

The Sad Lot of Women in Ukrainian and Yiddish Folksongs*

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In 1883 the Ukrainian poet and folklorist Ivan Franko published an article entitled “Female Servitude in Ukrainian Folksongs.”¹ Franko’s paper entered the history of Ukrainian folkloristics: from that time on the category of songs about the sad lot of women became a nearly obligatory element of Ukrainian folkloristic taxonomy.

Franko viewed folksongs as a direct reflection of folk life. He was therefore struck by the fact that among Ukrainian women’s songs were many that he characterized as “gloomy” and “mournfully painful,” songs that “reveal to us a great degree of misery.”² How are we to explain the existence of such songs, the author asked, if all those scholars who have studied Ukrainian life agree that Ukrainians treat their wives much more gently, much more humanely than their neighbors do? Franko blamed the worsening situation of Ukrainian women on new socioeconomic conditions, including increasing poverty.

Franko began his article on songs about women’s lot on a comparative note, commenting on the higher degree of culture of the Ukrainian nation in comparison to neighboring nations, as revealed in the way that Ukrainian men treated their women. Neither he nor subsequent Ukrainian folklorists, however, applied a comparative approach to the songs themselves. The goal of the present paper is to compare Ukrainian and Yiddish songs about women’s lives in order to illuminate the similarities and differences in the treatment of the same life situations in the folklore of two nations that lived together for centuries.

Among the life problems reflected in Ukrainian and Yiddish songs are “longing for the family,” “a cruel, unloved husband,” “a husband who is a drunkard,” etc., to cite the terminology of Halyna Dovzhenok, the compiler of a collection of Ukrainian songs about family life.³ In general, as the Ukrainian folklorist Mikhailo Hrytsai writes:

There are few compositions about happy married life. The songs mostly deal with unhappy marriage; they are imbued with profound sadness and melancholy.⁴

The present paper, however, will concentrate on songs that portray or comment on relations between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law. Conflicts between sons-in-law and mothers-

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in-law are also reflected in the Ukrainian material (although not in the published Yiddish sources), but songs on that topic are relatively rare.⁵ Fathers-in-law play a small role in both Ukrainian and Yiddish songs.

The fact that relations between a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law are a frequent folksong topic is not surprising. As the Yiddish proverb says:

A shviger un a shnur in eyn hoyz zenen vi tsvey kets in eyn zak.⁶
A mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law in one house are like two cats in one sack.

Or in the words of a Ukrainian proverb:

Ridna maty i b'ie, tak ne bolyt', a svekrukha slovamy b'ie hirshe, nizh kulakamy.⁷
When your own mother beats you, it does not hurt so much, while a mother-in-law beats worse with words than with her fists.

The proverbs of the two nations provide different explanations for the source of bad relations between the two generations of women. A Yiddish proverb explains it in this way:

Di shviger hot fargesn, az zi iz amol aleyn geven a shnur.⁸
The mother-in-law forgot that she herself was once a daughter-in-law.

A Ukrainian proverb offers a competing theory:

Pamiataie svekrukha svoiu molodist', cherez te i nevisttsi ne viryt'.⁹
The mother-in-law remembers her youth and because of that does not trust her daughter-in-law.

A systematic examination of Ukrainian and Yiddish proverbs, however, would take us too far afield, for, as the Ukrainian paremiologist Mikhailo Paziak has observed, the cycle of proverbs about the oppression of daughters-in-law by their mothers-in-law is “especially extensive.”¹⁰ We will, though, cite particular proverbs where relevant to our commentary.

Our approach to the song material will be as follows. We shall begin with a thematic classification of the Yiddish song material. For each category we shall examine the treatment of the given topic in the Ukrainian material. Finally we shall examine those topics that are represented in Ukrainian songs but not in Yiddish ones.

Yiddish songs dealing with the sad lot of the daughter-in-law can be assigned to four thematic groups. In songs belonging to the first group the daughter-in-law complains that no matter what she does, she cannot satisfy her mother-in-law. The second group includes songs that are semantic, but not structural, variants of the songs of the first group. Here the daughter-in-law is criticized by her in-laws, while she is praised by her parents and her husband. In songs belonging to the third group a mother teaches her daughter how a daughter-in-law should behave in her mother-in-law's home, but these lessons do not

protect the daughter from her evil mother-in-law. The fourth group contains dialog songs consisting of a mother's questions and the answers of her married daughter.

