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THE RUSSIAN FOLKTALE
BY VLADIMIR YAKOVLEVICH PROPP

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BY VLADIMIR YAKOVLEVICH PROPP

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY

SIBELAN FORRESTER

FOREWORD BY JACK ZIPES

Wayne State University Press © 2012



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INTRODUCTION

IN PRAISE OF THE FOLKTALE

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IT WOULD SEEM THAT we all have a clear empirical idea of what a folktale is. Perhaps we preserve poetic recollections, remembering a tale from childhood. We intuitively feel its charm, we enjoy its beauty; we dimly understand that we are face to face with something quite significant. In other words, it is a poetic sense that guides our understanding and evaluation of the folktale.

A poetic sense is absolutely essential for understanding the folktale—and not only the folktale but any work of verbal art. This sense is a natural gift. Not everyone has it, and some very good people lack it. No one knows why some of us are born with inclinations, abilities, and an interest in mathematics while others are gifted in chemistry, physics, or music. The humanities occupy a somewhat particular place among the sciences. A botanist does not necessarily have to understand the beauty of the flower whose structure and growth he studies. However, an aesthetic reception is quite possible here too. Academician Aleksandr Fersman understood the beauty of rocks from the time of his childhood. Such receptivity and sensitivity are all the more

necessary for people who work with any of the arts, including the folk arts. A person who lacks such a sensitivity, vocation, or interest should take up something else. At the same time, a poetic reception, although essential for understanding the folktale, is not yet sufficient. It is fruitful only when combined with strict methods of scholarly study and research.

A scientific or scholarly approach has greatly advanced the study of the folktale. There is such an immense body of literature that a mere bibliographic list of titles of works on the folktale and collections that have been published all over the world would make up a thick volume. Before World War II, scholars in Germany began publishing an encyclopedia of the folktale (*Handwörterbuch des Märchens*); several volumes came out before the war interrupted. In the German Democratic Republic a new edition of this encyclopedia is being prepared, in conformity with contemporary scholarly demands.¹ An Institute of German Folk Studies has been created under the auspices of the Berlin Academy of Sciences. Since 1955 this institute has published an annual review of everything that is taking place in Europe concerning the study of the folktale (*Deutsches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* [The German Folklore Annual]).² The International Society for the Study of Narrative Folklore periodically convenes international congresses and publishes a special journal, *Fabula*.³ The Institute of Russian Literature (the Pushkin House) is a part of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, and it includes a special sector for folklore that publishes an annual journal, *Russian Folklore*.⁴ A bibliography of Russian folklore is in preparation.⁵ Even so, scholars have not completed all that is to be done, and their work will continue.

My task is not to produce a broad, comprehensive, monographic study of the folktale or to reveal all the problems associated with it. I will open the door to this treasure house only slightly, so as to peek in through the crack.

The folktale's range is enormous, and studying it has required the work of several generations of scholars. The study of the folktale is not so much a discrete discipline as an independent science of encyclopedic character. It cannot be imagined in isolation from world history, ethnography, the history of religion, the history of forms of thought and poetry, linguistics, and historical poetics. The folktale is usually studied within national and linguistic boundaries. We too will proceed this way: We will study the Russian folktale. Strictly speaking, however, this kind of study will not reveal all the issues connected with the life of the folktale. The folktale must be studied with a comparative method, using material from all over the world. Folktales are

spread throughout the whole world. No people lack them. All the cultured peoples of antiquity knew the folktale: ancient China, India, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. It is enough to recall the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*—a collection known to the Arabs from the ninth century—to feel the greatest respect for Arabic folktale art. The peoples inhabiting the Asian part of the Soviet Union possess an unusually rich trove of folktales: the Buriats, Tadzhiks, Uzbeks, Evenks, Yakuts, and many others, as well as the peoples of the Volga and the European North. Armenian and Georgian folktales, like the tales of other peoples of the Caucasus, are famous throughout the world. All this has been painstakingly collected, recorded, and studied. Only a trifling part of it has been published.

I would also digress if I started to list all the peoples of the world and their folktales. Every people has its national tales, its own plots. But there are also plots of another kind—international plots known all over the world, or at least to a whole group of peoples. It is remarkable not only that folktales are so widespread but also that the tales of the world's peoples are interconnected. The folktale symbolizes the unity of peoples, who understand one another in their tales. Folktales pass widely from one people to another, disregarding linguistic or territorial or state boundaries. It is as though the nations conspire and work together to create and develop their poetic wealth. The idea that the folktale should be studied on an international scale has dominated scholarship for a long time, especially in the era of the Grimm brothers, who cited a huge number of variants of tales from all the peoples of Europe in the third volume of their *Children's and Household Tales*. I digress slightly here, but I want to mention that on the hundredth anniversary of the 1812 appearance of the first volume of the Grimm brothers' collection, in honor of that date, German scholar Johannes Bolte and Czech scholar Jiří Polívka began publishing an enormous work titled *Notes to the Tales of the Brothers Grimm*. They continued the work the Grimms had begun, adding variants of folktales not only from Europe but from the whole world to the 225 tales in the Grimms' collection. The list of variants takes up three thick volumes. They also published two volumes of material for study of the history of folktales among various peoples. Publishing these *Notes* took about twenty years (1913–32).

To give some sense of the dissemination of folkloric tales and individual plots, let me cite one example: the tale of the fool who tricks everyone. The fool travels to the city to sell the hide of a bull he has killed. Along the way

he happens to find a treasure, and he says that he got the money by selling the bull's hide. His fellow villagers slaughter their bulls too, but they are unable to sell them. The fool carries out capers: He receives a large sum when he sells a pot that supposedly cooks by itself, sells a whip or a flute that supposedly reanimates the dead, drives away someone else's cattle and says he found them at the bottom of the lake. His envious enemies jump into the water to find herds themselves, and they drown. The tricks may vary, but there are few variations, and the tale type is stable. This tale is known among the Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Bulgarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, Sorbs,⁶ Germans, and Polish Kashubians. The tale is known in Holland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, the Faeroe Islands, Scotland (but not England), France, Italy, Spain (among the Basques), Albania, and Romania. It is known among the Baltic peoples (the Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians), the Finno-Ugric peoples (Finns, Hungarians), the Nenets, the Volga peoples (Udmurts, Mari, Tatars), and the peoples of the Caucasus and Asia Minor. It is also found in Afghanistan, in India (in several languages), and among the Ainu. It exists in Africa: on Mauritius, in Madagascar, the Congo, Tunisia, among the Swahili peoples, the Berbers, and in Sudan. In the Americas it is attested to in the Bahamas, in Jamaica, in Louisiana (United States), in Peru and Brazil, and in Greenland.⁷

The list of peoples who know this tale was long when it was published in 1915, but it is clearly incomplete. Some peoples' tales have been collected very little or not at all.

But if a tale that is spread throughout the world is an international plot in the fullest sense of the word, is there any sense then in studying one people's tales in isolation from those of other peoples—and is it even possible? In fact, it is not just possible; it is essential. First, each people, and sometimes each group of peoples, has national plots of its own. Second, even given a common subject, each people will create distinctive forms. The tale of the fool I mentioned is far from being merely a cheerful farce. Every people invests it with its own specific life and social philosophy, shaped by that people's material conditions and history. Russian tales of the fool are just as nationally specific as German, French, or Turkish ones. Third and finally, establishing comparative folklore studies on a worldwide scale is a matter for the fairly distant future. It demands a variety of prerequisites. One of these is full mastery, first and foremost, of all national material. Russians should first and foremost study the Russian folktale—it is our duty.

I will not ask how we can explain the folktale's universality. This topic still lies before us. The folktale's universality, its ubiquity, is just as striking as its immortality. All forms of literature die out at some point. The Greeks, for example, created great dramatic art, but the Greek theater of antiquity as a vital phenomenon is dead. Reading Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, or Aristophanes today requires a certain preliminary study. The same can be said of the literature of any era. Who can read Dante now? Only educated people. However, absolutely everyone understands the folktale. It passes unhindered across all linguistic boundaries, from one people to another, and it has been preserved in that form for millennia. It is understood just as well by representatives of peoples who have not yet joined modern civilization, who are oppressed by colonialism, and by minds standing at the apex of civilization, such as Shakespeare, Goethe, or Pushkin.

This is the case because the folktale contains eternal, unfading values. These values will gradually reveal themselves to us. For now I will limit myself to pointing out the poetry, the sincerity, the beauty, and the deep truthfulness of the folktale, its cheerfulness and liveliness, its sparkling wit, its combination of childlike naïveté with deep wisdom and a sober worldview. Of course, each text taken in isolation may contain defects or imperfections. These imperfections should not at all be glossed over, evened out, or concealed, as unfortunately often happens. The folktale reveals its treasures only in broad comparative study of each tale type. This requires labor and patience, but the labor will be richly rewarded.

THE FOLKTALE'S ROLE IN THE ORIGINS OF EUROPEAN LITERATURE

We are moved to study the folktale not only because of its folk poetic character and ethical virtues. Knowing about folktales is essential for all scholars of literature and especially literary history. The folktale played a large role in the rise and development of European literature. The folktale's influence on the process of literary development is bound to certain periods of this development.

We find no influence of the folktale and almost no trace of it in medieval Russian literature. Only in isolated cases do folktale motifs penetrate into hagiographic literature, as in the fifteenth-century tale (*povest'*) of Prince Peter

and the maiden Fevronia, one of the loveliest tales not only in Russian literature but in the world. This old-fashioned, morally elevating tale is entirely shot through with folktale motifs.⁸

The situation in Western Europe was somewhat different, but medieval culture on the whole bore a clerical character both in Russia and in the West. This culture created grand monuments of architecture, visual art, and literature. We need only recall the cathedrals of Cologne, of Reims, the church of St. Basil the Blessed or the Uspenskii Cathedral in Moscow, the Kievan church complex. We need only walk through the rooms of medieval art in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow or the Russian Museum in Leningrad to get an impression of this art's grandeur. Medieval literature was equally subordinated to the religious worldview.

This art developed for centuries, but it could not last forever. The watershed came in the fourteenth century, in the epoch known as the Renaissance, or Rebirth, the epoch of humanism. The new art, centered in Italy, could no longer depend on or continue the Christian medieval tradition. Its forms were based on the pagan art of antiquity.

