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UKRAINIAN THEATER ACTRESSES IN EASTERN GALICIA

Українські акторки театральні в Галичці Вschodniej

Abstract: This article offers a typology of the experiences of Ukrainian theater actresses in Eastern Galicia from the end of the 19th to the first half of the 20th centuries, identifying the most common artistic and biographical trajectories that make up the particular continuities of women's collective cultural experience. The "images" of these Ukrainian actresses are delineated according to how they were constructed by the contemporary Ukrainian press, and their peculiarities are identified in accordance with the specifics of the activities of Ukrainian theater in Eastern Galicia during the period in question. (*Transl. S. Harbuziuk*)

Keywords: feminism, Ukrainian theater, Ukrainian theater actresses, trajectories of experience

Abstrakt: W artykule zaproponowano typologię doświadczeń ukraińskich aktorek teatralnych w Galicji Wschodniej od końca XIX do połowy XX wieku, określając najpowszechniejsze trajektorie biografii i kariery artystycznej, które współtworzą obraz zbiorowego doświadczenia kulturowego kobiet. W wizerunkach aktorek, przedstawionych zgodnie z tendencjami obowiązującymi w ówczesnej prasie ukraińskiej, podkreślono cechy szczególnie wynikające ze specyfiki ukraińskiego życia teatralnego w Galicji Wschodniej w tym okresie. (*Przeł. E. Partyga*)

Słowa kluczowe: feminizm, teatr ukraiński, ukraińskie aktorki teatralne, trajektorie doświadczenia

A number of stereotypes and mythoi concerning the acting profession have always been present in society, and the perception of actors varies widely, ranging from reverence to contempt. By studying the Western Ukrainian press of the 1920s and 1930s from this angle, one can see that Ukrainian society in Eastern Galicia also adopted and perpetuated many of the most common stereotypes. Such ideas are most pronounced in folk or journalistic humor, which existed in the form of anecdotes and occasionally made its way into the daily press (for example, the newspaper *Novyi Chas*) or satirical magazines (*Budyak*, *Zyz*, *Komar*). These anecdotes demonstrate the main stereotypes relating to actors in general, as well as the images of specific actors and actresses. On the one hand, Ukrainian actors are depicted as virtual martyrs to Ukrainian art, while on the other they are portrayed as atheists and spendthrifts. Actresses were often painted as beautiful but uneducated and easily accessible women.

In actual fact, diaries, correspondence, and memoirs by Ukrainian actresses, who lived through various difficult times in 20th century Europe, not only give the lie to most of the stereotypes of the time but also illustrate the real experience of Ukrainian women artists and the true value of the acting profession. Testimonies and archive sources from the 1920s and 1930s provide a treasure trove of information about actresses of different ages, with different lives and artistic practices. Individual women's biographies, despite all their uniqueness, reveal the common trajectories of women's collective cultural experience.¹ Political circumstances, stereotypes about the place and role of women in society, and the specifics of Ukrainian theatrical life all contributed to the particular experiences of Ukrainian theater in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. In this article, we shall therefore try to identify and classify the life trajectories typical of that time and the fate of selected Ukrainian theatrical figures.

So far, this subject matter has not been covered from this perspective, although the lives of Ukrainian actresses have been researched by Stepan Charnetskyi,²

¹ See Showalter, E. (1981). Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(2), 179–205.

² Charnetskyi S. (1927). Pam"yaty A. Osypovychevoyi, *Svit*, 1, 14; Czarniecki, S. (1937). Jubileusz Janiny Biberowicz, *Biuletyn Polsko-Ukraiński*, 2(193), 20; Charnetskyi, S. (1934). Nashi teatral'ni aktrisy. *Nazustrich*, 12, 7.

Hryhoriy Luzhnytskyi³ (a number of creative portraits), Valeriyan Revutskyi (via an artistic biography of the actress Vira Levytska),⁴ Petro Medvedyk (his study of the biography of Vanda and Stepan Yanovych,⁵ his artistic biography of Kateryna Rubchakova⁶ and others), Rostyslav Pylypchuk (a series of biographies of Kateryna Rubchakova⁷ and others), Svitlana Maksymenko (a biography of Sofiya Stadnykova),⁸ Olena Bonkovska (a biography of Mariya Morska),⁹ Roman Lavrentiy (a biography of Sofiya Stadnykova¹⁰ and research into the history of the touring Ukrainian theater run by Teodora Rudenko).¹¹

This study is based on the following sources: various publications about actresses, including interviews with them in the Western Ukrainian press (in such newspapers as *Novyi Chas*, *Teatralne Mystetstvo*, *Nazustrich*, *Zhinka*, *Nova Khata* and others), the memoirs of actresses (Vira Levytska, Hanna Sovacheva, Lesia Kryvytska), letters (written by Hanna Sovacheva, Yevheniya Shvedivna), and the diary of Yevheniya Shvedivna.

