

Media and Literature
in Multilingual Hungary
1770–1820

Edited by
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Language, Media and Politics in the Hungarian Kingdom between 1770 and 1820*

The “Literary Culture in Western Hungary, 1770–1820” research group held a conference entitled *Media and Literature in Multilingual Hungary, 1770–1820* in Győr and Pannonhalma between 25–27 April 2018, which was organised and financed by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In this paper, I present the goals of the long-term research and I briefly introduce the current volume.

The research group was established to publish critical editions of Hungarian works, to build digital databases and to collect information from various archives.¹ The question ‘what does western Hungary mean at the end of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth century?’ is still an open one. How can one define this region? Western Hungary, as an imagined cultural-geographic notion comprises of all the counties found on the left side of the Danube river.² One can see this region as a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional standard of the Hungarian Kingdom within the Habsburg Empire. Some may claim that special forms of the Central-European public sphere also emerged from this region. Today, the region is split between more than one country, including the present northern Croatia, western Slovakia and western

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1 See <https://iti.btk.mta.hu/hu/lendulet/nymi1770-1820/adatbazisok>

2 On imaging territories in Central Europe, see R. J. W. EVANS, “Frontiers and National Identities in Central-Europe”, in: Id, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs: Essays on Central Europe, c1683–1867*, 114–133 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Hungary. In fact, we can count in Vienna as well, if we take into account the fact that literary intellectuals from all over the empire were present there. These people founded a number of institutions (e.g. the Vienna Theresianum and the first attempts to a Croatian or Slovakian language journal are worth mentioning) and Viennese cultural life served as a model for Vienna, Bratislava, Zagreb, Buda and Pest, Komárom/Komárno, Pápa, and Sopron.

Most Hungarian historians agree that the economy of this region was powerful, and it had noteworthy achievements in several areas, from the educational system to culture. This success was the direct consequence of the seventeenth-century wars against the Ottoman Empire. After a period of 150 years, the Habsburg Monarchy reoccupied the former territory of the Hungarian Kingdom. In order to reorganize the administration of this territory, the Emperor counted on western Hungarian Catholic aristocracy, the members of which were the leaders of the multi-ethnic army of his Christian Empire. Noble families rose from this historical moment, such as the Esterházy, the Széchenyi or the Festetics family.

For example, four members of the Esterházy family died in the battle of Velké Vozokany [Vezekény] against the Turks in 1652, after which a highly representative funeral ceremony was held in Trnava [Nagyszombat/Tyrnau]. The family could demonstrate the sacrifice they made, the economic power they had, and their loyalty to the Emperor.³ Also, Palatine Pál Esterházy was at the siege of Buda in 1686; he convinced the noble estates at the diet (i.e. parliament) the following year that they had to set aside the so-called opposition clause of the Hungarian common law, henceforward the Habsburg King, Leopold I was confirmed. The family received many rewards for their services within a few years. Not only did Pál Esterházy gain the rank of Prince of the Holy Roman Empire but he also became the owner of immense estates. For instance, the now-King donated huge domains in Bihar County, which lie along the Hungarian-Romanian border today. These were situated considerably far from the western Hungarian estates of the Esterházy family. Importantly, Paul Esterházy was not only a warrior and a prince. He was a great poet of his era and he also composed music, including a cycle of religious hymns under the title *Harmonia caelestis*.⁴ (The contemporary writer, Péter Esterházy followed his ancestor when he named his most important

3 SZABÓ Péter, *A végtisztesség: A főúri gyászszertartás mint látvány* [Last Honours: Aristocratic Funeral Ceremony as a Spectacle], Mikrotörténelem (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1989).

