

REVIEWS

Олександра Бріцина. Українська Усна Традиційна Проза: Питання Текстології та Виконавства (O. Britsyna. Ukrainian Traditional Oral Prose: Questions of Textology and Performance). Kyiv: *Natsional'na Academiia Nauk Ukrainy, Institut Mystetstvoznavstva, Fol'klorystyky ta Etnolohii im. Ryl's'koho* (Rylsky Institute for Art Studies, Folkloristics and Ethnology at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences), 2006. 395 pp. 20 hryvna. ISBN 966-02-3371-X

O. Britsyna's book Ukrains'ka Usna Tradytiina Proza: Pytannia Tekstolohii ta Vykonavstva is an important contribution to Ukrainian folklore scholarship. The importance of this study to the further development of folklore theory in Ukraine is best appreciated in the context of the development of contemporary folklore studies world wide.

As a scholarly discipline, folkloristics seems to have allowed itself a very brief existence. It became a scholarly discipline relatively late in the nineteenth century, flourished from the 1920s through the 1970s, and then suddenly dissolved into the field of interdisciplinary studies toward the end of the twentieth century.

The main, and unfortunate, characteristic of world folkloristics at the border of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries can be described as scholarly indifference to the search for answers to its principal theoretical and methodological issues. This is compounded by the related tendency to ignore traditional folklore and to concentrate on the search for folk elements in other phenomena of life. It seems that contemporary folklorists happily announced that traditional folklore is dead, and that there no longer exists the need for a general theoretical understanding of issues such as who constitutes the folk, what the genres of folklore are, and the nature of the folk text. Textology has become unpopular. Nevertheless, traditional folklore functions actively in village and urban communities; its elements are most influential in the spiritual and everyday life of our contemporaries.

The absence of general agreement among scholars as to what we are studying, and where the borders between folkloristics and other disciplines lie, makes the object of study appear very amorphous indeed. A common approach among folklorists today is that one should not seek to demonstrate that a particular phenomenon is folklore, but rather should search for folklore elements within it. This creates a situation in which scholars seem to be lost, and to be returning in their work to the

concepts developed from the 1930s through the 1970s. At folklore congresses and conferences, scholars either delve into interdisciplinary studies or else concentrate on the topic of why general folkloristic theory is not needed. This leads to underdeveloped terminology, to the absence of a common understanding of the discipline's scope, and to an ignorance of the importance of further development of fieldwork methodology and practice. Traditional folklore is not being recorded, new techniques for collecting materials are underutilized, and ways in which tradition develops and integrates into the modern world are left unexamined.

At a time when world folklore conferences are examining wedding invitations and internet chat rooms, and when bodybuilding culture occupies an entire session, contemporary Ukrainian folkloristics goes to the other extreme by denying that any non-traditional subcultures could possibly produce folklore. A Soviet, literature-oriented approach to folklore still dominates the works of Ukrainian scholars, and the folk nature of phenomena is not conceded unless they belong to a traditional genre system developed by twentieth-century folkloristic schools.

Thus, the statement "Soon we will call the dirt on the walls folklore" reflects the common understanding of folklore as being only tales, legends, songs and narrative (itself understood to be only fixed-plot, oral text). It is almost painful for contemporary Ukrainian folklorists to broaden their outlook on the scope of folklore, and to admit new subjects into the realm of folkloristic analysis. As a result, many artifacts and traditions are left unrecorded and under-studied.

These two current tendencies, the American and the Ukrainian, are distractions that stunt the development of folklore studies and fieldwork. In the American tendency, the absence of any commonly-acknowledged methodology and theory of folklore genre and textology makes folkloristics hard to distinguish from anthropology, cultural studies, and ethnology. Traditional folklore is under-collected; and in theoretical discussions, traditional texts and plots are buried under a mass of material which is of dubious nature. In the Ukrainian tendency, folkloristics becomes strongly dependent on literary theory, almost as an attachment to literary criticism and linguistics. New phenomena of urban subcultures are ignored by Ukrainian folklorists, who concentrate on village folklore and see it as a source of national pride.

