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Postgraduate Certificate in Romanian Literature and Culture

# Romanian Folklore and Mythology

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## Romanian Folklore and Mythology

Romanian folklore and mythology are rich cultural traditions that have been passed down through generations, shaping the country's identity and worldview. These stories, legends, and beliefs provide insight into the values, beliefs, and fears of the Romanian people. In this course, we will explore key terms and vocabulary related to Romanian folklore and mythology to gain a deeper understanding of this fascinating subject.

### Folklore

Folklore refers to the traditional beliefs, customs, stories, songs, and practices of a particular community or culture. Romanian folklore is a vibrant tapestry of myths, legends, fairy tales, and folk songs that have been handed down orally from generation to generation. These stories often feature supernatural beings, heroic figures, and moral lessons that reflect the values and beliefs of the Romanian people.

One of the most famous figures in Romanian folklore is Dracula, a vampire who is based on the historical figure Vlad the Impaler. The legend of Dracula has inspired countless books, movies, and other works of art, making him a global icon of horror.

### Mythology

Mythology encompasses the myths, legends, and beliefs of a particular culture or civilization. Romanian mythology is a complex tapestry of stories and beliefs that blend elements of ancient pagan traditions with Christian influences. These myths often feature gods, goddesses, heroes, and monsters who embody various aspects of the natural world and human experience.

One of the most important figures in Romanian mythology is Zalmoxis, a deity worshipped by the ancient Dacian people. Zalmoxis is often associated with the sun, fertility, and the afterlife, and his cult played a significant role in shaping the religious beliefs of the region.

### Key Terms and Concepts

1. **Strigoi:** In Romanian folklore, a strigoi is a type of undead creature similar to a vampire. Strigoi are believed to be the spirits of the dead who return to the world of the living to seek revenge or cause mischief.
2. **Calusari:** Calusari are a group of dancers and ritual performers in Romanian folklore who participate in traditional rituals to ward off evil spirits and bring blessings to the community.
3. **Iele:** The iele are mythical creatures in Romanian folklore who are beautiful, seductive, and capricious. They are often associated with natural phenomena such as storms and whirlwinds.

4. **Dragons:** Dragons are powerful, mythical creatures that appear in Romanian folklore as symbols of chaos, destruction, and the forces of nature. Heroes often have to defeat dragons to prove their bravery and strength.
5. **Moroi:** Moroi are vampiric spirits in Romanian folklore who are said to haunt the living and drain their life force. They are often associated with death, disease, and misfortune.
6. **Baba Yaga:** Baba Yaga is a witch-like figure from Slavic folklore who appears in some Romanian stories as a fearsome old woman who lives in a hut on chicken legs. She is often portrayed as a trickster and a wise woman.
7. **Straja:** Straja is a protective spirit in Romanian folklore who guards a particular place, such as a village or a field. People would often make offerings to the straja to ensure their protection and good fortune.

### Practical Applications

Studying Romanian folklore and mythology can provide valuable insights into the cultural heritage and identity of the Romanian people. By exploring these stories and beliefs, we can gain a deeper understanding of the values, fears, and aspirations of the community. Furthermore, these traditions can inspire creative works of literature, art, and music that draw upon the rich tapestry of Romanian folklore.

For example, many Romanian writers and artists have drawn inspiration from folklore and mythology to create works that celebrate the country's cultural heritage. By incorporating elements of these stories into their creations, they can connect with audiences and evoke a sense of nostalgia, wonder, and pride in their shared heritage.

### Challenges

One of the challenges of studying Romanian folklore and mythology is the vast and diverse nature of the subject. With thousands of stories, legends, and beliefs to explore, it can be overwhelming to navigate the intricate web of traditions and customs that make up the cultural landscape of Romania. Additionally, the oral nature of these traditions means that many stories have multiple versions and variations, making it difficult to pin down definitive interpretations or meanings.

Another challenge is the evolving nature of folklore and mythology in a modern, globalized world. As Romania's society changes and adapts to new technologies and influences, traditional beliefs and practices may be at risk of being lost or forgotten. It is essential to preserve and protect these cultural treasures for future generations to ensure that the rich tapestry of Romanian folklore and mythology continues to thrive and inspire.

In conclusion, Romanian folklore and mythology are essential components of the country's cultural heritage and identity. By studying these traditions, we can gain a deeper appreciation of the values, beliefs, and fears of the Romanian people. Through exploring key terms and concepts related to Romanian folklore and mythology, we can unlock the mysteries of this fascinating subject and connect with the vibrant tapestry of stories that have shaped Romania's cultural landscape for centuries.