

**INEXPLICABLE BEINGS, PHENOMENA, AND EVENTS, CATEGORIZED AS  
MYTHOLOGICAL, AMONG THE PEOPLES OF THE SOUTH SLAVS:  
COLLECTIONS OF FOLK TALES, INTERVIEWS WITH STORYTELLERS AND  
MYTHOLOGICAL BEINGS IN MODERN NOVELS**

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**Abstract**

This article contains the basic structural features of a same-named Ph.D. research thesis. The main tasks of the research are to identify three focal fields with mythological elements, whether they are phenomena, objects, people, or creatures that some believe and others doubt exist. These focal fields are found in various collections of folk stories, and contemporary literary texts as well as in interviews with storytellers. However, the focus of this article is primarily on the introductory story and on providing the background of the general idea. The goal is to acquaint the readers with the background that explains the origin of the mentioned stories among the people. It talks about death, man's natural fear of it, and the world of the paranormal, religious, and mythological, which combined create inexplicable phenomena that contradict the rational reasoning of man. One of the hypotheses of the research itself is to understand why this phenomenon is still present in the human community and what benefits it brings. Furthermore, the methodology used in the research includes a comparison and contrast of information between folk stories and contemporary literary works. In addition, the most important research method used is the interview technique with the aforementioned storytellers with strategically selected persons who are assumed to possess quality information.

**Keywords:** myth, folk tales, mythological beings, supernatural events, paranormal, storytellers, Slavic mythology

**Discipline:** cultural anthropology

**Absztrakt**

MITOLÓGIAI KATEGÓRIÁJÚ MEGMAGYARÁZHATATLAN LÉNYEK, JELENSÉGEK ÉS ESEMÉNYEK A DÉLSZLÁV NÉPEK KÖRÉBEN: NÉPMESEGŰJTEMÉNYEK, INTERJÚK MESEMENDÓKKAL ÉS MITOLÓGIAI LÉNYEKKEL A MODERN REGÉNYEKBEN.

Jelen tanulmány a szerző azonos című doktori értekezésének alapvető szerkezeti jellemzőit tartalmazza. A kutatás fő feladatai közé tartozik három olyan mitológiai elemeket tartalmazó fókuszterület – a jelenségek, tárgyak, emberek vagy lények – azonosítása, amelyek létezésében egyesek hisznek, mások pedig kételkednek. Ezeket a fókuszmezőket különböző népmesegyűjteményekben és kortárs irodalmi szövegekben, valamint a mesemondókkal készített interjúkban találjuk meg. A tanulmány középpontjában elsősorban a bevezető történetek és az általános elképzelések hátterének bemutatása áll. A cél az, hogy az olvasók megismerjék azt a hátteret, amely az említett történetek népi eredetét magyarázza. Szó esik a halálról, az ember haláltól való természetes félelméről, valamint arról a paranormális, vallási és mitológiai világról, amelyek együttesen olyan megmagyarázhatatlan jelenségeket hoznak létre, amelyek ellentmondanak az ember racionális érvelésének. A kutatás egyik hipotézise, annak megértésére fókuszál, hogy miért van még mindig jelen ez a jelenség az emberi közösségben, és milyen előnyökkel járhat mindez az egyének számára. Továbbá a kutatásban alkalmazott módszertan magában foglalja a népmesék és a kortárs irodalmi művek közötti információk összehasonlítását és szembeállítását is. Ezenkívül a legfontosabb alkalmazott kutatási módszer az interjútechnika olyan mesemondókkal, stratégiailag kiválasztott személyekkel, akikről feltételezhető, hogy minőségi információkkal rendelkeznek a témában.

**Kulcsszavak:** mítosz, mitológiai lények, természetfeletti események, paranormális jelenségek, mesemondók, szláv mitológia

**Diszciplína:** kulturális antropológia

**The Border of Life and Death**

In every family in the South-Eastern Balkans, one saying is kept being told to the young members of a family: “There is a solution for everything except death”. Seems morbid but if you ask an average, concerned mother/father with years of life experience and wisdom - not really. On the contrary, it is instructive and realistic, and the sooner one understands it the easier it will be to go through life, for people needlessly burden themselves with things for which there is always a solution. This is all said in order to receive a better impression of how heavy, difficult, and undeniable fact death is. Whichever way a man turns, whatever he does, however he lives his life, he moves rectilinearly towards it. This should not be taken

literally in a straight line, because a man’s life path seems to be everything but straightforward, but in essence, the path is the same, at least in abstraction. Unless completely uninterested in believing in ‘some God out there’ or a ‘force’ then the average person, one would say, wants only one thing: not to meet the eternal darkness afterlife. In other words, one hopes there is life after death.

