

Helsinki or Helsingfors?: Jean Sibelius and the Stage Philip Ross Bullock (University of Oxford)

Located at the easternmost reach of what has traditionally constituted 'Western' Europe, and – at the same time – having a significant history as one of the most westerly outposts of the Russian Empire, Helsinki (or Helsingfors as it is known in Swedish) constitutes a fascinating case study in what it means to be a capital city. Within the Nordic region, its status is equally polyvalent, given Finland's close, yet nonetheless oblique relationship – politically, historically, linguistically, and culturally – to the Scandinavian nations of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, not to mention its ties to the Baltic states, above all Estonia. The geographical and historical factors determining Helsinki's status are matched, too, by temporal considerations. Although Helsinki's foundation dates back to the sixteenth century, it was little more than a military outpost until the nineteenth century. Then, after several centuries of Swedish rule, Finland was ceded to the Russian Empire in 1809. In 1812, the Russian authorities deliberately established Helsinki as the capital of the new Grand Duchy of Finland in a strategic attempt to weaken the Swedish influence represented by the former capital, Turku (Åbo in Swedish). At the behest of Tsar Alexander I, the city's scale and aspect were comprehensively transformed by the German-born architect, Carl Ludvig Engel. Thus, and perhaps ironically, many of its most obviously national institutions – its legislature, administration, university, and bank – were inaugurated through processes of external imperial rule, even whilst they came to express a powerful sense of local autonomy, culminating in Finland's declaration of independence on 6 December 1917 in the wake of the October Revolution.

The story of Finnish self-determination and eventual independence has been told many times and remains a powerful prism through which the Finnish arts have typically been viewed. Whether through its participation in the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900, interest in the *Kalevala* and Karelian culture more generally, cultivation of its autonomous administrative institutions, resistance to Tsar Nicholas II's policies of Russification, and eventually the assassination of Nikolay Bobrikov, the Russian Governor-General, in June 1904, Finland has often been seen as the archetypal 'small nation' intent on freeing itself from imperial domination. This chapter charts a rather different course, seizing on the fractures and discontinuities within Finnish history in order to explore the complex and multi-layered nature of Helsinki's status as the Finnish capital under the period of Russian rule. In particular, it examines the interaction between Finnish- and Swedish-language institutions, particularly in the world of the theatre. In doing so, it challenges accounts which have tended to foreground national romanticism, a search for self-determination, and a rejection of Russian influence as the principal features of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finnish culture, emphasising instead hybridity and multiplicity as central elements in the city's make-up around the turn of the century.

This polyphony extends to Helsinki's transnational and international engagements too. On the one hand, the city was often held to embody a coherent and uniform sense of Finnishness (not least in the context of international exhibitions and the global circulation of culture). At the same time, Helsinki itself served as a multilingual and multinational *entrepôt* for the import and export of various cultural models which were subsequently taken up by various factions within the city's artistic communities. Indeed, its physical distance from many of Europe's main centres was the precondition for its many cosmopolitan cultural encounters. The individual who best embodies this chapter's themes

is, perhaps paradoxically, Jean Sibelius. Perhaps best known as the composer of *Finlandia* and other patriotic works and celebrated as the most famous musical expression of Finnish nationalism, Sibelius instead emerges as a complex and ambiguous figure, whose own multilingualism and cosmopolitanism well match those of the Finnish capital.

City and Nation

Given the prominence of the narrative of national self-determination in many accounts of Finnish history, it is perhaps surprising to see how often Helsinki's status as Finland's capital has been called into question. As Lieven Ameel suggests, 'Helsinki has long been defined by what it seems to be lacking. It has been claimed that it has little or no history, that it is an artificial construction that is not representative of the Finnish nation and its culture.'¹ As late as 1914, the novelist and poet Veikko Antero Koskenniemi – author of patriotic words sung to the tune of Sibelius's *Finlandia* – was lamenting Helsinki's failure to produce a writer who could express the city's character both within the nation and internationally:

Stockholm has Strindberg, St. Petersburg has Dostoevsky, Berlin has Kretzer, Hamburg has Frenssen, Oulu has Pakkala and Rauma has Nortamo – but who is Helsinki's poet? Who has claimed for Helsinki the admission ticket into the society of literary cities? Who is the poet of Helsinki?²

Koskenniemi's sense of scale here is revealing; Helsinki appears to be caught uncomfortably between the great European capitals and financial centres on the one hand (Stockholm, St Petersburg, Berlin and Hamburg), and seemingly more 'authentic' expressions of Finnish regionalism such as Oulu and Rauma on the other. Equally significant is Koskenniemi's presumption that a capital city should be the organic expression of a nation's identity, even – perhaps especially – when that nation is not (yet) a state. Complaining about the absence of any 'synthetic literary work about Helsinki, a novel or an epic, in which this Northern capital would live in its totality with all those characteristics which nature, race and culture have bestowed upon her', he imposes a particular linguistic and ethnocentric vision on the city and its relationship *vis-à-vis* the nation.³ In this regard, Koskenniemi harks back to a complaint voiced some three decades earlier by the writer, Zachris Topelius, who had suggested that Helsinki was 'alien to the country it had to represent'.⁴

