

“There is Only One Ukrainian People!” Ukrainian Canadians, symbols of self, and the negotiation of legitimacy in Cold War Canada

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Introduction

Homelands, argues Frances Swyripa, are powerful sources for symbols of identity amongst diaspora communities.¹ Many symbols are nostalgic interpretations of objectified figures or objects that become familiar because of their association with specific groups. The incorporation of symbols by immigrant community's hints at their concern of preserving fragments of the Old World in a foreign and often incongruous environment. Their use also suggests that immigrant groups were deeply occupied with situating themselves within the 'safe' bounds of Canadian society. The symbols incorporated by Ukrainians upon their arrival in Canada reflected these trends. The organized community deliberately picked figures and objects that could be molded into representations of the past that were inoffensive to the dominant – and largely xenophobic – Canadian narrative. For example, things like the Cossack or the embroidered peasant blouse were popular because of their accessibility to both community members and so-called 'outsiders.' They were simple, yet vivid, and signified an “unambiguous national stereotype.”²

Ironically, many symbols began to exist independently of their homeland specificities, romanticizing, mythologizing, and distorting their Old-World past in the process. Indeed, Taras Shevchenko, the most noteworthy of Ukrainian poets, had never lived under Austro-Hungarian rule as most of the emigres had, and had never set foot in Canada. Yet, he became extremely important to manifestations of Ukrainian Canadian identity as he “[lightened] their burdens, gave birth to hope in their hearts for a brighter future, and urged them to struggle for its realization.”³

¹ Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-religious Identity and the Canadian State* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010), 160-165.

² Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes*, 160-165.

³ Peter Krawchuk, *Shevchenko in Canada* (Toronto: The Ukrainian Canadian, 1961), 14.

Moreover, despite his strong patriotism and calls for an independent Ukraine, Shevchenko could be reformatted as politically innocuous.⁴

Perhaps the greatest interest in Shevchenko stemmed from the fact that he belonged to the romantic nineteenth century movement of nation building, participating in nationalist political organizations throughout his life. His works combined competent and moving prose with the political project of unifying often disparate and polylinguistic peoples. Shevchenko's writing was consciously designed to instill nationalist ideas in populations, coalescing criticism of the Russian tsar with deep sympathies for the plight of the peasant and serf. In Canada, Shevchenko as a propagator of Ukrainian identity took on new forms, as he assisted in the articulation and consciousness-building of a distinct Ukrainian diaspora. This was especially relevant in the postwar period, when pronounced factions emerged within the community. The split was largely ideological, separating Ukrainians into distinct assemblages and organizations. The Ukrainian Canadian Committee (UCC) emerged to represent nationalist Ukrainians and the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians (AUUC) spoke on behalf of socialist and communist Ukrainians.⁵

This paper will explore the use and articulation of Shevchenko by various factions within the organized Ukrainian Canadian community during the Cold War. While Shevchenko had long been a popular symbol and catalyzing figure, Cold War tensions coupled with international events resulted in his feverish promotion by both the UCC and the AUUC. I argue that Shevchenko cannot be understood as merely an amorphous poet or cultural symbol, but rather as

⁴ Aya Fujiwara, *Ethnic Elites and Canadian Identity: Japanese, Ukrainians, and Scots, 1919-1971* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012), 68.

⁵ For more on the ideological splits within the Ukrainian community see John Kolasky, *The Shattered Illusion: The History of the Ukrainian Pro-Communist Organizations in Canada* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associations, 1979); Peter Krawchuk, *Our History: The Ukrainian Labour Farmer Movement in Canada, 1907-1991* (Toronto: Lugus Publications, 1996); Lubomyr Luciuk, *Searching for Place: Ukrainian Displaced Persons, Canada, and the Migration of Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). The AUUC replaced the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association (ULFTA) after it was made illegal in 1940.

a political and *politicized* figure. In many ways, the struggle over Shevchenko was a struggle for the legitimate inheritance of the Ukrainian people. As the poet was the most cherished in the language, events devoted to him were excellent avenues of organizational and ideological recruitment, as well as for securing legitimacy as the one, ‘true’ organization representing Ukrainians in Canada. This legitimacy was especially important when it could transcend geopolitics and serve as a form of social armor against a dominant Canadian society who remained intensely resistant to the inclusion of ‘others.’

This paper will also address how changing notions of belonging, citizenship, and Canadian-ness interacted with ideas of whiteness, political utility, and the wider social sphere. The story of the creation of a singular voice for organized Ukrainians in Canada shows how the state did not simply act upon its citizens, but was also acted upon in kind. Tracing the way in which competing political factions battled over Shevchenko reveals the larger issue of how the state actively shaped ethnically articulated organizations to their own domestic and geopolitical ends. Despite the Canadian location of this struggle, it was far from a simple internecine or parochial affair. The postwar jockeying over the legacy and inheritance of the poet was part of the transnational and ideological frameworks that constituted the era. Indeed, diaspora politics are global politics, and the fight over political and cultural legitimacy extends well into the political, ideological, and cultural realm.

