

Balkan Wolf/Dog in Folklore Interpretations in the Mythology of Nature by N. Nodilo through T. R. Đorđević to Lj. Radenković and P. Plas

—Suzana Marjanić—

This interpretive timeline presents (not necessarily in chronological order) the imaginary of the “Balkan” wolf/dog in South Slavic customs and beliefs from Natko Nodilo, through T. R. Đorđević and Lj. Radenković, all the way to contemporary cultural animal studies research by P. Plas (the author employs a methodology that integrates ethnolinguistic/semiotic and linguistic-anthropological and ethnopoetic approaches), contextually related to other Slavs and Indo-European comparative mythology in the framework of archetypal wolf/dog phobias (*lupophobia*, *kinophobia*). While Nodilo relies on A. de Gubernatis’ interpretation of nature mythology, T. R. Đorđević follows the ethnographic material of the South Slavs (as for Croatia, he carefully researched, among other things, the wolf/dog entries in the *Collection of Folk Life and Customs of the South Slavs*), and Lj. Radenković semiotically observes the wolf/dog in the symbolism of the world of the South Slavs, where he notes that the closest domestic animals to man are the horse, sheep, cow and ox, followed by the bull, goat, donkey, hen, pig, dog and cat. So-called wild animals are arranged in relation to the *god-shepherd* (*God’s shepherd*) – the bear is closest to him, and the wolf is the farthest.

KEYWORDS: wolf, dog, fear, folklore interpretation, South Slavic customs and beliefs

Interpretativni časovni pregled predstavlja (ne nujno v kronološkem zaporedju) domišljjski lik »balkanskega« volka/psa v južnoslovanskih običajih in verovanjih, od Natka Nodila, prek T. R. Đorđevića in Lj. Radenkovića vse do sodobnih kulturnih raziskav živali P. Plasa (avtor uporablja metodologijo, ki združuje etnolingvistični/semiotični in jezikoslovno-antropološki ter etnopoetični pristop), kontekstualno povezano z drugimi Slovani in indoevropsko primerjalno mitologijo v okviru arhetipskih fobij volkov/psov (*lupofobija*, *kinofobija*). Medtem ko se Nodilo opira na A. de Gubernatisovo interpretacijo mitologije narave, T. R. Đorđević sledi etnografskemu gradivu južnih Slovanov (kar zadeva Hrvaško, je med drugim skrbno raziskal vpise o volku/psu v *Zbirki ljudskega življenja in običajev južnih Slovanov*), Lj. Radenković pa semiotko opazuje volka/psa v simboliki sveta južnih Slovanov, kjer ugotavlja, da so človeku najbližje domače živali konj, ovca, krava in vol, sledijo pa jim bik, koza, osel, kokoš, prašič, pes in mačka. Tako imenovane divje živali so razvrščene v odnosu do *boga-pastirja* (*Božjega pastirja*) – medved mu je najbližji, volk pa najbolj oddaljen.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: volk, pes, strah, folklorna interpretacija, južnoslovanski običaji in verovanja

Once upon a time, there were a lot of wolves in Europe.
Tihomir R. Đorđević (1958: 205)

Following the lexical entry on the W/wolf (*Canis lupus*), we start with the zoological fact that the wolf belongs to the dog family (lat. *Canidae*), and following the conceptions of religion that recognize the beginnings of religious phenomena in the fear of nature, as did the nature mythology by Friedrich Max Müller, I start with the question of where the historical, historically conditioned, certified fear of wolves comes from.¹

In addition to the archetypal phobia, there is a deeply rooted notion of the wolf as man's enemy. Wolves were the first animals with which humans established a mutual relationship, which eventually led to domesticated dogs (*Canis familiaris*). As highlighted by the exhibition *Of Animals and Humans* ("O životinjama i ljudima", Ethnographic Museum, Zagreb, 2017), modern science supports the theory of unintentional domestication, meaning that wolves initiated contact with humans by following them to feed on human food scraps. Over time, both species lost their initial fear, fulfilling the first condition for a mutually beneficial relationship. In sedentary cultures, the wolf was considered an enemy that killed domestic (useful) animals. The food competition between man and wolf (cf. Visković, 1996: 310) was soon accompanied by hunting competition. Phobia and the demonization of wolves,² along with competitive hunting, led to frequent wolf persecutions in Western and Central Europe, aiming for their complete eradication. Thus, wolves were exterminated in Great Britain (where the last wolf was killed in 1743), Denmark (1772), and Germany (1904).³ In Southern and Eastern Europe, greater tolerance toward wolves (and other large *beasts* – I am using this common linguistic speciesism) was documented.⁴ Even here, after significant damages, wolf hunts were organized, but the goal was never to exterminate their entire population.⁵ Milan Lang notes that in Samobor, people "exterminated" wolves around the mid-19th century:

¹ The article was originally published in Croatian in the journal *Folkloristika: časopis udruženja folklorista Srbije* (Belgrade), No. 1, 2025.

² In the context of anthropological structures of the imaginary, Gilbert Durand states that for Western imagination, the wolf is the savage animal *par excellence* (Durand, 1991: 77), demonstrating how the animal's snout concentrates all the terrifying fantasies of animality: "agitation, aggressive mastication, sinister grunting and roaring" (ibid.: 76).

³ Tihomir R. Đorđević (1958: 205) refers to the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. 9 (Berlin/Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1938–1941), which documents the disappearance of wolves in various European countries.

⁴ Today, the largest wolves live in the cold regions of Latvia, Belarus, Alaska, and Canada, and can reach a weight of up to 60 kg (cf. "Gray Wolf", "Sivi vuk", 2023).

⁵ On the other side of demonization, regarding the phobia of the "Balkan wolf", we find the apotropaic charm of the wolf's yawn (the skin cut around the wolf's jaw) in this symbolic whirlwind. During epidemics, children were passed through the wolf's yawn, as a sort of magical circle, because of the belief that they would be protected under the wolf's patronage (Bandić, 1991: 26; cf. Plas, 2021: 35–38). "In folk magic, the act of passing through something is considered one way to eliminate the *man-demon* opposition, whereby the person, to free themselves from evil influences, enters the demonic world by crossing a boundary perceived as a symbolic line between the human and non-human world. Considering the 'liminal' characteristic of the wolf, the 'wolf's yawn' often forms a 'boundary' during ritual passage" (Radenković, 1996: 78–79, 81).