There was a surge in the social activity of Ukrainian women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and it was part and parcel of the progress made globally by feminism. The modern feminist movement, which many date to 1848 in the United States and Europe, reached the territory of modern Western Ukraine (then part of Austria-Hungary), at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. When it comes to Ukrainians, these ideas had been developed since 1884 by the Society of Rus Women¹² in Stanislaviv (now Ivano-Frankivsk), led by Nataliya Kobrynska.¹³ From 1917, the activity of the Union of Ukrainian Women, which was run

³ L. [Luzhnytskyi H.]. (1937). Krytyka pro p. Lyanovs'ku-Biberovych. *Novyy chas*, 203, 6; Nyhryts'kyy L. [Luzhnytskyi H.]. (1942). Hanna Sovacheva. *Nashi dni*, 5, 6.

⁴ Revuckiy, V. (1998). *Vira Levytska: Zhyttya i scena*. Toronto.

⁵ Medvedyk, P. (1987). Kurbasovi vesnyani vechory: Do 100-richchya vid dnya narodzhennya O. S. Kurbasa. *Zhovten* '4, 80–89; & 5, 81–95.

⁶ Medvedyk, P. (1989). *Kateryna Rubchakova*. Kyiv.

⁷ Pylypchuk, R. (1981). Slavetne im'ya... (Do 100-richchya vid dnya narodzhennya K. Rubchakovoyi). *Radyans'ka zhinka*, 12, 22; Pylypchuk, R. (1960). Vyznachna ukraiyins'ka spivachka: Pro Filomeny Lopatyns'ku. *Radyans'ka Bukovyna*, March 30; Pylypchuk, R. (1991). Kateryna Rubchakova – aktrysa. *Vil'ne zhyttya*, May 4.

⁸ Maksymenko, S. (2008). Stadnykova Sofiya Andriyivna – «charivna feya, neosyazhna mriya, bozhestvenna krasunya». Do 120-richchya vid dnya narodzhennya Sofiyi Stadnykovoyi (1888–1959). In M. Zubelyak et al., *Mytsi L'vivshchyn: Kalendar pam'yatykh dat na 2008 rik* (pp. 57–60). Lviv.

⁹ Bonkovska, O. (2006). Mariya Mors'ka: Pol'ka za pokhodzhennyam, ukraiyinka za stsenichnouy doleyu. *Khudozhnya kul'tura: Aktual'ni problemy*, 3, 530–560.

¹⁰ Lavrentiy, R. (2009). Sofiya Stadnykova (13 veresnya 1888–21 veresnya 1959). In *Pohlyad u mynule: Kalendar pam'yatykh dat na 2009 rik* (pp. 193–195). Lviv.

¹¹ Lavrentiy, R. (2007). “Naddnipyrians'kyy teatr” Teodory Rudenko. *Visnyk NTSH*, 37, 21–22.

¹² The Society of Rus Women (Tovarystvo rus'kykh zhinok) in Stanislaviv (1884–1932) was one of the first Ukrainian women's public organizations and was founded by the writer and public figure N. Kobrynska. In 1932 the society became part of the Union of Ukrainian Women (Soyuz ukraiyinok).

¹³ Nataliya Kobrynska (1855–1920) was a Ukrainian writer, public figure, and publisher.



Ivanna Biberovych, Historical Museum of Kolomyia

by Milena Rudnytska from 1928, played a significant role in the development of Ukrainian feminism.¹⁴ The activities of the organization were conducted in various fields, starting with the involvement of women in the political, scientific, and literary arenas, to the spread of ideas regarding self-education among Ukrainian women.¹⁵

¹⁴ Milena Rudnytska (1892–1976) was a Ukrainian public and political figure, journalist, writer, and ideologue of the women’s movement in Ukraine. The Union of Ukrainian Women (Soyuz ukraïnyok) is the largest society of Ukrainian women, first founded in Galicia (in 1917) and then expanding (from 1919) to the whole of Ukraine. The organization operated in several main areas and had a clear three-tier structure: from the headquarters in Lviv, to branches in smaller towns, and clubs in rural villages. The purpose of the organization was to encourage women to be socially active, raise their educational level, and unite around common problems. The Union existed until 1939 and was revived in 1991.

¹⁵ See Bohachevska-Khomyak, M. (2018). *Bilympo bilomu: Zhinky u hromads'komu zhytti Ukraïny: 1884–1939*. Lviv.

The Ukrainian feminist movement had its own peculiarities because it developed under the influence of Ukrainian nationalism. Malanchuk-Ribak and Cherchovich have emphasized this feature of Ukrainian feminism.¹⁶ This difference was due to the political situation experienced by Ukrainians, who did not have their own state. The term “educated woman” meant a nationally conscious Ukrainian mother who raised her children in the same spirit. In this context, feminist ideas were perceived positively. The cultural, educational and social activities of women were welcomed, and therefore in these areas they could feel quite free, in contrast to politics or science, where women faced violent confrontations and literally fought for their right to work.¹⁷ We also find examples of a more patronizing and lampooning images of women engaged in the field of independent, authorial activity such as writing and journalism.¹⁸ Therefore, when the idea of educating Ukrainian women was perceived positively by the public, it mostly meant an “instrumental” way of ensuring a decent upbringing for the younger generation that raised consciousness regarding Ukrainian nationhood. Marriage and motherhood remained the main business for a woman. A woman could only provide for herself by working either before marriage, or if she did not marry, or if she became a widow. When a woman married, the issue of any work outside the family was automatically made moot, because from that moment she had to take care of her family.

