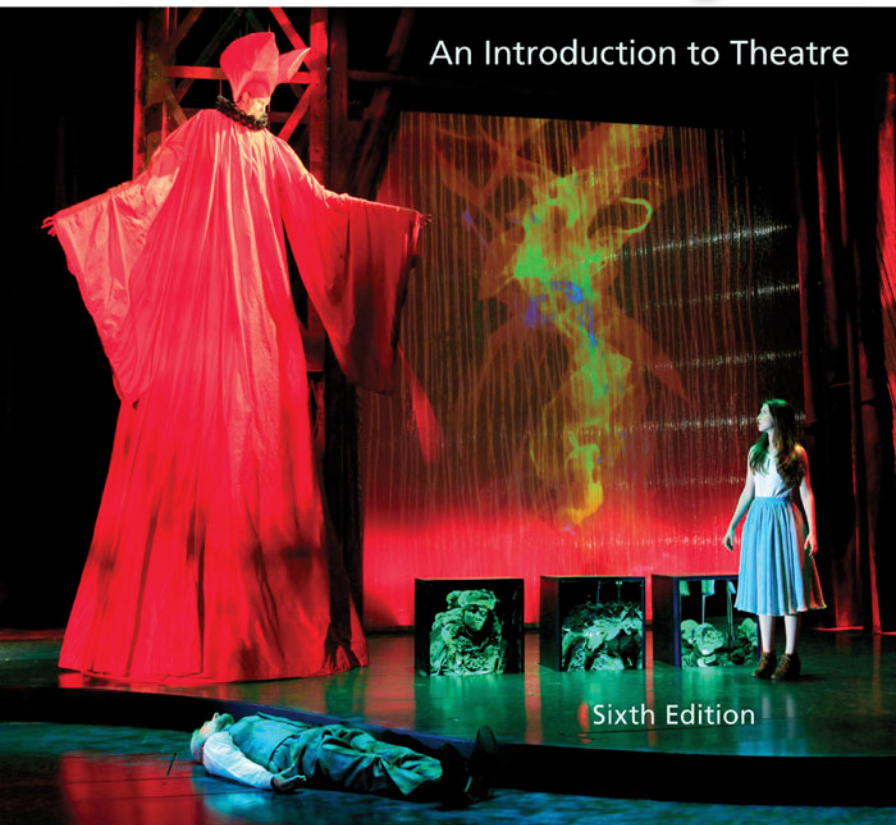


# The Creative Spirit

An Introduction to Theatre



Sixth Edition

Stephanie Arnold



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## An Introduction to Theatre

Sixth Edition

**Stephanie Arnold**

Lewis and Clark College

**Mc  
Graw  
Hill**  
Education



THE CREATIVE SPIRIT: AN INTRODUCTION TO THEATRE, SIXTH EDITION

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For Mark and for Daniel



# Brief Contents

PART I	<b>The Nature of Theatre</b>	1
	1 The Impulse to Perform: Origins	2
	2 Theatre as a Mirror of Society	24
PART II	<b>The Nature of Performance: The Theatre Practitioners</b>	45
	3 The Playwright's Vision	46
	Looking at <i>Joe Turner's Come and Gone</i> by August Wilson	
	4 The Art of the Actor	110
	5 The Director	134
	6 The Designers	162
PART III	<b>The Nature of Style: Realism and Theatricalism</b>	193
	7 Understanding Style: Realism	194
	8 Expressing a Worldview through Realism	209
	Looking at <i>And the Soul Shall Dance</i> by Wakako Yamauchi	
	9 Understanding Style: Theatricalism	261
	10 Expressing a Worldview through Theatricalism	285
	Looking at <i>Angels in America: Millennium Approaches</i> by Tony Kushner	
	11 The Musical Theatre	349
PART IV	<b>The Nature of Drama: Structure and Genre</b>	373
	12 The Elements of Drama and Dramatic Structure	374
	13 Innovations in Dramatic Structure	388
	Looking at <i>Water by the Spoonful</i> by Quiara Alegria Hudes	
	14 Genre	449
	15 The Project	476



# Contents

Preface xvii

## PART I

### The Nature of Theatre 1

#### 1 The Impulse to Perform: Origins 2

Performance and Human Behavior 3

Performance and Role Playing 4

Community Performance 5

Ritual Performance Among the Hopi 8

Kachina Performances 8

The Hopi Performer 9

Society and Aesthetic Expression 9

The Collective and Public Nature of Theatre 10

Theatre as a Social Force 10

#### Theatre and Religious Festivals 11

The Greek Theatre: Athens, Fifth Century B.C.E. 11

The Origin of Greek Theatre in the Worship of Dionysus 11

*Medea*, by Euripides 13

Staging Conventions 14

The Medieval Mystery Cycle 18

Staging and Production: A Community Endeavor 18

The Role of the Mystery Cycles in Medieval Society 21

Summary 22

Topics for Discussion and Writing 23

#### 2 Theatre as a Mirror of Society 24

The Professional Theatre 24

The Elizabethan Theatre 25

The Theatre in Society 25

The Nature of Elizabethan Drama 26

William Shakespeare 27

Elizabethan Staging 29



Acting in Elizabethan Dramas	31
The Beijing Opera of China	31
A Formal Society	32
Playwrights and Plays	32
A Language of Gesture	32
Acting and Staging	34
The Beijing Opera and the Communist Revolution	35
The Theatrical Mirror	36
Theatre and Social Change	37
South Africa	37
Theatre and Resistance to Apartheid	40
Truth and Reconciliation	42
Conclusion	43
Summary	44
Topics for Discussion and Writing	44

