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## **VILENICA AND VILENJAK: BEARERS OF AN EXTINCT FAIRY CULT<sup>1</sup>**

This article traces a popular pre-Christian fairy cult in Croatia and broader, with *vilenica* and *vilenjak* as its bearers and practitioners. The sources analyzed are historical records, sixteenth-century literary fragments, theological writings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographic data. The author reconstructs and examines the morphology of the cult, its influence on the learned culture (Renaissance literary works), along with the theological endeavours to alter the social reception of an apparently widespread cult and to root it out. The Roman Catholic efforts to reform popular culture as well as the historical phenomenon of witch-hunting and its consequences contributed markedly to the disappearance of the contemporary awareness of *vilenicas* (f) and *vilenjaks* (*vileniks*, *vilovnjaks*) (m) as the central personages of a rich cosmological cult similar to those practised elsewhere in Europe.

Key words: *vilenica*, *vilenjak* (*vilenik*, *vilovnjak*), fairy cult, witch-hunting, popular culture

1. It was in early August of 1660 when captain Ivan Gučetić of Janjina captaincy, the Republic of Dubrovnik, was informed of the presence of *vilenicas* and *streghe* [witches] in his district. Intrigued by the report, he decided to have one of these *vilenicas* summoned. Soon before him stood a young woman, aged between 25 and 30, who was to satisfy the captain's curiosity and puzzlement. But what followed may well be characterized as

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<sup>1</sup> This is an abbreviated version of a chapter entitled "... To je bilo prin, prid trista godišća" ["... That was before, three hundred years ago"] of the book *Vilenica i vilenjak. Sudbina jednog prekršćanskog kulta u doba progona vještica* [The Vilenica and Vilenjak. The Destiny of a pre-Christian Cult in the Period of Witch Persecution] (2002), in which the historical context of witch-hunting, along with the conversion of the pre-Christian beliefs in fairies and their relations with humans towards a theologically constructed international stereotype is analyzed more thoroughly. It also discusses the repercussions this process had for the expert ethnological evaluation of the corpus of the ethnographic material on the popular belief in witches, collected at the end of the 19th and in the course of the 20th century.

a conversation rather than an interrogation, let alone duress. "Are you a *vilenica*?" She replied with a whiff of confidence: "Sir, I most certainly am." The captain enquired more as to the exact actions of the *vilenicas*. "I can heal". Asked about the person who had taught her the knowledge, her reply was: "Tetka Vila" [Aunt Fairy].<sup>2</sup>

The first sign that the situation could become serious was the following question which revealed that, even if the captain was not completely aware of the world of *vilenicas*, he had some existing knowledge of contemporary international concepts of wizardry: "In what shape has this Aunt Fairy appeared before you?" The captain's insistence on the form of this supernatural being proved to be part of the routine in a century in which the theologically and legally accepted belief in the existence of certain persons communicating with non-human beings or demons prevailed. The question was formulated in such a manner as to stimulate a response commonly acknowledged in the European cultural tradition of the time in that the demon or Satan appears before his worshippers in diverse forms, most often assuming those of animals (mainly goat or dog, cat, ram, fox, badger), or even in human shape with a prominent feature, as was more common in northern Croatia. Thus, the answers followed the pattern frequently witnessed in the fantastic confessions of the accused witches.

"Robed in white, in the shape of a nun and she taught me how to heal."

"How many times has this Aunt Fairy appeared before you?"

"Whenever I pleased."

"What signs did you and this Aunt Fairy use when you wished to communicate?"

"She told me that whenever I wished her to appear I was to pick the root of a herb called *oman* or *popuna* [inula or ninum], and another herb called *lisičji rep* [foxtail]...I can tell a person whom a witch has harmed and whether or not he will be cured."

"How is it in your power to know?"

"By means of a herb called *oman*: if a person harmed by the witch can smell the herb, no harm will come upon him, and if he can't, he will die."

"Have you practised this on anyone?"

"Yes, Sir, on many a person."

"Do you know which women in our captaincy are witches?"

"I know of many" (Vojnović 1895:64-65).

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<sup>2</sup> As the source of this text related to the first witch-trial in the Republic of Dubrovnik (a letter of the Dubrovnik senator Pavle Gradić, dated November 15, 1660, and addressed to his brother Stjepan, abbot in Rome) was penned in Italian, with some minor exceptions cited in Croatian, leads us to believe that Pavao Gradić was well-acquainted with the interrogation report, for otherwise he could not have inserted the accused's Croatian testimony in the first person into the Italian text.

From the evidence gathered, Gučetić considered it necessary not only to continue the investigation but also extend it. It marked the beginning of one of the two known Dubrovnik trials for witchcraft in a sense provided by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century demonological literature.<sup>3</sup> Having learnt of the existence of witches in his captaincy, Gučetić enquired about their identity. *Vilenica* denounced nine women, all of whom were soon summoned to appear before the captain.

2. The conversation between *vilenica* and captain Gučetić seemed to have taken a somewhat unexpected course. Suspected of witchcraft, *vilenica* was apprehended and interrogated so that her identity and actions be established, and whether or not she represented a possible threat to the local community and wider. The sickness of people, animals, accidents, crop failure were commonly believed to be the doing of witches. But the course of the interrogation turned to *vilenica's* advantage; she claimed that she was the one who, through her practice, combatted the witches' evil actions. In doing so, she was able to detect the evil spells, determine the chances of recovery, and restore health by using particular herbs. She acquired the knowledge from Aunt Fairy, who, robed in nun's white, appeared before *vilenica* whenever she pleased. I shall refer to this fragmentary but most illustrative testimony repeatedly in the course of this article.

Having denounced nine women whom she suspected of witchcraft, no further record of *vilenica* can be traced. This leaves us to speculate on whether the captain simply decided to accept *vilenica's* explanation according to which she and her practice were of benefit to the community and a threat to the witches. Considering that a man of his stature may have been furnished with some general notions of magic and witchcraft, it is likely that he did not have a clear picture of the theological aspects of the problem by which communication with supernatural beings alone bore negative connotations. True, *vilenica's* benevolent appearance in court, her admission and self-determination, as well as denunciation of nine witches in the captaincy could have contributed to the authority's lack of further interest in her case.

3. It may appear curious how a rumour of the *vilenicas'* presence in the captaincy was considered an incident worthy of the authority's attention, because records prove that the personage of *vilenica* was part of the common cultural tradition in the then Dalmatia, recognized by learned culture as well, and efficaciously present in small rural communities. The

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<sup>3</sup> There is direct evidence on only one more case from the mid-16th century when a city prostitute was accused of deafening a young nobleman with the magic spells. But this case belongs to a completely different category of processes, those of suspected magical malfeasance, and not participation in the international witch conspiracy against Christianity under the guidance of Satan (cf. Bayer 1953: 523 and further).

existence of the local *vilenicas*, among other problems, was on the agenda of a series of visitations to the islands of Brač, Hvar, and Vis in the 17th century. Despite some minor chronological discrepancies, the records of these official visits<sup>4</sup> shed light on the time and space frame of the earlier mentioned case, adding certain elements missing from the above trial account.

Several facts arise from these statements. First, traditional belief in magic and special ability of certain persons to harm others by using it was widely distributed in small-scale island communities. Although we learn about it from the visitorial records, that is, the officials' theological understanding of witchcraft, it is evident that a conversion of the traditional patterns into those of the learned culture is taking place here. The witches that the visitor enquired about, those that given the demon's power fly through the air on the Sabbath and worship the Satan, feast on most disgusting food and drink and indulge in orgies, were not the community's cause for concern. This is how Šimun Cerineo-Cerinić, priest of the Nerežišće parish on the island of Brač, described the pertaining occurrences to the visiting bishop, Ivan Andreis, in 1668:

I do not know if there are any witches and warlocks. Certainly not in public. But there is a witchcraft of some sort. They tie knots through some evil spells cast to forward marriage or obstruct it. Sport or spite is their motive. They do not apprehend that by collaborating with the devil they bring evil and thus harm their fellow men. In addition, they exert disruptive influence on the fruits of the sacrament, the latter being of paramount importance for the survival of mankind (Jutronić 1969:180).

Although his interpretation stresses the absence of serious motivation behind the magical practices, the priest seems disposed towards their real effects. Underlying his condemnation, however, is the theological doctrine, on the basis of which a broad variety of "magical powers" and "most foolish customs" are being qualified as a result of the "dangerous communion of men and demons" (St. Augustin), or as in a more sophisticated scholastic interpretation, the very commitment of certain actions implied a silent pact with the devil (Thomas Aquinas).<sup>5</sup> Regardless of his attitude, the forthcoming visitations of 1673 and 1678 witnessed

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<sup>4</sup> In a somewhat inaccurately edited short paper (Jutronić 1969), void of thorough presentation of the documents, the author is inconsistent in citing the exact statements contained in the visitations, the records of which he had personally examined at the Archives of the Bishopric of Hvar, Brač, and Vis, citing them interchangeably in the first person without the quotation marks or paraphrasing them in the third person. In sum, we do not have an insight into the complete documents.

<sup>5</sup> While Augustine condemned the practice of wearing amulets, the use of medications "condemned by the medical science", or a practice of stepping on one's threshold whenever passing by the house, or returning to bed if caught sneezing while putting on one's shoes in the morning, Thomas resorted to a theological construction according to which the pact with the devil may be two-fold: explicit (invoking demons) or unspoken (practising forbidden actions) (Bayer, 1953:51-52, 75-76).

more complaints from the parishes across the island — Pučišća, Nerežišća, Donji Humac — concerning many young couples and their fear or suffering from the maleficent power of "tied knots", feeling inhibited to consume the sacrament of matrimony. In 1678 the priest of the Nerežišća parish replied that

the married couple is cursed. He is thus forced to perform the ceremony during night. The bride and bridegroom, however, have little regard for the holy mass and blessings afterwards (Jutronić 1969:180).