Canada’s cultural mosaic and the appropriation of cultural symbols

By the Second World War, Canadian designs of citizenship and identity had shifted away from the wholesale suspicion of immigrants and entrenched xenophobia towards a ‘cultural mosaic’ model that would attempt to incorporate – and even celebrate – distinct immigrant cultures. As Ivana Caccia notes, the war had resulted in national anxieties over the potential

delicacy of Canada's collective identity. Fears of Canada's vitality resulted in heightened desires to reinforce cohesiveness, re-examine the imagined boundaries of nationhood, and accelerate the process of nation building. This would not only include recognizing the French-English duality of Canada, but also its aboriginal and immigrant presence.⁶

The use of symbols by the Ukrainian community was largely influenced by the literature produced by Canadian elites at the time. A significant agent of Canadian citizenship was John Murray Gibbon, who attempted to consolidate white, British-Canadian identity through the assimilation of immigrants into Canadian culture. Gibbon's intervention was essential to the development and popularization of the 'Canadian mosaic.'⁷ Gibbon had previously written about the impact of Ukrainians on Canadian designs in 1923. "These new flowers," he wrote, "will surely add a richness and colour to the present, somewhat monotonous, Canadian literary garden."⁸ In 1938, Gibbon once again commented on the impact of Ukrainians on Canadian culture: "Ukrainians can be described as a race of poets, musicians, and artists" who have "fixed for all time their national history in the songs of the people which no centuries of oppression could silence." As for Shevchenko, he "wrote the songs they love best to sing."⁹ Several other writers echoed Gibbon, further reinforcing the potential of Ukrainians to assimilate. Writing for *Saturday Night*, Charles Roslin noted that in matters of art "the Ukrainian race is richly endowed." Roslin noted that Ukrainians were "passionately fond of music, of the dance, and of drama." He praised Ukrainian organizations for giving their community "good music, folk

⁶ Ivana Caccia, *Managing the Canadian Mosaic in Wartime: Shaping Citizenship Policy, 1939-1945* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 3.

⁷ Antonia Smith, "Cement for the Canadian Mosaic: Performing Canadian Citizenship in the Work of John Murray Gibbon," *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 1:1 (2007).

⁸ John Murray Gibbon, "European Seeds in the Canadian Garden," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* 25:2 (1923): 123, 124.

⁹ John Murray Gibbon, *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1938), 299.

dancing, and homemade vernacular drama.”¹⁰ Watson Kirkconnell similarly wrote that “unheeded by the Anglo-Canadian, [Ukrainians] have tenaciously cultivated their handicrafts, music, ballet, drama, fiction, and poetry.”¹¹

The war had also helped solidify the overt factions amongst Ukrainians, resulting in increased competition over which group would be the single bearer of the organized community. As the nationalists were mainly integrated into the war effort (the government played a significant role in the establishment of the UCC), they were well-equipped to reinvigorate their symbols to support the long-term goal of Ukrainian independence.¹² The UCC also used their advantageous position to advocate against their communist opponents in the AUUC. Early in the war, they appealed to the government to protect people “led astray by agents of Moscow,” restrict communist activity, and ban communist organizations.¹³ State-sanctioned repression of communism led to the illegality of the ULFTA, the seizure of its property, and the internment of its leadership. It is in this context that Shevchenko was politicized, cloaked in the new rhetoric of citizenship and democracy, and transformed into the most significant accolade denoting community legitimacy.

The relatively disadvantaged position of the pro-communist Ukrainians did not stop them from competing over Shevchenko. In fact, their inconsequential status in the eyes of the state may have been responsible for their invigorated efforts to claim Shevchenko as their own. On the 125th anniversary of Shevchenko’s birth, AUUC leader Matthew Shatulsky honored the poet:

¹⁰ Quoted in “Canada’s Bolshevist Drama – Miroslav Irchan: Playwright and Prophet of a Proletariat Revolution,” in John Kolasky, ed., *Prophets and Proletarians: Documents on the History of the Rise and Decline and Ukrainian Communism in Canada* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1990), 72.

¹¹ Watson Kirkconnell, *Canadian Overtones: An Anthology of Canadian Poetry* (Winnipeg: The Columbia Press, 1935), 76.

¹² For more on the formation of the UCC see Bohdan Kordan, *Canada and the Ukrainian Question, 1939-1945* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), Lubomyr Luciuk, *Searching for Place*.

¹³ John Kolasky, *The Shattered Illusion*, 22, 23.

“Every Ukrainian citizen should know, not only of Shevchenko, but Shevchenko as he was. To know Shevchenko,” he continued, “means to read his work – not the work that has been censored by all kinds of ‘moralizers,’ not the expurgated versions offered by Ukrainian nationalists, falsified by nationalist literary ‘historians,’ reviewers, critics, and itinerant authorities of Shevchenko.” Instead, the poet should be read “as [he] wrote it.” Only then could Ukrainians “better organizer...to struggle with today’s fascist aggressors and their Ukrainian hangers-on.”¹⁴

The Cult of Red Shevchenko

Towards the end of the war, the loyalties of the state had shifted. Now an ally in the war, the USSR and its representatives in Canada were – at least officially – ‘preferred’ by the state. The political climate and wartime commitments of the day had secured the official acceptability of the AUUC over the UCC. Writing in 1943, Dana Wilgress, a Canadian diplomat in the USSR, warned his associates in Ottawa of anti-Soviet groups such as the UCC who “complicate Canadian-Soviet relations” and promote “disunity among the Allies.” A 1943 memorandum publicly affirmed these sentiments, proclaiming that the “nationalist elements among the Right Wing Ukrainians will become a greater source of embarrassment” and that “this irredentism

¹⁴ Peter Krawchuk, *Shevchenko in Canada*, 41. Reflecting on his internment during the Second World War because of his activities in the Ukrainian pro-communist movement, Peter Krawchuk noted the significance of Shevchenko’s work to his senses. Interestingly, Krawchuk notes that Shevchenko’s works had been censored twice before being delivered to him, once in Ottawa and once by the guards at Kananaskis. Peter Krawchuk, “Shevchenko in the Camps,” in *Interned Without Cause*, Socialist History Project, <http://www.socialisthistory.ca/Docs/CPC/WW2/IWC18.htm>

among Ukrainian Canadians is being closely followed in Moscow and is resented.”¹⁵ The RCMP was instructed to closely monitor the activity of the UCC and its upcoming inaugural Congress.¹⁶

