

**UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**

**A Female Ideal? Gender Roles in Smetana's Libuše**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

During the nineteenth century, the ethnic groups within the Austro-Hungarian empire started to develop their own national identities and strive for political independence. The Czechs were one of these groups. Their national consciousness evolved through a revival of their language, a reinvention of their history, and the development of their own literature, art, and music. One of the main figures of this period was Bedřich Smetana, a Czech composer, who dedicated his life to the creation of music that would reflect this nationalism. His opera *Libuše*, which was created as a gift to the Czech nation, stands as a monumental example of nationalism reflected in art. The opera's nationalistic resonance is due to thoughtfully implanted nationalistic images. Gender images are also used to trigger nationalist connotations. The plot concentrates on Libuše, the historical founder of Prague, and she is used as a representation and model of the ideal Czech woman.

## PREFACE

*Libuše* is the story of one of the key moments in the constitution of a nation. The Czech nation, any nation. A nation as a community of people sharing the same history, the same fate, a nation as the awareness of cross-generation connections. From a theatrical point of view it makes little difference if the story was made up, how much, by whom and why. The essential thing is that the nation exists and that for centuries it has been shaped by dramatic conflicts such as this one.<sup>1</sup>

Petr Novotný's description of Bedřich Smetana's opera *Libuše* makes it clear that this is no ordinary opera. Normally, operas focus on love, revenge, or class struggles, and although *Libuše* contains some of these aspects, it also was conceived of and received as a cultural gift to the Czech nation. Since the opera's premiere on June 11, 1881, for the opening of the National Theatre, *Libuše* has served as a great cultural icon for the Czech people.

The tradition of performing *Libuše* on important or festive occasions has continued into the present day. In the Czech Republic, *Libuše* has been performed since 1990 only on January 1 (New Year's Day) and May 8 (the anniversary of the liberation of Prague from the Nazis in 1945). The opera is performed on these historically important dates because *Libuše* is not only a celebration of the greatness of the Czech nation but also a declaration of the nation's will to survive against all odds. May 8 therefore stands for the freedom and indestructability of the Czech lands, while January 1 serves as the focal point for a ritual festival renewing the nation's commitment to its existence. Smetana himself delayed the first performance of his work for nearly a decade in order to enhance

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<sup>1</sup> Petr Novotný, "A Nation as an Anathema...?" in *Bedřich Smetana: Libuše*, program booklet (Prague: National Theatre, 1995): 66.

its significance by having it performed at the newly-constructed, long-awaited National Theatre. After the opera's premiere, the theatre burned down but *Libuše* was the first production mounted in the newly reconstructed theatre on November 18, 1883. On November 1, 1918, the famous Czech soprano Ema Destinnová [Emma Destinn] sang *Libuše* in the newly independent Czechoslovakia, a highly important political and cultural event that reinforced the symbolic significance attached to *Libuše*. This practice was continued during the interwar years when performances of *Libuše* again served as a powerful cultural image for many nationalistic occasions significant to the Czech people.<sup>2</sup> Carrying on with this tradition, four more important productions were prepared after the war.<sup>3</sup> Finally, on January 1, 1990, after the fall of the totalitarian regime, *Libuše* ushered in the dawn of a new era in the history of the Czech state with a festive performance in honor of Václav Havel's new presidency.

Clearly, *Libuše* has never been a part of the everyday repertoire of Czech language opera. Instead, for over a century, it has served, as Smetana himself intended, as a special stage work reserved for important events in the life of the Czech people. *Libuše* acts, then, as a Czech icon, a type of national myth and a single example, without direct

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<sup>2</sup> Otakar Ostrčil prepared a renowned production for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Smetana's birth on May 12, 1924, a production that remained on the National Theatre stage for thirteen years. After March 15, 1939, the day of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, Václav Talich's *Libuše* was performed for the last time before the war in June. After the final act, the audience stood and sang the national anthem as a symbol of the nation's faith in its ability to overcome the impending misery.

<sup>3</sup> In 1953, a new production was mounted for the marking of the seventieth anniversary of the National Theatre opening. Public interest in this event was enormous, reflected by the number of tickets sold, and spurred on by the description of this performance as a festival of Czech culture. In 1959, *Libuše* was performed at Děvín, a castle ruin north of Prague with a special connection to the story. This outdoor production marked the fifteenth anniversary of the liberation of this area of Bohemia and it was attended by 150 000 spectators. Yet another new production was arranged for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone for the National Theatre in 1968. Between 1977 and 1983, the theatre was closed for renovations. When the reconstruction was completed, *Libuše* again marked the reopening and the centenary of the original "second" opening of the theatre.

parallel or equal, of the fusion of an artistic work with a nation's vision of itself. This point is exposed by Libuše herself in the final words of the opera:

Český národ neskoná  
on pekla hrůzy slavně překoná!  
Sláva! Sláva!

(Czech people shall never perish, they will ever resist all hell's horrors! Glory! Glory!)<sup>4</sup>

While this statement may seem exaggerated to those outside the Czech-speaking realm, nineteenth-century Czech people, faced with the possible loss of their language, saw the prospect of the disappearance of their culture, and therefore their nation, as a real threat. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, following the efforts of Emperor Josef II to Germanize the empire, Prague was a German-speaking, German-cultured, and Catholic city. Czech, at that time, was not a language of learning, nor was it used in civic administration. Czech was thought of, even by educated Czechs, as an essentially “primitive” language suitable only for peasants and servants. Even Smetana, born into a native Czech-speaking family, was fully educated in German and he stands as a typical example of most middle-class Czech people in the 1830s.<sup>5</sup>

Fearing the loss of their language and culture, certain Czech middle-class patriots began to develop and advance a Czech culture in opposition to the German language and culture that threatened to overtake them. This period of history is known to the Czechs as the *národní obrození* (national revival or rebirth).<sup>6</sup> Through the reinvention of Czech history, the rise of Czech language education, and the instillation of a Czech culture exemplified in literature, art, and music, the National Revival was able to create a modern

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<sup>4</sup> All translations of the Czech libretto, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from *Bedřich Smetana's Libuše: Libretto* (Prague: Supraphon Records, 1995), compact disc.

<sup>5</sup> Smetana also kept his diary in German until the 1860s and he never actually fully grasped the nuances of the written Czech language.

idea of what it was to be Czech. Driven by the fear of the disappearance of Czech civilization, this movement created a mythical identity for the Czech people or, as Benedict Anderson refers to it, an imagined community.<sup>7</sup> In the absence of an established literature of Czech language plays, poems, and operas, the culturally-oriented Czechs of the National Revival period expended much energy in the creation of a modern repertory. In this enterprise, opera was seen as an all-encompassing art with its combination of language, drama, and music. *Libuše*, then, stands as one of the major cultural products of the National Revival.

The conception of this opera forms part of the cultural reawakening sweeping not only Bohemia, but also Slavic countries in general. The establishment of a high-quality vernacular operatic tradition became a pan-Slavic goal that took hold of not only the Czech lands, but also Russia and Poland. Operas such as Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* (1836) and later Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (1868-9), were infused with nationalist sentiment and fulfilled the need within Russia for the expression of Russian nationality. Czech vernacular opera began with the translation into Czech of popular German Singspiels and was superseded in the 1830s by a few works of popular character set to Czech-language librettos, for example František Škroup's *Libuše's Marriage*, 1835]. Musically, these operas were of a lower quality and they were not instilled with any of the nationalistic fervour that would be felt regarding *Libuše*.

Around 1862, Smetana, urged on by the pan-Slavic need for a distinguished vernacular national opera, decided to attempt to create a Czech repertoire of opera

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<sup>6</sup> A full account of the National Revival will be given in chapter one.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991): 6.

embedded with various aspects of Czech culture. Smetana is considered the ‘father of Czech opera’ not because he was the first composer to write an opera in Czech but because he established a wide-ranging, high-quality repertoire of Czech operas which could be used in the everyday Czech theatre. Smetana produced three types of opera: comic operas, ‘comic-romantic’ operas, and serious operas based on Czech history or myth. The peak of his output, *Libuše*, produces its intensely patriotic effect by presenting the historical subject matter in the context of a whole number of nationalist symbols, symbols with which the Czech people had already become familiar and with which they began to identify during the first half of the nineteenth century. Thus, the opera reaches the heights of the national myth-making plan as it sets *Libuše* up as a great cultural icon.

The fact that this majestic national and cultural Czech icon happens to be a woman is also significant. While the connection between gender and nation may at first seem implausible, most nations define themselves, in some way, through male or female images. One example is Germany with its conception of the nation as a fatherland. German mythology originated with a male god which was represented by the German oak tree, a symbol of strength and perseverance. The image of the fatherland became so ingrained in German society that, many years later, millions of Germans would die for that image. In contrast, France has used the image of a woman to celebrate the nation’s adherence to democracy. This is exemplified in Victor Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People* [1830]. Similarly, Russian identity, formed through Slavic mythology which originates with a female goddess rather than a male god, is exemplified through Mother Russia.



Czechs, with their need for separation from the occupying German-speaking people surrounding them, chose to identify themselves with the Slavic nations and with female images. To foster national consciousness, certain patriotic images were employed and often repeated as literary, artistic, and musical motifs. While images like the peaceful Czech countryside or stories about peasant life began to emerge as a means to distinguish the Czechs from the Germans, gender images also became part of the national myth-making process. Many Slavic nations were represented by the feminine lime tree (*lípa* in Czech, the word is a feminine noun in the Czech language), a symbol of life, and stood in direct opposition to the masculine German oak. This image of the lime tree was dispersed throughout Czech cultural works and became one of the central images in *Libuše*.<sup>8</sup> Libuše, a historical figure who founded Prague and brought into being the great beginnings of the Czech nation, became the feminine image that could separate the Czechs from the Germans.<sup>9</sup>

By examining the role of women in *Libuše*, it will be shown that gender plays an important nationalistic and symbolic role in this opera, not only in the inner workings of the plot, but ultimately, as the very embodiment of those ideal aspects of character and

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<sup>8</sup> The image was so strong that even in 1983, for the reopening of the newly constructed theatre, the setting was dominated by a stylized crown of a spreading lime tree.

<sup>9</sup> Many writers make mention of the unusually "pro-female" aspect in all of Czech opera. As John Tyrrell has remarked in his very important monograph of Czech opera, "Czech composers seem to have sought out and responded positively to opera librettos with women rulers, warrior women, resourceful, rescuing wives, and fiercely protective mothers or foster-mothers. Mothers in Czech nineteenth-century opera are more dominant and influential than fathers, wives more dominant than husbands, queens more charismatic than kings." See John Tyrrell, *Czech Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 6. Why did Czech composers respond so positively to librettos with strong female characters? Possibly, this question is unanswerable, however, it may be as Tyrrell suggests, that it is the contribution of Czech female librettists. On the other hand, it is also possible that the image of the female, which fortified the identity of the Czechs in opposition to the Germans, inspired Czech composers to choose strong female subjects. If the nation was identifying with the female, then why not composers too? Another aspect may be that it is also women who give life, literally, and for a nation seeking a "rebirth", the image of a woman certainly proves to be an inviting symbol.

personality that the National Revivalists wished to emphasize as representative of the Czech nation. To accomplish this task, the first part of the paper will investigate the idea of Czech nationalism itself – how the participants of the National Revival cultured and engineered a Czech identity. Chapter two will focus on Smetana's early career and his first three operas. Finally, chapter three will explore the connection between gender and nationalism and the history of the Libuše legend. This will be followed by discussion of the libretto and the music of Smetana's *Libuše* to illustrate how these images of nationalism and gender were fused to represent the spirit of the Czech nation.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### CREATING THE IMAGINED COMMUNITY

In order to understand Czech nationalism and how it plays out in *Libuše*, it is first necessary to examine the idea of nationalism and how it affected the political and artistic climate within Bohemia in the mid-nineteenth century. Benedict Anderson defines nation as “an imagined political community.”<sup>1</sup> With his emphasis upon imagination, Anderson’s definition differs from earlier writers for whom language and political boundaries were central to the concept of nationhood. Anderson’s book, originally published in 1983, formed a foundation on which other modern ideas of nationalism could be based. For example, Anthony D. Smith writes that “at best, the idea of the nation has appeared sketchy and elusive, at worst absurd and contradictory.”<sup>2</sup> Along the same lines, Peter F. Sugar asserts that “nationalism can be defined as an artificially fostered group feeling.”<sup>3</sup>

Robert B. Pynsent upholds a similar idea:

Nationalism presupposes the potential existence of a nation, most commonly in the minds of a small élite of nobles (Hungary, Poland) or intellectuals (Slovakia, Bulgaria)...nationalism is both ideology and mythology, for, in the modern nationalist’s mind the nation itself is a myth in the sense that it constitutes a narrative which explains the feeling of being closer to someone in one’s own cultural community than to someone in another.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991): 17.

<sup>3</sup> Peter F. Sugar, “Roots of Eastern European Nationalism,” in *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Peter F. Sugar and Ivo John Lederer (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994): 8.

<sup>4</sup> Robert B. Pynsent (ed.), *The Literature of Nationalism: Essays on East European Identity* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1996): 3-4.

Today, most scholars who write about nationalism concede that nationalism is an ideology which must be invented within each nation. Words such as “imagined,” “presupposed,” “mythologized,” or “artificially fostered” exemplify this formulation, one that is particularly true when considering Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century. Ernest Gellner, in his recent book, elaborates this point by explaining that in the absence of political states and national cultures, East European ethnic groups had to create their own modern identity:

In Eastern Europe, all in all, [during the nineteenth century] there were *neither* national states nor national cultures. In terms of our metaphor, neither groom nor bride was available. If the nationalist imperative – one state, one culture – was to be satisfied, and the passion for it in fact became very strong in the course of the nineteenth century, then both state and culture had to be created. Both political and cultural engineering were required.<sup>5</sup>

Inspired by ideas that emerged during the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the example of popular nationalism that took hold in the Americas, ethnic groups living under the Austrian-Hungarian empire in the late eighteenth century, such as the Poles, the Hungarians and the Czechs, began to create an identity for themselves in opposition to the authority that governed them. This development of a sense of national identity was a gradual process, not fully realized politically until after the First World War. The impetus for the expansion of nationalistic fervour was the Patent of Toleration passed by the enlightened despot, Joseph II, in 1781. Meant to consolidate and unify the many ethnicities within the empire, the patent made German the sole official language of state organs and of higher education. Non-German speakers, therefore, found themselves in a disadvantaged position, but it was a position that could be consciously recognized and



openly complained about under the new, more moderate enlightened reforms. The process by which these non-German speaking ethnic groups became independent nations is long, complicated, varied in each case and at times blurry. However, it was Joseph II's reforms that stimulated these groups to think about nation and culture, concepts which had had very little significance before this time and which would be developed according to the very different circumstances that existed within each ethnic group.

### The National Revival

Bohemia, situated in the center of Europe and populated mostly, though not exclusively, by Czechs, became one of the nations that had to "engineer" its politics and culture in the nineteenth century. Late eighteenth-century Czechs, who had been living under Imperial Austria for nearly 300 years, did not possess their own identity as an independent nation of people. Motivated by the reforms just mentioned, nationalism evolved and intensified in Bohemia during the so-called National Revival. Long dominated by German culture and art, the main aim of the Czech National Revival was the establishment of a cultural base that would guarantee the survival of Czech-speaking people. Key to this survival was the cultural and, ultimately, political separation of the Czech people from their German-speaking occupiers.

During its early stages, the National Revival was supported mainly by a small group of intellectuals who gradually started to think about and develop a sense of themselves as Czechs. These intellectuals were inspired by the German writer Johann Gottfried Herder

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<sup>5</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997): 54.



Figure 1: Europe in 1914, showing the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia as part of Austria-Hungary.

(1744-1803). His book, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* [Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man]<sup>6</sup>, significantly furthered the principle of nationalism and provided the basis on which Bohemians could “foster” their culture. Two of Herder’s ideas were seized upon by the early Czech revivalists and became the basis for their “invention” of a modern Czech identity. The first was his idea that language was the foundation of nationality and that it played the most important role in expressing national character. Based on this opinion, the revival of the Czech language became the first and most important preoccupation for the early Czech awakeners.

The second was Herder’s portrayal of the Slavic nations as a unified and common group with a peaceful and rural national character. This concept would be used by the

<sup>6</sup> For a recent edition of Herder’s work, see Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* [Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man] (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989).

revivalists to separate themselves from the Germans, seen by the Czechs as a more urban, more aggressive people. The magnitude of Herder's influence on this aspect of Czech character was enormous, as can be seen from Milada Součková's introduction to her monograph of the Czech Romantics:

Rare is it, in the history of ideas, that a few pages of a book become a message influencing the imagination and psychology of a whole nation. This chapter from Herder's *Ideas*, dedicated to the Slavs, in his philosophy of human history, produced such an effect on the Czech mind. The Czechs, oppressed by political absolutism and cultural Germanization, discovered in Herder a partisan, a promoter of their cause before the European audience. Portraying the Slavic character as peaceful and rustic, and therefore a prey to Germanic aggressiveness, Herder brought forward an inclusive ideological argument to support the Czech grievance against Germanization. The Czechs also adopted Herder's equalitarian and humanitarian ideal as an article in defense of their national claims. They found in Herder's description of the Slavic character a pleasant picture of themselves; and his presentation of their Slavic past stirred their imagination.<sup>7</sup>

### Language

"Once one starts thinking about nationality in terms of continuity, few things seem as historically deep-rooted as languages, for which no dated origins can ever be given."<sup>8</sup> People within the large, polyglot states of nineteenth-century Europe had thought of certain languages (first Latin, then French, English, Spanish, or German) as 'civilized languages' from the time of the Middle Ages. It was not until the late eighteenth century that they began to regard 'uncivilized' vernaculars with respect. By the early nineteenth century, vernacular languages began to assert themselves more forcefully and to provide the impetus for specific national regions to detach themselves from the larger, dynastic

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<sup>7</sup> Milada Součková, *The Czech Romantics* (Netherlands: Mouton & Co., 1958): 14.

states. Educated people, leading the new nationalist movements, began to ask centralizing authorities for an explanation as to why they could not speak their 'own' languages. The vernacular languages were seen as having been buried and asleep for generations under foreign rule and now had to be reawakened. The idea of sleep "permitted those intelligentsias and bourgeoisies who were becoming conscious of themselves as Czechs, Hungarians, or Finns to figure their study of Czech, Magyar, or Finnish languages, folklores, and musics as 'rediscovering' something deep-down always known."<sup>9</sup>

The Czech language thus became the ideological and political centre of Czech nationalism. This is not surprising considering the connection that the Czech language literally establishes between the family and the nation. This idea, described by the Czech Protestant bishop and Bible translator, Jan Blahoslav (1523-71), was embraced by the revivalists as a "rediscovery" of the connection between family and nation inherent in the Czech language itself, a point stressed in a recent study devoted to Blahoslav's work:

The words *rod* [family] and *národ* [nation] come from *naroditi se* [to be born], but the distinction between the two words must be made clear. *Rod* is someone's family, i.e. blood relations, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, etc. [...] But the word *národ* has a broader meaning, for it signifies a country, or a large body of people living in a country or using one language. Thus we say the German *národ*, *die deutsche Nation*, the Turkish, Jewish, Saracen *národ*, etc.<sup>10</sup>

Here, a Czech verb and the nouns associated with it, literally link the ideas of family, nation, and birth.

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<sup>8</sup> Anderson, 196.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, 196.

<sup>10</sup> Mirek Čejka, Dušan Šloar, Jana Nechutová (eds.), *Gramatika česká Jana Blahoslava* (Brno: 1991): 264-265.