The issue of women, their position in society, and the issue of women’s social life, were discussed especially actively in the Ukrainian press during the 1920s and 1930s, in particular in *Hromadskyi Visnyk*, *Novyi Chas*, *Dilo*, and other newspapers and magazines. Also, from the end of the 19th century, there had been a new press for women: *Lada* (from 1853) and *Rusalka* (from 1868), in the 20th century – *Meta* (from 1908), *Zhinoche Dilo* (from 1912), *Zhinochyi Visnyk* (from 1922), *Nova Khata* (from 1925), *Zhinka* (from 1935) and others.¹⁹

In particular, a separate edition of the culture and art magazine *Nazustrich* was dedicated to the women’s issue in response to the International Women’s Congress held in June 1934 in Stanislaviv by representatives of the Union of Ukrainian Women. In the 12th issue of this biweekly, Ukrainian women were represented in the fields of writing (an article by Dr. Mariya Derkacheva and Viktor Simovych)

¹⁶ Malanchuk-Ribak, O. (2001). Typolohichna identychnist’ ukraïnyns’koho emansypatsiynoho rukhu zhynok. *Etnichna istoriya narodiv Yevropy*, 11, 93–96; Cherchovych, I. (2017). Emansypatsiyni ideyi vs konservatyvni praktyky: zhynky u seredovysshchi ukraïnyns’koyi intelihentsiyyi Halychyny zlamu XIX-XX stolit’. In O. Kis (ed.), *Ukraïnyns’ki zhynky v hornlyi modernizatsiyyi* (pp. 32–52). Kharkiv.

¹⁷ Diadiuk, M. (2017). Zmahannya za predstavnyts’ku rivnist’: politychna diyal’nist’ zhynok u mizhvoyennyi Halychyni. In O. Kis (ed.), *Ukraïnyns’ki zhynky v hornlyi modernizatsiyyi* (pp. 176–203). Kharkiv.

¹⁸ See E. Kozak’s sketch, as well as the works of researchers such as M. Diadiuk, O. Kis, I. Cherchova.

¹⁹ Peredyriy, V. (1996). *Ukraïnyns’ki periodychnyvi dannya dlya zhynok v Halychyni (1853–1939): Anotovanyy kataloh*. Lviv.

and in music (an article by Melaniya Nyzhankivska). Moreover, a review of the birth of the global women's movement (Rudnytsky's text) was featured and a famous woman platoon commander (Olena Stepaniv) was discussed. Importantly for our topic, there was an article by Stepan Charnetskyi about Ukrainian theater actresses.²⁰ In this review, Charnetskyi not only presents a galaxy of famous and iconic actresses from Western Ukrainian theater, but he also (almost for the first time in the public press of Eastern Galicia) raises the issue of how actresses are perceived by society.

When it comes to the experiences of Ukrainian theater actresses in western Ukrainian lands, we must also remember various external factors (e.g. the absence of their own state) that influenced the (mostly nomadic) life of Ukrainian theater in the second half of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. The non-existence of the Ukrainian state precluded regular state subsidies or developmental assistance. Despite the high artistic level of some Ukrainian theaters, they remained traveling troupes and private institutions, or else were under the protection of Ukrainian civic organizations. This meant that theaters maintained themselves almost independently, without permanent premises, traveling to their audiences in cities and towns, renting halls at different locations. At the same time, they were often forced to balance the need for financial success with their artistic values; and sometimes they managed to do just that.

Despite such conditions, two famous theater managers of the time were actually women: Teofilya Romanovych,²¹ who headed the theater of the Lviv society "Ruska Besida" in 1874–1880, and Kateryna Rubchakova,²² who was the actress-manager of the theater of the society "Ukrayinska Besida" in 1917–1918. Some traveling theaters of the 1920s and 1930s were also headed by women (or at least they held official licences), including the Teodora Rudenko Theater,²³ Nina Boyko Theater,²⁴ Olha Mitkevych Theater,²⁵ and the Tosia Lepkivna Theater.²⁶ However,

²⁰ Charnetskyi 1934, p. 7.

²¹ Teofilya Romanovych (1842–1924) was dramatic actress and theater manager.

²² Kateryna Rubchakova (1881–1919) was a Ukrainian dramatic actress and singer. She came from a famous Ukrainian artistic family, the Kossaks.

²³ Teodora Rudenko was a Ukrainian actress and director. From 1920 she had been head Ukrayins'kyy naddnipryans'kyy narodnyy teatr Teodory Rudenko, also known as the Kyiv Theater of Dora Rudenko. The theater traveled through Galicia to Warsaw and Vilnius, and operated until the beginning of World War II.

²⁴ Nina Boyko was a Ukrainian actress and director. In the second half of the 1920s she headed Ukrayins'kyy naddnipryans'kyy teatr Niny Boyko.

²⁵ Olha Mitkevych was a Ukrainian actress, director, and director of Ukrayins'kyy naddnipryans'kyy teatr Ol'hy Mitkevych 1925–27. In the interwar Ukrainian press, Naddniprianskyi Theater from 1925 to 1927 was celebrated as one of the best Ukrainian theaters in the (then) Polish state.