## PART II

### The Nature of Performance: The Theatre Practitioners 45

#### 3 The Playwright's Vision 46

Looking at <i>Joe Turner's Come and Gone</i> by August Wilson	
Exploring the Text of <i>Joe Turner's Come and Gone</i>	49
Plot and Characters: A Meeting of Two Worlds	49
Historical and Cultural Contexts of the Play	49
Theatre as History	51
The Aftermath of Slavery: Peonage and Sharecropping	52
Migration to the North	52
The Metaphor of the Road	53
The Oral Tradition	53
The Playwright's Sources	54
Bessie Smith and Romare Bearden	54
<i>Mill Hand's Lunch Bucket</i>	55
Folk Sources and W. C. Handy	57
The Complete Text of <i>Joe Turner's Come and Gone</i>	58
Producing <i>Joe Turner's Come and Gone</i>	95
The Construction of Meaning through Collaboration	95

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival	95
The Actors at Work	96
Understanding the Play	96
The Rehearsal Process	97
Physical Characterization	99
Staging the Juba	100
Drumming and Dancing	100
Text and Verbal Improvisation	101
The Meaning of the Juba	102
Expanding the Stage Image: The Work of the Designers	102
The Set Design	103
The Costume Design	104
The Lighting Design	105
Conclusion: History and Meaning in <i>Joe Turner's Come and Gone</i>	106
The Quest for Self	107
Family and Inheritance: The Way from the Past to the Future	107
Summary	108
Topics for Discussion and Writing	109
<b>4 The Art of the Actor</b>	<b>110</b>
The Presence of the Actor	111
The Actor's Craft	114
The Work of the Actor	114
Competing for Roles: The Audition	114
Preparing for the Role	118
The Rehearsal Process	119
Approaches to Acting	124
The Internal Approach	124
The External Approach	125
Acting Cordelia in <i>King Lear</i>	125
Gestural Acting	127
Acting in <i>Apollo</i>	128
The Performance	131
Theatre and Film	131
Summary	132
Topics for Discussion and Writing	133

## 5 The Director 134

### The History of the Director 135

The Director and the Development of Realism 135

The Director and the Determination of Style 137

The Visionary Director: Jerzy Grotowski and the Poor Theatre 139

The Playwright as Director: Athol Fugard 141

Directing the Theatre of Mixed Media: Ping Chong 143

Elizabeth LeCompte 145

### The Director at Work 146

Choosing the Play 146

The Director's Initial Response to the Play 149

Creating Metaphors 149

### Working with the Actors 151

Casting 151

Nontraditional Casting 152

The Work Environment 152

Improvisation 153

### Staging the Play 154

Focus 155

Spatial Composition and Character Development 156

Rhythm and Pacing 158

### Preparing the Play for Performance 158

### The Director's Training 159

### Summary 159

### Topics for Discussion and Writing 160

## 6 The Designers 162

### Stagecraft and the Theatre 163

### The Theatrical Space 164

The Proscenium Theatre or End Stage 165

Thrust, Arena, and Black Box Stages 166

The Implications of Theatre Architecture for Designers 168

Three-Dimensional Space 169

### The History of Scene Design 169

### Scene Design Today 171

*Eurydice* at South Coast Repertory 171

Design that Supports the Action of the Play 172

Costume Design	174
Stylistic Unity	175
The Psychology of Character	175
The Costume Designer and the Actor	175
Costume Design for <i>Eurydice</i>	176
Lighting Design	179
The History of Light in the Theatre	179
The Lighting Designer's Materials	180
The Light Plot and Light Cues	180
Visibility	180
Focus	181
The Rhythm of Light	181
Conceptualizing with Light	182
Mood, Atmosphere, and Psychology of Character	183
Video Design	185
Exploring the Character's Unconscious	185
The Integration of Video into the Production Process	187
Unifying the Production Through Sound	187
The Materials of Sound Design	188
Composing and Producing the Score	188
Integration of the Sound Design into the Production	189
Summary	190
Topics for Discussion and Writing	191

## PART III

# The Nature of Style: Realism and Theatricalism 193

## 7 Understanding Style: Realism 194

### Introduction to Realism 195

Realistic Elements in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* 195

Realism in Film 196

### Origins of Realism 196

#### The Social Background of Realism 198

#### European Realism 198

Henrik Ibsen 198

August Strindberg 199

Anton Chekhov 200

American Realism	201
Lillian Hellman	202
Poetic Realism: Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams	203
Konstantin Stanislavsky and Realistic Acting	205
Summary	207
Topics for Discussion and Writing	208
<b>8 Expressing a Worldview through Realism</b>	<b>209</b>
Looking at <i>And the Soul Shall Dance</i> by Wakako Yamauchi	
<i>Exploring the Text of And the Soul Shall Dance</i>	210
Plot and Characters	210
Personal, Cultural, and Historical Contexts of the Play	211
The Play as Memory	211
Personal History	212
Prejudice, Discrimination, and Internment	214
The Play as Social Document	215
Evoking a World Through Detail	216
The Complete Text of <i>And the Soul Shall Dance</i>	218
<i>Producing And the Soul Shall Dance</i>	247
Introduction to East West Players	247
History of East West Players	247
Location and Physical Space	247
Staging the Play	248
The Director's Prologue	248
The Influence of Asian Theatre	250
Staging a Period Play: The Work of the Director and the Actors	250
Building Character Relationships	253
Contrasting Productions: East West Players and Northwest Asian American Theatre	256
Scene Design and the Physical Space	256
Interpreting Family Relationships	257
Sexuality and Gender	259
Summary	260
Topics for Discussion and Writing	260

