

Article

Viy in Nikolai Gogol's Novella and Related Mythological Creatures in Ukrainian Folklore

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Abstract: This article examines Ukrainian folkloric parallels to Viy, a character in the horror novella of the same name by Nikolai Gogol. It is a formidable chthonic, demonic creature whose eyelids cover the eyes and need to be lifted, and the gaze sees what is hidden from others. Although the writer claimed that this character, like the entire plot of the story, was taken from Ukrainian folklore, some modern researchers claim that Viy is the author's own invention. This is contradicted by folkloric data, primarily Ukrainian lore. Demonic characters with different names but with the same appearance and very similar functions as Viy appear in Ukrainian folk tales, legends and beliefs recorded in the 19th and 20th centuries. The plots have various degrees of closeness to the plot of Gogol's story, showing that Viy is an authentic figure from Ukrainian folklore.

Keywords: Nikolai Gogol; Ukrainian folklore; fairy tales; legends; beliefs; Viy

1. Introduction

The mystic novella *Viy*, first published in the story collection *Myrhorod* (1835), has a special place among the works of Nikolai Gogol. The title of the novella is the name of a male Slavic demonic creature who plays a key role in the plot. It tells the story of Khoma Brut, a student at a monastery in Kyiv. While travelling home at the end of term with two fellow seminarians, the group becomes lost. As night falls they take shelter at the house of an older woman, but as Khoma begins to sleep, he is awoken by the woman who snatches him up to fly together through the night sky. Realizing he has been caught by a witch, Khoma struggles free and takes his revenge. As the witch takes her final breath, she transforms into the most beautiful girl he has ever seen. Fearful of the implications, both worldly and supernatural, of what has just happened, he leaves her and runs back to the seminary. Soon after, he is summoned by his master and told to travel to a rich Cossack chief's home to read psalms over his daughter who has crawled home and is at death's door after being attacked by some ruffian. Her dying wish is that Khoma Brut (she asks for him by name) keep a vigil over her corpse and read psalms over her for three nights to allay her disquieted spirit and redeem her sullied soul. Khoma is reluctant to comply after his recent scare but is compelled to go, escorted by a retinue of hardened Cossacks to ensure he completes his task. When he finally sees the girl in her coffin, he recognizes the young witch he'd beaten to death. The vigil is held in a neglected chapel and each night the cadaver of the young witch rises from her coffin and assails him, abetted by a host of imps and night creatures, all of which are kept at bay by Khoma's psalm recitations from behind the aegis of a protective circle that keeps the fiends from either seeing or touching him. On the third night, the witch summons Viy because he is the only one who can see through the circle. The squat Viy is hairy with an iron face, bespattered all over with black earth, his limbs like fibrous roots. Viy is led up to the chapel and orders "Raise my eyelids. I cannot see". He points out where the young man is, the spirits all attack, and Khoma falls dead. According to an author's note, "Viy is a colossal creation of folk imagination. This name is applied by people in Little Russia to the chief of the gnomes,



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whose eyelids reach to the ground. The whole story is a popular legend. I did not wish to change it in any way and tell it almost as simply as I heard it" (Gogol 1979, pp. 333, 366–67). This mythological character—with its parallels in Ukrainian and other Slavic folklore, its extremely long eyelids which have to be lifted by lesser demons, its well-known request for that, and the deadly, all-penetrating stare—provides ample material for academic debates. Some scholars, who are the critics of the 'nativist' approach to Slavic mythology, suggest that Slavic folklore lacks a character with the entire set of characteristics exhibited by Gogol's Viy, and they claim that Viy is merely a mystification (Levkiyevskaya 1998). Literary critics delving in a psychology-based interpretation of the novella also considered Viy to be a product of Gogol's own imagination (Rancour-Laferriere 1978; Connolly 2002; Romanchuk 2009). Still, Indo-European mythology has a number of chthonic mythological creatures with a more or less complete set of features linking them to Gogol's Viy (Ivanov 2000, p. 69; Stetsiuk 2000, 2004; Vassilkov and Razauskas 2003; Tyshchenko 2006, p. 164; Gura 2012; Lajoie 2014; Mysykaty 2019). The most prominent figures are the Irish Balor (Pokhishcheniye 1985, pp. 374–75) and the Welsh Ysbaddaden Pencawr (Mabinogion 1995, pp. 86–123), unknown to Gogol. Similar characters can also be found in the Old French Arthurian epic (Chênerie 1989, pp. 1001–3; Foerster 1908, pp. 102–3). In this regard, it is important to determine whether there are correspondences to Viy in the folk tales of Ukraine.

