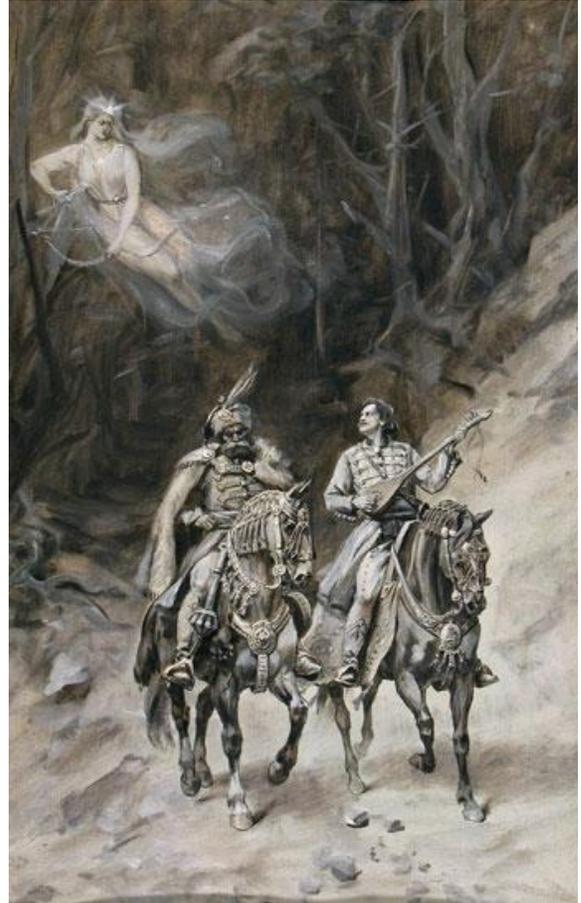


Week 3: Fairies

Marko Kraljevic is a Serbian folk hero modeled after Marko Mrnjavčević who ruled territory in western Macedonia and Kosovo from 1371–1395. Marko is the most popular hero of Serbian Epic Poetry, which is traditionally sung alongside instruments. The Marko of epic has a lifespan of 300 years, and throughout the stories we see him grow and mature, overcome adversity, and fight for the common people.

Many of Marko's adventures take place during the Ottoman empire. To protect his people and land, Marko Kraljevic worked alongside the Turks to keep the peace and, because of his strength and skill in battle, was often sent to fight against other fierce warriors that terrorized the countryside. Yet, even in these situations, Marko has respect for his enemies and mourns their deaths because he sees that they too were great warriors and that in another life they could have been friends.



In the following epic poem, Marko and his brother by mutual oath, Miloš, meet the vila, Ravijojla. The vila are fairies of Slavic folklore, and they dwell in caves and mountain passes. The vila can be helpful to heroes, but they are also easily offended. To appease the vila, people place flowers, food and drink at the mouth of caves.

Marko Kraljevic and the Vila

Pobratimi, brothers by oath, ride forth
over the rocks of high Miroč Mountain.
The one brother is the bold Prince Marko,
and the other, his brother, Duke Miloš.
They ride abreast, on their two fine horses;

they ride abreast, bear chivalric lances.
Their white faces they join there in kissing
out of the love they hold as sworn brothers.
Then Prince Marko falls asleep on Šarac.

When he awakens, he says to his brother,
"O my brother, my brother, Duke Miloš,
A heavy sleep just now fell upon me;
sing to me now, and talk to me a bit."

Then Duke Miloš answers to Prince Marko:
"Ah, Prince Marko, dear and true sworn brother,
I'd sing to you, but I drank too much wine
all last evening, up there with the *vila*,
on the mountain there with Ravijojla,
and she told me, she gave me fair warning,
if she hears me, if she hears me singing,
she will shoot me, she will let me have it,
in the throat, here, and in my throbbing heart."

Now Prince Marko answers in this fashion:
"Ah, sing, brother; do not fear the *vila*,
for I'm with you, I, the mighty Marko,
and here's Šarac, a most clairvoyant horse,
and here's my mace, golden, with its six spikes!"

So then Miloš begins with his singing.
First he sings him a truly lovely song
of our people who are great and ancient,
how each of them ruled over a kingdom
in a pure place, in Macedonia,
how each did build himself a holy church.
The song pleases Prince Marko immensely.
He leans forward on his saddle's pommel.

