



**WRITING ALBERTA: Alberta Building on a Literary Identity**  
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ISBN 978-1-55238-891-4

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# The “Father” of Ukrainian-language Fiction and Non-fiction in Alberta: Rev. Nestor Dmytrow, 1863-1925

*Jars Balan*

In 1897 Canada’s federal Department of the Interior hired a Greek Catholic Ukrainian priest from the United States named Nestor Dmytrow<sup>1</sup> to tour the settlements that had been established across the Canadian West over the previous five years by Galician and Bukovynian farmers from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His job was to report on the conditions that he found there, and to document the material progress that was being made by the settlers. At the same time, it was understood that he could provide some spiritual comfort to the immigrants, who were living in a harsh and unfamiliar environment far from their homeland without the benefit of the clerical leadership that they had been accustomed to in their native villages. Father Dmytrow began his fact-finding mission in April, starting out from Winnipeg, Manitoba, after which he visited colonies in the Dauphin and Stuartburn areas of that province. He next travelled by train to Edmonton so as to inspect the districts being homesteaded by Ukrainians outside the city, in the vicinity of the Edna (subsequently renamed Star) post office some eighty kilometres to the northeast, and around Rabbit Hill, just west of Edmonton’s modern-day international airport.

As he was making these preliminary rounds, Dmytrow was penning a running account of his experiences that he was mailing back to Mount Carmel, Pennsylvania, for publication in the newspaper *Svoboda* (*Liberty*), whose editor he had been before leaving for Canada. His articles appeared

in the Ukrainian-language weekly roughly three weeks after they were written, providing detailed despatches about his adventures and the situation of Western Canada's earliest Ukrainian pioneers. A month after the final installment of his travelogue appeared in *Svoboda*, it was also published in booklet form under its series title, *Kanadiis'ka Rus': Podorznyi spomyny* (*Canadian Ruthenia: Travel Memoirs*), and by early July 1897 it was already being advertised as being available from the newspaper for ten cents to readers in North America.<sup>2</sup> Even more importantly, the fifty-six-page imprint was distributed in western Ukraine, educating potential immigrants about what they could expect to find if they were to settle on the Canadian prairies. Thus, in one fell swoop Fr. Dmytrow broke ground for Ukrainian-language journalism in Canada, as well as being responsible for the publication of the second work of non-fiction documenting the Ukrainian-Canadian experience.

While churning out his weekly installments for his *Kanadiis'ka Rus'* series, Dmytrow also found time on the road to produce an equally historic piece of literary prose that creatively blended fictional with non-fictional elements. It was based on an event that Dmytrow had learned of, or heard about, from people he met along the way, and was later followed by other works of short fiction written in a similar vein. The very first of these hybrid works was authored or completed in Calgary, where in 1897 rail passengers going to Edmonton had to transfer to the northern C & E line. Titled "Ruska paskha—i frantsuzkii ks'ondz. Obrazok z zhytia emigrantiv" ("Ruthenian Easter—and a French Catholic Priest: A Scene from Emigrant Life"), it begins with an account of an immigrant couple from Galicia travelling by train across southern Alberta on the eve of Easter celebrations.

"Ruthenian Easter—and a French Catholic Priest" tells the story of Stepan and Maryna and their two small children as they contemplate their imminent arrival in Calgary. Stepan hopefully asks Maryna if they would be eating *paska* that Easter, only to have her snap at him and complain derisively about having been brought "somewhere to the ends of the earth, where it wasn't the way it should be among people ..." (Dmytrow, "A Ruthenian" 56).<sup>3</sup> Stepan avoids antagonizing her further and instead retreats into a daydream about how Easter was celebrated in his native village, recalling the extreme fasting of the older people and the hi-jinks of the boys, who would steal gates and mischievously burn them along

with wagon wheels and stamp mills. He especially relishes his memories about assisting the priest and taking part in all of the rituals associated with the Easter service, while also recollecting how as a child he had once sinfully “pinched raisins from the *paska*” (56) and broken the meatless fast by gulping down some *kovbasa* (sausage) behind a barn on the Saturday before the Holy Resurrection Liturgy.

Upon reaching Calgary the family immediately proceeds to the Immigration hall, where they meet up with other fellow Ruthenians who have temporarily decamped there. Determined to commemorate Easter in the traditional manner, the newcomers have already begun baking Easter bread, or *paska*, and obtaining the eggs and meat that are essential ingredients of the traditional paschal meal. While Maryna scrambles to catch up with the other women making preparations for the Easter feast, Stepan and the men discuss the problem of finding a clergyman who would come and bless their special dishes as custom required. The only problem is that at this time there were as yet no Ukrainian priests in Canada, and Roman Catholic clergymen were totally unfamiliar with the Easter rituals as practised by the Slavic settlers from eastern Europe.<sup>4</sup>

The men decide that since there is a nearby Roman Catholic church, two of them would go to it and summon its pastor to perform the blessing. They deduce that even “though it’s not quite like our faith ... our reverends wouldn’t always be going there on church holidays to give confession, because if it were a sin, then our reverends wouldn’t go there, of that you can be sure” (57). Their comments are incongruously drawn from the Ukrainian experience in the United States, where Greek Catholic clerics had been residing since the 1880s, while Dmytrow was the first Ukrainian priest to visit Canada.

