

Dvořák's *Armida* and the Czech Oriental "Self"

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In his path-breaking article on Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*, Ralph P. Locke claims that nineteenth-century orientalist operas usually included a

young, tolerant, brave, possibly naïve, white-European tenor-hero [who] intrudes, at risk of disloyalty to his own people and colonialist ethic, into mysterious, dark-skinned, colonized territory represented by alluring dancing girls and deeply affectionate, sensitive lyric soprano, incurring wrath of brutal, intransigent tribal chieftain (bass or bass-baritone) and blindly obedient chorus of male savages. (1991:263)

Locke, reflecting a major stream in the criticism of literary and visual works set in exotic lands, posits that in most orientalist operas there exists a "binary opposition between a morally superior 'us' (or 'collective Self') and an appealing but dangerous 'them' ('collective Other') who come close to causing 'our' downfall" (1991:263). As is the case with most binary concepts, however, this neat distinction does not reflect the full complexity of the relationship between "Self" and "Other." This is true, as Locke himself goes on to show, with regard to various aspects of *Samson et Dalila* itself (beyond the basic plot). And it is all the more true in respect to certain less canonical operatic works set in exotic locales, such as Antonín Dvořák's last opera *Armida* (first performed at the National Theater in Prague on March 25, 1904).

On the surface, *Armida* seems to project binary oppositions similar to those described by Locke. The opera features a brave European hero, Rinald (whose name represents the Czech version of the more familiar "Rinaldo"). Rinald intrudes, together with his fellow crusaders, into the mysterious kingdom of the Syrian King Hydraot during their campaign to liberate Jerusalem. Rinald endangers the war plans of the crusaders by falling in love with Hydraot's daughter Armida, and, as a result, he has to fight the brutal magician Ismen. At the end of the opera, Rinald and the crusaders overcome their Muslim opponents and continue their (colonizing) campaign in Syria.

A closer consideration of the opera's libretto and music reveals that the distinction between the European crusaders and the Muslims is not as straightforward as a simple Us/Them dichotomy would prescribe—a fact that several writers have commented upon. In his memoirs, the Czech baritone Bohumil Benoni, who played the role of the magician Ismen during the premiere of *Armida*, writes of the work:

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Armida is Dvořák's tragedy [i.e., failure]. Dvořák was too naïve and literal a Christian, thus the magician Ismen is barely believable, and he [the composer] only responded to the political life of the crusader knights of Rome. (Cited in Smaczny 1996:90)

Benoni's statement resonates somewhat with Locke's description of the basic orientalist operatic plot. In Benoni's view, Dvořák identified through his music with the Christian crusaders who in his opera represent the sympathetic "collective Self," yet his musical characterization of the Muslims is unsuccessful and unrealistic.

Similar to Benoni, the Czech musicologist Jarmil Burghauser suggests that Dvořák's Muslims are not exotic enough (or realistic enough, in Benoni's language). He asserts that it is a pity that Dvořák did not base more of the music associated with Hydraot and his subjects on the muezzin's motive, as such musical characterization would have resulted in a more pronounced musical difference between the opera's Muslims and Christians (1994b:19). Throughout his book on Czech opera, John Tyrrell expresses a similar opinion of Dvořák's last composition. Tyrrell does not mind Dvořák's approach to the Muslims so much, but he takes issue with the musical characterization of the crusaders. He complains that "Dvořák responded to . . . the Christian soldiers with four-square martial music of a particularly undistinguished cut" (1988:87–88). Tyrrell, like Benoni, assumes Dvořák to be firmly on the side of the crusaders and is therefore disappointed that the strictness and uninventiveness of the crusaders' music does not create a sufficiently positive image of the European characters.

By claiming that Dvořák's last opera does not succeed in presenting a heroic image of the Christian crusaders, or that it does not distinguish the Saracens (Muslims) with sufficiently exotic-sounding music, all three commentators try to understand *Armida* through the conventional formulas of orientalist operas that categorically distinguish the evil exotic Other from the identifiable European Self. As a result, they end up seeing the work as a failed orientalist opera. The problematic musical and dramaturgical relationship between the crusaders and the Muslims in *Armida*, however, acquires a different meaning when considered in view of the nineteenth-century Czech attitudes towards exotic countries and peoples. Nineteenth-century Czech exoticism differed significantly from the French and British orientalism described by Locke. Unlike French composers of orientalist operas, who belonged to an imperialist nation, many nineteenth-century Czech artists perceived their own country as a colony of the Habsburg Empire. As a result, many nineteenth-century Czech artworks dealing with exotic subjects blurred the boundaries between the European Self and the non-European

Other, especially if this Other was represented by a subjugated, colonized nation (or by a nation, as we shall see, in the process of being colonized by a European power or its equivalent).

The tendency to create sympathetic images of ethnic groups threatened by imperial expansion becomes obvious in some nineteenth-century Czech paintings, especially in the works by the Czech painter Jaroslav Čermák. In the early 1860s, Čermák traveled to Montenegro and Dalmatia, the Balkan regions inhabited by a South Slavic people who, in the nineteenth century, were under constant pressure of the Ottoman Empire. His paintings of the people of Montenegro resemble in many ways some of the French nineteenth-century orientalist paintings—in both Čermák's and his French contemporaries' works we often find people in archaic, exotic dress with elaborate jewelry. But, unlike many French painters' depictions of various inhabitants of faraway countries, Čermák's works portray the exotic Montenegrin people in sympathetic and identifiable ways. His famous painting of a Montenegrin woman, for example, shows her not as a menacing *femme fatale*, as was often the case with French depictions of exotic women, but as a mother caressing her child (figure 1).

