Trauma, Conspiracy, Memento: Representations of the Munich Crisis in Czech Cinema

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Cultural traumas emerge when "members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event," but these "events do not, in and of themselves, create collective trauma."[1]

Instead, the process of the "socially mediated attribution" is what determines its generic identity and the extent of its dissemination.[2] In this way, one could paraphrase the main argument of Jeffrey Alexander's theory of cultural trauma, which, despite its sociological anchoring, also creates a good precondition for an exploration of the artistic representations of these traumas: "Representation of trauma depends on constructing a compelling framework of cultural classification. In one sense, this is simply telling a new story."[3]

The question is what kind of story this would be. According to Alexander, it is a master narrative that combines four different elements: the pain, the victim, the wider audience, and the attribution of responsibility.[4] Such a definition is insufficient from the perspective of the analysis of concrete representations of cul-

1 Alexander 2012: 6 and 13.

2 Ibid.: 13.

3 Ibid.: 17.

4 Cf. ibid.: 17–19.

tural traumas, however, because it only describes the level of social communication within which the trauma is processed, not the level of the story itself.

In order to define a traumatic story, we will first have to turn to a smaller analytical unit, Gerald Prince's term *minimal story*, for example, which defines the basic narrative sequence as follows: state A becomes non-A as a result of event B. In other words: "John was happy, then John met a woman, then, as a result, John was unhappy."[5] The traumatic story is specific in that it does not develop this basic scheme any further. John just remains sad.

In one of his late works, Lubomír Doležel also noted the special nature of the fictional worlds that are generated by this kind of story. "Passive fictional worlds," as he called them, "arise in such a way that the dominant component of the world moves away from the actions of the agents to the 'passivity' of the affected characters."[6] According to his findings, such worlds are characterized by a "tendency to narrative staticness" and usually also by a "strong dynamic of inner, mental life of fictional persons."[7] Despite all of these limitations, however, the passive worlds have "as strong narrative potencies and as rich diversity" as the worlds of action.[8]

The traumatic story, thus, derives only from the first element of Alexander's scheme, but the supposed source of this "pain" may actually be the starting point for a different type of story in which the main task is "to establish the identity of the perpetrator."[9] Detective stories are extraordinarily widespread and are for the most part completely independent of the original traumatic story. One of their variants is also a conspiracy story, which is based primarily on the impossibility of identifying or convicting the perpetrator. The reason for this is that it is not just an individual, but a whole network of perpetrators whose share in crime is difficult to detect and prove. As a social practice, this kind of story represents a "narrative structure capable of reuniting … the collective and the epistemological."[10] Conversely, the epistemological power of such a story is often uncertain and may also result in the destruction of the scapegoat.

5 Prince 1973: 35.

6 "Trpné fikční světy vznikají tak, že se dominantní složka světa přesunuje od akcí konatelů k 'trpení' postižených postav." – Doležel 2010: 423.

7 "sklonem k narativní statičnosti", "silnou dynamičností vnitřního, duševního života fikčních osob" – ibid.: 425.

8 "stejně silné narativní potence a stejně bohatou rozmanitost" – ibid.: 439.

9 Alexander 2012: 19.

10 Jameson 1992: 9.

Contrary to Alexander's idea of a single master narrative, which governs individual stories that are initiated by a particular trauma, these introductory remarks have shown that representations of cultural traumas operate in a far more complex narrative framework. However, in order to properly defend this thesis, first a concrete historical sample is needed.

The Munich Crisis and Its Emplotments

The political crisis of September 1938, which led to the loss of a significant part of Czechoslovak territory for the benefit of Nazi Germany, left a significant mark in the collective memory of the Czech nation and was, for some time, also the source of extensive cultural trauma. Historian Zdeněk Beneš, who examined the portrayal of this crisis in Czechoslovak and Czech history textbooks, discovered three different narrative patterns through which this trauma was presented over time.

In the brief period of the Third Czechoslovak Republic (1945–48), when the Munich events were still "perceived as part of the present," there were textbooks dominated by renditions of the crisis in the form of a traumatic story.[11] However, a new emplotment was established in the textbooks after February 1948, when the political regime was changed. The conspiracy story, which formed the basis of the official interpretation of the time, was in fact realized in two different variants. On the one hand, it developed the story of the betrayal of the Western Allies and, on the other hand, the story of traitors within the nation, whose roles were cast by some important representatives of the pre-war Czech bourgeoisie.

