

REVIEWS

Jack V. Haney, The Complete Russian Folktale. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe.

Vol. 1: An Introduction to the Russian Folktale (1999), 144pp. \$50.95 (cloth) ISBN: 1-56324-489-6, \$20.95 (paper) ISBN 1-56324-494-2.

Vol. 2: Russian Animal Tales (1999), 296pp. \$65.00 (cloth) ISBN 1-56324-490-X, paper N/A.

Vol. 3: Russian Wondertales: I. Tales of Heroes and Villains (2001), 494pp. \$68.00 (cloth) ISBN 1-56324-491-8, paper N/A.

Vol. 4: Russian Wondertales: II. Tales of Magic and the Supernatural (2001), 500pp. \$68.00 (cloth) ISBN 1-56324-492-6, paper N/A.

Jack V. Haney, Professor Emeritus of the University of Washington, Seattle, has devoted much of his career to the study and teaching of medieval East Slavic literature. His publications include two books on the life and works of Maxim the Greek, and articles concerning the Skazanie o kniazikh vladimirskikh (Tale of the Princes of Vladimir), Slovo o polku Igoreve (the Igor' Tale), and the Povest' o Petre i Fevronii (Tale of Peter and Fevroniia of Murom). Professor Haney also has a significant scholarly interest in Russian folklore, and this interest has led him to a truly monumental undertaking — a scholarly annotated edition of Russian folktales including at least one text of every known tale type, arranged according to the internationally accepted Aarne-Thompson (AT) system of classification. Translated collections of Russian folktales in Western languages have appeared from time to time, but I know of no collection which approaches this one in its breadth and depth, or which gives the reader such a truly representative sample of the vast amount of tale texts published in Russian. Until now, many English-language readers have relied on the excellent translation from the Aleksandr Afanas'ev collection by Norbert Guterman. However, this thick volume with 178 tales represents only a part of the entire Afanas'ev corpus, which contains almost 600 tale texts (or more than 600, if one counts the ribald or vulgar “secret tales” originally published anonymously abroad, some of which appear in this new edition). Distinguished as it is, the Afanas'ev collection is only one of many others; Professor Haney's series draws on the many folktale collections made in Russia both before and after Afanas'ev, and makes hundreds of texts available to English-language readers for the first time.

The first volume, An Introduction to the Russian Folktale, discusses this complex genre both in general terms and in the Russian tradition specifically. Not every folklorist will agree with Professor Haney's definition of the folktale and its complex relationship to myth and legend. His observations on the wealth and diversity of the East Slavic tale tradition (through a comparison of the relative numbers of recorded tale types in the Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian and English traditions) are especially interesting and valuable for readers unfamiliar with folktales from this part of the world. His remarks lead one to hope that more folklore from the particularly rich “fringe” areas of the Ukrainian lands will appear in translation. There is a brief discussion of folktale structure, with an obligatory nod to Vladimir Propp, and to Eleazar Meletinskii and his colleagues. In a footnote, Professor

Haney points out that Propp never significantly took on the question of female-centered folktales; he himself concludes that they have a different structure (one attempt to elucidate such a structure was made by Dagmar Burkhart in a 1982 article), and that heroine-centered tales “never involve any testing beyond the initial test for deportment.” Would it be stretching Propp’s scheme too far to suggest that in AT 432 (often called the tale of *Finist iasnyi sokol* (Finist the Bright Falcon) in Russia), when the heroine contends with the woman who has her husband-to-be under enchantment and manages to wake him up and recognize her on the third attempt, we are in fact looking at something like Propp’s functions of struggle/victory or difficult task/resolution (or Meletinskii’s second test)? The problem of female-centered folktales and their relationship to male-centered narratives, which Propp considered normative, is still in need of clarification, and has been interestingly discussed in recent work by Francisco Vaz da Silva and Isabel Cardigos.

In the second and third chapters of this volume, Professor Haney provides a short history of folktale recording and collecting in Russia, and a brief account of medieval minstrelsy and the later fate of the minstrels, or *skomorokhi*. This history is often summarized in Russian surveys of the folktale, but has not often appeared in English; Professor Haney’s discussion also includes his own insights as a scholar of medieval literature. The fourth and fifth chapters present evidence for a “myth-ritual” interpretation of Russian folktales, as propounded by Vladimir Propp in his 1946 work, *Istoricheskie korni volshebnoi skazki* (The Historical Roots of the Wondertale). While Propp’s conclusions in this work are still widely accepted by Russian and other Slavic scholars, many folklorists and anthropologists in the English-speaking world are likely to disagree with Professor Haney about the possible ritual origins of folk narratives. Nevertheless, he presents much information that is interesting concerning documented rituals in East Slavic culture: birth, wedding and funeral rituals, the ritual “rebaking” of children, a ritual known in some parts of Russia in which a girl was asked to jump down from a bench into a skirt, when she first began to wear one, and the role of the bear and horse in folk tradition.

