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NEJEDLÝ CONTRA JANÁČEK: THE CONTROVERSY CONCERNING MODERN CZECH MUSIC

The series of controversies concerning modern Czech music dates from the early 1870s. The distinctive phases of the associated discourse of the Modern in Czech music were usually termed 'struggles' for or against someone, 'attacks' on someone, or 'cases' or 'affairs' concerning someone; and the standard narrative underlying Czech music history features 'struggles' concerning Smetana, the 'affair' of Karel Knittel, 'struggles' concerning Dvořák, an 'affair' concerning Suk, numerous 'cases' concerning Nejedlý, and a 'struggle' against modernism after 1948, among others. As the military and juridical vocabulary suggests, the discourse of the Modern was far more than a matter of taste and aesthetic judgements. From the outset, it was a discourse legitimizing highly practical acts in struggles for power, rank, career advancement, influence, recognition, awards and sanctions in musical life. There were important issues at stake, and losers were usually banished from the paradise of Czech musical culture. As the discourse was advanced by a dialectics of the Modern and National, its ideological and political overtones were apparent. It is difficult to say when it finally ceased; perhaps this has not yet happened, and it is now only dormant.

For a historian, the most attractive aspect of this discourse consists in the stereotypes that have been recurring in it for more than a century. For instance, many of the arguments used against modernism in the early 1950s as a part of the doctrine of socialist realism had been adopted not only in the 1930s, but in various projects in Czech music after 1918, where they had been used to reject modernism in the name of the national character and of vernacular traditions. Moreover, the origins of this attitude can be identified as early as the 1870s.

On the other hand, a historian is faced with obvious difficulties resulting from the contamination of the aesthetic discourse with social power. The temptation to compensate for past injustices, small or great, is almost irresistible in writing history, as is the temptation to find clues for the present in the past. It is extremely difficult to take an objective, unprejudiced position, and even if one were to succeed, such an analysis of the discourse would be likely to be received by the public, even by professional musicologists, in moral rather than in purely cogni-

tive terms. In 1999 Jindra Bártová published an illuminating example of these difficulties in the journal *Opus musicum*. In her article, 'Podivnosti kritických soudů v českém hudebním časopisectví na počátku století' (Peculiarities of critical judgements in Czech music journalism in the early 20th century), she attempts to correct what she believes to be the traditional messianic picture of Zdeněk Nejedlý. Her correction results in an attack on some Prague music critics for being too contemporary, and for criticising a stage director from Brno who is not contemporary enough; and in an (anonymous) assault on an American university professor for accusing our beloved and great composer Antonín Dvořák of having been insane. This professor, so Jindra Bártová believes, is still continuing Zdeněk Nejedlý's tradition of attacking our great master in 1998. In her words, she wrote this article about these egregious mistakes in early 20th-century journalism to instruct and enlighten us. She is anxious to prevent this dubious heritage from becoming a part of present, and perhaps even future, discourse (Bártová 1999: 23).

As one can see, the discourse on modern Czech music is still very powerful, and no one, including myself, is quite safe from its (lack of) logic. But this should not prevent us from being able to consider the particular stages of this discourse and to analyse its basic concepts. It represents a substantial part of our self-understanding. In order to do so, this paper focuses on the controversy concerning Janáček's *Jenůfa*, which ranks among the most popular episodes of the discourse – though its modern popularity is in proportion to ignorance of its context. The popular view of the controversy conjures up a picture of a stupid, prejudiced and self-blinded Don Quixote, represented by Zdeněk Nejedlý, the professor of musicology, and a picture of a victorious, wild *bestia triumphans*, represented by Leoš Janáček, the natural genius. The picture deploys so many binary oppositions, such as sophistication – natural talent, centre – province, theory – practice, or West – East, that it resembles the Czech fairy tale about 'Český Honza', Czech Johnny, who wins a princess in a struggle with a dragon-like dark sorcerer. It is unnecessary to add that the sorcerer comes from the western, German side, where the old sun is dying, and the victor comes from the East, where the new, young sun is being born. The picture is pleasant. Perhaps it is not entirely true, but who cares about the truth these days? I do not intend to destroy it. I would only like to add some slightly subversive details to the construction, to make it more dramatic.

