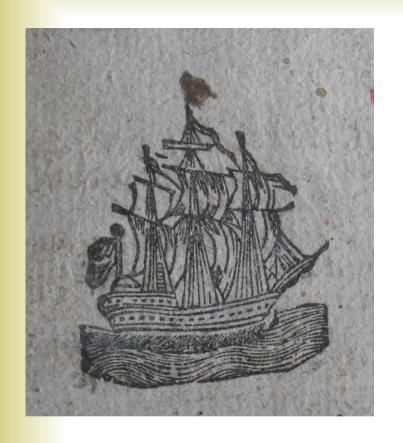
"Palčivého živlu zhoubný hněv." Natural Disasters in Poems of the Czech National Revival and Their Relation to Broadside Ballads

CB

Andrea Vítová

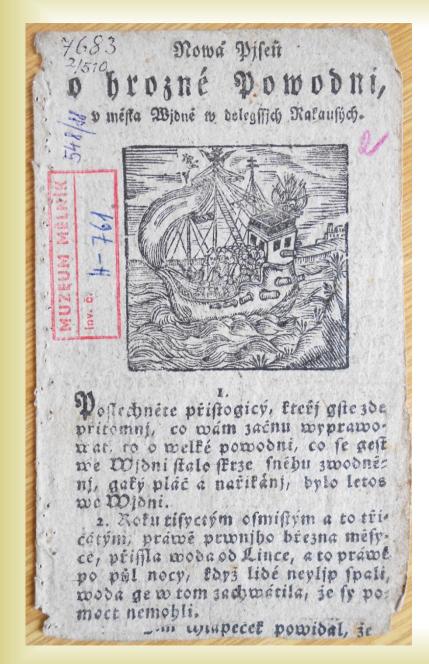
Institute of Czech Literature of the CAS



Songs about unusual natural phenomena or natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, fire or appearance of comets, belong to the oldest broadside ballads. They perform the role of "historical news" and – consequently – they have their place among similar works.

The dominance of the nature over a human life was demonstrated also in pieces narrating about mining accidents, famines, the plague etc., and also in polythematic songs culminating in a general moral advice.

Nevertheless, these ballads are not the most frequent ones: the readers found them attractive, still the stories about crimes, human wickedness or about war hardships prevail over them.



The role of the songs describing natural disasters was to inform the listeners about extraordinary events as well as to amuse them, to tell a curious and attractive story. Even in the cases when the author was an eye-witness of the event, the work was always built up like a fictional story which was necessary when the author knew the topic of the narration only by hearsay. František Kutnar, a historian, even came to the conclusion that broadside ballads tell us more about the narrating subject and its surroundings then about the events and historical facts.



The audience of the broadside ballads were yearning for sensations and for real-life, current affairs. The tendency to focus on topical issues grew stronger at the turn of the 18th and 19th century along with the rising availability of newspapers and magazines.

The periodical press was not widespread among folk readers at the time yet; still, many of them were quite well familiarised with various spheres of the literary production.

At the same time, even more people were influenced by growing national awareness and they started to prefer new and ambitious Czech literary projects to the broadside ballads.



starem meste, w liliewé ulici, čjsle 946, a k dostánj gest w kněhoskladu wydawatelowu każdý čtwrtek po archu , k němažto se we čtrnácti dnech weždy geště přikládá.



#### 2hý r. běh.

Předplacenj u wydawatele i u wšech řádných kněhkupců rakauského mocnárstwi na celý rok za 3 zl. 12 kr., na čtwrt eta za 48 kr. na stř. se přigjmá. I po c. k. ostow, anyadech, a wšak gen za půlletnj předplátku 2 zl. 12 kr. na stř., týdennjk tento se rozesjlá.

### Národnj zábawnjk pro Čechy, Morawany a Slowáky.

15ho rjgna]

Kde Čech který, k nám spěš bljže, Přešlechetných oslawit, Nás k nim moená wděčnost wjže, Láska, něžný nebes cit.

J. N. Stepánek.

[1835.

#### Plesáni wěrné Prahy

u slawném přigezdu

GEGICH CJS. KRAL. MAJESTATNOSTJ

## FERDINANDA I. a MARIE ANNY KAROLINY,

DNE 4. NIGNA 1835.

Proč mizj sen giž před switánjm? Proč tisje hlasů znj plesánjm? A srdce pne se w tanżenj? Proč duch se wznáši k Wšemocnosti, Tam wladařjej na wysosti, U wraucjm, zbožném modlenj?

