"VASILISA AND STAEVER":

THE RUSSIAN VERSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL NARRATIVE

"WOMAN DRESSED AS A MAN RESCUES HER HUSBAND"

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The Russian epic song (*bylina*) "Vasilisa and Staver" is a national rendition of the international narrative theme "Woman dressed as a man rescues her husband." I place the song in the context of several renditions of this theme in non-Russian traditions. I also compare it to two other *byliny* that are centered around the relations between a female warrior and her spouse. I then outline the set of characters, the repertoire and the sequence of the motifs in twelve variants of "Vasilisa and Staver." This allows me to construct the invariant (i.e., type) of this *bylina.*
To my sister and parents

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INTRODUCTION

The motif of a prince or husband rescuing a princess or his wife appears almost too often in tales. The inverse of this premise, in which the princess or wife rescues the prince or husband, occurs with much less frequency in folklore. Nonetheless, examples of this motif type exist in many traditions, e.g. Russian, German, Polish, Bulgarian, Canadian, to name a few. Obviously this narrative theme is restricted neither by language nor geography. The Russian bylina (a folk epic song) about Staver Godinovich, a powerful Russian boyar, and his wife Vasilisa Mikulichna, who dresses as a man and frees her husband from prison, is a perfect example of this broadly conceived international narrative theme. In my discussion, I will call this Russian epic type "Vasilisa and Staver," since Vasilisa is the protagonist. The Russian collectors usually use the name Staver as the title of their recorded texts, but as it will become clear during my examination of the type, Staver has a secondary role in all of the available materials.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the narrative theme "Woman dressed as a man rescues her husband" in its international and Russian context. I will first outline its international renditions in Indian, Irish, German, Lithuanian, Polish and Balkan traditions. Second, I will place the epic "Vasilisa and Staver" in the context of Russian folklore by focusing on the characteristics of the Russian oral tradition. Third, I will analyze twelve
variants of this particular epic song in order to establish the core motifs comprising the type. Finally, I will discuss the representations and roles of women in Russian folk epics and traditional Russian culture.

The bylina type of the wife saving her husband has been little studied by Russian and Soviet folklorists, therefore this analysis will shed light on many issues which have been either insufficiently clarified or never really considered.
CHAPTER 1

THE THEME “WOMAN DRESSED AS A MAN RESCUES HER HUSBAND”

IN ITS INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The plot of “Vasilisa and Staver” and elements of it are found under several headings in Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson’s *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*. The types closest to this epic are 880 and 888. Other types, listed under the heading “880-899 Fidelity and Innocence,” also reflect aspects of the Russian variants. Type 880, “The Man Boasts of his Wife,” involves a husband who is imprisoned for bragging about his wife and is then rescued by her disguised as a man. While wearing her disguise, the wife is betrothed to a princess, but in escaping with her spouse she avoids the marriage. In some Russian variants, too, Staver’s wife dressed as a man comes to the prince pretending to seek marriage to his daughter or niece. This minor variation does not suggest the story belongs to another type, but rather it is a reminder that the index was compiled on the basis of folktales and not of epic songs. All Russian versions involve a man boasting, usually of his wife, then he is thrown into the dungeon and rescued by his wife who comes disguised as a man. According to the Aarne-Thompson index, variants of this tale appear in Finnish, Lithuanian, Irish, Serbo-Croatian, Greek, German and Russian collections.
The second pertinent type is number 888. It displays more differences in comparison to the Russian epic, but is still valid because its focus is on the wife who, again, rescues her husband in disguise. Tales of this nature appear in Lithuanian, Livonian, Icelandic, Danish, Irish, French, Catalan, German, Czech, Slovenian and Russian traditions. The type 888A, entitled “The Wife Who Would Not be Beaten (Rescues her Husband)” has one subheading, “The Rescue,” applicable to “Vasilisa and Staver.” It involves the wife, dressed as a man, rescuing her husband by winning a chess game. In several variants of the Russian version, one of Vasilisa’s tests is a chess game which, of course, she wins. According to Aarne-Thompson, this type is attested in the Indian tradition.

Many Indian tales are catalogued in Stith Thompson and Jonas Balys’ *Oral Tales of India*. Motifs associated with this tale appear in several places. For example, under the heading of “K: Deceptions,” motif K1837 notes examples of women disguised in men’s clothing. These texts were recorded in eight regions of India. Another motif in this section, K2357, involves a “disguise to enter enemy’s camp (castle)” in “Vasilisa and Staver,” this may find a parallel in the fact that disguised as a man, Vasilisa enters the gates of Kiev without any problems. In section R, “Captives and Fugitives,” the subheading R152 contains cases of the motif of a wife rescuing her husband. It is listed as occurring in four regions of India. The more specific motif R152.5 is about the “transformed wife tak(ing) (her) husband out of captivity.” The word “transformation” can be quite vague. In some instances, this may refer to a magical transformation, perhaps into a bird or a tree. But a transformation can also be a self-induced one, such as taking
on another identity temporarily in order to achieve a goal (i.e., to rescue someone from prison).

Scholars who have published collections of folklore frequently, but not always use the numbering system in Aarne-Thompson. An author who uses Aarne-Thompson’s numbering is Seán Ó’Súilleabháin. In his *Handbook of Irish Folklore*, the section on oral tradition, he has subdivision in which he notes international narrative types that are also found in the Irish tradition. Ó’Súilleabháin uses the same numbering to guide the Irish folklorist’s research. Before listing the tale types, he notes that “collectors should record all available variants of the tales outlined on the following pages” showing that this list was meant to present international tale types which had Irish variants. He gives type 880 (with a summary identical to that in Aarne-Thompson’s) and lists its Irish variants.

A scholar who does not utilize either the tale type numbering system or the motif system is Donald Ward, who edited and translated the 1981 collection *The German Legends of the Brothers Grimm*. Before the detailed index, Ward explains why he omits the motif system developed by Thompson:

> I have made no attempt to coordinate the motifs of *The German Legends* with those listed in Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*. Even though Thompson does include some international legend motifs in his Index, these entries represent only a very small percentage of the totality. Moreover, Thompson’s system of classification does not truly reflect the interrelationship of legend motifs and thus his system, when applied to legends, creates more problems than it can solve.

Ward’s points are certainly valid. I believe that the index systems can create additional problems if interpreted literally. However, if seen as guiding a folklorist’s research, like Ó’Súilleabháin, and approached with more flexibility, it can be quite useful. An example
of the “woman dressed as a man rescues her husband” appears in Ward’s collection as well. The legend “The Man Yoked to the Plow” tells of a knight who is enslaved but the white shirt his wife gave him always remains clean, thus symbolizing his wife’s “continuing fidelity and chastity.” This annoys the sultan/antagonist and he sends one of his men to try to seduce the wife. His efforts fail. The wife, Florentina, dresses as a pilgrim, learns to play the harp, and, while disguised, tricks the sultan into releasing her husband. However, she does not reveal her true identity to her husband. Instead, she requests a piece of his shirt as proof of her story. She returns home before he does, and greets him as his wife, not a pilgrim. When the husband hears of her global travels in his absence, he angrily confronts her. She then puts on her disguise again, brings the piece of the shirt to him, and tells him she rescued him. Clearly there are similarities between this legend and the epic of “Vasilisa and Staver”: the wife successfully rescues her husband and no male character, not even her husband, recognizes her.

Scholars have compiled indexes similar to Aarne-Thompson’s, with their focus on the tales, epics, or legends of a single nation or culture. Since the core of my discussion deals with the Russian variants, as we will see in Chapter 3, I will devote the remainder of this chapter to the presence of this tale type in other Slavic traditions. The indexes of Lithuanian, Polish, Bulgarian, and Balkan folklore give numerous examples of the story of a wife who rescues her husband.

Jonas Balys’ *Motif-Index of Lithuanian Narrative Folk-Lore* lists the tales and the legends according to Aarne-Thompson’s system. Like Ward, he comments on this
system, however his conclusions are different. While Ward decides not to use either

established system, Balys uses the Aarne-Thompson system:

The cataloguing has been carried out according to Antti Aarne’s system, which although not perfect, even as all other systems, is the most convenient, and various European countries have published their catalogues of folk-tales using this system....

Many difficulties were encountered in the task of cataloguing legendary tales. Up to the present time there is no adequate general system for the cataloguing of legends; and I doubt whether one will ever be formed. In legends, more than in ordinary folk-tales, we find material of an individual, national character, which is usually difficult to generalize. Most probably it will be necessary for each country to form her own system for the cataloguing of legends. It is true that Aarne attempted to catalogue Finnish and Estonian legends, and in doing so, began each section with a fresh number. This method is very inconvenient, especially for citations....

Thompson’s huge decimal system [in the] “Motif-Index of Folk-Literature” is too complicated to be used with success either by an indexer or the user of an index formed in accordance with this system.... After having considered various means of cataloguing, I decided... it would be best to catalogue legends according to Aarne’s principle for the cataloguing of general tales....

Aarne-Thompson’s number 888, regarding the faithful wife, appears in this collection, and is attested to in Lithuanian folklore.

A version of this tale is also mentioned in An Inventory of Polish Folk Ballad by Elzbieta Jaworska. This catalogue organizes the ballads according to the author’s own system. Ballad number 101 is thematically related to the Russian epic “Vasilisa and Staver.” This Polish variant is called “A Girl Delivers Her Lover From the Prison.” In this ballad, the female provides the male with ropes to use to escape. It seems that she does not alter her appearance, but she is certainly the one who makes his escape possible. The sources mentioned concerning this ballad are of particular interest to this study. All
of the variants were published in the nineteenth century, with the earliest one appearing in 1836. This shows that the notion of a woman rescuing a man was at least imaginable in the early nineteenth century.

Two catalogues indicate the presence of this type in Bulgarian folklore. The Bulgarski folklorni prikazki katalog, which also follows Aarne’s system of classification, includes type 884B\(^{14}\), which deals with a female warrior. A similar narrative type is also catalogued in Bulgarski narodni balladi i pesni s mitcheski i legendarni motivi, under number 926\(^{15}\). The image of the female warrior is relevant for the Russian epic of “Vasilisa and Staver.” Often, Vasilisa is a poleiitsa, i.e. a female warrior. In the Russian tradition the mighty male warrior is called a bogaty. Thus, even before the exploits of the particular tale begin, her strength as a warrior has been clearly marked. This Bulgarian catalogue also notes ballads and legends referred to as “Wife frees her husband from prison\(^{16}\),” which is clearly similar to the tales of other traditions.

This particular tale type is also found in Branislav Krstic’s Indeks motiva narodnih pesama balkanskih slovena. His index notes many variants of this epic type published in various collections. It provides the most specific evidence for similarities between the Russian epic “Vasilisa and Staver” and other Slavic cultures’ through fewer differences on the basic level of genre, which provides more reliable data in the end. Obviously, the tale of the woman rescuing her husband is an international type, which is well-known in the various Slavic traditions.

Even though cross-dressing is a major aspect of this tale type, it is certainly not a modern story. “Vasilisa and Staver” appear as early as the early eighteenth century in the
Russian collection by Kirsha Danilov. As we saw in the Polish index, there was a ballad recorded in the early nineteenth century. In Russian scholarship, I. Sazonovich wrote a series of articles on many aspects of the bylina about “Vasilisa and Staver” which were published in Russkii Filologicheskii Vestnik from 1885-1886. He looks at similar epics in South Slavic traditions as well as in Western European cultures. His extensive discussion on the female warrior in this time shows that this tale type not only existed before 1885, but was quite well known and popular. In addition, since Sazonovich published his discussion on the tale-type in five parts, each of which was a lengthy article in itself, it seems he felt strongly that it was a topic worthy of much scholarly discussion. And I obviously agree with him.
CHAPTER 2

"VASILISA AND STAVER" IN THE CONTEXT OF
THE RUSSIAN ORAL TRADITION

As with other ethnic groups, the folklore of Russia involves a variety of genres and mediums of expression such as verbal folklore, music, dance, ritual performances, and visual arts and crafts. The verbal folklore, or, as it is often called, the oral tradition, has many genres, including epic songs, ballads, lyric songs, laments, folktale, legends, proverbs, riddles, incantations, etc. This chapter will focus on the background and characteristics of the epic songs, known as bylina\textsuperscript{17}, since the stories about Vasilisa Mikulichna and Staver Godinovich are part of the Russian epic tradition.

The bylina are narrative songs about certain historical or legendary events which revolve around the actions of specific historical or legendary figures. According to Sokolov, the term bylina was introduced as a scholarly term “... in the 1830’s by the scholar-dilettante Sakharov, on the basis of a well known expression from the Tale of Igor’s Raid - ‘the bylina of this time\textsuperscript{18}.’” He emphasizes the fact that the bylina, not only narrate about certain events, but “fully reflect the most diverse aspects of the historical and everyday life of the Russian people\textsuperscript{19}.” This genre has a rich repertoire of traditional
motifs and subjects, and a well developed traditional poetic structure. It brings out the hopes and dreams of the Russian people through the main character of the song. In order to fully understand bylina, one must pay close attention to the performers of the epics and the actual act of performing a bylina as well as the poetic devices used within the song. Being able to sing a bylina was not a common talent. Only those with exceptional artistic ability supplemented with years of training could perform them. The training involved an apprenticeship with one or more established singers, and at times, the master singer was a close relative of the novice. Accomplished singers were often invited to perform in public, at a particular place or event and received some material reward for their performance (e.g. food, drink, money). The success of the performance was determined by the audience’s reaction. This demonstrates that the people not only valued the talent of the epic singer, but also had a set of norms for evaluating singers’ artistic skills.

