

Introduction, Part II: Natalie Kononenko's Folklore Activities at the University of Alberta, Canada

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I consider folklore extremely important. Folklore is artistic expression of belief. It satisfies our craving for beauty, be it colorful pysanky and embroidery, or songs that cause tears to flow. And it is the sort of expression that is available to everyone. Folklore instructs. It teaches cultural norms in a way that is not didactic and not obtrusive. And it teaches universal moral truths: being kind to all living creatures, being patient, being forgiving. This makes folklore both universal and culturally specific. Because it is so pervasive and so accessible, it often goes unnoticed. So often it is dismissed. "That's just folklore!" people say. Or "What is there to study? Everyone knows folklore!" In my career as a folklorist, I have so often had to justify what I do. My problems were compounded by the fact that I specialize in Ukrainian folklore. "Why study Ukrainian?" I would hear. "Students want to learn Russian. Russia is an important player on the political scene. What is Ukraine?" Worse still, I specialize in the folklore of the countryside. Again, the village is not the seat of power and so what I do would be further disparaged for that reason.

—Natalie Kononenko

Natalie Kononenko had an international reputation in Ukrainian folklore long before she came to the University of Alberta in 2004. See, for example, her books: *Ukrainian Dumy* (1979), *The Magic Egg and Other Tales from Ukraine* (with Barbara Suwyn) (1997), *Ukrainian Minstrels: And the Blind Shall Sing* (1998) as well as dozens of journal articles.

Thanks to the generosity of Peter and Doris Kule, with matching funds from the Faculty of Arts and the Government of Alberta's Access to the Future Fund, it was possible to create the Kule Chair of Ukrainian Ethnography. In 2004 Natalie Kononenko moved from the University of Vir-

ginia to become a full Professor at the University of Alberta and the first Kule Chair.

Over the last seven years she developed and taught undergraduate and graduate courses for both students specializing in Ukrainian folklore and those with different majors. Among them are "Introduction to Folklore," "Folklore and the Media," "Readings in Contemporary Folklore Theory," "Readings in Post-Soviet Folklore," "Ukrainian Folk Song," "Ukrainian Folk Prose," "Ukrainian Folk Belief," "Ukrainian Rites of Passage," "Ukrainian Folk Art and Performance," "Ukrainian Folklore Methods," and "Folklore Research Methods." She has supervised two Master's students and three Ph.D. students over this time. Her teaching and research excellence were recognized through a number of teaching and research/equipment grants, namely a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant in support of the project "Reciprocal Analysis: Group-sourcing Ukrainian Folklore Audio" (2010), a Ukrainian Pioneers of Alberta grant for developing and testing a folklore-based learning module for the Ukrainian bilingual program (2006), a University of Alberta Academic Technologies for Learning grant for developing the Ukrainian Traditional Folklore website as a learning object (2004–05), a University of Alberta Endowment Fund for the Future Special Capital Equipment Grant (2004–05), and a Ukrainian Benevolent Society of Edmonton archival support grant (2004–05).

Folklorists do their work in the community as well as in academia. Natalie Kononenko is no exception to this rule. Thus, she has performed "scary stories" at restaurants in Edmonton, specifically at Halloween time. She has performed children's stories at the Edmonton Deep Freeze Festival. She has done other community networking, sometimes in the company of Peter Holloway and Yanina Vyhovska, during Edmonton Heritage Days, the Vegreville Pysanka Festival, and at the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village. She has repeatedly conducted free workshops open to the public on the craft of *pysanka* writing and the production of *motanky* (cloth dolls). She has also presented a number of public lectures at the Shevchenko Scientific Society in Edmonton, the Alberta Genealogical Society, and at several Ukrainian churches in Edmonton.

In 2004, right after she arrived at the University of Alberta, Natalie organized a weekly graduate seminar/lunch that was later renamed the "Folklore Lunch." The initial purpose was to let graduate students give formal presentations in front of an audience and in this way to prepare them for conferences outside of the university. Natalie has also invited various guests to those Folklore Lunches, including folk performers and scholars from academe; she has also made several presentations herself. The Folklore Lunches have had a very positive effect on our graduate students by giving them experience in presenting their research both here and at other professional meetings. The lunches have also attracted the attention of and strengthened

our relationship with the local Ukrainian community and have been greatly appreciated.

Natalie has also invited a number of international and national speakers to the university, such as Mykhailo Koval' (a bandura player from the village of Velykyi Khutir), Oleksandra Britsyna (the Ryl's'kyi Institute of Art, Folklore, and Ethnology, Kyiv), Cory Thorne (Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador), Larisa Fialkova (University of Haifa, Israel), Viktor Mishalow (Australian-born bandura player from Toronto), Sabina Magliocco (California State University, USA), Maria Rypan (*gerdan* [Ukrainian beadwork] maker from Toronto), Robert Klymasz (University of Manitoba, formerly from the Canadian Museum of Civilization), Myron Momryk (Archives Canada), and Lubow Wolynetz (curator from the Ukrainian Museum in New York City).

Natalie Kononenko has been a valuable addition to the Folklore Centre, the University of Alberta, and the Edmonton community and has been extremely active in all three of these spheres.