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SOURCES AND INFLUENCES OF THE DRAMATIC WORK OF JOHANN CHRISTIAN ALOIS MICKL

A subtheme of this theatrological conference that deals with the period of 17th – 19th century is: *Sources, influences, texts in Latin and in the vernacular, ways towards professional stage*. I am convinced that the dramatic work of the author who I would like to briefly introduce to the international audience is – as far as the outlined topic is concerned – highly interesting. What is more, we can also, under a certain angle, observe all those aspects in said work, such as „sources“, „texts in Latin as well as vernacular“, „ways towards professional stage“, and so on.

The late humanist writer Johann Christian Alois Mickl (1711–1751)¹ was a unique personality of the culture of the early modern period in the Czech lands. He wrote his pivotal pieces – poetic as well as prosaic – in Latin, as a student of Jesuit schools when he was only nineteen or twenty years old (before 1730). He then included them into the conceptually compact collection *Recentior artis poeticae Helicon [...] e Graeciae finibus in Germaniae usque gremium translatus*,² a bigger part of which, to this day, has remained in a manuscript. It was designed in a way which would reflect various literary fields and then segmented into nine separate chapters named after the respective muses of each field. Eight dramas were supposed to be

¹ Johann Christian Alois Mickl (13. 2. 1711, Ostrolovský Újezd u Borovan – 23. 2. 1767, Vyšší Brod), poet, playwright, historian, philosopher, theologian, lawyer of the baroque era. Direct reports about his education and life until the entry into the order are missing. His work suggests that he apparently studied at the Jesuit gymnasium in Český Krumlov and finished his gymnasial studies (poetics and rhetoric) at Prague's Klementinum. After junior studies in the period from 1727–1729, he attended the Faculty of Arts at the Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague and obtained the master's degree. On 23 June 1731 he entered the Cistercian Monastery in Vyšší Brod. After the oath a year later, he studied philosophy and theology and in 1735 he was ordained as a priest. In the years 1735–1737 he worked as a teacher at the theological school in the Vyšší Brod Monastery, in the years 1737–1739 he continued in further studies of theology and also law in Prague. From 1740 to 1742 he worked as a professor of theology at the Bishop's Theological College of St. Adalbert and obtained his doctorate in both law and theology. From 1742 he was a professor of philosophy in Vyšší Brod, in 1747 he was elected abbot. In his capacity he had the monastic library built and arranged. A large part of his Latin poetic works originates from the time of his studies, even before the entry into the order (1727–1731). In 1730 he started their critical review a edition of the calligraphically decorated collection *Recentior artis poeticae Helicon [...]*. The encyclopedic work *Scriptores materiae theologicae, philosophicae et historicae*, a certain list of all the works until 1767 in the area of theology, philosophy and world history with bibliographic notes in 35 folio volumes, is the most important from the non-poetic works. Literature on his life and work: MICKL 1902b, HOFMANN 1990, 1992, FÖRSTER 2011, 2014, 2016.

² Vyšší Brod, Monastery Library, ms. 1 VB 888.

part of this unfinished poetry work, the main purpose of which should likely have been *imitatio et aemulatio veterum* – imitation and emulating the famous poets of the Ancient times as well as the essential genres of this era, such as eclogues, eposes, didactic poems, tragedies, comedies or odes.

Another dramatic work of Johann Christian Alois Mickl, the German written „Hanswurst play“ *Eine lustige Komödie*,³ is a separate piece, independent of *Helicon*, but it still falls well within the framework of the context of his poetic work inspired by the Classical antiquity. It is interesting and valuable for several different reasons. First, it is the only „hauptaktion“ of a local playwright that was preserved to this day intact. All other „hauptaktionen“ performed in Prague are known only from the so called „signs“ – written announcements about where and when the respective performance would take place. Another reason is the fact that the play was not directly connected to the environment of professional theatre, as the author was not very active in this field. The incentives leading to the author producing this play were different. Most likely, we can also attribute this work to the principles of *aemulatio a imitatio*, the imitation of the contemporary professional dramatic production which was common from the 1680s to the 1730s, especially in the German-speaking countries of Central Europe, including the Czech lands.

As far as understanding the typical constitutive features of Mickl’s dramatic work is concerned, there are two underlying areas of inspiration distinctively recognizable in his work: on one hand, it was his monastic (Jesuit) education, closely linked to the practice of conducting school plays in Latin language, and on the other hand, there was also the production of professional touring theatre companies in Prague.

Mickl created his work in the late 1720s and early 1730s as a student of the Faculty of Arts at the Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague, where he studied after graduating from a gymnasium in Český Krumlov. However, despite the fact that the bulk of his work is connected to the Jesuit school and system of education, he did not primarily write with the Jesuit college in mind, but rather to satisfy his autonomous effort in the context of his own vast artistic concept.

