

The Formation of Folklore as a Science

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Abstract:

This article is about the formation of folklore as a science and its place in world and Russian literature. The article notes the disordered use of the term “folklore”: it means either the subject of research, or historical and cultural science, or the method of studying ethnographic material, or folk psychology, or the method of its study. The concept of “folklore” was first used in 1846. However, the instability and certain vagueness of this term, as it was understood in the 1880–1890s, became the reason that Russian scientists rarely used it.

Keywords: folklore, historical science, cultural science, ethnographic materials, folk psychology, literature.

Introduction. Pre-revolutionary science the term “folklore” was not particularly popular, nevertheless, fundamental positions were formed regarding the content of this concept. V. Lesevich spoke out on this topic earlier and more fully than anyone else. He described the field of folklore as “the general body of folk knowledge - everything that the people know according to legend... This vast and complex mass of various statements of the people about their entire internal and external life in all its ramifications” [9.P.343].

Literary review and methodology. In the twentieth century, in particular in the works of M.K. Azadovsky, there was a tendency to assign the term “folklore” to oral literature. However, the scientist did not limit this literature itself to the framework of “artism.” He included in it, along with songs and fairy tales, superstitions, the folk calendar, signs, etc., and most importantly, he did not lose sight of the unified program of “genuine local history knowledge of the country”, establishing the “face of the modern village” and considered from this point view of oral texts as “ethnographic units”. In 1926, a yearbook with the characteristic title “Artistic Folklore” began to be published. In the programmatic article of the yearbook, one of the leading Soviet folklorists, Yu. M. Sokolov, proposed using the term “folklore” instead of the traditional Russian science terms “folk literature”,

“folk poetry”, “oral literature”. At the same time, he emphasized the need to study folklore “with the help of... literati, ethnographers, art historians, musicians, artists of artistic storytelling and vocal art”. However, a few years later, in 1931, in the report “The Significance of Folklore and Folkloristics in the Reconstruction Period,” Yu. M. Sokolov parted with his previous ideas under the influence of Soviet ideology:

“Folklore is one of the most important areas of poetic creativity, and folklore studies is one of the most important parts of Marxist-Leninist literary criticism. All the basic methodological principles that apply to literary criticism and art criticism in general must be applied to the study of folklore... The current tasks of modern worker and collective farm-proletarian folklore are the same as the current tasks of proletarian literature”.

The term “folklore” became widespread thanks to the speech of A. M. Gorky at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. Folklore for Gorky is “the oral creativity of the working people,” in which a large role is given to the individual principle - the creator, the creator [6].

Addressing the problem of defining the concept of “folklore,” another outstanding folklorist, V. Ya. Propp, wrote: “Approaching the matter historically, we will have to say that for pre-class peoples we will call folklore the creativity of the entire totality of these peoples. All poetic creativity of primitive peoples is entirely folklore and serves as the subject of folkloristics. For peoples who have reached the stage of class development, we will call folklore the creativity of all segments of the population, except for the dominant one, whose creativity relates to literature. First of all, this includes the creativity of the oppressed classes, such as peasants and workers, but also the intermediate layers gravitating towards the lower social classes. So, you can still talk about bourgeois folklore, but it is no longer possible to talk, for example, about noble folklore” [10]. This definition is actually based on the historical-evolutionary and class approaches that were natural for domestic science of the Soviet period. V. Ya. Propp contrasts his own point of view on the concept of “folklore” with the opinions of Western scientists, noting that folklore is an international phenomenon and folklore studies covers the creativity of all peoples. In this regard, the scientist concludes: “folklore is understood as the creativity of the social lower classes of all peoples, no matter what stage of development they are at. For pre-class peoples, folklore is understood as the creativity of the totality of these peoples” [10].

Discussion and results. Characterizing the situation with the understanding of “folklore” that developed at the turn of the 20th–21st centuries, K. V. Chistov noted that in contemporary science an idea of folklore is emerging in both narrow and broad meanings. Among the diverse approaches to defining this concept, the scientist identified four main concepts:

- a) sociological (and historical-cultural), within which folklore is understood as “orally transmitted common experience and knowledge. This means all forms of spiritual culture,” and with the broadest possible interpretation, also some forms of material culture. Only a sociological limitation (“common people”) and a historical and cultural criterion are introduced—archaic forms that are dominant or function as relics”;
- b) aesthetic, for which “folklore is common people’s artistic creativity or, according to a more modern definition, “artistic communication”. This concept allows us to extend the use of the term “folklore” to the sphere of musical, choreographic, visual, etc. folk art”;
- c) philological, according to which folklore is understood as a “common verbal tradition”;
- d) theoretical-communicative, which considers folklore as a sign-symbolic system that arises within the boundaries of pre-literate culture: “folklore is an oral tradition. In this case, orality is given paramount importance. This allows us to distinguish folklore from other verbal forms (first of all, to contrast it with literature).”

In this work, K. V. Chistov gives the following definition to the segment of traditional culture, which is usually called folklore: "... this is a set of structures integrated by word, speech, regardless of what non-verbal elements they are associated with". The scientist raises the question of the possibility of giving a "end-to-end" definition of folklore, correct for different peoples at different stages of their development, and gives the following answer: "If we focus on the narrow definition of folklore associated with the philological and theoretical-informational concept, but also take into account more broad ethnographic context, then we could say that folklore is a set of verbal or verbal-nonverbal structures that function in everyday life. This refers to structures that function orally in contact groups (in a family, community, locality, district, region, ethnic group and within the area of a particular language or bilingualism). This definition does not contain characteristics of the content, stylistic features, genre, plot repertoire, etc. No, because for all the traditional nature of folklore, if we consider its centuries-old history, it was a dynamic phenomenon. At least, at different stages of the history of spiritual culture, it acquired certain (not always known to us) features".

Conclusion. Let's summarize some results. In Russian science, the term "folklore" throughout the 19th–20th centuries had a narrower meaning than in foreign science, and referred only to the sphere of oral folk art, until the end of the 1980s. In modern folkloristics, there has been a change in the objects and methods of research, which led to a change in the scientific paradigm and expansion of the subject field of the word "folklore"; in addition, folklore correlates not only with the subject itself, but also with ideas about it. Today, in the understanding of folklore, the opinions of scientists of various directions differ, which continues to constitute a scientific problem. The solution to this problem will be facilitated by an in-depth study of a variety of oral texts that represent both the history of folk culture and its current state.

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