

## **Effect of Tradition and Innovation on an Actor's Work Over Time: The example of Salme Reek**

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Changes in sociopolitical conditions are accompanied by changes in the repertoire of theatres, in the choice of means of expression, and in aesthetic beliefs and practices. An actor's role in the theatrical process, and his or her relations with the public also change with time. An actor's work is closely connected with the era in which he or she lives, his or her time, and with the circumstances in which his or her roles are created and developed. An actor is always shaping himself as a creator according to the general trends in the theatre and the purposes of the director with whom he or she cooperates.

Since its beginning (1906), Estonian professional theatre has been striving for innovation, hoping to find new forms of expression. Starting with the activity of the actors' company of the Estonian society Taara (founded in 1898), and especially after the founding of the first Estonian professional theatre Vanemuine under the leadership of Karl Menning (in 1906–1914), traditional realistic theatre has continuously existed in Estonia. Over the years it has changed, developed, and evolved, and its means of expression have become interwoven with those of innovative "theatrical theatre", which emphasizes the creation of a stage mood, playfulness, images and symbols.

In what follows I shall trace the effect of two opposite influences – tradition and innovation – on one actor's work, using the example of legendary Estonian actress Salme Reek (1907–1996), whose name was connected with nearly 70 years of the hundred-year history of professional theatre in Estonia. According to the data of the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum, during the period 1929–1996, Reek participated in 182 stage productions in bigger or smaller roles. Reek's coming to the stage coincides with the general establishment and professionalization of Estonian theatre; she is an important connecting figure between different periods of change and reform. As an actress, she succeeded in adapting to the styles of very different stage directors, following theatre in its dynamic evolution and going along with innovations.

The starting point for viewing the connections between the context of the times and the actress' work is the innovative theatre of the 1920s, influenced by neo-romantic trends (impressionism, symbolism) and German expressionism. Salme Reek started her career as a professional actress in the beginning of the 1930s when these trends were still active. She studied at the Drama Studio theatre school in 1927–1930, and following her graduation, worked in the Drama Studio Theatre (Estonian Drama Theatre since 1937). As an actor Reek stayed true to this theatre until her death, though she took visiting roles at other theatres. Reek's professional path started in the complicated years of a world economic crisis, which

also affected Estonian theatre through a decrease in audience. Theatre researcher Luule Epner has analysed the theatre situation of the time as follows: "In those tight conditions the theatre could not afford the risk of experiments. To last, it had to find repertoire acceptable to the taste of a wider theatre-going public. The crisis was overcome with the help of original Estonian dramas [...] In the choice of plays above all 'closeness to life' was sought, expressed in actualities and in the choice of subject matter and character types in accordance with the everyday experience of an average theatregoer." (Annus et al. 2001: 327–328.) At the time of the economic crisis the search for modernist means of expression so characteristic of the 1920s gradually diminished. The 1930s brought about a new wave of realism and an overwhelming percentage of local repertoires. Local Estonian drama (mostly situation comedy) was a school for actors in the creation of colourful, true-to-life national characters.

Salme Reek's first roles in professional theatre were a six-year-old boy in a children's play in 1929 when she was still a theatre school student and a grotesque old lady in "Mikumärdi", an original comedy by Hugo Raudsepp about country life (stage director Ruut Tarmo). As a young actor, Salme Reek often had opportunities to play small children and old ladies, both in fairy tale productions for children and realistic productions for adults. Boys' roles became her actor's trademark. Reek is considered the most famous travesty – a female player of boys' and men's roles – in Estonian theatre. When Reek started work at the Drama Studio, the theatre placed priority on increasing its audiences through children's productions; thus actors able to play children's roles were in demand. Reek was thought suitable both because of her personal qualities and physical assets: she was small, athletic, slender and gracious, mobile and lively. She surprised her colleagues, critics, and the public in her first roles with her exceptional ability to interpret children, and she became more and more interested in children's psychology.

