

Robert E. Sherwood and the Finnish Winter War: Drama, Propaganda and Context 50 Years Ago

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Robert E. Sherwood published two versions of *There Shall Be No **Night***, both of which were produced on stage.* The original version is set in Finland during the Russo-Finnish war of 1939–1940, the so-called Winter War. Its text was published in the year of the first production in the United States, in 1940, and its main character is Dr. Kaarlo Valkonen, a Finnish neurologist and winner of the Nobel Prize for Medicine.¹ His political sentiments are basically pacifist and internationalist, and during the Finnish struggle with the Soviet Union he at first supports his own country in a civil capacity, by joining the army medical corps. When there seems to be no alternative to utter defeat, however, he finally takes up arms and departs into battle. Valkonen embodies, in other words, a moral dilemma: Is violence ever justified? In the second version of the play, staged in London in 1943 and published in the same year, the setting is Greece, the name of the Nobel laureate is Dr. Karilo Vlachos, the invaders are Italians and Germans, but the story-line closely resembles that of the original version.² The most striking difference is that this time Dave Corween, an American "former newspaper man" who also appears in the first version, decides to stay in the violated county, and the audience will probably assume that he will fight on the side of the local population till the bitter end—after the close of the action on stage.

The question arises: How do these two versions of the play relate to each other? The answer is to be found by reading them against their historical contexts, to which they are, as it were, married. The study which follows can actually be regarded as an example of diachronic literary pragmatics, since it suggests the way a text can change in significance under the pressure of historical circumstances. That pressure explains why Sherwood took his text back, re-formed it, and issued it anew. It also explains fluctuations in critical and scholarly responses to both versions.

Especially in the first version, Sherwood was preoccupied with the largest of general questions about human civilization. Is mankind truly civilized? Is further progress possible? And the answer Sherwood suggests to such questions still seems to retain traces of his earlier optimism. At a more specific level, however, the theme of the texts is about living under the stress of foreign aggression, and in the treatment of this theme Sherwood raises questions that were of directly political relevance for the particular audiences he was addressing. The first version located the struggle against the aggressor in Finland, the second in Greece. Yet it was changes in outlook in America and in Great Britain that gave rise to differences between the two versions.

From 1940 onwards, after completing the first published version of *There Shall Be No Night*, Sherwood became heavily involved in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration. For several years he had a hand in many of Roosevelt's speeches, and he was eventually appointed Head of Overseas Information Services at the Office of War Information,³ a post in which he continued until September 1944.⁴ During the years following the Great Depression, prior to his career in government propaganda, Sherwood had been a journalist, critic and playwright with a tendency towards left-wing political thinking and pacifism.⁵ This fairly loose engagement in political affairs had changed into more deliberate participation as a result of the outbreak of the Second World War. Sherwood offers an account of that development in the Preface to the 1940 edition of *There Shall Be No Night* (pp. xxvi–xxx).

One of Sherwood's first ideas, as he makes clear in the Preface, was to write a provocative play about the global danger represented by Nazism. On November 30th, 1939, however, the Soviet Union attacked Finland,⁶ and Sherwood wanted to do something by way of response. For him and for other liberal-minded citizens, the ruthlessness of Soviet expansionism came as a rude shock, and in addition to objecting to the naked violence of both Germany and the Soviet Union he also wanted to advocate an American role in the expanding war in Europe. Relinquishing its isolationism, the United States should acknowledge that real life meant commitment, which could also entail shedding blood. Here Sherwood gave expression to what for him was a new kind of attitude: violence can sometimes be the only way out.

Such was the historical situation, then, and such were Sherwood's feelings, when he wrote the first version of *There Shall Be No Night*. By 1943, the year of the second version, the context had changed. The United States was at war with Japan and Germany, and the Soviet Union and the United States of America were now allies. Furthermore, the Finnish objective in this phase of the war was to reclaim the territory lost to the Soviets as a result of the Winter War, and Finnish troops were actually occupying Russian soil. Needing all the help they could get, the Finns entered into a relatively loose alliance with Germany. The United States never declared war on Finland, but

relations were rather chilly. Under these circumstances, Sherwood obviously judged that the Soviet Union would no longer look quite right in the role of aggressor: the tables were turned. Casting about for a new setting for his play about freedom fighters, he lighted on Greece, currently under the yoke of Nazi occupation. He rewrote the play, and now the original cause of his concern actually came more to the fore: it was with Nazi Germany.

One of the problems in interpreting the second version, however, has to do with dates, since most of the dates given are left unchanged from the first version. This, of course, goes against historical facts: the climax of the Finnish story is plausibly conceived as happening in February–March 1940, but Sherwood has the Italian forces attack Greece in April of the same year.⁷ The Italian attack on Greece actually came only in the late autumn of 1940, and the Germans occupied the entire country in April 1941, over a year later than the "Peace of Moscow," signed between the Soviet Union and Finland on March 12th, 1940.⁸

Clearly we can speak of slips and carelessness—Sherwood was working under pressure of time and other important engagements. The unchanged and inaccurate dates, however, may also indicate the strong primary impression that the Winter War made on Sherwood as a private man. Together with other reminiscences of the earlier version soon to be discussed, they can even be seen as the symptoms of a moral confusion. The message of freedom was not so easily to be severed from the original subject matter and carried over to the new version. In the quick transplantation job he had to perform as the propaganda agent of a government now in alliance with the Soviet Union, he was hampered by his still surviving feelings about the Soviet invasion of Finland. Though he doubtless felt some sympathy for the Greeks, it was not enough to make him write an entirely new play about their situation.

