Fall 2012

Review of *Re-Imagining Ukranian Canadians: History, Politics, and Identity* edited by Rhonda L. Hinther and Jim Mochoruk

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Re-Imagining Ukrainian Canadians: History, Politics, and Identity. Edited by Rhonda L. Hinther and Jim Mochoruk. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011. x + 482 pp. Notes, index, $80.00 cloth, $35.00 paper.

Hinther and Mochoruk offer the reader an interdisciplinary look at aspects of Canadian history through the prism of the Ukrainian Canadian experience. The volume includes contributions from an array of specialists: historians, literary critics, archivists, curators, geographers, and others. Consequently, the quality of the articles is wide-ranging, but overall the editors succeed in demonstrating that the immigrant experience is neither homogeneous nor adequately studied.

The editors’ introduction is most helpful, succinctly describing the state of academic inquiry into the Ukrainian Canadian experience. The volume includes contributions from an array of specialists: historians, literary critics, archivists, curators, geographers, and others. Consequently, the quality of the articles is wide-ranging, but overall the editors succeed in demonstrating that the immigrant experience is neither homogeneous nor adequately studied.

The editors’ introduction is most helpful, succinctly describing the state of academic inquiry into the Ukrainian Canadian experience. The editors accurately describe the “mythology” of the prairie peasant-cum-dangerous foreigner. They present the evolution of scholarship from essentializing Ukrainian identity to recognizing its complex nature, noting the invaluable works of Frances Swyripa and Orest Martynowych. The volume’s focus on the Ukrainian Canadian left and the early and mid-twentieth-century shift of community activity to urban centers deepens our understanding of this complexity. Nevertheless, there is a surprising lack of attention to the prairie experience.

By devoting half of the volume to the Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association and later the Association of United Ukrainian Canadian, the authors attempt to address a lacuna in scholarship. However, in spite of the Ukrainian population’s dominance on the Prairies, it receives little attention, with two exceptions. Mochoruk studies a conflict in the Winnipeg community between longtime Ukrainian activists and the Anglo-Celtic leadership of the Communist Party of Canada based in Central Canada, while Andrij Makuch discusses the conflict between the so-called Lobayites (Winnipeg-based) and Central Canadian leadership. Both these essays retrieve important archival sources and demonstrate the degree to which many prairie-based Ukrainians sympathetic to the Communist ideology attempted to maintain their own community autonomy and cultural uniqueness. Further study could look more closely at whether general Western/prairie vs. Central/urban tensions factored into these conflicts.

With a slightly different focus and reflecting the prairie experience more clearly are pieces by Karen Gabert on the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village outside Edmonton, Lindy Ledohowski on the writers Lisa Grekul and Andrew Suknaski, and Jars Balan on Illia Kiriak. Gabert describes the shift of the Canadian prairie’s first “living museum” from presenting the “Ukrainian” experience to telling a story for “all Albertans.” Unfortunately, the author fails to consider how this shift reflected the increasing political identification of Ukrainian community leaders with the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party. Ledohowski thoughtfully examines how descendents of homesteaders have used literature to struggle with questions of identity and home. Finally, Balan offers insight into the life of Illia Kiriak, revealing how his
acclaimed Syny Zemli (Sons of the Soil) is rooted in his personal experience.

This volume attests to the complex character of the Ukrainian community. Its gaps generate questions for further research: What is happening to the Ukrainian community on the Prairies as leadership shifts eastward? What are the family dynamics when members are split between the main community and the left? Finally, how does religion function in the shifting identities of community members?

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