And yet the priests were completely ignorant about the witches (1673, Pučišća):

Of witches and warlocks I could say no more but that all young couples complain about being under the spell of tied knots (Jutronić 1969:180).

Evidence on visitations brings to light next important fact: the presence of trustworthy individuals in the rural communities to whom people turn for help. They are primarily skilled in healing, but as the illness is often believed to be caused by magic of some sort, their practice thus included the techniques of countermagic as well. These exceptional abilities mark them out in the community. The source of their knowledge further contributes to their importance. They are referred to as *vilenicas*. On May 19, 1634 Jakov Foretić, chaplain of Komiža, island of Vis, accused before the visitor, vicar Ivan Ivanišević, two women, Lukrecija, wife of Mihovil Mihatović, and Margarita, daughter of Marko Brizgavac, of healing the sick with herbs, claiming that they had acquired this knowledge from the fairies with whom they socialized. The chaplain was certain that the people believed them, for they were often called for and well rewarded (the only tribute cited was that in clothes), having learnt it all from no other than his sister who had also sought help from a *vilenica*. Regrettably, the records of the interrogation of the suspected two *vilenicas* have not been preserved, but there is evidence of the final decision: only Margarita Brizgavac was forbidden from engaging in activities of the kind (Jutronić 1969:181).

Another seemingly surprising fact drawing our attention (which, due to the lack of evidence, should be taken with reserve) is that the parish priests and vicars either didn't take any measures regarding the chronically bewitched state of the newly-weds and suspicious contacts between *vilenicas* and *vilas* (fairies), or assuming that some measures had been taken, the reaction was far from the serious official consequences witnessed in similar cases elsewhere in Europe, as evidenced in the above case in which vicar Ivanišević banned only one *vilenica* from further practice. During his visitation of Vrisnik, island of Hvar, Bishop Zorzi (1635-1644) also allowed a woman to resume her healing practice (Jutronić 1969:181).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Curiously, during a visitation of Bishop Cedulin to Jelsa, Hvar, fifty years earlier, in 1594, Simoneta Zorančić was denounced as witch because she healed with herbs. Jutronić

The priest Šimun Cerineo-Cerinić, well-aware of the healing practice of a certain Katarina Maričević carried out "in a manner rightly deemed to be of the devil himself", repeatedly warned her to abandon this practice. As the woman ignored all his warnings, the priest was forced to resort to the ultimate measure at his disposal: he refused to give her the sacraments. However drastic this measure might have seemed, it had little effect upon Katarina; all was in vain and the priest was helpless. A similar fate befell Katarina Kubretić (or Čubretić). Priest Ivan Vuzio punished her by refusing to give her one of the sacraments (confession) because she had sought help from a certain *vilenica* of Pitve, island of Hvar. Whether he learnt of the sin during her confession or from some other source remains obscure, but not for a moment did Vuzio doubt the sinfulness of her act (the woman was suffering from skin ulcers and a painful knee), considering it an utter negation of the Church authority and teaching, and denied her absolution. Convinced that she had not broken any religious laws and that she was unjustly punished, on October 20, 1678 Katarina appeared before the Bishop of Hvar, Jerolim Priuli, most likely on a complaint matter (Jutronić 1969:182).

The reason why *vilenicas* were not subjected to a greater deal of pressure, though their source of powers reflected the ancient pagan sacral dimension, may well lie in the empirical nature of their activity. A number of witnesses testifying in the case against Katarina of Pitve (a witness-client claimed the former's name was *Zečevica*) described *vilenica* as a traditional village "medicine man". In treating ulcers, stiff legs, faintness, stomach disorder, she prescribed diverse concoctions and powders, the use of which varied. Sometimes it was essential that the healing took place in the presence of fire (a particular sort of wood — *figler*). Other remedies such as figs, almonds, eggs, and wine were also used, spiced with the inevitable set of magical instructions: the use of blessed water, the powder should touch an infant's mouth prior use... Yet some elements point to the significance of empiricism. Though familiar with the Pythian ways (she addresses some for having arrived "late but not too late", or that "anything can be the cause of sickness with a sick person"), *vilenica* answered negatively when asked to identify the illness only on the basis of a sick person's belt brought before her. According to her statement, she was unable to determine the disorder or evil spells on the basis of someone's clothes, as she needed more details on the nature of the disease in order to be able to help. Another account testifies of *vilenica's* detailed enquiry about the symptoms of a third person, but, poorly informed, the latter's kin were to go back home and return armed with more details.

It is difficult to ascertain as to how efficient *vilenica's* herbal remedies actually were. No doubt this kind of help must have been considered better than nothing in seventeenth-century rural island

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fails to detail the conditions which led to her denunciation, nor the future of the said woman.

communities. Pronounced and impressive, the cosmology of the fairy world and the personage of *vilenica* as its witness must have marked considerably not only the everyday life of common people, but the learned culture as well. This fact will lead us back to the true reason behind the authority's concern about the existence of *vilenicas* in Janjina in the middle of 1660 and the first known Dubrovnik witch-trial.

4. The presence of Diana, Flora, Venus, Ariadne, the nymphs and other mythological characters of the ancient heritage of Rome and Greece in the Croatian literature of the Renaissance reveals the influence of classical and contemporary Italian models, while in the appearance of *vila*, "in the Croatian manner commonly depicted as remarkably beautiful", in the first Croatian novel *Planine* (written in 1536) by Petar Zoranić (born 1508, died between 1543 and 1569) we don't have to look upon such remote influences. Namely, Zoranić, alike the earlier mentioned *vilenica* of Janjina, had been instructed by a fairy. She scolds him for wasting his talent on woeful romances instead of setting his mind on the glorification of his country. Thanks to this revealing advice, Zoranić embarks "under the pretence of seeking a remedy for my love woes" (Zoranić 1988:62-63), and finds *vilenica* Dejanira who is to cure him from the sufferings.

At this point our attention should be drawn to the interaction between two cultural levels, popular and learned culture, subordinate and dominant strata, written and oral, anonymous and authorial literature within the Croatian framework. Rightly discerned, the theory of the sinking cultural heritage does need some corrections: the transfer of cultural contents and influences never was and is not primarily taking place in an "up-down" direction. Conversely, a dominant culture of pre-industrial Europe, like that of our own day, was open to influence, often adopting elements of popular traditions, but as in the case when an subordinated culture absorbs the achievements of a learned one, these cultural elements always undergo a change and are never passively adopted, whether they are part of the so-called material or religious culture. They adapt to all the other elements already integrated in a certain cultural environment, and thus modified satisfy the specific psycho-social needs of their recipients.

Functional assimilation of this kind can equally be recognized in *vilenica's* Aunt Fairy, who appears "robed in white in the shape of a nun", and in Zoranić's *vilenica* Dejanira, whom the author uses as the frame for the mythological etymologization<sup>7</sup> of the name of mount Dinara, so that, following the fairy's advice and the Greek models, he was to glorify his native land.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Greek myth, Deianeira was daughter of Aeneas, king of Calidones, and second wife of the legendary hero Heracles (Zamarovsky 1985:62).

The appearance of Aunt Fairy in a nun's image, if surprising, may be explained by the nature of the popular sacral ideation. The latter exhibits no a priori assumptions on the basis of which certain sacral elements are to be accepted or rejected in favour of others. Conscious criteria for discrimination of the orthodoxy of certain beliefs or ideas found in the religiousness of the learned culture are here replaced by unconscious criteria of association based on an inner or, more precisely, structural affinity. Owing to this free and unattached attitude towards external and artificial relations, and contrarily, owing to the religious experience of the world in the coordinates of absolute values, such belief conglomerates should come as no surprise. The amalgam of the two cultural levels within them exhibits a pattern otherwise considered impossible.

The term *monaca* [nun] certainly does not stem from the inventory of the traditional culture. Its origin should to be traced in the conditions which enabled the penetration of the Christian context into the popular belief patterns, priority being given to the institution with the most likely predispositions. In 1225, only eighteen years after the establishment of the order, the first Dominican monastery in the Croatian lands was founded in Dubrovnik. In 1437, another monastery was founded in Gruž, Dubrovnik's vicinity, in 1622 in Župa Dubrovačka, six years later in Broce near Ston (Šanjek 1966:715). In 1399 Dubrovnik also witnessed the foundation of the Monastery of St. Mary of Angel, sheltering contemplative Dominican nuns. Robed in white, the Dominican friars and nuns have played a significant role in the public life of Dubrovnik and Dalmatia over the centuries, their simple style of dress having acquired them a popular term *bijeli fratri* [white friars] or *bijele sestre* [white sisters] (Krašić 1984:521-522).

*Bijela* [white] is, on the other hand, one of the two qualities most commonly attributed to the fairies, as in a recent narration from Pelješac:

Fairies are pretty girls in white...,

and

Fairies have long fair hair down to their feet, and long white dresses (Pederin 1976:278-279).

Another epithet depicting the fairy is *posestrima* [a besistered person] (see Skok 1973, under *sestra*). Until recently, the residues of water taboos could still be found on the Pelješac Peninsula. Before touching the water, the fairies were to be besistered three times with the following formula:

Praise the Lord, green woodlands, and the besistered fairies dwelling in you, to bestow health upon me and my love-to-be (Pederin 1976:280).

Reverence for and the divine authority of the fairy blend in the vision of *vilenica* of Janjina, brought before us in a fragmentary record of a seventeenth-century witch-trial, with a dimension of holiness of a Christian religious order. The basic structural predispositions for this subconscious

creativity lie in the very personality traits of the fairy and the (Dominican?) nun. Both of them project a figure distinguished by the notions of chastity, mystery, marginality, and benignancy; the white besistered fairy (or aunt as stated by our *vilenica*) blends in the popular religious syncretism with the sister-nun in the white habit. To prove that the traditional belief system has no regard for the artificial borders between the two imaginary worlds — the Christian and the pagan — — existent only on the level of the learned culture, is an illustration and account of a teller from Mačkovac near Tuzla, who compared the fairy with fresco paintings in the church building.<sup>8</sup> The amalgamation takes place in accordance with the principle of structural affinity.

