

## NATIONAL HERO: CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT (MILAN RASTISLAV ŠTEFÁNIK IN SLOVAK FOLKLORE)

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The author starts from the historical genre – the biography of Byzantine saints. In Slovakia this genre is represented by the biography of St. Constantine-Cyril and Methodius from the period of Great Moravia in the 9th century. The study analyses the elements of biography in the contemporary folk oral cycle about the Slovak national hero General Milan Rastislav Štefánik. He was a co-founder of the Czecho-Slovak Republic and died in an air-crash in 1919. The motif of his death is an important myth-creating element in the folk oral cycle.

### *The elements of bios in contemporary Slovak folklore*

Folkloristics uses the terms of *cycle* and *cyclization* to designate a characteristic process of accumulating episodes in oral narrative literature, most often centred around one key figure. The measure of the occurrence of cyclization as a variational procedure is different in many folklore genres: legendary tales, superstitious stories, fairy tales, legends, humorous stories and especially in anecdotes. Thus, folklore achieves monumental types and figures...<sup>1</sup> With regard to the issue of these textbook-like simplified stylized characteristics, the significant function of cyclization in the mythicized modelling of ideas, themes, and heroic types should be emphasized. It is not only that the cyclization occurs in many genres but, through their coexistence, the theme centres around the core of the story in one theme worked out by means of several genres. The character of the genre in the cycle denotes the division and accent of the cyclicized story.<sup>2</sup> Folklore cyclization around the hero

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<sup>1</sup> LEŠČÁK, M. – SIROVÁTKA, O.: *Folkór a folkloristika*. Bratislava 1982, pp. 220–221.

<sup>2</sup> HODROVÁ, D.: *Hledání románu*. Praha 1989, pp. 24, 27, 85 ff. Thus e.g. in one folklore cycle about MRŠ a type of superstitious account, local legend, episode from recorded memory, oral personal narrative, sentimental-novellistic, realistic-adventurous accounts influenced by literature or accounts with the elements of fairy-tale fantasy may occur side by side.

can be imagined in the form of the basic motion in nature – both in the universe and in the atom – as circulation, centripetal motion of particular independent, self-sufficient but also dependent particles around the one, strong centre of gravity. Such is the universal principle of the crystallization of ideas into shapable and shaped wholes having the character of a cycle, episodes, stability, transferability, centralization, variability. Therefore it is possible to look for parallels in apparently and paradoxically incompatible, spatiotemporally remote and different phenomena.<sup>3</sup> It seems that the universal theme of the central position of the hero, repeated in different periods and transformations of the functioning of literature and folklore as well as the satellite position of episodes, which map changes in the significance of the hero from different historical points of view, and interpretations of him in particular political and historical conditions, that is the stability or variability of its components, is the cause of its historical transferability and comparability.

The heroic folklore cycle is identifiable as a special type of the universal genre of biography. It is known from the ancient times of the development of verbal arts as epic, ancient heroic biography and ancient historical novel, Byzantine hagiography about the Christian “lives” of saints, medieval chivalric novels, historical factual accounts, folk reading up to contemporary literary biography, biographic monograph and autobiography. The biblical history of the life of Jesus Christ has become the basic and classical biography.

The scheme of the biography of the Byzantine saint, one of the oldest and most popular genres of Byzantine literature as a prototype of the canon of biography was analysed by T.V. Popova.<sup>4</sup> The authoress sheds light on the biography oscillating between its folk anonymous form and the author’s instructive form, between the narrative and the rhetorical form. This transformational motion between the official written and the folkloric poles was crystallized approximately in the sixth century into certain universal features, or shaping of a scheme of universal features characterizing the biography in its composition and theme. The authoress traces an approximate sequence as the skeleton of the canon of biography (some features in the particular wholes can, but need not be present) as follows: introduction – a contemplation on a “soul-saving” theme – is followed by data about the family, parents, and siblings of the hero, chiefly their moral qualities and honesty; the hero’s child-

