

**MODERN FOLKLORE: SERGEI LUKYANENKO'S**

***NIGHT WATCH***

by

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## ABSTRACT

In 1998, Russian author Sergei Lukyanenko published what would become one of his most popular Russian fantasy novels, *Night Watch*, which later resulted in a movie franchise, a video game based on the novel, and translations in various languages, including French, German and English. The massive popularity of the novel in the Post-Soviet era brings it to the forefront of the genre of modern Russian fantasy, and it will surely influence future generations of Russian literature. Arguably the most significant impact of the book lies in its creation of a new genre presenting a modern setting through the lens of one of the oldest and most culturally unique components of Slavic culture - folklore. Each major element of the novel can be compared to those found in folklore, and existing scholarly resources, such as the stories, fairytales, and myths collected by A. N. Afanas'ev, and works that focus on Slavic culture by W. R. S. Ralston and Cherry Gilchrist, help identify subcategories shared by the novel and Slavic folklore as a whole.

These resources helped identify three major areas of impact: story format, magical elements, and cultural influence. Story format focuses on the overall story line and overview of content, the second section examines overlapping magical ideas and similarities between supernatural creatures, such as magicians, vampires, and devils, and a third part addresses other minor, but important cultural elements found in both older Slavic societies and *Night Watch*. The numerous identified parallels indicate that Slavic folklore, myth, and culture clearly influenced the modern novel. In light of this research, Lukyanenko's work can be viewed as a sort of "modern folklore," as it

contains all of the elements essential to of Slavic fairytales and myths while incorporating contemporary themes and setting.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Sergei Lukyanenko's novel *Night Watch*, published in 1998 and set in present day Moscow, follows the main character, Anton Gorodetsky, as he navigates through the challenges of being an "Other" in the "Night Watch." Every Other, or supernatural being, goes through an initiation into one of two Watches, the Night Watch or the Day Watch, after successfully entering the "Twilight." The Twilight provides a second setting alongside urban Moscow, as a parallel world that only Others can access. Once a human enters the Twilight, he or she gains magical powers, takes on a supernatural form, and is placed into one of the Watches based on the nature of his or her aura and inner traits. The Night Watch takes altruistic and innately good people who become "Light," while the Day Watch takes the egocentric who become "Dark." The two Watches create and maintain the balance between good and evil with the help of a Treaty signed millennia earlier.

As a Light magician, Anton follows the orders of the head of the Night Watch, Boris Ignatievich, also referred to by his ancient birth name Gesar. In the beginning of the novel, Anton tracks two vampires who broke the Treaty by hunting without permission and accidentally meets a young woman with a large curse over her head, which only Others can see. Anton attempts to disable the curse, which takes all of his powers, leaving him to fail in his quest as he kills one vampire but lets the other escape. As a result of the failed mission, the boss gives Anton an owl named Olga to help with his tasks, who turns out to be a transformed Night Watch agent and a

powerful sorceress. Together, Anton and Olga track the vampire and disable the curse, which begins another entire series of adventures for Anton.

The author divides Anton's missions into three parts, and provides emphasis on three distinctly different ideas. In the first part, Anton apprehends the vampire with the help of the vampire's victim, Egor. He turns out to be a young "Neutral" Other, one without a Dark or Light allegiance even after entering the Twilight. Anton describes to him the complicated differences between the Watches. In the second part, Anton continues to describe the dissimilarity to Svetlana, the previously cursed young woman who joins the Night Watch after the first part of the novel. At this point, Anton begins to become disillusioned with the Watches and starts doubting the actions of its leaders. In the last part of the novel, Anton tries to stop the Night Watch from completing its biggest mission in a century due to the potential harm it could cause. In essence, the entire novel tries to explain the thin line between good and evil through action and dialogue, while incorporating multiple elements of fantasy and magic.

The multitude of folkloric ideas, like the novel itself, can similarly be divided into three distinct categories of story format, magical elements, and cultural beliefs, which in turn help view each component by itself and then find similar notions in other stories. The scholar A. N. Afanas'ev was the first to collect and publish entire tomes of old Russian fairytales, myths, and legends. A close examination of each of these stories or category of stories allows for a generalization of important ideas and elements within the broader spectrum the older culture. Another scholar W. R. Ralston helps understand the significance and importance of each component. Award-winning author and lecturer Cherry Gilchrist provides further analysis of cultural components of the older Slavic practices and beliefs from pagan times, folklore and culture before



and after Christianity, and major influences from the West. By combining these approaches, an examination of the various types of impact that folklore has on the novel can produce greater insight into the complexity of Slavic cultural roots embedded into the story and help readers recognize the depth of ideas presented by the author.

In order to view the evaluation of beliefs of Slavic people over time, two periods of lore must be considered: pre- and post-Christianity. Both time periods provide vastly differing views of deities and religion. While ancient Slavs worshiped pagan gods of nature with their own complex sets of ideas of the world, Christian Slavs worshiped one God and the many saints known today. In addition, peasant culture exhibits differing accounts of life in that pagan and Christian ideas combine and blend over time, eventually creating the cohesive society of the modern era. However, folklore should still be examined through a division of the two time periods of Slavic history in order to produce a clear picture of culture in its entirety.

By combining certain components of Slavic folklore and cultural superstitions and creating a complex novel with multiple culturally traditional layers, Sergei Lukyanenko essentially creates his own genre – that of “modern folklore.” This establishes a connection between the pagan past of the nation and the contemporary age, while providing an example of how an author can use folklore in a modern setting; Lukyanenko incorporates a rich, latent history into a new era of literature in the post-Soviet period. The way that Lukyanenko uses story format, magical elements, and cultural beliefs produces a unique genre of fantasy, the foundation of which lies in traditional folklore.

## **Chapter 2**

### **STORY FORMAT**

#### **The Wonder Tale**

In the analysis of both the novel *Night Watch* and the associated folkloric tales, the actual storyline remains crucial. In Slavic stories, myths, and legends, and especially in what scholars call the “wonder tale,”<sup>1</sup> the audience is assumed to have a previous understanding that the magical and the mundane exist side by side. Thus as a story begins, the listener or reader is already aware that the story may take on a magical nature at any time while still being believable, as the plot elements remain realistic. Such a magical turn might invoke strange worlds unknown to most people or ferocious creatures and supernatural beings who prevent a hero from completing his quest. In most cases, the stories employ such magical aspects to entice and entertain the members of the audience, yet simultaneously distance them from the story’s magical events in which they themselves do not participate.

The introduction of the wonder tale typically stresses the prosperity of the family or kingdom to which the hero belongs in order to create a contrast with future misfortunes. The narrator depicts prosperity as a father with beautiful daughters, the king with a mythical orchard, or a beautiful princess with multiple suitors. The introduction might also present other sources of fortune, such as a miraculous birth

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Y. Propp, Sibelan E. S. Forrester, and Jack Zipes. *The Russian Folktale by Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2012. Print. 147.

from which the hero issues. The plot of the story begins when a member of the older generation sends away either a single member or a set of brothers, or when the hero leaves home willingly in order to fulfill a certain task. The hero could either be a prince or a peasant; his social standing is not a factor in his ability to complete quests. However, the main character consists of an unlikely hero, someone the audience would not expect to be a vanquisher of villains or rescuer of fair maidens; in Slavic stories the village fool or the youngest of three brothers typically becomes the hero.

The most important traits of the protagonist are typically those tacitly assumed by the audience. For example, while no one in the stories ever discusses the appearance of the character, the audience assumes him to be handsome because he embodies only the positive traits of an idealized version of a hero. These traits typically include bravery, selflessness, and strength. At the time these stories were told and repeated, people viewed greed as the worst possible characteristic, so naturally the protagonist of the stories displays only generosity. Through this most important characteristic, the hero completes tasks for the benefits of others, seeking neither praise nor reward. During his adventure, the main character usually sets free or rescues some person. When the hero finds a potential bride or princess, he earns her by saving her or by aiding in her escape from an enchantment or evil supernatural being.

Throughout his journey the protagonist always plays the role of seeker; he has to find something or someone. Once leaving home, the hero wanders without really knowing where to go. The narrator never reveals how much time the journey takes but typically implies a long period of time. Before reaching the main destination, the hero runs into what Propp calls the folktale “donor,”<sup>1</sup> either a benevolent figure of the Baba

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<sup>1</sup> Propp, 158.

Yaga (a specific Slavic witch usually found in the role of villain) or another type of older and wiser person who helps the hero find his way, gives crucial advice, or supplies a magical item to help his journey. The donor may also be an animal that the hero meets during his adventure, captures and later releases, or voluntarily helps. The animal donor always appears later in the story to help the hero avoid villains, escape from foreign kingdoms, and finally return home.

After meeting a donor, the protagonist soon finds his destination, specifically the entrance to the mythical world in which a coveted object or a person can be found. At some point, either on the way to his destination or after arriving, the character must complete a series of tasks in order to obtain his goal. In almost every scenario, the hero initially fails in his endeavors and requires multiple attempts to complete his tasks. After the completion of assignments, the hero defeats the villain or successfully abducts the maiden or coveted magical object. Upon fleeing from the original destination, the previously encountered animal donors may aid the hero in his escape. Escape does not always indicate the end of the hero's journey, however.

Stories often feature a second part in which the protagonist forfeits the maiden to one or more false heroes, such as his two brothers, who meet the hero before their return to the kingdom, render him incapable of continuing home with them, and take credit for the heroic deeds upon their arrival back. If the false heroes mortally injure the main character at this stage, the donor typically helps to revive him, so that he can return to his kingdom and reclaim his reward. While the protagonist heads home, the false hero is preparing to wed the maiden, who in turn usually demands of him the completion of certain tasks that only the real hero can fulfill. This serves the purpose of not only frightening the false hero, but also of stalling the wedding until the

intended groom arrives, whereupon the deception comes to light and the real hero is praised by all and ultimately weds the maiden.

This condensed version of the wonder tale can be applied to the analysis of the novel *Night Watch*. If similarly condensed, the story revolves around a supernatural world beside the human one and the magical aspect falls in line with that of older stories, particularly the “wonder tale.” The narrative and plot of the modern novel completely rest upon its magical elements, as the story belongs to today’s fantasy genre, or more specifically “urban fantasy.”<sup>1</sup> This places the novel alongside the wonder tale, as both need magical elements to function. The idea of the fantasy novel set in modern-day Moscow also bridges the supernatural world and the human one, as do the heroes in older stories who crossed to other magical worlds and back again in order to complete their tasks.

The concept of the unlikely hero presents another major aspect found in both the modern story and the older ones. The main character of the novel, Anton, works as a common computer programmer in the Night Watch. The story begins as Anton is given an important assignment by his older and wiser superior, according to which he must work as a field operative who must leave the comfort of his previous position—a surprise to all of the major characters involved because, as a medium-grade magician, Anton possesses neither the necessary magical strength nor the physical experience of having worked directly with dangerous supernatural beings. Other characters,

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<sup>1</sup> According to editor and reviewer Amy Goldschlager, “urban fantasy” is a subgenre of fantasy set in a contemporary city, in which the familiar city life co-exists with a hidden, magical aspect frequently including magical creatures.

Avon Eos, Amy Goldschlager. “Science Fiction & Fantasy: A Genre With Many Faces.” 1997. PDF file.

however, comment on his decent looks and young age, both qualities that the heroes of the wonder tale exhibit.

