



Folkloric Elements in *The Pobratim: A Slav Novel*

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The Pobratim: A Slav Novel by P. Jones, published in 1895 and dedicated to “His Highness, Prince Nicholas of Montenegro,” is an intriguing piece of literature, even though little is known about either the author or the book. With an intricate plot comprising multiple framed stories and presented by an omniscient narrator, the text centres on the exploits of two “blood brothers” and is of modest literary merit. However, it vividly portrays traditional values, customs, national costumes, places, superstitions, and has a distinct local feel. This article aims to identify and analyse the key folkloric elements present in *The Pobratim: A Slav Novel* and to provide a commentary on the novel from the perspective of cultural history.

Keywords: folklore, cultural history, tradition, belief system, southeastern Europe.

Published in 1895 and dedicated to “His Highness, Prince Nicholas of Montenegro,” *The Pobratim: A Slav Novel* (henceforward referred to as *The Pobratim*) was authored by an obscure writer, who identified as “Prof. P. Jones.” Despite its author’s – and its own – obscurity, *The Pobratim* is an intriguing text well worth reading and studying. The book reveals that the author –most likely of British extraction– must have been well-versed in South Slavic culture(s) and knew a lot about Montenegro, the Montenegrin way of life, and local beliefs and traditions. This makes *The Pobratim* a captivating subject for discussion and analysis from the perspective of cultural history. With an intricate plot comprising multiple framed stories and presented by an omniscient narrator, the novel centres on the exploits of two *pobratimi* (“blood brothers”) and may be said to be of modest literary merit. However, it is rich in presentations of traditional values, vivid descriptions of customs, national costumes, specific places, and superstitions, and has a distinct local feel.

According to Professor Branko Momčilović, who “discovered” *The Pobratim* and presented it to an audience largely composed of students with an interest in cultural history, Jones’ book is only referenced in *The Catalogue of the Printed Books of the British Library*. The title of the book, in all probability, appeared unusual to British readers because the word *pobratim* originates from a language unfamiliar to most of them. The word *pobratim* in the book’s title is written in the singular, even though it refers to two individuals and so requires the plural form *pobratimi*. This suggests that Jones’ knowledge of the foreign tongue must have been limited. The writer and novel were not mentioned in *The English Bibliography of the Eastern Question* (Momčilović 144), edited by Vojislav Jovanović, a distinguished researcher in the field of cultural history. It is no surprise that even experts in South Slavic history and culture were unaware of it until recently.

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The book is difficult to categorize due to its broad thematic scope and non-traditional novelistic format. Readers are given information about geography, ethnography, traditions, and customs. Most of the novel is set in the Montenegrin coastal town of Budva, but it also references Montenegro in general, Dalmatia, Italy's coasts, and even Great Britain. The text's timeline encompasses the reigns of Petar I or Petar II Petrović Njegoš, that is, from the late 1700s to the mid-1800s. The main characters are Uroš and Milenko, friends and brothers by blood, who are good seamen, as their fathers used to be before them. Moreover, they are successful in their commercial undertakings and substantially increase their families' wealth. The plot thickens as their fathers, Janko Marković and Miloš Belačić, are asked by the well-to-do Radonić to act as intermediaries and propose marriage, on his behalf, to a beautiful girl called Milena. Milena's father does not object to the proposal of the old, but prosperous Radonić as he owes him money. The actual narrative begins with the meeting of Milena and Uroš at a festival. Despite her engagement to another man and her inability to escape the marriage due to her father's debt, Milena is irresistibly drawn to Uroš, and their love ignites with great passion.

The novel's plot is complex but also rather conventional, as the author employs the usual motif of a difficult love affair. Significantly, Jones describes the powerful emotions of the two young people while also portraying, sometimes in the minutest detail, the traditional customs and moral values of a patriarchal society. Vranić, a suitor whom Milena has previously rejected, exposes her relationship with Uroš. Uroš and his friend Milenko go to sea on account of the potential threat posed by Radonić's jealousy and his desire for vengeance. Vranić is crafty, jealous, and seems to be cursed because he is a man "with a cast in his eye" and is (perhaps) "branded by the hand of God" (Jones 31).

