

Copyright Notice

Staff and students of Lancaster University are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA licence which allows you to:

- access and download a copy;
- print out a copy;

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this Course of Study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by the University.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

Name of Designated Person authorising scanning: P. Hagopian

Course of Study for which scanned (course code and name): Law 311

Number of registered students on Course of Study 45

Duration of Course of Study in weeks: 20

ISBN (of book) or ISSN (of journal): 0961754X

Name of Publisher: Oxford UP

Title of item copied: A Quintessential Czechness, in: *Common Knowledge*. 1998. 7:2.

Name of Author of chapter or article: D. Sayer

OR Name of Visual Creator (for an image):

Page numbers (please give both start and end pages): pp. 136-164

Source (indicate **one**): A. original owned by Lancaster University ✓
B. copyright fee paid copy
C. supplied by another Licensed institution (state name)

Reason for scanning if digital version exists:

- A. Digital version owned by Lancaster but format unsuitable
- B. Lancaster does not own or subscribe to digital version

Artistic Works:

- A. full page artistic work
- B. artistic work with text
- C. artistic work disembedded from surrounding text on page



COMMON KNOWLEDGE

Common Knowledge (ISSN 0961-754X) is published three times a year by Oxford University Press, 2001 Evans Road, Cary, NC 27513. The journal is supported in part by The University of Texas at Dallas. The *Common Knowledge* community thanks President Franklyn Jenifer, Provost Bryan Hobson Wildenthal, and Dean Dennis Kratz of The University of Texas at Dallas; the Alfred Jurzykowski Foundation; Jon and Lillian Lovelace; JoAnn Corrigan; and the Consensus Foundation. *World Wide Web*: http://www.utdallas.edu/research/common_knowledge/index.html.

Submissions

Common Knowledge publishes work in the arts, social sciences, cultural studies, and intellectual history that redefines divisive terms and figures of the past and present in ways that make expanded sympathies possible. Potential contributors should send a letter of inquiry to the Editors, *Common Knowledge*, The University of Texas at Dallas, Box 830688, JO 31, Richardson, TX 75083-0688.

Subscriptions

Subscriptions are available on a calendar-year basis. The annual rates (Volume 7, 1998—3 issues) are US\$38 (£27 in UK and Europe) for individuals; US\$71 (£49 in UK and Europe) for institutions. Single issues are available for US\$15 (£11 in UK and Europe) for individuals; US\$27 (£19 in UK and Europe) for institutions.

Individual rates are only applicable when a subscription is for individual use and is not available if delivery is made to a corporate address. All requests for subscriptions, single issues, back issues, changes of address, and claims for missing issues should be sent to:

NORTH AMERICA: Oxford University Press, Journals Subscriptions Department, 2001 Evans Road, Cary, NC 27513, USA. Toll-free in the USA and Canada 800-852-7323 or 919-677-0977. Fax: 919-677-1714. E-mail: jnorders@oup-usa.org.

ELSEWHERE: Oxford University Press, Journals Subscriptions Department, Great Clarendon St., Oxford OX2 6DP, UK. Tel: +44 1865 267907. Fax: +44 1865 267485. E-mail: jnl.orders@oup.co.uk.

Advertising. Helen Pearson, Oxford Journals Advertising, P.O. Box 347, Abingdon SO OX14 SXX, UK. Tel/Fax: 44 1235 201904. E-mail: oxfordads@helenp.demon.co.uk.

Requests for Permissions, Reprints, and Photocopies

All rights reserved; no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher (Oxford University Press, Journals Special Sales, Great Clarendon St., Oxford OX2 6DP, UK. Tel: +44 1865 267561. Fax: +44 1865 267782) or a license permitting restricted copying issued in the USA by the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923 (fax: 508-750-4744) or in the UK by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd., 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE. Reprints of individual articles are available only from the authors.

Microform

Microfilm and microfiche inquiries should be directed to University Microfilms Inc., 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Indexing

Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in *MLA International Bibliography*, *Historical Abstracts*, and *America: History and Life*.

Postal information

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Common Knowledge*, Journals Fulfillment Department, Oxford University Press, 2001 Evans Road, Cary, NC 27513. Postage paid at Cary, North Carolina, and additional offices.

Common Knowledge is distributed by M.A.I.L. America, 2323 Randolph Ave., Avenel, NJ 07001.

⊗ The journal is printed on acid-free paper that meets the minimum requirements of ANSI Standard Z39.48-1984. (Permanence of Paper), beginning with Vol. 1, No. 1.

Copyright © 1998 by Oxford University Press

A QUINTESSENTIAL CZECHNESS

Derek Sayer

It was in 1951, the centennial year of Jirásek's birth, that the communist government of Klement Gottwald opened a museum to the historical novelist and playwright Alois Jirásek at Bílá hora on the western outskirts of Prague. Jirásek's old friend Mikoláš Aleš, whom Prokop Toman's *New Dictionary of Czechoslovak Fine Artists* describes as "the founder of the national tradition in painting, our most Czech artist,"¹ joined him there in 1964. The choice of location was not random. It was at Bílá hora—the White Mountain—on 8 November 1620 that the Czech Reformation launched two hundred years earlier by the followers of Jan Hus met its end at the hands of the army of the Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand II. The Kingdom of Bohemia lost its independence for three centuries. By the time a "national rebirth" [*národní obrození*] occurred in the nineteenth century, many "awakeners" [*buditelé*], among them the "national composer" Bedřich Smetana and Josef Mánes, that painter "national in his very being,"² had to struggle to learn Czech as a second language. The museum is situated in a Renaissance hunting-lodge built in 1555–1556, which was renovated for the purpose by Pavel Janák, architect twenty years earlier of the celebrated functionalist villa colony at Baba in northwest Prague. The building is known as Star Castle [Letohrádek Hvězda] from its unusual shape; it can be seen in the background to Aleš's drawing "1620" (1907), in which the catastrophe is personified by a lone horseman with a death's head.

Hvězda was ceremonially handed over to the Minister of Education, Sciences, and Arts Zdeněk Nejedlý on 12 March 1951. Already seventy years old when the commu-

The author wishes to thank Alena Sayer, Colin Richmond, Shyamal Bagchee, John-Paul Himka, Karol Krotki, Steven Slemmon, Rosalind Sydie, Gavin Williams, and Yoke-Sum Wong, and to acknowledge support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

¹Prokop Toman, *Nový slovník československých výtvarných umělců* [New dictionary of Czechoslovak fine artists], 4th ed. (Ostrava: Výtvarné centrum Chagall, 1993), 10. All translations from the Czech in this article are by Alena Sayer.

²As he is described in Pavel Augusta et al., *Kdo byl kdo v našich dějinách do roku 1918* [Who was who in our history to the year 1918] (Prachatice: Rovina, 1992), 193.

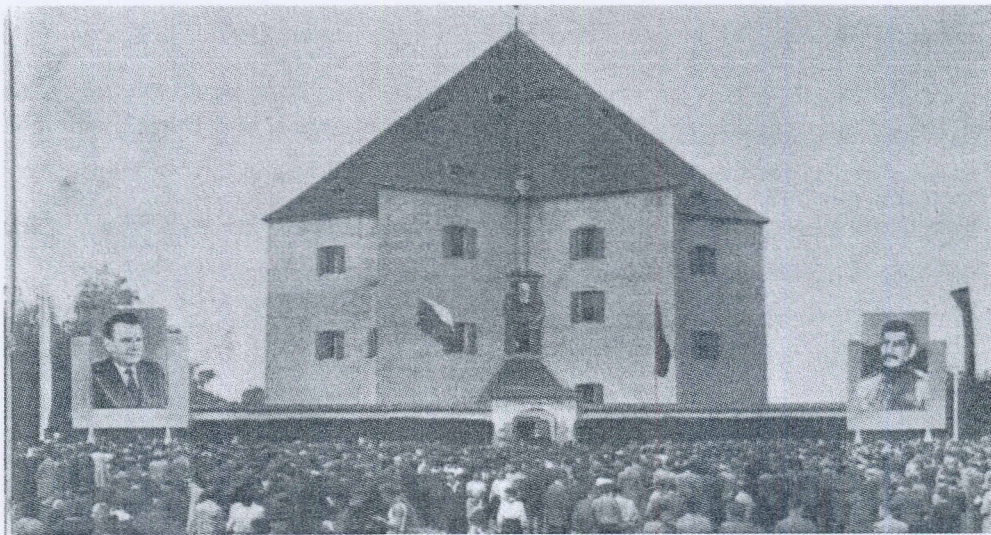


Fig. 1. The opening of the Alois Jirásek Museum at Hvězda Castle, 1951.

nists seized power in February 1948, Nejedlý was his country's leading Smetana scholar and authority on Hussite song, and the author of studies on Jirásek, Aleš, and the nineteenth-century Czech novelist Božena Němcová. Photographs of the event strategically position Jirásek's portrait above the doorway between gigantic posters of Klement Gottwald and Joseph Stalin (fig. 1).³ Visitors would encounter a marble plaque in the entrance hall, whose text is also by Gottwald. It reads:

*We claim Jirásek, and he is close to us—closer than to the old capitalist society—in that in his work he expressed in masterly fashion what in our traditions leads forward, toward freedom and the blossoming of the nation. His work thus teaches us a correct view of our past, strengthens our national pride and fills us with historical optimism and faith in the creative powers of the people.*⁴

The displays in the museum were organized not, as we might expect, according to the chronology of Jirásek's life, but by the cadences of the oppressions and liberations of Czech history as it is represented in his fictions.

The following year, Prague witnessed what is possibly the most ambitious artistic exhibition ever staged in that city.⁵ It marked the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Mikoláš Aleš. Aleš's Year [*Alšův rok*], as it was officially known, was celebrated with a six-month homage that colonized four separate venues. The president of the organiz-

³See Miloslav Novotný, *Roky Aloisa Jiráska* [The years of Alois Jirásek] (Prague: Melantrich, 1953), 413.

⁴Novotný, *Roky Aloisa Jiráska*, 419.

⁵The relevant catalogues are: František Nečásek et al., *Výstava díla Mikoláše Alše* [Exhibition of the works of Mikoláš Aleš] (Prague: Orbis, 1952); Emanuel Svoboda and František Dvořák, *Výstava díla Mikoláše Alše: seznam děl vystavených v Jízdnárně pražského hradu* [Exhibition of the works of Mikoláš Aleš: list of works exhibited in the Riding School of Prague Castle] (Prague: Orbis, 1952); and V. V. Štech and Emanuel Svoboda, *M. Aleš: výstava jeho života a díla pro českou knihu a divadlo* [M. Aleš: exhibition of his life and works for the Czech book and theater] (Prague: Národní muzeum, 1952).

ing committee was once again Zdeněk Nejedlý; the patron, President Klement Gottwald himself. The Riding School at Prague Castle assembled 475 of Aleš's paintings, drawings, and studies, together with letters, photographs, and other memorabilia. Aleš's sketches for murals and frescoes were displayed at the former Mánes Artists' Society gallery on Slav Island in the Vltava, opposite the National Theater. The society, founded in 1887, had been peremptorily dissolved and its gallery nationalized two years earlier. Mikoláš Aleš had been its first president. The National Museum on Václavské náměstí (Wenceslas Square) mounted a 767-item exhibition, "Aleš's Life and Work for the Czech Book and Theater," while another 503 of his drawings were shown in the exhibition rooms in the Kinský Palace on Prague's Old Town Square, Staroměstské náměstí. During the artist's lifetime these had been the classrooms of the k. k. Staatsrealgymnasium; it was from the Kinský Palace balcony that Klement Gottwald had delivered the speech that launched the communist coup of "Victorious February" 1948. There were concurrent exhibitions in Brno, Olomouc, Hradec Králové, Liberec, Kolín, Náchod, Plzeň and Písek; and Václav Kopecký's Ministry of Information helped stage shows of reproductions of Aleš's work in over a dozen other Czech towns.

