



BARBARA DAY

TRIAL BY THEATRE

**REPORTS ON
CZECH DRAMA**

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DRAMATICA

Barbara Day

Trial by Theatre

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of *Romeo and Juliet* at the National Theatre, 1963.

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of *Chameleon*, 1984. Photo by Jaroslav Krejčí

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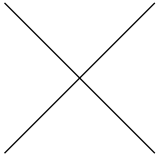
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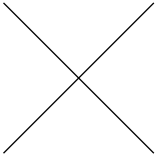
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PREFACE

In the country now called the Czech Republic, the 1960s are known nostalgically as the *Zlatá šedesátá*, the “Golden Sixties.” For a quarter of a century, Czechoslovakia had been shrouded in Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianism, but seemed in that decade to be emerging into a time of freedom. Czechs were looking forward to speaking and behaving as they wished, without fear of betrayal. The political hopes of the period, summed up in the phrase “Socialism with a human face,” proved an illusion. But the Prague Spring itself was not; the decade of the sixties really was a time when literature and the arts flourished. Freedom of speech culminated in the summer of '68, when censorship was abolished.

I was fortunate enough to be there. Intrigued by meetings with young Slovaks and Czechs in Italy and France,* I found a way to cross the Iron Curtain by means of the bilateral cultural exchange programme administered by the British Council. In October 1965 I registered in the Drama Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (DAMU). I was overwhelmed—by the beauty of Prague, by the eagerness of new acquaintances to introduce me to their culture. Everyone went to the theatre, it seemed, and moreover had connections to someone working in it. My most important discovery was the Theatre on the Balustrade (*Divadlo Na zábradlí*); at first Ladislav Fialka’s mime company, whose production *Fools* (1965) had a poetry and intensity I had never experienced in the British theatre. Then I met the drama company, led by the theatre director Jan Grossman with his close colleague, the playwright Václav

* This was in 1963 and 1964, when travel restrictions began to ease; students from the Bratislava Academy of Performing Arts (*Vysoká škola múzických umení, VŠMU*) brought Pavel Kohout’s musical version of *Around the World in 80 Days* to Parma’s 11th Festival Internazionale del Teatro Universitario. The student group included the future stars of Czechoslovak theatre, Emília Vášáryová and Marián Labuda.

Havel—Czechoslovakia’s future president. Within weeks I had seen Havel’s first plays in their original productions,* as well as Jan Grossman’s iconic *Ubu Roi* (1964). In May 1966 I was watching the rehearsals for Grossman’s dramatisation of Kafka’s *The Trial*.

As a fresh graduate from Manchester University’s department of drama, I was accustomed to the hierarchy of English theatre. But in my discovery of the Czech theatre, I found myself running neck and neck with luminaries of the British theatre: Peter Brook, Martin Esslin, Kenneth Tynan, Peter Daubeny... In the spring of 1967 and 1968, the Theatre on the Balustrade was a highlight of London’s World Theatre Season; I was there, employed in an undefined role backstage. In June 1968 I returned to Prague hoping to negotiate a more defined role—until we were woken before dawn one August morning by the thunder of Soviet aircraft.†

Over the next few years I watched from a distance the gradual demolition of the society that had so engaged me. The country entered its third phase of totalitarianism. The lowest point came in 1979, with the imprisonment of the playwright who, in 1966, had lent me the first English translations of his plays: Václav Havel. I realised that not only had the whole world of the 1960s disappeared and its playwrights, directors, and dramaturges been dismissed, expelled, or otherwise silenced, but that the period could not be written about *at all*, that its names and activities were being erased from history. In an un-serious moment I observed that the ban could not apply to me; I was beyond the jurisdiction of President Husák’s “Normalisation.” The observation was taken seriously by the scholar and expert in Russian theatre, Edward Braun; in 1980 I was accepted for postgraduate study at Bristol University, researching the history of the Theatre on the Balustrade and the small stages of the 1960s.

On my return to Prague in 1982, I was registered in the Department of Theatre Studies of the Arts Faculty of Charles University. A remorseless purge had been operating in the faculty throughout the 1970s; a process that had involved not simply the abolition of departments and the dismissals of academic staff, but long drawn-out appeals, examinations, justifications, and assessments followed by constant checks, in an effort to ensure the faculty’s loyalty to the regime.‡ In retrospect, I appreciate all the more the assistance I was given by my ironical consultant, the theatre historian Milan Lukeš, and

* *The Garden Party* (1963) and *The Memorandum* (1965).

† AN-12s carrying tanks.

‡ In the early part of this century, this operation was the subject of research project *KSC na FF UK 1969–1989* (The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia at the Arts Faculty of Charles University 1969–1989) funded by Charles University, the Academy of Sciences, and the Czech Science Foundation. The resulting literature can be found in the Bibliography.

by those he suggested I should met. At the same time, I sought out my old contacts; knowing now what humiliations these practitioners and scholars had suffered and the risks they still ran, I look back with amazement at the willingness with which archives and memories were opened. I remember a visit to a windowless archive where the theatre historian Jindřich Černý introduced me to the daughter of the philosopher Jan Patočka; the lilac-scented, crumbling Sova Mills on Kampa Island, where I interviewed the theatre historian Vladimír Just; an enigmatic summons from the head of the Theatre Institute, Eva Soukupová; and long conversations with Jan Grossman in his apartment on the Vltava embankment. Later, I brought copies of articles I had written for the British press to Karel Král in the documentation department of the Theatre Institute; and met Anna Freimanová, who was secretly working on the samizdat journal *O divadle*, in the corridors of the National Museum's theatre department, where she was officially employed. Then, as I went around Prague one day in spring 1984, I was quietly informed by three different people that Havel had been taken from prison to hospital. I became increasingly aware of solidarity in theatre circles, and a network of connections functioning below the surface.

Not all my research was on the decade of the 1960s. I became fascinated by Czech theatre history, especially the nineteenth-century National Awakening and the interwar avant-garde. Above all, I discovered that theatre under "Normalisation" was not the barren land it seemed from a distance, but was full of fresh growth that subtly camouflaged itself to avoid attention from the authorities. Most dynamic of all, commended to me immediately on my arrival by Jan Grossman and by Milan Lukeš, was the Brno Theatre on a String (*Divadlo na provázku*). Its impact was similar to that of the Balustrade Theatre twenty years earlier, but this time my role was to bring the theatre to England. With the cooperation of Bristol University and many others, in a festival held during one of the low points of the Cold War (1985), audiences were cheering not only Theatre on a String but also the dance theatre Chorea Bohemica, the jazz musician Jiří Stivín, and other high points of Czech culture. Through the dramaturge Petr Oslzlý, the driving force behind Theatre on a String, I became involved with the "underground seminars"; that is another story, told in *The Velvet Philosophers* (1999), but I thank Roger Scruton, my colleague then, for his encouragement with the present book.

