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Rus, Russia and Ukraine between Fairy Tales and History: Alternative Slavic Fantasy by English-Language Writers

PART TWO: MODERN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES*

————— Larisa Fialkova —————

Prispevek je drugi del prispevka; uvod in prvi del je objavljen v *Studii Mythologica Slavica* 24 (2021): 13–32). Alternativna slovanska fantazija je opredeljena kot fantastika (spekulativna fikcija), ki so jo ustvarili angleškojezični pisci na podlagi resnične ali domnevne slovanske folklore, vendar ločeno od slovanske fantazije kot take. V središču pričujočega dela je logika interakcije med slovanskimi in/ali kvazislavskimi ljudskimi zapleti in liki z rusko in ukrajinsko zgodovino 19.–20. stoletja v dilogiji Evelin Skye ter romanih Catherynne Valente in Orsona Scotta Carda.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Evelin Skye, Catherynne Valente, Orson Scott Card, alternativna in kripto zgodovina, fantazija

This is the second part of the paper (for introduction and the first part which addresses Medieval Rus in Peter Morwood's and Katherine Arden's trilogies see *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 24 (2021): 13–32). Alternative Slavic fantasy is defined as fantastika (speculative fiction) created by English-language writers on the basis of real or assumed Slavic folklore, separate from Slavic fantasy per se. The focus of the current part is the logic of interaction between Slavic and/or quasi-Slavic folk plots and characters with Russian and Ukrainian history of the 19th–20th centuries in Evelin Skye's dilogy and Catherynne Valente's and Orson Scott Card's novels.

KEYWORDS: Evelin Skye, Catherynne Valente, Orson Scott Card, alternative and crypto history, fantasy

THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE 19TH CENTURY: EVELIN SKYE'S ALTERNATIVE VERSION

Evelin Skye's interest in Russia dates back to her teens when she established a long-term pen pal called Denis Ovchinin. She went on to receive a BA in Slavic Studies from

* Part 1, which contains an introduction to the entire paper and analysis of Medieval Rus's representation in Morwood's and Arden's trilogies (Morwood 2016, 2016a, 2016b; Arden 2017, 2018, 2019), see *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 2021. Conclusions are based on both parts of the paper.

Stanford University. In 2003, she visited Russia and went on a river cruise from Moscow to St. Petersburg (Skye 2016: 401–403, 406). This makes it only natural that St. Petersburg would become the main location of her historical fantasy dilogy. Yet, unlike other creators of alternative Slavic fantasy, she concentrates on Russia as an Empire which manifests in another key location – Kazakh’s steppe. Skye’s sources include not only Pushkin’s *The Bronze Horseman*, Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* and Dostoyevsky’s Petersburg novels, but also her old textbooks – Figes’s *Natasha’s Dance* and Olcott’s *The Kazakhs* (Skye 2016: 401–402, 2017: 413) – and fairy tales, with *Cinderella* chief among them.

In Skye’s alternative Russia, Christianity coexists with magic, which is practised by the imperial enchanter. The country’s stocks of magic are limited and dwindling due to the population’s Christian religiosity and the growing scepticism regarding power of non-Christian magic forces. There is, therefore, just a single imperial enchanter, one who typically is long-lived. When there are two candidates for the post, they must compete in the Crown Game until one of them perishes. The plot’s focus is on the Crown Game engaged in by Viktoria Andreyeva and Nikolai Karimov (later Karimov-Romanov), whose tutors, Sergei Andreyev and Galina Zakrevskaya, are sibling rivals. Viktoria Andreyeva, whom Sergei Andreyev has adopted, is in fact the abandoned daughter of the volcano nymph. She directs the magic forces of nature. Nikolai Karimov-Romanov, a fictional illegitimate son of Tsar Alexander and the Kazakh faith-healer¹ Aizhana, is adept at the magic of mechanics. Starting out as mortal adversaries, Viktoria and Nikolai are in fact two halves of a magic superpower. Their unity is reinforced in several exchanges of energy in which they revive each other in various situations. This voluntary gift of energy differs radically from Aizhana’s reviving herself through the energy brutally appropriated from her victims, be they plants, worms or human beings. Aizhana’s predation is similar to that of Cherryh’s *rusalka* before she meets her future husband (Cherryh 1989: 104, 154, 156; Fialkova 2020: 444; Skye 2016: 150, 369).

The timeframe of the dilogy roughly encompasses 20 years. It commences in 1805 when the imperial enchanter Yakov Zinchenko has fallen in the Battle of Austerlitz, leaving the position vacant. Its end coincides with the new Tsar’s coronation and the start of his reign in 1826, following the failure of the Decembrist coup² during which Viktoria and Nikolai fight on different sides of the barricades. Viktoria loses her hand in the battle, but Nikolai makes a prosthesis for her from the sash of the Bronze Horseman. Whole again, Viktoria can perform magic with it. Viktoria and Nikolai’s competition, the duel, deaths and resurrections restore population’s belief in magic, and the store of it grows in the country. In this new reality, Russia now has room for two imperial enchanters, with powers that, while different, are equally magnificent. The new Tsar changes the rules of the Crown Game, thereby benefiting from the united protection of the two enchanters, and the Church agrees to work with them (Skye 2016: 9, 50–51, 387–392; Skye 2017: 402–404, 413).

¹ A faith-healer in Skye’s definition, Aizhana might better be called a witch.

² The attempted coup was as in reality on 14 December 1825. This timeframe is somewhat wobbly. For example, one of Viktoria’s magic moves is imprisoning Nikolai inside a Fabergé-type egg, even though Fabergé did not open in Sankt-Petersburg until 1842 (Gudek 2020).

