

*Olga Visentini*

## LIBRI E RAGAZZI: STORIA DELLA LETTERATURA INFANTILE E GIOVANILE

*Visentini O. Libri e ragazzi: storia della letteratura infantile e giovanile [Books and Young People: History of Children's and Youth Literature] (3rd ed.). Milan: A. Mondadori, 1940. Pp. 414–423.*

### *Russian writers*

#### *1. The land and its peoples*

In both its profile and its position — Waliszewski has written — Russia is neither Europe nor Asia: although boundless and wild, it does not oppose an indomitable resistance to the efforts of men, allowing itself to be subdued and domesticated.

Lacking clearcut boundaries it has been the highway for repeated mass emigrations: Scythians, Goths, Avars, Bulgars, Hungarians.

The waves of nomadic peoples that have overlapped one another through the centuries have left behind a sense of the inexorable nature of fate and shaped, despite that, a passionate character in the people for the tenacious defence of every right: at once humble and rebellious, violent and dreamers, essentially mystical.

In addition, Russia has been influenced by countries from both East and West in the perennial ebb and flow of peoples across its endless plains. The struggle to unify so many disparate elements, of which the main ones are the Finns, the Tartars and the Slavs, was a long and difficult one, and delayed all settled forms of civilization.

For these and other reasons, a vibrant and imaginative oral tradition recycles motifs from other lands, intermixing historical figures with legendary indigenous heroes, and the written children's literature has no distinct character of its own like that of some other nations, but is part and parcel of the great literature of all Russia.

Waliszewski recounts how in 1834 the critic Belinsky, while preparing the history of his country's works, asked himself: Do we have a

literature — answering his own question: We have only a book trade. And some years later, when publishing a literary survey, he gave it the title “Trifles on trifles”, suggesting how short is the story of the artistic production of this people, which had to rise to civilization through a very long historical evolution.

## 2. *The national legends*

The national legends of a people excluded from the European community by geographical and ethnic circumstances, have an immeasurable undercurrent of sadness, veiled with irony. As Pushkin says: “Everything we sing, we sing sadly... a melancholy lament is the true song of Russia...”.

The folksingers travelled through the steppes, the plains, along the rivers, reciting their *byliny*, short heroic songs that are collected in two cycles, the Kievan and the Novgorodian.

The Kievan cycle features many giants who are perhaps the progenitors of the Titans in Greek mythology. Volga Svyatoslavich is the son of a princess and a serpent, strong and cunning, capable of extraordinary deeds. Vladimir is a giant in the guise of a chivalrous knight: he has the soul of an inveterate hedonist, but when the Tartars besiege Kiev, he kneels before Ilya, the saviour appointed by destiny.

Ilya is the hero par excellence of the folksingers: he vanquishes winged monsters, saves cities, survives pitched battles; but like a good Russian peasant he is a great trencherman and not averse to a drink.

Less interesting is the Novgorodian cycle, that offers us merchants, pilgrims, seafarers, racketeering, showing the clear influence of real-life medieval events. The wandering minstrels would also sing of other legends among the huts and villages, hotchpotches of Christianity and paganism.

Legend takes on the grandeur of epic when the shadow of Ivan the Terrible falls over it, garnering all the adoration of the populace.

Hardly less fulsome is the admiration heaped on Vladimir the Saint, or on Igor, the warrior prince and poet, inspirer of all Russia, who in his wars against his enemies, his imprisonment and flight, has something of William of Orange and of Ogier the Dane.

## 3. *Popular legends*

The Russian people are well supplied with mystical and fantastical legends that mirror life in a fanciful manner.

The people adore the supernatural and they look for it here on earth, hoping to see signs of it in the simple events of daily life. The peasant who wanders through a forest at night is not afraid but marvels at its wonders; and if nothing extraordinary happens to him, he resorts to his imagination and creates what, in the telling and retelling, he will come to believe he has lived.

Many legends begin like this.

And then we have the poetry of the *rusalki*, the water nymphs, once young maidens fallen into the waters, now prisoners of the Spirit of the Rivers, and of *Leshy*, the god of the woods, and of the witches and their nocturnal gatherings

Sly mischief is the leitmotif of the stories about Ivanushka Durachok: “Ivan the Fool, a sort of Sicilian *Giufà*: essentially a pretend idiot who always comes out ahead.”