Over the years I have many people to thank: for the original dissertation, Edward Braun and Bristol University, and the British Academy, which helped to fund my research; also the bilateral exchange programme administered by the British Council, which made longer visits to Czechoslovakia possible; and my examiners, J. P. Stern of Cambridge and Robert Porter of Bristol. Robert Pynsent and David Short of London University and James Naughton of Ox-

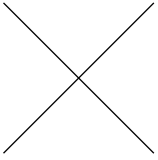
ford University were generous with their time and knowledge. Simon Trusler published a long essay in *New Theatre Quarterly* (August 1986), following which Nick Hern commissioned *Czech Plays* (Nick Hern Books, 1991).

Among my Czech teachers and friends, I remember with especial gratitude Karel Brušák of Cambridge University and Jan Grossman. Jitka Martin, Petr Oslzlý, and Richard Weber were also immensely important. Close behind came Oldřich Černý, Lída Engelová, Jiří Hanák, Antonín Jelínek, Karel Král, Zuzana Kočová, and Zdenka Kratochvílová. Those who gave much help when I was researching the original dissertation included Jan Burian, František Černý, Jindřich Černý, Drahomíra Fialková, Jarmila Gabrielová, Vladimír Just, Jakub Korčák, Otomar Krejča, Milan Lukeš, Lída Myšáková-Paulová, Bořivoj Srba, Jiří Suchý, Milena Tomíšková, and Ivan Vyskočil. I also interviewed or corresponded with Jiří Daněk, Jan Dušek, Ladislav Fialka, Václav Havel, Miroslav Horníček, Václav Hudeček, Jan Hyvnar, Karel Jernek, Jaromír Kazda, Jan Kopecký, Karel Kraus, Ivan Kyncl, Oldřich Lipský, Harry Macourek, Miloš Macourek, Luboš Malinovský, Zdeněk Míka, Jiří Nesvadba, Petr Pavlovský, Karel Pech, Boleslav Polívka, Zdeněk Potužil, Jan Přeučil, Petr Scherhauser, Evald Schorm, Otakar Roubínek, Zdeněk Šikola, Josef Škvorecký, Ladislav Smoček, Zdeněk Svěrák, Ctibor Turba, Milan Uhde, Nina Vangeli, Radim Vašinka, Vladimír Vodička, and Stanislav Vyskočil. The help of the Theatre Institute has been invaluable throughout. More recently, my thanks go to Veronika Ambros, Marie Boková, Jan Dvořák, Anna Freimanová, Vlasta Gallerová, Jaroslav Krejčí (photographer), Julek Neumann, Jana Patočková, Ladislava Petišková, Jitka Sloupová, and Eva Šormová. Finally, I want to thank Martin Pšenička for his encouragement and perseverance in seeing this project through from 2014.

I am grateful to the students on the Arts and Social Change program of SIT Study Abroad, Czech Republic, and Academic Director Sarah Brock, and to the students on the international programme at DAMU, Dean Doubravka Svobodová and Vice Dean Marek Bečka, for giving me the chance to relive this story of Czech theatre. At the final stage, I turn again to the Department of Theatre Studies of the Arts Faculty of Charles University Prague and the Karolinum Press, and thank them for enabling this publication.

Barbara Day

June 2018



INTRODUCTION

The past is never far away in Central Europe, and this book is for those interested in the ethical and cultural resistance to the destructive ideologies of the twentieth century. *Trial by Theatre: Reports on Czech Drama* is not concerned with theatre alone; nor is it intended as a comprehensive history of the Czech theatre. It is rather an exploration of why the theatre is central to the social and political history of the Czech lands (Bohemia and Moravia). Czech theatre, described by the historian Jarka Burian as the “Reflector and Conscience of a Nation,” is neither peripheral nor elitist, but an essential part of daily culture. Historically, it is identified with the spirit of the nation, and with the revival of its language. It is about the power of the creative spirit and its engagement with the deadly forces of totalitarianism.

Trial by Theatre is a revision and completion of my dissertation *The Theatre on the Balustrade of Prague and the Small Stage Tradition in Czechoslovakia* (1986). I worked on this during the years of “Normalisation,” to keep alive the memory of the small stages that had played a critical role in the society and politics of the 1960s. I followed threads leading back to the Czech “National Awakening” in the Habsburg Empire. In the Bohemian lands, the theatre’s status and reputation enabled its practitioners to develop visual, linguistic, and dramatic features that they used to promote national objectives. The pressures of history led to their constant reinvention and redeployment at times of social and political crisis. Between the wars, the Prague Structuralists created a laboratory for the analysis of theatre. During the Nazi occupation, theatre became a refuge. The intense theatrical creativity of the 1960s was partly due to the ideological barriers that forced intellectuals out of literature and academia. Similarly, the theatre of the 1980s owed much

of its vitality to the influence of personalities banned from public life after the Soviet invasion of 1968. It was, as it turned out in 1989, the theatre that shaped the Velvet Revolution. The historical examples I have chosen often come from the “poor theatre” (in Jerzy Grotowski’s sense) rather than from the classic stage. The deeper I went, the more I realised how much more there is to discover. I do not consider this book to be a definitive text, but a handbook for further exploration.

The prologue reports on a debate organised by the journal *Divadlo* (Theatre) in November 1968, three months after the Soviet invasion. The theatre directors, playwrights, dramaturges, and critics involved were aware of how the theatre could influence the emotions and behaviour of the public, and of their own responsibility in this context. Conscious that they were standing at a historic moment, they reflected on the emotional power of history, and on how it had been used and misused. Since they invoked the National Awakening, I have made this the starting point of my narrative. In the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century, two theatre cultures ran side by side: the mainstream German-language theatre and its makeshift country cousin, the Czech-language theatre, always translating, improvising, complaining, shouldering its way onto the stage. The roots of theatre in the Bohemian Crown Lands, however, reach deeper. Maybe they took hold in the first century AD when the Celtic Boii settled at the crossroads of Europe, or perhaps five centuries later with the arrival of the Slavs. Surrounded on three sides by Germanic tribes, the Czechs took possession of a bowl of the most fertile and picturesque territory in Europe. Among the legends later dramatised are those of Princess Libuše, prophet of the greatness of Prague. The martyrdom of Jan Hus in 1415 established him as a national hero, while the military defeat of 1620 (the Battle of the White Mountain) was followed by the executions of the Czech aristocracy and the emigration of the Protestant intelligentsia. The next three hundred years, controversially denoted an “age of darkness,” were marked by re-catholicisation and the dominance of German as the language of education and administration. This formed a historical context in which an emotional yet practical and articulate resistance developed on several levels.

