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Jeely Beely: Rolling into the Russian Fairy Tale

Sarah Greeson
Ouachita Baptist University

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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

“Jeely Beely: Rolling into the Russian Fairy Tale”

written by

Sarah Greeson

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for completion of the
Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

Dr. Amy Sonheim, thesis director

Dr. Irene Trofimova, second reader

Dr. Kevin Brennan, third reader

Dr. Barbara Pemberton, program director

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Sarah Greeson
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I. Introduction

When I was a child, I used to think that fairy tales always ended happily, and that winning a prince's affection was life's grand goal. I thought so because I was exposed to Disney versions: tales of a handsome prince rescuing an isolated stepchild from boring housework as in *Cinderella* (1950) and tales of a kiss literally saving at least two girls' lives as in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). While I recollect my father reading to my brother and me from an encyclopedia-sized collection of *Aesop's Fables*, I do not recall him reading Brothers Grimms' and Charles Perrault's fairy tales to us, unfortunately (or fortunately, since their tales employ violence that would have deprived six-year-old me of sleep). Instead, my primary experience with fairy tales was that of most children's who grew up in the nineties: I watched the animated fairy tales of Walt Disney (1901-66). I can confidently inform you that the first Disney film in my possession was *The Fox and the Hound* (1981), and I watched it on our home's static-prone, fickle operating videocassette recorder with a friend, by myself, or with my cabbage patch dolls, each time in wonder and awe.

Admittedly, Disney's films had a tyrannous hold on my adolescent imagination. They became, and still are, a part of our formative American culture. Disney's influence tainted my view of love forever. Even as a twenty-one-year-old, I find it most difficult to accept that marrying the right man is not tantamount to a problem-free life, for that is true for Disney's *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*, not to mention countless others. In his 1995 article "Breaking the Disney Spell," Jack Zipes critiques Disney. Zipes writes about the evolution of the fairy tale as it changed technology: the oral, communal folktale reconciled with the intimate, literary fairy tale to produce a new cultural artifact, the film. Moreover, Zipes assesses the phenomenon of Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* as it has been altered from Grimms'

1857 version to become enmeshed with American folklore. Zipes notes: "...*Snow White* was [Disney's] story that he had taken from the Grimm Brothers and changed completely to suit his tastes and beliefs. He cast a spell over this German tale and transformed it into something peculiarly American" (347). Among other differences from Grimms' version, Disney also employs these changes: he orphans Snow White, he adds the prince at the film's beginning singing a love song to Snow White, he names seven dwarfs and makes them the "star attractions of the film," and he awakens Snow White not when a dwarf stumbles as he lugs her coffin, but when the prince bestows on her an antidotal kiss (347-48).

Disney's tweaking the Grimms' version of fairy tales is a frequent endeavor. According to Zipes, "It is the repetition of Disney's infantile quest—the core of American mythology—that enabled him to strike a chord in American viewers from the 1920s to the present" (345). As I can attest, the way Disney employs similar quests and character shades in his versions of fairy tales has become normal to the American child. Zipes urges that "it is the prince who frames the narrative. He announces his great love at the beginning of the film, and Snow White cannot be fulfilled until he arrives to kiss her" (349). The prince is Snow White's ultimate reward, and his wealth and power are exalted at the story's end. Zipes believes that the prince's prosperity autobiographically describes Disney's often dominating and power hungry character (350-51). Zipes boldly claims,

Disney 'violated' the literary genre of the fairy tale and packaged his versions in his name through the merchandising of books, toys, clothing, and records. Instead of using technology to enhance the communal aspects of narrative and bring about major changes in viewing stories to stir and animate viewers, he employed

animators and technology to stop thinking about change, to return to his films, and to long nostalgically for neatly ordered patriarchal realms. (352)

Zipes, as a Marxist critic, finds fault with Disney's self-established, capitalistic empire.

It makes sense, then, that fairy tales might also influence the formative culture of international societies, even those outside of the western hemisphere. Particularly, how might a Russian child be influenced by her country's familiar fairy tales? This question charged my research. I was convinced that delving into a comparative literary study on three different variants of a fairy tale would improve my understanding of Russian culture.

As a student of the Russian language who has traveled to Russia twice, I delight in every gain I make to understand Russia's rich traditions, whether through reading, building language skills, or visiting. I wished first to familiarize myself with the Russian fairy tale *Kolobok* (2010). In my research, I found two analogues to this tale: the English *The Gingerbread Boy* (1987) and the Japanese *The Funny Little Woman* (1972). In *A Handbook to Literature* (2006), William Harmon and Hugh Holman define *analogue* in literary history as "two versions of the same story...especially if no direct relationship can be established" (24). Since these three tales were born out of three different cultures, there is no direct relationship. So, I have three tales of a runaway bread ball, a runaway bread boy, and a runaway rice dumpling.¹ By sifting through the language, plot, and distinct contrasts in *Kolobok* (2010), I discerned Russian nuances and distinctions within *Kolobok*. Ultimately, I will draw conclusions about some cultural significances of this Russian fairy tale.

In exploring fairy tales, I join a conversation with those who have been producing scholarship on the subject for decades. Well-received research has already been published.

¹ Beyond the American and Russian versions, Arlene Mosel's Caldecott Medal recipient *The Funny Little Woman* tells of a runaway rice dumpling in Japan. In order to embrace all parts of the globe, I will also consider Mosel's tale. Interestingly, Mosel's tale is the only version that ends happily.

Even a dual-language compilation of Russian fairy tales exists.² Is there anything new to bring to the table? I urge that there is. A large part of my study, therefore, must entail not only my own discoveries but on pulling up a chair—preferably with a piping latte in hand—to the table of those who have already contributed credible scholarship. Maria Tatar, for example, editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *The Classic Fairy Tales*, has summoned fairy tales of the French, Germans, Chinese, Americans, and others to examine six different popular tale types, among which are my personal childhood favorites of “Little Red Riding Hood” and “Cinderella.” But I caution those who pick up these tales on a whim: their multicultural variants are not for the faint of heart. In Jakob and Wilhelm Grimms’ tales alone, violence darkens their pages. You will meet victims of cannibalism, kidnapping, and of those whose toes have been hacked from their feet. *The Classic Fairy Tales* (1999) also includes a collection of critical essays on issues such as the origin, psychological aspects, and evolution of fairy tales. Vladimir Propp (1895-1970) has thoroughly studied the structure of fairy tales—particularly Russian fairy tales—to produce templates for a fairy tale’s characters and sequence of functions. The Russian poignancy of Propp’s methodology, then, is conducive to my own approach.

