



**UNIVERSITY  
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## **The Medialization of Literature in the Interwar Czech Press**

Summary of the Dissertation

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**Theses of dissertation *The Medialization of Literature in the Interwar Czech Press***

The theme Medialization of literature in the interwar Czech press is based on the connection between literary, political, and media communication in the specific context of interwar Czechoslovakia in the years 1918–1938.

The period of The First Czechoslovak Republic represents in many respects a unique era of cultural development in Czech history. The milieu of the new democratic state created a space for developing pluralism of opinion and the possibility of freedom of speech. Journalism was a major communication tool and not only political leaders could address the public with media. At the same time, the development of journalism led to the professionalization and differentiation of professions. In connection with this, the writers, who until now had the role of public speakers, suddenly had to redefine their position in the public sphere. Because of the unusual politicization of public life, the relationship between literature, journalism and politics took the form of a specific connection that meant the manifestations of opinion in new specific forms.

The thesis focuses on the topic of medialization of literature in four selected interwar Czech cultural magazines as part of cultural and political communication in young democratic Czechoslovakia. The aim of the thesis is to describe ways of understanding literature and the role of literary life in the Czech public sphere of The First Czechoslovak Republic as one of the factors of political communication, which formed the relationship to the new state.

The character of the topic implies that interdisciplinary methodology is necessary. The research methodology combines history, media studies, and literary science. It is also inspired by the sociology of literature, which understands literary communication as part of societal processes. A similar inspiration for methodology means the analysis of discourse with stylistics, which makes a deeper analysis of the intentions of texts possible.

Public press is a tool for communication. The final form of it is influenced by a huge number of factors from the whole cultural context to the individual influences of its authors. At the same time, the public press carries and creates meanings which leads to the social construction of reality thanks to the institutionalized form of media communication.

The researcher who works with the press must remember that the media reflect and at the same time also are formed by society. That is the reason why the media causes the social construction of reality. The concept of this was created by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966).

When analyzing a media text it is therefore good to use tools involving a broader context, such as different forms of discourse. For example, discourse according to Michel Foucault or Paul Ricoeur. One possible method is stylistic analysis, which focuses on language as the basic symbolic system in the construction of reality. Stylistic analysis also describes the language in contexts that reveals both the denotative and connotative components in a message.

The topic medialization of literature connects the context of media and literary communication. This communication shapes literary life. According to Pierre Bourdieu, it creates the literary field in which the meaning of art, persons and or the ways of expression such as genres and movements emerge and are formed.

This means that for the analysis of interwar media it is necessary to consider the functioning of interwar journalism as a system.

To study interwar journalism, we can find many historical sources. There are huge amounts of newspapers and magazines, memoirs of journalists and publishers, depictions in fiction or even in film, and well-developed professional and scientific reflection. In the period between the two world wars, the beginning of Czech media studies was born. The scientific level it achieved is comparable to today's media studies.

Authors such as Alfred Fuchs (1892–1941), Karel Hoch (1884–1962), Oskar Butter (1886–1943), Emanuel Chalupný (1879–1958) and other or specialized journals such as *Duch novin* (1928–1931) published texts about the development of the press and its influence on society. They were often inspired by sociology.

Texts reflecting on interwar Czech journalism talk about its crisis and decline. The problems came from the acceleration of media production. There were more and more resources and less and less time for their quality processing. Many texts in newspapers were simply taken from other newspapers or from the information service of news agencies. This period in Czech history also saw the culmination of a process called the Northcliff revolution, which means the transformation of journalism from an instrument of public education into a tool for

a profit. The commercialization of journalism led to the development of the tabloids. Also, newspapers and magazines began to pander to the audience. The style of the newspaper changed. The texts that were published were shorter and with lower levels of language expression.

Another cause of changes in journalism was technical development. This included not only communication tools such as the telegraph and telephone, but also new printing techniques which enabled, for example, the production of illustrated magazines.

The professionalization of politics and changes in journalism also caused a change in the position of journalists in the public sphere. Although many texts depict journalists as people who educate the readers and help to create a new state, the differentiation of occupations means that most journalists have stayed anonymous.

Reflection on journalism emphasized the role of gatekeeping and the author's guidance, but at the same time in the newspapers there was no time for deeper analysis. On the contrary, the power of entertainment increased. The public could not see the transformation of journalism without having an experience in the newsrooms. That means the profession of

journalist was for most of society something romantically adventurous.

Professional and scientific reflection show the problems coming from the new way newspapers were created. The reflection also included issues such as the social and legal status of the journalist and also drew attention to the fact that the term „journalist“ includes various forms of one profession that should not have the same conditions. Nevertheless, still more or less popular was the idea of a journalist such as Karel Havlíček Borovský (1821–1856), and idealistically hoping for responsible journalism.