In this environment, theatre became a tool for survival in the hands of a nation that felt existentially threatened. This was when the “myth of the National Theatre” emerged—the “Golden Chapel” built out of the contributions of ordinary people. Even if one allows that most of the funding came from state sources, the myth has its own validity, and its impact on the popular attitude to theatre is recognisable today. In the nineteenth century the theatre was an essential element of Czech identity; in the twentieth it asked increasingly difficult questions, instinctively analysing and subverting any ideological programme. In its role as the conscience of the land, the theatre has been

educational without being didactic, ethical without being self-righteous. Although often intensely political, it did not condemn or endorse, but invited theatregoers to decide for themselves. That is not to say it did not know right from wrong; rather, it asked theatregoers to look at right and wrong from different angles, and maybe to revise their conclusions. The audience took the questions home, or debated them there and then in the theatre foyer.

In this “theatre on the move” (*divadlo na pohybu*)* every performance was different and thus “always at a beginning.” It drew inspiration (but not convention) from the past. It relied on the paradox that an event in history can happen only once, yet in the theatre that one time is “here and now”. With censorship on its heels, it learnt to express itself through simile and metaphor, through juxtaposition, allegory and allusion, requiring the full engagement of the theatregoer. This kind of theatre was at home on the “small stages” (*malé scény*) that originated in the 1960s, in the “auteur théâtre” (*autorské divadlo*)† of the 1970s and in the “studio-type theatres” (*divadla studiového typu*) of the 1980s, when its practitioners, taking responsibility for an otherwise “normalised” nation, pressed for change.

In *Trial by Theatre: Reports on Czech Drama*, I try to tell the story of a national theatre whose history parallels that of society, using particular themes and personalities to follow it from one generation to another. I have summarised or omitted (maybe unfairly) some aspects of theatre history which deserved a fuller treatment, but which did not illuminate the story of “theatre that is always at a beginning.” Conversely, I have sometimes highlighted minor figures or incidents to emphasise a particular relevance. The continuity of the Czech theatre community makes it possible for this to work organically. More tangibly, the Czechs have been (and still are) exceptionally diligent in recording and analysing their own theatre history.

The Cabinet for the Study of Czech Theatre (*Kabinet pro studium českého divadla*) was founded in 1956 as part of the Institute of Czech Literature of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. Its researchers were engaged in long-term projects such as the four-volume *Dějiny českého divadla* (*The History of the Czech Theatre*; 1968, 1969, 1977, 1983). Notoriously, the history never advanced onto the delicate ground beyond 1945. It would be a major work of scholarship were it not for its ideological bias—for which I do not blame the researchers, most of whom would have wished things otherwise. Under Communism, the Cabinet was not only the workplace of ideologists, but also

* Theatre on the Move is the name of a festival held by Theatre (Goose) on a String (see p. 236–241) in Brno in 1973 and subsequently at unpredictable intervals, but always at a critical moment in the life of the theatre.

† In the sense that the author is one or more members of the company, cf. Josef Kovalčuk, *Autorské divadlo 70. let* (1982).

a refuge for banned teachers and dramaturges, much of whose research remained unpublished until after 1989. When, in the early 1990s, the budget of the Academy of Sciences was radically cut, the Cabinet was rescued by the Theatre Institute (*Divadelní ústav*). A team of researchers still produces scholarly encyclopedias and histories such as *Česká divadla: Encyklopedie divadelních souborů* (*Czech Theatres: Encyclopedia of Theatre Companies*).

The Theatre Institute itself—now the Arts and Theatre Institute (*Institut umění - Divadelní ústav*)—was founded in 1959 by the Ministry of Culture bureaucrat who had been responsible for the hugely successful Czechoslovak exhibit at Expo 58 in Brussels. It became an essential part of the Czechoslovak theatre scene and in the 1990s adapted to the electronic age, not only through a comprehensive website, but also through networking all theatres and associated institutions.* It organises conferences and exhibitions (including the Prague Quadrennial), is an initial point of contact for foreigners, collates information from theatres and teaching institutes countrywide, operates an accessible library and documentation department, and publishes a range of books on theatre.

One feature of Czech theatre that intrigues foreigners is the lack of unemployment; under Communism this was manipulated by the Plan—the number of students selected by the teaching institutions corresponded to the number of personnel required for the countrywide theatre network. They were prepared at the academies, the universities, and the Prague Conservatoire (musicians and dancers). The Academy of Performing Arts (*Akademie múzických umění*) in Prague† and the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts (*Janáčková akademie múzických umění*) in Brno‡ are prestigious, university-level institutions on the international network. They prepare students for practical roles in the theatre, including acting, directing, puppetry, arts management, and stage design. Dramaturgy, which straddles the practical and academic fields, can be studied either in the performing arts academies or in one of the university departments for theatre studies at Charles University in Prague, Masaryk University in Brno, or Palacký University in Olomouc. The university departments became independent more gradually than the Academies, which were established in the energetic postwar years. In Brno and Olomouc they emerged as fully fledged departments only after 1989; while the department in Prague barely survived the purges of the Normalisation period, in the process being merged with the department of music. These organisations and their publications are important for any researcher of Czech

* The Theatre Institute director responsible (from 1996–2007) was Ondřej Černý, son of the theatre historian Jindřich Černý. He then became director of the National Theatre (2007–2012).

† Opened in 1946, it has three faculties: Music/Dance, Drama, and Film/TV.

‡ Opened in 1947, it has two faculties: Music and Drama.

theatre, as is the Clementinum Library, the Baroque complex of buildings in the Old Town of Prague.* The British Library in London also has impressive holdings of material on Czech theatre. However, there was very little available in English in the 1980s, and the situation has not improved as much as one would hope. Two well-researched but contrasting books *Czech Drama Since World War II* by Paul Trensky (1978) and *The Silenced Theatre* by Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz (1979) emerged at the end of the 1970s.† A number of articles have appeared in specialised theatre journals; the best of them are by Jarka Burian, who subsequently shaped some of them into *Leading Creators of Twentieth-Century Czech Theatre* (2002), as well as publishing *Modern Czech Theatre: Reflector and Conscience of a Nation* (2000). I recommend the latter as the best available introduction to Czech theatre. Since 1989, two histories of the Czech theatre have been translated and published by the Drama Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (DAMU): Jaromír Kazda's *Czech Theatre* (1994) and Jan Císař's *The History of the Czech Theatre* (2010). The first is clear and factual, but very brief; the second is thorough and erudite, but complex for a newcomer to the subject.‡

