

# LETTERS TO

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## The Editors:

The two issues of the *Tulane Drama Review* on "Stanislavski and America" have been a kind of revelation, at least to someone like me. Through several series of accidents, I have become co-publisher of Stanislavski's writings. Although I have worked over his texts for almost eighteen years now, have also dealt with Boleslavsky's acting book, and have found myself reading—or having to read—many allied books and manuscripts; although I sometimes have felt that Stanislavski had become a personal mentor and friend, I knew of the impact of the man and his ideas by a casual osmosis. (To be sure, I was taken to meet Stanislavski in 1935, when I was a reporter in Moscow, but my "eighteen years" began in 1947, when I joined *Theatre Arts Monthly* as an associate editor under Rosamond Gilder and was put in charge of its book publishing department.) Thus the interviews and articles defined for me, and I gather quite a few others, influences, contributions and differences as never before. Particularly valuable, in its ordering of facts and organizing what had previously seemed unreliable and chaotic, was the "Critical Chronology" by Paul Gray that opens the second issue (T26, Winter 1964, pp. 21-60).

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Stimulated by it and the other pieces, I found myself digging in the files of Theatre Arts Books and then those of certain individuals who had had a hand in bringing Stanislavski and his ideas to this country. It is not that I know more or better than Paul Gray or those interviewed and writing in both issues—in fact I know far less—but for the record I would like to add a few “entries” to his many, representing mainly facts I didn’t know when he and I discussed his plans for the piece almost two years ago. I will attempt to follow his style, but since I am only making interlardings in a chronology that forms a kind of history, the reader should have Mr. Gray’s article open beside him for any proper perspective.

September, 1917. Oliver M. Saylor, drama critic for the *Indianapolis News* and reporter for the *Boston Evening Transcript*, headed for Moscow via Japan and Siberia (the only way, because of the World War I “Western Front” and the March Revolution in Russia) to try to record “before it was too late” the achievements of the Moscow Art Theatre, about which he had heard from Chaliapin and others. He arrived in Moscow the night of the outbreak there of the Bolshevik “October Revolution” (November by our calendar). Two days later, in answer to frantic queries from his papers, he cabled “HAVE JUST WITNESSED PERFECT HAMLET.” His detailed accounts of the MAT performances, which continued without interruption, appeared in a number of U. S. newspapers, in *Theatre Arts Quarterly*,

and in his books, *Russia, Red and White*, 1919, *The Russian Theatre*, 1920, and *Inside the Moscow Art Theatre*, 1924. Morris Gest credited Saylor’s persistence and enthusiasm with his decision to bring first the *Chauve Souris*, that offshoot of the MAT, here in 1922, and then the MAT itself in 1923 and 1924.

1925. Stanislavski intended to revise *My Life in Art*, written in this country and published here in 1924, on his return to Moscow, but “never found the time” (see his preface, dated 18 October 1928, to the second Russian edition). In the Russian text there are many rearrangements of material, which have led hasty observers to believe the two books are quite different, and a few

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concessions to the Moscow censors. For instance, the final sentence in the original English—"May the Lord aid me in the task!"—was deleted.

December 14, 1925 to May 1, 1926. The Musical Studio of the MAT, under the direction of Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, toured the United States, appearing in New York (seven weeks), Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, and Detroit, repeating the success of the main company of the MAT, with seven operas, several of which were written particularly for the Studio. The largest impact was made by *Carmen-cita and the Soldier* and *Lysistrata*, highly stylized productions using "constructivist" sets, with Olga Baklanova and Velikanov as principals.

1928-1929. Following the heart attack Paul Gray refers to, Stanislavski went with his family to Badenweiler in Germany, where Chekhov had died, to be treated by Chekhov's old doctor. Here he was visited by Norman and Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, who suggested that Stanislavski might now be able to write the series of books about his "system" they had been urging him to do since they became close friends of his in 1923 in New York. Arrangements were made to finance his stay outside of Russia for one year, and the Alexeiev family—Stanislavski was, of course, a *nom de théâtre*—moved to Nice to be near the Hapgoods. Afternoons Mrs. Hapgood worked with Stanislavski, and in the evening translated for her husband what had been written. "My first help came from Norman Hapgood and his red pencil," Stanislavski wrote Mrs. L. Gurevich (December 23-24, 1930), who was look-

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ing after his manuscripts in Moscow. Norman Hapgood had been editor-in-chief of *Collier's*, *Harper's Weekly*, and *The International Magazine*; before that he had been drama critic for New York dailies and *The Bookman*, and he wrote theatre accounts for the magazines he edited; he was the author of *The Stage in America* and in 1930 had just completed his book, *Why Janet Should Read Shakespeare*. Mrs. Hapgood translated her husband's suggestions back into Russian and the next afternoon she and Stanislavski worked on. Mornings Stanislavski spent rewriting, and writing letters as well as the detailed notes for the production of *Othello* he had worked out in his mind but which now had to be staged by two assistants at the MAT in Moscow. These notes became *Stanislavski Produces Othello* (translated by Helen Nowak, London and New York, 1948).