The potential conflict between the influential families of Budva is also a factor in the decision of the two young men to go to sea. Their course of action enables the branching out of the plot. On the one hand, the reader follows the adventures of the *Spera in Dio* crew (Uroš and Milenko being part of it), the rescue of shipwrecked survivors, bad weather in the open sea, new acquaintances, and eventful, sometimes even fatal, encounters. On the other hand, the reader also follows what happens at home: Milena continues to experience persistent harassment from the obsessive Vranić, as well as enduring Radonić's harsh treatment. Despite these difficulties, she is actively seeking a solution to her seemingly hopeless predicament.

The novel's characters are far from convincing: we are presented with protagonists that are not fully developed and mostly function as "flat" characters. However, the descriptions of national customs, beliefs, costumes, and natural scenery are more than appealing and require additional attention. It is more than obvious that the author was well acquainted not only with the history of the people living in Montenegro and the surrounding areas, but also with southeastern European geography, ethnography, and anthropology. For example, when the ship reaches the shores of Zara (present-day Zadar), we are introduced to a variety of beautiful dresses, jewellery, and local costumes. On another occasion, Jones depicts the bride and bridegroom's clothing and customs related to the traditional wedding ceremony, the bride leaving her father's home and being accepted by the husband's family:

Milenko wore the beautiful dress of the Kotor. Like his train, he had splendid bejewelled daggers and pistols stuck in his leather girdle, and a gun slung across his shoulder. They all walked gravely, two by two, up to the garden-gate of Giulianic's house; there they were stopped by the sentinels. ... 'We are in search of a beautiful bird that inhabits this neighbourhood. ... We wish to take it away with us.' An old red cap was brought forth and placed upon a stone – it represented the allegorical bird – and the young men fired at it. As almost all of them were excellent marksmen, the cap was soon afterwards but a burning rag. Having thus shown their skill, they were allowed to enter within the yard, where more questioning took place. ... The svati were led into the principal room, where the table was laid, and there begged to sit down and partake of some refreshments. All the young men set down, each one according to his rank, all keeping precisely the same order as they had done in marching. ... [T]wo of the svati – the bariactur and the ciaus – volunteered to go to his assistance; and soon after-

wards they reappeared, bringing back with them the beautiful, blushing girl decked out in her wedding attire. Her clothes were of red velvet, brocade and satin, richly embroidered in gold, heirlooms which had been in the family for, perhaps, more than a century, and worn by the grandmother and the mother on similar occasions.

For the first time Ivanka now appeared without her red cap, which in Dalmatia is only worn by girls as the badge of maidenhood. Her long dresses formed a natural coronet; they were interwoven with ribbons of many colours and adorned with sprays of fresh flowers. ... It was that of taking possession of the chest containing all the bride's worldly goods, and on which were displayed the beautiful presents the bride had received. Amongst these were, as usual, two distaffs and a spindle, for spinning had not yet entirely gone out of fashion. ... A little imp of a boy ... was seated on the chest, and he kept a strict watch over it. He had been told to fight whosoever attempted to lay hands on it, therefore, took his part seriously. ... At last, having received some cakes and a piece of silver money, he was introduced to give up the trunk to the svati, who carried it off. The bride then left the house amongst the shouting and the firing of the multitude, and the whole train, walking two by two, proceeded to church. ... Ivanka was received at the door of Milenko's house by his father and mother, and there, after the usual welcome, she was presented with two distaffs, two spindles, and a baby-boy, borrowed for the occasion. The child is to remind her that she is expected to be the mother of many boys, for children are still, in Dalmatia, considered as blessings. (274–277)

The novel abounds in digressions which, in many cases, encumber the plot and lead to interruptions in the narration (Momčilović 153). However, such digressions demonstrate to the reader that the author was familiar with the cultural legacy of the South Slavs. It is more than obvious that one of his major goals was to successfully depict the local way of life, mentality, and traditions. Momčilović asserts that Jones went too far in his exploitation of such elements at the expense of more sophisticated narrative devices, which explains the modest literary merit of the book and the fact that it is often placed in the category of folkloric fiction.

Elements of South Slavic Cultural Heritage

The narrative of *The Pobratim* abounds in references to South Slavic cultural codes and mythology. The novel largely depicts customs, some of which are still practised today, as well as beliefs and rites that seek to ward off and destroy mythical monsters. The motif of blood kinship, for example, appears to be closely linked to the superstitious beliefs in vampires, werewolves, and witches in South Slavic pre-Christian culture.

