

# From Tradition to Contemporary Belief Tales: The “Changing Life” of Some Slovenian Supernatural Beings from the Annual Cycle

Monika Kropej

*The article addresses the oral tradition and tales about certain Slovenian supernatural beings that accompany the annual cycle and its turning points: midsummer and midwinter solstice as well as spring and autumn changing shifts. Discussed are the changing images of these folk belief narratives resulting from continuously changing cultural and social contexts, while supernatural figures or spirits acquire a demythicised image in contemporary belief tales and urban legends.*

Slovenian folk belief legends feature over one hundred and fifty different supernatural beings, among them the supernatural beings of nature, restless souls, demons and ghosts, mythical animals and cosmological beings. The supernatural beings here presented accompany the yearly turning points: the summer and the winter solstices, the spring equinox, and the conclusion of the autumn. Containing a wide variety of motifs, folk belief legends about these supernatural beings have undergone continuous changes due to the different cultural and social contexts.

## Kresnik and the Summer Apparitions

The summer solstice is connected with a number of customs and beliefs that are similar throughout Europe. In Slovenia, a characteristic supernatural being that makes an appearance during this period is **Kresnik** (*Krsnik*, *Krstnik*, *Šentjanžvec*). Kresnik's attributes are the sun and the fire (in Slovene, *kresati* denotes to kindle fire by striking). Judging by these attributes and narrative tradition, Russian philologist Nikolai Mikhailov established Kresnik's similarity with the principal Slavic God **Perun**, the Thunder God and the conqueror of **Veles**. Mikhailov linked Kresnik with fire, lightning, and with golden color, thus with atmospheric phenomena (Mikhailov 1998, 117–235). Like Perun, Kresnik had defeated the dragon, or **Veles**, God of the Underworld and of earthly riches. The structure of the tales about Kresnik can be classified into eight principal episodes:

1. Kresnik was born and lived in the castle (on the glass mountain, in the ninth kingdom, in Bear's castle). His mother carried him for nine years, and the child had to be baptized ten or nine times. He was recognized as a *kresnik* by his horse hooves or other marks on his body. (Pajek 1882, 579–580; Slekovec 1895, 24–25; Šašelj 1906, 215–216).

2. Kresnik rode with his brother Trot in the golden carriage through the sky, and was attacked by the Snake, whom he conquered in single combat.

3. Kresnik owned many cows and other riches. One day, a dragon stole his wealth and locked it in a crag. Kresnik found his cattle with the help of his four-eyed dog or

a magic plant that could open cliffs; then he conquered the dragon, and reclaimed his wealth.

4. Kresnik traveled at night and fought for the benefit of his country. People said that when there was lightning in autumn, the Kresniki were fighting each other. Therefore people tied the wheat sheafs with thick bindings, so that Kresnik when he seized a sheaf and beat with it, in the end still had something in his hands. If he gained the victory the country was rich.

5. Kresnik was greatly tempted to acquire the Snake Queen's beautiful crown. The crown would bring plenty of money to the person who owned it. Kresnik gets hold of some strong horses and makes the corridor from his to the snake's castle. He plays cards with the Snake Queen for her crown. When the Queen notices the theft of her crown she raises such a hue and cry that a multitude of gigantic snakes rush from everywhere. Kresnik escapes with the help of his horses through the corridor to his castle. (Mulec 1858, 253–254).

6. Kresnik fell in love with the beautiful daughter of the Snake Queen. Since he could not otherwise enter the Queen's palace, he turned into a dwarf. As he reached the courtyard everybody started to laugh and mock him. At night he turned into a handsome prince and took the princess with him.

7. Consequently the Snake King dispatched a dragon to Kresnik's castle. In the castle a beautiful princess named Vesina was living. The dragon spent six months watching over her. On St. George's Day the handsome count Kresnik, appeared with a bright sword and positioned himself over the snake. After he had conquered the snake, golden wheat started to fall onto the ground. Kresnik took Vesina for his wife, and his country was wealthy.

8. Kresnik's wife noticed one day that Kresnik was away during the night. When she finally saw him on the roof, she called him by his name, and Kresnik fell down and killed himself. (Pajek 1882, 581).

The well-known legend describing Kresnik's adventures is the legend of the Kresnik of Vurberg castle. Documented as early as in the 1840s, it was first published in its entirety by Matej Slekovec in 1895. This legend contains most of the cited episodes, except the second and the third episode. The second episode is depicted in another tale collected in 1858 in Styria:

*Kresnik had a brother named Trot. One day the brothers were flying in a golden carriage to a feast given by the Babylonian Snake Queen. During the ride it started to thunder fiercely. Although the Snake Queen had always fawned over Kresnik, in reality she couldn't stand him. So she dispatched a snake that had mighty wings like an eagle. The snake appeared from the fog, attacked Kresnik, and tried to slaughter him. But Trot cut its head off with a golden axe. As the snake flickered its tail into the clouds the clouds produced an immense downpour of rain, almost drowning Kresnik and Trot. But the swift hooves of Kresnik's horses, fast as lightning, managed to save their master from the flood. (Pohorski 1858, 347).*

The image of Kresnik or Peun driving through the sky in a golden carriage has connected Perun in the time of Christianisation with **St. Elias**.

