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MYKOLA GOGOL IN THE CONTEXT OF UKRAINIAN CULTURE

Mykola Vasiliovich Gogol was born on the April 1 1890 in the village of Veliki Sorochyntsi, not far from Poltava. Gogol's parents were Christians, they followed Orthodoxy. That's why they christened their son in the Transfiguration church (the Spaso-Preobraghensky church) in Velyki Sorochyntsi. This ancient church was built in 1734. Its style largely represents Ukrainian baroque. The Transfiguration church is available now for both tourists and church-goers. The unique characteristic of this church is the wooden iconostasis, where the icons are directly presented. The height of the iconostasis is 22 m. It is considered one of the best sights of the Ukrainian baroque. Exactly in this church Gogol was christened and named Mykola.

The name Mykola was chosen for a reason. Gogol's mother Maria Ivanivna prayed to Saint Mykolay for the birth of her son. At that time, there was a miraculous icon of Saint Mykolai in the village of Dikanka, the future author got his name on the honor of it.

In Ukraine most people are Christians and one of the most famous winter holidays is St. Nicholas Day. We celebrate it every year on December 19. Saint Nicholas is very similar to Santa Claus. This holiday is still one of the favorite day for children in Ukraine. Little kids believe that Saint Nicholas brings presents and puts them under their pillows during the night on December 18. Even now there is a tradition among Ukrainian children to write letters to

Saint Nicholas, where it is necessary to mention what good and bad they did during the last year. According to this, Saint Nicholas has to reward kids with nice gifts for all good things they did. So, Gogol was named after Saint Nicholas.

At first, Mykola Gogol studied at school in Poltava, then he continued his education in the gymnasium in Nizhyn. The motto of the gymnasium was "Work and Diligence". In Nizhyn, Gogol had a lot of interests. He played the violin, painted, wrote plays, and took part in plays himself. In 1825, when Mykola Gogol was a pupil of the 6th form, his father died. He had to become the main support for his mother and sisters. During all his life he was looking after his family, having some responsibilities about the householding and education of his sisters. He often wrote letters to his family and came to his home village because of the tight knitted relationship with his mother and sisters.

After finishing the gymnasium Gogol moved to St. Petersburg. He dreamt about the career of both writer and clerk. At that time, it was incredibly difficult to rise above the crowd being a poor person from the village. Gogol couldn't find a job for some period. Finally, Gogol got a place of clerk in one of the Household departments. He went to his job every day to copy the documents but dreamt to become a writer. When Mykola Gogol was in St. Petersburg, he realized that Ukraine might become the main topic of his works because of the beautiful nature and unique culture, which always surrounded him in childhood. That's why he decided to write several stories about the peculiarity of Ukrainian life united with one title «Evenings on a Farm Near Dykanka». Gogol asked his mother and sisters to send him detailed descriptions of Ukrainian customs, traditions, and clothes. He studied extensively all these aspects and widely described them in his novels.

In terms of the national Ukrainian costume (men's and women's), it should be noted that national costumes are

different depending on the regions of Ukraine. We will show you Ukrainian national costumes, which were and still are worn in our region, in Poltava region, where Gogol lived and grew up.

The spiritual symbol of the Ukrainian people from time immemorial was a beautiful vyshyvanka. It is an individual attribute of Ukrainians, regardless of where they are from the corner of our Motherland.

Ukrainian ancestors treated the embroidered clothing with great respect. Mothers and women decorate shirts by sewing patterns for their husbands and children, giving attention to each symbol because they all have a definite meaning.

Embroidery fills its owner with health, spiritual and physical beauty, light and love. After all, each embroidered element that adorns a Ukrainian shirt carries a magic value and gives its master a particular force, protects it. Viburnum means beauty, oak – strength and life, roses – passionate love, colorfulness – fidelity, poppy – youth and protection from evil, and sunflower – a symbol of the sun, light, and labor. The shirt is embroidered with colored threads provides the owner with healing power.

Ukrainian traditional costume consists of: vyshyvanka, zapaska (a skirt) and krajka (woven belt). Often the woven waistcoats with embroidery are carried.

The central areas like Poltava were characterized by white-on-white embroidery and also by a large amount of black and red patterns. The ornamentation was geometric or vegetative.

In 1831-1832, Mykola Gogol's collection of short stories "Evenings on a Farm Near Dykanka" was published in St. Petersburg. It brought the glory to the young Gogol. This book includes such works as "Sorochyn Fair", "The Night Before Christmas", "May Night" and others. On May 20 1831, Gogol met Alexander Pushkin, who appreciated the

Gogol's book. The Russian writer supported Gogol on his further path. Pushkin understood that love for Ukraine was the basis of Gogol's talent.

What is the secret of «Evenings on the Farm near Dykanka»? Why was the refined and educated St. Petersburg fascinated by Gogol's Ukrainian novels? This is very well explained by Pushkin, he said that Gogol's stories were really funny, sincere, easy-going, without greed, very poetical and sensitive. It was a brilliant flowering of Gogol's young talent, but only the first step on the great path of the writer.

Recently, on January 7, we have celebrated such a great holiday as Christmas in Ukraine. It is finely depicted in the Gogol's story "The Night Before Christmas", which is based on the Gogol's memories of celebration of the great Christian holiday in his Motherland. Gogol often took part in the Christmas celebration.

The ancient Ukrainian rite of caroling is described in the story "The Night before Christmas". Nowadays Ukrainian youth still loves it. Children or young people go from house to house and sing special songs. Caroling means to sing songs under the windows on the eve of Christmas, these songs called carols. The name of the songs is related to the Ukrainian word "Koliada" (from kolo (circle) – the sign of the Sun) – it means the God, who began a new circle of the Sun (Svarog) namely agricultural year in ancient times. With the adoption of Christianity, Koliada was associated in the Slavs with the holiday of Christmas.