Skye's Saint Petersburg appears in the dilogy with many of its famous landmarks, their names either real or slightly altered, alongside an invented space. The landmarks include the *Ekaterinsky* (sic!) Canal,³ the Winter Palace, the Imperial Public Library on the corner of Nevsky Prospekt and Sadovaya Street, Neva, Vasilyevsky Island, Chernyshev⁴ Bridge, and the Bronze Horseman (Skye 2016: 19–20, 29, 122, 156, Skye 2017: 9, 328). The invented space includes fictional locations invented by Skye from the very beginning (Ovchinin Island and Bolshebnoe/Volshebnoe Duplo or Enchanted Hollow)⁵ and those created by Viktoria and Nikolai through the magic they use during the Crown Game. Among the latter are Viktoria's Summer Island and Nikolai's benches. Each bench is inscribed with a different place-name – Moscow, Kazan, Kostroma, Mount Elbrus, Kizhi Island, the Kazakh steppe – and is a kind of portal, which takes the person seated in the place inscribed, into a dream if not into reality (Skye 2016: 2, 79, 236, 257–268, 398; Skye 2017: 10, 167). Another layer of invented space evokes the fairy tale. Thus, the Cinderella Bakery is mentioned on the book's very first page, located on Ovchinin Island where Sergei and Viktoria Andreyev reside. When Viktoria moves to Sankt-Petersburg for the Crown Game, the bakery moves there as well, at least temporarily. Its owner Ludmila, although a former circus performer not a fairy, claps her hands and supplies Viktoria with a dress made of snow for her first ball at the Winter Palace. The debutante Viktoria, as Lady Snow, simultaneously evokes Natasha Rostova and Cinderella, especially when her magnificent dress starts to melt (Skye 2016: 1, 151–152, 187–189, 206–207, 226–227).

From time to time, Skye uses italicised Russian words, mostly in phonetic transliteration – such as, *ochen kharasho*, *spasiba*, *tvoe zdarovyie* and, mistakenly, *myevo zdarovyie*. Many of these words concern Russian cuisine – *piroshki*, *vatrushka*, *zavarka*⁶ and so on. The longest Russian passage is transliterated and italicised (Skye 2016: 2, 130, 132, 151, 231; Skye 2017: 204, 346).

An alternative chronotope develops an alternative history. In Skye's version, Tsar Alexander and Tsarina Elizabeth parent two teenage children (in reality not true) – Pasha/Pavel Alexandrovich Romanov and Yuliana Alexandrovna Romanova. Thus, the new Tsar is not the historical Nikolai 1, but the fictional Pavel Alexandrovich Romanov (Skye 2017: 413). Even though Alexander dies in Taganrog, like in the historical record, the cause of his unexpected death becomes Aizhana's vengeful kiss that gives him typhus (Skye 2016: 29–30, 348–351). Skye refers to the famous Decembrists Trubetskoy, Pestel, Obolensky and Volkonsky. Trubetskoy in the book, similarly to the historical Trubetskoy, does not come to Senate square on the day of the rebellion, but the reason given is his fictional conversation with Yuliana Alexandrovna, who never existed. Contradicting historical truth, the Decembrist coup does not lead to executions. Russia's death penalty

³ Ekaterininskii kanal, Catherine Canal, currently Griboyedov Canal or kanal Griboedova.

⁴ Currently, it is Lomonosov Bridge.

⁵ The spelling varies in different books. The motif of the magic hollow may be familiar to readers of Andersen's *The Tinder-Box*. However, in Skye's version, the hollow is not in a tree, but in the Mountain and nothing should be physically removed from it.

⁶ These are, respectively, pies, pastry filled with quark or farmer's cheese, and a dark tea concentrate.

has been abolished, and Pavel does not want it reinstated, even to punish the rebels (Skye 2017: 341–344, 409).

In Skye's alternative Slavic fantasy, the power of the state and the power of magic, both of nature and mechanics, come together within the family despite the orphaning and illegitimacy. Pavel and Nikolai are half-brothers, and Nikolai and Viktoria are, it may be assumed, prospective spouses. All types of power are inborn, but they must be drawn out through appropriate upbringing and education. Evil and good powers are inner family matters, open for rebooting. Magic and Christianity complement each other as the state's guardians. Russia's alternative future is peaceful: the Decembrists go unpunished and their ideas lead to reform.

RUSSIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY: CATHERYNN VALENTE'S HISTORICAL FANTASY

Valente's interest in Russia began in childhood. It was prompted by both Cold War fears and a healthy curiosity nurtured by her stepmother, who was of Russian origin. Her husband is an immigrant from the former Soviet Union who translated Russian fairy tales for her. Valente is also familiar with Russian cuisine and Russian language. In 2019, she participated in Petersburg's Fantastic Assembly, *Fantassambleia* (Fialkova 2020: 441).

Valente's plot has its roots in *Marya Morevna*, one of the most popular Russian folktales (discussed in Fialkova 2021)⁷. It has, however, no Ivan Tsarevich, responsible for his orphan sisters, and their mother is still alive. Three suitors appear as birds at the doorway of Marya's house, each wishing to marry her but getting her sisters instead. These birds are different from those of the folktales and of Morwood. Instead of a falcon, an eagle and a raven, they are *gratch* (a rook), *zuyok* (a plover) and *zhulan* (a shrike). The birds transform not simply into supportive siblings and princes of faraway magic lands, but also into Russian officers representing the changes in power before and after the Revolution of 1917. All are lieutenants. Gratch serves in the Tsar's Personal Guard, Zuyok in the White Guard, and Zhulan in the Red Army. While three is a typical number in folklore, in Valente's novel there are, in fact, four birds, with the fourth appearing much later. He is an elderly owl, "Comrade Koschei, surname Bessmertny", who marries Marya. Koschei is the only one whose military rank is unspecified. He is also the only brother whom Marya has not seen as a bird, despite her ability to see suitors as birds – or, in other words, to see the world's naked truth (Valente 2011: 16–19, 54–55). These breeds of bird, with the exception of the owl/Bessmertny (the Deathless⁸), appear in Russian without italics.⁹

⁷ Other fairy tales – e.g., *Vasilisa Prekrasnaia* (*Vasilisa the Fair* or *Vasilisa the Beautiful*) and *Tsarevna-liagushka* (*The Frog Princess*) as well as many stories about Yelena the Beautiful – are used episodically (Afanasev 1916, Zheleznova 1966).