The following text, collected in Bessarabia, can serve as a typical example of songs from the **first** group:

Oy vey, mame, vos zol ikh tun. Ikh hob a beyze shviger, hot zi mit mir tsu tun.	Oh, mama, What should I do? I have a cruel mother-in-law, She's dissatisfied with me.
Gey ikh gikh -- shrayt zi – ikh rays di shikh, gey ikh pamelekh -- shrayt zi az ikh krikh.	If I walk fast, She yells that I'm tearing my shoes; If I walk slow, She yells that I'm crawling.
Kokh ikh fish, zogt zi s'iz on tam, kokh ikh nit, makht zi in shtub a tareram.	If I cook fish, She says that it has no taste; If I don't cook, She makes a to-do at home.
Kokh ikh yoykh, zogt zi, s'iz mit ash, kokh ikh nit, makht zi in shtub a rash.	If I make chicken soup, She says it has ashes in it; If I don't make any, She makes a fuss at home.
Oy vey, mame... ¹¹	Oh, mama...

The semantic invariant of such songs is the daughter-in-law's complaint that no matter what she does, her mother-in-law is dissatisfied with her. The structural basis of some (but not all) songs from this group is the formula: "If I do X, my mother-in-law complains (criticizes me); if I do not do X (or do the opposite), my mother-in-law still complains." It is interesting that in his article Franko cites an example of such a formula (recorded in Nahuevychy, Drahobych region), but as a "humorous saying":

Do svekrukhy zahovory, to kazhe: "Pysok maiesh!" – movchy, to kazhe: "Tsy vzhe i hovoryty ne vmiiesh?"¹²
If you speak to your mother-in-law, she says: "You have a big mouth!"; if you are silent, she says: "Don't you know how to talk?"

Among the Ukrainian songs that belong semantically to this group, the song "Matinko moia kokhana" (Beloved Mother of Mine), which was collected in Podolia in 1922, is closest to the Yiddish structural type:

Matinko moia kokhana! Nashcho ty mene kokhala? Nashcho ty mene kokhala, Lykhii svekrusi viddala? Poperu shmattia na richtsi, Svekrukha kazhe – v horiltsi.	Beloved mother of mine! Why did you love me? Why did you love me And give me away to a cruel mother-in-law? If I wash clothing in the river, My mother-in-law says – in alcohol.
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Ledashcho nevistka, ledashcho,
 Ne khoche robyty nizashcho.
 Pokladu shmattia na ploti,
 Svekrukha kazhe – v boloti.
 Ledashcho nevistka, ledashcho,
 Ne khoche robyty nizashcho...

My daughter-in-law is lazy, lazy,
 She doesn't want to work at all.
 If I put the clothing on the fence,
 My mother-in-law says – they're in the dirt.
 My daughter-in-law is lazy, lazy,
 She doesn't want to work at all.

etc. Unlike the corresponding Yiddish songs, however, this song ends with the young woman's husband defending her:

Podivliusia ia v vikontse,
 Zasiaiav mylyi, iak sontse.
 --Idy, myla, do khaty,
 Ne bude maty laiaty.¹³

I look out the window,
 My darling shone like the sun.
 "Go home, darling,
 My mother won't yell at you."

In another song, "Na krakivs'kim mosti iara ruta skhodyt'" (On the Cracow Bridge Bright Rue is Coming Up), recorded in the Ternopil' region, the difficult situation of the daughter-in-law is formulated in general terms, in the third person:

Na krakivs'kim mosti iara ruta skhodyt',
 Nevistka svekrusi nihdy ne dohodyt'.
 I shchob nevistka u pivnochi vstala,
 To svekrukha kazhe: do poludnia spala. [...]
 Oi shchoby nevistka z rozhi kvitku shyla,
 A svekrukha kazhe, shcho nits ne robyla.¹⁴

On the Cracow bridge bright rue is coming up,
 A daughter-in-law never satisfies her mother-in-law.
 Even if the daughter-in-law got up at midnight,
 Her mother-in-law would say: she slept until noon. [...]
 Even if the daughter-in-law sewed a rose flower,
 Her mother-in-law would say that she hadn't done
 anything.

In a Yiddish song collected in Sobolivka (Vinnitsa region) in 1926 only one stanza corresponds to the structural type we are discussing:

Gey ikh gikh --
 zogt zi, kh'rays di shikh.
 Gey ikh pamelekh --
 zogt zi, kh'bin a neveyle.