5. This will help us explain why *vilenica* perceives Aunt Fairy in such a particular form. But if we go a step further and eliminate for a moment the distance of our own cultural superiority or the prism of scholarship which is likely to classify it as popular imagination, the meaning and nature of her statement require our deeper consideration. It cannot be characterized as a spontaneous ethnographic narrative about what the teller believes or knows to have been believed in the past. Her story is genuine because she tells of her own experience and not someone else's. Before the local authority *vilenica* unequivocally states her case: I owe all my knowledge to Aunt Fairy, I see her whenever I please, and I know how to call her. Records of seventeenth-century visitations of the islands of Hvar, Brač, and Vis further contribute to the authenticity of *vilenica*'s statement, placing it in the context of very colourful tradition. Around 1634, while rubbing with oil Mato Bogda's daughter, Margarita Brizgavac of Komiža spoke how she "kept company with fairies, feasted on myriad flavours with them and how the fairies helped her know the matters in the world" (Jutronić 1969:181). Thus the relationship between *vilenica* of Janjina and Aunt Fairy is not to be considered an isolated case of individual inventiveness. In addition, *vilenica* of Janjina was not just another herbwoman or a sorceress similar to some northern Croatian women accused of divination, magical use of herbs, etc., although these skills were a part of her competence as well.<sup>9</sup> She is distinguished by her name which clearly demonstrates the character of her personality and the origin of her learning, and a specific belief pattern of which she is an embodiment. It could be regarded as a well-shaped archaic religious

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<sup>8</sup> *Upitnica* 1967, vol. IV, theme no. 142: "Vještice, vile, suđenice" (all the data used in this article has been provided by the same theme), inv. no. 536. The same mechanism was at work in the widespread popular belief in the ambivalent nature of the priests, that is, their ability to attract hailstorm.

<sup>9</sup> *Vilenica* Zečevica of Pitva told Margarita Brešković, whose right leg hurt, "that her illness was of the kind caused by the warlocks", and that "close to Margarita's house lives a sorceress who, having cast evil spells, expelled them out into the street", on which the wretched woman stepped. The wife of Jure Barhanović was given the same diagnosis (Jutronić 1969:182-183).

system, the fragments of which we are able to trace in the sporadic evidence created primarily as a consequence of a (manufactured) clash of two traditions.

6. A comparison with analogous data from elsewhere in Europe (cf. Ginzburg 1992:89-110; Henningsen 1993), shows that the cult maintained by the Dalmatian *vilenicas*<sup>10</sup> fits into the European context: it is a cult of female beings of superhuman characteristics, benefactors of knowledge and prosperity, with whom one is able to have close or even sexual relations (in the case of male favourites);<sup>11</sup> they are of ambivalent nature when offended, but are always willing to make up; they have certain animal features which do not affect their beauty, and they gather in pursuit

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<sup>10</sup> The reason I here refer to "Dalmatian *vilenicas*" is a unique historical confirmation of their existence, some of whom have even been identified by their name as contrasted with ethnographic data, although it is not a specificity of Dalmatia. Sporadic and fragmentary ethnographic evidence casts light on the practice of such people (outside Croatia) to the modern time, e.g., a record from Koruška describes a well-known dwelling of the "white ladies" (fairies) near Podenski Grad, named "Tabor". "There also dwelled not so long ago *vileniks* (*planetarji*) and *vilenicas*, divining and foretelling the people's future." To contribute to the authenticity of the record, the author adds: "My mother too (God forbid!) had her fortune told by one of such *vilenik* when she was a young girl" (Mayer 1847:11). Also in Bosnia (Pljeva) there were *vilenicas* to whom common details were attributed: "An old woman has it that, when she was a little girl, the fairies carried her away and fed her with herb bread. They called the old woman *vilenica*" (Pečo 1925:378).

<sup>11</sup> Here I should point to the fact that the folk narratives also contain the personage of *vilenjak* (*vilovnjak*, *vilenik*) not in the sense of the fairy's male counterpart, but a human male connected to fairy in one way or another. At times this relationship resembles that of *vilenica*, but often he is but a *miljenac vila* [the fairies' favourite] whom they help, seduce, have children with, etc. In the surroundings of Karlovac, however, *vilenjaks* are the "favourites of the mountain fairies who bestow upon them some of their powers so as to be of comfort to the wretched folk"; during their not-less-than-a-year service with the fairies, the latter "teach them how to cure various illnesses". But the relationship does not end here, for "even after they part, they must call on the fairies in their remote dwellings, and tell them how people live, if they are happy or not, etc." (Lorković 1863:242).

In Srednja Gora, near Udbina, the fairies' favourites are "those particularly pious, whom the fairies approach and gather with and teach the art of healing" (*Upitnica*, inv. no. 635). *Vilenjaks* may be found in the same role outside Croatia, in Serbia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, though the name has not always been preserved e.g., in the vicinity of Vrnjačka Banja: "Men become the fairies' favourites and only the virgins, whom they seduce, he is a hero as well" (*Upitnica* inv. no. 2184); near Livno: "There are men whom the fairies fancy, but they do not bear a special name, they are heroes who can heal" (*Upitnica* inv. no. 539). Kukuljević rightly asserts that individuals, who, on account of their special qualities, are chosen and taught by the fairies, can be of either sex — male or female (Kukuljević-Sakcinski 1851:87).

In view of the historically documented evidence, emphasis is being placed on *vilenicas*, although for the semantic reconstruction of their statements one may also use the materials concerned with their male-counterparts (*vilenjaks/vilovnjaks/vileniks*) who heal, divine, etc., for the belief system is the same, as I shall refer to later in the article.

of leisure and pleasure.<sup>12</sup> A closer insight into the folk legacy of the fairies provides the following distinction valuable for the understanding of the subject matter. The bulk of this legacy involves oral literary narration in the full sense of the word: mythological beliefs in fairies, their character, dwellings, activities. A distinctive and relatively homogenous fairy cosmology as this gave way to a fruitful creative impulse in the oral (and written) literary tradition — lyric and epic poetry, fantastic narratives. This world materializes in the collective consciousness of the community through numerous individual accounts of brief encounters, visions, and events with fairies or pertaining to them, often unconsciously modelled after common and widespread typological patterns.<sup>13</sup> On this level the world of fairies may rightly be understood as a function of popular imagination, folklore, and mythology.

On another level, closely intertwined with the former, we find specific individuals, concrete persons of either sex, fairies' favourites and intermediaries between the human and the fairy world. Their testimonies about the fairies, together with other statements on the nature of this relationship contribute to the privileged position of these individuals in their community. The character of this special and, most of all, lasting relationship singles them out as figures of exceptional qualities which the community recognizes as the gifts of the divine beings; they cure, ward off evil spells, and divine. The existence of *vilenicas* as those who attain divine experience more profoundly than other members of the community, who in a way embody the divine for they live it abundantly, or, rather, they are lived by the religious form that had chosen them (as Eliade noted on *shamans*) is documented as a vital element of seventeenth-century Dalmatian popular culture. Similar to the Italian adherents of Horiente's "society" (Ginzburg 1992:92) or the Sicilian "ladies from outside" (Henningsen 1993), *vilenicas*, as intermediaries between the human and the fairy world, apply the conferred knowledge and abilities to heal the sick, combat evil spells, spreading thus and confirming the common religious idea through live oral tradition. The divine, that is, the heavenly origin of the healing powers of their bearers can be traced among numerous archaic populations (Eliade 1985:111).

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<sup>12</sup> For a comprehensive survey of the variety of functions of the fairy motive in the culture and belief among the Croats based on the oral-literary narratives and texts, see: Botica 1990:29-40. For a synthesis of the fairy materials in the Balkans by the mid-20th century, see: Đorđević 1989. For an Indo-European comparative analysis, compare Nodilo 1981.

<sup>13</sup> One of the kind, a widespread variety of which may be found in the Croatian folklore, for example, is the spouse-fairy motive, as she abandons her mortal husband after bearing him a child. On the basis of similar Maori, Hawaiian, Tahitian and other examples, in which the husband, in quest of his spouse-fairy, experiences unexpected situations, Eliade places the spouse-fairy motive in the context of the myths underlying an initiation scenario (ascending to Heaven, descending into the Underworld, et.) (Eliade 1985:80).

Therefore, *vilenica* is an intermediary. This leads to the question of the nature of her communication with the world of fairies. There are three plausible explanations: the women either lie, they are insane, or speak the truth. As the given frame of this research has no aim to provide resolute answers, I shall opt for a moderate approach. Unwilling to side with the historiography which fails to address the significant issues, but qualifies such statements as "female hysteria" or "peasant superstition", more recent scientific research tends to analyze them within the time and space frame of the persons themselves, highlighting the belief system in which different worlds truly coexist side by side. Popular religious culture makes no definite incisions between the world we imagine and the one we live, the state of visions and reality, wakefulness and dreams.

But will the scarce evidence gleaned from the statement of Margarita Brizgavac on her feasting of the myriad flavours with the fairies, or the testimony of Janjina's *vilenica* and her frequent encounters with Aunt Fairy suffice to conclude that their experiences took place simply because of their capacity to, whenever they pleased, live most intensely the abundance of their colourful oral tradition (similar to this is an interpretation of a markedly female phenomenon of a Sicilian fairy cult according to which it was a "daydream religion that allowed poor people to experience in dreams and visions all the splendours denied them in real life" (Henningsen 1993:200))?<sup>14</sup> Or do the fragmentary indications suffice for a deeper insight into the episodes we have discovered in the documents and folklore narratives? Unable to ascertain the exact nature of the described experiences, we shall best tend towards an explanation by which in the case of *vilenicas* and *vilenjaks*, along with scores of similar European examples and testimonies about women related to the "benevolent" nocturnal deities, we witness the cult of an ecstatic nature (cf. Ginzburg 1992:100).