⁸ Deathless, also used by Arden, is a synonym of Morwood's Undying. Different authors spell his name differently: Koschei (Morwood), Kaschei (Arden) and Koschei (Valente).

⁹ The translations of bird breeds into English appear near the end of the novel when, one after another, they come to Marya Morevna's second husband, Ivan the Fool, to ask for some of Marya's personal possessions. Looking at the state of these objects, they learn of her pain and approaching death (Valente 2011: 321–326).

Glassford compares several English translations of this folktale and finds that suitors can be falcons, eagles and ravens, but also hawks and crows (Glassford 2018: 31, 36, 38). The hawk is somehow present in this novel in Marya's perception of Lenin's essence and the crow's eyes Marya in due time acquires herself (Valente 2011: 26–27, 284).

The plot develops in both Russia, with the focus on Marya's house, and in the magic lands of fairy tales. The house, while remaining in the same place, changes its address and its tenants. Gratch comes to Gorokhovaya Street in Saint Petersburg, Zuyok to the same street, but in Petrograd. At the time of Zhulan's visit, the street name is Kommissarskaya, and Koschei goes to Dzerzhinskaya Street. These changes in address, which virtually follow the actual renaming history,¹⁰ go hand in hand with the changing social and economic status of Marya's family. At first, they live in a private house in St. Petersburg. In Petrograd and then Leningrad, Marya squeezes in with other families. Each family brings its *domovoi* or house spirit, and the house spirits organise a *Domovoi Komityet*, a pun on House Committee. Among the new tenants and alongside Russian folk characters like *domoviye* (Valente's spelling for plural for *domovoi*) and *rusalki* (water spirits, a mermaid, but without a tale), there is even a beautiful *vila*, a pagan spirit with the wings of a swan from Southern Slav folklore. In the novel, she becomes the beautiful Madame Lebedeva (from *lebed'*, swan) (Valente 2011: 15–22, 30–31, 38, 54–55, 82). The story starts before the First World War in Marya's big, happy home, and ends with the death of her shrunken house from famine during the Siege of Leningrad, February 1942 (Valente 2011: 247, 270–284, 318, 320). The novel's final date is 1952. It is well after the war between Germany and “the wizard with the mustache in Moscow” (Valente 2011: 343–344), who is recognisably Stalin. This date may signal the Doctors' Plot, an anti-Semitic campaign during 1952–1953, which started by accusing Jewish doctors of plotting the murder of top Soviet leaders. While this plot is, in fact, mentioned in the novel, in another section it is disconnected from its historical time (Valente 2011: 239). The world of the living has become the world of the dead. The dead, however, must continue their daily work and the routine of the living (Valente 2011: 348–349). In Valente's novel, Russia, like Marya Morevna, has two husbands. One is Koschei the Deathless, the Tsar of Life, who is constantly dying and resurrected, acquiring a new woman with each resurrection.¹¹ The other is Ivan the Fool. He is not the fool of fairy tales, who wins in the end. Even his surname Geroyev (‘Hero’yev) does not make him a hero. He has no bird within him. He is the fool who serves at the “factory of arrests” (Cheka, the secret

In the original folktale, as well as in Morwood's trilogy discussed in the first part of this paper, Ivan visits his married sisters himself and leaves some of his possessions to their husbands. Whereas in the folktale and in Morwood the birds resurrect Ivan from death, in Valente's novel they simply inform him of Marya's suffering and about death gathering inside her. When help is in fact available, it comes from the sisters and not from their husbands. The inversion of roles is very prominent.

¹⁰ The actual Russian name of Komissarskaya Street is Komissarovskaia. In the novel, the street becomes Dzerzhinskaya while still in Petrograd – which, in reality, takes place in 1927 when it is Leningrad. See St. Petersburg: Official City Guide <https://www.visit-petersburg.ru/en/showplace/199458/> (last accessed 14.02.2021).

¹¹ His former spouses – numerous Yelenas and occasional Vasilisas the Beautiful with their dolls – forever work in factories, bent over leaping shuttles and hurtling looms. Marya is the only one to escape this fate. Yet, in her death she remains alone as well.

police), looking for “enemies of the people.”¹² Ivan dies from famine during the 1942 Siege of Leningrad. His final foolish act of liberating Koschei helps Marya to reunite with her first husband and escape with him from Leningrad to the magic lands (Valente 2011: 178, 185, 278, 282–284).

Some features of Valente’s poetics are close to those of Arden whom she precedes chronologically. She gives Russian folk characters new family members, some of whom she finds in folklore and others in fiction and history. Koschei the Deathless and Baba Yaga become siblings of Viy from Gogol’s eponymous story. Gorinich’s mother happens to be the dragon from Lake Baikal, while his father is the mighty Genghis Khan.¹³ The mechanism of ruling through terror is common to both the Party and the Golden Hord (Trocha 2020: 408). The dialectic between Koschei and Viy, the Tsar of Life and the Tsar of Death, is somewhat similar to that between Morozko and the Bear in Arden’s trilogy. Another point of similarity with Arden is the postulation of human guilt as concerns the *chyerti* (sic!) (devils) who they not only oust from towns and churches, but from the entire world (Valente 2011: 47–48, 78–79, 104, 132, 135, 206). Even the fact of Marya’s choice of Koschei predicts that Vasilisa will select Morozko. Both couples are doomed because the women are mortal whereas their magic partners are not.