As mentioned previously, by the end of the eighteenth century, Czech was the language of only the peasantry in Bohemia. The disappearance of the Czech language, seen as a real possibility, compelled later Czech revivalists to push for education, administration and literature in the Czech language. However, many early Czech awakeners, educated in German, wrote their accounts of the Czech language in German, not only because they were more familiar with German as a written language, but also because German was the language that would be widely-read by other intellectuals. Count František Josef Kinský (1739-1805) was one of the first Czechs to publish a defense of the Czech language in 1773. He has stated, “as a good descendant of Slavs I have inherited the prejudice that if the mother tongue of a Frenchman is French and of a German, German, then for a Czech the mother tongue must also be Czech.”<sup>11</sup> Kinský’s pamphlet was written more from a pedagogical viewpoint than a patriotic one. However, his ideas bore fruit with the Catholic priest Josef Dobrovský (1753-1829), who in his *Geschichte der böhmischen Sprache und ältern Literatur* [History of Czech Language and Literature, 1792], produced the first systematic history of the Czech language and its literature. Later, in 1835-39, came Josef Jungmann’s significant five-volume Czech-German dictionary. These early publications, written more as scientific and philosophical studies within a German linguistic theatre, were milestones in the long march toward the rebirth of the Czech nation. They serve as the starting point for the periodicals, newspapers, compiled grammars and dictionaries in Czech, the establishment of Czech cultural institutions and a modern Czech literature. Czech nationalists wished to revive Czech culture through a linguistic and literary rebirth in which the Czech vernacular

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

language was transformed into a refined medium for nationally-oriented literature. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Czechs did not possess a single example of modern literature written in the Czech language.

Works like K. H. Mácha's *Máj* [May], K. J. Erben's *Kytice z pověstí národních* [A Garland of National Tales], and Božena Němcová's *Babička* [The Grandmother] provided the foundations for a sophisticated Czech literature. Central to the writers' works was a representation of the Czech people or folk (*lid*). It is in these works that Herder's idea of the Slav character is elaborated. Because it was the peasants, rural people connected to the land, who spoke Czech, the urban intellectuals of the National Revival naturally linked themselves to this rustic view of Slavic character. The cultivation of the folk was in large part an imagined construct by the urban intellegentsia, but this construct, over time, became a central aspect of Czech nationalism.

Writers like Ján Kollár and Pavel Šafařík, both actually Slovaks, firmly instituted Slavism as a significant part of the modern Czech identity. Šafařík's major work was a reconstruction of the ancient history of the Slav people, *Slovanské starožitnosti* [Slav Antiquities, 1836-37], published and popularized by Matice česká, a fund supporting publication of Czech scholarly and scientific literature. Kollár's seminal work of Czech literature was the pan-Slavic cycle *Slávy dcera* [Sláva's Daughter, 1824]. This widely-read book created some of the main images that would be developed as quintessentially Czech, for example, the lime tree as national symbol.



Figure 2: Josef Mánes's drawing *Lullaby* from his cycle *Music* (1855).

Art was another important component of the establishment of the ideal, rural, Slavic Czech identity, as can be seen in the paintings and drawings of Josef Mánes (see Figure 2). As with patriotic writers, one of the key motifs for painters of the nineteenth century was the representation of the contented Czech countryside.<sup>12</sup> Mánes and others have been celebrated for consistently and constantly dedicating themselves to the representation of the timeless Czech landscape. Karel B. Mádl's biography of Mikoláš Aleš, another

<sup>12</sup> The Academy of Fine Arts, originally founded by the Society of Patriotic Friends of Art in 1799, was gradually transformed into a center for national art throughout the nineteenth century. Some of the major figures of the so-called "Generation of the National Theater" artists include Josef Mánes, Mikoláš Aleš, František Ženíšek, Vojtěch Hynais and Julius Mařák. Josef Mánes's paintings featured Bohemian and Moravian peasants wearing embroidered, local costumes. His ornamental calendar disk for the centuries-old astronomical clock on the Old Town Hall, painted in 1866, sentimentally portrays the agricultural year. As well, his 1855 cycle of drawings entitled *Musica* is a celebration of the nation's folk music traditions. Aleš was highly involved in the creation of the artwork for the National Theatre which included paintings based on folk life but also events and scenes from Czech history which had recently been reinvented as part of the national myth.

important artist for the National Revival, is dedicated to illustrating the folk aspect that had been created and attached to Czech people. Written near the end of the nation's political struggle for independence, this book provides an excellent example of the National Revivalists quest for a Czech identity expressed in visual terms:

Aleš comes from the people, that is from the countryside, from the region which we call South Bohemia not merely in the geographical but in the ethnic and ethical sense. The country is here as it were an opposite pole to the big city . . . , whose cultural plentitude is nourished almost entirely by the healthy blood of the choice influx from the countryside . . . Aleš's birthplace Mirovice is a town, but one of those in which the farmer has not yet been transformed into a burgher, where work is often half crafts and half in the fields, where the waves of the peasant countryside lap the town square. Mirovice is also a South Bohemian small town in that it is entirely Czech in its surroundings, undisturbed by any foreign elements. Sixty and fifty years ago, Mirovice was an old-world little town where life went on evenly and quietly, if not always contentedly, from century to century. Everything disquieting and dangerous, which was usually short-lived, arrived from outside and abroad; and here also everything foreign became something out of the ordinary, disturbing and conspicuous, be it a squadron of cuirassiers or a gypsy caravan.<sup>13</sup>

The representation of Czech people as contented villagers gave the Czech public a rustic and Slavic view of themselves. Further symbols, which would be tied up with the Czech identity, were provided by history.

### History

As Benedict Anderson explains, one very important feature of an imagined community is the strong connection established with its past. "Nations have no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural. Because there is no Originator, the nation's biography cannot be written evangelically, 'down time,' through a long procreative chain of begettings. The only alternative is to fashion it 'up



time' – towards Peking Man, Java Man, King Arthur, wherever the lamp of archaeology casts its fitful gleam."<sup>14</sup> Czechs also wished to form some sort of coherent and chronological line in their past which would culminate in the National Revival. In other words, all past events would be seen as precursors to the drive for independence in the nineteenth century. Czechs began to write their nation's biography during the late eighteenth century when history was just becoming a serious form of scholarship. The subject of history itself, at this time, was considered a long narrative of former great events and rulers. "The nation's biography snatches . . . exemplary suicides, poignant martyrdoms, assassinations, executions, wars, and holocausts."<sup>15</sup> It was at this time that Czechs began to look at their past and they recognized the great deeds of those before them as their own.

František Palacký (1798-1876) is the main figure involved in the creation, dispersion and popularization of the Czech past. Distinguished as the "Father of the Nation," his *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě* was undoubtedly the most influential work of the nineteenth century for the Czechs. Palacký's goal, as he formulated it, was to "awaken the nation by giving it a mirror in which to recognize itself."<sup>16</sup> His systematic historical campaign produced a Czech history that established clear links between nineteenth-century Czechs and those before them. As nineteenth-century Czechs read about their nation's past and taught their children this history, the series of events became part of a family history – the Czech family history.<sup>17</sup> This history, written in the

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<sup>13</sup> Karel B. Mádl, *Mikoláš Aleš* (Prague: SVU Mánes, 1912): 13-15.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, 205.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, 206.

<sup>16</sup> Sayer, 63.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson, 201.

nineteenth century, is almost entirely conceived in direct correlation to the Czech nation's history of rivalry and association with the Germanic nations.<sup>18</sup> Future Czech scholars like Josef Šusta, Josef Pekař and Josef Žemlička followed Palacký's tradition and even today Czech history is generally formulated from the same basic ideas that Palacký employed in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> This perspective understands Czech nationalism to be a result of its relationship of conflict with and assimilation by the German nations:

The chief content and basic feature of the whole history of Bohemia-Moravia is . . . the continual association and conflict of Slavdom with Romandom and Germandom. . . . And because Romandom had no direct contacts with the Czechs themselves but almost entirely through Germandom, we may also say that Czech history as a whole is based chiefly on conflict with Germandom, or on the acceptance and rejection of German customs and laws by the Czechs. . . . [It is] a struggle waged not only on the borders but in the interior of Bohemia, not only against

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<sup>18</sup> Joseph F. Zacek, "Nationalism in Czechoslovakia," in *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Peter F. Sugar and Ivo John Lederer (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994): 170.

<sup>19</sup> The following is a brief summary of Czech history as it was understood in the nineteenth century: The foundation of modern Czech nationalism is rooted in its history and politics from the fifteenth century. The Hussite revolution formed part of the politico-religious reformation that took hold of the whole of Europe in the late fourteenth century. Germanic lands within the Holy Roman Empire had been divided amongst mostly German princes who vowed allegiance to the new Holy Roman Emperor. In Bohemia, Prague University became an early centre for a reform movement led by Jan Hus (1369-1415). By 1409, the Czechs had successfully gained voting rights over the Bavarians, Saxons and Poles. In the towns, Czech artisans began to demand increased rights from the German nobility. As German-Catholic townsmen began to flee from religious persecution, the populations of towns became increasingly Czech and eventually, a Czech bourgeoisie was developed. Vernacular Czech was enriched through literary expression, church services, and finally royal and municipal state offices. When Jan Hus was executed as a heretic in Constance in 1415, the Czech people's national pride became so inflamed they began a twenty-year war against the German-Catholic intruders. They were opposing both Catholicism and German aggression. The entire Hussite experience had an important, galvanizing effect upon the growth of Czech national consciousness.

The Battle of Lipany (1434; the Hussites were defeated) and the death of the last native Czech king (George of Poděbrady) in 1471 signalled the end of the nationalist momentum that had been built in the Czech consciousness. For the next 150 years, the Czech nation was ruled by foreign dynasties, the nobility forced the peasantry into serfdom, and German authority re-entered the land. In 1526, the Habsburg rulers again encouraged the use of the German language in administration and among the aristocracy. Finally in 1620, the Catholic Habsburg monarchy won the decisive Battle on White Mountain, forcing the exile and emigration of a quarter of the nobility, a quarter of the bourgeoisie and the majority of the Czech intelligentsia. Their estates were given to foreigners and an increasing amount of Germans began to settle throughout the Czech lands to make up for the huge population losses during the war and exile. Prague became a "German" city; Catholicism became the only religion; the Jesuits destroyed all indications of the Hussite movement; and German soon became the sole language of the nobility and the bourgeoisie, while Czech was taught to the servants and peasants.

foreigners but among native inhabitants, not only with sword and shield but with spirit and word, laws and customs, openly and covertly, with enlightened zeal and blind passion, leading not only to victory or subjection but also to reconciliation.<sup>20</sup>

It was with this idea as the foundation that Czechs built their identity during the National Revival.<sup>21</sup> The Czech national consciousness was created and strengthened through language, literature, art, and music which became invested with the sentimental glow of nationalist feeling. Images of historical leaders, the past glories of the state, a country with a mature and long-ranging literature, a peaceful Czech folk countryside with its own distinct traditions - these were all systematically engaged and received by a receptive Czech community.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the revival of Czech culture and national consciousness had again been rekindled. With the revolution of 1848, a political aspect was added to Czech nationalism. In addition to writing, the Czech intellectuals entered the political arena and the leadership of the Czech national movement was from now on energetically pursued by the middle class. The main success of this uprising was the removal of serfdom. With this change, more and more peasants began to move to towns, and Prague slowly became a predominantly Czech-speaking city by the end of the century.

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<sup>20</sup> František Palacký, *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě* (Prague: Kvasnička a Hampl, 1939): I, Part I, 12-13.

<sup>21</sup> It was also this sense of history that led Smetana to open his very first opera with the following words. "Já ale pravím: Nelze déle, tu trpěti cizácké sbory. Už potřebí se chopit zbraně, a vyhnat z vlasti Branibory, již hubí zem, náš jazyk tupí, pod jejichž mečem národ úpí!" (But I say this: we can no longer tolerate foreign hordes here. We must now take up arms and drive the Brandenburgers from our homeland. They are destroying our country, blunting our language and under their sword the nation suffers!). Translation taken from Tyrrell, I.

After the 1848 revolution, an important change occurred within the Czech intelligentsia. It became divided into two separate and opposing groups, hampered by the political reforms that all Czechs had hoped for. The two groups became known as the *staročeši* [Old Czechs] and *mladočeši* [Young Czechs]. The Old Czechs were characterized as the ‘feudal-clerical’ party. They were represented by the wealthier classes with extensive amounts of property and they maintained strong association with the German-speaking part of Prague. The Young Czechs were the free thinkers, the party of artists, journalists, and men of letters. They were a much more aggressive group that resented the slow-moving political manipulations employed by the Old Czechs. Debates ensued in pamphlets and newspapers but it was the Old Czechs, represented mainly by F. L. Rieger and Palacký, who embarked on a political struggle in the Austrian Reichsrat. Despite their efforts, the Austrian politicians largely ignored them. As Bradley points out. “in the 1860s and 1870s, when Rieger was the leader and the Old Czech Party was dominant, political protests were few and far between; but even then they assumed a cultural form.”<sup>22</sup> Frustrated by the actions of the Old Czechs, the Young Czechs became more militant and eventually sparked a serious rift between the German-speaking and Czech-speaking people of Bohemia. Czech political independence would have to wait until the end of the First World War.

### The Dream of a National Theatre

As nationalist feeling grew in Bohemia, Czech revivalists realized that in order to highlight and advance Czech art, they needed their own *chrám umění* [shrine of art]. During the 1840s, demands increased for a Czech theatre where Czech plays and

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<sup>22</sup> John J. N. Bradley, *Czech Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century*, East European Monographs (New

compositions could be performed. The idea to build a permanent theatre began in the autumn of 1844 at patriotic gatherings in Prague. Officially, it was initiated with a request for an independent Czech theatre put before the Committee of the Estates of the Czech Parliament by Palacký in 1845. As Czech citizens developed a sense of patriotic duty, funds were raised by the state (through the Bohemian Provincial Council) to build a Provisional Theatre in 1862. This theatre was meant for Czechs alone and it stood at the centre of the development of Czech opera and drama for the next twenty years. The theatre was “provisional” in that the Czechs planned an even bigger project, that of the National Theatre; this was finally opened with great ceremonial celebrations in 1881.

The building of the National Theatre became the most significant focus of national endeavour from the 1860s onwards. The Provisional Theatre provided the opportunity for a permanent Czech ensemble (drama, opera, and ballet) with a repertory of new and translated works in Czech but the National Theatre still stands as the greatest achievement of the Czech National Revival as it was built through private fund-raising by Czechs throughout the Czech nation. As Sayer comments, “money was given by rich and poor from the largest to the smallest and most remote settlements across Bohemia and Moravia, a point of national pride (and a powerful means of welding these places *into* a self-conscious nation).”<sup>23</sup> The building of the theatre was completed throughout the 1860s and 1870s but was hindered by the inexperience of the organizers and tactics of the obstructive Austrian authorities. Interestingly enough, when the theatre burned down in 1881, the ease with which the money was raised and the quick pace with which the

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York: Columbia University Press, 1984): 17-18.

<sup>23</sup> Sayer, 102.

theatre was rebuilt reflect the growing affluence and national consciousness of the Czech community.

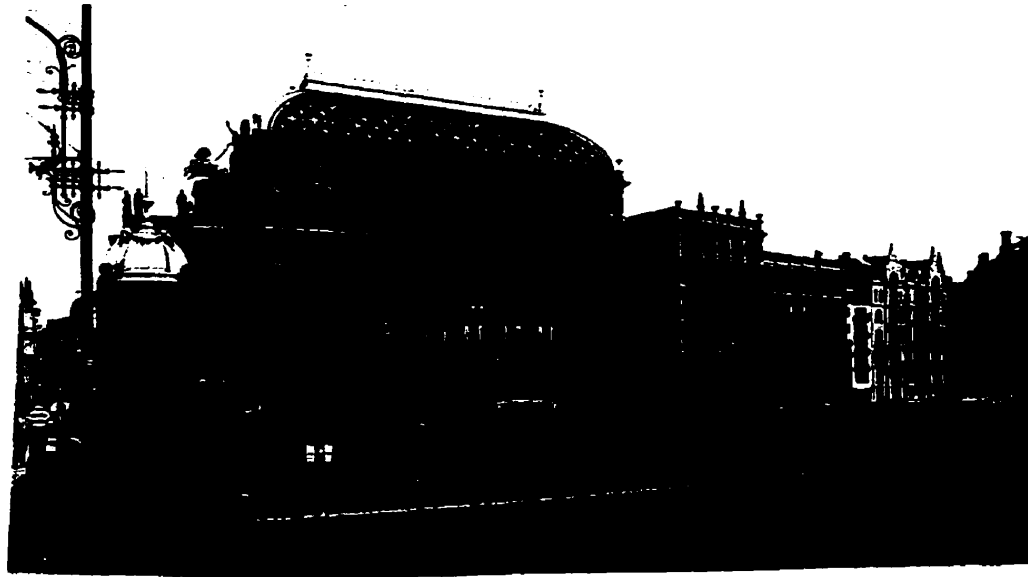


Figure 3: The National Theatre in Prague.

The National Theatre stands as a physical monument representing the new conception of Czech identity. Its motto, presented above the main stage, reads *Národ sobě* [The nation to itself]. The ceremonial laying of its foundation stone on May 16, 1868, was an occasion for a nation-wide celebration. Today, the main foyer of the re-built theatre is decorated with fourteen paintings entitled “Our Country.” These paintings represent key moments in Czech history, moments which had been used to rekindle national pride throughout the early parts of the National Revival. As Tyrrell points out, “where other nations expressed their nationhood in the adulation of the monarchy or the military, or in the obeisance to a flag, a constitution or ‘la gloire’, the Czechs celebrated their nationhood in operatic rituals staged at the National Theatre.”<sup>24</sup> The National Theatre

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<sup>24</sup> Tyrrell, 9.

represents an almost sacred place for Czech people, one where they can express the feelings and goals for the nation in their own language and in an art - music - that they consider a central part of their being.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SMETANA'S EARLY OPERAS

#### Czech Music Before Smetana

In addition to literature, art, and history, music, especially opera, was an important source of Czech national consciousness raising and debate in the mid-nineteenth century. The Czechs have a time-honoured and respected musical tradition. Their proximity to Vienna allowed musicians to follow developments there, and skilled Czech musicians performed throughout Europe, contributing to the establishment of the Classical style. As Tyrrell explains, with an absence of strong artistic role models in the early stages of the National Revival, musicians provided a focus for early Czech national pride:

With no gallant political folk heroes, and no writers or painters of international standing, the Czechs could at least boast of their musicians. . . . at a local level the humble musician-teacher, the village schoolmaster or kantor, inspired affection and gratitude for keeping Czech culture alive at the lowest ebb of the nation's fortunes. Playwrights, librettists and composers fondly contributed to depict Czech musicians at work, a recognition of their preeminence in national hagiography.<sup>1</sup>

Part of the creation of the Czech national identity was the fostering of the idea that Czechs were innately musical. In Smetana's opera *Dalibor*, the jailer Beneš asks, 'what Czech does not love music?' Encouraged by the notion that part of their Czech identity was a high affinity to music, choral societies for amateurs gained immense popularity in the 1860s both as organizations of high musical standard and also as pretexts for meeting and singing texts in Czech with nationalist sentiments.



At the beginning of the nineteenth century, opera in Bohemia was a competition between the Italians and Germans. The main theatre in Prague at this time was the Estates Theatre which ran two opera companies: a German company that performed plays and simple Singspiels, and an Italian opera company. In 1807, the Italian company disbanded and the theatre focused solely on German opera. Under the direction of Carl Maria von Weber (1813-1816), the theatre was significantly improved and reorganized on German models. Czech language productions were sometimes performed, however they were often translations of other works. Some Czech operas were written and performed during this time as well. These include František Škroup's singspiel *Dráteník* [The Tinker, 1825] and his serious work *Libušín sňatek* [Libuše's Marriage, 1835] as well as František Kott's singspiel *Žižkův dub* [Žižka's Oak, 1841]. These works set the foundation for original operatic works in the Czech language, however they were exceptions within the composer's repertoires. For the most part, they still composed in German and the operas were still based on the model of the German singspiel.

### The Opera Competition

Along with the construction of the Provisional Theatre and the plans to build the National Theatre, there was a need for original compositions in Czech. In 1861, the Czech nationalist Count Jan Harrach announced a competition in the music magazine *Dalibor* for the best Czech historical and comic operas. His wish was that the winning opera would be played at the opening of the Provisional Theatre.

