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Товариство Об'єднаних



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49th AUUC National Convention Pre-Convention Discussion Bulletin Number 2 June 26, 2025

In this issue: Reinigorating Kobzar Publishing *Submitted by Alex S. Boykowich, Edmonton*

Our Association has a long, impressive, proud (I hope), and (I dare say) glorious history of both cultural and ideological work. By *cultural* work I mean especially the performing arts, particularly in the forms in which they are still practiced in our Association—dance, orchestral music, and choral music. By *ideological* work I mean literary work (in Ukrainian and in English), the written word, in the form of newspapers, magazines, and books. (I do not wish to overlook other aspects of our work, historical or current, such as drama/theater, which straddles the border as it were between the performing arts and literature, or textiles/embroidery, or food/cuisine. But I exclude them here for the sake of argument.) Mathew Shatulsky is a perfect example (of which our Association has many) of the combination and integration of cultural and ideological work embodied in a single individual. This comes across clearly in Tony Mokry's four-page history of our Association in Edmonton ("How It Began In Alberta", written in 2002):

In 1916 the first Shevchenko concert in Canada was held at the Dreamland theatre, 97th street and Jasper avenue, under the conductorship of Mathew Shatulsky.[...]

Mathew Shatulsky was working at Brule coal mine during the winter and on the CNR section in the summer. He used to come to Cardiff on a handcar to be with friends, the Mokrys, Steve and Tekla Chaban and the other countrymen. Here, in the house, Mathew Shatulsky used to hold sing songs and discuss progressive matters. A Drama Group was formed.[...]

A new paper was formed, "The Ukrainian Labor News" and Mathew Shatulsky was taken from the west in 1920 to Winnipeg to head the press.

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While we have managed to maintain our cultural (performing arts) work, we have neglected, failed to maintain, our ideological (literary) work. (The illness and death of Wilfred Szczesny, editor of the *Ukrainian Canadian Herald* newspaper, and previously of *The Ukrainian Canadian* magazine, was a severe loss for us especially in this regard.) This imbalance is somewhat understandable. In Canada, where the Ukrainian community is a relatively small minority compared to the dominant English and French nations, the Ukrainian performing arts have a broader appeal than Ukrainian literature (including in translation). And really, it is primarily if not exclusively Ukrainian dance that has this broader appeal, not the other Ukrainian performing arts. (And Ukrainian cuisine has the broadest appeal of all!) If the average Canadian, the Canadian public-at-large, is asked what they associate Ukrainians with, what constitutes Ukrainian identity in Canada, they will undoubtedly answer by referring to Ukrainian food or Ukrainian dance, and perhaps also to the *vyshyvanka*, but very likely to nothing else (not even to Ukrainian music, which is quite an essential partner to Ukrainian dance!). (Unfortunately, they may also refer to Ukrainian collaboration with nazi Germany.) Many Canadians know what a pyrogy is. But how many know who Shevchenko is? In Alberta, we have several large monuments to Ukrainian food: a giant pyrogy in Glendon, and a giant kubasa in Mundare. What about monuments to Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, and Lesya Ukrainka? (In our Ukrainian Center in Edmonton, we have a monument to Mathew Shatulsky. Other Ukrainian organizations have monuments to such figures as the nazi collaborator, mass murderer, and fascist terrorist Roman Shukhevych.) These are the two sides of assimilation in Canada: on the one hand, Ukrainians are accepted as Ukrainians into multicultural Canadian society in such forms as Ukrainian food and Ukrainian dance; on the other hand, they are rather limited to these forms and otherwise ignored (at best) and assimilated. Ukrainian identity in Canada is reduced to food and dance, and thereby made available, served on a platter or a stage, to all Canadians.

This is problematic for our Association, its identity, its special, particular existence. If we concentrate too much on these broadest aspects of Ukrainian identity, then there is nothing to distinguish us as an organization, and we may as well cease to exist as an organization, as we have ceased to exist ideologically, with our own, special identity. A pyrogy is a pyrogy is a pyrogy, judged (to be sure) by its particular qualities, its taste, its filling, and of course its price. But good pyrogies can be made by bad people (fascists, for example). The same thing might be said about dance, or music, or even literature. But writing, especially non-fiction writing, provides a much clearer, more developed, more comprehensive expression of one's character than those other forms of expression. To take an extreme and therefore clear example, consider Hitler. I know that he is bad, evil, a nazi-fascist, not because of the paintings he painted, or the music he enjoyed, but because of what he wrote (and what he said, transmitted to us in writing, and what he did, which was a putting into practice of what he wrote, and which is also transmitted to us in writing, in history books). The character, the identity of an individual (at

