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Baba Yaga, Monsters of the Week, and Pop Culture's Formation of Wonder and Families through Monstrosity

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Abstract: This paper considers transforming forms and their purposes in the popular culture trope of the televised Monster of the Week (MOTW). In the rare televised appearances outside of Slavic nations, Baba Yaga tends to show up in MOTW episodes. While some MOTW are contemporary inventions, many, like Baba Yaga, are mythological and fantastic creatures from folk narratives. Employing the concept of the *folkloresque*, we explore how contemporary audiovisual tropes gain integrity and traction by indexing traditional knowledge and belief systems. In the process, we examine key affordances of these forms involving the possibilities of wonder and the portability of tradition. Using digital humanities methods, we built a “monster typology” by scraping lists of folk creatures, mythological beasts, and other supernatural beings from online information sources, and we used topic modeling to investigate central concerns of MOTW series. Our findings indicate connections in these shows between crime, violence, family, and loss. The trope formulates wonder and families through folk narrative and monster forms and functions. We recognize Baba Yaga's role as villain in these episodes and acknowledge that these series also shift between episodic and serial narrative arcs involving close relationships between characters and among viewers and fans.

Keywords: fairy tale; popular culture; television; intermediality; wonder; families; folkloresque; formalism; digital humanities

For popular culture, Baba Yaga affords a wondrous form to be appropriated with other forms in a Monster of the Week (MOTW) television show. An ambiguous Slavic figure, her origins stem from primeval sources in a Russian pantheon where she plays mythological and ritualistic roles of earth mother and death guardian ([1], pp. xxx–xxxiv; [2], pp. 8–31). With her iconic huge nose, iron teeth, and other ugly features, along with her mortar and pestle flying contraption, and her chicken-legged hut, she is distinctive and easily recognized. In Russian folktales including “Baba Yaga”, “The Feather of Finist the Bright Falcon”, “The Tsar-Maiden”, and “Vasilisa the Beautiful”, she may be known as a witch, grandmother, cannibal, examiner, and helper [1]. Never the protagonist of tales, she nonetheless may be both an antagonist and a helper, a threat to life and a benefactor of light. Her wonder, thus, is marked by being awful and full of awe.

Baba Yaga's presence has spread from Russia to the West since the nineteenth century. She may be thought of as a constellation of iconic features and ambiguous functions that together may coalesce and reconfigure in an array of genres, themes, modes, and media. Indeed, she has become a transcultural and intermedial figure associated with Mussorgsky's orchestral *Pictures from an Exhibition*, Ivan Bilibin's ubiquitous illustrations, and a wide array of popular, global products and productions from picture books to sneakers to punk rock to video games ([1], pp. xliv–xlv). An International Fairy Tale Filmography (IFTF) search brings up thirteen Baba Yaga films over the past seven decades,

mostly Soviet, Russian, or Eastern Bloc productions, and two from the United Kingdom. This indicates that she maintains some bearing over space and time and adapts to various media and cultures.¹ Therefore, examining Baba Yaga's particular affiliation with the MOTW trope brings together folklore, fairy tale studies, narratology, media studies, adaptation studies, popular culture studies, psychology, and literary history and theory around the key issue of powerful traditional forms transforming.

For well over two centuries, intrigue over forms transforming has marked the emergence of modern scholarly fields, involving biology and poetics, as well as social sciences. Scholarly divisions such as literature, folklore, sociology, anthropology, art history, and humanities along with perceived divides of human expressivity, art, and knowledge between elite, popular, and folk cultures suggest that some forms transform due to sociocultural forces of colonialism and capitalism [3,4]. Given this history, folklore scholarship claims traditional forms and has emerged from antiquarian investigations and romantic nationalist inclinations [5–7]. Folklorists favor artifacts, songs, stories, manners, and customs learned and transmitted orally, by imitation, and in performance; these forms are widely shared yet still uniquely claimed by specific individuals and groups [8]. Questions of transformation especially have informed folk narrative research, and the tale has been a gateway for formal inquiry linking folklore with literary studies, anthropology, psychology, and linguistics [9–12]. Stephen Benson explains, "Folktales are intrinsically unstable" and thus lead to variability, "the basic constituent elements of a narrative can be manifest in a number of different versions" ([9], p. 22). Accounting for such variation with continuity leads to tale type and motif indexes, Propp's morphology of functions, and more linguistic-based narrative theories ([9], pp. 23–41). An impetus for this scholarship remains tracing and understanding the social work accomplished or constrained by such communicative forms and their transformations.

Adaptation studies and literary studies also traverse historical and contemporary lines of thought that involve cultural and media studies in concern about forms transforming and issues of variation and continuity. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoön* considers classical precedents of media adaptation, advocating that poetry and painting do not become conflated even though they may be considered together as "painting is mute poetry and poetry a speaking painting". He reiterates that criticism and art should distinguish among media although there will be shared forms ([13], pp. 4–5). For contemporary literary and cultural studies, Caroline Levine posits a broad definition of form to "mean all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference" in order to more effectively coalesce insights on a "new formalist method" ([14], p. 3). To avoid the conflation-of-media mistake Lessing critiques, Levine addresses the *affordances* of forms, borrowing from design theory to mean "the potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs", and she recognizes that all forms afford potentialities and portability ([14], pp. 6–7). We see Baba Yaga as a traditional form affiliated with folk narrative that has been appropriated by the MOTW trope to serve as a pop culture form, and we inquire into what this affords in terms of aesthetic and social potential.

Given that Baba Yaga's appearances on television remain quite limited, especially outside of the film rebroadcasts and animated shows on Soviet and Russian TV, it remains striking that there is a perceptible pattern. The few productions including Baba Yaga listed in the Fairy Tale Teleography and Visualizations (FTTV), so far, come from North America and Japan. Whether in an anime, supernatural drama, or children's mystery episode, this figure is associated with an antagonist in the MOTW trope, obviously so named because protagonists face a new monster each week. The wiki TVTropes attributes the MOTW label to the television show *The Outer Limits* [15] and its promise to bring viewers a new monster every week. A strict definition requires that the monster only appears in one episode and does not become part of an ongoing story arc although the temporality of weekly viewing affects the monster encounters [16]. The monster figure takes various forms over successive weeks with a recurring purpose to threaten the well-being of the protagonist, and even of the whole world. The

¹ The International Fairy Tale Filmography was accessed for a Baba Yaga origin search on 26 February 2016.

threat catalyzes social relations in order to confront the monster's deformity and deviance, and more significantly to combat the will to subjugate and dominate. When Baba Yaga takes the monster position, the wondrous ambiguity that makes her both a helper and an antagonist in the tales lessens as her affordance for deformity and self-interest makes her another MOTW villain to be defeated.

