

Sibelan Forrester, Helena Goscilo, Martin Skoro, and Jack Zipes. *Baba Yaga: The Wild Witch of the East in Russian Fairy Tales*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013. Brief Bibliography for Further Reading. Notes. Index. vii+202. \$45.00 (cloth). ISBN 978-1-61703-596-8. \$25.99 (ebook). ISBN 978-1-61703-778-8.

Baba Yaga: The Wild Witch of the East in Russian Fairy Tales is, as it acknowledges in the introductory pages, a book for several audiences: those of Russian heritage, specialists in Russian culture and folklore, students, and general readers. The book generally finds a good balance in accommodating these various readers, though it sometimes reflects the tension involved in making choices among the needs of these audiences.

The book is a beautiful hardcover volume of more than two hundred pages (an e-book version is also available), with a variety of color illustrations and photos of visual interpretations of Baba Yaga (more than 70 are included, based on a collection by Martin Skoro). This collection of images is one of the things that makes this book unique and appealing. The images include traditional illustrations by Benois, Bilibin, and Vasnetsov, as well as well-known *lubki* [popular print publications of 17th-19th century Russia]. There are also contemporary illustrations of Baba Yaga with styles as diverse as comic and steampunk. Some of the most striking and unusual visuals, however, are photos, including some of performances that include Baba Yaga as a character, actual houses that resemble her hut, and objects like lacquer boxes, nesting dolls, and playing cards, but even ranging as far as shoes with Bilibin's illustration printed on them.

The foreword, written by renowned scholar of fairy tales Jack Zipes, discusses some of the essential features of Baba Yaga and her relationship to western witches as well as character and thematic traditions from other cultures. He also mentions some of the most important scholarly works about Baba Yaga and outlines the two major collections from which the tales were taken for this volume (Afanas'ev and Khudiakov). The piece establishes the tone for the rest of the volume, being at once conversational and scholarly. The preface, acknowledgments, and translator's note further set the stage for the book to come: explicating the source materials of the volume and delineating the ritual context of the genre. The translator also prepares readers for the plot overlap that can be observed in some of the tales and explains her approach to translation of the tales and inclusions in the notes.

The lengthy introduction provides a good context for the reading of the tales and attempts to answer questions that might arise in the reading. Forrester discusses a variety of topics, including the names of Baba Yaga and other characters, the objects that typically surround Baba Yaga, the possible deeper meanings of the witch and her surroundings, and the role she plays in pop culture today. She also gives an overview of the scholarly work done on Baba Yaga that might be of interest to students or readers. The brief bibliography notably includes a listing of films with Baba Yaga as a character as well as works of scholarship and translated editions. The tales themselves take up the bulk of the book, numbering 29 in all, with some tales overlapping in plot but differing in style or details. Finally, the notes and index take up the last part of the volume. The notes include useful bibliographical references, language, cultural, and historical notes, as well as some variants of the tales as given in the original source material.

The content of the book seems most appropriate for students in courses about Russian fairy tales or folklore: the bibliographical information, the detailed notes, and the textual variants all seem catered to analytical or comparative work. The form of the book, however, seems more appropriate for a general audience; the way the images are scattered throughout the text does not necessarily lend itself to any kind of unified analysis.

To make the volume more useful to students, the authors might have instead decided to group the images together or in a more organized order. The captions, while interesting, do somewhat interrupt the flow of the reading of the tales, and a welcome inclusion might have been a scholarly essay analyzing the images in more depth. The general reader who is more interested in the tales for the narrative might wonder why stories with such similar plots are included, or might not tolerate the detail included in the introduction or the notes. In some ways these read more as the transcript of a university lecture than they do a book, with conversational elements, ellipses, and tangential information alike. It is, however, an interesting and thorough lecture, and readers who work through it will be rewarded with interesting nuggets of subtleties of language and culture.

While a book intended for only one type of reader might have benefited from a slightly different set of choices, *Baba Yaga* does a reasonably good job of balancing between the needs of students or specialists on the one hand, and general readers on the other. Perhaps the ideal scenario is a person who comes first for the tales and returns for the details, allowing Baba Yaga, as the translator says, to be brought back to life.

Shannon Spasova
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan
United States