But, the work is not without pitfalls. Originally, I planned to analyze a Russian legend that I worked with in my Russian Conversation and Composition class by approaching it from three different schools of literary criticism. After talking with Dr. Irene Trofimova, Professor of Russian, about my interest in fairy tales, she suggested that I study something other than that legend, which was written by a twentieth-century Soviet and Kyrgyz author. It was not folklore passed down through generations. After deciding to pursue the Russian fairy tale, I thought I would read and translate several tales, pull aside distinct components that seemed unlike

² Though there may be several similar compilations, the one to which I am referring is A. Afanasiev’s *Russian Fairy Tales*.

something I would find in the English fairy tale, and use Propp's methodology to glean "quintessentially Russian" qualities.

First, I supposed that analyzing any Russian fairy tale would lead me to pinpoint quintessential Russian values. Literary critic and professor Robert Darnton, in his article "Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose," quickly led me to reconsider my assumption. Darnton writes,

[Anthropologists] do not expect to find direct social comment or metaphysical allegories so much as a tone of discourse or a cultural style, which communicates a particular ethos and world view...It does not necessarily exclude formalistic analysis such as that of Vladimir Propp, but it stresses rigorous documentation—the occasion of the telling, the background of the teller, and the degree of contamination from written sources. (285)

In other words, in this comparative literary study I cannot hope to ascribe an all-encompassing statement to Russian culture. Such hope would be misguided, and a statement about a foreign culture would likely bewilder any Russians who encounter my research. Darnton also points out that, while it is often impossible to trace fairy tales back to specific events, there is a danger to "dilute them in a timeless universal mythology" (291). It is necessary, then, to point out that my study is a synchronic one: my comparative literary study on *Kolobok* and its analogues are of the language at a specific point in time. To put it another way, I am not investigating folklore from its historical development or analyzing how it has changed through time.

Secondly, I found that I must familiarize myself with a series of terms. Before we proceed, it is necessary to define *culture*, *folklore*, *folktale* and *fairy tale*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* ascribes *culture* to be "the distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products, or

way of life of a particular society, people, or period.” Moreover, Harmon and Holman build their definition of culture around a collective environment: “...practices, habits, customs, beliefs, traditions—become institutions, the body of which is known as *culture*...A cultural approach to literature assumes beforehand that a work exists most interestingly as part of a social context” (139). In addition, Andy Crouch, author of *Culture Making* (2008), defines culture as “what humans make of the world...our relentless, restless human effort to take the world as it’s given to us and make something else” (23). In my working definition of *culture*, I will more narrowly refer to the social behaviors of Russian people as they are evident in a particular time.

When I proposed a thesis on “Russian folklore,” I assumed that the term *folklore* included both legends and fairy tales. *Folklore*, as it turns out, is legends, fairy tales, and much more. As defined by *Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, the term is used for

the beliefs, customs, legends, and traditions that are handed down, generation after generation, in cultures all over the world. It is as old as our first people and has been passed down through most of history via the oral tradition. Ballads, dances, fairy tales, folktales, legends, myths, nursery rhymes, riddles, songs, and superstitions are all areas that folklore can include.

A Handbook to Literature claims, to my amazement, that “folklore includes myths, legends, stories, proverbs, nursery rhymes, charms, spells, omens, beliefs of all sorts, popular ballads, cowboy songs, plant lore, animal lore, and customs dealing with birth, initiation, courtship, marriage, medicine, work, amusements, and death.” In other words, the poem I wrote in the fifth grade about the beach, the book in my mother’s home library on disease fighting plants, and my runaway bread tales may all be included under the umbrella of *folklore*. When I tell someone about my thesis research, then, I say that I am exploring “Russian folklore.”

Next, more confined is a *folktale*: “a short narrative handed down through oral tradition, with various tellers and groups modifying it, so that it acquires cumulative authorship. Most *folktales* eventually move from oral tradition to written form...The range of *folktales* goes from myth through legends, fables, tall tales, ghost stories, and humorous anecdotes to fairy tales” (Harmon 222). In short, a *folktale* narrows *folklore* down to a story. Therefore, my study on Russian folklore is also one of the folktale.

Lastly, *Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* gives a helpful definition of fairy tales as,

narratives out of the folk tradition, set in an indeterminate past and typically including some enchantment or sense of the wondrous...Traditionally, the tales are formulaic, beginning with expressions such as ‘Once upon a time,’ clearly distancing the events from the present (giving the stories an archetypal quality). Happy endings are the norm...Their themes are serious, dealing with such fundamental issues as love, hate, jealousy, revenge, loyalty, and sexual awakening. They certainly are among the world's oldest literature; although they remained alive only in the oral tradition for centuries. (par. 1)

As this definition illuminates, it is important to remember that the oldest fairy tales began as oral tales passed down from generations. Even though my own encounter with fairy tales has been with shallow, yet graceful and beautiful princesses adapted to Disney’s big screen, this is not the experience of most fairy tale devotees throughout history. Moreover, Harmon and Holman define *fairy tale* as, “a story relating mysterious pranks and adventures of spirits who manifest themselves in the form of diminutive human beings.” According to Harmon and Holman, fairy tales first became popular near the end of the seventeenth century (210-11).

In analyzing a Russian fairy tale, I must set boundaries. I must use this Russian narrative without misusing it. I must not overstep the boundaries of what is true for Russian culture. How will I know what is true? Fortunately, I have traveled to Russia twice in the last three and a half years with my last visit being only three months ago in January 2011. Beyond my small window of experience, I have connections to people who are and were fully a part of Russian culture. My Russian language professor, Dr. Trofimova, is a native of Russia who has lived in the United States now for over twenty years. In addition, Russian students on campus have provided me with insight into my generation of Russian culture. I have a handful of contacts who currently reside in Russia (a blend of Russians and Americans). Lastly, I have a video of a Russian child, Sophia, relaying to me the story of *Kolobok* by memory and with sparkle in her eyes. Sophia proved to me that a synchronic approach to the Russian fairy tale is valid, and that fairy tales actually do influence children of other cultures.