9	Understanding Style: Theatricalism	261
	Exposing the Mechanics of the Theatre	262
	Expressionism	263
	German Expressionism	264
	American Expressionism: Eugene O'Neill	265
	Epic Theatre: Bertolt Brecht	266
	Brecht's Concept of Alienation	267
	Brecht's Approach to Acting	268
	Theatre of the Absurd	270
	A Revolution in Movement: Martha Graham	271
	A New Dance Vocabulary	272
	Costume and Set as Partners in Dance	273
	Total Theatre: Robert Wilson	273
	Wilson's Experience	274
	The Interior Landscape	274
	A New Meeting of East and West: Shen Wei	275
	From Opera to Modern Dance	275
	Choreographer and Designer	277
	Handspring Puppet Company	278
	Summary	283
	Topics for Discussion and Writing	284
10	Expressing a Worldview through Theatricalism	285
	Looking at <i>Angels in America: Millennium Approaches</i> by Tony Kushner	
	Exploring the Text of <i>Angels in America: Millennium Approaches</i>	286
	Plot and Characters: a World in Spiritual Collapse	286
	The Role of Roy Cohn	287
	The Shifting Point of View	288
	Influences on Kushner as Playwright: Bertolt Brecht and Caryl Churchill	288
	The Historical Framework of <i>Angels in America</i>	289
	The Character Roy Cohn as a Historical Figure	290
	Roy Cohn and the Plot of <i>Angels in America</i>	293
	Roy Cohn and Ethel Rosenberg	293
	The Complete Text of <i>Angels in America: Millennium Approaches</i>	296
	Producing <i>Angels in America</i>	341

	The Eureka Theatre and the Playwright	341
	The Role of the Dramaturg	341
	The Developmental Process	343
	Expanding Opportunities for the Development of New Plays	347
	Summary	348
	Topics for Discussion and Writing	348
11	<b>The Musical Theatre</b>	<b>349</b>
	Origins of Musical Theatre in America	350
	The Broadway Theatre	350
	<i>Oklahoma!</i>	350
	<i>West Side Story</i>	352
	<i>My Fair Lady</i>	354
	<i>Cabaret</i>	355
	Stephen Sondheim	357
	<i>A Chorus Line</i>	360
	New Directions for the Musical Theatre	362
	Savion Glover and <i>Bring in da Noise, Bring in da Funk</i>	362
	Jonathan Larson and <i>Rent</i>	363
	Julie Taymor and <i>The Lion King</i>	365
	Susan Stroman and <i>Contact</i>	368
	The Musical Theatre Today	370
	Summary	371
	Topics for Discussion and Writing	372

## PART IV

	<b>The Nature of Drama: Structure and Genre</b>	<b>373</b>
12	<b>The Elements of Drama and Dramatic Structure</b>	<b>374</b>
	Fundamental Elements of Structure	375
	Character	375
	Plot	377
	Language	377
	Music	381
	Spectacle	381

	The Organization of the Drama in Space and Time	383
	The Duration of the Performance	384
	Building the Drama: The Internal Rhythm	384
	Conflict, Rising Tension, and Resolution	385
	Summary	387
	Topics for Discussion and Writing	387
<b>13</b>	<b>Innovations in Dramatic Structure</b>	<b>388</b>
	Looking at <i>Water by the Spoonful</i> by Quiara Alegria Hudes	
	<i>Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue: A Quartet for Actors</i>	389
	A New Trilogy	397
	The History of the Trilogy	397
	The Elliot Trilogy	398
	The Playwright's Sources: Family	400
	The Dual Worlds of <i>Water by the Spoonful</i>	401
	The Complete Text of <i>Water by the Spoonful</i>	403
	<i>Producing Water by the Spoonful</i>	436
	Second Stage	436
	Dramatic Structure and Spectacle	436
	Design	436
	Acting	439
	Defining the Characters	443
	Researching the Social Environment	443
	The Interior Journey	444
	The Language of Resilience	445
	The Musical Environment	446
	Summary	447
	Topics for Discussion and Writing	448
<b>14</b>	<b>Genre</b>	<b>449</b>
	<i>Introduction to Genre</i>	450
	Tragedy and Comedy	450
	Origins in Greek Drama	452
	Aristotle on Tragedy and Comedy	452
	Tragedy: Catharsis and Awareness	453



	Plot Summaries of Selected Tragedies	453
	Common Themes of Tragedy	455
	Can Tragedy Exist Today?	456
	Melodrama	458
	Tragicomedy	460
	Farce	462
	Writing about the Theatre	464
	The Dramaturg	465
	The Critic	468
	<i>Two Reviews of Medea</i>	471
	Summary	475
	Topics for Discussion and Writing	475
15	<b>The Project</b>	<b>476</b>
	Preparing a Production	477
	Alternative Plays	477
	Working on the Project	477
	Sequence of Work	477
	Topics for Group Discussion (Group Meeting 1)	478
	Group Decisions (Group Meeting 2)	478
	Project Assignments	479
	The Director	479
	Character Analysis	479
	Scene Design	479
	Costume Design	480
	Sound/Music Design	481
	Program Note	481
	Poster	481
	Conclusion	481
	<i>Appendix: Guided Writing Assignments</i>	<i>483</i>
	<i>Notes</i>	<i>488</i>
	<i>Glossary</i>	<i>493</i>
	<i>Credits</i>	<i>499</i>
	<i>Index</i>	<i>502</i>

# Preface

I wrote *The Creative Spirit* for students like mine, whose interest in live theatre is critical to its future. My goal has been to give students the information they need for an in-depth understanding of the way theatre creates meaning. Rather than using a multitude of examples from plays that students may not have seen, I have chosen to focus on fewer works in greater detail, allowing students to become immersed in the worlds of the plays, the lives of the characters, and the choices involved in bringing these texts to the stage. 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.

In order to create this textbook, I turned to my professional colleagues in the theatre and asked for their participation. I selected plays that I thought represented important artistic, philosophical, and social issues and sought out productions of those plays. I sat in on rehearsals and performances. I interviewed playwrights, directors, actors, and designers. I invited theatres to contribute photographs of their productions so that a visual story would accompany a written story. I wove quotes from my interviews through the descriptive material so that the practitioners could be part of a shared dialogue with the students. I tried to create a sense of what it would be like to be in the rehearsal hall and what it would be like to be an audience member at the production. I also considered what kind of historical and social background materials would help students understand the plays that they were reading. Building a substantive cultural context meant considering historical, political, and economic background materials as well as musical and artistic sources. The presentation of

the cultural context could then demonstrate for students the place of the theatre in the development of the community and the way the theatre represents a gathering place of knowledge as well as of individuals.