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<sup>1</sup> John Tyrrell, 8.

There is no nation who loves song and music in greater measure and at the same time could prove themselves with a treasure of genuine songs and delightful melodies than the Slav in general, and the Czech in particular.

... I want to encourage the composition of Czech National Opera, and therefore announce two prizes, each of six hundred gulden, for the two best two-act scores, and two prizes, each of two hundred gulden, for the best Czech texts to these. The first of these operas is to be based on the history of the Czech people; the second should be of gay content and taken from the national life of the people of Bohemia, Moravia or Silesia.

The composers are free to choose their texts and their librettists so that each can work out, in collaboration with his own poet, his own treatment. It is not necessary to remind the entrants that the selected plot must be simple but sufficiently dramatic, at the same time rich in lyric and pathetic moments so that there can be an adequate basis for song and music. The characters should be lightly drawn and well contrasted; the verses must be fluent and singable; rhythm and form moulded to the mood and situation; the diction should be poetic, natural, easy and correct and the whole content imaginative, emotional and above all musical.

Concerning music and song, I stipulate that the opera shall be based on a diligent study of the national songs of the Czech and Slovak peoples. The music must have a real national identity. The chorus in gay operas should not cause boredom among the audience, but rather a vivid reflection of national songs which stimulate a lively interest. In gay operas national dances may also be introduced to advantage. To what extent historical operas employ old chorales as themes for the chorus is left to the discretion of the composer according to his chosen plot.

A basic condition is that the composer should by birth belong to the lands of the Czech Crown. The composition, text and music should be delivered at the latest on September 30, 1862, to my address in Prague. On the first page should appear a motto which at the same time should be written on the envelope of a letter in which is sealed the name of the poet and the composer, his position and address. Manuscripts and compositions not awarded a prize will be returned by means of this motto. The jury that will make the decision for the successful composition and the best text will be called together officially and announced at a later date. The poet whose text will be recognized by the jury to be the best will receive a premium even if the musical setting is not awarded a prize, and he will be free to do as he wishes with his text. The prize-winning opera shall remain the exclusive property of the composer with one condition that the first performance shall be given in a Prague theatre. And so I invite my dear compatriots, wherever they may be, to participate enthusiastically in this Czech enterprise – to produce a real national work that will glorify the Czechs!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Count Jan Harrach, "Vypsání cen za nejlepší dvě české opery a naležitě k nim texty" [Competition for the two best operas and their respective texts], trans. Brian Large *Dalibor* 4 (1861): 45.

To apply such requirements to a work of art seems artificial and unnatural at first glance, but it must be remembered that before this competition there were virtually no Czech models for opera. The prerequisites declared by Count Harrach reveal the priorities that Czechs set for their opera. First, Harrach reminds us that there is no other nation that loves music to the same extent as the Czech nation. As before, the pride that Czechs feel for their musicality is evidenced. The composer must be born in the Czech lands which assumes that he would have had some contact with the Czech language and the libretto must of course be written in Czech. He, then, states that one opera must be based on the history of the Czech people and one should be taken from the national life of the people. As previously stated, Czech nationalism was based on a renewal of the faith in their history and the glorious deeds of their past as well as a strong belief in their rustic, folk characteristics. It is no surprise that Harrach wished to illustrate these factors in the opera. Seen from the perspective of Gellner, Harrach was the ideal social engineer. His competition and his ideas for inspiring nationalism were meant to develop a history and foundation for Czech art.

In the third paragraph, Harrach's comments become much more generalized. He is basically describing a standard operatic form used in German and Italian opera for decades. His specifications become more particular when he refers to the use of the national songs of the Czech and Slovak people. He states that the music must have a "real national identity" from which we may infer that the composer must incorporate the Czech folk song into the work. As well, the chorus should reflect national songs with "lively interest" and national dances should be introduced in the comic operas. From Harrach's statement, it seems that in order to produce a Czech original opera, it was necessary to

include the national songs of the people, the folk. No other part of this message reflects any particularly “Czech” condition. This is understandable when we consider the basis of Harrach’s nationalism, idea widely shared at the time. It was the peasants who kept the Czech language alive during the Germanizing years of the Habsburg regime. Also, as previously mentioned, Herder and other romantics exalted art forms that used folk songs, folk mythology, and national history as their poetic models. How could composers glorify the Czechs, as required by Harrach? They could write about the rustic, “natural”, Czech-speaking peasants and through them, the great history of the Czechs.

What became of this competition and Harrach’s requirements? For the answer we must now turn to the central player in this drama: the composer.

### Smetana’s Early Career

Smetana was born in 1824 in a small east Bohemian town called Litomyšl. His father was a brewer, an amateur musician, and thereby a respectable member of the middle class. As with most middle-class children of the time, Smetana was educated in German. Although Smetana could understand Czech, he did not have occasion to cultivate his knowledge of it, and he did not know the Czech grammatical system. Smetana’s early vocal works were written in German, he kept his diary in German, he wrote to his wife and her family in German, and two of his most overtly nationalist operas, *Dalibor* and *Libuše*, were written to texts originally written in German. In one letter that he wrote in 1860 to a good Czech friend, he apologized for his mistakes in grammar and spelling:

I would ask you to excuse my mistakes both in spelling and grammar, of which you will certainly see plenty, for up to the present I have not had the good fortune to perfect myself in our mother tongue. Educated from my

youth in German, both at school and in society, I took no care...and to my shame I must confess I cannot express myself adequately or write correctly in Czech . . . But I am Czech, body and soul, and I am not ashamed to assure you, albeit imperfectly in my native tongue, for I am proud to show that my homeland means more to me than anything else.<sup>3</sup>

Smetana also spent approximately five years in Sweden (1856-1861) where his contact with the Czech language was very minimal. It was not until the 1860s that Smetana made the conscious decision to use Czech in his personal and professional life. Even then, he continued to make grammatical mistakes for the rest of his life.



Figure 4: Bedřich Smetana in 1866.

Smetana's musical education began with his father who instructed him about rhythm; he also learned to play the violin at a very young age. By the time he was five he was

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in František Bartoš, *Smetana ve vzpomínkách a dopisech* [Smetana in reminiscences and letters],

able to lead a Haydn string quartet and at the age of 6, he appeared for the first time as a concert pianist. His first teacher was Jan Chmelík, who introduced him to the French operatic music that was popular at the time. After studying in Prague for a year, he finished his schooling in Plzeň. Smetana was introduced to both German and Czech traditions of music during his schooldays. These included Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Liszt, but also light virtuoso piano music, military band music, and popular dance music. In 1843, he settled in Prague where he received training in music ranging from Bach to Berlioz. In 1849, Smetana married Kateřina Kolářová and they had four daughters. Despite his fine musical grounding and several (mostly instrumental) compositions, it was difficult for him to earn a living as an unknown musician in Prague at this time. As well, there was little opportunity for the expression of nationalistic ideas in the 1850s. The reactionary administration of Prague, controlled by the Bach regime, became a city in which the arts were strictly controlled. As a result, Smetana took an offer to work in Sweden. He stayed for approximately five years and this would be the only time in his life that he would work outside of Bohemia.<sup>4</sup> These five years gave Smetana the opportunity to mature as a composer in a much freer environment.

When Smetana returned to Prague from Göteborg, he “seemed to be obsessed with a mission to establish a musical life that was Czech in language and spirit.”<sup>5</sup> With a lifting of the restrictions of the Bach regime, the political conditions in Prague had undergone some change. Czech cultural organizations had begun to flourish and construction had begun on a permanent Czech opera house. Smetana felt that this was a time of great

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trans. Daphne Rusbridge (Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury, hudby a umění, 1954): 54.

<sup>4</sup> John Tyrrell, “Bedřich Smetana,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London, 1992): Vol. 4, 418-19.

possibilities for Czech music, and he returned to Prague to found a musical institute and take an appointment as chorus master to the Hlahol Choral Society. The chorale *Kdož jste Boží bojovníci* [Ye who are God's Warriors] was performed during his first concert. This chorale was an important Hussite revolutionary hymn and Smetana's use of this chorale shows that he keenly supported the glorification of the Czech past in music. Smetana's reputation as a composer was little known in Prague at this time. As a result, he wished to make his plans for the musical life of Prague known to the general public. He began to write in various magazines about the two issues that most concerned him: the low standard of musical life in Prague and the need to struggle for the recognition of Czech music. His article in *Slavoj* on October 1, 1862 illustrates his conviction:

If I have set myself the task of bringing concert life here, which as regards programmes and execution is to proclaim a striving after the preservation of the sacred rights of art, yet I am far from attempting to set myself up as a reformer . . . I am simply making a beginning. . . . The programmes I suggest are to include masterpieces by heroes of every nation, but particular attention will be given to the works of Slavonic composers. And rightly so. Have works by Russian, Polish or Southern Slav composers ever been heard in Prague? I hardly think so. Indeed, it is a rarity to meet one of our own people's names in our programmes . . . As a Czech I arrange Czech concerts. Surely we Czechs are allowed to have our own concerts. Or is the Czech public not fit for this? I think our reputation as a musical nation is sufficiently old and well known to justify this. As for me, I am merely making a beginning!<sup>6</sup>

His articles continued in *Národní Listy* (an important political magazine) and he had many followers as well as a large number of enemies who resisted his radicalism and his desire for change.

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<sup>5</sup> Brian Large, *Smetana* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970: 121.

### Smetana's Early Operas

The creation of a truly Czech opera and Czech repertoire formed the most public focus of Czech cultural aspirations. It was with this in mind that Smetana composed his eight nationalistic operas in a variety of genres, all embodying different aspects of Czech culture. With the opening of the Provisional Theatre and the announcement of Harrach's competition, Smetana became determined to write a large dramatic work for the stage. As previously mentioned, he had virtually no model for this.

The libretto he chose for his first opera, by Karel Sabina, was based on Czech medieval history – *Braniboři v Čechách* [The Brandenburgers in Bohemia, 1862-3]. The story begins in 1278 when the Bohemian king, Přemysl Otakar II, died. The land was left to his widow, Queen Kunhata, and her young son. Unable to halt the advances of her husband's murderer, Rudolf of Habsburg, she enlisted the help of Otto V, Margrave of Brandenburg. Rather than bringing help, the Brandenburgers began a campaign of death and destruction, including holding the Queen and her son captive in Bezděz castle. The plot met one of the expectations for a Czech work of art described by Harrach, i.e. it must be based on Czech history. In addition to this, the libretto clearly announces that the Czechs should rid their land of foreigners and establish their own national independence, a goal not only for the Bohemians of the thirteenth century but also for the Czechs of the nineteenth. Obviously, the plight of the Bohemians can easily be applied to the Czech revival of the nineteenth century. The hatred of the foreigner (especially the German foreigner), the glorification of the Czech past, and the victory of a member of the peasant

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Large, 129.



class over the nobility are all traits of the new mythologized identity of the Czechs. It appealed to Czech audiences as well and Smetana's first opera was an immediate success.

The choice of plot for *Braniboři v Čechách* fulfilled the requirements set out by Harrach. But what about the music? As indicated before, Harrach demanded the actual quotation of Czech folk song and dance within the work. From the outset, Smetana maintained that he could not subscribe to note-for-note quotation of folk melody. In the symphonic poems that he had written previously (*Wallenstein's Camp* and *Hakon Jarl*) he had deliberately avoided the use of native folk elements. In a discussion with František Rieger, director of the Provisional Theatre, he argued that an opera based on Czech folksongs would be a mere collection of songs, a potpourri, and not a unified artistic whole. He also defended his position in several of his *Národní listy* articles: "Imitating the melodic curves and rhythms of our folksongs will not create a national style let alone any dramatic truth – at the most only a pale imitation of the songs themselves."<sup>7</sup> As a result, Smetana's *Brandenburgers* does not contain any Czech folk songs. In fact, the music relies more heavily on the French and Italian traditions of opera. The work includes moments of Italian cabaletta, a revolutionary scene that points to the influence of the French grand opera (further illustrated by a non-essential ballet), a responsorial chorus in the French tradition, and a standard Italianate finale.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, the Czech public loved the work and the opera took first prize in Harrach's competition, although several critics objected to the final decision. To explain this, we must consider the politics of the time. As previously stated, Czech politics

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<sup>7</sup> Otakar Hostinský, *Bedřich Smetana a jeho boj o moderní českou hudbu* [Smetana and his struggle for modern Czech music] (Prague, 1901, 2/1941): 112.

<sup>8</sup> Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, 72.

became divided into two factions in the mid-nineteenth century - the Old Czechs and the Young Czechs. Musically, the debate took on the same dimensions and Smetana placed himself squarely within the Young Czech camp. On the other side were musicians and administrators who made most of the decisions regarding musical life in Prague. These included František Rieger, Jan Nepomuk Maýr (conductor of the Provisional Theatre before and after Smetana), and Harrach himself. For the Old Czechs, folksong became a catchword for what they considered to be an opera with truly national character. Of course, Smetana and his followers maintained that other, more artistic ways of suggesting national character existed. As John Tyrrell writes, “the politics of Czech opera polarized more openly here than on any issue and had the effect of charging with crucial importance something that might otherwise have remained purely a matter of artistic choice for the composer.”<sup>9</sup> As a result, several members of the Old Czech party considered Smetana’s *Brandenburgers* to be of an *avant garde* style that resembled Wagner and avoided Bohemian folk melody. Maýr thought the opera was too advanced with overuse of dissonant harmony and too complex of a plot. Count Harrach’s committee found that the vocal writing and the counterpoint were weak and they considered the subject insufficiently national. Political bias forced the Old Czech party to disregard Smetana’s work, however they could not deny that it was a box office success.

Smetana’s next work *Prodaná Nevěsta* [The Bartered Bride], a comic opera, fulfilled both the critics’ and the public’s expectations. Today, it is still the most popular Czech opera by Smetana within the Czech Republic and outside of it. The reasons for this point to the fact that the work again takes on many of the traits connected to the “folk”. First of

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<sup>9</sup> Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, 209.

all, its setting is a Czech village and the characters all fulfill the role of rustic, natural peasants. The music also contains folk-like features including a dudy [bagpipe]-like drone in the opening chorus, an occasional pentatonic colour in the melody, and a polka, furiant, and skočná (Czech national dances).

This work has often been called “quintessential Czechness” by Czech and foreign authors. This may be due, in part, to the writings that emerged about Smetana at the end of the nineteenth century and continued into the mid-twentieth century. After Smetana’s death, two writers supported Smetana as the founder and father of Czech music. They saw him as a life-long sufferer who spent nearly his whole career in Bohemia with the single purpose of advancing Czech opera. These writings, like revivalist writings of the mid-nineteenth century about the Czech past, looked at Smetana as a key figure in the creation of Czech national consciousness. In this way, Smetana himself became a part of the Czech myth.

Zdeňek Nejedlý [1878-1962] was an influential music historian and teacher. He aggressively championed Smetana and the patriotic aspects of Smetana’s music. The evolution of Czech music, according to him, advanced through Smetana, Fibich, Foerster, and Ostrčil while other figures including Dvořák, Janáček, Suk and Novák were ignored or severely criticized. Otakar Hostinský (1847-1910) was one of the most important Czech aestheticians of his time. He defended Smetana vehemently against all attacks of Wagnerism in his work *Bedřich Smetana a jeho boj o moderní českou hudbu* [Smetana and his struggle for modern Czech music]. These views persisted throughout the early twentieth century. Nejedlý’s biography of Smetana was virtually the only scholarly text written until the mid-twentieth century, and it was therefore used by Czech and foreign

authors as the basis of later work on Smetana. During the Communist era (1948-1989), this view of Smetana as a nationalist continued to flourish with writers like Jaroslav Jiránek (born 1922) who again glorified Smetana for his inward-looking stance to Czech music. Jiránek helped to reorganize Czech musical life on Marxist cultural-political principles. *Hudební rozhledy* and *Hudební věda*, two of the most important Czech music journals, were edited by him for much of the communist period. Through these postings and his teaching appointments, Jiránek gradually became the leading Czechoslovak Marxist-orientated musicologist.

The glorification of Smetana as the quintessentially Czech composer was very difficult to break down. An example of this comes from a quote about Smetana in a 1904 article:

When he began to write Czech folk operas, Smetana could not rely on any theory of Czech song, for he did not know its characteristics. He was, however, a great genius, a musician in whose soul slumbered conscious sources of melody delightfully and faithfully Czech. He had no need to develop his Czechness, and with his first operatic note, he at the same time created a Czech dramatic style . . . Smetana grew out of his Czech inner self, thereby solving at a stroke all questions of style: he wrote just as his enormous instinct led him.<sup>10</sup>

Although this is an early example, we also see a similar mode of thought in biographies as recent as 1970. It is clear that many authors believed that Smetana could write in a “Czech style” that was not learned but rather a matter of instinct. In this way, they were able to dismiss the issue of folk songs and concentrate on Smetana’s innate “Czechness”.

Brian Large describes his Czech spirit as follows:

[Smetana] created melodies that are fervently Czech in spirit and one of the remarkable qualities of these dances is the composer’s ability to write music which sounds authentically folk-like while springing from his own

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<sup>10</sup> Jan Branberger, “Smetana,” *Čas* 24 (January 26, 1904).

pen. . . . The polka in Act I becomes a whirling village dance for mass merrymaking by country-folk, a transformation of the folk dances he may have witnessed as a boy in Růžková Lhotice. It was certainly in this district that he became acquainted with groups of itinerant musicians whom he portrays in the *Skočná* (Dance of the Comedians). From the same region he drank deep of the rustic streams of a language that was the very essence of the Bohemian ethos; and in this lies his greatest strength. . . . Within a few years it [The Bartered Bride] had overshadowed his other operas and so charmed the public that they failed to respond to the later scores which he himself felt to be among the most significant contributions to Czech music.<sup>11</sup>

The debate over Smetana and the “Czech” style increased in intensity with his next opera *Dalibor*. The work achieved little success during his lifetime and was frequently heavily attacked in the press by members of the Old Czech Party. The primary criticism was its unquestionable Wagnerian and thereby, German influence. Examination of Smetana’s diaries and letters reveals that he had great respect for Wagner as a musician. When Franz Liszt visited Prague in 1856, Smetana spent many hours discussing the Neo-Romantic school and Wagner’s writings with him. In 1870, Smetana had the opportunity to hear the first two operas of Wagner’s *Ring*. In July he attended performances of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* which he commented on in his notes in his calendar and in letters to his wife.

July 12, 1870:

Tonight I was at the opera ‘Walküre’ by Wagner. I got the ticket from an assistant for free. I really liked the opera itself and the scenery was splendid and charming. The Walküres really gallop in from the sky on horses, real live horses borrowed from the King’s stables. The music is really beautiful and in time it will win hearts everywhere. Everywhere here you can hear Wagner’s music. It would really be something for Mr. Pivoda. The Czechs living here are all fervent Wagnerians. On Thursday at 14.20 I will see ‘Rheingold’.

July 22, 1870:

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<sup>11</sup> Large, 186-87.

In Munich, I saw *Die Walküre* twice and *Das Rheingold* once and I must say that the more I get to know Wagner, the more I believe him to be a real reformer in opera, a great man.<sup>12</sup>

From these comments, it is clear that Smetana was very impressed with the works from *The Ring*. Of course, these operas were attended two years after the premiere of *Dalibor* but his impressions attest to the fact that despite the attacks from critics, Smetana was still very much taken with Wagner and thoroughly loved his music. In 1871, he returned to Munich to hear *Tristan und Isolde* and later this same year he attended *Die Meistersinger* at the Estates Theatre in Prague.

