

How to Popularize Radicality

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George Bernard Shaw's plays "Mrs. Warren's Profession" (1893) and "Widowers' Houses" (1892), produced at *Kansan Näyttämö* (the Folk Stage) in Helsinki in 1909 and 1910, belong to the group that Shaw called "plays unpleasant". According to Shaw, these plays deal with crimes of society, and portray lives that are financially based on prostitution and the renting of slum flats (Meisel 1963: 126–127). Shaw wanted "dramatic power [to be] used to force the spectator to face unpleasant facts" (ibid, 128).¹ While the English censorship banned the public staging of these plays, and private performances were received without much enthusiasm², Finnish productions of "Mrs. Warren's Profession" and "Widowers' Houses" at the Folk Stage had some success both among critics and the larger public and stood on the brink of being included among the theatre's most successful productions.

Why did the Finnish not react to these plays with confusion and disapproval? Did the plays' political messages interest the audience, or did the plays gain popularity irrespective of their politics? It is hard to believe that all Finnish spectators were particularly interested in Shaw's critique of English society, but the political significance of the plays cannot be dispensed with entirely: their topics must have had corresponded to similar social issues in Helsinki, especially concerning close links between the Folk Stage and the Socialist Party. The venue leads us also to question whether censorship in Finland kept a closer watch on political stages like the Folk Stage, or whether it concentrated more on the Finnish National Theatre.

In surveying Shaw's Finnish premieres, I aim to shed light on the status of a modern political drama in certain social and theatrical contexts. I claim that the theatrical and political context in Finland was especially favorable to these plays; their success among spectators and the absence of censorship were strongly indicative of the time and place of the performances, and of factors like social class, and the status and ideology of the theatre. The general knowledge about Shaw and his plays at the time also helped shape the

1 According to Meisel: "The word "unpleasant" had long been popular with reviewers to suggest qualities they might not care to name" (Meisel 1963: 126).

2 The Independent Theatre showed Shaw's first play "Widowers' Houses" as a closed-house performance in 1892. "Mrs. Warren's Profession" was published in 1893 but was not accepted into the repertoire of the Independent Theatre. It was also banned by the censorship. The Stage Society was the first theatre to put it on as a closed-house performance in 1901. (Chothia 1996: 47.)

expectations of the production throughout its history (see Bennett 1990: 98).³ The beginning of the 20th century was a time of political and artistic commotion in Finland, and these two cannot be wholly separated. Politics invaded the artistic field, and artistic innovations were becoming political. The potential political threat of a production could be calmed down by emphasizing its artistic features when necessary.

As Willmar Sauter emphasizes in his model of performance in context, the presentation and the perception are constantly co-present, each liable to influence by different contexts. While analysing historical performances with limited sources, the multiple contexts proposed by Sauter become especially important. In its artistic decisions the Folk Stage followed (or renewed) certain **conventions**, theatrical traditions, and norms of its time. As one theatre in a larger organization of theatres in Finland, it was situated within the theatrical **structure** of society; the Folk Stage was also linked to the workers' movement, and thus participated in the period's **political** structures. The Folk Stage had a special status between national theatres and workers' amateur groups. This background shifts into sharper focus the **conceptual** context including social ideology as this pertains to theatre. (See Sauter 2000: 9.)

The present article will examine Shaw's plays in their structural, conventional, and conceptual contexts in Finland at the beginning of the 20th century. Through surveying these contexts, I aim to answer questions about the political attitudes of the audiences of the Folk Stage, ways in which Shaw's ideology met Finnish society, and the hegemonic status of this new theatre in both the theatrical and social fields.

Institutional contexts

The Folk Stage⁴ was created out of an amateur workers' theatre association and became professional in 1907. Its company shares were sold mostly to various divisions of the workers' association, its members, and other supporters of the workers' movement (e.g. the director of the Theatre). The labor movement occupied a central position in the eyes of the theatre board, whose members participated in a variety of political activities at the time.⁵ For instance, the first spring after the foundation of the theatre in 1907 ended

3 Marvin Carlson points to "one of the richest and most significant aspects of the theatre event aside from the performance itself: the physical environment of the performance" (Carlson 1990: 42). According to him, "the concerns of theatre history have [---] to begin to take account of the entire social, cultural, and economic system of which theatre is a part." The theatre belongs to "the rich fabric of human society". (Ibid, 54.)

