

ARCHTYPOLOGY OF THE FIGURAL ANTAGONIST IN CLASSICAL FAIRY TALES AND OTHER CULTURE-FORMING STORIES

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Abstract: The present study focuses on the semiotic profile of a literary character acting as a villain/antagonist (Propp) as one of the central factors of the existential problem situation (the *de facto* “originator” of problems), which represents a general theme in the folk fairy tales and/or culture-forming stories. The aim of this paper is neither to cover all the principles and manifestations of antagonists exhaustively, nor to present a complete typological description of antagonistic characters, but to cover those basic forms and most frequent or otherwise essential attributes that canonically standardize and significantly universalize the archetype of an antagonist in the selected range of narratives. The issue is approached from the perspective of literary theory (with an emphasis on the morphological, structural, and thematic analysis of the literary characters), and it is materially and argumentatively based on the representative sets of folklore and culture-forming narratives (Aarne-Thompson-Uther’s international catalog of fairy tale types, world myths, canonical texts, etc.), as well as on their national (Slovak) variants.

Keywords: antagonist, archetype, fairy tales, culture-forming stories

The world was already dualized to polar principles or phenomena as early as in the oldest myths and religious texts: chaos – cosmos, earth – sky, light – darkness, life – death, good – evil. The symbolic and allegorical representatives of these principles act as opponents and bearers of archetypal values.

The cosmogonic myths describe how the world is organized through the victory over chaos, or how the established universe is threatened by the return of

chaos. These scenes take place at the level of players in hostile disputes: the gods of light are in a constant battle with the demons of darkness.

This dualistic mythological worldview assumes that the world originated as a result of a struggle between good and evil deities. The section on mythological motifs in the *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (1955–1958) by Stith Thompson includes several semanthemes that iconize the struggle between good and evil (e.g., motif A50, “Conflict of good and evil creators”; A106, “Opposition of good and evil gods”; A106.2, “Revolt of evil angels against god”; A107, “Gods of darkness and light: darkness thought of as evil, light as good”; A525, “Good and bad culture heroes”). According to Russian philosopher Jakov Golosovker, these images embody the absolute good and evil (in terms of the absolute criteria of cultural values). The positive moral ideas are embodied by the “Savior”, “Messiah”, “Prophet”, “Saint”, “Hero” just like the images of sovereign negativity: “Chaos” as a natural will, “Chimera” as the greatest delusion, “Lucifer” as satanic pride, “Cain” as the first murderer, etc. (Golosovker 2021: 52–53).

From the perspective of literary theory, we are dealing with a figural confrontation between the *protagonist* and *antagonist* (from the Greek *agónistés* ‘wrestler in the games’, *prot* ‘first’, *anti* ‘against’), while our attention is also focused on the hero’s opponent as one of the central factors of the existential problem situation (the *de facto* “originator” of problems), which is the general theme of folk tales and/or culture-forming stories. The antagonist resists the protagonist and causes contradictions and trouble. His motives, actions and intentions are contradictory in relation to the protagonist. They lead to a violent reversal of the status or events to the detriment of the hero and/or other literary characters.

The English *villain* represents this type of character and is originally derived from the French *vilaine* ‘rustic’ (Barnhart & Steinmetz 1999: 1204), later used in a shifted meaning of a “slave” (Baldick 2015: 353), “unknightly and treacherous person” (Lewis 2013 [1960]: 118), a villager as a villain, a “person of indecent mind and morals”. With the initiating impulse of medieval English aristocracy, the connotations of this word grew worse over time. The word *villain* currently refers to an *evildoer, criminal, violent person, the main culprit*, while the adjective *vile* (from the Latin *vilis*, French *vil*) means *morally disgusting, morally wrong, evil; having no value, having no respect* (Barnhart & Steinmetz 1999: 1204).

In the fictional world of folk- and culture-forming stories, the antagonist represents a fundamentally negative character (the substance of evil) that intentionally harms the hero or other characters. From the point of view of deep psychology, it is an archetype of the shadow, which Carl Gustav Jung and his followers defined in terms of the collective image of “evil as a principle”

(destructiveness as a modality of human behavior), and also in terms of weakness and dark and amoral aspects of human personality (Jung 1970 [1951]: 8–10).

The image of the shadow as an archetype is purely and essentially conveyed by the classic fairy tales and archnarratives (culture-forming stories): the hero experiences the clash of good and evil as a challenge. He develops internally by struggling with dangerous obstacles and hopeless situations. The confrontation with evil causes a significant change in the hero himself and his life (for more information, see Čechová 2019).

ANTAGONIST VERSUS PROTAGONIST: MORPHOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF THE ANTAGONIST

The opposition between the protagonist and antagonist represents some of the key figural components of the ancient folk and contemporary artifacts, building on the iconization of the struggle between good and evil (the moral antithesis of heroism and wickedness). Their characteristic corresponds to the dialectic of the genre structure of classical folk and/or culture-forming narratives. Although the hero and the villain form a clear axiological opposition, they are united by the motif of desire, driven by scarcity, loss, incompleteness (a desire for another being, ownership, knowledge, status, power, etc.), or it stems from a constitutional disposition (aggressiveness, animal lust, instinctive destructiveness, etc.). Regardless of the above, desire is a catalyst for the plot, action, behavior (for a meticulous interpretation of this thematic component under the categorial heading of “action”, see Miko 1987).

