

# “Oh, My Thoughts, My Thoughts...”: Olena Pchilka’s and Lesia Ukrainka’s Contributions to Epigraphic Embroidery

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## Abstract

The article focuses on the role of Olena Pchilka<sup>1</sup> and Lesia Ukrainka in epigraphic embroidery<sup>2</sup> development. Undoubtedly, Olena Pchilka was an ardent proponent of folk art purity.<sup>3</sup> Following from this, there is a tendency to think that she was against all novelty in Ukrainian embroidery. Many researchers and antiquity enthusiasts refer to her authority when arguing against inscriptions on textile as a phenomenon resulting largely from printed cross-stitch on paper.<sup>4</sup> However, not all embroidered verbal texts have been of print origin. Most of them were folkloric (or folklorized) texts. What is more, Olena Pchilka to some extent provided her own comment on epigraphic embroidery in approving Lesia Ukrainka’s *rushnyk* (embroidered runner) containing the inscription “Oh, my thoughts, my thoughts, woe is with you! Love one another, brethren, love Ukraine” (devoted to Taras Shevchenko). In modern embroidery, embroideresses reproduce the citation with new connotations of these words, thereby continuing the

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- 1 All people mentioned in this article are closely related – mainly by family or friendly ties – with Lesia Ukrainka. Olena Pchilka (Olha Kosach; 1849–1930) – Lesia Ukrainka’s mother, a Ukrainian writer, folklorist, ethnologist, translator, and public activist. Mykhailo Kosach (Mykhailo Obachnyi; 1869–1903) – Lesia Ukrainka’s elder brother, a Ukrainian scientist, writer, translator and public activist. Olha Kosach-Kryvyniuk (1877–1945) – Lesia Ukrainka’s younger sister, a Ukrainian writer, ethnologist, translator, and biographer of Lesia Ukrainka. Mykhailo Drahomanov (1841–1945) – Lesia Ukrainka’s uncle, a Ukrainian publicist, literary critic, historian, philosopher, and public activist. Marharyta Komarova (1870–1929) – Lesia Ukrainka’s close friend, a Ukrainian translator.
  - 2 Epigraphic embroidery is embroidery with inscriptions. The practice of embroidering verbal texts was widespread in Slavic culture from the late 19th until the first half of the 20th centuries. In most cases, this involved folkloric texts (lines from folk songs and proverbs) embroidered on Ukrainian *rushnyky*. A *rushnyk* (ritual towel) is a piece of cloth that is highly important in Ukrainian ceremonies and rituals. Folkloric texts (folklore) are used here in a broad sense – that is, all texts popular in folk culture. They include folklorized texts, that is, authored texts that over time have come to the people in many variations. Details about the phenomenon of epigraphic embroidery (or embroidered verbal texts) may be found in the monograph: Tetiana Volkovicher, *Verbalni teksty u narodnii vyshyvtsi kintsia XIX – pershoi polovyny XX st.: heneza, semantyka, prahmatyka* [*Verbal Texts on Folk Embroideries (End of the 19th – First Half of the 20th Centuries): Genesis, Semantics, Pragmatics*] (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 2019).
  - 3 Olena Pchilka, *Ukrainski uzory* [*Ukrainian Patterns*] (Novohrad-Volynskiy: Novohrad, 2007).
  - 4 Cross-stitch papers are typographic samples (printed on squared paper) for counted-thread embroidery.

epigraphic embroidery tradition. The author illustrates the folklorization of oft-cited lines from Taras Shevchenko's poetry with examples of epigraphic embroidery from her own *Interactive Index of Folklore Formulas (Epigraphic Embroidery)*.

**Key Words:** Olena Pchilka, "Ukrainian Folk Ornament," Lesia Ukrainka, *rushnyk*, epigraphic embroidery, inscriptions, cross-stitch papers.



## Introduction

At the turn of the 19th century, radically new forms began to appear in Ukrainian folk embroidery.<sup>5</sup> This was connected with the rapid development of printing houses that began producing cross-stitch papers. Their circulation was so extensive, that the residents of almost all Ukrainian regions had access to them.

Many girls and women quickly mastered embroidery modeled on printed schemes. The printed production was for all tastes,<sup>6</sup> as represented were ancient geometric ornaments as well as absolute novelties for Ukrainian folk embroidery, such as naturalistic images of people or verbal texts.

It is noteworthy in this regard that it was the content of the pictures and inscriptions proposed by the publishers that was not strange for people,<sup>7</sup> as some presented scenes of everyday life and others originated from folklore (or folklorized) texts, mainly songs and proverbs. The absolute novelty was in their form: the images and inscriptions were to be embroidered.

The article will emphasize the existence of verbal texts on textile. Today we have a special term to denote it – epigraphic embroidery. There is no longer doubt that the tradition of making inscriptions on textile caught on in Ukrainian culture.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, many researchers and authorities in the matter continue to argue for folk art purity.<sup>9</sup> They speak out against embroidery that has been made by means of printed cross-stitch paper. In this respect, a generally negative attitude has taken shape, when it comes to verbal texts on textile.