The events in a story take place on Christmas Eve (Rich Evening, Holy Supper). Christians cook 12 Lenten dishes, gather with a whole family, read prayers this evening. Everyone waits for the first star in order to break the Lent. The main dish on the Christmas table was *kutia* (the hungry kutya or Lenten kutia) which is made of the gifts of nature and considered as a symbol of further prosperity and

protection from evil forces. People believed that on the Christmas Eve some magic things, unusual transformations and even the meeting with evil spirits have happened, but all evil spirits have to retreat before Christmas. There are a lot of such magic events in the Gogol's story «The Night Before Christmas»: a witch turned into Solokha, a devil into a horse, and a blacksmith Vakula managed to saddle the devil, flew to St. Petersburg during one night and got shoes for the beautiful Oksana from the Queen.

The plot of Gogol's story "The Night Before Christmas" revealed the traditions of the Ukrainian vertep – folk theater, where the action took place in two tiers: the upper (heavenly) and lower (earthly). The religious plots were showed in the upper tier and the funny scenes of a folk everyday life in the lower one. The traditional characters of Ukrainian vertep were a Holly Mother, Christ, a devil (in the upper tier), a woman, a deacon, a Cossack (in the lower tier). The most positive and dynamic character in vertep was Cossack, he was the winner in all scenes and embodied the freedom-loving ideals of the Zaporizka Sich.

The upper and lower tiers of the Gogol's story «The Night Before Christmas» are not separated but closely related to each other. The majestic story about Christmas is projected on the earthly world, where a person fights with a devil for a light, a good and a happiness in the life.

Mykola Gogol in his story "The Night Before Christmas" (Christmas Eve) described one of the traditional Ukrainian dish – varenyky (Ukrainian dumplings). Varenyky (dumplings) are known all over the world and Ukraine is the motherland for this wonderful dish. The national love immortalized varenyky in poems, songs, movies, and even monuments!

Ukrainian varenyky can be both the main course and the dessert. The most popular and widespread fillings are

potato, sauerkraut, cracklings, cheese, cherries, blueberries, and many other fruits and berries. Usually varenyky are served with fried onion or sour cream.

Mykola Gogol often mentioned varenyky in his novels. Born in the village Sorochyntsi, in Poltava, he was fond of Ukrainian cuisine, varenyky in particular. In his novel «Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka», Gogol described in detail the way Paciuk swallowed his varenyky with cheese and sour cream, while in his novel “Vii” the writer narrated about “giant” varenyky with the size of a hat and the diameter of 30-40 centimeters.

In Ukraine, varenyky are not just a national dish, but also a special talisman. Since ancient times there were some beliefs, varenyky were sacrificed to the moon for the well-being of the family. Ukrainian varenyky are half moon shaped, that has a big meaning.

It is known that Gogol liked varenyky very much. He knew how to cook them himself. On St. Nicholas Day, he gathered his friends and treated them to varenyky.

And when Gogol visited his mother and sisters in Vasylivka village, his mother baked him Koroway. This is a special Ukrainian round loaf of bread. It is used in a lot of rituals. Koroway has the shape of the sun. The sun is a sacred symbol in Ukrainian culture. The Sun Worship was before the adoption of Christianity. And now dear guests in Ukraine are greeted with bread and salt on an embroidered towel. This custom came from paganism, when bread was a deity. Koroway is used at weddings as a symbol of family well-being.

And one more traditional Ukrainian dish that Gogol loved is borshch. It is the most well-known and symbolical traditional Ukrainian food. This traditional soup, made of beet root and up to 20 other ingredients, is a staple dish in every Ukrainian family. Usually it's consists of beetroot, cabbage, tomatoes, potatoes, dill and meat. Borshch has

been one of the main dishes on Ukrainian table way back since the 14th century, so it's no wonder there are more than 30 variations of its recipe. Apart from the classical «red» borscht, in which beetroot gives its recognizable color, many Ukrainians also love «green» borscht, where the main component is sorrel leaves. It is often served in summer and considered the 'light' dish. Red borshch is traditionally served with pampushky – small, fluffy buns often sprinkled with garlic and dill.

Moving on now to another very popular work of Mykola Gogol “Taras Bulba”. Taras Bulba is a story published in 1835 in the book Mirgorod. Set on the Ukrainian steppe, “Taras Bulba” is an epic tale of the lives of Cossack warriors. The narrative follows the exploits of an aging Cossack, Taras Bulba, and his two sons. Gogol published a revised and expanded version of the story in 1842 year. But who is a Cossack? Cossack (from Turkic kazak, «adventurer» or «free man»), member of a people dwelling in the northern lands of the Black sea. They had a tradition of independence and finally received privileges from the Russian government in return for military services. They lived in Zaporizka Sich. The name of several Cossack's dwellings on the Dnipro River that were the centers of the Zaporizhia. They are very similar to Japanese samurais. They were very brave, strong and had their own traditions and laws. The Cossacks accepted anyone who was considered a worthy warrior, but the new members had to believe in Christ.

The Cossacks had specific customs. A child was taught the warrior-ways of the Cossacks from birth. When a male child was born, the parents would take his hand and place it on a weapon. The Cossacks were superior horsemen. By the time a Cossack was three years old he was riding horses. The Cossack lifestyle was also based on simplicity. Members shared land and lived in communes.

So, Ukrainian land has a lot of varied customs and traditions. It has long history and a lot of writers with a great pleasure described it in their works. And Mykola Gogol is one of the most famous writers who kept Ukrainian national traditions in his works.

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