Now, the line is drawn at the very end. What is there to be done until that end? People live their lives in the way they know best, in the place they know best, with the customs they know best, and the pattern they know most surely. Let that border be named: *the border of life and death* and in a literal sense, not in a metaphysical one. On the other hand, there are always those who prove in various

ways that they know what happens after, along with the absolute non-believers who 'know' that there is nothing after death. Christians and Muslims, on this question, are prepared to give answers in two forms:

First, 'no one knows', because no one has ever returned after death except, in the Christian world, the Lord Jesus Christ and those he himself resurrected (here, for obvious reasons, the Islamic religion is excluded), but in essence, in the modern age, no one has. In another form, the answer says that heaven or hell awaits after death based on deeds in life. In the meantime, humans need to believe, hence the word faith. Therefore, most massive assumptions and beliefs were made about what awaits after the end, and in the meantime, life is there to be lived.

### **The Village as a Portal for the Paranormality**

When talking about life, the narrative has to be moved to a period, not so far from today's, the twentieth century (just as an example), the fifties, the village of Ljevišta, Gornja Morača. This is the northern part of Montenegro (the village Ljevista is situated in the region of Gornja Moraca (Upper Moraca in English) ranging from Mioska to Savnik municipality. The other part of the Moraca region is the 'Donja Moraca' or the Lower Moraca. This is the northern part of Montenegro). This is taken as an example because it is that exact village that makes a segment of a larger field work where the interviews with storytellers will be conducted. Some of the most fantastic stories come from two people who lived a part of their life there.

In the majority of active and formerly active villages in the Balkans, there are, or were, four segments that are inseparable from each other: work in the fields and with livestock (from which one lives), family life (what life is made of), social life, and the religion and belief segment. This last segment, of the most interest and it touches upon

all the remaining mentioned segments and exerts an influence on them. The actual story about death and life shows how important, terrifying, and unfathomable the phenomenon of death is for a human. There awaits the question of the location of the connection between the village and that phenomenon. What is the meaning of that connection? What is hidden in it and what are the consequences of it? This will be answered later and everything will be clearer.

Ljevista, like most Montenegrin villages, is the territory of one of the seven tribes situated in the Moraca region with Rovci and Kolasin municipality. In his book „*Origin and Development of the Hill, Montenegrin, and Herzegovina Tribes*” (author's translation. Of the book's original title in Serbian: „*Postanak i Razvitak Brdskih, Crnogorskih i Hercegovackih Plemena*”), Branislav Djurdjev records that the people who lived there are also called Bogicevici, the heirs to Bogic Moracanin.

The people have a habit of saying that every village is the same as the next one but also has a separate culture in itself. If earlier history was heroic, written in blood and battles with the Turks and other invaders, the one mentioned is similar even in periods of peace. In the unfilled space there was only village life and care for families, animals, and crops, which in such harsh regions of the untouched nature, meant 'life and death'. Until recently, before advanced technology, people often filled their free time with dances, card games, and of course, what is most interesting, telling stories late into the night. It was then when they would talk about everything that a person would absorb with their eyes during their working day, hear, and hide within themselves.

Then one could hear stories about everything mentioned, but also sometimes about what the man himself experienced on his own skin, which stood out from the normal. At the heart of the folklore of every village was or is the theme of inexplicable events, strange events, and incredible

combinations of circumstances. The mentioned have as a foundation the folk belief in the existence of certain beings (that do not belong to this world), phenomena, and all of them would be in some way connected to religion, that is, closeness to or deviation from God and God-pleasing life. These include, if rules strictly related to Christianity are excluded, various customs ‘what should or should not be done on certain days’, what is allowed and what is not allowed to be done, ‘where one should go’ and where no one sets foot because of ‘this or that reason’ etc.