5 Valerii Malyna, *Narodne mystetstvo Pivdnia Ukrainy. Kinets XIX – pochatok XX stolittia. Na materialakh Mykolaivskoi, Odeskoi, Khersonskoi oblastei* [Folk Art of Southern Ukraine. From the End of the 19th to the Beginning of the 20th Centuries. On the Materials of the Mykolaiv, Odesa, and Kherson Regions] (Mykolaiv: Artil "Khudozhnii khram," 2007), 305.

6 Kostiantyn Dalmatov, *Tretii albom russkikh, malorossiiskikh i yuzhnoslavianskikh uzorov dlia vyshivaniia* [The Third Album of Russian, Little Russian and South Slavic Patterns for Embroidery] (Sankt-Peterburg, 1883); Ye. Dolivo, *Sbornik Yuzhno-Russkikh Uzorov* [Collection of South Russian Patterns] (Kyiv: Izdanie T. A. Gubanova, 1898); M. Karagodina, *Uzory dlia vyshivaniia M. Karagodinoi* [Patterns for Embroidery by M. Karagodina] (Odesa: V. Til & Co Litography, 1897).

7 Volkovicher, *Verbalni teksty u narodnii vyshyvtsi*, 55.

8 Volkovicher, *Verbalni teksty u narodnii vyshyvtsi*.

9 Ivan Honchar, "Dolia na rushnykovi [Fate on a *Rushnyk*]," *Ukraina* 21 (1988): 25; Tetiana Kara-Vasylieva, *Istoriia ukrainskoi vyshyvky* [The History of Ukrainian Embroidery] (Kyiv: Mystetstvo, 2008), 298.

At the same time, I must note that far from all embroidered inscriptions were made according to printed schemes. It is truer to say that published cross-stitch papers gave impetus to epigraphic embroidery development, as they contained not only ready inscriptions, but also an alphabet<sup>10</sup> – schemes of separate letters, with the aid of which embroideresses could compile any phrases.

Despite this, many antiquity enthusiasts still disfavour epigraphic embroidery.<sup>11</sup> They often refer to the authority of a well-known campaigner for folk art purity, Olena Pchilka, who was alleged to have had the same view. As proof of this, her statement "There is a great need for such purely folk, Ukrainian samples, as similarly to folk poetry, embroideries may deteriorate, get worse,"<sup>12</sup> is actively cited in numerous works.<sup>13</sup>

The question arose, however, of folk art purity meaning no innovation at all. Linked to this is a second and more concrete matter: drawing upon Olena Pchilka's thought, would it be justifiable to advocate against epigraphic embroidery as a phenomenon resulting largely from cross-stitch paper?

### **Olena Pchilka as a Researcher of Embroidery and Campaigner for Folk Art Purity<sup>14</sup>**

Olena Pchilka, an outstanding writer, translator, public figure, and the mother of Lesia Ukrainka, was recognized in her lifetime,<sup>15</sup> inter alia, as a researcher of Ukrainian folk

10 N. Shaposhnikov, *Albom azbuki i uzorov dlia vyshivaniia po kanve* [*Album of Alphabet and Patterns for Embroidery on Canvas*] (Moscow, 1899).

11 Olha Konovalova, "Osoblyvosti formuvannia ikonohrafii antropomorfnikh motyviv ukrainskoi narodnoi ornamentiiky v XIX st. [Features of Iconography Formation of Anthropomorphic Motifs in Ukrainian Folk Ornaments of the 20th Century]," *Mystetska osvita: zmist, tekhnolohii, menezhment* 4 (2009): 83; Olena Moskalenko, "Ukrainskyi rushnyk. Osoblyvosti rushnykiv Zaporizkoho rehionu [The Ukrainian Rushnyk. Particularities of the Zaporizhzhia Region]" (2013), accessed July 8, 2021, [http://www.cossackdom.com/culture/moskalenko\\_rushnik.htm](http://www.cossackdom.com/culture/moskalenko_rushnik.htm).

12 Pchilka, *Ukrainski uzory*.

13 Konovalova, "Osoblyvosti formuvannia ikonohrafii," 83; Moskalenko, "Ukrainskyi rushnyk."

14 Details about so-called folk-art purity, which is often perceived as opposite to the process of folklorization, may be found in the article: Tetiana Volkovicher, "Vyshyti verbalni teksty na ukrainskykh rushnykakh kin. XIX – pershoi pol. XX st.: folklor chy feiklor? [Embroidered Verbal Texts on Ukrainian Rushnyky from the 19th to the First Half of the 20th Centuries: Folklore or Fakelore?]," *Literaturoznavstvo. Folklorystyka. Kulturolohiia* 18–20 (2015): 78.

15 Serhii Yefremov, *Istoriia ukrainskoho pysmenstva* [*The History of Ukrainian Literature*] (Kyiv, 1911), 180–81; Olena Dikunova, *Olena Pchilka – berehynia ukrainskoi natsii (Rekomendatsiinyi bibliohrafichniy spysok literatury)* [*Olena Pchilka, a Keeper of the Ukrainian Nation. Recommended Bibliography*] (Kryvyi Rih: Kryvorizkyi natsionalnyi universytet, 2014), 3; Liubov Drofan, "'I pravdu i borotbu blahoslovyty' (Olena Pchilka v suchasnomu prochyttanni) ['To Bless Truth and Struggle' (Olena Pchilka in Modern Perception)]," *MIST: Mystetstvo, istoriia, suchasnist, teoriia* 7 (2010): 201.

