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HARD TRAVEL: AMERICAN ENCOUNTERS WITH THE MODERN RUSSIAN THEATRE

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In September 1917, Oliver M. Sayler, dramatic editor for the *Indianapolis News*, boarded a ship bound for Russia via the Pacific Ocean, intent on collecting a firsthand account of the Russian theatre before "the pressure of revolution should bear too harshly upon it."[1] After a brief layover in Japan and a rough train ride through Siberia, he arrived in Moscow in the midst of the Bolshevik revolution armed with only a loaf of rye bread, a mediocre Russian-English pocket dictionary, and a highly valuable American passport. Sayler entered the turbulent Russian city one week prior to the Provisional Government's surrender to the Bolsheviks and witnessed for six months the chaos and danger of a nation in transition while stubbornly amassing records of theatrical activity in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Sayler ultimately published his experiences of the theatre in *The Russian Theatre Under the Revolution* (1920) and his experiences of Russia during the revolution in *Russia Red or White* (1919), though articles appearing in the books first appeared in the *North American Review,* the *New Republic,* the *Saturday Evening Post,* the *Indianapolis News,* the *Boston Evening Transcript,* and *Vanity Fair.* Thus, his views on the revolution, the theatre, and the Russian people reached a broad and interested American readership. His publications helped establish the terms for understanding Russia, its people, and its art. Both Sayler's trip and his work are steeped in the discourses of modernism, and particularly the language of travel, which emphasized a sense of displacement, cultural contrast, and nostalgia for an older, more aesthetic world in the midst of decay.

Like Sayler, Hallie Flanagan traveled to Russia to see for herself the state of Russian theatre, though her trip came eleven years after the Revolution. Both she and Sayler reported their personal accounts with authority to their American audiences and greatly influenced the way Americans came to appreciate the Russian theatre and even began to approach theatrical production. Their texts, of course, worked within a complex network of intertextuality that included popular images of Russians pre- and post-revolution, narratives of modernity and modernism, current events played out in the press, modes of advertising, performances of Russian artists on tour, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian literature. Significantly, their writing reveals a reliance on the strategies of travel narratives, an extremely popular genre in the 1920s and 1930s, which enabled them to consider their own American identities as they sought to define the Russians they encountered, and to understand the new Russia in relation to the old. As with travel writing, their works are as preoccupied with their own homeland as they are with Russia and its theatre. An exploration of the works of Flanagan and Sayler reveals some of the ways Americans became familiar with the Russian theatre in relation to the modernist principles regulating cultural exchange.

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[1] Oliver M. Sayler, *Russia White or Red* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1919), ix.

American interest in Russian theatre occurred long before the famed Moscow Art Theatre tour in 1923 and escalated in the last half of the 1920s. Although a couple of Russian performers had toured American in the early 1900s, it was Gordon Craig who sparked widespread American interest in Russian performance with an article on the Moscow Art Theatre in his magazine, *The Mask* in 1909.[2] The American tours of Anna Pavlova, beginning in 1910, and the vast publicity surrounding them helped make Russian performance synonymous with "high art." Diaghilev's Ballet Russe increased interest in Russian performance and theatrical design among the elite during its United States tours in 1916-1917. In 1919, Michel Fokine earned the highest salary of any choreographer when he staged the dances for the Broadway spectacle *Aphrodite*, a testament to the popularity of the Russian artist. The Russian-émigré and American theatrical impresario, Morris Gest, backed by the millionaire financier Otto Kahn, contributed to the developing interest in Russian theatre when he sponsored the wildly popular tours of Balieff's Chauve-Souris cabaret theatre beginning in 1922 and extending into the early 1930s. The two men also enabled the important tours of the Moscow Art Theatre in 1923 and 1924 and the Moscow Art Theatre Music Studio in 1925. The 1926 performances of the Habima, the Hebrew theatre from Moscow, also garnered the attention of American theatre artists and audiences, especially those interested in theatrical experimentation. All of these performances helped to generate an increasing interest in the Russian theatre, as even a quick glance through *Theatre Arts* magazine during these years will attest. These tours and the excessive publicity surrounding them helped to define Russia for Americans and they served as important background for American theatre scholars, critics, and artists writing about the Russian theatre during the 1920s and 1930s. Both Sayler and Flanagan reference these tours in their books on the Russian theatre.

