

Animal Magic: Contemporary Beliefs and Practices in Ukrainian Villages

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Гей, дай же, Боже, і в домі щастя,
І в домі щастя для челядочки!
Гей, дай же, Боже, і на двір щастя,
І на двір щастя для худобочки,
Для худобочки, для рогової!

Щедрівка (1)

Ukraine is predominantly an agrarian country with livestock production being the second most important occupation of the villagers. The repetitive upheavals of the 20th century – civil and world wars, revolution, the mass collectivization of 1928-1933, the artificial Great Famine that took the lives of about seven million Ukrainians, village uprisings, and mass resettlements introduced major changes to the traditional peasant world outlook.(2) The collectivization and dekulakization (eliminating the rich peasantry) campaigns, through expropriation of private arable lands and forceful imposition of Soviet collective farms, or *kolkhosp*y, was aimed at destroying the institution of private ownership. They were accompanied with arrests, exiles, and executions of many villagers. Village churches were mostly destroyed or turned into either *kluby*, entertainment centers, or storage places, while priests were imprisoned after being convicted of being enemies of the people. Most traditional village rituals were publicly ridiculed as superstitions alien to the new, Soviet people. All that, as Wanner pointed out, “effectively destroyed the essence of a peasant-based, rural Ukrainian culture.”[Wanner 41]

It certainly was expected that villagers would turn into a new, enlightened, and advanced stratum of society. Indeed, some advancement took place in village life: many kinds of traditional, back-breaking labor were mechanized, agricultural operations were accelerated, and secondary education became compulsory, to name but a few changes. But even though Soviet ideology affected visible “landmarks” of village life, it had little influence on the invisible, peasant worldview, which remained magical.

For people who see the world magically, no accidental events exist. The magical worldview has its own strict logic or system for

explanations for success and failure: people who are successful possess Power while those who fail lack it. Power can be either benevolent or malevolent, and can vary in its distribution among people so that some people possess one variety of Power and others, another.[Wax and Wax 183](3) Within the magical worldview, power is perceived as something physical: a “thing freely given, sold, extorted, stolen, or exchanged.”[Wax and Wax 185] Gaining Power then to protect oneself from hostile superior Powers becomes a vital concern which is essential for survival.

There are various explanations why Ukrainian villagers continued believing and practicing magic and, particularly, animal magic. One possibility is that magic used for protection and enhancement of one’s private animal husbandry was a means of securing one’s current survival and future financial independence from others, no matter who those ‘others’ were – fellow villagers or the State. To propose that magic was consciously practiced as a form of resistance to the oppressive intrusion of the State is a dubious speculation that is impossible to verify. What I argue in this article instead is that magic was directly and exclusively linked to the villagers’ sense of private ownership and thus did not extend to animals owned collectively in *kolhospy*. During Soviet times, and fourteen years after the collapse of the USSR, Ukrainian villagers believed in and practiced magic for the sake of their animals. Protecting what they personally owned and were responsible for gave them hope for economic stability or even prosperity, and it invariably led to a sense of relative safety and independence. Hard-working villagers who possessed nothing and had no individual rights were essentially slaves. Not only were they helpless before natural forces but were also unprotected before the power of the State. Magic was the means of protection. It did not contest religion. It paralleled religion. It was just another way to deal with otherwise unruly powers. Evidently, for this reason, Ukrainian peasants have never made a clear-cut distinction between magic and religion.

There are sparse data on contemporary magic beliefs and practices in Ukrainians regarding their livestock. In his monograph, Zhuravliov - using primarily snippets of information from archival collections and ethnographic publications of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries - summarizes information about Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian folk practices on reproductive, commercial, and prophylactic animal magic. [Zhuravliov 254]

The present paper, based on 23 personal interviews with contemporary villagers from different regions of Ukraine (central, eastern, and western ones)(4), is a description of villagers' practices and beliefs in the same three major areas. The questionnaire used for these interviews (see Appendix), is partially adopted from Zhuravliov's data [p. 146].

I follow Frazer's distinction between contagious and imitative magic based on two main laws of magic – those of contact and similarity [Frazer 1963]. I also share Bogatyrev's point of view that “both kinds of magic... can be found in the same magical action.”[Bogatyrev] I also use the subdivision of magic into positive (prescription) and negative (proscription/taboo). Positive magic is present in actions aimed at achieving some desirable effect, while negative magic consists in non-performing, avoiding actions, which would otherwise cause some undesirable (negative, detrimental) effect. Additionally, I borrow Bogatyrev's notions of motivated and unmotivated magical actions. If the person performing the action can explain the reasons why the action produces a desirable result, then this would be an example of motivated magical action. If the person does not know the reason why the action causes a desirable effect, but still believes in the result, then this is an example of unmotivated magical action. Not only magical actions but also spontaneously appearing omens have the ability to foretell the future, and their interpretations are usually denoted as either “good” or “bad.”

My study population was formed mostly through my personal contacts or those of the interviewees, and included people who agreed to provide information about their livestock. There were six male informants and seventeen females. Ten of them were from Western Ukraine, nine from Eastern, and three from Central Ukraine. Most of my informants were people of middle age or older; the oldest was a 91 year old female from the eastern region.

The general tone expressed by my informants was cautious. None of them attributed success with animals to themselves. On the contrary, they all gave numerous examples of their own bad luck with their animals. There was a general fear of praising one's own good fortune before strangers because of the belief in the evil eye. To talk about success was dangerous for the villagers. Thus, their ‘shields’ of bad luck were probably used to deflect my envy and thus evil eye from their important business. The psychological sensitivity of the topic was substantial, and that might be concluded from the fact that I got many refusals to my

requests for interviews, and that most of my informants were not willing to provide their names.

Reproductive Magic

Animal reproduction is a very important sphere for peasants. Thus, reproductive magic has a central meaning and includes rituals, beliefs, taboos, omens, and incantations aimed at increasing the general fertility of the animals and improving aspects of animal mating, pregnancy, labor, and the post partum period. It also includes magical actions of protection and omens that enable one to predict the sex of future offspring and the time when they will be delivered.