Valente is heavily indebted to the Russian literature of the 19th and first part of the 20th centuries.¹⁴ Direct quotations and allusions show that Pushkin’s *Ruslan and Liudmila*, Akhmatova’s *Poem without a Hero* and Gogol’s *Viy* are sources for her fantasy. Hidden allusions to Bulgakov are no less important. Ivan the Fool, as Ivan Nikolayevich Geroyev (Hero’yev), reminds readers of Ivan Nikolayevich Bezdomny (Homeless) from *The Master and Margarita*. Marya’s ability to see the supernatural behind the mask is similar to that of the Master in identifying Woland, the Satan, disguised as a foreigner. Marya’s ride with Koschei (the owl) in the driverless car parallels that of Margarita’s with the rook in the driver’s seat. Soviet writers as liars who eat in special cafes and relax in *dachas* invoke the writers’ restaurant Griboyedov in the same novel. And, of course, the narrative of life in Stalin’s Moscow in the 1930s opens the gate to a fantasy version of Petersburg-Petrograd-Leningrad (Bulgakov 1988: 23, 68–81, 157, 282; Valente 2011: 60, 98–102, 171). Finally, the village of Yaichka (sic!) (An Egg), where the dead forget the animosities of the living, is reminiscent of paradise in Bulgakov’s *The White Guard*, seen by Alexei Turbin in a dream. This paradise accepts both Whites and Reds from the front along with their women. In Yaichka. Vladimir Ilyich and his wife Nadya¹⁵ Konstantinovna (Lenin and Krupskaja) not only have two sons, Josef and Leon (Stalin and

¹² The manager of the factory of arrests is Comrade Gorinich, Zmey Gorinich (Valente’s spelling for Zmei Gorynych), a dragon/serpent and a villain from Russian folklore. In the novel, Comrade Gorinich boasts of having organised many deaths, including the 1934 murder of Sergei Mironovich Kirov and of those falsely accused of his murder. Gorinich almost convicts Marya Morevna, but she manages to outwit him and escape the death penalty (Valente 2011: 131–136).

¹³ Genghis Khan (1158–1227) founded the Mongol Empire. I would like to remind that the Blue she-wolf in Morwood’s trilogy discussed in the first part of this paper is also connected to Chinggisid lineage.

¹⁴ Magyarody compares Valente’s Koschei with that of the Strugatsky brothers, but does not bring sufficient evidence of their similarity (Magyarody 2017; Fialkova 2021: 20).

¹⁵ Nadya is a diminutive of Nadezhda.

Trotsky), but also become friendly with the Russian Tsar and his family, all of whom have been executed by the Bolsheviks (Bulgakov 1989: 233–237; Valente 2011: 293–297). On a visual level, Yaichka with its denizens is a kind of Fabergé egg.

FROM UKRAINE IN THE 1970S–1990S TO KIEVAN RUS AND BACK IN
ORSON SCOTT CARD'S *ENCHANTMENT*

Orson Scott Card's interest in alternative Slavic fantasy originates from neither family nor education. Aware of his lack of knowledge, he hired a graduate student – a native Russian-speaker, who contacted him through Internet – to check his use of Russian language and allusions to Russian culture (White 1999). Although Card's plot addresses both Orthodoxy and Judaism, he himself is a dedicated Mormon.

His novel is set in three distinct locations. Two of them are from the familiar world – Soviet and post-Soviet Ukraine, and the USA during the 1970s to 1990s. The third is the fictional state of Taina (Mystery), ruled by the fictional King Matfei in the so-called Rus of the everlasting 9th century. Taina's principal enemy is not a historical invader like Cumans or Pechenegs, but Baba Yaga. Yet, this fairy tale character is partly identified with the historical Princess Olga (920–969) of Kievan Rus. Yaga's long-forgotten first name is Olga and she is a widow, who, like her prototype, cruelly slaughtered the leaders of the Drevlians in response to a proposal of marriage from their King Mal. Still, the Drevlians are not to blame for her widowhood. Card explains that her evil behaviour is a result of the trauma related to the sexual abuse she suffered. Her late husband, King Brat (not Prince Igor), rapes her at age 12 and later becomes a victim of her revenge (Card 1999: 65, 118). The widowed Yaga then marries a huge Bear, Rus's winter god. However, the mythological beings do not eliminate Christianity. The people of Taina are baptised and the words of the Church fathers are familiar to some. The fictional state is sealed off, separated from modern Ukraine by a clearing and a Pit in the Carpathian Mountains. The Pit is guarded by the Bear and usually invisible. Some characters, both good and evil – a modern man and a medieval princess, Baba Yaga and the saint Mikola Mozhaïski¹⁶ – can cross this void between the two worlds and/or play a role in both. Using witchcraft, others can glimpse into Taina without actually crossing its border.

Card's protagonist is Vanya/Ivan Petrovich Smetski, a boy of mixed Jewish/Slavic descent from Kiev,¹⁷ the son of Petr Smetski, a professor of ancient Slavic literature and of oldest dialects of Ukrainian, Bulgarian and Serbian (Card, 1999: 3, 14). In the 1970s, the family decides to emigrate to the West, a perilous undertaking in Soviet times. The

¹⁶ According to Card, Mikola Mozhaïski is “the protector of sailors, ancient but unforgotten god” (Card 1999: 202). In the Orthodox Church, he is perceived as an emanation of Saint Nikolas, who, in the 14th century, protected the town of Mozhaïsk against Tatar invasion <http://iordanham.orthodoxy.ru/Icons5-rus.htm> (last accessed 25.02.2021). Card uses Ukrainian form of the name - Mikola (instead of Mykola) and not Russian – Nikolai.

¹⁷ It is unclear whether Vania is Russian or Ukrainian on his Slavic side. As his father's second cousin Marek owns a farm in the Carpathian Mountains and is later identified as Mikola Mozhaïski, he is likely to be Ukrainian. Card uses Russified toponym Kiev and not the Ukrainian Kyiv, although he chooses the Ukrainian spelling for the city of L'viv and for Kiev's district Podil (Card 1999: 7, 11, 26, 36).

only way to do this is apply to the Soviet authorities for visas to Israel and, once they leave, change their destination to the USA. Although the family has been living as Russians, they pragmatically adopt an Orthodox Jewish lifestyle to prove their partly Jewish roots, circumcise their men and change their names. Thus, 10-year-old Ivan becomes Itzak¹⁸ Shlomo (1–12).