In his article "The Struggle for Meaning" (1976), psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim asserts that, in children's literature, "nothing can be as enriching and satisfying to child and adult alike as the folk fairy tale" (270). Bettelheim argues that fairy tales provide meaning for children. Bettelheim explains that "...these tales, in a much deeper sense than any other reading material, start where the child really is in his psychological and emotional being...[they] offer examples of both temporary and permanent solutions to pressing difficulties" (271). While I wholeheartedly agree with Bettelheim's statement, Bettelheim assumes that the children access deeper meaning in fairy tales only when they learn to read them; yet, Sophia has learned *Kolobok* by heart. As a student of the language, I urge that there is still value in oral retelling.

As I alluded to before, others have claimed that cultural significance lies in the fairy tale. I am writing not only to endorse this concept, but to spotlight one culture's qualities by looking

closely at three tales. By the time a colleague, professor, or acquaintance finishes a thorough examination of my research, I hope that he or she will be able to pinpoint what is distinct about the way the Russian version of our *Gingerbread Boy* is told. *Kolobok*, *The Gingerbread Boy*, and *The Funny Little Woman* are human stories. In the pages to come, I will provide my own translation and transcription of *Kolobok*, I will compare the written fairy tale to Sophia's oral retelling, and I hope to answer the question, "What are the Russian distinctions within this human tale called *Kolobok*?"

II. Why a Russian Fairy Tale?

Like so many fairy tales that I read as a child, my story with Sophia and *Kolobok* begins with “Once upon a time,” or as Russians say, “Jeely Beely.” The time was June 2007, and I had just graduated from high school. I was like a well-educated princess looking forward to a fairy-tale future of summer followed by more education. When asked if I wanted to travel to Russia for two weeks with a group from First Baptist Church of Hot Springs, I was packed and ready to cross the Atlantic in about as long as it takes to utter “Sputnik.” Upon my arrival, I was fascinated and overwhelmed by Russian landscape, people, food, and language. I met Russians in orphanages, schools, museums, and on the sidewalk. I knew five words at best, yet I was captivated by the way two people did not have to share language to communicate. Without recognizing the letters of the Cyrillic alphabet, I could still fashion a necklace or balloon animal for a child or smile graciously when a Russian hostess offered me горячий чай (“hot tea”) and конфеты (“candies”). During that trip, a tiny Russia-loving seed was planted within me, one that I did not place there. Russia found *me*.

In the fall of 2007, Russia found me again at the small liberal arts college in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. On the first day of my freshman year at Ouachita Baptist University, I entered a classroom overseen by a fairy godmother—she prefers to be called Dr. Irene Trofimova—who welcomed me into her Elementary Russian I. In the eight semesters that followed, Dr. Trofimova waved spells of Russian grammar, vocabulary, and verb conjugations in my direction. Even more, Dr. Trofimova told about me Russian culture as applicable to our textbook units: Russian holidays, education, idioms, hospitality, and food. Unlike most, perhaps, this fairy godmother was raised and spent her young adult life in the Soviet Union; she came to work as a professor in the United States in 1989.

Having already lured me to an interest in Russian culture with her spells and whatnot, Dr. Trofimova introduced our class to a new genre in my Fall 2010 Russian Composition and Conversation course: Russian folklore. She exposed us to “Легенда о Матери” (trans. “Legend about a Mother”), a text that tells of a widow who seeks happiness from a fountain of youth. As instructed, I participated in our class’s usual formula for studying a Russian text: read the text repetitively, translate into English, memorize unknown vocabulary in nominative cases, and, the method that demands the most magic, a reverse translation in which we look at the English version only and say the Russian version exactly as it appears in the original text. Not even Dr. Trofimova can grant my wish to learn the Russian language in my sleep; it comes only with diligent work and perhaps a few tears.

As I became familiar with this particular Russian legend, I began to wonder about tales in 2011 that Russians have grown up hearing. Are sweetly round-faced children on the other side of the world exposed to tales comparable to the ones I grew up with, such as *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Goldie Locks and the Three Bears*? Is it likely that Russian and American children are interested in similar tales, or are our cultures too diverse? These questions filtered through my mind when I realized in September of 2010 that Russia was once again calling. It was up to me to discover more about Russian culture through a lens other than that of a Russian student. This time, I would peer through the lens of a Russian fairy tale enthusiast.

My undertaking as Russian fairy tale enthusiast was not one without fears. Initially, I feared that Russian fairy tales were not widely read or important. However, rest assured, there is no shortage of fairy tales in Russia, and adults and children alike find them worth reading! Finally, I was again offered the chance to journey to Russia. Again, I whipped out my passport and leftover rubles from the previous trip faster than it takes to say, “More borsch, please.” So,

in January of 2011, I ventured to Yekaterinburg with First Baptist Church of Hot Springs, this time with an intimate group of only two others and a base of more than five Russian words. The landscape, people, food, and language I was bombarded with three and a half years ago surrounded me again. I found the stark contrast from my home overwhelming yet again, but this time it somehow felt more welcoming, even with the icy sidewalks and stifling cold.

I asked women and children ranging from toddler to teen about Russian folklore, particularly whether they might retell a favorite fairy tale to me by heart. My first conversation about folklore with a Russian eased my fears: during the two-hour drive from Yekaterinburg to Alapaevsk the morning of our arrival, Olga, our team's translator and—in my mind—a magical helper, told me that I would have no trouble finding material on folklore. In the ten days that followed, I acquired collections of Russian fairy tales, matryoshka dolls modeled after Russian fairy tales, and even a pictorial narration of the “Mistress of the Copper Mountain” on a box of chocolates. I was overwhelmed with gifts of fairy tale retellings from Russian children and adults alike, in an English class of teenagers, in a Russian home church, and from a local Russian pastor's young daughters. As if the fairy tale retellings were not enough, I met with Natasha, an English teacher and professor of folklore at Уральский Гуманитарный Университете (trans. Ural University for Humanities) over чай (*chai*, or tea) and пельмени (*pelmini*, or meat dumplings). Natasha spoke mellifluously about folklore from the Ural Mountain region: of “mysterious people with white eyes,” of underground cities, and of nomads who lived with wooly mammoths as pets. I was in the thick of Russian culture as an academic endeavor.

