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## REVIEWS

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**Joseph Grim Feinberg, *The Paradox of Authenticity: Folklore Performance in Post-Communist Slovakia*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2018, 234 pages.**

"... His performance was the truth, and when the performance threatened to turn from the truth into a lie, he made a sincere effort for the sake of honesty." With this quote from Jonathan Freisen's novel *Freedom*, the author of *The Paradox of Authenticity: Folklore Performance in Post-Communist Slovakia*, published by the University of Wisconsin, Joseph Grimm Feinberg, pictorially and poetically, despite the book's title with a political connotation, suggests to the reader

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that, to deal with the "truth" or "freedom" of folklore in Slovakia during the mentioned period.

According to the author, the book is the result of many years of research begun in 2010, and the final corrections of the manuscript were made in 2018. As he himself states, during the research, certain changes took place, so drastic that, looking back at the initial research, he got the impression that it was a completely different period of time. More precisely, the phenomenon that was the focus of his research still existed, but the political context of the phenomenon changed over time, which required additional research, the author points out. The book is an analysis of a folklore performance adapted to the liberal hegemony of a period often referred to as "post-socialism" or referred to as "post-Communism", which the author considers more appropriate. In the book's preface, Feinberg explains that the main categories of "self-understanding" of this new folklore, such as "authenticity", "people" or "people", were reformulated due to the general delegitimization of populism, nationalism and revolutionary romanticism after 1989. The author notes that the mentioned political tendencies never completely disappeared, but after the rule of the Communist Party, they found it in-

creasingly difficult to articulate in public. Due to the party's great influence on many spheres of the public, the result was a rhetorical rejection of everything associated with "totalitarianism", including not only fascism and Stalinism, but also numerous other political tendencies associated with them.

During ten years of research conducted in Slovakia, the author saw the initiative of young folklore enthusiasts to convince the public that true folklore, authentic, is not related to populist, nationalist and revolutionary-romantic political ideologies, but that they discredited it because of the image placed in the public. Feinberg explains that the enthusiasts aimed to change that image of folklore and to point out that it should be viewed in the context of the "present" age. They claimed that, moving away from the mentioned discredited political tendencies, folklore became something completely different. What are those changes and what is it becoming? It is precisely these questions that Joseph Grimm Feinberg tries to answer in the book - the search for the course of these changes and the interpretation of the significance of these changes in society have emerged as the main goals of this book.

The author also points out that in reaching the mentioned goals, he does not represent the views in favor of folklore nationalism, nor their liberal critics, as he calls them "defenders" of folklore. He also explains that his goal in the research was not to discover "what is right" under the veil of political influence, but to map and analyze the way in which depoliticization itself became politically significant and changed the course of events.

As the author himself states, this book is about "authenticity and inauthenticity, participation and performance, embodiment and representation, intimacy and publicity, and about clarifying the drama of depoliticization of politics that was important in the period of post-Communist liberalism in Slovakia". in the words of the author, in the period of research, the end is in sight.

In the section of the book called Introduction – The Dialectic of Authenticity, Feinberg explains the course of his field research. He started it in Bratislava, where he visited the so-called A "dance house" where people gather to learn traditional dances. Already during the first visit, the author came across a surprising statement by the respondents. In a conversation with a dance instructor, when asked if they could talk about dance, he received the following answer: "This is not what you are looking for" referring to the dances learned in the dance house, "(...) but this is it", pointing to a dance recording performances from the rural environment, which at that time were played on a white screen on the wall, which implied that he should continue his research in another, smaller, in the opinion of the narrator, more adequate environment.

He decided to conduct further research in the town of Košice in the eastern part of Slovakia, where he met with members of the Hornad Folklore Ensemble. The author, acquainted with the importance of participation during the research, participated in all the activities of the members of the ensemble, trying to draw certain conclusions through direct observation, but also from personal ex-

perience. It is this personal aspect that influenced the style of writing of the author, replacing the objective, scientific style, with a surprisingly subjective, in some instances, unexpectedly direct way of expression. The author very honestly, without hesitation, conveys to the reader his feelings, both positive and negative, shares with him his dilemmas and internal struggles. At the same time, a special challenge is to achieve objectivity, which the author achieves by supporting personal conclusions with data from a large number of professional bibliographic units of Slovak and authors from other countries, constantly plagued by struggling with his own emotions and striving to stay on the right, objective research path. In this case, Feinberg's surprising openness does not diminish the value of his research, but on the contrary, it further complements them and helps to obtain a broader, more complete picture of the phenomenon in the focus of research.

Feinberg categorizes and presents his research in several sections in the book. In the first section, entitled *The Paradox of Folklore Publication*, the author describes in detail the first few months of field research, focusing on "authentic" folklore from an outsider's perspective and how such folklore is marketed to the general public. The placement primarily refers to the activities within the "dance house" and the problems that enthusiasts encounter in practice. The problems are primarily related to organizing events for beginner dancers, without the presence of "performers and spectators". As the author finds out during the research, from conversations with the respondents, the purpose of the

