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### **“EVENINGS ON A FARM NEAR DYKANKA” BY MYKOLA HOHOL**

#### **Mykola Hohol: A Literary Bridge Between Cultures**

Mykola Hohol remains one of the most enigmatic and influential figures in world literature. His unique blend of realism, satire, and folklore has captivated generations of readers, securing his place among the literary greats. Despite spending much of his life in the Russian Empire and writing in Russian, Hohol's work is deeply rooted in Ukrainian traditions, customs, and folklore, making him a literary bridge between cultures.

#### **The Ukrainian Spirit in Hohol's Work**

Born on April 1, 1809, in the village of Velyki Sorochyntsi in the Poltava region, Hohol grew up in a culturally rich environment. His father, Vasyl Hohol-Yanovsky, was an educated man who wrote comedies, while his mother instilled in him a deep love for folk tales, legends, and Ukrainian traditions. These early influences would later shape his literary masterpieces.

One of Hohol's most famous works, *Evenings on a Farm Near Dykanka* (1831–1832), is a vivid example of his deep connection to Ukrainian folklore. This collection of short stories immerses readers in the enchanting world of Ukrainian village life, where reality intertwines with mysticism and humor. Among these tales, *The Night Before Christmas* stands out as a brilliant depiction of Ukrainian culture, blending the supernatural with everyday life.

#### **The Magic of *The Night Before Christmas***

First published in 1831, *The Night Before Christmas* follows the story of a humble yet courageous blacksmith, Vakula, who must obtain the Tsarina's slippers to win the heart of his beloved Oksana. This story is filled with fantastical elements, including Vakula's daring journey to St. Petersburg on the back of the devil himself. Hohol masterfully weaves together elements of folklore, humor, and romance, painting a rich picture of Ukrainian customs and traditions.

One of the most striking aspects of the story is its symbolic depth. The night itself represents a mystical time when the boundary between the real and the supernatural thins, allowing divine and demonic forces to interact. The moon, stolen by the devil, symbolizes disorder, while its return signifies the restoration of harmony. Colors also carry meaning – red represents love and youth, while green symbolizes renewal and happiness.

#### **Folklore and Tradition in *The Night Before Christmas***

Hohol's story is deeply embedded in Ukrainian folk traditions. One of these is the *vechornytsi* – evening gatherings where young people would sing, dance, and tell stories. This communal tradition is reflected in the lively atmosphere of *The Night Before Christmas*,

where characters celebrate, joke, and engage in festive rituals.

Carols (*kolyadky*) and *shchedrivky* (New Year's songs) play a crucial role in creating a festive mood. These traditional songs honor the host, bring blessings, and celebrate the renewal of nature. In Hohol's work, carolers visit homes, adding to the rich cultural texture of the narrative.

Another fascinating folk tradition present in the story is the *vertep* – a form of Ukrainian puppet theater dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries. The *vertep* often featured characters like the cunning Solokha, the brave Cossack, and the humorous godfather, all of whom appear in Hohol's story, reinforcing its folk origins.

### Hohol's Literary Legacy

Despite his deep connection to Ukrainian folklore, Hohol's relationship with his cultural identity was complex. He spent much of his life in the Russian Empire and Western Europe, struggling with questions of nationality and belonging. His later works, such as *Dead Souls* (1842), moved away from folklore and became more philosophical, reflecting his inner conflicts and spiritual quests.

Nevertheless, Hohol's influence on both Ukrainian and world literature is undeniable. His works transcend national boundaries, earning him a place among global literary giants. Ukrainian writer Oles Honchar aptly described him as “a great genius of the Ukrainian people,” highlighting his unique ability to fuse cultures and traditions.

### Conclusion

Hohol's *The Night Before Christmas* remains a timeless masterpiece that continues to enchant readers with its blend of magic, humor, and cultural richness. Through his vivid storytelling and deep connection to folklore, Hohol preserved the spirit of Ukrainian traditions while crafting a work of universal appeal. His legacy endures as a testament to the power of literature to bridge cultures and celebrate the richness of human imagination.

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