

**THE VAMPIRE AS THE MYTHOLOGICAL CREATURE
IN THE CINEMATOGRAPHY OF SOUTH SLAVIC COUNTRIES:
VAMPIRE IN FILMS “LEPTIRICA” AND “HOLY PLACE” - FOLKLORIC JUXTAPOSITION**

Author:

Milena Medojevic¹
University of Debrecen (Hungary)
(Montenegro)

Reviewers:

Gábor Biczó (Ph.D)
University of Debrecen

Norbert Tóth (Ph.D)
University of Debrecen

...and two other anonymous reviewers

Medojevic, Milena (2024). The Vampire as the Mythological Creature in the Cinematography of South Slavic Countries: Vampire in Films “Leptirica” and “Holy Place” - Folkloric Juxtaposition. *Special Treatment Interdisciplinary Journal [Különleges Bánásmód Interdiszciplináris folyóirat]*, 10. (SI), 83-96.
DOI [10.18458/KB.2024.SI.83](https://doi.org/10.18458/KB.2024.SI.83)

Abstract

Mythological creatures have enchanted and intrigued human beings for ages, and humans unconsciously stimulated their fears and insecurities. People have created a vampire-paranormal obsession that is reflected in everything that human creativity has touched, especially in film adaptations. In this article, readers will see the representation of the mythological creature Vampire on the Serbian film screen. The article dissects two selected films, “She-Butterfly” and “The Holy Place” from the vampire-induced horrors of the South Slavic cinematography. They will representatively be the focus of the study. These examples will reveal how the film of that time conjured up the horror, fear, and general aura of the mythological creature Vampire that has haunted the human race for centuries. In contrast to film representations, the author places a vampire from folklore as a pillar for comparison or a test sample to analyze the similarities, differences, and credibility of the representations in the film. Regarding the supportive material, we will extensively rely on the "Serbian Mythological Dictionary" as it provides a solid collection of various folk explanations and descriptions, which we will use for comparison. The methodological approach includes a description of the film plot with important elements, the analysis of the mentioned elements of interest within separate important parts of the plot, and a comparison with a folklore vampire within the analysis.

Keywords: Vampire, Folklore, Horror Film, “She-Butterfly”, “The Holy Place”

Diszcipline: Cultural Anthropology, Ethnography

¹ Milena Medojevic. Department of Ethnography, Faculty of Arts, University of Debrecen, Program of Ethnography and Cultural Anthropology, PhD School of History and Ethnography (Hungary) (Montenegro). E-mail address: milena.medojevic@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9985-0789>

Absztrakt:

A VÁMPÍR MINT MITOLÓGIAI LÉNY A DÉLSZLÁV ORSZÁGOK FILMMŰVÉSZETÉBEN: A VÁMPÍR A 'LEPTIRICA'(PILLANGÓ) ÉS A 'THE HOLY PLACE' (A SZENT HELY) FILMEKBEN - FOLKLORISZTIKUS JUKSZTAPOZÍCIÓ

A mitológiai lények évszázadok óta elvarázsolják és lenyűgözik az embereket, és öntudatlanul serkentik a félelmeiket és bizonytalanságukat e lényekkel kapcsolatban. Az emberek különösen a filmadaptációk révén létrehozta egyfajta vámpír-paranormális megszállottságot, melyben tükröződik az emberi kreativitás. Jelen tanulmányban a szerb filmvászonon megjelenő vámpír, mint mitológiai lény ábrázolásoknak a bemutatására kerül sor. A tanulmány a délszláv filmművészet vámpír-indukálta borzalmából létrejött "She-Butterfly" és a "The Holy Place" című filmeket boncolgatja. E példákából kiderül hogy, hogyan idézte meg a korabeli film a vámpír mitológiai lény rémületét, félelmét és általános auráját, amely évszázadok óta kísérti az emberiséget. A filmes ábrázolásokkal szemben a szerző a néphitből származó vámpírt állítja az összehasonlítás pilléréként, elemezve a filmbeli ábrázolások hasonlóságait, különbségeit és hitelességét. A tanulmány nagymértékben támaszkodik a szerb mitológiai szótárra, mivel ez egy részletes gyűjtemény a különböző népi magyarázatokról és leírásokról. Jelen módszertani megközelítés magában foglalja a filmek cselekményének leírását, elemzését és a népi vámpír felfogással való összehasonlítást is.

Kulcsszavak: Vámpír, folklór, horrorfilm, "She-Butterfly", "The Holy Place"

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia, néprajz

Vampire roots in Western cinema

To open the doors of South Slavic vampire cinematography to the readers of this article, it is necessary to look back at the Western vampiric seeds and the resulting jungle of vampire filmography that dates back to the beginnings of silent films. One of the first films, made in 1922, about vampires, is the famous "Nosferatu" which is the creation of Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau. Lotte Eisner in her book "The Haunted Screen" defines this film as successful and stylistically fantastically shot. The expressionism with which the director conjures the atmospheric horror of the terrible creature is ingenious because of the slowness with which the shots follow the vampire in one moment, and in the next, present it to a close-up shot where the creature is suddenly huge and terrifying (Eisner, 1925).

This German vampire representation started turning the wheel, but also the idea that light is

fatal for vampires. Regarding that information, if one follows the life of a Balkan vampire, he will encounter it as complete nonsense: the vampire certainly functions very well during the day.