I will not speak here about issues of architectural and representative arts in the Renaissance. That would take me too far afield. The process of liberating the human being from captivity to the church's worldview and ascetic ideals also took place in the development of verbal art: Writers began to study Greek and Latin literature. But narrative art could not orient itself toward antique culture as much as the visual arts and architecture could. The new secular literature arose on the basis of national folklore, primarily narrative folklore and, first and foremost, the folktale. This explains the rise of one well-known figure of Renaissance literature, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–75). His famous *Decameron* (1350–53), which marks the beginning of secular literature in Europe, is half composed of folk plots. Even those plots that are not attested in folklore are clearly not Boccaccio's own inventions but rather retellings of stories and anecdotes that were current in urban circles.

This orientation toward folklore is not an individual trait of Boccaccio; it is a sign of the times, a historical law and necessity. Boccaccio is only the most outstanding and famous of a whole group of novelists. His English counterpart is Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?–1400), with his *Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400). Twenty-nine pilgrims, simple people with various occupations, meet in a tavern on the road to Canterbury to visit the grave of St. Thomas Becket. At night and while traveling they exchange amusing stories, which a folklorist will easily recognize as folktales. Chaucer has only twenty-one stories, told

in simple conversational language (though in verse), some with dialect elements. Here too, as in Italy, a new secular narrative literature of realistic character grew up from the soil of folktales.

The folktale's influence did not weaken after the Renaissance; on the contrary, it grew stronger. An imitation of Boccaccio, usually called *The Pentameron*, that is, "five-day collection" (*decameron* means "ten-day collection"), came out in Naples in 1634–36. The author, Giambattista Basile, was a simple soldier who had heard all kinds of unusual stories during his campaigns. The framing story is basically that a certain prince, to amuse the princess, hires ten women to tell one folktale each for five days. Together the result is fifty tales, all genuine Italian folktales in their plots, although narrated in literary language and style.

These works are all united by one common trait. They represent a kind of reaction against church and ascetic literature. Many are therefore aimed at the Catholic clergy, which is depicted satirically with all its failings. The human personality comes into its own, tossing off the chains of asceticism and religious exaltation or contemplation. It claims the right to ordinary human love. It is through folklore that the theme of love enters world literature. Let us note that the theme of love comes to lyric poetry from the folk song as well.

However, we should not conceive of the matter too simplistically, as though writers simply borrowed folklore plots and retold them. Things are significantly more complicated. The folktale is a source of varied plots, but the plots themselves undergo an essential reworking as they enter the orbit of literature. The aesthetics of folklore and the aesthetics of professional composition reveal deep differences, which gradually become obvious. A great deal has been written and said about the interrelations of folklore and literature. There are many works on Pushkin and folklore, Gogol and folklore, Lermontov and folklore, Blok and folklore, and so on. They describe folklore's beneficent influence on literature, and that is undoubtedly true. Folk creativity has been a source of inspiration for many writers, as Maxim Gorky noted. But at the same time people forget one thing: A writer who mines the treasures of folklore must not only accept the folk tradition but also overcome it. Scholars usually fail to demonstrate this. One may establish which plots Boccaccio borrowed from the treasury of the novellistic folktale, and many works have already done so, but Boccaccio is still not the same thing as folklore. We must determine the deep and principled differences, and this is possible only once we have fully studied the poetics of folklore and of the folktale in particular. The folktale is in essence a made-up story. Once folktales pass into literature,

they take on the character of the novella, that is, of narratives that have a certain plausibility. They acquire exact chronological and topographic locations, their characters receive personal names, types change into characters, individual experiences begin to play a larger role, the setting is described in detail, and events are narrated as a chain of causes and effects.

What occurred in Western Europe in the fourteenth century took place significantly later in Russia, essentially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Secular literature arose then in Russia, on the basis of the folk narrative tradition. It arose in cities, and its creators and bearers were working people, the third estate. The *bylina* (epic song), which peasants had sung, moved onto the pages of manuscript books, where it was called a tale, a story, or a word, and it became the subject of reading for amusement.

Secular literature developed somewhat differently in Russia than in Western Europe. Russia had no writers like Boccaccio and his followers. But the rise of secular literature was essentially the same. The Russian secular tale arose anonymously. One may cite the seventeenth-century tale of Karp Sutulov, based on the tale of a priest, a deacon, and a sacristan who try to gain the favors of a beautiful woman. She invites them in one after another on the same evening and hides them all in a trunk full of soot. Her husband drives the trunk to market and releases them there, saying that they are devils. Gogol used this plot in his story "The Night Before Christmas" (A-T 1730).⁹

Still, folklore influenced secular literature less in its plots than in its realistic narrative style. Tales were created about the fox who goes to confession, Ruff, Son of Ruff (*Ersh Ershovich*), Shemiaka's Judgment, Savva Grudtsyn, Frol Skobeyev, and others.¹⁰

Some of these, like the tales of the fox confessor or Ruff, Son of Ruff, undergo a circular movement. Their plot is folkloric. They are creations of individual authors who remain unknown to us, but their images, motifs, and style come from folklore. The tales of Ruff, Son of Ruff and the fox confessor imitate the animal folktale—and they imitate it so well that these works have passed back into the sphere of folktales. They have become folklorized. This phenomenon has been the object of more than one study. They are literary tales with a folkloric basis, which thereafter returned to folklore.

I will not speak about the later development of Russian prose and its folkloric roots. I will touch on the *lubok* (woodblock) print folktales of the eighteenth century, such as *Bova*, *Eruslan Lazarevich*, and others. Russian tales of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly the tales of the Petrine era, are unimaginable without the foundation of folk prose. They are studied

by historians of literature. The most complete study, richly supported by materials, is by Vasilii Sipovskii.¹¹ A briefer outline can be found in any textbook or course on eighteenth-century Russian literature;¹² I refer anyone who is curious to these works.

I can add nothing new here. It is a task for scholars of literature, not for folklorists. We are studying the folktale, not the development of literature based on folklore. The examples I have cited only show the significance in principle of the folktale in the development of European literature. This process takes on a different character in the nineteenth century.¹³

Realist writers of the twentieth century no longer draw plots from folktales, but Maxim Gorky indicated how much a contemporary writer might learn from the folktale in his speech at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934.

THE FOLKTALE AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

There is, however, another sphere where the folktale has had a fruitful impact up to the present day. This is in the fine arts: musical and dramatic arts, ballet, and opera, as well as symphonic music. They have been influenced by verbal folklore and by musical folklore as well.

Mikhail Glinka's opera *Ruslan and Liudmila* is replete with folktale and musical folklore. Everyone, of course, will remember Rimsky-Korsakov's *Tale of Tsar Saltan* and *Kashchei the Deathless* and Sergei Prokofiev's *Love for Three Oranges*. Less well known are Iuliia Veisberg's operas *Jack Frost* (1930) and *The Magic Swan-Geese* (1930) and Marian Koval's *The Wolf and the Seven Kids* (1941). The Grimms' tales have been used in more than thirty German operas.

The ballets are more numerous: two ballets (by Ludwig Minkus and Rodion Shchedrin) based on the plot of the Little Hump-Backed Horse; *Sleeping Beauty* by Petr Ilyich Tchaikovsky; *Cinderella* by Sergei Prokofiev; *The Firebird*; *The Tale of the Runaway Soldier and the Devil*, and *The Fable of the Fox, the Rooster, the Tomcat, and the Ram* by Igor Stravinsky; *Ivushka* by Orest Evlakhov; and *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp* by Boris Savel'ev. In addition, the symphonic compositions include Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* and *Folktale for a Large Orchestra*; *Baba-Yaga* and *Kikimora* by Anatolii Liadov; and Sergei Prokofiev's *The Fool Who Out-Fooled Seven Fools* and *The Old Granny's Tale*. Folktales and musical folklore are the basis for the young opera and ballet arts in our [Soviet] national republics (e.g., Farid Iarullin's *Shurale*).¹⁴

It is curious, all the same, that there are no well-known or popular dramatizations of the folktale. A folktale on stage without music would be simply tedious. The folktale's magical element turns to reality, without ceasing to be magical, only with music. The folktale is possible in the puppet theater, where there are many performances. It is just as impossible in cinema as on the stage, and for the same reasons (e.g., the tale of Never-Laugh).

Animated cartoons can be based on folktales, on the same basis as the puppet theater.

But the folktale is out of place in one sphere of the arts. This is visual art. True, there is no shortage of artistic illustrations of folktales. But, in my opinion, even the best of them (Ivan Bilibin, Elena Polenova) do not convey the folktale world; instead, they present a stylization. They correspond neither to folk ideas nor to the folktale spirit. I think the folktale cannot be illustrated in principle because its events take place outside time and space, whereas representative art transfers them into real, visible space. A folktale ceases at once to be a folktale. This is true even of the best paintings, such as Viktor Vasnetsov's *Alyonushka*. The picture is full of a genuine, lively lyricism. A girl sits on the pebbles by the water, sorrowfully hugging her knees, resting her head on them. Completely absorbed in her grief, she gazes straight ahead without seeing anything. It is a splendid painting, but there is nothing of the folktale in it except the title. Another painting by Vasnetsov, *The Flying Carpet*, is incomparably weaker—simply a poor piece of work. The flying carpet hangs in mid-air, the princess sits on it calmly, and we don't believe any of it.

Brilliant and significant artists who have depicted folktales express themselves more than they express the folktales. This is the case, for example, with Mikhail Vrubel's *Swan Princess* or *Thirty-Three Bogatyrs*. It is typical Vrubel, but it is no folktale.¹⁵ Yet I digress. One could write a whole book on the folktale's role in the development of European culture.

THE TERM FOLKTALE IN VARIOUS LANGUAGES

I began with the question of what the folktale is, but I did not answer the question. Instead, I indicated some of the folktale's qualities and its role in the origin and early development of European literature. We must return to the question, What is the folktale? What do we mean by the term? It is essential to have a scholarly definition of the concept "folktale." The other questions that arise in the study of the folktale will depend on that definition.

What is a folktale? At first the question might seem entirely rhetorical, as though everyone knows the answer. Even scholars have advanced such opinions. Finnish scholar János Honti writes, “A one-sided definition of a concept that everyone knows is in fact superfluous: everyone knows what a folktale is and can use that sense to distinguish it from so-called related genres—the folk *predanie*, the *legenda*, and anecdotes.”¹⁶ Authors of some fundamental folklore surveys have made do without a definition of the concept and essence of the folktale.¹⁷

I note that Aleksandr Veselovskii, whose works on the folktale make up a whole volume, never gave his own definition of the folktale. This does not mean that these scholars had no personal understanding of the folktale. They had, but they never recorded it in exact definitions. Nevertheless, we cannot rely on a *sense*, as Honti suggests. We must lay out our point of view as precisely as possible. We cannot accept as folktales everything that is included in collections. In his review of Aleksandr Afanas’ev’s collection, nineteenth-century scholar Aleksandr Pypin pointed out the motley nature of folktale material and the fact that “the concept of the folktale has now become very inclusive.”¹⁸

We should first obtain as clear as possible a concept of the term *folktale* itself. I will begin by defining the Russian term *skazka* (folktale) and by studying the word *skazka* and how it is expressed in various other languages. Could such a survey reveal what the folk itself understands by the word *skazka*, what is invested in that notion?