Czechoslovakia briefly caught the attention of the West by its success at Expo 58 in Brussels, which also launched the international career of the stage designer Josef Svoboda. However, Svoboda's ascent, although fuelled by half a century of Czech scenographic experiment, was largely solo, and its specifically Czech features were uncredited abroad. His work is described in Helena Albertová's *Josef Svoboda: Scenographer*, and that of his predecessors Vlastislav Hofman and František Tröster in the monographs *Vlastislav Hofman* and *František Tröster: Artist of Light and Space* (theatre designers are more fortunate than theatre directors in having their work made accessible to the international public; puppetry is likewise relatively well presented). The creative surge in 1960s Czechoslovakia—especially the new wave of film^s but also theatre and literature—led to the appearance of Czech theatre companies in London's World Theatre Season. This stimulated the writing

* It was here that in 1983, after I had been vainly ordering copies of *Divadelní noviny* (*Theatre News*) for 1967, a courageous assistant in the reading room alerted me in a whisper to the existence of the (unsigned) *zvláštní fondy*—special deposits of politically sensitive material—in the attic. An official letter from the Department of Theatre Studies at Charles University allowed me to access the attic and read *Divadelní noviny*. My temper tantrum when the *zvláštní fondy* refused to release the papers for photocopying led to an appointment with a higher authority, which rather strangely took place in a public corridor. The authority prevaricated by requiring another letter from my department, which felt, however, that it had pushed the barriers far enough, and arranged for me to borrow copies from a personal archive.

† Details of all the publications mentioned in the Introduction are in the Bibliography.

‡ I would also like to thank Martin Pšenička for drawing my attention to the fact that Jan Císař's book is part of an ongoing dialogue between different schools of Czech theatre historians, particularly with reference to the (untranslated) *Dějiny českého divadla* (*Divadelní revue*, 1/2011, pp. 161–164).

§ See Peter Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave* (1985).

of reviews and newspaper articles by British journalists and theatre critics, in particular the American professor, Henry Popkin, in *The Times*. These are now buried in archives, although Martin Esslin's brief chapter on the Czech Theatre of the Absurd appeared in the second edition of his seminal book on the subject. The Havel phenomenon was beginning to emerge at this time, and his first plays were published in English in the late 1960s; however, their potential was hampered by the well-meaning attempts of his translator to retain control. In the West, Václav Havel has tended to overshadow other Czech playwrights of this period, although one is grateful for his theatrical biography by Carol Rocamora (*Acts of Courage*) and literary biography by Kieran Williams (*Václav Havel*). A major project to translate Havel's theatre writing and publish it in English was recently refused funding.

Otherwise, information on theatre produced in the Czech lands is largely inaccessible to students and researchers who do not know Czech. Enormous frustration is caused by the fact that the nation that has probably done the most to document and analyse its theatre experience has done so little to make it systematically available in a world language. With some exceptions, publications available in English are lightweight and/or occasional, without an overall strategy. The publishing house *Pražská scéna* occasionally publishes in English, as does the Theatre Institute, mainly on aspects of contemporary theatre; this is also the case with the Theatre Institute's periodical *Czech Theatre*. One edition of the Cabinet's scholarly periodical, *Czech Theatre Review*, has been published in English; a second is due. English editions of the internationally oriented periodical *Svět a divadlo*, published as *World and Theatre*, also appear sporadically.

Returning to books published abroad: If one covers the field chronologically, the political story of how the National Theatre came to be built is told in Stanley Kimball's *Czech Nationalism: A Study of the National Theatre Movement 1845-83* (1964), while *National Theatre in Northern and Eastern Europe: 1746 to 1900* (edited by Laurence Senelick, 1999) uses contemporary documents to bring alive the stage of that period. John Tyrrell's *Czech Opera* (1988) and Brian S. Locke's *Opera and Ideology in Prague: Polemics and Practice at the National Theater, 1900-1938* (2006) shed some sidelights on theatre practice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Given how little has been published in English on the Czech avant-garde between the wars, it is not surprising there is virtually nothing on the equally dynamic and innovative avant-garde theatre. An exhibition in 1990 in Oxford and London produced a catalogue on the Devětsil arts association; MIT published a monograph on its leader Karel Teige in 1999; and Derek Sayer's *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century: A Surrealist History* came out in 2013, but none of them has much to say about the Liberated Theatre or E. F. Burian. The only extended stud-

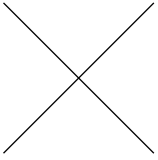
ies in English on the Liberated Theatre and Burian's D34 have again been Jarka Burian's articles, republished in *Leading Creators*. More is available on the work of the interwar Prague Linguistic Circle, which was ahead of the world in its development of the Structuralist analysis of theatre: *Semiotics of Art: Prague School Contributions* (1976), edited by Ladislav Matejka and Irwin R. Titunik, has papers on the semiotic analysis of theatre; Keir Elam analyses these in *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (1980). The first book specifically on the Prague School and theatre semiotics, *The Semiotic Stage* by Michael L. Quinn, was published in 1996 after the author's death, and *An Approach to the Semiotics of Theatre* (2012) by one of the original Structuralists, Jiří Veltruský, in 2012, eighteen years after his death. Hot off the press is the *Theatre Theory Reader: Prague School Writings* (2017). Its anthology format is a model for publications in English that would disseminate Czech theatre analysis and criticism.

The case is similar with the Czech repertoire, only a part of which is available in English. It was 1999 before any of the classics of the late-nineteenth-century village drama became available in English; the first was Gabriela Preissová's *Her Stepdaughter*, otherwise known as *Jenufa*, followed in 2002 by *Maryša* by Alois and Vilém Mrštík (with an essay by Jan Grossman). The other plays of this genre, including the wry comedy *Our Proud Peasants*, are still not available. The interwar period is represented by Karel (and Josef) Čapek's plays, either in dated 1930s translations (*R.U.R.* and *The Insect Play*) or in more acceptable recent versions (*Čapek: Four Plays*, 1999). The plays by the more interesting František Langer do not seem to have been translated into English, except for a difficult-to-obtain version of *On the Periphery*; the only other I know from this period is Arnošt Dvořák and Ladislav Klíma's *Matthew Honest*. The 1960s fared better; all of Václav Havel's plays are available, sometimes in editions that include plays by his colleagues: He shares *Drama Contemporary: Czechoslovakia* with Klíma, Kohout, Kundera, and Uhde; *The Vaněk Plays* with Dienstbier, Kohout, and Landovský; and *Czech Plays* with Fischerová, Klíma, and Topol. Josef Topol's *The End of Shrovetide* is available in the Visegrad Drama series, but existing translations of plays by Milan Uhde and Arnošt Goldflam are not on general sale. It is unfortunate that one of the most notable playwrights of the 1960s, Alena Vostrá, is not among them; she helped to continue the Czech tradition (strongest in the nineteenth century, especially with Gabriela Preissová) of women writers with insight into the shifting zeitgeist.