Interestingly, Zoranić's Dejanira describes her *vilenica*-to-be training as an ecstatic initiation:

Hercules had mercy upon this tearful plea; one day at noon in a dream he with Apollo came from the heavens, for the memory of true love I cherished, he prayed to Apollo to confer upon me this divine skill. Then Apollo, to please him, for he had not yet been bestowed, taught me to distinguish all kinds of plants and herbs, roots and flowers, waters, juices and rocks and when they should be picked, rooted up, dried and parched (Zoranić 1988:198).

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<sup>14</sup> Such a conclusion neither lessens the wondrous aspect of the phenomenon, nor does it provide the answers to all of the questions. It was on the basis of these research results, which he had submitted before the international symposium in Stockholm in 1984, that on the following 1988 conference in Budapest Gustav Henningsen expressed his doubts about rationalistic interpretations, even if they were his own (Henningsen 1991/92:302).

As we see, it took place in a dream and at high noon. Apollo's presence and his role here comes as no surprise; this patron of Pythia, master of visions and prophecy, is referred to by some other legendary Greeks who could be compared with *shamans* (Abaris, Aristaeus, mythology pertaining to Orpheus) (Eliade 1985:287).<sup>15</sup> Has Zoranić here, wrapped in the Renaissance terminology, told us something about *vilenicas* which, in his own day and earlier, was considered understandable by itself and what we have but failed to observe (and we shall later see why)? And do the fragmentary contemporary ethnographic narratives of the fairies offer memory of some sorts of ecstatic/initiation experiences of the practitioners of a once widespread form of popular religiousness?

7. The only information *vilenica* of Janjina provided us with is that she has her very special Aunt Fairy. But the source shed no light on the background of the relationship. Three hundred years later, the missing link is provided by a recent narrative not far from Janjina, in Blato, island of Korčula, which proves that none of the elements of *vilenica's* impressive credo nor her familiarization with the fairies can here be characterized as an original invention. Conversely, what we have here is a display of consistent patterning. The additional significance of this piece of ethnographic information is that even when there is no trace of the mythical whole and the belief in fairies in the narrator's mind, a fragment yet remains, cloaked in a retold true event. A following ethnographic account on the fairies has been recorded:

There is no definite idea as to their characteristics or activities. That is why the narrator's exact words used to describe the fairies are being quoted: a woman disappeared from the village while an infant. She returned after many a time and said that she had been with the "aunts", one of whom was a "godmother" — the said "godmother" was a distant relative of Benković-Vila (a family by the name of Benković, nick name "Vile", still lives in Babino Polje, not in Blato); that is why this family was also nicknamed "Vile".<sup>16</sup>

Here we have a rather frequent motive of child abduction most likely carried out by the fairies, here tabooed as "aunts".<sup>17</sup> The accounts, however,

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<sup>15</sup> Eliade is explicit in his referring to him as a protector of ecstasies (Eliade 1991:232). In some of his traits Apollo completely resembles the folk narratives of the fairies: "He protected people in war and danger, cured their illnesses..., praised and rewarded the good and punished the evil" (Zamarovsky 1985:31).

<sup>16</sup> *Upitnica* inv. no. 1246.

<sup>17</sup> In support of the fact that this ethnographic data, as well as *vilenica's* of Janjina account, follow a centuries-old articulate belief pattern is the evidence provided by Kosmas, a Czech chronicler from the turn of the 11th century, which points to a belief among the Czechs in a being named *Tetka* [Aunt], who has taught the Czech people to call and worship the mountain and woodland fairies: "[Tetka] haec stulto et insipienti populo Oreadas, Driadas, Amadriadas adorare et colere et omnem superstitionam sectam ac sacrilegos ritus instituit et docuit" (Niederle 1924:29).

often fail to cite or recognize the true purpose of these abductions, as in the aforementioned case, being simply part of the general characterization of the fairies. They could fit the following description:

Sometimes they would carry away a child to nurse and care for, later live with or recover him fair and well-nourished, but never was he to tell of his life with the fairies or where he had been.<sup>18</sup>

Or a brief detail:

They carried a young man away and he became a *vilovnjak*.<sup>19</sup>

In order to account for the purpose of this temporary abduction, we shall refer to an event recorded in Rodaljice, the neighbourhood of Benkovac, where the fairies also performed their activities:

The rumour has it that the fairies had taken away a child from a woman and kept it with them several months. It was then that the little girl came back on her own and she could cast spells at an age of no more than six. It is rumoured that she talks of nothing but fairies.<sup>20</sup>

After her absence and life with the fairies, the latter seemed to have been the girl's only topic of conversation — as exactly was the case with the local *vilenicas*, Margarita and Lukrecija, of whom Jakov Foretić, chaplain of Komiža, complained during the visitation of the vicar Ivan Ivanišević on May 19, 1634; and the people believed the stories these two women told, Foretić reported. An act of irrational abduction begins to make sense. The child chosen and carried away by the fairies experiences an apparent transformation during the absence from the community. He/she is being initiated into a mystical skill by beings who — this is a commonplace of the folk legacy of the fairies — have the ability to heal and to divine, possessing extraordinary power. Essentially benevolent, they bless people with knowledge, happiness, and prosperity through specially chosen intermediaries. With the accomplishment of training, the isolated candidate is ready to return to his village, manifesting typical abilities of an initiate.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kali on the island of Ugljan, *Upitnica* inv. no. 901.

<sup>19</sup> Čučerje near Zagreb, *Upitnica*, inv. no. 1366.

<sup>20</sup> Rodaljice near Benkovac, *Upitnica* inv. no. 883.

<sup>21</sup> Exclusively for the purpose of a better and more insightful perspective, without any ambition to go into in-depth comparison (a task exceeding the thematic frame of this research), in some of the following notes we shall draw certain parallels with the shamanistic phenomenology. This, however, does not suggest a likely shamanistic character of these phenomena in the strict sense of the word.

In Sumatra the one in the Nijas tribe, destined to the vocation of a prophet-priest, disappears suddenly, being taken away by the spirits (the young man is probably taken up to heaven); he returns to his village in three or four days. If he fails to show up in this time, a search is organized to find him; he is usually found on a top of some tree, talking with the spirits. The adolescent seems deranged, and in order to restore his health sacrifice must be made. The initiation also includes a pilgrimage to the graveyards, a spring, and a mountain (Eliade 1985:122).

The same pattern can be traced in a number of other narrations. In Stajnica, vicinity of Brinje, the recount referring to fairies states that

they would abduct an infant. And take it with them to the mountain. Later he was to become a witch doctor, had magical skills, that is, he could divine.<sup>22</sup>

Although most of the examples do not state explicitly the name attributed to such a chosen person, it is evident that we are dealing with *vilenicas*- and *vilenjaks*-to-be. In Donji Hrašćan near Čakovec the fairies' favourites were

*vilenjaks*. They were carried away by the fairies who made them good and clever.<sup>23</sup>

In Aržano near Imotski there also exist

*vilenjaks*. You become a *vilenjak* by disappearing for a number of days, particularly a child.<sup>24</sup>

Apart from children, the fairies carry away adults as well, as in Novigrad:

They can snatch a man and teach him the skills of divination.<sup>25</sup>

Although the oral tradition favours the fairies' relationship with young men, when the transfer of sacral abilities is concerned, however, both genders seem to be equally recruited:

They choose a person by taking him away with them for a few days so as to teach him to cure various illnesses, and uncover the secrets known only to them. They usually take a handsome young man or a beautiful girl.<sup>26</sup>

The tradition in Slakovci near Vinkovci has it that the fairies could make an elderly chance traveller go insane,

or if young, they snatch him and force him to live with them by becoming a *vilenjak*. (...) There are people who are the fairies' favourites, they are chosen, and are marked out for their curative powers and courage.<sup>27</sup>

The former statement exemplifies the fusion of the two levels mentioned earlier in the article. On the one hand, we have the folklore image of fairies who brush away their hair and dance in the morning sun, and a passer-by, who, if young, may qualify for the role of *vilenjak* by featuring as the fairy's lover. On the other hand is the tradition underlying the origin of knowledge and powers of folk doctors, although the very term *vilenjak* is not often attributed to them, for it has transcended from the reality to

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<sup>22</sup> *Upitnica* inv. no. 1742.

<sup>23</sup> *Upitnica* inv. no. 1674.

<sup>24</sup> *Upitnica* inv. no. 1670.

<sup>25</sup> *Upitnica* inv. no. 2077.

<sup>26</sup> Zaton near Obrovac, *Upitnica* inv. no. 968.

<sup>27</sup> *Upitnica* inv. no. 1035.

folklore. As we shall see later on, even when the term denoting the fairies' patronage over the recent magical technicians is not explicitly stated or is suppressed, the trails leading to them can be clear regardless of the practitioner's title — *gatar*, *vračar* [sooth-sayer, witch-doctor], and the like.

In the former mythemes, which explain how and where the local initiate draws his powers from, there are also elements of mythical geography, common in the comparative study of religions, such as a mountain or a tree. The latter, however, can be materialized in the projection of the real, physical setting. In one of the aforementioned examples the candidate becomes a witch doctor and diviner after having spent some time in the fairies' mountain dwellings. The following account describes as to what he actually experienced in this remote place. It also shows that, regardless of the fact that the tellers no longer knew it or simply referred to him as *gatar* or *vračar*, there is no doubt that we are dealing with a *vilenjak*. The records show that in the period after World War II, in the early 1950s, magical and prophetic powers had been attributed to a certain Đuro of Zagora.<sup>28</sup> In Pokrovik the rumour had it that the fairies

did away with him on [mount] Velebit and recovered him, having bestowed power on him.<sup>29</sup> As he divines, he calls: "Fairy Jelena, come and help" (Bošković-Stulli 1952:69).