Reek often gave a grotesque colouring to her old women's roles, as if watching the characters she created from a distance with a half-smile. Among her roles are prying scandalmongers, meek babysitters, humble housemaids, simple countrywomen, ladies from the town, etc. Sometimes these women seem ridiculous; sometimes, however, cordial and touching. The old women played by the young actress provoked controversial opinions, perhaps because of her deviation from the realistic manner of playing, her sharp, theatrical accent on certain character traits, and her frequent use of the tricks of farce theatre. The successes and failures of the beginning of Salme Reek's theatre career depended on the strength or weakness of the literary material the productions were based on and the stage directors' working style. The often low aesthetic quality of the original drama dominating in Estonian theatre in the 1930s and the superficiality it entailed in creating characters seldom offered actors the opportunity of going more deeply into their roles.

In theatre school Salme Reek received systematic training in the realistic manner of acting, including the art of finding the inner truth, impersonation, and technical quality, all of which are prerequisites for the variability of the actor's range, and in turn for artistic

longevity. This is a good basis for managing different theatre trends and styles, both in the traditional and the innovative theatre, and both in “the art of experiencing” and “the art of representation” (using Stanislavsky’s notions). For Salme Reek, a most important school for mastering body language was study at Gerd Neggo’s dancing studio (a private school in Tallinn in 1924–1940).

Criticism supports the view that in her first roles from the end of the 1920s to the beginning of the 1930s, Salme Reek tried to caricature her characters, to sharpen certain of their features. Such a slightly affected manner existed in Estonian theatre of the time parallel to a much more natural, “true-to-life” style of realistic performance. The choice would depend on the wishes of the stage director. Sometimes, however, the young actress could not depict an old person using an inner approach and chose therefore to hide her youth by stressing the external features of an old person.

Reek’s more theatrical approach to her role was apparently also affected by the inclinations of stage director Paul Sepp, who was under the influence of the ideas of the Russian conventional theatre, where romanticization of characters was preferred, along with amplification of features of character by a pathetic speaking manner or accentuated plastic movements. Naturalness was not always demanded, either in the behaviour or attitudes of the characters. In several of Sepp’s productions, mixing of life and theatre was demonstrated through a blend of realistic and theatrical theatre styles. In Sepp’s best productions the expressive manner was used, opening the depths of the human psyche, based on the actor’s inner gnosis, and true, organic acting. Young Salme Reek doubtless found interesting the inner analysis and different phenomena of human psychology in Sepp’s more realistic productions. Among these roles were the young girl Eha Noorkikas in Hugo Raudsepp’s comedy *Põrundu õnnistus* (“Blessed be the Fools”, 1931) and a daughter of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Aleksander Antson’s *Tšempionaad* (“Championship”, 1933). A third factor impinging on Reek’s manner at the beginning of her creative path might have been the expressionist theatricality that spread to Estonian theatre in the 1920s. A socially critical expressionist drama was close to the views of Salme Reek’s teacher Hilda Gleser, the basis of whose teaching was, similarly to Stanislavsky’s ideas, psychological realism.

Sociopolitically the 1930s were a restless decade, in Estonia no less than elsewhere in Europe. The 1934 *coup d’état* marked the end of the democratic era and the beginning of an authoritative regime. The subsequent period of “silent agreement” exerted its own pressures on the theatre, which now had to serve the interest of national aspirations and to emphasize the positive side of life. The demand for original national culture further increased the importance of original plays concerned with the national character and the search for roots. A neo-realistic style, already dominant in European theatre of the time, became prevalent on Estonian stages. Systematic training at theatre school and the lengthening of rehearsal periods at theatres increased actors’ mastery of their roles. Expressionistic

sentimental pathos, which often caused overstrained acting and high style declamation on stage now receded. The goal was to represent features and mentalities from real life, not copying the character from the real world mechanically but striving for psychological plausibility. Achieving the latter was often made more difficult by the superficiality and simplicity of the literary material. Original real life comedies, often simple, superficial, or of questionable aesthetic value, pushed acting towards a simplified, comic presentation of characters, avoiding softer half tones, and resulting in stage stereotypes such as the stubborn farmer, the clever farmhand, the sincere maid, the upstart lady, etc. Salme Reek's early roles were often also affected by these pressures.

