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HALLIE FLANAGAN'S AMERICAN DRAMATURGY

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE  
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## Chapter 1: Introduction

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Today America has a rich regional theatre system where a freelance dramaturg can work production-to-production with many companies and playwrights or with one company as a staff member working season-to-season. Each theatre is autonomous; most theatres are not bound to another through style, content, or administration. However, between 1935 and 1939, the government of the United States funded a national theatre program under the Works Progress Administration during Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal which united theaters across the United States. Hallie Flanagan, a professor at Vassar College, was chosen to head the Federal Theatre Project and implement Harry Hopkins'<sup>1</sup> vision for a federally-funded theatre in President Roosevelt's program. Flanagan's career leading up to the production of *One Third of a Nation* (1938) is similar to a modern dramaturg's. The notable aspect of her career suggested in this thesis is that Flanagan employed dramaturgical practices to perform her duties as National Director of the Federal Theatre Project.

The Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA) is an organization dedicated to the continued life of dramaturgy. It does this by creating a network for dramaturgs and providing resources to promote their work on different productions. The tasks a dramaturg might perform as defined by LMDA include: "helping develop the mission, help plan the season, and help look for scripts." A dramaturg working with new plays may "solicit scripts from writers and agents, read and evaluate new scripts, track and file those scripts, write kindly letters to writers, . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Hopkins was the head of the Works Progress Administration.

negotiate with agents, prepare adaptations and translations, commission new work, organize the in-house play reading program, organize the new play reading program for subscribers, help bring new plays into full production, and support those writers whose vision captures our minds and hearts.”<sup>2</sup> The formal designation of the dramaturg in a theatre company is relatively new to American theatres, but throughout theatre history, individuals like Flanagan have performed the functions of a dramaturg while assuming various roles in the theatre such as director or playwright.

Raised in Iowa, Hallie Flanagan showed an affinity for writing at a young age. Her love of writing led her to Grinnell College where she majored in German and English. She wrote several plays while at Grinnell, and she was involved in many clubs including drama. Flanagan’s classmates described her as leader who actively participated in school functions. Following her graduation from Grinnell in 1911, Flanagan married and became a high school teacher, but a year later she realized that she wanted to return to Grinnell. After the death of her husband she began to focus on her career and decided to continue her education. She began teaching at Grinnell and then took a year off to study in the 47 Workshop at Harvard with George Pierce Baker. Here Flanagan was introduced to Gotthold Lessing’s *Hamburg Dramaturgie* (1767), which is still used in training modern dramaturgs. At the conclusion of the 47 Workshop Baker encouraged Flanagan to travel to Europe and study theatre there. She applied for and received the Guggenheim Fellowship – the first woman to do so – to travel to Europe and write about theatre produced there in the 1920s. Her journals show

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<sup>2</sup> "What is Dramaturgy?" *Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas*. Web. 20 June 2014. <<http://www.lmda.org/tags/what-dramaturgy>>.

that on this journey she learned about scenery, lighting, playwriting and experimental styles emerging throughout Europe from famous theatre practitioners such as Edward Gordon Craig, Konstantin Stanislavsky, and Vsevolod Meyerhold. Her notes from this trip culminated in her book, *Shifting Scenes*, published in 1928. She visited several European countries, including Russia and Czechoslovakia, where professionals were experimenting with agit-prop<sup>3</sup> and politically-motivated theatre. While in Russia Flanagan discovered a new form called Living Newspapers and later adopted and adapted their style of political theatre for America's Federal Theatre Project.

Flanagan was Harry Hopkins' and President Roosevelt's first choice to lead the Federal Theatre Project based on her success in directing the Vassar Experimental Theatre. President Roosevelt served on the college's governing board during her time at Vassar and was impressed with her successful leadership of the theatre department and experimentation with contemporary theatrical styles on a small budget. Her emphasis on education and experimentation, coupled with her experience managing a theatre with a small budget, appealed to the President. Initially Flanagan did not want the job as the director of the Federal Theatre Project and offered several other names of people she thought would be more suitable.

As the director of the Federal Theatre Project, Flanagan assisted Harry Hopkins in developing its mission, organizing the regional offices throughout the United States and planning seasons for each region. Some of the dramaturgical tasks she performed included working with regional directors to maintain the government's vision for the Federal Theatre project, writing plays and setting up offices to research information for

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<sup>3</sup> Art with a clear political message.



scripts. She also assisted in adapting Living Newspapers to reflect different regions' Depression era social concerns of different regions like the Russian Living Newspapers. Flanagan describes her experience with the Russian Living Newspapers in *Shifting Scenes*,

At Trade Union or Factory theatres, the Blue Blouses, workers by day and actors by night, perform original acrobatic plays. I remember seeing three men and three girls glorify workers of the Army, the Navy, the farms, and factories. Each motif reached its climax in a refrain taken up by the audience, a refrain consisting of the repetition of a single word *Comrade*—half sung, half shouted.<sup>4</sup>

She also notes a meeting with Hungarian writer and revolutionary, Mate Zalke, about revolutionary theatre,

“In Russia to-day are two main theatres,” Zalka [sic] explained, “They are the formal, and the revolutionary. . . . In the revolutionary wing, we are not concerned with theories of art, but with theories of life. We have many theatres, of which Meierhold [sic] may be said to be chief regisseur<sup>5</sup> in the sense that all look to him as creating the art form; but the other worker’s theatres, the Proletcult, the trade Union theatres, the Social Satire groups, these also give spirit of the new Russia.”<sup>6</sup>

Similarly Flanagan created programs in the F.T.P. that balanced classical works, new works, and political theatre. Zalka goes on to explain the writing of the Russian Living Newspapers,

“A revolutionary dramatist is not as yet usually a literary artist. A man has an idea for a play. He comes to the regisseur, they talk it over, they call in actors, all work on it together. Then the play comes.” I asked whether the Revolutionary Theatre disapproved of other forms of drama. “Not at all,” said Zalka tolerantly. “We are glad that the government pays to help the other theatres just as it pays to help us. Other theatres should be kept alive as museums of the past. Our theatres, however, are not museums. They are life.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Flanagan, Hallie. *Shifting Scenes of the Modern European Theatre*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1928. 108-109. Print.

<sup>5</sup> A regisseur is comparable to a contemporary director.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 109-110.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 110.

Comparably Flanagan established the Living Newspaper research offices, which researched topics in news articles. They chose articles which reflected social issues important to Americans like tenement housing, employment and farming. The articles and headlines were then transformed into full-fledged Living Newspaper plays, the most well-known of which is *One Third of a Nation* which depicts the horrible, unregulated living conditions of tenements.

Flanagan adhered to Hopkins's vision of an organization whose primary purpose was to employ out-of-work theatre artists. She also used her knowledge from George Pierce Baker's 47 Workshop to develop successful educational programs like the touring theatre companies which performed plays for the young men in the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.) relief program which relied upon audience engagement and strong storytelling devices.

At this point, if this [project] were a living newspaper, a motion picture of C.C.C. camps would show boys in northern woods, in western mountains, in southern swamps, show them planting forests, repairing roads, fighting floods and fire. It would also show them crowding in the mess hall to see a Federal Theatre play. The C.C.C. camps adopted Federal Theatre. All through New England, each C.C.C. camp contributed out of its mess fund a sum sufficient to transport the unit over the circuit. They wrote about the shows in the camp newspaper, *Happy Days*; they ran a national contest, and the prize play, *Return to Death*, by Washington Porter, was later produced by a Federal Theatre company in Holyoke, Massachusetts.<sup>8</sup>

Flanagan created diverse programs that addressed Americans' Depression era concerns, regardless of class, income, employment, or relief status.

She also initiated programs like The First Federal Summer Theatre, a summer program for select F.T.P. employees representing each region. The forty participants took classes led by theatre professionals who taught movement, acting, design, music,

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<sup>8</sup> Flanagan, Hallie. *Arena*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1985. 233. Print.

lighting and costuming regardless the participants' specialization in their respective theatres. During the Federal Summer Theatre the participants and the instructors created a Living Newspaper that would later become *One-Third of a Nation*.<sup>9</sup>

Flanagan never referred to herself as a dramaturg; however, her education, travels, and teaching career reflected the education and training of a modern dramaturg and prepared her for her role as the National Director of the Federal Theatre Project. There she employed dramaturgical practices to achieve the mission of the F.T.P. established by Flanagan, Harry Hopkins, and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this thesis is to use examples from Flanagan's education and career to establish that Flanagan used dramaturgical practices to achieve the educational and political mission of the Federal Theatre Project. I explore Flanagan's early education and leadership among her peers, as well as her continued education with George Pierce Baker. Furthermore, I examine how she became National Director of the F.T.P. and how the dramaturgical skills learned from George Pierce Baker affected the projects she instituted.

### **Significance**

I aim to raise awareness of Flanagan's use of dramaturgical techniques to implement Federal Theatre programs, which employed out-of-work theatre artists and introduced quality affordable theatre to thousands of Americans, many of whom had never seen a play.

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<sup>9</sup> *First Federal Summer Theatre: A Report*. New York: Federal Theatre National Publications, 1937. 14. Print.

The Federal Theatre project had a tremendous impact on the lives of Americans between 1934 and 1939. Flanagan's career embraced the leadership and creative functions of dramaturgy that editors Geoffrey S. Proehl, Michael Lupu and Susan Jones include in *Dramaturgy in American Theatre: A Source Book*. The preface explains the history of dramaturgy and its roots in German theatre. At the end of the preface, Proehl and Jones suggest dramaturgs: "Look for continuities among [the different articles], for those ideas, images, and metaphors that surface again and again" to develop ones' own dramaturgical techniques as well as "Question everything."<sup>10</sup> Inspired by these suggestions I apply ideas in the *Source Book* to Flanagan's actions and publications to illustrate the ways Flanagan employed dramaturgical methods. According to dramaturg Mark Bly, until the Yale School of Drama introduced the study of dramaturgy as practiced by contemporary dramaturgs, individuals who acted dramaturgically, but never referred to themselves as dramaturgs, defined the early history of American dramaturgy.<sup>11</sup> Anne Cattaneo acknowledges in "Dramaturgy: An Overview" that in the United States, "the functions of the dramaturg existed well before the profession itself had a name."<sup>12</sup> In her list of dramaturgs throughout theatre history, Cattaneo does not mention Flanagan but cites other historical figures including Arthur Ballet whom she acknowledges as running "a sort of national dramaturgy office."<sup>13</sup> There are few publications that associate Flanagan's career as National Director of the F.T.P. with

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<sup>10</sup> Jonas, Susan and Geoffrey S. Proehl, "Preface." *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1997. Xvi-xvii. Print

<sup>11</sup> Bly, Mark. *The Production Notebooks vol. 1*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1996. P. xvi- xvii

<sup>12</sup> Cattaneo, Anne. "Dramaturgy: An Overview." *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book*. Ed. Jonas, Susan, Geoffrey S. Proehl, and Michael Lupu. New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1997. 2. Print.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* 3.

dramaturgy. By examining her education and career, a modern dramaturg could apply Flanagan's practices to their own career, especially when working with multiple theatres throughout the United States as Flanagan did.