The plot-forming purpose of the negative character in the fictional narrative world is to act in opposition to the positive (heroic) character, while the actions of both characters form the central plot of the story, which is the source of a sharp tension and dramatic expression (these are Miko’s expressive categories). The traditional hero acts in an effort to achieve the goal that stands at the heart of the story. The antagonist is a contradictory character: he introduces a problem to the image of the protagonist’s existential situation that must be solved or overcome in order for the hero to succeed in his efforts.

Unlike the hero, who is characterized by virtue, courage, ingenuity, and the pursuit of justice and good in the fictional world of the archnarratives, the antagonist is in principle characterized by actions stimulated by selfishness, addiction, cunning, meanness, cruelty or evil-doing.

The plot function of the antagonist is to provoke a conflict (to create an extremely problematic existential situation) and stand in the protagonist’s way.

In other words, he makes the hero's life difficult by placing obstacles and challenges in it (various forms of difficult or impossible tasks, kidnapping, theft, expulsion, lying, etc.).

In his syntagmatic model of the Russian fairy tale, Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp assigned the first circle of action to the villain, and the seventh to the false hero (a treacherous character with unjustified claims). Of the thirty-one fairy tale functions, eleven were linked with the villain or false hero. He considered the eighth function (the antagonist causes harm or loss to a family member) to be extremely important because it "triggers the story of a fairy tale" (Propp 2008 [1928]: 33). The antagonist either initiates the story (causes harm to the hero, his family or loved ones in the exposition phase – for example, the dragon kidnaps the princess, the witch bewitches a castle, or the evil judge casts a bad spell over the newborn), tries to thwart the protagonist's intentions (older brothers steal a miraculous elixir from the youngest brother, which is meant for their father, etc.), or comes into conflict with the hero in the subsequent sequences of the plot backstory within the compositional principle of chance (e.g., the Slovak hero Lomidrevo wins over the devious Laktibrada, who he accidentally met on the way to the dragons), he finally measures his strength in a struggle or competition (or riddles), and usually pursues the hero with the intention of killing him after the loss.

The villain usually appears twice in the fairy tale: he first suddenly appears out of nowhere (arrives, appears, etc.), and later enters the story as a found character (ibid.: 69), e.g., the Little Red Riding Hood meets the wolf in the forest and then finds him in his grandmother's bed, the dragon kidnaps the princess and the hero finds him to punish him and free the king's daughters.

In the basic structure of a classic fairy tale, the hero, his opponent and the object of the search are in a mutual relationship. Since the plot consists of a meeting between the hero and the object of the search, these semiotic entities must first be separated from each other. The object either belongs to another world and is linked with the supernatural villain (for example, the miraculous light that Vasilisa has to acquire is with Baba Yaga), or the hero and the object of the search/desire belong to this world and it is the villain's job to separate them (the stepmother pushes her own daughter to be married to the prince instead of the stepdaughter).

The forms of confrontation between the protagonist and antagonist in the classic fairy tales and archnarratives range from the relatively innocuous ones (the stepmother prevents Cinderella from meeting the prince) to the extremely destructive ones (the stepmother poisons Snow White). The villain often uses deception to do this, so the hero considers him a friend, helper or donor, and in

some cases the antagonist actually performs these functions (for example, the witch gives the hero a miraculous horse).

BASIC TYPES OF CONFLICTS

There are three types of conflicts – and three ways of dramatization of the plot – in how the protagonist is confronted by the antagonist in the archnarratives.

Overt conflict

This is an open dispute between the protagonist and antagonist. The antagonist (usually) acts in a way to harm the protagonist, or shows his/her clearly negative attitude towards him/her. This is how he/she engages in an open confrontation with the “opponent”. Usually, it involves physical or mental harm. The protagonist and antagonist usually either get into a direct clash (e.g., a clash between the hero and the dragon, devil, giant, witch, enemy troops), or their dispute takes the form of mutual subterfuge (one slyly outwits, deceives or blackmails the other, often with the help of magic), or the antagonist’s animosity and hostility towards a defenseless hero is openly manifested (e.g., the stepmother and Cinderella or Maruška in the fairy tale “The Twelve Months”). This usually happens in the family: an irreproachable girl or boy is harmed by his/her blood relatives or kinship (sister, stepmother, mother-in-law, father, etc.). According to the Aarne-Thompson-Uther International Catalog (hereinafter ATU), this is the case, e.g., in the fairy tale type 510A, “Cinderella” (persecuted heroine); 510B, “Donkey skin”; 403, “Black and white bride”; 425C, “Beauty and the beast”; 923, “Love like salt”; 327A, “Hansel and Gretel”; 706, “Maiden without hands”; etc.

Covert conflict

In the archnarratives, we also encounter a hidden conflict between the protagonist and antagonist. Neither the hero nor the environment is aware of its existence, at least not at first sight: the hero has no idea that he has an enemy trying to harm him or is not expecting an attack. In classic fairy tales, it is mainly the stepmother’s plots against the stepchild. The vicious and often deadly traps are secretly set by the stepmother herself in disguise while attempting to win the hero’s trust (e.g., Snow White unwittingly succumbs and falls for the trickery and deceit of the evil stepmother). A similar narrative scheme (with

the figural opposition adult – child, or old – young, old – new) can be found, e.g., in the fairy tale type ATU 461, “Three hairs from the devil’s beard”, and ATU 930, “Prophecy”.

