



Fall 2014

*Baba Yaga: The Wild Witch of the East in Russian Fairy Tales*, Sibelan Forrester, Helena Goscilo, and Martin Skoro, eds. & *The Russian Folktale* by Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp (Review)

Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby  
University of Kentucky, j.rouhier@uky.edu

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Rouhier-Willoughby, Jeanmarie, "Baba Yaga: The Wild Witch of the East in Russian Fairy Tales, Sibelan Forrester, Helena Goscilo, and Martin Skoro, eds. & *The Russian Folktale* by Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp (Review)" (2014). *Modern and Classical Languages, Literatures and Cultures Faculty Publications*. 5.  
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**Notes/Citation Information**

Published in *Slavic and East European Journal*, v. 58, no. 3, p. 531-533.

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## REVIEWS

Sibelan Forrester, Helena Goscilo, and Martin Skoro, ed. *Baba Yaga: The Wild Witch of the East in Russian Fairy Tales*. Jackson, MS: U of Mississippi P, 2013. Bibliography. Illustrations. Index. liv + 202 pp. \$45.00 (cloth).

Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp. *The Russian Folktale*. Ed. and trans. Sibelan Forrester. Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2012. Bibliography. Indexes. xxvi + 387 pp. \$29.95 (paper).

Forrester, Goscilo, and Skoro have produced an exquisite volume in *Baba Yaga: The Wild Witch of the East in Russian Fairy Tales*. The book features translations by Forrester of tales from Afanas'ev's *Narodnye russkie skazki* (1855) and Khudiakov's *Velikorusskie skazki* (1860–62). Forrester's translations are nuanced and extremely readable, no mean feat when dealing with the dialectal and archaic language in the original collections. She brings a folklorist's eye to her choices by ensuring that variants of tales are included. In some cases, variants of a single tale plot, e.g., "The Tale of the Fine Young Man" (Afanas'ev nos. 174 and 178), may be presented in their entirety. In others, in the endnotes Forrester has included variants to portions of the tales highlighted by Afanas'ev and Khudiakov themselves. These range from single lines to fairly long texts. The editors are to be commended for providing these variants, as they serve well the purposes of a volume intended, at least in part, for use in courses on folklore. However, it would have been easier for the reader had they been included at the end of each tale to reduce the extensive flipping back and forth required.

The tales are preceded by a foreword by the eminent tale scholar Jack Zipes as well as by commentary on the figure of Baba Yaga by Forrester. Forrester's introduction provides a fine overview of Baba Yaga in scholarship, in the tales themselves and in popular culture in the Slavic world and beyond. It includes a discussion of names in the tales; the symbolism of Baba Yaga's companions and of objects associated with her; her possible connections to pre-Christian goddesses and to rites of passage; her shifting nature and symbolic functions; and interpretations of this personage by other scholars. This section concludes with a brief bibliography and filmography. These materials will be of great benefit for those who would like to use the book in the classroom as a starting point for examination of this fascinating character.

The tales and commentary are complemented by a range of images of Baba Yaga selected by Goscilo and Skoro. The full-color images are taken from the art of noted tale illustrators, such as Bilibin and Vasnetsov, as well as from the work of later artists from across the world working in a variety of media from the graphic novel to the painting. The range of images, which also includes photographs of Siberian houses on tree stumps resembling "chicken legs," theatre productions, lacquer ware, film cases, book covers, dolls, stamps, and even shoes, is impressive. Leaving aside the fine translations and commentary, these images alone make this book a worthy purchase. They illuminate the international fascination with this seminal Russian folktale character and also may serve as the basis for scholarly or classroom study. However, given the format (a large art book), it may not be a practical choice for students.

Forrester's recent contributions to Russian tale studies do not end with this fine volume dedicated to Baba Yaga. She also edited and translated *The Russian Folktale* by Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp. This book, never before translated into English, will be a welcome addition to those who teach Russian or Slavic folklore as well as to scholars of the folktale who know only Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (Indiana UP, 1955). This book helps to contextualize his

significance as a scholar of folkloristics in the Soviet Union as well as to elucidate some of his fundamental approaches to the tale. The book is composed of an introduction (by Forrester) and eight chapters (including an introduction) by Propp. *The Russian Folktale* was based on a course Propp taught in his later years and was first published posthumously in 1984. The unfinished volume was augmented by materials from former students. Forrester discusses the history of the volume as well as Propp's life and his role in Soviet-era folklore scholarship.

Propp's own introduction lays out the history of both the tale as a genre and of its study, primarily in Europe. It includes a consideration of how the tale contributed to (and borrowed from) literature and to other forms of artistic expression, such as music, ballet, and opera. He discusses terminology for the tale in various languages as well as the difficulties in defining a genre that includes a wide range of subtypes (magic tale, anecdote, novelistic tales, animal tales), many of which had been understudied. He provides illuminating discussions of the connections and differences between the tale and other genres such as myth, epic, memorate, religious legend, and heroic legend. In this section I took issue with one decision that Forrester made in her excellent translation: she chose to render *predanie* as 'tradition.' However, that usage does not correspond to the term that most folklorists use for narratives of this type (usually rendered as 'legend,' or, if necessary, 'historical' or 'heroic legend,' while the Russian *legenda* is restricted to 'religious legend'). Thus, it is a bit of a conundrum to determine if tradition (when it occurs without *predanie* in the immediate context) refers to a narrative genre or to tradition in the sense of *traditio*. This section concludes with an overview of previous attempts to classify tale subtypes, which is a major focus of the volume throughout.