²⁶ Tosia Lepkivna was a Ukrainian actress and director, wife of Yarema Stadnyk. In the late 1930s she headed a private Ukrainian troupe.

these theaters were the exception rather than the rule. Most artistic leaders and directors were still men. The example of Panas Karabinevych's traveling theaters is illustrative; the main director, and artistic director, was actually Apollinariya Karabinevych,²⁷ but the concession (the license to put on theatrical activities) belonged to her husband, as it was easier for him to obtain.

Within this variety of different female experiences of Ukrainian actresses, we will try to single out iterative, typical experiences that can be generalized and systematized in some way.

THE FIRST TRAJECTORY: THE DYNASTIC / FAMILY TRAJECTORY

An important factor in the biography of each actress, one which contributed to whether her talents were discovered and she obtained artistic opportunities or not, was her belonging to or marrying into a theatrical dynasty. There were many such examples, the best-known of which included the following Ukrainian acting families: the Yanovyches (Kurbases), Stechynskyis, Nyzhankivskyis, Stadnyks, Kossaks, and the Rubchaks. Stories of how such dynasties arose are often associated with some familial conflict, based on stereotypes regarding the work of an actor. Thus, the history of the Yanovych (Kurbas) acting dynasty began with the opposition of Stepan Kurbas's parents²⁸ to their son's chosen profession (he later changed his last name to Yanovych, precisely because of a falling out with his father). The parents of Stepan Kurbas-Yanovych's future wife, Vanda Teikhman,²⁹ were also against her doing the same. The acting profession, and its often nomadic way of life, went against contemporary society's traditional ideas regarding life of an exemplary family, as well as the role of women in it. As a result, the acting couple of Stepan and Vanda Yanovych were forced to sever all ties with their families for a long time.³⁰

²⁷ Apollinariya Karabinevych (pen name Lucia Barvinok) (1899–1971) was a Ukrainian actress and director. She worked in the theaters of M. Sadovsky, Ukrayins'kyi derzhavnyi teatr UNR, the Theater of Y. Stadnyk, and the Theater of O. Mitkevych. Later she and her husband, P. Karabinevych, worked in and ran their own theater. During the Soviet occupation she worked in Ternopil's'kyi derzhavnyi teatr imeni Ivana Franka. After 1944 she also worked abroad, first in a camp theater in Schweinfurt (Germany), and later when she moved to Rochester (USA).

²⁸ Stepan Yanovych (real name Kurbas) (1862–1908) was a Ukrainian actor, director and singer. From 1884 to 1898 he worked as an actor at the Ruska Besida theater. He was the husband of actress Vanda Yanovycheva, and father of Ukrainian actor and director Les Kurbas.

²⁹ Vanda Yanovycheva (Teichman) (1867–1950) was a Ukrainian actress. She worked in the theater of the "Ruska Besida" society, and "Kyidrante". She was the mother of Ukrainian actor and director Les Kurbas.

³⁰ See Medvedyk 1987.



Ivanna Biberovycheva and Ivan Biberovych in Shevchenko's *Nazar Stodolia*,
Vasyl Stefanyk National Scientific Library of Ukraine in Lviv

The female experience of the Stadnyk family demonstrates how actresses could develop creatively if they were born into a theatrical environment. This starting position allowed them to develop their artistic careers faster and not be interrupted at a young age by marriage. Such were the stories of Sofiya Stadnykova³¹ (who came from the acting family of Andriy and Eleonora Stechynskyi and later married actor Yosyp Stadnyk³²), and her daughters – also actresses – Sofiya Stadnyk (Zablotska) and Stefaniya Stadnykivna³³ (who married actor Yaroslav Helias³⁴). Although they were all different creative personalities with excellent artistic personae, achievements, and

³¹ Sofiya Stadnykova (1886-1959) was a Ukrainian actress and soprano. She worked in the theater of the “Ruska Besida” society and other theaters in Eastern Galicia, and also in the Mykola Sadovsky Theater in Kyiv.

³² Yosyp Stadnyk (1876–1954) was a Ukrainian actor, director, and entrepreneur. He was director of the Ruska Besida theater (1906–1913; 1921–1924) and head of a number of private theaters.

³³ Stefaniya Stadnykivna (1912–1983) was a Ukrainian operetta and drama actress. She worked in Ukrainian theaters in Lviv, Kharkiv and Kyiv.

³⁴ Yaroslav Helias (1916–1992) was a Ukrainian theater and cinema actor, and a theater director. He worked in various Ukrainian theaters in Lviv, Kharkiv, Ternopil, Uzhhorod, Kyiv, and Odesa.

working methods, their professional success was united by a similar life scenarios, the key events of which were their being born into a theatrical family and/or their marriage to a representative of the world of theater.

There are many examples of such a trajectory in the experiences of Ukrainian theater actresses. In addition to the above-mentioned Vanda Yanovych, Sofiya Stadnykova, and Stefaniya Stadnykivna, these were also the stories of Kateryna Rubchakova, Vira Levytska, Lesia Kryvytska, and others. And for the most part, despite the difficult historical circumstances, with their many trials and tribulations, these were stories of a long and successful acting career. It should be emphasized that, historically, this is the oldest type of career path associated with the “private family theatrical enterprise” and typical for Ukrainian theater as touring theater until the late 1930s.