In the new framework, the previous traumatic story has also lost its importance because the "new social order … has pushed the Munich crisis, its causes and immediate consequences, into the past."[12] After November 1989, long-recurring conspiracy stories also followed the same fate and "Munich" took the form of a memento, which provided students with an opportunity to experience the fateful events from a distance and in a broad context. As one of the post-November textbooks summarizes: "The adoption of the Munich decisions raises

11 "pociťované jako součást přítomnosti" – Beneš 2004: 282.

12 "nový společenský řád, který Mnichov odsunul, jeho příčiny i bezprostřední důsledky, do minulosti" – ibid.: 286.

an eternal question: should we or shouldn't we defend ourselves? There is no simple and clear answer."[13]

The research undertaken by Zdeněk Beneš has confirmed that cultural trauma can be expressed in various emplotments. However, in addition to the traumatic story and the conspiracy story that we have inferred from Alexander's scheme, he adds one more: memento. But is this really an emplotment? Is it not, instead, some broader narrative strategy? Can we also find the same time sequence in the history of artistic representations of the Munich events? A more detailed survey of the films inspired by the Munich crisis can provide answers to these questions.

Nine Years after the Crisis

Uloupená hranice (*The Stolen Frontier*, premiered on 14 March 1947) was the feature-length neorealist debut of director Jiří Weiss (1913–2004), who worked in Great Britain during World War II, where he made a number of war documentaries as a member of the government's Crown Film Unit. The screenplay for the film was based on a story by Miloslav Fábera ("Dny zrady"/"Days of Betrayal"), but Weiss intervened in the script while filming, removing unnecessary pathos and paper dialogues from the film.[14]

The story of a local community living in the Czechoslovak border area in the Ore Mountains takes place at the time of the Munich crisis from 22 to 30 September 1938 (the passage of time is marked by a calendar hanging in the office of the local police station). The escalating relationships between the Czech minority and the German majority are depicted by the tragic fate of the Langer family. The German father and the Czech mother symbolize the bygone ideas of the mutual rapprochement of both nations, but their children face the current political struggle against each other. Anna Marie, who helps with cleaning at the local police station, tells the *gendarmes* that her brother is involved in smuggling weapons for German illegal troops. Her brother, Hans, explicitly emphasizes his chosen identity by using the German version of his first name: "I'm not Honzíček, I'm Hans!"[15] Eventually, he deceives his sister to get out of prison and set fire to the police station.

13 "Přijetí mnichovských rozhodnutí otevírá věčnou otázku: měli, nebo neměli jsme se bránit? Není na ni jednoduchá a jednoznačná odpověď." – ibid.: 292.

14 Cf. Weiss 1995: 96.

15 "Nejsem Honzíček, jsem Hans!"

The story of the Langer family is a story about the separation of the German and Czech communities and it, rather characteristically, culminates at the end of the second third of the film. After an argument with Hans, Anna Marie runs away from the cottage where Old Langer is in a confrontation with the local "Ordner." A random shot hits his wife, whose final words invoke the names of both of her children, as one of them, Hans, chases after his sister.

The final third of the film is focalized only from the perspective of the local Czech community, which fortified the police station and took care of supplies needed for the incoming unit of the Czechoslovak army. The defensive fight, which is victoriously fought, eventually loses all sense when a message is received from headquarters ordering the withdrawal of all Czech troops. The director himself emphasized the emotional tone of the film's conclusion: "When Sergeant Vrba lowered the flag of the Republic and the only sound was the creak of a pulley, we all had tears in our eyes. Spontaneous applause always broke out after the last words: 'We'll come back.'"[16]

The Thirty-Fifth Anniversary

Another Czech film, on the theme of the Munich crisis, was also based on the aforementioned short story by Miloslav Fábera, who in the meantime had become—in 1970—the director of the Barrandov Film Studio. However, director Otakar Vávra (1911–2011) turned the story of the Czech border community into a minor episode and built his *Dny zrady* (*Days of Betrayal*, premiered on 27 April 1973) as a three-hour documentary drama that gradually depicts the complicated diplomatic negotiations that led to the Munich Agreement.

Based on archival sources, the film shows the individual steps taken by European statesmen and Czechoslovak politicians and illustrates their implications for the domestic population through a series of fictional stories. Nevertheless, these stories and the selection of historical facts depicted already lead to a certain framework of interpretation. Its essence is the title theme of betrayal, which is realized in several forms throughout the film.

