

Jack V. Haney. The Complete Russian Folktale, Vol. 6: Russian Tales of Love and Life. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2006. Glossary. Bibliography. 416pp. \$89.95 (cloth). ISBN 1-56324-495-0.

Jack V. Haney. The Complete Russian Folktale, Vol. 7: Russian Tales of Clever Fools. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2006. Glossary. Bibliography. 216pp. \$68.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-7656-1719-6.

These two volumes of Russian folktales are the capstone of a remarkable achievement. Jack V. Haney, professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Washington, Seattle, a specialist in medieval literature and folklore, has for many years taken on the laborious task of selecting, translating and annotating a unique compendium of Russian folktales. This seven-volume set, with the well-deserved title The Complete Russian Folktale, comprising a staggering 738 tales, is now finished. (Volumes 1–5 have been reviewed in previous issues of Folklorica). What makes this collection uniquely complete is that it includes examples from the Russian tradition of virtually every extant folktale type, according to the internationally recognized Aarne-Thompson (AT) system of classification, used by Slavic folklorists as well. (Cf. the index of East Slavic tale types, Sravnitel'nyi ukazatel' siuzhetov: vostochnoslavianskaia skazka, compiled by L. G. Barag et al., Leningrad 1979). For each text, Professor Haney has included an annotation indicating sources for the tale when they are known, relative distribution, and other information. For scholars interested in comparative folktale studies who do not read Russian, this will be an essential resource. Most of the tales in the collection are appearing in translation for the first time; many are taken from archives or obscure collections found in few libraries. I know of no other translation that presents a folktale tradition in this “complete” fashion.

Volumes 1-5 include animal tales, fairy tales, and religious legends, as well as an introductory survey of the Russian folktale (history, characters, themes). Volume 6 presents tale types AT 850-999, what Professor Haney calls “tales of love and life.” Stith Thompson refers to these tales as belonging to the category of the *novella* or romantic tale, while for Russian scholarship they are novelistic tales, tales of everyday life (*bytovye skazki*), or satirical tales. None of these designations is entirely satisfactory. The events in these tales are improbable or impossible, but not fantastic as in the fairy tale or wondertale proper (found in volumes 3 and 4). The setting of the tales is not a thrice-tenth realm, but a Russian village or city. We are still in the realm of fantasy,

but not the fantasy of the fairy tale. There are difficult tasks for the protagonist to overcome, many episodes are repeated three times, but structurally these tales are simpler than fairy tales, without the complex morphology elucidated by Vladimir Propp. One obvious difference appears in tales lacking the obligatory happy ending: in one tale the protagonist is a poor man who tries but fails to conceal his poverty from a prospective bride (no. 513).

Nevertheless, there are happier tales about courtship, and the protagonist, frequently a peasant or soldier, usually overcomes his antagonist (a wealthy merchant or landlord). A clever hero avoids being punished by a general, after sleeping with the general's wife and taking his money (no. 520). A soldier beats a general at cards and eventually marries the general's daughter. The tsar appoints him head of a division (no. 531).

The class conflict in these tales is obvious, but many readers may be struck instead by a kind of popular monarchism, found here as well, when the tsar is portrayed positively, sympathetic to the peasant or commoner. In one tale Peter the Great enjoys peasant food while on the road and asks his cook to prepare it for him at home (no. 589). A soldier saves the tsar's life from bandits (no. 620). The tsar shows himself to be wiser than a priest and a landowner, and he rewards the clever hero, a potter who manages to humiliate a prominent boyar (no. 583). Ivan the Terrible, on the other hand, tries to cheat a peasant who has helped him. The peasant, who turns out to be a divine manifestation, warns him that he has now brought treachery to Russia (no. 592).

