

Kononenko, Natalie. *Slavic Folklore. A Handbook* (Greenwood Folklore Handbooks). Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2007. Additional features: Glossary, Bibliography, Web Resources, Index. xvi + 209. \$55.00 (hardcover). ISBN-13:978-0-313-33610-2.

Natalie Kononenko's recent volume in the Greenwood Folklore Handbooks series is a most welcome addition to the ever-growing body of scholarship on Slavic folklore in English. The author states at the very beginning that the book is intended for the non-specialist, for the reader who knows little of Slavic history or folklore. But that does not mean that the specialist and especially the student of Slavic folklore will find little of interest in it; to the contrary.

The Introduction focuses on the setting for what is to follow: the branches of the Slavic peoples, early evidence of Slavic lore, Slavic mythology, and three old East Slavic documents of some value, the likely spurious Book of Veles, The Primary Chronicle, and the recounting of Igor's Campaign of 1185 (not 1085 and Robert C. Howes, not Howse). Many, if not most, modern Russian and western scholars reject the notion that the story of Igor is an oral epic (see "On Igor's Campaign" on the web) but accept that it no doubt contains material from earlier oral sources. But these are minor points.

The chapter "Definitions and Classifications" takes the reader through the prose and poetic genres of Slavic folklore. The bulk of the examples are from Ukrainian and Russian but Kononenko refers to other traditions as well. The descriptions of the Russian, Ukrainian and South Slavic (Serbian) traditions are the most thorough. Oddly enough there is no mention of the Russian spiritual verses, the *dukhovnye stikhi*. Especially informative sections on rite and ritual and on material culture complete this chapter.

Examples of most of the genres discussed in chapter two of this book are presented in a separate chapter, "Examples and Texts." The majority are Ukrainian, often translated by the author, although there are Russian texts and one Slovak tale as well as some shorter texts from Macedonian, Polish and Serbian. All are well chosen and well translated. Indeed, one only wishes that this chapter could have been expanded.

A survey of scholarship and approaches to Slavic folklore constitutes the third chapter of Kononenko's book. One may take issue with her statement that it was "the beginning of the century (nineteenth) and its last quarter" (p117) that were the most important periods in folklore studies. Surely with regard to the East Slavs it was the middle

third of the century that was the most significant, although the groundwork was to some extent laid earlier, as the author's observations seem to show. For reasons that are not quite clear to this reader, Kononenko continues to refer to the Discourse, Tale or Song of Igor's Campaign, which was certainly not "Russia's only medieval manuscript"(p121), apparently relating it to the folk epics recorded in modern times.

The survey of Russian and Ukrainian collecting and scholarship is brief, a feature dictated by the scope of the book as a whole, but Kononenko refers to the main trends and most of the main publications covering the topics. For many folklorists her observations on folklore and music, dance and songs especially will be particularly helpful, as are those on rituals that continue to be practiced even up to the present time. One wishes that space had permitted the author to describe in some detail such modern phenomena as urban folklore, "New Age" birthing techniques, and graffiti.

The history of scholarship among the West and South Slavs is quite different because these peoples, with the partial exception of the Poles, were not under Russian domination and Soviet control until after World War II. There is some attention paid to Polish and Serbian folklore scholarship and some names of European and North American scholars are mentioned, and considerable space is devoted to Parry and Lord, whose work on the composition of epic verse cannot be overstated. The work of émigré scholars is also noted. Unfortunately, one might be left with the impression that neither the Czechs nor Croats possess any folklore, as they are not mentioned in the text. A good bibliography concludes the chapter.

The last chapter of the book, "Contexts," deals with the interaction between folklore and literature, art, and music, again with the primary focus on Ukrainian and Russian. The nationalist tendencies of both peoples have been exploited to the maximum, judging from the numbers of writers, composers, and artists Kononenko quite properly claims have made use of folkloric elements in their work. Not all would identify Blok's "*Prekrasnaiia dama*" with a *rusalka*, while the ties of Village Prose to traditional folklore are not well documented. I found the passages dealing with the uses of folklore in the post-Khrushchev period particularly well done. No doubt students at all levels will be inspired to continue research along many of the lines suggested by Kononenko's work here.

The ties between Ukrainian folklore and the other arts are less well known to the English-speaking world. Although some of the names of the artists are known outside Ukrainian scholarly circles, most of the more recent ones are probably not, and again Kononenko does us a service in bringing them to our attention.

The Polish poet, Jan Kochanowski, whom the author refers to as “perhaps the greatest Slavic poet prior to the nineteenth century,” was among the earliest (sixteenth century) writers in that language and probably the first to make use of folk poetry in his verse. He was followed in his use of Polish folklore by Mickiewicz, Sienkiewicz, Wladyslaw Reymont, the composer Chopin and others. In post-communist Poland the author points to the sponsorship of Polish folk music festivals across Poland, all assisting in keeping Polish folk traditions alive.

A single paragraph devoted to Czech folklore and literature mentions the names of some writers who were in one way or another influenced by folklore themes and materials but there is nothing of Božena Němcová, (1820-1862), pseudonym of Barbora Panklová, whose *Babička/Granny* (1855) captured the spirit of the Czech country folk and remains a classic of Czech literature today. She also collected (and edited) Czech folktales and legends even earlier. Milan Kundera might have deserved a mention, as might the great Czech composers who incorporated folk themes into their works: Dvořák, Smetana, and Janáček.

The South Slavs also receive little more than passing attention, which is a pity, because good collections of Serbian and Croatian folktales exist, and much Bulgarian and Macedonian folklore is known in the West. The South Slavic groups of North America have done an especially fine job promoting song and dance.

*Slavic Folklore: A Handbook* concludes with a fine glossary, a bibliography, an index, and a good guide to Web Resources. These are of great value to readers who have only English. All in all this is a most useful work for the beginning student, especially one who wants to gain a good overview of Russian and Ukrainian folklore and folklore scholarship.

Jack V. Haney  
Seattle  
Washington  
USA