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-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.

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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,	Oh, mama,
vos zol ikh tun.	What should I do?
Ikh hob a beyze shviger,	I have a cruel mother-in-law,
hot zi mit mir tsu tun.	She's dissatisfied with me.
Gey ikh gikh --	If I walk fast,
shrayt zi – ikh rays di shikh,	She yells that I'm tearing my shoes;
gey ikh pamelekh --	If I walk slow,
shrayt zi az ikh krikh.	She yells that I'm crawling.
Kokh ikh fish,	If I cook fish,
zogt zi s'iz on tam,	She says that it has no taste;
kokh ikh nit,	If I don't cook,
makht zi in shtub a tareram.	She makes a to-do at home.
Kokh ikh yoykh,	If I make chicken soup,
zogt zi, s'iz mit ash,	She says it has ashes in it;
kokh ikh nit,	If I don't make any,
makht zi in shtub a rash.	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!	Beloved mother of mine!
Nashcho ty mene kokhala?	Why did you love me?
Nashcho ty mene kokhala,	Why did you love me
Lykhii svekrusi viddala?	And give me away to a cruel mother-in-law?
Poperu shmattia na richtsi,	If I wash clothing in the river,
Svekrukha kazhe – v horiltsi.	My mother-in-law says – in alcohol.
Ledashcho nevistka, ledashcho,	My daughter-in-law is lazy, lazy,
Ne khoche robyty nizashcho.	She doesn't want to work at all.
Pokladu shmattia na ploti,	If I put the clothing on the fence,
Svekrukha kazhe – v boloti.	My mother-in-law says – they're in the dirt.
Ledashcho nevistka, ledashcho,	My daughter-in-law is lazy, lazy,
Ne khoche robyty nizashcho...	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,	I look out the window,
Zasiaiav mylyi, iak sontse.	My darling shone like the sun.
--Idy, myla, do khaty,	"Go home, darling,
Ne bude maty laiaty.[13]	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',	On the Cracow bridge bright rue is coming up,
Nevistka svekrusi nihdy ne dohodyt'.	A daughter-in-law never satisfies her mother-in-law.
I shchob nevistka u pivnochi vstala,	Even if the daughter-in-law got up at midnight,
To svekrukha kazhe: do poludnia spala. [...]	Her mother-in-law would say: she slept until noon. […]
Oi shchoby nevistka z rozhi kvitku shyla,	Even if the daughter-in-law sewed a rose flower,
A svekrukha kazhe, shcho nits ne robyla.[14]	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 --	If I walk fast,
zogt zi, kh'rays di shikh.	She says I'm tearing my shoes.
Gey ikh pamelekh --	If I walk slowly,
zogt zi, kh'bin a neveyle.	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,	Oh, woe, woe,
tay ne vernetsya	And to return
tsu der beyzer shviger,	To my cruel mother-in-law,
mame, nye khotshetsya.	Mama, I don't want to.
Pohanay, pohanay	Race, race,
for mayn klyatshe,	Go, my old horse,
odhaday, odhaday,	Guess, guess,
tshoho ya platshu.	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	Rather than [eat] my mother-in-law's
pireshkes mit shmalts,	*Pirozhki* with chicken fat,
beser ba der mamen	It's better [to eat] at my mother's house
sekheres mit zalts.	Dry crusts with salt.
Eyder ba der shviger	Rather than [sleep] on my mother-in-law's
af pukhove kishn,	Down pillows,
beser ba der mamen	It's better [to sleep] at my mother's house
af di hoyle tishn.[15]	On bare tables.