2. Fairy Tales about Witches

Ukrainian folklore has characters with the features of Viy. The plot of a fairy tale from the village of Novoselytsya of the Vynohradiv District in the Transcarpathia Region displays similarities to Gogol's novella. In this tale, the role of Viy is taken by the old Lucifer, who demands to have his eyelids raised so that he can see the protagonist. Three seminarians are hired during the holidays to work for the king. When a witch in the guise of an old woman tries to ride one of them, Ivan Khashcha, he kills her, but she turns out to be the beautiful daughter of the king. Ivan must then read the Psalter over her coffin in church for three nights. For two nights he manages to hide when the princess rises from the coffin because he follows the advice of a sage old man at the inn. Before the third night, the old man advises him to lie down next to the coffin so that the lid will fall on him when the princess gets out. The old man instructs him to lie down in the coffin, fold his arms on his chest, close his eyes and not respond when she approaches. She will promise mountains and valleys, the whole kingdom. If he fails to relent to the princess's pleadings, he will die. The princess climbs out of the coffin and says that she knows where Ivan is hiding, and now she will find him. Khashcha lies down in the coffin. She searches for him but cannot find him and calls upon the evil spirits, but they cannot find him either. She then orders them to summon Lucifer. They quickly bring Lucifer, an old man, already blind. Lucifer says: "You know what? I'm not fit to find him. Come on, lift my eyelids so that I can search for him". Two witches come and lift his eyelids a little. He peers out and says: "I see him. He's in your coffin". They take Lucifer and carry him away. Everyone leaves and the princess is left alone. She asks Ivan to let her lie down in the coffin before the roosters crow and promises him a reward: the throne of the king. But Ivan never relents. After the third rooster crows, she loses her powers of witchcraft, raises Ivan from the coffin, lies down there and dies (Zinchuk 2008, pp. 41–47). The tale, which ends well and has many discrepancies in its details, is unlikely to have been influenced by Gogol's story. The plot of a hero forced to spend three nights over the body of a dead witch and hide from her is widely represented in the Ukrainian folklore (Sumtsov 1892, pp. 472–76; Chudakov 1906, pp. 30–32; Nevirova 1909, pp. 43–49; Stetsiuk 2000, pp. 131–36). It was these stories that formed the folklore basis of Gogol's novella. Some of them were recorded in the Carpathians and Transcarpathia and have episodes similar to the fairy tale from Novoselytsya (for example: Sabov 1893, pp. 219–21; Chendey 1960, pp. 321–23; Demyan 1964, pp. 103–6; Lintur and Ihnatovych 1968, pp. 85–88; Lintur 1969, pp. 177–80; Pushyk 1976, pp. 84–91; 1983, pp. 72–75; Zinchuk 2009, pp. 174–76). The research of Johannes

Bolte and Georg Polívka on the Grimm brothers' *Die Prinzessin im Sarge und die Schildwache* notes the related tales from many folk traditions, including those of German, Norwegian, Icelandic, French, Italian, Armenian, Magyar and Gypsy origin (Bolte and Polívka 1913, pp. 531–37). The authenticity of this demonic character as a genuine figure from oral lore is proved by its direct parallels in the folklore of other Slavic nations, in particular the Serbs. The Serbian fairy tale has a partially analogous plot, where a soldier has to spend three nights in a church with a dead princess who is trying to find him. This story features the blind father of the devil, who asks to prop up his eyelids with twelve stakes so that he can see the one hiding (Eschker 1992, pp. 61–64).

Moreover, close parallels to the senior devil with long eyelids can be found in the folkloric narratives of the Letts and Lithuanians (Arājs 1967, pp. 290–91; Alksnite et al. 1957, pp. 285–86), Livonians (Loorits 1998, pp. 185–86), Latgalian Russians (Makashina 1976, p. 95; Friedrich 1980, pp. 227–29), Ludza Estonians (Kallas 1900, pp. 383–84; Annom et al. 2018, pp. 337–38), Mari (Aktorin 1995, pp. 101–4) and Chuvash (Sidorova 1979, pp. 188–94). Their plots are completely independent from Gogol's story, but there the devils, in difficult cases, in the same way call on their elder, whose long eyelids are raised with pitchforks. He must find the hidden hero or help deal with a strange phenomenon. Therefore, Lucifer in the Ukrainian fairy tale could be an authentic image too.

3. Heroic Folk Tales

Similar characters, but dual female and male, can be traced to heroic tales recorded in the village of Dulova in the Tiachiv District of the Transcarpathia Region. The story describes ancient female and male creatures with long eyelids that have to be propped open to see visitors. They feel animosity toward mortals and are considered the world's masters. The female is the mother of devils and reigns over half the world. The male used to reign over the entire world before yielding to the knight White Polianyn. In one of the fairy tales, prince Ivan Farmudz, looking for his kidnapped wife, comes eventually to his sister, who is married to an evil spirit. Ivan's wife is in the seventieth country far away, serving as a cook for the Heathen King. The brother-in-law gives Ivan his prophetic horse, but the Heathen King also has a prophetic horse, its older and stronger brother. The Heathen King catches up with Ivan's slower horse and chops Ivan into pieces. His brother-in-law resurrects him and says that perhaps his mother, Baba, could help. She is in charge of half the world and knows a lot, but she might eat Ivan as soon as she sees him. Ivan's journey to find her takes six months. Baba senses him from a distance, roars that she has been living in this place for ten thousand years and has never seen a mortal here yet. She has not eaten fresh human meat for three thousand years, and she is determined to have some. Ivan calls the woman a sweet mother, a dear mother of the son-in-law, and says that he was sent by her son, to whom he gave his sister. The old woman wants to see him but promises to eat him. However, her eyelids have sagged so much that they will no longer stay up. She takes two iron poles, ten meters each, and props up her eyelids so that she can see. When Ivan tells her how he got and lost his wife, the old woman feels sorry for him. She sends him to her husband, but there is little hope there because the hag's husband is even angrier with earthly mortals. The trek to her husband takes six months. The old woman feeds Ivan tin dumplings, and he does not feel hunger the entire journey. The old man senses him from an even greater distance, roars that he has been living in this place for fifteen thousand years and has not yet seen an earthly mortal here. For five thousand years he has not eaten human flesh, but now he will. Ivan calls him a dear father, a beloved father of the brother-in-law, and tells him that he was sent by his wife to the person in charge of the whole world. The old man says that he has already eaten millions of people in his life, but he has never met someone so affectionate and kind. He wants to see him and then devour him. He props up his eyelids with iron pillars twenty meters long. He asks Ivan to tell him about his problem but still promises to eat him. Ivan manages to pity the old man, who feeds him steel dumplings. The old man gives him a stallion and a mare, who are the parents of the rest of the prophetic horses. With the help of these two horses, Ivan