Two folk stories, neither Slavic and both familiar to Card's protagonist from childhood, appear in the book's first two chapters, signalling their roles as plot movers. They are the universal fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty* (ATU 410) and the Jewish story of *The Sky, the Well and the Rat*.

Ivan/Itzak Shlomo's first glimpse of an alternate reality occurs shortly before he emigrates. The Smetskis, now Refuseniks, find temporary refuge with a paternal second cousin, Marek, on his farm in the Carpathians. The boy is exploring a forest near the farm when he finds himself in a clearing at the edge of a Pit. In its center, a sleeping woman is lying on a pedestal rising up from a deep hollow. The vision is fleeting but introduces the motif of the Sleeping Beauty, who is Katerina here, the Princess of Taina, who Vanya/Itzak Shlomo will one day rescue. Soon afterward, the visas are miraculously granted and the family leaves for the USA. Ivan never tells his mother about the sleeping woman.

Time passes by. By 1991, Ivan is happily engaged to a Jewish girl, Ruthie, and has all but forgotten what he saw in the clearing. His mother, Esther, however, magically knows that Ivan has a prior marriage obligation that cannot be altered. She reminds Ivan of the old Jewish story, *The Sky, the Well and the Rat*, which she told to him as a child and which he has since studied in folklore class. A rabbinical student agrees to rescue a girl from a well if she agrees to sleep with him. She insists that he marry her and he undertakes to do so, as witnessed by the sky, the well and a rat. Upon returning home, he forgets his promises and marries another. It is not long before their two children die – one from a rat bite, and the other after falling down a well. He divorces his wife and returns to the girl (Card 1999: 18).

The next stage of Card's story starts in 1992, when Ivan arrives in the newly independent Ukraine to do a PhD on Russian fairy tales. "It was a mad project, he soon realized – trying to reconstruct the earliest versions of the fairy tales described in the Afanasyev collection in order to determine whether Propp's theory that all fairy tales in Russian were, structurally, a single fairy tale was (1) true or false and, if true, (2) rooted in some inborn psychologically true ur-tale or in some exceptionally powerful story inherent in Russian culture" (Card 1999: 22). Returning was not his wish but that of his parents, especially his mother. Yet, once back in Ukraine Ivan leaves behind the American version of life in the USSR as all terror and poverty, which had been installed in him during his studies, and instead feels the happiness of coming home. He decides to prove to himself that the woman sleeping in the clearing only exists in his dream and is no impediment to him marrying Ruthie. He returns to cousin Marek's farm, by then fully mechanised, goes into the forest – and again sees the sleeping woman on the pedestal. A star athlete, Ivan jumps over the hollow and kisses the woman, who awakes. The huge Bear who is

¹⁸ Card uses form Itzak and not Itzhak – L.F.

guarding over the woman is climbing the pedestal, and Ivan's only escape is to propose marriage to the rescued woman. Card's princess has been cursed by Baba Yaga, who wants to vanquish Taina and rule over it. To stop her, Princess Katerina must marry and give birth to a child. The curse, unrelated to the fairy birthday wishes, is intended as an everlasting obstacle to marriage. The spindle is mentioned twice, but briefly and in passing – first, as Ivan's reference to a fairy tale motif, and then in Katerina's dim recollection of falling asleep (Card 1999: 54, 80). Ivan must follow Katerina to Taina where people perceive him as foolish. His behaviour is incompatible with their expectations – as in fairy tales about Ivan the Fool, and in the experience of new immigrants.¹⁹ As a survival strategy, he mobilises his cultural capital – his proficiency in Church Slavonic²⁰ which helps him communicate in proto-Slavic, his professional knowledge of folklore and history, and his pragmatic familial flexibility. Having experienced becoming Jewish overnight in order to emigrate to the USA, in Taina he agrees to convert to Christianity, as is obligatory for the marriage. Even when legally wed, the couple shun physical contact. Their marriage is not consummated until much later, when they escape from Baba Yaga to the USA of the 1990s. This time, it is Katerina who becomes the immigrant, first in the Carpathian Mountains of independent Ukraine and then in the USA. The alienation gradually evaporates and love grows.²¹

Ivan's magical journey to Taina gives his doctorate a new angle. With his planned escape to the Present, he realises the potential of artifacts, which can be fabricated in the Past. To create the best artifact possible, he instructs the lame scribe Sergei to write down oral tales on the reverse side of an ancient parchment of the gospels, written in Old Church Slavonic, by still not canonised Kirill.²² “He wanted stories about witches and sorcerers. About Baba Yaga. About Mikola Mozhaiski. About kings and queens, about lost children and wolves in the woods. (...) About Ilya of Murom” (Card 122–123).

Although Ivan realises the ethical dubiousness of his project, which Sergei would never have undertaken without his instruction, he is firm in his decision to complete it. He ensures that the parchment's carbon-14 molecules show eleven hundred years of radioactive decay to convince people that it is genuine. The plan works, making Ivan a respected professor in America and a cultural hero in the Ukraine, with a street named after him in Kiev. This street was once named after a communist who had slaughtered millions of Ukrainian kulaks. Ironically, Card sees no contradiction between Ivan's status as a Ukrainian cultural hero and the fact that it was granted to him for having discovered the earliest known versions of Russian rather than Ukrainian folktales. Simultaneously, Ivan is a king who retains the throne of Taina (Card 146–147, 383–384).

The partly-Jewish boy from Kiev thus becomes Ivan the Fool of Russian fairy tales and builds an international academic career in folklore studies. He travels repeatedly

¹⁹ This paper does not address American sources of Card's plot, such as Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (Card 1999: 133–134).

²⁰ According to Card, Petr Smetski spoke to his son for 1 year in Church Slavonic (Card 1999: 14, 257), although the language was designed for religious purposes and had never been used as a vernacular.

²¹ The Smetskis' life in the USA will be addressed in my next paper – *America and Americans in the Alternative Slavic Fantasy*.