First of all, one such betrayal can be seen in the treason committed by Konrad Henlein, chairman of the Sudeten German Party, at his meeting with Adolf Hitler at the end of March 1938. Henlein promises to speak to preserve Czecho-

16 "Když [četař Vrba] spouští vlajku republiky a jediným zvukem je vrzání kladky, měli jsme všichni slzy v očích. Po posledních slovech filmu 'My se ještě vrátíme' vždycky propukl spontánní potlesk." – ibid.: 97.

slovakia's territorial integrity, but at the same time steps up his demands so that the Czechoslovak government cannot meet them. The agreement between the *Reich* and Sudeten German leader is depicted at the very beginning of the film and, thus, represents the starting point of the entire drama.

The next link in the chain are the steps taken by Czechoslovakia's ally, the French government, which is in favor of the British position that Czechoslovakia must surrender its border territories in order to preserve peace in Europe. The situation escalates on 19 September 1938, when the French ambassador tells President Beneš that if these demands are rejected, he can no longer count on French military assistance. Beneš characterizes this stance in a subsequent meeting of the Czechoslovak government: "It is treason! France betrayed us."[17]

Last, but not least, there are separate negotiations led by the chairman of the strongest Czechoslovak political party, Rudolf Beran, and influential financier Jaroslav Preiss. Their intentions are twofold; on the one hand, they want to settle on a new distribution of power in the state with representatives of Sudeten Germans, and on the other hand, they are trying to prevent the Soviet Union's possible involvement in the conflict. The second of these demands is expressed very precisely by Preiss during one of the behind-the-scenes debates: "And if anyone wanted to call the Red Army for help, then we would open the border and let Hitler's divisions into Bohemia."[18]

It is only by combining these individual betrayals and conspiracies that the film can present its basic thesis: "Although the individual participants in the Munich Agreement pursued their specific objectives, they were all jointly and integrally involved in the imperialist conspiracy against peace, the victim of which was Czechoslovakia."[19] This quotation comes from the book *Zářijové dny 1938* (*September Days 1938*) written by the Czech Marxist historian Václav Král, who also participated in Vávra's film as an expert advisor.

Král's interpretation of the Munich crisis as a conspiracy relied on a careful study of archival sources, as evidenced by his publication on the political documents *Politické strany a Mnichov* (*Political Parties and Munich*; Král 1961) and the monograph *Plán Zet* (*Project Z*; Král 1973), in which he mainly used British diplomatic archival records. At the same time, however, he worked with a speci-

17 "Je to zrada! Zrada Francie na nás."

18 "A kdyby někdo chtěl zavolat na pomoc Rudou armádu, potom otevřeme hranice a pustíme do Čech Hitlerovy divize."

19 "Jakkoli jednotliví účastníci mnichovské dohody sledovali své zvláštní specifické cíle, přece jenom se všichni společně a nedílně podíleli na imperialistickém spiknutí proti míru, jehož obětí se stalo Československo." – Král 1971: 160.

fic framework of interpretation, the beginnings of which can be found in the testimony of the direct witnesses to the Munich crisis. Czech communist journalist Julius Fučík spoke of the "world conspiracy of fascism"[20] in his diary entry of 18 September 1938 and the Communist Party chairman, Klement Gottwald, expressed something similar in his parliamentary speech a few days after the end of the crisis: "We have to do with a far-reaching conspiracy against the people, against the republic and against democracy."[21]

Vávra's film also reflected the tension between the documentary point of view and the party interpretation within this conception of the crisis. It manifested itself as a clash between the faithful presentation of historical reality and the figurative rendition of some film characters: caricature for representatives of the bourgeoisie and pathetic for representatives of the proletariat. The latter feature of Vávra's drama was also noted by contemporary Czechoslovak critics as being his aesthetic shortcomings.[22]

The movie ends, like *Uloupená hranice*, with the departure of Czechoslovak soldiers and the Czech minority from the borderland. Given the earlier detection of the specific perpetrators, however, this farewell to the lost territory sounds far more determined. As one of the soldiers says: "We must expel them. But everyone, who caused that."[23] Moreover, this is not the very end of the story, given that *Dny zrady* is only the starting point for the entire film trilogy. The follow-up wartime film *Sokolovo* (*The Battle of Sokolovo*, premiered on 9 May 1975) depicts the formation of the Czechoslovak combat battalion in the Soviet Union, and the final film *Osvobození Prahy* (*The Liberation of Prague*, premiered on 6 May 1977) tells the story of the Prague Uprising and the arrival of the Red Army. Its intervention also completed the seven-year dramatic arc of Vávra's trilogy which told a grand narrative about the demise of a Czechoslovakia that was betrayed by the Western Allies and anticipated its post-war reconstruction within the Eastern Bloc.