Trajan Stojanović states that although Montenegrin families followed rigorous and well-defined patterns, they also engaged in several forms of contractual kinship during the Ottoman era, such as *pobratimstvo* (“blood brotherhood”) and *posestrimstvo* (“blood sisterhood”). Such practices were opposed by the Orthodox Church in the Byzantine period but were endorsed by priests in Ottoman times (Stojanović 199). The ceremony of becoming *pobratimi* (“blood brothers”) and *posestrime* (“blood sisters”) has been maintained in Montenegro and the neighbouring South Slavic countries to the present day. It involves selecting a person who is near and dear and forming a deep friendship where both individuals become like siblings, committed to totally nurturing the relationship and providing support and assistance whenever needed.

There is a consensus among experts that our knowledge of South Slavic pre-Christian culture is incomplete (Kalezić Đuričković 501). Evidence has shown that superstition and belief in witchcraft were widespread as an integral part of traditional values. Veselin Čajkanović, for instance, states that the vampire, as a pre-animistic demon, was regarded as a living corpse, a dead body that had come back to life and risen from the grave. It wandered around and sucked blood (162). According to a later, animistic

belief, however, only the vampire's soul could escape from the grave in the form of a butterfly which may afterwards transform itself into a human being, an animal, or an object. According to Čajkanović (163), the word "vampire" (*vampir* or *lapir*) is related to the word *leptir* ("butterfly") and is apparently linked to the belief that the souls of the deceased take the form of butterflies. Thus, an important part of the ceremony of the destruction of a vampire is the ceremonial burning of the butterfly that escapes from the demonic body, otherwise the vampire will not be destroyed.

Another creature that inhabits South Slavic pre-Christian beliefs is the *vukodlak*, a word used commonly in some parts of Montenegro and Serbia to refer to a vampire, but in fact a *vukodlak*¹ is a wolf-like demon, a werewolf. Some experts argue that according to local beliefs, every vampire had to be turned into a wolf for a certain period of time; in Herzegovina and Montenegro, the two would coincide (Čajkanović 164; Plas 82). The werewolf form of the vampire is originally Slavic, but it did not remain unknown to other nations. Interestingly, the *vampirdžija*, a person who kills vampires, must be a foreigner, since the vampire functions in the local community, the village, the brotherhood, or the family. According to old beliefs, vampires often haunt mills. Dishonest, rapacious, bad people are prone to becoming vampires, but it may also happen to righteous people who have died suddenly or have been murdered and have, therefore, crossed to the "other world" dissatisfied. Other examples include righteous persons who, when lying dead, were flown over by a bird, stepped over by a cat or any other animal, or were buried without a lit candle (Petrović 210; Čajkanović 165). Vampires have a red face and a swollen body full of blood, while the body of their children can cast no shadow, they are boneless, and cannot look upwards (Čajkanović 166). It is believed that their children (*vampirovići*) have large heads and can see and kill vampires (Petrović 738). There is also a belief that a vampire can appear in the form not only of a wolf but of some other animals, as Čajkanović states, primarily that of the animal that stepped over him while he was lying dead on the bier (168).

The belief in werewolves can be traced back to the twelfth-century East Slavic epic poem *Slovo o polku igoreve* (*The Tale of Igor's Campaign*), in which Prince Vseslav of Polotsk has the uncanny ability to shift into a werewolf. A similar belief apparently existed in thirteenth-century Serbia as well (Petrović 210). In the South Slavic countries, it was believed that a deceased person could become a vampire during the forty-day period following their funeral (Petrović 733). There was a prevailing idea that vampires would mostly target individuals and livestock at night and would consume the *crna džigerica* ("liver") of their victims. If the vampire is not captured within a period of forty days, it acquires bones, as it was initially devoid of skeletal structure (Petrović 735). Another popular belief was that vampires were only visible to their progeny and men born on Saturdays, and that they had the power to destroy them. To prevent a dead person from returning as a vampire, it was customary to perform certain rituals. These rituals involved the cutting of various body parts of the deceased, such as a toe or the muscles below the knee (Petrović 735), or the ear, cheek, neck, or hand (Pišev and Dražeta 83). In addition, these rites could involve the cracking of an egg at the location where the deceased was laid in the house, the hammering of a nail into the spot where their head was resting, or the placement of an olive or a silver coin under their tongue. In order to "kill" the vampire, a hawthorn or spruce stake was forcefully inserted into its body (Petrović 733-735). Čajkanović asserts that the hawthorn shrub has long been regarded as a potent deterrent against malevolent spirits, owing to its ancient role as a cosmic tree (140).

