

Mikaela Iakovlevna Mel'ts, 1924-2003

With the passing of Mikaela Iakovlevna Mel'ts on October 25, 2003 the study of Russian folklore has suffered a great loss. Her name is known to everyone involved in the study of the oral literature of the Russian people, no matter whether they live in Russia, Western Europe or in America. Mel'ts' bibliographies on Russian folklore have become reliable guides for both novice folklorists and mature specialists on Russian folk culture.

Mikaela Iakovlevna Mel'ts, née Druskina, was born April 21, 1924 in St. Petersburg, or Leningrad as it was then. Her career began in June 1942 during the Second World War. At the time she was in the Urals, in the city of Perm' which had become a refuge for many of those evacuated from Leningrad. There Mel'ts started work in a factory, but she soon became a student in the history and philological faculty at the local university. After her return to her native city she continued her studies at Leningrad State University, graduating in 1947.

Already during her study at LGU Mel'ts started working in her future specialty, at first in the Library of the Academy of Sciences and later by contracts in the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House) AN SSSR. In August 1947 she became a regular member of Pushkin House. She was invited to join Pushkin House by M. K. Azadovskii who then headed the Oral Folklore Sector. Azadovskii determined the specialty that Mel'ts eventually came to have, that is, the bibliography of Russian folklore.

Mel'ts' first publication on folklore bibliography appeared in 1956. This is an exhaustive selection entitled "Bibliografiia avtoreferatov dissertatsii po problemam narodnogo poeticheskogo tvorchestva 1949-1955 gody" [Bibliography of dissertation abstracts on poetic folklore 1949-1955]. It was published in the first volume of the recently established Pushkin House series, Russkii fol'klor [Russian Folklore], Moscow, Leningrad, 1956, 1: 313-46.

In 1961 Mel'ts prepared the first volume of her fundamental bibliography Russkii fol'klor. 1945-1959 [Russian Folklore], Leningrad, 1961. In this publication Mel'ts set new standards for the bibliography of Russian folklore by creating a model for a differentiated bibliography. Through bibliographic methods she was able to enhance the syncretic essence of folklore as a cultural phenomenon. Materials and studies reflecting the philological, ethnographic, musicological and historical aspects of folklore were included in the bibliography. Already in the first volume Mel'ts offered readers a balanced and well thought out generic and thematic grouping of the material. A chronological principle for the disposition of the material in each rubric permitted an exposition of the history of the study of folklore in the post-war period. Reference annotations and auxiliary indexes of names and geographic places furnished additional means for retrospective searches.

Mel'ts subsequently turned Russkii Fol'klor into a series. The following volumes reflected the history of the study of folklore over seventy five years: Russkii fol'klor. 1917-1944 (Leningrad, 1966); Russkii fol'klor. 1960-1965 (Leningrad, 1967); Russkii fol'klor. 1901-1916 (Leningrad, 1981); Russkii fol'klor. 1966-1975. Pts 1-2 (Leningrad, 1984-85). These volumes, which quickly became authoritative throughout the world, not only included massive documentation for the field, but also through bibliographic methods defined the most important future trends for scholarship about the "living past." During her long and productive life Mel'ts published more than thirty bibliographic selections on various topics in the study of folklore. All these

selections turned out to be in great demand among scholars. For many years she collaborated with the international publication Internationale Volkskundliche Bibliographie = International Folklore Bibliography = Bibliographie Internationale d'Ethnologie and provided it with information about current works on the study of Russian folklore.

Mel'ts retired in 1979 but remained apprised of all the new writing on folklore and continued to work intensively. One after another her surveys and reviews of works by other people came out. In 2000 she published a fundamental bibliography entitled Poeziia A. S. Pushkina v pesennikakh 1825-1917 gg. i russkom fol'klore (po materialam Pushkinskogo doma) [The Poetry of A. S. Pushkin in Song Books from 1825 to 1917 and in Russian folklore (based on materials in Pushkin House)]. This reference book, which immediately became valuable both in the field of Pushkin studies and for the study of folklore, both sums up the topic of "Pushkin in song books" and at the same time offers a reliable guide to further study of the subject.

Mel'ts made a significant contribution not only to the bibliography of folklore, but also to the history of Russian bibliography on the study of folklore. She wrote a series of articles such as: "M. K. Azadovskii kak fol'klorist-bibliograf" [M. K. Azadovskii as folklorist and bibliographer], Russkii fol'klor, Moscow, Leningrad, 1964, 9: 307-21; "Ukazatel' russkoi etnograficheskoi literatury A. N. Pypina" [Index to the Russian ethnographic literature of A. N. Pypin], Sovetskaia etnografiia, 1966, 5: 149-55; "Neosushchestvlennyi fol'klorno-bibliograficheskii zamysel P. K. Simoni" [P. K. Simoni's unrealized folklore-bibliographic plan], Sovetskaia etnografiia, 1967, 2: 97-102; "Russkie fol'kloristy-bibliografy kontsa XIX - nachala XX v." [Russian folklorist-bibliographers from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century], Ocherki istorii russkoi etnografii, fol'kloristiki i antropologii [Excerpts from the History of Russian Ethnography, Folklore Study and Anthropology], Moscow, 1971, 5: 76-101].

In 1970 Mel'ts defended her dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Sciences on the subject Russkaia fol'kloristika i problemy bibliografii fol'klora [The Study of Russian folklore and problems in the bibliography of folklore].

The bibliography of Russian folklore did not form Mel'ts's sole scholarly interest. During the many years she was in Pushkin House she took an active part in everything in which the Sector of Oral Folklore was involved. For example, together with N. P. Kolpakova and G. G. Shapovalova in 1957 she prepared the collection Izbrannye poslovitsy i pogovorki russkogo naroda [Selected Proverbs and Sayings of the Russian People], Moscow, 1957, and slightly later a basic edition entitled Poslovitsy, pogovorki, zagadki v russkikh sbornikakh XVIII-XX vekov [Proverbs, Sayings, and Riddles in Russian Collections of the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries], Moscow, Leningrad, 1961. Mel'ts also wrote numerous articles about the history of the study of Russian folklore.

The name of Mikaela Iakovlevna Mel'ts will be preserved in the history of Russian scholarship. In the memory of those who knew her personally she also will remain as an exceptionally benevolent, forgiving and cultured person.

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(Translated by James Bailey)