

Joanna the Wife of Chuza by Lesya Ukrainka as a New Model of Communication in Modern Ukrainian Literature

ABSTRACT. Olena Haleta, *Joanna the Wife of Chuza* by Lesya Ukrainka as a New Model of Communication in Modern Ukrainian Literature [Joanna, żona Chuzy *Lesi Ukrainki jako nowy model komunikacji w modernistycznej literaturze ukraińskiej*]. „Przestrzenie Teorii” 36. Poznań 2021, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 289–307. ISSN 1644-6763. DOI 10.14746/pt.2021.36.17.

This article examines the drama *Joanna the Wife of Chuza* (1909) by Lesya Ukrainka, who is one of the defining figures in the history of modern Ukrainian literature. This work is considered an example of creating a new communicative model, introducing the poetics of an open work in the Ukrainian literature and establishing a new relationship between writer and audience. The incompleteness of the central image of this work, and therefore of the corresponding behavioral model and worldview, leads to the absence of a plot ending which would be the final solution to the conflict. In this way, Ukrainka establishes a new reading practice, not limited to experiencing the ‘life world’ of the author’s work. As reference to the history of the text shows, it corresponds to the author’s conscious instruction, with which the composition of the work agrees: the events take place in a special period of time, when the previous story has already ended and the new one has not yet begun (after the crucifixion of Christ, but not after the resurrection). At the same time, the spatial organization of the work emphasizes the position of readers, turning them from interested witnesses to active searchers. The example of *Joanna* is all the more telling because it undermines the hegemony of the novel in twentieth-century literature and draws attention to literary forms that correspond to a particular literary situation, especially that of ‘submerged population groups’ (Frank O’Connor). The change introduced by Lesya Ukrainka at the level of a separate work is also a change within the genre as a way of communicating between an author and a reader; it is also a change in the very notion of literature as a certain type of aesthetic experience and as a culturally established way of cognitive and rhetorical response to a certain type of situation.

KEYWORDS: Lesya Ukrainka, reader-response theory, literary communication, open work, drama, genre

Introduction

Lesya Ukrainka, 150th anniversary of whose birth is celebrated in 2021, is one of the defining figures in the history of Ukrainian literature. The most important part of her writing are dramatic works written in the aesthetics of modernism and in the context of European drama (Ibsen, Hauptmann, Maeterlinck, and others). But for Ukrainian contemporaries, accustomed to the ethnographic drama and drama of everyday life of the Narodniks’ nineteenth century, and also limited in their repertoire by the Valuev Circular and the Ems Ukaz, Lesya Ukrainka remained the ‘respected but not

read' (in her own words) author. Being at the center of the literary canon, Ukrainka's dramas became the object of study of each next generation, in particular, representatives of the 'high modernism' of the 1920s¹ and post-war emigration². The interpretation of her work in the post-Soviet period and a recent edition of her works in 14 volumes provided an opportunity to test the methodology of psychoanalysis, phenomenology, hermeneutics, existentialism, feminism, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, etc in Ukrainian literary studies³. However, some of her work still remains an interpretive challenge for readers and researchers. In particular, this applies to her dramatic 'small forms' characterized by limited stage performance, the static nature of the plot and the lack of an obvious ending.

The dramatic study (by the author's definition) *Joanna the Wife of Chuza* [Йоганна, жінка Хусова, 1909], in which the author depicts the return (after Christ was crucified) of Joanna, one of the myrrh-bearing women, to the house of her husband Chuza, continues and summarizes Ukrainka's previous search for a modern dramatic form. This work is built as a series of dialogues that take place between Herod's steward Antipas, the Galilean tetrarch Chuza, along with his mother Michal, the slave Sabina, the influential Roman citizen Publius and his wife Marcia, Joanna and servants. Limited by the space in the parlour of Chuza's house, and deprived of a solution to the main conflict, this drama still poses a challenge for literary critics, focusing on the images of the main characters, plot collisions, inner experiences and ideological confrontations. However, the writer's previous experience, her meticulous editing and zealous admiration for the final form of her own works, as well as the history of textual changes at the level of the work and at the genre level encourage the search for an interpretive perspective that would enable understanding of the author's text strategy.

¹ See М. Драй-Хмара, *Леся Українка*, [in:] М. Драй-Хмара, *Літературно-наукова спадщина*, Київ 2002, p. 35–151; М. Зеров, *Леся Українка*, [in:] М. Зеров, *Твори у двох томах*, том 2, Київ 1990, p. 359–400; Леся Українка, *Твори: у 12 т*, Київ 1927–1930, etc.

² See Ю. Шерех, *Театр Лесі Українки чи Леся Українка в театрі?*, [in:] Ю. Шерех, *Пороги і запоріжжя*, Харків 1998, том 1, p. 379–389; Д. Козій, *Проблема трагічної провину у драматичних творах Лесі Українки* *Форми трагізму у Лесі Українки*, [in:] Д. Козій, *Глибинний етос: Нариси з літератури і філософії*, Торонто–Нью-Йорк–Париж–Сідней 1984, p. 139–163, etc.