There are no wolves in the Samobor area. In the past, when there was more brush and thickets around, one might wander here in the winter. The late Samobor teacher Josip Herović noted in his writings that he was once chased by two wolves while driving at night from Mokrica to Samobor. – Fifty years ago, landowner Farkaš killed a wolf near his estate (Kalinovica). No one recalls hearing or seeing a wolf near Samobor after that (Lang, 1911: 207).⁶

Tihomir R. Đorđević, according to Friedrich Wilhelm von Taube's account, in the section "Extermination of Wolves" documents how, in the second half of the 18th century, there was a significant trade in wolf and fox skins in Slavonia, where the wolf was considered a pest and bloodthirsty predator, leading to "relentless extermination" by the people (Đorđević, 1958: 220).⁷

Canids (lat. *Canidae*) include both dogs and wolves. In the context of the archetypology of archetypal demonization, dogs are included in folklore beliefs of foretelling death and misfortune, and I cite some from the *Collection of Folk Life and Customs of the South Slavs* related to beliefs about dogs as "domesticated wolves". Rudolf Horvat notes the following belief from Koprivnica: "When a dog howls with its snout pointed downward, someone will die, but if it looks up, there will be a fire" (Horvat, 1896: 254). Milan Lang writes the following for Samobor: "If a house dog howls terribly at night, it signifies the death of a distant relative or acquaintance. Otherwise, the general belief is: If the dog lowers its snout to the ground while howling, it means death; if it holds its snout upward, it means fire." In a footnote, Lang adds: "Our people say that when a puppy is born, it sees nothing in its first year; only after a year does it start to see" (Lang, 1914: 195). Frano Ivanišević, writing about Poljice (in a section on reading omens related to natural phenomena), notes: "Similarly, if a dog howls around the house, it calls for death" (this comes after text related to the croaking of ravens); "No evil spirit approaches a black dog" (Ivanišević, 1905: 283). Tomislav Macan records a variation of the belief from Blato on the island of Mljet: "If a dog licks a roof, someone will become a reaper. (i.e., a werewolf) (Blood can come from the nose or a wound)," and "When a dog howls in the village, something bad will happen (i.e., war)" (Macan, 1932: 236).⁸

⁶ Lang also mentions rat hunting with dogs: "Rat terriers are very skilled rat hunters. A man named Jozef has two such dogs. He has trained them very well, and wherever he goes with them, it's a delight to watch how deftly and passionately these small dogs catch rats. Like lightning, they leap here then there, grabbing a rat by the neck, shaking it, and laying it dead at their master's feet" (Lang, 2011: 209).

⁷ In 2019, the first study on the socioeconomic and cultural impact of wolves in Croatia was conducted. Despite the saying (Plautus – Hobbes) "Man to man is wolf", the residents of Lika, Gorski Kotar, Dalmatia, and Kordun, regions where wolves reside, believe that wolves have the same rights as humans and should continue living in their ancient, natural habitats within Croatia. The vast majority of people living in areas inhabited by wolves are not afraid of them, and despite the damage wolves cause to their livestock, most believe that life without wolves would worsen because the ecological balance would be disrupted (according to Tišma et al., 2019).

⁸ Tihomir R. Đorđević (1958: 239) refers to the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. 4 (Berlin/Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1931/1932) as a source for the dog acting as an omen of death. Similar beliefs involving omens are recorded about the wolf as well, for instance Škarić for Lipovo Polje in Lika writes "When the wolf howls, it is an omen for bad weather or military conflict" (Škarić, 1911: 153).

Dušan Bandić, in the context of the mentioned phobia, emphasizes that even the name of the wolf was not to be spoken, and various taboo-nicknames were used instead, such as *napomenik*, *kamenik*,⁹ *pogan*,¹⁰ or *the one from the hills* (according to Bandić, 1991: 25). Slavist Pieter Plas has written extensively about the motif of petrification in formulas recited when breaking the verbal taboo, as well as other attributes as motifs of neutralization (2021: 196, 243).

Perhaps the symbolic, archetypal nature in Durand's definition – the anthropological structure of the imaginary, the combining of the dog and the wolf – can be illustrated through the systematic research of Ülo Valk on zoomorphic manifestations of the devil in Estonian folklore records. Ülo Valk differentiates four categories of zoo-visualizations: domestic animals (with the dog coming first, followed by the cat, goat, horse, pig, foal, ox/bull, cow, ram, calf, sheep, lamb). In the category of *wild* animals, the hare dominates (followed by the bear, wolf, squirrel, fox, frog/toad, snake, mouse, hedgehog, European moose, lynx, lion, tiger, rat, marten, unspecified animal). Among ornithomorphic visualizations – the rooster (followed by the crow, capercaillie, black grouse, hawk, raven, magpie, unspecified bird, eagle, sparrow, cuckoo, hen, stork, goose), and among fish and insects – northern burbot, northern pike, picus, horsefly. He points out that there is a significant difference in the zoomorphic manifestation of the devil between Estonian folklore records and Christian demonography. Compared to Christian literature, where so-called *predatory beasts* hold the top place in animal demonization, in Estonian folklore, domestic animals dominate (242 visualizations of the devil in isomorphisms of domestic animals out of a total of 390 zoomorphic manifestations), while among wild animals, the harmless vegetarian hare stands out. Given that the boundary between demonology and zoology was indeed not clear in the Middle Ages, some bestiaries introduced the devil into the classification of animals, and Ülo Valk refers to the animal euphemism for the devil – the (*old*) *snail* – (*vana*)*tigu* in Estonian folk tradition. It is interesting to note that the devil less frequently manifests zoomorphically in Estonian folklore than in German folklore; one typical zoomorphic manifestation of the devil in Estonian folklore is the dog, which appears in 72 out of a total of 390 zoomorphic manifestations, and is generally black in color, although the *demonic* and *demonized* dog is not necessarily portrayed as *large* or *threatening*. It usually appears as a small lively dog, a small dog/dachshund, and as a white dog. The author also reveals that the connotations of the dog in the Estonian cultural sphere are not easily defined because, as A. A. Amfiteatrov states, the devil¹¹ in the form of a dog is a feature of Western European tradition (Valk, of course, refers to Mephistopheles' appearance as a black poodle during the first encounter with Faust in the worlds of Goethe's *Faust*, to which I add Sloterdijk's *cynical* interpretation that the *devil* chose the symbol of a cynical sect of philosophers for his first appearance). In the Orthodox East, the dog symbolically figures as a friend of humans, who is in conflict with

