MIGRATING MODERNIST PERFORMANCE

BRITISH THEATRICAL TRAVELS THROUGH RUSSIA

CLAIRE WARDEN

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Introduction

In 1920 author H.G. Wells made his second trip to Russia, and found destruction and destitution that would not have looked out of place in his seminal 1898 alien-invasion novel *The War of the Worlds*; in his words, 'a vast, irreparable breakdown'.[1] His subsequent reflections on his trip, published as *Russia in the Shadows* (1921), simultaneously lament the poverty and ruination he found while at the same time, with caveats, backing the Bolshevik government's attempts to initiate positive changes. Not only has Russia suffered economic and societal collapse, he cries; there has also been a serious cultural breakdown. And yet, amidst this picture of wretchedness stands a peculiar anomaly:

> For a time the stablest thing in Russia [sic] culture was the theatre. There stood the theatres, and nobody wanted to loot them or destroy them; the artists were accustomed to meet and work in them and went on meeting and working; the tradition of official subsidies held good. So quite amazingly the Russian dramatic and operatic life kept on through the extremest storms of violence, and keeps on to this day.[2]

While books remained unprinted, pictures unpainted, and poetry rejected as obscure and precious, theatre endured.[3] For Wells the theatre seemed unbreakable, a steadfast cultural presence in a country where everything else seemed fractured, damaged or desecrated. Here we begin: a British traveller to Russia, discovering that theatre abides in even the harshest

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environment, providing a creative outlet regardless of the socio-political tumult beyond its walls, acting as a refuge for bewildered foreign travellers.

Russia and Britain: Untangling the Relationship

'Russia' and 'Britain' are by no means settled concepts; in fact they exist as both individual, denotional abstractions and as tangible, geographically designated yet tentatively definable spaces with shifting borders. I will employ the lexicon of performance from the off and suggest that Russia and Britain, along with other nation states, enact a sort of dance, occasionally coming closer or moving further apart, politically, socially and even geographically.[4] This is unsurprising if one reads space in light of Michel de Certeau's definition that 'a *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements.'[5] If space is defined by fluidity rather than stasis then, inevitably, the relationships between and across spaces will be equally malleable. In the early to mid twentieth century, British perceptions of Russia oscillated between perceived threat and supportive ally, negative exemplar and model to emulate. These differing opinions appeared simultaneously across the socio-political spectrum. Inevitably in global diplomatic relations, other countries interrupted and transformed the enacted geographical dance between these two European superpowers. The rise of fascism, for example, significantly altered British attitudes to Russia; left-leaning activists felt compelled to shift their focus from setting up a political utopia in the image of Soviet Russia to fighting against fascism, first in the Spanish Civil War and later against Nazi aggression. The effect of fascist expansion was as keenly felt in the corridors of Whitehall as the union committee halls, eventually engendering an alliance that would see Stalin sit alongside Churchill and Roosevelt. The difficulty in defining the changing relationship between Russia and Britain patently remains in the contemporary context with referenda, foreign affairs, shadowy stories of spies and poisonings, economic antipathies/accords and wars. A tense (and mutable) alliance continues just as it did during the early to mid twentieth century.

This shifting relationship on a broad, political scale is complicated further by the subjective, interpretative reflections of its citizens. How can one make sense of the cultures, histories and identities of another country? Throughout this book, this remains an issue, particularly when understood through varying political prejudices and media agendas. A scan

through historical newspaper articles illustrates the complexity. The *Daily Mail*, for instance, mentions Russia on numerous occasions and, like so many mainstream outlets, seems to fluctuate between effusive praise and exasperated (even fearful) condemnation. It describes the early days of the Soviet Union in ambivalent terms, simultaneously decrying the treatment of the Tsar while also celebrating the First World War victories of the new Russian army. The 1930s are full of denunciations of the new Russian state. By 1943 Russia and Britain had established a wartime pact and the newspaper reverberated with celebratory tributes in an editorial entitled 'Russia and Ourselves', a piece that focuses on British citizens' admiration for their Russian allies and their desire to materially support their comrades:

> They have studied the soldiers and the people of Russia under their own great ordeal, and have drawn the right conclusions for themselves.[6]

Not only does this article bask in the glory of the Red Army, it gives a strong sense of the working people of Britain uniting in spirit with their Russian counterparts.