Kulišić, describes a part of the vampire's duties as completely human at some point, in his "Serbian Mythological Dictionary" because they can be ordinary people during the day, usually working as butchers or traders, unrecognised. That implies, logically, that the sun does not do much for them in a negative sense, or it gives -1 out of 100 points of damage, in horror video-gaming terms. (Kulišić et.al., 1970) Following the mentioned "Nosferatu", films such as "Dracula" (1931), and "Son of Dracula" (1943) by Universal Pictures studio ensued and inflated the imagination of the audience and creators. Since the thirties and forties, the audience of vampire movies, particularly those who admire the "real vampire" (which will be discussed later), have struggled with the challenge of depicting a

vampire. Namely, when comparing a Western and a South Slavic vampire, a reader will quickly come across a clear distinguishing determinant: the vampire in Western Hollywood films from the 1930s appears as a polished gentleman seducer with a fitting suit, aristocratic manners, a large estate, and wealth. The Serbian vampire wears worn-out village clothes and lives in his grave or an occasional watermill, waiting for the reader to open the door.

Humble Beginnings of the Yugoslav Filmography and the Horror Genre

Yugoslav filmography certainly had, to put it mildly, modest beginnings with their repertoire from the pre-Yugoslav period with a limited budget. Daniel Goulding points out that before the instability and wars of the nineties, filmography from 1945 to 1950 was practically non-existent, unprotected by copyright, under the pressure of communist ideology, unprofessional film crews, and outdated equipment. (Goulding, 2002) Afterwards came the period of the sixties and seventies, which brought a new creative wave of diversity to all those nations and their cultures that reflected the then-Yugoslav and now-independent Balkan countries. However, after the eighties boom, there was a collapse: “Once a vibrant and vivid artistic reflection on Yugoslav ideological and socio-cultural progress, Yugoslav cinema ceased to exist with the violent disintegration of the Yugoslav federation at the end of the twentieth century..” (Murčić, 2020, p.110)

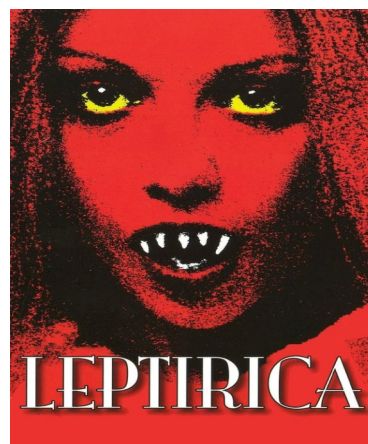
The film “She-Butterfly” begins a horror cinematic adventure. This terrifying masterpiece was shot in 1973, long before the nineties and the era when directors finally found inspiration in this genre. Considering that this beauty of Serbian horror was filmed in a very short time, with a modest budget but an exquisite cast, one could say that they took a long time. However, it is important to mention it as the “cornerstone” of future horror

films, since the She-Butterfly’s occult-terror aura still affects modern audiences. Besides films in focus, the readers should be aware of the effect of other horror genre films from the 1990s such as “Sugarloaf”, “Full Moon Over Belgrade”, a comedy, “Vampires are Among Us”, and a typical horror “Vampire” of a recent production from 2020.

Vampire in the film “She-Butterfly”

“She-Butterfly” is a film directed by Đorđe Kadijević, who wrote the script based on Milovan Glišić’s short story “After Ninety Years” from 1980 (Picture 1). The film differs from the story itself in several key details, most notably because it does not have a happy ending, as is in the story. Although “She-Butterfly” many considered the first, real, Serbian horror, Kadijević revealed in an interview article with the BBC they did not intend to make a horror, nor did he have such an idea. “Honestly, I was interested in a poetics of fantastic genesis that would enter the space of metaphysics, transcendence, in which Yugoslav film, and even less television, never caught up.” Moreover, a film to some extent conceived as a comedy, turned into a horror film that strikes fear into people’s hearts to this very age. (Mitrović 2023, pp.10-11).

Picture 1: A poster from the film “Leptirica” (She-Butterfly). Source: TMDB



The plot part I

The plot of the film “She-Butterfly” is set in the remote village of “Zarožje”, most likely in the second half of the twentieth century, when the film itself was set. In reality, the film was shot in the village of Zelinje, near Zvornik.

The first significant part of the film plot, which provides also the first “plank” in the structure, is the wheat grinding in the mill by the village miller Vule. He must grind the wheat in the mill that springboards the vampire to the viewer. The second significant part of the film plot, which provides the next “plank” in the structure, is the love between Živan’s daughter Radojka and the village boy Strahinja, who wants to marry her, however, her father persistently refuses. These two plots are central and the whole vampire adventure revolves around them.

Namely, the adventure in the film begins with Živko bringing grain to the mill, where he and Vule the miller hear the sinister sounds of an unusual bird, which ominously accompany the film whenever the presence of the vampire is hinted at. Vule commented on Živko’s nearby daughter mentioning she looks like a “She-Butterfly”, thinking of her beauty and gentle behaviour. Before each vampire attack, two repeating actions occur: the mill wheel that grinds the grain stops working, the candle burning in the mill goes out, and the viewers hear the ominous sounds of an unknown bird. Unfortunately for Vule the Miller, the vampire shows up immediately.

The film presents it as a hairy, dark-skinned creature with dark eyes, extremely sharp teeth, and large fangs, covered with a black cloak. It attacks the sleeping miller by biting the neck and sucking his blood. After the attack, the mill wheel starts turning again. In the meantime, the villagers find out about the unfortunate incident and reveal that the famous vampire Sava Savanović is active again, even though he died about ten years ago. This causes fear to move into the village again.

