

★ **The Narrow Cage and Other Modern Fairy Tales****Vasily Eroshenko****Adam Kuplowsky, Translator**

Columbia University Press (Mar 7, 2023)

Softcover \$25.00 (296pp)

978-0-231-20769-0

Vasily Eroshenko uses simple tales to explore powerful, complex morals in *The Narrow Cage and Other Modern Fairy Tales*.

Storytellers have long used fairy tales and children's stories as a means of delivering radical, even subversive messages to their audience. Such was the case with the blind Ukrainian writer Vasily Eroshenko. Eroshenko's tales often feature innocent-seeming creatures—including a religious young carp, a scholarly mouse, and a socialist canary—who are forced to reckon with the world's cruelty and their own unwarranted optimism. The introduction contains a biography of Eroshenko's restless, fascinating life that places the stories that follow in proper context and is just as absorbing as any of them.

The stories themselves were written during Eroshenko's time in Japan and China. In the Japanese stories, the characters are often optimistic at the start, filled with naïve love for everyone around them. No sooner do they express these feelings than others—cynical and hardened to the ways of the world—beat them down. In many cases, they must pay the ultimate price for their innocence. The Chinese stories feature Eroshenko himself as the recipient of tales from the denizens of his new city, Beijing. The appendix includes autobiographical pieces.

Deceptive in their simplicity, the stories deliver ruthless, incisive morals that rebuke humans for their abuse of nature and each other. Only one includes a happy ending. Eroshenko's fairy tales are by turns quaint and heartbreaking, engrossing and thought-provoking. Their evergreen messages—pertaining to equality, political freedom, and the humane treatment of animals—feel as fresh and relevant now as they were a century ago.

*The Narrow Cage and Other Modern Fairy Tales* illustrates serious topics through short, fanciful tales featuring animals, humans, and forces of nature.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (March / April 2023)

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