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Introduction

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In the centre of Prague on the evening of 17 November 1989, a student procession was attacked by police. The procession was to commemorate the date in 1939 when the Nazis closed the Czech universities; the attack was part of a power struggle between two factions in the ruling Communist party. The aim of both was to ensure the continuation of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia; that night saw the beginning of the end.

One student who escaped the attack, which took place on a main boulevard a few yards from the National Theatre, made his way to a suburban fringe theatre. The 'Junior Klub na Chmelnici' is scarcely a theatre; it's a bare hall used as an occasional venue by rock groups, amateur shows, provincial tours and avant-garde performers who were not welcomed by the authorities in central Prague. On the night of 17 November, the student, whose home town was Brno, knew he would find performers from Brno's avantgarde companies Divadlo Na provázku (Theatre on a String) and HaDivadlo (HaTheatre).

The two companies were staging a joint production which they described as a 'living newspaper', *Rozřezání (Break through)*; this 'issue' – so far the first and only – was 'On Democracy'. The show consisted of sketches, poetry, dance, and a short play, a semi-documentary – author uncredited – called *Tomorrow!* about the beginnings of the Czechoslovak state. I had seen a performance the previous October (in the meantime the production had been banned) and been struck by the straightforward, factual treatment of themes which under the Communists had been ideologised, and by the emotion of the audience's response. On 17 November 1989 the response must have been still stronger, for the student came onstage in the course of the performance to describe the drama he had just witnessed in central Prague – quite a scoop for a 'living newspaper'. Other students telephoned their friends in the theatres, and by the next afternoon a meeting had been convened in the Realistické divadlo (Realist Theatre) at which actors from the Prague theatres decided to cancel further performances and read to the audiences a manifesto issued by the students and theatre people.

It was not by chance that the first people to support the students were the actors and their colleagues from the theatres. A network of theatre people who opposed the Communist régime had come together over the previous two years – a network which ranged from such 'official' people as the head of the theatre department in the state literary agency, through the 'semidissident' playwrights Daniela Fischerová and Karel Steigerwald, to the notorious jailbird Václav Havel. Stealthy gatherings took

place in the smoke-filled offices of the Realist Theatre. At meetings of the Union of Theatre Artists, dramaturges risked their careers by demanding the inclusion in the repertoire of plays by forbidden playwrights. (Goaded to a defensive reply at one of these meetings, one bureaucrat found his unguarded words recorded and published in a samizdat newspaper; cf *Plays International*, April 1989.) From the beginning of 1988 the atmosphere was confused and sometimes threatening. In January 1989, when most people still thought it was impossible to stage the work of a Charter 77 signatory, Josef Topol's *End of the Carnival* was revived in the provincial town of Cheb; in June, Topol was led onto the stage of Prague's Vinohrady Theatre to acknowledge the applause at the premiere of his new play, *The Voices of Birds*. And Václav Havel – although under threat of another prison sentence – was everywhere that summer; attending a student revival of Daniela Fischerová's *Dog and Wolf* (banned for the previous ten years) at a cellar theatre in Řeznická Street; taking the lead in a public seminar held on the highly 'official' premises of the Writers' Union (a sleight of hand by the playwrights which did not go unchallenged by the authorities). These were the open manifestations of a new ordering of forces which was barely in place when the secret police precipitated the events of 17 November.

The people from whom the first government of the new era was largely formed – and who held their first meetings on the stages of the Činoherní klub (Drama Club) and the Laterna magika (Magic Lantern) – included a high proportion of theatre workers. Amongst their tasks they had to ensure not only the smooth stage-management of the massive crowds, but also that the content of the meetings engaged the public's interest and understanding. The handling of these spontaneous demonstrations was the culmination of decades of theatre as a subversive force against a totalitarian régime. Afterwards, Petr Oslzlý – *de facto* director of the Theatre on the String and one of the organisers of the spectacles – described how the outdoor demonstrations gave him the impression he was witness to one of the great theatrical performances of ancient Greece.

This unity of actor and action was found not only in Prague but across the country; the 'striking' theatre workers organised themselves into troupes with a mission to spread the news of the extraordinary events in Prague – not only from their own stages, but from improvised platforms in village halls and factory canteens. These stages were almost the only source from which ordinary people could find out what was going on, since the old régime still struggled to keep control over radio, TV and the press.