In his preface to the catalogue for the main exhibition at Prague Castle, František Nečásek claimed the same contemporaneity for Aleš as the plaque in Hvězda had for Jirásek. "Today," he says, "[Aleš's] art rings out to us in new tones than before, in the capitalist past":

Aleš's Sirotek [The Orphan] or Za chlebem [In Search of Bread], these really are already narrations of a past, which will not return; his cossacks with the Soviet star on their caps really did come to Staroměstské náměstí and have brought us freedom; his Hussites really have come back to life today in our people, in our mighty struggles for peace and the building of socialism; and happily, as never before, the joyful shrieks of Aleš's children and the songs of his skylarks ring out over the freshly green hereditary field of our nation.⁶

Alois Jirásek was born in 1851 in the little town of Hronov in northeastern Bohemia, one of eight children, six of whom lived. Hronov had been founded six centuries earlier by Hron z Náchoda, from whom it took its name, and formed part of the lordship of Náchod Castle, whose seigneurs also controlled the ecclesiastical living. The Jiráseks had farmed here since 1758, when Alois's great-grandfather Václav entered into a tenancy left vacant by the sudden extinction of the Plundra family—father, mother, two daughters. It was the time of the Seven Years' War, and troops carried pestilence with them everywhere they went. In his memoirs Jirásek writes: "I come from an originally peasant line. Its history is simple; the fate of the Czech peasantry is its fate. Many

⁶František Nečásek, "V Alšově jubilejním roce" [In the Aleš jubilee year], preface to Nečásek et al., *Výstava díla Mikoláše Alše*, 13–14.

oppressions, and the worst of them, in the old times, serfdom and the *robot* [corvée].”⁷ Serfdom had been abolished by Joseph II in 1781, but the *robot* clung on until the revolution of 1848, just three years before Jirásek was born. His father Josef was originally trained as a weaver, but after his marriage turned to his wife’s trade of baking to supplement his farming. “From his earliest youth,” explains that imposing monument to the nineteenth-century Czech rebirth, the twenty-eight volume *Otto’s Encyclopedia*, “Jirásek was thus acquainted with the most diverse dispositions, worries and particularities of the people, its costume and speech; he heard abundant reminiscences of the old times and learned to feel with the people. Mingling daily with working folk at home and in the fields, he grew thoroughly familiar with crafts as well as farming.”

The “beautiful locality” in which Jirásek was raised, the *Encyclopedia* adds, “situated on the very borders of the land, full of legends and traditions, a live theater through the ages of the changing fates of the homeland,”⁸ equally shaped the man and his writing. The region is immortalized in the best-loved of all Czech nineteenth-century novels, Božena Němcová’s *Babička* [Grandma, 1853], subtitled “Pictures from Country Life,” which is set in the Ratibořice valley a few miles west of Hronov. The novelist and playwright Karel Čapek, who grew up in the same area, captured it beautifully in the tribute he wrote in *Lidové noviny* on Jirásek’s death in 1930, entitled “Jirásek’s Country.” He paints a landscape where

red sandstone hills rise gently, speckled with silvery birch and dark spruce and pine . . . where still in our childhood hand-ooms were clattering from morning to night . . . a country without grandiosity, naively open and mild, modest and delicate; a country that suffered in its people more than it led, but which silently and steadfastly held onto its typical Czechness at the very border of our national region.

“Few of our places,” Čapek continues, “have so much war in their past as this gentle country; Jirásek’s historicism is directly the local tradition.” Hronov was burned by the Swedes in 1639, during the Thirty Years’ War. It was the site of a battle between Austrian and Prussian armies in 1742, during the War of the Austrian Succession. Nearby Hradec Králové and Česká Skalice were to see fighting again in Jirásek’s own youth, during the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. Čapek conjures up religious emigrations, rebellious mayors, Jesuit priests, and earnest *buditelé*. All of this, he implies, went into the making of “our most quintessentially national writer.”⁹

Born in Mírotice in southern Bohemia in 1852, Mikoláš Aleš’s background was

⁷Alois Jirásek, *Z mých pamětí* [From my memories] (Prague: Mlada fronta, 1980), 16.

⁸František Bílý, “Jirásek, Alois,” in *Ottův slovník naučný* [Otto’s encyclopedia], 27 vols. plus supp. vol. (Prague: J. Otto, 1888–1909), 13 (1898): 539.

⁹Karel Čapek, “Kraj Jiráskův” [Jirásek’s country], in his *O umění a kultuře* [On art and culture], 3 vols. (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1986), 3:200–201.

similar to Jirásek's own. So are the emphases of their biographers. Writing in 1912, a year before the artist's death, Karel B. Mádl comments with evident approval on the uneventfulness of Aleš's life after he graduated in 1876 from Prague's Academy of Fine Arts, "to which he was never to return," and the "consistency and constancy" of his art "from its very beginnings up to today." After a brief study trip to Italy in the summer of 1879, Aleš never left his homeland again, unless we count journeys to Slovakia—or as it then was, Upper Hungary. In this he differed from many other Czech artists of his day (and later), like Václav Brožík, Vojtěch Hynais, Alfons Mucha, or František Kupka, all of whom spent long periods abroad. Aleš lived out his life in modest apartments in Prague, which also served as his studio. The sources of his creativity, Mádl concludes, lie not in any external or contemporary influences, but in the experiences and locations of his rural childhood and youth:

Aleš comes from the people, that is from the countryside, from the region which we call south Bohemian 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 plenitude 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 southern 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.¹⁰

Like Jirásek's Hronov, Aleš's Mirovice, too, is located in a land of memories. Mádl speaks of "all but dead recollections of the time of Frankish lords and labor-services for the nobility, memories kept alive by songs, in which a note of ridicule alternates with passive yearning" (16). Communist-period commentators are more inclined to stress the fact that Mirovice lies in Hussite country. The Czech past was also still alive here in a more palpable sense. Aleš was raised in a thatched cottage, a typical Czech *chalupa*, distinguishable from its rural counterparts only by its location. Still in his childhood "country folk came into the little town to market and to church for the sermon in their age-old costumes, dressed up in furs and vividly colored layered skirts." By the lights of the time and place, Mikoláš's father František Aleš was an educated man. He knew Latin better than the parish priest, and was the town scribe. But patterns of reading here were also far from modern:

¹⁰Karel B. Mádl, *Mikuláš Aleš* (Prague: Mánes, 1912), 13–15.

Still a book was an event and reading was a continually repeated act of piety. Reading was deep, but not broad. Aleš always remained at heart just such a rural reader, a strong reader, who returned again and again to a few books: the Bible, the chronicle, and songs. His love of reading came straight from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and closely resembled that of the old scribes. They found wisdom in the Bible, learning in the chronicles, and pleasure in the songs, and all three of these sources of their intellectual life they held sacred.¹¹

There is, we are made to feel, a timelessness to Jirásek and Aleš, a quintessential Czechness—Czech has a word for it, *českost*—that is rooted in the people and the land whence they sprang, which has stubbornly endured through all the vicissitudes of the centuries.

The fourteen accused in the trial of the leadership of the antistate conspiratorial center headed by Rudolf Slánský, held in Prague in Aleš's Year 1952, were described in the official indictment as follows:

Rudolf Slánský . . . of Jewish origin, from a businessman's family . . . former general secretary of the KSČ [Communist Party of Czechoslovakia], before his arrest deputy prime minister of the government of the Czechoslovak Republic.

Bedřich Geminder . . . of Jewish origin, son of a businessman and innkeeper . . . former head of the international division of the Central Committee of the KSČ.

Ludvík Frejka . . . of Jewish origin, son of a doctor . . . former head of the national-economic section of the Chancellery of the president of the Czechoslovak Republic.

Josef Frank . . . Czech, from a working-class family . . . former representative of the general secretary of the KSČ.

Vladimír Clementis . . . Slovak, from a bourgeois family . . . former minister of foreign affairs.

Bedřich Reicin . . . of Jewish origin, from a bourgeois family . . . former deputy minister of national defence.

Karel Šváb . . . Czech, from a working-class family . . . former deputy minister of national security.

Artur London . . . of Jewish origin, son of a businessman . . . former deputy minister of foreign affairs.

Vavro Hajdů . . . of Jewish origin, son of the owner of the Smrdáky spa . . . former deputy minister of foreign affairs.

Evžen Löbl . . . of Jewish origin, son of a large business-owner . . . former deputy minister of foreign trade.

¹¹Mádľ, *Mikuláš Aleš*, 16. The "layered skirts" referred to here were constituted in the nineteenth century as "national costumes" [*národní kroje*]. See Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), chap. 4.

Rudolf Margolius . . . of Jewish origin, son of a large business-owner . . . former deputy minister of foreign trade.

Otto Fischl . . . of Jewish origin . . . son of a businessman . . . former deputy minister of finance.

Otto Schbling [Šling] . . . of Jewish origin, son of a factory-owner . . . former chief secretary of the regional committee of the KSČ in Brno.

André Simone . . . of Jewish origin, son of a factory owner . . . former editor of [the KSČ daily newspaper] Rudé právo.¹²

At the conclusion of the trial, state prosecutor Josef Urválek demanded punishment to the fullest extent that the law allowed:

*Citizen judges,
in the name of our nations [i.e., Czechs and Slovaks], against whose freedom and happiness the criminals rose up, in the name of peace, against which they shamefully conspired together, I request the sentence of death for all the accused. Let your judgment fall like an iron fist without the slightest mercy. Let it be a fire, which burns out to the roots this shameful cancer of treachery. Let it be a bell, calling through the whole of our beautiful homeland for new victories on the march toward the sun of socialism. (114)*

The following day Slánský, Geminder, Frejka, Frank, Clementis, Reicin, Šváb, Margolius, Fischl, Šling, and Simone were sentenced to death; London, Hajdů, and Löbl, to imprisonment for life. Zdeněk Nejedlý gave four talks about the trial on state radio.¹³ The death sentences were carried out promptly, by hanging. Vlado Clementis wrote a final letter to his wife Lída on the morning of his execution, 3 December 1952. "I am smoking a last pipe and listening. I hear you clearly singing the songs of Smetana and Dvořák. . . ."¹⁴

In Jirásek's childhood, Hronov comprised a mere handful of houses and cottages, the parish church of All Saints, an old and a new rectory, a school, two mills, and four pubs.¹⁵ It

¹²Bedřich Utitz, *Nezavřená kapitola: politické procesy padesátých let* [An unclosed chapter: the political trials of the 1950's] (Prague: Lidové nakl., 1990), 16–17. This work is a collection of unedited excerpts from the official transcripts of the trial, originally published under the title *Proces s vedením protistátního spikleneckého centra v čele s Rudolfem Slánským* [The trial of the leadership of the antistate conspiratorial center headed by Rudolf Slánský].

¹³Zdeněk Nejedlý, "K procesu s protistátním spikleneckým centrem: 4 projevy v Čs. rozhlasu" [On the trial of the antistate conspiratorial center: four speeches for Czechoslovak Radio] (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1953). These are among the items, later removed from Czech libraries, listed in the Catalogue of Formerly Prohibited Literature in the National Library in Prague.

