

# ART IN THE SERVICE OF THE NATION: MIROSLAV TYRŠ AS ART HISTORIAN AND CRITIC\*

*By Claire E. Nolte*

Miroslav Tyrš is best known as the founder and chief ideologue of the Sokol movement, the Czech nationalist gymnastic organization, but he was also a major figure in the Czech art world of the mid-nineteenth century, who contributed pioneering works in the field of Czech art history and aesthetics, and set the standards of artistic taste for the national community in his work as an art critic. Underlying his dual career in gymnastics and art was a program of national revival based on an idealized view of ancient Greece, which foresaw the physical renewal of the nation through gymnastics complemented by the spiritual refinement of aesthetic consciousness<sup>1</sup>. At a time when artistic awareness was expanding beyond the narrow confines of the church and the nobility, he encouraged the nascent Czech bourgeoisie to support a national art which was only then in the process of defining itself apart from German models<sup>2</sup>. His work in art took place at a crucial time in the evolution of the Czech national movement as it began to expand beyond the linguacentric emphasis of the early Awakeners to a more iconocentric approach, whereby art became a form of national language, accessible to the broader public<sup>3</sup>.

Tyrš embarked on his career in art in middle age, a decade after founding the first Sokol club in Prague in 1862<sup>4</sup>. Until that point, the Sokol had been the major, if not

---

\* The research for this article was undertaken with the generous assistance of a grant from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, East European Program, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1</sup> Pospíšil, Zdeněk: Sociální filozofie umění Miroslava Tyrše [The social philosophy of art of M. T.]. *Estetika* 13 (1976) 236. See also, Ludvík ovský, Jaroslav: Antické myšlenky v Tyršově sokolském a národním programu [Classical ideas in Tyrš's Sokol and national program]. *Tyršův sborník* 6 (1923) 3–38.

<sup>2</sup> The role of the Czech intelligentsia in marshalling support for Czech cultural enterprises is brought out in Jan Havránek: Předpoklady působení české kultury v Čechách v 19. století [The preconditions for the attainments of Czech culture in Bohemia in the 19th century]. In: *Město v české kultuře 19. století*. Ed. by Milena Freimanová. Praha 1983, 118.

<sup>3</sup> Prahl, Roman: 'Dobrou noc, krásné umění v Čechách'? Ke krizi v české malbě počátku 70. let 19. století ["Good night, fine art in Bohemia?"] On the crisis in Czech painting at the beginning of the 1870s]. *Umění* 32 (1984) 522.

<sup>4</sup> The most complete biography of Tyrš was written by his wife. Tyršová, Renata: Miroslav Tyrš: jeho osobnost a dílo [M. T.: His personality and his work]. 3 parts in 1 vol. Praha 1932–1934. The most recent biography is Zora Dvořáková: Miroslav Tyrš: Prohry a vítězství [M. T.: failures and successes]. Praha 1989. His work in the Sokol is examined in Claire E. Nolte: Training for National Maturity: Miroslav Tyrš and the Origins of the Czech Sokol, 1862–1884. Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, New York 1990.

exclusive, focus of his national work. The 1860s, when Tyrš founded the Sokol, had been a heady time for the Czech national movement, a second awakening following the end of the neo-absolutist Bach era in the empire. New clubs were founded, new publications appeared, and the expanding Czech bourgeoisie manifested their growing numbers and confidence in great national festivals and celebrations. A recent graduate of Prague University in search of employment, Tyrš threw himself into work for nationalist causes, organizing festivals such as the ceremony for the laying of the foundation stone for the National Theater; presiding over the massive *Omladina tábor*, held to protest the *Ausgleich*; and even winning political office on the Young Czech ticket, which, following the Czech policy of passive resistance, he did not assume. But by the early 1870s, the *Ausgleich* and the failure of the Hohenwart government to achieve a compromise with the Czechs undermined the nationalist enthusiasm of the previous decade. Disillusioned by these trends and by the inability of Czech politicians to effect meaningful change, Tyrš withdrew from politics to consider a new course. His engagement to Renata Fügnerová, the only child of his Sokol collaborator, Jindřich Fügner, contributed to his decision to seek a more stable, lucrative, and prestigious career than that of a gymnastic leader.

Tyrš worked in his new career in the field of art for a little over a decade, until his death at age 52 in 1884, lecturing in popular forums like the Art Alliance (*Umělecká beseda*), an organization founded in the 1860s to promote Czech art and literature; writing about art for journals and newspapers; and serving on artistic juries. In this last capacity, he helped select the young sculptor Josef Myslbek to create the statues of Czech heroes for the Palacký Bridge, and was directly involved in the artwork of the National Theater, which was nearing completion in the late 1870s. In 1881 he became the curator of the newly created Prague City Museum, where he was influential in the acquisition of works by the Czech artist Josef Mánes. During all this time he remained at the helm of the Sokol movement, and also suffered bouts of poor health so debilitating that he went to Italy for a year-long convalescence in the mid-1870s<sup>5</sup>. From time to time, Tyrš attempted to translate his growing expertise on artistic matters into a permanent position on the university level, a goal he finally achieved in the fall of 1881, when he was named docent at the Prague Technical College<sup>6</sup>. The following year, after the division of Prague University into Czech and German parts, he became a docent in art history at the Czech University, and he was named Professor Extraordinarius in December 1883. Fulfilling a condition of that appointment, he resigned from his positions in the Sokol in June 1884. Ten weeks later he was found dead, an apparent

<sup>5</sup> Following his doctor's advice, Tyrš left Prague for the Bohemian countryside in the spring of 1875. Finding no relief, he went to Italy, first to Pisa and later to Florence, returning to Prague only in October 1876.

<sup>6</sup> Created in 1869 by the division of the Prague Polytechnical School into German and Czech parts, the Prague Technical College was the first exclusively Czech institution of higher learning. The problems surrounding Tyrš's attempt to acquire this position are described in Ladislav Janáček: *Život Dr. Miroslava Tyrše* [The life of Dr. M. T. J. Brno 1932, 117–128. His inaugural lecture at the Technical College is reproduced: *O způsobu [sic] a významu studia dějin umění výtvarných* [On the method and meaning of the study of art history]. In: Miroslav Tyrš: *O umění*. 6 vols. Praha 1932–1937, here 1: 91–100.

suicide, in an isolated spot in the Tyrolean Alps where he had gone on a vacation retreat<sup>7</sup>.