Vampires mostly act on their own, people in the region believed. However, witches, as well as other female demons, usually act in a group and sometimes attack people together (Čajkanović 174). They gather at crossroads and at the *pometno guvno*, that is, a threshing place that is no longer in use. The very use of the word *vještica* is common in Slavic languages; it originates from a verb meaning "to know" which would suggest that a *vještica* was originally a woman of great knowledge (Čajkanović 173). Researchers have also noted that a witch can be regarded as analogous to a vampire. In the Kući

¹ There are several terms that refer to a vampire in South Slavic countries. For example, according to Petrović, *vampir* and *tenac* are used in eastern Serbia; in Lika, Kordun, Banija, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, *vukodlak* and *vjetrogonja* are common. In Bosnia, *lampijer* or *lampir* are also used; in some parts of Croatia, the common terms are *vukodlak*, *vuk*, and *višćun* (Petrović 211). According to some researchers, the term *tenac* was also used in Montenegro in the past. In some west Balkan regions, *vukodlaks* are not considered to be vampires.

region of Montenegro, it is believed that witches are born with crimson caul, which their mothers keep hidden until their daughters reach adulthood and are ready to conduct witchcraft. Researchers also maintain that in Grbalj, if a boy was born with a bloody caul, he would become a *vjedogonja* while a girl would become a witch. Aside from predestination, such supernatural transformations can frequently occur because of deliberate human choice. Thus, a witch is a woman who sells her soul to the devil or is “possessed” by the devil, a woman who was born with a bloody caul, or during the last lunar phase (Petrović 211–213; Rajković).

In addition, a witch has the ability to transform into many creatures, including a butterfly, a moth, a black bird, a turkey, a goose, and occasionally, a frog, a cat, or a wolf (Petrović 213). According to some experts, witches can transform into two ancient and genuine forms - a butterfly or a bird. However, the transformation into a cat or a horse is likely influenced by German traditions (Čajkanović 173). A variety of demons possess shapeshifting skills (Dujović Pajović 89). Moreover, witches had a reputation for engaging in sorcery, “taking away” the milk from their neighbours’ cows, abstaining from garlic, killing humans and cattle, and even sucking the blood of children. In the South Slavic folkloric tradition, it was customary to envision witches manifesting in a state of nudity, particularly on the eve of St. George’s Day (*Đurđevdan*). They would typically assemble under a walnut tree or on a *guvno* (“threshing floor”) between Christmas Day and Twelfth Night, when the “lower world” is open (Petrović 213–214). Some researchers also mention in this context a pear tree (Pišev and Dražeta 176–177).

The South Slavs believed in demons in human or semi-human shape, such as *kuga* or *čuma*, *morija*, a demon of illness, imagined as a woman or a young girl with long, dishevelled hair, a white scarf or clothed in a white robe, *mora*, a demon that puts pressure on people while sleeping and stops their breathing, usually appearing as a young girl who becomes a witch after getting married, *ala* (*lamija*, *lamnja*), a monster that brings clouds and hale. *Suđaje* (*suđenice*, *usude*, *rođenice*, *orisnice*) are creatures that determine a child’s fate on the third night after birth. They usually appear in a group of three. A *zmaj* (“dragon”) is a creature that breathes fire, flashing, and thunder (Čajkanović 179-226; Petrović 211-245).

