

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# An ‘Execution’ at the Hofoper: Czech Perspectives on the Viennese Premiere of Dvořák’s *The Cunning Peasant*

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## Abstract

On the score of his *St Ludmila* oratorio, Dvořák scribbled: ‘completed in the days when *The Cunning Peasant* was executed in Vienna’. Indeed, Dvořák’s comic opera sparked a riot at its Hofoper premiere in 1885 and was met with harsh criticism in the Viennese press. David Brodbeck argues that the rioters were motivated to action not by *The Cunning Peasant* itself, but by the composer’s nationality. Likewise, Brodbeck shows that the opera’s harshest Viennese critics belonged to a new generation of German liberals, who subscribed to an increasingly ethnic, rather than civic, view of nationalism and were thus predisposed to disapprove of any Dvořák opera because it was not German. Based on this analysis, it would appear that Dvořák’s fate was sealed long before the first notes of *The Cunning Peasant* were sounded at the Vienna Hofoper. This article builds on Brodbeck’s claims, by exploring the Viennese scandal from the perspective of Czech critics, many of whom remained unconvinced that all Czech operas – whether by Dvořák or by another composer – would have been greeted with the same kind of disdain. In their view, *The Cunning Peasant* failed because it was too overtly Czech for Vienna, having been designed for Prague’s Provisional Theatre, and because it was insufficiently representative of Czech achievement in the genre, paling in comparison with the operas of Smetana. Rather than offering a more plausible explanation for the riot, the opinions articulated in the Prague press reveal much about the biases and motivations of the Czech critics themselves.

**Keywords:** Reception; Dvořák; *The Cunning Peasant*; Vienna; Czech critics

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) inscribed the score of his *St Ludmila* oratorio with the following pointed remark: ‘completed in the days when *The Cunning Peasant* (*Šelma sedlák*, op. 37, 1877) was executed in Vienna’.<sup>1</sup> In this statement, Dvořák is referring to the 1885 Viennese premiere of his comic opera – an event that incited riotous behaviour in the audience and brought forth harsh criticism in the Viennese press.<sup>2</sup> According to newspaper reports, a group of protestors in the upper galleries of the Hofoper showed their

<sup>1</sup> ‘dokončeno ve dnech popravы Šelmy sedláka ve Vídni; Praha 23/11/1885’. Jarmil Burghauser, *Antonín Dvořák: tematický katalog, bibliografie; Přehled života a díla* (*Thematic catalogue, Bibliography; Survey of life and work*) (Prague, 1996), 251. Czech critic Ed Moučka uses similar phrasing in his review of the event for *Dalibor*, claiming that ‘Vienna truly executed Dvořák’s darling opera’; Ed Moučka, ‘Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni’ (*Dvořák’s The Cunning Peasant* in Vienna), *Dalibor*, 2nd ser., 7/44 (28 November 1885), 432. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

<sup>2</sup> The Viennese premiere of *Šelma sedlák* (*Der Bauer ein Schelm*) took place on 19 November 1885. The title has been translated into English in various ways, including *The Peasant, a Rogue*; *The Scheming Farmer*; and *The Cunning Peasant*. None of these titles truly captures the essence of the Czech original, since the term ‘*šelma*’ has no clear English equivalent. I refer to the opera as *The Cunning Peasant* throughout this article because it is the most

disapproval of *The Cunning Peasant* by whistling and hissing throughout the performance, which caused such a disruption that several of them were arrested. Some Czechs were also in attendance, and their hearty applause allegedly provoked the protestors to even louder demonstrations. The opera was given a second performance in Vienna – this time to a nearly empty house – before being withdrawn. The drop in attendance at the opera's reprise was likely triggered, at least in part, by poor reviews, since critical assessments generally played a large role in determining Viennese public opinion of a work.<sup>3</sup> As stated by one critic writing for the Czech daily *Národní listy*, 'the Viennese audience ... swears by the newspapers, and already during [the] second performance of Dvořák's opera the theatre was empty'.<sup>4</sup>

While Dvořák's reception in Vienna prior to this event had not been without its complications, the riot brought about by *The Cunning Peasant* was unprecedented for Dvořák. David Brodbeck has suggested that the opera's negative reception had less to do with *The Cunning Peasant* than with the politics in Vienna during the 1880s.<sup>5</sup> At a time when the Czech nationalist cause was gaining ground and Austrian minister-president Eduard Taaffe had granted the Czechs certain small concessions, many Germans in Austria felt compelled to reject anything that might pose a threat to the privileged status of German language and culture. Based on this analysis, it would appear that Dvořák's fate was sealed long before the first notes of *The Cunning Peasant* were sounded at the Vienna Hofoper. Yet the incident takes on new meaning when considered from the perspective of the Czech critics who followed Dvořák's international career with great interest and were eager to voice their own opinions on the matter in the newspapers and journals of Prague. By and large, these Czech critics remained unconvinced that *all* Czech operas – whether by Dvořák or by another composer – would have been greeted with the same kind of disdain. Although the Czechs were often the first to acknowledge that Viennese judgement could be clouded by blind prejudice, the critics were unanimous in declaring that the fault lay mainly in the decision to stage *The Cunning Peasant* rather than another opera. These views, as expressed in the Czech press, are significant not because they offer a more plausible explanation for the riot, but because of what they reveal about the Czech critics themselves and their attitudes towards *The Cunning Peasant* in the 1880s.

Inspired by this extreme incident to speak perhaps more candidly than usual, the critics address many broader issues in their reviews. Implicit in their discussions are various assumptions about the nature of Czech opera and its suitability for international performance as well as questions about Dvořák's place within the Czech operatic canon. More particularly, the reviews cast a spotlight on the strained position of Czech composers vis-à-vis Vienna, especially in the realm of opera – a genre that was not easily exportable – with critics articulating theories and strategies on how to break through on the coveted Hofoper stage in the future. In this way, then, *The Cunning Peasant* provides a snapshot of the unique challenges of transnational opera performance.

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familiar translation, appearing often in the scholarly literature in English. In an early draft, the opera was entitled *Políček knížeti*, which translates as *A Slap for the Duke*.

<sup>3</sup> Sandra McColl, *Music Criticism in Vienna, 1896–1897: Critically Moving Forms* (Oxford, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> 'tím zaujato je vídeňské obecnstvo, jež přísahá na noviny a už při včerejším druhém představení opery Dvořákovy bylo prázdné'. Unsigned, 'Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni (Dvořák's *The Cunning Peasant* in Vienna)', *Národní listy*, 25/321 (22 November 1885), 3.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of the work's reception in Vienna, see David Brodbeck, 'Dvořák's Reception in Liberal Vienna: Language Ordinances, National Property, and the Rhetoric of *Deutschtum*', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 60 (2007), 104–10 and Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum: Political Ideology, German Identity, and Music-Critical Discourse in Liberal Vienna* (Oxford, 2014), 184–91.

## ‘Preventing Czech music from appearing in Vienna’: political contexts for the Hofoper riot

Success at the Vienna Hofoper eluded Dvořák for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the political situation of the time. Brodbeck argues that the rioters, who were members of a radical pan-German student movement, were motivated to action not by *The Cunning Peasant* itself, but by the composer’s nationality.<sup>6</sup> Proof for this claim is provided by Viennese critic Josef Königstein, who writes in his review of the opera for the *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt* that yellow slips of paper were passed out among the students in advance of the performance, urging them ‘to prevent Czech music from appearing in Vienna’.<sup>7</sup> Königstein also points out that the police were on hand at the theatre, anticipating that a riot might break out. As Königstein puts it, ‘the police were informed of the scheme and about thirty detectives ... were assigned to the gallery ... the police brigade at the sentry post in the Giselastraße had been increased considerably in order to nip every outbreak of scandal in the bud’.<sup>8</sup> This suggests that the protests were premeditated – planned before these students actually had a chance to familiarise themselves with Dvořák’s opera.

In general, the pan-German movement, of which these students were a part, was acquiring momentum in Austria during the 1880s under the leadership of Georg von Schönerer. Although the movement had already attracted a considerable following during the 1860s and 1870s, it intensified after Eduard Taaffe took up the office of Austrian minister-president in 1879 and initiated certain policies to appease the Czechs.<sup>9</sup> Three measures in particular helped Taaffe win the support of the Czechs in the early 1880s.<sup>10</sup> The first was the Stremayr Language Ordinance, which came into effect in April 1880, establishing Czech, as well as German, as an external administrative language in Bohemia and Moravia.<sup>11</sup> This meant that citizens residing in the linguistically mixed parts of these regions were able to communicate with government officials in Czech. The second measure was a change to the election system, which granted Czechs a greater degree of control in the Bohemian Diet.<sup>12</sup> The third was the division in 1881 of Prague University into two distinct Czech and German institutions. Naturally, these measures sparked resentment among the Germans in Austria.<sup>13</sup> William McGrath claims that

<sup>6</sup> Brodbeck, ‘Dvořák’s Reception in Liberal Vienna’.

<sup>7</sup> ‘die böhmische Musik in Wien nicht aufkommen zu lassen’. Josef Königstein, ‘Dvořáks Der Bauer ein Schelm’, *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt* (20 November 1885); translated and quoted in Brodbeck, ‘Dvořák’s Reception in Liberal Vienna’, 107–8, 124 and Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum*, 188.

<sup>8</sup> ‘die Polizei war von dem Vorhaben interrichtet und etwa sowie dreißig Detectives ... waren auf der Galerie vertheilt, ferner war die Poliziemannschaft in der Wachstube der Giselastraße erheblich verstärkt worden, um jeden ausbrechenden Scandal im Entstehen zu unterdrücken’. Königstein, ‘Dvořáks Der Bauer ein Schelm’; translated and quoted in Brodbeck, ‘Dvořák’s Reception in Liberal Vienna’, 108, 124 and Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum*, 188–9.

<sup>9</sup> Taaffe managed to stay in power for fourteen years – much longer than any other of the *fin-de-siècle* minister-presidents – and, according to Robert Kann, he did so by taking a reactionary approach to government policy. Robert A. Kann, *The Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848–1918* (New York, 1970), 96–7.

<sup>10</sup> Robert W. Seton-Watson, *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks* (Hamden, 1965), 221.

<sup>11</sup> The internal administrative language – that is, the language that government officials used to communicate among themselves – continued to be German *only* in these regions. For a more detailed discussion of the Stremayr language ordinance and its aftermath, see Eva Branda, ‘Speaking German, Hearing Czech, Claiming Dvořák’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 142 (2017), 109–11.

<sup>12</sup> Pavel Cibulka, Jan Hájek and Martin Kučera, ‘The Definition of Czech National Society during the Period of Liberalism and Nationalism (1860–1914)’, in *A History of the Czech Lands*, ed. Jaroslav Pánek and Oldřich Tůma (Prague, 2009), 332.

<sup>13</sup> See Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914* (West Lafayette, 1982), 149–53, and William A. Jenks, *Austria under the Iron Ring, 1879–1893* (Virginia, 1965), 90–103.

Taaffe's policies drove most of the remaining moderates among the students in Vienna to radical pan-Germanism, and though they would later distance themselves from it, many of Austria's leading German intellectuals were involved in the *deutschnational* movement in their youth.<sup>14</sup> As Pieter Judson points out, many of the politicians who emerged in the 1880s 'owed much of their ideological arsenal to the dogmatic Schönerer'.<sup>15</sup> Apart from advocating closer partnerships with Germany, these pan-Germans devised the so-called Linz programme, which called for reform to the taxation system, the introduction of legislation to protect the interests of the lower classes, and an extension of the franchise. In addition to these demands, it proposed a change to the borders of Austria, to exclude two outlying Slav territories so that German populations might be in a majority. Such an arrangement would ensure the continuation of German hegemony within the Habsburg monarchy. Even though the Linz programme did not materialise and the pan-Germans ultimately had very little political power, they had a strong ideological impact, as demonstrated by the riot at the performance of *The Cunning Peasant*.<sup>16</sup>

The opera's harshest Viennese critics, such as the rioters, belonged to a new generation of German liberals, who subscribed to an increasingly ethnic, rather than civic, view of nationalism.<sup>17</sup> Whereas older critics such as Eduard Hanslick (1825–1904) and Ludwig Speidel (1830–1906) held to a traditional liberal ideology that was more inclusive and willing to grant status to any work that might be thought to display certain 'German' traits,<sup>18</sup> the younger generation – represented by critic Theodor Helm (1843–1920) – were moderate German nationalists who held a considerably narrower view of German identity. Instead of seeing Germanness as something that might be attained through education and acculturation, these liberals thought of German identity as inbred and unchangeable and were thus predisposed to disapprove of any Dvořák opera because it was not German.<sup>19</sup> Such a stance is demonstrated in Helm's review for the *Deutsche Zeitung*, where he writes that 'in this music is found, in addition to many trivialities that please only a Slavic-national ear, many pretty melodies and a number of fine orchestral effects as well'.<sup>20</sup> This statement is dripping with condescension, implying that while the 'many

<sup>14</sup> William J. McGrath, 'Student Radicalism in Vienna', *Journal of Contemporary History* 2 (1967), 183–201; Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton, 2002), 71.

<sup>15</sup> Pieter M. Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries: Liberal Politics, Social Experience, and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848–1914* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 127.

<sup>16</sup> Kann, *The Multinational Empire*, 97–101. It did not help that the performance fell on the Empress's name day.