It is clear that Wagnerism and the Neo-Romantic school in general translated into progress for Smetana. He did not assign any national characteristic to these developments in art. Rather, he believed that the composers of the late Romantic school held the key to the future of music. John Clapham here describes Smetana's belief and the criticisms surrounding him:

When Smetana wrote this opera he was firmly convinced he was following the right path for Czech music. As a progressive composer he was keenly interested in the newer trends in contemporary music, and prepared to borrow ideas from them if it suited his purpose. His audience had no clear understanding of his aims, and the critics who thought that Czech opera should have a folk-song basis fancied that *Dalibor* was an example of full-blooded Wagnerism. The bad press notices had such a serious effect upon attendance at the repeat performances that the opera was dropped from the repertory after only five complete presentations. It reappeared in December 1870 but was given only six times, and subsequently three more times in 1879. This persistent rejection of a work for which Smetana had the highest regard was a bitter experience. It also marked the beginning of an unpleasant campaign of vilification and abuse.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bedřich Smetana, Letters to Bettina Smetanová (1870), Smetana Museum in Prague. Translated by the author.

<sup>13</sup> John Clapham, *Smetana* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972): 36.

Unfortunately for him, this “unpleasant campaign” killed all possible success for *Dalibor*. The bitterness Smetana felt as a result of this failure stayed with him till the end of his life. As we have seen, *Prodaná Nevěsta* [The Bartered Bride] is the most popular work by Smetana internationally. However, for Smetana, the work was not so highly considered. At the hundredth performance of *Prodaná Nevěsta*, during his speech at the celebratory banquet, he reported that:

*The Bartered Bride*, gentlemen, is nothing but a toy. I composed it, not for my ambition but rather out of spite as I was accused of being Wagnerian after writing *Braniboři v Čechách* and that I am unable to compose anything in a lighter, national style. So, I ran to Sabina and he made me a libretto and I wrote *The Bartered Bride* according to my own feeling, not even Offenbach could have composed it, and so it was the cause for such a festive day.<sup>14</sup>

His remarks may reflect his bitterness but they also illustrate his priorities. Smetana wished to compose as a Czech composer but it did not mean that he would disregard the advances made in Western art music in general.

Despite the “Wagnerian / German” attacks, Smetana’s greatest show of spite was his decision to compose *Libuše* after the repeated criticism of *Dalibor*. *Libuše* is far from comic or dance-like, in fact it perhaps goes further down the Wagnerian path than *Dalibor* ever did. He considered *Libuše* his highest achievement despite the fact that it does not contain any folk-like elements – it is a product of the developments in art that were sweeping all of Europe in the mid to late nineteenth century. Smetana wished to show that a Czech composer could create and compose on the same level as the Germans. He indicated his goal near the end of his life:

The task which I had set for myself, I hope, is fulfilled, or at least it is very close to being fulfilled. This task was to prove, that we Czechs are not only good musicians (as they say, our talent is only in our fingertips but

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Bartoš, 210.

not in our minds and thoughts) but also that we have been given the creative spirit and that we have our own and special music.<sup>15</sup>

In order to do so, he had to follow in their footsteps, not because they were German but because their art form was what he considered the art of the future. As Smetana wrote in 1862, “if the new German school is proclaiming progress then I am their disciple – but otherwise I belong to myself. I try to write only as I feel in myself.”<sup>16</sup> Here Smetana explains his motivation in music. Although the plot reflects Czech nationalism, the music reflects only the composer, who happens to be Czech.

Smetana’s later operas begin with the comedy *Dvě vdovy* [The Two Widows, 1874]. After Smetana went deaf in 1874, he still composed three more operas. These include *Hubička* [The Kiss, 1876], a folk opera, *Tajemství* [The Secret, 1878], a comic opera, and *Čertova stěna* [The Devil’s Wall, 1882], a comic-romantic opera. All three of these operas are something of a mixed genre of comedy and tragedy.

As the peak of Smetana’s output, *Libuše* was conceived on a more elevated level. The story itself is based on the mythology surrounding the origins of the Czech state. Smetana considered the opera his finest achievement and a legacy to the Czech nation. *Libuše* was to be seen as an example to Czechs of the glory of their nation in the past and the struggles and ultimate triumphs in the future. Of all his operas, Smetana spent the longest amount of time on this one, nearly four years. Despite the fact that he completed the opera in 1872, it was not performed until 1881 on his insistence. He would not perform it at the Provisional Theatre (built in 1862 as a temporary establishment) as “he believed it

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Bartoš, 175.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Bartoš, 89.



to be destined for something far greater, possibly the opening of the National Theatre.”<sup>17</sup>

Smetana’s wish is evidenced by these comments:

Letter to Adolf Čech June 14, 1883:

I believe that operas such as “Dalibor,” “The Kiss,” “The Two Widows,” “The Secret,” and of the old ones, “The Brandenburgers,” surely meet all the demands of dramatic national music. When I come to Prague, I want to call on the director of the theatre whom I do not know personally. I want to speak about the contract-condition for “Libuše”, which I never placed at the disposal of the theatre as a repertoire opera. I want it to serve the celebrations of the whole Czech nation.<sup>18</sup>

Letter to Adolf Čech August 17, 1883:

...For the future I shall sign no binding undertakings in connection with “Libuše” which I would, as it were, inter by the daily round of performances. “Libuše” is not an opera in the old-style, but rather a glorious tableau, a musico-dramatic manner of bringing to life... “Libuše” is not, however, a daily repertoire opera because it is not subject to these conditions but demands its own. I am the creator of this genre of music, particularly Czech music. For the sake of a few miserable gulden I shall not allow my work, the only significant one in our literature, to be dragged along in the society of songs made to be whistled.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, *Libuše* was specifically composed to serve as a great national and cultural icon. To Smetana’s credit, it has been accepted as such. Smetana’s creation of the Czech national opera, specifically *Libuše*, is one of the most successful examples of the cultural engineering that went on during the National Revival in Bohemia.

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<sup>17</sup> Large, 232.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in František Bartoš, ed., *Bedřich Smetana: Letters and Reminiscences*, trans. Daphne Rusbridge (Prague: Artia, 1955): 273.

<sup>19</sup> Bartoš, *Letters and Reminiscences*, 273-274.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SMETANA'S *LIBUŠE*

#### Gender and Nationalism

Through music, art, and literature, Czechs were able to create a conception of themselves as a community. Of course, the members of this community were men and women and their roles within the society were another mechanism used to foster national sentiment. In other words, to enhance cultural history, it became necessary to construct a moral community made up of ideal men and women. In George L. Mosse's work, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, he argues that the two main forces in nineteenth-century bourgeois society in Europe were nationalism and the cult of respectability.<sup>1</sup> He believes that an alliance was built between these concepts and, as a result, ideal representations of men and women came into existence. In order for nationalism and respectability to succeed, they had to provide symbols with which people could identify, for example national flags, anthems, and monuments, but also female and male national stereotypes.

The female national stereotype or ideal developed in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Usually, the ideal was illustrated through a female symbol taken from history or legend. Artists and writers glorified her in their works thereby adding a visual and literary dimension to the model. She was representative of purity, morality, order, virtue and decency. By far, her greatest function was as guardian of the traditional order, protector

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<sup>1</sup> George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985).

of the continuity and immutability of the nation, and the embodiment of its righteousness. Despite this important role, these female symbols were passive rather than dynamic. Exemplifying immutability does not mean progress. Instead, female symbols were meant to provide the backdrop against which men would settle the fate of the nation. As well, while certain women were idealized, others were put firmly into their place. "Those who did not live up to the ideal were perceived as a menace to society and the nation, threatening the established order they were intended to uphold."<sup>2</sup> While the great national symbols stood as examples, the majority of women were still considered to be nervous, weak, illogical and especially victims of passion.

Ideal national stereotypes were an important aspect of most European nationalist movements. In German and English nationalism, the male ideals were equally, if not more important, than female ideals. In Bohemia, especially within the cultural world (literature, art and music), the opposite is true. Rather than focusing on male heroism or manliness, a large percentage of artistic works concentrate on women.

As written above, the Czech national movement developed in direct opposition to German authority. Eventually, everything German became negative and Czech individuals had to be very careful about what association they had with the Germanic nations or people. As in the case of Smetana and his opera *Dalibor*, the accusation of German influence often meant the downfall of a production or piece of literature. To separate themselves from the Germans, Czechs turned to the Slavs. The idea of a pan-Slavic nation and ties to Slavic speaking countries became increasingly important during the National Revival. The Slavs were represented by mythical female figures whereas the

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<sup>2</sup> Mosse, 90.

Germans were represented by a male God. As a result, the central Slavic symbol, the lime tree (*lípa* in Czech), took on female symbolic connotations in contrast to the oak tree which had long stood as the central, very masculine, symbol in German nations.<sup>3</sup> The female principle stood for the Slavs as opposed to the masculine principle identified with the Germans.<sup>4</sup> In very plain terms, the German nations were masculine, Slav nations were feminine. It was at this time that Czechs started to nationalize and identify with Libuše, their own female mythical goddess. The notion of “female” was therefore identified with the Czech nation itself. Czechs had supported gender harmony from the beginning of their existence, their patriarch was a matriarch. Their fatherland was a motherland and the myth of gender equality became an integral part of their identity.

### The Libuše Myth

None of Smetana's operas better illustrates the idea of an imagined community than *Libuše*. By examining the history of this legend and how it was transformed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is possible to see how the Czechs used the story of Libuše as their vehicle for the notion of the ideal Czech community.

The first version of the legend of Libuše was recorded by Cosmas (1045-1125), Canon of the Prague chapter, in his Latin *Chronica Boemorum*.<sup>5</sup> This work, said to be based on

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<sup>3</sup> Petr Vít, *Libuše: Proměny mýtu ve společnosti a v umění* [Libuše: Transformations of the Myth in Society and in Art] *Hudební věda* 19/3 (1982): 270.

<sup>4</sup> For fuller discussion of this topic, see Vladimír Macura, *Znamení zrodu: české obrození jako kulturní typ* [A Sign of Emergence: The Czech Revival as Cultural Type] (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Cosmas was a high-ranking church diplomat and dean of the Prague Chapter. He began to write his chronicle near the end of his long life. He was married, as it was still possible at this time for Catholic priests to marry, and he had a son. An experienced and important cleric, he took part in many diplomatic missions to Hungary, Germany and Italy. Significantly, he studied at the well-known Latin school at Liège. Cosmas supported the Roman rite and he was strongly against the use of Old Church Slavonic in the liturgy. He also firmly supported the duke, the bishops and the rights of the Prague Chapter. He possessed

Cosmas's knowledge of ancient traditional folk legends, outlines Bohemian history from the beginning. It helped to form a national consciousness in subsequent generations:

His chronicle is a great artistic work and the first conscious mouthpiece of the Czech nation and the Přemyslid regime. The idea of the Czech nation is contrasted purposefully with the German and Polish nations. Cosmas places extremely articulate speeches in the mouths of dukes, speeches that represent the first program of the state. The chronicle exercised an important civilizing influence and laid the foundation of public opinion. He condemns barbaric excesses and was the first to point out the judgement of moral values.<sup>6</sup>

Part of his writings tell of a founder, Čech, who turned over his name to his people and endeavoured to establish a settlement under the sacred hill Říp, about 60 kilometers north of Prague. Čech brought his people to this land which was said to be full of milk and honey. The pagan Bohemian prince Krok, Čech's successor, had three daughters. The youngest of these was Libuše who succeeded Krok as ruler. She led the country fairly and was loved by everyone. Cosmas describes Libuše as "smaller in years but greater in wisdom. . . . She was wonderful among women, chaste in body, righteous in her morals, second to none as judge over the people, affable to all and even amiable, the pride and glory of the female sex, doing wise and manly deeds; but as nobody is perfect, this so praiseworthy woman was, alas a soothsayer."<sup>7</sup> At one point, her judgement in a boundary dispute was challenged whereby the loser claimed that women have long hair but short understanding. He (the loser) believed that it was an outrage that the Czechs were ruled by a woman. Out of anger and humiliation, Libuše decided to marry in order to give the

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extensive knowledge of Latin literature and classical authors. He quotes Ovid and Vergil in *Chronica Boemorum*. Despite his worldly education though, it is clear that he thought in Czech and that he was familiar with the old traditional folk legends from the prehistory of Bohemia. He quotes Czech sayings and proverbs, translating them into Latin.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred Thomas, *Anne's Bohemia: Czech Literature and Society, 1310-1420* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998): 24.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Large, 213.

Czechs a male leader. She even gave directions as to where to find her future husband and appointed a delegation to go after him. The delegation, following Libuše's instructions, traveled beyond the mountains to a stream called Bílina where they discovered a village named Stadice. There they spotted a man, Přemysl, ploughing with two piebald oxen. He was given Libuše's robe and symbols of office and asked to return with the delegation as Libuše's husband and ruler of the Czechs. Přemysl agreed and induced his oxen to vanish into thin air. He then thrust a hazel rod into the earth from which three branches grew with leaves and nuts. Two of the branches withered away but the third shot up tall and large, a sign that the royal family would have many sons but only one who would rule. Upon returning with the delegation, Přemysl married Libuše and together they founded the first Czech princely dynasty, the Přemyslids. Libuše then prophesized the founding of Prague:

Standing on a rock on Vyšehrad in the presence of her husband and the elders of the people, and incited by the spirit of prophecy, Libuše uttered this prediction: 'I see a town, the glory of which will reach the stars. There is a spot in the forest, thirty strides from this village, which the River Vltava encircles and which to the north the stream Brusnice secures by its deep valley; and to the south a rocky hill, which from its rocks takes the name of Petřín, towers above it . . . when you have reached the spot you will find a man in the midst of the forest who is working at a doorstep for a house. And as even mighty lords bend before a low door, so from this event you shall call the town which you shall build – Praha.' Thus they proceeded immediately to the ancient forest, and having found the sign which had been given them they built on this site Praha, mistress of all Bohemia.<sup>8</sup>

Cosmas's account became the main source for the early history of the Czech state and it was often duplicated in other histories and chronicles.<sup>9</sup> The best-known of these is Václav Hájek z Libočan's *Kronika česká* [Czech Chronicle] of 1541. This version

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Large, 213. 'Praha' in Czech is doorstep or threshold.

<sup>9</sup> For a full description of the legend of Libuše, see Vladimír Karbusický, *Nejstarší pověsti české* [The Oldest Czech Legends] (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1966).

was published in German in 1596 and was widely circulated. Libuše again gives judgement on a land dispute, she sends out a delegation in order to bring back Přemysl and various omens confirming Libuše's choice of husband are given (the vanishing oxen, the hazel rod which has five branches rather than three and an iron table - Přemysl's upturned plough – where Přemysl entertains the delegation).<sup>10</sup>

After the German publication of Hájek's chronicle, the Libuše myth was firmly established within German literature and popular legend as a whole. It was not thought of as particularly "Czech" and several German, as well as other, treatments of the story exist. A variety of Baroque entertainments which took place in Prague, Vienna and Dresden used elements of the story and popularized the theme. One of these was a dramatized adaptation given by Veltn's groups of wandering players in Dresden up to around 1665. It was called *The Comedy of Libussa* and proved so popular that the Italian composer Albinoni made use of the story in his opera *Primislao primo rè di Bohemia*, presented in Venice at San Cassiano in 1697. These works, along with *Der eiserne Tisch* [The Iron Table] from the first decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, were parodies on the Libuše theme. Another opera entitled *La Libussa* by Wolfenbüttel was performed in 1692 which led to the first opera on a Czech subject in the Czech lands, Bartolomeo Bernardi's *La Libussa* (Prague, 1703-04). In 1734, *Praga nascente da Libussa e Primislao* was staged by Count Sporck's company in Prague and it is loosely based on Fux's *La constanza e fortezza* (1723). Besides opera, the Libuše legend was also adapted into many works of German literature. These include Herder's poem *Die Fürstentafel* [The Prince's Table], J.K.A. Musäus's work on the

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<sup>10</sup> The symbol of the iron table became especially popular with German writers.

Czech ruler and enchantress entitled *Libusza; Herzogin von Böhmen* [Libuše: Duchess of Bohemia, 1791] first presented in Leipzig, *Die Töchter Kroks: Böheims Fürstinnen* [Krok's Daughter: Princess of Bohemia, 1792] by Albrecht, Steinberg and Stamm's *Libuše*, J.N. Komareck's *Przemisl*, Franz Grillparzer's *Libussa* (1847) and Clemens Brentano's five hundred page dramatic epic *Die Gründung Prags* [The Founding of Prague, 1815].<sup>11</sup> Some Czech works were produced as well, including the Czech translation of Steinberg's play (1787), Kreutzer's opera *Libussa* (1822) based on a German text by J.C. Bernard, František Škroup's opera *Libuše's Marriage* (1835) and J. V. Frič's *Libušin soud* [Libuše's Judgement, 1861].<sup>12</sup>

Czechs generally tend to think of Libuše's legend as their exclusive property but as we have seen, this is not the case. At this stage, it becomes necessary to examine how Libuše was portrayed in these works and how they differ from Wenzig and Smetana's *Libuše* which treated her as a symbol of the nation, an inviolable sanctity far above normal people. Beginning with Cosmas, it is clear that Libuše is a special woman (seen from the quote given above), but she is most definitely still a woman, defined by her sex. To be female is to be connected to the body and therefore, every adaptation of Libuše mentioned above combines a certain degree of eroticism with the character. For example, Cosmas describes Libuše as she rests "gently lying on embroidered cushions piled up high and leaning on her elbows as during childbirth." This is Libuše's pose while she ponders her judgement in the land dispute. The position is clearly not connected with the idea of respectability and it sounds as if she would be more suitable for erotic games than

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<sup>11</sup> Arnošt Kraus, *Stará historie česká v německé literatuře* [Old Czech History in German Literature] (Prague: Bursík and Kohout, 1902): 6-109.

<sup>12</sup> John Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, 140.



for pronouncing her decision. As well, although Libuše was an admirable figure in Cosmas's eyes she was also slightly problematic as her prophesying abilities connected her with witchcraft. Hájek also proclaims that Libuše is the mother of her people but he "sees her in the company of eccentric Amazons who chase elk around the forests, and involves her in many local pseudo-legends about the founding of settlements."<sup>13</sup> In the Baroque play *Der eiserne Tisch* [The Iron Table] Libuše is transformed into an exotic seductress who entices her lover into a cellar, makes love to him and then kills him. In fact, many of the foreign portrayals of Libuše prescribe to her an exotic, magical and mysterious personality. Most of the German works draw on the Czech chronicle tradition but they also include fantasies about fairies and elves, magic roses, Libuše's suitors and cryptic riddles. Although the Libuše legend was thought of as their own "German" material<sup>14</sup>, this subject was foreign to these writers. It concerned a hidden, exotic and fabled prehistory of Germany that was thrillingly unknown to them. "The legend of Libuše pointed to the past, allowed fantasy to create dreamlike images of a realm of fables and great heroic deeds, of a time of close connection between man and nature, when magic and mysterious arts determined the course of events. It offered in short a dream about a vanished 'golden age', a play of unbridled fantasy."<sup>15</sup> As a result, plots such as Bernardi's develop in which Přemysl emerges as Libuše's secret lover rather than husband. The engraving for the title page of Steinberg's play depicts Libuše as an

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<sup>13</sup> Vladimír Macura, "The Story of Libuše," in *Bedřich Smetana: Libuše*, program booklet (Prague: National Theatre, 1995): 46-7.

<sup>14</sup> Musäus outlines his work as a "German fairy tale." Herder describes his poem as Bohemian however he understands it as a "German song". Brentano, who combined ideas from Slavic mythology, the mythology of Christianity and ideas from old German epics begins his drama with a prologue invoking the beauty and greatness of the great German fatherland.

<sup>15</sup> Macura, *Libuše*, 44.

Amazon complete with helmet, breastplate, shield and spear (see Figure 5).<sup>16</sup> In Grillparzer's work, the role of Libuše is to pose riddles to the nobles of her tribe. Even in Škroup's opera she resembles a wild female warrior more than a goddess and it is her wedding celebrations which are the focus of the work. Other Czech works also draw on this tradition. Comedies by Václav Kliment Klicpera and Josef Kajetán Tyl changed the setting of the story to modern times, altered the names of the heroes and heroines and basically preserved only a few details from the original story. As Malečková has written, "if there were any patriotic motifs in these works they were definitely not embodied by the heroines."<sup>17</sup>



Figure 5: Libuše as Amazon warrior, engraving by G. Balzer for the title page of the 1779 edition of Guolfinger von Steinsberg's play *Libusza: Herzoginn in Böhmen*.

