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75 years of Felix Timmermans in Czech : summary

In: Horáčková, Veronika. *75 jaar Felix Timmermans in het Tsjechisch*. Eerste druk Brno: Masaryk University Press, 2024, pp. 125-128

ISBN 978-80-280-0681-5; ISBN 978-80-280-0682-2 (online ; pdf)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.82374>

Access Date: 05. 07. 2025

Version: 20250701

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SUMMARY

75 years of Felix Timmermans in Czech

This publication, entitled *75 jaar Felix Timmermans in het Tsjechisch* (75 years of Felix Timmermans in Czech), deals with the reception of the Flemish writer Felix Timmermans (1886–1947) in the Czech context between 1920 and 1995. During this period, eleven of his novels and novellas together with six short stories were published in Czech, which is a relatively high number compared to similar Dutch and Flemish writers. This is a high number compared to similar Dutch and Flemish writers. This publication, based on Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory and other theoretical approaches, tries to explain the large number of Timmermans' titles published in Czech.

The analysis of Timmermans's works published in Czech reveals several facts. Firstly, almost all Czech translations of Timmermans' books were published during his lifetime. Secondly, most of Timmermans' novels were published in Czech several times, which is unusual for Dutch-written literature in the Czech environment. Furthermore, some of Timmermans' works have been translated into Czech several times. Also of note is that several of Timmermans' novels were first published in newspapers and magazines and only then were they published as books. Finally, the analysis shows that a large part of Timmermans' works was translated into Czech either by Rudolf Jordan Vonka or Otto F. Babler.

The aim of the publication is to map the reception of Felix Timmermans in the Czech language and to explain the popularity he enjoyed. In doing so, I focus on three aspects:

First, I describe the circumstances of the creation of Czech translations of Timmermans' works. In doing so, I ask, among other things, the following questions:

who translated the work and who illustrated it? What publishing house, magazine or newspaper did it appear in? Which institutions and individuals were involved in the publication process?

Secondly, I seek to discover what kind of reputation Timmermans had in the Czech (literary) milieu. In doing so, I look for answers to the following questions: how did Czech reviewers evaluate Timmermans' works? Are there adaptations of his texts?

Thirdly, I focus on how the political situation in Bohemia and Moravia influenced the reception of Timmermans. I aim to find out what influence the different political regimes that changed on the Czech territory during the 20th century had on the perception of Timmermans.

There are already several works dealing with the reception of Dutch and Flemish literature in the Czech Republic. So far, however, no work has dealt exclusively with the reception of Felix Timmermans. As far as the theoretical basis is concerned, I use Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory. However, since it is not exhaustive, I combine it with other theoretical concepts, in particular literary field theory and imagology.

As for Felix Timmermans himself, I introduce readers to his life and work. It is worth mentioning that Timmermans' books have been translated into a total of 26 languages. By far the largest number have been translated into German, with French and Czech coming a close second.

In this publication I describe the reception of Felix Timmermans on Czech territory. I focus upon the period during which his works were published in the Czech Republic, i.e. for the years 1920 to 1995. I divide this period into three shorter sections, namely 1920–1938, 1939–1947 and 1948–1995. In each period I first focus on what the Czech literary system looked like, then examine the reception of Dutch-language literature in the Czech language as such, before finally describing the reception of Felix Timmermans specifically.

In the analytical part I try to shed light on the reason for Timmermans' popularity in the Czech context. First, I examine the role of institutions and individuals moving in the literary system. One of the groups that contributed substantially to the reception of Timmermans were prestigious publishing houses and renowned translators. Among the renowned translators who translated Timmermans the primary one was Rudolf Jordan Vonka (1877–1964). He translated a total of 10 works from Dutch, five of them from Timmermans' pen.

Another group of institutions and individuals who were involved in Timmermans' Czech reception I have dubbed "popular reading". These are publishing houses, newspapers and magazines that were aimed at a wide readership.

I also focus on the image of Timmermans in the journalistic, intertextual and multimedia spheres. In doing so, I draw mainly on texts discovered by OCR in the Czech database called Kramerius. The analysis of journalistic sources shows

that most of Timmermans' novels were widely reviewed in Czech newspapers and magazines. Reviewers usually state that the plot of Timmermans' texts is simple, the books are written in an uncomplicated form and do not deal with any deep themes. On the other hand, they highlight the optimism, love of nature and beauty of the Flemish landscape that appear in Timmermans' works.

The intertextual and multimedia component of Timmermans' reception includes, for example, quotations from Timmermans' works, which can be found in several Czech literary works. As a point of interest, the novel *Het kindeken Jezus in Vlaanderen* was broadcast by the Czechoslovak Radio in 1935 and a filmed version of *En waar de sterre bleef stille staan* was screened at the Febiofest festival in Prague in 2011.

In the last subchapter of the analytical part, I focus on the political factors that influenced the reception of Timmermans in the Czech context. In essence, Nazism did not negatively affect the publication of Timmermans in Czech. This can be explained firstly by the fact that the Czech literary system was under the influence of the German system during the Protectorate, where Timmermans was one of the most popular and protected authors. Another reason is that Dutch and Flemish literature served as a substitute for, among other things, British and French literature, which were banned during the occupation.

However, Timmermans met an unfortunate fate during the communist period. Timmermans was added to the *List of Nazi, anti-State, anti-Soviet and other pulp literature* in 1950. His books were not allowed to be displayed in libraries. Timmermans was finally banned in 1954, when he was added to the *List of Hostile, Unsound, Obsolete and Undesirable Literature*, because his works fell into the category of "ruralism". The biographical novels *Adriaan Brouwer* and *Pieter Brueghel*, published in the early 1970s, were apparently not considered a threat due to their subject matter. It is also possible that they were a 'relic' of the Prague Spring.

The publication is also accompanied by a conclusion in which I draw conclusions from the whole work. Firstly, it can be stated that Timmermans' works were published in Czech almost exclusively by prestigious publishers or in high-quality periodicals. The books were usually worked on by renowned illustrators and in some cases were even bibliophile editions. The translators of Timmermans included prominent writers, librarians and teachers, who usually translated the works directly from Dutch, which in the first half of the 20th century was especially the case with works of higher literary quality.

Secondly, it can be concluded that the print media of the time had a largely positive response to Timmermans. While there was criticism of the naivety and simplicity of his works, there was also praise for their optimistic tone. There have even been adaptations of his works. The sources examined show that Timmermans was considered both an author of quality and a popular author.

Thirdly, it is possible to conclude that Timmermans' reception was influenced by political changes. During the First Republic as it is called, a number of Timmermans' works were published and Timmermans was at the centre of the literary system. He was also widely published during the Protectorate, probably due to his popularity in Germany and the lack of other foreign literature. During the communist period, he was a banned author because of the rural and Catholic themes he liked to treat. After the Velvet Revolution, only one of Timmermans' works was published, which seems to be related to the fact that Timmermans already had an outdated impression, and readers were more interested in contemporary (foreign) authors who could not be published under communism.

What is certain is that Timmermans is today (not only in the Czech Republic) a forgotten author. This seems to be due to the fact that he did not bring new impulses to Czech literature, and thus fell gradually into the periphery of the literary system. His translations of rural prose may have consolidated the "worldliness" of Czech ruralism, but in the long run they did not bring anything new. Nevertheless, I am convinced that Timmermans played an important role in the contacts between the Czech and Dutch-language literary systems at a certain time.