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## TALES, TEXTS AND IMAGES: APPROACHES TO FOLKTALE ILLUSTRATIONS

This essay thematizes issues around studying and analyzing book illustrations of folktales and folk wondertales. It surveys some of the most recent and relevant studies of folktale illustration by international scholars with the view of developing a systematic approach to the emergence of a large corpus of Russian folktale illustration since the rise of the illustrated folktale book in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Russia. The specific focus of the survey is on approaches that are able to address the large amount and variety of illustration traditions of particular folk wondertales on the one hand, and the cultural and historical dynamics of the literary interpretation of the tale. To contrast these approaches from literature studies and art history, the essay also raises the perspective of folklore studies on book illustration. This raises important perspectives around the relation between tales, texts and images, that have yet remained muted or presupposed.

*Keywords:* folktales, illustration, iconography, Soviet iconography, Afanasjev, Grimm, folklore studies, defolklorization, ban on images, lubok

### *Introduction*

It seems self-evident to us that folktales<sup>1</sup> are extensively illustrated. Especially when intended for young children, the illustrations are an indispensable part of the book. Folktales themselves are highly evocative of images, and this has inspired a rich tradition of illustrating folktales. However, the analysis of all these illustrations is mostly absent from folktale studies, whose methods of collecting, systematizing and interpreting folktales do not involve looking at book illustrations. Indeed, visual images are sometimes treated as alien to the aural and linguistic constitution of the folktale. This neglect or exclusion characterizes

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a wide range of methodological approaches to folktales, such as the historical-geographical, the morphological, the psycho-analytical, feminist and others. As a result, folktale illustrations tend to be studied by visual methods and art history, which in turn tend to neglect the folktale tradition. In Russia, only few folktale illustrators were object of study, namely those who were able to contribute to the established canon of art history. Consequently, almost the entire imagery of the Russian folktale as it developed since mid-19<sup>th</sup> century remains largely unexplored. Yet this material can serve as a rich source for studying Russian and Soviet culture and the history of socio-political developments. This essay is concerned with surveying approaches to folktale illustrations that could help addressing the largely understudied corpus of Russian folktale illustrations. Despite the abundance of folktale illustrations since the rise of the popularity of the illustrated folktale book in Germany in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and in Russia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century there has been a surprisingly limited range of methodological analyses of these images. It is the aim of this essay to survey the most convincing and most recent approaches to folktale-illustration research, and to suggest ways in which they can be developed further to elaborate our understanding of the Russian folktale imagery.

### *I. Approaches within Illustration Studies*

Whereas there is a wide range of scholarly studies on book illustration and book design [Vereshchagin 1898; Fomin 2015; Ottowitz 2017], especially on illustrated children's literature [Thiele 1991; Thiele, Doonan 2000; Ries 1992; Johnson 2019; Scherer 2020; Rigler 2020; Balina, Vyugin 2013; Balina, Oushakine 2021; Chistobaev 2017–2021], there is relatively little to be found specifically on folktale (or fairytale) illustration. If we focus on publications that are dedicated to folktale illustrations and address their specificity, we have relatively little at hand. Generally, the methods at stake revolve around stylistic, formal and socio-historical (including biographical) analyses, which are common in traditional art history, or what is more interesting for the analysis of folktale illustrations, around the analysis of the content which is depicted. In image-oriented art history (*Bildwissenschaften*) we analyze the evolution of traditions that depict certain contents, such as a motif, historical or mythical person or event. 'Iconography' is an important method here for analyzing the historically evolved conventions of depicting certain content and addressing the multiplicity of images. As will be demonstrated below, this approach is very productive of analyzing

illustrations, especially because they have become an important mass medium, playing a key role in the process of popularization of folktales in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

One prominent publication with an art historical focus is Nadezhda Shanina's *Skazka v tvorchestve russkich chudozhnikov* (The tale in the work of Russian artists) from 1969. It presents black and white illustrations and color plates, accompanied by a long contextual essay. It deals with folktale illustrations by "the most outstanding artists" of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries [Shanina 1969, 16], namely Ilya Repin, Viktor Vasnetsov and those associated with Abramtsevo and *Mir Iskusstva*, such as Ivan Bilibin, Elena Polenova, Mikhail Vrubel, Nikolai Roerich and Sergei Maljutin. This list of artists already indicates that Shanina has chosen a traditional art-historical approach. She contextualized the folk- and fairytale illustrations within the art-critical discourse of the period at stake, considering the historical views of the artists' contemporaries, for example, the critics. Although this approach is justified and remains important within art history, Shanina's accounts are problematic. For example, she draws our attention to the shortcomings of Repin's attempt to depict the legend (*bylina*) "Sadko" in his painting from 1876. After completing it, Repin himself admitted that it was "terrible". The reasons for such a harsh judgement remained in the dark, and Shanina did little to shed light onto this issue. Otherwise, she praised the achievements of Vasnetsov in creating a new genre within painting with his *Ivan Tsarevich and the Grey Wolf* (1889). But here she omitted the reactions of the critics: Vladimir Stassov found this, and other paintings by Vasnetsov, "helpless spawns" and "weak images" [quoted in Lang 2003, 186]. Aleksander Benois drew on an already established view on this painting in the press, when he referred to the wolf as a taxidermized, stuffed bag from a shop window [quoted in Lang 2003, 186]. The German art historian Walther Lang explains that what Vasnetsov's critics problematized was the fact that Vasnetsov failed to translate Realism into folktales because of his rather clichéd imagination. Lang's *Das Heilige Russland* (2003) offers a more critical analysis of folktale painting, when he thematizes the problematic relation of Vasnetsov and his critics to Nationalism and how this, in fact, stood in the way of developing a new genre, namely that of fairytale painting. The argument that Vasnetsov's fairytale paintings are valuable from the art historical perspective thus remains problematic<sup>2</sup>.