In this shifting and often contested space, competing factions were belligerently galvanized and extremely conscious of the importance of securing legitimacy for themselves. An article in *Ukrainski Robotnychi Visty* (Ukrainian Labour News), the official organ of the AUUC, noted: “Our organizations will conduct the campaign...[to] mark the fiftieth anniversary of the death of T. Shevchenko. We should raise the March campaign this time *above all campaigns*. We should place the [organization] *at the forefront*, utilizing for this all our forces: organizational, educational, and cultural.”¹⁷ In this era, the newspaper frequently featured articles on Shevchenko emphasizing his great revolutionary and democratic potential. For example, articles with titles such as “Taras Shevchenko – Revolutionary Poet” and “In Memory of the Great Poet-Democrat” were frequent. The newspaper emphasized the integral role of

¹⁵ Donald Avery, “Divided Loyalties: The Ukrainian Left and the Canadian State,” in *Canada’s Ukrainians: Negotiating an Identity* eds. Lubomyr Luciuk and Stella Hryniuk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 283. The nationalists nonetheless had allies amongst the Canadian elite. Watson Kirkconnell, for example, warned of the activities of the AUUC as dangerous to Canada. “The politics behind their concerts and dances,” he stated, “were the icing on the educational cake, but the cake itself was filled with political arsenic” that would “destroy both Christianity and the British form of government”. Watson Kirkconnell, *Our Canadian Loyalists* (Winnipeg: Ukrainian Canadian Committee, 1943), 20.

¹⁶ Lubomyr Luciuk, *Ukrainians in the Making: Their Kingston Story* (Kingston: The Limestone Press, 1980), 134-137. A private RCMP memo relayed that “no cooperation...is possible between the patriotic Ukrainians in Canada and the revived Communist elements, formerly members of the ULFTA. The Ukrainian Canadian Committee,” it continues, “has defined its stand on this subject at a meeting...when it was decided to continue to opposition against the new Communist movement in Canada, and to that effect warn the people in a special communiqué, which was to be issue in the press”. Interestingly, the report hints at suspicions of the AUUC, declaring their claims of loyalty to Canada “as false as the Communists themselves. The Communists in Canada...are fully aware that the Government continues towards them an attitude of suspicion and hostility” and that “they maintain their old uncompromising attitude toward the Government”. The report concludes with a warning that it would be “sheer folly on the part of authorities...to trust this class of people in Canada which had proved itself in the past as the most malcontent and unreliable class of Canadians. No matter what, they will always harken to the voice of their masters in Moscow and play the same old game of subversive activities”. For more on the private musings of the state in regards to pro-communist Ukrainians see Kassandra Luciuk, “A Necessary Bridge to a Radical Consciousness: Rethinking the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association and the Peculiarity of Ukrainian Identity,” Master’s dissertation, (Queen’s University, 2013).

¹⁷ “Take Advantage of the Month of February for Great Organizational Preparation,” *Prophets and Proletarians*, 86. Emphasis in original.

Shevchenko in the building of Soviet culture, his revolutionary ideas against serfdom, and, to appeal to Canadian tastes, his classification as a democrat. “In building a Ukrainian Soviet culture,” wrote one article, “we celebrate and honor the memory of the poet-revolutionary-democrat Shevchenko who fought against darkness, serfdom, and domination in appalling conditions enforced by the [tsarist] reaction.” Another editorial noted that Shevchenko was a revolutionary of the peasants. Shevchenko “reflected the interests of the peasantry, which was, at that time, aimed at the destruction of tsars and masters. He called [on the peasants] to break the thrones and tear the porphyry.... In this is his revolutionary strength.”¹⁸ The newspapers also criticized the nationalist community, which was accused of “treating Shevchenko’s original work liberally, adjusting the language so that it was in their interest. Everyone who has read the work of Shevchenko is easily convinced that his language was different from that “amendable” language defended by [nationalist writers]”.¹⁹

The intensified commitment to the promotion of cultural events by the AUUC also reflected changes in the Soviet Union’s policy towards the advancement and utilization of nationalism.²⁰ In the initial years of Soviet rule, Shevchenko’s works were forbidden, his portraits were trampled, and copies of his *Kobzar* were burned. However, Soviet officials began

¹⁸ “Taras Shevchenko – Revolutionary Poet,” 10 March 1936, *Ukrainski robotnychi visty*, NJ. FM. 1774, Library and Archives Canada Microform Holdings Newspaper Collection, Library and Archives Canada. The translations are the author’s own.

¹⁹ “The Language of Taras Shevchenko,” 6 March 1936, *Ukrainski robotnychi visty*, NJ. FM. 1774, Library and Archives Canada Microform Holdings Newspaper Collection, Library and Archives Canada. The translations are the author’s own.