In the 1943 version, the scene of action having changed from Finland to Greece, the names of the original Finnish characters have been modified to Greek ones: Erik Valkonen is turned into Philip Vlachos and Kaatri [sic] Alquist into Eleni Rhalles. Such modifications, however, still recall something of the spirit of the original, the names still having an international ring though with a strong local inflection. And although there are consistent deletions and additions in the stage directions, there is also an interesting similarity between the two versions in what one might call general atmosphere and field of reference. Thus Uncle Leonidas, originally Uncle Waldemar and a church musician, becomes "an eminent archaeologist", yet is still a good pianist, and plays Sibelius in both versions ("something particularly gloomy" and "solemn"). In somewhat the same way, Minnesota, which is mentioned in the first version as an important target area for a broadcast speech by Dr. Valkonen because of its sizeable Finnish colony and because its scenery bears resemblance to that of Finland, is still mentioned in the second version, even

though it has no direct connection with Greece. Dr. Vlachos knows some fellow scientists living there, and it is noted for its beautiful scenery in a more general way.

But the differences between the two versions of the play are also very striking. The actual historical context of the first version is the war between Finland and the Soviet Union in 1939–1940, whereas the second version tends to eradicate unfavorable references to the Soviet Union. Thus Dr. Valkonen and his future wife, the American girl Miranda, have met for the first time, in 1914, in St. Petersburg, whereas Dr. Vlachos and his Miranda have met, also in 1914, in Vienna, not only a more plausible place for a Greek and a psychiatrist to visit, but also a place that will evoke no sympathies for pre-revolutionary Russia. (Dr. Valkonen had served as a medical officer in the Russian army before the revolution). Again, Kaarlo Valkonen says:

I know the Russians... I treated Lenin for a sore throat! And I can tell you about these Russians: they love to plot—but they don't love to fight, and the reason they don't love to fight is that they are a little like the Italians—they're too charming—they really don't know how to hate. (TSBNN) 1940, Sc. I, pp. 33–34)

whereas when Karilo Vlachos speaks his mind about the Italians the Russians have vanished from the comparison altogether—

I know the Italians well. I once treated one of the high officials of the government... The Italians love to dress up as soldiers—they love to parade—but they do not love to fight. They're too charming. They do not know how to hate. (TSBNN 1943, Sc. I, p. 20)

And other things get brushed under the carpet as well. In the original version Kaatri Alquist says: "The Russians went into Poland, too" (p. 44), but in the second version, although Dave Corween has been reporting from Warsaw during the German invasion (as was also the case in the first version) and therefore ought to have been aware of the full circumstances, Italy is mentioned as the sole ally of Nazi Germany at this stage of the war. By the same token, the character of the Polish Major Rutkowski undergoes an interesting change in the second version. His appearance in the play stems from the pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which resulted in yet another partition of Poland. That is why the Major had come to Finland in the first version: he wanted to continue the struggle against one of the powers which had invaded his native country; it just happened to be the Soviet Union; and in Finland he would be capable of inflicting most damage on that enemy. But he never allowed himself to forget that the number of the forces occupying Poland was two. In the second version, this seems to have slipped the Major's mind. Here in Greece, he is full of quiet hatred towards the Germans only, and he makes no explicit mention of the Soviet Union, even

though he still gives his life for his county of birth—despite the changes, he can still bring home to an American audience the importance of making a stand for one's country even on foreign soil.

True, even in the second version Sherwood has retained one of the more damning speeches of Major Rutkowski. It may be that the speech still had some didactic function for an American audience. Yet the negative reference to the Soviet Union is quite clear:

I have often wondered what it could be like to be an American—to believe, even for a moment, that such things as peace and security are possible. You see, we have never been permitted such belief. For us the sun rose each morning among our enemies—and it set among our enemies. And now, it is high noon, and our enemies have joined together over our country—and we are gone. (*TSBNN* 1943, Sc. IV, p. 60)

Admittedly, in the historical context of 1943, there were only German forces occupying Polish ground, since the fires of war were now burning in Russia. Yet the passage reaches back into Poland's earlier history, and Sherwood has not shown his usual care in removing embarrassing material from his text.

In other respects, however, the second version maintains Sherwood's "official" line more consistently, and by now it will be clear why Dave Corween's original summary of developments had to be omitted:

Three months ago, the Soviet troops marched in. They had brass bands and truckloads of propaganda with them. They thought it would be a parade through Finland, like May Day in Red Square. So now—several hundred thousand men have been killed—millions of lives have been ruined. The cause of revolution has been set back incalculably. The Soviet Union has been reduced from the status of a great power to that of a great fraud, and the Nazis have won another bloodless victory. (*TSBNN* 1940, Sc. VII, p. 170)

Now as this last quotation makes very clear, both the Soviets and the Nazis were recognized as enemies in the first version. Even there, though, Sherwood tended to see the Soviets as a less fundamental source of evil. Uncle Waldemar remembered something from his stay in Germany:

