

Taras Hunczak. *My Memoirs: Life's Journey Through WWII and Various Historical Events of the 21st Century*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. viii, 238 pp. Illustrations. \$34.99, paper.

Taras Hunczak's memoirs were first published in Ukrainian in 2005 (under the title *Moi spohady—stezhky zhyttia* [*My Memoirs—Paths of Life*]). The edition under review is an English-language translation, and it also includes Hunczak's reflections on the Euromaidan demonstrations and on Russia's subsequent aggression toward Ukraine. Hunczak was born in Pidhaitsi, in Ternopil oblast, in 1932, and we follow his life path from his childhood in a Ukrainian village through his time during the war years—as a young boy, undertaking dangerous courier assignments, while his older brother was the leader of the local branch of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN); together fleeing from the Red Army to Germany in 1944; and himself managing to escape conscription into the Nazi youth corps. Hunczak also describes how his family fared after they had been evacuated to Bavaria; ended up as displaced persons in the American zone in postwar Germany; and, finally, received their entrance visas for the United States in 1949 and settled in Buffalo, New York. The first two chapters of the book cover Hunczak's childhood and youth experiences.

In the following chapter, Hunczak reflects on the period of his study and research of Ukrainian, Russian, and Eastern European history, an academic path that earned him the position of professor of history at Rutgers University. We follow Hunczak's research of various central individuals and momentous events in Ukrainian history, his archival studies in several European countries, and his participation in numerous conferences and lectures. We are also offered a look at the political and cultural life of the Ukrainian diasporas of the United States and Canada, including their internal conflicts and their relations with Ukraine during the Cold War.

Chapter 4 deals with the turbulent 1980s in Soviet and Ukrainian politics, a period during which Hunczak continued his work in the Ukrainian diaspora, among other things as the editor-in-chief of *Suchasnist'* (*Contemporaneity* [Munich-Newark]) and the head of the Council on Ukrainian Heritage. In chapters 5, 6, and 7, we are introduced to Hunczak's thoughts and reflections on the politically tumultuous years leading up to the declaration of Ukraine's independence. We follow him on his trips to Ukraine; and we get a first-hand perspective on important and acute events and issues, such as nationality, language, and ethnic minorities in the newly independent Ukrainian state—although I myself have difficulty understanding his position on these matters. Hunczak was also directly involved in preparations for the referendum on independence in Ukraine,

and his recollections provide a window into the most decisive milestone in the history of the modern Ukrainian state.

Chapter 8 focuses on the 1990s post-referendum period in Ukraine and the difficulties and challenges that had to be resolved in the newly independent Ukrainian state. Hunczak continued his visits to Ukraine, and he obviously contributed to the process of the consolidation of Ukrainian independence by giving lectures and participating in various discussion forums. Chapter 9 touches on his academic work. In chapter 10, Hunczak describes his extended family; they are also portrayed in pictures. Chapters 11 and 12 deal with his academic activities from 2010 onward and contain his reflections on the Maidan demonstrations and their aftermath.

I read Hunczak's memoirs from the position of a Norwegian social anthropologist of Ukrainian heritage. My paternal grandparents probably had similar experiences to those of Hunczak in prewar Ukrainian lands, wartime Germany, and postwar displaced persons camps. One significant difference is that they ended up as refugees in Norway, a country without a sizable Ukrainian diaspora, at least until just a few years ago. Hunczak, his academic merits, and the life of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States as described by him are, thus, not familiar to me in the same way that they would be to members of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States. This brings me to a major inadequacy of the book: its perspective, contextualization, and descriptions are overly narrow and exclusive; therefore, they are, to some degree, inaccessible to those outside of the Ukrainian diaspora of the United States who want, or need, to understand Ukrainian history more from "the inside."

Hunczak, as a historian, is not entirely successful in writing history as it unfolded before his eyes. We are offered glimpses into a window of memories from his own past, but the wider historical landscape that surrounds those memories is diffuse or missing. The reader must have a certain level of knowledge about Ukrainian history and insight into the Ukrainian diaspora of the United States in order to fully appreciate the book. There is also quite a bit of name-dropping in the book—names of people that Hunczak has met or conferences that he has attended. To someone outside of the Ukrainian diaspora of the United States, such name-dropping can be confusing and frustrating. One reason to read a memoir is to be taken back in time to important events and to see them through the eyes of a witness. However, the book's rather colourless language, permeated with empty phrases like "[f]or me it was very moving" and "[i]t is difficult to describe" (137), does not help me, as a reader, imagine those events, at least not in the way that Hunczak experienced them.

The reading experience is also hampered by some inaccurate and inconsistent translations from Ukrainian into English (e.g., 128—of the five

times that the surname *Fokin* is mentioned, it is misspelled three times as *Fokine*) and by too many unnecessary repetitions (e.g., 220 and 222—both pages provide the same exact lengthy quote of Daniel B. Baer).

Hunczak's memoirs are an important contribution to the understanding of the history of Ukraine and the history of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States from the perspective of an active participant. The author's reflections on the turbulent years before and after the referendum on independence in Ukraine, in particular, are an invaluable source of information regarding those critical years in Ukrainian state-building. Other parts of the book, unfortunately, cannot easily be understood by those of us who do not possess an in-depth knowledge of the many specific events and people mentioned.

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Works Cited

Hunchak, Taras. *Moi spohady—stezhky zhyttia*. Vydavnytstvo "Dnipro," 2005.