The third episode is described by the same author:

*People from Pohorje say that Kresnik owned many cows and was breastfeeding them. Their milk was so fragrant that the white snake repeatedly hid in the stable and sucked it from their udders. Kresnik was grazing his cows by himself, usually in the mountains. When he once fell asleep a brigand stole all his cows. Try as he might, Kresnik could not find them. But he owned a four-eyed dog, whom he dispatched to look for the cows around the mountain range. The dog quickly smelled the cows hidden in the cave of a mighty mountain. He ran home to Kresnik, who was sitting in a large castle, and told his master that he had found the cows. Flying as a bird, Kresnik soared across the mountains and knocked on the door. But the giant, who was half human and half dragon, did not release the cows until Kresnik slaughtered him with a bolt of lightning. (Pohorski 1858, 374).*

The rescuing of the princess and killing the large snake is the key episode in the cycle of Kresnik's legends and at the same time this is also the principal Slavic myth, reconstructed by V. V. Ivanov and V. N. Toporov (1974). One of the legends about Kresnik killing the snake and rescuing the princess was recorded in Styria in 1870:

*/.../ A snake was crossing the river Drava. It was so large that it stemmed the river's flow as it was creeping across. Folks say that the Drava overflowed the entire Ptujsko Field and ran among hills planted with vines; one can still see the dry, winding riverbed. The snake crawled toward a mighty castle where its enormous body, its tail in its mouth, coiled around it. In this castle was imprisoned a beautiful princess by the name of Vesina. For six months Vesina had been kept imprisoned in the castle by the snake. Then, on St. George's Day, the handsome Count Krsnik came along. He positioned himself over the snake, but since it had wings it lifted into the air. But Krsnik, who was also a sorcerer, grew wings. A fierce battle took place in the air. Krsnik defeated the snake, threw it into the deep castle well and chained it to a rock with a strong chain; it has been lying there to this day. After the fight golden wheat started to fall from the sky. Krsnik took Vesina for his wife and they lived happily. (Trstenjak 1970, 21).*

While this legend contains the elements of the **principal myth** of the Slavic cosmology; the third episode - about Kresnik the owner of many cows stolen by the dragon and locked in a crag - contains the elements of the ancient **Indo-European stockbreeding and agricultural myth** reconstructed by Bruce Lincoln. This myth presents the fight between the hero and the three-headed snake, because the sneak took away the hero's cattle. The hero, strengthened by the inebriating drink and sometimes with the help of the God of the war, defeats the monster and takes away the prey (Lincoln 1983, 103–124). Lincoln connected this myth with the socioeconomic circumstances of the cattle-breeding societies, where the greed for the cattle became the synonym for the conflicts.

In the fifth episode, Kresnik has to fight with his adversary the *False Kresnik* or *Vedomec* for the benefit of his country. As already Leopold Kretzenbacher assumed, the Kresnik and his opposition the False Kresnik were supposedly two poles of one and the same figure (Kretzenbacher 1941, 21–22). According to the narrative tradition it seems that Kresnik had his double or his twin brother, who represented his opposite pole.

Kresnik has gradually lost his mythical character. While he was initially in the function of a god, he later became Prince Kresnik, or a kind of wizard, fighting the false Kresnik to ensure good crops for his lands; he thus assumed the role of clan protector, shaman, or sorcerer, the "ecstatic Kresnik", as Zmago Šmitek named him (Šmitek 2004, 145). The

lore about the so-called “ecstatic Kresnik” shares its roots with the Hungarian *Taltos*, Italian *Benandant*, Greek *Kallikantzaros*, South Slavic *Mogut*, etc. All of them have acquired the characteristics of sorcerers or shamans. The “ecstatic kresnik” differs from the “mythological Kresnik” in that he appears in the role of a “village shaman” fighting for the benefit of his local community.

It was believed that the “kresniki” were born with a mark upon their body, either still wrapped in their placenta or with eyebrows grown together, with teeth, a small tail, extra fingers or toes, etc. Already J. W. Valvasor had written about the *kresniki* and their adventures, mentioning that the *Vedavci* fight the *Šentjanževci* (Valvasor 1689, vol. XI, p. 282). It was also believed that these Kresniki fought disguised as animals, for instance as a red ox fighting a black one, as a bull battling with an ox (Pajek 1882, p. 578; Pajek 1884, 77), as a white and a black dog, or as a pig with horse hooves (Pajek 1884, 82). For their weapons they used horns (that are associated with lightning), axes, sheaves, and beanpole ends (which remain in the field after harvest) as in the tale from Primorska (the coastland):

*Slovenes living near Gorica believe that on St. John's Eve witches fight with Kresniki. They also believe that Kerstnik is the twelfth brother, which means that if a family has twelve sons begot by one father, the twelfth brother is a kerstnik. On Midsummer Day the kerstniki find themselves in grave danger. They are attacked by witches using beanpoles and stakes. Actually, they use what has been left of those beanpoles and stakes, which are the parts that break off and remain in the soil after beanpoles have been collected and taken home in the fall. So in order to prevent witches from seizing such weapons, farmers carefully pull out all such pieces.* (Kociančić 1854, 157; Kropelj, Dapit 2006, no. 13, p. 26).

Kresnik can be helped by his servant, or by people watching the fight:

*The Kresnik of Vurberg once said: “A terrible storm and downpour with wind shall come to pass today. Two wild boars shall try to kill each other in the field. One of them will be slender and scrawny, the other fat. You are not to help the fat one since he is already stronger.” And this came to pass, just as Kresnik had said. People saw the two boars fight and chop at one another. A farmer in a field thrice struck the thin one with a switch, and right away the fat one started to win the fight. When the scales were tipped to the disadvantage of the slim boar another farmer jumped near, thrusting a pitchfork from behind in the portly boar's testicles. Immediately an abundance of wheat started to rain on the field, and the farmers had ample quantities of it. The slender boar turned out to be the Kresnik of Vurberg. Later on, he showed the first farmer his back marked by the three strikes of the switch, saying sulkily: “See how strongly you have hit me?”* (Pajek 1882, 581).

At night, the Kresniki were believed to meet at crossroads, under trees, particularly walnut trees, like in the recently recorded legend from Slavia Veneta:

*Balavantarji were such people who, when it was that time of night, assembled together. They themselves had no idea where they were going. They just went to a crossroads. None of them later knew that they had met, neither the first one nor the second nor the third... There were so many. For it is said that on the way to St Martin there are four paths that make a real crossroads.*

*Once they started to fight there. One of them had a wooden leg. It happened that they could not find his leg so they made him one from an elder tree.* (Recorded by: Roberto Dapit, 1996, published: Kropelj, Dapit 2008, no. 12, p. 22).

