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STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICE IN ANNA LAUERMANNOVÁ-MIKSCHOVÁ'S WORK



Introduction

Writer Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová can be rightly placed among prominent personalities in Czech history, having been actively involved in creating Czech culture. While her major contribution is seen in her literary salon, with her prose put more or less aside, she managed to capture there topics that have been up-to-date even today, if we look at the fulfilment of gender roles.

Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová (1852-1932)

Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová became famous especially for her organization of the first Czech literary salon that was established in early 1890s. Held for several dozens of years, it was attended by many important persons of that period, such as František Ladislav Rieger, Julius Zeyer, Josef Václav Sládek, Jaroslav Vrchlický, Otakar Theer, Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, Josef a Karel Čapkovi, etc. Her diaries from the period between 1872 and 1929 represent a significant source from historical and literal points of view, depicting her surroundings and inspiring her literary works. She was a highly emancipated and intelligent woman who managed, despite temporary customs and certain social down-warding, to get out of an unhappy marriage and seek separation (having become promoter of a Divorce Act).

For Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová, became a symbol of happiness, regained freedom and lifelong love Italy.

The two years spent in Rome were the two happiest years of my life. I stayed with my mother, my faithful Karla and my little daughter at Via Gregoriana, street stretching from the Pincian Hill

down to the city center. Windows provided us with a view of Rome, our rooms were equipped with ancient Renaissance-style furniture, [...], we had an open fireplace, a book shelf was bursting with works from various authors from Gregorovius to Taine, and down there, below the hill, there was Rome – Rome with its layered cultures [...]¹,

she would remember.

Paradoxically, she came to the “Eternal City” in autumn 1886 because she had been suffering from serious health problems closely connected with her family situation. As Anna Mikschová admitted, she got engaged “[...] as a result of certain spleen, certain bankruptcy of all the hoping in my life[...]² with Josef Lauer mann (1844-1907), grandson of Josef Jungmann. However, soon after they got married, her handsome husband developed pathological jealousy with inclination to sadism.

As a result of several years of psychic stress, Anna suddenly started to throw out blood and, fearing the development of tuberculosis, she decided to act contrary to temporary habits: to leave her husband and, accompanied by her mother, nanny and her little daughter Olga, she left Prague to settle first in Switzerland, then in the French Riviera and finally in Italy.

Anna Lauer mannová-Mikschová profited from her journey to the south not only through improved health condition but it also gave her time to wait for the divorce having been arranged in her absence by dr. Tomáš Černý, as states Miroslav Rutte³. Finally, lengthy negotiations turned out to be successful – Josef Lauer mann moved out from their house and Anna could come back to Prague in spring 1888. Yet, Rome would remain unforgettably rooted in her heart.

Felix Téver

Nevertheless, Anna had been struggling with difficulties to be fully integrated in society which was still going by gender stereotypes and incapable to accept a divorced woman.

And it was right after she had returned from Italy that Anna tried to publish her own work.

¹ A. Lauer mannová-Mikschová, *Řím Macharův a můj (Vzpomínky na šťastné dny nad Tiberou)* (Rome of Machar and mine (Memories of Happy Days by the Tiber River)), [in:] *Lidé minulých dob: kniha lidských a básnických osudů* (People of Past Times: A Book of Human and Poets Destinies), Prague, Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, 1941, p. 84, translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

² A. Lauer mannová-Mikschová, *Vzpomínky z bělohorské pláně* (Antonín Gindely) (Memories from the White Mountain Plain (Antonín Gindely)), [in:] *Lidé minulých dob...*, p. 79, translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

³ M. Rutte, *Portrét z mizejících dob: život a dílo Anny Lauer mannové* (Portrait from the Times Disappeared: Anna Lauer mannová's Life and Work), [in:] *O bábušce: na památku paní Anny Lauer mannové (Felixe Tévera)*, (About Babushka: To Commemorate Mrs. Anna Lauer mannová (Felix Téver)), ed. F. Novoveský, Prague, Czechoslovakia, 1935, p. 44, translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

You know, after those years of home hell I retrieved happiness in Rome. But a male name – so that no one would find out it is me.” – ‘Happy, that is Felix,’ said Marie [Červinková-Riegrová]. – Happy at the banks of the Tiber River – the Tiber is in Italian Tever. Therefore, Felix Tever. Put it here up on the manuscript⁴.

In 1888, the *Květy* magazine published Felix Tever's first short story called *Lutrář* (*Gambler*). Allusions to Italy, or more explicitly to Rome, and the duality motive, so typical of her further works, had been at the very beginning of Felix Tever's artistic career.

Her diaries, she would write between 1872 and 1929, are very interesting, they significantly contribute to the depiction of temporary Czech society⁵. Notes in her diaries served as a rich source of inspiration for her fiction and she used them also when collecting her memories of her friends and prominent personalities, published separately in the *Národní listy* newspaper (to be published as a collection in 1941 thanks to Miroslav Rutte).

