

The Tragic Motif in the Ballad of "Kata Kádár"

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"We must not forget ... that the ballads of all countries and in all languages also deal to a considerable extent with subjects and topics, tragic and otherwise, that have always been the very stuff of life in society and the family and thus simply cry out for poetic treatment..." (Seeman et al., eds, European Folk Ballads, xxii).

The Hungarian folk ballad "Kata Kádár" is one of the oldest recorded ballads in Hungary.¹ It belongs to the group of "old style ballads" which have certain discernible characteristics. Hungarian ballad collectors and folklorists separate these older, more "classical" ballads from newer types (új stílusú népbal-ladák), such as the "betyár" or outlaw ballads, and local ballads of questionable literary merit. It is generally assumed that the older ballads are connected to heroic epic poetry and medieval romance and are, hence, more sophisticated works of art than the newer ballads.

At the time of publication of the only English language collection of Hungarian ballads with commentary, Ninon Leader's *Hungarian Classical Ballads*, there existed at least fifteen versions of "Kata Kádár," all of which came from Transylvania, Bukovina, and Moldavia. Most were sung by the Székely people and some by the Bukovinian and Moldavian Csángós. According to Leader, the Székelys are a Hungarian clan of "uncertain origin" who have preserved archaic traditions. The Csángós are descendants of Székely emigrants to Moldavia and Bukovina. The important point is that the Székelys and Csángós have preserved most purely the oldest type of Hungarian folk ballad and music traditions. The ballad metre and music are marked by unique Ugrian and Asian features — most notably the pentatonic scale, on which Kodály and Bartók based many of their compositions. The oldest ballads are characterized by frequent alliteration, parallelism, the repe-

tition of half-lines and international ballad devices (incremental repetition, formulas, epithets), all of which are evident in "Kata Kádár."

Until recently the Székely regions, Moldavia and Bukovina have been largely untouched by western European urban culture. These groups retain remnants of what must have once been an incredibly rich treasury of ballads. We must remember that Hungarians got off to a late start at collecting: when most nations were recording the poetry of their people, Hungary was involved in protracted struggles against Turkish and Habsburg forces of occupation. The first collectors did not print their findings until the mid-nineteenth century, after the War of Independence of 1848-49, and at least a century after Bishop Thomas Percy, for example, had published his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) at the other end of Europe. Hungarian patriotism grew steadily in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and this patriotism fostered wide-scale interest in Hungarian culture. The Hungarian peasantry and its oral traditions represented a stabilizing force in a nation whose identity was unclear because of prolonged occupations. Some of the pioneers in folk ballad collecting in Hungary are János Erdélyi, *Népdalok és mondák* (Folksongs and Tales), 1846-48; János Kriza, *Vadrózsák* (Wild Roses), 1863 (probably the first printing of "Kata Kádár" is in this book); and Lajos Kálmány, *Koszorúk az Alföld vadvirágaiból* (Garlands from the wild flowers of the Lowland), 1877-78.

Hungarian scholars have speculated on the exact age and origin of "Kata Kádár." Sándor Solymossy, one of Hungary's first folk literature theorists, states that there have been three waves of ballad production in the Hungarian ballad province; that is, in those part of Central and Eastern Europe where the Hungarian language is spoken. Solymossy places "Kata Kádár" in the first wave of ballad production, which took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Contemporary ballad experts concur with this view. Ninon Leader calls the ballad that originated in this period the "classical ballad," and "Kata Kádár" is in her opinion one of the most popular of the classical ballads. Lajos Vargyas is even more specific. He maintains that classical ballads are really "medieval" ballads, and "Kata Kádár" is one of the earliest of the medieval ballads in Hungary.²

Old style ballads are characterized by the important fact

that they have international counterparts or at least that they share motifs from the international ballad tree. “Kata Kádár” does not have an exact ballad counterpart in Europe or Asia, but it does have typological affinities with other ballads, or has borrowed motifs and episodes from other European ballads and medieval romances, namely, English and Scottish ballads, and the romance of Tristan and Iseut, or Isolt.³ “Kata Kádár” derives much of its force and its tragic meaning, from its borrowing of the motif of “The Twining Branches,” listed in the *Aarne-Thompson Motif Index* as number 631.O.1: “twining branches grow from graves of lovers.”⁴ This motif is called alternately the motif of “The Two Chapel Flowers” by Vargyas, and “the sympathetic plants” by Leader. Whatever it is called, however, it refers to a symbol and an idea that together constitute “one of the most favourite motifs in romances and ballads.”⁵

In order to see where and how the twining branches come into play in the ballad, a breakdown of the plot of “Kata Kádár” is needed. The following plot description is based on Version *A* (translated by N. Leader):