Speaking of the discussions of the productions of the Drama Theatre in the criticism of the time, Lea Tormis points out in her book *Eesti teater 1920–1940* ("Estonian Theatre in 1920–1940") that "... even in the case of original productions (beginning with "Mikumärdi") a certain overstrained quality prevailed, a coarse overshooting of the mark in acting style, which is the reverse of rich stage expressiveness. Such an approach may have been emphasized by the need to attract all kinds of audiences, especially while on tour, and that was why the "pedal was pushed to the floor." (Tormis 1978: 164.)

The quest for more demanding literary material led to more and more frequent dramatizations of Estonian original prose in the theatre of the 1930s. A. H. Tammsaare's ethically and existentially deep prose works gave rise to important stage productions, helping the theatre evolve from an eclectic style, by turns naturalistic, by turns overacted and pathetic, into a unified realistic ensemble theatre. Through stage productions based on Tammsaare's major novel *Tõde ja õigus* ("Truth and Justice") Salme Reek refined her skills in viewing the production as a whole and relating to the work of other actors. These productions challenged the actress with roles emphasizing thinking, and nuances became important. In the stage production based on "Truth and Justice I" and titled "Vargamäe" (1932, staged by Kaarli Aluoja), Reek played a colourful tenant farmer's wife, a blabbermouth. In the stage production based on the second part of the novel, entitled *Härja Mauruse I järgu koolis* ("At the First Rate School of Mr. Maurus", 1935, staged by Andres Särev) she played the small girl Tiina, who had a deep inner life, who was unable to walk but who had a sincere belief in God and His healing powers.

Compared to the previous decade, the proportion of world classics in the repertoire of the Drama Theatre diminished in the 1930s. In the second half of that decade interest in theatre, all but lost during the years of the economic crisis, started to grow again, accompanied by a shift towards seriousness in repertoire. Stage language became more metaphorical and poetical. In productions of European classics Salme Reek succeeded in playing Argon's small daughter Luison in Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire* (1936) and Nichette in *La dame aux camélias* (1937) by Alexandre Dumas fils. By the end of the 1930s, a strong ensemble of actors was formed at the Estonian Drama Theatre, Salme Reek's home theatre.

One of the most original young girl characters in Salme Reek's work was Ellie May Lester, the hare-lipped daughter of a poor American farmer in the stage production of Erskine Caldwell's story "Tobacco Road" (1939), based on Jack Kirkland's dramatization. This production, staged by Leo Kalmet, stood out in the general theatre picture of the 1930s due to its artistic unity, harmonious ensemble, and nuanced, realistic approach. "Tobacco Road" showed the grotesquely shabby life of poor white Americans in bright colours and in a psychologically grounded manner. This basic approach allowed several participating actors, including Salme Reek in the role of Ellie, to succeed in "communicating the grotesquely dejected general tone of the work" (Tormis 1978: 344). In a harmonious ensemble the troupe of capable actors used simple everyday scenes to evoke a tragic atmosphere of extreme poverty and hopelessness.

World War II and the Soviet occupation of Estonia in 1940 brought with them serious changes in the work and repertoire politics of Estonian theatres. The number of original Estonian dramas decreased notably, and theatres were forced to produce ideologically "correct" dramas translated from the languages of other Soviet peoples. Life circumstances and the socialist future had to be idealized. Characters were presented in a simplified black-and-white technique, often using heroic and hollowly pathetic undertones. The actors had some creative leeway when playing in dramas based on Estonian or world classics. During the Stalinist 1940s and 1950s there was much talk about the method of socialist realism in art, which was a far cry from depicting the real world truthfully. Life and human relations were viewed from the aspect of the Communist party ideology, which constituted significant distortions. Modernist theatre trends were officially disapproved, and referred to collectively by the label of "formalism". Standards set for art were conceptual clarity and veritability, while all metaphorical thinking was denounced. Preferred themes on stage were the war and the subsequent period of reconstruction, including breaking the resistance of the *kulaks* and building up collective farms.