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

Beser tsu lebn in tsores un noyt	It's better to live in troubles and need
Eyder tsu esn dem soldatske broyt.[16]	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,	Better peas and cabbage at home
niż na wojnie kura tłusta.[17]	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	I lay my head down
oyf mayn mames betele;	On my mother's bed.
geyt di mame farbay,	My mother passes by;
nokh anand zi tut un kvelt:	All she does is beam:
"Shlof, mayn tokhter sheyninke,	"Sleep, my beautiful daughter;
eygelekh hostu kleyninke,	You have little eyes.
shlof gezunterheyt!	Sleep in good health!
shlof gezunterheyt!	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	I lay my head down
oyf mayn shvigers betele;	On my mother-in-law's bed.
geyt di shviger farbay,	My mother-in-law passes by;
nokh anand zi tut un shilt:	All she does is curse:
"Mayn shnur iz keyn berye nit,	"My daughter-in-law is no bargain.
keyn melokhe tut zi nit!	She doesn't do any work!
Nokh anand zi tut un shloft,	She just sleeps.
nokh anand zi tut un shloft.[18]	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,	I spin, I keep watch,
Spaton'ky khochu,	I want to go to sleep.
Oi skloniu ia holivon'ku	Oh, I lay my head down
Na biluiu postilon'ku,	On the white bed;
Mozhe, ia i zasnu.	Perhaps I'll fall asleep.
Azh svekrukha ide,	But my mother-in-law comes in,
Iak zmiia, hude:	She hisses like a snake:
--Sonlyvaia, drimlyvaia,	"Sleepy, drowsy,
Do roboty linyvaia	Too lazy to work
Nevistka moia!	Is my daughter-in-law !

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

Oi spy, myla, khoroshaia,	Oh sleep, my beautiful darling.
Pishla zamizh molodaia,	You got married young.
Ne vyspalasia![20]	You haven't had enough sleep!

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

Svekorko ide, hudyt' mene:	My father-in-law comes by, berates me:
--Uzialy nevistku-nerobitnytsiu, potrokhu zhne.	"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-robitnytsiu, 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,	Beloved daughter,
tokhterl du mayn,	daughter of mine,
ikh vel dikh lernen,	I will teach you
vi a shnur tsu zayn.	How to be a daughter-in-law.
Beshas di shvigerl	When your mother-in-law
vet geyn fun shul,	Is returning from the synagogue,
azoy zolstu untertrogn	You should bring her
dem gildernem shtul.	The golden chair.

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,	Keep your house looking beautiful,
Rushnychky na kilochku,	Towels on their pegs.
Derzhy vidertsia vsi chysten'kiï	Keep your buckets all clean,
Vodychky povnen'kiï.	Full of water.
Pryidut' zovytsi pyty vodytsi,	So when your sisters-in-law come to drink water
Shchob tebe ne hudyli,	They won't chastise you;
Pryidut' bratyky pyty vodytsi,	So that when your brothers come to drink water
Shchob tebe pokhvalyly.[24]	They will praise you.

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:

--Vos' tu dortn opgeton,	"What did you do there,
vos' tu dortn opgeton,	What did you do there,
ba der beyzer shviger?	At the cruel mother-in-law's house?"
--Gevashn tish un benk,	"I washed the table and the benches,
mit trerelekh geshvenkt,	I rinsed them with my tears,
muter, du libste, du mayne.	Beloved mother of mine."

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:

--Un vu bistu geshlofn,	"And where did you sleep,
un vu bistu geshlofn,	And where did you sleep,
tokhter mayne getraye?	My devoted daughter?"
--Oyf a boydem hey, hey,	"In a loft of hay, hay
mit khalutsim tsvey, tsvey,	With two pioneers.
mame, s'iz gevezn a mekhaye![29]	Mother, it was wonderful!"

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:

--Vu bistu geshlofn,	"Where did you sleep,
Tokhter mayne getraye?	My devoted daughter?"
--Unter a brik, mit a bolshevik,	"Under a bridge, with a Bolshevik,
mame, s'iz gevezn a mekhaye![30]	Mother, it was wonderful!"

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 khalef*).[32] In one song from the Vilna *guberniia* the metaphor is expanded:

Hert ir ale,	Listen, all of you,
eltere beyde,	Both parents,
ir nemt a kind a kale	You take a child, a bride,
un firt ir tsu der akeyde.	And lead her to the "binding."
Di oygn iz [sic] farbunden,	Her eyes are bound,
di harts iz ful mit vunden,	Her heart is full of wounds.
der tate shteyt bay der zayt,	Her father stands alongside;
er shert un shnaydt,	He cuts [with scissors and with a knife],
er shnaydt un shert	He cuts
zayne kinder on a tsayt.[33]	His children before their time.