The second significant part of the film plot begins with the introduction of Radojka and Strahinja, whose love blossoms but whose marriage is stopped by Radojka’s jealous father Živan. Due to disappointment and inability to marry a girl, Strahinja becomes the new miller after the death of Vule, at the suggestion of villagers in Zarožje. However, even the young man’s fearlessness does not stop the reappearance of the vampire who announces his arrival in the same way: the mill wheel stops working, the candle goes out, ominous sounds are heard and the vampire appears. However, this time, the new miller Strahinja, being awake, manages to spot the evil creature in time, scares it by falling from the attic of the mill, and survives the night.

Analysis - Part I

To make it easier for the reader to follow the vampire saga, the film will be “paused” several times, to provide the according analysis. The first matter that invites attention is the watermill itself. For centuries, Serbians have been calling the watermill a place where demonic forces and various beings appear. The watermill, as a place necessary for survival (people used it to grind the grain for flour), was logically a frequently visited place in the village. Because of this, they also attracted creatures from the side of “anti-life”, i.e. death, a place where life and light are absent. The creature that people most often encountered in the mill was a vampire. According to the collected folk traditions of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, compiled in the book “Life and Customs of the Serbian People” (Title in original language: *Život i Običaji Naroda Srpskoga*), one of the places vampires live is a water mill. According to Karadžić, people often saw this mythological creature around grain barns, animal pens, and corn warehouses. (Stefanović Kardžić, 1867) Therefore, it is clear that the vampire, being a primordial human creature,

although bloodthirsty and eager for revenge, still has a “left-over” need for human food. This usually means the creature is attracted by any product made from wheat, corn, or some other grain. Even though it can be assumed that it does not consume human food, it remains a symbol of his former life which he is constantly attracted to.

Furthermore, the ominous sounds, one hears in the beginning, resemble a bird that people often drive away because it invokes misfortune. A raven is the first that comes to mind as the folk consider it “a fatal bird, a harbinger of misfortune and death.” (Kulišić, 1980, p.95) Later, that sound coincides with the arrival of the vampire, which leads to the conclusion that this is precisely the way he is announcing himself. This supports the belief that the soul of the deceased who vampirized can move into an animal, or simply change from a human form into an animal form. “From the description of the vampire (...) it can appear in different forms, especially in the form of some animals, such as a wolf, dog, cat, donkey, horse, etc.” It is entirely possible that the sound of the “bird” in the film was the sound of a vampire who then metamorphosed himself into a bird. Furthermore, according to the scenario, Vule the miller declares Živan’s daughter Radojka looked like a “she-butterfly”, referring primarily to her beauty and grace. Later in the analysis, it will be clear why this is important and what it has to do with the mythological creature, therefore, for now, the reader should keep this statement of the miller in mind.

Furthermore, there is a repetition of the actions that emphasize and announce the arrival of the vampire: the stopping of the millstone that grinds the grain, which symbolizes the stopping of that natural event. The stopping of natural events announces the supernatural, that is, the very manifestation of the mythological creature. Afterwards, the candle flame goes out, which in itself symbolizes the absence of light and thus positivity,

goodness, and security. In the Christian context, the wax candle has a special meaning: “(...) wax as a substance that burns, signifies our deification (i.e., our nature that is purified by the Divine fire), and finally, the wax, on which the flame burns, or that light, signifies the union and strength of our love and peace.” (Solunski 2019, p.134).

In this sense, it is logical to assume there is no peace in the village’s watermill. The night itself has its symbolism since all these events happen during this time. According to the “Mythological Maps, “the night is associated as the main time for the activity of strange demonic creatures such as Mora - a night butterfly that presses on the chest and sucks blood(...) a witch = morinja (Trpanj) ‘an unmarried woman who sleep at night’ ”. (Petrović, 2000, p.118) Then there is a vampire “(...) who transforms at night as a wolf or an owl and kills people and animals.” (Petrović, 2000, p.124)

Moving past the bird sounds, the film viewers meet the vampire face to face, literally, and extremely dramatically: two dark, menacing eyes surrounded by a hairy face peering through the hollows of the watermill’s walls. This creature is depicted, as mentioned earlier, covered in a black cloak, hairy, dark-skinned with barbed sharp teeth reminding of the ones of a piranha fish. This partly corresponds to the descriptions of vampires from folklore because, as mentioned earlier, a vampire is co-identified with a werewolf: a hairy animal, often dark in colour, with sharp teeth, and fangs. Johnson and Oldys define the creature as a menace that attacks people during their sleep and sucks their blood. (Johnson & Oldys, 1745:358) Having that in mind, the role of the teeth is clear.

It is interesting to mention in the context of the description of vampires if we compare the script of the film with the story which inspired the director (who is also the screenwriter): the Milovan Glišić’s vampire or Sava Savanović was described as “a tall man, red as blood in the face. (...) Bloated like a paunch. Whole as if he was put to the grave

yesterday, all red, seems like blood itself.” (Glišić, 2017, p.187) There is no mention of any hairiness, sharp teeth, or the rest of the description that makes the movie vampire terrifying, however, the fact that there is no such description in the story does not mean that the screenwriter strays away from the mythological records. However, Glišić was more accurate since Čajkanović describes the vampire as “a demonic creature with supernatural qualities who is just a reanimated, undecomposed body (Čajkanović, 1994 a, p.103). Therefore, physically he looks like a normal, living man as his body remains the same since the moment of the funeral.