³ See Я. Поліщук, *Міфологічний горизонт українського модернізму: літературознавчі студії*, Івано-Франківськ 1998; В. Агеева, *Поетеса зламу століть: творчість Лесі Українки в постмодерній інтерпретації*, Київ 1999; О. Забужко, *Notre Dame D'Ukraine: Українка в конфлікті міфологій*, Київ 2007; Леся Українка, *Драми та інтерпретації*, Київ 2011; Леся Українка, *Повне академічне зібрання творів: у 14 томах*, Київ 2021, etc.

In the proposed paper, this drama is considered as an example of creating a new communicative model, which introduces the poetics of an 'open work' in Ukrainian literature and establishes a new relationship "between the artist and his audience, a new mechanics of aesthetic perception, a different status for the artistic product in contemporary society [...] it installs a new relationship between contemplation and the utilization of a work of art"⁴. *Joanna* is all the more telling because it undermines the hegemony of the novel in twentieth-century literature and draws attention to literary forms that correspond to a particular literary situation, especially of "submerged population groups"⁵. The change introduced by Lesya Ukrainka at the level of a separate work is also a change within the genre as a way of communication between the author and the reader, as well as a change in the very notions of literature.

Literary context: textual sources and misunderstandings

The eponymous drama is not the first time Joanna appears in the work of Lesya Ukrainka. Her first appearance was in 1901 at the beginning of the final scene of *Obsessed* [Одержима]. Joanna appears here in accordance with tradition: sporadically, 'as one of the followers of the Messiah', carrying the news of His resurrection. On Miriam's reproach, Joanna twice refers to the teachings of the Messiah himself and disappears into the crowd, not wanting to attract attention. Ukrainka clearly opposes the interlocutors, as evidenced by the draft autograph of the drama. Despite the fact that there are few changes in this part of the text, and they are rather technical, the author changes Miriam's address to Joanna. Initially, in the dialogue, both heroines use the address 'sister': "Joanna (to Miriam): Peace, sister, and joy! [...] For God's sake, sister, be quiet!" – "Miriam: What are you selling, sister?" But in the last phrase the author changes 'sister' to 'woman'⁶, further emphasizing the insurmountable distance that Miriam establishes by the sudden mention of trading – in the context of the redemptive sacrifice of the Messiah.

However, the events in *Obsessed* and *Joanna the Wife of Chuza* can hardly be constructed in chronological order. The action in *Joanna* is based

⁴ U. Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Bloomington 1979, p. 65.

⁵ F. O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*, Brooklin, New York 2004, p. 20.

⁶ Леся Українка, *Одержима*: чорновий автограф, 18.I.1901, Київ, Інститут літератури ім. Т. Шевченка НАН України, 2/799, f. 14.

on a biblical story; Eleonora Solovey notes that the Gospel mentions of Joanna in a later drama “are preserved unchanged, with all the attention and respect for the source”⁷. There are only two such mentions in the Gospel text – both in the Gospel of Luke. For the first time, “the wife of Chuza, the steward of Herod” (8:2–3) is mentioned (immediately after Mary Magdalene) as one of the women whom Christ healed from evil spirits or diseases and who followed Him, serving Him with their means. For the second time she is named among the women who “came with him from Galilee” (24:10) and were with Him till the end. This scanty information, however, undermines the comprehensiveness of Borys Yakubsky’s (1927) interpretation, who argues that “*Joanna* [...] perhaps poses the problem of marriage most acutely; it is no accident that the very title of this ‘study’ seems to emphasize that we have not just Joanna, but ‘Joanna the Wife of Chuza’”⁸. According to him, in her dramas, Lesya Ukrainka pays ever more attention to the themes of “marriage and love, the role of women in love in general”⁹, but the title of the work indicates first and foremost the biblical pretext, and both affirms and problematizes what is said.

Other researchers before Yakubsky not only considered *Joanna* as a story from personal life but also identified the work with the biography of the author. In particular, Mykola Yeshan (1913), a contemporary of Ukrainka, claimed that she “belongs to those figures in literature who do not have “biographies” outside of their creative activity”¹⁰. At the same time, Ukrainka complains in her correspondence about the critics of the time, who were unable to understand and accept her own approach to creativity: “Our criticism is really very backward, [...] talent and civic virtues are not enough for a critic, one just badly need a special education”¹¹. Misunderstandings occurred even with those closest to her – with her mother and editor Olena Pchilka, her husband and the first reader of her works, Klyment Kvitka, with her close friend and modernist writer Olha Kobylanska, or her colleague-intellectual and frequent consultant Ahatanhel Krymsky. In particular, Krymsky’s private response to *Joanna* almost prevented the publication of her other work, namely the drama *The Noblewoman (Бояриня)*. As Ukrainka wrote to her mother on March 14 (27), 1913, “it happened af-

⁷ Е. Соловей, *Драматичний етюд Лесі Українки “Йоганна, жінка Хусова”*, [in:] *Леся Українка, Драми та інтерпретації*, Київ 2011, р. 458–468.