⁹ Cf. Karadžić, the lexeme *kamenjak* in *Rječnik*.

¹⁰ Mijat Stojanović noted the lexeme *pogan* (1866: 17).

¹¹ Gura points out that in the Polish ritual of inducting a young man into the circle of adult reapers, the newcomer is referred to as “wolf”, to which in some local variations corresponds the name “bear”: “such a young man was adorned with bean stalks and given a tail made of ears of grain” (Gura, 2005: 130).

evil spirits. Ülo Valk's interpretation of the *demonized dog* is based on the monograph *The Devil in Dog Form: A Partial Type-Index of Devil Legends* (1956) by folklorist Barbara Allen Woods, which contains – as the title phrase suggests – a (partial) index of types and a bibliography of legends about the devil in the form of a dog.

Thus, while the wolf represented a visual symbol of fear in hunter-gatherer societies, this symbolism was taken over by the dog with the Indo-European peoples. Ljubinko Radenković, in his exceptional study on dogs, shows that dogs resemble their ancestors (wolves and jackals), eat carrion, human feces, reproduce in groups, can transmit certain diseases to humans, are active at night, are *briable*, and traditional culture generally considers them unclean animals, attributing them with demonic qualities. Radenković also notes that such perceptions were further influenced by two major religions – Christianity and Islam – which negatively structured the image of the dog into the segment of the unclean animal (Radenković, 2023: 489).¹²

WOLF/DOG IN THE NATURE MYTHOLOGY: NODILO'S READING OF DE GUBERNATIS ON THE EXAMPLE OF A NYCTOMORPHIC WOLF

One of the earliest scholars to write about the folkloric conceptualization of the dog in the context of South Slavic studies was Natko Nodilo, working within the framework of Müller's nature mythology (Müller, 1997 [1898]; Marjanić, 2022). Nodilo detected that the Vedic worlds deal only with the Sun, Sky, Day, Dawn, Morning, Spring, to which the appellation *deva* belongs, and oppose dark forces, whereby the sunrise and sunset, the alternation of day and night, the struggle between light and darkness, becomes the main narrative of mythology.

In addition to the mentioned anthropocentric phobia, which arose from the sedentary agricultural paradigm, narratives of fear of the wolf can also be illustrated within the context of Angelo de Gubernatis' mythology of nature, specifically his zoo-mythology, which draws from Friedrich Max Müller.¹³ Nodilo uses their interpretations (now debunked) to

¹² Authors of the exhibition *The Dog in Croatian Fine Art from the 19th Century to the Present Day* (Galerija Prca, Samobor, 2013) Snježana Pavičić and Dajana Vlaisavljević state that "art generally offers evidence of the positive relationship between humans and dogs. The darker side of the dog is rarely depicted, though it was most present during the early Middle Ages, when the dog was considered an unclean animal, a trait that took on symbolic connotations. The dog is also considered an unclean animal by Jews and Muslims, which explains their negative view of this animal. The Bible, too, alludes to the greed and gluttony of dogs, but later, at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, for example, one of the more popular Christian saints, Saint Roch, became the patron saint of dogs. Similarly, Saint Bernard, from whom the popular breed of dogs, the St. Bernards, got their name, and Saint Dominic, founder of the Dominican Order (or God's dogs, according to the Latin name *domini canes*), are examples of a positive relationship towards dogs in Christianity" (Pavičić, Vlaisavljević, 2013).

¹³ The importance of de Gubernatis' interpretations of zoomythology and cultural botany (*La mythologie des plantes, ou les légendes du règne végétal* [Mythology of Plants, and Legends from the Plant Kingdom], 1878) in the region at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century is also evidenced by Pavle Sofrić's (from Niševljan) monograph *Glavnije bilje u narodnom verovanju i pevanju kod nas Srba po Angelu de Gubernatisu* [Main Herbs in Folk Belief and Singing Among Us Serbs According to Angelo de Gubernatis] (Belgrade, 1912), which comes from the mentioned cultural botanical book by de Gubernatis.

explain the nyctomorphic wolves in the worlds of the *Rgveda* and the *Edda*: the so-called Night Wolves, the zoomorphic form of the Wolf as a nyctomorphic demon – Vṛka from the ṛgvedic concept and the symbolic wolves – Sköll, Mánagarm, Fenrir/Fenrisúlfr – from the worlds of the *Edda*. In the context of nature mythology, de Gubernatis notes that we already have several intriguing mythical accounts of the wolf in the *Rgveda*; in these worlds, the wolf is demonized, represented as the exhausted Vṛka (de Gubernatis, 1872: 142), and following this, the wolf in the *Edda* is depicted as a grim and devilish monster.

The night and the winter is the time of the wolf spoken of in the Voluspa; the gods who enter, according to the German tradition, into wolves' skins, represent the sun as hiding himself in the night, or the snowy season of winter (...). Inasmuch as the solar hero becomes a wolf, he has a divine nature; inasmuch, on the contrary, as the wolf is the proper form of the devil, his nature is entirely malignant. The condemned man, the proscribed criminal, the bandit, the *utlagatus* or outlaw, were said in the Middle Ages to wear a *caput lupinum* (in England, *wulfesheofod*; in France, *teste læue*) (de Gubernatis, 1872: 149).