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[2] See Laurence Senelick, "The American Tour of Orlenev and Nazimova, 1905-1906" in *Wandering Stars: Russian Émigré Theatre, 1905-1940*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1992) for a discussion of the early Russian tours.

It is important to point out that by the 1920s the term "Russian" had taken on a variety of complex and often contradictory meanings influenced by Russian-American diplomatic relations, the high rate of Russian emigration to the United States, the 1919 Red Scare, and America's increasing contact with nineteenth-century Russian literature, art, music, and theatre. For example, even as Americans perceived Russians as backward and barbaric, inefficient and dangerous, they portrayed them as highly intellectual, cunning, and deeply spiritual. Immigration officials invented statistics to "prove" that Russians were among the least intelligent foreigners present in America and the least likely to be integrated into American culture, but progressives saw them as artistic and literary geniuses.[3] Numerous Russians found positions as teachers of art, music, and performance when they emigrated to the United States.[4] Certainly, though, due to the government's Red Scare tactics as played out in the popular press with headlines and articles in the *New York Times* screaming that Russians were going to overthrow the United States government and end all religion, the majority of Americans were developing mistrust and fear of Russians, who represented a potential threat to American freedoms and values.

Though there were dozens of articles written about the Russian theatre in the 1920s, there were very few lengthy studies available in English in the first decade after the revolution. Oliver M. Sayler published his first book length study, *Russian Theatre Under the Revolution* in 1920, and expanded it as *The Russian Theatre* in 1922. He also wrote *Inside the Moscow Art Theatre*, published in 1925. The British writer, Huntly Carter, published his *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia* in 1923 and *The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre* in 1928. In 1924, Harvard professor Leo Wiener wrote *The Contemporary Drama of Russia* and in 1928 Hallie Flanagan focused a third of her study, *Shifting Scenes of the Modern European Theatre* on the theatre in Soviet Russia.

In this paper I am interested in looking at the works of Oliver M. Sayler and Hallie Flanagan as they worked specifically to define Russian theatre and Russians in general for Americans in terms of their own American and modernist sensibilities. Unlike Wiener, whose impersonal dramatic criticism largely obscures his national interests, both Flanagan and Sayler foreground themselves as Americans, clearly designate their implied readers as American, and establish an us/them approach to analysis. Additionally, both authors traveled to Russia following the revolution and exploit the narrative strategies of travel texts in defining the Russian as "other" (even as they hoped to dispel some popular images of Russians as portrayed in the press and to encourage cultural exchange between Russians and Americans).

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[3] Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 226.

[4] See the many advertisements in *Theatre Magazine, Dance Magazine,* and *Dance Lover's Magazine* in the 1920s to get a sense of the number of Russians who were teaching acting, dance, and scenic design.

Oliver M. Sayler figures dominantly in the history of American interest and understanding of the Russian theatre and of the Moscow Art Theatre in particular. Huntly Carter, in his 1928 work on the Russian theatre, noted that Sayler "has come to be known as the historian of the Moscow Art Academic Theatre;" however, Carter rightly questions some of Sayler's analysis.[5] Sayler worked as a publicist for Morris Gest for the tours of the Chauve-Souris and the Moscow Art Theatre and his enthusiasm for the Moscow Art Theatre and Stanislavsky, in particular, often distorts his work. As part of the publicity for these ventures, Sayler had several articles published, revised, and re-issued in his book of the Russian theatre under the revolution, and then wrote *Inside the Moscow Art Theatre.* His later books set out to educate Americans about Russian theatre in part to attract them to performances. In these works, Sayler emphasizes the "artistic spirit of the Russian," attempts to alleviate American suspicions of the touring artists by de-politicizing them, compares and contrasts the "natures" of Russians and Americans, and insists that there is great value in cultural exchange between artists of the two nations.

In his work, *The Russian Theatre* (an expansion of *Russian Theatre Under the Revolution*), Sayler is chiefly interested in raising American interest in Russian theatre by revealing the vitality of Russian performance by emphasizing the continuity of pre-revolutionary impulses. Though he establishes the revolution as a framework for his study, partly to heighten the sense of danger that his research involved, it is little more than a painted backdrop (sometimes a nuisance) to the story of the "spirit of Russian art" and its masters.[6] He bases most of his discussions and observations primarily on his personal meetings with Russian artists, visits to theatres, and the sometimes (he admits) sketchy production histories he collected during the several months he spent in Russia in late 1917 and early 1918.[7] Ultimately, as his new chapter, "The Russian Theatre in America," might suggest, his work aims to encourage cultural exchange between the artists of both nations (and help sell tickets to the Moscow Art Theatre production). Throughout the book and in his conclusion, Sayler argues that Americans have much to learn from "these more mature but still fresh and unspoiled preceptors."[8] As Sayler hoped, this work served as an important early tutorial for Americans who wanted to understand and model their work on the theatre of the Russians.

