

BOOKFILTER'S SPRING BOOK GUIDE FOR THEATER BUFFS

MICHAEL GILTZ | MAY 1, 2018

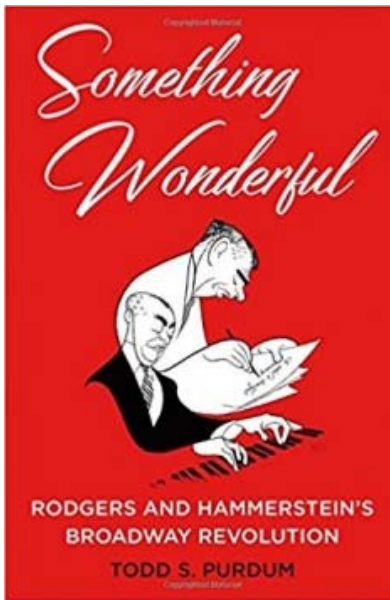
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The savvy reader's favorite website BookFilter.com chooses the best theater books ready for reading, exclusively for Broadway Direct.

While you can try to go to the theatre every day of the year, it's just not possible. It's too rainy or too cold to venture outside, even to support your terrific community theatre. Or you're not visiting New York City or London until July. Or you keep entering the *Harry Potter* lottery but — like a Muggle — you keep not winning. Or that touring production you bought tickets for months ago doesn't actually come to town for weeks. Or you've just seen/worked on/starred in the final performance of the school year and now summer looms with no shows in sight! What to do? I mean, you've already watched the latest episode of the TV series *Rise*. Twice. So if you're not heading to a show tonight or even if you simply have hours to kill before curtain, books about theater are always waiting for you. Here are the latest.

[SOMETHING WONDERFUL: RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN'S BROADWAY REVOLUTION](#)

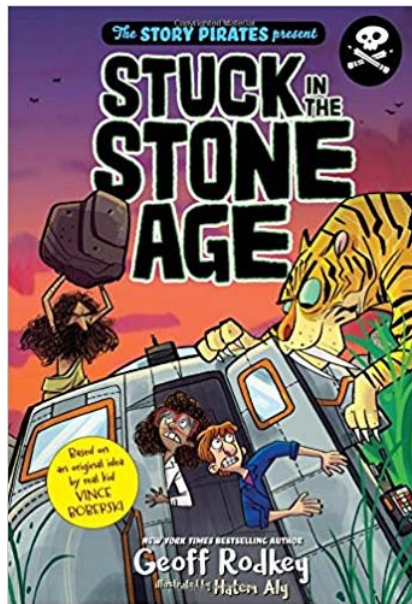


By Todd S. Purdum

\$32, Henry Holt & Co

This brisk and lively biography of the greatest team in musical-theater history remains happily focused on what matters most: the shows. Author Todd S. Purdum begins by covering their lives and careers up to that fateful partnership, reminding us that Oscar Hammerstein (*Show Boat*) and Richard Rodgers (Rodgers & Hart) had already accomplished enough to be remembered forever even before they met. Then Purdum devotes about a chapter to each major work and the increasing activity that surrounds colossal success. Rodgers & Hammerstein were the boldest and most fascinating of talents, pushing boundaries on what stories a musical could tell, how they would tell them, and doing it all with songs that are so precise and deceptively simple that everyone can sing them and yet they reveal passionate depths in the right hands. Purdum doesn't shy away from the personal, like Hammerstein's insecurities, Rodgers chasing after showgirls, or battles with depression and alcoholism. But it's always in the context of how personal matters affected their relationship and their shows. *Something Wonderful* doesn't rock the boat with any unexpected claims for this show or damning of that work, but it's a solid, affectionate description of artists who look more important today than at any time since, oh, 1945.