⁸ Б. Якубський, *Йоганна, жінка Хусова*, [in:] *Леся Українка, Твори*, Київ 1927, том 8, р. 45–53.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ М. Євшан, *Леся Українка*, [in:] М. Євшан *Критика, Літературознавство. Есеїстика*, Київ 1998, с. 160.

¹¹ *Леся Українка, Листи 1903–1913*, Київ 2018, р. 448.

ter a friendly review – in a letter – to *Joanna*, where the reviewer was too sincerely looking for ‘an autobiographical basis’¹².

While recognizing Krymsky’s knowledge and literary skills, Lesya Ukrainka did not always agree with his approaches and conclusion. In particular, she denied the autobiographical reading of *Joanna*: “You can be sure that my soul has never lived ‘in the house of Chuza’, otherwise it would have died a long time ago”¹³. In the same letter, she claims that “In *Joanna* subjective notes are only those that are in her relation to the teacher”, and later the author quotes Paul Verlaine: “et tout le reste est de la littérature” (“and all the rest is literature”). However, it was not so much about a specific work as a general principle: Ukrainka also quotes Charles Augustin de Saint-Beuve (a founder of the biographical method – *sic!*), saying that drama is an ‘appropriate exaggeration’: “le drame c’est une exagération à propos”¹⁴.

On the other hand, researchers who considered *Joanna* from a purely artistic point of view, were faced with an alleged incompleteness of the dramatic plot. Back in 1926, Mychaylo Dray-Khmara pointed to the incompleteness of the spiritual rebirth of the main character of the drama: “‘Spiritual balance’, the ‘kingdom of God’ is not yet known to Joanna”, who only “is a symbol of a female slave with a tragic soul, who is about to be liberated, but has not yet grasped it and has stopped halfway”¹⁵. Oksana Zabuzhko is also close to Dray-Khmara in her perception of the image of Joanna: “everything she went through, did not transform her, as it turns out”¹⁶. If Dray-Khmara sees in Lesya Ukrainka a successor to Ibsen, Maeterlinck, and Romain Rolland, who portrayed love as a self-sacrifice, then Zabuzhko calls Joanna a “symbolic suicide attacker”¹⁷ and notes a certain incompleteness of the image in comparison with other biblical characters, as well as with the image of Chuza. And this is not a matter of the peculiarity of the author’s idea, but relates rather to the drawback of the work itself: “And Joanna is not fully opened, that’s true”¹⁸.

Eleonora Solovey admits that the work itself has an ‘open ending’. Analyzing the drama, she relies on an imaginary continuation of Joanna’s story: “ahead of her is the prospect of living on the verge, in the final tragic hopelessness and unsolvability of this situation of controversial existence

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 630–631.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 550.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 550–551.

¹⁵ М. Драй-Хмара, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

¹⁶ Леся Українка, О. Забужко, Бл. С. Шевчук, *Апокриф. Вибране*, Київ 2020, p. 70.

¹⁷ О. Забужко, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

¹⁸ Леся Українка, О. Забужко, Бл. С. Шевчук, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

as earthly hell [...] ahead of her is a constant ordeal, eternal torture, and she is aware that this is her cross”¹⁹. Vira Ahejeva does the same: at the end of the passage dedicated to *Joanna*, she speaks of the daily torments, humiliation, ridicule and shame that await Joanna in the future²⁰. However, the text of the work itself does not say anything about it – the story breaks just when Joanna desperately longs for her unimaginable future.

Open structure: characters and plot

Such a textual strategy by Lesya Ukrainka can hardly be taken as neglect. In particular, in the article “The latest social drama” she strongly rejects the “dialogue sermons” in the literature, “imbued with exposure” and “subject to the moral and philosophical principle”, which are like “a court in which the procedure is conducted only pro forma, because everyone knows the sentence in advance”²¹. The textual changes in *Joanna’s* draft²² and final²³ manuscripts convince us that Lesya Ukrainka described the images of her protagonists in detail, avoiding simplifications, direct oppositions (unlike early dramas) and premature conclusions. These changes primarily concern the dialogue between Joanna and Chuza – every time Ukrainka rewrites Joanna’s story about what prompted her to follow Christ.

The author makes corrections and additions in ink to the draft written in pencil, and then changes this later version as well. From the initial explanation she removes the first short remark, full of impulse and irrational faith: “I was drawn by an invincible force, / in his speeches I heard something / that I saw in dreams, in reveries”²⁴. Of this remark the author leaves only the final lines: “So he healed me as I lay / on my deathbed!”²⁵. Similarly, Chuza’s answer in the final version is limited to the lines “Oh, great happiness! / It would be better if you died then, / than shame me!”²⁶. The second part of this remark (“I gave him money for that – / why didn’t he take them?”) Ukrainka deletes, as well as Joanna’s answer: “Did he

¹⁹ Е. Соловей, *op. cit.*, p. 464.

²⁰ See В. Агеєва, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

²¹ Леся Українка, *Новейшая общественная драма*, [in:] Леся Українка, *Зібрання творів у дванадцяти томах*, Київ 1977, том 8, p. 233–234.