The Soviet occupation and the postwar period brought several children's roles into Salme Reek's work, such as the young communist Galya in A. Bulgakov's "New House" (1940); Timur in a stage production of Arkadi Gaidar's story "Timur and his Team" by Alfred Rebane (1947); Vanya in Valentin Katayev's drama "The Regiment's Son" (1947), and Gavrik in "Lonely White Sail", a play by the same author (1949). Despite official prescriptions, the actress did not seek to represent an idealized hero, but rather a human being with all his strength and weaknesses. Thus, in preparing for the role of Vanya, Reek talked to homeless children, trying to win their trust and to understand them. Reek became a popular interpreter of boys' roles; her renditions were so convincing that she was often taken to be a real boy, for example as Tom Sawyer in Mark Twain's and Leo Martin's "Tom Sawyer" (1945), Kaj in Yevgenyi Schwartz's "Snow Queen" (1945), and others. Salme Reek's "careful study of the psychology of the young and her numerous observations from life were the source of her original interpretations of roles" (Kask 1987: 228).

The beginning of the 1950s was a complicated time for Salme Reek. The 24 graduates from the Estonian studio of the Moscow Lunacharsky State Theatre Institute (1948–1953) needed 24 posts at the Tallinn Drama Theatre<sup>1</sup>. Thus the theatre had to sacrifice someone, and Salme Reek, then at the best creative age of 46, was made a stage manager. This time, when she was forbidden to appear on stage, was a painful period in Reek's life, and perhaps it also explains why roles as middle-aged ladies are most rare in her creative biography. In those years she appeared secretly in the role of a small boy, Nikita in Andres Särev's production of Oskar Luts's *Tagahoovis* ("In the Backyard", 1955), a classic of national literature famous for its rich true-to-life characters. At the demonstration performance, theatre leaders had no choice but to accept Salme Reek's interpretation of the role, so impressive was its "external truthfulness" and success at representing the character's psychology. Nikita seemed to be truly hidden inside the actress, inside her sensitive memory and wanted to get out.

In the middle of the 1950s, during the famous Khrushchev "thaw", artistic opportunities of expression gradually expanded. Not only were there more stage productions based on world classics and original Estonian literature, but theatrical language changed as well. Contrary to the postwar distortions of socialist realism, the principle of "closeness to life" again became important. Pathetic heroism eulogizing the Soviet order also started to disappear from the stage. A kind of lyrical realism that emphasized the poetry of everyday life became popular. So-called little people with their joys and problems became the centre of attention. Again an opportunity opened up for the stage director to follow his or her own vision in creating the production, and actors were freer to play original individuals rather than class stereotypes.

Though Bertolt Brecht had been an officially disapproved author during the Stalinist era, at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s Estonian theatre increasingly experimented with Brecht's ideas. The first production of Brecht in Soviet Estonia, "Mr. Puntila and his Man Matti" was staged by Voldemar Panso in 1958. The style of the play differed greatly from what the public was used to: it was more playful, more theatrical, and more conventional. Salme Reek played the role of Telephone-Sandra. Reek's roles of this era – the Old Farmer Woman in Brecht's "Mother Courage" (1962, directed by Ilmar Tammur) and the First Bridesmaid in Vladimir Mayakovsky's satire "Bedbug" (1963, directed by Mai Mering) – often showed playfulness, the use of estrangement techniques, and critical attitudes towards the character, all features characteristic of Brecht's theatre.

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<sup>1</sup> In those days, "national studios" for each of the Soviet republics were operating in Moscow. Students were selected for admission to the studio in Estonia, and after they completed their studies, all the graduates were assigned to the Tallinn Drama Theatre.

In 1962 Salme Reek's legendary role was born, that of mother Åse in Henrik Ibsen's "Peer Gynt". Like Ilmar Tammur's stage production as a whole, this role blended lyricism and satire, irony and dramatics. The stage production focused on the caring, loving relations between mother and son, their mutual play (they were like big children in a world of fantasy and play), which continued throughout their lives, and even into the mother's hour of death. Russian critic N. Balashova has noted that Reek's Åse, dressed in rags and with red tousled hair was small and frail on the outside, but inside there was a poetical woman capable of great love who moved on stage with a light youthful stride; whose gestures were impatient, as she watched her son sometimes with a loving and understanding, sometimes with an annoyed look (see Treier 1963). In creating Åse's role, the physical activity of the actress was very important, and alongside it a connection with inner spirituality. Relating both spiritually and emotionally with Peer's mother, Salme Reek managed to make this role supremely credible.