THE SECOND TRAJECTORY: “ST. JOHN’S FLIES” (FIREFLIES)

The scenario where the actress works for a very short time – just a few years before marriage – is one of the most common seen in the late 19th century and remained typical until the 1930s. In such cases, it was difficult to fully flesh out one’s artistic career in such a short period of time.

Charnetskyi was one of the first to draw attention to these aspects of the plight of actresses (and not only Ukrainian ones) in his 1934 article, “Our Theatrical Artists,” in the issue of the magazine *Nazustrich* that was dedicated to women in Ukrainian art. Although he called Ukrainian actresses’ dependence on marriage for their creative fulfillment a thing of the past, in practice a wife being an actress, while her husband worked in some non-theatrical sphere, remained a rather isolated exception in the interwar years. Charnetskyi dubbed actresses who left the stage at a young age “St. John’s flies” (fireflies), which for a moment shone brightly in Ukrainian theater yet quickly disappeared. There were many, and – while naming some of them – the author adds with regret that many have already been forgotten.

This particular career path was typical not only for Ukrainian actresses in the 19th and early 20th centuries. We can learn from other national presses of similar professional paths experienced by Polish and German actresses of the time. For example, the Lviv-based reviewer Adolf Luka wrote an article in the German-language press about Anna Wirer.³⁵ At the time of her final performance, she was only 22 years old, and she left the stage upon marrying Count Henryk Mier. Wirer played Helen in an operetta by the French composer Jacques Offenbach, so Luka

³⁵ A[dolf] L[uka]. (1867). Lemberg (Korrespondenzen). *Die Bühnenwelt*, 4, 2.

metaphorically plays with the age-old plot, describing the reasons for the actress's career ending. Luka compares her future husband to Paris, and the stage and the audience to Menelaus, so Wirer/Helen has to make a choice.

Paris: I have exclusive favor with Helen; Joys experienced alone are half-joys that I do not care for. I want to admire the gift of Venus all by myself. [...] After a long time of indecision, a good life won, and Jupiter's daughter, the beautiful Helen withdrew into private life with Paris. As an artist, she also had to say goodbye to her audience, and she did so on December 31.³⁶

Such reviews of final performances of young actresses are often found in the Ukrainian, German, and Polish language presses, which shows that this trajectory was quite typical for European theater at the turn of the 20th century.

Thanks to materials that were never intended to be made public, namely the diary and letters of the little-known Ukrainian actress Yevheniya Shvedivna, it is possible to analyze the experiences of an actress with a similar trajectory. Shvedivna worked in the theater for only one and a half seasons (1936–1937);³⁷ her career can be described as not having been fully realized because she spent only a very short time treading the boards. Shvedivna's letters show how difficult it was for her to make career decisions. First of all when she joined the theater as a girl who did not belong to a theatrical dynasty, and then when it came to turning her back on a theatrical career, choosing marriage. The reason for Shvedivna's constant hesitations about the correctness of her choices was external social pressure (in her letters this comes mainly from her father).

We know that Yevheniya Shvedivna graduated from Hanna Ossoria's³⁸ school of stage and film acting in Warsaw, but this was merely seen by her family as a good way to learn proper Polish pronunciation. Her father did not take her acting career seriously, as we learn from a letter she wrote to a friend, Mykhailo Sinytskyi (her future husband): "My daddy quite quickly took me away from Warsaw because he thought that there was no point in just sitting there, doing nothing, and just acting in those movies. Although, recently I've indeed started to perform more and more, but now everything is gone."³⁹

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Yevheniya Shvedivna (her maiden name was Shved and she became Synytska on marriage) (1913–1995) was a dramatic actress and singer, and later she would become a teacher. She worked as an actress at the I. Tobilevych Ukrainian Theater under the direction of M. Bentsal (February to July 1936) and in the Ukrainian Theater „Ruska Besida” under the direction of Y. Stadnyk (July 1936 till early 1937).

³⁸ Hanna Ossoria, see <http://www.encyklopediateatru.pl/osoby/84586/hanna-ossoria> [accessed June 20, 2020].

³⁹ Kozachuk, N. (2011). Odyn rik teatral'noho zhyttya Yevheniyi Shvedivny. *Zapysky Naukovoho tovarystva imeni Shevchenka: Pratsi teatroznavchoyi komisyyi*, 262, 463–503, p. 493.



Yevheniya Shvedivna. Nina Kozachuk's private archive

According to Shvedivna's granddaughter, Nina Kozachuk, later generations of her family did not know about her grandmother's acting past for a long time, because she herself never spoke about that period of her life. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that Shvedivna married Mykhailo Sinytskyi, who was later ordained as an Orthodox priest. However, even before that, returning home after her studies in Warsaw, Shvedivna began preparing to become a teacher. We can observe her internal fluctuations, fueled by the external stereotypical idea of the actress's profession, in her letters to her brother and to her future husband. Despite the fact that Shvedivna "dreamed" of being on stage, she wrote in one of the letters that she had completely abandoned "her plans":

It seems that I have changed a lot now. I have no plans for the future. I live from day to day... I also planned a lot for myself – the stage, being an actress (you know very well, I was passionate about it all), and now suddenly – boom! – and everything is gone. I'm not crying, I'm not grieving now, maybe it's for the better. I think it is.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 494.