The folk tales of Russia were collected by ALEXANDER AFANASYEV, who, like the Brothers Grimm, transcribed them directly from the lively tellings of the people: a curiosity among them is the story Little Red Riding Hood with certain adaptations imposed by the Russian environment, its habits and customs.

#### 4. *The fabulists*

As the people sang and dreamed, eternally childlike, Christian, Greek, Roman and Germanic elements gradually infiltrated, preparing the ground for civil unification and the arrival of Peter the Great.

Artistic life largely centred around the courts of the Tsars who seem to have drawn in the creative forces of the people.

La Fontaine was first translated by IVAN CHEMNITZER (1745–1784) with an all but humble simplicity and certainly less artistry than that deployed by IVAN DMITRIEV (1760–1837) who sculpted the tales with a singular musicality and elegance of language. The greatest of the Russian fabulists is surely IVAN KRYLOV (1769–1844), born into a poor family in Moscow: his first collection of twenty-three fables was published in 1809 and reprints soon reached seventy-seven thousand copies. To these, Krylov would add many others, some two hundred in all: initially the poet drew on La Fontaine, as had his fellow countrymen, but then extended his sources to include Aesop and Phaedrus, finally composing his own material set in Russia and imbued with the soul of the country — fables that deal with humble situations, warning against snares, or imparting a lesson, at times betraying the barely veiled and disdainful mordancy typical of many Russian writers. Plots often unfold

powerfully and rapidly, as in *The Pond and the River* [*La contesa fra lo stagno e il fiume*], or *The Vain Ant* [*La formica vanitosa*], or *The Siskin and the Dove* [*Il Canarino e il Colombo*] or *Young Lion's Education* [*L'educazione del Leone*]; others are tinged with a subtle satire and couched in a sprightly, even nervy language rendered in finely crafted verse.

The poet was appointed to a post in the Imperial Library at Saint Petersburg and made a member of the Academy. But his work would receive higher recognition still; one of his sweetest tales — *The Cornflower* [*Il fiordaliso*] — fell under the eyes of the Princess Maria: the story of a flower the colour of the skies, which opens in the shade, and remains pale, almost withering away until the rising dawn bestows dew on its petals, reviving it just as hope can be revived.

The Empress was moved to reward the poet with a simple bouquet of flowers for his fine lyrics; and he kept this singular gift until his death, asking for it to be placed in his coffin. A deep and nostalgic show of feeling in apparent contrast with his often bitter poems and somewhat wild life: but the contrast is ample testimony to the Russian spirituality. Krylov has been translated into many languages.

## 5. Fairytales

The first fairytales we have from Russia we owe to a poet, VASILY ANDREYEVICH ZHUKOVSKY (1773–1852), whose own life reads like a fairytale: born in a village of the Tula province to a nobleman and a Turkish servant and adopted by Andrey Zhukovsky, he was transferred to an artistically inclined aunt in the city; there the boy composed and recited verses, got into the university and took part in the war of 1812, which inspired his poem *A bard in the fields of the Russian warriors* [*Il bardo nel campo dei guerrieri russi*]. The Empress desired his presence at court and appointed him a reader and later tutor to the young princes. In that role the poet, who possessed a profound knowledge of German and Greek literature, and who had translated from the Indian the Mahabarata and the songs of Firdowsi from the Persian, composed fairy tales for the emperor's sons betraying these varied influences, without losing the characteristic impress of his Russian lineage.

The story *The Tale of Iván Tsarévich and the Grey Wolf* [*La storia del principe Ivan e del Lupo grigio*] revisits the well-known motif of the bird stealing the golden apples from the king's garden and Ivan setting out in pursuit with the help of a grey wolf; *The Sleeping Princess* [*La principessa addormentata*] is a version of the Sleeping Beauty, while

*The War of mice and frogs* [*La guerra dei topi e delle rane*] is taken from Homer, but with new entertaining elements including an appearance by the Tsar.

One of the loveliest is *The Tale of Tsar Berendei* [*La fiaba dello Zar Berendei*], written for an unusual competition between himself and the great Pushkin: Tsar Berendei, while drinking from a spring finds himself being caught by his long beard: it is the Spirit of the Rivers who will not let him go unless in exchange for his only son Ivan. After many adventures the prince succeeds in extracting himself from imprisonment and returns to claim his kingdom.

This story again contains traditional elements, but it is revitalised by the introduction of fabulous creatures that inhabit the superabundance of Russian nature, and other characters are also given an indigenous makeover, the whole being imbued with a melancholy which only increases its enchantment.

