



## BOOKFILTER'S BEST OF SPRING PICKS

MICHAEL GILTZ | APRIL 19, 2016

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The savvy reader's favorite website [BookFilter.com](http://BookFilter.com) chooses the best theater books of the spring just for Broadway Direct.

The year is just warming up according to the calendar. But theater buffs know that Broadway is reaching a crescendo with splashy new musicals and gripping dramas opening up right through the end of April, just in time for the Tony Awards deadline. So it's no surprise that books devoted to theater are blossoming as well. Here's a roundup of the best titles that have just hit stores this spring.

### HAMILTON: THE REVOLUTION

By Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter

\$40, Grand Central Publishing

Well, heck. You can't get tickets to the show so you might as well get this extensive making-of coffee table book. It contains the full libretto, including footnotes by Miranda, a complete history of the groundbreaking musical, behind-the-scenes info, photos, and more. I mean, you're still listening to the cast album obsessively, so at least now you have something to hold in your

hands while doing so. (And, let's be honest, while practicing your flow when singing along.)

[Learn more.](#)

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## THE SELECTED LETTERS OF ELIA KAZAN

Edited by Albert J. Devlin

\$25, Vintage

It's a compelling glimpse into the mind of one of the giants of theater and film. Stories about the making of landmark works of the stage like *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Death of a Salesman* are cheek by jowl with stories about classic films such as *On the Waterfront* and *East of Eden*. Kazan's take on Marlon Brando and James Dean will pull many in; his take on the craft of mounting a play will keep them turning the pages. Will we chart a person's life in the future via their emails and texts? Maybe. But this is as good as Kazan's autobiography, written on the fly with passion and humor and intelligence. [Learn more.](#)

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## THE DARK LADY'S MASK

By Mary Sharratt

\$26, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Did William Shakespeare — that barely educated country bumpkin — actually write those globe-spanning masterpieces? Who is the Dark Lady, the woman who haunts some of the greatest sonnets in history? Those are two of the greatest puzzles hovering over the life of the world's foremost dramatist. Author Sharratt amusingly combines them both in this tantalizing novel of "What if?" In it, a cross-dressing poetess stumbles upon and falls hard for a penniless poet named William Shakespeare. They abscond to Italy and begin collaborating on comedies and tragedies that will shake the world of drama. When their romance ends, so does their collaboration. With Shakespeare the public face of their achievement, he garners all the glory — and then taunts his onetime artistic partner with those sonnets. He should remember that hell hath no fury. . . . [Learn more.](#)

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## ROMEO & JULIET

By William Shakespeare

\$7, Penguin Classics

*Romeo & Juliet* is one of the most assigned plays in schools around the country, the perfect introduction to the romantic, funny, rich, and tragic world of Shakespeare. The Pelican Shakespeare books are one of the most acclaimed modern presentations of the plays of the Bard since the line's birth in the 1950s. This is just one of many new editions that the imprint is releasing. Each comes with a new cover and the usual essays and notes putting the plays into the context of Shakespeare's time. They are handsome, portable, and a pleasure to read. Sure, you can download rough copies of all his plays. Maybe you already have some weighty tome on your shelf containing all the collected works, the sort of edition you display but never actually open. Yet there's an undeniable pleasure in holding individual copies of *R&J* and *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* in your hands, dipping in when you've got a moment, carrying them with you everywhere, making notes in the margins, and losing yourself on the page almost as much as you can during a great performance. (Or, if you're critic Harold Bloom, losing yourself even more!) [Learn more.](#)

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## SUMMERLOST

By Ally Condie

\$17.99, Dutton Books for Younger Readers

English teacher turned bestselling novelist Condie has delivered one of the most anticipated kids' books of the year. It's a bittersweet tale of Cedar, a girl slowly recovering from the accident that killed her father and brother. She's spending the summer at Iron Creek, tentatively finding her way back into the world. And the safe space she discovers there, one that welcomes Cedar and gives her a newfound pleasure in life? It's Summerlost, a renowned annual festival where Cedar makes friends, finds work at a concession stand, and discovers the joys of theater. [Learn more.](#)

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## ON BROADWAY

By Drew Hodges

\$45, Rizzoli

Savvy readers know the name Chip Kidd: He has designed some of the best book covers in recent years, the rare artist of the form to become a household name. It's no surprise he's written an introduction for this handsome work. Why? Because *On Broadway* explores the last 20 years of theatrical history via the posters and imagery created in tandem with SpotCo, the

company founded by author Hodges. From working with the still grieving family of Jonathan Larson on *Rent* to the record-breaking revival of *Chicago* and right up to the selling of the hip-hop musical *Hamilton*, SpotCo has been in the thick of it. For many people, name a show and the first image that pops to mind is the poster. On Broadway turns the creation of those posters into a thumbnail sketch of the Great White Way over the past two decades. It includes anecdotes featuring everyone from stars including Nicole Kidman and Sting to theater legends such as Harvey Fierstein and Cherry Jones. And, of course, classic posters in all their glory.