The moment when a cow will come into heat is watched carefully by everyone and becomes a public matter if the cow is in a herd. The herdsmen then typically send a messenger to the owners. Usually there are several bulls in a village, and whoever needs to inseminate a cow walks with her to the house of a bull-owner. It is believed that this walk should be made in silence to be successful. The primary reason is obviously to conceal the real purpose of the trip from people who could wish bad luck because “*there are different people and different eyes!*” (5) The cow-owner will not even say hello to a relative in the street. The villagers will not be offended: they understand the reason of such behavior and practice it themselves. Halyna O-a (52 y.o., Er) said that it is advisable to utter “God bless” before leaving ones’ own yard with the cow. This, according to her, is a protective formula for starting any kind of business. The price for insemination is neither too high nor too low (25-30 *hryven'* in local currency, an equivalent of \$5-6). If a cow is not impregnated after the first try, the bull-owner allows the second and third attempts for free. However, money is a must. Valentyna Z-y (52 y.o., Er) explained her cow’s recent premature delivery and postpartum health problems to the fact that the bull-owner refused to take money because he was a relative. According to her, in wishing to help his not so-rich relatives, the bull-owner involuntary violated this strict rule and created even worse financial hardships for Valentyna’s family.

Orysia K-n (45 y.o., Wr) provided the details of the ritual of cow insemination that was never articulated by interviewees from other regions. Upon arriving at the bull-owner’s place, the owner of a cow must put the *nalyhach* (the rope with which she is tied) on the ground, the owner of the bull picks it up and leads the cow to the bull. When he returns the cow to the owner, they do the same thing again. All this, according to Orysia, is to prevent the loss of good luck with one’s own

animals. She stated that before leaving the yard, the cow should get some alcohol with sugar. It is supposed to calm her down and thus keep the semen inside. Others, on the other hand, stated that a cow gets sugar upon returning back home (Vasyl' V-k, 75 y.o., Wr; Mariia O-k, 74 y.o., Wr).

However, as artificial insemination is being used more and more in villages, the above ritual is observed less and less. Artificial insemination creates greater likelihood of success and requires less caution. Therefore, magic becomes unnecessary.

A cow's pregnancy is very desirable for her owners. During the whole pregnancy, the cow should be kept away from human eyes so that as few people as possible see the cow and know about her condition. The main reason for this is, again, fear of the evil eye.

All informants unanimously stated that the sex of the future offspring could not be predicted. Then the same informants provided noticeable patterns of animal behavior which might serve as indicators. For example, cows usually deliver female calves exactly 280 days after insemination, and if they are late by 10-14 days, then this is an indication that the calf will be male. Valentyna Z-y stated that if, during pregnancy, a cow prefers to lay on her left side in a barn, this is an indication she is carrying a female calf, while if she lies on her right side, the calf is male. Liudmyla S-k (48 y.o., Cr) added that a cow usually washes herself towards her back when carrying a female calf, and towards her front legs when carrying a male calf.

It is possible to influence the sex of future offspring, but only with chickens. Sofiia (72 y.o., Cr) insisted that, in order to have female chicks, one should put the eggs under a brood hen on "female days," i.e. the days of the week which are of feminine gender in Ukrainian – *sereda*, *p'iatnytsia* (Wednesday, Friday). "Male days" like *vivtorok*, *chetver* (Tuesday, Thursday) will result in roosters. Saturday and Sunday, it was explained, are usually skipped as inappropriate for the start of any business.

The masters of the house assist in their animals' deliveries. The ritual of animal birth is quite similar to the human one. The informants stated there was no specific prayer for animal delivery and thus "Our Father" was used widely. Those who know special incantations usually use them first. Only if there are complications will the villagers send for a veterinarian. Peasants use various methods to speed up a cow's (or goat's) placenta coming out. Some give her hot water to drink during delivery (Antonina O-k, 66 y.o., Er). Others give a bucket of sweetened

water (Mariia Sh-o, 84 y.o., Cr), or sweetened water with millet (Liudmyla S-k.). Still others give her the newborn calf to lick (Oleksandra K-o, 63 y.o., Er).

The placenta of the cow (or of any large species) should be properly buried. Many informants stated that it should be put in dung, and that it is a taboo to simply throw it away or to let the cow herself eat it. The explanation was that the cow would then become sick, and that her milk would decrease in volume, become bitter, or stop altogether. Only Antonina Z-y (91 y.o., Er) insisted that, if the placenta is fed to a female dog, it will increase the milk of the cow who delivered it.

In addition to a wide-spread taboo on lending anything from a household after sunset, the informants emphasized that on the day when there is some “live income” (meaning a newborn animal) in a household, the taboo on lending extends to the whole day. Three informants, however, insisted on a three day taboo period, and one (Liudmyla S-k) extended it up to nine days. Violation of this taboo is widely believed to result in the death of animals or some other major loss, according to the law of similarity. The interviewees provided numerous examples to support their beliefs in the taboo. The taboo itself is common knowledge in villages, but if a potential borrower still persists, such behavior would be symptomatic of evil intentions: *“If he persists, it means he is the enemy! He consciously wants to harm your cow!”* (Mykola U-k, 75 y.o., Wr) (6)

Post partum magic goes hand in hand with prophylactic magic and mostly includes protection of domestic animals from the evil eye, which is especially dangerous to weak, small, or beautiful creatures. Orysia K-n stated that the masters should keep poppy seeds in a barn long before a cow’s delivery.(7) As soon as the cow has delivered, the owner should make a clockwise circle around the cow and the calf pouring those poppy seeds. It guarantees that nobody will evileye either the cow or the new calf. Petro V-k (76 y.o., Wr) suggested a far more radical method, which, however, can only be used at the very first delivery of a cow: *“In order for no one being able to evileye your cow, wait for that cow’s delivery, then take the placenta in your teeth and run naked three times around the barn at night; then bury the placenta.”* (8) He then provided an “easier” variant of this performance where the owner puts the cow’s placenta in a bucket and carries it in three circles, first around the cow and then the barn.