Riddles or riddling speech play a role in many tales. The clever peasant hero teaches Peter the Great riddles which his generals and officers then cannot answer (no. 578). Ivan the Terrible also learns riddles from a peasant (no. 592). The hero is rewarded for answering the landlord's riddles, while an envious rich peasant then fails (no. 587). The hero's riddles or riddling speech win a princess (nos 508 and 510). A soldier uses riddles to outwit a rich merchant in a tale that also exposes bad living conditions in the army (no. 512). Several tales feature a clever girl or young woman who presents or guesses riddles. A peasant's wise daughter answers the riddles posed by a military governor (no. 525). A poor man's daughter answers a judge's riddles (no. 529). Tsar Peter I is outwitted by a clever woman who speaks in riddles and manages to avoid the traps he sets for her (no. 526). These clever women recall other folktale traditions, and figures from medieval Russian literature like Princess Olga and Fevronia of Murom.

Ill-tempered wives are the focus of another group of tales. A man tricks his wicked, contrarian wife into falling into a ravine. Later, when he tries to pull her out, he pulls out a devil instead. The devil complains of how the man's wife had tormented him and then helps the man marry a gentleman's daughter (no. 514). Other tales concern a man who frightens his obstinate wife into submission (no. 559), disciplines both his wife and his mother-in-law (no. 560) or his lazy wife (no. 561). It is fascinating to see how the Russian folk tradition has treated the Oedipus theme (nos 603 and 604).

Volume 7 includes tale types AT 1000-1199, what the AT index calls "tales of the stupid ogre." These tales are characterized by an earthy humor, and several include erotic or scatological elements. They celebrate the triumph of the hero (a peasant, laborer, soldier, or Ivan the Fool) over his adversaries (a priest, merchant, or devil). Most are structurally and thematically simple—the hero uses a trick or a series of tricks or practical jokes to outwit his greedy and deceitful opponent—but readers will surely not resist their charm. Hired by a priest, the hero agrees to a contract forcing the first one who gets angry to forfeit money. Of course the priest always gets angry first. Told to watch the door of a granary, the hero removes the door and takes it with him. He foils the priest's attempts to drown him. Often sent to devils to recover money, he fools them into giving up all their gold. When the hero confronts a devil or imp, they compete in running, wrestling, whistling, or squeezing milk from a stone. When a lion is angry at the hero, he gets the lion drunk (no. 714). Figures from Russian folk belief occasionally appear: the forest spirit (no. 733), the *rusalka* (no. 711), Baba Iaga (nos 708 and 730). Christ himself appears as a donor in a tale where a soldier outwits a mischievous spirit (*kikimora*), but Christ reproaches the soldier because he has prevented Death from killing people for a whole three years (no. 720). A soldier exchanges his violin for a magic book from the devil, outwits the devil many times, but finally succumbs to him. Music lovers will recognize this tale as a source for Igor Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat* (no. 722). Some tales include the blinding of a one-eyed devil or *bogatyr*' and recall the episode of Polyphemus from the *Odyssey* (nos 711, 713, 714). In the very last tale in the collection, really a legendary narrative about the supernatural (no. 738), a threshing barn saves girls from devils by singing a song about the growing and processing of flax until dawn, when the devils run away. It recalls Slavic folk beliefs about a female spirit, the Noon Woman (*poludnitsa* in Russian), who

sometimes must be kept at bay by talking about the preparation of flax for an hour.

The AT and East Slavic indices continue with tale types 1200-2400, which are jokes and anecdotes, not folktales proper, and therefore outside the scope of Professor Haney's translation, as he points out in his postscript, which includes some personal observations on the folktales.

At a time when the study of Russian and other Slavic languages regrettably appears to be in decline, it is all the more important that up-to-date, scholarly, annotated translations of Slavic folklore be available in English and other Western languages. The Complete Russian Folktale is a very timely contribution in this respect, and the arrangement by tale type will facilitate comparison, showing what is both unique and international in the Russian tradition. Like other forms of folklore, folktales are a rich source of cultural information, and readers will gain a special insight into the life of the people who told and enjoyed the tales, a particularly Russian experience. Yet these tales are part of a common human cultural heritage that can and should be enjoyed by a wider audience. Thanks to Professor Haney's many years of patient dedication, for the first time, English-language readers have access to a truly representative compendium of this important oral tradition. Folklorists, Slavists, medievalists, literary historians, and interested readers of all backgrounds can now enjoy these wonderful tales, and together we can thank Professor Haney for this extraordinary, unprecedented effort and achievement.

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