Similarly, as in the wonder tale, our unlikely hero leaves his usual surroundings to complete his journey, in this case the apprehension of two bloodthirsty vampires, and fails his mission on the first attempt. Instead of letting Anton try again in the same fashion, as the hero does in the wonder tales, the head of the Night Watch and Anton's personal mentor, Gesar, decides to give Anton an animal companion, an owl named Olga, to help him complete his task. Olga plays the role of the "donor" from the wonder tales as she gives Anton crucial advice, and together they not only complete the initial task but also accomplish another; during the very next quest Anton meets a beautiful woman, with whom he immediately falls in love and eventually marries. The woman, Elena, turns out to be a powerful sorceress who joins the Night Watch with Anton, in fulfillment of the wonder tale convention of a hero helping to save a maiden and bringing her back to his kingdom.

The completion of the original task and successful integration into a new setting of the maiden, as in the wonder tale's, does not signify the end of the journey. The *Night Watch* builds upon this idea, as the completion of the original task only finishes the first part of the novel. The second part involves a mystery person, a "false hero," who frames Anton for various murders of supernatural beings throughout the city, and Anton becomes the false villain in the eyes of his peers. With the help of his original donor Olga, Anton ultimately finds the real culprit and clears his name. The third part of the novel, however, departs from the wonder tale story trope by exhibiting a complicated and rather modern notion of the protagonist uncovering and stopping a huge conspiracy, which is created by his own superiors, with guidance from the Day

Watch, thereby forestalling its harmful consequences and painting the originally “good” side in a negative light.

Through the combination of various elements, the *Night Watch* takes the established storyline of the wonder tale and builds upon it in a modern way. The first part of the novel shares the ideas of the older generation sending away the unlikely hero on a quest, which the protagonist completes with a wiser helpful donor and rescues a fair maiden, who is shortly thereafter brought back into the world of the hero in order to help him overcome the image of a false hero. These actions take place in both the human and the Twilight supernatural world simultaneously throughout the entire story. The contemporary urban setting of the novel evokes the atmosphere of modernity which, when combined with the magical element, help create a fantasy fit for the modern era, but one that still follows the basics provided by storytellers long ago. *Night Watch* builds upon these original ideas to create an entertaining and relevant story for today’s reader by adding complexity through multiple storylines and quests. Yet, when broken down into its fundamental elements, the story follows the same progression of events that stories always had.

### **Binary Opposition**

Stories of the past and present use another component found in both the general storyline of the novel and the wonder tale - the concept of binary opposition. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, dualism both analyzes the knowing process and explains reality through the use of two heterogeneous principles, which can either

oppose or complement each other.<sup>1</sup> Professor of English Francesca Marino explains the similar concept of binary opposition, which looks at how two related but opposing concepts function within a larger system or overall environment. The idea was first introduced into the field of literary analysis through the analysis through the theory of structuralism, but the concepts of duality can be traced in both Slavic and Russian culture and literature for centuries dating all the way back to pagan times.<sup>2</sup> Binary opposition in literature can appear as simple as the opposition between feminine and masculine, between day and night, and good and evil.<sup>3</sup> Although the analysis and concept of binary opposition has since greatly expanded and become more complex, the basic theory of opposition remains the same.

As scholar Cherry Gilchrist claims, this duality or binary opposition has always been central to Russian culture. Gilchrist maintains that people divided the four elements into oppositions; water and earth constituted the horizontal plane while fire and air constituted the vertical plane of the “Tree of Life.”<sup>4</sup> This view addresses the most basic of the pagan beliefs and is specifically important when looking at the significance of duality. Since the introduction of Christianity and the growing development of language, stories and myths have incorporated these elements, grown

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<sup>1</sup> "Dualism | Philosophy." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Web. 2 Apr. 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Francesca M. Marino. "Binary Opposition in Literature: Definition and Examples." *Study.com*. Education Portal. Web. 2 Apr. 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Due to their extremely similar nature, the terms binary opposition and duality will be used interchangeably in this work.

<sup>4</sup>Cherry Gilchrist. *Russian Magic: Living Folk Traditions of an Enchanted Landscape*. Wheaton, IL: Quest, 2009. Print. 15-17.



ever more linguistically and theoretically diverse, and in the process created more complex ideas of binary opposition.

Some of the oldest stories in folklore contain such traces of duality. As British scholar William Ralston points out, common folkloric opposition tended to include good and evil, light and darkness, and heat and cold.<sup>1</sup> For example, the story “Vasilissa the Fair” [Василиса Прекрасная], contains a vast amount of dualities; the main opposition of youth, beauty, and benevolence of Vasilissa thoroughly opposes the old age, unsightliness, and malevolence of Baba Yaga. In the story, innocence and light clash with evil and darkness, creating another most basic duality. Aside from these obvious contrasts between Baba Yaga to Vasilissa, one can also identify more subtle oppositions within just this simple short story.

“Vasilissa the Fair” begins with a loving dying mother giving her beautiful young daughter Vasilissa a magical doll that will help her if she treats it with respect and feeds it everyday.<sup>2</sup> After the young girl’s mother dies, her father marries an unsightly woman with two evil daughters, who despise Vasilissa from the start. After a few years of living together, the stepmother sends her beautiful stepdaughter to Baba Yaga for a light in hopes she will kill the girl. Baba Yaga gives Vasilissa multiple tasks to complete in return for a lantern, all of which the girl completes with the help of her magical doll. In return for her deeds, Baba Yaga gives Vasilissa a lantern, which when brought home burns the stepmother and her evil daughters to ash.

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<sup>1</sup>William R. S. Ralston. *Russian Folk-Tales*. New York: Arno Press, 1977. Print. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander N. Afanas'ev. *Narodnye Russkie Skazki A.n. Afanas'eva: V Piaty Tomakh* [A. N. Afanas'ev's Russian National Fairytales: In Five Volumes]. 5 Vols. Moscow: TERRA, 1999. Print. Vol. 1. 101-112.

In the beginning of the story Vasilissa and her dying mother display utter love and affection for one another. The adoring and kind mother who only wishes to help her daughter exhibits characteristics that fully oppose the cruel and wicked stepmother who only wishes harm to come to the young girl. The opposition lies in the presentation of two completely different types of mother and the relationship of each to a single person. At the same time, the drastic differences between Vasilissa and her stepsisters create yet another duality. With age the young protagonist becomes more industrious, considerate, and loving, her sisters become more indolent, jealous, and malicious. A quote from the story represents this idea:

Vasilissa bore everything with resignation, and every day became plumper and prettier while the stepmother and her daughters became thinner and uglier from wrath [Василиса все переносила безропотно и с каждым днем все хорошела и полнела, а между тем мачеха с дочками своими худела и дурнела от злости...].<sup>1</sup>

The treatment of others, as seen in “Vasilissa the Fair,” functions oppositionally in this folkloric fable. The entire premise of the story rests upon the importance of treating others with kindness and respect. The sisters and stepmother all display only cruelty toward the girl, forcing her to work hard while they themselves rest. At the end of the story, the malevolent family members pay for their sins while Vasilissa lives on happily. Baba Yaga likewise acts with indifference and wickedness toward those around her by threatening to eat Vasilissa if she does not complete all the designated tasks on time. Vasilissa, unlike her opposing antagonists, chooses to give her small portions of food to her doll, thereby starving herself.

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<sup>1</sup> *Narodnye Russkie Skazki*, vol. 1, 102.

The treatment of others is just one of the many dualities that follow the rules of binary opposition, which state that contrasting ideas must stem from the same environment or system. The mothers the story provides belong in the same broader category of “mother,” yet they represent opposing ideas of maternal characteristics. The treatment of others, the two mothers, and the three stepsisters can all display positive or negative characters, but folklore requires a strict division of characters and action in order to explain which characters are the heroes and which are the villains. This concept requires that the heroes, such as Vasilissa and her mother, to possess only the best human qualities, while the antagonists, such as the stepsisters and their mother to possess only the most negative character traits. These basic themes have echoed throughout time and culture for centuries, and it is no surprise that they surface in today’s literature, though these opposition no longer need to be so strictly divided. These common but important concepts remain as central to society and its values today as they did so many centuries ago.

Sergei Lukyanenko’s novel displays a vast number of the ideas that first appeared in the oldest of pagan stories and beliefs. *Night Watch* tackles the binaries of good/evil, human/supernatural, and free will/destiny. The entire premise of his book revolves around the supernatural workers of Light and Darkness, the good and evil characters, who work for the Night Watch and Day Watch, respectively. The Watches fundamentally oppose one another, yet their combined purpose preserves the balance between the Light and Dark sides, ensuring the balance between good and evil for the humans. The setting of modern-day Moscow does not diminish the paramountcy of the ancient duality, but on the contrary may even increase its significance.

The salient good-versus-evil battle drives the entire plotline. As declared in the novel, this battle has existed for thousands of years. When a human becomes identified as a supernatural Other, that person chooses to join either the Light or Darkness. As in the true sense of duality, all persons have the potential for good and evil within them, but can only choose one side to join. Anton notes that “a Dark Magician can heal; a Light Magician can kill” [Темный маг может исцелять, Светлый маг может убивать], showing virtually no absolute moral difference between the Night Watch and the Day Watch. He further identifies the main difference between the two sides: “If first and foremost you think of yourself and your own interests, then your path leads to Darkness. If you think about others, it leads to the Light.” [Если ты думаешь в первую очередь о себе, о своих интересах – твоя дорога во Тьме. Если думаешь о других – к Свету.]<sup>1</sup>

Aside from the potential moral similarities and differences, the main character does explain one fundamental contrast between the energy of the two sides. The Light Others in the Night Watch obtain their power from human happiness, while the Dark Others receive their power from human suffering. Both happiness and suffering represent integral parts of the emotional scale, although diametrically opposing one another as extremes. This ensures further opposition amongst Others on the Dark and Light sides. The power of their energy influences the deeds of which Others are capable. For example, the Light side has the power to express unconditional good, while the Dark side has the power for unconditional evil. If one side commits an

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<sup>1</sup>Sergei Luk'ianenko. *Nochnoi Dozor* [Night Watch]. Moscow: Izd-vo "AST", 2004. Print. 194.

oppositely weighted act, the other side is allowed to balance it with a similarly weighted act of its own.

Such binary opposition spreads to humans, who already find themselves in opposition to the supernatural. Both a human and an Other identifies as a creature living in this world, but each exhibits different powers and composition. Once an Other joins a side, he or she can no longer be identified as human. That person stops aging and can easily heal, which are attributes that oppose the weakness of human mortality. Others possess powers that humans will never be able to obtain, such as the ability to transform into an animal. Supernatural beings can live in both the human world and the “Twilight,” a parallel shadow-land that humans will never enter. Upon entering the Twilight, the features of Others warp into the true grotesque forms of their beings, further distancing them from their human counterparts.

Using the oppositions between human and supernatural and good and evil, Lukyanenko depicts a complex world divided in two. The most basic understanding of this duality created in the novel, however, prevails in the image of a beverage that Svetlana orders on a whim. The drink has two immiscible layers, one black and one white, consisting of sweet plum liquor and bitter dark beer. The layers completely oppose one another, yet create a pleasantly balanced drink when the consumer tastes both layers simultaneously. An anecdote provided by Semyonov, Anton’s coworker, relates the background of the first Others to the layers in the drink; in which one race of people with two diametrically opposing ideologies create a single race of magical beings, but divides them into two groups. According to Semyonov, the split between the Watches started in the prehistoric caves, when people glanced into the Twilight to help find mammoths and other food. One man chose to lead people to the food and

was simply pleased to help, while another leader demanded rewards in return for the help, thereby splitting the fundamental moralities of the two groups within a single supernatural race.

