

'We Were—And We Shall Be.'

USUALLY, any mention of “puppet” and “politics” in the same context is as a metaphor, such as “puppet government” or “puppet dictatorship.” However, in the case to be examined by this article, the connection is not figurative. Puppets have played an important role in Czech political life periodically during at least the last 150 years, especially in times

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of crises. Their role in the “awakening” was crucial in the mid-nineteenth century, when the Czechs sought to demonstrate their legitimacy as a distinct nation and to regain their autonomy from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On the eve of World War I, puppet plays mocked the Austrians and propagandized against their domination of the Czech people. During that war, Czech puppet-makers created characters to encourage enlistment. After the creation of the Czechoslovak republic in 1918, Czech puppet theaters flourished under direct state sponsorship.

Traveling puppeteers again struggled against outside domination, in this case Nazi rule during WWII. Puppeteers secretly performed anti-communist plays while Czechoslovakia was part of the Soviet bloc. On the eve of Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Revolution, the bloodless demise of communism in the late fall of 1989, street puppeteers mocked the party and its economic and



Puppetry and Czecho-Slovak Politics, 1860-1990

by William Keyes

social failures. All of these examples show the often close connections between puppetry and politics in the Czech lands.

A prominent Pittsburgh Slovak family continued this tradition in America. In addition to significantly contributing to the birth and survival of the Czechoslovak republic in the first third of the twentieth century, they used puppetry to promote Czechoslovak political goals in the United States. A pivotal chapter in this article is based upon the important collection of Czech puppets, stage sets, scripts, catalogues, and journals recently donated by this family to the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. In order for that chapter to be fully appreciated though, the historical context for Czech puppetry and Czech politics needs some clarification.

Although the precise origins of Czech puppetry are not known, it is clear that it was already an established art

form when the kingdom of Bohemia lost its autonomy to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1620.¹ Only in the mid-nineteenth century, when nationalism "awakened" the Czech people, did puppetry begin to assume its political importance. At a time when literacy was not high, when mass media were scant, and when Austrian censorship inhibited all printed communication forms, the puppeteers began to use the Czech puppetry tradition to secretly spread the message of nationalism in the hope of regaining their lost independence.

Supporters of the Czech nationalist movement in the nineteenth century, like most of the nationalist movements in subjugated Eastern and Central Europe, held the philosophy of Johan Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) to be their wellspring. The Czech historian Fratišek Palacký (1798-1876) called Herder "the apostle of humanity" because Herder urged the Slavs to rise from "their long, enervating sleep" and to take their rightful





place among the nations of the world.² Herder based this right upon culture.

Herder was not referring to "high art." For him, culture was the collective personality and sense of identity that bound a people or nation together and made them an unique entity. This invisible sacred bond was an organic fabric fashioned from rituals and customs, folklore, myths, and folk songs. Language, for Herder, was the silver thread woven throughout the fabric. It was what distinguished a Czech from a German or a Pole. The nationalists interpreted Herder's culture-

Bohemian Museum in Prague.⁴ Similar activities were occurring throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

To the Hapsburg rulers, Herder's theories were particularly threatening because within the empire's borders were the Slovenes, Serbs and Croats (of present-day Yugoslavia), the Czechs and Slovaks, Ruthenians (of today's eastern Czechoslovakia, northern Hungary and part of the former western USSR), the Magyars (of modern Hungary), Poles, Germans, Romanians, and (until 1866) Italians. Each of these ethnic groups could claim a cultural right to nationhood.

The empire's government in Vienna effectively blocked each Czech attempt to increase its political voice. Stymied on the political front, the Czechs turned to the cultural front. The National Theater Movement (1845-1883) was a central element, as the National Museum had been in

the previous generation. Joseph Tyl (1806-1856), the father of the Czech theater, acknowledged Herder's influence when he said in 1841 that both "a patriotic ardor and love of language can be generated by a play on the stage."⁵ Important Czech leaders of the day backed Tyl's effort to create a national theater in Prague, recognizing that an active national culture based on tradition was a primary building block of nationhood.⁶ Although these initial efforts were stopped by the state, subsequent efforts were successful.

Czechs have been calling the National Theater the "Temple of Our National Rebirth" since its completion in 1883. The symbolic nature of the enterprise is revealed by the building itself. As one historian has put it, by 1868 stones were being sent to Prague "from ancient and historic sites all over Bohemia and Moravia to be incorporated ceremoniously into the foundation of the theater."⁷ Thus, the theater was built upon the cultural legacy of the Bohemian kingdom that predated Austrian rule. Its artwork, decoration, and design are considered the ultimate model for the Czech style.

Since puppetry was a traditional Czech folk art, it too experienced a revival in this period. From the late-Medieval period until the National Theater Movement stimulated

amateur stage performances, puppetry was often the principal form of live theater available in the countryside. During much of that period, puppetry was as much an art form for adults as for children. In addition to the traditional religious and folk tales, its repertoire included productions from the live-actors' theater. Even now, in the late twentieth century, Czech marionettes can still be seen in productions of *Dr. Faustus* and *Don Juan*, works by Shakespeare and Moliere, and in operas. In these performances the puppets and the sets are the traditional elements of the Czech style.



A 1924 performance in Washington, D. C., featured, left to right, John Wolarik, Theodore Geissinger, Otis Wingo (seated), Ivan Getting, Milan Getting Jr., and Vlado Getting as puppeteers. The Getting family, which later lived in Pittsburgh, recently donated this puppet theatre (the proscenium is shown here) to the Historical Society. Above: The earliest known depiction of a Czech puppet is this sixteenth century woodcut print.

based definition of a nation as their birthright for political autonomy.³

In keeping with Herder's theories, the nationalists' bid for political autonomy had to be legitimized by cultural uniqueness.

The foundation for the Czech claim was laid in the early nineteenth century with the publishing of a systematic Czech grammar, a history of Czech literature, a history of the Czech people, and the establishment of a



The high-water mark of Czech puppetry in the mid-nineteenth century was the publication of *Comedies and Plays* in 1852. This collection of traditional puppet plays and new plays in the traditional style can be compared to the earlier publication of a Czech grammar or a collection of folk tales. In addition to preserving what had previously been an oral tradition, it presented Czech puppetry as an integral part of Czech culture. The book signaled a conscious link between Czech puppetry and the nationalist cause.