THE STORY PIRATES PRESENT: STUCK IN THE STONE AGE

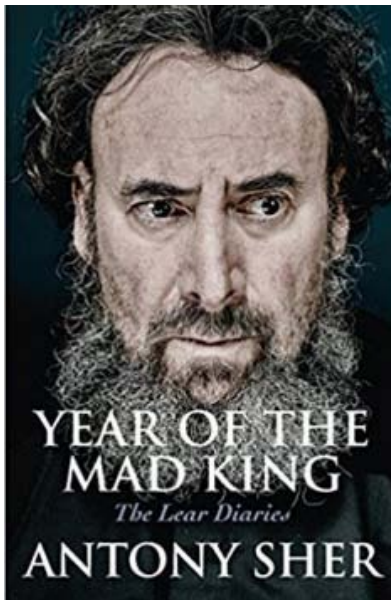


By Geoff Rodkey, Based on an Original Idea by Real Kid Vince Boberski

\$13.99, Rodale Kids

The Story Pirates are the famous arts company that uses improv and theater to educate and entertain children. They began with comics improvising shows based on stories written by kids. That led to branches in New York and L.A., the Story Pirates podcast, tours, and now even a children's book. Like their shows, it leaps from an idea by a kid — this time, Vince Boberski — and then the fun begins, along with oh-so-casual descriptions of how the novel was crafted, the techniques they used, the choices they made, and more. Utterly original. Dubbed *Monty Python* meets *Schoolhouse Rock*, no wonder they're a favorite of Jon Stewart.

YEAR OF THE MAD KING

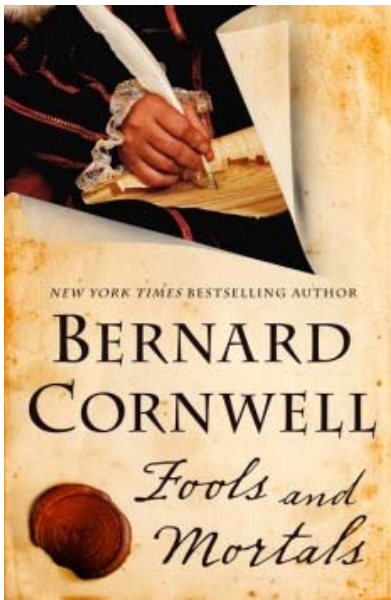


By Antony Sher

\$26, Nick Hern Books

Antony Sher is touring the world with an acclaimed new production of *King Lear*, a performance this legendary actor insists is his final Shakespeare play. What a pity that would be, though, truly, Sher has tackled most of the Bard's major roles through his lifetime. He shot to prominence with a groundbreaking spin on Richard III, and Sher's fame was doubled by the diary he kept and published about the creation of that show. His new diary — *Year of the Mad King* — follows in its footsteps, combining a backstage diary of the ups and downs of a theatrical life with keen insights into Shakespeare and how Sher crafted his performance. Absolutely essential for fans of Sher, Shakespeare, and the theater, but above all for actors. So that covers pretty much everyone.