Even in his depiction of the Turks, Čermák digresses from the typical orientalist tropes. In presenting the Turks either as rapists or as overseers of enslaved women, for example in the 1865 painting “Únos” (The Abduction) (figure 2) and the 1870 “Zajatkyně” (The Female Captives) (figure 3), he to some extent evokes the orientalist image of the threatening Other. But unlike the French depictions of oriental cruelty (as seen, for example, in Henri Regnault's painting “Summary Execution under the Moorish Kings of Grenada”), Čermák's unflattering images of the Turks do not merely show the violent and barbaric qualities of the Turkish culture; they also draw the viewers' attention and sympathies to the suffering of the oppressed Montenegrins who always appear in the paintings as well.

Nineteenth-century Czech artists used images of the Turkish oppression of Montenegrins as a powerful symbol of the Austrian oppression of the Czechs. The 1877 grand opera *The Montenegrins* by the Czech composer Karel Bendl reveals the significance of Turkish-Montenegrin symbolism in Czech national consciousness by the 1870s. In his opera, Bendl drew so many parallels between the Ottoman Empire's treatment of the Montenegrins and the Austrian Empire's treatment of the Czechs that the opera “was considered too provocative for the Czech stage, and . . . [as a result, its] performance did not take place until 1881” (Tyrrell 1988:125). When it was eventually performed, Bendl's *Montenegrins* “achieved immediate popularity which owed much to the domestic parallels that could be drawn by the Czech audience” (Tyrrell 1988:125).

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Figure 1: Jaroslav Čermák, "Černohorská Madona" (The Montenegrin Madonna) (1865).
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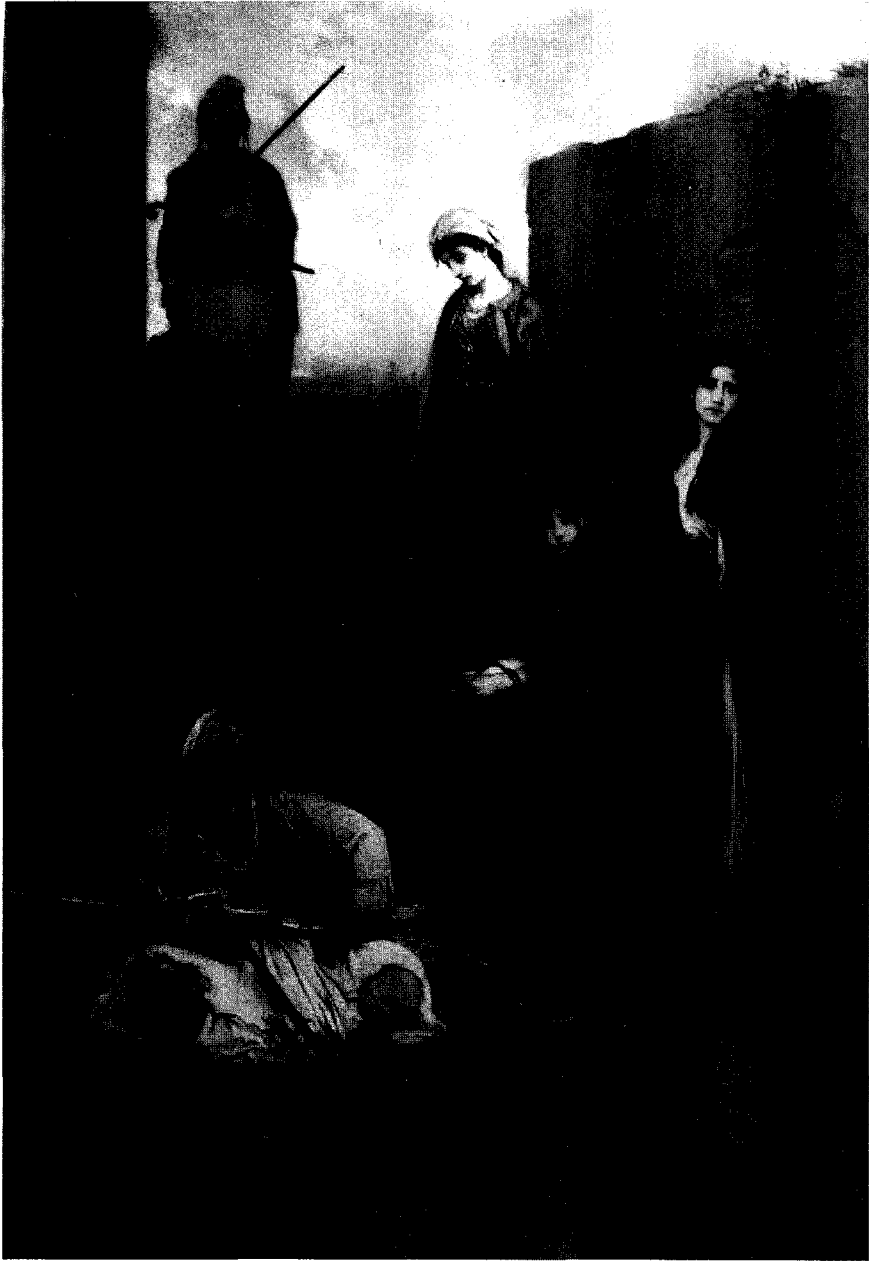


Figure 2: Jaroslav Čermák, “Únos Černohorky” (Abduction of a Montenegrin Woman) (1865). Photograph © Copyright National Gallery in Prague, 2007.



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Figure 3: Jaroslav Čermák, “Zajatkyňe” (The Female Captives) (1870). Photograph © Copyright National Gallery in Prague, 2007.