²² Card uses the Russian spelling Kirill rather than Cyril.

across the Pit that separates Past from Present – to wake the Sleeping Beauty, overpower Baba Yaga, and reconcile paganism with Judaism and Christianity.²³

The idea of a modern man finding a sleeping medieval princess in a clearing came from Card's friend and business partner, Peter Johnson, and marked the beginning of his work on the novel (Vincent 2018). The source of the plot, according to Card himself, is Perrault's version of *Sleeping Beauty* and unspecified Russian folktales, which do not end with marriage. On the contrary, the marriage signals a new start as the princess dislikes her husband and tries to kill him (Card 1999: 71; Vincent 2018). Burkhardt compares Card's *Sleeping Beauty* with both those of Perrault and the brothers Grimm, in combination with Disney images and mentions Russian variants, which again are unspecified. As a sign of Russianness, Burkhardt points to the social standing of the hero, who may not be a prince (Burkhardt 2009: 241–242). Although in two Russian versions of ATU 410* *Okameneloe tsarstvo* (*The Realm of Stone*), the hero is indeed a soldier or peasant rather than a prince, both end in a happy marriage without delay. Another relevant fact is that in the Russian versions and in that of Card the famous motif of birthday blessings from fairies to a new-born princess is completely absent. Instead, the big bird – the princess' sister – transforms the Tsardom into a realm of stone (Afanasev 1916: 204; Afanasiev 1985: 280–282). Still, neither Russian version has a sleeping princess. According to Dobrovolskaia, Russian folklore lacks the type of Sleeping beauty – ATU 410 (2021: 158). However, the sleeping beauty is the sole image from this fairy tale that is truly important for Card. His interest in delayed consummation of marriage can nevertheless be directly traced to Russian folklore. Two books here are key – *Morphology of the Folktale* and *Historical Roots of the Wonder Tale* by the same Vladimir Propp whose theory Card's protagonist Ivan/Itzak Shlomo Smetski wants to test in his PhD thesis (Propp 1968: 63–64, 73–74, 131–132; Propp 1986: 112–140, 298–299, 305–309; Propp 2012: 198–204). Propp analyses motifs and plots, which reflect initiation rites in the so-called “big houses in the woods”. Particularly important among these are *The Beauty in the Coffin*, *The Wife at her Husband's Wedding* and *The Husband at his Wife's Wedding*. According to Propp, in the period following initiation but prior to integration into the adult collective, young men had to live together in the woods in a kind of brotherhood. Women were forbidden from entering their houses, with two notable exceptions. Older women could be there as mothers to look after the young men, as could young girls, who stayed there as “sisters” during their own initiation rites. The word “sister” is used to obscure true gender relations. They acted as wives to their “brothers”. These group sexual encounters tended to morph into couples after leaving the big house, especially in the case of a child. The woman, however, had to “forget” her past. The path to a new life led through a ritual temporary death and the motif of a woman in her coffin.

According to Propp, both women and men made two marriages – a temporary group marriage in the big house in the woods, and a constant union as a couple at home as the

²³ To my mind, Card's motif of the Bear as the god of winter on the clearing, that separates the two words later influenced Arden's image of a clearing with the Bear/the demon of summer on it. In both cases, the enemy later becomes an ally.

basis for a family. In some fairy tales, the hero marries twice or at least intends to marry a second time because he forgets his first wife. The abandoned first wife reminds him of their past, and the hero resumes the union, remarrying his wife from the woods/other world and abandoning or even killing his second bride. Examples of such plots are in *Morskoi Tsar' i Vasilisa Premudraia – The Sea Tsar and Vasilisa the Wise* (Afanasiev 1985: 137–142)²⁴ and *Peryshko Finista Iasna Sokola – Finist the Falcon* (Afanasiev 1985: 190–198; Zheleznova 1966).

The wife is not always good and faithful, and can be aggressive and cruel, behaviour sometimes caused by her lover, a monster. The nuptial night thus becomes a test: the bride may try to kill her husband and/or his magic helper, or to escape from him. Reconciliation between them, seen as a second marriage, signals normalisation. An example is the fairy tale *Beznogii i slepoi bogatyri – The Legless Knight and The Blind Knight* (Afanasiev 1985: 59–65; Afanasev 1916: 321–332).

The idea of the first betrothal being of greater value than the second is, as mentioned above, manifest in Card's novel through the Jewish folktale *The Sky, the Well and the Rat*. This story is known in written form from the Talmudic era but scholars believe it to be told orally prior to the Talmudic age. It has numerous folk versions and literary elaborations in various Jewish languages, e.g. Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino and Judeo-Arabic (Alexander 1998: 257). It forms the Jewish oikotype 930*F *The Well and the Weasel as Witnesses*, one of the four Jewish oikotypes of the universal folktale *The Predestined Wife* ATU 930AA, discussed in detail by Aliza Shenhar.²⁵ Another oikotype, however, AT930*J *Taming the Father-in-Law*, which refers to a boy of low origin and a princess, is even more relevant to Card's plot. Central to it is *King Solomon's daughter in a tower* in which the king has secluded his daughter in a helpless attempt to avoid her predestined marriage to a boy of unfit origin. In other stories of the oikotype of predestined marriage, it is mother and son and not the father who are at the centre. Importantly, Shenhar equates legends about an "imprisoned or sleeping hero" (Shenhar 1987: 33)²⁶.

In one of the variations of this oikotype, a young Jewish scholar who is loyal to the commandments of the Torah and tradition is magically transferred against his will to a strange land where he is betrothed to a Christian princess. Transferred back, his heart remains with his bride. Both pine desperately for each other. The young man's father finds the bride, heals her and brings her to his son, but he has died of grief. His bride brings him back to life and the couple are reunited. In any case, the foreign princess always converts to Judaism because of her love for the Jewish boy. Intriguingly, this oikotype of a Jewish boy and a Christian princess is popular among Jews from Islamic countries (Shenhar 1987: 31–32, 34–37).

²⁴ The English translation of this fairy tale in Afanasev 1916: 243–255 lacks the second marriage.