embroidery. The following excerpt from Ivan Franko's letter to her provides clearest evidence of this:

I also would like you to write an article about Ukrainian folk embroideries and ornaments. Many compendiums that have come out in our country are modeled on your compendium and introduction to it. Some of them are teamed with articles (e.g. by Volkov). It seems to me there were also separate articles, because Ukrainian folk ornament has become very popular. As such, these achievements in the past several years should be reviewed and pieced together. And you seem like the most competent person in this regard.<sup>16</sup>

No prizes for guessing that the mentioned by Ivan Franko compendium is the well-known "Ukrainian Folk Ornament" (1876)<sup>17</sup> that soon brought fame to Olena Pchilka as the first Ukrainian researcher of folk decorative and applied arts, in particular, embroidery.<sup>18</sup> The main message of this work is the cultural identity of Ukraine on the example of its ornamental art.<sup>19</sup> Such a patriotic idea could not have gone unnoticed. The book turned out to be such a big success that not only Ukrainian, but also Western European researchers praised it. As Petro Odarchenko and Valentyna Tytarenko state, some French professors even lectured on her work.<sup>20</sup> Small wonder, then, that the compendium was reissued five times during the author's lifetime.<sup>21</sup>

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- 16 Halyna Levchenko, "Pryiateli sviatoi poezii: Ivan Franko ta Lesia Ukrainka: Studii 1, 'Nezaterdagy slidamy' vzaiemyn Lesi Ukrainky ta Ivana Franka [Friends of Holy Poetry: Ivan Franko and Lesia Ukrainka: Article 1, 'Unforgotten Traces' of Lesia Ukrainka's and Ivan Franko's Relationship]," *Franko: Live*, February 21, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3y5XIoI>; Oleksa Voropai, "Ivan Franko yak doslidnyk zhyttia, kultury i pobutu selian i robotnykiv [Ivan Franko as a Researcher of the Life, Culture and Activities of Peasants and Workers]," *Vyzvolnyi shliakh* 19.7–8 (1966): 843.
- 17 Olha Kosacheva, *Ukrainskii narodnyi ornament: vyshivki, tkani, pisanki [Ukrainian Folk Ornament: Embroideries, Fabrics, Easter Eggs]* (Kyiv, 1876).
- 18 Olena Dikunova, *Olena Pchilka – berehynia ukrainskoi natsii*, 2; Drofan, "I pravdu i borotbu blahoslovyty," 221.
- 19 Mykhailo Huts, "Slovo! Rich to velyka, sviataia... [A Word! A Great and Sacred Thing...]," *Kyivskyi Politekhnik* 27 (2009): 4; Liudmyla Novakivska, "The Elucidative Activities and Pedagogical Views of Olena Pchilka" (PhD diss., Institute of Pedagogy of the Ukrainian Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, 1999), 5.
- 20 Petro Odarchenko, "Vydatna diiachka ukrainskoi kultury kintsia XIX – pochatku XX st. [A Prominent Figure in Ukrainian Culture from the End of the 19th to the Early 20th Centuries]," *Narodna tvorchist ta etnohrafia* 2–3 (1999): 4; Valentyna Tytarenko, "Naukovets-etnohraf kintsia XIX – pochatku XX stolittia Olena Pchilka [Olena Pchilka as a Researcher-Ethnographer of the End of the 19th to the Early 20th Centuries]," *Vytoky pedahohichnoi maisternosti. Serii: Pedahohichni nauky* 6 (2009): 110.
- 21 Olena Pchilka, *Ukrainski uzory [Collected Ukrainian Patterns]*, 1st–6th editions (Kyiv, 1879, 1900, 1902, 1912, 1927; Novohrad-Volynskyi, 2007); Drofan, "I pravdu i borotbu blahoslovyty," 202; Huts, "Slovo! Rich to velyka," 4.

Olena Pchilka began collecting folk ornaments in Zviahel (Novohrad-Volynskyi) immediately upon marriage (1868) and moving there<sup>22</sup> although she was interested in folk decorative and applied arts before these important events in her life. According to Olena Pchilka, she was inspired by her brother, Mykhailo Drahomanov.<sup>23</sup> The fact that Volyn embroidered patterns differed from her home Poltava ones encouraged the young researcher to intensively collect samples in order to have the opportunity of comparing them. The collected material showed Olena Pchilka that Ukrainian ornament had its own originality.<sup>24</sup>

The last (during the author's lifetime) fifth edition of Olena Pchilka's *Ukrainian Patterns* was published in 1927<sup>25</sup> – in the period of the New Economic Policy (1921–1928). After that a long time-out in balanced Ukrainian folk art research transpired.<sup>26</sup>

In her works, Olena Pchilka relied on materials collected by herself: "Probably, it may seem strange or false to someone... But I will just answer that my conclusion is based on facts that I have collected."<sup>27</sup> And it is so. Nothing is more convincing than personally obtained extensive material.