Čermák's and Bendl's sympathetic portrayal of Montenegrin suffering may have been influenced by the fact that this ethnic group represented fellow Slavs to the Czechs. Yet their works with Balkan themes parallel other artistic portrayals by Czech artists of even more distant and exotic peoples and countries. The poet and writer Svatopluk Čech depicted "the conflict between [Czech] national consciousness and Austrian oppression" in his works with exotic subjects (Bečka and Mendel 1998:126). His allegorical verse epic *Hanuman* (1884), for example, describes the struggle of an Indian tribe of monkeys to preserve their indigenous culture and lifestyle against Western European influences.¹

A small number of Czech exotic artworks directly criticized European imperial expansion. Bendl's first opera, *Lejla*, subverted and denounced European imperialism and, at the same time, openly identified with the non-European Other. Bendl based his opera on a libretto by Eliška Krásnohorská that "set the plot in 1491 at the siege of Granada and offered many opportunities for exotic coloring" (Smaczny 2003:376). *Lejla* appeared during the politically turbulent year 1868 (in which the Habsburg monarchy split into a confederation of Austria and Hungary without acknowledging the national interests of the Czechs), and its depiction of the struggle between the Moors and the Spaniards was filled with "current anti-Habsburg and anti-Viennese allusions" (Stich 1984:339). A brief examination of the libretto of *Lejla* shows that the Muslim characters constantly express their love for the "nation" and their readiness to fight for the "fatherland" and its "liberty." The Spaniards are depicted as aggressive, greedy, and perfidious religious fanatics, prone to using violence against the innocent Muslim people. That Bendl's and Krásnohorská's sympathetic portrayals of the exotic Other in contrast to the cruel and treacherous European Self reflected the commonly accepted archetypes of Czech exoticism and Czech national identity becomes obvious especially in view of the fact that *Lejla* was "a popular success" and that "it was the first Czech opera to be published after *The Bartered Bride*" (Tyrrell 1988:78). (Immediately after its premiere in 1866, Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* became the Czech opera par excellence and was thought of as reflecting essential qualities of Czech national identity and culture. The fact that *Lejla* achieved similar popularity suggests that its sympathetic portrayal of exotic people and its vilification of the European Christians resonated with the political and cultural outlooks of its Czech audiences.)

The idiosyncratic features of Czech operatic exoticism as it appears in *Lejla*, especially its benevolent view of the exotic peoples, can be identified in Dvořák's *Armida* as well. *Armida*, like *Lejla*, depicts Muslims in a sympathetic manner and thus reflects the general trends in the Czech artistic treatment of exotic, oppressed peoples. As a result, Dvořák's musical treatment does

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not naively sympathize with the crusaders and does not create easy distinctions between the various ethnic groups. Rather, the opera is imbued with ideological ambiguity about the relationship between the crusaders and Muslims, an ambiguity that confounds the stereotypical distinction between Self and Other.

Vrchlický's Libretto

In the libretto, poet Jaroslav Vrchlický dramatized the most famous story from Torquato Tasso's sixteenth-century epic *Gerusalemme liberata*: that of the sorceress Armida's attraction to, and brief abduction of, the Christian knight Rinaldo. In spite of Vrchlický's familiarity with Tasso's work (he produced the first translation of Tasso's epic into Czech), the libretto differs significantly from the original story, as well as from the many previous librettos on the subject.² As Albert Gier shows in his study of the various Armida librettos, most librettists from Quinault to Rossini's librettist Reghini tend to present Armida as an incarnation of evil, whereas Vrchlický presents her as an angel (1996:660). Only the Czech Armida, for example, never shows hatred for the Christians and refuses to go to the Christian camp to bewitch the European knights. Eventually she decides to go only when she finds out that Rinald, whom she has seen and fallen in love with in a dream, is among the Crusaders. In the idiosyncratic ending of the opera, Vrchlický combines the Armida story with that of another heroine from Tasso's epic: like Tasso's Clorinda, Armida appears on the battlefield in disguise, and she fights Rinald, who wounds her mortally without knowing her true identity. Before dying, Armida asks to be baptized so that she can meet Rinald in heaven. Armida's tragic yet heroic death and her refusal to do harm to the crusaders transform the character from an oriental femme fatale into a proto-Christian martyr.³

Unlike Western European Armidas, Vrchlický's heroine does not use spells to bind Rinald to herself. Rinald is deeply in love with Armida when they meet for the first time in the opera; he has loved her ever since they met by chance in the woods before the opera's action begins.⁴ Vrchlický's Rinald therefore leaves the Christian camp with Armida of his free will, unlike any of the previous operatic Rinald characters. Furthermore, Armida does not lure Rinald away from the Christian army in order to weaken the military power of the crusaders; at one point during her impassioned dialogue with Rinald in act 2 she says: "My love has no understanding of fighting for rich cities and holy graves." By voicing support for pacifism and love rather than war, Armida would have marked herself as much more sympathetic to the nineteenth-century Czech audiences than the ascetic and religiously fanatic

crusaders, since pacifism, as will be shown later, was considered to be one of the intrinsic traits of the Czech people (and Slavs in general).

Vrchlický's libretto casts Armida's Muslim compatriots in a sympathetic light from the first act, set at the court of Hydraot, the King of Damascus and Armida's father (the figure known as Argante in settings by Handel and others). A similar setting opens Quinault's libretto for *Armide* (set by Lully and Gluck): there we encounter the Muslims in the midst of celebrating their recent victory over the Christians; Armide has captured several valiant Christian knights through her magical powers. From the first scenes, Quinault presents the Muslims as aggressive and dangerous people who do not hesitate to use supernatural powers against their Christian opponents. Vrchlický's libretto, by contrast, depicts the Muslim courtiers of King Hydraot in an idyllic, pastoral setting. According to the stage directions at the beginning of act 1, Hydraot's courtiers are dispersed in small groups, and "the women entertain themselves by decking the scene with garlands and by joining their voices in song, while the men play chess or do mock-fencing." After the introductory orchestral music (supposedly accompanying the courtiers' activities described in the stage directions), the characters on stage sing about peace and love: "As the delightful rosary beads glide in the hands of the dervishes, so our days pass by in peace and are entwined in garlands. Hark, from the shady grove birds call happy lovers to amorous dalliance." The idyllic scene is interrupted when Hydraot comes forth with the magician Ismen who announces that the country has been invaded by the Franks. Ismen's description of the Franks' aggression is bleak:

They advanced from the far north under the pretext of liberating the holy grave of their God. They will spread terror in your realm: today you are still a king, tomorrow you will already be their slave. The world of the West threatens you now; you are the first [nearest] citadel of the East, yet you are badly equipped and could scarcely withstand them. Gaza has already fallen, Tyre also, and they are storming further with ever greater strength. Rivers of our blood accompany their attack, and you ask who could bring them to a standstill? Many think Jerusalem, but you would be foolish, O king, if you gave that credence. They will advance further and yet further to conquer the whole globe.

