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“My Town—Miková, Czechoslovakia”

Throughout her life, Julia Warhola delighted in memories

of her wedding: “Wedding was beautiful, beautiful. Three-day wedding.”¹ A traditional Carpatho-Rusyn wedding was literally a three-day event. In time-honored fashion, the 1909 nuptials of Ulia Zavacka and Andrii Varchola were saturated with ritualism and magical significance. Combining song, dance, music, and the spoken word, the wedding celebration was a multifaceted piece of folk theater, performed expertly by unsophisticated, barely literate peasants. Everyday Rusyn life was steeped in tradition and ritual that harked back to ancient times, but no occasion was more infused with theatrical ritual and superstition than the wedding.²

For Carpatho-Rusyn peasants, marriage was primarily an economic transaction.³ As described in numerous folk songs, young women feared being married off to an elderly man out of financial considerations. Ulia was spared this anxiety. The Zavacky family was from the middle class of Miková peasant society. Her maternal grandfather, a skilled tradesman from Poland, had built a water mill in Miková, which brought in extra income for the family. Ulia’s parents could offer a respectable dowry and would have been on the lookout for a moral, stable, and industrious young man. While mothers played the major role in matchmaking, courting and betrothal were the initiative of the prospective groom. With a delegation of relatives

and friends, the young man went to the home of his chosen mate to present his proposal to her parents. To divert the attention of unclean spirits, his spokesman introduced the subject obliquely in formulaic speeches, with a metaphor that only a girl from an agricultural society might appreciate: "We hear that you have a young heifer to sell. We would like to buy it." When the parents and young people came to an agreement in these staged negotiations, bargaining over the bride's dowry ensued under the influence of homemade brandy.

For Ulia and Andrii, the formal matchmaking would have followed the same plot sequence, but it had a more unconventional prologue. As Julia Warhola later described it:

My husband . . . come from my town—Miková, Czechoslovakia. I meet him when I'm seventeen, he's twenty. My husband, Andy, he go to America a year before and then come back to town.⁴ He was good-looking. Blond. My husband had curly hair. Oh! He came back to village and every girl want him. Fathers would give him lots of money, lots of land to marry daughter. He no want. He want me. . . . So Andy comes into house. Oh so good-looking. I never forget. I come back from fields and I carried wheat. He sees me. "Who's this little girl?" he says. My Momma laughs. "She's gonna be your wife," she says. My mother, she jokes, for fun.

It was common for Rusyn men to emigrate to America to earn money, with the intention of returning to the homeland, buying land, and settling down. In Andrii Varchola, Ulia's mother recognized a good marriage prospect. In an unconstrained manner that would later also characterize Julia's maternal style, she set the process in motion. But while it may have been love at first sight for Andrii, Ulia was not convinced. For a Carpatho-Rusyn peasant girl, marriage meant moving in with her husband's family, where she might be looked upon as just an extra pair of hands. "I was seventeen, I know nothing. He wants me, but I no want him. I no think of no man. My mother and father say, 'Like him, like him.' I scared. My Daddy beat me, beat me to marry him. What do I know? The priest—oh, a nice priest—come. 'This Andy,' he says, 'a very nice boy. Marry him.' I cry. I no know. Andy visit again. He brings me candy. I no have candy. He brings me candy, wonderful candy. And for this candy, I marry him."⁵

The dowry was arranged, the parish priest blessed the betrothal and announced the banns, and a wedding date was set for a weekend in May, a month after the end of the Lenten season and the Easter holiday.⁶ The night before the wedding, Ulia and her *druzhky* (bridesmaids) wove wreaths of periwinkle, a flowering evergreen plant that symbolized everlasting love. Andrii spent the night singing and dancing with

his groomsmen, while his female relatives, led by his godmother, the senior *svashka* (matron of honor), prepared the wedding flag—a branch of spruce decorated with colorful kerchiefs, ribbons, and streamers to represent the star of Bethlehem. The next morning, the groom's party was assembled at the Varchola home by the *starosta* (master of ceremonies), who, alongside the senior *svashka*, served as director and lead actor of the play. It was their duty to ensure that all tradition was carefully observed. After prayers, rhetorical speeches, and refreshments, not sparing strong drink, Andrii received his parents' blessing. In response to his mother's tears, he sang, "Oh mother, don't cry, but be glad, for your son will bring into your home a worker for you. And a dear helpmate for my heart." Fronted by the wedding flag, the groom's party proceeded to the bride's house with shouts, whistles, songs, and lively music.

At the Zavacky home, the groom's party found the doors locked. A ritual drama ensued, again using allegorical speech to deceive evil spirits.

—*Slava Isusu Christu!* Glory to Jesus Christ! Christ is among us!

—*Slava na viki!* Glory forever. He is and will be! . . . And what do you want?

—We know that you have in your garden a beautiful rose, which we would like to transplant to our garden so it may bear fruit. We have a young lad who would like to care for that rose.

Playing out their scripted adversarial role, the bride's family demanded to know whether the bridegroom and his representatives were wise and God-fearing people. The *starosta* responded by reciting a prayer and solving a riddle to their satisfaction. When the groom's party at last gained entrance and asked for the bride, they were presented with an old woman, a Gypsy, or a boy dressed in women's clothing. Only on the third request was Ulia brought forward, to the musical refrain: "This is the right one / A great beauty. / This one is ours / Most beautiful of all." After the *starosta* made the sign of the cross and marked the door with his ax to prevent unclean spirits from joining them, the young couple left the house, carefully stepping out on the same foot so they might live together in harmony.

Although their wedding took place near the end of May, Ulia probably wore fur and Andrii, a long linen coat, to demonstrate affluence, and according to superstition, to ensure future prosperity. "I wear white," Ulia recalled in 1966. Her homespun linen dress was embroidered with white threads in patterns that originally had magical and protective significance. "I beautiful. My husband had big white coat. Funny, funny. He had hat with lots of ribbons. Three rows of ribbons." Ulia probably wore an open tiara-like wedding headdress decorated with

periwinkle and flowing with colorful beaded and embroidered streamers that fell below her knees. "I had hair like gold. Hair down shoulder, oh beautiful hair."⁸ According to tradition, a maiden's headdress showed off her hair, which hung in a single braid. A married woman covered her hair with a cap or kerchief, reflecting ancient beliefs about the magic powers of women's hair. Only on her wedding day did a woman's hair flow freely in public. Ulia's joyful memory of her "hair like gold" is a poignant evocation of innocent youth.

Church bells rang as Ulia and Andrii stood before the door of Saint Michael the Archangel Greek Catholic Church, where they had both been baptized. Saint Michael's was a simple masonry building topped by a graceful baroque cupola and a three-barred cross. The nuptial ceremony of the Eastern Catholic rite of Byzantium, as developed among the East Slavs, was accompanied by a cappella congregational singing of the Carpatho-Rusyn *prostopenie*, or plainchant. Reverend Father Jan Turkiniak led Ulia and Andrii down the aisle, chanting litanies that asked God to bless them with a blameless marriage and the happiness of abundant fertility. Ulia promised to be subject in everything to her husband, and Andrii pledged to love his wife. The climax of the marriage ceremony was the "crowning" of the bride and groom. Father Turkiniak blessed the wedding wreaths prepared by the bridesmaids and placed them on the heads of Ulia and Andrii, praying, "Lord our God, crown them with glory and honor." After Ulia offered a special prayer before the icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the couple were showered with grain as they left the church for the bride's home.

Ulia remembered the wedding festivities: "A day and a half with my Momma. A day and a half with his Momma. Big beautiful celebration. Eating, drinking, barrels of whiskey. Wonderful food—eggs, rice with buttered sugar, chickens, noodles, prunes with sugar, bread, nice bread, cookies made at home. Beautiful. . . . And music, such music. Seven gypsies playing music." The food that Ulia tried to put into English for the interviewer was the traditional fare of Rusyn celebrations—*halushky* (dumplings or noodles sautéed with cabbage and bacon), *pirohy* (ravioli-like dumplings filled with potatoes or bryndza cheese), *holubky* (stuffed cabbage), and *kolachy* (rolled pastry filled with nuts, apricots, or poppy seed)—along with ham, sausage, and chicken. The couple ate from a common plate and drank from a single cup. They sang joyful wedding songs with the guests, and danced the polka, waltz, and czardas. The revelry continued until it was time for the saddest and most emotional ritual—the bride's farewell to her family. In a formal speech, the *starosta* thanked the bride's parents for bringing up their daughter righteously. Ulia bowed to her parents and asked forgiveness for her childhood transgressions, as her bridesmaids intoned

sorrowful songs of parting and the groomsmen shouldered her feather-down quilt and other household items for the move to her new home.

In a theatrical change of scene, the wedding drama moved to the Varchola house for the second act. Andrii's mother greeted her new daughter-in-law with the ceremonial welcome of bread and salt. "What have you brought with you, daughter-in-law?" Presenting her gifts of bread and money to the women of the groom's family, Ulia said, "I bring the word of God, God's gifts, and God's blessings." Andrii's mother daubed the faces of bride and groom with honey for a sweet life together and slipped an egg down the front of Ulia's bodice, a superstition to ensure easy childbearing. Relatives and friends—the Chomas, Kacsurs, Hladoniks, Janocskos, Kalinyaks, and other villagers—gathered for more singing, dancing, feasting, and merrymaking, until it was time for another central event of the wedding, the "capping" ritual (*chepchovanie*). The *starosta* ordered that the bride's headdress be removed, asking rhetorically, "Am I to cut off your head, or just take off your wreath?" The bride twice answered, "Cut off my head!" before she finally agreed to give up her maiden's tiara. The married women from the groom's family then plaited the bride's loose hair, wrapped it in a bun, and covered it with a cap suitable for a married woman. From now on, Ulia's outward appearance told the world that she was no longer a maiden, but a wife.

The male guests lined up for the *riadovyi tanets* (dance in a row) to dance a few minutes with the bride, paying for the privilege with a monetary contribution to the couple's new life and receiving in return a shot of whiskey. All the while, like a Greek chorus, the *svashki* (matrons) sang age-old rhyming verses that narrated and commented on the action:

Glory to Jesus Christ, / We have a beautiful bride // Our bride is like a pine tree / Where did such a girl grow? // Our girl has been capped / She is now a *baba* // Our girl has married / Leaving her friends behind // She's still ours, not yet yours / give some money and you will have her // Whoever gives for the cap / Can dance with the bride // God the Lord rejoices / The bride is dancing with her papa // May the good Lord rejoice / The bride is dancing with the groom // This lovely bride / Has grown up for you // Take her with you / And love her till death.⁹

Finally, with music and practical jokes, the young couple was led off to the bed prepared for them in the loft, while the merrymakers continued the festivities, improvising erotic jokes and bawdy songs. Many years later in Pittsburgh, Julia playfully told her granddaughter how, as a result of the revelry, Andrii clumsily navigated the ladder to their nuptial bed.¹⁰

Mythmakers

The Carpatho-Rusyn wedding ritual was a theatrical transformation of everyday life. Thanks to Julia Warhola's 1966 interview in *Esquire*, her wedding has become the single fixed point for the narrative of her early life. And yet, it cannot be taken as historical fact. Julia's brother Stephen was a witness to the marriage. His daughter Nora recalled her father's reaction to Julia's story, chuckling at the memory. "When she's talking about her wedding, he started to laugh . . . she said they had seven gypsies playing. He was laughing, he said that's not true."¹¹ Stephen's refutation was surely overstated, given the known facts from official records and the persistence of custom. But according to her niece, Julia was "a talker," who told exaggerated stories for the amusement of her audience.¹² Her story and her public image were passed down to subsequent audiences of scholars, biographers, and fans, who came to know Julia through the *Esquire* interview. In fact, the self-image she projected in her wedding narrative was not entirely natural, but rather a construction of personal identity in the context of Carpatho-Rusyn culture.

The interviewer, Bernard Weinraub, reports that he did not prompt Mrs. Warhola to talk about her wedding. Rather, Julia, who was "sort of in charge of the interview," launched into her personal narrative performance.¹³ Scholars of narrative explain, "In the form a particular narrator gives to a history, we read the more or less abiding concerns and constraints of the individual and his or her community."¹⁴ Accordingly, in Julia's narrative, we see the forces and features of her culture. Although her first reaction to Andrii was that he was "oh, so good-looking," Mrs. Warhola highlights, and probably exaggerates, her innocence, an obligatory element of Carpatho-Rusyn peasant culture. Pointing up the peasant woman's lack of agency in marital matters, she is persuaded to accept Andrii's proposal by a priest, albeit "a nice priest," and her father, who "beats" her, although this harsh phrasing may arise from Julia's limited English. In the end, it is Andrii's gift of "wonderful candy," probably a taste of America, that induces Julia to accept him. These wistful plot features give way to the joyful narrative of the wedding, as the elderly Julia Warhola indulges in happy memories. The "barrels of whiskey," "wonderful food," the groom's ribboned hat, and the "seven gypsies playing music" are glowing details of traditional culture that brighten the gloom of her later life. The repeated exclamation "Oh!" highlights the expressive character of her performance, and the evaluative comment, "I beautiful," exposes its function. Telling the tale at almost seventy-five years of age, Julia asserts a romantic vision of her worth and vitality as a beautiful young bride in Miková.

Julia's story of her wedding was a performance in the sense that the term is used in performance studies: "a certain type of particularly involved and dramatized oral narrative," a purposeful presentation of the self.¹⁵ From Julia's earliest performances in Miková to the stories she told her children and recorded on tape, to her relationships with her son's New York friends and her appearances in his film and video, performativity was basic to her personality and her communicative style. She passed on her proclivity for performance to her son Andy, who later made films in which self-dramatizing personalities projected a unique presence or identity in staged events and improvisations.¹⁶ According to Weinraub, his interview with Mrs. Warhola took place in her apartment on the lower level of her son's house, where "all these weird people were wandering around. And there was this very old lady in black sitting there. She was a total fish out of water."¹⁷ In a transformative performance for the interviewer, the "old lady in black" held on to the reality of the past, reveling in the identity she enjoyed as the innocent peasant girl with golden hair at the center of the wedding story.