<sup>17</sup> Brodbeck, 'Dvořák's Reception in Liberal Vienna', *passim*, and Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum*; the passage in Brodbeck's book entitled 'Deutschliberal, nationalliberal, deutschnational: Three Generations of Music Critics' is particularly useful in clarifying terminology, 12–22. See also Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge and London, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Traits that were typically understood as 'German' among these traditional liberals included seriousness, genuineness and strength; Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> These differences in attitude are evident in two speeches that were made in Prague in autumn 1885. In an address from 17 October 1885, just one month before the Viennese premiere of *The Cunning Peasant*, Old Czech (Staročechi) leader František Ladislav Rieger said: 'make peace with the idea of the nationalities, which is the dominant idea of our time and the really constructive idea ... Austria, if she allies herself with this idea, will find in it a powerful helper; for the protection of all the nationalities united under the sceptre of our Empire must make her strong and powerful.' This led a Germanised Czech by the name of Swoboda to retort: 'If the Czechs in Bohemia are made into Germans, that is in my view no deadly sin, for they rise from a lower step to the sunny height of a highly civilized nation. But to seek to Czechize the Germans in Bohemia is quite another thing; that would be a disgrace unheard of in the pages of world history. That is the difference, Dr. Rieger, between Germanization and Czechization!' Seton-Watson, *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks*, 224–5.

<sup>20</sup> 'in der Musik findet sich neben vielem Trivialen, nur einem slavisch-nationalen Ohr Genießbaren auch so manche hübsche Melodie und eine Menge feiner Orchestereffekte'. Theodor Helm, [Review of Dvořák's *The Cunning Peasant*], *Deutsche Zeitung* (20 November 1885); translated and quoted in Brodbeck, 'Dvořák's Reception in Liberal Vienna', 107, 123–4 and Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum*, 188. Similar trends can be seen in the reviews

trivialities' in the music might pass muster with the unrefined Slavs, they could not possibly garner the interest of the more sophisticated Viennese audience. Though Helm concedes that the music has some merits, he dismisses the work completely in his final assessment, deeming it to be entirely undeserving of such a fuss; in his words, 'the utter dramatic worthlessness of the Dvořák-Veselý opus is not worth partisanship for or against'.<sup>21</sup> Robert Richard is even more severe in his review of the work for the *Deutsche Kunst & Musik-Zeitung*, describing *The Cunning Peasant* as having been 'devoured' by the Viennese public. He follows this up by commenting that while the phrase 'speak no ill of the dead' normally holds true, this is not possible for *The Cunning Peasant*, where everything is bad.<sup>22</sup> Such a categorical rejection of the work in all of its particulars suggests that the politics of the day had clouded his judgement. With the exception of a few traditional liberals such as Hanslick<sup>23</sup> and Königstein, who ends his review by asserting that 'what is beautiful remains beautiful whether it was created by a Russian or a German, an Italian or a Czech',<sup>24</sup> the politically driven German critics and protestors seemed determined to make a scandal of *The Cunning Peasant*. Dvořák was not given an opportunity to redeem himself on the Hofoper stage, since the event marked the one and only time that a Dvořák opera was to be performed in Vienna during the composer's lifetime.

### 'Die kleine Oper war für das Prager czechische Publikum geschrieben'

In the aftermath of the event, Czech critics were quick to offer their interpretations. While opinions differed in their details, these Czech critics agreed that the whole Viennese affair might have been avoided if a different opera had been selected for performance. They considered *The Cunning Peasant* to be inappropriate because it was too overtly Czech for Vienna, as it had been designed to appeal to the tastes of audiences at the Provisional Theatre (Prozatímní Divadlo) in Prague, where it was premiered in January 1878.<sup>25</sup> Hanslick himself acknowledges as much, declaring in his 1885 review of the work that

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of other Dvořák pieces. For instance, when Dvořák's *Píseň bohatýrská* (*Heroic Song*) was given in Vienna in late 1898, younger critics such as Helm and Richard Hirschfeld were much more likely to bring the composer's ethnic background into the discussion than traditional liberal critics such as Eduard Hanslick; Christopher Campo-Bowen, 'Bohemian Rhapsodist: Antonín Dvořák's *Píseň bohatýrská* and the Historiography of Czech Music', *19th-Century Music* 40 (2016), 169–73.

<sup>21</sup> 'im Grunde verlohnte die gänzliche dramatische Werthlosigkeit des Dvorak-Vesely'schen Opus gar nicht eine Parteinahme für oder wider'. Helm is referring to Dvořák's librettist Josef Otakar Veselý. Helm, '[Review]'; translated and quoted in Brodbeck, 'Dvořák's Reception in Liberal Vienna', 107, 125 and Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum*, 187.

<sup>22</sup> 'de mortuis nil nisi bene ... Wie ist dies aber möglich ... dasselbe in *Der Bauer ein Schelm* gerade das Allerschlechtesten ist?' Robert Richard, 'Der Bauer ein Schelm', *Deutsche Kunst & Musik-Zeitung* 12/42 (25 November 1885), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Hanslick's review seems to have been the least offensive to the Czechs; Prague newspapers report that all critics in Vienna, except for Hanslick, 'mock the opera' (*Národní listy*) and '[unleash] their venom on the *Peasant* [not having] even one good thing to say about it' (*Lyra*). Unsigned, 'Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni', 3; 'mimo Hanslicka všichni ostatní kritikové ironisují operu'. Unsigned, '*Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni (*The Cunning Peasant* in Vienna)', *Lyra: Orgán Hudebního Spolku Dalibor v Hořicích* 3/7 (15 December 1885), 2; 'vrhli se veškeré kritikové – mimo Hanslicka v N. Fr. Pr. – na Šelmičku a nenechali na něm nit dobrou'. Hanslick's was the only one of the Viennese reviews to be partially reprinted in Czech translation in *Dalibor*; an excerpt of Hanslick's review is quoted in Moučka, 'Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni', 433–4.

<sup>24</sup> 'was schön ist, bleibt schön, ob sein Schöpfer ein Russe oder ein Deutscher, ein Italiener oder Czeche gewesen ist'. Königstein, 'Dvořák's *Der Bauer ein Schelm*'; translated and quoted in Brodbeck, 'Dvořák's Reception in Liberal Vienna', 109, 124 and Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum*, 190.

<sup>25</sup> The opera was premiered in Prague on 27 January 1878.

'the small opera was written for the Prague Czech public'.<sup>26</sup> That Hanslick considered Czech audiences to be provincial is well known; he had once written to Dvořák, 'it would be desirable for your things to become known beyond your narrow Czech fatherland, which in any case does nothing for you'.<sup>27</sup> In some respects, Hanslick seems to be raising a very real practical concern in both *The Cunning Peasant* review and his early letter to Dvořák, suggesting that the composer's works would have a relatively small chance of being widely disseminated if they were designed for a specifically Czech audience and written on a Czech text. In other words, Hanslick knew that Dvořák's Czech operas were not likely to have as wide a reach as those that were written in German, French or Italian – languages that were considered to be 'Weltsprachen'. At the same time, an element of cultural snobbery is certainly palpable in Hanslick's writing. Even his description of *The Cunning Peasant* as a 'small' opera has connotations of inconsequentiality.<sup>28</sup> Whatever his opinion of the Provisional Theatre public, Hanslick agreed with his Czech colleagues on one point: Dvořák's opera was inseparable from its context in late 1870s Prague.

Hanslick continues his critique of *The Cunning Peasant*, by stating that 'the subject, the character of the music, suggest that a small stage ought to be used'.<sup>29</sup> While the small scale of the work, in terms of spectacle, was considered to be problematic on the large stage of the Vienna Hofoper, it was entirely appropriate for the Prague Provisional Theatre. Built on a site that measured a mere thirty-two by twenty metres, the Provisional Theatre could seat no more than 362 people, with standing room for an additional 340.<sup>30</sup> Smetana voiced frequent complaints in the newspaper *Národní listy* in the early 1860s about the narrowness of the stage, the distorted acoustics resulting from the theatre's small size, and above all the limited space allotted to the orchestra.<sup>31</sup> By the 1870s, however, composers had learned to cope with the venue's dimensions and designed their operas accordingly. Though calling for nine soloists, *The Cunning Peasant* is not a particularly small opera by Provisional Theatre standards.<sup>32</sup> More so than his contemporaries, Dvořák gives a substantial role to the opera chorus, integrating choral passages into the whole work, rather than confining them to the opening and finale as was the usual practice in Czech comic operas at that time. The chorus is often split into male

<sup>26</sup> Eduard Hanslick, *Am Ende des Jahrhunderts (1895–1899): Musikalische Kritiken und Schilderungen* (Berlin, 1899), 132.

<sup>27</sup> 'es wäre doch wünschenswert, daß Ihre Sachen über das engere tschechische Vaterland, das ohnehin nicht viel für Sie tut, bekannt würden'. Milan Kuna et al., *Antonín Dvořák: Korespondence a Dokumenty (Antonín Dvořák: Correspondence and Documents)*, vol. 5 (Prague, 1996), 86; 30 November 1877: translated and quoted in David Beveridge, 'Dvořák and Brahms: A Chronicle, an Interpretation', in *Dvořák and his World*, ed. Michael Beckerman (Princeton, 1993), 60. In his commentary on this letter, David Beveridge detects a certain ethnocentrism: 'Hanslick was correct in suggesting that Dvořák's music was not known outside his "Czech fatherland" ... However, to say that Dvořák's fatherland had done nothing for him was an exaggeration, for he had accumulated a substantial list of publications and performances in Bohemia.'

<sup>28</sup> On some level, Czechs in *fin-de-siècle* Bohemia delighted in 'malost' or 'littleness', and it became an important part of their identity, particularly during the 1890s. Derek Sayer argues that this was a brand of nationalism that focused on the Czechs as a little people, coming from a little nation; the term was often used in humorous and self-deprecating contexts. Derek Sayer, *Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton, 1998), 119.

<sup>29</sup> 'das Sujet, der Charakter der Musik weisen es an eine kleinere Bühne'. Hanslick, *Am Ende des Jahrhunderts*, 133.

<sup>30</sup> John Tyrrell, *Czech Opera* (Cambridge, 1988), 27.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, 'Feuilleton: Hudební Poměry v Praze: Opera, III' ('Feuilleton: The State of Music in Prague: Opera, III'), *Národní listy* 4/197 (22 July 1864), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* and *The Kiss* call for roughly the same number of main characters. Both Dvořák's *The Stubborn Lovers* and Smetana's *Two Widows* have fewer soloists than *The Cunning Peasant*. While *The Cunning Peasant* features nine lead performers, usually no more than two or three are on the stage at a time.

and female ensembles, alternating on the stage, which also betrays a sensitivity to the limitations of this performing space.

Another aspect that troubles Hanslick is the length of *The Cunning Peasant*; in his review, he points out that '[the work] does not fill an evening at the theatre'.<sup>33</sup> Though short in Hanslick's estimation, the length of Dvořák's opera was not exceptional in Prague at the time of its premiere. Written in two acts, *The Cunning Peasant* aligns itself with several other Czech comic operas of the 1870s, including those works in the genre by Bedřich Smetana (1824–84) that had directly preceded it: *Two Widows* (*Dvě Vdovy*) performed at the Provisional Theatre in 1874 and *The Kiss* (*Hubička*) from 1876.<sup>34</sup> Taking approximately two hours to perform, *The Cunning Peasant* was not generally regarded in the Czech press as unusually short.<sup>35</sup> The reviewer for the Prague daily *Pokrok* even describes the work's length as optimal, noting that 'the brevity of some sections does not leave the listener unsatisfied, nor does the long duration of others tire the listener out'.<sup>36</sup> Though Czech critics waged discussions on other issues concerning *The Cunning Peasant*, including the relative proportions of the two acts,<sup>37</sup> the work's division into scenes,<sup>38</sup> and its dramatic pacing,<sup>39</sup> none of the reviewers in Prague during the 1870s saw the opera's length as inadequate for an evening's performance.

In its scope and length, then, *The Cunning Peasant* is not unlike other Czech comic operas from the era of the Provisional Theatre, but it nevertheless triggered a unique response from the public when it was first staged in Prague in 1878. The critic for *Pokrok* describes the memorability of the tunes in *The Cunning Peasant*: 'the melodies have such an impact', writes the reviewer, 'sounding fresh, original, and yet so familiar to the Czech ear, such that they stay with the listener for a long time afterward, haunting one in an almost intrusive manner'.<sup>40</sup> These impressions are corroborated in *Národní listy*, where the reviewer speaks of the audience being 'electrified' by the work's 'fresh,

<sup>33</sup> 'sie füllt nicht einmal quantitativ einen Theaterabend'. Hanslick, *Am Ende des Jahrhunderts*, 133.

<sup>34</sup> The initial version of *The Bartered Bride* had been in two acts as well. Even in its expanded three-act form, *The Bartered Bride* has fewer scenes than *The Cunning Peasant* and runs only about a quarter of an hour longer.

<sup>35</sup> Dvořák's comic opera in one act, *The Stubborn Lovers* (*Tvrď Palice*), had been rejected by the Provisional Theatre committee in 1874 – set aside for a full seven years before it was finally premiered in Prague at the New Czech Theatre in 1881 – and Dvořák's early biographer Otakar Šourek asserts that the main reason for its rejection was its brevity; Šourek, *Život a Dílo Ant. Dvořáka* (*The Life and Works of Ant. Dvořák*), vol. 1 (Prague, 1916), 128.

<sup>36</sup> 'hudba jeho ani přílišnou úsečností posluchače nezůstavuje nespokojeným, aniž opět přílišnými délkami jej neunavuje'. -f-, 'Divadlo, literatura, věda, a umění: Zpěvohra' ('Theatre, Literature, Science, and Art: Opera'), *Pokrok* 10/37 (7 February 1878), 5.

