



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's Report on MA Thesis
**Literary Politics of the Radio Free Europe in Czechoslovakia
in the Period of "Normalization"**
by Aleksandar Momčilović

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This is an excellent thesis that deals with the cultural ideology of Radio Free Europe (RFE) during the normalization period in Czechoslovakia. It is an outstanding MA thesis, which ranges through a many different linguistic, cultural and historical contexts. The student's judiciousness, insight, and critical dexterity are on display page after page. Faced with such a complex field, many would be tempted to fall back on simplistic frames of argument; to these the student never succumbs.

Chapter 2 discusses the ideas of canons in the given period, analyzing underlying RFE's critical narratives of rupture, restoration, and a figuration of official literature as somehow "unreal" in contrast to that covered in the broadcasts. It was considered unreal because of the ideological matrix that fostered it and disseminated it; by emphasizing that ideology, RFE implied that its own standpoint was unideological, even though it was funded directly by US Congress. By characterizing RFE's work in this way, the student lays the ground for his later conclusions.

Chapter 3 addresses how RFE's radio medium affected literary and cultural aesthetics; it is wonderfully argued through apposite examples, and illuminates more generally the manner in which literature is fundamentally transformed by the means of transmission. I admired how the student was able to segue from a sophisticated theoretical discussion that surpassed the conditions of his chosen period, and then apply these deftly to the transnational cultural dynamics of normalization.

Chapter 4 brings together complex issues like parallel Czech canons, nation, freedom, all toggled against historical changes; also, this is where the student begins to reveal the way in which his argument about normalization RFE can be used to understand the ligatures between culture and ideology (if these can even be separated) in the Cold War.

I note that there is no conclusion, but chapter 5, provocatively entitled "Normalizing' Liberal Democracy," may be considered as the extensive and persuasive culmination of the thesis, in which the student reviews the course of the work and consolidates its argument. Through his account of the transformation of RFE's agenda into what was normal, commonsense, and natural after 1989, one sees how the earlier chapters have created a platform that allows a view of Czech society over the last three decades. Of course, RFE was not the only source for this ideology, but it was a key player.



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This thesis is in English and engages with a large amount of Czech-language material; and it moves back and forth fluently between not only the two languages, but also arguably three ideological spheres – that of Communist Czechoslovakia, Cold War US, and our own present. This is done so well that it is easy to forget that the author is neither Czech nor native anglophone. It is a tribute to the student's argumentative deftness and linguistic abilities that he makes us forget this so well.

Because of time constraints unfortunately I was not able to copy edit the thesis before submission, so in places there are stylistic infelicities and errors. However, these at no point impede comprehension, and indeed the student is to be praised on his otherwise lucid and precise style.

I recommend a grade of **1/výborně**.

Justin Quinn, Ph.D. (Associate Professor)