

# SLAVIC MYTHOLOGY LOST IN FANTASY: LITERARY ADAPTATIONS OF SLAVIC BELIEFS IN ANDRZEJ SAPKOWSKI'S AND JURAJ ČERVENÁK'S NOVELS

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Slavic myths increasingly survive in people's consciousness as supernatural elements or as literary characters rather than as real beliefs in their existence. Adult readers in Poland and Slovakia, for example, encounter Slavic supernatural beings in the fantasy literature book series such as *Wiedźmin* by Andrzej Sapkowski and *Černokňažník* by Juraj Červenák; however, literature cannot be expected to portray superstitions and demons in the same way as belief legends. Placing Sapkowski's and Červenák's works within the context of ethnographically recorded beliefs illuminates various aspects of intercultural and intertextual relationships within the literary setting. This article shows that there are several types of literary adaptation of Slavic myths: adaptation in accordance with folk beliefs, denial of superstitions, incorporating a folk myth in order to create an illusion, and using the name of a demon while also adding characteristics from other sources – especially from popular culture.

Keywords: Slavic mythology, Andrzej Sapkowski, Juraj Červenák, fantasy literature, Slavic fantasy

## INTRODUCTION

Mythology is one of the three fundamental pillars of fantasy literature.<sup>1</sup> As Dickerson and O'Hara argue, "modern fantasy literature is steeped and rooted in ancient myth, medieval heroic legend, and fairy tale" (Dickerson and O'Hara 2006: 16). These myths are primarily

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Celtic, Nordic, and Arthurian, given that modern fantasy literature as a genre developed within Anglophone literature. Inspiration from specific myths led to a distinction between different subgenres, such as Celtic fantasy, Nordic fantasy, and Arthurian fantasy (Stabelford 2005). The tradition is based on the works by J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, who influenced the character of fantasy literature for several decades in the Anglo-American and Western European world and elsewhere. Thanks to translations of their work, fantasy literature has also gained popularity in Central European countries such as Poland and Slovakia, especially from the 1980s onwards (Kaczor 2017: 100). Central European authors adopted the patterns of Anglophone fantasy literature along with a whole range of Western European myths, legends, and folk tales. A turning point came when the Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski published the short story *Wiedźmin* (The Witcher) in the *Fantastyka* magazine in 1986 and a collection of short stories entitled *Ostatnie życzenie* (The Last Wish) in 1993, where he drew on Slavic mythology and Polish superstitions and folk tales. The genre of Slavic fantasy in Poland thus came into being.

Sapkowski himself declared that the book cycle *Wiedźmin* (The Witcher), which includes the aforementioned collection of short stories, should not be classified as belonging to the genre of Slavic fantasy (Szyborska and Czyż 2020). Indeed, his works are essentially based on Celtic and Arthurian traditions (Łęć 2009). Nonetheless, he inspired other authors in Poland, who increasingly began to refer to demons, superstitions, and traditions from Polish (or a more broadly conceived Slavic) culture from the 1990s onwards. As a literary subgenre, Slavic fantasy has now been fully established (Wieczorek 2020: 261–262). Sapkowski's idea has travelled beyond Poland. Juraj Červenák, the best-known author of adventure and fantasy literature in Slovakia, openly admits that the idea to write Slavic fantasy was born after he had read Sapkowski's works (Červenák 2011a: 5). Therefore, this article presents a comparative analysis of the book series *Wiedźmin* (The Witcher) by Sapkowski and *Černokňažník* (The Warlock) by Červenák.

In their works, both authors include supernatural figures that come from their cultural sphere. Polish and Slovak culture are close to each other. They are situated next to each other, share some common history, and are also connected by languages that belong to the West Slavic language family. This affinity is also reflected in the fact that many supernatural beings with etymologically similar names appear in both Polish and Slovak pre-Christian mythological imaginations, and their characteristics are often very similar. It is therefore not surprising that in both the *Wiedźmin* and the *Černokňažník* series, there are several supernatural beings with almost the same name. Several publications have already investigated the relationship between Slavic mythology and the *Wiedźmin* series (see Kaczor 2006, Žukowska, 2011). However, no such scholarship exists about the *Černokňažník* series. A comparison of the Polish and Slovak book series has not been addressed, either. Research has not yet determined to what extent these two authors

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adhered to the image of supernatural beings in Slavic mythology, nor have reasons for their possible modification been uncovered.