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. when J. Ludvíkovský compares the ancient adventurous novel with Čapek’s essayist account of “the novel for maids” (LUDVÍKOVSKÝ, J.: *Řecký román dobrodružný*. Praha 1925, pp. 88 ff) or J. Komorovský seeks parallels of the internationally spread cycle of folklore accounts about King Matthias Corvinus and the old Russian apocryphas about King Solomon (KOMOROVSKÝ, J.: *Rozprávky o královi Matejovi a ich vzťah k staroruským apokryfom o královi Šalamúnovi*. Čas. pro slovan. jaz., lit. a dej. SSSR 1/1956, pp. 295–300).

<sup>4</sup> POPOVA, T.V.: *Antičnaja biografija i vizantijskaja agiografija*. In: *Antičnost i Vizantija*. Moskva 1975, p. 220: in original Greek hagiographic literature she differentiates between the “martyrdom” describing the martyrdom of a Christian, and a type of “bios” depicting the life of an orthodox Christian who usually dies a natural death.

hood with the manifestations of unique attributes, seeking solitude and studying the holy books; later in his life he is an example of modesty and humility doing valuable work in a monastery; performing miracles, healing people who are sick, showing heretics the right way of Christians. He often dies in suffering, receives a sign of death "from above". A special part is the "death description"; after death miracles happen in connection with the hero's remains.<sup>5</sup>

In the literary historical perspective, the biography is a genre that follows not only the life of the hero from his birth to his death but often also its reflection and importance in the life of a community (miracles of remains, the myth of Christ's resurrection, a symbolic message to a national community). It represents an evident outline of mythicizing modelling as understood by J.M. Meletinskij in his conception of the myth as a sociocentric, ethical, and symbolic phenomenon with a specific function of modelling and harmonizing the relationships and with a comprehensive approach to the world.<sup>6</sup>

The oldest biographies preserved in the territory of Slovakia are *The Life of Constantine-Cyril* (873–879) and *The Life of Methodius* (after 885) from the period of Great Moravia. These literary relics which transfer the genre of Byzantine biography into our culture, were preserved in copies from the 11th–16th centuries.<sup>7</sup> It may be of interest to folkloristics how much these works following the hagiographic Byzantine patterns point to the elements of bios in contemporary Slovak folklore. Historians see these *Lives* as historical sources that passed the critical review on the one hand and as original literary works of art of early medieval cultural events on the other hand.<sup>8</sup> Historical legends (including the Great Moravian legends), their interpretation in relation to reality and their official (also political) application were studied by H. Hlôšková from the point of view of folkloristics.<sup>9</sup> In her description of the genre of oral personal narrative, G. Kiliánová describes the division of its thematic areas which is in principle similar to that of the Byzantine biography and denotes them as biographical (personal) narratives. The thematic areas are: 1. childhood, 2. youth, 3. adulthood, 4. work, occupation, 5. departures from home, 6. tragic life stories, 7. comic life stories, 8. stories about ancestors. The author states that the personal level and the social and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 220–221. The genre of biography was further developed in three functions: 1. to keep in memory stories of the prominent men, 2. celebration of a hero, 3. moralist-psychological function (pp. 222–223).

<sup>6</sup> MELETINSKIJ, J.M.: *Poetika mýtu*. Praha 1989, pp. 179–181.

<sup>7</sup> *Veľkomoravské legendy a povesti*. Bratislava 1977, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., afterword by P. RATKOŠ, p. 142.