Tyrš had no formal training in art, which was not unusual at a time when art studies were, in the words of the Czech aesthetician, Max Dvořák, "das Herzenskind des Dilettantismus"<sup>8</sup>. He had received his university degree in philosophy, with a *Habilitationsschrift* on Schopenhauer, and in the course of his studies had taken classes on aesthetics with Robert Zimmermann, described as "the most gifted of the Austrian Herbartians" for his work in expanding the principles of the German philosopher Johann Friedrich Herbart into a comprehensive system of aesthetics that emphasized purity of form over the emotionalism of Romanticism<sup>9</sup>. In addition to Herbartianism, Tyrš had studied Hegelian principles with Ignác Hanuš, a philosophy professor and Czech nationalist who became his friend and mentor. He learned of the exciting new evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin from his contacts with the circle around the famed Czech physiologist, Jan Evangelista Purkyně<sup>10</sup>. These contemporary trends, combined with a veneration for classicism he had acquired in *gymnasium*, created the foundations of his aesthetic outlook<sup>11</sup>.

Tyrš's first forays into the field of art in the 1860s were popular in nature, such as his 1868 lecture series on Greek sculpture sponsored by the Art Alliance and the American Club of Ladies (*Americký klub dam*), a progressive women's organization<sup>12</sup>. Around the same time as this lecture series, he wrote an essay on the ancient Olympic Games for a Sokol publication, which demonstrated his fascination with Greek culture in both its artistic and gymnastic manifestations<sup>13</sup>. In 1869, following a tour of art

<sup>7</sup> A recent biography of Tyrš offers convincing evidence that the increasingly large doses of chloral hydrate he took for insomnia caused the symptoms which led to his suicide. Dvořáková: Tyrš 217–218. The conclusion of another recent study that he suffered from syphilis is less satisfying. Morava, Georg J.: Miroslav Tyrš (Friedrich Emanuel Tirsch) 1832–1884: Sein Tod in der Ötztaler Ache im Lichte bisher unbekannter Quellen. *BohZ* 25 (1984) 95–101. See also, Jandásek: *Život Tyrše* 163.

<sup>8</sup> Dvořák, quoted in Ivo Kořán: *Obraz a slovo v našich dějinách* [The picture and the word in our history]. In: *Kapitoly z českého dějepisu umění*. Ed. by Rudolf Chadraba, et al. Praha 1986, 1:15.

<sup>9</sup> Johnston, William M.: *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History, 1848–1938*. Berkeley 1972, 286. Zimmermann's work is discussed in *ibid.*, 286–290. Tyrš acknowledged Zimmermann's influence on his aesthetic ideas in a curriculum vitae he submitted for his 1883 appointment as a university professor, which was subsequently published as Miroslav Tyrš: *Běh mého života* [The course of my life]. *Sokol: časopis zájmům tělocvičným věnovaný* 25 (1899) 278–279.

<sup>10</sup> Tyrš's Darwinism is the subject of Věnceslav Havlíček: *Vliv Darwinovy nauky na Tyrše* [The influence of Darwinian theories on Tyrš]. *Tyršův sborník* 7 (1923) 47–67.

<sup>11</sup> The argument that the classicism of his *gymnasium* years was the central influence on Tyrš's intellectual development is presented in Jaroslav Ludvíkovský: *Tyršův řecký sen* [Tyrš's Greek dream]. *Umění* 6 (1933) 69–73; and Ludvíkovský: *Antické myšlenky* 3–38.

<sup>12</sup> Tyrš published his lecture many years later, in the April 30, 1880 edition of the journal, *Lumír*, under the pseudonym, "Zdislav Bořický." It is reprinted as: *Phidias, Myron, Polyklet*. In: *O umění* 2 (1934) 112–141.

<sup>13</sup> Tyrš, Miroslav: *Hod Olympický* [The Olympic games]. In: *Sborník sokolský pro rok 1868*. Ed. by Miroslav Tyrš and František Čermák. Praha 1869, 191–220. See also, *Antika a česká kultura* [Antiquity and Czech culture]. Praha 1978, 467.

galleries and gymnastic halls in Paris, London, and various German cities, Tyrš began to consider developing his interest in art into a career, as he wrote in a letter at that time:

... with one [Sokol work] substantially complete and no longer completely filling my thoughts, with my desire turning elsewhere, toward the study of aesthetics, with which I had occupied myself for my own amusement, it now beckons as an area for new and fresh activity. Again, I say to myself: What you do best, your preferred task, this is your duty. I firmly hope that again this time I will carry it out<sup>14</sup>.

Around the time of his marriage in 1872, Tyrš wrote his first serious work on art, an analysis of the Laocoon statue prepared as part of an application for a position at the Prague Technical College<sup>15</sup>. At a time when the periodization of the magnificent statue of Laocoon and his sons in their death struggle with a giant sea serpent had not been definitively established, Tyrš argued that it was a Roman piece, and presented his conclusions as a pioneering Slavic effort in a field dominated by Germans:

The question about the periodization of Laocoon became – mainly because of the dispute which developed between Winckelmann and Lessing – essentially a German question. ... What I want to prove would not alone have given me sufficient reason to undertake this investigation; however, once I had begun, I discovered that along with my academic interest there was another level, a point of view which strengthened and encouraged me in a task which, from the beginning, was almost hopeless and often boring and tiring – to attempt to finally resolve this confusing problem – on *Slavic* soil. This was the only ambition I could allow myself<sup>16</sup>.

Despite having begun his new career in the field of art history, Tyrš wrote little on this subject, mostly occasional pieces undertaken in connection with his efforts to obtain a university position<sup>17</sup>. His works were carried out in the style of cultural history, then at the peak of its popularity, which sought to recreate the entire milieu of an historical era, as Jakob Burckhardt had done<sup>18</sup>. Tyrš was most influenced in this regard by the French philosopher and historian, Hippolyte Taine, who introduced modern concepts of social change into the field of art studies<sup>19</sup>. Under the influence of

<sup>14</sup> M. Tyrš to Renata Fügnerová, July 30, 1869, quoted in Tyršová: Tyrš 1:106. The tour had been jointly sponsored by the Art Alliance and the Prague Sokol.

<sup>15</sup> He subsequently withdrew his application after learning that he would have to master architecture to qualify. Tyršová: Tyrš 2:50.

<sup>16</sup> [Emphasis in original] Tyrš, Miroslav: Laocoon, dílo doby římské [Laocoon, a work of Roman times]. Praha 1873, vii–viii. First published in the journal *Osvěta* in 1872, it is reprinted in *O umění* 2 (1934) 31–111. Originally excavated in Rome in 1509 in the presence of Michelangelo, the statue influenced the aesthetic thought of an entire generation of German scholars, beginning with Winckelmann. As part of his research on the work, Tyrš invited a professor of anatomy to the Sokol training hall to observe gymnasts recreating the statue. He concluded that the statue was carried out in the style of the cruel spectacles of ancient Rome, and did not realize until several years later that it was Hellenistic. Tyršová: Tyrš 2:21–24; and Chadřaba, Rudolf: Miroslav Tyrš. In: *Kapitoly z českého dějepisu umění* 1:165. On Laocoon and German aesthetics, see Butler, E. M.: *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany*. Boston 1958 [1935], 46–48, 81, 132–133, 179, and 208.