²⁵ Shenhar wrote her paper addressing Aarne-Thompson's classification (AT) as Uther's reworking of it (ATU) has not been done yet.

²⁶ Prof. Eli Yassif who commented on my presentation at the annual folklore conference in Bar-Ilan University in 2022 suggested another Jewish folktale as a source of Card's story. A young man puts a ring on the finger of a sleeping woman whom he abandons without understanding the consequences. However, Ivan did not approach Katerina when he was 10.

The striking similarity between Card's plot and Shenhar's paper suggests it may be one of Card's actual sources, even though he uses the oikotype with a notable inversion. Instead of a Jewish scholar who studies the Torah, Ivan/Itzak Shlomo Smetski is a secular scholar whose Jewishness is pragmatic and superficial. Instead of the Torah, he studies non-Jewish culture. His mother, the most Jewish person among the Smetskis, sends her son away from his Jewish bride, Ruthie, to his predestined Christian wife. In Taina, he pragmatically converts to Christianity, and back in the USA continues to live as a secular Jew. The Jewish Ruthie, influenced by Baba Yaga, tries to kill Ivan but he is saved by his mother's witchcraft. According to the same logic of inversion, it is not the Jewish King Solomon who should be tamed, but a Christian King Matfei who needs the legitimate heir, but hates the idea of unsuitable son-in-law. Katerina's conversion to Judaism is not part of the narrative. It may be assumed that she did so as in the USA her children are registered as Jewish. Yet, all become Christian during their regular visits to Taina (Card 1999: 291, 387).

Card's alternative Slavic fantasy is largely based on non-Slavic folklore, be it the universal type of a *Sleeping Beauty* or Jewish oikotypes of the *Predestined Wife*. He not only makes his protagonist a folklorist, but also makes intense use of folklore scholarship. In her research into folklorists as characters in contemporary American fantastika, Shelley Ingram claims they are professionally incompetent. Card's Ivan Smetski refutes this. Capable of being both a folk hero and a scholar, he anticipates the emerging Russian fantastika tradition which treats folklorists as people with magical power (Fialkova 2020a; Ingram 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

All of the authors discussed in this paper create their alternative Slavic fantasy using plots and motifs from fairy tales and mythology of both folk and literary origin. They either ignore the Russian epic *bylinas* or simply mention them in passing, like Morwood and Card. This is of particular interest because *bylinas*, although containing various monsters, address Russia's assumed historical past rather than the non-existent world. Where epic poetry is relevant – for example, as the source of magic – Morwood alludes to the *Iliad*. The sources of the plots openly manifested by the authors could be unreliable. Thus, Arden's trilogy is indebted not so to *Morozko* as to Marshak's play *Twelve Months*, while Card's novel not to the Russian versions of *Sleeping Beauty*, but to the contamination of the Russian folktales with the motif of delayed marriage and the Jewish oikotypes of the Predestined wife. While Valente's direct allusions to Gogol's *Viy* are merely superficial, hidden parallels with Bulgakov are evident.

Folklore characters freely merge with literary creations and historical figures. In Arden's world, for instance, Baba Yaga is a former lover of Pushkin's Chernomor and they are great grandparents of Alexander Peresvet (Lightbringer), a hero of the Battle of Kulikovo. Valente's Koschei the Deathless and Baba Yaga become siblings with *Viy* from Gogol's eponymous story, while Zmei Gorinich (Zmey Gorynych, a snake) is the son of the dragon from Lake Baikal and Genghis Khan; in Stalinist times, he convicts and

kills “enemies of the people”. Many of the female characters are proactive and powerful (Morewood, Arden, Skye, Valente), sometimes even androgynous (Arden), which lead them to husbands/mates from the supernatural world.

Chronicles are not juxtaposed with folklore as reality to fiction because they are freely manipulated by the rulers – commissioned, torn and edited (Morwood). Authors relate to folklore as an important historical database and see linguistic ability as a source of magical power. It is therefore logical that the professional folklorist proficient in languages prospers in both worlds (Card).

Alternative Slavic fantasy recreates different historical periods and events with varying levels of accuracy, from Kievan Rus in the 9th–13th centuries (Morwood, Card), the Principality of Moscow in the 14th century (Arden), the Russian Empire of 1805–1826 (Skye), Russia during 1913(?)–1952 (Valente) and Ukraine between the 1970s–1990s (Card). The plots play out in fictional states such as Khorlov and Koldunov (Morwood) and Taina (Card), and in recognisable Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Kiev (Arden, Skye, Valente, Card). In many instances, famous historical events are totally reconstructed, as happens to the Northern Crusade in Morwood’s novel. It features the only conflict between Rus and the westerners in the novels under discussion. Similarly, changes occurred in the actions of Oleg of Ryazan in the Battle of Kulikovo in Arden’s trilogy and in the fate of the Decembrists in Skye’s diology. Only this last one, however, offers an alternative outcome. More typically, authors expose ‘how it really was’, creating a crypto-history rather than an alternative one. The problematic character of the chronicles, themselves manipulated, helps them do this.

The phenomenon that attracts almost all of the authors is *dvoeverie* – the duality of paganism and Christianity. Whereas this can be freely explored in a mythological mode, in historical fantasy there is always a tension between the two, from mild (Morwood, Skye) to hostile (Arden). The conflict between paganism and Christianity is perceived as the factor which negatively influences the country’s safety. Consequently, the authors strive to bring the two together for a reconciliation. The idea of unity and peace between former enemies is generally very important in this type of historical fantasy. Although there are enough historical events, featuring the Russian or Soviet army as the aggressors, they do not influence the plots. As a result, contrary to current political realities in alternative Slavic fantasy Russia does not pose a threat to the Western world. Aggression is often directed inward against Russian citizens and Russian pagan spirits.

