

Abstract

In my thesis, I have analysed the influence of the family (and the position of the family members within the given roles) on individuals in their particular stages of life - childhood, teen years, adulthood and old age – literally life of a typical family of the 19th century – and its depiction in the Czech fiction of that time. The theoretical basis of the thesis was acquired from a number of professional publications, while the provided illustrations and citations from literary works of art and memoirs of 19th century authors have supported the practical confirmations of arising conclusions.

Based on theoretical sources, it can be assumed that Czech families of the 19th century were usually characterised by a dominant position of men. A man was regarded as “the head of the family” not only within daily life, but also during official acts; a man decided about the future of his children, wife and other family members, but still the family showed him a great level of respect and reverence. Contrary to that, the position of women in the family was subordinate; women had no rights towards men, merely duties. The same was applied to the position of children and seniors; the position of seniors was also subordinate to a dominant role of men. Conclusions resulting from the analysis of findings drawn from selected literary works explicitly confirm the aforementioned assumptions.

Interpretations and analytical processing of selected literary works confirm the fact that Czech families of the 19th century were based on the authority and decision-making power of the male family members, whose responsibility was to take care of their families, farms, wives, children, and employees if they had any, and to be in charge of the above mentioned from the moral, economic and legal point of view. Mostly it was the role of the father to make decisions about important issues associated with the functioning of the family, such as choosing future partners for his children, or making decisions concerning their future professions. This social role connected with an enormous scope of powers provided men with a feeling of proprietorship and importance; on the other hand, men who were less stress-resistant were very likely to experience high levels of stress, due to the fact that they were under permanent pressure and concern whether they could materially secure the household and all other family members.

Social-economic factors were absolutely decisive for the functioning of the family in the 19th century. Maintenance, expansion and social position were the most preferred criteria

when deciding on the functioning of a household, or when selecting a life partner for a child. The above mentioned statements may be, apart from others, confirmed by the literary depiction of the senior period of life, in which property-based relationships are preferred more than family interpersonal relationships.

The asset of the presented thesis is the employment of the interdisciplinary method consisting in monitoring social aspects through literary works, which applies the attitude to fiction as to a historical source based on which it is possible to analyse and describe issues of socialisation, social roles, social standards and dynamic processes in small groups. This method is applied particularly when analysing social processes which cannot be analysed by classical methodologists procedures, mainly for the reason of long time intervals between monitored social processes (if they occurred in the past), and a large time scope in which a wide spectrum of determinants is monitored.

On the other hand, it is necessary to respect the fact that a work of art is not a true and real image of the society in which the author lived and that the findings acquired through literature are not true facts; rather they have to be evaluated as portrayals, influenced by the ideas and artistic orientation of the author, also by the social group which the authors came from and in which he lives, possibly the social group to which the work is addressed. Last but not least, they are limited by a literary genre through which the idea is processed, and also by the social, cultural, national or period context.