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN (1799–1837), Zhukovsky's great friend, wrote for the unusual above-mentioned competition *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* [*La fiaba dello Zar Saltan*], which although sticking close to well-known models, he invested with such grace and typically Slav melancholy that it acquires a notable originality.

The same qualities can be seen in the fairy tales translated by Verdinis: *The Golden Cockerel* [*Il gallo d'oro*], *The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish* [*La leggenda del pescatore*], *The Tale of the Dead Princess and the Seven Knights* [*La principessa morta e sette cavalieri*]: in his stories for the young Pushkin is no different from the Pushkin we know from his adult stories: a harmonious fusion of different elements of European civilization, reshaped by an ardent character and a mysterious power to recreate them with an all-Russian physiognomy. Characteristic and heroic is the story of Russlan and Ludmilla.

It is as if ALEKSEY REMIZOV, born in 1877, had set out to encapsulate the soul of Russian literature so as to transmit it to young people: a novelist working from a strong palette in his early works, in his maturity he captured everything that is Slavic, interweaving the life, customs, traditions, superstitions, portents, and popular legends in his Olya trilogy.

Remizov loved enchantment, wizards, fairies, dreams, wonders, nightmares and animals. This penchant, mingled with folkloric elements, had him compose the stories for children which he called the *Tales of Asseka, the Monkey King* [*Fiabe di Asseka, re delle scimmie*]; strange, vivid fairy tales, full of action and dialogue, sometimes with a nursery-rhyme lilt like *Tiny Wrinkle* [*Sorcetta Rughetta*], often painfully

human like *The Bear Cub* [*L'orsetto*], original even when they take their inspiration from tradition like *Hare Ivanich* [*Il leprotto Ivanic*], which owes something to Bluebeard.

DMITRY MAMIN, who wrote as SIBIRYAK (1852–1912) is best known for his hunting stories set in the wild Ural Mountains, among them the fine *The Little Deer* [*Il piccolo cervo*]. He also wrote a delightful children's novel *Fireflies* [*Lucciole*], set in a woodland landscape.

## 6. *Leo Tolstoy*

Count LEO TOLSTOY, born in Yasnaya Polyana in 1828, taken by his studies to Moscow, to Kazan and to Petersburg, by military service to the Caucasus and Crimea, and by the desire to see more of the world to travel around Europe, subsequently retired to his lands, reared a family, and wrote. Fame soon came to him, of the most radiant kind. It might seem to represent that chimera of happiness ever pursued by men; but instead it seems as if an abyss opened in front of the great thinker, a huge void, a question that reached out to being, to time, to space and finding no response brought him near to a desperate denial of life.

But a light was glowing in the shadows; it came from the eyes of peasants, from the smiles of little children, it came from a flame of love that revealed God and the infinite to him. And so he returned to what he had once been — a child — to that blessed age that knows how to see the divine in things and in creatures.

And as he wrote: “The idea came to me that I should organise here in the country a school for the whole neighbourhood”.

Tolstoy's school was one of the most engrossing adventures of his life (1): he worried away at opposing principles, and experience by experience arrived at the following formulation: “The only books that the people understand and that meet their taste are the books not written *for* the people but *by* the people and more exactly: short stories, proverbs, collections of songs, legends, verses, riddles”.

And further on, a eulogy of the Scriptures: “Without the Bible our society would not be possible, just as Greek society, the boy developing into the man, would not have been possible without Homer. The Bible is the only book for primary school and children's reading”.

These two key declarations reveal the spirit of the reading books he edited for his schools. There are four of them and they gradually build a collection of fables and tales, true stories and narratives, historical tales, *byliny*, topics for conversation, with an evident concern not to stray into error or excess, into allowing the sentimental world to predominate

over the rational one. Tolstoy does not want limits or preconceptions to condition the impressions that reading can stimulate, so he enters briskly into the meat of matters, does not comment on them, or conclude any passage with a moral precept, but allows the lesson to emerge spontaneously from the reading.

The fables draw on the rich European heritage, that is, on Aesop, Phaedrus, La Fontaine: sometimes they are original, sometimes inspired by legendary religious figures; the true stories say things about life, becoming more complex in the later volumes and with a novel-like flavour in their breadth of reference and pacy plots that keeps the reader in suspense.

