

Fantastic Creatures and Poetics of Horror Elements in the Works of Milovan Glišić

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Abstract

This research article explores the integration of fantastic creatures and horror elements in the works of the Serbian realist writer Milovan Glišić. While considered a creator of the realistic short story, Glišić uniquely incorporates folklore fantasy into his narratives. The study analyzes the representation of various fantastic creatures, drawing parallels between their depiction in Glišić's prose and mythological or religious traditions. Furthermore, it examines the poetics of horror present in his works, highlighting the creation of eerie atmospheres and the use of fear. Ultimately, the paper concludes that these supernatural elements, while rooted in folk beliefs, often serve to expose human ignorance and limited worldviews, suggesting that the true source of horror lies within ourselves rather than in external monstrous entities.

Keywords: Milovan Glišić, Fantastic Creatures, Horror Elements, Folklore Fantasy, Mythology

Introduction

As a writer of the era of realism, Milovan Glišić is considered the creator of the realistic short story, but his realism integrates fantasy, that is, fantastic elements that make the world of Glišić's works unique and bring innovation in the form of folklore fantasy. Among the multitude of fantastic elements, fantastic creatures appear as a constant, the depiction of which is also the theme of this work, along with the elements of horror that we encounter in Glišić's prose, and which also play a significant role in shaping the image of the narrated world. Our study first briefly presents a critical review of M. Glišić's works, followed by answers to general questions about what fantasy is, explaining the etymology of the word and the possible connection between fantasy and horror as a literary genre, as well as the definition of fantastic creatures.

Under the title "Fantasy and Fantastic Creatures in Glišić", Glišić's view of the realistic and the fantastic is first presented, his references to mythological consciousness, and then the fantastic creatures from Glišić's works are presented individually, starting with the less characteristic (represented) ones, all the way to those without which his folkloric fantasy would be unimaginable. Within the framework of these analyses, an analogy is made between the representation of miraculous creatures in

mythology (religion, tradition) and the representation of creatures in Glišić's prose, and we concluded that the writer relied on myth in most cases. The title "Horror" contains the basic characteristics of the genre, with an emphasis on the genre in literature, and then the elements of the same in Glišić's works are presented, indicating the close connection between horror and fantasy. In the final part, based on the analysis of the excerpts presented in the paper, we concluded that presents the most important insights of our study, summarizes the information, and presents the goal of depicting fantastic creatures, along with poetics of horror in the M. Glišić's works.

Fantastic Creatures and Myth

Fantasy is a form of speculative fiction that, depending on the subgenre, introduces the reader to one of the different settings of the world. Works of fantasy are freed from the usual limitations and authors find inspiration and models for plot settings in a wide variety of areas, from real life to mythology. The original etymology of the word fantasy is mythological. Fantás was Morpheus' brother, one of the minor deities, responsible for showing people pleasant things in their dreams. In the modern Serbian language, the basic meaning of the foreign word fantastic is: that which has become a pure activity of the imagination, regardless of reality.

Namely, almost all thoughts about fantasy start from the premise that it contains something that is not present in reality. This conclusion is the basis for the definition that speaks of fantasy as a genre in which supernatural events or beings appear. According to some definitions, the role of horror and elements of horror in general in defining fantasy is very large. Here it is possible to establish an analogy between fantasy and horror (fear, terror) as a genre. It is possible that fantasy was born from one such genre – specifically, the Gothic novel – but it is also evident, despite the opinions of some prominent critics, that it has today clearly separated from it.

Fantastic stories are those in which we have the polarity of good and evil, this world and the other, rational and irrational, real and unreal... In accordance with this dualism, the introduction of fantastic beings as the opposite of human is clear to us: thus, the human is directly compared with the non-human, that is, the bestial. The implied opposition, however, does not lead to an absolute division between man and animal. Creatures that represent combinations of humans and animals are common (chimeras, gorgons, fauns, sirens, centaurs, harpies, even angels as a combination of man and bird). Such representations, in a way, represent man's reckoning with himself, because through the anthropomorphization of fantastic, unreal beings, the very fantastic experience of the world, that is, the representation of the world of the unreal, returns to where it originated - to ourselves.

Fantasy and Fantastic Creatures in Glišić's Prose

Milovan Glišić, as a writer on the border between romanticism and realism, very successfully presents in his stories the opposition of two definitions of the world - on the one hand, the folkloric one, which includes beliefs, traditions, magical practices, and on the other, the socio-political one, which deals with issues of the state, power, and bureaucracy. Dušan Ivanić (1988: 30) says about this: "The traditional forces of the underworld (hell) are now joined by forces that have grown out of the secularization of the world: the tragic position of the village individual becomes a major literary theme..."

