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FOLKLORE RESEARCH AND CULTURAL PRACTICE

Summary

The author discusses the relationship between the sciences which deal with folklore and »folk culture« on the one hand, and cultural practice or cultural action on the other.

The cultural-historical approach in ethnology is criticised for its insistence on a breach between the past and the present in the analysis of culture. This sort of »old ethnology« has searched for the beginnings and authenticity of cultural phenomena, but has neglected the natural setting and the time in which a culture develops and in which folklore is created. It has considered contacts with other cultures only with regard to how much they endanger the authenticity of a phenomenon under analysis. When such theoretical assumptions (be they conscious or unconscious) were applied to the national folklore in the past, they made possible even nationalistic misuse of folklore.

The author supports her argument with an analysis of folklore festivals which was published in »Narodna umjetnost«, vol. 15, 1978. (S. Sremac: »Folklore Festivals in Croatia — Past and Present«). It is demonstrated that choreographies and stage presentations of folklore, when based on the assumptions of the cultural-historical school of ethnology, hinder the scenic expression of that folklore. They are known to the public as pretty but uniform holiday models which do not reveal all potentials of the folklore itself.

The hypothesis about »the end of folklore«, still present in some schools of ethnology and folkloristics, is discussed in the second part of the article. The author states that contemporary cultural practice reveals:

1. a need for folklore, especially in migrant populations, or those who emigrated to other countries; folklore offers to them various alternative possibilities of identification (as has been suggested by Bausinger);
2. differences between folklore and folklorism are erased since the second existence of folklore often stimulates further variation and improvisation — thus turning into its first existence again.

The author holds that parts of Croatian and Yugoslav ethnology and folkloristics lag behind in both the research on the contemporary folklore and culture of various groups, and in the research on the relationship between folklore and folklorism, i. e., modern application of folklore. The lack of critical insight into these problems, that is, into the present role of folklore in our cultural practice, makes possible the persistence of antiquated and uniform models of folklore presentations (with often absurd insistence on grandiosity and sternness). It also makes possible the interpolation of the cheap and false interpretations of folklore themes into cultural practice.

(Translated by Olga Supek-Zupan)