Under the influence of the scientific revolution of the 1960s, a number of plays using science fiction motifs were staged. In the Drama Theatre Boris Kabur's original "Rops" (1964, staged by Ben Drui) and *Rops aitab kõiki* ("Rops Will Help Everybody", 1965, staged by Hanno Kalmet) gave Salme Reek, then already over fifty, the opportunity to create one of her most famous roles as the mechanical robot-boy Rops. As Rops was a machine, not a human being, the role prescribed a theatrical solution: the lines had to be delivered quickly, as if coming from a machine, and movements had to resemble a clockwork appliance. The genesis of Rops' thoughts, his development and strict logic became apparent through the actress's original solution, her rigid and monotonous movements, her immobility, and barely perceptible mimicry on her mask-like face. In this role, Salme Reek effectively blended the features of a living boy and a robot belonging to the world of fantasy.

At the end of the 1960s modernist ideas started to spread both in Estonian literature and theatre, due to closer cultural interaction and exchange with other countries. Antonin Artaud's and Jerzy Grotowski's ideas about the theatre became known in Estonia, as well as experiments of the *avant garde* theatre. Among the new means of theatrical expression that were adopted, the absurd and the grotesque were often used on stage. Theatrical language became more metaphorical, poetical, physical, and variable. This decade might be spoken of as the stage directors' era in Estonian theatre. For actors, it was important to change in accordance with the emergence of this new theatrical language.

At the hub of the radical theatrical innovations that started in 1969 was the Tartu theatre Vanemuine. The Drama Theatre in Tallinn remained a rather conservative place, where realism of everyday life was preferred, and original Estonian literary material was used, without paying much attention to its quality; the theatre was generally oriented toward a less demanding public. Such a repertoire politics was one of the reasons why the theatre went through a crisis at the end of the 1960s. Nevertheless a more allegorical and metaphorical theatre language sometimes reached the Drama Theatre stage, such as in "Monolisk" by Ardi

Liives, an “allegorical satire in Dürrenmatt’s style” (Annus et al. 2001: 531), staged by Ben Druu in 1969, with Salme Reek in the role of Secretary.

The 1970s have often been referred to as a “golden era” of Estonian theatre, rich in interesting and original stage directors and a variety of styles. The metaphorically rich trend of the modernist theatre continued, though its radicalism and sharpness receded with time. Modernist means of expression often blended with the psychological-realistic tradition. In the work of Salme Reek this trend was expressed in her role as an old gossiping woman, Zinaida Savvshina, in Anton Chekhov’s “Ivanov”, staged in 1971 by visiting Russian stage director and theatre pedagogue, Maria Knebel. The criticism of the time noted a dominance of realism in Reek’s role, while also acknowledging her use of theatricality, estrangement, and psychological grotesque.

In 1970 Voldemar Panso became the head stage director of the Drama Theatre, and under his guidance the theatre came out of the crisis. Panso made his stage productions in a more traditional, psychological manner. In *Inimene ja inimene* (“Man and Man”, 1972), based on the fifth part of Tammsaare’s classic novel “Truth and Justice” Salme Reek had an opportunity to penetrate into the depths of the classic’s philosophy, playing Ida, the daughter-in-law of one of the two Vargamäe farmers.

At the end of the 1970s, Salme Reek, now over sixty, had the opportunity to play in a more theatrical manner in the productions of Ago-Endrik Kerge, who started working at the Drama Theatre in 1976. Bright, elegant, frail, and very plastic in her movements, she fit well into Kerge’s slightly ironical, merry, and theatrically sharpened stage world. A good example of this period is Reek’s incomparable Woman in a play “A Visit of a Young Lady” (1977) by Czech playwright Zdeněk Podskalský. This was a stage production blending parody, harlequinade, bright repartee, and pop melodies, where Reek sang, danced and frolicked about with such energy and impact that all efforts to guess at the actress’s age were in vain. Experience and knowledge gained during Reek’s long creative life only added lustre to her acting. In this stage production the actress demonstrated her ability to control her body and her voice. Her use of body language ranged from copying everyday behaviour to dancing movements and acrobatic tricks.