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[5] Huntly Carter, *The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre, 1917-1928* (New York: Brentano's, 1929), 306.

[6] This is partly due to his decision to write a separate account of the revolution in *Russia White or Red.*

In *The Russian Theatre*, Sayler adopts the strategies of travel writing to describe the theatre he experienced in Russia. For example, Sayler speaks with a distinctively American narrative voice, expresses a romantic nostalgia for old Russia, continuously makes comparisons between home and abroad, relegates the Russian people to a time other than his own, and describes them with lists of features. He also suggests that his travels are dangerous and presents himself, from time to time, as *one of them*. These are some of the characteristic features of travel writing as analyzed by Mary Suzanne Schriber. In her work, she argues that the observations of other lands and other people served the construction of American identity by reference to the other.[9] Sayler's book works in a similar manner as he defines the Russian theatre and Russians in general in terms of his American identity.

Sayler speaks with a distinctly American narrative voice throughout *The Russian Theatre*. In the preface, he tells his readers that he hopes this book will help to establish permanent contact between "our own theatre and the Russian."[10] In chapter one, as he establishes that he went to the theatre as often as possible for his research, he explains that he bought his tickets to the Art Theatre "on Thanksgiving Day." Also in chapter one, he interjects, "I must be very American, indeed," with little purpose other than to establish the fact that he is in a world quite unlike his own.[11] He re-establishes this narrative voice at the beginning of nearly every chapter and at times within the chapters, though his voice shifts to that of the objective critic as he begins to detail the plays on stage.

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[7] Sayler, *The Russian Theatre* (New York: Brentano's, 1922), 9 and 263.

[8] Ibid., 329.

[9] Mary Suzanne Schriber, *Writing Home: American Women Abroad, 1930-1920* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 21.

[10] Sayler, *The Russian Theatre*, x.

[11] Ibid., 4.

Sayler continues to apply the strategies of travel writing by establishing early on and repeatedly reminding his readers that his research was dangerous. In this way, Sayler becomes heroic in his efforts to chronicle the Russian theatre, like the adventurers and travel writers before him. Chapter one begins:

> It wasn't a promising prospect for a winter of calm consideration of the Russian theatre, as I sat one morning in November, 1917, in the Yaroslavl station. . . . Down by the Kremlin the big guns had been booming ever since my journey across Siberia had come to an end.[12]

Two pages later, he writes, "During a bloody week of violent civil strife and another week of nervous uncertainty . . . , the prospect of studying Russian theatre was dark enough." He adds that he was advised to leave as the embassies were doing, but he refused, enlisting Meyerhold and others who "promised to keep [him] in hiding for two years if necessary, in case the Germans should come."[13] His tactic of explaining his dangerous situation serves to heighten the sense of his heroism, but it also points out to his readers that he is out of place. The danger of Russia constantly reminds him of home, where he is safe to go to the theatre, mediocre as it may be.

Over the course of *The Russian Theatre*, as Sayler works to assuage American fears of Russians by minimizing, and sometimes excluding altogether, notions of a relationship between Russian political and artistic life, he reinforces pre-revolutionary, non-threatening images of Russians by nonchalantly listing their features in various anecdotes and descriptions. After piecing together scattered references regarding Russian nature, Sayler's American readers are reminded that Russians are "dilatory" (like the Mexicans, he suggests), crude and rough, dramatic, gloomy, slow-moving, self-abasing, naïve, gentle, and brilliantly creative.[14] Even his description of Stanislavsky relies on assumptions about typical Russian behavior. Sayler says that Stanislavsky is "indeed Russian in the gentleness and simplicity of his ways, in the beauty of spirit which inheres alike in the artist and the man."[15] Sayler also attributes what he perceives as Stanislavsky's lack of confidence and authority, as well as his inability to speak English or French fluently, to his Russian nationality, suggesting that Russians were not very worldly. "Transplant him, as you could a man of the world, and he would perish."[16] However, he calls Stanislavsky "thoroughly un-Russian" in "his capacity for work" and "his grasp of detail."[17] (And here, of course, Sayler means that Stanislavsky resembles an American in this sense.) Sayler's depiction of characteristic Russian behavior enables him to alleviate American fear of the Russians while establishing them as quite unlike, though compatible with, Americans.

