Witches, Wise People and Werewolves: Traditional Supernatural Powers and Popular Attitudes Toward Their Bearers Among Carpatho-Rusyns in Ukraine

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Abstract

This article explores the attitudes of the inhabitants of one village in the Zakarpats’ka Oblast’ of Ukraine towards the bearers of supernatural powers. On the basis of my own fieldwork, I describe several supernatural powers known to people in the village: milk-stealing, performed by women; self-protection against attacks; and turning husbands into wolves. Attitudes are shaped by one core value: fairness; the villagers strongly resent unfair usage of supernatural powers against those who cannot protect themselves. However, story characters who use such powers responsibly in self-defense and restore the status quo to punish aggressors are exonerated from blame by story-tellers and their audiences. In daily life, people do not like to be associated with supernatural forces for fear of being accused of using them unfairly.

Introduction

While folklore is a window into the worldview of a culture, analysis depends on the nature of the collected text. For example, texts published in collections of Carpatho-Rusyn tales often represent the literary standards of the collector rather than the actual performance, which would include the reactions of performers and listeners. (1) Capturing these elements allows one to understand much more about the culture, its attitudes and values. (2) This paper attempts to describe the attitudes and values of Carpatho-Rusyn village culture conveyed in performances of stories about people with supernatural powers.

Rusyns, or Carpatho-Rusyns, are a recognized minority in Slovakia, Serbia, and some other countries of Eastern Europe; in Ukraine their status is dubious. Their language belongs to the East Slavic group (3), and a number of regional varieties exist. (4) The recordings that form the basis of this article were made in the village of Novoselycja, Zakarpattja region, Mižhir’ja district, Ukraine. Some were recorded in 1987 and others between 2011-2016. Most stories and motifs that I have recorded are known in the Carpathian area and elsewhere. (5) I recorded not only stories, but entire sessions and, therefore, I have a vast collection of performers’ and listeners’ comments on texts and character behaviors. Analyzing this material is similar to reading the comments section of a newspaper article published online; a comment and its replies resemble a
conversation, and the attitudes of the community members are revealed. Of course, attitudes strongly depend on individual people’s personalities; nevertheless, certain patterns can be found.

The attitudes of people encountering supernatural forces reveal a great deal about their understanding of themselves and the world. Stories about people with supernatural powers center on the idea of fairness; magical properties serve to punish and prevent unfair use of power by other members of the social group (6), while the unfair usage of magic to the disadvantage of non-magical people is controlled by gossip. If an offense happens, the ideal outcome is for offenders, threatened by magic on the one hand and guided by the society on the other, and given an opportunity to repair the damage done, cede their unfair gains and apologize to victims. This is the ultimate goal for dealing with both non-magical and magical offense as expressed in these stories. Interestingly, that goal, known also to other cultures without a state-supported justice system, has recently been introduced as an alternative to Western criminal justice system under the name of “restorative justice” (see below for discussion).

Types of characters: Witches and milk

Below is the text of a story told in 2012 by a man in his late 80s. I also heard it from several other people in the village. The story is about one of the most common types of supernatural activities: stealing milk from other people’s cows by using magic. The speaker told two such stories without pausing; I chose to present only one of them in the interest of space.

1. Girl milking a rope (7)

| 2-07 | дру́га бы́ла при́чча | быв чолові́к ві́н уже́ умір давні́ і сь́м’ї його́ поумирала́ | чолові́к бы́в | сам | но та́й сь́мьї у ного́ бу́ла яка́сь | трі́ба бы́ло слу́жниці дото́моги | There was another incident. There was a man, he died already a long time ago, and his family died since. He was there, and he had a family, so he needed a female servant, |
| 02-08 | обу́ зна́ла коро́вьї па́сти ци́ могу́сь обу́ жо́ні помочь | і пі́шов най́в со́бо́ десь тудь́ в за́вішня́ ци́ в ті́пківці ци́ у при́слоні́ діво́ку | ві́ддо́нічку | помага́ти за слу́жницю сь́хи́р | ... | та́й при́шов тай при́в’яв | пі́шла топа́ дойти́ коро́ви уже́ | so that she could herd his cows or help his wife. And he went and hired himself somewhere in Zavydka or ‘Titkovec’ or in Prislyp, a girl of a marriageable age, to help as a servant. Suxyr was his name. [...] So he brought her home. She went to milk cows,
Milk from one’s own cow has long been a major food staple in the Rusyn culture. If a cow starts giving less milk, or the milk contains less fat than before, people often blame a witch who is stealing milk by magic. It is clear for any bearer of the village culture that milk (magically) flowing from a rope does not come from nowhere; it must come from someone else’s cow. Stories like this one are very common; they are a large part of many storytellers’ repertoires, including

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this storyteller who told two of them in sequence. Stealing milk is the main harm brought about by a witch, bosorkan’a, a female carrier of supernatural powers. Stealing milk by magic is always considered bad, because it robs someone else of sustenance and dooms them to poverty and hunger while the witch profits. In and of itself, this practice goes against the grain of the peasant “subsistence ethic” [Scott 1976], which considers it moral to ensure the right to enough food for survival to all members of the community. This community share is ensured through an elaborate network of technical and social arrangements.

Stealing food is a grievous offense in village life. Furthermore, depriving people of subsistence by magic is especially unfair, because people without magic abilities cannot protect themselves. In this story, the head of the household displays a common attitude towards magical milk stealing: he could have benefitted from getting more milk from his cow, but he does not want to associate with a wielder of these forces. Indignation and disgust are common attitudes shared by everybody in the village who mentioned milk stealing. The only thing people can say in favor of a person accused of milk stealing is “maybe it is someone else, not her.” On the contrary, expressions of negative attitudes are widespread and various. When a victim goes for help to a wise person (see below) to discover who the witch was, the wise person can offer the victim choices: damage to or even the death of the witch, harm to the witch’s cattle, or simply identification of the witch. The gravity of the options are a clear indication of how people feel towards a person who steals their milk. My interlocutors reported that they chose to identify the witch, but not everybody might be so generous.

The identity of a witch may be discovered unintentionally. For example, villagers might maim a toad or a dog who had strayed into their cowshed. The next day when a woman is found dead or with similar injuries, people might then believe that she was actually a witch. I heard many such stories in Novoselycja (they are generally common in the East Slavic tradition and elsewhere), and neither story-tellers nor listeners have ever shown sympathy for the injured woman. If they commented at all, they would state that she got her just desserts.

Witches’ magic abilities are also said to interfere with the normal transition from life to death. Women who steal milk are reported not to be able to die until they transfer their powers to someone else. When they finally die, they cannot take the stolen milk with them, so that it pours out of their eyes, nose, and ears. When the transition to the other world finally happens, witches receive punishment there. In one story I collected in Novoselycja in 2012, told by a female teller in her 70s, a woman has been asked by her daughter why she has a lot of butter, but the daughter has little. The woman throws a piece of her butter in a river, where frogs and snakes consume it. The mother tells the daughter devils in hell will tear apart her soul in the same way, because she gets her butter through witchcraft. The woman could have taught her daughter to magically increase the fat content of her cows’ milk too, but she chose not to, protecting her daughter’s soul from suffering in the afterlife. The connection between milk stealing and suffering in hell is clear, as demonstrated for the naive daughter, but it is common knowledge in the village, as these stories (and others I have collected)
demonstrate. Negative attitudes to milk stealing are so pervasive in the culture that even children become frightened when they believe they have witnessed witchcraft. Below is a vivid childhood memory of a woman born in 1936, recorded in 2012, some seventy years after the actual encounter, and her comments:

2. Children see a woman doing witchcraft

| a я рас скотарила невелика я была ичя дитваком | та тоже на сякоє сято | мы скотарили | тай вйдиме | йде жона | завита у вилах | та к | и не вітко гёт вилах до | до того | іде | та усе | усе сх’їльить ся | та дє корова стала та сє_слідіє бере’ | слінна | та думає собі госьді а мї тічеме бо мї ся боімє | дітть | а тіпєр сє думає осподи ко била тотов | мї ниеєг та так била м ї имала та так била я била ї подивила ичо тотов за он ’ | And once I herded cattle, I was little, still a child, and [it was] also on a holiday, we herded cattle, and [we] see, there goes a woman wrapped in a homemade cloth, so that one cannot see her at all, the cloth is up to... there... [she] walking and all the time [she] bending where a cow stood and, from the footprint, [she] takes clay. And [I] think to myself ‘Oh, my God.’ And we run away because we are scared, children. (8) And now I think – ‘Oh, my God,’ And we run away because we are scared, children. (8) And now I think – ‘Oh, my God, if I were... had I met her today, I would have caught her and I would have seen who she was.