²⁰ The shifts and contours of the Soviet national policy and their edification of cultural symbols within the social sphere, to political ends, was criticized by Leon Trotsky, who argued: “Nowhere did restrictions, purges, repressions and in general all forms of bureaucratic hooliganism assume such murderous sweep as they did in the Ukraine in the struggle against the powerful, deeply-rooted longings of the Ukrainian masses for greater freedom and independence. To the totalitarian bureaucracy, Soviet Ukraine became an administrative division of an economic unit and a military base of the USSR. To be sure, the Stalin bureaucracy erects statues to Shevchenko but only in order to more thoroughly to crush the Ukrainian people under their weight and to force it to chant paeans in the language of *Kobzar* to the rapist clique in the Kremlin”. Leon Trotsky, “Problem of the Ukraine,” *Socialist Appeal*, 9 May 1939.

using his influence and popularity, and he accordingly became the semi-official cultural icon of Soviet Ukraine.²¹ The ‘Cult of Red Shevchenko’ spread quickly, with Soviet authors referring to him as the ‘Red Christ,’ the ‘Evangelist of Equality,’ the ‘Apostle of the Day Labourers and Hired Hands,’ and the ‘Proletarian Poet.’ The transformation of Shevchenko into a useful figure was tied with attempts to erase all traces of him as a prophet of national independence, a concept previously popular in what would become the Ukrainian SSR. However, since many Ukrainians had now emigrated beyond Soviet borders and were protected from potential repercussions, the battle over interpretations, and ultimate ownership, of Shevchenko was relentless.²²

Exploiting the allied status of the USSR, the AUUC decided to stage a festival that would mark Canada’s transition from war to peace. A tremendous success for the organization, the event attracted over 55,000 people. To the surprise of the audience, three delegates from the Ukrainian SSR and the Soviet ambassador greeted and thanked the crowd for their support of the USSR during the war.²³ Due to the tremendous success of the first festival, AUUC leaders began organizing a western Canadian equivalent to take place in Edmonton in July of 1946. Several distinguished Canadians attended, including the Governor-General, lieutenant-governors, provincial premiers, provincial chief justices, mayors, and so on. A delegation was also hosted from Soviet Ukraine, including a leading Ukrainian poet and the editor of the newspaper funded by the Comintern. The AUUC stressed the significance of these cultural festivals, publicly remarking that no other organization or ethnic group has “revealed the artistic and organizational

²¹ For more on Soviet nationality policy see Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53:2 (1992) and Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

²² Bohdan Rubchak, “Introduction,” in *Shevchenko and the Critics, 1861-1980*, ed. George Luckyj (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 23.

²³ On 2 July, the representatives appeared in Winnipeg, where they spoke at a mass concert and meeting at the Playhouse Theatre. In the evening, they were honored at a banquet at the Royal Alexandra Hotel, attended by over 300 guests.

talent that our association has revealed in organization [this] and other festivals.”²⁴ This series of festivals generated considerable intrigue amongst Ukrainians, and raised the influence and prestige of the AUUC tenfold. In stark contrast to the beginning of the war, the AUUC was now entertaining both delegates from the USSR and members of the Canadian government at its events.

“Ukrainian Canadians have never belonged to this type of people!”

For the UCC, now somewhat out of favor with both its community and the Canadian government, the public presentation of their culture was especially important for demonstrating that they too were socially and politically parallel with Canadian values. They repeatedly referred to the previous recommendations of Gibbon to publish a collection of ethnic literature, noting that Ukrainian cultural works could appeal to mainstream Canadians. “We have often appeared before our Anglo-Saxon friends with our beautiful folk songs, our spirited dances, and our colourful national costumes. Through our music and songs,” stated C.H. Andrusyshen, “we have practically unlimited possibilities for the enrichment of Canadian culture.” At the first UCC congress, Andrusyshen cited Gibbon again: “Dr. Gibbon thinks, and rightfully so, that the successful completion of such an anthology will assist the Canadians in their understanding of each other thoroughly, and so will help to consolidate their varied cultural attainments into a single Canadian mosaic.”²⁵

²⁴ John Kolasky, *The Shattered Illusion*, 50-55.

²⁵ Aya Fujiwara, *Ethnic Elites and Canadian Identity*, 97-99. Meanwhile, Anthony Hlynka, MP to Vegreville, quoted Lord Tweedsmuir, an early supporter of Ukrainians and Canada’s cultural mosaic, on two occasions in the House of Commons. In 1940, he conveyed Tweedsmuir’s message of resisting distrust of Ukrainians and stressing the value of Ukrainian culture to Canadian identity. In 1943, he cited Tweedsmuir again to envision how postwar Canada should incorporate its Ukrainian community. He argued that now that Ukrainians had proven their loyalty, Canada should produce a form of citizenship that would reflect an inclusive mosaic.

The UCC was also eager to distance itself from its pro-communist counterpart and distinguish itself as a separate organization that could more appropriately speak on behalf of the community. They repeatedly objected to the AUUC's plans for a 1945 – 1946 festival. In fact, when the Edmonton City Council donated \$300 to the festival's committee, the UCC protested.²⁶ Wasyl Kushnir, President of UCC National, simultaneously emphasized his organization's supremacy and cast doubt on the legitimacy of the AUUC to speak on behalf of all Ukrainians in Canada. "We, the Ukrainian Canadians," he stated, "have never belonged to this type of people. We have never been, we are not, and we will never be the Communists or the Nazis."²⁷

Danylo Lobay, a former member of the socialist-progressive movement, was an especially vocal critic of the AUUC for what he considered to be a manipulation of Shevchenko. "The communists in Canada celebrate the anniversary of Shevchenko because the anniversary has become [important] in Ukraine [because] of Stalin. In Ukraine, Shevchenko is celebrated for the glorification of Stalin's terrorist regime in Ukraine and to attach Russian patriotism to the Ukrainian nation. The so-called Ukrainian SSR," he continued, "allegedly has its own government and its own Presidium, even though they are assigned by Moscow and are composed of Moscow's men. They cannot give a theatre in Kyiv the name of T. Shevchenko – only

²⁶ John Kolasky, *The Shattered Illusion*, 82. The nationalists seemed intent on protesting virtually every AUUC effort, including, in 1947, a display in the Toronto Art Gallery.