<sup>9</sup> HLÔŠKOVÁ, H.: *Historické ústne tradície ako etnoidentifikačný faktor*. Slov. Národop. 40, 1992, pp. 131–148. For the issue of heroic folklore cycles see also VANOVIČOVÁ, Z.: *Folkloríny hrdina za národnou hranicou. (Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk na Slovensku)*. In: *Gramatika národného mýtu a folklór*. Ed. Z. Profantová. Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava 1998, pp. 51–73.

historical levels overlap.<sup>10</sup> These parallels between the thematic areas of folklore and hagiography justify our assumption that folklore, historical and literary accounts of the themes influenced one another much more, particularly in the Middle Ages, when there was not such a great distance between folklore and literature. In addition to the similarity of the themes, they are also close in composition, in cyclizing of the episodes round the hero as we know it from the contemporary heroic folklore cycles. The complex of the lives of Constantine and Methodius are composed of individual episodes organized into a certain system by the authors. In contemporary folklore cycles, the episodes recorded in the field are oriented both theoretically and ideally towards the biography as a whole. This exists in the available collectors' records and, on the other hand, in the consciousness of potential bearers. The existence of the whole (ideally completed, invariant), through the system of the chronologically arranged or not arranged episodes, which can be organized by the authors of the biography or by collectors from the field according to their strategy, brings back the problem of thematic cyclization.

On the basis of the study of the folklore cycle about M.R. Štefánik we can assume that the "lives" of other prominent historical personalities exist parallelly in folklore as short episodes and as more extensive chronological biographical accounts, as well as in the written form (in historical or literary accounts), which mostly fixes an official relation to historical events. These two versions of one theme can influence one another, borrow some components, conform to either official or folklore outlooks, shape different attitudes in different historical situations, the folklore cycle representing a more stable interpretation of the relationship to historical personalities in contrast to the official ruling attitude adapting to variable aspects.

The author divided *The Life of Constantine-Cyril* into 18 episodes (numbered parts) which include:

1. "commendation" from the teacher of the nation with biblical citations;
2. report about the native town, parents, family background, care of Constantine as a child;
3. childhood, a dream as a herald of future life ("from among women he chose Sophie – Wisdom"), God's control of his life (he lost his sparrow-hawk while hunting – a sign of a different life orientation), therefore he "became immersed in the sense of many languages and great science", in the doubts of the quest, the divine paths made wisdom accessible to him;
4. studies and education away from home, industry, modesty, a variety of interests (grammar, geometry, dialectics, philosophical sciences, rhetoric, arithmetics, astronomy, and music), recognition by the most powerful in the community (caesar's

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<sup>10</sup> KILIÁNOVÁ, G.: *Rozprávania zo života ako žáner ľudovej prózy*. Slov. Národop. 40, 1992, p. 272. In contrast to the oral personal narrative which only exceptionally goes beyond the historical level, the heroic folklore cycle, equally fed by reality and rumours and fantasy, enters the level of mythicization.

logothete), his popularity, refusal of material wealth and secular recognition. He retires into the seclusion of monastery and after a lot of persuasion accepts the position of philosophy teacher;

5. fight against heresy in the Church (period of iconoclasm);
6. sent on a mission to persuade heretics and pagans in foreign countries, philosophical disputes and attempted poisoning;
7. seclusion, miraculous feeding of the poor;
8. more journeys and discovery of the remains of St. Clement;
9. gains esteem through his wisdom and philosophical work;
10. conversion of non-believers, philosophical disputes;
11. recognition and gratitude of the enlightened and christened pagans, as a reward, he asks for liberation of Greek captives instead of gifts;
12. miraculous proofs of being chosen (purification of non-drinking water, a harbinger of an archbishop's death, felling of a sacred tree – an oak grown together with a cherry tree worshipped by pagans and their conversion);
13. decoding an inscription on the Solomon's glass in St. Sophia with a prophecy of the coming of the Christ;
14. sent on a mission to Great Moravia, revelation of the script for the Slavic language;
15. promotion of Great Moravia's interests (struggle with Trilinguals), superstitions, and pagan customs), liberates captives instead of a reward;
16. philosophical defence of the divine truths and manifestations of his wisdom;
17. recognition by the Pope;
18. illness, physical suffering, revelation and the presage of death, awaiting the end, saying goodbye to people close to him, death, magnificent burial (as "of the Pope himself"), Methodius' efforts to bury him according to the mother's will in a monastery and Pope's decision to bury him in St. Clement's church in Rome, celebration of his grave (making of pictures, burning of a light by day and night, miracles at the place of his grave).<sup>11</sup>