Here we encounter some uncertainty. The peoples of the world, or rather the European peoples, do not as a rule distinguish this variety of folk poetry, using the most varied words to define it.¹⁹ Only two European languages have created special words to express the concept: Russian and German.

The Russian word *skazka* is significantly more recent. It first appeared with its present meaning no earlier than the seventeenth century. Old and medieval Rus’ did not know it. This does not mean that there were no folktales; rather, it means that the tales were originally described by some other word. We presume that one such word was *basnia*, corresponding to the verb *baiat’* (to speak), which is now obsolete, and the noun *bakhar’*. The twelfth-century sermonizer Kirill of Turov, listing the torments awaiting sinners in the other world, mentions under the fifteenth torment sinners who “believe in [predicting the future through] meetings, in sneezing, in tracks and in birds’ singing, in enchantment, and who tell tales [*basni baiut*] and play the *gusli* [a folk instrument like a psaltery].” Another twelfth-century sermon (in the *Sermons*

of [Pseudo-] *John Chrysostom*) depicts a rich man going to bed: “As he lay down and could not fall asleep his friends would stroke his feet. . . . Others would play music, still others were telling tales [*baiut*'] and performing sorcery.”²⁰ Turns of phrase such as *polno basni-to skazyvat'* (stop telling stories) or *bab'i basni i durak liubit* (even a fool loves old wives' tales), cited in Vladimir Dal's *Explanatory Dictionary*,²¹ point to the fact that the term *basnia* in the living contemporary Russian language may include the meaning of *skazka*. Ancient Rus' did not know the word *skazka*; *basnia* served as its equivalent.

In the beginning the word *skazka* had a completely different sense from what it has now. It signified a spoken or written word, a document in force. We read in the notes of eighteenth-century memoirist Andrei Bolotov, “Then they (the peasants), being satisfied, created together with me a document [*skazka*] of affection.”²² In oral use *otobrat' skazku* (to take away a *skazka*) once meant “to take down testimony.” In Nikolai Gogol's novel *Dead Souls*, *revizskie skazki* was the term for establishing, by means of revision, documented lists of the peasants who belonged to a landowner. But *skazka* could signify other things too. Ivan Turgenev's story “The Bailiff” gives, “We've drawn the boundaries, your honor, all through your mercy. We signed the *skazka* three days ago.”²³

The root of the term *skazka*, *-kaz-*, acquires a variety of meanings with different Russian prefixes, but the basic meaning of the root itself is some form of communication: *kazat'* (to say), *ukazat'* (to indicate), *nakazat'* (to punish, to make an example of), and so on. Serbian *kazati* means “to speak,” and Czech *kazati* means “to prove, to demonstrate.”

Therefore, until the seventeenth century the Russian word *skazka* signified something trustworthy, written or oral testimony, or a witness with legal strength. From the seventeenth century on we can trace another sense of the word *skazka*—one that contradicts the meaning just cited. A 1649 *ukaz* of Tsar Aleksii Mikhailovich reads: “Many men through unreason believe in dreams, and in meetings, and in tracks, and in birds' songs, and guess the answers to riddles, and tell impossible *skazki*.”²⁴ Note that the word *skazka* appears here in the same context we saw in Kirill of Turov with *basni* (bird song, tracks, and the like), showing clearly that the word *basn'* was replaced by *skazka*. Here the word *skazka* already conveys the same meaning that we give it.

What conclusions can we draw from this outline? We can extract two markers of the folktale encoded in the word: (1) *Skazka* is recognized as a narrative genre (*baiat'* means “to narrate, to tell” [*skazyvat'*, *rasskazyvat'*]);

(2) a *skazka* is considered an invention. (In Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich's *ukaz* we have *skazki nebylye* [tales that never happened].) The Ukrainian language contains the word *kazka*, along with the word *baika*. Both signify not only a narrative but an invention unworthy of trust.

It is difficult to say how a word could receive a meaning opposite to its own meaning. Apparently those *skazki*, the testimonies taken during trials or investigations and so on, tended to be so undependable, so filled with lies, that the word *skazka*, which once meant a dependable document, came to signify a lie, an invention, something completely untrustworthy.

The ancient Greeks used the word *myth* to mean a folktale. They had no special word for the folktale.

In Latin, the word *skazka* is conveyed by *fabula*, but this word is not specific to the folktale either. It has many different meanings: a conversation, gossip, a topic of conversation, and so on (compare *fabula* in Russian, which means "a plot, the subject of narration"), but also a story, including a folkloric tale and a fable. It passed into German in the sense of *basnia* or fable. In German *Fabel* means a fable (*basnia*), and the verb *fabulieren* means "to tell an exaggerated story."²⁵

I will not dwell on how the concept of the folktale is expressed in various world languages. Bolte has done this with great mastery.²⁶ I will discuss only three languages: Italian, French, and English. Italian identifies the folktale with the words *fiaba* and *favola*, which clearly descend from the Latin *fabula*, or the words *conto*, *racconto*, and others. The root *cont* generally signifies a count (compare the Russian root *chit*, as in *schitat'*, "to count"). French most often uses *conte*, which means "story," as in *raconter* (to narrate, to tell). For exactness they use *conte populaire* (folk story), *conte de fées* (fairy story, which actually only fits the wonder tale), *récit*, or *légende*.

The same is true in English. *Skazka* is conveyed by the word *tale*, which signifies a story in general or any kind of story. Dickens gave one of his novels the title *A Tale of Two Cities*. *Fairy tale* is used on the French model. Tales meant especially for children are described with the term *nursery tale*. The words *story* and *legend* are also used.

Here again I might digress and take up the question of how to convey the concept of the folktale in various languages. Such a study might reveal why most peoples lack specialized terms and why they these terms do exist in German and Russian. I could state as many hypotheses as you like, but a scholarly solution would demand broad investigation.

DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF THE SKAZKA

I mentioned earlier that many scholars have made do without defining the concept of the folktale. Others, though, have offered definitions. Scholarly understanding of the term *skazka* has its own interesting history, which I will address in what follows. For now, I will cite two or three definitions and attempt to make sense of them. To make a complete study of the folktale, we must have at least a preliminary idea about this.

Bolte and Polívka gave a definition that has been accepted in Europe. It can be summarized as follows: Since Herder and the Grimm brothers, the folkloric tale has been understood as a story based on poetic fantasy, particularly one from the world of magic, an account not connected with the conditions of real life, which people at all levels of society listen to with pleasure, even if they find it unlikely or implausible.²⁷

Can we agree with this definition? Although it has been widely accepted, it reveals a number of weaknesses.

First, defining the folkloric tale as “a story based on poetic fantasy” is too broad. In general, any work of literature is based on poetic fantasy. Even if we understand “poetic fantasy” as pure fantasy, things that are impossible in real life, then, for example, Gogol’s story “The Portrait” or the second half of his story “The Overcoat” would have to be recognized as folktales.

Second, what does “particularly one from the world of magic” mean? The majority of folkloric tales (animal tales, novellistic tales) involve no enchantment at all. It is present only in the so-called wonder tale. This definition would exclude all folktales that are not wonder tales.

Third, a Soviet scholar would never accept the idea that a folkloric tale was “not connected with the conditions of real life.” The question of the folktale’s relationship to real life is complex. But it is wrong to consider it axiomatic that a folkloric tale is not connected with the conditions of real life, and to put that into a definition. We shall see that even the most fantastic folkloric tales grow out of the reality of various eras.

Finally, making it a formula that the folkloric tale provides aesthetic pleasure even if listeners find it “unlikely or implausible” suggests that a folkloric tale *might* be considered verisimilar or plausible, that it all depends on the will of the listeners. We have seen that the people have always considered the folkloric tale an invention. We must find a different definition.

An old rule of logic states, *Definitio fit per genus proximum et differentiam specificam*; that is, a definition is drawn through the nearest kind and the spe-

cific difference. In this case we should understand the nearest kind to mean the story in general, narrative. The folkloric tale is a story; it belongs to the sphere of the *epos*. But not every story can be called a folkloric tale. What kind of story may be called a folkloric tale? What is its specific distinction?

The first thing that may come to mind is that a folkloric tale is defined by its plots. Really, when we think of the folkloric tale, we recall the tale of the fox, the kidnapped princess, the Firebird, the priest and his hired laborer, and so on; that is, we imagine a whole sequence of plots. Yes, these plots really are specific to the folkloric tale, but nonetheless the folkloric tale is not defined by its plots alone.

In fact, the plot of a woman rescued from a dragon is possible in myth, in the *legenda*, in the *bylina*, in spiritual verses. It is not the plot that is specific to the folktale, but the *folkloric* form of the plot. Boccaccio rewrote plots he took from folktales in the form of novellas, and they ceased to be folktales. The plot of "Terentii the Guest" exists as a folktale, a *bylina*, and a full comedy. The plot of the nightingale robber is possible for the *bylina*, but it is told in the form of a folkloric tale, especially in areas where the epic *bylina* no longer exists.

Plot is of crucial significance for understanding and studying the folktale, but the folktale nonetheless cannot be defined by its plots. What defines it, then?

If we compare genres, we see that their distinctness lies less in the range of plots than in the fact that their artistic form conveys different points of view. Each genre possesses a particular artistry that is specific to it, and in some cases to it alone. This specific trait must be isolated and defined.

A body of artistic devices that has taken shape through history can be called a poetics, and I would now say that folklore genres are defined by a specific poetics. Thus we arrive at the original, most general definition: The folkloric tale is a story (*genus proximum*—the nearest kind) that is distinct from all other kinds of narrative in its specific poetics.

This definition, made according to all the rules of logic, nonetheless does not reveal the folktale's essence; it must be supplemented further. If we define the folktale through its poetics, then we are defining one unknown by another, because this poetics has not yet been studied sufficiently. The concept of poetics also permits variant interpretations, different understandings. Nevertheless, the principle itself is important. If the poetics has not yet been sufficiently studied, that is a matter of time, not a difficulty in principle.