Like a woman, a cow is considered “unclean” for some time after delivery and her milk is not consumed by humans. But the very first

milk, which often contains blood, is considered beneficial for both humans and calves. So, some families feed it all to the calves, while others cook a part of it in a special dish, called *molozyvo* (in central and eastern regions) or *kulašter* (in western region), for themselves.

Eggs and milk are very important foods in the village and much magic is directed at increasing their production. To ensure maximal hatching of eggs one should put them under a brood hen in the evening when the herd of cows returns home from the pasture in order “*to have as many chickens as there are cows in the herd*” (Antonina Z-y). Halyna O-a emphasized that a woman should carry the eggs in a man’s fur hat to the hen if she wants them all to hatch. The brood hen is well cared for and usually sits in a quiet, isolated place, often inside the house, where neither humans nor animals can disturb her. There is a belief that the eggs will not hatch if they are carried over moving water, like a stream, a brook, or a river. (Sofiiia). Finally, there must be an uneven number of eggs. One would never put an even number under a hen and expect good results. (9) As far as the number 13 is concerned the informants stated that it would just be impractical to put that few eggs under a hen, but did not see any indication of bad luck in the number per se. As a rule, there should be 17-19-21 eggs so that the brood hen would be able to cover them all. Often, out of 19-21 eggs there would only be 10-15 chickens, or even less. But, if after all the precautions and “correct” actions there are still no chickens, that would be a bad omen foretelling an unhappy year for the household or even the whole village, according to Antonina O-k. Orysia K-n told about a ritual widely performed on Christmas in Western Ukraine. During the Holy Supper, when all the family is at the table, some member of it, one who is very calm and kind, sits under the table for some time making hen clucking sounds. This is supposed to ensure there will be many chickens next spring.

The cow is generally a villager’s most important possession and the milk she produces their most important food. Even though my informants liked to repeat that milk was “on a cow’s tongue,” meaning that milk quantity and quality depended on good feeding, they nevertheless actively tried to influence both. Little was prescribed for magically increasing milk quantity. Valentyna Z-y confessed that there were special prayers for improving milk quality – unfortunately unknown to her – and that some good owners “*pray every time they milk.*” At the same time, proscriptions, i.e., how to avoid a decrease in milk production, were numerous.

A decrease in milk production is believed to be due to, among other reasons, either the deliberate casting of the evil eye or to accidental jealousy. To prevent both, there is a well-known prescription of putting salt in any jar of milk which is to be sold. A tiny amount of salt is believed to neutralize any evil thoughts or wishes as well as preventing any involuntary casting of the evil eye.(10) At the same time, salting milk late in the evening (that time is strongly associated with the evil forces) is done to reverse “giving away” of household prosperity and milk in particular. Villagers avoid spilling milk while pouring it (Nelia D-ts', 69 y.o., Er). It is also taboo to drip milk onto the stove. According to the law of similarity, a cow's milk will evaporate from her udder like it evaporates from the hot stove. If milk is spilt on the stove, a possible antidote is to salt the spots of dried milk as quickly as possible. There is also a taboo against showing the full amount of milk obtained after milking to non-family members or to say openly how many liters a cow gives (Petro V-k; Orysia K-n). In addition one should not drink milk directly from the container one milks into (Petro V-k). Sofiia stated that a person returning an empty milk container to the owner has to put a stale piece of bread and a bit of salt inside. The owner then feeds that bread and salt to the cow. Another way to protect the cow is to be cautious with milk products. My informants said that one should not put sharp objects like a knife or a fork in sour cream, whipped cream, cottage cheese, or milk. According to the law of similarity one would “cut off” milk given by a particular animal.

Treatment or Prophylactic Magic

Treatment of sick animals involves a number of magical cures and natural, home-made medicines. The variety of cures depends upon people's experience and degree of competence. Natural cures are used by peasants if the cause of the sickness is known and if the causes are natural: canned cucumbers with yeast for a sick stomach (Valentyna Z-y); a mixture of yeast, milk, and blessed water (IEvdokiia H-k, 77 y.o., Wr), a mixture of vodka with sunflower oil and cucumber juice, for same reason (Antonina O-k); lard with sunflower oil and vinegar as a warming ointment for a swollen udder (Antonina O-k); red wine for scabs in dogs (Halyna O-a). Sofiia stated that a broth from *koniachyĭ shchavel'* (*Rumex Confertus*, Lat.), *zvirobiĭ* (*Hypericum Perforatum*, Lat.), and *dereviĭ* (*Achillea Millefolium*, Lat.) is used for curing diarrhea, while *krushyna* (*Frangula Alnus*, Lat.) cures constipation in animals. Only if those cures fail to produce the desired effect will the villagers call for a doctor. If the

cause of sickness is unknown or beyond the competence of veterinary doctors, then the owners will go to a *baba*, a folk healer, who knows specific incantations or prayers.

Reproductive magic and prophylactic magic are closely interconnected. The owners always wish good for their animals and share magic remedies with them to ensure their good health and well-being: they give blessed *paska* (Easter bread) to animals, *kutia* on Christmas Eve, and they sprinkle everything and everyone in the household and in the barn on Theophany with blessed water. Herbs and fumigation with blessed (usually on Transfiguration Day) herbs are utilized. Peasants wish human-like happiness and well-being to their animals at the beginning of New Year as described in a *shchedrivka* (an epigraph to this article) sung on January 13 (the Eve of the Julian New Year). They wish it to other villagers as well, since human well-being in the village is tightly interrelated with animal husbandry. Hence, wishing happiness to animals means wishing the same to humans *through* their animals. By the same token, it is possible to give bad luck to a human by wishing evil to her or his animals.

My informants assured me that the most frequent reason for the sickness of an animal, usually a cow, was the evil eye. This part of the interview was usually the longest and most emotional, full of details from their own experience and those of others. The interviews were replete with dozens of ways for diagnosing and treating the evil eye.