¹⁴Vladimír Clementis, letter to his wife Lída, 3 December 1952, in his *Nedokončená kronika* [Unfinished chronicle] (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1965), 182.

¹⁵See the town plan and accompanying photographs in Novotný, *Roky Aloisa Jiráska*, 18–19. Jirásek himself also discusses the Hronov of his childhood in the opening pages of *Z mých pamětí*.

had 193 houses and 2,258 inhabitants in 1890, by which time it had also acquired a Protestant church, a post and telegraph office, a drugstore, a railroad station, a bank, two cotton mills, a brick-works, a dye-works, a flour mill, and several other concerns devoted to the manufacture of cotton, linen, and silk fabrics.¹⁶ Sons and daughters of Czech-speaking peasants—like Jirásek and Aleš themselves—were moving en masse into the formerly “Germanized” towns, and the countryside they left behind them was inexorably drawn into the orbit of urban capital and communications, institutions and ideas; among them, in its modern incarnation at least, the idea of Czech nationality. Jirásek belonged to the first generation of Czech children able to pursue a secondary education in his native language. There were no Bohemian *gymnasia* teaching in Czech before 1860,¹⁷ but by the end of the decade there were twelve. One of them was in Hradec Králové, and Jirásek entered it in 1867. A fellow pupil there was František Adolf Šubert, who went on to become the first director of the National Theater. By the time Jirásek enrolled in Prague University in 1871, he was able to study Czech history in Czech under such eminent scholars as Václav Vladivoj Tomek, whose *History of Prague* has not been surpassed to this day. It is a sign of the times that the ancient university, founded in 1348 by the “Father of the Homeland” [*Otec vlasti*], Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV, was to split eleven years later into separate Czech and German institutions. On graduating in 1874, Jirásek was offered a position as a schoolteacher in the Czech *gymnasium* in Litomyšl, Bedřich Smetana’s hometown, where he remained for the next fourteen years. Two of his most popular novels date from this period. Set in Litomyšl, *A Philosophical History* [*Filozofská historie*, 1878] brings to life the revolution of 1848 and its student protagonists. *The Dogheads* [*Psoblavci*, 1883–1884] relates the story of the peasant rebellion in Domažlice in 1692–1693, led by the *sedlák* (yeoman) Jan Sladký Kozina.

By the time Jirásek was writing, Domažlice was the only part of the Bohemian borderlands where Czech-speakers extended to the German frontier, and a place replete with patriotic symbolism. In Jirásek’s version,¹⁸ the Chodové, as the people there are known, were free peasants who had guarded the border with Bavaria for centuries. The name “Dogheads” comes from the motif on their standard. They helped the Czech King Břetislav I repel the army of Emperor Henry III in 1040, and “it is certain that they were not idle in the rest of the struggles, in particular the Hussite times of glorious memory.” Hussite armies scored a famous victory here over the invading crusaders of Emperor Zikmund (Sigismund) in 1431. For these services the Chodové received special rights and privileges: they owed no labor services to any lord, could hunt in

¹⁶Anonymous entry “Hronov,” in *Ottův slovník naučný*, 11 (1897): 794–95. The figures are from the 1890 Austrian census.

¹⁷The only brief exception to this was Prague’s Academic Gymnasium from 1851 to 1853, when it again reverted to German until 1861.

¹⁸Not entirely accurate. See Sayer, *Coasts of Bohemia*, chap. 4.

the forests they guarded, and were permitted to bear arms. "Then," says Jirásek, "came Bílá hora. . . ." The following year, dominion over the Chodové was handed over to Wolf Wilhelm Lamminger, "who was one of the imperial commissioners and directors of the horrible tragedy of 21 June 1621," when twenty-seven Czech nobles and burghers were theatrically executed on Staroměstské náměstí for their part in the uprising of 1618–1620. Nine years later, "the Chodové were sold to the same Lamminger. . . . The new lord of course did not want to recognize and did not recognize their rights and privileges, and treated them as if they were serfs."¹⁹ The rebellion of 1692–1693 began with another Lamminger ordering the cutting down of a lime tree, which is a Czech national symbol. Jirásek "regularly and systematically" explored the Domažlice region before he wrote about it, painstakingly researching its customs, costumes, and dialect.²⁰ He dedicated the book "to the memory of Božena Němcová"; its illustrator was Mikoláš Aleš.²¹ *The Dogheads* went on to form the basis of an opera of the same title by Karel Kovařovic, which won a National Theater competition for new works and premiered in 1898.²²

In 1888 Jirásek moved back to Prague, where he taught at the Czech *gymnasium* on Žitná Street until he retired in 1909. He wrote prolifically and was an active participant in Czech cultural life. For a time he edited the Affordable National Library series for Jan Otto, publisher of *Otto's Encyclopedia*, where he encouraged translations of works from other Slavonic languages, among them Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Times*. He was also closely involved with Otto's multivolume *Čechy* [Bohemia], which luxuriously depicted the homeland through "a collaboration of writers and artists." Mikoláš Aleš provided the frontispiece for the opening volume, a drawing of the Czech patron Saint Václav (Wenceslas). From 1900 to 1921 Jirásek was a member of the editorial board of the literary weekly *Zvon* [The Bell], which he founded with Karel Václav Rais, Zikmund Winter, František Kvapil, and other like-minded writers to further "a pure, vital art, addressing the nation and humanity."²³ His own writings garnered him both popular success and public honor. His novels were serialized in the leading Czech magazines of the day, among them *Zlatá Praha*, *Květy*, *Světovzor*, and *Lumír*. His *Collected*

¹⁹Alois Jirásek, *Psoblavci* [The Dogheads] (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1980), 18–20.

²⁰See Jirásek's own account in his *Z mých pamětí*, 380–81.

²¹Because of contractual problems with the publisher, Aleš's illustrations did not appear until the edition of 1900. Božena Němcová had earlier told the story of Jan Sladký Kozina in one of her collections of folk tales; so had Karel Jaromír Erben.

²²Losing entries in the same competition included Fibich's *Šárka* and Foerster's *Eva*, both operas posterity has judged to be of far more enduring musical value. Kovařovic went on to become musical director of the National Theater from 1900 to 1920. He also turned Němcová's *Babička* into an opera under the title *Na starém bělidle* (1901).

²³Josef Thomayer et al., proclamation headed "České veřejnosti!" [To the Czech public] (Prague, 1900), reproduced in Novotný, *Roky Aloisa Jiráska*, 284.

Works, published by Otto from 1890, had reached forty-three volumes by the time of his seventieth birthday in 1921, and many of these had already been reprinted many times. *The Dogbeads* was by then in its twentieth edition.²⁴ His plays were regularly performed at the National Theater. *Jan Žižka*, which portrays the Hussite general and Taborite leader Jan Žižka z Trocnova, was chosen to première on 5 July 1903, the night before the foundation stone for Ladislav Šaloun's Jan Hus memorial was ceremonially laid in Staroměstské náměstí. Jirásek was elected to the Czech Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1890 and the Royal Society of Bohemia in 1901, named an honorary citizen of Hronov, Litomyšl, and in 1918 Prague, and awarded an honorary doctorate by Charles University in 1919.

Jirásek's novels, plays, novellas, and short stories retell virtually the whole history of the Czech nation from its mythical beginnings in the migration of the "Old Slavs" into Central Europe in the sixth century to the national struggles of his own time. Perhaps his most widely read book is *Staré pověsti české* [Old Czech Legends, 1894]. It tells of *Praotec* [Forefather] Čech, who first led his people into Bohemia; of the wise chieftain Krok and his three daughters, the youngest of whom, Princess Libuše, was chosen to succeed him as ruler of her people; of Libuše's marriage to the ploughman Přemysl, legendary founder of the Přemyslid dynasty that ruled Bohemia for four centuries down to 1306, who brought his bast shoes to Vyšehrad so that his descendants should not forget their origins since, in Jirásek's words, "we are all equal"; of Libuše's prophetic vision, as she gazed from Vyšehrad across the River Vltava to the wooded heights of Petřín Hill, of "a great city, whose glory will reach the stars" (fig. 2); of the "Girls' War" [*Dívčí válka*] that followed her death, when her handmaid Vlasta led Czech women in fruitless rebellion against male authority. It tells of Saint Václav, of one-eyed Jan Žižka z Trocnova, of Rabbi Jehuda Löw ben Bezalel's golem running amok in Prague's ghetto during the cabalistic reign of Rudolph II, of the ancient horologe on the Old Town Hall in Staroměstské náměstí, whose maker Master Hanuš was blinded by the City Council so that he could never repeat his marvelous creation abroad. It tells, too, of the executions of 21 June 1621. Every year, so Jirásek informs us, on the night before the anniversary, the twenty-seven Czech lords rise, assemble at the place of their execution, and silently process across the square to the Týn Cathedral, where they kneel at the altar to partake of the body of Our Lord *sub utraque specie*.²⁵

The demand that the laity should be permitted to receive communion "in both

²⁴These details are taken from František Páta, "Bibliografie Jiráskova díla" [Bibliography of Jirásek's works], in *Alois Jirásek: sborník studií a vzpomínek na počest jeho sedmdesátých narozenin* [Alois Jirásek: a collection of studies and memoirs in honor of his seventieth birthday], ed. Miloslav Hýsek and Karel B. Mádl (Prague: J. Otto, 1921), 477–505.

²⁵Alois Jirásek, *Staré pověsti české* [Old Czech legends] (Vimperk: Papyrus, 1992). The direct quotations are respectively from pp. 39 and 41.

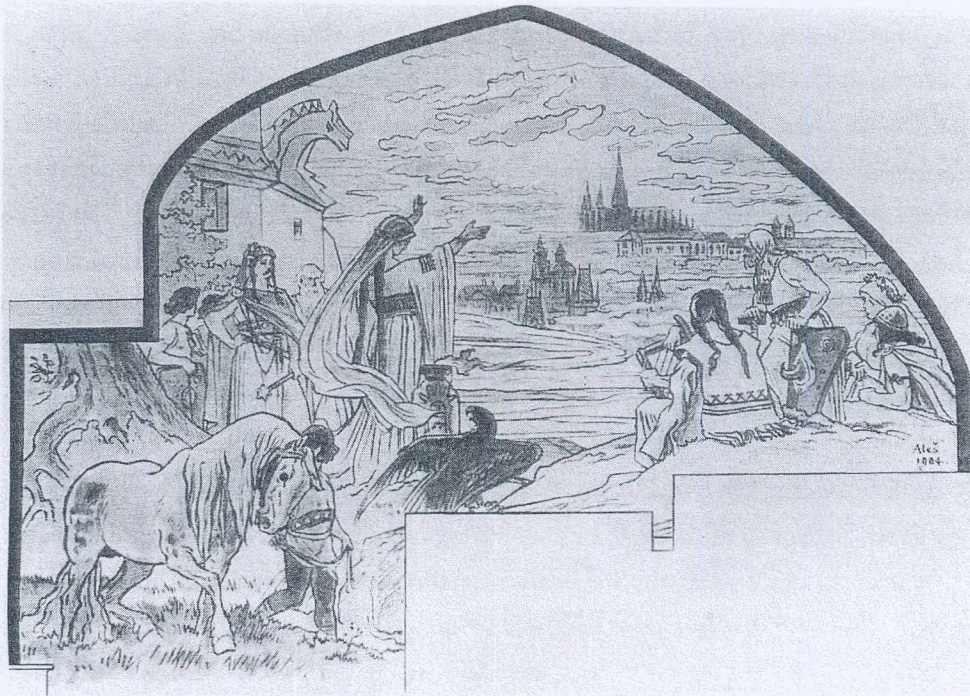


Fig. 2. *Libuše foretells the glory of Prague.* Mikoláš Aleš, sketch for mural in Old Town Hall, Prague, 1904.