This excerpt demonstrates the range of feelings, both as a child and as an adult, at witnessing activities associated with milk stealing: children get scared, while a more powerful adult woman feels indignation and is ready to expose, and possibly punish, the witch.

Another thing witches can do is transfer disorders such as plać (persistent night-time crying) from their own babies or children to other people’s children. To transfer plać, witches bring bathwater used on their own child and pour it onto the patch of ground lit by a light from the window of a house where another baby lives. Here again, they do magic for selfish gain, while subjecting unsuspecting people without magic powers to harm. Even worse, the spell is directed toward babies. People might know who has harmed their child (especially if the suspect had a child of her own who reportedly had been crying previously), but sometimes they have no clue. However, usually knowledge of who the offender is does not help to cure the condition. Even though sometimes people ask the suspected witch to take the plać back, she typically denies the accusation. Curing plać is painstaking business involving a number of possible remedies (such as washing the child with water where a certain number of live coals have been extinguished, or washing the child with rainwater that drips from the roof, etc. - all with appropriate spells), and it does not always work. Therefore, attitudes toward
witches who make others’ children sick are no better than attitudes toward those who steal milk from cows; in fact, these witches are particularly resented.

Despite the dismay associated with witchcraft in general, there are also grey areas. Most people agree there are women (and even men), who bring bad luck if they cross one’s path—they are called nedobri na perexid ‘bad for crossing.’ Not all agree whether this is an innate quality or the result of some event, e.g., some say that if a person has been weaned twice, s/he might acquire this trait. There is also disagreement about intention: perhaps a person just cannot prevent the bad luck or perhaps people curse others out of spite. The term ‘witch’ (bosorkan’a) is usually not applied to these people. If a person with specific powers, or even without any recognizable powers, looks at someone with malevolence or envy, they might inadvertently jinx that person. One can take preventative measures against a curse, such as putting a safety pin in child’s clothes or wearing something red, but even if one suspects someone, one cannot tell whether they were jinxed purposefully or not. Stealing milk or transferring plač, on the other hand, cannot happen involuntarily; both require ill will and a series of intentional acts. Thus, a witch is evil; she does these two things with a distinct intent to harm. In addition, her magical abilities give her an unfair advantage over others. Evil intent and unfair advantage are why these activities, and the people who perform them, invoke such distinct, strong, negative feelings.

Wise people

Luckily, there are other types of people with supernatural abilities: the wise men or women [mudri l’ude / żonyi]. Below is a story recorded in 2014, co-performed by two people, a 89-year old woman (HK) and her 54-year old adopted son (IS). It is from the repertoire of the deceased dido [old man], HK’s husband and IS’ adoptive father, who was known a good story-teller.

3. “The Old Man and the Builders”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ГК і дідо наш</th>
<th>е славу́нків</th>
<th>славу́ник</th>
<th>HK: And our old man [told us], [there was this one,] from the family of Slavunyk.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21-1:42</td>
<td>ГК і дідо наш</td>
<td>е славу́нків</td>
<td>HK: And our old man [told us], [there was this one,] from the family of Slavunyk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-1:43</td>
<td>колі на ропу́ ходи́ли</td>
<td>ні та́й ішлі́</td>
<td>Once he went to get the brine, they were riding there, beyond Khust. Long ago, when they went to get brine, they took barrels like these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>на ропу́</td>
<td>он туды́ гет за хуст</td>
<td>HK: In horse-drawn carts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>на ропу́ давно́ з бочками сякі́ми ходи́ли та</td>
<td>IS: To Solotvyno.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ходи́ли та</td>
<td>HK: In horse-drawn carts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ІС у соло́твіно</td>
<td>IS: To Solotvyno.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ГК ісь_ кі́нми</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ІС у соло́твіно</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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| HK: So, they went from there, and people were building a house, and they were passing by this house, and there, the horses stopped and wouldn’t go on. |
| IS: They were stamping their feet, but not moving, stamping in place. |
| HK: They were stamping their feet, but not moving, stamping in place. [people said:] ‘Gee! but the horses wouldn’t go, they were stamping their feet in place.’ And there was this man there [in the cart with the brine party], and he says, ‘Go and bring me a sliver. From there, from the building site.’ And he brought the old man that sliver, and the old man did something, I don’t know what he was doing there, and then he said: ‘Gee!’ and the horses started moving. And the old man is riding, |

| 21-1:44 |
| т́у́й | годькают и́з з́аду | чека́йте | чека́йте чека́те... а́й д́йо ищи́ майн кое́н | ру́шат | обы́ | кое́н | ишлй | агá | но́ та́ паќ |
| ИС: д́йуват а́й чолов́ик біж́ить и́з з́аду | ГК: чолов́ик біж́ить біж́ить дога́нят | но́ тай | д́йо уже́ майло хо́тів | і | помуштровати т́ого | т́их | тай | д́йо уже́ ста́в | а́й кио́ є ишо́ | д́йо та́кйй май | ишо́ є ишо́ | йой кі́жже бі́йте ся́ бо́га | ки́жже | чолов́ик кі́жже | ци́ підру́баб ся́ ци умі́(и)рать | ишо́сь тако́с | агá | но́ кі́жже но́ ідї | ідї кі́жже | ішо́ май кі́жже не бдё кі́жже | но́ обы́ сьте ки́жже бі́льш кі́ж же тако́с не роби́ли кі́жже | д́йо́ пові́й | та́й д́йо́ ишо́сь зна́в і́ |

and here someone is yelling from behind “Wait, wait, wait!” And the old man makes his horses run faster, so that they run. And then...

| IS: They look, and a man is running towards them from behind. |
| HK: A man is running after them, and catches up with them. The old man wanted to teach them a lesson. So, the old man stopped his horses: ‘What is it?’ that’s what the old man asks him: ‘What?’ ‘Oh,’ he says, ‘What are you doing, don’t you fear God?’ he says, ‘A man back there, either he cut himself...
| IC no | але якщося тóже зна́в | iс т́ьх | | ІС: Yes. But someone out of these guys also knew something. |
| ГК і та́м зна́в і д́йдо зна́в | відвернути | та́м зна́в тóт іспёрти фу́ру | | HK: There, a guy knew something, and the old man knew how to undo it. The guy there knew how to stop the cart, |

| 21-1:45 | а д́йдо зна́в тóже інч́ос | но | а хто́ його зна́є інч́о він | но тай інч́о він роб́ів | на ті трі́сці | де дій́ будова́ли | and the old man also knew something. And who knows what he... and what he did with this sliver from the building site. |

This story belongs to another common type in my collection: stories of contests between two people with supernatural powers (most often men) or stories of attack and retribution. In these stories, a person who is knowledgeable about magic attacks the main character, thinking him to be a non-magical person. However, the main character has supernatural powers too. He can both repair the damage and mete out retribution. The attacker is punished for using supernatural powers against a supposedly non-magical opponent. In these situations, people usually consider use of magic by the main character justifiable. The main character who uses his powers in self-defense usually has the sympathies of both the teller and the audience. In this story, both tellers mention the fear and haste of the builder after the old man caused another builder to hurt himself; neither teller expressed any sympathy for the builders. Remarkably, the builder running after the cart asks if the old man has the fear of God, i.e., blames the old man for using magic to cause harm (and also for the seriousness of the harm), but in his desperation, he forgets that it was the builders who started the magical attack. The old man, on the other hand, is shown in a positive light, as powerful but generous. Oftentimes, as in this story, the main character forgives the offender when the later demonstrates his pitiful state and/or asks for help, and may revoke the punishment. As the story-teller in this story notices, the old man just wanted to teach the builders a lesson.