<sup>37</sup> Critic František Pivoda (1924–98) considers the first act to be too long in comparison with the concise second act, comparing this imbalance to a piece of architecture standing on an uneven platform. He suggests a shortening of the first act, believing the whole opera to be unnecessarily long; František Pivoda, 'Opera: Šelma sedlák' ('Opera: *The Cunning Peasant*'), *Hudební a divadelní věstník* 1/29 (8 February 1878), 227–8. Ludevít Procházka, on the other hand, prefers the first act, considering the second to be too superficial and short; Ludevít Procházka, 'Z Ciziny: Z Drážďan' ('From Abroad: From Dresden'), *Dalibor*, 2nd ser., 4/31 (1 November 1882), 245.

<sup>38</sup> The critic for *Pokrok* complains that the scenes are too fleeting, often calling for a character to appear on the stage for only a moment; Unsigned, 'Denní zprávy ve prospěch stavby národního divadla: Z českého divadla' ('Daily News for the benefit of the building of the National Theater: From the Czech Theatre'), *Pokrok* 10/27 (27 January 1878), 5. Pivoda echoes this complaint, objecting to Veselý's tendency to split the opera up into many little scenes; Pivoda, 'Opera: Šelma sedlák' ('Opera: *The Cunning Peasant*'), 228.

<sup>39</sup> This issue is broached by the earliest critics, but Dvořák's biographer Otakar Šourek would later address this more fully; Šourek, *Život a Dílo Ant. Dvořáka* (*The Life and Works of Ant. Dvořák*), vol. 1, 176–7.

<sup>40</sup> 'působivost líbezných svěžích, originálních a přeče sluchu českému tak povědomých melodií na paměť tak jest rozhodná a ona tak v ní utkví, že pak posluchače dlouhou dobu téměř až dotěravě pronásledují'. -f-, 'Divadlo, literatura, věda, a umění: Zpěvohra' ('Theatre, Literature, Science, and Art: Opera'). 5.

melodious character of a purely national spirit, which can be heard in almost every tune'.<sup>41</sup> Critic František Pivoda (1824–98) also comments on the extraordinary reaction of the audience to the 'songs' in Dvořák's opera: 'the public is taking a great interest in this new work', he asserts, '[greeting it] every time with very good attendance, giving it undivided attention from the beginning ... to the end. That Dvořák's songs entertain and in parts ... move [the audience] is evident on all faces.'<sup>42</sup> Another reviewer observes that Dvořák's 'folk-inspired' melodies have 'a powerful impact on the Czech-Slavonic ear'.<sup>43</sup> As these examples show, the opera's tunefulness was prized in the Prague press during the work's first run.<sup>44</sup> While many Czech critics of the 1870s advocated a continuous approach to melodic construction in the realm of serious opera, taking their directions from Wagner, most of them agreed that 'melodious' works fared better with audiences in the realm of comic opera.<sup>45</sup> *The Cunning Peasant* was proof of this.<sup>46</sup>

Pleasing the audience was indeed a high priority in *The Cunning Peasant*, as demonstrated by an adjustment that was made to it in later years. Following its premiere, the critic for *Pokrok* singled out the ballet music in the first scene of the second act, predicting that it will seem too 'dark and learned' for many listeners.<sup>47</sup> The passage begins and ends in E flat major, but modulates to both closely related and distant keys, venturing as far afield as E major. These changes of key are managed through a series of sequences, which may have seemed excessive to the reviewer. The tonally unsettled impression of this passage is compounded by a slight sense of rhythmic disorientation, as several of the phrases have irregular lengths (Example 1). This ballet music was replaced with Dvořák's more conventional sounding *Slavonic Dance*, op. 46, no. 3 in A flat major for the opera's three performances in autumn 1880. Though it is unclear whose decision this was, critic Václav Vladimír Zelený (1858–92) claims that the choice was made in the interests of the audience.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to catering to the tastes of the Prague public, *The Cunning Peasant* seems to reflect the politics that were at play specifically at the Provisional Theatre during the 1870s. The work was written at a time when the more progressive political party in the Czech lands – the Young Czechs (Mladočeši) – had become prominent in the management of the theatre, and its adherents strongly favoured the operas of Smetana, who was

<sup>41</sup> 'svěží její melodičnost ryze národní duch, jenž z každého téměř nápěvu vane, elektrisovaly obecnstvo'. Unsigned, 'Literatura a umění: Z českého divadla' ('Literature and Art: From the Czech Theatre'), *Národní listy* 18/27 (30 January 1878), 2.

<sup>42</sup> 'obecnstvo zajímá se velice o nové dílo toto pokaždé velmi četnou návštěvou, věnujíc mu bedlivou pozornost od počátku ... až do konce. Že Dvořákovy zpěvy baví a v částech ... rozněcují, viděti je na všech tvářích.' Pivoda, 'Opera: Šelma sedlák' ('Opera: *The Cunning Peasant*'), 229.

<sup>43</sup> 'na ucho českoslovanského posluchače mocně účinkující.' Unsigned, 'Produkce: Opera' ('Production: Opera'), *Hudební a divadelní věstník* 1/28 (1 February 1878), 225.

<sup>44</sup> This 'melodiousness' (melodičnost) is identified by one reviewer as a specifically Czech characteristic along with 'lightness' (lehkost) and 'capriciousness' (rozmarnost); Unsigned, 'Literatura a umění: Z českého divadla' ('Literature and Art: From the Czech Theater'), *Národní listy* 18/26 (27 January 1878), 3.

<sup>45</sup> Otakar Hostinský, *Bedřich Smetana a jeho boj o moderní českou hudbu* (*Bedřich Smetana and his Battle for Modern Czech Music*) (Prague, 1901), 388. Many of the critics single out specific numbers in *The Cunning Peasant*, such as the Duke's aria in the first act or the duet between Jeník and Bětuška in the second act.

<sup>46</sup> However, Emanuel Chvála favours a more continuous approach to melody even in comic opera; Chvála, 'Opera: Šelma sedlák' ('Opera: *The Cunning Peasant*'), *Lumír* 28/4 (10 February 1878), 64.

<sup>47</sup> 'temnou a učenou'. -f-, 'Divadlo, literatura, věda, a umění: Zpěvohra' ('Theatre, Literature, Science, and Art: Opera'), 5.

<sup>48</sup> Zelený writes: 'We are sure that the audience happily heard such a valuable concert piece' ('jsme ovšem jisti, že obecnstvo rádo slyší přídávkem tak cenou skladbu koncertní'); V.V. Zelený, 'Z divadel: Zpěvohra' ('From the Theaters: Opera'), *Divadelní listy* 1/16 (27 November 1880), 259.



**Example 1.** Excerpt from the Ballet from Dvořák's *The Cunning Peasant*, Act II scene I.

himself a supporter. Though the term 'Young Czech' was in use as early as 1863, the Young Czech Party was not founded officially until 1874 as an alternative to the National Party, which by default became known as the Old Czech Party (Staročechi).<sup>49</sup> In essence, the Old Czechs believed that it was in the best interests of the Czech people to remain under Austrian rule, working within the framework of the Habsburg monarchy and in cooperation with the Bohemian nobility.<sup>50</sup> In contrast, the Young Czech Party

<sup>49</sup> The terms 'Old Czech' and 'Young Czech' were in common use during the nineteenth century, but the more official names of the parties are Bohemian/Czech National Party (Česká národní strana) and Czech National Liberal Party (Národní strana svobodomyšlná), respectively. These are Jeremy King's translations of the party names; though he translates 'svobodomyšlná' as liberal, the term literally means 'free-thinking' or 'independent'; King, *Budweisers into Bohemians*, 32 and 73.

<sup>50</sup> Bruce Garver, *The Young Czech Party, 1874-1901, and the Emergence of a Multi-Party System* (New Haven, 1978), 64-5.

advocated a greater degree of liberty for the Czech people, stating in their programme that they wished to achieve ‘the recognition and realisation of the independence and self-government of the Czech lands on the basis of valid and inviolate state rights’.<sup>51</sup> The Young Czechs disapproved of aristocratic privileges, had no desire to work with the Bohemian nobility and pushed for separation of church and state.<sup>52</sup> Given the Young Czech presence at the Provisional Theatre during this time, it seems to be no coincidence that Dvořák decided to invest his energies in composing an opera that was more in line with Smetana’s operatic approach than any of his earlier works in the genre had been. Moreover, a change in administration occurred at the Theatre in April 1876: Rudolf Wirsing, a Young Czech, took over as director, and the Theatre’s Consortium (Družstvo), which had formerly had many Old Czechs as members, now had a strong Young Czech presence. This led the Old Czechs to boycott opera productions at the venue for nearly a year. The boycott had an impact on the reception of Dvořák’s grand opera *Vanda*, premiered in April 1876, right after the change in leadership. Prague’s leading critic, Otakar Hostinský (1847–1910), claims that the effects of this dispute were still felt in November of that year, when Smetana’s comic opera *The Kiss* was given: ‘about half of the Czech audience did not even set foot in the theatre’.<sup>53</sup> Eventually, a United Consortium (Spojené Družstvo) was formed at the Provisional Theatre in 1877, with representatives from both political groups.<sup>54</sup> Though it would appear that the conflict had been pacified by the time *The Cunning Peasant* was premiered in January 1878, the events of the previous two years were not easily erased from people’s memories.

Dvořák’s decision to offer *The Cunning Peasant* to the Provisional Theatre administration in summer 1877 was timely, since it was a work that the increasingly prominent Young Czechs were likely to approve. *Vanda* had been pan-Slavic, both in its music and in its dramatic content, based on an ancient Polish legend. Of the two political parties, the Old Czechs were the ones who tended to be proponents of pan-Slavism, and such an opera would undoubtedly have appealed to their tastes.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, *The Cunning Peasant* draws upon material that is definitively Czech, and the work alludes to the comic operas by the hero of the Young Czech Party, Smetana. Having already found favour with the Old Czechs, then, Dvořák seemed to be striving with this opera to win over the Young Czech faction of the Provisional Theatre audience and the many Party supporters who stood at the theatre’s helm in the late 1870s.

Czech critics did not state it directly in 1878 in the way that Hanslick would in 1885, but their reviews affirm that Dvořák’s opera was indeed ‘written for the Prague Czech public’.<sup>56</sup> Emanuel Chvalá (1851–1924) characterised the work as Dvořák’s concession to a specifically Czech audience.<sup>57</sup> By offering *The Cunning Peasant* for performance at the Provisional Theatre, Dvořák demonstrated an awareness of the idiosyncrasies of the venue and its audiences. According to critics, those in attendance at the premiere responded to the opera’s tunefulness and easy accessibility. Seeking to provide an

<sup>51</sup> Garver, *The Young Czech Party*, 78. As Jeremy King points out, in using a ‘historical, state-rights rhetoric’, these Young Czechs were not unlike the Old Czechs; King, *Budweisers into Bohemians*, 74.

<sup>52</sup> Cibulka et al., ‘The Definition of Czech National Society during the Period of Liberalism and Nationalism (1860–1914)’, 334–5.

<sup>53</sup> Hostinský, *Bedřich Smetana a jeho boj o moderní českou hudbu*, 413–14. Rather than seeing this as a hindrance, Hostinský asserts that the absence of the Old Czechs actually bolstered Smetana’s reputation, since the reviews published by the Young Czechs were all positive.

<sup>54</sup> Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Milan Kuna, ‘Dvořák’s Slavic Spirit and his Relation to Tchaikovsky and Russia’, in *Rethinking Dvořák: Views from Five Countries*, ed. David R. Beveridge (Oxford, 1996), 143–4.

<sup>56</sup> Hanslick, *Am Ende des Jahrhunderts*, 132, as discussed earlier.

<sup>57</sup> Chvalá, ‘Opera: *Šelma sedlák*’ (‘Opera: *The Cunning Peasant*’), 64.

explanation for the work's popularity, Pivoda writes in summary that 'the reason for its success is the non-foreign, folk national direction that it takes',<sup>58</sup> and that 'national direction' was manifested in various distinct ways.

### 'Cunning' Dvořák: conforming to Czech comic opera conventions

As observed by its early critics, *The Cunning Peasant* is a thoroughly conventional Czech comic opera, which incorporates into its plot comedic gestures that had almost become clichés. For instance, at its climax in the second act, one of the characters falls victim to a prank. With Václav as his accomplice, Martin – the cunning peasant at the centre of the story – sets a trap for his daughter Bětuška's suitor, Jeník, removing the ladder from beneath Bětuška's window and replacing it with a barrel into which Jeník is supposed to plummet. The prank misfires, when an entirely different character – the valet Jean – falls into it instead. This type of slapstick humour was common at the Provisional Theatre, where audiences frequently witnessed characters plunging accidentally into barrels, boxes, wells and water ducts.<sup>59</sup> The gimmick can be traced back to Vilém Blodek's comic opera from 1867, *In the Well* (*V studni*).<sup>60</sup> In an attempt to court a peasant girl, the wealthy suitor, Janek, falls into a well at the opera's conclusion. A similar comic effect can be found in Vojtěch Hřímálý's 1872 opera *The Enchanted Prince* (*Zakletý princ*), where one of the characters slips into a water fountain. These operas were well known to Czech audiences, having become staples in the Provisional Theatre repertory by the late 1870s, and allusions to them in *The Cunning Peasant* would have been instantly recognisable.