kinds"—both the bread and the wine—had been one of the Four Articles of Prague issued by the Hussites in the summer of 1420. Jirásek devoted three trilogies of novels, *Mezi proudy* [Between the Currents, 1891], *Proti všem* [Against All, 1894], and *Bratrstvo* [Brotherhood, 1900–1909], to this most complex and contentious period in Czech history. He also composed a "Hussite trilogy" of plays, *Jan Hus* (1911), *Jan Žižka* (1903), and *Jan Roháč* (written in 1913–1914, first performed in 1918). The Tábórite *hejtman* [captain] Jan Roháč z Dubé, who was publicly executed with fifty-six of his followers in Prague in 1437, led the last armed resistance to Emperor Zikmund's return as Czech king. The delay in the play's première was due to more contemporary circumstances; the serialization in *Národní politika* of Jirásek's novel *Husitský král* [The Hussite King], whose hero is Jiří z Poděbrad, the last Czech to sit on the Bohemian throne, was likewise stopped by Austrian censors in 1915. Besides "the Hussite times of glorious memory," Jirásek devoted most attention to re-creating the post-Bílá hora period that he himself christened "the Darkness" [*Temno*, 1915] and the *národní obrození*. He chronicles the national rebirth in two epic cycles of novels, the five-work *F. L. Věk* (1890–1907) and the four-work *U nás* (1897–1904). *U nás* is a potent phrase in Czech, one that has no simple English equivalent. Depending on context, it can mean "among us," "at our home," "in our country"; Jirásek's title makes the national and the domestic sounding boards for one another. The book is set in his hometown Hronov (thinly fictionalized in the novel as Padolí), and many of the figures who crowd its pages are people Jirásek knew in childhood.

In a speech delivered in the Moravian capital of Brno²⁶ on 23 June 1945, Klement Gottwald, who was then deputy prime minister in the National Front government, situated his country's recent sufferings at the hands of Nazi Germany in the *longue durée* of Czech history. *Anschluss* Vienna apart, Prague had been the first European capital to be occupied by Hitler's *Wehrmacht* on 15 March 1939, and was the last to be liberated on 9 May 1945, a day after the official German surrender at Rheims. Gottwald called upon his compatriots to expel "once and forever beyond the borders of our republic . . . an element hostile to us" and resettle the borderlands [*pobraníčí*] with Czechs in order to "redress Bílá hora" and rectify "the mistakes of our Czech kings, the Přemyslids, who invited the German colonizers here for us."²⁷ By the end of 1946, some three million people had been deprived of Czechoslovak citizenship and expelled to Allied-occupied Germany and Austria. From 29.5 percent of Bohemia's population in 1930, "Germans"—as they had by this date unambiguously become²⁸—made up less than 2 percent in 1950. German sources name 18,889 individuals who died in this forcible deportation; the body count of unnamed dead would undoubtedly be a good deal higher.²⁹ This "cleansing" [*čištění, očista, vyčistit*] of the homeland, as it was widely conceptualized at the time, was not just KSČ policy, but the explicit and highly popular objective of all parties in the National Front.³⁰ It had also been endorsed by the victorious Allies at the Potsdam Conference of 1945.

Alois Jirásek's novella *Na ostrově* [On the Island, 1888] was reissued, with an afterword by Minister of Education Zdeněk Nejedlý, in The People's Library in 1948. The title is a reference to the German-speaking "islands" [*ostrovy*], as they were being described by the late nineteenth century, in the Czech lands. These islands were mapped, with considerable precision, in *Otto's Encyclopedia*. The book is one of very few among Jirásek's writings to be set in his own time. The 1948 cover blurb reads:

²⁶A not insignificant location in this context; a German "island" in the nineteenth century, in 1919 Brno still had 52,000 German inhabitants (by self-declared "nationality" [*národnost*]) as against 151,000 Czechoslovaks. Census figures, given in *Ottův slovník naučný nové doby* [Otto's contemporary encyclopedia], 6 vols., each in two parts (Prague, 1930–1943), 1.2:751.

²⁷Quoted in Tomáš Staněk, *Odsun Němců z Československa 1945–1947* [The expulsion of the Germans from Czechoslovakia 1945–1947] (Prague: Academia/Naše vojsko, 1991), 60.

²⁸Elsewhere I have argued that the Czech/German linguistic divide shifted from a signifier of class identity and difference to a signifier of ethnic identity and difference over the nineteenth century, erasing many ambivalences and ambiguities in the process. The communists were in this sense drawing on an older substratum of meanings in (re)turning the tropes of nineteenth-century nationalism into a discourse of twentieth-century class warfare. See Derek Sayer, "The Language of Nationality and the Nationality of Language: Prague, 1780–1920," *Past and Present* 151 (1996), and, more generally, *The Coasts of Bohemia*.

²⁹All figures here are contested. See Staněk, *Odsun Němců*.

³⁰See, inter alia, Staněk, *Odsun Němců*, 57–60, for examples of such sentiments and language across the official political spectrum; also, in particular, Prokop Drtina's speech at the National Socialist Party congress in the Lucerna Palace in Prague on 19 May 1945, reprinted in his *Československo můj osud* [Czechoslovakia my fate], 2 vols., each in two parts (Prague: Melantrich, 1992), 2.1:63–64.

In the time when we have forever finished with the German question in the border regions of our land, it is well to recall the history of the penetration and strengthening of the German element in our country. Jirásek as the eternal conscience of the nation dedicated all his work to the rousing of the national consciousness, and consecrated to it this slim volume from the Czech borderlands in the second half of the last century. He reminds us here how national indifference, or, conversely, national consciousness always went hand in hand with the economic standing of the individual in society. Czech capital is almost non-existent, capital in the hands of albeit Czech-speaking but nationally indifferent people puts up German factories, and the Germanized factory owner puts the talented boys of his Czech foremen through German schools with the clear intention of suppressing even in the womb everything healthy in the Czech element, which threatens by its talent to build a future dam against German expansion; the wife of a Czech landowner forces her daughter to marry an owner of German factories, who calculates that with his wife's dowry he can acquire Czech land as well, which he will use to expand his German factories and thus by economic pressure support the Germanization of the region. The consciousness-raising struggle of the Czech intelligentsia in these times is difficult. It remains on the shoulders of enlightened priests and aware teachers and gymnasium professors. . . . That the work of these awakeners succeeded, is by now clear. In this simple story, Jirásek faithfully portrays how difficult their labor was and how slowly the national idea penetrated to the strata of the "better sort," who gladly aped German society both in language and in fashion, and who considered the aware Czech individual "eccentric."³¹

In Prague, meanwhile, the former Deutsches Kasino on Na příkopě, the center of German society in the city since 1862, was reborn as Slovanský dům (the Slav House). Mikoláš Aleš's patriotic lunettes on the facade of the Zemská Bank next door, built in 1894–1895, finally had the semantic field to themselves. But they no longer adorned a proud bastion of Czech capital whose very presence on the German Corso was an emphatic statement of national revival. Like all other Czech banks, insurance companies, mines, and major manufacturing industries, the Zemská Bank was nationalized by presidential decree in October 1945. Slovanský dům provided the temporary seat of the Central Committee of the KSČ until 1948. The Zemská Bank eventually became the headquarters of the state travel agency Čedok.

Jirásek became a pivotal figure in this sewing together of ancient and recent oppressions, recollected and relived resistances, to construct the spaces and times of "people's democracy" [*lidovláda*]. Klement Gottwald officially launched what he called the "Jirásek Action" [*Jiráskova akce*] on 10 November 1948. The "very contemporary" cultural task, he said, was "to emphasize the significance of the works of our great national,

³¹ Alois Jirásek, *Na ostrově* [On the island] (Prague: Lidová Knihovna, 1948), dust-jacket blurb, no author credited.

popular writer for today's times, and to give them into the hands of the people."³² This speech was printed as a pamphlet, with a cover illustration by Mikoláš Aleš. The following May, Orbis, later renamed the State Publishing House for Literature, Music, and Art (SNKLHU), began publication of a thirty-two-volume selected works entitled *Jirásek's Legacy to the Nation*. This was said to give "a complete chronological picture of the Czech past from mythological times, from old Czech legends up to work from the author's own times."³³ Its first volume was *Staré pověsti české*. Every work in the edition carried a cover illustration by Aleš, and many were furnished with prefaces or afterwords by Zdeněk Nejedlý. The standard print run was 55,000 copies, and there were frequent reprints. Between 1953 and 1962, SNKLHU alone published an additional eighteen books by Jirásek outside the Legacy series.³⁴ His works were equally insistently staged, filmed, and televised. Between 1947 and 1953, five of Jirásek's plays (*M. D. Rettigová*, *Lucerna*, *Jan Žižka*, *Vojnarka*, and *Samota*) were mounted—*Lucerna* [The Lantern] in two different productions—at the National Theater, for a total of 632 performances.³⁵ The Hussite trilogy of *Jan Hus*, *Jan Žižka*, and *Jan Roháč* was staged by the Theater of the Czechoslovak Army in 1951–1952. Kovařovic's operatic rendition of *The Dogheads* went through no fewer than four new productions at the National Theater between 1945 and 1962. *Jan Roháč* was filmed in 1947, *Temno* in 1950, *Staré pověsti české* in 1953, *Jan Hus* in 1955, *Jan Žižka* in 1956, *Proti všem* in 1957. The *obrození* saga *F. L. Věk* was televised in the early 1970's.

Images of (in Gottwald's words again) "Jirásek's life and work, as well as the epochs and events that his work records"³⁶ saturated socialist Czechoslovakia. Jirásek monuments were commissioned from leading sculptors for Prague, Litomyšl, and elsewhere. So were statues of Jan Želivský, whose radical preaching provoked the defenestration that sparked the Hussite revolt in 1419, Jan Roháč, and other Soldiers of God. One of them, in the courtyard of Hvězda Castle, fashionably commemorated "the heroic part of women in the Hussite struggle."³⁷ Streets in the Prague suburb of Braník took their

³²Quoted in Novotný, *Roky Aloisa Jiráska*, 403.

³³Novotný, *Roky Aloisa Jiráska*, 405.

³⁴Zdenka Broukalová and Saša Mouchová, *Bibliografický soupis knih vydaných SNKLU v letech 1953–1962* [Bibliographic listing of books published by SNKLU 1953–1962] (Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury a umění, 1964).

³⁵Information in this article on productions at the National Theater is taken from *Soupis repertoáru Národního divadla v Praze* [Listing of the repertoire of the National Theater in Prague], 3 vols., ed. Hana Konečná (Prague: Národní divadlo, 1983).

³⁶In his speech of 10 November, 1948. He is speaking specifically of what will be on display in the museum at Hvězda. Reproduced in Novotný, *Roky Aloisa Jiráska*, 403.