²² See Леся Українка, *Йоганна, жінка Хусова*: чорновий автограф, 3.VI.1909, Київ, Інститут літератури ім. Т. Шевченка НАН України, 2/783.

²³ See Леся Українка, *Йоганна, жінка Хусова*: чистовий автограф, 3.VI.1909, Київ, Інститут літератури ім. Т. Шевченка НАН України, 2/782.

²⁴ Леся Українка, *Йоганна, жінка Хусова*: чорновий автограф, f. 14.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

give / his divine gift for a useless income? / You say this because you did not know him”²⁷.

A few lines below, another fragment was removed from Joanna’s answer to Chuza’s question: “Well, great – he was a prophet for you, / or I don’t know what else. And you? / What were you to him?”²⁸. After Joanna’s laconic answer “I was nothing”, lines are deleted from the original text: “That is how faithful shadow follows a man / follows him everywhere and he does not even pay attention / because he is used to having this silent companion at his side. / Why is that shadow going? – Because the light is shining”²⁹. At the same time, in the text written in pencil, the author first changed the last line, offering the option “When does that shadow disappear? When darkness falls”³⁰, but ultimately crossed it out with a pencil, returning to the original version, before completely removing the entire quatrain from the text (cross-out in ink). Thus, the author departs from the opposition of pure spiritual impulse, the act of wholehearted faith (by Joanna) and mundane, pragmatic calculation (by Chuza). In the final text, only an excerpt after the deleted words remains to explain Joanna’s action – the author moves it a few lines above, to the beginning of the main part of the dialogue:

I once heard him say,
that foxes have burrows, birds – nests,
he has nowhere in the world to rest.
And I couldn’t live in the halls anymore,
In affluence, in peace and plenty, – I followed him.
I served him with my wealth
and helped his whole community,
so that he may have shelter everywhere,
that he did not experience hunger and cold,
Have a circle of supporters around him,
traveling among unfriendly people.
It would be a sin to leave him!³¹

Lesya Ukrainka makes another edit in ink in the last line of the draft, which initially looked like “I couldn’t leave him!”³². The question of personal ethics (ability) thus becomes a question of cultural ethos (sin).

²⁷ *Ibidem.*

²⁸ *Ibidem.*

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

³⁰ *Ibidem.*

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 24–25. Here and afterwards, unless otherwise indicated, the translation was prepared by Marta Hosovska specifically for this publication.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 16.

Solovey emphasizes that the action in *Joanna* takes place “after the Gospel events, but *immediately after* them”³³. However, the heroine seeks herself after the crucifixion of Christ – but not *after* the events of the Gospel. This drama appears as a kind of interpolation in relation to the Gospel text – insert ‘between the lines’, connected with them in content, due to the demands and needs of modern times. The action unfolds in the special time *between* the crucifixion and the resurrection, which in the personal dimension can take any length. After all, it is not a matter of chronological but existential time. Joanna returns to Chuza’s house not as a harbinger of Christ’s resurrection, she sees no way in front of her, experiencing existential abandonment and loneliness. Lesya Ukrainka departs from the testimonies of biblical story: Joanna finds herself in between times, in the fold of a historical event, between the crucifixion and the resurrection:

[...] It was said by
many of our people who came to them...
And He called in Galilee... I came back
hoping to see him at least once
followed his every footstep...
and did not see [...]³⁴

The culmination of history does not lead to a turning point and an ending: it is prolonged on the principle of amplification, deepens the existential crisis. Structurally, this is reflected in a double culmination: Joanna in despair “without shouting, without crying”³⁵ tears her hair out at the time of Christ’s death (as we learn from the story of Marcia) and again experiences loneliness and loss at the end of the work in Chuza’s house – “falls to her knees and raises her hands”, while “a silent, muffled crying without tears is shaking her whole body”³⁶. These two scenes not only look alike; they express the same emotion, the same psychological experience.

In the final act of the play, Joanna is left alone in the parlour – catharsis does not happen. One of the most influential critics of Ukrainian modernism Mykola Zerov (1929) calls Lesya Ukrainka’s works “disturbing”³⁷; it should be added that anxiety is not a cause but a consequence of the unfolding action. As Zerov aptly observes, the structure of Lesya Ukrainka’s small

³³ Е. Соловей, *op. cit.*, p. 461.

³⁴ Леся Українка, *Йоганна, жінка Хусова*, [in:] Леся Українка, *Зібрання творів у дванадцяти томах*, Київ 1976, том 5, p. 180.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 195.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 200.

³⁷ М. Зеров, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

drama is subject to the principle of agon³⁸, an unresolved dispute between two parties represented by the protagonist and/or the chorus. But if in the ancient tragedy equal forces converged in such a confrontation, none of which did not want to succumb and could not overcome, then in Lesya Ukrainka's works there are different perspectives of vision, each of which has its own way of reasoning. At the same time, the author avoids not only teaching but also an unnecessary aphoristic nature. As Larysa Miroshnychenko states, in her poetic works Ukrainka repeatedly even shortened the narration, removing "temporary ideas" from her works³⁹ and encouraging a reader to undertake independent intellectual work.