One thing should be clear: Everything mentioned is an important part of a village, but what became clear in the conversation with the people who spent most of their lives there is that no one, no matter how contradictory it sounds, added significant importance to it. In most cases, if something happened that would later become a dark part of village folklore, such as the appearance of the famous creature fairy, they would record it in their mind and the collective consciousness, but never act upon it directly because of either superstition (fear: mentioning its name might summon it) or because of natural avoidance of what makes one afraid.

Regarding fairies, Petrovic classifies this creature as „a mythological female being who lives and clicks on the rocky mountains, endowed with magical power (heals and tells fortune)” (Petrovic, 2000, 122.) (Author's translation. Of the quote from a book in Serbian: „mitologično žensko biće koje živi i klikće po plainama kamenjacima, snabdeveno magičnom moći(leči i proriče)”. In addition “fairies are forever young and wear a long and thin white or blue dress, which hides the goat legs of some fairies. Some fairies also have wings, and with their wonderful voice, they lure those young men into their dance circles. The eyes of fairies shine like lightning“ (Vasiljev, 1928, 50). (Author's

translation. Of the quote from a book in Serbian: „S druge, takodje, „vile su večito mlade i imaju stalo na sebi dugu i tanku belu ili plavu haljinu, koja krije kožje noge ponekim vilama. Neke vile imaju i krila, svojim divnim glasom, primamljuju one mladiće u svoja kola. Oči vila sevaju kao munje“). Vasiljev also talks about fairies as creatures that can be good and helpful to humans, but also evil in the event that they are harmed or if someone caused damage to their living space.

The story about the border of life and death places itself in the middle of the village of Ljevišta. That border can be imagined as a line that divides life and death and between the two there is a territory that neither the dead nor the living understand. Neither should belong there, nor be ‘seen’ by one or the other. The ideas are that in that space exists a world full of inexplicable beings, phenomena, and everything that human science calls mythology. Some Ljevišta residents would describe that area as ‘he got drunk and saw fairies’, but whether someone got intoxicated or a real fairy added a bottle of rakija. This world of different dimensions, spiritual and material, overlap in that border, and therefore some people, not all, for unknown reasons, can see, hear, and experience what should not exist in the world of the material and rational. Not all of them have the experience and that is why such events are special.

However, they are not devoid of coincidences, appearances, the ‘you must be imagining things’ phenomenon, as well as the well-known villagers’ practical jokes. In support of this story is the belief that villages or specific villages are really ‘knots’ of certain forces, where people say, strange events take place, ghosts appear, or even inexplicably cars stop working. Such was the case when A.S. Ignjatovic (2014) describes his encounter with the inexplicable force which made his car shut down at midnight, on the bridge leading towards a small place called Bistrica.

## The Role of the Human ‘Hero’ in the Inexplicable

*Here we have our present age...  
bent on the extermination of myth.  
Man today, stripped of myth, stands famished  
among all his pasts and must dig frantically for roots,  
be it among the most remote antiquities“  
(Nietzsche, 1993, 110).  
The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*

Folklore, stories, retellings, collections of folk stories, and modern literary adaptations have their roots in the supernatural and inexplicable. Something that happened, whether it was real or not, an event that a certain person experienced goes against the normal and explainable. It can be an event, an incomprehensible apparition, a sound, or a person who, according to all the laws of reason and rationality, time and space, should not or could not be in front of the eyes of the hero of the story. An inexplicable event that defies logic and rationality could be a creature that looks neither human nor animalistic or is one or the other. It possesses inhuman/supernatural powers or/and human/animal attributes. In these stories, for the purpose of the example, it is often a fairy, a demon, a devil in disguise, a vampire, or even a *karakondzula*.

Figure 1. “The Story Vampire life”, Ivica Stefanović, 2011



Karakondzula creature is an interesting one because it can be accepted as a female version of a vampire. It is important to record it because it is one of the most mentioned ones. This creature is an embodiment of a once-living human, a Christian soul, a woman, very often a bride ‘jilted at the altar’, an animal, a demon, and many other things. It is usually a physical manifestation of a formerly young woman but in a form of an ugly, old woman in the afterlife. From the various stories, it is understood that it is an old witch, a woman who was supposed to be a bride in the world of living and now she chases mostly men and terrorizes them.