The South Slavs also believed in supernatural beings called *vile* or fairies. These fairies were often shown as attractive young women dressed in white garments and possessing enchanting long hair. The phrase “*lijepa kao vila*” (“beautiful as a fairy”) has long been a popular idiom in Montenegro and the neighbouring areas. *Vile* usually appear in groups of three or, in rare cases, nine, and anonymously (Čajkanović 187; Petrović 226). They represent a very complex form of metamorphic demons in semi-human shape that are notorious for their interaction with dragons. In many folkloric tales a *vila* can marry a dragon and have children or she may marry a human and give birth to human children (mostly girls). In some epic poems they are given names such as Ravijojla, Andresila or Anđelija (Petranović 223–226). The *vile* like dancing in a *kolo* (“ring dance”) and fighting against young men in endurance contests; they bring fertility to the land and cattle and foster marital bliss. At the same time, they possess chthonic powers and can make people sick as well as predict the future. Petrović describes a case in Budva, Montenegro, in which some girls offered a sacrifice in garlands to the *vile* and asked them to give them back a bridal garland (227). According to Vuk Karadžić, the *vile* will not hurt anyone unless they are insulted. However, if they are shot in the leg, arm, or heart, a terrible outcome is assured (qtd. in Petrović 227). The fairies can be categorized into different types based on their habitats and activities. These include the *vile izvorkinje* (“spring fairies”), *vile brodarice/vodarkinje* (“water fairies”), *vile zagorkinje* (“mountain fairies”), *vile hamadryade* (“tree fairies”), *vile oblakinje* (“cloud fairies”), and *vile biljarice* (“plant fairies”) (Petrović 225).

Traditionally, “magic acts” were thought to occur in locations such as graveyards, crossroads, forests, ponds, or on rooftops. Wizards and witches could form a circle around themselves in order to perform a particular ritual. South Slavic folklore was characterized by a prevalent belief in magical practices (Petrović 62). Magic rites were usually performed in the vicinity of trees and special plants in the awareness that every plant is animate and has a “soul.” According to Petrović, the cult of the tree was one of the rare cults that was accepted by the Orthodox Church (185). Linden, hazel, and oak trees were extremely important, particularly the oak tree, which the Proto-Slavs thought to be a holy tree associated with the cult of the ancestors and with a specific role in the *badnjak*, or the yule log, and the cult of

the hearth. The oak tree was connected to the Slavic gods Perun and Svarog. There were also fire cults. In the past, bonfires were lit during the Carnival, on St. Peter's Day, and Midsummer Day. According to Petrović (442), people would leap over them in the hopes that they would cleanse their lives, obtain protection against demonic possession, and guarantee a bountiful harvest.

The Pobratim provides extensive depictions of South Slavic beliefs and traditions. We will observe the process by which they are fictionalized and integrated into the literary narrative.

The South Slavic Context and *The Pobratim*

As already stated, the author of the book was familiar with aspects of South Slavic folk culture. As a result, the reader is not surprised when the characters in the novel mention, present, or quote folk poems such as the tragic love poem "Hussein and Ayesha" or epic poems that revolve around one of the most prominent heroes in folk literature, Marko Kraljević² (for example, "Marko Kraljević's Falcon" or "Marko Kraljević and Janko of Sebinje"). The epic nature of these poems, however, arises from an intricate interplay between laudatory legends and factual history. Jovan Deretić argues that the poems about Marko Kraljević do not reflect his actual character. Marko Kraljević, an Ottoman vassal, ruled Macedonia following the Battle of the Maritsa. He was killed in the Battle of Rovine in 1395 while fighting for the Ottomans, but he nevertheless remains the most popular hero in South Slavic folk poetry. According to Deretić, he was revered in folk literature for his physical strength and moral values. Thus, many poems and songs honour him as a protector of the poor and oppressed who battles injustice. He may also appear as a vassal, which demonstrates the ambiguity of his character.

Jones was clearly aware of Marko's prominence in the South Slavs' collective consciousness. He was particularly aware of the importance of epic poetry in South Slavic cultural history, as some of his characters are *guslari*, who sing about the heroic past while playing the *gusla*, a traditional one-stringed instrument. As a result, the remark "we Slavs are so fond of music and poetry, that we will remain for hours listening to one of our bards, forgetting even hunger in our delight" (Jones 23) should come as no surprise to the reader. Jones uses, among many other original words, terms which contribute to the effectiveness of the text and create a local feel: *stara-mati* ("old woman"; "old mother"), *rakee* (alcoholic drink), *slivovitz* (*šljivovica*, a traditional alcoholic drink), *kabanica* ("a great coat"), *vila* ("fairy"), *opanak* (a kind of a shoe usually worn by peasants), *starescina* ("the one in charge"), *pop* ("priest"), *pas* ("belt"), *zivio* ("cheers"), *badnjak* ("yule log"), *gospa* ("lady," "matron"), *ljuba* ("sweetheart"), and so on. It is noteworthy that Jones does not use diacritics when using original words in the text, which shows his modest knowledge of the orthography of the local language.