Ismen's speech can be seen not only as a symbolic critique of the Western European imperialism in the Middle East, but also as a reflection on the Habsburg imperialism in Central Europe, which would have been so familiar to the Czech creators and audiences of the opera.⁵

The imperialist interests of the crusaders are reaffirmed by the monk Peter. In act 4, Rinald sees the crusader army marching through the desert, and he asks Peter where the army is going. "To Damascus" answers Peter,

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Example 1: Antonín Dvořák, *Armida*, act 1, scene 2, Armida's entrance.

HYDRAOT (divá se do scény, odkud Armida přichází)
(looking at Armida as she approaches)

Larghetto ♩ = 92-96

Tam při-chá-zi,
There she comes,

s ní pro-mluv o-ka-mži-tě!
go and talk to her

Ob.
 E.H. Bn.
 Armida Leitmotif

ppp pp

fz dim. p pp

Detailed description: This musical score excerpt features a vocal line for the character HYDRAOT and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the lyrics 'Tam při-chá-zi, There she comes,' and continues with 's ní pro-mluv o-ka-mži-tě! go and talk to her'. The piano accompaniment includes parts for Oboe (Ob.), Euphonium (E.H.), and Bassoon (Bn.). The score is marked 'Larghetto' with a tempo of 92-96 beats per minute. Dynamic markings include 'ppp' (pianississimo) and 'pp' (pianissimo) for the piano, and 'fz' (forzando), 'dim.' (diminuendo), 'p' (piano), and 'pp' (pianissimo) for the vocal line. A bracket labeled 'Armida Leitmotif' spans across the piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C).

Example 2: Richard Wagner, *Lohengrin*, act 1, scenes 1-2, Elsa's entrance.

ELSA
 Mässig langsam.

Ob.
 Str., pizz. p
 E.H. Bns.

pp

fz p

Detailed description: This musical score excerpt shows the entrance of Elsa in Wagner's Lohengrin. It features a vocal line for Elsa and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is marked 'Mässig langsam' (moderately slow) and includes dynamic markings 'fz' (forzando) and 'p' (piano). The piano accompaniment includes parts for Oboe (Ob.), String (Str., pizz. p), Euphonium (E.H.), and Bassoon (Bns.). The score is marked 'pp' (pianissimo) for the piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C).

confirming Ismen's prediction: Jerusalem was only a pretext, and the real goal of the crusaders is indeed the conquest of the countries much to the east of the "Holy Land." Vrchlický's libretto here presents the Christian crusaders as imperialist aggressors and the Muslim inhabitants of Hydraot's kingdom as their innocent victims. Early twentieth-century Czech audiences would have probably identified with the Muslims at this point, since Czech national ideology tended to portray the nation's history as a constant struggle of the democratic and peace-loving Czechs with Western, or, more specifically, Germanic aggression.⁶

Dvořák's Music

Dvořák's musical treatment of Vrchlický's libretto supports the messages encoded in the text. Like Vrchlický, Dvořák portrays Armida sympathetically, in a manner that echoes the musical characterization of other European operatic heroines. Especially prominent is the connection between Dvořák's musical introduction of Armida and the way Richard Wagner presents the angelic Elsa in his opera *Lohengrin*. Dvořák announces Armida's approach to the stage through a motive that becomes one of the three main musical ideas connected with this character (example 1). The instrumentation of this passage is striking especially in its timbre: oboe paired with English horn playing a melody in octaves. This is the same instrumentation that Wagner uses in *Lohengrin* at the moment of Elsa's first arrival on stage (example 2).⁷ Soon after their appearance, both heroines launch into an aria in which they recount a dream. Both arias have the same key signature, and in both the onstage audiences (King Heinrich and the Brabantians in Elsa's case, Hydraot and Ismen in Armida's case) comment on the strangeness of what they hear after the first stanza. There is also evidence suggesting that Dvořák studied the scores of both *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser* in the period immediately preceding his composition of *Armida* (Burghauser 1994a:15).⁸ This music immediately characterizes Dvořák's exotic Armida as similar to Wagner's Christian heroine, and it distinguishes her from the previous, demonic Armidas.

In act 3, after a moment of bliss with Rinald in her magic gardens, Armida encounters Ismen, who by now has proven himself to be the real villain of the opera. Because of his unfulfilled desire for Armida, Ismen decides to destroy Armida's magic palace. Armida nevertheless overpowers his spells and conjures the palace once more. As she leads Rinald into this new palace, she says to her lover: "Now entrust yourself to my power, my love: a blissful night awaits us." As she utters this statement, the orchestra plays a motive that is otherwise connected with Christ and the Cross throughout the opera, and that, as John Clapham has pointed out, is "a near quotation of

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Example 3: Dvořák, *Armida*, act 3, scene 4, the “Cross” motive and Armida.

ARMIDA

Pojď, mi - lác - ku, věř v mo - ji moc, —
Come, my love, trust in my power,

pojď, pojď, bla - že - ná - nám ky - ne moc!
come! bliss awaits us!

Winds *fz* *p* *ff*

Fl. *p*

8va

— The Cross Motive —

Example 4: Dvořák, *Armida*, act 1, scene 2, Hydraot's entrance—royal fanfares.

Royal fanfares

Vystoupí král a Ismen. Dvořané ustoupí před králem, který vyjde z paláce, na signály trub do pozadi.
(Enter the King and Ismen. On hearing the trumpet call, the courtiers bow to the King.)