Thus, the Baba Yaga figure is not organizing the MOTW trope, which has had at least as much to do with space aliens as traditional monsters since its inception, but rather it fulfills some key purposes that depend on her unique affordances even as they are transformed and flattened by the pop culture trope. Protagonists in the different series seek her defeat because she is traditionally ugly, powerful, and awful, which primarily means that she seeks control for her own self-serving benefit. This formation of Baba Yaga as sheer villain reduces the complexity and ambiguity of the folk narrative figure. Because producers have recognized the form affords the MOTW trope, Baba Yaga in association with the different weekly monsters invites consideration of monstrosity itself, a pop culture construct of who and what fits into the monster antagonist form and also of why monsters are threatening. Moreover, in the transformation of the strictly episodic MOTW format for ongoing story arcs, defeating the monster becomes aligned with constructing and maintaining relationships modeled on families. As a pop culture form that seeks a wide, loyal audience, the MOTW trope has come to feature protagonists and friends who build close relationships by regularly confronting monsters which, in the process, invites the MOTW viewers also to build close relationships with the fictional characters and with fans. Our recursive textual analysis and digital humanities topic modeling affirm that Baba Yaga emerges as a wondrous MOTW monster who, as a self-serving villain, affords social relations to formalize around families, both natal by blood and figural families of choice.

As a way to investigate the MOTW trope, we turned first to digital humanities methods; our purpose was to leverage a computer's computational capacities to take a step back and get a broader (yet paradoxically also more specific) view. Implementing scalable reading as an analytic tool can help identify patterns that lead to deeper insight into the tropes. We built a corpus to analyze by first identifying shows with a MOTW trope and compiling the data that episodes might provide. Aggregating patterns in the metadata and implementing textual analysis of the content of our corpus itself then incorporates the Baba Yaga figure from specific episodes into the affordances indicated through creating a MOTW monster typology and topic models (models which, in the abstract, might help explain some of the deeper, underlying composition of the trope). This research opens many questions and potentialities, but for this article it specifically provides details about how popular culture, with the MOTW trope, formulates wonder and families through monstrosity. Our corpus contains 18 different series, ranging from the full run of *The Outer Limits*, through the 1990s shows that revived the trope such as *The X-Files* [17] and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* [18], to the most recent seasons of shows such as *Supernatural* [19] and *Dr. Who* [20]. Many of these shows had longer-than-average runs as far as TV series go, giving us 2168 episodes of television to explore. The dataset contains both descriptive metadata—episode plot summaries, character and actor names, and broadcast information—as well as textual content: in this case, subtitle files from each episode. That we investigated subtitles rather than scripts is significant; subtitle text only captures words spoken by a character (whether in dialogue or narration), and thus provides a focused snapshot of what was significant enough to be part of a conversation or audible framework in the episode.

Speaking is often important in these shows. Plots of MOTW episodes are usually portrayed as a Sherlock Holmes-ian mystery, where characters spend a great deal of time verbally discussing the monsters themselves as well as clues and twists. This holds true for both literal monster plots (such as in episodes of *Scooby Doo* [21] and the *X-Files*) and for metaphoric ones (such as episodes of *House* [22], where the doctors had to diagnose and treat a different disease each week, or episodes of *Criminal Minds* [23], where the FBI spent large chunks of screen time conversing about the monstrous weekly serial killer). With this paradigm in mind, we built a text corpus that combined each episode's dialogue with its metadata, and started to build computational models to explore how the monsters might be functioning across the specifics of a given series' theme or season arc.

Because the MOTW trope becomes a pop culture construct of who and what becomes a monster-antagonist, our first model was concerned with the various forms the monster could take across all these MOTW episodes. We built a “monster typology” by scraping together lists of monsters, folk creatures, mythological beasts, and other supernatural beings from Wikipedia, Freebase, and other online information sources. Trying to account for the forms that played the most prominent or recurring monster role, we searched through our dataset (both the subtitles and the metadata) and weighted appearances of monster types and names in the various episodes. For example, a monster antagonist reference appearing in an episode plot summary might get more weight than a passing reference in the subtitle text, but multiple repetitions of a name throughout a given episode would also be given greater weight. Our computer algorithms then ranked our weighted scores to determine which forms most commonly function as a monster of the week. The data shows that “demon” is the most commonly employed reference to a monster in our MOTW episodes, followed by “witch”, the generic term “monster”, and then “vampire”.

It is important to acknowledge that our typological choices emphasize traditional monsters whereas technological or psychological monstrosity may not be identified given our search parameters. All monster types imply a belief system and ways of knowing and assessing dilemmas and threats to survival through a deviant human form. Gregory Schrempp observes that monsters in general are anthropocentric. He explains, “If we were capable of imagining an alien being that was entirely free of us—a ‘totally other’—it would not be monstrous” ([24], p. 241). Monsters, to be identified as such, must have some human resemblance and deviate from something ordinary. This then implies that monstrosity involves some human deformation that threatens humanity although it certainly may implicate relationships and other life forms such as plants, insects, amphibians, animals, beasts, mechanical objects, and technological inventions as well. That “alien” appears in the more frequent monster types indicates that the extraordinary status leading to MOTW monstrosity may be extraterrestrial. But, most striking in the MOTW data is the preponderance of malevolent spiritual, supernatural beings taking the monster form that suggests a convergence of Christianity and earlier belief systems: demons, devils, witches, and vampires. The predominant appearance of these figures as MOTW monsters in our corpus may say something about a lingering satanic paradigm in pop culture.

While this overview of monster types is intriguing, we wanted our models to dig deeper into the data and explore the more complex narrative patterns underlying the seemingly formulaic monster confrontations. To do this, we employed topic modeling, a staple investigative tool of machine learning. Topic models are, at their heart, models of probability, where common clusters of words in a given text are grouped together to indicate which word groups, when present in a text, form a coherent “topic”. As machines running the probability algorithms over a corpus of texts have no easy way to assign semantic labels to these topic sets, common topic model tools will instead return these word lists, allowing scholars to make sense of what the topics, or word clusters, might indicate about common narrative themes or conversation subjects.