If we take the scheme of the motifs of the *Lives* as a basis, they can be compared with folklore episodes of the cycle about M.R. Štefánik:

1. The introductory "commendation", a tribute to the personality representing the author's rhetorical art and his knowledge of biblical examples in the *Lives* is lacking;
2. the part about family background and the hero's parents is elaborate and interesting in folklore (poverty of the large family of a priest, help of parishioners, father-hunter provides food for the family);

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<sup>11</sup> *Veľkomoravské legendy a povesti*, op. cit., pp. 70–82. The Life of Methodius, the first archbishop and famous teacher of the nation of Slovieni by an unknown author is shorter, and the defence of the Slavonic liturgical language against the Frankish Latin clergy and the defence of the rights of the Moravian-Pannonian church are in the foreground.

3. the hero's childhood is also a significant point of interest, underscoring his exceptionality which he showed in relation to his family (to the ill brother, mother, grandmother – care-taker), in relation to his future fate (boat floating in the brook as a symbol of future journeys faraway – in the period of his childhood, ships represented in the region under Bradlo, where he had come from, the fate of emigrants, America) but also in relation to his future profession and interests – astronomy (watching stars, love of nature);

4. youth – the period of education, studies, and crystallization of relationships away from home and family, the width of his interests and specialization in an exotic science – astronomy, his performance and demonstration of national feelings, the narrators evaluate his relationship to parents and native village (visits after long separation, discussions with his peers), studies in Prague are evaluated through recognition of his success in work and social success abroad;

5. defence of the nation's interests in an episode about his anti-Magyar performance during elections, where a well known farmer with a whip saved Štefánik and an episode about a conflict with pro-Magyar Slovaks in a train;

6. stress on the significance of his mission during his journeys abroad (astronomical research), in military actions during the war serving in the French Army and the diplomatic mission in the high society of France and Italy in favour of Czechoslovakia;

7.–9. hints of his clairvoyance as if a miraculous property and technical discoveries and improvements in astronomy and in the military air force. Recognition by military authorities and politicians endeavouring to establish a republic. His activities in diplomatic efforts to help the new state often appear in the point of the episodes as “Help me to liberate my nation”;

10.–17. these parts are further developed in other episodes about his exceptional abilities, his work for his nation and recognition by celebrities of the European political and social world;

18. the “description of the death” of the hero is a special and the most extensive part of the cycle with many variants. There are few allusions to his disease in folklore, emphasis being laid on the fact of his return to his homeland as a renowned diplomat attacked by his enemies (envy, revenge by representatives of various nationalities), a stop to his activities for his nation and his death (the air crash). If in the *Lives* the saint is preparing for death seen in a dream, with Štefánik there is a premonition of death, thought about his death and place of burial in statements from his young years reflecting his longing for his motherland. It ends with his family's, especially his mother's waiting for his return, the nation's expectations followed by a disappointment at a sudden tragedy, a break which should probably have indicated the following development, oppression of the nation's rights. The story-tellers saw there the consequence of anti-Slovak efforts. There are parts close to the *Lives* that describe and emphasize the magnificence of the hero's funeral, the presence of a great number of people and of political authorities, his burial in the

place he had chosen, the importance of his native region as an emphasis and satisfaction of ideas he defended throughout his life, commemoration of his grave by an annual fire (in the *Life of Constantine* “the burning of a light by day and night”) as an expression of undying recollections.

Short episodes from recorded memories with elements of superstitious accounts predominate in the composition of the particular accounts of the cycle about M.R. Štefánik. As in the *Lives*, only two parts are characterized by longer chronological narrations: the part about his life in the foreign world and the last part about his tragic death, funeral and the posthumous cult. On the one hand there are some elements of the tale-fantastic, adventurous character and realistic, almost naturalistic elements on the other hand. Precisely these accounts underscore the importance of these parts of the hero's life.