Unlike Müller's mythology of nature, Nodilo assumes dualism (religion of *two principles*) for *bright/Uranian gods* who can also be transformed into ethically "inappropriate" deities. Considering the annual, cosmic period of activity of the supreme Slavic deity who acts as Vid during the summer/day and as an *aged* Veles during the winter/night (a *weakened* aspect of Svantevid), he initiates the binomial supreme deity of Serbs and Croats (Vid – Veles) (cf. Marjanić, 2022). According to Nodilo's interpretation, the bright gods can be teriomorphized into wolves, bears, and foxes, but during the hardships of winter, they are mostly wolves, in line with the dominant Wolf figure.

That this is not merely a metaphor, but that winter was once associated with the Wolf, is evident from the proverb: 'The wolf hasn't yet eaten the winter', or 'The wolf hasn't yet swallowed the winter' (Nodilo, 1981: 254).¹⁴

In the winter darkness, even the light faces of the divine become akin to the *terrifying* Wolf or fall under his dominion, as portrayed in the *Edda*, where the nyctomorphic Wolf devours Odin himself. Nodilo emphasizes that in more *ancient* times (than witches), people were frightened by the voracious Wolf, a three-headed monster (Nodilo, 1981: 98), which figures as the zoomorphic embodiment of the night, a *predator in the imaginations* of the early Indo-European peoples (ibid.: 108).

In short, Nodilo references the Scandinavian symbolism of the Wolf and the Vedic image of the Wolf (Vṛka) devouring a quail (Dawn), whom/which the Aśvins save from the nyctomorphic Wolf (RV I, 117, 16; I, 118, 8; X, 39, 13) from the wolf's lair (cave of night)

¹⁴ For the general connection between wolves and winter documented in proverbs, see Plas, 2021: 158 (section "Vučje vrijeme" – Time of the Wolf).

(Nodilo, 1981: 90, 446) (Nodilo, 1981: 446). In the *Edda*, wolves symbolize the end of the world and chaos – “the wolves will soon devour the Sun. Three long winters without summer will cover the Earth with snow and ice” (Sturluson, 1997). In the context of Nodilo’s nature mythology, the zoo-symbol of the nyctomorphic Wolf becomes a marker of the dark zoomorphoses of night and the cold part of the year.

Likewise, Nodilo draws a parallel between Zora and the *half-white, half-black* goddess Hel, sister of the wolf Fenrir/Fenrisúlfr, whom Saxo Grammaticus (*Gesta Danorum*, book/chapter 39) interpreted as Proserpina, and whom the *Edda* places in the *underworld* of Niflheim. In Niflheim, the northern land of eternal ice and fog, there is a *court and courtyard* called Niflhel, ruled by the goddess Hel (Nodilo, 1981: 121). Loki, who has three *demonic* children (the wolf Fenrir, the *serpent* Jörmungandr [Jörmungand – another name for the Midgard Serpent; cf. Orchard, 2002: 223], which *encircles the cosmos*, and the daughter Hel, who receives the dead who do not go to Valhalla), is one of the twelve Aesir/Asâ/Ansâ, sons of Odin, known by the Saxons – who equated him with Saturn – under the name Krodo/Hruodo (Nodilo, 1981: 371–372).

In the context of this interpretation of the wolf, Nodilo refers to the religion of two principles, where the nyctomorphic wolf appears as the zoosymbol of Črnobog (Black God). He adds an interpretation to Helmold’s record of Zcerneboch: “(...) and the black god of the Baltic Slavs was possibly also called Vrag [the Devil]” (Nodilo, 1981: 107).¹⁵

In the context of nature mythology, Nodilo follows de Gubernatis’ interpretation of the wolf, specifically as the Vedic Vṛka, and in the context of the Scandinavian Fenrir who devours the Moon, symbolizing a cosmic disruption. As Angelo de Gubernatis states:

In the *Edda*, the two wolves Sköll and Hati wish to take, one the sun and the other the moon; the wolf devours the sun, father of the world, and gives birth to a daughter. He is then killed by Vidarr. Hati precedes the luminous betrothed of the sky; the wolf Fenris, son of the demoniacal Lokis, chained by the Ases, bites off the hand that the hero Tyr, as an earnest of the good faith of the Ases, had put into his mouth (cf. de Gubernatis, 1872: 147).¹⁶

Let us focus further on Fenrir from the *Edda* within the context of Nodilo’s description of Hel’s realm. Beneath the third root, which is located above the land of ice, the hell of Niflheim (Hel’s realm) where the wolf Fenrir dwells (Nodilo, 1981: 134), who seeks to reach the well of Hvergelmir (*the boiling cauldron*) that is the source of all the rivers in the world; the dragon Nidhogg (*he who strikes with hatred*) resides, who gnaws at the roots at the bottom. “In Hvergelmer with Nidhug are more serpents than tongue can tell” (Sturluson, 1997: 59). In Niflheim, the northern land of eternal ice and fog, there is a *court and courtyard* called Niflhel (Orchard, 2002: 264), ruled by the goddess Hel. As a

¹⁵ The compensation or penalty paid for murder in the *Law code of Vinodol* (Articles 29 and 31) is referred to as *vražba* (Katičić, 1989–1990: 79). Compare this to Nodilo’s parallels regarding *Vrag* and the deities of the underworld within the framework of Indo-European comparative mythology, as shown in a table in Marjanić, 2022: 155.