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[12] Ibid., 1.

[13] Ibid., 10.

[14] Ibid., 9.

Sayler's views of Russians in contrast to Americans is stated directly in the first chapters of *Inside the Moscow Art Theatre,* which he wrote after a second visit to Moscow following the company's US tours. Like *The Russian Theatre,* the later work explores Russian theatre in relation to American theatre and culture and serves to identify specific American traits through contrast with the Russian. Sayler argues that both the Russian artists and American audiences benefited from the cultural exchange provided by those tours. He claims unabashedly that the Moscow Art Theatre became more orderly, efficient, speedy, and adaptable following its visit to the United States.[18] He argues relentlessly that, "until these pampered and privileged Russians visited us, . . . they resented change," and that they learned the value of work from the Americans.[19] He writes that the Russians especially took to heart the American slogans, "Do it now," "Everything is possible," "I'll try anything once," and "time is money."[20] By comparison, the Americans, hardworking and efficient, though "superficial, impatient and spoilt," learned patience and the value of beauty and art from the Russians.[21] As in *The Russian Theatre,* Sayler's 1925 book points out the differences between the two cultures in order to insist on the benefits of cultural exchange. Obviously, in Sayler's mind, the Americans could use an aesthetic educa-

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[15] Ibid., 15.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Sayler, *Inside the Moscow Art Theatre* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1925), 3.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Sayler, *The Russian Theatre,* 4

[21] Ibid.

tion while the Russians needed a lesson in the values of modern American capitalism.

While constituting himself as an outsider and adventurer in *The Russian Theatre*, Sayler sometimes represents himself as "one of them." For example, at one point he writes, "Along with other hundreds in that crowded playhouse, my body was torn with hunger and my soul flayed with sickness and pity and despair. Yet there we sat, willingly, eagerly, plunging the knife of spiritual torture still deeper in the wound."[22] By becoming one of them, (one of those tortured Russian souls who is quite at home with despair), Sayler reveals to his readers that he has gone beyond mere tourism to become an insider and thereby can be viewed as an authority on his subject. As a member of a Russian audience, he has been enabled to feel more deeply than most Americans ever do. Such an experience, he suggests implicitly throughout the work, would grant those childish Americans a moment of spiritual and aesthetic maturity.

Ultimately, Sayler provided the most comprehensive and detailed account of the Russian theatre available to Americans at the time. In doing so, he encouraged pre-revolutionary stereotypes of Russians and constructed an American identity in contrast to those stereotypes. However, Sayler also suggested similarities between Russians and Americans in order to encourage cultural exchange. Sayler asserted that it was because the people of both nations were capable of great sensitivity and deep emotion that they were able to transcend cultural barriers to share the best traits of their souls.[23] In his books and publicity for Russian performance in the United States, Sayler insisted that it was through art that the American and Russian people could achieve greater understanding of the other. In a souvenir program for both the Chauve-Souris and the Moscow Art Theatre entitled, "The Russian Players in America," Sayler declared that "the peaceful invasion" of these companies "had done more to reveal to each other the Russian and the American people, to establish their essential kinship and common humanity, than all the guns of generals and deception of diplomats."[24] His work certainly did a great deal to establish relationships between Russians and Americans by generating American interest in Russian performance while helping to set the terms for the discussion of Russian art and performance in America.

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[22] Ibid., 7.

[23] Ibid., 4.

[24] Sayler, "The Russian Players in America," Souvenir program (New York: Bernhardt Wall, 1923).

Sayler's *The Russian Theatre* and Hallie Flanagan's *Shifting Scenes* operate in very similar ways, as they work to create American interest in Russian theatre, as they explore Americanness even as they work to define Russianness, and as they borrow the strategies of travel writing. Flanagan's book works more like a travel text than Sayler's and could actually be called a travel narrative. It covers her impressions of the theatres across Europe and, as a log of her Guggenheim-sponsored journey, features many more aspects of travel itself. Flanagan discusses the variety of vehicles, the geography, smells and tastes, architecture, and history of the places she visits; she regularly references the literature of the culture; and she locks the portrayals of the many people she meets into distinct events (much more frequently than Sayler). All of these elements of travel capture Flanagan's attention as she writes about the theatre in Russia. Her primary goal is to reveal the vitality of Russian performance in response to (rather than in spite of) the Revolution, so the world outside the walls of the theatre figures more prominently in her text than in Sayler's.

