

Bedrich Smetana's National - Historical Operas as Mediums for Expression of Political Attitudes

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National operas

- The potential to morally improve, educate and mobilize the audience
- Opera being the most important cultural institution of the 19th century (Philipp Ther)
- In the 19th century, music had a central role in the formation of national sentiment and in attracting people to that idea (Anthony Arblaster)
- "Even the apparently least political of arts, music, had the strongest political associations. This was perhaps the only period in history when operas were written as, or taken to be, political manifestos and triggered off revolutions." (Eric Hobsbawm)

Braniboři v Čechách (1866)

Collective memory

- ▶ Period of Brandenburg government over Bohemia (1278-1283)
- ▶ Very negatively remembered: imprisonment of crown prince Václav, pillage of churches and monasteries, natural disasters (plague, floods, storms, extremely strong winter, and hunger)

Political criticism within the plot

- ▶ The Motif of language suppression as a potential criticism of the Habsburg attitudes towards Bohemia
- ▶ Main message: importance of national unity, warning against internal divisions

Possible interpretation

- ▶ Immediate possible anti-Prussian interpretation
- ▶ 20th century: dominant anti-German interpretation

Libuše (1881)

Collective memory

- Middle Ages: a real historical person
- 19th century: part of national mythology
- Since 1527, and especially 1620, Libuše myth in service of confirmation of Bohemian statehood and historical continuity

Political messages within the plot

- The court scene highlights the importance of state autonomy and the Czech legal system
- The prophecy scene highlights the importance of the national dynasty and the national perseverance

Reactions on King's actions

- The prophecy scene was only added after Francis Joseph refused to have himself crowned as king of Bohemia (for the third time)
- Six pictures: the most important persons and events of Czech history from the period of national dynasty

The prophecy scene

Břetislav (1034.-1055.) a Jitka
The first prince who ruled over
all the Czech lands

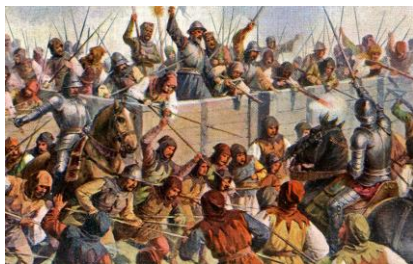


Jaroslav ze Štenberka (13. st.)
Hero who, as the legend has it,
defended Bohemia against the
Tatar invasion



Otakar II., Eliška a Karel IV.
Transition of crown from Přemyslid
to Luxembourg dynasty; their
successes: “lord who ruled from sea
to sea, (...) townbuilder and friend of
the people”; the one who birthed
the nation not a ruler but a father;
and “a father who to the Czechs /
gave the bread of culture at their
own table!”

Žižka, Prokop Veliký a husité
Hussite victories and chaos
of warfare



Jiří z Poděbrad (1420.-1471.)
the last ruler of Czech origin, his
reign is considered to be the last
glorious period of Czech history



Praha
“Czech people shall never perish,
they all hell’s horrors will ever resist!
Glory! Glory!”
(III, 5, 6 – *finale*)





Thank you for your attention!