### **Magical Realm**

Folklore takes these ideas of division and creates a physical separation of lands that appears in many wonder tales aids in the duality between supernatural beings and humans. In order to create this separation, the narrator in folklore typically places the supernatural antagonist, and often the donor, into a magical realm, evoked by enigmatic phrases such as “beyond the thrice-nine lands to the thrice-tenth kingdom” [за тридевять земель в тридесятом царстве]. This does not reveal the exact whereabouts of the magical villain, yet still creates a believable yet mystifying effect by stating that such a place of wonders exists, only not within the listener’s vicinity.

In the wonder tale, once the hero leaves his earthly kingdom, he journeys forth to meet a potential plethora of magical beings. While the duration of the trip is never stated, one assumes that the hero travels for a very long time to reach his destination, sometimes arriving at a seemingly normal kingdom, at other times entering a wholly different world. Often, the entrance to the magical realm is found at a vast distance, or remains hidden or guarded, thus demanding that the protagonist find the entrance where he least expects it. From such complications in even entering the realm, the story implies that only the worthiest people may enter a magical place.

The characteristics of the magical realm to which the protagonist journeys are determined by the type of antagonist in the story. If a water king plays the role of villain, the hero must venture to the depths of the sea to find the underwater kingdom. When the antagonist is Baba Yaga, the hero ventures to find her in a house that stands

on fowl's legs in the woods usually located far away from his initial starting point. Koshchei the Deathless, a recurring immortal villain, has no specifically designated place of residence. His "death," however, is a physical manifestation of mortality often hidden either on an island in the middle of the sea, to which the hero must travel great distances, or in a series of animals, such as an egg inside a duck inside a rabbit. The malevolent Snake of the Mountains known as Zmei Goryinyich [Змей Горыныч] resides either in a mountain cavern or underground. Likewise, many other evil beasts and demons typically live underground.

One such specific example is found in "The Norka," in which the main protagonist sets out with his three older brothers to kill a huge beast terrorizing the land in exchange for half the kingdom.<sup>1</sup> The hero fights off the beast and follows the fleeing creature. The beast lifts up a great white stone, as big as a hill, and escapes to the underworld. The hero's two brothers attempt to lift the stone but fail; however, the youngest flings it away into the distance with a single touch. The two older brothers, having refused to follow the hero into the underworld, lower him into it alone. On his way to find the beast, the hero stays at palaces made of copper, silver, and gold, finally surprising the sleeping beast in the middle of the sea and slaying him with a single blow. After accomplishing his task, the hero returns to the surface.

This story highlights many beliefs associated with the magical realm. The concept of the evil beast living a great distance away from the original kingdom assures that the protagonist must leave home and conquer a series of obstacles in his quest. In this case, the hero needs to bypass a colossal stone in order to reach the

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<sup>1</sup> *Russian Folk-Tales*, 73-80.

entrance. The other characters help by lowering him into the underground but are too afraid to go themselves, stressing one of the most important old-story concepts that only the worthy and brave may enter this realm. Once there, the hero arrives at palaces made of precious stones, signs of riches and grandeur associated with the magical world, signifying it as a world unlike the human one.

In another story called “Marya Morevna,” [Марья Моревна] a prince helps Koshchei the Deathless, who in turn kidnaps the hero’s eponymous wife.<sup>1</sup> While the prince easily finds Koshchei’s kingdom, he fails to escape with his wife three times due to the magical powers of Koshchei’s horse. The hero’s wife asks the antagonist how he obtained such a horse. Koshchei replies that he herded Baba Yaga’s horses successfully for three days, and she in turn bestowed upon him a flying mare with which it is possible to travel the entire world in a single day. Koshchei also tells Marya that the Baba Yaga lives beyond the thrice-nine lands in the thrice-tenth kingdom on the other side of a fiery river, adding that nobody can cross the fiery river without a magical handkerchief. The hero proceeds to steal the handkerchief and travel to the supernatural realm to bring back another such magical steed to save his princess.

As in “The Norka,” the second story shows the audience that only certain people have the ability to cross into the magical realm in which the fearsome witch resides. In “Marya Morevna,” only people with access to a special handkerchief can cross the fiery river, and even the protagonist resorts to stealing the item in order to complete his quest. This story also displays two dramatically different supernatural beings residing in different areas of the same land. So, while both Koshchei the

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<sup>1</sup> *Narodnye Russkie Skazki*, vol. 1, 254-262.



Deathless and Baba Yaga have supernatural powers, they live in different areas of their world, each living a great distance from the protagonist's kingdom.

Like its Slavic predecessors, the novel *Night Watch* describes different worlds. Its main character upon numerous occasions explains the significance of the Twilight world for supernatural beings such as himself. Anton discloses an entire world alongside the human one, a world that only supernatural beings can enter. Upon first entering the Twilight, a person chooses the side of Light or Dark and the supernatural form he or she will eventually take. This transformation from human to supernatural being occurs because the Twilight grants magical power to the person in exchange for the Other's humanity. For most, the transformation happens quickly, but for Others like Egor, a young boy whom Anton introduces to the world of Others, the decision can take months; the person meanwhile remains a "Neutral" Other lacking a definitive supernatural form and Watch allegiance.

Even though he is a Neutral Other, Egor perfectly explains how most people shift into the Twilight world for the first time, as he confesses to Anton that he often wakes up in the middle of the night but his surroundings stay dark and he cannot turn on the light. This phenomenon occurs because the Twilight world shrouds the typical surroundings in a gray mass, removing all color from the world and leaving only shades of gray with an occasional supernatural plant or being shining in color. In exchange for entering and staying in the shadow world, the Twilight proportionally depletes an Other's energy to the amount of time spent within it. This weakening of power can even cause the Other to stay in the Twilight forever, creating a dead shell of a person. In consequence, while accidentally entering the shadow world for the first time is easy, intentionally leaving appears to be very difficult.

This energy phenomenon is further demonstrated by Anton cutting his own hand to sacrifice physical energy, in the form of blood in order to provide enough energy necessary for Egor to leave the Twilight after staying in the realm for too long. Anton admits that only a lot of practice and the ensuing magical strength will allow an Other to remain in the Twilight for long periods of time. Part of the training for successfully going into the Twilight involves voluntarily entering the supernatural world through the use of one's own shadow by making it grow and rise, then enveloping oneself inside it. Once Others learn the proper way of entering the magical realm and gain enough energy to stay inside it, they obtain many benefits from that ability. For one, travel becomes much faster because time accelerates to three times more in the Twilight than in the normal world; a stroll that takes fifteen minutes in the human world only takes five minutes if traveling through the Twilight.

Anton shows Egor a trick illustrating the possibilities of magic within the Twilight realm. After breaking a teacup, Anton enters the shadow world to collect the pieces, which fuse together through the powerful energy within the Twilight. Anton tells the young boy that he is only able to fix the cup because the Twilight provides a sort of time limit to fix an object that broke earlier than it was originally destined to. This same energy that fixes the cup is found solely in the Twilight, and additionally hides Others from humans as they travel through the shadow world. While Others can see the human world alongside the Twilight one, humans cannot see the Twilight, yet still evade Others who are in the Twilight through intuition provided to them by the supernatural realm. Anton states that an Other does not suddenly turn invisible, but rather the human near him avoids the immediate area around this supernatural being.

The average Other has this ability to travel through the Twilight without interfering with humans, but only the most advanced beings have the necessary power to enter the deeper parts of that world, because the further an Other travels into the Twilight, the more life and energy it depletes from that being. Thus, in the world created by Lukyanenko, there are essentially more lands than just two. Anton can venture deeper into the Twilight, but cannot stay there for more than a few minutes, just as Egor cannot stay long in the first level of the shadow world. Olga, Anton's very powerful companion, can travel through multiple depths of the Twilight, though she does not have the powers that the heads of the Day Watch and Night Watch possess. The leaders can venture into the deepest layers and produce portals there, which allow instant travel.

The magical realm in both the modern novel and the older stories provides a parallel world in which the supernatural resides. This allows the audience to view supernatural beings as ones who can potentially exist, though few humans encounter them, because they live apart. Their land blocks the average human who is either unworthy of entering or simply does not possess the magical power necessary to travel through the barrier. In *Night Watch*, humans cannot see into the Twilight unless they have sufficient potential to become an Other, while, in a story such as "The Norka," the unworthy brothers possess insufficient strength to move the obstacle in front of the entrance to the underground. The idea of another magical realm is echoed in stories throughout various time periods, including the contemporary era, allowing an audience to imagine a world alongside its own in which magical beings exist.

### Chapter 3

#### MAGIC

Magic and magical abilities saturate Slavic folklore and create an environment in which heroes and humans mingle with supernatural sidekicks and foes. This environment allows magic to flourish and allows supernatural beings to coexist with humans. Witches, magicians, the undead, shape-shifters and demons thrive in such a story land, and the stories have survived to contemporary times. Today the literary world features entire genres, such as fantasy and science fiction, dedicated to the creatures and events deemed too imaginary to truly exist, while ancient folklore remains at the root of it all. *Night Watch* falls into the category of fantasy and science fiction due to its realistically impossible elements. Sergei Lukyanenko creates a parallel world to the contemporary human one, very reminiscent of the original stories, in which magic and supernatural creatures exist, introducing various magic wielders into the novel that echo their older counterparts.

Ralston discusses several unique magical aspects distinct to Slavic folklore that are still seen in literature today, especially those of the magical waters of life and death, and sometimes the waters of strength and weakness.<sup>1</sup> In some stories the hero needs these waters to survive, and in some instances they even bring him back from death. Usually, the companion of a hero sprinkles the Water of Death onto the hero's mutilated corpse to reattach his body together and then uses the Water of Life to

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<sup>1</sup> *Russian Folk-Tales*, 230-236.

reawaken the hero. However, the waters sometimes possess virtues other than the giving of life and death, but one usually always heals or aids a person while the other does the complete opposite. In some stories, for example, the healing water has the side effect to make the drinker younger.

While the supernatural characters in the modern novel do not use these waters of life and death *per se*, they do possess qualities that make them nearly immortal, thus eliminating the need to take special mythical waters. The alcohol that appears in the novel comes closest to the original Slavic idea; Anton drinks vodka in order to curb his hunger for blood and then pours the same alcohol on a vampire in order to burn her flesh and slow her down. Others revive Ignat, another member of the Night Watch, with cognac after a failed mission. Semyon even tells Anton that one should drink cognac and wine to soothe the heart and vodka to soothe the soul. The novel uses alcohol as a tool to revive or harm magical beings.

Characters in lore likewise use various magical items as instruments to help them with their quests. For example, a witch may use a magical cauldron to contain a hero's heart or a hero may use a magical ring in order to find a villain's "death," such as Koshchei's physical manifestation of death. The Baba Yaga in one story possesses a magical sword, with which the hero kills her. In stories such as "Vasilissa the Fair" a magical doll helps a heroine complete impossible tasks and survive. Sometimes a donor gives the hero a magical item or animal, such as horse or mythical firebird in order to escape mortal peril. Without the essential magical items or creatures in such stories, the heroes would never overcome the dangers of their quests. While magic prevails in almost every story and myth, supernatural creatures also play crucial roles in the mythical world of lore.

## The Devil

One of the most crucial and pervasive of the supernatural characters in lore and culture through centuries remains the devil. Either as an evil spirit or a definitively demonic creature, the devil, or at least the idea of him, influences the way people perceive villains and heroes. A powerful and prevalent figure with many names, the devil appears in stories of both Christian and non-Christian origin. Some names, such as devil [дьявол] or demon [чёрт] specifically name him. Other times, peasants refer to the devil as “that one” [тот], “the evil one” [лихой], or most commonly “the unclean one” [нечистый]. Pictorially, the devil appears black and hairy, having hoofs, a long tail, and horns on his head. World-renowned folklore scholar Felix J. Oinas mentions the rare occasion, in which the devil appears lame, because he and the rest of the demons broke their legs upon their fall from heaven.<sup>1</sup> Stories from folklore, however, often describe the devil as a handsome young man, whom the hero readily trusts until told otherwise.