I was with one of my friends, an old musician like me, and we were looking from the windows of his house. Across the street a truckload of young Nazis had pulled up and they were wrecking the home of a Jewish dentist. They wanted to take the gold he used to put in people's teeth. They were doing it systematically, as the Germans do everything. And my friend whispered to me—for he did not dare to raise his voice, even in his own home—he said, "They say they are doing this to fight Bolshevism. It is a lie! For they *are* Bolshevism!" And that is the truth... "Today we own Germany, tomorrow the world." Including Russia. (*TSBNN* 1940, Sc III, p. 72)

This clearly made Nazi Germany seem the aggressive expansionist power, and even made the Nazis responsible for the detestable qualities usually associated with the Bolsheviks. Another example had to do with the German Consul General to Helsinki, Dr. Ziemssen, an unashamed Fascist, who made even more deliberate use of the vagueness and mobility of political terms for political purposes. In the play he was actually the polar opposite of the cosmopolitan Dr. Valkonen, for he represented the idea of the rule of the German nation over all others, and he described Communism as a merely temporary phenomenon—

Communism is a good laxative to loosen the constricted bowels of democracy. When it has served its purpose, it will disappear down the sewer with the excrement that must be purged. (TSBNN 1940, Sc. III p. 86)

Furthermore, Ziemssen said that the techniques for annihilating the Poles were not invented in Moscow: they ultimately stemmed, not from *Das Kapital*, but from *Mein Kampf* (TSBNN 1940, Sc. III, p. 87). Indeed, in the first version the Soviets sometimes even figured as the Nazis' middle-men and puppets. Thus Joe Burnett, an American airman, spotted Nazi officers behind the Russian lines (TSBNN 1940, Sc. V, pp. 134–35), something quite at odds with the general aim of Allied war propaganda and with the facts of history—at the time of the 1939–1940 Winter War the Nazis were actually passive in the Nordic sphere.

In the second version, however, Sherwood's exoneration of the Soviets goes to even greater lengths. The annihilation of the Poles is still mentioned, but is not associated with Moscow in any way at all. Displays of military strength are now exclusively German. The Soviet parades in Red Square become the Nazi ones in Nuremberg; it is now the Germans, not the Russians, who drop two-ton bombs (TSBNN 1940, Sc. II, p. 61, Sc. V, p. 132; 1943, Sc. II, p. 33, Sc. V, p. 66); and it is of course behind Italian lines that Joe Burnett now spots Nazi officers, as was more concordant with both historical probability and Allied propaganda (TSBNN 1943, Sc. V, p. 67). Similarly, it is now Fascist rather than Soviet propaganda that the main character's son accuses of pulverizing the American and other governments with fear (TSBNN 1940, Sc. II, p. 51; 1943, Sc. II, p. 28).

As is already partly clear, the oversimplifications of wartime propaganda have affected the portrayal of the enemy in both versions of the play. The enemy merely changes from "an illiterate Russian peasant" (TSBNN 1940, Sc. II, p. 80) to "the witless automatons of the Master race" (TSBNN 1943, Sc. III, p. 42). And obviously these stereotypes spring from an imagination that is very American. Dave Corween, who gives voice to them, is Sherwood's own authorial spokesman.

Certain other changes, it has to be admitted, were simply the result of Sherwood's hasty switch from Finland to Greece. Often he found only rough equivalents—geographical and other—for the pattern of action and circumstances already established in the 1940 version. The "Mannerheim Line" becomes the "Metaxas Line" of Greece, and whereas Major Rutkowski had earlier surmised that Soviet planes are probably trying to cut off reinforcements by shelling the railroad line between Viipuri and Helsinki, in the second version his opinion is that German planes are probably engaged in the same operation on the line between Platy and Larissa (TSBNN 1940, Sc. VI, p. 146; 1943, Sc. VI, p. 73). The ski-troops of the earlier version become mountain troops. The 1940 Olympic Games, which were supposed to be hosted by Finland—this fact is brought up by Dave Corween in the first version—are not explicitly mentioned, but Sherwood adds a few lines from Byron musing on the connection between Marathon and freedom for Greece.

Some changes in the local mood, however, do reflect the changed circumstances in which Sherwood is writing. When the second version of the play was being acted in Britain, the United States was already a party to the war, with a vital interest in the outcome of the struggle. So whereas in the first version there are prayers for peace, in the second version prayers have two aims: *victory* and peace. In both versions, there is also a New Year speech made by Dave Corween, an American, but in the first version the speech ends, "and we hope that this New Year will bring you and yours health and happiness" (Sc. IV, p. 112), whereas the second version adds a dash and the words "and victory" (p. 56). In the historical context within which this second version so clearly places itself, "you and yours" is tantamount to "us," since everyone is now fighting together. One general impression is actually that in the first version of the play the moral justification for the use of even defensive violence is more seriously questioned. In the first version a Briton called Gosden, fighting alongside other international and Finnish soldiers, is asked about his motives for coming to Finland. His reply displays his disillusionment:

GOSDEN: Are you trying to trap me into making any remarks about fighting for freedom and democracy?

FRANK(*wearily*): No.

GOSDEN: Because I had enough of *that* muck when I fought in the last war (TSBNN 1940, Sc. VI, p. 144).