4 About the Folk Stage (*Kansan Näyttämö*), see Koski 1986.

5 Mikko-Olavi Seppälä has shown that the Theatre's artistic staff and central administrators in fact had more than a half of the shares, but while each individual had one vote independent of the amount of her/his shares and many shares concentrated on the director, his family and the vice-director, the politicians had more power than their shares gave as such (Seppälä 2007: 77).

in an opening night performance organized in honor of the new parliament⁶, with social democratic representatives invited as honorary guests. The company's connections with the government also indicate that leftist ideology was accepted in society, and that the theatre was potentially a strong political force.

The Theatre was at the crossroads of two different institutions: the workers' movement and professional theatres with their respective traditions. The board's artistic decision-making was influenced by working-class ideology, but the small group of professional artists, including the director, who worked in the theatre and owned shares, were linked to the working classes only in a wider sense. The institutional nature of the Folk Stage was community-based to the extent that the owners of the theatre (representatives of the audience) participated actively in the artistic decision-making via the mediation of the theatre board.

The influence of – and conflict between – the personalities of two central figures is clearly visible in the Folk Stage's repertoire policy and ideological identity. The most influential figure during its early years was Yrjö Sirola (1876–1936), academic social democrat and member of the first parliament. The other prominent figure was the director of the theatre, Kaarle Halme (1864–1946). Sirola influenced the selection of repertoire, but as director Halme both influenced it and decided the chosen plays' final quality on stage.

Halme and Sirola had different educational backgrounds. Halme received a theatrical education after a modest career as a civil servant. Sirola's university education made him part of the intelligentsia of the period. Sirola with his international and academic background and Halme with a career in professional theatre represent two ways of approaching political drama. Halme was a professional artist, who had received his education at the old Finnish Theatre (from 1902 the Finnish National Theatre). His strength lay in his rejection of the National Theatre, while still holding on to tradition. Sirola worked as a journalist for *Työmies* (The Worker), and was a party secretary and an ideologist, known for his pro-cultural attitude. Both men represent general currents in the politico-cultural field of the beginning of the century: both belonged to the leftist "converts", and held ideological beliefs formed during their adult life, based more on concepts than life experience. In the Folk Stage, Halme represented the producing system; Sirola was no theatre artist but made artistic decisions.

After the early years of the Folk Stage, the relation between the two men became strained. Sirola's opinion of theatre did not overtly clash with Halme's, but the more internationally active Sirola presumably had more extended sources. In the end, however, Halme had the final say as a director of the theatre. Sirola's goals for the Theatre were not political practice, but could be compared with politics; both the theatre and politics were concerned with

6 This first unicameral parliament was elected in a general election. Women had the right to vote and to be elected.

“the improvement of the human values of life”. Sirola was also attuned to new artistic currents. One indicator of this is his translation of Strindberg’s play *Brott och brott* (“Crime and Crime”, 1899). He also had connections with England, and in the autumn 1909 he visited the USA.

Until the beginning of the 20th century the Finnish theatre world had been ruled by the Finnish-speaking National Theatre⁷, which had only a minor connection with the country’s other influential professional theatre, the Swedish-speaking *Svenska Teatern* (the Swedish Theatre), under the influence of Stockholm. In 1905, an important change took place in the Finnish National Theatre when its long-time director, Kaarlo Bergbom⁸, retired. The new direction did not necessarily cause any radical artistic changes, but the general artistic goals of the Theatre had to be rethought. During the first decades of the 20th century, new professional theatres also appeared in the field dominated by the National Theatre, creating a forum for new artists and new audiences. Thus the Folk Stage was surrounded by a changing theatrical system (Wilmer, Koski 2006: 127–129).

