

Thesis of the PhD Dissertation

A Comparative Study on the Hungarian and
Ruthenian (Ukrainian) Folk Ballads

László Fábián



UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

Doctoral School of History and Ethnography

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Due to the geographical and ethnic peculiarities of its surroundings, the Hungarian population of Transcarpathia could get acquainted with the material and mental culture of the Rusyns, who have been having a common historical fate with the Hungarians. This familiarizing occurred on the levels of constant economic and cultural relationships. The Hungarians familiarized themselves with the Rusyn culture, while kept their own one with faith. The folklorist working in this multicultural context is similarly lucky because through the knowledge of language he is given the opportunity to carry out a comparative investigation of the two nations' treasure of ballads. Besides indicating the values of the given people, the analysis can prove to be a definite step towards each other's better understanding.

Reaching this purpose is the goal of the dissertation. However, as it is pointed out throughout the dissertation, it is important to emphasize the parallel use of the terms 'Ukrainian' and 'Rusyn', as the Ukrainian state has not acknowledged the Rusyns as an individual nation yet. The past one and a half centuries, and the past fifty years in particular, left significant marks on the life of the Rusyns. Because the process of becoming a nation was broken in the era of reforms in Hungary before 1948 by the strengthening Pan-Slavic propaganda, and forming the literary language could not be completed, the basic works of national culture were created, either (dictionaries, local historical monographs, and folklore collections).

In spite of this, it must be stated that the historical fate of the Rusyns is extra-ordinary, that is, it is not just one of the fates of people living in similar conditions. Therefore the lessons learnt from it are not ordinary, either. These can be of use for all the nations of the Danube-basin.

The overall processing of the Rusyn and Ukrainian ballads that can be also placed in the taxonomy of the European branch of science, in fact started in the 1980s. The 19th century published collections and those in manuscripts were gathered by O. I. Dej, professor of the Maksym Ryl's'ky Institute of History of Art, Folklore and Ethnography. His aim was to systematize and catalogue the ballads which were significant and outstanding even according to European standards. When defining the principles of systematization, he took human relationships and conflicts as a base, and divided Ukrainian ballads into the following subject areas: 1. Love and love affairs before marriage, 2. Family relationships and conflicts between family members, 3. Social – historical relations and conflicts. In Dej's system, these subject areas fall into cycles based on the important common features of conflicts, and the cycles are further divided into subtypes. So, 283 subtypes of Rusyn ballads can be distinguished which is a considerable amount compared to 134 types recorded by Vargyas.

Not only does the catalogue facilitate searching and orientation, but it is an excellent tool in starting the comparative analysis. Twenty-three ballads were selected from the total of the investigated

Rusyn (Ukrainian) ballads. This selection was based on the correspondence of the story and similarity of the motives in the Ukrainian and Hungarian ballads. According to Vargyas' type indicator, these are the following: 1. *The allured young wife*(3), 2. *The allured young wife leaving her child* (5), 3. *Three orphans* (6), 4. *The intimidated wife* (12, 13), 5. *Two prisoner brothers* (17), 6. *The brave warrior and the lover* (18), 7. *The wife of the outlaw* (20), 8. *The triple baby-killer* (24), 9. *The cruel mother-in-law* (28), 10. *The mother kidnapped by her son* (42), 11. *The fidelity trial* (43), 12. *The turtledove who lost its pair* (44), 13. *The corrupted boy* (62), 14. *The haughty wife* (67), 15. *Miraculous dead* (68), 16. *The trial of love* (69), 17. *The girl soldier* (80), 18. *The girl with a gander* (81), 19. *The dead bridegroom* (86), 20. *The wedding of crickets* (91), 21. *The girl with a peacock* (92), 22. *The person keeping away from the church* (95), 23. *The cheated-on husband* (129).

The statement that there is no theory without comparison in folklore is a cliché nowadays. Instead or parallel with it, the methodology of comparative folklore must be worked out. On the other hand, while revealing the biography of the Hungarian folk ballad and its European relations, Lajos Vargyas warns us not to swing to the other extreme in forceful connecting of the cultures of people distant from each other in time and space.

To avoid rough mistakes, it was decided to use the typological and genetic criteria spread by V. Propp, P. Bogatyriov, and V. Zhirmunsky in analyzing the subtypes and their variants.

These two principles of the approach can either be used separately or as one supplementing the other for comparison of numerous common elements of form and meaning between the Hungarian and Rusyn ballads. This is due to the fact that the seven or eight hundred year long past of our peoples made it possible to constantly exchange economic goods and create the conditions for the movement of cultural phenomena. For example, if we look at the history of the north-eastern Highlands some decades after the war of independence led by Rákóczi, we can see that the migration of the population in territories devastated by wars and epidemic is extremely lively. Attila Paládi - Kovács, who surveys the region's Ukrainian diasporas in the 18th and 19th centuries, mentions more than fifty settlements inhabited totally or partly by Rusyns with a population of about 10000 people. However, it is Zoltán Újváry who calls the attention to the fact that the examination of the Ukrainian diasporas meets difficulties partly because of the linguistic assimilation, and partly because the Ukrainian settlements have been registered as Slovakian.

Based on the work done, it can be stated that the material compared with the purpose of defining the directions of topic and motive wandering is not as homogeneous as it was thought at the initial selection. The categorization was done taking into consideration such form and meaning criteria as follows: *1. Correspondence of the theme and the basic story, 2. The consistency of the action's elements, 3. The completeness (distortion) of the*

motives, 4. The quantity and geographical position of the variants, 5. The instance of motives of other Hungarian types, Magyarisms.

Based on the above, the following results were found:

1. Ballads borrowed from Hungarian folklore: *The allured young wife, Three orphans, The cruel mother-in-law, The corrupted boy, Miraculous dead, The trial of love, The girl with a peacock, The haughty wife, The cheated-on husband*, altogether 9 ballads.

2. Double bound ballads with a common basic story of idea, but recreated by the Rusyn (Ukrainian) oral tradition: *The allured young wife leaving her child, Two prisoner brothers, The intimidated bride, The wife of the outlaw, The triple baby-killer, The mother kidnapped by her son, The fidelity trial, The turtledove who lost its pair, The girl soldier, The wedding of crickets*, altogether 10 ballads.

3. Types borrowed from Rusyn: *The girl with a gander, The dead bridegroom, The brave warrior and the pious man, The person keeping away from church*, altogether 4 ballads.

It must be stated that the types *The corrupted boy* and *The trial of love* are considered to be borrowed from Hungarian based on their variants believed to be original, because the versions that were formed in the individual existence of the type are thought to be true Rusyn or Ukrainian.

Thus the comparative analysis of the ballads (including different subtypes) was carried out in the spirit of the above ideas. The work done might as well be a success story, if the Ukrainian state provided the appropriate medium and institutional system of cultural life.

Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to move forward in this respect because of the degeneracy of institutions or general culture, though the Transcarpathian local historical and folklore research is under the pressure to move. It is urged by time and by the task the realization of which can provide value for the homogeneous Hungarian and Danube-basin cultural heritage, and at the same time it can reconstruct the retaining tradition for the survival and prosperity of endangered national communities.

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