If I walk fast,
 She says I'm tearing my shoes.
 If I walk slowly,
 She says I'm a corpse.

The song is interesting, however, for two reasons. First of all, the text is partly bilingual: the first stanza, which is then repeated as a refrain, and the second stanza are sung in a mixture of Yiddish and Ukrainian:

Oy, zhal, zhal,
 tay ne vernetsya
 tsu der beyzer shviger,
 mame, nye khotshetsya.
 Pohanay, pohanay
 for mayn klyatshe,
 odhaday, odhaday,
 tshoho ya platshu.

Oh, woe, woe,
 And to return
 To my cruel mother-in-law,
 Mama, I don't want to.
 Race, race,
 Go, my old horse,
 Guess, guess,
 Why I'm crying.

Also interesting are the two stanzas that show how much the daughter-in-law dislikes her mother-in-law's home:

Eyder ba der shviger
pireshkes mit shmalts,
beser ba der mamen
sekheres mit zalts.

Rather than [eat] my mother-in-law's
Pirozhki with chicken fat,
It's better [to eat] at my mother's house
Dry crusts with salt.

Eyder ba der shviger
af pukhove kishn,
beser ba der mamen
af di hoyle tishn.¹⁵

Rather than [sleep] on my mother-in-law's
Down pillows,
It's better [to sleep] at my mother's house
On bare tables.

This is an echo of a soldier song, which includes formulas like:

Beser tsu lebn in tsores un noyt
Eyder tsu esn dem soldatske broyt.¹⁶

It's better to live in troubles and need
Than to eat soldiers' bread.

The soldier song, variants of which were collected before the Russian Revolution in the Poltava, Mogilev and Vitebsk provinces, derives from the Polish soldier song "Idzie żołnierz borem, lasem" (A Soldier is Marching through the Woods), which dates from the sixteenth century. The third part of the song about the wandering soldier consists of a series of comparisons of the type:

Lepsza w domu groch kapusta,
niż na wojnie kura tłusta.¹⁷

Better peas and cabbage at home
Than a fat chicken in war.

Yiddish songs of the **second** group contrast the young woman's parents and husband, who praise her, and her in-laws, who criticize or even curse her, as in a song collected in the Vilna area:

Leyg ikh mir mayn kepele
oyf mayn mames betele;
geyt di mame farbay,
nokh anand zi tut un kvelt:
"Shlof, mayn tokhter sheyninke,
eygelekh hostu kleyninke,
shlof gezunterheyt!
shlof gezunterheyt!

I lay my head down
On my mother's bed.
My mother passes by;
All she does is beam:
"Sleep, my beautiful daughter;
You have little eyes.
Sleep in good health!
Sleep in good health!

The same thing happens with her father and, at the end of the song, with her husband, but her in-laws react differently:

Leyg ikh mir mayn kepele
oyf mayn shvigers betele;
geyt di shviger farbay,
nokh anand zi tut un shilt:

I lay my head down
On my mother-in-law's bed.
My mother-in-law passes by;
All she does is curse:

“Mayn shnur iz keyn berye nit,
keyn melokhe tut zi nit!
Nokh anand zi tut un shloft,
nokh anand zi tut un shloft.¹⁸

“My daughter-in-law is no bargain.
She doesn’t do any work!
She just sleeps.
She just sleeps.

The Soviet specialist in Yiddish folksong, Z. Skuditski, cited close Ukrainian parallels from Chubinskii’s collection and a similar Russian song from Shein’s collection, both published in the 1870s.¹⁹ He also pointed to the use of the same theme by the Russian poet Nikolai Nekrasov in the third part of his epic poem, *Komu na Rusi zhit’ khorosho* (Who Can Be Happy in Russia, 1873-76). To Skuditski’s examples we can add the following text:

Priadu, sokochu,
Spaton'ky khochu,
Oi skloniu ia holivon'ku
Na biluiu postilon'ku,
Mozhe, ia i zasnu.
Azh svekrukha ide,
Iak zmiia, hude:
--Sonlyvaia, drimlyvaia,
Do roboty linyvaia
Nevistka moia!

I spin, I keep watch,
I want to go to sleep.
Oh, I lay my head down
On the white bed;
Perhaps I'll fall asleep.
But my mother-in-law comes in,
She hisses like a snake:
“Sleepy, drowsy,
Too lazy to work
Is my daughter-in-law !