Verse	Description of plot segments
1.	Martin Gyulai asks his mother’s permission to marry their serf’s daughter, Kate Kadar.
2.	The mother refuses to give permission and orders him to marry a lord’s daughter.
3.	Martin proclaims his love for Kate.
4.	Martin’s mother disowns him.
5.	Martin orders his footman to prepare his horses.
6.	He bids farewell to Kate. She gives him a life token, a scarf that will change its colour should any harm come to her.
7.	During his travels the scarf turns red.
8.	Martin orders his footman to turn back to the village.
9.	At the edge of the village Martin meets a swineherd. He asks him what is new in the village (in Versions <i>B</i> and <i>C</i> Martin meets a miller, and in Version <i>D</i> , a “Wallach dandy”).
10.	The swineherd informs Martin that his mother has thrown Kate into “a bottomless lake.”
11.	Martin makes a deal with the swineherd. If he will lead him to the place where Kate was drowned, Martin will give him his gold, his house, and his coach.

12. Kate speaks to Martin from the lake. Martin jumps into the lake.
13. Lady Gyulai has divers pull Martin and Kate out of the lake. She has one of the two buried in front of the altar and the other behind.
14. Two chapel flowers grow from the graves of the lovers and embrace each other above the altar. Lady Gyulai plucks the flowers.
15. One of the chapel flowers speaks and casts a curse on her.

Although there are at least two other international motifs in the “Kata Kádár” ballad,⁶ we are here concerned with the motif of the twining branches, or the two chapel flowers, which appears in verses 13 to 15. Each flower represents the soul of a lover, so that the intertwining of the flowers is the bringing together of their souls after life. Only in death are the lovers united. They are prevented from loving each other on earth by social conventions that prohibit the marriage of serfs with lords. These conventions are represented by the person of Lady Gyulai, who also happens to be the mother of Martin. In this context the two chapel flowers are structurally and thematically very important. Structurally, the motif rounds off the plot. Thematically, the motif gives the ballad its tragic force and meaning. Even though the ballad is a genre transmitted orally among illiterate or semi-literate peoples, Francis Utley is right when he says that “some of the great ballads are worthy of the name of tragedy.”⁷ “Kata Kádár” comes close to being worthy of the name, and as such, its relationship to some of the great literature of our epoch comes as no surprise.

Aspects of form and structure have a lot to do with generating tragic effect in “Kata Kádár.” A closer look at metre and the arrangement of stanzas will reveal how form informs tragic meaning. It is not always easy to talk about the formal aspects of oral literature, because for obvious reasons oral literature does not adhere as regularly to literary devices and conventions as written literature does. But certain formal aspects of “Kata Kádár” are significant in the ballad traditions, either because they tend to conserve the norm, or because they diverge from it and in so doing emphasize important features of the poetry. The singer of Version *A* of “Kata Kádár” for example, has modified a conventional stichic metric scheme in order to achieve a certain building-and-relaxing effect. Stichic metre typifies old-style

ballads in which the pace never lets up, whereas strophic metre is employed in the newer, less “tragic” ballads, the “betyár” ballads, for example. Stichic verse ballads are marked by a definite number of syllables per line, but newer versions of “classical” ballads may well mirror both stichic verse qualities, and strophic. This might be the case with Version *A* of “Kata Kádár”, because it is by no means as metrically and structurally regular as, say, the English ballad “A Maid Freed from the Gallows” (Child, no. 95), and yet it does make use of elements we find in the English ballad. What, then, is the difference? The English ballad is more orderly, structurally more sophisticated, and metrically more uniform. “A Maid Freed from the Gallows” is, in the abstract, a “chain of skeleton stanzas.”⁸ and each stanza repeats refrains, questions-in-answers — the likes of which we encounter only in the introductory stanzas of “Kata Kádár” (see stanzas 1 to 4). The metre employed in “Kata Kádár” then, gives it a more contemplative tone; action is followed by a pause, or a caesura.

