

Feri Lainšček and His Poetry for Children and Youth

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Abstract— The article attempts to briefly review Feri Lainšček's children's poetry. After short bibliography, some of the reasons for the author's popularity with young readers are mentioned. Later on, the themes of his youth poetry and illustrations in his collections are analysed.

Keywords— children's poetry, Feri Lainšček, illustration.

I. INTRODUCTION

Feri Lainšček is one of the most popular Slovene writers among children and adults. His children's poetry is popular due to his ability to avoid moralizing, vivid imagery, humour etc. Central figures are animals, which do not only have human characteristics, but are also attractively drawn. Children love them because of their rhythmical sound and themes, to which young children are interested.

II. FERİ LAINŠČEK

Feri Lainšček (1959) is a Slovenian best-selling versatile author. He writes poetry, drama, prose, puppet shows, and radio plays. With general public he is best known for his novels, some of them being *Namesto koga roža cveti* (Instead of Whom does the Flower Blooms, 1991) *Petelinji zajtrk* (The Rooster's Breakfast, 1999), *Ločil bom peno od valov* (I Will Divide the Foam from the Waves; 2003), *Poema o ljubezni* (A Love Poem, 2003), *Muriša* (2006) and *Orkester za poljube* (An Orchestra for Kisses, 2013). He received numerous literary awards, including Kresnik, Slovenian award for the best novel, for *Instead of Whom the Flower Bloom* and *Muriša*.

He also writes children's literature – novels, fairy tales and poetry. He has continuously been writing children's poetry since his first children's poetry collection *Cicibanija* (Cicibanland) was published in 1987. It was illustrated by Jana Vizjak. The collection was republished in 2012 with new illustrations by Silvan Omerzu. Later he published *Rad bi¹* (1998, illustrated by Igor Ribič), an alphabet riddle *Če padeš na nos, ne prideš na Nanos²*

(2003, 2004, illustrated by Igor Ribič), *Barvice³* (2010, illustrated by Andreja Brulc), *Pesmi o Mišku in Belamiški⁴* (2010, illustrated by Maša Kozjek), *Pesmi za mala čebljala⁵* (2015, illustrated by Nana Homovec), *Ne⁶* (2018, illustrated by Nana Homovec), and some others.

III. WHY ARE LAINŠČEK'S POEMS POPULAR WITH CHILDREN?

First of all, the poet does not attempt to moralize. He surpasses superiority and the need of being didactic. He succeeds in putting himself in a child's shoes. Themes and imagery of poems are attractive to children and teenagers. Furthermore, the tone of the poems is lively, humorous, playful and vivid. A very important element is also the illustrations, which are colourful and thus catch a child's eye.

Stylistically, his later collections are more perfected, linguistically richer, and have more diverse motifs. Pregl-Kobe (2016) suspects that a reason for this is in the fact that some poems are meant for slightly older children. Lainšček writes for children and youth of all ages. *Pesmi za mala čebljala* is a collection of 16 poems, mostly for the youngest children, but not exclusively. Some poems are dedicated to slightly older children, who are secretly in love. *Cicibanija* is another collection for younger children, who will enjoy hearing about family life, everyday events, imagination, friendship etc. Teenagers will be happier reading *Ne*. Thematically, poems in his last collection talk about life events of every teenager: rebellion, rejection of school, not understanding the meaning of life and boundaries, love etc.

Poems with animal figures, which are always attractive to young children, are a regular feature in Lainšček's children's poetry. They sound light, playful, and humorous when talking about frog pee-pee, a forgetful snail, who is looking for his house; in *Cicibanija* a cow, who is a milk machine, appears etc. In *Cicibanija*, there are many humorous word plays and themes, connected to

¹ I wish.

² If you fall on your nose, you do not climb Nanos.

³ Colour pencils.

⁴ Poems about Miško and Belamiška.

⁵ Poems for little prattlers.

⁶ No.

nature, weather and seasons. There's universe, rain, spring and summer poems etc.

Likewise, *Pesmi za mala čebljala* and *Pesmi o Miški in Belamiški* introduce animals as main protagonists. The poem collection *Pesmi o Miški in Belamiški* is the continuation of his fairy tale *Mišek Miško in Belamiška*. It is the poetic remake of the story about two mice from two different social classes. They fall in love, but their families are warring. The story has a happy ending. Despite the fact that the main protagonists are animals, the adult readers find analogies to Shakespeare's tragedy. Motifs of the ten poems are very similar to real life events. Also the way mice think and feel is very similar to people's thoughts and feelings. The happy ending happens due to both mice mothers' emotional intelligence. They both recognize true values at the right moment. Motifs of cornfields and watermills resemble the countryside of the author's homeland. The peculiarity of this collection is that the poems are set to music; the lyrics are written by Lojze Krajncan and sung by Romana Krajncan.