Art-historical or art-critical approaches to folktale or fairytale illustration are also employed in analyses of book illustrations. Helena Gosciolo analyzed illustrations by various artists of Hans Christian Ander-

sen's "The Little Mermaid" [Goscilo 2020]. Such a single-text approach is revealing, insofar as it offers the possibility to reflect on the different visual interpretations of the text, which in turn contribute to its literary interpretation. Yet Goscilo's analysis hinges on the art-critical approach, and so the assessment of good and bad painting turns into the assessment of good and bad illustration. Such an approach tends to reproduce the canons of art history. The question of *why* fairytale or folktale illustration needs to be considered as art, or what the relevance of such a canon is, is not critically addressed.

Interestingly, Shanina acknowledges the existence of a broader range of folktale illustration in Soviet children's books, which, as she says, would require a separate study [Shanina 1969, 16]. But we should add that it would also require a completely different approach. The Russian folk- and fairytale illustration does not stop after Bilibin or Vasnetsov, but, as Goscilo has demonstrated, spans over several decades, artistic movements and historical contexts [Goscilo 2020]. A method to incorporate a broad range of folktale illustration must be therefore epoch- and genre-spanning. Furthermore, folktale illustrations should not be considered only as 'art', but more generically as *images*, especially in terms of their political, religious iconography and in terms of their specific folktale iconography.

## *II. Iconography in Folktale Illustrations*

The earliest study that paves the way towards such an image analysis of folktale illustration is by Ruth Bottigheimer from the mid-1980s, her approach being a combination of literature and art historical methods. She focuses on single folktales and how they were illustrated by various artists. In her essay "Iconographic Continuity in Illustrations of 'The Goosegirl'" (1985), Bottigheimer draws our attention to two clusters of illustrations, or 'elaborated images', as she terms them, which dominate the iconographic tradition of the folktale "The Goosegirl" (Grimm's *Kinder und Hausmärchen*). She shows how these 'elaborated images' played an important role in the reception and interpretation of that tale. One 'elaborated image' shows the unrecognized 'right princess' passing through an arch, where the head of the previously beheaded magic horse is attached to the wall. Only the horse head knows of her real descent and thus the illustrations from this cluster depict the girl in a melancholic mood, in a hopeless situation. Another 'elaborated image' has a feminist character, Bottigheimer argues, since it shows the girl as she is performing her magical powers, making the wind blow. Illustrators

who chose other scenes to illustrate “The Goosegirl” have — deliberately or not — departed from this initial feminist meaning of the folktale [Bottigheimer 1985, 69–70]. This analysis presupposes a close reading of the text and the decision to interpret this folktale as a feminist tale. The iconographical analysis serves to reinforce this reading. With this approach Bottigheimer departs from an art-historical analysis of the artistic achievements of single artists.

In 2010, Bottigheimer characterized her approach and methodology as “content analysis”, which is “both nominal (what is depicted) and dynamic (effective action within illustrations)” [Bottigheimer 2010, 143]. Furthermore, she draws attention to the substantive difference between single and multiple illustrations of a tale:

[W]hether to create multiple images that mirror the narrative as a whole or to craft a single image that visually concentrates the narrative into a single moment is crucial. Since the number of illustrations has commercial consequences, that decision generally springs from the publisher. On the other hand, the choice of illustration moment(s) usually belongs to the artist [Bottigheimer 2010, 148].

According to Bottigheimer, it is not only the artist who makes decisions about the function of the image, by choosing scenes, interpreting, reformulating or replacing the folktale text. The publisher’s decisions need also be taken in consideration. When one illustration is printed as a full-page color illustration and the other as a small black and white drawing, then this will also have an impact on how the folktale is interpreted [Bottigheimer 2010, 154]. Furthermore, the issue of reprinting is key: is a particular illustration reprinted in later editions or even in other cultural contexts? [Ibid] Thus, her approach includes practical, economic, and quantitative aspects, which goes far beyond the analysis of the artist’s and critic’s aesthetic judgements.

With her earlier study of how children responded to “The Goosegirl” with their own drawings [Bottigheimer 1990], she implies the necessity of also going beyond the analysis of canonical illustrators. As a consequence, we depart from the idea that images of folktales are only images by well-known artists. Furthermore, her case study of American and Japanese multi-image editions of “The Goosegirl” indicates the relevance of a comparative approach for gaining insight into gender, culture, and the very conceptualization of illustrations [Bottigheimer 2010, 151–153]. A large data set, as was used in Bottigheimer’s study, enables an analysis of a range of culturally acceptable images for a given story and thus to derive insights about various social constructs.

As a further example of recent approaches to folktale illustration, Regina Freyberger's *Märchenbilder — Bildermärchen* (2009) should be singled out. It is a comprehensive and ambitious study of illustrations of the Brothers Grimm folktales (*Kinder- und Hausmärchen*) from 1819 to 1945. Freyberger was able to identify many more illustrations to "The Goosegirl" than Bottigheimer, because she did not only look at the official collections of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (KHM), but at all kinds of editions, such as picture books, single-text books, broadsheets and even paintings and advertisements. However, her aim is not primarily to analyze different illustrations of one folktale (although this is one of the outcomes), but rather to write a history of illustrating the KHM folktales, including narratological methods from art history, an analysis of the printing industry and of publishing houses. What is significant about Freyberger's approach to the aims of this survey is that she acknowledged the visual specificity of folktale illustrations. She argues that artists in the 19th century did not have an iconographic tradition of folktale to draw from, so they had to either invent it or borrow from other iconographic traditions, such as history painting [Freyberger 2009, 18]. But primarily, she tried to work out the specific iconography of folktale illustrations by grouping illustrations of the same tale together and by comparing them. As an art historian, Freyberger speaks of 'iconography' when she basically means the same as Bottigheimer with her term 'elaborated image'. In this context the single or mono-scenic illustration plays a particular role. The mono-scenic illustration is, as it were, at once the medium and the precondition for the 'elaborated image'/iconography:

Das monoszenische Einzelbild zeigt dem Betrachter nur eine Szene, zumeist die Schlüsselszene, die *pars pro toto* für das Märchen steht und in ihrer Prägnanz das ihm zugrunde liegende Märchen so problemlos erkennen lässt, dass die Erzählung, in die das Bild eingebettet ist, vom Betrachter assoziativ ergänzt wird<sup>1)</sup> [Freyberger 2009, 19].