Despite such sentiments, five months later Shvedivna went to Drohobych, where the Ivan Tobilevych Ukrainian Theater was based at the time. Probably she went there to audition. However, to employ her in the theater, the director Mykola Bentsal had to obtain permission from her father. The head of the Ivan Tobilevych Theater had a conversation with Shvedivna's father, asking him to let his daughter work, and taking full responsibility for her stay in the theater. Thus, when engaging a young girl in the theater, the director primarily dealt with her father. Shvedivna mentions this again in a letter: "In the spring, at the beginning of March, the Tobilevych Theater came to Stryi and asked my father. And I went with them."⁴¹ The tone of Shvedivna's letter to Sinytskyi indicates that she, in a sense, was apologizing for this act. After all, she only dared to write to him seven months after joining the theater. She also wrote that she had "good reviews in our magazines"⁴² and that she "was tired of this gypsy life, although the Galician audience loved [her] on stage",⁴³ exhibiting a certain concern for how her choice might be perceived. After all, such freedom of action, when a young girl joined the theater and set off on a journey without proper accompaniment, was perceived with suspicion, as risky and potentially immoral behavior. Such stereotypes exerted pressure not only on the family (in Shvedivna's case, her father was worrying about his daughter's good name) but also on the actress herself. Even though Yevheniya "dreams" of the stage in her correspondence, she constantly blames herself for this. In a letter to Sinytsky, she asks: "Do you want me to act on stage?", but adds that she has undoubtedly changed: "If you saw me now, you would admit to me that I am no longer as I was, distracted by that stage."⁴⁴ Such internal conflict is due to external pressures, specifically the perception in society that being an actress was a frivolous profession. From her letters, we see that the father regularly tried to bring his daughter home. In a letter dated October 6, 1936, the actress wrote: "It seems that my father will not let me work for the winter and will take me home from Stryi. He writes to me that it's time to take a rest." A month later we read in her correspondence:

my father came to Stryi for our show, he wanted to take me home, but my director⁴⁵ asked my dad to let me act in a new thing [...] the main roles [...] the premiere will take place in Lviv in around a month [...] and so my dad agreed to another month but after that he wants me to take a rest.⁴⁶

Eventually, Yevhenia Shvedivna gave up the stage and got married.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 497.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Joseph Stadnyk (1876–1954) was executive director and artistic director of the Ruska Besida Theater.

⁴⁶ Kozachuk 2011, p. 498.

BEYOND THE TRAJECTORIES (PART 1): THE WIDOW

*...it is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room
with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry*
– Virginia Woolf⁴⁷

Among the artistic biographies of Ukrainian artists, we have one example of a woman who entered the theatrical world as a widow. This scenario is a unique one, but once again it confirms the importance of marital status for women, in particular for actresses of this period. This example concerns the Ukrainian actress Hanna Sovacheva, who began her acting career at the age of 45. Although she received her professional education in 1897 at the Moscow Music and Drama School under a professor, co-founder of the Moscow Art Theater Vladimir Nemyrovych-Danchenko, she nevertheless spent the Russo-Japanese War and the First World War working as a Red Cross nurse. During her service, Hanna met and later married a Ukrainian military doctor, Vasyl Sovachev, who died in 1924 during a typhus epidemic. The couple had no children. Even before her husband's death, Hanna Sovacheva took part actively in public work; in particular, for some time she headed the Joint Committee of Public Organizations in Kamianets-Podilskyi, as well as the Union of Ukrainian Women in Częstochowa, and later in Tarnów.⁴⁸ In 1921, Sovacheva collaborated with the British Relief Committee, which helped refugees from Dnieper Ukraine. She worked with the organization as a representative of the Union of Ukrainian Women, and it was there that she experienced a lack of acceptance due to her national identity, which led her to stop collaborating with this organization in protest. In her memoirs, Sovacheva wrote:

In the autumn of 1921, a woman's congress was to take place in Stockholm. We could not go there and decided to send our greetings and a memorandum from Ukrainian women. Upon learning that the head of the Mission was going to the congress, I, as head of the Union of Ukrainian Women in Tarnów, asked her to defend our interests. But she suddenly refused, saying that 'everyone abroad considers Ukraine a part of Russia!' 'Is this your view?', I asked, and after receiving confirmation, I got up and left. That's how my collaboration with the Mission ended, but not my friendship with its members.⁴⁹

Sovacheva's position regarding her national allegiance was clear and uncompromising as part of the program of the Union of Ukrainian Women.

⁴⁷ Woolf, V. (1989). *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Bridgewater, p. 105.

