

ACUAVITAE

ALBERTA'S UKRAINIAN ARTS AND CULTURE MAGAZINE

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Superstitious Matters

MYTH MATTERS | FOLK MEDICINE: THE WAX CEREMONY



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Publisher: Alberta Council for
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Editorial Management:
Lizzy Taylor, Darka Broda-Masiuk,
Rena Hanchuk, Robin McHugh

Proofreading:
Rena Hanchuk

Contributors:
Lyrisa Sheptak, Izzy Sheptak,
Tamara Soltykevych, Lizzy Taylor

Art Direction: Kristin Gibson
www.kristingibson.ca

Advertising: info@acuarts.ca

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ACUAVITAE



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Lady Winter, sold as part of Art for Aid

BY IRYNA KARPENKO



FEATURE

Myth Matters

By Lyryssa Sheptak

SOMETIMES I LIKE TO WONDER
WHAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN
LIKE GROWING UP IN ANCIENT
UKRAINE. I CAN SAFELY SAY THAT I
WOULD HAVE CULTIVATED FRIENDS
IN THE MOST UNUSUAL PLACES.

The stork would have been one of my dearer friends because I would have been told that I could trust its help and judgement. I could see myself now, trying to attract it to the roof of my house, hoping it would build its nest and move in for good. Then our family wouldn't have to worry about wars or a bad harvest. We'd also know how to dress for the weather just by popping our heads out the window and watching how the stork was behaving. A clacking beak foretold a sunny day. Standing on one leg? Put on a coat, it'll be cool outside.

I'm also sure I would have walked around my village or the surrounding forest thinking I was constantly threatened by impending danger or doom. Bodies of water would have been forbidden playgrounds. Mama would have warned me of the *rusalky* who liked to drag unsuspecting children into the water and leave them to drown. My brothers would have had to be extra wary of them, because the *rusalky* were beautiful mermaids who were known to seduce young men and lure them to their demise. Advice? Don't get caught up with beautiful women who could lead you astray.

But the inside of my home wouldn't exactly be a haven either, thanks to old *domovyk* taking up residence. *Domovyk* – the invisible household demon – was always watching... always evaluating. It could cause trouble or help a person (but that would be rare). *Domovyk's* temperament was dictated by how well I would have done my chores or obeyed my parents. Watch out! Old *domovyk* might steal my socks! But we'd all know that he was best placated with something yummy. Nothing a delectable bowl of sweet-tasting blueberry *varenyky* couldn't help. I'd know he wasn't fussy and would even enjoy a simple bowl of porridge set for him in the corner of the house each day too.

I'd at least be able to set up my own stool by the fire on a stormy night and eat some of those sweet blueberry *varenyky* as



DOMOVYK | BY IVAN YAKOVLEVICH BILIBIN, 1934

my baba promised me that Perun – the god of thunder – would pass us by. She'd probably regale me with folktales, *kazky*, like the "Magic Egg" or the "Golden Slipper". I would have been lost in the dramas and romance stories. Tales of shapeshifters and *vidmy*, brave soldiers, and canny princesses. My world, both the animate and inanimate, would have been replete with spirits and otherworldly beings.

Long ago in Kyivan Rus, and earlier, pre-Christian beliefs centered around a polytheistic world view. Spirits and gods representing forces of nature and mystical beings permeated their daily lives and explained the unexplainable. These

mythologies included "higher gods" like gods of sun, thunder, lightning, and lower ones, the spirits which infused nature. When Christianity became the accepted religion of Kyivan Rus, old traditions melded with the new. For instance, *pysanky*, intricately decorated eggs which symbolized fertility, prosperity, and the rebirth of Spring, became symbolic of Christ's Resurrection, new life in Christ, centering around the Easter celebration. Winter solstice celebrations were replaced with Christmas on the religious calendar.

But that was then, what about now? Does mythology and folklore matter anymore? Does it hold any relevancy in modern society? Today, Ukrainian folklore remains rich. According to Dr. Andriy Nahachewsky, Professor Emeritus from the University of Alberta and the first Kule Folklore Centre director, folklore is defined as "an informal expressive cultural experience in small groups." Basically, it's the everyday things and events that we do or