To answer these questions, I will deal with supernatural beings of Slavic origin present in both Sapkowski's and Červenák's works: *rusatka* : *rusalka*, *strzyga* : *striga*, *wampir* : *upír*, *wilkotak* : *vlkolak*, and *Žywia* : *Živa*. Based on ethnographic literature, their original characteristics in folk culture are first presented. This description is then compared with how the beings are presented by Sapkowski and Červenák in their book series. The comparisons reveal that only some literary characters correspond to the features of supernatural beings in folklore captured by ethnography (the Slovak *rusalka* and the goddess *Žywia/Živa*). For others, the original image of the being served as a disguise or an illusion (the Polish *rusatka* and the Slovak *upír*). Also, superstitions about these beings were intentionally refuted as untrue in some cases (the Polish *strzyga*, *wampir*, and *wilkotak*). In two cases, it can even be claimed that the folk superstition was not the real source of inspiration for the creation of the literary character (the Slovak *striga* and *vlkolak*).

## METHODOLOGY

The research focuses on two book series of fantasy literature where several elements of Slavic mythology occur. One of them is the *Wiedźmin* series by Sapkowski, who was the first to use elements of Slavic mythology in fantasy literature in Poland. This series consists of the short story collections *Ostatnie życzenie* (The Last Wish) and *Miecz przeznaczenia* (Sword of Destiny) and five novels published in the 1990s: *Krew elfów* (Blood of Elves), *Czas pogardy* (Time of Contempt), *Chrzest ognia* (Baptism of Fire), *Wieża jaskółki* (The Tower of the Swallow), and *Pani Jeziora* (The Lady of the Lake). The story takes place at an unspecified time in an imaginary world where several kinds of intelligent beings coexist and compete for power. The main protagonist of the series is Geralt of Rivia, who is a witcher – a mutant that has been transformed and trained to fight against beasts that threaten humans. On his way to his destiny, Geralt encounters many beasts and demons from Slavic mythology. Many are mentioned only briefly and serve to complete the picture of the presented world, but several of them are also crucial to the storyline and their characterization is therefore more detailed.

The second book series is by Červenák and is entitled *Černokňazník*. It is a trilogy consisting of the novels *Vládca vlkov* (The Lord of the Wolves), *Radhostov meč* (The Sword of Radhost), and *Krvavý oheň* (Blood Fire). The first part was published in 2003, but Červenák published an amended and revised edition in 2009 followed by two more volumes. Červenák set his story in the ninth century CE, recounting actual historical events in the area of present-day Slovakia and Czechia. The main character is Rogan, who first fights with Avar tribes; later the plot shifts towards a fight for power between gods. Slavic mythology provides the cultural and religious background to the entire series. Prior to writ-

ing, Červenák studied history and mythology so as to accurately depict the historical and geographical environment in the story and incorporate elements of the supernatural into it.

Both book series contain many Slavic supernatural beings. For the purposes of this comparative analysis, the selection was narrowed down according to two criteria. Firstly, I focused only on beings whose characteristics in the novels are sufficiently described in terms of appearance and/or behaviour, making their analysis and comparison possible. The second criterion was the presence of characters in both book series. Based on these criteria, the literary treatment of the selected beings in the Slovak and Polish novels could be compared so as to determine how Slavic mythology was approached as a literary motif and what modifications, if any, were undertaken in relation to the original folk representation. A total of five beings corresponded to the criteria (given in alphabetical order in Polish and Slovak): *rusałka* : *rusalka*, *strzyga* : *striga*, *wampir* : *upír*, *wilkotak* : *vlkolak*, and *Żyvia* : *Živa*. All of them can be found as entries in Polish and Slovak ethnographic encyclopaedias, which proves that creatures with these names were part of the beliefs of Poles and Slovaks alike.