However, materials collected more than a century later demonstrate concrete changes in Ukrainian folk embroidery.<sup>28</sup> This allows me to make inferences, some of which run contrary to previously noted ones. For instance, Olena Pchilka argued that

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- 22 Natalia Bendiuk, "Analiz z istorii doslidzhennia pysankarstva pivdennoi Volyni ta Ostrozhchyny zokrema [An Analysis from the Exploration History of Egg Painting in South Volyn and Particularly the Ostroh Region]," *Istoriia muzeinytstva, pamiatkookhoronnoi spravy, kraieznavstva i turyzmu v Ostrozi ta na Volyni* 3 (2011): 306; Vira Rymska, "Porih sviashchennyi i vichno dorohyi [A Sacred and Ever Dear Threshold]," *Lesia Ukrainka i suchasnist* 6 (2010): 537–38; Tetiana Yemets, "Olena Pchilka – vydatna diiachka ukrainskoho rukhu druhoi polovyny XIX – pochatku XX stolit [Olena Pchilka – a Remarkable Figure of the Ukrainian Movement from the End of the 19th to the Early 20th Centuries]," *Ukrainoznavchyi almanakh* 6 (2011): 19.
- 23 Valentyna Iskorok-Hnatenko, "Olena Pchilka: '...maiu swoim pochesnym zavdanniam – sluzhyty, po zmozi y snazi, Vysokodostoinii Akademii' [Olena Pchilka: 'To Serve My Highly Respectable Academy with All My Ability and Energy Is My Honourable Duty']," *Volyn filolohichna: tekst i kontekst* (2019): 178–79; Halyna Tvardovska, "Vyshyvka – davnie narodne mystetstvo [Embroidery is an Ancient Folk Art]," *Zviahel*, July 22, 2016.
- 24 Pchilka, *Ukrainski uzory*.
- 25 Pchilka, *Ukrainski uzory*; Valentyna Iskorok-Hnatenko, "Storinkamy kyivskoho zhyttia Oleny Pchilky [Pages of Olena Pchilka's Life in Kyiv]," *Slovo i chas* 7 (2019): 48.
- 26 Kostiantyn Datsko, "Peredmova do shostoho, pershoho posmertnoho vydannia [Introduction to the Sixth, the First Posthumous Edition]," in Olena Pchilka, *Ukrainski uzory* (Neu-Ulm: Ukrainischer Stickmuster-Verlag, 1947), 2.
- 27 Olha Kosach, "Volynskyi styl ornamentyky [The Volyn Style of Ornamentation]," in Yevheniia Shudria, *Oranta nashoi svitlytsi* (Kyiv: Atelie "Polihrafichnyi kompleks," 2011), 457.
- 28 Tetiana Brovarets, *Interaktyvnyi elektronnyi pokazhchyk folklornykh formul (Epigrafichna vyshyvka)* [*The Interactive Online Index of Folklore Formulas (Epigraphic Embroidery)*], 2016–2021, accessed July 8, 2021, <http://volkovicher.com> (password: 2707).

naturalistic images of people, animals, or buildings were not typical for Ukrainian folk embroidery,<sup>29</sup> as it “demands a relatively more complex technique, failing which they would be ugly.”<sup>30</sup> Actually, the statement was fair for the times described. Today we have a rather different picture of Ukrainian folk embroidery, and can state that it also contains naturalistic images. This is absolutely normal. Traditions always develop according to new contexts.

Above all, as we will later confirm, Olena Pchilka ultimately recognized some novelties in folk art, even at that time. This will be seen on the example of Lesia Ukrainka’s work.

As evidenced by memoirs of the Drahomanov-Kosach family, Olena Pchilka’s work meant the world to her children.<sup>31</sup> They called her compendium “mother’s patterns.”

One of Olena Pchilka’s daughters, Olha, would later write:

Those mother’s patterns had a strong parenting influence on Lesia and Misha: since the beginning of their conscious lives, the children watched their mother working on patterns, seriously and purposefully, – collecting them, drawing them, writing something about them, consulting with her “learned” uncle on this question, finally – and this is key – publishing them. And this work is not about some sort of “handicraft for ladies,” but towards a “Ukrainian Folk Patterns” compendium from their beloved Zviahel region. This work of mother in tandem with Chubynskyi’s ‘Works’ have taught the children from an early age to respect the work connected with Ukrainian ethnography.<sup>32</sup>

Olha stated that she deliberately mentions the publication of “mother’s patterns” in Lesia Ukrainka’s “Chronology” in 1876 as an event in her life.<sup>33</sup>

### **Lesia Ukrainka as an Embroideress and Heir of Olena Pchilka**

Olena Pchilka’s work led to Lesia Ukrainka’s passion for folk ornaments.<sup>34</sup> When the girl was six, she learned to sew and embroider. It was not a curiosity for that era, as it

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29 Kosacheva, *Ukrainskii narodnyi ornament*.

30 Kosach, “Volynskyi styl ornamenti,” 464.

31 Olha Kosach-Kryvyniuk, *Lesia Ukrainka: Khronolohiia zhyttia i tvorchosty* [*Lesia Ukrainka: A Chronology of Her Life and Works*] (New York: The Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1970), 43.

32 Kosach-Kryvyniuk, *Lesia Ukrainka*, 43.

33 Kosach-Kryvyniuk, *Lesia Ukrainka*, 43.

34 Iryna Lukashyk, “Rechi pobutu ta etnografii yak skladova chastyna literaturnoi ta memorialnoi ekspozytsii muzeiu Lesi Ukrainky v s. Kolodiazhne [Household and Ethnographic Items as a Component of the Literary and Memorial Exposition at the

was a typical pastime for young girls. Notably, Lesia Ukrainka treated this activity not as a routine, but as a harmony of mind. Later, in her letters to her mother,<sup>35</sup> Lesia Ukrainka asked her to send some patterns for embroidering, and in her letters to her sister Olha,<sup>36</sup> Lesia Ukrainka wrote that she "often was in such a state that she could only embroider and do nothing else," advising her sister to embroider too, as the activity could do no harm.

