

Stella Adler and Harold Clurman:

An Inventory of their Papers in the Performing Arts Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Adler, Stella, 1902-1992 Clurman, Harold, 1901-1980
Title:	Stella Adler and Harold Clurman Papers
Dates:	1898-2003 (bulk 1950-1990)
Extent:	56 document boxes, 5 oversize boxes, 1 oversize folder (26.5 linear feet)
Abstract:	Stella Adler (1902-1992), founder of the Stella Adler Conservatory of Acting, and Harold Clurman (1901-1980), director, producer, drama critic, and co-founder of the Group Theatre, were married from 1943-1960. The Stella Adler and Harold Clurman papers consist of typescript and handwritten manuscripts, notes, lecture transcripts, annotated texts of plays, class schedules, clippings, proofs, photographs, slides, negatives, correspondence, legal and financial papers, datebooks, certificates, brochures, and theater programs, all ranging in date from 1898 to 2003. Adler's teaching material makes up a large portion of the archive.
Call Number:	Performing Arts Collection PA-00175
Language:	English and Yiddish
Access:	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchase (R 15221), 2003
Processed by:	Katherine Mosley, 2006
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketches

Stella Adler (1902-1992), founder of the Stella Adler Conservatory of Acting, is best known as a teacher of the principles of acting and character and script analysis. As a child, she began acting in the New York Yiddish Theater with her parents, Jacob and Sara Adler. She joined the American Laboratory Theatre of Russian actor and teacher Richard Boleslavsky in the mid-1920s and in 1931 became part of the Group Theatre through Harold Clurman, whom she married in 1943.

In 1934 Adler briefly visited Europe, where she met and studied with the actor and director Konstantin Stanislavsky of the Moscow Art Theatre. Three years later, she moved to Hollywood and acted in films for six years before returning to New York to act and direct. She began her teaching career at the New School for Social Research in the mid-1940s. In 1949 she founded the Stella Adler Theater Studio, later the Stella Adler Conservatory, still in existence today as the Stella Adler Studio of Acting. Adler continued to teach acting for more than forty years and counted many prominent actors of the twentieth century among her students.

Adler was married to Harold Clurman from 1943 until 1960. She was previously married to Horace Eleaschreff and was later married to Mitchell Wilson until his death in 1973. Adler and Eleaschreff had one daughter, Ellen. Stella Adler died of heart failure in Los Angeles, California, on December 22, 1992.

Harold Clurman (1901-1980), a central figure in twentieth century American theater, was a director, producer, drama critic, and co-founder of the Group Theatre. Clurman became attracted to the theater at age six, when he attended a production starring Jacob Adler. He attended Columbia University and the University of Paris (degree, 1923). Upon returning to New York in 1924, Clurman, though he had no formal training, became involved in theater, beginning as an actor, stage manager, and play reader. Having seen Stanislavsky's ensemble approach with the Moscow Art Theatre, Clurman worked to create a permanent acting company in the United States. Together with Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford, he formed the Group Theatre in 1931 and served as its director until it dissolved in 1941. The Group Theatre, with its ensemble approach and emotional and realistic productions that expressed political and social views about contemporary issues, permanently altered American theater's previous emphasis on pure entertainment.

Following the dissolution of the Group Theatre, Clurman worked in Hollywood as a film producer and director before returning to New York in 1946. He was an arts critic for *Tomorrow* (1946-52) and a theater critic for the *New Republic* (1949-52), the *Nation* (1953-80), and the *London Observer* (1959 and 1963). In addition, between 1935 and his death in 1980, Clurman directed over forty stage productions, including plays by Lillian Hellman (*The Autumn Garden*, 1951), Carson McCullers (*A Member of the Wedding*, 1950), Arthur Miller (*Incident at Vichy*, 1964), Clifford Odets (*Golden Boy*, 1937), Eugene O'Neill (*Desire under the Elms*, 1952, *A Touch of the Poet*, 1958, and *The Iceman Cometh*, 1968), and Tennessee Williams (*Orpheus Descending*, 1957), among others.

Clurman was married to Stella Adler from 1943 until 1960 and married to Juleen Compton in 1960. He died in New York of cancer on September 9, 1980.

