

# Doubles Game: Orko & Macić Versus Golem & Homunculus

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*This short tennis analogy is the author's attempt at revision and theoretical elaboration of the earlier paper on two imaginary beings of Croatian folklore. Broadening the scope and introducing comparison with similar literary characters and demons of learned culture might help us to better understand the contemporary role of belief narratives in remythologization processes within popular culture.*

## Domestic team: Orko and Macić

The imperial tranquillity and serenity of social sciences and humanities belongs to the past centuries. Even my own, seemingly recent paper on the *orko* and *macić* belongs to the end of the last millennium (Lozica 1995). The paper is a review of the records and data about *orko* and *macić*, two attractive imaginary beings of Croatian folklore. *Orko* (the monster) and *macić* (the villain) both belong to the ancient layer of oral tradition. They were very popular up to recently in oral narration, but nowadays the general public is not so familiar with them. It may be that their non-Slavic origin kept them away from the body of the Croatian written literature. The study has been inspired by the exhaustive and detailed footnotes on those mythical beings in the works of M. Bošković-Stulli. A selection of texts has been added (from manuscript collections and from printed books, dictionaries and magazines) in order to illustrate the character of the two demons. The bibliography at the end of the article contains the indicators to help in locating them within the vast field of dispersed sources.

But who are *orko* and *macić*? The two controversial mythical beings from oral legends and belief narratives are charged with strong literary capacities and properties. That is my main argument for treating them as demons. Can we be sure about their number? Are there only two demons? Are they demons at all? In oral tradition and written records they appear under diverse (though similar) names, their appearance can vary in shape and size, sometimes within the same narration.

The imaginary beings of belief narratives can be compared with the demons of learned culture only conditionally, *cum grano salis*. Those beings are not Christian or pre-Christian demons. The term demon derives from Antiquity, but acquires negative connotations in Christianity. The Christian demons are evil spirits originating from the rebellious angels. *Orko* and *macić* are not good or bad; their ethically ambivalent character is closer to the pre-Christian understanding of demons – though it might not necessarily be the result of their supposed pre-Christian origin. It seems that they are

both beyond good and evil. *Macić* is friendlier - he often helps humans to find money and protects them against peril. However, they both scare people and both can kill. *Orko* and *macić* are folk demons, demons from the folklore realm. They are living in Christianity for centuries, they have been Christianized a long time ago. That explains their contaminations with the devil and why *macić* (or *tintilin*) often serves as a ghost of the unbaptized child. *Macić*, *mačić*, *macvalić*, *macmolić*, *mamalić*, *masmalić*, *malik*, *tintilin* and others usually look like pert children, boys who wear red hats or caps and like fried food - but can also appear as various animals or jumping flames, and can be hatched from a cock's egg warmed under one's arm. They hide horses or cattle over night and bring them back in the morning, milked or tired out.

As early as the 4th century, St. Hilarius of Poitiers asserted that demons entered the bodies of humans to use them as if they were theirs, and also proposed that the



same could happen with animals. The latter can also be said about the *orko*, who appears mostly at night as a small but fast-growing or flying dangerous donkey - although he can sometimes take the body of a mule, dog, goat kid, mouse or black sheep. The *orko* likes to be ridden. To ride an *orko* is a pleasant relaxation at first, but if the rider falls asleep he can wake up at a distant and unexpected location: on top of a tree, on a bell-tower, somewhere high in the mountains, near a puddle or elsewhere. If the traveler knows how to force him, the *orko* can return to the initial spot - but only before the first cockcrows.

The formation of an *orko* is seldom explained in narratives. According to some reports, an *orko* can originate from garbage or grow out of a hen manure dunghill that has not been dug over for seven years. The *orko* is often associated with sweepings, refuse, stench, bad odour, excrements and farting. The capability for sudden growth

is somehow connected with the *orko*'s other appearance as a nocturnal giant standing astride over the road - an enormous humanlike (or more or less shapeless or headless) dark figure, a murderous personification of darkness.