The art of bylina telling/singing requires both individual creativity and improvisational skills as well as memorization. According to Albert Lord, epic singers do not memorize completely any particular bylina in its entirety. Rather they memorize only certain patterns, the story line, inserting particular set phrases and traditional themes at their own discretion and according to the circumstances of the performance. In The Singer of Tales, Lord shows the ways in which Muslim performers of the Serbo-Croatian epic songs memorize traditional patterns, as opposed to the entire text, as well as the ways in which the audience evaluates the performance. This way of production of epic songs in general, and of their texts in particular, explains why a bylina can exist only as a group of
variants and can never have a single definitive text. By utilizing traditional devices, like descriptive passages and epithets, singers have a structure with which to work, in addition to the actual plot. It is precisely this process of combining devices with the story-line that makes *bilyny*-telling an art which requires a long period of apprenticeship. As Sokolov explains:

Good narrators devote themselves seriously to the performance of their *bilyny*. They profoundly immerse themselves in the content of the *bilyny*, and sensitively observe their "ritualism," that is, the peculiarities of the poetic form which are inherent in the *bilyny*. In spite of the fact that they devote themselves with great attention to the preservation of the texts which they have assimilated from their teachers, every narrator always manifests his special, individual creative manner of constructing the *bilyna*, and frequently also makes significant changes in form and content\(^20\).

Clearly, the individual singer has considerable control over the song and text he/she performs. The singers of the *bilyny* were mostly middle-age or older men\(^21\), but there certainly were women who knew and performed such songs, as seen by the fact that two of the "Vasilisa and Staver" variants I will use in Chapter 3 were performed by women in 1871. Consequently, the entire repertoire of the singer as well as the individual songs, carried specific features related to gender, personal preference, regional dialect and music, to name a few.

Some of the devices used to construct a *bilyna* also may be used in other folklore genres, e.g. introductory (*zachin*) or concluding (*kontsovka*) remarks by the singer, brief or extensive repetition, traditional epithets, and non-metrical rhythm. Usually, however, they carry certain markers which identify them as part of the *bilyny* tradition. All of the
examples below are taken from the byliny texts which will be analyzed in the following chapter.

Formulaic singer’s comments at the beginning and the end of the bylina can be easily identified. These remarks have more to do with the relationship between the singer and the audience than with the bylina itself. In Zenzinov’s copy of “Vasilisa and Staver,” the account of events is preaced by the following zachin:

Blagoslovi zha menia, gospodi, starinu skazat’,
Starinu skazat’ stary prezhumui,
Staru prezhumui da starodavnuui."^22

Obviously, the singer is preparing the audience for the story. He/she immediately identifies the kind of story that is to be performed. It is a “starina,” i.e. “a story of yore,” which was the way in which folksingers in many areas referred to the byliny. The singer may choose to also conclude the story with a similar marker of transition from the act of performance to some other activity. For example, in the variant performed by Petr Ivanovich Riabinin-Andreev which was recorded in 1931, one finds the following last line, “Tak ved’ ten-to bylinochka okonchilas’,” (“That’s how, you know, with this the bylina ended.”) Such remarks, however, do not always appear in the published collections of Russian epic songs. There could be two possible explanations of their absence. It is possible that the singer did not make any such comments and the recorded text reflects his/her performance faithfully. However, since the byliny were normally performed in front of an audience, it is quite likely that singers customarily included some sort of introductory and/or concluding remarks to frame their performance as well as to inform the audience of the beginning and the end of the actual story. As mentioned earlier, Lord
has a number of observations demonstrating the ways in which the audience checked and evaluated the singer’s performance. The singer certainly had much incentive to cater to and please his/her audience. Some collectors or editors, who were looking at the written text, may have regarded these remarks as superfluous to the plot of the bylina since the text in these cases was taken out of context of the performance event and, therefore, they decided not to include them in the publication.

Other devices used in byliny appear much more regularly in the published texts. One of them is what one may call “brief repetition.” It involves repetitions of assonances and consonances as well as repetition of particular prefixes, suffixes or roots. This can be seen in the already quoted example of zachin (i.e. “Blagoslovi zha menia, gospodi, starimu skazat’/Starimu skazat’ stary prezhuim/Staru prezhuim da starodavnuim!”). In it, the root “star-” appears five times, the word “prezhuim” and the phrase “starimu skazat’” are repeated two times as well.

Extensive repetition is frequently found in the byliny. In this case entire passages are repeated almost verbatim. The following excerpt, from Abram Chukov’s performance, offers a good sample of this kind of repetition. It involves the conversation between Prince Vladimir and his daughter:

_Sam govoril da takovo slovo:
- Akh, ty ei zhe doch’ moia vozliublena,
Priekhal est’ posol zemli liakhovitskia,
Togo korolia syn liakhovitskago,
Molodoi Vasiliy syn Mikulich-de,
On ob dobrom dele da ob svatostve
Na tebe liubimoei na docheri.
Chto zhe mne s poslom-to bydet delati?

Govorit-ko doch’ emu vozliublena:_

14
- Ty ei, gosudar', moi rodnoi batiushka!  
Chto u tebia teper' na rozumi?  
Otdayat' devchiny sam za zhenshchinu  
Rich'-pogovory vse po zhenskomu,  
Pel'ki miakon'ki vse po zhenskomu,  
Peretski tonen'ki vse po zhenskomu,  
Gde zhukovin'ta-ty byli, da to mesto znat'.  

This passage occurs four times in this particular text: lines 104-119, 153-168, 195-210 and 247-262. The use of extensive repetition adds to the tight structure of the work. It also gives the performer a moment to collect his or her thoughts and focus on the upcoming events.

Traditional epithets are also a common feature of the bylina. For example, when Vasilisa is referred to directly, that is, when she is not disguised as a man, she is always called “molodaia zhena” (young wife). She is also referred to as “Vasilisa doch' Mikulichna” (Vasilisa daughter of Mikula), while her husband is “Staver syn Godinovich” (Staver the son of Godin). Likewise, the bogatyrs-warriors are always “moguchii” (mighty) and the field is always “chistoe” (clear). This kind of device is also found in Homer's works, such as the Iliad and the Odyssey. It connects a specific characteristic with each epic character and thus firmly engraves their personality into the minds of the listeners.

All of these elements appear in genres besides bylina. However, combined with the non-metrical rhythm, subject matter and performance aspect, bylina emerge as having their own genre which uses traditional poetic devices to portray a story.
The historical frame of reference of the byliny is also a traditional feature and can be used as a marker of the genre. In terms of my study, it is important because it allows me to place “Vasilisa and Staver” in its proper context. The Russian byliny can be classified into three large groups, namely the ones which refer to the pre-Kievan period of Russian history, to the Kievan one, and to post-Kievan times. There is no direct evidence of pre-Kievan byliny. Their existence is inferred only on the basis of various pieces of indirect information. This situation can be explained by the fact that literacy came to Russia after the Kievan state was already founded. Some of the earlier oral stories were eventually recorded in the chronicle accounts. For example, the Primary Chronicles explain that the city of Kiev was named for Kii, the oldest of the three brothers who, together with their sister, built the city on the hills by the Dnepr. Since there is evidence of such legends, the assumption that byliny existed in this non-literacy era is a reasonable hypothesis.

In Russkii geroicheskii epos, Vladimir Propp “connects that origin of epic to the introduction of marriage.” This conclusion suggests that the search for a wife was probably the main topic of pre-Kievan byliny. Marriages in this time usually occurred between different tribes, and males would go out in search of a wife in another, possibly unknown, tribe. In a bylina, this tradition is represented by a story of a hero leaving his own world/home for an unknown world, possibly full of monsters and other supernatural creatures, in order to find a wife. Along the way, the hero has to perform certain tasks to prove himself worthy of that particular woman.
In the Kievan cycle, matrimony became a peripheral issue. Although it still remained as an element of the bylina, it was not considered the main heroic task. The epics of the Kievan group focus on the capital city of Kiev, around the time of the Christianization of Rus', by Prince Vladimir in 988/9. There are no records of bylina texts physically from this period, but in seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century recordings there are numerous references to Kiev, Prince Vladimir, and to various geographical and historical details which testify that they were closely connected with the epic tradition of earlier centuries. There are two types of bylina that refer to this era: some of them are centered around Kiev and some around the city of Novogorod. The three major figures who appear in the bylina of this cycle are Dobrinia Nikitch, Ilia Muromets and Alyosha Popovich. These bogatyrs are highly esteemed in Russian culture. There are many stories about the heroic deeds of each of them, as well as stories in which they act as a group. Some of them are occasionally mentioned in individual variants of the “Vasilisa and Staver” bylina, which also belongs to this cycle.

Post-Kievan bylina originated at some point after the reign of Prince Vladimir. The epics of this cycle take a different approach to the previous Kievan themes. In “Vasilisa and Staver,” for example, Prince Vladimir is not presented in a very positive light. Even though he is treated with a certain degree of respect, Vladimir is, at the same time, far from glorified. His temper flares when Staver boasts, and thus provides challenges to the protagonist, acting as the antagonist’s. His tests fail to reveal the identity of the disguised Vasilisa. Finally, he is tricked into releasing Staver from his dungeon.
There has been much scholarship on *byliny* in Russia as well as numerous publications of *byliny* texts. In the collections of folk songs either the collector or the editor organizes and comments on the material. However, I will not provide a complete listing of the voluminous studies and publications of texts. Instead, I will mention only a few of the most important ones. Anna Mikhailovna Astakhova, a leading Russian expert in this tradition, for example, places the greatest emphasis on the performer. By collecting *byliny* texts from a father and a son pair, she was able to establish the way in which the son had learned his repertoire from his father and to note the differences between the two performers. She also wrote two detailed studies on the Russian *byliny*, i.e., *Byliny: itogi i problemy izuchenia* and *Russkii bylinnyi epos na severe*. Another leading expert, Iurii Sokolov, also collected *byliny* (*Onezhskie byliny*), and wrote about the genre in general (*Russian Folklore*). Vladimir Propp, a major figure best known for his *Morphology of the Folktales*, is the author of *Theory and History of Folklore* and *Russkii geroicheskii epos* which are present milestones in the study of Russian folklore. He did not publish collections of epic songs, but put forward influential theories and interpretations of the material.

Of the other major publications of *byliny*, one must note Kirsha Danilov’s collection, which was first published in 1804. He was probably the first to compile a collection of Russian epics. His book greatly influenced the contents of some later collections, such as Pavel Nikolaevich Rybnikov’s *Pesni*. Rybnikov collected more than 200 *byliny* and edited the first edition himself. He wanted to organize the book by performers, but the publisher refused this arrangement. A few years later, in 1873,
Gil'ferding published his *Oenzehskie byliny*. There he presents the material according to the performer. He was the first collector to arrange a published compilation in this fashion. The beginning of the twentieth century saw a second edition of Rybnikov's collection, as well as a collection of epic songs compiled by V. F. Miller. This collection is considered to be the best organized publication of its type to date. In it the *byliny* are arranged in historical-chronological order within each category of performers. The final major collection is that of Pyotr Ivanovich Riabinin-Andreev, published in 1939. Edited by V. Bazanov, this work emphasizes the performer himself who, while not a professional singer, came from a family with a tradition of epic singing.

It should be evident from listing the above collections that much emphasis was placed on the performer. Lord's *Singer of Tales* is probably the most influential scholarly work on epics. Although his studies revolve around Serbian, English and ancient Roman epics, his conclusions are relevant for many different epic traditions, especially those of the Slavic people.

Another topic which should be addressed before analyzing the variants of "Vasilisa and Staver" concerns the roles of women in *byliny*. An examination of the images of women in provides the necessary context for interpreting the role of the female protagonist in "Vasilisa and Staver." In many songs of heroic deeds, the female character is more of an element rather than a character. The hero may be seeking marriage, or his task is to rescue the princess from the antagonist, which often is rewarded by marriage. However there are also a number of examples of women who have more diverse roles. Sokolov points out three women who, as mothers, "are the figures of the staid,
commanding types of mothers, imbued with the consciousness of their own worth\textsuperscript{27}.

These women are Amel'fa Timofeyevna, Malf'a Timofeyevna and Afimys Aleksandrova, the mothers of Vasily Buslaevich, Diuk Stepanovich and Dobrynia Nikitich, respectively.

Dobrynia’s wife Nastas’ia Mikulichna deserves special attention. She, like Vasilisa, is a polenitsa, who can be described as either an amazon woman or a female bogatyry. Joan Delaney Grossman summarizes the plot of this bylina in the following way:

[Dobrynia] is riding about the country when he meets a strange bogatyry who does not respond to his questions except with a challenge. Before they enter into mortal combat, however, Dobrynia discovers that his foreign adversary is a woman, Nastas’ia Nikulichna. They forthwith return to Kiev and are married.... In subsequent stages of their relationship, [she] assumes a purely feminine role\textsuperscript{28}.