Be that as it may, Stepan is one of the men delegated to the task because he had been a sexton in the old country, and therefore knew how to properly conduct himself with men of the cloth. The utter naivety of the peasant immigrants is conveyed by Dmytrow in his observation that “along the way they debated whether the priest knew Ruthenian or not, but they came to the conclusion that anyone with an educated mind like that of a priest, would have to speak Ruthenian” (57). After coming to the door, listening to the request of the two men, and failing to make any sense of their babbling before vainly trying to speak to them in French, English, and German, the Reverend Father nevertheless takes his hat and goes with

them to the Immigration Hall although he has no idea of what was being asked of him.

The immigrants are next confronted with the challenge of how to explain to the priest that they want him to bless the foods that they have laid out before him. As hard as they might try using mimed gestures, they are unable to successfully convey what they want the French Canadian *pater* to do. Eventually, he determines that his hosts are obviously devout Christians, and decides that they must have generously invited him to come and share in their feast. When he reaches out to help himself to some of the food, the immigrants react with alarm because they believe he is simply raiding their Easter provisions without first performing the appropriate blessing with holy water. The story ends on a somewhat comic note of mutual misunderstanding, with Stepan scratching himself “once more on the nape of his neck as if to say, ‘It’s not the same here, the way our reverends bless paska!’” (57). This theme of cultures colliding due to a lack of understanding is one that Dmytrow would return to in several of his other later works with New World settings.

“Ruthenian Easter” appeared in the 20 May 1897 issue of *Svoboda*, but at the bottom it was datelined “Calgary 8 May 1897.” It was the first piece of literary prose to be written and published by a Ukrainian in Canada, and thus has a special place in the history of Ukrainian-Canadian literature. It seems obvious that it must have been inspired by a real event, which Dmytrow undoubtedly learned about during his visit to Alberta. That this was the case is confirmed by a short news item carried in the *Edmonton Bulletin* on the front page of its weekly edition on 20 April 1897. The brief report read as follows:

Some of the Ruthenian ladies and gentlemen who are being imported to populate the district—the parents of “future Canada”—when passing through Calgary on their way to Edmonton, took some of their bread, butter and eggs to one of the Catholic priests to have it blessed in accordance with a rite of the Greek church, of which they were members, and which rite is generally observed at Easter. The ceremony being one which is not observed in this part of the world was unknown to the priest and he erroneously supposed that the “necessities of life” brought to him were in the way of donations and not

wishing to take any of their much needed supplies and also not wishing to offend the foreigners, took a little of each. The wearers of the sheepskin coats with the fur inside, thereupon saw that something was wrong and when they realized the situation hurriedly retired, evidently believing that “a half loaf (even though unblessed) was better than no bread.”

Since the *Bulletin* story was published on the very day that Dmytrow left Winnipeg for Alberta, it seems almost certain that he read it following his arrival in Edmonton, or perhaps saw a copy of the paper while travelling on the train from Calgary. Then again, he may not have ever read the article at all, but merely learned of the incident that formed the kernel of “Ruthenian Easter” from the immigrants he encountered en route. Whatever the source, it can be stated unequivocally that Dmytrow’s first literary sketch written in Canada was based on an actual occurrence, to which Dmytrow added his own creative touches. It is somewhat curious, however, that the *Bulletin* article describing the Calgary encounter appeared in print immediately after Latin Easter on 18 April 1897, but several days before Easter fell according to the eastern Rite calendar, on 25 April. One suspects that the newcomers at the Calgary Immigration Hall simply celebrated Easter according to the western Church calendar along with other Christians in Canada, a decision they made either consciously or possibly out of ignorance of the different dates. Whatever the case may be, as the story was dated on the same day that Dmytrow departed from Calgary on his return to the east, having spent a total of seventeen days in Alberta, it seems likely that the story was written while he was in the Edmonton area or on the train south, and then mailed while making the connection to Winnipeg.