## Four Complete Playscripts

At the core of the text are four complete plays: *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* by August Wilson, *And the Soul Shall Dance* by Wakako Yamauchi, *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* by Tony Kushner, and *Water by the Spoonful* by Quiara Alegria Hudes. Each play is used to illustrate a chapter theme: in Chapter 3 *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* illustrates the playwright's vision; Chapter 8 includes *And the Soul Shall Dance* as an example of expressing a worldview through realism; in Chapter 10 *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* is included as an example of expressing a worldview through theatricalism; and in Chapter 13 *Water by the Spoonful* is explored to consider elements of dramatic structure. Together these four works demonstrate the power of contemporary American theatre to address the questions and concerns of our time.

## Examples from a Range of Cultures and Periods

In addition to the four complete plays, extended examples from classic and contemporary drama are included throughout. Chapter 1, for example, introduces ritual dramas performed by the Kwakwaka'wakw people of the Pacific Northwest and the Hopi Indians of the Southwestern United States. The chapter also includes an overview of

ancient Greek theatre represented through an exploration of Euripides' *Medea*. Medieval mystery cycles, Elizabethan drama, the Beijing Opera of China, European modernism, and American musicals are among the types of drama represented. The primary focus, however, is still the rich diversity of contemporary American theatre. And because the theatre's eloquence depends on visual imagery as well as on language, *The Creative Spirit* is supported by 200 production shots, design sketches, renderings, and drawings that highlight the exciting work of today's theatre artists.

## An Integrated Approach: Context and Performance

I have tried to show students how to explore the text of a play as a theatre practitioner might, and how this exploration also enriches their experiences as audience members. Each of the book's four complete playscripts is accompanied by a discussion of the playwright's other works, his or her sources, and the historical and cultural context that informs the play's plot, setting, and characters. "In Context" boxes provide timelines related to the play; for example, a list of key dates in the African American experience offers some background for *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. Following each playscript 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, South Coast Repertory, and the Mark Taper Forum, to off Broadway and Broadway playhouses. This integrated approach is most apparent in these "case study" chapters, but I have also discussed cultural context and performance choices in the book's eleven other chapters.

## Voices of Theatre Artists

In writing *The Creative Spirit*, I wanted to bring to the forefront the energy, passion, and commitment of artists working in the theatre today.

I wanted students to hear playwrights, actors, designers, and directors explain, in their own words, the choices and methods they use in their work. To obtain this material, I have interviewed more than ninety theatre artists over the course of preparing the six editions of the book. The playwrights Quiara Alegría Hudes, Craig Higginson, and Wakako Yamauchi; directors Marc Masterson, Malcolm Purkey, Oskar Eustis, Davis McCallum, Nancy Keystone, Ping Chong, and Tony Taccone; the actors Zabrina Guevara, Armando Riesco, Liza Colón-Zayas, Sean McNall, and Heather Robison; designers Neil Patel, Gerard Howland, Bruno Louchouart, Anne Militello, and John Crawford, and choreographer Shen Wei are among the commentators on plays and productions discussed in the text.

## Supporting Pedagogical Features

Integrated throughout the book are structured assignments that focus on critical thinking, writing, and creative approaches to advance the students' understanding of theatre and to help students develop essential skills applicable in many areas of their education. All chapters include content-specific exercises for discussion, writing, and creative activity. The project chapter at the end of the book provides students with a guided structure for imagining their own productions and engaging creatively with elements of theatre practice. The project also presents the opportunity for historical research. The appendix of guided writing assignments builds on the approaches of the dramaturg and critic introduced in Chapter 14. Writing assignments include reviewing productions, preparing research materials for display, and conducting interviews. Together the assignments throughout the book provide students with the foundation for appreciating the complexities of theatremaking and for being insightful and sophisticated audience members. With the expanded Web site and revised testing materials, *The Creative Spirit* includes all of the resources for a complete course.

## New to the Sixth Edition

- The 2012 Pulitzer Prize winning play, *Water by the Spoonful* by Quiara Alegria Hudes, has been added to Part 4: The Nature of Drama: Structure and Genre. In an entirely new version of Chapter 13, *Water by the Spoonful* introduces students to a young playwright's approach to dramatic structure involving social media as well as thematic concerns related to the struggles of American veterans returning home from the Iraq War. *Water by the Spoonful* is the second play of a trilogy Hudes has written about a young marine, Elliot Ortiz, during and following his tour of combat duty in Iraq. The first play of this trilogy, entitled *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* (2007), examines the related experiences of a son, father, and grandfather, during their times of service in three different American wars: Iraq, Vietnam, and Korea. In *Water by the Spoonful* Elliot Ortiz attempts to move beyond the wounds of the Iraq War and the wounds inflicted by his mother's crack addiction. A new way of defining family is achieved by the expanded group of characters in this second play, some of whom are related to each other and some who connect in cyberspace. A scene from *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* is included in *The Creative Spirit* as part of the introduction to *Water by the Spoonful*, identifying the themes central to the full trilogy and the way the characters are drawn from Hudes' own family. The introduction to *Water by the Spoonful* also includes a consideration of Hudes' background as a composer who draws on classical and jazz music sources for the innovative structures of her plays. Following the complete text of the play is an analysis of the production of *Water by the Spoonful* at Second Stage in New York City in 2013. The casebook study of the production includes commentary from all of the key artists developed specifically for *The Creative Spirit*. Photographs are included throughout the chapter from *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* and *Water by the Spoonful*.
- Chapter 6, The Designers, has been extensively rewritten to focus on the design for a new production of Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* produced at South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa, California under the direction of Marc Masterson in 2012. A group of exceptional designers demonstrate the power of theatrical imagination in interpreting Ruhl's poetic retelling of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. The design work includes sophisticated sound and video scores showcasing the ability of emerging technologies to support and enhance the work of the actors and the other designers. Fourteen photographs and drawings illustrate the specific contributions of the scenic, costume, lighting, and video designs with commentary from the director and all of the designers to explain the development of the design concept and each of their individual responsibilities. Selections from the sound and music design for the production are presented on *The Creative Spirit's* Web site.
- Although the focus of *The Creative Spirit* continues to be on the American theatre, the international coverage has been expanded to include the contribution of theatre to social change in South Africa. Material on South Africa has been integrated into Chapters 2, 5, 7, and 9. The importance of theatre in resisting apartheid is introduced in the discussion of theatre as a mirror of society in Chapter 2. The work of the great South African playwright and director, Athol Fugard, is presented in Chapter 5 as part of the history of directing. Recent plays that explore the changing identity of South Africa post-apartheid are introduced in Chapter 2 and Chapter 7. And the work of the Handspring Puppet Company from Cape Town, South Africa, has been added to Chapter 9, Understanding Style: Theatricalism. The Handspring Puppet Company became known for its brilliant use of visual art, puppets, and dramatic texts that reflect Brecht, expressionism, and absurdism during the 1980s and 1990s. Most recently