It is exactly here that the visible importance of this creature shows itself. The fear does not start when one meets a gorgeous young woman in the woods. It does not even start when a person realizes she is not of this living world or when she starts chasing them through the woods.

The fear strikes when she, according to the village people, shows her young and beautiful body, but with a head of an old witch, flashing her animal fangs. However, the descriptions are different, therefore in “The Serbian Mythological Dictionary”, for example, this creature is described as having light-colored eyes and walking around with a huge cane with which she chases children.

It is especially present during the time of the unbaptized days when she could be seen sitting above the entrance of somebody’s house, waiting to hop on the person’s back as he comes out. Karakondzula rides on a person’s back and makes him run usually towards a stream or a river until either the rooster starts to sing, that is, until dawn, or in the rare case, she is thrown off. (Kulišić, 1970).

Furthermore in the “Serbian Mythological Dictionary”, the ‘unbaptized days’ or in Serbian “*nekršteni dan*” are those between the Orthodox Christmas (which falls on January 7th) and Epiphany or ‘Theophany’ and according to the folk

belief, the demons and the deceased, unbaptized children appear during this time.

Coming back to the role of the hero of the story who is at the same time the subject but often also the object of the phenomenon, the hero can be:

- A silent observer who may or may not be noticed, who returns home safely, unharmed.
- An active participant in a supernatural event who may emerge alive and unharmed but will more often end up either dead or permanently mentally and/or physically crippled.

According to the template, the hero of a supernatural event, if he (assuming it is a he) belongs to the first group, he either does not believe in what happened to him, after which he finally believes, helped with afterthought and counseling, or he believes and immediately adopts the "lesson". If the hero belongs to the second group, considering that he survived the encounter with the supernatural, he suffers from the consequences of the encounter in the form of mental or physical disturbances (often both). The person is the only one who knows the truth, and people either do not believe him (often justifying the event with alcoholism) or believe him, and they draw a lesson from that - opinions are divided. In the event that, is often is the case, he turns up deceased, considering there are witnesses (which is not a rare case), it serves as an example for learning lessons from encounters with the supernatural. If there are no witnesses, he is labeled as a victim of an accident or self-harm event.

In the end, stories like this about events that may or may not have really happened have their own function among the people.

It is exactly this function that leads folk to pass them on from generation to generation, to write them down, publish them, print, and adapt them even into movies.

### **The Three Key Fields and Tasks and the Definition of the Mythological**

Going back to the grander scheme of things, the whole research, it is important to present the three key tasks that have been formulated in the terms of three fields of interest. The first field is presented in form of collections of folk stories that were collected by famous Serbian (Balkan) writers, and versatile and talented historians such as one of the greatest: Vuk Karadžić. His collections were formed by going from village to village, from place to place, from door to door listening to and writing down folk tales, stories, extraordinary experiences, songs, proverbs, and more. The focus stands on the folk tales, and all the exceptional examples of mythological creatures and the phenomena that accompany them are singled out. In addition, there are things that cannot be categorized as mythological, but as absolutely unfathomable, sinister, and extraterrestrial. Furthermore, all the accompanying 'hexes and spells', 'witchcraft', 'curses', and, sub-religious processes are included, for they are certainly inseparable from the mentioned beings.

In the second field, which is conceived as a set of literary works of recent times, identical to the previously mentioned objects and subjects are being identified. As an additional idea, analyzing film adaptations of a mythological background proves to be an abundant source of information. The third field takes the form of interviews, that is, conversations with storytellers. Those story-tellers are selected people who must, first of all, fulfill at least one and the most important condition.

The condition is that he or she must have a personal 'paranormal experience' (which is valued the most) or personally know someone who had an experience with a supernatural event, that is, an event that defies the natural laws of this world of matter, rationality, and reason. Therefore, something extraordinary happened to a single person and now, either in the complete conviction

