

The Soul of the Folk and Its Discoverers

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The theme of this year's meeting, Magic in World Music, raises a number of issues that touch not only contemporary forms of folk traditions and their changes, but also historical parallels; often, the recognition of them in their time was led to by the same reasons as today. To capture and reveal inner moments and mechanisms of human creative expression in connection with a specific phenomenon is not an easy task, and it is at the least a multidisciplinary one. It is interesting, however, to learn how long and why folk culture has been appealing especially from this point of view.¹⁾

Meetings with the known and the other have raised reactions since the first contacts of man with his close and more distant surroundings. It is possible to find information of such encounters in the oldest written records of many cultures. Typical examples are reports from authors of the ancient world. Frequently they mention the customs or appearance of members of other ethnic groups with which their civilization had come into contact. In Europe, such sources provide valuable information, for instance in the studies of the settlement of the British Isles, or in the continental Europe—an example is the famous *Limes Romanus*, the defensive wall against barbarians. The main reasons that led to European interest in the “other,” which uncovered the heretofore unknown, included wars of aggression, business matters, desires for travel, and religious missions. The unknown was usually linked with a different and distant geographical environment, and so it is a paradox that it was only

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great oversea voyages—the results of which are today perceived as contradictory phenomenon²⁾—led to a European interest in local rustic traditions. After the initial rejection of aboriginal people of America as imperfect, Europe in the period of the developing Enlightenment changed its view: the Noble Savage became a symbol of a more natural, unspoiled, and more righteous society.³⁾ A search began for a similar type of man within European culture as well, humans unspoiled by civilization (mainly in the sense of morals) of the European type. The philosophy of the Enlightenment and the new coming pre-Romanticism, which in fact strongly followed the political and historical development of Europe, formed a base for a European view on its own folk culture with its predominantly rural traditions.

In Europe, we may look to the first discoveries of the soul of the folk; of course, other discoveries preceded these. From a cultural point of view, there was first of all a discovery of lower social layers by higher social strata. Evidence of mutual penetrations has been preserved mainly in music, particularly in the area of dance across the whole Europe. Some historical facts show the popularity of such productions for nobility where selected serfs took part personally.⁴⁾ Later on, theories on the

²⁾ Erazim Kohák writes, “Encounters with people of North America introduced the fundamental shock that ended the Middle Ages since they meant the end of certainty.” Cf. E. Kohák, *Člověk, dobro a zlo. O smyslu života v zrcadle dějin. Kapitoly z dějin morální filozofie* [Man, Good and Bad: On the Sense of Life in the Mirror of History: Chapters from the History of Moral Philosophy] (Prague, 1993), p. 34.

³⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴⁾ It is even possible to present examples from our region, the area of Moravia. For example, a document of the period from the Pre-Monstrian monastery [premonstrátský klášter] Hradisko u Olomouce where, for almost an entire century (until the dissolution of the cloister in the Josephine period), “operas” from the Haná region were performed. Representatives from the country were called in, as is shown in this contemporary diary entry: “On 12 July 1696, the entire castle convent observed a theater performance in the summer house in the cloister garden; also there were Wallachians who made those present smile with their dances.” Cf. J. Fiala, *Dobové české slovesné reflexe slezských válek* [Contemporary Czech Written Reflections on the Silesian Wars] (Olomouc, 2001), p. 22.

origin of folk art were created on the basis of the relationship between these “higher” and “lower” stratum, including reception theory (the crucial sign in this was not originality, but a receptiveness of phenomena by folk environment even from other strata).⁵⁾

Other mutual discoveries included the existence of various ethnic groups. The relationship between the East and the West of Europe was especially interesting. The Slavic East knew the West of Europe better, which was obviously due to language competency within intellectual circles. Until the 17th century, the West perceived the East, namely Slavic ethnic groups, very dimly. The knowledge of Slavonic languages was very poor as well; knowledge of Slavic languages there was quite small and mainly depended on individuals who were able to disperse unknown information thanks to their language skills.⁶⁾

In the 17th century, the West began changing its relationships, especially towards Poland and Russia, but almost nothing was known about the Slavs who lived in a close proximity of West European centers.⁷⁾ The interests of western scholars in the Slavic East were led not

