

Examples of the Motif of the Shrew in European Literature and Film

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Volume 4 Issue 1 (March 2002) Article 3**Louise O. Vasvári,****"Examples of the Motif of the Shrew in European Literature and Film"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss1/3>>Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 4.1 (2002)***<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol4/iss1/>>

Abstract: In her paper "Examples of the Motif of the Shrew in European Literature and Film" Louise O. Vasvári presents the shrew-taming story as a masterplot of both Eastern and Western folklore and literature concerned with establishing the appropriate power dynamic between a married couple. Vasvári first reviews the comparative groundwork of the story she has documented in her earlier studies of the topic. In addition to tracing the bundle of motifs that make up the shrew story from medieval Arabic and European versions to the present, she then devotes attention to Hungarian folklore traditions. In the second part of the study, Vasvári interrogates how the *Shrew's* cultural capital has been appropriated and repackaged (or "transadapted") and made topical as a cinematic commodity, tracing its development from the earliest silent film versions to a recent pornographic film. Particular attention is paid to two Hungarian film versions, both produced in 1943, *Makacs Kata* and *A makrancos hölgy*. Both films combine elements of the shrew story with the influence of earlier Hungarian genre films, as well as some borrowed conventions of 1930s American screwball comedy. The two films appear at a fortuitous moment, repackaging the old battle of the sexes into seeming the lightest escapist farce, at the same time that they promote the prewar values of gentry life and the purifying effect of harmonious life on the land.

Louise O. VASVÁRI

Examples of the Motif of the Shrew in European Literature and Film

The shrew-taming story is a master plot of both Eastern and Western folklore and literature. The oft-told tale is concerned with the processes of power dynamics between a married heterosexual couple. Stories about shrewish wives reflect anxieties about insubordinate female behavior, a constant threat to what is supposed to be a male-dominated marital system. Popular storytelling in close-knit communities can fulfill functions of moral censorship of inappropriate gender roles in marriage. Oft-told tales like the shrew stories can also be a powerful source of social cohesion in affirming group rapport and shared values (see Norrick 199). Stories about shrews are always meant to elicit laughter, but their violent latent content exposes the politics of overpolarized notions of male and female subject positions within the institution of marriage. In my earlier work, I sought to trace the continued vitality of the bundle of motifs that make up the shrew story from medieval Arabic and European versions to the present (see Vasvári, "Pornográfia"; "Hit the Cat"). In this study, after briefly laying the comparative groundwork, I discuss some Hungarian folk analogues. Then I interrogate how the shrew's cultural capital was repackaged and made topical as a cinematic commodity in wartime Hungary in two films, *Makacs Kata* (Stubborn Kate) and *A makrancos hölgy* (Unruly Lady), both produced, significantly, in 1943. In treating filmic interpretations of the shrew as part of the folklore tradition, I heed Linda Dégh's important challenge to folklorists to expand the parameters of what should be studied as folklore to include variants of the same items from oral as well as written, printed or electronically reproduced sources (see Dégh, *American Folklore and the Mass Media* 1, 18-19). Folklore is to be judged not by its medium of transmission but by whether it is based on tradition, whether it is socially relevant, and how it is adapted to current needs.

In my analysis I use the term "story" to mean a central narrative, like that of the shrew, capable of maintaining an independent existence in variant forms and "motif" as one of a number of subplots the story can be broken down to. The basic story of the shrew involves a man, often a new bridegroom, who tames his unruly wife. She is described usually as shrewish, but can also be lazy, or haughty, or have other "bad" qualities. The husband tames his supposedly unruly wife through a ritual process of physical or psychological abuse. Any of a number of secondary motifs may be present in a given telling of the basic story. These include a) the youth is a fortune hunter who marries the girl in spite of her bad qualities because of her dowry; b) a friend, or the future father-in-law, attempts to talk him out of the match; c) the shrewish bride has a (younger) docile sister, or, alternatively, even more shrewish mother; d) the taming process occurs on the way home from the wedding and/or at the groom's house immediately after; e) the taming may take as little as one night -- the wedding night -- or it may go on for an extended period, during which the husband avoids sexual contact with his wife; f) the groom may kill or torture one or several animals (one of which is usually a cat!) as part of the process of intimidating his wife psychologically; and g) he may also beat his wife and/or deprive her of sleep or starve her into submission. Typically, the story ends with the sudden and exemplary atonement of the young wife and an "ever-after" happy marriage. Sometimes, in a coda to the story, the father-in-law or a friend tries to imitate the husband's feat but by the time he tries it in his own marriage it is much too late because his wife already knows his true character. In this paper I shall only be able to concentrate on comparing variants of the most important central motif, the mode and length of the taming process and its relation to the sexual consummation of the marriage.