<sup>16</sup> According to Cosmas, after Libuše's marriage to Přemysl, women's power was diminished. As a result, women protested by building a fortress, training an army of warrior women and winning many battles before finally being defeated. This episode in Czech legend is known as The War of the Maidens and it was also elaborated upon by future writers and composers. Hájek gives a name to the leader of these women - Vlasta. The illustrator for Libuše's engraving, and several authors, were probably confusing her with her warlike successors.

<sup>17</sup> Jitka Malečková, "Nationalizing Women and Engendering the Nation: The Czech National Movement," in *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall (Oxford: Berg, 2000): 299.

Clearly, the character of Libuše was largely fictional and without great significance to these writers and composers. The stories are simply for entertainment and they do not contain any moral or nationalistic overtones. Libuše's ability to prophesize made her mysterious, seductive and excellent thematic material for works based on the legendary past. They saw her as an exotic, untamable and therefore, most exciting popular subject for their compositions. Above all, in each of these works, Libuše is very much defined by her sex, her femaleness. Because she was a woman with special powers she had to be treated as something Other – charming, mysterious, but also a bit terrifying because she was different.

In Wenzig and Smetana's version, the character of Libuše attains a higher level than what has been described here. Smetana believed that the opera *Libuše* was his greatest work, a work with enormous meaning to the Czech people. As previously discussed, in order to illustrate the greatness of the Czech people as a whole and therefore make them legitimate as a nation, it became necessary to produce a long, glorious past:

Previously inert material now became invested with a warm glow of nationalist sentiment that could be appealed to for patriotic purposes. Images of historical rulers and the past glory of the nation, of a civilization with a sophisticated literature stretching back into the distant past, or of a contented Czech countryside with its own distinct way of life, customs and music, were carefully fostered and imprinted on the minds of a susceptible Czech community.<sup>18</sup>

For proponents of the National Revival, Libuše no longer corresponded to an exotic, fictional character but rather she evolved into a figure which represented the origin of Czech national independence and the foundations of the Czech state. "In Czech culture the nostalgic story from antiquity was also turned more unequivocally in a forward

direction. Libuše's prophecies were not only a component of fantastic, Romanesque coloring; they were perceived as a call to people of the present to prepare a different future. From this perspective Libuše herself ceased to be only a character in a legend: she became a symbol of the nation, its ancient roots and its hope."<sup>19</sup>

In order to celebrate Libuše as a symbol of the nation itself, it became necessary to cut away the old images of her as seductress, female warrior, or soothsayer. Libuše could no longer be something Other because now her most significant role was as founder of the first community of Czech people. For this reason, Libuše had to develop into an ideal representative of the Czech state. One of the first Czechs to complain about the portrayal of Libuše in German literature was J.V. Frič in 1861. He stated that Libuše deserved a much loftier description than the "lecherous shrew" she was made out to be in German works. Giving Libuše the air of respectability meant that she had to rise above her previous descriptions. "The love stories, the riddles, the magic and sorcery, the overly colorful display, but maybe also the directing of the ancient story toward some modern conflict between power and feeling, and the longings for an intimate relationship to both the elements of nature and to progress – all this seemed to be petty and undignified in relation to the sanctified founder of the fabled Czech state."<sup>20</sup> In other words, Libuše could not be endowed with any erotic feeling, any sensuality, indeed any "femaleness." To separate herself from the image of the shrew, she had to become sexless.

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<sup>18</sup> Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Macura, *Libuše*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> Macura, *Libuše*, 46.

Luckily, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, two sources of information about Libuše were “discovered,” the *Rukopis zelenohorský* [Green Mountain Manuscript, 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries] and the *Rukopis Královédvorský* [Queen’s Court Manuscript, 13<sup>th</sup> century]. Both of these works are now considered fabrications, written in order to provide Czech with a more ancient history as a written language. However, at the time that Wenzig and Smetana were working on the opera, these sources were thought to be genuine and they had in fact led to a revival of interest in early Czech literature. The Green Mountain Manuscript contains two fragments, one of which describes Libuše’s judgement in ancient epic format. None of the fanciful, erotic descriptions of Libuše are presented here. Rather, as Vladimír Macura explains, she loses all connection to eroticism or gender:

She maintains an air of statuesque simplicity...The fragment begins and ends with a judgment – a display of the ruler’s power; not even the erotically-colored willy-nilly election of Přemysl made its way into the fragment. We do not find in the Green Mountain Manuscript the scene of Libuše capriciously pontificating on the cushions, as with Kosmas, or on a rug as with Hájek. Libuše does not recline, but proudly stands, before the participants in the council ‘in a gleaming white robe’; she even appears on something like a throne: ‘she steps onto her father’s throne in the solemn assembly’. Thus she is presented in her basic function, the function that can most easily arouse passion: the ruler of a distinctive nation with a different language and different laws (‘It is not good to seek truth in Germany’), a nation through and through, ever democratic and cultural.<sup>21</sup>

As a result of these manuscripts, Libuše became a respectable national heroine who was connected with the beginnings of Czech history. As mentioned above, scholars, constructing Czech history at this time, tried to identify and accentuate the positive events in Czech history, especially those that separated them from their German past. Thus, images of ancient women, particularly Libuše, became relevant. Václav Hanka,

one of the authors of the forged manuscripts, greatly contributed to the glorification of Libuše.<sup>22</sup> He saw the ancient period of Czech history as the great Czech golden age when goddesses were more important than gods, when Libuše and her sisters ruled better than any mythical men. František Palacký also described the early Czech history linked to Libuše in positive terms and he believed that the position of women in this early society demonstrated the democratic principles which predominated among the ancient Slavs, in contrast with the Germans. Thus, Libuše began to be treated “as evidence of the admirable qualities of the Czech nation, of its democratic spirit, education, or courage, which were manifested even by its women.”<sup>23</sup>

While Libuše was being established within Czech national history, new images of her appeared in literature and art. Josef Linda, the other author of the forged manuscripts, described her as a heroic and proud foremother in his work *Záře nad pohanstvem* [Light over Heathendom].<sup>24</sup> Josef Navrátil, an important Czech painter of the National Revival, depicted Libuše patriotically on the frescoes of a Prague house. Božena Němcová also called on women to join the patriotic fight in the name of Libuše in her poem *Slavné ráno* [Glorious morning]: “The country was founded by a woman, let the country be defended by women again.”<sup>25</sup> As well, an anonymous song created during the 1848 revolution asked Czech women to “live and die for freedom”

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<sup>21</sup> Macura, *Libuše*, 47-48.

<sup>22</sup> Václav Hanka, *Dějiny české v kamenopisně vyvedených obrazech* [Czech History in Pictures] (Prague: Antonín Machek, 1824): 11, 31-3. Malečková, in her article “Nationalizing Women” states that Hanka’s role in the construction of gender relations in the Czech lands is a topic which should be more thoroughly investigated.

<sup>23</sup> Malečková, *Nationalizing Women*, 301.

<sup>24</sup> Josef Linda, *Záře nad pohanstvem nebo Václav a Boleslav: Vzobrazení z dávnověkosti vlastenské* [Light over Heathendom or Vaclav and Boleslav: A Picture from Patriotic Antiquity] (Prague: ELK, 1949): 46-58.

<sup>25</sup> see Božena Němcová, *Básně a jiné práce* [Poems and Other Works] (Prague: SNKLHU, 1957): 23-4.

as did Libuše and Vlasta whose “blood boils in their veins.”<sup>26</sup> One of the most famous drawings of Libuše comes from near the end of the Czechs’ struggle for independence with Mikoláš Aleš’s *Věštba Libušina* [Libuše’s Foretelling, 1904] (see Figure 6). As can be seen from these examples, Libuše served as an ideal model for Czech people of the nineteenth century. This ideal heroine was the image that Wenzig and Smetana then built upon.

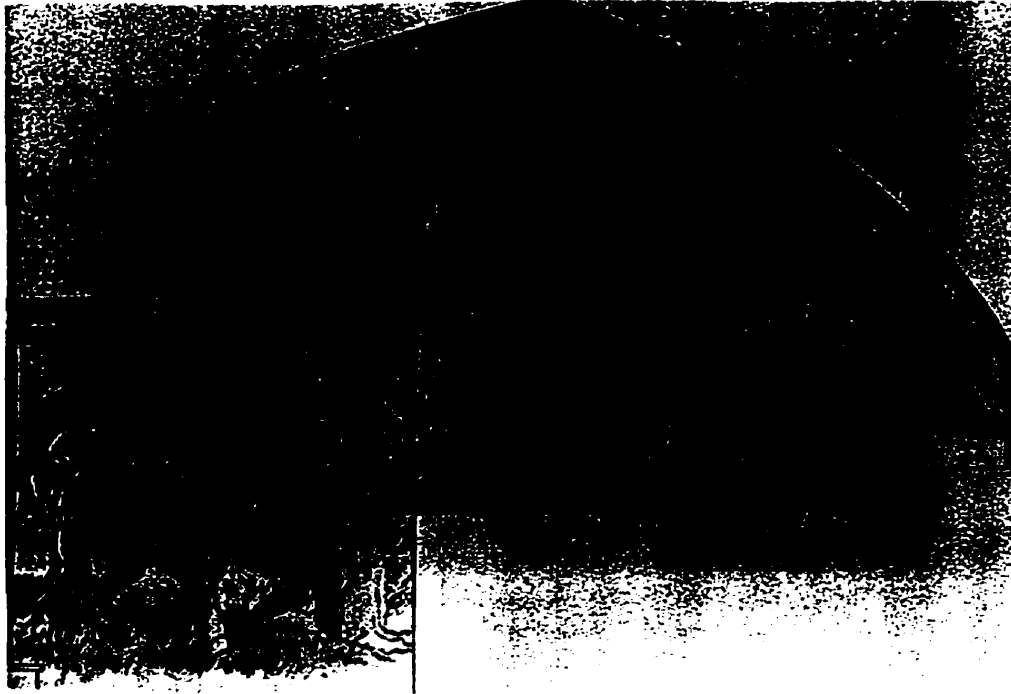


Figure 6: Mikoláš Aleš’s *Věštba Libušin* [Libuše’s Foretelling, 1904].

Before delving into the libretto, it now becomes necessary to quickly comment on the idea of the imagined community. As has been shown, to create an imagined community (in this case, the Czech nation) you must first develop a long, illustrious past. These manuscripts provided this basic function for the Czechs during the

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<sup>26</sup> see Macura, *Český sen*, 83.

National Revival. Libuše developed into a great leader, someone to revere and to look up to – an ideal representative but certainly an imagined representative. Indeed, the “newly discovered” manuscripts were fakes, written with a real political agenda that fit the needs of the revivalists. Even Cosmas’s account of Libuše has been called into question. Although long believed to be the first account of the founding of Prague, the tale is actually mentioned in Christianus’s life of St. Václav and St. Ludmilla, written 130 years before Cosmas during the late tenth century.<sup>27</sup> Omitted from this chronicle is the name of Libuše herself, the details of her life, her judgement and her marriage. Instead Přemysl’s (Premizl) life is mentioned with a passing reference to a prophetess who is said to have advised his call to the throne, ultimately marrying him. Although some Czech scholars believe that Cosmas was using his knowledge of ancient traditional folk legends,<sup>28</sup> others think that the invention of very clear details regarding Libuše was the work of Cosmas himself. Karbusický has suggested that Cosmas may have based the character on the matriarchal Matilda of Tuscany (1046-1115) and on parts of contemporary Minnesinger ballads.<sup>29</sup> In other words, Libuše may be more related to German mythology than Czech. What about Čech? As namesake of the people and the founder of the first Czech settlement, he is primarily forgotten about in all further accounts and literature or he is only briefly mentioned. In Karbusický’s work *Nejstarší pověsti české* [The oldest Czech legends], the first chapters are devoted

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<sup>27</sup> This dating has been a bone of contention for Czech historians for years primarily because the work seriously deflates the importance of Libuše in Czech history and therefore robs the Czechs of their most meaningful national legend. Many scholars have tried to deny the authenticity and dating of Christianus’s work although Jaroslav Ludvíkovský’s 1978 critical edition claims it was written 130 years before Cosmas. This is generally accepted nowadays.

<sup>28</sup> Mirko Očadlík, *Libuše: vznik Smetanovy zpěvohry* [The origin of Smetana’s opera *Libuše*] (Prague: Melantrich, 1939): 17.

<sup>29</sup> Vladimír Karbusický, *Nejstarší pověsti české*, 32-40.



to Libuše. In Kraus's *Stará historie česká v německé literatuře* [Old Czech History in German Literature], Čech and Krok are briefly mentioned but they were rarely taken up as subjects for German works. What was so appealing about Libuše? It is Libuše who stands out, who becomes the focus. For the literature and musical works which were constructed before Smetana, it was Libuše's nature which made her so enticing – primarily, her prophesizing ability. By the time that Wenzig and Smetana were beginning to work on this legend, she had already been stamped as the founder. When Czechs were searching for ideal symbols, it was realized that Libuše was particularly suited to nationalist invention and reinterpretation. Nationalizing Libuše would give the Czechs an unquestionably positive symbol that could be used as a model for women and men.

Smetana's *Libuše* served as the artistic culmination of the popularization of the Libuše myth. The fact that Libuše was a woman made her all the more significant because women were looked upon as ideals – as defenders of the nation, as mothers, as teachers of the language, as creators of the Slavic nations. All of the negative qualities of her femaleness are cut away in this work so that she can serve as the feminine symbol of the Czech lands, the key figure in the establishment of the Bohemian state and thus a contrast to the Germans. Smetana and Wenzig's *Libuše* creates a woman who stands as the supreme, untouchable and positive model for Czech men and women.

### The Libretto

The patriotic conception of *Libuše* was further developed by Josef Wenzig. Wenzig (1807-76) was a German by birth but spent most of his life in the Czech lands. He began his career as a teacher of German, history, and geography. Despite the fact that Wenzig was German, he took up the Czech patriotic cause. After 1848, he started to seriously sympathize with the Czech Revival movement and became a strong advocate for the equality of the Czech and German languages. As a founder of the first Czech *Realschule* (technical grammar school), he played an important role in the establishment of Czech language learning. Wenzig was also President of the Umělecká Beseda, an important Czech cultural society, where he met Smetana and presented his librettos for both *Dalibor* and *Libuše* to him. In other words, Smetana did not commission these works but rather they existed beforehand. Six of his plays are based on Czech historical subjects but these are all written in German as this was his more fluent language. At first *Dalibor* and *Libuše* were of little interest to Smetana for this very reason. Because of Smetana's disappointment, Wenzig asked a former pupil of his, Ervín Špindler (1843-1919), to translate the two librettos into Czech. Špindler actually received very little credit for his work as both Wenzig and Smetana wished to keep his name out of circulation. The fact that the libretto for this great national Czech opera was written in German was a detail that Wenzig and Smetana wished to keep disguised – yet another bit of imaginative cultural engineering.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the fact that Špindler did not receive much recognition, it is from him that information regarding Smetana's involvement in the changes of the libretto comes. In

truth, Smetana did ask for some changes to the text but these were few and far between, mostly in regards to high notes being set to open vowels. Generally though, he only asked for simple changes of word order. The only change he made in regards to the structure of the libretto itself was the tomb scene between Chrudoš and Krasava. This was added as an afterthought on Smetana's impetus and Wenzig actually rewrote the end of the second act in Czech on Smetana's request.<sup>31</sup> All of these points make it clear that Wenzig was the inventor and creator of all of the features of the characters, the structure, and the order of events in the operatic version of *Libuše*. Act One concentrates on the land dispute between the two brothers – Chrudoš, the older brother, and Št'áhlav. A court is convened at Vyšehrad where Libuše gives her judgment for the younger man. Chrudoš is appalled and insults Libuše by stating that it is unseemly for a woman to decide such important matters and as a result, Libuše declares that she will marry Přemysl. Other characters including Lutobor, the brothers' uncle, and Radmila, the brothers' sister, take part. In the second act, we learn that the quarrel between the two brothers has been provoked by Krasava, Lutobor's daughter. Even though she is in love with Chrudoš, she has pretended to favour Št'áhlav. The first part of the act concentrates on the reconciliation of Krasava and Chrudoš while the second part of the act focuses on Přemysl who is now called on to rule over the Czech nation at Libuše's request. Act Three is a celebration of the Czech nation. The two brothers make peace, Libuše and Přemysl ascend the throne at Vyšehrad together and Chrudoš is embraced and forgiven for his insult. Finally, Libuše, in prophetic

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<sup>30</sup> Jaroslav Jiránek, *Smetanova operní tvorba. I: Od Braniborů v Čechách k Libuši* [The operas of Smetana. I: From The Brandenburgers in Bohemia to Libuše] (Prague: Supraphon, 1984): 233.

<sup>31</sup> Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, 105.

mood, guarantees the future of the Czech nation by outlining six of the heroic figures of Czech history. The opera ends on a note of jubilation by expressing the conviction that the Czech people will never perish (see appendix for a full synopsis).

Libuše, in her full glory as national heroine, really emerged in Wenzig's version of the story. He relied on three sources for the libretto – Cosmas's chronicle, the Green Mountain Manuscript and František Palacký's *Dějiny národa českého v Čechách i v Moravě* [History of the Nation in Bohemia and Moravia]. This latter source, since it was the first authoritative Czech history, lent credibility to the story and stressed the historicity of the work, not just the myth. It also isolated Libuše from the more common portrayals which focused on her wedding or her seductive powers. The same can be said of the Green Mountain Manuscript where Libuše becomes a character with great integrity and immutability. Her role in the manuscript is as a great democratic leader and none of the foggy details regarding her sexuality or her individual emotions are apparent. The main inspiration for Wenzig in the Green Mountain Manuscript "lay above all in the statuesque simplicity of Libuše, which freed her of everything 'literary' and 'superfluous' and concentrated attention only on her single role – the role of 'mother of the nation'".<sup>32</sup>

Besides the statuesque, lofty view of Libuše, the Green Mountain Manuscript also provided Wenzig with several characters and symbols not present in the story before. These include Chrudoš and Št'ahlav, Radovan od Kamena Mosta (Radovan from the Stone Bridge), Lubotor, Radmila and several elders, noblemen and other tribal leaders. As well, several ceremonial symbols are added to the story and Wenzig incorporated

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<sup>32</sup> Macura, *Libuše*, 48.

these into the libretto. For example, 'law-giving' tablets, 'swords of judgment', a burning fire, a vase with water, and lime trees can be found at Vyšehrad. All of these are meant to be symbols representing Libuše's home and therefore herself, establishing her as a solemn, ceremonial ruler with the backing of great tradition. They were also symbols which were already well-known by the Czech audience and they were "deliberately inserted to trigger off a nationalist response."<sup>33</sup>

Lime trees are the central national symbol used in this opera. As we have seen above, the lime tree developed as an important feminine Czech emblem during the nineteenth century and it stood in opposition to the masculine German symbol of the oak tree. Because this opera is based on the Czech matriarch, the most important woman in their history, the lime tree is featured along with her as a symbol of Czech virtue and strength but also as the key element which makes the Czech nation different to the German. Přemysl's ode to the lime trees in the second act clearly demonstrates this idea:

Přemysl:

O, vy lípy, o, vy lípy,  
praotců ruka vsadila vás!  
Jak pne se vznešeně hlava vaše  
dýchajíc vůni,  
lahodnou skýtajíc včelám stravu  
člověku stín!  
Právem zasvěceny  
národu jste mému.  
o buďte jeho obrazem,  
sil, ctností, krásy pravzorem!

Přemysl:

O, ye lime-trees, o, ye lime-trees,  
Forefather's hands have planted you here!  
How nobly do your tops rise to the heights  
Exuding scent,  
Offering delightful food to the bees  
And shade to man!  
Truly sacred you are  
To all of my people.  
O, be ye ever its image,  
A symbol of its virtue, strength!

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<sup>33</sup> Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, 4.