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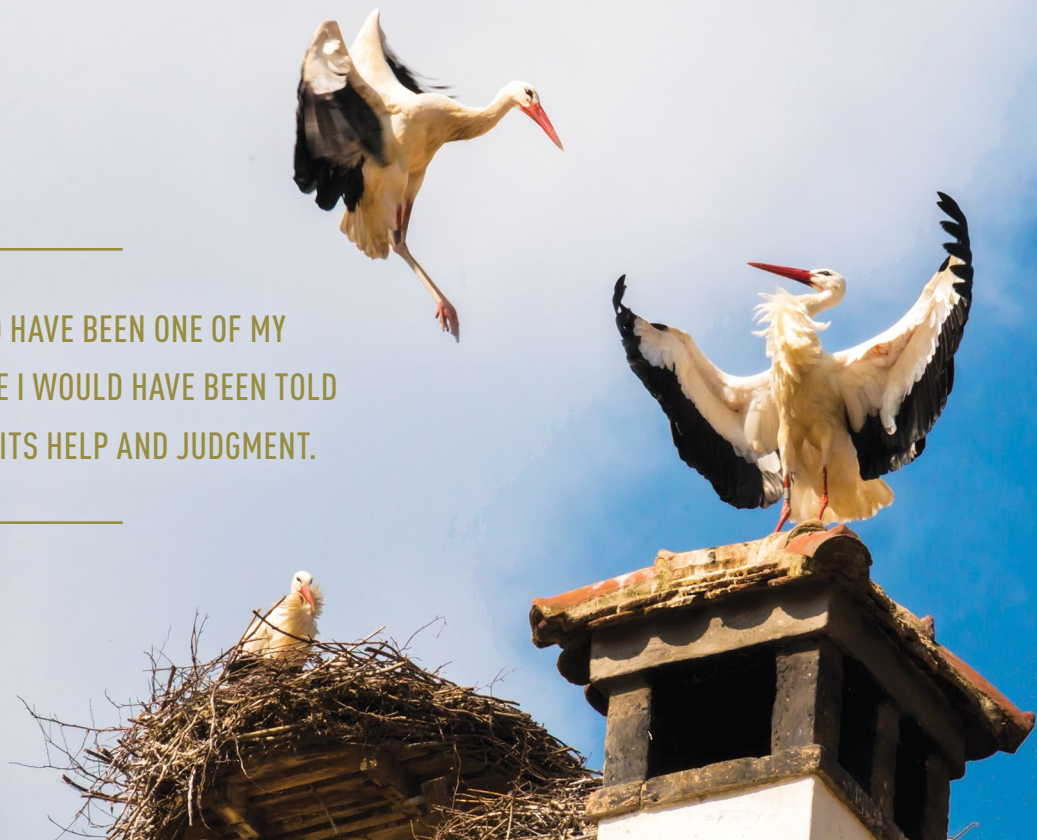


PHOTO CREDIT: PIXABAY

take part in within our small cultural groups. They are not necessarily what we are told to do, or what we are expected to do. Rather, they are expressions of self within our ethnicity or community. Thus, although our stories may change over time and history, the ways in which we express ourselves remains the same. Some aspects, however, may disappear only to reappear in a future, relevant time. Song, dance, superstitions, embroidery, pottery, music, mythology – these fall under the umbrella of ‘folklore’. They help us express our individual and collective identity.

Environmental and personal circumstances affect folklore as well. Ukrainian stories, folktales, and myths differ by region, and even throughout the diaspora. People are either forced, or inspired, to put their own twist on things when in new environments or situations. We can see this in other forms of folklore as well, like the stitching on *podushky* (embroidered pillows), or the embroidery on the costumes featured in ACUA’s 2021 exhibit *Threads that Connect*. New environments impact the supplies and even the patterns used, allowing for creativity and uniqueness to the folk art. As well, it gives artists the courage to stray slightly from tradition and try more individual things within the cultural context.

Myths still serve a valuable purpose in modern times. Historically, they were passed down orally through the


generations by elders who wanted to give teaching moments to their grandchildren. Today, we can find books, websites, and television shows that tell these stories. We can even learn about them in school, cultural organizations, or post-secondary institutions. Mythology still entertains children and offer relevant messages, but now learning about them has become something more. By attributing value to the power of myth, we are drawn closer to our ethnic identity or the community in which we live. Myths have become a form of cultural preservation, instead of a day-to-day necessity like in ancient times. This is specifically relevant throughout the diaspora.

In studying myths, we become connected to our ancestors and our ancestral home because we have a window into the past where we can see humanity’s earliest attempts at explaining the unexplainable: their surroundings, religion, moral instruction, and the mysteries of science. We catch a glimpse of how they answered their questions about the creation of the world, the mysteries of life, the seasons, darkness and light. Such stories and legends, and how they answered life’s big questions, are present in every culture. In a world that is obsessed with thinking that science can explain everything, there is a humble wisdom which can be found in these stories and in the telling of them. In this technological age, face-to-face interaction has faded. However, storytelling is imperative for the building of