Jan Harold Brunvald catalogued over 400 oral and literary versions of the shrew story in thirty countries or national groups in Europe. Nevertheless, his catalogue is far from exhaustive, as he did not consider Eastern versions, related proverbs, nor any of the numerous modern film representations in various languages. My own interest is not merely in identifying more variants, but rather in excavating the underlying text from the various incoherent surface narratives. The analysis of the underlying text, which always exceeds the narrative, reveals a repressed latent content, which, as in many traditional stories and fairytales, can be shown to be violently sexual (see Carter 122; Butler 331). An embryonic shrew tale is already present in the earliest surviving written version of *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (*Thousand and One Nights*), from the fourteenth century (see Mahdi). Versions of this tale, as we shall see, will reappear in Hungarian tradition. Many tales and proverbs continue to circulate today in oral

tradition, such as the Egyptian "Kill a/your cat on the wedding night" and the more eloquent Maghrebi variant "Hit the Cat and Tame the Bride," where *gattusa* (cat) and *la'rusa* (bride) rhyme and whose cat motif we see also appear in Hungarian tales. It is those variants of Eastern oral tales which reached the West that were most likely to be textualized, and it is precisely in medieval Europe that we find the two most literary and at the same time most violent versions. In a thirteenth-century French *fabliau* a count performs a threefold ritual, killing his two greyhounds, his horse, and cutting off the ear of a servant, all for ostensibly disobeying him. All this is to strike terror in his new wife, whom he then proceeds to club almost to death. It is only after she is rendered unconscious that he takes her to the marriage bed. Because his bride supposedly learned her shrewishness from her mother, the young man then performs a bloody operation on his mother-in-law, where he pretends to extract her "balls" (*couilles*), the supposed source of her dominating behavior (Montaignon and Renaud 1, 95-116; English translation in Brians 25).

In a fourteenth-century Spanish tale a bridegroom does not actually touch his wife but renders her totally docile by forcing her to witness the bloody decapitation of his dog, cat, and horse, none of which obeyed his order to bring him water to wash his hands before his meal (story XXXV in the *Conde Lucanor*, see Ayerbe-Chaux; English translation in Keller). When he then commands his wife to perform the same service they both understand that offering water for ablution is one of the degradation ceremonies that symbolizes feminine servility. For example, according to the Talmud, it is one of the three most intimate ways that a woman can serve a man -- along with making his bed and preparing his food, with all three serving as a prelude to the sexual act. In some regions of Central and Southern Europe there still exists a related ceremony, where the new wife has to wash her husband's and father-in-law's feet, while, reputedly, in some Arab tribes the bride must not only wash her husband's feet but also drink the water (see Erlich). Variations on the type of violence committed by the husband to tame his wife can be very inventive in different versions. For example, in a popular Middle German version the husband kills his horse on the way home from the wedding. He then saddles and rides his wife the rest of the way, saddling being another symbolic degradation ceremony (see Boose; Hemming). In an English piece, often cited as a possible source of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, a timid husband finds another method of punishment by proxy (see Bolte). His wife considers herself too high-born to do housework, so he wraps her in a sheep's skin and beats the skin until he has tamed her. In a longer, even more sadistic version, called *A Merry Jests of a Shrewde and Curst Wyfe, Wrapped in Morrelles Skin for Her Good Behavior* (Child 104-07), the husband makes good his threat to make his wife's "bones all crackle." He beats her unconscious and then wraps her bleeding body in the flayed and salted hide of his old horse, claiming that this is supposed to function as a magic charm to cure her of her wickedness. Like his predecessors, this husband also articulates clearly that the major form of subservience he demands is sexual: "For this I trow will I make her shrinke / And bow at my pleasure when I her bed" (Hazlitt 216; see also Vasvári, "Intimate Violence").

The most famous literary adaptation of the shrew story is Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, which picks up many of the usual motifs, such as the groom, Petruchio, being a fortune hunter in search of upward mobility through marriage. Kate's father would be only too happy to be rid of her, especially as he must do so before he can marry off her younger and tamer sister, Bianca. The direct violence against animals so central to the earlier history of shrew-taming is missing in Shakespeare. The tradition is, however, clearly echoed when Petruchio makes clear that he will tame Kate herself as if she were an animal, using on her the exact strategies of starvation, sleep deprivation, and psychological torture used to domesticate wild hawks. Shakespeare also subtly echoes the cat torture motif so prevalent in proverb versions by naming the wild bride -- nameless in most folktale versions -- "Kate", homonymous with "cat," hence Kate, the cat. That the naming is intentional becomes clear from Petruchio's first words of greeting to Kate, a prolonged display of his power of naming, renaming, and nicknaming her: "Good morrow, Kate -- for that's your name, I hear." Ignoring her own insistence on being called the more formal "Katherine", he proceeds to call her ten variations of "Kate": "plain Kate, bonny Kate, Kate the curst, Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom, Kate of Kate-Hall, my super-dainty Kate" (II.1. 183-94), adding soon thereafter another litany of Kates, with an obvious pun on "wild Kate" and "wildcat": "For I am he am born to tame you, Kate / And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate / Conformable as other household Kates" (II.1. 278-81).