4 About his career, see Esterházy Pál, *a műkedvelő mecénás: Egy 17. századi arisztokrata-életpálya a politika és a művészet határvidékén* [Paul Esterházy, an Amateur Patron: A 17th Century Aristocratic Career at the Border of Politics and Art] ed. Ács Pál (Budapest: Reciti Kiadó, 2015).

novel *Harmonia caelestis* after this work.)⁵ Why is this case paradigmatic in our view? First of all, it is important that in this period, a new Catholic elite emerged which was very loyal to the new King and they originated in the western region of Hungary. Secondly, these aristocrats identified themselves as the pioneers of adopting a refined type of court culture. Pál Esterházy wrote his poems because he thought that culture was an instrument (or resort) to express and represent the economic and political power of his family. Economic and political power went hand in hand with cultural innovation.⁶

In the eighteenth century, the new elite used this new economic-cultural power constantly. However, their culture of representation changed soon. A new, radically different conceptual framework was on the horizon. Prince Nicolaus Esterházy employed Joseph Haydn as a court chorus-master and conductor, inspired by the former court culture. Haydn's case is only one example of the new idea that civilization was based on culture. This new conception involved also that the more members of society cultivated their manners the more developed society would become. The polite society of gentlemen was based on the never-ending conversation by means of which anyone could refine their manners. Culture not only represented power but became a prerequisite for any kind (social, economic, intellectual) of progress.

The western Hungarian region had the economic resources for cultural expansion. Not only did the aristocracy invest a great amount of money in this purpose but the whole cultural-institutional system started changing. The end of the eighteenth century was a particularly important period of Hungarian cultural history regarding the interactions of media with other literary organs. The expansion of the market of media products was accompanied by the acceleration of social communication and the broadening of its participant base. The newspapers that were published twice a week and the periodicals which only published a few issues a year followed international models and took over the function of popular almanacs. New reader behaviours, new editorial-authorial roles emerged and an increasing number of people took advantage of the new opportunities to publish. Some newspapers and periodicals primarily published

5 ESTERHÁZY Péter, *Harmonia caelestis* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 2000). Some translations: *Harmonia caelestis*, traduit par Joëlle DUFEUILLY et Agnès JÁRFÁS, Du monde entier ([Paris] : Gallimard, 2001); *Harmonia caelestis*, aus dem Ungarischen übersetzt von Terézia MORA, 2. Auflage (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 2001); *Celestial harmonies: A novel*, translated by Judith SOLLOSZ (New York: Ecco, 2004).

6 See Ivo CERMAN, "The Aristocratic Achievement: Aristocratic Writers and Philosophers in Bohemia", *Austrian History Yearbook* 48 (2017): 39–53. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237816000540>

political and economic news, while in other outlets more space was devoted to publications focusing on scientific, medical, agricultural etc. topics. The scientific or educational texts published in the media had to make up for the deficiencies of public education, and so the periodicals published portraits of historical figures, descriptions of historical events, astrological, geographical, botanical, zoological etc. announcements. The majority of the newspapers and periodicals in Hungary served both as a means of communication for the scholarly intellect as well as a frequent forum for enlightened national endeavours.

The essays of this book analyse the media history of this region in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This period often appears as a turning point in intellectual history. To mention a few examples: according to Michel Foucault, the modern anthropological concept of man developed this time;⁷ according to Peter Burke, the elite and popular culture became sharply separated, and a new cultural institution system reinforced this separation;⁸ according to Niklas Luhmann, the emotional culture of the modern individual was formed at the time as well;⁹ according to Friedrich Kittler, “general alphabetisation” transformed orality-based society into a literacy-based one.¹⁰ From our point of view, the most important such “great narrative” is the one Jürgen Habermas told in the 1960’s. Habermas, in his classical work on “the structural transformation of the public sphere” (*Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*), analyses the transition of the literary public into forms of political publicity and states that “as soon as privatized individuals in their capacity as property-owners desired to influence public power in their common interest, the humanity of the literary public sphere served to increase the effectiveness of the public sphere in the political realm.”¹¹ Habermas’ concept of “the Bourgeois public sphere”, as it was pointed

7 See for example Michel FOUCAULT, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1964); Michel FOUCAULT, *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* ([Paris]: Gallimard, [1966]).

8 Peter BURKE, *Popular culture in early modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978), 205–286.

9 Niklas LUHMANN, *Liebe als Passion: Zur Codierung von Intimität* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982).

10 About this problem, see Friedrich A. KITTLER, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*, 4. Auflage (München: Fink, 2003); David WELLBERY, “Foreword”, in Friedrich KITTLER, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, translated by Michael METTEER and Chris CULLENS, vii–xxxiii (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Elizabeth L. EISENSTEIN, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1980); in Hungarian context István György TÓTH, *Literacy and Written Culture in Early Modern Central Europe* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2000).