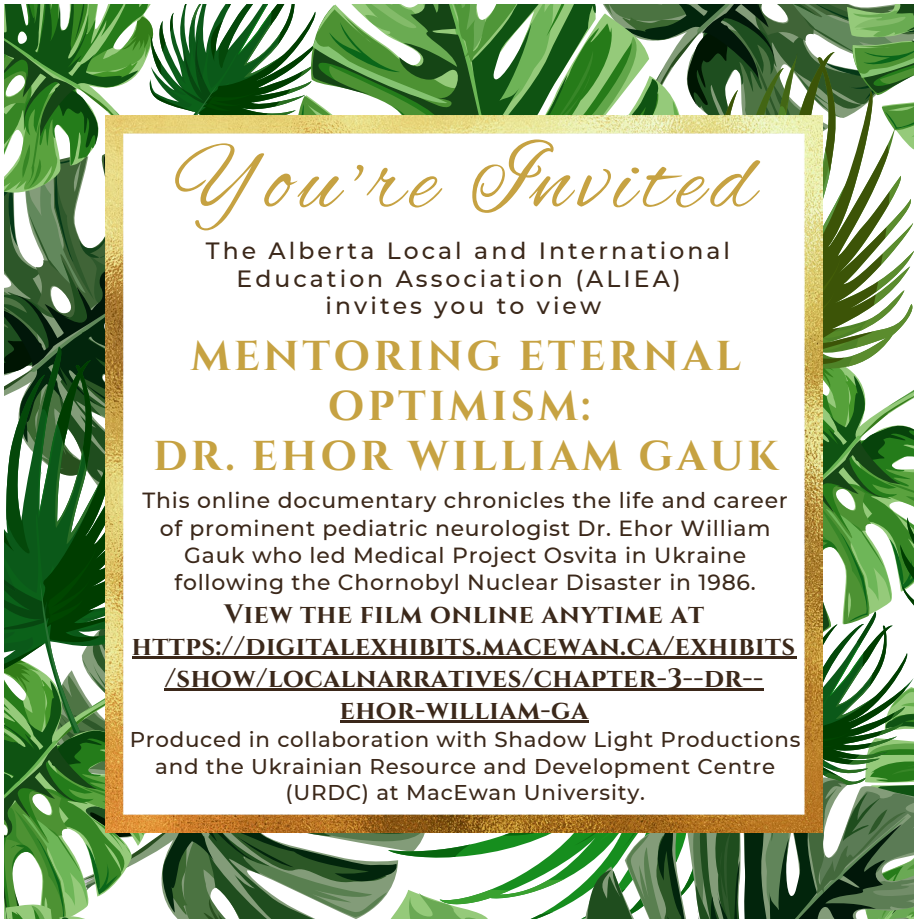
community, and a pleasant by-product for listeners is being transported through time. Science and facts may appeal to our minds, but folklore and myths speak to our hearts and emotions.

Myths and stories provide structure and direction as we navigate life's ups and downs. They transcend politics and flow with time. Some stories may come and go, disappear and reappear, and often that is due to present-day relevancy. War is a good example of this. Stories surface warning of wolves and shapeshifters lurking in forests; *kozaky* fighting for freedom; victories won with prayers and weaponry; people fighting not only outer demons, but inner ones as well. Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky mentioned that during times of trauma, humour releases a person from the present moment. People need a reason to laugh, even with dark humour and tales. Mythological stories can take the edge off and allow for escapism, even if just for a moment.

We tend to compartmentalize and label everything in our lives. Our interactions with our environments are not as fluid as they once were. Myths have been relegated to mere entertainment or children's bedtime stories. Yet we

don't realize that we are writing our own stories today just as did our ancestors. Our stories are our lives, and we are continually sharing them – trying to explain ourselves, our decisions, and relevancy. Maybe they aren't myths explaining the unknown with fantastical characters, but our life stories still relay our victories and failures, our happiness and fears, the known and unknown. Some of them are a snapshot of time, others are our more epic histories. Our stories are not just for us in search of our identity, they affect how others perceive us as well. Long ago these mythologies and legends were told by elders, and later people read them in literature. Now, they are retold in more technological ways, but the messages are still the same connecting the generations. Humanity has not changed. We still want to know why we matter. We want to ensure *that* we matter. 

Special thank you to Larisa Sembaliuk Cheladyn for sharing her knowledge of myth and folklore.



You're Invited

The Alberta Local and International Education Association (ALIEA) invites you to view

**MENTORING ETERNAL OPTIMISM:
DR. EHOR WILLIAM GAUK**

This online documentary chronicles the life and career of prominent pediatric neurologist Dr. Ehor William Gauk who led Medical Project Osvita in Ukraine following the Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster in 1986.

VIEW THE FILM ONLINE ANYTIME AT
[HTTPS://DIGITALEXHIBITS.MACEWAN.CA/EXHIBITS/SHOW/LOCALNARRATIVES/CHAPTER-3--DR--EHOR-WILLIAM-GA](https://digitalexhibits.macewan.ca/exhibits/show/localnarratives/chapter-3--dr--ehor-william-ga)

Produced in collaboration with Shadow Light Productions and the Ukrainian Resource and Development Centre (URDC) at MacEwan University.



Суспільна Служба Українців Канади (ЕДМОНТОН)

11717 - 97 Street
Edmonton, AB T5G 1Y3
Tel. 780-471-4477 Fax: 780-477-0671
E-mail: ucss@shaw.ca
ucssedmonton.ca

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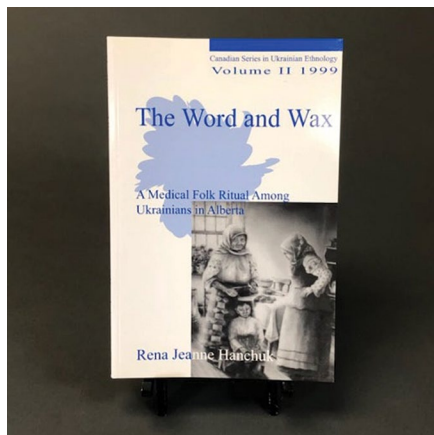
Welcome!
Вітаємо усіх новоприбулих!