Oinas further explains such duplicity by noting the ability of both the devil and his demons to change their outward appearance. For example, devils can turn into black cats, black dogs, wolves, and various other animals. They can even materialize into balls of thread or piles of hay.<sup>2</sup> Devils live practically anywhere, such as in churches and houses, but their favorite places include forest swamps and marshes. Perhaps the most feared power of the devil remains his power to influence people to commit various heinous acts, such as the arson of villages and theft. People hold the

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<sup>1</sup> Oinas, Felix J. *Essays on Russian Folklore and Mythology*. Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1985. Print. 98.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,

devil responsible for suicides, believing anyone who commits suicide ends up serving the devil as a horse or coachman. While the seduction of women remains his favorite pastime, the devil also enjoys tempting people and playing vicious pranks on them, abducting unbaptized or cursed children, and causing sickness.

Oinas continues the discussion of the devil by mentioning various religious and folk methods of protection against these numerous wiles. Rituals involve crossing oneself after hearing thunder, after opening doors, or after drawing water, and after any encounter with an aperture through which the devil might enter, like holes in walls and windows. The devil cannot abduct a child in the night if a mother makes the sign of the cross while putting a child to bed. Likewise, any travelers who suspect that the devil has caused them to become lost may turn their clothes inside out to counteract the evil influence. Physical forms of protection involve amulets worn around the neck consisting of prayers woven into cloth that can ward off evil spirits. Devices such as icons, blessed candles, and charms sufficiently offer protection from the devil and his workers. An enduring defense against supernatural forces continues to be the idea of drawing a protective circle around a person, making it impossible for any evil beings to enter the space. Some stories feature circles drawn with chalk or salt, carved with knives, or simply made by having a priest walk around the person in a circle.

Such extensive protection is needed as some legends describe the powers of the devil as comparable to those of God; this is an idea that appears in creation stories, in which the devil makes mountains and lakes and angers God, or those in which he makes demonic helpers after watching God create angels. Other legends and stories feature the devil as much less powerful, easily tricked or even captured. Such devils of lesser stature, sometimes referred to as spirits or demons, take on subordinate

positions to witches and wizards. These lesser devils often are easily deceived and rather dim-witted, more easily tricked into doing the bidding of the hero or even of a secondary character. While depictions and features of the devil and demonic beings vary from story to story and over time, the underlying notion of an evil spirit intent on causing harm remains the same.

While the devil does not originally appear, the ancestors of these underlings and followers of the devil have origins in the oldest pagan beliefs, which present a world filled with sprites, woodland creatures, house spirits, and various other supernatural beings living alongside humans. If one performs the correct rituals, the creatures in turn offer positive rewards, whereas forgetting to pay respects to the creatures may bring terrible consequences. After the spread of Christianity and general acceptance of religion among peasants, a cultural shift replaced the forest spirits [лешие], water sprites [водяные], and other creatures of nature with demonic spirits and workers of the devil. Gradually, stories changed to feature darkly religious creatures rather than mischievous and morally ambivalent beings. Pyotr Simonov perfectly clarifies how the pagan spirits and the Christian religion merge:

“A popular legend tells that when Satan and all his host were expelled from heaven, some of the exiled spirits fell into the lower recess of the underworld, where they remained in the shape of goblins. Some, however, were received by the woods which they haunted; others dived into the rivers and streams; some remained in the air and delighted in riding the whirlwind and directing the storm; and some attached themselves to the houses of mortals as domestic spirits.”<sup>1</sup>

While many stories feature the workers of the devil as mentioned by Simonov, others maintain a clearly identifiable devil figure, who interacts with humans in order

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<sup>1</sup> Pyotr Simonov. *Essential Russian Mythology*. London: Thorsons, 1997. Print. 22.



to make a deal or gain something from them. For example, in “The Awful Drunkard” a young man accuses a woman on her way to church of sinning because he hears her blame the devil for tripping her.<sup>1</sup> At that point, the devil himself appears as a fine looking fellow who thanks the main character for defending him and offers the young man a reward for his kindness. Subsequently, a fair maiden informs the young man, when he first enters the devil’s palace, of the demon’s planned deceit, and instructs him as to how to escape with his bewitched father, whom everyone believed to have drowned but the devil had turned into a horse. With the help of his crucifix, the youth escapes the devil and restores his father back to human form. Stories with similar plots emerge through the centuries, substituting certain details, but not the main ideas.

The central ideas that “The Awful Drunkard” presents deal with many other previously acknowledged characteristics attributed to the devil, such as the ability to appear before someone immediately after being mentioned. According to folk belief, even the briefest comment could make him appear, to the detriment of the speaker, thereby emphasizing the omnipresence of the devil as well as his putative teleportation powers. In this last story he appears to the young man solely to trick him into servitude, rather than to bestow a proffered reward. The story’s narrator explains that evil spirits had abducted the fair maiden who helps the young man escape, alluding to the commonly feared belief that the devil kidnaps people. Further, the devil had turned the young man’s father into a horse, exemplifying the cultural beliefs that attributed certain shape-shifting abilities to devils.

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<sup>1</sup> *Russian Folk-Tales*, 33.

While “The Awful Drunkard” features a powerful anthropomorphic devil who can transform the appearance of others, “The Smith and the Demon” presents a demonic creature with the ability to change his own appearance and who desires the respect of the smith.<sup>1</sup> In this story, a smith decides to paint a black demon with horns and tail on the door of his smithy after seeing such a depiction in a church. Every day for many years the smith greets the picture with respect, until the day he dies. The smith’s son, by contrast beats the picture with a hammer and sometimes spits on it, thereby greatly angering the demon. To teach him a lesson, the demon transforms himself into a boy, whom the young smith decides to take on as an apprentice. One day, an old lady drives by the smithy in a carriage, and the apprentice offers to make the woman young again, which he proceeds to do by burning her in the furnace, washing the bones in milk, and then reviving her. When the lady sends her husband for the same treatment, the young boy disappears, leaving the smith to ineffectually attempt the same ritual. As the smith walks up to the gallows to his death, the young boy reappears and makes him promise to treat the demon with respect, after which the demon heals the husband.

This story shows both the maleficent and beneficent aspects of demons, depicting them as mischievous and arrogant while also possessing intelligence and goodwill. Instead of committing exclusively despicable acts, demons can become identifiable characters for the audience. This demon appears as the traditional black creature with horns, but also as a seemingly normal young boy with no indication of a supernatural nature. He performs the task of making a person younger, even if his

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<sup>1</sup> *Russian Folk-Tales*, 59.

means are complicated and appear evil at first glance as he has to initially burn the victims. The demon featured in “The Smith and the Demon” is reminiscent of the typical house spirit [домовой] from Slavic culture, a black and furry creature that resides in the house and rewards the family if shown kindness.

While the older stories of folklore offer a variety of demonic creatures and types of devils, the modern *Night Watch* novel presents only one main, demonic character. Though no one ever refers to him as such, Zabulon, the head of the Day Watch exhibits many qualities associated both with the devil in lore and in the modern sense. Anton first notices Zabulon while completing his mission to stop the vortex from rising. The as-yet-unknown character possesses enough power to break the protective shell around Anton with a single glance, requiring the hero to wear an amulet in order to withstand his influence. During the first meeting, everyone simply refers to Zabulon as a high-ranking Day Watch magician observing the operations of the Night Watch.

The true demonic nature of Zabulon is subsequently made manifest when he interferes in the capture of a vampire girl. He first appears as a human, in a shapeless black coat and a black fur beret, reminiscent of the Slavic idea of a demon covered in black fur. Later in the novel Zabulon transforms himself to show what Lukyanenko calls “the classical features of a demon,” complete with:

“...dull scales instead of skin, an irregular shape of the skull, overgrown with some kind of matted fur instead of hair, narrow eyes with vertical pupils... from the base of his spine hung a short forked tail.” [...тусклая чешуя вместо кожи, неправильная форма черепа, поросшего вместо волос какой-то свлявшейся шерстью, узкие

глаза с вертикальными зрачками...с копчика свисал короткий раздвоенный хвост.]<sup>1</sup>

The devil continues the gradual transformation into a beetle-like creature with multiple arms, a shifting mouth, and wings. As the character becomes more ferocious, Anton ponders the effects of the appearance of such a powerful demon on the general human population in the area, dreading the influence the sheer amount of dark magic will have on others. He believes the event will affect the souls of humans through such channels as intense feelings of depression or irrational joy, betrayals of faithful lovers and quarrels between best friends, heart attacks, and much more. Like this unintentional but catastrophic influence, his intentional magical powers also display great force.

Zabulon breaks into Anton's house and freezes the guards without anyone's notice, using a battle staff to produce deadly flames. Zabulon, just like Gesar, has the ability to hear a summons and either immediately teleport himself to that person's location or answer him or her mentally. Both men possess a type of omnipresence that allows them to know various future outcomes and to hear multiple conversations at once, which makes them especially powerful when compared to the average Other. In addition, the two powerful men have lived since the signing of the Treaty between the Light and Dark, centuries before the events of the book.

When he shifts back to his human appearance, Zabulon appears to be about thirty years of age with sunken cheeks and a military hair-cut. He always wears a loose-fitting gray suit, which contrasts with the usually casual look of Gesar. Either an ordinary human countenance or the typical look of a demon are seen in older

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<sup>1</sup> Lukyanenko, 143.

descriptions of the devil, though the insect form described in the novel does not fit into the Slavic category of lore. What does correspond to lore includes the power to instantly travel distances and hear when someone speaks his name, like the devil presented in “The Awful Drunkard.” The Christian aspect of the devil comes into play when Zabulon tells Anton that he does not possess a soul, implying that nothing will become of him after death. Furthermore, folklore considers witches, vampires, and other dark creatures to be magical entities and followers of the devil who have the ability to recruit humans, through either direct or indirect influence. In *Night Watch*, the primary devil character acts as the head of Day Watch, meaning everyone else operates under him as his subordinates, in both power and rank.

### **Magicians**

Followers of the devil typically possess supernatural qualities, especially the abilities to control magic. Stories in folklore often contain elements of magic, especially tales about magicians. Baba Yaga remains one of the most recognizable magical characters of lore. Contemporary images of the witch and wizard thoroughly resemble the Baba Yaga and her male counterpart, Koshchei the Deathless. Baba Yaga displays powers that others do not possess, and sometimes people would use her name interchangeably with that of the witch. Yet, in some stories the witch differs from the Baba Yaga as being a daughter born of ordinary human parents but who becomes possessed by evil spirits and begins to devour everything and everyone in her path.<sup>1</sup>

The infamous character of the Baba Yaga deserves detailed mention, as the stories associated with her figure prominently in storytelling even today. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Russian Folk-Tales*, 170.

personification of evil - tall and gaunt, and often with disheveled hair - she belongs to the category of malevolent enchantress with other “old, hideous and hateful” creatures of dull wit.<sup>1</sup> While most stories depict her as living alone and only a few attribute sisters or daughters to her, all stories describe her residence as being a hut supported by fowl’s legs or a house surrounded by a fence made from human bones. Her favored mode of transportation consists of a mortar and pestle, in which she rides and sweeps away her traces with a broom. The Baba Yaga’s power extends over her servants, consisting of night and day, as well as various animals, including dogs and cats. Most stories involving the enchantress depict her as a villain in search of food consisting of human flesh.<sup>2</sup> In certain retellings, the Baba Yaga and the snake often appear to be interchangeable.

