

Articles

The Image of Koshchei Bessmertnyi in East Slavic Folktales

Andreas Johns

Koshchei Bessmertnyi, Koschei the Immortal or the Deathless, is a well-known villain in East Slavic folklore. Koshchei's home is the folktale (*skazka*), and in particular the type of folktale variously called the magic tale, fairy tale, or wondertale (*volshebnaia skazka*). He is probably best known for his most distinctive feature -- the hidden location of his death in an egg, nested inside a series of other objects.

Koshchei also appears in folk broadsides or prints (*lubki*), in some oral epic poems (*byliny*), and makes an appearance in literary works as well. A character named Karachun, inspired by Koshchei, appears in a work of the 1770's (M. Popov, *Slavianskie drevnosti. ili Priklucheniia slavianskikh kniazei*), and a literary adaptation of a tale about Koshchei appeared in the 1790's in the collection *Dedushkiny progulki* (Novikov 1974: 193). Zhukovskii wrote two tales in verse that include this character, one of which, "Skazka o tsare Berendee," has influenced oral tradition (cf. Razumova and Sen'kina 1982 no. 22). Aleksandr Vel'tman wrote a novel named after Koshchei in 1833 and subtitled it "Bylina starogo vremeni." Pushkin made one of the earliest recordings of a tale about Koshchei in 1824 from Arina Rodionovna, and included Koshchei in the opening verses of "Ruslan and Liudmila," where Koshchei serves to represent the Russian spirit, along with Baba Iaga and the *rusalka*.

The image of Koshchei in the *lubki* and in some literary adaptations appears essentially different than in the *skazka*. Nikolai Novikov describes a *lubok* that represents Koshchei as a miser who endlessly hoards money, assisted by a devil (Novikov 1966: 150-151). In dictionaries of modern Russian, the word "Koshchei" is identified with the folktale character, but it can also designate a thin, bony man or a miserly, stingy person. Neither of these two other conceptions appears to be clearly or directly derived from Koshchei as he appears in the *skazka*.

A striking feature of Koshchei as a *skazka* character is that he is essentially, most typically, and most often associated with one tale type--Aarne-Thompson (AT) 302, "The Ogre's (Devil's) Heart in the Egg".

The tale can be summarized as follows: the hero receives magic help or objects from grateful animals, from giants he has tricked, or from his animal brothers-in-law. A princess has been carried off by an ogre. From her the hero learns where the ogre's heart, soul, or life is, what his life is bound

up with, or how he may be slain. The hero follows instructions, finds the ogre's soul hidden away, and kills the ogre by destroying the external soul.

Carl Wilhelm von Sydow distinguishes Celtic and Slavic oicotypes (local forms specific to one area) for AT 302. He identifies as an essential feature of the Slavic oicotype the episode of the forbidden room (Sydow 1948: 214). The princess warns the hero not to open a certain door or go into a certain room. He does so nevertheless, and finds an ogre imprisoned there. The ogre asks for water, and the hero gives it to him. The ogre breaks out of his chains or confinement, runs away with the princess and disappears. This episode is found in Slavic and Hungarian versions of AT 302.

However, the East Slavic tales about Koshchei are usually more complex than this outline, because more often than not, they combine AT 302 with other tale types, such as 222B* (The Sparrow and the Mouse), 300A (The Fight on the Bridge), 301 (The Three Stolen Princesses), 313 (The Girl as Helper in the Hero's Flight), 400 (The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife), 402 (The Mouse as Bride), 513 (The Extraordinary Companions), 516 (Faithful John), 518 (Devils, Giants Fight over Magic Objects), 550 (Search for the Golden Bird), 551 (The Sons on a Quest for a Wonderful Remedy for their Father), 552A (Three Animals as Brothers-in-Law), 554 (The Grateful Animals), and 650A (Strong John).

Because of these combinations of tale types, it is difficult to define a typical example of a tale about Koshchei, for the opening and first part of the tale. What is essential is that the hero acquires a spouse or fiancée in one way or another. Sometimes the hero arrives at Koshchei's dwelling and finds captive maidens there, or Koshchei's own daughters (Karnaukhova 42, Onchukov 107, Razumova and Sen'kina 1974 no. 35), but in most he already has a spouse before traveling to Koshchei's realm. In some tales Koshchei has abducted the hero's mother. When the tales about Koschei are combined with the tale of the Frog *tsarevna* (AT 402), Koshchei does not physically abduct her. Instead, when the hero burns her frog skin, she must immediately depart for Koshchei's realm (Akimova 372, Afanas'ev 269, Korguev 1944: 50-73, Razumova and Sen'kina 1974 no. 34).

After the abduction, the tales proceed in a fairly consistent fashion. The hero sets out to search for his spouse or mother, and finds her at Koshchei's dwelling. He may unsuccessfully try to escape with her. Sometimes Koshchei kills the hero at this point, and the hero's animal brothers-in-law revive him. The hero then has his spouse find out from Koshchei where his death is. East Slavic tale tellers enjoy developing this episode, where the woman uses her feminine charm to get his secret, convincing Koshchei that she loves him. Sometimes he lies down, putting his head on her lap, and she asks her questions while picking lice from his hair. Koshchei may lie to her about the location, usually twice,

saying his death is in a broom, in a cow's or ram's horns, or some other object. She then gilds or decorates the object, and Koshchei laughs at her, and quotes unflattering proverbial "folk wisdom" about women's long hair and short intelligence: "*Volos dolog, da um korotok*" (Afanas'ev 158), "*Vot u zhonki: volosy vypustila, a uma ne nazhila*" (Balashov 24). Of course Koshchei is undone by the woman he had kidnapped, who turns out to be more clever than he. He seals his own fate by revealing where his death is.