Thus, among the main problems that folkloristics faces today include an absence of common ground in theory and terminology. Lack of emphasis on fieldwork and especially the opportunities that new

technologies provide is also an issue. Also crucial is the fact that folkloristics is regarded as an undifferentiated tradition where no attempt is made to distinguish traditional from modern, or to maintain folklore studies as an integrated but distinct field. Questions on the nature of the folk text, the importance of the context and the transcription of recorded materials remain unaddressed. Folklorists have come to the twenty-first century with little theory on how folklore texts should be understood, recorded and transcribed. Fieldworkers and scholars have no common rules for transcribing intonations, contextual elements, and gestures as part of the recorded narrative; this is especially noticeable when we work with prose texts.

This criticism of current tendencies in folkloristics is intended to underline the importance of Britsyna's book, which combines the results of experimental fieldwork with theoretical concepts of the folk prosaic text. This is the first Ukrainian folklore study in many decades to address general theoretical issues and to seek to build a better understanding of the essence of the folklore text. This study brings Ukrainian folkloristics to a new level by investigating issues practically ignored by Ukrainian scholarship since the 1930s. The author not only brings together existing theories of the folk text, but, more importantly, suggests her own theory of the oral text's nature. She supports her ideas with extensive experimental work conducted in traditional village communities over the last few decades. The author's experimental work includes recordings of the same prosaic plot from different performers, and the same performer, over periods of time varying from a few hours to a few years. It also includes texts recorded in their natural context versus contexts created at the researcher's request. The techniques of this experimental work are described in detail, and their goals are stated very clearly by the author.

Another very important aspect of Britsyna's study is the fact that it is based primarily on traditional demonology collected by the author in central Ukraine. While demonology (e.g. stories of house demons, hobgoblins, witches, dead souls and mermaids) has always been very popular in Ukrainian villages, Ukrainian folklorists of the mid-to-late twentieth century practically ignored such texts, both in their fieldwork and their analyses. Demonological legends were actively collected by Ukrainian folklorists only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hnatiuk, Hrynchenko, Malynka, Lesevych and others collected demonological folk beliefs, but did not consider them to be a serious folk genre. Analysis of them was made only in the context of the folk pagan beliefs of Old Slavs. (Hnatiuk, Nechui-Levitskyi and Myloradovich built

a mythological concept of pagan spiritual life.) Neither the performers of demonological prose nor the texts themselves received special attention. Later, Soviet Ukrainian folklorists concentrated on lyrics, folk rituals, and especially fairy tales and their tellers. This book is evidence of the active life of traditional folklore in modern Ukrainian communities.

Ukrains'ka Usna Tradytsiina Proza: Pytannia Tekstolohii ta Vykonavstva consists of four theoretical chapters, and an appendix listing all the repeated recordings made by the author (of her informants) at different times in various contexts. The first chapter, "Usna Pryroda Fol'kloru ta Spetsyfika Tekstolohii Prozovykh Zhanriv" (The Oral Nature of Folklore, and Specifics of the Prosaic Genre's Textology), is theoretical and historiographic. It surveys topics related to folklore and "genetic textology". The author gives a very clear explanation of the different understandings of the terms *oral text* and *written text*. Special attention is paid not only to folkloristic concepts of the folk text and its elements (Romantic School, Oral-Formulaic Theory, Performance Approach, Contextual Approach), but also to linguistic and structural-semiotic textological concepts. The history of recording methodologies is also presented, starting with the nineteenth century (e.g. writing from memory) and going up to the present. The author shows the importance of conducting experimental fieldwork at an intensive level, and shows that the absence of commonly-acknowledged terminology can be caused partly by the absence of data.

The second chapter, "Problemy Tekstolohii v Istorii Fol'klorystyky" (Problems of Textology in the History of Folkloristics), is devoted to the history of Ukrainian editorial practice in the area of folklore publishing from the nineteenth century through the present, and to folkloristic concepts of the recording and transcription of oral texts. This chapter shows how and why the concept of the text, in Ukrainian folkloristics, was adapted from literary studies, with twentieth-century Ukrainian folklorists following the literary model of the text in their fieldwork and theoretical analysis. Another aspect addressed in this chapter is the classification of folk prose, and the issue of genre theory in the context of published folk anthologies. The author discusses the tendency to publish folk texts organized by performer or village rather than by genre.