Folkloric realism on the one hand is opposed by folkloric fantasy on the other. The mythical is so deeply rooted in the image of the world that its admixtures are impossible to avoid in folklorism. Fantastic creatures in Glišić's works appear in stories with fantastic elements, which, in accordance with folk beliefs, are also connected with religion. In general, the connection between the mythical, religious and fantastic is very strong and these elements seem to permeate and complement each other. Glišić starts from the fact that "there is a belief among the people", that is, that the mythological consciousness of the Serbs was strongly influenced by the "miraculous" action of cosmic and natural forces. All this, as well as the way of earning a living, since the people were mostly engaged in agriculture and cattle breeding, produced a deep attachment of people to nature among the Serbs, traces of which are felt primarily in belief. "The folk tales that Glišić processed are of a ritual character. As such, they open the carriers of madness and representations into a ritual scheme, so that even the nightmarish figures that emerge before us are presented as if everything must obey the same phantasmagoric order, the murderous grammar of the relationship between man and demon." [1].

However, the fantastic creatures that appear in Glišić's stories are not all those that we can find in mythology. He only talks about a few creatures that are repeated, that is, they appear again and again in several of his stories, and it is not uncommon for several fantastic creatures to be found in one story. The writer himself seems to be preparing us at the beginning of the story for what follows: "After dinner, we talked about all sorts of things. Finally, we started talking about vampires, ghosts, giants, witches and other evil forces that appear to man in the dead of night [2]".

In general, fantastic creatures are divided into:

1. faceless demons (which include fantastic animals) and
2. demons in human and semi-human form.

Glišić's miraculous creatures mostly fall into the second group according to the presented division, which corresponds to the previously mentioned dualism and confrontation with one's own nature. His apparitions are mostly anthropomorphic, but we still come across examples of faceless demons with various animal characteristics: "It looks like a black goat - not bigger. ... - The same black goat, only with a long tail, and it doesn't run on all fours but on its two hind legs. It rushes to the middle of the bridge and gives a terrible yelp.....When it gets past Ivan - it neighs like a little foal and staggers to the end of the bridge under the side and stops there, squealing like a pig. ... It clings like an ant, and crawls along the rocks - it only black and crawls, crawls [2]."

This representation of a demon in goat form corresponds to the ancient Greek representation of Pan, and later also of evil forces. A demon with goat legs and horns provides clear symbolism. Unspecified demons also appear, to which the author indeed gives animal attributes, but we cannot learn much about their appearance, except that they "grin, snap their teeth at him, wag their tails, bite and scratch the beams in front of him like dogs when they rush to dig... they encroach, squeal, growl, growl, snap their teeth..." [2]. In the next moment, when Ivan looks "where the evil force has thickened", Glišić returns to the anthropomorphic demonic depiction: "They turn black, all like people, their teeth like boars', then white, then they rise up to their ears... their eyes shine like cats' in the dark..." [2]. There is even an unidentified monstrosity with a hump, which may represent a hint of surrealist fantasy of the absurd and grotesque.

In the same story, we also encounter other fantastic beings, concrete in contrast to the impersonal demons. One of them is the giant, also associated with mythological representations. Giants as supernatural beings appear in Islamic mythology, and, like humans, live in a community. They are invisible to the human eye, although they normally see people. They have free will and can be good or evil. The role of evil giants coincides with the role of demons in the Christian religion, where they can possess people and subordinate them to their will. In order to deceive people, giants often take on a different form, either evil or good (e.g. animals, plants – bushes or humans). Giants can possess a person (then the person becomes mad – in Arabic majnun). In Islam, the Jewish King Solomon is famous for having conquered the giants and subordinated them to himself. They can embrace religion, and never oppose God, but always observe Him.

"Since the dawn of time, children, in an unbaptized era, they tell stories that giants ruled this land. But Emperor Kostadin came, drove them all the way across the blue sea and forced them to a great gate in a dark vilayet. He hung his sword on the gate, and as soon as the giants realized that they had returned here to the baptized land and reached the gate – the sword rang out: Emperor Kostadin is alive!', and they immediately fled back. So they have no way to come among the baptized people – except in the dead of night when it is not known where the dark vilayet is, and where the baptized land is, they go out and here and there they dance their wheel, and whoever steps on them, they shoot him [2]."

Namely, folk beliefs explain the occurrence of the disease by the action of supernatural forces and demons. The basic remedy is wearing amulets, talismans, and charms to cure a person of fear or demons. The most common procedure is exorcism – expelling demons from the body. One of these beliefs is related to those who were shot by giants. Ivan stepped on a giant's wheel "below Mravinjaci, in that deep valley. That man on a white horse who walked over the rocks – that was the giant's king. Those three stacks – those were the three evil spirits who guard around so that no one steps on the giant's wheel." After that, he falls into a fever, and his hand and foot "burn more and more [2]."