Descriptions of such fights suggest that Kresnik's soul left his body to travel through the world. These belief legends about the human soul in the form of an insect such as a hornet, that leaves human body during sleep and later returns, are known throughout Europe and also in a part of Asia. The earliest reference can be found in a book written at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century by the historian Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* (vol. 3, chap. 34). The text refers to border areas between Slovenia and Italy (Šmitek 2003, 5), which is the territory where the lore about the so-called *zduhači* (people with escaping souls), for example the *Vedomci*, the *Banandanti*, and the *Kresniki*, had been preserved almost to the present.

Souls in the shape of butterflies or mice are mentioned in inquisition records from 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. In Italian Slavia Veneta such records contain interesting data on the *banandanti* who were accused of witchcraft, stating that during sleep they were leaving their body and setting off to fight witches or wizards; there are also notes on the *banandanti* whose souls in the form of a mouse had climbed from the mouth of a person fast asleep.

Carlo Ginzburg questioned a close connection between the "older" Kresnik, the ruler of the earthly world, and the "later" one, the protector of territory. Along with some other scholars, he found parallels in Italian, particularly Friulian, and Hungarian traditions about the *banandanti* only with the "ecstatic kresnik". According to Ginzburg this lore preserves the memory of ecstatic cults that are somehow connected with ancient Eurasian shamanism (Ginzburg 1989, 130-160).

Maja Bošković-Stulli has researched the lore on Kresnik in Croatia, which has been preserved particularly in Istria and Dalmatia. She has ascertained that the Croatian Kresnik has principally the role of protector. Believing that the *kresniki* were mainly adversaries of the *štrigoni* (sorcerers) Bošković-Stulli drew a parallel between them and the South Slavic *moguti* or *zduhači*, beings whose soul at times escapes to roam other worlds (Bošković-Stulli 1960, 292).

In Istria people believe still today that while the person who is Kresnik is sleeping, his "consciousness", "his breath" or his "other body" – that is his metaphysical body that can't be seen – travels around. If his physical body is turned around, his metaphysical body can't return, and the person dies (Lipovec Čebren 2008, 133). They still tell tales about Kresniks fighting the sorcerers in the form of a black and a white dog, such as this:

*One day my uncle went with his donkey to a mill beneath Črnica. They were grinding grain until night fell. It was summer and there was little water. So when he was returning it was already late at night. As he was nearing Dvor the donkey started to strain its ears. When uncle reached his field he saw two dogs, one black and the other white, running toward him. He thought there were hunters with them; he thought it was already dawn. So he took a stone and hurried behind the white dog. The dog bared its white teeth, growled, and ran away. When uncle reached his home it was still night but it seemed to him that it was already morning. It was about two or three hours after midnight. People had no watches in those days, not like today when we constantly carry a watch.*

*They say the white dog is a Kresnik; he would help and protect and defend you. The black dog is a sorcerer who, if it weren't for the white one, would slaughter you.* (Recorded by Mojca Ravnik, recounted by Ernest Kmet, 1989, Kluni in Istria, Archives ISN ZRC SAZU).

The *Kresniki* have become today firmly embedded in people's belief especially in Western Slovenia. Strongly convinced that they possess certain abilities, people in Istria even today believe that the kresnik (a certain person) assumes the role of witch doctor or village healer (Lipovec Čebren 2008, 132–136).

### Jarnik, the Wolf-shepherd and the Departed Souls

In folk belief tales, the *Volčji pastir* (Wolf-shepherd), also called *Šent* (Devil), *Šentjurij*, *Jurij s pušo* (George with a gun), *Jarnik* or *Volčko* (Trstenjak 1859, 50; Kelemina 1930, no. 29), had the role of the Master of the Wolves and simultaneously the protector of cattle. It can be said that the Master of the Wolves is a counterpart of St. George: while the pasturing season commences on St. George's name day (April 23/24), the Master of the wolves announces its end on St. Martin's name day (November 11).

In Slovenian folk heritage Wolf-shepherd is either a mythological chthonic being or a human transformed into the Wolf. His special characteristics are often foretold by the manner of his birth or by certain distinctions with which he is born. In folk belief tales the Wolf-shepherd may ride a wolf or a goat, he may appear as a horseman, or as an old man, often lame, with a limp, sometimes blind in one eye. He may even be half human and half wolf, or an eternal wanderer; some people depicted him as the devil. He usually appeared during the twelve – or the wolf – nights around Christmas which are called the *kalikandëri* in the Balkans. He may also appear during the time of wolf holidays called the *martinci* (around the name day of St. Martin on November 11), including November 1 (All Saints' Day) and 2 (All Souls' Day), when, as they say, the dead return to this world.

People living on the southern slopes of Pohorje say that the Wolf-shepherd can do most harm on Christmas Eve. That evening he quietly limps to his homestead and chases away his servants. After forcing them to swim across the waters he transforms them into wolves. A similar tradition was described by Pajek who depicted Šent as a “mean ghost with an axe” (Pajek 1884, 226). In Styria, the leader of carolers is called *Volčko*; the name is obviously derived from the Slovene word *volk*, the wolf.

Other saints may also appear in the role of the Wolf-shepherd. In her treatise on the Wolf-shepherd, Mirjam Mencej listed as many as twelve saints who may assume the function of the wolf master within the yearly cycle of pasturing. They are as follows: St. Martin (or St. Mrata, November 11); the autumnal St. George (November 26); St. Andrew (November 30); St. Nicholas (December 6); St. Danilo (December 17); St. Ignatius (December 20); St. Sava (January 14); St. Trifun (February 1-5); St. Ilija (July 20); St. Dimitrij (October 26); and St. Michael (September 9). In Bavaria, St. Wolfgang (October 31) (Mencej 2001: 125). According to Mencej, one of the principal functions of the Master of the wolves is to *summon* the wolves and to *dismiss* them, thus announcing the first and the last day of pasture, respectively. In this sense, the Master of the Wolves exchanges the winter with the summer (Mencej 2001, 185–196).