Potential conflict

The two performative modes (overt, covert) of the conflicts outlined above primarily concern the conflict between the opposing factors (characters) in an unfolding story. However, even the very threat of a conflict, which is only present latently and does not break out in the fictional world, can be the source of a dramatic tension in the story – and a very strong one. It is noteworthy that we can encounter the interaction between the protagonist and antagonist in the classic fairy tales, which does not result in an open dispute or clash between the central characters; however, both characters are aware of a possible collision. This type of conflict is usually due to the ambivalent relationship between the hero and his opponent (e.g., Vasilisa and Baba Yaga).

Since the classic fairy tales belong to ancient culture-forming stories (i.e., archnarratives), one can assume that the performative conflict modes outlined above could represent the basic typological outline as a vital source of dramatic expression even in other art forms and genres (so long they have a topic, i.e., they mediate certain aspects of the fictional world). This would mean that it is possible to derive a much broader, more modern (present in contemporary art), and therefore a more sophisticated and – in its relativistic ambiguity – more complex and structured diapason of “dramatic” storylines.

PHYSIOGNOMIC AND CHARACTER-BASED PARALLELISM

In the case of a directly expressed function of a negative literary character, the narrator in a classic fairy tale portrays his/her character “blatantly” when describing the body: the antagonist has ugly or disgusting (often hyperbolized) facial and bodily features, “is afflicted by strange bodily features ... unnatural body size (exaggeration as a remnant of mythical thinking, which endows the beings connected with the divine world with a supernaturally large or, on the contrary, miniature body – giants, dwarfs)” (Hodrová 1993: 164). When describing the villain, the emphasis is placed on his repulsive or terrifying look, which mirrors the antagonist’s inside in the conventional encoding of the magic archnarrative (e.g., Gashadokuro, a ghost in Japanese mythology, who takes on the form of a giant skeleton; the Scottish demon-centaur Nuckelavee, who has

no skin and one can see black blood flowing in his yellow veins and fire burning in one eye; the menacing Gorgon Medusa, turning those who look at her into stone; ugly women with long unkempt hair, skewed eyes, a body covered with scales and hooves, called mermaids or kneelers in Czech legends).

The character's appearance... is an important means of characterizing it mainly because it directly singles it out from other entities around, and thus helps its identification across the narrative ... in the case of the character's appearance, certain global characteristics of characters are demonstrated to a lesser or greater degree. (Fořt 2008: 66)

In the archnarratives, the literary character (protagonist or antagonist) enters the story as a complete character in terms of its semantic structure, with a stable costume, props, typical behavior, character or name (Hodrová 2001: 560–561). Thanks to his articulated and expressive figural drawing, the villain's opposite (antinomic) position towards the innocent, loving and visually charming heroic figure is accentuated not only with his repulsive appearance, but also, and especially, with his corrupt inside, which results in malicious actions. Since this literary character has outright negative traits, it must be defeated by the hero, and his/her further actions must be prevented in accordance with the logic and value-moral norms of the archnarratives.

ARCHETYPES OF THE VILLAIN

Supernatural monsters

Supernatural monsters embody evil in its purest and essential form. Unlike human villains (stepmother, brothers, sisters, bandits, traitors, etc.), whose actions are usually motivated by greed, wickedness, malice, jealousy, lustful desire, etc., most supernatural monsters act destructively on principle – for the sake of evil itself. They can distinguish good from evil, but they choose the second option. And even if they love, their “love” stems from a perverted desire, callous obsession, and violent greed (e.g., an abducted princess becomes the dragon's wife). They crave the death of others and cause trouble to the hero or the wider community, which is what satisfies them (e.g., Grendel – a raving murdering monster and Beowulf's opponent, a hero from the eponymous Old English epic). According to the fairy-tale canon, they are incorrigible: they do not feel sorry for their deeds, they do not show remorse for those they have hurt, and therefore cannot be redeemed or saved.

One of the most universal characters of supernatural (divine) nature, which embodies destructive and misanthropic power, is the *dragon* (with the exception of the Chinese tradition). According to mythological notions, the dragon is the largest, most powerful and most dangerous monster that threatens the entire human community. Ancient myths often associate it with the original chaos that comes into conflict with the creator of order (God, who establishes order and the necessary balance, is usually the winner of these cosmic battles). Many cultures equate the dragon with the snake because of their appearance, characteristics and symbolism.