The entire Carpatho-Rusyn wedding was, in fact, not real life, but ritual, "where theater and anthropology overlap."¹⁸ In his study of Carpatho-Rusyn drama, the Russian scholar Evgenii Nedziel'skii pointed out that viewers of the wedding ritual expected not realistic role-playing on the part of the participants, but a theatrical transformation that would produce a kind of catharsis in viewers.¹⁹ Conventional gestures, formalized expressions, and self-dramatizations were expected. One can imagine that Uliá excelled as a histrionic actress-bride. As time passed, and as she told and retold the narrative of her wedding, she reconstructed and embellished it.

Perhaps self-mythologizing on Julia's part should not surprise us. Julia's son, Andy Warhol, was known as a consummate mythmaker. He crafted his own public persona out of artistic invention (self-portraits that conceal more than they reveal), psychological defenses (his monosyllabic public nonstatements), fabrication (literary self-representations that were in fact produced by associates), appropriation (unauthorized use of photographs), and outright deception (dispatching an impersonator to substitute for him at college lectures).²⁰ Biographers have conceded defeat in their attempts to define his character and biography in explicit terms, resorting instead to hollow statements of ambiguity—he was "the tycoon of passivity," or "a trickster, artfully evading our attempts to pin him down," "a character without a past, who conjured himself out of his own head."²¹ In the most recent biography, the art historian Blake Gopnik notes, "There had always been something theatrical about the way [Warhol] refused to be tied down to the simple facts of his own existence—about the way he'd always shaped his myth and persona to suit himself and please others."²²

Warhol's persona was built on performance, on the presumed irrelevance of reality. He reportedly said, "Who wants the truth? That's what show business is for—to prove that it's not what you are that counts, it's what they think you are."²³

Did Warhol learn to deflect, obfuscate, and embellish at his mother's knee? Of the numerous commentators who have mentioned Julia's tendency to embroider reality and create stories, Joseph Giordano was most explicit. An advertising art director who worked with Warhol in the late 1950s, Giordano claims that he "almost lived [with Andy and his mother] for five or six years." Archival information attests to a close relationship between Giordano and Julia, whom he called "Missy." Some of his memories strain credulity, but he admits that in Julia's stories, he could not distinguish myth from reality. "She was exactly like Andy—she was a myth-maker. . . . And I think this was the basis of [Warhol's] whole character. . . . He knows how to perpetuate the myth. . . . That is exactly what Missy was. He had the most wonderful teacher in the world."²⁴

Indeed, Julia Warhola had her own flare for "show-business." Gifted with a theatrical personality, she developed her natural talent for performance and her penchant for self-mythologizing as she practiced the folkways of her native culture. Throughout her life, she created an artistic world of imagination to supplement and enhance her dull reality. The traditional culture of Carpathian-Rus', communicated across generations, encompassing attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors, was a psychological and social construct that defined Julia Warhola's world. Her artist-son internalized his mother's creative interaction with the world, turning the focus of his own creative energy to American life and fashioning artistic images from commonplace items. Like participants in the Rusyn wedding drama, he played with different versions of reality in improvisational films, where actors role-played themselves in routine activities drawn out to marathon length. Warhol's camp artistic taste "[moved] insistently towards performance, towards the theatricalisation of everyday life."²⁵ Ethnographers used the same formulation to describe Carpatho-Rusyn folkways. Evgenii Nedziel'skii compared the peasants' theatricalization of everyday life to the elaborate court ceremony of English royalty: "The theatrical ceremony of the royal court pales by comparison to the traditional, ritualistic, and superstitious aspect of everyday Carpatho-Rusyn peasant life."²⁶ Warhol transferred his mother's old-world creative instinct to contemporary American life, employing an aesthetic that derived from a wealth of folk tradition rooted in Ulia Zavacka's lived experience—Carpatho-Rusyn life and culture in the village of Miková.

The People from Nowhere

Carpatho-Rusyns, also known as Rusyns, Rusnaks, Carpatho-Russians, Lemkos, and Ruthenians, are a stateless people whose homeland is located on the northern and southern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains in central Europe.²⁷ Ulia Zavacka, who would become Andy Warhol's mother, was born in 1891 in the village of Miková, in what was then the Kingdom of Hungary, a largely autonomous component of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy. Miková was located near the border with Austrian Galicia in Zemplyn (Hung. Zemplén) County, and today it is in the Prešov Region of northeastern Slovakia.

Magyars were a numerical minority in the multiethnic state they ruled, and to counteract the demographic trend, the Hungarian government carried on a rigorous campaign to assimilate national minorities. But the Carpatho-Rusyn peasants living in the villages of the kingdom were largely untouched by national movements or governmental compulsion. They went on speaking their own East Slavic dialects, practicing their Eastern Catholic religion, and performing the time-honored customs and traditions that predated states and monarchs. They viewed the nobility and government officials with suspicion and distrust, and it was typical of Rusyns to deride the gentry as lazy and pompous. "He dresses like a *pan*" (gentleman) is an insult directed at a pretentious peasant. "She thinks she's a *pani*" (lady) is a slur aimed at a woman who avoids work and puts herself above others of her own class. This way of thinking, hardwired in simple Rusyns, was unconsciously absorbed by their American children. Andy Warhol's secretary wrote, "The worst thing that Andy could think to say about someone was that he was 'the kind of person who thinks he's better than you,'" and according to his colleague from the 1970s, Bob Colacello, "his usual response to a star he had met was not 'Gee' and 'Wow' and 'Great'—it was 'Who does she think she is?'"²⁸

The Hungarian government's policy of national assimilation had an impact on Rusyn peasants through the educational system. Formal education was considered a pursuit of the nobility and was little valued in Rusyn villages. As they later indicated to US census officials, none of the Zavacky or Warhola immigrants had more than a few years of elementary education.²⁹ By the time Ulia and Andrii began attending school in Miková, students were required to demonstrate proficiency in Hungarian, and only religion was taught in Rusyn. However, peasants never gained a real mastery of Hungarian, which was largely useless in practice, and most remained semiliterate in their own language. The Hungarian Ministry of Education replaced Cyrillic, the natural alphabet of the Rusyn language, with the Latin alphabet in a complicated

ANDY WARHOL'S MOTHER



Figure 1.2. Carpathian Rus', 1919–1938. Miková is located four miles northwest of Medzilaborce.

Hungarian transcription. Throughout their adult lives, Julia and her relatives used this script, later mixed with elements of Slovak and the random misspelled English word or phrase, in a basic phonetic spelling, making their notes and letters a challenge for researchers.

Another imposition of the Hungarian government on peasant life was military conscription.³⁰ Every male citizen between the ages of twenty and thirty-six was subject to compulsory military service. In the infantry, recruits served one to three years, followed by nine or ten years in the active reserves, during which time they were required to participate in annual training. Even after their obligation was completed, conscripts could be called up in time of war. This was a burden for peasants, who made their living through time-intensive agricultural labor. Andrii Varchola emigrated to America first in 1905 at the age of nineteen or twenty, perhaps with

the possibility of conscription in mind. By 1911, when he was back in Miková, the Austro-Hungarian army was conducting maneuvers in the region. When war broke out in the Balkans in 1912, Andrii again departed for the United States, leaving his wife in Miková.

The Carpatho-Rusyn people endured these governmental intrusions into their lives with relative equanimity, not allowing them to deflect the course of tradition. The inhabitants of Miková continued to speak, write, and pray in Rusyn, identifying themselves as Rusnaks, or simply as "our people," and referring to their language as *po-nashomu*, that is, "our way of speaking." If they were asked about their identity, Rusyn peasants might use the word *rus'kyi*, the ethnonym for "Rusyn." Since it sounded similar to "Russian" (*russkii*), it created another level of ethnic confusion for outsiders and later for Americans. Their identity as Rusyns was based primarily on their language, religion, and folklore. Rusyns in the homeland, and later immigrants in America, sang the hymn composed in 1851 by their "national awakener" Aleksander Dukhnovych, a declaration of identity and fidelity that is sung by Carpatho-Rusyns worldwide down to the present day.³¹

I was, am, and will always be a Rusyn.
I was born a Rusyn
And will not forget my worthy people.
I will remain their son.
My father and mother were Rusyn
As are all my family,
Sisters and brothers,
All the community.
I came into the world in the Carpathians,
Where I first breathed Rusyn air.
I was nourished by Rusyn bread
And rocked in a Rusyn cradle.³²

But history was unkind to Carpatho-Rusyns, never granting them the time and stability necessary for socioeconomic progress and cultural development. Instead, they were caught in the ebb and flow of borders, as one controlling force followed another. Hungarian control came to an end with the collapse of Austria-Hungary after World War I, when boundaries were redrawn, and new states created. In May 1918, a group of Czechs and Slovaks met in the Loyal Order of Moose Building on Penn Avenue in Pittsburgh to announce their plan to establish an independent



Figure 1.3. Frontispiece to the literary almanac *Greetings to the Rusyns for the Year 1851*, compiled by Aleksander Dukhnovich.

nation of Czechs and Slovaks. The document, known as the Pittsburgh Agreement, called for political and cultural autonomy for Slovakia. When the nation-state of Czechoslovakia was inaugurated after the war, Carpatho-Rusyns were included as an official nationality with their own semiautonomous province called Subcarpathian Rus'. However, the Rusyn province excluded eastern Slovakia.³³ This meant that the approximately 100,000 Rusyns living in Zemplyn, Sharysh (Hung. Sáros), and Spish (Hung. Szepes) Counties remained a minority in a state ruled by Slovaks, a related, but still alien, ethnicity. The Rusyn religious and cultural center in Slovakia was the town of Prešov, where the future bishop Pavel Goidych (Pavel Gojdič) actively promoted Carpatho-Rusyn identity and the use of the Rusyn language in schools. Theoretically, Czechoslovakia guaranteed minority rights in a liberal, democratic government, and at first, the vernacular Rusyn language was allowed in education. But through the 1920s, as Slovakia pushed for greater control over its minorities, Rusyn gave way to Slovak in schools, and Carpatho-Rusyns in eastern Slovakia once again endured assimilationist pressure.

To demonstrate loyalty to the new republic, the central government promoted a "Czechoslovak" national identity for all its citizens, blurring ethnonational distinctions. The term caught on only with Carpatho-Rusyns, who up to now had lacked a generally recognized identity, and Jews, whose identity made them subject to discrimination.³⁴ Although Julia Warhola had lived barely two years under the new administration, in her later life she proudly referred to "my town Miková, Czechoslovakia." To uninformed Americans, she referred to her language as Slovak. In fact, the first language in the Warhola home was Rusyn, which Julia spoke with her children all her life. But thanks to the ethnic confusion that began in Europe and often became even more muddled in America, Rusyns did not have a name for their language or even a proper term for their own ethnicity. A new label, "Slavish," was invented by outsiders as a comprehensive, but meaningless, designation for this immigrant people.

During World War II, Miková belonged to the Slovak Republic, which was then a client state of Nazi Germany. After the war, Nazi repression was replaced by Soviet domination, and the Warholas' homeland became part of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. For their own political and strategic purposes, the Soviets rejected the very concept of a Carpatho-Rusyn nationality and declared that Rusyns were a sub-ethnos of the Ukrainian people. Many Rusyns of Slovakia resisted the government's imposition of this alien ethnic identity and language by opting instead for Slovak. Finally, as communist governments fell throughout Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, the peaceful Velvet Revolution gave rise to the Czecho-Slovak

Federative Republic, which divided in 1993 into two sovereign states, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Longtime residents of Miková might have lived successively in five different countries without ever leaving their own small village. In a 1977 interview with Ira von Fürstenberg, a European socialite and actress of noble Hungarian lineage, Andy Warhol said, "Isn't it funny how they could change states. I could never understand how all that happened."³⁵ To be sure, given the convoluted history of their homeland, it may have been easier to say, as Warhol reportedly did, "I come from nowhere."³⁶ In fact, Miková was first mentioned in historical records in 1390 and has been the site of a Greek Catholic church since 1742. While it was subject to numerous political ideologies and administrative configurations, its people and their culture have always been unmistakably and indisputably Carpatho-Rusyn.

However, most Rusyn immigrants and their children could not put a precise name on their ethnic background, referring to themselves as "our people," using the meaningless term "Slavish," identifying with their Greek Catholic religion, or with the modern-day country from which they or their parents emigrated. On his application for admission to the Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1945, Andy Warhol denoted his "national descent" as "Austrian," which was incorrect.³⁷ His answers about his parents' origins show confusion, but in some respects, a more nuanced view of geopolitics than many Rusyns of his generation possessed. He stated that his father was born in Austria (Austria-Hungary would have been a better answer). He identified his mother's "nationality" as Slovak and her country of birth as Czechoslovakia, a country that did not exist before her twenty-seventh birthday. But then, the complex story of Carpatho-Rusyn ethnicity and nationality does not fit neatly into a college application's questionnaire.

Later when Warhol was asked about his name or ethnicity, he said he was Czechoslovakian or Czech. There is no evidence of his ever using the term Slovak, and he was never known to call himself Ukrainian. His publisher William Jovanovich, an ethnic Serb, recalls asking Andy where his mother was born. Jovanovich recounts the conversation: "'Czechoslovakia,' he said. Then I asked, 'Bohemia? Moravia?' 'No, Slovakia, I think.' 'Was she born near mountains?' It appeared so. 'Then she's from Ruthenia,' I said finally. Some weeks later Andy was being interviewed on television. He said, 'I know the most amazing man! He asks you a few questions and tells you where someone was born.'"³⁸ But Ruthenia, a Latin-based term for the Rusyn homeland, was not on the map, and Andy could not be more specific than to identify himself with the country from which his mother emigrated.

