# THE MAGIC EGG AND OTHER TALES FROM UKRAINE

Barbara J. Suwyn

Greenwood
PUBLISHING GROUP

# The Magic Egg
# and
# Other Tales from Ukraine

**Folk Stories of the Hmong: Peoples of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam**. By Norma J. Livo and Dia Cha.

**Images of a People: Tlingit Myths and Legends**. By Mary Helen Pelton and Jacqueline DiGennaro.

**Hyena and the Moon: Stories to Tell from Kenya**. By Heather McNeil.

**The Corn Woman: Stories and Legends of the Hispanic Southwest**. Retold by Angel Vigil. Translated by Juan Francisco Marín and Jennifer Audrey Lowell.

**Thai Tales: Folktales of Thailand**. Retold by Supaporn Vathanaprida. Edited by Margaret Read MacDonald.

**In Days Gone By: Folklore and Traditions of the Pennsylvania Dutch**. By Audrey Burie Kirchner and Margaret R. Tassia.

**From the Mango Tree and Other Folktales from Nepal**. By Kavita Ram Shrestha and Sarah Lamstein.

**Why Ostriches Don't Fly and Other Tales from the African Bush**. By I. Murphy Lewis.

**The Magic Egg and Other Tales from Ukraine**. Retold by Barbara J. Suwyn. Edited and with an Introduction by Natalie O. Kononenko.

**When Night Falls, Kric! Krac! Haitian Folktales**. By Liliane Nérette Louis. Edited by Fred Hay, Ph.D.

**Jasmine and Coconuts: South Indian Tales.** By Cathy Spagnoli and Paramasivam Samanna.

**The Enchanted Wood and Other Tales from Finland**. By Norma J. Livo and George O. Livo.

**A Tiger by the Tail and Other Stories from the Heart of Korea.** Retold by Lindy Soon Curry. Edited by Chan-eung Park.

**The Eagle in the Cactus: Traditional Stories from Mexico.** By Angel Vigil.

## *Selections Available on Audiocassette*

**Hyena and the Moon: Stories to Listen to from Kenya**. By Heather McNeil.

**The Corn Woman: Audio Stories and Legends of the Hispanic Southwest**. English and Spanish versions. By Angel Vigil. Spanish version read by Juan Francisco Marín.

**Thai Tales: Audio Folktales from Thailand**. By Supaporn Vathanaprida and Margaret Read MacDonald. Narrated by Supaporn Vathanaprida. Produced and with an Introduction by Margaret Read MacDonald.

**Folk Stories of the Hmong: Audio Tales from the Peoples of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam**. By Norma J. Livo and Dia Cha. Narrated by Norma J. Livo and Dia Cha.

# The Magic Egg and Other Tales from Ukraine

Barbara J. Suwyn
Drawings by the Author

Edited and with an Introduction by
Natalie O. Kononenko

1997
LIBRARIES UNLIMITED, INC.
Englewood, Colorado

Libraries Unlimited, Inc.
P.O. Box 6633
Englewood, CO 80155-6633
(800) 237-6124
www.lu.com

*Production Editor:* Kevin W. Perizzolo
*Copy Editor:* Brooke D. Graves
*Proofreader:* Eileen Bartlett
*Indexer:* Christine Smith
*Interior Design and Typesetting:* Judy Gay Matthews

---

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Suwyn, Barbara J., 1949-
The magic egg and other tales from Ukraine / [retold by] Barbara J. Suwyn ; drawings by author ; edited and with an introduction by Natalie O. Kononenko.
xxxv, 230 p. 19x26 cm. -- (World folklore series)
Includes bibliographical references (p. 207) and index.
ISBN 1-56308-425-2
1. Tales--Ukraine. I. Kononenko, Natalie O. II. Title.
III. Series.
GR203.8.S89 1997
398.2'09477--DC21 97-6734
CIP

*This book is dedicated to my father,*
*who taught me to love stories,*
*and to my mother,*
*who taught me to seek the truth.*

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Contents



## Part I
## Animal Tales



## Part II
## How and Why Stories

## Part III
## Moral Stories



## Part IV
## Legends and Fairy Tales

# Preface

"ONCE UPON A TIME."