Handspring collaborated on one of the most successful current works of popular theatre, *War Horse*. The importance of theatre festivals in sustaining new artistic movements in South Africa and throughout the world is also addressed. A video about emerging young artists and the Grahamstown National Arts Festival in South Africa made specifically for the sixth edition of *The Creative Spirit* is available on the book's Web site.

- Over fifty new color photographs provide coverage of many exciting new plays and productions of classics including *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue, Eurydice, The Glass Menagerie, The Island, Master Harold and the Boys, Mies Julie, Once, The Three Sisters, Uncle Vanya, War Horse, Water by the Spoonful,* and *The York Mystery Cycle* (for the London Olympiad in 2012).
- Chapter 15, The Project, has been revised to focus on students' imagining their own production of *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* or *Water by the Spoonful*. A new play is no longer included in this chapter.

## Supplements

The following supplements are available through a McGraw-Hill sales representative.

- An **Online Learning Center**, located at [www.mhhe.com/creativespirit6e](http://www.mhhe.com/creativespirit6e), offers interviews with theatre practitioners, a slide show, music, video, chapter quizzes, exercises, and more.
- The **Instructor's Manual and Test Bank** offers a variety of resources for instructors, including assignment ideas; chapter summaries; and multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions.

## Acknowledgments

As *The Creative Spirit* enters its sixth edition, I am deeply appreciative of the many people who have contributed to its evolution. A large number of theatre artists have given generously of their time in helping to build the case studies of the

various productions or in contributing additional interview material. The playwrights, actors, directors, and designers whose insightful commentary is found throughout the text have added immeasurably to the book's specificity and vitality. For the sixth edition it was my pleasure to interview a number of remarkable theatre practitioners. For the production analysis of *Water by the Spoonful*, I had illuminating conversations with playwright Quiara Alegría Hudes, director Davis McCallum, scenic designer Neil Patel, and actors Liza Colón-Zayas, Zabrina Guevara, and Armando Riesco. Many thanks as well to Frances White and the Second Stage staff who helped make arrangements in New York. To develop the design material on *Eurydice* produced by South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa, California, I spoke with director Marc Masterson and designers John Crawford, Gerard Howland, Bruno Louchouart, and Anne Militello. Tania Thompson, public relations director at SCR, was an invaluable ally in arranging interviews, background materials, and the beautiful photos to support the discussion of the production. In 2010, I attended the Grahamstown National Arts Festival in South Africa as both a participant and an observer. Gilly Hemphill was wonderful in taking time from her packed schedule to help connect me with a number of prominent South African theatre artists. During the festival I interviewed the artistic director of the Market Theatre, Malcolm Purkey, and the Market's literary manager and dramaturg, Craig Higginson, also a well-known playwright and novelist. I spoke with playwright and director Mandla Mbothwe, playwright and designer Neil Copen, director Libby Allen, and actors Dorothy Ann Gould and Michael Maxwell. Lynette Marais, who was the executive director of the Grahamstown Festival for many years, was most gracious in providing me with her insights into its history and significance. All of the above practitioners were in the midst of their own demanding productions and yet made time to welcome me into their communities and share their thoughtful and inspired perspectives on the nature of theatrical communication. The opportunity to speak with leading and emerging theatre and art practitioners is one of the great joys of my continued work on

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A growing number of people have reviewed the manuscript at different stages of the project. A fundamental goal of mine in writing *The Creative Spirit* has been to partner effectively with theatre teachers to provide the most meaningful experience for our students. The review process helps to make that goal possible. I wish to thank the following reviewers for their invaluable comments and suggestions for the sixth edition:

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Once again, I would like to include a few words about my students. I have been most fortunate in my teaching career to have worked closely with many remarkable students. As I have taught them in acting and dramatic literature classes or directed them in plays, we have had the great joy of making discoveries together, learning from each other, and together reaching an understanding of the value of the theatre in our lives. I salute their talent, their openness, their idealism, and their commitment.

Finally, I acknowledge the support of my family. To my son Daniel Arnold gratitude for our ongoing conversation about the craft of writing. To my husband Mark Prieto my deepest appreciation for his insights into the nature of art over many years and his help in all phases of making this book a reality.



## Author's Note

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B.A. is from Stanford University and she holds M.F.A. and Ph.D. degrees in theatre from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She has directed over forty productions for the theatre, including works by classical and contemporary playwrights, musicals, and opera. Most recently she has directed *Vilna's Got a Golem*, *Jabulile!*, and *Karwuna, You're It*. *Jabulile!* was presented at the 2010 National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa.

