

Section One
Kaj Munk

Chapter One: Approaching the Questions of Freedom of the Press, Censorship, Self-Censorship, and Press Ethics

Søren Dosenrode

[...] the freedom of the press is one of the great bulwarks of liberty, and can never be restrained but by despotic governments (Virginia Bill of Rights, article 12, 1776)

Free circulation of information (and since the invention of the book press, a free press)¹ has always been a thorn in the side of adherents of totalitarianism, be it in a political, a cultural or a religious form. Freedom of the press can be restricted in many ways: through more or less official censorship, but also through self-censorship where the journalist does not write what the state, the society, his superior, or his colleagues would not like to hear. The motives for such behavior are many and could include fear, opportunism or simply the fact that it is easier. This raises the ethical question of how the press should behave when it is under strain, under pressure from the state or from the surrounding society: should it conform, or go into opposition? Thus the purpose of this book is to analyze the role and behavior of the press when it finds itself under pressure from totalitarian forces of various kinds.

Casting a quick glance on history reminds us that free expression of one's thoughts is not an old freedom, and also that it was not always looked upon without reservation, e.g. Socrates was sentenced to death for 'corrupting' the youth with his conversations and speeches. The institution of the censor in Rome was looked upon positively, as it helped shape the youth in the correct manner etc. (Newth 2001). Still, proponents of freedom of expression did exist, as this verse of Euripides, written about 450 BC indicates (cited in Newth 2001):

This is true Liberty when free born men
Having to advise the public may speak free,
Which he who can, and will, deserves high praise,
Who neither can nor will, may hold his peace;
What can be more just in a State then this?

But the basic freedom of the press was not a topic until the 17th century, where John Milton wrote a tract to the English Parliament, the "Areopagitica" in 1644 (Newth 2001). He did not plead for unlimited freedom of the press, but for unlimited right to publish, and then to defend one's writings in the courts, if one had caused offense. He was strictly against pre-publishing censorship as it was practiced then.

Freedom of the press in our sense of the word first occurred as a legal right in the Virginia Bill of Rights from 1776 (see above) which undoubtedly inspired the founding

1 Where nothing else is explicitly stated, the term 'freedom of the press' is used synonymously with 'freedom of information' and 'freedom of expression'.

fathers of the United States of America to add it to their constitution in 1791 as the first amendment:

Congress shall make no law [...] abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.

In spite of the emerging understanding of the freedom of the press as essential among the ‘enlightened’ elite, this idea was not unchallenged, e.g. the Prussian Georg Hegel (1770 – 1831) was not keen on people’s unlimited right to speak and comment on everything, and he was thus in opposition to his contemporaries like the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), who saw the freedom of the press as *the* main instrument with which to secure freedom. As the liberal revolutions swept Europe around 1848-49 the freedom of the press was guaranteed in numerous constitutions. In the Danish constitution of 1849 as well as its successors; the formulation has been like this:

Everyone is entitled to publish his thoughts in print, although under the responsibility of the courts. Censorship and other rules alike are not to be introduced again. (§84 in the first constitution and §77 in today’s constitution)

Like most freedoms, this freedom is fragile and one of the first to be abolished by totalitarian states; and given up by democratic states in times of hardship, as a sacrifice to ‘*Realpolitik*’. This was also the case in Denmark in the years prior to World War II as well as during it.

Censoring Kaj Munk

The Danish priest, dramatist, poet and journalist Kaj Munk² became a victim of censorship in a number of forms, which may be illustrative for the topic of this book, and he shall be looked at in depth in the two following chapters, therefore only a few brief points will be given here.

