

Viktor Sobiianskyi **Віктор Собіянський**Expert in public and cultural diplomacy, project manager,
The Polish Institute in KyivЕксперт з публічної та культурної дипломатії, Польський
Інститут у Києвіe-mail: viktorsobi@gmail.com | orcid.org/0000-0003-2017-5636

Theatre Criticism in the 1920s Ukrainian Newspapers

Театрально-критичні публікації у газетних виданнях України 1920-х років

Abstract. The paper provides an outline of the 1920s Ukrainian newspapers that consistently covered theatre life, lists and characterizes their leading contributors, and analyzes a number of illustrative drama reviews.

The basis for systematization and comparative analysis of the 1920s theatre journalism constituted the general scientific research methods based on empirical, descriptive principles of source studies. The method of biographical research is an attempt to recreate the biographical facts of certain critics, the formation of their aesthetic landmarks, and trace the features of their individual writing style. Developments in the field of the theory of literary and critical genres were used in the analysis and classification of reports by these theater critics.

The paper addresses a genre of brief reports in the 1920s Ukrainian newspapers, as well as more detailed reviews. A quantitative increase in the number of articles on theater, their diversity, and cultural scope was noted. An attempt was made to follow the transformation of critical thought in the 1920s newspapers exemplified by the critics of different generations and aesthetic orientations.

Keywords: theatre criticism, newspapers, 1920s, genres, Chaim Tokar's articles, Yevhen Henis's activity, Ivan Kocherha's work, Stanislavski's unpublished letter.

Introduction

Traditionally, since their emergence in the eighteenth century and up to the era of the Internet, newspapers were the most popular and widely circulated periodicals globally. Their main advantages were almost instantaneous coverage and affordable pricing. The most sought-after were the daily, minimum four-page broadsheets.

Such a situation persisted in Ukraine during the 1920s, when the number of newspapers published rose, to a certain extent, in comparison to the previous periods. Numerous wall newspapers and district-level periodicals emerged, as well as the ones published by various organizations. However, their lifespan in the province was limited. On the contrary, regional and All-Ukraine newspapers thrived for years if not decades. Still, the previous studies failed to address in a separate paper the coverage of cultural and artistic life in Ukrainian newspapers during the 1920s.

Literature Review

Ukrainian art criticism of this period was extensively studied by the Ukrainian musicologists Ya. Gordiychuk, Maya Rzhavska, and O. Rudneva, who authored a dissertation and numerous publications on the subject. At the same

time, Ukrainian theatre criticism quite rarely turned to the obscure 1920s. Those few to do so were Anna Bilyk (2018), Marina Grynshyna (2003), Yuliana Polyakova (2011), and Yulia Schukina (2018). A key problem with much of the literature is a lack of detailed studies on the periodicals and reviewers of the period in question.

As the factual basis of the paper were the publications on theatre in the Ukrainian periodicals of the 1920s, to identify most of them the indexes of art periodicals by Veniamin Vyshnevskyi and Ksenia Muratova were used. Unfortunately, the full coverage of all Ukrainian socio-political newspapers from the 1920s was not possible within this paper. According to the assessment of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine staff (Pakhucha et al., 1985), the collection of the library includes almost 1000 titles.

Aim of the paper

This paper examines several All-Ukraine and regional newspapers, which addressed theatre life the most. In addition, the leading Ukrainian theatre critics of the 1920s were named and some drama reviews were analyzed as exemplifying this theme and genre.

Results and Discussion

Several telling newspaper articles in the genre of theatre criticism illustrate the changes undergone during that period, both in regard to form and senses. During the 1920s, daily newspapers strove to inform their audience about the most crucial social, political, and art events. Their high publication frequency, limited publication space, and “universal” nature, as well as the most general audience, dictated the profile of the periodicals, which formed during the early twentieth century. A prompt reaction to the events, laconic style, and being “readily-accessible” for most of the readers were the reasons behind the dominance of various genres of theatre journalism¹: brief and extended theatre chronicles, reports, and announcements.

The prevalence of theatre journalism also affected the basic genre of theatre criticism—a review. In general, an article should be completed the very day of the premiere for it to be in print the next morning. Reviews are usually limited in size and in the use of specialized terminology, similarly to many other genres of newspaper journalism (an essay, a feuilleton, and an interview).

As Anna Bilyk aptly notes, “Theatre criticism of the second half of the nineteenth century developed three key issues: performability of the play, acting (actors’ performing traits), and the audience’s ability to comprehend the staging” (Bilyk, 2018). The issues, topical for the theatre during the early twentieth century, remained such in the 1920s as well. Unfortunately, the common superficial way to discuss these issues resembled a template: one paragraph for the play, the next one (sometimes two or three) about the actors, and the last one characterizing the reception by the audience. This cliché, also used by the “provincial” Russian critics, would persist in some periodicals, notably in the Odesa-based ones. Meanwhile, the critics in Kyiv and Kharkiv gradually distance themselves from such writing techniques.