FOOLS AND MORTALS

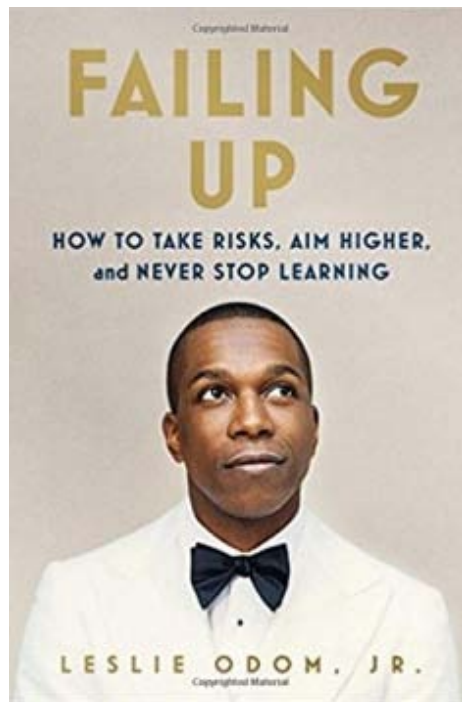


By Bernard Cornwell

\$27.99, Harper

Bestselling author Bernard Cornwell is known for a string of rousing historical adventures, ranging from those starring the rascalion Richard Sharpe (set during the Napoleonic Wars) to novels about the search for the Holy Grail to the reign of Alfred the Great and even a series set during the U.S. Civil War. But he's thrown his many fans off-kilter with his latest standalone novel. Called *Fools and Mortals*, it stars William Shakespeare's younger brother Richard. He has fled a brutal apprenticeship and seeks refuge in Will's company, playing modest female parts ... until rescuing some stolen manuscripts rewards Dick with the standout role of Mercutio in *Romeo & Juliet*. Filled with Cornwell's typically scrupulous attention to historical detail, this is a delightful change of pace and should garner him a whole new set of fans.

FAILING UP

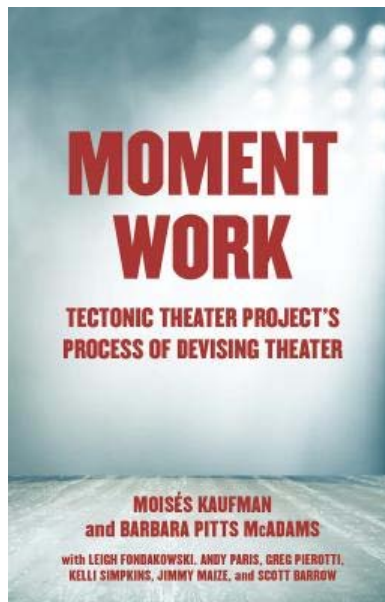


By Leslie Odom Jr.

\$19.99, Feiwel & Friends

The remarkable original cast of *Hamilton* has spread out to conquer everything from TV to music and film and, of course, theater. Tony winner Leslie Odom Jr. might just do all of that, and now he's tossed in books for good measure. In this memoir/self-help guide, Odom uses the commencement address speech as a way to share how he struggled, fought, and “failed up” on his way to *Hamilton* and the role of a lifetime. He debuted on Broadway at the age of 17 in *Rent* (another show with a historic original cast) and hasn't looked back since.

MOMENT WORK

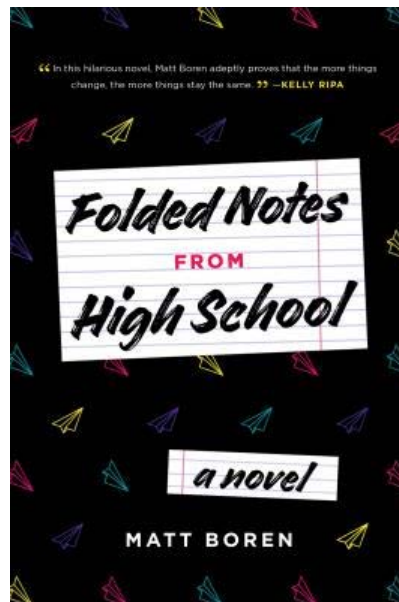


By Moisés Kaufman and Barbara Pitts McAdams

\$18, Vintage

The Tectonic Theatre Project has created some of the most innovative works around, including legendary shows such as *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* and *The Laramie Project*. They've done it through a collaborative process called Moment Work. Here, the founder and artistic director, Moisés Kaufman, partners with Barbara Pitts McAdams, the dramaturge of *The Laramie Project* and Tectonic teaching artist, to share in detail how they do it. The result is a behind-the-scenes glimpse into major works that came to be along with a practical guide for those who want to embrace Moment Work themselves.