When I was a child, those were the most magical words to me, for those were the words my father spoke as he began our bedtime stories. Each night, as the world outside gathered itself into darkness and silence, my three sisters and I lay tucked snugly into bed, enraptured by our father's tales of talking animals, good and powerful heroes, evil villains, enchanted castles, flying carpets, dragons, and fairies. My father's stories opened the doors to our imaginations and led us to our dreams. We loved stories more than any other form of entertainment; and when father told stories, we listened. No other words could so capture our attention as "Once upon a time."

As we grew older, my sisters and I turned to books. Throughout our childhood years we delighted in animal tales and fairy tales; we thrilled to adventure stories, mysteries, and tales of horror; and we swooned over romances. We shared our books and stories, as we still do, but it is my belief that our love of reading had its beginning in the bedtime stories we heard as children. I credit my father with instilling this love of stories and books in us.

Recently I asked my father where he had learned all the stories he told us as children. His reply was simple: "In school." Stories and learning are great companions. Stories are not just entertainment—they teach us. They teach us about ourselves and others, they illustrate great truths, and they illuminate the connectedness and meaning of our lives. It is therefore natural and good that stories be used to educate.

The stories in this book hold many opportunities for learning. They demonstrate the value of honesty, generosity, and kindness. They show us that animals can be great friends to people and that people have a natural place in the world. These tales also acquaint

readers and listeners with the cultural roots of a country and people who have been too long forgotten. Ukraine, which has only recently emerged from the shadow of the Soviet Union, is a country rich in history and culture. Its folk literature is vast, and reading through it involves a bit of excavation. Here readers can find ancient pagan elements, Christian themes and characters, and modern populist influences. They will recognize parallels with tales from Western Europe as well as with those of Russia, Turkey, Poland, and other neighboring countries and groups. For example, some readers will note similarities between the character of Little Fox in this collection and the notorious Reynard of Germany and Eastern Europe. Many will recognize the Cinderella tale, which takes on some unique twists in the Ukrainian version ("The Golden Slipper"). These and other folktales of Ukraine have been shaped through history by a multitude of hearts and voices as they have been handed down from generation to generation. Through this process they have become richly layered with meaning.

Ukraine, which means "borderland," is situated between Europe, Asia, and the Mediterranean. Throughout its history, it has often been dominated by other nations, but Ukraine has also reaped cultural benefits from its associations. Ukrainian folktales illustrate the rich history of the country—depicting brave warriors, powerful princes, and poor but clever peasants. Educators can use these stories as springboards for further learning with extension activities that encourage research and study. Projects can range from having students write a report on the *cossacks* in Ukrainian history, listening to traditional *bandura* music, watching a film about the *Hutsuls* (an ethnic group from the Carpathian Mountains), or studying the geography of Ukraine with its mighty rivers, great plains, and wooded mountains. There are many opportunities for learning in this book—the possibilities are truly endless.

In the time it has taken me to assemble this collection, I have had the pleasure of working with stories that are highly entertaining and also rich in content. The tales have led me to learn more about the country, art, traditions, and people of Ukraine. In many ways, these tales have touched me.

There is an old tradition of welcome in Ukraine. When guests came to visit, they were offered bread and salt. Bread, the staff of life, is for Ukrainians the one essential food of life. Salt, a precious commodity and one of the first

preservatives, is also a symbol of kinship and longevity. Offering salt to a guest meant the host was giving something precious and dear, and it was an invitation to live long in harmony. Life and kinship continue to be the sentiments that Ukrainians extend to their visitors. This collection of stories is extended to readers in that same spirit of welcome, of bread and salt, life and kinship. Perhaps they will sustain you or whet your appetite for more. My intent with the stories in this collection is to spark your interest and the interest of your students, children, or listeners. If you wish to learn more about Ukraine's history, geography, and culture, the publications listed in the bibliography will provide you with a good starting place. Above all, it is my sincere hope that these tales will touch and teach you as they have touched and taught me, and that through your sharing, these stories will live on.