Stereotypes and prejudices as key topics

Family background, the atmosphere of the Rieger's house she could use thanks to her friendship with Marie, as well as her own experience formed Anna to become a self-confident and intelligent person showing no difficulties in disputing her beliefs even with her closest friends. She would put considerable effort in changing female perception in society as a whole⁶. This is how Miroslav Rutte commented it:

She would be particularly passionately irritated by writers who narrowed love to gender or described a woman as a 'little loving animal': in such a case it was not only other-type artist who would revolt in her, but also, as she would put it, her 'esprit de corps' and a sharp-witted debater turned into a fanatic who would not be easy to seal friendship with⁷.

Published in 1924 in the January edition of the *Národní listy* newspaper, her column called *O krisi manželství a leccěms jiném* (*On Marriage Crisis and Many More*) reflects on the question of divorce, stating objective reasons that can logically result in divorce, providing personal support to this option:

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 57, translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

⁵ A. Lauermannová-Mikschová, T. Riedlbauchová, E. Farková, *Z deníků Anny Lauermannové-Mikschové* (From Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová's Journals), Prague Czech Republic 2014, p. 8, the title translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

⁶ K. Kubanová, *Manželství jako okovy – z díla Anny Lauermannové-Mikschové* (Marriage as the shackles – from the work by Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová), [in:] *QUAERE 2019: Reviewed Proceedings of the Interdisciplinary Scientific International Conference for PhD students and assistants*, June 24-26, 2019, Hradec Králové, The Czech Republic [CD-ROM], Hradec Králové, Czech Republic, vol. 9, p. 1123, 2019.

⁷ M. Rutte, *Portrét z mizejících dob...*, [in:] *O bábušce...*, p. 7, translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

*We do own up to it and vote with all our hands for a Marriage Divorce Act. Why? ... Change is an eternal act of life. Tradition should be our experienced teacher in life but it shall not be a jailer imprisoning humankind in ancient institutions and outdated acts*⁸.

Most probably she had been thinking about her friend Marie Červinková-Riegrová who would spend last years of her life in such “self-detention of the two”⁹ which would speed up her early death in 1895. Indeed, Anna faced this loss with huge difficulties. “When she left, I suffered seriously, having a strange feeling of a painful amputation in my own spiritual life ... as she was a helpful soul also to me...”¹⁰

Marriage is captured, among others, in Felix Tévér’s novel *Prapodivná historie* (*A Truly Strange History*), her last fiction published after her death in 1932. Indeed, she imprinted her most intimate experiences in Italian princess Camela who, having entered in wedlock, becomes deeply disillusioned as she is tortured by her insane husband. Desperation suffered by the young wife is depicted through her diary notes:

Leaves in the park have been falling, bare branches of tall trees show up against grey sky, all roses that were yesterday in blossom have been burnt by frost. – Carlo was swearing throughout the night – he would not let me sleep, putting the worst thoughts in my life, torturing me with questions. I was so tired from the previous sleepless nights that I fell asleep while he was swearing – to wake me up, he poured me, but not with water in the carafe on his night table¹¹.

Facing the decision to seek divorce or to stay in wedlock, Camela finally yields to temporary social conventions, finding the sense of her life in looking after poor children.

In the short stories mentioned below, marriage is looked at from a different point of view – *Papírový koník* (*Little Horse in Paper*)¹² tells a story about getting over marital infidelity; mutual misunderstanding between the spouses results from lack of communication and trust that is revealed with a help of a family friend. A short story called *U Božího oka* (*At God’s Eye*)¹³ presents a young woman who, while having been disgraced by her fiancé, remains faithful to him until she reveals that all he craves is money; with mother playing a key role. Furthermore, the story includes also a topic of games addiction. The plot is partially similar to Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*.

⁸ F. Tévér, *O krisi manželství a leččems jiném* (On Marriage Crisis and Many More), *Národní listy*, Czechoslovakia, vol. 64 / issue 1, p. 1-2, 1924, translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

⁹ A. Lauermannová-Mikschová, *Duše pomocná* (Ženský profil) (Helping Soul (Female Profile), [in:] *Lidé minulých dob*, p. 69, translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

¹⁰ M. Rutte, *Portrét z mizejících dob...*, [in:] *O bábušce...*, p. 33, translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

¹¹ F. Tévér, *Prapodivná historie* (A Truly Strange History), Prague Czechoslovakia 1932, p. 76, translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

¹² F. Tévér, *Povídky* (Short Stories), Prague: Published and printed by J. Otta, 1894, the title translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

¹³ F. Tévér, *U Božího oka a jiné povídky* (At God’s Eye and Other Short Stories), Prague: Published by Česká grafická akc. společnost “Unie”, 1919, the title translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

*Manželské štěstí (Happy Marriage)*¹⁴ describes a story of a bachelor and a young widow, pointing out that actions are more powerful than words.