Perhaps because of the success of the new amateur live-actor theaters, puppetry experienced a decline in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The theaters, both live-actor and puppet, had kept the Czech language alive during periods when German was the official language of the Czech courts, banks, universities, and newspapers. But with the loosening of restrictions in 1879, the theater's leading role in this capacity was diminished somewhat.⁸

However, in Slovakia, which was under Hungarian rule in the eastern half of the empire, cultural repression increased in the last third of the nineteenth century. Under the Compromise of 1867, a separate government had been established in Budapest, transforming the empire into the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary. While Magyars were the single most numerous ethnic group in the kingdom of Hungary, they were outnumbered by their combined subject peoples, which included the Slovaks.

"Magyarization" was the official state policy for solving the ethnicity problem. The policy made the Magyar language compulsory in all primary schools, for the children of all subject peoples. It severely limited non-Magyar publications and all non-Magyar nationalist organizations were suppressed. Only people willing to change their names to Magyar names and to accept the domination of Magyar culture could take advantage of the few career opportunities available. According to the Slovak-American historian, M. Mark Stolarik, between 1875 and 1915, "half a million Slovaks, or one out of five, chose the alternative of emigration to the New World."⁹

One of these immigrants was Milan Alexander Getting (1878-1951). When he arrived in Pittsburgh from New York City in 1903, he had been away from his native Slovakia only six months. According to a family history written by his daughter-in-law, Norma C. Getting, Milan

was employed by the state-run railroad in Zilina, Slovakia. He was responsible for the installation and repair of Westinghouse air brakes being introduced at the time. When offered the position of superintendent of the repair shops if he would Magyarize his name to "Goetting," he quit. Three months later he came to America.¹⁰

While living in Zilina, Getting became acquainted with Slovak and Polish nationalists. Dr. Dušan Makovický, whom Getting met through his Zilina relatives, was a Slovak nation-



Milan Getting has been called the "foremost proponent of Czechoslovakianism in America"; his family donated to the Historical Society the puppet collection and family papers that this article is based on. *Right:* Slovaks in the former Austro-Hungarian empire endured especially harsh political and economic restrictions; by one count, only Ireland exceeded Slovakia's per capita emigration in the nineteenth century.

alist who held meetings several times a week in his home. Independence was the frequent theme. There Getting met Ignace Jan Paderewski (1860-1941), the Polish patriot and future prime minister who hoped to free Poland from outside domination. The role of





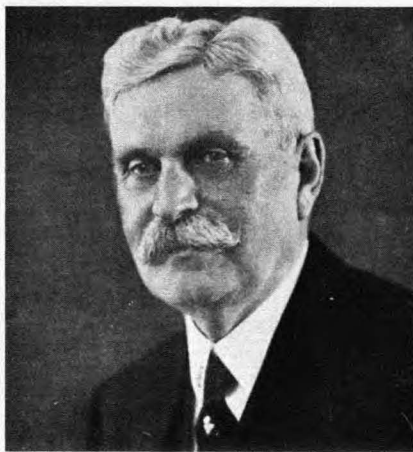
national culture in politics was surely a part of these discussions.¹¹

Before his arrival in Pittsburgh in June 1903, Getting had been made chairman of the Literary Committee at the Slovak Sokol Convention in Passaic, New Jersey. The Slovak Gymnastic Union Sokol is a patriotic fraternal gymnastic club which was outlawed in Slovakia but flourished in America among Slovak immigrants. Although the Sokol was headquartered in New Jersey, Pittsburgh, too, was an important center for Slovak fraternal and publishing activity.¹²

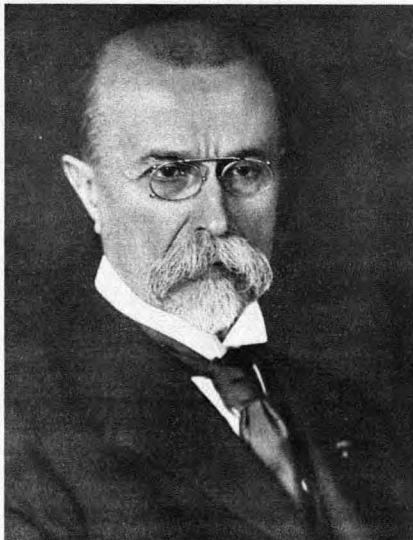
Getting was probably drawn to Pittsburgh by the opportunity to continue his nationalist political activities in its thriving Slovak community, the likelihood of finding an industrial job, and the fact that his elder sister lived there. Over the next 16 years, he worked tirelessly to raise the political consciousness of Slovaks in Western Pennsylvania and the eastern United States. For him and many other Slovaks, a combined Czech-Slovak state was the route to Slovak freedom from Hungarian rule.

While there is not room in this article to fully explain the thorny question of Czech and Slovak political unity, an issue still bitterly debated, some attention must be given it. Getting and other pro-unity advocates saw their fellow Slovaks as backward when compared to the Czechs. This is corroborated by statistics published in 1904 on the education and occupational status of East European immigrants to America: Slovak illiteracy was 14 times that of Bohemian and Moravian immigrants, and Slovak occupational status was far below that of Czechs and Moravians.¹³ These disparities reflect both the differences in economic development in the two halves of the dual monarchy and the repressive ethnic policies imposed on Slovakia.

Culturally, the Czechs were more westernized. Prague's Charles University is among the oldest in Europe, predating the Sorbonne in Paris. There were Czech writers, artists, and composers who had achieved international status. Their higher literacy rate afforded them greater opportunities to address the international community about their cause. In the view of Getting and other pro-unity Slovaks, they had to link up with the Czechs to be considered worthy of independence because they would be judged by the western standards of literacy, modernity, and cultural significance.¹⁴



Rev. Vincent Písek, *above* c. 1927, led a prominent Czech congregation at the Jan Hus Presbyterian Church in New York for 50 years. Professor Thomas G. Masaryk, *below* c. 1927, was the first president of a combined, independent Czecho-Slovak state, as had been proposed at a meeting in Pittsburgh in 1918.



