



Becoming Baba Yaga: Trickster, Feminist, and Witch of the Woods

Kris Spisak

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First a force within Eastern European oral traditions before flowing into popular culture as a frightening witch, Baba Yaga is a character whose many incarnations suggest fascinating depth. Stories about her are teased out and mined for models of empowerment in *Becoming Baba Yaga*, Kris Spisak's nuanced work of feminist literary criticism.

Baba Yaga has been known by other names, but elements of the stories about her are consistent, Spisak shows. She is said to live in the woods in a house that moves about on long avian legs; she consumes some who seek her and rescues others. She is of the earth, primordial and terrifying, life-giving and life-taking; "she gives us permission to scream into the void, cackle at the darkness, and vent our anxieties to the wind." Stories of her were whispered by grandmothers to children as warnings and promises before being recorded by those prone to treat her powers as dangerous. Here, Spisak retells her shifting tales, parsing them for historical and cultural context and relocating within them the seeds of emancipation: "if given the chance to meet with a savage witch who could transform your world and your possibilities," she asks, "would you do it?"

For those who reject polite obedience to gender norms, *Becoming Baba Yaga* is a freeing folkloric inquiry that celebrates an archetypal defiant woman.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2024)

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