However intuitive and convincing it may sound, it is also worth enquiring into the statement that the mono-scenic image tends to illustrate a 'key scene', which stands for the tale as such. Bottigheimer has already demonstrated that decisions about what is a 'key scene' are made on a subjective basis. The mono-scenic illustration expresses the artist's

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<sup>1)</sup>The mono-scenic single image offers merely one scene to the viewer, mostly the key scene, which stands for the tale *pars pro toto* and which by means of its conciseness easily enables a recognition of the tale at stake, so that the viewer can complete the story, in which the image is embedded (transl. M.G.).

individual interpretation of the folktale, which is infused by his or her specific social and cultural context. In other words, the concept of ‘key scene’ is a result of subjective interpretation and becomes ‘objective’ only insofar as it gets reprinted and insofar as other illustrators pick up on this scene. The identification of a ‘key scene’ is therefore not the result of a scholarly method but of the history of illustrating only. In contrast to this, folklore studies, which engage in systematic analyses of folktales, do not offer such a concept: a folktale does not have one ‘key scene’, which stands for the folk or fairy tale, but rather a *set* of ‘key scenes’ (*set* of motifs) [Uther 2004].

Where folktale scholars do engage in illustration, we find a different term. The folktale scholar and editor of the revised version of *The Types of International Folktales* (2004) Hans-Jörg Uther employs the term ‘identifying illustration’ (*Erkennungsillustration*) [Uther 2013, 118], meaning an illustration that enables the viewer to identify or recognize a specific folktale. The question, however, whether the viewer recognizes it because it is a ‘key scene’, or because he or she had seen other similar illustrations of the folktale, or because of a different dynamic, is yet to be answered. It is perhaps less misleading to proceed on the assumption that a folktale is recognized by an image, not because the iconography is immanently key to the tale, but because it has been reproduced many times before. Freyberger found out that the most recurrent iconography for the folktale “Frau Holle” (KHM 24) is when the kind girl shakes Frau Holle’s bedding out of the window, which causes snow to fall [Freyberger 2009, 357–358]. For the development of the plot of “Frau Holle” this scene is irrelevant, which demonstrates that a ‘key scene’ is not necessarily dramatically relevant, but rather a ‘key’ to visual recognition. What makes it a ‘key scene’ is the choice of the artist, and the subsequent emerging tradition of illustrating the folktale in this particular way. As a consequence of this tradition, we begin to recognize the folktale by merely one (mono-scenic) illustration.

Dargestellt wurden immer wieder dieselben Szenen, die als Schlüsselszenen der Märchen zuletzt so populär wurden, dass sie nicht nur im Bereich der Buchillustration, sondern auch im Bereich der Malerei autonom und stellvertretend für das ganze Märchen stehen konnten<sup>2)</sup> [Freyberger 2009, 152].

A ‘key scene’ can only ‘stand’ for a folktale when there is a long tradition of illustrating it in this way. The choice of this scene should not

<sup>2)</sup>The same scenes, that as key scenes of the tale finally became popular, were depicted again and again, so that they became autonomous not merely within book illustration, but also in painting, and representative of the whole tale (transl. M.G.).

be conflated with mass reproduction of the illustration, although mass reproduction obviously enhances its dissemination. An illustrations' status as 'identifying illustration' or 'key scene' is a product of a dynamic process of reception and distribution of folktale illustrations, which is yet to be explored.

### *III. 'Soviet' Iconography of Folktales*

Megan Swift's *Picturing the Page: Illustrating Children's Literature under Lenin and Stalin* (2020) employed a method that is comparable to Bottigheimer, insofar as she analyzed single fairytales in relation to the varying ways they were illustrated, and insofar as she considers the illustration as an important aspect of interpretation.

The texts themselves were fixed, but illustrations proved to be a malleable medium that could begin to imbue works with new meanings, make ideologically appropriate shifts and adjustments, and connect to the values of the present. Illustrations could be the voice of today sounding from the pages of yesterday [Swift 2020, 12–13].

Her book includes case studies on fairytales, i.e., literary adaptations of folktales by the canonical Russian writers Pushkin and Ershov, which were newly illustrated and printed between 1920 and 1950. Her specific selection of the fairytales is oriented towards the archival material concerning political campaigns between 1920 and 1930. Through her analysis of the Soviet illustration of these fairytales it becomes clear that the campaigns and political debates are reflected in those illustrations and respectively change the politics of those fairytales. Herewith she demonstrates the relation between children's literature and politics, drawing on illustration alone, since the texts of the fairytales do not change significantly.

Under Stalin, the magic of the flying humpback horse was depicted in terms of the Soviet achievements in aviation [Swift 2020, 59]. If in the 1920s Ivan was depicted "as a kind of village idiot", under Stalin he "became more earnest and serious" [Swift 2020, 61]. Under Lenin, the horse was donkey-like, whereas in the mid 1930s it became heroic and folkloric [Ibid]. As Swift demonstrates, these differences in the visual characterization of the sky, the hero and the horse seem to echo political campaigns, social and cultural shifts. In the contexts of the analysis of these visual differences, she employed terms such as 'versions of Ivan' or 'depiction of the horse'. Furthermore, Swift draws our attention to the fact that certain 'scenes' received at times more attention than

others. Even though she has not done this systematically, this approach is comparable with Bottigheimer's or Freyberger's, insofar as one scene is singled out to stand for the whole tale. Additionally, Swift provided a possible interpretation for the choice of this scene: in publications from 1917 and 1924, it is the final scene of the demise of the Tsar, when he is boiled alive, which alludes to the revolutionary history [Swift 2020, 63–64].