His popularity spread as far as Ličko Cerje where, in 1955, the researcher recorded the following:

My cattle was dying so I sent my wife to Đuro the witch doctor in Biovičino Selo below Kistanje in Dalmatia. He conspires with the fairies, he is always mentioning fairies, my wife told me so upon her return from him. (...) His incantation goes as follows: "help, fairy of the mountain and the fairy of Velebit." And he mixed some herb roots with salt so that when she arrived home she was to grind a piece of solid rock and mix it altogether and feed the cattle with it on the same days she usually gives it mild salt. And she did so and no more cattle died afterwards. The wife asked him about the price. He refused any

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<sup>28</sup> A certain witch doctor by the name of Đuro appears in two separate collections of Maja Bošković-Stulli, one concerned with the folklore materials from the vicinity of Šibenik and Drniš, and other with the surroundings of Lovinac, in Lika. Given that the first narrative was recorded in Pokrovik, and the second traces him in Biovičino Selo below Kistanje, one may assume that we are dealing with the same person.

<sup>29</sup> Although the dismemberment of bodies and exchange of internal organs seems to be a significant element of initiation of the Australian medicine men, there are also other ways of their initiation: first, an ecstatic experience of ascending to Heaven, including his training by the supernatural beings. Sometimes the initiation consists of a simultaneous dismemberment of the body of the *shaman*-to-be and his ascending to Heaven. We find all these initiation types with the *shamans* of Siberia and central Asia (Eliade 1985:62).

payment, but was willing to accept a token of good will (Bošković-Stulli 1955:128).

Not only do the fairies train a *vilenjak* to help people, but they also assist him in flying through the air as shown in a record from Blato, near Dubrovnik:

A man could jump across Blatina (a big pond below the village after which Blato was named) thrice, for the fairies helped him.<sup>30</sup>

The initiation by fairies, invocations, possession of power, reception of tokens, medicinal herbs — are all elements we have already encountered either with Đuro's seventeenth-century fellow-practitioners *vilenicas* from the island communities, or in the folk narratives of anonymous *vilenjaks*.

Considering that many of the witch doctors are actually *vilenjaks*, it is clear why people say that the *vilinska bolest* [fairy disease], which spread by stepping on *vilinsko kolo* [fairy dance performed in a circle] is to be cured by witch doctors. In Rodaljice near Benkovac

people still believe that a man can be taken ill of the so-called 'fairy disease' if he treads at night where the fairies had danced. Sometimes he can be cured and sometimes not. Witch doctors can cure him with their magical powers.<sup>31</sup>

In Struga near Dvor "the fairies can harm a man, and the 'fairy disease' is cured by the witch doctors."<sup>32</sup> Similar to the Sicilian "ladies from outside", who mediated by negating the baneful influence of *donas*, Croatian *vilenjaks* were also qualified for such delicate performances.<sup>33</sup> The healing

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<sup>30</sup> *Upitnica* inv. no. 1246. According to seventeenth-century writers, as confirmed by folklore, a descent into the land of shadows of the Lapland *shamans* started with an ecstatic journey towards a mountain, as with Altaic peoples: mountain is known as a symbol of the universal axis, being located, understandably, in the "midst of the world". The modern medicine men of Lapland still recall the miracles of their forefathers who could fly through the air, etc. (Eliade 1990:68).

<sup>31</sup> *Upitnica* inv. no. 883. With the conversion to Christianity some of these abilities were transmitted to a new sacral figure — the priest. In Zelengrad, near Obrovac, a person's illness is also known to be attributed to his "having stepped on *vilinsko kolo*". They "cure their illness by calling on witch doctors and the priest so as to drive the evil out with a prayer" (*Upitnica* inv. no. 882). In Medviđa near Benkovac "*vilinska bolest* is cured by going to church where the priest restores health with a prayer" (*Upitnica* inv. no. 881).

<sup>32</sup> *Upitnica* inv. no. 1698.

<sup>33</sup> Several cases in which these women diagnosed the patients as having offended *donas de fuera* one way or another have seen the light: a young man who, while playing the guitar, accidentally pushed several *donas* gathered to listen to his music, experienced a severe cramp attack, another patient with a painful arm learnt that she had accidentally sat on top of a pregnant *dona* and that is why the latter revenged on her, etc. (Henningsen 1993:200). We find similar beliefs in Croatia as in Strošinci near Soljani, for example, where "if you step in the fairies' bowl, they make you punish yourself with hanging" (*Upitnica* inv. no. 796). "The fairies are very strong" in Bijela near Daruvar, "the one whom they strike either suffers from a long illness or dies instantly" (*Upitnica* inv. no. 801).

formula of more recent witch doctors of Pavučnjak near Jastrebarsko went as follows:

Come little fairies, my sisters, mountain fairies, deliver health, for if she had offended you, she didn't know nor intent to, she didn't even behold you when she hurt you, so gather, restore her health. You are the fairies of the mountain, you may what you desire, of benefit rather than of harm, and this time, too, you shall cure this ailing person.<sup>34</sup>

Far from being considered the result of folklore imagination, the psycho-social profile occasionally attributed to *vilenjaks* exhibits the commonly acknowledged manifestations of mystically disposed individuals in many religions: pensiveness, seclusion, absentmindedness, prophetic dreams, etc. Thus Kričko Mile of Drniš is known to

have communicated with the fairy. Later he left his wife and came to Drniš. He knew lots of things, he could divine, and foresee events in the world. He has foreseen this war in which brothers would slaughter each other in the greatest massacre here above Drniš, in Petrovo polje. He absolutely couldn't wait for it and he hanged himself just before the war (Bošković-Stulli 1952:69).<sup>35</sup>

Note that the clairvoyance element was also present in the statement of *vilenica* Margarita Brizgavac in that "the fairies helped her know the matters in the world". In Ivanić Grad *vilovnjaks* are pictured as

thin and gaunt men, who, despite their feasting and dancing with the fairies, are always weary, melancholic, and ill-disposed, and whatever they do, in joy or for the sake of joy, they feel it a must (Deželić 1863:217).

Lastly, let us conclude this abridged survey with a relatively obscure piece of evidence located "in the county of Križevac and Croatian Zagorje".<sup>36</sup> According to the popular tradition

*Vila* [Fairy] comes flying from the sky on every old Friday to teach women how to heal and cure people. These women with their hair loosened must go to the grove, where two of them together with *Vila* ascend any old tree, and as they listen to *Vila* they are to eat the yarn so as to help them remember what the *Vila* had taught them; once taught, they become *vilenicas*. These two women up the tree, along with all the other listeners underneath the tree, are joined together with a single yarn they hold in their hands, and while *Vila* speaks, they have to spin the yarn together, or as people say, break it. (The women underneath the tree do not eat the yarn). The one who does none of this, does not hear the *Vila* talking, learns nothing.

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<sup>34</sup> *Upitnica* inv. no. 853.

<sup>35</sup> This concerns World War II.

<sup>36</sup> The information is provided by Kukuljević-Sakcinski 1851:89-90. As it does not relate to some general belief but a well-shaped fragment, Kukuljević's generalization of the locality is questionable, since he fails to cite the exact place.

The reading of this fascinating text absorbs us into the legacy of archaic ecstatic ideology. Unlike the common fairy narratives of the oral literary tradition which single out their beauty, dancing talent or goat/donkey-shaped legs, the text before us contains nothing of the kind, at least not in the foreground, providing the reader with an unexpected insight into the initiation myth. Elements such as Heaven, a being that descends from it in order to initiate the mortals into the privileged knowledge of healing and divination, an ancient tree upon which the initiation ritual takes place are clear indicators of where we stand.<sup>37</sup> Apart from recognizing these universal elements and meanings, the myth as a whole and the symbolism of certain parts remains shrouded in obscurity. Why do the women have to *eat* the yarn and why this particular object? What is the role of the audience underneath the tree and why are they separated from the two initiates? And lastly, another element which distinguishes this fragment from the similar ones: why is this initiation a collective event, and not part of the individual and private experience? A thorough analysis of the comparative data may lead to a better understanding of the matter and some additional answers.

8. Following the indications in the analyzed documentation we encountered a certain semantic compatibility existing between seemingly unrelated data, that is, there exists a common cosmological context within which feature special personages of both genders, *vilenicas* and *vilenjaks*, as the practitioners of a popular-religious healing cult, divination, and magic. Their exposure does not influence the fact that in this cult, through the acceptance of the cognitive system and cosmology, as well as their lasting oral literary elaboration, the wider community participates just as equally, the diversity of the folklore narratives concerning it being the best proof. What distinguishes these individuals is their ability to communicate with the fairies as beings from the yonder world at will. At this point it seems that there is enough evidence for an assertion according to which the map of European distribution of the "Ecstatic journeys in search of predominantly female divinities" (Ginzburg 1992:98-99) should be updated; owing to their articulate identity, *vilenica* and *vilenjak* deserve to

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<sup>37</sup> Tree is a common element in the initiation ideologies of Asian shamanism, similar ideas being found within the initiatory and lunar symbolism of the so-called "primitive" peoples. The ecstatic ascending to Heaven is likely to be and often is ritually substituted by the symbolic climbing of the tree.