Poco meno mosso e maestoso

ff *ff*

3

fz

7

7

the beginning of the Grail theme” in Wagner’s *Parsifal* (1979:291) (example 3). Armida and her magic are therefore linked with the redemption and overcoming of evil through Christ. Thus, from the beginning of the opera, Armida is a proto-Christian heroine whose character cannot be understood if one insists on applying the template that opposes the European Christian Self and the oriental Other.

Armida’s father and his subjects similarly upset the Self-Other binarism usually associated with nineteenth-century operas set in the Orient. Hydraot’s first appearance in scene 2 of act 1, for example, is accompanied by a C Major brass fanfare of a type that was generally connected with European monarchs, not with oriental despots (example 4). Once again Wagner’s *Lohengrin* might have provided an important model for Dvořák’s musical introduction of Hydraot: in Wagner’s opera the German king Heinrich is introduced with a similar C Major fanfare. More surprising still, the musical characterization of the muezzin also eschews the typical orientalist tropes. His call to prayer is heard several times throughout the first scene of act 1, and it also closes the act. Instead of modally inflected melodies and erratic, improvisational rhythms—typical for Western stage presentations of muezzin’s songs (such as the one in Felicien David’s symphonic poem *Le Désert*, or the call of multiple muezzins in Peter Cornelius’s opera *Der Barbier von Bagdad*)—we hear a diatonic melody in regular triple meter (example 5). At the end of the act, Dvořák develops the muezzin’s melody contrapuntally, away from its initially heterophonic treatment, which further removes his musical image of the muezzin from conventional ways of representing non-Western people and their culture in nineteenth-century opera (example 6). The rhythmic simplicity and clear diatonicism of Dvořák’s muezzin’s music is striking especially in comparison with Bendl’s muezzin’s song from *Lejla*. As Smaczny observes, “Bendl’s Muezzin is far more inclined to floridity than Dvořák’s” (2003:376). Moreover, Bendl, unlike Dvořák, actually based “some attractive numbers . . . on a mock Arab scale” (2003:376). Had Dvořák really wanted to mark Hydraot, the muezzin, and the other inhabitants of Damascus as oriental in contrast to the Europeans, he could easily have used a more exotic sounding musical idiom, such as those found in other orientalist operas of the day, especially in Bendl’s *Lejla*.

In the few places in the score where Dvořák does seem to evoke exotic-sounding musical idioms, the music is not necessarily associated only with the Muslims. True, parts of the muezzin’s call seem to be built on a gapped scale, and his last descending sixteenth-note figure on the word “Allah” sounds pentatonic.⁹ Yet, similar exotic-sounding elements characterize the music associated with the crusaders, for example at the beginning of act 2, when the curtain opens on the crusaders’ camp and we hear their morning

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Example 5: Dvořák, *Armida*, act 1, scene 1, muezzin's call.

MUEZIN (na věži) (*from a tower*)
pobožně (with religious devotion)

K čty-řem ú - hlům svě - ta z ní má pí - seň
To the four corners of the world I send my call

stá - lá, k slun-ci a zpět slé - tá.
it rises to the sun and re-echoes:

Ve - li - ký jest Al - lah!
Great is Allah!

p *mf* *f*

3 6

Example 6: Dvořák, *Armida*, act 1, muezzin's motive developed.

Meno mosso maestoso

MUEZIN (na věži)

f

Ve - li - ký jest Al -
Allah is great!

E.H., B.Cl., Harp

fz *fp* *p*

Opona padá
Curtain goes down

lah!

Tr.v. *fff* Tbn. *fz*

fz *ff* Timp.

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Example 7: Dvořák, *Armida*, act 2, Prelude, beginning.

The crusaders' camp near Damascus... Morning, the knights are receiving communion...

Andante con moto

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, with the Harp part in the upper staff and the Winds part in the lower staff. The Harp part is marked *mp* and the Winds part is marked *p*. The second system continues the piece, with the Harp part in the upper staff and the Winds part in the lower staff. The Harp part is marked *pp* and the Winds part is marked *p*. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mp*, *pp*, and *p*, and articulation marks like '7' and 'y'.

prayer (example 7). The theme that begins the short overture of the second act and that the crusaders sing during their morning service is based on the minor pentatonic scale. When it appears during the act 2 prelude, the theme is played by winds in unisons and octaves with chordal accompaniment by the harps. The modal quality, instrumentation, and the heterophonic texture of this orchestral section make it sound as exotic as any of the passages linked to the Muslims. If this exotic-sounding music appeared only in the prelude to act 2, it could be seen as simply setting the colorful scene, which depicts the Christian camp in the middle of the Syrian desert. By incorporating the modal theme into the crusaders' morning prayer, Dvořák avoids the musical distinction between the Eastern Muslim setting and the Western Christian intruders.

The tambourine and other unconventional percussion instruments have traditionally been used as markers of the exotic in nineteenth-century opera. Yet once more Dvořák's use of this orientalist musical trope is ambiguous: we hear the tambourine for the first time in act 1, during the opening chorus of Hydraot's courtiers, but its exotic sound also accompanies a chorus of the crusaders in act 4.

Dvořák's score also suggests possible connections between the Christian soldiers and the evil magician Ismen. Ismen's chromatic descending scalar leitmotif makes distinctive use of rhythm—a group of four sixteenth-notes followed by a group of three sixteenth-notes. This flourish appears for the

Example 8: Dvořák, *Armida*, Overture, beginning.

Andante con moto

The Crusaders' Motive

Ismen Motive

Tbns.

first time in the overture where it follows the first occurrence of the crusaders' motive (example 8). A closer look at the two motives establishes that they are rhythmically related, as both consist of a group of four notes followed by a group of three notes. Thus from the very beginning of the opera, a musical bond links the crusaders to the evil magician Ismen.

As the plot develops, the crusaders become more closely associated with the evil magician. In act 3 two knights, Sven and Ubald, come to Armida's magic palace to "liberate" Rinald. Ismen, who is furious after having been rejected by Armida in favor of Rinald, offers his help to the two knights. He shows them the place where the magical shield of the Archangel Michael is hidden. The shield has "magnetic" powers and will help the knights snatch Rinald away from Armida. The fact that the magical shield is supplied by

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Example 9: Dvořák, *Armida*, act 4, scene 1, the “shield” motive.