The cycle about M.R. Štefánik – like the frequent martyr's sacrifice in the lives of saints suffering for their faith – with its tragic end taking place at the birth of the state which he had helped to create, reminds of the motifs of “violent death” – sacrifice in the myths about creation.<sup>12</sup> The worldly motif of “faithful lover” (marchionness Benzoni) which naturally does not occur in the lives of the saints, is here based on the theme “love is stronger than death” and the “mysterious disfavour of fate”. Certain laws in binding adventurous and heroic motifs to the motifs associated with violent separation of love, faithfulness and often predetermination for tragedy are also found in the analyses of K. Čapek.<sup>13</sup> The contemporary folklore cycle with the elements of bios incorporates more real and more concrete features from the particular history, period and events, the closer the theme is to the present (as in the case of the oral personal narrative), preserving the components of classical folklore genres and motifs in tradition.

#### *The death motif as a myth-creating element in the folklore cycle about M. R. Štefánik*

In European culture, fed from the sources of antiquity, Judaism, Christianity and national pagan mythologies, the visions and attitudes pertaining to death changed with historical experiences and wars. Interestingly, in spite of the frequent and widespread occurrence of the motif of the death of heroes in extensive ancient, German and Slavic epics, relatively little attention was paid to them in the literature on this subject. The motif of the death of the hero occurs within the complete range of human relations: as honourable death in the fight against the enemy, treacherous death, death for revenge, infidelity, intolerance, envy, death in defence of honour and truth, where the hero plays the role of the fighter-avenger-martyr-victim-libera-

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<sup>12</sup> *Die Schöpfungsmythen*. Darmstadt 1980. Preface by M. ELIADE, p. 289 – the sacrifice has the character of the creator, ensuring life and permanence for the work to which it was sacrificed.

<sup>13</sup> LUDVÍKOVSKÝ, J.: op. cit., p. 115.

tor-redeemer-saviour. If Antiquity presents the pantheon of its divine heroes with the halo of immortality, people or demigods with the punishment of eternal suffering and impossibility of death it simultaneously introduces the vision of the hero as a prototype of everlasting immortal value or myth.

The reflection of such visions in both written and oral Slovak tradition concentrated in various genres and motif variants across the whole spectrum of the fates of the heroes. In traditional Slovak folklore, however, the motif of the death of a hero is usually a marginal, irrelevant motif. The accounts of meeting the figure of death, which constantly connects the world of the living with the afterlife, often with a humorous flavour, were the only exceptions.<sup>14</sup> The motif of mysterious, unexplained and inexplicable death is a significant element.

Mysterious circumstances surrounding death in any situation always stimulate curiosity, conjectures, when "little information and much disinformation" create conditions for spreading several possibilities for its interpretation. The accumulation of evidences can expand and become an element, an accompanying symptom of the shaping of a heroic type. The motif of the hero's death can occupy an episodic or key position in particular accounts. Although death closes in general the life of each individual, it does not leave its mark of the same force on the lives of other people. It mostly leads to gradual oblivion and only episodes about one's acts and relationships survive. The position of the death motif is rarely of key character in tradition. Generally speaking, it symbolizes, strengthens, and confirms the message of hero's personality that remains in consciousness; the way of death draws at the same time the contours of the characteristics of the type of the figure. The basic Christian myth places the motif of Christ's birth on a level with the significance of his death and thus creates a complex of the parable of the life cycle of man handed down for centuries in the legends and rituals of Christian civilization. It shapes the figure of Jesus Christ as an innocent victim – a sufferer for all people and a saviour. The legends about the chiefs of highwaymen, liberators, heroes close and crown the life of the hero with the indictment of the unjust punishment, sentence and death which conceals the importance of other episodes from the hero's life. The interpretation of death in Jánošík's tradition, one of the most important cycles of the heroic legend in Slovakia, underlines the motif of the degradation of the hero – a popular symbol of the struggle for justice – to an ordinary thief, fire-raiser and murderer.