<sup>17</sup> Tyrš's art historical writings comprise only one of the six volumes of his collected works on art. Tyrš: *O umění* 2 (1934).

<sup>18</sup> The work of Czech practitioners is examined in Rostislav Švacha: *Historikové kultury* [Historians of culture]. In: *Kapitoly z českého dějepisu umění* 1:141–159.

<sup>19</sup> Taine's influence on Tyrš is the subject of two articles: Žákavec, František: *Příspěvek k poznání vztahu Tyršovi k Tainovi* [A contribution to recognizing the relationship of Tyrš



positivism, Taine had abandoned Burckhardt's intuitive approach in favor of a more scientific method, which analyzed the relative influences of artistic genius, social organization, and historical development to understand the art of the past. Asserting that a historian must be a biologist, physicist, classifier, and measurer, Taine launched a trend among nineteenth-century cultural historians to proceed with methodical exactness and draw examples from the developmental processes of nature.

Tyrš acknowledged his debt to Taine by translating part of his *Philosophie de l'Art* into Czech and applying its lessons to the Czech nation in his own article, "On the Conditions for the Development and Success of Artistic Activity"<sup>20</sup>. In his piece, Tyrš sought to identify, like Taine, the social conditions and individual qualities which produce artistic flowering, as his comments on the backwardness of American art demonstrate:

The good moneymakers of the great transatlantic republic, immersed in the mysteries of profit, lack that – let us say – *poetic disposition of thought*, the opposite of mere practicality and sober reason, which makes artistic flight possible<sup>21</sup>.

While Tyrš expanded on Taine's scheme by making a strong sense of national consciousness and a healthy national life prerequisites for artistic greatness, he also warned his countrymen against the dangers of narrow nationalism: "We must not forget that beyond our mountains there is also a world, and this world – in its present as in its past – is large, rich, and significant ... we do not live only in Bohemia, we also live in Europe"<sup>22</sup>.

In addition to Taine, Tyrš revealed the influence of the evolutionary principles of Charles Darwin, which had been so fundamental to his Sokol program, in an 1881 piece entitled "About the Gothic Style":

The history of nature teaches us that each of the eras which existed on the earth produced its own special biological creatures. Plants are living things dependent on certain conditions of existence, and they must wither and die whenever the general basis of life is changed. This change was also the reason why new species gradually evolved, until the surface of the earth was finally covered by other forms, creating another appearance, another spectacle of impressions. As it is written in the chronicle of nature, so it is manifested in the history of art. Artistic forms lose their vital power and die out whenever their basis in society, in the sensibilities and opinions of the age and the nation, are changed<sup>23</sup>.

---

to Taine]. In: Spisy filosofické fakulty University Komenského v Bratislavě, Nr. 18. Bratislava 1935. – L o r m a n o v á, Jarmila: O vlivu H. Taine na Miroslava Tyrše [About the influence of H. Taine on M. T.]. Tyršův sborník 16 (1935) 1–24.

<sup>20</sup> Taine's *Philosophie de l'Art* consisted of a series of lectures he gave at the Beaux Arts school in Paris. Tyrš translated one chapter as: O podstatě díla uměleckého [On the essence of a work of art]. In: O umění 1 (1932) 11–36 [Originally published: Ženská biblioteka (1873)]. Tyrš's own piece was: O podmínkách vývoje a zdatu činnosti umělecké. In: O umění 1 (1932) 37–74 [Originally published: Máj (1872)].

<sup>21</sup> [Emphasis in original] Tyrš: O podmínkách 48.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>23</sup> Tyrš, Miroslav: O slohu gotickém: podmínky historické, myšlenky konstruktivní, rozbor estetický [About the Gothic style: historical conditions, construction concepts, aesthetic analysis]. In: O umění 2 (1934) 196 [Originally published 1881]. Tyrš expressed similar sentiments in his inaugural lecture at the university: O významu studia dějin starého umění

The concepts of Taine and Darwin brought Tyrš away from the abstract aesthetics of the German romantic school to the more scientific approaches of French and English scholarship<sup>24</sup>. He was not alone in adopting these new trends. Contemporary German art history, especially that pioneered by the Prague German scholar, Anton Springer, described as the "most wide-ranging of art historians," was also moving in the same direction, and undoubtedly had a profound influence on Tyrš's thought<sup>25</sup>.

Writings on aesthetics were more or less expected from art scholars in Tyrš's day, and he obliged with an 1873 article entitled "On the Laws of Composition in the Visual Arts," which belied both his Herbartian training and his empirical bent<sup>26</sup>. Following the arguments of his former professor, Robert Zimmermann, that artistic judgments may not be abstract, but rather must rest on concrete phenomena, Tyrš developed an aesthetic system based on the five rules of consistency, proportion, harmony, distinctiveness, and clarity. He concluded that genius was not arbitrary, rather in an argument which characteristically invoked natural science:

In nature we meet calm and storm, wind and rain and many other changes, and naive thought did not realize for thousands of years that these were subject to the rule of laws, ... It is similar in the realm of art. As in nature, where scientific thought first penetrated to find these truths, so also here only the experienced eye can penetrate from the function to the law, and at the same time arrive at the recognition that true genius does not lie in arbitrariness, but rather that all genius carries a sense of laws ... We can even say that the higher the form of artistic creation, the more laws are manifested in it<sup>27</sup>.

Under the influence of these rules, Tyrš and his wife, who worked with him on artistic projects, systematically measured art, using a special ruler prepared for this

---

orientálního [On the importance of study of ancient near eastern art]. In: *O umění 1* (1932) 101–118 [Originally published: *Časopis musea království českého* (1883)]. Tyrš's Sokol philosophy is analyzed in Claire E. Nolte: 'Our Task, Direction and Goal': the Development of the Sokol National Program to World War I. In: *Vereinswesen und Geschichtspflege in den böhmischen Ländern*. München 1986, 123–138.

<sup>24</sup> Novák, Mirko: Česká estetika od Palackého po dobu současnou [Czech aesthetics from Palacký to the present day]. Praha 1941, 79. One scholar credits Tyrš with creating a Czech "sociology of art." Pospíšil: *Sociální filozofie* 225–237.

<sup>25</sup> This description of Springer is in Michael Podro: *The Critical Historians of Art*. New Haven 1982, xxvi. Springer was a Prague German whose support for Czech national causes in 1848 caused him to lose his position at the university. Turning away from politics, he became the leading art scholar of his day, holding posts at universities in Bonn, Strasbourg, and Leipzig. While Czech scholars including Tyrš condemned him as a national renegade, they could not escape his influence. His work is the subject of Anděla Horová: Anton Heinrich Springer. In: *Āpitoly z českého dějepisumu umění 1*: 123–137. See also, Chádraba: Tyrš 167.