When Lesia was eight, she embroidered a shirt for her father. This fact is mentioned in works about Lesia Ukrainka as evidence of her skills in embroidering from an early age.<sup>37</sup> Although, it was another embroidery by Lesia Ukrainka that gained more fame. This was a *rushnyk* dedicated to honoring Taras Shevchenko.

There are several interesting moments connected with this embroidery. Firstly, the runner was embroidered not only by Lesia Ukrainka, but along with her friend, Marharyta Komarova. It is accepted that the runner was commissioned. The Odesa Hromada commissioned Lesia Ukrainka and Marharyta Komarova to make a *rushnyk* for a Taras Shevchenko portrait (by Ilya Repin), as tradition demanded.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the collaborative preparation of such a sacred article as a *rushnyk* may be examined in the context of the friendship between the Drahomanov-Kosach and Komarov families. There is an extant photo of Lesia Ukrainka, Mykhailo Kosach and Marharyta Komarova with this *rushnyk*. This is how Tetiana Ananchenko annotated the photo:

She is often visited by Marharyta Komarova. The girls always find fascinating topics to talk about. At that time, they took a picture together to remember the moment – Lesia, Mykhailo, and Marharyta Komarova. This is the famous photograph wherein the girls sit by a tree, dressed in Ukrainian style:

- .....
- Lesia Ukrainka Museum in Kolodiazhne Village],” *Lesia Ukrainka i rodyna Kosachiv v konteksti ukrainskoi ta svitovoi kultury* 4 (2011): 240–41.
- 35 Lesia Ukrainka, “Lyst do materi 18.07.1889 [Letter to Mother, July 18, 1889],” in Lesia Ukrainka, *Povne akademichne zibrannia tvoriv u 14 tomakh*, vol. 11, ed. Svitlana Kocherha et al. (Lutsk: Volynskiy natsionalnyi universytet imeni Lesi Ukrainky, 2021), 78, [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1e-6Z8LR8Cgw\\_\\_dr3LnxD\\_ghUHCT7yKvi/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1e-6Z8LR8Cgw__dr3LnxD_ghUHCT7yKvi/view).
- 36 Lesia Ukrainka, “Lyst do sestry 25.11.1910 [Letter to Sister Olha, November 25, 1910],” in Lesia Ukrainka, *Povne akademichne zibrannia tvoriv u 14 tomakh*, vol. 14, ed. Serhii Romanov et al. (Lutsk: Volynskiy natsionalnyi universytet imeni Lesi Ukrainky, 2021), 219, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/19LhqQ5r2CbTkCUhpI5zmplG85Tfsj-Es/view>.
- 37 Halyna Levchenko, “Olena Pchilka i Lesia Ukrainka v osobystii i tvorchii vzaiemodii [Olena Pchilka and Lesia Ukrainka in Personal and Creative Interaction],” *Volyn filolohichna: tekst i kontekst* 28 (2019): 249; Tvardovska, “Vyshyvka – davnie narodne mystetstvo.”
- 38 Oksana Konstantynivska, “Maisternist na kinchychakh paltsiv: Lesia Ukrainka – umila vyshyalnytsia [Excellence on Fingertips: Lesia Ukrainka as a Skillful Embroideress],” *Ukraina moloda* 69 (2020): 13.

wearing tiaras, corsets, and *vyshyvanky* (embroidered shirts), with beads around their necks. There is an embroidered *rushnyk* on their knees (later, they would present this runner in Kaniv, at the Kobzar's gravesite, it would later be stored in the Taras Shevchenko memorial museum).<sup>39</sup>

There are different legends about this very visit to Taras Shevchenko's grave with the gift. According to the first version, the *rushnyk* was taken to Kaniv region only by Marharyta in 1889. Two years later, Lesia Ukrainka and her mother saw the embroidered runner there, in a place of honor.<sup>40</sup> Lesia Ukrainka's sister Olha also wrote about this in her "Memoirs and Notes of the Year 1889":

Marharyta Komarova, while visiting someone in Kaniv region that summer, took the *rushnyk* that they had embroidered together with Lesia to the house at Shevchenko's gravesite. When we (mother, Lesia, and I) were at Shevchenko's grave in the summer of 1891, we saw the *rushnyk* hanging in a place of honor in the house.<sup>41</sup>

Another legend states that this very *rushnyk* was presented at Shevchenko's gravesite by Lesia Ukrainka herself. In June 1891, Lesia Ukrainka, her sister Olha, and their mother, while travelling to Yevpatoria for medical treatment, stayed in Kaniv in order to leave the embroidered towel there.<sup>42</sup> As Liudmyla Ohnieva states, there are memoirs about that visit by Ivan Yadlovskiy, legendary watchman and keeper of Taras Shevchenko's gravesite:

I didn't know that such a thin, small, and weak woman was the prominent writer Lesia Ukrainka. She brought the embroidered *rushnyk* by herself. There were some people with her. One man wanted to put the runner over the portrait of Shevchenko, but she said that she wished to hang it personally: "Myself, myself..."<sup>43</sup>

39 Tetiana Ananchenko, "Odeskymy stezhkamy Lesi Ukrainky [Lesia Ukrainka's Odesa Paths]," *Nauka i osvita* 8-9 (2008): 296.