In what follows, each of these beings has been characterized with reference to Polish and Slovak ethnographic works. Polish and Slovak encyclopaedias and scholarly works focusing on folk culture, superstitions, and mythology in Poland and Slovakia – or in the whole Slavic area – were used as sources. Next, the description was compared with how the authors portrayed the creatures in their literary works. Finally, the technique for incorporating the respective mythical element into literary plot was identified according to Bogdan Trocha's proposal (2009). Based on existing literature scholarship, Trocha proposed the following categories: renarration, elimination, condensation, prefiguration, modification of meaning, amplification, permutation, reinterpretation (adaptive, polemic, parodic, speculative), and adiaphorisation (Trocha 2009: 277–285). This categorization helped not only to determine the extent to which Sapkowski and Červenák adhered to the conceptualized representations of the beings, but also to explain the possible reasons for their modification.

## RUSAŁKA : RUSALKA

In both Polish and Slovak folk culture, this creature is well known as a female nature demon. In folklore, she appears as a beautiful woman with long hair who seduces men (Nádaská and Michálek 2015: 157). In some regions, it was believed that they lived near bodies of water and lured young men into the depths of a lake (Wróblewska 2019) or that their habitat was a dense forest near streams and lakes. They were rarely found in solitude. In Slovakia, people believed that when a young man came their way, they would force him to dance to death in the night and that he could only be saved by being dressed backwards, or when a rooster crowed (Botík and Slavkovský 1995: 303). In Poland, it was common to imagine that a *rusałka* would sit in a tree, lure young men, and then sting them to death, although, according to Aleksander Brückner, this idea actually comes from literature (Brückner 1980:

307). In both Slovak and Polish culture, the characteristic of a *rusalka* overlaps with another female demon – *vila* (fairy) – and the two often appear synonymously.

In Sapkowski's works, the figure of the *rusatka* is ambiguous. In the short story *Ziarno prawdy* (A Grain of Truth), we meet a female being named Vereena, who we initially believe to be a *rusatka*. She is slender, has long black hair and a white dress, does not speak any human language or eat human food, often dwells in the woods, and is actually afraid of humans (Sapkowski 2012a: 66). It eventually turns out, however, that she was a *bruxa*, a type of vampire, who was only posing as a *rusatka* in order to gain power. Sapkowski used the technique of character substitution to escalate tension and introduce a plot twist. Apart from this confusion, however, it can be stated that the image of the *rusatka* in Sapkowski's version retains only general features of the original belief – a woman with long hair in a dress and a vague association with the forest. The fear of contact with people cannot be considered typical. After all, an important characteristic of *rusatka* is the seduction of young men, which is completely absent in the Polish story. On the contrary, Vereena's lover Nivellen is convinced that the *rusatka* is with him only because he is not a man. The belief legend of *rusatka* was applied here by using the technique of elimination, given that the image of the supernatural being was reduced to its basic general features, and it lacks further connections to the legend of *rusatka* in the folk culture. Elimination served the purpose of character substitution and introducing a plot twist. Had the description of the being been more detailed, misleading the reader would not have been possible.

In Červenák's books, *rusalka* does not appear as an independent character with her own storyline; instead, she occurs in four different situations. In the first instance, the disappearance of a lover without saying goodbye is likened to how a *rusalka* disappears after the first crowing of a rooster (Červenák 2011a: 30). Secondly, a *rusalka* is mentioned as part of a folk song about a stray bachelor and aroused *rusalkas* (Červenák 2011b: 17). Later, Červenák describes the spring landscape and mentions that *rusalkas* would jump out of thawed wells, ponds, and marshes (Červenák 2011b: 176). Finally, there is a description of a glade in the middle of a forest where fog and a dark atmosphere prevail (Červenák 2011b: 177). It is clear from the above examples that Červenák followed the original image of the *rusalka* in Slovak culture in many ways. He preserved the image of the *rusalka* as a female creature who seduces young men and who lives near a body of water or in the forest. He also used the crowing of the rooster as a moment when the *rusalka* disappears – with her magic powers fading away at that time. Červenák even created his own folklore for his fantasy world in a song about a young man and a *rusalka* that reflects beliefs in supernatural beings as if they were in the real world.