In the Czech lands, the use of theatre as a didactic tool dates back to the late eighteenth century. There had been a lively theatre tradition in the Middle Ages, when a considerable standard was reached in liturgical plays and sacred farces, but its development was interrupted by the Hussite wars. It was not until the end of the eighteenth century that Czech plays – usually adapted from German originals – began to be performed by amateur groups of Czech patriots. Performances took place at first in inns and halls, and later at matinees and on holidays in the established

theatres. The first permanent public theatre had been built in Prague in 1737, for the performance of Italian opera and German plays; in 1781 Count Nostitz built an opera house known today by its nineteenth-century title, the Stavovské divadlo (Theatre of the Estates). Drama, for the Czech patriots of the early nineteenth-century 'National Revival', was central to their aspirations. Translations into Czech, especially of Shakespeare's plays (already known in Bohemia through performances by travelling English players, but in the eighteenth century translated from German) helped to prove it a language capable of elevated expression. But the first attempts at original Czech plays were for the most part didactic and nationalist.

The situation did not change until the opening of the Prozatimní divadlo (Provisional Theatre) in 1862. Its building was a preparation for the Národní divadlo (National Theatre), a project which had been adopted after the political disappointments of 1848. Now, at last, a permanent repertoire in theatre and opera could be established; the Czechs had no golden age to be nostalgic about, and the actors, musicians and theatre workers knew that it was up to them to create a Czech theatre comparable with the theatres of other European nations. Bedřich Smetana led the opera company, and *The Bartered Bride* was premiered in the Provisional Theatre in 1863; it was Smetana's opera *Libuše*, glorifying the history of the Czech nation, which opened the National Theatre in 1881. (The Czech National Theatre is unique in having been paid for, not by the state or a patron, but by the people themselves.)

The establishment of a permanent professional Czech theatre, opened the way for a new generation of dramatists. In a late emergence of the realist movement, many of them wrote plays in a genre known as the village drama, in which the writers used their knowledge of the traditions and way of life of the Bohemian and Moravian countryside. Plays such as *Maryša* by the Brothers Mrštík and *The Farmer's Woman* by Gabriela Preissová are not only powerful dramas, but vivid evocations of the society of the time, and of the struggle of the nonconformist – especially a woman – against convention. The plays are still unknown to the English-speaking public, except for Preissová's *Her Foster-Daughter* – the source for Janáček's opera *Jenůfka* (premiered in his native Brno in 1904). Czech opera also prospered, and by the turn of the century opera and drama performances at the Czech National Theatre were second to none in Europe.

By this time, there were many other professional Czech language theatres in Prague and the provinces, as well as popular outdoor summer arenas frequented by the working class and country visitors. These were non-didactic theatres, showing spectacle, farce, operetta, and the popular genre of fairy-tale drama. There were also the *šantány* (a Czech version of the *café chantant*) where peripatetic groups would perform songs and sketches sometimes lascivious and sometimes a little subversive – in a room of a pub.

By the turn of the century the Czechs were confident in their cultural identity. They looked beyond Austria-Hungary to other European countries and even America for contacts and exchanges. In music, the work of Smetana and Dvořák was

internationally known; artists such as Alfons Mucha and František Kupka made their name abroad; whilst Czech architects and designers were unique in rethinking cubism as an environment for everyday life. The nationalist cause no longer seemed so critical; and although the literary cabaret came late to Prague, it appealed to the public of the 1900s and 1910s precisely because of its political independence.

Two great directors dominated the Czech theatre in the early twentieth century: Jaroslav Kvapil, who introduced symbolism to the Czech stage; and Karel Hugo Hilar, who introduced just about everything else. Kvapil, himself a poet and dramatist, did not see theatre direction simply as the solving of technical problems, but as the work of an artist, combining the theatrical elements to create a visual and aural experience. Hilar, who seized each new theatrical fashion and made it his own, staged productions which shocked and thrilled Prague audiences. It was under Kvapil and Hilar that (Czech playwrights first attracted international attention – František Langer with *The Outskirts of the City* and *A Camel through a Needle's Eye*, and Karel and Josef Čapek with *R. U. R.* and *The Insect Play*).