<sup>26</sup> Tyrš, Miroslav: O zákonech komposice v umění výtvarném. In: *O umění 1* (1932) 119–164 [Originally published: *Světotozr* (1873)]. Originating from a lecture Tyrš had given at the Art Alliance, this piece was intended to be part of a larger work on artistic theory, which was never completed, in part because the publisher ran out of money for illustrations. Tyršová, Renata: *Předmluva* [Foreword]. In: *O umění 1* (1932) 4.

<sup>27</sup> Tyrš : O zákonech 122–123. He applied these aesthetic rules to an analysis of Sokol gymnastics. Tyrš, Miroslav: *Tělocvik v ohledu estetickém* [Gymnastics from an aesthetic point of view]. Sokol 3 (1873) 2–3, 9–10, 17–19, 25–26, 33–35, 57–58, 65–66, 121–123, 160–163. See also: Miroslav Tyrš a jeho místo v dějinách české pedagogiky [M. T. and his place in Czech pedagogy]. Praha 1989, 43.

purpose. Tyrš even created a table of categories for his wife to use when viewing art, to assist her in determining its aesthetic value<sup>28</sup>. Using this approach, Tyrš concluded that Raphael had been the greatest of all painters, while other great artists, among them Michelangelo, had fallen short by violating the "rules"<sup>29</sup>.

Tyrš moved away from this aesthetic dogmatism in his second and final work on aesthetics, "On the Law of Convergence in Artistic Creation"<sup>30</sup>. Published in 1880, it demonstrated how several years of work and study in the field had brought him to reconsider his view of art, especially in regard to Michelangelo, whose work he observed first-hand during the year he had spend convalescing in Italy. Tyrš argued that art was the product, not of laws, but of an idea, a single creative concept, which made all elements of the work converge toward a single goal, adjust to a single *a priori* artistic idea<sup>31</sup>. Connecting this idea to his notion of historical development, he concluded that art evolved from a primitive stage of centripetal development to a time of artistic flowering dominated by convergence, and ended in eclecticism, when the art of the period lost its organic character.

Tyrš's aesthetics were neither particularly original nor completely consistent, yet despite varying emphases over time, certain basic themes endured, among them his admiration for classical culture and belief in evolutionary law<sup>32</sup>. His classicism, however, did not extend to endorsing the practice of copying the work of ancient artists, as was done in the art academies of his days, rather he maintained:

New times seek new forms of art ... To place modern art above ancient art and to speak in *this sense* about progress in art is also nonsense. Art is not science, where old opinions are replaced by new ones, where there is constant progress and never a final, perfect state. In this lies the grandeur of a truly artistic work, that it has absolute value without regard for all that has gone before or what could follow after. Homer did not overshadow Shakespeare, Praxiteles stands alongside Polyclitus, and Phidias is not diminished because Raphael came after him<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Žákavec, František: O umění a umělcích [On art and artists]. In: Paní Renáta Tyršová. Památník na počest jejích sedmdesátých narozenin. Praha 1926, 18. Tyrš had been Renata Fügnerová's tutor and had taught her art and aesthetics. After their marriage in 1872, she became his assistant, collecting materials and even writing drafts of articles and lectures. One such instance is recounted in Tyršová: Tyrš 3:63.

<sup>29</sup> Tyrš criticized Michelangelo's statue of the captured slave on the grave of Pope Julius II for violating his aesthetic rule of clarity. Tyrš: O zákonech 128–129.

<sup>30</sup> Tyrš, Miroslav: O zákonu konvergence při tvoření uměleckém. In: O umění 1 (1932) 165–206 [Originally published: Květy (1880).]

<sup>31</sup> Tyrš: O zákonu konvergence 206. Although Tyrš was an anti-Wagnerian who believed music had declined after Mozart, his idea was similar to the neoromantic concept of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. His theory is discussed in Otakar Hostinský: Miroslav Tyrš a umění [M. T. and art]. In: Vzpomínky na dr. Mir. Tyrše. Ed. by L. Jandásek. Praha 1934, 8. – Chadraba: Tyrš 167; Novák: Česká estetika 94; and Švácha: Historikové 149.

<sup>32</sup> Novák: Česká estetika 95, and Chadraba: Tyrš 163. In an article on Tyrš, the Czech positivist Josef Tvrđý described his philosophy as "syntheticism." Tvrđý, Josef: Jest filosofie Tyršova pozitivismem? [Is Tyrš's philosophy positivism?]. Tyršův sborník 1 (1920) 5–13.

<sup>33</sup> [Emphasis in original.] M. Tyrš to Renata Fügnerová, December 12, 1870, quoted in Tyršová: Tyrš 1:110–111. See also, Antika a česká kultura 467; and Tyrš: O zákonu konvergence 206.

Believing nationalism to be the ruling idea, the animating spirit, of his own world, he made its propagation fundamental to his work in the Sokol as well as in the field of art. For Tyrš, all great art was national art, which infused the nation with higher moral values and saved it from the corruption of materialism, as he explained in the introduction to an unfinished work on Raphael:

The question is not, as in earlier times, merely that love of art is satisfying as an inner and ennobling impulse, rather it now concerns the *health and harmony of the entire machinery of society*, which it must rescue from the moral harm that results when art is solely ruled by the struggle for material gain, . . . We may not be thoughtless, we may not think, speak, take pen in hand, without the thought being at the same time a fortress, the word a weapon, the letters an army; however, the more eternal, deeper, and universal we become, the more we fulfill our task, we carry out our duty to humanity and to our nation<sup>34</sup>.

Tyrš's fiery rhetoric is characteristic of his conception of nationalism, which had been forged in the fires of the Revolution of 1848 he had witnessed as a youth. He brought the romanticism and idealism of that era to all his work for Czech causes.

Tyrš's most enduring achievements in the field of art grew out of his efforts to inspire a Czech national art. Applying the practical organizational talent he had employed to build the Sokol movement, Tyrš set out to advance the national art, using his position as an art expert to draw attention to Czech artists and their work. He first set forth proposals for reform in a speech at the Art Alliance in 1872, but they went unheeded in the economic depression that engulfed Central Europe following the crash of the Vienna stock market in 1873. Economic recovery and the accession of the more Slavophile government of Count Eduard Taaffe in 1879 brought better times, and Tyrš delivered a renewed call for support of the national art in a speech at the Art Alliance in that year<sup>35</sup>. In these speeches, Tyrš outlined a broad-based program to expand awareness of art in the national community through lectures, exhibits, illustrated journals and a network of art clubs, and to improve the training of local artists, by scholarships for study abroad and other means. It is indicative of his modern sensibilities that he rejected the current practice of sending art students to Italy for study in favor of sending them to more contemporary centers of art, such as Paris or Munich<sup>36</sup>. Tyrš worked to realize his programs for Czech art in the Art Alliance, where he served in a variety of functions and became personally involved in the careers of young Czech artists, some of whom, such as the painter František Ženíšek and the sculptor Bohuslav

<sup>34</sup> [Emphasis in original] Tyrš, Miroslav: Raphael Santi a díla jeho [Raphael Santi and his works]. In: O umění 2 (1934) 214f. [Unfinished partial manuscript dated 1873].