The experiences and conclusions of prominent British socialist figures Beatrice and Sidney Webb provide another brief (and alternative) case in point. Journeying to Russia in 1932, the couple wrote two subsequent books: *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* (1936) and *The Truth About Soviet Russia* (1942). Like many Britons on both sides of the political divide, they arrived in Russia with a partisan attitude: in their case, a one-sided admiration of Russian Communism. Neither spoke Russian and this proved a barrier to a fuller understanding of culture, as it did for many of the figures in this book. Their reflections are full of odd, ill-informed assumptions, including the remarkable proclamation in the 1942 volume (written some ten years after their original trip and following Stalin's infamous Purges) that Soviet Russia 'is the most inclusive and equalized democracy in the world'.[7] Historian A.J.P. Taylor who, it must be remembered, was not without his own biases,[8] described *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* as 'the most preposterous book ever written about Soviet Russia'.[9] Without wishing to unkindly vilify the Webbs (or predictably and unfairly point the finger solely at the *Daily Mail*), these examples reveal some of the inherent difficulties in comprehending the relationship between Britain and Russia: the prejudices, political motives, misunderstandings and limited experiences (as often caused as much by travel

restrictions put in place by Soviet governments as by unwillingness on the part of journalists or commentators) make historical accuracy a difficult thing to find. This absence of objective fact does not prove a barrier for this enquiry. For *Migrating Modernist Performance*, in a sense, the stories created and performances enacted are more important than unearthing presumed realities or truths. This book is less an analysis of historical fact than an unpacking of the various British responses to Russian culture, and theatre in particular.

While the relationship between the two countries, particularly in a modernist context, is difficult to assess, many scholars are currently attempting to untangle it. This book engages with the work of two recently established networks: the Anglo-Russian Research Network and the Russian Theatre Network (UK). In addition, it is indebted to (and I hope sits alongside) a number of new reassessments of Russian and British culture: Rebecca Beasley and Philip Ross Bullock's edited collection *Russia in Britain 1880–1940* (Oxford UP, 2013) (and their 2011 special edition of *Translation and Literature*), Anthony Cross's edited *A People Passing Rude: British Responses to Russian Culture* (Open Book, 2013), Jonathan Pitches's edited *Russians in Britain: British Theatre and the Russian Tradition of Actor Training* (Routledge, 2012) and Caroline MacLean's *The Vogue for Russia: Modernism and the Unseen in Britain 1900–1930* (Edinburgh UP, 2015) among others. David Ayer's forthcoming *Modernism, Internationalism and the Russian Revolution* (Edinburgh UP) and Matthew Taunton's future book on the resonances of the Russian Revolution in Britain confirm the ongoing interest in this artistic relationship between modernist Russia and Britain. This book aims to engage with this current trend, evident in both modernist studies and performance studies.

Modernist Spatiality and the "Expanding" Fields

The comprehensive reassessment of prominent figures in these recent books has given me licence to approach the work of more marginal Britons, many of whom remain under-researched, their innovations and reflections 'lost' to theatre history. Most of them prove rather difficult to situate; I am interested in theatre-makers and commentators and, while they might categorise themselves as actors, directors, playwrights or choreographers (or even filmmakers, poets, painters or travel writers) at certain moments, most of them adopt a number of these roles at various points in their

careers. Their performances sometimes strongly exhibit influences from the Russian stage but, at other times, seem to be consciously rebelling against the constructivism of Vsevolod Meyerhold or the later optimistic similitude of socialist realism, or else constructing (deliberately or accidentally) distinctly 'British' appropriations of Russian methods and texts. Some are identified with the established theatre (and therefore often falsely dismissed as formally conservative), some are better known in reference to other artistic genres (cinema particularly) and others have been simply ignored, their work regarded as too marginal, regional, esoteric or artistically unsuccessful. Further, some disassociated themselves from the modernist art scene, making it difficult for future scholars to know quite how to categorise them or intelligibly narrate their careers. A combination of all these barriers has prevented a full assessment of these figures, particularly their connections with the Russian stage.