However, in the years after the First World War the young avant-garde considered even Hilar's expressionist productions at the National Theatre to be old hat. They saw themselves as part of an international movement and created the Devětsil, in its early years a left-wing group committed to proletarian art, which drew its members from the fine arts and from architecture, from the theatre and from literature. The *Devětsil* developed the idea of an art derived from popular entertainment and everyday life, an art which would relate to the general public through allusion, invention and metaphor, and to which they gave the name poetism. Poetism – 'a poetry not confined to texts, but of the five senses' – was influenced by cubism, futurism and constructivism, and was a forerunner of surrealism. The sort of theatre envisaged by the *Devětsil* owed more to film than to traditional theatre; its material was to be drawn from the world around – from fairs, carnivals and street events. The Liberated Theatre, founded in 1926, staged Apollinaire and Marinetti and Jarry's *Ubu roi*, as well as the young Czech writers of the avant-garde. But it was two student performers who caught the popular audience: Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich who, with the composer Jaroslav Ježek, presented topical revues full of satirical repartee and improvised word play, hot jazz and slow blues. In their early revues V + W showed little interest in politics; but as the power of Hitler and Mussolini increased, they began to take their themes from contemporary events: the Spanish Civil War, the annexation of Austria, Hitler's demands for the Sudetenland.

Another member of the *Devětsil*, E. F. Burian, dreamed of his own left-wing, avant-garde theatre, which he founded in 1933. In Burian's hands a text became a scenario, raw material from which he could fashion a 'many-voiced' drama. His stage was small, with few technical facilities, and economy was a necessity; the acting area was expanded by the dynamic use of different stage levels and of lighting, film and

projection. The productions were assembled like musical compositions; music, dialogue and action flowed like a well-written score. Burian's most innovative

productions were adaptations – Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*, Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. In *War*, a montage of voiceband and dance, Burian used Bohemian folk songs presented in an unfamiliar way to show that the strength and hope of the nation was in its ordinary people. But when the Zhdanov doctrine became the official cultural policy of Communism, Burian's powerfully individual work was condemned by the left-wing critics.

During the 1930s, the Czech theatre became source-material for the Prague structuralists, whose research covered a broad field – linguistics, literature, aesthetics, sociology. In the theatre the structuralists analysed the individual elements which make up a performance, and how they relate to each other and to the audience. The Prague theatre, from the National Theatre to the avant-garde, gave ample illustration of ways in which information could be transferred from one element to another, could be conveyed by setting or by speech, by gesture or by sound.

The Czech lands were occupied by the Nazis in 1939. Voskovec and Werich were already in exile in America, whilst E. F. Burian spent the war in the concentration camps. Although the theatres – unlike the universities – remained open, they were restricted to an increasingly circumscribed repertoire. After the war those who returned from exile and imprisonment threw themselves into a renewed and hectic artistic life.

But the world had changed. It was the start of the cold war, and in February 1948 Czechoslovakia came under Communist control. In the 1920s socialism had offered the artists 'a whirligig, a dazzling fairground, a kaleidoscope of thoughts, a celebration of new understandings, manifestos and struggles'. But in the 1950s culture was too dangerous a weapon to be left in the hands of the artists. The daring avant-garde of the pre war period now endeavoured to conform to the dictates of their lords and masters, and the years which followed the victory of Communism were the most sterile known in the Czech theatre. It was argued that as progressive ideas could now be presented on the main stages, there was no need for satirical or experimental theatre. New plays were expected to deal with the contemporary themes showing the building of socialism, the fight against bourgeois morality, and the salvation of the 'positive hero'. 'Formalism' was the great enemy, so much so that theatre directors were afraid of showing any sign of originality in their productions and adopted the most conventional interpretation. Numerous playwrights, critics, directors and other theatre workers were forced to leave their profession, or chose to leave the country.

