

## SECULAR PLAYS IN CHURCHES: FOLKLORE BASED DRAMA ON THE CANADIAN PRAIRIES

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Від кінця XIX ст. українців завербовували заселятися й займатися сільським господарством у преріях Центральної та Західної Канади. Канадський уряд намагався асимілювати українців, які приїхали, і тому практикував агресивну мовну політику, особливо в системі освіти. Щоб протистояти урядовому натиску англізації, українці за-снували власні інституції: православну церкву та греко-католицьку церкву. Церкви та організації, які були з ними пов'язані, наприклад жіночі ліги, виховували дітей українських піонерів згідно з народними традиціями, навчали їх писанкарству, вишиванню та народним танцям. Церковні зали й народні дома дозволяли світські розваги, наприклад, українськомовні п'єси на фольклорні теми. Вистави, що були популярними у 1950–1960-х роках, відображали надії та переживання українських канадців щодо родичів і друзів, яких вони залишили в Україні. Нині п'єси не ставляться, а багато сільських церков закрито. Віднайдення цих п'єс стало частиною проекту *Sanctuary* — багаторічне зусилля задокументувати українсько-канадську сакральну культуру.

**Ключові слова:** усне мистецтво, міграція та поселення, церкви, мова, драма.

Starting from the late XIXth century, Ukrainians have been recruited to settle and farm the prairies of Central and Western Canada. The Canadian government has tried to assimilate the Ukrainians who come and practiced aggressive language policy, especially in the educational system. To countervail the governmental pressure of anglicization, Ukrainians have established their own institutions: Orthodox and Eastern Rite Catholic churches. The churches and the organizations affiliated with them, such as Women's Leagues, have taught folk traditions including pysanka-writing, embroidery and folk dances. Church halls and national houses are allowed for secular activities, such as folklore-based plays in Ukrainian. The plays, popular in the 1950s–1960s, reflect the hopes and fears of Ukrainian Canadians concerning the relatives and friends they have left in Ukraine. The plays are no longer staged and many of the rural churches are now closed. The revival of these plays has become a part of the *Sanctuary Project*, a multi-year team effort to document Ukrainian-Canadian sacral culture.

**Keywords:** verbal art, migration and settlement, churches, language, drama.

**Introduction.** How do new immigrants adjust to a country especially when they speak a language that is different from the language of the majority? How do they deal with the pressure to assimilate while still preserving a sense of their own identity as a people? These questions are most urgent at this time of massive movements of people. This paper looks at Ukrainian immigrants to Canada and uses the results of the Sanctuary Project to look at the role of the church in negotiating the fine line between integration and assimilation. It examines the entertainment staged in church halls to show how non-religious activities sponsored by the church served the needs of immigrants and contributed to the maintenance of Ukrainian identity. The activities that occurred in church halls were many. There were dance performances by organized local groups. There were social dances, along with church suppers. Singing was a regular occurrence at lunches following church services. While many such activities still continue in those churches that remain

active, one church hall activity has either died out or moved to secular venues such as Ukrainian National Federation halls in cities like my own. That activity is the Ukrainian language play.

In 2016 Norman Harris of Endeavour, Saskatchewan gave me a stack of such plays. The booklets were old and tattered. Many, while printed, had no publication information. Several had the names of the local people who were going to play the various roles written in them in pencil. They were important to Harris and that is why he passed them on to me. This paper will discuss several of those plays to show how they met the needs of immigrants of Harris's generation. It will conclude with some comments on the types of Ukrainian language plays currently staged in secular venues such as the Ukrainian National Federation Hall in Edmonton (il. 2, 4).

Before looking at the plays, I need to examine why the church took on the role of offering secular services in addition to religious ones. For Ukrainian

immigrants, having one's own church meant having an established institution that was specifically theirs. There were many reasons why the church was the institution chosen. The Ukrainians were a very religious people, but the circumstances of life in Canada made the church one of the few institutions that Ukrainians could call their own.

The Ukrainian church in Canada is many churches. The church from which Norman Harris's plays come was an Orthodox one and Orthodox Christianity, along with Eastern rite Catholicism, are the two major denominations serving Ukrainian Canadians. There are also many smaller denominations and some Ukrainians worship with other nationalities, as in MacNutt, Saskatchewan and Boian, Alberta where they join the Romanians. It is not the purpose here to give a survey of Ukrainian spirituality or to trace its history in Canada<sup>1</sup> [7; 8]. Rather, this paper will begin by examining the reasons why the church, regardless of denomination, became the institution that was the centre of Ukrainian life.

***The Sanctuary Project.*** My knowledge of prairie religious life comes from Sanctuary, The Sacral Heritage Documentation Project, or Sanctuary Project for short. This is a multi-year effort run by three faculty from the University of Alberta. John-Paul Himka and Frances Swirypa are from the Department of History and Classics. I am Natalie Kononenko. I hold the Kule Chair in Ukrainian Ethnography and work in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies. Swirypa is responsible for the archival research that locates the sites of our work. She and Himka are also the principal photographers on the project. I conduct interviews with parishioners, asking them about ritual practices such as the celebration of weddings, baptisms, and funerals and also about holidays such as Christmas and Easter. I ask about church life, memories of the past and accounts of current activities. Eva Himka is our project co-ordinator. She arranges our access to the churches we document.