Potentially, Swift's book can provide an idea of what a Soviet or political iconography of the fairytale could be: technological progress, the powerful and heroic worker and peasant, a modern topography, etc. Such Soviet political iconography of the fairy- or folktale could also be read in terms of the process of 'politicizing magic'. In *Politicizing Magic* (2005) Marina Balina, Helena Goscilo and Mark Lipovetsky show how the folkloric wonder tale was adopted to the Soviet revolutionary spirit:

Soviet Russia... elaborated a very specific relationship to fantasy and wonderland, harnessing the fairy tale's teleological protagonist to socialist realist do-gooders and achievers (Gaidar's group-loyal Malchish-Kibalchish, Kataev's "consciousness-raised", petal-tearing little girl), the magic helper to benevolent older Soviet "mentors" (Kataev's anonymous kindly old woman, Lagin's ethnically suspect but politically useful Khotabych, Bazhov's rich but anticapitalist Mistress of the Copper Mountain), and the happy ending to the "radiant future" of a classless paradise (in Gaidar, Tolstoy, Lagin, and Kataev) [Balina, Goscilo, Lipovetsky 2005, X.].

And thus, Swift's book can be seen as a contribution to analyzing the politicization of the fairytale. However, not all fairytales were subject to such a process. Swift as well as Balina, Goscilo and Lipovetsky provide only a selection and do not attempt to give a full picture. Regarding the folktales edited and published by Aleksandr Afanas'ev (*Narodnye Russkie Skazki* (Russian Folktales), first published in 1855–1864)<sup>3</sup>, we can expect an alternative politicization, namely, more subtle, and possibly with aspects that are yet to be identified as 'Soviet' or 'socialist'. Furthermore, we need to critically consider that our understanding of 'Soviet political iconography' has been informed by contemporary perspectives of what is considered to be 'Soviet'.

#### IV. 'Iconography' of the Ancient Russian Culture

In her Master dissertation, "Book Illustration of the Russian Wonder Tale: Interrelations between the Verbal and Visual Text" (*Knizhnye illyustratsii russkoy volshebnoy skazki*), Oksana Barsukova studied 71

illustrated wonder tale books from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century until 1914 [Barsukova 2016]. She produced four case studies analyzing the editions *The Feather of Finist the Bright Falcon* (Peryshko finista yasna-cokola, 1902) illustrated by Bilibin; *The Tale on Marja Morevna* (Skazka pro Mar'yu Morevnu, 1904, illustrated by Boris Vasil'evich Zvorykin; *Russkie narodnye skazki i pribautki*, there the tale "Synko Filipko", 1906, illustrated by Elena Polenova; *The Frog Princess* (Tsarevna lyagushka, 1914), illustrated by Maximilian Eberman. She analyzed the illustrations in terms of the categories of 'costumes', 'attributes', and 'topology' and came to the conclusion that the 'iconography' of the Russian wonder tale is oriented towards ancient, pre-medieval Russia (900–1240). This corresponds to her general analysis of the 71 illustrated books:

In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Russia's own tradition of folktale iconography was established, which is oriented towards the peasant's everyday life and the ancient, pre-Peter-the-Great-history. Folktale illustration becomes the incarnation of the national myth of original 'Russian-ness' (transl. M.G.)<sup>3)</sup> [Barsukova 2016, 37].

In those illustrations, the wonder-tale space and the heroes are inscribed into a certain historical reality, namely, the epoch before the reign of Peter the Great [Barsukova 2016, 20], albeit these are only approximations. Barsukova understands these approximations in terms of 'simulacra' (following Baudrillard) because they do not represent any particular reality. For instance, the folktale does not provide any details about costumes [Barsukova 2016, 19]. This is the process in which "the tale is objectified, and the historical reality is mythologized" [Ibid, 19].

The "tradition of visualization of the Russian wonder tale" in terms of this historical simulacrum is "based on the individual work of the artists-illustrators" [Barsukova 2016, 21]. We know that the artists around the Abramtsevo, such as Bilibin and Polenova, were interested in medieval and pre-medieval Russian culture, and the parallel this has to the medievalism of other artistic movements, such as the 'Arts and Crafts' in England, could be developed in relation to art-historical research on these movements.

The term 'iconography' is not understood by Barsukova in the same way as Bottigheimer or Freyberger, but rather as a general orientation,

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<sup>3)</sup>На протяжении XIX века в России устанавливается своя традиция сказочной иконографии, ориентированной на крестьянский быт и древнерусскую, допетровскую историю. Сказочная иллюстрация становится воплощением национального мифа самобытной «русскости».

or as a general way to visualize the space and time in which a wonder tale is taking place, namely, in ancient Russia. For Barsukova, the categories of such an iconography include costumes, architecture, tools and weapons, whereas for Bottigheimer and Freyberger iconography concerns a particular way of depicting a scene or folktale.

Barsukova's approach is comparable with others that analyze the way in which illustrators inscribe a specific historical reality into their images. This process is facilitated by the fact that the folktale texts do not offer description, so the 'description' provided by illustrations is easily discerned. For example, there are illustrations of Hans Christian Andersen's fairytales that include architecture from the Estonian city Tallinn [Leving 2020, 354], or illustrations of Grimm's folktales that present a Hessian landscape [Zuch 2015].

Barsukova understands 'Russian-ness' in terms of costumes and architecture, but alternatively we can think of this category in terms of motifs that emerged in Russia and that formed an iconographic tradition of a particular folktale. A good example to illustrate this point could be a comparison between the "German" folktale "Frau Holle" and the "Russian" folktale "Frost" (*Morozko*), both belonging to the same tale type, namely ATU 480, "The Kind and the Unkind Girls". According to Freyberger, shaking out the pillows for Frau Holle by the kind girl has become the dominant iconography for this folktale. This motif is special and only exists in this German folktale (version). The scene depicted can be read as an image or work<sup>4</sup>. More precisely, we can understand it as an image of housework by women. Some illustrations include the visualization of feathers turning into snowflakes, which 'causes' the meteorological phenomenon of snowfall on earth. In the 'Russian' folktale "Frost" the kind girl does not have to work, to carry out household chores and gets rewarded simply for being friendly, kind and modest. The fact that the dominant iconography of "Frau Holle" is about work, triggers the question of what the iconography of this Russian tale would be? What is 'Russian' about not working and 'German' about 'working'? Such approach would enable a different level of interpretation of folktale illustrations, namely more socio-historical, and philosophical. They could help us understand 'Russian' culture (and on a comparative level, other regions) not in terms of costumes and attributes, but in terms of the way concepts such as work, non-work, reward, punishment, etc.

