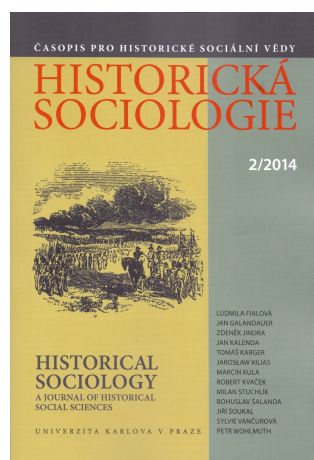


Format de citation

Šalanda, Bohuslav: Rezension über: Jan Čermák (ed.), Kalevala. Eliase Lönnrota a Josefa Holečka v moderní kritické perspektivě, Prague: Academia, 2014, in: Historická sociologie - Historical Sociology, 2015, 2, S. 114-117, <https://recensio-stag.lorax.syslab.com/r/99ddc66d487044c9bf8da469fac02e34>



copyright

Cet article peut être téléchargé et/ou imprimé à des fins privées. Toute autre reproduction ou représentation, intégrale ou substantielle de son contenu, doit faire l'objet d'une autorisation (§§ 44a-63a UrhG / German Copyright Act).

the very limits of his professional expertise. All in all, as a collection of historical (I would not dare to say: historical-sociological) essays the book is indeed attractive and worth reading.

The question of the actual relation of the essays to historical sociology and in particular to the ambitious program outlined in the introduction is quite another matter. In my opinion the answer to it is positive in the case of those papers that concentrate on concepts and ideas, such as the already mentioned pieces on the idea of modernization. Those dealing with “harder” phenomena, such as migration and urban development still offer interesting, sociologically relevant observations, and often illuminating impressions. But do they add to more general knowledge, as the author’s concept of historical sociology suggests? In my opinion in order to offer sociologically relevant knowledge on those “harder” phenomena one should use precise conceptual instruments and employ careful, disciplined analysis. An example of a text in which the author’s approach turns out to be counterproductive is the essay on national culture. The very idea of “national culture” purposefully conflates a few different concepts: the word “culture” as a symbol of usually abstract and rarely well-defined spiritual values, culture as production and consumption of art (mostly perceived as a supposed transmitter of the former), as well as culture as a medium of communication. In the case of academic writings they all blend with the all-embracing, anthropological concept of culture typical for mid-twentieth century cultural anthropology. As a result, any serious attempt to deal with the national culture issue must start (and may probably end) with disassembling the concept. Otherwise – as in case of Kula’s essay – it turns into an idle presentation of examples that prove the obvious fact that the term “national culture” is a mere political symbol. Using examples from various epochs and region, disregarding temporal and geographical diversity and without taking into account their specific social contexts, which appears in some of the papers, including those on capital cities movements or migrations, was by no means problematical in their original publication or conference context. I have the

impression that some conceptual refinement would turn the reflection on the twentieth century as an age of thinking people into an entirely different text too. Still, what seemed appropriate in individual texts, published individually, among more conventional studies in scholarly journals or conference proceedings, looks much more problematic in a collection of essays entitled “Pages from Historical Sociology” – even when the reader employs a less ambitious idea of historical sociology as a social science discipline that respects particular historical contexts of the studied subjects and realizes the spatial and temporal limits of its own findings.

All in all, Kula’s book forms a fine collection of well written and insightful historical essays, full of novel facts and observations, often offering the readers interesting and sometimes not at all obvious thoughts and insights. On the other hand its title seems to be to some extent misleading, and the readers do not get what they are expecting. This is not because “Pages from Historical Sociology” are not sociological enough, but rather because some of the topics would better serve a more intellectual discipline and more analytical approach – at least when they are dealt with not in dispersed papers, but in one, more or less coherent book.

Jaroslav Kiliás

Jan Čermák: *Kalevala Eliase Lönnrota a Josefa Holečka v moderní kritické perspektivě*. Prague: Academia, 2014, 1116 pages

During the last two decades science has entered into a wide interdisciplinary – one could almost say post-disciplinary – phase. Many topics of study form part of more than one scientific discipline, leading to a differentiation in the original sciences. The recently reviewed edition of *The Kalevala* can be placed not only at the intersection between literary science and folklore, but also the sociology of literature, or possibly historical sociology of text. Other areas that could be considered are general narratology or the sociology of knowledge (in this case

traditional). Undoubtedly there are other fields of science which could address the issue of cultural artefacts of this type. These could include cultural anthropology with an emphasis on the relationship between orality and literacy, or written, as well as the ethnography of reading, focusing on cultural specificity.

The new edition of *The Kalevala*, by the Czech linguist Jan Čermák, comprises several approaches. The edition itself is presented in a traditional format and this is for several reasons. At first glance it is surprisingly hefty so this is not a matter of an easy read and a “fat” book cannot easily be placed on a bedside table. I stress that I am not being ironic here. Standard practice dictates that the typeface used for the book is Preissig Antiqua, created by the painter, graphic artist and typographer Vojtěch Preissig (1873–1944). Furthermore it is decorated using illustrations by the famous Finnish painter Aksel Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931), whose art focused on Finnish mythology in a style that moves between realism and art nouveau. Still on the topic of the formal page, the edition is hardback with a sleeve. This is certainly not a paperback. *Summa summarum* – *The Kalevala* is actually a bibliophile edition. We should also mention the author of the introduction in the new Czech *Kalevala*, Markéta Hejkalová. She is a writer, Finnish translator and member of the PEN International club.