During the 1920s, the number of announcements in Ukrainian newspapers drops, while their size increases. Reviews become a fixture, meeting significant ideological objectives. It is all the more so for the national newspapers, as in the provincial ones the genre of a report is still dominant. While the genre boundaries between a report and review blur up to the mid-1920s, in time these boundaries become more delineated. The extended reviews emerge that provide the analysis of the several plays at once.

Gradually, the size of the articles also increases and the drama reviews change in its essence. At the turn of the twentieth century, the broadsheets published articles, often providing no author information. Instead, during the 1920s, most drama reviews in the daily periodicals have a listed author. Some articles go even further and are titled metaphorically: previously, the titles were eponymous

¹ Throughout this paper, the list of genres proposed by theatre researcher Serhiy Vasyliiev (2008) was used.

to the theatre or a play or were simply the headings. This is a profound difference, as the articles become full-scale author’s text reviews that might be considered a genre of literature.

The fact that the trade of theatre researcher gained value in society contributed to the process of professionalization of theatre criticism. Drama critics became influential figures and could experiment with breaking away from tradition. For instance, Yakiv Mamontov and Isaac Turkeltaub, who taught at the Kharkiv Music and Drama Institute, received the academic rank of professor; Chaim Tokar was a member of a City Council, and later, in 1927–1928 edited *Vechirniy Kyiv*—highly popular Kyiv newspaper.

Previously rare in newspaper formats, short “creative biographies” emerge, commemorating a birth anniversary of a notable figure or the historical outlines of the theatre companies. Daily newspapers also welcome back the genre of correspondence, when the letters of journalists from other cities were printed. Social discussions were also publicized, as well as the disputes between different periodicals. Unquestionably, this prompts the journalists to utilize the genre of the opinion pieces. However, due to limited space, these texts often did not exceed a remark. One of the most noteworthy instances of such “remark” is the 1929 column by Mark Sheliubskiy in the *Kievskiy Proletariy* newspaper. Titled “Notes on theatre,” this column featured small opinion pieces, detailing his reflections on a certain staging.

Finally, the traditional overviews of theatre seasons and reports about the premieres were published. As for the interviews, they were presented in a rather unusual form in the Ukrainian newspapers of the 1920s: the reporter retells the essence of his conversation with his interlocutor, without mentioning the exact form of the dialog and his role in it. This was the most popular among the editorial staff of the Odesa-based newspapers. Newspapers often published non-dialogic interviews with Les Kurbas; for example, in *Visti VUTsVK*, it was Borys Simantsev who worked in this genre.

The present study will focus on several national and regional newspapers that reviewed theatre life, had art columns and staff reviewers, and had their published articles included in the “gold collection” of academic circulation for the Ukrainian theatre criticism. Four of them—*Visti VUTsVK* (Kharkiv), *Kharkovskiy proletariy* (Kharkiv), *Proletarska pravda* (Kyiv), and *Izvestiya* (Odesa)—were established during the first year of the Soviet rule. Nevertheless, some periodicals that most extensively reviewed the theatre processes emerged during the second half of the 1920s, namely, *Komsomolets Ukrainy*, *Robitnycha hazeta “Proletar”* (both Kharkiv), *Kievskiy proletariy* (Kyiv), and some evening newspapers—*Vechernee radio* (Kharkiv), *Vecherniy Kiev* (Kyiv) and evening edition of *Izvestiya* (Odesa), with the latter in 1926 becoming a newspaper of its own right—*Vechernie izvestiya*.

At the time, the staff of the newspaper theatre sections was comprised mainly of the younger generation of critics: those to start their career as theatre critics were Leonid Boloban (*Visti VUTsVK*, Kharkiv), Symon Hets (*Komsomolets Ukrainy*, Kharkiv), Volodymyr Ivolgin (*Veчерnee radio*, *Visti VUTsVK*, Kharkiv), Ivan Kocherga (*Robitnyk*, Zhytomyr), Kost Kravchenko (*Proletarska pravda*, Kyiv), Yuriy Mezhenko (*Proletarska pravda*, Kyiv), Volodymyr Morskyi (*Proletariy*, Kharkiv), Mykhailo Romanovskiy (*Kharkovskiy proletariy*, Kharkiv), Borys Simantsev (*Veчерnee radio*, Kharkiv; *Proletarska pravda*, Kyiv), Yuriy Smolych (*Visti VUTsVK*, Kharkiv), Chaim Tokar (*Veчерний Kiev*, Kyiv), Vasyl Khmyryi (*Visti VUTsVK*, Kharkiv), Yona Shevchenko (*Visti VUTsVK*, Kharkiv), Mark Sheliubskiy (*Kievskiy proletariy*, Kyiv), and others.

The previous professional experience and age of some of active theatre reporters, unfortunately, is not identifiable: P. Zhatkin (*Veчерnee radio*, Kharkiv), V. Mankivskiy, with the predonym (?) of Glyadach, a “viewer” (*Robitnycha hazeta “Proletar”*, Kharkiv), Boris Rozentsveig (*Veчерний Kiev*, Kyiv), O. Stankevych (*Veчерnee radio*, Kharkiv), etc.