Because ancient Slavic cultures regarded witches and wizards as people who personified the force of nature in their ability to heal the body and mind from disease, control the elements, look into the future, and decipher hidden meanings of omens, each village would boast of its own witch or wizard well before society even started regarding such powers as dark.<sup>3</sup> The differences between various types of witches and wizards created a power divide based upon the abilities that each type of sorcerer purportedly possessed. Those witches having the higher knowledge of prophecy and healing held the titles sage [ведун/ведьма], medicine man [знахарь/знахарка], or

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<sup>1</sup> *Russian Folk-Tales*, 138.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>3</sup> William R. S. Ralston. *The Songs of the Russian People: As Illustrative of Slavonic Mythology and Russian Social Life*. New York: Haskell House, 1970. Print. 379.

magus [волхв/волхва]. Those with the abilities to provide sacrificial offerings were called conjurer [колдун/колдунья], whereas those who had exceptional knowledge of curses and potions were called sorcerer [чародей/чародейка].<sup>1</sup>

Popular belief aside, the common stories passed down to modern times hold that witches and wizards gain their supernatural powers through pacts with evil spirits, even sometimes receiving the ability to turn into a vampire after death, thereby relegating all practitioners of witchcraft to the demon world. Most commonly in stories, the witch completes her dark tasks in the middle of the night by taking the form of various animals, especially a wolf or a cat.<sup>2</sup> Some of these dark acts include stealing the dew, moon, or stars, casting curses upon peasants, and flying in the sky by means of a domestic tool, such as the mortar and pestle of the Baba Yaga. Other magicians use their powers to help people, not harm them. These witches and wizards create special amulets out of simple material like wood and enchant them through spells, usually to be employed by peasants for their protection.<sup>3</sup>

Protection against the sorcery of witches and wizards is provided by these special amulets and likewise by certain symbols that trap the witches, such as chalk-drawn crosses over doors. Peasants in the stories believe witches and wizards bring death and disease to mankind and beasts through the help of evil spirits. Common belief also holds that magicians use poison distilled from earth and roots to kill people

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander N. Afanas'ev. *Mify, Pover'ia I Suever'ia Slavian: Poëticheskie Vozzreniia Slavian Na Prirodu* [Slavic Myths, Legends, and Superstitions: Slavic Poetic Views on Nature]. Vol. 3. Moscow: ÈKSMO, 2002. Print. 402-406.

<sup>2</sup> *Russian Folk-Tales*, 270.

<sup>3</sup> *Songs*, 386.

either singly or *en masse*. The success of defending oneself against a witch lies in the use of proper rituals to ward off attack. As people do not consider witches and wizards to possess the supernatural ability to heal themselves, killing a magician presents no greater difficulty than a person might face dealing with any other creature. A few stories describe the ease of killing a witch, however, even when the person did not intend to do so.

In one particular story, “The Headless Princess,” a young boy spies a princess through a palace window removing her head in order to wash it.<sup>1</sup> Upon his arrival home, the boy tells everyone about the princess, who obviously possesses the abilities of a witch. Not long after the telling of her secret, the princess falls ill and dies, but not before she requests that the boy reads psalms over her coffin. Every night for three nights, she reawakens at midnight and conjures up horrors for the boy as he reads. The boy’s only protection consists of a circle drawn around him that does not allow supernatural beings to cross into it. The king learns of the witchery and orders an aspen stake driven through his daughter’s chest before burying the coffin. A similar story, “A Soldier’s Midnight Watch,” conveys nearly the same events; here, though, a soldier utters a spell to turn a witch into a mare and rides her to death while beating her with an aspen club. Instead of using a magic circle, the soldier hides in various places from the witch and her demons.<sup>2</sup> Both stories display the ease of killing a witch and the undead nature of her body after death.

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<sup>1</sup>*Russian Folk-Tales*, 271.

<sup>2</sup> *Russian Folk-Tales*, 274.



Unlike the story with the boy and the undead witch, other stories, such as “Ivashko and the Witch” [Ивашко и Ведьма], depict an evil antagonist in a more traditional fashion, as one more likely to make a deal with the devil in exchange for power to conduct wicked deeds.<sup>1</sup> In the plot, a young boy named Ivashko is fishing from a canoe and thinks he hears the voice of his mother calling him to shore; however, it is a witch with her voice altered with the help of a smith to sound like his mother. The deceit works and she takes Ivashko home, where she asks her daughter to bake the boy for a feast. Ivashko tricks the daughter into getting into the oven herself, however, and hides himself on the top branches of a nearby oak. The witch compels the same smith to forge her a set of iron teeth, with which she gnaws at the oak. Ivashko escapes a horrid fate with the help of a flock of geese flying by. The powers displayed by the witch are not particularly impressive from the point of view of magic, though she is able to gnaw through a tree and change her voice with the help of the smith, as well as hold feasts of human flesh, behaviors attributed to dark supernatural beings.

In any study of popular belief, reading stories like “Ivashko and the Witch” helps promote understanding of the values and beliefs of people who lived at the time the stories were told. Gilchrist outlines aspects of Russian culture dealing with magic in her novel, discussing the magus [волхв], a type of wizard whom she compares to a Western shaman.<sup>2</sup> According to her observations, these Russian shamans act as mediators between the human and spirit worlds, usually accompanied by an animal

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<sup>1</sup> *Narodnye Russkie Skazki*, vol. 1, 114-117.

<sup>2</sup> Gilchrist, 13.

spirit guide. They have responsibility for the wellbeing of the community, often undergoing personal sacrifices to fulfill their charge. The shamanic gift can bestow healing or prophetic power, carry news of the dead, and offer glimpses of other lands. The main character of *Night Watch*, Anton, roughly fits into the categories provided by Gilchrist, with his ability to visit the Twilight, duty to uphold peace in the community through working in the Night Watch, and necessity to travel with an animal guide on his first mission, thus making him a modern literary example of such a shaman.

Many characters in the novel, including Anton, fall into carefully delineated categories of magicians in the Watches, which outline and divide levels of magic, hierarchically providing certain magicians with greater numbers of powers than others. For example, a third-level magician possesses more skills than his fifth-level counterpart. Magicians can heal, cast curses, and mentally affect human memory, emotion, and action. One Other mentioned as a member of the Night Watch uses a floating crystal ball with her eyes closed, able to envision space in its totality. Some more powerful, yet still common talents include teleportation, shape shifting, and the ability to disable huge catastrophe-inducing vortices. A magician, or more specifically a healer, like Svetlana, expresses great potential and moves up in levels much more quickly than her peers, displaying powers beyond the typical levels and ultimately placing her on an “uncategorized” level, along with Olga and the heads of the Watches.

Some magicians like Polina Vasilievna, who works at the Night Watch as an instructor for household spells, have great powers but only in the narrow field of everyday magic. While she is an expert in her field of simple spells, she cannot fight

or heal. Anton muses on Polina Vasilievna's life as she instructs a class on everyday magic. The Watch only discovered and initiated Polina at the age of sixty-three, making her one of the physically oldest people in the Watch. Anton says that for her entire life she made money by telling fortunes through cards, so it took a long time for people to realize that she held true powers. In folklore, the arts of divination and fortune-telling apply to a specific type of sorceress [колдунья], making Polina the modern and literary version of this variety.

Like Polina Vasilievna, Anton has a limit on his power potential; the boss always reminds Anton that his capacity as a magician does not extend beyond the second level, making him merely average. Yet even as a common magician, Anton only holds the position of Senior Programmer in the Night Watch because of his human skills and experiences. Two weak sorceresses work for him as minor programmers simply because the Watch had no other employment for them. Most such magicians work in the Watches tutoring new recruits and gaining higher positions based upon their abilities. A magician like Tiger Cub, one of Anton's co-workers, turns into a ferocious tiger at will and holds the rank of a fighter for the Watch, promoting the peace of the Treaty between Light and Dark. Others like Boris Ignatievich, the boss of their regional office who possesses incredible powers and is centuries old, hold very high positions managing the Watches and serving on the Tribunal. Some, like Olga, have abilities to dismantle and stop catastrophes, only working when needed or specially assigned.

The higher authorities give members who do not possess high-level skills special amulets that contain a concentrated amount of power to be used in emergencies or to finish missions. Anton uses his amulet at the beginning of the story to try to stop

a harmful black vortex that is seen above Svetlana, and subsequently lacks the necessary power to immobilize a vampire to later detain him. Also, Boris Ignatievich gives Anton an amulet to protect him from the gaze of Zabulon. Without the amulet Anton would have been powerless to disobey orders given to him by Zabulon. Toward the end of the novel, Alissa, a witch in the Day Watch, obtains a special type of dangerous amulet which quickly kills Others through desiccation.

Without amulets, Others still have powers beyond human capabilities, the potency of which depend on the magician's expertise level. Some abilities influence humans through cognition. Anton performs a low-level "remoralization" [реморализация] exerting a power to influence and change a person's morality, in one case slightly increasing a sidewalk salesman's aversion to deception and turning him toward the light. Alissa addresses her concerns over the performed remoralization. During the exchange Alissa exhibits through bewitchment what Anton calls a "witch's glance" [ведьмовский взгляд] making her look more and more beguiling for a short period of time.<sup>1</sup> Her power does not directly influence Others, but Anton implies that the charm powerfully affects humans.

The outcome of the exchange between Alissa and Anton is an agreement, which allows Alissa to perform a similar magical intervention at a different time. Olga does not approve of this result as she displays the high-ranking magical ability to foresee the outcomes of agreements. This power allows an Other to anticipate consequences of compromises even before officially making them. The boss displays similar power when he sends a car to pick up Anton during an urgent mission. Anton

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<sup>1</sup> Lukyanenko, 43.

notices that the boss went through the probability field, weeding out all accidents, traffic jams, and police officers, thereby providing an optimal route that allows the driver to proceed as quickly and recklessly as possible. At this time, Anton also mentions that he and all Others possess an “artificially elevated success coefficient” [искусственно повышенный коэффициент удачи]<sup>1</sup> in avoiding everyday problems faced by humans.

The magical order and organization of witches and magical powers described in *Night Watch* fall in line with the beliefs found in Slavic lore from long ago. In both types of stories, witches and wizards under various titles possess special powers attributed specifically to them under the broader category of natural magic. Supernatural abilities sometimes appear in humans, but not everyone acquires them or makes deals with evil spirits to get them. Likewise, not everyone enters the Twilight, and levels of magic depend on the limits and morality of the person. Sometimes magicians in lore create amulets for protection, like that which the boss provides Anton to thwart the powers of Zabulon, while at other times magic provides prophetic power, as used by the Watch to create probability lines of action. The magical worlds created in both lore and in the novel provide realms and layers of magic and powers that allow people to play various roles.

One such magical role worth mentioning belongs to a person who gains supernatural power with age. When Anton discusses the possibilities of potential curse casters, he tells Olga that an “upsurge of latent magical abilities typically occurs in the later years in life” [в последние годы жизни обычно происходит всплеск

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<sup>1</sup> Lukyanenko, 93.

латентных магических способностей].<sup>1</sup> The witches featured in folklore tend to be much older than their heroic counterparts. The best example of this idea remains the iconic image of the Baba Yaga and her sometimes-interchangeable counterpart of the witch [ведьма]. Many stories also include an older woman or on occasion even a man who gives the main character crucial advice about the magical realm and protection against evil spirits. These characters remind readers of earlier witches and wizards in villages who served to inform and help the rest of the villagers through supernatural methods.