In Ago-Endrik Kerge’s stage production “Peer Gynt” (1978), Salme Reek had an opportunity to play mother Åse for the second time. In Kerge’s rather metaphorical, plastic production, which used new theatrical language, Reek masterfully connected a psychologically perceptive manner led by inner impulses with a markedly physical and playful manner of presentation, adding outer expressiveness to the means of psychological theatre. All means of expression at the actress’s disposal were included in the creative process: deep inner feeling, intonation, plastic body language, and facial expression. This role of Åse might be considered as a bridge connecting different periods in theatre and of styles, between traditional and innovative theatre.

By the beginning of the 1980s the time of more radical innovation in Estonian theatre



was past, a time when playful and metaphorical theatre combined with stylistic variability. The expressive manner of the period, which included the rich use of the absurd and irony, receded. A new wave of traditional psychological and realistic theatre coincided with an interest in Estonian history and a search for roots, in opposition to the social oppression and Russification of the period. Those productions of the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s based on original literary material mostly offered moments of recognition with respect to everyday realities. This was a high point for national classics in theatre. In the centre of stage interpretations of the original literary works was man with his *Weltschmerz*, his worries and consternation, his joys and his passions. Acting was turned inward, demonstrating the simultaneous prevalence of strong feeling and deep thought.

The politics of reform and *glasnost* provoked a national movement in Estonia and a second awakening that culminated in the “Singing Revolution” of 1988. The removal of censorship made it possible to speak openly about formerly forbidden themes. Dramas written some time ago, but previously unacceptable to the Soviet powers were now staged. One of the strangest characters played by Salme Reek was born in the Vanalinnastudio (The Old-Town Studio) in Tallinn in 1990 in a comedy by Hugo Raudsepp *Salongis ja kongis* (“The Salon and the Prison Cell”, staged by Gunnar Kilgas), criticising totalitarian order and full of political aphorisms. (The comedy had been published in 1933, but during the Soviet regime it was contraindicated for stage production.) Reek’s Human Being was a figure presented in the key of the absurdist theatre, a symbolic, ageless, timeless, and abstract being that jumped into the space through an open window on the empty stage after an apocalyptic catastrophe.

With the restitution of the Estonian Republic in 1991, rapid social changes took place, which held the attention of the people on the street; thus there was less time to participate in cultural activities. Innovation in social life did not in itself evoke radical change nor did it bring new style into theatre. To compensate the lack of audience, theatres again started to attract more people by staging comedies. In the middle of the 1990s, repertoires again began to vary, accompanied by an increased interest of the public towards theatre. Previously prohibited absurdist plays now reached the Estonian stage in greater numbers. Psychological realism with modernist elements was dominating on stage. It was in this manner that Salme Reek played the old card player Avdotya Nazarovna in her second Chekhov drama, “Ivanov” (1992, staged by Elmo Nüganen). Reek’s acting in a perennially vaudeville manner infused with deep human compassion differed significantly from the traditional ridiculing interpretations of this character. Criticism pointed out that Reek’s good sense of humour and fine sense of irony in her Nazarovna were reminiscent of Charlotta from Chekhov’s “Cherry Orchard”.

The roles marking the end of Salme Reek’s creative path demanded traditional psychological-realistic manner, as her first works from theatre school days had done. Her last great role at the Drama Theatre was Du in American playwright Jane Martin’s “Keely and Du” (1994, staged by Madis Kalmet). This play was included in the repertoire of

the Drama Theatre specifically with Salme Reek in mind. The world of that elderly woman who as a nurse is assigned to keep watch over a young woman, Keely, a rape victim chained to her bed to prevent her from having an abortion, was not in concordance with the actress's own convictions and demanded deep analysis of the character. In the small hall of the Drama Theatre, through the actress deeply psychological approach, through her facial expression and movements, the public could watch how two human beings – a prisoner and a guard – drew imperceptibly closer, step by step.