11 Jürgen HABERMAS, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas BURGER (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 56.

out by many of his critics, is not sufficiently differentiated in many respects. According to them, Habermas did not pay enough attention to local, social¹² and media history,¹³ or even the gender differences of the public.¹⁴ However, it is not only the direct critics of Habermas who we may turn to for revising the concept of structural transformation of the public sphere. For instance, Robert Darnton's studies scrutinize the social impact of the readings which were "excluded" from the public sphere. Darnton concludes that the history of the French Revolution was written from an "elite" perspective and he suggests an alternative narrative which takes account of underground cultural practices.¹⁵

At the end of the eighteenth century, publishing periodicals was natural in Western Europe. The form that appeared at the end of the seventeenth century became differentiated in the eighteenth century: daily newspapers became distinct from the subject-specific press. The transition from critical to business-orientated journalism began.¹⁶ Among the very diverse consequences of these processes, I now highlight only the two most important ones that may be most relevant to my specific topic. On the one hand, Asa Briggs' and Peter Burke's controversial view of Jürgen Habermas establishes that this period did not only include the birth of what is today known as the public sphere but also the revolutionary changes of communication, transport and economics went hand in hand with one another. In their eyes, only this complexity provides a suitable frame-

(The original: Jürgen HABERMAS: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* [Darmstadt–Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1962].)

- 12 See Wolfgang JAEGER, *Öffentlichkeit und Parlamentarismus: Eine Kritik an Jürgen Habermas* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973).
- 13 See Asa BRIGGS and Peter BURKE, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet: Third Edition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 88–89.
- 14 See Joan B. LANDES, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Ages of the French Revolution* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988).
- 15 Robert DARNTON, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, MA – London: Harvard University Press, 1982); Robert DARNTON, *Édition et Sédition: L'univers de la littérature clandestine au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991); Robert DARNTON, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York – London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995). Later, Darnton's critics pointed out that Darnton's concept of a supposed hidden publicity was not complex enough to convey the different dimensions of social use of texts; otherwise, Darnton's works and the discussions following them raised issues to consider in terms of the stratification of the public sphere and, in several respects, served as a methodological model for the analysis of Central European sources. See *The Darnton-Debate: Books and revolution in the eighteenth century*, ed. Haydn T. MASON, Vif Paperback Series (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998).
- 16 See Frédéric BARBIER et Catherine BERTHO-LAVENIR, *Histoire des médias, de Diderot à Internet* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1996), 83–84.

work for understanding this period as the age of “communications revolution”.¹⁷ The second relevant theory is of Benedict Anderson. His theory on nationalism claims that the national community was created by journals and newspapers, as these were the first media outlets which engaged in dialogue with the “imagined community” of the nation.¹⁸

In Central Europe, or more precisely in Habsburg western Hungary at the end of the eighteenth century, these phenomena and processes occurred somewhat differently. Briggs’ and Burke’s consideration of the complexity of different levels of media, technology and social structures enables us to review the contexts of Central European media. The structural transformation of the public sphere in the Habsburg-Hungarian Kingdom, unlike Western European patterns, did not depend on the rise of a bourgeois intellectual class but was promoted by the aristocratic classes. Thus, we have to understand first the legal-social structure of political governance.

The Hungarian political system – and the Croatian one which was a parallel to it – was based on continuous dialogue between the estates (i.e. noble order or class) and the ruler. Legislation was passed by the diet, which was called and entitled to dissolve it by the ruler. The King introduced laws which were discussed at the *Tabula statuum et ordinum* (House of Commons) and then the *Tabula magnatum* (House of Lords), and the King consecrated them once the estates’ opinion was considered. The estates themselves were also allowed to make suggestions (the so-called “grievances”) the King was to respond to. The diet itself changed over time. The members of *Tabula magnatum* were the aristocrats and high priests (archbishops and bishops) by birth and their office; the meetings of the *Tabula statuum et ordinum* were mostly attended by representatives of the gentry class (the so-called *bene possessionati* in the Hungarian Kingdom), elected representatives of the noble counties, delegates of free royal cities and representatives of chapters (*capitulum canonicorum*). The diet of the estates did not meet every year. The King either did or did not convene a diet depending on the political situation, his interests, the pressures of the estates, and, consequently, there were many years without a diet session.