Therefore Nastas’ia’s role changes in order for a happy marriage to exist. Grossman points out the relationship between Nastas’ia and Dobrynia in one of the variants of this type is similar to the story of Penelope and Odysseus. Just as Nastas’ia is about to marry another, Dobrynia returns. Nastas’ia begs him to forgive her “foolishness.” As Grossman points out, “For her ‘woman’s foolishness’ she is forgiven, though we have heard earlier that she is ‘no fool (neglupaia)’\textsuperscript{29}.” It seems that Nastas’ia’s role changes as her relationship with Dobrynia develops.

Another strong female character is Nastas’ia who is associated with Dunai. She, too, is a strong warrior, but maintains her strength until her death. Nastas’ia and her husband Dunai compete in order to determine who the best archer is. When she proves that she is better in archery than her husband, Dunai points his arrow at her in his jealousy. Nastas’ia tells him that she is pregnant with a son, but he does not believe her and kills
her. Dunai realizes that she told the truth and he kills himself in remorse. This tragic story can be interpreted several ways. On one hand, this can be viewed as a case of intense competitiveness between spouses. On the other, it could be perceived as a warning that a husband should have faith in his wife, otherwise both of them, and their child, will die. A third possible interpretation may place the blame for the tragic outcome on Nastas’ia, for instead of submitting to the traditional female expectations of behavior, she dared to become a woman warrior and, unlike the first Nastas’ia who changed after marriage, never turned into a typical spouse.

These images of women shed additional light on Vasilisa. She, too, is strong, and even beats her husband in a wrestling contest, as Dunai’s Nastas’ia. But, like the first Nastas’ia, when the marriage returns to its normal state, she returns to her feminine clothes, and to her role of the wife. This allows people to see the fulfillment of traditional roles, while at the same time showing how Staver truly needed his wife to rescue him from prison due to his own boasting.
CHAPTER 3

AN ANALYSIS OF “VASILISA AND STAVER”

A. Passportization

The analysis of the bylina “Vasilisa and Staver” involves a careful investigation of the actual variants of the story about the clever and courageous wife who rescues her husband from prison. Its variants come from several different geographical regions. Different folklorists recorded the texts from different performers in the course of approximately 200 years. Regardless of all the variations, however, all the texts contain certain constant features which allow to establish an invariant or type of the bylina “Vasilisa and Staver.” In this chapter I will examine the differences and similarities between twelve published texts of “Vasilisa and Staver.” First, I will present the circumstances in which each variant was recorded and published, a process also known as passportization. Then I will examine the set of characters and development of the plot of these texts. Finally I will outline the invariant, i.e., I will construct the basic story using the features that I found to be essential for identifying the individual texts as belonging to a specific narrative type.
All but two of the twelve texts at my disposal indicate the place where the respective variant was performed. It is not clear whether this kind of information was available, but not included in the published volume, or was never actually provided by the person who originally recorded the two texts of unknown origin. The remaining ten variants came from two general areas: Northern Russia and Siberia. The Northern Russian variants (hereafter NRV) are more numerous. They were recorded mainly in the Onezhskii Region, which is situated to the northeast of St. Petersburg, and centers around Lake Onega and the Onega river. More precisely, the collectors mention the villages of Garnits, Kondy, Rimskoe, and Gorka. The places of origin of the Siberian variants (hereafter SV), however, are not as concentrated within a relatively small geographical area as those of the NRV. This may be due to the fact that I know of only three “Vasilisa and Staver” SV as opposed to seven NRV. It should also be taken into account that Siberia is a vast geographical area which has always been rather scarcely populated. Two of the three SV specify the regions in which they were recorded, namely, the areas of the Altai mountains and around Lake Baikal.

The most valuable collection, in my opinion, is Aleksandr Fedorovich Gil'ferding’s 1871 collection, for he notes the exact date when each bylina was recorded, as well as biographic information about the singers. Four of the byliny which I analyze are from this collection. One of the texts belongs to Abram Evtikhiev Chukov, from the village Gorka, of the Pudozhgorskii area in Northern Russia, who performed “Vasilisa and Staver” for Gil'ferding when he was about 59 years old. Chukov learned the art of byliny singing from his father, a master-singer from the village of Kosmozer, in the Kizhskii region. This
accounts for the fact that, according to Gil'ferding, Chukov did not sing the bylina in the manner typical for the performers from the village of Pudozhaia Gora, but as a person from Kizhi. Chukov met also with Rybnikov, another famous Russian folklorist, and contributed greatly to his collection of songs from the Olonetskaia Province. 

Thus, I have at my disposal two versions of “Vasilisa and Staver” by Chukov, which provide an opportunity for a series of useful observations. One of the texts is published as number 151 in Gil’ferding’s collection. The other one appears as number 30 in Rybnikov’s Pesni. Rybnikov even notes under the title of the bylina that it is Gil’ferding’s 151. One might initially interpret this as an indication that Rybnikov reprinted Gil’ferding’s publication. Indeed, as the set of the characters and the plot analysis will show are quite similar. The similarities, however, can be explained by the fact that they both were performed by Chukov. It is also possible that this was some kind of editorial oversight in reproductions of Rybnikov’s collected epics: the second edition of Rybnikov’s collection was published in 1909, but the original collection came about from 1861 - 1867, and Chukov’s version of “Vasilisa and Staver” was recorded in 1863, i.e. before Gil’ferding’s collection of 1871. Perhaps the 1909 edition of Rybnikov’s collection is emphasizing that the two versions were both sung by Chukov. In actuality, they are two different performances of the same song, recorded a few years apart. This explains why there are so many similarities in the plot, as well as why the differences concern primarily the syntax of the texts.

The three other variants in Gil’ferding’s collection were performed by different people. All of them were recorded in the beginning of July 1871. Andrei Vasil’evich
Sarafanov, from Garnits (Sennogubskii region), was about 50 when he performed the bylina recorded in Gil’ferding\textsuperscript{34} (number 109). Like Chukov, Sarafanov learned his art from an older family member, his grandfather Ignatii Andreev. It seems that Gil’ferding recorded both Domna Vasil’evna Surikova’s bylina (number 140) and Sarafanov’s on the same day, July 4, 1871. Surikova lived in the same region, but in a different village (Konda). Surikova was a widow of 40 when Gil’ferding recorded from her\textsuperscript{35}. She seems to have learned to perform byliny from not from members of her immediate family, but from other elderly people. Gil’ferding recorded “Vasilisa and Staver” (number 169) from two other women - Praskov’ia Makarova and Praskov’ia Poluektovna Pastukhova, who were both from the village of Gorka. At the time Gil’ferding met them, they both were about 30 years old. They performed both byliny and religious songs (“

\textit{dukhovye stikhri}”) which they learned from their parents\textsuperscript{36}. Unlike the other epic performers who sang solo, they sang together, and were joined by a third young woman, whom Gil’ferding describes only as Pastukhova’s sister\textsuperscript{37}.

Two NRV were recorded in December 1931 and 1932. The first one was performed by the twenty-seven year old Pyotr Ivanovich Riabinin-Andreev. It was recorded by M. B. Kaminskaia and N. N. Tiaponkinaia and was published in Astakhova’s \textit{Byliny Severa}. Interestingly, the performance took place in Garnits, where Gil’ferding recorded a “Vasilisa and Staver” bylina from Sarafanov sixty years earlier. The later one was sung by Petr Ivanovich Riabinin-Andreev who continued the Riabinin family tradition of epic performance. This was his first performance of “Vasilisa and Staver.”\textsuperscript{38} The 1932 one was performed by Afanasii Matveevich Denisov, who was in his 60’s at the time. It
was recorded in Rim (Pudozhgorskii District of Medvezhegorskii region) and recorded by Tikhonravov.

Unfortunately, the background information about the SV is not as good as that about the NRV. The oldest of these variants is found in the famous collection of Kirsha Danilov. In the commentary to the 1958 edition, it is concluded that this variant belongs to the Siberian type because Vasilisa dresses as a Tatar envoy and is seeking tax money. In the Northern group Vasilisa typically demands the hand of Prince Vladimir’s daughter. Unfortunately, there is no information either about the performer, or about the place and the time of the recording. Since this collection was first published in 1804, it is safe to assume that this variant existed at the end of the eighteenth century.

The next two SV came from the collection of Siberian bylina called Russkaia epicheskaia poezia sibiri i dal’nego vostoka (Russian Epic Poetry of Siberia and the Far East). The first “Vasilisa and Staver” in this collection was performed by L. G. Tupitsyn and recorded by S. I. Guliaev. The first publication date of this collection is 1939, allowing for the assumption that this SV is either a late nineteenth century or an early twentieth century variant. According to the editors this bylina is from the Altai region. The second “Vasilisa and Staver” is placed together with epic songs from the area around Lake Baikal. It is particularly noteworthy for its original plot, which will be explored in full detail later. The singer is unknown, and so is the date of performance. This bylina was found in the possessions of the merchant M. A. Zenzinov, who owned several manuscript collections of folklore and died in the 1870s. The grammar and style of the text make the editors infer that Zenzinov was only the owner of the copy, and that he did
not record it himself\textsuperscript{43}. However, for the purposes of this discussion, I will call this SV the Zenzinov text. I will date the text as a pre-1870 record.

The final two variants to be examined were published without much background information. However, they both are of significant importance. One of them was recorded from Trofim’ Grigor’evich Riabinin, whose grandson Petr Ivanovich Riabinin-Andreev has already been already introduced. Trofim’ Riabinin was a famous epic singer. His variant is part of a collection of his songs published in 1898. The second text dates back to the first quarter of the eighteenth century\textsuperscript{44}. It was re-published from F. I. Buslaeva in the collection \textit{Byliny v zapisakh i pereskazakh XVII - XVIII vekov} prepared by A. M. Astakhova, V. V. Mitrofanova and M. O. Skripil’.

These are the twelve epics which I will analyze in my study of the Russian versions of the narrative type “Woman dressed as a man rescues her husband.” For the rest of my investigation, I will use a two-part acronym for each of the twelve byliny. The first part of it refers to the region; the second part to the singer, or, in case the singer is not known, to the collector. All of this information is summarized in Table 1 on the next page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Region</th>
<th>Performer or Collector</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Buslaeva</td>
<td>Un-B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Riabinin</td>
<td>Un-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siberia</td>
<td>Danilov</td>
<td>S-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siberia</td>
<td>Tupitsyn</td>
<td>S-T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siberia</td>
<td>Zenzinov</td>
<td>S-Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Russia</td>
<td>Chukov/Gil'ferding</td>
<td>NR-ChG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Russia</td>
<td>Chukov/Rybnikov</td>
<td>NR-ChR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Russia</td>
<td>Denisov</td>
<td>NR-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Russia</td>
<td>Makarova &amp; Pastukhova</td>
<td>NR-MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Russia</td>
<td>Riabinin-Andreev</td>
<td>NR-RA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Russia</td>
<td>Sarafanov</td>
<td>NR-Sa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Russia</td>
<td>Surikova</td>
<td>NR-Su</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The general sources of twelve “Vasilisa and Staver” variants and their acronyms.
B. Set of Characters

The next step is to identify the characters and their names in each of the twelve texts. The first name, encountered in all versions of these *byliny*, is Staver. It is usually used by the people who collected or published the texts as a title of the *bylina*. These titles are almost identical. "Staver" or "Stavyor" is title of NR-ChG, NR-Sa, NR-Su, and NR-MP. It is probably not a coincidence that all of these NRV are found in Gil'ferding's collection. Five others are called "Staver Godinovich:" NR-D, NR-ChR, S-T, S-Z, and Un-B. One variant, S-D, is named "(About) Staver the Boiarin," emphasizing his position as a powerful Russian nobleman. The last two, Un-R and NR-RA, are both entitled "Staver Godinovich and Vasilisa Milkulichna." In these cases, it seems Vasilisa is treated as a character who is as important as Staver, even though she is mentioned second. These are also the two longest variants, with 484 and 407 lines, respectively. Although NR-RA was recorded in 1931 and Un-R in the nineteenth century, it is probably no coincidence that they have the same name and are of similar length since Riabinin-Andreev was a grandson of Riabinin.

Staver’s name within the text is rather consistent. In eleven variants, one finds either Staver Godinovich, or a form of this name which reflects a regional dialect, such as Stavyor (Un-R, NR-ChG, NR-Su, NR-MP, NR-RA) or Gadenovich (Un-B). The exception is NR-Sa, where the first name is still Staver, but the patronymic is changed to Stogodinovich. Because of the addition of the prefix *sto-*, the meaning of the name is no longer "son of Godin," but "the one who is a hundred years old." This variant also changes the name of the female protagonist as well. It is quite probable that the singer
(Sarafanov) was trying to create a variant on his own. As the passportization indicates,
Gil’ferding recorded both Sarafanov’s and Surikova’s byliny “Vasilisa and Staver” on July
4, 1871.