### **Vampires**

Besides witches and magicians, the vampire is another prominent figure in Slavic belief. In general, people considered a vampire to be the product of an aberration in the community, such as an excommunication or a violent death, as from suicide<sup>2</sup>. Ralston also adds people who died from alcohol consumption and a victim of a parent's fatal curse to the list of potential vampires.<sup>3</sup> Believers took extra precautions to prevent a vampire from rising, including the placement of plants and crucifixes into the coffins of the dead. The arrival of a vampire could result in major problems such as an epidemic or lesser problems like the death of animals or the death of the relatives of the suspected vampire.<sup>4</sup> The physical appearance of the creature was

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<sup>1</sup> Lukyanenko, 119.

<sup>2</sup> Garza, Thomas J. *The Vampire in Slavic Cultures*. San Diego, CA: Cognella, 2010. Print. 184.

<sup>3</sup> *Songs*, 409.

<sup>4</sup> Garza, 185.

lifelike and human, even to showing signs of growth. In order to kill a vampire a stake made either of wood or iron had to be driven into the creature's head, heart, or stomach; a vampire could also be killed through decapitation or fire.

The name used in Russia for vampire, *упырь* [упырь], was tied to the concept of heresy as well as being associated with witches, sorcerers, and werewolves.<sup>1</sup> People considered practitioners of magic are the most likely candidates to become vampires after death. On the other hand, Garza states "Little Russians [Ukrainians] attributed birth of a vampire to an unholy union between a witch and a werewolf or a devil."<sup>2</sup> The term heretic [еретик] interchangeably referred to a sorcerer who would become a vampire, merging the idea of heretic and vampire. Over time, the term heretic was used to refer anyone who drew people away from the true faith and as well as to witches who sold their souls to the devil. People believed that vampires possessed "an evil eye" which allowed them to draw humans to their graves simply with a gaze.<sup>3</sup> Peasant belief also held that the arrival of vampires not only caused weather changes, but that the creatures themselves wielded powerful influence over weather and the elements.<sup>4</sup>

Of the many untitled stories about vampires collected by A. N. Afanas'ev, one centers around a stranger picked up near a graveyard by a peasant riding by late at

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<sup>1</sup> Garza, 212.

<sup>2</sup> *Songs*, 409.

<sup>3</sup> Garza, 213.

<sup>4</sup> *Songs*, 411.

night.<sup>1</sup> Taking the stranger to a nearby village, the peasant passes by every house with a cross only to stop outside a house without a cross. The stranger proceeds to enter the house, striking dead the two occupants in order to fill and drink pails of blood while the unsuspecting peasant waits outside. Closer to morning, the peasant returns the stranger to the graveyard, who then disappears as soon as the roosters begin to crow. Despite its short length, the tale contains important information. The stranger's outward appearance, for instance, does not give away his supernatural nature, revealing that vampires are practically indistinguishable from humans, nor can the vampire in this story pass into a religious dwelling, hinting at his heretical nature. In addition, daybreak signals the end of a vampire's animation period.

Another of the stories collected by A. N. Afanas'ev called "The Vampire" [Упырь] features the undead creature, or as he is called in the story the unclean one [нечистый].<sup>2</sup> In the folktale, a young girl named Marusia meets a handsome and rich young man at a party who offers to marry her that night. Her mother advises her to tie thread to his button in order to find where he lives, which she does and follows it only to discover the young man eating the body of a corpse in a church. When the vampire later confronts her about seeing him in the church, she denies it; after which he kills both her mother and father, and later her husband and son for every denial. Ultimately, she sprinkles the "unclean one" with holy water, turning him to ash and dust.

In both stories, the physical appearance of the vampire matches older beliefs and shares some of the traits of the modern version found in *Night Watch*. This the folkloric vampire perfectly blends in with society, while consuming human flesh to

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<sup>1</sup> *Mify*, 529.

<sup>2</sup> *Narodnye Russkie Skazki*, vol. 3, 63-67.



retain animation. Until Marusia caught the young man eating a corpse in a church, she had considered him an ordinary traveler, rather handsome, and had deliberated his marriage proposal. Likewise, the peasant in the previous story noticed nothing wrong with his traveling companion.

Vampires in Lukyanenko's novel retain human appearance after their vampire transformation. For example, the novel's main character, Anton, does not realize the supernatural nature of his neighbors until he first crosses into the Twilight, enters the Night Watch and gains the ability to recognize other supernatural creatures. Anton then discovers that a "registered" [зарегистрированная] family of vampires lives above him, feeds on donated blood, and has permission to occasionally hunt. Anton points out that two vampire parents usually produce vampire offspring, as demonstrated by his neighbors. This sample of information echoes Ralston's notes on vampires being the offspring of supernatural creatures, such as a witch with either a werewolf or devil.

*Night Watch* additionally includes an original idea for a potential vampire when Anton himself barely escapes turning into a vampire. He consumes animal blood and nearly bites a human during his attempt to catch one, an event implying that Others can become vampires too, but only after giving into the urge to bite humans. Conversely, humans bitten by a vampire can either die or willingly accept becoming a vampire. As Anton states, the "initiation" [инициация] or transformation can only take place with mutual consent.<sup>1</sup> This idea feeds upon the older notion of people choosing to succumb to the devil and dark magic in order to transform themselves into

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<sup>1</sup> Lukyanenko, 134.

vampires. In the case of the modern novel, a person can choose to succumb to bloodlust after accepting the Twilight and magic, but not every Other chooses to do so. As Anton informs Egor: They acquire great powers, but lose the gift of life itself. They can only ensure their existence through the energy of others. [Они получают огромные возможности, но теряют саму жизнь. И поддерживать свое существование могут лишь чужой энергией.]<sup>1</sup>

The powers displayed by vampires in *Night Watch* after their transformation also correspond to earlier beliefs. For example, modern vampires have the ability to lure their victims with the “Call” [Зов], a ratification of the older idea of an “Evil Eye” that allows vampires to lure their victims to their grave. The call described in *Night Watch* summons a chosen victim to the creature over a distance, with the human incapable of resisting. Some humans seem to have the strength and intuition to sense the pull, but they experience reckless behavior in place of the actual urge to go to the vampire. Anton describes this phenomenon as sweet music hypnotizing a person and making it easier for vampires to feed on them.<sup>2</sup> Anton also mentions the generally mild attraction humans have toward supernatural beings without consciously realizing it. One could take this idea of heightened subconscious supernatural attraction and apply it to Marusia’s situation, in which the entire town’s population was enthralled by the handsome stranger, without a logical reason. It appears as if the capacities of modern-day vampires are merely updated versions of the ones in older beliefs.

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<sup>1</sup> Lukyanenko, 86.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 21.

According to old Slavic superstition and to folklore mentioned earlier, people also attributed to vampires the power to influence weather. Lukyanenko demonstrates this concept with his ideas of “bouquet of sensations” [букет ощущений] that certain characters produce and discuss. Semyon, a prominent character who gives much advice to Anton throughout the novel, produces a cool wind in a car without air conditioning on a hot summer day, releasing a breeze that he previously collected at 3 a.m. after a small storm in Yalta in 1972.<sup>1</sup> He continues to share a story of a Watch agent releasing twenty minutes of rain in the desert after nearly dying of heat stroke. Demonstrating the influence of supernatural agents upon various weather events reminiscent of earlier beliefs, Semyon boasts:

“In my collection I have the taiga rain from nineteen thirteen, I have typhoon from the forties, I have a spring morning in Jurmaala from fifty-six, and I think a winter evening in Gagry” [У меня в коллекции есть таежный дождь девятьсот тринадцатого, есть тайфун сорокового, есть весеннее утро в Юрмале пятьдесят шестого, кажется, есть зимний вечер в Гаграх.]<sup>2</sup>

Another aspect of vampires reminiscent of older stories specifies the time of day that vampires terrorize and feed on peasants. Common belief holds that vampires animate after nightfall, specifically after midnight. This accords with Sergei Lukyanenko’s novel in which vampires, part of the Day Watch, operate only at night. Anton closely associates vampires with werewolves due to their similar nature, just as his Slavic ancestors lumped the two together with witches and other heretics. As protection against the dangerous creatures, priests and other clerics often used holy

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<sup>1</sup> Lukyanenko, 284.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 285.

water to exorcise them.<sup>1</sup> In *Night Watch*, Anton drinks vodka to decrease his own vampire urges and later even harm a vampire. He does this by pouring vodka on a vampire girl, who immediately begins screaming in pain, shedding layers of skin, and whirling around on the spot trying to make the alcohol stop burning her skin.<sup>2</sup> Alcohol in the contemporary novel and holy water in stories of the past are both employed to sap a vampire's power and help defeat them.

After harming the vampire girl, Anton kills her companion. Remnants of older stories linger in the modern novel in this particular aspect. According to the earlier beliefs, a stake had to be driven into the body of the vampire in order to kill it. In more severe instances, people burned a suspicious body to completely purge it of supernatural qualities. When talking to Olga, Anton discusses the "traditional" methods of killing vampires, which included using a poplar stake or silver to slow them down; however, he kills the vampire by tearing off the vampire's identity tag, thus draining him of all energy.<sup>3</sup> Afterwards, the vampire's remains turn into feather-light dust, redolent of ash after burning, which parallels the ending in the older story featuring a vampire.

### **Werewolves**

As previously mentioned, Slavic people tied vampires and other magical beings to a broader heretic [еретик] category, especially linking vampires and shape-

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<sup>1</sup> Garza, 185.

<sup>2</sup> Lukyanenko, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 24.

shifters closely together due to their similar natures. Both supernatural creatures were thought to be products of witches and wizards. Unlike the typical Western shape-shifter, who turns into a wolf, the Slavic people considered the most common transformation to produce animals symbolizing clouds or storms. These animal forms include the wolf form and other animals that display the bosom, udder or teat that was stressed by Afanas'ev as animal aspects symbolizing clouds. The most important characteristic of shape-shifters lies in the idea that they are all either magic wielders or people turned into animals by wizards. It appears that witches and wizards have the ability to transform, and do so by choosing animals symbolic of rain, as they themselves are addicted to stealing dew and rain.<sup>1</sup>

While lore suggests shifters favor animal transformations that represent rain, A. N. Afanas'ev also discusses wolf and bear transformations as common, both appearing throughout Slavic stories.<sup>2</sup> In lore, wizards typically favor animals with horns, such as bulls, while witches favor cows, mares, and especially cats. According to popular belief, while evil spirits may enter the bodies of cats and dogs during thunderstorms, witches and wizards do not need the same conditions in order to transform.<sup>3</sup> The same beliefs hold that witches and wizards put on the furs or feathers of a chosen animal in order to take their character, a witch perhaps donning the feathers of a magpie, another favored witch form, in order to transform into one.

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<sup>1</sup> *Songs*, 381.

<sup>2</sup> *Mify*, 505

<sup>3</sup> *Mify.*, 507.

While the actual animal form of transformation remains a significant component, Slavic lore also makes an important distinction between the voluntary and involuntary werewolf and shifter. People consider a voluntary werewolf to be a practitioner of magic, usually a witch, who transforms into an animal in order to help complete certain dark tasks, such as spreading plagues or deceiving people. Ralston notes that some dark dealings of a witch-turned-animal include the preying on livestock or its milk, as livelihood revolves around cattle. Ralston also clarifies the fundamental difference between an involuntary and voluntary werewolf stating that “dealers in the black art who have turned themselves into wolves are, for the most part, ravenous destroyers of all that falls in their way, but people who have been made wolves against their will seldom disgrace their human nature.”<sup>1</sup>

In essence, the victims of magical curses who retain their humanity after transformation into an animal represent the perfect example of the involuntary werewolf. When angered or spurned, witches and wizards may transform others into animals, usually into wolves.<sup>2</sup> These wolves, which one can even describe as gentle, attach themselves to humans and act as pets or helpers, because they retain rational thought and continue their inoffensive behavior even in their wolf form by never killing humans and only eating the animals of villages other than the ones in which they were originally thought to have lived. The “werewolf” of such folklore does not transform back into a human unless someone performs a ritual. Thus, the involuntary wolf cannot transform back and forth at will between human and animal forms, unlike

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<sup>1</sup> *Songs*, 406-407.