In the archive of the Kaj Munk Research Center in Aalborg, Denmark, one finds a number of letters and notifications telling of how Kaj Munk – as well as many others – was censored in Denmark during World War II. In a stack of documents one finds a short notice written by the editor of the *Jyllandsposten*. He had had a telephone conversation with Kaj Munk about an article, where Munk had written that Jesus is a Jew. The chief editor did not want to publish it, and Munk replied: “If *one* in *Jyllandsposten*

2 It is hard to come to grips with Danish and Scandinavian *inter bellum* history without including Kaj Munk in the analysis. Kaj Munk was a fierce opponent of the German occupation of Denmark. When Benito Mussolini and later Adolf Hitler seized power, they fascinated him immensely, and the ‘strong men’ were a theme of several of his plays. But when especially Hitler’s prosecution of the Jews became more and more obvious, his enthusiasm faded, and when Denmark was occupied by German forces in 1940, he took up position against Germany. During the years of occupation, he vehemently opposed the Danish policy of cooperation with the occupational forces, and he was killed by the German secret police, the Gestapo, in January 1944. Chapter Two of this book is dedicated to Kaj Munk as a journalist. In Dosenrode 2008, chapter 4, Kaj Munk’s thoughts on resistance are analysed.

cannot write that Jesus is a Jew, *I* can no longer write for *Jyllandsposten!*”³ (KMF 95.03.01, my translation). In some cases the notifications look ‘official’, but are in other cases anonymous. In a letter from Mr. Egebjerg – editor of *Jyllandsposten* – it is openly stated that “...under the aggravated censorship the Foreign Ministry has prohibited us to publish your works.” (KMF 45.16.04)⁴ This letter was dated September 1, 1943, two days after the collapse of the Danish policy of appeasement.⁵ Censorship works fast – nothing is more dangerous to an authoritarian regime than a free press!

But Kaj Munk had already been censored before the war, e.g. when some of his plays were prohibited from being performed in the southern part of Jutland, in order not to provoke Denmark’s neighbor Germany. In a newspaper article in the daily *Berlingske Tidende* on January 20, 1939 with the headline “Kaj Munk’s ‘The Melting Pot’ cancelled after Mr. Steincke’s intervention” one could read Minister of Justice K. K. Steincke’s comment on this (my translation):

[...] I find the Rev. Munk’s play very interesting. But it is something quite different that one, especially in a border region, should avoid the public performance of a play which sets the national passions on fire.

Mr Steincke, a Social Democrat, clearly expressed the policy of appeasement the government displayed towards Germany in spite of the constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression which are quoted above.

Munk’s own reaction to censorship during the occupation was to defy it. He preached and spoke in public when he got the opportunity, and when his drama *Niels Ebbesen* (about the Danish squire Niels Ebbesen who killed the German occupier Count Gerhardt III of Holstein in 1340) was confiscated, Kaj Munk went on tours, by bicycle, to Danish village halls where he would read it in front of an audience.

An important incident is Kaj Munk’s famous “Ollerup speech” from July 28, 1940. It is famous, or rather infamous, because only parts of it were published in a résumé in *Svendborg Avis*, a local journal. The journalist had, if we are to believe the handwritten résumé by R. Fauerskov Lauersen which also exists, conducted a very strong kind of self-censorship, leaving out all of Kaj Munk’s anti-German remarks, and including only the pro-Hitler ones.⁶ This suspicion is proven correct when one reads a ‘letter to the editor’ of the Danish daily *Information* from April 25, 1946 from the journalist who produced the résumé. He wrote that the editor had told him (my translation):

- 3 My translation. ”Kan man ikke i Jyllandsposten skrive, at Kristus er Jøde, kan jeg heller ikke mere skrive i Jyllandsposten.”
- 4 Egebjerg himself had to seek refuge in neutral Sweden shortly afterwards.
- 5 Denmark was occupied by German forces on April 9, 1940. After short sporadic fighting the government and the king capitulated. A policy of (forced) cooperation was established and continued until public rebellion made it collapse on August 29, 1943.
- 6 Counting the signs in Fauerskov Lauersen’s résumé which was circulated illegally after the speech gives 8206 signs and counting the censored résumé in *Svendborg Avis* gives 4650 signs (Dosenrode 2009, 43.).

Regarding Kaj Munk, [...], then we of course need what he says, but take it a bit easy, because we can't unfortunately write everything we would like to, after the arrival of the Germans. [...] And the editor's order is the law of the journalist.