The other prominent male figure of these variants is Prince Vladimir. The singers
use this name throughout the twelve variants. Some secondary male characters are also
given names. They either take part in the action or are only mentioned in passing. For
example, Tsar Kalin, a fierce Tatar leader, is mentioned in both NR-RA and Un-R. This
similarity is probably a result of the tradition of byliny performance within the Riabinin
family. Another foreign ruler, Etemanuil Etemanuilovich, is referred to in S-D. From
Russia, the bogatyrs Il’ya Muromets, Alyosha Popovich and Dobrinya Nikitich are
frequently encountered figures in Russian folklore and also appear in variants of “Vasilisa
and Staver.” Il’ya Muromets is only mentioned in NR-RA, but he appears as an old man
in NR-Sa. Alyosha Popovich and Dobrinya Nikitich act as Vladimir’s envoys as well as
Vasilisa’s adversaries in S-T. The two men who fight against Vasilisa in one of the tests
to determine her sex are also mentioned by name in S-D: Pritchenka and Khapilonka45.
The same names appear also in Un-R, but there they are the family names of two groups
of brothers, totaling seven men. Lastly, Staver’s servant, who informs Vasilisa of her
husband’s predicament, is called Vaniusha (NR-MP).

A character who appears along with Prince Vladimir is a female relation of his
(e.g. his wife, daughter or niece). This character is actually the only one who realizes that
the envoy is actually a woman in disguise. In the cases in which it is the wife who notices
the deceit, she warns Vladimir that he is being fooled by Staver’s wife. Vladimir’s wife,
Apraksiia, appears in Un-B, S-D, S-T, NR-Su, NR-RA, and NR-D. When his daughter or
eiece is the female relation, she comments on the pending marriage proposal by the
“envoy,” and begs Vladimir not to give her away to a woman. The niece, called Zabava
Putiatichna, appears in Un-R and NR-RA (both singers from the Riabinin family). In five
of the six remaining variants, the female relation is Vladimir’s daughter. In NR-ChR and
NR-ChG, her name is Opraksiia (this is the name of Vladimir’s wife in variants Un-B, S-
D, S-T, NR-Su, NR-RA, and NR-D); in NR-MP she is Mashuta Vladimirovna, and in
NR-Su she is Nastas’ia Vladimirovna. The daughter appears as a character in NR-Sa but
has no name. Vladimir’s female relation is vital for the story, because she is the one who
initiates the questioning and the testing of the envoy’s sex. The only variant in which such
a character does not exist in S-Z, in which, as it will be discussed later, Vasilisa’s sex is
not an issue.

The protagonist’s name is Vasilisa or Vasilista in every variant except for NR-Sa,
in which she is called Nastas’ia. This is the same variant in which the patronymic
Stogodinovich appears. The difference in the names suggests the singer’s effort to
change the song, but not the plot. In eleven of the variants, Vasilisa’s patronymic reflects
a dialectical variation of Mikulichna: Mikulichna in Un-R, NR-ChR, NR-Sa, NR-Su, NR-
MP, NR-RA, and NR-D; Mikulishna in Un-B and S-D, Nikulichna in NR-ChG; and
Nikulishna in S-T. A completely different patronymic, Vasil’evna, is found only in S-Z.
By giving Vasilisa’s father the masculine version of her name, the performer could be
emphasizing Vasilisa’s traditionally male characteristics, such as being physically strong.
and clever. Clearly, the differences between the protagonist’s name are generally minimal with one exception in her first name, and one exception in her patronymic.

The protagonist’s assumed name also deserves attention. In spite of her change of identity, Vasiiisa does not assume a specific name in NR-Sa, NR-Su and NR-MP. Her assumed name in Un-R, NR-ChR, NR-ChG and NR-D gives simply the masculine forms of her actual name and patronymic. In UN-B and S-D, her first name is Vasilii, but her patronymic is changed to Ivanovich, which is not at all related to her actual patronymic Mikulishna. Another different patronymic is Vasil’evich (S-T). Another seemingly unrelated assumed patronymic is Okulich (NR-RA).

Another important aspect of “Vasilisa and Staver” involves the localization of the protagonist’s and antagonist’s homes. In all variants, the antagonist, Prince Vladimir, resides in Kiev. This is also where most of the action takes place. The name of the home of the protagonist, however, varies. Four variants (S-D, S-Z, NR-Sa and NR-D) do not name her/his home at all. In six texts, her/his home is in the city of Chernigov (Un-B, Un-R, S-T, NR-Su, NR-MP, and NR-RA). In Chukov’s variants her/his home is said to be in Liakhovits, but this area is referred to differently in each: NR-ChR refers to it as “Liakhovitskaia” and NR-ChG as the “Liakhovitskaia land.”

C. The Plot: Variants and the Invariant

I will first examine the plot of each group of variants (NRV, SV and the two unknown ones) in order to demonstrate the differences within the regional versions. Next, I will combine the repeated essential features found in each variant and will outline the
invariant of this narrative type. Such a construction is not intended to produce an artistically superior epic narrative, but rather to serve as a scholarly tool facilitating our understanding of this type of epic song.

I have listed the elements found in the twelve variants of this bylina under 15 headings: (A) Introduction, (B) Feast, (C) Staver’s Boasting, (D) Vladimir’s Reaction, (E) Vasilisa Learns of Staver’s Misfortune, (F) Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue, (G) Vasilisa’s Journey to Kiev, (H) Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev, (I) Envoy’s/Vasilisa’s Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Daughter, Niece or Wife, (J) Testing of Envoy/Vasilisa to Determine Sex, (K) A Second Feast, (L) Vasilisa Poses Riddles to Staver, (M) Vasilisa Reveals Her True Identity, (N) Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home, and (O) Concluding Remarks. Each of these headings contains sub-elements that may or may not occur together. It is only in “G” where all of the sub-elements are present. However, this happens only in the cases where the singer describes Vasilisa’s journey to Kiev. It should also be noted that there may be some unique elements which are not on the list. Some of the unlisted elements add distinctive characteristics to the texts and, therefore, deserve special consideration.

In six of the seven NRV Vasilisa arrives in Kiev under the pretext of proposing marriage to Vladimir’s niece or daughter. The only exception of this occurs in NR-D, where the “envoy” is invited by Vladimir, because “he” has been sent by Vasilisa. The two possible pretexts are combined in NR-RA. There, Vasilisa/the envoy tells Vladimir she/he is there to collect taxes for the Golden Horde, but “he” personally wants to marry his niece.
This variant, as well as NR-ChG and NR-ChR, provides an additional motivation for Vladimir’s decision to imprison Staver. While in the other nine variants (Un-B, Un-V, S-D, S-Z, S-T, NR-Sa, NR-Su, NR-MP and NR-D), Staver is thrown into the dungeon simply because of his boasting, in these three, Vladimir wants to see Vasilisa’s response, i.e., whether or not she would live up to Staver’s boasting of her exceptional abilities. Another noteworthy element which is present only in NR-Sa, concerns the reason for Staver’s boasting. His lack of restraint actually results from the fact that Vladimir asks him a series of questions, which essentially encourages Staver to boast. These features could be innovations introduced by the singer, rather than features typical for a regional tradition. It is significant that they occur in the same variant in which Staver’s patronymic is changed to Stogodinovich and the heroine’s first name is not Vasilisa but Nastas’ia.

Element “J,” the reason for which Vladimir releases Staver from prison, is usually presented as a response to Vasilisa/the envoy’s request to hear masterful gusli playing. Staver, the most accomplished gusli-player in Kiev, is invited to entertain the “fearsome envoy.” Several variants, however, present different reasons for Staver’s release. In NR-Sa Vasilisa/the envoy, suggests a wrestling match to prove “his” physical skills and superiority. On the advice of the famous, and in this variant elderly, bogatyр II’ya Muromets, Vladimir releases Staver to wrestle the envoy. Vasilisa/the envoy wrestles her husband and wins. In NR-Su, she tricks Vladimir into releasing Staver, but in this case instead of physical strength she demonstrates her superior intelligence. She tells Vladimir that the only person who has ever been able to beat her/him in chess is Staver. Vladimir immediately releases him and organizes a game of chess which Vasilisa/the envoy wins. In
S-T, after winning over Alyosha Popovich and Dobrynia Nikitich in a physical contest, the "envoy" declares that he has fought against no one mightier than Staver. This, of course, prompts Staver's release.

The main variation within the Siberian variants is found in S-Z. This variant not only differs from the other SV, but from all of the NRV as well. In it, Vasilisa does not change her appearance, i.e. disguise herself as a man in order to rescue her husband. She remains dressed in woman's clothes as she travels to Kiev, confronts Vladimir, and negotiates the release of her husband. This variant emphasizes Vasilisa's strength and self-confidence, whereas in the other variants these are secondary characteristics and the main emphasis is placed on her cleverness and wit.

Even though it is unclear where Un-R and Un-B were performed, both of them have features which are found in the Siberian tradition. In Un-R, Vasilisa assumes a new identity claiming to be from the Golden Horde. As a Tatar envoy, she/he arrives in Kiev to collect taxes, which is a typical feature of the Siberian variants. The second, Un-B, is incomplete. The text begins part-way through Staver's boasting, but it is clear that Vasilisa/the envoy does not arrive in search of a wife and that Vladimir's wife is the one who suspects that the envoy is Staver's wife. As we already saw in the NRV, the protagonist's main pretext for her/his visit to Kiev is often marriage. In such cases Vladimir's relation who was suspicious of Vasilisa's disguise was either his daughter or niece. When marriage is not the pretense Vasilisa uses, Vladimir's wife is the character who voices her doubts of the "envoy's" identity.
The invariant, constructed on the bases of all twelve variants involves the following five elements as well as three sub-elements:

(C) Staver's Boasting

(D) Reaction to the Boasting

(1) Vladimir learning about it and

(2b) sends him to the dungeon

(E) Vasilisa Learns of Staver's Misfortune

(1) through some kind of transfer of information

(H) Vasilisa Arrives in Kiev

(N) Vasilisa and Staver leave for home together.

Variant Un-B, which begins during Staver's boast is obviously incomplete, since all other versions begin with (B) "Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev" (describing the guests and their activities). Variant S-Z, in which Vasilisa does not disguise herself as a man, is also rather different in terms of motivations and tone, but, once again, it is an exception rather than a representative of a specific branch of the tradition. If one disqualifies S-Z as a somewhat idiosyncratic transformation, one can add three more elements to the invariant:

(F) Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue

(2) and changes her appearance

(a) by cutting her hair;

(i) the "Envoy's" Sex is Questioned by Vladimir's female relation; and

(J) Vladimir tests the "envoy" to determine the sex
(1) each test has a (2) positive outcome for Vasilisa.

Therefore, there are nine main elements necessary for the Russian tale of the wife rescuing her husband. The invariant can be presented as the following formula (there are no variations in the order in which the individual components appear in the specific variants):

B (1, 2); C; D (1), (2b); E (1); F (2a); H; I; J (1, 2); and N.

This invariant supports Albert Lord's findings about the learning and performance of epic tales. Remembering a series of elements or as Lord calls them "themes," i.e., "feast," "husband boasts," "punishment," "wife learns of events," "prepares rescue," "arrives," "her man's disguise is questioned and tested," and "leaves with her husband," is much less complicated than memorizing hundreds of lines of verse. In this way, the invariant is retained in the performer's mind as well as in the memory of the members of her/his audience. The audience as much as the singer herself/himself must be able to identify the song, decide whether this is what they want to hear, and finally to evaluate the quality of the performance.
CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, I analyzed the variants and constructed the invariant of the bylina "Vasilisa and Staver." This however addresses only part of the significance of this tale. The second major aspect concerns interpretations of the narrative type, i.e., attitudes and evaluations of various social roles and models. The purpose of my concluding chapter is to offer some interpretations of the "Vasilisa and Staver" variants.

As it became evident in Chapter 2, in the bylina about Nastas’ia and Dunai and about Nastas’ia and Dobrynia, the wife is, in one way or another, defeated by her husband. In the first case, Dunai literally murders Nastas’ia. In the second one, Nastas’ia ends up fulfilling the role of a typical Russian wife. These stories reinforce the idea that the husbands are physically and emotionally stronger than the wives. Vasilisa, however, manages to deceive every male character without changing her actual position or permanent role in society. In the end of the bylina, she returns to her role as a wife, but by doing this she does not sacrifice anything essential. She clearly is the undisputed protagonist.
The invariant presents Vasilisa as a resourceful and determined woman. She disguises herself as a man in order to rescue her husband. She performs tasks normally associated with male gender roles and proves that she is not equal to men such as Prince Vladimir and the bogatyrs, but better. Her strength and intelligence are established before the events of the story begin. It seems safe to assume that Vasilisa was regarded as a female warrior, or a polenitsa, before Staver’s imprisonment. However, since women in patriarchal societies were not supposed to outshine any man, it is unusual to present a woman as a character who successfully overpowers every male character in the story, including her husband, and fulfills the goal she had set for herself, i.e. to rescue her spouse. The unusually positive outcome of the woman’s adventure certainly conveys a message about gender roles in Russian society. It seems that it is socially acceptable for women to be considered equal to men on the condition that this is beneficial for at least one male character. In order to prove equality, the female protagonist must show that she is even more heroic than the male protagonist.