Nestor Dmytrow’s mission to Canada had its origin in an earlier visit made to the first Ukrainian colonies in the West by a friend and fellow immigration activist, Dr. Josef Oleskow (Iosyf Oles’kiv, 1860-1903). An agronomist from the city of Lviv (Lemberg) in Austro-Hungarian Ukraine, Oleskow made a six-week trip across Canada financed by the federal Department of the Interior in the fall of 1895 to assess how the Ruthenian settlers from Galicia were faring, learn about the areas suitable for agricultural settlement, and investigate other economic opportunities that might be available to immigrants in frontier industries needing unskilled

labour. Upon completing his tour of Western Canada, Oleskow travelled to Pennsylvania to meet with Dmytrow and his circle of fellow priests and activists with a view to encouraging both the re-immigration of some American Ruthenians to the Canadian prairies, while at the same time working together to redirect the flow of immigrants from Galicia away from South America in favour of Canada. Oleskow visited the United States from 21-30 September 1895 on the invitation of Frs. Ivan Konstankevych and Nestor Dmytrow, spending time in Shamokin and Mount Carmel before returning to Ottawa for follow-up meetings at the Department of the Interior to discuss immigration issues.<sup>5</sup> He then made his way back to Galicia, where he wrote up a thorough overview of his findings, published in Lviv that December under the title *O emigratsii* (*About emigration*) by the M. Kachkovsky Educational Society. Written as a practical handbook and guide, it included the earliest descriptions of Alberta and the Austro-Hungarian immigrants settled in Canada's West to be published in Ukrainian. It was thanks to Oleskow's recommendation and his connections with Canadian officials in Ottawa, that Fr. Dmytrow was contracted to produce a first-hand report on the Ukrainian colonies in the Canadian West and subsequently to serve as a field immigration agent.<sup>6</sup>

Nestor Dmytrow was born in 1862 in the village of Utishkiv, located fifty-seven kilometers northeast of the city of Lviv in the Zolochiv region, in what is now in Busk raion of Lviv oblast. The son of farmers, he completed his secondary education at Lviv's Ruthenian Academic Gymnasium No. 13. In the fall of 1890, shortly before his twenty-eighth birthday, he entered the seminary of the Lviv Greek Catholic Archeparchy. It was as a student activist that Dmytrow got interested in the plight of the Galician peasantry that had emigrated abroad, and with like-minded friends urged young priests to minister to the settlers overseas. After finishing his theological studies and pastoral training, he was consecrated into the priesthood by the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Metropolitan Sylvester Sembratovych, in April 1894. A year later he immigrated to the United States, settling initially in Shamokin, Pennsylvania, in an area that had attracted a considerable number of Ukrainian immigrants from Austria-Hungary.

The thirty-four-year old Fr. Dmytrow immediately threw himself into community work, and at the second convention of the Ruthenian National Association, held in May 1895, he moved that the association purchase the

newspaper *Svoboda*, which had been established by another Greek Catholic priest in September of 1893. Although the Ruthenian National Association had voted the previous February to make *Svoboda* its official organ, the paper's founder, Fr. Hryhorii Hrushka, continued to finance and legally own it. Fr. Hrushka subsequently tried to sell the newspaper when he needed money for another venture, but an attempt to assemble a co-operative formed of other clerics proved unsuccessful. Consequently, the newspaper was bought by Nestor Dmytrow and Fr. Ivan Konstankevych with their own money, the two men becoming the joint editors and publishers of the influential weekly periodical, which was also beginning to develop a readership among settlers in the fledgling Ukrainian agricultural colonies of Western Canada.

In July 1896 *Svoboda* moved its operations to Mount Carmel, west of Shamokin, where Nestor Dmytrow had relocated. Although Rev. Konstankevych assisted with the publication, Dmytrow was a leading contributor and the de facto chief editor prior to his departure for Canada.<sup>7</sup> His proximity to the press appears to have been responsible for initially stimulating his journalistic and literary productivity, though it has not yet been possible to determine whether or not he had ever tried his hand at writing, editing, or publishing before coming to America.

Dmytrow's account of his visits to the Ukrainian colonies in Western Canada appeared in *Svoboda* in eight installments between 22 April and 10 June 1897. His initial report from Alberta was published in the same issue as "Ruthenian Easter" on 27 May as the fifth installment of *Kanadiiska Rus*, his final submission from Alberta being printed as the seventh installment on 3 June. His commentary about his experiences chiefly focussed on the time he spent in the Edna-Star (also known as Limestone Lake and Beaver Creek) and Rabbit Hill districts outside of Edmonton. It also included some observations of a more general nature, such as the following remarks conveying his impressions of the prairie countryside, as he travelled by train between Calgary and Strathcona:

I will not force myself to describe those boundless domains that stretched out on both sides of the railway tracks, because that would be a pointless exercise. Whoever has not seen those limitless, uninhabited, deserted prairies in Assiniboia<sup>8</sup> won't have the capacity to imagine them. The grass was already

greening—and hundreds of head of cattle were idly cropping the grass. I asked an Englishman where the stables for the cattle were, and he in reply waved his hand in the air, with this gesture making it known that the horizon—that was the enclosure for this steppe livestock. (Dmytrow, *Kanadiis'ka Rus'* 30-31)

