

Zuzana Profantová, ed. Traditional Culture as a Part of the Cultural Heritage of Europe. The Presence and Perspective of Folklore and Folkloristics (Etnologické Štúdie 8). Bratislava: Institute of the Ethnology of Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2003. 140 pp. ISBN: 80-89069-09-6.

During the Soviet era, the United States and the Soviet Union, with its Soviet Bloc countries, differed in their respective definitions of what constituted folklore. In the former communist nations, folklore was defined narrowly as oral literature, folk music, and folk dance. In the United States, many genres and traditions that were either ignored or placed under the domain of ethnography or ethnology in the communist bloc countries were categorized as folklore. Examples include, among others, studies of material culture, such as pottery, and modern genres, such as graffiti, which Berkeley folklorist Alan Dundes dubbed “latrinalia.”

Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the demise of communism, Russia and the former Bloc nations have struggled to adapt to changes in ideology, in government, in lifestyle, and in worldview. Under the influence of globalization and westernization, people and countries have been required to change. The old definition of folklore has come under scrutiny and has been found to be too narrow to accommodate a global, modern, technological age. Lively discussions have ensued regarding challenges and definitions.

In Traditional Culture as a Part of the Cultural Heritage of Europe, Zuzana Profantová has edited a compendium of articles that explore the challenges that a modern age brings to defining, recording, and archiving folklore for posterity. The articles grew out of an October 25, 2002 conference in Bratislava that was inspired by UNESCO’s “Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage” (1972). In “Past, Present, and Future of the 1989 UNESCO Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Folklore in Memory of Lauri Honko,” Vilmos Voigt traces the history and political ploys involved in the eventual passing of the resolution that was initially written jointly by Lauri Honko of Finland, Voigt of Hungary, and Ralph Rinser of the Smithsonian. UNESCO folklorists were intent on creating a document on “how to conduct and protect fieldwork, archives, publication and dissemination of genuine folklore,” how to deal with copyright issues, and how to distinguish between folklore, fakelore, and folklorisms (21).

Radost Ivanova writes about the modernization of Bulgarian folklore (“Processes of Modernization in the Folklore Tradition”), Wigdis Espeland writes about Norwegian identity (“Folklore on Stage: Identity in Local, National and International Context”), and Ilona Nagy explores the influence of the computer on the results of the 2002 Hungarian elections (“Folklore in Statu Nascendi—Hungarian Election 2002”). Most of the twenty articles address Slovakia’s challenges. Hana Hlôšková traces the academic development of the study of folklore in “Teaching Folkloristics at Universities in Slovakia.” She states that in Slovakia folkloristics is a part of ethnology since it addresses the evolution of folklore, its performers, content, and form (45). Until 1991 an education in ethnology was offered only at the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava. Folkloristics dealt with oral folklore, and folk music studies were a branch of musicology. Hlôšková places into historical context the names of great scholars, such as Karel Chotek, Piotr Grigorievič Bogatyriov, Jiři Polívka, and Andrej Melicherčík. At present, the Department of Ethnology is headed by Milan Leščák.

Juraj Hamar discusses problems connected with the presentation of folklore on stage in “Folklore on Stage in Politics and the Media.” He complains that the state no longer sponsors groups on the basis of merit as it did earlier, and therefore monetary considerations predominate. This leads to a noticeable lowering of artistic level and the replacement of traditional groups with groups that have mass appeal. He states that the idea that folklore was the puppet of communism is a sad legacy of totalitarianism that has led to the discrediting of folklore by the intelligentsia (67). Ivan Murín continues the theme in “On the Problem of Movement and Dance Analysis in Contemporary Fieldwork Records.” Dance has undergone modern transformations, but residues of folk dance can be found at weddings, at Maypole dances, and at Shrovetide. Murín suggests that computer analysis and virtual modeling are a starting point for analyzing dance transformations.

In “The Heritage of Folk Prose in Modern Fantastic Fiction,” Ondrej Herec lends a Jungian interpretation of folk prose and speculative fabulation, which encompasses the genres of science fiction, horror, and fantasy. He refers to the commercialization of fandom with accompanying computer games, TV series, toys, films, and other products that have transformed the medium from written word to other forms.

In a study of WWI narratives (“Shifted Focuses? Thematic Studies of Oral Narratives in Contemporary Folkloristics”) Gabriela Kiliánová

has found that, since the end of the 1960s, WWI stories about the experiences of ordinary men and women have disappeared in Slovakia and have been replaced with WWII stories. WWI hastened social changes, leading, for example, to the emancipation of women. Slovakian stereotypes of heaven and hell are explored by Helena Tužinská in “Decoupled Cognition. Example of Mental Representations of Heaven and Hell.” In her opinion, concepts of heaven are hedonistic, ascetic, or ambivalent, and concepts of hell are spiritual or a mix of natural and spiritual,¹ with emphasis on hell as a place of punishment.

The authors of several articles discuss genre classification and changing definitions of familiar terms, such as ethnography, ethnology, and folkloristics. (Milan Leščák in *Neue Situation und Alte Offene Fragen der Folkloristik*” and Ingo Schneider in “Folkloristics, Volkskunde, European Ethnology in Changing World. Some Remarks on Presence and Future of Our Disciplines”). Schneider gives an example of Hip Hop as a modern system of meaning, tracing it back to rap. Zuzana Galiová states that Slovak folklorists are just beginning to record and compile genres, such as urban legends and rumors, and to explore ways of analyzing the material. She urges folklorists to begin thinking about changes in genre classifications. Dana Bittnerová discusses the relationship of written folklore to oral folklore in “Replication of Written Texts in Various Genres of Written Folklore.” She covers written folklore and its pictorial aspect among young people, the military, and among adults (graffiti and internet folklore). In “The Relation of Verbal and Technical Forms of Communication” Marija Stanonik focuses on how technology has affected communication throughout its various stages: phonograph, tape recorder, video technology, and electronic media. She concludes that impersonal media messages on the computer and cell phone have replaced intimate handwritten messages.

There are a few misspellings and awkward translations into English, apparent even in the titles, but the collection of articles is interesting because it highlights the process that folklorists of the former communist nations are undergoing in redefining folklore to include new genres. The collapse of a totalitarian system, coupled with the advances of a technological age, has necessitated an expansion of the old concept of “classical” folklore.

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