Topelius's complaint was based on the observation that the Finnish capital was still dominated by Swedish-speaking Finns (including, ironically enough, Topelius himself). Throughout the nineteenth century, Helsinki – or, rather, Helsingfors as it is known in Swedish – was predominantly a Swedish-speaking city. Even by 1900, when Finnish nationalism was at its most intense, the capital was split roughly equally between the two language communities, whereas by the same date, the number of Swedish-speakers in the Grand Duchy as a whole amounted to just 12.9 percent.⁵ Matters were complicated by questions of class too. Swedish remained the language of many members of the social,

¹ Lieven Ameel, *Helsinki in Early Twentieth-Century Literature: Urban Experiences in Finnish Prose Fiction 1890-1940* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2016), p. 10.

² V. A. Koskenniemi, *Runon kaupunkija* (Porvoo: Werner Söderström, 1914), cited in *ibid.*, p. 10.

³ Cited in Ameel, *Helsinki in Early Twentieth-Century Literature*, p. 10.

⁴ Zacharius Topelius, *Muistiinpanoja vanhasta Helsingistä* (Helsinki: Helsinki-seura, 1986), p. 21, cited in Ameel, *Helsinki in Early Twentieth-Century Literature*, p. 30.

political, economic and cultural elite, with Finnish being the language of the less educated working classes, many of whom had moved to the city from the countryside.⁶ Topelius presupposes that a nation's capital can be conveyed adequately only through the use of a shared national language as spoken and written by its leading literary representatives. This was, of course, a widespread view at the time, even if evidently fails to convey the complexity of language politics in many European cities, as well as the lived, multilingual experience of many of their inhabitants. It is, moreover, a view which underpins – explicitly or implicitly – much modern scholarship. Studies of the representation of Helsinki in literature tend to bifurcate into distinct linguistic traditions, even when many writers were themselves bilingual in daily life, if not in literary practice. Lieven Ameel, for instance, focuses on the image of Helsinki in Finnish-language prose, whereas Massimo Ciaravolo and Arne Toftegaard Pedersen devote their attention to the canon of works by Swedish-speaking Finns.⁷

More recently, however, narratives such as these have been nuanced and complicated by the application of comparative, transnational approaches to the study of Finnish literature. In particular, Riikka Rossi's consideration of the impact of French literature on Finnish naturalism, and work by Pirjo Lyytikäinen and others on the international entanglements of Finnish symbolism and decadence, have painted a more complex and wide-ranging narrative of turn-of-the-century literary culture.⁸ This widening of perspective offers a useful counter-narrative to accounts of Finnish culture that are written on exclusively national or linguistic grounds and can be productively applied to the cityscape of Helsinki/Helsingfors itself. By setting aside a narrative of national romanticism which has tended to emphasize the rejection of Russian domination and the emergence of a distinctly Finnish national consciousness, it becomes possible to attend to the internal fissures of language, class and identity which shaped the city as a site of lived artistic experience.

City and Language

One of the most distinctive features of Helsinki/Helsingfors in the nineteenth century was the emergence of a parallel set of cultural institutions designed to cater to the needs of its two chief language communities. To this day, it hosts both a Finnish Literature Society (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, or SKS) and a Society of Swedish Literature in Finland (Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, or SLS). Founded in 1831 and 1885 respectively, these institutions not only reflect Finland's two national languages, but actively shape its twin canons of literature and culture through print. The importance of print in creating and maintaining a coherent sense of national identity is a well-established theme in scholarship, and both the SKS and the SLS are central to the emergence of what Benedict Anderson

⁵ Max Engman, 'Finns and Swedes in Finland', in Sven Tägil, *Ethnicity and Nation Building in the Nordic World* (London: Hurst, 1995), pp. 179-216 (p. 192).

⁶ Ameel, *Helsinki in Early Twentieth-Century Literature*, p. 53.

⁷ Massimo Ciaravolo, *En ungdomsvän från Sverige: Om mottagandet av Hjalmar Söderbergs verk i Finland 1895–1920* (Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2000) and Arne Toftegaard Pedersen, *Urbana odysseer: Helsingfors, staden och 1910-talets finlandssvenska prosa* (Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2007).

⁸ Riikka Rossi, *Le naturalisme finlandais: une conception entropique du quotidien* (Helsinki: SKS, 2007), Pirjo Lyytikäinen, *Narkissos ja sfinksi* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1997), Pirjo Lyytikäinen (ed.), *Changing Scenes: Encounters between European and Finnish Fin de Siècle* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2003), and Pirjo Lyytikäinen et al. (eds), *Nordic Literature of Decadence* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

would call the 'imagined communities' of Finnish- and Swedish-speaking Finns.⁹ As in the case of studies by Ameel, Ciaravolo and Toftegaard Pedersen of the representation of the Finnish capital in prose, such practices can have the effect of instantiating linguistic difference. Yet such seemingly rigid distinctions are belied by the realities of living in a multilingual urban environment (and note that in the nineteenth century, in addition to speakers of Finnish and Swedish, Helsinki was also home to a substantial number of German- and Russian-speakers, as well as communities of Jews, Tatars and Roma).¹⁰ One way of accessing this experience is by shifting the focus of attention from the world of print to that of everyday life and artistic performance, both of which operate according to cultural practices very different from those structuring the production and consumption of published texts.