My approach to analyzing a Russian fairy tale follows a long line of famous approaches. For example, just as I have transcribed Sophia's retelling of *Kolobok*, the Frenchman Charles Perrault and German Brothers Grimm recorded selections of their homelands' fairy tales.

Perrault published a collection of fairy tales in 1697, which included such favorites as “Cinderella,” “Sleeping Beauty,” and “Little Red Riding Hood.” In the introduction to *The Complete Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, Neil Philip emphasizes that Perrault “was the first to value such stories for himself (13). In other words, Perrault was not the original author of these literary favorites, and he was not a folklorist; he was simply the first to transcribe and publish a selection of commonly recited Indo-European tales. In his transcriptions, Perrault includes the morals that children have for centuries grown up hearing. For instance, Perrault’s “Cinderella” ends with two morals that transcend the superficial:

Charm is the true gift of the fairies;

Without it you've nothing; with it, all.

.....

[Shrewdness, wit, and courage will] never help you get ahead

Unless to spread your talents farther

You've a willing godmother, or godfather. (Perrault 69)

The first moral delves below the skin, urging that charm trumps appearance, while the second necessitates a close relationship in order to live fruitfully. In the centuries to follow, folklorists such as Paul Delarue and Genevieve Massignon took these same French folktales and shaped them into forms of their own (Philip 13).

In his introduction to *The Brothers Grimm: Two Lives, One Legacy*, Donald R. Hettinga notes that in 1812 the Brothers Grimm published a collection of fairy tales, not only to make a living in war time but also to celebrate German nationalism (x). Hettinga traces the Brothers Grimms' work to ancient folktales: “These stories existed long before the Brothers Grimm. Fairy tales are part of an oral tradition that is as old as human civilization. For example, ever

since its first appearance in China sometime before recorded history, the story of Cinderella has been told around fires and at bedsides on every continent” (xi). While the Brothers Grimm certainly sought to solidify the ancient storytelling tradition by writing down the tales, they also sought to emphasize their German culture.

Likewise, other countries have written down oral tales in ways that emphasize their own cultures as distinct from any another. In my study, I am following this idea as it pertains to Russian culture.

III. *Kolobok* and Translations

The following section provides a threefold display of the Russian fairy tale *Kolobok*. The first column presents the tale as it appears in *Русские Народные Сказки* (trans. *Russian Fairy Tales*), a collection of fairy tales without an accompanying English translation that I purchased during my visit to Russia in January 2011. The second column provides an English transcription to closely mirror the Russian word order. Lastly, the third column provides a more smoothly flowing English translation, but one that does not follow as closely word-for-word order to the original Russian version. It is more than a paraphrase, but I have taken the liberty to arrange the words in a way that would match the voice of a native English speaker. For instance, in the last line of *Kolobok*'s chant, "От тебя, зайца, не хитро уйти!" there is a negative, *не*. I have transcribed the line as "From you, hare, not cleverly escape!" However, in the fairy tale, *Kolobok* *does* cleverly escape; even with the negative, *Kolobok* intends that he can escape. In the third column, then, I have translated the line as "From you, hare, I can cleverly escape!"

In translating, I discovered that a handful of Russian words in *Kolobok* do not appear in my Russian-English dictionary. So I turned to two Russians on campus, Lily Sokolova and Maria Kiseleva. Both native Russian speakers confirmed that these words are obsolete. Each of these outdated words appears in the first two pages of the tale, and they are used to describe the process by which the old woman bakes the bread. In my translation, then, I included the English terms that Lily and Maria suggested. The Russian word *крылышко* is, according to Maria, an ancient tool for measuring ingredients. *Крылышко* may be translated "wing," but "wing" is not a familiar tool or measurement in English. The transcription, then, states "The old woman scraped a wing of flour from the box, searched in all corners, and two fistfuls of flour were gathered." The translation, however, states, "The old woman scraped two fistfuls of flour from the box."

Lastly, the Russian word *колобок* actually means “round bread.” According to Dr. Trofimova, it comes from the word *клубок*, meaning “something round in shape.” When the old man in the tale asks his wife to make *колобок*, then, he is asking for a certain type of bread, one that, if dropped, would roll along a pathway all on its own.

Колобок (Kolobok)
жили-были старик со
старухой.

Просит старик:
“Испеки, старая,
колобок.”
“Из чего
печь-то?
Муки нету.”
“Э-эх, старуха!
По коробу поскреби, по
сусеку помети--авось
муки и наберётся.”

Взяла старуха
крыльшко, по коробу
поскребла, по сусеку
помела, и набралось
муки пригоршни с две.
Замесила колобок на
сметане, изжарила в
масле и положила на
окошечко постудить.
Колобок полежал-
полежал да вдруг и
покатился с окна на
лавку, с лавки на пол, по
полу да к дверям,
перепрыгнул через порог
в сени, из сеней на
крыльцо, с крыльца на
двор, со двора за ворота,
дальше и дальше.

Катится колобок по
дороге, а навстречу ему
заяц:
“Колобок, колобок! Я
тебя съем!”

Kolobok Transcription
There once lived an old
man with an old woman.

Asks the old man:
“Bake, old one,
a round bread.”
“From what
to bake something?
No flour.”
“Heigh-ho, old woman!
From the box scrape, from
all corners—perhaps
flour will be gathered.”

The old woman scraped a
wing of flour from the box,
searched in all corners, and
two fistfuls of flour were
gathered.

The round bread was
kneaded in sour cream,
fried in butter and put on
the window sill to cool.
The round bread lay-lay
and suddenly rolled out the
window on a bench, with
the bench on the floor, by
the floor to the door,
jumped over the threshold
into the hall, from the
entrance to the courtyard,
from the courtyard through
the gate, on and on.

Rolls Kolobok by the
road, and meets to him a
hare:
“Kolobok, Kolobok! I you
will eat!”

Kolobok Translation
Once upon a time there
lived an old man and his
wife.

The old man asks her:
“Bake, wife,
a round bread.”
“How do I
bake it?
There is no flour.”
“Oh, wife!
Scrape the box to gather
flour.”

The old woman
scraped two fistfuls of
flour from the box.