## STRZYGA : STRIGA

In this case, Polish and Slovak folk ideas are united by the fact that this is a female being. In terms of other characteristics, there is nothing in common. In Polish folk beliefs, the

*strzyga* was the soul of a child who had been born with teeth and then died prematurely (Brückner 1980: 279). This could also be a person buried without having been baptized or a child born with visible physical anomalies (Lehr 1982: 135). According to the superstition, one could get rid of a *strzyga* in several ways – including by piercing her body with an aspen stake and then cutting off her head. Her characteristics thus overlap with those of another demon – the vampire, which will be discussed below.

In Slovakia, a *striga* is a female half-demon half-human characterized by supernatural qualities and abilities aimed at harming her surroundings. She could be a young girl or an old woman, her supernatural abilities could be both innate and acquired, and she would use these abilities for a range of negative purposes. She could summon a storm, destroy the harvest, deprive people and animals of their health, or spoil cows' milk. When smeared with magical ointments, *strigas* were attributed with the ability to fly. In Slovak superstitious tales, the names *striga* and *bosorka* dominate, whereas *čarodejnica* and *ježibaba* are more common in magical folk tales (Botík and Slavkovský 1995: 202).

The differences in the Polish and Slovak cultural images of *strzyga* and *striga* are also reflected in the analysed book series. The whole plot of the short story *Wiedźmin* by Sapkowski is based on the narrative of the *strzyga*. It is about a child who was born with teeth and other anomalies and died shortly after birth. It continued to grow in the coffin and after seven years began to attack people (Sapkowski 2012a: 14–15). In this part, the description of the *strzyga* is quite consistent with folklore; however, the reason why the child became a *strzyga* differs in the short story – it is not a *strzyga* just because it was born with teeth and died before baptism but rather because someone put a curse on it. The method of defeating the *strzyga* also differs in folklore and in the tale. In the short story, the curse can be reversed by not letting the *strzyga* sleep in its coffin during full moon. Geralt prevents this from happening, and the *strzyga* is eventually transformed into a girl; however, Sapkowski also worked with a version that the *strzyga* must be beheaded, pierced with an aspen stake, or burned. Most of the characters in the short story believe in this method because they are convinced that the *strzyga* is the irreversible result of incest between a brother and sister. As stated above, Geralt proved this belief to be untrue. This means that all the elements of the belief legend about the *strzyga* appeared in the short story, with part of it being presented in its original form and part of it being presented as untrue.<sup>2</sup> In his short story, Sapkowski used the technique of polemic reinterpretation of the *strzyga*. The polemic reinterpretation questions the truth of specific mythical or religious meanings, allowing to manipulate them (Trocha 2009: 280). The reinterpretation was necessary for Geralt to become the hero of the story, the only one who was able to remove the curse. The myth was subordinated to the principles of a heroic fantasy story.

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<sup>2</sup> It is likely, however, that Sapkowski drew inspiration from Roman Zmorski's 1852 folk tale entitled *Strzyga* as well as from folklore. In both texts, the origin and age of the *strzyga* and the method of removing the curse coincide. In other respects, Sapkowski's short story seems to be a purposeful denial of the typical features of the folk tale (Roszczyńska 2003). It can be considered a variant of 401A "The Enchanted Princess in Her Castle" with the motif D753 "Disenchantment by accomplishment of tasks" according to the AT types of folk tales (Aarne and Thompson 1973: 131).