Consider, for instance, how inhabitants of turn-of-the-century Helsinki/Helsingfors might have interacted with the various spaces of the capital. As a modern, carefully planned and compact city, Helsinki was ideally suited to the activities of the *flâneur* or *flâneuse*.¹¹ Architecturally and administratively speaking, the official centre of the city was – and remains – Senate Square (Senaatintori in Finnish, Senatstorget in Swedish). Flanked to the west by the main buildings of the university, to the north by the city's imposing Lutheran cathedral, and to the east by the senate (and now government), it unites the institutions of learning, religion and politics. The statue to Tsar Alexander II that stands in the middle of the square indicates, moreover, that Finnish autonomy was overseen from St Petersburg, some 300 kilometres away, just as the frieze adorning the nearby House of the Estates shows Tsar Alexander I presiding over the Diet of Porvoo (Finland's first legislative assembly, which was convened so that the country's four estates of the nobility, clergy, burghers and peasantry could pledge allegiance to the Russian Emperor in 1809). Certainly Engel's neoclassical designs for many of Helsinki's principal nineteenth-century buildings are redolent of the Russian capital. Yet the elegant spectacle of Senate Square (not to mention its exposed and windswept expanse) means that it does not readily accommodate some of the more mundane elements of everyday life. Here, another space proved more conducive to ordinary companionability: the central Esplanade a few hundred metres to the south of Senate Square. To be sure, the Esplanade – Esplanadi in Finnish and Esplanaden in Swedish – contains its share of official buildings, not least the official residency of the Finnish president (and one of the imperial palaces of the Russian ruling dynasty before 1917). Yet the Esplanade's primary function is oriented more towards the needs of Helsinki's ordinary citizens, or at least its educated bourgeoisie. At its eastern extent is one of the city's open-air markets, as well as a small brick-built market hall. To the north and south of the Esplanade are shops, hotels, restaurants and offices, creating spaces of sociability and interaction on a variety of scales. The park which runs between the north and south sides of the Esplanade functions as one of the city's principal areas for pleasurable strolling and gentle entertainment, and constitutes an ideal space to see and be seen. The notion of the

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

¹⁰ Neil Kent, *Helsinki: A Cultural and Literary History* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2004), p. 69. See, too, George C. Schoofield (ed.), *A History of Finland's Literature* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) for capacious survey of literature in Finland which actually devotes more space to writing in Swedish than in Finnish.

¹¹ Lieven Ameel, 'Walking the Streets of Helsinki. Traces of the Flâneur in Early Finnish Prose Literature', in Petra Broomans and Marta Ronne (eds), *In the Vanguard of Cultural Transfer. Cultural Transmitters and Authors in Peripheral Literary Fields* (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2010), pp. 119-34.

Esplanade as Helsinki's outdoor 'salon' is reinforced by the presence of many of its most celebrated cafés and bars, including the Kämp in the hotel of the same name and, perhaps most famously, Kappeli (the 'Chapel', or Kapellet in Swedish). Looking rather like a cross between a Grecian pavilion and a Victorian palm house, it provided a luminous symbol of the city's social life. It was also a site of temptation and even ruin; many turn-of-the-century fictions include scenes in which the young and innocent hero encounters here both alcohol and sex. Indeed, historically speaking, Esplanadi was also the haunt of prostitutes and streetwalkers, adding an edgier undertone to its urbane sophistication.¹²

The spaces of the Esplanade were always likely to accommodate a variety of languages, accents and idiolects, and one very striking cultural expression of linguistic identity is to be found at its western-most extent. This is the location of the Swedish Theatre, the city's first theatre in fact, and certainly its most significant one until the construction of the Finnish National Theatre in 1902.¹³ The original building was constructed to designs by Engel in 1826-7 (it was, in fact, first known as the Engels Theater) and accommodated an audience of up to 400. This was replaced by a rather larger building in 1860, which burned down in 1863. The present structure dates from 1866 and was constructed to designs by Nikolai Benois of the Imperial Academy of the Arts in St Petersburg (it has been renovated a number of times since).¹⁴ Known until 1887 as the New Theatre (Nya Teatern), and since then as the Swedish Theatre (Svenska Teatern), it was primarily home to Swedish-language productions. Although many Russian interventions in Helsinki were intended to diminish Swedish influence by supporting key aspects of Finnish national sentiment (a chair in Finnish language and literature was established at the university in 1850, for instance, and much ethnographical work on the *Kalevala* and other key documents of Finnish culture was supported by the Russian Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg), it is striking that throughout the nineteenth century, the city's leading theatre was associated with its Swedish-speaking elite. A visible expression of the cultural confidence and even supremacy of Swedish drama in the city at the time, the theatre attests both to a native tradition of Swedish-language literature, and to close connections with the theatrical world of Sweden itself (in ways that are perhaps analogous to the relationship between Paris and Brussels). Helsinki/Helsingfors is, then, a linguistic palimpsest shaped by the cultural practices of its varied inhabitants.¹⁵

Sibelius and the Theatre

Best known as a composer of symphonies and orchestral works, Jean Sibelius is closely associated with Finnish nationalism. In works such the *Lemminkäinen Suite* (1895), the

¹² For a detailed consideration of a number of literary representations of the Esplanade, see Ameel, *Helsinki in Early Twentieth-Century Literature*, pp. 56-80. On prostitution, see pp. 67-8 and pp. 73-6.