Dvořák's opera also conforms to established traditions by being set in the Bohemian countryside: a rural setting had become an indispensable ingredient for a successful Czech comic opera, ever since *The Bartered Bride* (*Prodaná nevěsta*) had enjoyed immense popularity in the early 1870s. When soliciting entries for an opera competition to mark the opening of the Provisional Theatre in 1862, Count Jan Harrach had suggested that Czech comic operas be based on village life.<sup>61</sup> While urban audiences found these rustic milieus to be somewhat off-putting at first,<sup>62</sup> such subjects quickly became a mainstay of Czech theatre. By the 1870s, rural locales were a safe choice for comic operas not only because they were sure to please, but also because they could be easily staged. The same sets and costumes were used repeatedly at the Provisional Theatre, which certainly helped give audiences the impression that these works were part of a unified repertory.<sup>63</sup> For *The Cunning Peasant*, librettist Josef Otakar Veselý (1853–79) indicates that the

<sup>58</sup> 'dokonalého úspěchu toho má co děkovati směru necizáckému, nám příbuznému a prostonárodnímu – směru'. Pivoda, 'Opera: Šelma sedlák' ('Opera: The Cunning Peasant'), 227. This would have been an important consideration for Pivoda, as he disapproved of the way in which Czech critics and composers had embraced Wagnerian principles. The term 'prostonárodní' used here is best translated as 'folk national', rather than simply 'national' (národní); the prefix has very particular connotations, implying something that is simple, folkloric and/or traditional.

<sup>59</sup> Pivoda, 'Opera: Šelma sedlák' ('Opera: The Cunning Peasant'), 228.

<sup>60</sup> The text of *In the Well* is by Karel Sabina (1813–77), the librettist of *The Bartered Bride*.

<sup>61</sup> Czech composers at this time generally seemed to gravitate towards serious genres of opera. All the entries that were eventually submitted to Count Harrach's competition were in the serious opera category; Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, 126.

<sup>62</sup> Brian Large explains: 'The Prague audience not only failed to respond to *The Bartered Bride*, but, coming as they did from society or middle-class circles, found the plot too naïve, even too rustic. It was, after all, one of the earliest Czech operas to be set in a village milieu where the *dramatis personae* were ordinary folk and not the conventional aristocratic characters whom the public were used to seeing on the stage'; Brian Large, *Smetana* (London, 1970), 165

<sup>63</sup> Tyrrell writes that 'the appearance of a new set was usually hailed as a particular attraction'; Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, 31.

story is to take place in the town of Domažlice, rather than leaving the name of the village unspecified, as was usual practice. As a result, new costumes were ordered for the opera's premiere, designed to reflect the dress that was native to the Domažlice region. This emphasis on regional authenticity ties in with the broader European staging practice of using historically 'accurate' sets and costumes in opera productions. Christopher Campo-Bowen has also pointed to the 'emphasis on ethnographic and geographic veracity', and noted that the trend began in 1820s Paris.<sup>64</sup> This authenticity simultaneously distinguishes *The Cunning Peasant* from other contemporary Czech works of its kind. Many of the critics comment on the costumes as a particular selling point of the work, especially in articles that were published in the weeks leading up to the premiere. For example, one critic writes with palpable excitement: 'The production will be rich and a large portion of the costumes, particularly the national dress of Domažlice, will be completely new.'<sup>65</sup> In its idealised rural depiction, Dvořák's work not only adhered to a common Czech opera trope, but also 'perform[ed] the village', and in so doing invited wider acceptance of Czech music.<sup>66</sup>

The plot itself also relied on a well-worn premise. Much like *The Bartered Bride*, *The Cunning Peasant* tells the story of a young woman being forced against her will into an arranged marriage and simultaneously deterred from marrying her true love. The notion of two suitors vying for the same peasant girl – one of her father's choosing and one of her own – would undoubtedly have brought Smetana's best-known opera to mind for most audience members. Even the names of some of the characters from *The Bartered Bride* are retained in *The Cunning Peasant*. In each of the two works, the female protagonist's true love – the peasant boy, whom she ends up marrying – is called Jeník, though in *The Bartered Bride* he is much more pro-active than in *The Cunning Peasant*.<sup>67</sup> Tenor Antonín Vávra (1847–1932) performed both roles in Prague during the 1870s, sealing the connection between these two characters.<sup>68</sup> The other suitor in *The Cunning Peasant* is Václav, whose name is a formal version of Vašek, his counterpart in *The Bartered Bride*. Though less ridiculous, Václav is similar to Vašek: both are the sons of wealthy landowners and considered to be the most suitable prospective husbands for the female protagonists.<sup>69</sup> Additional parallel characters between the two operas have different names. Martin, the title character of *The Cunning Peasant* and the heroine's father, can be likened to Kecal, the marriage broker in *The Bartered Bride*: classic buffo characters, these men concern themselves with bringing about financially lucrative marriages. Like Mařenka in Karel Sabina's libretto, Bětuška plays the role of the pious and morally upright peasant girl in Veselý's text. In their broad strokes, then, the operas tell the same basic story;<sup>70</sup> yet, their titles indicate different points of emphasis. *The Bartered Bride* revolves mostly

<sup>64</sup> Christopher Campo-Bowen, "'A Promising, Political Sound": Epistemologies of Empire and Bedřich Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* at the 1892 Vienna International Exhibition of Music and Theater', *The Musical Quarterly* 102 (2019), 51–3. See also Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester, 2005), 142–3.

<sup>65</sup> 'Výprava bude bohatá a většič část kostímu, zejména kroje domažlické, úplně nová'; Unsigned, 'Literatura a umění: Z českého divadla' ('Literature and Art: From the Czech Theater'), *Národní listy* 18/24 (25 January 1878), 3.

<sup>66</sup> Campo-Bowen, "'A Promising, Political Sound"', 36.

<sup>67</sup> While Jeník in *The Bartered Bride* comes up with a clever scheme to ensure that he marry his beloved, Jeník in *The Cunning Peasant* is quite unenterprising and passive.

<sup>68</sup> Josef Bartoš, *Prozatímní divadlo a jeho opera (The Provisional Theater and its Opera)* (Prague, 1938), 156–7.

<sup>69</sup> Unlike Vašek, whose personality is fully drawn and whose characteristic stammer is integral to the comedy of Smetana's opera, Václav plays a very minor role in Dvořák's opera. He is not even mentioned in Karel Hoffmeister's quite detailed synopsis of the opera; Hoffmeister, 'Dvořákova *Šelma sedlář*' ('Dvořák's *The Cunning Peasant*'), *Meziaktí: Divadelní věstník* 2/6 (26 September 1901).

<sup>70</sup> In their reviews, Czech critics do not tend to discuss the plot similarities between *The Bartered Bride* and *The Cunning Peasant* in any detail; these parallels would have likely been obvious to audiences.

around the arranged marriage, while the central event in *The Cunning Peasant* is the aforementioned trick that Martin devises in order to thwart Jeník's courtship of Bětuška.<sup>71</sup>

Given the similarities between the works and familiarity with *The Bartered Bride*, comparisons with Smetana's opera were inevitable in reviews of *The Cunning Peasant* following its Prague premiere.<sup>72</sup> Hostinský links these two operas, citing the duet between Jeník and Bětuška in the second act of Dvořák's work as evidence:

It was pitiable when, just a year ago, Smetana complained that his *Bartered Bride* had won the approval of so many of our audiences but not our composers; now he has true confirmation; a very talented representative of the younger generation of composers [Dvořák] barely set foot on Smetana's path of comic opera [composition] and was able to achieve such a success. And those parts [of *The Cunning Peasant*] that are most similar to *The Bartered Bride* were the best liked (for instance, the duet between Jeník and Bětuška in the second act) and show best that Dvořák did not give up his own artistic personality and individuality. This example of Dvořák's will not remain without a following, Lord willing; for it is only by this path – along which a talented artistic group heads in an excellent direction, determined by an individual [Smetana] – that an artistic school can be created.<sup>73</sup>

Smetana's librettist for *The Kiss* – Eliška Krásnohorská (1847–1926), who attended the premiere of *The Cunning Peasant* – refers to the same example as Hostinský in a letter dated 28 February 1878. Addressing Smetana, Krásnohorská states emphatically: '[Dvořák] has borrowed from your Act I duet in *The Bartered Bride*. Other parts are almost copies!'<sup>74</sup> Though occurring at different moments in their respective plots, 'Rozlučme se dráha' from *The Cunning Peasant* (Example 2) and 'Věrné milování' from *The Bartered Bride* (Example 3) are both lyrical duets in which the lovers pledge devotion to one another.<sup>75</sup> Each duet begins with a tenor solo in the high register; the soprano soon joins in with recitation-style interjections on the fifth scale degree. Krásnohorská further claims that the dramatic progression of the first few scenes leaves listeners with little doubt as to its model. 'His libretto is very similar to ... Act I of *The Bartered Bride*', she observes: 'first a gay chorus, then a lament by a

<sup>71</sup> While librettist Veselý draws upon *The Bartered Bride* for the conflict in *The Cunning Peasant*, he turns to *Le nozze di Figaro* for its resolution. *The Cunning Peasant* already channels *Figaro* in its mixing of upper- and lower-class characters, which was not typical of Czech comic operas; however, the connections between the two works go deeper. In the middle of the first act of *The Cunning Peasant*, a visiting Duke makes a grand entrance in the village, bringing with him an entourage that includes his long-suffering wife as well as chamber servants Jean and Berta, who are romantically linked. It does not take long for the Duke – and Jean – to become enthralled with Bětuška, setting up a situation that parallels Count Almaviva's infatuation with Susanna in Mozart's opera.

<sup>72</sup> Critic F.P. Laurencin draws attention to the immense popularity of *The Bartered Bride*; Laurencin, 'Smetanova Prodaná Nevěsta' (Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*), *Dalibor*, 1st ser., 2/12 (21 March 1874), 89.

<sup>73</sup> 'Bylo to věru tklivé, kdy Smetana v oboru komické opery ještě před rokem sobě stěžoval, že jeho *Prodaná Nevěsta* vydobila si uznání toliko našeho obecnstva, ne však našich skladatelů; nyní dáno jest mu malé zadostiučinění: výtečně nadaný representant mladší generace skladatelské, sotva že jednou nohou vkrčil na dráhu Smetanovy komické opery, již domohl se skvělého úspěchu. A právě to, že místa slohu *Prodané Nevěsty* nejpříbuznější nejvíce se líbila (jako na př. dvojzpěv Jeníka a Bětušky v druhém jednání), nejlépe dokazuje, že Dvořák tím nikterak nezadal své vlastní umělecké povaze a osobnosti. Tento příklad Dvořákův nezůstane bohdá bez následování; vždyť jenom touto cestou soustředěním se nadaného skupení uměleckého kolem vynikající směr, určující individuality může se vytvořiti umělecká škola.' Otakar Hostinský, 'Původní novinky české zpěvohry' (Original New Works of Czech Opera), *Osvěta* 8/10 (1878), 748.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Large, *Smetana*, 423.

<sup>75</sup> Dvořák engaged much more directly with this material on another occasion; he quotes Smetana's love duet 'Věrné milování' from *The Bartered Bride* in the piano introduction to his tenth Biblical Song 'Zpívejte Hospodinu píseň novou'. Such direct quotation was very rare in Dvořák's oeuvre.

Marenka

SOPRANO

Jeník

TENOR

*p dolce amoroso*

Věr - né mi - lo - vá -

Piano

*dim.*

*pp sempre dolciss.*

6

*sempre con sentimento*

*p sotto voce*

*sempre sotto voce*

Věr - né mi - lo - vá - ní ne - pře - ru - ší žá - dné zlo - by na - lé

-ní ne - pře - ru - ší žá - dné zlo - by na - lé - há - ní!

*dim.*

**Example 2.** Duet 'Rožlučme se, drahá' from Dvořák's *The Cunning Peasant*, Act II scene 2.

girl, then a duet for the girl with her lover, then an intervention by the father and the suggestion of a rich bridegroom, and so on'.<sup>76</sup> While Hostinský and Krásnohorská allude to specific moments in Dvořák's opera that remind them of *The Bartered Bride*, most critics confine their remarks to generalities. One reviewer from 1878 writes simply that Dvořák attains 'a loveliness [in *The Cunning Peasant*] that was formerly seen only in Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*';<sup>77</sup> another critic, reviewing the work after an 1883 performance, describes *The Cunning Peasant* as belonging to a Czech operatic trilogy, along with *The Bartered Bride* and Hřímálý's *The Enchanted Prince*.<sup>78</sup> Comments like these suggest that the critics sought to situate Dvořák's work at the centre of a Czech comic opera repertory.

Yet more than *The Bartered Bride*, it is Smetana's *The Kiss* that is mentioned in reviews of Dvořák's opera. *The Kiss* was premiered at the Provisional Theatre in late 1876, and Dvořák had allegedly attended the performance, witnessing its success first-hand.<sup>79</sup> The event

<sup>76</sup> Large, *Smetana*, 422–3.

<sup>77</sup> '[skladatel podal dílo] tak půvabné, jaké jsme před tím nacházeli jen v Smetanově *Prodané Nevěště*'. Unsigned, 225.

<sup>78</sup> B, 'Z divadel: Opera česká' ('From the Theaters: Czech Opera'), *Divadelní listy* 4/7 (4 March 1883), 60.

<sup>79</sup> Krásnohorská claims that Dvořák was present at the premiere of Smetana's *The Kiss*; Mirko Očadlík, ed., E. Krásnohorská a B. Smetana: *Vzájemná Korespondence* (E. Krásnohorská and B. Smetana: *Correspondence*) (Prague, 1950), 110.

Marenka

SOPRANO

Jenik

TENOR

*p dolce amoroso*

Věr - né mi - lo - vá -

Piano

*dim.*

*pp sempre dolciss.*

6

*p sempre con sentimento*

*p sotto voce*

*sempre sotto voce*

Věr - né mi - lo - vá - ní ne - pře - ru - ší žá - dné zlo - by na - lé

-ní ne - pře - ru - ší žá - dné zlo - by na - lé - há - ní!