An online search for material begins with the English pages of the Theatre Institute site. The papers of some candidates at Czech universities who have written their dissertation or diploma work in English are available on the internet, as are some papers on Czech theatre studies by English-speaking

scholars. On the other hand, the number of books on theatre in Czech continues to grow, in spite of what one would expect to be a limited readership; not just commercial publications (those too), but also serious criticism and analysis. In 2016, the Janáček Academy listed around twelve Czech periodicals that dealt exclusively with aspects of theatre (I am counting dance, puppetry, and amateur theatre, but not opera, as this overlaps with music generally). Of current periodicals, the most useful for historians is the *Divadelní revue* (*Theatre Review*), published by the Cabinet for the Study of Czech Theatre. I have included in the Bibliography only those books and periodicals directly relevant to my work.

When I first had the idea for the dissertation that became this book, the Iron Curtain still divided Europe, and the Cold War seemingly stretched for decades ahead of us. I wanted to put on record achievements that could not then even be mentioned in the Czech lands. I wanted to celebrate the free spirits of the past and present who saw resistance to totalitarianism as a self-evident activity. I wanted to honour those who believed in theatre as the ethical heart of society. This still applies.



PROLOGUE

Freedom will never be obtained through crying and lamenting; it will only come through hard work... No nation has ever secured it overnight; a sensible man will not despair but work even harder.

–Karel Havlíček, 1848

Freedom is not something we wait for, some gift, but our task. We create our freedom by thinking and working freely, by wresting it out through our own specific actions.

–Václav Havel, 1968

In the revolutionary year of 1848, Karel Havlíček, politician and journalist, was a member of the Bohemian delegation that hoped to establish a provisional government for the Lands of the Bohemian Crown under a federal Austria. The previous half-century had seen the growth of a movement (retrospectively described as the National Awakening) to re-establish the Czech language and a sense of Czech identity, a movement in which the theatre was to the forefront. The delegation's aim was defeated by the absolutist government that returned to power in Vienna the following spring.

In 1968, during the emotional months that followed the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, patriotic citizens flocked to revivals of operas and plays dating from the National Awakening. Bedřich Smetana's *Libuše* and Jaroslav Vrchlický's *Drahomíra* evoked legendary figures from Bohemia's heroic past; audiences identified with the sentiments expressed onstage and thereby renewed their optimistic belief in their own moral superiority. Three months after the invasion, the magazine *Divadlo* (*Theatre*) held a discussion to assess

the phenomenon.* The playwright Václav Havel opened proceedings by observing that the sense of community was strongest when that community was threatened, but that the response needed to be practical, not emotional. The current phenomenon substituted emotion for action: It was a surrogate programme, pseudo-activity, even fraud. Like Havlíček, Havel rejected a national identity that consisted of slogans and flag-waving in favour of building a responsible society based on ethical principles.

In Havlíček's time, the frustration of 1848 was partially sublimated into a campaign to build a Czech National Theatre, which eventually opened in 1883. Until the late nineteenth century, intellectual life in Prague, an administrative centre of the Habsburg Empire, was for the most part conducted in German. The elegant, stone-built Estates Theatre was patronised by the German-speaking educated classes, since performances in Czech drew only a limited audience from the lower classes (although Czech-language theatre thrived in the countryside). A handful of enthusiasts saw it as their task to create an audience, and to stimulate a sense of national identity, Czech dramas were often based on heroic events from Bohemia's past. It was the proliferation of sentimental and indiscriminate nationalism that drove Havlíček, himself a patriot, to protest.

The *Divadlo* debate of November 1968 similarly concerned the morality of the way in which the theatre was feeding the emotions of the Czechs. The theatre director Jan Grossman responded to Havel by saying that at the time of the National Awakening, theatre had been based on a collective experience, and that he saw the continuation of this on the avant-garde stages, where people "did things for themselves," rather than in the established theatres. In the Bohemian lands, he argued, particular resonances, not necessarily artistic but also nationalist, linguistic, and cultural, contributed to the sense of theatre being a movement related to movement in society (noting that "in our papers, theatre performances are listed under 'culture,' not under 'entertainment' as for example in England"). However, every stick has two ends. Havel had spoken about the substitution of emotion for action, but Grossman pointed out that in the nineteenth century the theatre itself was used as a substitute for political action. Under abnormal circumstances substitution was bound to happen, Grossman argued—just as we drank ersatz coffee during the Nazi occupation.

The Brno playwright Milan Uhde agreed with Havel about the dangers of sentimental patriotism; an age like the present, he believed, was ripe for the formation of false myths, and even in their own time, these historical dramas

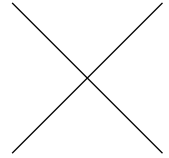
* November 1968; the transcript of the discussion was published in the January 1969 issue of *Divadlo*.

had perpetuated a distorted view of life because they simplified the complicated truth of history.

The frequently praised heroic nature of the Czech theatre arose out of times like the late nineteenth century, which were quite unheroic, continued Grossman. In his eyes, this distortion was repeated in the 1950s, a time of conformity when it was incumbent on the citizen and artist never to step out of line. The theatre became “a museum of heroism and revolution.” The fact that the substitution of theatre for political action should be significant at all came about because of the theatre’s engagement with developments in politics and society. Underlying all progressive trends was a sense that a theatre’s programme—its dramaturgy—was not a mere season of productions, but related to movement in society. Therefore, although the writer might resent being cast in the role of a freedom fighter, the pursuit of artistic aims had in itself political results, as it was the pursuit of objective truth.

Counter to expectations, in the two decades that followed the *Divadlo* discussion—one of the direst periods of this totalitarian state, with all its sanctions and censorship—there was an intensely political dialogue being conducted between stage and audience, before the very eyes (or over the heads) of those charged to prevent it. Although it involved mainly the small stages, it was not necessarily absent from the “stone” theatres. The risks could involve demotion, dismissal, loss of profession, damage to family life—standard treatment under Normalisation. The qualities that made this possible were ethical as well as artistic, and followed a trail that led onwards from the struggling, quarrelsome, impoverished “national revivalists” of the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

“Every true art fights for freedom,” claimed Grossman, “for freedom of knowledge, of a way forward, of further new projects. As Havel says, for the authenticity of man.”¹



I BOHEMIA RESURGENT

NATIONAL AWAKENING

Under Rudolf II Habsburg at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Prague, capital of the Bohemian Crown Lands,* was a place of experiment and adventure. Under Rudolf's brother Matthias, however, Vienna became the seat of power and Prague a provincial city. The revolt of the Bohemian Estates against Matthias's withdrawal of their rights and privileges inaugurated the Thirty Years, War; by the end, the overwhelming majority of the Czech nobility had been killed or driven into exile and their estates distributed among nobility from German-speaking lands. Habsburg absolutism was imposed, the Estates retained only nominal powers, and the country was re-catholicised. It was the reforms of Empress Maria Theresa and her son Josef II more than a century later that provoked the movement known as the Czech *Národní obrození*—the National Awakening, Renewal, Revival, or Rebirth.