And yet, in 1955, from a small cellar bar in the centre of Prague could be heard the sounds of rock-n-roll – 'a daring word, and at that time pronounced in the same breath as the word "imperialism"'. By some oversight on the part of the authorities, an amateur group had begun to draw a popular following to the Reduta bar, reopened after its closure as a place of ill-repute. The original bass player of the group was a young poet and artist called Jiří Suchý, who dreamt of a topical theatre like that of Voskovec and Werich. He formed a partnership with the writer and performer Ivan Vyskočil, creator of the 'text-appeal', and it was the enthusiasm of their

audience which led to the founding in 1958 of the Divadlo Na zábradlí (Theatre on the Balustrade).

Round about the same time, in 1957, the actor-director Otomar Krejča had been appointed to head the drama company at the National Theatre. Krejča aimed at a theatre very different from the approved optimism of socialist realism. With the dramaturge Karel Kraus and the designer Josef Svoboda, he created something like a studio within the National Theatre, a place where writers and actors could try out new ideas and ways of working. Krejča and Kraus sat down with three writers, two of them inexperienced in the theatre: the older František Hrubín, and Milan Kundera, whose *Owners of the Keys* (whilst still conventional in content) caused widespread admiration in 1962 for the originality of its form. The third writer, Josef Topol had been a colleague of Krejča in E. F. Burian's theatre, where *Midnight wind*, a historical drama, had been produced. Now they collaborated on two plays which took a broad view of contemporary life. *Their Day* (1959) shows the passage of twenty-four hours in the community of a small Czech town, where the aspirations of youth struggle against provincial narrow-mindedness. *The End of the Carnival* (1963) is set at the time of the traditional shrovetide festival in a Czech village where, as throughout the country in the 1950s, privately-owned land had been subsumed into a co-operative. It was a familiar setting in socialist realist drama, but the treatment by Topol and Krejča, their portrayal of complex layers of relationships and reactions, was anything but conventional. Both plays used all the resources of a large company and a stage equipped with Svoboda's sophisticated technology.

At the Theatre on the Balustrade, Jiří Suchý's co-founder, Ivan Vyskočil, had engaged a young stage-hand who had been working for a season with Jan Werich. Václav Havel had ambitions to be a playwright, and with Vyskočil co-authored a hit, *Hitch-hike*, based on the cabaret traditions of the small theatres. The series of satirical sketches spoke of contemporary man's dependency on material objects, and of the risks and challenges of a free life. *Hitch-hike* was too popular to go unnoticed by the authorities, who forced Vyskočil's resignation (and kept him under surveillance for the next three decades). In 1962 Jan Grossman was appointed director of the Theatre on the Balustrade, and Václav Havel became his dramaturge. Grossman had been a critic and author who in the 1950s had been banned from publishing. He turned instead to theatre direction, developing his idea of a theatre which did not offer solutions, but which put questions to the audience and challenged them to respond. The repertoire included Czechoslovak premieres of Beckett and Ionesco, adaptations of Jarry's *Ubu rai* and Kafka's *Trial*, as well as plays by contemporary Czech authors. In 1963 Grossman invited Otomar Krejča to direct Havel's *Garden Party*, and in 1965 himself directed Havel's *Memorandum*. If the authorities had been upset by *Hitch-hike*, there was more to disturb them in these two plays. Havel presented onstage a micro-world which, in its parade of hypocritical corruption, was only too painfully familiar. In *The Garden Party*, characters control and manipulate each other by the use of linguistic conventions; in *The Memorandum*, the audience was reminded of Alfred

Jarry's pataphysical machines, structures whose only purpose is to prolong their own activity.

In the mid-1960s Otomar Krejča founded his own company, Divadlo Za branou (Theatre Beyond the Gate). Krejča's earlier experiments with productions using film and stage-machinery now interested him less than long and arduous rehearsal with the group of actors which had followed him from the National Theatre (one of the complaints levelled against Krejča was that he worked too hard, took theatre too seriously, and expected other people to take it seriously too). The leading actors in the company were Jan Tříska and Marie Tomášová, who had been Krejča's Romeo and Juliet at the National Theatre; and it was they for whom the central roles in Josef Topol's *Cat on the Rails*, the play which opened the Theatre Beyond the Gate, were written.