*dim.*

**Example 3.** Duet 'Věrné milování' from Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, Act I scene 2.

was undoubtedly still fresh in people's minds in early 1878, and this is reflected in assessments of *The Cunning Peasant*. Writing in *Národní listy*, Hostinský predicts that Dvořák's work will 'become a favourite of audiences in the same way as Smetana's *The Kiss*, of which it is a blood-related sister'.<sup>80</sup> The critic for *Světovzor* goes further:

*The Kiss* was an appropriate model for [Dvořák], but not a model that he wanted to imitate; rather one to which he created a compelling counter response (*protibraz*) based on his own imagination; and even if the composer Dvořák did not achieve in this work the kind of harmony of all parts, those characteristics, purity and stability of the national style, which we rightly admire in the music of Smetana, he can still look at his opera with great satisfaction – a work with which he has gained a second spot among our dramatic composers.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> 'jest patrnó, že nová tato práce se stane rovněž tak miláčkem obecnstva jako *Hubička* Smetanova, jejíž jest vlastní sestrou'. Otakar Hostinský, *Z Hudebních bojů let sedmdesátých a osmdesátých (The Musical Battles of the 1870s and 80s)* (Prague, 1986), 111–12; the original can be found in -ý., 'Literatura a umění: Česká Zpěvohra' (Literature and Art: Czech Opera), *Národní listy* 18/46 (19 February 1878), 3.

<sup>81</sup> '*Hubička* byla mu vhodným vzorem, ake nikoliv vzorem, jež chceme napodobit, nýbrž k němuž dle vlastní fantázie tvoříme stejně závažný protibraz; a třeba skladatel Dvořák v díle svém nedosáhl ještě onoho souladu

A more extensive analysis of the opera's relationship to Smetana's *The Kiss* is provided in *Pokrok*. In the first of two articles on *The Cunning Peasant*, the reviewer writes as follows: 'We do not consider some reminiscences [of Smetana's *The Kiss*], which have more to do with details of construction (*podrobnosti faktury*) than melodic motives, to be [Dvořák's] fault; they are completely natural, can scarcely be avoided, and apart from these, Dvořák's imagination and thoughtfulness is evident on every page of the score.'<sup>82</sup> The critic's comments in the second article are in a similar vein: 'we have already hinted that the influence of Smetana's *The Kiss* on the composer is discernible in this work; nevertheless, we do not agree with those who see Dvořák as a talented and fortunate imitator'.<sup>83</sup> Reiterating his earlier point, the critic assures readers that Dvořák 'does not imitate, but imbibes the spirit of Smetana's music, creating independently'.<sup>84</sup> As evidence for this assertion, the reviewer calls attention to the peasant Martin's 'Dobrá jdi si tedy k němu', from Act I scene 3 of *The Cunning Peasant* (Example 4) and Father Paloucký's 'Jak jsem to řek', from Act I scene 6 of *The Kiss* (Example 5) – arias which, in the critic's view, might be considered complementary.<sup>85</sup> Though they are set in different keys, both are cast in 2/4 time, with a prominent underlying triplet rhythm. The arias begin with a series of downward leaps and proceed in a quick patter style of vocal composition that alludes to the buffa tradition. Perhaps the most conspicuous similarity comes at the end of the two numbers: each concludes with lengthy melismas, which contrast with the otherwise largely syllabic text-setting of the arias.

For all the critics' efforts to show that Dvořák's work is aligned with Smetana, none refers to the aria 'Jak úzko mi a bolno', which appears at the end of Act I of *The Cunning Peasant* (Example 6). Here, the reference to Smetana is unmistakable. Bětuška sings of her anxiety over her impending arranged marriage to Václav and asks God to intercede, so that she might marry her beloved Jeník instead. This aria bears a strong resemblance to heroine Vendulka's 'Jak zapomněl by na ten krásný čas', from Act I scene 7 of Smetana's *The Kiss* (Example 7). Like Bětuška's aria, Vendulka's comes at a moment of uncertainty in the opera, as she contemplates her former love for Lukáš and conveys her trepidation for the future. A textual similarity seals the connection, as the arias begin with the word 'jak' (how). Both arias are marked 'Andante', written in 3/4 time, and scored in A major. Above the opening F♯ minor chord with an E♯ appoggiatura in the bass, the voice sings a relentless C♯, in a kind of recitation style that is moulded to the sorrowful text.<sup>86</sup> Such an overt nod to Smetana is rare in Dvořák's oeuvre. In short, when composing *The Cunning Peasant*, Dvořák showed himself to be well versed in the Czech repertory, and this was seen as a positive quality among Czechs. Rather than

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všech částí, té případné charakteristiky a té ryзости a ustálenosti slohu národního, jakým se právem obdivujeme v hudbě Smetanově, přece s velkým zadostiučiněním může patřiti na svou zpěvohru, kterouž zaujal druhé místo mezi našimi dramatickými skladateli.' Unsigned, 'Rozmanitosti: Divadlo' ('Miscellanea: Theatre'), *Světozor* 12/5 (1 February 1878), 62–3.

<sup>82</sup> 'Některé reminiscence, které méně se vztahují k melodickým motivům, jako spíše k některým podrobnostem faktury, neklademe mu za vinu; jsou zcela přirozené, nelze se jim téměř ani vyhnouti a kromě toho originální vynalézavost i důmyslnost Dvořákova jeví se na každé stránce partitury'. -f-, 'Divadlo, literatura, věda, a umění: Zpěvohra' ('Theatre, Literature, Science, and Art: Opera'), 5.

<sup>83</sup> 'již dříve jsme podotkli, že se v něm patrně jeví vliv Smetanovy *Hubičky* na skladatele, nikterak však nesouhlasíme s oněmi, kteří v Dvořákovi spatřují jaksi jen nadaného a šťastného imitatora'. -f-, 'Divadlo, literatura, věda, a umění: Zpěvohra' ('Theatre, Literature, Science, and Art: Opera'), 5.

<sup>84</sup> 'Dvořák ... neimituje, nýbrž povj v sebe ducha hudby Smetanovy tvoří samostatně'. -f-, 'Divadlo, literatura, věda, a umění: Zpěvohra' ('Theatre, Literature, Science, and Art: Opera'), 5.

<sup>85</sup> -f-, 'Divadlo, literatura, věda, a umění: Zpěvohra' ('Theatre, Literature, Science, and Art: Opera'), 5.

<sup>86</sup> After the first two phrases, Dvořák takes the material in a direction that is quite different from that of Smetana. He introduces contrasting material beginning in G major, before bringing about an elaborated return of the opening material in A major. Smetana's approach is more through-composed; the material from the start of the piece does not come back in the vocal part, though it is reprised in the accompaniment.



Martin

BASS

mú - - - - - žeš, mú - žeš jit!

Piano

*ff*

**Example 4.** Martin's aria 'Dobrá jdi si tedy k němu' from Dvořák's *The Cunning Peasant*, Act I scene 3.

BASS

Jak jsem to řek, už je to tak, jak jsem to řek, už je to tak, ba zá - - - - - zrak byl\_ by na - o - pak;

Piano

*p*

**Example 5.** Father Paloucký's aria 'Jak jsem to řek' from Smetana's *The Kiss*, Act I scene 6.

viewing Dvořák's adherence to well-established operatic norms as a weakness, Czech critics of the 1870s delighted in it and described *The Cunning Peasant* as the composer's first step on a path that had been laid out by his operatic predecessors.

Several critics suggest in their reviews that the title of Dvořák's opera is inappropriate, arguing that the peasant Martin's actions are not terribly 'cunning'. Of all the conventional gestures that were embedded in Veselý's libretto, Martin's prank was considered to be the most clichéd – labelled by Pivoda as an 'over-used gag'.<sup>87</sup> Hanslick writes: 'Both of the ingenious inventors, Martin and [Václav], want to laugh themselves to death at the joke of putting an empty barrel under the climbing lover; but the ones who do not laugh are the audience members, at least those at our [Vienna] Court Opera. The whole intrigue is aimed at an astonishingly naïve public.'<sup>88</sup> Even Hostinský –

<sup>87</sup> 'opotřebovaných šprýmů'. Pivoda, 'Opera: *Šelma sedlák*' ('Opera: *The Cunning Peasant*'), 228.

<sup>88</sup> 'Über den Witz, dem aufkletternden Liebhaber ein leeres Faß unterzustellen, wollen sich die beiden genialen Erfinder, Martin und Conrad, zu Tode lachen; aber wer nicht mitlacht, ist das Publikum, wenigstens das

*Andante con moto*  
*Betuska*

SOPRANO  
Jak úz - ko mi a bol - no v tom mém sr - dé - čku ma - lém!

Piano  
*pp*

5  
proč jin - ým je tak vol - no, když já u - mí - rám ža - lem?

*f*  
*ritard.*  
*p*

**Example 6.** Bětuška's aria 'Jak úzko mi a bolno' from Dvořák's *The Cunning Peasant*, Act I scene 14.

*Andante amoroso*  
*Vendulka* *mf espressivo*

SOPRANO  
Jak za - po - měl by na ten krá - sný čas,

Piano  
*p*

5  
kdy mě - sí - ček nás ví - - dal po - spo - lu,

*pp dolcissimo*

**Example 7.** Vendulka's aria 'Jak zapomněl by na tak krásný čas' from Smetana's *The Kiss*, Act I scene 7.

unserer Hofoper. Die ganze Intrigue ist auf ein erstaunlich harmloses Publikum brechnet'; Hanslick, *Am Ende des Jahrhunderts* (1895–1899), 135. Rather than necessarily calling Dvořák's music naïve – as many of Dvořák's critics did, especially those from German-speaking Europe – Hanslick applies the term to the libretto and ultimately to the Czech audiences for whom this opera was designed.

though he does not frame it in the same condescending terms as Hanslick – remains unamused by Martin’s jokes:

The whole ‘cunningness’ of the peasant Martin – who says of himself that he is a ‘calculating bird’ and that ‘jokes come from every fibre of [his] being’ – lies in the fact that instead of a ladder, on which the poor farmer Jeník comes to visit Martin’s daughter Bětuška, he places a barrel with a splintered plank beneath the window of her chamber ... we [might] add that even this one and only ‘clever trick’ does not work out for Martin, because his victim turns out to be someone else.<sup>89</sup>

In view of Martin’s failed attempts at craftiness, it might be argued that the ‘cunningness’ of the opera as a whole lies in another direction – that is, in its appeal to Provisional Theatre audiences. Dvořák had secured a place for himself on the Czech operatic stage by tailoring the opera to his Czech public. Aware of Dvořák’s own small-town roots, critics perhaps believed that he was better qualified than other composers to access the idealised rurality that they so craved in the comic opera genre. Jarmil Burghauser has observed that Dvořák’s characterisation as a ‘peasant among composers’ that arose in the 1880s was surely encouraged by the composer himself as it helped to distinguish him from the fashionable philosophical or literary constructions of his contemporaries at the *fin de siècle*.<sup>90</sup> The real title character of the piece, then – the true ‘cunning peasant’ – might be Dvořák himself.

### **‘Impossible for the foreign stage’? Analysing the Viennese scandal in the Prague press**

More than Dvořák’s other operas, *The Cunning Peasant* is bound to a particular time and place. Unlike *Vanda* and *Dimitrij*, both of which are based on pan-Slavic material, and *Rusalka*<sup>91</sup> and *Armida*, which have more universal plots, *The Cunning Peasant* strives to be unequivocally Czech.<sup>92</sup> Since Czech operas were unknown in Vienna, audiences could not appreciate *The Cunning Peasant*’s many connections to the Provisional Theatre’s existing repertory; nor could they place the opera in a broader Czech context. The writer for *Národní listy* accounts for the opera’s riotous Viennese reception by pointing to its Czechness, which to him makes it inappropriate for foreign performance. He also laments the fact that Dvořák’s opera *Dimitrij* had not been chosen instead, asserting that this more recent work would have had a better chance of faring well on the international stage:

<sup>89</sup> ‘Celé “šelmovství” sedláka Martina – jenž sám o sobě praví, že je “vychytralý ptáček”, že “ze všech jeho cípů kouká plno vtípů” – spočívá v tom, že na místo žebříku, po němž chudý chasník Jeník přichází k Martinově dceři Bětušce, postaví pod okno její komůrky sud s nalíčeným rozštípnutým prknem ... ani tato “chytrá lest” se Martinovi nedaří, poněvadž se její obětí stává někdo jiný.’ Hostinský, ‘Původní novinky české zpěvohry’, 745–6.

<sup>90</sup> Jarmil Burghauser, ‘Metamorphoses of Dvořák’s Image in the Course of Time’, in *Rethinking Dvořák: Views from Five Countries*, ed. David R. Beveridge (Oxford, 1996), 19.

<sup>91</sup> *Rusalka* is based on non-Czech materials, including Friedrich De la Motte Fouqué’s *Undine* (1811), Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Little Mermaid* (1837) and Gerhard Hauptmann’s *Die versunken Glocke* (*The Sunken Bell*) (1896). However, certain characters such as Vodník and Ježibaba are distinctly Czech folkloric figures. Even some of the folksy dialogues between the gamekeeper and turnspit add some local colour to an internationally shared fairy tale.

<sup>92</sup> The only other Dvořák opera that specifies a Czech setting is *The Jacobin* (*Jakobín*, 1887–8). However, given that it is based on a Czech folktale, *The Devil and Kate* (*Čert a Káča*, 1898–9) is also likely meant to be set in rural Bohemia (specifying a country inn for Act I).