⁵⁾ In 1903, the Swiss researcher Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer published his thesis that “the people’s spirit doesn’t produce, it reproduces.” Extremely similar was the theory about declining cultural values, which stated that the people were not creating, but only taking from higher strata. This was presented by German researcher Hans Naumann in the 1920s. Cf., e.g., M. Leščák and O. Sirovátka, *Folklór a folkloristika. O ľudovej slovesnosti* [Folklore and Folklorist: On Folk Verbal Art] (Bratislava: Smena), pp. 63–64. As Bedřich Václavek wrote, according to this idea, “the people are not creative even when an individual from the people composes a song, because even in this case only the literary examples from higher strata hold sway, and of course in those strata the examples have become outdated.” Cf. B. Václavek, *Písemnictví a lidová tradice. Obraz jejich vztahů v písni lidové a zlidovělé* [Literature and Folk Tradition: A Portrait of Their Relations in Folk and Popularized Song] (Prague: Svoboda, 1947), p. 62.

⁶⁾ Cf. K. Krejčí, *Mýtus a dialog v historických vztazích Slovanstva se Západem* [Myth and Dialogue in Historical Relations of the Slavs with the West], in *Československé přednášky pro VI. Mezinárodní sjezd slavistů* [Czechoslovak Lectures for the Sixth International Convention of Slavists] (Prague: Academia, 1968), p. 200.

⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

only professionally (in the 18th century, research expeditions to Russia contributed with their findings to the formation of the field of ethnography at the University of Göttingen) but also pragmatically, because they served to political aims (which is not uncommon in either the history of anthropology or ethnology). The “Europeanization” of Russia under Peter the Great contributed enormously to the Western approach to the East; at that time contacts among nations were deepened and cultural information communicated.

As literary historian Karel Krejčí writes, “At first glance, this process gives the impression that delayed and less developed cultures of Slavonic nations were being absorption by more mature and advanced culture of western nations, and it has often been interpreted this way. Nevertheless, by stressing their own cultural traditions and values, the Slavs caused a revision of this one-sided approach, even though some western scholars adopted such approach more from reasons of international courtesy than from their own conviction. There still seemed to be a noticeable discrepancy on the Slavonic side concerning a mutual exchange of values: whereas factually established influences, borrowings, and initiatives that came to the East from the West could easily fill books with facts, the flow of ideas going in the opposite direction during this period (the 18th and beginning of the 19th century), was small to nonexistent.”⁸⁾

Krejčí adds that a discovery of the Slavs by Europe led to an origin of certain myths: the most “impressive myth was created by Herder in his chapter on the Slavs, in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, where he stated that the basic characteristic of the Slavs is their peace-loving nature. Herder attributed to the Slavs a leading role in the coming future, a role which would impose an idea of humanity against a principle of power and violence.”⁹⁾

⁸⁾ Ibid, p. 200.

⁹⁾ Ibid, p. 201.

The rich work of Johann Gottfried Herder, and not just the above mentioned one (the 16th chapter *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, published in the years 1784–1791), really initiated the process of national consciousness in Europe, and turned attention to rural folk culture.¹⁰⁾ In the Czech environment in this connection, Herder strongly influenced figures of the Czech national awakening such as Josef Dobrovský, Josef Jungmann, František Palacký, Jan Kollár, and František Ladislav Čelakovský; his influence extended even farther to Jaroslav Langer, K. J. Erben, and František Sušil (and were again relevant for T. G. Masaryk in the 1890s).¹¹⁾ As Karel Krejčí suggests, the myths were fictitious to a certain extent, but they proved to have creative power that allowed a new reality to grow from this fiction.¹²⁾ For J. G. Herder's heritage, this is doubly valid, because he serves as a reference for almost everything concerned with folk culture in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century. Herder's contribution, then, was a fundamental influence on the culture and politics of nineteenth-century Europe. Even Herder's biographical data shows how closely he was connected with the development of Europe of that period, and that he knew well the relationships in science and culture. He came from eastern Prussia, and during his studies in Königsberg, both Immanuel Kant and Johann Georg Hamann, who was one of the first German thinkers who championed emotions against reason, considerably influenced him. In 1764, Herder left for Riga as a teacher; it was there that he got acquainted with the Slavonic world, particularly Russia. He left for France in 1769 to study literature and philosophy; there he met Johann Wolfgang Goethe, who used his influence to secure Herder a position as General

¹⁰⁾ It is possible to find the chapter on the Slavs in Czech translation in the collection of essays *Vývoj lidskosti* [Development of Humanity] from 1941.