“By singing about lime trees Přemysl was both invoking a now well-established nationalist symbol and at the same time reinforcing it.”<sup>34</sup> Přemysl’s admiration for the lime trees is based on the same principle as his and all of the Czech nation’s admiration for Libuše.

Wenzig’s own inventions for the libretto include Libuše’s prophecy as the culmination of the opera and the character of Krasava. Both of these inventions were developed in the spirit of the new tradition of the character of Libuše. In order to uphold the image of Libuše as a ritualistic, statuesque guardian of the nation, she had to be excluded from the dramatic events of the opera. As George Mosse has written, female national heroines had to be passive. Instituting their emotions or personal feelings into the ideology made them human and these women were conceived on a superhuman level, above everyone else – in fact, without gender.<sup>35</sup> In Wenzig’s libretto, Libuše is not linked with common, ‘personal’ activities. Rather, everything she says and does is connected with the fate of the Czech nation, its present and future. In many other literary versions of the story, Libuše’s wedding is the focus and ultimate goal. However, in Wenzig’s libretto, because the emotional, passionate, female Libuše is neglected, the wedding scene becomes only a minor occurrence in an ending which focuses on a series of *tableaux vivants* describing important scenes from Czech history. Her prophesizing ability is not seen as something mysterious or “other” in this version of the story but rather as a call to her people.

As well, because Libuše could not be combined with the dramatic events of the story, Wenzig created the character of Krasava. She is a full-blooded, passionate

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<sup>34</sup> Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, 4.

female who provides the dynamic emotion needed for an operatic libretto of the nineteenth century. Wenzig adds to the land dispute of the original story by placing Krasava, one of the women in Libuše's court, as the real quarrel between the two brothers. Because Chrudoš does not immediately return Krasava's feelings of love, she contrives a plot of revenge by stating that she has fallen in love with Št'ahlav. Consequently, Krasava becomes the bearer of the basic conflict in the opera. Love triangles are, of course, common to opera. Wenzig's creation of the secondary plot results from his reliance on "normal" operatic conventions and expectations.

On the one hand, there is Libuše who represents gender equality, a connection to the Slavic past, a virtuous, wise, democratic albeit passive, almost "unfemale" protector of the Czech lands. She is the model for the great Czech nation, one of the main purposes of Wenzig's libretto. On the other hand, Krasava, who through falsehood, ignorance, overexerted passion and vengeance, almost creates war within the nation. She is the center of the dramatic conflict and therefore fulfills the other purpose of the libretto, the presentation of a more exciting story with some romantic motivation. These two women can be compared on three levels within the libretto: their character, their sexuality, and their dramatic roles within the story.

The two women's characters are juxtaposed from the very first scene of the opera. The basic purpose of this scene is to set the context of the historical story. Radmila, the sister of the two brothers involved in the land dispute, introduces Libuše as Krok's illustrious daughter, a mighty princess bestowed with the wisdom to solve difficult conflicts. She is immediately presented as the savior of the nation and she addresses

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<sup>35</sup> Mosse, Chapter 6.

Radmila calmly (*klidně*) and solemnly (*slavně*). Libuše's first words reveal her character as a calm, steadfast guardian of the Czech people:

Libuše (Radmilu zvedajíc k sobě,  
klidně a slavně):

Již vstan' a potěš mysl svoji!  
Libuši vodí bohův hlas.  
S pomocí jejich podaří se  
že bratři srovnají se zas.  
Bohové věční tamo nad obalky,  
v milosti shlížejte na tuto zem!  
Ku svornosti ji ved'te  
a lásce pozasvěť te,  
had sváru nechat' mine její lem!  
At' síly země blaho rodí  
a lidu všemu hojnost plodí!  
At' svorné síly národ vedou k štěstí  
a příštím věkům jeho slávu věští!  
O bohové, slyšte modlitbu mou,  
můj národ vezměte v ochranu svou!  
O, chran'te mou vlast!  
Můj národ vezměte v ochranu svou...

Již hlas mě volá  
do sboru hlav,  
k svatému soudu  
dle otců práv!

Libuše (lifting Radmila to herself,  
calmly and solemnly):

Rise up and put your mind at peace!  
Libuše's guiders are the gods,  
With their help we shall succeed in solving  
The strife which now divides your kin.  
Eternal gods, ye that dwell above the clouds  
Look down with grave upon our land!  
To concord do ye lead it,  
To love consecrate it,  
Outside its borders keep the serpents of strife!  
May the land's powers bring about good  
and produce plenty for all its men!  
May concord and love lead the people forward  
And proclaim the glory of its future days!  
O, my gods, hear this my prayer,  
Take my people under your wing!  
O, protect my land!  
Take my people under your wing!...

This voice invites me  
To the council  
To solemn judgement  
As custom demands!

Here Libuše displays her faith in old Czech custom, the ideas of court, law, and justice. Thereby, democracy is exemplified in her speech.

On the other hand, Krasava enters the scene in a state of panic. She is immediately presented as a nervous, guilt-ridden, and excitable woman, ignorant of the consequences of her actions. In Scene 2, she is described as a trembling, unworthy, wretched creature. Her words demonstrate her panic, her lack of reason, and her guilt:

Krasava:

Vidíš ten plamen,

Krasava:

Do you see that blaze



jak se v kotouči zvedá!  
 Běda, teď jme se  
 vždy dále a dále, výš a výš!  
 Již chatka padá, tam hoří stoh,  
 již spaluje lesy  
 po vůkolí všem  
 moře plamenův!  
 O, ten žár, který po zemi vzplál,  
 mou rukou vznik, mou rukou se vzňal!

Which rises in a whirl?  
 Alas, the higher it rises  
 The stronger it becomes up and up!  
 There's a hut crumbling, there burns a stack,  
 Now forests are burning  
 The whole land's engulfed  
 By a sea of flames!  
 The blaze that rages all around us  
 I have kindled, my hand started it!

The fury that Krasava has stirred up is immediately soothed by a change of scene. Now the symbols of the Czech nation connected with Libuše are illustrated at Vyšehrad – a throne on a dais, a vessel with burning fire, another vessel filled with water, and a lime tree. Whereas Krasava has just described a land full of strife and fire, Libuše's home presents us with the symbols of a traditional, peaceful, and justice-loving nation. Her procession into the court demonstrates her regal demeanor. She ascends the throne as a true ruler with all the ceremonial garb. The tablets and a sword surround her and the maidens bow in reverence to her. Her monologue in scene four, the introduction to the court, makes evident the tradition, immutability and link to history associated with her. Everything she does in this act is related with ancient custom and ritual:

Libuše:  
 Vy kmeti, leši! Před vámi tu jsem,  
 dceř Krokova, na trůn zvolena vámi!  
 Pod korunou posvátné vaší lípy,  
 po pravici mé desky právodatné,  
 nalevo křivdy kárající meč,  
 před mými zraky oheň pravdozvěstný  
 a u mých nohou svatocudná voda!  
 Já svolala vás, vladyky a kmety,  
 abyste při tu rozřešili  
 nad Chrudošem od Otavy křivé,  
 od Otavy křivé, zlatonosné,  
 nad Štáhlavem na Radbuze chladné!  
 Ti, oba bratři, oba Klenovici,

Libuše:  
 You elders, chieftains! I come before you here,  
 I, Krok's daughter, whom you yourselves have chosen!  
 Under our sacred lime tree,  
 On my right hand the tablets of the law,  
 On my left the sword that punishes wrong,  
 Before my eyes the truth revealing fire,  
 And at my feet the purifying water!  
 I have summoned you, noblemen and elders,  
 That you may decide this litigation  
 Between Chrudoš from Otava the Crooked,  
 From Otava the Crooked and Goldbearing,  
 And Štáhlav from Radbuza the Cold!  
 They, two brothers, both Klenovici,

roda stara Tetvy Popelova,  
 přišel s pluky Čechovými  
 v tyto žírné vlasti přes tři řeky,  
 o dědictví se sváří,  
 ač sotva k otcům odešel jich otec,  
 Nuž slzšte! Sud'te!

Of the old clan of Popel's Tetva,kKterý  
 Who with the regiments of Father Čech  
 Came to this fertile land across three rivers,  
 Fight over their legacy  
 Although the goods have just received their parent.  
 So hear ye! Judge ye!



Figure 7: Ema Destinová in her role as Libuše, beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Libuše's judgement in the land dispute also illustrates her noble character. She makes her decision according to the old Czech law in contrast to Chrudoš who wishes to follow the new German law. Democratically she asks the elders, chieftains and noblemen to consider her judgement and form their own. Krasava is not even present for the scene at the court. She has no association whatsoever with tradition, history, and ancient custom.

Libuše is also willing to sacrifice. When she sees that the land dispute and the court's decision could lead the country into war, she immediately sacrifices her power and determines that she will marry in order to preserve peace. Martyr-like, she even allows the people to choose her husband although they respond that they trust her judgement and, therefore, she should choose herself. The nation has a higher priority for Libuše than her own personal wants. In fact, her own emotions never really enter the story. She chooses Přemysl because she cherished him during her youth but most importantly because she believes he will make a great leader for the country. Her choice is not made out of hasty passion but rather it is based on wise thought (Libuše: *Volba vzkonána po uvážení přemnohém* / My choice has long been made and after thorough thinking).

On the contrary, Krasava's motivation is based solely on her personal feelings. While Libuše is level-headed, calm and willing to sacrifice, Krasava is passionate, nervous, and selfish. In her explanation to her father of her behavior at the beginning of act two, she describes her lack of wisdom, her hurried and careless decision based on her own personal emotions:

Krasava:

Můj otče, slyšte, pomněte,  
že obětí jsem kruté vášně!  
Mou vinu zlou  
nesud'te pojednou! -  
Ach, vzňalo se láskou k Chrudoši!  
mé srdce, vyplanulo při poznání,  
že není ke mně bez citu.  
Však jakkoli jsem chtěla  
odloudi tajemství jeho,  
vždy pyšně vyhýbal se nástrahám.  
To bodlo mně,  
že častokrát jsem plakala.  
I napadlo mi vzítí na něm  
pomstu, děsnou pomstu za trýzeň.  
Můj otče, hle! Tot' pramen zla!  
A tož, když v blahé touze lásky  
on plál a cit svůj projevil,  
že jsem, o žel, ho odbyla,  
na srozuměnou davši mu  
- jáť netušila následků -  
že zadána jest láska má,  
že citů mých pánem je bratr, ne on!  
Ale čím mocněji se nes  
spor obou bratří k činu,  
tím jen víc mne pojímal strach  
vyznati vinu  
tím více vzrůstala zoufalost moje  
až v šílenost!  
Za politování vás prosím  
za jediný pohled ždám  
nesud'te nemilosrdně,  
když se v pokoře z viny své znám!

Krasava:

My father, hear me, keep in mind  
That I'm the victim of passion!  
My evil guilt  
Hastily do not judge! -  
I have fallen in love with Chrudoš  
And my heart flamed up when I saw  
That he does not lack love for me.  
But however I tried to  
Make him disclose his secret feelings,  
He proudly avoided all my snares.  
That wounded me  
And frequently I have shed tears.  
And so I thought to take my vengeance,  
Vengeance, frightful vengeance against him.  
My father, lo! this is the cause!  
And so when he in love's sweet yearning  
Flamed up and declared himself,  
I have alas, rejected him,  
Have given him to understand  
- Not facing the consequences -  
That my heart is no longer free,  
That the one I love is his brother, not he!  
Alas the more the strife has grown  
And deepened between brothers,  
The more afraid I have become  
To admit my guilt,  
The greater grew my desperation  
Making me nearly mad!  
Your compassion is what I'm seeking  
I beg for only one look,  
Do not judge me without mercy  
When in meekness I confess my guilt!

Krasava cannot meet the requirements of an ideal Czech woman. She is dishonest, lying to serve her own personal needs. She gives in to her passions and she displays her anger and vengeance forthrightly. She is "desperate," "meek," and "nearly mad". By exhibiting her fear to confess, she also shows that she is cowardly. Because of this, she is a traitor or at least a menace to society. Her actions have threatened the stability of the nation and she herself calls her acts "evil."

The way that other characters view Libuše and Krasava also illustrates the contrast between them. Libuše has great respect and is viewed as a saint by almost every figure in the opera. Radmila opens the opera by calling her “Krok’s illustrious daughter, mighty princess.” Štáhlav states that he looks up to the “glorious princess” as he would to a powerful rock indicating his faith in her immutability. Lutobor refers to her as a princess, “elevated so high above all other clans and people” and Přemysl also modestly wonders if he is good enough to be united with a woman who reaches the stars “traversing the heavens in a magic glow.” All of these descriptions put Libuše on a higher plane than the rest of the characters in the opera and give her a saintly, statuesque presence. Chrudoš is the only character who does not admire Libuše but he is also the only character in the opera who defies the ancient Czech laws. Chrudoš represents a Czech who has been temporarily deluded or taken in by the Germans. He wishes to solve the land dispute according to German law which states that the oldest son receives all property from the father. When Libuše decides against him, he insults her out of anger but by the end of the opera he has realized his mistake and he begs her forgiveness. Even when he originally insults her, the chorus immediately responds with “Hrůza! Ký to vzdorný hněv!” [Horror! What a spiteful rage!] and Lutobor swears that he will avenge the outrage that Chrudoš has committed. The audience is made to think that Chrudoš is unenlightened and therefore, his opinion is of no significance. His view does not taint Libuše’s image.

On the contrary, Krasava is viewed negatively but this negativity is not only directed towards her. Rather, the opinion is expressed toward all women. Lutobor’s words about his daughter reveal his attitude:

**Lutobor:**

Napojte koně teď a čekejte!  
O, proč mě krutý osud trestá  
tak nezvedeným dítětem?  
Jak různá jeho, moje cesta!  
At' proto zví o hněvu mém!  
Slabosti ženská, marné snění,  
ó, lsti a nerozume žen!  
Jak často ještě k zahubení  
půl světa hodíš ve plamen?...

Vlk a liška lstivá  
nepochází z ušlechtilého jelena,  
a z orla, jenž se v mračna vznáší,  
nevzešla noční plemena!  
Ne, nejsi krev má, v duši tvojí  
tak podlá faleš sídlo má,  
že nejlepšeho reka v boji  
otravným jedem užírám!

**Lutobor:**

Water the horses now and wait for me!  
O, why does divine fate punish me  
With such an unprincipled child?  
How different is her way from my own!  
So let her now my anger know!  
O, female weakness, futile dreaming,  
O, female artifice and guile!  
How often yet will you lead the men  
Of half the world to utter ruin?...

Cunning wolves and foxes  
By noble deer have never been procreated,  
And eagles which through clouds do soar  
Have not brought into being bats!  
You're not my blood, no, in your soul seems  
Such crafty falsehood to reside  
That with its venom does it poison  
One of our greatest heroes!

Obviously, Lutobor holds no respect for Krasava despite the fact that she is his daughter. He also has no sympathy for her mistake and he even threatens that unless she can subdue Chrudoš's anger, she will be banished from her home, the absolute worst punishment. Lutobor is not only speaking specifically of Krasava but also of women in general. Weakness, illogical planning, deceit, and unfaithfulness are female qualities in Lutobor's view. Women are to blame when men make mistakes. Lutobor still thinks of Chrudoš as one of the nation's great heroes despite the fact that he has threatened war and insulted the country's leader. It is Krasava's fault rather than Chrudoš's. Chrudoš has acted out of passion and anger as well, but his passion is not condemned by society as Krasava's is. Male anger and vengeance are not commendable but they are understandable. The opposite is true for women in general. Krasava must beg and plead with her father for forgiveness, even kneeling before him, but this is never expected of Chrudoš although he has insulted the most saintly figure

in the opera. As well, Lutobor's comments about Krasava are basically the same complaints which Chrudoš has against Libuše as he believes that Libuše is unfit to rule the nation because of her womanhood:

Chrudoš:

Běda, když se ku ptencům  
plíží zmije zlá,  
běda, jimž žena vládne  
tak nestálá!  
Muž jen na muže sluší  
pevnát' jeho pěst.  
váš soud je mi ničím,  
nebot' on z ženy jest!

Chrudoš:

Woe to birds when an evil snake  
Creeps up,  
Woe to them whom a woman  
Rules, inconstant!  
Man can only man obey,  
For his fist is firm.  
I despise your ruling,  
It comes from a woman!

Everyone in the opera is shocked by Chrudoš's insult but no one is mortified by Lutobor's words for Krasava. The reason lies in the fact that Libuše is protected from the traditional view of women because she is not associated with women in general. Her character is elevated above the average woman. However, even though Libuše is guarded by her "unfemaleness," no one in the opera really disagrees with the basic principle that she should choose a man to rule the nation. In fact, Radovan is quite pleased that Chrudoš has insulted her as it has prompted her to decide to choose a husband:

Radovan:

Ó, je-li dnešní den k tomu dán,  
by tu ti vnukl snahu,  
pak bud' za to navždy požehnán,  
neb národ vedl k blahu!

Radovan:

O were this very day predestined  
To give you this idea,  
Then it will be for ever blessed,  
For it means the people's good!

Radovan expresses similar thoughts at the opening of the opera:

Radovan:

Radovan:

Nám knížete jest věru třeba,  
by se jí dobrým rádcem stal  
ó, kéž by sobě chotě vzala,  
který by vášně poutat znal!

We truly need a man for ruler  
Who would support her with his aid  
that she might only choose a husband,  
Capable of restraining passion!

Even though everyone in the opera believes in Libuše's great power and ruling ability, they also wish to establish a patriarchy. Her marriage to Přemysl and his ascendance to the throne is greatly celebrated despite the fact that she is also worshipped as a great leader. There is no question of her competence but in order to maintain peace it is taken for granted that a man would be more suitable for this task. This is, of course, necessary for the historical plot but it also coincides with the nineteenth-century idea that men are the heads of nations, are more capable of restraining passion and therefore make greater leaders. Libuše's greatness is not distorted by Přemysl's ascendancy but the upholding of the patriarchy neatly fits in with nineteenth-century ideals. Perhaps it even makes her greater as not only is she a worshipped leader on her own but also she is able to sacrifice her own power for the establishment of a great dynasty that will last for centuries.

The next aspect which can be used for comparison is Libuše and Krasava's sexuality. Libuše, on a pedestal, elevated high above all other women and men as well, is a person to be admired. Krasava is a victim of passion, illogical and mysterious, difficult to understand and certainly not worthy of praise. For this reason, Krasava is also allowed to show her sexuality whereas Libuše is not given this right. Erotic love in this opera is reserved for Krasava and Chrudoš rather than Libuše and Přemysl. In fact, after the premiere of the opera, even the love between the subsidiary characters was severely criticized as it was felt to be undignified for an opera on this very important historical subject. Libuše never reveals her personal thoughts or emotions.



Instead, all of her actions are connected with the security of the state. Even when she announces her choice for husband, she explains that it is a choice made after thorough thinking. Libuše does not act out of passion and when she claims that she will marry Přemysl, she introduces him not as her new husband but rather as the people's prince and lord:

Libuše:  
Nuž staň se! Volba vykonána  
po uvážení přemnohém!  
Již zvěstujte to, drazí, všem,  
že ten, kdož trůn si  
osvojí v pokoji,  
je Přemysl ze Stadice,  
vaše kníže!

Libuše:  
So be it! My choice has long been made  
And after thorough thinking!  
Go, tell it to all people then  
That he who in peace  
Will ascend the throne  
Is Přemysl of Stadice,  
Your prince and lord!

Radovan a sbor:  
Bud' zdrav! Již, národe, jásej!...

Radovan and chorus:  
Long live! Ye, people all, rejoice!...

Libuše:  
Jaká to rozkoš!

Libuše:  
O, what a delight!

Radovan a sbor:  
At' po zemi zazní blaha hlas!

Radovan and Chorus:  
Let the sound of joy ring through the land!

Libuše:  
Jej přivinu k srdci!

Libuše:  
I'll hold him in my arms!

Radovan a sbor:  
A jako vás dva milosti páska,  
tak svazek svornosti objímej nás!