Another mythological creature that Glišić mentions is a dragon. Dragons are beings of fiery power, located in high and inaccessible mountains. The rare legends that they live in a lake, a hollow tree or an underground lair probably arose from a confusion between a dragon and *aždaja*, and yet Glišić's dragons are exactly like this. As fiery creatures, created in a magical way, dragons do not like water, and there is even a belief that boiling water is one of the few things that can kill them, and they often avoid daylight and heat, leaving their mountain caves and shelters most often during clear nights, when they can be seen flying across the starry sky. The most common description of the dragon in Slavic mythology is that it is a large and powerful winged creature that breathes flame. However, the Slavs gave their dragon much more importance than many other peoples. The dragon is, above all, a noble and respected being.

"Dragon scales, according to folk tales, were usually found near mountain springs where dragons bathe. The scales are about the same size as fish scales, only much shinier and cleaner. Whoever finds one carries one sewn into his belt or in a special amulet, a simple cloth bag sewn together at three corners, which he hangs around his neck so that it reaches under his left armpit [2]."

When describing Miladin Malešić's estate, Glišić adds a detail about dragons, just in passing comment.

"...There is something even higher up the Kravarica, almost in the mountain itself, near Zmajevac, a spring that was called that way back when dragons bathed there and when you could find their droppings. It's been a long time since anyone has found dragon droppings at that spring. The world has become so perverted today that even dragons don't come anymore [2]."

A creature that certainly plays a significant role in M. Glišić's stories is the black child. If we look at his story *Sugar Head*, two fantastic scenes are related to this creature, at the beginning and at the very end of the story. The first scene refers to a black child who attacks the hero in the wee hours in the morning at the mill

and makes a head of sugar, while in the second (also at night), the child drives the hero to complete mental disorder and to the point of throwing the aforementioned head into the water. "The demonic evil in the form of a black child is a metaphor for real social evil, and fantastic scenes serve as images that are placed next to the subject of the treatment for the sake of symmetry to highlight it as much as possible. A metaphorical, but also factual, correspondence is thus established between the otherworldly and real evil [3]."

The black child announces himself as a *plakavac* – crybaby, looks like a *nav*, and acts like *nekrštenac*. The place and time of the appearance of the unclean force are completely folklorized, as is the border between the two worlds. Namely, Glišić takes the characters of black children from folklore. They are also known as *navs*, *crybabies*, *tintilini*, or *nekrštenci*. According to the legend, the crybaby is a small vampire, a newborn baby strangled by its own mother, who rises from the grave at night, returns to its home and screams around it, but otherwise cannot harm anyone. It is very similar to *drekavac* so we can draw an analogy between a black child and *drekavac*. *Drekavac* is a creature from the mythology of the South Slavs. The belief is widespread in Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro. According to legend, *drekavac* is the material manifestation of a deceased, unbaptized man (according to some stories, a young boy), who cannot find peace, so it haunts those who have wronged him in life.

Drekavac is a small, hairy creature that constantly steps on its own fur, and then howls with a mixture of crying and wolf howling. It most often wanders through cemeteries, strangling its victims in their sleep. It is very afraid of light, although it cannot be destroyed until it finds peace. *Drekavci* attack people who find themselves near a cemetery or forest late at night, by jumping on their backs and forcing them to walk all night, until the first roosters crow. If the victim does not comply with the demands of this being, he will be scratched and torn by the huge claws of this mythical creature.

With this comparison, we can notice many similarities between black children and *drekavci*. "Just step on it, when a child in the country starts to cry several times.... A small child, like a pot... it turns black... When he was in the middle of the water, while the child starts to giggle; it does not laugh like other children, but somehow completely perverted: 'Our head! Ha, ha! Our head! Ha, ha!' " Unlike the crybaby, Glišić's demonic child is active, in accordance with the description of the screamer, he jumps on Radan's back [2]. "While something is pushing against his back, harder and harder... he wants to push him back. He waves his hand on his shoulder, when alas - a paw! On the other hand, and there - a paw! He barely looks back when there is no child sitting in the car..." The following is a description of his struggle with an evil force, in which the depiction of the child truly corresponds to the mythological *drekavac* [2].