This shows the risks of self-censorship. The consequences of this journalist's report were of course to harm Kaj Munk's image and the résumé is still quoted to show that Munk was an admirer of Hitler's (cf. Dosenrode 2009).

So, in the 'case' of Kaj Munk we may see how the State may try to oppress freedom of expression and how the press sometimes imposes censorship on itself; but it also shows us that there are ways to fight for freedom of expression – although the price may be high – Kaj Munk was shot in January 1944. As most will know, such killings of people defying totalitarianism are not just a thing of the past. This is demonstrated clearly by the killings, among others, of Anna Politkovskaya in 2006 and Anastasia Baburova in 2009.

Why this book, or close to a state of the art reflection

Looking at the number of publications of newer monographs or anthologies on the topic of 'freedom of the press' is – surprisingly or rather sadly – very limited. But there are a number of newer contributions which may be subdivided in a number of categories. Beginning with what could be labeled '**factual contributions**' *Freedom House* publishes its annual review of statistical facts, as well as analysis, but its approach is global, mainly quantitative and 'present-time oriented'. Then there is a vast bulk, the **juridical literature**, where one finds a number of good contributions, but – as indicated – of a juridical and often, though not always, single country character. Examples are: Lidsky & Wright's *Freedom of The Press – A Reference Guide to the United States Constitution* from 2004; a typical book, being of juridical character and focusing on one individual state. Another contribution of similar kind is Archibald Cox's *Freedom of Expression* from 1999. Especially interesting is Vincenzo Zeno-Zencovich's book *Freedom of Expression – a Critical Analysis* from 2008, in which he looks at the current legal position of the freedom of expression in a number of European countries and broadens the debate to include sociological aspects. Dario Millo's book *Defamation and the Freedom of Speech* (2008) discusses the clash between the freedom of expression and the right of reputation. It argues that fundamental rules and procedures of defamation law need to be reformed to take into account the dual importance of public interest speech, on the one hand, and the right to human dignity on the other.

Not surprisingly there are a number of **historical books** like Debora Shuger's book *Censorship and Cultural Sensibility – The Regulation of Language in Tudor-Stuart England* from 2006, Robert Mchesney's *Our Unfree Press – 100 Years of Radical Media Criticism* from 2004, and Daniel Schorr's book from 2006 *The Idea of a Free Press* which focus on the development of the concept during the Enlightenment. Not surprisingly a lot of relevant literature has a 'one state focus', i.e. **national litera-**

ture. As an example, much newer literature originates in the US and concentrates on ... the US. Examples are *Freedom of Speech* by Ian Friedman from 2005, as well as Kate Burns' *Fighters Against Censorship* from 2004 and focusing on American 'fighters' only. The same goes for her 2006 book – basically for teaching at sub-university level on censorship in America.

Within the **political sciences** and **media sciences** one also finds a number of important contributions. Raphael Cohen-Almagor's book from 2005, *Scope of Tolerance*, presents an assessment of the risks and limits of contemporary democracy. This is a study concerned with the limits of tolerance. Additionally one finds a global or International Relations perspective in Douglas van Belle's slightly older contribution on *Press Freedom and Global Politics* (2000).

The general impression is that contemporary literature's focus is on the role of the press in relationship to democracy; how media influences democracy, how the political and the ethical aspects are managed etc. (persuasive design as the newest). This book on the one hand is a part of this central discourse, but on the other hand it attempts to broaden the view by its focus on the historical and contemporary experiences made when the press was under strain in significant periods since the 1930s. Additionally its geographical scope is broader than most books. Thus the ambition is to fill some of the gaps noted above.

About this book

In the following chapters of this book, aspects of press freedom are analyzed starting with the 1930s and then moving up through time. An underlying question is whether or not it is possible to conjugate 'freedom of the press', such as 'full freedom of the press', 'nearly freedom of the press', 'some freedom of the press' etc.? After having read all chapters of this book, the reader will understand that the answer is no.

