Karel Havlíček (1821-56) has become somewhat better known in North America thanks to Thomas Pesek's dissertation, Barbara Reinfeld's monograph, and Michael Heim's study on Havlíček's Russian journey. For a century his memory was cherished by Czechs of the most diverse political persuasions as that of a national educator, hero, and martyr. In retrospect there is a sense of great inner unity and concentration that surrounds this man's personality. The circumstance that he came to an untimely end before Czech public life was highly differentiated was bound to keep him effective, long after his death, as a unifying force in Czech society.

It is not so much the mature metropolitan journalist and political fighter who concerns us here as the obscure young man from provincial Bohemia, a son of the Czech lower-middle class as it emerged within two generations of

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2. For examples, see the partisan biography by the Young Czech, Karel Tůma, Karel Havlíček Borovský, nejslavnější publicista českého národa (Kutná Hora: Karel Šolc, 1883); Tomáš G. Masaryk, Karel Havlíček: snahy a tužby politického probuzení (Praha: Jan Laichter, 1896; 3d ed., 1920); Emanuel Chalupný, Havlíček: prostředí, osobnost a dílo (Praha: Melantrich, 1929). The collection edited by Antonín Hajn, Národ o Havlíčkoví (Praha: Jednota československých novinářů, 1936) illustrates the cult of Havlíček as a national hero. B. Stanislav, Karel Havlíček Borovský (Praha: Státní nakladatelství politické literatury, 1954) and Miloslav Formánek and Václav Procházka, Myšlenkový odkaz Karla Havlíčka (Praha: Státní nakladatelství politické literatury, 1961) express a continuing need to interpret Havlíček from a Marxist-Leninist perspective.
the Josephine reforms. Caught up in the Czech national movement, but having passed through a German-speaking educational system in the 1830s, young Havlíček saw his vocation as that of a Czech writer, and he stuck to this decision for the rest of his life.

Over wide stretches of post-Napoleonic Europe, literary work still served as a substitute for politics; but in the Bohemia of 1840, Czech literary or linguistic pursuits in their own right could have vaguely unsettling possibilities. The Bohemian lands offered a classic example of the bilingualism known to sociolinguists as diglossia. German, as the higher-ranking language, generally stood in first place, where Joseph II had wanted to see it established, as the lingua franca in law, administration, business, science, and higher culture. The Czech language ranked lower, in spite of the impressive literary revival, and still qualified largely as an idiom of home and marketplace. Upwardly mobile Czech patriots, who hoped to secure a higher standing for their native tongue, frequently invoked fashionable romantic Pan-Slavism, which seemed to give their claims a greater legitimacy. Havlíček’s commitment to the popular speech had to be justified even to his parents, who did not object to their Czech language as such, but who did not care to see their son distracted from what they considered his main objective, a solid professional career.

It was precisely his patriotic and linguistic commitments which led Havlíček to apply to the Prague seminary, in hopes of being a candidate for the priesthood, and which also led to his dismissal, all within the academic year 1840-41. Stirred by his Czech and Slavic affiliation, by a budding interest in Catholic reform, and by the intrusions of free thought, he could not adjust smoothly to the conformity his mentors expected of him. The seminary experience, involving a rebellion against Restoration Catholicism,3 remained significant for him and reverberated in his later work.

In August, 1841, shortly before he received his dismissal notice, Havlíček went to Batelov, not far from Borová, his birthplace, to visit his aunt, who was housekeeper for the local priest. The young seminarian was to be the guest preacher at the Sunday service. On Saturday evening, as he stood on the hilltop thinking about his sermon and watching the sunset, a stanza occurred to him:

3. “Roman Catholic Restoration” is the term used by Eduard Winter to characterize the post-Napoleonic reaction in the Vatican and the simultaneous ultramontane tendencies in the Austrian Church, as exemplified by Anton Rost, praeses of the Prague seminary, and the butt of several of Havlíček’s 1843 epigrams, Cf. Eduard Winter, Der Josefinismus: die Geschichte des österreichischen Reformkatholizismus (Berlin: Rütten & Loening 1962), parts IV and V; for Rost, cf. pp. 290-96.