Marko dreams on while Miloš is singing,
but the *vila*, Ravijojla, hears him.
Now she begins to sing songs to Miloš.
Miloš sings too, then the *vila* answers.
Miloš sings well; his fine voice is better
than the *vila*'s; he has the better voice. 58
Ravijojla then becomes quite angry,
and she runs up onto Miroč Mountain.
she draws her bow and lets fly two arrows,
and one hits him, poor Miloš, in his throat,

and the other right in his hero's heart.

Then says Miloš, "God! O Holy Mother!
O my Marko, by God my sworn brother!
O my brother, the *vila* has got me!
I told you so, didn't I tell you, brother,
that I shouldn't sing near Miroč Mountain?"

Marko wakes up from his blissful slumber,
and he jumps down from his great piebald horse.
Then he tightens Šarac's girth quite firmly;
he embraces and kisses dear Šarac.
"O my Šarac, my dear horse, my right hand,
if you catch her, *vila* Ravijojla,
I will shoe you with shoes of pure silver,
of pure silver and of bright, shining gold!

I'll cover you in silk cloth to your knees,
and from your knees, right down to your pasterns!
I'll braid your mane with threads of purest gold
and adorn it with tiny, shiny pearls!
But if you fail, if you don't find the *vila*,
I'll gouge your eyes, I'll tear them from your head!
I'll break your legs, I'll smash them one by one!
And I'll leave you behind, to live like that,
to drag yourself from fir tree to fir tree,
just as I would without my sworn brother!"

Then he mounts him, sits on Šarac's shoulders,
and so they ride across Miroč Mountain.
While the *vila* flies over the mount's crests,
Šarac gallops through the mountain's middle,
but he cannot see nor hear the *vila*.
When he at last sees the accursed *vila*,
Šarac jumps up to a height of three spears;
he jumps forward, a good four spears forward.
And thus quickly Šarac finds the *vila*.

Now the *vila* finds herself in trouble;
she flies straight up, well above the white clouds.
But then Marko brings out his spiked war mace,
and he clubs her, strikes her with abandon,
hits the *vila* between her white shoulders,
and he pulls her all the way to the earth.

Then he begins to club her once again,

he spins her 'round, spins her from right to left;
he is using his mace with six gold spikes.
"Why, O *vila*, may God rightly kill you,
why did you shoot Miloš, my sworn brother?
You'd better get some herbs for that hero,
if you would like to keep your head for long!"

Then the *vila* in God's name calls him brother:
"In God's own eyes you're my brother, Marko,
and I beg you, by God and by Saint John,
let me free now! I'll go to the mountain,
there I'll gather herbs of Miroč Mountain
to cure Miloš, to heal the hero's wounds."

Marko's mercy is in the name of God.
Though in his heart he is sad for Miloš,
he lets her go on up to the mountain,
and she gathers herbs of Miroč Mountain.
She gathers herbs, and she speaks to Marko:
"I am coming, O my sworn brother!"

Now she's gathered enough herbs on Miroč,
so she takes them and heals the hero's wounds.
This makes Miloš's voice even lovelier,
it's lovelier than it has ever been,
heals Miloš's heart, now stronger than ever,
now it's truly healthier than before.

Now the *vila* goes back up the mountain,
and Marko goes with his true sworn brother,
and they ride on, on to Porec County;
they cross water at the river, Timok,
near Bregovo, a large, pleasant village.
Then they ride on, on to Vidin County.
But the *vila* tells the other *vilas*:
"O now hear me, you, my sister *vilas*,
don't you dare shoot heroes in the mountains;
you'll hear the voice of that bold Prince Marko!
You'll meet that horse, the clairvoyant Šarac!
You'll feel that mace, that mace with six gold spikes!
How I've suffered from this violent hero,
really suffered, barely escaped alive!"

Source: Milne Holton, & Vasa D. Mihailovich. (1997). Songs of the Serbian People: From the Collections of Vuk Karadzic. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Image Credit: Prince Marko, Miloš Obilić and the vila Ravijojla in a 1906 painting by Paja Jovanović