of the truth of the event or in continued disbelief, they recount their experience. Furthermore, those persons, ideally, come from or still live in places (villages) where such events take place. They know someone to whom something "out of this world" has happened. In those retold stories, a structure is built where the essential, key elements are singled out, and they match those found in the collections of folk stories, also in the aforementioned contemporary literary works. It is very important to clarify the situation with the 'mythological' aspect of the whole work. A myth is "a story of the gods, a religious account of the beginning of the world, the creation (...) the reenactment of a creative event (...) transferred to the present and its result (...) can be achieved once more here and now. In this way, too, the world order, which was created in the primeval era and which is reflected in myths, preserves its value as an exemplar and model for the people of today." (Honko, 1970, 38.). It is a wondrous world of gods, demigods, fantastic creatures, and their outward abilities, told, painted, and created by those who are the opposite of the people. The eternal desire of a man is reflected precisely in the mythological construction that stands seemingly in front of us. „A myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world. Myths are the narrative patterns that give significance” (May, 1991, 15). It fascinates with its grandiosity, but when one puts his hand through it, he realizes that it is only a hologram of his imagination and eternal desire for divine supremacy. The mythological basis here is, of course, the Old Slavic mythology, which is complex and rich, but it really only started to be researched in the 18th century and can only be reconstructed from parts that are found in folk tales, fables, epics, songs, etc.

### **Slavic Mythology and the Complex Fusion of Paganism and Christianity**

In essence, the complex world of Slavic myths can be concentrated on the basic myth that

consists of the struggle between good and evil in a metaphorical sense, with heaven and the underworld as the domain of the protagonist and antagonistic deities, heaven, earth, and the underworld in cases where the human races become integral. One often comes across a combination in which the plane of evil and good is divided between the god of rain, thunder, and lightning Perun, who rules the sky (positive element), and Veles - the god of the earth, that is, the underground (element of evil). As the focus here is mostly on the southern Slavs, it is known that there were various differentiations regarding the form, properties, abilities, and names of the deities as the Slavs migrated from the prehistoric Slavic territory. All of them, however, have a common root and belief, therefore, taking for example Perun and Veles, as well as many others, are often found under a similar name.

Kaisarov (1810) begins the history of the Slavic polytheistic world by pointing out that a Slavic man, at least in the beginning, did not worship as many gods as was the case at the end. In the period when man did not yet know art, deities were objects for him, as representatives of nature. All nature, earth, mountains, hills, water, and air were only objects of his admiration, Kaisarov thought, and at that stage of human development, there was no idea the mentioned elements could control a man. From the moment when that thought appeared, there was an assumption about the power possessed by those elements of nature, and therefore, first appreciation, respect, worship, and finally deification ensued.

When thinking about the cause of the appearance of deities, that is, polytheism in early humans, the mind immediately flies to the thought that man is essentially a 'weak' being who, knowing his weakness and vulnerability (and he is strong and brave up to a certain limit), seeks the ultimate protection in the form of a higher power. In addition, there is a natural curiosity and desire of a

man to explain what is happening to him and around him. Therefore, the creation of Gods moves rational consciousness and logical reasoning far into the future. And so Kaisarov continues in "Slovenian and Russian Mythology" (1810) that in the beginning man had no idea about good and evil, not at least about its manifestations. Therefore, when he went hunting and came back empty-handed and in pain from exertion, he would not blame the obvious, logical reasons for his pain, but the existence of „something evil” that want to cause him harm. With the same pattern of cognition, man also discovered ‘something good’ when he felt the joy of a good hunt, then he would attribute that success to a new divine creation that he himself unconsciously is the creator of.

This is how early man got the first two deities: "Bjelbog" and "Cernobog" with clear associations of good and evil. Furthermore, the template for the emergence of new deities are clear, and the eventual merging and ‘evolvment’ into the Christian differentiation of good and evil, God and Satan.

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In a way it can be said that a mythological assimilated with the Christian world of God and godly creatures, i.e. angels, saints and the like, as well as with the world of demonic creatures. With that one naturally arrives to the church’s war with the paganism once Christianity set its foot on the stage. People lived with spiritually settled lives before, for centuries even, along with their beliefs which their life consisted off. Therefore, just as today’s mainly monotheistic religions, the people were not ready to give up that lifestyle that easily.