Zdeněk Nejedlý, born in 1878 in Smetana's Litomyšl, came to Prague in 1896 to study history and aesthetics. In 1905, he became the first lecturer ('docent') in musicology at Prague University, and 1909, he became professor. The history of the relationship between Nejedlý and Janáček has been already described by Jiří Fukač (Fukač 1963), and I will not expand on that. I will concentrate on the key concepts on which Nejedlý's negative criticism of *Jenůfa* is based. His criticism of the Prague premiere of *Jenůfa* appeared in the journal *Smetana* in 1916. The journal had been established in 1910 by Nejedlý himself, and served as a platform for the 'Smetana' party in the controversy concerning Dvořák. Nejedlý was the leader of this party, which consisted mostly of his pupils, among whom Vladimír Helfert and Josef Bartoš played the most prominent roles.

The key concept bearing strictly negative connotations in Nejedlý's view (Nejedlý 1916, already in Nejedlý 1911: 185–191) is that of Naturalism. Nejedlý claims that Janáček is a true Naturalist, as he transgresses the borders of autonomy in a work of art to saturate it with elements of life itself. The only difference between his early folkloristic works and *Jenůfa* consists, according to Nejedlý, in the replacement of rough material derived directly from folk music by his speech melodies. Both strategies guarantee a link to reality, to life, a link which serves in turn as a guarantee of truth in art, according to the view of Naturalism. I do not intend to discuss the role of speech melodies in *Jenůfa* or in Janáček's music in general. To understand the reception of *Jenůfa*, it is sufficient to recognise that the musical public broadly agreed around 1916 that Janáček did use speech melodies as material for his opera. This opinion was supported by many statements by Janáček himself, even if he stressed a number of times that he did not steal this material from reality, and did not incorporate it in his music without artistic stylization. The degree of stylization was the proper topic of the controversy in the press, but this did not prevent the stereotype being established of Janáček as a Naturalist. Even Václav Štěpán, a critic in the Dvořák party, who published an answer to Nejedlý in the journal *Hudební revue* (Štěpán 1916), was ready to accept the label of Naturalism, though of course without negative overtones. He wrote: 'Kdyby mne někdo vyzval, abych mu určil jediným slovem směrovou příslušnost Janáčkova díla, jmenoval bych snad realismus, tedy styl, odlišovaný od naturalismu jen mírnějšími odstíny, ne podstatou; a kdybych si byl jist, že mi bude dobře rozuměno, nebál bych se ani říci „naturalismus".' [If I were asked to define the style of Janáček's work in a single word, I would call it Realism, meaning a style which is usually distinguished from Naturalism only by more moderate grades of colour, not by its substance; if I were to feel safe from misunderstanding, I would not hesitate to call it "Naturalism".] (Štěpán 1916: 35) To rescue *Jenůfa* from the curse of 'crude Naturalism' and to transfer it into the ranks of acceptable, noble Naturalism, Štěpán is forced to declare that there is a conflict between Janáček's speech-melody theory and his operatic practice. According to Štěpán, speech-melody theory accounts only for the origins of the motives in Janáček's music. Their aesthetic function arise from their musical elaboration and from traditional motivic development [*motivische Arbeit, motivická práce*] (Štěpán 1916: 35). In other words, according to Štěpán, Nejedlý was led astray by taking too literally what Janáček had said about his own work theoretically. According to Štěpán, Janáček did not transfer speech melodies directly into his music in the opera, as Nejedlý had said, although the speech melodies had served as rough material in the process of artistic stylization. This link with reality, despite the process of stylisation, encourages one to talk about Janáček's Naturalism.

Even Janáček himself was quite happy to be labelled as a Naturalist. In his late manuscript essay dating from 1924 or 1925, given the title 'Janáčkova studie o naturalismu' [Janáček's study on Naturalism] by the editor, Miloš Štědroň, Janáček stresses the part to be played by the relationship with reality in the development of modern music. He writes: 'Nebát se naturalismu. ... Myslím, že ne-

potírá naturalism se idealismem – ale s ignorantstvím; toto vede k primitivismu.' [Do not fear Naturalism. ... I think that Naturalism is not in conflict with idealism, it is in conflict with ignorance, which leads to primitivism.] (Štědroň 1998: 246–247)

Despite the different concepts signified by the label of Naturalism, one can argue that as soon as *Jenůfa* had been identified as a manifestation of 'Naturalism', it entered the discourse of the Modern together with all the consequences of its logic or lack of logic. At least, it entered this discourse for those Czechs who were familiar with this discourse and ready to participate in it. There were not many of them. Nejedlý's rejection of Janáček, although it is usually interpreted as a symptom of his 'narrow-mindedness', might be seen rather as a symptom of his 'open-mindedness', of his orientation to the 'western' discourse of the Modern. In other words, his blindness was the price that he paid for his outlook.