### Methodology

In this thesis I use modern dramaturgical resources to examine Flanagan's career and show the ways in which she used dramaturgy to perform her duties as the National Director of the F.T.P.

In *Toward A Dramaturgical Sensibility*, Geoff Proehl writes,

To work with the dramaturgy of a play—whatever one's role (director, designer, actor, stage manager, playwright, audience member, teacher, critic, observer producer, patron, friend or partner)—is to enter into a thoughtful and persistent engagement with the ways in which the form and content of theatrical performances emerge from their first dreamed indeterminacies to their most recent staged incarnations. A dramaturg—the person who appears in the program with this title—is never essential to the rehearsal and production process. Dramaturgy, however—this deep, often personal, even idiosyncratic understanding of the forms and rhythms crucial to a play as written or conceived and performed—is inseparable from theater making, whether or not the word itself is ever used.<sup>14</sup>

There are individuals who hold the role of a dramaturg separate from any other job in their theatre. However, before dramaturgy became a separate study at the Yale School of Drama in 1966, American theatre practitioners incorporated dramaturgical practices into their primary jobs of critiquing, directing, designing and acting. Because of this, it is the practice of modern dramaturgs to look at traditional theatre jobs such as script doctors, directors, and playwrights for dramaturgical practices before 1966 in America. I believe that by looking at Hallie Flanagan's actions as the National Director of the

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<sup>14</sup> Proehl, Geoffrey S, D D. Kugler, Mark Lamos, and Michael Lupu. *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility: Landscape and Journey*. Madison N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008. 20. Print.

F.T.P. and comparing them to modern dramaturgical practices, modern dramaturgs can learn from her example and incorporate her approaches into their own work.

I explore primary sources from the Federal Theatre Project and Flanagan's personal papers to prove that Flanagan used dramaturgical practices to engage American audiences and educate her employees in the Federal Theatre Project. I also cite secondary sources about the Federal Theatre Project to help illustrate the scope of the project and the impact that Flanagan had on the growing American theatre audience of the 1930s.

In 1983 Peter Hay published his article, "Dramaturgy: A Critical Re-Appraisal," in *Performing Arts Journal*. In it he cites an unpublished survey by Felicia Londré identifying the different duties that dramaturgs performed:

51 out of 56 respondents stated that they were involved in play selection, 38 in making decisions about casting, 31 directed showcase productions, 19 attended auditions in other cities, 18 worked to raise funds, 15 directed major productions (including four Literary Managers), 16 wrote or translated plays, 11 acted, 7 listed business management, 4 house management, 2 designed, 2 worked in the shop, 1 in the costume shop. Additional activities include producing a new play series, supervising workshops and play readers, teaching, talent scouting and editing support materials. According to the Londré survey, research takes up an average of 11.64% of dramaturgical time, 10.71% is spent on "reflection, analysis and discussion" and 5.35% on public relations. Under other activities (7.14% of their time) dramaturgs embrace a very large range of responsibilities: writing, conducting seminars and producing literary evenings, being involved in project development, educational outreach, and "acting as an ombudsman."<sup>15</sup>

Dramaturgs may not always be called "dramaturgs," but dramaturgical work is vital in implementing theatrical productions. George Pierce Baker was instrumental in bringing the study and practice of theatre into *the academy*. His students went on to become famous playwrights and to found theatres across the country. He taught them how to

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<sup>15</sup> Hay, Peter. "American Dramaturgy: A Critical Re-Appraisal." *Performing Arts Journal* Vol. 7, No. 3. 1983. 9-10. E-Journal.

function dramaturgically based on Gotthold Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgie*. Hallie Flanagan used this dramaturgical understanding of playwriting and directing to introduce theatrical productions and educational projects to a quarter of the American population as the National Director of the Federal Theatre Project.<sup>16</sup>

### Review of Literature

The sources for this thesis range from primary Federal Theatre documents and Flanagan's personal papers to contemporary works published about dramaturgy and the way a dramaturg functions in a theatre. George Pierce Baker's 1907 book, *The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist*, argues for a theatre that arrives at a final product through the use of academic research, script analysis, and audience engagement. Baker's description of a dramatist influences the way I understand Flanagan's perception of playwriting and collaborative theatre after she attended Baker's 47 Workshop at Harvard. I also cite Wisner P. Kinne's 1954 book, *George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre*, that explores Baker's teaching career in comparison to Flanagan's actions after creating the Vassar Experimental Theatre and the National Director of the Federal Theatre Project. I also explore primary sources from *The Hallie Flanagan Papers*, located at the New York Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Center. This collection of Flanagan's personal papers and Federal Theatre Project documents provides insight into the various facets of Flanagan's years as the National Director of the Federal Theatre Project. Flanagan's *Shifting Scenes* describes Living Newspapers she saw in Russia. It confirms the importance of Flanagan's first-hand knowledge of experimental theatre styles emerging from Europe in the late

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<sup>16</sup> Robbins, Tim, and Theresa Burns. *Cradle Will Rock: The Movie and the Moment*. New York: Newmarket Press, 2000. 3-4. Print.

1920's. Willson Witham's *Bread and Circuses*, which Flanagan recommended to students who wrote her inquiring about the F.T.P., and Joanne Bentley's *Hallie Flanagan: A Life in the American Theatre* provide insight into Flanagan's personal life and career. I explore the relationship between Flanagan's career and modern dramaturgy by citing more recent publications about dramaturgy and the Federal Theatre Project. Throughout the thesis, I reference *Dramaturgy in the American Theatre: A Source Book, Towards a Dramaturgical Sensibility*, and articles such as Peter Hay's, "American Dramaturgy: A Critical Re-Appraisal," to illustrate the different titles someone who functions dramaturgically might hold. I explore secondary sources about the Federal Theatre Project such as *Furious Improvisation* by Susan Quinn, *The Federal Theatre 1935-1939* by Jane DeHart Mathews, *Century of Innovation* by Oscar Brockett, the companion book to the 2000 film *The Cradle Will* based on the notorious F.T.P. production with the same title and *Staging the People: Community and Identity in the Federal Theatre Project* by Elizabeth Osborne. Each of these sources provides information about the Federal Theatre Project and its impact on modern American theatres. In Chapter Four, I compare two versions of the 1938 Federal Theatre Living Newspaper scripts for *One-Third of a Nation* to illustrate how Flanagan used dramaturgical skills to adapt plays for different audiences. The first is an original script produced by the New York Living Newspaper offices and the second is the script that was adapted for the Philadelphia production. I refer to Arthur R. Jarvis Jr.'s 1994 article, "The Living Newspaper in Philadelphia, 1938-1939," to help differentiate the two versions and accurately convey the impact of the changes to the Philadelphia script.



## Chapter 2: Flanagan's Editors Contents

The first chapter is this introduction, followed by the second chapter that briefly outlines the trajectory of Flanagan's career from a student at Grinnell to the national director of the Federal Theatre Project. The third chapter explains how Flanagan's studies and leadership at George Pierce Baker's 47 Workshop provided her with a dramaturgical education that she would access later in career as the director of the Vassar Experimental Theatre and as National Director of the Federal Theatre Project. The fourth chapter explores how Flanagan became the National Director. In this chapter I discuss how Flanagan's dramaturgical education at the 47 Workshop impacted the projects and the productions that she oversaw as National Director. The fifth and final chapter is the conclusion.

## Chapter 2: Flanagan's Education

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Flanagan's education and career impacted the projects that she implemented as National Director of the Federal Theatre Project. Each step in Flanagan's education, academic and professional career made her the ideal candidate to lead the Federal Theatre Project. Her early education and her experiences exploring European theatre in the late 1920s led to the productions she created as the director of the Vassar Experimental Theatre. Flanagan's direction commanded audiences and experimented with styles of theatre she saw in Europe, such as the Living Newspapers, that would later develop into successful components of the Federal Theatre Project. Investigation of Flanagan's education and academic and professional careers will demonstrate how Flanagan's training as a playwright was similar to a modern dramaturg's.

In their paragraph about Flanagan in *Century of Innovation* theatre historians Oscar Brockett and Robert Findlay note that Flanagan was a student of George Pierce Baker along with other "leaders in post-war American theatre."<sup>1</sup> It is important to study Flanagan as a student and teacher as well as the National Director of the F.T.P. Her interest in contemporary theatrical techniques and attention to the audience was not something that occurred to Flanagan spontaneously; they were skills that she learned, tested, and experimented with throughout her career, and including her time as National Director of the Federal Theatre Project.

A dramaturg is trained in both practice and theory. A successful dramaturg can navigate the confluence of both. In his article in *Dramaturgy in the American Theatre:*

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<sup>1</sup> Brockett, Oscar G, and Robert R. Findlay. *Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre and Drama Since 1870*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1973. 130. Print.

*A Source Book*, famed theatre historian Oscar Brockett writes, "One of dramaturgy's primary goals is to promote integration of the knowledge and perception learned from theatre history, dramatic literature, and theory with the skills and expertise needed to realize the potential of a particular script in a particular production in a particular time and place for a particular audience."<sup>2</sup> A dramaturg has to be aware of the shifts in contemporary theatre, and the nuances of modern performance: they must also apply theory, style, analysis and critical techniques in appropriate situations. Through her education at Grinnell, her studies abroad, participation in the 47 Workshop, and her teaching at Vassar, Flanagan learned these skills and applied them. In order to understand Flanagan as a dramaturg, it is necessary to examine her education.

Flanagan began her studies at Grinnell College in Iowa in 1907 and graduated in 1911.<sup>3</sup> She was involved in many student activities such as the drama club, and was generally known among her peers as a hard-working, active and creative student. At Grinnell she was "president of the Literary Society and editor of the college literary magazine and her class yearbook. She joined Dramatic Club [the student theatre group], her senior year she was designated class poet, and wrote a series of poems for the yearbook."<sup>4</sup> She was an extremely talented student who excelled socially and academically.