Cat on the Rails is essentially a two-hander, which suited Krejča's wish to work closely with the performers. It was also, in the context of Czech drama, a movement away from the analysis of social themes to a more inward-looking, Chekhovian theatre (Chekhov is a key dramatist in Krejča's theatre). Évi and Věna are a recognisably ordinary couple from Prague on a day's ramble which loses them somewhere near a country railway station, from which they hope to make it back to Prague. Interrupted only by a boy in flight from a local vendetta and his two pursuers, they pass the time with games and reminiscences, until they touch on Évi's longing – the desire for a settled life, for a peace shared with Věna, for a family hearth. But for Věna such peace is no peace at all. The 'hearth' reminds him of an old woman he knew, who destroyed a magnificent historic fireplace to have somewhere to put her cupboard: 'From that time on, "hearth" is a hollow term – like a great many heartwarming words. In due time, they will be joined by "love" when love will have been totally wiped out.' A few days before the premiere of *Cat on the Rails*, Krejča said of Topol in an interview: '... he is convinced that the protagonist of contemporary drama is one who does not swim with the time, who is full of doubt and uncertainty, who is always seeking.'

Following the Russian invasion in 1968, *Cat on the Rails*, like the rest of Topol's plays, was not seen on the Czech stage for twenty years. Topol, like his protagonist, did not 'swim with the time'. For a while he made a living as a translator, until, after he signed Charter 77, that too was forbidden. An English translation of *Cat on the Rails* made in 1966 by Jiří Voskovec (of the famous 1930s' Liberated Theatre) who had been living in America since 1948.

The power struggle taking place in Czechoslovak politics in the mid-1960s was reflected in the energy of Czechoslovak writers and artists. In the wake of the Theatre on the Balustrade and Semafor several new professional theatre companies had started up, and even the established theatres were performing the work of new writers. But these activities came to an end after the invasion of 1968 and the 'normalisation' of the subsequent months. It was comparatively easy to deal with playwrights and critics. Theatres were simply not granted permission to stage any

play by any writer on the black list, domestic or foreign, whilst the specialist theatre magazines were closed down in the spring of 1970. The dynamic activity of the theatre was more difficult to control; the nadir was reached in 1978, when a new Theatre Law made it impossible to set up a new theatre company, or even to close down an existing one.

But unlike the post-1948 period, this was not a time of stagnation in the theatre. In the old days some artists and writers had believed that Communism was the way forward, and efforts were made to conform to the Zhdanov doctrine. Now, even the reform Communists, the 'sixty-eighters' had turned dissident, and were for the most part replaced by bureaucrats who – opportunistically or pragmatically – promoted Communism as the only viable form of government for Czechoslovakia. Whereas in the 1950s artists like Burian had tried to conform to socialist realist principles, in the 1970s and 1980s the 'lords and masters' were forced to suppress or contain the subversive artistic spirit. The Theatre Beyond the Gate was closed and Krejča, after a brief period in a suburban theatre, could only find work abroad. Topol worked as a labourer on the restoration of the Charles Bridge. Grossman was banished to the border town of Cheb. Havel put himself beyond the pale by open protest. Many other talented directors, dramaturges and actors were forbidden to work in Prague (a policy which greatly improved artistic standards in the provinces).

Amongst the writers forbidden to publish was the essayist, novelist and dramatist Ivan Klíma. Two of Klíma's plays had been staged in Prague in the 1960s: *The Castle* at the Divadlo Československé armády (Czechoslovak Army Theatre) and *The Jury* at the Komorní divadlo (Chamber Theatre). In both cases critics pointed to the obvious influence of Franz Kafka, whose work had recently been allowed to reappear; but dramatically, a stronger influence was that of Friedrich Dürrenmatt, an author not yet published in Czechoslovakia. *Games*, which Klíma wrote in 1973, was translated into German and performed in Vienna in 1975. It is an early example of the genre which became extensive over the next fifteen years – samizdat: writing which could not be published officially, was typed in editions of increasingly illegible carbon copies, and discussed in small, private groups.