The structure of this book is thematic as well as chronological. Thematic in the way that the chapters are grouped in four sections each analyzing a central aspect of the overall topic indicated in the book title. The sections focus on: A) Kaj Munk, B) The Press under Strain, C) Religion, Politics and the Press, and D) The Press as a Political Instrument. The individual sections are, as mentioned, organized chronologically. In spite of the various headlines, they all look at the working conditions, role and behavior of the press in times of strain and oppression. The book is biased towards Europe with only one chapter on Radio Free Europe, one on Turkey, and one on the Pakistani reactions to the Danish-provoked Mohammed Crisis having parts of their focus outside Europe. If an argument for this should be necessary it would be, that the inspiration for it came from studying Kaj Munk, who was a European. This also explains why World War II occupies so much space in the book. An additional reason could be that Europe and North America were the cradles of the freedom of expression and the freedom of the press, and thus worth focusing on.

In the first chapter *Arense Lund* introduces Kaj Munk as a journalist and his life as a writer who cherished and fought for his right to write and publish. She emphasizes that he did not behave as an ordinary journalist, and did not follow the rules of ‘good journalism’ such as beginning your article with the most important information, always trying to be objective and never presenting your own opinion. Instead he was observant, critical and often showed a great sense of humor. His close – but not always faithful – cooperation with the daily *Jyllandsposten* was important and is looked at. Altogether he wrote more than 600 articles. He was fascinated by the ‘strong men’ (Mussolini and, to a lesser extent, Hitler), but he also used his ability to write to defend the Jews against Nazi persecution, in his writings and in his plays. Lund’s contribution is followed by Svend Aage Nielsen’s introduction to censorship in Denmark. He also analyses in-depth how Kaj Munk was indeed censored from the second half of the 1930s onwards, before the German occupation of Denmark. After the occupation of Denmark, in 1940, the Danish censorship of Kaj Munk increased in intensity including orders from the ecclesial authorities not to preach on certain subjects – he refused to obey.

Then follows this volume’s largest section on “The Press under Strain”. It starts out with Beate Schneider’s in-depth analysis of the conditions of the German press under Nazi rule between 1933 – 1945. Schneider stresses the efficiency of the Nazis’ control of the press and how thoroughly the press was misused, and how it can be seen as an archetype of how a state may manipulate the population through the press. Schneider, in her concluding part, accentuates the importance of the negative Nazi heritage in today’s German press landscape. The bad experiences have led to a constitutional guarantee of press freedom, and the constitutional court has been keen to defend this right, thus “A negative heritage has been transformed into positive efforts.” Through Schneider’s analysis one understands the working conditions for the Norwegian and the Danish press analyzed in the next chapters. Rune Ottosen analyzes the conditions of the Norwegian press during the German occupation between 1940-1945, focusing both on the ‘street level’, on how the individual journalists were coping under the occupation, as well as on the Norwegian Press Association (NP). The conclusion, looking at how many journalists were still working in Oslo and in the rest of the country gives a clear picture of the state of Norwegian journalism: roughly speaking 1/3 were still working – this included some supporters of the Nazis, 1/3 were in exile and 1/3 had found other occupations. In the province even fewer had retained their jobs (approx. ¼). Ottosen concludes that:

The Norwegian press survived five years of a state of emergency, where press freedom was terminated. The choices that were made by the individual journals and journalists created wounds and conflicts that would live on for a long time after the war.

Palle Roslyng-Jensen’s analysis of Denmark, Norway’s Scandinavian brother-country, reflects the different natures of the occupations. Whereas the German occupation of Norway was brutal, the German occupation of Denmark was, at least until August 29, 1943, fairly mild. Roslyng-Jensen discusses what the control and censorship system meant for the degree of adaptation of the press to the authorities exercising the control

of the press, and what it meant for the reception of newspapers and the interpretation of news and comments in a democratic context.