The church knew this and it “sought to know paganism primarily in order to successfully criticize it, to expose its manifestations, in order to combat manifestations of dual faith. For these purposes, church authors, presenting their teachings, they singled out in paganism mainly those features in which it differed from Christianity: polytheism, idolatry, bloody sacrifices, the slaughter of people.” (Klein, 2004, 13.) (Author's translation. The original text in Russian: „*Prostoj narod, derzhas' stariny, pomnil o nih dol'she, no i jeta pamjat' slabela so vremenem. Sobranilis' obryvki znanij, ostatki, perezhitki. Srednevekovaja uchenost' obsluzhivala hristianskiju cerkov' i stremilas' znat' jazycestvo prezhdje vsego radi togo, chtoby ego uspesjno kritikovat', razoblachat' ego projavlenija, radi bor'by s projavlenijami dvoeverija.*

*V jetih celjah cerkovnye avtory, sostavljaja svoi pouczenija, vydeljali v jazycestve glavnym obrazom te cherty, kotorymi ono otlichalos' ot hristianstva:*



*mnogobozhie, idolopoklonnichestvo, krovanye zbertvy, zaklanie ljudej. Jeti otlichija userdno preuvelichivalis.”).*

However, where the ‘combat’ with paganism did not work, the clergy simply put on a different label on deities and found common ground. The consequences of this are visible in, for example, the villages, where the customs that are the result of the mixing of Old Slavic deities with Christianity have persisted and even spread among the urban population, for the purpose of better acceptance of the new monotheistic religion among the people. Thus, for example, in Orthodox Christian communities, a debate is often opened as to whether some religious custom, minor or grander is really related to pure Christianity, or if it is just a legacy of the earlier period of paganism which strayed away from The Book. St. Elijah as an example is the perfect case of this.

### **The Example of St. Elijah**

Saint Elijah was an Israeli prophet who lived in the ninth century BC. His name and personality, among others, are recognized as legitimate and significant in Judaism and Islam, given that Elijah’s name is mentioned in all three holy books for each of the mentioned religions. Taken from chronicles of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and having an insight into the information from the King James’ Bible, St. Elijah was a miracle worker and a true witness of God’s faith, born in Tesvita from the tribe of Aaron. From the moment he was born, strange supernatural phenomena and beings that circled around him in the form of angels and fire were present, and according to the writings, it is said that this is precisely what originated his "thunderous" and "fiery" character. (Eparhija Zahumsko-Hercegovacka, 2021). With his great spiritual commitment, sacrifice, and fight against idolatry in the Jewish kingdom, he proved himself before the Creator, fighting most of all against Ahab, the King of Israel. (Eparhija Zahumsko-

Hercegovacka 2021). At the end of his spiritual and God-pleasing asceticism, St. Elijah would finally be taken up to heaven “as (...) suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind” (The King James Bible, 1611/2001, 2 Kings 2:11).

The last description also confirms the "thunderous" and "fiery" element of his persona, which will also be important for comparisons later.

At this point an introduction to St. Elijah within the Serbian community is essential. Among the Serbs, he is known in the church as *Elijah the Prophet*, but also as *Elijah the Thunderer* (In Serbian: „*Ilija Prorok*” and “*Ilija Gromovnik*”), and under this name, he is mostly associated with the folk belief and the people’s way of accepting this Christian saint.

St. Elijah occupies a special place, especially among saints who have a thunderous character both literally and figuratively. These are generally characterized, looking through the framework of Christianity, as deserving holiness received from God. However, some of them are "gentle" and some harshly punish humans for sinful acts with the power they received, again, from the Lord God. Bearing in mind that the assimilation of Christianity with the already present earlier beliefs of the people was somewhat difficult, there was an inevitable ‘fusion of deities’ where the Christian St. Elijah got something from the character of the earlier 'pagan Elijah', i.e. the god Perun.

Of course, a somewhat more logical alternative is to match the description from the Bible with popular descriptions of earlier deities. In any case, among the people, St. Elijah is represented on fiery horses with thunder rumbling behind them, while he rides in the sky through the clouds. This is exactly what is depicted in Orthodox icons. In some of them, where his persona is Elijah the Prophet, the saint often sits on a rock or in a cave while a raven brings him food. In other versions of

this saint, under the persona of Elijah the Thunderer, he is depicted riding on fiery chariots pulled by winged horses, followed by angels. Both of these personas are legitimized by the Serbian Orthodox Church and deemed inseparable.

The breaking point of the discourse which splits the field and creates a debate is the following question: Is St. Elijah, the Christian saint known to the Serbs as "Ilija Gromovnik" (Ilijah the Thunderer) in fact in people's subconscious the God Perun who controlled thunder and lightning? From the anthropological angle it does not really matter. What matters is the richness of culture and folk belief for the goal is not to prove the existence

but to show from the present everything that was and still is and why it is there.