¹¹⁾ J. Munzar, *Herder v Čechách* [Herder in Bohemia], in *Dějiny kultury a civilizace Západu v 19. století* [History of Western Culture and Civilization in the 19th Century], ed. J. Hanuš (Brno: Center for the Study of Democracy and Culture, 2002), p. 44–51.

¹²⁾ Krejčí, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

Superintendent of the Lutheran church. From 1776 until his death in 1803, Herder lived in Weimar.¹³⁾ Ivo T. Budil, in his book *Behind the Western Horizon* [*Za obzor Západu*], also claims that Herder “turned the studies, which to that point had been limited to a narrow group of ‘collectors’ and ‘antiquarians,’ into a powerful and important instrument for the constitution of national states,” which is another feature linked to Romanticism in Europe.

Classic German philosophy was formed in environment that favored scientific discoveries, especially the expansion of natural sciences, and at the same time included an interest in human anthropology. As an example, we may take Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), who is noted for the development of early concepts of human races. Immanuel Kant also dealt with races (1775, *On the Different Races of Man*). It was not far from an interest in nature and the first naturalistic system to an interest in man, and finally in human culture. This sphere undoubtedly includes the names of the Humboldt brothers (Alexandr von Humboldt [1769–1859], naturalist and explorer; Wilhelm von Humboldt [1767–1835], linguist), and the findings of Johann Reinhold Forster (1729–1798) and his son Johann Georg Forster (1754–1794). They served as travelers (among other things, they participated in James Cook’s second voyage around the world in 1772–1775). The older of the two Forsters is also denoted as a late Baroque polyhistorian. Concrete findings from his personal empirical discoveries, from his field research trips, led him away from the Enlightenment, often sentimental ideas on man. The concept of *Völkerpsychologie* by Wilhelm von Humboldt focused on the psychology of nations as one of the first scholarly formulated hypotheses of its kind.¹⁴⁾ In the mid-nineteenth century the

¹³⁾ Cf. Munzar, Herder v Čechách, op. cit., p. 44–51.

¹⁴⁾ I. T. Budil, *Za obzor Západu. Proměny antropologického myšlení od Isidora ze Sevilly po Frazu Boase* [Behind the Western Horizon: Changes in Anthropological Thought from Isidor de Sevilla to Franz Boas] (Prague: Triton, 2001), pp. 380–382.

term *Volksgeist* (the soul of the nation) appeared as a common word to refer to the psychological essence of members of a specific nation (*Volk*), which has the main influence on the fate of a specific population. Expressing the soul of the nation are the language, mythology, religion, and customs. This stream is followed by the rise of ethnopsychology; for example, Adolf Bastian (1826–1905), professor of ethnology in Berlin in the second half of the 19th century and one of the founders of the German Society of Anthropology in 1869. Bastian is remembered as one of the pioneers of the concept of the psychic unity of mankind, the idea that all humans share a basic mental framework, which he called an *Elementargedanke* (elemental ideas). Bastian postulated that cultural customs, myths, and beliefs of each group were formed according to rules of cultural evolution and differed according to geographical areas, and he spoke about these as *Völkergedanke* (folk ideas). Bastian's work *Der Mensch in der Geschichte* (Man in History, 1860) was written under the influence of Herder and van Humboldt. Adolf Bastian is considered a representative of early cultural evolutionism; Bronislaw Malinowski and Carl Jung referred to his ideas as the concept of collective unconscious.¹⁵⁾ Among another representatives, Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), German physiologist and psychologist, founded experimental psychology (in 1863, his lectures were published as *On the Soul of Man and Animals*). At the turn of the 20th century, he aimed at the establishing of social (cultural-historical) psychology, which was to explore higher functions through the means of cultural products (language, myths, art); ten volumes of his *Völkerpsychologie* [Psychology of the People] were published between 1900 and 1920. The idea had a similar basis in American cultural anthropology; for example, it was supported by Richard Thurnwald (1869–1954), a collaborator with Franz Boas, at

¹⁵⁾ For a monograph on Bastian's personality, see K. P. Koepping, *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind: The Foundation of Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Germany* (New York, 1983).