“MY TOWN—MIKOVÁ, CZECHOSLOVAKIA”

This confusion over ethnicity was not unique to Warhol. As late as 1997, Andy's brother John observed, “We just said we were Slovak because no one had ever heard of the Carpatho-Rusyns.”³⁹ In a written response to a question from the Warhol biographer David Bourdon, Paul Warhola responded, “We always referred [to ourselves] as being Slavish. Mother said we were Rusnaks,” a colloquial term for Rusyns.⁴⁰ Typically, Andy resorted to creative obfuscation. At various times he claimed to be from Hawaii or to have Cherokee blood. He even told his companion Charles Lisanby that he was from another planet.⁴¹ More often than not, he told the interviewer to just “make it up.” But Andy was from a time when diversity was not in fashion, information on his own ethnicity was scarce, and second-generation Americans were eager to relinquish their old-world background for a more prestigious classification as American. For Warhol, it was natural to be embarrassed and ashamed of his “Hunky” background, where Rusyns occupied the lowest rung of immigrant society, even among Slavs. At least the Poles and Slovaks knew who they were; a great many Carpatho-Rusyns had no name and no country.⁴² They did, however, have a homeland.

“Ah, What a Delight It Is to Live There”

Nestled in the Lower Beskyd range of the Carpathian Mountains at 1,200 feet above sea level, the village of Miková stretches along a valley washed by three streams that flow into the Laborec River. The mountains and rolling hills, covered with beech, spruce, and pine forests, are home to deer, wolves, brown bears, and black storks. Located just off one of the highroads that stretched from the south of Hungary north to Austrian-ruled Galicia, Miková was near the site of a massive oak cross that stood at a turn in the road. Six miles to the southeast lay the fourteenth-century Krásny Brod Monastery, which housed a theological school, an icon-painting workshop, and a valuable library. Fifteen miles northwest of Miková was the Dukla Pass, the lowest point in the Carpathian Mountains, a gateway from Hungary into Austrian Galicia, which became part of Poland after World War I.

Miková would be unknown to the outside world today if not for Andy Warhol. After the fall of communism, when it became known that Warhol had connections to this obscure village, Miková became a popular destination for film crews and journalists. Documentary films, the most famous of which is Stanislaw Mucha's *Absolut Warhola*, cast a cynical light on Warhol's ancestral homeland, derisively exploiting the incongruity between the ultramodern Pop artist and the village residents, who are portrayed as backward, ignorant, clueless, and drunk.⁴³ Recent

Warhol biographers have taken the documentary description of Miková at face value, comparing it to the Kazakhstani village in Sacha Baron Cohen's satirical "mockumentary" film *Borat*. Tony Scherman and David Dalton sum it up: "Watching *Absolut Warhola*, one can understand why Andy wanted to put as much distance from his origins as possible; Miková is a warren of bigotry, . . . provincial ignorance, dim-witted literalism, grinding poverty, . . . alcoholism, and, of course, homophobia."⁴⁴ In response to *Borat*, Kazakhstan launched a campaign to repair the country's image. Unfortunately, the Rusyns of Miková had no state to protest their ethnic defamation.

Like *Borat*, *Absolut Warhola* puts comedy ahead of historicity, and for the sake of narrative effect, the film focuses on preconceived ideas about the backwardness of the region and the degradation of the people. But *Absolut Warhola* and the biographers who cite it reveal considerable ignorance of the historical context of northeastern Slovakia. Mucha's Miková of 2001 had been shattered by two devastating wars, polluted by a half century of rule by a noxious sociopolitical system that corroded its citizens' culture and morality, and was now plunged into a baffling atmosphere of democracy and modernization. An effort to understand rather than deride the unwitting naiveté of the Miková Rusyns might have helped illuminate the cultural background of the American artist. The depiction of Miková presented in *Absolut Warhola* is certainly not the image that Julia portrayed in the stories she told her sons about her homeland.

For a more nuanced view, it is useful to look at the comprehensive observations of western travel writers who explored Carpathian Rus' when Ulia Zavacka and Andrii Varchola lived there. Lion Phillimore, the pseudonym of Lucy Fitzpatrick Phillimore, a wealthy British socialist who traveled through northern Hungary in the first decade of the twentieth century, recorded her observations in a 1912 book, *In the Carpathians*. Phillimore and her husband traveled from Zakopane in western Galicia into Hungary, then east to Medzilaborce and southward along the horse-shoe of the Carpathian foothills to Sighetu Marmăției in present-day Romania. To bypass "the staleness of civilization," the Phillimores roved the mountains by horse cart with a Polish guide, pitching tents and setting campfires in and around Carpatho-Rusyn villages.

Writing for an audience that expected the rhetoric of romanticism, the author accordingly found clean, kind, and generous peasants who stood "primeval and erect," "unselfconscious as a child," "part of Nature herself," in valleys "flooded with pure golden radiance, dream-like and mystical." However, the author wrestles with the contradictions between romantic notions and factual observations of squalor and misery. Traveling east from Rus'ka volia, a Rusyn village about thirty-five

kilometers southwest of Miková, she finds a wild, poverty-stricken country. "The villages were old and decayed and had fringes of one roomed filthy gipsy huts on their outskirts. The painted patterns round the house windows were rough and irregular, daubed without spirit by householders who had lost heart. . . . These people were desperately poor."⁴⁵

Phillimore's negative tropes are similar to Mucha's cinematic images, but her presence in the narrative propitiously reveals subjective sympathies and instances of culture shock. An "evil-faced peasant," who looked like "a wild man of the woods," unexpectedly smiles with kind eyes, leaving her ashamed of her preconceptions. On the other hand, she follows picturesque peasants from church on Sunday to the village tavern, where they happily sink into intoxication. But throughout the travelogue, her European-normative moral judgment is tempered with understanding. "The villages were built of wood, and each house stood in a fenced enclosure with a few straggling trees near it. Sometimes the villages were pretty, and sometimes they were plain, but always there was a curious feeling of inertia and hopelessness about them. It was as if in them life had reached its utmost of endeavor beyond which it was useless striving. The people appeared helpless."⁴⁶

Historic Miková was indeed poor, and its people were uneducated peasants, repressed for centuries by officials, landlords, and outside estate agents. As in most Slavic peasant communities, poverty and oppression fostered submission, fatalism, domestic violence, and alcohol abuse. Hygiene was primitive, and health was precarious. Church metrical records show frequent smallpox epidemics and occasional outbreaks of typhus. Because of its isolation, Miková was insular and provincial, and it was not immune from bigotry, corruption, and immorality. In fact, western travelers were taken aback by the deviations from conventional European moral standards that they found among the Carpathian peasantry. In 1896, H. Ellen Browning, a university-educated British woman, undertook a solo trip into eastern Hungary, where she found among the peasants "so little piety and so much religion."⁴⁷ Emily Greene Balch, an American sociologist who spent most of 1905 visiting Slavic villages in Austria-Hungary, wrote, "Anyone who knows country life anywhere is likely to be free of the widespread delusion that what is rural is necessarily more innocent than what is urban."⁴⁸ Indeed, church records show a surprising number of out-of-wedlock births. As in most European peasant communities, liturgy on Sunday morning was followed by afternoons of drinking, singing, dancing, and brawling in the tavern and the village square, the only respite from a week of hard toil. But in the church-dominated community, sins

were censured, atonement was expected, and forgiveness was always available through sincere confession.

While they bewailed their poverty, Carpatho-Rusyns felt a deep love for their land and nature, while submitting to, and overcoming, the hardships it imposed. As Rusyn proverbs have it, "One's native land is heaven on earth." "Civilized" travelers like Ellen Browning delighted in the natural beauty and serenity of the Carpathians. "Imagine a stretch of the softest, finest, thickest pasture dotted over with venerable oak-trees, shut in on three sides by hills. Beeches, larches, and saplings, ruddy and golden clothe their sloping sides. Where the forest ended the valley widened. Cornfields and patches of maize stood yellow and brown against the sky, and faded away in a misty purple "distance" of forest and mountain on the horizon. . . . The grandeur and beauty of those seemingly everlasting pine-forests are utterly indescribable."⁴⁹

Similarly, Rusyn lyric poets sang of streams, waterfalls, forests, cliffs, and soaring eagles, portraying Carpathian nature as virginal, magical, and healing, a wealth of beauty that was the birthright of the native inhabitants.⁵⁰ For them, the homeland, however poor and sordid, was a realm of beauty and spirituality, hospitality, and charity. The poet Iuliy Stavrovskiy, who lived in a village neighboring Miková, described the area as Ulia Zavacka would have seen it: "In our homeland all of nature / Blooms in eternal beauty, / There abides forever / Purity of spirit, love, and freedom. / Ah, what a delight it is to live there."⁵¹

Folk poets developed a mythology of the Rusyn people, transmuting characteristics judged by outsiders as negative—poverty, onerous toil, and simplicity—into national virtues, which fostered a positive Carpatho-Rusyn self-image. In folktales, they depicted themselves as pious, peace-loving, submissive, hardworking, and long-suffering, but also clever and cynical. Their lack of formal education was recompensed by common sense. Serenity and a gift of natural poetry compensated for the hardships of their life. As one writer put it, "Among our mountains there are insufficiencies, poverty, but there is also poetry, and that poetry makes us forget our grief. It enchants our souls and rewards us for our afflictions. There is not another people in the world who are as attached to their homeland as the Rusyn is to his Carpathians."⁵² Indeed, Rusyn immigrants to America would yearn for the homeland, keeping the positive features alive in memories and songs, and an estimated 30 percent of Rusyn American immigrants eventually returned to their homes.⁵³ When asked whether Julia ever considered revisiting Miková, Paul Warhola said, "Mother used to talk about it all the time."⁵⁴ Documents and letters indicate that she contemplated a return to her native land even as late as the 1960s.

Julia was an inveterate fabulist, especially when it came to her memories of Miková. The clean water, rich soil, and pure air were imaginatively magnified in her narrative performances. One of her nieces described Julia's stories of the "beautiful Miková mansion" where she lived, the parties she hosted for "neighbors who would come in beautiful horse and buggies, and the women would dress beautiful, beautiful, all rich people." Asked if Julia was fantasizing, her niece admitted, "It had to be. I loved these stories. She was a talker, you know."⁵⁵ To be sure, the romantic image nurtured by immigrants of an earthly paradise was infused with myth and fantasy, but it captured an artistic element inherent in Rusyn nature that should not be ignored, an intrinsic sense of beauty that Uliá Zavacká carried with her to brighten life amid the smog and smokestacks of Pittsburgh.

Jews, "Gypsies," and Rusyns

In 1900, Miková was a good-sized Rusyn village with a population of 427, almost all of whom were Carpatho-Rusyns of the Greek Catholic faith.⁵⁶ Jews made up 10 percent of Zemplýn County, and a handful of Jewish families, including the Weisbergs, Grosmans, and Mellingers, had made Miková their home since the early years of the nineteenth century. The most detailed available accounting of the village comes from the 1869 Hungarian census, which counted 325 Greek Catholic Rusyns, 20 Jews, and 4 Greek Catholic Roma, a total of 349 souls in 59 households. Like the Rusyns, the Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews of Miková were small-scale agriculturalists. Some also served as merchants, tavern keepers, and moneylenders. In 1869, Jewish men were the only villagers who were literate.

Two well-to-do Jewish households stood at the head of the village. One of them, owned by Simon Grosman, housed the tavern. Each of these Jewish households had two Rusyn Greek Catholic servants and boasted numerous outbuildings with horses, cows, oxen, and the only large herd of sheep in the village. Other Jews, who were cotters or sharecroppers and owned no more livestock than their neighbors, lived side by side with Rusyns. As members of the ultraconservative Hasidic movement, their appearance—long, dark cloaks, sidelocks, and yarmulkes—and their insular way of life distinguished and isolated them from their Christian neighbors. Nonetheless, relations between Rusyns and Jews were fundamentally cooperative. In his novel about the Carpatho-Rusyn bandit Mykola Shuhai, the Czech writer Ivan Olbracht described the relationship. "Through centuries of association the Jews and Ruthenians have become used to each other's peculiarities, and religious hatred is foreign to them."⁵⁷ Paul R. Magocsi maintains that antisemitic pogroms

and violence, so common elsewhere in central and eastern Europe, were absent in Subcarpathian Rus'.⁵⁸

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Jews of Hungary were less oppressed than their coreligionists in Galicia, Poland, and Russia.⁵⁹ Until World War I, they served as economic intermediaries between the gentry, that is, the urban population, and the peasants. Jewish merchants bought peasant produce to be exported beyond the region. In return, Jewish storekeepers and peddlers provided services and sold manufactured goods from local artisans and city factories. As the sociologist Ewa Morawska writes, "Set in close proximity and a long historical tradition, this economic symbiosis bound the two groups in daily interactions and allowed for considerable familiarity."⁶⁰ Peasants assembled in Jewish-owned taverns and asked advice in matters of money and official business. Jewish midwives often attended peasant women at childbirth, and peasant girls worked as servants in Jewish homes. Gentile boys and men served as *shabbes goyim*, performing necessary tasks that were proscribed for Jews on the Sabbath, just as Julia's son, Paul Warhola, would do later in Pittsburgh.⁶¹

Still, the cultural divergence between Rusyn peasants and Jews resulted in what Morawska calls "simultaneous propinquity and distance," and each group viewed the other as "native" but "strange." Rusyn peasants associated Jews with money operations, which agricultural societies generally held in disdain. As Jews became business owners and moneylenders, peasants increasingly resented their economic dominance and blamed them for their own hard lot. In his 1850 temperance play, *Virtue Is More Important Than Riches*, Aleksander Dukhnovych castigated the Jewish tavern keeper for exploiting the Rusyn peasants, even as he judged harshly the villagers' failure to resist the tavern's temptation.⁶² Things had not improved by the first decade of the twentieth century, when the English Phillimores visited the Rusyn village of Folyvark (Stráňany), viewing it through the prism of their own bias. "We hurried away from the inn with its crowd of peasants in their beautiful embroideries and picturesque costumes, rapidly drinking themselves blind for the profit of the sordid wide-awake Jews who owned it. The ugliness and uselessness of it all went with us."⁶³ A Slavic proverb advised, "The Jew sells vodka, but he doesn't drink it."⁶⁴