# The Nature of Theatre

For thousands of years, in almost all cultures, the theatre has been an essential part of human expression. In his book *The Rainbow of Desire*, the Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal calls theatre the first human invention because it is through theatre that we step back from ourselves to observe and interpret our own behavior. Through the theatre, we reflect on our experiences and we imagine new possibilities. Making theatre is a way of understanding the world around us and our place in it. We also find this process of projecting ourselves into strange or familiar circumstances immensely entertaining.



In the theatre, the **playwright** and the **actor** together present stories in the form of action. The stage action invites audience members to enter a created, fictional world. The energy of the actors and the energy of the audience fuse to charge the theatre event with an intensity that carries the performance beyond ordinary existence into a magical realm of the human spirit. Into theatre performances we pour our dreams, our myths and stories, our struggles and fears. The conflicts that divide us and the laughter that makes us whole take their place on the stage. We make a journey through space and time that is limited only by our imagination.

Before the electronic age, the theatre provided much or all of a community's dramatic entertainment. Today, drama takes place on small and large screens and over the airwaves as well as in the theatre. But although it has much in common with its electronic relatives, the theatre is distinguished by the very fact that it is a live event dependent on the presence of actor and audience in the same space. The live actor-audience relationship offers countless possibilities for envisioning human experience.

This book presents a study of contemporary American plays and productions as a way of understanding the theatre in our own time. To lay a foundation for this approach, we begin by examining the nature of performance and the way performance responds to deep human needs. We look at the impulse to perform that draws actors onto the stage. We then consider the power of the theatre in society. Just as performance exerts a strong pull on individuals, the theatre generates a forceful presence in the life of a community. By introducing some of the great theatre traditions worldwide, we begin a discussion of the many forms that theatre may take and the complex relationship between theatre and society.



# The Impulse to Perform: Origins

As dusk falls, the people gather in the ceremonial house for the Winter Dance. All the members of the community are present, from the oldest to the youngest, as well as honored guests who have arrived by boat to the island village located on a remote waterway. A fire burns in the center of the large dark lodge. Beyond the blazing logs stands a screen painted with images of sea animals, whales and otters and eagles, flickering in the firelight. The screen represents the house of the chief of the undersea kingdom.

A loud, commanding whistle sounds, filling the lodge with its notes and announcing the presence of supernatural forces. A rustling is heard from behind the screen and then a large whale swims into view. Swooping and spouting, the whale glides around the fire, bringing with it the authority of the natural world and an ancient story told many times by the community elders about their ancestor, Born-to-Be-Head-of-the-World. A young man from this village was drawn beneath the sea, where he performed feats of heroism in the undersea kingdom. When he returned, he possessed the knowledge and power of the sea.

A dancer wears the enormous whale mask that recalls one of the forms in which Born-to-Be-Head-of-the-World appeared. The mask is animated by this actor through the movement of his own body and the moving parts of the mask, which the master carver has fashioned for this fantastic creature and which the dancer controls by manipulating strings. The enormous, ferocious mouth drops open and snaps shut. The double tail with flukes, curving forward and back, can be lowered to suggest the motion of a diving whale. An eagle rides on the whale's back and even his wings flap as the whale swims on. Paint and mica make the eyes glow in the firelight and glisten as if they carry drops of water from the sea.



The whale mask shown here was collected by the anthropologist George Hunt in 1901 and would have been used to enact the story of Born-to-Be-Head-of-the-World during the nineteenth century in Hopetown, British Columbia. Made from wood, hide, and rope, this heavy piece, measuring about 7½ feet long and 2½ feet wide, would have required skill and practice to maneuver effectively. This mask is in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.



The dancer stops and a further pull of the strings causes the entire face of the whale to give way and open to reveal another presence inside, a large bullhead fish (a sculpin), carved and painted to be both fish and man. This transforming mask and the performance itself are nothing less than a display of the supernatural powers of this community's ancestor, Born-to-Be-Head-of-the-World.<sup>1</sup>

This whale performance is part of the **potlatch** ceremonies of the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast of the United States and the Southwest Coast of Canada, and dates from the nineteenth century and perhaps earlier. It is one example of the many ways storytelling and performance function in almost all human societies. Storytelling is central to the formation of human culture. Myth and metaphor are fundamental, imaginative constructs that we employ to distill human experience. But it is not enough for us to tell our stories through words alone. We are compelled to act them out, to perform our understanding of human behavior and the forces that we believe govern our world. This impulse to perform is an essential part of human nature that appears in our daily interactions as well as in the dramas we put on the stage and on film.

## Performance and Human Behavior

If we step back from organized dramas to examine individual behavior, we see that the impulse

to perform is part of the way we survive. We adapt to changes in our circumstances by making adjustments in the identity we present to other people. We seek to transform ourselves or to emphasize a compelling characteristic, such as courage or humility, that will carry us safely through danger. The human mind is elastic and imaginative in the construction of identity. Part of growing up depends on observing successful role models and experimenting with identities that make us feel comfortable in the face of changing social pressures or demands. Identity is fluid rather than fixed; we may be one person with our families and quite a different person at work or in public situations. Peer pressure or social conditioning can cause people to adopt various sets of behaviors that make them a recognizable part of a group.

Sometimes we feel that we cannot know certain people until we can break through the masks that they wear to protect themselves or, perhaps, to take us in. Consider on one hand the politician who puts on a different face for every new situation or constituency. We may even doubt that such a person has a core identity at all. On the other hand, we may believe that we cannot really know someone until we



The mask shown in these photographs represents the continuation of the ceremonial traditions of the Kwakwaka'wakw people in the present day. The artist George Hunt Jr. has resumed the carving practices that were almost lost when the cultural practices of Native peoples were suppressed. Today Hunt Jr. makes masks and costumes for the potlatch ritual, which is observed by coastal Native peoples of Southwestern Canada and Northwestern United States. At its height in the nineteenth century, the potlatch ceremony lasted for days. It was a major social occasion involving the immediate community and many invited guests, and was also an essential means of expressing changes in the social order. Rites of passage for the young, marriages, and mourning cycles were all observed through the potlatch. Dramatic performances were a highlight of these gatherings and included elaborately carved masks, spectacular costumes, and astonishing special effects. The transformation mask in these photographs changes from a wolf, in the first image, to a killer whale, in the second, when the performer pulls on strings threaded through both sides of the wolf's long face.

recognize that he or she is made up of different identities. Certainly we understand the great release in letting go of certain “expectations” of behavior and trying out a role that is “nothing like us.” In the theatre, actors build on this fundamental human impulse to perform in order to describe and interpret human existence for an audience. As audience members, we take great pleasure in watching the work of actors who have made an art out of an impulse that is part of human nature.