An interesting feature of Flanagan's work, which is consistent with women's travel writing, is her humble apology. In the preface, she calls her work a "dramatic diary" in which she allows the "actors" speak for themselves.[25] Those actors are listed as "Dramatis Personae" in the first pages of her book and include Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Gordon Craig, and other important European theatre artists and theorists. "My part," she writes, "has been merely to set the stage and now and then speak a few lines for the chorus."[26] As Sidonie Smith notes women travel writers often muted the narrative "I" to "avoid the impropriety of self-preoccupation and self-promotion."[27] Flanagan's apology decenters her from her narrative by making others the heroes of her narrative, quite in contrast to Sayler, who inserts himself heroically into his. Throughout the work, Flanagan remains self-effacing and without heroism though her first-hand accounts establish her authority on her subject.

Following her apology, Flanagan composes her fairly brief and eventful impressions of the dominant figures in theatre across Europe before she arrives in Russia, where she lingers for an extended stay. Flanagan sets out to see for herself what part theatre plays in the new order, and her discussion of the theatre in Soviet Russia begins with a rebuttal of the mass of information circulating outside Russia about what was happening inside Russia.[28] She writes,

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[25] Hallie Flanagan, *Shifting Scenes of the Modern European Theatre* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1928), iii-iv.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Sidonie Smith, *Moving Lives: Twentieth Century Women's Travel Writing* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 18.

> I was told, among other things, that it was useless to go in at all because I would be allowed to see only what "They" wanted me to see; that I would be under espionage, day and night; . . . that I should be led to think that everyone in Russia was in favor of the Soviet, . . . that it would be impossible for me to talk with anyone in English, German, or French, because all the people who formerly spoke these languages had been exiled, shot, or placed under terror; . . . that the only people one met in Russia to-day were ignorant and loutish peasants; that all churches in Russia were either demolished or closed by order of the Soviet; that streets were so unsafe that a woman could not walk about alone; . . . that it was useless to go to Russia to study the theatre, since the drama, together with all other art, was dead.[29]

After listing this series of warnings, she proceeds in the next five chapters to counter them. She describes walking alone at night, unnoticed; she portrays intelligent artists, scientists and workers able to speak several languages arguing the fine points of the new regime; and she very excitedly details the vitality of the audiences in the theatre.

Unlike Sayler, Flanagan focuses on the changes in Russian theatre, and Russia in general, following the revolution. Throughout her work, Flanagan discusses her experiences and encounters in terms of whether they represent the old Russia or the new Russia. Flanagan depicts old Russia with great nostalgia and respect, while she presents the new Russia as one might present a younger sibling. In one anecdote that demonstrates her views of the old and new, she dramatizes what she calls, "the difference between the old and the new Russian courtesy." This becomes a quick, farcical episode between a doorman of the old order, "a whitehaired old aristocrat," and two young hotel workers, whom she calls "comrades."[30] In the episode, Flanagan struggles to put on her galoshes and the young men simply stare "stupidly" at her without offering to assist her. She shrugs off their refusal to help her with the thought that "this is Soviet Russia—why should any person put on the galoshes of any other person?" Finally, she writes, the old man, representing pre-revolutionary courtesy:

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[28] Flanagan, *Shifting Scenes*, 82.

[29] Ibid., 83.

[30] Ibid., 90.