Popular folk sayings repeated in various versions through the Slavic regions depict the Jew as deceitful and cunning: "As just as a Jewish scale"; "Sly as a Jew." A proverb in Aleksander Dukhnovych's list of Rusyn aphorisms touts Christian virtue, while it warns against Jewish shrewdness: "Live like a Christian, count like a Jew." However, as both Robert Rothstein and Ewa Morawska point out, peasant perceptions of Jews "contained a detectable element of at least ambivalent, if not positive and admiring, evaluation, ascribed to the initiative and resourcefulness,

intellectual cleverness, and group solidarity of the Jewish traders."⁶⁵ It was a compliment to be called "as wise as a Jew," and Carpatho-Rusyns were advised "to stand for each other like one Jew for another." Peasants readily acknowledged they would rather deal with a Jewish merchant than a Christian one, a preference that continued in the immigration. They did not understand the Jewish religion, and their own Easter observances emphasized the negative role of the Jews in Christ's death, but Rothstein points to a Slavic proverb that holds up the Jews as an example of religious devotion: "The Jews pray to God most steadfastly; for this, God rewards them."⁶⁶ In their own tradition-sanctioned folk belief, Rusyns ascribed to Jews certain magical powers, both good and bad. The ethnographer Petr Bogatyrev noted the custom of the *polaznyk*, the first guest to enter the house on a holiday. "If a man is the first to enter the house on Christmas Day, it is a favorable omen; if it is a woman, it is no good at all; if it is a Jew, everything will be just fine." Failing that, a dark-haired man, perhaps closest in appearance to a Jew, was second best.⁶⁷

In Pittsburgh, the Warholas rented part of their home for a time to Jewish lodgers. "They had the businesses, they had the money," Julia's son John recalled.⁶⁸ One of Julia's best friends in the 1930s was Bessy Zionts, a Jew from Poland, who lived with her family a few houses from the Warholas and enjoyed the services of a live-in maid. Bessy's son recalled how Julia "poured out her heart" to his mother, who had immigrated in 1900 and could give Julia advice based on her own experience.⁶⁹ Julia's familiarity with Yiddish and Jewish culture goes back to Miková. In the film *The George Hamilton Story*, Julia gives her costar a language lesson, comparing Rusyn, English, and Yiddish: "Bread. You know for Jewish people, name—*broyt* . . . English—*bread* . . . And Czechoslovak-a—*khlib*." Andy's cousin recalled Julia's wish that Andy might marry a Jewish woman, since she saw them as rich and intelligent.⁷⁰ According to Warhol's associate Bob Colacello, Andy mused about Jews often, asking, "Why are they all so smart, Bob? . . . Could it be something in their diet? Don't you wish you were Jewish sometimes?"⁷¹ The Warhol biographer, Blake Gopnik, refers to Warhol's "important and complicated" relationship with Jews and Jewishness. "Various records of Warhol's conversation show him using language that casts Jewishness as exotic and maybe just faintly disreputable."⁷² The artist's 1980 series, *Ten Portraits of Jews of the 20th Century*, reviewed by critics as exploitative, but embraced warmly by Jewish audiences, may have derived from the same mix of awe and aversion that was part of the Carpatho-Rusyn experience.

In 1869, the house on the edge of Miková was inhabited by Demeter Mihaly and his family, who are identified as Greek Catholic Roma. Mihaly was the village blacksmith. In the late nineteenth century, there were 36,000 Roma in the area that

is today Slovakia, of whom only about 2,500 were nomadic. Most Roma settled on the edge of a village and interacted with the local peasant society as artisans, service workers, and traders. Some adopted the dominant religion, and numerous *tsigany* (Gypsies) can be found in the baptismal records of the Miková Greek Catholic parish. Smithery was a traditional occupation for Roma, along with basket weaving and adobe brick making. They were especially appreciated for their musicianship, and they played an essential role at every Rusyn wedding and village dance.

A symbiotic relationship existed among the diverse groups in any Rusyn village, each fulfilling a fixed function that contributed to the overall community. Julia mentioned the “seven gypsies” who performed the beautiful music for her wedding. Given her brother’s recollection, perhaps there were only three or four, but Roma musicians were a vital element of any proper village wedding. The popular stereotype of thieving Roma did not apply to the sedentary population. An East Slovak villager told a researcher, “Our Gypsies did not steal. Would a villager invite a Gypsy music band to play at his son’s wedding if he knew that half his poultry would disappear?”⁷³ Any anti-Rom antagonism was reserved for itinerant Roma, who were notorious for fortune-telling, chicanery, and thievery.

Despite the generally cooperative environment, the groups were distinct, as social and religious mores prevented them from more than everyday relationships within established social roles. Joseph Giordano’s account that Julia spent “one or two seasons with a gypsy caravan” is more than dubious and smacks of Julia’s mythmaking.⁷⁴ The Miková villagers put on dramas, occasionally performing for neighboring villages, and Ulija undoubtedly enjoyed and was perhaps inspired by Romani performers. Later she might well have invented fanciful stories to entertain gullible Americans, but the notion that a Rusyn girl could take off with a band of Gypsies and then return to traditional life is the stuff of romantic fiction, rather than Rusyn reality. Milena Hübschmannová, the preeminent scholar of the Roma of eastern Slovakia, writes, “To marry a Gypsy was something unimaginable among decent *gadže* [non-Roma]. In many Rom families a *gadžo* ancestor does crop up now and then. Such *gadže* were usually the poorest of the poor, themselves outcasts from the wider society.”⁷⁵

In a formula that also describes the relations between Rusyns and Jews in Miková, the scholar David Sheffel describes group interactions as “defined by accommodation of difference by means of a kind of habitual and unreflective tolerance rooted in pragmatic acceptance of, rather than activist interference in, the affairs of one’s neighbors.” While each group may have found the other alien and their customs distasteful, society was characterized by “a local culture

of moderation" and a "live and let live" attitude, a "pragmatic tolerance that leads to a kind of grudging civility." Sheffel's assessment, that public opinion in the multiethnic communities of eastern Slovakia was "more strongly influenced by a person's ability and willingness to live up to the local standard of decency than by shrill ideology," accurately describes the pragmatic old-world judgment that Rusyn immigrants brought with them to America.⁷⁶

Up from Feudalism

Until 1848, Carpatho-Rusyns worked as indentured peasants for Hungarian noble landowners, doing unpaid labor for the benefit of the gentry, whose manors were generally located in the empire's cities, far from Rusyn lands. Miková, along with about fifty other Zemplyn villages, was owned by the Keglević family. Keglević was a Hungarian count of Croatian origin, whose name is associated today with Keglevich vodka. In the Hungarian Urbarial Census, conducted in Miková in 1774, all the villagers are listed under the heading "Coloni Perpetua Obligationis" (Tenant farmers in perpetual bond).⁷⁷ That is, they were serfs bound to land that they farmed but could not own. Among them were six Varchola households and six Zavacky households out of a total of thirty-two.

The Urbarium was initiated by Empress Maria Theresa to clarify the subject farmers' obligations to the landowner, which were explicit and considerable. Most village households farmed a half unit of land. The actual size varied, but a half unit was the amount of land generally considered barely sufficient for a serf and his family.⁷⁸ Peasants were required to perform twenty-six days of unpaid labor on the landlord's estate if they were lucky enough to own farm animals, or double that number of days if they did not. They were also obligated to submit annually to the Jewish estate agent three-quarters of a cord of firewood, half a quart of clarified butter, one capon, one chicken, six eggs, and a portion of their crop. About half the village, including four Zavacky and two Varchola households, farmed even less land with accordingly fewer excises and obligatory days of unpaid labor. The Urbarium also stipulated the taxes to be paid to the state and the tithe required by the church. Tied to the lord's land, serfs could not migrate from the village or marry outside the estate. As time passed and restrictions eased, villages gradually attained a greater degree of autonomy, but it was not until 1848 that the feudal system was abolished in the Kingdom of Hungary. Andrii's father and Julia's grandparents were born before the 1848 emancipation. The soon-to-be American Warholas were barely a generation past harsh feudalism.

After the emancipation, the economic status of peasants in Hungary improved only marginally, as the best land, pastures, and forests went to the lords and to outsiders with money.⁷⁹ In 1851, the population of Miková was 448, with 421 Greek Catholics, 8 Roman Catholics, and 19 Jews. Its 735 arable acres had been acquired by the noble Hungarian Barkóczy family.⁸⁰ The peasants' small plots diminished with each generation, as a family's land was divided among the sons. At best, Carpatho-Rusyns were subsistence farmers, barely able to support a single family, with no surplus for profit. They cultivated oats, barley, rye, and buckwheat—hardy grains that could survive in the hilly, cloudy climate and infertile soil. Beyond the homesteads, situated along a single road, the farmland surrounding the village on the hillside slopes was divided into individually owned strips, a time-honored but inefficient system. A farmer worked a number of strips that were not necessarily adjacent. Because the nearest fields were owned by the church, peasants walked a considerable distance to reach the land they farmed. When it was inconvenient to return home at night, they slept in the field at the edge of the forest. The local priest enjoyed additional privileges at the expense of the villagers. The first calf from each cow was claimed by the priest, and a chicken or a goose was the usual compensation for a christening.

For centuries, the residents of Miková have been called “millers” for their use of sandstone, found in the forest near the village, to produce hand mills, essential tools for grinding grain. Miková peasants sold the hand mills at area markets to bring in extra income.⁸¹ Zavacky family legends tell of one Matthias, their oldest-known ancestor, a clever man who came from Poland with his family.⁸² Matthias diverted two streams and created a water mill at their confluence. The water rose overnight, peasants arrived early the next day to grind their grain, and Matthias brought in extra income. The location in Miková, known still today as the *mlyn* (mill), is located opposite the house built on the original Zavacky land by Ján Zavacky, the son of Julia's brother Yurii.

The Mikováns of Ulia's and Andrii's generation raised livestock—cows that grazed outside the village and sheep that were herded to pasture in the highland fields—to provide milk and cheese for their diet and wool and leather for winter garments. Julia told her children that she went to market with her father in the district town of Medzilaborce, about ten miles to the east by horse-drawn wagon.⁸³ She reportedly told Joseph Giordano that she rode “from town to town on horseback, singing.”⁸⁴ As horses were owned only by families that already had a sufficient number of cows, the most essential farm animals, these seemingly authentic stories confirm the Zavackys' better-than-average economic status.

Homesteads usually included a poultry house, a pigsty, and stables for the oxen that pulled plows and carts. Garden plots supplied cabbage, potatoes, and other vegetables. Peasants ground wheat from their fields through hand-cranked grain mills to make the flour used to bake bread. Each family preserved several barrels of sauerkraut to make *keselica*, a soup from sauerkraut juice, which would be accompanied by bread with garlic and salt. Ethnic cuisine was based on bread, potatoes, cabbage, beans, and millet cereals. A pig was slaughtered in the fall to provide meat through the winter, which was saved for the most important holidays. It was rare for the land to yield enough to support most families. To augment their livelihood, peasant farmers traveled seasonally to work the harvest for six to eight weeks in the fertile Hungarian lowlands.

In winter when their fields lay fallow, men harvested timber for firewood and hewed rail ties to supply the railroad that ran through Medzilaborce. Women were occupied yearlong with the time-consuming job of producing textiles. In a tedious process requiring some twenty-three steps from start to finish, they planted and harvested flax, softened the stalks, dried, beat, and scutched them, spun yarn on an in-hand spindle, and finally wove cloth for carpets, table and bed linen, sacks, rope, and other household necessities. In spring and summer, they spread the linen on the ground by the river to bleach it in the sun. In winter, women plucked goose-down feathers for bedding—another time-consuming task, since it took sixteen geese to make a *peryna*, a down comforter, which was a household necessity on cold winter nights and brought a good price at the market. With the exception of metal products from the village blacksmith, Rusyn peasants were largely self-sufficient, and from a young age, all members of the family participated in the unremitting labor.

Agricultural work was communal. Cutting grass for hay was a social event, when meadows were filled with men, women, and children working together to the accompaniment of lively folk songs, sung in multipart harmony. Each family entrusted its sheep to the village *bacha* (shepherd), who pastured the herd in the *polonyna*, the highland meadow, and returned to each household its due portion of bryndza cheese and shorn wool. The villagers worshipped together and celebrated weddings, christenings, and religious holidays with ritualized festivities. For better or worse, everyone was known to all. As the Rusyn proverb has it, “To live in a village is to hide nothing.” Along with the character of the individual, the reputation of family was firmly guarded, and each village earned its own standing among the surrounding communities. A sign of a virtuous, hardworking village was an abundance of stork nests, for according to the proverb, “Storks do not endure evil people.” Miková had plenty of storks.

The Zavackys and the Varcholas

A Carpatho-Rusyn village was like a large extended clan. The families were inter-related through birth, marriage, and *kumstvo*, that is, serving as godparents for one another's children. Most families had many children, and the early deaths of wives or husbands meant that second marriages were common, ensuring that every individual had a multitude of cousins and stepsiblings. The earliest known Andrii Varchola is listed in the Hungarian census of 1715. The American Andy Warhol was the third traceable "Andrew" in the modern Varchola line.⁸⁵ His paternal grandfather Andrii was a widower who, at the age of forty, married twenty-seven-year-old Julia Choma (pronounced Khoma), the sister of his first wife. It was customary among European peasants for a widower to marry the sister of a deceased wife in order to preserve the family property. Andrii Varchola and Julia Choma had three sons, Andrii (1886–1942), who would become Andy Warhol's father, Josyf (1890–1972), and Jan (b. 1893), his uncles. They were known in Miková by the "alias" or "household name," "Kost'," the name of an ancient ancestor, which had become a kind of nickname that served to distinguish this particular Varchola family from the several unrelated, or only distantly related, village families with the same surname.