Flanagan was an active collaborator even as a student, able to work well with her peers while leaving an indelible impression. It is not explicitly stated in Flanagan's

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<sup>2</sup> Brockett, Oscar. "Dramaturgy in Education: An Introduction." *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book*. Ed. Jonas, Susan, Geoffrey S. Proehl, and Michael Lupu. New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1997. 42. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Bentley, Joanne. *Hallie Flanagan: A Life in the American Theatre*. New York: Knopf, 1988. 16. Print.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* 19.

book, *Arena*, nor the biography by her step-daughter Joanne Bentley how Flanagan impressed Harry Hopkins, leader of the W.P.A., during their education at Grinnell College. However, they both indicate that their friendship began there. While the most impressive aspects of Flanagan's career occurred two decades after her graduation, she cultivated her attitudes toward education, humanity, and the welfare of others at Grinnell as a result of her diversified interests and education. Flanagan strove to educate herself in the theory and history of theatre while focusing primarily on earning a degree in German and Philosophy.<sup>5</sup> She immersed herself in her studies as well as student organizations. She learned what is required of a leader while attending Grinnell.

Flanagan was a passionate and popular student. Fellow students regarded her as "impulsive, generous, venturesome, and very loyal to her friends. She could hold her own in any argument."<sup>6</sup> Her peers admired her and "regarded [her] as a leader,"<sup>7</sup> because of her own success as well as her investment in the success of her fellow students.

Flanagan's passion for the arts and influence as a leader followed her into the classroom when she became a teacher.

One young man she taught that year recalled the dramatic hush that came over the classroom when Hallie read Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. "She was almost in tears when she finished, and so was the entire class. All she did when the class period was over was wave us out. And we all filed out the door. Nobody said a word."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Hallie Flanagan Davis." *Vassar Encyclopedia*. Web. 5 Nov 2013. <<http://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/faculty/prominent-faculty/hallie-flanagan-davis.html>>.

<sup>6</sup> Bentley, Joanne. *Hallie Flanagan: A Life in the American Theatre*. New York: Knopf, 1988. 17. Print.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 17.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 29.

Flanagan's ability to interpret art that resonated with her audiences started in her early career as an educator as evidenced in the audience reaction to her productions.

In 1920 Hallie began teaching English at Grinnell College. That year Grinnell introduced playwriting and dramatic production courses taught by colleague William Bridge.<sup>9</sup> Flanagan loved writing stories and plays from an early age but had no formal education in playwriting. As Bridge's classroom assistant Flanagan began her playwriting education. In 1923 she left Grinnell and moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to join George Pierce Baker's 47 Workshop at Radcliffe College. In *Dramaturgy in the American Theatre: A Source Book*, dramaturg Art Borreca writes in his article "Dramaturging New Play Dramaturgy: The Yale and Iowa Ideals," "Without being known as such, Baker was Yale's first critic/dramaturg. And today the 47 Workshop (known as Drama 47) remains at the center of Yale School of Drama's new play activity."<sup>10</sup> Without a doubt Flanagan's experience at the 47 Workshop permanently altered her career, Bentley writes; "Hallie was later to say that George Pierce Baker taught her everything she learned about theatre."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid 30.

<sup>10</sup> Baker was a student at Harvard and taught in the English Department there after graduating. Later he helped found the Yale School of Drama. He brought his playwriting workshop with him. The seminar was known as the 47 Workshop regardless of location. Borreca, Art. "Dramaturging New Play Dramaturgy: The Yale and Iowa Ideals." *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book*. Ed. Jonas, Susan, Geoffrey S. Proehl, and Michael Lupu. New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1997. 57. Print.

<sup>11</sup> Bentley, Joanne. *Hallie Flanagan: A Life in the American Theatre*. New York: Knopf, 1988. 37. Print.

George Pierce Baker established the 47 Workshop while he was teaching classes at Radcliffe.<sup>12</sup> He created a workshop where fledgling playwrights could try out their new plays. When speaking to the Drama League in Pittsburgh about this idea he stated that an aspiring playwright

has no place to "try out" his plays except with amateurs, or on the professional stage. People go to the first [performance], not seeing the acting, but to see their friends act. It means no chance for many plays, for when presented on the professional stage, many with one or two acts good, are rejected by a critical, unsympathetic audience; whereas, if given in an independent "trying out" theatre they could easily be reconstructed. At present, all that can be done for such plays is some juggling on the part of the [producer] to the despair of the unfortunate playwright, and a total rehashing of the production until little of the original remains. A trying-out place is sadly needed in this country.<sup>13</sup>

Baker's solution was the 47 Workshop. He explained to the president of the Harvard

Dramatic Club:

The plan is to establish an informal organization of the [forty-seven] people in and around Cambridge, for a twofold purpose: first, to bring plays written in Eng. 47 to the test of actual production at an early stage in their development thus giving to the author at the time when he most needs it, the inspiration and instruction of seeing his work tried out; and second to experiment whenever the nature of the play permits, with some of the new methods of staging, scene-painting and lighting now in use in the Continental theatres . . . thus a play showing a distinct dramatic value, on being tried out in the Experimental Theatre, will be worked over and made as good as possible and then offered to the Harvard Dramatic Club or the professional theatres.<sup>14</sup>

By limiting this workshop to dramatists and people who had a technical<sup>15</sup> interest in theatre, Baker developed a new type of dramatist as well as a new type of critic, one who applies their skills to the betterment of a new work.

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<sup>12</sup> Kinne, Wisner P. *George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954. 156. Print.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 156.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 157.

<sup>15</sup> Both an in-depth knowledge of theatre and students who worked on productions.

The workshops began in 1912 and continued into the 1920's when Flanagan received her invitation to study. At the 47 Workshop Flanagan became close to Baker. "According to a classmate, 'he listened with great interest whenever she spoke or criticized our work.'"<sup>16</sup> While Flanagan attended classes with Baker and studied playwriting, "it was Halle's job to attend rehearsals and keep Baker informed about sets, lighting, and costumes. She took her job seriously but kept a sense of humor about her duties. It was also Halle's job to carry student designs to a group of three experts and report their criticisms back to Baker."<sup>17</sup> Flanagan was fully capable of holding her own among her peers at the 47 Workshop, many of whom would also go on to have a great impact on American theatre. She was able to speak intelligently about theory and criticism as well as production elements such as sets, lighting, and costumes. This skill would be crucial to her leadership in the Federal Theatre Project where Flanagan would employ theatre practitioners in many diverse areas of production and education.

Flanagan and Baker both use the term "dramatist" when referring to playwrights in their respective publications. It is crucial to understand that during his career Baker was attempting to redefine the American playwright, from someone "truckling to an audience" to an educated dramatist who "consider[s] [an audience's] natural likes and dislikes, interests and indifferences, their probable knowledge of his subject as well as [the audience's] probable approach to it."<sup>18</sup> In Baker's book *Dramatic Technique* he explains, "Either in [the first re-write of a play] or possible later re-writings, the

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<sup>16</sup>Bentley, Joanne. *Hallie Flanagan: A Life in the American Theatre*. New York: Knopf, 1988. 37. Print.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid 37-38.

<sup>18</sup> Baker, George P. *Dramatic Technique*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919. 509. Print.

dramatist shapes his material more and more in relation to the public he wishes to address, for a dramatist is after all, a sort of public speaker.”<sup>19</sup> Though Flanagan wrote plays before meeting George Pierce Baker, the training and criticism at the 47 Workshop influenced the caliber of her writing as well as her critical vocabulary. Therefore, it is clear that George Pierce Baker, who wrote two books describing dramatic technique and his view of a dramatist, influenced her terminology and her perception of the distinction between the terms “playwright” and “dramatist.” Flanagan adopted this distinction in her book, *Arena*, in which she refers to the playwrights of the Federal Theatre Project as “dramatists.” When Baker refers to a dramatist, he refers to someone who does much more than write the script. The modern conception of a playwright is someone who takes into consideration historical and social circumstances, theatrical devices, and theatrical conventions. Baker recognized that the audience of the early 1900s did not consider contemporary plays simple entertainments “but dramatic essays on social questions.”<sup>20</sup>

In *The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist* Baker states that many plays of the early 1900s demonstrate a “distinction between permanent characteristics of the form, drama, and the ephemeral differentia of plays belonging to different periods or different nationalities [which have] not been widely understood.”<sup>21</sup> Here he states that we need to educate the audience, a job that is relegated, in part, to a dramaturg in contemporary theatre. Baker was training dramatists, individuals who write, but also

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<sup>19</sup> Baker, George P. *Dramatic Technique*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919. 509. Print.

<sup>20</sup> Baker, George P. *The Development of Shakespeare As a Dramatist*. New York: Macmillan Co, 1907. 4. Print.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid 5.



who undertake many tasks in a production. He calls for a playwright who edifies an audience the way that Shakespeare did. Because Baker chooses to label Shakespeare as a dramatist (a word Baker does not use exclusively, as he later refers to some artists as playwrights) it stands to reason that this term has a slightly different meaning than “playwright.” In *Arena*, Flanagan’s post-mortem recollection of the rise and fall of the Federal Theatre Project, she refers to some theatre practitioners as “dramatists” and others as “playwrights.” This distinction raises the question, “What then is a dramatist to Baker and Flanagan?” In the introduction to *The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist* Baker suggests that playwrights in the early 1900s often tried to imitate Shakespeare but they did not understand why they were inclined to do so. He goes on to write:

The imitators forget that no play can have lasting popularity which neglects the prejudices, tastes, above all the ideals of its own day. That we find delight in Shakespeare’s plays to-day does not alter the fact that had he written for us he could not have written exactly as he did for the Elizabethans. Therefore to judge his plays technically by other standards than those of the time for which he wrote them is illogical, and likely, as in the case of the Restoration critics of Shakespeare or Mr. G.B. Shaw’s strictures more recently, to throw more light on the critics than on their subject.<sup>22</sup>

*The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist* is divided into chapters that examine experimentation and style in Shakespeare’s writing. Baker considers the theatre spaces for which Shakespeare wrote, his experimentation in style and adaptation, and the structure of his plays. In both *The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist* and *Dramatic Technique*, Baker calls for someone who acts like a dramaturg: someone who researches, attempts to understand the theatrical conventions at the time a play was

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid 5-6.

written, and adapts other stories for modern audiences.<sup>23</sup> He taught his workshop students to create plays that were more relevant to a contemporary audience. He did this by encouraging thorough research, fully-developed characters, strict text analysis, and then, after the play is produced through collaborative means, he calls for in-depth criticism from peers with a technical understanding of theatre.