⁴⁸ Sovacheva, H. (2017). *Ukrayina taky bude! Spohady; Statti y zamitky; Lysty* (ed. O. Rotach). Poltava, p. 432.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

Hanna Sovacheva first appeared in Ukrainian theater in a few roles in the branch of the State Theater of the Ukrainian People's Republic in Kamianets-Podilskyi. Later she became a full-fledged actress and translator of drama (from Russian and French) in the Ruska Besida Theater under the director Oleksandr Zaharov (Lviv at that time was part of Poland). Then she went on to work as an actress, translator, and director in the „Prosvita” Rus Theater Society (in Uzhhorod, at that time part of Czechoslovakia), and later worked in the representative modern Ukrainian Young Theater „Zahrava,” which was led by Volodymyr Blavatskyi. In 1944 she went into exile in Austria (she headed the Ukrainian theater in Salzburg), and after 1949 she worked in France. Sovacheva had begun to take part in the theater after she became a widow. It was then (in 1924) that the actress went to Uzhhorod, and she first worked as an actress at the Rus Theater of the Prosvita Society, and in the 1927/28 season she became a director.

BEYOND THE TRAJECTORIES (PART 2): FREE ARTISTS

There are only a few cases in which women actresses refused to marry for the sake of a stage career. A striking and atypical example was the Ukrainian opera artist Solomiya Krushelnytska,⁵⁰ who deliberately refused to marry for the sake of her stage work. A frantic thirst for creative fulfillment prompted Krushelnytska to transgress the established traditions and go beyond stereotypical ideas about women in theatrical art. Krushelnytska dared to take an extraordinary step away from the traditions of that time: she cancelled her planned wedding to the seminarian Zenon Gutkovsky when she learned that her fiancé was not at all in favor of his future wife performing on stage.⁵¹ The actress rejected all further suitors. In a letter to a friend, Mykhailo Pavlyk, Krushelnytska explained her refusal to marry Mykola Shukhevych the day before:

I'm just telling you that I want to work, I can't imagine my life without work. If I don't succeed in something in my career, I won't be able to succeed with my life either, I would be broken, and I cannot live without artistry... I dig so deep into music that I can't think of anything else. My husband would be unhappy if I did not leave the theater after marriage. I wouldn't get to love him the way I love music.⁵²

But none of her prospective grooms was ready to break the stereotypes of marital relations, in which the husband required his wife to fully dedicate herself to

⁵⁰ Solomiya Krushelnytska (1872–1952) was a Ukrainian opera singer who achieved global recognition during her own lifetime. She performed on stage in Italy, France, Poland, and even Argentina.

⁵¹ Krushelnytska, S. (1978). *Sphady, materialy, lystuvannya* (vol. 2: *Sphady*, ed. M. Holovashchenko). Kyiv.

⁵² Tykhobayeva, H., Kryvoruchka, I. (eds). (2009). *Solomiya Krushel'nyts'ka. Mista i slava*. Lviv, p. 35.



Solomiya Krushelnytska, Vasyl Stefanyk National Scientific Library of Ukraine in Lviv

the family. None was ready to accept second place in the life of the famous singer; none assured her that marriage would not hinder her career until 1910.⁵³ Later, in the life of Krushelnytska there appeared a lawyer, Cesare Riccioni, who did not set any requirements concerning her professional activities as an artist. At the age of 38, as a world-famous and popular opera singer, Krushelnytska married, and this biographical fact in no way stymied her stage career.

Krushelnytska's position regarding her national allegiance was also clear. She did not hide her origins and refused to be called a Polish singer, even when performing on Polish theatrical stages. Additionally, during an audience with Tsar Nicholas II in 1899, when he asked about her nationality Krushelnytska answered that she was Ukrainian.⁵⁴ It is also known that the actress corresponded with well-known Ukrainian politicians and even financed some of their projects to advance the Ukrainian question in Poland.⁵⁵

⁵³ Korzeniowska-Bihun, A. (2012). Genderowy i narodowy dyskurs w biografii Salomei Kruszelnickiej. In A. Adamiccka-Sitek, D. Buchwald (eds.), *Nowe historie 03: Nowe biografie* (pp. 83–90). Warszawa.

⁵⁴ Krushelnytska 1978, p. 77.

⁵⁵ Ibid.



Solomiya Krushelnytska, Vasyl Stefanyk National Scientific Library of Ukraine in Lviv

Such life experience was rather exceptional at the turn of the 20th century. However, it worked quite well as a model for subsequent generations of Ukrainian artists, who could look to this existing model of behavior for guidance. In the end, Krushelnytska's niece, Odarka Bandrivska, wrote in her memoirs about her aunt: "She gave [us] courage with her successful endeavors and showed the way for women in the field of art. She proved that in this field, in the future women can develop their abilities and creative activities and bring glory to their people."⁵⁶ Personal independence has, therefore, actually become the key to gaining the opportunity to develop in in the arts.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 165.

Such an example of going beyond the established trajectories, even just a single one, nevertheless meant support for those artists who did not want to choose any of the established artistic paths in life. The strengthening of the women's movement in Eastern Galicia in the interwar years paved the way for an increase in the number of Ukrainian actresses who did not end their careers due to marrying men outside the theater.

