The Return of Ancestral Gods. Modern Ukrainian Paganism as an Alternative Vision for a Nation. By Mariya Lesiv. Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queens University Press. 2013. 244 pp. Notes. Glossary. Index. Photographs. $67.50: Cloth.

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Ukrainian Paganism and its "multiple modernities" (166) interact to create a bold new spiritual paradigm that also serves the cause of validating Ukrainian nationhood based on pre-Christian ancestral traditions and practices. Applying her excellent control of an imposing volume of research, Mariya Lesiv has produced an engrossing narrative about Modern Ukrainian Paganism in all of its complexities. It is about a people who rejected the dominant Christian religion and nationalist political ideology in favor of a two thousand year old past for validation of their historical ethnic identity. She examines in meticulous detail Paganism's emergence as an alternative religion during a time of the people's rising national consciousness, its adaptations to modernity, its place in the global community of Pagans (à la Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 1996), its potential for becoming a lasting belief system in Ukraine, and its direct involvement in forging a modern spiritual paradigm.

Known as *Runvira* (Native Ukrainian National Faith), this modern Pagan tradition was established in Chicago in 1966 and began to filter into Ukraine in the 1980s, at a time when history was being redrafted and "collective memories of the past were being restructured" (7). Expansion of this alternative to the Christian faith advanced dramatically after Ukrainian independence in 1991 (64). Together with *Runvira*, two additional officially registered communities—*Native Faith*, monotheistic like *Runvira*, emphasizing native traditions and a nationalist orientation; and *Ancestral Fire*, a polytheistic faith that accentuates magic, orients itself toward a pan-Slavic community, and exhibits little interest in nationalist ideology—rose to dominance in Ukraine. Common to the three is an aspect unique to Ukraine. They all revere a spiritual hero who symbolized for them their native values, and provides an important connection to Ukrainian Pagan claims for a heritage of pre-Christian beginnings. He is the nineteenth-century poet, Taras Shevchenko, valorized in Ukraine as a spiritual giant with a reservoir of compelling symbols with which they could identify.

The first four chapters of Lesiv's book help us to better appreciate the ways in which the newly converted Pagans related to this spiritual phenomenon as their pursuit of a national identity took them away from, not toward engagement with, the mainstream Orthodox religion or Eastern-rite Catholicism that defines the religion of most Western Ukrainians. The connection to Paganism furnishes for Ukrainians irrefutable evidence of the reality of their being a discrete ethnic nation with a well-established history. Native folklore tied to rural settings, a perceived connection to an ancient Trypillian culture originating in the Dnipro-Dnister region around Kyiv, and a connection to the bygone Scythian tribal culture, coalesced to strengthen their avowal of authenticity as an ethnic-nation.

The following four chapters advance the narrative beyond the founding and organizational structure of Paganism to convey important insights into its inner workings, goals, shared beliefs, attraction of its aesthetics, and its kinship with Western Pagan communities. Although the West

and Ukraine are united in their fascination with the past, over the course of their respective developments they have also diverged in a number of critical ways. The author's explanation of their differences is also part of this segment. She argues persuasively that Western Pagans focus on creativity as opposed to "authenticity" and have come to terms with the fact that their religion is new, whereas Ukrainians argue against being seen as modernist in favor of adherence to traditionalism. Those rituals and symbols, the sacred ceremonies performed near shrines, the wearing of native dress, and artifacts replete with ancient, frequently stylized, symbols are all products of "imagined achievements of their imagined ancestors" (99). They offer important insights into the making of a modern Pagan identity in Ukraine.

The last two chapters include an examination of the network of conflicting beliefs adapted to the very modernity that Ukrainian Pagans decry, even as they employ its technology to promote their re-imagined faith. Here, Lesiv also raises important questions about the role of Western ideas in helping to chart a course toward the creation of a new spiritual paradigm and religious discourse for those Ukrainians seeking an alternative to mainstream Christianity, as well as their rejection of the nationalistically charged political ideology to which so many Ukrainians turned to claim irrefutable nationhood. In addition, this segment boasts an in-depth discussion of its aesthetics, aspects of which are found in the many symbols and sacred rituals, features that make conversion so appealing. Finally, the author contemplates the potential for the survival of Ukrainian Paganism as it engages the process of creating a "new indigenous face" for Ukraine (166) and reflects on its place in the extended global community of Pagans.

Lesiv's impressive work is solidly rooted in wide-ranging fieldwork that takes into account the folk songs and sacred rituals witnessed during her many years of on-site research in Ukraine and its diaspora; personal interviews; use of archival documents, scholarly and popular publications, and the internet. In sum, not only is this an excellent example of scholarship, it is also a mine of information for scholars and students alike—especially at the graduate level, although upper-level undergraduates can profit as well. The casual reader will find it an appealing and edifying read.