

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF FOLKLORE STUDIES

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Annotation: In this article we can read about origin and development of folklore studies.

Folklore is the whole of oral traditions shared by a particular group of people, culture or subculture.[1] This includes tales, myths, legends,[a] proverbs, poems, jokes, and other oral traditions.[3][4] They include material culture, such as traditional building styles common to the group. Folklore also includes customary lore, taking actions for folk beliefs, and the forms and rituals of celebrations such as Christmas, weddings, folk dances, and initiation rites.[3] Each one of these, either singly or in combination, is considered a folklore artifact or traditional cultural expression. Just as essential as the form, folklore also encompasses the transmission of these artifacts from one region to another or from one generation to the next. Folklore is not something one can typically gain from a formal school curriculum or study in the fine arts. Instead, these traditions are passed along informally from one individual to another, either through verbal instruction or demonstration.[5] The academic study of folklore is called folklore studies or folkloristics, and it can be explored at the undergraduate, graduate, and Ph.D. levels.[6]

The word folklore, a compound of folk and lore, was coined in 1846 by the Englishman William Thoms,[7] who contrived the term as a replacement for the contemporary terminology of "popular antiquities" or "popular literature". The second half of the word, lore, comes from Old English *lār* 'instruction'. It is the knowledge and traditions of a particular group, frequently passed along by word of mouth.[8][9]

The concept of folk has varied over time. When Thoms first created this term, folk applied only to rural, frequently poor and illiterate peasants. A more modern definition of folk is a social group that includes two or more people with common traits who express their shared identity through distinctive traditions. "Folk is a flexible concept which can refer to a nation as in American folklore or to a single family."[10] This expanded social definition of folk supports a broader view of the material, i.e., the lore, considered to be folklore artifacts. These now include all "things people make with words (verbal lore), things they make with their hands (material lore), and things they make with their actions (customary lore)".[11] Folklore is no longer considered to be

limited to that which is old or obsolete. These folk artifacts continue to be passed along informally, as a rule anonymously, and always in multiple variants. The folk group is not individualistic; it is community-based and nurtures its lore in community. "As new groups emerge, new folklore is created... surfers, motorcyclists, computer programmers".[12] In direct contrast to high culture, where any single work of a named artist is protected by copyright law, folklore is a function of shared identity within a common social group.[13]

Having identified folk artifacts, the professional folklorist strives to understand the significance of these beliefs, customs, and objects for the group, since these cultural units[14] would not be passed along unless they had some continued relevance within the group. That meaning can, however, shift and morph; for example, the Halloween celebration of the 21st century is not the All Hallows' Eve of the Middle Ages and even gives rise to its own set of urban legends independent of the historical celebration; the cleansing rituals of Orthodox Judaism were originally good public health in a land with little water, but now these customs signify for some people identification as an Orthodox Jew. By comparison, a common action such as tooth brushing, which is also transmitted within a group, remains a practical hygiene and health issue and does not rise to the level of a group-defining tradition.[15] Tradition is initially remembered behavior; once it loses its practical purpose, there is no reason for further transmission unless it has been imbued with meaning beyond the initial practicality of the action. This meaning is at the core of folkloristics, the study of folklore.[16] Folklore began to distinguish itself as an autonomous discipline during the period of romantic nationalism, in Europe. A particular figure in this development was Johann Gottfried von Herder, whose writings in the 1770s presented oral traditions as organic processes grounded in locale. After the German states were invaded by Napoleonic France, Herder's approach was adopted by many of his fellow Germans, who systematized the recorded folk traditions, and used them in their process of nation building. This process was enthusiastically embraced by smaller nations, like Finland, Estonia, and Hungary, which were seeking political independence from their dominant neighbors.[18]

Folklore, as a field of study, further developed among 19th century European scholars, who were contrasting tradition with the newly developing modernity. Its focus was the oral folklore of the rural peasant populations, which were considered as residue and survivals of the past that continued to exist within the lower strata of society.[19] The "Kinder- und Hausmärchen" of the Brothers Grimm (first published 1812) is the best known but by no means only collection of verbal folklore of the European peasantry of that time. This interest in stories, sayings and songs continued throughout the 19th century and aligned the fledgling discipline of folkloristics with literature and mythology. By the turn into the 20th century the number and sophistication of folklore studies and folklorists had grown both in Europe and North

America. Whereas European folklorists remained focused on the oral folklore of the homogenous peasant populations in their regions, the American folklorists, led by Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, chose to consider Native American cultures in their research, and included the totality of their customs and beliefs as folklore. This distinction aligned American folkloristics with cultural anthropology and ethnology, using the same techniques of data collection in their field research. This divided alliance of folkloristics between the humanities in Europe and the social sciences in America offers a wealth of theoretical vantage points and research tools to the field of folkloristics as a whole, even as it continues to be a point of discussion within the field itself.[20]

References:

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- 15.Dundes 1965, p. 1.
- 16.Schreiter 2015, p. [page needed].
- 17.Sims & Stephens 2005, pp. 7–8.
- 18.Noyes 2012, p. 20.
- 19.Noyes 2012, pp. 15–16.
- 20.Zumwalt & Dundes 1988.