She kneaded the dough in
sour cream, fried it in
butter and put it on the
window sill to cool.
The round bread lay and
suddenly rolled out the
window onto a bench,
from the bench to the floor,
rolled from the floor to the
door, jumped over the
doorway into the hall,
rolled from the entrance to
the courtyard, from the
courtyard through the gate
and on and on.
Kolobok rolls along the
road and meets a hare:
“Kolobok, Kolobok! I will
eat you!”

“Не ешь меня, косою зайчик! Я тебе песенку спою,” сказал колобок и запел:

“Я по коробу скребен,
По сусеку метен,
На сметане мешен,
Да в масле пряжен,
На окошке стужен.
Я от дедушки ушел,
Я от бабушки ушел,
От тебя, зайца,
не хитро уйти!”

И покатился себе
дальше--только заяц его
и видел!

Катится колобок, а
навстречу ему волк:
“Колобок, колобок! Я
тебя съем!”

“Не ешь меня, серый волк! Я тебе песенку спою!”

“Я по коробу скребен,
По сусеку метен,
На сметане мешен,
Да в масле пряжен,
На окошке стужен.

Я от дедушки ушел,
Я от бабушки ушел,
Я от зайца ушел,
От тебя, волка, не хитро
уйти!”

“Do not eat me, crooked hare! I to you will sing a song,” said Kolobok and began to sing:

“I by the box was scraped,
was gathered from its
corners, in sour cream was
kneaded, in butter fried, on
the window set to cool. I
from grandfather left, I
from grandmother left,
from you, hare, not
cleverly escape!”

And rolled himself
along—only the hare saw
him!

Rolls Kolobok and meets
to him a wolf:

“Kolobok, Kolobok! I
you will eat!”

“Do not eat me, grey wolf!
I to you will
sing!”

“I by the box was scraped,
was gathered from its
corners, in sour cream was
kneaded, in butter fried, on
the window set to cool.

I from grandfather left,
I from grandmother left,
I from a hare left,
From you, Wolf, not
cunningly will escape!”

“Do not eat me, twisted hare! I will sing you a song,” said Kolobok and he began to sing:

“I was scraped from all
corners of the box,
kneaded in sour cream,
fried in butter,
set on the window sill to
cool. I left grandfather, I
left grandmother, and from
you, hare, I can cleverly
escape!”

And he rolled himself
along before the hare even
saw!

Kolobok rolls along and
meets a wolf:

“Kolobok, Kolobok! I will
eat you!”

“Do not eat me, grey wolf!
I will sing a song to you!”

“I was scraped from all
corners of the box,
kneaded in sour cream,
fried in butter, set on the
window sill to cool.

I escaped grandfather,
I escaped grandmother,
I escaped a hare,
But from you, Wolf, I can
cunningly escape!”

Покатился себе дальше--
только волк его и
видел!..

Катится колобок, а
навстречу ему медведь:
“Колобок, колобок! Я
тебя съем!”
“Где тебе, косолапому,
съесть меня!”

“Я по коробу скребен,
По сусеку метен,
На сметане мешен,
Да в масле пряжен,
На окошке стужен.
Я от дедушки ушел,
Я от бабушки ушел,
Я от зайца ушел,
Я от волка ушел,
От тебя, медведь, не
хитро уйти!”
И опять укатился--только
медведь его и видел!..

Катится, катится
колобок, а навстречу ему
лиса:
“здравствуй, колобок!
Какой ты хорошенький!”
А колобок запел:
“Я по коробу скребен,
По сусеку метен,
На сметане мешен,
Да в масле пряжен,
На окошке стужен.
Я от дедушки ушел,
Я от бабушки ушел,
Я от зайца ушел,
Я от волка ушел,

Rolls himself along—
only the wolf
saw him!

Rolls Kolobok and meets
to him a bear:
“Kolobok, Kolobok! I
you will eat!”
“Where are you, clumsy,
eat me!”

“I by the box was scraped,
was gathered from its
corners, in sour cream was
kneaded, in butter fried, on
the window set to cool.
I from grandfather left,
I from grandmother left,
I from the hare left,
I from the wolf left,
From you, Bear, not
cleverly escape!”
And again rolled away—
only the bear saw him!..

Rolls, rolls
Kolobok, and meets to him
a fox:
“Hello, Kolobok!
How you are attractive!”
And Kolobok sang:
“I by the box was scraped,
was gathered from its
corners, in sour cream was
kneaded, in the butter
fried, on the window set to
cool. I from grandfather
left, I from grandmother
left, I from the hare left,
I from the wolf left,

He rolled himself along—
only the wolf watched
him!..

Kolobok rolls along and
meets a bear:
“Kolobok, Kolobok! I will
eat you!”
“Where are you, Clumsy,
eat me!”

“I was scraped from all
corners of the flour box, I
was kneaded in sour
cream, I was fried in
butter, set on the window
sill to cool. I escaped
grandfather, I escaped
grandmother, I escaped the
hare, I escaped the wolf,
but from you, Bear, I
cannot cleverly escape!”
And again he rolled
away—only the bear
watched him!..

Kolobok rolls
and meets
a fox:
“Hello, Kolobok! How
attractive you are!
And Kolobok sang:
“I was scraped out of all
corners of the flour box, I
was kneaded in sour
cream, I was fried in
butter, set on the window
sill to cool. I escaped
grandfather, I escaped
grandmother, I escaped the
hare, I escaped the wolf,

От медведя, ушел!
От тебя, лиса, и подалее
уйду!”

“Какая славная песенка!”
сказала лиса.

“Но ведь я, колобок,
старая стала, плохо
слышу. Сядь-ка на мою
мордочку да пропой еще
разок погромче.”

Колобок вскочил лисе на
мордочку и запел ту же
песню.

“Спасибо, колобок!
Славная песенка, еще
бы послушала!
Сядь-ка на мой язычок да
пропой в последний
разок,” сказала лиса и
высунула язык.

Колобок прыг ей на язык,
а лиса его--ам!--и съела.

From the bear, left!
From you, Fox, all the
more will go!”

“How wonderful a song!”
said the fox.

“But I, Kolobok,
have become old, badly
hear. Sit on my
snout and sing your song
again a little more loudly.”

Kolobok jumped the fox
on the snout and sang the
same song.