Aleksandr Nikiforov, an important folktale collector and researcher, set out to define the concept of the folktale in this way. He collected a great deal

and worked on the practical methodology of collection. He published several specialized works on the folktale as a form; as a result, he was ideally prepared for a multifaceted understanding of the folktale.

Nikiforov's definition states, "Folktales are oral stories, known among the people with the purpose of entertainment, containing events that are unusual in the everyday sense (fantastic, miraculous, or everyday), and distinguished by a particular compositional and stylistic structure."²⁸ To this day, this definition has not lost its scholarly significance. It should form the basis of our understanding of the folktale and help us set it apart from other related formations.

This definition results from a scholarly understanding of the folktale, expressed in the briefest possible formula. It provides all the fundamental traits that characterize the folktale. The folktale, the tale told by the folk, is a folk narrative genre characterized by the form of its function in society. It is a story passed on from generation to generation by oral transmission alone. This distinguishes the folktale's function from the function of the artificial, or literary, fairytale, which is transmitted by reading and writing and is unchangeable. The literary tale, like other literary works of art, may come into use by the people and begin to circulate, produce variants, pass orally from person to person; in that case it too enters the folklorist's field of study. This is the folktale's first trait—still not specific to it but one that should be stressed and underlined.

Furthermore, the folktale is characterized as a story; that is, it is a narrative genre. This trait is not decisive either, because there are other folk narrative genres that differ from folktales (the *bylina*, the ballad). As I said, the word *skazka* itself suggests something that is *told*. This means that the people perceive the folktale primarily as a narrative genre.

Another trait Nikiforov noted is that the folktale is told for entertainment. It belongs among the entertainment genres. The great Russian critic Vissarion Belinsky noted this trait, and no doubt correctly, although it is sometimes disputed. Thus, for example, Vladimir Anikin asserts that the folktale pursues educational goals.²⁹ We cannot dispute the idea that it has an educational significance, but to say that it was created with the goal of education is definitely wrong. The folktale's entertaining character does not by any means exclude deep ideational content. When Nikiforov speaks of the folktale's entertaining significance, this means that it serves primarily aesthetic functions, that it is a genre with artistic goals and is thus distinct from all the forms of ritual poetry,

which have applied significance, the *legenda*, which has moralizing goals, or the tradition (*predanie*), whose purpose is to convey information.

The trait of entertainment is connected with another folktale trait advanced by Nikiforov, namely, the unusualness of the events (fantastic, miraculous, or everyday) that make up its contents. Soviet scholarship set apart this trait of the folktale long ago, but Nikiforov added the essential point that its unusualness is understood not only as a fantastic unusualness (as in the wonder tale) but also as an everyday unusualness, which allows us to include novellistic folktales under the definition. He is undoubtedly correct in noting this trait, although I must say that it is more probably typical of folklore and the epic in general rather than one specific to the folktale. Epic folklore does not speak of general, everyday, workaday things. That may sometimes serve as a background for subsequent events, which are always unusual. But unusualness in the *bylina* is different from that in the folktale. There is a specifically folktale unusualness, and this should become the topic of our study.

Finally, the last trait Nikiforov advances is the folktale's special compositional and stylistic structure. We can unite style and composition under the common term of poetics and say that the folktale is distinguished by its own specific poetics. Let us add on our own account that this very trait is decisive in defining the folktale. This is the trait Nikiforov first advanced, recognizing it as a scholarly achievement. True, here one unknown (the folktale) is reduced to another unknown (its poetics), because the study of folktale poetics is still far from adequate. Nonetheless, the given definition is not merely a verbal formula. It points the way toward a real, concrete discovery of the concept of the folktale. By defining the folktale's nature through its poetics, we know what direction to follow in our ongoing studies; we must make a detailed study of folktale poetics and the regularities of that poetics.

In this way, we have a definition that reflects contemporary views of the folktale and enables further study.

One trait, however, is insufficiently developed, although Nikiforov did note it. This is that listeners do not believe the veracity of what is told. The folk themselves view folktales as inventions; we see this not only in the word's etymology but also in the Russian saying "A tale's made up, a song's the truth" (*Skazka—skladka, pesnia—byl'*). They do not believe the actuality of the events laid out in the folktale, and this is the folktale's fundamental, decisive trait. Belinsky himself noted it when, in comparing the *bylina* with the folktale, he wrote: "At the basis of the second kind of verbal work (i.e., the folk-

tale) we always notice a second thought, we notice that the narrator himself does not believe what he is saying and is laughing inside at his own story. This is particularly true of Russian folktales.³⁰

This is an essential trait of the folktale, although at first glance it may seem to be a trait that belongs not to the folktale but to the listeners. They are free to believe or not. Children, for example, do believe. Nevertheless, the folktale is a deliberate poetic fiction.³¹

Jacob Grimm tells an interesting story. One tale from the Grimms' collection ends with the words *Wer's nicht glaubt, zahl't'n Thaler*. This German saying means, "If you don't believe, pay me a thaler." One day a girl rang at the door of his apartment. When Grimm opened the door, she said, "Here's a thaler. I don't believe your tales." At that time a thaler was a large gold coin.

Not everyone agrees that the people do not believe in folktales. In his book *The Russian Folkloric Tale*, Vladimir Anikin says, "There was a time when people believed in the veracity of folktale narrations just as unshakably as we believe in a historical documentary story or sketch today."³² This is not at all correct. True, there are individual cases where an object, plot, or story from folktale narrations entered the contents of non-folktale formations and those stories were believed. For example, Herodotus tells about how a crafty thief robbed the Egyptian king Rampsismit and married his daughter. Thanks to comparative materials, we now know quite well that this is a folktale. But Herodotus did not know, and he believed that it had all really happened. In our chronicles the tradition of the miraculous jelly of Belgorod represents a folktale from a cycle about fooling someone from another tribe, but the chronicler believed the tale. Even the enlightened Englishman Samuel Collins, Ivan the Terrible's doctor, passes on in his book about Russia the tale about Ivan the Terrible and the thieves, not realizing that it is a folktale; he conveys it as historical fact. Individual cases of people who believe in the veracity of the narration have occurred, but they are not typical of the folktale and its listeners among the broad mass of the people. If people believe a narration, then they are not taking it as a folktale.

Anikin needs this kind of assertion to prove that the folktale is realistic. It depicts reality, and therefore people believe it. The folktale consciously depicts reality, according to Anikin: "A millennium of original history opens before us through the folktale."³³ However, it is enough to pick up any textbook of history to see that this is not so. If Anikin says, "The folktale reproduces reality by means of fantastic invention," then this is nothing more than a paradox.³⁴

Everything I have stated here gives us a particular and, for now, approximate impression of the folktale's specificity. To understand it more exactly, we must distinguish the folktale from adjacent genres, which I will now proceed to do.

THE FOLKTALE AND ADJACENT GENRES

The Folktale and Myth

To distinguish the folktale from related genres, we must find some trait that produces this distinction. I will choose the trait that has been perceived from the very beginning of scholarly examination of the folktale, namely its implausibility, hence also disbelief in the reality of the events it narrates. This is not an external or accidental trait but one that is deeply internal and organic.

Correspondingly, the whole sphere of folk prose can be separated into two great divisions: stories people do not believe (all kinds of folktales belong here) and stories people do believe or used to believe. The latter type includes all the other genres of folk prose. What are those genres?

The folktale has been studied in relation to genres that presumably preceded its appearance. Among these, we must turn first of all to myth. The folktale's relationship to myth presents a great problem, one that has occupied scholarship from the beginning to the present day. For the moment we will not ask whether the folktale and myth are genetically related to one another. The vagueness of ideas about myth led the so-called mythological school to a dead end, as they asserted the invariable descent of the folktale from myth. For Soviet folkloric scholars the myth is a formation from a much earlier stage than the folktale. The most primitive, most archaic of all peoples known to us had myths at the moment they were discovered by Europeans, but they did not have folktales as we understand the word. This too gives us the right to say that myth represents an earlier stage of development than the folktale.

The folktale signifies entertainment, whereas myth has sacral meaning. Nonetheless, scholarship on the folktale's relationship to myth has shown extreme disagreement. The German scholar Erich Bethe writes, "Myth, tradition, folktale are scholarly concepts. In essence all three words signify one and the same thing—simply a story."³⁵ Here the boundary between myth and folktale is completely erased, and erased as a matter of principle. Wilhelm Wundt considers the myths of aboriginal peoples to be folktales and creates

a special term for them, *Mythenmärchen*.³⁶ Stories in circulation among aboriginal peoples are called myths (e.g., by Brinton),³⁷ folktales (Cushing),³⁸ legends (Rand),³⁹ or traditions (Boas),⁴⁰ or they are described by other terms (traditions, stories). The vagueness of this situation cannot be tolerated.

We shall describe as myths those stories of aboriginal peoples that are not, perhaps, presented as reality (this cannot always be confirmed or denied, because we see here a different type of thinking; the boundaries between invention and reality may not be fully recognized) but that are admitted as reality of a higher order; they partake of a sacred character. Among aboriginal peoples such stories have religious and magical significance. They may be part of or accompany rituals. Like rituals, myths are also intended to act on nature. Stories about animals, for example, are meant to bring good luck in hunting. Other myths are meant to act on the weather or to heal illnesses. They represent an original form of science, an attempt to explain the world, the origin of the universe or of parts of it—rivers, mountains, animals. Myths of this kind can be called etiological.

A completely different formation is presented by the myths of peoples who already know gods (Greek, Scandinavian, Hindu, and others). Classical mythology can serve as an example. When gods appear in human culture and human consciousness, a myth becomes a story about deities or demigods. The mythology of antiquity is one of the great achievements of human culture in the richness of its plots, its beauty, depth, and harmony. Unfortunately, this mythology is still little known in Russia. There are popular retellings, but popular retellings cannot replace the originals.⁴¹ To give some impression of that mythology and also to cast more light on the difference between the folk-tale and myth, I will linger on one model, the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. The plot of this myth has passed into European culture; Glück's remarkable opera *Orfeo ed Euridice* is based on it.

The myth is Greek. We do not know the Greek texts or how this myth was told among the people. It is mentioned by Aeschylus and in Euripides's *Agonists* and is reflected in representative art. We know it best from Roman literary treatments. There are treatments in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and in Virgil's *Georgics* (a georgic is a didactic poem about the charms of agriculture). Let me remind you that Virgil is the one who Dante, in his *Divine Comedy*, takes as his wise guide through the underworld. Roman literary treatments of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth must be recognized as splendid and highly artistic. I will give a retelling summarized from all the sources accessible to me.