This project began with a conference in 2008 and fieldwork commenced in 2009. We have been documenting Ukrainian sacral culture in the

prairie provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan<sup>2</sup>. A similar effort in Manitoba is run out of that province's university. Our project is nearing completion and, so far, we have amassed over 300,000 photographs and 200 hours of sound. A popular website with excerpts from our work is available at [livingcultures.ualberta.ca/sanctuary](http://livingcultures.ualberta.ca/sanctuary). Research databases are being developed and will be housed in and maintained by the University of Alberta library. The sound file database should be ready soon.

The impetus for the Sanctuary project is keen awareness of the importance of sacral culture in the life of Ukrainian Canadians. The onion domes of Ukrainian churches dot the western provinces of Canada: they are literally an iconic feature of the prairie landscape. Yet the churches are closing at an alarming rate and it was the realization that they need to be documented before they disappear that prompted us to begin our work. Why were churches so important to Ukrainians who immigrated to Canada and why are they disappearing so rapidly now? The answers to the questions are complex and, in the process of looking at the church and the secular services it offered, I will be able to examine only some of them.

***Ukrainian immigrants to Canada.*** Any discussion of immigrant adjustment and the relationship of Ukrainians to their churches must start with a look at the people who built the churches and worshipped in them. Ukrainians came to Canada in waves of immigration. The first immigrants began arriving in 1890. The flow of new arrivals stopped with the First World War and resumed at war's end. The first two waves were economic immigrants who came primarily from Western Ukraine and who undertook the arduous journey across the ocean to create a better life for themselves and their families. Most were farmers who settled across the prairies and built the rural churches that are currently under the most threat of closing. The Second World War also put a stop to immigration. The immigrants who came to Canada after that war were very different from those of the first two waves. They were educated professionals. They came for political, rather than economic,

reasons and they settled primarily in urban areas. During the Soviet Period, there was little immigration to Canada. *Perebudova* (*Perestroika*) allowed a new, though not voluminous, wave of arrivals, primarily educated professionals and skilled workers. They too gravitated toward cities. The most recent, or fifth, wave is the one that has come with the independence of Ukraine. These are primarily economic immigrants, but they are not farmers. The most recent immigrants are skilled labourers who take jobs as pipe fitters, oilfield workers, construction workers, or clerical workers. The last two waves typically join existing urban churches.

This paper will focus on the first two waves of Ukrainian immigrants, often referred to as the *Pioneers*, and their descendants. Norman Harris is one such descendent and it is people of his generation and their parents who used their churches as their touchstone in adapting to Canadian life. They were the ones for whom church plays were an important form of specifically Ukrainian artistic expression and it is they who needed the plays to explore issues of deep concern.

***The church as a Ukrainian institution.*** Why did the Ukrainian *Pioneers* and their children build all of those churches, investing an enormous amount of time, energy, and financial resources into their construction? One factor that propelled the building of churches was that they were a specifically Ukrainian institution that helped counter-balance mainstream institutions, institutions founded prior to the arrival of Ukrainians and ones with an anti-Ukrainian bias. The Canadian government wanted Ukrainians to come to Canada and settle the prairies, cooperating with recruiters like Josef Oleskew to encourage migration, but they were not quite pleased with what they got. As a result, they practiced policies of segregating Ukrainians, producing the bloc settlements found in the Western provinces. They also practiced aggressive assimilation tactics, especially through the school system [4, p. 1–12; 7, p. 61–66].

Early Canadian immigration policy favoured colonization of vacant prairie land combined with assimilation of the new arrivals. According to

John Lehr, the government did its best to meet the perceived needs of Ukrainians, while also catering to prejudice against them. Ukrainians were settled on the periphery of prime agricultural land and they were placed in proximity to one another. The choice of bush country was partially motivated by the government's fear that Ukrainians did not have the financial resources to survive on farming alone and would become a burden on the state. Thus, placing them near wooded areas gave them access to hunting, foraging for mushrooms and berries, and a chance to make money by cutting and selling cordwood. Another reason was the belief that placing Ukrainians in proximity to one another would help them adjust to their new home while also segregating them from other settlers [4, p. 5–6]. Segregation itself had multiple motivations and many Canadians did not view Ukrainians positively, seeing them as animal-like brutes with questionable hygiene, good for tilling the soil and little else. The appellation "men in sheepskin coats", a phrase that became the title of Vera Lysenko's book, captures this bestial quality [6]. Additional and painful discrimination was suffered during the First World War when Ukrainians, because many came from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were interned as enemy aliens and subjected to forced labour.

Ukrainians liked the early settlement policies that put them together with their co-ethnics and Lehr shows that they preferred to live near people to whom they were related, either by birth or by marriage [5, p. 207–219]. Ukrainian desire to live near people like themselves meant that they were also segregated according to religion. The settlers who came in the first two waves were from Galicia and Bukovyna and, while both of these regions were part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, they differed on the basis of religion, with Galicians being Eastern rite Catholic and the Bukovynians being Orthodox. Because there was antipathy between the Galicians and the Bukovynians, the Canadian government soon discovered that putting these two groups together was not productive and, subsequently, settled people with their co-religionists, thus emphasizing the importance of

religion [4, p. 6–8]. The pattern of Catholic/Orthodox segregation did not persist and many places now have both Ukrainian Catholic and Ukrainian Orthodox churches<sup>3</sup>.