The texts of early media studies also show how the authors interpreted the role of writing about literature and fiction in newspapers. They write about cultural sections in newspaper that do not fulfil their function. The reader did not find in them the necessary information about the literature that he needed or that interested him. Also, the serialized novels published in the newspapers were not an example of high-quality literature. According to theorists of early Czech media studies, the level of cultural reviews in newspaper also often did not correspond to the level of the reader.

For this reason, it is useful to study the media coverage of

literature in cultural journals. They are expected to be a product of the specialization authors made for intellectual audiences.

A high level of politicization is typical for interwar Czech society. In journalism, this means political parallelism, which has led to the situation where most of journals were published by large publishing houses that belonged to political parties. The politicization of the public has also manifested itself in the literature. Therefore, in examining the interwar mediation of literature it is good to include political connections and the various types of their manifestations, such as direct and indirect links to the political party.

The typology created in the thesis includes four journals and in individual studies it focuses on the main features of their way of mediating literature. The selection of the analysed journals is based on both political parallelism as a characteristic of media systems in The First Czechoslovak Republic. It also corresponds to the definition of several main literary trends and movements from the same time. Therefore, selections includes the agrarian magazine *Brázda* (1920–1942), the Catholic magazine *Akord* (1928–1948), the independent weekly *Přítomnost* (1924–1945) and the left-wing literary-artistic monthly *Host* (1921–1929).

While *Brázda* is a representative of the political party cultural



journal, *Akord* shows a range of different opinions within one political ideology. *Přítomnost* represents the interwar concept of independence and at the same time the proximity of the political centre associated with state-building activities. The last of the journals, *Host*, is a magazine that is primarily non-political but presents a politicizing artistic movement. In addition, all journals represent important trends of literature in the interwar period, such as ruralism, Catholic literature, pragmatism, expressionism and the avant-garde.

Because the goal of the thesis is to describe how the texts about literature in journals were involved in political communication, the analysis of selected journals includes three main topics. Texts about literature are chosen for research according to the presence of thematized issues of the nation, democracy, and the relationship to foreign inspirations.

The magazine *Brázda* is an example of the ideological direction of the agrarian party. The party derived the image of the state and the identity of the nation from the land. The party explained the land as a national treasure. Similarly, the agrarian party emphasized tradition as the wealth of knowledge that has worked in the past and that needs to be followed. The countryside was for them the main space where tradition is

maintained and where the tradition has its revitalizing character. Thanks to the development of farmers' families, this environment was able to preserve the necessary awareness of its roots and also unique rural wisdom. According to the agrarian party, rural wisdom needs to be maintained, commemorated, and properly passed on.

According to the agrarian party it was necessary at the same time to work for the development of the countryside. This effort was related to the educational tendency that influenced agrarian thinking about literature and culture. It emphasized the formative role of books and public press that were interpreted by agrarians primarily as educational devices.

*Brázda* is characterized by a clear structure and its use of quite clear forms of journalistic genres. This is based on the need for clear and intelligible expression. We can find in the journal emphasis on the interpretive process and the analytical journalistic style and scientific style of expression that are evidence of the effort to provide a scientific description of current issues for rural areas and agriculture. This fully corresponds to the ideological concept of education in the Czech interwar agrarian movement. At that time young rural intellectuals who came from the countryside worked for its

cultural and economic development.

*Brázda* began as a literary and culturally oriented journal which did not forget to commemorate the anniversaries of writers and so on. With the changes of the editorial office this tendency disappeared. At the end of the 1930s literary journalism in *Brázda* focused only on current events. There is also less cultural journalism because of the need to refer to political developments in the rest of Europe - especially in Germany.

Even though the magazine gradually evolved from an intellectually motivated cultural journal into a current weekly review, the ideological basis remained the same. If the nation comes from the land and the rural is key to the connection with the land it is necessary to take care of it. Otherwise, neither culture nor democracy will survive.

For *Akord* magazine nation and state were not synonymous. In *Akord* they understood the nation as a spiritual community that needs to be nurtured, united, and built on a Christian foundation. Only that could bring truth and direction toward higher values.

In contrast, the state was for them a political construct that shapes and holds the nation from the outside. The task of the state is to protect and lead cultural policy. Because cultural policy has a crucial role in shaping the nation it needs special

attention. The third concept that appears in *Akord* in connection with the state and the nation is the concept of homeland. The homeland here means the spatial connection of the nation and land. The land has positive connotations as well as the nation. The homeland needs to be loved; the nation needs to be developed.