Spatial dimension of dramatic action

An indicative feature of the structure of this play is that the central scene with the participation of Joanna and Chuza is essentially a conversation about Joanna and Christ. Moreover, instead of developing the action, the text offers a story about an existential event that goes beyond the plot. Such a construction of this work has led some researchers to argue that the Ukrainka dramatics in *Joanna* is not stage one, but psychological one. In particular, Yakubsky, referring to the allegations levelled at Ukrainka about the non-staging of dramas, does not refute them, but claims that "the writer never considered them suitable for the stage"⁴⁰. However, in a letter to her mother, Ukrainka directly proposed this work for stage performance and pointed out its suitability for a "compact hall and stage" and "intimate staging": "This work is actually not for a big stage, because it requires not as much spectacular as subtly nuanced play for 'not far away' audience"⁴¹.

Yakubsky, on the other hand, believes that the course of all nine actions with the change of actors in the parlour of the Chuza's house shows the author's inattention to the stage space. Such permanence, or even indifference "to constructive and decorative aspects"⁴² are explained by the critic as the author's focus solely on the reader's perception. However, in a letter to her mother dated May 24 (June 6) 1912, Ukrainka admits, albeit about another drama, but based on the experience of previous productions, that "it would be unplayable to write it all down in remarks, because [...]"

³⁸ See *ibidem*, p. 385.

³⁹ See Л. Мірошніченко, *Над рукописами Лесі Українки: нариси з психології творчості та текстології*, Київ 2001, p. 83–84.

⁴⁰ Б. Якубський, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁴¹ Леся Українка, *Листи 1903–1913*, p. 667.

⁴² Б. Якубський, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

remarks also have their ‘style’, not just ‘serving value’⁴³. At the same time, she confirms her readiness to cooperate with directors in order to properly implement not only her speculative but also visual ideas. This statement undermines the definition of *Joanna* as a typical ‘drama for reading’, because the emphasis on acting shifts attention from the external entourage, which is easily conveyed by appropriate remarks, to bodily expression and the materiality of the depicted world. The writer’s mention of the audience, of their relation to the stage action is especially noticeable in this context: the author determines the distance and focus of the gaze, sees the staging itself as an actor-spectator interaction.

Lesya Ukrainka accompanies the dialogues in *Joanna* with realistic and concrete directions describing the appearance of the heroine, hair color and changes in her face, clothes and jewelry. Such attention to detail is all the more noticeable in the context of the author’s statement about her own style, which she always tries to “concentrate [...] like some strong essence, to make it laconic, like inscriptions on basalt, to free it from lyrical lethargy and lengthiness (someone always say that it is the main problem!), to reduce the plot to short energetic features”⁴⁴. With such verbal economy, place descriptions not only create a background for events, but also acquire a special semantic load.

Setting the action exclusively in the space of the house (parlour), Ukrainka rearranges the story from time coordinates to spatial ones, thus breaking with the literature of the 19th century, which was focused on the historical-temporal axis. In *Joanna* the architecture of the house is interconnected with the composition of the work and the perspective, the division into masculine and feminine, visible and invisible, one’s own, foreign and alienated. According to Gaston Bachelard, “both room and house are psychological diagrams that guide writers and poets in their analysis of intimacy”⁴⁵. However, if for Bachelard the house is connected first and foremost with our consciousness of verticality and our consciousness of centrality as being in the center of being, then the house to which Joanna returns is not capable of containing the being she desires. There is no spatial vertical here, the whole action unfolds on the same level, only the mutual location of the characters indicates a social hierarchy (when, for example, Chuza sits on a ‘small bench’ at his mother’s feet or next to a respected guest).

The house therefore appears as another model of the social: from the poetics of space, Lesya Ukrainka moves to the politics of place⁴⁶, abando-

⁴³ Леся Українка, *Листи 1903–1913*, p. 595.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 672.

⁴⁵ G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, New York 2014, p. 133.

⁴⁶ See E. Rybicka, *Geopoetyka: przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich*, Kraków 2014, p. 15.

ning the image of space as a container that can be filled with anything, and linking its structure with power⁴⁷. The authoritarian hierarchy is also expressed through spatial interaction in other scenes in the play: a triclinium in the Roman style is placed in the ‘eastern-style’ room of the Chuza’s house; dissatisfied Michal goes to her private quarters; at Chuza’s call, Sabina stops “at the threshold”, but has not gone far beyond the threshold when he sends her out of the parlour; in the same way, Joanna stops “at the threshold” when she returns home; Publius enters the room through the middle entrance, which was previously closed by curtains; then Chuza leads him by the hand to the room and lets her go before him; Chuza, having seated guests from Rome, does not sit down himself; Joanna stands in the doorway, coming to the guests, and when Publius stands to approach her, Marcia remains seated.