Efforts to assimilate Ukrainians into the Canadian mainstream were many and varied, but what came up most often in my interviews was the school system and its attempts to Anglicize young pupils. People I interviewed remember being beaten for speaking Ukrainian. Children's names were forcibly changed. Elsie Kawulich described how her primary school teacher forced her to adopt the first name that she now bears. Lesia, the name given by her parents, the teacher said, was not a real name and needed to be changed. While Elsie did retain the name forced on her by her teacher, she also developed a sense of having been wronged by the system and this was compounded by her discovering that the police were using her friendship with the daughter of one of their members to spy on Ukrainian settlers. As she recounted in our interview, when the police would go to a Ukrainian home to investigate crimes, they would take Elsie along so that she could listen to what the people were saying in Ukrainian. They would then interrogate her without telling her the reason for their actions. Her sense that she had been wronged for no reason other than being Ukrainian led to Kawulich's life of activism and the Order of Canada award<sup>4</sup>. Norman Harris also had his name changed, and not by choice: he started life as Nazarii Haras. Some people Anglicized their names willingly for better job prospects. This is why Frank Cedar's father changed his name to Cedar from Woitovych and why the donor who endowed the professorship I now hold went from Petro Kuleba to Peter Kule<sup>5</sup>. Kawulich's case is not the only one of police misuse of authority and Mark Minenko, a retired lawyer, is currently examining police archives to find evidence of such misuse. As he reported at the archival conference, held at the University of Alberta in May 2018, his search has been most successful [9].

***The church as the place for all things Ukrainian.*** With Canadian institutions such as the school system and the police lined up against them,

Ukrainians needed an institution of their own and that institution was the church. The church was not only a Ukrainian religious body, it supported all aspects of Ukrainian culture. As already noted, in church halls, members of the congregation could attend Ukrainian language plays and sing Ukrainian folk songs. These were such favourites that Joe Galichowski compiled a hand-written book of songs in memory of a son killed in a traffic accident and would pass out copies of it to those in attendance at church lunches<sup>6</sup>. The church's deep commitment to being a Ukrainian institution can be seen in icons where Christ the Saviour, Mary Mother of God, and other religious figures wear Ukrainian embroidery. Such icons can be found in Bellis, Alberta and in the Holy Ascension church in New Kiew, among other locations<sup>7</sup>. Women's leagues affiliated with churches formed and were responsible for cultural programs, language instruction, and the education of the young in Ukrainian arts and crafts. The Catholic women's league has recently published a large book cataloguing their activities. It details the founding of branches in cities, followed by expansion to a progressively greater number of communities. The book lists the activities of the various branches and gives tables enumerating classes in pysanka-writing, embroidery, pottery, and dance<sup>8</sup> [11, p. 159–160]. Women's leagues ran museums. In Edmonton there is a Catholic museum at St. Josaphat's and an Orthodox museum at St. John's. Both museums display traditional embroidered clothing, pysanky, ritual breads (the korovai), and other cultural objects. The women's leagues were and are so diligent in collecting folk material culture that the museum at the central Catholic eparchy in Winnipeg has stopped accepting folk materials for reasons of space, limiting its collection to religious objects only.

Where communities were too small to organize a women's league to provide cultural services and instruction in traditional crafts, the gap was filled by the Sister Servants of Mary Immaculate. Every summer the Sister Servants headed out to remote communities. They would spend two weeks in each location, teaching the catechism and also showing

children how to write pysanky, embroider, and cook. They would sing songs and they played baseball with the children and taught Ukrainian dance wearing their full-length habits<sup>9</sup>. Many times when I asked a talented pysanka artist or embroiderer how she or he learned the craft, the answer was: the Sister Servants.

It is my supposition that the women's church leagues, along with the Sister Servants, filled a gap created by the demographics of early Ukraine immigration. I call it the baba hypothesis. During the first two waves of immigration, families typically arrived without grandparents; it was too expensive to bring the elderly and they were often too feeble to make the journey. As a result, there was no baba to mind the children and to teach them traditional arts and crafts. Furthermore, even if the mother of the family was skilled in traditional activities, she had no time to pass these on to her children. I cannot describe the harshness of early prairie life in the small space that I have here and I refer readers to Martynowych [7; 8], Fodchuk [2], and Czumar [1], among others. The demands of clearing land and feeding a family were overwhelming. To help the family survive, men often had to leave the farm and take railroad or other paid employment. Family members who stayed behind were stretched to the limits of their abilities. Michael Mucz, writing about folk medicine, goes so far as to claim that mothers administered narcotics derived from poppies or hemp to their babies to make them sleep because that was the only way they could handle needed work [10, p. 102–106]. Teaching arts and crafts was out of the question. This gap in instruction was filled by the church. Be it the women's leagues and their classes, or the Sister Servants and their entertainment to supplement religious instruction, it was the church and its affiliates that kept alive the material, oral, and ritual culture that we associate with being Ukrainian, passing it on to future generations. Essentially, the church took over the transmission of folklore.

