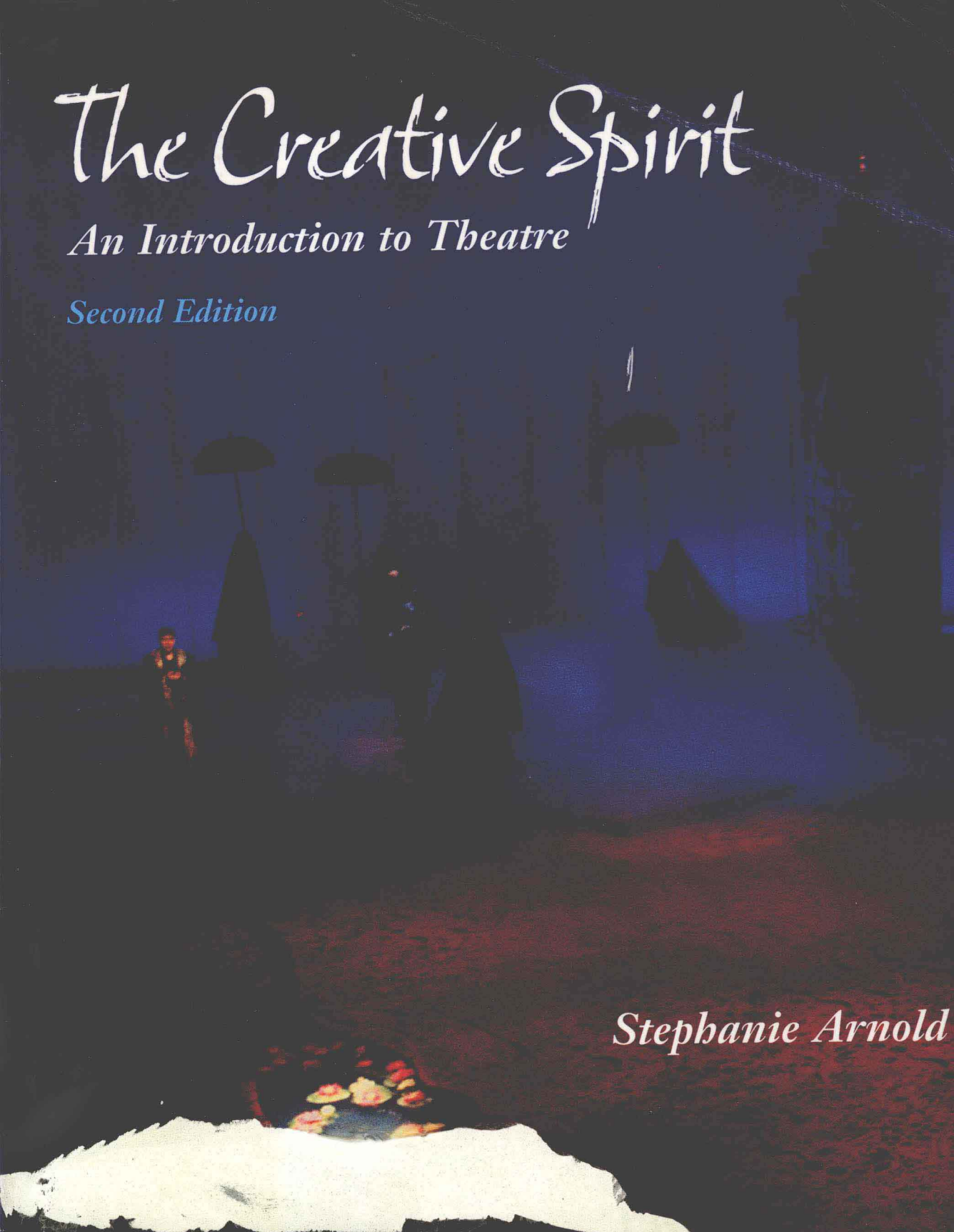


The Creative Spirit

An Introduction to Theatre

Second Edition

Stephanie Arnold



SECOND EDITION

The Creative Spirit

AN INTRODUCTION TO THEATRE

Stephanie Arnold

Lewis & Clark College



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*For Mark and for Daniel—
who provide the inspiration and the joy.*

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Preface

In writing *The Creative Spirit: An Introduction to Theatre*, my goal has been to bring to the forefront the energy, passion, and commitment of the theatre practitioners—playwrights, actors, directors, and designers—working in the American theatre today. Through contemporary plays and performances, the book explores both the fundamentals of the theatre and the ways the theatre addresses the questions and concerns of our time.

My teaching has convinced me that students gain the most comprehensive understanding of theatre when plays are presented both in the context of culture and history and in relation to performance. By examining the social, political, and artistic forces that shape a playwright's work, students acquire the background necessary for insightful reading. By analyzing a play in performance, students see how the choices made by actors, directors, and designers help to express the play's meaning. A play becomes more accessible, and the experience of reading or watching it becomes richer, when the number of reference points is expanded.