The original translation by the classic Czech writer Josef Holeček (1853–1929) complements this antique appearance. This exponent of realism and ruralism in literature learned Finnish and in 1894 published *The Kalevala* in Czech. Holeček’s translation remained unchanged in further Czech editions of this Finnish cultural jewel [1953, 1980, 1999]. However the Anglicist and Finno-Ugric specialist Jan Čermák, currently the latest editor, provides the “foreign” translation with a rich critical commentary, notes to the text and a wide ranging study on the origins and structure of the epic based on modern research. The result is an unusually voluminous publication which can, without a doubt hold its own in the international field of the study of heroic epics. The editor Jan Čermák chose to keep the original translation by the

writer Josef Holeček due to its excellence, rich vocabulary and accuracy. The editor of the new edition has provided detailed notes to the text showing possible deviations from the original. This demonstrates that nearly the majority of translators cannot adhere strictly to the original text. In this context it could almost be said that *The Kalevala* could also act as a text book for the theory of translation.

It may also be worth adding that Jan Čermák to some extent takes on the role of commentator, mediator and performer. He has already published a translation and critical presentation of the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, the only manuscript dating back to the year 1000. It was while comparing the epic *Beowulf* and *The Kalevala* that he realised that both works represent the result of a long creative oral process culminating at the end with an imaginary “last singer”: the anonymous creator of *Beowulf* and the Finnish revivalist Elias Lönnrot. Čermák maintains that although the two texts are very different in many ways and far apart in terms of age, nevertheless it is possible to use comparisons between the two in order to gain a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the creation and structure of this genre. According to Čermák, *Beowulf*, which is a sixth of the size of the *Kalevala*, is unique: the manuscript does not exist in any other form. The Anglo-Saxon tradition did not last long. *Beowulf* was also heavily influenced by monastic culture as well as trying to accommodate a pre-Christian, mystical period. In the case of *The Kalevala* we do not find such a strong Christian influence. Moreover Catholic hagiography did not take root in Finland for long, the growth of the Lutheran reformation dissolved the Catholic cult of saints. In Karelia orthodoxy prevailed.

In the analysis of the heroic epic the concept of bricolage peeps somewhat impishly from behind the scenes. This concept is mainly connected with the social anthropologist and mythologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss. Bricolage means do-it-yourself in terms of structural improvisation, shifting terms of reference, fixing and mending. It even includes veering from the original plot, using scraps, assembling etc. Nevertheless in general the result tends to be

professional, virtuosic, unique. At the end of the day these creative steps are applicable to all human activity. Even Elias Lönnrot, creator of the literary version of *The Kalevala* could not avoid some do-it-yourself when reconstructing this complicated multi-layered work. He created a single narrative structure of the epic by combining several variations and omitting irrelevant verses. Basically he codified oral literature. To a certain extent he used Homer's epics as a template for his work.

I will only make brief remarks on the work itself and will certainly not narrate the contents of which there are many other variations apart from the fixed literary form. Firstly I propose that *The Kalevala* shows a lesser representation of the heroic element. If we were to summarise then *The Kalevala* is the birthplace of the main heroes of the work which are Väinämöinen the fortune-teller, Ilmarinen the skilful blacksmith and Lemminkäinen, the womaniser. These heroes embark on a search for adventures which mainly take place in the northern kingdom of Pohjola. *The Kalevala* is set in a period of time stretching from the "beginning of the world" to the birth of Christ.

In Finnish-Karelian runes heroic battles play a much lesser role than so called "worldly occupation". For example the aim of an epic fight takes place in order to gain and take control of the Sampo mill which gives abundance. In short heroism is replaced by magic. The hero is more likely to wield spells than a sword and even then we are not talking about some young gun but rather a wise old man. There is further evidence of a certain idealisation of the shaman figure, which may lead to a consideration of shaman legends and the "role" of the shaman. However one of the main protagonists, Väinämöinen does not appear in the role of shaman – as a hunter of souls, he is only accompanied by magic.

The Kalevala should also be studied in terms of the myth-folkloric continuum. I have found it contains motifs which are characteristic of mythical cultural heroes. In the majority of the different versions about the sea voyages of the wounded Väinämöinen we find the cosmogonical myth about the creation of the world from the eggs carried by a duck, placed on the knee

of this hero. It is told that a duck or a goose lays golden eggs into a copper nest on his knee. The eggs fall into the water and break into pieces. Väinämöinen magically turns the lower part of the eggshell into the earth and the top part becomes the sky, the yolk becomes the sun and the white the moon. The rest of the eggshells turns into stars and clouds. Clearly here we can identify the universal creation myth of the cosmic egg. Elsewhere a mythical prehistoric bird carries eggs on to a ship, to an island, to an elevated hillock etc.