The Wolf-shepherd is the successor of the mythical protector of herds, cattle, and sheep who could also cure sick animals. As is the case with the Wild Hunter, the Wolf Shepherd's chthonic character and lameness makes him similar to the Germanic Odin, the Norse Wodan, the Greek Hephaestus, the Celtic Dis Pater, and the Slavic Dažbog. Rather than perceiving him as the protector of cattle and pasture, Jiří Polívka, who has written an extensive treatise on the subject, links him primarily to a forest spirit such as Lisun, Polis-

un, and Lešij, for example (Polívka 1927, 175). In his essay on the Wolf Shepherd, Veselin Čajkanović focused on his original character and role, but did not study him within the broader context of Slavic shepherd rites and beliefs. Originally the lame, or the limping last wolf, the Master of the Wolves, suggests certain parallels with the South-Slavic god of cattle and the world beyond Dabog or lame Daba (Čajkanović 1994, 118–122). Mencej established that in the Slavic heritage the Master of the wolves has the same characteristics as Veles/Volos, the pre-Slavic god of death and of the afterworld (Mencej 2001, 248).

Radoslav Katičić has placed the act of closing, or the locking, of wolves' muzzles on St. George's Day in the very center of the pre-Slavic vegetation and fertility myth (Katičić 1987, 27–28). According to him **Zeleni Jurij** (Green George) was the son of Perun. He was born on New Year's Day, carolers (representing Veles) took him to Veles' world of the dead; in spring he once again returned to the world of the living. Building on the hypothesis that St. George replaced the Master of the wolves at the onset of Christianity, Mencej has pointed out the shepherd aspect of this fertility myth connected with the yearly cycle. She suggests that Jurij the shepherd and a victim of the Master of the Wolves, who is often depicted as a shepherd himself, are the same character, and that the son of Perun was truly taken to the world of Veles on the last day of outdoor pasture in the fall. *Zeleni Jurij* was a fertility deity combining both the vegetational and the shepherd aspects (Mencej 2001, 196–204). But the written sources prove that this *Zeleni Jurij*, who appears in late autumn is the opposite twin – Wolf-shepherd or Jarnik – of *Zeleni Jurij* who appears in spring time.

It is undeniable that the period of late autumn is the time dedicated to departed ancestors. At the end of the yearly cycle people are reminded of the brief duration of their own lives. Although people have always remembered and honored their deceased throughout the year, they do so particularly on All Saints' Day (November 1), and on All Souls' Day (November 2), certain that on these days their deceased ancestors, family members and friends are closest to them.

When a person died, their family opened all windows and doors to enable the soul to leave the house. It was believed that for forty days the departed souls visited familiar places and lingered on their own grave, which is why their relatives placed some food there. Since by far the most difficult task for the soul was to traverse water, some traditions – particularly those of the East Slavs – held that Saint Nicholas ferried departed souls to the world beyond.

It is an interesting fact that in Croatian Velebit (in the vicinity of Split) people still attend the cemeteries for departed souls, the so-called *mirilo* (*mera* = measure). Each village had its own "soul cemetery". On their way to a regular cemetery, mourners would stop to make a symbolic grave for the soul of the deceased by taking his measure, afterwards proceeding to the cemetery to bury the body. On their way back they covered the taken measure with stones (Pleterski, Šantek 2010).

Even today people tell stories about supernatural beings connected with beliefs in ghosts, departed souls, death, and the afterlife. These notions often derive from animistic beliefs and also from fear of deceased relatives or returning souls. The restless beings representing the souls that return to the world of the living because of their sins, have been named the *Meraši*, the *Džilerji*, the *Brezglavci* (acephalos – the headless), the *Preklese*

or the **Preglavice** (the troubles), the **Svečari** or the **Svečniki** (the candles), like in this tale from Prekmurje:

*A man from Melinci was returning late at night from Beltinci where he had been to a cattle fair. He had sold a cow, so afterwards he had a few drinks in a pub. When he reached a bridge across the Doubel he was overtaken by a džiler. The džiler jumped on his shoulders and the man had to carry it all the way to the cemetery in Melinci. The apparition then crept down from his shoulders and retired to the mortuary. (Rešek 1995, 59).*

These cursed souls can also appear in human form or in the form of an animal such as a dog, a cat, a frog, or a moth circling a burning candle. In Slavia Veneta, people imagined a departed soul that finds no peace after death as a small roaming light or hovering fire (*fuch voladi*). If a reflection of a hovering fire fell on the laundry drying outside at night the person who would put on such a shirt would be afflicted with erysipelas or even with burning pain popularly referred to as the sickness of Saint Anthony's fire – *fuch di San Antoni*. (Maily, ed. Matičetov 1989, p. 59, no. 8).

All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day are today in Slovenia closely connected with Halloween (Santino 1983). Halloween is now sufficiently popular, and has been incorporated in contemporary legends and jokes such as this one:

*Do you know what kind of a holiday is Halloween?*

*It's the same as Women's Day, only it's Witches' Night.*

Its punch line becomes clear once we know that Halloween is called Witches' Night in Slovenia.

Folk belief traditions have been transformed - or better: traversed - from the visions of the divine to the apparitions of the ghosts, and finally to the jokes about witches.