However, not all plot events are covered by the eye and, accordingly, the text: the semantic level of work also contains what is happening outside. A viewer / reader of the play only guesses about the communication of Joanna with Michal and Sabina, to which she “goes as for a torture” and later returns “pale as death” with a “heavily made-up” face that “looks like a mask”⁴⁸. Finally, not only Joanna leaves the space of the parlour – even Chuza, who connects the individual dramatic scenes into a single line of events, enters the parlour after a reader ‘views’ the space described at the beginning of the work, and at the end leaves it with Publius and Marcia. In the meantime, the author also describes a scene when “there is no one in the parlour for a while”⁴⁹. However, empty space (particularly in literature) does not exist⁵⁰, it is always associated with either memory or perception, and is filled with experience and feelings⁵¹.

The house in the drama exists because of the view – and this is the view of readers. Their presence in the space of the text is no less definite than the position of the protagonists, and it is it that establishes the perspective of the vision. From the beginning to the end of the action, readers contemplate the events inside the house. They do not look into the house as strangers or outsiders, nor do they leave the interior, and when the action is transferred outside the walls of the parlour, their gaze remains directed from the inside to the hall and outside. We first learn about this when the slave pulls back

⁴⁷ See E.W. Soja, *Taking Space Personally*, [in:] B. Warf, S. Arias (eds.), *The Spatial Turn. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, London and New York 2009, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Леся Українка, *Йоганна, жінка Хусова*, p. 182, 184, 192.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 191.

⁵⁰ See H.J. Miller, *Topographies*, Stanford 1995, p. 7.

⁵¹ See Y.-F. Tuan, *Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective*, [in:] “Progress in Geography” 1974, VI, p. 213.

the curtain, opening the hall and the entrance to the house to a reader; later, when Chuza leads Publius by the hand to the threshold of the parlour; when Publius and Chuza go out to meet Marcia; and, finally, when the guests move into the courtyard to inspect their new property from the roof. The reader (as the viewer) is also in the room before the appearance of Joanna and does not leave it with her departure in the mother-in-law's private quarters. Eventually, the reader is left alone at the very end of the drama after Joanna "gets up and staggers out of the parlour like a grass from the wind"⁵².

For the reader, Lesya Ukrainka leaves not only a spatial but also an interpretive perspective. Deprived of the opportunity to merge with the central character of the drama, motivated to imagine and conjure up events beyond the dramatic text, readers find themselves in front of an open finale, literally on the line – in the middle of the stage at the moment of the highest tension. However, irreversibility does not mean hopelessness, and the resolution of the conflict is transferred beyond the plot to the plane of the reader's cultural and ethical choice.

In search of dramatic form: from work to genre

Lesya Ukrainka encourages varied reading not only at the level of a specific work, but also at the level of the genre. In her dramatic works, she repeatedly addresses the same topic, highlighting complementary perspectives: for instance, she calls the drama *On the Ruins* [*На руїнах*, 1904] a pendant to *The Babylonian Captivity* [*Вавилонський полон*, 1903]⁵³, and at the same time claims that it was not written with the "same idea"⁵⁴. Both dramas appear almost simultaneously; the author considers them as valuable achievements and places them side by side in the editions of her own works. Ukrainka also wrote *Joanna the Wife of Chuza* almost simultaneously with the drama *In the Field of Blood* [*На полі крові*, 1909], with which it echoes both thematically and structurally. Olha Kosach-Kryvnyuk dates the completion of both dramatic poems on the same day, June 3, 1909, although the final manuscript of *In The Field of Blood* that is preserved at the T. Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine is dated February 2, 1909 (the same as the draft; such dating of the draft coincides with the version of Kosach-Kryvnyuk)⁵⁵.

⁵² Lesya Ukrainka, *Йоганна, жінка Хусова*, p. 200.

⁵³ See Lesya Ukrainka, *Листи 1903–1913*, p. 666.

⁵⁴ Lesya Ukrainka, *Листи 1903–1913*, p. 567.

⁵⁵ See O. Kosach-Kryvnyuk, *Lesya Ukrainka: хронологія життя і творчості*, Нью-Йорк 1970, p. 834.

In search of interpretive approaches to *Joanna*, literary critics have repeatedly paid attention to the convergence between the two works. Thus, Abram Hosenpud (1947) stated that both dramas are an attempt to understand Christ “through the perception of those who loved him (Joanna) and those who hated him (Judas)”⁵⁶. Following’s Hosenpud line of thought, Solovey calls both works “parallel” and supports Hosenpud’s view that *Joanna* is the same “analogy to *In The Field of Blood* as *On the Ruins* – to *The Babylonian Captivity*”, concluding that “all the dramatic works of this period and of these themes are internally interconnected”⁵⁷.

According to the manuscripts, Lesya Ukrainka moved gradually to find her own dramatic form. In particular, the draft and final autographs of the dramas *On the Ruins* and *On the Field of Blood* have been preserved, which contain significant changes that the author made at the stage of preparing the work for publication. In the first case, she changed the final scene, in which the prophetess Tirzah leaves a hostile crowd with the promise to return at the right time for the final departure of Tirzah with no hope of return. In the second case, the author completely removed the final part of the drama, in which Judas, after the news of Christ’s resurrection, commits suicide, leaving him in the field of blood in a state of inner shock – even a stone thrown by a pilgrim in his direction does not reach him. Neither the first nor the second change was accepted by critics, just as *Joanna*’s open ending was not accepted.