The element of cross-dressing, essential for this tale type, raises several questions. Why does Vasilisa assume the identity of a man? Why doesn’t she rescue her husband as herself? In some variants, Vasilisa is seen thinking over possible courses of action. She decides that she cannot go and fulfill her task if she remains dressed as a woman. Another motivation for such a decision could be the fear that Vladimir will be looking for her. Indeed, in some texts he sends envoys to bring Vasilisa to him, while in others he imprisons Staver in order to see Vasilisa’s reaction. Since the antagonist is searching for Vasilisa, she needs to disguise herself. Since she, in some variants, travels by
herself and confronts the antagonist alone, such a decision could be the most practical one for her time. In her book on women warriors, Dianne Dugaw points out that:

Dressed as men, they [women] could travel at liberty, without requiring masculine guardianship. Indeed, the severe restrictions on women’s everyday lives in the early modern era... probably made cross-dressing one of the only alternatives. For a woman to do anything, she had to escape the semiotic category of being a “woman.”

Even though this is said in reference to ballads of the British Isles, it is certainly applicable to the Russian bylina, especially since, as we saw in the first chapter, the story of the wife who rescues her husband from prison is an international narrative type. Dressed as a man, Vasilisa could deceive and frighten the Kiev envoys on the road. If she had remained dressed as a woman, there may have been more physical obstacles along the way to Kiev. Perhaps this shows that women and men can be equally strong and clever, but their methods of achieving their goals may have to differ: Vasilisa disguises herself as a man so that she can easily travel and approach Vladimir as an equal in society’s eyes. Since she passes physical tests, such as wrestling matches with multiple opponents and impossible archery contests, as well as tests of wit, such as chess games and the bathhouse test, she is clearly able to defeat any opponent - even her husband - on any level, but chooses to achieve her goal in disguise. After her success, she can reveal her true identity.

As we saw in the previous chapter, in one Siberian variant (S-Z) Vasilisa does not disguise herself. This particular bylina also shows how a polenitsa can be just as strong and intimidating as a bogatyry. Unlike the invariant, she does not achieve her goal by encountering the antagonist dressed as a man. This difference is quite unique and deserves special attention. Since the cross-dressing is a distinctive feature of this narrative type,
can we include this text into the group of the “Vasilisa and Staver” variants? The answer is “yes,” because the connection can be established with the help of other markers of the invariant such as the names of the characters, their roles in the plot, and the main goal of the female protagonist. The differences can be easily explained as influences from other Russian epics. The names of the three major characters remain the same as in the invariant. The protagonist is Vasilisa, the victim is Staver and the antagonist is Prince Vladimir. Other markers of the invariant are the episodes of Staver’s boasting. This results in his imprisonment by Vladimir as well as in Vasilisa’s trip to Kiev. Kiev also acts as a marker because that is where most of the action takes place. Finally, and most importantly, Vasilisa achieves her goal of rescuing Staver by overcoming all of the tests she faces. Since these features of the invariant appear in S-Z, there can be no doubt that it belongs in this group of byliny.

The absence of cross-dressing gives this text a meaning that is somewhat different than the rest of the variants. It shows how women are equal to men, and that superiority is based on a comparison of individuals, regardless of sex. The protagonist obviously does not feel any need to change her appearance in order to make her actions fit the engendered norms of social behavior. She was wronged by the antagonist, so she goes to confront him and free her husband without concealing her sex or her intentions. Thus, gender is not seen as an obstacle, because she regards herself as equal to the bogatyrs.

I already demonstrated in Chapter 2 that Vasilisa is not the only female warrior in byliny. However, she is the only one who is not compelled to change her role in society in the course of the action. Instead she disguises herself as a man, successfully fulfills her
task, and reveals her sex at the end. Vasilisa's success can be partially attributed to her ability to keep her real identity hidden in spite of the antagonist's many efforts to reveal the truth. Her ability to maintain her assumed identity becomes a major achievement in itself. As Dugaw points out:

...the Female Warrior enacts a drama which was firmly rooted in the everyday experience of early modern women. Her disguising epitomizes the resistance to confinement and danger which was imaginatively available to all eighteenth century women, however few actually lived it out.\(^49\)

In S-Z, however, Vasilisa rebels against the confinement and danger by rescuing her spouse without the help of any disguise whatsoever. It is hard to judge to what extent this development is simply a result of a more or less mechanical contamination with the woman-warrior Nastasia known from other bylins, or was intentionally introduced in order to reflect the view that women are equal to men, which was gradually emerging in nineteenth-century Russia.

As we saw in Chapter 1, the story of the "woman dressed as a man rescues her husband" is a narrative type found in many cultures. The details of the tale differ, but in each case the woman successfully rescues the man. Here, I will not attempt to determine where this tale type originated. However, I must note that historically women have occasionally dressed as men and fought in many wars. In her book, Dugaw gives a number of British examples. Other such cases exist in American, French and Russian history: Sarah Rosetta Wakeman\(^50\), Renée Bordreau\(^51\) and Nadezhda Durova\(^52\), respectively. It is only logical to assume that as people observed women taking on male-personae, folk narratives regarding this originated and developed. After all, folklore can
reinforce society's beliefs as well as help people cope with difficult situations. The old folk tales of women-warriors who fought dressed as men could be used as justification of the actions of the real women who decided to participate in military operations. After all, if it was acceptable for Vasilisa to dress as a man to save her husband, then it was even more commendable that the nineteenth-century Nadezhda Durova, dressed as a man, helped drive Napoleon's army out of Russia. That is not to say that it was women warriors who created this tale, but rather that they may have inspired the theme. It is also possible this story was created and developed by people who felt that women are truly an integral part of humanity and that, when the need arises, they can be not only equal to, but even better than their male counterparts.
ENDNOTES

1 Anti Aarne and Stith Thompson’s *Types of the Folktale* demonstrates that a great number of folktale plots are found in the narrative traditions of many cultures. Since this index focuses on folktales, its scope is narrower than what would be needed to find all of the variants of a folk epic. Thompson, the editor of the second revised and enlarged edition of Aarne’s index, points out in the preface of *Oral Tales of India* that *Types of the Folktale* is predominantly Eurocentric, i.e., it is international, but not truly world-wide in scope. The index is nevertheless quite helpful at the beginning of a search for international variants of folk narratives, whether the narratives are folktales or epics.

2 Aarne-Thompson 298.

3 Aarne-Thompson 298.

4 Aarne-Thompson 303.

5 Thompson and Balys 334.

6 Thompson and Balys 345.

7 Thompson and Balys 395.

8 Seán Ó Súilleabháin 558.

9 Ward 385.

10 Ward 164-65.

11 Ward 164.

12 Balys xii-xiv.

13 Jaworska 251.

14 Daskalova-Perkovska et al. 313.

15 Bogdanova et al. 698-701.
Bogdanova 701.

"Byliny" is the plural nominative form; "bylina" is the singular nominative form.

Sokolov, *Russian Folklore*, 291.

Sokolov 291.

Sokolov 301-2.

Kononenko says that the *byliny* were dominated by men, while laments were only sung by women. This distinction persisted until the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth (18).

Smirnov and Shentalinskaia 247-8, lines 1-3.


Gudzii 4-5.

Kononenko 26.

Sokolov 327.

Grossman 56

Grossman 56.


The first edition was published in 1873.

Gil’ferding 207.

Gil’ferding 351.
Gil'ferding 539.

Gil'ferding 539.


Nechaev 163. In the notes, Nechaev writes that this version of “Vasilisa and Staver” was recorded by Tikhonravov, but the rest of his name is omitted.

Danilov 606.

Smirnov and Shentalinskaia 17.

Smirnov and Shentalinskaia 40.

Smirnov and Shentalinskaia 410.

Astakhova, Mitrofanova et al. 296.

These are the diminutive forms of their names. They are both male characters.

For a detailed outline of the possible elements, please see Appendix D.

The *gusli* is a stringed instrument popular in traditional Russian culture.

Dugaw 135.

Dugaw 136.

Wakeman fought in the American Civil War under the name Private Lyons Wakeman. Burgess notes in the introduction to her publication of Wakeman’s letters (see bibliography) a number of women who dressed as men and fought in the Civil War.

Bordereau fought in the Vendean Wars and used the name l’Angevin. Yalom notes on page 202 of *Blood Sisters* that even after the war, Bordereau was more comfortable dressed as a man, even though it was well known that she was female.

Durova fought for Russia during the Napoleonic Wars. After Tsar Aleksandr discovered Durova was female, he allowed her to remain in the army and promoted her. Like Bordereau, she preferred men’s dress after retiring from the military.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


**Secondary Sources**


APPENDIX A

MAPS OF THE LOCATIONS OF "VASILISA AND STAVER" VARIANTS
Map 1: Northern Russia. This illustrates the locations of “Vasilisa and Staver” variants as attested in Dmitrieva’s Geograficheskoe rasprostranenie russkikh bylin.

Map 2: Siberia. This illustrates the locations of "Vasilisa and Staver" variants as attested in Dmitrieva's *Geograficheskoe rasprostranenie russkikh bylin*.

APPENDIX B

PASSPORTIZATION OF THE “VASILISA AND STAVER” VARIANTS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Collector (or Publisher)</th>
<th>Performer (or collection)</th>
<th>Place of recording or Performer’s home</th>
<th>Date of recording (or publication)</th>
<th>Title of bylina (Number of lines)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Un-B</td>
<td>Astakhova</td>
<td>reprinted from Buslaeva</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1st quarter of the 18th century</td>
<td>Staver Gadenovich (274)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un-R</td>
<td>Avenarius'</td>
<td>Riabinin</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>published in 1898</td>
<td>Staver Godinovich and Vasilisa Mikulichna (484)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-D</td>
<td>Danilov</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Siberia</td>
<td>published in 1804</td>
<td>(About) Staver the Boiarin (260)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-T</td>
<td>Guliaev (publisher)</td>
<td>Tupitsyn</td>
<td>Siberia</td>
<td>published in 1939</td>
<td>Staver Godenovich (169)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-Z</td>
<td>Zenzinov</td>
<td>reprinted from Miller</td>
<td>Siberia</td>
<td>1870's</td>
<td>Staver Godinovich (77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR-ChG</td>
<td>Gil'ferding</td>
<td>Chukov</td>
<td>Onezlskii Region</td>
<td>July 30, 1871</td>
<td>Staver (406)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR-ChR</td>
<td>Rybnikov</td>
<td>Chukov</td>
<td>Povenetskii District</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Staver Godinovich (342)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR-D</td>
<td>Tikhonravov</td>
<td>Denisov</td>
<td>village Rimskoe, Medvezhorskii Region</td>
<td>December 12, 1932</td>
<td>Staver Godinovich (159)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR-MP</td>
<td>Gil'ferding</td>
<td>Makareva &amp; Pastukhova</td>
<td>Onezlskii Region</td>
<td>July 1, 1871</td>
<td>Stavyor (219)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR-RA</td>
<td>Kaminskaia &amp; Tiapkinia</td>
<td>Riabinin-Andreev</td>
<td>Garnutsa, Sennaia Province, Zaonezhskii Region</td>
<td>December 31, 1931</td>
<td>Stavyor Godinovich and Vasilisa Mikulichna (407)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR-Sa</td>
<td>Gil'ferding</td>
<td>Sarafonov</td>
<td>Onezlskii Region</td>
<td>July 4, 1871</td>
<td>Staver (192)</td>
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<td>NR-Su</td>
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<td>Surikova</td>
<td>Onezlskii Region</td>
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Table 2: Passportization of the “Vasilisa and Staver” variants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Protagonist</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Antagonist</th>
<th>Antagonist’s relative</th>
<th>Homeland</th>
<th>Alter ego</th>
<th>Other characters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Un-B</td>
<td>Vasilisa Mikulishna</td>
<td>Staver Gadenovich</td>
<td>Prince Vladimir</td>
<td>Aprakseia (wife)</td>
<td>Chernigov</td>
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<td>(no other significant characters)</td>
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<td>Un-R</td>
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<td>Stavior Godinovich</td>
<td>Prince Vladimir</td>
<td>Zabava Putistichna (niece)</td>
<td>Chernigov</td>
<td>Vasiliu Mikulich</td>
<td>tsar Kalin (reference); Khapilov, Pridchenka, Khapilonka (families of wrestlers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-D</td>
<td>Vasilisa Mikulishna</td>
<td>Staver Godinovich</td>
<td>Prince Vladimir</td>
<td>Apraksevna (wife)</td>
<td>(not mentioned)</td>
<td>Vasiliu Ivanovich</td>
<td>Etnanuil Etnanuilevich (reference); Pridchenka, Khapilonka (wrestlers)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Staver Godinovich</td>
<td>Prince Vladimir</td>
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<td>Chernigov</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mashuta Vladimirova (daughter)</td>
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<td>Vaniusha (Staver’s servant)</td>
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<td>Apraksia (wife), Zabava Putistichna (niece)</td>
<td>Chernigov</td>
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Table 3: Names in the “Vasilisa and Staver” variants.
APPENDIX D

COMPREHENSIVE LISTING OF ELEMENTS

OCCURRING IN THE BYLINA “VASILISA AND STAVER”

A. Introduction (zachin)

B. Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
   1. guests
      a. many boyars
      b. many princes
      c. many bogatyrs
      d. many polenitsy
      e. Staver
   2. activities
      a. consumption of large quantities of food and drink
      b. praising of the host (Vladimir)
      c. conversation and boasting
      d. only Staver is unimpressed

C. Staver’s Boasting
   1. wealth and power
   2. wife
      a. clever
      b. pretty
      c. young
      d. able to manipulate the prince and boyars at will

