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Present

# Unraveling Tales: Exploring Intersections between Folkloristics and Literature

**Make Ukraine Great Again: Gogol's Viy, St. Cassian and Ukrainian Beliefs**

Alina Oprelianska (University of Tartu, Estonia)

This paper aims to draw connections between the horror Novella "Viy" (published in 1835), written by the Ukrainian writer Mykola Gogol and the witch-lore and Ukrainian beliefs about St. Cassian. Gogol's novella featured a monastery student Khoma Brut who happened to cause a witch's death and was called to provide a funeral service for her; the monastic student managed to stay alive for two nights, however on the third night he died soon as he saw Viy. Thus, in this manner the novella has evoked substantial discussions about the origin of the Viy and whether or not he existed in Ukrainian folklore.

Although there are no notions about the title Viy in Ukrainian folklore, beliefs about St. Cassian display some similarities between the Saint and Viy. Being an ambiguous figure, St. Cassian was believed to appear among the living once every four years; he is believed to have two huge eyebrows and can kill the living creatures with merely a single glance. Another belief describes him as the chained guardian of Hell, whom God allows to look up at Leap year.



Meanwhile, Ukrainian folklorist Pavlo Chubyn's'kyi in 1872 collected a legend with a similar plot to Gogol's novella, except for Viy. Instead of him, the key figure is a new born witch capable of seeing where the young priest is hiding. The legend reflects the beliefs about the born-witches and trained-witches, as well as Ukrainian mortuary customs for witches that will be discussed in the paper.



**Alina Oprelianska** is a PhD student at the University of Tartu (Estonia), and PhD student at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Ukraine), specializing in the field of Fairy Tale Studies with a focus on gender aspects. Her research interests are Ukrainian wonder tales, customary law and folk beliefs. She is grantee of Darmasiswa scholarship (2012-2013), Scholarship of Mykhailo Hrushevskyi (2020-2021), and Voldemar Siimon Memorial Scholarship (2021). She is involved in the Tartu University's project PRG670 'Vernacular Interpretations of the Incomprehensible: Folkloristic Perspectives Towards Uncertainty.'



**LECTURE  
SERIES  
ON ZOOM**

**22nd July 2021**

**16:00 Estonian time and 18:30 IST**

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