Dmytrow continues his report from Alberta by relating details of his first encounter with fellow Galicians upon arriving at the end of the rail in Strathcona, or South Edmonton:

Just before the train station in Edmonton, I spotted several of our grimy women in the doorway of a building, who, upon noticing me waved their hands—they had seen me in Winnipeg and now were staying, as if quarantined, in the Immigration Hall. I subsequently went into that shelter for our people and witnessed a horrible sight. In two large rooms, strewn about the floor, amid filthy rags and gigantic Galician chests, there lay women and children of various ages. Several dirty, sleepy, and unattractive women wandered around the kitchen, where a stove smoked as if it were a locomotive. There was a murderous stench, it was simply impossible to breathe. I announced that I would come at 9 o'clock to bless the *pasky*, and quickly fled outside. At the appointed hour I returned to them, and found everything in a state of readiness. On a long table there lay gigantic *pasky* and all kinds of Easter breakfast food. The women had by now dressed up a little, and with children in their arms—were waiting for me. Following the blessing of the Easter breads, during which they loudly wept, I said a few words, presented the cross for veneration, and after I had removed my vestments strongly rebuked the women for having such untidy living quarters. The wicked women nodded their heads and blamed one another for the disarray. There were fifteen families there, generally from Yaroslav County. The men had gone off to find farms outside the city.

On Easter Friday in the afternoon, because English people don't move from their houses before noontime, I drove out in the company of a Presbyterian preacher to Edna. (31-32)

Dmytrow's harsh remarks about the women and the state of things in the Immigration Hall are classic examples of why his writings make such insightful and entertaining reading even today. Blunt to the point of being tactless, he expressed himself freely about what he saw and what he thought, often in ways that today would be considered to be politically incorrect. Indeed, his candour sometimes created problems for him, as happened in the wake of his trip to Edna-Star. That was because a few of the settlers were already subscribers to *Svoboda*, and when he described them on a couple of occasions in an unflattering light, they understandably took offense.<sup>9</sup>

It is possible from his descriptions of the homesteads he visited around Edna-Star to literally track quarter-section by quarter-section much of his itinerary during the week he spent northeast of Edmonton. He provides detailed information about the buildings that had been erected by each of the farmers he looked in on, the livestock they possessed, and the amount of land that had been cleared by them, so as to give an accurate picture of their relative wealth and progress. While this was clearly done for his report to Ottawa, he also includes passages about his other activities, such as this intimate description of the first eastern Rite liturgy to be celebrated in the province of Alberta:

On the very same day I also inspected the farms of all of the more established farmers and dropped into the school, which was in the process of being constructed, to prepare everything that was necessary for the Divine Service. The entire gallery wailed like little children when "Christ is Risen" was sung. After the D[ivine] S[ervice], following the blessing of the *pasky*, everyone went to their homes, and subsequently all gathered for Vespers and a cheerful discussion took place in front of the school on the celebration of Easter in the Old Country, and in Canada. The people gathered around me with genuine, heart-felt gratitude and with tears in their eyes thanked me—saying, 'Reverend-Father, for two years now we've sat

like wild beasts in our shacks on Easter and sprinkled our un-blessed *paska* with tears.’ I had to flee into the school to do the Vesper service, because I myself could not keep from crying. On Easter Monday I again conducted a service at the school as well as Vespers, while on Tuesday, [I did the same] in the eastern end of the colony, in the home of the honourable Ivan Halkow, from Horozhanna Mala, county of Horodok. In the course of those three days 159 people gave confession and I baptized and anointed with oil twenty-five children for them. On Wednesday and Thursday I visited farmers on the western section not far from the [North] Saskatchewan River, while on Friday [I toured] the western parts—beginning with the honourable Ivan Danchuk from Borshchiv county. On Sunday, after the Divine Service, there took place with great solemnity the blessing of the first Ruthenian cemetery in Canada, and at the same time we erected a cross in commemoration of freedom. A committee was also elected which after the harvest was to undertake the building of a church and a residence for a future priest. (Dmytrow, *Kanadiis’ka Rus’* 34-35)

Dmytrow’s account of his time in Alberta concludes with some fascinating observations that he made about his trip back to Winnipeg from Edmonton, several of his anecdotes providing glimpses into what train travel was like in Canada at the end of the nineteenth century.

In the meantime, Nestor Dmytrow’s presence in the Edmonton area had been noted in a front page announcement in the *Edmonton Bulletin* on 26 April 1897, six days after the item appeared about the Calgary incident which served as the basis of “Ruthenian Easter”. The notice read:

REV. LESTOR DYMYTRIOW, of Mount Carmel, Pa., a delegate sent out by the Russian National Union arrived on the last train and drove out on Friday to Edna, to interview the German and Russian settlers located there, and to inspect the country and its advantages for immigration. Rev. Mr. Dymytriw [sic] is here for the primal purpose of securing locations for fifty families from Mount Carmel, where there is a Ruthenian colony settled, and as the colony is becoming crowded

some of these are forced to emigrate. From what the reverend gentlemen has seen of the country he is highly pleased with its prospects and the field for immigration which it offers. He intends to stay in the district about two weeks.