Her father-in-law says the same thing, but her husband “coos like a dove”:

Oi spy, myla, khoroshaia,
Pishla zamizh molodaia,
Ne vyspalasia!²⁰

Oh sleep, my beautiful darling.
You got married young.
You haven’t had enough sleep!

In another song the daughter-in-law is harvesting wheat:

Svekorko ide, hudyt' mene:
--Uzialy nevistku-nerobitnytsiu,
potrokhu zhne.

My father-in-law comes by, berates me:
“We took a lazy daughter-in-law; she reaps
a little bit at a time.

Her mother-in-law and her brother- and sister-in-law say the same thing, but her parents and sister praise her:

Oddaly dochku-robotnytsiu, po sim
kip zhne.

We married off a hard-working daughter;
she reaps seven shocks of wheat at a time.

Her husband

Uziav serpok da nazhav snopok:
“Siad' odpochyn”.²¹

Took a sickle and reaped a sheaf of wheat:
“Sit down and rest.”

The **third** group of Yiddish songs about a cruel mother-in-law could be summed up by a Ukrainian proverb:

Navchai mene, moia mat', iak svekrusi dogodzhat'²²
Teach me, mother, how to please my mother-in-law.

One such song, recorded in the Vitebsk *guberniia*, begins:

Tokhterl, du libste, tokhterl du mayn, ikh vel dikh lernen, vi a shnur tsu zayn.	Beloved daughter, daughter of mine, I will teach you How to be a daughter-in-law.
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Beshas di shvigerl vet geyn fun shul, azoy zolstu untetrogn dem gildernem shtul.	When your mother-in-law Is returning from the synagogue, You should bring her The golden chair.
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The daughter follows her mother's advice, but that does not help her. When she is about to give birth, her mother-in-law refuses to send for the midwife and does not want to let her sit by the window or in the garden so that she would feel better. In a Warsaw variant of the song the young woman asks her father-in-law to go to the synagogue to pray for her and to give alms with her money. He refuses since

Got vil dikh nisht hobn oyf der velt.
God does not want to have you in this world.

The song ends with her mother, sent for by the son-in-law, finding her daughter dying (or already buried in another variant).²³

The theme of preparation for the role of daughter-in-law can also be found in the Ukrainian material, but without the additional motif of the daughter-in-law's death. In one song, collected in the Cherkassk region, the mother gives her daughter the following advice about how to please her mother-in-law:

Derzhy khatochku, iak u vinochku, Rushnychky na kilochku, Derzhy vidertsia vsi chysten'kii Vodychky povnen'kii. Pryidut' zovytsi pyty vodytsi, Shchob tebe ne hudyli, Pryidut' bratyky pyty vodytsi, Shchob tebe pokhvalyly. ²⁴	Keep your house looking beautiful, Towels on their pegs. Keep your buckets all clean, Full of water. So when your sisters-in-law come to drink water They won't chastise you; So that when your brothers come to drink water They will praise you.
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It is possible that the Yiddish type is a combination of the shared Ukrainian-Yiddish motif of teaching the daughter with a motif borrowed from English ballads. Eleanor Gordon Mlotek has written about such borrowings.²⁵

Whereas in songs of the third group the daughter-in-law dies in childbirth and the mother-in-law bears only indirect responsibility for her death, in songs of the **fourth** and last group the mother-in-law (or some other relative by marriage) kills the daughter-in-law. To be sure, this is not expressed unambiguously in all variants, but, e.g., in texts from the Mogilev and Minsk regions and from the Kurland *guberniia*, when the mother asks “What did you drink?” or “What did they give you to drink?”, the daughter answers “wine with poison.”²⁶ All the songs of this group take the form of a dialog between a mother and her daughter: the mother asks questions and the daughter answers them, for example:

<p>--Vos' tu dorn' opgeton, vos' tu dorn' opgeton, ba der beyzer shviger? --Gevashn tish un benk, mit trerelekh geshvenkt, mutter, du libste, du mayne.</p>	<p>“What did you do there, What did you do there, At the cruel mother-in-law's house?” “I washed the table and the benches, I rinsed them with my tears, Beloved mother of mine.”</p>
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It is only in the last stanzas that we realize that this conversation is far from ordinary since the daughter is no longer among the living.²⁷ Eleanor Gordon Mlotek considers these songs a “Yiddish analogue of the Anglo-Scottish ballad *Lord Randal* (Child 12) in which the mother questions her dying son who has been poisoned by his sweetheart.”²⁸