During this time in Cambridge, Baker encouraged Flanagan to “spend a year seeing plays” in Europe. He even suggested that she should fund this trip through a fellowship. “Baker, in fact, gave her a high recommendation. He was to write the Guggenheim Foundation that she was ‘as distinguished a woman student as I have ever had in my 47 Workshop, and she holds her own well with the best of men.’”<sup>24</sup> Flanagan was an inspiring educator and an active student. She recognized areas where she lacked expertise and sought to improve.

Considering the education Flanagan received at Baker’s workshop, it is no surprise that she returned to teach at Grinnell “full of ideas.”<sup>25</sup> She wanted to create shows with her students that incorporated her education with Baker. This resulted in a production of *Romeo and Juliet* that catered to her university audience:

Hallie’s conception of the play was above all youthful. She decided to stress “hot blooded riot in the streets, with every man quick to give or avenge an insult; gay-hearted jesting on the way to the feast . . . Juliet a child until the moment where she first sees Romeo . . . running the whole gamut of youthful intensities.” Hallie had decided to revert to the “bare boards of the Elizabethan stage,” using only an occasional piece of furniture and relying on lights to create the mood.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Baker, George P. *Dramatic Technique*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919. 509. Print.

<sup>24</sup> Bentley, Joanne. *Hallie Flanagan: A Life in the American Theatre*. New York: Knopf, 1988. 41. Print.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid* 41.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid* 43-44.

Bentley quotes a student about the effect of the show on the audience:

The whole audience sat immobile, recorded the result of the production. Not a hand moved to clap. There was just a death-like silence. For several moments no one moved from his seat. Then people stood up and began to move out into the aisles. Old friends were seen as we moved down the aisles, but not a word of greeting was spoken. No one wanted to break the spell.<sup>27</sup>

*Romeo and Juliet*'s success solidified Flanagan's vision about the future of theatre and education of practitioners and also affirmed the education she received during her year with the 47 Workshop. She applied thorough research, attention to detail, text analysis, and criticism, and she produced an intricate production of *Romeo and Juliet* that resonated with her college audience at Grinnell. As a result of this production Flanagan was invited to join the faculty at Vassar College in New York.

Before beginning her work at Vassar, Flanagan received a Guggenheim Fellowship to visit Europe and study contemporary theatrical practices. While in Sweden she met actress Harriet Bosse, August Strindberg's widow. "Bosse told Hallie that Americans must have a false impression of her late husband, that 'Strindberg can be understood only if his plays are acted together, in a cycle, as we act him . . . . All of his plays belong together, in the order written, like threads in a tapestry.'"<sup>28</sup> In Copenhagen, Flanagan met designer Edward Gordon Craig. Craig showed Flanagan his studio filled with maps and "long tables with sketches and models."<sup>29</sup> After Flanagan said that she had a hard time understanding his current production, *The Pretenders*, Craig shared his ideas of stage design with her: "No stage design is worth its salt unless it helps the actor. That is what I have always said but people have always misunderstood me. I have always put the actors first but people think because I

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid 45.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid 57.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid 60.

published designs in a book I thought the designs were more important than the acting.”<sup>30</sup> This sentiment clearly affected Flanagan’s practices as National Director. In the early years, Flanagan was known for intricate designs that were backbreaking to implement, but had a tremendous effect on the audience. However, later in the Federal Theatre Project, she pared down her concepts for more abstracted forms that focused the attention on the actors rather than the scenery.

In Russia, Flanagan interviewed a sixty-three-year-old Konstantin Stanislavsky. “Stanislavsky told Hallie in an interview after the performance [of *Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich*] that he wanted to do a revolutionary play, though he would not do one simply because it was revolutionary.” He went on to say that he felt that the Russians were “too close to the Revolution to produce art reflecting it.”<sup>31</sup> It seems that this idea affected Flanagan’s later actions as National Director as well. The most important part of Stanislavsky’s advice was about producing the right play at the right time. Modern dramaturgs often ask the question, “why this play now?” As the National Director of the Federal Theatre Project, Flanagan oversaw the production of many plays that would later be deemed “revolutionary.” Yet she believed she must produce them because of the timing of current events and content. Stanislavsky provided Flanagan with a dramaturgical outlook on the content of plays for production, and it is clear that she took this message to heart later in her career.

Flanagan continued her studies in Russia by attending *The Death and Destruction of Europe* directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold. The “insolent rhythms”<sup>32</sup> she

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid 60.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid 68.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid 68.

saw in Meyerhold's production were a strong contrast to her experience with Stanislavsky's "moment [that] had been carefully designed to emphasize an aspect of character."<sup>33</sup> Meyerhold invited her to watch him rehearse. Flanagan considered Stanislavsky an "invisible director" but she was captivated by Meyerhold's charisma.<sup>34</sup> Flanagan would go on to see several of Meyerhold's productions and would marvel at his ability to tell a story through movement, tempo, and rhythm. Years before the Soviet government would interrogate Meyerhold for his revolutionary and politically-charged art, Flanagan questioned in her notes if Meyerhold was "primarily artist or primarily revolutionist?"<sup>35</sup> This question would also be asked about Flanagan's career in her hearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

One of the most significant forms of theatre Flanagan witnessed in Russia was a new form of social theatre called Living Newspapers. Flanagan visited several Living Newspaper troupes.

Living Newspapers had started very simply, when leading members of Soviet workers' clubs got up onstage to read newspaper articles to other club members. In a country where illiteracy was widespread, reading aloud had a practical, propagandistic purpose. Gradually these readings aloud had evolved into something more elaborate. Hallie found the Blue Blouses to be the best of the Living Newspaper groups.<sup>36</sup>

The Blue Blouses' Living Newspapers gave Flanagan the inspiration to create her own American Living Newspapers as part of the Federal Theatre Project.

While in Germany Flanagan learned that her father had died four weeks prior to her arrival and that one of his dying wishes was that Flanagan continue with her book

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid 69.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid 70.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid 71.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid 73.

and travels.<sup>37</sup> Given her father's death and her recent travels to Russia, Flanagan was not in a state to be impressed with Germany. She found German theatre "smothered . . . crushed under its own weight."<sup>38</sup> Homesick, Flanagan continued her travels to Vienna. She was equally unimpressed with the theatre there. However, Italy provided a feeling of home and relief that Flanagan needed. She travelled through Venice and Florence, finally arriving in Rome where she met Luigi Pirandello. Familiar with and interested in his plays, Flanagan asked how Pirandello might like his plays produced in America. He replied that he would like them done, "in a fine balance between the seen world and that other world which many of us know exists only a hairsbreadth from the actual. Perhaps this balance can be shown by muted tones of the voice in contrast to full tones; or by wavering gesture in contrast to sharp lines of every day; or by light, which seems to be the best to express subtle things in the theatre."<sup>39</sup> Later Flanagan would be the first American to produce Pirandello's *Each His Own Way*.<sup>40</sup> This idea of "balance" and "contrast" is seen in the way that productions were staged for the Federal Theatre Project, specifically for *One-Third of a Nation* and the Federal Summer in which she required participants to study lighting design. Flanagan hired Abe Feder to teach lighting design because his ability to evoke atmosphere with a few instruments and the way he viewed theatrical lighting as a scenic element. She notes in *Arena* a favorite quote from Feder who said, "Don't buy flats, don't buy paint, don't buy costumes, and don't buy make-up! Buy lights!"<sup>41</sup> This idea was cost efficient and also played to

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid 78.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid 78.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid 88.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid 88.

<sup>41</sup> Flanagan, Hallie. *Arena*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1985. 213. Print.

Pirandello's suggestion that light brings out subtleties in the story, set, and actors' expressions.

After taking time to vacation on the coast of the Mediterranean, Flanagan returned to Vassar. With her newfound knowledge and experiences with contemporary theatre across Europe, Flanagan directed Chekov's *The Marriage Proposal* "three times in one evening, each time in a different manner."<sup>42</sup> Flanagan staged *The Marriage Proposal* "realistically, as Chekov had intended."<sup>43</sup> After an intermission "the audience would return to find that the stage had become an abstraction."<sup>44</sup> Her actors then performed in masks and "would speak in rhythmic monotones, the tempo of each adjusted to fit individual character. Everything would be done expressionistically to reveal the essence of the play 'the eternal, deadly struggle, between man and his implacable enemy, woman.'"<sup>45</sup> After the second intermission

Meyerhold's constructivist ideas would come alive on the small Vassar stage. The stage would have become a space for the actors who "would cease to be characters, as in realism, or abstractions, as in expressionism." This time they would be acrobats in "dark work suits and skull caps, undifferentiated save for Natalya's scarlet handkerchief." And they would act their parts under direct stage lighting and against the exposed walls of the stage.<sup>46</sup>

Flanagan continued this experimentation at Vassar, exploring theatrical ideas of the modern age.

While at Vassar Flanagan's experiments with new styles and her strong skills as a director led to another interesting job opportunity. In 1934 Flanagan was offered a teaching position at Dartington Hall, England. Dartington was known for quality

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<sup>42</sup> Bentley, Joanne. *Hallie Flanagan: A Life in the American Theatre*. New York: Knopf, 1988. 95. Print.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid* 39.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid* 39.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid* 96.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid* 96.

education and philanthropic ideals that motivated its curriculum based on the vision of the founders of the school Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst.<sup>47</sup> Dorothy Straight Elmhirst, an American by birth, had many ties to the American academic artistic community and actively sought faculty to help transform their drama department into one with a more professional focus.<sup>48</sup> One week before Flanagan's departure, Harry Hopkins, a friend and classmate from Grinnell and now head of the Works Progress Administration, called Flanagan with a unique job offer. Hopkins wanted Flanagan to come to Washington, D.C. and interview for a federal government position to help out-of-work actors. After hearing about her job offer at Dartington Hall, Hopkins replied, "I don't know what an American wants to do in an English theatre, but if you're not interested who would be?"<sup>49</sup> After mulling over this statement Flanagan informed those at Dartington that she was not the candidate they had in mind; instead she and her second husband Philip Davis travelled back to Europe to continue the research she had begun in 1926. Ultimately Flanagan's sense of civic duty outweighed her desire to teach abroad. While during the first European trip she had studied contemporary styles, on this trip she studied theater history.<sup>50</sup> When she returned in 1935, Jacob Baker of the W.P.A. offices called Flanagan again on Hopkins' behalf saying, "Mr. Hopkins wants you to come to Washington to talk about the unemployed actors."<sup>51</sup> After much back and forth in which she tried to convey how unqualified she felt to take such a job, Flanagan agreed to meet with Hopkins in Washington, D.C. Flanagan, feeling overwhelmed with

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<sup>47</sup> Bonham-Carter, Victor, and William B. Curry. *Dartington Hall: The History of an Experiment*. London: Phoenix House, 1958. 23-55. Print.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 126-135.