*Слава Богови ма України!
Glory to God and Ukraine!*



FOLK MEDICINE THE WAX CEREMONY

By Tamara Soltykevych



THE WORD AND WAX BOOK. IMAGE PROVIDED.

There is a tradition that originated from the Old Country and remains popular to this day, though some Ukrainian Canadians may not have heard of it.

The Wax Ceremony, referred to as *Vylyvaty Visk* or *Strakh Vylyvaty*, is a ritualistic form of folk medicine that has been extensively studied by Rena Hanchuk in her book, *The Word and Wax*. I talked to Rena about her knowledge and interest in the subject.

Rena Hanchuk has a Masters in Ukrainian Folklore, an Honours Bachelor's in Ukrainian Language and Folklore, and a Bachelor of Education in Ukrainian Language. As a student at the University of Alberta, she took folklore classes that piqued her interest. Rena was particularly drawn to the Wax Ceremony. Her first introduction to it came when she visited a wax pourer as a young girl. It also intrigued her that although some folk traditions died out as people moved to urban centres, the Wax Ceremony did not. Rena's research became the basis for her master's thesis in 1990. In 1999, the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS) edited the thesis into the book, *The Word and Wax: A Medical Folk Ritual Among Ukrainians in Alberta*.

To underscore its popularity, Rena says that in 1990, she found seven wax pourers who between them, had patients by the hundreds. According to *The Word and Wax*, this tradition came to Alberta with the first wave of immigrants, mainly from Western Ukraine. The Wax Ceremony was often practiced in Ukraine and was easily transferable to Canada because no special materials were required.

The Wax Ceremony is performed by a healer, a Baba or Babka. The healers believe they were chosen by God. People seek out the healers in hopes of remedying ailments; it is most commonly to remedy “fear sickness” in children, characterized by sleeplessness, continual crying, and general unrest, among other symptoms. The term “fear sickness” is not recognized by Canadian medicine, but it is a common ailment in the Ukrainian community. Rena believes that the Wax Ceremony remains popular because it addresses a specific community need that cannot be solved by other means.

Rena notes that there are similar standards that all healers follow. The healer will first discuss the patient’s concerns with them. The healer then chants prayers or incantations before pouring melted wax into a bowl of water over the patient’s head. One such example:

*Vodychko-Iordanychko,
Umyvaiesh luhy-berehy, korinnia, bile kaminnia,
Umyi seho rshchenoho, chysto vrodzhenoho
Vid ubrodu, hnivu, nenvysti I vid usiakoho zloho*


O water of the Jordan,
You wash the meadows and the banks,
the roots, the white rock,
Cleanse this baptized, blamelessly born one
From excesses, sin, hatred, and from all evil

Beeswax is used as it is considered holy, and a clove of garlic is added to the water to ward off evil spirits. After the wax solidifies, the healer interprets the shapes in the wax and can tell the patient what ails them. The wax is then remelted and poured into the bowl in front of the patient’s chest and the process is repeated. It is done a third time with the wax poured behind the patient’s shoulders. Rena mentions that the healer typically will dip their fingers into the melted wax water and make the sign of the cross on the patient’s forehead or hands. After the wax is poured three times, the healer will burn something to produce smoke around the patient, which is meant to send the prayers up to God. After the ceremony is completed, the wax water is poured into a jar and given to the patient to take home.

The Word and Wax is an excellent resource to learn more about the Wax Ceremony. It provides an overview of folk medicine,

discusses ceremonial elements including incantations and prayers, and includes techniques by seven different healers with an in-depth comparison. It can be purchased at ACUA, CIUS, or the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village. Rena has sold her book worldwide, including to customers in Australia, Germany, France, and the United States.

The Wax Ceremony continues to be studied academically; Rena is aware of two new research papers on the subject. “Waxing Like the Moon: Women Folk Healers in Rural Western Ukraine,” by Sarah Phillips, and “Waxing Away Illness: A Study of the Ukrainian Wax Ceremony in Western Canada”, by Ashley Halko-Addley, MA. To Rena’s knowledge, there are two healers still practicing in Edmonton today. She believes that it is very important to maintain and pass down traditions like this because it is a part of our Ukrainian culture, and we must keep them alive.

Rena believes that there has been a rebirth of folk medicine. As proof of that, her book is getting republished and will be released this Fall, with a new foreword written by Rena. To quote her, “Like the wax itself that melts and leaves a permanent mould to be filled repeatedly, my book keeps on going. It’s finding a new audience and cohort of contemporary diviners and healers.” 

ENAMEL DISH WITH WATER AND A CLOVE OF GARLIC; ENAMEL CUP USED TO MELT BEESWAX; KNIFE USED TO FLIP THE CONGEALED WAX OVER IN THE WATER BATH; HOMEMADE INCENSOR USED TO “SMOKE THE PATIENT” DURING THE PROCEDURE; AND SHOT GLASS USED TO GIVE THE PATIENT THE WATER FROM THE ENAMEL HEALING WATER.

IMAGE PROVIDED BY RENA HANCHUK



FEATURE

AN ABRIDGED UKRAINIAN

Superstition Manual

By Izzy Sheptak

How to make the devil dance

STEP 1: IF YOU ARE OUTSIDE, GO INSIDE. IF YOU ARE INSIDE, STAY PUT.