saves his wife, and the Heathen King's horse throws the King from a height on the advice of the stallion and the mare, his father and mother (Lintur and Chendey 1965, pp. 9–29). In another tale, a count's son, who is nicknamed Sitting in the Ashes, gives his three sisters in marriage to evil spirits. He goes to look for a knight named White Polianyn and comes to his younger sister. Her husband, in charge of one-eighth of the world, sends him to her middle brother, who is six months away. The husband of the middle sister, in charge of one-sixth of the world, sends him to her eldest brother, who is six months away. The eldest is in charge of a quarter of the world and sends him to their mother, who is six months away. The younger brother wanders until he finds a rock from which you can reach the sky with your hand. Smelling him, the mother of the evil spirits roars that she has not eaten human flesh for five thousand years. The younger brother calls her dear mother and mother of the brother-in-law, begs her on his knees not to eat him because he gave his sisters to her sons. The mother of the evil spirits wants to see the guy with her terrible eyes, and she takes long iron pillars and props up her eyelids with them. In charge of half the world, she sends him to her husband, who harbors even more anger toward earthly mortals. He feeds the count's son with tin dumplings, after which he does not feel hunger for six months. The count's son then wanders until he comes upon fire-breathing mountains. Sensing his presence, the old man roars and breathes fire, craving human flesh. He props up his eyelids with iron pillars and looks at him. The count's son calls him a beloved father of the brother-in-law, a dear father, and on his knees says that he gave his own sisters to his three sons. The old man feels sorry for him. He knows White Polianyn, who is now in charge of the whole world instead of him. White Polianyn gives the count's son his horse. The knights become comrades and together rule the whole world, protecting people from evil rulers. The evil spirits, their mighty father and mother die in a fight with the demonic mother of the count's son (Lintur and Chendey 1965, pp. 119–33).

In another tale from the village of Puznyakovtzi of the Mukachevo District in Transcarpathia, a prince, while searching for a golden bear together with his brothers, finds a hole that leads to the subterranean world. After descending into the underworld, he encounters in succession three old sisters whose eyelids are propped up by struts so that they can see. Each of the sisters gives him a bottle of strength potion and a ring that summons devils to help. He marries the daughter of one of them (Dey 1981, pp. 45–50). In a fairy tale from the village Horinchevo of the Khust District of the Transcarpathia Region, the protagonist, Sycamore Ivan, is abandoned by a deceitful friend in the underworld. Ivan is sad, walks along the path day and night, sees a lighted hut, and decides to spend the night. He comes to the hut, opens the door, and there sits an old hag whose eyelashes reach to the ground. They greet one another, she calls him a dog's son, agrees to take him into her service, and orders him to take a pitchfork and lift her eyelids so that she can see him. Ivan takes a pitchfork and lifts the hag's eyelashes. She recognizes him as Sycamore Ivan, says that she knows him and the sycamore from which he was made. She instructs him to look after her mares. He must lead the mares out to pasture and bring them back three times, otherwise his head will be cut off. The mares are the hag's daughters. Ivan manages to pass all the tests, and as a reward he begs for a magic horse, and this angers the hag. She chases Ivan through the air as he flees on the magic horse, but she dies, unable to cross the border into the human world above. Ivan restores justice and marries one of the princesses he saved (Lintur 1969, pp. 151–60).

In a fairy tale from the village of Zbui of the Zemplén County in Hungary, a similar character is Gindzhibaba (Baba-Yaga), the mother-in-law of dragons. An emperor's son, Yanko, born by a female dog, goes with his brothers to return the sun, moon and stars stolen by three dragons and kills the dragons. On the way back, bitch-born Yanko tells the brothers to wait. He turns into a cat and climbs into Gindzhibaba's hut through the chimney. The youngest daughter recognizes him by his eyes and tells her mother that the cat looks like Yanko. The other two daughters confirm that the cat has eyes like Yanko. Their mother Gindzhibaba replies that she would recognize him if she saw him. The youngest goes into the hallway to get an iron pitchfork to lift one of her mother's eyelids so that she can see.