Reviewers and later scholars tried to restore (in the case of *On the Ruins* and *In the Field of Blood*, see Haleta 2016) or contemplate (in the case of *Joanna*) the missing ending. Perhaps the only exception is Jurii Sherekh (1943), who resisted such an approach, as well as the psychological understanding of the conflict underlying both works. Analyzing productions of *Joanna* and *In the Field of Blood*, Sherekh speaks of reading “individual drama”⁵⁸ in the works of Lesya Ukrainka as a cutting, narrowing the range of their sound. Each time he offers several possible interpretations, emphasizing that such ambiguity, openness to interpretations – a special feature of Ukrainka’s drama, which cannot be conveyed through the stage embodiment, given the different nature of the two arts, the art of speech and the art of stage⁵⁹. Accordingly, the connections between the individual dramas are not limited to oppositions. Thus, the opposition between *Joanna* and *Judas* is appealing and telling but does not reflect the whole complexity of Lesya Ukrainka’s dramatic work. *Joanna* cannot be explained only as an

⁵⁶ А. Гозенпуд, *Поетичний театр (драматичні твори Лесі Українки)*, Київ 1947, р. 129.

⁵⁷ Е. Соловей, *op. cit.*, р. 459.

⁵⁸ Ю. Шерех, *op. cit.*, р. 382.

⁵⁹ *See ibidem*, р. 388.

antithesis to Judas, if only because Judas is not an allegory of hatred, but a much more complex character. Instead, one can see another similarity between *Joanna* and *In the Field of Blood*: these are two dramas without a visible ending, written almost simultaneously.

Another similarity between these dramas is that the very names of the works often indicate the place of action, such as *On the Ruins* or *In the Field of Blood*. In one of her letters Ukrainka notes that “*The Babylonian Captivity* is actually called *In Captivity*”⁶⁰, thus emphasizing once again the connection of the place with the course of events and the type of conflict depicted. In Lesya Ukrainka’s early dramatic works (*The Babylonian Captivity* and *On the Ruins*), the action unfolds in an open space, sprawling and unstructured. However, this is a public space, where the main conflict unfolds as a dispute between the individual and the community, which is divided in half and is exhausted in constant internal conflict, and therefore cannot resist the external enemy. The appearance of the hero as ‘other’ gives the community an opportunity for liberation – not only from external, but above all from internal captivity. In the works written in 1909 (*In the Field of Blood* and *Joanna the Wife of Chuza*), the conflict acquires a personal dimension, which is reflected in the change of scene: Judas finds himself outside the city as a social space, Joanna, to some extent, too, because the whole action of the work unfolds in the space of the house. If in the dramas of 1903–1904 the conflict is neo-romantic, then in the 1909 dramas it is existential: it is not only about the courage to make the right choice, but also about the complexity and vagueness of what to consider the right choice. Joanna is betrayed in her trust in a husband who refuses to understand her:

I was coming back home, to being a wife,
I made a sincere confession, without deception,
I thought, “He would believe me! He would understand!”
And you have only mockery for me,
contempt, improbability...⁶¹

For Chuza, Christ is only a “Nazarene carpenter”, the difference between his vision and Joanna’s perception is expressed in his own words: “he was a prophet to you, / or I don’t know what else”⁶². The direct opposition is rather between the view of Joanna and Marcia, after the words of whom “three criminals were crucified / there” the author emphasizes the antago-

⁶⁰ Леся Українка, *Листи 1903–1913*, р. 666.

⁶¹ Леся Українка, *Йоганна, жінка Хусова*, р. 178–179.

⁶² *Ibidem*, р. 174.

nism with a remark: “Joanna looks straight into Marcia’s eyes”⁶³. Chuza’s view, on the other hand, is a profane one. However, Joanna’s faith in Christ also does not show her a way out of the situation; having decided to ask her husband for a divorce, she recalls that Christ commanded marital obedience. Joanna then surrenders in despair: she appears as a *homo viator*, but she does not see where she will go next:

Oh my God! How long is this torment going to last?
Teacher! What did you leave me with?...
When is the kingdom of God? Where is it?
Will my soul live to see it?...⁶⁴

As already mentioned, the reader learns about the key events that cause the dramatic conflict (the healing of Joanna, her departure from Chuza’s house, service to Christ, crucifixion) from onstage dialogues. In this way, *Ukrainka* moves away from understanding drama as a direct depiction of events, forcing readers to use their own ideas (as knowledge and imagination) of evangelical history. At the same time, a viewer of the work cannot rely solely on the Gospel text, limited as it is to too scarce records. Such a structure of the play confirms Lesya *Ukrainka*’s final transition to modern writing, which, according to Maria Zubrycka, “draws readers into the realm of the game of creative imagination and requires them to take a particularly active part in the reading process. Readers cease to be passive observers of the game, they become players, because that is what the rules of this game are”⁶⁵. From the example of *Ukrainka*’s small dramas, one can trace how the writing strategy changes: if *The Babylonian Captivity* suggest that a reader accepts a certain solution to the conflict, *On the Ruins* encourages the reader to realize the existing conflict that cannot be resolved by outside efforts, *On the Field of Blood* – to take responsibility for the expected solution, then *Joanna* offers not only to put yourself in the place of a literary protagonist, but also to find your own place in the situation, to see it from your own perspective and to problematize it. In *Joanna* Lesya *Ukrainka* takes another step towards creating the poetics of an open work, as Umberto Eco would later call such a literary form: “we can say that the work *in movement* is the possibility of numerous different personal interventions, but it is not an amorphous invitation to indiscriminate participation [...]”