Columbia University. The field developed with the help of many scholars and branches within anthropology, including the cultural and physical fields.¹⁶⁾ Other fields aside from natural sciences were also hit by this idea, especially the arts, namely literature and poetry, which set out on a similar path. There is not room to include names here, but there was enough space within the artistic movement of Romanticism for this type of thinking to develop. The interest in so-called “folk poetry” was mainly in oral genres, from which the alluring were the song and the fairytale. Men of letters and philosophers were leading figures, and already at the beginning of the 19th century two concepts concerning folk poetry had been developed. For example, August Vilém Schlegel (1767–1845) claimed that folk poetry was created by the folk or for the folk. In spite of this, most of the representatives of Romanticism considered originality a key marker for understanding folk poetry. In spite of the fact that folk poetry was considered a source of inspiration for personal creativity by many poets of that period, there was increasing interest in field collections that captured material from directly among peasants. We may see Herder’s collection *Volkslieder* [Folk Songs] as a model here (first published in 1778–1779, and after 1807 published under the title *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* [Voices of the Folk in Songs]).¹⁷⁾ The method of fieldwork then did not resemble today’s practices much; scholars did not gather the material right among the peasants. To understand the methods of the day, we may explore the preserved correspondence of the Brothers Grimm, leading representatives of German Romanticism (Jacob, 1785–1863, and Wilhelm, 1787–1859),

¹⁶⁾ Budil, *Za obzor Západu*, op cit., pp. 380–382.

¹⁷⁾ As Jiří Horák stated, Herder “became a pioneer of collection efforts even in Slavic nations. . . . The celebrated collection *Volkslieder* is an embodiment of Herder’s ideas on esthetics, literature and history . . . in which can be found few real folk examples from the Balto-Slavic region.” See J. Horák, *Národopis československý. Přehledný nástin* [Czechoslovak Ethnography: A Concise Outline] in *Československá vlastivěda II. Člověk* [Czechoslovak Ethnography, vol. 2: Man] (Prague: “Sfinx” Bohumil Janda), pp. 313–314.

and their friend Clemens Brentano (1778–1842), a noted German poet. Brentano used to visit his brother Christian who resided in Bukovany near Milovice [a community in the Czech lands]. What he brought back to the Grim brothers in 1810, when they were looking for material from Czech fairytales, were just books of popular folk reading, and contact with Josef Dobrovský, who could also only help with literary sources. Jacob Grimm encountered real folk fairytales much later, after he got in touch with printed collections of folk fairy tales of Czech origin. Of these, he preferred the collections of the priest Beneš Metod Kulda (1820–1903). Kulda, under the influence of František Sušil, began collecting folk fairytales and legends in the region of Moravian Wallachia, and these were first published in 1854 as *Moravské národní pohádky a pověsti z okolí rožnovského* [Moravian Folk Fairytales and Legends from Rožnov and Surroundings].¹⁸⁾

For the Romantics, the spirit of the folk was the leading leitmotif of their work, and soon they began to be interested in the soul as well. This is evident in various references and contemplations from the people interested in folk culture of that period. Apart from national and patriotic issues, which they preferred to collect, they started to think about issues dealing with the core of folk creativity. They were interested in the genesis of phenomena so it is no wonder that, after the first enchantment with certain aspects of folk culture, the first more or less complete European theory about its origins was a mythological theory, which looked for the reflections of ancient myths in fairytales and, later on, in other folk materials as well. The origin of this theory is linked with Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* (1831). We may find reflections of the mythological theory all over Europe, including in the work of Czech collectors Václav Krolmus and K. J. Erben, and even fifty years later in the work of Lucie Bakešová, collector of the *Královničky* dance from the

¹⁸⁾ J. Jech, "Česká pohádka a bratři Grimmové" [The Czech Fairytale and the Brothers Grimm], *Národopisné aktuality* 25 (1988): pp. 155–158.

Brno area.¹⁹⁾ It was not until the end of the 19th century that this theory was surpassed by new critical findings, especially in literary theory, though it has never completely disappeared (archetypal theories on the psychology of man, supported by myths, fables, and dreams, are still found in certain forms).²⁰⁾

The newly formed comparative literature, which since its beginnings dealt with the relationship between oral literature and high literature, was the field to introduce new hypotheses.²¹⁾ German scholar Theodor Benfey (1809–1881) was an important figure; he added a migration theory to a basic frame of the mythological theory, and he established a thesis about an acceptance of European folk materials from the East, especially from India. Other personalities of the period worked with Benfey's theory, including Gaston Paris and Alexej Nikolajevič Veselovskij, an important Russian folklorist. An anthropological theory of the 1870s then tried to prove that materials could originate independently too, without any models, as an effect of similar influences (cultural, social, economical). At the turn of the 20th century, Scandinavian scholars in the so-called Finnish school introduced the most thoroughly worked out teaching on migration. They fully developed a comparative method and began to create first systematic indexes of themes and motives, which still used today in studies of oral literature and in literary theory.

