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UKRAINIAN MIDSUMMER CELEBRATIONS

In this paper I will discuss Midsummer celebration. Midsummer celebration is the event which many European nations hold on a midsummer day which is traditionally called St. John's day. This celebration has various traditional elements such as making bonfires or picking herbs in a forest. Herbs picked on the day of Midsummer are believed to have strong medicinal properties. Besides, they are used to perform rituals of exorcism (purging evil spirits) on the night of Midsummer. An important element of Midsummer celebration is sun worship. In Northern Europe, where there is weaker sunlight, maypole (high ornamental pillars) are made and bonfires are burned so that the blaze in the sun continues.

Regarding the Midsummer celebrations in Ukraine and other Eastern Slavic countries (Ukraine, Russia and Belarus) Midsummer celebration is called Ivan Kupala. Nowadays, the festival is held on July 6 or 7. It is said that Ivan Kupala dates back to festivals celebrated by Slavic people before Christianity. For instance, in Ivan Kupala in Kiev, people used to dance in a circle and burn a fire in the middle of the circle. A pair of men and women jumped over the bonfire. They believed this led to exorcism and marriage. Then, young men and women wearing corolla flushed it into a river. If two corollas got close in a river, they believed they will marry.

Finally, I will discuss Ivan Kupala and the devil. Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852) is a writer born near Poltava, Ukraine. One of Gogol's works deals with Ivan Kupala. "St. John's Eve" which is a short story written in 1830 in the collection *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*. This story has a motif of a devil. A young man made a contract with the devil to get

rich and get married with a girl he loved. However, he ended up being unhappy. As is well known, devils appear in many Ukrainian folktales. In “St. John’s Eve” and many Ukrainian folktales, the devil is a troublesome existence. Therefore, driving away the evil spirits or devils were believed as an important event on Ivan Kupala.

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MIDSUMMER CELEBRATIONS IN EUROPE

I would like to talk about Midsummer Celebration in Western and Northern European countries.

As is well known, St. John’s day, June 24, is traditionally celebrated as the birthday of St. John who was a prophet known as John the Baptist. He is regarded as a predecessor of Jesus Christ. Before Christianity people celebrated Midsummer among Celts, Germanic people and Slavs. As Christianity spread among them, they made this celebration into the feast of John the Baptist as his birthday was believed to be six months earlier than Jesus’s. This is how John the Baptist and Midsummer have been merged. William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* has a plot connected with St. John’s Day. In this comedy, on Midsummer Night, confusion is caused between two human couples and one fairy couple triggered by a magic love potion. In Midsummer night, people let themselves loose which can lead to a situation which was sometimes referred to as “Midsummer night madness”. Shakespeare’s comedy has two elements strongly related to Midsummer’s folk customs. The first one is love. It is believed that on a midsummer night young couples went to forests to give each other a corolla as a sign of their love. In Shakespeare’s comedy, the plot unfolds within a forest and love plays a main role in it. The second element is fairies. People believed that fairies, demons and evil spirits moved around