### **The Midwinter Deities, Mokoš, Pehtra Baba and the Wild Hunt**

A dazzling creature, "Perachtum" illuminated the world in winter and, on a certain night in the middle of winter, strengthened the warmth of the sun so that it could shine upon the earth once again. A supernatural being **Pehtra** (*Pehta*, *Pehtra Baba*) is a successor of Mokoš. The Slavs widely worshipped **Mokoš**, also called *Mokóška*, *Mátoha*, or *Mátoga*. Mokoš was together with **Perun** and **Veles** a female deity who played an important role in the principal Slavic myth. She was connected with water and spinning (Ivanov, Toporov 1983). She was also a Slavic deity of cyclical circulation and renewal, fertility, protector of female chores, particularly of spinning, weaving, and doing laundry. While the Old Church Slavonic root *mok-* denotes wet, damp, the root *mot-* denotes to coil, to spin; *mótok*, for instance, denotes a spinning wheel. Mokoš was also the protector of trades, particularly of spinning, weaving, and music. The deity connected with Mokoš in Slavic traditions was also **Zlata Baba** (Golden Hag); later successors of Mokoš are beside her also **Baba** (the Hag) **Pehtra Baba** – a dazzling creature, **St. Lucia** who was supposed to bring light in the land and was a Christian attendant of Perht, and other Midwinter deities - the personifications of days of the week - like **Torka** (Tuesday), **Četrka** (Thursday), **Petka** (Friday, **St. Parasceve**, 14. Oct.), **St. Nedelja** (St. Sunday) and **Kvatra** (Quarter day woman), which also assumed some functions of the Perht. These personifications ensured



that people respected and obeyed the restrictions of spinning and other prescriptions for these days (for more about this see: Krojej 2008, 182–186).

According to popular belief Mokoš or Mokoška was later connected with the Great Witch (Lamia). Davorin Trstenjak wrote down the story about Mokoška – **Lama baba** (Lamwaberl) – living in a castle in a marshy place that he had heard about from Rudolf Puff in Styria:

*Lamwaberl used to live in Grünau, a marshy place not far away from Šent Florjan Square, near the Ložnica that often overflowed its banks. Archaeological artifacts confirm that in the olden times the place had been cultivated. A lonesome farming estate is situated there now, but once upon a time there stood the castle of Mokoška, a heathen princess who lived in it. The castle was surrounded by gardens that were always green. She occasionally helped people but sometimes also harmed them; she was especially wont to taking children with her. At long last, God punished her. On a stormy night the castle and all its gardens sank into the ground. But Mokoška was not doomed. She continued to appear, disguised in different female forms. She still carries off children, especially those who have been neglected by their parents. (Trstenjak 1855, 206).*

The heritage that has been preserved about Baba depicts her as a scary female figure who barred the road to anybody who was for the first time taking cattle to pasture, or was about to undertake a commercial trip, or went to school for the first time, etc. Anybody who chanced upon her had to donate something, for example a piece of bread, kiss her, and so on.

According to tradition Pehtra Baba was, among other things, the leader of the **Wild Hunt**. People imagined it as a night-time procession of rushing and raging demons and departed souls during twelve nights around Christmas and New Year. The popular tradition of the Wild Hunt is based on the concept of the ghosts of the dead storming around at a certain time of the year. This tradition seems to derive from the belief, known already in antiquity, in which the leader of the souls of the dead was Cybele. In the Norse saga Snorra Edda the Wild Hunt, which takes place on battlefields of the fallen warriors, is led by the Valkyries who are bringing slain heroes to Valhalla, the kingdom of Odin.

The tradition of Perhtra Baba or Perta was particularly popular in the region of the Alps, like in the tale from Bovec:

*A man refused to believe that the Pêrte existed. So on Epiphany he set out to await them. In order to see them pass he hid near the bridge across the Koritnica (by Bovec). But although he was hidden the pête knew where he was. As they were passing one of them hacked at his leg with a broad ax, laming him. A year later he waited for them again. The same pête said: "I've forgotten something here last year; I have to take it back." And he was well again. (P-ov 1884, 303–304).*

It was believed that if the Wild Hunt encountered a human it would tear him or her apart, or would fling an axe into them. A year later, at the same time and in the same place, the Hunt would remove the axe and relieve the victim from pain. If they heard the Wild Hunt, people were advised to swiftly throw themselves into the right-hand side wheel track on their path or to cross themselves, step aside, and remain motionless; this was the

only way to avoid grave injuries that could be inflicted upon passersby by the Wild Hunt. Those who mimicked the howling of the Wild Hunt would be thrown a human shoulder or a leg, as if to say, “You hunted with us, so also feast with us!” or “Since you helped with the chasing you will also help with the gnawing!” In Carinthia people still today recount of hunters who chanced upon the Wild Hunt during their nocturnal hunts.

In Resia, the tradition about the Wild Hunt is still known in the form of variants about fallen warriors rushing, either on horseback or on foot, by those who happen to be in that place at that moment. In Val Canale people tell stories about the Wild Hunt burning the clothes on the back of those unfortunates who happen to pass by, even if they swiftly throw themselves on the ground (Kropej, Dapit 2008, p. 36, no. 28).

Pehta or Perta has become a popular supernatural being in Upper Carniola and in the Western Alps. Peter Jakelj - Smerinjekov, a folk storyteller – who inspired the writer Josip Vandot – told stories about **Pehta**, **Bedanec** and **Kosobrin** in the late 1950s and 60s to Milko Matičetov. The recorded material is preserved in the Archives ISN ZRC SAZU. In this way Pehta from Kranjska gora has become a literary heroine in children’s books written by Josip Vandot, and she remains to this day one of the principal local tourist attractions because the daughter of Smerinjekov, Marica Globočnik still tells stories about her to the visitors and tourists.

### Zeleni Jurij, Marjetica and the Spring Time

All of these frightening activities of mid-winter supernatural beings awaken the spring that is heralded by **Zeleni Jurij** (Green George) on St. George’s Day, he is known as *Jack in the Green* in England. East Slavs had named him also **Jarylo**. Zeleni Jurij is, like **Kresnik**, supposed to be Perun’s son. It seems that they are two of Perun’s incarnations or sons appearing in different yearly periods.