³⁷Milan Krejčí, *Pražské pomníky a sochy* [Prague monuments and statues] (Prague: Galerie hlavního města Prahy, 1979), unpaginated.

names from Jirásek's works and characters.³⁸ Amid the omnipresent images of proletarian revolution—Lenin and Stalin, Pushkin and Mayakovsky, labor days and party congresses, Five-Year Plans and hydroelectric dams—a long line of nineteenth-century Czech *buditelé* threaded its way across the philatelic landscape.³⁹ Jirásek and Aleš were the only such personalities to be honored during this period with sets of three postage stamps each. The 1951 Jirásek centennial issue features a portrait of the novelist and two cartoons by Mikoláš Aleš for his cycle *Vlast* [The Homeland] in the grand foyer of the National Theater. One, entitled “Legends and Fates,” recalls the mythical world of the Old Slavs conjured up in *Staré pověsti české*. The other depicts the Hussites of Tábor.

Two years earlier, Jirásek had already appeared on a set of six stamps entitled “Cultural and Political Personalities.” Four of them portrayed communist cultural icons: Julius Fučík, the young prewar editor of the KSČ daily *Rudé právo*, who had been executed by the Gestapo in 1942 and whose prison journal *Reportáž psaná na oprátce* [Report Written Beneath the Gallows] became required reading for Czechoslovak schoolchildren; Jan Šverma, another communist journalist, who froze to death during the Slovak National Rising of 1944; Vladislav Vančura, a writer and founder of the 1920's Prague avant-garde Devětsil group, who was shot by the Nazis in 1942 in the wave of reprisals that followed the assassination of Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich; and Jiří Wolker, a *proletkult* poet who escaped these horrors, having died romantically young in 1924. The montage of past and present into a single canon of the “progressive” was ubiquitous. Behind the tractor and agricultural worker advertising the new order on a stamp of 1950 stood the silhouette of Říp Mountain, a landscape drawn many times by Mikoláš Aleš. From Říp, Jirásek tells us in *Staré pověsti české*, Forefather Čech looked out and determined that “we have found the land where we will remain and establish our dwellings. Behold, this is that land, which you have sought. . . . This is that promised land, full of animals and birds, abounding in honey.”⁴⁰ Another 1950 stamp collages a Soviet tank driver and Prague Castle, ancient and contemporary seat of Czech sovereignty. The following year, to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the KSČ, the ghostly outline of a Hussite warrior gazed protectively over the shoulder of a workers' militiaman.

Jirásek and Aleš first met as students in Prague, and it was the start of a lifelong friendship. The artist's career was to be a good deal more checkered than the writer's,

³⁸Jiří Čarek et al., *Ulicemi města Prahy od 14. století do dneška* [Through the streets of Prague from the fourteenth century to today] (Prague: Orbis, 1958), 28. All information on Prague street names in this article comes from this source.

³⁹Information on Czechoslovak postage stamps is taken from Alois Dušek et al., *Specializovaná příručka pro sběratele československých poštovních známek a celin* [Specialized handbook for collectors of Czechoslovak postage stamps and entires] (Prague: Svaz československých filatelistů, 1988).

⁴⁰Jirásek, *Staré pověsti české*, 13.

but Mikoláš Aleš too had his share of public glory. As a student at the academy he had already determined that "I am simply going down the Mánes road."⁴¹ Later he was to draw his predecessor as a colossus striding across Staroměstské náměstí. His first large composition was entitled *Čechie v slávě* [Bohemia in Glory, 1875], a work he intended as the opening page of a cycle *Tři doby země české* [Three Ages of the Czech Land]. The cycle was never realized. In conversation with the art critic Emanuel Svoboda in 1912, Aleš recalled what he had originally had in mind:

The main pictures and among them insertions. (And at this he sketched with his finger on the table how he imagined it all.) Vyšehrad in glory and opposite Petřín with the god Perun. The Přemyslids—in the center Otakar with his standard—the homeland bows down at the sarcophagi in Saint Vitus's Cathedral—that is what I was thinking of then—perhaps more than necessary—The Hussites—highest in the heavens Christ, at his sides Hus and Jeroným [Pražský]. In the clouds Žižka and commanders—and down below the armed Hussite people—The Thirty Years' War—a motto of three executed young men, who had opposed the clerics, then the execution of the lords. Valdštýn riding a horse points in the distance to a shining star—all around, skulls. I wanted to depict in more depth the resurrection and awakening. Oh, my boy, it is vain to talk of these plans. And from all this came only one sheet—the fragment A ta naše lípa [And That Lime Tree of Ours, 1891].⁴²

Perun was the Old Slav god of thunder and lightning. There were two Přemyslid kings called Otakar; it is probably Přemysl Otakar II (1253–1278) that Aleš had in mind here—his armies extended the borders of the medieval Czech kingdom to the shores of the Adriatic. Saint Vitus's Cathedral in Prague Castle, founded by Saint Václav in the tenth century and rebuilt by Charles IV in the fourteenth, contains the tombs of Václav himself, Saint Vojtěch, who was the first Czech bishop of Prague (982), and several Czech kings, among them the Father of the Homeland. Valdštýn (Albrecht z Valdštejna) was a Czech noble who fought on the imperial side against the rebels of 1618, and a rich beneficiary of Bílá hora. The Valdštejn Palace, which he built in 1624–1630, is the largest complex of historic buildings in Prague after Hradčany (Prague Castle) and the Jesuit Klementinum. Master Jeroným Pražský was burned, like Hus a year earlier, in 1416 by the Council of Konstanz. *A ta naše lípa* portrays Czech *buditelé*—Smetana, Němcová, Mánes (with the young Aleš himself at his feet), the historian František Palacký, and many more—gathered under a Slav lime tree, in whose branches are intertwined the names of seminal works of the *obrození*: Jan Kollár's pan-Slav poetic cycle *Daughter of Sláva*, Josef Jungmann's *Dictionary*, Pavel Josef Ša-

⁴¹Quoted in Toman, *Nový slovník*, 10.

⁴²Quoted in Emanuel Svoboda, "Doslov o historii cyklů" [Afterword on the history of the cycles], in Mikoláš Aleš, *Cykly* [Cycles], ed. Jaromír Neumann (Prague: SNKLU, 1957), 360.

fařík's *Slavonic Antiquities*, Palacký's magisterial *History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia*, Němcová's *Babička*. It is drawn with deliberate, childlike primitivism.

Aleš's greatest triumph came to him early in life, in 1879 when he and František Ženíšek won first prize in the competition to decorate the National Theater with their cycle *Vlast*, intended for the main foyer. That same year he married a local girl, his adolescent sweetheart Marie, whom he had earlier tried vainly to persuade to elope with him. His letters, writes Svoboda, "opened to her his human and artistic heart, filled with a great love for the homeland, the nation, Slavdom [*Slovanstvo*] and art."⁴³ Described later by Jirásek as "the cathedral of Czech art,"⁴⁴ the National Theater was the sanctum of a good deal more than that. "The little golden chapel on the Vltava" [*zlatá kaplička nad Vltavou*] was the fruit of a campaign begun under Palacký's chairmanship in 1850, in which funds were contributed by rich and poor alike through the length and breadth of the Czech lands. Aleš later portrayed the campaign for František Adolf Šubert's splendid souvenir volume *The National Theater* (1884). The collection box stands on the table of a humble *chalupa*, the man of the house is dressed in a knee-length sheepskin coat, his wife in layered skirts. Šubert's history carries the dedication "To the entire Czech nation, builders of the theater above the Vltava, hallowed for the memory of all future ages."⁴⁵ Above the theater's proscenium arch (and embossed in gold leaf on Šubert's cover) is the legend "*Národ sobě*"—the nation to itself.

Jan Neruda, poet, feuilletonist, and author of the Czech literary classic *Tales from the Malá strana* [*Povídky malostranské*, 1878], responded warmly to Aleš's cartoons for *Vlast* in the newspaper *Národní listy*:

Here thought and felt a poet that was whole and Czech. The designer offered for the fourteen lunettes in the foyer a cycle so new and so ingenious, of a kind we have not possessed previously in our own domestic art. Love for the homeland, ardent and proud, is the dominant idea in this pictorial cycle, and it is given epic, eloquent expression in it. It is, if I may speak thus, a patriotic tale, translating our contemporary emotions onto past times, linking the Czech present with time immemorial. The preface to the cycle and so to speak

⁴³Emanuel Svoboda, untitled introduction to *Seznam děl jubilejní výstavy Mikoláše Aleše v Praze na Příkopě 1932* [List of works at the jubilee exhibition of Mikoláš Aleš in Prague on Na příkopě 1932], 2 vols. (Prague: Myslbeč, 1932–1933), 1:16.

⁴⁴Speech by Alois Jirásek of 16 May 1918 in the Pantheon of the National Museum, at the ceremony for the fiftieth anniversary of laying the foundation stone for the National Theater. "Řeč Al. Jiráska," in *Za právo a stát: sborník dokladů o československé společné vůli k svobodě 1848–1918* [For right and state: a collection of documents on the Czechoslovak will to freedom 1848–1918] (Prague: Státní nakladatelství, 1928). No editor credited.

⁴⁵František Adolf Šubert, *Národní divadlo v Praze: dějiny jeho i stavba dokončená* [The National Theater in Prague: its history as well as its completed building] (Prague: J. Otto, 1884), unnumbered dedication page.

*its moral is the first picture: despite the discomfort of their vigil, two armed Chodové alertly stand on guard for their homeland in snow-bound Šumava. . . .*⁴⁶

In the event, Aleš was not permitted to execute the murals themselves. That was left to the more refined Ženíšek. Aleš bitterly complained later, "And then they said that I don't know how to color, to paint. And so they knocked the palette from my hand. . . ."⁴⁷

This victory of Ženíšek's polished academicism over Aleš's sturdy virility of line—a line "whose Czechness," according to Emanuel Svoboda, "cannot be defined by words, but only understood by the Czech heart"⁴⁸—was a foretaste of things to come. By the 1880's fashionable artistic tastes had turned away from what V. V. Štech describes as "heroic conceptions expressed according to . . . inner convictions, with concentrated simplicity and dramatic truth," in favor of representation of the past as "an interesting and present theater, excellently fitted out to the point of illusoriness." Aleš was already being viewed as "outdated, indeed reactionary, as an unartistic draughtsman of another, lower order than the then-celebrated painters of the colored splendors of the exterior."⁴⁹ He was derided, in particular, for his 1886 illustrations for the *Dvůr Králové* and *Zelená Hora* manuscripts (which Josef Mánes had illustrated before him). Julius Grégr, proprietor of the newspaper *Národní listy*, wrote that "work so shallow, superficial and ugly is not worth either the paper it's printed on or the expense."⁵⁰ The young Alfons Mucha, by contrast, ever the pan-Slavist romantic, wrote Aleš on behalf of Czech art students in Munich assuring him that "[w]e always understood you and shall always understand you, just as everyone certainly will in our Czech nation who is not a reactionary and retains a last ounce of sense."⁵¹ It did not help matters any that these purportedly early medieval Czech poems, "discovered" by Václav Hanka in the early years of the century—a discovery Aleš portrayed in another drawing of 1886—were unmasked as forgeries by Tomáš Masaryk and Jan Gebauer that same year in Masaryk's journal *Atheneum*.

Of Aleš's more than eight thousand works, fewer than seventy are oil paintings, dating mostly from the years 1876–1882. Many of these are devoted to themes from

⁴⁶Quoted in Antonín Matějček, *Národní divadlo a jeho výtvarníci* [The National Theater and its fine artists] (Prague: Sbor pro zřízení druhého Národního divadla, 1934), 114. Originally published in *Národní listy*, 31 January 1879.

⁴⁷Quoted in Toman, *Nový slovník*, 11.

⁴⁸Svoboda, in *Seznam děl jubilejní výstavy Mikoláše Aleše*, 1:16.