<sup>35</sup> The 1872 speech appeared as: O podmínkách vývoje. See note 22 above. The 1879 speech was later published as: O prostředcích k povznesení uměleckých poměrů našich [On the means to improve our artistic conditions]. In: O umění 1:75–89 [Originally published: Květy (1879)]. Tyrš issued a similar call for renewal in the Sokol movement in 1879, which had also declined in the crisis of the 1870s. Tyrš, Miroslav: O příčinách upadání a prostředcích k obživení jednot sokolských [On the causes of the decline and the means to revive Sokol clubs]. Sokol (1881) 21–22, 29–30, 41–42, 51–52, 57–58, 65–66, 85–86, 101–102.

<sup>36</sup> Tyrš: O prostředcích k povznesení 78. Some sources mistakenly assert that Tyrš opposed sending Czech artists to Germany for study. For differing points of view, see Josef Bartoš: Miroslav Tyrš: studie kritická [M. T.: a critical study]. Praha 1916, 50; and Hostinský: Tyrš 77.



Šnirch, were also members of the Prague Sokol<sup>37</sup>. The leading Czech artist of the period, the sculptor Josef Myslbek, acknowledged Tyrš's influence in a letter to his friend and fellow artist, Vojtěch Hynais, declaring, "it was Tyrš, who made me what I am today!" and other artists echoed similar sentiments<sup>38</sup>.

Tyrš's involvement with artistic projects occurred at a time when the horizons of Czech art had begun to expand. In addition to the rising interest in contemporary art that was taking place throughout Europe at this time, the national movement in the Bohemian Lands had spawned an enthusiasm for monuments and grandiose public buildings which called forth the talents of young Czech artists and made Prague an artistic center<sup>39</sup>. The emergence of a Czech bourgeoisie interested in displaying both its wealth and national consciousness provided a new stratum of patrons and collectors that art galleries, like that of Mikuláš Lehmann, sought to exploit<sup>40</sup>. Recognizing the potential of this new and growing market, Tyrš encouraged the Czech bourgeoisie to value the work of Czech artists over that of more established German artists.

Believing art criticism to be one of the most effective means to improve public taste, Tyrš made his work in this field the cornerstone of his efforts, a goal he summarized in his inaugural lecture at the Prague Technical College:

The more perceptive and critical the public becomes, the more broadly the attitude spreads, the higher the art of the time, the art of the nation, will be raised. It is a highly desirable goal. I would only wish that I may be able to contribute to it with my modest talents<sup>41</sup>.

Assailing "the time . . . when our papers praised everything, without exception, that was Czech," he sought to impose a more critical approach to the visual arts, such as he believed had already occurred in the fields of literature and music<sup>42</sup>. He found a broad forum for his efforts, writing a regular column on art for the Czech cultural journal *Osvěta*, which he had helped found, and also contributing articles to numerous other publications, including *Světovzor*, the only Czech periodical with illustrations, as well as *Zlatá Praha*, *Ruch*, *Květy*, *Máj*, and *Lumír*<sup>43</sup>. His reading public increased drama-

<sup>37</sup> An overview of the work of the Art Alliance at this time is F. Tučný: *Dějiny výtvarného odboru* [History of the visual arts division]. In: *Padesát let Umělecké besedy, 1863–1913*. Ed. by Hanuš Jelínek. Praha 1913, 3–75.

<sup>38</sup> J. Myslbek to V. Hynais, 1884, quoted in František Žákavec: *K věrnému přátelství Hynaise s Myslbekem: úsek 1881–1884: léta vyzdobování Národního divadla* [About the friendship of Hynais and Myslbek: the period 1881–1884, the years of decorating the National Theater]. In: *Sborník k 70. narozeninám Karla B. Mádlá*. Praha 1929, 244. A testimonial from the sculptor Bohuslav Šnirch is: *Přátelská vzpomínka* [A friendly remembrance]. In: *Vzpomínky na Tyrše* 145–150.

<sup>39</sup> Poche, Emanuel: *Úvodem* [Introduction]. In: *Praha národního probuzení*. By Emanuel Poche, et al. Praha 1980, 24–28; and Hostinský, Otakar: *Umělecký ruch v národě Českém za posledních padesát let* [Artistic activity in the Czech nation in the last fifty years]. *Almanach České akademie císaře Františka Josefa pro vědy, slovesnost a umění* 9 (1899) 155.

<sup>40</sup> This trend is illustrated in Zdeněk Hojda: *Kdo nakupoval na výstavách krasoumné Jednoty?* [Who bought at the exhibits of the Art Union?]. In: *Město v české kultuře* 133–153. On the role of the Lehmann gallery, see *Praha*: *Dobrou noc* 509–511.

<sup>41</sup> Tyrš: *O způsobu a významu* 100.

<sup>42</sup> Tyrš: *O prostředcích k povznesení* 83.

<sup>43</sup> *Osvěta* means "Culture"; *Světovzor*, "World Horizon"; *Zlatá Praha*, "Golden Prague"; *Květy*, "Flowers"; and *Ruch*, "Activity." *Máj* [May] was the journal of the Art Alliance, and

tically in 1881, when he replaced Jan Neruda as art critic for the Czech daily, *Národní listy*<sup>44</sup>. Inventing terminology for his work, just as he had earlier created Czech gymnastic terms, he brought Czech art criticism to a higher level, as the art critic, Karel Mádl, later acknowledged:

Tyrš was the herald of Czech art, of national art, and because of his specialized education – he was the first art critic not just out of amateur interest or dilettantism, but rather from vocation, education, and knowledge<sup>45</sup>.

The 1870s, when Tyrš began his work, was a time of crisis in Czech art, when the traditional art establishment in Prague was confronted with the challenge of new trends from abroad. The old struggle between the art taught in the Prague Art Academy, which emphasized drawing skills according to classical models, and the so-called “independents” like Josef Mánes, who rejected this narrow focus, had declined. In its place a new trend of salon art, born in the Paris art market and geared to appeal to a mass audience, challenged the dominance of the academy. The new styles and trends of art which emerged out of this struggle paved the way for the emergence of modernism at the end of the century, for despite its constraints in bending to public taste, salon art pioneered the concept of originality, the pivotal artistic definition of modern art<sup>46</sup>. To resolve this conflict between an aesthetic ideal only insufficiently embodied in the academic tradition and the creative individualism appropriated by salon art, Tyrš emphasized nationalism as a form of originality, seeking in this way to protect Czech artists from the danger of artistic fads by establishing them in a tradition, while still encouraging them to explore new trends<sup>47</sup>.