²⁷ Lubomyr Luciuk and Bohdan Kordan, *A Delicate and Difficult Question: Documents in the History of Ukrainians in Canada 1899-1962* (Kingston: The Limestone Press, 1986), 107. Tension between organizations often surpassed vicious commentary in the newspapers and was expressed with extreme violence. On 8 October 1950, an explosion occurred outside the Ukrainian Labour Temple at 300 Bathurst St in Toronto. Several individuals used railroad spikes, which had been attached to a bomb, landed in the auditorium, where a concert was being held. The AUUC quickly released a statement categorically denying that the bombing "was the result of some kind of 'rivalries' among Ukrainian Canadian 'factions'". The Ukrainian Canadian community in Toronto, with its different churches and organizations, has existed for 40 and more years and at no times has there been terrorism of such a nature in our midst. The Ukrainian Canadian community," it stated, "is composed of decent, law-abiding citizens". The AUUC accused "former SS Nazi men, who have managed to enter our country in the guise of Displaced Persons" of the attack. "If the perpetrators of this attempted mass-murder are not apprehended," the statement warned, "then further and more diabolical terrorist attacks, not only against our people, but against other sections of the Canadian people, will inevitably follow". "Bombing 300 Bathurst Street, Toronto. 1950," Prokop Family Fonds, Box: H-875 File: 30, Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau, Quebec.

Moscow can do this. And behold, in Kyiv's *Proceedings*, on 8 March 1939, it was written that the Presidium of the USSR in Moscow released a decree renaming the National Opera of Ukraine into the Ukrainian National Opera and Ballet Theatre of T.H. Shevchenko, [attaching Shevchenko's name] to the National University of Kyiv." Lobay asserted that whenever the theatre announced "Long Live Stalin!" the orchestra would play *The Internationale* and everyone would stand. "Was this the anniversary of Shevchenko," he wondered, "or the anniversary of Stalin? Did they play tribute to the Ukrainian poet or did they pay tribute to the Moscow-Georgian satrap?" When the anniversary of Shevchenko became an anniversary in the USSR," he concluded, "then Moscow's followers in Canada would undoubtedly also celebrate the anniversary and continue fooling gullible people. And so, they celebrate."²⁸

Contested spaces and the rise of Cold War tensions

The competition over Shevchenko climaxed with the unveiling of the AUUC monument in his honor in the village of Palermo, Ontario in 1951. Determined to maintain the momentum of the 1945-1946 festivals, the organization resolved to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of Ukrainian settlement in Canada. Notably, the monument was unveiled on Canada Day, emphasizing the dialectical interactions between Ukrainian culture and Canadian inclusivity. The decision to unveil the monument on Canada Day further emphasized that the creation of a more inclusive Canada was not simply a 'top down' process, but one in which the marginalized actively involved themselves.

According to George Kidd, a reporter for *The Telegram*, "Rain failed to keep the guests from all over the Dominion from attending. Traffic was snarled completely an hour before the

²⁸ "Why the Communists Celebrate Shevchenko," 18 May 1949, Danylo Lobay Fonds, Oseredok Ukrainian Cultural and Education Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba. The translations are the author's own.

unveiling. It was the largest gathering of Ukrainians ever held in Canada.”²⁹ Indeed, the unveiling was a tremendous success, with some suggesting that over 45,000 people attended the unveiling.³⁰ William Pylypiw, son of the first Ukrainian immigrant to Canada, fittingly undraped the statue, “his voice [breaking] continually” and “forced to wipe tears from his eyes.” As the statue was unveiled, “thousands of people wept unashamedly” but also “cheered [as] the choir sang the familiar Ukrainian number, [Shevchenko’s] *Zapovit*.”³¹

Reflecting on the success of the event, a member of the AUUC praised the “great AUUC for their cultural manifestation on a scale unequalled in the history of any other, even the oldest, Canadian national group. This was a manifestation of which all progressive Ukrainian workers and farmers can be justly proud.” Commenting on the lasting mark of the festival, they noted that participants “will carry their impressions to the people” and will “tell their friends of the concert and the unveiling of the monument of Taras Shevchenko. Hundreds of thousands... will learn of the success of the famous sixtieth anniversary.” The task at hand now, they argued, was to further strengthen the AUUC.³² At the AUUC’s Fifth National Convention, Peter Prokop called the event a “massive demonstration by the Ukrainian Canadian democratic population in Canada” and a “display of its respect and gratitude to the people of Ukraine.” More so, he argued that the unveiling underscored the AUUC’s “ties with our maternal roots, and at the same time [has] consolidated our place here, as citizens, with roots imbedded deep in Canadian soil.” He stressed that the unveiling was not only attended by members of various Slavic organizations, but also by Ukrainians “who belonged to no organizations, as well as those who belonged to

²⁹ “Statue of Poet-Hero Unveiled at Palermo,” *Prophets and Proletarians*, 293.

³⁰ Peter Krawchuk, *Our History*, 82.

³¹ “Statue of Poet-Hero Unveiled at Palermo,” *Prophets and Proletarians*, 293.

³² “Glorious Sixtieth Anniversary Jubilee,” *Prophets and Proletarians*, 295.

nationalist organizations and churches.”³³ The suggestion that Ukrainians from all factions of the community were present at the unveiling underscores the very real bids of the AUUC to appeal to – and speak on behalf of – all Ukrainians in Canada.