Orpheus was a singer. His mother was Calliope, the Muse of epic song. Sometimes Apollo was called his father. Apollo gave him a lyre. When he played and sang, the birds would fly up, fish would swim to him, and the beasts of the forest would run to him. Even the trees and cliffs would listen to him.

Compare with the hero of the *Kalevala*, Veinemeinen. Consider rune 41, p. 284. In the end: the tears are pearls.⁴²

Orpheus's wife was the naiad Eurydice. The naiads are female inhabitants of flowing water: springs and wells, rivers, lakes. They correspond to the Russian *rusalki* but as a rule are not malevolent; on the contrary, they are benevolent creatures distinguished by beauty and appeal. Eurydice was strolling in a flowering meadow with her friends, nymphs and dryads. (The nymphs are daughters of Zeus; they live, according to Homer, in the mountains, in groves, and on the shores of lakes and rivers. The dryads live in trees.) Such meadows always seem particularly beautiful to the Greeks. The natural landscape of Greece is the sea, valleys, and mountains, rocky and severe; therefore green meadows are the Greeks' most beloved landscape. Their favorite flower is the narcissus. The shepherd-god Aristaeus was struck by the beauty of Eurydice and chased her. She fled and did not notice that she had stepped on a snake. The snake bit her, and she fell down dead. I cite Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, X, 8–10):

The young woman,
In the company of naiads wandering the green meadow,
Fell down dead, wounded in the heel by the snake's tooth.

Her friends—nymphs, naiads, dryads—mourned for her loudly. This means that all nature wept. Orpheus cried as well, and he sang. The birds and the clever deer listened to him. Virgil says:

He sang of her when the sun was rising,
He sang of her when the sun was setting.

But this could not bring back his beloved wife. So he decided to go down to the underworld, to the kingdom of shadows, to the ruler of that kingdom, the gloomy god Hades and his spouse Persephone. He addressed him with a song:

I have tried to bear it, the immeasurable grief,
 Long have I struggled like a man.
 But love is breaking my heart.
 I cannot live without Eurydice.
 And now I beg you, terrible, holy deities . . .
 Give her up to me, my beloved wife,
 Release her and return to her the life
 That lost its flower too soon.
 But if this cannot be,
 Take me too into the number of the dead,
 I will never return without her.⁴³

And a miracle occurred. Everyone wept. The bloodless shades of the dead wept. Even the cheeks of the horrible Eumenides, whose hair was twined with dark-blue snakes, flowed with tears. Hades and Persephone, who had never known pity, felt it now. Persephone summoned the shade of Eurydice. This was a victory of love over death, pity over dispassion. But there was one condition:

Take her, but know this: only if you do not glance back
 At the one who will follow after you, only then will she
 Be yours. If you look back too soon,
 Then you will see her no more.

We already know that in folklore the prohibition is always violated. Ovid describes their return:

Here in mute silence both already moved up the slope,
 Up a dark steep path, swathed in unbroken gloom,
 And they were already not far from the earthly border—
 But fearing she might fall behind, and greedy to see her,
 He cast his eyes back, and at once his spouse disappeared.

Virgil has Eurydice say:

Both I, your unhappy wife, and you, Orpheus, are undone
 By your lack of reason! Here I am called back by merciless
 Fate, and my eyes, already clouding with sleep, flood with tears.

Farewell! The great night seizes me and bears me away,
 I can only hold out my powerless hand to you, but I
 May be yours no longer!⁴⁴

So this narration ends. There is another myth about Orpheus—but we will not dwell on it. Orpheus continued to mourn his beloved wife. He paid no attention to other women. For his scorn of women he was torn apart by the maenads. This piece is literary in its workmanship.

It is quite clear that we have before us in essence not a folktale but a myth, a sacred story, one that people believed to be real. The Greeks believed in the existence of the underworld, believed in the god Hades and the goddess Persephone, believed in the existence of naiads and nymphs and in the terrible Eumenides. The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice was sacred truth for them.

Myths are already alive in the earliest society. By the way, a myth resembling the antique myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is found among the North American Indians. The hero of this myth is not a singer but an ordinary man. When his wife dies, he carries out a purifying bath and penetrates alive into the kingdom of the dead. He succeeds, despite various obstacles, and brings back his wife.

As I have already said, when the gods appear in human consciousness and human culture, myth becomes a story about deities or semideities. This is the whole of Classical mythology. I need not recall the myths of Prometheus, Zeus's abduction of Europa, the Argonauts, and so on. In their plots, composition, and fundamental motifs, myths may coincide with the fairytale. Thus there are episodes in the myth of the Argonauts that correspond fairly closely to our folktales, but they represent myth, not folktales. Jason is sent to Colchis to get the Golden Fleece just as the hero in our folktales is sent over thrice-nice lands to seize golden marvels. King Aeëtes will let him have the fleece if Jason first withstands a test: he must plow a field with two bronze-legged fire-breathing bulls.

Here mention the episode with the golden fleece. Draw more folktale motifs from antiquity from Bolte-Polivka and Herodotus.

Jason is supposed to sow the teeth of a dragon, which will immediately grow into terrible warriors, and he must kill all of them. Aeëtes's daughter, Medea, falls in love with Jason and helps him. Jason manages to do

everything and flees with her in his ship. The king tries in vain to catch up with them.

All of this is a classical fairytale. Plowing a whole field and so on are difficult tasks. Medea is the princess-helper, as in many folktales. Finally, winning the wonders, winning the princess, flight and pursuit—all these are typical compositional motifs of the wonder tale. But Jason and the Argonauts is not a folktale but rather a sacred myth, despite all the resemblances between the compositional schemes. The contemporary folklorist cannot take a solely formal point of view. These myths were told with a purpose that was far from entertainment, although their plots were interesting. Myths were connected with cults. Cults were intended to act upon deities so they would help people. The difference between myths and folktales is thus a difference of social function. “The myth, having lost its social significance, becomes a folktale.”⁴⁵ Myth is a story of religious order; the folktale is aesthetic. Myth is an earlier formation; the folktale is a later one. In this way, myth and folktale are distinguished not so much in themselves but in how people approach them. This means that folkloristics is a science not just of plots, texts, but also of the role of plots in the social lives of peoples.

Byl', Bylichka, Byval'shchina

Stories with religious content were still being told not long ago among the Russian people, and in fairly large numbers and a variety of types at that. They are current in Western Europe to the present day. Can we consider such stories myths as well? Perhaps they should be considered folktales? They cannot be considered folktales according to the criterion we have given, because they are presented as reality and people are firmly convinced of their veracity. They also cannot be considered myths, because they do concern deities whose worship is elevated into a cult in the state religion. People distinguish them from folktales, and Russians call them *byl'*, *bylichka*, and *byval'shchina* (memorates), all based on the root *byt'* (to be), which suggests something that really *was*. These names tell us that people firmly believed in their reality. I will use the same terms. They are more successful than the vague term accepted in West European scholarship, *Mythische Sagen*. Memorates are stories that feature such figures as the forest spirit, the water spirit, the field spirit, the house spirit, the *rusalka*, the bathhouse spirit,⁴⁶ and so on—that is, demonic beings who exert their supernatural powers on human beings for good or evil. Stories about meetings with such beings also make up the contents of the *byl'*

(the forest spirit leads an old woman astray, brings her to his dwelling, and keeps her there as a nanny for his offspring). The subject of these stories can also be a person: not a living, natural person but rather a dead one, a ghost, a vampire, a werewolf, and so on. The subject may be nature, but not the nature that a person deals with in everyday life and has power over; rather, it is nature ruled by unknown powers, nature before which people are powerless, which they attempt to master using special magical means. For example, there are stories of ferns that flower on St. John's Eve. Stories of this kind are communicated not with aesthetic goals but with a certain tremor of horror and mystery, and people would never call them *skazki*. It is true that such stories are sometimes included in folktale collections, and they are in themselves valuable ethnographic and folkloric material, but they are not folktales. Dmitrii Sadovnikov includes more of this material than others, as he calls his collection *Folktales and Traditions of the Samara Region* (1881).⁴⁷ Sadovnikov understands the term *predaniia* (traditions) to mean precisely stories of this type. We find them in the collections of Afanas'ev, Nikolai Onchukov, Zelelin, Irina Karnaukhova, and others. Classifying memorates as folktales is a widespread error. Pushkin wrote of the folktale in *Ruslan and Liudmila*:

There are wonders there, there the forest spirit wanders,
Rusalka sits on the tree branches.⁴⁸

This means that Pushkin too considered these stories folktales. The mistake is completely understandable, given that in Pushkin's time there was still no differentiated concept of the folktale. The mistake continues to this very day. It is repeated in Iurii Sokolov's course on Russian folklore, where he includes memorates among the folktales.⁴⁹

Analyzing memorates is not part of our task. Their plots are completely distinct, as are their origins, manner of performance, and poetics, so much so that the memorate should be separated from the folktale and studied with different methods. It is placed with the folktale because of the lack of study of folktales and adjacent genres; this cannot be supported. The Grimm brothers did not consider memorates folktales. They did not include any in their folktale collection, but they did give them a place in their *German Legends*, under the not entirely suitable name *Orts-Sagen* (place legends), because stories of this type usually have exact locations. Antti Aarne did not include memorates in his index of folktales either. Nikolai Andreev added an outline for a future index of stories of the memorate type to Aarne's index.⁵⁰ Andreev himself, not

entirely successfully (and evidently following Sadovnikov), calls them *predaniia*. However, this schema does not display a sufficiently precise understanding of the genre, because, alongside stories about dead people, devils, witches, nature and house spirits, and so on, he also suggests including stories about robbers, which, from our point of view, do not belong here at all, and also historical traditions, which represent a different genre, as we shall see.

In 1961 a remarkable index came out, compiled by the Finnish scholar Lauri Simonsuuri, under the title *An Index of the Types and Motifs of Finnish Mythological Narratives*.⁵¹ This is a precise, logical, and superbly organized index of what we call memorates or, in Simonsuuri's terminology, "mythological narratives." In Russia this genre has received little attention from either collectors or researchers.⁵² In Western Europe, on the other hand, the genre is intensively studied and problems connected to its study are discussed at international congresses. Several thousand texts have been collected in Finland. In recent years Russian expeditions (including student expeditions) have brought back new and interesting materials from this naturally moribund genre. It is obvious that these memorates are not folktales. We must qualify this, however, by saying that some of them may be transitional, borderline, or unclear cases. I have distinguished memorates from folktales by the qualities of their characters (nature spirits and so on) and their relationship to reality, that is, by two features at once. But their features may not coincide. Belief in the beings depicted in these stories might be lost, whereas the story remains as a pure invention. It is true that such cases are rare, because loss of belief usually causes disappearance of the story. But such cases are possible, they exist, and then we are dealing with intermediate formations, whose generic belonging must be decided on the basis of each case separately. The *byl'* may turn into an anecdote, as well as into a folktale. In its social function the memorate is a story with religious content; moreover, here it is still living, an active, pagan religion. The folktale, on the other hand, is a purely artistic story with no religious function at the present.