*Plays staged at All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Endeavor, Saskatchewan.* The plots in the playbooks that Norman Harris gave to me are quite varied. Some are humorous

and some are sad. Almost all are based on folklore themes familiar to me from other sources. *Zhinka Horoiu (The Wife on Top/Wife Triumphant)* is a humorous treatment of a theme frequently found in folktales. In this story, the husband comes home from working in the fields to see his wife sitting and resting. He decides that she has it easy while he does all of the hard work to support the family. He complains quite bitterly and the wife says, fine, let us trade places; I will do all of the work outside the home and you can take care of the household in my place. The trade proves disastrous for the husband. He tries baking bread and makes a mess. While he is struggling with the baking, farm animals go unfed and a beggar comes by only to end up stealing some of the livestock. The wife does fine with the work out in the farm fields. When she comes home at the end of the day, the husband's problems are revealed and the pair decide that the old way of doing things is the best. The husband acknowledges the tremendous contribution that his wife makes and the pair goes back to life as before. They even manage to recover a few of the stolen piglets.

While the play is a comedy, it does touch on topics of deep concern. As noted in the discussion of the church taking over the teaching of arts and crafts, the burden on women, especially in the absence of grandmothers to mind the children and share some of the work, was enormous. It is significant that the play presents a family that consists of just a husband and a wife; there are no grandparents or children to help out: the play is about women's work and men's work and that alone. Furthermore, as told to me privately by several older female respondents, men, overwhelmed by their own burdens, would sometimes take out their frustrations on their wives. My respondents said they suspected this because, when they went to church as children, they would see mature, married women with black eyes and bruises. The play focuses on the incompetence of the husband in doing his wife's work and serves to justify women's contribution. It might even have allowed women a chance to laugh at men and thus get some slight feeling of revenge for the abuse they had endured.

The play *Zhinka Horoiu* (*The Wife on Top / The Wife Triumphant*) is not set in any specific location but, in addition talking about problems facing parishioners living on the prairies, it might also have dealt with imagined problems back in Ukraine. All of the other plays discussed below are set in Ukraine. The first one treats a Ukrainian issue that impacted Ukrainian Canadians. The other two deal with relations between people living in Ukraine and their relatives who left for the West in search of work. They explore hopes and fears in a powerful way.

*Hapka Bushovnychka* (*Hapka, the Revolutionary*) has an actual publication date and place. It was printed in Lviv during the period when this city was outside Soviet domination and it has a decidedly anti-Soviet theme. It most surely must have been staged in Endeavour because the names of the actors playing the various roles are written in pencil inside the front cover, next to the characters of the play. This play offers political commentary that must have appealed to Ukrainian Canadians. It takes place in Ukraine and features a wealthy couple, a doctor and his wife, who live comfortably and employ Hapka as their servant. The play begins with a scene of domestic tranquility. Soon that tranquility is disrupted as news spreads of approaching Soviet troops. First a lawyer friend of the couple drops by to wish the doctor a happy birthday and informs the couple of some of the new laws that the Soviets are seeking to impose. Next Buchak, a childhood friend of Volodko, the doctor, runs in and begs for help. He is wearing the uniform of the Ukrainian Resistance Army and fears for his life. He begs the doctor and his wife to give him civilian clothing so that he will not be killed by the Soviets. The couple obliges, refusing to accept the money that Buchak offers them for their help. They take the fleeing soldier's uniform and tell Hapka, the servant, to hide it. The Soviet army does arrive and Hapka takes a fancy to one of the young soldiers. Almost immediately she becomes an ardent supporter of the Soviet cause. She starts running around with a red flag and posting pictures of Lenin. Furthermore, she declares that she now realizes how she has been

exploited by the couple for whom she works and starts demanding equal rights in the household. Her idea of equal rights turns out not to be equal at all and she mistreats her former employers mercilessly. She takes over the couple's bedroom and sends them to the servant's quarters. She sleeps until noon. She demands her former mistress's clothes for trysts with her Soviet boyfriend. In short, she is generally abusive. She manages to get away with this because she knows that the couple helped the fleeing soldier and she threatens to reveal this fact. At one point Volodko remembers what the lawyer who had come to his house had said, namely that, under Soviet law, a man can divorce his wife with no advanced notice. Furthermore, in such a case, the wife loses all claim to the couple's property. He hatches a plan, but reveals it to no one. The next thing we see is Volodko declaring undying love for Hapka and plans to divorce Oksana, his wife of many years. No one suspects what is going on and the Soviet Commissar summoned to the house writes out the divorce papers and the marriage papers that will unite Volodko with Hapka. Hapka is thrilled by this turn of events and gladly leaves her Soviet boyfriend for her former employer. Of course Volodko proves to have calculated correctly. Sasha, Hapka's Soviet boyfriend shows up at the house drunk and demands to see his girlfriend. At this point Volodko says that he will not tolerate infidelity and calls in the Commissar to file divorce papers freeing him from Hapka. Divorce, of course, means that Hapka will now be thrown out on the street and left destitute. Hapka realizes that the Soviet system which she had so ardently championed can punish her worse than she could have imagined. Volodko's marriage to Hapka is annulled, but he does not throw her out. He and Oksana agree to let Hapka stay on as their servant; they even reinstate her former salary. The play ends with the situation returning back to what we saw at the beginning of the play: Volodko and Oksana are again a loving couple and Hapka is again their contented servant.