<sup>49</sup> Flanagan, Hallie. *Arena*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1985. 3. Print.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid 7.



the idea and her lack of knowledge about out-of-work actors, sent several telegrams to leaders of various representative organizations, such as Actors' Equity, and commercial theatre leaders. One reply she recorded was from Elmer Rice, another candidate for the position in D.C.

Upon her arrival in Washington, Jacob Baker, a W.P.A. administrator and assistant to Harry Hopkins, met with Flanagan. He shared with her the impetus for a national program to help out-of-work American citizens.

People have forgotten what it was like when President Roosevelt walked in through those pillars. They've forgotten the savings accounts swept away, the thousands of banks collapsing all over the country. They've forgotten that they turned to the President and asked him to do something, anything, to pull this country out of the worst slump in its history. Well—we're part of what he's trying to do.<sup>52</sup>

Harry Hopkins and Jacob Baker did their best to convince Flanagan that she was *the* candidate; the other people considered for the job, including Mr. Rice, were only being interviewed if she did not accept. It seems that the only person who successfully communicated this to Flanagan and convinced her that she was the woman for the job was First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

Hopkins spent the majority of the initial interview asking Flanagan about her ideas on relief<sup>53</sup> and how she might envision a national theatre of the unemployed. He asked about her views about implementing a federal program for the arts. Every answer she gave and every idea she relayed confirmed Hopkins' conviction that Flanagan was the best candidate for the job. After asking Flanagan to draw up a plan, "He got up and looked out toward Pennsylvania Avenue. 'There's a party going on over there at the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid 8.

<sup>53</sup> Government subsidies which aided unemployed individuals during the recession and Great Depression.

White House—want to go?”<sup>54</sup> Arriving at the party Hopkins suggested Flanagan “[t]alk to Mrs. Roosevelt. She’s interested in all these art projects.” Flanagan states that she was “somewhat staggered at the calm assumption that [she] could simply go and talk to the wife of the President of the United States, but [she] learned, as many others have learned that the busiest woman in the United States was never too occupied to give attention and understanding to any one of the myriad problems which seemed to her important in the pattern of American life.”<sup>55</sup> Flanagan’s recollection of this party in her book, *Arena*, is filled with every detail of a cherished memory.

She asked a number of questions about my observations of subsidized government theatres abroad, and spoke about my work for the past ten years as the director of the Vassar Experimental Theatre. Apparently President Roosevelt, during the time he was a trustee of Vassar, had known of the work of this theatre, which stressed original plays, original designs, and training in every phase of the theatre.<sup>56</sup>

Mrs. Roosevelt then inquired about the budget Flanagan had been given for this experimental theatre. Flanagan confirmed that she had done the productions with small budgets. “As I rose to leave, Mrs. Roosevelt said, ‘I shall write President MacCracken [of Vassar] that I hope you are going to help work it all out.’ I left Mrs. Roosevelt, feeling that a great new social plan was under way and eager to help work it out.”<sup>57</sup> And with that, Flanagan became the National Director of the Federal Theatre Project, part of the Federal One section of the Works Progress Administration.

As the F.T.P. began, Flanagan toured the country with Hopkins by train, explaining to citizens that the government was creating a relief program for theatre artists that would culminate in federally subsidized theatrical productions throughout

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid 10.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid 10.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid 11.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid 12.

the United States, not just in cities known for commercial theatre such as New York City. It was not going to be an easy task. The average American (the target audience of the F.T.P.) could go to the movies for much less than the price of a theatre ticket on Broadway. Furthermore, taxpayers wanted to know who would be funding this national theatre. Part of the tour took them to Iowa State University. Flanagan recounted,

It was a hot night and the farmers were in their shirtsleeves. Harry painted the picture of poverty and desolation before work relief had come along, launched the work theme, built up a thrilling story of what it could do. He came to a climax and at that point someone in the crowd called out, "Who's going to pay for all that?" That was the question they had been waiting for. On his answer everything depended. Would he hedge? He did not hedge. He looked out over the crowd. He took off his coat, unfastened his tie and took it off, rolled up his sleeves. The crowd got perfectly still. Then he said, "You are." His voice took on urgency. "And who better? Who can better afford to pay for it? Look at this great university. Look at these fields, these forests and rivers. This is America, the richest country in the world. We can afford to pay for anything we want. And we want a decent life for all the people in this country. And we are going to pay for it."<sup>58</sup>

This was going to be a truly American theatre that would produce numerous plays throughout the United States, divided into regions, crafting each season based on the interests and needs of the audience in each region. After travelling throughout Europe and studying various national theatres and styles, Flanagan was going to help institute a truly American theatre. On August 23, 1935, Flanagan took the oath of office "swearing to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic" inside a theatre in Washington, D.C. that was being renovated by the W.P.A.<sup>59</sup>

Her experience to date made Hallie Flanagan an ideal candidate to lead the Federal Theatre project and, as Harry Hopkins suggested, her character contributed as

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid 28.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid 29.

well. She was open-minded and eager to learn. She strove to become the best artist and theatre practitioner possible. She was not afraid to ask important questions and she did not shy away from responsibility. She was able to synthesize contemporary ideas into realized productions effectively. And she did all of this without ever compromising her beliefs or breaking the bank. She was the leader that the Federal Theatre Project needed in a trying time. Moreover, she was the leader that American audiences never knew they needed. She was able to give employment to out-of-work theatre practitioners, and by staging the Living Newspapers, she was also able to give a voice to the average American citizen.

### Chapter 3: Theatrical Education at the 47 Workshop

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Dramaturgical techniques are the means by which one applies the theoretical skills learned by a dramaturg to a production. There are different types of dramaturgs: production dramaturgs, literary managers, company dramaturgs, and others. Therefore, there are different types of dramaturgical techniques. The production and company dramaturg in America emerged from Yale School of Drama. However, many individuals have performed dramaturgical tasks using dramaturgical techniques before it was a standard practice. George Pierce Baker taught dramaturgical techniques at the 47 Workshop at Radcliffe College when Hallie Flanagan attended. After attending the 47 Workshop, Hallie Flanagan used her newfound dramaturgical techniques to create audience-driven educational projects for the rest of her career.

According to Boricua's article "Dramaturging New Play Dramaturgy: The Yale and Iowa Ideals" in *Dramaturgy in American Theatre*,

The tradition of the Yale critic/dramaturg has two beginnings. The first occurred in 1925, when George Pierce Baker moved from Harvard to Yale in order to head its new Department of Drama in the School of Fine Arts. At Harvard, Baker had demonstrated that the training of playwrights was the legitimate object of universities; at Yale he placed his famous 47 Workshop—a new-play production workshop that grew out of his playwriting course—at the center of the first drama department in the country to offer a master of fine arts degree. Without being known as such, Baker was Yale's first critic/dramaturg: the first in a line of Yale playwriting instructors—Baker, John Gassner, Richard Gilman—who were primarily critics rather than creative writers.<sup>1</sup>

The 47 Workshop was a year-long playwriting seminar that developed from George Pierce Baker's playwriting class at Harvard in the early 1900s. Baker began teaching at

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<sup>1</sup> Jonas, Susan, Geoffrey S. Proehl, and Michael Lupu. *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book*. New York: Harcourt Brace Co. Publishers, 1997. 57. Print.

Harvard shortly after graduating. He taught English classes and his “lectures grew from his undergraduate studies of the ‘old drama’ and of the playwrights of the Elizabethan and Jacobean children’s acting companies. More recent sources were the books in the considerable dramatic library he had collected during his travels abroad.”<sup>2</sup> Baker was interested in changing the way theatre was taught in higher education across America. He wanted to move away from the idea of reading plays as literature and view them as guides to a production.

According to Brockett and Findlay, “Although plays had been presented by college students since colonial days, course work in theatre was rare until 1903, when George Pierce Baker initiated a class in playwriting at Radcliffe College. This course was later opened to students at Harvard, and in 1913 a workshop for producing plays was added.”<sup>3</sup> Baker was one of the first professors in America to teach theatre in the conservatory style. One of his students noted “his sympathetic understanding of the relation between the life and the plays of each [playwright]; his belief that the dramas he taught were created for the stage and were to be acted rather than read; and his view that the history of the drama showed an evolution of dramatic form.”<sup>4</sup> His classes produced some of the most prolific writers and theatrical leaders of the twentieth century: Eugene O’Neill, Philip Barry, S. N. Behrman, Sidney Howard, Robert Edmond Jones, Samuel Hume, Rupel Jones, and Hallie Flanagan. Baker was well travelled and

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<sup>2</sup> Kinne, Wisner P. *George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954. 37. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Brockett, Oscar G, and Robert R. Findlay. *Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre and Drama Since 1870*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1973. 129-130. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Kinne, Wisner P. *George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954. 37-38. Print.

aware of emerging theatrical styles and ideas in Europe at the turn of the century. He examined many of these styles and plays in his class. One text was Gotthold Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgie*, which continues to provide the basis for modern dramaturgy.

The 47 Workshop was one of the first playwriting classes in the United States to purposefully integrate German dramaturgical practices. The Yale School of Drama was the first to create a graduate degree program for critics and dramaturgs, but dramaturgical practices have influenced American theatrical education since Baker's shift to a more professional academic theatre in 1903. Baker's 47 Workshop was a response to an American audience "still dominated by Puritan notions of what could and could not be shown in a playhouse."<sup>5</sup> Baker's lessons influenced many of the programs and practices that Flanagan implemented as the National Director of the Federal Theatre Project.

In *Dramaturgy in American Theatre* Stephen Weeks writes,

Baker's career was exemplary. He was perhaps the most influential teacher of playwriting and dramatic art we have seen in this country and our first real dramaturg. His students included George Abbott, Sidney Howard, Eugene O'Neill, S.N. Behrman, Philip Barry, and Elia Kazan. Baker wanted to develop a native American drama equal in quality to that of Europe—"a drama of American conditions which shall have permanent value." To create a "genuine American drama" Baker put theatre and the craft of playwriting on the agenda of American education and helped to legitimize what we now refer to as academic theatre. His book *Dramatic Technique*—as well as many entries in the field by the American professoriate—should be seen as a gesture of that legitimation.<sup>6</sup>

Flanagan applied to the 47 Workshop because she had heard Baker lecture about the future of academic theatre and playwriting and because her colleague, William Bridge,

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<sup>5</sup> Bentley, Joanne. *Hallie Flanagan: A Life in the American Theatre*. New York: Knopf, 1988. 31. Print.

