

NEW RESEARCH ON RUSSIAN FOLKLORE

R E V I E W S

Svetlana B. Adoneva. Skazochnyi tekst i traditsionnaia kul'tura [The Text of the Tale and Traditional Culture]. St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 2000. 183 pp.

As the title suggests, this book explores the Russian folktale (specifically the magic tale, the *vol'shebnaia skazka*) and its relationship to traditional culture. Since this question has often been ignored or overlooked by Russian folklorists, this new study is a welcome addition to Russian folktale scholarship.

In her first chapter, Adoneva investigates the logical structure of folktale narrative. She finds that every event in the folktale is the result of a character's activity, the expression of a will, or the response to such an act. Thus the folktale character typically acts in response to a communication. Adoneva proposes a typology of several kinds of dialogic folktale interactions. More interestingly, she feels that the narrative consists of pairs of actions, related as cause and effect. These pairs of actions do not, however, form a longer "causal chain."

Next, Adoneva discusses the nature of space and time in the magic tale. For this narrative world, space and time are not neutral categories, but are experienced subjectively, and values are attributed to them accordingly. In her third chapter she discusses the nature of folkloric discourse. She identifies two narrative modes, one denotative and profane, and the other sacred, in which a word, image, or act can also stand for a number of related ideas or concepts. Adoneva argues that the distinguishing feature of the magic tale, and what makes it an "artistic" text (unlike the texts of memorates, fabulates, or incantations) is the fact that it is simultaneously profane and sacred, employing both narrative modes.

Adoneva relates the features of the magic tale to what she describes as a traditional mentality. Looking at various superstitions, she finds that they always imply meaningful, intentional signs, an active will, and an actor with intentions; unusual events do not "just happen."

To the traditional mind, the world is full of dialogue or dialogic interaction with beings who act with certain intentions and to whom one must respond in a certain way, as do the characters of the folktale. The traditional mind does not seek causes or natural laws, but rules of behavior for interaction with the spirit world. Likewise, the folktale hero(ine) does not resolve problems by analysis or experimentation; solutions are simply provided by custom or “knowledgeable” persons.

Many students of folklore are likely to disagree with Adoneva's view of the folktale structure as lacking an overall “causal chain.” The discovery of Vladimir Propp's morphology, and the development of this line of research by E. M. Meletinskii and others would seem to suggest that there is a logical overall pattern to the folktale's narrative structure. This seems especially apparent in the relationship between Propp's functions 8-8a (villainy/lack) and 18-19 (victory/liquidation), which are separated by numerous other functions, but which motivate and give a logical direction to the narrative.

Another question concerns Adoneva's definition of the two narrative modes and the identification of “sacred” folkloric speech as typically metaphorical. If this is so, do the frequent metaphoric images in proverbs necessarily make proverbs sacred?

In the tale material she adduces to support her arguments, Adoneva only refers to single examples of a given tale type. At times this may lead her into error, as when she implies that there is a lack of logic in a tale from the Afanas'ev collection (tale no. 128, a version of AT 301); the version she cites does not explain why the hero's brothers appear beside the hole, through which he has descended to the underground kingdoms. Even though an explanation may be missing from this particular version, it seems likely that the tale teller and listeners would have in their minds memories of previous performances of this tale; in many versions, the hero's brothers or companions initially lower him into the ground, so that their appearance there later is to be expected. It is possible that some of the folktale's features and characteristics that Adoneva discusses can be better explained by the needs and limitations of oral narrative and performance than by the presence of a traditional mentality or world-view.

It is surprising that Adoneva's study does not include more consideration of the folktale as a performance event, or as a form of entertainment. One of the criteria most consistently suggested by folklorists in many countries in an effort to define the folktale has been its status as fiction; at many times and in many places it has been recognized by teller and listeners as fiction, an entertaining story. While Adoneva points out many intriguing similarities between the imagery

in folktales and incantations, for example, it is also clear that the folktale was not usually regarded by its audiences in the same way as the incantation, whose words had the power to influence human affairs.

Although one may disagree with some of her conclusions, Adoneva's book is a stimulating discussion with many interesting observations and should be read by anyone with a serious interest in the Russian folktale, or its interpretation.

Andreas Johns

University of Washington-Seattle