Barbara J. Suwyn, 1997

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Acknowledgments

I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS MY SINCERE APPRECIATION to the following individuals who supported and contributed to this endeavor: Dr. Bohdan Wynar, for giving me the opportunity to participate in the project, granting me the full use of his archives, and sharing with me his love for Ukraine; Dr. Bohdan Medwidsky and Dr. Robert Klymasz, for advice in the initial planning stages of the project; my editor, Prof. Natalie Kononenko, who contributed her time, expertise, and creativity to the project and guided me in finding sources, selecting and writing stories, and authenticating content; Dr. Eugene Petriwsky, for help in locating source material; Heather McNeil, Marilyn Hempstead, and Dr. Suzanne Barchers, for help with storytelling methodology and techniques; Dr. Larysa Onyshkevych, for sharing her version of "The Turnip"; Nadia Vynnych, for help with translation; Olha Yarema Wynar, for consultation on folk custom and tradition; Clark Richert, for technical help with maps, photographs, and illustrations; Kevin W. Perizzolo, my production editor, for his generous support and guidance throughout the production phase of the project; Judy Gay Matthews for her sensitivity in design and layout; Joan Garner for her outstanding cover design; the staff of Libraries Unlimited; and many others too numerous to mention.

Generous thanks go to the following people for allowing me to use their materials in this book:

Alexander Tkachenko: for use of his artwork *Ukrainian Christmas* (on the front cover) and *The Path to the Windmill.*

Myron W. Surmach: © Surma Book & Music Co. for use of *Christmas Is Here* (glass painting).

Natalie Kononenko: for use of photographs and stories: "Pea Roll-Along," "The Doll," "The Man Who Danced with the Rusalky," "The Christmas Spiders," "The Red Death," "How Evil Came into the World," "The Sun, the Frost, and

the Wind," "Dnipro and Dunai," "St. Cassian," "Dovbush's Treasure," and "The Stranger.".

Bohdan, Marta, Virna, Danylo, Olena, Tamara, and Halina Koval: for use of Halyna Mazepa's artworks, "Girl with Buckets" (on back cover), "The Three Brothers," "Vasyl' and the Frog," and "The Two Daughters."

Bohdan S. Wynar: for use of photographs.

# Introduction to Ukrainian Folktales

Natalie O. Kononenko

TALES AND LEGENDS are but one small part of Ukraine's rich and varied folklore tradition. This tradition includes proverbs, riddles, dances, games, and songs of every kind, from long story songs about great battles to short lyric songs about love, from songs for adults to lullabies for children. The richness of Ukrainian folklore comes from many sources, but foremost among them is the Ukrainian people's intense feeling for the land and for all living things. Although Ukraine is a land of great cities, as well as towns, villages, and separate farmsteads, the heart and soul of the people and of their folklore are in the village. Villages depended heavily on farming and Ukrainian farming was wonderfully successful. In fact, Ukraine was known as the breadbasket of Europe and will probably resume that title someday.

The success of Ukrainian farming resulted not only from the fecundity of the soil, but also from a deep, centuries-old understanding of the land, the plants that grew in it, and of the animals that lived on it. We see that understanding here in the many stories about animals and the stories in which crops play a role. In "The Doll," "The Stolen *Postoly* and the Boiled Eggs," and "The Clever Maid," for example, understanding how crops are sown and reaped is central. In "Pea-Roll-Along," a vegetable as small as a pea makes a woman give birth to a great hero, one stronger than all of his brothers and mightier even than an incarnation of evil.

As for the animal tales, all folklore traditions have animal stories for the entertainment of children and for teaching virtues such as trustworthiness and generosity. Ukrainian folklore has this,too,

along with a sense that animals are the kin of human beings. We see animals assuming human roles—farmer, midwife, village head—and interacting with people as if animals and human beings understood each other and lived on the same terms. In addition to all of the animals in specifically animal tales, we see many animals in tales outside this category. In "The Magic Egg," for example, there is an eagle who soars as high as the heavens, who can take people to the other world and also teach them respect for all life, animal as well as human. Respect for all life was important for, in many senses, Ukrainians did indeed feel that they were related to all living things, that they and animals were one. Should anyone forget this, stories such as "The Christmas Spiders" remind us that even the lowliest animals are blessed and can transfer their blessings to humankind.