In this study I use the term 'modernist' not only because of its chronologically specific (though notoriously fluid) associations, but also because of its suggestion of innovation, both politically and aesthetically. It is a term that has always provoked questioning and debate but, in recent years, new perspectives have led to an even more inclusive and dynamic field. Indeed Michael Whitworth concedes that modernism 'is not so much a thing as a set of responses to problems caused by the conditions of modernity'.[10] While the figures in this book differ considerably in character, intention and artistic practice, all are responding to the conditions of modernity, aesthetically and/or socio-politically.

There are two particular disciplines explored in this book: modernism and performance. Both fields have experienced significant and far-reaching growth over recent years, to the point where 'modernism' and 'performance' have become almost indefinable. Much of this extension of the disciplines is welcome. However, simultaneously, new obstacles have been erected. For example, unhelpful barriers have appeared between 'theatre' and 'performance', the former (along with 'drama') regarded as rather old-hat compared with the perceived broad inclusivity of the latter. I include both terms in the title of this book, actively resisting the obstructive barriers often put up between them. In this I am following the lead of scholars like Erika Fischer-Lichte and Benjamin Wihstutz whose *Performance and the Politics of Space* 'aims to bridge the gap between the artistic and academic disciplines of theatre and performance'.[11] Actually the theoretical approaches of both theatre studies and performance studies influence this book, whether discussing the onstage techniques of directors or the

everyday performance of travellers in unfamiliar cities. 'Modernism', too, has become increasingly broad; it is no longer simply a chronological delineator or select collection of aesthetic choices. Indeed we are now, following Peter Nicholls, confronted with 'modernisms' in the plural[12] and our definition is challenged afresh by what Andreas Huyssen refers to as 'alternative modernisms'.[13]

In her analysis of planetarity and modernism Susan Stanford Friedman acknowledges the problem: 'the danger of an expansionist modernism lapsing into meaninglessness or colonizing gestures is real.'[14] In response to this trap scholars advocate a geographically broader approach. There is a desire to reassess modernism in more global terms and, as part of that, to challenge the Western-centric. This is a central intention of recent volumes like Stephen Ross and Allana Lindgren's *The Modernist World*, which 'addresses the various ways *modernism* signifies across the disciplines and around the world'.[15] Geographical and disciplinary expansions go hand in hand here. Simon Gikandi recognises a particular postcolonial transformation in the way modernism is constructed: 'a second narrative of global modernism is evident in the rerouting of modernity through a set of texts that might initially appear to be marginal to its economy.'[16] While *Migrating Modernist Performance* does not directly tap into these welcome postcolonial narratives, it remains focused on the act of 'rerouting' or discovering new journeys and reinterpreting the dynamics between Britain and Russia through them.

The fascination with spatiality is evident even in the language used to describe these changes in modernist and performance studies, with Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, like Friedman, referring to the central effect of new modernist studies as 'expansion'.[17] If 'expansion' is an effect, it is also an action, a conscious decision to extend the territory of the field. A similar undertaking can be identified in performance studies where scholar/director Richard Schechner suggests that '(in)direction is characteristic of performance studies'.[18] Both approaches rely on the syntax of geography and movement across spaces. This expansion does not only occur in the theoretical terminology but is embedded in the search for new spaces of cultural production to be brought alongside more established modernist or performance spaces. Indeed, many recent scholars follow Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker in *Geographies of Modernism* in asking 'where was modernism?'[19] A similar question preoccupies theatre studies and performance studies with Schechner, in his seminal textbook *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, asking 'where do performances

take place?'[20] and Paul Rae, grounding his question in global spatiality, pondering 'where is the cosmopolitan stage?'[21]

But this is by no means simply a retrospective imposition of theoretical narrative; early twentieth-century artists were also fascinated by space and the way one moves between spaces. It is no wonder; their worlds were expanding and growing ever more complex as they did so. While recognising that much of the world's population remained trapped by economic circumstances, the defining objects of modernity – cars, trains, steamboats, aeroplanes – engendered the potential for travel. Casey Blanton suggests that, through the gradual 'democratization' of these symbols of urban, industrial expansion, more people than ever started to travel, experiencing new cultures, landscapes and ideas.[22] Coupled with the growth in literacy, technology (telegraphy, telephony, radio and eventually television) and media outlets that focused on international affairs, however one-sided their journalism could be, national barriers began to break down even as they were reconstructed by economic meltdown, the rise of dictators and subsequent wars.