¹⁶ Cf. “Hati Hróðvitnisson”, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hati_Hr%C3%B3%C3%B0vitnisson.

shorter mythological reference, with all the main actors involved, Fenrir (or Fenrisulfr, Fenris Wolf, Fenris) is a mythical creature in Norse mythology – a wolf, the son of Loki and the giantess Angrboða. Fenrir is chained by the gods, but he will grow too large for his bonds and eventually kill Odin during Ragnarök. When Fenrir reaches his full size, his upper jaw will touch the sky while his lower jaw touches the Earth. After killing Odin, Odin's son, Víðarr, will slay Fenrir, either by stabbing him in the heart or tearing apart his jaws.¹⁷ In short, at the end of the world, Fenrir will devour the Sun, while another wolf, Mánagarmr, will do the same to the Moon.¹⁸

In his ethno-astrological research, Janković notes the archaic belief that during solar and lunar eclipses, certain *monsters* are eaten; he also references Nodilo's observation that the explanation for the cause of solar and lunar eclipses through werewolves is a Slavic belief; in this context, Janković mentions that the Romanian word *verkolači* refers to the *lunar eclipse* (Janković, 1951: 110; Nodilo, 1981: 258).

The wolf as a nyctomorphic devourer of light can be linked to the concept of "Pasunce" (Sun Dog), a myth about the three Suns; the suncovuk (Sunwolf); blind Sun (in Montenegro), Sun dogs. A false Sun, parhelion, or Sun dog is an optical phenomenon in Earth's atmosphere, appearing as two bright spots at 22° on both sides of the Sun at the same height above the horizon (Janković, 1951: 40).¹⁹ In Norse mythology, Sköll (Old Norse

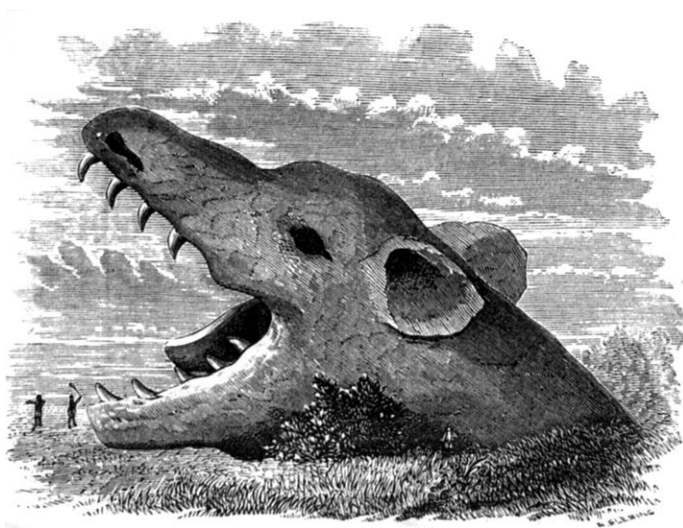


Figure 1: A. Fleming, The Wolf Fenrir (Alexander Murray, *Manual of Mythology: Greek and Roman, Norse, and Old German, Hindoo and Egyptian Mythology*, London, Asher and Co., 1874. (Taken from: [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Fenrir_\(Manual_of_Mythology\).jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Fenrir_(Manual_of_Mythology).jpg))

¹⁷ "Fenrir", <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fenrir>.

¹⁸ Durand notes that these beliefs also appear in northern Asia, where the Yakuts explain the phases of the Moon through the insatiability of a bear or a ravenous wolf; similarly, they use the expression that a dog howls at the Moon or howls at death (Durand, 1991: 77).

¹⁹ In northern Montenegro, this phenomenon is known as "blind Suns". See also "Sun dog". Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_dog. "In the case of parhelia, one or two bright circles can be seen to the left and right of the Sun, similar in size to the Sun, but much dimmer in brightness" (Janković, 1951: 40).

“Treachery” or “Mockery”) is a wolf chasing the Sun (personified as the goddess Sól). Hati Hróðvitnisson pursues the Moon (the Moon personified as Máni). According to Rudolf Simek, it is possible that Sköll is another name for Fenrir, and if so,

There could be an interpretation within nature mythology in the case of Sköll, who chases the Sun, and Hati, who chases the Moon. Such an interpretation suggests that wolves were meant to describe the phenomenon of parhelion or sun dogs, as they are called ‘sun wolves’ in Scandinavian languages (Norwegian ‘solvarg,’ Swedish ‘solulv’), ‘wolf of the Sun’ (Simek, 1998: 375).

WOLF FOLKLORE

Ljubinko Radenković offers a remarkable conceptualization of animals, including the dog/wolf, in his book *Simbolika sveta u narodnoj magiji Južnih Slovena* (1996). From a semiotic and ethnolinguistic perspective, he demonstrates how humankind constructed its worldview from the familiar to the unknown, from itself to the distant and unconquered spaces believed to be inhabited by the souls of the dead and mythological beings (Radenković, 1996: 7). Radenković applies two criteria to determine the symbolic status of animals: the vertical arrangement relative to the world tree (*arbor mundi*) and the horizontal arrangement based on the distance from humans. According to the first criterion, grounded in oppositions such as up–down, above–below, dry–wet, animals are arranged as follows: at the top of the world tree are birds (with eagle or falcon figuring as zoometonymies); in the middle, at the level of the tree, are hoofed animals, dogs, cats, chickens, and sometimes bees; on the same level, but opposite these animals, are wild animals like wolves, foxes, deer, and bears. In the lower part of the world tree, at the final, third level (roots), reside snakes, frogs, fish, moles, mice, insects, etc. Using this arrangement, which focuses on proximity to humans, Radenković notes that animals closest to humans include horses, sheep, cows, and oxen, followed by bulls, goats, donkeys, chickens, pigs, dogs, and cats. So-called wild animals are positioned relative to the *god shepherd* (*božji pastir*),²⁰ with the bear being closest and the wolf the furthest (ibid.: 356–357).²¹ Thus, the dog is seen as a guardian of the boundary between social and wild spaces, while the wolf is the guardian of the opposite boundary, from the wild to the social (Radenković, 1996: 99).

²⁰ According to the folklore of Serbs and some other nations (Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Romanians, Lithuanians, Finns, French, etc.), the wolf shepherd is the master of wolves, who gathers them once a year and determines their prey. There is a widely known legend about a man (most often a shepherd) who, hidden in a tree, observes how a wolf shepherd distributes the prey (as a rule, livestock) to the gathered wolves (Mencej, 2001; Radenković, 1996: 356–357).