Koshchei's most memorable and essential attribute is probably the hidden location of his death: it is inside an egg which is nested in a series of objects. There are of course many variations on this series, but a typical one is that Koshchei's death is inside an egg, which is inside a duck, inside a hare, in a chest, buried under an oak tree, on an island in the sea. Many versions give the island the name Buian, and include this in a rhymed, formulaic phrase: "*v more, v okeane, v ostrove Buiane stoit dub, pod dubom kamen', v kameniu iashchik, v iashchike zaiats, v zaitse utka, v utke iaitso*" (Razumova and Sen'kina 1982 no. 2). The hero sets out to retrieve the egg and becomes hungry. He meets three animals he at first wishes to kill for food. They plead for mercy, saying they will help the hero. He spares them, and they help him obtain the egg. The hero returns to Koshchei's dwelling. Some narrators describe how the hero tosses the egg back and forth from one hand to the other, and Koshchei is thrown back and forth in the room. He breaks or crushes the egg, throws it against something, throws it at Koshchei, often at Koshchei's forehead, and Koshchei dies.

Based on comparison of Asian and European versions of the tale, Sydow concludes that AT 302 must date back to a few thousand years B.C. Some of the motifs in AT 302 in the Celtic and Slavic oicotypes lead Sydow to date these types to 600 B.C., when the Celtic and Slavic peoples lived in geographical proximity (Sydow 1948: 56-57).

Of course it is difficult to assign dates to folktales in the absence of written historical records. The first written recording of AT 302 is apparently a Swedish manuscript of 1702, but it is clear that the oral tale must be much older (Tuczay 1990: 930). The motif of a separable, external soul is ancient. It appears in a tale recorded on an ancient Egyptian papyrus, which includes a number of motifs common to Indo-European folktales (Thompson 1977: 275, Hollis 1990). Some scholars have suggested that the motif of the external soul may be derived from beliefs and practices in certain societies (Röhrich: 66-67).

Koshchei also appears in a subtype of AT 302 which is found in the Slavic and Hungarian folk repertoire. The East Slavic tale type index refers to this subtype as SUS 302 (2), "Koshchei's Death from a Horse" (Barag et al. 1979: 108). In this subtype, the hero usually attempts to rescue his

wife two or three times from Koshchei, without success. Koshchei's horse is faster than the hero, and tale tellers sometimes employ delightful hyperbolic expressions of how much faster Koshchei is. His horse may tell him not to worry, because they can drink, eat, and bake pirogi for three days and nights and still catch up with *Ivan-russkii bogatyr'* and Anastasiia Prekrasnaia (Khudiakov 22). Eventually the hero has his wife find out from Koshchei where he obtained his horse. The hero obtains a similar horse with the help of donors, by accomplishing difficult tasks, such as herding mares for Baba Iaga, and is able to rescue his spouse. When Koshchei pursues the couple, the hero's horse kills Koshchei with its hoof or convinces Koshchei's horse to throw Koshchei down to his death.

Other villains occasionally take Koshchei's place in East Slavic versions of AT 302 and the "Death from a Horse" subtype: the Zmei (Khudiakov 48, Novikov 1971 no. 30, Zelenin 1915 no. 86, Mints et al. 1957 no. 17, Afanas'ev 162), Zmei Gorynych (Gurevich and Eliasov 36), a *starik* and *volshebnik* (Chernyshev 77), *Idol Poganyi* (Shastina 54), or *Solovei vor razboinik* (Sorokovikov 5).

Koshchei is also found intermittently in other tale types that lack either the death egg sequence or the horse sequence. He appears in a few versions of AT 313, and in isolated instances of other tale types. In AT 313, Koshchei appears as the hero's villain father-in-law, setting impossible tasks for the hero on pain of death. The hero's supernatural spouse accomplishes the tasks at night with the help of spirits. Then the young couple flees, chased by Koshchei or his servants, and they disguise themselves as animals or objects. In one version they are pursued twice by Baba Iaga and then by Koshchei himself. The last time they have disguised themselves as a duck and a lake, and Koshchei, who takes the form of a bull, is unable to drink up the lake and returns home disappointed (Krasnozhenova 19).

In one version of AT 560 (Sorokovikov 3), the hero's wife betrays him with Kashel-tsar' bessmertnyi, who has her find out where her husband has obtained his magic powers. This is an interesting reversal in that the hero, rather than Koshchei, has a secret to reveal.

Koshchei can appear as a very fierce and aggressive warrior. In a version of the Neznaika tale (AT 532, Sokolov 144), the hero battles against a foreign army and Koshshui to keep his wife, the princess. In a unique and anomalous tale from the Minsk region of Belarus (Serzhputovskii 1911 no. 72, also 1965: 146-164) Baba Iaga and Kashchei appear as a fearsome couple who kidnap a princess and freeze her. Kashchei breathes on a prince and his companions and turns them to stone, climbs in Baba Iaga's mortar with her, and kills the princess' horse with the pestle. In a later fight, Kashchei takes Baba Iaga in his arms and flees. Kashchei causes darkness to fall, but the hero has the sun on his forehead, and is able to revive the princess, the prince and his companions. Kashchei chases after them in the forest. The hero splits Kashchei's head into two pieces and subdues him, standing on his throat

and threatening to strike him dead. Kashchei pleads for mercy, promising to stay in the marsh, and the hero releases him.

In single versions of AT 315 (Sokolov 152) and AT 465A (Sokolov 59), Koshchei appears as the possessor of magic objects the hero is seeking. In a version of AT 401, Koshchei has transformed a princess into a snake, but Koshchei does not appear in the tale (Afanas'ev 270).

In a Belorussian version of AT 300A (Bandarchyk 1973 no. 6, also in Vasilenok 1958: 162-173), Kashchei Bessmertnyi takes the place of the more usual Zmei, and removes the sun, moon, and stars. The hero fights the three sons of Kashchei, and eludes the murderous intentions of Kashchei's two daughters and his serpent wife.