D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
   1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements
      a. Vladimir hears of them through other people
      b. Vladimir is present at the boasting
   2. Vladimir punishes Staver
      a. Vladimir first confronts Staver to see why he boasts
      b. sends him to the dungeon: i. this is Vladimir’s own decision; or
         ii. Vladimir is advised to do this
E. Vasilisa Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
   1. transfer of information
      a. Staver sends word home
      b. the news reaches Vasilisa in some other way

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
   1. comes up with a plan
   2. changes her appearance
      a. cuts hair
      b. changes clothes
      c. assumes a man’s name
      d. assumes a new identity: i. sex; ii. ethnicity; iii. social status
   3. Vasilisa arms herself
      a. gets weapons
      b. gets a horse
      c. i. gathers a retinue
      ii. prepares to go alone

G. Vasilisa’s Journey to Kiev
   1. along the road she encounters Vladimir’s envoys
   2. conversation with the envoys
      a. deceives the envoys: i. by appearance; ii. by misinformation
   3. the envoys go back to Kiev
   4. the envoys warn Vladimir about the Tatar tax collector/Vasilisa

H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev
   1. met with special honors by Vladimir because of her assumed identity
   2. conversation with Vladimir
   3. gives a deceitful statement about the purpose of her visit
      a. taxes overdue
      b. marriage to Vladimir’s daughter or niece

I. The Envoy’s (i.e., Vasilisa’s) Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Daughter, Niece or Wife
   1. list of markers of feminine gender
      a. hands/arms/fingers
      b. speech/voice
      c. facial features
      d. walk
      e. how s/he sits on chair or horse
      f. her chest or shoulders
   2. refusal to marry because of her suspicion that the envoy is a woman
   3. suspicion that the envoy is Staver’s wife
J. Testing the Envoy/Vasilisa in order to Determine Her/His Sex
   1. tests
      a. bathhouse
      b. bed test
      c. wrestling match: i. against a group of wrestlers; ii. against one wrestler
      d. chess game(s)
      e. archery
   2. outcome of the tests: the envoy/Vasilisa passes each test without any difficulty

K. Second Feast
   1. the envoy/Vasilisa is depressed in the midst of the merrymaking
   2. Vladimir inquires what he can do to cheer up the bridegroom
   3. the envoy/Vasilisa requests a skillful gusli player
      a. Vladimir brings out many
      b. Vladimir releases Staver to play the gusli
         i. to impress the envoy
         ii. by specific request of Vasilisa

L. The Envoy/Vasilisa Poses Riddles to Staver
   1. does he remember their youthful games
   2. does he recognize her/him (in men’s clothing)

M. Vasilisa Reveals Her True Identity
   1. they go on a trip from Kiev
   2. Vasilisa reveals her identity to Staver in a tent in a field
   3. in Kiev at the feast
   4. parting with Vladimir
      a. he is upset about her true identity
      b. he is still unaware of her identity
      c. she takes Staver with her
      d. the envoy/Vasilisa requests that Vladimir gives her Staver in lieu of his
daunder or the tax-money
      e. Vasilisa and Staver change clothes; Staver dresses as an envoy
   5. Vasilisa lectures Staver about boasting
   6. Vladimir and Staver make a trade deal, because Staver had not exaggerated the qualities of his wife

N. Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home

O. Concluding Remarks (kontsovka)
APPENDIX E

MORPHOLOGY OF THE INVARIANT OF "VASILISA AND STAVER"

B. Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
   1. guests
   2. activities

C. Staver’s Boasting

D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
   1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements
   2. Vladirair punishes Staver
      b. sends him to the dungeon

E. Vasilisa Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
   1. transfer of information

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
   2. changes her appearance
      a. cuts hair

H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev

I. The Envoy’s (i.e., Vasilisa’s) Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Daughter, Niece or Wife

J. Testing the Envoy/Vasilisa in order to Determine Her/His Sex
   1. tests
   2. outcome of the tests: the envoy/Vasilisa passes each test without any difficulty

N. Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home
APPENDIX F

MORPHOLOGY OF THE INDIVIDUAL VARIANTS

Elements of Un-B

* This variant begins part way through the performance.

C. Staver’s Boasting
   1. wealth and power
   2. wife: a. clever

D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
   1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements
      a. Vladimir hears of them through other people
   2. Vladimir punishes Staver
      a. Vladimir first confronts Staver to see why he boasts
      b. sends him to the dungeon: i. this is Vladimir’s own decision

E. Vasilisa Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
   1. transfer of information: a. Staver sends word home

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
   2. changes her appearance
      a. cuts hair
      b. changes clothes
      c. assumes a man’s name
      d. assumes a new identity: i. sex; ii. ethnicity; iii. social status

G. Vasilisa’s Journey to Kiev
   The journey along the road is described.
   1. along the road she encounters Vladimir’s envoys
   2. conversation with the envoys
      a. deceives the envoys: i. by appearance; ii. by misinformation
   3. the envoys go back to Kiev
   4. the envoys warn Vladimir about the Tatar tax collector/Vasilisa
H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev
   1. met with special honors by Vladimir because of her assumed identity

I. The Envoy’s (i.e., Vasilisa’s) Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Wife
   3. suspicion that the envoy is Staver’s wife

J. Testing the Envoy/Vasilisa in order to Determine Her/His Sex
   1. tests
      c. wrestling match: i. against a group of wrestlers
         e. archery
   2. outcome of the tests: the envoy/Vasilisa passes each test without any difficulty

K. Second Feast
   3. the envoy/Vasilisa requests a skillful gusli player
      b. Vladimir releases Staver to play the gusli: i. to impress the envoy

L. The Envoy/Vasilisa Poses Riddles to Staver
   1. does he remember their youthful games
   2. does he recognize her/him (in men’s clothing)

M. Vasilisa Reveals Her True Identity
   3. in Kiev at the feast
   4. parting with Vladimir
      Vladimir sent them back to Chernigov

N. Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home

Elements of Un-R

B. Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
   1. guests
      a. many boyars
      d. many polentsy
      e. Staver
   2. activities
      a. consumption of large quantities of food and drink
      b. praising of the host (Vladimir)
      d. only Staver is unimpressed

C. Staver’s Boasting
   2. wife
      a. clever
      b. pretty
c. young
d. able to manipulate the prince and boyars at will

D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
   1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements
      b. Vladimir is present at the boasting
   2. Vladimir punishes Staver
      b. sends him to the dungeon: i. this is Vladimir’s own decision
         (Staver receives a six year sentence)

E. Vasilisa Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
   1. transfer of information: b. the news reaches Vasilisa in some other way

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
   1. comes up with a plan
   2. changes her appearance
      a. cuts hair
      b. changes clothes
      c. assumes a man’s name
      d. assumes a new identity: i. sex; ii. ethnicity; iii. social status
   3. Vasilisa arms herself
      b. gets a horse
      c.i. gathers a retinue

G. Vasilisa’s Journey to Kiev
   1. along the road she encounters Vladimir’s envoys
   2. conversation with the envoys
      a. deceives the envoys: i. by appearance; ii. by misinformation
   3. the envoys go back to Kiev
   4. the envoys warn Vladimir about the Tatar tax collector/Vasilisa

H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev
   2. conversation with Vladimir
   3. gives a deceitful statement about the purpose of her visit
      a. taxes overdue
      b. marriage to Vladimir’s niece

I. The Envoy’s (i.e., Vasilisa’s) Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Niece
   1. list of markers of feminine gender
      a. hands/arms/fingers
      b. speech/voice
      d. walk
      e. how s/he sits on chair or horse
      f. her chest or shoulders
2. refusal to marry because of her suspicion that the envoy is a woman

J. Testing the Envoy/Vasilisa in order to Determine Her/His Sex
   1. tests
      c. wrestling match: i. against a group of wrestlers
      d. chess game(s)
      e. archery
   2. outcome of the tests: the envoy/Vasilisa passes each test without any difficulty

K. Second Feast
   1. the envoy/Vasilisa is depressed in the midst of the merrymaking
   2. Vladimir inquires what he can do to cheer up the bridegroom
   3. the envoy/Vasilisa requests a skillful gusli player
      a. Vladimir brings out many
      b. Vladimir releases Staver to play the gusli:
         ii. by specific request of the envoy/Vasilisa

L. The Envoy/Vasilisa Poses Riddles to Staver
   1. does he remember their youthful games
   2. does he recognize her/him (in men’s clothing)

M. Vasilisa Reveals Her True Identity
   1. they go on a trip from Kiev
   2. Vasilisa reveals her identity to Staver in a tent in a field
   3. in Kiev at the feast
   4. parting with Vladimir: a. he is upset about her true identity
   6. Vladimir and Staver make a trade deal, because Staver had not exaggerated the qualities of his wife

N. Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home

O. Concluding Remarks (*kontsovka*):
   “*Tut li pro Stavra i starinu poiut,*
   *Moriu sinemu na tishinu,*
   *Vsem vam, dobrym liudiam, na poslushan’ e.*”

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Elements of S-D

B. Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
   1. guests
      a. many boyars

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1 Avenarius, p. 66, lines 482-84.
c. many bogatyrs
d. Staver

2. activities: a. consumption of large quantities of food and drink

C. Staver’s Boasting
1. wealth and power

D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements
   a. Vladimir hears of them through other people
2. Vladimir punishes Staver
   b. sends him to the dungeon: i. this is Vladimir’s own decision

E. Vasilisa Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
1. transfer of information: b. the news reaches Vasilisa in some other way

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
2. changes her appearance
   a. cuts hair
   b. changes clothes
   c. assumes a man’s name
   d. assumes a new identity: i. sex; ii. ethnicity; iii. social status

G. Vasilisa’s Journey to Kiev
1. along the road she encounters Vladimir’s envoys
2. conversation with the envoys
   a. deceives the envoys: i. by appearance; ii. by misinformation
3. the envoys go back to Kiev
4. the envoys warn Vladimir about the Tatar tax collector/Vasilisa

H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev

I. The Envoy’s (i.e., Vasilisa’s) Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Wife
1. list of markers of feminine gender
   a. hands/arms/fingers
d. walk
e. how s/he sits on chair or horse
3. suspicion that the envoy is Staver’s wife

J. Testing the Envoy/Vasilisa in order to Determine Her/His Sex
1. tests
   c. wrestling match: i. against a group of wrestlers
d. chess game(s)
e. archery
2. outcome of the tests: the envoy/Vasilisa passes each test without any difficulty

K. Second Feast
   1. the envoy/Vasilisa is depressed in the midst of the merrymaking
   3. the envoy/Vasilisa requests a skillful gusli player
      b. Vladimir releases Staver to play the gusli
         i. to impress the envoy/ Vasilisa

L. The Envoy/Vasilisa Poses Riddles to Staver
   1. does he remember their youthful games
   2. does he recognize her/him (in men’s clothing)

M. Vasilisa Reveals Her True Identity
   1. they go on a trip from Kiev
   2. Vasilisa reveals her identity to Staver in a tent in a field
   4. parting with Vladimir
      b. he is still unaware of her identity
      e. Vasilisa and Staver change clothes; Staver dresses as an envoy

N. Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home

   Elements of S-T

B. Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
   1. guests
      a. many boyars
      b. many princes
      d. many polenitsy
      e. Staver
   2. activities: c. conversation and boasting

C. Staver’s Boasting
Staver boasts in response to Vladimir’s challenge
   1. wealth and power
   2. wife
      b. pretty
      d. able to manipulate the prince and boyars at will

D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
   1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements: b. Vladimir is present at the boasting
   2. Vladimir punishes Staver
      b. sends him to the dungeon: ii. Vladimir is advised to do this

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E. Vasilisa Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
   1. transfer of information: b. the news reaches Vasilisa in some other way

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
   2. changes her appearance
      a. cuts hair
      c. assumes a man’s name
      d. assumes a new identity: i. sex; ii. ethnicity; iii. social status
   3. Vasilisa arms herself
      b. gets a horse
      c.i. gathers a retinue

G. Vasilisa’s Journey to Kiev
   1. along the road she encounters Vladimir’s envoys
   2. conversation with the envoys
      a. deceives the envoys: i. by appearance; ii. by misinformation
   3. the envoys go back to Kiev
   4. the envoys warn Vladimir about the Tatar tax collector/Vasilisa

H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev
   1. met with special honors by Vladimir because of her assumed identity

I. The Envoy’s (i.e., Vasilisa’s) Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Wife
   1. list of markers of feminine gender
      d. walk
      e. how s/he sits on chair or horse
   3. suspicion that the envoy is Staver’s wife

J. Testing the Envoy/Vasilisa in order to Determine Her/His Sex
   1. tests
      a. bathhouse
      c. wrestling match: i. against a group of wrestlers; ii. against one wrestler
   2. outcome of the tests: the envoy/Vasilisa passes each test without any difficulty

K. b. Vladimir releases Staver to fight the envoy/Vasilisa

M. Vasilisa Reveals Her True Identity
   4. parting with Vladimir
      b. he is still unaware of her identity
      c. she takes Staver with her

N. Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home
Elements of S-Z

A. Introduction (zachin):
   “Blagoslovi zha menia, gospodi, starimu skazat’,
   Starimu skazat’ staru prezhimiu,
   Staru prezhimiu da starodavniu”

B. Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
   1. guests
      a. many boyars
      b. many princes
      c. many bogatyrs
      d. many polenitsy
      (Staver was absent in the beginning, and arrived on Vladimir’s request)
   2. activities
      a. consumption of large quantities of food and drink
      b. praising of the host (Vladimir)
      c. conversation and boasting
      d. only Staver is unimpressed

C. Staver’s Boasting
   2. wife *strong
      c. young
      d. able to manipulate the prince and boyars at will

D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
   1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements: b. Vladimir is present at the boasting
   2. Vladimir punishes Staver
      b. sends him to the dungeon: i. this is Vladimir’s own decision

E. Vasilisa Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
   1. transfer of information: b. the news reaches Vasilisa in some other way

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
   3. Vasilisa arms herself
      a. gets weapons
      b. gets a horse
      c. ii. prepares to go alone

H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev
   2. conversation with Vladimir
      *Vasilisa yells at Vladimir.

