

UKRAINIAN INCEST BALLADS FROM WESTERN CANADA

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In every ballad tradition, transgression against the accepted norms of behaviour marks a crucial thematic pivot for the poetic expression of alarm, shock and disdain. The three ballad items that follow in English translation underline this particular thematic segment in the traditional Ukrainian-Canadian ballad corpus as recorded by Robert Klymasz on the prairies in the 1960's.

Comparative materials are found in Francis James Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*: "Babylon" (14), "Sheath and Knife" (16), "The Bonny Hind" (50), "Lizzie Wan (51), "The King's Tochter Lady Jean" (57), "Brown Robyn's Confession" (57), and "Lady Isabel" (261).

No. 1: THE HAPLESS MARUSJA

1. On a hill, up on a hill / there were soldiers riding, *Hej, hej, u-xa-xa*, there were soldiers riding.
2. They rode and rode, / and dropped into a tavern.)2*
3. They sat down to play cards / and ordered some beer.)2
4. "O Marusja, sweetheart, / pour the beer quickly!")2
5. Marusja was pouring the beer / and the glass did flash.)2
6. The oldest one was watching / and he took a liking to Marusja.)2
7. "O Marusja, sweetheart, / what is it that flashes so brightly?)2
8. "Is it a ring on your finger / or the blush on your cheeks?)2
9. "Tis neither a ring on my finger / nor a blush on my cheeks,)2
10. "It's only that when I was pouring the beer / the glass did flash.")2
11. "O innkeeper, our pater, / you have a pretty daughter!)2
12. "What would you want / in order that you give Marusja to me?")2
13. "If you give four silver thaler coins, / – take her right away!")2
14. "O Marusja, sweetheart, / come with me quickly!)2
15. "O Marusja, sweetheart, / make up the bed quickly!")2
16. Marusja was making the bed and / she moaned with a heavy sigh.)2
17. "O Marusja, sweetheart, / why do you moan with such a heavy sigh?")2
18. "How am I not to moan / when I have to sleep with my brother?")2
19. What kind of world has this now become / that a brother should not have recognized his sister?)2

*As shown in stanza no. 1, in each stanza the segment to the right of the slash mark (/) is repeated after the interpolation of a brief refrain (*Hej, hej, u-xa-xa*).

*Sung by Mr. Philip Sydor,
Winnipegosis, Manitoba, 1964*

No. 2A: THE WIDOW AND HER SON

1. In the field stands a blackthorn berry tree – there aren't anymore except that one,
Oj, ha, ju-gda-gda, there aren't anymore except that one.
2. From under that blackthorn tree / a young widow came forth.)2*
3. A young widow came forth / and she gave birth to two sons.)2
4. And after she had given birth / she wrapped them in black silk.)2
5. She wrapped them in black silk / and placed them in a basket.)2
6. She placed them in a basket / and let it go in the Danube's waters.)2
7. "O you quiet Danube, / care for my children!)2
8. "O you yellow sand, / care for my children for me!")2
9. Twenty years later / the widow went to fetch water.)2
10. She began to take some water – and a boat came up to her.)2
11. One was sitting on the boat / combing his curly locks.)2
12. Another was sitting on the edge / winking at the widow.)2
13. "O you young widow, / do you like the kozak?")2
14. "I do like the kozak! / I'm going to marry the kozak!)2
15. "I myself am marrying one / and I'm marrying my daughter off to the other!")2
16. That's news for you! / A mother marrying her son!)2
17. That's confusion for you! / A sister marrying her brother!)2
18. The world has become such, / that the son cut off his mother's head!)2

*As shown in stanza no. 1, in each stanza only the segment to the right of the slash mark (/) is repeated after the interpolation of a brief refrain (*Oj, ha, ju-gda-gda*).

*Sung by Mrs. Anna Zacharuk,
Vegreville, Alberta, 1965*

No. 2B: THE WIDOW AND HER SON

1. High up on a hill
There grows a spreading blackthorn berry tree.)2
2. And from under that tree
There came forth a young widow.)2
3. There came forth a young widow
Who gave birth to two sons.)2
4. After she gave birth to them,
She placed them in a basket.)2
5. She placed them in a basket
And let it go on the quiet Danube.)2
6. "O you steep river banks,
Do not scold my sons!)2

7. "O you yellow sands,
Feed my sons for me!)2
8. "And you, O shining moon,
Entertain my sons!")2
9. Fourteen years later
The widow went to fetch water.)2
10. As she began to take the water
The basket came floating by.)2
11. The basket came floating by
And began to talk to the widow:)2
12. "O you young widow,
Do you love your two sons?")2
13. "I myself am marrying one
And I'm marrying off my daughter to the other.")2
14. What has become of the world
That sons do not recognize their mothers!)2
15. What sort of ominous hour is this
That sisters are their brothers' wives!)2

*Sung by Mrs. Harry Rewakowsky,
Canora, Saskatchewan, 1964*

The first variant of this ballad (2A) is more archaic than the second (2B). The second variant does not include the final motif (stanza 18) in which the mother is slain by her own son, lacks the lighthearted texture of the first variant (underlined by the rollicking refrain *Oj, ha, ju-gda-gda*), and is more lyrical in tone (see especially the mother's plea to the elements of nature, 2A stanzas 6, 7, and 8).

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Résumé: *Auprès d'Ukrainiens vivant dans l'ouest du Canada, M. Klymasz, du Centre Canadien d'Etudes sur La Culture traditionnelle, Musée National de l'Homme, a recueilli trois ballades se rapportant au sujet d'incest. Il les présente en cet article.*