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Michael M. Naydan

Volume 9, Number 1, 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1088670ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus704>

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies University of Alberta

ISSN

2292-7956 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Naydan, M. (2022). Marian(a) J. Rubchak: In Memoriam (1931–2021). *East/West*, 9(1), 5–10. <https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus704>





Marian(a) J. Rubchak: In Memoriam¹ (1931–2021)

Michael M. Naydan

Woskob Family Professor of Ukrainian Studies at the Pennsylvania State University

The faux-Chinese blessing or curse, may you live in interesting times, depending on how one perceives it, unquestionably applies to the remarkable life of Mariana Rubchak. She describes many of those times in her published memoir “My Life with the Poet and His Poetry” and in more detail in a much longer unpublished version, “Those Were the Days: Reminiscences,” soon to be deposited in her and her husband Bohdan’s papers at the Bakhmeteff Archive at Columbia University. In the Anglophone world, Mariana was known professionally as Marian, while I always preferred calling her by the Ukrainian version of her name. While her married last name Rubchak connects her inescapably to her eminent poet-scholar husband Bohdan, she certainly gained equal prominence on her own with an extraordinarily successful career as a scholar in the fields of history and Ukrainian women’s studies.

Mariana was somewhat of a late bloomer, the result of familial circumstances. She raised four daughters, who were born during her first

¹ I am grateful to Mariana’s daughters Lesia Kmetyk and Stacey Burke for sharing biographical and bibliographical information about their mother for this article. The picture included here is one that I took of Mariana at a Fulbright reception in Kyiv, Ukraine in spring 1999.

marriage and reared mostly during her second fifty-four-year marriage to Bohdan. In 1963 at the age of 32 she started working on a Bachelor's Degree at the University of Manitoba, where Bohdan had just taken a teaching position. After meeting him in a class he was teaching, nearly two years later she and Bohdan were married on 22 January 1965 in Winnipeg. Soon after they moved to Chicago with the family. After relocating first to Forest Hills, New York in 1967 for Bohdan's new position with Radio Liberty, the family moved to New Brunswick, Jersey in 1969 where Bohdan worked on his PhD in comparative literature at Rutgers University. Mariana graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1971 with a Bachelor's Degree from Douglass College, the women's division of the university. She earned her MA in intellectual history from Rutgers University in 1972 and soon after relocated once again with her family back to Chicago, where Bohdan accepted a tenure-track teaching position at the University of Illinois. She continued her graduate studies and defended her PhD in history at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1988 on the topic of "The Cultural and Political Activities of the Lviv Stavropigilia Brotherhood and the Development of a Ukrainian National Consciousness, 1585-1632."

She first taught part-time at Valparaiso University from 1988-1990, after which she was offered a tenure-track appointment at the ripe young age of 59. She earned tenure and the rank of Professor at Valparaiso at a time when many academics consider retiring. Even after her eventual retirement in 2006 to move to be with Bohdan in Boonton, New Jersey, she received a nine-year appointment as a Senior Research Professor off site. Her delayed but still highly productive career provides positive proof that a woman truly can have it all—both a loving family and a demanding profession even when she decides to do that at a later stage of life.

Upon a search of Mariana's works in an online card catalog such as the WorldCat.org or an Internet bookstore such as Amazon.com, one will find most prominently two edited volumes whose publication she tirelessly organized and edited: *New Imaginaries: Youthful Reinvention of Ukraine's Cultural Paradigm* and *Mapping Difference: The Many Faces of Women in Contemporary Ukraine*. The latter focuses mostly on articles by more established scholars, the former on the up-and-coming generation of Ukrainian scholars. Mariana provided insightful, expert introductions to both books along with translations from Ukrainian. These two volumes together in particular point to the fact that Mariana truly was a bridge between generations and focused on supporting younger feminist scholars both in post-independence Ukraine and abroad. One of her other major book contributions was a translation with footnotes of volume 19 of Russian historian Sergei Soloviev's *Religious Struggle in Poland-Lithuania: Tsar Alexis' Reign Begins, 1654-1676* for Academic International Press. She was

attitudinally forever young and astoundingly curious in her outlook on life and scholarship, with a capacious and sharp mind even at the age of 90.

Besides her two books that helped to elevate Ukrainian scholarship on par with world feminist scholarship, 46 major articles appeared in scholarly journals and as chapters of books. She wrote on the topics of Russian and Ukrainian history; on gender, politics, and society; on feminism, especially in the Ukrainian context; on the misogynistic image of the *berehynia* (goddess of the hearth) and matriarchy in Ukrainian culture; and others. Her scholarly contributions all were thoroughly researched and well received.