That this song type was well-known is shown by the existence of parodies. Ruth Rubin, for example, collected a Zionist version, which she characterized as “[o]ne of the last Yiddish folk songs to achieve wide popularity in Palestine.” It included such questions and answers as the following:

<p>--Un vu bistu geshlofn, un vu bistu geshlofn, tokhter mayne getraye? --Oyf a boydem hey, hey, mit khalutsim tsvey, tsvey, mame, s'iz gevezn a mekhaye!²⁹</p>	<p>“And where did you sleep, And where did you sleep, My devoted daughter?” “In a loft of hay, hay With two pioneers. Mother, it was wonderful!”</p>
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The same stanza was quoted by Shlomo Katz, who also cited part of a “popular Yiddish song” that he remembered from 1921 from his hometown in southwestern Ukraine:

<p>--Vu bistu geshlofn, Tokhter mayne getraye? --Unter a brik, mit a bolshevik, mame, s'iz gevezn a mekhaye!³⁰</p>	<p>“Where did you sleep, My devoted daughter?” “Under a bridge, with a Bolshevik, Mother, it was wonderful!”</p>
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It is noteworthy that in some other Yiddish songs the female narrator compares getting married to murder. For example, in songs recorded in the Minsk and Kovno *gubernii* a young wife complains to the matchmaker:

Du host mikh gekoylet on rakhmones.³¹
You have killed me mercilessly.

In other songs a married daughter complains that her parents had led her to the slaughter; she recalls “the sharp knife” (*der sharfer kbalef*).³² In one song from the Vilna *guberniia* the metaphor is expanded:

Hert ir ale, eltete beyde, ir nemt a kind a kale un firt ir tsu der akeyde. Di oygn iz [sic] farbunden, di harts iz ful mit vunden, der tate shteyt bay der zayt, er shert un shnaydt, er shnaydt un shert zayne kinder on a tsayt. ³³	Listen, all of you, Both parents, You take a child, a bride, And lead her to the “binding.” Her eyes are bound, Her heart is full of wounds. Her father stands alongside; He cuts [with scissors and with a knife], He cuts His children before their time.
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The word *akeyde* (binding) refers to the biblical story of Abraham who, obeying God’s command that he sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, bound him and placed him on the altar.

In the Ukrainian material there are songs about a daughter-in-law poisoned by her mother-in-law,³⁴ but more common are variants of the East Slavic ballad (known also among the West Slavs) about a daughter-in-law turned into a tree (or other plant) by her mother-in-law. When her son returns home, his mother sends him to chop down the tree. In a text recorded in the Vinnitsa region, for example, we read:

--Oi, viz'my, mii synku, hostruiu bardynku Ta i zrubai topoliu na chuzhomu poliu. Obiishov vsi hory, hory shche i dolyny – Ne znaishov topoli, lysh na svoim poli. Iak zarubav vpershe, -- topolia skhylylas', Iak zarubav vdruhe, -- topolia skryvylas'. Zarubav vin vtrete, -- ta i zahovoryla: --Khiba zh ty ne znaiesh, to ia tvoia myla? Bodai tvoia matu na sviti ne zhyla, -- Vona nas, molodykh, z pary rozluchyla. ³⁵	“Oh, take, my son, a sharp axe And cut down a poplar on someone else’s field.” He walked over all the hills and dales; He could only find a poplar on his field. When he chopped the first time, the poplar bent over. When he chopped the second time, the poplar winced. He chopped the third time, and it spoke: “Don’t you know that I am your beloved? If only your mother didn’t live on this earth; She has separated us, a young couple.”
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As the Prague folklorist Orest Zilynskyj observed, “ancient animistic concepts have here been transformed into mature artistic symbols.”³⁶ The image of such magical transformation is however foreign to the Yiddish song tradition. The only parallel to the mother-in-law’s use of supernatural force against her daughter-in-law might be seen in the father-in-law’s refusal to ask God to help his daughter-in-law in the song quoted above.

There are also other motifs present in Ukrainian songs about the relations between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law that are not found in the Yiddish material. Earlier we saw that there are both Yiddish and Ukrainian songs about a mother teaching her daughter how to behave in the role of a daughter-in-law. There is no parallel in the Yiddish material, however, for the image of the Ukrainian mother teaching her son how to punish his wife. To be sure, the Ukrainian son does not always follow his mother's instructions. In a song called "Oi, mi bat'ko hirkyi" (Oh, My Bitter Father) the mother incites her son:

Oi, ty, synochku mii,
Chomu zhinky ne b'iesh?
Chomu zhinky ne b'iesh,
Nashcho zhaluiesh?