> utters a furious ejaculation, strides into the cloakroom, seizes the two comrades, and with an avalanche of Russian terrifying to the ears, knocks their heads together, bangs them against the wall, flings them limp and stunned in a heap on the floor, spits upon them, advances to me as I sit petrified, . . . with a magnificent gesture, to put on my galoshes.[31]

As this anecdote indicates, Flanagan often longs for the more personal grandeur of the pre-revolutionary Russia of her imagination, created by encounters with nineteenth-century Russian novelists and at least a few farces. In fact, Flanagan regularly compares the Russians she encounters with the characters from pre-revolutionary Russian literature.[32]

Though less farcically, Flanagan continues to construct her impressions of Russia in terms of the *new*—a youthful, fast-paced, curt, active, but somewhat drab world—and the *old*—inert and geriatric but beautiful, colorful, and deeply spiritual world—accompanied by nostalgic sighs of the writer and her characters. Stanislavsky and his theatre represent the best of the *old*. Her description of the history of Russian theatre accompanies her chapter on Stanislavsky, whom she describes (after taking a moment of meditation) as a spiritually incorruptible man with the greatest artistic integrity (perhaps she was influenced by Sayler?).[33]

Meyerhold, for Flanagan, represents the best of the *new*. Note the clues of motion and modernity in her description of him, which I have italicized for emphasis:

> This tall man with a *shock* of gray brown hair tossed carelessly back from a face at once *magnetic* and sinister meets with *electrical* response from his actors. He is

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[31] Ibid.

[32] See ibid., 83–85 for lengthy comparisons revealing the degree to which Russian literature, music, and performance have influenced her reading of Russian culture.

[33] Flanagan, *Shifting Scenes*, 125.

> *dynamic* as one of his own *machines*, as *free* and *released* as
> his own stage.[34]

Her most detailed descriptions of communism and the new Russian society as she views it accompany her chapter on "Red Theatre" in which Meyerhold emerges as the hero.

Throughout her book, places, like individuals, are described in the terms she establishes to divide the new and the old. The countryside brings Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov to her mind, but both Moscow and St. Petersburg (Leningrad at the time of her writing) are mixtures of the "splendor of the old" and "the strangeness of the new."[35] For her, "St. Petersburg" still exists, though it now shares the same space with "Leningrad." She represents the coexistence of the new and the old in this city with images of the beautiful churches and the Russian architecture and art of the ages in the Hermitage in juxtaposition to images of throngs of active, rowdy workers dressed in sensible, but drab, coarse clothing, eating plain and bland foods.

Like Sayler, Flanagan performs her role as the American amid the Russians by adopting a distinctively American voice. For example, at one point, she writes that her Russian host "touches with childlike admiration [her] American clothes."[36] And in a particularly telling episode, Flanagan tells us she was called upon by the host of an impromptu cabaret performance in St. Petersburg to describe the state of theatre in America. She writes, "I have never been able to recall exactly what I said, but I have vague memories of responding in the name of all professional theatres of New York, all the experimental theatres of America, and of adding a personal word of greeting from the white house."[37] As a traveler in Russia, Flanagan becomes the voice of America.

Flanagan never forgets the American nationality of her implied reader as she explains the significance of events in Russia and Russian theatre with comparisons to events in America. For instance, she compares the Russian response to Mikhail Bulgakov's *Days of the Turbins* to the American reaction to *What Price Glory?*[38] Later, she notes that Tairov's production of O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* departed from the original production at Provincetown, assuming her readers' knowledge of the original.[39]

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[34] Ibid., 113.

[35] Ibid., 87.

[36] Ibid., 161.

[37] Ibid., 175.

Flanagan also assumes that her reader is familiar with the many harsh accounts of Soviet Russia in the American press and shares the American sense of superiority over Russian society. She critiques this elitism lightly on several occasions. The first time she undermines this attitude is in her discussion of the slow advancement of technology in Russia. "We cry, these people are not efficient, they will never get anywhere. By this we mean they will not get where we are. Nor will they, nor, inconceivable as it may seem to us, do they wish to."[40] Here, Flanagan's attitude starkly contrasts Sayler's, for she does not hope to see a Russia sharing the entrepreneurial spirit of America as it is tied to technology and the rapid movement of time. Flanagan again critiques American society when she describes the homeless children of Russia. With irony, she writes, "We have no such children in America. Lord, we thank Thee we are not as Russia—and a sudden memory of a New York street with well dressed men and women descending from motors, while around the corner children lay gasping on fire-escapes."[41] In both instances, Flanagan not only plays on the prejudices of her American readership to deflate its elitist attitude over her subject matter, but also to critique American capitalism. In doing so, Flanagan hopes to reveal the oversimplification of Russian society by the press and US government as absurd and unreasonable.