As important as the feeling of being one with nature was the belief that the dead continue to interact with the living, protecting them, guiding them, making sure that they prosper and do all that is right and good. In our stories we meet old people who help young people and tell them what to do, offering counsel and guidance that is so wise it can overcome the devil himself. We learn that the gift of a dying relative, even something as small as a seed (perhaps a symbol for a bit of good advice) can protect the living, reward the pure of heart, and lead to prosperity. Even people who did some bad things during their lifetimes may become protectors and arbiters of justice after death. In the story of "Dovbush's Treasure," we see the Ukrainian Robin Hood supporting the poor and teaching good moral values, even though he himself did bad things as well as good while he was alive. In Ukraine, the presence of ancestors was always felt—past generations and traditions—with which people wanted to maintain contact, linking them to future generations through tales.

The perceived presence of ancestors led to great respect for old people. Unfortunately, it did not fully overcome the opposite tendency, a tendency to ignore elders or even mistreat them and cast them aside. Old people are often weak of body, even if they are strong of mind, and there is a certain temptation to avoid giving them their due. Certainly Ukrainians face this problem, as do peoples all around the world. Stories in every category remind us what folly it is to disregard the old. Whether it is an old dog or an old cat, who is cast out because of age and weakness but later triumphs over incredible adversity; an elderly father who seems stupid but outsmarts all his greedy and inattentive children; or a grandmother who seems ineffectual but can protect a child from beyond the grave, characters in folklore show us again and again that the old

are valuable members of the community. The emphasis on old people in tales is probably not coincidental. Old people were the primary tellers of tales and conservers of the Ukrainian heritage. It is thanks to them, and to the triumph of the positive tradition of respecting old people, their wisdom, and their lore, that we have so vast a folklore tradition.

Another reason for the richness of Ukrainian folklore comes from the fact that Ukraine is such an ancient land. The area has been continuously inhabited since 5,000 B.C., and possibly longer. Archeological finds show that a well-developed culture existed several millennia before our era. They also demonstrate that the ancient culture is continuous with the culture of modern Ukraine, at least to a certain degree. Decorative motifs found on prehistoric pots, statues, and other artifacts are still used today.

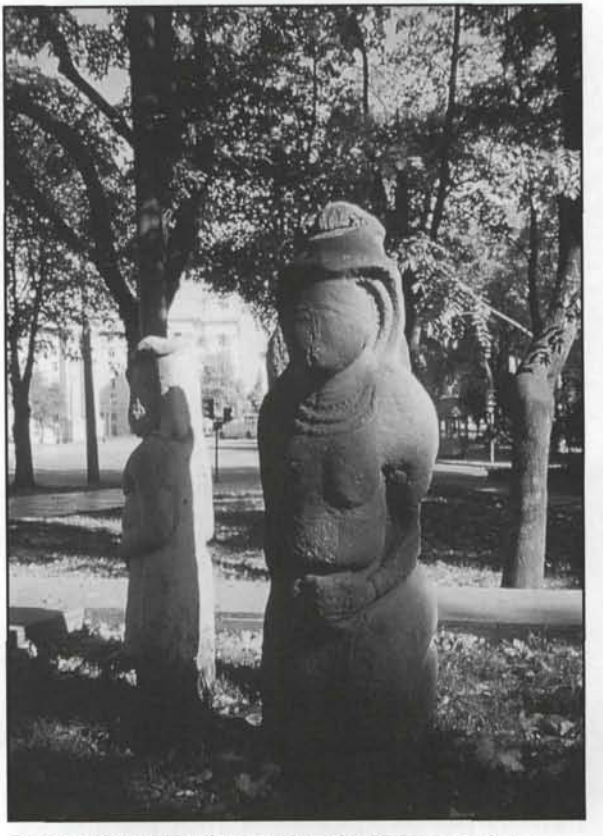
Perhaps the two most interesting and most typically Ukrainian artifacts that are in use today and that can be linked to prehistory are *rushnyky* and *pysanky*. *Rushnyky* are embroidered towels. These are not towels used for drying hands or wiping the dishes; rather, they are decorative and sacred objects. They are hung around icons and around windows and doors. A newborn child is typically wrapped in a *rushnyk*; a *rushnyk* is placed on the body of a deceased person; a bride wears one as a belt on her wedding day. All these uses establish that the *rushnyk* is a sacred cloth used to protect people, especially people in transit, people moving in and out of a house, or people crossing from one stage of life to the next.