“Thank you, Kolobok!
A sweet song, still more to
listen!
Sit on my tongue and sing
your song,” said the fox
and put out tongue.

Kolobok jumped on the
tongue and his face—
am!--and was eaten.

I escaped the bear!
From you, Fox, I will
escape all the more!”

“What a wonderful song!”
said the fox.

“But I, bread, have become
old, and my hearing is
poor. Sit on my snout and
sing your song a little more
loudly.”

Kolobok jumped on the
fox’s snout and sang the
same song.

“Thank you, Kolobok! A
sweet song, and there is
still more to hear!
Sit on my tongue and sing
your song,” said the fox,
and he stuck out his
tongue.

Kolobok jumped on his
tongue—yum!--and was
eaten.

IV. Sophia's Oral Retelling of *Kolobok*

My visit to Russia allowed me to witness firsthand the relationship between Russian culture and fairy tales among children. My most cherished oral retellings came from the children of a family with whom I spent much of the week. Illya Obvintsev, a bivocational pastor and beekeeper in the small town of Alapaevsk, has four children between the ages of four and twelve. All of his children are bashful, but the two older children, Nastia and Sophia, lit up when I asked them about fairy tales.

Once upon *this* time, the time in which the lasting oral and written versions of the Russian tale *Kolobok* blended, was on the sixteenth of January, 2011. Sophia, age ten, introduced me to the tale. Sophia does not live in a castle with turrets and spires. Instead, we sat in her family's extremely modest home while several feet of snow and numbing cold lingered outside. While sipping чай (there was always *chai*) and snacking on пироги с мясом и капустой ("pies with meat and cabbage"), I listened to their giggles and sing-song words—understanding only a handful of phrases—while Olga translated. I recorded the storytelling scenario with a camcorder, and, once home, transferred the video footage to a Digital Versatile Disc (DVD). By retelling this story of unknown origin, presumably centuries old, Sophia proved that the same tale is still circulated in her homeland today.

I was delighted to find that Sophia's oral retelling carefully followed my written version. Sophia still includes all of the same characters in the same sequence and the same unhappy ending. Sophia's retelling differs from my written version of *Kolobok* in only one major way: it is more succinct. In her retelling, Sophia does not include Kolobok's song, she only tells that he sings a song. Sophia also feminizes the fox in her retelling, which contrasts with the storybook's masculine fox. That Sophia deems the smartest character—the fox—to be female shows how the

story teller can nuance folktales. It also shows that this young girl pictures the smartest animal like herself!

The Bread Man,” as told by Sophia Obvinsev and as translated by Olga Yevstafyeva

The old man with the old woman lived together, and so the old man said, “Bake me a bread man.” The old lady took what they had and baked the bread man, and he was round. She put him on the window so that he would cool off a bit from the stove. He was tired of sitting on the window sill, and then he jumped off and (as he was round) he was rolling and rolling and then he met a hare. The bread man’s name was Kolobok. The hare said to him, “Kolobok, Kolobok, I will eat you!” He answered, “No, don’t eat me! I will sing you a song.” Kolobok sang a song to the hare and then he rolled again through the forest. Then he met a wolf, and the wolf said, “Kolobok, Kolobok, I will eat you!” But he said, “Please don’t eat me! I will sing a song to you.” And so he sang a song to him and rolled away. Then he rolled, rolled again and met somebody else. So he met a bear, and the bear said, “Kolobok, Kolobok! I will eat you. But he answered, “Please don’t eat me! I will sing you a song.” So he sang a song and rolled away. Then he rolled and met a fox. Fox said, “Kolobok, Kolobok! I will eat you. But he answered, “Don’t eat me! I will sing you a song. He sang a song to the fox, and the fox said, “I can’t hear you. You must jump on my nose so I would hear better.” So he jumped on her nose and started to sing, and she ate him.”

V. On *The Gingerbread Boy* and *The Funny Little Woman*

As analogues to my chosen Russian fairy tale, *Kolobok*, *The Funny Little Woman* and *The Gingerbread Boy* trace a similar plot. All three analogues begin with the equivalent to “Once upon a time,” and all three tales’ action begins when food escapes home. It must be said, though, that *The Funny Little Woman* is the most diverse in both details and plot. The rice dumpling is only a rice dumpling—it is not a character. The rice dumpling has no voice or name. It rolls only because it fell off of the little woman’s table. Furthermore, the story’s hero, the little woman, creates the food. In *The Gingerbread Boy* and *Kolobok*, an old woman creates the hero.

The Gingerbread Boy and *Kolobok* are the two most similar analogues in terms of detail. Both appoint talking bread runaways as heroes. Both bread characters encounter villains who want to eat them, but they narrowly escape by means of a song or chant. The rice cake in *The Funny Little Woman*, on the other hand, has no voice of its own; it simply rolls. Interestingly, the rice dumpling leads the funny little woman on to success: it leads her to the “wicked *oni*,” who leads her to a magic paddle, which allows her to cook rice dumplings infinitely more efficiently. In the story, the rice dumpling leads the little woman into a series of misfortunes, but it ultimately leads her to a better life than she had before she began the search.

On the contrary, *The Gingerbread Boy* and *Kolobok* run (or roll) carelessly along paths of pastoral settings, meeting characters who outright admit that they want to eat the breads. The Gingerbread Boy successfully escapes a cow, horse, threshers, and mowers, and then he became “so proud that he didn’t think there was anybody at all who could catch him” (15). Just when the little bread considers himself immune from danger, the archetypal sly fox sneaks up. The Gingerbread Boy again offers his pretentious chant:

I have run away from a little old woman,
 A little old man,
 A cow,
 A horse,
 A barn full of threshers,
 A field full of mowers,
 And I can run away from you, I can!
 Run! Run! As fast as you can!
 You can't catch me, I'm the Gingerbread Man! (15)

To this, the glib fox replies, "I would not catch you if I could. I would not think of disturbing you" (16). They come to a river, and the fox offers to take the Gingerbread Boy across before his pursuers catch him. Swimming across with Gingerbread Boy in tow, the fox says, "Oh dear! Little Gingerbread Boy, my shoulder is sinking. Jump on my nose so that I can hold you out of the water" (18). The Gingerbread Boy, without question, obeys. *Now* he obeys! In the tale's final lines, the sinister fox enjoys a meal time in which he snaps off and devours each quarter of the Gingerbread Boy.