Such a critique of the Soviet system was surely appealing to Ukrainian Canadians. It validated the style of life that they had known in Ukraine and

then continued in their new Canadian homeland. Furthermore, it allowed them to express their hatred of the Soviet system, one that increasingly impacted their lives. Soviet rule separated Ukrainians in Canada from their friends and relatives back in Ukraine in painful ways. During the early years of migration to Canada, return to Ukraine was possible. In fact, men would travel to earn money and then return to their families, a situation that is the subject of a play that will be discussed below. Under Soviet rule, travel between Canada and Ukraine became increasingly difficult and then virtually impossible. Furthermore, even contact through letters became problematic, as Khanenko-Friesen has shown [3, p. 99–125]. While letters did go back and forth, they had to be written in cryptic language so as not to endanger those living under Soviet rule. In such a situation, portraying the Soviet system as ridiculous and non-functional, as in the *Hapka Bushovnychka* play, allowed some hope that this system would collapse and permit return to old ways, just as *Hapka's* household returns to its pre-Revolutionary state.

The most tattered play script that I have is a booklet called *Svekrukha Evdokah* (*Evdokha, the Mother-in-law*). It too has the names of parishioners written in pencil next to the roles they were to play. Like the comedy about a husband and wife exchanging roles, it too is based on a well-known folklore theme, this one most commonly found in ballads. The play begins with a scene in which we see the mother-in-law of the title, her husband, and their daughter-in-law. Economic necessity has forced the young man of the family to seek work outside the farm. In this particular play, he travels to North America. Whether his destination is Canada or the United States is not clear. His young wife and their child are left behind and live with the young man's parents. Just as in folk ballads, *Evdokha* dislikes *Ksenia*, her daughter-in-law, intensely and, just as in folk ballads, the absence of her son gives her the opportunity to torture and torment the poor young woman. She does her best to overwork the young woman and she is verbally abusive, accusing her of not working hard enough and being a drain on the family's meager resources.

*Yakiv*, *Evdokha's* husband and *Ksenia's* father-in-law tries to stand up to his wife and defend *Ksenia*, but he is no match for *Evdokha's* rage. *Evdokha* goes down to the village well and runs into a friend of hers. The two complain about the poverty that is their lot and the friend warns *Evdokha* that what she is doing to *Ksenia* is sin for which she will have to pay. Another friend, after a similar discussion about poverty, suggests that *Evdokha* send *Ksenia* away to work on someone else's farm and earn money. *Evdokha* seizes on this idea and tells *Ksenia* to go in search of work. When *Ksenia* is unsuccessful in finding employment, *Evdokha* starts withholding food.

To underscore *Evdokha's* evil nature, there is a secondary plot in which *Evdokha* tries to marry her own daughter, *Olena*, to the village head, mistakenly thinking that he is wealthy and that such a union will improve the family's finances. The village head is a most unattractive man, both physically and morally, and *Olena* vehemently objects, but to no avail. *Olena* and *Ksenia* commiserate and *Ksenia* grows progressively weaker and dies. *Ivan*, *Ksenia's* husband and *Evdokha's* son, returns home to find his family in ruins. He does manage to save his sister from the unwanted marriage, but he is too late to save his wife. He refuses to move back in with his birth family, takes his daughter, and sets up a household of his own. *Evdokha*, who had started feeling uneasy even earlier in the play, begins to sicken and it becomes apparent that she will soon die. She decides to beg her son's forgiveness and he does forgive his mother. Still, the ending is not a happy one for *Ivan* is left without his beloved wife and *Maryna*, his daughter, is left without a mother.

As can be seen from the length of this summary, the play made a powerful impression on me and it must have been a favourite in Endeavour. Considering the condition of the booklet, it must have been staged many times. It allowed for a good cry, something that is often needed as much as a good laugh. It likely also expressed the concern of Ukrainian Canadians for families left behind, people with whom contact became increasingly difficult under Soviet rule, an issue already mentioned in conjunction with the play about

Нарка, the “revolutionary” servant girl. I believe that the play also allowed expression of a sense of guilt for leaving family and friends to suffer under the Soviets while being able to enjoy the freedom and prosperity of Canadian life.