This last retort of Gosden's is dropped in the second version—it was a left-over of Sherwood's pre-war pacifism. Again, in the second version of the play Dr. Karilo Vlachos makes a long and eloquent prayer for victory, identifying Churchill and Roosevelt as the two great leaders in need of God's guidance

(Sc. IV, p. 61). The first performance was for a "mixed" audience of brothers in arms in London.

Aware of the sensitivity of his country now that it was fully engaged in war, Shenwood completely removed from the new version any suggestion that the United States was not doing her bit. In the first version of the play, one of the speeches satirizing the United States' failure to become involved was Uncle Waldemar's:

It's offering their good services to settle the Soviet-Finnish dispute. That's what they call it—the dispute (*TSBNN* 1940, Sc. II, p. 48).

This was simply omitted from the second version. Again, in the first version, Dave Conveen says:

It isn't always so completely delightful to be an American, Major. Sometimes even we have an uncomfortable feeling of insecurity. I imagine that Pontius Pilate didn't feel entirely at peace with himself. He knew that this man was a good, just man, who didn't deserve death. He was against a crown of thorns on principle. But when they cried, "Crucify Him!" all Pilate could say was, "Bring me a basin of water, so that I can wash my hands of the whole matter." (*TSBNN* 1940, Sc. IV, p. 122).

In the second version the tone and import of Dave Conveen's remarks have been altered in a fundamental way:

It isn't always so completely delightful to be an American, Major. Sometimes even we have an uncomfortable feeling of insecurity. And when that feeling is finally brought home to us—God help him who provoked it! We have to be shaken violently out of our normal state of complacency—but when we are shaken we can become very, very irritable (*TSBNN* 1943, Sc. V, pp. 60-61).

Shenwood may have considered that he himself had done some shaking of the American public through the first version of the play. In the situation of 1943, speeches like this second version of the one by Dave Conveen would bolster the morale of the Allied audiences in a difficult time.

Furthermore, those audiences saw an ending of the play that was significantly different from that witnessed by the audience on the first night three and a half years earlier. At the close of the first version of the play, Dave Conveen, Shenwood's own mouthpiece, was brought heavily into focus as he responded to a moving letter written by Dr. Valkonen just before going off into battle. Corveen wavers, but finally decides to leave the threatened Helsinki for Stockholm. In the second version, Dr. Vlachos's final message has one highly emotive addition (here marked by us in italics): "There are men here from all different countries. Fine men, *all fighting because they believe*

there is something worth fighting for" (Sc. VII, p. 88). And Corween decides to stay in Athens.

The Americans were at war now, and Sherwood's objective seems to have been to convince potential domestic and certain overseas audiences that the Anglo-American cause in the present war is just, and victory certain; that the struggle ought to be pursued to its logical conclusion. This is bound to cause a great amount of suffering. One ought even to be prepared to pay the ultimate price for freedom, as the Americans Miranda Vlachos and Dave Corween most likely do in Greece. In the first version of the play Conveen had also made a sacrifice, but a small one. A baby is going to be born to the son of Dr. and Miranda Valkonen and his wife, Kaatri Alquist, the daughter of an officer. Dave Corween lends Miranda fifty dollars so as to help the pregnant woman escape to safety with relatives in the United States. On giving the money, even Dave himself regrets that fifty dollars is the best he can do. "I wish to God you'd let me really *do* something," he says to Miranda (*TSBNN* 1940, Sc. V, p. 140; 1943, Sc. V, p. 69). At the end of the second version, however, it seems that Dave may soon give all he has.

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Now, in 1989, fifty years later, the very intertextuality of the two versions of *There Shall Be No Night* necessarily turns both of them into anachronisms, detracting from their credibility for any informed audience. The theme of involvement versus non-involvement in the face of violent threat, the theme of internationalism versus isolationism, were here put to topical use—twice, and in a way that hardly functions as drama any longer. Both versions seem more like historical documents, the *curiosa* of political propaganda.

Nevertheless, when seen in their context of culture, they are valuable evidence of the functioning of an influential American mind during the Second World War, and more generally, of the relationship that can exist between literary production and history at large. So as to obtain a still more concrete sense of this, we can now turn our attention to the critical and scholarly reception of the two versions of the play.

The most salient points in the history of reception are as follows. The response to the first version of the play was generally favorable, which probably made Sherwood feel that the play was a malleable text with further potential. After America became involved in the war, the first version became, as we have seen, inappropriate, and Sherwood did remold the play. The second version's commitment to the Allied cause and to the actual fighting was usually understood and accepted by critics on both sides of the Atlantic. After the war had ended, however, the ideological climate shifted yet again, this time so as to render the original version of the play once more acceptable.