As early as the interwar years, we can observe certain changes in the younger generation. In the 1920s and 1930s, couples began to appear where the actress did not feel compelled to ditch the stage after marrying a man from a non-theatrical environment. There are only a few such examples, but they still exist: there was Sofiya Fedortseva⁵⁷ and Fedia Fedortsev (a journalist and editor), Halyna Orlyvna⁵⁸ and Klym Lavrynovych (Polishchuk – a writer and journalist). Although isolated, these examples still show that views on actresses in society, and women in marriage, had changed, and therefore there were new paths open for a woman's life. These were scenarios that would become dominant later in the twentieth century. But despite this, the story of Yevheniya Shvedivna proves that a life trajectory featuring a curtailed creative period, when the actress ended her career due to marriage, was still quite common into the late 1930s.

However, regardless of the life trajectories and creative destinies of the actresses, in creative portraits published in the interwar years in art periodicals (*Teatralne Mystetstvo*, the literary-cum-scientific edition of *Novyi Chas*, *Nazustrich* and others), the image of the Ukrainian actress was depicted through the prism of sacrifice. In particular, when writing about Ukrainian actresses, Stepan Charnetskyi called them “victims of our Galician theatrical art”.⁵⁹ Obviously, he meant the difficult working conditions rife in Ukrainian theater of the 1920s and 1930s, but the image of a woman who sacrifices her talent, time, and comfort for the development of Ukrainian culture was still also associated with Ukrainian actresses. Charnetskyi wrote: “Apart from the sincere hard work of the ideological folk teacher, beyond the quiet, work of a nun, filled with dedication and self-denial... we still have the type of woman who puts all her nerves, all the blood of her heart and soul into her work. They are actresses!”⁶⁰ It is in this interpretation, in which the profession of an actress is compared to a teacher and a nun (!), that he manages to “ennoble” it for public acceptance.

⁵⁷ In 1926 – an actress at the Teatr Soyuzu Ukrayins'kykh Artysti, and in 1926/27 – at the Nezaleznyy lyudovyy teatr in Lviv; from 1927 she trod the boards at the Berezil Theater under the direction of Les Kurbas, Kharkiv, USSR

⁵⁸ Nee Mnevskya, she performed at the Young Theater under the direction of Les Kurbas (1917–1918, Kyiv, Ukrainian People's Republic); in 1921 she became an actress at the Ukrayinska Besida Theater.

⁵⁹ Charnetskyi 1934, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

This is exactly the image applied to the famous Ukrainian actress, Ivanna Biberovycheva, who ed from the stage in 1898 at the age of 31. On this occasion, there were rumors in the press that the talented Ukrainian actress had had enough of sacrificing herself to the service of the Ukrainian theater and was now leaving it to ensconce herself in quiet, peaceful family comfort. Similar rhetoric was repeated in the press in 1937, when a jubilee evening dedicated to the 70th birthday of the actress was held in Kolomyia, with the participation of a bevy of professional Ukrainian actors. Again, there were comments that the actress had “left the stage to perform the duties of wife and mother. She devoted the rest of her life to her home and raising children. Maternal love overcame the love of art”.⁶¹

Thus, we see that the most acceptable image of a Ukrainian actress was one where she served her people, sacrificed her youth and talent that Ukrainian art could prosper, and, when the time was right, chose the “higher” duty of being a mother and resting surrounded by her family. Such rhetoric makes no mention of the actress’s desire for professional self-fulfillment and creativity. And only in one of the numerous press articles about Biberovycheva’s 70th birthday in 1937, and later about the death of the actress, was an unusual opinion expressed. The journalist and editor Lidiya Burachynska said: “Ivanna Biberovych left the stage to devote herself to her family. A beautiful and noble impulse! But for some reason, it is a pity that the talented actress denied herself so much... What opportunities for development she had back then!”⁶²

Thus, the scenarios of the successful professional fulfillment of Ukrainian actresses provided two options: either marriage to an actor, a director, a manager of a theater (a common scenario), or refusal to marry at all (isolated cases). This dependence on the marriage factor is not just a feature found in the biographies of actresses. It stemmed from generally accepted stereotypes about the role of women in both the family and society.

The professional activity of the Ukrainian actress was associated with a number of stereotypes that were perpetuated in the interwar Ukrainian press, reflecting public views. Stereotypes were constructed not only based on the clear role of women in the family but also on a dual, almost polarized vision of Ukrainian actors. On the one hand, they were heroes, who through their artistic work, spread ideas of national freedom and identity, and, on the other hand, life and theatrical traditions were so different from one another that actors continued to often be perceived as atheists and idlers who strayed from the usual way of life. These stereotypes were a constant aspect in the life of Ukrainian actresses, who in their life and work had to maneuver between the circumstances they faced: either put up

⁶¹ Chubativna, S. (1937). Poklin velykiy artysttsi. *Zhinka*, 6.

⁶² L.B. [Burachynska, L.]. (1937). Ti, shcho vidiyshly: Ivanna Biberovych. *Nova khata*, 18, 4.



Ivanna Biberovych, Vasyl Stefanyk National Scientific Library of Ukraine in Lviv

with them, go beyond what was allowed, destroy the stereotypes, or be influenced by them. In the end, it was only going beyond the established trajectories that allowed both Krushelnytska and Sovacheva to have their own creative careers. The artists chose their paths, becoming role models in the process. However, for a more general change in the established paths to occur, transformations were required in the political and historical situation of the region, and progress was needed in views on the role of women in society. Only then could there be active development of the women's movement among Ukrainians in Galicia.

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