The Varchola-Kost' family was not well-off. According to village historians, they farmed two strips of land, had two cows and two rows of beehives. The grandfather of the American Andy Warhol died of pneumonia in 1896 at age fifty-five, leaving Andy's father, who was ten, and his two brothers, who were under six. The difficulty of earning a livelihood and taking care of his widowed mother and younger brothers was undoubtedly the reason that Andrii left for the United States at age nineteen in 1905, when Josyf would have been old enough to take over farming duties. Andrii spent two years working in a bituminous coal mine in the Pittsburgh area, sending money home to support his family. Just months after Andrii's marriage to Ulia Zavacka in Miková, his brother Josyf (Joseph) emigrated to Pittsburgh in October 1909.⁸⁶ Jan, the youngest Varchola brother, remained in Miková to care for his mother. At the outbreak of the Great War, Jan was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army. Although records have not been unearthed, it is believed he was wounded on the battlefield and died of his injuries after the war.⁸⁷

Like the Varcholas, the Zavacky family had deep roots in Miková. In 1828, there were six Zavacky households in the village, and the Hungarian census of 1869 finds three generations of Zavackys living in house number 17. Like the Varcholas, they were all Greek Catholic Rusyns. Julia's maternal line is more problematic. Her

mother, Justina Mrocsko, was a Greek Catholic, but recent research has confirmed Ján Zavacky's family tale that Justina's father, Mathias Mrocsko was a Roman Catholic Pole, born in Galicia.⁸⁸ Mathias's wife Josephine Blau, Julia Warhola's maternal grandmother, had roots in Bohemia. Despite family lore that claimed she was Jewish, records indicate that Josephine was an Austro-German Roman Catholic.⁸⁹

Lingering questions about Andy Warhol's ancestry can now be answered with some specificity. Records demonstrate that the ethnic background of the Warhola and Choma families is entirely Carpatho-Rusyn, as is the Zavackys' lineage on Julia's father's side. Julia's maternal ancestry shows a more complex genetic makeup with tantalizing non-Rusyn elements. But the Mrocsko-Blau family was clearly assimilated in the Rusyn community at least a generation before Julia was born. Andy Warhol's religious and cultural heritage, going back at least three generations, is Carpatho-Rusyn and Greek Catholic.

"My Momma had fifteen children," Julia told an interviewer.⁹⁰ Fourteen, of whom five died as babies or young children, can be documented in the Miková parish records. The first documented child, a girl, Paraska, was born in 1878 and lived just three days. Four children followed at two-year intervals, and Ulia (full name Julianna) was born November 20, 1891. A set of twin boys died at birth in 1894, and the next child, a girl baptized Zushka (Zuzanna), lived just four weeks. In 1901, another daughter was given the name of the deceased baby, Zushka. It seems to have been unlucky, since the second Zushka died at age four in July 1905. The cause of death is given as "worms," a parasitic infection that was a frequent childhood malady in summer, caused usually by poor sanitation. Finally, girls were born in 1903 and 1906. When the youngest, Eva, was born, her mother Justina was forty-six years old, and Ulia, by then skilled at childcare, was fifteen. Of those who survived to adulthood, only a son, Yurii (Yurko), and two daughters, Elena and Eva, remained in Europe. Three brothers (Stephen, John, and Andrew) and three sisters (Mary, Julia, and Anna) emigrated to America.

A blurry Zavacky family photograph exists. It is difficult to match names to faces if we take into account those who would have been alive and together in the home country at one time. According to Julia's niece, the photo was taken at the wedding of her father Stephen, the oldest Zavacky son, which, according to church records, took place in February 1905. She identifies Stephen and his wife in the back row.⁹¹ The Zavacky parents sit with the bride's father in the middle row, surrounded by six children. Julia and her sister Mary stand on either end; sources suggest that Julia is on the left in the rear. The overall appearance of the family is telling—the father wears an old-style long coat and round felt hat, while his son Stephen, who had already made more than one round trip to America, wears a



Figure 1.4. Zavacky family ca. 1905.

western-style jacket and bowtie. All the men have mustaches. Except for the baby in the mother's lap, the girls wear kerchiefs and look as though they are ready to work in the kitchen or the field.

There is a curious postscript to this photograph. In 1980 it was used in *Kentucky Monthly* magazine to illustrate an article about the decline of the traditional family in Kentucky.⁹² Communication with the current editor of the magazine revealed that no photo credit was listed, and the photograph cannot be found in the magazine's photo archive.⁹³ No one at the magazine today is aware that it depicted a family from the Carpathian Mountains, not Appalachia, although the parallel is apt. It is unknown

how the Zavacky family portrait made its way to Kentucky to illustrate a random, unrelated article, but the hoax, whether deliberate or not, seems very Warholian.⁹⁴

“Man Must Work”

After living in house number 17, the Zavacky family lived in house number 21. The folk architecture of the Rusyn regions adapted archaic traditions to local conditions. An ethnographer describes the typical peasant home:

The houses were most often made of split, half-round fir logs. . . . The round side of the split logs formed the exterior, the flat side the interior walls. . . . On the exterior, the timbers were rubbed with crude oil, which not only preserved the walls from rot and worms, but served as a sort of ornamentation. . . . The rounded logs were filled in or packed along the whole length with moss and clay. This “mortar” was then whitewashed, so that the resulting horizontal stripes stood out vividly against the dark oily background of the log, thereby underlining the structure of the house.⁹⁵

The walls were freshly whitewashed every spring, inside and out, to preserve heat and provide protection from wind and rain. The roof, which had two sloping surfaces, was most often thatched with rye straw, leaving a hole in the thatch for smoke to escape. Since the homes were crowded, heated by wood-burning stoves, and lit by candlelight, Rusyn peasants had a natural fear of fire, which could spread quickly. In 1911, a fire in the nearby village of Habura destroyed the church and seventy-two homes, along with many head of livestock.⁹⁶ Rusyns brought this fear of fire with them to America and passed it on to their children. Even in New York of the 1970s, Andy Warhol harbored the peasants’ dread. Finding that open cans of turpentine had sparked a blaze on the upper floor of his house, he told his diary, “I started to shake. My biggest fear had happened.” Joking that the room might be “possessed,” he declared, “I’m going to have a cross blessed and put it up there.” On Easter Sunday 1978, he brought holy water from church and spent a “couple of hours” sprinkling it around his house, just as his ancestors had done in Miková.⁹⁷

The typical peasant house was structured such that the family’s living space and farm buildings—stables, threshing barn and storage rooms—were constructed one touching the other, all under a single roof. Entering the peasant’s cottage through the unheated inner porch, which also served as a storage area for tools, buckets, and provisions, one reached the living area—a large, squarish room, about seventeen feet long and fifteen feet wide, with a seven-foot-high ceiling and an earthen floor



Figure 1.5. Rusyn peasant house in northeastern Slovakia.

sealed with yellowish flaxseed oil. It was here that women set up the loom and the grinder, where men fashioned footwear for their own use, and tooled woodcarvings to be sold at local fairs. It was the ceremonial space for all family rituals—christenings, weddings, and funerals. In winter, the family shared the heated living space with newborn lambs, goats, and calves to protect the animals from the bitter cold. Poultry typically nested under the benches. Visitors to an apartment where Andy lived with his mother in their first years in New York often commented on the “horrendous smell” from the many partially housebroken cats they kept. The odor was undoubtedly mild compared to Julia’s first home, where, as in all peasant cottages, the atmosphere was fetid, hygiene was haphazard, and sanitation was poor.

A quarter of the total living space in the main room was taken up by the large wood-burning masonry stove, which heated the house, cooked the food, baked the bread, and provided a warm sleeping space, especially for children and the elderly. Julia’s son Paul remembered his mother’s stories about sleeping on the stove. Not

surprisingly, he "couldn't visualize" it.⁹⁸ Around the stove hung kitchen utensils and strings of drying mushrooms. Diagonally opposite the stove was the ceremonial corner where the family's icons, sacred images used in religious devotion, were displayed, ornamented with embroidered towels. In the sleeping corner, a cradle hung from the ceiling. Four or five children huddled in a second bed, while others slept on benches along the walls or on bags filled with straw that were ranged on the floor as needed. Outbuildings attached to the house provided shelter for goats, sheep, pigs, and poultry. Oxen, horses, and cows were housed in the stable. A cold cellar was so well insulated that large blocks of ice lasted through the summer, preserving barrels of cabbage, vegetables, and fruit, as well as smoked meat and poultry.

In 1869, number 17 housed four adults and five children, one of whom was Julia's father, Andrii Zavacky. When Andrii married Justina Mrocsko in 1877 and they began their large family, they most likely shared the house with at least one set of grandparents. The Zavacky family farmed five or six hectares (twelve to fifteen acres) of land, as compared to the standard holding of two to four hectares. The minimum needed to maintain a subsistence-level existence was roughly fourteen acres. For the Rusyns of Miková, "middle class" meant having just barely enough from one harvest to the next. Ulia and her siblings grew up working in the fields and tending the cows. From sunrise to sunset, children as young as six watched over the grazing herds. Ulia told her children stories about working as a "shepherd," encountering wolves, and walking barefoot in the snow. We can assume her stories were not unlike those of the Carpatho-Rusyn memoirist Luba Fedash, who recalls:

My job began at sunrise and ended at sunset every day of the year except for Sunday mornings, the winter months, and a brief time I attended school. Restraining the cows by a rope made from our own home-grown and home-spun flax, I led them to the pastures far from home by the forest where I watched over them while they grazed all day. . . . Many an evening I barely made it home, too tired to walk to the house. . . . Living in harmony with nature brought me satisfaction. And for the most part, I was happy and glad to be alive, except on late autumn days when patches of frost covered the ground, or early spring days when rain fell from the sky non-stop all day, and I had to walk upon the cold earth barefoot, soaked to the bone. . . . I remember clearly to this day, how soothing my warm urine felt on my freezing feet and how welcomed it was each time nature called.⁹⁹

The peasant attitude toward work is worthy of note, because it continued to play an important role in the Rusyn immigration and in the Warhola family. As Ewa Morawska put it, "In the traditional peasant society, work had been perceived as

the attribute of human existence. It was a value in and of itself. . . . Religion only strengthened the peasants' attitude toward work as an obligatory task: 'Man has to work,' stated one of the commandments most often repeated from the pulpits in village churches."¹⁰⁰

Church registers denote the Varcholas as "farmers," that is, *khlieborob*, literally "grain workers," and like all Miková small landholders they employed timeworn methods, walking behind their ox-drawn plows, sowing their crops by hand, and harvesting with straight-handled scythes. They kept bees and sold honey in the market. Wild chestnut trees, found in Miková today only in the vicinity of the Varchola home, were planted by Andy's father in the belief they would increase the bees' yield. Even today, beekeepers prize honey made from the nectar of chestnut flowers. According to the reminiscences of villagers, the Varcholas were known for making agricultural tools and technical equipment to produce oil from hemp and flax seeds, beechnuts, and sunflowers.¹⁰¹ Today, a covered well is all that remains of the Varchola homestead where Julia and Andrii lived.¹⁰²

According to Ewa Morawska, while formal education was little valued, "the cultural system of East Central European peasants did not lack regard for knowledge and learning of a specific kind. Simple literacy, rather than the number of school grades completed, combined with popular wisdom, life experience, curiosity, and knowledgeability about things of the world were highly respected in all rural societies of the region."¹⁰³ The Varcholas were considered clever and knowledgeable. According to Ján Zavacky, the son of Julia's brother, they were "on a higher level" than their neighbors, literate and learned, with books in their home, which was unusual at the time.¹⁰⁴ They read newspapers, brochures, and technical handbooks, and expressed interest in the world beyond the village. The few letters and documents we have from Andy's father's life in Pittsburgh demonstrate a sharp mind, a sound business sense, and a feeling for family responsibility that was rooted in his life experience in Miková. His early decision to emigrate points to an adventurous, independent, ambitious character, unafraid of risk-taking. His return to Miková to find a bride indicates respect for old-world tradition and family responsibility. The Varchola practicality, combined with the Zavacky artistic sense, would shape the future artist.

"The Man Is the Head, but the Woman Is the Soul"

In Carpatho-Rusyn peasant society, the division of labor between men and women was clearly defined. Women took care of the children and the household chores of cooking, cleaning, baking, carrying water, spinning, weaving, and whitewash-

ing the house. They also tended the poultry, the vegetable garden, the hemp and flax fields, and they fed the cows, sheep, and goats. Housewives were responsible for selling eggs, cheese, and butter at the market, and they controlled the money they earned. While men seldom took on women's chores, women participated in the fieldwork during busy agricultural periods—turning, raking, and binding the grass mowed by the men. When Andrii first saw Ulia, she was bringing in what she called "wheat" from the field. In Warhol's film, *The George Hamilton Story*, she says, "When me was little girl, and me always working *na* [on, Rusyn] farm . . . I always go to shepherd, grass for cow." Misunderstanding her heavy accent, her interlocutor asks, "You chopped grass for cows?" Happy to think she's been understood, Julia agrees: "Cows, yes. Yes, I chop it. . . . In Europe you want milk from cow, you have to get something for cow. You know I a farmer, ten cow my mama and *didi* [grandfather] have . . . maybe nine year old I was. I chopped wheat, *toto* [that is] grass, you know, grass? . . . Green grass, nice, grass for cow eating. . . . [Proudly] Czechoslovak-a. Was my Europe, long time ago." In Julia's emotional narration, pathos for her childhood burden of raking grass and tending cows contends with pride in the number of cows she had to tend. "I a farmer," she insists, and with condescension, she explains to her inexperienced American listeners the give and take involved in caring for livestock. She invokes her homeland of Czechoslovakia, in an idiosyncratic pronunciation, as a point of pride in the narrative of her life.