During the 1920s, some seasoned theatre journalists also worked prolifically: Yenhen Henis (Alceste) (*Izvestiya*, *Veчерnie izvestiya*, Odesa), Grygoriy Karant (Grygoriy K.) (*Proletarska pravda*, Kyiv), Isaak Turkel'taub (*Visti VUTsVK*, Kharkiv), and Vsevolod Chahovets (*Kharkovskiy proletariy*, Kharkiv; *Veчерний Kiev*, Kyiv). Sophisticated literary culture, refined artistic taste, and thorough understanding of the artistic and aesthetical parameters of theatre were intrinsic to all of the mentioned periodicals.

Yevhen Henis and Chaim Tokar—representing two generations, with different experience in art, who were polar opposites in their aesthetic reference points—exemplify the theatre reviewers whose talent blossomed precisely during their 1920s journalistic career at the broadsheets and who, thus, illustrate the transformations of theatre criticism in the daily periodicals of the period.

The theatre life of Odesa was the most comprehensively covered by daily *Izvestiya* (Odesa), and first and foremost, by its evening edition—*Veчерnie izvestiya*. The reviewers of the “Theatre” heading there were Yenhev Henis and Isaak Kruti, the latter would later become a well-known Russian critic.

Yenhen Henis, under a pseudonym of Alceste¹, starts the 1920s with quite established likings and convictions about theatre, i. e. being an ardent proponent of realism. However, over time, after witnessing turbulent fundamental aesthetic changes and seeing the vivid pieces of experimental theatre, Henis started to perceive the stylistics of the conditional (symbolic) theatre differently.

For instance, he favored the staging of *Princess*

¹ For the detailed analysis of Henis's theatre criticism see: (Sobiianskiy, 2008).

Turandot by Carlo Gozzi in the Vakhtangov Theatre: “Turandot is a performance of an outstanding scenic beauty, it is bright and tender, like a smile of the sun.”

As Les Kurbas was a central figure of Ukrainian theatre at the time, understanding a critic's opinion about Kurbas's works is vital for determining his artistic worldview. Acknowledging actors' teamwork in *Jimmie Higgins*, Yenhen Henis nevertheless notes, “The performers are mostly immature actors from the theatre studio, who are yet to grasp the technique of stage performance” (Alceste, 1925, February 17).

Henis's opinion on *Jimmie Higgins* is especially valuable, as it illustrates the transition of the “old school” critic to another type of theatre, new for him, while still using the habitual “methodology.” As a result, he appraises the company for being well-rehearsed, however ignoring the stylistic experiments of the theatre director.

Publishing his critique in *Izvestiya* and *Veчерnie izvestiya*, the renowned theatre journalist meticulously observes all the local drama events. Henis regularly reviews the staging at the Odesa Drama Theatre (later renamed to the Odesa State Drama and Russian Drama Theatre), V. Lenin Theatre, Massodram Theatre, Grotesk Theatre, I. Franko Robsilteatr (I. Franko Workers' and Peasants' Theatre), Raidramteatr, Jewish Theatre, Summer Garden-Theatre, Mizinkevych Railroad Theatre, “Northern Theatre,” State Opera, etc.

Henis's particular focus was on the Children's Theatre. He formulated its approach as being true to the universal formula of a children's play: “Unsophisticated yet interesting plot, clearly and vividly depicted characters, as well as the easy sense of humor, sometimes becoming satire.” With this definition, the critic managed to avoid didacticism, moreover, it reveals the deep understanding of the essence of having children as audience. Henis characterizes Yefim Brill's skill in finding a common language with the children's audience with a great respect: “Brill's ability to approach children's audience, establish a close bond, to discipline and win over it is his highly valuable trait. He engages children in conversation and play in enclaves, doing this not with a distant, mentoring attitude but, on the contrary, cheerily, and passionately; and youngsters respond with affection and gratitude” (Alceste, 1925, April 28).

However, what receives Henis's particularly thorough review were the touring shows. In addition, the Odesa-based critic extensively covers the productions of the Jewish Theatre. In the USSR, this unique national art had its golden age during the 1920s. The State Jewish Theatres (DERZHYET in Ukrainian abbreviation or GOSET in Russian) open, including the Moscow GOSET that had continuous tours abroad. Modern Jewish drama was in full bloom, with the theaters beginning to stage plays not only in Yiddish but also in Hebrew. In Ukraine, besides the Kharkiv GOSET and Kyiv GOSET, The Kultur Lige organization and the Kunst Winkel Theatre were active.