Finland’s political life also underwent liberalization in 1905, resulting in a parliamentary renewal and release from censorship. Finnish censorship had traditionally concentrated on political questions because of the dependence on Russia. As Mikko-Olavi Seppälä has shown in his study of the workers’ theatres during that period, except for circumstances of straightforward censorship, theatres had to avoid certain taboos, e.g. concerning the royal family and religion. These taboos were not abolished in the liberalization after 1905, but the changes were strongly visible. This quite favorable period lasted from 1905 to 1911, which coincided with the years of the Shaw productions. (Seppälä 2007: 356–361.) Shaw’s plays clearly did not touch on these dangerous taboos.

The Folk Stage was situated in the Old Student Building, owned by the Student Association of the University of Helsinki. The building did not have a very high status at that time; its use was accidental and did not necessarily represent the convictions of its owners (see Klinge 1970: 152–153, Koski 1986: 70–71). However, neither was it a community hall (of workers). Centrally situated, its signification “as a unit within the urban text” (Carlson 1990: 50) was unclear, especially in the theatrical connection. The working class had to be attracted by the activities themselves because, unlike the former working-class theatre or the country’s

7 The National Theatre was called Finnish Theatre until 1902. It was renamed when it was moved into another building.

8 Kaarlo Bergbom (1843–1906) was the director of the Finnish National Theatre, founded in 1872, until 1905. His background was in German classical drama and Finnish folk tradition. The Theatre carried out a national educational program of developing national drama, producing classical works, and bringing modern foreign plays, especially by Ibsen, onto the Finnish stage. Bergbom refused naturalism and symbolism. See Tiusanen 1969, Wilmer, Koski 2006.

numerous amateur theatres, which were closely linked with working-class ideology, the place did not belong to the sphere of everyday working class life. Social divisions along political lines into the left and right were only beginning to take place, not to be finalized until the Civil War in 1918. In principle, performances at the Folk Stage were open to audiences on both sides, especially so because the non-leftist groups did not feel forced to enter a workers' community hall in order to attend. Apparently, however, the place gradually estranged the theatre's original working-class supporters.

During the first years, the Folk Stage consciously chose to present politically radical plays. Many of its playwrights at the beginning of the century, including Leo Tolstoy, August Strindberg, Ludwig Fulda, Ludwig Anzengruber, Philipp Langmann, Adolf Paul, and the theatre director Kaarle Halme, have been listed by historians of the Finnish working-class movement as supporters of the labor movement (Palmgren 1966: 46–47). The enthusiastic reception of the Theatre's first opening night production, Ludwig Fulda's *Työlakko* ("A Strike") in 1907, provoked the remark that "the stage was conquered by a social revolution" (see Koski 1988: 183). Leftist ideology and theatrical traditions and trends culminated in early repertoire, which defined the Theatre's situation in its professional field. However, this does not yet mean that these plays were always received as political. Generally, the repertoire, the composition of the theatre board, and the critical reception suggest that the most radical Left was slowly withdrawing, and that the Theatre was increasingly gaining recognition and acceptance by the Right. The production of Shaw's plays in 1909 and 1910 can be placed approximately in the middle of the Theatre's evolution, but it seems likely that politics were still an issue in the selection of Shaw's plays.

Choosing Shaw's radical plays did not necessarily push the Theatre into the political sphere. Surprisingly, Shaw's name is not on the list of the known supporters mentioned in Finnish workers' movement's history, perhaps because his better-known plays did not provoke public political debates. Shaw was generally regarded in Finland as a modern mainstream writer, and though his political convictions were known, they were seen as contradictory, manifesting themselves not only in his artistic work but also in some articles published about him in cultural and political journals.⁹ Yrjö Sirola, the chair of the Board of the Folk Stage had written an article on Shaw's political ideas in *Työmies*, acknowledging the significance of his ideology but also its deviation from that of the newspaper. He recommended Shaw to his "comrades" because Shaw derided the bourgeoisie (Koski 1986: 47). Consequently, one can assume that at least the supporters of the labor movement who chose the plays, and the critics who read cultural magazines were aware that Shaw was a supporter of modernity and the leftist movement. Which aspects were stronger is difficult to estimate and depended on the receiver's values.