This shows us that until recently there were no precise differentiated concepts of the genres of Russian folk prose, even in Russian scholarship. I propose separating memorates—on the basis of their images from a pre-Christian religion that was still alive at the moment of the story's performance and on the basis of belief in the reality of the events described—into a separate genre, distinct from folktales. Study of the poetics and manner of performance of this genre will show its deep distinction from the folktale, whereas a historical study will show its different origins.

The Legend

We must also distinguish the folktale from the *legenda*. The people have no term to define this genre. *Legenda* (legend) is not a native Russian word; it comes from church Latin. Latin *legenda* is the plural of a neuter participle (meaning literally “what undergoes reading”), and it was later incorrectly understood as a word of feminine gender in the singular. Like the memorate, the *legenda* has contents that are believed, but whereas the *bylichka* is composed of living remnants of pre-Christian folk belief, the contents of the *legenda* are Christian. The characters in the *legenda* are figures from the Old and New Testaments: Adam and Eve, the prophet Elijah, Solomon, Christ and his apostles (among whom Peter and Judas are especially popular), and also numerous saints. But holy beings from Christian religion are not the only characters in the *legenda*. There may also be people who have committed some grievous sin against fundamental Christian morality (which usually leads to the punishment and then to the sinners’ moral salvation and cleansing) or else people who are taken alive to the other world, to heaven, hell, and so on.

The *legenda* differs from the folktale not only in its characters but also in its relationship to what is narrated. Its goal is not entertainment, but moralizing. The *legenda* is close in many ways to spiritual verses. Its origins are distinct from those of the folktale as well. The *legenda*, which reflects Christianity, could only appear relatively late, along with Christianity. If we move to non-Russian material, then we can assert that the *legenda* in general arises within a system of monotheistic religions. Thus, alongside Christian *legendy*, we can speak of Muslim or Buddhist ones. The Russian *legenda* comes in part from Byzantium, the source of Russian Christianity. Many legends have a literary origin and recall the Apocrypha.

The particular poetics of the *legenda* depends on all these particularities. Here its laws differ from the laws of the folktale. It is true that the *legenda* sometimes reveals the same compositional system as the folktale and that moralizing, pious tendencies are occasionally found in the folktale. However, an intent and detailed study of the folktale and the *legenda* will show that we are dealing with two different formations here. Afanas’ev was completely correct to separate *legendy* into a separate collection, *Russian Folk Legendy*, rather than putting them in his collection of Russian folktales.⁵³ Nonetheless, not everyone recognizes the division of the *legenda* as a particular genre. Aarne places them in his catalog of tale types, calling them “legendary narratives,” and sets aside a hundred numbers for them (750–849). A monographic study

of individual plots will show which pertain to the folktale, which to the *legenda*, and which to other genres.

As one example, I will pause to discuss the *legenda* of the two great sinners. It has been thoroughly studied by Nikolai Andreev.⁵⁴ Andreev's book grew from a seminar paper at Kazan' University, written under the direction of Professor P. P. Mindalev and subsequently expanded. The study uses the methods of the Finnish school. At that time the tale of the two great sinners was known in forty-three variants, thirty-seven of them from the Slavic peoples. A person commits some kind of grievous sin. In most cases the sinner is a robber, but there are other treatments. In a few cases this plot is related to the myth of Oedipus: The sinner kills his own father and marries his mother without knowing what he is doing. In another case (used by Dostoevsky and known in other tale types), the sinner, after taking communion, does not swallow the wafer but spits it out and shoots at it. The wafer begins to bleed. In most cases, however, the sinner is a terrible robber who has killed ninety-nine people, looted monasteries, stolen things, and so on. The robber's conscience suddenly awakens. In most cases this happens for no reason ("The robber stole for many years and then got the idea of repenting"),⁵⁵ but narrators motivate the impulse in various ways. He discovers, for example, what kind of punishment awaits him in the other world, or, as in Gogol's "Terrible Vengeance," he is unable to die: Death does not come, but his soul is in torment. Death will not take him, and the earth refuses to receive him. Sometimes he is pursued by terrible dreams, and so on. He goes in despair to some elder or hermit, to ask him how to pray his sin away. Usually the elder puts a penance on him (to water a burnt log until it begins to grow; the burnt wood is often rooted on a mountain, water must be brought from a river flowing at the base of the mountain, and the sinner must go there and back on his knees). There are other forms of penance (e.g., tending a flock of black sheep until they all turn white), but the one I mention is encountered most frequently. The sinner spends many years in penance, but the burnt log does not grow. But then an even greater sinner rides past him, and he kills him. At that moment the burnt log starts to bloom. Who is this second man, the greater sinner? A lawyer, an extortionist, a tobacco seller, a merchant, a rich peasant exploiter, a priest. In one Belarusian variant the story runs: "He goes along and sees many, many people in the field. They are plowing, harrowing." We should add here that the action is set on Easter, considered the holiest day in the year, and that people are not supposed to work that day. I cite further: "What could this mean?" he thinks. "The first day of Easter, such a holy day that even

the birds are celebrating, not weaving their nests, and here christened people are laboring." Coming closer, the sinner sees the overseer walking among the laborers, shouting and driving them with his whip. The peasants weep and complain, but "the overseer bellows as if he's damned, strikes them with his whip." The angry sinner picks up a stone, hits the overseer's head and shatters his skull. For this murder all his previous ones are forgiven. He finds death at last, dies on the spot, and his soul is saved (or, at the moment of the murder the burnt log bursts into bloom).⁵⁶

The Belarusian variant is probably one of the most powerful. The sinner is saved because he kills another, even greater sinner. This second sinner is always a landholding noble, a merchant, a greedy peasant exploiter, a blood-sucker, an overseer, and so on. In Ukrainian variants he is an estate manager who is hitting graves with a stick, to drive even dead serfs to work. There are other cases, but the given form is predominant.

Nikolai Andreev's study has a purely formal character. It does not touch on the ideological contents of this folktale-*legenda*. Its idea is fairly clear. Killing a serf keeper is not only not a sin, it is a good deed, for which any sins at all, even the most grievous, are forgiven. This idea breaks through the multitude of genuinely Christian traditional concepts of sin, repentance, and salvation of the soul in the other world. This plot does not have worldwide distribution. It was born of Russian life with its terrible forms of serfdom, the peasantry's religious concepts, and the growth of indignation and protest. These contradict religious concepts and essentially replace them, although of course the peasants were not yet conscious of it at that time.

This plot is used by Nekrasov (part II, ch. 2).⁵⁷ According to Aarne it is a folktale, type A-T 756 C.

This legend of the two sinners (combined with another, about God's godchild) was also used by Leo Tolstoy. Here God's godchild is guilty of a person's death and repents, watering a burnt log. An even greater sinner passes him three times: a terrible robber who sings merry songs, with the songs sounding merrier when he has killed more people. But God's godchild does not kill him, as in the folk *legenda* Nekrasov uses, but teaches him and sets him on the path of truth: He persuades him not to ruin himself but to change his life. This second sinner repents and becomes a righteous man. Thus Tolstoy uses the folk plot in his own way as a lesson in his doctrine of nonresistance to evil by force, which is not at all present in the folk treatment.

The Skazanie or Predanie

There is one more genre that cannot be counted as a folktale, a genre we would most correctly call the *predanie* (legend, tradition) or the *skazanie* (tale, story, legend). Here we would place stories that are presented as historical truth and that sometimes even reflect or contain historical truth. If the legend is akin to the spiritual verse, then the *predanie* is to some extent kin to historical songs.

Skazaniia are stories that concern historical places or else historical personalities and events. The first kind is connected with a city, town, landmark, lake, burial mound, or the like. One of the most striking, artistic, and typical *skazanie* is the narrative of the drowned city of Kitezh. The second kind is connected with historical names: Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Stepan Razin, Emelian Pugachov, General Suvorov, and others. There is no firm boundary between the two kinds. Thus there are *predaniia* connected with places and persons at the same time, describing historical occurrences (wars with the Poles, Swedes, French, and so on). However, we must take care when ascribing folkloric material to the category of *skazaniia*. We have distinguished the given genre based on a certain category of character or of historical names or events. However, this trait is not always decisive. The decisive factor is the poetics of each genre, and the poetics of this genre has been studied even less than the poetics of others. Thus the presence of the name Ivan the Terrible in a story is not yet enough for us to take that story as a genuine historical *predanie*. We are better acquainted with the poetics of the folktale, and we will take some similar texts as examples of folktales, despite the presence of a historical name. Evidently, on closer study many *predaniia* or *skazaniia* of this kind can be described as anecdotes. Nonetheless we need the category of such a genre, with the caveat that its theoretical study still lies in the future. The Grimm brothers undertook one of the first attempts at a theoretical definition of this genre in the preface to their *Deutsche Sagen*. They called the corresponding category *Geschichtliche Sagen* (historical sagas).

It follows that there can be no “historical folktales” in the sense that we can talk about historical songs or historical *predaniia*. It is true that Erna Pomerantseva accepted this term in her textbook on Russian folklore, under Pëtr Bogatyrev’s editorial guidance, but she subsequently rejected the term and the concept.

Here is a model of a *predanie*: “Arakcheev was a very strict master—the dog! He had a lover who practiced black magic, who had power over him. She read in her books and knew everything that went on. For a long time

they wanted to kill her, but they couldn't because of the books. Once they stole her books and ran to get her; she reached for her books but they weren't there. That's how she died. Arakcheev gave it all up then, all his business, and ran away.⁷⁵⁸

This genre is diverse; it not only allows further internal subdivision, it requires it.

The Folk Book

The folk book is closely related to the folktale, but it is nonetheless a completely different genre. The term *folk book* demands clarification. In Western Europe this term describes printed tales of folk provenance, reworked in novellistic form. They began to appear in Germany in the sixteenth century. They include works such as *Faust*, *Fortunato*, *Robert the Devil*, and *La Belle Melusine*. The young Friedrich Engels wrote a specialized article on these books.⁵⁹

The folk book was a product of medieval urban culture, when the printing press took over the circulation of epic folkloric genres and reshaped them to suit middle-class tastes.