Running the topic model simulations numerous times, slightly changing assumptions about how many possible topics to search for, what sorts of function words to include or exclude, and so on, we began to see patterns emerge across our corpus of MOTW episodes. There were strong signals of each show’s basic premise; for example, one fairly large topic included words such as “alien”, “ship”, “planet”, and “space”. When we mapped the relationship between topic and show, we found this almost exclusively in sci-fi MOTW series such as *The X-Files* and *Star Trek* [25]. Other topics signaled television shows dealing with magic, religion, and so forth. However, four topics cut across all the shows, indicating a narrative cohesion that seems important for MOTW storytelling on television. The first of these demonstrates a common framework of setting or place with words such as “night”, “police”, “body”, “found”, and “clue”. Such a topic provides tangible evidence for the claim that MOTW episodes employ crime and detective motifs even when not explicitly in a mystery genre. The second common topic continues to lay out major narrative themes across episodes; words such as

“woman”, “sex”, “male”, “rape”, and “blood” are grouped together, revealing just how often MOTW television stories deal with violence, usually against women.

If these first two topics in our modeling illustrate common narrative modes of setting, theme, and a mystery and crime plot, the other two episode-spanning topics perhaps tie back to the MOTW trope’s sense of narrative purpose. One of these topics employs words such as “father”, “mother”, “love”, “house”, “parents”, “child”, “friend”, and “family”. While it may be almost too obvious to label this topic as being about interpersonal (usually familial) relationships, functionally such a topic plays an increasingly vital role in these shows. Generally speaking, characters in the shows we are exploring are not family, and in fact usually are not even friends in the first few episodes. Rather, the various monster plots serve as a catalyst for actually creating the familial-like bonds with the monsters determining the controlling issues or exigence. While the formation of such bonds through trial and hardship is a television narrative trope that goes far beyond procedural MOTW episodes, it functions quite a bit differently in a show such as *Angel* [26] (where, even in later years with more serialization, week-to-week monsters act as MacGuffins to draw the makeshift “family” closer) than it does on heavily serialized monster shows such as *Lost* [27] (where an antagonist creature such as the smoke monster must eventually be explained, justified, and situated narratively in the larger series arcs, often to less-than-successful results). We see that the other most common thematic topic is quite similar, superficially, since terms such as “mother”, “father”, and “child” are also included. Although, the clustering algorithms here associate these familial labels with words such as “died”, “gone”, and “hard”. In other words, this topic concerns the loss of a close human relationship and keys on the natal family impacted by the monsters’ violence and subjugation. Unexpectedly, the topic modeling suggests that dramatic arc *and* episodic MOTW series concern themselves as much with close relationships as with monsters per se. Our data analysis confirms that Baba Yaga as a traditional figure associated with motherhood, danger, ugliness, old age, witchcraft, life, and death would serve well in the narrative components and concerns of MOTW series, especially those associated with strong will, threats, and relationships.

As popular culture producers and viewers appropriate the Baba Yaga form for the television trope, they associate a monster’s will to dominate with Baba Yaga’s specific constellations of supernatural strength and mythic powers and, thus, reformulate her traditional wonder as a form of sheer villainy. The traditional portability of these forms, which means transmission through person-to-person channels of imitation and performance, transforms into the portability afforded by the technologies and institutions associated with mass media. The shareable traditional forms associated with folklore that appeal to popular culture are being conceptualized as the *folkloresque* in recent work by Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffrey A. Tolbert [28]. Popular culture has an orientation toward entertainment, middle and lower social classes, production for mass distribution, and a profit motive; it is a field and subject of study, as well as a mode of expression. As Foster configures it, “Popular culture is a set of processes and products that exists within a commercial-industrial structure and are oriented toward financial remuneration” ([28], p. 7). A simple definition of the folkloresque, then, is that it is popular culture’s “perception and performance of folklore” ([28], p. 5); in other words, the folkloresque involves ways that traditional forms transform when produced for mass consumption. When these forms transform as popular culture, they connect “to some tradition or folkloric source existing outside the popular culture context” ([28], p. 5). Wonder is something tradition affords popular culture in general and that Baba Yaga and traditional monsters afford the MOTW trope specifically.

While a MOTW episode is not a fairy tale and Baba Yaga is not only a fairy-tale character, the forms intermingle in part because they all afford access to wonder through shareable character traits, functions, plot moves, and themes. Cristina Bacchilega writes of wonder as an effect that “involves both awe and curiosity” and reiterates the fairy tale’s primary affiliation with wonder ([29], p. 5). Marina Warner, introducing a collection of French wonder tales, states the case for wonder: “It names the marvel, the prodigy, the surprise as well as the responses they excite, of fascination and inquiry; it conveys the active motion toward experience and the passive stance of enrapturement” ([30], p. 3).

Foster considers authenticity a major contribution of folklore to popular culture through the folkloresque because it implies the validation afforded by tradition itself ([28], p. 5). Yet, wonder should be considered folk narrative's greater affordance because it links the validation of tradition with potentiality. As Warner observes, "All the wonders that create the atmosphere of fairy tale disrupt the apprehensible world in order to open spaces for dreaming alternatives" ([31], p. xx). When Baba Yaga transforms into a folkloresque form in the MOTW trope, her traditional potentialities are drastically foreclosed as she remains only a villain, but as the monster form, she still catalyzes the threat that leads protagonists to assess and formulate new family relations.

A Baba Yaga indexes cosmic realities and potentialities of borders, beginnings, and endings, and her appearance in a MOTW episode affords the production a traditional formulation of the mysteries and challenges of life. Among other tale types, she is associated with "Hansel and Gretel" (ATU 327) in the story "Baba Yaga and the Kid", with "Beauty and the Beast" (ATU 425) involving an animal bridegroom and search for a lost husband in "Finist the Bright Falcon", and with "The Frog Princess" (ATU 402) involving an animal bride in "Vasilisa the Beautiful" [1]. Andreas Johns confirms that Baba Yaga is most at home in the folktale, "usually identified by its marvelous, fantastic elements" ([2], p. 44). Still, her affiliation with a Russian pantheon filters into her tale roles and presages her alliances with mythical gods and demi-gods from other cultures as well. Late eighteenth-century artists such as writer Mikhail Chulkov and editor Matthew Guthrie, according to Johns, consider a Baba Yaga to be a Slavic "underworld goddess" and Russian Persephone associated with death, winter, storms, blood sacrifice, and "represented in the form of a monster" ([2], pp. 16–20). In other situations, she is involved with birth, cycles of the sun and moon, and familiar with nature and creatures. Always fantastic and sometimes majestic, she associates with other dangerous, powerful beings such as Koschei the Deathless, dragons, tsars, even children and youth. According to Helena Gosilco, she "unites fundamental polarities in a circle or ring that images the cycle of life" ([32], p. 13). More than just a story character and villain, a Baba Yaga is a supernatural figure and even replicable as in some ATU 425 versions where the protagonist travels to three successive Baba Yagas in her quest for the lost groom. In the MOTW trope, protagonists investigate, confront, judge, and seek to contain or destroy such an extraordinary and deformed being because, for selfish purposes, such wonderful powers are going awry.