His conclusion is, seen from a democratic as well as a free perspective, positive, in as much as he concludes that:

The existence of a control system and censorship had a significant early impact on the readers creating distrust in news and articles, especially if they were seen as German inspired or from a German source. [...] generally the public were ahead of the press, although the newspapers never were able to take positions or voice opinions directly on German occupation rule.

But hardship as well as censorship did not end with World War II. Peter Schiwy gives an account of the conditions under which the press and the media had to work in Eastern Europe during the Cold War. Summing up Schiwy concludes that:

[...] success or failure of a media was, at best, of secondary interest. The chief purpose always remained the political control of the reader and listener with a view to preserving the power of the party.

Thus the media of Eastern Europe were utterly unprepared when the system changed after the fall of the Berlin Wall with the result being that the present media landscape is dominated by external owners.

After these historical analyses follows a contemporary account of the working conditions of journalists and indeed the strain on the press in Turkey. The present situation for the media in Turkey is not rosy, as Yusuf Kanli describes. Journalists have to strike a balance between the obligation to report on developments as they see them on the one hand, and “the contagious Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code (TCK), the anti-terror law, the taboos, written and unwritten restrictions on freedom of expression, political pressures, interests of the media bosses [...]” on the other hand. Kanli goes on to define two standpoints concerning the freedom of the press: individualist and communal; where are the limits of the individuals’ freedom of expression versus the ‘communal awareness’ which aims at protecting a majority’s feelings? Going on to analyze today’s situation, Kanli focuses on a structural problem: the growing monopolization of Turkish media combined with a symbiosis of the media-owners with the political elite. When one considers the fact that there is a tension between the secularized part of the elite, the Kamalists, and the moderate-Islamist elite headed by Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan “[...] harassing the media for criticizing the government with some ulterior motives instead of expanding reforms we unfortunately notice an iron fist tightening around our neck.” Also in Turkey journalists are killed for not conforming to the powerful.

The next part of the book is devoted to the discussion of “Religion, Politics and the Press” and focuses on the “Mohammed drawings”.

The ‘Mohammed drawings’ were 12 drawings of the prophet Mohammed published in the Danish daily *Jyllandsposten* on September 30, 2005. The reason for the publication was a number of incidents where Danish artists had refused to express themselves on matters related to Islam out of fear of reprisals, in other words self-censorship. In one concrete example the Danish daily ‘Politiken’ reported on September 27, 2005

that an author had not been able to find an illustrator for his children's book on Mohammed. The artists had excused themselves by referring to the killing of Theo van Gogh as well as to the physical assault on a Danish university teacher who had recited from the Koran in a lecture room at the University of Copenhagen (*Politiken*, September 17, 2005). Muslims residing in Denmark complained about the publication, and 11 ambassadors from Islamic countries asked the Danish Prime Minister to make a public apology which he refused to do. The incident became 'international', as Danish Muslims travelled the Middle East to promote international sanctions against Denmark.⁷

Against this background a roundtable discussion took place at Aalborg University on September 29, 2007, where editor Fleming Rose, who had authorized the publication of the 12 drawings, discussed the question of 'religion, politics and the press' with Yusuf Kanli, *Turkish Daily News*; Herbert Pundik, *Politiken*; and Iben Tranholm, media editor of the Roman Catholic Church in Denmark. Their discussion was reported by *Jyllandsposten* and is reprinted here. *Jyllandsposten* was supported by the press in some countries (e.g. the drawings were published in Germany, Norway and France, but the French editor was later dismissed from his job), but Great Britain – the homeland of John Milton – was critical, and in Pakistan riots took place, resulting in a number of deaths and injuries. Thus, the editor of this book has found it especially interesting to include the reactions and comments in Great Britain and Pakistan.