Barsukova envisioned how folklore studies, specifically Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, could provide methodological tools for image analysis. Her approach is based on the assumption that the hero goes into the underworld and returns, hereby moving through different

places, as described by Propp [Propp 2011, 8–21]. Thus, we look at the illustrations in terms of various places. However, this method can only be applied to multiple-image illustrations but does not offer any insight for mono-scenic images. In some ways, Barsukova's approach seems to be inspired by Propp's thinking, namely that all folktales have a certain structure in common. And fundamentally, this approach is not oriented towards analyzing the differences between the tales (albeit Propp attempted to provide a tool for it, it is not applied widely within folklore studies) and their types and motifs, but towards understanding the folktale as such.

#### *IV. The Ban on Book Illustrations in Folklore Studies*

According to Barsukova, so far, the image-text relation has not been addressed in folklore studies. She justified her decision to consider the 'folklore text' in terms of the image in her study by pointing to the assumption that the image influences our perception [Barsukova 2016, 4]. As we have seen so far, in literature and illustration studies, this approach has been productive. However, what service would image analysis do to folklore studies? And what are the reasons for its current absence within folklore studies? In the following I will indicate possible answers to these questions. One reason for this absence is that folklore studies understand book illustration in terms of 'art' or 'fine art', herewith excluding it from its own discipline. The second possible reason is a certain apprehension towards the book and the printed text in general and the illustrated book in particular, which manifests itself in concepts such as 'defolklorization' (defol'klorizatsiya) [Pankeev 2005, 66] and in the fear of the 'loss of sight' of the oral tradition.

The seventh edition of *Narodnye Russkie Skazki* (1984–85) by the Soviet folklorists Lev Barag and Nikolaj Novikov included four types of images: (1) *lubok* pictures from Dmitri Rovinski's collection, (2) photographs of objects from the Museum of Folklore in Moscow, from the Museum of Toys in Zagorsk, etc.; (3) objects such as embroidery and stove tiles; and Palekh (4). Those are all types of 'folklore images', i.e., images that derive from folklore-based crafts. That Barag and Novikov limited themselves to so many illustrations of this kind, was not due to the lack of folktale illustrations at the time. They themselves mention in their appendix to the first volume, that Afanas'ev's *skazki* have been richly illustrated, by "talented artists" e.g., Ivan Bilibin, Emil Lissner, Georgii Narbut, Nikolai Karazin, Evgenii Rachev, Elena Polenova, Konstantin Kuznetsov, Yury Vasnetsov, Tat'iana Mavrina, Aleksandr Kurkin, u.a.

[Barag, Novikov 1984, 419]. They add that this presents the most “vivid material for the various fine-art styles of Russian book illustration” [Barag, Novikov 1984, 419]. The list of illustrators by Barag and Novikov is by no means representative of the actual, very large number of illustrators of Afanas’ev’s folktales. By 1984 we can speak of an overwhelming flood of existing folktale book illustration. Evidently, they have not chosen these illustrations but instead images of folklore crafts, figurines and toys. The fact that this choice is not explained or even mentioned in their edition adds to the mystery.

Even when they refer to the traditional illustrations by Bilibin and Karazin, the general tone is that ‘fine art’ has its own tradition and that it lives its own life, which is not to intersect with folklore. This point can be qualified further by noting that some images that Barag and Novikov provide do not predate Bilibin and other illustrators. Thus, recent book illustration is excluded from this edition *only* because of its supposed relation to fine art. It is suggested that the visual cultures of folklore and fine art are neatly separate spheres, and that the visual folklore is more likely to have influenced fine art than the other way around. As a consequence, we should consider the visual culture of folklore as a possible source for studying book illustrations, precisely because of its historical precedence.

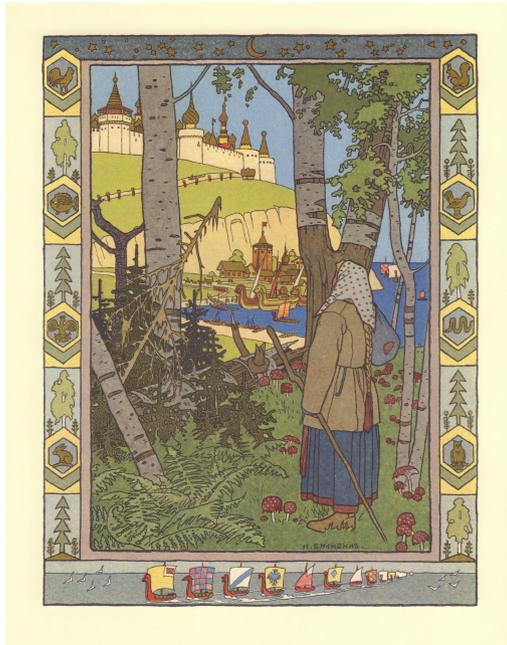
Another major folktale scholar to echo this view is the structuralist Vladimir Propp, who wrote two books that had a significant impact on folk- and fairy tale research (*The Morphology of the Folktale*, 1928). In his equally important *Historical Roots of Wonder Tales* there is an interesting passage about book illustrations:

Sometimes the place at which the hero arrived is described as a city or state. <...> “There is the blue sea, spreading freely and widely before her. And there, in the distance, the golden cupolas are blazing like suns on the white-stone towers” (Af. 235). The pseudo-Russian style in painting loves depicting this kingdom with churches — this is not in the folktale’s style. It does not know a Heavenly Jerusalem (transl. M.G.)<sup>4</sup> [Propp 1946, 360–361].