STEP 2: WHISTLE.

RESULTS: THE DEVIL IS DANCING. SIDE-EFFECTS MAY INCLUDE AGGRESSIVE "SHUSHING" IN YOUR DIRECTION IF THERE IS ANYONE WITHIN EARSHOT, AS IT IS GENERALLY UNDERSTOOD THAT MAKING THE DEVIL DANCE IS A BAD THING (THOUGH WE HAVE YET TO CONFIRM HE TRULY DISLIKES IT).

How to lose all of your money

METHOD 1: WHISTLE. RESULTS CAN BE INTENSIFIED BY BEING INSIDE, THOUGH THIS IS NOT ALWAYS NECESSARY.

METHOD 2: SWEEP CRUMBS OFF THE TABLE WITH YOUR BARE HAND (AS OPPOSED TO WITH A CLOTH).

How to acquire bad luck

METHOD 1: LOOK INTO A BROKEN MIRROR.

METHOD 2: SPEAK ACROSS, OR SHAKE HANDS OVER, A THRESHOLD.

METHOD 3: TAKE GARBAGE OUT OF THE HOUSE IN THE EVENING.

METHOD 4: WEAR/GIVE AN EVEN NUMBER OF FLOWERS.

*How to ward off bad luck/
acquire good luck*

METHOD 1: SPIT OVER YOUR SHOULDER. FOR EXTRA PROTECTION, SPIT OVER YOUR LEFT SHOULDER THREE TIMES.

METHOD 2: KNOCK ON WOOD. FOR EXTRA PROTECTION, KNOCK THREE TIMES.

METHOD 3: PUT PINS IN YOUR CLOTHES. IF THEY BECOME RUSTY, THIS IS A SIGN THAT SOMEONE MAY HAVE ATTEMPTED TO CURSE YOU, AND THE PINS SHOULD BE REPLACED.

METHOD 4: GET POOPED ON BY A BIRD.

How to ensure protection before a journey

STEP 1: SIT DOWN. STEP 2: SPEND A MINUTE IN SILENCE.

RESULTS: YOUR HOUSE SPIRIT - *DOMOVYK* - WILL BE TRICKED INTO THINKING YOU ARE STAYING AND NOT GOING ON A LONG TRIP, AND AS SUCH WILL NOT ATTEMPT TO NEGATIVELY INTERFERE WITH YOUR JOURNEY.

How to become angry and/or induce a fight

METHOD 1: LICK A KNIFE. METHOD 2: SPILL SALT. METHOD 3: EAT FROM BROKEN DISHES.

The guide above - while written with a light-spirited air of humor which may aggrieve ardent adherents of such practices - is not an exhaustive catalog of Ukrainian superstitions, but rather intends to draw attention to the myriad of habitual practices which have held a deep-seated position in Ukrainian daily life from ancient times to the modern day. Historically, such minor rituals and beliefs were so ingrained in the rhythm of life that one wouldn't even know where to begin looking if asked to eliminate all "superstition" from their routine. Such an extreme is not the case today, although superstition does persist in the cultural consciousness in different ways. Some of the superstitions listed above may still be in practice - though perhaps having been imbued with more practical meaning - while others may only be known through anecdotes about the

old way of life. Opinions surrounding superstition vary from the sincere belief that they do influence the supernatural realm, to outright bans on superstitious practice due to the belief that it traps people in pointless rituals that can be perceived as irrelevant, illogical, or even heathen.

It is generally more common for Ukrainian-Canadians to fall on the less superstitious end of the spectrum than their European counterparts. Part of what allows superstition to survive and thrive is communal reinforcement, something that was fractured by Ukrainian integration and assimilation into Canadian society. Thus, because early Ukrainian immigrants were living alongside other cultures in Canada that did not understand, observe, or condone such superstitions, they found



them rapidly falling away from their daily routine – whether by conscious choice or accident. Therefore, there are not a wide variety of uniquely Ukrainian-Canadian superstitions, as it was not the superstitions themselves that adapted in response to the new Canadian setting, but rather peoples’ relationships to them. However - from my own observations - I would argue that many Ukrainian-Canadians do not feel that failing to engage with such beliefs and rituals as anything more than mementos of the past has impacted our cultural identity or expression; their falling away does not feel so great a loss as when the language began to die away. Superstition was not mourned like our dance, song, dress, or food would be if they disappeared. Now, this does not mean that superstition is unimportant. As the offspring of ancient belief, it offers insight into the way our ancestors viewed and engaged with the physical and spiritual realms; it permits us to visualize how at every turn of the day, individuals were orienting themselves in the world

in relation to that which lay behind the visible. Being familiar with superstition allows us to better understand the deeply entrenched patterns that gave shape to everything in life, from the mundane to the highly ritualistic.

The very existence of superstition is based on a desire to exert control over the aspects of life which feel out of the individual’s power – often events related to physical and social survival and wellbeing which historically depended largely on chance. Lacking the modern technology, medicine, education, and basic rights and freedoms we are blessed with today, it is understandable why the oppressed Ukrainian peasantry led such superstition-bound lives. Misfortune was frequently attributed to pagan or Christian evil spirits, and thus behaving in a way that did not upset them and induce suffering was a constant focus. In deciphering the links between physical actions and their assumed supernatural effects, we see the ability of superstition to reveal something about the spiritual beliefs of our ancestors.