The Funny Little Woman develops much differently. While all three edible characters are created by older women at the beginning of the tales, the Gingerbread Boy and Kolobok hop off the pan to escape as soon as they are set to cool. The funny little woman is the only one who inadvertently leaves home: as she kneels to reach for her "ungrateful dumpling," which has rolled onto the floor and down a hole, "the earth [gives] way, and head over heels she tumble[s] and tumble[s]..." (6). The runaway rice dumpling mysteriously disappears by the time the wicked *oni* carries the little woman off to his home.

From the beginning, the little woman's outcome is uncertain. She encounters ominous elements on her search to get hold of the one rice dumpling that falls through a crack in her house: she stumbles onto "a most unusual road," a "hilly road lined with statues of the gods" (8); she meets a "very stern Jizo," a god made of statue (10); she laughs uncontrollably and at inappropriate times: "tee-he-he-he!" The tale's foreboding tone points to a hopeless situation for the little woman. The little woman encounters "wicked *oni*" on her search for the rice dumpling, they imprison her, but only so she will be their cook. She is never harmed at the *oni*'s dwelling. Because the Japanese tale is imbued with the little woman's need for rice dumplings, the tale comments on the importance of sustainability. Japan, a country much smaller than the other analogues' countries of origin, as an island has limited resources. The old woman must sustain herself and her people. The search for the rice dumpling, therefore, is necessary.

VI. Analysis of Tales

Propp's *Dramatis Personae*

	<i>Колобок</i>	<i>The Gingerbread Boy</i>	<i>The Funny Little Woman</i>
1. Villain	Fox	Fox	<i>oni</i>
2. Donor or Provider	Old woman (creator)	Old woman (creator)	Old woman (creator)
3. Helper	---	---	Jizos (god statues)
4. Princess (the one who is sought for)	---	---	---
5. Dispatcher	Hare, Wolf, Bear	Cow, Horse, Threshers, Mowers	---
6. Hero	Kolobok	gingerbread boy	rice dumpling
7. False Hero	---	---	---

Propp's Thirty-One Functions as Applied to Analogues

Function	Kolobok	Gingerbread Boy	Funny Woman
8a. One member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something (<i>lack</i>)	Old man desires for his wife to make bread (lack of bread)	Woman desires to have "a little boy of [her] own" (lacks a son).	The little woman's rice dumpling has fallen through the earth, and she wants it back (lacks rice dumpling)
11. The hero leaves home (<i>departure</i>).	The bread round, Kolobok, rolls off of the window sill (leaves home, departs)	Gingerbread boy escapes as soon as the old woman pulls him out of the oven	The little woman inadvertently departs from home when "the earth gave way, and head over heels she tumbled and tumbled..."
12. The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or helper (<i>the first function of the donor</i>).	Kolobok is first stopped by a hare, who says to him, "I will eat you!" As the story progresses, others attack him (Wolf, Bear and, finally, Fox)	Gingerbread Boy is first told to stop by a Cow who wants to eat him; later he is stopped by a Horse, threshers, mowers and, finally, a Fox.	The little woman is given an interdiction as she approaches three Jizos during her search for the rolling rice dumpling: "You had better not follow it because the wicked <i>oni</i> live at the end of the road."
13. The hero reacts to the actions of the	Each time he is stopped, Kolobok	Each time Gingerbread Boy is	The little woman's reaction to each Jizo's

future donor (<i>the hero's reaction</i>).	reacts with a song that tells how he was made and from whom he escaped.	stopped, he reacts with a chuckle and a chant that tells from whom he has escaped; he always ends with "Run! run! as fast as you can! You can't catch me, I'm the Gingerbread Man!"	interdiction is to disobey and continue running down the road.
14. The hero acquires the use of a magical agent (<i>provision or receipt of a magical agent</i>).	---	---	Once captured by the <i>oni</i> and taken to a "strange house," the little woman is given a magic paddle to cook rice.
19. The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated (<i>liquidation</i>).	---	---	The magic paddle turns one grain of rice into a potful. Lack of rice replaced by much rice.
21. The hero is pursued (<i>pursuit, chase</i>).	Kolobok is pursued by the Fox.	The Gingerbread Boy is pursued by the Fox.	When the little woman wishes to return home, the <i>oni</i> pursue her by drinking the water from the river in which she paddles.
22. Rescue of the hero from pursuit (<i>rescue</i>).	---	---	When the <i>oni</i> laugh at the little woman, the water flows out of their mouths and back into the river; this allows the little woman to escape for good.
26. The task is resolved (<i>solution</i>).	---	---	The little woman returns home in an even better condition than when she departed: she has a new asset, the magic paddle.
28. The false hero or villain is exposed.	The Fox is exposed as the villain when he eats Kolobok.	The Fox is exposed as the villain when he eats the Gingerbread Boy.	---

29. The hero is given a new appearance (<i>transfiguration</i>).	---	---	The tale ends with the little woman as “the richest woman in all of Japan” from selling rice dumplings.
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In the above tables, I adopted Vladimir Propp’s methodology, as he explains in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968), to fit the fairy tales *Kolobok*, *The Gingerbread Boy*, and *The Funny Little Woman*. I accept Propp’s methods as fitting and valuable not only because his work is specifically Russian, but also because Propp dedicated his time to studying fairy tales, one hundred, to be precise. Propp used one hundred tales under the Antti-Aarne system for classifying folk tales, studying them according to their characters and functions (Propp 24). While I took only one Russian fairy tale, *Kolobok*, and set it against two similar tales, *The Gingerbread Boy* and *The Funny Little Woman*, I find Propp’s method to be valid in my study of these tales, as well, because it aptly highlights the grammar or logic of the narratives.

First, Propp extracts what he calls the *dramatis personae*, or a list of archetypal characters: the villain, donor (or provider), helper, princess (or sought-for person) and her father, dispatcher, hero, and false hero (79-83). In reading through Propp’s definitions of the *dramatis personae*’s functions, I found that none of my tales include all seven functions. Many of the tales that Propp studied had princesses in them. Mine do not, but each one has a sought for character, which Propp classifies as having the same function.