The dramatic part of *Helicon*, which was divided into tragedies and comedies, has not been preserved to the present day or perhaps has never been finished. The character of this part of Mickl’s creative production, with the exception of a single preserved play, can today be traced only by the names of his Latin-language plays,

³ *Eine lustige Komödie. Titel: Dolus an virtus, quis in hoste requirat? Das ist: „Was Tugend nicht ausrichten kann, mit List man öftters stellet an, oder: Die durch Kriegs Macht unüberwindliche, mit List aber dennoch eingenommene Stadt Troja. Bey dessen Belägerung H. WSt., ein lustiger Intricant, einbildischer Soldat und listiger Diener des Ulyssis. Vyšší Brod, Monastery Library, ms. 1 VB 890/4. The play was obviously written before 1731, that is, before Mickl’s entry into the order. The play was published by Rudolf Schmidtmayer. See MICKL 1902a.*

which we know from the list of works of art⁴ that the young Mickl later himself wrote down: *Comica actio vulgo Piece Pandolfus dicta 2. Romulus et Remus, capitale drama 3. Tragoedia Bajazethus, secundus Turcarum imperator; 4. Daniel Belum subvertens; 5. Petrus Alexiewitz, magnus czar Moskowiae; 6. S. Achatius, martyr sub Maximiniano; 7. Jaromirus, dux Bohemiae, ab insidiis sicariorum liberatus* and the only play preserved to this day, 8. *Solennis tragoedia Mauritius, imperator.*

It is apparent that Mickl wanted to encompass the main topics of the Latin Jesuit drama with the motifs of his plays. This seems even more likely when we consider the time span and geographical distribution of his works, ranging from plays with Biblical themes to historical (from Classical Antiquity, national and worldwide history, including some exotic oriental themes) and hagiographic topics – the purpose of this was to include both secular and religious themes in the aggregate work.

However, caution is needed when assessing this part of Mickl's dramatic work, since only a fraction of the whole work is available for researchers to analyze. In addition to a single German-written „hauptaktion“, only one play – a manuscript of a tragedy about the fall of the emperor Mauritius – is complete, and we know that it was supposed to be a part of a bigger corpus (a dilogy).⁵

We can only guess, based solely on the titles, what the character of the other plays was. To some extent, we can rely on several helpful factors: on the contemporary analogy of defining aesthetical theories, dramatic and stylistic examples, on the then popular school production, especially from the 1720s and 1730s, accenting the corpuses of the plays from the Jesuit gymnasium in Český Krumlov,⁶ where Mickl had likely began his studies, and from the Prague Clementinum, where his education was completed. What can also help is comparing Mickl's work with the European context, although this should be considered a relatively vague and unreliable connection.

⁴ *Elenchus manuscriptorum P. Q. A. M., quae foetu [...] composuit tum aliorum partim in commodum, tum suam in exercitationem.* Mickl wrote the list as a priest some time after 1735, as is shown by the abbreviation P. (pater) before the initials of the name. The list was printed by Rudolf Schmidtmayer. See MICKL1902b, 56–57.

⁵ The full text of the title is: *Magnatum ruina facilis, Mauritius Cappadox, Orientis imperator, ob diversa patrata flagitia aequissimo Dei iudicio per Phocam, copiarum ducem, postmodo vero in imperio successorem, throno et vita exutus, sequentibus actione theatri propositus.* Vyšší Brod, Monastery Library, ms. 1 VB 888/16. The play was originally conceived as part of the unfinished dilogy called *Tragoedia duplex de alterius exitio, triumphans tyrannis pari poenae mensura plexa seu Phocas et Mauritius funestis uterque casibus ob crudelitatem e vivis sublatis, nunc vero scenis tragicis orbi ingenuo exhibiti [...]*. The dilogy remained in the middle, the second part was probably not started. Also missing from the dilogy is the prologue which was only entitled on an empty folio [fol. 2r]. About the play more see FÖRSTER 2011 and 2016.

⁶ About the collection of tragedies from Český Krumlov see HELFERT 1929, 88–94. About the plays from Prague Clementinum see BOBKOVÁ-VALENTOVÁ 2006, 86–118.

For the Jesuit playwrights at the beginning of the 18th century in the Czech lands as well as far abroad, there was an undeniable example worth following in the plays of Carolus Kolczawa S.J. a Jesuit college professor, whose Latin-language plays *Exercitationes dramaticae*⁷ were extensively reprinted. They stood out of the line of the other school theatre production and were highly influential up until the 1730s not just because of the topics they covered – they mostly consisted of tragedies in aristocratic settings, notable for their tragic pathos – but also for the rhetorics used in them, which was a subject of utmost diligent effort by Kolczawa.

Kolczawa set in motion a number of tragic heroes, his characters included distinctively positive figures, saints, martyrs, champions of true religion, truth and justice, with their perfection and integrity, but also repenting sinners or negative, despicable villains, who created a sharp contrast to the heroes. A significant feature of his plays is also a grim atmosphere, with bloody plot twists and strictly tragical outcomes. This tragic view of the world and the history is an inherent part of Kolczawa's work. As a fundamental motif of his dramas, he sets out the world of the absolutist rulers and the emphasis on the inadequacy or exposure of the autocratic power, over which only the powerful empress Fortuna holds power. However, the theme of a human being only as a toy in the hands of lady Fortuna, blind fate deciding the outcome of everything, had been present in the European ordinal theatre even before Kolczawa, as it was more or less a general feature of Baroque and it is possible to trace it both in the local and European drama in analogical plays as the ones written by Mickl.