Not all Slovaks in the United States or in Europe agreed with either the foundation of this argument or the potential benefits of a Czech-Slovak state. Still trying to escape from the suffocating effects of Magyarization, many Slovak immigrants were reluctant to risk Czech domination. Furthermore, many felt that Slovaks had their own cultural right to independence. Some of their reservations have been shown to be well-founded and the debate has flared again both in Czechoslovakia and among the descendants of Czech and Slovak immigrants in the United States.¹⁵

With the goal of Czech-Slovak unity in mind, Getting and other Slovak immigrants sought to raise the literacy and occupational level of Slovaks in the United States. Getting promoted a combined Czech-Slovak culture as one means of educating Slovaks and bringing them together with Czechs in America. Because of Getting's work toward this goal, and his efforts to create an independent Czechoslovak state during the first third of this century, Stolarik has called Getting the "foremost proponent of Czechoslovakianism in America."¹⁶

In the Pittsburgh area, Milan Getting helped to establish Slovak Sokol lodges on the North Side and in other towns. In Pittsburgh, he co-founded *Slovenský Sokol* (*The Slovak Falcon*, the national newspaper of the Slovak Sokol). Aside from the expected Slovak fraternal and homeland news, its

pages contained discussions of Czech and Polish political and fraternal activities, and U.S. politics. There were articles on traditional needlework, a running history of Slovakia, a series on astronomy, and many other subjects. These articles were geared to raising the cultural awareness and educational level of the Slovak immigrants, and to creating a sense of combined national pride. After the newspaper moved to New York City in December 1910, the Gettings took up residence at 313 East 74th Street, several doors from the Jan Hus Presbyterian Church in the heart of New York's Czech neighborhood.¹⁷

The Jan Hus Church and the adjacent Neighborhood House were considered a model for immigrant parishes by the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions, of which it was a part. While the church attended to the spiritual needs of the community, the attached Neighborhood House provided a full roster of social and cultural

activities, as it still does today. The director of the house, Kenneth D. Miller, wrote in 1922 that "its most distinctive contribution has been made along this line, and much has been accomplished. . . in preserving in the young people a love for the beautiful in their national heritage."¹⁸ Part of the national heritage that the Jan Hus Neighborhood House preserved was Czech puppetry.

Rev. Vincent Písek served the church for 50 years, until his death in 1930. In addition to his spiritual duties, he actively promoted Czech culture and assembled an extensive collection of Czech artwork. The collection included numerous Czech puppets. Rev. Písek was also active in Czechoslovak politics in New York, where he worked with members of the Slovak community, including Milan Getting.¹⁹ It is very likely that Getting, his wife and their son, Milan Jr., attended some of the frequent puppet performances at the Jan Hus Neighborhood House on the eve of World War I, right as Czech puppetry experienced another rebirth.

The man principally responsible for Czech puppetry's resurgence was Dr. Jindřich Veselý (1885-1939), who took his Ph.D. at Prague's Charles University in 1909 with a thesis on the Faust element in traditional Czech puppetry.²⁰ Veselý published extensively on the history of Czech puppetry in two reviews which he edited, *Česky Loutkář* (Czech Puppeteer, 1912-1913) and *Loutkář* (Puppeteer, 1917-1939). These journals established a new foundation for the serious discussion of Czech puppetry and provided practical information for amateur performers such as set and prop construction.²¹

At the suggestion of Veselý, a Prague workshop created the first of the so-called Aleš puppets in time for Christmas 1912. These puppets were based on designs created by Mikoláš Aleš (1852-1913), one of the creators of the Czech decorative style for the National Theater in the 1880s.²² This is another example of the frequent cross-fertilization between the actors' theater, the puppet theater, and the decorative arts. It also demonstrates how a national decorative style helped to form a unified sense of tradition which, in turn, reinforced the sense of cultural uniqueness.²³ Some of the puppets used at the Jan Hus Neighborhood House and all of the puppets owned by the Getting family are based on the Aleš designs.

During World War I, Getting and other Slovaks and Czechs in New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and elsewhere in the United States, supported the war effort in numerous ways. Using the fraternal newspapers as a platform, they recruited legionnaires (volunteer Czech and Slovak immigrants) to return and fight in Europe. They also collected money (over \$600,000) and sent it to the Czechoslovak provisional government.²⁴ And they struggled to form a consensus among the immigrant communities on the post-war political relationship between the Czechs and Slovaks in central Europe.

An important step toward the creation of the Czech-

oslovak Republic was taken in Pittsburgh on May 30, 1918, when the Czech-Slovak National Council held its convention there. It was attended by Thomas G. Masaryk, future president of the Republic. After much wrangling, the "Pittsburgská Dohoda" ("Pittsburgh Agreement") was signed by the assembled delegates, including Getting. The agreement approved a proposal for a combined Czech-Slovak constitutional republic to be created after the war from remnants of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.²⁵ On June 3, 1918, the Allied powers recognized the Czechoslovak provisional government.

Getting's political career ultimately led him and his family back to Pittsburgh. After a tumultuous year in Bratislava, they returned to the United States. In Washington, he served as Press Bureau Chief for the Czechoslovak Consulate until 1924, when he became the Czechoslovak consul in Pittsburgh. Getting continued his work over the next decade, retiring in 1933. He took part in the creation of a Czechoslovak Classroom among the University of Pittsburgh's Nationality Rooms and in other activities where the cultural and the political were linked to promote Czechoslovakia.

Milan Getting's political career, however, is not the

Kdo nevrátí tohoto čísla do 14 dnů, jest považován za odběratele!



O B S A H:

Jan Václav Rosůlek
PŘÍŠLI KOMEDIANTI...
Fr. Homolka
KÁSPÁREK.
B. M. Eliášová
Z RÁJE DÍTÍ - Z JAPONSKA.
N. Melniková-Papoušková
PETRUŠKA V SOVĚTSKÝCH SLUŽBÁCH.
Frano Musil
VÝZNAM MAŇÁSKOVÉHO DIVADLA NA SLOVENSKU.
Prof. Dr. Richard Rus
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Akad. malíř Zdeněk Kratochvíl
DIVADLO S VELKÝM JEVIŠTĚM A MALÝMI LOUTKAMI.
Akad. malíř J. Stokovský
JAK SI POČÍNATI PŘI MALBĚ DEKORACÍ?
KÁSPÁRKOVA BESÍDEČKA.
NÁRODOPISNÝ KOUTEK. LITERATURA.
ZPRÁVY A POZNÁMKY. LITERÁRNÍ OZNAMOVATEL.