She hooks on one eyelid and lifts it up. Gindzhibaba sees him and orders the daughters to grab him and put him in a bag. Thanks to his resourcefulness and courage, Yanko deals with all the evil spirits and turns Gindzhibaba into a mare (Hnatiuk 1898, pp. 39–54). In another fairy tale from the village Horinchevo of the Khust District in the Transcarpathia Region, the king has one son, Ivan. It is time for him to get married, and he only wants a natural girl and goes to look for her. In the wilderness he sees a lonely mill. There is an old woman whose eyelashes hang down to her knees. He greets her and calls her sweet mother. She raises her eyelashes. She had not seen a living soul for a hundred years. She offers to let him rest and then go to her middle sister the next day. She gives him a horse and a ball of thread, and he has to hold on to the thread. A year later he reaches his middle sister. Her eyelashes reach to the ground. The prince greets her and calls her sweet mother. She raises her eyelashes and explains that she has not seen a living soul for two hundred years. She offers to go to her older sister in the morning, gives him a horse and a ball of thread. A year later, Ivan reaches her older sister. He says hello and calls her sweet mother. The old hag's eyelashes are so long that she can barely raise them, but then she helps the prince find his betrothed (Lintur 1979, pp. 5–11). Perhaps the sharp-sighted assistant of the main character from the fairy tale recorded in the Kyiv Governorate also resembles Viy. He raises his eyes (possibly eyelids) with the help of a pitchfork and is able to see everything in the sky (Moszyńska 1885, pp. 110–11). The plots of the above fairy tales are not connected with Gogol's novella, but in these folklore works there is also an autonomous folkloric and mythological character with large eyelids and a high status.

4. Legends about Mangy Buniak

A separate place among the parallels to Viy is taken by Mangy Buniak (Bonyak, Banyak, Bunio). This mythological creature from the legends and beliefs of Western Podolia, Galicia and the Boiko Region is similar to Viy in his power and might. His heavy eyelids are raised by his minions upon his command, revealing a deadly stare that kills living beings and disintegrates objects. The analogies between this character and the mysterious creature from Nikolai Gogol's novella were made long ago, but now researchers have access to significantly more folkloric materials. The legends about Mangy Buniak portray him annihilating an army and destroying castles and towns. In a fairy tale from Galicia, Mangy Buniak is a fantastical creature whose heavy eyelids must be lifted by two people with pitchforks. Then, he sees everything and everywhere for a hundred miles. When he arrives at Queen Helena's palace, he orders his eyelids to be raised with a pitchfork and correctly solves her marriage riddle. Not wanting to marry the monstrous groom, Helena and her people begin to flee, leaving him her possessions. Buniak sees where she has taken refuge and rushes in pursuit faster than the wind, wanting the queen more than her land. The queen escapes Buniak by ordering that large mountains be poured behind her from Lviv to Kyiv, which Buniak overcomes with difficulty (Barącz 1866, pp. 81–83). According to another legend, all the large ancient settlements were built by Saint Helena the Queen, but Mangy Buniak, chasing after her, ruins them with his terrible gaze when his armed force raises his long-haired eyebrows with iron pitchforks (Petrushevich 1874, p. 322). In Galician legends of the early 19th century, Mangy Buniak, the "heathen king", is Satan, surrounded by serving devils, in the guise of a monstrous man of enormous height, with an open belly, a head covered with scabs (mange), and with eyelashes down to the ground, so that if he wants to see, the servants must lift them with golden pitchforks. He comes from the east during the reign of Daniel Romanovych, king of Little Rus. His army is as countless as the leaves on a tree. His first prey is the city of Plisnesko, where Princess Helena, the widow of Roman Mstyslavych and mother of Daniel, with a handful of her soldiers, is besieged. She runs for her life. After burning down Plisnesko behind the fleeing princess, Buniak's troops burned the cities, leaving behind embankments—places for convoys—and numerous mounds where the knights who fought with him were buried. Near Stary Sambir, there is a battle between Daniel and the mangy Buniak, whom Daniel defeats. Having ravaged Drohobych and rested in a mountain castle in Urych, where he