### Example Forms of Manifestations and the Three Key Tasks

In any case, it is not that one gets to actually meet the great examples of deities in the stories from collections and interviews. The case speaks about the manifestations of their power and energy fields, so to speak. However, one can, for example, encounter the greatest anti-hero that exists in all religions of the world, "The Devil", which exists in different forms and under different names everywhere.

Figure 2. St.Elijah, Unknown Serbian Iconographer, 18c.



Figure 3. Elijah The Prophet, Serbian Orthodox Church - Eparhija Šumadijska, 2014



However, in the Balkans, he often shows himself to the average seventy-year-old old man from the village when it gets dark, in the forest, when "the roosters are sleeping". In the past, among the village people all across the Balkans, at least in Serbia and Montenegro, the general advice was not to go out of the house before sunrise, that is, when the rooster starts singing, announcing the new day. People believed that everything 'unholy' and 'ungodly' roams the woods and roads at that time.

This is exactly the phenomenon that in some cultures might be called "the witching hour" or "The Devil's Hour" in relation to Christianity. "The witching hour" is a term which relates, supposedly, to the time of the night when the dark forces of the unknown, the devil, the ghosts of the demons, and other demonic creatures are the strongest and have the highest power. The general first mention of such a term or anything related to the witches surely rose from as early as the 16th century, considering the frequent witches' trials. However, it is interesting to note the mention of the phrase witching hour in one of the stanzas of the poem called "Night, an Ode" by Matthew West.

„And see, bright Cynthia from th' ethereal Steep  
On ev'ry Mountain sheds a solemn gleam!  
Her trembling Glories paint the wat'ry Deep,  
And add new lustre to the silver Stream,  
Along whose banks at Midnight's witching hour  
(So way-ward fancy dreams) aërial Beings pour!”  
(West, 1775, para. 4)

It is in the fourth stanza of his poem that he seemingly gently paints the nightly scenery. The author even mentions "Cynthia", which comes "from a Greek *Kynthia*, an epithet applied to the goddess Artemis (...) born on Mount *Kynthos* on the island of Delos" (Hanks et al., 2006, 66.), who is a "Greek goddess of the Moon and of hunting, equivalent to the Latin Diana." (Hanks et al., 2006, 21.). The setting in the poem is idyllic and one

might not even notice the witching part if one does not look for it. Now, that is also a part of the actual reason, according to the stories of the people, why people find themselves in the paranormal. What puts them in trouble is their curiosity which makes them look for something which does not want to be seen. On the other side, this setting suits the witching hour in which the before-mentioned fairies might be dwelling about since they are the demonic creatures described as fair, usually beautiful but deceitful and sinister. Considering that, Balkan villages' witching hours could be merged with the Western ones.

Thus, anyone who is involved in any kind of satanic, 'witch' process, magic, spell, etc. can have the best result exactly at this time of the day, that is, during the night time. Whether it was an alleged spell-making or casting a curse, or hurting an unsuspecting person, this is the time to do it and to have the best success. Regarding the exact time, as for the Balkans, considering the fact that up to the 19th century people rarely possessed clocks, not a considerable amount of care was put out towards the exact timing. The order was: 'do not go out' and that was enough. As for the other regions, more likely Western countries, this was considered to be somewhere between 3:00 am and 4:00 am, but the time varies from country to country.

Regarding the other phrase "The Devil's hour", the meaning is more or less the same but rather with a closer focus on the Devil itself, since, it is in the end, his hour. The belief among some in the Christian community was and is that the timestamp hour of the supposed time of death of Jesus Christ. However, the exact time as well the year is debatable, however, the timing is narrowed down to probable 3:00 pm. In the gospels of Mark and Luke, it is almost identically stated as such: "And when the sixth hour came, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? Which is, being

interpreted as, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (...) And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.” (The King James’ Bible, 1611/2001, Mark 15: 33:34, 37).

Luke in his reporting of the events says that „And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost“(same, Luke 23:44-46). Note that in this sense “gave up the ghost” means: breathed his last. In reference to the ‘witching hour’ which is between 3:00 am and 4:00 am, people believe that the whole purpose of the main anti-hero of the world, the devil, was to mock God by inverting the time of his death (which is then 3:00 am), the Dark Lord or Satan, as the Christians call it, opens the portal.