Given centuries of presence in tales and these rich, ambiguous mythical and tale associations, Baba Yaga, just by name, adds this form's supernatural affordance to *Soul Eater*, a manga created by Atsushi Ōkubo [33] and 51-episode anime [34]. Rayna Denison identifies some features that indicate this anime would achieve transnational reach in "its presentation of a group of young teen characters, in its gothic aesthetic style and in its generic positioning in the action and horror genres" ([35], p. 451). Notably, Denison does not associate success with the folkloresque deployment of myth and tale and the traditional epistemological, ontological, and cosmic systems that the Baba Yaga and other traditional forms bring to the series. Still, these traditional associations lie latent in the features Denison does identify, since gothic styles and action and horror genres also can take a folkloresque turn toward long-held, cross-cultural knowledge and belief expressed in recognizable traditional forms.

Baba Yaga, therefore, as a monster form in the anime affords these streams of traditional knowledge, belief, and world making to flow through the series, especially because a brief reference to her abode interacts with other traditional and pop cultural forms and their affordances. Created post-Harry Potter, the *Soul Eater* series features, both in manga and anime formats, a dizzyingly complex range of characters, monsters, social and interpersonal issues, and story arcs in a simple premise that students of the Death Weapon Meister Academy (DWMA), including teams of youth meisters and transforming humanoid weapons, must gather 99 evil souls and one witch in order to turn the weapon into a death scythe for use by the headmaster, Shinigami—Death himself [33,34]. The well-being of the world hangs in the balance.

Associated with the manga arc "Operation Capture Baba Yaga Castle" and an "Arachnophobia vs. DWMA" arc that concluded the anime series, the ambiguous Russian witch, death guardian, earth

mother, donor, tester, and villain only appears in the castle name. Still, the folkloresque is at play because the familiar form of her iconic hut on chicken legs transforms here into a spider-like castle guarded by eight spider-leg towers with controlling Demon Tool Locks that protect the throne room. The capacity for replication applies as the domicile bearing Baba Yaga's name now has eight rather than two legs. The castle is named for Baba Yaga, and it houses the central antagonist, Arachne, who also in a folkloresque move plays a role in the series' transformed version of Greek mythology's Gorgon sisters. Arachne Gorgon, one of three powerful sister witches, is the targeted antagonist of this arc, founder of the Baba Yaga Castle hidden in an Amazonian river basin and leader of Arachnophobia, an eight-hundred-year-old group creating Demon Weapons and using the Book of Eibon, a Demon Book associated with a great sorcerer of knowledge, to fight Death [36].² Medusa retains her name and becomes the middle, rather than youngest, Gorgon sister, while her traditional siblings Stheno and Euryale are replaced in *Soul Eater* by Arachne and Shaula. By giving the story an eight-century backdrop and transnational as well as supernatural geographic realm, *Soul Eater* incorporates folkloresque traits that can be understood in part through the Baba Yaga allusion and MOTW trope although both allusion and trope are augmented through the complexities of manga and anime.

Inherently intermedial and ripe with adaptation, manga and anime also teem with popular culture. As Foster configures it, admittedly in blurry categories, pop culture implies "entertainment and frivolity" the culture of the "nonelite", elements of "mass production and mass distribution", which involves "mass media", and aspects of "consumer culture" ([28], pp. 6–7), emphasis in the text]. Anime has become big, transnational business. Denison's article attests to the financial stakes in the growing disputes over fan subtitling, distribution, or piracy [35]. Yet, the bent toward the commodified and widely popular need not inherently exclude the possibility of these forms involve artfulness and wonder. Specifically working through the implications for anime and art, Susan Napier surmises, "Animation in general—and perhaps anime in particular—is the ideal artistic vehicle for expressing the hopes and nightmares of our uneasy contemporary world" because it is a "fusion of technology and art" ([37], p. 11). She champions anime as a "narrative art form", as well as a compelling visual form ([37], p. 10). More directly to our interests and observations of forms transforming, scholars associate animation with metamorphosis itself—requiring and inviting fluid motion and change. Napier says, "The favorite object of transformation is clearly the body" ([37], pp. 35–38). *Soul Eater* in the concept of humanoid weapons incorporates such metamorphosis while manifesting multiple other transformations over the course of the manga and anime, not to mention another iteration in *Soul Eater Not!* [38], something of a prequel also written by Atsuchi Ōkubo. Baba Yaga in the televised MOTW episodes remains only an antagonist, even if in *Soul Eater* it is only as a domicile named for her that must be overtaken.

As with many pop culture monsters and villains, and some historical ones as well, desiring omnipotence for self-gain and world domination becomes the great threat associated with the monster form in this series. Arachne becomes a target of the DWMA and of her sister Medusa and other witches because in her desire to become the Mother of All she captures and destroys witch souls [3]. Because Arachne and Medusa are sisters, this contest also plays out as sibling rivalry which is won by Medusa when Arachne and Baba Yaga's Castle are breached and eventually destroyed. In this story arc, we see that the topical affiliation of MOTW monsters with family, homes, friends, death, and loss remains salient. The other primary topics from our data analysis, of crime procedurals and violence, ramify as well in terms of the monster figure enacting evil intent and being met with violent confrontation. Other plot elements and backstory moments in *Soul Eater* turn on complex natal family relationships and on the development of familial bonds among friends as well. Anime resists the neatly packaged closure of

² Although *Soul Eater* was not included in our corpus, clearly some concept of demon, at least in translation, serves as a crucial identifier of powerful objects and beings in the series.

many fairy-tale endings, still the anime final episode, in English “The Word is Bravery!” [39], resolves the well-being of the world, and as importantly for many fans, asserts the well-being of key characters and their relationships. Cosmic status is righted at the anime’s close by the assertion of bravery over fear, which becomes a rite of passage for the main protagonist, Maka, and many of her associates. The monsters’ desires to subsume control for themselves is dispersed toward the protagonists’ growth, relationships, and future possibilities.