After the first attack on the miller Vule, the villagers also mention Sava Savanović, whom they suspect has become a vampire again, thinking he is probably the one killing and torturing the villagers. Sava Savanović is a fictional character from the short story by Milovan Glišić, based on the supposedly first case of a vampire recorded in Europe. Unlike Sava Savanović, Petar Blagojević (Peter Plogojowitzs in German), was a real persona whom Ernest Frombald mentioned in the report from the former “Wienerisches Diarium”. According to the report, Peter Plogojowitzs killed more than nine villagers in 1725, after his own death (Frombald a, 1725). The name of Frombald himself, who attended the entire Vampire hunt and destruction was unknown to the public, and it was Garcia Marin in his article from 2020 who revealed the name and described the events in the village of Kisiljevo. Namely, this Imperial Provisor, a member of the Habsburg Military Frontier in Serbia, escorted the entire process (Garcia, 2021). The whole vampire drama where the villagers and the priest dug up the body and found it completely undecomposed was first mentioned in the original. However, the copies that followed later and the comments from the new editions of the Wienerisches Diarium newspaper contributed to the loss of details that were key to the whole story, as well

as to the loss of Frombald’s first name. (Frombald b, 1725)

The Plot Part II

In the sequel, the villagers visit the old prophetess who confirms that this is Sava Savanović and reveals the location of his grave. The villagers and the village priest decide that it is time to stop Sava Savanović’s bloody campaign. The only way to do it is to follow a special folkloric vampire hunt to heal the community from the bloodthirsty creature. According to the template, it is necessary to have a black stallion that will lead the villagers exactly to the place where Sava Savanović was buried, for only a black stallion knows and can feel the place. As the prophetess said the grave is in a “crooked ravine under a crooked oak”, the words clearly emphasize that it is a symbolically wicked place, difficult to find. The black stallion successfully finds the grave and now viewers can see a classic medicine for vampire destruction. The template includes what the viewers see: the unearthing of the coffin and the driving of a hawthorn stake through Sava Savanović’s heart. The priest recites the prayer and pours holy water into the hole from the stake. At that moment “the butterfly” emerges from the coffin. The key element in this scene is the butterfly and how the characters emphasize it by capturing and killing it because that is the only way to “finish off the vampire”. However, the villagers do not succeed and the butterfly escapes. In the further development of the film, the love between Strahinja and Radojka continues again because Strahinja decides to kidnap and marry her despite her father’s opposition. The village supports him and officially declares him the village miller. The night before their wedding, by the Serbian village customs of the time, the bride is “guarded” from the groom so that there would be no sexual intercourse before the marriage. However, Strahinja ignores the rule and reaches the young woman who, to his astonishment, has a large

bloody wound under her breasts. At that moment, the scenario reaches its climax when Radojka transforms into a vampire, a hairy, dark-skinned creature with sharp teeth, in a female form. Radojka, now completely transformed into a female vampire, jumps on Strahinja's back and drives him to the crooked ravine where the villagers drive a stake through the vampire's heart. Radojka forces Strahinja to pull out the stake and in a dramatic drama, he succeeds in knocking her off his back and impaling her with the same stake. The coffin opens again and reveals not Sava Savanović but Radojka, now a dead vampire. In the meantime, the villagers continue to celebrate, unaware of the previous events, after which they find Strahinja sitting motionless on the ground with a butterfly in his hair.

Analysis – Part II

The village prophetess has her role in the mythological world, most often as a witch who, with her predictions and occult knowledge, discovers the burial place of the vampire Sava Savanović. The "Mythological Dictionary (Title in the original language: "Mitološki Rečnik") describes her work as witchcraft: an occult and diabolical activity that both the elderly and the young engage in, "secretly in the evening and at night, naked and silent, without looking back or being observed by others." (Kulišić, 1980, p.88) "Nobody tells any young and beautiful woman that she is a witch, it's just those old hags." (Vasiljev, 1928, p.52) The black stallion symbolically has a special role in the mythological world because, due to its nature and its role in that world, it has the power to find similar demonic creatures.

It was believed that a colt (stallion), especially a black one and without a mark, would not cross the grave with a vampire in it. Hence, when it was thought that there was a vampire in the cemetery, they brought out the stallion and walked him over the graves. If it happened that he wouldn't cross a grave, it was believed that he had found a vampire. (Kulišić, 1980, p.131)

The crooked ravine and the oak tree are, according to folklore, places where demonic forces meet and which mortals should avoid. "Some oaks, similarly to some other forest trees, were believed to be "shady" — they contained all magical writings — and they were not to be cut because the one who did so could die immediately or would suffer for a long time and finally die." (Kulišić, 1980, p.398). Furthermore, the very process of driving a hawthorn stake through a vampire's heart is full of mythological elements, therefore one can start with the material from which the stake was made. Čajkanović writes that, in addition to its supernatural powers, the hawthorn also has "cosmic" powers, for the Slavic people believed the world rested on the hawthorn branches. "A black dog constantly bites the hawthorn, and if it were to bite through it, the world would perish, that's why St. Peter crosses it with his stick from time to time and the hawthorn comes back to the old measure." (Čajkanović a, 1994, 170) Čajkanović also points out that next to the oak, the hawthorn has the strongest influence against the vilest of demons. "The best protection is, of course, hawthorn (see hawthorn), i.e. hawthorn stake or hawthorn thorn, from which the vampire always runs away and is the easiest to kill." (Kulišić, 1980, p.59) The priest recites a prayer and sprinkles holy water, which in the Christian context has its properties as a protective agent against demonic creatures. The Orthodox Encyclopedia also calls it "Agaism" the meaning of "Sanctified Water" or "Holy Water", which is marked "Big A" if the origin is more highly sanctified, and "Small A" if it is of a lower elevation, therefore less power. An example of higher holy water with stronger power or Big A is Epiphany water and the water of the holy act of Baptism. (Zhel'tov & Nikiforova, 2008) Therefore, as such a sacred object, it carries enormous power in the fight against demonic creatures such as vampires who act extremely negatively in contact with it.