Oh, my son,
Why don't you beat your wife?
Why don't you beat your wife?
Why do you spare her?

But her son objects:

Oi, ty, maty moia,
Nashcho zh meni zhinku byt'?
Nashcho meni zhinku byt',
Iak umiie vse robyt?³⁷

Oh, my mother,
Why should I beat my wife?
Why should I beat my wife
When she knows how to do everything?

In a song collected in the Kingdom of Hungary in 1885 a husband warns his wife about his mother:

Hei, uvazh sobi, uvazh,
Divchatochko, uvazh,
Zhe v moiei mamychky
O try verkhy korbach.
Hei, iak ty ne budesh
Moiu mat' slukhaty,
Ta po tobi bude
Toi korbach puchaty.³⁸

Hey, be careful, be careful,
Dear girl, be careful,
Because my mother has
A whip with three lashes [?].
Hey, if you don't
Listen to my mother,
Then you're going to feel
That whip.

In another song, "Oi, na hori vasylechky skhodiati" (Oh, on the Mountain Cornflowers Are Coming Up), the son follows his mother's instructions when she sends him to the market:

Kupy, synu, reminniï vizhky,
Skruty mylii ruchen'ky shche i nizhky,
Shche i do toho drotianu nahaiku,
Skatai mylu, iak siniu kytaiku.

Buy, son, leather reins,
Tie up your darling's hands and feet,
And also get a wire plait,
Beat your darling like blue nankeen.

But the actions of the mother and son, which led to the death of the girl, did not meet with approval:

Po mylen'kii v usi dzvony dzvoniati', Syna i matir do ostrohu honiat'. Na mylen'ku sorochku nadily, Syna i matir v ostroh posadyli. ³⁹	They're ringing all the bells for his beloved; The son and mother are being driven to prison. They've dressed his beloved in a blouse; They've put the son and his mother in prison.
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One should not conclude from the examples cited so far that the daughter-in-law was defenseless. In the same article in which Ivan Franko cited the testimony of anonymous folk authors about “female servitude,” he also noted that Ukrainian folksongs also reflected another, opposite phenomenon, the reaction of women against their growing oppression.⁴⁰ Mikhaïlo Hrytsai also drew attention to the protests and determined resistance presented by daughters-in-law, citing a fragment of dialog from a song:

--Ta tsyt', nevistko, ta ne rozpuskai huby, Iak bachysh kotsiubu, to pozbyraiesh zuby.	“Quiet, daughter-in-law, don't blabber; If you see the poker, you're going to be picking up your teeth [i.e., you're going to get a beating].”
Ia, moloden'ka, umila odvit daty: --V kotsiubi dva kintsi, budem zuby miriaty. ⁴¹	I, young [wife], knew what to answer: “The poker has two ends; we'll match teeth.”

In another song (“Na krakivs'kim mosti...,” cited above) the daughter-in-law answers her mother-in-law's reproaches by saying that she should not have let her son marry her:

Bulo svoho syna do mene ne slaty, Bulo ho pislavy azh do vitovoï, Bula b ti pryvela zo chotyry korovi, Zo chotyry korovi, a ialivku p'iatu, Bula by ty mala nevistku bahatu.	You shouldn't have sent your son to me; You should have sent him to the village head's daughter. She would have brought you some four cows, Some four cows and a heifer as the fifth. You would have had a rich daughter-in-law.
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The daughter-in-law in a song recorded in the Rovno region warns her mother-in-law:

Shanui nevistku, bo v tebe odna. Iak bude druga, to i ne takaia, Iak bude tretia – norovystaia. ⁴²	Respect your daughter-in-law, because you only have one. If you have a second one, she won't be the same kind. If you have a third one, she'll be obstinate.
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The Yiddish folksong material lacks such an assertive daughter-in-law. The only place we find an echo of such an attitude to a mother-in-law is in the wedding song “Mekhuteneste mayne,” in which the bride's mother suggests to the groom's mother that they (the mothers) should have a good relationship. She asks her *mekhuteneste* (her son-in-law's mother) to treat her daughter-in-law like a daughter, but

Tomer vet ir zayn a shlak, a beyze shviger, iz mayn tokhter oykhet an antikl! ⁴³	If you're a shrew, a nasty mother-in-law, My daughter is also no slouch!
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Our examples, both those in Yiddish and those in Ukrainian, confirm the image of “female servitude” that was outlined by Ivan Franko in his article of 1883. It is summarized

in extremely condensed form by the Yiddish song fragment first published by Cahan in 1912:

Heyse tey, kalte tey,	Hot tea, cold tea,
teyglekh mit fasolyes;	<i>Teyglekh</i> with beans;
ale sheyne meydelekh	All beautiful girls
hobn miese dolyes. ⁴⁴	Have ugly fates.