An iconic example is the Akkadian cosmogonic poem *Enuma Elish* (2nd millennium BC), in which the young god Marduk wins over the original deity, the demonic sea monster Tiamat (dragon-snake). Marduk models the celestial dome from its shattered skull and determines the course of the stars. He eventually creates humanity to celebrate his victory over the dark chaos. Marduk is thus given the role of the creator of the world and organizer of the cosmos. In the Indian *Bhagavata Purana*, the hero Krishna (an avatar of God Vishnu) fights Kali, a hundred-and-one-headed serpent demon, who dwells in the depths of the River Yamunā, destroys the surrounding region with his fiery breath and threatens its inhabitants:

The enraged Kaliya bit him in the chest, stretched his hood around Krishna and almost completely covered him. ... Krishna saw that the whole pastoral nation looked up to him as the only savior and refuge. ... He straightened himself and started to scramble out of the snake's hood, which almost burst under the pressure. The enraged snake could not bear the pain anymore, released his deadly grip and raised his head in front of Krishna's huge stature. ... Krishna then made him bow down and ... started to dance beautifully on top of Kaliya's head. ... When Kaliya's wives saw that their husband fainted under Krishna's weight because he carried the whole world, and there were holes from the dancing feet in his hood, they panicked: 'Oh, Lord, even though our husband Kaliya was born in darkness, the essence of his nature is ignorance, and his every action is motivated by malice, yet he has succeeded in achieving what others only dream of. After all, the touch of your foot brings absolute bliss. ... The Lord Almighty is merciful, and he will surely forgive those who have resorted to iniquity and done evil here on earth. Lord, have mercy on our husband.' And the Lord truly had mercy on him. Kaliya humbly bowed before Krishna: 'Oh, Lord, we were born as snakes, and therefore our whole life is one great evil. Everything we do is controlled by darkness and endless evil. But it is almost impossible to rid ourselves of our own

nature. We have a proclivity to evil in ourselves from the very beginning, from the first moment we came into the world. You are the creator, Lord, you created the whole universe. ... Whatever you think is best for us, be it forgiveness or punishment, order it. We will do it without hesitation,' said Kaliya. (Život vznešeného Kršny 2021: 127–136)

In the Indian *Rigveda*, the thunderous god Indra defeats the dragon serpent Vritra. The Syrian myth about Baal, the god of rain, who fights with his brother Yamm, the water dragon, has two meanings. First, at the level of imagination associated with agriculture and the seasons, Baal's victory means the triumph of the 'rain' over the 'sea' and groundwater; the rhythm of the rain representing the cosmic order replaces the chaotic immensity of the 'sea' and catastrophic floods (with Baal's victory, confidence in the stability of the seasons triumphs). Second, the duel with the water dragon illustrates the arrival of the young god as the victor and the new ruler of the pantheon. In the ancient Egyptian archnarratives, this cosmic struggle takes place between the celestial dragon-snake Apophis and the god of the sun Re; in Greek mythology, the clash occurs between Typhon, a monster with a hundred dragon heads, and Zeus.

One of the most common mythological scenes (the "Fight with dragon", motif B.11.11 according to the *Motif-index of Folk Literature*) can be observed in the heroes who won the respect of their surroundings by defeating the dangerous monster and achieved the highest goals – Hercules' tasks, Jason's duel with the dragon in the story of the Argonauts, Perseo's liberation of Andromeda, Sigurd's victory over dragon Fafni, etc. In the European folk tradition, the theme of the princess saved from the dragon by a young hero is one of the oldest and most widespread thematic algorithms (fairy tale type ATU 300, "Dragon-slayer"; 301, "Three stolen princesses"; 303, "Twins or blood-brothers"; etc.).

In a dualistic mythical religious system, the negatives are completely attributed to the rival of the good god, i.e., to the rival demiurge. In European culture, it is mostly the *devil*. In the Christian sense, he represents a fallen angel (Satan-Lucifer), an adversary of God and Christ (Mt 4:1-11), who seeks to oppose God's order, seize the human soul and lead man to sin. In the Old Testament, no single unified character of the devil appears, but rather the Yahweh's supernatural opponents known from ancient Middle Eastern myths, such as the sea (Yam), water monsters (Tannin), Leviathan (Job 3:8; Isa 27:1; Ps 74:13-14), mawet and/or Mot (death), plague (Deber) and contagion (Resheph) (Hab 3:5; Ps 91:3 and 6), as well as the serpent (Gen.), Asmodej (Tob 3:8 and 17), Moloch (Exo 20:2-5), Lilith (Isa 34:14), etc. The New Testament contains approximately three hundred references to the devil who is synonymously referred to as Belial (2 Cor 6:15), Beelzebub, the prince of demons (Mt 12:24), devil

(Mt 4:1), Satan (Lk 10:18-20), prince of this world (Jn 16:11), liar, murderer (Jn 8:44), tempter (Mt 4:3), beast (Rev 13), dragon (Rev 12:7-9), etc. God's deputy, archangel Michael, leads the heavenly hosts in the war with the dragon (Satan) and subdues the "great dragon, the old serpent" who seduced the whole world (Rev. 12:7-10; 20:1-3). Many folk tales and legends explain how the holy beings fight the devil, thwart his plans and capture or trick him.

In the fairy tales, the character of the devil usually does not cause fear. He usually makes a deal with human characters to win their souls (e.g., ATU fairy tale type 810, "Snares of the evil one"; 812, "Devil's riddle"; 360, "Bargain of the three brothers with the devil"). Their openness to the deal is motivated by the desire to achieve wealth, power, knowledge, supernatural abilities, extension of earthly life, etc. through an alliance with an alien power. The diabolical antagonist then acts as a false (hostile) donor who uses deception to achieve his intentions (at first he behaves friendly and helpfully). The deal means a short-term gain for those who accept it, but in the long run it only benefits the devil. However, within the development of the plot, the hero usually finds a way to cancel the deal before it is executed. The specific form of this motif is strongly influenced by the Judeo-Christian tradition, according to which the deal with the devil is a contradictory counterpart of God's covenant (ratified at the individual level by baptism). Accordingly, the deal with the devil is conditional to the rejection of God or Christ.

