

**Title:** Early Literary Adaptations of the Legend of Kitezh  
**Author:** Lisa Woodson, University of Wisconsin

The legend of the invisible city of Kitezh was discovered in the mid-19th century among communities of Old Believers in the Trans-Volga region of Russia. Supposedly dating to the 13th century, it described the miraculous salvation of the city of Kitezh during the time of the Mongol invasions; and in the Old Believers' telling, it presented a way for the devout to flee the evil world of the antichrist by escaping to a hidden city where only the righteous lived. By the turn of the 20th century, the legend had risen to national prominence, shedding many of its negative Old Believer connotations and taking on the status of a wholly Russian myth. But what made it so popular? That an obscure sectarian legend captured the imaginations of such diverse cultural figures as Korolenko and Gippius, Gorky and Rimsky-Korsakov, to name just a few, is telling of the legend's flexibility and potential for artistic and philosophical adaptation. Drawing on 19th-century ethnographic sketches and 20th-century folklore studies as background material for understanding the varied versions of legend and their origins, this paper will examine the early uses of the legend in literary culture that facilitated its rise prominence. Writers covered include Pavel Melnikov ("Grisha," *V lesakh*), Vladimir Korolenko (*V pustynnykh mestakh*), Zinaida Gippius ("Svetloe ozero"), and Maxim Gorky (*Foma Gordeev*). The paper will show how each writer developed his or her own Kitezh legend to fit the needs of a specific artistic project and worldview.

[lisa\\_woodson@hotmail.com](mailto:lisa_woodson@hotmail.com)