In the South American initiation of a *machi*, Araucanian *she-shaman*, the initiation ritual centres on ascending a tree or a peeled trunk called *rewe*. The first day is reserved for preparations, and the next day is the culmination of the ceremony. The old *machi* stand in a circle, beating the drums (some fall into ecstasy) and dance in turns. Finally the old *machi* and the *shaman-to-be* approach the tree-ladder and start to climb, one after the other. The elders follow holding to the ladder; two godmothers stand by her on the platform. They remove her gown of leaves and a bloody hide and hang them on the tree branches. Then they all descend, but the youngest does it last and backwards, following the rhythm (Eliade, 1985:110-111).

be included in the list.<sup>38</sup> Despite such an argument, there still remain a number of open issues to be answered concerning the morphology of the cult. To what extent, for example, are we to assume the beliefs presented in the aforementioned fragment of the *vilenicas*' initiation myth recorded in northern Croatia as existing, but unrecorded with *vilenicas* of Dalmatia? How to account for the group character of the described training? Is the tree around which *vilenicas* and the fairy gather a cosmological constant of the mythic landscape of this fairy cult? Is a whiff of ecstatic experience only a remote reminiscence or...?

9. Assuming that the here presented reconstruction of the cult maintained by *vilenicas* and *vilenjaks* is correct, and that the described phenomenon was so deep-seated in the Croatian pre-Christian traditional culture, a question arises as to how is it that it has remained thus far unrecognized as a remarkably relevant ethnological fact?<sup>39</sup>

In search of a historically-based answer to the above question, I aim to examine the influence of learned culture on the traditional beliefs and the conversion the latter was subjected to. Illustrative of the nature of this

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<sup>38</sup> Henningsen presents more examples from eastern Europe and the Mediterranean circle (Greece, Morocco, Tunisia, Romania) (1993:210-214).

The available data on the ideology, personal, and social activities of *vilenicas* and *vilenjaks* and their distribution being rather fragmentary, definite answers cannot be given yet. But from what has been submitted so far, and having in mind the existence of the tradition of *krsnik*, *mogut*, *ved*, *zduhač* and the likes, in addition to diverse tradition of *vilenicas* and *vilenjaks* (*vilovnjaks*, *vileniks*), a distinction made by Carlo Ginzburg in his documentation may well be confirmed. He draws a clear line between two different and non-related ecstatic cults: that of the female divinities (in our case fairy beings), masters of beneficial learnings and benefactors of prosperity, and that of males, who, having fallen into ecstasy, transcend in different forms into cult battles for fertility (Ginzburg 1992:159-160). In addition to the author's suggestion that Friuli and its *benandanti* should be viewed as a peripheral area in which both of the apparently detached cults are intertwined and equally practised, attention should be drawn to the future consideration of the existence of *vilenicas* and *vilenjaks* and the expected eastward shift of the border towards Croatia, for its territory harbours the practice of both types of cults.

<sup>39</sup> It is curious, however, that neither Antun Radić in his *Osnova za sabiranje i proučavanje građe o narodnom životu* [Scheme for Collection and Study of Material about Folk Life] (1929) (although he does mention *vilenjak* discussing the issue "Što neki ljudi mogu za života" [What Some People Can Do during Their Lifetime]), nor the concept of the systematic *Upitnica* [Questionnaire] for the collection of data for *Etnološki atlas* [Ethnological Atlas] of the Ethnology Department of the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb (1967), nor *Upitnik za prikupljanje folklorne građe o mitskim bićima* [Questionnaire for the Collection of Folklore Material on Mythic Creatures] (1985) of Đuro Franković (who also makes a reference to *vilenjak* in the chapter "Ljudi s nadnaravnim moćima" [People with Supernatural Powers]) included *vilenica* into their lists. The ethnographic material itself, on the other hand, tends to refer to *vilenjak* (*vilovnjak*) as a character who rather wins his position in a fairy tale-like projection of his relationship with the fairies, than as a personage in which we might be able to trace a reminiscence of the ancient practitioners of a popular sacral culture.

process and its theoretical basis is the subject of *vilenica's* metamorphosis in the theological works of the period between the 16th and the 18th century.

The study of the popular tradition of the past centuries is a truly demanding task. Namely, the researcher is faced with grasping the "ungraspable" as he tries to reconstruct a culture which at the time existed predominantly in oral form, was custom-based and generally non-literate, excluding the possibility of the legacy of direct written evidence. Thus in pursuit of the answers, we cannot but consult the *mediators*, our eyes and ears, the representatives of the learned culture, even though their subjective perception may sometimes lead us astray. They contribute considerably to the understanding of the cultural facts of the historical reality, their evidential value being two-fold. We are thus able to trace the relations between different cultural levels, primarily the attitude of a learned culture towards a popular tradition, evaluation ranging from an acceptance of its heritage, forms, and contents to rejection and reform attempts. For instance, not only is the Croatian Renaissance literature partly known to stem from the vernacular, but "as such, this popular background of our culture pulls it forwards" (Franičević 1974:10). In the literature which inhabited the world with fairies (or, rather, recognized their presence), the latter's mediators witnessed an equal reception. In Zoranić's work from the first half of the 16th century we encounter *vilenica* Dejanira in a highly affirmative role, her name accounting for the etymology of Mount Dinara. There is evidence that Zoranić also wrote an essay entitled *Vilenica* which has not been preserved.

Dating most likely from the second half of the 16th century is *Jeđupka neznana spjevaoca Dubrovčanina*, written in Petrarchan style, in which *Jeđupka* (a gypsy woman) lures a Dubrovnik lady (Franičević 1974:140). Having impressed the woman with her professional competence in herbs, curative powers of her ointments, roots, concoctions, and blood even, *Jeđupka* introduces herself in the following manner:

Aegrypia Vilenica is my name, a famous and virtuous maiden, more famous cannot be. (...) Sorrow and misery have I suffered then, oh, ladies of my heart, but now the powers I have many, make me the head of all *vilenicas* (*Jeđupka neznana spjevaoca Dubrovčanina* 1876:238-239).

The poet here does not pursue the sacred dimension of *vilenica's* character prevalent in the popular culture or with Zoranić. He reduces her in order to achieve the poetic effect; it almost seems that, underlying *vilenica's* accounting of her healing skills is the poet's intent to inform the reader about the needs and health problems of the Dubrovnik noble women: a herb placed near the heart was to stir passion, a concoction against female infertility, a skin bleach made of "mallow and starch, and three maple twigs", ointments that bring back the dead and cure the sick etc.

But *vilenica's* brief list of her abilities was itself a fairly risky matter in the period when the poem was written. Namely, one of the postulates which disqualified diverse popular healers was that the one who was able to cure, could also harm. This Dubrovnik-based poetic episode confirms a common fact that during the Middle Ages and later European noblewomen resorted to this kind of help without any constraint. Similar examples can be traced in northern Croatia in the former half of the 17th century. The poet's attitude towards *vilenica* is far from hostile, for in a typical cross-patterning of two traditions she is being affirmed through a Christian allusion:

A gift was I given then, by an infant, god of love, praised all the world  
across, from the east to the west (*Jeđupka neznana spjevaoca*  
*Dubrovčanina* 1876:240).

These words are attuned to the same arguments stated in vain by the *benandati* of Friuli before the inquisitors in the 16th century in the former's attempt to prove that they, in their ecstatic visions, fought for the cross and the faith in Christ; or with which Thiess, the wolfman of Livonia, claimed in 1692 that wolfmen despise the devil, for they are "God's dogs" which prevent him from devastating the country (Eliade 1981:105-106). By the end of the 16th century such an affirmation of the popular sacral culture through the cultural syncretism with the official religion becomes increasingly out of place.

The Christendom was to witness dramatic changes engendered by the Protestant criticism and demands for reform, the effects of which continued to reverberate through the centuries to come. A most direct consequence was the Council of Trent (1545-1563) which laid the foundations of the Counter-Reformation. A series of regional synods followed throughout Europe to effect this renewal and the Council's doctrinal teachings. Apart from being active and well-represented at the Council, the Croatian episcopate took immediate steps to organize episcopal and regional synods with the same objective in the Banate of Croatia, Venetian Dalmatia, and the Republic of Dubrovnik. The Roman Catholic Church centred on the revision of its own doctrine, disciplinary norms, and the regulation and improvement of the general and theological training of the clergy. But the spiritual upsurge expected to result from the reform had a most direct impact on the attitude of the learned culture towards popular tradition and its cultural structure, in what is currently referred to as the "reform of popular culture". The latter's negative experience resulted from an attempt to disseminate the Roman Catholic and Protestant Reformation among the craftsmen and farmers. In that context, we shall see how this new and, in view of the Renaissance, completely altered approach to our topic reflected in the Croatian works based on the spirit of the Counter-Reformation. The announcement of the new winds could, perhaps, be traced in Jeđupka's description of her birth:

the many were not glad to see me born, but in vain crowds wished to slay me (*Jeđupka neznana spjevaoca Dubrovčanina* 1876:238).

10. Bartol Kašić (1575-1650), a Jesuit, was one of the major contributors to the Croatian corpus of the Catholic revival. By order of Pope Paul V, Kašić compiled *Ritual rimski*, a liturgical manual in Croatian, subsequently published in Rome in 1640. According to the author, the manual contains "all the necessary instructions laid out in detail for the parish priests to perform the services of the Sacrament, Blessing, and Adjuration", that is, all the elements which a manual intended for general use should include so that the parish priests could perform their service in accordance with the reformed doctrine of the Church. Thus the chapter entitled "Za zaklinjati mučene od hudobe" contains prescriptions as to how a minister or any other church elder was to exorcize. The author points to the importance of good knowledge of literature on the subject so as to be able to ascertain that demonic possession was actually in question. They should distinguish the following devil's marks: the use of alien or ancient languages, or, if understood, the topic concerned remote and occult matters, a display of strength which surpasses the natural abilities of the possessed, and others. One should be very careful about the deceitful methods the demons are ready to use, taking advantage of the exorcist's lack of attention and trying to prove that the disorder is of natural origin, or even make "the sick" fall asleep in the middle of adjuration; however, one should resume with exorcism until the first signs of deliverance. During the ceremony, some demons "confess to the committed maleficence or wrongdoing, or point to the malefactor, and the way of undoing it" (Kašić 1640:357). It is then that the manual warns about the emergence of a new threat which reveals the persistent struggle of the Church not just to maintain its position, yet to win it as well:

But one should restrain himself from resorting for this purpose [of undoing the evil spells] to **vileniks** or **vilenicas**, or other evil doers, but to the Church officials shall resort the haunted one, and he should never turn to any kind of superstition or other illegitimate ways (Kašić 1640:357).<sup>40</sup>

This attitude towards the adherents of the fairy realm is far from the one traced in the literary works of the Renaissance. It is not just a renewal's effort to reform that segment of a popular tradition, but, in accordance with the broader cultural and historical frame of reference, a clear and evident polarization. It is likely that the popular practitioners may not have seen themselves directly opposed to the official religion, their culture being flexible. Conversely, the learned culture considered it a perfect moment for a clear line to be drawn between them. The foregoing quotation also speaks between the lines: in it, *vilenicas* and *vilenjaks* exist

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<sup>40</sup> Bolded by Z. Č.

within their authentic setting as persons of popular confidence, competent in countermagic, and whom people address for beneficial reasons. That, of course, was a social position the Church equally claimed, so in the following quotation the activities of the *vilenicas* and *vilenjaks* are no longer adverted to in their authentic dimension, but in a negative one. Therefore an exorcist is to

order the Devil confess whether he has possessed the victim by the work of a magician, **vilenica/vilenjak** or wizard, or whatever marks or conditions which, had the possessed administered them through his mouth, would throw them out, or if they were outside his body, he is to point to them, and, when found, they should be burnt (Kašić 1640:359).