¹³ Liisa Byckling, 'Finnish National Theatre' and 'Helsinki', in Dennis Kennedy (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Theatre and Performance*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), I, 467 and 580.

¹⁴ Kent, *Helsinki*, pp. 227-8.

¹⁵ Beyond the purview of this essay is the history of the Russian Theatre in Helsinki. Completed in 1879 and opened in 1880, it was designed to cater to the city's Russian-speaking audiences. It also hosted regular performances of opera and later became the official home of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet from 1918 until 1993. On the history of the Russian theatre, see Liisa Byckling, *Keisarinajan kulisseissa: Helsingin venäläisen teatterin historia 1868-1918* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2009). On Russo-Finnish cultural relations more generally, see Philip Ross Bullock, 'Sibelius and the Russian Traditions', in Daniel M. Grimley (ed.), *Sibelius and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 3-57.

choral symphony, *Kullervo* (1891-2), *Pohjola's Daughter* (1906) and the dramatic vocal scena, *Luonnotar* (1913), he drew on elements of the national epic, the *Kalevala*, originally compiled and published by Elias Lönnrot in 1835 and 1849. Musically, he was drawn to the runic singing and other folkloric traditions of Karelia, a region reaching across the Russo-Finnish border, which many nationalists saw as a pristine repository of national culture. Many of his close friends were active in the national revival, and his marriage to Aino Järnefelt in 1892 brought him into yet closer contact with a group of Finnish patriots. Accordingly, his music was increasingly interpreted as the artistic expression of the move towards national self-determination, much as Akseli Gallen-Kallela's paintings were in the world of the visual arts. Sibelius's participation in the European tour of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra in 1900 brought him to the attention of European audiences too. Coinciding with both the Exposition Universelle in Paris (at which Finland was represented with its own pavilion) and growing awareness of Russia's oppressive policies in the Grand Duchy, this tour translated Sibelius's music into an act of unofficial cultural diplomacy on behalf of the Finnish nation.¹⁶

In its broad outline, this story is typical of how small nations under imperial domination often deploy culture in service of their political aspirations.¹⁷ Just as the music of Fryderyk Chopin embodied the voice of Poland (then partitioned between Austria, Prussia, and Russia), or that of Bedřich Smetana or Antonín Dvořák articulated the experience of Bohemia within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, so too did Sibelius's music come to serve as the metonymic representation of Finnishness. Yet this is to overlook significant features of his artistic output and creative identity, not to mention his lived experience. After all, his first language was Swedish, not Finnish. This was not, in fact, an uncommon situation among Finnish patriots around the turn of the century, many of whom learned Finnish later in life and made efforts to Fennicize themselves in other ways. Gallen-Kallela, for instance, had been born into a Swedish-speaking family in Pori and only later changed his name from Axel Waldemar Gallén. Sibelius was aged ten when he began to learn Finnish at Finland's first Finnish-language secondary school, the Normaalityö in Hämeenlinna. Even when he had learned the language – and married into one of Finland's leading Fennoman families – he corresponded with his wife primarily in Swedish (Aino replied insistently in Finnish) and kept his diary mainly in that language too.¹⁸

¹⁶ Kerstin Smeds, 'The Image of Finland at the World Exhibitions, 1900-1992', in Peter B. MacKeith and Kerstin Smeds, *The Finland Pavilions: Finland at the Universal Expositions, 1900-1992* (Helsinki: Kustannus Oy City, 1992), pp.12-105, and Helena Tyrväinen, 'Sibelius at the Paris Universal Exposition of 1900', in Veijo Murtomäki, Kari Kilpeläinen and Risto Väisänen (eds), *Sibelius Forum: Proceedings from the Second International Jean Sibelius Conference, Helsinki, 25-29 November, 1995* (Helsinki: Sibelius Academy, 1998), pp.114-28.

¹⁷ Rajendra Chitnis, Jakob Stougaard-Nielson, Rhian Atkin and Zoran Milutinović (eds), *Translating the Literatures of Small European Nations* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019).

¹⁸ Suvisirkku Talas (ed.), *Sydämen aamu: Aino Järnefeltin ja Jean Sibeliuksen kihlausajan kirjeitä*, trans. Oili Souminen (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2001), *Tulen synty: Aino ja Jean Sibeliuksen kirjeenvaihtoa, 1892-1904*, trans. Oili Souminen (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2003), and *Syysilta: Aino ja Jean Sibeliuksen kirjeenvaihtoa, 1905-1931*, trans. Oili Souminen (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2007). Talas's edition of Sibelius's correspondence with his wife is not unproblematic, as the contents of the first two volumes are given entirely in Finnish translation. Only the third volume retains the original Swedish, alongside Oili Souminen's Finnish translations. Compare Fabian Dahlström's edition of Sibelius's diary, which is reproduced in its original Swedish, with occasional Finnish interjections: *Jean Sibelius: Dagbok 1909-1944* (Helsingfors and Stockholm: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2005).