The folk book existed in Russia too, although the term did not catch on as a description of Russian materials. From Pypin's times, the *povest'* (a long tale or novella) was the accepted term.⁶⁰ Growing up on a folkloric basis, the folk book evolves into the bourgeois *povest'* and gives stimulus to the novel. Its sources are exceedingly varied, as varied as the folk books themselves. They are often the products of international folk connections and influences. Thus typical folk books include *Eruslan Lazarevich*, *Bova Korolevich*, *Meliuzina*, and *Peter Gold Keys*. They are of folktale descent, Eastern and Western. But some folk books have other origins. Their composition is complex. They are adjacent to hagiography, the *legenda*, and the literary tale. The folk book, which arose on a folkloric basis, may return to folklore and be narrated as a folktale. A significant part of the woodcut *lubok* folktales, which were published in Russia in large quantities in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, can obviously be considered folk books. Folk books elaborated a characteristic language with splendid literary qualities, a special style, and special literary devices. Their language and their style influenced the folktale; some folktales are narrated in literary language. Folk books were exceedingly popular in Russia. Identifying the folk book with the folkloric tale is a methodological error. Yet it would be just as erroneous to study the folk book without regard to the

folktale. They are adjacent, related, and intersecting genres; each, however, has its own internal particularity, historical fate, and forms of circulation.

Skazy

After the revolution a new term appeared in our scholarship: the *skaz*. The essence and contents of this term have caused many debates. Contemporary life is so vivid, so rich in historical and other events, that every person who is drawn into life as it unfolds and does not lack the gifts of observation, curiosity, and even some small talent for narration will have something to tell about. Here we see stories about things people saw, heard, or lived through, about the heroics of our era, about life now and before, stories of heroes of the civil war and World War II, recollections of meetings with great civic figures of our era, and stories of dramatic occurrences of all kinds. Should all that be recorded? Or should we perhaps record only folktales, memorates about the forest spirit, or historical traditions of the distant past? It is obvious that such stories should be both recorded and studied, although only, of course, if they are interesting in content and artistic in their form. The famous mourner Irina Fedoseva told El'pidifor Barsov her whole life story, and Barsov did well to record it. Her story is no less valuable than her lamentations. It is a deeply artistic, truthfully realistic story. The art of narrating something seen and lived was always present among the people, but it underwent particular development after the 1917 revolution. One great storyteller of the Soviet era, Filipp Gospodarev, told Leningrad folklorist Nikolai Novikov many interesting episodes from his life: his childhood, landowners, prisons, repression under the tsars. The style of his reminiscences recalls Gorky's autobiographical works. If Gospodarev had received an education, he could have become an important realist writer.

I have cited examples of autobiographical *skazy*, but the field of the *skaz*, its form and its contents, is much broader. *Skazy* do not belong among the folkloric tales, and they are not always folklore. But folklorists who record and collect such stories are nonetheless doing the right thing. So, for example, Semën Mirer and V. N. Borovik collected reminiscences and stories from workers who were present on the square at Finland Station (Lenin Square) when Lenin arrived in Petrograd in 1917.⁶¹ Saratov folklorist Tat'iana Akimova organized an expedition following the steps of civil war commander Vasiliï Chapaev's division and collected a whole book of stories about him. These

sometimes intermix reality with artistic invention, but they are always interesting from many points of view.⁶²

The word *skaz* may have several possible meanings in Russian. We must distinguish other kinds of *skazy* from the *skazy* described here. For example, there are the so-called “secret *skazy* of the Ural workers.” These are semifantastic or wholly fantastic miners’ stories of meetings with mountain spirits; some of the miners believed in the stories’ reality. There are realistic layers in some of the stories, describing miners’ encounters with entrepreneurs. Pavel Bazhov heard stories of this kind and reworked them artistically into his story “The Malachite Casket.”

In belles lettres the word *skaz* was used, for example, by Nikolai Leskov, who gave his story “Lefty” the subtitle “The *Skaz* of Cross-Eyed Lefty from Tula, and of the Steel Flea.” By using the word *skaz*, Leskov meant to underline the folk-narrative nature of his plot.

THUS THE QUANTITY OF genres of folk prose is fairly large and various. Summing up what I have said about the genres that are close to the folktale, but still distinct from it, we can boil our observations down to the following (citing a vivid indicative example for each genre):

- The **myth** of Orpheus
- A **memorate** about the forest spirit
- The **legenda** of the two great sinners
- A **predanie** about Emilian Pugachov
- The **folk book** *Eruslan Lazarevich*
- The **skaz** about Chapaev

These genres do not exhaust the field of folk prose, all of which is customarily placed in folktale collections. Nonetheless, distinguishing them gives us some points of orientation as we start to find our way in this complicated field. The division of genres I offer has the drawback of essentially relying on the characters of the heroes, not on the genres’ internal structure and poetics. However, I presume that a study of the poetics of the genres indicated justifies their division. Of course, future research will contribute many other changes and clarifications. I must point out that the division here is carried out on Russian material and uses Russian terminology. I cannot include international terminology because there is no such international terminology

currently in existence. Thus the German word *Sage* is applied to all the genres established here (with the exception of the folktale) and besides that to the heroic epos; the word *legenda* is also used to signify all the genres described here, and it also signifies Classical myths, especially those in English. Russian terminology allows more exact and fine-grained definitions. In everyday language we too say “The *Legenda* of Stenka Razin” and so forth, but scholarly language does not permit such mixing.

The Anecdote

At first glance, the folktale’s relationship to the anecdote is not entirely clear. The anecdote essentially comes down to the unexpected, witty denouement of a brief narrative. The structure of anecdotes does not violate the generic traits of the folktale. Aarne includes anecdotes in a special rubric in his index of folktales, and in this case he is right in principle. He sets apart rubrics such as anecdotes about country bumpkins, spouses, women and girls, crafty people, priests, and so on. However, Aarne sometimes mistakenly includes long and complicated plots, such as “Nikola Duplenskii” or “Terentii the Guest,” for example, in his list of anecdotes. Some of the narratives he placed among the anecdotes are unquestionably folktales. Afanas’ev similarly includes anecdotes in his collection of folktales. He combines a number of witty brief stories under the title “Folk Anecdotes” (numbers 453–527). However, the stories’ brevity is a relative term and not a dependable feature. In the broader sense, the anecdote can include longer stories, such as the ones Afanas’ev places in his *Obscene Folktales*. In the preface to this edition Afanas’ev notes their sparkling wit and simple spirit. We may ask whether anecdotes have to do not only with the plots Aarne assigns to anecdotes (such as tales about country bumpkins and deceived spouses) and not only with folktales of the “obscene” type but also with a whole series of other tales that may be considered close to anecdotes. Here we find tales about crafty thieves, swindlers of all kinds, evil or unfaithful wives, lazy people, and so on. There is no basis for separating the whole sphere of folk humor from the folktale. Such stories can be combined as a particular kind of folktale, with a specific structure. Here we might question the folk anecdote’s relationship to the literary anecdote, but this is just part of the question of the relationship of literary and folk literature. At the same time, anecdotes that were passed on orally in an urban sphere among the upper classes undoubtedly deserve study as well (see Pushkin’s collection of anecdotes, for example), although they do not represent

folklore as we now understand it. However, not everyone shares this view. Aleksandr Nikiforov writes, in his introduction to Orest Kapitsa's anthology, "The anecdote as such is distinct from the folktale. It has always had a strictly humorous purpose."⁶³ Nikiforov later dwells on the anecdote's folkloric particularities, but in our view, as I noted, they do not exclude the generic traits of the folktale.

Thus, unlike other genres examined here, anecdotes can be considered part of the sphere of the folktale, but there are anecdotes that cannot be counted here. The criterion in this case may be social: Folk anecdotes (i.e., anecdotes that arise and circulate in a peasant milieu) represent one form of the everyday folktale, whereas historical and other anecdotes, collected and exchanged in urban circles, have no relationship to folktales.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE FOLKTALE

The survey we have carried out here lets us orient ourselves among the genres of Russian oral prose and distinguish the folktale from them.

But this is not enough for study of the folktale itself. We must establish what types of folktales exist in general.

Once we distinguish the folktale from adjacent and related genres, we must bring folktale material itself into a system. I have already indicated that the world of the folktale is exceedingly manifold, varied, and mobile. Classification is important so that we can bring not only order and system into the colorful world of the folktale but also a purely cognitive significance. Combining heteronomic phenomena in a single series will lead to further errors. Therefore we must strive to combine folktale formations of the same type correctly. Various types of folktale differ not just in their external traits, the character of their plots, heroes, poetics, ideology, and so on. They also turn out to have a completely different ancestry and history and to demand different approaches in their study. Therefore correct classification is of prime scholarly significance. At the same time, we must admit that to this day Russian scholarship possesses no generally accepted classification of folktales. In Afanas'ev's historiographic survey, listed in the following paragraphs, we shall see what attempts have been made. No one of them can satisfy us completely. In any case, these attempts are nothing compared to the elegant classifications in the biological sciences (zoology and botany) or even in linguistics. This is because scholars have not yet found the decisive trait that could serve as the

basis of divisions. Given the current state of scholarship, we must say that this trait ought to be the poetics of different kinds of folktales. A classification of this type would be genuinely scientific, and it would have the cognitive significance mentioned earlier. But the poetics of individual kinds of folktales has been as little studied as the poetics of the folktale as a whole. Therefore distinguishing types and varieties of folktales from the general repertoire encounters the same difficulties as distinguishing folktales from other genres of folk prose. Nonetheless the question should be resolved at least preliminarily, as a work in progress. We must recognize Aleksandr Afanas'ev's attempt as the best so far.