Proč národ sworným hlasem zpjwá, A zwučným plesem se ozýwá Změněná Praha w krásný rág? Proč tu, kde gindy wýhled planý, Ted' strmj k nebi slawné brány, A podzim zkwjtá gako mág?

Slyš zwonů welehjej zwnky, A zhožný zpěw i ryčné hluky, "Buď zdráw a zdráwa!" wolá daw : A panny, wiz, tu wènce winau,
A djíky, kmeti w slastech plynau,
O Praho zdobná, swět a slaw!

Hle, dnes z čerwánků w záři gasné, Dnes w době Bohem dané, spasné Se slunce skwege nad tehau: Ferdinand, Král twúg, we milosti Co Otec w tohě se uhostj Is Marij, twau Králownau.

Hle, gak se béře s gasnau twárj, Gak milost z oka Geho zárj; Kam okem hne, tu budj ples: A stráže nenj kolem Něho, Gen národ wjtá Krále swého, Gegž prwujkráte widj dnes.

Gew, Praho, gew, že nenhasne Památka této doby krásné, Dokawad frwá základ twúg; Gew zřegmě swětům w horliwosti, Že láskau plane a wěrnostj Ku Králi swému národ twůg.

Jan Watera.

Daily journalism in the form of newspaper articles on common events or daily chronicles wasn't the only rival of the genre of broadside ballads; new Czech magazines published also poems on important social and political occurrence affairs or on important scientific or literary feats.

Poetic works on topical events of the time were usually situated on a title page though we can find them also inside the issues of various magazines. On the other hand, texts about natural disasters were placed like that rarely (and rather surprisingly).



The occasional poetry in Květy, 1835



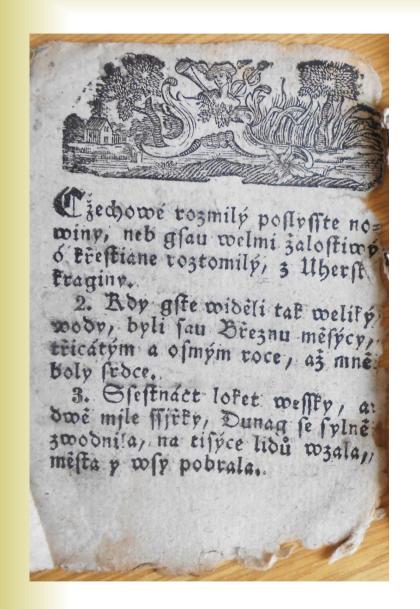
The composition and the means of expression of the newspaper poems were obviously adopted from the genre of broadside ballads but the influence of new Czech poetry is also detectable in these works.

In the early phase of Czech National Revival, poets were quite often inspired by the wildness of nature and by the manifestation of the power of the elements:

"Básně v řeči vázané" (an almanac published by Václav Thám in 1785) contains the poem BOUŘKA ("The Thunderstorm") composed by TOMÁŠ PAVELKA. Its way of speaking is expressive and exaggerated, some sequences were meant to give readers a fright.

The poem POVĚTŘÍ ("The Air", written by TOMÁŠ MNICH, published in 1798 in 3rd volume of Puchmajer's almanac "Nové básně") leaves similar impression. Mnich ended up his work with a moral advice in the manner of the broadside ballads.

FRANTIŠEK DOBROMYSL TRNKA used the same subject matter in the poem HROMOBITÍ ("The Peal of Thunder", collection of poems "Vesna", 1821).



The echo of broadside ballads sounds in all the works of art mentioned above; however, their basic characteristic is very different: their world is based on imagination. By contrast, the broadside ballads obligatorily refer to specific historical events.

When poets entered the conventional area of the broadside ballads, they adopted a repertory of the traditional genre, intentionally or unwittingly, using the same or very similar composition and means of expression. They also focused on the high-profiled moments of the story provoking emotional reactions in the readers or listeners. Finally, they tried to make contact with the target audience and to express a moral appeal.

#### Popsánj

ohne w meffecku Ryffperku due 3. kwetna 1824.

Sle tam wzdálenosti od půl noch Čerwená se obloha co frew! Táhne strach a hrůza se wsj moch, Palčiwého žiwlu zhaubuh hužw. Dým giž se zdwihá, Sem tam se mjhá, Arutosti gest to hužw.

Patř tam ofo lidsté, wzhledni bliže
Slzy autrpnosti zkalené!
Sluch mi trne, cýtý srdce tiže
Nehody na lid vwalené.
Lid se tu sbýhá,
Nářek se zdwihá,
K obloze zbarwené.