Propp refers to the folktale “The Feather of Finist the Bright Falcon” (Peryshko Finista yasna sokola, AF 235)<sup>5</sup>. Bilibin illustrated exactly this

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<sup>4</sup>Иногда это место, куда прибыл герой, описывается как город или как государство. <...> “Вот и синее море, широкое и раздольное, разлилось перед нею, а там вдали как жар горят золотые маковки на высоких теремах белокаменных” (Аф. 235). Ложнорусский стиль в живописи любит изображать это царство с церквами – это не в стиле сказки. Небесного Иерусалима она не знает.



*Figure 1.* Illustration for “The Feather of Finist the Bright Falcon”,  
Illustrator Ivan Bilibin, 1900. From *Skazki. Peryshko Finista Yasna-Sokola*. Goznak: Moscow, 1987

scene from the folktale (Fig. 1). What Propp means with “the style of the tale” remains ambiguous. Possibly, he confuses here concepts of ‘style’ and ‘iconography’. Heavenly Jerusalem (Nebesnyy Ierusalim) is an iconography, i.e., a historically evolved way or tradition of representing paradise with particular characteristics. On Bilibin’s illustration the city is represented as standing on a cliff edge, relatively high up in the left corner of the composition — as if ‘in the sky’ — heavenly paradise. According to Propp, the folktale “does not know” this way of depicting cities, implying that this iconography is more recent than the origin of the folktale. Even though the artists associated with the so-called pseudo-Russian style were particularly interested in a genuinely historical depiction of the middle-ages, it fails at giving the correct visual context for the emergence of the folktale. Presumably he refers here to Vasnetsov, to Bilibin and to other artists who are associated with the artistic movement, which has been characterized as ‘pseudo-



*Figure 2.* Final vignette for “The Feather of Finist the Bright Falcon”.  
 In Ja. V. Propp (Ed.) Afanas’ev A. Narodnye Russkie Skazki. Vol. 3.  
 Gosizdat: Moscow, 1957

Russian style’. Because Propp is interested in investigating the historical roots of the folktale, such illustrations are discarded as ‘misleading’. He does not approve of the ‘new iconography’ in book illustration, presumably because it is unable to tell us anything about the origins of the folktale. It comes as no surprise that his edition *NRS* from 1957 and 1958 is not illustrated, other than with purely decorative images, that have nothing or little to do with the text, such as the so-called ‘final vignette’ (Fig. 2). At the same time, Propp’s view on folktale illustration echoes Barag’s and Novikov’s implicit view, that book illustration belongs to a different sphere, namely (fine) art, which has its own rules and historical traditions. Consequently, for Propp folktale illustration should not be taken seriously in folklore studies, because it not only postdates folklore culture, but also because it is unfaithful to it.

But what kind of images are welcome in scholarly folktale editions? The images in Barag and Novikov’s edition do not illustrate any particular folktales but float around as examples of visual depictions of folktale motifs. Mark Konstantinovich Azadovski, who edited an academic selection of folktales in 1932 and who included lubok pictures into this edition, writes the following:

The drawings that accompany the textual part of the book, were taken from various lubok-tales editions and so-called popular pictures. They are not

illustrations in any strict sense: they do not illustrate any particular plot or certain episode of a tale. Rather they live in the consciousness of the bearers of the tale and its audiences, since the storytellers' latest contemporary repertoire owes its origin to that *lubok* literature, which, on the one hand, ceaselessly introduces new themes, and on the other hand, keeps the old tradition through reprinting. (transl. M.G.)<sup>5</sup> [Azadovski 1932, 8].

We can deduce that in the scholarly editions the relation between the image and the folktale is guided by a specific idea of the origins of the folktale, where text, image and tale existed in a non-hierarchical relation. What came first and what came second is not relevant, because the folktale as well as the image have a common source, namely the oral tradition and the life in a community.

This argument can also be illustrated by the choice of images for the fourth edition of *NRS* in 1913–1914, by Alexei Evgen'evich Gruzinski. In the editor's foreword Gruzinski writes, that as it was the wish of the publisher, each of the four volumes includes one image. The images show situations in which folktales were told in different parts of Russia. These color plates have the function of a frontispiece, appearing after the book title (in the first volume it appears after the editor's foreword and before the folktale section). One of them shows a group of people sitting together in a chamber: there are children of different ages, young adults and adults (Fig. 3). One adult woman is at the center of the evening scene. All the attention is directed at her, and her mimic suggests that she is about to tell something. She is knitting on the side and the yarn leads over her knee and to the yarn ball on the floor. This image, like those in the other volumes, does not relate to one specific folktale printed in the volumes, rather it points to a context that lies outside of the printed book and the written text. The image relates to the process of the oral tradition of the folktale and to the lack of illustration in that process. In this drawing by Mikhail Shcheglov's the experience of telling and listening comes to the fore. The dark common room is illuminated by a faint light source. This light throws shadows on the faces and the objects in the

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<sup>5</sup>Рисунки, сопровождающие текстовую часть книги, заимствованы из различных лубочных изданий сказок и так называемых народных картинок. Они не являются иллюстрациями в тесном смысле этого слова: они иллюстрируют не тот или иной отдельный сюжет или определенный эпизод в какой-либо сказке, но они являются общим иллюстративным материалом: они иллюстрируют характер тех образов, которые живут в сознании носителей сказки и их аудитории, так как позднейший и современный репертуар сказочников в значительной степени обязан своим происхождением этой лубочной литературе, с одной стороны, непрерывно вводящей новые темы, с другой — поддерживающей своими перепечатками старую традицию.