None of this should be taken to imply that Swedish-speaking Finns were somehow less patriotic than speakers of Finnish or that the Swedish language is any less central to modern Finnish culture. Many of the central figures of the national revival in the nineteenth century – above all, perhaps, the poet Johan Ludvig Runeberg – were and remain revered figures, just as Tove Jansson has become an international icon of Finnish culture in the twentieth. Rather, it highlights that whilst from the outside, Finnish artists were increasingly and even exclusively seen through a prism of a kind of romantic nationalism that was organically linked to language, their experience of cultural life at home was always mediated through the experience of multilingual hybridity. As James Hepokoski has argued, Sibelius remained faithful to the twin heritage of Finnish and Swedish culture which characterised turn-of-the-century Finland and which was played out in daily life in the Finnish capital:

During the 1890s [...] Sibelius cultivated and blended not one style but two, generated by different aspects of his personality. At the risk of oversimplification, one might also suggest that these differences intersected in vital ways with the ever-present dialectic of language and world-view in Sibelius's (and Finland's) life: the 'Finnish-language' (or Kalevalaic) and 'Swedish-Finnish' tendencies. The two styles were not mutually exclusive: there was much overlap between them, but certain compositions tilted towards one or the other. While the rugged Finnish manner, concerned with burning issues of ethnic authenticity and cultural legitimacy, was the more politicized and disruptive, the Swedish-Finnish impulse sought a larger, more international audience on traditional terms.¹⁹

If Sibelius's orchestral works tended towards what Hepokoski refers to as the 'Kalevalaic' (and hence the 'Finnish') aspects of his artistic make-up, then other, perhaps less familiar aspects of his creativity express his affinity with the 'Swedish-Finnish' tradition within Finnish culture. That is certainly the case when it comes to his more than one hundred songs (*romanser* in Swedish), almost all of which were composed to Swedish-language texts, whether by Swedish poets or Swedish-Finnish poets.

If these *romanser* are at least reasonably well represented internationally in recitals and on recordings, then Sibelius's music for the theatre constitutes a far more neglected facet of his contribution to turn-of-the-century life in the Finnish capital. These scores have not always been accorded the attention they deserve, partly because incidental music for the theatre has not enjoyed particularly high status in musicological criticism. A less obvious, but – for the purposes of this chapter – more significant reason for their neglect is that they do not easily inscribe themselves into the kind of nationalist historiography that has for so long been characteristic of Sibelius's reception as an icon of Finnish identity. Instead, his work in the theatre reveals two important additional axes around which Sibelius's artistic identity operates, and which are, moreover, closely intertwined with the world of turn-of-the-century Helsinki/Helsingfors: his involvement in the Swedish Theatre; and the Swedish Theatre's role as a site of cosmopolitan cultural production and consumption.

Sibelius's habit of rearranging his theatrical scores as concert suites, as well as refashioning individual movements as standalone pieces for concert performance, has largely effaced their relationship to the original plays and productions for which they were conceived. Take, for instance, his most popular work, the 'Valse triste', which was originally

¹⁹ James Hepokoski, 'Sibelius, Jean', in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., 29 vols (London: Macmillan, 2001), XXIII, 319-47 (p. 326)

composed for a production of *Kuolema* (*Death*), a play by his brother-in-law, Arvid Järnefelt. Even the iconic *Finlandia* had its origins in a series of seven historical tableaux staged at the Swedish Theatre on 4 November 1899 (three other movements were repurposed as the *Scènes historiques* in 1911). However, when restored to their original context, these scores shed light on the interaction of Finnish and Swedish theatrical traditions in the Finnish capital itself, as well as on the relationship between Finnish turn-of-the century culture and developments elsewhere in Europe.

Although Sibelius had written some theatre music in the 1890s (a single song for a production of Gunnar Wennerberg's *Näcken* (*The Watersprite*) in 1888, and the entire score for Adolf Paul's *Kung Christian II* (*King Christian II*) at the Swedish Theatre in 1898), it was in the first decade of the twentieth century that he turned most decisively to the stage. In 1903, he produced the score for the first performance of Järnefelt's *Kuolema*, which opened at the Finnish National Theatre on 2 December that year.²⁰ Given Sibelius's reputation as a composer of works on national themes, one might have expected this collaboration with one of Finland's leading Finnish-language authors to lead to more scores for the National Theatre. Yet in terms of language and cultural politics, *Kuolema* seems more like an extension of the *Kalevala*-inspired nationalism of the 1890s than a new direction in Sibelius's artistic development. It was, instead, to be another institution that stimulated a new bout of creativity. In 1902, a group of Swedish-speaking intellectuals had founded *Euterpe*, a journal committed to an international vision of Finnish culture, with a particular interest in the French arts.²¹ Sibelius's association with the group had a decisive impact on his creativity, which can be traced through a series of scores composed in the 1900s for landmark productions at the Swedish Theatre.