While popular culture transforms traditional forms into the folkloresque for the MOTW trope, these wondrous forms interrogate family formation through deformation and villainy. Focusing on childhood and gender ideologies, Bacchilega and John Rieder conclude that what is at stake in transformations of form that involve adaptation, narrative and media genre mixing is “a fight to control the energies of fairy tale wonder” ([40], p. 41). Distinctive tale elements do not melt unidentifiably into a pop culture mass when appropriated into television shows and the MOTW trope, and neither do those of myth, legend, and other narrative forms nor those of televisual genres. Levine’s term very aptly asserts the ways these forms combine without dissolving in that “patterns and arrangements carry their *affordances* with them as they move across time and space” ([14], p. 6, emphasis is mine). Rather famously, Warner surmises that “on the whole fairy tales are not passive or active; their mood is optative—announcing what might be” ([40], pp. xx). This optative mood becomes an affordance of the Baba Yaga form in the MOTW trope, ironically, as the monster seeks its own purposes and to control future possibilities. The trope foregrounds investigation, confrontation, making a judgment, and dealing with monsters all as ways of handling wonder going awry.

Seeing how Baba Yaga shares her folkloresque aura through minimal indexing in *Soul Eater* leads to considering the effect on wondrous possibilities and family relations when more components come into play in a live-action supernatural drama. The Canadian series *Lost Girl* includes Baba Yaga in the fourth episode of season two [41]. This episode, titled “Mirror, Mirror”, suggests that the plot requirements of a drama series reformulate the traditionally ambiguous Baba Yaga functions. While the episode contains familiar motifs from the fairy tales, such as girls required to do menial chores and Baba Yaga being involved with cannibalism and an oven, two major plot points come from other narrative and belief traditions. This *Lost Girl* episode signals the truth claims and reality experimentation linked with legend. Elliott Oring observes that legend “requires the audience to examine their world view—their sense of the normal, the boundaries of the natural, their conceptions of fate, destiny, and coincidence” ([42], p. 126). Monsters challenge the normal and natural, which is why they must be sought out and confronted in these shows because they not only challenge norms but usually overtly attack them, symbolically and literally. Defeating the monster Baba Yaga in all three episodes studied here becomes a badge of destiny because her self-interest blocks, or destroys, the well-being of others. In a way, every MOTW series involves legend because by asserting that monsters exist they interrogate a world view that sees them as fictional and imaginary. And every episode threatens wonder as the monster tries to foreclose possibility.

Legend is indexed in this episode by how Baba Yaga functions as an ancient possibility that becomes a reality that can be accessed, by magical means, from the real world. She is sought in this episode to curse an errant boyfriend and is invoked by a Bloody Mary-type chant, itself a legendary activity, involving a mirror. The mirror here has a more functional than symbolic role: more portal to a curse than indicator of beauty. This plays into how the legend affords key elements of the MOTW trope, investigation and a willingness to delay judgment. *Lost Girl* advocates these very traits through its basic premise that the protagonist, Bo (Anna Silk), is a succubus, in this case configured as a being who feeds off of humans through sexual activity and may destroy them. Here, the MOTW trope transforms from the basic iteration and allows monstrosity to be part of the protagonist while she and her friends confront the dangerous possibilities of their own differences and other monsters. The series develops a complex ontology of supernatural Fae beings that stems primarily from traditional belief systems, rather than inventing new creatures [43]. Related to our monster typology, succubi and many of the beings in the series are demons and must be discovered and understood for their supernatural traits

while operating in a human world. The process of investigating and delaying judgment is invoked repeatedly in the series, and this evokes the experimental mode of legend's claims to truth.

This episode, thus, transforms traditional behaviors of a Baba Yaga by tilting her function toward legend more than the tale. In Russian fairy tales in English translation, Baba Yaga certainly is a threat to those who wander to her hut, and while she may be sought for a boon, just as Vasilisa is sent to obtain light ([1], pp. 170–82), she rarely is sought to act like a witch and put a curse on someone. Cannibalism is more of her threat in tales. Yet, in this episode Kenzi (Ksenia Solo), Bo's sidekick, offers to get Baba Yaga (Kate Lynch) to seek revenge for Bo's being jilted by Dyson (Kris Holden-Ried). Already, the plot summary reads something like a conversation among teens although the show is set among twenty-somethings and involves adolescent issues of sexuality, identity, and interpersonal relations on a ramped up scale of age, experience, and the supernatural. Being sought to curse errant boyfriends is presented in the episode as a well-known role for a Baba Yaga. Kenzi, whose actress is Latvian-Canadian, considers other spells and then picks Baba Yaga explaining, "Every young Russian dyevooshka is taught to fear the old witch who lives deep in the woods in a cottage...Occasionally she'll help chicks get revenge on a dude who's wronged them" [41]. Eventually, she enters a bathroom and chants, in Russian and English, to Baba Yaga and asks for Dyson to feel the pain of rejection he has inflicted on Bo. Writing his name in red lipstick on the mirror, she leaves just before the mirror smashes to the sink and a shadowy figure rasps, "As you wish". The bathroom mirror in the episode indexes Bloody Mary, which is a teenager's legend trip because it involves going to place, often a bathroom, and completing actions to summon her and test belief [44]. Bloody Mary usually reveals the future, attacks those who seek her, or fails to appear at all.

Having young adults seek Baba Yaga to solve a problem through a teenage divination legend acknowledges the weighty tasks of gaining maturity and the ongoing applicability, and folkloresque use in the show, of traditional knowledge to work through such dilemmas. But, Kenzi's problem-solving technique is problematic itself when Bo becomes marked by Baba Yaga, and Dyson is rejected by every woman he meets. Characters learn the hopeful and dreadful consequences of calling on Baba Yaga when she is more than a possibility. Kenzi consults her fortunetelling aunt to enter Baba Yaga's realm and ends up destroying her in the oven and freeing her friends and several other unfortunate young women from the evil witch. That characters cannot walk through the woods to Baba Yaga's cottage establishes the ontological shifting of the series, the importance of having overlapping worlds. This ontology is referenced in the opening title sequence, where Bo in a voiceover states, "I belong to a world hidden from humans. I won't hide anymore. I will live the life I choose" [41]. Like other supernatural drama series, characters learn to see and deal with otherwise unseen paranormal, mythical, and magical worlds within the human world [45]. In addition to cosmic confrontations to save that human world, the more quotidian task in *Lost Girl* is for the protagonist, and her friends, to navigate their worlds successfully which means, in this case, by independence, making choices, and building close relationships.

The treatment of Baba Yaga in this episode is not an homage or recasting of her ethnographic or narrative authority but rather a folkloresque opportunity to mix traditional expressions and knowledge and belief systems for necessary plot and character development (Disney makes similar choices in most of its fairy-tale films). Baba Yaga can be sought, in Russian, to curse a boyfriend; she can appear after the manner of the Bloody Mary chant. She can be treated like a legend while retaining traits of a fairy-tale witch. When characters surmise that Bo bears Baba Yaga's mark, given the premise of the show and its deployment of the folkloresque, it is predictable that she would be a real being capable of helpful or harmful acts and accessible across worlds. Yet, Kenzi asks in surprise, "Baba Yaga is real?" [41]. MOTW series portray that possibility, evoke that wonder. Yet, in this episode what seems to matter more than the supernatural overlay is that friends need to work through betrayal and restore their friendship using any means available—even a Russian witch.