The final chord in Salme Reek's work was Neenu Moor in a stage version of an Estonian literary classic, August Gailit's realistic and at the same time romantic novel "Ekke Moor"; the production was titled *Paberist ingliske* ("A Paper Angel", 1996, staged by Dajan Ahmet) in the Salong-teater (Salon Theatre). The actor opened up the romantic nature of Neenu Moor, which Pille-Riin Purje regarded in her review as another version of Peer Gynt's mother Åse (Purje 1996). This was the actress' farewell to her public, having reached her eighty-ninth year of age.

Changes in society bring along changes in cultural life, including theatre, impacting theatre repertoires and the approaches of stage directors to the literary material. Actors and actresses have to adjust to the surrounding social realities, to feel the times they are living and creating in and move along with them. Basing her work on a solid foundation of realistic training, Salme Reek managed constantly to work with herself and through inner development to adapt to different forms and styles of theatre. In many roles she connected the traditional realistic-psychological theatre and its inward-turning stage life with an innovative, markedly physical, playful, and theatrical manner of presentation. Through her work Salme Reek tried to preserve the more distinguished part of the theatre of the past, concentrating on the character's inner world in the manner of psychological theatre but also on opening to the public the deeper dimensions of roles through the cumulative effects of many waves of changes in acting practice.

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## **Traditsiooni ja uuenduse mõju näitlejaloomingule läbi aja:**

### **Salme Reegi näide**

Eike Värk

Ühiskondliku situatsiooni muutumine toob kaasa muutused teatri repertuaaris, väljendusvahendite valikus, esteetilistes tõekspidamistes jne. Ajas muutub ka näitleja osa, tema olemus, tähendus ning näitleja-vaataja suhe teatriprotsessis. Näitlejale on oluline näha teatrit dünaamilises arengus ja ise uuega kaasa minna. Jälgin kahe vastandliku jõu – traditsiooni ja uuenduse – mõju näitleja loomingu eesti teatri ühe legendi Salme Reegi (1907–1996) teatrite näitel. Selle nimega seostub ligi seitse aastakümnet eesti kutselise teatri saja-aastasest ajaloost.

Reegi näitlejaks kujunemine algas Draamastuudios (1927–1930), kus ta sai traditsiooniliseks peetava realistliku, läbielamiskunstil põhineva näitlejakoolituse. See oli baas toimetulekuks erinevate teatristiilidega, traditsioonilises ja uuenduslikus teatris, erineva tinglikkuseastmega lavastustes, nii „läbielamisteatris“ kui ka „etendamisteatris“. Kooli lõpetamise järel asus ta tööle Eesti Draamateatrisse, kuhu jäi kuni oma surmani.

Reegi teatriaja esimene aastakümme kulges elulähedust ja eesti kultuuri eripära väärtustavas teatris. Neil aastail oli tal sageli võimalus mängida paralleelselt väikesi lapsi ja vanu naisi. Poisterollidest kujunes tema kui näitleja fenomen. Arvukatele vanaeiderollidele andis ta sageli groteskse värvingu. Nõukogude okupatsioon ja sõjajärgne aeg tõi Reegile mitmeid lapskangelaste rolle.

1960ndate teisel poolel ja 1970ndail pidi Reek kohanema uusi vorme otsiva mängulise teatriga. 1962. aastal sündis Ibseni „Peer Gyntis“ legendaarne ema Åse, mille loomisel oli olulisel kohal näitleja füüsiline eneseväljendus, selle seos sisemise vaimsuse ning näitleja enese ereda isikupära esiletoomisega. 1970ndate lõpul sai seitsmekümnendates eluaastates, kuid särav ja suurepärase plastilise liikumisega Reek võimaluse näitlemiseks teatraalsemas ja koomilisemas laadis Ago-Endrik Kerge lavastustes.

1980. aastate alguses vormiotsingud vaibusid. Näitleja mäng oli nüüd pööratud rohkem sissepoole, omandades samas tugeva mõtte- või tundelaengu. Üks kummalisemaid tegelaskujusid Reegi loomebiograafias oli Inimene Hugo Raudsepa „Salongis ja kongis“ – absurditeatri võtmes esitatud sümbolistlik, abstraktne, müstiline, eatu, sootu olend. Reegi näitlejatekond lõppes 1990. aastate keskel traditsioone austavas, ent samas ka uuendusi, muutusi sallivas teatris.

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