Meno mosso quasi Moderato

fff

Hrn.

Tbn.

7

3

3

ff

poco rit.

Shield Motive

Ismen is unique to Vrchlický's libretto: in all the other *Armida* operas, the knights bring the magic shield themselves. The rescuing knights in all of the non-Czech operatic versions need the magic shield in order to destroy the spell that Armida has put on Rinaldo to make him love her. But since the Czech Rinald is not really under any magic spell, in order to force Rinald out of Armida's palace the two knights have to actually put him under their own spell rather than liberating him from Armida's. Finally, the Phrygian music associated with the magic shield suggests that the knights use a pagan magic of sorts to ensnare Rinald (example 9).

The musical association of the shield with demonic powers becomes more apparent in Rinald's monologue at the beginning of act 3. As the act opens, Rinald wakes up after his abduction from Armida in the middle of the desert, where his knightly friends had left him when they went to fight a detachment of "Moors." Rinald sings a long soliloquy in which he recounts the events that ended the previous act: he was passionately involved with Armida in their magic bedroom when he heard knocking on the door; Sven and Ubald broke into the bedchamber, showed him the shield, and under its magical power Rinald was forced to leave Armida's palace. As Rinald describes the magical powers of the shield, the tempo of his narration suddenly accelerates from *allegro non tanto* to *molto vivace* and the shield motive is frantically repeated, so the section evokes a bacchanal more than a musical depiction of Christian conversion. This section resembles the prelude to act 2 of Dvořák's opera *Čert a Káča* (*Kate and the Devil*), especially through its instrumentation and the frenzied ostinato-like repetitions of the shield motive. The boisterous, orgiastic music of the act 2 prelude in *Čert a Káča* effectively announces that the ensuing action takes place in hell. Dvořák's allusion to the hellish prelude from *Čert a Káča* during Rinald's speech in *Armida* further marks the magic shield as a devilish, sinister instrument of Ismen's evil supernatural powers. By presenting the shield as a demonic tool,

Example 10a: Dvořák, *Armida*, act 1, scene 2, Ismen's speech and the "conquest-of-the-globe" motive.

Tempo I. string.

ISMEN

Však blá - zen by jsi, krá - li, byl, těm
But you would be foolish,

Viol. soli
pp

slov - ům kdy - bys u - vě - řil, ti pů - jdou dál a
O king, if you believed them, they will go further and further

→ Conquest-of-the-Globe Motive

f *p* (non legato)

until they have conquered the whole world!
 stá - le vpřed, snad chtě - jí do - být ce - lý svět. **HYDRAOT**

Však

Vrchlický and Dvořák also disrupt the Christian symbolism with which it is associated in most of the other *Armida* operas.

In his characterization of the crusaders, Dvořák also makes use of the musical motive that first appears in Ismen's anti-imperialist speech; the motive accompanies his words, "They will advance further and yet further to conquer the whole globe" (example 10a). The same motive is sung by

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Example 10b: Dvořák, *Armida*, act 2, scene 1, Gernand's speech and the "conquest-of-the-globe" motive.

GERNAND
Conquest-of-the-Globe Motive

My kle - sli ju na houf - ce bab; je
We degenerated into a bunch of weak women;

lik - na - vo - stí tá - bor sláb.
the army needs more strength!

Gernand, one of the crusader knights at the beginning of act 3. Throughout the first few scenes of this act we find out that there are disagreements between two major factions of the crusaders. The leader of the crusaders, Bohumír z Bouillonu (Gottfried von Bouillon) has temporarily halted the invasion of the Western army in order to send envoys to the court of Damascus. Gernand belongs to the faction that wishes to continue the conquest as aggressively as possible without dealing with the local population: he calls the less radical knights “a troop of women” and also “a bunch of empty bags who think too calmly.” Gernand’s fellow radical Roger then adds that what the troops really need at that point is the use of strength. It is precisely during this dialogue that the conquest-of-the-globe motive

recurs (example 10b). Thus Dvořák's music suggests at this point that at least one faction of the crusaders is as aggressive and merciless as Ismen depicts them in his speech.

The Military March

Throughout the opera Dvořák associates the crusaders with the military march, a musical feature that clearly marks them as aggressors. The main march-like theme of the opera is identical with the main leitmotif of the crusaders. The first major exposition of the Crusaders' leitmotif comes in the opening scene of act 2, in which the leitmotif becomes a full-blown march that accompanies the crusaders' prayers (it develops right after the pentatonic theme mentioned earlier). Other military marches derived from the crusaders' leitmotif resound in scene 4 of act 2 and in scene 3 of act 4 (example 11); both of these marches are exoticized by Dvořák's extensive use of trills, unusual rhythms, and *alla turca* instrumentation (including piccolos and various traditionally exotic percussion instruments such as bass drum, cymbals, and triangle).

The *alla turca* military march has a special negative connotation in the grand operas of Dvořák and in Czech nineteenth-century opera in general. In *The Brandenburger in Bohemia*, for example, Bedřich Smetana uses an *alla turca* march to characterize the Brandenburger soldiers. The plot of this opera is somewhat related to that of *Armida*: in the thirteenth-century, Bohemia has been invaded and plundered by the troops of the Germanic Brandenburg Margrave Otto V; the Czech people eventually tire of the foreign army's oppression; they revolt and finally manage to drive the invaders out of the country. As John Tyrrell points out, the creators of this Czech opera "were subjects of an Austrian Empire, with censorship regulations that specifically forbade the depiction of conflict between nations" (1988:160). As a result of this censorship, Smetana in *The Brandenburgers* characterizes "the sorrowing Czech masses with a strong vocal force," whereas he allows the German oppressors to appear only once throughout the opera as a small detachment of Brandenburger soldiers (which is highly unusual for the genre of grand opera, which often employed two different choruses depicting opposing political or national forces). The only singing Brandenburger character is captain Varneman, "whose music—'quasi marcia' with a ubiquitous dotted figure supplemented by the occasional jaunty trill" and marked by *alla turca* instrumentation—immediately differentiates him from the Czech characters of the opera (Tyrrell 1988:160). The words sung by the foreign soldier to the Brandenburger march distinguish him further. Addressing the Czech peasants, the German soldier says:

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Example 11: Dvořák, *Armida*, act 4, scene 3, the *alla turca* march/religious hymn of the crusaders.