During the 1920s, Yevhen Henis's views on national art undergo changes. For instance, in 1925 the theatre journalist, quite categorically, postulated that, "A Jewish actor, even the most talented, is the best suited for his very own domestic, realistic play... On the contrary, he rarely fits into the classical European repertoire, being out of tune, turgid, and stilted" (Alceste, 1929). Two years apart from this statement, characterizing the Moscow GOSET, Alceste slightly corrects his "unpolished" opinion: "Incorporating the elements of the national creativity in its mastery, GOSET manages to present this national component in art with outstanding vividness; GOSET found a synthesis of sense and form, providing their productions with evocative and topical meaning" (Evgenev, 1927, July 24). Summarizing the creative results of GOSET, Henis equivocally reasons the change of his viewpoint, "There is something in common in the evolution undergone during the last decade by Ukrainian and Jewish theaters." This observation was by no means unique: Samuil Margolin, Chaim Tokar, and Isaak Turkeltaub expressed similar sentiments.

Perhaps the greatest number of Henis's writings cover the productions of Maly Theatre and the Moscow Art Theatre. The theatre journalist from Odesa places an equal amount of his focus on the coryphaei of Ukrainian theatre—the leading actors of the turn of the twentieth century. He describes one of their plays as follows: "When Saksaganky and Sadovsky have a dialog [on stage], this sounds like music, the viewer simply enjoys the excellent ease of their tone, clear and deep phrases, richness and diversity of the nuances of speech, warmth and easiness of their humor" (Alceste (1927, May 5).

Appraising attitude towards the new theatre aesthetics may be traced in the discourse of theatre criticism produced by Chaim Tokar¹. A native of Bila Tserka in Kyiv region, he started his career as a secretary of the editorial board of the *Proletarska pravda* newspaper almost since the first days of its publication—since the August of 1921. During the next year, Tokar published a significant number of reviews on the Berezil shows. It is hardly possible that a critic, starting his career in theatre journalism, had no art background. The fact that Tokar instantly becomes Kurbas's dedicated supporter, suggests that the journalist had possibly attended his shows earlier (during KyiDramTea's stay in Bila Tserkva), before arriving in Kyiv, and possibly was personally acquainted with the director. A significant part of Tokar's critique on Kurbas was published in the early 1920s but later on he was still a proponent of Berezil, lobbying its interest in the press. After theater's move to Kharkiv, Tokar greeted Berezil's tours to Kyiv with reviews; he also defended Kurbas in the 1929 discussion on *Narodnyi Malakhii* (The People's Malakhii, a play by Mykola Kulish),

¹ For a detailed analysis of Chaim Tokar's theatre criticism see: (Sobiianskiy, 2007).

and even published positive assessments of the theater's results in the 1930s, when anyone else hardly dared to do so, especially in Russian and Georgian periodicals, in addition to Ukrainian ones.

Similarly to Henis, probably the majority of Chaim Tokar's publications address Jewish theaters. With all the respect and acknowledgment of the significance of GOSET, Chaim Tokar's apparent idealization of Moscow State Jewish Theatre was a result of ethnic solidarity. As Abram Kagan recalled, "Privately, Mikhoels said that Tokar was truly Jewish and advised us to follow his example and act decisively" (*Dokumenti z arhivnoyi spravy Y. Buhbindera*, n. d.). The criminal case against Chaim Tokar contains the following characteristic by Itzik Feffer that echoes the previous assessment: "In Jewish literary circles, Tokar was known as the one, 'sailing forth' from the Jewish nationalist 'shore'" (*Dokumenti z arhivnoyi spravy Y. Buhbindera*, n. d.).

This seems likely, even more so with regard to the previous Tokar's pompous praises in both Ukrainian and Jewish periodicals that featured Moscow Jewish Theatre's tours to Kyiv. "There was not a word of scrutiny in Tokar's articles. He 'forgave' Jewish theatre not only its radical experiments with form but also its nationalism, by all possible means masking acknowledgment of these faults of the theatre with abstract phrases. Tokar promoted Jewish theatre in the *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* newspaper as well, which brought him closer to Mikhoels" (*Dokumenti z arhivnoyi spravy Y. Buhbindera*).

The testimonies of the Jewish authors Abram Kagan and Itzik Feffer are credible, yet have a certain limitation: they are provided during interrogations, under pressure, thus, may not be quite sincere. Nevertheless, this limitation does not deny their relevance. Nothing can be added to this quite apt characteristic by Chaim Tokar, except, perhaps, an excerpt from his own review: "The great merit of the founders of GOSET and its staff is in creating a world-famous theatre almost from scratch. ... Only by virtue of GOSET the Jewish stage, previously immersed in literary decay, gutter press, and rattling melodrama, finally witnessed the classical imagery of Jewish literature. ... National narrow-mindedness is not among GOSET's shortcomings. It ridicules the so-called 'Jewish zest'" (Tokar, 1930, August, 7). Only once Chaim Tokar equals another theatre to his usual "theatre Trinity" (Berezil, GOSET, and Meyerhold Theatre)—that being the Rustaveli Theatre in Tbilisi.