*Pysanky* are the famous Ukrainian batik Easter eggs. Unlike *krasanky* (which are Easter eggs all of one color, meant to be eaten to break the Lenten fast on Easter morning), *pysanky* are raw eggs, intricately decorated with beeswax and many colors of dye. They are not meant to be eaten, but are given as gifts to ensure health and prosperity and buried under houses and in fields to bring good crops and good fortune. Both *rushnyky* and *pysanky* have designs, such as the tree of life, soul birds, and votive female figures with upraised hands, that can also be found on prehistoric pieces unearthed in archeological digs. The *rushnyky* and *pysanky* show that motifs from an ancient belief system continue into today.

Ancient motifs are plentiful in our tales as well. In our stories we see magic trees, such as the tree that grows from a tiny seed to become the source of plenty, or the tree that speaks to the heroine and rewards her with apples while withholding gifts from her lazy and inconsiderate sister. There are magic birds that carry heroes out of the underworld, and many, many magical

women—the Frog Princess and the *rusalky,* among others. It becomes obvious that there is a cultural heritage in the area of Ukraine that dates back many millennia: a rich heritage of artifacts paralleled by a rich heritage of legends and tales.

"Legend and tale" is a standard division of folklore. *Legends* are stories that are told as if they were true, though many contain fantastic elements such as ghosts, goblins, and sprites. *Tales* are make-believe stories, stories that happened once upon a time and three times nine kingdoms away. The legends in this book have been further subdivided into how-and-why stories and moral stories; the tales have been subdivided into animal stories and magic stories. Though these divisions are standard, they do not fully correspond to the place and uses of stories in Ukrainian folklore, nor do they fully reflect the degree to which the story categories blend into and influence one another. For example, "The Doll," which is now a fantastic tale, was probably once a mythical story told as if it were true. In it we encounter an old woman—called a witch in our version, but probably once a goddess figure—who controls the sun. Her horsemen of morning, noon, and night bring sunlight and then take it away as night falls. This was probably once seen as a true story explaining why night changes into day and back again.



Prehistoric goddess figure (Photo by N. Kononenko)

The witch in this story also possesses a magical spindle and a magical loom with which she rewards the heroine for service. The fact that items used to make cloth come from a mythical woman who controls sunlight underscores the

reverence that Ukrainians have for cloth even today. We see the sacred quality of cloth not only in the importance of the *rushnyk* (as discussed earlier), but also in the general regard for embroidery in Ukraine. In the past, all girls were expected to learn how to embroider by the time they were eight years old. By the time they married, they were supposed to have filled a huge dowry chest with embroidered pieces. Even now, many Ukrainians embroider and consider beautiful embroidery characteristic of a Ukraine home. Note also that the name of the heroine of "The Doll," Paraska, probably derives from the name of the patron saint of cloth and fiber arts, Paraskovia Piatnytsia.

The mythic background of tales and legends is extensive, and some of the peculiarly Ukrainian belief features that it lends to our tales need further explanation. One of these is the figure of the witch. Ukrainian witchcraft beliefs were quite complex and were probably influenced by ancient goddess worship as well as by more recent, western approaches. Thus, we have the more western idea that witches are bad and harmful, coexisting with the older, more native idea that witches are wise old women who can offer advice and guidance. In the Ukrainian village, there was a distinction between born witches and learned witches. *Learned witches* were bad. Their magic could harm people and they were most like what we associate with the term *witch.* The term *born witch* indicated a person who had magical powers but was not an evil person. The magic of born witches was almost never harmful; instead, they helped to heal sick people and sick farm animals and to restore crops. Many of the witches and wise women we see in our stories are of the born witch category. When we read about them, we should suspend some of the apprehension that the term *witch* arouses in us and try to adopt the Ukrainian perspective.