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	"Oh, take, my son, a sharp axe
Ta i zrubai topoliu na chuzhomu poliu.	And cut down a poplar on someone else's field."
Obiishov vsi hory, hory shche i dolyny –	He walked over all the hills and dales;
Ne znaishov topoli, lysh na svoim poli.	He could only find a poplar on his field.
Iak zarubav vpershe, -- topolia skhylylas',	When he chopped the first time, the poplar bent over.
Iak zarubav vdruhe, -- topolia skryvylas'.	When he chopped the second time, the poplar winced.
Zarubav vin vtrete, -- ta i zahovoryla:	He chopped the third time, and it spoke:
--Khiba zh ty ne znaiesh, to ia tvoia myla?	"Don't you know that I am your beloved?
Bodai tvoia matu na sviti ne zhyla, --	If only your mother didn't live on this earth;
Vona nas, molodykh, z pary rozluchyla.[35]	She has separated us, a young couple."

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,	Oh, my son,
Chomu zhinky ne b'iesh?	Why don't you beat your wife?
Chomu zhinky ne b'iesh,	Why don't you beat your wife?
Nashcho zhaluiesh?	Why do you spare her?

But her son objects:

Oi, ty, maty moia,	Oh, my mother,
Nashcho zh meni zhinku byt'?	Why should I beat my wife?
Nashcho meni zhinku byt',	Why should I beat my wife
Iak umiie vse robyt'?[37]	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,	Hey, be careful, be careful,
Divchatochko, uvazh,	Dear girl, be careful,
Zhe v moiei mamychky	Because my mother has
O try verkhy korbach.	A whip with three lashes [?].
Hei, iak ty ne budesh	Hey, if you don't
Moiu mat' slukhaty,	Listen to my mother,
Ta po tobi bude	Then you're going to feel
Toi korbach puchaty.[38]	That whip.

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

Kupy, synu, reminnii vizhky,	Buy, son, leather reins,
Skruty mylii ruchen'ky shche i nizhky,	Tie up your darling's hands and feet,
Shche i do toho drotianu nahaiku,	And also get a wire plait,
Skatai mylu, iak siniu kytaiku.	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 dzvoniat',	They're ringing all the bells for his beloved;
Syna i matir do ostrohu honiat'.	The son and mother are being driven to prison.
Na mylen'ku sorochku nadily,	They've dressed his beloved in a blouse;
Syna i matir v ostroh posadyli.[39]	They've put the son and his mother in prison.

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] Mikhailo 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,	"Quiet, daughter-in-law, don't blabber;
Iak bachysh kotsiubu, to pozbyraiesh zuby.	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:	I, young [wife], knew what to answer:
--V kotsiubi dva kintsi, budem zuby miriaty.[41]	"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,	You shouldn't have sent your son to me;
Bulo ho pislaty azh do vitovoï,	You should have sent him to the village head's daughter.
Bula b ti pryvela zo chotyry korovi,	She would have brought you some four cows,
Zo chotyry korovi, a ialivku p'iatu,	Some four cows and a heifer as the fifth.
Bula by ty mala nevistku bahatu.	You would have had a rich daughter-in-law.

The daughter-in-law in a song recorded in the Rovno region warns her mother-in-law:

Shanui nevistku, bo v tebe odna.	Respect your daughter-in-law, because you only have one.
Iak bude druga, to i ne takaia,	If you have a second one, she won't be the same kind.
Iak bude tretia – norovystaia.[42]	If you have a third one, she'll be obstinate.

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,	If you're a shrew, a nasty mother-in-law,
iz mayn tokhter oykhet an antikl![43]	My daughter is also no slouch!

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;	*Teyglekh* 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 "enserfed 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 rodinnoho 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 tvorchist'* (Kiev, 1983), p. 153.

[5] Most deal with the so-called *pryimak*, 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 paremiolohiï ta paremiohrafiï.* (Kiev, 1984), p. 131.

[11] Zalmen Rozental, "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 *pirozhki* (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. Yofe-bukh*, ed. Yudel Mark (New York, 1958), p. 115.

[16] Y. L. Cahan, *Yidishe folkslider mit melodyes*, 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 Bystroń, "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 etnograficheskо-statisticheskoi ekspeditsii v Zapadno-russkii krai, 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-Spławiński, *Język polski: pochodzenie, powstanie, rozwój* [Warsaw, 1947]), p. 109.)

[22] *Ukraïns'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 kval* (Vilna, 1923), p. 69 (no. 10).

[34] O. I. Dei, *Ukraïns'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, mamo... 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 *teyglekh* 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.