As a definitive formulation of MOTW trope, Baba Yaga does not return to the series, which continued for five seasons and ended with a complex set of narrative possibilities and relationship

issues to confront with its finale. Relationships matter a great deal here, and as the series came to a close in 2015, the choice that mattered most to many fans seems to have been which partner Bo would end up with. By the series finale, “Rise”, there also are cosmically complicated natal family issues such as Bo being the daughter of Hades (Eric Roberts) and possibly joining him in world destruction, starting with dismantling Toronto [46]. There is even more family intrigue in the finale involving the birth of Bo’s half-sister, the death of the baby’s mother, and Kenzi’s new role as the baby’s caregiver [46]. Yet, on the website AfterEllen, Dorothy Snarker posts the major concern for the finale, “I want Bo with ‘X’. I won’t be happy unless Bo is with ‘X’. Because that’s what happens when you invest five years into a show—you care what happens to these characters” [47]. For a series that made life choice a central feature, sexuality an imperative, friendship a resource, family a cosmic challenge, and navigating human and supernatural worlds an important mandate, it is striking that romance and committed pairing would prevail in the end. At this memorable point in the series, the fairy-tale motif most heavily questioned and critiqued in the past four decades reemerges. For the finale, the legend issues of knowledge, normative boundaries, and destiny roil on—subordinated in fan desire for a highly anticipated happily ever after (HEA).³ That’s a pop culture formation of wonder and family through monstrosity worth noting.

Baba Yaga and the other monsters of the MOTW trope, as our textual analysis and topic modeling indicate, threaten and catalyze family relations. These relations involve dyadic pairs, parents and siblings, and familial bonds among close friends. This happens thematically and also corresponds with changing narrative mores on television. The family component fits the MOTW transformation from a disconnected weekly series of monster confrontations towards the serial narrative arcs favored by contemporary television. Other issues also are investigated and developed over long-arc serials, but the challenges of natal families and the possibility of new family formations stem from, and counter, the self-serving threats posed by the MOTW monsters. Both series involving Baba Yaga and the MOTW trope analyzed to this point aired in the early 2010s, and both incorporate components of complex TV storytelling theorized by Jason Mittell. He establishes a poetics of narrative TV complexity that deserves its own study in terms of these series, but for now, his basic definition is most salient: “narrative complexity *redefines episodic forms under the influence of serial narration*” ([49], p. 18, emphasis in the text). In the series analyzed here, this narrative poetics links with the folkloresque deployment of traditional knowledge and belief systems which we have seen include supernatural beings, narrative genres, tale motifs, and mythical world building, and destroying, strategies. The narrative arcs that involve Baba Yaga as the monster specifically formulate families as they confront and work through a monster’s will to dominate and through individual character’s and viewers’ desires for close relationships and belonging.

We posit that the folkloresque adds welcome diversity and possibility to the realism of recent serial melodrama (although exploring the contiguities and possibilities of fantasy and reality works for realistic *and* fantastic television series). Unlike *Breaking Bad* [50] or *The Wire* [51], the recent series that include a Baba Yaga MOTW episode depend on beings who have existed over a long duration. The plots and themes of these shows are informed by ancient knowledge, and the episodes advocate learning by investigation, confrontation, and delayed judgment. These series lead to cosmic battles of good and evil in addition to featuring significant attention to character interaction and relationships. In other words, these series deploy a range of folk narrative genres and the folkloresque. With online streaming and other new technologies altering how viewers access, see, and incorporate watching television into their lives, industry analysts, producers, and viewers all want to know where this is going and if it still can be called television. Along with the more recent trend toward complex narrative arcs, series deploying the MOTW trope still have at least some episodes with one major monster

³ Most fans approved of this HEA finale. A SpoilerTV poll [48] concludes that 271 voters, or 32% responding, found the finale Awesome; 14% great; 16% good; 17% OK, and 22% poor or awful.

confrontation resolved before the episode's end. The MOTW series show that some things do stay the same while television production and viewing have been in remarkable flux over this period; the more things change, the more they can also stay the same.

Amid this flux, at least one uncomplicated MOTW series from the 1960s remains in rebooted, franchised production—the former Saturday morning kids' cartoon, Hanna-Barbera's *Scooby Doo, Where Are You?* [21]. Although new characters appear in later productions, the franchise centers on Scooby Doo, a Great Dane, and Fred, Daphne, Shaggy, and Velma, four teenagers who drive around in a groovy van, confront a monster each week, and solve mysteries. It is not so surprising that it would take over forty years for Baba Yaga to take her turn as a Scooby MOTW. There was a Cold War with the Soviet Union for half of those forty years. Baba Yaga tales were not retold in another classic of 1960s TV fairy tales—*Rocky and Bullwinkle's "Fractured Fairy Tales"*, although that show did not shy away from Cold War issues [52]. The Baba Yaga form was not yet fitting somehow. According to the FTTV database, she doesn't appear in North American television until a 1999 episode of *Arthur* explored multicultural beliefs, possible realities, and storytelling assumptions in another children's animated show [53]. Whatever the political and cultural causes, it was only in the first iteration of the Cartoon Network's years that Scooby and the gang met Baba Yaga in *Scooby Doo! Mystery Incorporated (SDMI)*, the eleventh televised configuration overall [54]. No spoiler here, she was not really a supernatural being but rather a person in disguise with a greedy motive, thwarted by the meddling kids and their huge, endearing dog.

With the *Scooby Doo* franchise, the monster is crucial to each week's mystery investigation, yet the monster gets unveiled as a conniving human and debunked in every episode, putting us again in the realm of legend as studied by folklorists. As Jan Brunvand has noted, making a truth claim is a defining feature of the genre [55]. Brunvand dedicated his first collection of urban legends, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, to "my students past and present, skeptics and believers alike" [56]. So when the monster's veracity becomes a point for both skeptics and believers, a MOTW series involves legend in its genre mix. *Soul Eater* makes no such truth claim but rather assumes a world where mythic beings and humans constantly interact. In all *Scooby Doo's* reboots and intermedial guises, including books, comics, live-action feature films, and games, the series follows a standard formula of mystery investigation about a disruptive monster. The investigation eventually unveils a human with a grudge or greedy plan who has perpetuated the offense. The world, in a cosmic sense, is never threatened by the monster, but the story scene is always challenged with some impending violation including commercial development, environmental degradation, and other personal gain of the perpetrator over community well-being. Therefore, the transforming forms in this Baba Yaga episode, "The House of the Nightmare Witch", involve common motifs including the mobile hut on chicken legs and threatening behaviors with the distinctive *Scooby Doo* feature of the formulaic unmasking to show that this monster is merely a man [57]. As with other series, the monsters do the cultural work of bringing the folkloresque into the show because the monster implies some extraordinary aspect that often stems from traditional ways of knowing and many cultures.