If *Dimitrij* had been given, it definitely would have been well liked; it would have surprised given the immense poverty of opera production [in Vienna], and from Vienna it would have made its way to all European stages, pushing Dvořák to the first rank of operatic composers. This had to be prevented and for that reason the relatively weak and purely Czech comic opera *The Cunning Peasant* was chosen. Its unfortunate text, which is impossible for the foreign stage, kills at least half of the effect of the lovely music. Dvořák's friends, who know the conditions here, warned Dvořák long ago and intently not to allow this particular opera to be performed first. Dvořák allowed [this to happen] after all and now he must see that his opera is being treated as a failure.<sup>93</sup>

The critic for the journal *Lyra* sees the situation in much the same way and questions Dvořák's judgement not only in allowing this opera to be performed, but also in agreeing to have the libretto twisted out of shape.<sup>94</sup>

Efforts had been made to downplay the Czech elements in Dvořák's opera. The German translation of the text – prepared by Emanuel Züngel for productions in Dresden and Hamburg during the early 1880s<sup>95</sup> – was considered inadequate for Vienna and had to be revised extensively so that it might please the more demanding Viennese public.<sup>96</sup> The plot was also transferred from its original setting of Domažlice to 'Upper Austria' – an alteration that had been initiated by publisher Fritz Simrock in 1882 for the opera's printed score and had already been in place for the Dresden and Hamburg performances of the opera. This change in location was likely done out of sensitivity to these German-speaking audiences. Located in Western Bohemia, the town of Domažlice had certain anti-German associations, since it had been the site at which Czech armies joined together to drive Germans out of Bohemia during the Hussite Wars of the fifteenth century, in what is referred to as the *Hussenflucht*.<sup>97</sup> Presumably, it was thought that such changes were required for it to be successful in the German-speaking world. However, its effect was somewhat miscalculated. In his review, Hanslick is bothered by the discrepancy between the 'Slavic' music and the 'Upper Austrian' setting, and he decries attempts to purge the opera of its Czechness. His comments on this are worth quoting in full:

<sup>93</sup> 'Kdyby se byl *Dimitrij* dával, byl by se rozhodně líbil, ba on by byl při nesmírné chudobě operní produkce velice překvapil a z Vídně byl by nastoupil vítěznou cestu po všech jevištích evropských a byl by Dvořáka posunul do přední řady také operních komponistů. Tomu se musilo zabránit a proto sáhlo se k poměrně nejslabší a také čistě české opeře komické *Šelma sedlák*, jejíž nešťastný na velkém cizím jevišti nemožný text už napřed zabijí aspoň na polovic účinek rokošné hudby. Přátelé Dvořákovi, znající zdejší poměry, dávno a důtklivě Dvořáka varovali, aby nedopustil, by zrovna této jeho opeře dána byla přednost. Dvořák přece do dopustil a nyní musí viděti jak se s jeho operou jedná jako s propadlou.' Unsigned, 'Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni', 3. (The emphasis is mine.)

<sup>94</sup> Unsigned, 'Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni', 2.

<sup>95</sup> Translated into German by Emanuel Züngel (1840–94), *Der Bauer ein Schelm* was performed at the Dresden Hofoper on 24 October 1882 and in Hamburg on 3 January 1883. The Dresden performance came about through the efforts of Ernst Edler von Schuch (1846–1914) and Ludevít Procházka (1837–88), a Czech music critic and concert organiser who worked in Hamburg and Dresden for several years during the 1880s. Performances in both cities were deemed moderately successful.

<sup>96</sup> One critic for *Dalibor* states that Züngel's German translation of the libretto, which had been labelled inadequate by Procházka, will have to be reworked for the Vienna performance. The task of reworking the text was entrusted to Mayerhofer, a singer at the Vienna Hofoper, who also performed the part of the Duke in the production. In Hanslick's view, the new text was an improvement over Züngel's. Regardless, these extra efforts show that the Vienna performance of *The Cunning Peasant* was viewed as an event of some importance; Unsigned, 'Drobné Zprávy: Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák*' ('Brief News: Dvořák's *The Cunning Peasant*'), *Dalibor*, 2nd ser., 7/9 (7 March 1885), 84.

<sup>97</sup> Seton-Watson, *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks*, 70.

More noteworthy, even baffling, is the statement in the Berlin libretto: ‘the plot takes place in Upper Austria’. From where did this nonsense come? The character of the music is distinctly Slavic; everyone can hear that after a fleeting listen to the first number; indeed one has to say this even after hearing the overture: the work is set in Bohemia and is played by Bohemian peasants. A composer, who wanted to characterise these melodies as Upper Austrian, belongs in the observation room of a mental hospital. Dvořák naturally had no part in this; in his original, the characters, who in translation are called Regina, Conrad, Gottlieb, have typical Czech names: Bětuška, Jeník, Václav. These original names should have been retained;<sup>98</sup> *The Cunning Peasant* is first and foremost a national-Bohemian opera, a work of Bohemian country life and as one cannot disturb this character in Dvořák’s music, so one should not look to deny it or to transplant it to a different country. Which German translator of the opera *Carmen* would write in the libretto: the plot takes place in Steiermark, just to make it more popular here? ... One must give distinctly national works with all their peculiarities or not at all.<sup>99</sup>

Echoing Hanslick, Edvard Moučka – the Viennese correspondent for the Prague journal *Dalibor*<sup>100</sup> – objects to the idea of removing some of these Czech elements, pointing not just to the neutrality of the sets, but also to the costumes.<sup>101</sup> Moučka alleges that the costumes used in Vienna were deliberately nondescript. In his view, when the nationality of a work is ambiguous, it becomes bland, and the characters turn into mere caricatures, lacking any depth. In Moučka’s words:

the national character of the whole work, which also contributes to making it interesting, was carefully taken out of the plot of the opera, even if it could not be taken out of the original music. In the piano-vocal score published by Simrock, Upper Austria is specified as the setting; here in Vienna, no location was given on the programmes and the costumes were completely international. The result of it was that all of the characters became mere puppets, who played their parts in a stereotyped, almost irritatingly caricatured, manner.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Hanslick’s criticism of the Germanised names of the characters seems unfair, considering that this was a common practice in Vienna and not particular to *The Cunning Peasant*.

<sup>99</sup> ‘Viel merkwürdiger, ja geradezu verblüffend liest sich in dem Berliner Textbuche der Veisatz: “Die Handlung spielt in Oberösterreich”. Von wem rührt wohl dieser Unfinn? Der Charakter der Musik ist so ausgeprägt slavisch, daß jeder nur flüchtig Orientierte beim Anhören der ersten Nummer, ja schon der Ouvertüre sich sagen muß: das Stück spielt in Böhmen, spielt unter böhmischen Bauern. Ein Komponist, welcher mit diesen Melodien Oberösterreich charakterisieren wollte, gehört in das Beobachtungszimmer des Irrenhauses. Dvorak ist das natürlich nicht eingefallen; in seinem Original führen sogar die Personen, die in unserer Übersetzung Regina, Conrad, Gottlieb heißen, die echt czechischen Namen Betuska, Jenik, Vaclav. Man hätte, glaube ich auch diese Original-Namen beibehalten sollen; “Der Bauer ein Schelm” ist einmal eine national-böhmische Oper, ein Stück böhmischen Volkslebens, und so wie man diesen Charakter in der Musik Dvoraks nicht zerstören kann, so sollte man auch nicht versuchen, ihn in Äußerlichkeiten zu verleugnen oder gar durch Verpflanzung in anderes Land. Welchem deutschen Übersetzer der Oper “Carmen” würde es einfallen, sie bei uns populärer zu machen, indem er auf das Textbuche schreibt: Die Handlung spielt in Steiermark ... Ausgeprägt nationale Stücke muß man mit allen Eigentümlichkeiten Bodens geben oder gar nicht.’ Hanslick, *Am Ende des Jahrhunderts (1895–1899)*, 135–6.

<sup>100</sup> The most extensive analysis in the Czech press of the Viennese premiere of *The Cunning Peasant* is provided in two parts by Ed Moučka for *Dalibor*; Moučka, ‘Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni’, 432–5, and Moučka, ‘Dopisy z Ciziny’ (‘Letters from Abroad’), *Dalibor*, 2nd ser., 8/10 (14 March 1886), 95–6.

<sup>101</sup> Moučka, ‘Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni’, 432–5.

<sup>102</sup> ‘národní ten ráz celého díla, jež mu také zajímavosti dodává byl pečlivě z opery v ději i samém provozování vyloučen, tak že zbyl jen v originální hudbě, ze které ovšem vymítniti se nemohl. V klavírním výtahu Simrokově označeno jest jako místo děje Horní Rakousko, zde ve Vídni nebylo na programech udáno žádné místo děje a

Moučka also marvels at the ignorance of the reviewer for the *Morgenpost*, who surmises that the Upper Austrian setting had been designated by Veselý in the initial version of the libretto, rather than being a revision intended to make the work more palatable to Viennese audiences. As Moučka explains, ‘the reviewer for the journal *Morgenpost* even dared to make the following reflection: “If Mr. Wesely” – the reviewer consistently avoids the orthography “Veselý” – “sets the story in Lower Austria and Dvořák sets the music in the Czech lands, the director ought to have taken his cues from the composer because it is easier to change the costumes than the music.”’<sup>103</sup> Conceived as a gesture that might make the work more relatable to Germans, the opera’s changed setting and neutral costumes offended the very audiences that they were supposed to please. To the Viennese, far worse than a Czech peasant singing Slavic melodies on the Hofoper stage was one who did so while claiming to be Upper Austrian. This issue was not particular to Vienna and had already been raised when the opera was performed in Hamburg in 1883. In his study on Dvořák’s reception in German-speaking Europe, Klaus Döge suggests that the mismatch between the setting of the story and the character of the music was the main element that prevented the opera from securing a permanent spot in the Hamburg Staatsoper repertory.<sup>104</sup> A Czech opera would not be performed in Vienna again until 1892, when Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride* was given, among other works, by members of the Prague National Theatre, as part of the International Exhibition of Theatre and Music. *The Bartered Bride* was performed several times, and the other works given were Smetana’s *Dalibor* and Dvořák’s *Dimitrij*. In preparation for the Smetana production, Dr Josef Herold, a delegate from the Imperial Reichsrat, emphasised to the members of the National Theatre Association that ‘it was necessary to preserve a Czech character for the Viennese performances’ in all aspects. Apparently, they were heeding the lessons from seven years earlier. *The Bartered Bride* would be favourably received in the Austrian capital, and the fact that its ‘Czech’ character was not diluted likely contributed to its success.<sup>105</sup>

Not only was *The Cunning Peasant* too Czech for Vienna and yet bland when its Czech elements were removed, but critics writing in Prague in 1885 considered it insufficiently representative of Czech achievement in the genre. To some extent, these kinds of opinions had already been expressed at the time of *The Cunning Peasant*’s 1878 Prague premiere. By the late 1870s, the popularity of *The Bartered Bride* had grown to such proportions that it proved a stumbling block for the Czech reception of even Smetana’s later operas, let alone the operas of other composers.<sup>106</sup> In such a climate, the best that Dvořák could hope for, when aligning himself with a distinctly ‘Smetana’ brand of comic opera, was second place

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kostymy byly úplně internacionální. Následkem toho sklesly všechny jednající osoby na pouhé šablonovité figury, které dle toho také šablonovitě, komické kromě toho až k nemožnosti karikovaně hrály’. Moučka, ‘Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni’, 432.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Referent časopisu “Morgenpost” odvážil se dokonce k následující reflexi: “Jestliže p. Wesely” – referent vyhýbá se všude orthografii “Veselý” – “děj do Dolních Rakous, p. Dvořák ale hudbu do Čech klade, měl režisér zajistit skladatele následovati, poněvadž kostýmy snadněji se měnit dají než hudba.”; Moučka, ‘Dopisy z Ciziny’, 95–6.

<sup>104</sup> Klaus Döge, ‘Dvořák a Německo (Dvořák and Germany)’, *Hudební Věda* 28/1 (1991), 53–4. Campo-Bowen, “‘A Promising, Political Sound’”, 44.

<sup>105</sup> Writing for the *Fremden-Blatt*, critic Oscar Teuber referred to the opening night of *The Bartered Bride* in 1892 as ‘an evening of compromise ... conceived in order to unite the fraternal enemies peaceably in the domain of music’ (‘Ausgleichs-Abend ... um die feindlichen Brüder auf musikalischem Gebiete friedlich zusammenzubringen’); Oscar Teuber, ‘Zwei czechische Opern im Ausstellungs-Theater’, *Fremden-Blatt* (4 June 1893), 11–12. For a rich discussion of these performances, see David Brodbeck, “‘Ausgleichs-Abende’: The First Viennese Performances of Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride*”, *Austrian Studies* 17 (2009), 43–61, esp. 49–50. The topic is also thoughtfully addressed in Campo-Bowen, “‘A Promising, Political Sound’”, *passim*, esp. 44.

<sup>106</sup> Large, *Smetana*, 187.

in the eyes of the Czechs. In fact, this may have been what motivated him to turn away from the Smetana model altogether in the early 1880s and find his own voice in the realm of opera. According to Kelly St Pierre, the 1880s marked a shift: whereas critics in the past had devoted 'attention to questions of whether or how Smetana wrote "Czech" music', Smetana's output was now being pitched as 'an ideal model for contemporary composers',<sup>107</sup> and after Smetana's death in 1884, the tone of much of this writing became increasingly hagiographic. By the early twentieth century, a group of Czech critics would go so far as to use Smetana's style as a yard-stick of 'Czechness' and label works that did not measure up, as overly foreign.<sup>108</sup> Even though critical perceptions of Czech nationalism were still broad enough during the 1870s and 1880s to encompass the music of more composers than just Smetana,<sup>109</sup> there was already a sense among critics that any efforts to draw international attention to Czech works in this genre ought to be done through Smetana.