brings his captured booty (fine fabrics, gold, silver, money and prisoners), Buniak and his army leave for Hungary along the stone road made for him by the devils. In Hungary, he burns numerous cities and villages, eventually reaching the sea. Sometimes it is said that he leaves on a golden chariot, but at the border his chariot hits a beech tree, falls through, and grows into the ground along with the Mangy Buniak (Wagilewicz 1844, pp. 181–83; 1842, pp. 163–65). Some tales include Buniak sleeping inside a mountain and waking up once in a thousand years. Others depict him dying when decapitated or when his stare is reflected against him. In the village of Stari Bohorodchany of the Bohorodchany District in the Ivano-Frankivsk Region, people say that Buniak sleeps in Castle Hill with his eyes open. They say his beard is chopped off once every millennium; it has already been chopped off twice. When he comes out into the light from the interior of the mountain, he burns the winter crops with his eyes (Pushyk 2016, p. 215). In the village of Pohonia in Galicia at the end of the 19th century, they said that in ancient times a certain pasha, an infidel named Bunio, came with the Tatars. As the story goes, he arrives with large hordes, but near Zavilov, Prince Roman of Galicia cuts off his head. The head falls to one side, the body to the other. Then, the head starts to roll. The eyebrows on the head were so long that the eyes could not see through them. One day, when they raised those eyebrows on the severed head with an iron pitchfork and the head looked at the settlement, the whole city sank underground. At that time there was no town of Tysmenitsa; it was built when the fortified settlement failed to protect against Bunio. The subsequent history talks about the Cossacks' pursuit of the head (Drahomanov 1891, p. 302). A similar legend from the village of Golenishchevo of the Kamenets District in the Podolia Governorate said that a princess who took a vow of virginity once lived in the local castle, from which traces of a stone fortification and a spring still remained. The strong and terrible sorcerer Sleepy Baniak ruled in the neighborhood, and no one and nothing could stand his gaze. With his eyes he conquered and destroyed everything he turned his gaze to. His eyelids were always closed. He himself could not open his eyes; for this, he needed two assistants, who, standing behind his shoulders so as not to meet his gaze, propped up the eyelids of Sleepy Baniak with golden forks. He decided to subjugate the princess to his power, force her to break her vow and marry him. Baniak sent an embassy to the princess and asked for her hand in marriage. She refused. He then sent an army to the castle, but the castle was too well supplied to be captured. Baniak gets up, arrives at the camp near Golenishchevo and orders himself to be placed where the entire castle would be visible. Two people from his entourage lift Baniak's drooping eyelids to his eyebrows with golden forks. This one glance at the princess's castle was enough for its complete destruction. The walls collapsed, and Baniak's army killed not only the princess's defenders but also all the inhabitants of the town of Divych, which stood below the castle on the river bank. Since then, there has been neither a castle nor a town. On dark and stormy autumn nights, the shadows of the victims wander along the valley on which the city stood. That valley is still called Divych. The ghosts of the former denizens of the castle fly through the air over the fort and in their crowd is a bright, radiant princess who descends into the valley and consoles the mourning shadows. Then, all around you hear the clatter of horses, sounds of horns, screams and war songs with the refrain "Let's go to Divych!" (Dal 1884, pp. 3–5). The Zamchyshe tract in Medobory in the Podolia region is surrounded by the Bohit Valley. According to legend, there was a large city there, which the Mangy Bunio destroyed with his gaze. He was a terrible destroyer who could kill with his gaze, turning cities and villages to dust. His deadly gaze was covered by eyelids and thick eyebrows. Only when he wanted to destroy the enemy's army or take some fortified city, the army could win by lifting his eyelids with a pitchfork (Kraszewski 1894, p. 543). In the village of Kotsyubinchyky in Western Podolia, they said that Mangy Baniak destroyed the ancient city of Bohod. He possessed the power in his eyes to destroy everything. Whatever he looked at, it fell into the ground or turned to stone. In the forest near the village of Rashtivtsi, there was a high mountain, Zvenyhorod. Walking past that mountain, Buniak met a woman and asked for directions. Recognizing his intentions, she showed him the wrong path. Then, he looked at her and turned her into

a rock, which resembles the outlines of a woman and is called Babyna Rock ([Żebrowski 1851](#), pp. 26–27).

In the village of Maciorsk of the Ushitsya District in the Podolia Governorate, ruins called Horodyshche were associated with a similar character. These were the ruins of castle ramparts built by the Mangy Boniak, who had immense power in his eyes. If something needed to be destroyed, a man would stand behind him and open his eyelids with forks. Whatever he looked at was destroyed, and people fell down dead. But a Ruthenian hero approached with his army when there was no one to open Boniak's eyelids. He took the castle, destroyed it and killed the monster. Boniak is also said to have a stone residence in the village of Ivankivtsi in the Kamyanets District that was destroyed at the same time that he was killed ([Levchenko 1928](#), p. 273). In the city of Sambir in Galicia, they said that Buniak attempted to walk across a bridge but met a fortune teller who was washing scarves on the river. His head was cut off by her with an axe and fell from the bridge. In another version from the village of Rozdollya, Buniak was killed by two twin brothers, the first-born sons of a fortune teller, while he was bathing in a bathhouse ([Wagilewicz 1844](#), p. 183). According to a legend from the village of Pomoryany, when Buniak ventured as far as the sea, Alexander the Great, armed with a huge mirror, came out to meet him. When Buniak saw himself in the mirror, he fell through the ground ([Wagilewicz 1844](#), pp. 183–84). The story from the village of Narayiv is similar. The wise Solomon invites Buniak to a service in a church sanctuary lined with mirrors. There he shamelessly lies to the monster until Buniak, in anger, gives the order to raise his eyelids, but when he sees himself in the mirrors, he falls through the ground ([Wagilewicz 1844](#), p. 184). In the village of Deleva of the Tlumach District in the Ivano-Frankivsk Region, they said that in a forest dugout there lived a certain Bun, whose eyes were constantly closed. He had servants who took Bun out of the dugout, raised his eyelids, and from his gaze trees fell in the forest and anyone in his line of sight died. But a certain daredevil went to the blacksmith and obtained an axe, which he equipped with a long axe handle. When Bun stuck his head out of the dugout, the daredevil chopped it off. There ensued a chase on horseback for the head, which rolled through the forest. Tired of serving the monster, Bun's servants joined the chase. The head did not manage to escape ([Pushyk 2016](#), p. 214). The village of Zavaliv of the Pidhaitsi District in the Ternopil Region and Pshenychnyky of the Tysmenytsya District in the Ivano-Frankivsk Region tell the same legend, but added that the monastery in the village of Pohonia arose where Cossacks caught Bun's head ([Pushyk 2016](#), p. 215).