Influenced by Enlightenment philosophers, the Habsburgs sought to improve the lot of their subjects by rationalising the state and civic life. Government was centralised in Vienna—ensuring that the language of bureaucracy would be German throughout the Empire. The Bohemian Estates lost even their nominal powers, and local officials were appointed from Vienna as imperial civil servants. Josef's reforms in education put the schools under state control, made elementary schooling compulsory for boys and girls, and admitted Protestants and Jews to universities, where the teaching language was changed from Latin to German.

* Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and, in the fifteenth century, Upper Lusatia.

Native German speakers had a natural advantage in their working life. Aspiring members of other language groups aimed to acquire a fluent command of German and to conform to Austrian codes of behaviour. They could thus anticipate a career that would raise them above their provincial roots to the higher levels of German-speaking society. In Prague and other centres, Czech was spoken mainly by the lower orders: tradesmen and domestic servants. Ambitious parents, whatever their native language, sent their children to German-language schools and were conversant with German learning and literature.* Books, magazines, and newspapers were published in German. In the late eighteenth century, essentially nothing of literary value, including drama, was written in Czech. As in Vienna, the Prague repertoire was dominated by Italian opera and German-language comedy, pantomime, and burlesque.

However, this did not mean that Czech-language theatre did not exist before the National Awakening. The population in the countryside and the smaller towns of Bohemia and Moravia (except for the German settlements in the border regions) had continued to speak Czech. Folk customs, songs, and music were still part of traditional life. The rituals of the church, the visits of strolling players and puppeteers, were highlights of rural life. There was a healthy tradition of vernacular Czech drama stretching back over several centuries. This native tradition included the liturgical drama of the Middle Ages which, although interrupted by the Hussite Wars, served as one of the diverse sources of material for the popular or folk theatre. In the mid-sixteenth century, the school drama, performed in Latin, became an important area of cultural development. The plays served an educational function, mainly in the form of dramatisations of Biblical stories. Some of the school dramas were translated into Czech, and incorporated elements of the older folk plays. One author who belonged to the humanist tradition was the “Father of Modern Education,” Comenius (Jan Amos Komenský), born in Moravia but exiled for his Protestant faith. Comenius took refuge in Leszno in Poland, where in 1630, the year that Sweden’s intervention in the Thirty Years’ War offered hope of a return home, he published his *Škola hrou* (*Schola Ludus*). It was a textbook containing eight dialogues for his students to perform—not for an audience, but so they might enjoy their studies and learn through doing.

The first permanent private theatre in Prague was opened by Franz Anton Reichsgraf von Sporck, in his palace on Hybernská Street in 1701; it was followed in 1739 by the first public theatre, the Kotzen Theatre, a converted market hall on the street now known as *V kotcích* near Old Town Square.

* These ambitions ended disastrously in the mid-twentieth century when, after the Nazi occupation, most inhabitants with German as their first language were expelled from Bohemia and Moravia.

From the 1770s Emperor Josef II, inspired by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's analyses in the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, began to reform the Viennese theatre. Lessing, a philosopher and playwright, envisaged a *Nationaltheater* which would be a public institution, determined neither by the taste of an aristocratic owner nor by reliance on the box office. Contemporary theatre was to be clear and resonant, taking classical principles as a standard, but relating them to the direct experience of the audience. Modern drama was to be based on reason, requiring the audience to feel the passions of the actors and to transform them into "virtuous actions." The audience was to be directly involved in the complex art of theatre, one that would make them conscious of their identity as part of a wider society.

In 1769, the new director of the Kotzen Theatre, Johann Joseph von Brunian, influenced by the German reforms, designated his theatre a *Nationaltheater* and began to stage a repertoire of serious drama (in German). In 1771, the theatre ran into financial difficulties and as an experiment Brunian staged a Czech-language production of the popular German farce *Herzog Michel*, calling it (in Czech) *Kníže Honzík (Count Johnnie)*. It was performed by the regular actors of the company, whose first language was German and whose Czech pronunciation was problematic. It seems to have been well attended, but did not lead to regular performances in Czech.

The Kotzen Theatre changed hands, and in 1781 the company was taken over by Franz Anton Josef Graf von Nostitz-Rieneck. Born into an old Lusatian family, he was a German-speaking patriot who defended the interests of the Bohemian Lands against Austrian centralisation. He decided to construct at his own expense a purpose-built theatre—the *Graflich Nostitzsches Nationaltheater*—next to Charles University and in the middle of the fruit market (*Ovocný trh*). Opened in 1783 as an assertion of Bohemian patriotism and intended to show that Prague could vie with Vienna, it is famous above all for the triumph in 1786 of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* after its lukewarm reception in Vienna, and for the première of *Don Giovanni* in 1787.* The fact that the first production, Lessing's *Emilia Galotti*, and subsequent productions were performed in German did not imply a lack of patriotism. Not only were there no plays in Czech nor actors to perform them; there did not seem to be any audiences eager to watch them either. In 1785, as a commercial experiment, the management tested whether there might be an audience for plays performed in Czech. On Sunday afternoons, when the lower classes had their free time, bilingual actors from the company appeared in plays translat-

* When the theatre was restored in 1984 (after it had been used as a location for Miloš Forman's *Amadeus*), it was found that Count Nostitz had in his haste built the theatre almost without foundations. Excavation, reinforcement, and reconstruction lasted for eight years—far longer than it had taken to build the theatre.

ed from German. In 1798, after the Count's death, the theatre was purchased by the Bohemian Estates and its name changed to the Theatre of the Estates (*Das Ständetheater*, in Czech *Stavovské divadlo*).

The Enlightenment appeal to the intellect coincided with a concern among Bohemian patriots that the Josephine reforms were contributing to a decline in the use of the Czech language, and as the language disappeared, so too would customs and traditions, even Czech history. They feared a future in which the educated classes would consider themselves Austrian first and Czech secondarily. With this in mind, the historian and philologist Josef Dobrovský—whose first language was German—started work on his *Lehrgebäude der böhmischen Sprache* (*Grammar of the Czech Language*, 1809), a landmark of the National Awakening. More scholars and writers emerged, publishing books and articles—written in Czech or translated from German—and embarking on projects to promote the Czech language. Among these were the forged manuscripts of *Zelená Hora* and *Dvůr Králové* (c. 1818), a carefully prepared hoax intended to prove that Czech had been a literary language as early as the tenth century. Dobrovský, who recognised their inauthenticity, was villified by more gullible revivalists.