9 E.g. *Finsk Tidskrift* 1907, *Valvoja* 1907 and 1911.

Drama meets audience

The first public performance of the Finnish version of “Mrs. Warren’s Profession” was on January 28th, 1909 and that of “Widowers’ Houses” on February 27th, 1910. The reception was certainly influenced by the fact that before these openings, the Theatre had already staged “Man and Superman” (the first night was January 9th, 1908), which had become a huge success – apparently, this was the first time that this play had been performed in its entirety, including the hell act.¹⁰ “The plays unpleasant” did not become as popular in Finland as “Man and Superman”, but the number of performances of both plays was above average. “Mrs. Warren’s Profession” was performed in Helsinki between 13 and 20 times (the records are unclear) and “Widowers’ Houses” 11 times. In evaluating the success of the plays, one has to take local circumstances into account. In Finland, plays were not performed as often as in big cities like London, and it was not necessary to do so. The theatres received financial support from the state and the cities, as well as free help from the communities. The Finnish-speaking population of the capital was still relatively small (about one half of the 100,000 citizens), which limited the potential audience. Of the fifty plays that had their opening nights at the Folk Stage from 1907–1911, only six were performed more than twenty times and more than half of them were performed less than ten times (Koski 1986: 44–60).

Shaw was imported into a new tradition where conventions were founded on the spirit of German *Volkstheater* and more generally on the idea of people’s theatre (see also Seppälä 2007: 78–80, who surveys the Parliament discussion emphasizing the educational role of the Theatre). The spectators certainly were “strikingly similar” in many ways, representing generally lower education and social status than was noticed in later Finnish audience surveys. However, the number of spectators who came to see the plays in question means that there were others besides the shareholders (and then the Left) among the audience.¹¹

The fact that neither play was staged by other theatres cannot be dismissed. “Mrs. Warren’s Profession” was not seen again on a Finnish stage until the 1930s and “Widowers’

¹⁰ The Finnish translation of the play (in the archive of the Helsinki City Theatre) was published with the remark “not denied by the author”. In England, the play was part of the series of successful plays that had begun with Shaw’s “Candida” in 1904 and it was thus already known. The London performance, however, did not include the hell act, which dealt with the analysis of socialism (Chothia 1996: 75).

¹¹ The Theatre’s shareholders were given two free tickets regardless of the number of shares they owned. Although the theatre also gave tickets away to other groups, which were close to its ideology, neither could this have been the only reason for the large number of performances. The Theatre had to sell at least half of the tickets for each performance in order to cover its rental costs. The production could hold about 600 spectators. Supposing that the Theatre was at least half full during each performance, one can assume that about 3300–6000 people in total saw Shaw’s plays (Koski 1986: 34).

Houses” was not performed again until the 1970s (Koski 1988: 139).¹² The majority of the country’s theatres were not interested in the “plays unpleasant”; most theatres preferred the playwright’s other plays. In his evaluation of the performance of “Candida”, a chronicler of the National Theatre sums up the prevailing attitude: “... unlike the rest of his earlier productions, this play represents a restrained and hesitant Shaw” (see Koskimies 1953: 184). The Folk Stage thus chose two of “the rest of his earlier productions” that contained suspicious traits. Nevertheless, it is possible that the middle-class audience of the period simply came to see the work of a famous playwright, without being aware of the reputation of these particular plays.

The criticism contained only a few evaluations of the first performances. Two articles were written about “Mrs. Warren’s Profession” and three about “Widowers’ Houses”. In addition, both plays were mentioned in other writings. “Mrs. Warren’s Profession” was discussed by Jalmari Finne in the liberal, neutral journal *Helsingin Sanomat* (The Helsinki Newspaper, 29.01.1909) and by Hella Wuolijoki in the social democratic *Työmies* (The Worker, 29.01.1909). Finne had begun his career as an assistant director in Finnish Theatre. Wuolijoki had come from Estonia to Finland to study and became a radical during the general strike in 1905. She was married to a social-democratic member of the parliament. The poet Eino Leino wrote about “Widowers’ Houses” in *Helsingin Sanomat* (01.03.1910). Leino was a leading figure in the attacks on the National Theatre and supported numerous modern dramatists, particularly Strindberg’s new drama. The poet Veikko Antero Koskenniemi’s article about “Widowers’ Houses” in the conservative *Uusi Suomi* (The New Finland, 01.03.1910) was opposed to Leino’s views, but Koskenniemi also regarded the National Theatre with certain disfavour. Kaarlo Kytömaa, who analysed Shaw’s plays in the magazine *Näyttömätaide* (The Stage Art), was a writer of several minor plays that did not get much attention.