Within the plot of this epic there are also allusions to the cosmic hunt of the elk, considered the guardian of the forest animals. Sometimes the hunt for the elk is carried out on skis made of sacred wood. Incidentally this plot also appears among smaller ethnic groups in Siberia: The Evenks, Khakas, Yakuts and Altays. Victory over a mythical or demonic creature is considered to be the first task of a young hero. As we can see the elk also functions on a cosmic scale.

In the Finnish-Karelian epic cosmogonical topics and motifs about the creation and population of the earth feature heavily. There are runes about the origin of things, the mythical origin of animals (for example the elk and the bear), about the discovery of fire and metal, creation of tools etc. Runes of an etiological nature do not deal with tribal leaders, warrior castes, there is no talk of ethnic identity or early states. *The Kalevala* creates literary strands where narrative is mixed with love poems, magical songs, spells and enchantments. *The Kalevala* is not an easy read, it is necessary to contend with so called cultural ambivalence where something appears thus and thus at the same time. At the same time one must not exclude the issues of monstrosity, hyperbole and gigantism.

The Kalevala contributed to the development of Finnish folklore which then significantly influenced the study of folklore. Researchers of world literature and folklore include the aforementioned Elias Lönnrot, also Julius Krohn (1835–1888) and his son Kaarle Krohn (1863–1933) and last but not least Antti Aarne (1867–1923) and Lauri Honko (1932–2002). During their research these researchers also studied the migration of plots and motifs using

a historical-geographical method. Kaarle Krohn's publication on *The Kalevala* (five-part *Kalevalastudien*, 1926–1928) should be considered as a reference book not just for Lönnrot's original. It was Krohn who accurately captured the etiological and magical character of Finnish runes (*Magische Unsprungsrunen der Finnen*, 1923). It would not be possible to carry out research on *The Kalevala* without these publications.

The presumed orality merits more attention since *The Kalevala* was performed as "loud" singing, and not "quiet" reading. Single chapters in *The Kalevala* are considered as runes which means a "song" relating to a single thematic plot. The Finnish term "runo" means "song" or "poem". Obviously this is a case of hypothetical assumptions on the performance of runes by singers based on relatively scarce knowledge or comparison with other ethnic groups. Furthermore it is not possible for us today to precisely imagine a performance of *The Kalevala* or other epics, presumably the whole could not have been presented in one single performance due to the limitations of human memory.

In order to assist memory the so called *Kalevala* verse was used. Only professional or semi-professional singers would have been able to manage this rhythmic speech. I would like to point out that a very thought-provoking study was carried out by Anna-Leena Siikala into the singing, customs and physical practices of the singers (*Body, Performance and Agency in Kalevala Rune-Singing*, in: *Oral Tradition*, 15/2, 2000: 255–278).

It is also important to note that Elias Lönnrot brings up the serious scientific problem of the textualisation of oral tradition. This is also connected to contextualisation based on the impact of nationhood and nationalism. In short it is a question of transforming oral poetry and a heroic epic into a textual discourse on nationalism and representing orality in the written form.

On the whole the new edition of *The Kalevala* graphically illustrates its influence on Finnish culture in creating a Finnish-Ugric ethnic identity. Last but not least, the heroic epic *Kalevala*, undoubtedly fulfils the essential desiderata necessary to be considered, according to

Goethe's interpretation, as a supreme work of world literature.

Bohuslav Šalanda

Dennis Smith v Ljubljani: s prispevki Avgusta Lešnika, Marka Kržana in Polone Fijavž / Dennis Smith in Ljubljana: with contributions by Avgust Lešnik, Marko Kržan and Polona Fijavž. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani, 2014, 154 pages

Dennis Smith develops a brilliant panoramic of the current financial crisis in the European Union which is far from over, arguing what he calls "humiliation" of all the countries – without exception – that form part of the EU. With the collaboration of Avgust Lešnik, Marko Kržan and Polona Fijavž, Smith also clarifies what is the role of historical sociologists in this important fact.

In the lecture given by him in Ljubljana in 2014; past, present and future of the EU are treated carefully. In Smith's words, the future of this crisis is being decided on the margins and the only recipe to the European Intellectuals who wants to take part in this process of decision-making is to face the European truth that is "lived" on the peripheries (mainly Greece and Ireland). He reminds us that, the Humiliation does not stem from our cultural incompatibility, it is spreading across the EU, in its core and on the borders, attached to the only true motor of the current progressive demise; the global dictate of the capital.

To understand better the situation of Europe and its financial crisis, Smith arises two main metaphors based in children's stories. The first one is the well known "Hansel and Gretel". It is a story of a wicked witch who deceives and betrays two hapless infants. By "witch" he means bankers and financiers and instead of "hapless infants" he sees employers, workers, consumers and small investors. Hansel and Gretel pushed the witch into her over and made their escape. In this point, Smith argues that in reality, the bankers and the financiers have largely survived, with