The *orko* might be a distant echo of *Orcus*, ancient Etruscan (and Roman) god of the underworld. *Orcus* was chiefly worshipped in the countryside and survived as a folk figure into the Middle Ages. His name came to be used for diverse European demons. The Italian *orco* and the French *ogre* are exactly the same sort of monster found in fairytales that feeds on human flesh - and they are both in relation with the medieval mythical figure of the *wild man* (Bernheimer 1979). If we are to believe Bernd Dieter Insam and Maja Bošković-Stulli, the term *orko* (with its numerous variants) covers diverse motifs and properties in correlation. The comparative research indicates that those are not separate and completely diverse mythical beings hidden under the same name - the *orko* should be understood as a unique figure with fluid character (Insam 1974:86; Bošković-Stulli 1975:144).

Still, the approach to classification is a matter of choice. To avoid uncritical generalization, we can as well treat the variants as separate, but similar mythical beings. If the *allopersonages* (Ivanov & Toporov 1974:6) are varied, otherwise named personages who function as signs for the same structural element, then diverse variants of *orko* can be *isopersonages*: personages with the same or a similar name who simultaneously function as tokens for diverse elements or semantic levels of structure (Lozica 2008:1024). The diversity of Croatian variants might well justify such an approach: flying donkeys, shapeless or humanlike giants, inflating goatskins, werewolves, vampires, cypresses and oaks may share the name of *orko*, but they can easily be treated as separate nocturnal beings.

On the other hand, if we take into account the close physical and dimensional resemblance of the alpine *orko* and Croatian *macić*, it may be difficult not to treat them as *allopersonages* of the same villain dressed in red. From that point of view there is only the *orko*, and *macić* is just one of his many appearances or transformations.

### Guest team: Golem and Homunculus

When writing about the *orko* and *macić* fifteen years ago, my main idea had been to stop the ethnic cleansing of the two non-Slavic imaginary beings in wartime Croatia. The resulting article is a reminder of the neglected, ignored so-called “lower” creatures of mythic legends. Those creatures are alive in the folklore process, they appear as personages in everyday narratives and thus differ essentially from dead pagan gods, but the academic priorities of mythological scholarship in transition nevertheless leave them in the shadow of the (re)construction of the Proto-Slavic holy family.

State borders and national identities should not stop supernatural demons - but demons are mental creatures and they need mortals (our bodies and souls) for cohabitation in the human world. Therefore linguistic barriers and political preferences can have an impact on demons, and I am glad if I have helped both *orko* and *macić* in this respect - namely in their demonic transfer from oral Croatia to written Europe.

However, the realm of written communication differs from the realm of oral tradition. It is more internationally competitive - even for demons. To make a long story short, on the playground of written culture *orko* and *macić* will confront *golem* and *homunculus*, the two famous imaginary beings, two “man-made humans” from kabbalah and alchemy.

The *golem* is most widely known in Jewish tradition as an artificial creature created by magic. The word *golem* can be found in the Bible, in Psalm 139; it means “unformed”, the state of matter before it is given form by the Creator - the *prima materia* of the alchemists. The popular idea of the *golem* in literature and film is associated with the legends surrounding the famous Rabbi Loew of Prague and had its start in the 1890s. The *golem* is often used as a kind of artificial slave or worker, similar to the modern robot or android, but the monster always gets out of hand. In many versions he behaves like an *orko*: he continues to grow and grow and becomes too big for the magician to handle.

The *homunculus* might also be of kabbalistic origin, though there is no proof for that assumption. However, the term refers specifically to the alchemic concept of a miniature though fully formed human body. Paracelsus defines *homunculi* as “artificially made human beings, generated from the sperm without the assistance of the female organism (black magic)” (Hartmann 1896: 36).

All four players in our doubles game do have a lot in common: under certain circumstances they can be produced artificially. *Orko* can originate from garbage or grow out of a hen manure dunghill which has not been dug over for seven years; *macić* can be hatched from a cock's or black hen's egg warmed under one's arm; *golem* is made of clay or soil, moulded by virtue of a magic act, through the use of holy names; according to Paracelsus, *homunculus* can be made if the sperm, enclosed in a hermetically sealed glass, is buried in horse manure for forty days, and then properly magnetized and artificially fed with the *arcanum sanguinis hominis* until it is about forty weeks old. Of course, there are other methods for making the artificial humans (from mandrake root, or by galvanic machinery), but those creatures are not real *homunculi*.

All four players can be used to help people: *golem* can defend the weak, *homunculus* can be educated and trained in diverse fields like any other child, *orko* can be used for transport and *macić* can bring us money.

