

## **Folklore and Oral Tradition**

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Whereas some of the cultural models for folklore are of a relatively constant nature, performing situation and variation are characteristically unstable features of oral tradition. There is no definition of folklore that would cover the whole discipline. Folklore in its oral and traditional form is in most cases transmitted orally and serves as shared tradition-based creations of a cultural community. I would not include public sector or applied folklore within this concept of oral tradition: the manifestations of applied folklore include folk festivals, various folk song and dance ensembles, or folklore festivals held all over the world. Applied folklore does not have the status of folklore proper.

The Folklore Archive of the Finnish Literature Society has used an inventory or classification system based on the division of folklore into loosely defined genre groups. This system is particularly applicable to manuscript materials (older material in archives) and is still in use. It should be stressed that this system was created on the basis of Finnish folk material and therefore includes non-universal, national categories. But it was augmented as researchers in folk traditions turned their attention toward new materials and subject areas. The bulk of early collecting efforts was concentrated solely on ancient oral (folk) poetry in the Kalevala meter; gradually interests broadened to include *Märchen* (tales) as well, and the first half of the twentieth century saw the gradual inclusion of legends, rhymed folksongs, proverbs, and so forth. In time, the system covered the bulk of Finnish agrarian oral culture. For the sake of clarity, the following sketch of contents has been slightly simplified.

### **The archived oral tradition**

The real collection of folklore began in Finland in the first half of the last century with poems and charms in Kalevala meter. These were joined at the turn of century by folktales, in the 1930s by legends, and gradually all

fields of agrarian folklore—proverbs and riddles, the belief tradition, laments, and so on. The old archived lore includes relatively little contextual data, that is, information on the situation in which it was performed and on the performers themselves.

### **Memory lore collected from aging tradition bearers**

Over the past few decades folklore research in Finland has exploited what can be called passive tradition-bearers. By this I mean that there are in Finland very many people who are unable, in a changing environment, to adapt the folklore they once learned, but who have stored in their memories feelings of identity that can be actualized by means of collection. This increasingly rare channel for the expression of tradition is particularly important because modern research methods can be applied to traditional items for folkloristic research, and the mechanisms for recalling and producing folklore can be studied by social scientific, psychological, and linguistic methods. The emphasis in this field of research is (in addition to conventional activities associated with classification) on contextual analysis and systematization.

### **Contemporary oral tradition**

Many genres of folklore have vanished forever with the passing of the last tradition-bearers familiar with them. Yet there is living folklore all around us: complex work-place lore, various contemporary tales, legends and anecdotes, rumors, gossip, parodies on proverbs and riddles, the rich children's traditions. It will be interesting to see the relationship between traditional agrarian folklore material and contemporary forms of folklore in the selection of research materials in the near future, and also the sort of traditional taxonomy and other classification practices established for studying these newcomers. I should like to mention here the perspectives contributed by the theory of Immanent Art, ethnopoetics, cognitive sciences, structuralism, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, as well as the notions of folkloristic variation, intertextuality, communicative competence, and computer analysis. These developments all represent a shift away from the world of old text-criticism, of purely and solely diachronic or typologically

oriented frameworks, and they also mean a shift away from the world of grammar-like structures and compositional device systems toward new syntheses.

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