

Haney, Jack V., trans. and ed. *Long, Long Tales from the Russian North*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013. Glossary. Bibliography. A-T-U/SUS Numbers. xxv + 300 pp. \$60 (cloth: alkaline paper). ISBN 978-1-61703-6. ISBN 978-1-61703-731-3 (e-book).

In *Long, Long Tales from the Russian North*, Jack V. Haney has selected and translated seventeen lengthy epic folktales by five tellers of northern European Russia. He refers to his selections as “serial” tales because of their length, the tendency of the tellers to string several tale types together, and the fact that they were told serially over several nights.

The five tellers include two Pomors, Matvei Mikhailovich Korguev of the now almost abandoned village of Keret’ and Petr Iakovlevich Nikonov of Sukhoi Navolok. The other three tellers are from the Pudozh area and include Fedor Fedorovich Kabrenov, Mikhail Osipovich Dmitriev, and his extremely talented but little recorded father, Osip Ivanovich.

Haney’s translated versions are true to the Russian. He has not doctored them in any way, so that they appear in natural form with all their idiosyncrasies, stumblings, and asides. Haney also gives the Aarne-Thompson type numbers for the tales. For anyone using the older Andreev index (*Указатель сказочных сюжетов* [Index of Tale Plots]), known as SUS, the numbers will differ occasionally. Examples include “Dawn Lad,” which is 301B in the Andreev index but 301 A and B in the A-T-U/SUS indexes, and “Son of a Bitch,” which is 300*B (+303 +513A) in the Andreev index but 402 + 400A + 302 in the A-T-U/SUS indexes.

Haney keeps the *okan’ie* (non-reduction of unstressed o), so characteristic of northern speech, as recorded, so that it is Tsar Ondron (176) in Nikonov’s “The Enchanted Kingdom” and Tsarevna Oleksandra (143) in Korguev’s “The Peasant’s Son and the Firebird.”

Nine of the seventeen translated tales are narrated by Korguev, who is deserving of the lion’s share of space as the most prolific and well-known of the tellers. Korguev was awarded the *Знак Почёта* [Medal of Honor] and was a member of the Union of Soviet Writers. In Haney’s faithful rendition of the text, Korguev’s personality emerges. Korguev’s narrations are peppered with asides, small digressions, explanations, additional information and anachronisms. In “Elena the Beautiful,” for example, Korguev informs his audience that there are two ways to tell the tale (19). After telling the listener that Ivan is forbidden to sleep with Elena for three years, he declares, “Now that’s a misfortune for Ivan!” (32). And when Elena is given only four hours to visit her parents, Korguev adds, “Such a time limit he gave!” (36). In “The Airplane,” correcting himself in an aside Korguev says, “I’ve omitted something here” (133).

In addition, the modern world creeps into Korguev’s accounts, so that we learn in the tale titled “Island of Gold” that in his capacity as ship’s cook Ivan asks for three rubles to prepare sixteen meals. Ivan also requests a letter of recommendation, and in “The Airplane,” the plane as a mode of transportation takes the place of the more traditional magic carpet or gigantic bird. In “Shkip,” Tsarevna Maria runs away, buys a home, and rents part of the house out to a widow and her son, named Ivan, who becomes Maria’s business partner.

The other Pomor teller, Petr Iakovlevich Nikonov, learned his tales from his father. Unfortunately, only four of Nikonov’s tales were recorded. Haney has translated two of them, “The Enchanted Tsardom” and “(The Rejuvenating Apples),” which represents half of Nikonov’s surviving repertoire.

Some of Nikonov’s characters have unusual names, not traditionally given. He uses Makar, Brebius, Zakhar, and Grigorii, and he refers to the Frog Tsarevna as “swamp hopper” (177). Like Korguev, he likes to offer explanations. He informs the listener that Mukhomor is “the same as Koshchei the Deathless” (183). Anachronisms are present, too. Nikonov refers to

the ataman field spirit of “(The Rejuvenating Apples)” as a “manager” (192). The teller touches on sexual relations with the utmost delicacy. When Ivan cannot resist making love to the sleeping ataman field spirit after being told not to, Nikonov informs us that Ivan “committed his crime” (191).

However, occasionally Nikonov uses colorful language. When Ivan selects the marriage road, Nikonov has Ivan reasoning, “What the hell, I won’t go home without that” (193). Again, when the bird transporting Ivan had to eat parts of Ivan to survive, the old woman in charge of the bird scolds, “You bitch, you ate his calf muscles and the muscles of his arms. You go vomit up those calves and muscles for him. He’s sitting on the shore there dying!” (203).

The two Dmitrievs and Kabrenov are Pudozh tellers. Three tales are translations from Mikhail Osipovich Dmitriev. He learned his art from his father, Osip Ivanovich, who was a professional taleteller. In “About a Wife Svetlana” and in “Bur-Khreber,” Dmitriev dazzles his audience by stringing together four tale types. He observes the use of formulaic expressions, such as, “Soon a tale is told, but by its result is a deed done” (226) and formulaic endings, such as, “I was there, I drank mead-beer. The beer was warm. It flowed over my lips, but nothing got into my mouth” (225).