There is a comedy of errors about a poor man living in Ukraine and his uncle who prospers in the West. This comedy likely served to balance the heavy subject matter of Svekrukha Evdokha because it too deals with the relationship between the people who stay behind and their relatives who go abroad to work. In this play, Zenon, the Ukrainian, is a man who is highly educated and likes to write poetry, but is not good at any other work. He rents a room in the home of a kindly widow. He has an uncle on the other side of the ocean who keeps sending him money and, to keep the cash flowing, the young man uses his literary talents to make up stories about his life. He claims to get married and a nice cash gift arrives. He claims that children are born and gets more money. All of a sudden, he gets a letter informing him that the uncle is coming for a visit. Panic ensues because, of course, neither the wife nor the children exist. Zenon begs Ol’ha, his landlady, to pretend that she is his wife and she reluctantly agrees. Of course there is the problem of the children that Zenon had claimed to have sired. Martyn, the uncle, arrives and a series of comic misunderstandings follow. Since Ol’ha and Zenon had not had time to agree of the names of the putative children or on their appearance, they make a series of mistakes that they try their best to explain, only to create greater and greater confusion. Eventually the truth is revealed and the ending is a happy one. Martyn, who has grown quite enamored of Ol’ha, asks her to marry him now that he knows that she is free and Zenon offers thanks for the blessings of the new family he will have as the result of this union.

This play can be read as artistic expression of hoped-for relations between Ukrainian Canadians and their relatives back in Ukraine. The people staging and watching this play in Endeavour likely wished that they could do just as Martyn, the rich uncle, had done and help out those suffering under the Soviet yoke. They wished that they could

travel in person and offer meaningful financial help instead of being limited to coded letters and the meager gifts that they knew would not get their relatives into trouble. The play is light and funny and likely did offer counter-balance to the feelings of guilt expressed by Svekrukha Evdokha.

There are other plays in the packet given to me by Norman Harris. There are also books of poems, anecdotes, and monologues to be recited on the church hall stages. These materials will be examined in another paper. The four plays discussed here were selected based on evidence of staging. Specifically, I chose the ones that were the most tattered and had names of parishioners written next to the roles that they were supposed to play, leaving out just one comedy that did not have parishioner names, but had hand-written changes to the text. I left that play out for reasons of space and also because I considered it redundant: it repeats themes found in the plays discussed above. Taken as a set, the four plays discussed here do treat issues of obvious importance to people like Norman Harris and the generation of his parents. We see problematic family relations and a great deal of concern for relatives left behind. The plays are art and artistic expression offers the most effective way of dealing with complex emotions.

Harris gave me the packet both because it was important to him and because Ukrainian-language plays are no longer staged. Why did the plays die out? Language loss is an important factor. While people like Norman Harris and Elsie Kawulych speak Ukrainian, they also have a fluent and unaccented command of English. Their children and grandchildren do not need to know Ukrainian to be able to speak to them. Equally, if not more important is the closing of Ukrainian churches mentioned in conjunction with the description of the Sanctuary Project. All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Harris’s home parish, like many other prairie churches, no longer exists and Harris travels to the Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Sturgis when he is able.

***The closing of rural prairie churches: demographic change.*** If churches were so important to the lives of rural Ukrainian Canadians, if they



provided important secular as well as religious services, if they served as centres around which a whole range of community and social activities took place, why are they closing at such a rapid rate? Many reasons are purely practical. The rural areas where the Ukrainian pioneers settled have experienced enormous demographic shifts. Mechanization has allowed individuals to farm progressively larger tracks of land – and farmers have responded by buying out their neighbors. Chris Zorniak of Innisfree, Alberta explained how he could program his equipment to do much of the work of plowing and reaping, allowing him to till more land. In Samburg, Saskatchewan Ron Adamko, 78 years old at the time of the interview, said that, because of the equipment he owned, he was able to run a huge farm single-handedly, with his son coming in only on weekends<sup>10</sup>. As the children of pioneers moved to urban centres and took non-farming jobs, the population of rural areas decreased.

The progressively greater availability of the automobile also had an impact. At one point, small towns could be found at regular intervals. In them were shops where farmers could buy needed equipment and replacement parts. Towns sold sugar and other foodstuffs that could not be produced on a prairie farm. Towns typically had a restaurant where visitors could purchase a meal while waiting for their equipment to be repaired<sup>11</sup>. With the progressively greater availability of cars and trucks, towns and their services lost their relevance. I have many pictures of small-town main streets with boarded-up shop after boarded-up shop. Wroxton, Saskatchewan offers a particularly striking example. This was the location of a large John Deere dealership. The family who owned the dealership was Ukrainian and wealthy and put their money into the construction of the St. Elias Orthodox church, a particularly large and striking edifice. Increased ease of travel meant that having a John Deere dealership in little Wroxton made no sense and the family moved their business to Yorkton, a nearby city<sup>12</sup>. St. Elias closed and, at the time of our visit in 2015, was up for sale, with already visible damage to the structure. My interviews indicate that membership in rural churches peaked around 1950–1960, just around the time when the

Endeavour plays were being staged, and began declining approximately 20 years later. Now many rural congregations consist of ten people or less and parish members find insurance, heating, repair, and other maintenance costs, not to mention eparchy fees, to be more than they can manage: they simply cannot maintain their church (il. 1).