On May 4, 1919, Milan Rastislav Štefánik (MRŠ) died in an air crash near Vajnory, on his way back to the liberated country as war minister of the Czechoslovak Republic. It happened several months after the end of World War I. His death was the last symbolic sacrifice for the Slovak nation offered on its altar and the first victim of the new republic. At the same time, this date meant the beginning of conjectures, suspicions, rumours, political speculations, which elevated this tragic

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<sup>14</sup> KILIÁNOVÁ, G.: *Smrt' v slovenských ľudových rozprávkach*. Tvorba T, 3, 1991, pp. 19–27.



event to the leitmotif of the recollections of MRŠ as a modern national hero. It is an unbelievable fact of twentieth-century history that shaped the history and the development of the Slovak nation.

The date of the death of MRŠ is the beginning of the myth-creating process, the growth of the heroic personality through folklore story-line supported by the historical and political tendencies of the time, both positive and negative. As part of Slovak national history it is connected with the establishment of the republic and the status of the Slovak nation within it. It seems that it was also one of the elements which affected visions and relations within the republic in the next historical period of the nation's development. It is indicated by the use and abuse of Štefánik's mythicization in different periods of bitter tension between the Czechs and Slovaks but, on the other hand, also its role and significance in confirming the continuity and the need for the coexistence of both nations. The unexpected, mysterious and never satisfactorily explained tragic death of MRŠ became the central motif of the folklore cycle, the basis for the development of tradition and the end of the majority of episodes. The folklore account stimulated by the official political versions of the interpretation of the circumstances of the death spread by the media but also by the rumours, creates further versions on the basis of regional folklore and religion. For instance, the factual literature<sup>15</sup> offers at least six interpretations of Štefánik's death: a sudden attack of his illness, a breakdown on the plane either prepared or accidental, the plane was shot down – intentionally, by mistake, by enemy forces with the motivation for the deed (by Hungarians, Italians, French, Jews, Czechs – T.G. Masaryk, E. Beneš, General J. Syrový, or the Freemasons). Folklore completes this explanation with the religious resistance and the Pope's intervention, social controversy and difference between Štefánik and his fiancé of "royal origin", marchioness G. Benzoni, or by the fatality of his exceptional life. These motifs complete other episodes related to the episode of Štefánik's death: prophecy of his death during his father's funeral by cracking of the family table, foretelling of his own grave, building of the memorial, the magnificent funeral and annual ceremonies – pilgrimages to Bradlo, his fiancé's visits of the memorial, persecutions for paying tributes to MRŠ in various periods.<sup>16</sup>

The myth-creating process through the development of the death motif ranks MRŠ among the historical, national and tragic types of heroes. He satisfies traditional visions about such a hero who joins traditions related to idealness, fatality, which he faces with inner freedom, about his higher rank in the hierarchy, higher

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<sup>15</sup> VÁROŠ, M.: *Posledný let generála Štefánika*. Obzor, Bratislava 1991.

<sup>16</sup> ROY, V.: *Národný hrdina generál dr. M.R. Štefánik a jeho mauzoleum na Bradle*. Myjava 1932, p. 60: Clement Simon, ambassador of the government of the allied France said about Štefánik's funeral at Bradlo that although he had "travelled all over the world, he had never experienced anything so moving and more beautiful than that burial ceremony and that only a few kings had probably been honoured by such an act of piety and love".

mission for a community and about nation-liberating efforts.<sup>17</sup> The dramatic death of such a hero is characteristic. The historicity anchors the story in actual events and in a particular place. Such a folklore principle is characteristic of legends. Tragicness, fatality and vagueness of the event related to nation's interests offers a subject matter for imagination which is typical of the poetics of a fairy-tale to folklore. The extraordinary, even adventurous life of MRŠ interrelates these reminiscences with the elements of novelistic accounts influenced by folk reading and sentimental romantic literature. From the point of view of the form, we encounter features of various genres in the episodes of the cycle about MRŠ – fairy tale, legend, novelistic tale and recorded memory.

