

## [Kupensky on Hrytsak, 'Ivan Franko and His Community'](#)

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**Yaroslav Hrytsak.** *Ivan Franko and His Community*. Translated by Marta Daria Olynyk. Brookline: Academic Studies Press, 2019. 588 pp. \$42.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-61811-968-1.

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Yaroslav Hrytsak's *Ivan Franko and His Community* (2019) is a pioneering volume that sits at the crossroads of three different genres. It is at once a biography of the Ukrainian writer Ivan Franko, a microhistory of eastern Galicia from the 1850s to 1880s, and a case study of the origins and meanings of the Ukrainian national movement.

These concerns are reflected in the book's title, both elements of which are creatively balanced in its narrative. At times, Franko's biography takes prominence, and the development and evolution of the artist serves as a structuring metaphor for the profound changes taking place in eastern Galicia in the last half of the nineteenth century. Elsewhere, the microhistory of eastern Galicia predominates, and, thus, we see the degree to which Franko's biography distills and amplifies the varied worlds he inhabited.

*Ivan Franko and His Community* is divided into two methodologically distinct parts that allow Hrytsak to read Franko both horizontally and vertically. "Part I: Franko and His Times" largely sticks to a chronological narrative and, in meticulous detail, takes the reader through the ever-expanding "small communities" (p. xiv) that helped shape Franko as he moved from his native village of Nahuievychi (chapters 2 and 3) to school in Drohobych (chapter 4), university in Lviv (chapter 7), prison (chapter 8) and back again (chapter 9). "Part II: Franko and His Society" synthetically analyzes core concerns of Franko's aesthetics and politics, such as his relationship with peasants (chapter 11), Boryslav (chapter 12), women (chapter 13), Jews (chapter 14), and his readers (chapter 15). It concludes with a discussion of why Franko began to be known as a genius (chapter 16) and a prophet, contrary to the biblical logic, even in his own land (chapter 17). Finally, the narrative is followed by fourteen fascinating tables that graphically illustrate the contours of Franko's worlds, such as the religious makeup of Galicia (table 1), literacy (tables 2-4), demographics of the Boryslav-Drohobovych oil basin (tables 5-6), family data (tables 7-8), data about Ruthenian-Ukrainian publications (tables 9-13), and the geography of Franko's publications (table 14).

Although the book's Ukrainian title uses the image of Franko as a "prophet"—*Prorok u svoïi vitchyzni. Franko ta ioho spil'nota (1856-1888)*—the English title in Marta Daria Olynyk's powerful translation wisely draws attention to its central historical and theoretical tensions, namely Hrytsak's thoughtful exploration of Franko's modernism, nationalism, and socialism.

Hrytsak begins his study by representing the Austrian province of Galicia as a "civilizational borderland" (p. 15), whose territory became the playing field for a host of competing class,

confessional, and national identities. And what Hrytsak emphasizes is that Galicia's historical development challenges the assumption that industrialization and urbanization (neither of which were widespread at the end of the nineteenth century) are necessary ingredients to the formation of modern nations. In his formulation, Galicia is a historical region "where there was a great deal of modernity but little modernization" (p. xix). In this respect, the volume makes a valuable contribution to studies of modernism in Eastern and Central Europe, which have tended to explore the relationship between the region's material backwardness and aesthetic progressivism. In *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1982), Marshall Berman noted how nineteenth-century Russian writers produced some of the most canonical symbols of modernity in a country without widespread industrialization and urbanization, a phenomenon he calls "the modernism of underdevelopment." [2] More recently, scholars have focused on the diversity of "peripheral modernisms" that emerged on the margins of the Russian, Habsburg, or Soviet empires. [3]

While Hrytsak does not explicitly place Franko's aesthetics within this tradition, his voice resonates with these debates by demonstrating how the Galician experience of modernity was not dependent upon the teleological triumph of urban (modern) over rural (traditional) spaces. Instead, it could be experienced not only in Lviv, the "hidden capital" of nationally conscious Ukrainians (p. 124), but also "without even leaving the village," where there was a robust network of "reading rooms, cooperatives, and other rural organizations" (p. 26). Because of his deep roots in both of these worlds, Franko emerges as the protean figure most capable of fostering "the consolidation of Ukrainian culture as a modern culture" (p. 151).