Julian Petley begins his analysis of the British reaction by asking why no British newspapers re-printed the 12 drawings, as they in fact reflected the British newspapers' general attitude as well. He starts out by looking at the liberal newspapers, and concludes that by not re-publishing they are consistent with their previous attitudes. The same thing cannot be said about the conservative press, which is characterized as hypocritical and basically trying not to offend potential customers. Petley is not certain that freedom of the press actually exists in Britain and asks whether it has to be thought. The answer is negative, one has to "empower the powerless rather than muzzling the powerful, and [...] newspapers, rather than being censored, should be allowed to 'publish and be damned' [...]". Barry White continues the discussion commenting on Petley. He starts out by looking at the background of Muslims, stating their situation as the poorest minority population in Britain. He then endorses Petley's argument, that:

It's one thing to spew out anti-Muslim sentiment to no one but your like-minded readers, but quite another to do so in the full glare of the global media spotlight [...]. Such a stance would have required both consistency and courage, two qualities conspicuously lacking in Britain's conservative press, [...].

White then raises the question whether or not the publication of the story and the drawings was in the public interest. He concludes that the publication of the drawings indeed was, but he draws parallels to Britain, where other controversial publications were not. He also concludes that freedom of the press is best served by empowering the powerless.

7 To strengthen their case the imams had fabricated drawings themselves i.e. one showing the prophet as a pig.

The Mohammed drawings lead to demonstrations, the burning of Danish diplomatic representations etc., and nowhere were the general sentiments as hostile as in Pakistan. Elisabeth Eide happened to be in the country as the riots broke out. Eide uses a discussion of Occidentalism as a generator of questions for her analysis, asking *inter alia* whether the cartoon controversy “led to an upsurge in essentialist and crude representations of an imagined ‘West’ in Pakistani media, or whether a more differentiated coverage may be found.” In her analysis of the way the press covered the controversy she identifies a number of phases: ‘the discourse of disgust’, ‘tumultuous action and self-flagellation’, and ‘David Irving comes to Pakistan’. One of Eide’s conclusions is that the incident was (ab)used by various groups to promote their causes, but another was that “[The] differing voices, the nuances and the self-reflexiveness [...] reveals a picture of a Muslim nation somewhat unlike the way ‘European’ news coverage represents a country like Pakistan.”

As a chapter in its own right, the political use of the media is described by Arch Puddington who analyzes the story of *Radio Free Europe (RFE)* during the Cold War. *RFE* was a major source of information in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe, much to the annoyance of the local dictators who, like all totalitarians, expended much energy to control the dissemination of information in their countries. What makes *RFE* interesting was its declared aim: to effect changes of government in Eastern Europe. In his chronological analysis Puddington dwells especially at the role and responsibility of *RFE* in connection to the Hungarian uprising of 1956, where he does not accept the accusation that *RFE* initiated the uprising, thus being guilty of the deaths of many Hungarians, but he does argue that:

... there is little question today that the station’s broadcasts to Hungary during the Revolution’s first eleven days violated – repeatedly and sometimes flagrantly – many of the accepted canons of professional journalism.

Puddington ends his chapter by concluding, that “In the war of ideas between Communism and democracy – [...] – *RFE* proved to be one of democracy’s most powerful weapons.”

The volume concludes with Jesper Strömbäck’s chapter where he discusses the fundamental question of the relationship between democracy and the media today. Strömbäck starts out by stating that democracy and freedom of the press, and speech, belong together, but also asks why or if this is so. To answer this question he discusses and compares four forms of democracy (procedural, competitive, participatory, and deliberative), before he introduces the concept of a social contract between democracy and the press. Then the roles of the press are stipulated as being providers of information and also watchdog of power. Strömbäck’s main conclusion also stands for the other contributions of this book when writing:

[...] democracy and the freedom of speech and of the press are inextricably linked. Democracy requires a free press, and a free press requires democracy. [...] However, not only does democracy require a free press. Democracy requires a press that uses its freedom to provide the information people need to be free and self-governing, [...].

A final note concerns the character or style of the contributions. The reader will soon realize that the chapters are written by ‘different kinds of people’, in the sense that the editor of this book has deliberately tried to combine university academics with journalists or people closely affiliated to the media world to secure first hand contributions from places where the freedom of the press is or was under strain. The hope is that this approach will broaden the scope and depth of the book.