In one exceptional text in Afanas'ev's collection, Koshchei appears as a donor (Afanas'ev 124, variant 3). This is a version of AT 502, in which a supernatural being caught by the hero helps him accomplish feats, win a princess, and defeat the servant who had forced him to exchange roles. Koshchei in this tale is described as "*sedoi starik, sam s nogot', boroda s lokot'*," an exceptional epithet which suggests that Koshchei's image has here been conflated with that of an old man dwarf with a long beard, who usually appears as a villain in East Slavic versions of AT 301.

Outside the skazka, Koshchei is found as an antagonist in the bylina about Ivan Godinovich (Rybnikov i: 93, ii: 122, 145, 195; Gil'ferding i: 51, ii: 179, 188, iii: 275, 293; Miller 74). Just as in the skazka, Koshchei is the hero's rival for a woman. In this bylina, Ivan Godinovich goes to Chernigov to ask for the hand of Mar'ia (or Nastas'ia) Mitrievichna (Mitreevna), and takes her away when he finds out that she is already betrothed to Koshchei Tripetovich. Koshchei comes and fights with Ivan. At first Ivan has the upper hand, but at a critical moment Koshchei asks Mar'ia to help him, rather than hand a knife to Ivan. Koshchei promises her that if she marries him, she will be like a queen or princess, but as Ivan's wife she will be a washerwoman, servant, or a peasant. Singers at this point sometimes insert the above-mentioned proverb about women's long hair and short intelligence. Mar'ia decides to help Koshchei, and they tie Ivan up. A raven or doves prophesy that Koshchei is not meant to have Mar'ia, say unflattering things about her, or imitate Koshchei and Mar'ia's love-making. Annoyed, Koshchei shoots an arrow at the bird(s), but the arrow flies right back and kills him. Sometimes Ivan has told his arrow to do so. Mar'ia unties Ivan, and he brutally cuts her to pieces. The bylina singers use common formulaic phrases in reference to Koshchei ("*grudi belye*", "*buimu golovu*"), call him a "Tatar," and sometimes include details to indicate how frightening he is (the earth and trees shake at his arrival), but otherwise do not describe him. The epithet "*bessmertnyi*" appears in at least two versions (Gil'ferding iii: 275, Rybnikov ii: 145).

Of Koshchei's individual attributes in the *skazka*, the most obvious and consistent one is the location of his death in the egg, and it appears to be Koshchei's attribute par excellence. In a few East Slavic folktales, it has been associated with other characters. In one anomalous tale, for example, the hero finds a princess inside a duck inside a series of objects who helps him capture Koshchei (Nikiforov 1936 no. 11, see also Khudiakov 82). Probably the most interesting assimilation and transformation of this attribute by a character other than Koshchei is found in at least five Russian versions of AT 400 in which the hero obtains an egg inside a series of nested objects that contains the love, heart, or sorrow of a maiden or tsarevna (*liubov'* in Afanas'ev 232, *serdcho* in Smirnov 130, and *toska* in Balashov 57, Tseitlin 10, and Razumova and Sen'kina 1974 no. 12). Without her knowledge, the maiden or tsarevna is given the egg to eat, and she regains her love for the hero, remembers the hero after she had apparently forgotten about him, or her sorrow disappears. In Afanas'ev 268 there is no mention of the egg's content, but the hero obtains it in the same manner, and his spouse, the Frog tsarevna, recovers her affection for him after she eats it.

Folktale narrators give Koshchei other attributes as well, but these are not distributed as frequently or consistently as the death egg sequence. Sometimes Koshchei smells the Russian scent of the intruding hero, but he does not always smell it, and he is not the only one who does this: the Zmei, Baba Iaga, and the hero's animal brothers-in-law also have this ability.

Koshchei's dwelling may be surrounded by a fence or wall with stakes that have human heads on them, with one empty stake for the hero's head (Mints et al. 1955 no. 11, Krasnozhenova 19). One tale teller gives Koshchei tusks or fangs, like a hog ("*klyki kak u borova*", Mints et al. 1957 no. 18). Koshchei's eyelids may be so heavy that other people must lift them (Bandarchyk 1973 no. 6; also in Vasilenok 1958: 162-173). An uncanny and weird quality is given to Koshchei when he rides a three-legged horse (Khudiakov 22), a seven-legged horse (Razumova and Sen'kina 1974 no. 1), or a three-legged goat (Potiavin 6). He is served by an evil spirit who takes the form of a dove (Khudiakov 22), and his captive maidens weave armies for him (Razumova and Sen'kina 1974 no. 35).

States of enchanted sleep, being turned to stone, and playing the *gusli* also figure in some tales about Koshchei. Koshchei has put everyone in his own and the hero's realm into a state of enchanted sleep. Then the *gusli-samogudy* begin to play and everyone wakes up (Mints et al. 1957 no. 18). Koshchei has turned everyone in the realm to stone, and they are revived when the hero plays the *gusli-samogudki* (Korguev 1944: 31-49). An enchanted princess tells the hero how to capture Koshchei by playing the *gusli* and putting him to sleep (Nikiforov 1936 no. 11). As already mentioned, Koshchei has the ability to cause darkness (Serzhputovskii 1911 no. 72, and 1965:

146-164).

Koshchei is sometimes the possessor of magic objects the hero is sent to obtain: a magical coat that is cold in summer and hot in winter (Onchukov 107), a magic jug with 12 spouts (Sokolov 152), or a magic ring that helps the hero to reach the Sea King and obtain the unknown (Sokolov 59).

