

Written Culture and Society in the Bohemian Lands 16th–18th Century Workshop in Honour of Roger Chartier, 18 May 2016

The French cultural historian, Roger Chartier was invited to Prague and Warsaw for an academic event series between 16 and 19 May 2016 in the framework of the Visegrad Forum program of the French Research Center in Humanities and Social Sciences (CEFRES). The events were co-organized by Polish and Czech academic institutions, among which the Institute of Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences hosted the workshop “Written Culture and Society in Czech regions, 16th–18th centuries” on 18th May 2016. The presentations provided insight into the research projects of five renown scholars of Prague inspired by and engaging in dialogues with the works of professor Chartier on the history of books, publishing and reading in early modern history.

The first presenter, Pavel Sládek (Faculty of Arts, Charles University) talked about the “Fragility of Hebrew Printing and Its Impact”. He questioned the unanimously positive assessment of the appearance of the movable type and argued for the necessity of a more nuanced analysis of the appearance of the new media. He called attention to the destructive effects of the printing press through the analysis of paratexts preserved in Hebrew books. The paratexts inform about a contemporary awareness of the endangered status of Hebrew manuscripts and report about various difficulties of their appearance in print. The loss of these manuscripts for the nowadays researcher indicate the fragility of Hebrew printing culture and the instability of the market for its specific products. Sládek called attention to a controversial phenomenon: while printing successfully overtook the role of manuscripts in the book and reading culture, it could not preserve as much as it “destroyed” by the fact that a large number of manuscripts could not be converted into the new medium.

Veronika Čapská (Faculty of Humanities, Charles University) presented her research on “Textual Practices, Cultural and Economic Exchange in the (Swéerts)-Sporck Milieu at the Turn of the Baroque and Enlightenment”. Her analysis emphasized the collaborative aspects of book production and investigated them on the basis of a case study exploring a great variety of textual practices cultivated in one generation of the (Swéerts)-Sporck family. She gave an account on the intellectual pursuits of both male and female family members and emphasized that the Sporcks’ were active not only as patrons, but also as producers and distributors of texts including translations, treatises and letters. Their constant relationship with text production constituted an inherent part of their cultural and economic exchanges and their activities could influence both the production and reception of books. The concluding remarks opened up further questions regarding the interconnectedness of the family’s textual practices with other motives, such as the family representation or materialization of order.

Michael Wögerbauer (Institute of Czech Literature, Czech Academy of Sciences) gave his presentation under the title: “No Applause Please or I Shall Put My Pen Down Forever”. Maria Anna Sager’s Novels *Die verwechselten Schwestern* (1771) and *Karolinens Tagebuch* (1774) and the Problem of the Near-to-non-circulation of a text.” As it was indicated, Wögerbauer set into focus two novels of the authoress that represent a double break in the history of Czech literature: they were the first novels in Bohemia and they were authored by a woman. While the distribution of bestsellers has been

studied in the French and German context, such bestsellers did not exist in Bohemia, but Wögerbauer argued for the benefits of raising the question why the circulation of some text remained very limited or did not happen at all? He detected the mechanisms of distribution in three ways: he analyzed the publisher's catalogues and marketing strategies, gave an account on the reflections of literary critics and listed all copies of the book that are available in nowadays collections. The low distribution of the book was explained mainly with its initial agenda to contradict the rules of the genre and to become an "anti-text", but the publisher's self-positioning on the market as a distributor of foreign books must have played a role in it, too.

Claire Madl (CEFRES/Institute of Czech Literature, Czech Academy of Sciences) challenged the narratives on national awakening and fostering the use of Czech language in written culture under the following title: "Which boundaries for which Readership? Enlarging and Diversifying the Reading Public through Advertising." Her study set into focus language strategies of publishers and booksellers to expand and diversify their audience. She analyzed advertisements of books published in two German and two Czech newspapers at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She examined how a readership was invented, what kind of linguistic or geographic boundaries the booksellers imagined for their public in searching for optimizing strategies to target new readers. On the basis of her investigation, she argued that publishers cannot be defined by the language of the books until the 1820's and other discriminating features have to be considered: the valorization of the language of the book, the usages of multilingualism, features of the distribution networks or the relation to tradition.

Daniela Tinková (Faculty of Arts, Charles University) spoke about "The 'Dangerous Correspondence of the 'Red Priests from Moravia. The French Revolution and the Formation of a Public Space in the Czech Lands". She analyzed two epistolary exchanges of two successive generations sharing the common features of a peripheral position: they were members of the lower clergy or came from artisanal background and lived in the remote and isolated countryside, in the regions on the borders of Moravia. She presented the sources of information they could access despite the censorship and anti-revolutionary propaganda and investigated their reception of the Enlightenment and the events of the French Revolution.

The first case was a literary exchange that took place between Johann Ferdinand Opiz, lawyer and bank officer in Čáslav, who was in the center of an extensive correspondence and Karel Killar, cultivated and polyglot priest, who was active in the small settlements of the massif of Vysočina. They corresponded in French for 16 years between 1793 and 1809 and exchanged ideas about their readings in philosophy and politics. The second case unfolded from a correspondence of three young clerics, Josef Sebastian Lang, Jakob Böhm and Jakub Čermák living in South Moravia. Their main source of information was Čermák who lived in Vienna as a student of theology and had access to libraries, cafes and newspapers.

The first generation represented a moderate attitude to the Enlightenment and to the French Revolution compatible with Josephinism and Catholic Enlightenment, while the second one was more radical: their correspondence echoed Rousseauian, Kantian and deist thoughts and showed much less respect towards authorities. However, both

generations kept thinking in a teleological framework and saw the revolution as a fulfillment of a divine plan.

The analysis concluded that despite an “information edge” and censorship, sufficient information was available for the intelligence even in peripheral settings: they could maintain intellectual ties that could provide them access to otherwise inaccessible and insecure information and news, they could make their own interpretations and draw conclusions independently from the official propaganda and share them in a closed circle of friends. Both cases reflected the politicization of the public opinion from the 1790s and a moderate form of the “public use of reason”.

Each talk was followed by remarks and questions firstly posed by professor Chartier and then from the broader audience. The presenters answered the questions and engaged in discussions in which they clarified their arguments and opened up further perspectives for studies on the history of reading and book culture.

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