Ukrainian villagers are very concerned about the evil eye and about people who are able to cast it. The power of the latter seems to be enormous and some interviewees tried to convince me that the negative consequences of the evil eye had no limits. Even mass epidemics were attributed to it (Oleksandra K-o; Hanna F-k, 62 y.o., Wr). People with the evil eye, according to my informants, were always around and quick to harm: “*You merely take <the cow> to the pasture and her milk disappears, because <people> watch the udder, <they> watch everything!*”(11) (Antonina O-k); “*It is necessary to hide everything from neighbors who have the evil eyes, and it is better not to argue with such folk*”(12) (Antonina O-k); “*<People> can evileye terribly!*” (13) (Valentyna Z-y); “*What evil can a domovyk do?! These are humans who can evileye for real with real eyes!!!*”(14) (Varvara M-k, 79 y.o., Wr). Orysia K-n even stated that anyone can cast the evil eye on cattle or humans if they openly express sincere admiration which contains a hidden jealousy: “*Yes, even you (me, SK) can cast the evil eye on my cow if you look at her and exclaim “Wow!!!” Instead you should first*

spit three times and say "No evil eye!" ("Nivroku!"). Only after that can you exclaim "Wow!!!" Then it will not affect my cow any longer."

Villagers distinguished between *vid'my* (witches) and people who simply possessed the evil eye. The former do deliberate damage secretly to animals and humans causing severe illness or even death. They can take milk away from cows completely. The latter, however, may cause unintentional harm resulting in much less severe consequences. Some people are believed to have jealous or wishful eyes against their will, or they may simply look at an animal at the wrong moment. My interviewees frequently used the phrase "bad eyes" instead of the "evil eye." Bad eyes that unintentionally cast evil upon animals are generally tolerated: people view this as an excuse and do not feel fear or hatred towards such fellow-villagers. In cases where there is accidental casting of the evil eye, and if villagers think they know who did it, they go to the person and ask her or him to come and spit three times on the cow to relieve her from the consequences of their unintentional jealousy: *"There are people with bad eyes" (Nelia D-ts'); "There are such people whose eyes are not good" (Mariia O-k); "There are different people and different eyes... <some> can cast the evil eye. Maybe a person does not know <that she possesses the evil eye>, but she just looks at an animal and the animal becomes sick, or can even perish" (Sofiia); "<Someone> can cast the evil eye involuntarily; she just looks at the wrong moment" (Varvara M-k); "Some person could just have a look <at an animal> and feel jealous, but there are people who can evileye deliberately" (Valentyna Z-y); "If someone casts the evil eye deliberately, then call that person to spit on your cow" (IEvdokiia H-k); "Usually you have an idea about who could have cast the evil eye" (Oleksandra K-o).*

Just as only the most successful people are evileyed, so it is the best, most productive animals which are targeted. All of my interviewees knew the classic behavior patterns of an evileyed animal, and the symptoms are similar to those of an evileyed human. The cow typically twists, yawns, is slack, refuses to eat; does not stand still or urinates while the mistress milks her. She becomes aggressive towards a person milking her; looks sick, does not produce much milk; and there can be blood in the milk. In any case, there are multiple remedies for curing evileyed animals as well as preventing them from being evileyed.

The first and the most widely used remedy is to sprinkle an animal with blessed water and utter the Lord's Prayer over it. Inviting a third party – a *baba* who is present in virtually any village – to help is also very popular: *"You have to call folk healers"* (IEvdokiia D-n, 60 y.o.,

Wr); “I led my cow to a wizard. He whispered something over corn flour. I fed it to the cow 12 times and after that it <the evil eye> was gone” (Mykola U-k); “Here lived a baba called Borovychka. She knew incantations and healed animals” (Pavlo K-o, 65 y.o., Er); “...a baba will whisper a prayer over <an animal>” (Mariia Sh-o); “There is a prayer against the evil eye” (Oleksandra K-o); “You have to call people who know<how to cure>” (Antonina Z-y); “You need to pray over the evil eye... There are lots of prayers against it” (Sofiia); “You have to go to the healers. They can overturn the casting of the evil eye” (Nelia D-ts’); “Say prayers over water that has not been used: “Our Father,” “Mother of God,” “Living Help,” and “May God Arise.” Then wash your cow with that water, from her head towards the tail, wash her udder and give <that water> to her to drink” (Vira B-o, 82 y.o., Er).

Sometimes villagers use “secret curative” means without inviting a *baba*. Valentyna Z-y compiled a list of people suspected of casting the evil eye on her cow, and prayed the Lord’s Prayer walking three circles clockwise around the sick cow. Then she burnt the list and fed the ashes to the cow to help her recover. Hanna F-k provided a method called *skydaty vohniu*, “to shed fire,” which serves two functions at the same time: diagnostic and curative. The owner takes bread and water directly from a well. She utters three times a special formula “Neither 9 (15), nor 8, neither 7, nor 6, neither 5, nor 4, neither 3, nor 2, neither 1” and throws crumbs of bread into the water. If they sink, it means that the cow was evileyed. The details in this ceremony matter a great deal; therefore it is important that water would be the first drawn in the morning (i.e., nobody drank it before). This water must be taken from a stream by drawing it against the flow. Others use pieces of hot coal for the same ceremony. Petro V-k provided a unique variant of this method called *hasyty vohon’*, “to extinguish fire.” According to the method, twelve metal objects (a knife, spoon, and latch among them) together with a milk filtering cloth are put in a bucket with water. After the countdown ceremony, the cow gets water from the bucket to drink.

On the other hand, the cow can be protected from the evil eye by having a red thread tied to her neck, tail, or horns, along with giving her blessed salt to lick, and sprinkling her with holy water. When animals are taken to the pasture for the first time in spring, they are “beaten” with blessed pussy-willow branches, fumigated with incense, with dried fungus that grow on trees, or with greenery. They are sprinkled with holy water, and the Lord’s Prayer is read over them. On regular days when cows leave the household for the pasture, holy water and prayers are

used along with quite exotic procedures. One such is sprinkling the owner's urine on a cow (Mariia O-k). Other acts involve a little bag with church incense hung on a cow's horns to guard against all the evil forces (Vira B-o). Other means are sealing mercury in a cow's horn (Mykola U-k), and disposing water used for washing a milk bucket in a toilet (Orysia K-n). It is also possible to create "permanent sites" of protection by burying blessed pussy-willow branches under the threshold of a barn (Liudmyla S-k); painting a cross on a barn wall on both the outside and inside on Easter, as well as inserting thorns inside a barn and on the gates of the yard on St. George day (May 6) (IEvdokiia D-n). In the latter case, the action is believed to prevent witches from entering since "*<thorns> prick their eyes,*" according to the law of similarity.