Felix Téver's way of writing can be characterized by a feeling for detail, fine capturing of personalities and empathy through which she gets deep to the core to express what is truly important in life.

Methodology

The aim was to collect and analyze literary work by Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová aka Felix Téver published in books and journals (diaries left aside, their compilation was published in 2014). The work is interpreted from the gender perspective – relationship between woman and man, role of women in society, stereotypes, prejudice, the triggering mechanism of the author's work being her unsuccessful marriage. Furthermore, it involves a survey and reflection on temporary reception of Felix Téver's work by literary critics. The focus is put on wider social dimension involving the development of emancipation efforts under Czech patriotic circumstances. Key issues looked at in the survey include the following: Are the problems captured in Felix Téver's work still relevant today?; To what extent was her work developed through social and private impacts (such as friendship with Marie Červinková-Riegrová or Julius Zeyer, affection to Italy etc.)?; Does the overall evaluation by literary critics result from conventional approach, i.e. male perspective?

Conclusion

From her early works written under pen name and sent with shyness, timidity and uncertainty to Svatopluk Čech for evaluation, Anna Lauermannová gradually developed into a self-confident, critical and publicly recognized author. Her success experienced with her third title *Duše nezakotvené (Unanchored Souls)*¹⁵ can be attributed not only to her dexterity in describing the characters psychology, but also to her skillful capturing of the real life in all its situations, both shiny and shady ones. This marked just a small step on her way to more extensive works that she started together with her double in 1912, having published a novel called *Na dvojí struně (On Double String)*¹⁶. We have

¹⁴ F. Téver, *Manželské štěstí (Happy Marriage)*, *Zlatá Praha*, vol. 36 / issue 21. 5., 4. 6., 18. 6., 2. 7., No. 35-36, 37-38, 39-40, 41-42, p. 273, 274, 295, 296, 307, 308, 310, 324, 326, 327, 1919, the title translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

¹⁵ F. Téver, *Duše nezakotvené (Unanchored Souls)*, Prague, printed and published by Jos. R. Vilímeček, 1908, the title translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

¹⁶ F. Téver, *Na dvojí struně (On Double String)*, Prague, printed and published by Jos. R. Vilímeček, 1912, the title translated from the Czech by Kateřina Matrasová.

tried to capture Felix Těver's literary work in a comprehensive manner as reflected in critical responses that might help us get to the early moments of creating female identity and solidarity, while the comprehensive picture of Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová is being completed as a woman perceived rather as organizer and host of a literary salon than as a writer.

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Stereotypy i uprzedzenia w twórczości Anny Lauermannovej-Mikschovej

STRESZCZENIE: Związek mężczyzny i kobiety, pozycja kobiety w społeczeństwie, współczesne konwencje i stereotypy to centralne tematy tekstów Anny Lauermannovej-Mikschovej alias Felixe Těvera. Swoją pracą bezpośrednio uczestniczyła w ich stopniowej transformacji i doskonaleniu. Choć jej proza nie była zbyt doceniana przez krytyków, a uwagę zwracano tylko na sprawy związane z jej salonem literackim, z pewnością zasługuje na dalsze badania, choćby z tego punktu widzenia, że sama okazała się nie ulegać ówczesnym konwencjom. Naszym celem są zebranie i przeanalizowanie twórczości literackiej Anny Lauermannovej-Mikschovej, publikowanej w książkach i czasopismach, oraz refleksja nad nią we współczesnym odbiorze krytycznym.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová, Felix Těver, czeski pisarz, pleć, recepcja, interpretacja, stereotypy

**Stereotypes and prejudice
in Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová's work**

SUMMARY: Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová, writer and founder of the first literary salon in Czech countries, published the majority of her titles under pen name Felix Téver: *Šťastný u břehů Tibery* (Happy at the Banks of the Tiber River). Her work features a wide range of genres from short stories, novels, plays to sketches, reflections and, last but not least, memoirs (memories, journals), the latter being probably the best demonstration of her narrative and observative skills. Reflecting her personal experience and thoughts, her work also pointed to a wide palette of issues that have not lost their topicality until present days, such as relationship between woman and man, role of women in society, stereotypes, prejudice. Demonstrated through her heroines' often vain fight caused by anchored life values and pre-determined gender roles (lover, wife, mother), the topic of marriage is our starting point for interpreting a selection of short stories written at various stages of the writer professional development. Furthermore, we also look at the works reception by literary critics of the period having evaluated the work very often superficially, from male perspective.

KEYWORDS: Anna Lauermannová-Mikschová, Felix Téver, Czech female writer, gender, reception, interpretation, stereotypes