## Performance and Role Playing

We begin our study of the theatre by exploring the place of performance in human behavior. What human needs are met through performance? What are the psychological, social, and cultural conditions that motivate performance? Understanding the functions of performance in our lives provides a basis for approaching the professional performance of the actor, whose work is the essence of the theatre.

These children, living in Iraq, use dramatic play to imitate and interpret the violence that governs their lives.

If we observe children at play, we see that many of them pretend to be the adults who are prominent in their lives. Children often start taking roles by “playing house” or “playing school”—pretending to be parents or teachers. Children living in war zones play out the violence that surrounds them at a very early age. Certainly children’s imitation of the behavior they observe is a way of learning about or preparing themselves for roles they expect to assume. But there is more to dramatic play than social conditioning.

Imagine a four-year-old boy going out with his mother. Before leaving the house he insists on putting on his cape and strapping on his sword. Whether he sees himself as Superman, Batman, Spiderman, or the latest incarnation of a superhero, his impersonation is a serious business. At four, he is old enough to know that the world can be a threatening place. He is aware that he is physically small and lacks the skills of older children or adults that would give him more control in a dangerous and confusing environment. So he puts on the costume or “signs” of what he recognizes as power. And through wearing the cape and bearing the sword, he takes on a role that enables him to share in the power of his hero.

We recognize in this small boy’s actions a pattern of behavior that occurs in a variety of situations and at different ages. Life is difficult and full of obstacles. In certain situations, we enact roles; we make adjustments in the way we present ourselves, particularly in ways that make us feel more powerful. The small child is not concerned about being obvious as he carts around his sword. He wants threatening forces, whether real or imaginary, to be clear about his new identity. As adults we try to be more subtle as we put on the clothes and accessories of power, assume certain postures,



and alter our language or vocal intonation. The actor Bill Irwin, whose work is discussed in Chapter 4, says he approaches many of his characterizations by asking himself two questions: (1) “What am I afraid of right now?” (2) “What are all the mechanisms that I’m putting into play to show that I’m not really afraid of that?”<sup>2</sup>

## Community Performance

The story of the little boy and his superhero battle gear is one of many examples of individual role playing. But humans also engage in forms of collective dramatic expression that are fundamental to the community. Through **dramatic rituals** we reinforce community values and act out community stories that preserve a way of life. The term *ritual* refers to a ceremonial observation that is repeated in a specified way in order to confer certain benefits on the participants. Rituals are highly symbolic events with densely coded meanings. There are sacred rituals, and there are distinctly secular rituals. Indeed, some of the richest forms of ritual dramatic expression take place as part of religious observances such as the enactment of the birth of Jesus in the Christian community or the observation of the seder meal at Passover in the Jewish community. The Kwakwaka’wakw whale performance at the beginning of the chapter is part of a traditional religious ritual.



*La Carpa del Ausente*, the 2007 production for Día de los Muertos at the Miracle Theatre in Portland, Oregon, is shown in this photo. Directed by Philip Cuomo, the production combined vaudeville, acrobatics, and political satire enacted by various skeletal characters. The actors are Daniel Moreno, Carlos Alexis Cruz, Matt Haynes, and Jorge Arredondo.

A ritual that is becoming more prevalent in the United States takes place in communities with a Hispanic heritage. *El día de los muertos*, or the Day of the Dead, is observed at the beginning of November as a way of remembering family members who have died and celebrating their lives. The beliefs that underlie the Day of the Dead come first from Aztec worship and embrace a view in which life and death are seen as part of a continuum. Death is accepted rather than abhorred or denied. By tending to family graves and bringing to the cemetery the food and drink enjoyed by those who have died, “the way is prepared for the spirits to return.” Far from being a morbid or sad occasion, the day is filled with humor, music, processions, food, and performances. At this time, comic figures of skeletons appear who are engaged in all the activities of life, bright orange marigolds decorate cemeteries, and special breads take over bakeries.

Olga Sanchez is the artistic director of the Miracle Theatre in Portland, Oregon. Each year this theatre celebrates the Day of the Dead with a musical festival or a play that builds on the more personal observations of families. Sanchez sees the Day of the Dead as a “chance to revisit with your ancestors and acknowledge the people who came before us, to hear of their stories, their sacrifices,

and their values.” The connections to the past help to form more meaningful “personal and community identity.”<sup>3</sup>

Weddings and graduations exemplify two types of well-known community rituals. In a traditional wedding, a sacred ritual, the bride, the groom, and the attendants wear elaborate and highly ceremonial clothes, and the couple enact their vows according to the custom of their religious faith. Many believe that such a ceremony strengthens the marriage and subsequently the community, whose members participate as witnesses and join in the celebration; they see the wedding ceremony as essential to the stability of the community. Although rituals tend to change slowly because their form needs to be fixed to be effective, they can also be somewhat flexible. One element of the wedding ritual currently undergoing significant change is giving away the bride. At one time this gesture symbolized shifting authority over a woman from her father to her husband. Today other family members or friends may “give the bride away,” or the couple may choose to eliminate this custom altogether.