FOLDED NOTES FROM HIGH SCHOOL

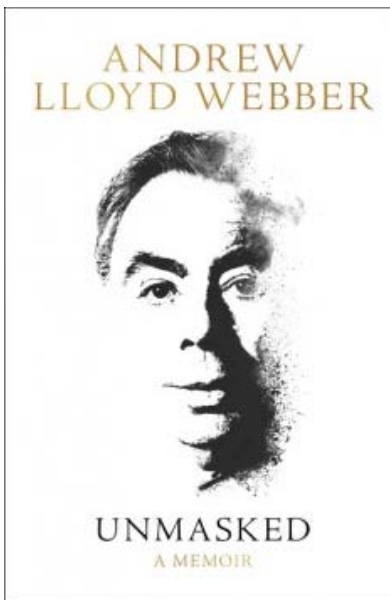


By Matthew Boren

\$17.99, Razorbill

Is there more drama anywhere than a high school theater program? No, there is not. In this lighthearted take on the Heathers and Regina Georges of the world, we are introduced to Tara, the queen of her high school. She has a superhot jock boyfriend *and* the lead role of Sandy in *Grease* to top off the perfect senior year. The only problem is that a freshman named Matthew Bloom — a freshman! — has won the role of Danny Zuko. Sure, he's amazingly talented, and really, she has to admit he's kind of dazzlingly cute, but he's a *freshman* and she's a *senior* and never the twain shall meet. So if Tara finds herself volunteering to do scene work with this Matthew, why, it's only to make sure he doesn't spoil her final triumph and it has absolutely nothing to do with her falling hard for his charms. Really.

UNMASKED: A MEMOIR

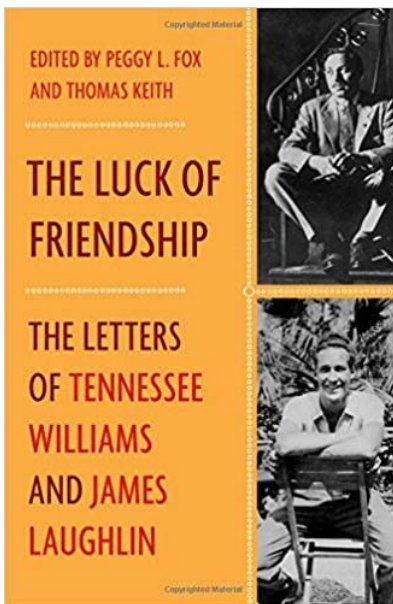


By Andrew Lloyd Webber

\$28.99, Harper

Well, he certainly dishes. One might have feared the knighted Andrew Lloyd Webber would have taken himself and his outrageously successful career too much to heart, lording it (or at least “sir”-ing it) all over us poor peasants. But he was a fan of theater before he dove into it, and Lloyd Webber knows memoirs are for telling stories, especially the naughty ones. He doesn’t hold back in this survey of his career, from the schoolboy romp of adapting a story from the Bible (a lark that became an actual musical!) right up to the now-and-forever success of *Phantom of the Opera*. Yes, this juicy memoir stops with Lloyd Webber right at his peak. A sequel will surely be coming, and with the misses outpacing the hits from then on out, it will be fascinating to see if he can dish on himself as insightfully as he does everyone else. Besides, doesn’t everyone want to hear his take on kissing and making up with Patti LuPone?

[THE LUCK OF FRIENDSHIP](#)