Many reviewers were ready to praise the first version of the play, and above all for its noble idealism. Having opened at The Playhouse in Providence, Rhode Island, on March 29th, 1940, and having received a mention in the *New York Times* as a play "based on the invasion of Finland" that got "an enthusiastic reception,"⁹ the play was transferred to New York on April 29th, 1940. In the first of a series of articles about the play, Brooks Atkinson said that the Finns came across as "cool of head" in the face of the Russian invasion, and he saw Sherwood as commenting "at length on the meaning of these tragic times."¹⁰ The play is "no masterpiece;" "it does not hang together particularly well." But "there is nothing cynical, cheap or shallow in this portrait of the ordeal of a brave nation." Atkinson stressed the topicality and—simultaneously—the timelessness of the play, referring to the fates of Denmark and Norway as continuations of the story of Finland. The play speaks "for the truth with enkindling faith and passionate conviction." In a second article, Atkinson went on to picture Sherwood as a man "in search of some truth that can put a violent world in order and give a man peace with himself."¹¹ The Finnish cause was "doomed from the beginning" in the play, but the characters seemed to grow in faith. The theme of "public responsibility" and the general spirit of the script seemed to have an upright quality transcending the particular content. Somewhat similarly, Burns Mantle maintained that *There Shall Be No Night* is "a drama of our time," "the story of an embattled Finland making the first desperate stand of small nations against the assault of the dictatorships;"¹² the play disproves the notion that destruction is a means of progress and civilization. Sidney B. Whipple, again, saw in the play a genuine worry for democracy, and a demand that America take her place in the forefront of its defenders, praising the characters as "human," even though they are remote and exotic in the way Finns often are to citizens of the United States.¹³ Richard Watts, Jr., rather like Atkinson and Whipple, called the play "a lofty and passionate tragedy of the assault on Finland:" it is not tidy or consistent; yet, "it is a play of stature, dignity and high emotion, thoughtful, eloquent and heart-felt..."¹⁴ John Mason Brown, finally, wrote that Sherwood's drama "cannot be separated from the problems and anguishes of present day living:"¹⁵ "civilization is at stake," and Brown admires the handling of this theme for its "restraint."

As is already apparent, however, reviewers did not find the play artistically flawless, and although Whipple praised it for restraint in its treatment of the Finno-Soviet conflict others found this political engagement somewhat too naked. Brown commented that Sherwood had "depended...heavily on the outside events to complete his writing for him," and asked, "How effective merely as playwriting would this script remain if its scene were Ruretania rather than Finland?"—a question which may have registered with Sherwood and been influential in the play's later change of setting. Brown maintained

that Sherwood, functioning "as a propagandist," "has turned sickening headlines into dialogue, and has stated the tragedy of a nation in terms of a single family"—if he is successful it is as a "pamphleteer." In similar vein, Bums Mantle spoke about journalistic qualities that did not enhance the artistic value of the work, and Richard Lockridge dwelt upon Sherwood's thesis that the Germans were the power manipulating the Finno-Russian conflict, something he judged to be in conflict with historical facts.¹⁶ Like Lockridge, Richard Watts, Jr., was surprised that "Mr Sherwood is more indignant at the German regime than at the Russian, which he regards with more disappointment than bitterness." And neither Brooks Atkinson, Bums Mantle nor Sidney B Whipple responded with any evident warmth to Sherwood's call for involvement.

Yet on the whole the reviewers were impressed, and we must remember that by the time they were writing the war between the Soviet Union and Finland had already come to an end, so that in this respect they were recording their assessments of the play's historical probability *ex post facto*. They were perhaps more likely to comment on artistic flaws and refrain from stating their own views on the position of the United States. Some reviewers, we have seen, noticed Sherwood's conviction that Germany was the real threat, and to the United States as well. But they clearly felt that their responsibility did not extend beyond recording that idea.

When the play re-opened in New York in the September of 1940, "J. G." came to the following conclusion:

Compared to the reaction of the first-nighters, last evening's audience accepted calmly Mr. Sherwood's somewhat pointed barbs at Americans who prefer geography to realism. Here and there the newspaper headlines may have weakened "There Shall Be No Night," for what was fresh at the time of writing last spring is virtually a *fait accompli* by now.¹⁷

This notice gives a foretaste of much subsequent criticism of the play. The closer one gets to the second version, the more frequently critics wonder whether the play is dated.

Brooks Atkinson undertook his third piece on *There Shall Be No Night* in September 1940. In hindsight, he did not regard it as prophetic of historical facts, for it gave no intimation of the subsequent German invasions of Holland, Belgium and France. "It is an isolated play about Finland, the little country that submitted to the bloody tyrant of Eurasia last winter after heroic resistance."¹⁸ So that, one might think, was that. On the other hand, the story "hangs together only too well," and occurrences in Central Europe seem to have made Atkinson ready to accept Sherwood's argument for "action today." In this there is a certain irony. Atkinson thinks that the ending of the Winter War has turned the play into a self-contained work of art with no reference to

real-life history. Yet his own warming to the idea of American involvement tells another story.

The play was taken on tour in the United States in the autumn of 1940, and was an outstanding success for the whole of the first half of 1941. But then came the twist in historical circumstances. This seemed to render the play meaningless, and as Jared Brown writes in his biography of the famous American Sherwood-actors, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, the Playwrights' Company issued a statement:

In view of the current world situation that finds Finland enrolled, reluctantly enrolled in all likelihood, but nevertheless enlisted as an ally of the Axis powers, the best interest of this country would be served through the termination of this tour.¹⁹

According to Jared Brown's information, "the last performance in America was given on December 18, 1941, in Rochester, Minnesota."²⁰ We have so far failed to find records of any subsequent professional production of either version of *There Shall Be No Night* in the United States.