Another Lainšček's poem collection that has been set to music is *Na dvorišču*⁷, published in 2015. There are 16 poems, all entitled by different farm animals. With each poem there are music added.

Če padeš na nos, ne prideš na Nanos is a collection of 25 alphabet riddles – a solution is one of the letters from Slovene alphabet. This type of literature (i.e. writing poems about letters, their shape, sound, and liveliness) is not new in Slovene literary tradition. Despite this fact, Lainšček does not distance from this literary tradition, but continues using simple word-plays and poetizes the world of letters and children. Rhythmically, most poems are one-stanza quatrains. Verses are rhymed and in amphibrach. Every now and then, Lainšček touches an occasional taboo.

As has been said, the poet does not attempt to moralize. He is a child's ally, he hears them and has fun with them. *Kako je v šoli? / Joj, kakšno vprašanje. / Saj vsak, ki je poskusil, / ve da je s... (Pazi se rime!)*. He also relates to their uneasiness and gives warm advice: *... kar skrivaš v srcu, je pravo bogastvo, / želiš ga deliti in to ji povej*. He also tries to break some stereotypes, when he talks about thieving Gypsies.

Rhythmically, most stanzas are in quatrains. Verses are rhymed and in amphibrach. The exception is *Rad bi*, where only some of the stanzas are quatrains, others are either couplets or tercets. Unlike most of his other poetry collections, *Rad bi* uses a little boy as a central figure. Each poem is a poetic verbalization of one of his day-dreams and/or wishes.

IV. ILLUSTRATIONS

The first edition of *Cicibanija* was illustrated in black and white by Jana Vizjak. There are only 16 illustrations in a small format book. It is doubtful a child today would be attracted by such a book. The second edition is furnished with colour illustration and printed on an A4 format. The front cover is bright orange, and the back cover is "grass-green". A cat in a skirt and a slightly sneering smile on a little boy's face are certainly a reason enough, why a child would be interested and attracted by the book itself. Each poem has its illustration on the opposite page (only a few have two-page illustrations); titles are written in a child-like hand-writing and in different colours. Illustrations are also in colour. They are seemingly simple and mimic child's drawings.

The cover of *Pesmi za mala čebljala* is similar to the one in *Cicibanija* – bright sunny orange, which makes the book attractive at the first glance. In this collection there are 16 two-page illustrations (each poem is illustrated). The background is white. However, the pages are not empty. There are funny drawings of houses, people, animals ... People's characters, even less positive ones (like gluttony) are shown with respect, but are caricatured with exceeded stressing of gestures, mimics, hairstyles etc. Some drawings are very dominant (e.g. big red lie is drawn with a very bright red colours), while the others are minimalistic (e. g. Nina's phone in the centre of the page). Pregl-Kobe (2016) is bothered by the fact that pages are not numbered and by the absence of table-of-contents. She argues that both are necessary, because it is easier for a child or/and a parent, who wants to reread the poems, to find them.

Unlike the previous collections, the collection *Ne* is illustrated mostly in black and white. Only here and there the illustrator uses colours, which are symbolic. Emoticons and elements from the popular culture (all-star shoes, selfies, allusions to social networks etc.) are used to relate better to the youth. Fifteen poems have illustrations on the opposite side (one has an illustration on both pages). A few drawings are minimalistic. There is just a butterfly, or a box of pills in the centre or in one of the corners of the page.

Two-page illustrations in *Pesmi o Miški in Belamiški* are very vivid and remind of a "frozen moment" from a story. They mostly show events from everyday life in a mice town. People's emotions can be deduced from their face expressions. Colours are bright.

The poem collection *Na dvorišču* has two-page illustrations. There is a bigger drawing of an animal from the title of the poem and a smaller drawing of the thing that this animal likes/eats/plays with etc. E.g., there is drawing of a sheep with a scarf, a drawing of a cow with

⁷ In the yard.

a bell etc. The drawing on the front cover represents a big self-confident rooster.

Although Igor Ribič illustrated both *Rad bi* and *Če padeš na nos, ne prideš na Nanos*, the drawings are quite different. In *Rad bi* these are two-page illustrations in mild colours, showing children's imaginary world, while in the collection of riddles drawings include letters, using vivid, eye-catching colours. The front-cover drawing for *Rad bi* shows a little boy, eating his breakfast and day-dreaming about his imaginary world.

V. CONCLUSION

Feri Lainšček is with no doubt one of the greatest Slovene modernist writers. His canon is versatile and incredibly rich with motifs, styles, and poetic figures. This article is only a short overview of his canon of poetry for children and youth and deserves much more detailed analysis.

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