ROČNÍK VII. (IX.) 1922 PŘEDPLATNÉ 50 K. ČÍSLO 1.
NÁKLADEM Dr. JINDŘ. VESELÉHO, Kr. VINOHRADY čp. 1550, NA ŠVIHANCE 4

The journal *Loutkář* (Puppeteer) was edited by Jindřich Veselý, who through his scholarship and practical support of puppetry spearheaded its twentieth century resurgence.



Death



Sir John



Fairy



Queen



Devil



The puppets, props and scenery from the Getting/Cibula Collection were made in Prague in the early 1920s. They were designed by the Czech artist Mikoláš Aleš, who used traditional Czech motifs. *Opposite page:* The gingerbread house is a familiar fairy tale prop; the marionettes, *top*, are characters from the 1920s play, *The Enchanted Forest*, but the two hand-carved wooden puppets, Death and the Devil, are based on prototypes from the Middle Ages. Note the Devil's one cloven foot. All marionette costumes are hand-sewn. Milan Getting, Jr., installed an electric light to give a reddish glow on stage to the witch's cauldron, *above*. For over a century Kašpárek, the comic hero of Czech puppetry, *left*, has mocked despotism in the Czech lands under the regimes of the Hapsburgs, Nazis and Marxists.

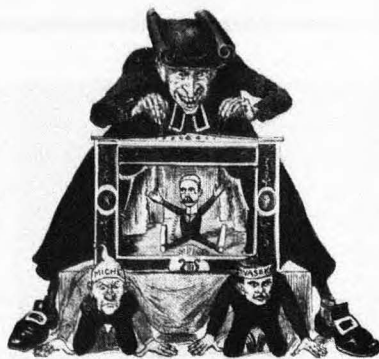
central focus of this article, as critical as it is to the understanding of the events under examination. Instead, the article will turn to the political career of an unlikely hero. His name is Kašpárek, and he is a puppet.

Since the late Middle Ages, Kašpárek has been a character in the Czech puppet theater. Traditionally he played the role of a clever though simple-seeming clown. In the puppet plays, it was he who would advise the penniless prince in his quest to save a princess or to foil the evil spell of a wizard. Czech puppeteer Matěj Kopecký (1775-1847) ensured Kašpárek's lasting fame when his collected *Comedies and Plays* was posthumously published and linked puppetry to the nationalist cause.²⁶

Kašpárek's most venerable ancestor was Kaspar (Casper), one of the Three Magi in the Christmas story, dating from the late Middle Ages. In both live-actor and puppet performances, he most often had the comic role in this pageant, not only in Bohemia but throughout much of Central and Eastern Europe. Owing to this common source, he has relatives throughout Europe: the Slovak Gašpárko; the German and Viennese Kaspar; the Russian Petrushka; and, more distantly related, the English Punch and the French Guignol.²⁷ But none of Kašpárek's cousins have the same high political profile.

Although Kašpárek's political activities began earlier, he is most often singled out for his contribution to the Czech independence cause during World War I because, as one author put it, he could say what "statesmen dared not utter."²⁸ Another author has noted that Kašpárek "boldly prophesied the disintegration of the Austrian government and encouraged the initiated to further revolutionary activities."²⁹

Kašpárek's role in the liberation movement is memorialized in Plzeň, a Czech city about 60 miles southwest of Prague. The thankful citizens of Plzeň placed a plaque at the cabaret theater, run by Professor Josef Skupa (1892-1957). The plaque, says a leading authority on Czech puppetry, recounts "how Kašpárek helped to demolish the Austro-Hungarian Empire."³⁰ At Skupa's cabaret, live-actor revues and puppet performances were interspersed with revolutionary ad libs by the master-of-ceremonies and irreverent political jibes from Kašpárek.³¹ Because the Austrian government considered puppetry to be merely a childish diversion,



Above: Puppetry has been used universally in political cartoons, as in this Czech example from 1905. Below: Catalogue illustration of the puppet stage proscenium ordered by the Getting family.

it was not considered a threat and it escaped censorship, unlike printed works.

During World War I, puppeteers and puppet makers were fully involved in the war effort. Legionnaire puppets, made in Prague, were created to encourage volunteers to join the fight. Puppets served in military hospitals, in prisoner-of-war camps, and with the Czech legions at the Russian and Italian fronts to boost morale, to give instructions in hygiene, and to explain the political aims of the struggle.³²

The importance of puppetry's influence is best indicated by the prominence the Czechoslovak government gave to puppetry in the post-war period. In September 1920, contemporary with the new Czechoslovak constitution, Říše Loutek (Empire of the Puppets) was established in Prague. This new puppet theater fully focused on young audiences in the spirit of



the Czech saying, "Let us bring up our children with puppets — not as puppets."³³ By 1928, when the theater moved to Prague's central Municipal Library, it was called "the most lavishly equipped puppet theater on the European continent."³⁴

Puppetry was supported by the state organs of education and health. A 1921 official decree issued by the school board in Prague advocated puppet theaters for schools for their "educational and propagandistic effects." This decree was seconded by similar endorsements from educational authorities in Brno (Moravia) and other federal government ministries.³⁵

A "Puppeteers' Center" was established at the Masaryk Institute for Adult Education in Prague in 1923. This puppeteers' guild headquarters was the first of its kind in the world. It became the center for the Puppeteers' Congress. The guild printed theater decorations and later established an important puppetry training course.³⁶ This extraordinary government support for puppetry was amply reciprocated by the professional puppeteers.

After independence, Dr. Veselý's journal *Loutkář* published numerous plays to promote the new Republican government. Kašpárek visited President Masaryk in the adulatory work, *Do Prahy za presidentem* (To Prague to See the President, 1920).³⁷ In the puppet play *Život za republiku* (A Life for the Republic, 1919), Kašpárek joined the 1919 fight against the Hungarian Bela Kun's Red Army in Slovakia, defeating the Bolshe-

vik threat to the new Republic. An earlier play, *Probuzení* (*Awakening*, 1918), urged Czechs and Slovaks to unite. In the play, a spirit named Kyrasam (“Masaryk” spelled backwards) appears to Kašpárek and his comrade-in-arms Honza. Kyrasam rouses the two to continue their fight for independence. After Honza is fatally wounded, Kašpárek comforts Honza’s tearful mother, reminding her of the purpose of her son’s death: “We sow in each heart a seed of the tree of Liberty and it will unify all Slavic lands in its shadow. . . . Remember what Kyrasam said: ‘Union! Union! Union!’”³⁸

These and many other patriotic plays were written by professional journalists, poets, and amateurs—all buoyed by the euphoria of the new independence. The plays were sold through Veselý’s journal and performed by both professional and amateur puppeteers all over the republic. As all of the state-sponsored and independent activities demonstrate, puppetry had fully acquired the status of a national art form and was a

means of expressing national solidarity.