The 1925 Kyiv tour of the Moscow Art Theatre started on June 25 with *The Lower Depths* by Maxim Gorky. Tokar provides a detailed announcement for this event in the 18th June issue of *Proletarskaya pravda*. Interestingly enough, this was his last publication in this periodical: on June 25, 1925, *Proletarskaya pravda* and *Bilshovyk* were merged. The newly founded newspaper was published in Ukrainian and titled *Proletarska pravda*, having completely different editorial board.

This Tokar's article on the Moscow Art Theatre is worth special attention, as it provides in-depth analytics of the theatre performance results. Brilliant knowledge of the material, as well as vivid and weighted discourse and meaningfulness go side by side with outright ardor: "All its [theater's] undertakings were permeated with the grand artistic idea, outstanding mastery, and the scale of director's design. ... Artistic culture accumulated by drama is exceedingly vast and valuable." Tokar's characteristic of the Moscow Art Theatre is worthy enough to be cited in full length: "What has reigned in theatre up to this day and what is appreciated the most is an ensemble cast. ... In this 'depersonalized' cast, the greatest talents emerged, such as a 'character' actor Moskvina; Lilina, 'psychologically' subtle in her acting style and true to the genre; Kachalov, with his 'universal psychologism'; as well as Chekhov, a prominent master of paradox and acute grotesque." With all the undoubted respect for this theatre, including personally for Stanislavski, Chaim Tokar, being a man of his time, cannot help pointing out at momentous "ideological" faults: "The theatre suffered from all the maladies and sentiments of the intelligentsia."

It is hard to overestimate the importance of this article for the Moscow Art Theatre Kyiv tour, as it was hardly covered in any other periodicals. As a rare exception, the newly-Ukrainian version of *Proletarska pravda* published the reviews of the theatre tour authored by Grygoriy Karant (Grygoriy K.), who previously worked for *Bilshovyk*. However, being heavily politically engaged, Karant was by no means analytical. Instead, Chaim Tokar succeeded in capturing and explaining to the so-called "revolutionary-era audience" the true nature of the Moscow Art Theater's art that once again emphasizes the significance of individual traits in theatre criticism.

Moreover, it is highly probable that, in addition to his article in *Proletarska pravda*, Tokar delivered a greeting speech at the opening of the Moscow Art Theatre Kyiv tour, and later on initiated a correspondence with Stanislavski. At least, this is the logic behind Stanislavski's response letter to Tokar that is in the archive collection of the Museum of Theatre, Music, and Cinema of Ukraine (Fond "R", No. 15913). This unique document did not previously appear in academic publications; thus, it will be provided in full:

"Dear Mister Tokar, I felt genuinely sorry for not knowing you in person and not thanking you for your kind attitude towards the Theatre and towards me personally. It was well reflected in your greeting speech and, as I was told, in your article, which I did not have a chance to read. Hopefully, we will meet and discuss your principal objections regarding our Theatre and art that are mentioned in your letter."

Apparently, Tokar's letter mentioned some issues of the Moscow Art Theatre aesthetics and art forms. This conclusion can be made based on the preceding Tokar's

publications about the Kyiv tour of the Revolution Theatre. In one of its stage productions Tokar sees "formalism": "The time of the formal achievements only, of the left forms in art is running out. Let it be others, who lack knowledge of the subject, to defame this theatre method of revolutionary directors, calling it 'leg swings' etc. This method was necessary to break the cobwebs, the mold of the traditions of the old theatre. This method was a protest of sorts, a protest of theatre criticism against the 'age-old prejudice' of the worshippers of the altar of a 'sacred art'."

After the reorganization of *Proletarskaya pravda*, Chaim Tokar's publications on theatre became rare, though during this time he reveals his organizational skills. He edited *Vecherniy Kiev* newspaper, the first issue of which was published on March 1, 1927. This daily newspaper was issued only three years, however even during this relatively short period of time Tokar's talent as an editor blossomed, mainly in editing the section of culture.

The editorial board of *Vecherniy Kiev* initiated thematic pages, created new sections, published the reviews on the articles in other periodicals, and covered cultural events abroad, with a special accent on theatre. Chaim Tokar offers cooperation to the journalism "pillar" Vsevolod Chahovets and published articles by Henri Barbusse, Erwin Piscator, Anatoly Lunacharsky, Maxim Gorky, Sergei Eisenstein, Mikhail Chekhov, Ilya Ehrenburg, Lidiya Seifullina, Vadym Meller, Les Kurbas, and others.

In the context of characterizing the general theatre-criticism discourse of the 1920s, publication of the discussions on art becomes fundamentally important. This is not limited to the disputes between theoreticians and practitioners of theatre, as was the dialog between Les Kurbas and Yakiv Mamontov, one of the longest lasting and most publicized. Discussions between editorial boards were even more popular. For instance, the controversy surrounding Chaim Tokar's article "Frontal attack," published on June 1, 1929 in *Vecherniy Kiev*. Particularly notable are the critic's fervor and black-and-white thinking: "It is unwise to demand from Berezil to be readily-understandable by, at present, culturally laggard strata of society ... There is no room for theatrical simplifiers."

