

ROUTLEDGE FOCUS

WORDS FOR THE THEATRE

Four Essays on the Dramatic Text

David Cole

ROUTLEDGE
Focus



Words for the Theatre

In *Words for the Theatre*, playwright David Cole pursues a course of dramaturgical self-questioning on the part of a playwright, centred on the act of playwriting.

The book's four essays each offer a dramaturgical perspective on a different aspect of the playwright's practice: How does the playwright juggle the transcriptive and prescriptive aspects of their activity? Does the ultimate performance of a playtext in fact represent something to which all writing aspires? Does the playwright's process of withdrawing to create their text echo a similar process in the theatre more widely? Finally, how can the playwright counter theatre's pervasive leaning towards the 'mistake' of realism?

Suited to playwrights, teachers and higher-level students, this volume of essays offers reflections on the questions that confront every playwright, from an author well-versed in supplying words for the theatre.

David Cole is a playwright who has written two prior books of dramatic theory: *The Theatrical Event* and the Nathan Award-winning *Acting as Reading*. His plays may be found at www.davidcoleplaysandprose.com.

Focus on Dramaturgy

Series Editor: Magda Romanska

The *Focus on Dramaturgy* series from Routledge – developed in collaboration with TheTheatreTimes.com – is devoted to the craft of dramaturgy from multiple contemporary perspectives. This groundbreaking comprehensive series is authored by top professionals in the field, addressing a variety of current hot topics in dramaturgy.

The series is edited by Magda Romanska, an author of the critically-acclaimed *Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*, dramaturg, writer, theatre scholar, and Editor-in-Chief of TheTheatreTimes.com.

Shakespeare in Three Dimensions

The Dramaturgy of *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*

Robert Blacker

Words for the Theatre

Four Essays on the Dramatic Text

David Cole

For more information about this series, please visit: www.routledge.com/performance/series/RFOD

Words for the Theatre

Four Essays on the Dramatic Text

David Cole



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2019
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2019 David Cole

The right of David Cole to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Cole, David, 1941– author.

Title: Words for the theatre.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2019. |

Series: Focus on dramaturgy | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019011602 | ISBN 9781138240636 (hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781315283173 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Playwriting.

Classification: LCC PN1661 .C559 2019 | DDC 808.2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019011602>

ISBN: 978-1-138-24063-6 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-28317-3 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

For Helen and Bert Cole



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Contents

	<i>Preface: words from a playwright</i>	viii
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
Essay I	The dramatic text as transcript and prescription	1
Essay II	The dramatic text as type of the text	13
Essay III	The theatre wants to go in	34
Essay IV	Theatre as an event and another event; or, the sorrows of realism (something like a manifesto)	52
	<i>Words for the theatre</i>	64
	<i>Index</i>	65

Preface: words from a playwright

There are two questions any reader taking up this volume is likely to have:

- 1 What are these four very different essays doing in the same book?
- 2 What is a book made up of these four essays doing in a series on dramaturgy?

Fair questions, both; and, it might seem, quite unrelated. But the two questions have a single answer, are in fact two versions of a single question.

I am not a dramaturg. I have neither studied nor taught nor practiced dramaturgy.

I am a playwright, which is to say I have worked closely with dramaturgs from time to time. It is not, however, on the basis of such secondhand experience that I venture to speak out here with a “focus on dramaturgy.” On what basis, then?

The time is past (if there ever was such a time) when dramaturgs did no more than conduct historical research for directors and supply program notes. A present-day dramaturg may be called upon to serve as “ideal spectator” or to design lobby displays, to moderate post-show “talkbacks” or to write blog posts.

Doubtless, some of this activity comes near to, or overlaps with, playwrighting. Dramaturgs, for example, adapt and revise scripts or, if the production is a communal, unscripted one, lend a hand in the “devising” of its action.

Still, one instinctively feels, whatever else a dramaturg may be or do, he or she *is not the one who writes the thing*. No one would think to proclaim an equivalence between “dramaturg” and “playwright” if the term itself did not proclaim it or at least sanction the claim. For *dramatourgos*, from which “dramaturg” derives, is, as is often noted (though rarely with sufficient astonishment), the ancient Greek word not for “ideal spectator” or “literary adviser” but for “playwright.”