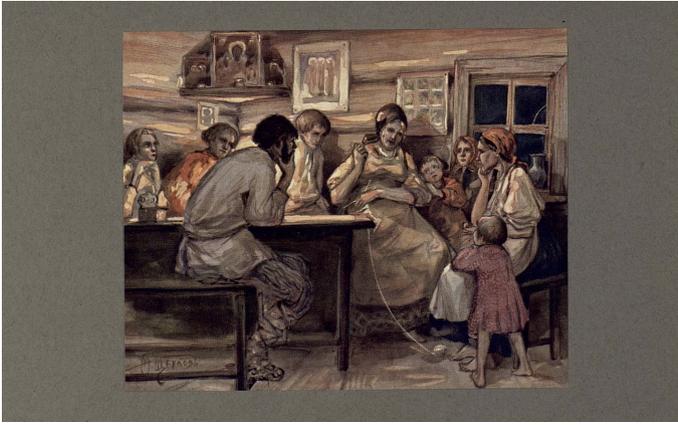


Figure 3. Coloured drawing, *Skazka v central'noj Velikorossii*, artist Mikhail Shcheglov. In A. Afanas'ev *Russkie narodnye skazki* (ed. by Gruzinskij). Vol. 1. Sytin: Moscow, 1913

room and might prompt the imagination of the listeners. Additionally, the storyteller engages gesture and offers with her knitting an additional visual stimulation. A performance takes place which involves multiple senses. Shcheglov's image is full of symbolic meaning. The yarn is the thread of life that leads to death; the knitting is associated with the fabrication of stories. The depiction of the story-telling scene could be considered as a proto-illustration. This points to the historical context of the emergence of the folktale, when text and illustration were absent in some parts of Russia, and when tales were disseminated orally. In contrast to this, book illustrators illustrate particular texts, which, from the perspective of Barag, Novikov, Propp and Gruzinski, does not do justice to the very essence of the folktale.

#### V. 'Defolklorization' and the Bottigheimer-Controversy

Perhaps it comes as no surprise that Ruth Bottigheimer, who has produced one of the most productive and elaborated approach to folktale (book) illustration, was involved in a controversy with folklorists. The thesis by Bottigheimer, that the fairytale only came into existence with its textualization in mid 16<sup>th</sup> century [Bottigheimer 2002], was firmly rejected by a group of folklorists in 2010 on the pages of the journal *The Journal of American Folklore* and elsewhere. This controversy was

emotional and confrontational in parts. Such events are not frequent in academia, and they tend to reveal a lot about the self-understanding of a discipline. Bottigheimer argued in her book *Fairy Godfather: Straparola, Venice, and the Fairy Tale Tradition* (2002), that the poet Giovanni Francesco Straparola had invented the fairy tale<sup>6</sup> as we know it today.

Folklorists, however, assume that the fairytale existed long before Straparola or anyone else who has put it in writing and in this literary form. Furthermore, Bottigheimer shows that Straparola, who lived in Venice, was writing for the local bourgeois public of this important trading city. Thus, the Godfather of the fairytale is not the peasantry or folk, living in the countryside, but the high-bourgeois Straparola. It was also him, according to Bottigheimer, who invented the most well-known fairytale type, namely the rise-tale ('from rags to riches'), which gets its popular expression in "Cinderella". She employs the method of socio-historical analysis, when she demonstrates that the story of a poor and neglected girl, who rises through marriage, must have been particularly compelling to the Venetian bourgeois, since they have also nurtured the wish of a rise in status. Her main objection to folkloristics is: There is no evidence for an existence of fairytales before 1500. The origin of fairytale cannot therefore be in the oral tradition but must be in the written text (by Straparola).

In his response to Bottigheimer Francisco Vaz da Silva writes that her proposition is a challenge to folklorists, who tend to ignore literary texts as a matter of principle. But he also doubts aspects of her proposition, e.g., whether it would be possible to demonstrate that "Straparola's 'invention' could have yielded the whole modern oral fairytale tradition, by literary means only, in just two and a half centuries" [Vaz da Silva 2010, 411]. Referring to Bottigheimer's claim, that the fairytale only exists, if and when it is written down and that the "absence of evidence is evidence for absence" [Bottigheimer 2007, 19], Jan Ziolkowski responds:

Absence of evidence does not indicate the nonexistence of a phenomenon, any more than the absence of a person from a room of observers indicates that the individual in question has ceased to be or has never existed [Ziolkowski 2010, 387].

As an attempt to summarize the numerous objections from her critics, we could say that Bottigheimer's approach was found to be too positivist. She has the tendency to define the fairytale as specific to text, whereas the

folklorists tend to believe that its origin is in the oral tradition. However, this summary is also reductive, because folklorists do not insist anymore on the purely oral origin of the fairytale and have concluded that it is more productive to consider a non-hierarchical and perhaps non-causal relation between the oral and the written tale [e.g., Ziolkowski 2010].

“The folktale is being forgotten” (*Skazka zabyvajetsa*) — this claim was made in the context of field work in Soviet Russia during the period of 1956–1974 [Vedernikova 1975, 118]. This means, that once the folktales are not told orally anymore, they stop existing. N. Vedernikova writes: “The regularity of performance is an indication of the full-fledged life of the tale within the oral tradition”<sup>6)</sup> (transl. M. G.) [Vedernikova 1975, 118]. She observes that this process has been changing for several decades and that reading folktales from books has also become more common in the countryside [Vedernikova 1975, 120]. Such social and cultural processes change the way folktales are disseminated and consequently they change the form of the folktale (e.g., it becomes shorter, *ibid.*). Moreover, it changes the way we understand the folktale or folklore in general. The process of this change is referred to as ‘defolklorization’. The invention of the book press and the possibility to print folktales has, in a way, undermined the ‘original’ character of the folktale that it acquired in the process of the oral tradition. It made it, as we have seen above, for folklorists impossible to clearly state that one fairytale or one folktale has a purely oral origin. From this perspective, book illustration only adds to this ‘problem’, by potentially confusing cause and effect. Propp’s criticism of Bilibin’s iconography can be considered as a symptom of this ‘problem’, as well as the Bottigheimer-controversy, being an effect of the folklorist’s fear of being undermined by ‘black-on-white’ arguments that become possible through book publishing. In other words, book illustration perpetuates and solidifies this mournful process of ‘defolklorization’.

## VI. Conclusion

The melancholic attitude of some folklorists regarding the disappearance of the oral tradition of the folktale is to be taken seriously, because the printed book has become a dominating form of folktale dissemination and popularization. And the book illustration played a prominent role, the dynamics of which is yet to be explored. As a consequence of

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<sup>6)</sup>Показателем полнокровной жизни сказки в устной традиции служит преемственность исполнения.

the concerns of folklorists we should take the visual culture of folklore more into focus when studying book illustrations, and not merely fine art, art historical concepts of Christian and mythological iconography. This could help defining the specificity of the folktale imagery, something that is yet an understudied question within art history and visual analysis of folktale illustrations.