A closer look at the metric scheme of “Kata Kádár” reveals a pattern that focuses the listener’s attention on the tragic motifs in the ballad, especially on the central tragic motif. Most of the lines in Version *A* have eight syllables. This is not uncommon in Hungarian ballad metres, but it is more the norm in Rumania and Bulgaria. What is interesting about the way in which our particular ballad employs this metric measure, however, is that whenever there is a shift in viewpoint, motif, or style (e.g., from dialogue to description), the metre undergoes a change. In stanzas 5, 7, 9, and 11 there are only six syllables per line, and although the listener notices this change in measure, he is not shocked by it; unity of thought and action is maintained because the metre is stable within each of the digressing stanzas, and each stanza-type is repeated at regular intervals (every second stanza) in the ballad. The important transitional stanzas, however, those that either end or begin an episode in the action, employ the unique *Deseterac* (the ten-syllable line), which, according to Erich Seemann,⁹ is the most notable feature of the oldest Serbocroatian ballads. Because the *Deseterac* stands out in “Kata Kádár” so too does the stanza in which it is used. It is no wonder then that the *Deseterac* is used to sing the most important motifs in the ballad: the life-token motif in stanza 6, the burial motif in stanza 12, and, finally the twining chapel

flowers motif in stanza 14. These three stanzas are also the most descriptive in the ballad — the others are filled up with dialogue — and they are laden with symbolic meaning. Stanza 14, especially, is full of emotional significance. It frames the “selected incident” in the narrative: the climax and the dénouement. Not infrequently the central motif (the “selected incident”) is withheld until the end of the ballad. As Walter Morris Hart has said, the ballad seems perfectly intelligible without the central motif, but it has none of its tragic specialness. “At the close a significant fact is revealed, and the hearer is compelled to re-interpret the whole story.”¹⁰

“Kata Kádár” is, essentially, a tragic tale. The same thing may be stated about “Kata Kádár” as Eugene Vinaver has said about “Tristan and Isolt”: “it is a tale of a disaster caused by the clash of irreconcilable forces.”¹¹ “Kata Kádár” may be compared to Romeo and Juliet; as the chorus states in the prologue to Shakespeare’s play: *Romeo and Juliet* is a tale of “a pair of star-crossed lovers” and “the fearful passage of their death-marked love.”¹² Like Tristan and Isolt and Romeo and Juliet, Kate and Martin are prevented from loving each other. What is tragic about this situation, however, is that we feel from the beginning of the ballad that this is their fate. Their choices are limited, and they act according to what is necessary. Kate and Martin are wronged; we feel that their love is sanctioned by the singer and everyone who listens to his song. The audience is bound to experience a certain kind of “tragic” relief when this love story, like all the others, ends in a death that finally and ironically brings the lovers together. It is the tragic motif of the twining branches that does this work for the ballad, as it does for “Tristan and Isolt.”

The mystical union of the twining branches calls into question the reliability of the human order of things. In all of the tragic love stories mentioned above, it is always the supernatural (i.e., the other-than-human) order that resolves the conflict, passes judgment by implication on the human order, and thereby exposes human fallibility. From the moment the supernatural element enters “Kata Kádár” in verses 6 and 7 (the life-token motif), we become aware of two things: (1) despite the courage and integrity of the lovers, doom is impending, and (2) despite the fact that their humanness makes them fallible and their lot seems unmerited, the final destiny of Kate and

Martin is determined by forces that are greater than human. We are allowed to hope that there will be compensation for their suffering. When the two lovers are pulled from the "bottomless lake" in each other's arms (verse 13), we have reason to believe that their death is not entirely meaningless. Inasmuch as death can have meaning, the motif of the twining branches is "tragic," because it embodies this contradiction in one pregnant symbol: two branches, or flowers, spring from the graves of the wronged, unfortunate lovers only to unite, intertwine above the earth, over the church, impervious to the will of Lady Gyulai and the conditions of life in the village. As R.J. Dorius states in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, "courage and inevitable defeat" signal the tragic in "great literature." This is also true for folk literature and for the ballad. He further states that these two qualities affect us above all others because

the first in any society is rare and the second is a prospect most men find intolerable. Without courage or endurance, the exceptional action or *commitment* (my emphasis) which characterizes tragedy would not be undertaken or sustained; without defeat, it would not be placed in the perspective of the ordinary world. For the tragic gesture or thrust is on too grand a scale to conform to the ways of the world or to find means to alter them ... Tragedy stops history, it is a summit or end stage, always concerned with problems of value; it is human life seen in an ultimate perspective. The tragic protagonist's courage must seem possible...(but) it must also be doomed.¹³