Afnas'ev was the first Russian scholar who encountered the compelling need to put an enormous and motley body of folktales in order. The first edition of his folktales in 1855–64 (we will speak of it later in more detail) had a somewhat chaotic appearance. Material was published in installments as it came into the publisher's hands. Not only folktales of one type, but even variants of one and the same plot were scattered through various volumes of this edition. When the first edition was complete, however, Afanas'ev perceived the need for some kind of order, and the second edition arranged the tales systematically (1873), although he did not live to see it (he died in 1871). Afanas'ev did not divide his collection into parts and did not give titles to the sections. If we do this for him, we obtain the following picture:

- Tales about animals (nos. 1–86), followed by a few folktales about objects (nos. 87 and 88) (e.g., “The Bladder, the Straw, and the Bast Shoe”), plants (nos. 89 and 90) (e.g., “The Mushrooms Go to War” and “The Turnip”), and the elements (nos. 91–94) (e.g., “Frost, Sun, and Wind” and “The Sun, the Frost, and the Raven”).
- Wonder tales, that is, mythological, fantastic folktales (nos. 95–307).
- Folktales drawn from *byliny* (nos. 308–316) (e.g., “Il'ia Muromets and Nightingale,” “Vasilii Buslaevich,” and “Alyosha Popovich”).
- Historical *skazaniia* (nos. 317 and 318) (e.g., “About the Tatar Khan Mamai” and “Alexander of Macedonia”).
- Novellistic or everyday tales (no. 319 and the like).
- Memorates (no. 351 and others), that is, tales about dead people, witches, the forest spirit, and so on.
- Folk anecdotes (nos. 453–527).
- *Dokuchnye* (tiresome tales) (nos. 528–532).
- *Pribautki* (humorous sayings) (nos. 533–547).

Looking attentively at these categories, we can easily discern a certain lack of order, but that is easily resolved. Then the virtues of the classification become apparent. From our point of view, historical *skazaniia* and retellings of *byliny* do not belong among the folktales. The tiresome tales and humorous sayings are not folktales either, although they are of course close to them and may be included in folktale collections. The memorates fall in part among the everyday folktales, but they are easily distinguished from them. Aside from these imperfections, we get an elegant classification, including these major categories:

- Folktales about animals
- Folktales about people
 - (a) wonder tales
 - (b) novellistic tales

This schema is not suitable for African folktales. Tales there do not distinguish between people and animals.⁶⁴

We could add smaller categories, represented by one or two cases, to these larger ones. Afanas'ev did not separate a class that has been established only recently: the cumulative or chain-form tale, such as "The Gingerbread Man" or "The Rooster Choked." This way, we obtain only four large classes: animal tales, wonder tales, novellistic tales, and cumulative tales. We too will adhere to this division. Afanas'ev took an empirical approach and found the proper approach, dividing the fundamental classes. Gradually, however, the need for a finer classification became obvious: subdivision into families, types, variants, and so on.

The Finnish School: Tale Types

A finer classification of tale types was suggested by Finnish scholar Antti Aarne. As folktale material was collected in Europe, it became more and more clear that the quantity of plots was relatively small, that many plots were international, and that in most cases new material represented variants of plots that had already been recorded and described. The question arose: Which plots are known to the European fairytale as a whole? Aarne answered this question. He took several major European collections and established the plots they included. Aarne described recurring plots as tale types. He compiled a

catalog of types and published it in German as *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen*. This index came out in 1910 in Helsinki, in the series *Folklore Fellows' Communications* (no. 3). Aarne performed an invaluable service for world scholarship. Every type of folktale received a name and a number. The type number represents a code, that is, a conditional symbol signifying the tale regardless of the language it is recorded in. These codes have the same significance as the international Latin names of plants and animals or as chemical symbols. Folktales cannot be signified through their titles alone, because different peoples and even the same people may tell one and the same tale with different titles. And the titles may say nothing about the tale's contents. Really, what stories lurk under the titles "Sit-at-Home Frolka," "Elena the Wise," and so on? We will see later that Dmitrii Zelenin or the brothers Boris and Iurii Sokolov, for example, were obliged to give brief retellings of texts in order to provide indexes to their collections. This approach is obviously impossible when one is dealing with thousands and thousands of texts. Now, to signify a tale, it is enough to indicate the tale type number. Thus tale 707 is "Tsar Saltan." Under this number we will find a brief description of the contents of the folktale. For example, when a collector returns from an expedition and wants to communicate what folktales he found, he simply describes them with Aarne's numbers. The same is done to describe collections.

Since Aarne's index first appeared, it has become common practice throughout the world to append a list of types to a collection. If a researcher is occupied with one plot, say, "The Little Hump-Backed Horse," he has no need to read whole collections. He looks to see whether a certain collection includes type 531, and he knows at once whether the folktale he wants is present or absent in any collection in any language. The numerical system has even greater significance in describing archival materials and in compiling catalogs of tales preserved in an archive. I remember how I once turned to the Pushkin House archive while I was studying the tale of Never-Laugh. They graciously allowed me to examine any of their manuscript materials, but they could not tell me whether a certain tale was in the archive. This has changed now in a fundamental way. It is enough to look into the catalog, compiled according to Aarne's system, to establish at once whether a given tale is present in an archive, and, if it is, then in precisely which folder, in what collection, and on what page.

Aarne's catalog has received worldwide distribution and has become a part of international scholarship. It has been translated into many European languages. Professor Nikolai Andreev translated it into Russian under the

title *An Index of Folktale Plots According to the System of Aarne*. This translation was published in 1929 by the Folktale Commission of the State Russian Geographical Society.⁶⁵ Andreev equipped the index with bibliographic references to the newest Russian collections. Thus, if a researcher is studying "The Frog Princess," he will find a list of Russian variants of this tale in the collections Andreev examined under tale type 402.

The quantity of plots turns out to be strikingly small. Aarne provided about 2,400 numbers for his index. In fact, there are fewer plots than this Aarne understood, of course, that he had not exhausted the material, that others might find new types he had not foreseen. Therefore he left empty places in his numeration, blanks that could be filled in afterward. Thus, for example, after type 130 comes type 150. Twenty numbers are left free to be filled in the future. In point of fact, Aarne established fewer than 1,000 types. This way of distributing material makes it possible to supplement the index without breaking up and violating the order that has come into worldwide use, and researchers and publishers have used it widely. For example, when Andreev translated the index into Russian, he made several additions based on Russian material. Scholars from other countries have done the same. The supplements brought a certain lack of coordination and demanded accounting and reordering. This was done by American scholar Stith Thompson, who translated the index into English and took into account all the additions that had been made up to that time.⁶⁶ His translation was reissued in 1964 with further additions. To the present day, this edition is the standard by which the whole world orients itself. Here there are published bibliographic indexes (among others, Andreev's index) for each number, and each type also includes the newest research on that type. In this way, any researcher can determine right away all the published variants for each tale and all the works published on it in all European languages.⁶⁷

These are the virtues of Aarne's index. Along with those, the index has many significant imperfections. Folkloristics has advanced significantly over the years, and this index already fails to satisfy contemporary requirements. We are compelled to use it for lack of a better one. I will not delve here into a detailed critique of the index; I will indicate only the most important imperfections.

Aarne did not define anywhere what is understood by the term *type* (Russian scholarship does not use this term). On the one hand, Aarne understands a type to mean a series of tales united by a common character. Thus type 1525 is called "The Crafty Thief." This type includes the most various plots (but

far from all plots) about crafty thieves. This type is divided into subtypes (A, B, C, and so on), which is not done in other cases. The concept of a type is understood more broadly than the concept of a plot. On the other hand, sometimes fine distinctions of motif are understood as a type. Thus numbers 1000–1199 are given to tales about a devil or giant who is fooled. Each trick of the hero against a stupid devil receives its own number: A threat to make waves on a lake comes under type 1045, a racing contest has number 1012, a contest with throwing an oak log represents type 1063, and so on. Thus a whole folktale (Aleksandr Pushkin's "Balda") is broken up into parts, whereas the tale as a whole is not given.

Another imperfection of this index is the inconsistency of classification and its poor fit with the material. Thus wonder tales are divided into classes: a marvelous opponent, a marvelous spouse, a marvelous task, a marvelous helper, a marvelous object, a marvelous power or knowledge (ability), and other magical tales. From the outside all this looks elegant and logical. But in fact this classification is arranged according to traits that do not exclude one another. For example, the marvelous task is usually carried out with the help of a marvelous helper. In the tale "Sivko-Burko" the marvelous task is to jump up to the window of the princess and kiss her, and it is achieved with the help of the marvelous horse, Sivko-Burko.

One may point to several other imperfections in the classification. These mistakes are unacceptable from the scholarly point of view. Moreover, they create significant difficulties in using the index, namely, the categories are arranged in an entirely subjective way. To move from the index to the tale is easy, but the path from the tale to the index is very difficult. Collectors who wish to define their material according to Aarne must leaf through many pages and try out dozens of types before finding the necessary one. Thus the tale of the stepmother and stepdaughter falls into the class of the "magical task," but the tale "Cinderella," which, one would think, also involves a stepmother and stepdaughter, is found in the division of "magical helper." Nikolai Andreev was a virtuoso who could define any folktale instantly, but he could do this only because he knew the index by heart. A person who does not know it by heart is often placed in an impossible position. An alphabetical subject and name index to the typological index might offer a way out of that position. Stith Thompson set out to accomplish this.⁶⁸ If collectors working on a tale wish to define which type "Sivko-Burko" or "Tsar Saltan" or "The Frog Princess" belongs to, they look into the alphabetical index and

find what they need right away. Unfortunately, Andreev's Russian translation is not equipped with such an index.

To this day there is no scholarly classification of folktales. This is clear even if we examine only the attempts made in Russian folklore textbooks. Thus, for example, Iurii Sokolov's classification essentially comes down to dividing the following categories: wonder tales (nos. 320–330), tales about animals (nos. 330–335), cumulative tales (no. 335), realistic tales (nos. 335–342), folktale-*legendy* (no. 342), folktale-*byliny* (nos. 342 and 343), historical legends and *predaniia* (nos. 343 and 344), and religious *legendy* (nos. 344–347).⁶⁹ All these genres are included in the system of folktales. The mistakes in Sokolov's classification are fairly obvious. They represent a step backward compared to Afanas'ev's classification, which distinguished folktales from *legendy* and created two separate collections. The Grimm brothers did not consider historical legends or *predaniia*, and they too were right. The difference between Sokolov's "folktale-*legendy*" and "religious *legendy*" remains unclear. We will see later why *byliny* cannot be considered folktales.

How can we escape this position? Let us take the classes Afanas'ev established as the basis. We will make subdivisions not according to Aarne, but by uniting folktales into groups according to the relatedness of their plots as a whole.

As I have already stated, Afanas'ev recognized the existence of three large groups of folktales: (1) animal tales, (2) fantastic (mythological) or wonder tales, and (3) novellistic tales. Afanas'ev did not specify his classification anywhere. The enormous material itself fell naturally into these groups. We will adhere to the classes Afanas'ev observed, but we will do so for different reasons.