



1. BABA YAGA

Baba Yaga the ambivalent mystical figure with matriarchal origins

Baba Yaga is a mythical figure recognized across various cultures, primarily through folktales. While she is often portrayed today as an evil witch, her origins reach back to pre-industrial societies with matriarchal structures. Baba Yaga embodies an ambivalent figure that represents diverse aspects of life and preserves knowledge about reproduction and society. She exists between good and evil, life and death, and the cycle of rebirth. With the rise of industrialization and the spread of Christianity, her complex nature was reduced to a binary framework, resulting in her demonization as a malevolent witch.



Baba Yaga as arbitress over life, death and rebirth

Baba Yaga dwells in the forest, surrounded by a fence adorned with skulls, symbolizing her connection to the realm of the dead. In folklore, the forest often represents the domain of the deceased, and Baba Yaga serves as the guardian of the afterlife. As a wise and aged goddess, she embodies various characteristics and functions within this otherworldly realm. She presides over the cycle of life and death, taking lives and granting them back for the purpose of rebirth. In this way, she can be seen as the „ancestral mother of the female line,“ a divine matriarch.

In pre-industrial societies, life and death were understood as an interconnected cycle rather than strict opposites. Aging and dying were viewed as natural transitions, integral to the ongoing cycle of existence, fostering renewal and continuity. However, with the rise of Christianity, perceptions shifted, framing life and death as rigid dualities. This new perspective introduced distinct concepts of the afterlife and Hell, emphasizing a separation between earthly existence and the spiritual realm, where one's actions determined their eternal destiny.



Baba Yaga as the goddess of fertility and nature

Baba Yaga embodies not only death but also life and rebirth. Although she is often described as an old woman, she possesses a nurturing and protective side, representing fertility in relation to sexuality, the body, and nature. She is frequently depicted with oversized breasts, a feature known as hypertrophy, which dates back to the Paleolithic era and signifies a stage of female fertility that exists without male involvement.

Her attributes of the mortar and pestle highlight her significance as the Corn Mother. Baba Yaga is both the Corn Mother and the ruler of the afterlife. She prepares the flourishing of vegetation in the underworld, taking in the souls of the dead and releasing them into new life, much like the way spring brings new blossoms to the earth.

In the face of the rising patriarchy, which restricted women's societal roles to motherhood, Baba Yaga stands out as a goddess of nature, deeply connected to the forest and animals.



Baba Yaga as guardian of a women's kingdom

In many tales, Baba Yaga serves as the guardian of a women's or „girl's kingdom.“ She oversees the boundaries of this realm, which is led by the „Tsar Maiden.“ These girl kingdoms, with the Tsar Maiden at the forefront, may reflect traditions of early matriarchal clans or exceptional instances of Amazon-like cultures. The Tsar Maiden corresponds to the hereditary princess or clan mother. These cultures revered the Great Goddess as the primordial mother who gives birth to all, acting as the protector and nurturer of the matriarchal clan. This protective role has transitioned into the figure of Baba Yaga within folklore.



Baba Yaga as a threefold body

In many tales, Baba Yaga does not appear as a singular figure but as a triadic entity. The Baba Yagi, depicted as Maiden, Mother, and Crone, or as three sisters of varying ages, represent the sacred trinity. In mythology, they embody not only the different phases of life—from youth to motherhood to old age—but also reflect the natural cycles of life. The Baba Yagi support each other to maintain the balance of nature and symbolize the inseparable forces of birth, life, and death



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Baba Yaga as instructor and master of initiation

In many tales, Baba Yaga presents protagonists with tasks they must complete to avoid being cursed or harmed. These tasks often involve seemingly mundane household chores: the protagonist, often a young girl, is asked to stoke the fire, prepare food and drink for Baba Yaga, and the next day, clean the yard, sweep the hut, cook meals, and wash the laundry. At first glance, these appear to be simple domestic duties. However, these tasks carry a deeper, ritualistic meaning, rooted in magical matriarchal traditions where knowledge about the reproduction of society is embedded.

These trials are not just chores but symbolic rites of passage. They serve as initiations, preparing the protagonists for a new phase in life. Through these challenges, they learn and grow, developing the skills necessary for their future roles. Those who complete Baba Yaga's tasks are richly rewarded, not only with material gifts but with wisdom and spiritual growth. These gifts represent an understanding of the forces of life and death, healing, and creation. Thus, Baba Yaga is not merely a terrifying figure but also a wise and generous teacher, willing to share her knowledge with those who earn it through hard work, courage, and determination.

Жизнь и труд

Минутки



Русские
Народные
Сказки

Baba Yaga as keeper of reproductional Wisdom

Baba Yaga, as an instructor and master of initiation, serves as a guardian of societal reproductive knowledge. In pre-industrial societies, this knowledge was of immense value, forming the center of community life and meticulously preserved by women as it was passed down from generation to generation. However, with the devaluation of reproductive work, Baba Yaga herself has been relegated to the status of an old grumpy crone or housewife, diminishing the significance of her wisdom and power.

As patriarchal influences took hold, magical matriarchal activities such as spinning, weaving, cooking, and agriculture were trivialized and reduced to mere „housekeeping.“ Even the broom, an attribute of Baba Yaga, was ridiculed. Yet, sweeping the floor can still be associated with the symbolism of purification and renewal, reminding us that these tasks, though often dismissed, carry deep cultural and spiritual significance..



A. Cruzob

Baba Yaga as spinner and weaver of destiny

Baba Yaga is often depicted in Russian fairy tales as a figure intimately connected to the arts of spinning and weaving. These ancient matriarchal practices symbolize women's power, as they not only create threads but also weave the very fabric of life. In pre-industrial societies, women were seen as rebirthers, capable of bringing ancestral souls back into the physical realm.

In many stories, Baba Yaga engages in spinning or assigns these tasks to the girls she initiates. The spindle, a significant symbol, can serve as a gift, and it is said that even the beautiful Elena may hide within it. The act of spinning represents a continuous process of creation, transforming raw flax into yarn. For a girl learning to spin, this initiation connects her to her fate and fertility, marking her entry into sexuality.

Spinning houses, where these activities took place, were often seen as spaces for sharing women's wisdom. These gatherings were accompanied by songs and stories that passed down reproductive knowledge through generations. However, during the witch hunts, such women's spaces were deemed dangerous and demonized, reflecting societal fears surrounding feminine power and knowledge.



Baba Yaga the demonised witch

Baba Yaga is often depicted as a fearsome witch in Russian folklore, a figure whose image has been demonized over centuries. Originally, she was a complex being embodying the duality of life and death, wisdom and danger. However, in modern interpretations, her character is often simplified and primarily seen as an evil entity.

With the rise of Christianity and patriarchal structures, Baba Yaga's image became increasingly negative. Her role as a nurturer and teacher was overshadowed by associations with witchcraft and malevolence. The qualities that once defined her strength—knowledge of herbs, healing, and magic—were portrayed as dark, and it was said that she consorted with the devil or that she eats children.

In many stories, Baba Yaga serves as an antagonist, challenging heroes with trials while also embodying the wisdom of women and the natural world. She reflects the deep-seated fears of female autonomy and power. Despite her demonization, Baba Yaga remains a symbol of resilience and complexity. As an archetypal wise woman, she eludes simple categorization and inspires discussions about femininity and power. By questioning her demonized image, we can explore the important lessons and rich intricacies of her character.