The political situation of The First Czechoslovak Republic was not acceptable for Catholics in many aspects. This was mainly because the young democracy was accompanied by a decline in moral and spiritual values. *Akord* fully agrees with this view and its authors repeatedly draw attention to the unhealthy effects of admiring progress as idols of the time and the promotion of materialism, liberalism, pragmatism and other influences that reduce human value to a simple unit of the state mechanism.

According to *Akord*, the Czech nation was also captured by its own small-mindedness and provincialism which manifested itself either by a nationalism or by a blind interest in foreign patterns. This led *Akord* into a critique of the national inability to build a strong awareness of tradition and the valuable legacy of ancestors on which national identity and self-confidence should be built. Then the foreign patterns can be used as a source of inspiration. It is necessary to translate foreign

literature - it does not matter whether the works are Slavic, French, or German, etc. The choice must be free from the influences of fashion and politics and must follow only true art. That is the art that comes from the artist's heart and soul based on the effort to truly know the reality that is only in God. Only then can art serve its purpose, that is, leading the soul to eternity. This is the great task Catholics should perform for the nation. One of the ways to carry out this task was to commemorate valuable works and great authors from the history of the nation. *Akord* was especially concerned about the legacy of Baroque literature.

This artistic direction in *Akord* found the way of writing about literature or art in general. Artisticism gives authors a very free hand in choosing language - therefore, for example, their texts are relatively free in genre. Artisticism was also becoming a source of legitimacy for authoritarian judgements in literary criticism.

Although *Akord* is not representative of party-political Catholicism, as represented by the People's Party, it presented his own Catholic political line. It is based on the artistic perception of the world. In *Akord*, they did not follow ideas of caring for the family, education, and encouraging Catholic

solidarity as a People's Party, but they looked for the ways to raise the spirit in art and their growth for the nation.

*Akord* criticized Czechoslovak democracy for its secularism. Secularism leads to lack of assurance of persistence based on a deeply lived faith. W Deeply lived faith is a guarantee of honour and morality as well as being a reason for self-sacrifice.

Independent review *Přítomnost* is different from the previous two magazines. It is not an artistic or educational magazine but a well-thought-out professional journalistic product. This manifests itself in a clear definition of the target reader: an intellectual who is interested in social, cultural, and political issues.

With its social focus this magazine was also able to work with the potential competition of early life-style magazines, which were popular in interwar Czechoslovakia. The magazine finds obvious inspiration from the English tradition of writing based on the fascination with everyday life and its hidden details. This means the basic characteristics of this magazine combine journalistic and intellectual ambition. Both tendencies are connected in a natural way with the typical features of the pragmatic-realistic generation that *Přítomnost* represents.

The interwar reflection on journalism that grew from the context

of the party journalism tradition warned against the press which promoted itself as independent. This interpreted independent press as potentially dangerous because it means that it is not clear whom it serves. *Přítomnost* magazine leads to the question of how to understand that an independent magazine has been successful in a media system that has preferred political influences in magazines. *Přítomnost* can be an example of how independence can be understood in the context of the Czech interwar public sphere. One of the important features is the strong patronage of the editor-in-chief. He became a guarantee of a specific opinion and that gave the magazine an ideological direction. Although from the point of view of today's understanding of journalistic independence it may seem that this approach is in an antagonistic position towards the application of opinion and individual attitude, the form of *Přítomnost* shows that the First Czechoslovak Republic's understanding was different. Independence did not mean neutrality, but freedom of expression of one's own opinion with only one limit in the writer's personal convictions.

*Host*, the last of the magazines, is the only magazine that has always focused on art, and never became its dominant theme. This was due to the special form of the avant-garde generation.

This generation, born around the year 1900, felt a strong need to reject the old world that led to the war. They wanted to start again, but to do so they needed to leave everything they saw as limiting. The generation of the Czech interwar avant-garde saw the social problems of Czechoslovakia and sought ways to solve them in left-wing politics. They were interested in the proletariat, the people, and the world instead of nation and state. They also tried to join artistically and ideologically in the wider community of the whole world. They wanted a new future for the world without social problems, but with a new and better proletariat in a brotherhood of all.

The artists of the avant-garde were fascinated by the power of the generation and the possibility of being heard. That's why they wrote manifests and discoursed in many polemics. But they were mostly interested in art, so they stayed away from politics. Not surprisingly, the generation of *Host* magazine was not interested in the nation for quite some time. It is for them just an empty term, the repetition of which became a symptom of past efforts for a better world which ended in war.

The generation in *Host* gradually found the idea of utopian universal brotherhood does not work. Even within a generation it was not possible to find a common voice, as shown by the



disputes with the communist avant-garde group *Devětsil*. Eventually *Host* made a circle: in the beginning they rejected the term nation but in the end, they found it to be an essential part of their own context.

For the whole eight years and despite the changes in publishers and editors the magazine was able to maintain consistent content. The magazine profiled itself as a literary and cultural periodical and remained so.