The misspelling of his name is just one of several variants found in English-language references to him in period sources which, besides providing additional information about his endeavours, sometimes contain factual inaccuracies or details which contradict those in Dmytrow's own reports. At this time, Ukrainians (i.e., Ruthenians, Galicians, or "Bukowinians") were still often identified as Russians, hence the mention of "Russian" settlers here and elsewhere, though Ukrainians were also frequently referred to as "Austrians".

Following his return to Manitoba, Dmytrow travelled to Ottawa and made a brief side-trip to Pennsylvania before coming back to Canada in July. During the next two and half months he visited settlements in Stuartburn, Dauphin, and the rural districts around Yorkton, Saskatchewan. He was back in Alberta from 25 September to 4 October 1897, in an effort to counter the impact of a mission earlier in July by two clergymen sent by the Russian Orthodox Church in San Francisco. Although he did not write or publish anything about this second visit, his activities were described in an article published on 28 October 1897 in *Svoboda*, titled *Svoboda* "Visty z ruskykh' kolonii v Kanadi" ("News from the Ruthenian Colonies in Canada," 2-3) and written by a correspondent who was accompanying him. He also received coverage in three news items that appeared in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, one of which (on 11 October 1897) reported on the fact that he had been to Edna with Bishop Emile-Joseph Legal of the Roman Catholic Diocese of St. Albert to choose a site for a church to be constructed there in the fall.

Meanwhile, probably sometime during the summer months when he was mostly based in Winnipeg, Dmytrow began work on a longer piece of prose fiction. A novel titled *Timko Harvryliuk: Opovidanie z emihratsi-inoho zhytia* (*A Story from Immigrant Life*) described the experiences of a peasant who quits Galicia for Canada. The opening chapter was carried in *Svoboda* on 2 September 1897, the eighth and last appearing on 21 October. As with *Kanadiis'ka Rus'*, the series was later issued by the *Svoboda* press

as a seventy-nine-page booklet,<sup>10</sup> first advertised for the price of fifteen cents on 16 March 1899.

Each chapter of the novel relates a different phase of the immigration process, beginning with Timko making the difficult decision to leave his native village with his family for a fresh start in the New World. The chapter headings then perfectly summarize the narrative line of the novel: “Timko in Lviv”; “Timko Sells His Land”; “Timko Goes to Get His Passport”; “Timko En Route to Canada”; “Timko at Sea”; “Timko in Canada”; and “Timko on the Farm”. Once again, Dmytrow distinguishes himself with some of his graphic descriptions, among them this portrayal of the effects of a storm that the immigrants suffered through during their Atlantic crossing:

It began to grow light out. The storm subsided, the high seas grew smaller, the roaring dimmed, and afterwards only the echoes of that terrible night could be heard. The clamour still resounded in the ears of the people—[but] the sun shone brightly, and the weather outside turned beautiful. People began poking their heads out, like corpses from a grave, and looked to see if death, that angry witch, had finally withdrawn to a distance. Slowly, some of them could be seen on deck, and they were frightful looking, as if they had risen from a grave. Others, especially the women were throwing up on the middle deck, almost barfing their guts up. The unfortunate people threw up non-stop—they were heaving the whole day. They were even up-chucking last year’s *paska*, not just potatoes and cabbage. Where does all of that vomit come from?!—Gradually, people showed up for breakfast. Looking like cadavers, they groaned and rued that moment, when the idea came to them to travel on that cursed ship. (*Svoboda* 1)

Needless to say, Dmytrow was obviously trying to paint as realistic a picture as possible of some of the hardships that immigrants might expect to be faced with coming to Canada so as to prepare them for their journey. His journalistic pieces contain some equally explicit depictions, often dealing with the dirty and dishevelled appearance of Galician and Bukovynian peasants, and their unfamiliarity with elementary sanitary practises.

The final chapter of the novel is devoted to the long train trip to Edmonton and to Timko's settlement on a homestead in the Ukrainian colony northeast of the city. The account of the former clearly draws in part on the impressions that Dmytrow first wrote up in "Ruthenian Easter" and *Kanadiis'ka Rus'*:

By the morning of the second day the train had already reached Assiniboia. Timko looked outside and was seized by fear. It was a wasteland, a boundless wasteland. Wherever you cast your eye, there was stunted, dry grass. There wasn't so much as a patch of cultivated land, nor was there a single shrub to be seen. Everything was uninhabited and mute, except that far, far away you might see a herd of livestock and a pack of horses. All day long the train rolled through that wasteland, all day long Timko looked through the window. (*Svoboda* 2)