One of the most effective ways of promoting the Czech language was through theatre, which in time became an arena for disputes over two tendencies: one that wanted to popularise the Czech language and attract a wide audience through entertainment; another that saw this approach as demeaning the Czech language. The second faction set high standards in composition and linguistics, with the aim of demonstrating that Czech held a worthy place among European languages. Controversies ensued over whether it was better to cultivate original writing in Czech, however clumsy the first attempts, or to concentrate on translating established works and on finding appropriate Czech equivalents.

Czech-language theatre was inextricably involved with the National Awakening. It became both a tool and a symbol. It was practiced largely by amateurs like the Thám brothers: Karel, who made the first translations into Czech of Schiller and of Shakespeare (through German), and Václav, who in 1784 published the first anthology of Czech verse. The same year the brothers delivered a petition to the Town Council asking for “a Czech-German theatre in the New Town of Prague,” since:

Every sensible person who is also acquainted with history is aware that the art of acting has always had a great influence on a country's morals and that, in many cases, it has assisted in sharpening public awareness and education. However, a large proportion of people are deprived of the enjoyment and beneficial influence of performed plays because of their inadequate knowledge of the German language; the petitioner is therefore

convinced that the regular presentation of plays in Czech to such a public will ensure that good entertainment is provide quite cheaply in place of a vulgar kind of amusement.²

Nevertheless, it was 1786 before the Thám brothers were able to open the Patriotic Theatre (*Vlastenské divadlo*) on the Horse Market (now Wenceslas Square). Despite being designated “Imperial and Royal” by Emperor Joseph II, the theatre was popularly known as the “Hut” (*Bouda*). The opening production was *Gratitude and Love to the Homeland*, a morally improving play adapted from August Wilhelm Iffland’s German original. The historian Jan Císař estimates that in the first two years 120–140 new plays in Czech were performed,³ including what is believed to be the first original drama in Czech, Václav Thám’s *Břetislav and Judith or, Abduction from the Cloister* (1786). The audience consisted of domestic servants, craftsmen, tradesmen, and students, but numbers were too thin to make an all-Czech repertoire viable, and performances had to be scheduled in German too. In spite of the prestige of a visit from the emperor, the Hut was abandoned in June 1789 amid complaints that it disrupted trade in the market, but chiefly because it was not financially viable.

One of Josef II’s reforms had been to close down approximately half the houses of religious orders in the empire. This enabled the company from the Patriotic Theatre to move to a theatre space set up in the library of a former monastery of Irish Franciscans near the Powder Tower, known as *U Hybernů*. Certain distinctive elements of Czech theatre were emerging: theatre practitioners who saw the medium as educational as well as entertaining, an audience drawn from ordinary people, the use of everyday life as a dramatic subject, an awareness of the importance of language, an ability to disguise the intended message, and consciousness of the emotional power of history and of the subversive nature of justice. Historical plays were popular, especially those dealing with the problems of servitude, while new plays on contemporary life were set in a lower-middle-class environment. The Czech-speaking performers were young and enthusiastic, but although they saw themselves as reformers rather than revolutionaries, political repression and instability arising from the Napoleonic Wars caused many setbacks, and the end of professional performances in 1809.

Josef II’s reforms stalled after his death in 1790 and in some respects went into reverse. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars shook belief in rationality, and the ideas of its proponents were outlawed by the new regime in power in the Austrian Empire, in which Klemens Wenzel von Metternich played a major role. His conviction was that stability had to be maintained in Europe, and that any revolutionary movement had to be avoided at all costs.

This effectively suppressed political involvement by patriots seeking to restore power to the Bohemian Estates, and the national revivalists had to content themselves with cultural activities. Bohemian aristocrats focused rather on the Society of Patriotic Friends of the Arts (*Společnost vlasteneckých přátel umění v Čechách / Privat Gesellschaft patriotischer Kunst-Freunde*), predecessor of the National Museum and the National Gallery, and the Foundation for the Czech Motherland (*Matice česká*, 1831), which was to support the publication of books in Czech.

It was in this atmosphere in 1824 that Jan Nepomuk Štěpánek, leader of an amateur theatre company, was appointed director of what was now the Royal Theatre of the Estates. He had the opportunity to reintroduce professional Czech-language performances and was himself the author of popular comedies based on everyday life (*The Czech and the German*, 1816). He also adapted plays from the German repertoire (*The Bandits at Chlum*, 1815). The choice of the local setting of Chlum, a Czech-speaking village to the west of Prague, helped the audience to identify with the characters. Štěpánek was the first to introduce opera in the Czech language, even including original Czech operas. However, his revivalist critics condemned the idealised and romantic stories of his repertoire as mere escapism.

The National Awakening was still just the work of a handful of patriots, trying to engage the interest of Czechs in their own language, literature, and national identity, but unable to agree even among themselves. According to practitioners such as Štěpánek, the theatre was a public platform that could be used to popularise the Czech language. According to his critics, the theatre was a temple of the arts that should propagate only what was highest and noblest in Czech culture. It was often difficult for playwrights and performers to live up to the ideals formulated in patriotic circles.

One active critic was the enterprising young Josef Kajetán Tyl, a hotheaded talent who in 1833 took over a Czech-language journal he named *Květy* (*Blossoms*). It was an instrument through which he could promote his concept of Czech identity, and he used its pages to express his frustration with Štěpánek's choice of repertoire and inadequately rehearsed productions. Tyl was also working as a part-time actor at the Estates Theatre, but left to start his own amateur theatre company, housed in the refectory of another of Prague's redundant monasteries, the Theatre at the Theatines (*Divadlo u Kajetánů*) in the Lesser Quarter. In its three-year existence, it set new standards of production for Czech performances. Many of the performers were writers for *Květy* (they included the poet Karel Hynek Mácha, author of *Máj* (*May*,* 1836)

* *Máj*, according to some scholars a Romantic poem, according to others an ironic poem in Romantic guise, is one of the darkest and most complex works of Czech literature.

and the group was founded largely to promote work of Tyl's teacher, the Hradec Králové schoolmaster and playwright Václav Kliment Klicpera.