The setting of *Games* is a party which is a microcosm of the society in which Klíma lived during the early 1970s; a society not as conveniently divided into 'Communists' and 'dissidents' as the West might have imagined, but in which any individual might find that the most mundane decision faced him (or her) with a political or moral dilemma. 'Life forces us to assume certain roles, to fulfil other people's expectations,' wrote Klíma in the programme note to the first production in Vienna. 'In games we fake seriousness. And for a while they allow us to avoid confronting our fate. But finally our true nature glimmers through, and, for a moment, we see our real selves. Sometimes this takes us by surprise, for the nature we catch a glimpse of seems totally unknown to us. Or we notice, to our astonishment, that our true nature doesn't exist any more; our role has absorbed us, transformed us, we have already become a function of it . . .' Later in the decade, as

people grew more skilful at dissimulation, their responses became increasingly cynical. The characters in *Games* are still inexperienced, surprised most of all by their own emotional responses. Irena, who has planned the party, anticipates it as an evening of escapism – a retreat to a lost innocence. But there is an ugly event which cannot quite be put out of mind – the murder of a young girl whose body was disposed of in a refuse cart. There is no bridge back to lost innocence; the games only strip the characters of the conventions which have so far sustained civilised behaviour.

Games was the last play Klíma wrote under the conditions prevailing in totalitarian Czechoslovakia; after that he concentrated on prose and novel-writing. This translation was made in 1989 for Midnight Theatre Company, and directed at the Gate Theatre, London, by Derek Wax in the summer of 1990.

Klíma was one of those who had already made their names before the August of 1968, and who remained on the blacklist unless they publicly recanted. Younger writers were dealt with more subtly by the authorities; there was always the hope that they might prefer the considerable privileges of being an officially approved writer, and avoid the humiliation experienced by their older colleagues. One of the younger writers was Karel Steigerwald, whose tetralogy of plays about the Czech experience (*Period Dances*, *The Tartar Fete*, *The Neapolitan Disease and Foxtrot*) were capriciously banned and released throughout the inconsistent 1980s. Another was Daniela Fischerová, daughter of the composer Jan Fischer, and in 1968 only twenty years old. Fischerová studied at the Film Academy, and subsequently wrote a number of radio and film scripts. In 1979 her first stage play, *Dog and Wolf*, was staged at the Realist Theatre in Prague; after few performances, orders came from the City Council that the play was unsuitable for public performance and should close forthwith. In 1984 Fischerová wrote *Princess T* (Turandot) staged in 1986 in the mining town of Ostrava. In 1987 she completed *Legend* (started in 1981), a version of the Pied Piper story, also staged initially in Ostrava.

Fischerová's three plays belong to a genre typical of the Czech theatre of the 1980s; the historical allegory, the adapting of familiar stories to deal with contemporary moral problems. The action is set against a mythical background – seventeenth-century France, ancient China, medieval Hamelin – overlaid with transparent layers of Central European metaphor. But the themes which run through all three plays – themes of betrayal and of free will – are presented in realistic terms. The characters are faced with concrete situations, which they have to resolve by their own judgement.

The Czech title, literally translated as *The Hour Between Dog and Wolf*, has a double meaning; the hour between dog and wolf is the twilight hour, a time of change and transience, of mutability between one state and another. In the context of the play it is also Villon's choice between the antisocial, lawless existence of the artist and conformity with the establishment. Fischerová takes several moments in time and weaves them onstage into a single 'now', so that at Villon's trial we find present both

the murdered victim, as the counsel for the prosecution, and present-day reporters with all their technological apparatus. Towards the end of the final scene, Régnier de Montigny (the Wolf) demands freedom for Villon. Bishop d'Aussigny laughs quietly. 'Freedom? There is no freedom. I thought you knew that. Freedom is only a mask for necessity, and our task is to serve that necessity.' At the end the trial is not terminated but adjourned: 'Here and now!' exclaims de Montigny. *Dog and Wolf* has given its British premiere by the Rose Bruford College in June 1993, in a production by the young director Petr Palouš from the northern Bohemian town of Ústí-nad-Labem.