A number of scholars have compared Koshchei and Baba Iaga or seen a connection between the two. They do in fact appear together in a number of tales, where Baba Iaga may be a villain who adds to the protagonist's woes, or a donor who helps the hero obtain Koshchei's death. Koshchei and Baba Iaga are occasionally even said to be related (brother and sister in Krasnozhenova 19). Nevertheless, Koshchei's image pales beside that of Baba Iaga. There are far fewer formulaic phrases traditionally associated with Koshchei, and far less physical description. Baba Iaga appears to be a much more "popular" character in the East Slavic *skazka* tradition, based on the sheer number of tales recorded in which she plays a role, and the number of tale types. While Koshchei is limited to his role in AT 302, its subtype and a few appearances in other tale types, Baba Iaga appears in about seventy different tale types. The present researcher obtained about three hundred tale texts with Baba Iaga; the present survey, although not as extensive, produced comparatively few texts with Koshchei, only about fifty. Unless we see Koshchei as an unwilling donor when he reveals the secret of his death, Koshchei is consistently a villain, the male hero's rival for a woman, while Baba Iaga can be both donor and villain, and appears in tales where the protagonist may be a child, a young adult, male or female.

Whether or not the folktale narrators and listeners believed in the existence of Koshchei and the truth of the tale is a complex question. The East Slavs reportedly both believed and did not believe in the characters and events of the *skazka*, believed that they might have happened in former days, or did not draw a clear line between truth and fiction in the *skazka*. Scholars of East Slavic folklore are not in agreement on this question. Koshchei has attributes and powers not unlike the sorcerer or shape shifter of folk belief, and one narrator even refers to him as an evil spirit. After Ivan releases Koshchei from the forbidden room and Koshchei carries off Ivan's wife, the teller remarks: "*Ne poslushalsia, vypustil nechistuiu silu*" (Krasnozhenova 20). Afanas'ev reports that there were spells against a "Koshchei-iadun" (Afanas'ev 1969 ii: 595).

In this context, the frequently formulaic sequence of objects containing Koshchei's death is interesting, since it bears resemblance to formulaic phrases used in many Russian incantations or spells, which may begin by naming the sea, the ocean, Buian island, and an oak tree: "*Na mori, na kiiami, na vostrovi na buiani...*", "*Na more-okiiiane, na ostrove na Buiane stoit syr dub krekovist...*"

Eleonskaia supposes that the folktale has influenced the spell, but that both have deep roots in the same mentality and world-view (Eleonskaia 1994: 77-78, 103). Razumova feels that the correspondences between folktale and spell are not due to borrowing, but come from a similar archaic view of the magic power of the word (Razumova 1991: 90-94). These correspondences may indicate the influence of one genre on the other; it is easy to imagine that a practitioner of spells might also be a skilled tale teller, or that a tale teller might be familiar with the texts of spells. It is impossible to say with any certainty whether these correspondences link Koshchei with the real beliefs of the East Slavs in supernatural powers. Koshchei's limited appearances in *skazka* and *bylina*, and the lack of memorates or fabulates about him, separate him from the class of figures of "lower mythology" or folk demonology, the spirits of the house (*domovoi*), bathhouse (*bannik*), forest (*leshii*), and others in whom people undoubtedly believed.

In attempting to identify what is uniquely East Slavic about Koshchei, we must take into consideration the many comparable ogres from other traditions whose external soul is contained in a nested series of objects. AT 302 is found throughout the Indo-European area, from India to Western Europe, and narratives bearing some resemblance to it have been recorded elsewhere as well.

The life of a wicked enchanter in a folktale from India depends on a little green parrot, in a cage, below six jars of water, surrounded by a circle of palm trees and guarded by spirits. The hero rescues his mother and uncles when his mother cajoles the secret from the enchanter (Frere 1912: 1-12). A demoness from Assam has six external souls kept in gourds (Goswami 1960: 195). In another Assamese folktale the hero revives a girl in the underground land of the demons. She finds out from the demons that their life is hidden in a bumblebee in a casket in a tank. The prince kills the bee and the demons die (*ibid.* 182).

An Armenian ogre, a little man with a long beard, dies after the hero waits at sunrise for a red bull to drink at a brook, cuts open the bull's forehead, and finds a box with three birds, and kills the birds (Hoogasian-Villa 1966: 273-290). A Turkish folktale hero wins a maiden for a giant, and then slays the giant after the maiden finds out that three deer come to drink water from a ditch in the forest, and that in the belly of the yellow deer that stands toward the south there are three boxes that contain the three "naked lives" of the giant (Walker and Uysal 1966: 77-83). The hero of a tale from the brothers' Grimm collection (Grimm 197) disenchant a princess by obtaining a crystal ball inside an egg, inside a fiery bird, inside an ox.

In Hungarian folktales there is a character called the Lead-Headed Friend or Lead-Headed Monk. In one tale the hero has the Beauty of the World find out from the Lead-Headed Friend where

his strength lies. In a forest there is a meadow, in the meadow a well. A deer drinks at that well, in the deer there is a dove, in the dove an egg, in the egg a wasp, and the wasp contains the strength of Lead-Headed Friend (Róheim 1992: 79).

Another close relative of Koshchei is the Serbian ogre Bash-Chelik (in Turkish, "Head of Steel"). The hero releases him by giving him water to drink, Bash-Chelik flies away with the king's daughter, who asks him about the location of his heroism, courage, or strength (*junaštvo*). The first two times the ogre lies, but finally reveals that his strength is in a distant mountain, where there is a fox, in the fox a heart, in the heart a bird, and the strength is in the bird (Karadz'ic; 1870: 185-205, Mijatovich 1921: 77-103). In Bulgarian versions of AT 302 the villain may be a dragon, the "red wind", a black man, or a villain called "something" who is half human and half stone. In the Bulgarian tales the hero obtains the strength, soul or the death of the villain, found in an egg or a dove (Daskalova-Perkovska 1994: 101-102, Novikov 1968: 153). Afanas'ev cites one Polish folktale about Koshchei, but there appears to be no comparable figure in West Slavic folklore (Afanas'ev 1969 ii: 594-596).