The reviewers’ general critical attitude toward the Finnish National Theatre may have increased their willingness to accept new kinds of repertoire, different from the National Theatre. The activities of the Folk Stage were partly justified by new attitudes toward traditional and mainstream theatre, which was not seen at the National Theatre. Halme in particular billed his goals as new artistic innovations, in opposition to the National Theatre, though this was not always as clear in practice. In the objections to the National Theatre one can see the artistic and political criticism of the younger generation, while Halme’s interest in the people is still also connected to the ideal education of the national ideology, to tradition.

¹² The original manuscript of the former was lost and so was any knowledge of a translation. The latter was translated by the son of the theatre director, the actor Aarne Halme.

The Finnish criticism permitted acceptance of “unpleasant” Shaw, but those aspects of “the unpleasant” which could have caused problems were not really staged (or seen). The message of Shaw’s plays was understood in a concrete sense but it did not shock the audience. Critics saw the theme of “Mrs. Warren’s Profession” as “human fate in a capitalistic society” (Wuolijoki) or prostitution (Finne). The opinions varied, but on the whole they were positive, with the most positive attitudes aligned with romantic rather than intellectual interpretations. The interpretation of “Widowers’ Houses” was more diverse. Evaluations ranged from “a social depiction of the working-class housing situation” (Leino) to “a love-story” (Koskenniemi) to “a social sermon” (Kytömaa). The conservative press called the play “typically Shaw, but not showing his best side” (Koskenniemi), while two other reviewers regarded it as “a complete creation of art”. Neither play was regarded with disapproval. The socialist press was more class-conscious, but this did not diminish its reviewers’ artistic appreciation. Thus Shaw’s “plays unpleasant” were accepted by both the Left and the Right.

In London, Shaw was likewise seen as a radical writer of the intelligentsia, the elite. The distance from the working-class is also visible in the “plays unpleasant”, where social problems are discussed but not shown. Tracy C. Davis writes that “London Fabians were not much concerned with motivating the working-classes” (Davis 1994: 53) and there, too, Shaw’s plays were produced by the commercial theatres in London’s West End. Keeping this in mind, the Folk Stage in Finland was not the most natural place for Shaw’s plays to be produced, regardless of its political supporters. The Theatre’s shareholders were, apart from a small minority, all laborers or theatre artists with leftist sympathies, and the presentation of the play *Työläkko* by Ludwig Fulda at the time of the strikes touched their lives far more than Shaw’s middle-class debates. The plays’ way of discussing politics also differed from the activities in Finnish society where the Left had just acquired the right to vote and obtained success in parliamentary election. This may have estranged the plays’ reception from the original conceptual ideology of the middle-class audience and pointed more to practical matters like the socialistic fame of the playwright or the story. Sirola’s view of Shaw’s plays as deriding the bourgeoisie was not visible in the reception of Halme’s stage interpretation. On the other hand, the cultural difference from England may have given the audience – among it non-socialist spectators and reviewers – an opportunity to see the themes as exotic, to distance them from the local political structures. The fact that practical politics was not generally linked with the writer’s reputation may have supported their popularity; when needed, either politics or artistic innovation could be “cooled down”.