The connection between Milan Getting and the puppet Kašpárek dates from this period. It stems from two known performances of *Začarováný les* (*The Enchanted Forest*, 1918), a fairy tale play written by Czech poet and critic Zdeněk Schmoranz. The performances were in Washington, D.C. (1924) and in Pittsburgh (c. 1935). Although the actual text of the play reveals no overt political agenda, the play continues in the tradition, newly reinforced, of presenting puppet plays to promote patriotism and Czecho-Slovak culture.³⁹

On January 30, 1924, when *The Enchanted Forest* was performed in the second-floor lobby of Crandall’s Ambassador Theater in Washington, the performers were three sons of Milan Getting and three friends. The puppet theater—one of the Aleš theaters mentioned here earlier—had been mail-ordered from Prague at Getting’s suggestion. The eldest son, Milan Jr., wrote shortly before his death in 1990 that the motto “We Were — And We Shall Be,” which was inscribed across the proscenium of their puppet theater, “made us feel quite defiant.”⁴⁰ This motto is taken from the words of the eminent Czech historian Palacký, mentioned earlier here for his work in the nationalist movement. Palacký wrote in 1848, “Before Austria was, *we were*: and when Austria no longer is, *we still shall be*.”⁴¹ Even at the age of 15, young Getting had recognized the political assertion inherent in placing such a quote on the theater: Czech culture had been preserved and used as an instrument to combat the oppressor.

The oppressor in *The Enchanted Forest* was an evil wizard who imprisoned a princess and intended to marry her against her will. When Kašpárek and Sir John try to rescue her, the evil wizard puts her in a dragon’s cave. As Kašpárek and the knight approach the dragon, flames and thunder roar. The princess’s mother, a fairy queen, gives Sir John a magic sword and he slays the dragon during a fiery battle. The rescued princess says to John as he kneels before her, “Come with me to my country where eternal spring prevails. And where treason is unknown.”⁴² She then pledges her heart to him and they set off for her kingdom. Meanwhile, Kašpárek amuses himself with a magic ring given to him as a gift by the knight, having declined to join them in her far-off land.

Much of the technical work for the production was done by Milan Jr. Sixty-five years later he recalled the response to the 4-foot-long flames that shot out at the audience from the dragon’s cave: “I can still feel the thrill that all six of us enjoyed in startling our youthful audience when they turned over their chairs in fear.”⁴³

The audience consisted of 200 children of the Washington diplomatic corps, of which the elder Getting was a member. In keeping with this nationalist strategy, the Gettings’s performance presented puppetry, this unique component of Czech culture, to an international audience — literally. The Getting family demonstrated that the 400-year-old Czech puppetry tradition was an



The Matěj Kopecký Memorial at Koloděje nad Luznicí commemorates the famous nineteenth century puppeteer’s work with a sculpted image of Kašpárek, the well-known Czech puppet figure.



Josef Skupa, c. 1945, a puppeteer known across Czechoslovakia, also ran a cabaret theater in Plzeň. By 1947, the country had some 1,200 puppet theaters.

We must add to Kašpárek's accomplishments the discovery of oil in Pennsylvania in 1859. In the "social" plays of the 1920s, Czech authors often mixed public education with their entertainments. *Princess Oil* uses the standard fairytale genre to give a lesson about oil and its discovery. A poor Czech worker, Drak (taking the part of the American named Drake who is credited with discovering oil), and his assistant, Kašpárek, travel to America in search of wealth. Winetoua, an Indian maiden, tells them about Princess Oil, who is trapped under the Earth by an evil magician. Drak and Kašpárek free the imprisoned

princess. Symbolically the princess also represents the imprisoned Czech people. Likewise, some authors contend that *Sleeping Beauty* is allegory for the "awakening" of nationalism in the nineteenth century. In *Princess Oil*, the awakening is allied with progress and entry into the modern world.

Right: Illustration from scene 3, "In the Oilfields of Pennsylvania," of the 1935 Prague Puppet Theater production of *Princezna Nafta* (*Princess Oil*, 1926), by František Ptáček, scenery and puppets by Jan Malík.

important part of world culture. World-class culture imbued the Czechoslovak state with legitimacy.⁴⁴

Although it is unknown if the Washington performance was officially sponsored by the Czechoslovak government, the Czechoslovak Institute for Countrymen Abroad had been funding puppetry performances as “live propaganda” since 1910.⁴⁵ The Czechoslovak government also promoted puppetry as positive propaganda abroad. Milan Getting, from his position as Czechoslovak Press Bureau Officer in Washington, may well have been aware of these efforts and the state’s apparent belief in their effectiveness. If he was not aware of it through his official position, he knew it as a subscriber to Dr. Veselý’s journal and from the Czech puppet plays that he bought, among them *A Life For the Republic* and *To Prague to See the President*.⁴⁶

A performance of *The Enchanted Forest* also took place in Pittsburgh—“in the ’30s,” according to Millie Salay, who at age 82 is the only surviving member of the cast. The play, she recalled, was staged by the Czechoslovak Junior Circle, a youth organization attached to the Czechoslovak League which promoted culture and patriotism among people of Czech and Slovak heritage. The Gettings’s puppet theater was used for the performance and both Milan Sr. and his son participated. The other performers were well-known local Slovaks and their relatives.⁴⁷

A renewed local interest in puppetry may have prompted the Pittsburgh performance. The Mason Marionettes premiered in Pittsburgh in 1933 to wide acclaim, continuing through the 1940s. Pittsburgh was also the home of Jean Gros, who presented *Il Pagliacci* in 1922 and went on to a nationwide career, eventually founding the Caravan Players in 1945 in Pittsburgh.⁴⁸

Performance of *The Enchanted Forest* was an opportunity to demonstrate the much older Czech puppetry tradition.