[Learn more.](#)

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## WOMEN OF WILL

By Tina Packer

\$16, Vintage

If you ask us, playwright Eugene O'Neill was almost *always* experimental. This anthology focuses on key early works *The Emperor Jones* (notably providing a great role for black actors who sorely lacked them at the time), *The Hairy Ape*, and the one-acts set on board a ship, known collectively as *The S.S. Glencairn Plays*. It's a useful look at one facet of a prolific career best known for his lengthy tragedies. [Learn more.](#)

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## THE GREAT AMERICAN WHATEVER

By Tim Federle

\$17.99, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers

True, this young-adult novel is actually about a gay teenager who is crazy about the movies, not the theater. But it's by Tim Federle, the author of the bestselling middle-grade books *Better Nate Than Never* and *Five, Six, Seven, Nate*, both amusingly fanatical about the stage. So he's earned a lot of goodwill. This novel is aimed at slightly older teens and charts the reawakening of Quinn, a teen sunk into depression and guilt from the death of his sister in a car accident. In a whirlwind week, Quinn falls hard for another guy, gets his hair cut, cleans up his room and his life, comes out, and realizes that while their dream of being the first great brother-sister team in movie history may be gone for good, in fact it might have just been *his* dream. And life is still worth living. Filled with movie references and a passion for the arts any theater lover can appreciate, Federle delivers his usual breezy humor, but here with a new undercurrent of maturity and sadness. [Learn more.](#)

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## THE 101 GREATEST PLAYS

By Michael Billington

\$26.95, Guardian Faber

Author Billington is as much a part of the U.K. theater scene as the National or Judi Dench. He has lectured on the arts, published biographies of Harold Pinter and Peggy Ashcroft, and, above all, reviewed theater with passion and insight. So yes, while you or I or just about anyone could whip up a list of “the 101 greatest plays,” you or I or just about anyone probably isn’t as informed and ready to create a list worth reading as much as Billington is. (He’s been reviewing shows for nearly 50 years and seen about 9,000 productions . . . and counting.) Mind you, it’s not the list that really matters, choices that range from the ancient Greeks up to the present. It’s Billington’s passionate arguments and essays about what he’s selected and why that will inform and enrage and delight — and likely send you off to read a few plays and make your own list in response. [Learn more.](#)

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## THE COMPLETE BOOK OF *LES MISÉRABLES*

By Edward Behr

\$19.99, Arcade Publishing

*Hamilton* is just the latest theatrical event to become a worldwide phenomenon. *Les Misérables* was also a game-changing blockbuster that rewrote the rules of musical theater. That’s where the comparisons end. *Hamilton* began Off-Broadway and was acclaimed from day one. *Les Miz* began in Paris and came to London, where the critics harrumphed at this glitzy, almost silly spin on Victor Hugo’s sprawling masterpiece. *Hamilton* looked forward to hip-hop for musical inspiration. *Les Miz* looked back to opera. Both have fans who are passionate, to say the least. For those who didn’t dream of missing the recent Broadway revival of *Les Misérables*, this reissue of the making of that masterpiece contains the full libretto and the rags-to-riches story of its unlikely success. [Learn more.](#)

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## PRODIGAL SON

By John Patrick Shanley

\$13.95, Theatre Communications Group

A new play by the author of *Doubt* and the Oscar-winning screenwriter of *Moonstruck* will always be an event. When it's set in a prestigious boarding school, is strongly autobiographical, touches on everything from mentors to sexuality to the saving grace of education, and features a juicy central role any young actor would kill for, then it becomes essential. Actor Timothée Chalamet gave a career-making turn as the lead character and doubtless young actors all over the country will be poring over the play, relishing his monologues and dreaming about what they would do with a chance to play this part. [Learn more.](#)

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## SEX WITH SHAKESPEARE

By Jillian Keenan

\$25.99, William Morrow

Roger Ebert opened our eyes to the usefulness of acknowledging sexiness in film criticism. Too often, the erotic is giggled over or mentioned quickly and almost with embarrassment. Ebert demonstrated that the appeal of actors is so fundamental to enjoying the arts that ignoring it is foolish. And the sooner you do acknowledge what turns you on, the sooner you can start thinking seriously about why and how it turns you on. Writer Keenan doesn't know from embarrassment, as her memoir makes clear. She's written for countless outlets, from *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times* to *Scientific American* and *Playboy*. Here, Keenan combines her personal journey of realizing and accepting her own identity as a sexual masochist with a close reading of Shakespeare's plays. The result is genuine insight, from the (obvious) bondage and domination of *The Taming of the Shrew* to the (less obvious) sexual masochism of Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the (unexpected) possibility that *King Lear* is a sexual predator.

[Learn more.](#)

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**KEEP READING:**



**Another *Hamilton* Premiere: *Hamilton: The Exhibition***

H★MILTON

**ONE LAST TIME  
(44 REMIX)**



**CHRISTOPHER JACKSON  
BARACK OBAMA  
BEBE WINANS**

December #Hamildrop: "One Last Time (44 Remix)"





Jimmy Fallon Joins Lin-Manuel Miranda and *Hamilton* Cast in Puerto Rico

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