The recent debates in folklore studies promise to open the question regarding how our understanding of the folktale has changed since the rise of the book. Folklorists do not insist anymore on the purely oral origin of the folktale and have concluded that it is more productive to consider a non-hierarchical and perhaps non-causal relation between the oral and the written tale [e.g., Ziolkowski 2010] and of *lubok* pictures [Korepova 2012]. Also Barag and Novikov point to the fact that Afanas'ev's *skazki*, in their textual form, have had an impact on the late *lubok*, on oral variants of folktale tellers and in all the forms of visual folklore and professional arts [Barag, Novikov 1984, 426]. This indicates that they acknowledge the potentially non-hierarchical relation between tale, text and visual arts, and that they acknowledge that the text can also have an influence on the oral tradition. They go on pointing to the overwhelming number of adaptations after Afanas'ev's *skazki* in Soviet culture:

They also received a diverse synthetic incarnation on the stages of drama and music theatres for children and in cinema films. Thanks to the mass-produced editions for children, during the Soviet time many of Afanas'ev's folktales had an unprecedentedly broad distribution (transl. M. G.)<sup>7)</sup> [Barag, Novikov 1984, 426].

The processes of 'synthetic materialization' referred to by Barag and Novikov and of 'appropriation' and 're-creation' of folktales referred to by Jack Zipes in his study *The Enchanted Screen* [Zipes 2010, 7–15], can also be identified within folktale illustration. This process is different in illustration, because illustration reduces the narrative to one or several motifs, which come to represent the whole folktale. There are already a number of studies on the folktale film, which address this synthetic 'materialization' and 're-creation', i.e., novelty of motifs, motif-combinations and versions which result from it. But there is nothing like it for illustration.

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<sup>7)</sup>Разнообразное синтетическое воплощение получили они также на сценах драматических и музыкальных детских театров и в кинофильмах. В советское время многие из сказок Афанасьева, благодаря массовым их изданиям для детей, получили небывало широкое распространение.

And finally, to comprehend the iconography of Afanas'ev's folktales and to understand what became subsequently 'Soviet' about them, and to analyze how they influenced our contemporary understanding of the folktale, we can turn to a systematic approach of analyzing the political iconography of those images. What was the illustration's role in "politicizing magic" [Balina, Goscilo, Lipovetsky 2005] and how did this contribute to the dissemination and popularization of the folktale? This would imply that folktale illustrators are producing representations of folktales, which need to be taken seriously, not just from the art historical perspective, but also from the perspective of story-telling tradition. It would show that folktale illustrations produce their 'new versions' of folktales, and that they are not merely illustrating a text. However, these new versions are yet to be defined and this process would involve a rethinking of how folktale illustrations impacted not only on the single folktales, but also on the very conception of the folktale today.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The term 'folktale' translates from the Russian term *narodnaja skazka*. Following Jack Haney's translation of Afanas'ev's *Narodnye Russkie Skazki* (2014–2021) this term will also be used here. The use of the term 'fairy tales' is more common, but according to Haney, it should be reserved for literary adaptations or imitations of the folk wondertales [Haney 2014, Preface]. This is also the case in *Politicizing Magic. An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales* [Balina, Goscilo, Lipovetsky 2005].
- <sup>2</sup> For more successful examples of 'fairy-tale painting' see the work of the Pre-Raphaelite Edward Burne-Jones [Rager 2009] and of the German painter Moritz von Schwind [Freyberger 2007].
- <sup>3</sup> For an English translation of Afanas'ev's *Russian Folktales* see [Haney 2014–2021]. Haney's translation is based on the seventh edition of *NRS* by Lev Barag and Nikolaj Novikov (1984–85).
- <sup>4</sup> I thank Hans-Jörg Uther for this observation in a conversation in 2019.
- <sup>5</sup> Even though Barsukova deals explicitly with this illustration and its relation to the text as well as with Propp, she does not mention this passage in Propp's *Historical Roots of Wonder Tales*.
- <sup>6</sup> Bottigheimer uses the term 'fairy tale' to refer to the literary genre, which, as she argues, was invented by Straparola.

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### СКАЗКИ, ТЕКСТЫ И КАРТИНКИ: ПОДХОДЫ К ИЛЛЮСТРАЦИЯМ НАРОДНЫХ СКАЗОК

В статье освещаются различные аспекты, связанные с изучением традиции иллюстрирования фольклорных и литературных сказок, вошедших в круг детского чтения. Автор обозначает перспективу сопоставления фольклористического, литературоведческого и искусствоведческого взгляда на книжные иллюстрации к изданиям сказок и поднимает вопросы о соотношении между традицией народной сказки, текстом и изображением. Здесь представлен обзор наиболее значительных современных работ по данному вопросу (авторства Ольги Гоцилло, Меган Свифт, Регины Фрейбергер и др.) где предлагается систематический подход к объёмному корпусу изданий иллюстрированных сказок. Фольклористический и литературоведческий аспекты раскрываются на основе исследований В. Я. Проппа, Дж. Зайпса, М. Балиной, С. Ушакина. В качестве материала рассматриваются издания сказок братьев Grimm, Х.-К. Андерсена, А. Н. Афанасьева, А. С. Пушкина, П. П. Ершова, иллюстрации В. Васнецова, И. Репина, советская графика. Основное внимание в статье сфокусировано на тех исследовательских подходах, которые базируются на анализе большого количества изданий с разнообразными иллюстрациями, что позволяет проследить историческую динамику интерпретации сказочных текстов художниками. В качестве одного из примеров рассматривается история иллюстрирования сказки братьев Grimm «Гусятница», описанная в работе Рут Боттихаймер.

*Keywords:* фольклорная сказка, литературная сказка, иллюстрации, книжная графика