Afterwards, the viewers have the opportunity to see the result of the ritual when the butterfly flies out of the coffin. Now the readers should remember the meaning of the butterfly from the very beginning. In the first scenes, miller Vule calls Radojka a “she-butterfly, and this scene fully assembles the puzzle. From the beginning, the film hints that the innocent, beautiful girl is a disguised vampire or at least his future victim. The butterfly creature itself is one of the metamorphoses of the vampire, which is why people believe that the soul of this creature resides in the butterfly. However, it is possible that it could also be the body of a bird, snake, cat, or some other animal. “The butterfly that comes out of the vampire’s mouth represents the soul of the deceased, that is, the spirit that even when destroyed can live and act independently” (Kulišić, 1980, p.123)

In the further description, the viewers understand that the impaling of “Sava Savanović” meant, in fact, that Radojka the vampire was also impaled. When the coffin is opened once more, she is now in the place of Sava Savanović. This sequence of events of the “vampire switch” according to mythological logic and folkloric beliefs has no explanation and does not make sense. This chain of events can only indicate the possibility that the vampire Sava Savanović bit or otherwise infected the innocent girl Radojka, after which she became a vampire who haunts the villagers. However, this is not resolved in the film and is left to the viewers to guess. As for folklore beliefs, a vampire can turn another human into a vampire, but this rarely happens. Most often, one becomes a vampire through sinful life, the external influence of demonic forces, or by birth itself. “Some people can become vampirized during their lifetime, but as a rule, it only happens after death (...) “Vampirović” is a child born from the relationship between a normal woman and a vampire. A child conceived in this way, according to belief, has a special ability to recognize a vampire, i.e. sees him, can talk to

him, and kill him (v. vampire). (...)” (Kulišić, 1980, p.59)

Furthermore, the very end when Strahinja sits crestfallen on the ground with a butterfly indicates a neutral outcome with no positive or just seemingly negative results. Despite all the actions of the villagers and Strahinja’s interference in the process of destroying not one, but now two vampires, nothing was achieved because the ritual was not completed! Describing one of the forms of vampire (“vampirić” in Serbian), the Serbian Mythological Dictionary points out that when killing a vampire, “the most important thing is to kill that butterfly because if it happens that it escapes, destroying the body is in vain.” (Kulišić, 1980, p.60). The denouement of the film is the fact that no one managed to kill the butterfly, which is why its soul, according to beliefs, continues to live and waits to move into a new victim.

Vampire in the film “The Holy Place”

“The Holy Place” is another film by Đorđe Kadijević, shot in 1990, inspired by the short story “Viy” by Nikolai Gogol who wrote the story back in 1835 (Picture 2).

Picture 2: A poster for the film “Sveto Mesto” (The Holy Place). Source: IMDB



The Plot – Part I

The plot of the film “The Holy Place” can be divided into three important parts. The first one begins with the opening scenes in which three young theologians are wandering along a deserted road, returning from a fair, in search of shelter. In the background, they hear an ominous howl reminiscent of a wolf. Soon after, the theologian Toma notices a black carriage moving along the road with a young, beautiful woman. The carriage passes Toma at high speed and continues in the distance towards the rest of the group. Toma runs up breathless in fear that the carriage will run over his companions only to discover that the other two theologians have not seen any carriage on their way. Soon after, they find a hut with a sullen and ill-tempered old woman, where they seek shelter. She separates them, sending Toma to the stable and the other two to the house. In the background, the theologian Tom again notices the mysterious black carriage, now standing quietly on a nearby hill. He reaches it but finds it empty. As he spends the night in the barn, he hears the wolf howling again in the background. Soon after, a dishevelled old woman, the owner of the hut, appears at the scene and insinuates that she wants to have sexual relations with the young theologian. He refuses. She then attacks him wildly, letting out inhuman screams, after which she grabs the theologian and jumps on his back, screaming, howling, and making him run mindlessly down the field. The hurried old woman now looks like a wild witch sitting furiously on the theologian’s neck, screaming while he repeats the “Our Father” prayer out loud. He manages to throw her off him and kill her, after which she transforms into the young, beautiful girl he saw the day before in the carriage. At that moment, the carriage passes him again.

Analysis – Part I

The first “vampiric element” to notice is the howling of the alleged wolf in the background of

the three theologians. There is a possible connection between the howling and the existence of werewolves in South Slavic mythology. Karadžić defines the werewolf as “a man into whom (according to folk tales) after 40 days of death some devilish spirit enters and revives him (turns into a vampire).” (Stefanović Karadžić, 1867, p.213)

The next important scene, which the reader should remember for subsequent analysis, is the moment when the theologian Toma notices an ominous carriage carrying a mysterious girl in black. Another important detail is that he was the only one who saw the carriage, considering the two friends exclaimed they did not even see it pass by. Here, the black carriage also represents a negative omen for Toma and the fact that he was chosen as a victim by the young girl in the carriage. The old lady who reluctantly welcomed the theologians into her house turns out to be the mythological creature “Karakondžula” who, by her very nature, targets young men. This creature is usually represented as an old woman, a demonic, lost soul that, as people in Serbian Kosovo believe, sits above the house’s front door in the evening. As soon as anyone, especially a male, leaves the house, she jumps on his back and rides him to the nearby river until the roosters start to crow. (Kulišić 1980) This matches the specific horror that Toma endured. During the Karakondžula’s attack, the theologian Toma recited the Christian prayer “Our Father” which, with its spiritual effect, influenced the Karakondžula. This is why he succeeded in overthrowing and killing her. However, after killing the demonic creature, Toma saw she had transformed into the young girl he saw the day before, and then, after the seeming “murder”, he again noticed the carriage that transported her. This indicates that it was indeed the girl in black that he saw. Several transformations of one mythological creature into another are already taking place here. It can be said that in addition to the Karakondžula, readers have the opportunity to see a potential female vampire. This vampire has

the power of transformation for at one moment she was a human being in a carriage, and in the other an old, enraged woman, and then again, a young girl. There is a power of transformation, but whether it was a female vampire or some other mythological creature, in this part of the analysis is not clear, at least for now.