Despite the monument being a gift from the USSR, there were no Soviet representatives at the ceremony. With the defection of Gouzenko in 1945, Soviet officials probably felt it was best to avoid such publicity. Nonetheless, the AUUC viewed the event as a success. The festival provided an opportunity to showcase the organization’s work but also served to discredit negative views of the Soviet Union before an undecided Ukrainian community. Due in large part to the unveiling of the Shevchenko monument, the AUUC entered its most relevant and successful period. Indeed, the weekend-long event had reportedly attracted over 100,000 people.³⁴ The popularity of the organization was also reflected in its sustained growth: the AUUC reported 13,000 members and 315 branches in 1945, with numbers consistently growing in the following years. The women’s branches had also more than doubled, from fourteen to twenty-nine.³⁵ Where as many did not necessarily join the organization, they were certainly attracted to their cultural events.

Widespread praise and an increase in support from the Ukrainian Canadian community rewarded the AUUC. However, the festival was still marked with controversy. The UCC, displeased with the attention that the AUUC was receiving, criticized the organization and questioned its intentions. “Having realized that Ukrainians feel very sentimental towards

³³ Peter Krawchuk, *Our History*, 82, 83.

³⁴ Peter Krawchuk, *Our History*, 81.

³⁵ John Kolasky, *The Shattered Illusion*, 59. The great success of the unveiling of the Shevchenko monument also prompted the organization to establish a Shevchenko Museum to be built beside the monument. The museum contained numerous exhibits on the life and work of Ukrainians in Canada as they related to Shevchenko. Again, there were no representatives from the Soviet Union at this unveiling. However, a few months later, the Shevchenko Museum in Kyiv sent approximately 500 additional exhibits to Palermo. The historical realities of some of these pieces have been questioned in recent years, which frequently portrayed Shevchenko as a friend of Vissarion Belinsky, a Russian literary critic and known opponent of Shevchenko.

Shevchenko and have profound love for him and his achievements,” stated one editorial, “the communists [manipulated] his honest sentiment of Ukrainians for their evil goal, spreading hostile propaganda, collecting donations from Ukrainians, and using them for their weak cause. Shevchenko vigorously reveled against Moscow, the worst prison house of people, [to lead] his people in the correct direction: the liberation of the Ukrainian people from Moscow. On this road,” it concluded, “Ukrainian leaders and the entire people stand today.”³⁶ *Homin Ukrainy* (Ukrainian Echo), another nationalist newspaper, referred to the monument as a “Danean gift” and a “Trojan horse.” The Ukrainian Self Reliance League (USRL) openly demanded that the Canadian government deport the monument to Moscow. Some UCC members eschewed words for deeds, traveling to eastern Canada to protest the unveiling.³⁷

Given the geopolitical context of the day, Canadian officials seemed unwilling to impose preference for the 1951 events. When the UCC invited representatives of the government to its own sixtieth anniversary celebration, government officials declared it was “preferable to exercise caution.” It was noted that a “vociferous communist minority” had recently held its own celebration, which “inflamed Canadian public opinion.” Therefore, rather than take a stand, the government agreed it would not officially favor either the AUUC or the UCC and declined the UCC’s invitation.³⁸ It is understandable that the government did not take advantage of the UCC to undermine the influence and reputation of the communists. The creation of ecumenical wartime propaganda, coupled with geographically and ethnically mixed armed forces, precipitated a broader and more inclusive understanding of membership within the Canadian

³⁶ Aya Fujiwara, *Ethnic Elites and Canadian Identity*, 138.

³⁷ Peter Krawchuk, *Our History*, 82.

³⁸ Lubomyr Luciuk, *Searching for Place*, 257, 258.

polity.³⁹ Paired with the new rhetoric of citizenship, identity, and inclusivity, Ukrainians were heuristically transformed from ‘ethnics’ and ‘radicals’ into ‘Canadians.’⁴⁰ Apart from their impressive numbers, it was not politically or socially palpable to simply repress the public activities of the AUUC through simple violence or illegal detention. Moreover, with the Ukrainians emerging as ‘white’ Canadians and a potential ethnic voting bloc, the government exercised caution so as not to be perceived as inimical towards the organization that clearly represented – or held the interest of – most Ukrainians in Canada. Furthermore, as the unveiling was couched as a socio-cultural event, the organization was cloaked in a form of social armor that could protect it from the attacks of the state.

Despite – or perhaps because of – the mass showing of 1951, coupled with the Cold War context, the government made quiet inroads into concreting their material support and political sanction of the vehemently anti-communist UCC. This was largely accomplished through a show of force at the organization’s social and cultural events. Speaking at the UCC Congress in 1953, Prime Minister St. Laurent applauded the contributions of Ukrainians in Canada. The thinly veiled subtext of his address was evident. The showing of St. Laurent at the Congress was indicative of the government telegraphing its preferences within the brokerage politics of the community and invigorating the organization friendlier – and more useful – to the government’s interests. St. Laurent’s remarks were followed by the President of the UCC, who reminded Ukrainian Canadians of their “triple duty” to “Canada as Canadian citizens, to the growing Canadian generation, and toward their less fortunate brothers across the Atlantic.”⁴¹

³⁹ See Donald Avery, *Reluctant Host: Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995).

⁴⁰ For more on the transformation of immigrants into acceptable members of the polity see David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005) and Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁴¹ “Speakers Praise Ukrainian Contributions to Canada,” 10 July 1953, Danylo Lobay Fonds, Oseredok Ukrainian Cultural and Education Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

“There is only one Ukrainian people and one Taras Shevchenko!”