Gershom Scholem points out that the *golem* always lacks some essential feature. In some versions he cannot speak, in others he lacks intelligence or some other positive human quality (Scholem 1965). In all *golem* stories he is strong, but less than fully human. In fact, the truth is that none of the four players are perfect. Why is that so? The idea that mortal humans can share in the creative power of God is considered blasphemous and betrays either the hubris of humanity or the work of the devil.

### **The unbearable virtual reality of the playground**

Tradition is a continuing (historical and ongoing) process of multi-level interpretation of repetitive procedures and symbols in the human community, rather than an inherited collection of indisputable facts, spiritual values and material objects. Not so long ago there were two more or less separate playgrounds: the oral tradition and the written culture. Today the playground is only one, and it includes the interactive cyberspace. In the recent popular culture *Orko* is a fictional character from the *Masters of the Universe* franchise and we can meet him even in video games. He appears for the first time in the 1980s *Filmation* animated series *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* and in the 2002 remake of the series. *Orko* is a Trollan, he wears red robes and he is never without his red hat... in another words, he looks just like an alpine *orko* or levitating *macić* from the Croatian belief narratives. Trolia is a world in another dimension. It is not Tyrol in the west of Austria – but who knows...

It becomes more and more tedious to follow the interaction of the processes of tradition and retraditionalization in the formation of multiple aspects of the cultural identity.

The tennis analogy serves here as a framework for theoretical elaboration. *Orko* and *macić* - the two imaginary beings from the Croatian (and Mediterranean) oral tradition - do share many resemblances and mutual differences with the *golem* and *homunculus*. The latter two originate from kabbalah and alchemy, and thus - according to enlightened modernist classifications - inevitably belong to literary fiction. Nowadays, the literary net is fading under the postmodern pressure of interdisciplinary globalization, and its height cannot be measured: the pairs are blending into a common mythical playground. The idea of the free market aspires to become the new materialist deity, and it renounces the very existence of spirituality - even within the human brain. Religion, mythology,

art and literature are oversimplified to ideology. The imaginary beings (both in literature and in belief narratives) cease to be the relevant subject in the humanities, and they have to make room for real humans - narrators and their social context.

On the other hand, the arrogant anthropologization of our studies bears no proportion to the spontaneous remythologization in society.

Who are the real, pure humans, is still an open question. The otherness is still within us, and the deprived imaginary beings can strike back. They can use the anthropocentric hubris of neoliberalism and return as superior “man-made humans”. A “new singularity” (Kurzweil 2005) might transcend human biology by combining the three important technologies of the 21st century: genetics, nanotechnology, and robotics (including artificial intelligence).

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## Igra parova: Orko i Macić protiv Golema i Homunculusa

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Analogija igre parova u tenisu ovdje služi kao okvir za teorijsku razradu. *Orko* i *macić* – dva imaginarna bića u hrvatskoj (i mediteranskoj) usmenoj tradiciji – odlikuju se snažnim književnim nabojem i svojstvima, ali ih samo uvjetno možemo uspoređivati s demonima učene kulture. To nisu kršćanski ili pretkršćanski demoni. Ipak, *orko* i *macić* iz usmenih predaja te *golem* i *homunculus* iz kabalističkih i alkemijskih tekstova dijele mnoge sličnosti i uzajamne razlike. Opreka usmenosti i pisanosti blijedi pod postmodernim naletom interdisciplinarnе globalizacije. Usmene predaje i vjerovanja marginalizirani su koliko i književna fikcija: ideja slobode tržišta nameće se kao novo materijalističko božanstvo, negirajući i samo postojanje duhovnosti. Religija, mitologija, umjetnost i književnost pojednostavljeno se tumače kao puka ideologija. S druge strane, arogantna antropologizacija naših struka u suprotnosti je sa spontanom remitologizacijom u društvu. Drugost je još u nama i obespravljena imaginarna bića mogu iskoristiti antropocentričnu samouvjerenost neoliberalizma. Mogu nam se vratiti kao nadmoćni umjetni ljudi, nastali kombinacijom triju važnih tehnologija dvadesetprvog stoljeća: genetike, nanotehnologije i robotike, kombinacijom koja uključuje i stvaranje umjetne inteligencije.