Zjragicý plamen wsecko sijrá,
Sýdlo celé geden plamen ge;
S ohněm zápasý tu wichr plápol sbjrá
Wůkol daleko geg házege.
Plamen tam spčj,
Wjtr tu sičj,
Gměnj gest stráwené.

Darmo zwonû zwuk tê strasti blásyl.

Třestot, prastot, hluk ho nestyssel;

Laučege se opět zhaubu blásyl,

Spadna, z plamenu wjc newysel.

Wrchole wěži

M popeli leži,

Thrám kde se slawný skruěl.

Example Nr. 1. Jan Sudiprav Rettig: "Popsání ohně v městečku Kyšperku dne 3. května 1824" ("The Description of the Fire in the Town of Kyšperk on May 2, 1824").

Published in Čechoslav shortly after the tragedy.

Theme: Kyšperk (today Letohrad, Eastern Bohemia) was seriously damaged by the fire: almost 80 buildings in the square and in the nearby street got burned down.

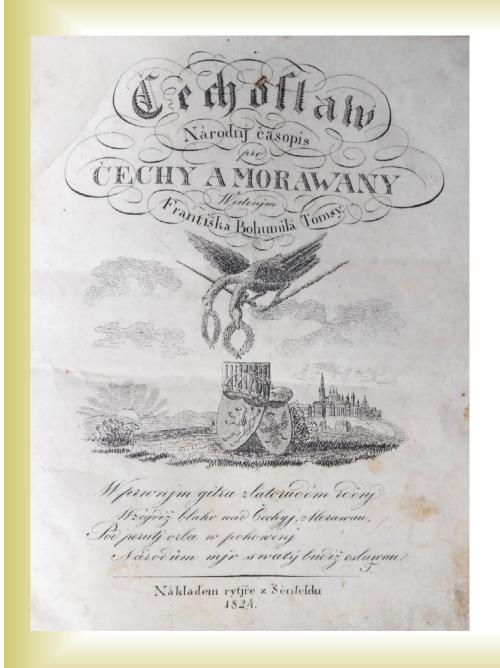
Rettig probably witnessed the accident or at least he experienced the impact of the fire on the town and its inhabitants personally. At that time, he was already an well-known author of occasional poetry.



The title of the Rettig's poem seems to indicate that a "reportage in verse" is going to come: a reader expects a detailed description of the destructive fire and of the fight against it. However, the text shows the opposite tendency: it offers a more general view of the incident. Every strophe presents an image of a particular phase of the event. The details are of little consequence.



Jan Alois Sudiprav Rettig (1774 -1844)



The images come in a chronological order. The first scene (a sight from the distance) makes us anticipate the tragedy. The second strophe adds a visual and hearing perception but the description of the spread of fire is yet to come in two following strophes and it culminates in the moment when the bells and the tower fall down. Two final strophes deal with the depressive impact of the natural disaster on the town and the readers are encouraged to help.



The cover of the Čechoslav, 1824



The text lacks the historical details about the event but the composition of the poem keeps the usual story order of the broadside ballads. Furthermore – the author expressed his sympathy and appealed to the audience in order to draw their attention to the hard-luck story.

We can speculate if the poet copied the narrative structure of broadside ballads unconsciously or if he used the common scheme of popular songs intentionally – to gain the favour of the wide audience. The second option seems to be right.

#### Wěž Plzenská bleskem ztráwená dne 6. Unora 1853.

(Básch složená od professora Wogtěcha Sedláčka, a w plzenském diwadle dne 22. Unora b. r. deklamowaná od p. Běcka)

Giž tichá půlnoc pryč se odebjrá,
W posledným spánku dýchá wšecko stwořený:
Ay! mračno na nebi se rozprostýrá,
A z dálky slyšet gako wětrů banřený;
A zdá se, gakby noc se navrátití chtěla,
Neb gakby země s nebem zápasití měla,
A gakby táhl k nám wšech wzteků rog,
Wždy wýc a wýc se blíží živlů bog.

Hwėzdičky nebes zahalugį twáře,
Tma nad noe černěgšį zakrýwá kraginu,
Gen z dálky mrak otwirá blesku záře,
W tom slyšet s wěže bjti třetj hodinu.
Ha! co se děge, bauře nad námi se wzteká!
Trhá se každý ze sna, celá zem se leká!
U prostřed zimy, skrze led a mráz
Hrom stjhá hrom, a bige ráz a ráz:
Po dwakrát silná rána udeřila,
Po dwakrát křiž na křiž zem oswjtila.