The danger was indeed great. Vienna was in the thrall of the dazzling but banal art of Hans Makart, while Munich celebrated the sentimental style of the Bohemian German artist Gabriel Max. Tyrš rejected both Maxism and Makartism, along with other more enduring trends, as his remarks on the emotionalism of artists like Delacroix illustrates:

It also must be said that neither in literature, nor in painting, are French creations completely genuine in their crude peculiarities. Blood, dead bodies, all the horrors of the earth, of hell, of

---

the title *Lumír* was derived from a hero in one of the Czech Manuscript forged by the Romantic poet, Václav Hanka.

<sup>44</sup> Tyrš had contributed occasional articles to *Národní listy* before, but had not been its regular critic because of his connection to the Young Czech party, which backed the paper. By 1881, however, he was no longer involved in politics, and Neruda himself recognized the need for a column on art written by an expert. Tyršová: Tyrš 3:64.

<sup>45</sup> Mádl, Karel B.: M. Tyrš v ‘Národních listech’ [M. T. in *Národní listy*]. In: Půl století Národních listů. Praha 1911, 136. See also Mádl, Karel B.: Miroslav Tyrš; Kritik (1901) [M. T.; critic (1901)]. In: Výběr z kritických projevů a drobných spisů. Praha 1959, 26.

<sup>46</sup> The traditional argument that this period was a long, quiet intermezzo between the classical era of Czech painting, exemplified by Mánes and his generation, and the modern art which burst onto the scene at the end of the century, is challenged by Prah: Dobrou noc 507. The opposing point of view is in Eva Reitharová: Malířství [Painting]. In: Praha národního probuzení 395.

<sup>47</sup> German artists, likewise threatened by the new trends from France, responded with an “Old Germanic” style of art. Nipperdey, Thomas: Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918. München 1990, 696; and Prah: Dobrou noc 513–514.

land and sea ... – even clothed and named in various ways as beauties and interesting episodes – they are only means to lure the public and to increasingly work on their fevered imagination”<sup>48</sup>.

He also condemned the new critical realism of artists like Gustave Courbet, arguing that it violated the law of convergence by copying, not creating: “Naturalism is not art, ... it degenerates art, conventionalism makes art decline and die”<sup>49</sup>. Having little appreciation for contemporary efforts to expand the definition of art in new directions, Tyrš clung to the traditional perception that art should edify and instruct, and reflect society and its values, especially nationalism.

Tyrš founded his belief that “all original and significant art was always national art” on aesthetic grounds, as his remarks to the editor of the Czech periodical *Osvěta* demonstrate: “What I write is my completely *scholarly* conviction, I do not look at art from the point of view of impartial patriotism; I am a patriot *in art* only out of consideration of my aesthetic convictions”<sup>50</sup>. Attempting to define Czech art at a time when its existence was challenged by German scholars, he urged artists to go beyond mere copying of themes and costumes:

*The national character does not exist in materials, rather in ideas.* Italian art demonstrates this very clearly, emphatic even for those, who do not want to know about national art, even for those, who find national art in the *mere* selection of *subjects*, which portray scenes from Czech life or history in completely foreign forms, which have been learned and borrowed from elsewhere. In this true and higher sense we have had so far only one great national artist – Josef Mánes<sup>51</sup>.

Tyrš “discovered” Mánes at a time when the artist, who had died in 1871, had been largely forgotten<sup>52</sup>. From an artistic family, Mánes had awakened to a Czech national

<sup>48</sup> Tyrš, Miroslav: Jaroslav Čermák: životopis a rozbor esthetický [J. C.: biography and esthetic analysis]. In: *O umění* 4 (1936) 14–15 [Originally published: *Osvěta* (1878–1879)], 37. Tyrš expressed his opinions on contemporary art and artists in Miroslav Tyrš: Dětské kartony Mánesovy [Mánes's drawings of children]. In: *O umění* 5 (1936) 5; ‘V létě’: Obraz H. Makarta [Summertime: a picture by H. Makart]. In: *O umění* 6 (1937) 28–30; and Makart a jeho Abundantie [Makart and his Abundantia]. In: *O umění* 5 (1936) 105–108. See also Bartoš: Tyrš 58; Praha: Dobrou noc 514 and 516; and editorial note in: *O umění* 4 (1936) 8.

<sup>49</sup> Tyrš: Čermák: životopis 14. He called the work of Courbet and the French artist, Alexandre Cabanel a “product of crude materialism and enervated elegance, which is represented in the realm of art by these two equally talented and equally superficial artists.” *Ibid.*, 41. See also: Antika a česká kultura 466; and Šváb: Historikové 149.

<sup>50</sup> Tyrš: Čermák: životopis 9. [Emphasis in original] M. Tyrš to V. Vlček, n. d. [1876], quoted in Tyršová: Tyrš 3:47. Tyrš's letter to Vlček concerned the controversy over the extent of foreign influence in Czech literature that divided the Czech intelligentsia between the rival journals of Ruch and Lumír in the 1870s.

<sup>51</sup> M. Tyrš to F. Zákrejs, Sept. 12, 1876, quoted in František Zákrejs: Upomínky na Miroslava Tyrše [Reminiscences of M. T.]. In: *Vzpomínky na Tyrše* 185; and Tyršová: Tyrš 3:46. A respected German art historian in Prague, Professor Woltmann, declared in a speech to the German student club Concordia in 1876 that all Bohemian art had been German. The young Czech artist Mikuláš Aleš spent four days in jail for participating in the demonstrations against Woltmann which followed. Dvořáková, Zora: Když ještě nebyli slavní: Nástup výtvarné generace Národního divadla [Before they were famous: the emergence of the artistic generation of the National Theater]. Praha 1988, 133; and Tyršová: Tyrš 3:56.