There are also stories where a non-magical offender, (male or female), causes harm to a wise man in a natural way (stealing something from him, detaining his horse for trespassing on his land, etc.). The wise man would respond
using supernatural powers (e.g., send snakes to the offender’s house; make the offender’s mouth droop; have the offender bring back the stolen goods and stand with them on his shoulders until forgiven), but often he would revoke the punishment if the offender came to him with apologies. In a similar story type, wise men or wise women can repair magical damage caused to others. They usually find and punish the witch who stole a cows’ milk. All these types of stories evoke the feeling of rightful retribution; attackers, whether natural or supernatural, are punished or warned, at the very least. Apparently, using supernatural powers for self-defense and protection of one’s well-being is not perceived negatively nor as a threat to the wielder, since it is employed explicitly to counteract unjust acts. The same idea of just retribution underpins the above mentioned stories where a witch goes to a cowshed as a toad to steal milk. After the toad gets maimed or killed, the next day a woman in the neighborhood turns out to be injured. The only difference between them is that the antagonist here is a good person with no supernatural powers who triumphs over an evil magical person.

Female self-defense: Two wolf stories (9)

Below are two stories I recorded in 1987 from a skillful female story-teller born in 1920. She talks about two cases of a rare supernatural power: transforming from a human into a wolf. These stories are particularly interesting in the light of the conclusions above about justified retribution. They discuss the fairness of using supernatural power in more complicated cases, comparing and balancing the advantages of magic with more earthly societal powers and privileges. 

4. Two stories about a husband turning into a wolf

| 4-50 | [...] я знаю як тото шиць і мені була(?) і не чу[(д)]ячі | цьо була чоловіка пустіла у вовкунь | так було уже | побрали ся молді | побрали ся ай | а він йей збитковав | всі він на нь(у) збитковав та кахе | я тебе начу ... я тобі укажу |
| 4-51 | тай тогді підє у хацшу | і прийде вовк | ід жоні | і тымат | їшил у поле робити сіно | я уже се кахе ййо як сіно пішли робити | шли навперед сіно робити | та то уже на посидітку | ніт на упіре | і пішли у поле сіно робити но і |

I know how it was, [she] also was my kin, the one who made her husband into a wolf [lit.: werewolf]. It was like this. A couple got married, they got married, but... but he beat her, he constantly beat her, and she says: ‘I will teach you, I will show you,’ and then he goes to the forest, and a wolf comes back, to the woman, and he pulls her... they went to the field to make hay. I will tell it how it was. They went to make hay. First, they went to make hay... no, that was later... no, it was first. So, they went to the field to make hay,
він пішов у хайчу і віття прихідять вовк і люде відбили і ледве збили бо вовк геть на ній півку пірвав і | но й він віття пішов у хайчу назват він ся ужесь розробий | пришов і шо ти туй пишчала ічо той било тай ішо | та вовк каже чоловіче боюсь туй бив | та каже міло ня не іззві тай ічо | но тай і она ужесь по ... сіли подійда ... поплідюновали | тай сіли тай і ужесь істі | хіттят | подійли | тай він і каже | шоби му подівщал у голів | подівшила і она йому дивит у голів дивити і в зуби

| 4-52 | а тю тончі нитки | з ієї пі(ю)вкі | но ужесь лишює півку | а у зубах ізь ієї півки | нитки | каже она ть слухай каже | василю | слухай каже та ть каже | та ть каже майсь із | моєї півки | у теве у зубах нитки | а він каже ее айбо каже му напудила ся ся | йой як я ся каже напудила | я ся напудила | а він каже ть кветь хочешь каже відімі но як ть той зробиш но она йому зачає но як ть станеш чоловік у вовка станеш і ть вовком нірас пришведі вовком і ть чоловік но косів | йой каже я ся каже бою і бим ть каже указав | айбо .... ти ся толькі дурний був бо ічо піві лише оби сь каже не повіла скаменів би сь | я каже піду

and he went to the woods, and from there, a wolf comes, and people beat it and barely chased it away, because that wolf, it totally tore her skirt. And he came back from the forest, he already turned back [into a man]. He came: ‘Why did you cry, what was it, what?’ ‘But there was a wolf,’ she says, ‘Hey, man [lit: God’s man], it was here,’ and, she says, ‘It very nearly ate me.’ So, what then... And they already... sat down, ate lun... ate lunch, and they sat down, they wanted to eat, they had a lunch, and he says to her: ‘Check my head for lice, check it.’ And she looks at his head, she looks at the teeth,

| 4-53 | і він оня ужесь підметав копіцю | висококий маї | бо оня ся боїла |

and he... she... he already made the haystack a little higher, because she
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XIV. I wish you become a rock

Dad always... my Dad used to tell.

So she turned him into a wolf [lit.: werewolf].

And she already said... he started rolling back, but she said I wish you become a rock, and it happened... he started jumping onto the stack (?), he would have eaten her already. And he went away forever, he became a wolf forever. And then, she started crying there, on that... there... on that... she started crying – ‘Oh,’ she says, ‘A wolf is eating me. Me... people...’

XV. I wish you become a rock

and she cries, and people around see that, and people came, one with a pitchfork, another with a scythe, everyone brought something, and [the wolf] fled. Well. And this one... Does this thing speak here? [=does this recorder here record what I say?] Well. Then I will tell this one too. And another wife, she got married, got married, they already had four children, and he [the husband] beat and beat her. And then he says, ‘I am going to get a Christmas tree for the Christmas Eve.’ And she thinks to herself, ‘Go, I will turn you into a wolf [lit.: werewolf].’ And he went... she made him into a wolf [lit.: werewolf]. That was not far from here, there in Rekyty. My Mom always... my Dad used to tell. So she turned him into a wolf [lit.: werewolf]. He is not coming back,
4-55

а діти на тьє тьє тьє та хліба
мечут | ящо | дают а вна | ідї
коже загойкала куме ідї оде
вовка убе́й | но вовк прийшов
вовк тай | жили они жили | они
уже відбили того кум стрілів
айбо не устрілів у нього ай |
яко́ися так бо́є догада́є ши́о
пішло у льофт | пішов він | і
коже но може́ бъяла она вже
дова жила сьєде... уже ма́ла
вісімдесять років жила роки |
і прийшов ко́нати | айбо ба́ба не
може сконати | підпові́дати —
ся жовни д ні приходять тьї
яќьись грі́х ма́си ть яќьись
гріх учинила | наго́дуй ся яќьї
ть гріх учинила она уже́ про
нього й забила | а аже не забила
айбо не хотіла ввіяви́ти | она́
dóть сконати не могла́ | тогдї
коже |

and he is not coming back. In the morning on Christmas Eve... He went in the morning, in the morning, and in the evening, he came as a wolf, to the house.