W tom poutichne banř, a wichrů wánj, Gakby se zarazily nad swau wzteklostj, Wšak s wýše wěže slyšet bědowánj, A mysl poděšená trne auzkostj; Neb zwonů smutný zwuk, a bubnů hlaholenj Nám ohlašuge w městé strašné zanjcenj. Na gedno mjsto hledj lidu na tisjee, Kde wrchol wěže hořj gako gasná swjce, A obracj se w kauli ohníwau, A osvěcuge město zářj swan.

Ach! běda tobé, slavné Čechůw sjdlo!
Giž plamen wnitřnosti twé wěže požjrá,
A gako horaucjho pekla zřjdlo
Swau tlamu na weškeré město rozdjrá;
Wiz trámů hořjejch z wazeb se dolů sutj,
Hrozjejch chrámu Páně strašné zahynutj,
An w rachotu a hřnotu krow se rozpadá,
A s hrůzau na to patři celá osada.

Zde a tam sršj obniwé děště, Hodiny na wěži tlukau si geště: Čtwrt gedna — druhá — i třetj bige, W tom pak ge ohniwá litina kryge. Poslednj odbily hodinku sobé, Audy swé skládagj we włastnjm hrobé; Giż plamen ke srdci weże se béře, Hledage průduchy, okna a dwéře, Obgjmá zwonici, proniká kowy, Po hmoté znětliwé hltawě lowj. —

Ach, wy zwony, welikáni!
Střjbrozwukem wládnaucj,
Slyšim waše potykánj
W této peci horaucj.
Raždé o wás udeřenj
Rlad a trámů hořjejch,
Poslednj z wás wáhj zněnj,
Wás — se s námi laučjejch.
Na sta let gste wěrně, stále
Lid do chrámu wodily,
Ted gste sobě nenadále
Umjráčkem zwonily.

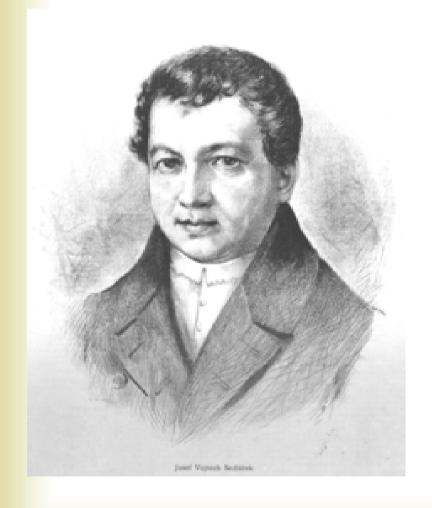
Bůh pomozi! giż se bořj
Podlaha, a krow se zwrácj,
Wšecko u wnitř šmahem hořj,
Zwonů strog se dolů kácj;
Rauř a plamen wen se walj
Skrze každau průdušinu,
Skrze trámy, klády, swaly,
Skrze žhaucj zwonowinu —
Geho diwé zuříwosti
Žádná sjla neodolá,
Raždý Plzňan s nábožnostj
K Bohu za ochranu wolá!

W tom pak ruka hoži kyne, Oheň swau se hmotau dusj, Chrám náš swatý nezahyne, Zhyne gen, eo zhynaut musj, Smělost wogska srdnatého, Snažnost wěrných měštěnjnů, Zachowaly sobě města swého A chrám swatý Hospodinu.

Wšak kam ruka Páně sáhla,
Rozpadlo se djlo w zřjceniny;
Diwá bauře pryč odtáhla,
Ostaly zde gegj činy.
Stogj prázdné stanowiště,
Stogj gako lebka umrléj, —
Prázdné zdi má smrt w swém náručj!

Example Nr. 2. Josef Vojtěch Sedláček: "Věž plzenská bleskem strávená dne 6. unora 1835" ("The Tower of Pilsen Digested by the Lightning on February 6, 1835"). Published in Česká včela 24. 2. 1835.

Theme: Extraordinary winter thunderstorm lit the roof of the tower of St. Bartholomew's cathedral in Pilsen and the bells melt in the fire.



Sedláček was familiar with Czech popular reading. However, at the time when he wrote this poem, the broadside ballads started to leave their place in the public life being replaced by a new genre – "společenská píseň" ("community song").

In his work Sedláček connected the traditional means of the broadside ballads as well as allegoric scenes and metaphorical expressions typical of the patriotic lyrical poetry.



