

Šešo, Luka. *Živjeti s nadnaravnim bićima: Vukodlaci, vile i vještice hrvatskih tradicijskih vjerovanja*. [Living with Supernatural Beings: The Vampires, Vilas and Witches of Traditional Croatian Belief]. Zagreb: Jesenski i Turk, 2016. Bibliography. 295 pp. 129 kn [\$18.73] (paper). ISBN: 978-953-222-777-2.

The last two decades have seen a striking number of competent, provocative and erudite publications produced by the cadre of Croatian scholars connected to the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore and the Department of Ethnology at the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences. This wealth of material speaks to a renaissance of public interest in local traditions and folklore as well as the attention being paid by these scholars to updating the models used to explore them. A former member of both institutions, Dr. Luka Šešo has recently expanded upon and reworked his doctoral dissertation into a strong monograph. Based on periodic field research conducted in multiple regions of interior Dalmatia between 2003 and 2009, Šešo's research is a much-needed return to the question of the role of supernatural beings in society. Though much of the tale-telling traditions in the region are moribund, Šešo has connected with a number of informants and tale-tellers who recollect a wide range of materials as well as varying degrees of believers who still actively engage with the traditions. Not only is the book an important update on the status of extant tales and the ways in which they have been remodeled in the 21st century, but the argument also follows a clean functionalist approach that presents solid results.

In short, the author seeks to illuminate the role that belief in supernatural beings holds for individuals and wider groups (10, 134-5), especially with regard to the seeming dissonance of such beliefs being held by citizens of a modern nation and member state of the European Union (89). Most importantly, Šešo takes a note from anthropologists and folklorists such as Julie Cruikshank, Charles Briggs, Willem de Blécourt and others, in foregrounding the interaction between scholar and informant and drawing his correspondents into the work itself. Thus the book is well laden with the author's interlocutors and their opinions and insights on why they or others (past and present) believe in the existence of supernatural beings. While some of these insights stem from modern interpretation (particularly the responses of one crucial informant who draws his conclusions from the insights he gained reading Carlos Castaneda and Erich von Däniken [158]), Šešo and his interlocutors provide interpretations that suggest continuities with the past and the *longue durée* cultural functions of belief in supernatural beings that obtained in the memorates, fabulates, and tales documented in the earliest folklore collections from the regions. Their discussion about the connection between supernatural beings and large-scale trauma (223-30) and the use of supernatural scares as covers for thievery (230-6) hearken back to similar comments made by Veselin Čajkanović in the 1920s, while the narrative of an informant who claims to have been abducted by *vile* as a child (238-43) is highly informative and enlightening of older materials.

Šešo begins his book with a general overview of the most common supernatural beings in local Dalmatian traditions: *Vila*, *Vukodlak*, *Mòra*, and *Vještica*, as well as a brief explanation of some lesser known beings: *Vrimenjaci*, *Višćaci*, *Negromanti*, *Orko*, and *Macić*. The material here is drawn from a range of scholarly works (Maja Bošković-Stulli is, of course, ever present) but primarily from the *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje Južnih Slavena* [Review on Folk Life and Customs of the South Slavs] as well as the archives for the journal housed in the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences. Having worked at the archive for years, Šešo is well acquainted with the material and has gathered a strong collection of examples to illustrate the general understanding of these beings and the forms that their traditions took 100 to 150 years ago.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of theoretical paradigms used widely in Europe for the analysis of supernatural beings, starting with Grimm and working its way through Frazer, Evans Pritchard, Eliade (who has held a more lasting sway in the folkloristics and mythology of BCMS regions than in America), and Carlo Ginzburg, and ending on the work of Hungarian scholars Éva Pócs and Gábor Klaniczay. The chapter concludes by running a similar tour through the specific context of Croatian scholars, from Antun Radić and his project with the *ZbNŽO* through to Bošković-Stulli. The material and theories presented focus heavily on research into witchcraft, to the detriment of the other beings in Šešo's research, but the overview is competent and theoretically inclusive despite this. Moreover, this lacuna speaks to the scarcity of studies such as this that explore the anthropological implications of supernatural beings beyond the easy and oft-tread territory of witchcraft. This overview carries into the third chapter which outlines some contemporary research into the role of supernatural beings as well as the circumstances that prompted the author's foray into the Dalmatian hinterland.

Chapter 4 presents classificatory types of interlocutor responses as a method of analysis. Responses are categorized as: those unfamiliar with traditional beliefs (148); potential interlocutors reserved due to skepticism (150); responses with strong auto-censure and rationalization stemming from ethno-political problems (153); 'traditionalists' (those who give thorough descriptions and accounts of supernatural beings, their doings and encounters with them, but add caveats of disbelief, doubt or suspicion onto their accounts) (159); and responses of personal belief in supernatural beings (161). Chapter 5 suggests a number of insightful theories regarding the functional roles of tale telling about and belief in supernatural beings. These sections are the bulk of the study and are well presented, clear, concise and replete with anecdotal material and reported speech from informants that provide useful data to the analysis as well as being a joy to read. The author's strength here is his ability to weave his interpretations through those of his interlocutors, providing competent conclusions through coproduction and dialogue.

The final chapter offers some thoughts on the shifting role of and responses to supernatural tales in the region as well as some rumination on the complex connection between and interwoven nature of religious belief and belief in the supernatural among informants.

Dr. Šešo's book is an indispensable study that directly tackles a question which is so often skirted, avoided or half-answered in other, similar works. The methods by which the author groups and analyzes types of response and levels of engagement with oral traditions and beliefs could well serve scholars dealing with similar materials in other regions. The book is never heady, but reads clearly and the seamless blending of theory and material, of author and interlocutor, keeps the work engaging throughout. The book itself is a nicely bound and well-sized edition. The soft back pressing by Jesenski i Turk follows a tradition of publishers in the region in their dedication to producing affordable prints of academic works. It is a commendable effort and a credit to them.

Dorian Jurić
McMaster University
Hamilton, Canada