The geopolitical and the domestic merged in sharp relief when Khrushchev’s Secret Speech was leaked in 1956. Khrushchev’s revelations not only weakened the political legitimacy of the AUUC, but also slowed its membership growth and led to a significant defection of current members disillusioned by the revelations.⁴² The magnitude and repercussions of the exposé was perhaps most evident in the AUUC’s attempted celebration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Ivan Franko, another highly revered Ukrainian poet. At the Seventh Congress of the AUUC in 1956, it was declared that Ivan Franko, “who belongs to us Ukrainians in Canada,” would be celebrated by the organization. Recognizing their newly acquired have-not status, the AUUC issued a statement emphasizing their desire to collaborate with the UCC. They reasoned that working together “would raise the Ukrainian image to new heights, create a favorable and beneficial impression among other Canadians in general, aid the cause of friendship generally, contribute to a better understanding of Ukrainians by their fellow countrymen of other ethnic origins, and help the cause of peace, which is what all Canadians and people the world over long for.”⁴³

Upon receiving their offer, the UCC refused to collaborate with the AUUC, accusing the organization of attempting to sabotage their triennial congress. “The centennial program is an outright propaganda ruse,” stated the UCC, “arranged solely because they knew our congress would be held this week.”⁴⁴ They further suggested that the AUUC’s labours made it easier “for the communist Fifth Column in Canada to spread its subversive activities here.”⁴⁵ The UCC managed to successfully lobby the Canadian government to refuse entry visas to members of a

⁴² See John Kolasky, *The Shattered Illusion*, 177-199.

⁴³ Peter Krawchuk, *Our History*, 84.

⁴⁴ “Hostile Note for Opening of Congress,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, 3 July 1956.

⁴⁵ *Winnipeg Free Press*, 3 July 1956.

delegation, including Franko's niece Zinovia Franko, who were hoping to attend the AUUC's celebrations.⁴⁶ Franko's daughter, Anna Kluchko furthered the blow by refusing to participate in the AUUC's festivities. Speaking to the press, she announced that she would speak at the UCC Congress instead, noting that had her father been alive, "[the communists] would have killed him, as they have others, or would have sent him to [Siberia], as they did my brother."⁴⁷ While the AUUC celebration went on as planned, its efforts were seriously crippled by the interventions of the UCC, a now-powerful contender in the ongoing battle for legitimacy.

The circumstances surrounding the celebration of Franko are notable. This was the first time since the victory over fascism that the government had actively and openly sided with the nationalist UCC. Furthermore, although the essence of the Secret Speech had been known since February, the publication of the text in full by the *New York Times* only a month before was undeniably influential on the outcome of the AUUC's celebrations. The events of 1956 were a devastating blow to the organization, who had relied exclusively on its membership for financial sustenance. Lacking powerful political patrons or close ties to Canadian elites, the AUUC understood the critical need to remain active in the face of an emerging anti-communist front. Thus, the organization continued its efforts to promote their once-popular festivals and celebrations.

On the 100th anniversary of Shevchenko's death, the UCC decided that it would build its own monument in Winnipeg. Hoping to capitalize on the prestige and publicity that would follow, the AUUC declared its readiness to work together with the UCC. Recognizing the changing geopolitical climate aimed towards invigorated and active anti-communism, the

⁴⁶ "Rap Red Tactics in Franko Festival," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 30 June 1956.

⁴⁷ "Franko Never a Red, daughter tells UCC," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 30 June 1956.

National Executive of the AUUC penned an open letter to the UCC in their newspaper, the *Ukrainian Canadian*. The letter outlined the AUUC's acceptance and support of the monument and declared their desire for a joint all-national celebration. The AUUC reasoned that this was "the business of all Ukrainians in Canada, irrespective of organizational affiliation, conviction, or religion. As they saying among Ukrainians has it," they argued, "there is only one Ukrainian people and only one Taras Shevchenko." Somewhat cheekily, the organization stated that it was "prepared to enter negotiations" over the monument, reminding the UCC of its fort year lead on educational and cultural work amongst Ukrainians in Canada.⁴⁸ However, the AUUC was ignored, and preparations for the unveiling of the monument continued without them.

The night before the unveiling, Michael Starr, Minister of Labour and the first Ukrainian to hold a federal cabinet post, spoke to a rally about the approaching celebration. "In Canada, freedom is ours. There is freedom for our institutions, freedom for our folkways and culture, freedom for our language and freedom to participate in the democratic way of life. If Shevchenko had been in Winnipeg," said Starr, "he would be proud of what has been accomplished."⁴⁹ The next morning, the monument was finally revealed on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislature by Prime Minister Diefenbaker. Shevchenko took his place beside Queen Elizabeth, Major General James Wolfe, Lord Dufferin, and Louis Riel, signifying his symbolic acceptance into the Canadian mainstream. The crowd joyously sang *O Canada*, the Ukrainian national anthem, Shevchenko's *Zapovit*, and *God Save the Queen*.⁵⁰ In his speech, Diefenbaker connected the legacy of Shevchenko to the ongoing Cold War. He expressed his faith in the eventual independence of Ukraine when communism "inevitably collapsed" and reminded

⁴⁸ "Offer Co-operation to Build Monument in 1961," *Prophets and Proletarians*, 352.

⁴⁹ Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes*, 168.