Edwin Bronner's account of the next two years in the life of *There Shall Be No Night* is very brusque: "When the Finns threw in their lot with Hitler, Shenvood was forced to completely revamp the play."²¹ George Freedley offers a somewhat more rounded picture in his biography of the Lunts:

Since Russia at this time was England's ally against the Nazis, a play in which she was exposed as an aggressor would not be fitting, so Shenvood transposed the situation in the play to the German invasion of Greece and it opened that way at the Aldwych Theatre on 15 December 1943.²²

It is worth mentioning that although Bronner and Freedley were writing after the war they belonged to a generation which was decisively formed and marked by the war, and whose voice can be heard in their texts—they are paying homage to members of the wartime alliance. That voice was still more loud and clear in the wartime reviews.

'British reviewers of the second version of *There Shall Be No Night* probably had not seen the first version on the stage, but the historical occasion of that version, the Winter War, had involved their country more than it had touched the United States. Britain, together with France, had offered to send forces to Finland at a late stage of the Winter War, but such a relief expedition would have been too small, and it would have arrived too late to play a decisive role in the fighting. Thus Finland chose to conclude peace with the Soviet Union, which was now prepared to accept a political solution to the conflict. In discussing the second version of the play, some British reviewers do mention its original Finnish connection, and were thus aware that the British volunteer, Gosden, was transported to Thermopylae from

Viipuri. But this seems to have left them in some uncertainty as to whether this play's concerns were merely those of ad *hoc* propaganda or altogether more universal. Sometimes the reviewer's grasp of historical facts positively slips.

The Times opted for a more universal interpretation. It saw "the spiritual integration of the invaded" as the most important message of the play.²³ The home of these people "might be the home of good people in any country, but the choice falls with perfect fitness upon Greece." Hence *The Times* could almost be read as a retort to John Mason Brown's argument that the play could not be switched from Finland to Ruretanian. The story is a captivating one as such, *The Times* writes, "but interest in these events is less than in the hard journey which all people make to the conviction that in their willingness to resist evil there is hope for mankind." *The Times* makes no reference to Finland, the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom or Nazi Germany.

In somewhat similar fashion, Desmond MacCarthy, another British critic, was not concerned to state in any detail the way in which the ideological climate had changed. He reduced the origin of the second version to the internal political situation in the United States in 1940, and treated the original Finnish setting as only a starting point for a more general theme:

It is not generally known that with the exception of the most trifling changes (place-names and surnames) the play we see now is exactly the same. The characters are the same, their speeches are the same, and the dialogue is unchanged because the *theme* is the same.²⁴

That theme is evil, and MacCarthy praises Sherwood for divining that Germany was the real evil as early as 1940. With no further historical particularities, MacCarthy concludes that the strength of the play stems from its "tragic quality....It has nothing to do with victory and only remotely with hope." MacCarthy thus overlooks the force of Dave Corween's New Year's speech and Dr. Vlachos's prayer in the second version of the play. It is almost as if MacCarthy was discussing the first version of the play before the prayer for victory was added for the benefit of wartime audiences of brothers in arms.

The reviewer for the *London News Chronicle*, mentioned the "switchover" to Greece from Finland, but mistook the historical context in which that switch had been made. He found it significant that such a change "was still possible in 1940...."²⁵ But of course it was not until 1943 that Sherwood reset the play. In other respects, however, the reviewer was accurate enough. He harbored no doubts of the playwright's sincerity, and saw Dave Corween as the carrier of the author's attitude in the play: Corween is "sincerely moved by the desperate courage of the invaded, horrified by the ruthless tyranny of the invader."

Another British reviewer, James Redfern, judged the second version to be "an eloquent and moving exposition of the Anti-Isolationist party's attitude in the United States...addressed primarily to an American audience."²⁶ He too, then, contextualized the play with the American world picture of a few years earlier, making the same mismatch with historical facts as *The News Chronicle*. The second version of the play seen by James Redfern had been tailored especially for a British audience by removing both Finland and the Soviet Union from the script. As was also the case with a part of MacCarthy's argumentation, Redfern's remarks could have been applied very accurately to the *first* version of the play. MacCarthy and Redfern both confuse their own present with recent history, and are highly selective in their mention of historical particularities.

A more informed and sober commentary was offered by Ashley Dukes. He understood the vicissitudes of war and public opinion:

We British could explain well enough for ourselves how Finland had become Greece and how her aggressors also had made a quick-change. We are living through "that sort of war". And we are used to seeing, if I may say so, this sort of play.²⁷

Such "dramatic journalism," he explained, serves an urgent need on the part of players and public alike; it cannot be simply dismissed. All the same, the play had not changed for the better, and his professional obligation to write something about it was irksome.

The American reviewers of the second version were more conscious than the British of the passing of time, since they had been closer to the original production to begin with. The London correspondent of the *New York Times* said the new production, though a "somewhat reworked version" of the original, was actually dated.²⁸ *Newsweek*, on the other hand, thought that the passing years had strengthened the play. Revised "for obvious reasons, since the original dealt with the Russian invasion of Finland,"²⁹ it had stood the transition to Greece and perhaps even gained in sincerity. Here the reviewer was perhaps trying to defend both Sherwood and America against accusations of "dumping Finland."