The theme of Buniak's drowning was played out in a legend from the village of Bukivna of the Tlumach District. According to this narrative, Bun was born into a wealthy family from the neighboring village of Petryliv. He was a shaggy half-beast, half-man and was kept in a cave in the mountains, where he was fed raw meat on an iron pitchfork. His parents consulted sorcerers who said that he must not let him see the world because, if he looked at the village, he would break all the houses with his eyes and everything would fall under the ground. One day during a flood, they stuffed him into a barrel and cast it into the Dniester ([Pushyk 1990](#), p. 65; [2019](#), p. 224). A legend from the village of Luka of the Monastyrська District in the Ternopil Region also talks about this. In a cave in the rock of Stink lives a very large man, red, completely bald, with a very large belly hanging over his legs, hanging arms and fused fingers, with a very wide face and bulging eyes of gigantic proportions. His eyelids are kept closed because he kills people with his gaze: wherever he looks, everyone falls dead and houses fall down. When he moves his hand, rocks fall. His name is Bunio. Bunio is insatiable and gets angry when he wants to eat. He threatens to destroy the village. People bring him sheep, calves and barrels of water. When they are late and he is hungry, he gets a terrible rumbling in his stomach. The food is put on carts and brought down from the mountains. When he wants to see what they give him to eat, they take a two-pronged pitchfork, sit on his shoulders and lift his eyelids with the pitchfork. When he eats, he wants to be entertained with singing and dancing. One day he is displeased by the dancing and everyone gets stuck to the rock. Bunio is angry that no food was brought to him, so he leaves the cave and destroys the village. Wherever he looks,

everyone falls dead. Only a little boy and his younger sister, unnoticed by Bunio, manage to escape. The boy shoots an arrow into Bunio's eye, then into the second. Bunio goes blind and dies. People from many villages come together and consult on what to do with his body. The elders decide to put him in a large barrel and throw him into the Dniester. Now, whenever the Dniester overflows, Bunio is blamed. His cave has been blocked with stones (Pushyk 2019, pp. 216–18).

An unusual case is the legend from the village of Pshenychnyky, where Bun is a saint whose head was cut off by pagan warriors. It rolled through the forest while enemies chased after it. A miraculous well was associated with it (Pushyk 2019, pp. 218–19). Perhaps this is an indication of the Buniak cult as a pagan deity. Sometimes he is known as Tsets, Tsetsyn or Horokh. According to one legend, on Mount Tsetsyno (now the outskirts of the city of Chernivtsi) there once stood a large castle inhabited by a giant named Tsets, or Tsetsyn. He was taller than the trees and his hands reached the ground. His eyes, hidden under the huge eyelids, were like two blocks of stone. When Tsetsyn opened them, he had to prop up his eyelids with a pitchfork so that they would not close. If he cast his gaze around the area, then for seven years the fields and vegetable gardens would not bear fruit. He caused much harm to people, but no one could kill him. There was no such power in the world (Pushyk 1990, p. 65). In the village of Grabovets of the Bohorodchany District in the Ivano-Frankivsk Region, people said that King Gorokh once lived on Mount Horodyshche. He had a large castle/palace there, but he spent his days and nights in the cellar of the palace because he had evil eyes. Anyone he looked at would die, and houses collapsed from his gaze. For this reason servants would lead him out into the courtyard blindfolded. And Gorokh was not allowed to leave the cellar. Brave men took positions behind the door with axes and, when the king tried to leave one day, they chopped off his head. The city disappeared, swallowed by the ground, and only a quagmire remained there. The neighboring village was called Gorokholino (Pushyk 1990, p. 65). Sometimes these are nameless characters. In the village of Sadzhavy of the Bohorodchany District, they said that in Miska Mountain, in a cave, there lived an old man who had very long eyelashes, which had to be raised with a pitchfork so that the old man could see. There was no one near the old man, so no one raised them, and if they had been raised, everything would have been devastated. One day a little boy got lost in the forest. He helped the old man go up the mountain. There was a field on the mountain, and oats grew in the field. The old man asked the boy to take a pitchfork and lift his eyelashes. The boy acquiesced, and the old man looked out at the field, and this caused the oats to fall and rot. After this, the field was overgrown with forest. According to another version, the old man invited the boy to serve him (Pushyk 2014, pp. 611–12). In the village of Hlyboka of the Bohorodchany District, they said that on Miska Mountain, in a castle, there lived a sleepy giant. He had servants, and when he wanted to look at the world, the servants raised his eyelashes with pitchforks. He lived there for a long time until some strangers came and cut off his head, which rolled as far as the city of Stryi (Pushyk 2014, p. 612). According to a legend from the village of Maidan-Seredniy of the Nadvirna District, there once was a city of Hupchin, or Hubchin. An evil-eyed landowner ruled there. He was forbidden to look at people and at the light because he might destroy the city. When he was taken out for a walk, he had to be blindfolded. One day at Easter time, this landowner who was being transported in a carriage through the city began to ask that his eyes be untied so that he could look at the light. The coachman removed the blindfold from his eyes and immediately dropped dead. And the entire city of Hubchin fell through the ground. The landowner said: "It's not a pity! It was already so small" (Pushyk 1990, p. 66). The mention of Easter is not accidental, since the sound of underground bells, which supposedly could be heard on Easter, could be associated among Ukrainians with the Mangy Buniak (Skurativskyi 1996, p. 191). A character from the village of Palahychi of the Tlumach District in the Ivano-Frankivsk Region resembles the demonic old women with long eyelids from fairy tales. This is the old woman Palahna, who weighs three hundred kilograms. Her eyelids are lifted with forks. When the Tatars attack the village, people run and hide and Palahna lies in the house.

When the Horde begins to burn the village, the giant woman comes out into the yard. The Tatars get scared and run away. On the site of the burned village, a new one arises, which is called Popelev, because there are a lot of ashes from the fire, and Palahna founds the new village of Palahychi (Pushyk 2016, p. 226).