Witches were part of something called the *unclean force.* The unclean force is a huge category that comprises a great number and variety of beings. One of the ways in which Ukrainians expressed their feeling that the world around them was alive and that people could interact with any and all aspects of this world was a system of spirits. There were spirits for nearly everything in the farmstead (the house, the barn, the bathhouse, the shed) and everything outside (the field, the stream, the forest, and so on). Like witches, these spirits could be both good and bad. Although Christianity tended to view these spirits negatively, and the designation *unclean* probably comes from the time of Christianity, the spirits actually upheld many moral values. They made sure that people shared with the needy the fish they caught or the wood they cut; they rewarded those

who were hardworking by tending their cattle for them or helping them with their spinning and weaving; they even punished those who did not go to church on Sundays. Among the stories presented here, we have a creation legend that tries to explain how these spirits came to be. We also encounter a very special version of the unclean force, the *klad* or treasure spirit, in the form of Oleksa Dovbush, who makes sure that people do not succumb to greed.

One unique member of the unclean force was the *rusalka*, sometimes also called the *mavka*. Often pictured as a mermaid because she made her home in a body of water such as a lake or a river, the *rusalka* was much more than that. *Rusalky* did indeed live in water, but they had legs and feet and they could come out of water, sit in trees, and even dance in fields. *Rusalky* are often described as sitting on docks, combing their green hair, and singing songs that were supposed to be the most beautiful, most entrancing songs in the world.

Like the witch, the *rusalka* probably evolved from an ancient goddess figure; thus, she was much more than a spirit of a building or a place. Also, like the witch, the *rusalka* could be good or bad. Often believed to be the spirit of someone who had died a bad death, such as a person who had committed suicide, a *rusalka* could harm people by leading them astray and tempting them to drown themselves. A *rusalka* could also do many good things. The goddess from which she developed was probably a crop and fertility deity who had control over water and rain and could make crops grow, as the *rusalky* were said to do. A typical legend tells of circles in forests or in fields where the grass grew particularly lush and green because it was a spot where the *rusalky* had danced. There is even a summer festival that, in certain parts of Ukraine, bears the name of the *rusalka* (though in other areas it is named for the seventh week after Easter). During this festival, girls do fortune-telling with trees, flowers, and water and try to act like *rusalky*, bringing fertility to the fields around the village so that the crops will grow.

*Rusalky* have captured the imagination of many generations. They appear extensively in both legends and tales, and stories about them are included in this collection. There are also many folk pictures of and songs about *rusalky*. *Rusalky* or characters based on them appear in modern Ukrainian movies, such as *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*; there is even a chocolate candy called a *rusalka*.

Tales and legends, along with other forms of folklore, have been extensively collected and very well documented in Ukraine. The reasons for the good documentation of Ukrainian folklore are both happy and unhappy ones.

The most positive is the love for Ukrainian folklore of people like this author, people who seek to collect and preserve Ukrainian traditions and to disseminate them as widely as possible. Systematic collection of Ukrainian folklore began early in the nineteenth century. The results of the many collecting efforts, both those made by individuals and those made by folklore expeditions, have been published in books, magazines, and journals. Many materials, however, remain in archives, unpublished. The wealth of Ukrainian folklore is great indeed!

The unhappy reason for the extensive recording of Ukrainian folk traditions is that folklore was often the only means of expression allowed Ukrainian authors and scholars. Ukraine is a rich and beautiful land coveted by many. It has almost never been free. Since the fall of the Kyivan state, it has suffered Turko-Tatar domination; domination by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Austro-Hungarian empire, and Poland; and rule by the Russian imperial and (most recently) Soviet empires.