4-56

она пішла пак цуря зобра́ла
томо ай де він лишні цуря
розобра́є ся та лишні | она́ то
cзуря забра́ла та покла́ла у
стапів | під? стапів давні
старий у давні хъя́гі та
покла́ла там під стапів | і
коже | но та ввійте́м ми коже
попа | буду ся сповідати |
nагадала ся жоне́ куми
прийшлі | жьоне уже́ дещіта
до́ба ть уже́ геть ісконат уже́
сконат | уже́ і не діхат |

And the children go, ‘Here, here,’ they throw... they give it bread, and she says, ‘Come,’ she called, ‘Come, кум [godfather of her child/ren], come here, kill the wolf.’ Well, it was a wolf who came, a real wolf. So they lived and lived... They already ... The godfather shot, but did not hit him, but somehow God made it so that the bullet missed. It [=the wolf] went... And they say, maybe she lived long, maybe seventy years... she was already eighty years old, she lived a long life. And it was time for her to die. But the old woman cannot die. She has confessed her sins to a priest, and women come to her, ‘You must have some sin, you committed some sin, go ahead, remember what sin you committed,’ and she already forgot about it, and, if she hasn’t forgotten, she was not willing to tell. And she could not die. Then she says...

she went and took the clothes, where he had left the clothes, he had gotten undressed and left the clothes, and she had taken those clothes and put them into the barrel ... under the barrel, as old things are put in old houses, and she put it under the them. And she says, ‘Well, call the priest to me, I will confess, I remembered.’ Women came, her children’s godmothers. You know, it is the tenth day already, and she cannot die, she is
Witches, Wise People and Werewolves

4-57
за сякій великий гріх | а она  
кăже беріт кăже бăли у неї і  
dити беріт кăже там е |  
вільцьовоць цурьа | піт тов  
стовольвов там кăже  
перевертайте тьомь становь  і  
tам е цурьа | і беріт і несід_го  
kăже там у свідкiркъ там мь  
робиш всь та гадаю собi | мь  
биваю ходьме та гадаєме ць на  
оти борозьд тоото | сказав та  
чииня ся та учинив ся вовч ць на  
оти та мьо пригавдуюме собi | бо  
tамо там ужее косив там  
bываю то прикаує та кăже ге  
tуїкъ пішовь | мьй уйчаник кăже  
vовкунь | жонако пустіала |  
но ай кăже но ніч | они ужей  
tогдьи | пішовь понесли | чекаюм  
| а то не мож... | понєсли они  
tам цурьа | понєсли они там  
цурьа | айбо тамо дьєн айбо  
tамо два | тай нєс | тай прй |  
not breathing already, and dying,  
and dying, and cannot die. And  
they... she thought it over, and she  
says, ‘Take [his old] clothes and...’  
and to the priest... she already  
confessed to the priest, and the  
priest says, ‘How I can give you an  
absolution, only then can I give you  
an absolution when he comes  
home, and forgives you that sin, but  
I cannot give you an absolution  

4-58
гадат собi ужее жоньы говорит |  
но бєзівно як вiн | дезь го убiли  
y вовкaх | убiли го | там вжє і  
ona висімдоєйт рокiв має а вiн  
єщє стацьць быв | та бєзівно  
не жєє | но нiда не умrє та не  
мож дивити на муку | дити їм |  
She thinks, and the women already  
are saying, ‘He is most probably  
dead, he got killed somewhere,  
while a wolf, he got killed. She was  
eighty years old, and he was still  
older, so he is dead for sure.’ And  
she cannot die, one cannot watch
4-59

і прийшов і п'якельває її
вийтко ти ингедую і 
і п я 
не 
меб п 
робив вона 
і 
він і свої(е) гріхі
казати
і 
і 
не 
робив бо 
я 
тебе 
захвіт
нісив та 
каже я
тобі 
вийтко 
ине 
ще 
ти 
то 
не 
ине 
ще
на 
сьовтй вчір діти мені несли
хліба
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метала
а 
ти 
гоїкала куме куме пой убіти
а 
є 
соби 
гадаю гесподо 
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б'їв в вовкках
та 
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пдомав 
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ть 
ся 
каже
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ты віши 
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нам 
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paliuchov 
pokajce 
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і 
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там 
pide 
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sme 
bily 
golonyнi 
boh 
нам 
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прийшли

how she suffers. And there are children, they see how their mother suffers. And then, the ninth day, he comes. The ninth day, he came. His hands were scarred, covered with hair, and here, he was covered with hair... like a real wolf, only he had put on his clothes. He was so scary. And he says... he came and greeted her, and said: 'Thank you, my wife, that you returned me to my household.' And he says, 'I forgive you everything,' and he came, and he kissed her, 'I forgive you everything, I also did bad things,' he started to confess his sins, 'I also did bad things because I beat you often for nothing, beat you... and,' he says, 'I forgive you everything, only that I cannot forgive that on Christmas Eve children were giving me bread, they were throwing it to me, and you said 'Kum, come and kill it.' And I think to myself, 'Oh, my God, if I lived... I was already a wolf... if I lived...' that is what he thought to himself. ‘And,’ he said, ‘I dreamed of you, that you suffered a lot, that you were hanging on a rope and you couldn’t either touch the ground, or go up, and you kept getting alive... and I dreamed about you all the time when I was a wolf.’ ‘And how did you live there, how were you?’ And he says: ‘I don’t forgive... You know,’ he said, ‘Oh, how we suffered there. We suffered a lot, because,’ he says, ‘every time when God pointed with a stick where to go, we would go there, and we were very hungry. Once God pointed to one peasant’s yard, and
The first story (beginning at 4 minutes, 40 seconds) reports how a woman’s husband went to the forest, returned as a wolf, attacked his wife, disappeared in the forest, and returned as a man; later the woman recognizes him by the threads from her skirt sticking between his teeth. Having discovered this fact, the woman ensures that her husband is trapped in wolf form for the foreseeable future. (10) The teller also describes the wife’s motivation. The woman turns her husband into
a wolf because she does not want to live with a werewolf, and also because, as she said at the beginning of the story, she wants to keep him from beating her. Wife-beating is a recognized element of life in Novoselycja. The woman in the story, like many other women past and present, is under the total control of her husband and has no socially recognized means to defend herself. In other cultures, a defenseless party in a desperate situation is known to recourse to magic for self-protection. Kivelson [2013], researching early modern Russian witch trials, notices that for the people of 17th-century Russia witchcraft was a tool for the weak to protect themselves from the abuse of the powerful when they acted in unjust and unbearable ways. Kivelson [2013: 8] states that:

Ideas about witchcraft grew, in large measure, out of a consensual understanding of where the limits to abuse resided, where violence or physical torment or exploitation was acceptable, and where it strayed into excess. Magic ... erupted at precisely those points of trespass. In its latent or active threat, witchcraft served to patrol those norms and obligations, to mitigate the harshness.

This story presents a parallel case. The female teller despicts the husband as having an unfair advantage over the wife by having the right to beat her. By using magic, the wife nullifies his advantage and stops the abuse, thus ensuring fair treatment.