Even a brief analysis of Czech puppet performances in this century illustrates the power that the art form has maintained in modern Czechoslovak cultural and political affairs.

While popular as a modern artistic medium, many plays, including *On Earth, in Heaven and in Hell*, reveal puppetry’s vestigial Medieval roots. In the play, the Devil, Angels and Death are present as characters, as they were in Medieval drama and puppet plays. The story is structured as a struggle between Good and Evil with the hero’s soul as the prize, but Kašpárek outwits them all.

In the play, witnessed by an American visitor to Prague in 1927, our hero Kašpárek is visited by the personification of Death. He merely shrugs as a Devil and an Angel struggle for his soul, and barely blinks when the Devil tosses him into the jaws of hell. As he is shown the horrors of eternal damnation, he hums and strolls about, never losing his smile. Dragged out of hell by two policemen, Kašpárek is booted up to heaven. His nonchalance is no more appreciated there. Once he eyes several female cherubs, though, he consents to become a cherub, too. The story ends with him fluttering about, bouncing off the walls of heaven.⁴⁹

What was considered so strongly subversive in this play and many others like it was that Kašpárek openly flouted authority. He had no fear of punishment, no awe of majesty. This accounts for a considerable part of the appeal that brought him renown during World War I. Kašpárek was the hero of a people subjugated for centuries. Like the hero of Jaroslav Hašek’s 1923 novel *Good Soldier Schweik*, Kašpárek fought his Austrian masters by native cunning and subterfuge while presenting a facade of smirking indifference. In this sense, both Kašpárek and Schweik are saboteurs at least and revolutionaries at best.⁵⁰

Perhaps what is most difficult for an American audience to appreciate is that under a repressive regime, where censorship of all art forms is the rule, every medium is automatically politicized. A puppet like Kašpárek can be a threat because when he mocks authority it is a direct attack on the ruling system. Truth becomes contraband that is smuggled in under many disguises and hidden in the most unlikely places.

While the Austrian government misjudged the political power of puppetry during the World War I era, the same cannot be said of the Nazis in World War II. Nearly all puppet theaters were closed. All puppetry publications were suspended. The Czech Sokol organization and its 900 puppet theaters were shut down. Josef Skupa of Plzeň continued to tour with programs for adults, “the allegoric points of which, imperceptible for the censors,” notes a leading authority, “were received with bated breath and hidden emotion.”⁵¹ The Nazis arrested Skupa in 1944 and imprisoned him at Dresden, where he escaped from a jail burning under Allied bombardment. He was more fortunate than Zdeněk Schmoranz, author of *The Enchanted Forest*, who was executed in Plotzensee, Germany, in 1942.⁵² Many other artists of the puppet theater were executed, succumbed in concentration camps, or died in the five days of street-fighting prior to the liberation of Prague.⁵³ The Nazis understood the power of traditional culture to sustain a people in times of crisis and they crushed it mercilessly.

A more recent Czech puppet performance provides yet another example of the continued activity of puppets in anti-government propaganda, this time aimed at the Marxist government. Puppeteer Margo Lovelace, director of Pittsburgh’s renowned Lovelace Theater from 1964 to 1982, saw a performance in Prague in 1976.



The play encouraged children to protect opponents of the state. In the play, a non-conformist character is pursued by the secret police. The children in the audience were asked to hide the character from the agents while they sang, to the tune of "We Shall Overcome," a song of resistance. Lovelace rightfully concluded her story by wondering "about the children who sat in the audience in that little theater. . . . Were they marching in the streets during the 'Velvet Revolution'?"⁵⁴ The 1989 Velvet Revolution is the term given to the bloodless collapse of the Czechoslovak Marxist government, which had been in power since 1948.

On the eve of the Velvet Revolution, Jan Getting, the great-grandson of Milan Getting, Sr., witnessed a puppet performance in the streets of Prague. The show was for adults and was overtly political. The play portrayed the "international union of alchemists," a veiled version of the Communist Party, which sought to restrict a renegade wizard who was attempting to break the "Czech spell of silence." In a test of magical powers, a "party" alchemist drew a charmed circle on the ground and defied anyone to enter the circle. A young woman from the audience entered and the "party" alchemist said, "Look these people in the eye and say succinctly and truthfully what you think of our current political, economic, and social situation." He expected the "spell of silence" to inhibit her, but the renegade wizard had broken the spell. The truth was heard.⁵⁵

The role of the theater in the recent political upheaval in Czechoslovakia is well known. The selection of a playwright, Václav Havel, as president, and the pivotal function of the theater as a forum for open political discussions attest to this fact.⁵⁶ But the full story of the role of puppetry remains to be told. Undoubtedly, puppetry will again emerge as an integral part of the liberation struggle, as it has been in the past.

In the nineteenth century, Czech cultural traditions were the basis for a Czech claim to national recognition. The same terms of national self-definition were brought to America and used to support the idea of a combined state. As a part of the Czech cultural patrimony, puppetry was used to promote the nationalist cause.

Puppetry was effective in the Czech nationalist cause because it was an integral part of Czech culture, and the Getting puppets are a good example of how strong the cultural fabric can be. By cross-fertilization between art forms (puppetry, the actors' theater, and the graphic arts) the web becomes more dense, stronger. As an agent

of nationalism, the cultural network was used in times of crises to bolster national solidarity. For the next generation at the next crisis, the cultural network has earned a traditional appeal as a tried-and-true bulwark. When there is no crisis at hand, the art form recedes somewhat from the front, but retains the intimate connections with the time of struggle.

While the details differ from case to case, cultural objects have a symbolic life that we rarely examine consciously, yet we grasp the message that they impart. For the Czech puppets, they were merely toys, but they acquired a cultural importance that was used for a positive political purpose. In tumultuous times we use the weapons, tools, or toys at hand.

For the Gettings and their puppets, it is impossible to ascertain how much of this was known to Milan Getting when he ordered the puppet theater from Prague for his sons in 1922. Nor can it be determined how much of his enthusiasm was due to his political fervor and how much to the simple enjoyment of a family activity. It is clear, however, that he was well aware of the political potential for puppetry to bring to his fellow countrymen the Czecho-Slovak message. He owned political plays written for that purpose, and the activity did involve him and his sons propagating a distinctly Czecho-Slovak culture.