The Russian philologists Ivanov and Toporov have found mainly on the tradition about Zeleni Jurij, traces of the principal myth of **Perun** and **Veles**, linking Jurij/Jarylo with Balto-Slavic Jarovit, a deity of fertility, who was initially worshipped on April 15 (Ivanov, Toporov 1974, 184).

Both Radoslav Katičić (1987) and Vitomir Belaj (1998) share the opinion that Jurij/Jarylo is the son of Perun and central to the pre-Slavic vegetation and fertility myth. Jurij was taken by envoys of Veles to the land of the dead from which he returned to the world of the living in spring. As a harbinger of spring, Zeleni Jurij is also connected with the circular flow of time and with renewal. According to Katičić’s reconstruction of the myth of Zeleni Jurij, the mythic story recounts how young Jurij rides his horse from afar, from the land of eternal spring and the land of the dead – from Veles’ land – across a blood-stained sea, through a mountain to a green field. In Nestor’s Chronicle from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the word \*irъj, \*vyrъjъ – “Vyrej” – denotes a paradise beyond the waters, a place to which birds of heaven migrate in winter; the name Jurij, whose etymological origin is the word *irej*, links him with swampland. At the end of his journey, Jurij arrives at the door of Perun’s court to marry Perun’s daughter (his sister) **Mara**. Together with the sacrifice of the horse, the *hieros gamos* ensures vegetational growth and fertility (Katičić 1989). Some Slovene folk tales and songs also mention an incestuous relationship between a brother and a sister (Tvrdoглаv and Marjetica, SLP I, no. 21; The girl saved from the dragon, no.

22/1-4), which is the sacred marriage already mentioned in the myth of Kresnik. The sacred marriage is therefore connected also with Zeleni Jurij.

It can be gathered from the lore that **Jarnik** is the counterpart, or the twin brother, of Jurij. In some tales, Zeleni Jurij, or **St. George**, has the role of the **Wolf Shepherd** or the Master of the Wolves. People living in the vicinity of Karlovac used to tell that on St. George's Day all wolves gathered in one place, waiting for St. George, who then arrived riding a fiery billy goat. Around Karlovac people even believed that he appeared in the shape of a white wolf to allocate each wolf its own hunting ground (Kelemina 1930, no. 21/II).

**Jurij with a gun** is also mentioned in a folk song that has been preserved in a manuscript written by Anton Martin Slomšek and published by Ivan Grafenauer in Slovenski etnograf (Grafenauer 1956, p. 197-202). The final, fifth verse goes like this:

*/.../ Again a fearsome beast appeared,  
And there came Jurij with his gun.  
He shot the mosquito in the small hole:  
George got the mosquito; the mosquito got the lion,  
The lion got the wolf, the wolf got the fox, the fox got the rabbit,  
The rabbit got the cat, the cat got the mouse, and the mouse got the yellow wheat.  
When, oh when, you peasant poor, when will you get rich?  
(SNP I, no. 966).*

In this song, that has been classified as a children's song about animals, Jurij with a gun plays the role of a hunter hunting animals that in turn hunt one another. Anton Martin Slomšek added a handwritten note that this was one of the oldest songs in Carniola. As frequently happens in folk lore, a mythological character has been transplanted from an abandoned ritual, or from a ritual song, to children's folk lore.

In Ledenice in Gailtal (Austrian Carinthia) folk custom was performed on St. George's day, that was described by Franz Koschier (1957, 862-880): After building a bonfire on a nearby hill local lads also dug a grave for St. George next to it. Wrapped in straw, St. George lay in the grave covered with green pine branches. After a prayer the lads tore down the hill, making a tremendous racket, with St. George in pursuit. Researchers believe that the custom exhibits characteristics of a buried and newly-awoken vegetation deity (Šmitek 2004, 132). However if we regard the folk custom and the narrative tradition about Zeleni Jurij as a common source, we can see that Zeleni Jurij is the young god - the son of Perun, and that **Marjetica** (**Vesna** or **Deva**) is the young goddess - the daughter of **Mokoš**, and that the three figures: Zeleni Jurij, the dragon and Deva form another triangular form, repeating the principal Slavic myth.

Nowadays the customs and processions connected with Zeleni Jurij are being revived mostly by folklore groups that enact them, particularly in Bela Krajina where the customs of celebrating St. George's Day have been preserved longest.

## Conclusion

The material analyzed for the purpose of this paper strongly indicates that the supernatural beings that accompany the yearly cycle are intertwined and related. For example,

both Kresnik and Zeleni Jurij (Green George) appear in the same role of the dragon slayer in the principal Slavic myth. Both of them are the sons of Perun, the God of Heavens, and some sources even indicate that they might be the tenth, or the twelfth, brothers. Both are said to have their opposite counterpart, or a twin brother. The counterpart of Zeleni Jurij is Jarnik, or the Wolf-shepherd (the Master of the wolves), appearing in autumn from the world beyond, from across the waters, he unties the wolves and thus announces the arrival of winter. The counterpart of Kresnik is the false Kresnik, named Vedomec, whom Kresnik has to fight in order to ensure a good harvest in his land. This indicates the **parallels with Indo-European stockbreeding myth** (Lincoln, 1983, 103–124).

The old Slavic deity Mokoš and her daughter, the young goddess Živa, whose name in Slovene folk lore is often Vesna or Marjetica (St Margaret) or Deva (Virgin), are Slavic parallels of the **Indo-European old and young goddesses** examined by Emily Lyle (2007, 67-68). Together with Perun and Veles, Mokoš has been classified as one of the principal Old Slavic deities (Ivanov, Toporov 1983). Therefore Mokoš was the predecessor and the mother of young deities such as Deva, which has been confirmed by toponyms (Šmitek 2006). It follows from the Slovene folk narrative and song tradition that the parents of both Kresnik and Zeleni Jurij were Perun and Mokoš; at the same time they were also the parents of Vesna and Marjetica, who were the sisters and simultaneously the brides, of Zeleni Jurij and of Kresnik.