Continuing the ‘village story’ and in the direction of the old man who is taking a walk during the forbidden time, he usually comes across the crossroads where the devil meets him, but in the form of a well-known vampire. Regarding the crossroads, Kulišić et al. (1970) define them as the places where the dead once used to be buried. There also the sick were brought out to be asked for forgiveness, and the avengers would summon their dead and curse all those who caused any harm to them. Therefore, it is clear that crossroads carry, as people would often say, ‘negative energy’ and the reason why it was heavily avoided. The vampire itself is a story that has already been told a long time ago but in Slavic mythology, and even to this day, it is anything but the smooth gentleman from the American films about Dracula.

The Serbian Vampire, who is known under many names and forms, does not wear a Versace suit, but most often a Serbian national clothes, the one for everyday work. The one he wore before he died and ‘rose from the dead (“Povampirio se” or

“povampiriti se” in Serbian denotes once a living person who became a vampire by either an unknown cause(usually explained by a sinful life) or as a victim of another vampire.

In the Balkans there are many superstitions which ‘explain’ how does one become a vampire. Example: If a cats jumps over your dead body during wake. To prevent this and other misfortunes from happening, people ‘guard’ the deceased for a period of time, which is called ‘wake’). A vampire can also be a woman, of course, because even though the South-Eastern Balkans has for centuries carried the Western label of gender, the liberally and democratically unconscious part of Europe, a Serbian peasant woman can be a vampire and take revenge on all the men who may have rubbed her the wrong way.

It is clear that chase is about a whole host of dark motives and accompanying elements from one getting answers to three main questions or three key tasks:

1. To identify through the mentioned three focal fields everything that is the main interest of the mythological aspect and accompanying beings and phenomena. Creatures that do not belong to the material world should not exist or once belonged, and now appear after death and against reason. They can be of human, animal, mixed, or completely undefined origin. They are followed by various processes of summoning, rejection, and protection.
2. To compare the mentioned elements, find their common points, as well as differences, and determine the purpose of existence from the very beginning, up to the present day.
3. To explore the phenomenon of the mythological and supernatural beings from the present life among the people.

### **Methodology**

The already existing data was processed in the form of the mentioned collections of folk tales and

the modern literature from which the conclusions and comparisons were drawn. Regarding the most important part, the interviews as a focal point are envisaged in the following forms:

The storytellers convey their experiences with inexplicable events that may or may not be real. What is the content of that experience has already been explained in ‘the third field’ segment as one of the three key ones. The interviews are unstructured and semi-structured, that is, in order to achieve the effect wanted and to relax the storyteller. In general, pre-determined questions are not formulated, and the natural conversation is created for the sake of greater freedom for the storyteller. In addition, generic questions are present and are logically asked to each person providing basic, personal information about him/her.

The goal is for the quality of the conversation to be reflected in a live encounter and a conversation ‘within four walls’, in the place where the person lives. That is the primary objective but in the event that where it is technically impossible to carry out the aforementioned, the interviews are conducted via the online platform. Another type of quality looked for through interviews is usefulness or the quality of the information itself. It is much more useful for the research itself if the person interviewed has personally experienced something that he is telling about. Following that, other people’s experiences, that is, experiences from another source, are classified as useful information, but of lower quality. In any case, any rich experience is welcome and recorded.

### Conclusion

In the end, the main tasks of the mentioned dissertation were identified and also the foundations of folklore traditions, found in collections such as those of Vuk Karadzic. However, what was found in them, the mythological and supernatural

elements, was also found in contemporary literature. In the end, the greatest focus was on the interview method with storytellers who possess their personal stories that they accept to share in confidence. The background of the story is the entire world, which in the logical realm of science is characterized as ‘mythological’, and in this article, a picture was created that tells about all the cultural creations of man that influenced the appearance of witches, pagan deities, vampires, fairies and the cult of death in general. The hypotheses of this dissertation helped readers to understand why the phenomenon of death gave birth to inexplicable creatures and phenomena that people fear, believe in, or refuse to believe in. That gives the leverage to finally come to the conclusion of why everything mentioned still exists in the people and what their function is.

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