Intermarriage with non-Ukrainians is an important cause for the dwindling of church membership. While it has brought some new members into Ukrainian churches, it has also prompted people to join non-Ukrainian and exclusively English-speaking congregations. Ukrainians on the prairies are becoming assimilated. Discrimination is gone and many Ukrainians hold positions of power and prestige. Parks and other civic locales are named in their honour, Hawrelak Park in Edmonton being one example. Institutions like the school system that once punished students for speaking Ukrainian on school grounds and forced Elsie and Norman to change their names now run Ukrainian bi-lingual programs. Bi-lingual schools exist in Edmonton and other prairie cities and even smaller municipalities such as Vegreville have bi-lingual schools. There is no longer the feeling that the church needs to be the centre of all things Ukrainian.

#### *The Ukrainian language plays today.*

Ukrainian language plays are still staged, but not in churches. Civic organizations, located primarily in cities and serving fourth and fifth wave immigrants, do stage plays, but they are very different from the ones given to me by Norman Harris. They are comedies. I have neither seen nor read a play with a tragic theme such as that found in *Svekrukha Evdokha*. And they deal with the concerns of the new immigrants, not the concerns of Norman Harris's and his parents' generations. A good example is a play called *Ostannii Shans (Last Chance)* which was staged as part of the *Malanka (Old Style calendar New Year)* celebration at the Ukrainian National Federation Hall in here in Edmonton in 2014. This play was written by Yanina Vykhovska and the action takes place in a Ukrainian Canadian match-making agency. Much of the humour revolves around the fact that, because

of its name, many people mistake this agency for a funeral parlor and are shocked by the discussions that they have with the staff. The many comedic interludes are interlaced with an attempt at real matchmaking. Friends advise Snizhana, an older single woman, to turn to *Ostannii Shans* for help. The parents of Marko, a highly educated young man, also turn to this agency. It seems that, as the result of his love for his subject matter, Marko is constantly investigating various parasites instead of showing any interest in the opposite sex and the parents want to remedy this situation. Of course there is much word play involving Marko's parasite fascination. In the end, Marko and Snizhana are successfully introduced to each other and the play ends with them kissing.

It is easy to connect this play to the concerns of new immigrants. Many do arrive in Edmonton to seek degrees from the University of Alberta. Education is very important to them. They see it as a path to immigration to Canada and getting a good and highly specialized education helps both with requests for permanent residency and with success on the Canadian job market. Marriage is considered extremely important in Ukraine and the young people whom I know through my work at the University of Alberta and through the Ukrainian National Federation continue to hold this view. For some, marriage to a person with Canadian citizenship, like obtaining a good education, becomes the path to permanent residency.

**Conclusion.** The plays that are staged and enjoyed by a particular group reflect the interests and concerns of that group. As artistic expression, they allow for a nuanced and complex expression of issues important to the audience. The plays staged at the Ukrainian National Federation Hall speak to new immigrants and I hope to examine more of them in the future, looking to find recurrent themes, just as I have done with the plays staged in All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Endeavour, Saskatchewan. It will be interesting to identify those themes.

Right now my goal is to capture a sense of artistic life on the prairies in the 1950s and 1960s. Before the booklets in my possession deteriorate to dust, before more churches are closed and their church halls are lost along with them, I want to give a sense of what happened on stages belonging to rural churches. Many such stages still have backdrops picturing scenes of rural life in Ukraine. Some have an interesting mix of an imagined Ukraine combined with what seems to be a Canadian landscape. The backdrops too, would be worthy of study. I mention them here because the great number of them indicates the importance of plays such as those provided by Norman Harris. It is also indicative that the backdrops, like the plays, tie the audience back to the homeland that they or their parents left behind. Most of them were never able to visit and see the Ukraine pictured on the backdrops. But they were able to artistically explore their connections to that homeland through their plays (il. 3).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Fieldwork in MacNutt, Saskatchewan, June 16, 2105; fieldwork in Boian, Alberta, June 11, 2018. See especially Orest Martynovych, *Ukrainians in Canada*, Vols. 1 and 2.

<sup>2</sup> Funding for my work comes for the Kule Chair Endowment and KIAS, the Kule Institute for Advanced Studies, Cluster Grant program.

<sup>3</sup> In most communities that we visit, both Catholic and Orthodox churches can be found. In Innisfree, Alberta, for example, the two churches are on the same street, several blocks apart, and in Bruderheim, Alberta, they were kitty-corner from each other. This holds true in most communities although the churches of the two denominations are often somewhat further apart.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Elsie Kawulych, Vegreville, Alberta, March 20, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Norman Harris, Endeavour, Saskatchewan, June 21, 2013; interview with Doris Kule (nee Radesh) August 21, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Interview in the Galichowski home, June 21, 2014. Khram at the Luzan-Toporiwtsi Ukrainian Orthodox church in August 2014 and 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Bellis, Alberta All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church and New Kiew Holy Ascension Ukrainian Catholic Church documented June 6, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> *UCWLC: Builders of Home, Faith and Community*. Example of instructional activities: pp. 159–160. This book also lists museum-related activities, both exhibits and donations.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, interview with Andrew Chupik, Danbury, Saskatchewan, June 21, 2013. The Sister Servants would stay at the Chupik home. Elsie Kawulych and others also credit the Sister Servants.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Chris Zorniak at St. Josaphat's, Ukrainian Catholic Church, Innesfree, Alberta, June 28, 2014 and interview with Ron Adamko at

the St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church, Samburg, Saskatchewan, June 17, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Doris Kule, interviewed August 21, 2007, described what was bought on shopping trips to Willingdon, Alberta.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Gerald Yaholnitsky, St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Wroxton, Saskatchewan, June 20, 2015.