Spatiality, Subjectivity and Movement

In *The Soul of London* (1905) Ford Madox Ford famously concludes that 'we live in spacious times'.[23] Too often, however, Ford's well-known proclamation of spaciousness is read without reference to the rest of *The Soul of London*. It is worth returning to the preceding sentence:

> Humanity is on the march somewhere, tomorrow the ultimate questions shall be solved and the soul of man assuaged.[24]

These are not just 'spacious times', they are 'moving times': we are marching, questioning and satisfying our 'souls' in the process. Ford is ultimately interested in the way communities and individuals move across spaces and the way spaces like London are transformed into kinetic, shifting landscapes by the addition of people. Thacker picks up on this defining characteristic of modernist space, beginning his 2003 book *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* with Ford's proclamation of 'spacious times' before suggesting a 'connection between space, geography and movement' that forms the basis for his own studies.[25] Thacker is by no means alone in his corporeal understanding of space. Jessica Berman, for example, identifies a change in perceptions of space during the modernist

period when 'cultural geography diverged from cartographic and physical geography by focusing on the interaction between human communities and their natural contexts'.[26] Even when mapping does occur in modernist studies, it often defies easy borders or boundaries, and suggests a greater sense of movement, reflecting Friedman's idea of circulation, 'a polycentric model of global modernities and modernisms based on circular or multidirectional rather than linear flows'.[27] I am reminded here of Bonnie Kime Scott's 'A Tangled Mesh of Modernists' or of that quintessential modernist cartographic image, Harry Beck's Tube map, based less on accurate geography than on usability. It seems that even mapping (whether historically modernist or embedded in contemporary modernist studies) becomes tied up with subjective, bodily understandings of space.

In this book I have chosen the term 'migrating' to describe the activity, intention and aesthetic approach of my key figures. It also describes the transference of modernist techniques and ideas following Brooker and Thacker's introductory comment to *Geographies of Modernism* in which they identify 'the *transnational* character of modernisms, whereby modernist practices travel and migrate across nations and are, in turn, transformed by encounters with indigenous national cultures'.[28] Although, as this suggests, texts can migrate, the term 'migration' also intimates subjective, corporeal associations. While I mention more text-based communication between Russia and Britain, this book is primarily interested in the act of travel, in the difference that physical interaction can make to an individual's theatrical output and perspective on a country. According to Christopher Schedler, the prevalence of the moving body (the wandering, exiled, restless) in modernism means that 'modernism and migration are inextricably linked'.[29] 'Migrating' also suggests movement between spaces without making those spaces too settled or determinable. I return here to de Certeau's idea of the '*migrational*, or metaphorical city', a space defined by an intrinsic sense of mobility rather than stasis.[30]

Brigid Cohen, while focusing primarily on precarious movements of people during times of war and upheaval, builds on this by suggesting that 'migration' is a 'directionally ambiguous term'.[31] Although this study has two European superpowers at its heart, the way people (and indeed ideas) move between these spaces is indeed 'directionally ambiguous'. Individuals moved through other countries in order to make this journey, arrived in obscure way stations, found themselves stranded in Riga or Kiev, or included a visit to Russia as part of more expansive trips. The same is true for theatrical ideas, which often arrived and developed alongside

avant-garde aesthetics in Paris, or merged with artistic practices originating in Germany, or even crossed the Atlantic only to find their way back to Europe. Despite the clear focus on two nations, this book takes a multidirectional approach, revealing Britain and Russia less as two centre-points than as locations in a shifting confluence of people and ideas.