²¹ Aleksandar Gura highlights the parallelism between the wolf and the bear, which can be observed in their symbolic and metaphorical equivalence with the pair of domestic animals – dog and cat: “if the wolf in folk representations corresponds to the dog, then the symbolic analogy for the bear is often represented by the cat” (Gura, 2005: 130).

In summary, Ljubinko Radenković systematically presents a zoomorphic code, schematically mapping animals based on proximity/distance and high/low, with binary oppositions clean/unclean, wild/domesticated. In this system, the wolf is positioned at the level of semantic or semiotic opposites – *distant*, *wild*, *low*, and *unclean* – while the dog is associated with the *near*, *domesticated*, *low*, and *unclean*, and is placed next to the cat (cf. Radenković, 1996: 187). While the domestication of dogs is linked to hunter-gatherer societies, the domestication of cats occurred with the advent of early agricultural societies, as they protected grain from rodents and snakes.

“Wolf folklore” – the ritual genres and the ethnopoetics of “wolf texts” – are most comprehensively documented in Plas’ book *Mi o vuku* (2021). This is the first local study that provides a systematic analysis and interpretation of the symbolism of the wolf – understood as a “text” – in traditional folk culture of the Western South Slavic, particularly Shtokavian, region, based on ethnographic, folkloric, and linguistic sources, mostly from the period 1880–1970 (the research corpus includes 1134 bibliographic entries). This study is also the first local work to merge the interpretive niche of ethnopoetic interpretation with modes of symbolic, interpretive anthropology in the context of ethnozoological readings of the “wolf text.” Through a contextual and structural-linguistic analysis of oral literary texts and a simultaneous observation of form (stylistic and structural features), content (semantic-referential), and function (pragmatic meanings), Pieter Plas employs a methodology that integrates ethnolinguistic (semiotic and linguistic-anthropological) and ethnopoetic (oral literary, poetic, and pragmatic-performative) approaches, achieving a comprehensive approach to the studied phenomenon (cf. Pandurević, 2016: 22–23).

Pieter Plas naturally used Nodilo’s interpretation of “wolf folklore” in his research. As this text focuses on Nodilo’s interpretation of the source of the fear of “wolf’s mouth”, who was the first to write about this phenomenon in the context of mythology of nature/mythological research as far as the South Slavic corpus is concerned, we should fragmentarily mention some dimensions of “wolf folklore” from Nodilo’s study *Stara vjera Srba i Hrvata* [Old Faith of Serbs and Croats] (1885–1890). This is Nodilo’s interpretation of the lycanthropic name, which becomes an apotropaic name, used to ward off “invisible misfortune”, as Nodilo interprets the German name Wolfgang. Furthermore, these are “dog days” as well as the custom of *vučari* (wolf hunters).

There are a number of “wolf folklore elements” in Nodilo’s nature mythology, such as a lycanthropic remedy called *izmeče* (a lamb in the stomach of a sheep slaughtered by a wolf), which is left to dry and then used as incense to treat a condition called *vukojedina* (a kind of wound on a child), “when the child’s mother, while pregnant, accidentally eats sheep or goat meat from an animal devoured by a wolf” (Karadžić: Rječnik – *Vukojedina, Izmeče* [Nodilo 1981: 254]),²² but on this occasion I’m only focusing on the previously mentioned wolf phenomena.

Nodilo records that the apotropaic practice of giving lycanthropic names is known in Montenegro, Boka Kotorska, and Herzegovina. A person would climb onto a wall

²² *Izmeče* – an unborn lamb from the womb of a sheep slaughtered by a wolf, cf. Plas, 2021: 365. For *vukojedina* cf. Plas, 2021: 401.

around the house during the birth of the child and recite a ceremonial-poetic formula for apotropaic naming (from Vrčević's writing) to protect the child from *witches*: "Hear, people and folk! A she-wolf has given birth to a wolf, for all the world to know, and for the wolf cub's health!" (Nodilo, 1981: 98; cf. Vrčević, 1881: 73).²³

In the context of the symbolic reading of the dog, Nodilo dwells on *Dog Days*. During this period, the Romans practiced the ritual of *caniculi* (July 24 – August 23), *augurium canarium*, where they sacrificed dogs near the city gates (*porta catulana*) to invoke an abundant harvest (Nodilo, 1981: 377). They also celebrated *Vulcanalia* in honor of the fiery god Vulcan. Nodilo interprets the *caniculi* ritual as representing the Indo-European concept of two dogs serving as guardians at the entrance to winter and night, symbolizing the underworld (*mundus subterraneus*).

Sima Trojanović records that this time, when water would become contaminated, was called the Dog Days (*dies caniculares*), lasting from July 23 to August 23. The greatest heat also occurred during this period, and the Saxons were forbidden from bathing or drinking from open sources, as all water was believed to be poisoned by "dog drops" (particles) that had fallen from the sky (Trojanović, 1911: 163–164).²⁴

Sirius, once known as the "burning" star, was also called the Dog Star (*Stella canicola*),²⁵ and it was believed to bring misfortune, such as droughts, crop destruction, and the spread of rabies. Thus, sacrifices were offered to the star, including dogs, sheep, and wine. The period of these ritual festivities was called the *Dog Days*, as noted by Barbara Kovačević (cf. Gelenčir, 2017).

From this, the term 'pasji dani' (*dies caniculares*) originated, which exists today in other European languages as well, for example, English *Dog Days*, German *die Hundstage*, Italian *canicola*, and in the Croatian language, the term 'pasje vrućine' (dog heat) emerged, referring to the intense heat characteristic of the period from the end of July to mid-August. (Cf. Gelenčir, 2017; cf. Vidović Bolt et al., 2017.)²⁶

²³ Cf. the interpretation of the mentioned ritual text and the wolf metaphor in the meaning *wolf* = *health* (Plas, 2021).

²⁴ Same as Nodilo (cf. Marjanić, 2022: 383), Sima Trojanović also references *The Saxons in England* by John Mitchell Kemble.