Koshchei distinguishes himself most obviously from these other ogres by his name and epithet. Like most names in folklore, Koshchei's has many variants: Koshchei, Kashchei, Koshshei, Koshchai (Razumova and Sen'kina 1982 no. 2), Kashshei (Zhivaia Starina 21: 365-386), Kovshei (Balashov 145), Kosh (Afanas'ev 156), Kashch (Bandarchyk 1978 no. 6), Kachel', Kachel (Sorokovikov 3), Kostei, Kostsei (Karnaukhova 42), Kashshui (Sokolov 59), Kozel, Koz'olok, Korachun, Korchun bessmōrtnyi (Gospodarev 8), Kot Bezmertnyi (Sadovnikov 61), and Kostii bezdushnyi (Chubinskii 64). In the *bylina* we find Koshcheiushko, Koshcheg, Koshcherishcho, Koshchui, and Koshel'. Like the name "Baba Iaga," the name and epithet of this character present two components, one of which has an obvious meaning, while the other remains obscure. Different etymologies have been proposed for the name, deriving it from or relating it to *kost'*, (bone), *koshch'noe* (land of the dead), *koshchiuna*, (myth) (Rybakov 1987: 253, 316), and from a Turkic Tatar word *kos''c''i*, appearing in Old Russian texts with the meanings "youth, boy, captive, slave, servant" (Vasmer 1958 i: 652). Nikolai Novikov finds this last etymology most convincing because it reflects Koshchei's real initial situation as a captive or prisoner in many of the tales. Razumova argues that the use of foreign names in the *skazka*, such as Koshchei's, helps confer on them a magical, mysterious quality (Razumova 1991: 61). Because of the uncertainty surrounding its etymology, Koshchei's name alone does not allow for firm conclusions about his origin or nature.

The name may appear with or without the epithet, which is remarkably consistent, with only

occasional exceptions ("*bezdushnyi*" in Chubinskii 64, "*poganyi*" in Bandarchyk 1973 no. 71). This consistency helps explain why the content of the egg is "death" in almost every tale, with few exceptions (*Kostii bezdushnyi*'s soul in Chubinskii 64, Kostsei's strength in Karnaukhova 42). At first the epithet "*bessmertnyi*" appears paradoxical because Koshchei is not of course immortal. But it is possible to understand the epithet in the context of the *skazka* and the external death motif. Koshchei is "without" his death inasmuch as he does not possess it; it lies somewhere outside his body.

In the spirit of the mythological school, Afanas'ev interpreted Koshchei as a demon of winter, the representative of dark winter clouds that withhold life-giving rain (Afnas'ev 1969 ii: 594-604). Likewise Ralston describes Koshchei as "a mythical representation of Winter." Koshchei keeps princesses imprisoned, just as the earth is locked up by winter (Ralston 1970: 164-5). More recently, Anikin identified Koshchei's features with the emergence of class society, and the patriarchal order.

Rybakov finds that the complex image of Koshchei reflects different historical periods and conditions, including a period of contact between the proto-Slavs and the matriarchal Sarmatians at the beginning of our era. Rybakov finds a parallel between Koshchei's abduction of a princess and the ancient Greek myth of Hades and Persephone. Both the Greek myth and the East Slavic folktale derive from an Indo-European myth about the struggle between the forces of life and summer against those of death and winter. Rybakov finds both the *skazka* and *bylina* accounts of Koshchei's death in the figures of a tenth-century relief carving, although at this stage in its development, the myth about Koshchei lacked a hero such as Ivan-tsarevich or Ivan Godinovich (Rybakov 1987: 314-354; discussed by Propp 1984: 60-63).

Maria Kravchenko sees in Koshchei, in spite of his attraction to women, a manifestation of the goddess of death. G. Vercellin has proposed an Iranian prototype for Koshchei (cited in Tuczay 1990, unfortunately unavailable for this survey). Shapiro has found parallels in ancient Greek religion for Baba Iaga and her "highly particularized male counterpart" Koshchei in Cybele and Attis. Like Attis, who dies and is revived, the tales about Koshchei involve death and resurrection. However, it is the hero who is resurrected (usually by his animal brothers-in-law). Shapiro finds this to be an inverted reference to Koshchei's immortality (Shapiro 1983: 132-135).

Many scholars have tried to establish Koshchei's origins. Koshchei Bessmertnyi is a unique East Slavic folktale figure, and no doubt very old. The elements that constitute his image may very well be derived from Slavic pre-Christian beliefs or customs, or even older Indo-European elements, which at some point became associated with the East Slavic versions of AT 302. For some folktale narrators and listeners, Koshchei was akin to evil spirits in whom they believed. At the same time,

Koshchei is obviously related to similar ogres in the folktales of other peoples, and the tale type most typical for him, AT 302, is widespread. If AT 302 spread in a process of diffusion, it seems likely that this narrative was transmitted to the Slavs from elsewhere, and the narrative itself does not necessarily reflect any specifically Slavic historical condition or period. Whatever its origin may have been, the image of Koshchei has also been developed by folktale narrators in response to the needs of the *skazka* genre. The image of Koshchei, like those of other folktale characters, clearly involves the fantasy and imagination of tellers and listeners as well.

Thus we can also ask what the tales about Koshchei might mean for their audiences. To account for their enduring interest, they must in some way reflect their listeners' lives, and allow the listeners to identify with the hero, heroine, and fantastic events of the tale. The structure of the magic tale as elucidated by Propp, beginning with a child's departure from the parental home and ending with the establishment of a new family unit, suggests that it represents the maturation process, the passage from child to adult status. In this context, it is useful to note the attempts to interpret AT 302 and its ogre in psychological terms. Jungian scholars have interpreted the external soul and its nested hiding place as a representation of the unconscious, whose multiplicity of elements may dissociate, and yet represent a unity. The hero is an archetypal image of a newly developing consciousness, while the ogre represents an existent spirit in the unconscious. The hero's struggle with the ogre represents the process of achieving a higher consciousness (Beit 1952 ii: 613-620). Freudians not surprisingly see the ogre as a father figure (Reich 1992: 78-85, Holbek 1987: 425-426, 508, Taggart 1990: 137).