20 "Will [the nation] break this world-wide plot of fascism?" ("Zlomí [lid] včas ten světový komplot fašismu?") asks Fučík in his diary. – Fučík 1958: 9.

21 "Máme co činit s dalekosáhlým spiknutím proti lidu, proti republice a proti demokracii." – Gottwald 1953: 269.

22 Cf. Lachman 2004: 280.

23 "Musíme je vyhnat. Ale všechny, co to zavinili."

Seventy Years Later

This master narrative lost its attractiveness after the collapse of the bloc, of course, but it took a surprisingly long time for filmmakers to return to the Munich events. It was not until around the seventieth anniversary of the Munich Agreement that Miloš Forman, together with Jean-Claude Carrière and Václav Havel, began working on a screenplay for a film based on the novel *Le Fantôme de Munich* (*The Specter of Munich*; Benamou 2007). Its author Georges-Marc Benamou, co-author of the memoires of François Mitterrand and advisor to another French President Nicolas Sarkozy, captured the Munich crisis in the book through the lens of French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier. Although the film's preparations had reached their final stage, the French production company Pathé failed to raise enough money to produce it. The filmmakers still tried to rescue the project, but director Forman had to resign in the end: "In addition, a movie about the Munich Agreement could be unpleasant to the Germans, the French and the English, so certain people's thinking is that they could lose money."[24]

Five years later, another, albeit less ambitious attempt was successful. Czech documentary and fiction film director Robert Sedláček (1973), in collaboration with popular Czech historian Pavel Kosatík, produced a one-hour television drama *Den po Mnichovu* (*A Day after Munich*, premiered on 3 November 2013). It was the second episode of the quality TV series *České století* (*Czech Century*, 2013–14), which mapped important moments of Czech history from its establishment as an independent state in 1918 to the break-up of the Czechoslovak Federation in 1992.

Sedláček's drama is built around a question that has already been cited from a post-November textbook on Czech history: "Should we or shouldn't we defend ourselves?"[25] The first solution is sought by Czech military commanders, while the opposing position in the dispute is represented by President Edvard Beneš. The first clash between them takes place in the opening, eight-minute sequence of the film. On 21 September 1938, after the British-French ultimatum, the President informs members of the General Staff that France will not fulfill its allied obligations and that the state's military situation is hopeless. Officers blame the President for not having sufficiently informed them previously of how serious

24 "Film o mnichovském diktátu by navíc mohl být Němcům, Francouzům i Angličanům nepříjemný, takže úvaha určitých lidí je taková, že by na tom mohli prodělat." – Kailová 2011.

25 "[M]ěli, nebo neměli jsme se bránit?" – Beneš 2004: 292.

the situation was: "You lied to us!"[26] Some officers even openly threaten him: "You have agreed to curtail the Republic. You should be arrested, the whole government!"[27] But their proposals are ultimately constructive: they want a new, military government and a declaration of mobilization.

Indeed, in the days that followed, both requirements would be met, but the diplomatic situation was escalating. As the negotiations of the four Great Powers are beginning in Munich, President Beneš reunites with the members of the General Staff to tell them that the loss of territory is inevitable. The only hope is a pan-European conflict, which the President expects sooner or later: "War will be, gentlemen. It will be, but not now. I promise you the greatest war ever."[28] Staff officers proclaim that they want to defend their country now, and that the President's decision will not stand. This creates a discernable tension, explicitly expressed in a scene in which the most radical officers are smoking in the toilets. After a while, Beneš comes in and heads to one of the stalls. He sees the officers and stops. One of them says "I will never forget this."[29] And the President leaves silently.

The second meeting with the General Staff represents the whole drama's plot culmination, only after that the Munich Agreement is just implemented. However, the final third of the film is primarily devoted to another theme: the unfulfilled effort to reverse an already made decision. Dissatisfied officers meet with politicians to discuss a possible coup. In any case, these are purely theoretical considerations, given that it is difficult to find anyone among them who would announce their fundamental disapproval to Beneš. Finally, Colonel Moravec, lecturer at the military school, whose fate has been followed by the film in parallel with that of Beneš, agrees to take on the task. Their final encounter is primarily a battle of arguments. While Moravec invokes moral values, mainly related to the ethics of struggle ("Your great, glorious victory over Adolf Hitler will be useless, because people will only remember how they did in 1938."),[30] Beneš defends his strategic thinking: "You have to understand that this is not about the mental health of one nation, but about the question of who will rule Europe."[31]

26 "Lhal jste nám!"

