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FROM THE PAGE TO THE STAGE OUTSIDE OBSERVATIONS ON THE BONDS BETWEEN RUSSIAN THEATRE AND RUSSIAN LITERATURE

Со страницы на сцену.

Наблюдения за связями между русским театром и русской литературой

Ключевые слова: русская литература, русский театр, американский театр

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Аннотация. Динамизм русского театра основан на его сильных связях с литературой. Такое богатство литературы дает сильный импульс к тому, чтобы переосмыслить культуру и идентичность в рамках новых интересных подходов. Американское отношение к литературе и популярной культуре представляет собой разительный контраст с российской системой. Тем не менее, сравнительный анализ этих двух систем является, несомненно, интересной задачей для изучения культуры обеих стран.

Abstract. The vibrancy of Russian theatre comes from its strong ties to literature. This wealth of literature becomes a strong framework to reexamine culture and identity in new and exciting ways. The American relationship to literature and the popular culture work in stark contrast to the Russian system; however, the crossover between the two systems continue to be an exciting challenge for both countries.

Russia is one of the most literate countries in the world. Every few years various international surveys list Russia as one of the top ten countries in number of books read or time spent reading per year. The United States, on the other hand, lags a little behind. For example, a NOP World Culture Score Index states Russians read on average 7 hours, 6 minutes a week, whereas in the USA the average time reading per week is 5 hours 42 minutes. I mention this not to weigh one country's practices over another or to make any specific moral judgements. I mention this because Russia's love of literature invariably gives the country a common language; a cultural common ground that is missing from mosaic of American society. This has been made all the more clear in visiting many of the theatres in Russia, as I have these last few months. As a student of theatre at the American Repertory Theatre/Harvard University in the United States I have spent almost every night from late February of this year to today attending theatre in Moscow. What I

have observed is that theatre here seems to be a natural extension of a Russian literary language and, therefore, has a different resonance in here than in the States.

The dissimilar theatrical language is obvious if one were to peruse the theatrical listings of New York and Moscow. First, where New York's primary theatrical offerings would be musicals or many small new plays, Moscow's would be plays based on famous books. Additionally, where multiple theatres in Moscow may be performing different versions of Chekhov's plays or Pushkin's Eugene Onegin, there are very few theatres in New York playing the same plays by the same author at the same time. This is important as both of these factors are tied to the literary tastes of each country.

The ties of Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Pushkin and Gogol bind the Russian soul to its literature. They are stories that most Russians have learned in schools. It is easy to see, then, why this language also forms the foundation of Russian theater. These works become adaptable to the stage and audiences come to see parts of their favorite novels play out on the stage. America's relationship to literature, however, is more complicated to say the least. First of all, America is a country made-up of people who do not all share the same history or language. For example, my own family comes from northern New Mexico where many people speak Spanish and have since before it became a state in 1912. Spanish is said to be fluently spoken in 13% of all American households. This may seem small but it highlights an interesting complication to any concept of "shared" anything in America: our ethnic diversity many times limits a common ground.

This limiting of common ground makes an establishing of a common literary (and theatrical) voice very difficult. And it also shapes what American theater focuses upon. The prevalence of musical theater in America is a small part of this, as the musical has created its own language in theater that surprisingly reaches across many communities in America- not perfectly and not always artfully. In our theatre, plays and musicals alike, this reframing and redefining of our diverse culture happens regularly. Much of the current drive of theaters in New York and in large parts of the U.S. is on new play development and specifically highlighting young voices that reflect a diversity of views. It is a constant drive in the U.S. to find a definition that is not so readily available to us in our literature.

Both Russia and America's theatrical systems are in constant flux. Young theaters in Moscow such as the Gogol Center are bringing about some new exciting works, while many are reframing the classics in new, clever ways. In America, modern musicals like Hamilton- a hip-hop musical about the founding of the country, with a very diverse cast-, Shuffle Along - about the creation of an all African-American musical in the 1920's- and Fun Home -a story of suicide and a young woman working through her sexuality- are challenging us to re-look at the musical theater form and encourage more diverse voices.

In my opinion, the biggest challenge to the theatrical form in America is all of the various other forms of media. That same NOP World Culture Score Index study said that Americans watch about 19 hours of television a week, compared to the 15 hours a week in Russia. Television programming in the U.S. has boomed in the last few years, providing a wide range of shows that are better reflecting the diversity of the country. This is also challenging theatre to also work to reflect the ever-changing American culture.

The literature of Russia is rich and known all over the world and is a well-deserved source of pride for Russian culture. Therefore, the fact that theatre co-opts its richness is only natural. In observing much theatre for the last few months in Moscow, I am continually surprised at the way many of these classic literary works provide a foundation for performances that re-examine the Russian soul. Uncle Vanya at the Vakhtangov Theatre, directed by Rimas Tuminas, takes Chekhov's play and reframes it so that the concepts of women in culture are starkly highlighted, as is a different take on the superfluous male. Konstantin Bogomolov uses *The Brothers Karamazov* as a springboard to broadly speak about consumer culture, celebrity, and death in a confrontational and, frankly, confusing way. There are many similar examples in the repertory of Russian theatres. In my estimation, this common literary language is what gives Russian theatre its richness and beauty and continues to differentiate it from other theater internationally.

As an American studying theatre in Moscow I am continually fascinated by the breadth of Russian theatre. It is vibrant and challenging in ways that are different from American theatre. And though both countries could serve to learn from each other artistically, much of the cultural language is undoubtedly rooted in the very different histories of very different countries. Nikolai Gogol in his brilliant *Dead Souls* said, "A word, aptly uttered or written cannot be cut away by an axe." For Russia, it seems that those literary roots run deep beneath almost every Russian foot and truly are not going away anytime soon.

ЛИТЕРАТУРА

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