M. O. Dmitriev stands out in Haney’s selections for his propensity to describe violence, especially as it is used against women. In the Svetlana tale, Dmitriev has Ivan, the hero, “pop” old women in the ear, and Bur-Khreber, too, is a great bully. Dmitriev seems to relish describing how Bur-Khreber gives Maria Tsarevna a beating with rods until she hugs and kisses him properly. He depicts Baba Yaga getting a beating and animals being crippled. Mercy and kindness appear as weakness. When Ivan ignores an old woman’s advice to choke his wife and instead takes her finger tenderly, Dmitriev comments, “And that’s how he became a Fool” (218).

Mikhail Osipovich’s language is sometimes crude. In the above-mentioned Svetlana tale, after Ivan pops the woman sitting on a golden chair in the ear, he informs the audience that she “farts,” knocks over a table, and “farts” again (216). There are anachronisms in his tales. In “Bur-Khreber,” the tsar and his entourage go down to the sea “either by car or on foot....” (240). In “Your Friend Liubodei,” the false Ivan sends a radiogram to the tsar.

At the end of the Bur-Khreber tale, Dmitriev claims to have heard the story from his father, Osip Ivanovich. Indeed, the propensity to depict violence is present in the one story by Osip Ivanovich that Haney translated, “About a Mighty Warrior, Tsar Peregar, Who Reeked of Drink.” But Dmitriev’s father’s depictions are less graphic, less sensational, and seem to fit more naturally into the fabric of the single tale we have by him in this collection.

Only five of Osip Ivanovich Dmitriev’s tales have been recorded. The Tsar Peregar tale depicts battles and violence in a manner reminiscent of the *bylina* [epic]. In addition, in typical *bylina* superhero fashion, Tsarevich Dum grows “not by years but by the hours” (258). When Dum tosses a boulder fifty *versts*, tramples armor, and takes off his enemy’s head, Osip Ivanovich adds colorfully that Dum “tossed him off like a buttered *blin* [crepe]” (259). When Dum agrees to give the golden-bristled pig to his brothers-in-law in exchange for a finger each, the brothers-in-law say blithely, “We have good doctors; they’ll manage to heal our hands” (263). Even in this one tale, it is apparent that Osip Ivanovich’s style is more polished than that of his son.

Pudozh teller Fedor Fedorovich Kabrenov, who worked with wood as a carpenter and logger, has an extensive repertoire represented here by two tales, “About an Enchanted Mill” and “Ivan Tsarevich and Koshchei the Deathless.” Kabrenov’s tales keep his audience on the edge of their seats. The combinations are fascinating, and Kabrenov adds interesting imagery. In “Ivan

Tsarevich and Koshchei the Deathless,” for example, he describes Raven Ravenson/Talon Talonson (282) as having a brass nose and lead tail. At times he verges on poetic prose. The feathers Ivan’s raven brothers-in-law give Ivan to indicate that he is in trouble begin to quiver, causing hearts to quake (290). Kabrenov is the most artistic of the tellers selected.

Kabrenov honors old traditions in his use of the introductory formula (*zachin*): “This is no tale; it is a pre-tale” (268). There are modernisms, too, for example in the drawing up of a contract, instead of an agreement, with the devil (269). At times Kabrenov provides explanations and motivation. The devil of the Enchanted Mill tale, for example, convinces Maria to kill her brother, and Kabrenov explains that, “the devil filled Maria with its spirit, so that she no longer loved her brother” (272).

In fact, Kabrenov demonstrates Christian belief not only in his selection of content, as in “About an Enchanted Mill,” where the devil’s interests are foiled, but in his telling. In the Ivan Tsarevich tale, Ivan and his parents pray before he sets out on his journey to marry Maria Tsarevna. In rounding up the mares kept by Koshchei’s mother, Ivan asks to let his work in corralling the mares be “for Christ’s sake” (294). In sensitivity and artistry, Kabrenov stands in stark contrast to the coarser Dmitrievs.

Jack Haney’s selections and translations demonstrate a strong *bylina* influence in the repertoires of the northern tellers showcased here. Even *bylina* characters, such as *Solovei-razboinik* (Nightingale the Robber), appear as well as traditional fairytale characters, such as Baba Yaga.

Haney comments in his “Introduction” that “none of these seventeen tales has a true heroine....” (xxiii). However, the stories depict heroines who are on different journeys than those of the heroes but who nevertheless are heroic in their own way. (For specific heroine types, see Bonnie Marshall Carey, “Typological Models of the Heroine in the Russian Fairy Tale,” *diss.* U of North Carolina, 1983, in which there is a discussion of three typological models: the Hero-Warrior Maiden, the Swan Maiden, and the Passive Beauty.)

The unique characteristics of the tellers selected are conveyed in Jack Haney’s selections and translations. He is to be applauded for his faithful renditions of the texts, which make *Long, Long Tales* invaluable to scholars.

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