

Yershov, Pyotr. *Fearless Ivan and His Faithful Horse Double-Hump*. Retold by Jack Zipes. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2018. Table of Contents. Afterword. Author and Reteller's Biographical. 3–88. \$18.95 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-5179-0482-1

Fearless Ivan and His Faithful Horse Double-Hump is also commonly known in the English language under the title, *The Little Humpbacked Horse* or *the Magic Horse* (Конёк-Горбунок). With this new book, Jack D. Zipes (b. 1937), well-known folklorist, academic, and fairytale specialist, offers a new look to this beloved story that is part of Russian children's literature tradition.

The Little Humpbacked Horse was initially written by Pyotr Yershov (1815–1869) in 1834 while he was still attending university. Like many of his contemporaries, such as Aleksandr Pushkin (1799–1837), Yershov wrote his fairytale in verses. Eventually, he became a high school teacher and later a school director in Tobolsk, Central Siberia. While he never stopped writing and published dramas, short stories, and poems, none of his later works were as successful as *The Little Humpbacked Horse*. The story brought Yershov instant fame. According to children's writer Korney Chukovsky (1882–1969), *The Little Humpbacked Horse* appealed to the common people because its author used their colloquial speech, their type of humor, as well as their perspective on life (p. 84). In addition, the author's story borrowed elements from Russian traditional folktales such *Ivan Tsarevich and the Fire Bird* and *Sivka Burka*. Interestingly, *The Little Humpbacked Horse* became so popular that locals began retelling it orally. Thus, Yershov's poem, which was based on folklore, re-entered the Russian vernacular tradition.

Because the story satirizes and criticizes the ruling classes by exposing their hypocrisy and offered an unflattering depiction of the tsar, *The Little Humpbacked Horse* was censored in the 19th century (p. 84). Ironically, for the same reason, it is also one of the rare fairytales that was acclaimed by the Soviet regime after the 1917 Russian Revolution. Consequently, it was adapted to the theatre in 1922. An 1864 ballet choreographed by Arthur Saint-Léon (1821–1870) was also created followed by a Marius Petipa (1818–1910) revival in 1895, and a more recent version by Alexander Radunsky in 1960, based on a 1955-new composition by Rodion Shchedrin (b. 1932). Finally, Alexandre Rou (1906–1973) adapted *The Little Humpbacked Horse* to live-action cinema in 1941 and Ivan Ivanov-Vano (1900–1987) made it into animation in 1947 and 1976 in films produced by the main Soviet state-sponsored animated studios *Soyuzmul'tfil'm*.

Like *The Little Humpbacked Horse*, *Fearless Ivan* tells the story of a young peasant boy who outwits his enemies with the help of his magic horse. The story is divided in three parts. Part one consists of Ivan's adventures on his father's land, how he manages to outwit his conniving brothers, and rises from poverty to become the new royal groom. In part two, one can read about his adventure at the palace, how he defeats a jealous government minister and manages to succeed at all of the king's unreasonable demands. Finally, part three consists of his last heroic task. In it, one reads about how he won the heart of the princess and got rid

of the cruel tsar. Ivan's loyal double-hump pony accompanies him in all of his quests and, most of the time, saves the day. As a character, Ivan is lazy and an unambitious hero but who still manages to touch the reader because of his *naïveté* and innocence. Unsurprisingly, in the end, kindness wins over evil and Ivan becomes the new ruler.

The readers expecting to find an English equivalent of Yershov's poetry in this book will be disappointed as Zipes does not reproduce the Russian author's style. For example, in the beginning of Yershov's original verses, the reader will notice his strong musicality and rhythm:

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| За горами, за лесами, | Past the mountains, past the forest, |
| За широкими морями, | Past the wide oceans, |
| Против неба - на земле | Under the sky – on the land |
| Жил старик в одном селе. | Lived an old man in a village |
| У старинушки три сына: | The old man had three sons: |
| Старший умный был детина, | The eldest child was smart, |
| Средний был и так и сяк, | the middle one was okay |
| Младший вовсе был дурак. | and the youngest was a complete fool |
| | (Rough translation by the author) |

In his attempt in telling the story in prose, Zipes had to change several incidents of the story. However, as the reader will notice in his text below, he was able to keep the folk style and the main elements of a classical tale.

“Many years ago in the great empire of Russia, where wicked winds and cruel storms tormented the lives of poor peasants, there lived a shriveled old man with his three sons. If truth be told, the sun had never bothered to shine down on this gray-haired man. He had lost his wife right after the youngest son was born, and he had been compelled to raise the three boys by himself. The eldest was as sharp as a razor. The second was neither dull nor bright. The youngest was unfortunately a dunce. Some thought he had lost his wits after his mother died giving birth to him,” (p. 3).

Zipes' retelling is particularly interesting because he finds ways to fill the original text with more cultural, historical, and narrative detail. For example, he provides geographical (in the Russian empire) and social specifications (the class struggle) to make the story more specific. He also explains the third son's idiocy by linking it to his mother's death. In Yershov's original text the mother is simply non-existent and this absence is never addressed. Zipes' changes certainly bring a richer story to the reader and while he loses the text's musicality, he certainly makes the narrative more believable.

Fearless Ivan is illustrated with colorful postcard images of *The Little Humpbacked Horse* by artists such as Nikolai Kocherin (no date), Mikhail

Kupriyanov (1903–1991), Vladimir Milashevsky (1893–1976), V. Grishna (no date), Alexandre Alexeieff (1901–1982) and N. Straganova (no date). Unfortunately, the work of each artist is not identified throughout the book and makes further research on these images difficult. If this is a lack for the academics, one must mention that the 30 images make the reading quite pleasant and helps to keep the readers' interest with visual stimulation.

In general, the book is an easy read addressed to most non-specialists and would be valued in any fairytale lover's personal library. If the prose retelling is not quite like the original poem, the readers will nevertheless find in *Fearless Ivan* most of the essential elements of Yershov's work and of the Russian folktale tradition. As mentioned in the afterword, Zipes' hope in adapting Yershov's poem was that "tyrants will be exposed and deposed," (p. 87). In today's rise of tyranny throughout the world, he couldn't have found a better story to express this message.

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