While in our globalised world 'migration' has taken on specific political associations, this book attempts to re-energise the term as, in Emma Cox's conception, 'migration is, at its heart, about encounters with foreignness – with foreign people, and with foreign places. These are, it may be supposed, ingredients of good storytelling'.[32] 'Migration' seems to centralise corporeal encounters and emphasise the unfamiliar, the culturally contrastive. There is also the direct connection of the term with subsequent storytelling, whether through written narratives, spoken reflections or, indeed, theatre-making. Furthermore, 'migration' brings a welcome sense of messiness that the more stable (and hierarchically political) 'international' potentially negates. In developing a 'cosmopolitan style', Walkowitz suggests 'replacing static models of modernist exile with more flexible, dynamic models of migration, entanglement and mix-up'.[33] While this approach is less straightforward, and certainly harder to manage, it better reflects the fluid toing and froing between cultures, artistically and/or physically. The tangled openness of the term is as useful for modernism as for performance studies, for transnational interchange as for artistic interdisciplinarity: as Schechner suggests when considering the relationship between the avant-garde and the mainstream (a dialogue vital to the narrative of this book), 'particular genres migrate from one category to another'.[34]

British Experiences of the Russian Stage: Translation, Texts and Travel

Given the recent postcolonial expansion of modernist studies it might appear a little regressive to focus on the relationship between two European superpowers:[35] Russia and Britain. Rebecca Beasley and Phillip Bullock identify this problem in their introduction to *Russia in Britain*. While it might seem a 'somewhat old-fashioned topic, affiliated to an earlier methodology', actually the complex relationship between these two influential geographical spaces and cultures is often overlooked and remains 'largely absent from the discussions about the "global turn"'.[36] Uncovering this relationship, as we will see, can be a difficult, bewildering

task. In addition, this reconfiguration of Russia and Britain can be understood through Laura Doyle's dialectic, 'regional transnationalism' with its 'particular regions and their transnational economic and discursive formations, *across borders and yet within a certain circumference*'.[37] This model fits rather better with the Russia-Britain dialogue than broader postcolonial frameworks.

While this book centres on travel and direct embodied experience of Russian theatre, such journeys should be contextualised within a literary, text-based transnationalism. The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of a number of little magazines, journals, newsletters and pamphlets that significantly contributed to British theatre-makers' understanding of the Russian stage. These documents stretched across the whole spectrum of political and aesthetic convictions. The Workers' Theatre Movement (WTM), for example, produced *Red Stage* (entitled *New Red Stage* from June/July 1932 onwards), a magazine that promoted leftist theatre and aimed to create some sense of connectivity between the various nationwide WTM groups. Russian theatre is mentioned regularly and with unequivocal admiration. There are, for example, articles written by Russian theatre-makers associated with TRAM (Theatre for Young Workers) with whom the WTM had 'entered into a contract of Socialist competition (or better – emulation)'.[38] Other articles authored by WTM members wistfully celebrate Russian theatre, often comparing it to the situation across Britain where absence of communist governance, prominence of escapist music hall or well-made plays, and lack of support for local working-class theatre were constant vexations. The first article of the opening edition from November 1931 establishes this comparative approach, which continues through each of the subsequent volumes:

> In the Soviet Union, our brother organisation fights with the workers' State against the prejudices and relics of Czarism, against the enemies of the Soviet Union, and helps to inspire the workers to greater achievements for the Five Year Plan.[39]

The British groups enjoyed none of these circumstances. Comparisons between vibrant Russia and moribund, reactionary Britain can be found throughout *Red Stage* and *New Red Stage*. In April/May 1932, for instance, leading figure of the WTM Tom Thomas wrote an article entitled 'How They Do It Over There' lamenting that 'we cannot expect such plays in Britain until the social conditions have been established'.[40]

In September 1932 Russian theatre audiences were described in glowing terms:

> In the U.S.S.R. the theatre is the weapon of the working class. Happy proletarian faces crowd the comfortable circles. Instinctively you feel in touch with the crowd, and everybody in touch with one another, instead of being divided by the insuperable barriers of class and money, as in England.[41]

Clearly the perceived commonality of the Russian audiences versus the fragmented, hierarchical English theatre spaces enabled the WTM members to make broader political statements. Though partly founded on inaccurate, romanticised imaginings of Russian theatre and politics, the articles of *New Red Stage* negotiate national difference and create connections between the working-class dramas of these two European powerhouses.