²⁵ Sirius, the brightest star in the constellation *Canis Major* (Latin for "Great Dog"), was referred to as the Dog Star by the ancient Romans, a name they adopted from the Greeks. They also borrowed the concept of the *Dog Days* (*dies caniculares*), which spanned from roughly late July to mid-August, when Sirius rose together with the Sun. "The Dog Days represent a period of hibernation, days when nothing happens, with the main activity being the struggle against the humid heat" (Tomić, 2020).

²⁶ For example, Milan Lang records two different dates for the *Dog Days* (Pasje dane). First, he mentions that the *Dog Days* (from July 27 to August 22) are blamed for bad milk (Lang, 1914: 197). Furthermore, Lang (now with different date markings) notes that the hottest days of the summer, from July 20 to August 20, are called the *Dog Days* and provides an etiological explanation: "When the dog was shivering from the cold in the winter, he said he would build a house in the summer; but when summer came and the heat arrived, he lay on his back in the hemp field, lifted his legs high, and said: 'Who on earth would bother with such work? These are the true Dog Days'" (Lang, 1911: 28).

According to Mannhardt's research,²⁷ Frazer examines the dog and the wolf as embodiments of the corn-spirit in harvest customs. He highlights that this understanding is widespread in France (most prominently in northeastern France), Germany, and Slavic countries. "Here the wolf is the corn-spirit whose fertilising power is in his tail." (Frazer, 2002: 316). The wolf caught in the last sheaf lives during the winter in the farmhouse, ready to act as the corn-spirit in the spring. During the winter solstice, when the lengthening days begin to herald the arrival of spring, the Wolf appears once again, notes Frazer. This can be contextualized with the custom of *vučari* (or *vukari* – wolfmen), a ritual performance (cf. Đurić, 2023: 552), which, in Croatia, was observed in Lika and the Dalmatian hinterland during the winter, most often between Epiphany (Three Kings, January 6) and Candlemas (February 2), when the threat of wolves was greatest (cf. Belaj, 1983).

In Poland a man, with a wolf's skin thrown over his head, is led about at Christmas; or a stuffed wolf is carried about by persons who collect money. There are facts which point to an old custom of leading about a man enveloped in leaves and called the Wolf, while his conductors collected money (Frazer, 2002: 318).

The custom of *vučari* is interpreted by Nodilo in the context of the Roman Lupercalia, the mythic site of the Lupercal cave and the *she-wolf* goddess who nursed the twins Romulus and Remus, which he further interprets as the *January* and *February* Sun. Nodilo establishes a parallel between the *she-wolf* goddess and Acca Larentia (Nodilo, 1981: 255–256, 295). Radmila Kajmaković argues that in this description of the custom, as noted by Nodilo, "it is clearly referring to *vučari*", rather than *čarojice* (witch-like figures), since *čarojice* never wear a *vučina* (wolf's pelt), although one participant is masked in the skin of an animal, "a goat" (Kajmaković, 1974: 633). Vitomir Belaj, however, rejects the interpretation of *vučari* as a survival or continuation of the Roman *discursus lupercorum* or *Lupercalia*, which took place in mid-February (Belaj, 1983: 86; cf. Plas, 2021: 276).

IN CONCLUSION, OR HOW THE WOLF *BECAME* A DOG: THE DOUBLET OF THE WOLF IS THE DOG (DURAND, 1991: 77) OR "SPEAK OF THE WOLF..."

This interpretive timeline (not necessarily in chronological order) of this review article presents the imaginary of the "Balkan" wolf/dog in South Slavic customs and beliefs from Natko Nodilo, through Tihomir R. Đorđević and Ljubinko Radenković, all the way to contemporary cultural animal studies and ethnopoeitic research by Pieter Plas, contextually related to other Slavs and Indo-European comparative mythology in the framework of archetypal wolf/dog phobias (*lupophobia*, *kinophobia*). While Nodilo

²⁷ Wilhelm Mannhardt in his works *Roggenwolf und Roggenhund. Beitrag zur germanischen Sittenkunde* (1865) and *Die Korndämonen. Beitrag zur germanischen Sittenkunde* (1868) focused on vegetation spirits from an evolutionary standpoint, more precisely the archaic cult of trees and its later development.

relies on Angelo de Gubernatis' interpretation of nature mythology, and remains in pure mythology (allegorism) in the vein of Max Müller's mythology of nature (1997), Tihomir R. Đorđević follows the ethnographic material of the South Slavs (as for Croatia, he carefully researched, among other things, the wolf/dog entries in the *Collection of Folk Life and Customs of the South Slavs*), and Ljubinko Radenković semiotically observes the wolf/dog in the symbolism of the world of the South Slavs, where he notes that the closest domestic animals to man are the horse, sheep, cow and ox, followed by the bull, goat, donkey, hen, pig, dog and cat. So-called wild animals are arranged in relation to the *god-shepherd* (*God's shepherd*) – the bear is closest to him, and the wolf is the farthest. Nodilo's "demonization" of the wolf (more precisely, his interpretation of the wolf's zoo-symbolization within the framework of nature mythology) contrasts with Čajkanović's totemistic interpretation, which suggests that the great Slavic god of the dead was envisioned in the form of a wolf (the divine *lame wolf*) (Čajkanović, 1941: 147; Bandić, 1991: 30). Pieter Plas points out that the complex of thanatological representations associated with this animal is generally approached with a critical stance toward existing interpretations, particularly in relation to Čajkanović's reading of the wolf as a totem and its role in the cult of the dead. Plas emphasizes that there are "very few indications of a direct connection between wolves and thanatological representations". In contrast, Dušan Bandić argues that Čajkanović's thesis about the wolf as an incarnation of the deceased and ancestral spirits is the most well-argued (Bandić, 1991: 30).