It is interesting to note that Kašić's manual makes no distinction between wizardry<sup>41</sup> and the activities of the *vilenicas* and *vilenjaks*, which clearly marks a tendency of a forced glissade of the traditional elements towards the negative theological stereotypes and demonization of certain elements of popular culture. As the manual was intended for the parish priests and their everyday practice, it is understandable that they tried to incorporate these attitudes in their daily sermons and confessions, and thus diffuse the ideas of the Roman-Catholic Reformation among their flock.

11. While in Kašić's manual we learn about the struggle of the clergy to displace the traditional magicians in the popular belief with the representatives of the official religion by reading between the lines, the subject is particularly discussed by Ivan Ančić (1624-1685), Bosnian Franciscan and writer, in his *Ogledalo misničko* (1681). Ančić's views gain in importance considering that he had spent most of his friarhood in the local communities of Našice, Velika, Brod, and Belgrade. On the one hand, his accounts cast a more realistic light on his own time and space and the specific problems relating to popular culture, and on the other, they highlight the efforts of the Church to challenge the problem within its own doctrine and the climate it tried to create.

In one of the chapters (IX *Razgovor. Misnici Bozi po kriposti*), under article 6, Ančić discusses the title "Those who will be burnt: all the Devil's servants, and who is forbidden and who is to be called upon the sick". In order to make an introduction, Ančić adverts to an elaborate Old Testament episode related in the 18th chapter of 1 Kings, in which Elijah, the sole survivor prophet of Jahveh, competes on Mt. Carmel with four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal "which eat at Jezebel's table" (1 Kgs 18,19) in trying to prove whose God is the genuine one. Namely, the seventh king of Israel, Ahab, married Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, and adopted Sidonian cult of Baal. Bringing the demonstration to a

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<sup>41</sup> In the 1827 edition, p. 320, revised by Pope Benedict XIV, there no longer is a reference to an act of a "magician, vilenica/vilenik or sorcerer", but only to an "act of vilenica/vilenik".

close, thanks to Elijah "the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench" (1 Kgs 18,38), proving thus the omnipotence of Jahveh. This episode led Ančić to conclude that if a "minister makes God descend upon his alter every day, then he is of greater virtue than Elijah himself" (Ančić 1681:69).

He also refers to an event described in the first chapter of 2 Kings, in which Elijah made fire come down from heaven and burn up the two captains with their fifties of Ahaziah, a follower of Baal and son of Ahab and Jezebel, "from which Baal-zebub the devil spoke" (Ančić 1681:69). The Biblical examples featuring Elijah and his explicit methods of dealing with what is currently acknowledged as the "cultural other" should, in Ančić's opinion, be equally applied by the men of God who should burn

all the conjurers, sorcerers and magicians (...); and those slatterns, beguiled by the Devil, called witches and **vilenicas**, are the Devil's creatures and are condemned by Christianity when beheld, if they do not seek repentance, they are burnt, just as Elijah burned the fifty evil servants and an evil king (Ančić 1681:69).<sup>42</sup>

The fact that they were viewed from the same perspective as witches in the late seventeenth-century Croatia meant a complete condemnation of the *vilenicas*. This equal treatment meant much more, as it aimed at denouncing the entire cosmology underlying the identity of *vilenica*. If such an unambiguous attitude existed towards the *vilenicas*, no doubt that in the daily religious practice based on sermons and confessions the priests adopted the same position towards a most wide-spread and colourful folk belief (the relics of which may still be found today), which embodied the whole of nature, the sky, water, groves, and mountains, that of the fairies and their connection with the human world. It is those elements in which the popular culture paralleled structurally with the demonological stereotypes of the witches as females who fly through the air, gather at night, indulge in occult practices that provided the precondition for the conversion of the popular belief pattern. Virtually no changes took place with regard to the contents as the new pattern was generally constructed out of the already existing elements, the majority of which stemmed from the popular culture and to a lesser extent from the learned one. Yet, bearing in mind that the fairy tradition had been subject to a centuries-long negative interpretation by the Church, this campaign undoubtedly contributed to a conversion of the fairy lore towards the leading paradigm of the omnipresence of witches and demons. The varying results of this process have been discovered in ethnographic records of a somewhat later date.

Therefore, what is it that *vilenicas* do to stir such a hostile attitude? With reference to Ančić, the greatest offence attributed to them was

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<sup>42</sup> Bolded by Z. Č.

interference with the practice of the Catholic religion, on which the latter claimed to have a monopoly:

For all the sorcerers, enchanters, magicians, diviners, and the likes who have no fear of God, are the servants and maids of the Devil himself, though they incant good prayers over the sick (Ančić 1681:69-70).

Even if the magical practices were to give positive results, it was to be considered as the Devil's trap:

... the devils assist their bodies to acquire two souls, one of the diviner, and that of the divined. That is why ministers have to keep an eye on the flock, through counsel and teaching: that those people have no good in them for which God may hear them better than other Christian souls (Ančić 1681:70).

It is here that we grasp the significance of the episode Ančić referred to in his introduction. It was upon the ministers "to combat against the devils and their servants, as theirs is the power of God" (Ančić 1681:70) and elders of the church should be called in case of sickness as taught by Apostle James in his epistle (5,14). In order for the popular deviations to be displaced by an orthodox Catholic understanding, Ančić gives the following prescriptions:

Thus my fellow-ministers, shepherds of the flock of Jesus, unceasing and patient let your efforts be in giving guidance day and night to the humble flock at sermons and confessions, and charitable let their deliverance of redemption be (Ančić 1681:70).

A battle which, as we know it today, has never been completely won.

12. A change in attitude towards the supernatural distinguished the second stage of the reform of popular culture in Europe (1650-1800) from the previous one. A decline in witch-trials in seventeenth-century England and France may be related to the fact that witchcraft was no longer regarded seriously either by the reformers or the courts (Burke 1991:191). On the other hand, it seems that on account of the "periphery effect", the time necessary for the diffusion and penetration of the inventions, the witch craze reached a delayed climax in Croatia (and Sweden, for instance) at the close of the 17th and the start of the 18th century. Such a course of events was further cultivated in the theological works of the Croatian authors written by the end of the 18th century. No positive developments can be observed in the treatment of *vilenicas* in the works which promoted unreserved adherence to demonological concepts and scholastic models.

In 1729, the first Croatian manual of moral theology was printed under the title *Bogoslovje diloredno oliti rukovod slovinski na poznanje svetoga reda*, the author of which was Antun Kačić (1686-1745), bishop of Trogir. Being of exceptional value in the training of pastoral clergy in

the post-Trent period, manuals such as Kačić's had great influence particularly among the clerics of the Dalmatian parishes.<sup>43</sup>

The fourth part of chapter V of the manual focusses on the "sin against nature". The author's major concern is the character of unnatural sin in which the semen is wasted in a manner contrary to the laws of human nature, or any form of carnal knowledge aimed at sinful indulgence and against conception. Particularly blasphemous was *životinjstvo* [bestiality], or a "man's intercourse with an animal; animal's with a woman; or with the devil" (Kačić 1729:533). The problem of intercourse between people and the bodiless spirits dates from St. Augustine, who took into consideration numerous records of intercourse between sylphs, fauns and women mentioned in the classical tradition. Although he found them too numerous and trustworthy to be ignored, yet Augustine didn't dare to draw any firm conclusions on the matter, for he was unable to envisage the actual physical act of the beings whose body was composed of air and not of flesh and blood. But thirteenth-century scholastic doctrine provided a solution by which angels, good or evil, having no body, but being bodiless spirits may "choose a body" and intercourse with people in this form (Bayer 1953:46-47).

With reference to this scholastic teaching, Kačić asserts that demons may "take the likeness" of a man or a woman creating it out of a breeze (though fallen and having lost the gifts and abilities of the supernatural, they have retained their angel-like nature), or by deluding a person to see what is not, or in a corpse. Having taken such shape, they "take advantage of wretched and mindless people, and have intercourse with them" (Kačić 1729:533). Should the devil appear in female shape, the theologians referred to him as *succubus*, or *incubus*, a male devil having intercourse with a woman. The former scholastic distinction provides the basis for theological interpretation of the colourful and widely distributed popular beliefs and narratives of the time related to intercourse between fairies and their earthly spouses. In this segment Croatian tradition resembled the classical parallels, the manifestations of which were readily condemned by the theologians.