"dance house" is for folklore to "return" to where it belongs – among the people, the people. However, the author realizes that in practice, most dancers who come here are those with previously acquired dance experience in folklore ensembles of which they are members. As an amateur dancer, he was always in the minority, which further contributed to his subjective feeling of not belonging, an outsider, and this made it even more difficult for him to enjoy participating in a dance, because, as he notes, learning dances was not adapted to inexperienced dancers to keep up with the more experienced ones. He realizes that such feelings were shared by other frequenters without much dance experience, who, unfortunately, generally did not appear for the second time at such meetings. This raises the question – what is the purpose of dance houses, i.e. returning folklore to the people, if it is not adapted to them and they actively, so to speak, do not participate in it? The author experiences the importance, but also the problem of presenting the activities of such dance houses in public. He cites an example where the organizers tried to "remove" folklore from the stage in every possible sense. Nevertheless, he notes that the most frequent participants in such events are people whose folklore experience is related to stage performance. This fact confirms the author's observation that when dancers are required to innovate and improvise, their skills in this field are mostly at an unenviable level. The author also states an interesting fact that at such dance events the dances of a certain locality are most often perfected, at no point does the aspiration, or at least the idea, of a certain standardiza-

tion or universalization of dance appear, which indicates the fact that at such meetings the elements are most often perfected, of certain choreographies, the author concludes.

The second section of the book, entitled *Folklore as Performance and Organization*, is dedicated by the author to his experience as a member of the Hornad ensemble. Here he takes the position of an insider and side by side with other, experienced members, monitors all their activities. He pays less attention to the public performance and presentation of folklore. The emphasis is on the demanding preparations that take place before the performance, on the organization of the action, but also on the moments of fun after hard work, which help the members of the ensemble to relax and get closer to each other. In this section, the subject of the author's observation is the way in which a common expressive culture can be shaped by specific models of social organization and social cohesion, which, as he says, may not always be visible during public performances, but ensemble members consider it crucial for their institution. According to the authors, these activities reveal competing conceptions of authenticity that stand side by side – the authenticity of the consistent presentation of folklore sources, which requires superior technical skills and long training, and the authenticity of “live” folklore to enjoy it in the company of friends, which they may experience when thinking about public performance is set aside and replaced by the enjoyment provided by socialization.

The importance of the subjective experience of folklore, the emotions it

arouses in people, not only during the performance but also during its observation, Feinberg emphasizes in the third part of the book entitled *Folklore and Festivals*, between the Public and the People. Within this section, the author and members of the Hornad ensemble visit folklore festivals and analyze them as events and space. Here, he notices the ambiguity of intimacy and publicity, where the boundaries between public and private are debatable or exceeded, and where, thanks to this ambiguity, the contradiction of authenticity can be temporarily forgotten. Within this section, the author insightfully sees the specificity of the slogans of the Vihodna festival, which they presented as “a festival you will fall in love with”. The author then notices the words folklore and love in the same sentence for the first time, which especially occupied his attention, as well as bringing folklore closer to the wider population with the words that folklore is “cool”. As an outsider at festivals, the author notices tendencies to approach folklore visitors who are not active participants in folklore with this choice of words.

The *Poetics of Authenticity* is the title of the fourth part of the book in which the author presents an analysis of an old archival video performed by a proponent of authentic folklore, which is then reinterpreted based on this analysis. Feinberg analyzes their analysis, which enabled him to emphasize “poetics”, that is, as the author calls it “authenticity”. This helped him draw conclusions about how authenticity should be communicated to the public, whose public presence, on the other hand, jeopardizes authenticity itself. This information led the

author to reconsider the approach of the representatives of “authentic” folklore in the realization of their intentions.

In the section Coda, the author looks at resolving tensions between “authentic” and “non-authentic” dimensions of folklore, which he observes in the context of a historical moment in which, as he states, “hope for resolving these tensions is slowly disappearing, although it continues. it works, and in some moments it is only seemingly overcome”. In this section, Feinberg explains that, analyzing the previously mentioned contradictions that a lover of authentic folklore encounters, he came to certain conclusions – authenticity can be performed on stage and does not have to be, which the author calls the “paradox of publishing folklore”, folklore must be performed in order to be recognized by the public at all, but in order to be recognized as authentic, it must also be outside public performance; representational performance does not necessarily have to be the dominant means of conveying meaning, the medium itself can sometimes become a message; the social structures of participation can be as significant as any derived images.

At the end of the book, in the Final Non-Scientific Postscript, the author looks back at the entire research presented in the book, from a different angle. He returns to the previously mentioned issue of authenticity in the modern world in a somewhat speculative spirit, and suggests a more alternative way of thinking about authenticity. Feinberg concludes that something can be authentic only if it is unaware of its authenticity. It also raises the question of

whether authenticity allows the one who seeks it to consciously perceive the problem of authenticity, which is constantly returning? The author also wonders, among other things, how one can react to an experience with inauthenticity when one knows that inauthenticity is part of the modern experience. One of the more interesting, philosophical ways of thinking of the author, which can certainly be an inspiration for further research and discussion, is that “maybe we as modern beings should give up the belief that folklore is hidden somewhere and start thinking in a way that folklore is simply this: the search for authenticity in a world where the past as such is the past. Maybe that aspiration to find authentic folklore is everything that ever existed as folklore, and folklore actually becomes that in the process of losing its authenticity.”

As a conclusion to his philosophical thoughts, the author draws unexpectedly romantic conclusions. He points out that “love gives him hope for the survival of an enthusiastic search for authentic folklore.” It is, as he states, an ideal that unites parties, performers, spectators, “defenders”, participants, experts and amateurs. Feinberg optimistically concludes that “together they can search for authenticity, because that would be an authenticity that cannot be found in one individual soul, but only in community. Those who are in love with folklore may find their people (folk) and their lore (science) in that love.” However, referring to his earlier claim, it can be concluded that the problem of authenticity is still present and that sometimes it is only seemingly overcome.

Translated by the author