It seems obvious, but nevertheless important to point out that Koshchei always appears in male-centered tales, that is, where the protagonist is a man. Koshchei is the rival of a male hero, and the object of their rivalry is a woman. This is true in almost all the folktales in which Koshchei appears, and in the *bylina*. Even in anomalous or unusual tales, when the narrative may not require it, tale tellers sometimes establish a triangle consisting of the hero, Koshchei, and a woman.

There is evidence in the East Slavic *skazka* for identifying Koshchei as a father figure. Most obviously, he is the hero's menacing father-in-law in versions of AT 313. The skilled narrator Natal'ia Vinokurova juxtaposes the hero's father and Koshchei in an unusual and original way in one of her versions of AT 302 (Azadovskii 1). The Eagle tsarevich seduces Koshchei's wife (Koshsheikha), and Koshchei beheads him. Koshsheikha gives birth secretly and manages to get her son away. The son Vasiliu grows up, comes to Koshchei's city and finds out about his origins. He disguises himself as a woman and plays a violin outside Koshchei's palace. Pleased by the music, Koshchei dances and calls for the musician. Vasiliu gains access to Koshchei's palace, and leaves notes to his mother, instructing

her to find out where Kashshei's death is. Vasiliï obtains the egg, kills Kashshei, and then uses the egg to revive his dead father. This juxtaposition of Vasiliï's father and Kashshei suggests that the paternal image has been split into a good father (the Eagle tsarevich) and a bad father (Kashshei).

In examining versions of AT 302 from rural Spain, James Taggart interprets them in Oedipal terms as the male child's competition with his father for the mother's affection. The Oedipal situation is certainly suggested by those tales in which Koshchei abducts or imprisons the hero's mother (Azadovskii 1, Afanas'ev 156, Mints and Savushkina 9). But in most East Slavic versions of AT 302 the hero is already married and sexually mature, and the woman in question is usually the hero's wife or fiancée. In the versions of AT 313, the rivalry is between the hero and Koshchei as his father-in-law. This might reflect life in some cases, but in traditional East Slavic peasant society, women most often moved into their husband's household when they married, and a man was therefore less likely to come into direct conflict with his father-in-law.

The hero's conflict with the ogre-father might in fact represent a man's conflict with his own father. The father-son relationship might be particularly difficult if a man remained in his father's household after marriage. A man still remained under the firm authority of his father and reportedly would not even dare to purchase a small gift for his wife without his father's permission (Kosven 1963: 74). One remarkable form of despotism was *snokhachestvo* (from *snokha*, daughter-in-law). Household heads had sexual relations with their sons' wives, sometimes sending their married sons to work outside the community or having them marry before they were sent away for military service. The daughter-in-law was powerless to resist her father-in-law's advances, and in some cases she might even react favorably toward them, since this situation would improve her standing in the extended family. In the central Volga region in the nineteenth century there were on average one to two families in medium-sized villages where this occurred (Busygin et al. 1973: 101-102). *Snokhachestvo* had been heard of in Belozersk as well, although this and the autocratic authority of the father appeared to be waning when the Sokolov brothers did their fieldwork there (Sokolov 1915: xxxvi, and no. 148). Despotism and abuses of power of various kinds by the family head would give special meaning and emotional resonance to the figure of a sadistic folktale ogre who seizes the hero's wife and kills the hero or tries to have him killed. The traditional authority of a father who denies freedom to and controls his adult children might well find its metaphorical or symbolic expression in Koshchei's ability to cause enchanted sleep, turn people to stone, or cause darkness.

Clearly there is an element of sexual rivalry between the hero and Koshchei. A tale from Onchukov's collection (no. 107) reveals strong antipathy both toward a hostile grandfather who sends

the hero out on deadly tasks, and toward Koshchei (who seems to be an alter ego for the grandfather). The hero kills Koshchei, and then crushes his grandfather to death when he returns home. A reference to male sexuality might be found in the fact that this narrator specifies that Koshchei's death is not in a single egg (the usual object), but inside eggs, plural: "*Ňn obradovawsia, iaitsia v ruki vziaw; slomaw, prizhaw eti iaitsia, i u Ňgo, bezsmŇrtного Koshcheia dusha von.*" This use of the plural suggests the vernacular and somewhat obscene expression for testicles, and serves to sexualize or at least lend a sexual undertone to the hero's aggression. The same use of the plural, when related by a 74-year-old woman, might well have been meant humorously (Balashov 24).

We can also ask what meanings listeners might find in Koshchei's death in the nested series of objects. From a practical standpoint, this hidden location makes Koshchei difficult to kill. As we have seen, for some Russian tale tellers of AT 400, the egg hidden in a series of other objects can represent deep-seated emotions or feelings (the love, heart, or sorrow of the maiden or princess). Perhaps the hidden egg of Koshchei contains not only his life force, but also represents a deep, hidden, and probably illicit or incestuous emotion, an emotion that stands in the way of the hero's marriage with the princess. From a psychological standpoint, this emotion might be the father figure's attachment to the daughter, or the daughter's attachment to the father, projected outward (Holbek 1987: 425-426, 508).

Like other characters of the magic tale, Koshchei is a complex figure who is created anew each time a tale is told, and potentially has as many meanings as there are tellers and listeners. It seems possible to distinguish at least three layers of meaning in Koshchei. Most obviously, his epithet and his fate in the tales reveal concerns with death and immortality; the wish for immortality and the inevitability of death. At the same time, Koshchei is associated with sexual attraction, seduction, marital infidelity, secrecy, deceit, and betrayal. The captive Koshchei deceives the hero when he asks for water, and the hero's spouse later deceives Koshchei. Even when some narrators alter the story or insert Koshchei into other tale types, seduction and deceit are important elements: a woman is seduced by Koshchei and deceives her husband (Sorokovikov 3), the hero's eagle father seduces Koshchei's wife, and the hero later deceives Koshchei by dressing in women's clothes and playing the violin, causing Koshchei to dance, which can be seen as a kind of seduction (Azadovskii 1). Finally, the fact that Koshchei is consistently the hero's rival for a woman, and his identification as the hero's father-in-law in some tales, suggest that one of Koshchei's functions is to serve as a focus of negative emotions toward a father figure in East Slavic culture.