To achieve this integrated approach to the study of theatre, I have created a text that includes five complete plays: *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* by August Wilson, *And the Soul Shall Dance* by Wakako Yamauchi, *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner, *Getting Out* by Marsha Norman, and *Buried Child* by Sam Shepard. Preceding each play script is a section on the playwright's sources, including personal history, that provides the cultural context for the play. Following each play script, except *Buried*

Child, is a section on the performance and production of the play at one or more representative American theatres. The theatres range from small, innovative theatres, such as the Eureka Theatre and East West Players, to large regional companies, such as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and Actors Theatre of Louisville, to Broadway playhouses. The selection of plays and theatre companies used in the text introduces students to a variety of significant participants in the American theatre.

Included in the performance analyses are commentaries taken from personal interviews I conducted with playwrights, directors, actors, designers, and dramaturgs specifically for this book. Their explanations of their work offer students a direct and dynamic link with the process of creating theatre. Playwright Wakako Yamauchi, directors Clinton Turner Davis and Tony Taccone, designers R. Eric Stone, Deborah Dryden, and Candice Cain, and dramaturg Oscar Eustis are some of the more than 30 theatre artists who comment on the plays and productions discussed in the text.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

The creation of a second edition has provided the opportunity for a number of revisions in both the content and organization of the book. The second edition includes the complete text of *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* by Tony Kushner instead of excerpts and the complete script of a new play *Getting Out* by Marsha Norman. The chapter structure has been

refined to strengthen the presentation of theory and theatre history. Separate chapters are now devoted to the theory and history of realism (Chapter 4), the theory and history of theatricalism (Chapter 6), genre (Chapter 10) and the musical theatre (Chapter 14). In addition to the five complete contemporary plays included in the text, two scenes from classical works have been added: a scene from *The Oresteia* by Aeschylus is used in Chapter 2, Theatre and Society, to support the students' understanding of Greek tragedy and a scene from *Tartuffe* by Molière is now included in Chapter 10, Genre, to enhance the discussion of comedy. Photos of remarkable recent productions and updates have been added throughout and an annotated bibliography now accompanies each chapter. Stephanie Arnold has also written an Instructor's Manual for this edition.

ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT

One of my aims in writing this book has been to help students understand and experience the creative processes that distinguish the theatre. Chapter 1 examines the impulse to perform that seems to be part of human nature. The chapter explores performances by Bill Irwin, Anna Deavere Smith, Neil Marcus, and Frances McDormand as well as kachina performances among the Hopi. Another of my aims has been to address the rich and complex relationship between theatre and society. To provide a foundation for the ongoing inclusion of this topic throughout the book, Chapter 2 introduces the ancient Greek theatre, the medieval theatre in England, the Elizabethan theatre, and the Beijing Opera of China. These two chapters comprise Part One, The Nature of Theatre.

Part Two, The Nature of the Drama, focuses on the creative approaches and choices of the playwright. Each chapter examines a different aspect of the playwright's creative process, as illustrated by a specific play. The chapters

also look at the collaborative partnerships necessary to the interpretation and performance of the play. Chapter 3 considers the playwright's vision and the elements that shape it, as exemplified by *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* in a performance by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

Chapters 4 through 7 consider the playwright's choice of style, with Chapter 4 examining the history of realism and Chapter 5 exploring a realistic play, *And the Soul Shall Dance*, in performances at East West Players and Northwest Asian American Theatre. Chapter 6 looks at theatricalism and Chapter 7 examines *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* in the context of theatricalism in performances by the Eureka Theatre, the Mark Taper Forum, and on Broadway. Having explored the creative choices made by many different people about three very different plays, I turn in Chapter 8 to an examination of the underlying elements of dramatic structure which are then further defined in the study of the play *Getting Out* in Chapter 9. Chapter 10, the last chapter of Part Two considers the playwright's choice of genre.

Part Three, The Nature of Performance: The Theatre Practitioners, looks further at the unique work of actors, directors, and designers (Chapters 11, 12, and 13); for the interested student, these chapters include summaries of some of the basic skills required for each of these types of work. Chapter 14 examines the American musical theatre and the groundbreaking contributions of theatre practitioners in shaping this unique form. Finally, Chapter 15 presents a blueprint for a student project: planning a hypothetical production of *Buried Child* by Sam Shepard or one of several alternative play choices.

The contemporary movements in theatre that form the center of the text are now framed by chapters describing the development and historical antecedents of those movements. For example, realism is introduced through the plays *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* and *And the*

Soul Shall Dance. Chapter 4, placed between the two plays, provides an overview of earlier playwrights working in this style, including Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Hellman, Miller, and Williams. Thus, concepts and issues introduced through current plays are expanded through discussion of plays from earlier periods.