<sup>2</sup> *Mify*, 521.

the voluntary practitioner of magic. Some stories specifically detail the involuntary werewolf, while a few Slavic tales feature gentle and helpful wolves that assist the human heroes in their own quests.

A. N. Afanas'ev briefly mentions an example of one of the story types in which a witch curses a victim and creates an involuntary wolf. In this untitled story, a gentle wolf attaches itself to a family who, after noticing his peculiarities, decides to take him to a wizard for help.<sup>1</sup> By heating a bath and scalding the wolf's skin off its body, the wizard turns the creature into a young man. According to the story, an old sorceress had bewitched the man who belonged to a neighboring village. The idea of a hot bath scalding the skin off a wolf ties into the original idea of dew- and rain-obsessed witches, with the water of the bath incorporating the special meaning behind water and rain. This story contains elements of both the favorable characteristics of an anthropomorphic wolf and the idea of a curse turning someone into an animal without his or her permission as well.

This type of gentle wolf further appears in Slavic myth as a companion to the hero. In one such example found in "Prince Ivan, the Firebird and the Grey Wolf" Prince Ivan's father sends him and his brothers on a quest to capture a golden bird that has been eating their golden apples at night.<sup>2</sup> Ivan leaves and ventures to various lands and completes a series of tasks for other kings in each respective kingdom, but not without the help of a grey wolf. Feeling guilty over this, the wolf decides to let Ivan ride him instead, thereafter accompanying the hero on each of his quests and

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<sup>1</sup> Mify, 523.

<sup>2</sup> Simonov, 62.

giving him invaluable advice for survival and successful completion of designated tasks. In addition, the wolf revives the main character with the waters of life and death after the hero's evil brothers kill him for his treasure. This wolf is never identified either as previously being a human or an evil werewolf, even though he does exhibit every quality attributed to an involuntary victim of a witch's curse. He repents of his natural wolf nature and earns forgiveness by helping Ivan complete his heroic tasks.

Another story type exists in Slavic myth that has neither a gentle wolf nor an involuntary werewolf, but rather a shape-shifter. In some tellings, such as "Volga the Hero," the main character himself uses shape-shifting abilities in order to complete quests.<sup>1</sup> According to the story, Volga possesses these powers because magic was revealed to him when he was ten years old. The myth describes him as an incredible human child exhibiting extraordinary strength and the magical abilities which allow him to transform into a bright falcon, a grey wolf, and a brown aurochs. With his magic, Volga aerially monitors his surroundings and travels great distances, thus completing his missions more quickly. Surprisingly, the narrator of the story never discusses or explains how the magic was revealed to the hero, so the audience simply accepts these skills as a natural part of the story, with these abilities imparting a mythical quality to the hero and leaving the audience in awe of his skills.

The main character being introduced to magic and attaining incredible powers aligns well with the plot in *Night Watch*. Unlike the teller in the Slavic story, however, the narrator in the novel takes the time to explain why supernatural beings including werewolves possess qualities that others do not. The story features both shape-shifters

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<sup>1</sup> Simonov, 124.



and werewolves, and provides a major distinction between the two, just as the stories and myths of the past. Two of Anton's important coworkers in the Night Watch, Bear and Tiger Cub, possess the ability to shape-shift into a bear and tiger respectively. Witches and wizards in folklore favored the animal forms of felines and bears, especially the latter. The tiger, on the other hand, provides a ferocious upgrade, of the favored cat, but now suitable for battle. Anton describes Bear and Tiger Cub to Egor as highly specialized magicians in the Night Watch, but does not divulge to him the whispered rumors that paint Bear as a true shape-shifter who switched from Day Watch to Night Watch. True shape-shifters have only one form, two at most, into which they can shift, while magicians can choose several forms.

On one hand, Bear and Tiger Cub present images of powerful wielders of transformation abilities that align with Slavic lore in which we find voluntary shape-shifting witches and wizards. On the other hand, Olga, falls comfortably into the category of an involuntary shape-shifter. On a mission to hunt vampires, Anton mistakenly begins working with a polar owl named Olga. After a period of successful work together, Anton learns that The Tribunal or supernatural court, as a punishment, had forced Olga into the owl shape following an egregious mistake during World War II that helped the Day Watch. Olga even alludes to the good fortune of her owl form regarding the alternate wolf form as being much worse.<sup>1</sup> In further leniency, the Others allow Olga to transform into a human for half an hour a day, a courtesy that witches did not extend to humans in traditional stories.

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<sup>1</sup> Lukyanenko, 48.

Even though the modern novel includes Olga, Bear, and Tiger Cub as the voluntary and involuntary shape-shifters, it does not include a true werewolf character, though Anton mentions werewolves at several points throughout the story. Because they have to kill in order to prolong their own lives, werewolves automatically fall under the Day Watch; that is, they must register themselves like their dark vampire counterparts. Werewolves like vampires and various Others retain near-immortal qualities which make them difficult to hurt and kill. Anton mentions that a single shell of an explosive silver bullet can incapacitate a werewolf for three days while he regenerates.<sup>1</sup> While ordinary steel cannot kill a shifter or a werewolf, shape-shifters can be killed with enchanted daggers, such as in the case of Inquisitor Maxim killing a werepanther in the novel.

Werewolves and shifters exhibit almost the same qualities in the novel as they do in the stories of folklore; however, other animals play a role in *Night Watch* as well. Witches and wizards in lore deem both cats and dogs worthy of shape-shifting form, just as Anton deems them worthy of note and discussion throughout the entire novel. Both cats and dogs can sense supernatural beings; dogs have the ability to see into the Twilight, and for as cats, “there is no ordinary world or Twilight—they live in all worlds at once.”<sup>2</sup> Dogs bark and growl in the presence of Others due to fear and loathing, but they never attack. Anton remarks that while dogs like the Light ones, they feel terrified of Dark ones and sources of magic in general. Others and shifters do not use cats and dogs as vessels for their deeds, but the sensitive animals still figure prominently in the supernatural world created by Lukyanenko.

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<sup>1</sup> Lukyanenko, 64.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 71.

## **Chapter 4**

### **CULTURAL BELIEF**

#### **Triplicity**

Even though the plot and magical story components prove major parallels between Slavic folklore and *Night Watch*, other traditional beliefs have significant influence on the novel as well. Certain cultural elements, which might not be explicitly included in the folkloric stories, nonetheless helped the tales through character action and thought. All of these ideas appeared during the period of time when folklore and oral narrative was most prevalent in society. Each of these concepts also exists as a cultural element today, so they are certainly included in *Night Watch*. While these ideas might not play any major role in the story or plot of the novel, they still persist as permanent fixtures of Russian culture through their inclusion in the modern story.

One such historical element that remains is the number three, which appears throughout folklore and literature, including *Night Watch*, due to its cultural significance. The author of *Night Watch* divides the novel into three parts, which incorporates the number in one of the most crucial ways possible. Lukyanenko creates an overarching idea, compartmentalizing the events of the story into separate categories. In order to achieve the illusion of division of events, the author begins each section with a different season and creating a contrasting setting for each section of the novel. Additionally, each section has a distinct title that foreshadows the events of each part. The full effect of the separation of the story into three parts allows the

reader to view each as a separate segment, even though the novel's events fully interconnect.

In order to fully understand the cultural significance of the number three in literature, the element's history should be considered. Gilchrist explains the most prominent theories of the ancient Slavic order of the universe: the previously mentioned Tree of Life spans three worlds: the celestial world of the skies, the earthly human world and the underground world.<sup>1</sup> Traditional shaman beliefs add that each world holds three smaller kingdoms within it. Gilchrist reminds the audience of Triglav, the ancient three-headed god whom people used to worship during the same time pagans worshipped gods and believed in the Tree of Life before the spread of Christianity. The ideas of the Tree of Life repeats on the smaller scale of a house, which typically had three levels consisting of the unheated attic, a main floor and a cellar.

The constant repetition of the number three becomes a key component in folklore and myth. The "thrice-nine kingdom" remains a significant trope of folklore. Additionally, three kingdoms of copper, silver and gold often appear in the mythical realm parallel to the human one. In many stories, three brothers undertake a quest and three princesses require liberation, or a benevolent daughter has two siblings, bringing the total number of children to three. Commonly, the hero undertakes three tasks or attempts a single task three times before he completes it, three objects need to be found, or three creatures beg for assistance. Sometimes the hero must battle a three-

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<sup>1</sup> Gilchrist, 11.

headed or nine-headed creature or face the Baba Yaga plus her two sisters, or three daughters. Multiple elements of triplicity are often incorporated within a single story.

Around the same time that folklore and its penchant for triplicity was most prevalent in society, Christianity was also spreading throughout Russia. Instead of suppressing all of the older beliefs, Christianity cohesively fused with a great number of them, including the significance of triplicity. If, before, peasants incorporated the number three in life and stories due to pagan beliefs, after Christianity the number three gained a new religious aspect. The Holy Trinity remains one of the biggest examples of triplicity in religion, but the Bible repeats the number three numerous times elsewhere, such as during the Resurrection, adding spiritual magnitude to the number. Naturally, this aspect only bolstered the cultural significance of an already crucial numeral, which only encouraged storytellers to continue the tradition of triplicity.

### **Songs**

One of the ways that storytellers spread folklore and its ideas to others was through an important cultural tradition of song, into which narrators placed great meaning and significance. While songs in folklore typically do not provide such direct foreshadowing, they do allow a glimpse into people's lives and traditions. Traditionally, songs provide a source of entertainment, narrating entire stories and teaching peasants lessons of life. As Ralston states, songs accompanied people through every facet of life and allowed a glimpse into their emotions and feelings. People sang to ease the toils of hard labor, to provide family bonding in the houses to, animate and liven holiday celebrations, and so much more. Some traditions, like the popular

Khorovod, gathers youths of every village to participate in a blended circle dance and song during the vernal times of the year in celebration of the changing season.<sup>1</sup>

Such a tradition includes singing certain songs only at particular times of the year, because each season has poems and songs created specifically for that time. This applies to the various festivals and holidays, during which people perform songs uniquely created for them. People only perform funeral songs during times of lament, or wedding songs during marriage celebrations. Some songs describe soldiers and narrate military life, so mainly soldiers perform them, while the songs that illustrate the lives of widows only apply to that distinct category. The broader categories of love songs and dance songs apply to various groups of people and follow peasants throughout their lives. Likewise, storytelling and song narrations provide both entertainment and instruction in life, just as the ordinary stories and myths do. These ancient songs passed down from generation to generation provide pictures for people today of the lives of peasants that lived long ago. The everyday songs show the typical concerns and emotions of people, as well as showcase what exactly people found important at that time.

Throughout the novel *Night Watch* Anton listens to music before major events, but the songs typically foreshadow certain developments or give the audience a glimpse of the mood or thoughts of the protagonist. In order to fully emphasize the importance of chosen songs, the author includes pertinent lyrics and often uses character narration to describe them. The added lyrics, as well as the character comments, explicitly tell the reader how the song relates to the actions of the novel

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<sup>1</sup> *Songs*, 1-2.

and the protagonist's mood. In the beginning of the novel, Anton describes his eclectic taste in music and admits to loving to see how certain songs on his music player correspond to events.