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2 Smirnov and Shentalinskaia, p. 247, lines 1-3.
Elements of NR-ChG

B. Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
   1. guests
      a. many boyars
      b. many princes
      d. many polenitsy
      e. Staver
   2. activities
      a. consumption of large quantities of food and drink
      c. conversation and boasting
      d. only Staver is unimpressed

C. Staver’s Boasting
   1. wealth and power
   2. wife: d. able to manipulate the prince and boyars at will

D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
   1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements: b. Vladimir is present at the boasting
   2. Vladimir punishes Staver
      b. sends him to the dungeon
      i. this is Vladimir’s own decision to see what Vasilisa will do

E. Vasilisa Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
   1. transfer of information: a. Staver sends word home

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
   1. comes up with a plan
   2. changes her appearance
      a. cuts hair
      c. assumes a man’s name
      d. assumes a new identity: i. sex; ii. ethnicity; iii. social status
   3. Vasilisa arms herself
      b. gets a horse
      c.i. gathers a retinue

H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev
   2. conversation with Vladimir
   3. gives a deceitful statement about the purpose of her visit
      b. marriage to Vladimir’s daughter

I. The Envoy’s (i.e., Vasilisa’s) Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Daughter
1. list of markers of feminine gender
   a. hands/arms/fingers
   b. speech/voice
2. refusal to marry because of her suspicion that the envoy is a woman

J. Testing the Envoy/Vasilisa in order to Determine Her/His Sex
   1. tests
      a. bathhouse
      b. bed test
      c. wrestling match: i. against a group of wrestlers
      e. archery
   2. outcome of the tests: the envoy/Vasilisa passes each test without any difficulty

K. Second Feast
   1. the envoy/Vasilisa is depressed in the midst of the merrymaking
   2. Vladimir inquires what he can do to cheer up the bridegroom
   3. the envoy/Vasilisa requests a skillful gusli player
      a. Vladimir brings out many
      b. Vladimir releases Staver to play the gusli
         ii. by specific request of the envoy/Vasilisa

L. The Envoy/Vasilisa Poses Riddles to Staver
   1. does he remember their youthful games
   2. does he recognize her/him (in men's clothing)

M. Vasilisa Reveals Her True Identity
   1. they go on a trip from Kiev
   4. parting with Vladimir: a. he is upset about her true identity
   5. Vasilisa lectures Staver about boasting
   6. Vladimir and Staver make a trade deal, because Staver had not exaggerated the qualities of his wife

N. Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home

O. Concluding Remarks (kontsovka):
   "Tut vek pro Stavra starinu point,
   Sinemu moriu-to na tishinu,
   A vam dobrym liudiam, na poslushan 'io."  

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3 Gil'ferding, p. 443, lines 404-6.
Elements of NR-ChR

B. Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
   1. guests
      a. many boyars
      b. many princes
      e. Staver
   2. activities
      a. consumption of large quantities of food and drink
      b. praising of the host (Vladimir)
      c. conversation and boasting
      d. only Staver is unimpressed

C. Staver’s Boasting
   2. wife: d. able to manipulate the prince and boyars at will

D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
   1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements: b. Vladimir is present at the boasting
   2. Vladimir punishes Staver
      b. sends him to the dungeon
      ii. Vladimir is advised to do this to see how Vasilisa will respond

E. Vasilisa Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
   1. transfer of information: b. the news reaches Vasilisa in some other way

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
   1. comes up with a plan
   2. changes her appearance
      a. cuts hair
      b. changes clothes
      c. assumes a man’s name
      d. assumes a new identity: i. sex; ii. ethnicity; iii. social status
   3. Vasilisa arms herself
      a. gets weapons
      c.i. gathers a retinue

H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev
   2. conversation with Vladimir
   3. gives a deceitful statement about the purpose of her visit
      b. marriage to Vladimir’s daughter

I. The Envoy’s (i.e., Vasilisa’s) Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Daughter
   1. list of markers of feminine gender
   2. refusal to marry because of her suspicion that the envoy is a woman
J. Testing the Envoy/Vasilisa in order to Determine Her/His Sex
   1. tests
      a. bathhouse
      b. bed test
      c. wrestling match: i. against a group of wrestlers
         e. archery
   2. outcome of the tests: the envoy/Vasilisa passes each test without any difficulty

K. Second Feast
   1. the envoy/Vasilisa is depressed in the midst of the merrymaking
   2. Vladimir inquires what he can do to cheer up the bridegroom
   3. the envoy/Vasilisa requests a skillful gusli player
      a. Vladimir brings out many
      b. Vladimir releases Staver to play the gusli
         ii. by specific request of the envoy/Vasilisa

L. The Envoy/Vasilisa Poses Riddles to Staver
   1. does he remember their youthful games and studies
   2. does he recognize her/him (in men’s clothing)

M. Vasilisa Reveals Her True Identity
   1. they go on a trip from Kiev
   2. Vasilisa reveals her identity to Staver in a tent in a field
   3. in Kiev at the feast
   4. parting with Vladimir
   6. Vladimir and Staver make a trade deal, because Staver had not exaggerated the qualities of his wife

N. Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home

O. Concluding Remarks (kontsovka):
   "Tut vek pro Stavra starinu poinit,
   Sinemu moriu na tishinu,
   Vam vsem, dobrym liudiam, na poslukan’e."

Elements of NR-D

B. Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
   1. guests
      a. many boyars

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4 Andreev, p. 292, lines 340–42.
b. many princes
c. many bogatyrs
d. many polenity

e. Staver

2. activities
   a. consumption of large quantities of food and drink
   b. praising of the host (Vladimir)
   c. conversation and boasting
   d. only Staver is unimpressed

C. Staver’s Boasting
   2. wife: d. able to manipulate the prince and boyars at will

D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
   1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements
      a. Vladimir hears of them through other people
   2. Vladimir punishes Staver
      b. sends him to the dungeon: ii. Vladimir is advised to do this

E. Vasilisa Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
   1. transfer of information: b. the news reaches Vasilisa in some other way

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
   2. changes her appearance
      a. cuts hair
      b. changes clothes
      d. assumes a new identity: i. sex; iii. social status

H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev
   1. met with special honors by Vladimir because of her assumed identity

I. The Envoy’s (i.e., Vasilisa’s) Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Wife
   1. list of markers of feminine gender
      b. speech/voice
      d. walk
   3. suspicion that the envoy is Staver’s wife

J. Testing the Envoy/Vasilisa in order to Determine Her/His Sex
   1. tests
      a. bathhouse
      c. wrestling match: i. against a group of wrestlers
      e. archery
   2. outcome of the tests: the envoy/Vasilisa passes each test without any difficulty
K. Second Feast
   1. the envoy/Vasilisa is depressed in the midst of the merrymaking
   3. the envoy/Vasilisa requests a skillful gusli player
      a. Vladimir brings out many
      b. Vladimir releases Staver to play the gusli: ii. by specific request of the
         envoy/Vasilisa

M. Vasilisa Reveals Her True Identity
   3. in Kiev at the feast
   4. parting with Vladimir

N. Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home

Elements of NR-MP

B. Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
   1. guests
      a. many boyars
      b. many princes
      d. many polenitsy
      e. Staver
   2. activities: a. consumption of large quantities of food and drink

C. Staver’s Boasting
   1. wealth and power
   2. wife: a. clever

D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
   1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements: b. Vladimir is present at the boasting
   2. Vladimir punishes Staver
      b. sends him to the dungeon: i. this is Vladimir’s own decision

E. Vasilisa Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
   1. transfer of information: a. Staver sends word home through Vaniusha

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
   1. comes up with a plan
   2. changes her appearance
      a. cuts hair
      b. changes clothes
      d. assumes a new identity: i. sex; iii. social status
   3. Vasilisa arms herself
      b. gets a horse
H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev
   2. conversation with Vladimir
   3. gives a deceitful statement about the purpose of her visit
      b. marriage to Vladimir’s daughter

I. The Envoy’s (i.e., Vasilisa’s) Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Daughter
   1. list of markers of feminine gender
      b. speech/voice
      d. walk
      e. how s/he sits on chair or horse
   2. refusal to marry because of her suspicion that the envoy is a woman

J. Testing the Envoy/Vasilisa in order to Determine Her/His Sex
   1. tests
      a. bathhouse
      c. wrestling match: i. against a group of wrestlers 
      e. archery 
   2. outcome of the tests: the envoy/Vasilisa passes east test without any difficulty

K. 3. the envoy/Vasilisa requests the most skillful gusli player
      b. Vladimir releases Staver to play the gusli: i. to impress the envoy

L. The Envoy/Vasilisa Poses Riddles to Staver
   2. does he recognize her/him (in men’s clothing)

M. Vasilisa Reveals Her True Identity
   3. in Kiev at the feast
   4. parting with Vladimir: a. he is upset about her true identity

N. Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home

Elements of NR-RA

B. Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
   1. guests
      a. many boyars 
      b. many princes
      c. many bogatyrs
      d. many polenitsy
      e. Staver
   2. activities
      a. consumption of large quantities of food and drink
      c. conversation and boasting
d. only Staver is unimpressed

C. Staver’s Boasting
  2. wife
    a. clever
    b. pretty
    d. able to manipulate the prince and boyars at will

D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
  1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements: b. Vladimir is present at the boasting
  2. Vladimir punishes Staver
    b. sends him to the dungeon: i. this is Vladimir’s own decision to see if
       and how Vasilisa can manipulate him

E. Vasilisa Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
  1. transfer of information: b. the news reaches Vasilisa in some other way

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
  1. comes up with a plan
  2. changes her appearance
    a. cuts hair
    b. changes clothes
    c. assumes a man’s name
    d. assumes a new identity: i. sex; ii. ethnicity; iii. social status
  3. Vasilisa arms herself
    a. gets weapons
    b. gets a horse
    c. ii. prepares to go alone

H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev
  2. conversation with Vladimir
  3. gives a deceitful statement about the purpose of her visit
    a. taxes overdue
    b. marriage to Vladimir’s daughter or niece

I. The Envoy’s (i.e., Vasilisa’s) Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Daughter, Niece or Wife
  1. list of markers of feminine gender
    a. hands/arms/fingers
    b. speech/voice
    c. facial features
    d. walk
  2. refusal to marry because of her suspicion that the envoy is a woman

J. Testing the Envoy/Vasilisa in order to Determine Her/His Sex
  1. tests
a. bathhouse
b. bed test
c. wrestling match: i. against a group of wrestlers
e. archery

2. outcome of the tests: the envoy/Vasilisa passes each test without any difficulty

K. Second Feast
1. the envoy/Vasilisa is depressed in the midst of the merrymaking
2. Vladimir inquires what he can do to cheer up the bridegroom
3. the envoy/Vasilisa specifically requests Staver, the most skillful gusli player:
   a. Vladimir brings out many
   b. Vladimir releases Staver to play the gusli: i. to impress the envoy and
      ii. by specific request of Vasilisa

L. The Envoy/Vasilisa Poses Riddles to Staver
1. does he remember their youth together

M. Vasilisa Reveals Her True Identity
1. they go on a trip from Kiev
2. Vasilisa reveals her identity to Staver in a tent in a field
4. parting with Vladimir: a. he is upset about her true identity
6. Vladimir and Staver make a trade deal, because Staver had not exaggerated the qualities of his wife

N. Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home

O. Concluding Remarks (kontsovka):
   “Tak ved’ tem-to bylinochka okonchilas’.
   (He pomniu, poekhal li Stavior s Vasilisoi domoi. V ume za
   kakim-to ukhom bylo, da mozhet polovina propushchena².”

Elements of NR-Sa

B. Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
   1. guests
   2. activities
      a. consumption of large quantities of food and drink

C. Staver’s Boasting
   1. wealth and power
   2. wife: d. able to manipulate the prince and boyars at will

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D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
   1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements
      b. Vladimir is present at the boasting, and he asks Staver many leading
         questions, thus encouraging him to boast
   2. Vladimir punishes Staver
      a. Vladimir first confronts Staver to see why he boasts
      b. sends him to the dungeon: i. this is Vladimir’s own decision

E. Vasilisa⁶ Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
   1. transfer of information: b. the news reaches Vasilisa in some other way

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
   2. changes her appearance
      a. cuts hair
      b. changes clothes
   3. Vasilisa arms herself
      a. gets weapons
      b. gets a horse

H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev
   2. conversation with Vladimir
   3. gives a deceitful statement about the purpose of her visit
      b. marriage to Vladimir’s daughter

I. The Envoy’s (i.e., Vasilisa’s) Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Daughter
   1. list of markers of feminine gender: b. speech/voice
   2. refusal to marry because of her suspicion that the envoy is a woman

J. Testing the Envoy/Vasilisa in order to Determine Her/His Sex
   1. tests
      a. bathhouse
      b. bed test
      c. wrestling match: ii. against one wrestler
   2. outcome of the tests: the envoy/Vasilisa passes each test without any difficulty

L. The Envoy/Vasilisa Poses Riddles to Staver
   1. does he remember their youthful games
   2. does he recognize her/him (in men’s clothing)

M. Vasilisa Reveals Her True Identity
   2. Vasilisa reveals her identity to Staver in a tent in a field
   5. Vasilisa lectures Staver about boasting

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⁶The protagonist is “Nastas’ia” in this variant.
N. Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home

O. Although this is not a traditional kontsovka, this variant ends with Vladimir’s daughter telling her father it is good that he did not marry her to a woman.