⁴⁹Štech, in *Seznam děl jubilejní výstavy Mikoláše Aleše*, 1:13.

⁵⁰Quoted in Mikoláš Aleš, *Ilustrace české poezie a prózy* [Illustrations of Czech poetry and prose], ed. Hana Volavková (Prague: SNKLU, 1964), 224.

⁵¹Quoted in Mikoláš Aleš, *Ilustrace*, 224.

Czech myth and history, among them "Old Slav Funeral" [*Staroslovanský pohřeb*, 1878], "Over the Grave of a Soldier of God" [*Nad hrobem Božího bojovníka*, 1877], and "The Meeting of Jiří z Poděbrad with Mathias Corvinus" [*Setkání Jiřího z Poděbrad s Matyášem*, 1878]. A famous triptych, "Poetry, Painting, Music" (1878), responds to Karel Hynek Mácha's great romantic epic *Máj* (May 1836), a cornerstone of modern Czech poetry. But Aleš's trademark media became pencil, pen, charcoal, and watercolor. His monumentalist ambitions found only muted expression in cycles of drawings. Among the best known are *Živly* [The Elements, 1881], *Praha* [Prague, 1882], and *Život starých Slovanů* [Life of the Old Slavs, 1891]. He also projected, but never fully realized, other cycles devoted to Russian, Polish, and South Slav history. Lacking commissions for his more grandiose projects, Aleš was forced to make a living mainly as an illustrator for calendars, magazines (*Český lid*, *Osvěta*, Svatopluk Čech's *Květy*, among others), and books. One consequence of this fact was that his work actually became far more "popular" than it might have turned out otherwise. His art was ensured a mass audience, and it remained simple, accessible, and unpretentious.

Among the books for which Aleš drew pictures were several classics of nineteenth-century Czech literature, including Karel Havlíček Borovský's *Tyrolské elegie* [Tyrolean Elegies, 1883], František Ladislav Čelakovský's *Oblas písní ruských* [An Echo of Russian Songs, 1884], Ladislav Quis's *Hloupý Honza* [Simple Simon, 1892], J. V. Sládek's *Zvony a zvonky* [Bells Large and Small, 1894], and K. V. Rais's *Doma* [Home, 1903]. Apart from *The Dogheads*, he also illustrated Jirásek's *Z Čech až na konec světa* [From Bohemia to the End of the World, 1890] and his short story *Na Chlumku* (1889), both of which were written for youth. *Na Chlumku* was contained in a reader entitled *To Our Children* [*Našim dětem*], which was published by Otto on behalf of the Ústřední matice česká, an organization concerned with extending Czech-language schooling, especially in the "German"-dominated borderlands. Much of Aleš's best work was done for children. He was an able and affectionate illustrator of Czech folk tales, songs, and nursery rhymes, whose collection earlier in the century by Čelakovský, Němcová, Karel Jaromír Erben, and others was a central task of "reviving" the nation (and identifying it with "the people"). Notable among Aleš's creations in this vein are his *Slabikář* [Primer, 1898] and above all his *Špalíček národních písní a říkadel* [A Little Bundle of National Songs and Rhymes, 2 vols., 1907, 1912]. The *Špalíček* went on to become an indispensable ingredient of a Czech childhood, comparable to Mother Goose in North America.

In his later years Aleš finally achieved the recognition that had eluded him through the dismal 1880's. He became widely sought after to design murals and frescoes for public and commercial buildings.⁵² Whatever the aesthetic cognoscenti may have made of his art, it proved well adapted, by the turn of the century, to advertising the

⁵²On these murals and frescoes, see Miroslav Míčko and Emanuel Svoboda, *Mikoláš Aleš: nástěnné malby* [Mikoláš Aleš: murals] (Prague: SNKLHU, 1955).

conquest of the commanding heights of Bohemian society by the Czech bourgeoisie. In Prague his work can be seen among other places in the vestibule of the Old Town Hall ("Libuše Prophecies the Glory of Prague," 1904) and of the Municipal Center Obecní dům (1910), on the Štorch bookstore on Staroměstské náměstí ("Saint Václav," 1897) and the Rott hardware store on Malé náměstí, on the Wiehl house on Václavské náměstí, and in the Czech Savings Bank (Česká spořitelna, formerly the Městská spořitelna) on Rytířská ulice. All of these are central locations, and Aleš's murals are very visible markers of their reclamation for Czechness. He also decorated the town halls of Plzeň, Pardubice, Vsetín, and Náchod, and many other buildings, both public and private, throughout Bohemia and Moravia. When dissatisfied students at the Academy of Fine Arts formed the Mánes Artists' Society in 1887, they chose Aleš as their first president, not because of his artistic style, which had few imitators, but because despite his stylistic anachronism he had come somehow to embody an authentically, irreducibly *Czech* art. As Štech puts it, "he became a patriarch outside time."⁵³ Aleš had exhibitions in Prague in 1896 (Topič Salon), 1902 (Mánes Artists' Society), 1908 (Topič Salon), and 1912, as well as in Olomouc (1911), Kolín, Písek, and Plzeň (all 1912). The 1912 Prague exhibition, organized by the patriotic artistic society Umělecká beseda in celebration of the artist's sixtieth birthday, was held at what was then the city's largest such venue, the Rudolfinum on the right bank of the Vltava. There were 362 exhibits, of which eighteen were oils. The embankment on which the Rudolfinum stands, which at the time was also named for Emperor Franz Josef's son, Crown Prince Rudolf, was to be rechristened Alešovo nábřeží in 1919.

František Nečásek begins his introduction to the catalogue for the 1952 Aleš exhibition in the Riding School at Prague Castle with a less complicated version of the artist's life story, preferring, perhaps, "concentrated simplicity and dramatic truth." Like all such children's fables, this one has a moral, which Nečásek does not shrink from spelling out:

The hundredth anniversary of Mikoláš Aleš's birth is an auspicious and glorious year for his work. It is as if the mists had dispersed, the dark clouds been torn asunder and the sun of Aleš's genius risen high over its homeland, illuminating it all.

And hard, nay cruel, was the fate of Aleš himself and his work in the past. They drove him out of the National Theater, they drove him out of the exhibitions, they would not allow him to decorate the National Museum, they insulted him, they killed him off. And then still worse—official recognition and in reality cold indifference. To be sure, not from the people; no, Aleš knew the love of simple people during his lifetime, and the succeeding generations likewise loved the creator of enchanting little pictures in primers and readers, in Jirásek's and Rais's writings. It was the Czech parvenu masters, their sons and grand-

⁵³Štech, in *Seznam děl jubilejní výstavy Mikoláše Aleše*, 1:14.

sons, who drove Aleš back to the cottage whence he came, and who did not wish to admit him into the "holy of holies" of the nation.

Yes, that's how it was. And today we are opening an exhibition of Aleš's work in the place most dear and sacred to the nation, in Prague Castle. Aleš is our first artist whose life-work has been exhibited in Prague Castle. . . . The government of the republic itself is watching over Aleš's jubilee year.

And what is the cause of this turnaround, what storm has dispelled the fogs and torn apart the dark clouds? Self-evidently the cause of the new, high regard for Aleš's work is not just the incident of the jubilee. There were enough of these even earlier. It really is a question here of a storm, which swept out the former masters, the enemies of our people and of Aleš's talent. That is why the arrival of Aleš to Prague Castle is directly symbolic: he could come there only when our working people came there and seized the reins of government. Aleš could come from the cottage to Prague Castle only when another son of the cottage came there too, the faithful son and leader of our people—Klement Gottwald.⁵⁴

The first workers' president, Nečásek continues, has from the beginning insisted that "our new order" must "hand over all the richness of the progressive culture of the past to its rightful heirs, to the working people, and on its basis build a new socialist culture."

To that end, Orbis produced a twelve-volume, lavishly illustrated *Dílo Mikoláše Alše* [The Work of Mikoláš Aleš, 1951–1975], whose titles included *The Homeland* (1952), *Czech History in the Work of Mikoláš Aleš* (1952) and *A Garland of National Songs* (1951). It is without much doubt the most ambitious series devoted to any Czech artist during the entire communist period. The secondary literature on Aleš in the late 1940's and early 1950's is correspondingly enormous.⁵⁵ Apart from the many exhibitions, Aleš's Year was marked by public lectures, celebratory evenings in the National Theater and Obecní dům, postcards, calendars, and postage stamps. Aleš's drawings were used to illustrate numerous books, among them the executed Vladislav Vančura's posthumously published *Pictures from the History of the Czech Nation*. Petr Bezruč, Jaroslav Seifert, and Vítězslav Nezval, all leading Czech poets of the century, published collections of verses inspired by Aleš's work. In 1950 Orbis established what it called a "National Gallery" [*Národní obrazárna*] of affordable artistic reproductions "so that our people can get to know the leading works of the masters of our art in the past and the best works of contemporary painting."⁵⁶ Introducing the brochure advertising the initia-

⁵⁴Nečásek, "V Alšově jubilejním roce," in *Výstava díla Mikoláše Alše 1852–1952*, 13.

⁵⁵For a partial listing, see Prokop Toman and Prokop H. Toman, *Dodatky ke Slovníku československých výtvarných umělců* [Supplement to the Dictionary of Czechoslovak fine artists], 2d ed. (Ostrava: Chagall, 1994), 16–17.

⁵⁶Unpaginated anonymous Orbis publicity brochure, entitled *Národní obrazárna* [National picture-gallery] (Prague: Orbis, n.d. [1950]).

tive, Zdeněk Nejedlý reminisced about how, in the old days, he would encounter only the well-heeled in the art galleries. He contrasts a recent exhibition he opened in the former Bat'a company town of Zlín, now renamed Gottwaldov: "Manual workers came, other workers came, in numbers never seen at a Prague exhibition, and they looked [at the exhibits] with an interest which was equally quite new, not to be seen among the bourgeoisie. I looked at them and observed them well. Many soldiers came too. They were immensely interested in Aleš's horses. . . . Certainly it would have warmed Aleš's heart to see such grateful and knowledgeable spectators."⁵⁷ The first three works in Orbis's National Gallery—which was given over almost entirely to nineteenth-century artists—were Aleš's "Hussite Camp" [*Husitský tábor*], "Jan Žižka," and "Meeting of Jiří z Poděbrad with Mathias Corvinus."

A folder of Aleš reproductions entitled *The Struggle of Our People for Freedom* was published in a first edition of twenty thousand by Orbis in the jubilee year of 1952. Of the thirty pictures, over a third portray the Hussites. Others recall Bílá hora, the Chodové, Jan Sladký Kozina, the "stormy year" of 1848. There are also, perhaps inevitably, several of Aleš's illustrations to "national songs," underlining the message that the ultimate subject of the national history is the anonymous "people" [*lid*]. Much could be culled from Jaromír Neumann's introductory study, which is entitled "Mikoláš Aleš and the Progressive Traditions of Czech History," but suffice it here to register two indices of that progressiveness. The first is Aleš's remark, not untypical of the pan-Slavist enthusiasms of his own era, that "[w]ith us it will be well, when the cossacks are in Staroměstské náměstí." (Aleš did not paint Soviet stars on their caps; that was merely František Nečásek's figure of speech.) The second comes from a letter to Jirásek of 1877, in which Aleš reflects upon his preferred subjects: "The further I go the more I recognize that, for me, the Hussite period and those peasant rebellions suit me the best. So I will hold on most to those times. And so what? It is a glorious time, that Hussite era, and that of the peasant revolts is again sad; to me this makes a still deeper impression than those emigrants after Bílá hora." Neumann comments: "All in all, this admission of Aleš's clearly shows his really democratic, revolutionary comprehension of history, for it is not so much the emigrants, who abandoned the land, but the simple people, who resisted, who rose up against oppression and fought, that are above all the object of Aleš's admiration and love."⁵⁸

Aleš's *Špalíček* went into its fifth edition in 1950 (fig. 3). Miroslav Míčko waxes sentimental—and employs plentiful Czech diminutives—in his introduction, explaining how Aleš collected and illustrated folk songs throughout his life until they

⁵⁷Zdeněk Nejedlý, untitled preface to *Národní obrazárna*.