Like Sayler, though much more prominently, she also becomes *one of them.* Starting by appropriating the Russian language, she inserts several Russian words throughout her account, particularly claiming the word "tovarish" or comrade, which she considers "the most significant word in Soviet Russia."[42] Her increasing use of this word and others reveals that she is growing more comfortable in Russia and beginning to masquerade as Russian. But she does this more directly in a chapter entitled, "Hard," in which she describes riding "hard," or third class, from Moscow to Leningrad. This chapter makes no single mention of the the-

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[38] Ibid., 130.

[39] Ibid., 152.

[40] Ibid., 157.

[41] Ibid., 177.

[42] Ibid., 89.

atre. Instead, it highlights differences between Americans and Russians as she imagines herself to be a Russian on this journey. She writes that the advantage of traveling this way is that she becomes "one of them and they accept me as such."[43] She boards the train, noting the strangeness of the three Russians who share her cabin: a woman in "mysterious head-wrappings," a Soviet officer who is writing a bloody play, and a worker who doesn't speak but continuously offers the others apples.[44] By the time night falls on their overnight trip, however, the cultural barriers have dissolved. Flanagan writes, "Here am I, eating the apples of one comrade, sleeping upon the coat of another and in momentary danger of being annihilated by the collapse of the third. Tovarish, indeed! I am at last becoming a part of Russia."[45] Although the gulf between the Russians and their American narrator dissolves in the anecdote, the episode serves to highlight the differences in the way of life between the two.

Later in the episode, the train stops for several hours and at first Flanagan is indignant because as an American, she considers such delays unacceptable. But then, she explains,

> Gradually I sink into a sort of Russian-ness, born of moonlight on snow, and the rise and fall of Slavic voices. After all, what is time? What matter whether we reach our destination tomorrow, or on some deferred tomorrow? Time is nothing . . . time is nothing.[46]

Even as she imagines herself as a Russian in this anecdote, her Americanness never dissolves. *New* Russian time might be quicker than *old* Russian time, but it is still slower than American time. This example also points to another feature of American travel writing by characterizing the local inhabitants as living in a distinctly different time than the American traveler.[47] However, unlike the nineteenth-century travel writers who depict the slow time of the other as a means of portraying the superiority of American culture, Flanagan reverses the criticism. She comments that Americans have become "slaves of time" unlike the patient (and free) Russians, who measure time in centuries rather than in train schedules and desk calendars.[48]

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[43] Ibid., 153.

[44] Ibid., 154.

[45] Ibid., 155.

[46] Ibid., 156.

[47] Schriber, *Writing Home*, 77.

Essentially, Flanagan's test serves to bridge the gap between the grandeur of the nineteenth-century Russia of the American imagination and the modern Russia, which she presents sympathetically in order to combat American dismissive prejudices. Of course, Flanagan cannot escape her American prejudices entirely and, like Sayler, sometimes presents Russians as childlike and backward. Nevertheless, like Sayler, Flanagan worked to alleviate Americans' fears of Russians, which she saw as unwarranted and even ridiculous, in the hopes that Russian artists and audiences might serve as tutors for American theatre practitioners and audience members.

Both Oliver Sayler's and Hallie Flanagan's travels to Russia and their accounts of the Russian theatre had a significant impact on the American theatre. Sayler helped to depoliticize the work of the Moscow Art Theatre artists in particular so that they might be more easily accepted by American audiences and theatre workers. Hallie Flanagan's work appeared in separate articles in *Theatre Arts*, the *Tanager*, and the *Saturday Review of Literature*, and in book form, undoubtedly reaching a broad readership. Her experiences with Russian theatre also informed her work in the theatre at Vassar College and later as head of the Federal Theatre Project in the late 1930s. Sayler helped to cement the status of Stanislavksy as an artist whose work transcended politics and could easily be adapted for American use, while Flanagan raised interest in more experimental forms devised by Meyerhold and the Blue Blouse groups, without devaluing Stanislavsky's status in the United States.

Significantly, both writers, using the narrative strategies of travel writing, sought to construct Russians (old and new) as other than "us," while at the same time pointing out what this "other" had to offer. They maintained, through their comments regarding time, travel, and work, that Americans were essentially more modern than their Russian counterparts, but that the Russian artist offered a spiritual and aesthetic sensibility unknown in the American theatre. They masqueraded as Russians while remaining firmly American and encouraged their fellow American artists to follow in their footsteps. Few can question whether or not they succeeded.

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[48] Ibid., 156.

CONTRIBUTORS

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