Scope and Contents

The Stella Adler and Harold Clurman papers consist of typescript and handwritten manuscripts, notes, lecture transcripts, annotated texts of plays, class schedules, clippings, proofs, photographs, slides, negatives, correspondence, legal and financial papers, datebooks, certificates, brochures, and theater programs, all ranging in date from 1898 to 2003. The material is organized in five series: I. Stella Adler, 1906-2003; II. Stella Adler Conservatory, 1958-2003; III. Russian Theater, 1898-1968; IV. Yiddish Theater, 1900-2000; and V. Harold Clurman, 1919-1989. The Stella Adler series is further arranged into four subseries: A. Teaching Material, 1950-1990; B. Works by Adler, 1960-2001; C. Career-Related and Personal Material, 1906-2001; and D. Works by Others, 1933-2003. The Harold Clurman series is divided into two subseries: A. Works, 1919-1980; and B. Career-Related and Personal Material, 1926-1989.

Adler's teaching material makes up a large portion of the archive. Teaching notes and lecture transcripts, along with class outlines, schedules, and similar items from courses in Characterization, Script Interpretation, Staging, Technique, and other areas, date from 1950 to 1990. Because Adler continuously reworked her lectures, many of the notes and transcripts date from one period but have handwritten revisions made for later classes. Of particular note are materials relating to numerous Script Interpretation courses analyzing plays by Anton Chekhov, Noel Coward, Henrik Ibsen, William Inge, Arthur Miller, Clifford Odets, William Saroyan, George Bernard Shaw, August Strindberg, Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, and other playwrights. Transcripts of scene critiques, in which Adler commented upon student acting, and her annotated playscripts and excerpts from scripts, are also present, as are notes on breakdowns and blocking for various plays. Class notes are compiled by Adler, colleagues Elizabeth "Betsy" Parrish and Jeffrey Horowitz, and others. Character and Technique class materials also include lists of assignments, and Character classes are also represented by photographs taken during classes held in the 1980s. Slides used in teaching, particularly in Character classes, include European art and sights.

Works by Adler in subseries B. include proofs of her books *The Art of Acting* and *Stella Adler on Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov*, in addition to typescripts and tearsheets of various essays. Of particular note is a typescript titled "How I Met Stanislavski."

Within the career-related and personal material in subseries C., correspondence includes personal letters as well as letters from students and fans dating from 1938 to 1992. While most of the correspondence is incoming, some copies and drafts of Adler's outgoing letters are present, as are letters received by her daughter, Ellen Adler, after Adler's death. Legal and financial materials include publishing agreements, royalty statements, and Adler's will, among other items. Production photographs and film stills from Adler's acting career, studio photographs, and photographs of Adler teaching and traveling are present, as are photographs of Jacob Adler, Sara Adler, Harold Clurman, and other family members, friends, and colleagues. Adler's address books, Christmas

list, datebooks, honorary degrees, and lists of books are some of the other personal materials found in the archive.

Works by Others, subseries D., includes works about Adler as well as typescripts by Lionel Abel, Saul Bellow, E. L. Doctorow, Christopher Fry, Tennessee Williams, and others. Notes of lectures by Sanford Meisner, taken by Mark Bailey, date from 1959 to 1960. Also of interest is Pavel Antokolskii's handwritten manuscript of entries from E. B. Vakhtangov's diaries.

Series II., The Stella Adler Conservatory, is represented by business papers, including legal documents, an operations manual, student rules, correspondence, brochures, class rosters, and other material.

The Russian theater series includes transcripts of lectures by Richard Boleslavsky, photographs of Stanislavsky, material relating to Adler's visit to Russia, and notes, correspondence, and broadcasts of transcripts from the 1964 "Seminars in Drama" featuring members of the Moscow Art Theatre in discussion with their American colleagues, including Adler.

Yiddish theater material in series IV. consists of articles and other material relating to the Adler family, Sara Adler's Yiddish memoir and autobiographical playscript, and Yiddish works by other authors, many unidentified.

Series V., the Harold Clurman series, includes original and photocopy material gathered by Marjorie Loggia, who edited *The Collected Works of Harold Clurman* with Glenn Young. Many of these items are accompanied by notes made by Loggia. Of particular interest are a handwritten draft of *The Fervent Years*, a photocopy typescript of "Plans for a First Studio," handwritten and typescript drafts of *Lies Like Truth*, and an edited typescript of *Reminiscences: An Oral History*. Tearsheets and clippings of numerous reviews and essays by Clurman are also present. Among other noteworthy Clurman material are his correspondence with Stella Adler and others, contracts and royalties, a diary, and theater programs he collected from 1926 to 1930.

A subject index listing manuscripts relating to particular plays and playwrights is located at the end of the finding aid.

Separated Material

Over one thousand video and audio recordings of Adler's classes have been removed from the papers and cataloged separately.

Index Terms

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Adler, Stella, 1902-1992

Clurman, Harold, 1901-1980

Boleslavsky, Richard, 1889-1937

Stanislavsky, Konstantin, 1863-1968

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Occupations

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Teachers

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