Paradoxically enough, in a work of 1970 to be noted below John Mason Brown would argue that the passage of world events had robbed this same second version of sincerity, a quality only to be recovered from the first version. But even in 1944 sincerity and sympathy were not among the most striking qualities of the second version as interpreted by V. A. Darlington, another London correspondent of the *New York Times*. According to him, the play in its 1943 form

lacks something in solidarity of material. The tragedy of Greece — substituted for Finland since you first saw the play—is here hinted at rather than described. One is tempted to take a murdered country's agony rather lightly and for granted...³⁰

Darlington is here echoing what John Mason Brown complained about in the first version of the play: the tragedy is too "vicarious."

And certainly, the shift **Darlington** recorded can seem to turn Greece and Finland into substitutes for each other: they can readily be re-labelled on the board of world history. This line of thought is almost unavoidable when one contemplates an advertisement for the second printed version which appeared in *Theatre Arts* in the United States. The advertisement notes:

The background has been changed by the author from Finland to modern Greece.³¹

Right underneath, on the same page, there is a box of exactly the same size as the Sherwood advertisement above, flying the flag of the United States and with the caption:

For Victory
BUY
UNITED STATES
WAR SAVINGS
BONDS * STAMPS

The composition of the page brings home the ideological relationship between the two announcements.

But if Shenwood the propagandist set too little store by historical and geographical particularities, the same was to be true of his own later critics. Limitations of space preclude detailed illustration of their inaccuracies and brash generalizations, but such tendencies were very marked.³² The pragmatic interrelation of Shenwood's texts and their original contexts was perceived ever more dimly, and the play's more universal themes gained a correspondingly greater emphasis.

Yet the remarkable differences between the two versions remain, and the transferral to Greece was perhaps not quite so easy after all. As already hinted, there may even be indications of emotional ambivalence on Sherwood's part. True, as R. Baird Shuman argued,

had the play [the first version] been fundamentally political rather than moral, Sherwood could not in good conscience have rewritten it in 1943 and changed the chief contending parties from Finnish to Greek.³³

In point of fact, though, both moral and political factors inspired Shenwood when he composed the original version, while for the second version his motivation certainly appears to have been a more predominantly political one.

The first version expressed an outraged conscience and a call to arms, both stemming from genuine sympathy with Finland. The second version urges the brothers in arms to go on fighting, using old material somewhat equivocally updated and re-set in a country and historical situation more acceptable to a changed political climate. The day of morality came anew after the war. In 1970 John Mason Brown accordingly wanted to regard the original version of *There Shall Be No Night* as "the final authorized version,"³⁴ and he reproduced it in his monograph on Sherwood.

* * *

Shenwood was deeply moved by the Soviet aggression towards Finland in 1939-1940. His audiences and readers sensed this and the play was a success. Through the American characters he depicted as involved in the tragic events in Europe, Sherwood was telling his countrymen that they ought to acknowledge the threatening situation in the world—that they were in the same world as the Europeans. Shenwood was conscious of the political and military power of his country and his people, and the play in its original version was a powerful move in the controversy about American isolationism, as some of the reviewers clearly saw. In the end the Japanese left the United States no choice but to enter the war.

In 1943 Sherwood was a high-ranking official in the American propaganda machinery. The United States was perhaps the most important party in a war about to reach its climax, and Shenwood's public position was bound to have an influence on his semi-private life as a playwright. Although he did not create new, original artistic material, he could renew pieces of his older production to meet the wartime demand. He must have been aware of the fact that many people among the new London audience and among the reading public at home were also members of the pre-war audience. They would recognize the intertextuality. They would make comparisons between the old and the new versions. But they would also know—to paraphrase the thought of Ashley Dukes cited above—that the most important thing in a war is not consistency but victory. For victory, one most often needs allies, and in the Europe of 1943, the Soviet Union was the most important military ally of the United States. But politically the United Kingdom was even more important, and for Great Britain the Soviet Union was even more important than for the U. S. A., because it effectively exhausted Nazi Germany's fighting force on the Eastern Front. Furthermore, by this time Finland was technically an enemy of Britain. Thus it was important for Sherwood to remove both Finland as a valiant oppressed country and the Soviet Union as an aggressor. In doing so he was also serving the American interest.

There are unquestionable reminiscences of Finland in the second version,

but also some clear-cut and fundamental changes; and the fact that the life-span of the second version of the play was very short and intensive bears witness to sheer political pragmatism behind the new version and production. When its propaganda value had been exhausted, it was disposed of.³⁵ A further sign of the altered circumstances after the war is that several critics and scholars chose to make no mention of, or were not even aware of the existence of, the second published version. The original effect created by the Soviet attack on Finland during a relative calm in the European war, and by the stiff resistance of the greatly outnumbered Finns, has again turned out to be more interesting than incidents in Greece. After the Second World War came the so-called Cold War between two of the victors in the earlier struggle. What was once felt to be better forgotten was now avidly remembered. And critics such as Shuman who want to deal with both published versions seem forced to apologize on Sherwood's behalf for the play's odd history.

As well as being a spur to the United States to enter the war, the first published version of *There Shall Be No Night* is also part of Shenwood's own personal progress from pacifism to activism. The two writers, Dave Conveen on the one hand and Kaarlo Valkonen on the other hand, represent the different aspects of his chosen profession as a playwright—instant contact with the public versus solitary study and contemplation—and they can be regarded as different aspects of the author. In their different ways, they both embody that conversion to activism which Shenwood himself further explained in the Preface to *There Shall Be No Night* published in 1940.