Periodicals published in the Soviet Union and distributed in Britain substantiated the claims found in journals like *New Red Stage*. From 1929 onwards many travellers entered the Soviet Union on organised trips with Intourist, a government-endorsed travel agency. Intourist produced periodicals – *Soviet Travel* and, later, *Soviet Land* – in order to promote their trips. In 1934 the following description could be found in *Soviet Travel*:

> The lathe worker laid aside his newly made instrument, and while he prepared to make another turned to his neighbour at the next lathe and said: 'the wife and I went to the Beethoven Evening at the Conservatory yesterday"… Such conversations are no longer rarities among Moscow workers. Go to any factory and you can hear them discussing plays, operas, concerts, or criticizing the performances of the actors, their make-up, or the stage decorations.[42]

This Soviet-produced material presents a concrete example of the 'happy proletarian faces' described by *New Red Stage*.

More general magazines and journals with various (or, indeed, no explicit) political perspectives mentioned Russian theatre alongside their other interests. T.S. Eliot's *The Criterion*, for example, regularly referred to Russian culture, particularly the Russian ballet.[43] This was similarly true for magazines like *New Age*, in which drama critic John Francis Hope unequivocally rejected Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* as 'a dreary study in self-pity',[44] or *The Egoist* where, in his analysis of Russian literature as the 'latest craze', M. Montagu-Nathan mentions playwrights like Chekhov and Ostrovsky alongside Pushkin, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.[45] As so often

in this book, the influence was not simply one-way. When Ballets Russes founder Sergei Diaghilev co-founded *Mir Iskusstva* journal in 1898 he looked to British magazine *The Studio* and figures like Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley for inspiration.[46] Furthermore, British theatre-makers increasingly enjoyed access to a number of important European theatre books. Many are mentioned in this volume. Books such as Huntly Carter's *The New Spirit in Drama and Art* (1912) and Leon Mousinnac's *The New Movement in Theatre* (1931), among others, included Russian innovations alongside work from elsewhere in Continental Europe, giving the impression that, across the Channel, exciting new methods were sweeping away traditional institutions and techniques. A number of new volumes appeared, aiming to give British readers a sense of the Russian stage: Alexander Bakshy's *The Path of the Modern Russian Stage and Other Essays* (1916),[47] for instance, provides an analysis of the Moscow Art Theatre and Meyerhold from a self-professed non-specialist. Again, the transmission of modern theatre techniques through the latest published books shifted both ways with texts such as Edward Gordon Craig's *The Art of Theatre*, translated into Russian in 1906.[48]

Thanks to the growth in translation, Russian playtexts, diverse in political intention and aesthetic attributes, became far more accessible to a general audience. Beasley claims 'translation from the Russian might be understood as *the* translation project of British modernism' and certainly the evidence bears this out.[49] This was not purely a literary revolution, however, and influenced the performance oeuvre of many companies and theatrical venues, with plays by Anton Chekhov, Maxim Gorky and Alexander Afinogenov presented alongside Shakespeare, Jonson, Shaw or Granville Barker. Indeed, in a sense, the act of translation is an act of performance, a process of 'acting out' a script, of transforming it into something intelligible and accessible for new audiences.[50]

Initial enquiries might suggest that British theatre companies attempted Chekhov's plays on a regular basis but largely overlooked other Russian plays deemed too experimental, incomprehensible or financially unworkable. However, on further reflection, it is clear that an enormous variety of Russian techniques inspired a generation of British artists, stretching to more experimental or formally challenging work. By way of example: Edith Craig's Pioneer Players showed a particular interest in Russian symbolism, producing Leonid Andreyev's *The Dear Departing* in 1915. This odd play narrates the story of a young man who appears to be about to commit suicide and the cosmopolitan crowd who have gathered to witness