Volume 2 in the series includes 150 texts of animal tales, representing tale types AT 1-299. Volume 3 and Volume 4 present Russian wondertales, AT 300-485 and AT 500-737, respectively. Volumes 2-4 together include a total of 400 tale texts. Volume 5 will contain about 105 texts of legendary tales, representing AT 750-849. Two subsequent volumes will include anecdotes and tales of everyday life. The volume of animal tales includes a very useful introduction that discusses some general questions as well as the possible history and origin of the Russian animal tales. Professor Haney concludes that most of them are derived from oral tradition; the influence of literary fables from India, Aesop’s fables, or medieval literary animal tales from Western Europe (the Reynard the Fox cycle) would have been minimal. He comments on the relatively simple structure of animal tales, and discusses the most prominent animal characters in the Russian repertoire (the fox, wolf, bear, and others). Professor Haney points out what appears to be the special status of the bear, and its relationship to St. Sergius. Most interestingly, he argues that these tales originally had a didactic purpose, which reflected the conservative values of the “patriarchal, inward-looking, and self-sufficient” Old Russia.

In his introduction to the volumes of Russian wondertales, Professor Haney revisits some of the theoretical issues in more detail. He discusses the problem of tale type classifications, which are imperfect but at the same time indispensable. Of particular importance are the fairly frequent and stable narratives formed of

more than one tale type, and Professor Haney presents a few examples. He examines Vladimir Propp's morphology in greater detail, and summarizes some significant subsequent scholarship in this area, especially that of Elli Kõngäs Maranda and Bengt Holbek. He presents certain conclusions of E. A. Tudorovskaia regarding the possible age of the folktale genre and various folktale plots. Speculation about how old the folktale genre (or even specific tale types) might be is of course fraught with difficulty. Professor Haney points out that Russian folktales make no mention of grand princes or dukes, the rulers of the Kievan and Muscovite eras, while the first tsar, Ivan IV, appeared in the sixteenth century. While not claiming that Russian folktales originated during this period, he finds that "this does appear a likely time to begin looking for them, especially when one considers that it was precisely in the sixteenth century that the Christianization of the Russian peasantry reached its greatest intensity and this might have provided some impetus for the creation of different kinds of tales." Nevertheless, it seems equally likely that the almost ubiquitous "tsar" in Russian folktales might be simply a newer, historically later designation that replaced an older one. Professor Haney briefly discusses the question of analogues, mentioning the Indo-European and diffusionist theories of the nineteenth century, as well as the "solar mythology" school that influenced Afanas'ev among others. In connection with the theory of diffusion of tales from India to Europe, he mentions Theodor Benfey, but does not mention an important later development in this area, the so-called Finnish School or historic-geographic method. Professor Haney briefly mentions scholars who have taken a psychological approach to the study of folktales, but his own discussion interprets the folktale in historical terms, rather than as a product of fantasy.

A very interesting segment concerns the special status of some tale tellers, who might have been seen as magicians or sorcerers by their contemporaries. Professor Haney points out the occasionally recorded taboos surrounding storytelling, which included prohibitions on telling tales during spring and summer, or during the day. He also includes an excerpt of a tale from the Sokolov brothers' collection in which the hero tells a tall tale to an old man in the forest in exchange for fire. The young man's humorous tall tale recalls similar tales from other traditions; in an essay on European wedding customs, Géza Róheim presents some Hungarian examples of tall tales close to this Russian one. Although this tall tale is "meant to be regarded as comic nonsense," Professor Haney finds that one motif in particular recalls certain Slavic creation myths: the young man falls into a swamp and contrives to have a wolf pull him out. Haney connects this with Slavic versions of the Earth Diver myth, in which God has the devil (or sometimes a bird) dive to the bottom of a primeval ocean to retrieve sand or earth to create the world. (Various forms of this creation narrative are found among the East and South Slavs, elsewhere in Eastern Europe, in Siberia, and in Native North America). Another detail that Professor Haney finds significant in this tale is that a duck builds a nest on the young man's head while he is in the swamp. Haney concludes that in this tale, and in a version of "Koshchei's death from an egg" (a combination of AT 552 and AT 302), there are "echoes of a Slavic creation myth that involves a cosmic egg laid by a diving duck," and that some of the Russian wondertales contain ancient mythic materials in the guise of "mere stories." Several questions arise. First of all, the East Slavic folklore tradition includes many creation myths. In a 1998 study, Vera Kuznetsova examines more than 300 versions of East Slavic creation myths, many of which contain the Earth Diver episode, while most involve the rivalry or antagonism of God and the devil. South Slavic tradition