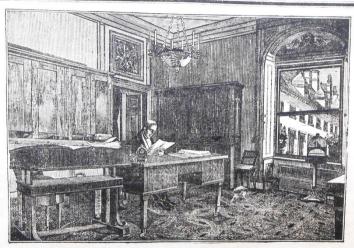
Josef Vojtěch Sedláček (1785-1836)

# Česká Wčela.

Čisso 1.

A pamětlim praotců flamnoch, Gedem fe boti bonofim.

Dne 5. Ledna 1836.



Rabinet Cifare Frantiffa,

Ied myobragenim tohoto fabinetu, m nemi tolifere bufagy welice ale fwug lib milowal, bofaguge to, je 8 nim manbrofti wladarfte a lafty wlaftenede na gewo bal zweinený mocnář, gehog gtrátu lonftého rotu gime oplafamali. Frantiffet počal fme panomani ga tegtich čafu, a nichs ale ga ctmrt ftoletj mitegne muftaupil, namratim negen from narodum, ale i cele Emrope pofog. Po unewnenj mjru wynaflabal cifar Frantiffet wffedu fwau na Rem gwlafftnibo prizuiwce, boel o profued pramuflu, filu na blaho fwe wlaftni geme. Storo geden libfth pologiw f politednickemu uftamu, f tomuto ftwoftnemu wef trunil na cifarffem ftolci, bofonale umagomam a plnim fnjecj fwe powinnefti. Do fwich podbanich byl pomajoman za otce a mubec tat oflamen, je fe gafojto obhoblan. Laffu Geho f webam prirodujm ofmedeinge neywljdnegffi, nepipramedlimegffi a neymiloftimegffi

Relge nam lépe gapočiti tretj ročniť "Čefté Weelh" giffanau bo raby prmnich mocnarů fe postawil. Gaf gebenfagby, foo oc gabati chtel, w tembni mluwiti mohl. Tafowat panowala f nemu bamera, je pobdani g neybalffich prichagegice fragin, pred otcomffim trunem gas legitofti fwe prednaffeli a od Reho rady a pomoci bochageli. Zwelebowanj wlafti webami a umenim, melo ftamenj, fam ofobne famen gaflabnj, gelifog f ugiteenes mu wzbelanj Geho "milych a wernich mefftanu" byl gahrada Genbrunftá a poflánj čtpř we přirodnictwj mocnar swehn well stwel a bustognost seban samym gbehlyd, mugu bo Bragisie, cimg na gewo bal swe

In the broadside ballads, the people afflicted by an accident usually stand for a collective protagonist. They play the main role and the listeners or readers are allowed to identify with them and feel the sympathy. In Sedláček's poem, on the other hand, the personificated building of the church gets into the spotlight of the work while the inhabitants of Pilsen make just passive staffage. The compassion of the audience is supposed to be directed to the damaged tower. In colourful, dramatic images, the author compares the fire to a furious rage of inferno. Emotions are provoked also by frequent exclamations and interjections.



According to the subtitle, the poem was recited in the Pilsen theatre on February 22, 1835. It was published shortly afterwards but the oral presentation was definitely planned as the primary way of publication. The structure of text was adapted on the ground of it. The first, wordy part of the poem is composed from the point of view of a passive observer. After a sharp turn it changes into an exclamation in the first-person narrative. The poet speaks to the church bells and asks God for help; nevertheless, the human effort is also celebrated. In the end the author appeals to the readers and listeners for active help, introduces his vision of the renovated cathedral and praises those who are going to participate on it. The mention of the church as of the "glorious seat of Bohemians" together with comparing the poet's contemporaries to their famous ancestors bring this poem closer to the patriotic-agitation poetry.



Both the examples of the Czech National Revival poetry we talked about were evidently inspired by the genre of broadside ballads. They involved both drama and sentiment but they also evoked a touch of nobility and respect instead of sensationalism.

Rettig and Sedláček arrived at two various targets:
Rettig gave the evidence of the abilities of new
Czech poetry and he converted one of the traditional
themes of the broadside ballads into the work of art.
He focused his attention on more sophisticated
readers and he offered them esthetical experience
instead of sensational reporting.

Sedláček, ten years later, attempted to direct his listeners and readers to an active and practical response. In his work he merged miscellaneous literary genres and influences without any selection: expressive phrases and an accent on emotions keep the religious and patriotic text closer to the broadside ballads.

# Thank you for your attention.

CB

The pictorial material in this presentation comes from:

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