Plot – Part II

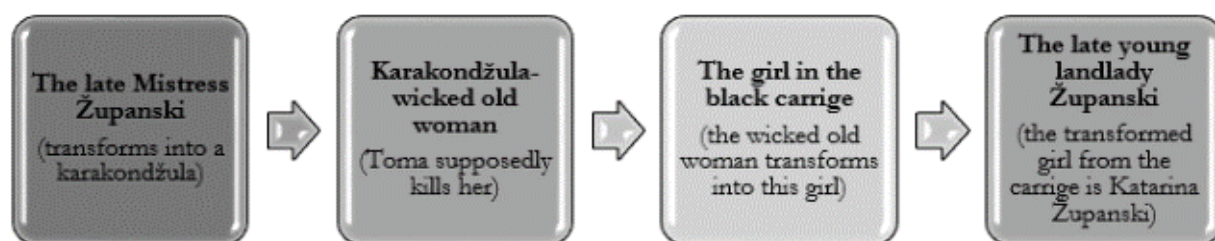
The second important part of the film plot continues with Toma's trip to Lord Županski's mansion to recite a prayer for his late daughter. Upon his arrival, Toma is surprised to see the girl from the carriage, whom he killed the night before, in a coffin. On second glance, he notices with shock the portrait of Mistress Županski, who looked like an evil old woman from a hut. The next night, Toma is locked up by the workers in the church to read a prayer for the repose of the dead girl's soul. At one point of the prayer reading the girl gets up from the coffin. Scared out of his mind, the theologian falls to the floor and draws a circle around himself in the sand on the church floor. While drawing a circle with his finger, he also drew "IN". Thomas takes the Holy Scripture and uses it to shield himself from the girl's gaze. Katarina Županski, the deceased girl, walks around him but does not enter the circle, after which she returns to the coffin. The next morning, workers come to unlock the church and after breakfast explain the lewd history of the Županski family. The discussion about the existence of witches and other demonic forces turns into individual confessions

where each worker reveals the promiscuity of the young mistress, who, in addition to having sex with all of them, also had an incestuous relationship with her father. According to the story of one worker, on the Holy Saturday before Easter, the father tried to enter the church with his daughter, but he failed because she collapsed in front of the entrance and for a moment transformed into the late Mistress Županski. Another worker said that the weight of her husband's and daughter's sins disturbed her so much that even after her death, late Mistress Županski was unable, as the worker said, "to calm down even in the afterlife" In the evening when the moon is full, she reportedly "howls like a she-wolf" and roams the fields.

Analysis – Part II

If Toma and the readers of this article were not convinced until now that there is a paranormal game of mythological creatures in the midst, then they were convinced when the theologian arrived at the estate of Lord Županski. There he notices the girl he allegedly killed the night before, in the coffin. The next strange thing he notices is the portrait of the late Mistress Županski, who looks identical to the old witch, the mythological creature Karakondžula he fought the night before. The entanglement between several characters and their "human and non-human forms" is obvious. It is not entirely possible to distinguish with certainty who transforms into whom. However, the following possible cycle and sequence of transformations are suggested (Figure 1):

Figure 1 Cycle and sequence of transformations of the Županski females



A special part of the analysis is devoted to the beginning of Toma's prayers for the repose of the soul of Katarina Županski. Although the film plot never precisely indicates that she was a vampire, the atmosphere and her behaviour during the "revivals" from the coffin indicate that the deceased "vampirized". Čajkanović states that according to a "pre-animistic" understanding, a vampire is "a dead body rising from the grave", therefore, it is a sign that a person has "vampirized". (Čajkanović a, 1994) In this film, Katarina, as well as her late mother, never literally tried to suck the blood out of anyone. However, in their own way, they did "suck the life out" of each of their victims. Toma recites a prayer for the repose of the soul and the deceased girl starts her horrific dramatics. The late Serbian Patriarch Pavle spoke of the "Prayer for the repose of the soul" as a necessity because in Christianity both living and the dead are alive in the Lord God, referring to the transfer of the spirit to eternal life. Therefore, it is the duty of those who are alive in the body to remember the deceased through this prayer. In this way, the living can help their sins be forgiven even after their earthly death (Milaković, 2023).

In this sense, Katarina Županski's reaction to priest Toma's attempt to help her with prayer is clear. Furthermore, Toma draws a circle around himself in the sand, on the church floor, for his protection. He writes "IN" with his finger which is a part of the acronym INRI - "*Iesus Nazarens Rex Iudaeorum*" which translates to "Jesus of Nazaret – King of Jews", written at the cross when the Jews crucified Jesus Christ. (Biblija Stari i Novi Savez, 2013, John 19:19 -22) One of the other protective tools, he also used was the Holy Scripture as the ultimate Christian spiritual guide.

