

The literary canon as a means of constructing collective memory. The canonisation of the Bosnian literature of the Austro-Hungarian epoch (1878-1918)

Research question/hypothesis

In this paper I will analyse how the Bosnian literary canon of the Austro-Hungarian epoch (1878-1918) evolved after the downfall of the empire. I will argue that the evolution of the Bosnian literary canon is a part of a broader cultural process, which consists in the construction of collective cultural memory about the Habsburg legacy in Bosnia and in the transformation of the cultural/national identity of the country and its peoples.

The Bosnian literature of the Austro-Hungarian period provides us with a particularly interesting case of literature becoming a cultural *Leitmedium* that plays the key role in the construction of national identities. Namely, the intensive promotion of 'national consciousness' and defence of 'the own national identity' gave the Bosnian literature of that period a strongly didactic character and resulted in an intense discursive production of nationalist myths, collective autostereotypes and heterostereotypes about the other ethnic groups as well as about the Austrian occupier.

Method

My analysis of the post-Habsburg canonisation processes within Bosnian literature will focus on the following questions: a) Which are the aesthetical and ideological qualities that according to Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian literary historians assured a literary work of the Habsburg period a place in the Bosnian literary canon? b) How did these aesthetical and ideological criteria evolve in the interwar period (1918-1941), in the Socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1990) and in the 1990's respectively? c) To which extent did these criteria differ from the dominant ideological discourse of these periods, and from the ideological discourse of the literary works concerned?

Results

My investigation shows that the changing reception of the Bosnian literature of the Austro-Hungarian era and the dynamics of its canonisation were seldom determined by the rise of new literary techniques and schools and by the changing literary taste of the reader. To a much greater extent they were determined by a sustained ideological effort of literary historians and critics to construct a specific cultural memory (about the Austro-Hungarian legacy in Bosnia) which would suit the rising national narrative. This resulted in an uncritical reproduction of the nationalist narratives and stereotypes of the literary works of the Austro-Hungarian epoch without proper historical contextualization.