Here and there, among the *byliny*, traditional fairy stories appear: *Tom Thumb* [*Pollicino*], for example. The scenes that Tolstoy supplies as conversation topics are very lively and dramatic. But everything (even contributions from different sources) is reworked and carries the writer's unmistakable imprint; the four books constitute both a statement and a new departure. Tolstoy hoped that ideally they would nourish at least two generations of Russian children, from the imperial princelings to the sons of the muzhiks. This elevated sense of mission, which had its basis in the divine, broadened in his Gospel stories, which move from the human to the divine in the course of the narration. We can look at some examples: There is a humble shoemaker who awaits Christ in his lowly abode and sees him coming in the shape of the poor, so that the unfolding of the tale confirms the Gospel verse: "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me".

In *Two Old Men* [*Due Vecchi*], of the two old men who go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, it is the one who stops along the way to help his brothers who truly reaches the tomb of Christ. *How to Resist Evil* [*Come vincere il male*] dramatizes the episode of Saint Nicholas the Hermit and the bandit, and we witness the reflowering of three old trees at each victory of the one for the good of the other. While the story *How much Land does a Man Need?* [*Quanta terra occorre ad un uomo?*] pauses to contemplate a pit less than two meters long, another entitled *What Men Live By* [*Di che vivono gli uomini?*] expands to embrace heaven and earth in the story of the exiled angel who, in the guise of a young boy, has to remain among men until he has learned that what they live on is love. Tolstoy's stories play out on a broad canvas, sometimes with a sort of novelistic legendariness, sometimes with the hovering hint of fairy tale, while his habit of proceeding by dialogue, with naive repetitions, and not without, here and there, prophetic overtones, recalls

the florilegia and the morality of the Middle Ages, and above all to the Gospels.

We feel that the writer speaks to the pure in heart, but as only a poet can speak; and we feel that the pure come to meet him just as children and angels must have met him when, in November 1910, he left the house of his fathers to move, old and gaunt as a prophet, between the snows and the storms towards infinity; and that infinity was death, that is, ascension.

### 7. *Novels and short stories*

The Russians are passionately attached to their land: they feel it, they describe it, they deploy it as a background to their novels and stories, which draw a particular indigenous flavour from it.

Russian patriarchal life is portrayed with great finesse through a veil of nostalgia by SERGEY AKSAKOV (1791–1859) in his *The Family Chronicle* [*Cronaca di famiglia*], his *Hunter's Memories* [*Ricordi di un cacciatore*], his *Memories* [*Ricordi*] and most of all in *Childhood Years of Bagrov the Grandson* [*L'infanzia del nipotino di Bagrov*] which earned him the title of 'the Russian Homer'. The life he portrays is transparent, without struggles, dominated by old grandfather Bagrov who, not in recognition of any spiritual superiority, but by mere force of tradition, exercises absolute sovereignty over the family; wholesome pages that exude the fresh odour of rustic and homely things.

NIKOLAI VASILYEVICH GOGOL (1809–1852) was a scion of minor gentry from the Poltava district, where old traditions and legends still persisted, and the spirit of that land suffuses his writings: *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* [*Le serate alla fattoria di Dikanka*], which came out in 1831, aroused considerable admiration for its powerful portrayal of Ukraine, with all its joys and sorrows, conveyed in stories not without a vein of irony and the odd echo of the romantic school. *Mirgorod* is a more robust exercise — though still not entirely free of romanticism — and laughter shines through the tears in a typically Gogol manner.

A fully realised expression of the 'Little Russia' way of life is his *Taras Bulba*: Taras, the father, persistently fights with his sons to prove their strength; elsewhere there is a young Cossack who throws himself into a puddle to show his contempt for the beautiful clothes he has been dressed in: episodes of an almost wild vigour, which demonstrate Gogol's forceful moulding of character, his sincerity, his passion, but also that sense of the inexorability of fate typical of Russia, and which would



result in both a certain mystical elevation and a degree of contradiction in the mature Gogol.

IVAN S. TURGENEV (1818–1883) adopts a procedure similar to that of Thackeray and Dickens in composing his novels: close analysis, a subtle and warm-hearted irony; in his humanitarian outlook he resembles Victor Hugo, but is more astringent. His books maintain a constantly high tone. Particularly worthy of mention are *Hunter's Sketches* [*Racconti di un cacciatore*] and the sketches in the prose poems *Senilia*.

