

modern European cultural or business history, art history, or Jewish studies—but also a general readership—will find the narrative compelling to follow. Its epic nature invites comparison with, but exceeds in scope, Lynn Nichols’s *The Rape of Europa* (1994), Jonathan Petropoulos’s *Art as Politics* (1996) and *The Faustian Bargain* (2001), or the book (2007) and film (2014) versions of *The Monuments Men* by Robert Edsel et al. In short, this history of Jewish involvement and achievement in the art world is history writ large and springs from the author’s often intimate grasp of the professional and private lives and efforts of the progressive dealers and collectors, reanimated here by one of the history profession’s master storytellers.

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## Přibáň, Jiří, and Karel Hviždala. *In Quest of History: On Czech Statehood and Identity*

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Cynthia Paces

The College of New Jersey, Ewing, New Jersey, USA

Email: [paces@tcnj.edu](mailto:paces@tcnj.edu)

During the 1980s, the journalist Karel Hviždala conducted a series of “distant interviews” with the dissident playwright and philosopher Václav Havel. Hviždala had emigrated with his family to West Germany a decade earlier, and Havel spent the 1980s under constant police surveillance with several stints in prison for “disturbing the peace,” which became the English-language title of the resulting book of interviews (New York, 1990). When it was released, Havel was the democratically elected president of post-communist Czechoslovakia. Hviždala eventually returned to the country of his birth and became famous for his book-length conversations with Czech dissidents and intellectuals, including Jiří Gruša and Pavel Landovský. No doubt, Hviždala drew inspiration from Karel Čapek’s 1929 *Talks with T. G. Masaryk*, which reproduced the conversations between the interwar writer and the first Czechoslovak president (North Haven, CT, 1995).

The prolific Hviždala has returned to this genre with *In Quest of History: On Czech Statehood and Identity*, a long and wide-ranging conversation with the political theorist Jiří Přibáň. Their quest is to revisit the relationship between Czech history and identity in an era of globalization. In their preface, the two intellectuals summarize this difficult task: “for some, the nation state is a tool of globalization; others see it as a last-chance emergency brake before we crash into globalization’s calamitous fallout.” Přibáň and Hviždala want to go beyond this dichotomy and explore the nuances of the Czech nation’s past: “to peer into the past and ask ourselves how we perceived and understood our history at different times, why this was so, and what it means for our present and future” (14).

Hviždala and Přibáň represent two generations. Hviždala was born during World War II and the Nazi occupation, and he describes himself as “[coming] of age in the Stalinist 1950s” (24). Přibáň graduated from Charles University in 1989, the year of the Velvet Revolution. Yet, the two men have much in common—both have lived and worked abroad. Přibáň, who became a professor of law at Charles University in 2002, now teaches at the law school of Cardiff University in Wales. Petr Pithart calls the authors “two men who are as European as they are Czech.” Hviždala and Přibáň are concerned that history has too often been written and co-opted as a tool of the state. A healthy civil society must eschew national histories’ “grand ideologies and established doctrines” and instead seek to understand why these generalizations have been embraced and employed (19). Not only do Hviždala and Přibáň want to critique Marxist teleology and fascist propaganda, but they also want to reexamine

the nineteenth-century Czech national revivalists, Tomáš Masaryk's moral realism, and Josef Pekář's scientific challenges to the Masarykian school.

The book is a part of the Václav Havel series of Karolinum Press, which seeks to continue the intellectual agenda of the late president. The authors' main goal was to introduce academic debates about Czech history to a broader Czech public. The book supposes a deep level of knowledge about the intricacies of Czech history. The discussions between Hvižďala and Přibáň move from the tenth-century establishment of the Slavic Přemyslid dynasty, through Bohemia's relationship with the Holy Roman Empire and Habsburg monarchy, to statehood in the twentieth century.

In translation, the book will speak only to academics with a very strong knowledge of both Czech history and theories of nationalism. For scholars specializing in Habsburg and Czech history, many of the topics will be familiar. For example, the writers challenge the idea that the Battle of White Mountain in 1620 ushered in a period of *"temno"* or darkness. They recognize that scholars have long discounted these generalizations, but they remind us that "this interpretation has stuck in the nation's collective memory right up to the present" (114). They also compliment the work of an ecumenical commission on the Hussite legacy, but they show that Czechs still embrace a national myth of a "bellicose and marshalling [Jan] Hus created by the film director Otakar Vávra and the novelist Alois Jirásek." Přibáň explains, "I am confident that a discussion on the 'dark age' could be . . . liberating for our modern national myths and the black-and-white view of our own history" (114).

The book comprises 13 chapters, some with broad themes, such as "Law without the State and State Law: from the Middle Ages to Modernity" or "Intellectuals and Politics." There are also more focused chapters, such as "The Republic of Educated Citizens, or Masaryk's Attempt at a Central European Utopia." Because the book is structured as a series of conversations by two of today's most erudite Czech public intellectuals, the topics covered in each chapter wander quite a bit. The two discuss, for example, Milan Kundera's novels and essays; the political philosophies of Montesquieu, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Alexis de Tocqueville; and the contemporary crises of Brexit, Scottish nationalism, and Vladimir Putin's irredentism. Because of this conversational and meandering style, an index would have been very helpful.

Although both Hvižďala and Přibáň critique the oversimplification of Czech history, they do begin with the premise that there *is* a Czech history about a singular nation. The impetus for the book was the hundredth anniversary of the Czechoslovak State established in 1918 after World War I. The historic German and Jewish populations of Bohemia play only a background role. A conversation between these two brilliant intellectuals that decenters Czech national history in favor of a multiethnic Bohemian history would be most welcome.

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## Linden, Ari. *Karl Kraus and the Discourse of Modernity*

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Donald L. Wallace

Department of History, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland 21402-1300, USA

E-mail: [dwallace@usna.edu](mailto:dwallace@usna.edu)

Over the last decade, a renewed visibility for Karl Kraus has emerged in the Anglophone world, driven by academic research, new editions, new translations, as well as a more public and broader discussion driven by Jonathan Franzen's (with Paul Reitter and Daniel Kehlmann) *The Kraus Project*. Ari Linden's study of Karl Kraus and modernist theory continues the widening aperture on Kraus's