The sharp rejection of Naturalism is only one part of Nejedlý's aesthetics of modernism in opera. Its second, more positive, side is to be found in his book *Česká moderní zpěvohra po Smetanovi* [Czech Modern Opera after Smetana], published in 1911, in passages concerning the composer Zdeněk Fibich. The chapter on Fibich's late operas begins with an extract which can be read as a manifesto of the Modern, in the meaning of the German word 'die Moderne' or the Czech 'moderna': 'Krise let 80tých byla krise dvou generací. Po starší generaci převážně obrozenských snah přichází *nová generace*, hledící jinak na život národní a tím i na úkol národního umění. Boj o národní bytí či nebytí jest do té míry skončen, že národnostní i politická existence jest nové generaci prostě faktem. ... Národnostní utilitarismus ustupuje do té míry, že právě umění nabývá jisté volnosti a vyvíjí se absolutně, ze sebe a pro sebe. ... Vyložený program „moderny" byl již svou povahou programem umění *aristokratického*, ovšem v pravém, dobrém slova smyslu. ... Proto nové umění jest k obecenstvu značně bezohledné... Kráčí rychle ku předu, nechávajíc větší část obecenstva za sebou a jen znenáhla jej uvádějíc na nové cesty. ...Umělec podává tu jen sebe, bez ohledu na záliby masy. ...Nové umění jest ryze *subjektivní*...' (Italics by Nejedlý) [The crisis of the 1880s was a crisis of two generations. After the older generation, dedicated mostly to the national revival, came the new generation, which had different views on national life and on the task of national art. The struggle for national existence is already complete, and national and political existence is a given fact for this generation. ... National utilitaritarianism gives way to freedom in art and its absolute development for its own sake. ...The programme of the Modern was a programme of an aristocratic art in the true sense of the word. ...This is the reason for the fact that it pays little regard to the public ... It progresses quickly, leaving a substantial part of the public behind. The new art leads the public only slowly into new paths. ...The artist presents himself alone, regardless of the preferences of the masses. ...The new art is purely subjective...] (Nejedlý 1911: 80–81).

Nejedlý was far from being a logically consequent representative of the modern generation. Nevertheless, his argument was based on the main principles declared in 1895 in the manifesto of the *Česká moderna*. This manifesto had re-

jected folklorism as a suitable base for modern Czech art. The picture of Nejedlý as of an admirer of Alois Jirásek is not complete. After his arrival in Prague in 1896, he accommodated not only the *Geisteswissenschaft* of Dilthey, but the basics of modern aesthetics and poetics as well. I will argue that the aesthetics of the 1890s operated as a rather efficacious local anaesthetic against the aesthetics of *Jenůfa*.

If we accept the plausible hypothesis that the modern Czech movement of the 90s was based on the reception of the modern movement in the capital, Vienna, we can easily identify the sources of Nejedlý's rejection of Naturalism. The head of the "Wiener Moderne", Hermann Bahr, had already in 1891 published a book entitled *Die Überwindung des Naturalismus*. The struggle against Naturalism bore some slightly national overtones in Vienna, as Naturalism had been imported to Vienna from Berlin several years earlier, and the polemics against it served as an instrument in constructing the cultural identity of Austria, the politically weaker sibling of Prussia. In his essay 'Naturalismus und Naturalismus', Bahr attacks Naturalism on the stage. He wrote: 'Vom Bühnennaturalismus nämlich will ich reden, nur von diesem. Der Buchnaturalismus, des Romans und der Novelle, gehört schon wieder der Geschichte. Sein Kampf, sein Sieg, seine Überwindung liegen hinter uns: der Geschmack und das Bedürfnis des Geistes sind über ihn schon wieder hinaus. Sein erledigtes Schicksal werden nun wohl die Professoren in ihre Vorlesungen setzen; aber die gierigen Horcher nach den Trieben der gegenwärtigen und nach den Zeichen der zukünftigen Kultur haben mit ihm nichts mehr zu thun. Die neue Psychologie, die neue Romantik, der neue Idealismus – der tastenden Worte sind viele, aber keines nennt die Sache recht, die noch nirgends ist als nur erst in unserer bangen, schwülen Sehnsucht – dieses allein sind jetzt ihre Fragen....' (Bahr 1899: 50). The theory of Naturalism was comprised, according to Bahr, in this doctrine: 'Die Wirklichkeit von der Straße, die ganze Alltäglichkeit um uns, ohne Dazwischenkunst des Künstlers, das Leben da draußen, nichts als nur das Leben, so wie es ist.' (Bahr 1899: 51)