The “ugly fates” of the last line are intended to contrast with the “beautiful girls” of the previous one. But whether she was beautiful or not, a Ukrainian or a Jew, a young woman who got married often met a difficult lot under the tyranny of her mother-in-law. In Ukrainian families the newlyweds usually lived with the husband’s parents, while in Jewish families they more often lived with the bride’s family. Songs about conflicts between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law, however, are widespread in the traditions of both nations. Ukrainian and Yiddish songs that portray the life of the “enserved young wife” (*molodytsia-nevil’nytsia* in the words of a song cited by Ivan Franko) have much in common both thematically and structurally. The common themes were provided by life itself, while the common structural elements and poetic devices were the result of centuries of living together.

Notes

¹ Ivan Franko, “Zhinocha nevolia v rus’kykh pisniakh narodnykh,” *Zoria* (L’viv), 1883, and as a brochure in the same year; citations here are from Franko’s collected works, Ivan Franko, *Zibrannia tvoriv u p’iatdesiaty tomakh* (Kiev, 1980), 26:210-53.

² Franko 211.

³ *Pisni rodynnoho zhyttia*, comp. H. V. Dovzhenok (Kiev, 1968).

⁴ M. S. Hrytsai, “Pisni pro zhinochu doliu,” in M. S. Hrytsai, V. H. Boiko and L. F. Dunaievs’ka, *Ukraïns’ka narodno-poetychna tvorčist’* (Kiev, 1983), p. 153.

⁵ Most deal with the so-called *prymak*, the son-in-law who moves into his in-laws’ home.

⁶ Ignaz Bernstein, *Jüdische Sprichwörter und Redensarten* (Hildesheim, 1969 [reprint of 1908 Warsaw edition]), #3626.

⁷ *Ukraïns’ki prysliv’ia ta prykazky*, comp. S. V. Myshanych and M. M. Paziak (Kiev, 1984), p. 199.

⁸ Bernstein, #3628.

⁹ *Ukraïns’ki prysliv’ia...*, p. 199.

¹⁰ M. M. Paziak, *Ukraïns’ki prysliv’ia ta prykazky. Problemy paremiolohii ta paremiografii*. (Kiev, 1984), p. 131.

¹¹ Zalmen Rozenal, “Shirey-am,” *Reshumot* 2 (1927): 374.

¹² Franko 225.

¹³ Dovzhenok 94.

¹⁴ Dovzhenok 102.

¹⁵ Z. Skuditski, M. Viner, *Folklor-lider*, 2 (Moscow, 1936), pp. 287-88. Examples from Skuditski and Viner are transliterated according to Soviet Yiddish orthography, e.g. “af” and “ba” rather than the YIVO standard of “oyf” and “bay.” The word *pireshkes* here probably refers to Russian-style *pirozhek* (baked or fried pastries stuffed with ground meat, cabbage or other fillings), although it can also refer to dough fried in honey. See Mordecai Kosover, “Yidishe makholim: a shtudye in kultur-geshikhte un shprakhforshung,” in *Yude A. Yofebukh*, ed. Yudel Mark (New York, 1958), p. 115.

¹⁶ Y. L. Cahan, *Yidishe folkslider mit melodies*, ed. Max Weinreich (New York, 1957), p. 374. See also S. M. Ginzburg and P. S. Marek, *Evreiskie narodnye pesni v Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1901), pp. 47-48.

¹⁷ Jan Stanisław Bystron, “Uwagi nad dziesięciu pieśniami ludowymi Żydów polskich,” *Archiwum Nauk Antropologicznych Towarzystwa Naukowego Warszawskiego*, vol. 1, no. 10 (1922), p. 10. A Belorussian variant was also cited by S. Z. Pipe in his review of the Skuditski-Viner collection (see note 16 above) in *YIVO-bleter* 14 (1939), no. 3-4, p. 351.