The first of these was the 1906 production of Maurice Maeterlinck's *Pelléas och Mélisande* (*Pelléas and Mélisande*), which was given in a translation by Bertel Gripenberg, one of the founders of *Euterpe* (three of Sibelius's *romanser* also set poems by Gripenberg). Maeterlinck's play was, of course, a cornerstone of symbolist drama across Europe at the time, so it is unsurprising that the Swedish Theatre should want to stage it. As shaped by the legacy of the English Pre-Raphaelites as much as by the theories of Richard Wagner, it offers a timeless, syncretic approach to drama that was very different from the socially inflected naturalism of Henrik Ibsen, Georg Hauptmann, Maksim Gorky or George Bernard Shaw. This production was, however, significant for another reason. It starred Harriet Bosse, the Norwegian actress who was later to become the third wife of the Swedish dramatist, August Strindberg. It was Bosse who subsequently suggested to Strindberg that Sibelius should compose the music for his as yet unstaged *Svanevit* (*Swanwhite*). Plans for a premiere in Stockholm fell through, and so the play's premiere took place at the Swedish Theatre in Helsinki/Helsingfors on 8 April 1908 instead.²² Marking a lyric strain in Strindberg's *oeuvre* that was distinct from the more naturalistic tenor of plays such as *Fröken Julie* (*Miss Julie*, 1888), *Svanevit* further highlights how Sibelius's engagement with the Swedish Theatre was part of a broader pan-European interest in myth and archetype. Between *Pelléas och Mélisande* and *Svanevit* came *Belsazars gästabud* (*Belshazzar's Feast*) by another member

²⁰ Eija Kurki, 'Sibelius and the Theater: A Study of the Incidental Music for Symbolist Plays', in Timothy L. Jackson and Veijo Murtomäki (eds), *Sibelius Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 76-94 (pp. 79-82).

²¹ Glenda Dawn Goss, *Sibelius: A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 306-12.

²² Kurki, 'Sibelius and the Theater', pp. 85-92.

of the *Euterpe* group, Hjalmar Procopé. Based on a story taken from the Biblical Book of Daniel, *Belsazars gästabud* also attests to the powerful impact of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, written, of course, in French, and, thanks to Max Reinhardt's famous German-language production at Berlin's Kleines Theater in Berlin in 1902 and the Dresden premiere of Richard Strauss's operatic version in 1905, a canonical document of European decadence.²³ If Procopé's play suggests that Finnish artists were keen to emulate the latest trends in modern drama, then the fourth of Sibelius's theatre scores illustrates the further development of a distinct brand of Nordic symbolism. Mikael Lybeck – like Procopé, a member of the *Euterpe* group – published his *Ödlan* (*The Lizard*) in 1908, but rather than following Procopé's Biblical example, he produced a play that attests to a powerful internalisation of Maeterlinck's symbolism, particularly through his evocative use of silence and abstraction. Sibelius's music was composed the following year, and the play eventually opened on 6 April 1910, again at the Swedish Theatre, running for just six performances.²⁴

Taken together, these four productions – a Swedish translation of a French-language play by the Belgian Maeterlinck, a world premiere of a play by Sweden's leading dramatist, and two plays by Swedish-speaking Finns that drew heavily on contemporary trends in European drama – illustrate something of the specificity of the cultural role played by the Swedish Theatre in the artistic life of the Finnish capital. The Swedish Theatre certainly catered to a local Swedish-speaking audience, yet it was intimately bound up with wider networks of cultural production, extending across the Gulf of Bothnia to Stockholm, and southwards to the European mainland. The generic range represented by these four plays also maps some of the principle creative preoccupations of Europe's leading dramatists at the time. Rejecting the social dictates of realism and naturalism, they embraced instead plots, motifs and characters that resisted narrowly national categories of language, milieu and setting. As much as the *Kalevala* and other documents of Finnish national identity, these Swedish-language plays were central to debates around Finnish modernity in the early twentieth century, and Sibelius's involvement in them is as crucial to his artistic development as his more well documented 'Finnish' compositions.

It might be tempting, therefore, on the basis of Sibelius's scores for *Pelléas och Mélisande*, *Belsazars gästabud*, *Svanevit* and *Ödlan*, to posit a distinction between the cosmopolitan repertoire of the Swedish Theatre and the more parochial ambit of the Finnish National Theatre. As Daniel M. Grimley argues, however, the 'complex cultural urban geography' of the Finnish capital means that it would be 'overly simplistic to map notions of provincialism and isolation onto the Finnish National Theater and a more international outlook onto its Swedish-Finnish counterpart'.²⁵ Whilst Sibelius might have kept his distance from the Finnish National Theatre after the premiere of Järnefelt's *Kuolema*, it is certainly not the case that the theatre was somehow more local or limited in focus. To be sure, it was much younger than the Swedish Theatre, dating from as recently as 1902. Yet that youth gave it a distinct advantage of its own in other respects. The canon of Finnish-language drama was still comparatively limited, both with regard to Finnish-language prose and poetry, and with regard to the Swedish-language repertoire.²⁶ Accordingly, Finnish-language

²³ Daniel M. Grimley, 'Vers un cosmopolitisme nordique: Space, Place, and the Case of Sibelius's "Nordic Cosmopolitanism"', *Musical Quarterly*, 99 (2016), 230-53. See also Kurki, 'Sibelius and the Theater', pp. 82-4.