Behold the devil's trap into which witches, **vileniks** and **vilenicas**, sorcerers and sorceresses fall! It is not enough that he who indulges in such contemptuous wickedness states during the confession that he has fallen into bestiality; he should confess to having slept with the devil, for sin with the devil is a greater sin (...), contrary to the worship of God (Kačić 1729:533).<sup>44</sup>

In further support of Kačić's misinterpretation of the premises and obscure theological perspective is a statement according to which

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<sup>43</sup> Evidence of this is provided by visitor Dinarić during his visitations of Poljica (Dalmatia) in 1762, where some of the parish priests confirmed of reading Kačić's work, as well as the fact that it had soon been sold out (Valković 1979:504).

<sup>44</sup> Bolded by Z. Č.

it should be established whether the person sinned with a female devil or a male one; a married woman, or a single one, a female kin, nun or the likes, as the shapes in which he appears affect the degree of the sin (Kačić 1729:533).

An exhaustive list of potential female personages in the shape of which the devil may sin with the mortals tells more of the dynamics of the social relations and moral problems the clergy was faced with than of the eventual answers to the theological issues. The fact that Kačić brings us back to the case of the *vilenica* of Janjina and the appearance of Aunt Fairy has an anecdotal whiff about it; when adverting to the shape of a nun as a potential "device the devil" may resort to in order to trick "witches, *vileniks* and *vilenicas*...", not for a moment are we to harbour doubts about the sentence he would pass upon *vilenica* to whom Aunt Fairy appeared precisely "robed in white, in the shape of a nun".

In sum, in the work of Bishop Kačić *vilenicas* and *vilenjaks* have been outlawed again, positioned in the context of the outcasts of the Church and faith.

13. The likelihood of one or two administrative acts, like the ones issued by Empress Maria Theresa in 1756 and 1758, making a drastic change in the centuries-old mental pattern that had hitherto been an official world view is very little. The residues of such inertia are to be found in the work of a Franciscan, Marko Dobretić (1713-1784), a Bosnian provincial, bishop, and vicar, whose compilation *Kratko skupljenje čudoredne, iliti moralne bogoslovice svrhu sedam katoličanske crkve sakramenata* was published in Ancona in 1782. The work includes diverse materials, from the Scriptures to the records of different church councils, decretals, and "fragments by most excellent theologians and canonists" (Dobretić 1782). The manual was intended for the priests "of the Slavonic parishes, primarily village ones, for the missionaries, for those who will be ordained, for confessors and all those who give and receive sacraments". Being intended for general use, it also proved helpful to those who were in everyday contact with the congregation and who were in the position to launch the here presented views and thus influence the flock. One of the chapters has been dedicated to an unavoidable topic of sin. Although the witch persecution in Croatia had officially been in decline for almost a quarter of the century, Dobretić continued his campaign against demons by including into his collection by far the most adverse idea in the history of religion, that of the pact with the principle of evil. The context because of which it was introduced was again a pagan element of popular culture, that is, the formerly mentioned magical syncretism which makes no distinction between sacred and nonsacred as far as the efficiency of the magical act is concerned. Inspired by older authorities, Dobretić states his view:

There are still certain sins different from all others, so vile and evil, and condemned by God who are through man done by the Devil, or by Satan, or through a pact, of which one dreads to speak let alone do; they are the sins of sorcery, divination and other works of the Devil and futile practices, in which a man, having sold his soul to the Devil, confuses the sacred with the pagan, and does things which by nature cannot be (Dobretić 1782:201).

To avoid the possibility of "confusing or even giving someone a misleading evil hints", Dobretić evades closer elaboration of the topic, explaining that a man transforms into a devil prior to sinning, with

the Devil in him, and he in the Devil, and the two together do things a man in himself could never do (Dobretić 1782:201).

Here I shall refresh our memory of the pre-Christian popular cosmology and the exceptional abilities and power that certain individuals come to possess by communicating with the fairies. It includes the power to heal and cast off destructive magical spells, divination, the power to foresee events distant in time and space, or even the performance of incredible physical actions. Interestingly, these people not only refuse to deny their connection with the mysterious beings, but contrarily, adopt their name as part of personal identity. Dobretić's condemnation thus becomes understandable:

Such are **vileniks**, and **vilenicas**, warlocks and witches, sorcerers and sorceresses, charlatans, diviners and the likes (Dobretić 1782:201-202).<sup>45</sup>

The author also cites the Latin terms denoting mortal sins, leading us to believe that he simply followed the classical model. In addition, one should point to the fact that *vileniks* and *vilenicas* not only head the list, but are the only unique personalities with an articulated cultural identity in the company of what may be defined as technical terms.

14. A brief survey of the first witch-trial in Dubrovnik, published in 1895 by Krsto Vojnović and which we have thoroughly analyzed earlier in the text, exhibits a defect irrelevant to his work as a whole, but for the comprehension of this article proves to be more than symptomatic. Characteristic of a part of older historiography, he fails to observe the document in terms of its subtle levels of narration. Thus when referring to the apprehension of Janjina's *vilenica*, he states that she confessed to being *vilenica*, and that "there are many of them, naming nine" (Vojnović 1895:18). This may lead us to believe that *vilenica* claimed that there were other *vilenicas* similar to her, having named nine of them. A closer reading of the testimony shows that *vilenica* here spoke of her ability to recognize a person harmed by a *strega* [witch] and whether such a person was to

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<sup>45</sup> Bolded by Z. Č.

restore health or not. The captain then asked her whether she knew which women in his captaincy were *streghe* [witches]. Her reply was that "there are many", after which she denounced nine of them. Therefore, the authentic participants of the event and the source itself make a clear distinction between *vilenica* and witch. Moreover, the second opening sentence of the document reports that in the captaincy of Janjina there are "*vilenicas* and witches" ("...che si trova nel suo Capitanato delle Villenize e delle streghe" (Vojnović 1895:64).

Further, Vojnović asserts that two of the nine women confessed to being *vilenicas*, which again is in contradiction with the cited source, the exact words being

La prima, la qual' ha interrogato, gli ha confessato, ch' essa e strega, e tutte quelle le quali ha nominato la Villeniza [The one who was interrogated first, confessed to being a witch as are all those named by *vilenica*] (Vojnović 1895:65).

The second suspect confessed in the same manner. Attention should be drawn to the fact that the trial report underlines explicitly that the women confessed freely and not under duress, quoting that their confessions were reaffirmed in the torture which followed. Although *vilenica's* testimony has nothing in common with those given during the interrogation of the two women, the latter being an amalgam of popular magic beliefs and practices from the domain of maleficence contaminated with the demonological stereotype, Vojnović persists in referring to them as *vilenicas*. His example was followed by Vladimir Bayer almost sixty years later.

The same distinction within the source recurs in another Dubrovnik witch-trial, that of 1689, published by Vojnović. On November 19, the accused, Vica Antićeva of Prizdrina, Pelješac, confessed to a variety of evil crimes: she had become a witch one night, lured by a man who appeared in a shadow twenty years before; she smeared the hearts of her four sons with special ointment the man had given her, then ate their hearts, after which they died several days later; having smeared herself with special ointment, she "became a bird as white as a dove", etc. Asked about the presence of *vilenicas* on the peninsula, she answered resolutely: "I know that Mare Kalma of Kima is a *Vilenica*." Enquired further as to how she knew it, she repeated the familiar and likely argumentation: "I have heard that she is a *Vilenica*, and I know she healed others, but I do not know how she heals" (Vojnović 1895:70). As it seems, nothing could have been further from Vica's mind than to, enquired about *vilenicas* on the peninsula, declare herself as one, just as the young *vilenica* from the beginning of this text had done in the same captaincy thirty years before. And the reason for that lies in the fact that Vica Antićeva simply, even according to her own admission, had no clue about the affairs of the *vilenicas*. It is far too clear that an enormous difference exists between her confessions of drinking children's blood, animal metamorphosis, along

with the other two women denounced by *vilenica* as witches in the 1660 trial and their confessions to having assumed the form of a butterfly, hen, or cat flying through the air, sucking out nephew's heart or eating one's daughter, having an intercourse with the devil on the one hand, and healing people by means of a special skill bestowed upon them by the fairies, on the other.

Bearing in mind the theoretical efforts (practical ones we know little of) made over the centuries to discredit *vilenicas*, it should not come as a surprise that the two afore mentioned reputable scholars fail to make a clear distinction between *vilenicas* and witches (apart from the fact that their field of interest was of a completely different nature). One may conclude that the long-waged campaign against them produced the desired result. *Vilenicas*, with their rich cosmology, women who, in their childhood or adolescence, are carried away by the fairies, only to reappear in their community initiated, acting as intermediaries and assistants, healers, diviners, women who live most intensively the collective lore surrounding the beliefs in fairies and fairy-encounters, have finally been pushed over the edge of recognition and social awareness of their identity.

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## VILENICA I VILENJAK: NOSITELJI IŠČEZLOGA KULTA VILA

### SAŽETAK

Na temelju povijesnih izvora, fragmenata književnih djela iz 16. st., teoloških djela 17. i 18. st., te etnografske građe 19. i 20. st., autor konstatira postojanje te rekonstruira pretkršćanski pučki kult vila sa *vilenicama* i *vilenjacima* kao njegovim nositeljima i praktičarima. Prikazuje se morfologija kulta, utjecaji na učenu kulturu (renesansna književna djela), te nastojanje učene kulture (teološke misli) da utječe na promjenu društvene recepcije očigledno raširenoga kulta koji nastoji iskorijeniti. Nastojanja katoličke reformacije na reformi narodne kulture, te povijesni fenomen progona vještica i njegove posljedice pokazuju se dominantnim razlogom nestanka svijesti o *vilenicama*, *vilenjacima* i osebujnoj kozmologiji kulta koji svoje usporednice ima i u europskim razmjerima.

Ključne riječi: *vilenica*, *vilenjak* (*vilenik*, *vilovnjak*), kult vila, progon vještica, pučka kultura