Elves

The little demon, a vicious and cunning little man, is represented in folklore by an elf (dwarf, permon, Laktibrada). According to S. Thompson (1946: 48) he appears under the name Rumpelstilskin (English) in one of the oldest and most widespread European stories, "Guessing the helper's name" (fairy tale type ATU 500) and/or Rumpelstilzchen in the German version by the Brothers Grimm (from the German *rumpelstilt* 'a little rattle' – a crooked elf who rattles his stilts; in a similar sense as the *rumpelgeist* 'a rattle spirit' or *poltergeist* 'a malevolent spirit', who smashes and moves household objects) or the Slovak Martinko Klingáč. This type of villain is a false helper who offers his services to a desperate girl (he weaves golden threads out of straw for her) on the condition that she gives him her most valuable first-born child. However, despite his supernatural powers, Rumpelstilskin cannot take the child arbitrarily. He has to do a barter with the girl. In the fictional world of fairy tales, the character agrees with the deal when she finds herself in an existential crisis or a hopeless situation. Then the human contracting partner unknowingly sells or promises

her own child to the demon (motifs MI S211, S240, 241, 242 according to the *Motif-index of Folk Literature*) because she does not know the subject of the agreement (e.g., the black lady's mischievous contract with a poor blacksmith who is just about to hang himself in the Slovak fairy tale "Goldilocks":

'Don't hang yourself, blacksmith, don't hang yourself! I will help you in your poverty, I will give you as much wealth as you desire; only if you promise me what you don't know of yet.' When the blacksmith comes home and tells his wife what had happened, she starts to grumble: *'... you sold your own child before it was even born!'* (Dobšinský 1996: 156)

In the stories about Rampelstilskin, the elf tries to make the woman give up her child, but at the same time he gives her an opportunity to redeem herself: if she guesses his name, he will not insist on his request. The attitude of the little man corresponds to his "ambivalent nature" (Danišová 2021: 171), which is typical of elves and fairies in the world of fairy tales.

Witches

Female characters that use their magical abilities to cause harm to the protagonist appear in the folktales of all cultural circles (motif G200–G299, "Witches" according to the *Motif-index of Folk Literature*; ATU fairy tale type 405, "Jorinde and Joringel"; 442, "Old woman/man in the forest"; 708, "Wonder child"; etc.). According to the established descriptive procedures (the above-mentioned physiognomic character parallelism), the witches are portrayed as old and abominable beings, appearing on the border of the human and demonic realm. These beings are of a high and/or indefinite age, have access to secret guidance, practice black magic and possess consciousness-changing (e.g., magic ointment, wand) or body-changing (including killing) substances. The witch in Slovak fairy tales is usually an old hunchbacked woman with eyes like fists, teeth like pegs, and a scorched face. In the fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel" by the Brothers Grimm, the child heroes look in horror into the witch's wet red eyes. Baba Yaga from the Russian stories is portrayed as a monstrous, bony, old and unruly woman with fuzzy hair. Her descriptions emphasize her large nose and teeth resembling wolf's fangs or iron teeth in the gigantic gaping (voracious) esophagus: "Baba Yaga is sitting by the window. She is grinding her ominous teeth and stretches out her arms hands like a rake" (Kuncová 2008: 215). The mountainous Yamauba (or Onibaba – an old female demon) with her long yellow hair,

piercing eyes and a large open mouth on top of the head (see, e.g., Luffer 2009) is her counterpart in Japanese fairy tales.

The witch's abominable or even demonic appearance corresponds to her hostile and dangerous character. She is characteristic of cannibalism (type ATU 327, "Children and the Ogre"; ATU 327A, "Hansel and Gretel"; ATU 327C, "Witch carries the hero in a sack"; ATU 327F, "Witch and a fisher boy"). Almost all fairy tales with Baba Yaga directly mention her immense hunger (she has a chamber full of food and pursues her victims with her mouth open wide, which is reminiscent of the folk image of the "hungry death").

The witch uses against the hero her miraculous abilities, which include, e.g., cursing him and transforming him into an animal (ATU 450, "Little brother and little sister"; ATU 425C, "Beauty and the beast"), stone (ATU 303, "Twins or blood-brothers"), poisoning (ATU 709, "Snow White") and other deadly snares (ATU 516, "Faithful John"), persecution of the protagonist by magical means (ATU 313, "Magic flight"; ATU 431, "House in the forest"), etc.