*Host* documents how much the interwar Czech avant-garde was a fluid and explosive movement. Despite this, the concept of the magazine remained relatively rational. Perhaps because *Host* stayed away from radical left communism and was more careful in its efforts to define itself. This might also be the reason why *Host*, as an avant-garde periodical, was published for a long eight years and captured an important time of generational development.

At the beginning of the thesis is the question of how is the medialization of literature involved in political communication and how did it take part in the formation of a relationship to the young Czechoslovak state. The chosen journals show different strategies that are the result of the ideological context of politics and literature.

A comparison of the connections with the theory of literary communication shows that all chosen periodicals formed their canon of foreign and home literature, built the position of patterns or important literary personalities, and participated in the formation of literary success through their evaluation. It also monitored and evaluated processes of literary life such as a survey or literary criticism.

The literary field is related to the formation of the worldview and its spreading. Controversies and discussions between periodicals illustrate the struggle for a hegemonic position in the literary field. The effort to gain a prominent position in the interwar literary field found its expression in manifest statements that were supposed to gain and justify the right of the artistic movement to exist. The fact that some artistic groups or personalities have been able to leave their mark in the literary canon to this day proves how successful their media strategy has been. Writers and journalists who were looking for a new position in the public sphere in the interwar period often considered how much it was their mission or duty to participate in discussions in the public sphere. Participation in controversies and the issue of the writer as a public intellectual had not only a theoretical form but also a practical one. It was in political

involvement, following current political developments and commenting on it. Apart from the magazine *Host*, which ends with the partial exhaustion of its generation in 1929, all other periodicals during the 1930s focused on current topics. *Brázda* and *Přítomnost* so much that the politics and other actual issues suppressed the previous significant cultural direction of the magazines. Although each of the magazines saw the political situation differently and understood differently the task of art, they all enter the public sphere through proclamations, controversies, discussions and ideologically motivated criticism. They understood the public sphere as their own space to be heard in.

The interwar Czechoslovak media system can be interpreted as the culmination of a development that began especially in the last third of the 19th century. That development built a tradition of commentary on journalism with strong political parallelism. Developments during the 20th century led to a complete change of paradigm. The original valued opinion became an undesirable tendency. On the other hand, the ideal of independent objective journalism today proves itself to be problematic. An examination of interwar journalism in this case can provide valuable perspectives for examining signs of opinion or a

different type of conception of independence.

In the analysed texts we can see the shift of the journalistic style from the interwar period to the present. Today the journalistic style is characterized by the choice of primarily neutral language which must support the objectivity of expression, whereas the interwar journalism allowed the authors to show a personal style and work freely with the form of genres. It is one of the proofs of a change from the commentary tradition that was typical for interwar journalism to the tradition of journalism which emphasizes the function of information and objectivity as a manifestation of independence.

The author of the thesis already wrote about related topics in just a few texts. The most important of them is an article *The conditions for revolution: The reflection of The First Czechoslovak Republic press in publications of early media studies*.<sup>1</sup> That paper focuses on the question how the expectations of changes in journalism were projected into these publications in connection with the new state. The aim was to answer whether political and social changes also implied the idea of journalistic revolution or if the transformation of

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1 KORÁBKOVÁ, Kateřina. *Předpoklady revoluce: reflexe prvorepublikového tisku v publikacích počátku novinovědy*. In: *Mediální (r)evoluce: revoluční příběhy*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2020, pp. 21–29.

journalism was supposed to be a condition for the continuation of democracy.

A few connections with the topic of the thesis are in the text *Avant-garde colours of interwar typography*.<sup>2</sup> The article focuses on the typography of interwar European journals as a part of semantic communication in journals. It also deals with the context of the avant-garde looking for a universal visual language

Also there is a third text that includes the wider context of cultural politics in The First Czechoslovak Republic, named, *“New directions of education will be necessary”: Education in the programs of political parties of Czechoslovakia between the World Wars*.<sup>3</sup> This article is based on the fact that the political parties, in the cultural resolutions of their political programs, emphasize education as the very main part of cultural politics. For the thesis it follows that journalism and the press were on the periphery of the interest of political programs.

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2 KORÁBKOVÁ, Kateřina. Avantgardní barevnost meziválečné typografie. *Tahy* 2017, **10**(1–2), 74–107.

3 KORÁBKOVÁ, Kateřina. „Bude nutno výchově dát směry nové.“ Výchova a vzdělávání v programech politických stran meziválečného Československa. *Historia Scholastica*, 2019, **5**(2), 7–20. Available at: <http://www.historiascholastica.com/sites/historiascholastica.com/files/HS/2-2019/hs-2-2019-cl-1.pdf>