40 Olha Karabinska, "T. H. Shevchenko v lystakh Lesi Ukrainky ta v spohadakh pro nei [Taras Shevchenko in Lesia Ukrainka's Letters and Memoirs about Her]," *Volyn – Zhytomyrshchyna* 21 (2010): 66-67; Levchenko, "Olena Pchilka i Lesia Ukrainka," 249-50; Raisa Tanana, "Olena Pchilka na Shevchenkovii Mohyli [Olena Pchilka at Shevchenko's Grave]," *Ridnyi kraj* 1 (2009): 179-80.

41 Kosach-Kryvnyiuk, *Lesia Ukrainka*, 105.

42 Liudmyla Ohnieva, "Ikony 'Sviatoho Tarasiia,' osiaiani imenem Shevchenka [The Shining by Shevchenko's Name Icons of 'Saint Tarasios']," *Obiednannia ukrainskikh tovarystv Latvii*, March 6, 2014, <http://ukrLatvian.lv/2014/03/page/5/>.

43 Ohnieva, "Ikony 'Sviatoho Tarasiia.'"



Ultimately, there is also a version that Lesia Ukrainka embroidered more than one *rushnyk* devoted to the Kobzar:

In June 1891, Olena Pchilka accompanied Lesia to Yevpatoria from Kolodiazhne for medical treatment... Lesia personally put the *rushnyk* embroidered by herself over the portrait of her spiritual father in Tarasova Svitlytsia. They also saw the runner embroidered in 1889 by Lesia Ukrainka and Marharyta Komarova. It is certain that Olena Pchilka consulted them in choosing the patterns...<sup>44</sup>

Unfortunately, detailed information is known about only one of Lesia's *rushnyky*.

A third factor, which is of most interest to us, is the content of the *rushnyk*.<sup>45</sup> Besides geometrical ornament, it contains an inscription. On one edge of the towel it reads "Oh, my thoughts, my thoughts, woe is with you!" ("Dumy moi, dumy moi, lykho meni z vamy!"), and on the other, "Love one other, my brethren, love Ukraine" ("Liubitesia, braty moi, Ukrainu liubit").

Today, verbal texts on *rushnyky* have become all-too-familiar. But at the end of the 19th century this tradition was still nascent. Many researchers demonstrated their total rejection of such "modernizing."<sup>46</sup> However, the practice of embroidering inscriptions on textile has deep roots in Ukraine.<sup>47</sup>

With regard to the embroidered text on Lesia's *rushnyk*, it consists of two parts. The first originates from Shevchenko's poem "Dumy moi, dumy moi" (1840; Oh, My Thoughts, My Thoughts), while the second has as its prototext Shevchenko's poem "Zghadaite, bratiia moia" (Remember, My Brothers) from the cycle "V kazemati" (1847; In the Casemate).<sup>48</sup>

Both verbal parts of Lesia's *rushnyk* have subsequently become formulas for epigraphic embroidery. This means that variants of these texts were widely embroidered by other women.<sup>49</sup>

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44 Valentyna Hnatenko, "Ukrainskyi natsionalnyi skarb [A Ukrainian National Treasure]," *Shevchenkoznavchi studii* 15 (2012): 144.

45 "Dumy Moi Dumy Lykho Meni Z Vamy // Liubytesia Braty Moi Ukrainu Liubyte [Oh, My Thoughts, My Thoughts, Woe Is With You // Love Each Other, My Brethren, Love Ukraine]," in *Interaktyvnyi elektronnyi pokazhchyk folklornykh formul* by Tetiana Brovarets, accessed July 8, 2021, <http://volkovicher.com/pokazhchik-tekstiv/a-d/dumy-moyi-dumy-lyho-meni-z-vamy-lyubytesya-braty-moyi-ukrayinu-lyubyte/>.

46 Honchar, "Dolia na rushnykovi," 25; Kara-Vasylieva, *Istoriia ukrainskoi vyshyvky*, 298.

47 Volkovicher, *Verbalni teksty u narodnii vyshyvtsi*.

48 Shevchenko, *Kobzar*.

49 "Dumy moi, dumy moi, lykho meni z vamy! – realizatsiia formuly [Oh, My Thoughts, Woe is with You! – Formula Implementation]," in *Brovarets, Interaktyvnyi elektronnyi pokazhchyk folklornykh formul*, accessed July 8, 2021, <http://volkovicher.com/verbalni->

As concerns the first part, the Interactive Online Index of Folklore Formulas (Epigraphic Embroidery)<sup>50</sup> contains a photo of a *rushnyk* with the reduced variant of this verbal text. The inscription is repeated twice from both sides: “Dumy moi lykho meni z vamy!” (Oh, My Thoughts, Woe is with You!).