For example, when Anton finally finds a vampire's human target and begins to chase him, the song that plays during the chase describes a woman whispering a haunting tune to the night. Like the woman in the song, a vampire lures its victim through an intoxicating and irresistible tune that only the victim and Others can hear. The tune draws victims to the vampire's location and gets louder and more powerful if the victim resists. The protagonist remarks on how well the song fits the situation, but also considers it a bad omen. The failure to capture the vampire and the human victim indeed prove Anton's suspicions. Another song, however, provides a good omen by foreshadowing the Night Watch's victory through the lyrics that describe an invisible force winning while people remain unaware of the conflict altogether.

### **Curses**

The same cultural significance that people place into songs is also placed into the spoken word, no matter who speaks them. The previously mentioned story, the "Awful Drunkard," depicts the significance of an everyday curse in folklore. A woman on her way to church blames the devil as she trips over a rock. The uttered curse brings attention to the devil, who later appears before the protagonist. This exhibits the devil's omnipotence; he hears all curses and later acts malevolently toward the speaker. *Night Watch* depicts a very similar scenario in which Anton begins to utter a curse but stops himself just in time. However, his omnipresent boss still senses the attempt and contacts Anton almost immediately. In order to protect

themselves from a similar omnipresence, Slavic people even wore amulets to protect against curses spoken either by people or witches, which further promoted the belief.

The most dangerous curse of all remains a parent's curse spoken against his or her child. Even the briefest of utterances said without true intent, what Ralston calls the "hasty word,"<sup>1</sup> can condemn even the most innocent of children into slavery to the devil. Once a parent curses a child, the parent cannot revoke the curse or get the child back from the devil. Many stories reflect this idea through the mention of cursed children, whom heroes find when they visit the kingdom of demons. It is usually a fair maiden or innocent victim, who lives as a captive of the devil as the result of a familial curse, helping the protagonist during his quest in the devil's realm. While the modern novel does not include demons and captives in this traditional sense, it does consider other aspects from folklore.

The novel *Night Watch* touches upon another significant aspect of ancient Slavic culture, which pertains to the idea of curses. Lukyanenko notes multiple types of curses that appear in Russian culture: both the everyday curse spoken in the heat of the moment and the malevolent curse said in order to cause harm to the recipient. The author creates a physical manifestation of curses that Others can see and humans can only sense in order to outline the varying degrees of severity of such curses and their consequences. Anton discusses the fairly common phenomenon of the black vortex that results from humans yelling such things as "Go to hell" or "I hope you die." These phrases uttered by ordinary humans cause blurred, pale and weakly spinning vortices

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<sup>1</sup> *Russian Folk-Tales*, 358.



to appear above their victim's heads. These usually last no more than an hour or two, with a maximum of a day, and cause minor unpleasant, but not fatal consequences.

On the contrary, a professional curse created by a hired Dark Magician manifests as a spinning black twister and causes potentially fatal harm. Anton admits that a girl with such a vortex above her has little chance of survival due to its sheer power. He predicts that the girl will survive for another day or two, and then have a tragic accident such as falling on black ice or getting hit by a car. Also, while the girl cannot see the vortex, she has a perpetually uneasy feeling of alarm caused by the curse. Later in the story, the vortex grows to a massive size with the potential to destroy entire city blocks, and the Night Watch speculates that the deadly twister was caused by a curse from the girl's mother. This concept follows that idea in Slavic lore, that a familial curse uttered by a parent causes the most lasting and fatal harm.

### **Destiny**

Due to the idiosyncrasies found in Russian culture, such as the fear of spoken curses, the idea that every person has a destiny remains a popular belief even in modern times. However, the idea of destiny appeared long ago, first surfacing during pre-Christian times in Russia. Dazhbog is the Slavic deity of the sun, who embodies happiness, justice, and destiny. While initially the god was a son of Perun, the primary Slavic deity, he surpassed his father as the supreme god for Slavic pagans.<sup>1</sup> The equalization of destiny with happiness and justice, and their association with the supreme deity indicates destiny's level of significance in the pagan culture. Within the oral tradition, the idea of destiny most commonly manifests in the mythological tales.

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<sup>1</sup> Dixon-Kennedy, Mike. "Dazhbog." *Encyclopedia of Russian & Slavic Myth and Legend*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1998. 61-62. Print.

The best example of such destiny in folklore appears in the story “Volga the Hero.”<sup>1</sup> While the narrator does not explicitly state the young boy’s destiny, he does describe the boy’s background and birth in detail. According to the story, Volga is the son of Marfa and a Dragon and the nephew of Prince Vladimir of Kiev. A great storm terrorized the land during the boy’s birth, forcing animals to scatter and hide. The narrator emphasizes the incredible atmosphere by stating that “all creation knew that a great hero was born this day in Mother Russia.”<sup>2</sup> This powerful scene depicts the birth of a warrior destined for greatness as he serves his country. Eventually in the story, the boy learns magic and transformation before singlehandedly defeating the Tatars, consequently living up to his destiny.

The ideas of destiny presented in *Night Watch* appear much more complicated than the straightforward elements found in folklore. As the omnipotent Head of Night Watch tells Anton, “there is such a thing as destiny...and there is nothing stronger” [есть такая вещь – судьба...и нет ничего сильнее].<sup>3</sup> As every single person in life has a destiny, one cannot escape it, but that destiny does have many variable components affected by choices and decisions. Others have the ability to see the lines of destiny, so they can understand the consequences of their choices better than their human counterparts. For example, Anton knows that if he succeeds in his assignment with Svetlana, then he will fall in love with her. Anton can also see that Svetlana will inevitably leave him after they start dating because she will become much more powerful than him.

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<sup>1</sup> Simonov, 124.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>3</sup> Lukyanenko, 354.

It turns out that Svetlana and Olga are the only Others with enough power to write in the “Book of Destiny.” If a great Light sorceress writes in this book, created in the times before the Treaty, with special chalk, she can alter someone’s fate. The problem lies in the fact that for each line written, the sorceress loses a part of her soul. This condition reinforces the important idea of predestined fate, because even someone extremely powerful has to sacrifice in order to change a fate. The difficulties that must be undergone indicate that, at least according to the novel, fate should never be changed.

*Night Watch* also reminds the reader that while every individual has a fate that varies with his or her decisions in life, each destiny does not entail a wonderful or heroic future. Some people simply lead average lives, not significant enough to be written into the Book of Destiny. This idea echoes the pagan beliefs, which described the births of great heroes destined for true greatness. A hero in folklore, like Anton in *Night Watch*, leads a life considered extraordinary by his peers. However, fate predisposes the hero for such a life, giving the character very little choice in the matter. It appears that both the cultures of modern day and of the past place strong significance in the notion of fate, but also concede that true heroes are rare in society.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

Sergei Lukyanenko's *Night Watch* depicts a true literary hero, one with a heroic quest, helpful companions, and moral dilemmas. Anton is one of the many elements of folklore that the author updates in order to fit a new time period. As this novel has become an enduring fixture in the Russian category of fantastical literature, spreading even across the globe; the multiple reincarnations in other forms, such as movies and video games have allowed it to reach a wider audience than the novels can alone. From the story format itself, the addition of magical elements, and the stress on cultural superstition, Sergei Lukyanenko's *Night Watch* in many ways greatly resembles folklore from the Slavic past. In fact, the vast number of similarities between folklore and the novel create a perceptible bridge, allowing past cultural beliefs to resurface in the modern era. Due to these similarities, the novel can be viewed as modern folklore, especially in light of the significant amount of influence it has produced in popular culture. Supernatural characters and story heroes from the past can be easily incorporated into the multiple layers of the modern novel, and likewise the characters of *Night Watch* are the equivalents of Baba Yaga, Koshchei the Deathless, and various other magical beings.

By incorporating the wonder tale format, folkloric character tropes, and traditional cultural elements, the novel truly captures the atmosphere associated with Slavic folklore even with its modern Moscow setting. Instead of decreasing the significance of folklore, the use of magical tropes in a modern setting creates a unique

combination of modern folklore. Considering the novel's great popularity, it will certainly influence the writing of future generations of authors, who have the chance to continue this new genre of modern folklore. By integrating Slavic folklore into the modern plot, *Night Watch* shows potential writers that they can use old ideas, especially those native to Russia, and still become successful, gaining of readers all over the world and spreading their own traditional beliefs.

With the help of globalization and the massive spread of Western ideas through the spread of entertainment world-wide, many characters and plots have become predictable with little expectation of diversity. Audiences have become inured to Hollywood blockbusters and other entertainment norms. What makes *Night Watch* so successful lies within the surprise produced not by expected Western styles, but by elements native specifically to its country of origin instead, even if these elements are latent. In a way, the novel serves to reject accepted ideas of globalization and instead promotes Russian beliefs. The sheer proliferation of the novel and the number of global readers indicate a larger cultural significance, as *Night Watch* spreads Slavic elements of folklore to other countries of the world and thereby making it crucial to contemporary Russian and world literature.

The identification and examination of native and cultural aspects within the novel also provide proof of a lingering vestige of older folklore in Russian society. The examined stories dominated Slavic oral narrative for hundreds of years and were crucial to society in that transmission of belief and superstition from generation to generation. The lasting remnants of folklore in contemporary society allow the general public a glimpse into the lives of their ancestors and create a stronger connection to their national identity through a common background. One of the most crucial aspects

of these distinctly Slavic elements, some of which date back to the pagan period of history before Christianity, is their endurance through both industrialization and globalization. Even the tumultuous twentieth century, with changing governments and destructive wars, did not eradicate the ideas of folklore seen today in culture and perfectly exhibited by Sergei Lukyanenko.

The examination of Lukyanenko's use of Slavic folklore allows further discussion of resurfacing cultural ideas and emerging sense of national identity for Russian people in the direct period after the fall of Communism and the end of the Soviet Union. While it is true that the author seems to reject predictable Western entertainment norms by using many components of Slavic folklore, Lukyanenko does incorporate some of the Western norms into the novel. The modern action plot of the third section of the novel, the use of Western werewolves as peripheral characters, and the devil's beetle transformation showcase the Western elements that Lukyanenko chooses to incorporate. The blend of distinctly Russian elements with subtle references to the past plus a few well-placed Western ideas produce a cohesive mix of past and present, as well as Western and Russian.

*Night Watch* continues to blend ideas by introducing audiences in the Post-Soviet era to latent beliefs and traditions. The significance that Lukyanenko places into curses and songs, for instance, reflect cultural elements of even Pre-Christian times. The updates to such folkloric components found in the novel present the audience with ancient beliefs in relatable and relevant ways. The same character tropes familiar to readers from childhood stories now somehow fit in modern Moscow with explainable magical abilities, levels, and positions within contemporary supernatural organizations consisting of Watches, which uphold the balance between good and evil.

Instead of dealing with Koshchei the Deathless and Baba Yaga, members of the Night Watch deal with Zabulon and Alissa. Likewise, instead of rescuing a princess, the hero falls in love with his magical coworker with whom he preserves the balance.

By presenting these elements in such a way, Sergei Lukyanenko creates a modern urban fantasy world, which introduces characters of lore, a magical realm filled with supernatural beings, with a subtle use of ancient cultural tradition. He continues the philosophical discussion associated with duality, especially that of good and evil that began long ago, yet he does this in a refreshing way through the creation of his “modern folklore.” The acknowledgement and success of *Night Watch* will linger in the literary world and further influence future writers. As for the author, after attaining a considerable following and gaining widespread recognition, Sergei Lukyanenko can be expected to continue using folkloric roots to write and build the genre of modern folklore.

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