<sup>6</sup> Weeks, Stephen. "How to Do It: A Brief History of Professional Advice." *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book*. Ed. Jonas, Susan, Geoffrey S. Proehl, and Michael Lupu. New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1997. 390. Print.

actively incorporated Baker's theories and practices at Grinnell.<sup>7</sup> At the 47 Workshop students took classes from Baker and wrote plays that would then be produced at Radcliffe. The playwrights in attendance became close friends as well as colleagues. Those attending the workshop orchestrated each production from script to strike. Baker taught his students every aspect of production. When these students returned to their respective hometowns he wanted them to continue teaching the style of playwriting and producing that they learned at the 47 Workshop. Baker wanted to disseminate his theories of a distinctively American theatre throughout the United States. Flanagan learned modern playwriting techniques as well as production pedagogy.

Flanagan was accepted into the 47 Workshop based on her play *The Curtain*. According to Flanagan's notes from the workshop she attended a six-week course on modern drama. The class studied modern drama but not from a purely academic perspective. In her notes, Flanagan quoted Baker, "Facts are all in the books" and "are [an] insult to intelligence."<sup>8</sup> Second, she notes that the class was not a "detailed study of [the] life of [the] authors."<sup>9</sup> Finally, she writes that the 47 Workshop was not a study of critical material from secondary sources.<sup>10</sup>

Baker taught the students to be problem-solvers and that solutions lie in the approach to the problem. "The approach to drama differs from the approach to other fields of literary expression because drama is a complex art – perhaps the most complex

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<sup>7</sup> Bentley, Joanne. *Hallie Flanagan: A Life in the American Theatre*. New York: Knopf, 1988. 32. Print.

<sup>8</sup> *Hallie Flanagan Papers*, \*T-Mss 1964-002, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Box 4, folder 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



of the arts.”<sup>11</sup> Most of Baker’s students would not have had a degree in drama. Some students, like Flanagan, came to the theatre through other fields like English and Literature. Similarly, many dramaturgs come to the theatre from different fields such as development or education. Baker had to teach his students how to approach a text from a production standpoint. Baker encouraged his students to be collaborative artists who are a part of a community of artists. He encouraged them to break out of the literary mindset, reading the play as literature, and to start thinking with a production in mind.

Every play that was ever conceived was written to be played on a stage, by actors, before an audience. It was not written primarily to be given to you in cold print – and it can come vividly alive only as you find it vivid in your imagination. So the first point in dramatic reading is to read the play as early as possible under the same conditions under which you would see it; that is, read it as a whole, if possible in a single sitting.<sup>12</sup>

After reading the play for the first time, Baker explained that the next step is to study critical material. Baker expounds upon a previous note that critical materials serve a function, but are not the sole means of understanding a play.

After reading a play we may go back and study it . . . production, diction, etc. – but the reading itself should be a swift process, a single effort of the attention. Read the play then, at a sitting, and by the help of stage directions and your imagination, visualize it as you read.<sup>13</sup>

Next Baker encouraged a second reading of the play. This time he suggests that the play be read “as a product of its own period.”<sup>14</sup>

Avoid judging all plays by your period. Read them to understand theirs. Try to escape the limitation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as you approach these early plays. There is no provincialism more confirming than the provincialism of time – and no surer cure for such provincialism than the study of the art of the past period. For a play is a social product. It is the author emerging from his social group, reflecting on his own time in his own way. Thus Euripides recreates Greece for

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

us, and Shakespeare, even when he writes of past Italian centuries, gives us inevitable glimpses of Elizabethan England.<sup>15</sup>

Here Baker pushed his students to study theatre history and then to understand the setting of the play, as well as the history of the time the play was written. He encouraged his students to use that information and discover what is universal about the play.

Every play we read in this course was not only significant in its own time, but contains enough eternal truth to make it exist throughout the centuries. Greatness is there, though whether or not you find it is another matter . . . perhaps at the end of the year you will take the position of [critic William] Archer in *The Old Drama and the New*. You may feel as he does that nothing in the old drama has half the sweep and power of Galsworthy, the intellectual fecundity of Shaw, the subtlety of Chekhov. But the point is that you can't take that position or any position intelligently until you know the drama of the past.<sup>16</sup>

Baker emphasized reading the play for an initial visceral response, reading it again critically, conducting research, incorporating the history, and most importantly the integration of the audience. Baker's biggest hurdle in introducing American audiences to European theatre was the Puritanical mindset about what was appropriate on stage. Therefore, during this time it was crucial for directors, playwrights, designers, and actors to take the audience's reaction into consideration with each production decision. After all, Baker wanted these changes to last.

Throughout her notes from the 47 Workshop Flanagan writes what might be considered a reader's report on each play she read. She carried this practice into her study of European theatre for her book, *Shifting Scenes*, as well as the plays she read for consideration during the Federal Theatre Project. For Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*, she starts the report with the author and the title of the play. She then breaks down each act

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

by location. This is followed by a list of character descriptions and important notes from the playwright about the play. Literary managers and dramaturgs commonly use similar information to catalogue a play to help with season selection and future projects. While Flanagan took these notes for her own use, the same type of information appears in the catalogues of plays produced under the auspices of the F.T.P. that was sent to every regional director. Flanagan hired people to read and commission plays for the F.T.P. who would catalogue them and distribute them to each regional office. After the distribution of information to all of the regions of the Federal Theatre Project, the regional directors could make informed decisions for their upcoming season. The organization and dissemination of such information is crucial to well-organized theatre, and still encouraged by contemporary dramaturgs and literary managers today.

It is evident from Flanagan's notes during this time that Baker introduced his students to many different styles of theatre. He taught them to look at the big conceptual ideas throughout theatre history, but he also taught classes on the style of specific artists whom he called "dramatists." The students would read selected plays from that dramatists' collection of work, or what Flanagan would later refer to as a dramatist's "dramaturgy." When Flanagan taught at Smith College after the Federal Theatre Project, she told her students "The dramatist is not a literary gentleman, but a man of the theatre."<sup>17</sup> In her lecture notes she lists the qualities of a dramatist: "As dramatists, cultivate and keep always in mind these three things: 1) Psychological awareness; 2) A sense of form and structure; 3) Vitality to create characters and patience to rework them

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<sup>17</sup> *Hallie Flanagan Papers*, \*T-Mss 1964-002, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Box 16, Folder 3.

until they attain reality.”<sup>18</sup> The connection between the term “dramatist” and “playwright” seems to have come from the 47 Workshop and seems most evident in Flanagan’s post mortem of the Federal Theatre Project, *Arena*. On page 42 she lists the names of the “theatre leaders who came to Washington on October 8 and 9, 1935, for the first meeting of regional and state directors.”<sup>19</sup> In this list of directors she lists Elmer Rice as a “Broadway-playwright-producer” and yet lists Philip Barber as a “dramatist, actor, stage-manager.”<sup>20</sup> In Flanagan’s notes and Baker’s publications, a dramatist is a playwright who ultimately functions as his or her own dramaturg. A dramatist’s growth throughout his career and his exploration of style and incorporation of theatre history and social issues is his dramaturgy. Neither Baker nor Flanagan showed any particular preference for the term “playwright” or “dramatist” in their work. Baker repeatedly referred to his students in the 47 Workshop as dramatists. The motivation from the 47 Workshop, the skills she gained organizing productions, working with Baker, and the first-hand European experience provided Flanagan with the skills necessary for her job as National Director of the Federal Theatre Project.

While Flanagan never directly refers to herself in her notes or publications as a dramaturg, it is clear that she received an education as a dramaturg from George Pierce Baker. She continued to practice the dramaturgical techniques she learned from Baker throughout her career. She first experimented with these techniques at Vassar and later she would use them to implement F.T.P. projects.

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<sup>18</sup> *Hallie Flanagan Papers*, \*T-Mss 1964-002, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Box 16, folder 1. Print.

<sup>19</sup> Flanagan, Hallie. *Arena*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1985. 42. Print.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid* 43.

## Chapter 4: Hallie Flanagan: National Director

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“Art, like politics, starts in the precinct. It starts where you are. When we talk about society we mean our own community, widening as our interest [sic] widen, to include all that pours into that community and all that goes out from it, widens as we become able to widen our vision to include our country and our world.” – Flanagan’s first lecture at Smith College, 1944.<sup>1</sup>

Flanagan’s education at the 47 Workshop and her studies in Europe made her the ideal candidate to become the National Director of the Federal Theatre Project. She had a theoretical as well as practical understanding of different styles of playwriting, production and design. She had not aligned herself with any particular movement like some of the other candidates. Her approach to the unemployment problem was balanced between education and job creation. Her ideas offered opportunities for large casts and production teams on a small budget. Furthermore, she was particularly adept at finding ways to use the F.T.P. in conjunction with existing regional theatres and other branches of the New Deal. Hallie Flanagan’s educational background, rooted in dramaturgical practices, prepared her to become an effective National Director of the F.T.P. and create diverse projects to achieve the President’s goal of resolving unemployment and addressing Depression era social concerns.

George Pierce Baker imparted Lessing’s methodology in his students, since he aimed to create stronger, production-driven academic theatres throughout the United States. Baker trained Flanagan in the essence of dramaturgy, the confluence of practice and theory. Dramaturgical practices extend beyond retention of facts and research skills

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<sup>1</sup> *Hallie Flanagan Papers*, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Archival material, Box 20. Print.

connecting abstract ideas into tangible materials such as: study guides, actor packets, director's letters, program notes, community outreach programs and script reports. A good dramaturg finds the right information and delivers it at the right time. Hallie Flanagan's dramaturgical understanding of theatre and emerging theatrical styles throughout the world made her the ideal candidate to head the F.T.P. But the application of her studies made her a successful National Director. Flanagan accomplished this by addressing the social concerns of the time, creating opportunities in theatrical theory and practice, defining the F.T.P. audience, and maintaining these projects after they were implemented.