The secular ritual of the high school graduation is of great significance to towns and cities across the United States. The graduation ceremony is a formal rite of passage for the community’s young people, a way for them to be accepted into adulthood. Robes and caps are worn; solemn music is played; the graduates accept their diplomas and congratulations and best wishes for the



In this late nineteenth-century photograph, a kachina ritual observation takes place in the plaza of Walpi Village. Walpi Village, on the First Mesa in Arizona, was settled in the ninth century and is the oldest continuously occupied community in the United States. It is striking to compare the dates relating to the development of medieval European theatre presented later in the chapter with the time frame in which performance rituals were evolving on the North American continent. This photo shows only a modest number of participants; other ceremonies could involve many more community members.

future from their community leaders. Most students play their parts with an unusual amount of dignity. To complement the formality of the actual graduation ceremony, many graduating classes develop their own more ecstatic, freer ritual festivities to mark the significance of this event.

Other secular rituals include sporting events, particularly college and professional football games. Sports fans wear costumes and makeup as part of their identification with the drama enacted on the playing field. Beauty pageants, too, are community rituals, as are parades, such as the gay-pride parades that occur in a number of communities and involve many dramatic elements of costume and impersonation.

Community rituals bind community members together by reinforcing their common history and shared goals. They help shape the yearly calendar and the many rites of passage in the human life cycle. Because the United States is made up of many religious faiths and cultural groups, our national rituals tend to be secular, which may be one reason sports have become so important to us. Nonetheless, some community rituals in the United States are a form of worship that interpret religious history or values and also allow for intense identification with the most sacred beliefs of the community. For some communities, dramatic religious rituals are central to community life and govern a great deal of community activity

throughout the year. It is from such entrenched dramatic rituals that many of the major dramatic traditions worldwide have evolved.

We turn to the dramatic rituals of a small Native American community, the Hopi, as a source for our further examination of the impulse to perform. This community has been chosen for two primary reasons: the richness of its ceremonial performances and the fact that its rituals—as well as other Native American ceremonial dramas—represent one of the earliest dramatic forms indigenous to our continent.

## Ritual Performance Among the Hopi

In an elaborate sequence of dramatic ceremonies, the Hopi Indians of the southwestern United States represent the *kachinas*, whom they view as their spiritual guardians. According to Dorothy K. Washburn, “Kachinas are the messengers and intermediaries between men and gods.”<sup>4</sup> The concept of the kachina is associated with the clouds from which rain falls and with the dead, whom the Hopi believe become part of the clouds and return to earth as rain. The Hopi believe that the intervention of the kachinas will bring rain to the arid landscape of the high desert and ensure the success of their crops.

With their brilliant costumes and **masks** incorporating animal and plant images, the ceremonial dramas make the kachina spirits visible to the Hopi community. Because most elements of the costumes and masks have a symbolic meaning, the Hopi figuratively “wear their world” when they are in their ceremonial dress.<sup>5</sup> For example, different colors represent the different geographic and spiritual directions and the weather and resources represented by those directions. Tortoiseshell rattles refer to the water of the ponds and springs where the tortoises live. Eagle and turkey feathers become the flight of prayers.

## Kachina Performances

The kachina ceremonies are central to the Hopi worldview and may have originated as early as



The performance of the kachina cycle binds the Hopi community together through the preservation of a belief system and a way of life. Kachina dolls like the one shown here are carved by Hopi artists as a sacred representation of the kachina ritual. The preferred Hopi word for kachina is *katsina* and, in the plural form, *katsinam*.

the twelfth or thirteenth century. There are more than 300 different kachinas, and kachina rituals are spread over much of the year. From December to July a great epic cycle of kachina performances involves all members of the community in varying responsibilities for the ongoing ritual drama. In fact, the Hopi villages are built around the plazas in which the ceremonial dances take place. The kachina performances are at the center of the community physically as well as spiritually and socially.

*Soyal*, the first observation of the **kachina cycle**, occurs at the winter solstice, in December,

to break the darkness and prepare for the new year. *Niman*, the last ceremony, anticipating a successful harvest, occurs in July. Following this final Home Dance, the kachinas are believed to return to the San Francisco Mountains west of the Hopi villages, where they remain until they rejoin the Hopi at the winter solstice. Between the initiation of the cycle in December and the conclusion in July, the kachinas perform a series of ceremonies in which seeds are planted, children are initiated, community members are taught discipline, and, finally, crops are harvested. Rain, fertility, and maintaining social order are the underlying goals of all kachina activity. The dramatic ritual is a highly complex way of exerting control over the environment—that is, the physical, social, and spiritual world.

The kachina ceremonies are frequently serious and sometimes even frightening. But humor is also an essential part of the ritual; laughter is understood as basic to human survival. Clowns appear among the kachinas, and they offer a critique of negative behavior through **parody** by performing outrageous acts that would be unacceptable outside the ritual observation.

## The Hopi Performer

The Hopi man who takes on the persona of a kachina is transformed (women do not participate as performers). He transcends his own being and becomes the kachina spirit that he embodies. He takes on the presence and the power of the kachina and therefore can act for the kachina in the ceremonies. Through the ritual dance, a transaction takes place between the human and the supernatural, a merging of the two levels of existence.

Like personal performance, community performance is very much tied to the quest for power. But in sacred community performance in particular, performers become separated from their status as mere mortal beings. They become elevated. By the nature of their special religious knowledge, their enactment of the ceremony, and their performance skills, they become “magicians” who act on behalf of the other members of the community.

## Society and Aesthetic Expression

Throughout the world the impulse to perform, to interpret human existence through the presentation of characters on a stage, has evolved into an astonishing variety of theatre traditions. Just as the human capacity for speech has produced many languages, so the impulse to perform has found expression in many distinct forms. In Indonesia shadow puppets play out complicated stories of kings and battles; in



Traditional theatre throughout the East uses various forms of dance as the foundation for storytelling and dramatic expression. The Odissi style of classical dance from eastern India shown here uses elaborate symbolic costumes as well as makeup and ornaments to complement the skills of the dancer, which take many years of training to master. Isa Prieto is a student working to learn a revived form of this temple dance that has been handed down for as long as 2,000 years.