It was necessary to do this short detour into the Hungarian political system in order to understand that this system did not favour the development of the

17 BRIGGS and BURKE, *A Social History of the Media*, 89.

18 Benedict ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism: Revised edition* (London – New York: Verso, 1991), 37–46. The same theory was underlined in French media history by emphasizing different cultural and non-cultural concepts of nationality: BARBIER et BERTHO LAVENIR, *Histoire des médias*, 67–68.

bourgeois public sphere. This is the reason why the central role played by the bourgeois class in Western society was taken over by the noble estates in the Hungarian Kingdom.¹⁹

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the political environment changed very quickly and dynamically within the Hungarian Kingdom. The expansion of the press may have been a cause as well as the purpose of this change. With the help of various periodicals, the representatives of the Counties and free royal cities now could make their voices heard. The increasing political power of the class *bene possessionati* is related to the history of the media. The trend that led to the enrichment and enormous political influence of the aristocracy of western Hungary and made the western Hungarian region so important and rich within the Hungarian Kingdom seemed to turn at the end of the eighteenth century. The political history of this period can be characterised by the fact that at the time, the influential Western Hungarian aristocracy, which often spent time in Vienna, was slowly losing prestige, and Hungarian political and social debates took place before the public opinion of the press. However, it is important to add two things here. On the one hand, the conflicts of interest in the different estates were deepened by the Vienna Court, especially during the reign of Joseph II. It is no coincidence that in the new institutions of public discourse, so many protestant gentries took initiative.²⁰ On the other hand, the relocation of the political centre of gravity did not necessarily involve territorial reorganization. Although the supporters of Joseph II came from many regions of the Kingdom (for example, Protestant intellectuals from Košice [Kassa] founded Hungarian journals such as the *Magyar Museum [Hungarian Museum]* and *Orpheus*, or, György Aranka founded the Magyar Nyelvművelő Társaság [Society for the

19 On the Hungarian diet, see Jean BÉRENGER et Károly KECSKEMÉTI, *Parlement et vie parlementaire en Hongrie, 1608–1918* (Paris: Honoré Champion éditeur, 2005), 181–284; István SZIJÁRTÓ, “The Diet: The Estates and the Parliament of Hungary, 1708–1792”, in *Bündnispartner und Konkurrenten des Landesfürsten? Die Stände in der Habsburgermonarchie*, Hrsg von Gerhard AMMERER, William D. GODSEY Jr., Martin SCHEUTZ, Peter URBANITSCH und Alfred Stefan WEISS, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 49 (Wien–München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2007), 151–171.

20 Moritz von CSAKY, *Von der Aufklärung zum Liberalismus: Studien zum Frühliberalismus in Ungarn*, Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Geschichte Österreichs 10 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), 235–246; Károly KECSKEMÉTI, *Le Hongrie et le reformisme liberal: Problemes politiques et sociaux 1790–1848*, Fonti e studi di storia moderna e contemporanea 1 (Rome: Il Centro di Ricerca, 1989), 199–234; Gábor VERMES, *Hungarian Culture and Politics in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1711–1848* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 153–212.

Cultivation of Hungarian Language] in Transylvania; etc.), it was western Hungary where new institutions of the public sphere really mushroomed.

The structural transformation of the public sphere within the Hungarian Kingdom also led to the intensification of the language issue. While the concept of the “Hungarus” national consciousness survived, a growing demand for the development of vernacular literacy also occurred. Paradoxically, the reign of Joseph II was a turning point in another respect as well. The attempt to introduce the German administrative language changed the status quo in the multinational country radically. The old political and legal tradition of using Latin was replaced by a unified Imperial language, German.²¹ This short-lived and failed attempt catalysed national language development plans.²² Firstly, these plans usually included the publication of the vernacular press. Secondly, the periodicals regularly dealt with questions about which language was suitable for science, which one was spoken by most people and which one could be learned more easily. (Of course, these opinions were always very biased.)