However, the abuse the husband might perform as a wolf is even more unjust than the abuse he performed as a man. As we have seen, using supernatural powers against an average person is considered evil in Novoselycja, because the victim does not have similar powers and cannot defend themselves. In the story, the woman wants to prevent her husband from attacking her in the shape of a wolf, i.e., from harming her using his unfair advantage. Remarkably, the wife has no supernatural powers herself (she is only saying the magic words her husband told her not to use). It is a case of self-defense on two counts at the same time: a powerless female defending herself against a powerful male, and a non-magical person defending herself against a magical one. On both counts, turning her husband into a wolf presents an elegant solution to the problem and thus cannot be judged too harshly. The woman is justified, as a defendant in a court of law might be acquitted if she used an offender’s gun against him in self-defense.

In the second story (beginning at 4 minutes, 54 seconds), which the teller told immediately after the first one, only stopping to check if the recorder was working, the initial situation is the same: the wife is abused by her husband. However, unlike the woman in the first story, this woman is a bearer of supernatural powers, and she wants to turn her husband into a wolf from the outset. She uses her supernatural powers for self-defense to prevent her husband from beating her; however, when her life comes to an end, she cannot die. This fact, coupled with the prolonged suffering before death, is in Novoselycja a sure sign of a grievous offense committed by the dying person, usually stealing milk.
or other manner of using magical gifts for an evil cause against non-magical people. Nevertheless, her use of supernatural powers against her husband is eventually forgiven by the victim, and her deed is thus presented as excusable. Her reversal of the transformation is the primary reason for this attitude. Neither the repentance alone, nor the confession to a priest could bring relief.

Moreover, the priest in the story explained unequivocally that the sin of using magical transformation against a non-magical person needed to be undone, and that it is only the offended person could forgive this sin. This argument does not reflect official doctrine; in the Orthodox and Greek Catholic church practices, (11) sins are commonly confessed by the perpetrator and then absolved by the priest, perhaps after giving the sinner penance. However, in the story, the priest says this sin is especially grievous, and, therefore, it is beyond his powers. The only solution is to reverse the spell. Remarkably, after the woman does that and her husband becomes a human again, he forgives her immediately. After coming back, her husband’s first words are thanking his wife for returning him home and forgiving her for turning him into a wolf. He grants her his permission to die peacefully on the spot. Moreover, before dying she has a lengthy conversation with him, asking him about his experiences while a wolf and telling him why she did not return him earlier. During this entire exchange, the husband does not demonstrate any animosity towards her, which indicates that his forgiveness is genuine.

An important detail in the story is that, unlike the transformation from a human into a wolf, which remained secret from the community, the process leading to her husband’s reverse transformation unfolds openly and is undertaken with the community’s guidance. The transformation into a wolf was not described in the story; such omissions are common in Novoselycja whenever an application of supernatural powers is to be mentioned. (12) However, later, when the woman in the story is nearing the end of her life, she is constantly surrounded by people: other women that remind her to confess and to remember a sin she must have committed; the priest who tells her to reverse the transformation; her children who go and take the husband’s clothes into the woods and who watch her suffering until their father comes back and forgives her. All these people converse with her, advise her, commiserate with her, and eventually help her on her way to undoing the sin and restoring her husband to his human form. The actual reverse transformation itself occurs in the woods far from people’s eyes, but all the steps leading to it, such as getting the man’s old clothes from under the barrel and carrying them into the woods for him to put on, and even waiting with anticipation for the transformation to occur, are carried out by other people and in full view. These actions are not secret; they do not need to be hidden, because they are not considered evil. The woman herself functions within the net of social connections. She listens to and eventually follows the advice of the community, thereby adhering to societal norms. While milk stealers are a- and anti-social, she, at this point, is not; she is re-united with the community and its values. By presenting the woman’s actions in plain view, under the influence and with the help of the community, the teller indicates her approval of the woman’s actions. The
community leads her through the correction of her transgression, and once she completes it, the victim also forgives her.

This second story is typologically a story of an attack on a person who happened to have supernatural powers and who used them for self-defense. As in the stories about people who stole from bearers of magical powers, the transgressor who attacked a magical person is punished. When the spell is reversed, the unfair advantage withdrawn, a state of fairness is restored. Reversing the magical harm and asking forgiveness is the acceptable pathway for redemption in the eyes of the community, even for a bearer of supernatural powers who applied them against non-magical people. These nuanced stories demonstrate that even though the use of magic against non-magical person is forbidden, in the eyes of a female teller it can be justified or at least is presented as justifiable, if it is used to counter a greater evil, such as domestic abuse. In addition, it must be in compliance with other socio-cultural norms, namely the need to reverse the action to obtain the victim’s forgiveness, the need to be part of the community, and the like.

Magical knowledge: Passing on skills

Since magical powers are dangerous and must be used with great caution, their transmission is also traditionally controlled so as to minimize the potential damage. The question then arises: how do people acquire magic powers? Below is an excerpt from a conversation between HK, a woman 91 years old at the time, L, her daughter-in-law, 53, and B (the author).

5. How people pass on supernatural knowledge

| L no | ę такоє | no | я знаю теперъ чи ходаю_ або | колись ходили | була така чутка | цо ходили молоко: відбери від | друтых корів соді там я знаю шо там они робили там у них там | робота своя | така школа цо там трéба научити трé предмети хтось має передати комусь розумі́те там | то передавало ся іс поколі́ня в поколі́ня |
|------|--------|----|-----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| B тó ся передавало? |
| L | тó ворожбі́тство но |
| B ді́йсно? |
| L так тáк | |

L: There are such things. I don’t know if they [=witches] go now or not, but in the old times they would go, people said, they went and took milk from others’ cows to themselves, and did something else, some kind of their work. They would learn it, someone would have to transfer the knowledge to them, and otherwise it would not work. It was passed on from one generation to the next.

B: And that got transmitted?
L: That sorcery/witchcraft, yes.
B: Is that so?
L: Yes!
HK: For example, if I know, I will teach you, and you will pass it on,
L: to your children, and grandchildren
HK: yes
L: It was passed on from one generation [to the next]. You know, such a family that knew, they would pass it on to their children, you know.
B: Uh-huh
L: And some said, well, as they say, that a father knew, but he did not pass it on, because his son was impulsive, he could have caused a large misfortune to someone else, he would not be given the knowledge to. And another [= a son in another family] would be more sensible, would think how to do and what... But if someone was impulsive, thoughtless, he could have done bad things to anyone, so father would not pass it on to him.

Both L and HK agree that magic knowledge had to be transferred, that is, taught and learned. When L wants to elaborate on the topic, she imperceptibly switches from talking about the transfer of knowledge among women (which was apparently the case in the example her mother-in-law gave) to the transfer generally in the family, and then to men passing knowledge on to men (father to son). She says that men feel responsible for transferring the knowledge into good hands, and this kind of cultural selection weeds out those candidates who do not have the right qualities to handle magic power without causing unnecessary harm to others. She does not return to the topic of women’s milk stealing, since this activity is inherently bad. Instead, she switches the topic to powers of other sort that only inflict harm when used by bad or impulsive people. According to other narrators’ accounts in my collection, some people are born with magic skills (that sometimes comes together with certain physical indicators, such as a tail that a witch may be born with). More often, however, a supernatural skill, just like any skill, is a type of knowledge which can be passed on in a family or learned from someone else. In a different village situated on the other side of the Carpathian ridge, but within 30 km from Novoselycja, I heard a story of a person who knew how to cure snake bites, but had no other supernatural powers; he learned this skill from a woman in America, where he went to work. After returning home, he practiced it a great deal and then passed it on to one of his sons, who, in his turn,
did not pass it on to anyone. Except for the mention of America, this is a typical story of power transmission. The transfer of supernatural knowledge as separate skills also explains why men do not steal milk or transfer diseases to children. In a traditional culture where each gender has specific labor roles, there are skills considered appropriate for one gender, but not the other. This division apparently extends to both natural and supernatural skills. (13) The transfer of magic powers through learning also explains certain concerns village people have today. The teller of the rope-milking story complained to me repeatedly that now that there were a lot of magic books around; every woman could pick a book and learn how to steal milk.