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РУСЬ, РОССИЯ И УКРАИНА В АЛЬТЕРНАТИВНОМ СЛАВЯНСКОМ
ФЭНТЕЗИ АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНЫХ ПИСАТЕЛЕЙ
ЧАСТЬ 2. РОССИЯ И УКРАИНА в 19 И 20 ВЕКАХ

ЛАРИСА ФИАЛКОВА



Термин альтернативная славянская фантастика определяет англоязычное фэнтези, сюжеты которого развиваются в славянских или квазиславянских странах на базе славянского или квазиславянского фольклора. Данная публикация – это окончание статьи, общее введение к которой и первая часть, посвященная образам условной средневековой Руси, опубликованы в предыдущем номере журнала *Studia Mythologica Slavica*, 2021, 24: 13–32 <https://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/sms/article/view/10419/9566>.

Сюжет дилогии Эвелин Скай разворачивается, в основном, в Санкт-Петербурге в 1805–1826 годах, но исторически переносится в Казахскую степь, актуализируя имперскую проблематику. Знаковые Петербургские топонимы, например, Невский проспект, Васильевский остров, Чернышев мост и Зимний дворец, соседствуют не только с вымышленными Овчинным и Летним островами, но даже с Волшебным Дуплом, в котором хранится

стратегический запас российской магии. Квазиисторический фон строится на сращивании известных исторических событий – битвы при Аустерлице и восстания декабристов - с откровенным вымыслом. Контаминация имен российских императоров вызывает к жизни никогда не существовавшего Павла Александровича Романова, пощадившего декабристов. Несмотря на упоминания Бабы Яги, основой романа является не русский фольклор, а сказка *Золушка*, заявленная и на топонимическом (название кондитерской), и на фабульном уровне. В дилогии Скай Золушкин бал сливается с первым балом Наташи Ростовской (*Война и мир* Толстого). Как и в трилогии Арден, рассмотренной в первой части статьи, только объединение языческих и христианских сил способно обеспечить безопасность и процветание России.

Топонимика чрезвычайно важна и в романе Кэтрин Валенте, где смена названия города (Санкт-Петербург-Петроград-Ленинград) и переименования улицы (Гороховая- Комиссарская (sic!)-Дзержинская) являются вехами времени. Сюжет охватывает период между примерно 1913 и 1942-м годами, включая Первую мировую, гражданскую и Вторую мировую войны, заканчиваясь блокадой Ленинграда. Дело врачей 1952–1953 годов лишь упомянуто вне сюжетного развития и общей хронологии. Украина упомянута дважды в контексте ее вечных страданий. Квазигородское российское пространство сочетается с фантастическим царством Кощея Бессмертного, царя Жизни, управляющего миром совместно с Виём (персонажем одноименной повести Гоголя), ставшего у Валенте Кашеевым братом и царем Смерти, и их общей сестрой сказочной бабой Ягой. Фольклорная основа романа - сказка *Марья Моревна* эпизодически дополняется отсылкам к сказкам *Василиса Прекрасная*, *Царевна-лягушка* и о *Елене Прекрасной*. Помимо персонажей русского фольклора в романе фигурирует вила, женское мифологическое существо с лебедиными крыльями, популярное в фольклоре южных славян. У Валенте вила русифицируется, став мадам Лебедевой. В отличие от явных отсылок к русскому фольклору, к творчеству Пушкина, Гоголя и Ахматовой, аллюзии на романы Булгакова *Мастер и Маргарита* и *Белая гвардия* автором завуалированы. Обнаружить их позволяет текстуальный анализ. Как и в творчестве Арден, рассмотренном в первой части статьи, исторические персонажи в хронологически более раннем романе Валенте сращены с героями фольклора. Например, товарищ Горинич (sic!) управитель российской фабрики арестов, - сын женщины-дракона из озера Байкал и Чингиз-хана. Роман завершается посмертным примирением жертв и палачей в Кашеевом царстве Яичка (sic!), визуальный образ которого, возможно, навеян яйцами Фаберже.

Сюжет романа Орсона Скотта Карда развивается в трех основных хронотопах – в условном древнерусском государстве Тайна, пребывающем в постоянном 9-м веке, в Украине, как советской (1970-е годы), так и постсоветской (1990-е годы), и в США в те же исторические периоды. Путешествие между тремя хронотопами, выживание и карьерный успех Ивана/Ицака-Шломо Сметского в

каждом из них, будь он то сказочным королем, то американским профессором или культурным героем Украины, – это и эмиграция во времени или только в пространстве, и сказочное чудо, и реализация профессиональных знаний героем-фольклористом, человеком смешанного славянского (украинского?) и еврейского происхождения. В основе сюжета романа - *Спящая красавица*, сюжет которой в русском фольклоре отсутствует, и еврейские легенды о предназначенной жене. У Карда, как и у следовавших за ним Валенте и Арден, намечено сращивание фольклорных и исторических персонажей, бабы Яги и княгини Ольги. Знаками независимой Украины в романе Карда являются украинский язык, переименование киевских улиц и механизация фермы в Карпатских горах. В отличие от Морвуда, Киевская Русь у которого связана и с Александром Невским, и с едва упомянутыми запорожскими казаками, т.е. и с Россией, и с Украиной, средневековая Тайна у Карда ни к России, ни к Белоруссии не отношения не имеет. Вместе с тем, героем Украины Иван/Ицак Шломо Сметский становится за открытие, а точнее, за фабрикацию пергамента с русскими, а не украинскими сказками. Образы украинского фольклора в романе не встречаются.

Характерной чертой альтернативного славянского фэнтези является свободное конструирование квазиславянского фольклора и сращивание фольклорных персонажей с литературными и историческими. За редким исключением (Скай), манипуляции с историческими событиями не приводят к результату, отличающемуся от известного. Исторические документы, подверженные манипуляциям, теряют убедительность, а сказки становятся историческим источником. Знание языков и фольклора соразмерно по значимости оружию и магии. Идеалом представляются двоеверие и примирение недавних врагов, превращенных в союзников.

Prof. Dr. Larisa Fialkova, University of Haifa, Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature, Abba Khoushy Ave 199, IL-2611001 Haifa, lara@research.haifa.ac.il