All of my informants stated that a decrease of milk production is due to either accidental (or deliberate) casting of the evil eye or is the result of witchcraft. According to my informants, every village has a witch, sometimes more than one: "*A half of our village – they are witches!*" (Maria Sh-o); "*There are such <people>. They are not uncommon*" (IEvdokiia H-k); "*The priest told <me> there are 18 witches in this village*" (Vira B-o). Therefore, the concept of witchcraft as associated with cattle and milk production is taken seriously in Ukraine.

People believe that witches or wizards are regular villagers "*who are not afraid of sinning*" (Varvara M-k) and who take cows' milk away or milk cows at night and do harm in other ways to permanently ruin good masters. There can be either born witches or learnt witches, and people think it is better not to quarrel with them openly, but to hide everything from their gaze instead. Knowing for sure that a witch is involved in an animal's sickness is very important because it then offers a way of curing the animal. Often, it is enough to counteract the witch's misdeeds to provide a cure.

Different methods were given by the informants for learning the identity of the witch who harmed a cow. All of them contained at least two elements: extremely hot iron and any of a cow's liquids. Typically, milk is poured on a red-hot horseshoe or an oven. Only in one instance did it involve the boiling of the cow's urine (Antonina Z-y). In any case, according to the law of similarity, the witch will feel burning in her chest and will come to the house asking to borrow some trifle. The owner's task is to refuse and not let her take anything away like she took the milk away. IEvdokiia H-k narrated that, when she was a little girl, her mother had to perform such a procedure to restart a cow's milk. A neighbor

came to borrow some little thing and was irritated by her mother's refusal. The neighbor then grabbed IEvdokiia's shoes and ran off with them. Because of this occurrence, the cow never produced milk again, and the owners had to dispose of the animal.

Petro V-k provided a memorate about a neighbor who had harmed his cow years ago. Petro sought protection by consulting a local wizard who then made a fire from thorny wood and read some incantations over it. After a while the wizard exclaimed: "*A strong <witch> did it but I will win her over!*" Several days later the suspected neighbor's two cows perished thus indicating the reversal of her own witchcraft.

Antonina O-k narrated that her cow was regularly milked by a grass-snake, who, according to her, was definitely a representative of evil forces. A big frog jumping near the barn is believed to be a sign of witchcraft done to a cow. Liudmyla S-k described such an account that happened several weeks prior to the interview. She believed that the frog was not guilty, that it was "sent over" against its own will, and yet she was advised to catch it and put it into a fire alive. Reversed witchcraft will then fall upon the witch and she herself will come to the victim to beg forgiveness.

Commercial or Trading Magic

Magic is invoked in commerce or trade just as intensely and frequently in contemporary Ukrainian villages as it was at the end of the nineteenth or beginning of the twentieth century, the period described in Zhuravliov's book. Buying a cow is a very serious step. A cow is very expensive: it typically costs \$300-400, while the average monthly wage of an employed villager seldom reaches \$100. Therefore, the choice of the cow should be made after careful consideration. Commercial magic somewhat coincides with heightening of general fertility since peasants know some specific traits of "good" animals. I was provided with a number of signs to help choose a good cow, i.e. one who not only gives plenty of milk (about 20-30 liters daily) but will give good progeny as well. Among the characteristics to look for were: special "milk veins" or "milk wells" located on the belly, thin and soft skin, thin legs, nice body form, long yellow-pointed tail (an indicator of rich cream), nicely shaped horns, bangs on the forehead, hairy ears with lots of ear-wax inside (also an indicator of rich cream), extra (i.e., rudimentary) nipples on her udder, a tender udder, and region-specific color (a cow certainly should not stand out in the pasture). It was also pointed out that gadflies usually bite a cow giving rich cream, thus gadflies near a cow are a good sign.

I Evdokiia H-k warned that there were cows whose seventh rib was significantly shorter than the rest. According to her, it is a very dangerous sign, and if one should buy such a cow and then that cow perishes, one would lose seven more head of cattle from the household.

Very often my interviewees used an opposition of “good” and “bad” referring not only to the eyes of people, but to milk as well. Bad milk is not only milk from an evileyed cow, or from a cow after delivery; it is also non-fat milk or milk with an unpleasant odor. This happens often with goat milk. To make sure milk will smell good one has to rub a goat on the space between her horns: if there is no smell on the palm then the milk of the goat will not have an unpleasant smell either.

A very powerful magical object while buying an animal, according to the informants, is the *nalyhach*, or rope, with which the animal is tied to a post. This rope is something that belongs to the household of a seller and should go with the cow. Buyers believe that if a seller is a good person she or he will sell an animal with a *nalyhach*; if a seller does not live up to the buyer’s expectations, he should use his own *nalyhach* and utter a prayer. Otherwise the cow’s milk (and the luck associated with owning that animal) will stay in the household of a seller. Sellers, on the contrary, believe that giving away a *nalyhach* will cause them to lose the magic touch with their own cattle. Even if, as Orysia K-n pointed out, the seller keeps a used *nalyhach* for himself and gives a new one to the buyer, he still should not place it directly in the buyer’s hands. He should put it on the ground and then the buyer should pick it up. Orysia K-n explained this as a way of not “*passing one’s own luck with the cow over to the buyer.*” The seller also should look carefully so that the buyer will not take anything from the yard. It might be something as trivial as a small branch from a tree. According to the law of similarity, taking anything from a successful household will transfer that success to the buyer. At the same time, as Mariia O-k stated, a seller can leave an old *nalyhach* on a cow but pull out some fur from between her horns. Doing this will cause the cow’s milk to remain in the seller’s household. There is obviously some competition between the buyer and the seller to retain or obtain good luck, and the responses of the interviewees on this matter depended upon which side of the commercial transaction they were in the recent past.