“I won’t do that, why do I need that?”: Denial of knowledge

When I asked people questions about anything to do with the supernatural, they were often eager to share stories about other people with supernatural powers, or about themselves as victims of them. However, when asked for explanations of how the magic was performed, they emphatically denied any knowledge both of the mechanisms and the procedures. As we can see in story cited above (The Old Man and Builders), the narrator gave a very detailed account of how the old man punished the builders, but then added an unsolicited explanation that she did not know how he achieved it and what he did with the sliver. Another woman, when her cow’s milk became less fatty (“like water”) was given advice by her neighbor who knew, but she did not follow it:

6. Woman did not pour milk on live coals

| тоді бріть йей мени казав а я тобі я не робила бо я дуяю я не роблю бо я не знаю кедь я не знаю до путі та ніщо я буду іншют робити єво чо каже ти собі каже кріз ковбу відий одні накладі добре в печі та вийсян тут молоко всю в піч оби му так серце горіло ги туто ги ть молоко киїть ци розуміете та в грінь вийсян та знасте іншо всю бдю я тобі не робила я би не діддала мени аж не казали [?] сік бим занімля та його уже не нісесь ніс давжим давню но він казав мені та кедь би іншу не знат та би не роблю а я дуяю я не роблю ній ніщо бдю ніщо мени тобі ай собі хто робит ній собі робит я я то перебуду |

And that brother of hers told me - and I didn’t do that, because I thought, ‘I did not know how to do that, why should I do that?’ He told me, ‘Eva, milk the cow, build a fire in the oven and pour all that milk in the oven so that her [=the witch’s] heart boils just as this milk boils. Pour it on the live coals...’ I didn’t do that. I would rather die... when he told that to me, I went numb... He died long ago, but he had told me to do that. Had he not known, he would not have advised me. And I thought ‘I won’t do that, what if something happens, why do I need that? Let the one who usually does it do it, and I will wait, maybe it will stop by itself.’ And it all ended eventually, and there are no witches,
The neighbor who gave advice apparently knew some magic, but the woman did not want to do as he advised to fix her cow’s milk, even though she was in dire need. She had ten children, and the quality of the milk was very important. Nevertheless, she decided not to act.

She also described how she “went numb” at the very suggestion of magic, and how horrifying the idea was to her. In the long run, the situation corrected itself. She preferred having lower quality food for an indefinite period of time rather than resort to using magic. One wonders why would she choose being hungry with her children over using magic to defend her sustenance from a magic attack. One reason, according to Scott [1976], is the conservative economic strategy that minimizes risk and stems from a subsistence culture’s necessity to avoid failure rather than increase production. However, there are other cultural reasons for her choice. One is likely to be the church’s disapproval of magic rituals in general. Since being a good Christian is an important component of villagers’ identity, they often explain their distancing from magic in religious terms. This same woman pointed out that “God did not make your/one’s mind to do such things, but to work and pray.” Another reason the speaker mentioned was the fear of the magic act going wrong if done without sufficient knowledge, which could lead to unexpected consequences both on earth and in the afterlife. However, she did not mention, because it is obvious to her (14), but which seems at least an equally potent fear is being accused of doing magic by one’s neighbors. A person’s reputation is an important asset, and people do not want to give others food for gossip, which is greatly feared in the village. This reason is especially worrisome for people who have been accused of witchcraft before, such as the teller of this story. For some reason, she had been targeted by her neighbors, a fact that she did not explain to me. Her emphatic and repeated denial of knowing anything to do with magic and of not doing magic ever, even in a dire situation, is a means to protect herself from nasty rumors and a bad reputation, a stance shared by most village inhabitants.

Conclusion

The stories and comments about the bearers of supernatural powers in Novoselycja reveal that the essential issue is fairness. It is not fair to use supernatural powers against people who do not have such powers, to take advantage of them, steal their livelihood and threaten their health, or attack them...
in a wolf’s skin. A person who does any of these things is regarded as evil and their action as an exceptionally grievous offense. (15) On the other hand, if a person with supernatural powers uses them in self-defense in a situation when nothing else works (against a thief, an abuser, or against another magical person), it may be deemed acceptable practice. However, one must reverse the spell eventually, if supernatural powers are to be used only for teaching a lesson, rather than for inflicting permanent harm. Even people who do not possess supernatural powers may find themselves in a situation when they may use such powers. If it is a case of self-defense, they are justified in doing so, and they do not have to (and, of course, they cannot) reverse the spell. Supernatural powers thus are regarded as something similar to natural powers and abilities. They exist in the social world and should not be used for gaining unfair advantage over other community members. (16) Fairness is generally regarded as a fundamental human value; it underlies law and many other cultural institutions, and it has been the subject of much research in moral psychology and ethics. Haidt [2007: 1001] suggests that fairness is one of the “five psychological foundations, each with a separate evolutionary origin, upon which human cultures construct their moral communities.” (17)

The idea of fairness is prevalent in the stories because community members must rely solely on problem-solving mechanisms already present within the village social structure. In contemporary Western law the presupposition is that, as a result of the social contract, individuals have delegated to the state their right to implement justice. Any crime is understood as an offense not only against the harmed individual, but also against the state, and thus is responsible for its investigation, trial, and punishment. The state allows citizens’ application of justice only in rare and strictly defined cases (e.g. self-defense). However, in the world of the stories, the state does not play any role, as if it does not exist. (18) The procedure and the underlying worldview conforms not with retributive justice meted out by the state and based on punishment, but with the recently emerged, in Western countries at least, community-based restorative justice that “actively involves victims and offenders in the process of reparation and rehabilitation” [Van Ness & Heetderks Strong 2010: 22]. In this system, the response to crime [is], not to add to the harm caused by imposing further harm on the offender, but to do as much as possible to restore the situation. The community offers aid to the victim; the offender is held accountable and required to make reparation. Attention [is] given not only to the outcome, but also to evolving a process that respected the feelings and humanity of both the victim and the offender. [Wright 1991: 112]

Moreover, since it is not only the victim who is wronged, but also the community whose values have been breached by the offense, a necessary part of the restoration of justice is censure in the legal sense of the word, i.e., condemnation of an offensive action. This step reaffirms the victim’s and the community’s moral
values. In restorative justice, this act is done jointly by the victim, the community, and the offender; by participating in the process, the offender accepts and reaffirms the values that were violated by his offense [Wenzel et al., 2008: 379-80]. We see a similar process the story about the builders and especially in the second story about the wolf-husband, in which the community is actively involved in reversing the damage and ensuring forgiveness.

The contemporary concept of restorative justice may also include the threat of punishment to make the offender more cooperative [Wenzel et al. 2008]. This is also the case in the context of Novoselycja stories: if offenders consider themselves to be in a position of power and entitled to abuse it, powerful mechanisms must come into play to reinforce the restoration of justice. Once a person has a choice between magical punishment and restorative procedures, they are usually much more willing to choose the latter. Moreover, fear of magic is also a powerful deterrent to future offenses. Magic stories from Novoselycja, as in Newfoundland and in early modern Russia, where the law-enforcing state is remote (and not involved in local affairs) or abusive, can frighten people into considering fairer treatment of others. This practice is an especially important instrument for the weak in their attempts to “patrol norms and obligations,” [Kivelson 2013: 8]. Accounts of magical punishment serve to put the fear of God, or rather, of crossing one’s neighbor, into the hearts of powerful and abusive husbands, bullies attacking passers-by for the fun of it, and even milk-stealing witches who can be detected and punished by “wise people” possessing stronger magic.