1930. The contract for publication of the book Stanislavski and the Hapgoods were working on was signed with the Yale University Press. As summer came on, the two families journeyed back to Badenweiler, where the work continued. "I tire easily," Stanislavski wrote Nemirovich-Danchenko (August 8, 1930), "but am working a good deal on my book, and its English translation, with Mr. Hapgood as my helper." Eunice Stoddard, who had been a member of the American Laboratory Theatre under Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya, studied acting technique with Stanislavski and his wife Lilina and was thus perhaps the first American to have direct instruction from him. In the autumn, after almost two years abroad, Stanislavski returned

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to Moscow with his manuscripts: *An Actor Prepares* was written; *Building a Character* mainly completed; and *Creating a Role* drafted. He hoped to condense the first two into one volume.

1932. Having abandoned the one-volume idea, Stanislavski sent Mrs. Hapgood, who had returned to New York, the Russian manuscript of *An Actor Prepares*.

1932–1934. A final complete text was prepared in English. Particular attention, as with Stanislavski in France and Germany, was paid to the proper rendering in English of the special terms Stanislavski had invented for his “system,” and Mrs. Hapgood consulted former members of the MAT in the New York and California area—Boleslavsky, Leo and Barbara Bulgakov, Tamara Daykarhanova and Ouspenskaya. American professional theatre people, like Edward Sheldon, were also consulted. It took some deliberation, in fact, to decide that “Emotional Memory,” a term some young American actors had brought back from Moscow and were using, was almost as imprecise as “sensational memory” might be for a memory of sensation, and “Emotion Memory” was the term established. The translation was delivered to the Yale University Press, which returned it stating that “in its total form not more than twelve people in the United States would ever read it.” Harper & Bros. and other publishers rejected the book in similar terms.

1935. Edith J. R. Isaacs, editor and publisher of *Theatre Arts Monthly*, accepted *An Actor Prepares* for book publication, but on condition that repetitious exercises and difficult Russian patronymics



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be cut out. She obtained a guarantee against loss to *Theatre Arts* from Mrs. Leonard Elmhirst, whom she also persuaded to find a place on the Dartington Hall faculty for Michael Chekhov. A note in the files by Susan Tully, Mrs. Isaacs' secretary, shows that the manuscript of *An Actor Prepares* was sent to Stark Young, then "associate editor" of *Theatre Arts Monthly*, for suggestions about cutting. His reply was probably by telephone, or if written, lost. Stanislavski gave his consent to any "further cuts" (many had been made by him and the Hapgoods as the work was being written) that would make the work more accessible to Western European actors. A letter from Mrs. Hapgood to Mrs. Isaacs (June 17, 1936) speaks of agreeing to suggested cuts. Mrs. Isaacs in a letter to Mrs. Hapgood at Woods Hole (September 2, 1936) and enclosing certain page proofs, says in a postscript, "I find that there is another place where I have made a change, cutting out these lines: . . ." Thus it would seem that many of the cuts as well as phrases which certain critics of the published translation have questioned because Mrs. Hapgood "was not a theatre person," were made by theatre persons of great experience who were also brilliant editors and writers. Theatre Arts Books also has in its files a word-by-word comparison of *An Actor Prepares* (New York and London, 1936) and *Rabota Aktora nad Saboi* (Moscow, 1938—published after Stanislavski died) made by Sergius Vassiliev, playwright and engineer, and husband of Tamara Daykarhanova. At the end of it he said in a notarized statement: "Everything that had been cut out consisted of repetitions and

tautologies. None of the essential material has been sacrificed."

1937. *My Life in the Russian Theatre* by Nemirovich-Danchenko was published in Boston and London. Mrs. Hapgood went to Moscow, taking copies of *An Actor Prepares*, in one of which Stanislavski wrote (May 31, 1937): "If it had not been for you this work would not ever have seen the light of day." He promised her the manuscript of *Building a Character* as soon as he could go through it again. He died the following year, aged seventy-five. World War II intervened and the manuscript was thought lost. Sometime after the war, it was forwarded to Mrs. Hapgood and was published in 1949, thirteen years after *An Actor Prepares*, to which it was an indispensable companion. It corrects the mistaken belief on the part of certain American teachers of Stanislavski's methods that he was not concerned with disciplining an actor's physical faculties.

*Robert M. MacGregor*  
Director  
*Theatre Arts Books*

#### The Editors:

It is unfortunate that you chose to include Gordon Rogoff's intemperate and inaccurate diatribe as a statement about Lee Strasberg and the Actors Studio in your second Stanislavski issue. As a person who was at the Studio before and during Gordon's tenure (I was the Studio Stage Manager for two years, a member of its Playwright's Unit for three years, and am no longer connected with the Studio in any way) I feel very badly that those who lack

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