⁵⁸Folder of reproductions entitled *Mikoláš Aleš: boj našeho lidu za svobodu* [Mikoláš Aleš: the struggle of our people for freedom], prefatory study by Jaromír Neumann, "Mikoláš Aleš a pokrokové tradice českých dějin" [Mikoláš Aleš and the progressive traditions of Czech history] (Prague: Orbis, 1952), 22, 11, 11 respectively.

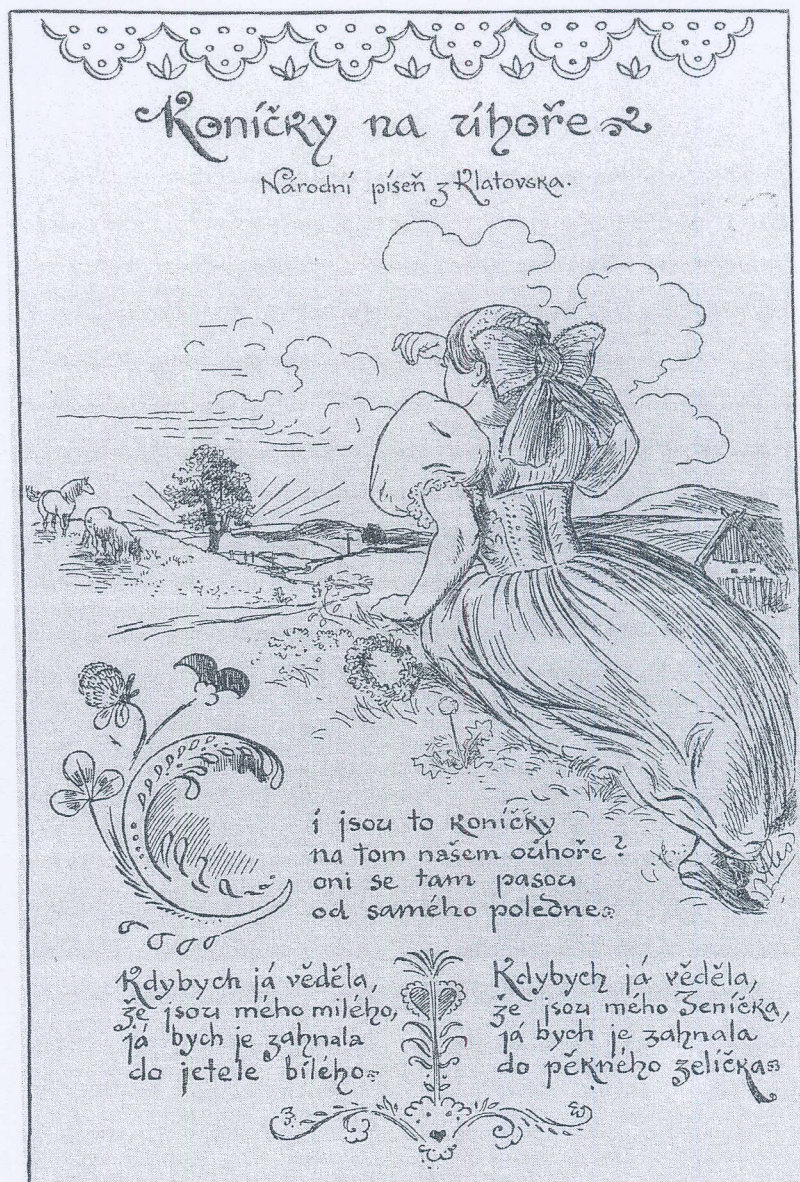


Fig. 3. A page from Mikoláš Aleš's *Špalíček*.

added up to a book, "in just the same way as his mother in the country fashion sewed together little songs [*písničky*], which she bought in the markets and fairs, until she had a bulky bundle [*špalíček*] of them—the typical little book [*knížka*] of Czech cottages. Aleš wanted with his *Špalíček* to give back a typically Czech book to the people. . . ."⁵⁹ The selection of rhymes and illustrations in the 1950 edition of the *Špalíček*, however, is not Mikoláš Aleš's own, but Emanuel Svoboda's. One rhyme is called "Our Jew Liebermann" [*Náš Žid Liebermann*]. It reads, in full:

⁵⁹Miroslav Míčko, introduction to Mikoláš Aleš, *Špalíček národních písní a říkadel* [A little bundle of national songs and rhymes] (Prague: Orbis, 1950), xi. A *špalíček* is, literally, a little log or block; in this context it connotes a small, thick book.

Our Jew Liebermann
Wandered seven years:
Arrived in Cracow
Bought potatoes.

The rhyme is accompanied by what for Aleš's time and place was an unexceptionally racist caricature—which did not, of course, make this page any less affectionate than the rest of the collection.⁶⁰

Anti-Semitism, epitomized in Jan Neruda's tract *The Jewish Fear* [*Pro strach židovský*, 1869], had been one of the less seemly facets of later nineteenth-century Czech nationalism. It was prompted, in part, by what Czechs perceived as the Bohemian Jews' cultural and linguistic affiliation to the country's "Germans." But we are not in Aleš's time. It is 1950. A scant few years before, other Germans had murdered eighty thousand Bohemian and Moravian Jews in the Holocaust. In remembrance of who they were, some of those Jews had contrived to stage the most Czech of all Czech operas, Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* [*Prodaná nevěsta*], in the Bohemian concentration camp of Terezín before they were transported by cattle truck to Auschwitz and Treblinka. In a climate in which art old and new was routinely judged and censored for its political "progressiveness"—and in a selection that was not a simple reprint but the communist state's own—we might, perhaps, have expected to see Liebermann quietly disappear in mute homage to the dead; as did so many others, both real and fictional, during these years. But no. The wandering Jew, part object of ridicule, part figure of fear, lives on in this "theater of popular life" painted by Aleš "with astonishing compass and color,"⁶¹ as eternal a feature of the imagined Czech landscape as his cottages and churches, gingerbread sellers and water sprites, pretty girls in country costume, and the dragoons and hussars who court them. "The meaning of the *Špalíček*," Míčko tells us, "just like the meaning of all [Aleš's] work . . . is present, and present up to today" (ix).

Mikoláš Aleš did not live to see an independent Czechoslovakia. He died in 1913. He was buried, with appropriate honors, in the national cemetery—as it had become since Václav Hanka and Božena Němcová were buried there in the 1860's—in Princess Libuše's legendary seat at Vyšehrad. He was given a memorial exhibition at the Ruběš Salon in January and February 1916, and further retrospectives by the Mánes Artists' Society in 1922 (112 drawings and sketches) and 1926 (65 oils). The eightieth anniversary of his birth was commemorated in 1932 with one of the largest exhibitions seen in interwar Prague. The jubilee show, organized by the Myslbek Artists' Society

⁶⁰Aleš, *Špalíček*, 93.

⁶¹Míčko, introduction to Aleš, *Špalíček*, ix.

in its pavilion on Na příkopě, lasted five months, and 497 works were on display. The exhibition was sponsored by the Czechoslovak government and Prague City Council, and its honorary committee included the mayor of Prague, the rector of Charles University, and the president of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Arts, as well as Aleš's widow Marie. As illustrative of Aleš's standing in what communist historiography refers to as "the bourgeois republic" is the list of those who lent paintings and drawings for the exhibition. They included the Slavia Bank, the Memorial of the Liberation [Památník osvobození], and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; President Tomáš Masaryk (who provided the cycle "Life of the Old Slavs") and former Prime Minister Antonín Švehla; the publishers Jan Otto and František Topič; the deputy director of the Živnostenská Bank Antonín Tille; a bevy of captains of industry and large landowners; and a phalanx of senators, professors, lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects, and "ladies."⁶²

Karel Čapek reviewed the show in *Lidové noviny* in a piece entitled "Old Master" [Starý mistr]. It is written in his usual beautiful prose. "When people look at Aleš's little pictures [obrázky]," he begins with a fond diminutive, "they act differently than when they look at all other pictures [obrazy]." Spectators poke their noses right up to the picture, so that no detail escapes their gaze:

It is winter, a boy with clenched fists slides across the ice, a butcher kills a pig, a soldier on a horse canters through the snow-covered countryside, old women and girls are spinning wool, in Bethlehem Christ the Lord is born, the three kings with their bundles make their way through the snow of a tiny town square, over the white and dead countryside, over the domes of the willows and the rows of poplars, rooks circle: all this belongs to the Czech winter, to the winter of our childhood and our home; all this is on one sheet, the artist wants lovingly to call to mind everything in the talkative simultaneity of his little pictures. . . . In this miniature composition of his drawings there is a touching attempt to say everything, to leave out nothing, to encompass all of life—just as it appears to a child; for the child is the discoverer of home.

The "second great simultaneity" in Aleš's work, Čapek continues, lies in the way he weaves together "everything that home means to us." This embraces remembrance of the past every bit as much as the fine-grained detail of the present:

Yes, it is a national idyll: children, the people, song, the countryside. . . . Father Aleš [Otec Aleš] has everything all together in one little bundle: national idyll and national epic, the beetle in the grass and the knights in combat, nature and history, children and kings, animals and elements, present and prehistory; for all this echoes together when we say and feel the word home [domov]. . . . To him the Hussite hejtman was as much a piece of home as the boy whittling a penny-whistle, as a butterfly, as the seasons of the year, as the rippling of a field. . . .

⁶²Seznam děl jubilejní výstavy Mikoláše Aleše, 1:57–58, 2:59–60.

*There is not and there cannot be a national art without such wholeness, which brings together heaven and earth, nature and myth, the ages and the seconds, the greatest things and the most everyday things in one single reality which is presented to be seen and loved. This is what Aleš and Smetana are to us, this is what the voices of the national poets are to us. All the rest is only personality.*⁶³

In his introduction to the jubilee catalogue, V. V. Štech strikes similar notes. He suggests that enough time has now elapsed for the merits of Aleš's art to be appreciated independently of the fickleness of artistic fashion. "We no longer feel the backwardness in Aleš's form, which mattered earlier," he says, "because we understand that the peculiar freshness of this painter is the result of pure sincerity, the fruit of an intensively lived youth, of his experience, of his ideals, to which he adhered even if they were romantic and uncontemporary." There are some who always seek the new. "But there are many, nay more, who seek a link with the past, because they believe that it would be wretched to live without a past, without continuity, without tradition. For these, the truth of Aleš's art reveals itself again and again."⁶⁴ Intrinsic to this continuity is a simplification, even an infantilization, that gives Aleš's work a large part of its enduring charm. Its very naïveté is what makes it timeless. "Such a self-evident art!" Štech enthuses in his concluding contribution to the catalogue; "Aleš's form is clear and simple. . . . Its comprehensibility meant that like so many great creators of archetypes before him, Mikoláš Aleš became an artist for youth"; "He never ceased to believe in fairy tales, he dreams of knights and lords, of mighty deeds, he longs for heroism . . . his historicism grew directly and necessarily out of his youth." In an equation we might want to think long and hard about, Štech avers that in Aleš's world, "the child and the people [*lid*] somehow belong together." He ends: "Times have rushed by, a world has grown up which according to appearances at least is new, but the art of Mikoláš Aleš always recalls the clear and deep sources of eternal youth. We go to them to remember, to refresh ourselves, to cleanse [*očistiti*]."⁶⁵

Alois Jirásek outlived his old friend by seventeen years. He was a prominent signatory of the Manifesto of Czech Writers of May 1917, protesting Vienna's suppression of Czech public life during World War I. He rose, "like a living incarnation of an old *hejtman* from the immortal Hussite revolution,"⁶⁶ in the Smetana Hall in *Obecní dům*

⁶³Karel Čapek, "Starý mistr" [Old Master], in his *O umění a kultuře*, 3:362–64.

