

**Myroslav Shkandrij. *Ukrainian Nationalism: Politics, Ideology, and Literature, 1929-1956*.** Yale UP, 2015. xii, 332 pp. Notes. Archival Sources. Bibliography. Index. \$85.00, cloth.

A spectre haunts Ukraine—the spectre of nationalism. Every so often, voices are heard in the media, in academia, or in semi-academic circles warning about a formidable upswing in Ukrainian nationalism. On the other side of things are those who dismiss this message as panic-mongering. Meanwhile, in Ukrainian communities, one can sometimes encounter the argument that a stronger nationalism (sometimes also called patriotism) is actually a good thing. But there is one troubling aspect to all of this talk. At any given time, any number of people claim to be experts in the area of Ukraine and its nationalism(s). So, for this reason, true and in-depth expertise on the topic is absolutely indispensable.

Myroslav Shkandrij's overview of the subject in his book *Ukrainian Nationalism: Politics, Ideology, and Literature, 1929-1956* represents a remarkable effort to address this need. It combines the strengths of both synthesis and close empirical investigation through a thorough survey of previous works, well-known sources, and a significant amount of new material (that is, Ukrainian-language studies plus previously unused sources) and original research. Shkandrij creates a holistic narrative that introduces new perspectives for seasoned researchers while at the same time telling a story that a general reader can grasp. The author chooses a proper approach in what is too often treated as an ideological battlefield rather than a field of study: he addresses the material without having any ready-made conclusions about it, and he thoroughly grounds in original sources any conclusions that he does make. This lack of preconceived notions in the book is particularly liberating given that this is a study with a strong propensity toward detailed and nuanced analysis. The book comes without a stack of labels attached—rather, it seeks to understand and explain. In this way, a diverse set of voices come through in the book. Together, they show that around the time of World War II, there was not one Ukrainian nationalism but many, all of which were clashing over a great many things.

In the introduction (1-14), Shkandrij rightly states that nationalism—an old and diverse intellectual tradition—should not be reduced to “a form of xenophobia” (2). And he elegantly escapes the conceptual conundrum of separating democratic and authoritarian nationalisms by referring to them with either a lower-case letter *n* or a capital *N* (an ingenious solution that can be recommended for broader use). He also treats the primordialist and the modernist perspectives on nationalism with a good dose of skepticism,

pointing out their limitations rather than subscribing to either line of thought.

The book is divided into three main parts (in four sections). The first part (15-76) deals with politics. It addresses the development of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), the causes of its stance (radical), its tactics (violent), and the political decisions and alliances that it had to make (difficult and often involuntary). This is a *Game of Thrones*-kind of story, and it unfolds showing the changes and different choices made by activists and leaders instead of portraying them as outright criminals or heroes. Shkandrij does not shy away from mentioning their crimes, such as co-operation with Nazi Germany or terror against civilians (especially the 1943 attack on civilian Poles in Volhynia). In the end, the OUN is not portrayed from an essentialist perspective but from a dynamic one: having “come full circle” and “jettisoned authoritarianism, it had now [post war] embraced the democratic nationalism it had once deplored” (76).

In the second part of the book (77-132), Shkandrij considers the notion of ideology. He starts with the ideology of Dmytro Dontsov and his influence on the OUN. Dontsov is shown as having been an openly pro-totalitarian apologist of fascism exerting a profound influence on the movement overall—an influence that the OUN partially tried to resist. The OUN’s own ideologists were a more diverse bunch: they included committed pro-Nazi Dontsov supporters; the rather pro-Mussolini Ievhen Onats'kyi; more pragmatic ideological manoeuvrers, such as Mykola Stsibors'kyi; sophisticated conservative thinkers, such as Iulian Vassyian (a follower of Edmund Husserl); and democratic Marxist sympathizers, such as Lev Rebet. Shkandrij tries to understand their writings on their own terms—critically and without excuses for antisemitism or totalitarian tendencies (where they are, indeed, present). The emphasis is on evolution and the heterogeneity of the movement—which considered different options, whose members constantly argued among themselves, and which was anything but static.

The third part of the book (actually, this is two sections, respectively entitled “Myth” [133-72] and “Literature” [173-276]) focuses on the literary output of the nationalist movement. It is about as long as the other two parts combined, and this is where Shkandrij, a scholar of literature, shines. His method is to approach the writings of Olena Teliha, Leonid Mosendz, Oleh Ol'zhych, Iurii Lypa, Ulas Samchuk, Iurii Klen, and Dokiia Humenna in the context of both nationalist ideology and modernist aesthetics. From his close reading of the texts, a picture emerges of nationalism as an essentially pan-European modernist phenomenon that is predicated on the ideology of renewal and palingenesis (regeneration) with myth as its key narrative

device. The accent, too, is on the evolution of writers, who often disowned their more radical previously held views. Once again, Shkandrij does not omit the ugly aspects, such as Samchuk's brief infatuation with Nazism and antisemitism, Klen's pro-Hitler period, and Humenna's initial ambiguity toward the Jews.

The structure of the book, in spite of its positive qualities, is not, in my opinion, entirely optimal. For instance, the chapter on Humenna (who was never associated with nationalism either ideologically or organizationally) seems like an odd and mechanical addition to the list of nationalist writers. Shkandrij's argument that it provides an outside perspective on nationalism during the war is understandable, but why did he only include Humenna? Given the scope of his study, would it not have been an improvement to add another part devoted to a critique of nationalism, where figures like George Shevelov and Iurii Kosach could come to the fore alongside Humenna? Shevelov is already present in the book peripherally—it would be worth expanding on the topic. Even the time frame of the study (1929-56) could be extended. Since the years 1957-59 mark the final act of integral nationalism, with the assassinations of Rebet and Stepan Bandera, and the last actions of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in Ukraine, perhaps 1959 would be a stronger and more logical end point for the narrative.

Stylistically, the book is a treat, and it is also well edited and well formatted. There are, however, small mistakes (although not many). Klen's poem has the title *Popil imperii*, and from what I have been able to determine, this should be translated as "*Ashes of Empires*" not "*Ashes of Empire*" (see 244), which is significant. The Koliivshchyna uprising of 1768 did not happen in southern Ukraine (see 289) but in the very central areas around Cherkasy, Kyiv, and Podilia on the Right Bank. It is probably better to give the area called "the Wild Lands" (see 180) the contemporary Western designation *Loca Deserta*. "*Khreshchatyi iar*" in the title of Humenna's work should not be confused with Khreshchatyk Street (see 253); it is a related area but a different place. Botanically speaking, it is more correct to render the word *kalyna* as "viburnum" or "guelder rose" rather than as "cranberry" (see 147)—this is a common mistake, which is perhaps somewhat justified by a general familiarity with the word *cranberry* and the berry's colour. It would be helpful to know whether "Jew" (see 256—quotation) is "*ievrei*" or "*zhyd*" in the original text. Other mistakes are simply typographic errors: "unconstitutionally" is wrongly used where "constitutionally" should appear (2); "Adolph Hitler" should be "Adolf Hitler" (59); "Germans policy" should be "German policy" (61); and "*Roman u 2-okh chastynakh*" should be "*Roman u 2-okh chastynakh*" (236).

These small details would be easy to address in a second edition. And there needs to be one: this monograph will no doubt become a reference work not only for scholars and experts but also for policy-makers, public figures, memory-politics practitioners, journalists, and anyone interested in the subject.

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#### Work Cited

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