Although the motif of the two chapel flowers is found throughout Europe and even Asia in both literary and folklore sources, Lajos Vargyas claims that the "earliest occurrence of the complete picture is in the French Tristan legend, before the appearance of the ballad genre."¹⁴ Although Vargyas also sees obvious borrowings from and connections with the "Agnes Bernauerin" legend-ballad, he downplays this influence in favour of the Tristan influence. He notes that the "most characteristic motif of our ballad, the grave flower(s), is unknown in German territory." He states that the exact and intense image of the intertwining chapel flowers rising from the graves of the dead lovers is missing. This motif is truly visible only in Hungarian, English, and Scottish ballads, and it has been

diffused through its rendering in the Tristan romance. Vargyas hypothesizes that the tragic motif travelled from France in the fifteenth century south and east to Yugoslavia and then north to the Hungarian ballad zone. (This theory would make sense in the light of the connections between the Croatian, Serbian, and Hungarian courts as early as the thirteenth century, and the links between them and the French nobility, especially with the court of Anjou.) At the same time, however, it travelled west into Portugal and Spain and finally on to England and Scotland, where it is most popular in the European ballad tradition, most derivative of the Tristan romance, and most like its Central, or Eastern European counterpart in “Kata Kádár.”¹⁵ Although Vargyas is unable to document any version of a French ballad that might have evolved from the Tristan romance, he feels justified in hypothesizing that:

There must, therefore, have been a French ballad which passed on to the southern and western neighbours, and to us (the Hungarians), the various elements, and in which social distinction, the obstacle to the lovers, as in the Hungarian and the Portuguese; the young man's enquiry on his return and his giving away (or exchange) of clothes, as in the English and Hungarian; the grave flowers with the birds and the vengeful mother (father's wife), which were preserved by the Portuguese, English and Breton with varying element.¹⁶

There are several versions of the motif in the Portuguese ballad tradition, but unfortunately we cannot cover them here. If, however, we isolate the motif in the texts relevant to our comparison, Vargyas' theory does seem reasonable. In Bédier's edition of *Le Roman de Tristan* by Thomas, the “miracle des arbres entrelacés” bears remarkable similarity to “the two chapel flowers” of “Kata Kádár”:

Puis les deux amants furent mis au tombeau, et l'on raconte qu'Isolt, la femme de Tristan, fit enterrer Tristan et Isolt en deux tombes, des deux côtés de l'église, afin que même après leur mort ils fussent séparés. Mais il arriva qu'un chêne ou telle autre espèce d'arbre germa de chaque côté du tombeau, et les deux arbres crurent si haut qu'ils entrelacèrent leurs ramures au-dessus du toit: par là l'on peut voir quelle fut la grandeur de leur amour. Et c'est ainsi que finit ce conte.¹⁷

In this text the two lovers are buried on either side of the church, as though the author wants us to think for one split second that after their death they will be eternally separated. But out of their two graves two trees grow,¹⁸ and their boughs intertwine above the roof of the church. The author then comments on the significance of this miracle: the branches intertwine in order to reveal the magnitude of the love between Tristan and Isolt, a love that cannot be fulfilled in their lifetime. Their love is now immortalized. On this tragic note the story will end. The motif of the twining branches is used in a similar way in “Kata Kádár,” but in some versions — the best versions — the ballad goes one step further thematically. When they embrace each other, the sympathetic plants reveal the power of love and the power of love then enables the plants to speak. They speak a crowning curse, the implications of which will be discussed in more detail later.

The curse is a particularly interesting element in “Kata Kádár” and in the Hungarian love-ballad tradition in general.¹⁹ In other European ballad traditions that employ the twining branches motif, the curse is rarely, if ever, a part of the motif. According to Leader the curse, “cast upon the cruel mother by the flowers, seems to be a genuine Hungarian addition to the ballad and it does not seem to exist in the English and Scottish ballad tradition.²⁰ The tragic motif without this final element is very prominent. Take for example “Earl Brand, B” (Child, no. 7), verses 18 and 19:

Lord William was buried in St Mary's kirk,
Lady Margret in Mary's quire;
Out o the lady's grave grew a bonny red rose,
And out o the knight's a briar.

And they twa met, and they twa plat,
And fain they was be near;
And a the warld might ken right weel
They were twa lovers dear.

Much like “Earl Brand” is “Lord Thomas and Fair Annet, A” (Child, no. 73):

Lord Thomas was buried without kirk-wa,
Fair Annet within the quiere,
And o the tane thair grew a birk,
The other a bonny briere.
And ay they grew, and ay they threw,

As they was faine be neare;
And by this ye may ken right weil
They were twa luvvers deare.

A more dramatic version of the motif occurs in "Lord Lovel, A" (Child, no. 15). Out of Lady Ouncebell's breast grew a "sweet rose," and out of Lord Lovell's "a bunch of sweet briar:"

They grew till they grew to the top of the church,
And then they could grow no higher;
They grew till they grew to a true lover's knot,
And then they tyed both together.

In "Fair Margaret and Sweet William," (Child, no. 74), verses 18 and 19, the rose and the briar...

grew as high as the Church-top,
Till they could grow no higher,
And then they grew in a true lover's knot,
Which made all people admire.

The English and Scottish ballads seem to consistently comment on the importance of the twining branches as a public symbol of true love. This is not a feature of the Hungarian ballads, and it does not occur at all in "Kata Kádár."