In the novel, Jones also demonstrates his knowledge of certain customs practised in southeastern Europe. Thus, when he depicts Christmas Eve, he presents it as a fasting day. People gather together in joy to celebrate the great holiday which is to come. The Christmas Eve meal consists of "fish cooked in different ways"; there is also a "a pillau with scallops ..., pickled tunny, eels, and so forth" (Jones 38). Jones' narrator represents the customary practice of individuals exchanging greetings and offering traditional toasts using the phrases "Zivio" or "For many years." After the meal, "black coffee was served in Turkish fashion, that is in tiny cups, held by a kind of silver, or silvered metal, egg-cup instead of a saucer" (Jones 38). Jones also depicts, in great detail, customs pertaining to Christmas Day: the burning of the *badnjak*, and the fact that the first man entering a house is supposed to put a log in the fire. In fact, it is Vranić who enters Belačić's house but the main reason for his visit on Christmas Day is his obsession with Milena; he is trying to find out if she is in the house. While Vranić utters the correct phrase, "May you have as many horses, cows, and sheep as the badnjak has given you sparks" (Jones 43), he makes a "mistake" by stepping over the log intended for the New Year's Eve fire, contrary to tradition. Stepping over the log is considered a bad omen. Vranić's imminent death is "foreseen" once more: Uroš wishes to see his wound, inflicted by Vranić, through his looking glass, but instead sees his enemy's face. Uroš

² Also known in southeastern Europe as Marko Kralje, Marko Krali, or Krali Marko.

interprets this as a negative omen predicting Vranić's death and Radonić's jealousy leads to Vranić's death shortly after this episode.

It is worth noting that Jones effectively portrays many traditional Orthodox Christmas practices; yet, he places Christmas in the Catholic Church's temporal frame, prior to the New Year. Besides, the book's author was well aware that St. Nicholas is regarded the guardian of seafarers. Thus, he describes St. Nicholas as "one of the most revered saints of the Slavs" (Jones 28).

Many inset or framed stories, stories within stories, appear in the text, giving it a special flavour, such as the story of Old Nor and the Miser, a supposedly witless beggar and a rich man who regrets his arrogance and haughtiness and repents after facing misfortune and being "enlightened" by the wisdom of the one whom he considered ignorant. There is also "The Story of Jella and the Magic,"³ a story full of supernatural elements. The characters in this story, as well as the protagonists in the book, believe in ghosts, witches, and wizards; they believe in the power of spells and are terrified of vampires and *vukodlaks*. Their world is inhabited by fairies and sprites.

Can you fancy his terror in seeing a voukodlak, a horrid vampire all bloated with the blood in nightly sucks. Slowly he saw them rise one after the other, each one looking like a drowsy man awaking from deep slumbers. Soon they began to shake off their sluggishness, and leap and jump and frolic around, and as the mist cleared he could see all the other uncouth figures whirl about in a mazy dance, like midges on a rainy day. It was too late to run away now, for as soon as these blood-suckers saw him, they surrounded him, capering and yelling, twisting their boneless and leech-like bodies, grinning at him with delight, at the thought of the good cheer awaiting them, telling him that it was by no means a painful kind of death, and that afterwards he himself would become a vampire and have a jolly time of it. (Jones 13)

The quotation clearly shows that Jones was familiar with the traditional South Slavic belief in the supernatural: vampires leaving their graves in the middle of the night in order to find prey and suck their blood. In South Slavic mythology, a vampire was usually imagined as a hairy creature with bloody eyes and teeth, mostly boneless, a figure formed of blood. In the above quotation Jones refers to "boneless" vampires with their "leech-like bodies" and this proves that he was well-versed in South Slavic mythology and cultural tradition. Jones also gives an interesting description of exorcism, since Vranić becomes a vampire and haunts his brother Joško, demanding revenge for his death. Here the motif of "kinship" acquires demonic dimensions:

The priest having reached in his orisons the moment when he uttered the name of Isuskrst, or God the Son, Josko Vranic, who stood by, shivering from head to foot, and looking like a cat extracted from a tub of soap-suds, drew out the dagger from under his coat, where it had been carefully concealed from the ghost's sight, and stabbed the corpse. It was, of course, a black steel stiletto, for only such a weapon can kill a vampire. (Jones 203)

All characters in the novel are superstitious: they believe that it is not good for men to shave on Friday; if a tossed garland falls down instead of staying in the branches of a tree, it is considered a sign of bad luck. They practise the custom of kindling bonfires and jumping through them in order to undergo purification and revive their life powers (Stojanović, 31). On another occasion Milena takes Mara's advice to put a piece of red cloth under her armpit in order to protect herself from Vranić's power although

³ "Mac", the merry, the mischievous sprite" from the story (Jones 15) most probably refers to "macić" (or "malić", "masmalić", "macmolić", "maličić"), a demonic creature that belongs to the framework of the traditional belief system of Istria, Slovenia, and Dalmatia, while in Dubrovnik he is usually referred to as "tintilin." The demon is usually imagined as a mischievous boy with a (red) cap and of a short stature. He can scare people or act in a mischievous manner but does no serious harm. In some places, such as Supetarska Draga, people believed that the *maljik* was an unbaptized child. It was also believed that the *malik* would bring money and wealth to the one who fed him well (Babić and Danilović 281–282; Petrović 234–236).

she doubts that this protection will be effective enough. The protagonists of the novel are also prone to various types of divination, such as melting lead in a bucket of water and the use of a “silver mass” for predicting the future. In order to escape the influence of Vranić and to deal with her violent and jealous husband, Milena accepts the help of a witch and receives a bag with a powerful spell: “‘In it’, whispered the old woman, mysteriously, ‘there is some hair of a wolf that has tasted human flesh, the claw of a rabid old cat, a tiny bit of a murdered man’s skull, a few leaflets of rue gathered on St. John’s Night under a gibbet, and some other things’” (Jones 82).

Jones was also well familiar with the moral precepts of Montenegrins and other South Slavs, and their firmness in maintaining them. For example, adultery is considered to be an unforgivable sin: “Adultery, amongst us, is no trifle, as it is in Venice, for instance; we Slavs never forgive” (Jones 101). He describes Montenegrins as proud people with a strong sense of honour. Furthermore, Montenegrins consider revenge their “sacred duty” and “settling all litigations with fines, and putting a price for the loss of life, is still in full force amongst them” (Jones 170). He also focuses on traditional gender norms and the situation of women in patriarchal families. Milena is a courageous young Montenegrin woman, bold enough to help in the fight against enemies. However, as a wife, she is fully aware of the “prescribed” gender roles and the subordinate position of women in patriarchal society; she knows that showing her feelings for her spouse in public is not socially acceptable: that is something that belongs to the private sphere and should be kept there. Although she does not love her husband, she is fully aware that “[e]tiquette not only requires a wife to avoid speaking of her husband, but also to eschew him completely when present, just as more northern people ignore entirely the name of certain indispensable articles of clothing” (Jones 97).

To summarize, *The Pobratim* is a novel that possesses a moderate level of literary excellence. Nevertheless, its construction is intricate, replete with captivating happenings and thrilling escapades. The novel ends happily: after facing numerous challenges and adversities, Milenko and Uroš, together with their wives, embark on a ship to start a new journey on a beautiful May morning, “thrilled at the opportunity to see more of the world” (Jones 278).

Reality and the supernatural are intertwined throughout the book; all the characters function in a world inhabited by supernatural beings and appear to accept them as part of their everyday lives. The novel’s rich and vivid descriptions of landscapes, the sea, and the interior of houses, along with its portrayals of witchcraft, supernatural powers, and traditional customs, all contribute to its value. *The Pobratim* also has some documentary significance, presenting an engaging picture of the people of Montenegro and their cultural heritage through the eyes of a learned British author deeply fascinated by the Slavic cultures of southeastern Europe in the late nineteenth century.

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