At the Folk Stage, relation to politics was apparent but complicated. It seems natural that a radical play should become successful when it is performed by a radical theatre simply by foregrounding its confrontational nature and adapting it to the social ideology

of the audience. In practice, however, the audience of the workers' theatres in Finland seemed to avoid ideology, supported as it was by active politicians in its administration. Audience research generally supports the idea that workers are seldom interested in "serious" productions.¹³

Evaluating art alongside politics and theatrical conventions in Shaw's productions also shows how theatre is bound to its contexts. The Folk Stage propagated its reputation as a modern alternative to the National Theatre. The idea of early 20th century Modernism with its division into "high" and "low" culture is intriguing in connection with Shaw and the leftist theatre, particularly if one takes into consideration the composition of the audience that came to see successful political plays. In the "Introduction" of her work on literary Modernism, Maria DiBattista emphasizes the importance of defusing the hostility between high and low culture. Her aim is to rejoin the aesthetic and the social in cultural studies, especially the differing terms of relation with the aesthetic in low and high culture (DiBattista 1996: 10). The traditional division regards the representatives of low culture as socialists and their productions as being easy to approach (ibid, 3–4). This definition would make Shaw and his political ambitions typically representative of low culture. DiBattista tries to draw attention to the *naïveté* of this division. James Naremore's and Patrick Bratlinger's division in "Modernity and Mass Culture" (1992) suggests that it is not the division into high and low, but the relation to tradition, with the need to dominate traditions and to develop free and autonomous individuals that is the central factor in modern art (ibid, 7–8).

During its early years, the Folk Stage preferred plays that were socially relevant and formally innovative, but this did not yet mean that the performance followed formal innovations. While English innovations were based on Ibsen, the realist tradition and the treatment of social questions (Davis 1994: 49, 52; Worthen 1992: 42; Chothia 1996: 75,155), Finnish traditions influenced what was seen as innovative. In Finland, e.g. Ibsen's "Ghosts" belonged to the "modern" category which was long been rejected by the National Theatre. Ibsen himself was part of the mainstream, however, since almost all of his other plays had been staged by the National Theatre. In Finland, Shaw was as much a mainstream writer as Ibsen, and in his case the mainstream was as selective. The Folk Stage's active support of modernism – performing a similar modernist play (as "Ghosts") by Shaw, rejected as dangerous by the mainstream, has connections with a conscious renewal of tradition, but this had clear political targets: this worker-owned theatre would compete with the National Theatre. Being modern and renewing tradition meant just that these plays differed

¹³ "A number of national surveys confirmed the suspicion that working class people rarely attended a theatre performance, and if so, that they preferred operettas, musicals, revues and other genres referred to as light entertainment." (Martin, Sauter 1995: 28.) Compare: "The love of art occupies a central place in bourgeois society." (Bennett 1990: 100, with reference to Anne-Marie Gourdon.) On the other hand, Bennett herself rejects fixed entities and constant rules.

from the National Theatre's "conservative" policy. In England, Shaw's plays parodied the emancipation of the middle class. The audience was left uncertain and could not just relax and wait for the familiar pattern to unfold. Shaw consciously used and ridiculed melodramatic situations (*ibid.*). On the way to the Folk Stage this irony had disappeared.

Shaw and society

The plays by Shaw selected by the Folk Stage had a potentially strong social charge, which presumably intrigued the director Halme and the board. It is questionable, however, whether Shaw's intentions were entirely fulfilled. The Shaw of the Finnish Folk Stage deviated from the English Shaw and from his image in the press. For instance, if one believes the critics, Shaw's metaphor of capital equaling theft was not conveyed to the Finnish audience. The Finnish interpretation put stress on completely different issues: paradoxically, this meant an emphasis on individual characters instead of crimes of society and those who collected profits.

An interesting aspect in the reception of Shaw's three plays is the fact that social issues were most present in "Man and Superman" – the play that was the least political. This is a sign of softening of the Theatre's political stand between 1907 and 1909, since political problems were accentuated more during the first two years of its existence, before these productions. This interpretation leads to the assumption that in 1909 and 1910 the audience no longer expected working-class ideology to be strongly presented in the performances, and that many of the original working-class spectators may have left the Theatre, which had the bourgeois Students' House as its venue. Studies of theatre criticism correspond to this interpretation. Social issues were still emphasized in the production of the third play, but it was made clear that the counterparts of the foul spots in society revealed by Shaw appeared on a much smaller scale in Finnish society than in England. The danger of the plays was minimized by the rejection of their generalizing metaphors. The plays' fictive world, as far as realistic interpretations go, was English and not Finnish. The spectators had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with Shaw's "danger", but not to an extent as to disturb the politically neutral or even conservative spectators. After all, these dangers were not linked with their lives.