In her study of east central European peasant societies, Morawska notes that the highest compliment one could pay a woman was to say that she was willing and able to work hard.¹⁰⁵ Julia's youngest sister remembered that Julia defied the customary gender division of labor. "[Ulia] mowed, chopped wood. She knew how to do everything. Our father taught us. He wanted a son and he was sad when Ulia was born. So foolish. She wanted to be as good as a boy so father wouldn't complain. She knew how to work. She was a beekeeper, she could do anything."¹⁰⁶ Blake Gopnik described Andy Warhol as "a pioneer transgressor of gender roles," but challenging societal expectations was nothing new to his mother.¹⁰⁷

Women were generally held in low esteem in Slavic peasant societies, and Carpatho-Rusyn folk culture was typically misogynist. The characteristically idealized mother figure was the exception to the rule, as it was generally accepted that "few people expressed such a reverent love for their mothers as did the Slavs."¹⁰⁸ But proverbs, which are similar across the Slavic world, express disrespectful and dismissive attitudes to women in general. "A woman's hair is long, but her mind is short"; "A dog is wiser than a woman; it does not bark at its master." Marriage is a proverbial trap sprung on men by wily women: "A robber asks for your money or

your life; a wife asks for both." A few Carpatho-Rusyn proverbs acknowledge the interdependence of men's and women's roles and their necessary reliance on one another in everyday life. "The man is the head, but the woman is the soul"; "A good wife halves trouble and doubles happiness"; "A widower is not a father to his children, for he is himself an orphan."¹⁰⁹ Wives were expected to handle the hardships and demands of life, to cope with crises, and to make life smooth for their menfolk.

Women were not without influence in the family. They usually controlled family finances and they arranged their children's marriages, but on their own, they had little value and no agency. In the patriarchal structure of the family and the culture, women were expected to be submissive and obedient. Spousal abuse was a persistent concern. However, an oppositional feminist reading of this aspect of Carpatho-Rusyn folk culture offers the woman's point of view. As Donna Gabaccia puts it, "Evidence of virulent misogyny in European . . . folklore and religious teaching is easy to find but very hard to interpret; we cannot know if it principally reflected social reality, functioned as an ideological sop to politically powerless men, or bolstered male esteem in the face of women skilled as manipulators of kin resources."¹¹⁰

The wedding ritual described at the beginning of this chapter foregrounds the stereotypical images of women and demonstrates how they were used to condition social attitudes. The bride-to-be is metaphorically a heifer to be purchased, a rose to be transplanted and cultivated to bear fruit, and an "innocent child" to be delivered to her husband. She will be "a worker" for her mother-in-law first, and only secondarily, a "helpmate" for the groom. After the "crowning" in church, which called down "glory and honor" upon the bridal couple, the "capping" ritual stripped the bride of her girlish identity—after she twice ritually proclaimed that she would rather have her head cut off. Her new headdress imposed upon her a subordinate, matronly persona. The teachings of the church, with its emphasis on the subservience of the wife to her husband, reinforced these time-honored values.

An element of the traditional Carpatho-Rusyn peasant wedding that is usually glossed over today is its eroticism. All primitive cultures promoted the vital peasant values of fertility and fecundity, not only in the field but also in the human population. The marriage ceremony was an occasion to celebrate procreation and sex. Thus, erotic proverbs, sayings, songs, and riddles were part of the celebration. The scholar of ethnography and women's studies Christine Worobec notes that old-world peasants often concealed provocative performances from outsiders. "They sang songs and told stories that ethnographers expected to hear, leaving the bawdy versions for occasions when the village was free of busybody officials and scholars. Only an ethnographer who had earned the peasants' trust would

have been introduced to the full panorama of peasant oral culture."¹¹¹ During the Soviet period in Eastern Europe, "shameful" variants were proscribed in ethnographic scholarship. Even today they are often omitted from popular collections of folk songs and tales. The ethnomusicologist Ivan Chyzhmar published Carpatho-Rusyn erotic-themed songs as a supplement to his extensive ethnographic study of the folk wedding, cautioning that it is intended "only for scholarly work."¹¹²

In songs and riddles, the sex act was represented allegorically in agricultural metaphors of ravens and jackdaws, cabbages and sausages, plowing and raking. But explicit terms are also used that would be shocking even today.¹¹³ Since it expresses a man's perspective, women were most often portrayed negatively in erotic folklore, in proverbs such as, "A woman is seen best when she's standing on a ladder"; "Men love that which girls are ashamed of."¹¹⁴ While the chant sung by the married women of the groom's family to accompany the "dance in a row" praised the bride's beauty and wished her well, verses that were hidden from or suppressed by ethnographers, and conveniently "forgotten" in the immigration, expressed explicit erotic motifs and vulgar images. To the same melody that praised "our beautiful bride," the *svashki* sang that the bride gave up her hair for "a piece of sausage and two eggs," called her a slut, a whore, and a seductress, and described the sex act in unambiguous terms.

These aspects of the ceremony would seem to suggest that women accepted the negative images imposed upon them, but a feminist reading points to a subversion of the male-dominated culture in its own language. The women's comic identification with negative images spotlights their understated resistance to patriarchal expectations. The exchange of a bride's hair, the symbol of her innocence, for "a piece of sausage" exposes the inequitable, oppressive nature of societal expectations. The "seductive slut" persona attributed to the bride in bawdy songs suggests a latent threat to masculinity. The ribald "capping" ceremony, performed traditionally only by married women but observed by the community at large, utilized humor and jovial irony to attack the stereotypes of women's ascribed role and status. In an expression of women's solidarity, the ceremony talked back to the otherwise male-dominated wedding ritual. The layers of meaning in the marriage ceremony initiate the new bride into the expectations of her culture, while implicitly critiquing and subverting them.

The oral art of the wedding ritual expressed the irrepressible voice of the people. By contrast, in the church and in written literature, women had no voice. Aleksander Dukhnovych elevated misogyny in Rusyn belles lettres in his classic play from 1851, *Virtue Is More Important Than Riches*. While the male protagonist is a

Rusyn “Everyman,” weak and foolish, but likable and ultimately redeemed, his wife is unvarnished evil. Adhering to old superstitions, abetting her husband’s alcohol abuse, and blocking her son’s education, she refuses to admit her mistakes and spurns forgiveness. She is the ultimate “bad mother,” whose moral defects and overindulgent child-raising practices corrupt her son and, metaphorically, the next Carpatho-Rusyn generation. In the immigration, Rusyn American writers elaborated on Dukhnovych’s misogynistic theme in numerous popular plays, which were performed by amateur groups to audiences in churches and fraternal organizations. One has only to glance at the dramatis personae of these dramas to predict the conventional plot. The cast of characters will include a middle-aged *gazda* and *gazdynia* (husband and wife of the household), a daughter of about eighteen, a Vasyl or Petro who is an orphan boy or a poor neighbor, and an additional male character who may be the son of the steward, a dissolute returnee from America, or a rich man, who is also, frequently, a drunkard. The husbands are sympathetic, though weak willed and dominated by their spiteful, materialistic wives, who are determined to marry their beautiful, virtuous daughter to the rich interloper, instead of her poor soulmate. In the course of the action, the chosen fiancé is revealed to be base and immoral (and often not even rich), the mother is chastened, and the daughter and Vasyl are married. If we are to take these narratives at face value, one must wonder what happens to Rusyn women, who are uniformly modest and wise maidens at eighteen and foolish, materialistic haridans at forty. A Rusyn proverb captures the phenomenon: “A wife is dear to her husband twice—when he marries her and when he buries her.”¹¹⁵

The Woman’s Voice

In folk culture, women’s voices were heard in the genre of the lyrical song. Women’s songs present the expected theme of love, reciprocated or lost. But contrary to societal norms, in numerous songs, girls and older women expressed notably rebellious thoughts, emotions, and concerns. Contextualized in terms of the position of women in Carpatho-Rusyn peasant culture, lyrical songs provide the female perspective that is missing from men’s sayings and priests’ writings. Singing together in multipart harmony throughout the day, at work in the fields and especially at *prialky*, spinning parties that combined work with amusement during the long winter evenings, their songs touched on courting practices, marital relations, and self-image. The topic is far too expansive and complex for a full treatment here, but a quick look at some of the most popular songs that survived from the homeland, through the immigration, and down to the present day is revelatory.¹¹⁶

A common theme is the young girl's fear that she will be matched with an old or unfit husband, instead of her beloved village boyfriend. A girl sings to her mother: "My dearest mother / You have just one daughter, me / Look far and wide / . . . / For the one to whom you will give me." Fortunately, this particular "dear mother" concedes, "I won't give you to just anyone," and allows the girl to marry her chosen one. Numerous songs express the voice of the bride who had a less sympathetic mother and found herself married to an old *dido* (grandfather). While a lament for her fate might be expected, and probably occurred in lived experience, songs were a safe space where women could voice the tension they felt between duty and desire. "And on my wedding day my mother told me / To take good care of my old husband. // And so, I care for the *dido* well, because I must, / But please, dear God, take the old man's soul!" Another young girl who was constrained to marry a graybeard, sings: "Why, oh why, do I need that old man? / You can't kiss or lie with him, or even look at him." In folk-song performance, these outspoken women straightforwardly voice bold notions that, in real life, could only be whispered.

Perhaps the best-known and most-loved song of Rusyn women of eastern Slovakia, enjoyed today also in Carpatho-Rusyn America as an anthem of women's liberation, is "Chervena ruzha troiaka" (A red rose of three shades), one of many similar songs that Julia Warhola recorded on tape in New York. The singer bewails her fate with her husband, a drunkard who beats her, and the song celebrates women's empowerment: "Don't beat me, my husband, don't punish me / I'll leave you the kids, the kids I'll leave you / And I'll go alone far beyond the Danube." As the woman boards the ship and waves her white kerchief, the symbol of hoped-for lasting love, her husband pleads, "Come back, my wife, come home. . . . The children are crying for you." She retorts: "I will not come home . . . I would rather lose my life." The themes of independence and resistance that women expounded in these songs may not have reflected their lived experience, but they opened up an exhilarating sense of possibility and personal power within the constraints of traditional culture.

Another theme of Carpatho-Rusyn lyrical songs that mitigates against images of women's subordination and shame is the sassy attitude they take toward the conventions of courting, with thinly veiled allusions to sexuality. "At our place there is a green meadow / Boys love me, because I am young. / At our place, oh, how the meadow is raked, / I've now broken five rakes." "I was raking and raking, / and broke the rake. . . . / For I had three boyfriends. // If only I knew / where my boyfriend is mowing / I would bring him / Something from under my apron." Other attitudes toward courting and sex are more explicit. "I would like to kiss my boyfriend so deeply that my mouth would water." A young girl calls to Ivan to "come secretly to our place tonight." A piece

of straw on the fence will signal that her *stary* (old folks) are at home; twigs of hay will be a sign that he can come in fearlessly. An assertive young woman sings to her fellow to warn his mother against arranging a marriage with another girl:

Tell her that you found a girl long ago
 When you came to our place that evening,
 Stayed overnight but left early
 So you wouldn't wake my mother.
 So now tell her openly
 To prepare me a wedding "cap,"
 And tell her we'll need a cradle
 For the coming baby.

Like the bold confidence expressed here, personal responsibility, rather than victimhood, is the response of another singer: "Only I am to blame / It was me myself / Who took a liking to him. // Oh, my boy, so you think / It's all about you / When you kiss my white cheeks again and again."

These lyrical songs reveal a celebration of self that challenges men's idealistic images of women's submission. Women sing their ire when they are defamed by village busybodies for their forward behavior, and they face gossip with smug cheek: "False tales are told about me." A girl who is talked about because she "sits on boys' laps" resolves: "I'll go to my door and stand there openly / And choose a boyfriend to my liking. // Yes, I'll go to my door and stand there looking pretty. / Whoever wants to love me, let him come." A girl who is derogated as a showoff fights back: "I don't paint my face / And no, dude, I'm not interested in you." Finally, it is notable that women's affirmations of femininity and sexuality are not limited to maidens. An older woman traces her love life from her teenage years, when she had twenty admirers, to her twenties, when she was pursued by young officers, to her maturity, when she fell in love with mustached men, and her sixties, when even a stooped old man would not have her. She concludes with sardonic irony: "Now I am a *stara baba* [old grandmother] / No one kisses me, though I wish they would." Although there are also a great many songs that express women's misery and subjection, these folkloric performances, which often address males directly, affirm the legitimacy of women's emotions and desires. Shuffling the dominant discourse, they communicate a sense of power, as they transgress cultural norms. Whether or not they had any effect on the actual domestic and societal structures of peasant society, they evidence a resistant female energy that challenged and subverted the apparent dominance of men.¹¹⁷

It was within this women's folk culture that Ulia Zavacka was raised and her psyche was formed. Julia Warhola continued to sing these and similar folk songs into her sixties, when her self-representation retained traces of the sassy peasant woman persona. While some of Andy's friends saw a naive, childlike nature in his mother, others noted a coquettish demeanor that could be manipulative and defiant. One of her son's female collaborators called Mrs. Warhola "Miss Prima Donna."¹¹⁸ According to the Warhol superstar Viva, the seventy-seven-year-old Julia told her stories about the suitors who had pursued her, explaining that her body was like a "magnet" that attracted any good man, a trope that could have come from the lyrics of one of her folk songs.¹¹⁹ In Warhol's film, *The George Hamilton Story*, Julia, in the same folklore idiom, jokes about spurning old men who want to marry her and resisting the kisses of young men. This side of Julia Warhola's personality, along with her tendency to exaggerate and self-mythologize, had its roots in the performative features of Carpatho-Rusyn peasant culture. As scholars of narrative put it, "The culture 'speaks itself' through each individual's story."¹²⁰

Homespun Beauty

Ulia was respected in the village not only for her hard work, but for her creativity, which was ingenious, given the conditions of poverty in which she lived. The Zavacky family homestead has not survived, but elderly residents recalled the decorative patterns Ulia drew on the whitewashed walls and the designs she painted on kitchen utensils. According to ethnographers, much attention was given to decorating the exterior walls of the peasant cottage. Decorations included various ornamental motifs, such as solar signs, chicken feet, the tree of life, braids, and flowers. The door would be ornamented with a flower that had as many stems as there were members of the family living in the house. The large and always growing Zavacky family would have required a competent artist. A cousin remembers, "Ulia Varchola, Andy's mother, was the first to paint cottages. . . . There was still no money even for whitewash, so she dug out a little reddish clay, dissolved it, and painted the walls with it. Then, when they had limewash, she 'daubed' roses on with a brush. . . . When the wall was painted red, she found some blue clay by the water and painted the plinth blue . . . painting white flowers on a blue background."¹²¹ Painting was done yearly before important holidays, and the designs, always new, were drawn by girls and elderly women with a cloth wrapped round a stick. Ulia made stencils from wood slats and covered the interior walls with patterns of flowers, animals, sun, and stars, foreshadowing Andy Warhol's pre-Pop

artwork of butterflies and flowers, which the art critic Arthur Danto described as “almost a form of folk art.”¹²²

Like all Rusyn women, Ulia decorated household linen and men’s and women’s holiday clothing with lavish cross-stitch and crewel embroidery, in geometrical patterns or in designs and colors inspired by wildflowers, trees, the moon and stars. Fertility symbols from nature, originally meant to protect the wearer from the incursion of evil spirits, were embroidered on the hems, sleeves, and openings of shirts. Each village had characteristic ornamental motifs and compositional patterns, handed down from generation to generation. The Russian ethnographer Sergei Makovsky traveled through Subcarpathian Rus’ collecting objects of folk art, which were exhibited to great acclaim in Prague in 1924. He noted “the remarkable difference between the embroidery designs of Subcarpathian Rus’ and those of Great or Little Russia [Ukraine].”