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least one of historical significance), and of an organization, is determined above all *in writing*, most definitely above other forms of expression like music or dance. In the case of our Association, the highest and clearest example of this is of course our written Constitution. Pyrogies have no noticeable ideological content, no ideological filling—just potatoes or cottage cheese (my favorite!) or cheddar cheese, whatever the case may be. And that is precisely why such things are the most popular, the most promoted and most accepted, aspects of Ukrainian identity in Canada. Ukrainian dance is of course at a higher level than Ukrainian food/cuisine, as are the other performing arts. But what is at the *highest* level is that which consists of *ideas appealing to reason*, in the form of the written word, which is above that which appeals more to the senses evoking emotions, *i.e.* the performing arts. By neglecting this higher-level work, we have put ourselves at risk of merging completely into the broader Ukrainian-Canadian community, led ideologically by “nationalist” and religious organizations, and into the broader, official, “respectable” Canadian society, led by the Canadian government and state. (I do not say that we must relentlessly oppose these forces. But we definitely must avoid and resist being charmed, seduced, dominated, absorbed, and therefore *destroyed* by them—chewed up, swallowed, and digested by them, like a pyrogy.)

Fortunately, we have at least three ready-made institutions or tools (nicely paralleling our three performing arts components) which we can use to (re)assert ourselves ideologically, to (re)assert our special identity and to distinguish ourselves from others, namely: the *Ukrainian Canadian Herald*, the CSULR (Canadian Society for Ukrainian Labour Research), and Kobzar Publishing. In this contribution to our pre-Convention discussion, I would like to focus on the last (but not least) of these, Kobzar Publishing. Although we have neglected these three arms of our literary-ideological work over the past several years, allowing them to atrophy, we have recently taken some steps to correct this in the two cases of the *Ukrainian Canadian Herald* and Kobzar Publishing. The current, outgoing National Executive Committee and National Committee took the important first step of reestablishing and reconstituting the board of directors of Kobzar Publishing. Now we must go further. I submit that Kobzar Publishing should commence publishing books once again. We already have several important, outstanding publications, books which are especially important in telling our own history to ourselves, and to the broader Canadian society, and to the world. (A separate, though related issue is: how well have we educated ourselves about our own history, using these books? How many of us, how many of our members, have read them? We must do a better job of educating our members about our Association, educating ourselves about ourselves. Perhaps this is a special job for the CSULR?) We already have material at hand that could be published in book form. I can immediately think of two kinds of such material: 1. previous publications of ours in Ukrainian, not yet translated into English, and 2. unpublished memoirs of our members, especially prominent, leading

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members. Our recent publication of Myron Shatulsky's memoir is a perfect example of the latter. For the former, I can immediately think of two or three good examples. We published an 88-page booklet in 1934, in Ukrainian, written by Ostap Synytsya, titled *The First Farmers' Strike in Canada*, an event which took place in Myrnam, Alberta, that same year. We have two or three copies of it in our library in Edmonton. That event is, I think, significant for our history, and for Ukrainian-Canadian history, western Canadian history, Canadian agricultural history, and Canadian labor history, though it is quite unknown. We also have several untranslated works, all of them quite short, written by Myroslav Irchan, who worked for our Association as a writer and editor, and who of course is the subject of a book written by Peter Krawchuk and published by Kobzar Publishing, *The Unforgettable Myroslav Irchan*. As far as I know, there are no English translations of any of his work, except those excerpts included in this book by Krawchuk (and translated by Mary Skrypnyk). Other items that could (and should) be translated include *Sower of the Word of Truth*, a collection of writings of Mathew Shatulsky, and *For Your Freedom and Ours*, a collection of primary source writings by and about Ukrainian-Canadian participants in the Spanish Civil War. We have multiple copies of both books, but they are lengthy, and therefore it is probably too great an undertaking for us at this point in time to translate and publish them. In any case, I expect that these publications would be unprofitable ventures, but likewise are our performing arts unprofitable—unprofitable in money terms, but absolutely essential for us if we want to have any claim to our own identity and existence.

I therefore call on our upcoming, 49th AUUC National Convention, to direct our incoming National Committee and National Executive Committee to prioritize the publication of books by Kobzar Publishing, as I have outlined above, at a rate of, at the very least, one in between Conventions (*i.e.* every three years), but preferably at least one per year.

Submitted by Alex S. Boykowich, Edmonton