The sense of the expansiveness, emptiness, and seeming desolation of the southern prairies was acutely felt by the pioneers from the Austro-Hungarian provinces of western Ukraine, who were used to living in crowded villages that dotted a typically more verdant and less monotonous landscape. Fortunately, the situation brightened the closer one got to Edmonton, as is evident in this passage about approaching the city from the much drier south:

on the following day Timko transferred to a different train and again spent a full day travelling, right until evening. From the afternoon of that day the countryside finally gave way to fields and forests. It was an undulating land, covered with forests, amongst which there were fields of wheat. Our muzhik breathed easier and spontaneously began to whisper a prayer. Before nightfall the train finally came to a stop and everyone went to the local immigration hall. (2)

The story then continues with a description of the two-day trip by wagon to the Ukrainian settlement and some details about how the Havryliuks established themselves on a homestead in the pioneering community. The novel ends with Timko's optimistic prediction for the future—appropriate

considering the author's priestly vocation—as he digs in the family garden with his initially skeptical wife, Paraska:

“There will be churches, and it will be like it is among people, if only God grants us good health,” Timko concluded and tossed out a gigantic potato with his shovel. (3)

Therefore, despite depicting the many challenges and fears that needed to be overcome by emigrants to Canada, Dmytrow's ultimate goal was to encourage others to follow in Timko's footsteps.

After spending the winter in Buffalo, New York,<sup>11</sup> where his wife Konstance Konstankevych gave birth to their first child (a son they named after his father), Dmytrow returned to Canada to work as an immigration agent for the federal government.<sup>12</sup> Although he planned to make another trip to Alberta in the summer of 1898, he did not get further west than Saskatchewan—probably because he had been successful in helping to recruit another Greek Catholic priest and fellow Ukrainian activist from Galicia, Rev. Paul Tymkiewich, who arrived in Edmonton in May 1898. Nor did Dmytrow ever come back to Canada once he had returned to the United States in the fall of that year.

Given the rigours of travel at the end of the nineteenth century, the demands of his schedule, and the purpose of his mission, Dmytrow's literary achievements are in retrospect quite remarkable. Besides his travelogue, his novel, and additional journalistic articles, he also authored four other literary prose pieces in a series called “Scenes from Canada,” complementing similar works that he wrote for *Svoboda* in a sequence titled “Scenes from America.” Two of the other Canadian short stories by Dmytrow, like “Ruthenian Easter,” were inspired by actual events. “Vyishla za Menonita” (“She Married a Mennonite”), printed in *Svoboda* in installments on 24 February and 3 March 1898, described the courtship and marriage of a daughter of a Ukrainian homesteader with the son of a neighbouring Mennonite farmer. It was clearly inspired by a *Svoboda* correspondent's 13 January 1898 report of a wedding that took place two months earlier near Stuartburn, Manitoba, conducted by a priest with the Russian Orthodox Mission. The second story or literary sketch, published in *Svoboda* on 24 March 1898 under the English-language heading “ASSIMILATION,” was an account of another early intermarriage, this time between a Ukrainian

girl and an Englishman in the Dauphin area in mid-October 1897. Documented in a *Svoboda* item on 4 November 1897, it is noteworthy that Dmytrow chose to transpose the event into a third person account—without mentioning himself by name—even though he personally officiated at the nuptials. Why he chose to fictionalize the event is open to question, but he may have done so to feel freer in commenting on the wedding, or to remove himself as a pivotal character in the proceedings.

Besides his other Canadian works, which include a tale about an aged father searching for a lost son and a satirical story about a naïve teacher who immigrates in the hope of finding an easy life in the New World, Dmytrow published a variety of articles, some American fiction, a little poetry as well as a couple of translations in *Svoboda* in the late 1890s and early 1900s. However, in terms of his overall output as a writer it is his Canadian oeuvre that holds the greatest interest, not only for its historical significance but for its unique content and literary qualities. Although his literary ambitions were modest, Dmytrow possessed a keen eye for detail and recognized material that would make a good story, or at least one that would be interesting to readers of *Svoboda* in the Americas and in the Old Country. He understood that the Canadian West would appear exotic and enticing to the Ukrainian peasants he wanted to coax in the direction of Canada instead of South America, and he set out to educate them by means of journalism and fiction to better prepare them for immigration overseas.

In terms of non-fiction, Josef Oleskow's *O emigratsii (About Emigration, 1985)* provides a useful contrast to Dmytrow's travelogue, *Kanadiis'ka Rus.* Both works cover much of the same ground literally and figuratively, describing trips made across some of the same parts of Canada, and being motivated by the same concerns—namely, they were written primarily as informational reports and intended to offer practical guidance for potential settlers. The two authors, who knew each other, also had similar attitudes towards the Ukrainian peasantry, most notable in the frustration that they repeatedly expressed about the low level of culture typical of the vast majority of *muzhiks*. Each could not resist editorializing about their fellow countrymen in moralizing and rather patronizing ways, but they were at the same time equally optimistic about the long-term prospects of the settlers that they encountered in Canada. And, of course, the objective of the two works was to encourage western

Ukrainian immigrants to choose Canada over Brazil, a goal that they fulfilled in related, yet different ways.