In his remarks on "Earl Brand," Child comments extensively on the popularity of the motif "the beautiful fancy of plants springing from the graves of star-crossed lovers, ... signifying ... that an earthly passion has not been extinguished by death."²¹ He cites ballads from all over the world that exhibit a version of the motif and includes in his discussion references to written literature that use the motif. He even mentions a "Magyar" version, as he knows it from a German text of the ballad. It is clear, however, that he did not have any of the more reliable Hungarian ballad texts at his disposal.²²

Thus it would seem that what most clearly distinguishes "Kata Kádár" from, on the one hand, the Tristan romance, and on the other, the English and Scottish ballads cited above, is the curse. The most dramatic versions of "Kata Kádár" do not end with the simple description of the intertwining "chapel-flowers" (*A*), the "white marble lily" and the "red marble lily" (*B*), the violet and the rosemary (*C* and *D*), or any other kind of flower or branch that might be part of some other Hungarian versions. Three of the four versions included here end with a curse directed at the mother, spoken by the flowers (see Versions *A*, *B* and *D*). Verses 18 and 19 of Version *B* stand

out in this regard. When Lady Gyulai plucks the flowers, a thorn pricks her finger, and Kate Kádár curses the mother of Miklós (her lover's name in this version).

“May your wheat produce just one grain,
And may that one grain be empty.
May you go without bread,
For nobody will be sorry.

“May your wash water turn to blood,
May your towels catch on fire,
For when this curse falls on your head,
I surely know how you will fare.”

There are many more of these curses in the Hungarian ballad tradition, all of them equally venomous: “May the footbridge you want to cross go up in flames”; “May the road slope upwards in front of you”; “May mud spring behind you”; “May you be given a spouse who does not love you”; “May your bread turn to stone.”²³

Leader argues that the addition of the curse to the ballad and the motif is valuable for three reasons.²⁴

1. It is a good piece of ethnographical information, since it preserves ancient incantation formulas and folk beliefs.

2. It lends a special structural importance to the twining branches; they are, of course, in all ballad sources a vehicle for communicating the magnitude of the love, but they are also a vehicle for delivering an effective curse;

3. It neatly closes the ballad, a ballad type that we have established as tragic, from the ethical point of view. I would like to add here that instead of enhancing the tragic thrust of the ballad, it detracts from it. The curse reduces the tragic vision of the ballad, bringing the action back down to earth, dispelling tragic emotion, pity, and fear, and instituting revenge in their place.

We must conclude, then, that the speaking plants change the finer tragic emotions in the ballad to the crude, less cultivated emotions of anger, revenge, and hatred. Furthermore, the struggle that was at one time resolved by supernatural forces, is re-established and left open-ended. The curse insinuates an ongoing battle on earth and a will to enforce retribution on earth. The ballad of “Kata Kádár” could easily turn into a

continuing saga in which the curse is actually carried out against Lady Gyulai.

Through the example of "Kata Kádár" we can see that thematically balladry and great tragic literature overlap; both "Kata Kádár" and the Tristan romance use the tragic motif effectively to elicit tragic emotion and contribute to a tragic vision of the world in the poem. But the finer points of the ballad, not included in *Tristan* — especially the curse endings — make Kata Kádár's folk heritage obvious. Great tragic literature, such as the Tristan legend ends peacefully with perhaps, the twining branches. "Kata Kádár" belongs most certainly to the tradition of the ballad, an oral tradition with its own culturally determined repertoire of dénouements and one rooted very much in an agrarian peasant culture and its everyday concerns, fears, and hopes. Although the balladry has freely borrowed elements from the great literary traditions, especially from tragic literature, one can never wholly define "Kata Kádár" in the tragic mode, as perhaps Francis Utley is wont to do. It is a genuine ballad that steals from the tragic mode but makes something quite new and special.

APPENDIX: VERSIONS A, B, C, AND D OF "KATA KÁDÁR"

VERSION A

KATE KÁDÁR

(The Two Chapel Flowers)

1. 'Mother, mother, my mother!
Lady Gyulai, my mother!
I shall marry Kate Kádár,
The fair daughter of our serf.'
2. 'I will not let you, my son
Martin Gyulai,
Marry instead a lord's
fair daughter!'
3. 'I do not want a lord's
fair daughter,
I only want Kate Kádár,
The fair daughter of our serf.'
4. 'Then away with you, my son
Martin Gyulai;
I disown you, you are no son of mine.
Not now, nor ever.'