Unlike ethnozoology, zoo-ethics corresponds to different settings. Zooethicist Nikola Visković adds that the wolf, usually seen as a model of bestiality, is not what we imagine: it is social, loyal to the pack and its mate, a caring parent, respects the territorial boundaries of wolf groups, and in mutual conflicts does not mutilate nor kill its opponent if the latter retreats or surrenders (Visković, 1996: 348). Referring to Boris A. Uspenskij's writings on the connection between cursing and the cult of the earth and the cult of the dog, Josip Užarević, in his exploration of the phenomenology of swearing, or the theory of swearing, adds that it is not entirely clear whether swearing means "calling someone a dog" (since "psovka" in Croatian – meaning curse word/phrase – shares the same root as "pas" – dog), as suggested by Ignacije Gavran, or perhaps "behaving like a dog, in a dog's manner" (by the *kynical* strategy of freedom in relation to the cynicism of the heteronomy of life), and concludes that both perspectives are likely intertwined.²⁸ Unfortunately, as an illustration of the use of animals in propaganda and the language of hate, it is usually denoted by Plaut's (Hobbes') apophthegm "Man to man wolf" (cf. Sax, 2001), as well as, e.g., Kafka's Jozef K., who, at the end of the *Process*, remarks upon his own death by saying "Like a dog".

Translated by Juraj Šutej

²⁸ Ignacije Gavran points out that in the context of obscene curses, speciesist animal names often appear, most commonly bitch, dog, and, for example, goat, stallion, mare, donkey.

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BALKANSKI VUK/PAS U FOLKLORISTIČKIM INTERPRETACIJAMA U MITOLOGIJI PRIRODE N. NODILA PREKO T. R. ĐORĐEVIĆA DO LJ. RADENKOVIĆA I P. PLASA

Interpretativna vremenska lenta (ne nužno kronološkoga slijeda) izlaže imaginarij o „balkanskom“ vuku/psu u južnoslavenskim običajima i vjerovanjima od Natka Nodila preko Tihomira R. Đorđevića i Ljubinka Radenkovića sve do suvremenih kulturnoanimalističkih istraživanja Pietera Plasa (koji koristi metodologiju koja integrira etnolingvistički/semiotički i lingvističko-antropološki i etnopoetički pristup), i to kontekstualno vezano uz ostale Slavene i indoeuropsku komparativnu mitologiju u okviru arhetipske fobije od vuka/psa (lupofobija, kinofobija). I dok se Nodilo oslanja na interpretaciju mitologije prirode Angela de Gubernatisa, Tihomir R. Đorđević prati etnografski materijal Južnih Slavena (što se tiče Hrvatske pomno je, među ostalim, istražio zapise o vuku/psu u *Zborniku za narodni život i običaje Južnih Slavena*), a Ljubinko Radenković semiotički promatra vuka/psa u simbolici svijeta Južnih Slavena, gdje zamjećuje da su *čovjeku* od domaćih životinja najbliži konj, ovca, krava i vol, a zatim slijede bik, koza, magarac, kokoš, svinja, pas i mačka. Tzv. divlje životinje raspoređene su u odnosu na *boga-pastira* (*božji pastir*) – njemu je najbliži medvjed, a najdalji vuk. Dakle, pas je čuvar granice socijalnog i divljeg prostora, kao što je vuk čuvar granica, ali suprotno usmjerenoga od psa, od divljeg prema socijalnom.

Autor je primijenio dva mjerila za određivanje simboličkoga statusa životinja: vertikalni raspored u odnosu na stablo svijeta (*arbor mundi*) i horizontalni raspored temeljen na udaljenosti prema čovjeku. Tako su po prvom mjerilu, u čijoj se osnovi nalaze opozicije gore – dolje, iznad – ispod, suho – mokro, životinje raspoređene na sljedeći način: na vrhu Stabla svijeta nalaze se ptice (kao zoometonimije figuriraju orao ili sokol); u sredini, na nivou Stabla svijeta raspoređeni su kopitari, pas, mačka, kokoš i ponekad pčele; na istom nivou, ali suprotno od njih nalaze se divlje životinje – vuk, lisica, jelen, medvjed. U donjem dijelu Stabla svijeta, na zadnjem, trećem nivou (korijenje) borave zmija, žaba, riba, krtica, miš, kukci itd. Po sljedećem mjerilu, ponovimo, čovjeku su najbliže životinje, ističe Ljubinko Radenković, konj, ovca, krava i vol, a slijede bik, koza, magarac, kokoš, svinja, pas i mačka. Ukratko, Ljubinko Radenković sustavno prezentira zoomorfni kôd, shematski prikaz rasporeda životinja po obilježjima blisko/daleko i visoko/nisko, s binarnom opozicijom čisto/nečisto, divlje/pitomo, gdje se Vuk nalazi na razini semantičkih ili semiotičkih suprotnosti *dalekoga*, *divljega*, *niskoga* i *nečistoga*, a pas – *bliskoga*, *pitomoga*, *niskoga* i *nečistoga*, i pritom je pozicioniran odmah do mačke (usp. Radenković, 1996: 187).

Nodilovo iščitavanje „demonizacije“ vuka (točnije, iščitavanje zoosimbolizacije vuka u kontekstu mitologije prirode) nalazi se u opreci s Čajkanovićevom totemističkom interpretacijom koja navodi da je veliki slavenski bog mrtvih zamišljen u obličju vuka (božanski *hromi vuk*) (Čajkanović, 1941: 147; Bandić, 1991: 30).

Pieter Plas navodi da kompleks tanatoloških predodžbi vezanih za ovu životinju uglavnom sagledava s kritičkim otklonom prema postojećim tumačenjima, prije svega u odnosu na Čajkanovićevo čitanje vuka kao totema i njegove uloge u kultu mrtvih, ističući da je „iznimno malo indicija o izravnoj vezi vukova s tanatološkim predodžbama“. Za razliku od Pietera Plasa, Dušan Bandić navodi da je Čajkanovićeva teza o vuku kao inkarnaciji pokojnika i predačkih duhova najbolje argumentirana (Bandić, 1991: 30).

Suzana Marjanić, PhD, Research Advisor, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, HR-10 000 Zagreb, suzana@ief.hr
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6158-3006>