Nejedlý's university teacher, Otakar Hostinský, possessed a copy of the second edition of the book, published in 1899. Its basic principles correspond quite closely with Nejedlý's argument against Naturalism as an outdated art, above which new art must rise. The rejection of Naturalism was a general phenomenon in the 1890's Europe. We can add an illuminating quotation from the essay 'The Decay of Lying' by Oscar Wilde, who was born in 1854, the same year as Janáček. At the end of his essay, which is written in the form of a dialogue, he gives a brief description of the three doctrines of the new art: 'Art never expresses anything but itself. It has an independent life, just as Thought has, and develops purely on its own lines. ... The second doctrine is this. All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals. Life and Nature may sometimes be used as part of Art's rough material, but before they are of any real service to Art they must be translated into artistic conventions. The moment Art surrenders its imaginative medium it surrenders everything. As a method Realism is a complete failure,...M. Zola sits down to give us a picture of the Second Empire. Who cares for the Second Empire now? It is out of date.

Life goes faster than Realism, but Romanticism is always in front of Life. The third doctrine is that Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. ...It follows, as a corollary from this, that external Nature also imitates Art. The only effects that she can show us are effects that we have already seen through poetry, or in paintings....The final revelation is that Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art.' (Wilde 1992: 991–992).

Oscar Wilde was read not only in Vienna, but also in Prague. Nejedlý formed his views of the Modern in the late 1890s, in accordance with the most up-to-date western modernist aesthetics. These principles were shared by the younger generation of professors at Prague University, for instance by Václav Tille, author of a monograph on Maurice Maeterlinck. In such an atmosphere, it would have been almost a crime to vote for Naturalism.

The extremely polarised and contradictory reception of Janáček as traditionalist or modernist results from the difficulties in mapping Janáček on to the history of modern music, if this is conceived in terms of linear progress. A good example of this view is offered by a linear graphical representation of the history of German music by Konrad Niemann, dating from 1905 (see the picture). This view of history was one that was broadly accepted, not only in Nejedlý's time. The difficulties one has to face trying to hang Janáček on an evolutionary tree result from the fact that he had come from nowhere and, 'historically speaking', went nowhere. I mean that his continuity with earlier developments in western music is, in comparison with that of other composers of the period such as Richard Strauss, Mahler, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Debussy, Novák or even Bartók, at least problematic. And, moreover, he established no school, style or direction. Even those who studied directly with him went in other directions, mostly westward to Prague, to study with Vítězslav Novák. For Nejedlý, the progressive line in Czech music history included the names of Smetana, Fibich, Foerster and Ostrčil. For Theodor Adorno, later, who was in many respects a more sophisticated, German *Doppelgänger* of the evil sorcerer Nejedlý, Janáček represented 'extraterritoriale' art, situated far from the history of modern western music. And this was precisely the reason why Nejedlý did not accept Janáček. Janáček represented to him a danger for Czech music, a danger which might prevent Czech music from being part of modern civilised western European music. In more self-confident western eyes, Janáček's music could easily be accepted in terms of a construction of the exotic Orient, of a wild Eastern Europe, as something independent of old western traditions – in other words, it could easily pass as modern music. Czech perceptions were much more problematic, in that being a part of the West has been the eternal problem of Czech society. In a society where anxiety about acceptance by a so-called 'Europe' inheres in everyday life, the symptoms displayed by the modernist neurosis of progress can seem even more obvious than those in the lands of its origin. It is not insignificant that the positive reception of *Jenůfa* by Czech audiences began just at the moment of the decisive shift in perspective concerning the political future of Czech society. It was the moment of the decision to leave the confines of the dying empire, which used to be called the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