27 "Odsouhlasili jste okleštění republiky, za to by vás měli zavřít. Celou vládu."

28 "Válka bude, pánové. Bude. Ale ne teď. Slibuji vám tu největší válku, jaká kdy byla."

29 "Tohle vám nikdy nezapomenu."

30 "Vaše velký, slavný vítězství nad Adolfem Hitlerem bude k ničemu, protože lidi si budou pamatovat jenom to, jak se v roce 1938 podělali."

31 "Musíte pochopit, že tady se nehraje o duševní zdraví jednoho národa, ale o to, kdo bude vládnout Evropě."

The final headline of Sedláček's drama recalls that Beneš's opponent, Moravec, became the Czech Quisling during the German Protectorate, and this implicitly supports Beneš's views. The logic of the story, however, requires that Czech passivity be somehow corrected and that the victim eventually become an active participant in historical events. This task was fulfilled by *Sokolovo* in Vávra's trilogy, and in the case of Sedláček's series, the next part *Kulka pro Heydricha* (*A Bullet for Heydrich*, premiered on 3 November 2013) sees a Czech political exile based in London, led by Beneš, prepare to assassinate the Deputy Protector of Bohemia and Moravia.

Lost in Munich as a Counterexample?

Each of the films studied uses the emplotment of the Munich crisis, which was dominant at the time of its creation. Weiss's *Uloupená hranice* tells the story of a double trauma: the separation of the Czech-German community and the expulsion of Czechs from the border areas. Vávra's *Dny zrady* depicts a complex international and class complot that leads to the demise of Czechoslovakia. Sedláček's *Den po Mnichovu* recalls the historical alternatives that were offered thereafter: acceptance of forced conditions or armed struggle. There is, however, another film about the Munich Agreement which is beyond this typology, at first glance at least. It is an allegorical comedy entitled *Ztraceni v Mnichově* (*Lost in Munich*, premiered on 22 October 2015), written by Czech screenwriter, playwright and director Petr Zelenka (1967).

Zelenka's film consists of three distinct parts: a short introductory sequence that recalls the basic dates of the Munich crisis and their traditional interpretation in the form of a weekly film; a half-hour crazy comedy in which a Czech journalist abducts an eighty-year-old parrot, who belonged to French Prime Minister Daladier at the time of the Munich events and makes shocking statements, such as "Hitler is a good fellow,"[32] with his voice today; finally, a 70-minute making-of that shows why filming this crazy comedy in a Czech-French co-production eventually failed.

The storyline of the making-of film shows that difficulties in filming begin when the lead actor becomes allergic to feathers. This requires a number of adjustments because the parrot is his main acting partner. Alas, when the problem is finally solved, the actor becomes allergic to metals and then to colored substances. The chain of allergic reactions is only explained after a visit to a home-

32 "Hitler je kámoš."

opath who tells the actor that his body is responding to the Munich theme itself. It soon becomes apparent that the lead actor suffers from Munich's third-generation trauma. As he explains: "Grandpa was mobilized and suffered terribly that we could not defend ourselves in 1938. He even wanted to return the distinction he received as a legionnaire in France."[33]

The main star's psychological troubles cause the director of the film to become more familiar with historical interpretations of the Munich crisis. An essay *Mnichovský komplex* (*The Munich Complex*) written by Czech historian Jan Tesař, an emigré in France at the beginning of 1989, which was originally intended only for a narrow circle of friends and was not published until ten years later, becomes a source of fundamental importance for the director. In his work, Tesař tries to deconstruct the two cornerstones of what he calls the Munich myth; on the one hand, there is the so-called betrayal of the Western Allies, and on the other, we find the question of whether or not Czechoslovakia should defend itself. According to Tesař, both are mere pseudo-problems that are not supported in a real historical situation.[34] On the contrary, it is essential that while the Czech nation has been carried away by military mobilization and hope to defend their state borders, its political leadership, led by President Beneš, only tries to negotiate the most advantageous compromise that would achieve a "partial satisfaction of the aggressor."[35]

Zelenka's film reproduces these arguments and, in the final part of the movie, allegorically represents them too. Just as the emptiness of the Czech-French military alliance was revealed during the Munich crisis, it also shows that the essence of Czech-French co-production was completely illusory. The producer tells the filmmakers that working together was just a trick to get a grant from the European Cinema Support Fund. Since this subsidy was not awarded, there is no money left to complete the film. The anger of the crew members who think that a foreign co-producer withdrew from the film turns against everything "French," including the poor parrot, and the production manager is saved from prosecution only by the accidental death of one of the main actors, because this becomes a false pretext to stop the production of the movie. Zelenka's allegory is based on informational inequalities between leaders (politicians and producers) who play complex games and simple pawns of history (the Czech nation and film crew),

33 "Děda byl mobilizovanej a strašně trpěl tím, že jsme se tenkrát v osmatřicátým nemohli bránit. Dokonce chtěl vrátit vyznamenání, který dostal jako legionář ve Francii."