Flanagan's theatrical education and practice were based on a dramaturgical understanding of how a theatre should operate within a community. This strikingly contemporary approach forms the premise of Des McAnuff's 1986 article in which he explains that dramaturgy became an American theatrical practice out of necessity. He notes that, "We live in a world that is saturated with bits of knowledge and information—knowing when and where this information applies is often extremely difficult."<sup>2</sup> Implementing a dramaturgical understanding in theatre includes actively seeking to pose the best possible questions for the right audience at the right time, in an effort to strengthen the art, audience, and outcome of a production, season or company. According to McAnuff, "The dramaturg, along with the rest of the professionals, must share a common goal or the dramaturg has no place in the room."<sup>3</sup> An example of a dramaturgical understanding of a production is choosing to adapt a play to the needs of

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<sup>2</sup> McAnuff, Des. "Observations: A Place in the Room for Dramaturgs," *American Theatre* April 1986: 42-43. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

a community while maintaining the focus and structure that the playwright originally created. A director with a dramaturgical understanding of theatre immerses himself in the world of the play, the psychology of the characters, the life of the playwright, the contemporary world and how the play will impact his audience. A dramaturg can help the director address which questions are relevant to the play. A playwright with a dramaturgical understanding of theatre does the same thing when he creates the universe of the play. A dramaturg can help a playwright find relevant social issues to aid in identifying the message or universe of a play. A dramaturg is not the person who answers dramatic questions alone, but rather provides possibilities and resources that lead to a collaborative answer. Just as a dramaturg helps implement a director's vision, Flanagan employed collaborators to help her address the President's vision to solve the unemployment issue of the 1930's.

Flanagan understood the struggle to achieve a theatrical education. As a student at Grinnell, she wrote plays and was a member of a drama club, but there were no academic opportunities for her to earn a theatrical degree. George Pierce Baker addressed the issue within academia, but there was a growing problem in the professional world that was not addressed. At the time of the Great Depression, universities were still establishing their first theatre programs and defining their curricula. Furthermore, the emerging regional theatres did not have enough funds to hire and cast actors as well as educate them in emerging styles to keep them marketable. The unemployed were not bad actors or designers; they simply lacked opportunities.

Hallie Flanagan recognized an opportunity to strengthen the American regional theatre system, train unemployed theatre practitioners in modern styles, educate artists

about creating and maintaining companies as she learned at the 47 Workshop and strengthen new play development in America, all subsidized by the United States government. President Roosevelt's problem in the late 1920's was the number of trained laborers who were unemployed. The Great Depression resulted in the worst unemployment conditions in American history. President Roosevelt's solution was to create jobs. If President Roosevelt, representing the Executive branch of the government was the Artistic Director of the F.T.P., created the theatre with the support of the Legislative branch, (a kind of Board of Directors), then Flanagan functioned dramaturgically as the National Director creating jobs for professional, unemployed theatre practitioners based on her Artistic Director's vision. However, any of the other candidates Hopkins considered could have done that job. Flanagan was different because she knew how to solve the practical problem: a lack of opportunity. Rather than establishing an entirely new federally-funded theatre, Flanagan took advantage of the emerging regional theatre system and used government money to strengthen these companies and create job opportunities. In her edits of a draft of an article published in the *Washington Post* in July 1936, Flanagan

made it clear that the government isn't taking this twenty-seven-million-dollar appropriation to establish a Federal theatre where every stage struck girl and would-be Hamlet in the country can become professional actors. "In the first place, the appropriation is to take care of a number of arts programs besides the theater," she explained. "Besides, it is largely a business proposition. Ninety per-cent of what is spent will go into wages for unemployed persons who have formerly made their living in the theatre. If the same number of unemployed artists were taken care of on the dole, it would cost the government 9/10 of the appropriation, anyway."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This document is a carbon copy of Flanagan's edits of a draft of an article by Hope Ridings Miller for the *Washington Post* July 1936. *Hallie Flanagan Papers*, \*T-Mss 1964-002, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Box 1 Folder 1.



Her job was not simply to employ people for the sake of paying them. She was to give them jobs so that they could maintain their skills until the economy strengthened.

In a note to Shirley Rich Krohn, who organized the *Hallie Flanagan Papers* Flanagan made sure that Krohn understood that Flanagan was the director of a federal theatre, not a national theatre, because a national theatre was understood to be permanent and arts-oriented, while the federal theatre was government-sponsored for relief purposes and oriented toward employment.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, when she accepted the position as National Director, she was accepting a dramaturgical responsibility. She accepted the challenge of asking the right questions of the right people by creating the right projects for the right audiences, establishing the right offices to fuel more productions and finding unique and innovative ways to make her employees more desirable in the job market. President Roosevelt and Harry Hopkins needed Hallie Flanagan for this job because they needed someone who could inspire theatre practitioners to embrace more economically viable theatre. Flanagan was a unique candidate because she had a vast understanding of many emerging theatrical styles at the time as well as the skills to employ them. She was first and foremost an educator but had the dramaturgical understanding of knowing when, where and how to promote the right projects for a successful Federal Theatre.

The *Washington Post* article describes how Flanagan achieved her goal of job creation through the diversity of the projects she established.

The situation in New York, Mrs. Flanagan believes presents her greatest problem. Provisions are already being made to take care of many of the 5,000

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*The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts*. Archival material. Box 1 Folder 1. Print.

trained stage persons now out of work, she explained. Elmer Rice, noted playwright, is Regional director. Under his supervisions plans have already been completed to start:

A Negro theatre in Harlem, where plays of Negro life will be presented.

A "living newspaper" theatre.

A playwright's theatre for the production of new scripts by writers who have suffered by the Depression and by writers interested in experimenting in new types of plays.

A marionette theatre where local and historical material will be presented under the direction of Remo Bufano.

A children's theatre.

[Flanagan] has already worked out plans for theatre projects in other parts of the country. For example, one city in the East is to have a theatre connection with its Art Museum. In Chicago, there are to be regular presentations of vaudeville and variety acts given by unemployed actors at the shelter houses in the many parks that dot the city. "I feel such performances can serve a double purpose," she said. "They can provide employment for actors and supply wholesome entertainment for the vast army of unemployed youths who have no money to spend for other entertainment." Her program as a whole provides for the organization of theatre companies as separate departments of existing non-profit companies in universities, towns, and cities where theatres have already developed.<sup>6</sup>

By creating circus performances, vaudeville acts, as well as theatres for the blind and African-American theatre, Flanagan helped fulfill President Roosevelt's initial vision to employ skilled yet unemployed theatre artists, serving the needs of each region.

Through this process she found new audiences.

Using her dramaturgical understanding of the American people in the 1930s, Flanagan employed the ideas of audience outreach she learned from George Pierce Baker. However, George Pierce Baker taught his students about academic theatre where there are boundless resources for research, publication and production. The F.T.P.

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<sup>6</sup> *Hallie Flanagan Papers*, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Archival material, *Washington Post* article edits July 1936. Box 1 Folder 1. Print

presented Flanagan with a new obstacle: company education within the regional theatres.

“I’m greatly interested in the regional theatre,” said Mrs. Flanagan. “In that lies our chief hope. The future of the American stage depends largely on the persons who write about things that they know best.” Her program also includes help for marionette and children’s theatres; for vaudeville, variety and circus projects (the first bill she signed after she took her present position pertained to these); for theatre companies in C.C.C. camps; for teaching theatre techniques (including direction, acting, playwriting, stage management, design, lighting, costuming and theatre speech); for research and publication (including the drawing up of lists of hitherto unproduced plays, translation of foreign plays, and the publication of a bulletin showing the nationwide activities of the Federal Theatre Project.).<sup>7</sup>

Flanagan approached educating her employees in two ways: first, through the exploration of new techniques she studied in Europe, most notably the Living Newspaper. Second, she employed individuals to teach others how to implement the style practically.

Russian Living Newspapers sought to educate average citizens about current events by dramatizing newspaper headlines. Flanagan introduced this style of political theatre to the F.T.P. From an administrative standpoint, this style created exponentially more jobs than a straight play. Flanagan’s Living Newspapers required researchers who combed through newspapers seeking headlines pertaining to the current Living Newspaper’s topics, such as housing and health care. She hired playwrights to shape the information into plays. Her Living Newspaper productions required enormous casts and therefore numerous costumes. Contrary to her past support for minimalist sets, her Living Newspapers had large intricate sets requiring many technicians to construct them. Some productions of the most famous Living Newspaper, *One-Third of a Nation*, included a large tenement house that caught fire. In some cities it collapsed on stage.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

The Living Newspapers created by the F.T.P. were also open to adaptation by theatres in various regions. Therefore, even more people could be employed to help adapt the play to fit the needs of audiences regardless of locale. Flanagan addressed the need for education by creating programs like the Federal Summer program that developed *One-Third of a Nation*. The Federal Summer hired several instructors and included one representative from each F.T.P. region. These participants and instructors spent each day teaching and learning all aspects of theatre and creating devised art.<sup>8</sup> From a dramaturgical standpoint, Flanagan helped these artists understand modern techniques in order to introduce their audiences to modern theatre.

In developing educated artists, Flanagan produced a more educated American theatre audience by exposing them to multiple styles of theatre and new plays. Had the F.T.P. been its own entity separate and apart from the regional theatre system, Flanagan's effort to educate artists and audiences would have vanished in 1939 with the F.T.P. However, because she had the vision to create opportunities out of the emerging regional theatre system, she helped to create a regional theatre audience. One way in which she accomplished her goal was through training playwrights and producing plays that had never been produced, thus exposing all Americans to new work. The *Washington Post* article asserts,

Yet, contrary to widespread belief, Flanagan is not attempting to pattern Federal theatres throughout the country on the one at Vassar, which is primarily an experimental enterprise. Nor does she plan to transfer the Soviet theatre system to the United States to make the American stage a propaganda vehicle. Although she has spent much time in Russia where she found the theatre vital and impressive, she realizes "what works in the Soviet would not necessarily be suitable in this country." But she is convinced the theatre must be more closely

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<sup>8</sup> Flanagan, Hallie. *To All Directors, Actors, Designers, and Producers on the Federal Theatre Project*. Washington, D.C: Federal Theatre Project, 1936. n.p. Print.

allied with modern life; that it must exist in terms of contemporary problems and events. That is why the regional theatre is one of her chief concerns and at this time comes second only to her interest in removing trained stage people from relief rolls through the Federal Theatre Project.<sup>9</sup>

In contemporary America, the arts are often treated as extraneous to science and math-related enterprises. Arts education programs are usually first to be removed when schools and other institutions cut budgets. Yet when times are truly hard, the need for quality entertainment at an affordable rate is a precious need, not a lavish desire. Art can function as an escape from desperate times, or provide an outlet to express social concerns. Live entertainment can do this while connecting the audience through a shared experience. In his companion book to the movie *Cradle Will Rock* about the Federal Theatre Project, Tim Robbins tries to convey the mindset of the Federal Theatre audience.

Imagine this: For your entire life, you have put your faith in the capitalist system. Then, one October day in 1929 the stock market crashes. Despite the fact that you have never invested in the stock market, you are told this affects you. And it does. In a matter of weeks, your local bank has failed. Your money is gone. Your small business fails. You are laid off. Unemployed and with no prospects, you are asked to be patient and continue to believe in this system of government that has left you bankrupt, jobless and hungry.