Propp’s aim is to accurately describe the logic of each tale. To do this, Propp took each of one hundred fairy tales by its component parts and then compared them to one another. Propp explains that “the result will be a morphology...a description of the tale according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole” (19). If the *dramatis personae* between two fairy tales differ but their actions and functions do not,

Propp asserts that “we can draw the inference that a tale often attributes identical actions to various personages” and that a fairy tale may be analyzed by the functions of its *dramatis personae* rather than the *dramatis personae* alone (20). Kolobok, the Gingerbread Boy, and the rice dumpling are each pursued, yet their pursuers differ. A grandfather, a grandmother, a hare, a wolf, a bear, and a fox chase Kolobok. A little old woman, a little old man, a cow, a horse, threshers, mowers, and a fox pursue the Gingerbread Boy. A funny little woman pursues the rice dumpling, and *oni* pursue the funny little woman.

A first glance at Propp’s term “false hero” may lead one to think of the Fox in both *Kolobok* and *The Gingerbread Boy*, because, in both tales, the fox pretends that he is good. He pretends that he only wants to help the Gingerbread Boy escape from his enemies. He acts as though he is interested in hearing Kolobok’s song more closely, so he asks Kolobok to jump on his snout and, eventually, his tongue. Jumping onto the tongue of a larger animal with a reputation for being sly is a big red flag, but Kolobok did not catch on. This trickery does not classify the fox as a false hero, though, because he is not the hero’s foil. The fox, rather, is the villain: in both tales, he is the cause of the hero’s destruction. With an arrogant, defiant chant, the Gingerbread Boy acts menacingly. Kolobok, on the other hand, continues along with a sense of empty-headed, happy-go-lucky adventure.

The fox is not the biggest, most physically threatening pursuer in either *Kolobok* or *The Gingerbread Boy*, yet he wins in both. He wins not because he is largest, but because he is smartest. In a set of fairy tales that rewards brains over brawn, is it possible that the the smaller persons in American and Russian communities, the children, are empowered and valued?

Propp further claims that a “sequence of events has its own laws,” leading him to conclude that the thirty-one functions keep the same order within tales. Even more, “the absence

of certain functions does not change the order of the rest” (22). Therefore, even though I was not able to match all of his functions with those in my three tales, I was able to search down the line of thirty-one functions to a handful that parallel my three tales.

Whereas the Gingerbread Boy is pursued by a line of characters, no one chases Kolobok; rather, Kolobok rolls into the hare, the wolf, and the fox. Only when he invades their space is he in danger. Perhaps this is a comment on the way Americans and Russians differently view the consequences of disobeying a caretaker. Is it possible that Americans teach that children will only find trouble when they crawl into it? Do Russians teach that trouble will find children if they are gullible? In any case, Sophia told me the story of *Kolobok* as a verbal folktale in one moment in time, and to her it is worth remembering.

VII. Conclusion

Although some readers may object to my claim that studying one common Russian fairy tale can lead to a valuable glimpse into Russian culture, I would argue that the tale's wide appeal makes my research worth sharing. In discussing my choice with her to analyze a Russian fairy tale, Dr. Trofimova shared some valid observations. She asserted that it is difficult to base a study on the culture in a country as I have seen it in only one "mindless" fairy tale. Familiarizing myself with multiple Russian tales, she said, would allow me to glean more cultural insight. She also assured me that *Kolobok* is a very common tale that any Russian, educated or uneducated, rich or poor, adult or child, would know by heart. Dr. Kevin Brennan, my third research advisor, backed up Dr. Trofimova's thought that examining multiple Russian fairy tales would yield a more precise commentary on Russian culture. While it is true that gathering a variety of Russian fairy tales would have broadened my knowledge of Russian culture, I note that *Kolobok's* appeal to all Russians is the kind of tale I regard as worth studying.

Just as *Cinderella* has been told innumerable times around cozy hearths and bedsides, *Kolobok* has, too. What makes this children's story and many others appealing no matter the culture? Bruno Bettelheim illuminates a possible answer:

For a story truly to hold the child's attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity...In short, it must at one and the same time relate to all aspects of his personality—and this without ever belittling but, on the contrary, giving full credence to the seriousness of the child's predicaments, while simultaneously promoting confidence in himself and in his future. (270)

While I believe that the fairy tale *Kolobok* is truly Russian, I also find that it is a human story. *Kolobok* incorporates a mixture of familiar elements—food, a grandmother who loves to bake,

and a series of common animals—with supernatural ones: talking bread that rolls away on his own will and talking animals. With elements of hospitality, music, and laughter, it incorporates what children and adults alike enjoy thinking about. *Kolobok* is one example of many that claims a logic to the human soul and imagination.

My written version of *Kolobok* includes a fascinating illustration of the old man and woman who produce the runaway round bread. The white-bearded Russian man relaxes on a log near an ax and stump outside of his modest hut. He looks at his wife, who holds out fresh round bread. Both man and wife are costumed in peasant garb: he wears a billowy red tunic, a brown vest, and patched work boots, and she wears a bright green apron, an underlying long sleeve blouse, and a handkerchief that hides all of her hair. The illustration does not hide the class system. This family is poor. They are surrounded by an agrarian setting of forests, chopped wood, and a hut made of logs. The same illustration, though, radiates happiness. The man and his wife share smiles and rosy cheeks as they lock eyes. The picture provides a sense of nostalgia for the days in Russia before industrialism and postmodernism.

I know that most Russians today do not live as peasants who provide their own living in a secluded forest. Having been to Russia twice, I also know that fresh bread in Russia is less common than in America. What I did find in Russia were groups of poor urban Russians. To me, it is remarkable that a tale such as *Kolobok* has endured such times as the Bolshevik Revolution and the Communist Era and that it is still being told by children on the street today. As time passes, more Russians move from rural to urban areas. What do we make of a simple tale's ability to shift from an oral tradition to written fairy tale form to enduring the collapse of the Soviet Union? Could it be that Russians and Americans alike enjoy remembering the simplicity of respectively peasant and pioneer days? Similar to the way Americans cling to fairy

tales such as Cinderella for feeding hopes that a charming man will sweep a delicate young woman off her feet, is it possible that Russians cling to fairy tales such as Kolobok for feeding hopes of a simple and happy family life with a home and fresh bread? Perhaps learning more about a culture is as simple as recalling the joy in having a loaf of fresh bread.

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