It was the topicality, the 'here and now!', which was the particular quality of Czech theatre in the 1980s. As Petr Oslzlý described, the theatres became almost like 'sacred circles' within a state of unfreedom – . . . from time to time, even in the big conventional theatres, an echo could be heard, maybe in just a brief allusion, or in a single appearance, or even a whole performance . . .'. Oslzlý's Theatre on a String in Brno, surviving in an ill-equipped room of the city art gallery, became the leading avant-garde theatre of the decade. Very often it was only the company's international reputation and its appearance at European festivals which saved it from being absorbed into the State Theatre. Paradoxically, one principle of the company's experimental work was commitment to past traditions; believing that the history of Czech theatre had been distorted by communist ideology, the company deliberately drew on original sources of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Czech theatre. It also adapted texts of modern European classics which otherwise were inaccessible to their young audience, and made links with writers banned from publishing, such as Ludvík Kundera and Milan Uhde. As well as drawing large audiences of young people – who loved the informal surroundings, extravagant language and acting, slapstick comedy and lavish use of fire and fireworks – the company also put on unofficial extra-mural events: concerts, readings, art exhibitions combined with performance. In the summer of 1987 they even held a three-week festival in the Episcopal Gardens in the centre of Brno. Collaboration with other theatre groups, both local and international, was important, and it was out of these co-operative, creative activities that an opposition movement was born. It became a game – a serious game – to see how far back the boundaries could be pushed. Alliances formed, far more intricately linked than the secret police ever realised.

It was one of these alliances that led to the writing of *Tomorrow*; commissioned by Petr Oslzlý for a specific occasion – the seventieth anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia on 28 October 1988. For the last forty of those seventy years the Communist régime had presented their own lacklustre version of how it came about; giving some marginal credit to Tomáš Masaryk (who became the first President, but who spent the war years in exile) and the Czech National Committee abroad, but none to their colleagues who handled the takeover of power in Prague. Havel and Oslzlý worked on a script which would explain in clear terms what exactly happened in Prague on 28 October 1918, and who were the main players. It was told from the

point of view of Alois Rašín, who subsequently became Minister of Finance, and whose policies helped to make Czechoslovakia one of the most stable countries in Europe in the inter-war period.

Tomorrow was both didactic and prophetic. Scarcely more than a year later Havel, Oslzlý and their colleagues found themselves acting it out in real life. Many of the elements of the velvet revolution of November 1989 – the meticulous advance planning, the anticipation of the dying régime's reactions, the precautions to ensure calm among the population – are already there in the text of *Tomorrow!* Rašín's dialogue with his wife in the final scene reflects subsequent political problems: the relationship of Czechs and Germans, the break-up of the 'South Slav conglomerate', the low morale of a nation which had always relied on the state to look after its needs. There was a personal note in Karla Rašínová's reference to the Quay that was named after her husband, 'but not for long'; Havel lived in his family house on what was at that time Engels Quay, but which was soon to become Rašín Quay again.

When the Czech theatre co-existed so closely with real life, where could it go next? When the scenes acted on stage were reenacted in the streets, what could follow on stage? Petr Oslzlý answered: 'In Czechoslovakia in the last twenty years the theatres had taken over those activities which were absent from ordinary life – free speech, free discussion, political debate. And now the theatres had become again only theatres and no more. The activities which the theatres had taken over returned where they belonged; to parliament, to the press, to television, to political conferences, to the privatisation auctions. It is in these arenas that the great dramas are being played out which will transform our society from totalitarianism to democracy. These have become the *Theatrum mundi*, the setting for the great dramatic contest between totalitarianism and humanity.'

In 1992, the Alfred Radok Prize was instituted, as a joint initiative of the Czech and Slovak theatre communities. (Alfred Radok [1914-1976], a highly original theatre director from Burian's school, was marginalised and belittled by the Communists. In spite of the limitations imposed on him, he had a great influence on the work of Otomar Krejča and Jan Grossman.) When the awards were made in 1993, there was no outright winner in the section for new plays. But among the ten highly commended entries (writers entered their work anonymously) were two by Daniela Fischerová and one, *The Innocent are Innocent*, by a student of dramaturgy at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts, the twenty-one-year-old Tomáš Rychetský. There is a line of succession in the Czech theatre which was not destroyed either by the Nazi occupation or by forty years of Communist totalitarianism; it will survive and surely thrive in the new state which is now the Czech Republic.

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