An analogous case of transferring one’s own luck with animals to others was given by Pavlo K-o. According to him, several years ago a neighbor came to him in the spring and, on behalf of his elderly mother, asked for some straw from Pavlo’s hay stack to make a nest for a brood

hen. Pavlo gave it without a thought, but later on discovered through his relative that one should never give away straw from one's own hay stack to anyone because that will result in not having brood hens yourself. Coincidentally or not, Pavlo did not have brood hens for about five years after that occasion and he was sure that the neighbor's elderly mother did it to him on purpose: "*She knew about this rule, for sure!*"

One major and important taboo involves not feeling regret over selling an animal. If a seller does feel regret, the animal will produce less milk, become sick, physically unruly, and be poorly adjusted to its new home if at all. Orysia K-n stated that she knew a magic formula to reverse this state but most people did not.

As far as money is concerned, Liudmyla S-k stated that the price for a cow should not be "wholesome" or an even number: "*It should be like 999 but never 1000.*" My interviewees from the western region unanimously stated that the person selling a cow must give some money back to the buyer "for luck." But money should not be placed directly into the hands; instead it should be thrown on the ground. The buyer should not spend that particular money on himself; instead he should buy something for little children or give it to the church as an offering. This will ensure good luck with the new cow. In central and eastern regions the buyer and seller usually just celebrate the event together with a simple dinner toasting each other and wishing each other luck.

Finally, not only are animal signs considered during the purchase, but the personality of the seller is as well. Villagers are so psychologically attuned to possible misfortune, the evil eye, magical spells and so forth, that they prefer not to buy a good looking animal if they do not like the appearance of a seller. The same is also true when a seller does not like a buyer: he or she can refuse to sell an animal if something in a buyer makes him or her feel uncomfortable.

Folk Magic and Religion

There is an extremely interesting relationship between the folk beliefs that I recorded and the religious faith of the people. The most religious among my informants from Eastern Ukraine, Vira B-o, who was an energetic Orthodox propagator, was also a healer. She started her career in her early fifties by reading incantations over a cow whose milk was taken away. "*And it really helped,*" she exclaimed, "*but the priest said I should not do it under any circumstances.*" Now she uses only prayers from the church prayer book. Even so she seems to mix up Christian symbols with pre-Christian ones: she stated that a piece of

church incense hung on a cow's horn would protect the animal from the evil eye. Another informant from Central Ukraine, Sofiia, also a regular churchgoer, when explaining why it was prohibited to lend anything from a household the day when a new animal is born, answered simply: *"Why? According to God's directive, this is not supposed to be."* She told me how important it was to say the Lord's Prayer before going to bed and at the same time she addressed the *domovyk*, a pagan house spirit, and said how it was important to be nice to him since *"He is the guardian!"* In the small village of N. in Western Ukraine people tell legends about a powerful local male healer, named Goï, who died in 2002. I tried to find out about the attitude of a local priest towards him. All people admitted that Goï was a very religious man and the priest respected him deeply. Goï healed both humans and animals and it was unanimously believed the power he possessed was given him from above. When a sixteen year old orphan, he could not help his cow which was in labor and he went to the priest and asked for help. The priest suggested that Goï make an oath on his cow, i.e. to promise to God that if the cow delivers successfully he will be fasting every Monday (that happened on Monday) or not eating that day at all. The vow helped, and Goï kept his promise faithfully ever since.

Orysia K-n is Goï's granddaughter. As a bearer of secret knowledge obtained from her grandfather she is highly respected in the village and people ask for her help all the time. She refused to tell me the incantations she knew: *"I will lose my power and you will not gain it either."* When I asked her what the words used in her magic formulae were and if they started with "In the name of Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit" Orysia answered: *"No, but they <the words> all are to God."* Petro V-k believed that sorcery had a tremendous power and hence *"A wizard is more powerful than a priest is. That <priest> can read a prayer but it does not help with anything."* (16)

In the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Mother of Pyrohoshcha, in the middle of Kyiv, a list of saints is posted to whom people can pray in case they have a particular problem. Among others, like praying for career advancement or a successful thesis defense, there were prayers "for domestic animals" to Martyr Blase, Modest, Cosmas and Damian, and Martyr Anastasia; "to prevent cattle from being eaten by wild animals" to St. George; "against sorcery" to St. Tryphon, St. Cyprian, and St. Justina; "from evil spirits and mean people, against witchcraft and the healing from it" to St. Cyprian, St. Justina, St. Niphont of Cyprus, St. Maruthas, and St. Nicetas the Stylite. Some interviewees

openly admitted giving money to the local churches or alms to the beggars to pray for their animals' health (Orysia K-n; Sofiia) and praying to the patron saints of animals. Among the latter there are St. George, St. Gregory, St. Basil, St. Barbara, and All the Saints. Some saints' days are believed to be "cattle" days and peasants avoid working on those days so as not to offend these saints and harm their own cattle. Orysia K-n who knew different magic formulae for animals said she was able to help any animal except for the pig and the horse, so that those should be treated only by doctors. When explaining why those were the exceptions she referred to the Biblical legend about the birth of Jesus: when Jesus was born and was in a barn, the horse started eating the straw on which he lay, and the pig dug a hole under him. So they became cursed animals. Sofiia added the dog and the cat to the list of the "non-blessed" animals but could not explain why.

Generally, villagers respect people who have a magic touch with animals and are even jealous of them. They assume there is some secret knowledge circulating around in the air, and often my informants replied with a sort of wistfulness if asked about some omens or special rituals or prayers used for the sake of animals: "Oh, I do not know that. Others probably know but I do not." And they always told me to check with a *baba* if anything goes wrong with animals or humans. Even if there is no *baba* in a village there are always some nearby and it is quite easy to find one who can cure *your* problem.