FYODOR M. DOSTOEVSKY (1822–1881) is a powerful portrayer of character and analyser of feelings, but he is certainly not a children's writer; none the less, suitable episodes can profitably be extracted from his books: the publisher Carabba provided an example with *The Little Netochka and Other Stories* [*La piccola Netotschka ed altri racconti*] in a translation by Eva Amendola<sup>1</sup>.

PAVEL IVANOVICH MELNIKOV (1819–1883), better known by his non-de-plume A. PECHERSKY, late in life wrote stories that children can read with pleasure, among them *Grandpa Polycarp* [*Nonno Policarpo*] and *Old Times* [*Vecchi anni*].

IVAN SAVVICH NIKITIN (1826–1861), an epic and lyric poet, deserves to be remembered for his profoundly human novel *Kulak* [*L'incettatore*], set in popular surroundings.

NIKOLAY MIKHAYLOVSKY (1843–1906) evoked, well on in his life, his earliest years, capturing them in the radiant, if often tearful pages of *Tioma's Boyhood* [*La fanciullezza di Tioma*], something of a flowering oasis in an otherwise scholarly body of work.

ANTON CHEKHOV (1860–1904) in his profound sense of the drama that can be played out in a small heart, has something in common with Florence Montgomery: there is a sweet but nagging pain in the pages of *Vanka* [*Il piccolo Ivan*]; and even the story of *Kashtanka* [*Castagnetta*], which has a more cheerful tone, is deeply melancholy at heart.

VLADIMIR G. KROLENKO (1853–1921) wrote for adults but is read by adolescents too for his vigorous simplicity and his sense of drama which brings his creatures to life and accompanies them in their vicissitudes: Social questions are touched on here and there without insistence: *The Blind Musician* [*Il musicista cieco*] is justly famous, while the pages of *The Murmuring Forest* [*La foresta mormora*] are very

---

<sup>1</sup>Dostoevsky F. *La piccola Netotschka ed altri racconti per fanciulli*. (Translated from the Russian by E. Amendola Kuhn. Ill. by L. Edel). Lanciano: Carabba, 1920. (Classici del fanciullo).

delicate. In Italy, Vallecchi has published a collection of short stories translated under the title *The Old Bell-Ringer* [*Il vecchio campanaro*]<sup>2)</sup>.

The human shines vividly through the often dramatically expressed melancholy of VSEVOLOD GARSHIN and strongly colours the unfolding of his novels and stories, among which *The Signal* [*Il segnale*] is a small masterpiece: a railway worker who lives a humble life beside the tracks that disappear into the distance, finds himself, by a combination of circumstances, faced with a train heading for disaster if he does not stop it. He has no signals, no means to hand, so he deliberately wounds himself and bloodies a strip of cloth, with which he manages to flag down the train.

The land and its endless steppes form the background to MARK VOVCHOK's *Marussia*, a gentle story, infused with elements of legend.

### 8. Contemporaries

The countryside, its rivers and the mountains of Russia, that seem to close off the boundless horizon, are perhaps the main protagonists of the writers nearer to us in time; and from that immensity melancholy blooms like a flower.

The lands of the Caucasus, wild and evocative, surround the protagonist of V. J. NEMIROVICH DANCHENKO's *The Falcon's Nest* [*Nidi di falchi*], and his dogged struggles mirror the ruggedness of the cliffs that reach up to the sky.

ALEKSANDR IVANOVICH KUPRIN, born in 1870, is a writer who carries on the tradition, happy to linger over descriptions of the landscape and of small details, as in *The White Poodle* [*Il barboncino bianco*] and *The Taper* [*Il pianista*].

T. SHCHEPKINA-KUPERNIK, far from her native Russia, commemorates her people from exile and captures their typical traits in her volume *The Lion-hearted Knight and Other Tales* [*Il cavalier Cuor di leone e altri racconti*]<sup>3)</sup>.

Among emigrants a nostalgia for the country left behind can often be expressed in passionate works: so much could be said of MIKHAIL OSORGIN who offers young readers a story pervaded with a fresh childlike joy in his *The Little Swallow Natasha* [*Rondinella Natascia*].

<sup>2)</sup>Korolenko V. *Il vecchio campanaro*. (Translation by B. Jakovenko). Firenze: Vallecchi, 1926. (Fontana viva. Opere scelte per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza).

<sup>3)</sup>Shchepkina-Kupernik T. *Il cavaliere cuor di Leone ed altri racconti* (transl. by K. Tkachenko). Lanciano: Carabba, 1923.

Another emigré writer is SASHA CHORNY who plots graceful animal tales and hymns humble things limpidly in poems aimed at children.