In addition to her publications, Mariana had the reputation of being a demanding professor of history at Valparaiso University where she taught for eighteen years. She also served as a reviewer of articles for many journals in the field, such as *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, *Slavic Review*, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *Nationalities Papers*, *Journal of Women's History*, and *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, as well as for book publishers. She always lent her avid support for good scholarship and gave sound advice for revisions to improve contributions. She was not threatened by but revelled in the success of other younger scholars. She also contributed a number of book reviews to a variety of journals on volumes in Ukrainian studies, women's studies, politics, history, and feminism.

I first met Mariana in 1991 at the yearly summer Ukrainian studies conference at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which I attended several times at the invitation of Dmytro Shtohryn and Bohdan Rubchak. From the moment I met her, I found Mariana to be a delightful conversationalist, always pithy in her comments, with a wry, delightful wit. I caught up with her over the years numerous times at yearly AAASS/ASEEES conferences as well as at other symposia. I also invited Mariana and Bohdan to deliver lectures at my university—Penn State—after they had retired to New Jersey and were within easier driving distance.

Our mutual interest in Ukrainian studies particularly merged when we both received Fulbright fellowships for the spring 1999 semester. Mariana was based in Kyiv and I in Lviv. During that time, I met with her at a Fulbright banquet in Kyiv where we sat together at a table with Iurii and Nina Andrukhovych along with several other Ukrainian and American scholars. That was truly a magical evening of fascinating conversation. When Mariana saw the prankster poet Oleksandr Irvanets' kiss the shoe of Oksana Zabuzhko, which I managed to capture with my camera, Mariana requested equal treatment. So Irvanets' on bended knee graciously complied to the delight of those nearby. My camera managed to catch the moment right after with Mariana's beaming smile.

She later decided to visit me in Lviv during the last ten days of her Fulbright stay since she had never been to the city. She was a bundle of energy during her trip, tirelessly getting to know the city and its fascinating

inhabitants and visitors, including the writers Viktor Neborak, Oleh Lysheha, and Andrukhovych; scholars such as Maria Zubrytska and Lidia Stefanowska; younger scholars and students; and local artists and musicians. I came to know Mariana the explorer during her visit, whose love of people, life, and the land of her ancestry were boundless.

While we stayed in touch over the years after that, I ended up working particularly closely with her on publishing a book of my and Svitlana Budzhak Jones's translations of Bohdan's poetry (*The Selected Poetry*). Mariana was extraordinarily generous in sharing her thoughts on the biographical context of Bohdan's poetry with us as well as photographs from her personal archive. With our numerous conversations and emails as a starting point, she ended up penning a stunningly candid memoir for the volume. She actively took on the role of the meticulous keeper and promoter of Bohdan's literary heritage following his death. She understood his genius as a poet and scholar as well as his psychological issues and idiosyncrasies. Following Bohdan's death, she copiously combed through his diaries, correspondence, and manuscripts to write her memoirs and finished a final draft of them less than a week before she herself passed away.

Mariana suffered through physical infirmity the last few years of her life and was mostly limited to spending time in her home alone during the Covid lockdown except for family visits. But her mind stayed as sharp as ever and she continued to work every day.

Ukrainian studies and the world have lost a wonderful human being in Mariana, whom I will terribly miss, and whose legacy will live on after her passing. The following poem by Bohdan Rubchak captures the beauty of her soul and her extraordinary role as his muse:

A Song for Mariana

This love is like precious fruit,
Mature, late in season.
It's like night that quivers in its
final, autumn song.

I carried this love out of September
for its delicate birdlike nature,
and for eyes that in a blue whisper
beseech beginning.

For hair that pours onto breasts
like torrents of nets,
for palms that in lunar reaches
cast the light of saintliness.

I live in this love as though in
an old, misty garden,
and gather silver beads of joy
in a shady leaf.

I became lost in my love's face
as if I were in a bewildering land:
In its mysterious landscape
I am seeking myself.

1967 (Bohdan Rubchak 73).

Figure 1. Mariana's visit to Lviv in 1999. My photograph.



Left to right: Natalka Babalyk, Oleh Lysheha, Mariana Rubchak, Iurii Andrukhovych, and Lidia Stefanowska.

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