The deployment of the folkloresque makes the cultural, and supernatural, differences foreign because in the MOTW trope the difference is deforming and threatening. This Scooby episode depends on foreign associations with a time and place where witches live in creepy huts in forests. That place is marked as Russian by explicit location at the opening of the episode, by feigned accents, clothing, Baba Yaga herself, and Faberge eggs. As the episode starts, Velma (voiced by Mindy Cohn) and a new character, Hot Dog Water (Linda Cardellini), are attempting to break into Baba Yaga's hut which happens to be displayed in a Russian museum. This implies the historicity of Baba Yaga if she and her hut can be put on display, but of course, this is debunked later in the episode when the Russian museum curator (Troy Baker) is revealed to have impersonated Baba Yaga in order to hide Faberge eggs in the hut and sell them on the black market. Debunking in the case of *Scooby Doo* always neutralizes the supernatural by explaining the monster with mundane, if nefarious, motives, and in the case of Baba Yaga, associates Russian culture with old-time images of huts, witches, and elaborate Faberge

eggs created for defunct emperors. Not every MOTW episode makes such cultural commentary but it often is implied that cultural difference may be threatening or catalyzing of new relationships.

The break-in of Baba Yaga's hut is part of a serialized plot that distinguishes *SDMI* from other episodic franchise versions, showing that even the most formulaic series could be influenced by complex TV narrative trends. Velma is searching the hut to obtain part of a planispheric disk that, when completed, will reveal important information to Mr. E (Lewis Black), another new character in this particular series. Unlike the simple friendship shared through a focus on mysteries, this iteration develops relationship and character drama over the series involving Fred's (Frank Welker) missing birth parents, a love triangle that leads Daphne (Grey Griffin, also voice of Baba Yaga) to temporarily leave the Scooby gang, and romance between Shaggy (Matthew Lillard) and Velma. More than these relationship arcs, the dramatic plot arc is also highly folkloresque in that season two involves Babylonian mythology and cosmic forces that must be decoded and understood (rather than overtly battled as in the *Soul Eater* and *Lost Girl* series) to avoid global disaster. Like some MOTW series, *SDMI* also sets scenes in high school emphasizing the characters' adolescence. The serial supernatural and relationship arcs mix with the folkloresque, but not so well with the history and ethos of the franchise, and they mostly are dropped in the next iteration, *Be Cool, Scooby Doo!* [58], which is back to MOTW investigations. The series' own familiar narrative moves and character interactions suffice, and hold their own, against more complex storytelling.

Obviously, the formula of confronting, and debunking, a new monster every week remains central. The episodic nature of "The House of the Nightmare Witch", including the signature closing, asserts a lingering appeal for the recognizable and familiar through formulas. The simple interactions of the four main characters and Scooby Doo, even their typecasting as the pretty girl, handsome boy, smart girl, goofy guy, and talking dog allow for satisfying, memorable, and replicable storytelling and viewing. However, formulaic aspects have been a concern and a methodological and theoretical component of popular culture studies since the field emerged in the 1960s, about the time of this series and the MOTW trope itself. John G. Cawelti advocated attending to the formulaic as a methodological feature of popular culture because content-oriented studies tended to overgeneralization [59]. David N. Feldman critiqued and extended Cawelti's formulaic approach by emphasizing benefits of incorporating Russian formalist techniques in popular culture analyses [60].

Feldman advocates breaking popular narratives into their most basic parts called motifs, which is also what folklorists mean by the term, and labeling them either free (disconnected) from the final resolution or bound (connected) to it. He posits that the free and bound motifs are involved in a predictive method to better understand narrative because re-familiarization, or the final sorting of those motifs, may be a key to appreciating audience reception [60]. The play of free and bound motifs defamiliarizes audiences, if only temporarily, from a predictable, chronological story. Feldman explains that there then seem to be two ways to refamiliarize, one he calls "aesthetic" and the other "pragmatic" ([60], pp. 210–11). TV shows in series, setting aside franchises like *Scooby Doo*, and in specific episodes come to an end, and the aesthetic refamiliarization feels like a payoff if the free motifs have not totally overwhelmed those that turn out to be bound to the final resolution. Pragmatic refamiliarization, according to Feldman, involves how the final resolution resonates with life outside the story, with audience values, expectations, and relevance ([60], p. 211). According to Feldman's approach, refamiliarization may be the difference between the pleased and contented overall response to the *Lost Girl* series finale and the disappointed and dejected response to *Lost*. In the case of *Lost* there seems to have been a failure of both aesthetic and pragmatic refamiliarization; the innumerable free motifs did not resolve well with what turned out to be bound motifs, and expectations of many fans were dashed by the irrelevance of the finale after years of dedication to the series. It seems likely that the triumph of evil in a MOTW series would break the audiences' ability for pragmatic refamiliarization given the strongly folkloresque pull for good to win in the end. A *Scooby Doo* episode could end with a real monster who gets away, but fairy-tale, and MOTW, formula would be shattered. Viewers would be confused or disappointed, and fans may become distraught.

In regard to Baba Yaga and the MOTW trope, these three episodes connect an optative mode of wonder and a retributive mode of justice. The monster receives justice for executing self-serving desires and plans while protagonists are left in the end with new family formations and potentialities. Baba Yaga's crimes in these episodes all involve hurtful actions toward others for personal gain and include destroying other witches, betraying a friend, and selling national treasures. In the traditional tales, her demise is rarely so assured because she does not always violate such regulations and sometimes serves as helper. In the MOTW trope, her castle is unlocked and overrun; she is pushed in the oven or revealed as a fraud because of violating social regulations and seeking to trick and dominate others. The tale still exerts lingering power in the MOTW trope through its transformations as it mixes with myth, legend, and televised mystery procedurals, anime, and supernatural drama. Fairy tale remains crucial to these episodes in great measure because, as Feldman would put it, its traditional associations and folkloresque applications, its familiar forms, and well known plot arcs help writers, creators, producers, viewers, and fans get the free and bound motifs in place as these transforming forms suspend and meet audience expectations and relevance.