In the novel *Vládca vlkov* by Červenák, the character of the *striga* is also called *ježibaba*. She is an old, skinny, dirty, and ugly woman with long hair and sharp claw-like nails. She lives in a tree that resembles a hut on a chicken leg, and she flies on a broom (Červenák 2011a: 259–260). The only thing this image has in common with Slovak folklore about the *striga* is its desire to harm or kill humans. Červenák's *striga* corresponds much more closely to another female demonic creature – Baba Yaga. This creature is of East Slavic origin and became known mainly thanks to Alexander Afanasyev's collection of folk tales *Narodnye russkie skazki* (1855–1863). It is in these Russian folk tales that Baba Yaga appears as a man-eating old woman who flies in a mortar or on a broom and lives in a house on a chicken leg (Wróblewska 2019). Even though *striga* and Baba Yaga represent different demonic beings in folklore, the *striga* in Červenák's novel is based on the notion of Baba Yaga. When a derivative and artistic presentation of a myth is present in literature, this belongs to the technique of renarration (Trocha 2009: 277). Whether this renarration of the belief legend of the *striga* is intentional is open to discussion, though, because the *striga* and Baba Yaga are commonly confused in Slovak discourse. This fact is captured in Slovak dictionaries. The word *striga* is given as a synonym for *ježibaba* (Kačala, Pisárčiková and Považaj 2003) and *baba jaga* is also given as a synonym for *ježibaba* (Buzássyová and Jarošová 2006), which means that all three terms are perceived to be more or less identical. The confusion of the various beings in literature and language shows that the general awareness of the original beliefs in these female supernatural beings is disappearing, and it is difficult to draw a distinction between them.

## WAMPIR : UPÍR

The idea of vampires is common to many European nations, although their naming varies. In Polish, depending on the region, the names *upiór*, *wąpierz*, *wampierz*, *wampir*, and *strzygoń* are used (Baranowski 2019: 64). In Slovak, the terms *upír*, *vampír*, *sotana*, *nezdrevenetý*, and *nelapši* can be found (Botík and Slavkovský 1995: 277). Although the names differ, the creature has very similar characteristics in folklore. It is the spirit of a deceased person or a living dead which feeds on blood, human flesh, and the soul. It emerges from its grave at midnight at full moon. It attacks whole families and returns when the rooster crows at dawn (Botík and Slavkovský 1995: 202). The belief in vampirism is common in southern and western Slavic regions, which also share ways of fighting vampires – e.g. throwing poppy seeds into a coffin and hiding it under a rock, piercing the body or head of the vampire with an aspen stake or with large nails, separating the head from the body, and so on (Giersztoy 2006: 256). Ideas about vampires spread to the rest of Europe, and today vampirism is one of the most common supernatural motifs in popular literature and audiovisual art.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore natural that, in addition to drawing on

<sup>3</sup> The myth of vampires and vampirism in literature and other media has been exhaustively treated in the literature. For recent Polish scholarship see Janion 2008; Cieciewicz 2009; Wolski 2015; Depta, Cieśliński and Wolski 2018.

indigenous folk superstitions in their work, authors also have to face up to the well-known image of the vampire in popular culture. Sapkowski and Červenák have done this in their works as well.

One of the members of Geralt's company in the novel *Chrzest ognia* – and an important minor character – is the vampire Emiel Regis, who initially claims to be an alchemist. His true identity is gradually revealed when he is not burned by fire, has no shadow of his own, can disappear and fly, and shows no reflection in a mirror. These are attributes that come from the popular culture image of the vampire, and it is interesting that Sapkowski chose to retain these characteristics with the character of Regis. On the other hand, this character debunks a number of myths about vampires that are based directly on original folk superstitions. The idea that he is a living dead comes from the human fear of something returning from the world of the dead as being unnatural. In the novel, Regis explains that human blood is not a source of nourishment for vampires but that it has similar effects to alcohol on humans. For humans, however, blood is a life-giving fluid; thus, any creature that drinks it is a threat to men. Vampires have a much higher regenerative capacity than humans, so being stabbed with an aspen stake is not fatal to them. Also, sunlight does not burn a vampire. This superstition was based on the fact that human life takes place in the sunlight. Everything dark is associated with the night, whereas sunrise signifies victory over the dangers of the night (Sapkowski 2012d: 287–290). As demonstrated above, the character of Regis does not reflect Slavic folk superstitions about vampires; however, Sapkowski purposefully refers to them, refutes them, and gives a rational explanation of their origin. It is a parodic reinterpretation of the myth of the vampire because it not only questions the known mythical patterns, but also mocks them in a satiric tone (Trocha 2009: 281). As the reason for this interpretation, I see Sapkowski's need to present such a popular character as a vampire in a new, surprising way.