On the other hand, magic is too strong a power to be given free rein in society. An adversary possessing supernatural abilities will win over a non-magical person in every case, which is again unfair and enables potential abuses. For example, if a person decides to use his/her supernatural abilities out of the human failings of greed or spite, s/he will have the upper hand. Thus magic needs to be controlled as well. If a magical person does not want to undo the action and compensate the victim, if s/he insists on keeping the ill-gotten gain, other mechanisms come into play. There are a (super)natural mechanisms to remind magical wrongdoers of their transgressions: they cannot die; or when they die, the stolen milk will spill out of their eyes and mouth. However, that mechanism only works at the end of one’s life. There is another, societal, mechanism which works more quickly: gossip. To be associated with the unfair application of magical practices and to be accused of witchcraft is bad for one’s reputation. Haidt calls traditional communities “reputation-obsessed” [2007: 1000], and rightly so. Spoiled reputation is punished by social ostracism, an easy, low-cost, and very effective technique to make one miserable [Haidt 2007: 1000]. Although belief in magic, which Haidt does not mention, seems to be one of the most powerful traditional instruments of social control, gossip and subsequent isolation are also extremely effective tools. It punishes, justly or unjustly, those suspected of any association with the unfair use of supernatural powers. I venture to suggest that it is rather the fear of that isolation than the fear of the supernatural powers as such.
that makes people publicly deny, and possibly avoid altogether, any insider knowledge of supernatural skills. I have so far only met two people who did not deny that they “knew something”: a female healer and a man who said he could bring good luck. Both had a good reputation in the village and therefore were not afraid of being accused of witchcraft.

Thus, knowledge is power, especially if it is magic knowledge. As one of the known types of power, it is built into the traditional system of power and resistance in a traditional culture of Novoselycja.

NOTES

1 The majority of Rusyn folk texts have been published in L’viv or Uzhhorod starting at the end of the 19th c., and during the turbulent century that has passed since that time, the collecting and publishing norms for Rusyn folklore have also undergone changes. According to Britsyna [2006: 60 ff], a ‘literary’ model of collecting and publishing folk texts that had developed in Eastern Ukraine in the 19th c. (i.e., texts were written down and then edited by folklorists according to their understanding of what the text should look like) became dominant in Ukraine in the Soviet period; that was also the model brought into the Rusyn territory after 1944 (see below). A different model that Britsyana calls ‘ethnolinguistic’ [Britsyna 2006: 93] developed at the end of the 19th c. in the Austro-Hungarian province of Galicia (before WWI, it was represented by Verxrats’kyi, Shuxevych, Hnatiuk, Rozdol’s’kyi, after WWI, Pan’kevych, etc.). The scholars using this model were interested in language as well as folklore; they preserved linguistic and textual features as closely as they could, taking down from dictation being their best option without technical possibilities of sound recording. However, these techniques were not without fault; dictation dispenses with the atmosphere of performance, so that the performers (or folklorists) might choose to omit certain parts, e.g., repetitions [Britsyna 2006: 74-5], or certain linguistic features that might turn out to be structurally valuable (see Boudovskaia [2016: 17] for analysis of one of such features in two tales from the same district in Pan’kevych [1938: 460-463]). Nevertheless, scholars from the ‘ethnolinguistic’ school published Rusyn texts that held high standing up to the end of the 20th c. However, the ‘literary’ model of folklore collection and publication, possibly aggravated by the Soviet practices of producing ‘ideologically correct’ fakelore [Britsyna 2006: 88], became the main model for Rusyn folk texts in the Subcarpathian territory from 1944 on. In the Soviet era, Rusyn folk texts were published in literary Ukrainian, i.e., in translation at best, and their syntax and style often were distinctly literary (cf., e.g., Lintur and Chendei 1965, Lintur and Turianytsia 1979, Lintur et al. 1984, Khlanta 1989, etc.)

2 The performance-centered approach to folklore puts material into its social context, studies the clues that the performance sends to its audience about how to interpret its meaning, as well as examines the feedback from the audience and the reaction of the performer(s) to this feedback. Hymes [1975: 18] defined
performance as “cultural behavior for which a person assumes responsibility to an audience.” He [1975: 71-2] concludes that, “1) knowledge of tradition is not the same as performance, though they are interwoven; 2) tradition that had been the emphasis of previous folkloristics, is only a means, while for the participants, performance is the goal, and 3) tradition underpins performance, but performance keeps tradition in existence and also makes change possible.” Similarly, Bauman [1975, 1984] argues that verbal art is performance, which is a social action; the audience evaluates and shapes the performance; and that it is not only the residual culture that is worth of studying, but “the totality of human experience.”

This concept of performance from the works of Bauman [1975, 1977], Hymes [1975], Ben-Amos [1971], Abrahams [1972], Toelken [1969] has become central to the discipline. Sawin [2002] takes issue with Bauman’s model, arguing that it undertheorizes the audience, leaving out the role of emotions in their perception and evaluation of performance. The performance approach by itself is diverse. One of the issues is the role of culture in performance: Bauman takes an anti-cognitivist position, at least in his later work: in 2013 he criticizes Hymes for his ‘mentalist’ orientation, disapproving of Hymes’ [2003] attitude as “preoccupied with what was going on in storytellers’ minds” [Bauman 2013: 36]. He was reacting to Hymes’ conclusion [2003: 11] that “to say that stories exist only in performance is to say that between performances narrators do not think. That they are prisoners of the presence of an audience. That they go about their daily lives, encountering nothing that makes them remember a story. That the stories they know never pose them problems, from perceived incompetence to contradictions, with one another or with their own experience. That, in short, they have very limited minds. We should be embarrassed to denigrate them so. To do so seems to me intellectually constipated.” In this dispute I side with Hymes’ opinion that the culture displayed in folklore pre-exists – and underpins – performance, while performance is a means to both maintaining and changing cultural models of participants. Similarly, I concur with Toelken [2014: 8] when he asked himself at a performance: “What does the [native] audience know that I don’t? What do they bring to this dramatic experience that makes the narrative mean something for them?” His answer is culture-specific knowledge: “A good story ... makes you experience or reexperience something. And that something is an otherwise-abstract but real idea from your culture, made concrete and experiential through the imagination and knowledge | which you bring to the story performance, enhanced by the power of the performer” [Toelken 2014: 4-5]. Both Hymes and Toelken express the conviction that cultural values are an integral component of performance without which it cannot be experienced and understood to a meaningful degree. There has been a large body of research dealing with cultural values within the performance approach, e.g., Hymes [1975] analyzed the performance-based features of a myth and a story based on the same myth, and traced the connection of formal features of the two performances and the two sets of values: the older values reflected in the myth (validation of the life of the native people along the river) vs. contemporary ethic concerns reflected in the story (tall
stories enforcing the limits of sexual exploit and pretense for men, and cautionary stories for women). Among other examples are such diverse works as Foley [1991], Limón [1994], Raby [2007], Toelken [2014], etc., and also work done with narrative and folklore within the cognitive model school in anthropology, such as Hill [1995], Mathews [2005], Price [1987], etc. However, Rusyn folklore has not yet been analyzed from this point of view.