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Galichowski Joseph and Sonja, Luzan-Toporiwtsi St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Church, June 21, 2014 and Khram services in 2014 and 2017.

Harris Norman, All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Endeavour, Saskatchewan, June 21, 2013.

Kawulych Elsie, Vegreville, Alberta, March 20, 2014.

Kule Doris, Edmonton, Alberta, August 21, 2007.

Soprovich Willis, St. Mary's Romanian Orthodox Church, Boian, Alberta, June 11, 2018.

Студії соціокультурного життя українських громад



1

1. The abandoned church in Wroxtton. Saskatchewan



2

2. The author with Normal Harris and another member of the All Saints Church



3

3. The stage set in Musidora. Alberta. Showing an imagined Ukrainian village combined with a view of the Canadian Rockies



4

4. The All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Endeavour. Saskatchewan

Yaholnitsky Gerald, St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Wroxton, Saskatchewan, June 20, 2015.

Zorniak Chris, St. Josaphat's, Ukrainian Catholic Church, Innesfree, Alberta, June 28, 2014.

### Резюме

У статті йдеться про пристосування українських іммігрантів до життя в Канаді, куди вони виїхали ще до Другої світової війни. Їх називають або піонерами, або іммігрантами перших двох хвиль. Зокрема, у статті особливу увагу зосереджено на дітях і онуках іммігрантів. Авторка намагається дати відповіді на низку питань: як переселенцям вдавалося адаптуватися до умов в іншій країні та водночас зберегти свою ідентичність, чому церква була такою важливою для іммігрантів. Канада в ті часи практикувала щодо іммігрантів жорстку політику асиміляції (навіть у школах дітей карали за те, що вони розмовляли українською мовою).

Церква взяла на себе відповідальність не лише щодо релігійних обрядів, але й щодо підтримки національної культури. Так, монашки навчали охочих писанкарству, гралися з дітьми; там співали пісень, танцювали, ставили п'єси, вишивали тощо — усе це було українським. Церква давала можливість бути українцем; вона захищала іммігрантів від асиміляційних тенденцій з боку держави; була місцем, де людям надавалася свобода творчості і свобода спілкування рідною мовою.

У статті йдеться про україномовні п'єси на народну тематику, які ставилися в холах при церквах, зокрема, при православної церкві Усіх Святих в Ендевері (Саскачеван). Найпопулярнішими серед них — «Жінка горою», «Гапка Бушовничка», «Свекруха Євдоха», «Вуйко з Америки». Ці п'єси були збережені лише в окремих примірниках. Їх віднайдено завдяки проекту «The Sanctuary Project», головною метою якого є збереження української сакральної культури Канади у звукозаписах і фотографіях. Цей проект проводиться групою професорів з Університету Альберти, і важливий він тому, що канадські церкви впродовж останніх 20 років закриваються або знищуються, а священні обрядові речі, які їх наповнюють, розпорошуються і, зрештою, зникають.

Розглядувані п'єси відображають мрії, страхи та прагнення іммігрантів щодо їхніх близьких, родичів і друзів, які залишилися в Україні. Зокрема, однією із центральних ідей виступає бажання іммігрантів, щоб Радянського Союзу не було і все повернулося на свої місця. Так, у п'єсі «Жінка горою», чоловік і жінка міняються ролями (він виконує жіночу роботу по дому, а вона — чоловічу в полі), а потім повертаються до того, як було раніше. Головна героїня п'єси «Гапка Бушовничка» спочатку радіє радянській владі, а потім проситься бути прислугою, як було раніше. У п'єсі «Вуйко з Америки» головний герой допомагає своїм родичам в Україні, а згодом і сам повертається туди. Ця п'єса передає бажання українців Канади приїздити до України й допомагати своїм родичам, так, як вони могли це робити в дорадянські часи. «Свекруха Євдоха» репрезентує уособлений образ того, чого боялися іммігранти, наприклад, чоловіки переймалися тим, що буде з їхніми дружинами, дітьми після того, як вони від'їдуть на Захід на заробітки.

П'єси, які ставилися в 50–60-х роках ХХ ст. українською мовою, зараз уже не ставляться, оскільки мало хто знає українську мову в Канадських преріях. Окрім того, значна частина людей переселяється до великих міст, а церкви, у яких раніше ставилися п'єси, зникають. У наш час україномовні п'єси ставляться лише у великих містах і лише сучасними іммігрантами. Зокрема, п'єса «Останній шанс» Яніни Виговської, яка була поставлена в Едмонтоні, відображає проблематику нових іммігрантів — одружитися та отримати вищу освіту.

Отже, розглядувані в статті україномовні п'єси відображали проблематику суспільства, у якому їх ставили, зокрема адаптацію іммігрантів до проживання в іншій країні, а культурне життя при церквах було одним із способів збереження ідентичності переселенців.

**Ключові слова:** усне мистецтво, міграція та поселення, церква, мова, драма.