THE VERY EXISTENCE OF SUPERSTITION IS BASED ON A DESIRE TO EXERT CONTROL OVER THE ASPECTS OF LIFE WHICH FEEL OUT OF THE INDIVIDUAL’S POWER – OFTEN EVENTS RELATED TO PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL SURVIVAL AND WELLBEING WHICH HISTORICALLY DEPENDED LARGELY ON CHANCE.

Superstition is based on assumptions about the nature of good and evil spirits which find their root in myth and religion, and the specificities of Ukrainian superstitions provide insight into the complexities of the spiritual history of Slavic peoples. St. Prince Volodymyr the Great converted from Slavic paganism to Eastern Rite Christianity in 988 A.D., bringing his new faith to Kyivan Rus’ through mass baptisms and the constructions of great churches. However, although he successfully struck down the pagan statues and temples from the



ST PRINCE VOLODYMYR THE GREAT

hills of his kingdom, he did not manage to fully strike the ancient belief from the hearts and lives of the people. Indeed, in the thousand years that followed, paganism and Christianity lived side-by-side, forming a vernacular Christianity - a unique blend of folk

beliefs - that still exists today. Some customs and beliefs were preserved in full, with house spirits like *domovyk* persisting in consciousness with no alteration. Many others changed very little in practice, but did adopt a Christian interpretation or connection that either replaced or supplemented the original pagan meaning. Only the Slavic gods of old truly found no place in the new scheme and were abandoned completely.

Ukrainian assumptions about evil spirits are derived in part from the Church understanding of demons that is rooted in Scripture and Tradition and dictates that they are wicked as a result of being creatures which have rejected God, and in part from pagan beliefs which are rooted in observations of nature and the understanding that they are connected to death and chaos. Often, as with Vernacular Christianity as a whole, superstitions blur the line between the two sets of beliefs in their rationale and practices. For example, Ukrainian

superstition holds that whistling is bad and should not be done (especially inside the house) because it is believed to make the devil (of Christianity) dance, call on evil spirits, or cause the whistler to lose all of their money. A likely explanation for this belief is pagan – whistling is perceived to be a sound that is unnatural for people. When we alter our speaking voices to a whisper or whistle we enter the ritualized sphere, a boundary between physical and supernatural that cannot be walked by just anyone. However, this exists within a Christian framework where one might pray to God to save them when they do in fact fall upon hard times. The story is similar for most of the superstitions listed above. While they may not seem anything more than entertaining stories to us now, they do compel us to reflect on the habitual practices we allow to shape our routines in the modern day. Although I don't urge anyone to feel the need to re-introduce a fear of taking out the garbage after sundown, it is worth reflecting upon whether the ways we move in the world reinforce or draw us away from our cultural and/or religious identities. ^{AV}

UKRAINIAN SUPERSTITION HOLDS THAT WHISTLING IS BAD AND SHOULD NOT BE DONE (ESPECIALLY INSIDE THE HOUSE) BECAUSE IT IS BELIEVED TO MAKE THE DEVIL (OF CHRISTIANITY) DANCE, CALL ON EVIL SPIRITS, OR CAUSE THE WHISTLER TO LOSE ALL OF THEIR MONEY.

ON PYSANKY

PYSANKY BY DAENA DIDUCK

By Izzy Sheptak

The time-honoured tradition of pysanka writing is inseparable from the story of the Ukrainian people and stands apart from many other art forms due to the inherently magical quality it possesses.

In material and design it bears witness to the joys and mysteries of creation that we have aimed to capture since pagan days, and which were imbued with renewed understanding and purpose with the Christianization of the Slavs. It is an art form which cannot be severed from the spirit of life; when the writer uses beeswax to cloak eggshells in symbol-rich imagery teeming with meaning, they meld the natural and the supernatural. Such meaning is not only found in the patterns and images which grace pysanky, but in the very medium itself, which demands of the writer to keep ever in mind the fragility of their canvas and the potential for life once contained within it. As well, the essence of the process - using wax to protect (and conceal) the various

stages of the pattern until all is revealed in the melting - means that the final work is shrouded in mystery to the artist themselves until the very end, and calls one to reflect upon patience, planning,



PYSANKY BY DAENA DIDUCK

and permanency. When one considers the importance of a clear vision to the pysanka-making process - for allowances must be made in space for designs that will only be added many colours and hours later - it is no wonder that it is standard tradition for the maker to ensure their home and mind are clear by cleaning and praying before making a pysanka. Even the shape of the egg requires the viewer to engage with pysanky in a more unique, active manner, for the whole of its beauty can only be experienced through movement. Although many designs are interconnected and have a degree of continuity, they appear different depending on whether one looks at the pysanka from the top, bottom, or sides. Thus, movement is required to properly

experience the work, a story unfolding as one twists and rolls the pysanka in their hands.