Hallie Flanagan's accomplishments [as National Director] were astonishing. I don't think there is any way to measure the effect the Federal Theatre had on this nation. When you consider the project reached 25 million people, or about a quarter of the U.S. population, you begin to get a sense of its impact. How many spirits were lifted temporarily from the hard-core poverty of the Depression, how many imaginations were ignited, how many outcasts in small towns saw these weird actors passing through town and felt better about themselves, perhaps even found their way into theatre careers of their own? The much-needed laughter, the emotions shared, the spectacles, the puppet shows, the

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<sup>9</sup> Hallie Flanagan Papers, 1923. Archival material, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. *Washington Post* Article edits, July 1936. Box 1 Folder 1. Print

social dramas—all were provided free or at affordable prices by Uncle Sam. Live theatre is a burning fuel.<sup>10</sup>

George Pierce Baker taught his students to engage the audience through well-written scripts, research and truth. Flanagan's projects all adhere to these ideals.

Perhaps the thoughts expressed by Robbins crossed Flanagan's mind. Yet one must always return to her original goal: to hire skilled, unemployed theatre artists. In order to keep employing people, Flanagan's projects had to be long-lasting. Perhaps this is another reason why Flanagan put so much effort into audience engagement. She did this by demanding inexpensive ticket prices, making plays affordable to the public. It was clear that she was in charge of a subsidized theatre, not a commercial one. She avoided competition with professional theatres through ticket prices and diversity of subject matter. After all, her goal was to employ more theatre artists, not put more out of work. She also achieved her goal of employment through the flexibility of her projects, an example of which is the conversion of the Living Newspaper *One-Third of a Nation* from its home in the New York Living Newspaper office and theatre to the Philadelphia Living Newspaper office and theatre.

Flanagan liked to use existing theatres as venues for F.T.P. productions. This was cost efficient and provided local theatres with income during hard times. The idea was successful, and some of the theatres that were used still exist today, like the oldest theatre in the nation, the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, which served as the home for the Philadelphia adaptation of *One-Third of a Nation*.

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<sup>10</sup> Robbins, Tim, and Theresa Burns. *Cradle Will Rock: The Movie and the Moment*. New York: Newmarket Press, 2000. 3-4. Print.

If the Federal Theatre offices in New York City produced a play, it was available to all of the offices throughout the United States. These regional offices were allowed to produce the play as written, or they could adapt it to meet the needs of their audiences and actors. In productions throughout the country, *One-Third of a Nation* dramatized the conditions of New York tenement housing. Philadelphia's F.T.P. unit was the only one to adapt the play to address its unique housing crisis.<sup>11</sup> The Philadelphia offices also struggled to create opportunities for its diverse F.T.P. employees. Flanagan travelled to Philadelphia to help adapt the show to address Philadelphia's circumstances. The names and ethnicities of some characters changed; the location became Philadelphia; the tenement house collapsed instead of burning. There were several small changes to the script, but nothing was radically different from the original play. Both conveyed the horrors of contemporary tenement housing while educating the audience about the source of the problem by depicting the history of housing in America and dramatizing ways to improve conditions. In an article published through Penn State University, Arthur R. Jarvis Jr. states,

"One-Third of a Nation" was the clearest demonstration of cultural localism in the Philadelphia Federal Theatre Project. A script written to dramatize slum problems in New York City was completely rewritten to fit the housing problems of Pennsylvania's largest city. In New York the problem was greedy landowners who squeezed every possible penny from renters, but in Philadelphia avaricious landlords preyed upon destitute workers who wanted to find housing close to their work. Where New York had its infamous "lung block" of tuberculosis victims, Philadelphia was plagued by epidemics of cholera and yellow fever caused by unsanitary water supplies in the mid-nineteenth century. In New York ramshackle buildings caught fire and incinerated occupants, but in Philadelphia bandbox dwellings collapsed, burying the residents. Each script graphically presented the problems of its specific urban area. By locating the stories in familiar settings Federal Theatre

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<sup>11</sup> Jarvis Jr., Arthur R. "The Living Newspaper in Philadelphia, 1938-1939." *Pennsylvania History*. 61.3 (1994): 343. Print.

heightened local interest, increasing the chances for success. One unexpected bonus for Philadelphia was that some cast members lived in the very conditions condemned by the drama and could bring their personal experiences to each performance.<sup>12</sup>

By allowing and encouraging regional offices to adapt plays to meet the needs of their audiences, Flanagan allowed for the sustainability of the projects.

Flanagan's projects helped ensure the sustainability of other New Deal projects as well. Those who lived during the 1930s were tenacious, hard working people who persevered through astounding personal turmoil. In projects like the C.C.C., young men between the ages of 18-25 travelled the United States tending to various public parks. In a time of great economic disparity this could not have been an easy job emotionally or physically. Flanagan saw an opportunity: she created a program in the F.T.P. that toured to different C.C.C. camps and provide free entertainment and in some cases theatre education for these young men. There were playwriting competitions. Flanagan noted in *Arena* that workers waited in lines to see these plays. One C.C.C. camp even staged a murder mystery with the help of the F.T.P. that involved both the C.C.C. workers and F.T.P. employees.<sup>13</sup> This encouragement through the arts helped sustain successful, hard working, tenacious C.C.C. workers.

Flanagan received a dramaturgical education from George Pierce Baker. She developed her playwriting skills and critiqued plays using the techniques found in Gotthold Lessing's Hamburg *Dramaturgie*. However, her dramaturgical understanding of the emerging regional theatre system and the American audience made her a

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<sup>12</sup> Jarvis Jr., Arthur R. "The Living Newspaper in Philadelphia, 1938-1939." *Pennsylvania History*. 61.3 (1994): 341. Print.

<sup>13</sup> Flanagan, Hallie. *Arena*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1985. 242. Print.



successful National Director who created jobs for American artists and introduced American audiences to new styles and diverse theatre companies.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

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It is widely acknowledged in the dramaturgical community that George Pierce Baker provided the springboard for American dramaturgy while teaching at Yale and Harvard. When Flanagan joined the workshop, he saw her potential to become a truly great theatre practitioner and encouraged her to travel to Europe in 1926 to study contemporary European theatre. She published her findings in *Shifting Scenes*. Her trip fueled her own work and influenced the American perceptions of European theatrical styles in the late 1920s. She used this information to help develop the Vassar Experimental theatre, which directly influenced her nomination for National Director of the Federal Theatre Project. As the National Director Flanagan was involved in many aspects of production and employed several out-of-work theatre practitioners. She used different projects suited to the needs of specific regional theatre audiences. *One-Third of a Nation* was a great success throughout the United States, specifically in Philadelphia, due in part to Flanagan's direct involvement in adapting the play to fit specific community needs. Flanagan wrote *Arena* after the closure of the project to share its goals, accomplishments and legacy with the world.

The *Hallie Flanagan Papers* at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts contain several letters written to Flanagan. One folder holds carbon copies of Flanagan's responses to students inquiring about the F.T.P. for thesis or dissertation research. The sheer number of these carbon copies on file suggests that Flanagan made every effort to respond to each inquiry. Flanagan attempted to preserve the F.T.P. goals long after the project had ended. She kept in touch with many former employees and

took a vested interest in their new professional careers. This exemplifies her dramaturgical impulses, to preserve and contextualize the F.T.P. so that it could continue to affect American theatre. Flanagan combatted false rumors and ignorance surrounding the F.T.P. before it ended, and she strove to preserve the positive outcomes of the project until her death in 1969. She supported those students attempting to write about the positive outcomes of the F.T.P. and published her own reflections in *Arena*. After Congress cancelled the F.T.P., the Library of Congress loaned the Project's archives to Flanagan for her research. After a few years, the materials were taken back by the government and were essentially lost. The *Hallie Flanagan Papers* contain several letters written to government officials seeking the documents. In response to students looking for the files, Flanagan expressed her own frustration about not knowing their whereabouts. In 1974 the missing F.T.P. documents were rediscovered in an old government airplane hangar in Baltimore.<sup>1</sup> They were then loaned to George Mason University, which housed them in their library until the 1990s when the government rescinded the loan. While GMU has copies of the original F.T.P. documents, the primary sources are spread out in libraries across the country and many of the regional F.T.P. documents have yet to be made public. This thesis only scratches the surface of Flanagan's dramaturgy.

Flanagan's work was so similar to the contemporary dramaturg's that studying her actions and her projects should be essential to the development of a creative and critically-thinking contemporary American dramaturg. By studying her career a young dramaturg can learn how to find information that could affect hundreds of thousands of

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<sup>1</sup> Osborne, Elizabeth A. *Staging the People: Community and Identity in the Federal Theatre Project*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. xii. Print.

people, to commission and select plays for a season, and to communicate more effectively with directors, designers, actors, patrons, and donors.

Much of a dramaturg's training relies on studying theatre history, technique, script analysis and audience engagement, just as Flanagan was taught. Her actions, writing, and education reflect those of contemporary dramaturgs. The evidence of the sidewalks and buildings that the W.P.A. constructed still exists. In the W.P.A. sidewalks and post offices one can see the work that the unemployed completed to make their towns better places, and provide their families with food, water, and shelter. However, the impact of other W.P.A. projects, like the Federal Theatre Project, is not so easily seen today. Furthermore few scholars relate the F.T.P. to modern theatres despite the evidence of ties to it. Hallie Flanagan functioned as a dramaturg, and her work at the F.T.P. provided a solid foundation for the American regional theatre system to continue to build upon. To ignore Flanagan's impact on contemporary dramaturgy is to ignore American theatrical roots. Flanagan helped create a successful nation-wide theatre from government funding and an order to hire out-of-work theatre artists. Its success in relation to its four-year lifetime is astonishing. It is imperative that we as artists continue to study the Federal Theatre Project and its impact on modern theatre practices.

As the National Director of the Federal Theatre Project Hallie Flanagan used her dramaturgical understanding of the theatrical world in her time to create socially-conscious theatre for the unemployed. This resulted in an unprecedented number of Americans attending federally-funded theatre productions. Flanagan's contributions to the Federal Theatre Project helped encourage the blossoming American regional theatre

system in the 1930s, which still thrives today. It is important to continue identifying American theatre practitioners throughout theatre history who have functioned dramaturgically in order to find unique precedents for creating dramaturgical projects for American audiences.

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## Appendix

### Federal Theatre Project Living Newspapers

*Ethiopia* (unproduced) 1936

*Flax (Yellow Harvest)* 1936

*Injunction Granted* 1936

*One-Third of a Nation* 1938

*Power* 1937

*Spirochete* 1939

*Triple A-Plowed Under* 1935

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