Chapters 1 and 2 present a history of collection of the tale in Russia and of the study of the folktale in Europe. Both chapters provide insights into Propp as a scholar and his positions on the nature of tale study. The second chapter is particularly valuable, as it provides a fine treatment of how the various critical approaches to tale which were circulating in Europe were reflected in the work of major Russian collectors and theorists, many of whom are little known outside of their native country. It opens a window to folkloristics in Russia and the U. S. S. R. to specialists unfamiliar with the scholarship.

While these chapters are of value to the historian of the discipline, of particular note for those interested in Propp's own approach to tales are Chapters 3–6. Each chapter is dedicated to a different genre of tale, namely wonder tales, novelistic tales, cumulative tales, and animal tales. Propp's discussion of the origin of wonder tales and of particular plots elucidates his earlier approach in *Morphology of the Folktale*. The analytic tools he applies demonstrate his erudition and are, in some cases, remarkably consonant with current approaches to folk narrative. In Chapter 4, he boldly suggests that novelistic tales may have been erroneously classified as tales and perhaps might better be described as another genre entirely. While many may object to the Soviet ideology and the idea of social evolution that he relies upon, he is able to tease out some important questions about the tales' development and role in the Russian village. In Chapter 5, he examines the form of cumulative tales and suggests that the repetition may serve an important function within folk practice broadly, an intriguing suggestion. Finally, he delves into animal tales in Chapter 6 and discusses their possible connection to totemism as well as to literary sources. He also provides an intriguing analysis of the form of animal tales (as contrasted to the wonder tale) and on the psychological functions of trickery. He points out errors (as he does throughout the volume with regard to other tale types) in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification of particular tales due to a lack of systematic definitions for each genre. To take one example, he contends that, despite the animal characters, the well-known tale "The Wolf and the Seven Baby Goats" is a classic wonder tale in form and not an animal tale at all. The last chapter in the book provides an overview of how the tale performance has been approached within the discipline in (Soviet) Russia. He makes clear that many folklorists had been too focused on classification of the types of tellers and group identity. As a result, they ignored the individual creativity and attitude that each performer brings to the narration. In addition, he chastises folk-

lorists for not considering the life of tales within the broader context of a village or region, instead concentrating only on a few accomplished tellers. He elaborates on these issues in a discussion of the role of tales in particular tellers' lives and the influence of the teller's background and experiences on the way the tales are presented. He also comments on the dilemmas and demands of work in the field and of collection. All in all, both of these volumes are welcome additions to the scholarship on the Russian tale.

*Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby, University of Kentucky*

Gary Saul Morson. *Prosaics and Other Provocations: Empathy, Open Time, and the Novel*. Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2013. Index. xxiii + 274 pp. \$85.00 (cloth).

As Gary Saul Morson states at the outset (viii), this book was originally intended to be a collection of what he regarded as his most important essays, but he instead decided to reshape and combine earlier writings so that most of the items included here have not previously appeared in similar form. The result is a volume that, while made up of discrete sections, nonetheless provides a broad introduction to the key notions that have guided his approach to literature and that he has continued to develop over the years.

The eight chapters are spread over five parts, three of which contain a single chapter. A preamble to what follows appears in Part 1, comprising the chapter "What Is Prosaics?" Part 4 (Chapter 7) describes the application of his methods to the classroom. Here he states that the "first task is to get the student to *want* to read literature" (187) and offers examples of how he has succeeded in doing so. The final part and chapter examine some of the concepts introduced earlier in the book in relation to games and wit. Part 2, "What Is Open Time?," is the longest; its two chapters ("Narrativeness" and "The Poetics of Process") contain the most direct presentation of his essential themes. The three chapters of Part 3 all appear under the author's sometime pseudonym, Alicia Chudo, and feature that persona's unorthodox take on literary matters. The first two chapters explore the invented field of "misanthropology," with a particular emphasis on voyeurism in art. The chief literary examples here, not surprisingly, come from Dostoevsky, whereas Tolstoy, for whom Morson clearly feels a special affinity, serves as the most frequent touchstone in most of the other sections. The third chapter contains an "Onegin of Our Times," with some twenty-four Onegin stanzas (including a translation of the first six in Pushkin's work) that provide a jaundiced view of certain critical fashions of the late twentieth century. Though the volume consists of widely differing essays (the "Introduction," it should be noted, consistently refers to the chapters as essays, and to the parts as chapters, possibly causing momentary confusion on the part of readers), it nonetheless reveals a consistent sensibility, even as the topics range from the nature of narrative to a parody of theoretical excess to gallows humor.

Professors in undergraduate and especially graduate courses once offered, and perhaps still offer, dire warnings against treating literary characters as though they somehow resembled real people or focusing on the writer's intent in producing a work. Evaluation—declaring a work to be "good" or "bad"—was to be abjured. Morson cheerfully, even aggressively, violates these prohibitions. He is not afraid to single out those writers and works that he calls great, to consider the views of authors on literature, and to use novels as a means for probing ethical issues that individuals may face in real life. A key influence is his reading of Bakhtin, who in the hands of others has often served as the model for highly theoretical studies. But for him Bakhtin is an "anti-theorist," who did not so much apply a theory to Dostoevsky but instead based his theories on what he found in the literary works (198). Morson himself seems not so much an anti-theorist as a post-theorist—possibly not a term he would embrace, but one that I think is reasonably accurate. He has gone to the mountaintop, peered into the promised land of the various