To read the story contained on a pysanka, one must be educated in the symbol-rich language of colour and design. Although not all Ukrainians in the past or present possess(ed) identical knowledge about the meaning of various symbols and colours - as variation exists depending on the region, the individual maker, and who the pysanka was made for - the majority of the time one is able to “read” what the maker has “written”. While there are entire books dedicated to the history and symbolism of pysanky, most designs either depict the natural world, Christian images, or geometric patterns.


A few common symbols and their meanings are as follows:

- **Crosses:** Christ’s victory over death.
- **Flowers:** Love, charity, and good will.
- **Storks, chickens, and roosters:** Fulfilment of wishes and fertility.
- **Deer, rams, and horses:** Good health, wealth, and prosperity.
- **Drops/dots:** Mary’s tears as she wept for Jesus on the cross/stars.
- **Cross hatching:** The net to which Christ referred when He said

Christians are to be “fishers of men”.

- **Ribbons and evergreens:** Everlasting life.
- **Triangles:** The trinity / air, fire & water / sun, thunder & bonfire / heaven, earth, & hell.

The meanings of such symbols, as well as the springtime setting which pysanky are temporally tied to, are reflective of the pysanka’s pagan origin and the 1000 year history of Christianity in Ukraine. Before the introduction of Christianity to Kyivan Rus’ in 988 A.D., the Slavs worshipped a pantheon of pagan gods, with the sun god Dazhboh being central, as he was understood to be the source of all life. For worshippers of Dazhboh, birds were considered sacred as they were the only creatures capable of getting near him. As such, birds’ eggs were viewed to be magical objects with special powers, small sources of life that connected one to the primary source of life – Dazhboh. With the coming of Christianity, the practice of pysanka writing fit organically into the new religious order, with springtime themes of new life and resurrection being mutual to both the old and new belief. And, although pysanka writing thus ceased to be associated with Dazhboh - with symbols taking on refined Christian interpretations - the Easter

eggs themselves were still understood to be magical objects with their own special power. This power exists now in the pysanka’s many different roles - as art, a talisman, a gift, and a symbol of life - and remains to the Ukrainian people a glittering thread in the tapestry of our culture and history. 

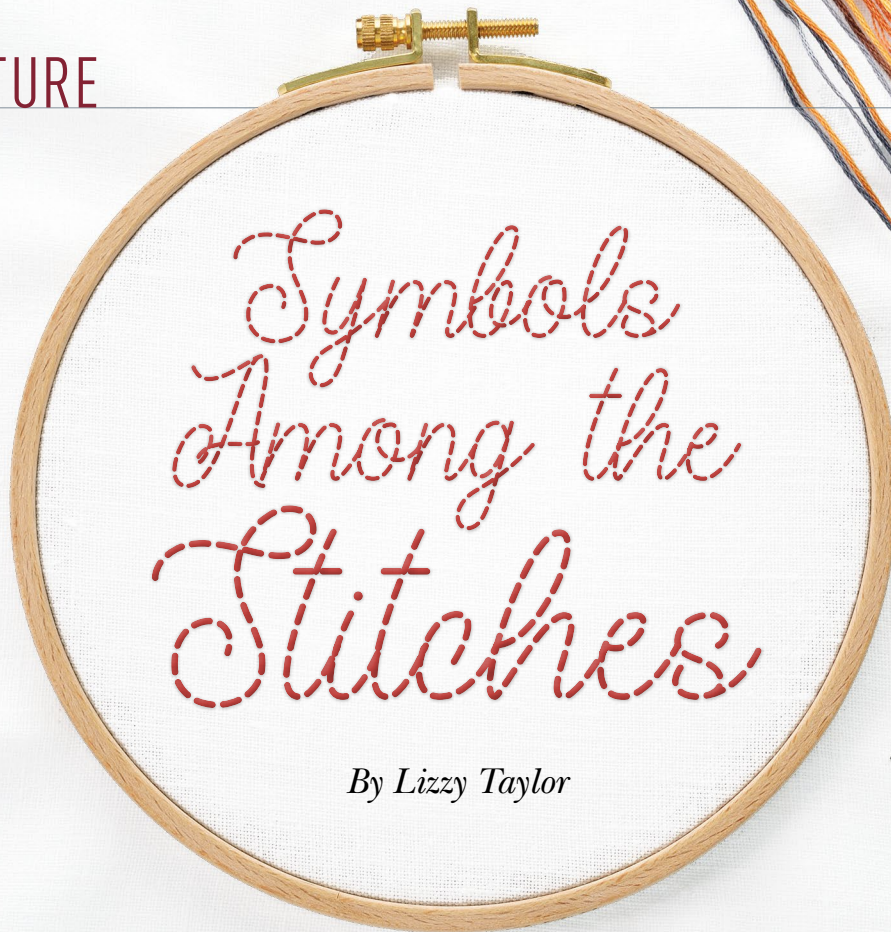


PYSANKY BY SHIRLEY MARCHUCK

Note: Ukrainians do not refer to creating pysanky as drawing or painting, but as writing – similar to iconography.



PYSANKY BY DAENA DIDUCK



By Lizzy Taylor

MANY PEOPLE KNOW UKRAINIAN EMBROIDERY FOR ITS BEAUTY, WITH A VARIETY OF PATTERNS RANGING FROM COLOURFUL FLORALS TO CLASSIC RED-AND-BLACK GEOMETRIC DESIGNS.