The national dress, together with the embroidery with which it is decorated, is the most well-preserved element of Subcarpathian peasant culture. The persistence of the national dress may be attributed to the backwardness of the country, but also to the depth of national feeling. Whether under the rule of Hungarians, Austrians, or Poles, the Ruthenians kept to their “Rusyn” dress as to a banner. And this showed a healthy instinct. The national costume was an efficient protection against spiritual absorption by foreign elements. If, after centuries of bondage, the Subcarpathian villager still says, “I am a Rusyn,” if he has not forgotten his native speech, and if he has preserved his orthodox character within the Greek Catholic faith, this is a result of his fidelity to the national dress of his ancestors.¹²³

Everyday women’s dress consisted of a blouse and underskirt, covered with a skirt of homespun hemp, decorated at the bottom with red and blue threads and, what Makovsky called, “a special kind of homemade lace.”¹²⁴ A band of embroidery ornamented the sleeves below the shoulder, and delicate designs decorated the breast and cuffs. A *laibyk*, or sleeveless vest, made of blue or black coarse cloth or velvet, decorated with multicolored laces and embroidery, was worn buttoned up, often with a necklace of rows of glass beads. In cold weather, both men and women wore a *hunia*, a cloak made of homespun lambswool, and women wore high boots.

The most elaborate form of Rusyn folk art, *pysanky* or painted eggs, was traditionally a woman’s art.¹²⁵ At Easter, girls gave *pysanky* to boys, the most beautiful egg intended for the boy a girl liked best. In an intricate and unrecorded technology, Rusyn folk artists created natural dyes, achieving various intensities in a

"MY TOWN—MIKOVÁ, CZECHOSLOVAKIA"



Figure 1.6. Julia's sisters Elena and Eva ca. 1920.



Figure 1.7. Carpatho-Rusyn pysanky by Mary Anne Mistick.

virtually infinite color scale. Throughout the year women gathered young winter rye, hemp, raspberries, walnut shells, birch branches, onion skins, and even soot to prepare the dyes. Not just at Easter but throughout the year, they decorated eggs in an atmosphere of spirituality, reciting ritual prayers before choosing symbols and motifs for what would become not just an aesthetic object, but a talisman possessed of magical powers. From time immemorial, the *pysanka* was believed to protect the house from fire and to ward off the “evil eye,” to increase the yield of fruit trees and ensure a good harvest. Painted eggs were placed in coffins and on graves, and *pysanka* shells were believed to have medicinal properties. When cast on hot coals, their smoke was said to cure illness.

By the twentieth century, *pysanky* had lost their symbolic significance, and their aesthetic function became dominant. Since it was one of the few forms of decoration that did not require large financial expenditures, it was an art form accessible even to poor peasants. Styles differed from village to village, but, as

the ethnographer Pavlo Markovyč writes, "All *pysanka* artists conform to certain basic principles of decoration: symmetry, alternation, rhythm, repetition, color harmony. These norms assure the aesthetic quality of the *pysanka* as a work of art. What is even more noteworthy is that these standards are observed by simple peasant women who have had no artistic training, but who exhibit a high degree of inborn aesthetic taste."¹²⁶

Ulia decorated *pysanky* in the time-honored style native to the Carpatho-Rusyns of eastern Slovakia, which is entirely distinct from the Ukrainian cultural tradition. The Rusyn folk artist applied hot wax to the egg surface with a pin or nail, its sharp end driven into a wooden holder. Beginning with a dot, she drew a short stroke that tapered off as the wax was spent. With speed and dexterity, the artist drew an organized design of stylized motifs from nature, often bordered with ornamental geometric bands. When the ornamentation was completed, the egg was placed in the dye, the wax-coated areas impervious to the pigment. Finally, the dry egg was warmed over a flame to soften the wax, which was then wiped from the egg surface with a cloth, leaving behind a negative image of the design. This wax-resist dyeing art is similar in principle to the silkscreen technique that became Warhol's trademark.

Julia passed on the distinctive Rusyn method of ornamentation and her sense of color harmony to her son, who would later give decorated eggs as gifts to New York art directors and business contacts. One of his drawings from the 1950s of a decorated egg depicts typical Rusyn *pysanky* folk motifs of the sun and stylized flowers, with a traditional ornamental border of chicken feet. In a 1977 interview, Warhol was asked if he thought more female artists would emerge as a result of the women's liberation movement. His answer was not surprising, given that the first artist he knew was his mother: "I always thought that most artists were women—you know, the ones that did the Navajo Indian rugs, American quilts, all that great hand-painting on Forties clothes."¹²⁷ For the young Ulia Zavacka, natural and traditional bits of homespun beauty brightened and enriched the hardscrabble life that was the Rusyns' lot, and she taught her son, Andy Warhol, to appreciate the aesthetic value of ordinary objects. Today her grandchildren are consummate *pysanky* artists.¹²⁸

Ivan Kupala and Saint John the Baptist

Prehistoric Carpatho-Rusyns were pagans who shared features of the mythology common among East Slavs. Since their livelihood depended on the success

of their crops, they worshipped various gods in the forces of nature. Perun, the god of thunder, controlled the weather; Iarilo ruled fertility; Veles, the cattle god, protected shepherds and their herds; and Mokosh, the only female deity, protected women, the family, and the home. Many minor gods and goddesses governed various aspects of life and seasons of the year: Lada was the Slavic god of love; Kupala reigned over water and vegetation; and Koliada ruled the winter season. The pagan Slavs entrusted themselves to the protection of household spirits and magical charms, fearing witches and sorcerers who could manipulate the forces of nature for their own ends.

When Christianity entered the lives of the Slavs in the ninth century, it did not eliminate the old cult, but instead, supplemented it, creating a synthetic belief system in which folk rites and Christian rituals overlapped and reinforced one another. Thus, the winter festival of Koliada was merged with the feast of Christ's Nativity, and the Rusyn word for a Christmas hymn is *koliada*. The summer solstice fused fertility rites in honor of Kupala, the god of water and vegetation, with the waters of Christian baptism on the midsummer feast day of Saint John the Baptist. The feast was known to Rusyn peasants as Ioann Kupala, a conflation of the Christian Saint John and the pagan Kupala. For centuries, devout Rusyn peasants clung to the ancient rites, seeing no contradiction between magical practices and Christian beliefs, between incantations and prayers. While such practices were often prohibited by Hungarian and Slovak Roman Catholic churches, local Greek Catholic priests saw no contradiction to canon law in such play, which was viewed as an innocent reservoir of national creativity that was better than the tavern. As time went on, Carpatho-Rusyns learned to extol the tenets of church dogma, but the coexistence of pagan ideas with Christian doctrine, known as *dvoeverie* or "double belief," survived into the twentieth century and exists in various forms today.

Rusyns trace their conversion to Christianity to the Byzantine missionaries Cyril (Constantine) and Methodius, who began preaching the Christian faith to the Slavs of central Europe in 863. They devised an alphabet, the prototype for Cyrillic, to transcribe the Slavic idiom. The language they developed for liturgical use, Church Slavonic, was related to and influenced by the vernacular speech of the people. After the eleventh-century schism in the Christian church that divided the Greek East from the Latin West, Carpatho-Rusyns followed the Eastern, or Orthodox, branch of the church. However, situated as they were between East and West, feeling pressure from Orthodoxy on one side and Roman Catholicism and Protestantism on the other, the Rusyn bishops of Austria-Hungary sought

a way to preserve and protect their unique religious heritage. They found it in compromise. Seeing political advantage in embracing the official religion of the country where they lived, they accepted union with the universal Catholic Church, under the condition that the Ruthenian (Rusyn) church would retain the rites and traditions of Orthodoxy. Empress Maria Theresa of Austria-Hungary later termed this compromise the "Greek Catholic Church"—"Greek" in its Byzantine ritual and "Catholic" in its union with Rome. Preservation of Orthodox customs and traditions—the Church Slavonic liturgical language, the Julian calendar, a married priesthood, distribution of the Eucharist as both bread and wine, the image-covered iconostasis (altar screen) that separated the sanctuary from the nave, *prostopenie*, a style of singing unaccompanied by musical instruments and heavily influenced by folk music—meant that the externals of the faith were essentially unchanged for the Rusyn people. By the eighteenth century, Greek Catholicism, today known as Ruthenian Byzantine Catholicism, had become decisively linked to Carpatho-Rusyns.

The appeal of Eastern Christianity to the early pagan Slavs is best captured in the legendary account of Prince Vladimir's choice of Orthodoxy as the official religion of Kievan Rus' in 988. Upon examining several world religions, Vladimir's emissaries returned from an Eastern Christian liturgy in Constantinople with the report: "We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth and we are at a loss to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations. We cannot forget that beauty."¹²⁹ That is, Orthodox Christianity was chosen as the religion of the East Slavs not for its dogma or abstract theology, but for the aesthetic appeal of its liturgy, which has hardly changed over the millennium. According to the Carpatho-Rusyn conversion myth, the Rusyns of central Europe had adopted Christianity a century before the Kievans, but like them, they had surely been won over by the religion's splendid, symbolic allure. The primacy of the aesthetic appeal persisted in Rusyn religion through the centuries, as seen in the contrast between the simple homes of immigrant miners and millworkers and the beauty of their churches.

In twentieth-century America, Andy Warhol's approach to religion was similarly aesthetic, rather than doctrinal. More than once, he expressed thoughts along the lines of these answers in his 1977 interview with Glenn O'Brien.¹³⁰

O'BRIEN: Do you still go to church?

WARHOL: Yeah. I just sneak in at funny hours.

O'BRIEN: Do you go to Catholic churches?

WARHOL: Yeah, they're the prettiest.

O'BRIEN: Do you believe in God?

WARHOL: I guess I do. I like church. . . . There are so many beautiful Catholic churches in New York. I used to go to some Episcopal churches, too.

O'BRIEN: Do you ever think about God?

WARHOL: No.

In the “prettiest” churches, a Carpatho-Rusyn Christian does not so much “think about” God, as feel God’s presence. The Eastern Catholic liturgy appeals to the senses. The beauty of the priests’ ornate vestments, stately processions, the monumental frescoes and glistening icons attract the eye. Clouds of fragrant incense from the priest’s energetic swinging of the censer over icons and worshippers soothe and entrance.¹³¹ The hypnotic resonance of the musical chant and repetitive litanies (“Hospodi pomilui, Hospodi pomilui, Hospodi pomilui” (Lord have mercy)), repeated after each petition in a long series, have a mesmerizing effect. In Eastern iconography and liturgy, the value is not variety, but repetition and familiarity. In icons, as in Warhol’s work, while the basic design is repeated, no two images are the same. For illiterate peasants, the iconostasis told the story of Christ and the saints in pictures, rather than texts. Models for behavior are found in Bible stories and saints’ lives, rather than in dry precepts. The formulaic rituals of Sunday liturgies and holiday ceremonies provide structure and comfortable familiarity, while Lenten fasts and midnight vigils afford spiritual exhilaration. This religion was ideal for the simple, illiterate Carpatho-Rusyn people, who basked in the aesthetic delight of the liturgy and wholeheartedly accepted the sacred truth it embodied.

Ulia Zavacka found a complement to the beauty of Carpathian nature in the splendor of the church. As a young woman, she “sang like an angel,” according to her sister. She knew the entire liturgy, and after World War I, when men were scarce, she led the congregational singing as a cantor.¹³² Ulia’s piety also found form in visual art. When the village church in Miková was being reconstructed, she assisted the painters, who were restoring frescoes that depicted scenes from the Bible. She helped mix colors and marveled at the ability of artists to make human figures come alive on the church walls.¹³³ Throughout her life, she drew pictures of angels that resembled the distinctive primitive style of Rusyn icons.

The rhythm of Ulia’s life in Miková was regulated by the religious calendar of the church and the folk calendar of the seasons. The church prescribed ritualized holidays that were welcomed by the peasants, since work on those days was

prohibited. But it also imposed eighteen weeks of strict fasts throughout the year, when meat, fish, dairy products, oil, and alcohol were forbidden. Folk proverbs indicate a spiritual appreciation of fasting ("The body fasts and the soul brightens"), as well as a grudging tolerance of the duty ("In Lent even the bed is hard"). But the laws of the church could not completely prevail over the primordial order of the seasons, in which primitive man lived at the mercy of natural forces. Instead, the Christian and the primitive merged. Christian saints took over the protective duties of ancient pagan gods, and pre-Christian rituals were endowed with religious significance.

Scholars assert that "Carpatho-Rusyns generally retained archaic elements in their folk customs more than any other Slavic people or ethnic group."¹³⁴ The Rusyn conflation of the Christian and the pagan suggests an answer to the question of Andy Warhol's religiosity, which has long perplexed biographers. At one extreme, its influence on the artist has been exaggerated, and at the other, it has been dismissed as "a mix of aesthetics and quite practical superstition."¹³⁵ In fact, a study of the "religiosity" of Warhol's Miková parents and ancestors shows that aesthetics, theatricality, and superstition were an integral part of their spirituality. Practices and beliefs that derived from pagan superstition left even devout Rusyn Greek Catholics open to alternative ways of thinking, a distrust of science, and acceptance of the paranormal. Their attachment to ritual, tradition, and the supernatural, often superseding church laws and doctrine, was part and parcel of their religious sensibility.