References

- Chomsky, Noam: http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Noam_Chomsky (accessed January 6, 2010).
- Dosenrode, Søren, ed. 2009. *Christianity and Resistance in the 20th Century – From Kaj Munk and Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Desmond Tutu*. Leiden: Brill.
- Dosenrode, Søren. 2009. “Hvad sagde Kaj Munk egentlig i Ollerup?” In *Munkiana*, vol. 40 (2009): 34-47. Aalborg: Kaj Munk Society.
- Euripides, quoted in John Milton, *Areopagitica*, <http://www.classicauthors.net/milton/aeropagitica/aeropagitica1.html> (accessed October 3, 2009).
- Kaj Munk Forskningscentret (abv. KMF). (Kaj Munk Research Center). <http://www.kajmunk.hum.aau.dk/> (accessed September 29, 2009). Numbers refer to records in the Center’s archive.
- Milton, John: *Areopagitica*, <http://www.classicauthors.net/milton/aeropagitica/aeropagitica1.html> (accessed October 03, 2009).
- Newth, Mette 2001. “The long history of censorship.” In *Beacon for Freedom of Expression*. http://www.beaconforfreedom.org/about_project/history.html (accessed September 29, 2009).
- Politiken, September 17, 2005: Islam- Dyb angst for kritik af islam.
- Virginia Bill of Rights, June 12, 1776. http://www.constitution.org/bor/vir_bor.htm (accessed September 29, 2009)

List of Abbreviations

KMF: Kaj Munk Forskningscentret (Kaj Munk Research Center). Numbers refer to records in the Center’s archive.

Chapter Two: Kaj Munk as a Journalist

Arense Lund

Kaj Munk wasn't a journalist in the traditional sense. He didn't follow the rules of the "news triangle". That is, that you always start an article with the most important information, that you try to be objective and never ever present your own point of view. He broke all of these rules in all of the articles he wrote.

But he had other qualities that are essential in good journalism. He was very observant, he had an intuitive sense of what was of topical interest and he was very inquisitive. His articles are a mix of commentary, observation and his own unique Kaj Munk brand of humor, Christianity and a lack of respect for authorities.

Kaj Munk wanted to be a journalist when he was a teenager. In his autobiography *Foråret så sagte kommer* (1942) he writes that he visited the local newspaper one day to tell them that he had heard that an old woman had fallen into the moat around the Christianssæde manor house in Lolland. They weren't immediately interested but then he dramatized the story a little and it was printed.

He had an article in a local newspaper *Maribo Amtstidende* April 15, 1913 with the title *Rottejagten* ("A Rat Hunt"). The story itself is fiction so it doesn't really count in this context but it is probably the first thing he managed to get printed in a newspaper. He comments: "How proud I was to see myself in the paper!" (Actually, he creates a little confusion about which article **was** his first because in the addition to his autobiography, *Med Sol og Megen Glæde* (1942, 50-54), there is an article called *Gud er Kærlighed* ("God is Love") from 1916 which he calls his first article).

He writes in his autobiography that these episodes made him want to become a journalist. So he went to his beloved foster mother, Marie, and begged her: "Let me become a journalist! Let me try and get an apprenticeship at a newspaper, Nakskov Tidende." But his foster mother just looked at him and contemptuously said: "Become a journalist! We have decided that you are going to the university so there is nothing to discuss" (Munk 1942a, 169).

In the following years he got an education, a job and a wife. He wrote lots of poems and plays but almost nothing journalistic until 1931. He did have an article in the local news paper *Ringkøbing Amts Dagblad* in 1925, where he defended a priest who had changed the baptismal service (Munk 1925).

1931 was an incredible year for him. His first child was born, he had a breakthrough with the play, *Cant*, and his newspaper career took off. He had met the nonconformist priest Drewsen Christensen who invited him to write for his parish magazine, *Dansk Folkeliv*. Drewsen Christensen made him an offer he couldn't refuse. He would receive no pay, have very few readers, but he could write whatever he liked. Their meeting was decisive because the articles he wrote here were seen by the editor of the large