¹⁸ Cahan 285-86.

¹⁹ Skuditski and Viner 2:366-68; *Trudy etnograficheskoi-statisticheskoi ekspeditsii v Zapadno-russkii kraii, snariazhennoi imperatorskim Russkim geograficheskim Obshchestvom. Iugo-zapadnyi otdel. Materialy i issledovaniia, sobrannye ... P. Chubinskim*, vol. 5 (St. Petersburg, 1874), p. 700 (no. 304), p. 702 (no. 306); *Russkie narodnye pesni, sobrannye P. V. Sheinom* (St. Petersburg, 1870), p. 136 (no. 66).

²⁰ Dovzhenok 94.

²¹ Dovzhenok 89. It is tempting to hear in this last line an echo of the oldest recorded Polish sentence. The Latin chronicle of a Silesian monastery includes a story about a man who took pity on his wife, who had grown tired from the work of milling flour, and said to her, “Let me grind [the grain], and you rest.” The husband’s utterance is cited in Polish. The story is dated 1270. (See Tadeusz Lehr-Splawiński, *Język polski: pochodzenie, powstanie, rozwój* [Warsaw, 1947]), p. 109.)

²² *Ukrains’ki prysliv’ia...* 199.

²³ Ginzburg and Marek 223-24 (no. 269); Cahan 290-91 (no. 316).

²⁴ Dovzhenok 90.

²⁵ Eleanor Gordon Mlotek, “International Motifs in the Yiddish Ballad,” *For Max Weinreich on His Seventieth Birthday* (The Hague, 1964), pp. 213-14.

²⁶ Skuditski and Viner 2:289-90 (no. 27); Cahan 291-93 (no. 317); Ginzburg and Marek 219-22 (nos. 267-68).

²⁷ Skuditski and Viner 2:289-90.

²⁸ Mlotek 211-13.

²⁹ Ruth Rubin, *Voices of a People: the Story of Yiddish Folksong*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1973), pp. 390-91. Here and in the following text (from Shlomo Katz) the spelling and translations have been revised slightly.

³⁰ Shlomo Katz, “From a Russian *Shtetl* to the Founding of *Midstream*,” in *Creators and Disturbers: Reminiscences by Jewish Intellectuals of New York*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and Ernest Goldstein (New York, 1982), pp. 46, 49.

³¹ Ginzburg and Marek 233-34 (nos. 279-80).

³² Ginzburg and Marek 237-38 (no. 285).

³³ Sh. Bastomski, *Baym keval* (Vilna, 1923), p. 69 (no. 10).

³⁴ O. I. Dei, *Ukrains’ka narodna balada* (Kiev, 1986), pp. 75-76: type II-H-4 (“A mother-in-law, during the absence of her son, murders [poisons] her daughter-in-law”); type II-H-5 (“Trying to poison her daughter-in-law, a mother-in-law also kills her son”); type II-H-6 (“A mother-in-law prepared poison for her daughter-in-law, but poisoned her son ...”).

³⁵ Dei 75 (type II-H-1: “A mother-in-law turns her daughter-in-law into a poplar...”), 118; *Dozvol' meni, mamó... Ukraïns'ki narodni balady Zakarpattia*, comp. P. M. Poida (Uzhhorod, 1998), p. 40. See also Orest Zilynskyj, *Slovenská ľudová balada v interetnickom kontexte* (Bratislava, 1978), pp. 95-99.

³⁶ Zilynskyj 408.

³⁷ *Ukraïns'ki narodni lirychni pisni*, comp. M. M. Hordiichuk, A. M. Kin'ko, M. P. Stel'makh (Kiev, 1960), pp. 418-19.

³⁸ Dovzhenok 101.

³⁹ *Ukraïns'ki narodni lirychni pisni*, pp. 392-94.

⁴⁰ Franko 211.

⁴¹ Hrytsai 154.

⁴² Dovzhenok 110.

⁴³ Eleanor Gordon Mlotek, *Mir Trogn a Gezang: Favorite Yiddish Songs of Our Generation*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1977), pp. 58-59.

⁴⁴ Cahan 232 (no. 238). In American Jewish cooking the term *teyglekch* usually refers to balls of dough that – having been first baked or not – are boiled in a honey syrup, which may contain fruits and nuts. In essence, however, the term merely refers to small pieces of dough baked, fried or boiled. See Kosover 116.