Klicpera's plays, witty and fast-moving with vivid characterisation, appealed to educated speakers of Czech more than the robust farces of Štěpánek. He drew on a wide range of genres from parody to poetic drama, and his knowledge of the classical and neoclassical drama influenced the structure of his plays. Among the most popular were the anti-heroic *Hadrian of Rheum* (1817) and *Everyone for his Homeland!* (1829). Tyl also wrote for the ensemble, and in 1835 his verse drama about the shepherd Čestmír rebelling against the stultifying atmosphere of the countryside showed him as a Romantic playwright, the hero modelled in some ways on his own restless nature. Nevertheless, the play ends with the individual's reconciliation with society. This may have represented the policy of nationalist writers to advance through trust and cooperation; it certainly made it easier for the play to pass the censorship. Tyl wrote in other genres too: dramas of contemporary life, fairy tales, and histories. One of his comedies, *Fidlovačka* (1834), included the song *Kde domov můj?* ("Where is My Home?" with music by František Škroup), which later became the Czech national anthem. *Fidlovačka*, set in Tyl's home environment, portrayed everyday life among the Czech lower classes (there were no others): shoemakers, journeymen, woodcutters, seamstresses, singers, dancers, dudes, waiters, whores, a blind fiddle-player, and Mamsell Margarethe, the German housekeeper. In *Švanda the Bagpiper* (1847), Tyl again takes the theme of the "wanderer" but brings him thankfully back to his home in Bohemia. The emphasis was love of the homeland, and Tyl's voice was growing increasingly assured. In 1847, *The Miners of Kutná Hora*, in which Tyl reworked a historical theme to make a political point about workers' unrest, was at first banned. Audiences stormed the theatre for the première of *Jan Hus* (1849), based on the life of the fifteenth-century Bohemian martyr, critical of the Roman Catholic Church and thus implicitly of the Habsburg Monarchy.

By this time, Tyl had become a major figure in national life; in 1846 he was appointed director of the Czech section of the Theatre of the Estates, and in March 1848 he was one of those who met to demand from the Habsburg regime the rights recently confirmed for the "Lands of St. Stephen" (Hungary)—the unity and independence of the "Lands of St. Wenceslas." In July he was elected to the Constituent Assembly, which in September passed the Act of Emancipation. The ending of the *roboty*, or statutory labour, initiated a major development in urban society, as the emancipated peasants made their way to the towns, swelling the labour force and increasing the Czech-speaking population. It meant the beginning of the industrialisation of Bohemia, with iron and steel works, engineering, and textile production. However, as far as political life was concerned, all attempts at autonomy collapsed after the

failure of the October Revolution in Vienna. In May 1849 the new absolutist regime imposed a new constitution which treated the whole Empire as a unitary centralised state.

The writer Karel Havlíček Borovský had also been a Czech delegate of the Constituent Assembly; with the historian, philosopher, and politician František Palacký, author of the *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě* (*History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia*; 1848–1876), he led the Czech liberals who sought a federal solution for the Empire. Havlíček was a fierce critic of all he saw as sentimental and lacking in thought. Having planned to work for the nationalist cause as a priest, he was expelled from the seminary for insubordination. Originally a supporter of Pan-Slavism, he was disillusioned by his experience as a tutor in a family of the Russian aristocracy. As editor of *Pražské noviny* (*Prague News*, later renamed *Národní noviny*, or *National News*), he made sure its coverage and editorial comment equalled that of the German-language press. He saw Czech literature of the period as being too influenced by the German Romantic style, whose fancifulness and vague phraseology did not suit the Czech idiom. Havlíček challenged ideas that were indiscriminately accepted as patriotically correct; he saw no value in encouraging original Czech writing when it was of poor quality and thought it better for writers to learn their craft by working on translations. He was also highly critical of Tyl's theatre practices—he would have preferred no cooperation with the authorities rather than a compromise, and regarded the policy of Sunday matinées at the Estates Theatre as accepting the second-rate status of the Czechs. Havlíček's emphasis was on the need for hard work rather than emotional talk for the achievement of nationalist aims; he did not blame external factors for the subservience of the Czech people, but the passivity of the Czech character itself.

In 1849, thanks to the efforts of the Prague lawyer and active politician Alois Pravoslav Trojan, who had been an amateur actor with Tyl in the 1830s, an open-air arena for summer entertainment opened, with Tyl as director. It was built in the settlement of Pštroska in Vinohrady, a pleasant area known for its gardens and vineyards, and was the first of several arenas to be built outside the boundary of the New Town. The plays chosen were not of literary merit, but delighted audiences with their comedy, spectacle, and topical jokes. The arenas became a popular feature of Prague summer life for the next half-century. Karel Havlíček, however, considered the semi-permanent structures to be yet another compromise of the Czech theatre enthusiasts with the Austrian authorities, writing in *Národní noviny*:

For a long time we have worked so that our nation would have what every cultured nation has—its own theatre. [...] On Sunday afternoons for a short time, when no one else

wants the building anyway, miserable plays are produced for us. And even these are presented thanks only to a few enthusiastic souls. Czech actors receive nothing, while their German counterparts are well paid. Now the present Provincial Board is embarrassed by such an example of "equality." So Hoffmann, director of the German theatre, requests that the board vote all of 9,000 fl. to build us a summer arena. This they think is equality!

We protest in advance against such equality. If this plan were to be carried out we would end up with a wooden hut where we could only present simple plays in a poor style to a vulgar audience. I believe that if the Provincial Board can offer us nothing better, we must request that they do not concern themselves and that the matter be postponed until the sitting of the first Bohemian Diet...⁴

The outspoken and ailing Havlíček was exiled to Brixen in the Tyrol and died in 1856, shortly after his return. His ideas had influenced some of Tyl's theatre colleagues who, while agreeing with the concept of theatre as an educational tool, reacted against Tyl's repertoire of plays that glorified the past and offered happy endings achieved by superhuman means. Tyl had lost his post as director of the Czech-language theatre company in 1851, returning to the roads of Bohemia as an itinerant actor. Shunned and unpopular with the authorities, he died on tour in 1856. His place had been taken by Josef Jiří Kolár, in the 1830s an actor in Tyl's Theatre at the Theatines. There had been tension between them in the past: In 1841, Kolár's refusal to play as cast had provoked Tyl to punch him in the face. Kolár had taken Tyl to court for insulting him "in the presence of... colleagues, in the most outrageous and illicit manner, grossly impugning his honour and person, attacking him with the most disgraceful names and striking him violently with his fist in the area of his temples and eyes."⁵

NATIONAL THEATRE

Monarchist control under the nineteen-year-old Emperor Franz Josef had been restored in the Austrian Empire with the Constitution of 1849. Policy was dictated by the minister of the interior, Alexander von Bach, who revoked the semi-independence won by Hungary, outlawed political activity, tightened censorship, and placed education again under the Roman Catholic Church. Seeing that all hope of political gain was lost, a group of Czech political and cultural patriots led by Alois Pravoslav Trojan obtained permission to form a Committee to Build a Czech National Theatre (*Sbor pro zřízení českého Národního divadla*). František Palacký (later to be known as the Father of the Nation) was appointed president, and the committee members (including Tyl) were people active in national and political life whose hidden agenda was to