Bibliography

IRGO = Imperatorskoe Russkoe Geograficheskoe Obshchestvo

Aarne, Antti, and Stith Thompson. 1964. *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*. (Folklore Fellows Communications 184). Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.

Afanas'ev, A. N. 1969-1970. *Poeticheskiia vozzreniia slavian na prirodu. Opyt sravnitel'nogo izucheniia slavianskikh predanii i verovanii, v sviazi s mificheskimi skazaniiami drugikhrodstvennykh narodov*. The Hague and Paris: Mouton. 3 volumes.

1984-1985. *Narodnye russkie skazki*. Moscow: Nauka. 3 volumes.

Akimova, T. M. 1946. *Fol'klor Saratovskoi oblasti. Kniga pervaiia*. Saratov: Ogiz.

Anikin, V.P. 1977. *Russkaia narodnaia skazka*. Moscow: Prosveshchenie.

Azadovskii, M. K. 1938. *Verkhnelenskie skazki*. Irkutsk: Ogiz.

Balashov, D. M. 1970. *Skazki Terskogo berega Belogo moria*. Leningrad: Nauka.

Bandarchyk, V. K. 1973. *Charadzeinyia kazki*. Chastka I. Minsk: Navuka i tekhnika.

1978. *Charadzeinyia kazki*. Chastka II. Minsk: Navuka i tekhnika. (3 volumes in series: Belaruskaia narodnaia tvorchasts').

Barag, L. G., I. P. Berezovskii, K. P. Kabashnikov, and N. V. Novikov. 1979. (eds.) *Sravnitel'nyi ukazatel' siuzhetov. Vostochnoslavianskaia skazka*. Leningrad: Nauka.

Beit, Hedwig v. 1952-1957. *Symbolik des Märchens*. Berne: Francke.

Busygin, E.P., N.V. Zorin, and E.V. Mikhailichenko. 1973. *Obshchestvennyi i semeinyi byt russkogo sel'skogo naseleniia srednego Povolzh'ia. Istoriko-etnograficheskoe issledovanie (seredina XIX-nachalo XX vv.)*. Kazan: Izdatel'stvo Kazanskogo universiteta.

Chernyshev, V. I. 1950. *Skazki i legendy pushkinskikh mest*. Moscow and Leningrad: AN SSSR.

Chubinskii, P. P. 1878. *Trudy etnograficheskoi statisticheskoi ekspeditsii v Zapadno-russkii krai. Tom II*. St. Petersburg: IRGO.

Daskalova-Perkovska, Liliana, Doroteia Dobрева, Iordanka Kotseva, and Evgeniia Mitseva. 1994. *Bulgarski folklorni prikazki: Katalog*. Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski."

Dobrovol'skii, V. N. 1891. *Smolenskii etnograficheskii sbornik. Chast' I*. (Zapiski IRGO 20). St. Petersburg.

- Eleonskaia, Elena N. 1994. Skazka, zagovor i koldovstvo v Rossii. Sb. trudov. Moscow: Indrik.
- Frere, Mary. 1912. Old Deccan Days or Hindoo Fairy Legends Current in Southern India. London: John Murray.
- Gil'ferding, A. F. 1949-1951. Onezhskie byliny zapisannye A. F. Gil'ferdingom letom 1871 goda. Moscow and Leningrad: AN SSSR.
- Gospodarev, F. P. 1941. Skazki Filipa Pavlovicha Gospodareva. (ed. N. V. Novikov). Petrozavodsk: Gosizdat K-F SSR.
- Goswami, Praphulladatta. 1960. Ballads and Tales of Assam: A Study of the Folklore of Assam. Gauhati: University of Gauhati.
- Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm. 1949. Kinder- und Hausmärchen. Munich: Winkler.
- Gurevich, A.V. and L. E. Eliasov. 1939. Staryi fol'klor Pribaikal'ia. Ulan-Ude: Gos. Buriat-Mongol'skoe izdatel'stvo.
- Haney, Jack V. 1999. An Introduction to the Russian Folktale. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Holbek, Bengt. 1987. Interpretation of Fairy Tales. Danish Folklore in a European Perspective. (Folklore Fellows Communications 239). Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.
- Hollis, Susan T. 1990. The Ancient Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers": The Oldest Fairy Tale in the World. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Hoogasian-Villa, Susie. 1966. 100 Armenian Tales and Their Folkloristic Relevance. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Johns, Andreas. 1996. Baba Iaga, the Ambiguous Mother of the Russian Folktale. Ann Arbor: UMI.
1998. "Baba Iaga and the Russian Mother." Slavic and East European Journal 42: 21-36.
- Karadžić, Vuk. 1870. Srpske narodne pripovetke. Vienna.
- Karnaukhova, I. V. 1934. Skazki i predaniia severnogo kraia. Moscow and Leningrad: Academia.
- Khudiakov, I. A. 1964. Velikorusskie skazki v zapisiakh I. A. Khudiakova. Moscow and Leningrad: Nauka.
- Korguev, M. M. 1944. Skazki M. M. Korgueva. Petrozavodsk: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Karelo-Finskoi SSR.
- Kosven, Mark O. 1963. Semeinaia obshchina i patronimiia. Moscow: AN SSSR.

Krasnozhenova, M. V. 1937. Skazki Krasnoiarskogo kraia. Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura.

Kravchenko, Maria. 1987. The World of the Russian Fairy Tale. European University Studies Series XVI, Vol. 34. Berne: Peter Lang.

Mijatovich, Elodie L. 1921. Serbian Fairy Tales. New York: Robert M. McBride & Co.

Miller, V.F. 1908. Byliny novoi i nedavnei zapisi iz raznykh mestnosteï Rossii. Moscow.

