

Aleksandr Kondratiev. On the Banks of the Yaryn (Middlebury Studies in Russian Language and Literature 28). Trans. Valentina G. Brougher. New York: Peter Lang, 2004. 226 pp. Bibliography. \$66.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-8204-6746-4.

Valentina Brougher's translation of On the Banks of the Yaryn by Aleksandr Kondrat'ev' (here transliterated as Kondratiev) , should be required reading for students of Russian literature, culture and folklore. Based on Kondrat'ev's 1930 original, Brougher's insightful translation includes a list of characters, helpful notes to the reader, an introduction with detailed information on Kondrat'ev's life and oeuvre, an appendix with descriptions of demonic spirits (spirits of water, forest and field) and practitioners of magic ("knowing man," magic healer, sorceress, witch) and a short bibliography.

The introduction provides the reader with a brief personal and literary biography of the author, a quick survey of Russian and Western criticism on his work and extensive information on the background of the novel as well as insight into Kondratiev's unique artistic vision behind the novel. Indeed, as Brougher points out, this novel truly offers the reader an "encyclopedia of Russian/Ukrainian folk belief." She continues, "the work portrays all the major unclean spirits of water, marsh, field, and forest that inhabit the folk imagination; various magical and religious rituals as well as practices and traditions dating back to pagan times; celebrations connected to the agricultural calendar that regulated people's lives; and folk stories and legends that have arisen out of the people's need to understand the world around them" (p. xx).

Aleksandr Alekseevich Kondrat'ev (1876-1967) was relatively unknown, even in his native Russia, until 1993 when a volume of his prose entitled Сны (Dreams) was published in St. Petersburg. The volume included the novel On the Banks of the Yaryn, first published in 1930 by Mednyi vsadnik, a Russian émigré press in Berlin (p. xi). As Brougher mentions, it is not surprising that Kondrat'ev's novel was overlooked by Soviet critics as the work did not fit "Stalin's call for fiction to model the achievements of the first five-year plan" (p. xii). While Brougher discusses Vladimir Toporov's 1990 seminal study on the novel (published in Italy), further information on the circumstances leading to the publication of the novel in Russia in 1993 is lacking. A brief mention of the political and literary context under which the novel was published would have been helpful for students. Brougher's statement that On the Banks of the Yaryn is "one of the finest examples of the interest in Slavic folklore that profoundly influenced Russian literature in the first decades of the twentieth century," is an assertion may very well be true. A short overview of the more recent reemergence of interest in Slavic folklore would, however, offer further understanding of how the novel came to be published in Russia in 1993. Brougher's introduction offers an insightful analysis of On the Banks of the Yaryn.

Kondrat'ev's narrative consists of two parallel worlds, the demonic and the real, where lust for vengeance and power, and a longing for love (sometimes of a rather nontraditional sort) reign. The novel abounds with creatures of the water, forest and fields. Death is the inevitable fate of those who seek vengeance (the Leshii), as well as for those upon whom vengeance is sought (Pull-by-the-Leg and Maksim). The struggle for power manifests itself on several levels of the narrative. Just as the Vodianoi clearly controls the river by exerting power over the ancient idol Perun, the Master holds witches' balls in order to exert his power over his

subjects and in the parallel world, Aniska uses witchcraft to ensnare and control Maksim. Kondrat'ev's sexually charged narrative blurs the line between lust and love among demons and mortals. In his world, natural elements such as fire and water ultimately prove deadly for demons and mortals alike.

This engaging translation contains a few misprints (pp. 51, 70, 125, 183 and 190). While the notes to the reader are extensive and extremely well researched, identification of the use of poppy seeds (pp. 24-26, 147) and the drawing of a circle around oneself (p. 79) to ward off evil and the cutting off, and then backward placement of a dead person's head, hands and feet in the grave to disorient him (p. 173) would benefit the reader.

Brougner's work is a fine example of outstanding translation. Her words are carefully chosen; her sentences are thoughtfully constructed. While she praises the original for creating for the reader a "visually rich, concrete and palpable reality," her translation is to be commended for doing the same (p. xix). Clearly an experienced translator, Brougner has also co-translated Fertility and Other Stories, an anthology of Vsevolod Ivanov's prose. Brougner's own writing is infused with a special Kondrat'evian quality that is most apparent in the conclusion to her introduction of the novel, which is both eloquently written and beautifully poetic. Brougner's translation of On the Banks of the Yaryn offers a wealth of observations and will prove informative to scholars and students alike.

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