In Červenák's novels, the vampire does not appear directly as a character. In *Vládca vlkov*, a creature appears which we initially believe to be a vampire: there are bite marks on the corpses around it, the creature can metamorphose, and it has sharp fangs. In fact, the creature in the novel is called a *hmlovec* (mist ghost) – it forms out of mist and is extremely offended by the fact that everyone mistakes it for a vampire. It is through the *hmlovec* that we learn what vampires are like: they come out of the grave at night, they feed on the blood of young virgins, and garlic can kill them. Although they have a reputation for being intelligent beings, the *hmlovec* considers them to be primitive (Červenák 2011a: 85). In the novel, the only thing that matches the original superstition is that the vampire comes out of the grave at night. Otherwise, we learn nothing about its origin or other ways it can be defeated. This means that the technique used was myth elimination. Moreover, Červenák refers to the popular culture version of the vampire, which means that the technique of renarration (as artistic presentation) was also used. However, parodic reinterpretation is applied as well, since the *hmlovec* mocks vampires. Apparently, both Sapkowski and Červenák made the effort to challenge the established pop culture image of the vampire.



## WILKOŁAK : VLKOLAK

The belief in werewolves is very old. As early as the fifth century BCE, they were mentioned by the Greek historian Herodotus among the tribe of the Neuri, considered to be ancestors of the Slavs. The werewolf is a living person with the supernatural ability to transform into a wolf. This could be a person born from the contact of a woman with a vampire, or born during the new moon, or born feet first. In eastern Slovakia, it was believed that a man with two hearts would become a werewolf. Once a person became a werewolf, he could transform at any time – but usually the transformation took place at the time of the winter or summer solstice. In wolf form, he attacked humans and livestock (Botík and Slavkovský 1995: 309).

Like the vampire, the werewolf is a creature known throughout Europe and is a popular motif in popular culture. The werewolf is mentioned in almost all of Sapkowski's books, but always only briefly. Sapkowski did not develop this being into a separate character, and so its characterization is not very detailed. It is mostly mentioned when naming various demons and monsters, which Geralt can get a reward for if he kills them, whereas destroying a werewolf is not considered to be a difficult task (Sapkowski 2012c: 17). As we learn in the books, werewolves attack and devour adults and children (Sapkowski 2012d: 47) and can take two (or at most three) corporeal shapes (Sapkowski 2012b: 45). The superstition in the fictional world is that the werewolf changes back into a human at sunrise, which is debunked like many beliefs concerning vampires (Sapkowski 2012d: 290). In a brief scene, a hungry and angry werewolf appears and sneaks up to the fireplace, but when he discovers that the troubadour Jaskier is sitting by it and singing, he just listens to him for a moment and leaves (Sapkowski 2012d: 213). The basic characterization of the werewolf as a man who turns into a wolf is absent in Sapkowski's books or is only implicit. Therefore, the belief legend of the werewolf is incorporated into Sapkowski's books mostly by the technique of elimination. Sapkowski seems to have assumed that this figure is widely known. He did not work with a specific folk superstition about the origin of the werewolf and its transformations. On the other hand, the scene with a sensitive werewolf can be considered humorous and contrary to the general idea of it being a dangerous creature. This means that parodic reinterpretation was applied as well.