It is possible that the terrible stories about Viy that Gogol's friend Aleksandra Smirnova heard in childhood from her Ukrainian nanny on the Gromokleya estate near the city of Mykolaiv (Smirnova 1894, p. 41) were reminiscent of these Western Ukrainian legends about Buniak. Although he himself is associated with the invasions of some hordes, Buniak's name can be interpreted from Slavic languages as "noisy" or "humming" (Vasilkov and Razauskas 2003, p. 41). Its analogue in Bulgarian folk mythology is the sleeping giant Imri-papa or Rim-papa, who wakes up once in a hundred years and whose eyelids need to be raised by a pitchfork. He may also be described in legends as running away from enemies (Popkonstantinov 1899, p. 886; Dechov 1905, pp. 81–82; Shkorpil and Shkorpil 1921, pp. 71–72; Mollov 2007, p. 61; Petrov 2001, pp. 216–17). The Bulgarians were afraid that Rim-papa might come on Christmas Eve accompanied by vampires (Mollov 2005, p. 283; 2007, pp. 54–55), and this is also reminiscent of Gogol's novella.

5. Cossack Legends

A Cossack leader Semen Paliy shares some features with Buniak in the legends of the Yekaterinoslav Governorate. In the village of Kapulivka in the Yekaterinoslav District, it was said that Semen Paliy, a great Zaporozhian knight and sorcerer, was immured in a pillar for seven years. When they remembered him, a yard of dirt had piled up on Paliy, and his eyebrows had grown so long that they needed a three-pronged pitchfork to lift them up. They bathed him, gave him three days to rest, dressed him, fed him and put him on a horse. Paliy then turned all the gunpowder of the Swedes into dust, spread a great fog over the entire army and brought up three tall pillars of fire, causing the enemy to flee in fear (Ioanidi 1985, pp. 221–22).

6. Beliefs and Legends about Saint Cassian

Saint Cassian is imagined very similarly to Mangy Buniak and Viy. In the folk beliefs of Ukrainians of the Kharkiv, Poltava, Vinnytsia and Odessa regions, he has a baleful stare and long eyelids or, alternatively, eyebrows or eyelashes, that need to be raised by a pitchfork. In the city of Kupyansk and the settlement of Kabanye of the Kupyansk District in the Kharkiv Governorate, Saint Cassian was considered angry and unmerciful. "Why are you looking like Cassian?" was spoken to an angry or frowning person. About a child or calf born on February 29, they said that Cassian had looked at it with his eye—no good would come from this newborn. Cassian has such long eyebrows and eyelashes that he cannot see anything, but every three years they rise, and woe to what he looks at first. If he looks at people, the people die; if he looks at livestock, the livestock start to die; if he sees the fields, there is complete crop failure (Ivanov 1907, pp. 74–75). In the settlements of Preobrazhenna and Svatova Luchka, people believed that Cassian had long eyebrows that reached below his knees. On St. Cassian's Day, you must stay inside before sunrise so that he does not look. If Cassian looks at cattle, then there will be death, and if at people, then pestilence (Ivanov 1907, p. 75). In the settlements of Dvorichna and Kabanye, it was believed that one could not work on St. Cassian's Day because he cruelly punishes those who work on that holiday. When he lifts his long eyelids and looks at animals or birds, everything perishes. He spares only those who honor his day (Ivanov 1907, p. 75). According to the ideas of the residents of the Lubny District of the Poltava Governorate in the late 19th century, Saint Cassian sits motionless on a chair, with lowered eyelashes, which are so long that they reach his knees and because of these eyelashes he sees nothing; only on the morning of February 29, on a leap year, does he raise his eyelashes and look around the world, whatever he looks at, he kills; therefore, it is not recommended to go out to the garden early in the morning on this day (Mendelson 1897, pp. 1, 12–13). In the village of Dorogintsi of the Nizhyn County, they believed that Cassian had long eyelids reaching

to the ground, and therefore he could not see anything. In the village of Kukavka in the Vinnytsia Region, they believed that Cassian had very large eyelids, which were lifted with a pitchfork. Residents of the village of Tashyno of the Berezan District in the Odessa County also agreed that Cassian's large eyelids were being lifted all the time with an iron pitchfork. (Nazarevskiy 1969, p. 44). In the villages of Iskivtsy-Senetski of the Sencha District in the Lubny County, Mikhailyky of the Brigadyrivka District, and Onufriyivka of the Onufriyivka District in the Kremenchuk County, they believed that Cassian had very large eyebrows that covered his eyes. In the village of Rivne of the Kirovohrad County, they said that Cassian could not raise his large eyebrows on his own. Because of his large eyebrows, Cassian can only look down, as they believed in the village of Portyanki of the Shyshaky District in the Poltava County (Nazarevskiy 1969, p. 44). At the same time, in the villages of Papuzhintsy of the Talne District and Prityka of the Khristynivka District in the Uman County, Cassian was believed to have long eyelashes. In the village of Romanivka of the Zinkiv District in the Poltava Region, they believed that Cassian had eyelashes that reached to the ground, and in the village of Sekretarivka of the Petrivske District in the Izyum County, they believed that his eyelashes almost reached his knees (Nazarevskiy 1969, p. 44). In the village of Rivne, they agreed that the eyelashes were such that Cassian could not lift them himself. In the village of Voloshske in the Dnipropetrovsk District and County, it was believed that Cassian's large eyelashes were lifted with a shovel, and in the village of Bryduny of the Novi Sanzhary District in the Poltava County, they believed that Cassian's large eyelashes were opened with stakes and propped up. According to residents of the village of Mykolayivka of the Zachepylivka District in the Poltava County, Cassian looks like a person covered in wool, with long eyelashes, right down to the ground, all black. It is hard for Cassian to see through his eyelashes, and evil spirits raise his eyelashes in a crowd (Nazarevskiy 1969, p. 44). A kobza player from the village of Borysivka of the Kharkiv Governorate said also that on February 28, at midnight, Cassian asks evil spirits to lift his long eyelashes and with his gaze causes hunger, war and pestilence. Cassian is the chief of all devils (Cheremskiy 2002, p. 181). These features bring Cassian noticeably closer to Buniak and fairy-tale characters.