Lastly, it is important to say that even in puppet plays without an overtly political message, like Schmoranz's fairytale *The Enchanted Forest*, there is still a haunting echo of the political troubles that have plagued the Czech lands. The fairy who introduces the story encapsulates 500 years of Czech history when she says, "I know what is pain, laughter and unfulfilled desires. . . . I know destruction and pleasure and the quiet harmony of reconciliation."⁵⁷ ■



Prague's national puppet theater, c. 1965

¹ The earliest known illustration showing a Czech puppet dates from 1588. Jan Malík, *Puppetry in Czechoslovakia* (Prague, 1948), 7.

² Robin Oakley, *Eastern Europe 1740-1980: Feudalism to Communism* (Minneapolis, 1982), 77.

³ Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (New York, 1983), "Herder's Legacy," 180-182.

⁴ Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (Boulder, 1977), 151. In addition to writing a five-volume history of the Czech people, the historian Palacký was involved in the establishment of the Bohemian Museum and was the first editor of the Journal of the Bohemian Museum.

⁵ Stanley Buchholz Kimball, *Czech Nationalism: A Study of the*

National Theater Movement, 1845-1883 (Urbana, 1964), 21. Kimball, 11, quotes Schiller's claim in reference to the case of German national identity, "We will never become a great nation without a national theater."

⁶ Kimball, 22-23. František Reiger (1818-1903) and Count Josef Matyáš Thun were avid supporters of the National Theater.

⁷ Kimball, 2. The building is entirely Czech in origin, using only Czech materials and Czech workmen. The Czech people paid for it entirely, with no funds from the government or nobility, which were German or Austrian.

⁸ Oakey, 81. The Czechs were not granted political rights in 1867 (as the Magyars were), not in 1871 with the request for "Fundamental Articles," nor at any time until independence after WWI. Only in 1879 was a Czech-language university granted and were Czech secondary schools established, gradually spreading the national sentiment.

⁹ M. Mark Stolarík, "The Role of American Slovaks in the Creation of Czechoslovakia, 1914-1918," in *Slovak Studies* VIII, *Historica* 5, 1968, 9. See also R. W. Seton-Watson, *Racial Problems in Hungary* (New York, 1972 [reprint of 1908 edition]). In another work Stolarík quotes a demographic study written in Slovakia in 1956 on the effects of depopulation there: "Slovaks were second only to the Irish in per capita emigration and population decline in the nineteenth century." Stolarík, "From Field to Factory: The Historiography of Slovak Immigration to the United States," in *Slovakia*, vol. xxviii, nos. 51-52 (1978-1979), 78.

¹⁰ Norma C. Getting, "Milan Alexander Getting," typed manuscript of Getting and Cibula Family History in the Getting-Cibula Papers, Archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh (hereafter Getting-Cibula Papers, HSWP).

¹¹ Ibid. According to the Getting family history, Dr. Dušan Makovický had spent time in Russia living at Tolstoy's estate. Like Masaryk, who had entertained ideas of Russian intervention to save the Czechs prior to the Bolshevik Revolution,

Makovický had pan-Slavic affinities. The presence of Paderewski also attests to this. Later as publisher of *Slovenský Sokol*, Getting frequently published the writing of Tolstoy. He also kept Slovak immigrants abreast of political happenings in Poland and Russia. Among Slovak nationalists of this period, it is interesting

to note that the Slovak patriot Dr. Jan Porubský not only installed a puppet theater in his house but also wrote original puppet plays (Malík, 44).

¹² Pittsburgh was, and still is, the home of the National Slovak Society and the Slovak League. Until recently, the United Lutheran Society (formerly the Slovak Evangelical Union) was there also. The first Slovak language newsletter, the *Bulletin*, began there in 1885. The first Slovak newspaper, *Amerikánsko Slovenské Noviny* (*American Slovak Gazette*) was started there in 1886. Pittsburgh was also the home of the first Slovak daily in the world, *Národný Denník* (*The Slovak Daily*). In addition to the daily newspapers, Pittsburgh was a center for weekly and fraternal publications. In 1921, of the 18 Slovak-language weeklies or fraternal newspapers in the United States, four were published in Pittsburgh: *Národné Noviny* (*The National Slovak News*), *Slovenská Mládež* (*The Slovak Youth*), *Nové Slovensko* (*The New Slovakia*), and *Slovenský Hlásnik* (*The Slovak Herald*). Of the nine Slovak banks in the U.S. in 1921, three were in southwestern Pennsylvania: in Pittsburgh, Uniontown, and Olyphant. Thomas Čapek, *The Čech (Bohemian) Community of New York* (New York, 1921), 91-93.

¹³ Of the immigrants from Bohemia and Moravia over the age of 14, 1.5 percent could neither read nor write, while those from Slovakia had a 21 percent illiteracy rate. As to occupation, the comparison was similar: the percentage of adult males from Bohemia and Moravia were 1.43 percent professional, 44.5 percent skilled, and 32 percent laborers; for the Slovaks: .06 percent professional, 5.6 percent skilled, and 88 percent laborers. "Slavs, Magyars and Some Others," *Charities, A Review of Local and General Philanthropy* xiii, No. 10 (Dec. 3, 1904), 203.

¹⁴ *American Slovaks and the Evolution of the Concept During the Years 1914-1918*, translated by Milan A. Getting, unpublished manuscript, 1978, Getting-Cibula Papers, HSWP, 124-127. This is a translation of *Americké Slováci a vývin československé myšlenky v letech 1914-1918* (Perth Amboy, N.J., 1933).

¹⁵ In Czechoslovakia in early 1991, President Václav Havel was heckled by Slovaks during a visit to Bratislava. Officially, a hyphen has been suggested for the country's name, making it "Czecho-Slovakia," to indicate a separate but equal status of the two. As this article went to press, Slovaks were preparing to consider a referendum on secession.

¹⁶ Stolarík, "The Role of American Slovaks," 31.

¹⁷ *Slovenský Sokol*: for example, on Czech and Polish Sokols see 15, IX, 1910; on astronomy see 15, IV, 1910; on American history see 30, IX, 1911; on Tolstoy see 30, XI, 1910.