There is no preface to the second published version of the play. Only the advertisement in the issue of January 1944 of *Theatre Arts* announces that "the background has been changed by the author...." The reason for this, and the key-word of the second version of the play, is "victory." The first version, which was itself a sharp argumentative tool, was hastily forged by its author into a battle weapon set against just the one enemy. After victory was gained, the weapon was refashioned into the original shape, but this time by critics and scholars living in different circumstances.

NOTES

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1. The text of the original version used in this article is Robert E. Sherwood, *There Shall Be No Night* (New York: Scribner's, 1940).
2. The text of the second version used here is Robert E. Sherwood, *There Shall Be No Night*, Revised Acting Edition, (New York: Dramatists' Play Service, 1943).
3. Walter J. Meserve, *Robert E. Sherwood: Reluctant Moralists* (New York: Pegasus, 1970), pp. 176-77
4. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
5. John Mason Brown, *The Worlds of Robert E. Sherwood: Mirror of His Times 1896-1939* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), passim.
6. Marcel Baudot et al. eds., *The Historical Encyclopedia of World War II*, Trans. Jesse Dilson (sine loco: Facts on File, 1980), p. 420.
7. However, in Scene Two of the second version of *There Shall Be No Night* there is a confusion in the date of action. According to the list of scenes, the action should take place "late in November, 1939" (p. 3) as in the first version of the play. The scene-heading reads, curiously, "Sunday evening, October. 26, 1940" (p. 25). Most likely this inaccuracy is indicative of lack of real interest and lack of time.
8. Baudot, *Historical Encyclopedia*, pp. 204-205, 421.
9. *New York Times*, March 30, 1940.
10. *Ibid.*, April 30, 1940.
11. *Ibid.*, May 5, 1940.
12. *New York Daily News*, April 30, 1940.
13. *New York World Telegram*, April 30, 1940.
14. *New York Herald Tribune*, April 30, 1940.
15. *New York Post*, April 30, 1940.
16. *New York Sun*, April 30, 1940.
17. *New York Times*, September 10, 1940.
18. *Ibid.*, September 22, 1940.
19. Jared Brown, *The Fabulous Lunts* (New York: Atheneum, 1986), p. 296.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 296.
21. Edwin Bronner, *The Encyclopedia of the American Theatre 1900-1975* (San Diego, New York: Barnes, 1980), p. 468.
22. George Freedley, *The Lunts* (London: Rockliff, 1957), p. 76.
23. *The Times*, December 16, 1943.
24. *New Statesman and Nation*, December 25, 1943.
25. *News Chronicle*, December 16, 1943.
26. *Spectator*, December, 24, 1943.
27. *Theatre Arts*, April 1944, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4, p. 209.
28. *New York Times*, January 2, 1944.
29. *Newsweek*, December 27, 1943.
30. *New York Times*, January 2, 1944.
31. *Theatre Arts*, January 1944.
32. A few examples will perhaps be suggestive. Sometimes, critics seem to misread the texts almost wilfully, and many scholars—Richard Wattenberg, ("The sense of

History in the Plays of Robert E. Sherwood," Diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1979), Richard Hasbany, ("Rituals of Reassurance: Studies in World War II American Drama," Diss., Michigan State University, 1973), Carroll Conklin, ("The Eschatological of Robert E. Sherwood," Diss., Bowling Green State University, 1977), Jean Gould, (*Modern American Playwrights* (New York: Dodd, Meade, 1966)), John von Szelski (*Tragedy and Fear: Why Modern Tragic Drama Fails* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971)—do not even mention the second version. Walter J. Meserve does mention it, but quite passes over those crucial differences between the earlier and later versions dictated by changes in power politics (Meserve, *Robert E. Sherwood*, p. 154). Again von Szelski, classifies *There Shall Be No Night* under the heading "Tragedies of Social Disintegration," which travesties the entire ethos of the play—the great integrating force constituted by a common cause, the fight of a people for survival (*Tragedy and Fear*, p. 227). A similar mirage of social disintegration seems to have seduced R. Baird Shuman, who also remarks that the play was rewritten in 1943, "after the Finns had been conquered, and the Greeks became the oppressed people...," whereas in fact the Finns were not absolutely conquered at any time during the whole of the Second World War (*Robert E. Sherwood*. Twayne's United States Authors Series 58 (New York: Twayne, 1964), p. 33). In a subsequent article Shuman wrote that *There Shall Be No Night* deal "with Finland's, and, in its re-written version, Greece's struggle against the Nazis..." ("The Shifting Pacifism of Robert E. Sherwood," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. LXV, No. 3, 1966, p. 384), quite overlooking the role of the Soviet Union.

33. Shuman, *Robert E. Sherwood*, p. 69.

34. John Mason Brown, *The Ordeal of a Playwright: Robert E. Sherwood and the Challenge of War* (New York, Evanston and London: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 124.

35. "*There Shall Be No Night* closed in Blackpool in July 1944. Appropriately enough, the last performance was given on the day the last German was driven from Greece" (Jared Brown, *The Fabulous Lunts*, p. 314).