²⁴ Jeffrey Kallberg, 'Theatrical Sibelius: The Melodramatic Lizard', in Daniel M. Grimley (ed.), *Jean Sibelius and His World* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 74-88.

²⁵ Grimley, 'Vers un cosmopolitisme nordique', p. 239.

²⁶ According to Kai Laitinen and George C. Schoolfield, the first Finnish-language play to have been staged in Finland was Pietari Hannikainen's *Silmän-kääntäjä* (*The Conjurer*), seen in Lappeenranta in 1848, with Aleksis

drama emerged as a younger, arguably more energetic cousin to the older and most established Swedish tradition. Moreover, whilst artworks inspired by the *Kalevala* could be interpreted as an expression of a primal Finnish identity more closely associated with the untouched rural landscape of Karelia, they could equally be incorporated into a modernist interest in myth, ritual, symbol and archetype.²⁷ The international sympathies of the Swedish-speaking members of the *Euterpe* group might have emerged 'in opposition to what they regarded as the more insular Finnish romantic nationalism',²⁸ yet that was to overlook both the receptivity and the contemporaneity of Finnish-language culture, especially after the heyday of romantic nationalism in the 1890s.

Something of this can be seen by turning to Sibelius's renewed engagement with the Finnish National Theatre after his close involvement with the Swedish Theatre in the 1900s. Initially, though, he stayed away from the Finnish theatre; after *Ödlan*, his next theatre score was *Scaramouche*, a ballet pantomime to a libretto by the Danish writer, Poul Knudsen. Composed in 1913, but not premiered until 1922 in Copenhagen and 1924 in Stockholm, it draws on characters and ideas of the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, thereby setting Scandinavian culture in an explicitly European, cosmopolitan context.²⁹ Sibelius's turn to the gestures and idiom of dance seems, moreover, to reject language itself, and with it, the linguistic justification for distinct national canons that appeared to govern the world of theatre in the Finnish capital and elsewhere. Much as he had become an icon of the Finnish nation and its struggle for autonomy, if not yet independence, Sibelius seemed keen to find ways to resist such a narrative and situate himself as a leading representative of European modernism.

In 1916, however, he returned to the Finnish National Theatre, and the details of this production shed important light both on his artistic priorities, and on those of the capital's Finnish-language stage. At the height of the Great War, rather than commit himself to a patriotic national drama by a native author, Sibelius produced a score to accompany a production of *Jokamies (Everyman)* by Hugo von Hofmannsthal in a translation by Huugo Jalkanen. Based on a number of earlier sources, including mysteries and morality plays from the Low Countries and England, Hofmannsthal's *Jedermann* was an attempt 'to reimagine a much earlier theatrical tradition while also striving to address the challenge of how to create a genuinely popular drama within a modern post-symbolist aesthetic context.'³⁰ Premiered in Berlin in 1911, *Jedermann* went on to inaugurate the Salzburg Festival in 1920 (both productions were directed by Max Reinhardt in a striking evolution of his aesthetics from the earlier production of Wilde's *Salome* in Berlin in 1902 which had made his name). There are a number of ways we might construe the 1916 production of *Jokamies* and Sibelius's involvement in it. Whilst it is not a piece of Finnish drama, it nonetheless bears witness to the political context of the time. As a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire, Finland had

Kivi's *Anttonius Putronius eli Antti Puuronen* being the first Finnish-language play to be seen in Helsinki in 1858. See 'New Beginnings, Latin and Finnish', in Schoolfield (ed.), *A History of Finland's Literature*, pp. 34-63 (p. 62). On Swedish-language theatre, see George Schoolfield, 'A Sense of Minority', in *ibid.*, pp. 354-452 (pp. 389-91).

²⁷ Pirjo Lyytikäinen, 'Shooting Tuonela's Swan: Modern Myths and Artistic Convergence in Finnish Symbolism', in Philip Ross Bullock and Daniel M. Grimley, *Music's Nordic Breakthrough: Aesthetics, Modernity, and Cultural Exchange, 1890-1930* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2021), pp. 111-25

²⁸ Grimley, 'Vers un cosmopolitisme nordique', p. 236.

²⁹ Leah Broad, 'Scaramouche, Scaramouche: Sibelius on Stage', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 145/2 (2020), 417-56.