34 Cf. Tesař 2000: 11.

35 "částečného uspokojení agresora" – ibid.: 91.

who do not know the essence of these games and believe in various myths. The consequence is what the director emphasizes as the main thesis of Tesař's essay: "The fact that the Czech nation does not participate in its own history."[36]

Does this mean that Zelenka's film should be understood as a conspiracy story that reveals the mechanisms of the intrigues that the powerful are fabricating at the expense of the powerless? Or is it the story of the trauma with which third generation carriers are dealing? Both motifs undoubtedly play an important role in the film but are subject to a more general narrative strategy. This strategy is strikingly similar to what we find in Sedláček's drama. As previously indicated, the *Day after Munich* represents the Munich crisis as a memento; it reenacts Munich events to draw some lessons for the present. Zelenka proceeds in a similar way, but he does not seek lessons in the historical event itself, only in its interpretations. In doing so, he seeks to distinguish true interpretations from false ones, which obscure the essence of the Munich events and, thus, prevent their full understanding. Or as the figure of the director utters in the movie: "The tragedy is the myth that arose from it."[37]

Conclusion

The analyzed film and TV representations of the Munich crisis follow the same developmental pattern that Zdeněk Beneš discovered in the textbooks of Czech history. This is a much smaller sample than in the case of the textbooks, but if we compare their production costs, these films represent a much more powerful social force. Rather than this correlation, however, this conclusion will concern itself with the consequences of this study's findings, which could be followed up by further research.

First of all, reflection is needed on the fact that it has not been possible to define the narrative form of the last phase more precisely. It is typical for the "memento" that it connects two time planes—the past with the present, and tries to revive past events through their reenactment, that is, to create the appearance that the events are still unsettled. However, this is not a specific narrative pattern, but rather a broader narrative strategy that governs individual stories in a given work. This also implies a hypothesis that would need to be verified on a larger body of material. The memento represents a transitional phase between the period at which the narrative of a cultural trauma is determined by the logic

36 "To, že se českej národ nepodílí na svejch vlastních dějinách."

37 "Tragédie je až ten mýtus, kterej z toho vzniknul."

of Alexander's scheme, and the moment it becomes an entity in itself independent from the original painful experience, thus opening itself up to a far more diverse spectrum of emplotments.

On a more general level, this hypothesis could be expressed as a transition between communicative and cultural memory. According to Assmann's estimation, communicative memory as a process lasts "80–100 years," which represents "a moving horizon of 3–4 interacting generations."[38] If this estimate is accurate, then our sample is at the final stage of its development, but it is still unfinished. However, this does not mean that we have to wait another twenty years before the story of the Munich events finally becomes part of cultural memory. Rather, it calls for the results of our research to be verified in representations of cultural traumas whose time has already come and gone.

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Abstract

The Munich crisis of September 1938, resulting in the Munich Agreement between the Nazi Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy and causing the loss of a significant part of Czechoslovak territory, is historically a proof of appeasement policy failure and one of the starting points of World War II. For the Czech population, however, it meant above all a traumatic experience, which was the driving force of its depiction in numerous literary and film works. Four of these film representations of the Munich crisis are analyzed in the present chapter, namely Jiří Weiss's neorealist debut *Uloupená hranice* (*The Stolen Frontier*, 1947), Otakar Vávra's documentary drama *Dny zrady* (*Days of Betrayal*, 1973), Robert Sedláček's quality TV drama *Den po Mnichovu* (*A Day after Munich*, 2013), and Petr Zelenka's allegorical comedy *Ztraceni v Mnichově* (*Lost in Munich*, 2015). Their interpretation focuses on answering two basic questions: First, how these films use the basic narrative patterns associated with telling a certain cultural trauma, that is, the traumatic story and the conspiracy story. And secondly, to what extent the representation of the Munich events in these films corresponds to their emplotments in Czech textbooks of history.