"He already notices how the nails of those paws pierce his groin, and they are already reaching the skin. He moves a little to shake himself, alas – he is even more oppressed! ... He tries to shake himself – you can't help it! He is oppressed, his bones are cracking... For a whole hour he struggled like that with an unholy force. While they were happily singing and clapping... The child jumped off his back, and ran to the side. He looked back and

said: Pray to God, Radan, that the fifth time he sings, otherwise you would really remember me. But all the same, there is the sugar head!... And he disappeared [2]."

In the story *Brother Mata* news spreads through the village that a vampirized unbaptized child is being seen. " – Aunt Novka claims – Stanko Dženabet says – that she saw him with her own eyes. It hasn't even been a week since they buried him, she says, and he's already started coming home [2]." Nevertheless, the story ends with a humorous twist, and the writer ultimately reveals the truth: that Mata himself dressed up as a vampire and spread the rumor about nekrštenac in order to ward off suitors from Smilja's house. The story *A Rare Beast* also speaks of deception. "There, Radoš is running from beech tree to beech tree, from bush to bush, while you just look around – something is moving around a shrub. Then he slowly, slowly – sneaks closer and closer. At first, he thinks it's a rabbit. But, there's something to see! ... a naked, naked child, all shaggy-tailed, running around the bushes [2]." In the end, it turns out that the demonic black child is actually an ordinary monkey.

Finally, Milovan Glišić's folkloric fiction culminated in his vampiristics, which is his most popular and innovative contribution to Serbian realistic literature. Glišić took fantastic material from folklore (as well as many other fantastic elements and creatures), and processed it realistically. There are two understandings of the word vampire: "the older, animatistic one, according to which a vampire is a demon who, as a dead person, comes among people and causes them evil, misfortune and death by sucking their blood; and the younger, animistic understanding, according to which a vampire is an unclean soul of an ancestor who, in the form of a deceased person, appears among people and performs the same actions [3]." Besides sucking blood, vampire strangles people, has sex with women, sucks the blood of livestock, wears a shroud (over his shoulders), slips through the smallest hole, appears at night, in the winter, on unbaptized (unclean) days, in his own house, in his village, near the mill, the barn...

"But, by God's miracle – not a single miller could survive in that mill! He falls asleep alive and well, and wakes up – dead, with a red bandage around his neck, as if he had been strangled by a cord [2]." Glišić's vampire Sava Savanović visits the village mill. The mill is associated with folk legends in which vampire is identified with the god of the underworld (Dabog from the old Serbian religion). There is a deeply rooted belief that demons and evil spirits of all kinds gather around the mill, especially the water mills and primarily at night, particularly vampires who suck the blood of the millers.

"A deaf darkness ensued. Neither the bell nor the owl could be heard anymore. Only the clock ticking, the water gurgling in the millstone and... nothing more." "Until suddenly a tall man entered the mill, his face as red as blood; he entered silently, you would say, the door did not even open. He threw a piece of linen over his shoulder, and it fell down his back all the way to his heels." (Ibid.)

The description of the vampire as "red in the face" partly comes from the belief that he had drunk human blood, but apart from this there are many other reasons, since the color red (among other things) also signifies the chthonic motif (fire, blood). Sava

Savanović becomes a vampire because he was a bad man in life; he is tall in appearance (and grows taller when necessary), he moves silently. The brave Glišić's hero clashes with the vampire Sava Savanović in Zarožane mill on the very first night and kills him with a rifle, traditionally loaded with "salutski marjaš". Since the locals decide to destroy the vampire, they must find a grave in the Crooked Ravine, under a forked elm.

"Everyone gathered to see. That's it! The deeper you go, the more clearly the boards show. Finally, it's clear that it's a grave." "...They have something to see! A whole man lies there, just as if he had been laid there yesterday. He's just turned over, his legs crossed, his arms stretched out beside him, swollen like a wineskin, all red, it seems like he's covered in blood, one eye closed and the other open. Two gunshot wounds can be seen on his chest, but both have almost healed [2]."

Among the Serbs, it is customary to bring shadowy animals over graves, especially black horses, preferably uncleaned ones. Bramble (in the form of thorns) appears with hawthorn and is used as a stake. Of the holy things, a cross and holy water are the most helpful. At the moment the locals opened the grave, they stabbed him with a spile, but "in that rush they didn't hit the mouth with the holy water", and a moth flew out of the vampire's mouth – his soul, which cannot harm adults, but only children. The story *Nagraisao* can be interpreted as an encounter with an (unnamed) vampire, because a whole series of elements from folk belief are conveyed: appearance, place and time of occurrence, strength of voice...