this event. Interestingly for the purposes of this book, *The Dear Departing* is a play of travel and voyeurism, some people viewing the scene for detached entertainment and others trying to intervene.[51] Andreyev's work received especial attention in Britain; plays like *The Seven Who Got Hanged* (1908) and *He Who Gets Slapped* (1916) can be seen in the performance lists of a number of British theatre companies despite Andreyev's brand of realist symbolism (or symbolic realism), which proved challenging for potential audiences.[52] *He Who Gets Slapped* (produced at Birmingham Rep in 1926 and at the Everyman, London in 1927) seemed to be particularly contentious. Reviewers' issues with this play were grounded in their understanding of Russian theatre history: 'where Tchehov [sic] succeeds in making dull people interesting, Andreyev, in this piece, succeeds only in making potentially interesting people most abominably dull.'[53] The *Daily Graphic*'s reviewer continues by criticising the play through issues of national identity, issues that reappear throughout this book:

> Every producer who feels in danger of being swept along into the Russian revival should see this production. It is Andreyev through English eyes; whereas M. Komisarjevsky is giving us in town Tchehov through Russian eyes. And the latter is the more satisfying fare.[54]

The question of authenticity compels this reviewer to make his comparison. The inference is that Russian theatre is better produced 'through Russian eyes' (in this case the eyes of Russian émigré Theodore Komisarjevsky), as if 'English eyes' find it tricky to really grasp the subtleties of the Russian stage. Again this tension acts as a backdrop to many productions mentioned in this book: can 'English eyes' ever satisfactorily 'view' (or creatively interpret) Russian theatre either as part of travel experiences or as practitioners engaging with Russian plays and aesthetics in a British context?

In March 1915 the Pioneer Players grappled with another Russian symbolist play: Nikolai Evreinov's *Theatre of the Soul*, translated by Christopher St John and Maria Potapenko and performed at the Little Theatre, London. Evreinov had welcomed the October Revolution, orchestrating one of the most memorable and influential theatrical achievements of Bolshevik theatre: *The Storming of the Winter Palace* (1920). However, his brand of symbolist experimentalism soon attracted the ire of the Soviet government and he emigrated from Russia to Paris where he struggled to gain the sort of recognition his innovations surely deserved. Such a

fate awaited Andreyev, too, who ended his days in Finland, a fervent anti-revolutionary, grief-stricken at the Bolshevik takeover of his homeland.

Evreinov's *Theatre of the Soul* dramatises prominent psychological theories, presenting three aspects of human consciousness: M1 (rational entity), M2 (emotional entity) and M3 (subliminal entity). After some typical wrangling with the Lord Chamberlain, Craig produced the play and St John describes the performance as follows:

> The heart was represented by a glowing red space which appeared to pulsate owing to an effect of light… The whole effect was thrilling and beautiful, and helped enormously to create a dramatic atmosphere.[55]

Such experiment was rare on the British stage and such work was far less celebrated than productions of Chekhov plays. Stuart Young suggests 'although there was a grudging recognition of Evreinov's dramatic skills, his plays were generally dismissed as pretentious, portentous and humourless' and certainly there is merit in this appraisal.[56] However, *Theatre of the Soul* has an interesting performance history that reveals broader issues about the British reception of such experimental Russian plays. After the initial March performance, Craig's production was due to move to the Alhambra theatre as part of a November celebration entitled *Russia's Day*. Such events occurred with remarkable regularity during the early to mid twentieth century, though often fraught with socio-political or aesthetic issues. However, *Theatre of the Soul* did not appear as part of this event; it was withdrawn late on with very little explanation.[57] The play appeared the next month, however, as part of a charity matinee for British troops at the Shaftesbury Theatre. The commentator in *The Times* seems in two minds about *Theatre of the Soul*; on the one hand, he concludes that Evreinov has a 'dramatic gift' and his presentation of the split mind is 'theatrically effective'; on the other, he suggests, the playwright uses 'a crude and easy method of characterization'.[58] Certainly such experimental Russian work engendered some audience confusion. However, it was not simply rejected. And, in this case, it found a new audience of soldiers and sailors. Whether they enjoyed the peculiarly obscure play we cannot know, but (and this will be a running theme throughout this book) modernist avant-garde Russian performance was by no means restricted to the Oxbridge-educated or the well-heeled frequenters of the West End. In fact some of the most innovative responses to Russian theatre actually occurred in front of predominantly working-class audiences.