Chaim Tokar comments on his vision about the idea of *The People's Malakhii*: "I am among those, who do not consider *Malakhii* to be just a product of Kulish's imagination. 'Blue dreamers,' if you may, are furious petty bourgeois". Kravchenko reacted to Tokar's article with a text "Head banging" that was published in *Proletarska pravda*. Kravchenko reproaches his colleague for not being present at the dispute for its full duration. In addition, he does not share the opinion of the common workers and divides the audience on "first-class" and "second-class," the latter being "simplifiers," not capable of understanding Kurbas. Chaim Tokar does not yield: he claimed to read all the transcripts of the discussion. Mentioning all Kravchenko's errors of judgment regarding the theatre process in general

and Hnat Yura in particular, Tokar labels Kravchenko a “simplificator” and the blow the latter attempted to inflict upon him—“blunt.”

Probably the most discussed topic during the 1920s was Les Kurbas’s theatre. Nevertheless, it was one of the very few subjects that could unite the polarized critics in the end. When Berezil moved from Kyiv to Kharkiv, *Proletarska pravda* published four articles of theatre journalists, each having some ties to the periodical, which was an unprecedented occurrence (with three of them in one issue). The editorial board of *Proletarska pravda* gave voice to the journalists of varying age and aesthetic standings: Grygoriy Karant, Kost Kravchenko (May 6, 1926 issue), Chaim Tokar (May 1, 1926 issue), and, most probably, to Yakiv Savchenko (May 6, 1926 issue, signed as “Ya,” thus, it may be assumed to be Savchenko, who was an active contributor of the newspaper). “It [Berezil theatre] was first in Ukrainian stage to abandon the rural romanticism and to sing praises to industrialism,” states Tokar in his “A child of the Ukrainian revolution” article. Karant’s report is equally full of sincere kind words: “When a loved one leaves and you say goodbye, sadness permeates your soul. All the things that were lost in mundane routine come to surface producing intimacy that was not previously experienced in everyday life.”

Another case when the critics showed a united front could be a phenomenon sparking outrage. While during the 1920s the genre of viewers’ “collective reviews” was not yet popular in the Ukrainian periodicals, *Komsomolets Ukrainy* presents another genre invention—a “collective review” by the leading theatre critics representing different periodicals. On February 23, 1929 there were seven theatre journalists—Yona Shevchenko, Yuriy Smolych, V. Mankivskiy, Volodymyr Morskiy, Leonid Boloban, Volodymyr Ivoglin, and Symon Hets—listed as the authors to the text “Unmerited ‘merits’ of Bl[umenthal]-Tamarin.”

Quite predictably, the critics demanded from Vsevolod Blumenthal-Tamarin to improve his acting technique. This and other demands were substantiated with specific remarks and sometimes overtly offensive references to the previous articles in *Komunist*, *Visti VUTsVK*, and *Nove mystetstvo* (New Art). For example, commenting on Blumenthal-Tamarin’s performance in the role of Shvandia [from *Liubov Yarovaya* by Konstantin Treniov], they ironized that “it is as far from the struggle for revolution, as the actor, who ‘blew his nose and cleared his throat for the whole duration of his role,’ from portraying a true character.” In general, the last paragraph of the article summarizes the critics’ reproaches formulated in its title: “A cultured actor, especially a Soviet actor, besides having a natural talent and cultivating it, has to add some degree of calculation and mental control to his acting, to his acting, affecting feelings, at the same time organized the mind of the audience.”

In the cities with slightly less established theatre traditions than in Kyiv, Kharkiv or Odesa and that were rarely toured by the leading companies with ground-breaking

stagings, theatre journalism during the 1920s developed in a different manner. Zhytomyr epitomizes such a city, with theatre events being covered in the *Robitnyk* and *Radianska Volyn* newspapers. Full-scale theatre reviews were rare, and the most significant writings on theatre are linked to the name of Ivan Kocherha.

Kocherha, a young playwright at the time, started covering theatre events back at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since 1928, he worked as a literary editor of the *Robitnyk* newspaper, and since 1930—in *Radianska Volyn*. In both periodicals, Ivan Kocherha published his critical writings, with the best of them later included in his *Radist mystetstva* (The joy of art) collected works.

In his articles on theatre (which were thoroughly studied by N. Kuzyakina and M. Prylutskiy), Ivan Kocherha mostly describes the plot of the play, not dwelling on the detailed analysis of the staging. He often uses generalizations that do not convey his whole impression of the show.

It is essential to note that Kocherha’s 1900s–1910s ideas about art, publicized in Chernihiv periodicals, changed significantly. To a certain extent, it was a result of his development as a playwright. Still, what mainly affected this change were the transformations in the art environment of Ukraine.