Slovene narrative tradition thus confirms the conclusion of August Wünsche that **ancient cultures regarded the calendar year and its segments as related in kinship** (Wünsche 1986). In Slovene narrative tradition the cosmogonic deities appear as married couples, brothers, sisters, and children. It also confirms the conclusion that this kin connection is based on kinship ties among gods who had created the year and its course.

During the course of many years, people's attitude toward these myths has changed. Mythological stories gradually transformed into unrelated legends or belief tales, which in turn became increasingly fragmented. Their content changed more than the narrative genres themselves. Today, the supernatural beings from old cosmogonical narratives have acquired a mostly demythicised image. Stories that helped us preserve the memory of mythological characters that accompany the year and its cycle are usually classified as belief tales. Only a few of them could be classified as contemporary legends, and only certain newer elements can be found in jokes and humorous stories, according to the classification of the ethnopoetic genres (Jason 2000, 30-37).

The changing images of these folk belief narratives result from continuously changing cultural and social contexts, whereby supernatural figures acquire a demythicised image in contemporary belief tales, narratives, and urban legends. This contemporary image may approximate spirits and witches, and it may acquire commercial and humorous features. But, surprisingly enough, these ancient supernatural beings are very much persistent in the Slovenian narrative tradition even today. At the same time they appear also in folkloristic events, contemporary customs as well as in literature and art.

## Bibliography and Abbreviations

- Belaj, V. (1998) *Hod kroz godina. Mitska pozadina hrvatskih narodnih običaja i verovanja*, Zagreb: Golden Marketing.
- Bošković-Stulli, M. (1960) Kresnik-Krsnik, ein Wesen aus der kroatischen und slovenischen Volksüberlieferung, *Fabula*, vol. 3/3, p. 275–298.
- Čajkanović, V. (1994) *O vrhovnom bogu u staroj srpskoj religiji* (1. edition 1941) Beograd: Srbska književna zadruga.
- Ginzburg, C. (1989) *Storia notturna. Una decifrazione del sabba*, Torino: Einaudi.
- ISN ZRC SAZU = Inštitut za slovensko narodopisje Znanstvenoraziskovalnega centra Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti (Institute of Slovenian Ethnology at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts).
- Ivanov, V. V. and Toporov, V. N. (1974) *Issledovanija v oblasti slavjanskih drevnostej*, Moskva: Nauka.
- Ivanov, V. V. and Toporov, V. N. (1983) K rekonstrukciji Mokoši kak ženskoga personaža v slavjanskoj versii osnovnogo mifa, *Balto-slavjanskije issledovanija 1982*, Moskva, p. 175–197.
- Jason, H. (2000) *Motif, Type and Genre: A Manual for Compilation of Indices. A Bibliography of Indices and Indexing* (FF Communications 273), Helsinki: Academia scientarum Fennica.
- Katičić, R. (1987) Hoditi-roditi. Spuren der Texte eines urslawischen Fruchtbarkeitsritus, *Wiener Slavistisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 33, p. 23–43.
- Katičić R. (1989) Weiteres zur Rekonstruktion der Texte eines urslawischen Fruchtbarkeitsritus, *Wiener Slavistisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 35, p. 57–98.
- Kelemina, J. (1930) *Bajke in pripovedke slovenskega ljudstva*, Celje, Družba sv. Mohorja.
- Kociančić, S. (1854) Navade primorskih Slovincov, *Slovenska bčela*, vol. 4, p. 157.
- Kretzenbacher, L. (1941) *Germanische Mythen in der epischen Volksdichtung der Slowenen. Ein Beitrag zur einer Kulturgestaltung in deutschen Grenzraum*, Graz: Das Joanneum Schriften des südostdeutschen Institutes.
- Kropej, M. (2008) *Od ajda do zlatoroga: Slovenska bajeslovna bitja*, Celovec-Ljubljana-Dunaj: Mohorjeva založba.
- Kropej, M. (2008) Slovene Midwinter Deities and personifications of Days in the Yearly, Work, and Life Cycles, in: Mencej, M. (ed.) *Space and Time in Europe: East and West, Past and Present* (Županičeva knjižnica 25), Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana, p. 181–197.
- Kropej, M. and Dapit, R. (2006) *Prek šibja, prek trnja, prek borov, prek dolov: Slovenske pripovedke o čarovnicah, čarovnikih in vračih*, Radovljica: Didakta.
- Kropej, M. and Dapit, R. (2008) *Kole, kole, koledo, leto lepo mlado: Slovenske ljudske pripovedi ob letnih mejnikih*, Radovljica: Didakta.
- Lyle, E. (2007) Narrative form and the Structure of Myth, *Folklore*, vol. 33, Tartu, p. 59–69.
- Lincoln, B. (1983), *Priests, warriors and cattle. A study in the ecology of religions*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press.
- Lipovec Čebrown, U. (2008), *Kročere zdravja in bolezni. Tradicionalna in komplementarna medicina v Istri* (Županičeva knjižnica 24), Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana.
- Mailly, A., ed.: Matičetov, M. (1989), *Leggende del Friuli e delle Alpi Giulie*, Gorizia: Editrice Goriziana.

