oxford Handbook of American Drama shows, the U.S. has a deep and varied tradition that extends back to the years before the Revolutionary War. The essays gathered here trace U.S. dramatic history, ranging from plays by Mercy Otis Warren to Tony Kushner.

The volume opens with an exploration of the trials and tribulations of strolling players in the colonial era, before shifting to a discussion of the ways plays were deployed for political ends during the Revolution, most notably by the patriot Mercy Otis Warren. The narrative extends to the post-Revolutionary period when plays were used as vehicles to promote republican virtue. Contributors also explore the vibrant drama to emerge during the nineteenth century, when blackface performers and stars such as Edwin Forrest, Charlotte Cushman, and Edwin Booth dominated the stage. The period also witnessed the arrival of the first piece of musical theater, *The Black Crook*, which is productively situated in a musical tradition that extends to Rodgers and Hammerstein. *The Handbook* offers a complex treatment of melodrama - the most popular genre of the century. The volume traces the rise of the country's first black acting company in the 1820s, as well as the growing number of ethnic characters presented on the stage. Several of the contributors also highlight the role of women playwrights such as Anna Cora Mowatt in the development of American drama.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Provincetown Players helped to usher in the era of modern drama, which allowed playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, and Edna St. Vincent Millay to experiment with the form and attempt topics regarded as taboo at the time. As melodrama gave way to realism, exemplified in the work of O'Neill and Rachel Crothers, other dramatic techniques such as naturalism and expressionism were introduced to the stage. Other topics covered in the Handbook include: the political plays of Arthur Miller; the major freedoms brought to the American stage since the 1960s; the new generation of playwrights, such as Tony Kushner and Harvey Fierstein, who created plays dealing explicitly with topics like AIDS and homosexuality; and the rich genealogy of the African American family play in works by Lorraine Hansberry, August Wilson, and Suzan-Lori Parks. The volume concludes with the bold performance art of the Living Theatre and the new multiculturalism that arrived on the contemporary stage, with various ethnic communities --Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Asians, and Native Americans--becoming the focus of the action. *The Oxford Handbook of American Drama* presents a comprehensive introduction to the form in all its guises.

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