5. 'My footman, my footman,
the one I hold more dear,
Drag forth my coach,
Place the horses between the shafts!'
6. The horses were placed between the shafts
They took the road.
Kate Kádár gave him a scarf:
'When its colour will turn to red
then my life too (take note of this)
will be changing.'
7. Martin Gyulai goes
Over hill and dale,
All at once he sees a change
on the embroidered scarf.
8. 'My footman, my footman, the one I hold more dear,
The land is God's and the horse is for the dogs,
Let us turn back, for the scarf has turned to red,
So Kate Kádár too has long met her end.'
9. The swineherd was at the end of the village.
'Hi, good swineherd, what is the news with you?'
10. 'Our news is good, but there is ill news for you,
For Kate Kádár has met her end.
Your mother has had her taken away,
She has had her thrown into a bottomless lake.'
11. 'Good swineherd, show me where is that lake,
And all my gold, my horse, my coach are yours!'
12. So they went to the shore of the Lake.
'Kate Kádár, my soul, speak one word, are you there?'
Kate Kádár spoke to him from the lake,
Quickly Martin Gyula jumped after her.
13. His mother sent divers,
They took them out dead, the girl in his arms,
One of them was buried in front of the altar,
The other was buried behind the altar.
14. Two chapel-flowers sprang up out of the two,
The intertwined on the top of the altar.
Their mother went there, she tore them off,
The chapel flower spoke to her thus:
15. 'May you be cursed, may you be cursed,
My mother, Lady Gyulai,
You have been cruel when I was alive,
And even now you have murdered me!'

Hungarian original published in Gy. Ortutay, ed., *Magyar népballadák* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1976): 23-4. English translation from N. Leader, ed., *Hungarian Classical Ballads and Their Folklore* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967): 125-6.

VERSION B

KATA KÁDÁR

(The Two Chapel Flowers)

1. "My dear sweet mother, allow me
To take Kata Kádár for my wife,
Kata Kádár,
The fair daughter of my serf!"
2. "Dear sweet son, I will not allow it,
I will throw her into the bottomless lake.
The village lords have many fair daughters:
Why not marry one of them?"
3. "My servant, my servant, my humble servant!
Saddle my chestnut steed.
We must set out on the long road,
The long road to wander."
4. Master Miklós set out
On the long road to wander.
Kata Kádár caught sight of him,
And opened the door for her Miklós.
5. "Do not open the door Kata Kádár!
For I cannot come in.
Now I must take to the long road,
The long road to wander."
6. "Master Miklós, spare me a few words!
I will bring my white gown,
I will bring you a bouquet of flowers.
When the white gown has turned bloody
And the flowers have wilted,
Then Kata Kádár has come to her end.
7. Master Miklós set out on the long road,
The long road to wander.
He came upon a miller.
"Master miller, Master miller!
What is new in the village?"
8. "Certainly nothing is new
But that Kata Kádár has come to her end.
She has been thrown into the bottomless lake."

9. "Master miller, Master miller!
Take me there to that very place,
The very place, that spot where she has been drowned,
The edge of the bottomless lake.
My chestnut steed,
All my riches, my fancy raiments are yours."
10. The miller did as he was beckoned;
He led Miklós to the edge of the lake,
To that very place, that spot,
The edge of the bottomless lake.
11. Master Miklós took off his clothes
And leapt into the bottomless lake.
12. Out of one spot grew a stalk of white lily,
Out of another grew a stalk of red lily.
The two grew out of the lake
Until they intertwined.
13. Miklós' mother went for a walk
And saw the two flowers.
She sent for a sea diver,
She plucked the two flowers.
14. For the one child she had made
A white marble coffin,
And for the other she had made
A red marble coffin.
15. The one child was buried
In front of the altar,
And the other was buried
Behind the altar.
16. Out of the one coffin grew
A stalk of white marble lily,
Out of the other grew
A stalk of red marble lily.
There the two grew
Until they intertwined (embraced one another).
17. Miklós' mother went for a walk,
Found the two flowers and looked at them.
She then plucked them both,
But a thorn pricked her finger.

Kata Kádár cursed Miklós' mother:
18. "May your wheat produce just one grain,
And may that one grain be empty.
May you go without bread,
For nobody will be sorry."

19. "May your wash water turn to blood,
May your towels catch on fire,
For when this curse falls on your head,
I surely know how you will fare."

Hungarian original published in *Magyar népballadák*, 25-7.
English translation by Marlene Kádár with Victoria Tóth.