Mints, S. I., and N. I. Savushkina. 1955. Skazki i pesni Vologodskoi oblasti. Vologda: Oblastnaia knizhnaia redaktsiia.

Mints, S. I., N. S. Polishchuk, and E. V. Pomerantseva. 1957. Russkoe narodnoe tvorcestvo v Bashkirii. Ufa: Bashkirkoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo.

Nikiforov, A. I. 1936. "Pobeditel' zmeia. (Iz severno-russkikh skazok). 15 skazok novoi zapisi A. I. Nikiforova." Sovetskii fol'klor. Sbornik statei i materialov 4-5: 143-242. Moscow and Leningrad: AN SSSR.

1961. Severnorusskie skazki v zapisiakh A. I. Nikiforova. (ed. V. Ia. Propp.) Moscow and Leningrad: AN SSSR.

Novikov, N. V. 1961. Russkie skazki v zapisiakh i publikatsiakh pervoi poloviny XIX veka. Moscow and Leningrad: AN SSSR.

1966. "O spetsifike obraza v vostochnoslavianskoi skazke (Kashchei Bessmertnyi)." Russkii fol'klor 10: 149-175.

1968. "Obrazy russkoi i bolgarskoi volshebno-fantasticheskoi skazki." Russkii fol'klor 11: 140-158.

1971. Russkie skazki v rannikh zapisiakh i publikatsiakh (XVI-XVIII veka). Leningrad: Nauka.

1974. Obrazy vostochnoslavianskoi volshebnoi skazki. Leningrad: Nauka.

Onchukov, N. E. 1908. Severnye skazki. (Zapiski IRGO 33). St. Petersburg.

Potiavin, V. 1960. Narodnaia poeziia Gor'kovskoi oblasti. Vypusk pervyi. Gorky: Gor'kovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet.

Propp, Vladimir. 1946. Istoricheskie korni volshebnoi skazki. Leningrad: LGU.

1969. Morfologiiia skazki. Moscow: Nauka.

1984. Theory and History of Folklore. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ralston, W.R.S. 1970. The Songs of the Russian People, as Illustrative of Slavonic

Mythology and Russian Social Life. New York: Haskell House. (First edition 1872).

Razumova, I.A. 1991. Stilisticheskaia obriadnost' russkoi volshebnoi skazki. Petrozavodsk: Kareliia.

Razumova, A. P., and T. I. Sen'kina. 1974. Russkie narodnye skazki Karel'skogo Pomor'ia. Petrozavodsk: Kareliia.

1982. Russkie narodnye skazki Pudozhskogo kraia. Petrozavodsk: Kareliia.

Róheim, Géza. 1947. "The Story of the Light That Disappeared." Samiksa 1 (1): 51-85.

1992. Fire in the Dragon and Other Psychoanalytic Essays on Folklore. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Röhrich, Lutz. 1991. Folktales and Reality. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Rybakov, B.A. 1987. Iazychestvo drevnei Rusi. Moscow: Nauka.

Rybnikov, P.N. 1909. Pesni, sobrannye P.N. Rybnikovym. (ed. A.E. Gruzinskii). Moscow.

Sadovnikov, D. N. 1884. Skazki i predaniia samarskogo kraia. (Zapiski IRGO 12). St. Petersburg.

Serzhputovskii, Aleksandr K. 1911. Skazki i rasskazy belorussov-poleshukov. (Materialy k izucheniiu tvorchestva belorussov i ikh govora). St. Petersburg: Imp. Akademiia Nauk, Otdelenie Russkogo iazyka i slovesnosti.

1965. Kazki i apaviadanni Belaruskaha Palessia. Minsk: Belarus'.

Shapiro, Michael. 1983. "Baba-Jaga: A Search for Mythopoeic Origins and Affinities." International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics 28: 109-135.

Shastina, Elena I. 1985. Russkie skazki vostochnoi Sibiri. Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo.

Smirnov, A. M. 1917. Sbornik velikoruskikh skazok arkhiva Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva. (Zapiski IRGO 44). Petrograd.

Sokolov, Boris and Iurii. 1915. Skazki i pesni Belozerskogo kraia. Moscow and Petrograd: Otdelenie Russkogo Iazyka i Slovesnosti Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk.

Solymossy, Sándor. 1927. "A 'vasorrú bába' s méitikus rokonai." Ethnographia 38 (4): 217-235. Budapest.

Sorokovikov, Egor I. 1940. Skazki Magaia (E. I. Sorokovikova). Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura.

Sydow, C. W. v. 1948. Selected Papers on Folklore. Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger.

Taggart, James. 1990. Enchanted Maidens: Gender Relations in Spanish Folktales of

Courtship and Marriage. Princeton University Press.

Thompson, Stith. 1977. The Folktale. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tseitlin, G. 1911. "Pomorskie narodnye skazki." Izvestiia Arkhangel'skogo obshchestva izucheniia Russkogo Severa 1911 (2): 77-92 and (3): 180-200.

Tuczay, Christa. 1990. "Herz des Unholds im Ei." Enzyklopädie des Märchens 6: 929-933.
Berlin: de Gruyter.

Vasilenok, S. I., K. P. Kabashnikov, and S. I. Prokofev. 1958. Belorusskie narodnye skazki.
Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Khudozhestvennoi Literatury.

Vasmer, Max. 1958. Russisches etymologisches Wörterbuch. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.

Walker, Warren S., and Ahmet E. Uysal. 1966. Tales Alive in Turkey. Cambridge: Harvard
University Press.

Zelenin, Dmitrii. 1914. Velikorusskie skazki Permskoi gubernii. (Zapiski IRGO 41).
Petrograd.

1915. "Velikorusskie skazki Viatskoi gubernii." (Zapiski IRGO 42). Petrograd.
Zhivaia Starina 21 (1912): 221-388. Petrograd: Otdelenie Etnografii IRGO.