3 Except for the language of Vojvodina Rusyns, see Pugh [2009].

4 For more detailed discussion see Pugh [2009:vii-20].

5 There are numerous systemic similarities between the materials recorded in Novoselycja and materials from other East Slavic traditions, other Slavic traditions, and even neighboring non-Slavic traditions, such as Hungarian and Romanian ones. Some sources will be noted below. Nevertheless, I will not include a consideration of parallels with other traditions, however tempting it might be, because it is beyond the scope of an analysis of attitudes to supernatural powers based on the material from one particular village. The Carpatho-Rusyn material from the territory south of the Carpathian ridge may be found in Bogatyrev [1929/1998], Hnatiuk [1897, 1898, 1900], Lintur & Turianytsia [1979], Lintur et al. [1984], Khlanta [1989], Hyriak [1965], etc. Material from the Northern slope of the Carpathian Mountains is presented in Rozdol’sk’yj [1899, 1900]; Hnatiuk [1899, 1902, 1902a, 1904], Franko [1901-1910]; Onyščuk [1909], to name a few. Relevant material from Polissia, Eastern Ukraine is systematized in Vinogradova & Levkievskaja [2010]; Hungarian material may be found e.g., in Dégh [1989].

6 The concept of fairness I use to describe the values in Novoselycja is not to be confused with the idea of limited good. According to Foster [1965], the idea of limited good is a feature of peasant mentality which considers all good things in the community to be limited: not only wealth, but also social goods such as respect, as well as health, etc. Therefore, if one member of the community increases his/her relative well-being in any regard, other members are suffering because the corresponding amount of good has been taken from them. Thus, the peasant has to either keep the status quo or conceal his advancements from the community. However, fairness as I understand it here is something different than not getting ahead of others; it allows competition, but demands competing on equal footing with other people, using the same means as they do, and not employing stronger tools, such as magic, to secure unfair advantages for oneself.

7 Stories 1, 3, and 4 contain additional information about the number of the recording they are transcribed from, as well as the time in hh:mm. Story 1 is taken from recording #2 in the collection of 2012, minutes 7 through 10. Story 3 is taken from recording #21 in the collection of 2014, hour 1, minute 42, through hour 1, minute 45. Story 4 is taken from recording #4 in the collection of 1987, minute 50, through hour 1, minute 1.

8 The woman apparently was performing witchcraft. Taking clay from cows’ footprints is one of the acts people do when they intend to steal a cow’s milk. The facts that the woman was wearing only a sack, and that it happened on a holiday, also suggest witchcraft.

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9 I am very grateful to Professor Vera Bergelson (Rutgers Law School) for her invaluable advice on the possibilities and limits of application of contemporary legal doctrine to the two werewolf cases.

10 There are other versions of the same story I recorded in this village, but they are shorter. Other tellers ended the story with the recognition, or added that after it, the husband turned into a wolf and fled. All versions were recorded from female tellers.

11 Novoselycja was Greek Catholic until the Transcarpathian territory was annexed to the USSR in 1944-45; from 1946 on, people were forced to convert to Orthodoxy. By 1987 they followed Orthodox rites. However, the two denominations share similar practices of confession and absolution.

12 Speakers may volunteer to provide a description of what they witnessed, but they usually are reluctant to talk about how supernatural powers work, apparently for fear of being accused of knowing too much about magic, which is tantamount to an accusation of actually performing witchcraft. This issue will be discussed below.

13 There is a large body of literature about gender division of labor in traditional agricultural societies; such division is considered to be characteristic of, and historically, possibly the basis for, patriarchy; see, e.g., the discussion in Quinn [in press]; the understanding of such division as normal and morally righteous tends to linger in more modern, but in essence still patriarchal societies, where a person defines their identity through their (gendered) labor [cf. Paoletti & Cavallaro Johnson 2007]. Gender-age groups are known to have distinct roles not only in physical labor, but in rituals and in other forms of folklife; e.g., in Slavic tradition for traditional Russian culture(s); see Bernshtam [1988] and Olson & Adonyeva [2012]. It is not surprising, therefore, that genders in Novoselycja have distinct roles in magic activities: men do building magic and repel thunderstorms, while women engage in milk stealing and transferring diseases. Both genders can magically detect and punish a witch or another offender. A more detailed account of gender-based division of supernatural activities in Novoselycja merits further investigation. This division seems to exist in other Slavic cultures as well. Ostling [2011: 127-8]), basing on material from witch trials, states that in Poland, and throughout Europe, “witches were, above all, thieves of milk.” This is corroborated by Polish court documents from the 15th and 16th centuries, while records of witches harming other household animals are almost non-existent.

14 Silence is often a way of signalling a culturally default point, obvious and not worthy of mentioning in the eyes of community members. However, as in this case, this point is important and worthy of mention for outsiders to understand the culture. As Hill [2005: 180] points out, “one part of finding culture in narrative is noticing what speakers do not tell stories about, and what they seem to ‘leave out’ as they narrate.”

15 Supernatural abilities, as mentioned above, can also be used to ensure fair treatment of the less powerful and to scare the powerful into a more respectful stance towards the powerless; see Kivelson; see also Rieti [2008] describing the
witch lore of Newfoundland, where the main pattern of witch stories is that a woman comes to somebody’s house to ask for food or clothing; the owner of the house does not give anything and receives magical retribution. Newfoundland witch lore coincides in its ethics with the lore of Novoselycja in several important points. Firstly, Rieti [2018: xiv] states that the organizing point of Newfoundland witch lore is the idea of reciprocity and fairness. Secondly, Rieti mentions that Newfoundland is the poorest part of Canada in terms of per capita income, but it is also a national leader in charitable donations, which may indicate that Newfoundland inhabitants, practicing subsistence economy until recently, also retained the idea of fairness described by Scott [1976], i.e., it is moral that each member of the community should have sufficient sustenance. Thirdly, Rieti [2008: 24] mentions that ‘witching offered women a voice’ in fishing and other areas that were otherwise exclusively male domains, i.e., witchcraft served to partially compensate for gendered power imbalance. Finally, according to Rieti [2008: xiv] quoting Story [1969: 33], Newfoundland villages had been without administration or state-imposed law for a considerable time in the 18th and early 19th centuries.; instead, people had customs “unenforced by magistrate, constable or town council.” See also note 4 [Rieti 2008: 153]. This similarity is striking when compared to the world of Novoselycja, where the state as enforcer of justice is not mentioned at all and seems not to exist.

16 Fair treatment should be given even to mythical creatures. In Novoselycja I recorded a story about a povitruľa (in other villages of the Transcarpathian region and the neighboring Ivano-Frankivsk region it is told about perelisnyčja - Kira Sadoja, personal communication). The povitruľa (or perelisnyčja) is a creature who follows an unmarried young man, sleeps with him, and does not leave him until he becomes magically sick and dies. In this story, a woman starts sweeping the floor in the morning and sees a povitruľa sleeping with her son; the povitruľa’s long hair is hanging down onto the floor. The woman picks it up and puts it on the bed next to povitruľa, who wakes up and says, ‘You have shown respect to my hair, and I will show respect to your son.’ She leaves and never comes back. Therefore, even an inherently evil creature responds to fair treatment in kind and, after being shown respect, decides to leave the young man alone and spares his life.

17 The other four are: harm/care; loyalty; authority; and purity [Haidt 2007:1001].

18 I am not specifying the type of social organization of village life that this type of ethics might correspond to. One possibility is self-governance, similar to the one Svetieva (2005) describes for Macedonian village of Porece with traditional punishments for common offences meted out by village head together with elected officials. However, my focus is more on the system of ethics than on customary law practices.
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INTERVIEWS


All stories recorded in Novoselycja, Mizhir’ja district, Zakarpats’ka Oblast’, Ukraine.