When a *baba* is not easily available villagers can try to replace her magic. For example Valentyna Z-y performed the ritual of burning a list of people suspected of casting the evil eye on her cow. In it she combined Christian with obviously pre-Christian curing symbols. Interestingly enough, the prayers specific to the curing of the evil eye can be found, according to Valentyna, in special literature, and there is indeed an abundance of such literature for sale everywhere in cities.(17)

Private vs. collective ownership

All rituals involving animals known to previous generations are passed on as part of the family tradition, and create a separate, more intimate world. I tried to explore the difference in attitudes towards animals that were privately owned by villagers and those belonging to *kolhospy*, large collective farms, during the Soviet times. The imposition of a new way of farming led to a strict demarcation between privately owned and collective property in Ukraine. Collective property was not anybody's in particular, yet the *kolhosp* workers were supposed to feel

personal responsibility for it. On top of that, Ukrainian peasants were not free to either make personal decisions concerning a *kolhosp*'s life (there were directives “from above” on what, when, and how to do things) or leave for a city. Till the 1960s, peasants were ‘village-ridden’ because local authorities would not issue the internal passports – the main document enabling employment, study, or housing outside of a village. (18) The absurdity of such a slavery-like “new way” resulted in alienation from the land and the rejection of work as valuable, as well as many traditions, which Ukrainian peasants used to have before Soviet times.

As Oleksandra K-o, now a retired specialist in animal husbandry, explained, each milkmaid in a *kolhosp* used to have, and was responsible for, a large group of cows (about 30-40). Although *kolhosp* cows used to have numbered tags inserted in their ears they had names as well. And the milkmaids knew all their cows' names. However, there was never the same feeling of private ownership in a *kolhosp* as there was in a private household. Sick cows were inspected by doctors and usually either treated with medicines or immediately labeled as rejected. The average life span of a cow in a *kolhosp* was only half that of a private owned cow, about 7-8 years. In the *kolhosp* a high level of milk production was the primary consideration and my interviewees often told me that they felt pity for their own cows and kept them far beyond their optimal milk productivity. They patiently cured and cared equally for both big and small animals in their own household. When I asked why, Oleksandra K-o exclaimed with astonishment: “*Because it is mine!*”

Villagers were very clear in their division of “mine” and “not mine.” Animals in the collective farms belonged to the latter category and that was the reason for viewing them as belonging to “others”, for secretly stealing food from them for one's own animals, for emotional detachment. With their own animals, on the contrary, villagers were emotionally engaged and if they had to sell a cow for butchering they often had a hard time doing that. They told me heartbreaking stories about separation: “<You> lead her <the cow> from the yard, and she has a foreboding: there are tears dropping from her eyes. But what can you do?! <You> just say ‘Forgive me’ to her” (Valentya Z-y). However, no one seemed to be sentimental about cows in a collective farm or be willing to sacrifice their own time and emotions for the animal's sake: “*You have no time at work <to be patient>. You just grab her <a cow> and drag...*” (Halyna O-a). Animals were simply objectified and regarded as property belonging to a *kolhosp* but not to the

workers personally. Therefore, there was no feeling of personal responsibility for animals and no personal involvement or desire to care for them.

Orysia K-n stated that it was impossible to cast the evil eye on the *kolhosp* cows since they did not belong to a single owner: “*There <in a kolhosp>everything is communal <there is no single owner, SK>, your eyes cannot concentrate. And when you go to <someone’s> barn – there is but one cow...*” (19) According to Orysia, to knock the *kolhosp* down by casting the evil eye on all its cows was impossible and an unnecessary waste of energy: *kolhospy* would always have some way of restoring any losses. But Halyna O-a, by contrast, stated that collective ownership still implied a certain degree of personal profit. Everyone knew how much milk each cow gave, and the milkmaids often got prizes for the highest yields. If the milkmaids knew somebody else’s cow gave more milk, they could be jealous and cast the evil eye on it as one giving more dividends or “belonging” to another milkmaid. In any case, the evil eye would not affect the milkmaid, her wages, or the family budget, and her problems with the *kolhosp* cows would always be only temporary and minor. Hence, nobody used prophylactic or reproductive magic for the sake of collective farm animals.

For all of my informants, their animals’ unusual behavior served as a natural method of forecasting weather or as a harbinger of something about to happen. It is widely believed that cows and goats produce less milk when rain or cold weather are in the offing; horses roll around before rain; bees start sealing themselves with propolis early in the fall when a severe winter is coming; dogs howl when someone in the village is about to die; pigs fight violently inside their pen before bad weather; cats cleanse themselves when guests are imminent; cats vigorously sharpen their claws before wind. Roosters crow during the day when there will be good weather; and if they drink water from a puddle on the day of the “Meeting of Lord” (February 15) there will be problems with the next season’s crops. Hens also act as predictors: if they pull their feathers out or nest down for too long in the evening, this means rain is coming; if they “bathe” in dirt, then good weather is ahead; hens screaming for no apparent reason predict misfortune in the house; and a hen that suddenly crows like a rooster predicts a major misfortune for humans. In the latter case the owners are to slaughter such a hen immediately.

My interviewees spoke about their homestead animals as if they feel and understand the same way as humans. The relationship between

animals and humans seems to be almost magical with humans projecting human traits onto the animals: if a person regrets selling an animal it will *long, be sad, cry, miss the old owner and so forth*. Once an animal is given a name, it is not to be changed because this *upsets and confuses* the animal, since it got used to its original name. The majority of the informants expressed the opinion that human names should not be given to the animals but rather ones indicating the time of the day it was born like *Zoriana* and *Vecheriana* (literally, one born in the dawn and one born in the evening), or month like *Marta* and *Travka* (the stem *Mart* comes from the Russian word for March, while *Trav-* is the stem of the Ukrainian word for May, *Traven'*), or color like *Chervona* and *Chornukha* (literally, the red one and black one), or starting with the same letter as the name of the cow's mother (e.g., *Marta*, *Maika*, *Mimozka*), or a self-explanatory name derived from some distinctive feature about the animal's appearance like *Lysa* (the bald one), *Zirka* (one with a star on the forehead), *P'iatnukha* (one with spots), etc.