It was a typical situation for “provincial” theatre critics to lack theatre-related experience or the basic knowledge of the global art context. This prevented them from a proper understanding of the new theatre reality. Still, with Kocherha, it was a different, regrettable case. The critic was, on his side, quite open to the changes in art, willing to accept and contemplate them. As is evident from his reviews, Ivan Kocherha followed the publications on theatre in the press. He analyzed the shows, attempted to draw some art parallels, and was familiar with the works of prominent contemporary playwrights, composers, and painters. For instance, he names Anatol Petrytsky “the most renowned theatre artist of Ukraine.” His main drawback, instead, was an inability to see first-hand the theatre experiments of Les Kurbas, Boris Glagolin, Marko Tereshchenko, Igor Terentiev, and other talented artists. For Kocherha, as well as for many others, this left a mark on his theatre-critical publications in the “provincial” press, stalling the development of theatre criticism significantly.

For that reason, the shows reviewed by Kocherha the most were the ones of the music theatre that toured Zhytomyr more often. In the 1920s, at least according to his published accounts, Kocherha was most impressed by the 1929 staging of *The Red Poppy* ballet by Reinhold Glière (State Ukrainian Right-Bank Touring Opera, choreography by Yu. Kovaliov, V. Lytvynenko, stage design by Anatol Petrytsky). Kocherha reacted to the Zhytomyr performance of *The Red Poppy* with two publications in *Robitnyk*: on July 18 and 20, 1929. In the last one, the critic emotionally proclaims, “Zhytomyr has never seen anything of this kind. It has never experienced such

combination of music, spicy as a pepper, of charming plastic art, flamy colors, and head-spinning moves. And, first and foremost, the music by Glière! Poignant, passionate, sometimes sweet and tender—it simply speaks to the audience. And then the colors. Only in a fever dream, one can see such a feverish bloom of red, green, orange, blue, and silver splashes. All of this whirls, smolders, allures. One has to be a great master to command all of this crazy disorder and turn it to the perfect harmony, as Anatol Petrytsky had done. Next are the movements. An unstoppable cascade of male and female (fairly scantily-clad) bodies storms and spills over the edge, synchronized in every slightest tempo with the beat of the orchestra. What strikes the most is that this fascinating play of colors and movements conveys a significant social idea; it is conveyed, not merely imposed, as it often happens. A true revolutionary pathos reverberates in this colorful show, it convinces and appeals.”

N. Kuzyakina stresses that these impressions and reflections by Ivan Kocherha should be placed in the context of his own dramatic works, as it was during this time that Kocherha conceived the idea of writing *Marko v pekli* (Marko in hell). It was the stylistics Kocherha “aspired for in his own féerie *Marko v pekli*, where the satirical depiction of everyday life, phantasmagoric scenes of hell, and romantic heroic line of Marko had to be united in revolutionary pathos. It may be stated that a play this colorful was the most interesting for Kocherha during this period, as it enabled him to organically combine fantasy and reality, to find the plot twists, which would preserve the most cherished part for the artist—the play of a fairy-tale, of romantic fiction, or musical comedy and ballet graciousness” (Kuzyakina, 1969, p. 35).

In contrast to the daily broadsheets, the functioning of theatre criticism in thematic art periodicals had its own specifics. In this case, the audience were the readers who, in general, followed the art process, thus, the reviewers could venture into writing long analytical articles, without the fear to overuse specialized slang and terminology or to be difficult to comprehend. However, in the second half of the 1920s, with only *Ukrainska muzychna hazeta* (Ukrainian musical newspaper, 1926) playing the role of specialized newspaper, the thematic supplements to daily broadsheets (both one-time and regular) took over this function. This meant that the coverage of theatre-themed articles increased, as the reader, after scanning the economic and political news, would proceed to the thematic supplement with theatre reviews. Thus, for these supplements, the material had to be presented differently, readily-accessible to all groups in society.

The following newspapers had such supplements: “Literatura i iskusstvo” (*Proletariy*, Kharkiv), “Literatura. Iskusstvo” (*Kievskiy proletariy*, Kyiv), “Literatura, kultura, mystetstvo” (*Molodoi rabochiyi*, Stalino), “Literatura y mystetstvo” (*Komunist*, Kharkiv), “Literatura — nauka — iskusstvo” (*Kharkovskiy proletariy*, Kharkiv), etc. The most

influential publications of this kind were the supplements to *Visti VUTsVK*: “Literatura, nauka, mystetstvo” (1923–1924), “Literatura i mystetstvo” (1929–1930), but, above all, “Kultura i pobut” that was published for the longest period (from 1925 to late 1928).

The frequency of publication of these supplements varied: weekly or bi-weekly. “Kultura i pobut” engaged the leading theatre critics of the 1920s: Kost Burevii, Yakiv Mamontov, Vasyl Khmyryi, Yona Shevchenko, and others. “Kultura i pobut” hosted the debates that evolved in the famous literary discussion. This supplement published the lengthy polemic between Yakiv Mamontov and Yona Shevchenko, the most of the *Vyshnia’s Theatrical Merriment* by Ostap Vyshnia, “The ways of Berezil,” the landmark article by Les Kurbas, and many other notable writings.