⁶⁴*Seznam děl jubilejní výstavy Mikoláše Aleše*, 1:14.

⁶⁵*Seznam děl jubilejní výstavy Mikoláše Aleše*, 2:17–18.

⁶⁶From František Soukup's speech at Jirásek's funeral, in *Jiráskův pobřeh a návrat do rodného Padolí* [Jirásek's funeral and return to his native Padolí], ed. Dr. Kudrnáč (Hronov: Družstvo pro postavení Jiráskova divadla v Hronově, 1930), 9. This volume is also the main source for the description of Jirásek's funeral given here. I provide a much more detailed account in *The Coasts of Bohemia*, chap. 5.

on 13 April 1918 to declaim the National Oath of the Representatives of Czech Cultural and Political Life, which condemned the war and called for national independence. He became a member of the National Committee that declared independence six months later. He was chosen to welcome home the exiled Tomáš Masaryk as first president of liberated Czechoslovakia at Prague's newly renamed Woodrow Wilson Station—previously it had been Franz Josef Station—on 21 December 1918. Masaryk responded: “I am honored, that I am greeted by you personally, that I am greeted by a writer. . . .”⁶⁷ The novelist became a member of the National Assembly, and his name stood at the head of the National Democratic Party's list of candidates for the Senate—the same National Democrats who were to be banned in 1945, along with all other “right-wing” parties, for their alleged prewar betrayal of the interests of the nation.

Streets, theaters, schools, bridges, and even an army regiment were named in Jirásek's honor. His works were required reading in first-republic schools,⁶⁸ and widely excerpted in children's readers. Introducing an English edition of selections from *Staré pověsti české* in 1931, Karel Čapek places “Old Mr. Jirásek” [*starý pan Jirásek*], as he calls him, in the fondly remembered landscapes of his own childhood, relating how he used to read the book perched up in an oak tree with a wooden sword hanging from his belt.⁶⁹ Jirásek had died the year before, aged seventy-eight. In its obituary *Naše Praha* [Our Prague], a patriotic magazine for children, eternally coupled Jirásek's name with that of another “darling of our whole nation,” President-Liberator [*Prezident-osvoboditel*] Tomáš Masaryk, whose eightieth birthday celebrations had just concluded: “And when the hour of liberation arrived, our men gathered together abroad, educated by Jirásek's writings, under banners Masaryk's courage and strength had hoisted.” “Who does not know this dear name?” asks Adolf Mazel: “Certainly you enjoyed his *Staré pověsti české*, in which he shows you the glory of Libuše's time and the wondrous events of the distant past. . . . You older ones have certainly read his *Dogheads*, maybe some of his other books as well (*U nás, F. L. Věk, Skaláci* . . .).” Mazel goes on to praise the verisimilitude of Jirásek's work, his ability to steep himself in sources and locations so that they come magically to life again in his writings. But much more than literary artifice, he says, was involved here. It was Jirásek's “simple heart, pure soul, his humble origin and above all his love for the Czech people and soil” that “brought his narrative art to such perfection that readers of his books formed with people long-dead, with their ideas and feelings, the unity which we call the nation.” Mazel adds: “It is no

⁶⁷Tomáš Masaryk, *Cesta demokracie* [The journey of democracy] (Prague: ČIN, 1934), 8.

⁶⁸See the syllabi given in *Ročenka československých profesorů* [Yearbook of Czechoslovak high school teachers] 1 (1921–1922): 208–17.

⁶⁹Karel Čapek, “Alois Jirásek: pověsti a legendy ze staré Prahy” [Alois Jirásek: stories and legends of old Prague], in his *O umění a kultuře*, 3:223–24.

accident that Masaryk was of simple country descent, it is no accident, that Jirásek is the son of a poor baker from Hronov."⁷⁰

A gigantic cenotaph was erected beneath the Saint Václav statue on Václavské náměstí, and the neon signs in the square were hung with black drapes. Fifty thousand mourners filed by Jirásek's coffin on the afternoon of 14 March 1930 as he lay in state in the Pantheon of the National Museum, surrounded by statues and busts of the great men and women of the Czech nation. He and Mikoláš Aleš were themselves to join this select company in 1936. The funeral took place the next day:

*Under the vault of the Pantheon he is now surrounded by everything that represents nation and state: president of the republic, government, houses of parliament, the highest state officials, representatives of the army, rectors and deans of the universities, writers, artists . . . the whole nation, which comes to bow its head before this black coffin. The whole nation: which is to say, the whole state too. . . .*⁷¹

Only the Catholic Church played no part in the ceremonies. As *Lidové noviny* explained, "Alois Jirásek, bard of the chalice and evoker of the strangling darkness, was without confession. He left the Church in order to gain the right to his conception of Czech history."⁷² There were orations from representatives of government, the army, Czech writers. Jaroslav Kvapil urged his compatriots not to mourn the novelist too much, for "to bow before his coffin came the liberator of the motherland, the successor, chosen by the nation, to our Hussite king, and over this coffin fly the victorious banners of the new Hussite armies. Lipany is redressed, Bílá hora redressed. . . ."⁷³ It took 350 men to carry all the bouquets laid on Václavské náměstí. Borne by four members of the patriotic gymnastic society Sokol, Tomáš Masaryk's wreath was a circle of laurel decorated with a floral bouquet, beneath which was a book made out of leaves. Wildflowers spelled out the words *U nás* (fig. 4).

Jirásek's coffin was carried from the museum on the shoulders of uniformed Sokols. There was an elaborate procession through the city to Olšany Cemetery. Behind the cortège marched soldiers, police, Czechoslovak legionnaires, the entire government, leaders of political parties, academics in full regalia, writers and poets, volunteer firemen, members of guilds, theatrical societies; fifty students from the Jirásek Gymna-

⁷⁰ Adolf Mazel, "Mistr Alois Jirásek zemřel" [The master Alois Jirásek dies], *Naše Praha* [Our Prague] 6 (1929–1930): 98.

⁷¹ *Jiráskův pohřeb*, ed. Kudrnáč, 14.

⁷² Quoted in Petr Mareš, "Ze století do století: 1930" [From century to century: 1930], in *Reflex* 12 (1996): 59.

⁷³ Jaroslav Kvapil, speech at Jirásek's funeral, printed in *Jiráskův pohřeb*, ed. Kudrnáč, 22. Czech Ultraquists ("moderate" Hussites) and Catholics joined together to defeat the more radical Tábórites at the fratricidal battle of Lipany in 1434, which cleared the way for a negotiated return of the Czech church to the Roman fold.

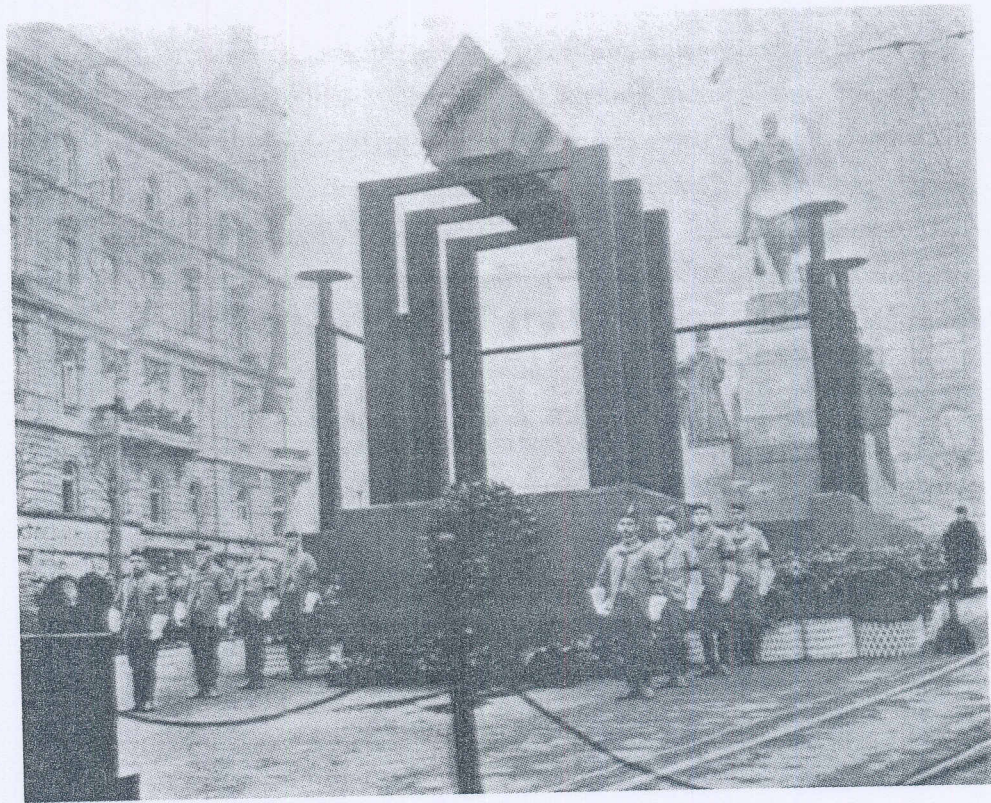


Fig. 4. Alois Jirásek's funeral, 1930—the cenotaph on Václavské náměstí.

sium, each carrying a standard bearing the title of one of Jirásek's books; the master's own pupils; the Dogheads of Domažlice, carrying their symbolic axes. At Olšany, Jirásek was cremated to the strains of the Hussite hymn "Ye Who Are the Soldiers of God" and the national anthem "Where Is My Home?" From there, his ashes were transported by slow motorcade, with more crowds, more speeches, more ceremony, through more than a score of Czech towns: Poděbrady, Litomyšl, Hradec Králové, Česká Skalice, Náchod. He was finally laid to rest in the soil of his native Hronov.

At the time, the veteran left-wing critic F. X. Šalda observed:

You have only to realize that here is a young state and for its building this state has a huge need of legend and myth, like every large social formation, in order completely to explain these ceremonial events and doings. It is no longer a question here of a man who wrote such and such books of such and such value, it is a question of a social symbol. . . . A state needs in its foundations an array of such figures, just as not so long ago great monumental buildings needed an array of sculptures on the façade, which were anything but faithful likenesses of definite concrete persons; well then, this mystique of state usage dictates its own requirements, and reality is recomposed, the finished poetic composition tailored to prescribed dimensions and profiles.⁷⁴

⁷⁴F. X. Šalda, "Alois Jirásek čili mythus a skutečnost" [Alois Jirásek or myth and reality], in *Šaldův zápisník* [Šalda's Notebook] 2 (1929–1930): 243. Šalda concludes that Jirásek's work "will soon be, I am afraid, a historical document. It will be in a museum case and above it will be written: 'The official literary style of the first republic'" (252).