Ethnographers have noted more than sixty days in the Carpatho-Rusyn calendar year that were connected to various rituals and strictly formulated events, which, like the folk wedding, resulted in a theatrical transformation of everyday life.¹³⁶ The feast of the Annunciation on April 7 by the Julian calendar marked the beginning of the agricultural year. Seed grain was taken to be blessed in church, and worshipers brought home sanctified bread, which they believed to have protective powers.¹³⁷ On May 6, the feast day of Saint George, patron of peasants, cattle, and forest animals, the villagers' flocks were herded to the mountain meadows for the summer season in a ceremony that included prayers, music, songs, and jokes. The chief shepherd was a dramatic figure who enjoyed an aura of power and mystery. The haunting call of his *trembita* or alpine horn, up to thirteen feet in length, resounded six miles across the forested mountains to announce the arrival and departure of the herds or to signal the far-flung shepherds in the upland pastures. The sheep had been blessed by the priest before leaving the village, but to prevent the herd from straying and to protect it from witches and

unclean spirits, the shepherd performed arcane magical acts with fire and ax. In a complex procedure, accompanied by incantations and dances, he lit a symbolic bonfire, or *vatra*, that would burn throughout the summer until the end of the grazing season.

Pentecost, celebrated on the fiftieth day after Easter to commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, was a time for Rusyn farmers to pray for favorable weather and a good crop. The village priest consecrated the seedlings with holy water to protect them from lightning and natural disasters, which could destroy in a moment the hard labor of a year. But Pentecost was better known to Carpatho-Rusyn peasants as the “green holiday” or Rusalia, the name of an ancient Slavic fertility festival. The people celebrated Rusalia by decorating the church, their homes, and the horns of cattle with greenery, a symbol of vegetative power. Rusalia was a time for engagements and marriages. In a vestige of pagan ancestor worship, the Rusyns left bread, eggs, and grain on family graves, and asked their ancestors to bless the harvest.

On Saint John's Eve, the midsummer festival of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist, young men leaped over bonfires, called *sobitky*, in what was originally a magical act of purification. Girls tossed wreaths into the stream to predict their marital prospects. Saint John's Eve, or Ioann Kupala, was a time when the community tolerated excesses in behavior and a certain range of sexual freedom. A straw effigy of a male figure with a prominent phallus was paraded around the village, as young people appealed for supplies to dress the scarecrow, and food and brandy to feed him for three planned days of merriment. Herders, both men and women, spent the night of the summer solstice in the forest, tending their cattle and passing the time in skits and games with erotic undertones. In bawdy songs and ribald tales, double-edged metaphors from agrarian life commented sardonically on marriage, sex, and seduction. As scholars of Slavic peasant life have put it, “Peasant society might have been sexually repressive, but it was rarely sexual prudish.”¹³⁸ Sexual ignorance was out of the question, when a large family lived in one undivided room and in close proximity to farm animals. Sexual games were an integral part of courtship practices and folklore. The strictures of the church were counterbalanced by permissive traditional customs, which surely shaped Rusyn peasants, including Julia Warhola, in a fashion that was more complex than the naive, innocent image they may have later presented to the outside world.

Midsummer was a time for women to gather medicinal herbs before sunrise in the mountains and meadows around Miková—Saint-John's-wort or horse-heal, valerian, peppermint, and chamomile. *Kravnyk* (bloodwort) was used to staunch

wounds, *kudilka* (horsetail) cured kidney disease, and *ratash* (wild chrysanthemum) eased stomach pain. But it was also the time when sorcerers and witches gathered noxious plants—swallowwort and nightshade—to bring harm to God-fearing folk. Like most primitive peoples, old-world Rusyns believed that illness was caused by supernatural forces or the "evil eye." Petr Bogatyrev, a Russian ethnographer who traveled through Subcarpathian Rus' in the interwar years of the twentieth century, reported that Carpatho-Rusyn peasants trusted folk remedies and supernatural cures, preferring to place themselves in the hands of sorcerers, rather than doctors.¹³⁹

The feast of Saints Peter and Paul was the eve of the harvest, when the short summer was already trending toward autumn, as the proverb indicates: "Peter and Paul arrived and the first leaf dropped." Another proverb started the harvest: "On the day of Saint Procopius, cut the rye and tie the sheaf." In a practice that recognized the supernatural force abiding in the earth, harvesters rolled in the soil to derive strength for the work ahead. After prayers, the farmer swung his scythe, taking the first swath, and the long days of backbreaking labor began, in hopes of bringing in the harvest before the first frost. Women and older children followed the reapers, gathering and binding the grain in sheaves to be taken away for threshing and winnowing. Even young children helped by raking the stubble.

After the harvest came the festival, which was again a mixture of Christian prayers and pagan superstitions. Ears of grain were gathered in a sheaf, decorated with wildflowers, and ceremoniously brought to the household to be used in wedding wreaths and childbirth beds, and to be placed in the nesting boxes of hens, to increase egg production. By the end of August, the harvest was in, and it was time for pilgrimage. Villagers from Miková and the surrounding area walked in procession to the Krásny Brod monastery, stopping for prayers at roadside shrines along the way.

Preparations for winter were then in high gear, with a deadline of the feast of the Protection of the Mother of God in mid-October. Snow was already visible on the mountains, and with ritual and ceremony, the herds were brought down from the *polonyna* to the sonorous wail of the *trembita*. The last cabbages were salted for winter, potatoes were dug up for cold storage, fruit was dried, and vegetables were pickled. After the feast of the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple in early December, it was prohibited to dig the earth, which was believed to be at rest, gathering strength for summer. The open-air festivities of young people came to an end and indoor evening spinning parties began. Women and girls spun flax into thread, while young men entertained them with music and games.

The preparation for Christmas began in late November with the beginning of Saint Phillip's fast, but on Saint Andrew's feast day, fasting restrictions were modified to allow the celebration of one of the most popular festivals, especially for girls. Andrew was the patron saint of love. On the eve of the holiday, girls visited the homes of the many boys and men named Andrew in the Rusyn village, wished them "many years," and, in Halloween style, asked for an "offering." Girls and boys then gathered for a party of feasting, fortune-telling, and magic rites to predict the girls' marriage prospects. The number of stones gathered from the stream, the first flour pellet eaten by a rooster, the condition of the ninth post from the left in a fence, the shape assumed by molten lead when dropped into a basin of cold water—all these seemingly insignificant phenomena held secret meaning and magical significance.

Mothering the Mind

Julia Warhola understood life according to the old-world Greek Catholic religious culture, supplemented by the codex of superstitions, proverbs, and instructions that guided one's actions almost every day of the yearly cycle. On Saint George's day a peasant could find out how many years he would live by counting the beats of a stork's wings. On a holiday, one could not sweep the house for fear of sweeping away happiness. While each directive may be trivial, thousands of trivialities added up to a world where every minor action or object held charmed significance, and nothing was too trifling for attention. It was a world where holy days directed daily duties, and natural phenomena exerted power over human life, a world of inspirational fantasy and destructive fear.

These attitudes, which were commonplace for the young Ulia Zavacka, became fundamental to Andy Warhol's artistic vision. When Julia left Miková for industrial Pittsburgh, she left behind agrarian precepts, which were of little value beyond her kitchen garden. But she brought with her traditions, prayers, and superstitions to pass on to her sons. Andy, her youngest, was most receptive. His cinematic collaborator Paul Morrissey said, "Andy was not a typical American. I knew both of his brothers and they are typical Americans. Andy was more like his mother. They were . . . village people using their natural intuition."¹⁴⁰ John Richardson, the eulogist at Warhol's memorial service, attributed Andy's religious consciousness to "atavism as personified by his adored and adoring mother."¹⁴¹ For Julia, as for Andy, intuition and atavism, the reversion to ancestral or primordial qualities, were integral to how they saw life and understood art.

Warhola family members insist that Julia was the most important influence on her artist son. In *Mothering the Mind*, Ruth Perry calls mothers the "necessary others" who have not been credited properly for the role they play in the creative work of their children. "And yet to a greater or lesser extent the artistic achievements were shaped by their presences."¹⁴² Julia's presence in Andy's life was infused by the overlapping reality and fantasy of Miková. According to Perry, "Probably the most important function of 'mothering' the mind of an adult, as of an infant, is to ease the movement between inner and outer reality so as to create more usable space between the two in which to work. The 'mother's' simple accord about basic values and assumptions extends the area in which inner and outer reality overlap and, by sharing the space, protects it from threat from without." Andy Warhol's creative practice shows an easy movement between outer and inner reality, facts and fancies. For him, everyday life was worthy of artistic and cinematic attention. Minor objects were imbued with artistic power, as he painted soup cans, flowers, and the head of a cow in series that mimic the visual repetition of the iconostasis and the aural iteration of prayerful litanies. His films portray the inconsequential actions of ordinary people, who, like the actors in Rusyn weddings and Rusalia rituals, attain theatrical impact. Perry writes that the mother's influence does not need to be direct or intellectual. "She might, for instance, call forth certain qualities that are central to the work . . . or she might embody them." That is, she "speaks the culture," in this case, Carpatho-Rusyn culture, through her own personal story.

While there is little evidence of direct influence from Julia on Warhol's choice of subject, his cow wallpaper shows the kind of nebulous correlation that existed between Julia's life and Andy's art. Ivan Karp, a promoter of Pop art and director of the Castelli Gallery where Warhol's cow wallpaper was first exhibited in 1966, took credit for the idea, recalling his conversation with Andy: "Every painter has to make cows at one time or another, right? It's one of the most important emblems in art making for five hundred years!" [Warhol] said, 'Cows! Oh, Ivan, that's wonderful! Isn't a cow like a mother?' I said, 'Yes, a cow is very much a symbol of a mother in many ways.'¹⁴³ The source photograph for Warhol's cow image was a reproduction of a jersey cow from an agricultural industry magazine found by Andy's colleague, Gerard Malanga. According to Malanga, Warhol disliked the image, but Malanga insisted, "Oh, Andy, this is the shot! It's so maternal!"¹⁴⁴ For Andy, whose familiarity with cows came primarily through his mother's stories, the link must have been especially poignant. Remembering their childhood, John Warhola said, "We didn't have no radio or TV to keep you quiet and in the winter

[mother] would tell us to come in the kitchen and she'd say 'Alright somebody draw a picture of a cow,' . . . and then the one who draws the best picture will get a prize. . . . Andy would always win."¹⁴⁵

Warhol's Pop treatment of the pastoral image is creative and uniquely American. According to Karp, Warhol said he decided to use it as wallpaper, "something super-pastoral, too large, too big, too ridiculous," and David Bourdon comments that the vivid and abrasive color scheme of fluorescent pink against a sulfur-yellow background suggests that "the creature was on some kind of acid trip."¹⁴⁶ However, a European perspective opens the image to interpretation based on a way of seeing the world through Rusyn eyes. The Czech novelist Bohumil Hrabal described his visit to the Andy Warhol Museum of Modern Art in Medzilaborce, Slovakia. "We saw several hundred cows with halters, several hundred cows adorning the walls like wallpaper, and all at once I realized—that before the Campbell's Soup there had to come these cows and their meat."¹⁴⁷

Warhol's images have often been intellectualized and overanalyzed. The cow may be simply a Warholian play on a common pastoral trope. But if the biographer Wayne Koestenbaum can theorize that the cow represents the "bovine aspect" of Warhol's temperament, a parody of his own public persona as "a mute who can't explain himself," Hrabal's hypothesis—that it comes from a Rusyn way of seeing that is antecedent to, and essential for, the appearance of the American Campbell's soup can—is at least as productive.¹⁴⁸ And of course, the link between the cows of Miková meadows and the cow in psychedelic colors is Andy's mother.

The influence subconsciously transmitted from Julia to Andy is even more apparent in his temperament and worldview, a down-to-earth practicality and superstitious mysticism that would not have been out of place in Miková. Warhol's fear of hospitals and distrust of doctors is well known. As John Richardson put it, "Like a medieval alchemist, [he] delved into mysticism and magic, and (true to his Slavic heritage) folk wisdom and folk remedies."¹⁴⁹ Like a Carpatho-Rusyn peasant, he rejected doctors in favor of alternative medicine. He took garlic pills to prevent illness and ate garlic sandwiches, albeit together with Reese's peanut butter cups.¹⁵⁰ In a practice that might have been prescribed by the village sorcerer, he let his dachshunds lie on top of him all night. "I hoped they would pick up [the illness] and take it away from me." Like the Rusyns of Miková who feared the "evil eye" and were ever watchful for the action of unclean spirits, Warhol speculated about the existence of "walk-in" souls, ghosts, and evil spirits. He was interested in Tarot cards and pyramid power. He waved crystals over vodka to render it benign and used gemstones for energy, protection, and in a futile attempt to repel roaches. Just



Figure 1.8. Andy Warhol, *Cow*, 1966. Screenprint on wallpaper 45½" x 29¾".

as Rusyns put themselves into the hands of sorcerers, Andy sought healing through treatment with crystals, consulting what he called a “crystal doctor.”

Julia's presence in Andy's life animated Miková for him on a subconscious level. Without realizing it, he internalized and incorporated attitudes, values, and behaviors that had their source in Carpatho-Rusyn peasant culture, and he went on to reproduce them in a unique American style, both in his art and in his life. Ulia Zavacka's early experiences in Miková laid the foundation for her life in Pittsburgh and New York. Carpatho-Rusyn peasant culture both infused and circumscribed her sense of self and her understanding of the world. But before coming to America, she had to undergo the suffering of loss and war, which scarred her for life. Ulia Zavacka, the young bride with flowing golden hair, who tended cows and danced around Saint John's Eve bonfires in the Old Country, was not the same Julia Warhola who came to the New World.



Red Row in Lyndora, PA. Communal toilets lined by frame houses.