VERSION C

KATA KÁDÁR

(Two Chapel Flowers)

1. Wife of Gyula, my sweet mother,
Allow me just this one thing:
To ask for the hand of Kata Kádár,
The beautiful daughter of our serf.
2. I can not allow you, dear son,
to take the hand of Kata Kádár.
Here in the village live
The king's daughter, the baron's daughter.
3. But I do not want the king's daughter,
I do not want the baron's daughter,
I would rather go into exile,
Into exile, on the long road.
4. He set out on the long road,
The long road, into exile.
He wandered and wandered
Until he came upon a millhouse.
5. Heh there! Master miller,
What is new in the village?
Bad news I have not heard:
But Kata Kádár has been kidnapped.
6. Kata Kádár has been kidnapped,
And thrown into the bottomless lake.
Kata Kádár has been kidnapped,
And thrown into the bottomless lake.
7. Márton Gyula heard this,
And went to the shore of the lake:
Are you alive, my sweet rose, or are you dead,
Or do you think of me?
8. I cannot live, I cannot die,
I only think of you.
He blessed himself,
And threw himself into the deep lake.

9. From one spot on the lake grew a stalk of violet,
From another grew rosemary.
They grew so high
Till they intertwined.
10. Mother Gyula heard about this,
She went to the shore of the lake,
She went to the shore of the lake,
And plucked both the flowers.
11. You have not left me alone during my lifetime,
And I am not left alone after death.
The Lord in Heaven punishes
He who forbids love!

Hungarian original published in: Lajos Vargyas, *A magyar népballada és Európa*, Vol. 2 (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1976): 112-3. English translation by Marlene Kádár.

VERSION D
KÁDÁR KATA
(Transylvanian Ballad)

1. "Dame Gyulai, my good mother!
Allow me just one thing,
To ask for the hand of Kata Kádár,
The fair daughter of our serf."
"Rather than to permit you my son
I would have her into a bottomless lake!"
2. "My servant, my servant, my dear servant,
Bring forth my horse,
Because I would go out into the world,
From one country into another."
He set out on his long journey,
A long journey into exile.
As he wandered, as he wandered, in the forest
He met a Wallach dandy.
"Listen, you Wallach dandy,
What news of my village?"
3. I have heard nothing else
Than that Kata Kádár has been destroyed,
Kata Kádár has been destroyed
Flung into a bottomless lake."
He went there to that place
Set on the shore of the lake:
"Are you alive, my rose, or are you dead
Did you think of me?"

4. "I am neither live nor dead,
 I think only of you!"
 His heart was gripped with sorrow,
 And he leaped into the vast lake.
 From one grew a violet,
 From the other a rosemary,
 They grew and grew until
 They embraced.
 Dame Gyulai upon this sight
 Torn them under her feet.
 Thereupon the flower spoke,
 "May the Lord in Heaven punish you
 Who are destroying love.
 You have not left me in peace when I lived,
 I cannot rest even after death."

Hungarian original recorded in: *Kodály Orchestral Songs*,
 Hungaroton. English translation by László Eöszé.

NOTES

1. "Kata Kádár" is the name of the heroine in the ballad, and the name of the ballad itself. Four versions of the ballad are included here; unless otherwise stated, comments in this paper will be made in reference to Version *A*, since it is the most popular version among scholars, and since it is the only version that has been published in an English critical edition. However, Versions *B*, *C*, and *D* have their qualities: although it is not well known, Version *C* is tidy and simple, and Version *D* is interesting because it is a recomposition of Kodály. It must be remembered that the effect of each version is heightened when set to music. I have heard only Versions *A*, and *D*, and *D* is a modern orchestral song. Hereafter "Kata Kádár" will be used to refer to the title of the ballad, and "Kate Kádár" to the heroine of the ballad. All four versions of "Kata Kádár" are included in the appendix.

2. Solymossy, Leader, and Vargyas represent the main trends in Hungarian folk ballad scholarship. Their work includes commentaries on "Kata Kádár." See Solymossy's essay on "Ballada" in *A magyarság néprajza* (Hungarian Ethnography), 4 vols. (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1872-1924) vol. 3, 98-9; Ninon A.M. Leader, *Hungarian Classical Ballads and their Folklore* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967): 125-41; Lajos Vargyas, *A magyar népballada és Európa* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1976) Vol. 2, 111-21; Vargyas, *Researches into the Mediaeval History of Folk Ballad* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967): 112-27. Although structuralism is starting to play a role in Hungarian folklore scholarship, nothing definitive has yet been written about "Kata Kádár" in this mode.