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 194.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 200.

⁶⁵ М. Зубрицька, *Ното legens: читання як соціокультурний феномен*, Львів 2004, р. 202.

In other words, the author [...] does not know the exact fashion in which his work will be concluded but he is aware that once completed the work in question will still be his own”⁶⁶. According to Eco, the ending of such a work cannot be completely predictable, but it is somehow determined by the author’s structure of the work.

Conclusion: reader as an actor

Mykola Yevshan (1910), one of the first critics of Lesya Ukrainka, drew attention to the role of the reader of Ukrainka’s works, but he approached this issue from a psychological point of view, emphasizing empathy: “It is absolutely impossible to read those works and not hear their sincere aspirations and calls; it is impossible to pass by without being touched to the bottom of the soul, without a trace of the deep seal that true poetry will always emboss in people’s hearts”⁶⁷. Zabuzhko speaks about the special reader positioning of Ukrainka’s dramas, believing that the author consciously addresses a reader with knowledge: her dramas are by no means enlightening, they are not intended to show, tell, inform. On the contrary, they are created for an interlocutor equal in knowledge to the author, ready to understand on the basis of existing cultural contexts⁶⁸. But, as *Joanna* persuades us, it is not just a matter of recognizing cultural signals, of reading ‘chalk marks’. Lesya Ukrainka’s textual strategy leads to the formation of an implied reader, who “embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect – predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself”⁶⁹. Moreover, such a strategy is aimed at the emergence of new “interpretive communities”, which are combined with common writing intentions and interpretive strategies⁷⁰ and “share a set of values and cultural assumptions”⁷¹. A reader of modern Ukrainian literature now has to choose not just one of the parties to the confrontation within the plot, but the level at which s/he accepts the challenge.

The drama in Lesya Ukrainka’s works is not limited to the depicted events and relations between the protagonists – it is the drama of finding

⁶⁶ U. Eco, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁶⁷ М. Євшан, *Леся Українка*, [in:] М. Євшан, *Критика. Літературознавство. Есеїстика*, Київ 1998, p. 153.

⁶⁸ See O. Zabuzhko, *op. cit.*, p. 175–177.

⁶⁹ W. Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore 1980, p. 34.

⁷⁰ See S. Fish, *Interpreting the Variorum*, [in:] K.N. Newton, *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, London 1997, p. 207.

⁷¹ H. Bertens, *Literary Theory in basics*, London and New York 2014, p. 96.

one's own answer to complex worldview-related questions. The dramatic tension arises not only from what is said, but also from what is not said. The incompleteness of the central image of the work, and therefore of the corresponding behavioral model and worldview observed by critics leads to the absence of a plot ending as the final solution to the conflict. In this way, Lesya Ukrainka establishes a new reading practice, not limited to experiencing the 'life world' of the author's work. As reference to the history of the text shows, it corresponds to the author's conscious instruction, with which the composition of the work agrees: the events take place in a special period of time, when the previous story has already ended and the new one has not yet begun. *Joanna* activates the reader's knowledge by appealing to the Gospel text: however, if *In the Field of Blood* appeals to what cannot be forgotten (the story of Judas), then *Joanna* appeals to what is impossible to remember (Joanna's story). General cultural competence does not save readers from searching for answers to the questions that Ukrainka's Joanna is unable to answer, because the biblical text is silent about her future. At the same time, the spatial organization of the work emphasizes the position of readers, turning them from interested witnesses to active searchers.

This dramatic sketch should also be considered in the context of Lesya Ukrainka's own work, where the construction of a new model of interaction with the reader takes place not only at the level of a single work but also at the level of genre as "a set of certain types of agreements between the participants of literary communication" that "design ways of reading, determine the reader's attitude to discourse"⁷². *Joanna the Wife of Chuza*, like Lesya Ukrainka's other dramas, encourages a change in the Ukrainian readership that was later described by the reader's response theory: "the text teaches us, through a pattern of raised expectations disappointed, how to read that text and, perhaps, how to read the world"⁷³. Such "cultural work"⁷⁴ of a literary piece is to introduce a new reading practice through a special structure of the work, transforming the reader literally into an active, or rather acting participant, a person involved in active interaction through the text with the author. The change introduced by Lesya Ukrainka is a change within the genre as a culturally established way of cognitive and rhetorical response to a certain type of situation.

⁷² M. Głowiński, *Dzieło wobec odbiorcy: szkice z komunikacji literackiej*, Kraków 1998, p. 54.

⁷³ L. Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, London and New York 2015, p. 168.

⁷⁴ J. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790–1860*, Oxford 1986, p. 200.

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