The witches from the western circle of magical folk narratives often act as stepmothers (see Jung's archetype of the mother). German researcher Nathalie Blaha-Peilleux (2008: 112) made a case that the stepmother is an initiator of extreme evil, which she carries out in a particularly cruel way. The difference between the fairy-tale stepmother and the witch stepmother is that the fairy-tale stepmother constantly humiliates and mistreats her stepchild (e.g., "Cinderella", "Jack Frost"), but she does not want to kill them. In contrast, the witch stepmother acts as a murderess (or a villain with murderous intentions) and usually uses black magic. Her motives mostly include an effort to gain benefits for her own offspring (e.g., the Brothers Grimm's tale "The dearest Roland, brother and sister"; in the fairy tale "Snow White" the stepmother's/witch's murderous conspiracies against her stepdaughter are driven by uncontrollable jealousy and narcissism). The stepmothers-witches are modeled as monofunctionally negative (evil, malignant and criminal) characters in a way that they are "perceptually impressive and clearly identifiable, easily classifiable, unquestionable and unmistakable in their substitution function" (Milčák 2006: 63). Without an exception, they can be classed as an antagonist operating in the vicinity of the hero from the beginning of the exposition phase of the narrative. In addition to the role of a stepmother, they also have the position of a biological mother ("Crystal ball"), chambermaid ("Goose shepherd"), wife ("Ferdinand the Faithful and Ferdinand the Treacherous"), etc., that is, a mortal being (*mortalis*) with supernatural abilities living in the terrestrial (human) world (*mortalitas*). This type of witch appears in the so-called "family-social fairy tales" (Marčok 1978: 53), which primarily deal with microsocial (kinship) relationships. In the western cultural circle, however, we also find fairy tales in which the witch lives

in social seclusion, in a remote forest, and has no family relationship with the hero (e.g., “Gingerbread house”, “Forest witch”, “Cannibals”).

The fact that the witch is severely punished (bursts out of anger, turns into resin, etc.) for her actions in the finale of the story as a semiotic incarnation of pure evil is the common denominator of both forms of this character in the fictional world of the Western fairy tale. It is naturally predestined for extinction by extreme negativity, spiritual emptiness and incompetence.

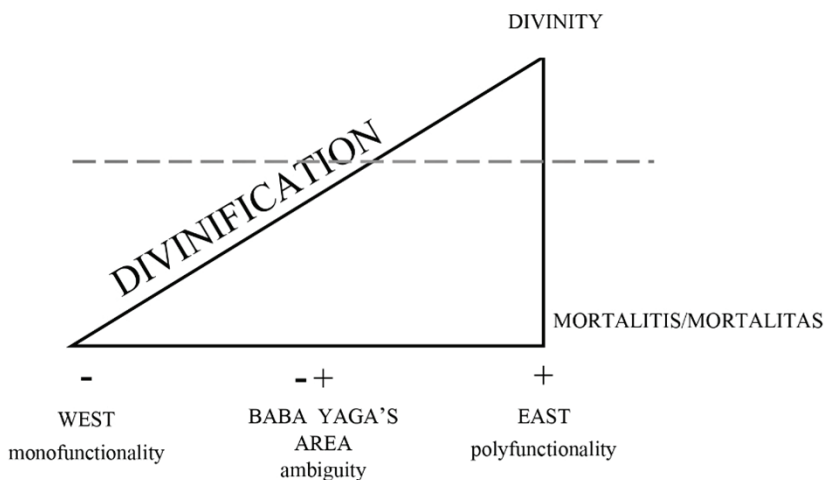
In his monograph *Baba Yaga: The Ambiguous Mother and Witch of the Russian Folktale*, American Slavist Andreas Johns (2010 [2004]) presents the Russian (but also Ukrainian and Belarusian) witch Baba Yaga in the context of classic fairy tales as an exceptional phenomenon thanks to her ambiguous (ambivalent or contradictory) profile, which differs significantly from the clear polarization (especially on the value axis good–evil or functional axis helper–villain) of the figural “pantheon” of this genre, as is the case with the western witch. From Propp’s morphological point of view, she has two opposing functions: 1. the villain (hurting the hero or his loved ones and persecuting him), and 2. the donor (trying and rewarding the hero) (Propp 2008 [1928]: 139). She often fulfills both functions in a single story. These opposite attributes of the fairy-tale Baba Yaga are supported by the attempts to liken her to the Great Mother archetype, which is characterized by ambivalent properties (dangerous and kind, terrible and loving, cannibal and wise counselor). Both characters embody something mysterious, scary, dangerous, but also lively, endowing and helping the protagonist’s success (the visitor of Baba Yaga is either facing death or a favorable magical transformation). The heroes of the tales about Baba Yaga, who encounter this mysterious seeress, usually undergo strange crucial trials.

In the Russian fairy tale “Beautiful Vasilisa” (from the collection by A. N. Afanasjev; ATU 333B, “Girl goes to the witch”, and/or ATU 334, “Household of the witch”), an evil stepmother and her two daughters send an eight-year-old girl named Vasilisa into the dark forest to the dangerous Baba Yaga to bring them the lost magic light. Vasilisa visits Baba Yaga and stays with her as a servant. In the unmanageably difficult tasks, she is helped by her magical doll, which was given to her by her mother before her death. The conversation between the heroine and the dangerous witch, which determines Vasilisa’s fate, is the key passage and the dramatic link in the fairy tale. Baba Yaga is irritated that Vasilisa is not asking her anything: “Why don’t you talk to me? As if you were mute! Ask me something!” (Afanasjev 1932: 49–50). So Vasilisa asks her three questions. They are about three mysterious riders (a white rider on a white horse, a red rider on a red horse, and a black rider on a black horse) who she saw enter the witch’s hut. Baba Yaga tells her that the first rider is her “bright day”, the second rider is her “red sun” and the last one is her “dark night”