Radovan and chorus:  
And as the bond of love unites you two  
So let the bond of concord unite us!

It is not the fulfillment of love or the marriage of Libuše and Přemysl which is being celebrated here but rather the unification and peace of the Czech lands. Libuše's joy here is fused with the joy of the nation. Her individuality is overshadowed by the needs of the country. As well, no real love scene ever occurs between Libuše and Přemysl. Přemysl learns about his future marriage from Radovan, the elders, and the noblemen. Then, while Libuše waits in the third act, expecting the arrival of her soon-

to-be husband, she sings of Krok, Vyšehrad, and the glory of the Czech nation. When Přemysl finally does arrive there is a short exchange between the two characters, however, this too focuses on the future of the Czech people rather than their personal feelings:

Přemysl:

Hoj, tvrdý Vyšehrad, buď stokrát vítán!  
Dnes nový host jej navštívil,  
oddán tvé službě, lide. Mír ho doprovázej,  
neb aj, tot' Libuše ho vede v hrad!  
(k Libuši)  
Ó moje choti, moje choti drahá,  
jak vysloviti city mám!  
Ve blažené se rozkoši  
Ó, kéž to nebyl sen a klam!

Libuše:

Ó choti, kýžený a drahý choti,  
i mně, i mně nedáno slov!  
Mne plní štěstí netušené  
a hvězdami je poset žití krov.

Přemysl a Libuše:

Ó bozi, kteří trůníte ve záři  
a vévodíte světa končinám,  
pohled'te na nás milostivou tváří,  
za požehnání prosby nesem k Vám!...

Libuše:

A teď, šlechetný choti, vyvolený  
za knížete v obecném jásotu,  
na zlatý stolec se mnou vstupte již!

Přemysl:

Hail, stronghold of Vyšehrad, my greeting to you!  
Today a new guest is coming here,  
Wishing to serve you, people! Peace accompany him,  
For lo! It is Libuše who is guiding him!  
(to Libuše)  
O you my consort, my consort dearest,  
How shall I express what I feel!  
How overwhelming is this delightful feeling.  
O, that it is true and not a dream!

Libuše:

O, husband, my beloved and dearest husband,  
I, too, I too am lacking words!  
I feel a happiness I never before have experienced  
And lucky stars are shining upon me.

Přemysl and Libuše:

O gods, ye, who are surrounded by glory  
And govern all region of the world,  
Look upon us with loving kindness and mercy,  
As your blessing we are asking, imploring!...

Libuše:

And now, my noble husband, whom the people  
With general acclaim have made their prince,  
Ascend with me the golden throne this while!

Instead of singing to each other, this couple sings to the gods. They are surrounded by their people, they do not express their amorous feelings and they never embrace each other but rather ascend the symbol of the nation together. Libuše's description of

Přemysl here is devoid of eroticism and her marriage is a great act for the nation rather than for herself. Because her people have accepted him, so she may as well. She has no feelings of sexuality or if she does, we never hear about it. In order to maintain the image of an ideal ancient national society, a drama of emotions cannot enter the historical scenes, nor can they have any connection with the historical characters.<sup>36</sup>

Krasava, on the contrary, is completely defined by her sexuality and passion. While Libuše and Přemysl hardly address each other in the opera, Krasava and Chrudoš's love scene is the key dramatic twist:

Krasava:

Nuž viz, zde mohyla ční,  
tam drahý tvůj otec dlí!  
Pro svatou památku naň,  
pro rodinný svazek,  
který nás váže,  
a smír nám káže,  
prosím, žádám od tebe:  
bud' ke mně nakloň srdce své  
neb mečem protkni srdce mé!

Chrudoš:

Ha, jak mohutně v mém nitru se  
vroucí její slova pnou!  
Jako střely rozžehané  
vnikají mi do prsou!  
Má Krasavo!

Krasava:

Můj Chrudoši!

*Zatím co si Chrudoš a Krasava mlčky  
leží v náručí, vystoupí Radmila,  
vedouc Lutobora a ukazujíc na ně;*

Krasava:

See, there's that burial mound  
Where your dear father's resting!  
For his sacred memory,  
For the bond of kinship  
Which binds us  
And imposes peace,  
I pray and request you now:  
Either to give your heart to me  
Or thrust your sword through my own heart!

Chrudoš:

Ah, how forcefully in my heart are  
Her ardent words implanted!  
They like flaming arrows,  
Penetrate all my being!  
My Krasava!

Krasava:

O, my Chrudoš!

*While Krasava and Chrudoš embrace  
each other silently, Radmila enters  
leading Lutobor and points them out.*

<sup>36</sup> Marta Ottlová and Milan Pospíšil, "Smetana and Wenzig's Libuše," in *Bedřich Smetana: Libuše*, program booklet (Prague: National Theatre, 1995): 54.

*zároveň s nimi vystoupí Št'áhlav.*

*Together with them enters Št'áhlav.*

**Radmila, Št'áhlav a Lutobor:**

**Radmila, Št'áhlav and Lutobor:**

On s Krasavou, hle, smířil se!  
Nám kyne blahá naděje,  
že smíří se i s vládkyní!  
Hězda naděje nám svítá,  
ranní záře plápolá!

With Krasava he's reconciled!  
Now may we hope with renewed strength  
That he'll make peace with the princess!  
The star of hope shines now again  
And morning glow is flaming!

**Krasava a Chrudoš:**

**Krasava and Chrudoš:**

Krasavo má!  
Chrudoši můj!

My Krasava!  
My Chrudoš!

The communication between Krasava and Chrudoš is clearly on a much higher passionate plane than that between Libuše and Přemysl. They are alone on the stage, are allowed to embrace, and they address each other on a higher emotional level. The key to this scene is their passion and their dramatic conflict whereas with Libuše and Přemysl the purpose is only to present the heroic, historical scene. Libuše cannot be sullied by erotic love and, therefore, her “femaleness” is taken away. She must remain sexless while Krasava fills the role of the complicated, passionate, emotional and “normal” woman.

Krasava's individuality is more highlighted as well especially through physical description. Přemysl never describes Libuše's personal features but Chrudoš focuses on Krasava's:

**Chrudoš (k Krasavě):**

**Chrudoš (to Krasava):**

Ó zraku, čarovný zraku,  
jak záříš perlami!  
Dej zlíbatí ty slzy,  
co řinou v ňadra mi!  
Nevěsto má nejdražší,  
poklade duše mé,

O, pearls, magical pearls  
Which sparkle in your eyes!  
Let me kiss of those tears  
Which fall upon my heart!  
My bride, of all the dearest,  
The treasure of my soul,

mám, sotva jsem tě našel,  
opět ztratiti tebe?

Shall I, just have found you,  
Shall I lose you again?



Figure 8: Gabriela Beňačková in her role as Libuše, 1983.

This kind of description is never employed for Libuše. The way that Libuše and Krasava appeal to their respective men is also indicative of their individuality or lack of. In the last act, Libuše asks Přemysl to forgive Chrudoš for his insult but it is not a request to redeem herself. Rather, it is a plea for peace in the nation. At the same time,

Krasava asks Chrudoš to give up his anger and accept the ruling of the court but her plea is for very individual reasons: “Now for our love’s sake submit to his will, Have mercy, mercy on poor wretched me.”

The final point of comparison between Krasava and Libuše is their dramatic role within the story. When Wenzig was constructing the libretto, he knew that the audience would already know the details of the story of Libuše and therefore he set only three independent scenes or images from the legend – her judgment, her marriage and her prophecy. The details of the story and supernatural features that had been present in many other versions of Libuše were therefore omitted in Wenzig’s version. Instead of focusing the plot on the historical scenes, Wenzig chose a subsidiary plot involving the two brothers and Krasava. It is within this subsidiary plot that the action develops. As Marta Ottlová and Milan Pospíšil have written, “the historical scenes are not the focus of the dramatic struggle, but their presentation is its purpose.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, it is Krasava who propels the action within the opera rather than Libuše. This fact coincides with the characteristics of the two women that are presented as well. To uphold the ideal of the mythical heroine, Libuše must be steadfast and unchanging. She cannot falter in her actions because the whole nation is depending on her as their protector. Like the lime tree, Libuše is without individuality. Rather, she is simply a symbol. Krasava is not limited by this burden and therefore, she becomes the center of the drama. She takes on the dynamic role while Libuše remains passive.

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<sup>37</sup> Ottlová and Pospíšil, 54.

### The Music

The concept of Libuše as passive symbol and Krasava as lively dramatic player takes on special significance in Smetana's music. Smetana's *Libuše* is a three-act festive opera conceived on an epic scale for ceremonial celebrations. He opens the work with a long orchestral introduction which presents the three most important motives of the drama: Libuše, Přemysl and Vyšehrad. These three ideas represent the main purpose of the work, that is to illustrate a great ideal Czech community of the past. Libuše, Přemysl and Vyšehrad are the centers of that community. Smetana uses the introduction as a kind of symphonic poem based on these three themes. Of the three, it is Libuše's which dominates the score.



Example 1: Libuše's motive.

The motive evolves from the opening fanfare representing Vyšehrad as if Libuše herself is descended from the historic castle. This ceremonial music is based on the C-major tonic triad and Libuše's motive is deduced from it. The motive stands as a musical representation of Libuše's character. The rhythm is slow and regular, the

harmony is firmly set in C major, and the melody traces the descending C-major scale. Libuše is set up musically as a pure, calm, unclouded, and regal symbol.

She is also a symbol which is unwavering. Her motive is heard in nearly every scene of the opera. For example, at the end of act one, scene one, after her prayer, the motive rings out in clear C major. Again, tranquilly, it is heard at the beginning of scene four, the high point of act one. This scene also ends with her motive. In the second act, the character Libuše never enters the action although again her presence is always felt. For example, her motive is heard in the second scene when Chrudoš wonders why he has been asked to come to his ancestors grave. Repeatedly it is heard during Přemysl's daydreaming and finally it is significantly interwoven into scene five of act two when Přemysl learns of his fate to marry Libuše.

All of the significant placings of her motive show that Smetana was emphasizing Libuše and what she represents over everything else in the opera. Smetana also made the important decision to have Libuše sing her prophecy at the end of act three. Wenzig's plan had been to close the text with everyone rejoicing together about peace in the land and love reigning again. He then wished to show the *tableaux vivants* of Czech history, such musical *tableaux* being quite common at the time. Smetana preferred for Libuše alone to describe the *tableaux* thereby elevating her to the high position of orator of Czech history. Jaroslav Jiránek has described Libuše as a "super" main character because her text and the music associated with her is of so much higher quantity than any other character in the opera. As he writes, "there are few operatic works in the world literature in which the title hero fills every page so meaningfully as



princess Libuše in Smetana's same-titled opera."<sup>38</sup> Smetana and Wenzig's wish was to present Libuše as the ideal model, so much so that she literally towers over all of the other characters musically and figuratively within the opera.

While Libuše dominates the score, it is Krasava who fulfills the dynamic role. Of the five main characters in Libuše (Libuše, Přemysl, Krasava, Chrudoš and Št'áhlav) only Krasava cannot be contained in a structured, stable motive. Instead, a "type" of music is associated with her but it cannot be clearly defined. Smetana did attempt to compose a specific motive for Krasava but when writing the opera, he decided to leave it out.<sup>39</sup> Rather, her music, like her character, is dynamic. The best example comes in the first act after Libuše's prayer. The first scene ends with Libuše's motive clear, dignified and stable. It is immediately followed by a short scene between Krasava and Radmila where Krasava nervously describes her role in the dispute (see Example 2).

The tempo markings in this short passage change three times from allegro to meno allegro to moderato. The triplet figures propel the action forward. There is no harmonic stability and the harmonic movement is rapid while crescendos and decrescendos appear in every bar. Krasava's speech is agitated. She begins with a *mf* tempo marking, changes to forte, and then to piano. The triplets used in her speech add irregularity to the rhythm and the intervals she sings are wide and dissonant. The overall effect achieved by this music is one of dynamic, uneasy and structureless momentum. Much of Krasava's music is written in this way. Instead of tying her to a motive which goes against the fabric of her character, Smetana invents a live, irregular

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<sup>38</sup> Jiránek, 390. Translation by the author of this thesis.

## KRASAVA:

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "KRASAVA". It consists of four systems of music, each with a piano (p) and vocal (v) staff. The tempo markings are: *Allegro*, *Meno allegro*, *Moderato*, and *agitato*. The lyrics are in Czech. The first system has the tempo marking *Allegro* and the lyrics "Nemohu dá - let". The second system has the tempo marking *Meno allegro* and the lyrics "Jej ne - lze mi zítít". The third system has the tempo marking *Moderato* and the lyrics "Před je - ho". The fourth system has the tempo marking *agitato* and the lyrics "tvá - ti bych ne-mohla díti".

I cannot join them. I must not see him. I, before his face could not, could not abide.

## Example 2: Krasava's music.

and nearly shapeless music to describe her nervous, active, and passionate personality. The music represents her continuity, her dramatic role. She is not an ideal or a symbol that can be fixed but rather a lively, real woman.

Krasava and Libuše's musical character can also be compared by examining the key dramatic and musical moments in which each are involved. Libuše, with minor exceptions, is presented in her heroic, ideal role. Musically, this means that her

<sup>39</sup> Jiránek, 336.

soprano line is composed almost entirely without dissonance, the harmony remains, for the most part, stable even to the point of monotony and the rhythm is regular and dignified. Libuše never hurries or panics. Her musical character is best exemplified in her prayer and ceremonial judgment duties in act one and her peace and history arias of scenes one and two of act three.

Libuše's prayer appears in act one, scene one and it serves as an excellent example. It is prefaced by a change of key to E flat major. The opening of her aria illustrates her musical character.

LIBUŠE:

Musical score for Libuše's prayer, opening. The score is in E-flat major and 4/4 time. It features a soprano line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Moderato assai (♩ = 72)" and the mood is "espresso". The lyrics are in Czech: "Bohové věční ta - mo nad o-bla-ky, v milosti" and "ahli - šíj - to - na - tu - to zemi". The piano part includes dynamic markings like "pp", "dim", and "dolce".

Eternal gods, ye that dwell above the clouds, look down with grace upon this our land!

### Example 3: Libuše's prayer, opening.

She begins by outlining the E flat-major tonic triad. In fact, the whole aria is structured around it as the soprano line generally sticks to E flat, G and B flat as the key notes. During these eight bars, only tonic harmony is heard and Smetana rarely wavers from it during the entire section. There is a slight modulation when Libuše mentions the

serpents of strife outside the country's borders, obviously motivated by the text, but this is a brief four bars before the return to solid E flat major. The rhythm is again regular and dignified. Musically, Libuše is entirely pristine, as is her character. This aria is interrupted by the chorus which restates the words she has just voiced (a technique used in many of Libuše's arias). Libuše then enters again towering over the chorus and other female characters on a high B flat, stretched to B natural for emphasis, on the words *národ* (nation). By revoicing her words, the chorus (people) shows contentment and agreement with what she has said. They clearly admire their wise leader and she joins them, albeit on a higher level, to demonstrate the unity within the land. Libuše's other arias are built on a similar basis. The main purpose is to give her the regal, immutable, and flawless character that the Czech people were meant to appreciate.

There are also some moments in the opera when Libuše steps out of character but these are instigated by the dramatic situation. The first example occurs when Chrudoš insults Libuše in scene four of the first act (see Example 4). This is the only time in the opera when Libuše becomes visibly and musically shaken.

Libuše's musical character is of a different quality here. The soprano line is not formed around triads or even regular intervals. Instead, there are irregular leaps and chromatic lines. The harmony is also unstable and b flat minor is used rather than the major tonalities associated with her in other scenes. The marking *s bolestným výrazem* [with painful expression] indicates that this scene is mentally very difficult for Libuše and the music reflects this through wide and irregular leaps as well as less clear tonalities. When a character as noble as Libuše is offended, especially unjustly, it is

understandable that she would react with great expression. She is not angry or aggressive in this scene but rather extremely hurt. Characteristically, however, this short section lasts for only eighteen bars after which Libuše declares that she will solve the problem by marrying and her regular, dignified persona returns for this part of the scene. Someone of Libuše's stature cannot help but react with some pathos when insulted but she is not shaken for long. In fact, considering the degree of the insult, her short response and quick recovery again prove that she is a woman of extremely solid character.

#### LIBUŠE:

The musical score is for a vocal and piano piece. It begins with the tempo marking 'Largo'. The vocal line starts with the lyrics 'Vy sly-še-li jste po-ha-né-ní mo-je.' The piano accompaniment features a 'ritard.' (ritardando) marking. The score continues with several staves, including a section marked 'espress.' (espressivo) and another marked 'cresc.' (crescendo). The lyrics continue: 'jak ra-mu-lál, před tvá - - - ři', 'ná - ro - da, že - jsem jen žnou nestatočnou v boje', and 'a hi - - - dny ten.' The score is written in a key with one flat and a 4/4 time signature.

You yourselves have heard how he insulted me, how he has cursed me here in your presence that I am only a woman without courage.

Example 4: Libuše offended.

Libuše's prophecy at the end of the opera provides another opportunity for Libuše to step out of character but again the exception is due to the emotional importance of the scene. Although Libuše's prophecy is not the dramatic climax of the opera, it is the opera's main *raison d'être*. Libuše orates six events from Czech history, although it is the future she is prophesizing in the opera. For this scene, Libuše stands in the foreground in prophetic rapture with her eyes and hands raised upwards, truly something otherworldly. Smetana's orchestral depiction of these six scenes becomes the focus while Libuše relates the information. Each picture is identified and separated from the rest by the orchestration used. Břetislav and Jitka are described with an archaic sound (horns, later supported by trombones, clarinets, doubled by bassoons, and the harp). Jaroslav of Šternbeck is presented by the strings. Otakar II, Elizabeth and Charles IV are brought in by the full orchestra while Žižka and the Hussites are invoked by the chorale *Ye who are God's warriors* on trombones and later the entire brass ensemble. Finally, George of Poděbrady is represented by the full orchestra which plays the chorale in a march rhythm. Libuše's soprano line is the unifying thread throughout these depictions. While the orchestra paints the scenes in many different colors and harmonies, Libuše remains the firm center. Generally, she again sings with clarity, regularity, and evenness but when the situation calls for a more passionate display, her rigidity falls away. For example, when she describes the Hussite wars, she speaks of the whole land trembling and shaking, the evil storm winds, and the frightful thunder and lightning. In this situation, her music becomes more agitated as is called for by the text. Strong accents, a minor key, large leaps and a more hurried rhythmic pulse characterize her line. Primarily, however, Libuše still

exudes an atmosphere of noble clarity and calm. When the last picture, the royal castle in Prague in a magic illumination, is presented, Libuše again sings in a clear D major “with grand expression” about her dear country which will never perish.

Krasava is most heavily featured in the second act. In scene one she pleads with her father while in scene two she appeals to Chrudoš. Krasava’s plea to her father is an excellent example of her changing, dramatic, and passionate character. In this scene, she wishes to convince her father of her loyalty and seek his forgiveness. Her father, Lutobor, is stubborn and unforgiving and for this reason, Krasava attempts several times and with several strategies to win her father over. She begins very passionately as we saw her in the first act. The tempo marking is *allegro agitato*, a semitonal figure played by the oboes creates a tense instability, and the familiar triplets which add energy and momentum to the atmosphere are heard. When she begs her father to let her look at him, she reaches a high A flat and the score is inscribed “with the greatest passion, breadth” (see Example 5).

After this section of the aria, there is a marked change. Now Krasava tries a more calm and sentimental approach with her father. This part of the aria is in a fairly firm D flat major and it does not contain the typical hurried feeling normally associated with Krasava. On the other hand, the soprano line is largely based on chromatic scales and the triplets are present. Krasava is attempting to convince her father of her faithfulness and constancy, represented in the quite stable harmony and rhythm, however, her passion is still detectable in the chromatic lines. Lutobor responds to Krasava’s plea but he is not convinced. When Krasava tries again she once more begins sweetly and calmly, however, her description of her history with Chrudoš

## KRASAVA:

The musical score consists of five systems of vocal and piano parts. The lyrics are in Russian. Performance markings include *cresc.*, *largo*, *largo* (with a note about the tempo), *lento*, and *dim.*.