With regard to the second part of Lesia’s *rushnyk*, four other embroideries in the Interactive Online Index of Folklore Formulas (Epigraphic Embroidery) are to be found. All the samples have amplified variants of this formula: “Love one other, my brethren, love Ukraine, and pray to God for our unfortunate country” (Liubitesia, braty moi, Ukrainu liubite i za nei beztalannu Hospoda molite).

Three of these *rushnyky* also have combinations with other verbal formulas. The full version of the first reads “Ukraine will rise up! The light of truth will shine, and slave children will pray in freedom / Oh, my God, save Ukraine! / Love one other, my brethren, love Ukraine, and pray to God for our unfortunate country” (Vstane Ukraina, svit pravdy zasvityt i pomoliatsia na voli nevolnychy dity / Bozhe, Ukrainu spasy! / Liubitesia, braty moi, Ukrainu liubite i za nei beztalannu Hospoda molite). The second version reads “Love one other, my brethren, love Ukraine, and pray to God for our unfortunate country / Oh, Ukraine, you are our mother...” (Liubitesia, braty moi, Ukrainu liubite i za nei beztalannu Hospoda molite / Ukraino, ty nasha nenko...). And the third reads “This is the well where the dove basked, this is the girl that I loved / Love one other, my brethren, love Ukraine, and pray to God for our unfortunate country” (Os taia kyrnychynka, v nii holub kupavsia, os taia divchynonka, shcho ya v nii kokhavsia / Liubitesia, braty moi Ukrainu liubite, i za nei beztalannu Hospoda molite). The last version contains only one formula “Love each other, my brethren, love Ukraine, and pray to God for our unfortunate country” (Liubitesia, braty moi, Ukrainu liubite i za nei beztalannu Hospoda molite).

The examples above confirm that the verbal formulas on Lesia’s *rushnyk* “Oh, my thoughts, my thoughts, woe is with you!” and “Love one other, my brethren, love Ukraine” become part of epigraphic embroidery. They are represented in different – reduced or amplified – variations and combined in various manner, which proves their folklorization.<sup>51</sup>

I do not have in mind that it was Lesia’s *rushnyk* that marked the beginning of these embroidered formulas, but I claim that Lesia’s *rushnyk* became part of epigraphic embroidery in its nascent stage.

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invarianti/dumy-moyi-dumy-moyi-lyho-meni-z-vamy-realizatsiya-formuly/  
 “Liubitesia, braty moi, Ukrainu liubite, i za nei, beztalannu, Hospoda molite –  
 realizatsiia formuly [Love One Another, My Brethren, Love Ukraine, and Pray to God  
 for Our Unfortunate Country – Formula Implementation],” in *Brovarets, Interaktyvnyi  
 elektronnyi pokazhchyk folklornykh formul*, accessed July 8, 2021, <http://volkovicher.com/verbalni-formuli/190-lyubitesya-brati-moyi-ukrajnu-lyubite-i-za-neyi-beztalannu-gospoda-molite-realizatsiya-formuli/>.

50 Brovarets, *Interaktyvnyi elektronnyi pokazhchyk folklornykh formul*.

51 “Dumy moi”, “Liubitesia, braty moi.”

## Olena Pchilka and Lesia Ukrainka in Modern Ukrainian Epigraphic Embroidery (End of the 20th – Early 21st Centuries)

We can be certain that Lesia's *rushnyk* laid the foundation for a wide range of Ukrainian epigraphic embroideries from the end of the 20th to the early 21st centuries. This resulted in numerous copies of her work made by modern embroideresses. Some of them are mentioned by scholars in their academic papers and public lectures.

For example, Svitlana Bryzhytska, commenting on modern *rushnyky* in the Shevchenko National Reserve in Kaniv, mentions a copy made by indigenous embroideress Halyna Bondarenko (1989), modeled on Lesia's *rushnyk* (1889)<sup>52</sup> – apparently, on the 100th anniversary of the commemoration of Lesia's embroidery. The author of these lines has recently lectured on interpretations of Lesia's *rushnyk* by modern embroideresses.<sup>53</sup>

Liudmyla Ohnieva has reproduced cross-stitch paper modeled on Lesia's *rushnyk* and published it in her eponymous book *Lesyn rushnyk* (Lesia's Rushnyk),<sup>54</sup> so that it be available to a broader spectrum of embroideresses, thereby increasing the number of would-be copies. However, as the author states, the existence of cross-stitch paper does not suffice for the reconstruction of the famed embroidery: "One should also have an understanding of what Lesia and Marharyta wanted to say to Taras Shevchenko, as a *rushnyk* is a letter."<sup>55</sup>

It could be added to this that there is one more natural occurrence in the development of folklore. Besides changing the forms of tradition (e.g. folk embroidery from the end of the 19th century can be supplemented by inscriptions, as contrasted to folk embroidery of the 18th century), there may also occur a rethinking of existing texts. Today, different reinterpretations or further connotations of this embroidered inscription are not excluded.

For instance, in a modern context the image of Lesia's epigraphic *rushnyk* is also used as a symbol of Ukrainian unity. In particular, another embroideress, Larysa Azymova, has made a copy of it in Sloviansk (Donetsk region) while under occupation, showing that Donbas is a part of Ukraine. The *rushnyk* was represented at the exhibition "The Rushnyk's Path of Donbas" (2016): "In a place of honor is a runner with the ubiquitous Shevchenko lines 'Oh, thoughts, my thoughts...' This is a copy of the *rushnyk*

52 Svitlana Bryzhytska, "Rushnyky v zibranni Shevchenkivskoho natsionalnoho zapovidnyka [*Rushnyky* in the Collection of Shevchenko National Reserve]," *Narodna tvorchist ta etnografii* 3–4 (2007): 12.