The motif of Štefánik's death in the folklore cycle can be divided into smaller segments which actually follow in succession in particular accounts: 1. news about the air crash, 2. reaction to the news about the death and associations to prophecies, 3. speculations about the cause of the air crash (political interpretations, variants in the regional and religious changes of the time), 4. building of the memorial on Bradlo hill, preparations for funeral and the burial ceremonial, 5. the cult of the memorial and pilgrimages to Bradlo, 6. persecution for such manifestations and intentional damages to the memorial (the motif of the enemy against the cult).

The political interpretation comes to the fore in two segments – speculations about the causes of the air crash and suppression of the cult. Interestingly, it is just here that the political moods, aversions, and sympathies of the time are transferred, revitalizing this cycle. At the same time, they are dynamic components of the cycle. The other segments are more or less stabilizing elements not only of this motif in the cycle, but the cycle as a whole in the story-telling repertoire. Both elements are myth-creating. The parallels of interests in the updating elements in the segments of the accounts about the death and the grave of renowned political and national representatives in the history of Slovakia can also be found in political allusions to the cults from different periods related, for example, to T.G. Masaryk, J. Tiso, A. Hlinka, and recently also to G. Husák and currently A. Dubček. They touch the way and circumstances, accusations and a measure of the cause of the death, interventions and attitudes of some people in this connection. They also concern the cult of the grave from ordinary, annual, and political visits, the cult of monuments and memorials of personalities as compensatory graves at different places reminding us of their lives. The building of grave monuments and ceremonials promoted by church rituals, secret assemblies and symbolic or protest celebrations in unfavourable conditions are also involved. The emergent cults of "folk martyrs" are of similar character; they demonstrate, in contrast to the official representatives of the nation, the attitudes of the civic masses and reawaken predominately in critical historical peri-

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<sup>17</sup> von SEE, K.: *Germanische Heldensage*. Part *Das Menschenbild der Heldensage*. Frankfurt, Athenäum Verlag 1971, pp. 166–171.

ods of the particular nation. The cults of Jan Palach and Danka Košanová, as well as some hints in the case of R. Remiáš from the latest section of Slovak history can serve as examples. The significance and the role of the motif of unnatural, unexplained death of the hero points, for example, to the connection between the tragedy of Ľudovít Štúr shot while hunting, which might have been an intervention of the Hungarian secret police (1856), MRŠ (1919), and Alexander Dubček (1992). A. Dubček died after a car accident and many versions trying to explain the accident started to appear: from coincidence through the planned exchange of a driver for a “stuntman” with an assignment to induce the accident, through the actions of pathogenic zones on the particular section of the motorway where the accident happened, up to his liquidation as a prospective Slovak president by the Czech side before the split of Czechoslovakia to do harm to the international position of Slovakia. There is even the Russian side coming into play, to do away with him to hinder his testimony in a trial involving the Soviet Communist party in Moscow. Further researches of the newer cults of national history and their folklorizing can indicate the method of their mythicization. The researches of the oldest and the most developed modern national mythicizing process carried out so far show that the principle of the mythicization of Štefánik’s death is of more universal character. It is built on the relationships between the updating dynamic elements as basic impulses and the stabilizing, developing elements. The untimely death of the hero – human-victim-ideal-symbol bringing the hope of freedom, peace and new life after the period of crisis where all norms and moral relationships have been violated, hinders the expected actions of the hero in favour of the community. Its cause considered as a betrayal is denounced as a guilt with respect to the whole nation. A tension between the real and the archetypal situation arises and is associated with political conflicts, opinions, attitudes, and relationships in different forms variously updated; in the new real situation it should lead to harmonization and integration of the relationships and of the life of the community.

The folklorized political mythicizing process such as Štefánik’s folklore cycle contains not only a variety of political illusions, justification of political attitudes, but also the archetypal fate of the violently or mysteriously killed hero and through his life the national idea embodied in the national hero is transferred to immortality in folklore tradition.