Hrytsak demonstrates Franko's skill at capturing the Ruthenian "mentality" (p. 17), which he himself wrote was characterized by "ambiguity, indefiniteness, and half-ness" (p. 72). For this reason, he stresses that there is no coherent Frankism to be found in his poetry and prose. Drawing upon Isaiah Berlin's essay *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History* (1953), Hrytsak classifies Franko as the consummate fox—a thinker who knows "many things" but not "one big thing" (p. 191)—and this philosophical flexibility gave him the latitude to adapt his aesthetics and politics to the region's changing conditions.

While Franko ultimately chose to marry Ruthenian and Ukrainian culture, Hrytsak takes a two-chapter digression (chapters 5 and 6) to travel down the different paths that Franko could have taken. And these chapters contain the book's valuable contribution to the study of national identities. Central to Hrytsak's analysis is the concept of the "fatherland" (*bat'kivshchyna*), which can be "small," like a village, region, or territory, or "large," like a nation or empire (pp. 77-78). He explores the competing fatherlands that overlapped in Franko's communities—Cossack, Galician, German, Rus', Russian, Ruthenian, Polish, Ukrainian—and demonstrates the great slippage between ethnonational and territorial understandings of these terms. To this end, he illustrates Mykhailo Drahomanov's observation that "the Ruthenians are a nationality that knows the least about its fatherland" (p. 95) in a thorough analysis of peasant representations of the symbolic geography of their homes. In one account, many Galician peasants, even by 1897, had no idea what the term "Ukraine" meant (p. 108).

In chapters 7 and 8, Hrytsak shows how Franko's conversion to the Ukrainian camp was intimately tied to his arrival in 1870s Lviv, a "nationalizing city" (p. 134) that also, crucially, was a "staging area" (p. 154) for political émigrés and radical ideas passing into and out of the Russian empire. The

central figure for Franko and his circle was Mykhailo Drahomanov, the Ukrainian intellectual who visited Galicia on his way to exile in Geneva. It was Drahomanov who helped make the case that the socialist and populist sentiments in vogue among young Ruthenian intellectuals were best realized through ethnonational solidarity with the Ukrainian people (p. 144). As a result, when Franko began to simultaneously champion the socialist and Ukrainian movements in 1876, this conversion allowed him to transform his social causes—feminism, free love, atheism—into Ukrainian ones as well. In other words, if it were not for the “new, leftist culture” that emerged in Franko’s Lviv, there may not have been the “victory of the Ukrainian national movement” in Galicia (p. 393).

In this respect, Hrytsak’s study effectively polemicizes with two persistent and seemingly irreconcilable interpretive traditions: the Soviet, which celebrated Franko as the spokesman of an “oppressed class,” and the national-patriotic, which praised him as the spokesman of an “oppressed nation” (p. 213). On the one hand, Hrytsak rehabilitates Franko’s socialism from the contorted teleological readings of Soviet critics, for, as he explained during a recent discussion of his book, “Franko was a Marxist who tried to save Marxism from Marx because he believed Marx was too simplistic” in his thinking about Eastern Europe.[4] By doing so, Hrytsak demythologizes the Ukrainian Franko as the flag-carrying bard of a politically independent nation-state by constantly emphasizing the many contexts when Franko’s socialist identity took equal, if not greater, precedence over his national one.

In the final analysis, Hrytsak’s study is a significant reexamination of Franko’s life and legacy, one that will be a touchstone for scholars of Central and Eastern European literatures, modernism, nationalism, and socialism for years to come. And perhaps the lasting contribution of Hrytsak’s progressive Franko is that he managed to show it was possible to “be both *Ukrainian* and *modern* at one and the same time” (p. 339).

#### Notes

[1]. *Prorok u svoïi vitchyzni. Franko ta ioho spil’nota (1856-86)* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2006).

[2]. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 193.

[3]. See, for example, Marc Caplan, *How Strange the Change: Language, Temporality, and Narrative in Peripheral Modernisms* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); Harsha Ram, “Decadent Nationalism, ‘Peripheral’ Modernism: The Georgian Literary Manifesto between Symbolism and the Avant-garde,” *Modernism/modernity* 21, no. 1 (January 2014): 343-59; Michael David-Fox, *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015); and Ilya Gerasimov, *Plebeian Modernity: Social Practices, Illegality, and the Urban Poor in Russia, 1906-1906* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2018).

[4]. Yaroslav Hrytsak, “Online Book Discussion: Yaroslav Hrytsak, *Ivan Franko and His Community*,” June 8, 2020, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, [www.facebook.com/canadian.institute.of.ukrainian.studies/](http://www.facebook.com/canadian.institute.of.ukrainian.studies/).

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