When folklore began to be intensively collected, eastern Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire and western Ukraine was part of Austro-Hungary. In eastern Ukraine, activities that might encourage Ukrainian nationalist feelings were banned, but folklore was not. Russians saw Ukraine as a backward, border place: *Little Russia*, as Ukraine was so often called. They also saw folklore as ignorant, country literature, appropriate to their perception of Ukraine. Russians felt that the collection of Ukrainian folklore, by perpetuating the image of Ukrainian backwardness, would foster the subjugation of Ukraine. Therefore, they permitted the extensive scholarly activity from which we draw so much of our information today.

Ironically, when Ukrainian folklore was published, it was often published not as Ukrainian material, but as a subdivision of Russian folklore. Thus Aleksandr Afanas'ev's famous collection, *Russian Folk Tales*, is not strictly a collection of Russian tales at all, but one that includes Ukrainian and Belarusian tales alongside the Russian ones. Because Ukraine was labeled Little Russia and its language was considered a distant dialect of Russian, its folklore was seen as subsumable under Russian folklore. Russia supposedly consisted of three parts: Great Russia, what we call Russia today; Little Russia, or Ukraine; and White Russia, what we now call Belarus. The latter two could be—and often were—included under Great Russia. Some of the material drawn on here comes from books that nominally contain Russian folktales or Russian legends. We know that they are actually Ukrainian because we can easily distinguish the Ukrainian

language from Russian. Sometimes Ukrainian tales appear in Russian translation to make them more accessible to a Russian reading public. In these instances we can discern their Ukrainian origin if the place where a tale or legend was collected is given in the index or the notes.

In western Ukraine, a similar situation prevailed, the major difference being that there was less of an attempt to assimilate Ukraine and Ukrainian culture into the politically dominant national group. A particularly productive period for folklore work in western Ukraine was the beginning and early part of this century, during which special folklore and ethnographic commissions collected information about and examples of all of the folklore forms listed at the beginning of this introduction, plus data on housing, clothing, and rituals such as funerals and weddings. Data gathered in western Ukraine have been used for the tales and especially for the legends, or "true" stories, presented in this book.

When the Soviets came to power, they controlled both eastern and (after World War II) western Ukraine. They took a less permissive attitude toward Ukrainian folklore than had Russian authorities during the tsarist period and Polish authorities in the west. Soviet government and other agencies soon recognized how effective folklore was in communicating information and ideas. It became Soviet policy to foster folklore, but not in its natural form. The old, classic collections disappeared. New ones, prepared following proper scholarly principles, were confiscated and destroyed. What we would consider true folklore was replaced with an artificial Soviet product. The job of folklorists was no longer to record folklore and present it in as accurate a form as possible; it was to remake folklore and turn it into an instrument that served the Soviet state. Thus folklorists went through stories and songs, taking out all references to religion, anything that might encourage Ukrainian nationalist feelings, and anything that might stimulate rebellious ideas. Only then were these reworked materials published. Folk forms that were considered particularly Ukrainian, such as *pysanky*, disappeared. Besides getting rid of all things that Soviet powers might find undesirable, folklorists were supposed to help folk artists create stories and songs to advance attitudes that would serve the Soviet state, such as submissiveness and collectivism. Instead of stories about ancestors, children listened to stories about Stalin. Instead of *rushnyky* with the tree of life or a goddess figure in the middle, people embroidered towels with portraits of Lenin and slogans to the glory of the Soviet Socialist Revolution.

Soviet rule has ended and Ukraine is now an independent country. In Ukraine, people are trying to reclaim their true folklore from the overlaid strata of Soviet influence. They are trying to recover truly Ukrainian stories, songs, and designs. Something quite different is happening in the United States. Though Americans of Ukrainian descent were always keenly aware of their heritage, Americans with no Ukrainian blood or ties often did not know that Ukraine even existed. So effectively had the Soviets presented Russia as the emblem of the Soviet Union that many people were unaware that the Soviet Union was indeed a union, that there were many non-Russian peoples living underSoviet rule. Now that the Soviet Union has fallen apart, all of the peoples hidden behind the Russian facade are being revealed, to the fascination of Americans who had never realized the richness and diversity trapped behind the Iron Curtain.