In the Slovak novel *Radhostov meč*, the werewolf is one of the enemies of the main character Rogan. He is Prince Vlastislav, who worships the god *Černoboh* (Blackgod) and has been endowed with the ability to change into a wolf in return for his loyalty. He can transform at will, and he uses his wolf form especially when moving quickly in the forest and in battle (Červenák 2011b: 49–53). The image of the werewolf in Červenák's book does not correspond at all with the original folk notions. Červenák used only the characteristic of a werewolf as a man who transforms into a wolf. In the *Černokňazník* trilogy, the wolf motif is generally important because Rogan's main companion is a black wolf, Goryvlad. The figure of Vlastislav is not motivated by folk superstitions about werewolves but is related to the power games of the gods, which were created by Červenák as part

of the plot. Two techniques of literary adaptation of the myth of the werewolf can be observed in this case. The first is elimination, given that only the basic characteristics were preserved. The second one is adiaphorisation. It describes the phenomenon of an aesthetic presentation where all other axiological qualities disappear and symbolic meanings of the myth are reduced to purely aesthetic ones (Trocha 2009: 283). It is related to the principle of demythologisation. The werewolf in Červenák's book was used only as a tool to escalate tension in the plot, and has no symbolic or mythological value.

## ŽYWIA : ŽIVA

The last being analysed is a goddess who was probably worshipped by the western Slavs, especially in the Elbe basin. Not much is known about her specific form and function, but it is assumed that she is related to the cult of land fertility (Profantová and Profant 2004: 249). Some scholars even doubt the existence of this goddess in the pantheon of Slavic gods (Brückner 1980: 233). In the texts by Sapkowski and Červenák, this goddess does not play a significant role and does not appear as a character. In both book series, however, her role as the goddess of soil fertility is present. In Sapkowski's short story *Kraniec świata* (The End of the World), we get to know her through an entry in a book of ancient wisdom which states that wherever she rises, the earth blooms, gives birth, and flourishes; all living things gravitate towards her, which is why she is called Żywia. She can be seen from May to October and most often in August on Sickle Day (Sapkowski 2012a: 213). In Červenák's novel *Vládca vlkov*, there is a description of a sacrifice to the goddess Živa; it is dominated by a statue of a female figure holding an axe in one hand and a cornucopia in the other. Around the statue there are sacrificial offerings such as cakes, an apple, wheat, and hemp oil to ensure a good harvest (Červenák 2011a: 37–39). As was demonstrated, both authors followed the characteristics of Żywia/Živa as the goddess of the harvest. It is, after all, the only quality that characterizes her. A more detailed description of the goddess was necessarily artistic licence.

## CONCLUSION

The subject of the study were two book series of fantasy literature (*Wiedźmin* by the Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski and *Černokňazník* by the Slovak author Juraj Červenák) in which supernatural beings of Slavic origin occur. The purpose of this article was to determine how these authors treated elements of Slavic mythology as a literary motif and how they modified original folk superstitions in their novels. The method of comparative analysis was used to answer the research question. Five supernatural beings of Slavic origin which appeared in both book series were selected – *rusalka* : *rusalka*, *strzyga* : *striga*, *wampir* : *upír*, *wilkotak* : *wkolak*, and *Żywia* : *Živa*. Ethnographic characteristics for each

creature in Polish and Slovak folk culture were described, and their common and distinguishing features in the two cultures were pointed out. Subsequently, the way in which the selected beings were depicted in the novels by Sapkowski and Červenák was presented. The similarities and differences in comparison with the ethnographic characteristics were pointed out. The techniques of incorporating mythical elements into literature by Bogdan Trocha were consulted.

Based on these comparisons, it was found that only three of the literary characters – the Slovak *rusalka*, the Polish *Żywia*, and the Slovak *Živa* – corresponded to the characteristics of the respective supernatural beings in folklore. In the case of the presentation of the *rusalka* in Červenák's novel, all the attributes coincide with the superstitious notions. The analysis of the representation of the goddess *Żywia/Živa* was limited by the fact that very little information is available about her; however, her characterization as a goddess of fertility has been preserved in the Slovak and Polish books.