Elements of NR-Su

B. Feast at the Court of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
   1. guests
      a. many boyars
      b. many princes
      c. many bogatyrs
      d. many polenitsy
      e. Staver
   2. activities: a. consumption of large quantities of food and drink

C. Staver’s Boasting
   1. wealth and power
   2. wife: d. able to manipulate the prince and boyars at will

D. Reaction to Staver’s Words
   1. Vladimir learns about Staver’s statements: b. Vladimir is present at the boasting
   2. Vladimir punishes Staver
      a. Vladimir first confronts Staver to see why he boasts
      b. sends him to the dungeon: i. this is Vladimir’s own decision

E. Vasilisa Learns about Staver’s Misfortune
   1. transfer of information: a. Staver sends word home

F. Vasilisa Prepares for the Rescue
   2. changes her appearance
      a. cuts hair
      b. changes clothes
      d. assumes a new identity: i. sex; iii. social status
   3. Vasilisa arms herself
      b. gets a horse
      c. ii. prepares to go alone

H. Vasilisa’s Arrival in Kiev
   2. conversation with Vladimir
   3. gives a deceitful statement about the purpose of her visit
      b. marriage to Vladimir’s daughter
I. The Envoy’s (i.e., Vasilisa’s) Sex is Questioned by Vladimir’s Daughter,
   1. list of markers of feminine gender
       d. walk
       f. her chest or shoulders
   2. refusal to marry because of her suspicion that the envoy is a woman

J. Testing the Envoy/Vasilisa in order to Determine Her/His Sex
   1. tests
       a. bathhouse
       b. bed test
       d. chess game(s)
   2. outcome of the tests: the envoy/Vasilisa passes each test without any difficulty

K. 3. the envoy/Vasilisa requests a skillful chess player
    b. Vladimir releases Staver to play chess
       i. to beat the envoy
       ii. by specific request of Vasilisa

L. The Envoy/Vasilisa Poses Riddles to Staver
   1. does he remember their youthful games
   2. does he recognize her/him (in men’s clothing)

M. Vasilisa Reveals Her True Identity
   1. they go on a trip from Kiev

N. Vasilisa and Staver Leave for Home
APPENDIX G

The following is an English translation by Lyubomira Parpulova and Charles E. Gribble of the “Vasilisa and Staver” variant from Kirsha Danilov’s collection (Drevnie Rossitskie stihotvorenia. Literaturnye pamiatniki. Eds. A. P. Evgen’eva and B. N. Putilov. Moscow-Leningrad: Izdat. AN SSSR, 1958, pp. 90-97.) I would like to express my gratitude to the translators for their permission to reproduce their text here.

STAVER THE BOYAR

1. In the capital city, in Kiev,
2. at the court of the kind lord, Prince Vladimir,
3. there was feasting going on, an honorable feast,
4. there was a banquet, an honorable table,
5. set for many princes and boyars,
6. and for mighty Russian bogatyrs,
7. and for wealthy merchants.
8. It is about the middle of the day,
9. it is half way through the banquet -
10. the princes and the boyars are drinking, eating, and merrymaking,
11. and boasting in front of the Grand Prince.

12. Only one boyar, Staver Godinovich,
13. is neither drinking, nor eating,
14. nor boasting in front of his fellow-boyars.
15. Only when he is alone with a friend
16. does he say these words:
17. “It is not much of a fortress
18. that the Grand Prince Vladimir has in Kiev,
19. the boyar Staver, have a spacious place
20. that is no worse than Kiev:
21. my court covers seven versy,7
22. and my quarters are of white oak,
23. they are covered with gray beaver pelts,
24. their ceilings are covered with black sable,
25. the middle of the floor is made of silver,
26. and the hooks and the holes are of gilded steel.”
27. But the prince did have loyal servants
28. and they reported this to Prince Vladimir:
29. “Oh, Lord, kind Prince Vladimir,” said they,
30. “Staver, the boyar, does not boast in front of you,

7 One vers is approximately 3500 feet.
but he does boast behind your back,
that he has a place that covers seven versa,
better fortified than Kiev,
and has quarters built of white oak,
they are covered with gray beaver pelts,
their ceilings are covered with black sable,
the middle of the floor is made of silver,
and the hooks and the holes are of gilded steel.”

Prince Vladimir listened to all this
and ordered Staver, the boyar, chained,
iron [shackles] on his hands and feet,
to be sent to the deep dungeons,
to be placed behind iron doors,
locked securely with steel locks.
And Prince Vladimir sent a merciless envoy
to the castle of Staver, the boyar,
to seal his place
and to bring his young wife to Kiev,
to the Grand Prince Vladimir.

The unhappy news reached
Staver’s young wife:
“Staver, the boyar, is held in Kiev,
he is thrown into the deep dungeons,
his hands and feet in iron fetters.”
Quickly she gets ready,
and quickly she gets dressed.
She cut off her hair
and put on [a wig with] black locks,
and boots of expensive green leather on her feet,
and she put on expensive clothes,
expensive clothes fit for an envoy,
and called herself the fearsome envoy,
the fearsome envoy Vasili Ivanovich,
and she set off with a large retinue
to the city of Kiev.

When they reached the middle of the road
they met a fearsome envoy from Kiev.
The two envoys greeted each other
in the way proper for envoys -
they held their hands and kissed each other.
The envoy from Kiev started to ask:
“Greeting, brave young gentleman!
Whither are you heading? Whither is God leading you?”

And they answered the envoy saying:

“We come from a faraway land, from the Golden Horde”
from the fearsome king Etemanuil Etemanuiloich.

[We are heading] to the city of Kiev,
to the Grand Prince Vladimir,
to collect the taxes he has not paid -
neither much nor little [money - taxes] for twelve years,
three thousand for each year.”

The envoy from Kiev became pensive
and said only these words:

“And I am a fearsome envoy from Kiev.
I am going to the place of Staver, the boyar,
to seal his estate
and to take his young wife to Kiev.”

Then the brave young gentleman said:
“We just passed through his estate,
we dropped in today - no one was home.
His young wife had left
for a faraway land, for the Golden Horde.”

The envoy from Kiev turned back.
He arrived at the capital city of Kiev
and told the prince quietly
that Vasilii Ivanovich, a fearsome envoy,
is coming from the faraway land, the Golden Horde.
And the prince became really worried.
They started running back-and-forth, swept the streets,
put fir-tree branches in from of the doors.

They are waiting for the envoy from the faraway land, the Golden Horde,
from the fearful king Etemanuil Etemanuiloich.

And he, the envoy, arrived at the princely court,
They jumped off their fine horses
and entered the well-lit halls.
The princess took the prince out,
led him to the basement-cellar
and quietly told him so:

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8 The Golden Horde was the powerful northwestern faction of the Mongol Empire. The Russian principalities were not directly ruled by the Golden Horde Tatars, but they were under Tatar domination. The Golden Horde had a complex and comprehensive tax system, and the Russians were required to pay tribute.
“Do not worry my Lord, about a thing,
this cannot be the fearsome envoy Vasilii Ivanovich,
this is Staver’s young wife Vasilisa Mikulishna.
I know the signs - everything is done in a feminine manner:
she walks around the court [gracefully], as if a little duck is swimming,
when she walks around the hall, she takes small steps,
when she sits so on a bench, she keeps her knees together,
and her little hands are white, her little fingers -- slender,
the indentations from her rings have not disappeared yet.”

And Prince Vladimir from the capital city of Kiev
started immediately to show hospitality to the envoy.
They drank all kinds of drinks with large goblets
and [it began to look as if] the envoy was getting drunk.
And Prince Vladimir started to test him.
“If the envoy were a woman, [he thought,]
he would not want to fight
with my mighty bogatyrs in Kiev.”
There were such people in Kiev,
special fighters, brave young men,
[called] Pritchenka and Khapilka.
And the prince put out seven fighters,
but Vasilii, the envoy, was not taken aback,
he came out into the courtyard to fight,
to the middle of the princely courtyard.
The fighters stepped forward to fight the envoy.
She pulled the arm of the first fighter out of his shoulder,
broke the leg of the second fighter,
seized the third one across his back
and threw him to the ground in the middle of the yard.
The prince spat out and went away.

“Stupid, senseless princess!
Your hair is long, but your reason comes short!
You say this bogatyr is a woman --
we have never seen such an envoy before!”
This time the princess started arguing with the prince:
“Do not say, kind Lord, Prince Vladimir,
that this fearsome envoy cannot be a woman --
this is Staver’s young wife.”
Then Vladimir of the capital city of Kiev said:
“Oh you, Princess Aprakseevnna,
I will still test the envoy Vasilii,
I will make him shoot with a strong bow
together with my mighty bogatyr."

Vladimir of the capital city of Kiev called forth

twelve strong and mighty bogatyr.

They began to shoot at a green oak

[that grew] a whole versia away.

They hit the green oak.

From these iron arrows

and from these shots

the green oak shakes

as if from a bad storm.

The envoy Vasili Ivanovich said:

“Oh you, Prince Vladimir,

I do not need these bogatyr’s bows,

I have an ordinary little bow

with which I ride across the clear-wide field.”

(At this moment her brave young men ran forward --

five people were carrying the first end [of the bow]

and as many were carrying the other end,

thirty people were dragging the quiver.)

And she said to the prince:

“This is only to entertain you, Prince Vladimir.”

She took [the bow] in her left hand

and took an arrow,

this arrow was made of steel,

she bent the bow by its ear,

*she hit the green oak --

*split it into pieces no bigger than knives’ handles\(^9\)

the string of the bow sang,

and Prince Vladimir crawled away in all fours,

and all the mighty bogatyr that was there

jumped up like madmen.

The arrow howled and went,

it hit the sturdy green oak,

split it into pieces no bigger than knives’ handles.

And the envoy said these words:

“I do not pity the sturdy green oak,

I only feel sorry for my iron arrow --

for no one would find it in the clear-wide field.”

Prince Vladimir spat and went away alone.

He said to himself these words:

\(^9\) * These two lines, 176-7, were misplaced for some reason. They are repeated later in lines 183-4 in what seems to be a more logical place.
“Perhaps I should test the envoy Vasilii myself.”

He invited him for a game of chess
with golden figured.
They played the first round
and the envoy won;
they started the second round,
the envoy won it, too;
they started the third round --
check and mate, and [the loser crawls] under the board.

And the envoy says these words:

“Oh your majesty, Prince Vladimir,
give me the taxes-tributes for twelve years,
three thousands for each year.”

Prince Vladimir said:

“Take me, envoy, and my wife instead.”

And the envoy says these words:

“How do you entertain yourself in Kiev, Prince Vladimir?
Do you have some merry young men?”

Prince Vladimir immediately sent
to find all kinds of such people
and they gathered merry young men at the princely court.

At this time the Grand prince
was giving an honorable banquet for the envoy
so that he can enjoy himself greatly.

But the envoy was sitting there unhappy.

He only said these words to the prince:

“Don’t you have someone who can play the gusli?”

Prince Vladimir got an idea,
he sent for Staver, the boyar,
the boyar Godinovich,
ordered him freed from the chains.

They took off the irons from his hands and feet
and brought him to the honorable banquet.

Then the envoy jumped on his nimble feet
and sat Staver on the oak bench across the table.

Then Staver began to play --
he played [the tune of] the City of the Czar,
[then] did the dances of Jerusalem,
sang praises to the prince and the princess,
and on top of that played the Jewish verse.

Then envoy dozed off and wanted to go to bed.
He said these words:
“Oh you, Prince Vladimir,
I do not need your taxes-tributes,
give me only one merry young man
Staver Godinovich, the boyar.”
And Prince Vladimir rejoiced,
he gave him Staver with his own hands.

The envoy, having gotten Staver, left Kiev.
Prince Vladimir with the princess saw him off.
And the envoy stopped at the swift [river] (D)Nepr.
He set out his white tents
and said these words:
“Please Lord, Prince Vladimir,
would you wait here while I get some sleep!”

Then the envoy took off his envoy attire
and got dressed in woman’s clothes,
and said these words:
“Oh Staver, merry young man,
don’t you recognize me?
Until recently you and I used to play svaika,
You used to have the silver stick (svaika)
and I used to have the gold ring.
You always wanted to play with me,
while I wanted to do that only from time to time.”
And at that time Staver, the boyar, guessed right.
He took off his black garments
and put in the attire of the envoy.

And they parted with the grand prince and the princess
and went to their faraway land.