The possibility of the existence of mythological creatures is revealed to the viewers of the film for the first time when the estate workers discuss the existence of witches, alluding to their young, now

deceased, landlady Katarina. In support of that, they share her promiscuous life and incest with her father. This can be counted as one of the characteristics of vampires who are said to have an increased sexual desire, especially when interacting with human, living creatures. "Vampires were first sexualized to strike fear into people of the taboo and sinfulness of sexual behavior, but later, this sexualization became a metaphor for repressed desires, until finally, their sexualization caused them to be humanized." (González Rosario, 2021, p.1).

Karadžić as well as other authors such as Čajkanović talk about folk belief that vampires are deceased men that rise from the graves and besides striking fear into people, they usually show themselves to their wives in the home where they once lived. "A vampire also often visits his wife (and especially if she is beautiful and young) and sleeps with her(...)"(Stefanović Karadžić, 1867, p.214) Čajkanović even mentioned a supposedly real encounter between a widowed wife Cvija and her vampire husband:

...The old peasant Paja Tomić... died... on April 9 of this year. Shortly after his death, his wife Cvija began to complain that her dead husband came to her like a ghost during the night and that he was running around home and scaring the household. Some believed Cvija, some didn't, but she constantly claimed that her husband became a vampire and came every night. It lasted for a whole month, when, they say, the sons noticed a vampire in the house. (Čajkanović b., 1994, p.101)

The proof that Katarina Županski had vampiric abilities even before her death and that she may not have been a human being at all, was her collapsing in front of the church on Holy Saturday, before Easter. There is also the possibility that Katarina was born a vampire, which leads to the conclusion that one of the parents, most likely the late Mistress Županski, was a vampire herself. In any case, if she was not a vampire until death, she certainly

was after death. The reader should remember that one of the workers precisely said that she “howled like a she-wolf” at night because of the weight of her daughter’s sins and that her soul cannot find peace. This completely matches the description of vampires as beings who, due to a sinful life or external sinful influences, “live” after death as wanderers without peace, seeking satisfaction in drawing the life out of living creatures. However, as can be seen from the entire film, they never succeed completely, which is why they rage and express dissatisfaction. A very important element can be noticed if the reader remembers the howling of the wolf in the background of the first scenes of the film. This coincides with the story that the late vampire landlady howls at night because of the restlessness of her soul. Therefore, the howling the theologians heard was the vampirized landlady Županski who later greeted them as a wicked old woman in the cabin.

Plot – Part III

The third important part of the plot of the film begins with theologian Toma reading another prayer for the repose of Katarina’s soul. On the second night, however, the vampiric girl becomes an enraged, terrifying creature. She floats in the air, screams and makes terrifying noises that drive Toma mad. He, on the other hand, remains protected in his circle. In the morning when the church is unlocked, Toma comes out with completely grey hair as a sign of huge shock. Later, the maid recounts a mysterious encounter with a furious, black cat, which she stabbed with scissors in an attempt to drive it away. The next morning, while bringing bath water to her young landlady, Katarina, she noticed that she had an injured hand, wrapped in bandages. In the sequel, the theologian Thomas, having no choice, goes for the third night, to recite the prayer for late Katarina’s soul. This time he draws a circle even further from the altar and reads the prayer fearfully. He approaches the

coffin and sees that it is empty, but when he turns around, the deceased woman is standing behind him. He falls into the coffin and Katarina enters standing, aggressively stepping on his genitals, just like she did with the deranged servant Nikita. In the morning, the people in the village along with lord Županski find Toma in the coffin with the deceased Katarina. The mob throws him out, after which one of them hits him on the head with a mace. In the finale of the film, the audience sees three theologians again, with one of them now carrying Toma’s body over a donkey. They find shelter in the same hut belonging to the old woman. She takes one of the theologians into the house and orders the other to go to the stable. In the background, the theologian from the stable hears terrifying howling and notices a black carriage on the hill. Soon after, just like at the beginning with Toma, the old woman enters the hut hinting at the possible sexual encounter which the theologian refuses. However, the old woman gets closer and closer and at one point jumps on him wildly while the young theologian screams in agony. The film ends with a scene showing Toma, apparently, dead.

Analysis – Part III

After the second prayer in the church, the viewers of the film see the heightened aggression of the vampire girl due to the impossibility of harming the young theologian. One can interpret this as the spiritual power that Thomas receives as a theologian and a believer within the protective circle, surrounded by prayer and the Holy Scripture. The maid’s story about the appearance of a black, ominous cat that attacks her, coincides with the theory that vampires, like witches, “Moras” (pl. of Mora)(note: “Mora” is a creature from the category of the witches who repented for their wicked ways, and now solely strangle people in their sleep by cutting off their air supply.see: Vuk Stefanović Karadžić “Životi Običaji Naroda Srpskoga“

1867:216), and other mythological creatures can also transform into animals, most often birds, cats, and snakes. The possibility that the demonized cat was the vampire Katarina can also be confirmed by the maid's testimony that the next day she saw Katarina's hand wrapped around the place where she stabbed the cat with scissors. In the mythological world, it is known that if a person kills an animal suspected of being a transformed witch or vampire, he or she kills the demonic creature itself. Therefore, it is clear that, although she did not kill her, the injury that the maid inflicted on the cat was transferred to the cat's human form, the young Mistress Katarina. In the sequel, when Toma reads the prayer in the church for the third time, he makes a mistake and leaves the protective circle, stops reading the Holy Scripture, which the she-vampire uses, and attacks him by stomping on his genitals in the coffin. The aforementioned is self-explanatory, and the genital injury of the theologian Toma symbolizes the punishment for his lust or at least his fascination with the beautiful mistress Katarina. In the end, the mob kills Toma, by which the vampire indeed managed to hurt him indirectly.