"By that chub, which is in the middle of the stream in a boat, a man stands straight as a candle. I shout: Who are you? 'He answers me: Who are you?' – Who are you, who are you? 'I to him, he to me; Two or three times like that [2]." In the story *Raspis* it is noticeable the motif of a false vampire, which leads to his demystification, as in the story *Brother Mata*. However, the motif we encounter here is properly derived from folk belief, since a black hen really flew over the deceased Janko, thus opening up the possibility of vampirism.

Poetics of Horror

Horror is the name used for a genre in fictional works (such as literature, fine arts, film), whose authors seek to provoke fear, anxiety, and discomfort. The most common source of unpleasant feelings is the introduction of evil – and sometimes inexplicable and incomprehensible – element of supernatural origin into "normal" human everyday life. Since the 1960s, the term horror has also been used for works with morbid, unpleasant themes and strong emotional tension. Horror is often intertwined with works of science fiction, as well as fantasy.

The beginning of horror as a literary genre dates back to the 18th century, which is also the beginning of the subgenre of the so-called Gothic horror. Death, mystical events and fantastic creatures are precisely the characteristics of this genre, so that in Glišić's works one feels not only a touch of the eerie, but it is precisely the horror that shapes the atmosphere of almost every story, and descriptions such as: "That night was not clear, to say the least, and not cloudy either; rather, a thin white cloud stretched across the sky, and through it the moonlight peeked very little. No breeze anywhere – only silence. And you could

see far through the forest and that wilderness. Those, my children, are the most terrifying nights [2]."

Elements of horror in Glišić's prose are noticeable when describing nature – a place where it is "terrible to pass even in the middle of the day, and even in the dead of night." His heroes "get goosebumps, and ants rush through them from head to toe... a hot wind blows around their ears [2]." The feverish state of the characters is contributed by nature, which is evil, hostile, the atmosphere is full of foreboding, "the roots of beech trees crackle loudly, one might say, they are being pulled out of the ground, and the branches peel and creak." (Ibid.) People in Glišić's stories gather at night, by the fire, and tell old, scary stories. The purpose of storytelling is to drive away horrors or at least teach people how to protect themselves from them. It is said that the fear of the dark is innate in every human being. The ones about the cemetery at night are particularly terrifying:

"I look, and across the road, from the cemetery, something no bigger than a cat crosses. I wouldn't have liked it, but what good would it do? I made my horse go faster. I was a little nervous. The slightest rustle made me shiver [2]." A specific location is often designated as the abode of chthonic beings in accordance with folk lore or belief: "That bridge, children, is in a terrible place. ...Avram drowned in that whirlpool. They say that he went down to swim at some point in the night – when he was catching fish, and as soon as he reached the middle of the whirlpool, something suddenly started pulling him by the legs, heavy as lead, and dragged him to the bottom... Before Avram, they say that a certain old woman Joka drowned there, and it was called "Joka's Whirlpool" [2].

It's similar to the topos of mill in the story *After Ninety Years*: "That ravine where the mill is located is truly terrible. On one side is a dense forest, and it is dark in it during the day, and even more so at night. On the other side, cliffs and rocks, all sorts of rubble, it seems like it will collapse down now [2]." The image of Peter's whirlpool from the story *Sugar Head* fits into the creation of an atmosphere of horror through folk belief or tradition, in which Peter drowns "in the midst of a deaf darkness." However, just as in the description of fantastic creatures, the development of the elements of horror is logical and realistic only up to a certain point. In most stories, the writer himself provides a resolution to the supernatural situation at the very end, inserting a certain amount of satire, thereby subtly but reliably exposing petty-bourgeois taboos and even mocking them [4].

Conclusion

This paper provides an insight into the fantasy of Milovan Glišić's works, or rather, a more detailed analysis of his fantastic creatures. Certain rules common to all fantastic creatures have been established – they appear when a person is alone and unprotected, at night, in characteristically dangerous places (forest, bridge, mill); their attributes generally coincide with the mythological representation, they want to harm a person, to destroy him. Summing up the analyses presented in the text, we have come to the conclusion that fantastic creatures are of exceptional importance for directing the course of the plot in the story – the introduction of the miraculous is an excellent solution for Glišić: it comes when it is least expected and is the easiest way to resolve a seemingly insoluble situation.

The appearance of the supernatural is also characterized by the narrator's distancing – which is actually a way of saying that he does not believe in these stories. He wanted to emphasize the primitivism and limited views of his compatriots. Whether the being is a giant emperor, a mysterious black child, or a cursed vampire, they are only different forms of the same demon, the same evil, whose root is nowhere else but within ourselves [5, 6]. Human ignorance creates monstrosities, Glišić tells us; limited worldviews create horror. There is no evil outside ourselves. There is a much greater demon than the fantastic ones; the demon from which all other demons emanate – the demon of ignorance [7].

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