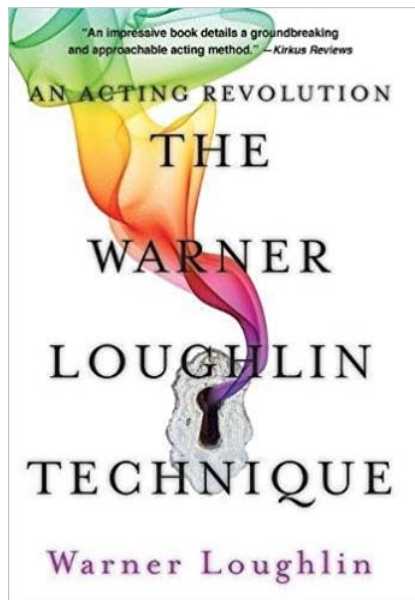


Edited by Peggy L. Fox and Thomas Keith

\$39.95, W.W. Norton & Company

Tennessee Williams remains an obsessively fascinating character. Surely no major playwright has been as compulsively written about, dramatized, and fictionalized as he. A new play hitting Off-Broadway tackles the meeting between Williams and William Inge, a key moment in their lives when the two closeted playwrights were just starting out. *Summer and Smoke* is getting a new mounting at the Classic Stage Company, and the same can surely be said about countless other works by him all over the country. So any time is a good time for books about Williams, and this one collects the letters between Tennessee and publisher James Laughlin of the imprint New Directions. They met at a party, bonded over a shared love of the poetry of Hart Crane, and became lifelong friends and pen pals. Laughlin published all of the plays by Williams, along with his novels, stories, and poetry, and they supported each other through the inevitable ups and downs of artistic life. A unique angle on a major dramatist's story.

THE WARNER LOUGHLIN TECHNIQUE: AN ACTING REVOLUTION

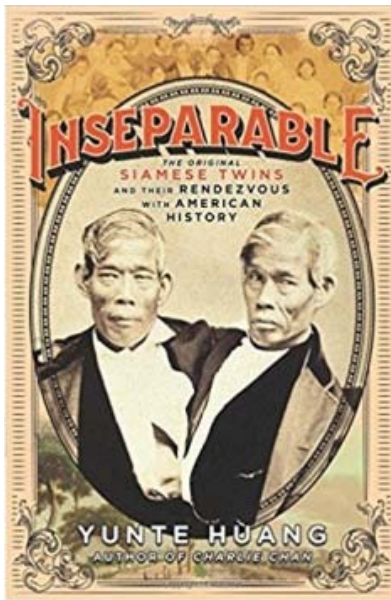


By Warner Loughlin

\$24.99, Howland Lilley Press

Must actors plumb the miserable depths of their pasts in order to dredge up emotion? As Laurence Olivier once famously said to the Method-y Dustin Hoffman, it's called acting, my dear boy. Olivier worked from the outward in, needing a prosthetic nose or a distinctive walk or a costume to find the role. Acting coach Warner Loughlin has another approach, and it has led to the endorsement of artists including Ryan Reynolds, Kyra Sedgwick, and Emma Roberts, among others. After more than 20 years of working with actors who have gone on to substantial acclaim, Loughlin details in print for the first time her approach to acting.

INSEPARABLE: THE ORIGINAL SIAMESE TWINS

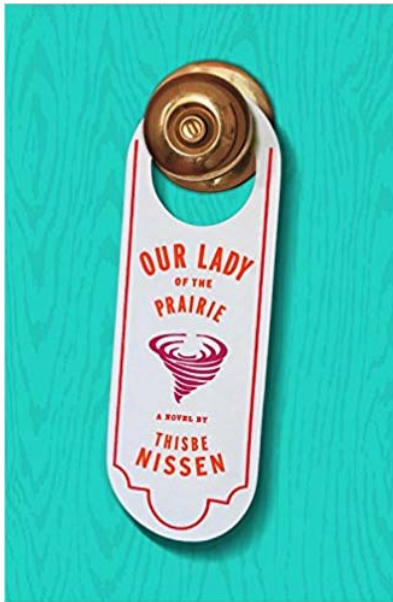


By Yunte Huang

\$28.95, Livewright

Did you love the movie musical *The Greatest Showman*? It captured the spectacle of P.T. Barnum, a man who knew outcasts might be ignored until you put them in the spotlight. Then suddenly people would line up and pay good money to see the “freaks.” Just as Barnum was hyping up his various museums/shows in New York City, the Siamese twins Chang and Eng were appearing in Boston as “exhibits.” In an amazing twist, the two earned their freedom, mounted their own shows, traveled the country, and ultimately became Southern gentry, earning a fortune, marrying two white sisters, fathering 21 children, and even enslaving other humans the way they were once enslaved themselves. Imagine Lettie Lutz (the bearded lady in the film) becoming her own boss and making more money than Barnum, and you start to appreciate the remarkable journey of these two men detailed in this work of history by Yunte Huang.