¹⁸ Kenneth D. Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks in America* (New York, 1922), 149-151. In Paul McPharlin, *The Puppet Theater in America: A History, 1524-1948* (Boston, 1969), the most exhaustive work on American puppetry to date, there is scant mention of Czech puppeteers in the U. S. Anton Houluskas, who emigrated here about 1912, began doing shows in the 1920s. His performances were confined to the Czech farm communities in Minnesota, the Dakotas, Iowa, and Nebraska (428). Other Czechoslovak cultural activities were presented in New York City; an exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of



Twentieth century Czech political cartoon.

Art was assembled in 1917 and used the opportunity to explain the political plight of Czechs and Slovaks in the homeland. The art work was a demonstration of cultural legitimacy. *New York Times*, Dec. 23, 1917, Magazine section.

¹⁹ Getting, *American Slovaks*, 65. Getting also worked closely with the Czech banker and author Thomas Čapek, the son-in-law of Rev. Písek.

²⁰ Malík, 14. The home of the original Dr. Faust is in Prague and the German puppet version of the story inspired Goethe's play.

²¹ *Loutkář* is currently published by the Academy of the Performing Arts in Prague.

²² Kimball, 2. The puppets and the scenery were made in collaboration with Dr. Veselý's Czech Union of the Friends of the Puppet Theater. This organization first published its catalogue *Album Dekorací českých umělců* (*An Album of Decorations by Czech Artists*) in 1913. (Malík, 15.) The Getting puppets were ordered from volumes 2 and 3 of this catalogue.

²³ For an example of this phenomena elsewhere in Europe at the same time, see Camila Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art, 1863-1922* (London, 1962), chs. 1 and 2.

²⁴ Milan Getting, *American Slovaks*, 166-69, and Stolárik, "The Role of American Slovaks," 39. The collection project was called "The Million Dollar Fund." The treasurer of the fund was a Roman Catholic priest, Rev. Jozef Murgaš of Scranton, Pa. The donations were made at weddings, christenings, and fundraiser dances and bazaars held throughout the eastern United States. Each donation was dutifully marked in two ledger books with the amount, the donor's name, and the date. Often the place and occasion are noted. The second of the two ledgers is among the Getting-Cibula Papers, HSWP.

²⁵ The Pittsburgh Agreement promised Slovaks that they would have their own administration and courts, and that Slovak would be their official language. Stolárik, in "The Role of the American Slovaks," states: "American Slovaks erred in trusting Masaryk because he had no intention of carrying out the Pittsburgh Agreement." (52) Ultimately, "none of the provisions of the Pittsburgh Agreement appeared in the Constitution." (53) From the summer of 1919 through the first half of 1920, after the establishment of an independent Czechoslovakia, Getting served the new government in Bratislava at the Press Information Bureau.

²⁶ Malík, 11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸ Helen Haiman Joseph, *A Book of Marionettes* (New York, 1936), 141.

²⁹ Šarka B. Hrbková, "Czechoslovak Puppet Shows," in *Theater Arts* 7 (Jan. 1923), 79.

³⁰ Malík, 17.

³¹ Zdeněk Bezděk, *Dějiny České Loutkové Hry Do Roku 1945* (Prague, 1983), 79.

³² Malík, 16. With the future in mind, Slovak soldiers were trained as puppeteers to be propagandists among their fellow Slovaks after the war. Hrbková, "Czechoslovak Puppet Shows," 71-72. An important model for propaganda was emerging to the east of Czechoslovakia in the early 1920s: the

USSR. The Soviet government was then in the process of exploiting all forms of culture for political propaganda including film, architecture, theater, mass pageants, posters, and puppetry. See Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Visions and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York, 1989). While few nations approved the political goals of the Soviet Union, many were in awe of their cultural strides.

³³ *Puppetry: A Yearbook of Puppetry and Marionettes* (1933), ed. Paul McPharlin, 63.

³⁴ Malík, 18.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 22, 24. By 1930 there were "3,200 puppeteers affiliated under the banner of the Masaryk Institute." *Puppetry: A Yearbook of Puppetry and Marionettes* (1931), ed. Paul McPharlin, 91.

³⁷ Bezděk, 77.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 71. Translation from the Czech by Professor Pavol Kvektó of the University of Pittsburgh.

³⁹ In 1919, Schmoranz published *Guliver v Liliputu* (*Gulliver in Liliputia*). Like Swift's original, it is a political satire. Here the midget king is Kaiser Wilhelm II. Bezděk, 79.

⁴⁰ Getting-Cibula Papers, HSWP.

⁴¹ Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, 155. Emphasis added.

⁴² Zdeněk Schmoranz, *Začarováný les* (*The Enchanted Forest*), unpublished translation by Getting Brothers, c. 1924, 3, Getting-Cibula Papers, HSWP.

⁴³ Milan Getting, Jr., "The Puppet Theater Photo—January 30, 1924," (unpublished, 1990), Getting-Cibula Papers, HSWP.

⁴⁴ Getting-Cibula Papers, HSWP.

⁴⁵ Malík, 41.

⁴⁶ Getting-Cibula Papers, HSWP.

⁴⁷ Getting-Cibula Papers, HSWP, and telephone interview with Millie Salay. Mrs. Salay is the daughter of Albert Mamatey (1870-1923), the nationally prominent Slovak leader. He was president of the National Slovak Society and president of the Slovak League, both headquartered in Pittsburgh, when he signed the Pittsburgh Agreement in 1918. Mr. Mamatey was also the first Czechoslovak consul of Pittsburgh; Getting replaced him in 1924.

⁴⁸ McPharlin, *The Puppet Theater in America*, 423, 433.

⁴⁹ Hallie Flanagan, "Puppets in Prague," *Theater Arts* 11 (April-May 1927), 359-362.

⁵⁰ *Good Soldier Schweik* was produced as a puppet play in Czechoslovakia, probably in the 1940s.

⁵¹ Malík, 33.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁴ Margo Lovelace, "Resistance at Detski Dum," *Puppetry Journal* 42, No. 1 (Fall 1990), 11-12.

⁵⁵ Letter from Jan Getting to the author, April 22, 1991.

⁵⁶ See Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation With Karel Hvizdala*, translated by Paul Wilson (New York, 1990).

⁵⁷ Unpublished translation of *Začarováný les* (*The Enchanted Forest*) by Getting brothers, 3, Getting-Cibula Papers, HSWP.