The Folk Stage achieved its political goals only through the symbolic value of the Theatre and its programmatic choices. The world presented by the theatre deviated from what Shaw represented in his plays, and the performances only strengthened the compromise that was typical of realism. Shaw generally represented a polemical drama which put stress on what the characters had to say. At the Folk Stage the social system was not recognized as a target of criticism, and the unfolding of the plot was seen as more important. In a country where Ibsen was continuously part of the repertoire of the National Theatre, Shaw's relation to Ibsen was not regarded as radical. In her analysis of Shaw studies, Tracy C. Davis points out Shaw's use of the melodramatic and, by contrast, his real innovations (Davis 1994: 171). The Folk Stage

seemed to have stressed the melodramatic (without irony) instead of innovations, interpreting the plays as love stories, or as depictions of general vice in foreign countries. The spectator remained a bystander, an observer, which diminished the danger of the plays.

All things considered, however, “Mrs. Warren’s Profession” brought the dangerous phenomenon of prostitution to the stage at the beginning of the century. Louis Crompton classifies this play as Shaw’s most severe work, taking its readers/spectators to a Dante-like inferno. Instead of the seven deadly sins, this hell is populated with economic and social crimes like inertia, exploitation and a sentimentalism that leads to estrangement from reality (see Crompton 1971). Davis claims, among others, that “Mrs. Warren’s Profession” is not about gender or even social politics. Prostitution was a Fabian metaphor: all capitalist productivity that favored one social class at the expense of another was exploitation. Further, it seems that the first English recipients of the plays did not even realize that the play was about prostitution, because the actual word was not mentioned in the text. (Davis 1994: 49.) Shaw also dissolves the femaleness of the main character: “Shaw’s play so fully subordinates the gender economy of prostitution to the parable of capital that its ability to examine gender as a commodity on the social market is forestalled.” (Worthen 1992: 43.)

Adapting these thoughts to the interpretation of the Folk Stage production strengthens the hypothesis of the influence of social context of performances on their reception, especially considering differences between female characters in England and Finland. The audience of the Folk Stage differed considerably from the English elitist audience. If there were working women among the audience, they had been busy outside their homes for a long time, and women in general had just received the right to vote and to be elected. They did not need metaphors in their political discussion. Perhaps this was the reason why the actual meaning of prostitution was realized and did not only remain a metaphor or be understood as such.

Apparently, the performances were not as critical as the plays’ prior reputation. The radicalism was diminished both for textual and contextual reasons, both with respect to the way in which the plays were produced, and theatrical conventions in general. The performances set aside metaphoric images which could have linked the play to local ideologies, and concentrated on the grassroots plot, which bordered on melodrama. The plays were easily romanticized. As such, they fulfilled the workers’ theatre’s popular interests but did not interest the censor.

Conclusion

Several intersecting currents are apparent in the performances of Shaw’s “plays unpleasant” which backed the success of the Folk Stage around 1910. Director Kaarle Halme did not dominate, but was more or less still dominated by traditions. Shaw’s plays were not light in themselves, but at least their productions did not require a change of a reference

frame. Halme's interpretations were not intellectual. Shaw's reputation as a political thinker legitimized the interest of the working-class audience, even though pleasure was obtained through another kind of experience.

The audience did not "face unpleasant facts" or an idea of ignoring "Art because [---] concerned with Reality, Persuasion, and Society," as Shaw ostensibly proposes (Meisel 1963: 126, 128). The sociohistorical context of the plays' productions was favorable in Finland, in that often contradictory objectives and interests could exist simultaneously and without seeming conflict; both the Left and the Right could accept the plays.

During these performances many kinds of formations were in process, those concerning politics, theatre structures, and art. There were as many reception frames as there were intentions of those responsible for the production process. Politics were spread over the process, and not concentrated in the themes or topics of the plays alone. Much of the content was not seen as political, and radicalism was absorbed into the stage conventions, especially the melodrama and the realistic style. The mainstream hegemony was not extremely alert to these modifications, nor to the "danger" of the content, certainly in part because the Folk Stage was small and not recognized as dangerous. In addition, as a part of the criticism against the National Theatre, the Folk Stage also had supporters among those who seemingly attacked leftist ideas.