System 1: *cresc.*  
 Vocal: *Vsk, kuj-te so-bé co-ko-li vy-bé-to dce-ru*  
 Piano: *tr*

System 2: *tr*  
 Vocal: *v di-vé pu-sti-ny,*  
 Piano: *tr*

System 3: *tr*  
 Vocal: *po-trob-to dce-ru tfo-ba vo pro-pa-si,*  
 Piano: *tr*

System 4: *largo*  
 Vocal: *jen dej-*  
 Piano: *tr*

System 5: *lento*  
 Vocal: *to zfi-ti ni vo m-di tváti*  
 Piano: *dim.*

But whatever you may intend, chase your daughter out into the wilderness, bury your daughter in a bottomless pit, but let me look into your dearest face!

## Example 5: Krasava's plea.

quickly becomes more emotionally heightened and uncontrollable. Finally, when she confesses her guilt and asks for her father's compassion and "just one look", she repeats one motive three times at chromatic intervals raising the emotional tension even higher. Each phrase asks for crescendo and accelerando until she reaches a high b



natural and then slowly drains out to rest in D flat major again. This aria, with its many changes, harmonic and melodic intensity, and rhythmic dynamism, gives the listener a very rounded view of all the sides of Krasava. Her passion, instability and breathtaking pathos ring through in this scene.

The contrast between Krasava and Libuše can also be felt during their respective love scenes. When Krasava appeals to Chrudoš it is a passionate outcry full of chromaticisms, pulsating triplets, and irregular rhythm (see Example 6a). The duet between these two characters is full of passion and it reaches its height when Chrudoš forgives Krasava by claiming “my Krasava” and she in turn “my Chrudoš” simultaneously, each singing the interval of a major second. This scene was Smetana’s idea and he asked Wenzig to add it to the libretto. In Wenzig’s original text, the scene was merely presupposed as hidden action. Obviously, Smetana felt that the personal theme was of great significance. As Marta Ottlová and Milan Pospíšil have written, “The personal theme of the dispute, which with Wenzig was more or less a dramatic crutch, became in Smetana’s musical setting the dramatic climax of the opera.”<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, Libuše never appears on stage alone with Přemysl. There is no moving exchange between these two characters. Instead, Libuše simply greets her husband in a calm and straightforward A major. Even when she is expressing the joy of her marriage and her future husband, her music remains tied to tonic harmony. She may be lacking for words but her emotions are very much in control (see Example 6b).

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<sup>40</sup> Ottlová and Pospíšil, 55.

a.  
KRASAVA:

Musical score for Krasava. The score consists of two systems. The first system has a vocal line (soprano) and a piano accompaniment. The tempo marking 'Moderato' is above the vocal line, and 'Allegro' is above the piano part. The lyrics are: 'Ó, dej se chomě-či-ti! Jak vo-lá-ka-rinám,'. The second system continues the vocal and piano parts with the lyrics: '— jen horoucí lá-skou k to-bě jsem u-la-bá-čy-bi-lal'. The piano part includes dynamic markings like *pp* and *p*.

O, let me persuade you! However great my guilt is, only out of love for you have I made this fatal error.

b.  
LIBUŠE:

Musical score for Libuše. The score consists of four systems. The first system has a vocal line (soprano) and a piano accompaniment. The tempo marking 'Moderato' is above the vocal line, and 'Allegro' is above the piano part. The lyrics are: 'Ó, cho-ti, ky - bo-ní-e'. The second system continues the vocal and piano parts with the lyrics: 'dra-hy cho-ti! I má-ě, i má-ě'. The third system continues with the lyrics: 'na-dá-ě slo-ě! Mno- pl-ní bí-ě - sti ni-l-ě na-tu-ě-ě'. The fourth system continues with the lyrics: 'hře-ě-ě-ě je po-ě-ě-ě-ě ti krov-'. The piano part includes dynamic markings like *pp*, *p*, *cruc.*, and *dim.*.

O, husband, my beloved and dearest husband, I, too, I too am lacking words!  
I feel a happiness I have never before experienced and lucky stars are shining upon me.

Example 6: Krasava and Libuše's expression of love.

The final comparison to be made between Krasava and Libuše involves how others are related to them musically. There are two motives used in this opera which represent the feelings of one character for another. Both are heard at the very beginning of act two and serve as a sort of foil to each other. The first represents Chrudoš's painful remembrance of love for Krasava.



Example 7: Chrudoš's painful remembrance of love for Krasava.

This motive is presented first by strings and then by winds. The music is full of pathos and longing. It also sets the mood for the second act which will first focus on the personal theme of love and jealousy between Krasava and Chrudoš. This highly emotional theme is then juxtaposed with another, Přemysl's love for Libuše which will become important for the last two scenes of the act.



Example 8: Přemysl's love for Libuše

When compared with the first theme, this motive is much more quaint and sweet. It is presented by the horns which gives it a regal manner. The clear major tonality often associated with Libuše is again connected with her here. Musically, the emotions which are felt for Krasava and Libuše are another example of the great contrast between them. Přemysl cannot express his love for Libuše with any sort of desire or excitement as these emotions are connected with eroticism, a concept unacceptable for Libuše if she is to remain a honorable, chaste and saintly figure. On the other hand, Chrudoš's feelings for Krasava may be expressed in the extreme as his jealous love and anger serve as the most important dramatic crisis in the opera.

As the last point of comparison, we may look at Přemysl's most famous aria from this opera, *O vy lípy* [Oh, ye lime trees]. In scene four of act two, Přemysl sings a great ode to the lime trees:

Přemysl:

O, vy lípy, o, vy lípy,  
praotců ruka vsadila vás!  
Jak pne se vznešeně hlava vaše  
dýchajíc vůni,  
lahodnou skýtajíc stravu  
a člověku stín!  
Právem zasvěceny  
národu jste mému.  
ó buďte jeho obrazem,  
sil, ctností, krásy pravzorem!

Přemysl:

O, ye lime trees, o, ye lime trees,  
Forefather's hands have planted you here!  
How nobly do your tops rise to the heights  
Exuding scent,  
Offering delightful food to the bees  
And shade to man!  
Truly sacred you are  
To all of my people.  
O, be ye ever its image,  
A symbol of its virtue, strength!

These words, describing the lime trees, could also very easily be used to describe Libuše. She is also noble, sacred and a symbol of the Czech people's virtue and strength. In fact, in the previous scene, Přemysl directly associates Libuše with the lime trees when he says "Máchnu-li mečem, klátí se doubcí, sosny, velikáni lesa! At' se odváží jen sem, my vraha zaženem: lesknoucích zbraní plamenné šípy uhájily by Libuši i lípy!" [When I swing my

sword, oak trees sway, fir-trees, the giants of the woods! Let him but invade the land we'll rout the enemy: The flaming arrows of our weapons will surely protect Libuse and the lime trees]. Here there is a direct reference to the "German" oak tree which will be routed from the land while the lime trees and Libuše become representatives for the Czech nation. Theoretically, Libuše and the lime trees are one in the same image. Both stand as noble feminine symbols in direct opposition to the German, masculine oak. When Libuše's motive is first heard at the beginning of the introduction, it is presented by the oboe. As well, in the first act, when Libuše describes the various symbols at the court, the lime trees are again evoked by the oboe. When Přemysl sings his aria to the lime trees, he is also singing to Libuše. The music can then be seen as a kind of love aria which is never allowed to be presented to Libuše herself.

PŘEMYSL:



O, ye lime trees, o, ye lime trees.

Example 9: Přemysl's ode to the lime trees.

The music presented in this aria is similar to that of Libuše's. The baritone line outlines the tonic triad of B flat major and hardly strays from it. The rhythm is extremely straightforward and clear, as is the harmony. The structure is also one of the simplest in the entire opera – a clearcut ABA. This music and text stand as excellent examples of the relationship between Libuše, the lime trees and therefore the Czech nation itself.

## CONCLUSION

After exploring the libretto and music of this opera, Libuše emerges as a female ideal. Two aspects of her femaleness are highlighted through the course of the opera. The first is her ability to sacrifice. Without batting an eye, Libuše relinquishes her power to Přemysl and thus saves the Czech nation from strife. She never considers herself or the loss of her power. Rather, her main concern is for the unity of the nation. The second aspect of her character that is highlighted is her ability as a seer, a traditionally female role. Typically, this quality has a negative aspect to it but not for Libuše. Rather, she becomes a prophet for the Czech nation by outlining their future troubles and also their future glories. Her insistence that the Czech nation will not perish is like a call to the people. She is willing them to survive.

This female ideal is also an anti-feminist one from a twenty-first century perspective. Although Libuše is trusted and treated as a great liberal and democratic leader, all of the characters in the opera are pleased that she will now rule with a man. In this way her power is titular. The general consensus is that a male ruler is needed to solve the more difficult conflicts in the land.

Musically, it is through her juxtaposition to Krasava that Libuše's ideal qualities are emphasized. Libuše's music is pure and ideal, almost "sexless". She sings melodies that revolve around the tonic triad, the phrase structure and rhythm are regular, and her arias often remain strongly tied to one major key. Krasava's music, on the other hand, is full of chromatic harmony, the rhythm and phrase structure are irregular, and her melodies contain wide and irregular leaps. Libuše and Krasava's music illustrates their character but it also sets up two different blocks of sound within the opera as a whole: one that is

pure, harmonically, melodically, and rhythmically and one that, in its chromatic harmony and irregularity, is more passionate, more full of life. Libuše's music does not stand out as something particularly female. In fact, she sounds very much like Přemysl. Rather, her ideal role is exemplified through the musical juxtaposition of her and her less ideal counterpart.

Images of gender and nationalism are fused together in Smetana's *Libuše* to represent the spirit of the Czech nation. It is a national spirit encompassing both the ideal female qualities of Libuše (sacrifice and her power as a prophetess) and the more human qualities of Krasava. It is also a spirit that was gradually created or imagined over the course of the nineteenth century and it continues to be developed today.

In the Czech Republic of the twenty-first century, the Czech national identity remains an issue. The fact remains that this is a small country of ten million people surrounded by nations which are larger and mostly economically stronger. As with most of the world, American pop culture has invaded, a McDonalds stands in nearly every neighbourhood and American sitcoms are broadcast in Czech every evening. The Czech parliament is working hard to join the European Union and enter the "Western" world again, but at the same time, many Czech people fear of a loss of their culture and the Czech identity that was fostered during the National Revival. Once again, they are being "invaded" from all sides. The Czech identity has to be reworked for the modern era and therefore, it becomes necessary for to re-invent the "Czech myth" with each passing generation.

Canadians often wonder what makes them different from the Americans. What is the Canadian national identity? This question, battered back and forth nearly every day on



the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, is very difficult to answer, perhaps it is unanswerable. But if one were to ask a Czech what makes them different from other nations in the world, he / she could quite easily answer. This is a result of the National Revival movement that took hold of the Czech imagination during the nineteenth century, a movement nurtured during the twentieth century, and which continues to be projected into the twenty-first. The fact of the matter remains that a Czech farmer living in Železná Ruda (a border town between Germany and the Czech Republic) probably has more in common, in the way of lifestyle, with a German farmer living just over the border in Bayer Eisenstein than she does with a Czech businessperson living in Prague.

And yet, she identifies with the businessperson because they sing the same national anthem, they respect the same president, and they both watch the same national news at seven o'clock every evening. This sense of the national goes still deeper: they will both likely have read Němcová's *Babička*; they will have learned about not only the Hussites and Charles IV but also Palacký and Jungmann; and quite probably they will have both seen Smetana's *Libuše* at the National Theatre in Prague. These cultural references bind the Czech people together, bind them so tightly that very few of them question what makes up this sense of themselves.

The same kind of attitude surrounds the Czech style in music. How else can we explain Brian Large's comment that "[Smetana] created melodies that are fervently Czech in spirit?"<sup>1</sup> The relationship between a highly developed sense of Czech national identity and what might be considered a Czech national musical style is complex and problematic. On the one hand, there is a large and distinctive body of Czech folk songs

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<sup>1</sup> Large, 186.

and dances that are clearly Czech in the sense embodied in Herder's formulation of a "people". However, it must also be recognized that *Libuše*, the great Czech cultural icon in music, actually contains very little of what could be considered quintessentially Czech. Folk songs and national dances, as Harrach explained in his appeal for a new "Czech" opera, were the basis of the Czech style. But *Libuše* contains no example of folk song or national dance. Rather, it steers closer to the developments of German opera and, especially Wagner, than any of Smetana's operas. Thus, the "Czech style" in music is yet another example of the universalized myth of the Czech identity.

For example, when the president of the Czech Republic enters the room, for any kind of formal occasion, the opening music from the introduction of *Libuše* is played. Each Prague Spring music festival begins with Smetana's *Má vlast* [My Country, 1874-79] and this performance is broadcasted every year on Czech Television.<sup>2</sup> The National Theatre continues to play *Libuše* every January 1 and May 8.

In a way, *Libuše* almost serves as a special national anthem performed for extra special occasions. In fact, Wenzig had asked Smetana to include the singing of the Czech national anthem *Kde domov můj* [Where is my home?], composed by Škroup, at the end of the opera but Smetana politely declined. The suggestion itself is testimony that *Libuše* stands as a musical representation of the Czech nation, a sense of common identity eloquently expressed by Anderson:

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<sup>2</sup> *My Country* is a cycle of six symphonic poems by Smetana celebrating both historical events in Czech history and also the Czech countryside. The Prague Spring International Music Festival is a permanent showcase for outstanding performing artists, symphony orchestras and chamber music ensembles of the world. The first festival was held in 1946 under the patronage of Czechoslovak president Edvard Beneš, and its organizing committee was made up of important figures in Czech musical life. Since 1952 the festival has opened with Bedřich Smetana's cycle of symphonic poems *Má vlast* (My Country), and it closes with the ninth symphony of Ludwig van Beethoven.

There is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests – above all in the form of poetry and songs. Take national anthems, for example, sung on national holidays. No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance. Singing the Marseillaise, Waltzing Matilda, and Indonesia Raya provide occasions for unisonality, for the echoes physical realization of the imagined community... How selfless this unisonance feels. If we are aware that others are singing these songs precisely when and as we are, we have no idea who they may be, or even where, out of earshot, they are singing. Nothing connects us all but imagined sound.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Anderson, 145.

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## APPENDIX

The following is a full synopsis of the opera.

**Characters:**

Libuše, Bohemian princess (soprano)  
 Přemysl of Stadice (baritone)  
 Chrudoš from Otava, Št'áhlav's brother (bass)  
 Št'áhlav from Radbuza, Chrudoš's brother (tenor)  
 Lutobor from Dobroslavský Chlumec, their uncle (bass)  
 Radovan from the Stone Bridge (baritone)  
 Krasava, Lutobor's daughter (soprano)  
 Radmila, the sister of the two brothers (contralto)  
 Four harvesters  
 Elders, chieftains and noblemen.  
 Maidens at Libuše's court.  
 Přemysl's retinue.  
 People.

Act I. Libuše's Judgement. Libuše's hall at Vyšehrad overlooking the Vltava river.

Radmila thanks Princess Libuše, attended by her group of maidens and priestesses, for calling a council of alderman together to settle a dispute between her brothers Chrudoš and Št'áhlav over their father's inheritance. Libuše promises to bring the brothers before her court and she prays for grace, fortune, glory, and protection for the nation. Libuše and her maidens leave to go to the court.

Krasava, the cause of the quarrel between the two brothers, stays behind. She reveals her guilt to Radmila but not her entire secret. As Krasava drags Radmila from the hall, she promises to detail the whole secret at a different time and place.

Scene three is set in an open space at Vyšehrad. The court is dominated by a sacred lime tree. Within its shadow stands Libuše's throne. Chrudoš and Št'áhlav stand along with the two groups of opposing elders. The dispute between the two brothers continues even before the opening of the council and seems irreconcilable to everyone's

consternation. The older Chrudoš asks for the entire inheritance, according to German law. Št'áhlav simply trusts in the just decision of the council. Libuše announced her opinion which is to let the two brothers administer their inheritance jointly. The council of aldermen agrees with her judgement and Radovan announced the decision. Chrudoš is outraged and he refused to submit to the judgement of a woman. Libuše, deeply wounded by Chrudoš's insult, declares that she will marry a man of the council's choice who will then become ruler of the Czech nation. Radovan is pleased by this decision but he insists that she should choose her own spouse. As the people elected her princess, so must she herself elect her husband. Libuše announces that Přemysl, a virtuous peasant, will become her partner and prince.

Act II. Libuše's Betrothal. Act two is set in a gloomy mountain forest close to the burial ground of the ancestors of Chrudoš and Št'áhlav. Lutobor and his daughter Krasava, after a pilgrimage of two days, have arrived at the grave of Lutobor's brother, the father of Chrudoš and Št'áhlav. For the first time Krasava confesses to her father that when Chrudoš resisted her appeals to his affection, she decided to take revenge and declare a false love for his brother. Chrudoš became angry with both Krasava and Št'áhlav and thus began the feud over the inheritance. Krasava begs her father for forgiveness with the help of Št'áhlav and Radmila. Lutobor orders Krasava to reconcile with Chrudoš, who is coming to the grave because of Lutobor's summons, or face the consequences: possible exile from the land. In scene two Krasava succeeds in reconciling with Chrudoš and she tries to persuade him to beg forgiveness from the abused Princess Libuše. The lovers

embrace. Radmila, Štáhlav, and Lutobor hope that as a result of the reconciliation, Chrudoš will also submit to Princess Libuše.

Scene three is located in the peaceful countryside at Stadice where, among lime trees, Přemysl has made his home. The singing of the harvesters working in the field rings forth joyfully. Přemysl reminisces about Libuše, who he meets with during her trips to the country. He realizes that he is in love with her. Sending his merry people on their way to the harvest festival, he is content to remain alone with his thoughts. Absorbed in his love for Libuše, he sings his praises to the lime trees. Afterwards, he sees a great procession coming with Libuše's white horse leading the way. It is a delegation chosen by Libuše to announce her decision to Přemysl that he will become her husband and prince. The happy Přemysl, whose premonition has been fulfilled, emotionally takes leave of the countryside and his people. When he finds out that Libuše was insulted by Chrudoš, who is perhaps preparing for battle, he hurried to Vyšehrad to help her.

Act III. Libuše's Prophecy. The act opens in Libuše's chamber in Vyšehrad where she welcomes the reconciled brothers. The delegation approaches with Přemysl. Libuše emotionally recalls her father Krok and asks for his blessing for her marriage and the nation. Maidens arrive and lead the Princess away to her wedding ceremony.

Chrudoš is still distrustful and refuses to recognize Přemysl as the new ruler. He withdraws his distrust only after a reproof from his brother Štáhlav, a threat from Lutobor, and a loving plea from Krasava.

At last Přemysl meets his beloved Libuše and the happy couple ask the gods for their blessing. Přemysl assumes power. The quarrel between the two brothers is settled at last

and Chrudoš atones for his abuse of Libuše by kneeling before her. Before he has the chance to carry out this action, Přemysl lifts him towards himself.

Libuše thanks the gods for the joyful day and enters into a state of prophetic rapture: images of glorious figures from the nation's future appear to her. Prince Břetislav, the unifier of Bohemia and Moravia, abducts his bride Jitka from a foreign convent. The mythical Jaroslav of Šternberk defeats the Tartars in Moravia, halting the advance to the West. Přemysl Otakar II, Queen Eliška, and Charles IV, Czech king and Holy Roman Emperor, symbolize the blossoming of the Czech state. The earth shakes under the violence of the Hussite wars, led by Jan Žižka and Prokop Holý. Finally Princess Libuše sees Jiří of Poděbrady, the last truly Czech king, great in peace and at war, a man of intellect admired even by his adversaries. Libuše senses that difficulties await her country, but she insists that the Czech nation will gloriously overcome all its problems and live on forever in the future.