Critics in Prague were, thus, surprised that the task of paving the way for Czech opera composers in Vienna had been entrusted to Dvořák, with his *Cunning Peasant* as the vehicle. It was probably Dvořák's international renown that endeared him to the Vienna Hofoper administration: by 1885, he had achieved success beyond Bohemian borders in essentially all genres other than opera. Furthermore, as early as 1879, his grand opera *Vanda* had been under consideration for performance in Vienna, though – after extensive negotiations – the idea of staging it was eventually abandoned.<sup>110</sup> For better or worse, it was Dvořák who brought Czech opera to Vienna officially, and the larger significance of this was not lost on Czech critics. In the days leading up to the performance, an article appeared in *Dalibor* suggesting that the stakes were high and that the outcome of the event would have far-reaching repercussions. The critic predicts that 'if this novelty breaks through with the rigorous audience of the Viennese opera, *Dimitrij* will not be far off on the horizon and maybe Dvořák will pave the way for other Czech composers to the stage that is supported by the state – a stage that has so far been closed off to them'.<sup>111</sup> Initial reports of the event in Prague are actually quite optimistic, and journalists seem to be reluctant to characterise it as a complete failure right away. The writer for *Národní politika* claims that the performance went off better than had been expected after the dress rehearsal and that the work 'was received by the large audience, which filled all areas of the theatre, with frequent loud praise'.<sup>112</sup> Relatively positive reports also appear in *Národní listy*:

<sup>107</sup> Kelly St Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana: Myth, Music, and Propaganda* (Rochester, 2017), 83.

<sup>108</sup> Brian Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague: Polemics and Practice at the National Theater, 1900–1983* (Rochester, 2006), 18–22, 38–43. Lébl and Ludvová claim that though the tendency to compare the two composers arose largely after Smetana's death, a 'healthy rivalry' had already developed between them while Smetana was alive; Vladimír Lébl and Jitka Ludvová, 'Nová doba (1860–1938)' ('The Modern Era'), in *Hudba v českých dějinách: Od středověku do nové doby* (*Music in Czech History: From the Middle Ages to the Modern Era*), ed. Vladimír Lébl (Prague, 1983), 392.

<sup>109</sup> In his recent work, Christopher Campo-Bowen has argued that Dvořák was largely viewed through the lens of cosmopolitanism in the late nineteenth century and the nationalist standard became dominant only in the early twentieth century; Campo-Bowen, 'Bohemian Rhapsodist', 160.

<sup>110</sup> Alan Houtchens, 'The Proposed Performances of *Vanda* and *Rusalka* in Vienna', in *Musical Dramatic Works by Antonín Dvořák: Papers from an International Musicological Conference, Prague 19–21 May 1983*, ed. Markéta Hallová, Zuzana Petrášková and Jarmila Tauerová-Veverková (Prague, 1989), 173–81; Alan Houtchens, 'From Vistula to the Danube by Way of Vltava: Dvořák's *Vanda* in Vienna', in *Rethinking Dvořák: Views from Five Countries*, ed. David R. Beveridge (Oxford, 1996), 257–64.

<sup>111</sup> 'prorazí-li tato novinka u rigorosního obecnstva vídeňské opery, nebude od *Šelmy sedláka* daleko do uvedení *Dimitrije* a možná, že otevře Dvořák i jiným českým skladatelům cestu na prkna jeviště podporovaného státem, která jim zůstávala dosud urputně zaterasena'. Unsigned, 'Drobné Zprávy: Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák*', 84.

<sup>112</sup> 'Byl přechetným posluchačstvem, které naplnilo divadlo ve všech prostorách, přijat častou hlučnou pochvalou'; Unsigned, 'Různé zprávy' ('Various News'), *Národní politika*, 3/319 (20 November 1885), 2.

According to news from Vienna, Dvořák's *The Cunning Peasant* had honourable success there, though we would not be the least bit surprised if the work of our fellow countryman, be it filled with extraordinary musical beauty, were refused under the present circumstances by the angered Viennese, who have long stopped being the friendly do-gooders that they allegedly once were.<sup>113</sup>

Yet hope quickly turned to disappointment when the opera fared so badly. The journalist for *Národní listy* highlights the severity of this failure, by asking the reader:

[After such a performance] who would want to prove, in the hope of a [positive] outcome, that *The Cunning Peasant* is not Dvořák's best opera – that he himself wrote the excellent grand opera *Dimitrij* on a good text by the spirited Mrs. Červinková? Who would want to convince the Germans that *The Bartered Bride*, *The Kiss* and *Two Widows* are valued much more in the Czech lands than *The Cunning Peasant*? [Who would want to explain to them] that, apart from Dvořák, we also have Smetana, Bendl, Rozkošný, Hřímálý, Bloček, Fibich, etc. and that these [composers] have [written] operas that will certainly achieve success on the large stage and will be more understood and well-liked than *The Cunning Peasant*?<sup>114</sup>

Clearly, Dvořák was supposed to act as a kind of trailblazer, following whom the likes of Smetana, Bendl and others could make their way to the Viennese operatic stage. After *The Cunning Peasant*'s scandalous reception, Vienna was perhaps more closed off to these other composers than ever. Aside from Czech participation at the International Exhibition in 1892, there was to be no performance of Smetana's operas in Vienna until nearly a decade later: *The Kiss* was staged at the Hofoper in 1894, and *The Secret (Tajemství)* followed in 1895. *The Bartered Bride* and *Dalibor* were given shortly thereafter, during the 1896/97 season. Although the Viennese premieres of the latter two operas witnessed no riotous behaviour, the press headlines for Smetana were, in some respects, much the same as they had been for Dvořák back in 1885. While some Viennese critics considered the performance of Smetana's operas in Vienna to be shamefully overdue, others used their reviews as an opportunity to uphold the operas of German composers and urge the Viennese to be weary of the 'inundation of [their] musical life with Slavic works'.<sup>115</sup>

In the wake of *The Cunning Peasant* controversy, several critics alleged that the whole incident had been orchestrated by members of the Vienna Hofoper administration to portray Czech opera in the worst possible light. They argued that a weak opera was chosen on purpose so that it might give Viennese critics an excuse to unleash invective on Czech art.<sup>116</sup> The implication is that a stronger work – in the Czech critics' estimation – would have been able to safeguard itself against the prejudice of a Viennese crowd. Moučka takes this notion of a conspiracy the furthest, claiming that the administration

<sup>113</sup> 'Dle zpráv došlých z Vídně měl tam Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* úspěch velice čestný, ačkoli bychom se byli pranic nedivili, kdyby dílo našeho krajana, přes to, že oplývá nevsedními hudebními krásami, bylo za nynějších poměrů od rozeštvaných pánův Vídeňákův, kteří dávno již přestali býti těmi přítelnyými dobráky, jakými prý byli dříve, odmítnuto'; Unsigned, 'Denní kronika' ('Daily Chronicle'), *Národní listy* 25/319 (20 November 1885), 2.

<sup>114</sup> 'Kdo by dnes chtěl s nadějí na výsledek tu dokazovati, že *Šelma sedlák* není nejlepší opera Dvořákova, že on sám napsal výbornou velkou operu *Dimitrijho* na doprý text duchaplné pí. Červinkové, kdo chtěl by předsvědčovati Němce, že *Prodaná nevěsta*, *Hubička*, a *Dvě vdovy* v Čechách mnohem více se cení nežli *Šelma sedlák*, že máme kromě Dvořáka ještě Smetanu, Bendla, Rozkošného, Hřímálého, Bločka, Fibicha, a j. a že tito mají opery, kteréž na velkém jevišti bezpečně dosáhnou úspěchu a vice budou porozuměny a líbiti se nežli *Šelma sedlák*.' Unsigned, 'Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni', 3.

<sup>115</sup> McColl, *Music Criticism in Vienna, 1896–1897*, 88–98, esp. 89.

<sup>116</sup> Unsigned, 'Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni', 3 (see footnote 93 and earlier discussion).



had Dvořák's opera *Dimitrij* in its possession and could well have mounted it, instead of *The Cunning Peasant*.<sup>117</sup> Although Moučka's own biases as a Czech in Vienna undoubtedly influenced his assessment, his ideas are not completely unfounded. Hanslick is known to have liked Dvořák's *Dimitrij*: he had travelled to Prague in 1882 for the express purpose of attending the opera's premiere. Access to performance materials might have been gained easily through him. Václav Vladimír Zelený, writing for *Dalibor* in 1882 – three years before the Viennese scandal – predicts that *The Cunning Peasant* will not fare well in the Habsburg capital:

It is important to give recognition to Professor Hanslick, who is constantly drawing attention to the excellent operas of Dvořák. ... I do not doubt that Dvořák, in any event, would soon be able to pave a path to foreign stages, but the efforts of Hanslick, more privately than through the press, have a great deal to do with it. ... The theatre audience [in Vienna] is much wider and on average much less acquainted with music than the concert audience; on the other hand, [the theatre audience] is much more entangled in national and political prejudice, and for this reason, it would certainly be best to disarm them with such an imposing work as *Dimitrij* (according to all reports), and then show the comic operas. For this it does not follow that it is necessary to be afraid of the success of *The Cunning Peasant*, if it is indeed the first Dvořák opera to be performed in Vienna. For even if the weak parts of the libretto would cause negative assessments to predominate at first – [the weak parts being] exaggerated in the eyes of the Viennese by their Czech origins, which [would] probably make them the target of their rude jokes – these [opinions] would have to change in time. This is partly because of the high value of Dvořák's music and partly because the Germans are grossly lacking in comic operas of the type that are overflowing with musical thought, like *The Cunning Peasant* or *Stubborn Lovers*. Only this much is certain: the path of *Dimitrij* would be shorter and more successful.<sup>118</sup>

Curiously, no mention is made here of the possibility of staging a Smetana opera in Vienna, in spite of Zelený's developing reputation as a Smetana partisan:<sup>119</sup> he confines his remarks in this instance to the operatic output of Dvořák. Though Zelený is more optimistic than those who would write in 1885, he already suspects *The Cunning Peasant* will be the 'target of ... rude jokes' in the Austrian capital. The author of another article, printed in *Dalibor* in 1882, also suspects that *The Cunning Peasant* will be received poorly in Vienna:

<sup>117</sup> Moučka, 'Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni', 432.

<sup>118</sup> 'To uznání sluší zde vysloviti prof. Eduardu Hanslickovi, že neustal obracet pozornost dvorní opery k výtečným operám Dvořákovým ... Nepochybuji sice, že by Dvořák za každých okolností brzo již si proklestil cestu na mnohá cizí jeviště, ale ono usilování Hanslickovo, ještě větší asi soukromí než tiskem, má o to zajisté take zásluhu ... Divadelní obecnost jest mnohem širší a průměrně mnohem méně znalé hudby než koncertní, s druhé strany mnohem zarytější v národní a politické předsudky a proto bylo by jistě nejlépe, je nejprv odbrojiti činem tak imosantním, jakým podle všech zpráv jest *Dimitrij*, a pak teprve ukázati mu opery komické. Z toho však nenásleduje, že by se bylo právě potřebí báti o úspěch *Šelmy sedláka*, bude-li ve Vídni první operou Dvořákovou. Neboť i kdyby slabé stránky libreta, zvětšené v očích Vídeňáků jeho českým původem, který arci bude terčem jejich sprostého vtípu, pravím i kdyby způsobily, že by úsudek nepřiznivý nabyt v první chvíli převahy, časem musilo by se to změnit. Jednak pro velkou cenu Dvořákovy hudby, jednak pro to, že mají Němci zoufalý nedostatek nových komických oper a jmenovitě takových, které by hudebními myšlenkami přetékalý jako *Šelma a Tvrde Palice*. Jen tolik jisto, že by cesta *Dimitrijem* kleštěná byla jim kratší a ještě úspěšnější.' V.V.Z., 'Dopisy z Vídně' ('Letters from Vienna'), *Dalibor*, 2nd ser., 5/31 (1 November 1882), 244.

<sup>119</sup> Kelly St Pierre unveils some of the ways in which Zelený participated in nineteenth-century critical discourses on Smetana, and her work is helpful in unveiling some of Zelený's biases; St Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana*, esp. 1, 74–5, 83–6.

[There] is talk, quite seriously, among the Czechs who are close to the world of opera, of the possibility of a performance of a Czech work by the present opera company, for which the name Dvořák, better known here, is at the forefront. Professor Hanslick earnestly asked the opera commission to prepare *The Cunning Peasant*, although I think that a serious opera would be more appropriate, whether it be *Vanda* or *Dimitrij*, unless a good revision of *The Cunning Peasant* would be done successfully.<sup>120</sup>

The scandal was, in many ways, foreseeable even to the Czechs, leading some critics to conclude that it had been purposely arranged.

Moučka claims that the conspiracy extended to aspects of the performance. In his view, an inferior conductor and poor singers were selected for the production, so that the opera could not be heard at its best:

Instead of entrusting the singing roles to the best voices, of which there are many in the institution, the two most important roles (the Duke and Martin) were given to Mr. Horowitz and Mr. Mayerhofer, who are talented actors, but singers with very small voices. They were not able to do much as singers, and the parts themselves did not allow them to do much as actors. The direction of the opera should have been entrusted to the conductor with the greatest musical sensitivity, preferably to director Jahn, who is always able to compensate for a lack of effective contrast through the soft shading of individual phrases. Instead, the opera was given to conductor Hellmesberger Jr., who treats everything as if it were ballet music.<sup>121</sup>

Though Moučka does not consider *The Cunning Peasant* to be without its weaknesses, he writes that 'a keen and well-intentioned performance would have been capable of hiding some of the flaws and presenting the strong points of the work'.<sup>122</sup> Whether or not there is any truth to Moučka's assertion, multiple sources – both Czech and Viennese – report that the musicians did struggle to take the work seriously when performing for an empty theatre during the opera's second night. In his final analysis, Moučka divides members of the Hofoper audience into three distinct camps: those who liked the opera and had 'retained the ability to make healthy aesthetic judgments about true beauty'; the blind fanatics, railing 'against all things Czech'; and those who were jealous 'over the fact that Vienna is fading more and more into the background in comparison to artistic production in Prague'.<sup>123</sup> Though in this last remark Moučka may be getting carried away with his own nationalist sensibilities, his comments do suggest that audience members

<sup>120</sup> 'mluví se však mezi Čechy, blízkými opeře, zcela opravdově o možnosti provodení některé české práce zdější operou, při čemž arci v popředí jest jméno Dvořákovo, zde známější. Prof. Hanslick důtklivě vyzýval správu opery, aby ujala se *Šelmy sedláka*, ač myslím, že by se lépe hodila opera vážná, budiž to *Vanda* nebo příští *Dimitrij* – leč by se podařilo, pomocí libretu *Šelmy* šťastným přepracováním'; Unsigned, 'Dopisy z Vídně' ('Letters from Vienna'), *Dalibor*, 2nd ser., 4/7 (1 March 1882), 52–3.