This is the line that Mickl most likely took even in his own plays, which showed crystallized types of characters with strong, exemplary stories and fates. In Mickl's dramatic interpretation, Fortuna played a similar game with the Turkish conqueror, sultan Bayezid I., who first, in 1396 at the battle of Nicopolis, experienced a glorious victory over the crusaders, but then was defeated and captured by the Mongols who later starved him to death. There can be no doubt that even another one of Mickl's characters, duke Jaromír – a rather tragic figure of the Czech history – represents an archetype of a ruler who is cruelly played by the fate and who experiences many reversals of fortune. A radical transformation was certainly the driving narrative about the drama of saint Acacius, originally from Cappadocia, one of the fourteen saint helpers, who is known for first being a captain in the imperial army, but later being tortured for his faith and in 311 finally being beheaded. The story of Daniel was probably composed with the purpose of reflecting the conflict between worshipping pagan idols and believing in The Lord, following the motifs of the Book of Daniel from the Old Testament. In the German-speaking lands, there is evidence of an existence of a play called *Daniel, divinae Providentiae exemplum et Christi patientis*

⁷ KOLCZAWA, 1703–1716. About Kolczawa more see RYBA 1924.

ac resurgentis figura – first performed in 1685 in Landsberg – which elaborates on the fate of the prophet in an even broader way, even including a story about the Babylonian god Bel. Again – this time in the prologue –, there is a mention of the pitiless blind Fortuna, lashing out blows all around her, who is, however, driven away by God's providence. Daniel's fate is likened to the suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I believe that by this particular choice of the distinct types of characters and strong narratives, Mickl managed to fulfil his resolve for a clean dramatic and tragic rigour. In particular, his take on the material about emperor Mauritius in what is Mickl's single preserved example of tragedy, or the intended sequel about the fall of Mauritius's successor, emperor Phocas, indicates the author's deeper insight, as well as his familiarity with the European monastic Latin-language drama.

Apart from the world of strict, sombre, tragic motives and promoting serious ethical values and principles, Mickl also showed a great sense for a different genre, one that involves elements of lightheartedness or even outright literary comedy. Unfortunately, just like we cannot be certain about most of the tragedies he produced, we do not know almost anything specific about his two Latin-language comedies that belong to the realm of the Muse Thalia. With a reasonable level of confidence, we can assert that these two were pure comedies, as an opposition to his tragedies, since the author pursued a clear distinction of genres and divided his works into sections based on the genre criteria.

We can only guess who the protagonists of these comedies were, as we do not have enough information about them. The names of the main characters (*Pandulphus*, *Petrus Alexievitz*) by no means point to a single possible interpretation and the European religious drama also does not offer any clear guidance here.

As a student in Prague, Mickl certainly attended performances of professional touring theatres, where he could see the „Hanswurst“ comedies, presented in particular by the Hoch-Teutsche Comoedianten theatre company. The character of „Hanswurst“ was played by Franz Albert Defraime,⁸ a successful theatre director who first worked for Count Franz Anton Sporck and then for a longer time (from 1724 to 1732) alternately in Prague and in Kuks.

Strictly tragic plays were, during these times, also performed in Prague, by the means of „hauptaktions“. Apart from Kolczawa's play about Saint Wenceslas, written in 1705, there is also a drama about the martyrdom of Saint Wenceslas and the intrigues that surrounded it – written in 1729 by A. Defraime – which includes a comical character similar to Hanswurst.⁹ In addition to Kolczawa's play about the martyr Thomas More, there was also a „hauptaktion“ by the same name, staged

⁸ See SCHERL 1999, 91–113.

⁹ SCHERL 99–100.

by Felix Kurtz in 1735.¹⁰ Kolczawa wrote a play about Saint John of Nepomuk, a topic that we also know from the contemporary Vienna theatre production, where several „hauptaktions“ about the martyrdom of this saint were produced.¹¹ Another example could be a play about emperor Nero and the tragic death of the philosopher Seneca, where a grim narrative, together with impressive ominous effect and a splendid scenes, is mixed with comical scenes played by Hanswurst.¹² The list of similar examples could go on and on.

It is particularly Mickl's German-written play that bears the curious name of *Eine lustige Comedie*, which is a drama piece typical for the contemporary „hauptaktions“, containing comical characters of Hanswurst and Scapino, together with their funny escapades, which are inserted into an otherwise serious plot of the Greeks capturing Troy using Hanswurst as a spy. Yet again, it is clear that Mickl wanted to showcase his literary talent, not just in the intellectual environment of the Latin-language school theatre, but also in the context of contemporary theatre in vernacular, the domain of professional theatre companies that performed for the widest strata of the population.

Mickl as a playwright is a unique type of author whose artistic aspirations represent belonging to and mutual influence of both of the most important components of the Baroque theatre culture: the theatres of order schools and professional theatre companies. At the same time, Mickl follows on the legacy of the European Baroque theatre.

¹⁰ SCHERL 129.

¹¹ SCHERL 135–136.

¹² SCHERL 100–101.