The emerging nationalism was embedded in transnational frames.²³ Various nations in Central Europe attempted to create communities with similar methods. While the cornerstones of ideological debates proclaimed the uniqueness of a language and nation, articles (and opinions) migrated from one newspaper to another among the different languages. In a Hungarian-language journal, the anecdote of how dangerous a flyspeck could be on a medical prescription²⁴ is just an illustration of the thesis that “prescriptions should be written in the folk’s

21 See R. J. W. EVANS, “The Politics of Language and the Languages of Politics: Latin and the Vernaculars in Eighteenth-Century Hungary”, in *Cultures of Power in Europe during the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Hamish SCOTT and Brendan SIMMS, 200–224 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For the difficult question of language in the context of the Habsburg Monarchy R. J. W. EVANS, “Language and State-building: The Case of the Habsburg Monarchy”, *Austrian History Yearbook*, 35 (2004): 1–24.

22 See Derek BEALES, “Was Joseph II an Enlightened Despot?”, in Id, *Enlightenment and Reform in Eighteenth-century Europe*, 262–286 (London – New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 272; R. J. W. EVANS, “Joseph II and Nationality in the Habsburg Lands”, in Id, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs*, 134–146.

23 See *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe: Volume I: Negotiating Modernity in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Balázs TRENCSENYI, Maciej JANOWSKI, Mónika BAÁR, Maria FALINA and Michal KOPEČEK (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 67–115.

24 „Not once did the doctors write a prescription for the patient, the fly also came to him, and where the doctor made only two dots, he made a third next to it, and the medicine became mortal for the poor patient.” “Néha egy légy sz– is megölheti az embert” [“Sometimes a Flyspeck Can Kill a Man”], *Mindenes Gyűjtemény [Miscellaneous Collection]* 1790, Quarter IV, Letter 22, June 16, 345–347. Here: 346.

mother tongue”.²⁵ The question remained whether this was only necessary for patients who cannot speak Latin to survive, or to develop the scientific dimension of the vernacular language, or, instead, to grant uncultivated members of the nation access to higher-level knowledge. Thus, the problem of language cultivation has many, complex layers within itself and there are many intentions and interests associated with the discourse thereabout.

Members of the *bene possessionati* founded the first journals and these enterprises were supported by aristocrats. Not only did they intend to communicate their political opinion by publishing media products but the founding fathers tried to establish institutions by means of which people could improve their manners and discuss their opinions as well. This is why the emergence of media is not simply a symptom of essentialized histories of (Hungarian, Austrian, Slovak or Croatian) “national awakening”. Rather, every media product of the era was a mixture of different political intentions, ethnic desires and religious ideas. These products could communicate the opinion of a local community and society in a very wide sense. They could serve as a model for a newborn criticism and for nations as imagined communities. Some of them improved vernacular languages for the sake of the sciences, some wanted to spread the language of a particular nation, while others only discussed matters in the vernacular language the readers understood. The essays of this book try to apprehend this very complexity of media history of the Hungarian Kingdom in its socio-cultural context.

* * *

As mentioned above, the region we investigate here (western Hungary) lies in different countries today. Of course, contemporary intellectuals used the geographical names in the language they spoke and wrote at the time. However, we adopted the old Hungarian name of Counties. These names were used in the eighteenth century in Hungarian, Latin, Slovak or Croatian and employing the contemporary names of the administrative areas that have been modified since would be confusing. Thus, the names of settlements (villages, towns, cities) are usually referred to as the current ones. Still, in the German essays we have given the German equivalents, and have also added the Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Croatian and German variants in square brackets. This method was revised only if the special topic of the essay justified it. We used the same method for

25 Ibid.

given names. Most of the historical agents that appear in this book had several names: they used a Hungarian name in Hungarian, a German name in German, and a Latin name in Latin, etc. In some cases, it is not only impossible to decide what “the real” name of the historical agent was but it is neither possible to tell even what their “mother tongue” was, or if this concept had a relevant meaning for them. Whenever necessary, multilingualism is indicated in square brackets too. At the end of the book, a place and person index includes the most important variations of given names and names of place.

Last but not least, we would like to express our gratitude to the Catholic College of Theology in Győr and the Benedictine Abbey of Pannonhalma for their support.