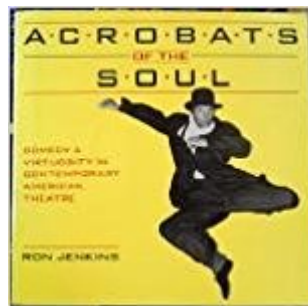




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Acrobats Of The Soul: Comedy & Virtuosity In Contemporary American Theatre



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Customer Reviews

Ron Jenkins holds a doctorate from Harvard and a masters in buffoonery from the Ringling Brothers Clown College. His translations of Dario Fo and Hoshua Sobol have been performed at theatres around the country. He is the author of Dario Fo and Franca Rame: Artful Laughter and is the chair and artistic director of the theatre department at Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

Ron Jenkins has written a fine book. It's wonderful, provocative title almost fulfills the promise it makes. It is beautifully illustrated. Jenkins selects an interesting collection of comic artists around which to explore his subject. Unfortunately the book suffers from one major flaw that I personally cannot get around. Jenkins is an academic - and infuses his book with the kind of politically correct, leftist politics that stifle the American academy in the late 20th century. Jenkins makes well the point that fine clowning is subversive; attacking the oppressive elements of everyday life in America. But the book was written in 1988. It was still possible then to adhere to the kind of antiestablishmentarianism that characterized the American cultural revolution of the late 1960s; left-wing, collectivist, and crypto-racist. Today however, the truly revolutionary, antiestablishment forces in America come from the Right; and are demonized to the point that many of Jenkins' premises no longer make sense. Jenkins' descriptions of Spalding Gray's comedic political commentary about Viet Nam are irrelevant in modern-day America when war-mongering is of the Left. Somehow you just know that if the government today allowed legitimate protest against its war-mongering in the Middle East and the former Yugoslavia that Jenkins would follow the party line

and find such commentary neither funny, nor radical - but racist, fascist and terroristic - so completely co-opted is the academy of which Jenkins is an inextricable part. Still I found delightful his chapters on Bill Irvin, Penn and Teller, and Le Cirque Du Soleil. Jenkins left me with a burning desire to see Penn and Teller's show. I would like to see Bill Irvin today, for I am sure that he has grown far beyond the naive politics that so enraptured Jenkins a decade ago. And Cirque Du Soleil is a fast-paced have set the standard for modern clowning. Despite my reservations, I recommend this book for those interested in any part of modern theater. The subject matter is interesting, the photographs are marvelous, and Jenkin's enthusiasm is quite infectious.

Perhaps before you write a review that publicly slanders the author and his subject, I think it best that one should back up their comment with proper research. In this case, A.L. Bell quoted a disturbing comment printed in the New York Times that depicted Dario Fo as a heartless human being. Before you wrote your misinformed review you may have discovered that there was a follow up to the article stating that Fo was mistranslated. The correct translation of Fo's comments which were made in the context of denouncing the tragedy as "a criminal act" from which speculators were attempting to earn profit is as follows: "The great speculators wallow in an economy that every year kills tens of millions of people with poverty, so what is it TO THEM that 20,000 are dead in New York?" Fo's intention was to call attention to the callousness of those who are attempting to profit from the tragedy. He was in no way diminishing the enormity of the catastrophe and the profound sadness and loss it has brought to so many people. So read the book, read Fo's plays, attend theatres that produce them, and don't be quick to judge! Isn't that one of the biggest lessons we should have learned from all of this??

Jenkins is best known as the translator and friend of Dario Fo and Franca Rame, the Italian writer and actress who released a statement containing the following sentence immediately after the Sept. 11 WTC attacks, when the ruins were still smoldering and the ashes of the dead were still burning the eyes of the residents of New York: "The great speculators wallow in an economy that every year kills tens of millions of people with poverty -- so what is 20,000 dead in New York?" There is a huge difference between being a Communist, and vigorously opposing U.S. foreign policy, and thinking that the incineration of 20,000 people (or, as it turned out, 6,500) is inconsequential. How could you ever, ever pay for a book and send royalties to someone who supports such heartless people?

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