Whereas *O emigratsii* reads in large part like the study and handbook that it is, having been written by an author with a scientific background, *Kanadiis'ka Rus'* has qualities that are more akin to an adventure story, as its narrative is infused with Dmytrow's distinct personality. Certainly, the fact that the latter had a worldview that was grounded in pastoral work ministering to a wide range of people, naturally gave him a less clinical outlook and made him more visceral in his responses. Oleskow's detailed discussions of the geography, climate, soil, flora, and agricultural suitability of the terrain he passed through inevitably have the character of a textbook, which befits a man of his training and professional disposition, but makes for drier reading. Dmytrow, on the other hand, conveys similar information—admittedly, without the same depth, breadth, or expertise—in a concise and colloquial manner, making his travelogue much more engaging, if not as thorough or itemized in its presentation.

While both authors provide inventories of the situation of individual farmers they visited, Dmytrow also includes sketches of some of the unusual people he met along the way, giving a strong anecdotal quality to his chronicle. And because Dmytrow wrote his travelogue in a series of despatches that were published while he was still on the road, there is an immediacy about them that is missing from Oleskow's summary of his Canadian tour, which he undoubtedly organized and polished after his return to Galicia. Thus, Dmytrow's impressions of "Canadian Ruthenia" are documented in a chronological narrative in which each installment picks up where the previous one left off, while Oleskow structures his material more thematically, and only broadly corresponding to his itinerary. The latter approach enables the Lviv professor to go into greater detail on specific subjects that he believes are important to address, but it disrupts the overall flow and lacks the spontaneity that are the attractive features of Dmytrow's prose.

The difference between the two authors is especially evident in their commentaries about train travel, with Dmytrow distinguishing himself with his vivid vignettes of fellow passengers, and Oleskow conveying a lot of well-researched facts and observations about fares, the landholdings of Canadian railway companies, and the expanses traversed in getting to the settlement areas. Dmytrow essentially takes his readers along with him

on his journey, dramatically describing how he stumbled through dense bush at dusk when trying to reach a remote colony outside of Dauphin, Manitoba, or how he rode two days on a wagon from Edmonton to the Edna-Star colony in the company of a disagreeable Presbyterian preacher and a free-spirited youth who was their driver.

In short, although the objectives of the two men were the same and there are many parallels in the stories they tell about Canada, they informed readers using different, if complementary strategies—*Kanadiis'ka Rus'* having a more literary feel to it, by virtue of its conversational style and serial structure. Not only that, but by also utilizing fiction as a vehicle for discussing the immigrant experience, Dmytrow showed a canny understanding of how to wrap some of the lessons he sought to impart in the form of compelling and artistically rendered tales. For instance, in *Timko Havryliuk*, he portrays Josef Oleskow (without specifically naming him) as a stuffy Lviv professor and implicitly criticizes him for the fact that *O emigratsii* was published by the conservative and Russophile Kachkovsky Society, and not the rival Ukrainophile Prosvita Society, which had a politically progressive orientation. Nevertheless, Dmytrow at the same time acknowledges that Oleskow was the leading authority on immigration to Canada, and encourages aspiring immigrants to look to him for advice.

As for Dmytrow's fictional writings, they somewhat resemble works by two other authors who made their reputations writing about the Canadian West around the turn of the century: Ralph Connor and Emily Murphy. Like them, he was a promoter of settlement on the prairies, which all three depicted as an exciting, if occasionally daunting frontier offering both great opportunity and adventure. However, Dmytrow's works certainly did not enjoy the commercial success of his Canadian counterparts, due in large part to the fact that his audience was circumscribed by issues of language and limited literacy. However, he also had a more utilitarian attitude towards fiction, which is especially apparent in *Timko Havryliuk*. Rather than developing a contrived plot or exploring different characters in his novella, he remains chiefly focussed on using his hero's travails in making his way to Canada so as to explain all of the steps required, and the pitfalls to be avoided, in successfully reaching a homestead on the prairies. Many of the descriptions are vividly drawn and Timko is convincing in his role as a typical Galician peasant, and there are also nice touches such as the exaggerated remarks about the seasickness experienced on the ocean

crossing. While hardly an epic rivalling other works in the extensive body of literature comprising the New World immigrant genre, *Timko Havryliuk* (along with *Kanadiis'ka Rus'*, i.e., *Scenes from Canada*) effectively served its ultimate purpose, which was to encourage, guide, and reassure at least some of the settlers seeking a better life in a strange and distant land.