(Z daleka ozve se válečný zpěv křižáckého vojska, všichni mu naslouchají)
(From a distance, the war-like chant of the crusaders resounds, everybody listens to it)

Andante maestoso marziale (♩ = 92-96)

SBOR KŘIŽÁKŮ

Tenors
 Zas vla - je Kris - - - tův
Let's gather at the banner of Christ

Basses
 p

8^{va}

pp fp

pra - - - por sva - - - tý

Picc., Ob.
 p

Tr.
 p

Tbn.
 B.Dr., Cym., Trgl.
 pp

v boj bo - - - jov - - - ní - - - kům,
Let's follow it into the battle

fp

(Example 11 cont.)

The musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with a *dim.* marking and the lyrics "dál, za ním dál, kde". The second staff is the bass line for the piano, starting with a *dim.* marking and the lyrics "dál, za ním". The third staff is the right-hand piano part, starting with a *p* marking. The fourth and fifth staves are the left-hand piano part, starting with a *fp* marking. The score is in a key signature of two flats and a common time signature.

“Stand still! Not a single step further! In vain you run away and try to save your possessions. You rascals! Leaving behind your empty huts! Give us the bags. The bread and wine, the meat and everything you have, or else we shall burn down all of your houses! And we will throw you into the fire like wood!”

The old man [responds]: “For all of these cruel deeds, the Lord shall curse you, all of you!”

The soldier: “You bloody old fool, you! If I weren’t just now in a good humor, indeed, I would put a piece of iron into your mouth to eat! Get up, prepare a banquet for my men and for those women there—a room from which they cannot escape!”

The cruelty presented in the speech of the Brandenburger soldier recalls the depictions of the Turks raping Montenegrin women and burning Montenegrin houses in Čermák’s paintings, and thus it fittingly reflects the *alla turca* elements of the accompanying march.

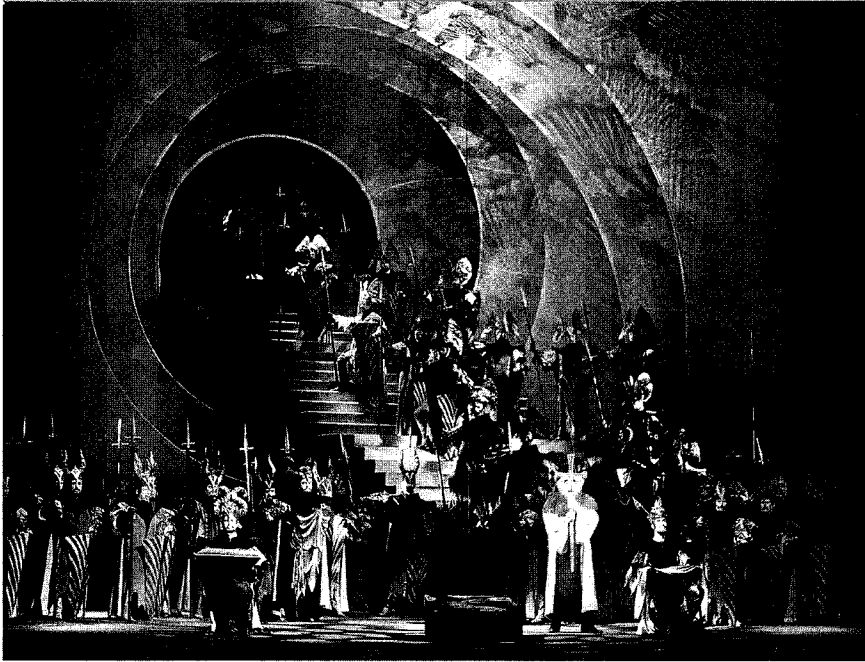
The habit of portraying European military aggressors with a Turkish march, however, did not originate in nineteenth-century Czech opera and visual art; eighteenth-century musicians from Bohemia used similar musical symbolism. František Kotzwara, for example, in his enormously popular 1788 composition *The Battle of Prague*, employs a Turkish march although the program of the piece has nothing to do with the Turks. Instead, it depicts the 1757 siege of Prague by the Prussian army during the Seven Years’ War. The Turkish music therefore probably symbolizes the aggressive Prussians.

The military march acquires a similar identifying function in *Vanda*, Dvořák's first grand opera. The heroine, in this case, is the mythical Polish queen Vanda, who is in love with the Polish knight Slavoj. The German count Roderich, however, desires Vanda as well. When he is rejected, he wages a war against the Poles. In order to save her people, Vanda sacrifices herself and drowns in the Visla River. Like Smetana in *The Brandenburgers*, in *Vanda* Dvořák avoids depicting the actual conflict between the Poles and the Germans. Instead we meet Roderich's envoy in act 1 and later, in acts 2 and 3, also Roderich himself. The envoy's entrance features a military march that, like some of the marches in *Armida*, employs several exotic elements, especially the *alla turca* percussion and harp accompaniment in its middle section. In his discussion of both operas, Jan Smaczny points out that "*Vanda* . . . was certainly very much in Dvořák's mind in 1900 and 1901, . . . within barely a year of these events, Dvořák was at work on the score of his last opera, *Armida*" (1996:83). Smaczny also points out many similarities between the two works: "both operas have a strong ceremonial element replete with fanfares and marches, and both conclude with the voluntary self-sacrifice of the heroine in scenes that are structured in remarkably similar ways" (1996:91). The close ties between the two works make it possible to consider the German *alla turca* march in *Vanda* as a direct predecessor of the crusaders' marches in *Armida*, which suggests a possible connection between the crusaders of *Armida* and Roderich's aggressive armies in *Vanda*.