At the end of the 19th century, then, new systematic scholarly research was introduced in Europe, which focused on folklore, especially in the areas of literary history and philology. One of the most important directions within methodology of a newly born folkloristics (or ethnology) was the ecological method. This expanded research to not

¹⁹⁾ M. Leščák and O. Sirovátka, *Folklór a folkloristika*, op. cit., pp. 56–57.

²⁰⁾ Cf. E. Kohák, *Člověk, dobro a zlo*, op. cit., p. 27.

²¹⁾ On this issue, see e.g. K. Horálek, *Folklór a světová literatura* [Folklore and World Literature] (Prague: Academia, 1979), pp. 7–35.

just an object but to its entire surroundings, and began to focus in detail on issues that had previously been neglected—questions about the role of performers, bearers.²²¹ Its application dates to the beginning of the 20th century and the above-mentioned Finnish school. Because they began to focus on the personality in the process of handing down folklore, their approach brought great possibilities for understanding the life of an expression and the creative ability of specific interpreters.

Several important monographs on folk singers and narrators expressed Czech interest in the personality of a bearer. (For example, the 1928 song collection by Karel Plicka called *Eva Studeničová spieva* [Eva Studeničová Sings] that presents one singer's entire song repertory.) The most systematic example of the search for the soul of the folk among Czech endeavors is a book by Vladimír Úlehla, a natural scientist. Úlehla left an outstanding legacy in the history of folkloristics. During the Second World War, he began writing a book called *Duše lidu* [The Soul of the Folk]; he died in 1948, and Úlehla's brother prepared the book for publication. The book, unfortunately, was never printed at all [Ed. Note: because of the political coup] and its typesetting was destroyed; it was only reassembled after November 1989 [Ed. Note: another political coup]. It was finally published in 1998 by Masaryk University in Brno in memory of its outstanding Professor. In the book, Vladimír Úlehla enters into a debate with scholarly theories, which are purely historical and sociological; he considers them too limited for an understanding of the essence of folk phenomena. He also thinks hard about the term folk which the science of his period began to define more broadly than just the rural folk, in spite of the fact that general ideas of the period were linked to the status of farmers. Finally, he comments as an essayist on the life of man and his culture in general. In the epilogue, Úlehla says:

“We set as our goal to search for the seat and the sources of the folk soul. And we have found it in the life of a farmer.

²²¹ M. Leščák and O. Sirovátka, *Folklór a folkloristika*, op. cit., pp. 67–71.

I have devoted a lot of attention to this matter, but this is not the main aim. It is just an important prerequisite, about which we should know a lot, in order to be able to think about the folk soul.

To get to know the folk soul, to understand what it can do, what is hidden in it, how far it might extend under favorable conditions, what are the probable numbers within such possibilities; to learn why the skills which it earlier used to be able develop are vanishing today, whether this will be the same in the future as well, whether the skills will be replaced by new ones. . . . This is the task that I would like to fulfill!”

Since the early days of ethnology, one of the ways through which scholars wanted to reach deeper knowledge and understanding of inner manifestations of man was the monitoring of the process of how the “soul of the folk” was being discovered and understood. In those early days, the discoveries of the other and the unknown was part of a mosaic of the previously unknown world, which could assemble its image only through new findings. Today, thanks to globalization, the outlines of such an image of the world have been almost assembled, but quite often we do not know the details. In order to complete the image, it is then necessary to learn historical twists and turns of various phenomena, processes and attempts. As philosopher Erazim Kohák says: “Out of all things happening, what would end up in history, and of what relevance, it depends on memory: what shall we remember and how we will explain our recollections.”²³¹

More about the author can be found at www.phil.muni.cz/etnol/

²³¹ E. Kohák, *Člověk, dobro a zlo*, op. cit., pp. 27–28.