(ibid.). However, the next question on Vasilisa's mind (what the meaning of the three magical pairs of hands without a body is, which serve and carry out Baba Yaga's orders in the hut) is never verbalized. The witch says: "You should only ask questions about what you saw outside the house and not inside – I don't want gossip to spread from my house" (ibid.: 50). This formula reminds us of the saying: dirty clothes are not washed in public. The mighty Baba Yaga's mystery thus cannot cross the threshold of her home. However, something very essential depends on it. Had the girl even touched on what should have remained shrouded in mystery, Baba Yaga would have surely punished her, as is clear from her reaction. Yet, both participants in this *partie remise* mutually respect their magical powers. Vasilisa does not ask her the last question concerning the witch's mysteries (three hands without a body), and the witch is not "analyzing" the girl's secret (help from the magical doll). When Baba Yaga asks her how she managed to do all the chores she was commissioned to do, she is satisfied with an abrupt and vague answer that it is a "blessing of my mother" (ibid.: 51). In the fairy tale, life or death and reward or punishment are all decided upon in a rather short conversation. In order for the heroine to survive, she must, so to speak, walk on very thin ice: conceal something or, on the contrary, confess to other things; react appropriately at a crucial moment because the whole situation depends on it. The result of the "conflict" between Vasilisa and Baba Yaga is a matter of a consensus (win-win): neither party must give up anything important (Vasilisa her life, Baba Yaga her mysterious nature). Their confrontation is resolved to mutual satisfaction because they mutually respect their taboos (for more details, see Čechová 2015: 52–65). The girl thus passes the witch's trials (she respects the Baba's fear-inducing and untouchable mystery, which the mortals should not know unless they are forced to do so) and returns home with a burning light hidden in a human skull. Its sharp glare burns the stepmother and her daughters, and Vasilisa marries the czar after a while.

The Indian female deities Mahadevi/Durga/Kali, the Balinese Rangda, or the Sumerian goddess of the underworld, Ereskigal, who appear in a multifaceted way in the archtexts (they give, help and protect, but also kill and destroy), can be considered the typological counterparts of Baba Yaga in the pantheon of eastern mythological deities: their divine nature (divinity) predisposes them to react to the lower (human) beings in such a way that by their behavior and actions they multiply in many ways the clearly defined fairy-tale polarity of good and evil, as is the case with the ambivalent Baba Yaga. All contradictory forms of the goddess Kali (on the bipolar axis of fertility and destruction, harmony and downfall) allow for a gradual transition of the human hero's consciousness to the highest attainable state – enlightenment. In terms of the result, they have

a favorable effect on the hero. In other words, the evil perceived in Western European thinking is becoming positive in the world of Eastern archnarratives. The polyformity and multifaceted meaning of the typological similarities of the villain is manifested in the archtexts of various cultures and nations, while the value shift on the West-East civilization / cultural axis is noteworthy.



Avengers

The function of the villain can be transferred to another character in the story who takes over his malicious intentions after his death. This intention is most often transmitted through the bloodline (family) or a devoted follower. For example, if a dragon played the role of a villain in a fairy tale but the hero killed him, another character (e.g., the dragon's sister) takes over his antagonistic role and persecutes the hero for a revenge (Grendel's mother fights the hero Beowulf after having killed her son). It is a vengeful enemy – a *nemesis* (derived from the Greek goddess of revenge).

Human villains

The hero's opponents are often members of his own family, such as an evil stepmother and siblings, or servants, or closest friends who turn into traitors in the course of the story. They mostly play the role of a false hero who takes

credit for the hero's performances and temporarily prevents him from receiving a fair reward. For example, insidious brothers need to get rid of the youngest sibling who is the only one who can complete the required mission. In the fairy tale "Water of life" by the Brothers Grimm, the sick king sends his three sons to the world to find life-giving water for him. After arduous ups and downs, the youngest son manages to get the water. Envious brothers steal the miraculous elixir on his way home and return to their father as saviors (e.g., ATU 550, "Bird, horse and princess"; ATU 551, "Sons on a quest for a wonderful remedy for their father"). Another subgroup of this type of villain is the so-called comrades/companions who join the hero on an adventure. A model example is the Slovak fairy tale "Lomidrevo or Valibuk" from the collection by Pavel Dobšinský (ATU 301, "Three stolen princesses"). Two strongmen – Miesiželezo and Valivrch – accompany Lomidrevo on his way to the princesses kidnapped by the dragon. They perform two Propp's functions in the story: first, they act as the hero's helpers/companions on the journey, and later they act as villains and/or false heroes. Their actions lead to some tense plot twists: false heroes go side by side with the actual hero on an adventurous expedition, but they cowardly leave him in a life-threatening situation, kidnap the princesses previously rescued by the hero and pretend to be their liberators in front of the king.