<sup>52</sup> Mádl: Tyrš; kritika 26.

consciousness during the revolutionary year of 1848, and he subsequently traveled through Slovakia and Moravia sketching villagers to develop a "Slavic type" for his art. Tyrš made Mánes's work a model for Czech national art, arguing that he had created "our ideal type, not only in the lines of the face and the shape of the body, but also in every movement, in each stirring of thought, even in things which at a glance seem to be peripheral and secondary"<sup>53</sup>. He especially praised Mánes's illustrations for an edition of the Czech Manuscripts, which the philologist Václav Hanka claimed to have discovered at Králové Dvůr [Queen's Court]. The selection of Mánes as illustrator over the more famous Gustave Doré had been controversial at the time, and Tyrš characteristically invoked national arguments to defend it:

Only that artist, who alone being from our Czech blood, who has studied it in its reality with such industry and endurance, was capable of drawing such graceful and ingenious sketches for its most beautiful poem . . .<sup>54</sup>

Among living artists, Tyrš singled out the work of the painter, Jaroslav Čermák, who lived and worked in Paris, as a model for young artists to emulate. From a Czech nationalist family which claimed descent from the great Hussite general, Jan Žižka, Čermák had concentrated on Hussite themes in his early paintings, some of which were only exhibited in Prague over the objections of Catholic church leaders<sup>55</sup>. His later work on the more contemporary theme of the struggle of the South Slavs, especially the Montenegrins, against the Turks, suited the taste for exotic art among the buying public. Between his travels to Montenegro and the demands of his growing fame in France, where he was elevated to the Legion of Honor, Čermák only visited Prague once before his premature death in 1878 at age 48<sup>56</sup>. Nevertheless, word of his success penetrated to the Bohemian capital, and Tyrš declared him an example of an artist who had maintained the purity of his national vision despite the temptations of modern artistic trends: "He remained a Czech, he remained a Slav in his heart, he remained it in all of his work"<sup>57</sup>.

Both Mánes and Čermák combined realism with an idealism of expression that Tyrš believed to be characteristically Czech, and both explored themes from the Czech

<sup>53</sup> Tyrš, Miroslav: Stálá výstava Besedy umělecké [Permanent exhibit of the Art Alliance]. In: O umění 3 (1935) 24. [Originally published: Národní listy March 11 and 12, 1873].

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 24–25. Although Jan Neruda had argued that Doré would attract an international buying public, the publishers chose Mánes instead. Ultimately, a lack of subscribers doomed this edition, and only the first volume appeared in 1860. See editor's footnote in: O umění 3:21n; and Chadraha: Tyrš 164.

<sup>55</sup> Blažíčková, Naděžda: Jaroslav Čermák a historická malba [J. C. and historic painting]. In: Historické vědomí v českém umění 19. století. Praha 1981, 176–185.

<sup>56</sup> Čermák had refused an offer to be the director of the Art Academy in Prague in 1874. Praha 1: Dobrou noc 510.

<sup>57</sup> Tyrš: Čermák: životopis 43. Tyrš had published only one article on Čermák in a Russian journal, an analysis of his painting, "The Wounded Montenegrin," when the artist died suddenly in Paris. Called upon to speak at a memorial service for Čermák at the Art Alliance, he began to research the artist's life and work, publishing a biographical article on the artist that was intended to be the first part of a longer analysis. It is reprinted as *ibid.*, 12–118 [Originally published: Osvěta 1878 and 1879].



past, Mánes in his drawings for the Manuscripts and his Hussite sketches, and Čermák through large-scale paintings of scenes from Hussite history<sup>58</sup>. Increasingly viewed as contrived and melodramatic in Western Europe, historical art continued to flourish in the fertile soil of Central European romanticism. Joined in the Bohemian Lands to the ideology of the national revival, both the art itself, and the criticism of it, were tools in the national fight. Conservatives sought to ban Hussite paintings from exhibits, and critics like Jan Neruda called for the creation of a Czech historical style, while condemning similar efforts from German artists<sup>59</sup>. Tyrš defended Czech historical art as a "national genre," explaining in a critique of a painting by the Polish master of historical art, Jan Matejko, that Czechs and Poles place greater value on history than other societies:

Matejko is not therefore some erring creature wandering belatedly on a road already abandoned by others, but instead the leader on a natural and celebrated path, one of the venerable soothsayers of the great Slavic future, in which we always, despite all adversity, have hope<sup>60</sup>.

Searching for a comparable artist among the Czechs, Tyrš found Václav Brožík, whose career he had followed from his first exhibit, as a young unknown, at the Lehmann gallery in 1874. Like Čermák, Brožík lived much of his life in Paris, where he enjoyed fame and success, but unlike Čermák, he kept in contact with Prague artistic circles and frequently exhibited in the galleries there. Reluctant to rely on commissions, the traditional underpinnings of historical art, he adopted more modern means of self-promotion, employing an agent to put his paintings on traveling exhibits and generating income from the entrance fees. Although aware that Brožík lacked Čermák's and Matejko's technical mastery, Tyrš nevertheless praised him, as he had Čermák, for maintaining his Slavic consciousness despite working abroad: "Even Brožík is and remains a Slav, he has stayed a Czech artist and will remain so in all its creativity, in all its youthful strength, in whatever he presents to us"<sup>61</sup>. Tyrš's hopeful praise was misplaced, for Brožík was not an artist who sacrificed personal gain or suffered for the national cause, as it could be argued Mánes had done. Despite his penchant for traditional themes, Brožík, like Čermák before him, was a creature of the modern art world, who geared his art to satisfy the demands of the market. Nor was he the herald of a glorious future of Czech historical art, for by the end of the century Czech artists had abandoned the artificial sentimentality and heroic posturing of traditional historicism in favor of more subtle and abstract expressions of historical consciousness<sup>62</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> Mádl: Tyrš; kritik 27.

<sup>59</sup> Praha 1, Roman: Česká historická malba [Czech historical painting]. In: Historické vědomí 203 and 206; and Pešek, Jiří: Společenská spotřeba historismu v Praze 19. století [Social uses of historicism in Prague in the 19th century]. In: Historické vědomí 221–222.

<sup>60</sup> Tyrš, Miroslav: Jan Matejko a jeho "Bathory" [Jan Matejko and his "Bathory"]. In: O umění 3 (1935) 80 [Originally published: Osvěta (1873)]. See also, Tyrš: Čermák: životopis 13.

<sup>61</sup> Tyrš, Miroslav: Rozhledy v umění výtvarném [Overview of art]. In: O umění 3 (1935) 133. [Originally published Osvěta (1879)]. Tyrš was highly critical of Brožík's "St. Iris." Tyrš: Rozhledy v umění výtvarném. In: O umění 3 (1935) 92–99 [Originally published: Osvěta (1874)].

<sup>62</sup> Kotlík, Jiří: Historické vědomí v české malbě v branách 20. století [Historical consciousness in Czech painting at the opening of the 20th century]. In: Historické vědomí 21.

Just as Brožík's work represented the end of an era of historical art, the National Theater to which he contributed was the artistic culmination of mid-century Czech romantic nationalism. Built in a neo-Renaissance style intended to identify its bourgeois supporters with their predecessors in the Italian city-states, it has been described as "the most compelling expression and impassioned consummation of the struggle of Czech historicism in the 19th century"<sup>63</sup>. The architect, Josef Zíték, realized Tyrš's concept of convergence in a "*Gesamtkunstwerk*" of architecture, painting, and sculpture, that was the final stage in the evolution of a national culture which had begun in pre-March.