The theatre season reviews in “Kultura i pobut” granted Isaak Turkeltaub¹ his rightful place in the history of Ukrainian theatre research, as instead of concentrating on standalone facts he reflected on the trends of an art process as a whole. Turkeltaub followed not only the major directing achievements in Moscow and Saint Petersburg but also abroad.

Arkadii Pletnov in his published but undefended dissertation on theatre life in Kharkiv during 1917–1927 provides a full and detailed personal account of Isaak Turkeltaub: “A critic, whose characteristic feature was a constant aspiration for a ‘middle ground.’ He was somewhat afraid of being known as a reactionary; therefore, he emphasized his encouragement for all new, nevertheless preserving the passion for realistic theatre in its classical representation. It was Tarkeltaub we already knew: a professor, stage director, theoretician, and not the last figure in the Kharkiv theatre life” (Pletnov, 1975, p. 142).

It is evident that during the 1920s, new aesthetical and social agenda was formulated and articulated by the theatre critics and published by the daily broadsheets. This aesthetics was manifested in the emergence of new genres of theatre criticism and in the transformation of the established, iconic forms. The genre of a review becomes central for the period: the boundaries between a short report and a review are delineated, the number of articles increases, their authors are mentioned increasingly often, and the titles are metaphorical. Both the “old school” and new generation critics tried their best as reviewers. For this research, the full range of opinions is valuable, as the young theatre researchers, who were open to the experiments, often lacked professional experience and knowledge, while the critics of the established mindset (though often excessively conservative) were able to provide an unbiased, generalized perspective of the contemporary theatre, as they were equipped to compare the art legacy of different eras.

¹ For a detailed analysis of Isaac Turkeltaub’s theatre criticism see: (Sobilianskiy, 2009).

The newspapers also became a platform for popular art discussion at the time. It was not uncommon for the editorial boards of different periodicals to publish their polemics. Hence, a newspaper evolves into a platform for communication of theatre critics and enables them to join forces in support or disapproval of a certain phenomenon.

Conclusions

This paper provides a general overview of the 1920s Ukrainian newspapers that covered local theatre life. It was observed that the number of articles on theatre increased, as well as their genre diversity and cultural scope. The focus was on the theatre criticism published in the daily broadsheets *Vechnyye radio* (Kharkiv), *Vechnyye izvestiya* (Odesa), *Vechnyye Kiev* (Kyiv), *Visti VUTsVK* (Kharkiv), *Kievskiy proletariy* (Kyiv), *Komsomolets Ukrainy* (Kharkiv), *Proletarska pravda* (Kyiv), *Robitnyk* (Zhytomyr),

and *Kharkovskiy proletariy* (Kharkiv). During the 1920s, the popularity of review as a genre surpasses that of a brief report. The name of the author most often is listed, and the titles are metaphorical and image-bearing. The interviews had a specific form of publication that may be an indication of the accented position of the author in regard to a certain artist. The critical reviews of Yevhen Henis and Chaim Tokar, who exemplify different generations and worldviews, illustrate the transformation of critical thought in the 1920s Ukrainian newspapers. A special accent was made on the reviews of the shows by Les Kurbas, who was a central figure of the Ukrainian theatre life at the time.

Theatre journalism in the thematic supplements to daily newspapers was analyzed, namely, the supplements to the *Visti VUTsVK*: “Literatura, nauka, mystetstvo” (1923–1924), “Literatura y mystetstvo” (1929–1930), and “Kultura i pobut” (1925–1928, the longest-published).

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Собіянський В.

Театрально-критичні публікації у газетних виданнях України 1920-х років

Анотація. На матеріалі кількох газет 1920-х років проаналовано окремі театральні критичні публікації у розрізі їхньої тематики та жанрової специфіки та названо провідних театральних критиків України зазначеного періоду.

Оснoву для систематизації та порівняльного аналізу театральних критичних публікацій 1920-х років склали загальнонаукові методи дослідження, що базуються на емпіричних, описових принципах джерелознавчої роботи. Зокрема, біографічний метод дослідження — при спробі відтворити факти життя і діяльності окремих критиків, формування їхніх естетичних орієнтирів, відстеження особливостей індивідуального письма. При аналізі та класифікації статей театральних критиків використовувалися розробки у сфері теорії літературно-критичних жанрів.

Здійснено короткий огляд газетних періодичних друкованих видань, що виходили в Україні у 1920-ті роки та активно висвітлювали театральний процес. Відзначено кількісне збільшення статей про театр, їхню різножанровість та культурологічний масштаб. Зроблено спробу на прикладі критичної діяльності представників різних поколінь та осіб з різними естетичними орієнтирами простежити трансформацію критичної думки у газетах 1920-х. Розглянуто специфіку побутування театральної журналістики у тематичних додатках до щоденних газет.

Ключові слова: театральна критика, газетні видання, 1920-ті роки, жанри, публікації Х. Токаря, діяльність Є. Геніса, статті І. Кочерги, неопублікований лист К. Станіславського.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 23.02.2023