53 Tetiana Brovarets, "Lektsiia u Kyivskomu literaturno-memorialnomu muzei Maksyma Rylskoho 'Lehendy pro Lesyn-Shevchenkivskiy *rushnyk*: naroshchuvannia novykh smysliv' [Lecture at the Maksym Rylskiy Kyiv Literature and Memorial Museum, 'Legends about Lesia's Shevchenko *Rushnyk*: the Emergence of New Meanings]," *Muzei Maksyma Rylskoho*, March 9, 2021, <https://youtu.be/aIWVYKkZc9I>.

54 Liudmyla Ohnieva, *Lesyn rushnyk* [*Lesia's Rushnyk*] (Donetsk: Nord-Kompiuter, 2009), 7–11.

55 Liudmyla Ohnieva, "Rushnyk – spovid [The *Rushnyk* as a Confession]," in *Kroky do istyny* by Liudmyla Ohnieva (Donetsk: Nord-Kompiuter, 2009), 176.

made by Lesia Ukrainka as a gift to the prominent poet.”<sup>56</sup> In this instance we see connotations regarding the recent events in Eastern Ukraine.

Another example is an attempt to make a precise copy of an artefact. Zhytomyr embroideress Tamila Yaremenko reproduced the runner 120 years after Lesia Ukrainka’s prototype. The artisan did her best to come as close as possible to the original, applying a method of historical reconstruction: “I made accurate measurements, took approximately five hundred photos, and restored the geometry of the pattern.”<sup>57</sup>

Needless to say, there are also plenty of epigraphic embroideries in honor of Olena Pchilka and Lesia Ukrainka themselves. The *rushnyk* below, devoted to Olena Pchilka, is embroidered with: “God forbid, one live to a time to lose faith” (Ne dai, Hospod, dozhyt do toho chasu, shchob viru shchyru zahubyt); the runner with an image of Lesia Ukrainka reads: “Oh, Ukraine, our unfortunate mother, my first string will be for you” (Do tebe, Ukraino, nasha bezdolnaia maty, struna moia persha ozvetsia).<sup>58</sup> These are lines from Olena Pchilka’s and Lesia Ukrainka’s poems, and represent the poetesses’ continuing indirect input into epigraphic embroidery development.



Modern epigraphic rushnyky with portraits of Olena Pchilka and Lesia Ukrainka, containing verbal texts from their poetry (Poltava region, Hadiach). Source of photo: <https://ua-travels.in.ua/2018/08/07/gadyachchina-kolis-najukra%D1%97nisha-ukra%D1%97na-shho-teper/>.

## Conclusion

On the one hand, we know that Olena Pchilka was a noted campaigner for folk art purity. She steadfastly reaffirmed this position in her introductions to her writings

- 56 Oleh Cheban, “I chervonoiiu nytkoiiu – sovist... [Conscience Through a Red Thread],” *Uriadovyi kurier*, February 4, 2016, <https://ukurier.gov.ua/uk/articles/i-chervonoyu-nitkoyu-22/>.
- 57 Anastasiia Chopivska, “Zhytomyrska maistrynia vidtvoryla istorychni rushnyky ta kartyny Pikasso [A Zhytomyr Artisan Has Reproduced Historical *Rushnyky* and Picasso’s Paintings],” *Ridne selo*, January 15, 2014, <http://ridneselo.com/node/10463>.
- 58 Nataliia Barbir, “Hadiachchyna: kolys naiukrainisha Ukraina. Shcho teper? [The Hadiach Region: Once the Most Ukrainian of Ukraine. What Now?],” *UA-TRAVELS*, August 7, 2018, <https://ua-travels.in.ua/2018/08/07/gadyachchina-kolis-najukra%D1%97nisha-ukra%D1%97na-shho-teper/>.

devoted to Ukrainian ornament. On the other hand, she approved of Lesia Ukrainka's embroidery containing verbal text on it, despite the fact that in those times inscriptions on textile did not yet belong to the sphere of native tradition.

Superficially, there appears to be a disconnect here. One might surmise that this discrepancy represented different periods of Olena Pchilka's life, or indicated an exception made for Taras Shevchenko's words, or perhaps there is something wrong with one of the statements. But there is a simple explanation for the conundrum.

The point is that the term "folk art purity" is not to be taken literally. This expression does not equal total rejection of everything new, at least in Olena Pchilka's understanding. Presumably, folk art purity implies not only the preservation of established elements, but also the development of new forms, including verbal texts on textile,<sup>59</sup> as in this case.

Therefore, notwithstanding the held view that Lesia Ukrainka's mother was against all sorts of novelties in Ukrainian embroidery tradition, she, on the contrary, contributed to them. With the aid of her daughter Lesia Ukrainka, Olena Pchilka, to a certain extent, provided input for epigraphic embroidery. Lesia Ukrainka's *rushnyk* marked the beginning of new embroideries symbolizing the unity of Ukraine. What is important is that this tradition is ongoing, gaining new connotations in response to modern contexts.

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