Because of the importance of the project, the National Theater has given its name to all Czech artists of the period, who made up the first coherent and truly modern generation in the history of Czech art, which until then had known only a succession of dispersed and often isolated individuals. Tyrš was the official spokesperson of this generation, serving on artistic juries for painting and sculpture contests, and reviewing and criticizing the work in his columns on Czech art<sup>64</sup>. He played a central role in several artistic decisions, requesting the sculptor Anton Wagner to modify his winning entry for the statue of Zábaj, a character from the Manuscripts, to give it "Slavic features," and intervening in the controversy between the painters František Ženíšek and Mikuláš Aleš over the attribution and execution of their joint proposal for the theater's foyer<sup>65</sup>. In this last case, Tyrš had suggested the sources of dramatic art, Myth, History, Life, and Music, as the theme of their joint project, but he was later reluctant to entrust the younger and less experienced Aleš with the execution of the paintings. Not only was he closer to Ženíšek, an experienced gymnast and long-time member of the Prague Sokol, but, along with others on the artistic committee, he favored Ženíšek's careful academic style over the intuitive approach of the more talented Aleš, whose dark, brooding pictures of Czech mythology clashed with the vibrant interior of Zíték's neo-Renaissance temple and violated Tyrš's principle of convergence. In the end, Ženíšek attempted with little success to realize Aleš's concepts in the beautiful style which the tastes of the time demanded<sup>66</sup>.

The fire that destroyed much of the new theater in August 1881 opened the way for a more modern conception of the building and its purpose<sup>67</sup>. Zíték had drawn up his plans amid the national enthusiasm of the 1860s with the intention of creating the most beautiful building of the day. In the sixteen years between conception and realization, the national movement had traveled from ritualism to realism, and the new architect brought in to replace Zíték, his student Josef Schulz, modified the original design to provide more practical amenities, like rehearsal rooms, greater seating capacity, and more modern accommodations. In similar fashion, the restructured theater committee adopted a new approach toward replacing the damaged artwork, abandoning the

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>64</sup> Tyrš's criticisms of the art in the National Theater are in: O umění vols. 5 and 6.

<sup>65</sup> Dvořáková: Když ještě nebyli slavní 116.

<sup>66</sup> The controversy and its resolution are analyzed in: Antika a česká kultura 434; Dvořáková: Když ještě nebyli slavní 199–201; and Reitharová: Malířství 397–402.

<sup>67</sup> The theater had been opened temporarily in honor of Crown Prince Rudolf's wedding trip to Prague in June 1881, and then closed pending completion of the final work. The fire broke out on August 13, 1881, ignited by materials left behind on the roof.

competitive process in favor of inviting prominent Czech artists, such as Václav Brožík or the landscape painter, Julius Mařák, who lived and worked in Vienna, to contribute. The later works in the National Theater demonstrate the new trends that were penetrating the Czech art world, from the paintings of Vojtěch Hynais, executed in the style of French luminism, to Mařák's scenes of Czech historic places according to the Barbizon school of landscape art. In praising Hynais's work as Czech in spirit, Tyrš demonstrated the evolution of his own artistic standards beyond the narrow confines of historicism and classicism<sup>68</sup>.

Tyrš's reviews of these later additions of the National Theater were among his final contributions to the field of art. Although he had little appreciation for many of the new trends that were sweeping the art world in his day, including early impressionism, he nevertheless paved the way for their introduction in Prague by opening the window of Czech art to the West. Just as the generation of the National Theater gave way to a more cosmopolitan set of artists, so also Tyrš's cultural historical style of art history was discredited by the newer positivist school around Jaroslav Goll, and his academic-rationalist approach to art criticism was abandoned by younger critics, who responded to art more impressionistically and less dogmatically. Even his romantic nationalism appeared increasingly anachronistic in the modern society that was emerging in the Bohemian Lands. Looking back from the turn of the century at the generation of the National Theater, the art critic Karel Mádl concluded that Tyrš, "like them, was a product of his time, and therefore like their work, his words are documents of the dominant ideas and conceptions of that time"<sup>69</sup>.

The triumph of cosmopolitan directions in Czech art did not represent the defeat of national art, but rather its emancipation from the restrictions of an earlier era. National art in Central Europe gradually abandoned pompous historical canvases in favor of smaller genre scenes of daily life, which Tyrš and his generation had regarded as a form of low art, valuable only as "cultural historical" material<sup>70</sup>. For example, Tyrš had praised Mánes' well known paintings and drawings of Moravian and Slovak peasants, but as "a study of the Czech type . . . [which] would provide a deep, true and original foundation for Czech historical art"<sup>71</sup>. The success of these more subtle styles of national art at the end of the century, however, demonstrated the emergence of a mature

<sup>68</sup> Overlooking the obvious French sources for Hynais's work, Tyrš argued that it fulfilled the aesthetic criterion of "harmony" between the theme and its presentation, which he considered a speciality of Czech art. In similar fashion, he mistakenly described some of Myslbek's work as classical in spirit, when it was actually inspired by contemporary French sculpture. *Antika a česká kultura* 422 and 435; and *Práhl: Dobrou noc* 515.

<sup>69</sup> Mádl: Tyrš; kritik 28.

<sup>70</sup> See, Tyrš's review of a painting of a Czech village. Tyrš, Miroslav: *Obrazy Havránkovy na saloně Lehmannově* [The Havránek pictures in the Lehmann salon]. In: *O umění* 6 (1937) 86 [Originally published *Národní listy*, March 28 & April 3, 1883]; and Tyrš: *O zákonech komposice* 123, n. 2. See also, Dybowski, R.: *Literature, Art and Learning in Poland since 1863*. In: *The Cambridge History of Poland*. Cambridge 1941, 547; Kampis, Antal: *The History of Art in Hungary*. Budapest 1966, 273–276; and Nipperdey: *Deutsche Geschichte* 695–698.

<sup>71</sup> [Emphasis in original] Tyrš, Miroslav: *K výstavě Mánesově* [On the Mánes exhibit]. In: *O umění* 5 (1936) 54. [Originally published: *Národní listy* December 9, 12 and 21, 1881].

and confident national society, whose internationally recognized artists did not have to retreat into the myth, historicism, and pathos of an imagined past to legitimize their claims to national greatness<sup>72</sup>.

---

<sup>72</sup> The escapist tendency in Czech culture is noted in Bedrich Loewenstein: *Theatralik, Historismus, bürgerliche Repräsentation: Aspekte der tschechischen Kultur im 19. Jahrhundert*. BohZ 29 (1988) 15–33.