The film ends as it began, with the scene of three travelling theologians, with the difference that the theologian Toma is dead. The other two ritualistically repeat the action that will lead one of them, apparently, to the same fate as the unfortunate Toma. They stop by the evil old woman's cabin again, who separates one of them in the stable as she did with Toma. This is the repetition of the first ritualistic step. In the background, the theologian from the stable hears howling, which is the second ritualistic step that has been repeated. The third ritualistic step occurs when the theologian notices an ominous, black carriage in the distance, just as Toma saw on the first day, and with that, the viewers of the film surely now understand that he is the next victim. The fourth ritualistic step occurs with the arrival of an old woman who insinuates a desire for a relationship with a theologian, which

he refuses, after which she becomes enraged and turns into a Karakondžula. This completes the ritual and leaves the rest of his fate for the viewers to guess, although, in the last scene showing the dead theologian Toma, not much is left to the imagination.

Summary

The final word of this analysis is primarily reflected in the roots of the creature that served as an inspiration for the film achievements of both the Western and South Slavic countries. That root grew in folklore, in the imagination and real experience of people, which turned into collections of folklore stories, fantastic novels, silent films, and modern adaptations that strike fear into the heart. This article briefly introduced readers to the beginning of horror in Western filmography, the process of development of Yugoslav film, and methodically, step by step, dissected and analyzed the plots of the films "She-Butterfly" and "The Holy Place" as representatives of the high-quality, albeit sparse, South Slavic horror genre. With the help of the analysis, the reader was acquainted with the mythological creature "Vampire" and its forms, similar creatures, and other mythological elements through the film medium inspired by folklore.

References

- Biblija Stari i Novi Savez: John, 19:19 - 23.* (2013).
 Čajkanović, V. (a) (1994). *Stara Srpska Religija i Mitologija* (V. Đurić, Ed.; 5th ed.). Srpska Književna Zadruga Beogradski Izdavačko - Grafički Zavod Partenon M. A. M.
 Čajkanović, V., & Đurić, V. (b) (1994). *Sabrana Dela iz Srpske Religije i Mitologije: Knjiga I* (2nd ed., Vol. 1). Srpska Književna Zadruga Beogradski Izdavačko - Grafički Zavod Partenon M. A. M. (Original work published 1991)

- Eisner, L. H. (1925). *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*. University of California Press.
- Frombald, E. b. (1721, July 21). Copia eines Schreibens aus dem Gradisker District in Ungarn. *Wienerisches Diarium*. Retrieved November 14, 2023, from <http://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=wrz&datum=17250721>
- Frombald, E. a (1725, July 21). Copia des vom Herrn Frombald kayserlichen Cameral Provisore zu Gradiska imKönigreich Servien erlasenen Briefs anno 1725. Die im Königreich Servien damals in Schwung gegangenen sogenannten vanpiri oder Blutsauger betreffend. *Wienerisches Diarium*, 25–26.
- García Marín, Á. (2020). Imperial Provisor Frombald's First Name— Discovered. *Journal of Vampire Studies*, 1(1), 119n11.
- Glišić, M. (2017). *Pripovetke: Posle Devedeset Godina*. Portalibris. (Original work published 1880)
- González Rosario, S. (2021). *The Humanization of the Vampire and Dehumanization of the Queer Community* [MA thesis]. University of Puerto Rico.
- Goulding, D. J. (2002). *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience, 1945-2001* (2nd ed.). Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis. (Original work published 1985)
- Johnson, S., & Oldys, W. (1745). *The Travels of Three English Gentlemen: Vol. IV: Vol. IV*. T. Osborne, in Gray's-Inn.
- Kulišić, S., Petrović, P., & Pantelić, N. (1970). *Srpski Mitoloski Rečnik*. Izdavačko Preduzeće Nolit.
- Milakovic, D. (2023, November 4). Zadušnice – dani usrdne molitve za upokojene • Radio ~ Svetigora ~. *Radio Svetigora*. Retrieved November 17, 2023, <https://svetigora.com/zadusnice-dani-usrdne-molitve-za-upokojene/>
- Mitrović, N. (2023, April 15). Film i Đorđe Kadrijević: Pola veka „Leptirice”, ostvarenja koje je “veći utisak ostavilo na gledaoce, nego na kinematografiju.” *BBC News Na Srpskom*. Retrieved November 9, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-65247493>
- Murtić, D. (2020). An Ordinary Warrior and his inevitable defeat: representation in Post-Yugoslav cinema. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 109–125). DOI [10.1007/978-3-030-33436-9_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33436-9_7)
- Petrović, S. (2000). *Srpska Mitologija - Mitološke Mape sa Pregledom Južnoslovenskog Prostora* (2nd ed.). Prosveta Niš.
- Solunski, S. (2019). *O Hramu Božijem i o Služiteljima u Njemu* (2nd ed.). Lio.
- Stefanović Karadžić, V. (n.d.). *Život i Običaji Naroda Srpskoga: Opisao i za Štampu Prigotovio Vuk Stefanović KARADŽIĆ* (2nd ed.). Štamparija L.Somera[L.Somer PrintHouse].
- Vasiljev, S. (1928). *Slovenska Mitologija* [PDF]. Srbobran, Beograd. https://www.svetlostistine.org/Knjige/SlovenskaMitologijaVasiljev/SlovenskaMitologija_Vasiljev.pdf
- Zhel'tov, M. S., & Nikiforova, A. YU. (2008). АГИАСМА[AGAI SMA]. In *Православная энциклопедия[Pravoslav'naya entsiklopediya]*. Retrieved November 16, 2023, from <https://www.pravenc.ru/text/63290.html>