Katherine J. Roberts, in an astute study of fairy tale and case study law, explores how this happens. In part, she says it is because "bad precedents' get retired", and stories that don't work "are left behind, much like cases which are overruled and fall into disfavor" ([61], p. 518). This disfavor seems to have happened with the serialized arc of *SDMI* which was jettisoned after two seasons. While *Lost Girl* fans needed to know Bo's life-long partner and wanted that HEA, Scooby fans need to wonder about the relationships among the gang and, obviously with all the reboots, continuously defer any conclusive endings (except those at the end of each episode). Coming up with new monsters each week is a daunting production task, so Baba Yaga presents a new precedent, as it were, because her stories have not been televised much outside of Russia and Slavic countries. But, audiences still gravitate toward monsters who violate social regulations and, thus, the monsters take the form of villains upon whom protagonists distribute retribution. Roberts observes that fairy tale "consistently seeks to uphold legal distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate acts of violence" ([61], p. 499). The monster's violence is illegitimate because consuming and self-serving while the protagonists' violence legitimately saves the group and society from harm.

In these MOTW series, the need for clarity prevails even though recovering the villain has been an important pop culture move recently. Providing an explanatory back story for a villain's anti-social tendencies, such as in *Maleficent* [62], happens regularly now and perhaps recapitulates the monster's backstory built into *Frankenstein* [63]. So, if recent MOTW series assure Baba Yaga's demise more often than in traditional tales, perhaps creators and viewers do not know her well enough yet to treat her as more than just another monster. Roberts attributes much of fairy tale's polarized thinking to young audiences and the socializing role of tales, stating "fairy tales make it their primary business to punish the bad and reward the good, and to teach readers the boundary between the two" ([61], p. 511). These shows with adolescent protagonists aim toward society's nascent adults and reach both older and younger audiences as well, and with these Baba Yaga episodes draw stark distinctions that portray and punish her as bad. In her specific case in these episodes, monstrosity does seem to metamorphose into sheer retribution.

What then of wonder? The focus on retribution and relationships tells something about audience expectations and what remains relevant. Our topic analysis indicates concern in the dialogue of MOTW shows about crime and violence as well as interest in close relationships such as natal families, friends, and loss. Pat Gill's study of teen slasher films of the late twentieth century focuses on parental neglect and abandonment as a central factor in the disaster that comes upon the teens [64]. The *Buffy* movie in 1992 [65] exemplifies this parental non-involvement although the later television show corrects the oversight by giving her an involved single parent. The televised version even may have instigated the involvement of family relations with the monster confrontations. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* [18] and *Angel* [26], created by Joss Whedon, are known for specifically working around the tropes' most strict episodic definition while regularly involving monsters. Relationships and the unfolding story take

precedence in shows like this; as Whedon acknowledges, “Although we came out of it [Buffy] as a sort of monster-of-the-week format, it was clear that the interaction was the thing that most people were latching onto” ([66], p. 4) Paying homage to the 1960s MOTW children’s mystery show, Buffy’s friends even are known as the Scooby gang ([66], p. 12), a phrase that implies the hometown chumminess of teenaged friends and the possibilities of close relations built around nefarious purposes, whether conducting them or defending from them. More than just parental issues, which ramify into complex genealogies over generations in shows like *Soul Eater* and *Lost Girl*, these MOTW shows work through the association of wonder with families.

In these Baba Yaga episodes, when the monster threatens to subsume power to herself, this act instills awe in other characters that draws them together. This pro-social response, rather paradoxically, may come from a diminished sense of self evoked by experiencing something naturally or supernaturally grand according to the psychological research of Paul K. Piff. Several of his research team’s studies demonstrate that “awe leads to more prosocial tendencies by broadening the individual’s perspective to include entities vaster and more powerful than oneself” ([67], pp. 895–96). By definition and function, the monster already is more vast and powerful than mere humans in at least some way. Baba Yaga’s traditional form affords folkloresque access to natural and supernatural awe when transformed into the MOTW trope. In these episodes, the monster advocates self-aggrandizement when made aware of opportunities for more power, and wants to rule others and the world, but this leads the protagonists to confront such self-interest by seeking intimate prosocial relationships as partners and families.

This exploration and interrogation of close relations fits the impulse of wonder toward inquiry and awe, suggesting that these MOTW stories investigate, confront, delay judgment about, and seek to understand the possibilities of family itself. William A. “Bert” Wilson reminds us of the Robert Frost poem “The Death of the Hired Man” for insights into two ways of thinking about families and relations. There is in the poem a famous phrase uttered by Warren, the husband, “Home is the place where, when you have to go there/They have to take you in”. Mary, the wife, tries to convince her husband to let their former hired hand stay with them because he is dying, and she responds, “I should have called it/Something you somehow haven’t to deserve” ([68], p. 73). Wilson connects Warren’s view of home with a biological, household view of family “held together by the bonds of blood, marriage, or adoption” while Mary’s view gets linked to “those clusters of people we have come to call families, even though they are not bound together by consanguineal or affinal ties” ([68], pp. 73–74). This tension plays out in the poem as Warren queries why the hired man came to their house instead of his rich brother’s thirteen miles away. The Arachne/Medusa battle of *Soul Eater*, the father Hades plot in *Lost Girl*, and the search for birth parents motif in *SDMI* bring natal family issues into the monster investigation and confrontation, illustrating the centrality of this topic.

Yet, these shows may be known more for the ways the characters bond with each other and their mentors through their schooling and monster hunting. Most of these close relationships are more healthy and supportive than the natal family dysfunctions. These relationship arcs create the “shipping” possibilities so appealing to fans and the friendship attachments developed over the weeks and years that make the characters themselves seem part of the viewer’s family. Examining the Baba Yaga MOTW episodes indicates how the monster catalyzes the central topics from our data analysis that involve crime, violence, loss, and family. In terms of audience relevance, the relationship issues hit closer to home than the cosmic battles of good and evil ever will, we hope. These compelling narratives and storytelling frameworks invite production teams to incorporate traditional knowledge and belief systems into these series. So, it is the prescience of folk narrative that brings the folkloresque into the MOTW trope, and only the most basic possibilities with Baba Yaga have yet come into these productions. What is there now deepens and extends the potentialities of close relations by casting them in the midst of overlapping benign and malignant worlds that appear much like our own.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

MOTW	Monster of the Week
HEA	Happily Ever After
SDMI	Scooby Doo Mystery Incorporated!
BYU	Brigham Young University

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