Years ago, embroidery served as a ritual, with the stitcher channeling light and positive energy into her work. Different symbols embroidered on cloth acted as talismans to both represent good fortune while protecting against evil. This article lists several popular symbols, but is by no means an exhaustive list of all motifs.

The **cross** in pre-Christian times warded against evil spirits, symbolizing the harmony of fire, water, earth, and air. Straight crosses were associated with masculinity and the sun, while the oblique cross represented femininity and the moon. Now, most often associated with Christianity, the cross's popularity in embroidery remains as popular as ever.

The **eight-pointed star**, or **mallow**, is formed through the unification of a straight and oblique cross, representing life. Stars were also thought to protect against disease and weakness. The mallow has been called the Mother's Star and can be commonly seen in icon depictions of the Virgin Mary.

The **lozenge** or **rhomb** is made of two triangles, representing the union of the sun and earth as well as man and wife – in ancient times it was thought that three corners of the lozenge represented the woman as keeper of the home, while the fourth represented the man to complete the family. A

lozenge with a dot in the middle represented the sown field, channeling prosperity and abundance.

Ancient Ukrainians associated the curves of the *bezkonечnyk*, known as the **infinite line** or **meander**, with water and the flow of life. This motif is popular on men's *vyshyvanky*, representing strength, vitality, and eternal life.

The **square** represents perfection, order, and harmony. Traditionally, squares depicted the Earth and were symbolic of the number four, calling to mind the points of a compass, the primary elements, and the seasons.

In ancient times, the **triangle** symbolized the unity of the heavens, underworld, and earth, and was often associated with fire. Later, the triangle came to represent the Holy Trinity.






MODEL ALEXIS ALFORD AT THE 2021 THREADS THAT CONNECT FASHION SHOW. DESIGNER OLENA ROMANOVA'S DESIGN DEPICTS THE TREE OF LIFE | PHOTO BY STEVEN STEFANIUK

The **chevron** is an open triangle whose meaning changes depending on their orientation. Chevrons pointing upward symbolize spirituality and masculinity, while chevrons pointing downward represent materiality and femininity.

Circles symbolize the sun and heavenly energy. Like many other cultures, the circle also represents eternity.

The **tree of life** is symbolic of youth, fertility, and beauty, making it a popular choice for the wedding *rushnyk*.

The embroidery of floral and other natural motifs can also hold special significance. The **poppy flower** wards off the evil eye, and **grapes** are a symbol of family happiness. **Swallows** are meant to bring good news, and the **doves** and **roosters** of a wedding *rushnyk* symbolize the start of a new family.

These motifs remain popular today, as I'm sure you've recognized many or all of these symbols within your own embroidered *vyshyvanka* or *rushnyk*. What meaning does your favourite piece of embroidery hold? 



EMBROIDERY SAMPLES:

1. PATTERN DEPICTING OBLIQUE CROSS WITHIN LOZENGE | PHOTO PROVIDED
2. EXAMPLES OF THE INFINITE LINE OR MEANDER | PHOTO FROM EUROMAIDANPRESS.COM
3. THE MALLOW | CREDIT TO WIKICOMMONS



PARTICIPANTS OF THE BANFF TOUR. TOUR GUIDE BORYS SYDORUK IS FIRST ON THE LEFT.




SELECTION OF PRINTING BLOCKS. PHOTO COURTESY OF THEO HARASYMIW.

Return of Kava Club

By Lizzy Taylor

This summer marked the return of our Kava Club series! Throughout the summer, ACUA organized six unique events covering various arts and culture subjects. Participants were treated to exclusive tours of the printing block mosaic project of artists Larisa Sembaliuk Cheladyn and Theo Harasymiw, and Theo's mosaic project at St. John's Cultural Centre.


Lectures on the church vestments of St. Josaphat's cathedral and an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour of the Orshinsky Textile & Embroidery Collection courtesy of the Royal Alberta Museum showcased fantastic Ukrainian embroidery. The Basilian Fathers Museum in Mundare hosted a curator tour with Dr. Karen Lemiski, displaying ethnographic and religious items as well as the museum's extensive library of books and documents dating back to the 15th century.

This year's Kava Club series wrapped up with a three-day guided tour of the Banff Ukrainian Internment Sites, with participants visiting three sites to learn from tour guide Borys Sydoruk. Keep an eye out next year for announcements of our next series of lectures, tours, and trips. 

ACUA's Big Move

By Lizzy Taylor

We've moved! ACUA has enjoyed showcasing Ukrainian art and culture in the Strathearn Centre strip mall, which has been our home since 2013. Earlier this summer, we were notified that the mall was closing as part of the Strathearn neighbourhood revitalization project.

We quickly got to work searching for the perfect location to continue hosting our annual Signature Artist Series, markets, workshops, and other exhibits. Our search brought us to downtown Edmonton, where we've found our new home at **#100, 10554 – 110 Street NW**. Come down and enjoy our new space, we'd love to see you! 





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- Invitations to openings and events
- 10% discount on art education courses
- Access to artist workshops
- Discounts at supporting community businesses