In the case of the other beings, there were significant modifications in the literary depiction compared to the original folk concepts. In two cases, the original characteristics served only as an initial deception – an illusion – because in the end they turned out to be different beings. This was the case with Sapkowski's *rusalka* (who was in fact a *bruxa*) and the Slovak *upír* (who turned out to be a *hmlovec*). What is common to both cases is that the authors used only a few known basic traits to create the illusion of a given supernatural being. Further details then helped to reveal their true nature. Another type of adaptation of folk beliefs was their refutation, which appeared in the case of Sapkowski's *strzyga*, *wampir*, and *wilkotak*. The original folk superstitions are present in the books as part of the literary world: i.e. they are believed by the literary characters. Sapkowski, however, refutes these folk beliefs as false, either through a reasonable explanation in a character's replica or by describing the actions of the creature through the narrator. A final group largely departs from folklore depictions, which means that the folk superstition was not the actual source of inspiration in the creation of these literary characters. There are two such cases from Červenák's novels. The first one is the *striga*, which corresponds to the East Slavic creature Baba Yaga. The second one is the literary depiction of the *wilkolak*, which has nothing in common with the original belief legends except for the transformation of a man into a wolf.

Literary modifications of folklore connected to supernatural creatures were contextualized within the scholarship of adaptation techniques of mythical elements into literary plots summarized and presented by Bogdan Trocha (2009). The most common technique was elimination, which occurred in the Polish depictions of *rusalka* and *wilkotak* and the Slovak depiction of *upír* and *wilkolak*. Two types of reinterpretation occurred: a polemic interpretation of the Polish *strzyga*, and a parodic reinterpretation of the Polish *wampir*, *wilkotak* and the Slovak *upír*. Two of the analysed supernatural beings did not refer to folk culture but to another artistic presentation of them, which means that the technique of renarration was used. In case of the Slovak *upír*, the author referred to the artistic image

of a vampire in the popular culture. The depiction of the Slovak *striga* clearly corresponds to the Russian supernatural and folk tale of Baba Yaga. One case of adia-phorisation was observed – the Slovak *vlkolak* was completely demythologised and did not possess any axiological or symbolic qualities.

The comparative analysis also showed that the common cultural framework and similarity of folklore in Polish and Slovak culture does not imply their similarity in literary adaptation. In fact, it cannot be claimed that the literary depiction was the same for any of the supernatural beings. Only the very basic characteristics coincide: the *rusatka/rusalka* is a female demon, the *wampir/upír* drinks human blood, the *wilkotak/vlkolak* is a man who turns into a wolf, and *Žywia/Živa* is the goddess of fertility. The representation of Slavic mythology offered to the readers in the two book series is very different.

It should be noted that this analysis focused on two authors of fantasy literature. The small sample prevents drawing any more general conclusions on Slavic fantasy as a genre. In future studies, investigating a larger sample of literary works from the genre of Slavic fantasy could lead to confirming the outlined patterns of adaptations of Slavic folklore in literature. Another possible focus could be readers' perceptions of Slavic mythology in fantasy literature.

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## SLAVENSKA MITOLOGIJA IZGUBLJENA U FANTASTICI: KNJIŽEVNE PRILAGODBE SLAVENSKIH VJEROVANJA U ROMANIMA ANDRZEJA SAPKOWSKOG I JURAJA ČERVENÁKA

Slavenski mitovi opstaju u svijesti ljudi manje kao stvarno vjerovanje u njihovo postojanje, a više kao nadnaravni element ili književni lik. Odrasli čitatelj u Poljskoj i Slovačkoj, na primjer, susreće slavenska nadnaravna bića u serijalima knjiga fantastične književnosti *Wiedźmin* Andrzeja Sapkowskog i *Černokňažnik* Juraja Červenáka. Međutim, ne može se očekivati da književnost prikazuje praznovjerje i demone kao u legendama

o vjerovanjima. Postavljanje djela Sapkowskog i Červenáka u kontekst etnografski zapisanih vjerovanja rasvjetljava različite aspekte međukulturalnih i intertekstualnih odnosa u književnom djelu. Ovaj članak pokazuje da postoji nekoliko shema književne prilagodbe slavenskih mitova – prilagodba u skladu s narodnim vjerovanjima, poricanje praznovjerja, ugrađivanje narodnog mita u svrhu stvaranja iluzije i korištenje imena demoni, ali dodavanjem osobina iz drugih izvora, posebice iz masovne kulture.

Ključne riječi: slavenska mitologija, Andrzej Sapkowski, Juraj Červenák, fantastična književnost, slavenska fantastika