An Anti-imperialist Opera

The finding that Dvořák presents an unsympathetic portrayal of the Christian crusaders contradicts the appraisals of scholars and critics of the music of *Armida*. The generally accepted image of Dvořák's last musical composition as a failed orientalist opera, presented in the writings of Benoni, Burghauer, and Tyrrell, has probably contributed to the fact that this work has not achieved the tremendous success of his previous opera, *Rusalka*, and that it never found its way to the international or even the Czech operatic repertoire. But not all approaches to the opera were marked by insensitivity to and confusion about its unconventional portrayal of the opposition between the Christians and the Muslims. The 1987 production of *Armida* in the National Theater in Prague, for example, strongly resonated with the opera's ambiguous approach toward the Christian crusaders (a photograph from the production can be seen in figure 4). Josef Jelínek's costumes for this production—black robes with horned helmets—made the crusaders look like devils rather than Christian knights.¹⁰ Even without the reinforcement of stage design and costumes, the text and music of Dvořák's *Armida* suggest that

Figure 4: A photograph of the Crusaders from the 1987 production of *Armida* in the National Theater in Prague. Courtesy of the National Theater Archive in Prague.



the opera should be seen as a fascinating anti-imperialist work. It presents an important example of a marginalized European nation's perspective on the discourse of orientalism and nationalism, showing these discourses to be heterogeneous and often filled with anti-hegemonic messages.

Notes

1. Since there has been only little research and interpretation done in the field of Czech nineteenth-century literature dealing with oriental subjects, Polish literature can serve as analogy. In her study of nineteenth-century Polish literary travelogues about the Orient, Izabela Kalinowska claims that "in the nineteenth-century, scholarly and literary Orientalism enjoyed great popularity in Eastern Europe in part because the Eastern Europeans desired to participate as equals in the intellectual life of Europe" (2004:3). Kalinowska then focuses on Polish literature as a product of a nation that, like the Czechs, was "relegated to the class of imperialism's victims" (2004:4). Her exploration of the Polish literary works dealing with the Orient shows, among other things, that a small group of Polish nineteenth-century writers (which included Adam Mickiewicz's *Sonnets*, written during the poet's stay in Crimea) would subvert imperialist ideology in their works, and that they were also "capable of engaging the cultural traditions of the East in a non-imperialist, dialogical way" (2004:187). Czech interactions with the exotic peoples and countries in the nineteenth and twentieth century are gradually gaining more and more scholarly attention as well (see, for example, Lemmen 2007).

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2. As Tim Carter writes, “almost 100 operas and ballets draw upon the love of the Saracen sorceress Armida for the Christian warrior Rinaldo (in French called *Armide* and Renaud [and in Czech called *Armida* and *Rinald*]), with such titles as *Armida*, *Rinaldo*, *Armida e Rinaldo*, *Armida abbandonata* and *Armida al campo d’Egitto*.” Tim Carter, “Armida,” *Grove Music Online* (accessed 16 March 2006).
3. The view of Armida as a proto-Christian character is further strengthened in several scenes in which she uses phrases with Christian overtones. Thus in her famous act 1 aria “The slender gazelle,” Armida compares Rinald to “a gleaming archangel.” Similarly, in her dialogue with Ismen in act 3, Armida calls the magician a “spawn of hell” whose “repugnant, detestable, and sinful desire” can never impeach her “purity.” (She says this after having spent the whole previous act with Rinald in the magical gardens of delights.)
4. Through this plot detail, Vrchlický’s Rinald and Armida parallel other sympathetic yet tragic couples from nineteenth-century opera, such as Edgar and Lucia in Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Raoul and Valentine in Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots*, or Carlos and Elisabeth in Verdi’s *Don Carlos*.
5. Ismen’s speech may have also reflected a critique of the European imperialism in North America and of the European treatment of the Native American population. Dvořák, having returned from his second trip to the United States just a few years prior to composing *Armida*, may have been aware of such issues.
6. See especially Sayer’s discussion of the nineteenth-century Czech interpretations of the fifteenth-century Hussite revolution and of the sixteenth-century revolt of Czech Protestant estates against the Catholic Habsburgs, which ended unsuccessfully at the battle of White Mountain in 1620 and resulted in forced re-catholicization and germanification of the Czechlands. According to Sayer, it was common among the Czech nationalists in the nineteenth century to put aside the fact that they were Roman Catholics and identify with Hussite heretics whom they admired for their “Slavic virtues [such as] . . . love of freedom, democracy, egalitarianism, and pacifism” (1998:140). Like the Muslims in *Armida*, the Czech followers of Hus were eventually defeated by foreign troops claiming, much like the twelfth-century crusaders, to be fighting for a religious cause.
7. Both of these passages, moreover, arise out of an earlier tradition of having the sympathetic heroine represented or announced by an oboe (such as Lucia’s first entrance in Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor*).
8. According to Burghauser, “Dvořák’s Wissensbegierde erstreckte sich aber nicht nur auf neue Gebiete und Erscheinungen, sondern auch auf die Vertiefung älterer Kenntnisse: Im Museum der tschechischen Musik befinden sich Klavierauszüge von *Tannhäuser* und *Lohengrin* mit Dvořáks Unterschrift und dem Datum 1901, obwohl er beide Opern schon als junger Mann kennenlernte” (1994a:15).
9. Pentatonicism appears quite often in Eastern and Central European (including Czech) folk music, and Dvořák’s decision to use it instead of other European musical markers of the exotic in the muezzin’s song may be evidence of yet another connection between the Muslims in *Armida* and the oppressed nations of Central Europe.
10. Jelínek’s costumes resemble the attires of the Teutonic knights in Sergei Eisenstein’s *Alexander Nevsky*—another dramatic work in which Christian Westerners are portrayed as the menacing Other.

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