³⁰ Daniel M. Grimley, 'Music beyond the Breakthrough: Sibelius, Hofmannsthal, and the Summoning of *Everyman*', in Bullock and Grimley (eds), *Music's Nordic Breakthrough*, pp. 127-49 (p. 135).

entered the Great War on the side of the Allied Powers (France, Great Britain and Russia). However, longstanding cultural affinities with Germany and a prevailing anti-Russian sentiment meant that few Finns were motivated to fight on the Russian side. Indeed, in 1916, a number of Finnish infantry soldiers formed a voluntary association of pro-German *Jäger*, many of whom trained in Germany and fought on the German side in the war. In 1917, Sibelius wrote his *Jäger March* to words by Heikki Nurmio, who was serving in the German Imperial Army at the time. The music for *Jokamies* does not directly reflect this military and political context, yet it is nonetheless striking to see how Sibelius's return to the Finnish National Theatre was linked to a major work of German-language drama. It may well have been the play's origins that led the Russian Governor General to cancel its premiere on 3 November (although it opened just two days later).³¹

It would be an exaggeration, though, to impute direct political motives to Sibelius's involvement in *Jokamies*. He was most likely motivated by financial considerations, as well as a growing sense of his own morality in the year after he had turned fifty (the play deals with Everyman's growing awareness of his responsibility for his actions as he faces death and the final judgment). Yet *Jokamies* does point to a reorientation in the nature of Sibelius's theatrical engagements. Whereas his collaborations with the Swedish Theatre were situated at the intersection of a number of transnational influences, with a strong predisposition towards France, *Jokamies* marks a shift towards Germanic culture, however momentary and contingent. In terms of genre, the symbolism, stylisation and syncretism of *Pelléas och Mélisande*, *Belsazars gästabud*, *Svanevit* and *Ödlan* give way to an older form of popular, participatory theatre.

Sibelius's next – and final – piece of incidental music would confirm aspects of this shift, yet would once again unmoor his relationship to language and nation. In May 1925, he was approached to produce the score for a production of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to be staged at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. He completed the score that autumn, and – after a number of delays – the production opened on 16 March 1926. As with *Jokamies*, *Stormen* (as *The Tempest* is known in Danish) represents a retreat from the contemporary repertoire that had characterised Sibelius's scores for the Swedish Theatre in Helsinki/Helsingfors. Similarly, it continues the geographical reorientation of Sibelius's theatrical attention towards the European north which had been precipitated by *Jokamies*. The perils of pursuing this argument too relentlessly should be clear enough, of course. Sibelius's German critics had long stressed the nature of his music as *Heimatkunst* (to borrow Walter Neimann's influential 1906 description).³² The appropriation of his music in the Third Reich similarly rested on an ethnocentric vision of Finnish culture as an organic part of an unsullied Nordic expression of Aryanism.³³

Yet *The Tempest* is a play about a shipwreck and evokes themes of dislocation, deracination and hybridity. Modern-day critics are increasingly inclined to see it through the prism of postcoloniality, ecocriticism and even the posthuman.³⁴ Within the context of this essay, however, it seems most important to note that Sibelius's last piece of incidental

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

³² Walter Neimann, *Die Musik Skandinaviens: Ein Führer durch die Volks- und Kunstmusik von Dänemark, Norwegen, Schweden und Finnland bis zur Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1906), p. 137.

³³ Timothy L. Jackson, 'Sibelius the Political', in Timothy L. Jackson and Veijo Murtomäki (eds), *Sibelius in the Old and New World: Aspects of His Music, Its Interpretation, and Reception* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 69-124.

³⁴ Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan (eds), *The Tempest: A Critical Reader* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), and Karen Raber, *Shakespeare and Posthumanist Thought* (London: Arden, 2018).

music was commissioned for a theatre outside of his homeland. It reminds us that the history of national theatres can certainly be thought of in centripetal terms, tending towards a gathering of forces inwards to establish and reinforce distinct national canons.³⁵ At the same time, theatre also functions centrifugally, throwing out ideas and influences, and creating an unstable blend of transnational motifs through the contingencies of translation, reception and performance.³⁶ This may be a particular propensity of 'smaller' nations, especially those at crucial moments in the emergence of their sense of identity, who deploy manifestations of their valuable cultural capital in the international arena as a means of enhancing their geopolitical reach and defending their often hard-won autonomy.³⁷ Sibelius's music for the stage also suggests that whilst the city of Helsinki/Helsingfors played a central role in the forging of modern Finnish statehood, it also stands for a more linguistically diverse account of turn-of-the-century Finnish culture than often proposed in nationalist narratives and evokes the productive relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism that is crucial to urban modernity.

³⁵ Laurence Senelick (ed.), *National Theatre in Northern and Eastern Europe, 1746-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), S. E. Wilmer (ed.), *National Theatres in a Changing Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), and H. van Maanen and S.E. Wilmer (eds), *Theatre Worlds in Motion* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998).

³⁶ Philip Ross Bullock, 'Ibsen on the London Stage: Independent Theatre as Transnational Space', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 53/3 (2017), 360-70, Erika Fischer-Lichte and Barbara Gronau (eds), *Global Ibsen: Performing Multiple Modernities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), Tore Rem and Narve Fulsås, *Ibsen, Scandinavia and the Making of a World Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), and Geraldine Brodie and Emma Cole, *Adapting Translation for the Stage* (London: Routledge, 2017).

³⁷ Hans van Maanen, Andreas Kotte and Anneli Saro (eds), *Global Changes - Local Stages: How Theatre Functions in Smaller European Countries* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009).