Shaw's "plays unpleasant" lost some of their original radicalism on the way from England to Finland. They were modified in a way which found a new audience in another theatrical and social context; their "identity" was founded where local needs met foreign narratives, and, in the final analysis, the former seem to have been more important.

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Kuidas populariseerida radikaalsust

Pirkko Koski

George Bernard Shaw' näidendid „Mrs Warreni elukutse” ja „Leskmeeste majad“ lavastati Helsingis Rahvateatris (*Kansan Näyttämö*) 1909. ja 1910. aastal. Nimetatud teosed kuuluvad rühma, mida autor nimetas „ebameeldivateks näidenditeks”, sest need tegelevad ühiskondlike pahedega: kujutavad inimesi, kes sõltuvad majanduslikult prostitutsioonist ja agulikorterite rendist. Kui Inglismaal oli tšensor keelanud nende näidendite avaliku esitamise ja kodused etendused oli vastu võetud üsna vähese entusiasmi, siis Soomes olid „Mrs Warreni elukutse” ja „Leskmeeste majad” üsna menukad nii kriitikute kui rahva seas.

Seoses Shaw' „ebameeldivate näidendite“ lavastustega, mis tagasid Rahvateatri menu 1910. aasta paiku, ilmsesid mitmed üksteisega ristuvad asjaolud. Lavastaja Kaarle Halme ei püüdnud siin ise domineerida, vaid laskis rohkem või vähem domineerida traditsioonil. Shaw' näidendid ei kuulu iseenesest meelelahutusliku repertuaari hulka, kuid nende lavastused ei nõudnud vähemalt taustsüsteemi muutmist. Halme tõlgendused ei olnud intellektuaalsed. Shaw' maine poliitilise mõtlejana tagas teatrile töölispubliku huvi, kuigi nauding saavutati siin ühe hoopis teistsuguse kogemuse kaudu.

Nende lavastuste mängimise ajal oli käimas mitmeid erinevaid protsesse poliitikas, teatristruktuurides ja kunstis. Niipalju kui trupil oli ideid ja eesmärke, oli ka vastuvõtu taustsüsteeme. Poliitika ei varjutanud mitte ainult näidendite teemasid, vaid ka lavastusprotsessi. Kuid paljudest poliitilistest vihjetest vaadati mööda ning radikaalsus maandati lavakonventsioonides, peamiselt melodraama ja realistliku stiili abil. Peavooluteatri hegemoonia ei olnud eriti häiritud, osaliselt kindlasti seepärast, et Rahvateater oli väike ja seda ei peetud kuigi ohtlikuks, kuid kuna ta samas kujutas endast opositsiooni Rahvusteatrile, oli tal toetajaid ka nende hulgas, kes näiliselt ründasid vasakpoolseid ideid.

Pirkko Koski – teatriteaduse emeritprofessor, Helsingi Ülikool (Soome). Kuni 2007. aastani oli Koski Helsingi Ülikooli teatriteaduse osakonna vastutav professor ning kunstiteaduste instituudi direktor. Tema uurimustöö on keskendunud etenduse analüüsile, historiograafiale, soome teatrile ja selle ajaloole. Lisaks teadusartiklitele on ta neil teemadel avaldanud mitmeid raamatuid: „Teatterinjohtaja ja aika” (1992), „Kaikessa mukana. Hella Wuolijoki ja hänen näytelmänsä” (2000), „Strindberg ja suomalainen teatteri” (2005) ja „The Dynamic World of Finnish Theatre” (koos S. E. Wilmeriga, 2006). Muu hulgas on ta toimetanud ja kirjutanud koos uurimisrühmaga Lahti Linnateatri ajaloo (2005) ja Helsingi Linnateatri ajaloo 1965–2007 „Kansaa teatterissa. Helsingin Kaupunginteatterin historia” (koos Misa Palanderiga, 2007).
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