(especially Bulgarian folklore) also possesses many interesting narratives about the creation of the world that depart significantly from the Judeo-Christian account received by the Slavs at the time of their conversion. Because these versions exist or existed fairly recently in Slavic oral tradition, why is there a need to posit the presence of a forgotten creation myth in some Slavic folktales? Why would the Slavic folk narrative traditions forget one creation myth, transforming certain of its elements into a humorous or serious folktale, while maintaining another creation narrative, explicitly performed and understood as an account of the creation? More versions of either of these two excerpts and more argumentation would be needed to provide convincing evidence that, in this case, an ancient myth has been transformed into an entertaining folktale.

Professor Haney briefly surveys the most significant actors of the Russian folktale, and ends this introduction to volumes 3 and 4 with speculation about the potential meanings of the folktale. He finds that the Russian wondertales can be divided into three groups, by the age and gender of the protagonist. There are tales about children who undergo no transformation, there are tales about girls of marriageable age, and there are male-centered tales. In the tales about young adult women, Professor Haney interprets the wicked stepmother as a representation of the young woman's mother-in-law in real life. He provides a description of the complex traditional Russian wedding ritual, and discusses the male-centered tales as a sequence of tests, showing that the young man is ready for integration into society as an adult.

Of course, the bulk of these volumes consists of the tale texts. The reader cannot fail to be struck by both the quantity and quality of this collection, representing virtually all regions of this vast country, and by the impressive number of sources, some of which are practically unobtainable in North America. Those who love folktales will derive hours of pleasure perusing this collection, but most importantly, those with a scholarly interest in the folktale will find texts that have never been available in English, as well as Professor Haney's instructive and valuable commentary. The notes include information about the tale teller, if this is available, about the place and time of collection, and about the relative frequency or popularity of a particular tale type in the Russian and East Slavic tradition. For the first time, scholars and students of folklore who do not read Russian will be able to find, quickly and easily, an example of each AT type known in the Russian folk repertoire.

Anyone who has ever translated between two languages as idiomatic as Russian and English knows what a difficult and time-consuming task this is. The translator of folklore faces additional challenges: most texts are recorded in their original dialects, far from the literary standard or the speech of educated city dwellers. Many contemporary Russians would find much that is incomprehensible in these texts. Professor Haney's translation is fresh and lively, and captures the nuances of the original, often humorous nuances. His solutions to certain problems of translation are clever and sometimes make one smile; in a Northern Russian tale from A. I. Nikiforov's 1936 collection, the princess' two sons Vod Vodovich and Ivan Vodovich, conceived from drinking two glasses of water, are rendered as "Wat Waterson" and "Ivan Waterson." The villain of a tale from the White Sea Coast, Voron Voronovich Klëkot Klëkotovich, Semigorodovich, is called "Raven Ravenson Shriek Shriekson, Son of the Seven Cities." A humorous rhyming joke that ends some tales, when the foolish narrator

misunderstands what a bird says (*sin' kaftan!* rather than *skin' kaftan!*) and gives up his kaftan, is translated: "I mounted up and rode off, and a little bird cheeped: 'blue kaftan.' I thought it said, 'Remove the kaftan.'"

About two hundred years have elapsed since the Brothers Grimm began their work, and it is astounding that so little of the rich folkloric heritage of the Slavic and Eastern European peoples has appeared in Western translations. Professor Haney's series represents a significant step in filling this lacuna, presenting much material that is not easily accessible, and making the voices of this rich tradition heard beyond the borders of their native land and language. For folklorists and students who wish to compare Russian folktales to the tales of other traditions, the presentation of these tales in order by their AT type number and the meticulous annotations will prove extremely helpful. English-language readers owe a great debt of gratitude to Professor Haney for this truly outstanding and unprecedented labor of love and erudition, a contribution of inestimable value that will no doubt become a standard reference work.

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