This collection is presented to respond to American interest in Ukraine and to Ukrainian Americans who want to read the lore of their land. It contains new versions of old favorites plus some stories that have not been routinely published in folktale collections. It has been our particular goal to include material that is little known outside Ukraine and material that has been mislabeled as Russian, as well as stories that appear in standard collections of Ukrainian folklore. This should help to make the picture of Ukrainian folklore presented here as accurate and as varied as possible.

With all our efforts, this collection just scratches the surface. There are many, many more stories out there, as well as songs, proverbs, charms, and other forms of folklore. We hope that you enjoy the stories in this book and that you get a chance to experience the rest of Ukrainian folklore as well.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Introduction

Barbara J. Suwyn

## *Folktales and History*

THE FOLKTALES IN THIS BOOK reflect many elements from Ukraine's history—from ancient wedding and burial customs to the tradition of *pysanky* (elaborately decorated Easter eggs) and figures of *cossacks*, peasants, and princes. They also embody the country's cultural roots and values. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that storytelling still flourishes in many Ukrainian villages and towns. Although the Ukraine of today is very different from the Ukraine in these stories, the tales offer not only a map of Ukraine's past, but a portrait of the country's soul. Hopefully, this collection will extend the important tradition of stories beyond Ukraine's borders and into the future.

## *About the Tales*

The tales in this book are as diverse as the people and countryside of Ukraine, yet together they show readers something of the spirit and unity of the land and its people. Under the guidance of my editor, I have sought to present tales that authentically represent the richness of the Ukrainian culture. I have also tried to create a collection that offers something for every reader. Tales such as "The Turnip," "Clever Little Fox," and "The Mitten," with their simple plots and repetitive lines, will delight very young listeners as read-alouds. Humorous animal stories, such as "Pan Kotsky, Sir Puss O'Cat" and "Old Dog Sirko," also appropriate for read-alouds, will appeal to children throughout the elementary grades; while stories with moral themes, such as "The Old Father Who Went to School" and heroic tales such as "The Flute and the Whip" will find audience

with upper elementary students. There are even a few spooky stories—"The Man Who Danced with the *Rusalky*" "The Stranger," and "The Sorceress"—that will fascinate older students in middle and high school. But while there is something for everyone, not every story in this collection is for every reader or listener, and parents and educators should review specific tales before sharing them with any audience to see if the content is appropriate.

In re-telling these tales, my goal has been to present traditional stories in a style more accessible to readers and listeners. I have tried to keep the language and the sentence structure relatively simple, so that the tales lend themselves to read-alouds and re-tellings. At the same time I have tried to retain elements in the stories that encourage vocabulary development, make the tales appropriate for silent reading, and spark the interest of older readers. Finally, I have made a conscious effort to include heroes of both sexes and also sought to avoid negative stereotypes without destroying archetypes.

### *Sources of the Tales*

The sources for this collection are varied and for each tale diverse sources were consulted. Many written collections, as listed in the bibliography, were used. Other stories were contributed by my editor. Most of these tales were handed down orally, but some are new conflations of traditional themes and materials. Tales that are the editor's original composites include "Pea Roll-Along," "The Doll," "The Man Who Danced with the *Rusalky*," "The Christmas Spiders," and "The Red Death." These originals are indicated with the editor's name at their endings. The editor has also shared her re-tellings of other tales. These include "How Evil Came into the World"; "The Sun, the Frost, and the Wind"; "Dnipro and Dunai"; "Saint Cassian"; "Dovbush's Treasure"; and "The Stranger." In addition, Larysa Onyshkevych wrote one of the versions of "The Turnip" on which I based my re-telling.

### *Historical Background*

The history of Ukraine is long and complicated, and it is not my intention to describe it in detail here but to offer a simple summary that highlights certain historic events of interest to general readers. Those seeking a thorough history of Ukraine are encouraged to explore the sources in the bibliography.