[OUR LADY OF THE PRAIRIE](#)

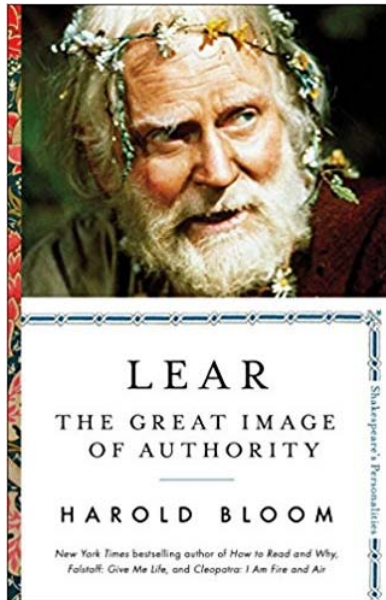


By Thisbe Nissen

\$25, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

A novel about a theater professor having a tumultuous affair during a nation-dividing presidential election? No, this is not a hot-off-the-press tale of Trump. Writer Thisbe Nissen's new corrosively comic novel is set during the Bush–Kerry election of 2004. And our wayward professor is Phillipa Maakestad, a not-so-happily-married woman who cheats on her husband while spending a semester teaching in Ohio. (Really, can you blame her?) She returns home for her “difficult” daughter’s wedding, and when everything is teetering and about to fall over, Phillipa decides to give it all a good shove. Also in the mix: a mother-in-law who might have been a Nazi collaborator, a tornado touching ground on the big day, and a husband who finally shows some spine when he’s been cuckolded.

LEAR: THE GREAT IMAGE OF AUTHORITY

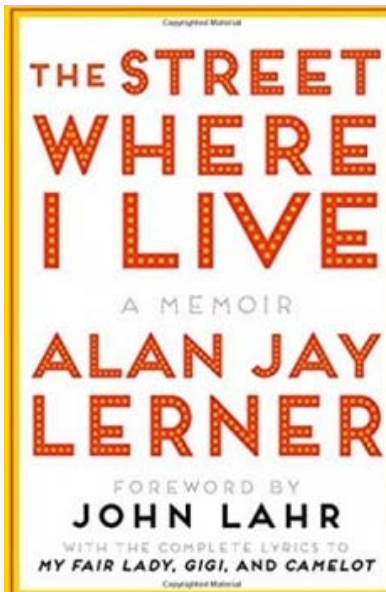


By Harold Bloom

\$24, Scribner

One of the great Shakespearean scholars, Harold Bloom is capping off his career with intimate, deeply insightful examinations of some of the Bard's major characters. Here, he x-rays *King Lear*, with Bloom sharing his own inevitably shifting impressions of the role as they developed and sharpened and changed during decades of study and legendary performances. Just 176 pages long, it's a master class in erudition and analysis.

THE STREET WHERE I LIVE



By Alan J. Lerner

\$17.95, W.W. Norton & Company

Often called the greatest musical of all time, *My Fair Lady* is returning to Broadway in a lavish new production starring Lauren Ambrose. The positive buzz is overwhelming. So if you can't wait, appease yourself by snapping up the reissue of Alan J. Lerner's classic memoir of life in the theater. It ranks with Moss Hart's *Act One* as a peak peek of the Great White Way. It covers three musicals: the film *Gigi* and the stage classics *My Fair Lady* and *Camelot*. Need we say more? A classic.

Michael Giltz is the creator of the website BookFilter, a book lover's best friend. He has written for Huffington Post, New York Post, New York Daily News, The Advocate, and many others, profiling talent, covering the theater business, and reviewing shows in New York City and London for many years.

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Let the Sunshine In! *Hair Live!* Set for 2019 on NBC



Sara Bareilles and Andrew Lloyd Webber: “I Don’t Know How to Love Him”



Mean Girls to Tour in 2019

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