This subtype of villain does not come into a direct conflict with the hero and does not fight him. Because, unlike the dragon – the representative of another (superhuman) world – the villain has family / gender / social ties to the hero, the hero "bears the reprisals like all socially impoverished heroes of the family and social fairy tales, and is liberated from his position by performing difficult tasks" (Marčok 1978: 128). According to Jeleazar Meletinskij, we are dealing with the third (last) stage of the hero's trials: the so-called "identification test" (1989: 309), which the hero takes after fighting a supernatural enemy. It is about recognizing the protagonist who performed a heroic act, as a result of which his opponents and false candidates for the princess's hand are disqualified in the finale. However, unlike the supernatural adversary (dragon, giant, witch), they are not executed but forgiven.

The archetypal image of a treacherous betrayal of those closest to us is also recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The stories of Joseph and his brothers who sell him to Egypt for twenty shekels of silver (Gen 37:28), and of Judas, the fallen apostle, who betrays Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matt 26:14-16), are emblematic. In both cases, the traitors regret their actions over time: the brothers ask Joseph for forgiveness, and Judas commits suicide out of remorse.

Murder is the ultimate act in the scope of the villain's action. This motif is often tied to kinship relations in the archnarratives: brothers and sisters are killed (e.g., the biblical story of "Cain and Abel", the story of "Romulus

and Remus”, the fairy-tale type ATU 403, “Black and white bride”; ATU 780, “Singing bones”), the parents (ATU 756, “Three green twigs”; ATU 931, “Oedipus”), sons and daughters (ATU 720, “My mother slew me”, my father ate me”; ATU 590, “Faithless mother”; ATU 781, “Princess who murdered her child”). The driving force behind the murder is lust, which is fueled by envy, jealousy, hatred, infidelity, or desire for property or status. In the folk narratives, the motif of murder is used mainly in the so-called family and love ballads: e.g., about John whose unfaithful wife has him drowned in a well; about John who is poisoned by his own mother due to illicit courting; about the mother-in-law who inadvertently poisons her own son instead of the bride; about the daughter who does not want to get married and is walled in by her mother in a convent, or about the newlywed husband who murders his bride during the wedding night (Medvecký 1923; Zilynskyj 1978).

In the folk tales, murderous plots are usually attributed to women: stepmothers and unwilling sisters who are usually unable to bear the heroine’s beauty, kindness or success. They use female deception in their actions – they pretend to be helpful, willing or caring. They kill insidiously and brutally. In the Czech fairy tale “About the golden wheel” (from the collection of B. Němcová), and/or in K. J. Erben’s ballad “The golden wheel” (from the collection *Bouquet*), a jealous sister kills her younger sister together with her mother, cuts off her limbs and plucks out her eyes. In the Slovak fairy tale “The killed sister” (from the collection of P. Dobšinský (1996)), the older sister kills the younger one because she collected more strawberries. In the fairy-tale ballad “The juniper” by the Brothers Grimm (ATU 720), the stepmother slyly kills her stepson, cooks him up and serves him to the unsuspecting father. The stepmother’s daughter collects the brother’s bones and places them under a juniper. A bird rises from the bones and reveals the terrible secret by singing (motif E613.0.1, “Reincarnation of murdered child as bird” according to Thompson).

The archnarratives about murders among the relatives, which are revealed as a result of the reincarnation of the victim, appear in all cultural circles (Thompson 1946: 136). The motif of reincarnation of the victim into a musical instrument made of his/her bones is very frequent (ATU 780; *ibid.*). The stories in which the killer himself is somehow forced to confess his heinous crime stand in contrast with the motivic complexes associated with the supernatural revelation of murder. In the tale “Bright sun reveals this” by the Brothers Grimm (ATU 960, circulating mainly in Germany and the Baltic countries), a journeyman tailor kills a Jew for money. The dying Jew’s last words are: “The bright sun shall reveal it!” (1988: 184). The journeyman gets married after a while. One morning, as he is sitting at the window with his wife, he pours coffee into the cup and notices the sunrays reflecting off the surface and forming circles on

the wall. The man raises his eyes to the ceiling and says: “You’d like to reveal it, but you can’t!” (ibid.). His wife does not understand the message behind his words and urges him to explain. The man finally confesses to what had happened years ago but begs the woman not to tell anyone. However, the wife does not keep her promise, and in three days the whole city knows what had happened. The tailor is sentenced to death (motif N271.1, “Murder comes to light”; “The sun brings all to light” according to Thompson).

The metaphor of light and darkness is used in the archnarratives to distinguish good from evil and innocence from sin. In a figurative sense, by designating God as the source of light and a righteous judge, this motif also appears in the Gospels: “For there is nothing secret that shall not come to light, and nothing has been so hidden that it will not come to light” (Mk 4:22; Lk 8:17; 12:3). In accordance with the conventional order of the archnarratives, a felony must come to light and the perpetrator must be punished adequately for the offense committed.

CONCLUSION

The figural, transtemporal and transculturally present archetype of the villain as the originator of tension in the story (collisions, crises or catastrophes in the plot outline of a classical ancient tragedy) is an iconized (thematized), stylized and personalized expression of universal human experience with the existential problem situation as a general topic in art (and the constitutive disposition *Dasein* in Heidegger’s notions). The source of its problems, after all, is the resistance, which is precisely the sovereign role (Propp’s function) of the villain or antagonist. The survey of its types (modes), which I attempted to present in the previous sections, could therefore contribute to a more detailed understanding of its semiotic modalities and create the preconditions for a deeper penetration into the universal sources of problems of human existence.

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