A fable about an unusual little dog, *Dashchenka*, is acutely observed and gracefully narrated by KAREL ČAPEK<sup>4</sup>.

V. P. ZHELIKHOVSKAYA stylishly evokes the world of childhood whose distant joys and kindnesses are recalled with a gentle nostalgia in her moving *How I was as a Child* [*Com'ero da bimba*], translated by Maria Chiara for Carabba<sup>5</sup>.

### 9. USSR children's writing

The troubled history of Russia after the war and during the Soviet regime has had its repercussions on children's and adolescent literature: the melancholy, evocative stories that seemed to breathe the spirit of the land and the mysticism of its people have given way to 'popular' didactic works, whether geographical, scientific, literary or philosophical.

Under this heading come the tomes of N. BAYSUTOV: *In the Chinese Village* [*Nel villaggio cinese*], *In the Country of Severe Frosts* [*Nel paese dei grandi geli*]; BEYUL's *Letters from Africa* [*Lettere dall'Africa*]; S. CHATSKINA's *The First One at the North Pole* [*Il primo al polo*]; and two by N. LEBEDEV, *In the North at the cost of one's life* [*Al Nord a prezzo della vita*] e *Alone among the Savages* [*Solo tra i selvaggi*]; also E. MYUDLIN's *Krassin*, which deals with travel, relations between peoples and their customs and usages.

V. BIANKI with his *Forest Newspaper* [*Giornale del bosco*], and V. DUROV with *My Animals* [*I miei animali*] e *A Feathered Artist* [*Artista pennuto*] offer instead animal stories, while M. ILIN with his *Black on White* [*Nero sul bianco*], *What Time is it?* [*Che ora è?*], *100.000 Whys* [*100000 perché*], and N. RUBAKIN with *Doctor Isaac's Experiences* [*Esperienze del dottor Isacco*], *How Men Learnt to Fly* [*Come gli uomini impararono a volare*] and similar volumes, to mention only these among many, provide scientific and philosophical instruction.

These works, though, are strangers to art. We no longer hear the soul of the people, their 'song', melancholy as may be, but song, nor the life and spirit with which her poets had imbued their homeland.

*Translated by John Francis Phillimore. Edited by Raffaella Vassena*

<sup>4</sup>The author includes Karel Čapek, although he was a Czech writer.

<sup>5</sup>Gelikovskaja V. P. *Com'ero da bimba. Dai ricordi della prima infanzia*. (Translated by M. Chiara). Lanciano: Carabba, 1930.

Mary Tibaldi Chiesa

## LETTERATURA INFANTILE

*Tibaldi Chiesa M. Letteratura infantile [Children's Literature]*  
(4 ed. 1953). Milan: Garzanti, 1944. Pp. 296–316.

The heritage of folk tales and popular and national legends in Russia is immense. They date back to ancient times and have a fantastic content of extraordinary variety and richness; some have a historical background.

In Russia, too, the imagination of primitive peoples filled nature with fantastic beings; in the rivers and springs there were the *russalke*, maidens of marvelous beauty, with long hair and white arms, dancing in the moonlight, singing. In the *russalke*, souls of drowned or fallen young women are impersonated as prisoners of the spirit of the waters, the *vodianoï*.

The *vodianoï* lives in lakes, wells, cisterns, has a long beard, magnetic eyes that lure men down into abyssal whirlpools, is evil and takes pleasure in the misfortunes of its victims. Wicked and malignant are also the witches, the *vedme*, with their hideous appearance and deformed limbs: sometimes, however (as is also the case in our folk tales, both for sorceresses and for the devil), they transform themselves into beautiful women to enchant travelers and divert them from the right path; this is what the Spirit of the Woods, the *liesci*, too does, it is the leader of all witches and imagines himself as an old man with a long green beard and horns on his head. He too takes many forms, and is wicked and terrible: at night he lurks in the woods and chases passers-by with mocking laughter, diverting them from the right path and vanishing at daybreak. In the *liesci* dwell the terrors of those who are forced to cross in darkness the immense lonely forests with dark trees, where the hoarse cries of night birds resound.

A powerful king ruled the sea, alongside his bride Onda [Wave]. He had many beautiful daughters who came to the surface of the waters at night to dance by moonlight. We see them appear in the legend of Sadko, and one of them bewitches the hero, a merchant, known as the Nightingale of Novgorod because of his marvelous voice and his art