<sup>121</sup> 'Místo aby rozkošné zpěvní partie svěřeny byly nejkrásnějším hlasům, jichž ústavu nijak neschází, přiděleny dvě nejdůležitější role knížetě a Martina pp. Horvicovi a Mayerhoferovi, kteří jsou sice dovední herci ale zpěváci velmi malých hlasů. Ve zpěvu nedovedli ničeho oni, ve hře pak nedovolovaly jim větší úspěch úlohy samé. Řízení opery mělo býti svěřeno dirigentu nejjemnějšího hudebního smyslu, nejlépe samému řediteli Jahnovi, který nedostatek účinných kontrastů vždy nejjemnějším odstíhováním jednotlivých frásí nahraditi dovede. Místo toho odevzdána ale opera kap. p. Hellmesbergovi ml., který vše odbyvá jako blašní hudbu.' Moučka, 'Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídní', 433.

<sup>122</sup> Moučka, 'Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídní', 433.

<sup>123</sup> '[malá část obecnstva, která] zdravý estetický úsudek pro pravou krásu si zachovala'; 'šílená vášeň slepých fanatiků proti všemu českému'; 'závisť vzdělanějších, že Vídeň před uměleckou produktivností Prahy vždy víc a více do pozadí ustupuje'. Moučka, 'Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídní', 432.

were not as unanimous in their reactions to *The Cunning Peasant* as some Viennese critics would have their readers believe. In passing, Moučka likens the whole affair to one of the most infamous riots in operatic history: the Paris premiere of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in 1861, when members of the Jockey Club whistled and shouted throughout the performance in protest against the Princess Pauline Metternich.<sup>124</sup>

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The politically charged atmosphere in Vienna during the 1880s prompted many audience members to head to the Hofoper production of *The Cunning Peasant* with their minds made up about what they were going to hear. The writer for *Národní listy* acknowledges this, writing that 'Czech artists do not have to feel sorry when their creations do not come before the Viennese audience during these irritable times. [The Viennese audience] persistently refuses to give recognition to a work, no matter how splendid it might be, and to an artist, no matter how world-renowned, when he is a Czech.'<sup>125</sup> The writer for *Národní politika* reaches the conclusion that Czech composers do not need Viennese approval in order to know their worth; as he puts it, 'for us, the opinion of an irritated mob is not what determines [the success of this work], though the [rioters] seem to have caught the attention of [the newspapers]'.<sup>126</sup> Favourable reviews from German-speaking Europe had caused *The Cunning Peasant* to grow in the Czech critics' estimation,<sup>127</sup> but denunciation from Vienna was not about to bring the opera down in their eyes. Even so, Czech critics were persuaded, and perhaps harboured the delusion, that the outcome at the Hofoper would have been better with a different opera – one that was less blatantly Czech and held in higher regard in Czech musical circles than Dvořák's *The Cunning Peasant*. Hostinský, known to have disapproved of *Dimitrij*, was probably the only Czech critic who would not have supported a performance of Dvořák's later opera. Hostinský spends a large portion of his article on Dvořák's operas from 1901 dismissing *Dimitrij*, not only because it is in the *grand opéra* tradition, which, to Hostinský, meant that it was regressive, but most especially because Hanslick approved of it; throughout the article, Hostinský communicates a sense of unease over the hold that Hanslick seemed to have on Czech audiences in general and Dvořák in particular.<sup>128</sup> Yet, even he writes in 1878 that: 'The best libretto for Dvořák would be a serious one, with true poetry, perhaps even pathos, in which lyrical moments might give way to large ensembles (let us remember Dvořák's *Hymnus* from Hálek's *Heirs of the White Mountain*) – such a text would guarantee an even more beautiful success than can be detected in *The Cunning Peasant*.'<sup>129</sup> Coming from a Czech

<sup>124</sup> Moučka, 'Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni', 432.

<sup>125</sup> 'Ostatně čeští umělci nemusí litovati, když nynějších rozeřtaných dobách se svými uměleckými výtvary nepředstupují před obecnstvo vídeňské, které zarputile vzpírá se uznání i sebe znamenitější dílo, i sebe lepšího, v celém světě uznaného umělce, když je – Čechem.' Unsigned, 'Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni', 3.

<sup>126</sup> 'pro nás však nerozhoduje úsudek pošťvané luze, který patrně *Tagblattu* a *Bohemii* velice imponuje.' Unsigned, 'Různé zprávy' ('Various News'), 2.

<sup>127</sup> Often, it was only after works by Czech composers achieved recognition on foreign stages that Czech audiences and critics really started to take notice of them, and *The Cunning Peasant* seems to be an example of this trend. Few Czech critics who wrote about the opera during the 1880s onward failed to mention that the work had been performed in Dresden and Hamburg. For an example of this, see B., 'Z divadel: Zpěvohra' ('From the Theaters: Opera'), *Divadelní listy* 4/6 (25 February 1883), 53.

<sup>128</sup> Otakar Hostinský, 'Antonín Dvořák ve vývoji naší hudby dramatické' ('Antonín Dvořák's Role in the Development of Our Dramatic Music'), in *Antonín Dvořák: Sborník statí o jeho díle a životě* (*Antonín Dvořák: A Collection of Essays about his Work and Life*), ed. Boleslav Kalenský (Prague, 1912), 208–25.

<sup>129</sup> 'Pro Dvořáka arci bylo by nejpřiměřenějším libreto vážné, pravou poesíí prodchnuté, snad i pathetické, v němž na základě jednoduchého děje lyrické momenty široce se rozkládají, poskytující dosti místa větším

vantage point, these critics were familiar with the many operatic works that had appeared on the stages of the Provisional and National Theatres in Prague and were bothered by what they deemed to be a case of misrepresentation. Although these critiques do not cast *The Cunning Peasant* in the most positive light, the immediate reaction that the Viennese episode seemed to inspire in the Czechs was sympathy. Jarmil Burghauser touches on this idea, when he claims that, after what happened in Vienna, Czech audiences became more interested in *The Cunning Peasant* – though this interest proved to be short-lived.<sup>130</sup> Dvořák's opera was given a brief run at the National Theatre in Prague in late 1885 and three performances in Brno in 1886, before being set aside once again. Though this upsurge in interest did not translate into a considerable increase in performances at home for the long term, the incident did force Czechs to revisit a work that had by then started to become somewhat neglected in the Czech lands and re-evaluate its place in the Czech opera repertory. Many years later, in an obituary for Dvořák, one critic observes: 'From among Dvořák's operas, *Dimitrij* is generally held in the highest regard; however, *The Cunning Peasant* is the most significant for the development of national Czech opera, even though its libretto, like many others, will always be an obstacle to its [wider] dissemination.'<sup>131</sup>

Two broader conclusions can be drawn from the events of 1885 at the Hofoper. The first concerns the relationships and dynamics among the multiple nationalities that coexisted in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Though industrialised and highly literate, Czechs were a relatively small national group and a subordinate population, from the perspective of Vienna. However, the discourses in Prague show that, as much as Czech critics were annoyed with Dvořák's treatment in the Viennese theatre and press, they were ultimately willing to give Viennese audiences the benefit of the doubt and refused to occupy a position of (perceived) cultural inferiority within the Empire. Such a feeling was likely misguided when it came to certain members of the Viennese public. Writing in reference to the late 1890s, Campo-Bowen claims that 'Dvořák's characterization as a naively creative Czech "Other" was firmly entrenched in the imperial capital.'<sup>132</sup> Even so, on the whole, their arguments show that they believed – whether misguidedly or not – that the riots had more to do with repertoire choice than any darker social agenda. The latter does not even enter the discussion, apart from a few oblique references to Viennese prejudice. Additionally, the reviews reveal that many Czech critics regarded Hanslick – a central and well-respected figure on the Viennese music scene – as an ally and considered the Imperial Court Opera not to be utterly impenetrable. For them, breaking through on the Hofoper stage was merely a matter of devising the right strategy.

Second, the incident is instructive because of what it tells about the aesthetic biases and attitudes of the Czech critics. In spite of the early success of *The Cunning Peasant* at the Prague Provisional Theatre, its disastrous run at the Hofoper consolidated the pecking order among opera composers in the Czech lands. It served to reinforce Smetana's

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ensemblům (vzpomeňte si na Dvořákovův *Hymnus z Hálkových Dědiců Bílé Hory!*) – takový text byl by zárukou ještě krásnějších úspěchů, než jsou ty, jimiž se všim právem honosí *Šelma sedlák*.' Hostinský, 'Původní novinky české zpěvohry', 747–8.

<sup>130</sup> Jarmil Burghauser, 'Hudebnědramatické Dílo Antonína Dvořáka' ('The Musical-Dramatic Work of Antonín Dvořák'), in *Antonín Dvořák Dramatik (Antonín Dvořák the Dramatist)*, ed. Jitka Brabcová and Jarmil Burghauser (Prague, 1994), 14.

<sup>131</sup> 'Nejvýše staví se dle obecného soudu z oper Dvořákových "Dimitrij"; největšího významu však pro vývoj národní zpěvohry české bez odporu jest "Šelma sedlák," ač libretto její, jakož i mnohých jiných, bude vždy překážkou jejího rozšíření'; O. Sl. N. 'Dr. Antonín Dvořák', *Příloha Pražského ilustrovaného Kurýra* 122 (2 May 1904), 1.

<sup>132</sup> Campo-Bowen, 'Bohemian Rhapsodist', 159.

primacy, and Dvořák would continue to play second fiddle to his older contemporary, at least when it came to writing a work that would appropriately represent the Czech nation on the larger stage of the Imperial Court Opera – a stage that was viewed by many as the portal to international acclaim. Regardless of Dvořák’s reputation as a country bumpkin next to the relatively cosmopolitan Smetana, it was *The Bartered Bride* that set the gold standard for idealised rurality in the eyes of the Czech critics. Proof positive for this assessment came in 1892, when Smetana’s famous comic opera was received enthusiastically by the Viennese at the International Exhibition, and by comparison Dvořák’s *Dimitrij* had a lacklustre showing at the same event. Those critics who had warned against staging *The Cunning Peasant* in Vienna back in 1885 were vindicated on this occasion, and the Czech operatic hierarchy crystallised further.

To close, it is worth turning the spotlight on Dvořák himself. As was his custom, Dvořák did not engage in the polemics, nor did he comment on the riots in his personal letters: undoubtedly, this was an episode that he preferred to forget. Yet, he did make one incisive remark about the event on the pages of his *St Ludmila* score, cited at the outset of this article: he likened the Viennese reception of his opera to an ‘execution’. His choice of word is significant here. Executions are political acts, carried out by the state and typically associated with a degree of public humiliation, both of which are important connotations that Dvořák seems to be conjuring up. Moučka’s use of the term ‘execution’ has some of the same implications. Just before using the ‘execution’ metaphor, Moučka writes: ‘The vast majority of the Viennese audience and critics lost themselves in the task of trying to destroy and humiliate this work just because it comes from the pen of a Czech.’<sup>133</sup> The image of a defenceless Czech peasant being subjected to a death sentence at the hands of the Austrian state is quite potent and does not cast the Imperial Court Opera in the best light. In the end, then, the incident did not so much reflect badly on Dvořák as on the imperial project,<sup>134</sup> which relied on the peaceable coexistence of several national groups for its continuation and was weakened by internal strife and intolerance, of which the Hofoper riots were a prime example. Moreover, even if it likely offered little consolation, David Brodbeck notes that Dvořák must have been aware at the time that the ideology fuelling the riots – *völkisch* pan-Germanness – only had a marginal presence in Habsburg Austria,<sup>135</sup> and already by the mid-1880s, Dvořák was gradually discovering that Vienna was by no means the only avenue by which success beyond the Czech borders could be achieved. The severest blow to the composer, however, came in his efforts to assert himself specifically in the realm of opera. His aspirations in the genre had suffered a major setback, both at home and abroad, as a result of the Hofoper scandal. In this area at least, the struggle for Dvořák – Prague’s ‘cunning peasant’ – was far from over.

**Supplementary material.** To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S095458672200012X>.

<sup>133</sup> ‘Převeliká většina vídeňského obecnstva i kritiky tak dalece se zapomněla, že za úkol si vystavila dílo toto zničit a zstudit, jen proto, že pochází z péra českého.’ Moučka ‘Dvořákův *Šelma sedlák* ve Vídni’, 432.

<sup>134</sup> In an intriguing counterexample, Christopher Campo-Bowen makes the argument that the highly favourable reception given to Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride* at the International Exhibition allowed the Viennese to ‘broadcast the success of the imperial project and likewise claim the artistic success of the Czechs as their own’. Campo-Bowen writes that ‘Viennese papers were quick to point out the welcoming attitude of the imperial capital, if in a somewhat self-congratulatory manner’; Campo-Bowen, ‘“A Promising, Political Sound”’, 49–50.

<sup>135</sup> Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum*, 190–1.

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