Given that the ultimate goal of animal breeding in villages is consumption of those animals or getting profit through selling them, this psychological bond between humans and animals is striking. It is obvious that such a bond could not exist in *kolhospy* where human interactions with animals were limited to strictly defined professional responsibilities, which were controlled through a chain of authority.

Conclusion

My informants were educated: all had at least secondary education and some had university degrees. They used contemporary technologies and believed in their efficacy. Yet they had respect for people with magic hands with animals. They used magical means (from either specific literature or inherited knowledge) for defending and curing their animals. They did this not only without being ashamed of it, but with some sense of pride. They did not really differentiate pre-Christian vs. Christian symbols or think about them as incompatible. Anything that could help the peasants cure their animals was considered good. My informants were eager to pick up any magical remedies or advice from others and believed in their usefulness. The uncertainty and insecurity of peasant life, which depends mostly on nature's will and thus may fluctuate from year to year, makes villagers seek and rely on any means to ensure successes and to fight failures in their private households by all means possible. Animal magic serves this purpose very effectively. That means traditional magical rites associated with animals remain an integral part

of the lives of peasants in contemporary villages in Ukraine. This traditional belief complex survived through the decades of Soviet rule and is currently alive, motivated, and widespread. The Soviet *kolhospy* have not changed peasants' attitudes towards animals: privately owned animals were the only ones who were connected to humans through magical actions. Thus their protection from other humans is still carried using magical counteractions.

Ukrainian villagers still tend to be quite conservative in the domestic breeding of animals and try not to make innovations. Community demand for sameness, which is hardwired into the peasants' minds, is displayed, for example, in the fact that villagers buy cows with a region-specific color.[Kononenko 1998: 67-90] The same demand is responsible for the somewhat cold or even negative attitude towards "unjustifiably" successful villagers, and often reveals itself through a wish that the cow of such neighbors perish. Villagers' magic behavior with their animals is subjugated to strict unwritten rules which must not be violated by the community members in order to keep peace and ensure order in an otherwise chaotic life.

Magic rites collected by ethnographers at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries are still meaningful for the peasantry of today in different regions of Ukraine, despite different political preferences or degrees of visibly attested religiosity. My research shows that there is no qualitative difference between the geographical regions of rural Ukraine in terms of animal magic beliefs and practices. These beliefs and practices are mostly passed down within the families and generally shared among the rural population. Interestingly, Liudmyla S-k's married daughter in her middle twenties, now an urban-dweller, "helped" her mother answer my questions. This demonstrates that those beliefs, which are still so dominant in Ukrainian villages, continue to be transmitted and that city dwellers, through having contact with the village, become bearers of this tradition and magical world-view.

Appendix A

Questionnaire used for the research on animal magic

1. Are there any omens connected with your animals having offspring?
2. What are the predictors of the sex of the future offspring? Which sex is more preferable?
3. Does one need to behave in a special way during the animal's pregnancy?

4 From now on the abbreviations will be used in the text to indicate an interviewee's region of dwelling: "Cr" stands for the central region, "Er" for the eastern region, and "Wr" for the western region.

5 Sofiia (72 y.o., Cr): *"Vsiaki ie liudy i vsiaki ie ochi!"*

6 *"IAk duzhe prosyt', to vin - vorih! Vin spetsial'no khoche korovu zbavyty!"*

7 Important detail accented by her: poppy must be *samosiïnyiï*, i.e., not planted by humans but naturally grown from the seeds that sprinkled around from a ripe poppy seed pod.

8 *"Shchob korovu nikhto ne zurochyv, treba dizhdatsia polohiv korovy, vziaty mistse v zuby i holym obbihty staiïniu trychi vnochi, a potim mistse zakopaty."*

9 Even numbers bear strong association with death. People would bring 2-4 flowers only to a cemetery or give 2-4 candies to another person only in commemoration of a deceased person.

10 Salt is believed to serve as a means against evil eye or mean people. For that reason my hostess in Kyiv, a young successful professor of history, always carries with her a little bit of table salt blessed on Easter. My male acquaintance from Kyiv, a respectable museum worker, gave me advice as for how to prevent an unwanted person from coming to my place with the help of, again, table salt. There also exists a well-known curse: "Salt into your eyes!" addressed to a person with jealous eyes.

11 *"A til'ky vyvedy na pashu – moloka nema, bo dyvliat'sia na vym'ia, dyvliat'sia na vse!"*

12 *"Vid hlazkyykykh susidiv vse treba khovaty i krashche z nymy ne sperechatysia"*

13 *"Zurochyty mozhut' dobriache!"*

14 *"Ta shcho tam domovyk mozhe zloho zrobyty?! Ot liudy zurochyty – tse mozhut'!!!"*

15 While some interviewees started the count-down from 10, others started from 9. It seems, however, that 9 would be more justifiable: it is more magically powerful being non-finalized, non-static. Number 9 itself stands for triplication of another magical number, 3.

16 *"Mol'far syl'nishyï za sviashchennyka. Toï prochytaie molytvu, ale vono nichoho ne daie."*

17 For example, a very popular book by Aleksandr Aksenov [1995]. *Ia ne koldun, ia – znakhar'* (I am not a wizard, I am a healer). Donetsk: Donechchyna.

18 Oleksandra K-o got her passport and left her village in 1959, at the age of 17, only after submitting to the village officials a document proving that she was admitted to an agricultural *tekhnikum* (a postsecondary educational institution focused on training staff for the collective farms). It was, therefore, guaranteed she would return back to a village (not necessarily her own). Oleksandra wanted to continue her education, but had no passion for becoming an animal husbandry specialist. According to her, the only way to deceive the authorities was to transfer to another educational institution after at least a year spent at the *tekhnikum*. Many people in fact did so, but Oleksandra was not brave enough.

19 “*Tam vse zahal'ne, ochi rozbihaiut'sia. A iak ĭdete do khaty – tam odna korova.....*”

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