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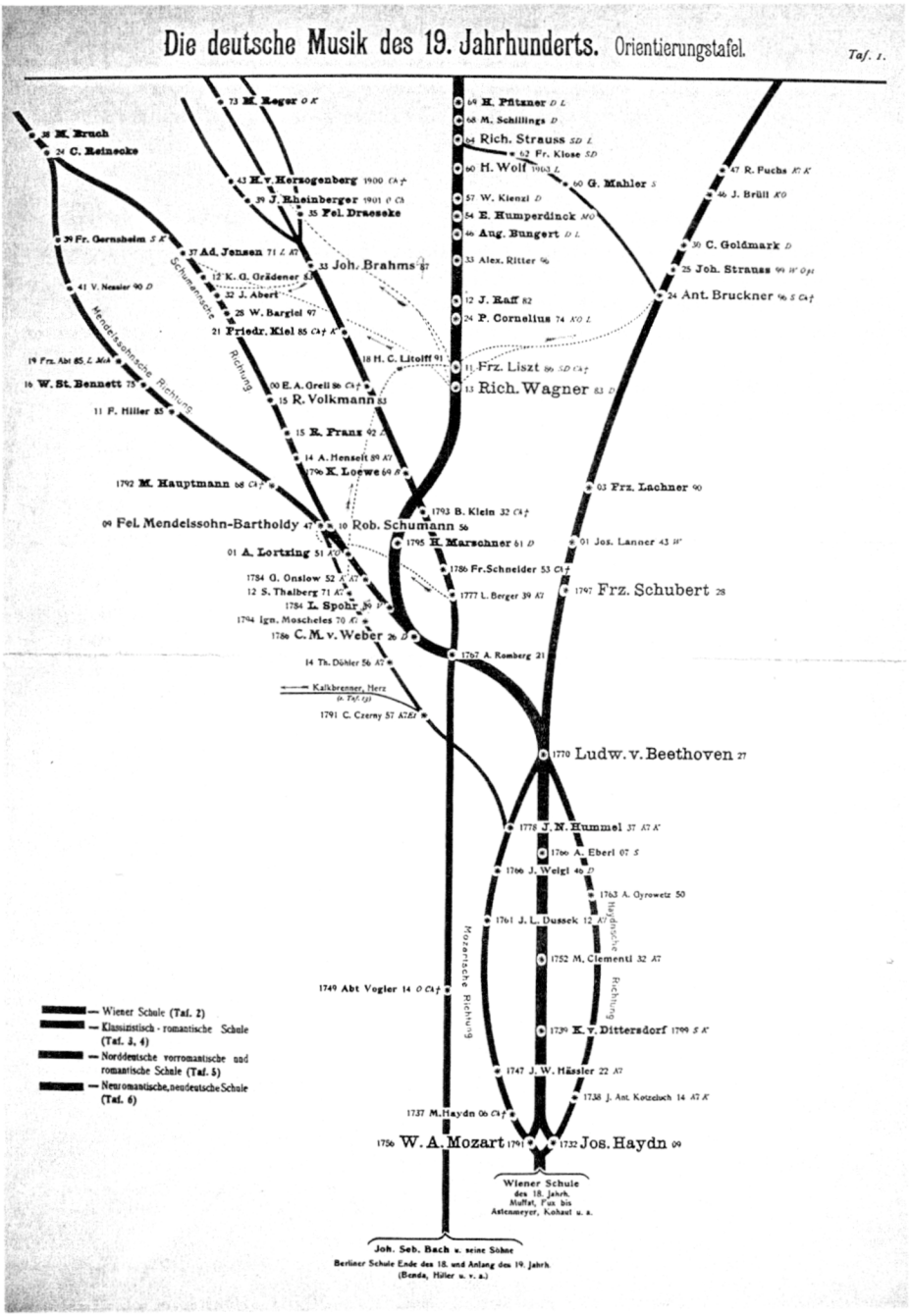

Tabel from the book *Musik und Musiker des 19. Jahrhudnerts bis zur Gegenwart in 20 farbigen Tafeln* by Walter Niemann (Leipzig 1905). Zdeněk Nejedlý offered a similar progressive line of the evolution of Czech music. It included Bedřich Smetana, Zdeněk Fibich, Josef Bohuslav Foerster, and Otakar Ostrčil.