The third chapter, "Tekstolohichni Aspekty Metodyky Fiksatsii Narodnoi Prozy" (Textological Aspects of Folk Prose Recording Methodology), is the most theoretical part of the book, and oriented toward the experimental approach. Any folklorist doing fieldwork and collecting folk prose faces the problem that there are too few

bibliographical sources in which fieldwork experience has been generalized. Fieldwork guides were published in the early twentieth century, but later folklorists concentrated their attention on other issues, with fieldwork left for each person to plan on his or her own. In this chapter, the author underlines the benefits of stationary fieldwork (in which the folklorist either lives in the community for a period, or travels there frequently) and of the vacuum-cleaner method of collecting data, which helps to reveal the dynamics of living folklore in the community over a lengthy period of time. Britsyna also shows why repeated recordings from the same, and different, performers in various contexts is the best way to understand the nature of the folk oral text. The author characterizes, in detail, different recording techniques and examines *written text creation* (or *script creation*) methods: What parts of the recorded performance event should be moved into written form? How can one avoid presenting absurdly lengthy texts, given all the context elements? What is the correct way to treat recorded materials?

Britsyna argues that a simple, traditional annotation accompanying the folklore text is not enough. Every folklorist should collect as much information about context as possible, and texts should be transcribed soon after the recording process with as much detail as possible: "the more sensitive the fieldworker is to all the nuances transmitted by the performer through the non-verbal means, the more accurately will his script show the real meaning of the oral text and the performer's intentions" (163-164). Only this approach can guarantee a high quality transcript of a performance. An important part of this chapter is the author's proposed system of signs for presenting an oral text in written form with as little loss as possible. Considering the polyphonic nature of folk narratives, it is not easy to present them while preserving the meaning of the plot. Incorporating the insights of linguists and folklorists, Britsyna has produced her own suggestion for presenting intonations, voice volumes, missing parts, pauses, logical stresses, etc. (179). The main insight of Britsyna's theory of the script of an oral text is that the script should fully reflect all the verbal and non-verbal elements of the oral text, and only then can the interpretation of the text's meaning be accurate.

The last chapter is "Prozovyi Tekst u Svitli Riznochasovykh ta Eksperymental'nykh Zapysiv" (Prosaic Text in the Light of Varying-Time Experimental Recordings). It presents the results of experimental work with performers, and the analysis of texts recorded from the same performer over different performing events. This analysis allows the

author to delve into the transmission and memorization of folk prose by its carriers and thus to characterize the folk prosaic text. Generations of folklorists have tried to understand how folk texts are reproduced, created, and memorized. What exactly is transmitted -- traditional knowledge, a plot, an entire text, or an idea? To what extent is the performer a creator of tradition, and to what extent simply its transmitter? These are essential questions of folklore theory, and extensive experimental work can help to resolve them. Based on numerous samples, and using comparative analysis of repeated recordings, Britsyna develops a theory of oral text transmission: as the listener "receives" a new text, it condenses and the text is memorized as a "conceptual clot." This is later developed into an oral text during each performance. A varying, textual mutuality expresses itself at the level of the verbal text (ground words and formulaic expressions) as well as at the non-verbal level (repetition of gestures, mimics, intonation) (326-327). The author proves that the performer's memory is not the only influential factor in the transmission of the oral text. Rather, the performer's artistry, as well as contextual specifics, play great roles in text development.

Thus, Ukrains'ka Usna Tradytsiina Proza: Pytannia Tekstolohii ta Vykonavstva constitutes fundamental theoretical research as well as an excellent source of fieldwork methodology for scholars interested in the nature of the folk text, performance, experimental fieldwork, and oral transmission. This is an all-too-rare example of humane, scholarly work in which theoretical concepts are based on a deep analysis of the collected data, and are supported by the results of intensive field and experimental work. It addresses the fundamental issues of modern folklore scholarship through textological and experimental approaches.

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