FEATURES OF THE TEXT

The text is distinguished by a number of unique features:

- “In Context” boxes support the background discussions of each play by providing timelines of significant historical and cultural events.
- The interpretive aspect of theatre production is emphasized by the comparisons of different productions of the same play. The text compares and contrasts two productions of *And the Soul Shall Dance*—by East West Players in Los Angeles and by Northwest Asian American Theatre in Seattle—and three productions of *Angels in America*—at the Eureka Theatre in San Francisco, at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, and on Broadway.
- Chapters on realism, theatricalism, and genre offer instructors flexibility in presenting the work of additional major playwrights and practitioners.
- Chapter 14 presents an overview of representative musicals, from *Oklahoma!* to *Rent*, *Bring in da Noise*, *Bring in da Funk*, and *The Lion King*. This chapter on the American musical theatre particularly emphasizes the contributions of composers and choreographers.
- Commentaries by some of today’s most innovative and talented theatre practitioners, taken from personal interviews, are included throughout the text.
- Exercises at the ends of chapters, as well as examples throughout the text, highlight the collaborative process.

- The visual nature of the theatre is explored through nearly 200 production shots, design sketches and renderings, drawings, and reproductions of paintings. Additionally, thirty-two pages of color photographs highlight the work of actors and designers.

This book is based on the idea that theatrical performance is fundamental to human nature and human society. My hope is that, after reading these pages, students will be inspired to continue exploring the creative process of theatre and to experience for themselves the way that process illuminates our lives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As the book has gone through different stages, the number of people who have contributed has grown and my gratitude has increased for their willingness to participate in this endeavor. First, I wish to renew my thanks to the large number of theatre artists who gave generously of their time to make possible the case studies of the productions included in the book. The playwrights, actors, directors and designers whose insightful commentary is found throughout the text have added immeasurably to the book’s specificity and vitality. I particularly express my gratitude to Wakako Yamauchi and Clinton Turner Davis who participated in multiple interviews and then reviewed large sections of the manuscript. The visual presentation of *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* has been greatly enhanced by scene and costume designs for which I thank Mike Fish and Candice Cain. My thanks also go to designers R. Eric Stone and Joan Arhelger who worked with me in preparing both editions of the book with special appreciation to R. Eric Stone for the design materials that made possible the photographic essay on *The Grapes of Wrath*. Beth Harper (director) and Andrew Lieberman (designer) were most helpful in developing the new production analysis of

Getting Out included in the second edition as was Actors Theatre of Louisville.

A number of theatres facilitated my studies of their productions and provided photographs for use in the book. Thanks first to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, East West Players, Northwest Asian American Theatre, and the Eureka Theatre for all the help in arranging interviews and providing materials associated with the plays included in the text. My appreciation for additional photographic assistance to Access Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, the Hartford Stage Company, the Goodman Theatre, the Guthrie Theatre, the La Jolla Playhouse, the Mark Taper Forum, the Old Globe Theatre, Pan Asian Repertory Theatre, Portland Actors Conservatory, Portland Repertory Theatre, Shakespeare & Company, South Coast Repertory, Theatre Simple, Trinity Repertory, and Wild Swan Theatre.

Many people reviewed the manuscript at different stages of the project. I am grateful to Tim Dang and Luisa Cariaga of East West Players, my colleague Stephen Weeks at Lewis and Clark College, and Dr. Richard Kelvin. I'd also like to thank these reviewers, many of whom offered invaluable comments: Doug Anderson, Kirkwood Community College; Patricia A. Clark, East Carolina University; David Cook, University of Tulsa; Joel D. Eis, State

University of West Georgia; Lani Johnson, Central Connecticut State University; Todd Neal, Western Michigan University; Nils Riess, Ohio Northern University; and Rebecca Rumbo, University of Connecticut. The book is far richer for the many contributions of theatre artists and the valuable suggestions of readers. For the second edition I was supported throughout the process by the invaluable research assistance of Heather Andrews who assisted me on the text as well as managing all the photo requests and permissions.

Once again, the staff at Mayfield were exceptional in their support of the book. I particularly thank Jan Beatty who has guided the project from the start and Melissa Williams Kreischer who has expertly managed the production of both editions. I also thank Andrea McCarrick for her wisdom and her precision in copyediting of the manuscript.

Throughout my teaching career I have enjoyed the company of remarkable students. I salute their openness, their idealism, and their commitment. The discoveries that we have made together are an essential part of the spirit of my work. Finally, I acknowledge the loving support of my family, who never flagged in their enthusiasm for the project or their willingness to undertake all the necessary tasks to make the book possible and to keep my sense of humor intact.

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