⁵⁰ "Shevchenko Centennial Souvenir Book," 8 – 9 July 1961, Toma Kobzey Fonds, Oseredok Ukrainian Cultural and Education Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

“Shevchenko’s children in Canada” that they enjoyed the rights and privileges of freedom and democracy. “It is to your great credit,” he said, “that one of the tasks you have set yourselves is to keep sirens sounding to warn the nations of the dangers of appeasement, complacency, or false security in the fact of the monster menace of International Communism.”⁵¹

The Souvenir Book distributed at the unveiling further revealed the government’s sanctioning of the UCC by featuring greetings from several politicians. The Prime Minister sent good wishes to “all Ukrainian democratic organizations,” while the Premier of Saskatchewan praised Shevchenko for speaking out against tyranny and oppression “just as we in our day must oppose any form of totalitarianism which seeks to restrict man’s basic freedoms”. Accordingly, he noted, “Shevchenko belongs not only to the Ukrainian people but to all mankind”. Both Saskatchewan and Manitoba officially recognized the event in their legislatures. On Parliament Hill, several speeches were made in the House of Commons. Nicholas Mandziuk, a Progressive Conservative MP, stressed the great significance of the event to Ukrainians in Canada who have “integrated themselves in the Canadian way of life and who can be counted as constituents of most of the members of this House”. Paul Martin, representing the Liberal Party, stated that the “House has unanimously agreed to lay aside its procedures to pay tribute to one of the great poets of Ukraine, Taras Shevchenko”. He noted this was necessary because it helped justify “the hopes of contemporary Ukrainians for the liberation of their homeland”.⁵²

Worried about the UCC’s unwillingness to collaborate with them, the AUUC released a statement condemning the organization’s efforts in *Ukrainske Slovo* (Ukrainian Word). The release stressed that the unveiling was not the first of its kind in Canada, drawing attention to

⁵¹ Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes*, 169.

⁵² “Shevchenko Centennial Souvenir Book,” 8 – 9 July 1961, Toma Kobzey Fonds, Oseredok Ukrainian Cultural and Education Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

their Palermo monument ten years before. The statement also described the UCC's efforts as painful and disgraceful, and criticized the organization for "[slandering] Ukraine and the Ukrainian people" and for "war politics against the Soviet Union, of which Ukraine is a component as a free, sovereign republic." The AUUC also criticized the Canadian politicians in attendance, who "in one breath extolled Shevchenko and in another attacked Soviet Ukraine, the Ukraine of Shevchenko which, together with Canada, is a member of the United Nations and is recognized by the whole civilized world as the greatest state of the Ukrainian people. This was not a solemn commemoration of Shevchenko," it concluded, "but a mockery of Shevchenko. All honest Ukrainians, who sincerely and honestly respect the great Shevchenko, have nothing in common with those who attempt to use his bright name for base Judas aims."⁵³

Conclusion

Increasing Cold War tensions coupled with the severe magnitude of the Secret Speech had significantly impacted the AUUC. Its leaders were struggling to answer the questions of their increasingly disenchanting and shrinking membership. The unveiling of the UCC's Shevchenko's monument, with its official endorsement, delivered a crippling and final blow to the organization. Its once-admired socio-cultural events were now a thing of the past. The organization continued to rally around the symbol of Shevchenko, but their efforts no longer attracted the kind of attention they once had. Meanwhile, the UCC had capitalized on the advantages bestowed to them because of international events. Their celebrations continued to increase in popularity and largely eliminated the influence of the AUUC by the eighties.

⁵³ "The Monument to Taras Shevchenko in Winnipeg," *Prophets and Proletarians*, 354.

The events surrounding the commemoration of Shevchenko reflect the larger trend of how Canada interacted with its ethnic communities, especially in the face of the Cold War. The state had long been interested in policing the ideology of immigrants, and had even nurtured the UCC as its potential monitor within the Ukrainian Canadian community. Indeed, the establishment of the UCC signaled the Canadian state's preferences for anti-communist immigrants and ensured that it would maintain significant political and social control over a large 'foreign' population. Moreover, the Canadian state had contracted out the production of 'good Canadians' to ethnic elites and brokers who, in turn, instilled the values and rhetoric of liberal democracy in their constituents. The state could define the parameters of acceptable social, political, and economic ideas, while Ukrainian elites internally policed correct forms of ethno-religious nationalism and political outlooks. This process neutralized competing voices and helped exert hegemonic power over community and cultural narratives.

As the UCC increased its social, cultural, and political capital following the eradication of the AUUC, it began making unprecedented demands on the state, even engraining itself in Canadian brokerage politics. The organization successfully lobbied the government on important issues, inserted Ukrainians into Canada's national narrative, controlled and promoted what histories were told, and influenced Canada's foreign policy on the Soviet Union. The UCC also solidified the reality of Ukrainians as an ethnic voting bloc, forcing both the government and the state into continued negotiation and interaction. As a result, members of the UCC were transformed from mercenaries of socio-political control into a political force themselves.

An examination of the uses of Shevchenko during the Cold War also shows how cultural symbols can transcend reality and become politicized figures used for strategic purposes. For Ukrainians in Canada, Shevchenko was more than just a poet or disciple of Ukrainian

nationalism; he was assumed by competing organization as a tool for securing legitimacy. Events bearing Shevchenko's name were exceptionally effective forms of social armour, means of organizational recruitment, and attempts to secure government and state approval. Indeed, the battle over Shevchenko was a battle over who would become the legitimate bearer of Ukrainian identity in Canada.

Understanding Shevchenko's role in Canada also speaks more broadly to the interaction of Ukrainians in Canada with 'acceptable' ideas of citizenship, belonging, ethnic identity, and 'whiteness' in an ever-changing climate. Moreover, it shows both the corralling of the Ukrainian Canadian community into a singular category and the ways in which community members contested and negotiated their place in the 'Canadian mosaic.' These interactions play no small role in influencing how community members continue to negotiate their identity – and their relationship to one another – to this day.

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