- Mencej, M. (2001) *Gospodar volkov v slovanski mitologiji* (Županičeva knjižnica 6), Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana.
- Mikhailov, N. (1998) *Kr(e)snik, eine Figur der slowenischen Version des urschlawischen Hauptmythos. Baltische und slawische Mythologie* (Studia Mythosemeiotica 1), Madrid: Actas.
- Mulec, K. (1858) Kresniki, basnoslovni vitezi starih Slovincov. *Novice*, vol. 16, p. 253–254.
- Pajak, J. (1882), Vurberški Krsnik, *Kres*, vol. 2, p. 578–581.
- Pajak, J. (1884) *Črtice iz duševnega žitka štaj. Slovencev*, Ljubljana: Matica slovenska.
- Pleterski, A. and G. P. Šantek (2010), Mirila. Kulturni fenomen. (Ed: A. Pleterski, G. P. Šantek) *Studia mythologica Slavica – Supplementa 3*
- Pohorski, F. (1858) O Kresniku. Slovenske narodne pripovedke. *Novice*, vol. 16, p. 374.
- Polívka, J. (1927) Volči pastyr, *Sbornik praci verovanyh profesoru Dru Václavu Tillovi k šesdesatym narozeninam 1867–1927*, p. 159–179.
- P-ov. (1884) P ê r t e. *Slovan*, vol. 1/38, p. 303–304.
- Rešek, D. (1995) *Brezglavjeki* (Glasovi 9), Ljubljana: Kmečki glas.
- Santino, J. (1983) Halloween in America: Contemporary Customs and Performances, *Western Folklore*, vol. 42, p. 1–20.
- Slekovec, M. (1895) Vurberg. Krajepisno-zgodovinska črtica, *Slovenski gospodar*, vol. 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; p. 5–6; 14–15; 24–25; 33–34; 42–43; 51–52; 60–61; 69–70; 77–78; 86–87; 95–96; 103–104; 112–113.
- Šašelj, I. (1906), *Bisernice iz belokranjskega narodnega blaga 1*, Ljubljana: Katoliški tisk.
- SLP I = *Slovenske narodne pesmi I*. Ljubljana: Slovenska matica 1970.
- SNP = Štrekelj, K. *Slovenske narodne pesmi I–IV*, Ljubljana: Slovenska matica 1895–1923.
- Šmitek, Z. (2003) *Sledovi potujočih duš. Vedomci, kresniki in sorodna bajna bitja*, Radovljica: Didakta.
- Šmitek, Z. (2004) *Mitološko izročilo Slovencev. Svetinje preteklosti*, Ljubljana: Študentska založba.
- Šmitek, Z. (2006) Vurberk. Kačji grad sredi »svete pokrajine«, Mošenički zbornik, vol. 3, p. 83–92.
- Trstenjak, D (1855) Starozgodovinski pomenki: Cvetlica Lotos in njen pomen na noriških rimskih kamnih, *Novice*, vol. 13/ 52, p. 206–207.
- Trstenjak, D. (1859) Mythologične drobtine, *Glasnik slovenski*, vol. 3 /1, p. 78–79.
- Trstenjak, D. (1870) Raziskovanja na polji staroslovanske mythologie: 2. Pripovedka o Vurmbergu, *Letopis Maticе slovenske*, p. 21.
- Valjavec, M. (1866) Narodne stvari: priče, navade, stare vere. *Slovenski glasnik*, vol. 9/1–4, 6; p. 23–28; 67–70; 108–112; 146–151; 229–230.
- Valvasor, J. W. (1689) *Die Ehre des Herzogthums Krain 1–4*. Laibach-Nürnberg: J. Krajec Buchdruckerei.
- Wünsche, A. (1986) Das Rätsel vom Jahr und seinen Zeitabschnitten in der Weltliteratur. *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturgeschichte*, N.F., vol. 9, p. 425–426.

## Od tradicije do sodobnih zgodb: spreminjajoče življenje nekaterih slovenskih bajeslovnih bitij letnega cikla

Monika Kropelj

Članek se osredotoča na ljudsko pripovedno tradicijo in pravljice o slovenskih bajeslovnih bitjih, ki spremljajo letni cikel. Med drugim so obravnavani *Kresniki* (*Benandanti*) – branilci pred čarovnicami in demoni, ki so bili še posebej prisotni v času poletnega solsticija. V pozni jeseni, ob dnevu mrtvih (1. november) in na dan vseh svetih (2. november), so si ljudje živo pripovedovali zgodbe o duhovih in dušah pokojnih. Prav tako so v času volčjih praznikov, ki jih Južni Slovani imenujejo *martinci* (okoli godu sv. Martina, 11. novembra), verjeli, da pride z onega sveta *Volčji pastir* (gospodar volkov). Ob zimskem solsticiju naj bi imele moč sredozimke: *Mokoš*, *Zlata baba*, *Pehtra baba* (*Pehta*) in druga ženska boštva, ki so bila pogosto povezana s prejo in ženskimi opravili. Pomladi ljudsko izročilo opeva *Zelenega Jurija* (*Jarylo*), prinašalca rodovitnosti in sončne toplote.

Raziskava je pokazala, da so "glavni junaki" med omenjenimi bajeslovnimi bitji med seboj povezani in celo v sorodstvenih odnosih. Tako slovensko mitopoetično izročilo potrjuje ugotovitve A. Wünscheja, da so božanstva in polbožanstva najstarejših mitov, ki so po eni strain ustvarjala svet, po drugi pa so tudi spremljala letni cikel in ciklično kroženje narave, med seboj sorodstveno povezana in nastopajo bodisi kot poročeni pari, bratje, sestre, otroci, kakor tudi med seboj nasprotujoči si dvojčki. Na ta način prevzemajo vloge bogov slovanskega glavnega mita, katerega protagonisti so Perun, Veles in Mokoš. Prav tako je raziskava tudi potrdila, da so te sorodstvene povezave osnovane na mitih o stvarjenju sveta in o stvarjenju leta in njegovega cikla; kakor tudi na indoevropskem živinorejsko-poljedeljskem mitu o kraji in ponovni osvoboditvi pridelka, ki ga je rekonstruiral B. Lincoln.

Spreminjajoče podobe in oblike teh bajeslovnih bitij in verskih predstav, povezanih z njimi, so se prilagajale družbenim, gospodarskim in kulturnim spremembam v svetu. Tako se je spomin nanje ohranil do današnjih dni, preživel pokristjanjenje in druge ideološke spremembe. V teku tega procesa je bilo izročilo demitizirano in je sčasoma postalo sestavni del sodobnega pripovedništva, verovanj, urbanih legend in šal, kakor tudi predmet poustvarjanja in umetniški navdih.