There were later justifications for this peculiarity of the saint. In a legend recorded in the village of Maksymivka of the Lubny District in the Poltava Region, Cassian and Saint Nicholas are going to an unknown destination. A widow needs help because she drove into the mud and got stuck. Cassian does not want to dirty his clothes, but Nicholas helps the widow. God says that St. Nicholas' Day will be celebrated once a year and Cassian will be beaten in the forge with a hammer for three years in a row, and only in the fourth year will he be able to see. Cassian's gaze is destructive, no matter what he looks at (Nazarevskiy 1963, p. 69). In the village of Mikhailivka of the Synelnikove district in the Dnipropetrovsk Region, there was a more detailed version of the legend. In the "Indian" state, the Myra-Lycian region is ruled by patrician chiefs together with the diocesan council. In a memorial book, they record the most worthy citizens for future celebration. Nicholas and Cassian lead a commendable life, help the poor, and guide people onto the righteous path. They put on decent clothes and go to the recording session. On the way, they see a widow whose plow is stuck in the bushes. Cassian refuses to help so as not to get his clothes dirty, but Nicholas helps pull out the plow and gets dirty. They tell Nicholas that even though his clothes are dirty, his soul is pure, and they decide to celebrate his day twice each year, May 6 and December 6. Cassian is told that even though his clothes are clean, his soul is dirty, and they assigned February 29 to be his holiday—once every leap year. Cassian is dissatisfied, angry and lives out his life until death. On February 29, he rises from the grave in the form of an old man, his eyelids covering his eyes. His gaze is destructive, and only the sunlight can neutralize it (Nazarevskiy 1963, p. 70).

However, in the Kolodyazhna settlement of the Kupyansk District of the Kharkov Governorate and in the Kyiv region in the late 19th–early 20th centuries, the disastrous, deadly look was correlated not with Saint Cassian but with the devil or the king of demons, the lame Lucifer, who takes advantage of the absence of the saint (Ivanov 1907, p. 76;

[Krasnokutskiy 1880](#), pp. 9–10). In the Zvenyhorodka District of the Kyiv Governorate in the early 20th century, they told how Christ rises from the dead and descends into hell to ransom sinful souls. Among them is the very great sinner Cassian. Christ asks when he wants to atone for his sins: now or after the Last Judgment. Cassian decides that he will atone now. Christ gives him a hefty hammer and orders him to hammer in the pillar to which the unclean one is chained, not to look anywhere, and not to stop beating day and night until the Last Judgment. Cassian says that he cannot stand to never look at the world, he asks him to look at least a little, and otherwise he will get tired and not be able to stand it. Christ allows one glance once every four years. Cassian is still beating that pillar, and the evil one is trying to shake it loose; within a week the pillar comes out, but on Saturday, when they call for vespers, the pillar again turns out to be deeper, and he sets about his task again. Cassian does not stop hitting, but he has grown a very long forelock: it hangs over his eyes. And when after three years he looks through his forelock, then immediately there is trouble. Wherever he turns, there will be pestilence or famine in that region ([Krymskyi 1930](#), pp. 283–84).

7. Legends about Judas

In the literary tradition of 16th-century Galicia, Judas is described similarly. While he lived in the world, he was so large and fat that he could barely squeeze with his head on the road where the chariot passed. His eyelids grew so long that he could not see daylight. His eyesight is powerful—more so than a witch’s mirror. His body was covered in scabs, infested with worms, and after his death such a stench spread around that his village remains uninhabited ([Franko 1907](#), pp. 52–54).

8. Conclusions

All these folkloric characters, having parallels in other Slavic traditions, help to prove the authenticity of Gogol’s Viy. Some of them are found in narratives similar in plot to the story, but most of the characters are present in completely unrelated plots. However, their role there is very similar. It is important that they share not only the external features of Viy, but also his dominant status, his associations with the lower world and the chthonic sphere, the special role of an all-seeing and at the same time dangerous gaze, and his being summoned by evil spirits in a hopeless situation. The famous words of Viy appear in Ukrainian folklore as a verbal formula. Thus, Ukrainian folklore proves that Gogol did not invent Viy, but actually used folk tales, obviously having at his disposal a fairy tale about a witch with such a plot. He could not borrow related motifs from other cultures such as Celtic legends for the simple reason that they had not yet been published by the time he wrote the story. Viy-like characters are present in the tales of other Slavic and non-Slavic people, some with plots that are close to Gogol’s story. All of them need further study.

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