3. The ballad and literary sources that are generally cited in relation to "Kata Kádár" are as follows:

- a) the medieval French romance of Tristan and Iseut;
- b) Italian Renaissance short tales, such as those found in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, 1348-53; Bandello's *Tragic Tales*, 1567; and Giovanfrancesco Straparola's *Nights*, 1557;
- c) A clumsy Hungarian romance based on the legend of Telamon, written in Kolozsvár in 1578;
- d) the popular Bavarian legend "Agnes Bernauerin" based on the "Bernauer tragedy," which was a real event in Germany in 1435 (parallels are drawn by Leader and Vargyas); see the ballad in Konrad Nussbacher, *Deutsche Balladen* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1967):52-4.

e) other European ballads, especially English and Scottish, collected by Sir Francis James Child in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols. (1882; rpt. New York: Folklore Press and Pageant Books, 1956); see especially "Earl Brand" (no. 7), "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" (no. 73), "Lord Lovel" (no. 75). Hereafter, Child ballads are referred to within the text; György Király links them in "Kádár Kata balladája," *Nyugat* (1917): 48-60.

4. Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols., Indiana Univ. Series 19-23, FFC 106-109 (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1957), Vol. 4, 411-13. This is part of the wider motif E630, "Reincarnation in Object," 411.

5. Leader, 134-5.

6. The two other important international motifs in "Kata Kádár" are:

a) The motif of the life-token, Stith Thompson's motif no. E761, wherein "an object has mystic connection with the life of a person, so that changes in the life-token indicate changes in the person, usually disaster or death." This motif is missing in Versions C and D of "Kata Kádár." In Version A the life-token is a scarf; in B it is a white gown. In the international ballad motif tree, however, rings are the most common life-tokens. They change colour or burst in order to reveal a change of some sort. See also George Laurence Gomme's *The Handbook of Folklore* (London: Published for the Folklore Society by D. Nutt, 1890), type no. 24.

b) The curse motif, which in the case of "Kata Kádár," is really part of the central motif of "the twining branches." The curse motif does generally appear, however, in other European ballads on its own. Leader refers us to Child, no. 10, "The Two Sisters," in which the harp that had been strung with the hair of the victim speaks against her murderers.

7. Francis Lee Utley, "Oral Genres as Bridge to Written Literature," *Acta Ethnographica* 19 (1970): 389-99.

8. See chapter 10, "The Rescued Maiden," in Erich Seemann, Dag Strömbäck, Bengt R. Jonsson, eds., *European Folk Ballads*, European Folklore Series (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1967): 162-3.

9. See Seemann's introduction to *European Folk Ballads*, xxii-xxiii.

10. *Ballad and Epic: A Study in the Development of the Narrative Art* (New York: Russel and Russel, 1907 and 1967): 63. For a more detailed discussion of metric pattern and "meaning" see Alvert B. Lord's chapter on "The Formula" in *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960): 30-67.

11. Eugene Vinaver, Foreword to *The Romance of Tristan and Isolt (version commune)*, trans. Norman B. Spector (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973): p. xv.

12. William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, Alfred Harbage, ed.; *Romeo and Juliet*, The Complete Pelican Shakespeare (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969): 859.

13. Alex Preminger, ed., *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, enlarged ed. (Princeton University Press, 1974): 860.

14. Lajos Vargyas, "The Two Chapel Flowers," in *Researches into the Mediaeval History of the Folk Ballad* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967): 115.

15. *Ibid.*, 115-20.

16. *Ibid.*, 119.

17. Thomas, *Le Roman de Tristan*, 2 vols. (Paris: Didot, 1902), vol. 1, 46. This motif is not included in the body of the text but is in a footnote. In an appendix Bedier has documented a fragment that includes a different version of the motif in the French romance. See vol. 2, 394. In this version a green briar descends from Tristan's grave into Yseult's and it will not be plucked: "De dedens la tombe Tristan yssoit une ronche belle et verte et foillue qui aloit par dessus la chappelle, et descendoit le bout de la ronche sur la tombe Yseult et entroit dedens. Ce virent le gens du pais et le comperent au roy. Le roy a fit par trois fois coupper: a l'andemain restoit aussi belle et en autel estat comme elle avoit este autrefois. C'est miracle estoit sur Tristan es sur Yseult."

18. It is not always trees that spring from the graves of lovers. In the Hungarian ballads we have everything from plants to marble lilies to tulips. In the Tristan legend we seem to have oaken branches and green briar. In the English and Scottish ballads, however, the plants always seem to be a briar and a rose, or a briar and a birch.

19. See Leader for other Hungarian ballads that employ the curse, especially "The

Maid Who Was Cursed," 259, and "The Dishonoured Maiden," 180-3.

20. *Ibid.*, 135.

21. Child, vol. 1, 96.

22. He refers to an atypical German translation of the ballad, "Schön Kätchen," in which the motif of the twining plants appears twice, as in Version B.

23. Leader lists a variety of curses and incantations (129).

24. *Ibid.*, 140-1.