Some nine decades after his death, and more than a hundred and fifteen years after he visited Canada, Nestor Dmytrow's Canadian stories still make for captivating reading, and not just for historical reasons. That is because they memorably capture a time, people, and places that while far removed from our present day and age, remain fresh and vibrant thanks to his efforts as a pioneering writer in Canada's West.

## NOTES

- 1 Although pronounced "Dmytreev" in Ukrainian (with the stress on the first syllable) and commonly spelled "Dmytriv" in many English-language Canadian sources, letters signed by the Reverend and contemporaneous references to him in English (including legal documents) almost always rendered his last name with an "o," the spelling used by his family and found on his death certificate and tombstone. The source of the two variants is the orthography used by late nineteenth-century Ukrainian, in which the printed accented "ó" was pronounced "ee". It is also worth noting that for his published works, Dmytrow often simply used his name without his clerical title, most likely to underscore his progressive views.
- 2 Ruthenia is a Latinized form of Rus,' the medieval principality ruled from the city of Kyiv between the tenth and the thirteen centuries, before being dismembered under the impact of the Mongol invasion. "Rusyn" (sometimes spelled Rusin, or rendered as Ruthenian) was the name that most Ukrainians used to identify themselves until the end of the nineteenth century, after which it was displaced by the modern term "Ukrainian" from the designation "Ukraine," first popularized on maps from the Cossack era. In the eighteenth century Muscovite tsars adopted and adapted the name "Russia" from "Rus," so as to symbolically lay claim to the inheritance of Kyivan Rus' hundreds of years after its demise.
- 3 All excerpts from Dmytrow's works cited in this essay are translated from Ukrainian by me. The translation of "Ruthenian Easter" by Myroslav Shkandrij contains some slight differences with my own rendering in English.
- 4 In 1596 a section of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine and Belarus entered an agreement that created a Byzantine-Rite Catholic Church recognizing the authority of the Holy See in Rome, in exchange for being allowed to retain most of the ecclesiastical practises and customs of the eastern Church, which included keeping the Julian calendar.
- 5 For details about Oleskow's mission to Canada, see Kaye. A scan of the original of *O emigratsii* [*About Emigration*] can be accessed electronically through Peel's Prairie Provinces, the online bibliography of the Bruce, Peel Special Collections Library at the University of Alberta.

- 6 Like Dmytrow, Oleskow should be pronounced “Oleskeev” and is therefore written as “Oleskiw” in some English-language sources.
- 7 *Svoboda* continued to be published in Mount Carmel until 12 July 1900, after which the paper was produced out of Olyphant, Pennsylvania, just north of Scranton. See Mushuha (45) and Kravcheniuk (6). This Ukrainian-language newspaper currently published in Jersey City, New Jersey, hosts a complete digital archive of its newspapers from 1893 to the present, and is the most convenient place to look up issues cited in this paper.
- 8 Assiniboia was the name given to southern Saskatchewan and a part of southeastern Alberta before the 1905 creation of the three prairie provinces. In 1897, Calgary and Edmonton were technically within that part of the Northwest Territories which was administratively known as the District of Alberta.
- 9 As was fairly common among clergy and many others of his generation, Dmytrow had very negative and stereotypically anti-Semitic opinions concerning Jews, also holding Orthodox Bukovynians in low regard, albeit for different reasons. On more than one occasion, he praised Native Canadians as being more dignified than the Ukrainian immigrants to Canada, and unfavourably contrasted settlers from Galicia and Bukovyna with those who had migrated to the United States from the Lemko region of Carpathian Ukraine. At the same time, he disparaged the often submissive attitude of his peasant countrymen and Galician women in general, and was especially critical of their uncouth behavior and indifference to matters of personal hygiene. However, he greatly esteemed the values of English civilization and liked “American women” for their assertive self-confidence.
- 10 Published versions of the novella are extremely rare, though a microfilm of it is available at the New York Public Library, where its title is transliterated as *Timko Gavrii-lukw: opoviedanie zw emigratiinogo zita* [sic].
- 11 Interestingly, the only mention made of Dmytrow in the Calgary press was a short news item on page four of the *Calgary Herald* on 11 November 1897 announcing that: “Rev. Nestor Dimitrov, the Greek Catholic priest who recently visited the Galician settlement at Edmonton, has returned to Philadelphia. He will return in May, bringing a priest of his church for Edmonton.”
- 12 As part of the agreement that created the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine and Belarus, Rome allowed for parish priests to be married, as has always been customary in the Orthodox Church. However, there are questions surrounding Dmytrow’s marital status when he arrived in North America, since Roman Catholic bishops in the United States and Canada fiercely opposed the immigration of any non-celibate Greek Catholic clergy. The possibility exists that Dmytrow might have wed in Pennsylvania, after his ordination, which technically would be in violation of canonical procedure.

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