With regard to the shrew in Hungarian culture, there are a number of versions of the shrew story and related stories of stubborn wives catalogued in Dégh (*Kakasdi népmesék* nos. 27, 35, 69, 86, 87) and in Olga Nagy (nos. 45, 46, 49, 51, 52, 54), with some translations and summaries in English available in Ortutay (nos. 23-25) and Dégh. I discuss here three that connect in particularly interesting ways with the Arabic and European tradition briefly described above. A story from the Transylvanian Hungarian (*Székelly*; today Romania) tradition, sometimes called "Szerencsés Jancsi" ("Lucky Johnny") or "Az állatok beszédje" ("Talking Beasts") is a convoluted embroidering of the story already present in the fourteenth-century manuscript of the *1001 Nights*, about a shepherd who is about to die due to the his wife's nagging. He has learned the language of animals and he hears his dog and rooster discussing his fate. The dog expresses his regret, but the rooster brags that he can keep his ten wives in line by beating them and if their master cannot even keep one in line then he deserves to die: "I have many wives and I can command them all. I cluck once and they all come running to eat after me and he has only one and even he can't teach. Well, then, he should die!" (unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine) ("nekem hány feleségem van, s én ennek a soknak tudok parancsóni. Eccer elkottyintom magamat, s látod, mind bejönnek utánnam enni, s neki csak egy van, s azt se tudja megtanyítani. Hát akkor ott hajjon meg!") [the text in Hungarian is phonetic; on hearing this, the man jumps out of his coffin, beats his wife to a pulp, and she then becomes obedient from that day on; Dégh, *Storytelling in a Hungarian Peasant Community* 335]). The fact that it is precisely a rooster who teaches the husband how to dominate his wife suggests that there is a latent sexual content to this tale as well. Roosters in folk tradition are not really known for beating their wives but for satisfying them sexually, as in the proverb to the effect that one rooster can satisfy ten hens but ten men cannot satisfy one woman (for example in the Italian *un gallo basta assai bene a dieci galline, ma dieci uomini possono male o con fatica una femina sodisfare* (*Decameron* III.1; see also Vasvári, "A Comparative Approach" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss4/1>>; "Fowl Play in My Lady's Chamber" on what I have called the "pornithological" lore of the rooster). In yet another story a young woman is unhappy with being given in marriage not to a young man but to an impotent sixty-year old husband. With the help of her equally crafty mother, she tests his tolerance for her misbehavior with the familiar threefold escalation of trials, finally driving him to his grave. Her second husband, unlike the first, is up to the job of taming her, which he does in as cruel a way as in any of the stories in the tradition. First he pours scalding potato water on her body, then has the cat scratch the boils, then sticks feathers into the wounds, and finally has the neighboring children pick off the feathers one by one (Dégh, *Storytelling in a Hungarian Peasant Community* no. 87). In a further version of the cat theme a man with a lazy wife orders the cat to prepare dinner. When it does not obey, he beats it to a pulp. He repeats this a second time, but his wife still does not catch on. The third time he ties the cat to his wife's back so that when he beats it, it claws the woman. Now she finally begs her husband on her knees to leave the cat alone, promising to do its work (Ortutay no. 25). Note how this story shares with the fourteenth-century Spanish tale the insistence on demanding the cat to do an impossible service and shares with the German tales the displaced beating of the wife by beating the cat. Further, Shrews in traditional tales are typically nameless, but when they are named, like Shakespeare's Kate, it is after that cat that appears in so many versions, as in this Hungarian song: "Kate Palcsi would be a good-looking girl, Kate! / If she didn't have such a mouth on her, Kate! / Three apples in a row would easily fit into her mouth, Kate!" ("Palcsi Kata szép jány vóna, Kata! / Ha a szája nem nagy vóna, Kata! / Három alma egy sorjába / Könnyen befir [sic] a szájába / Kata!" [Ortutay and Katona, 1 no. 29]).

Finally, let us look at another, more complex song (collected in 1912 in Garamkissaló, Hont County, formerly Hungary today Slovakia), which combines oral and literary traditions (see Honko, Timonen, Branch, no. 370). The song in form and content belongs to the specific category of wedding songs performed at the wedding ceremony (these songs are often either humorous or obscene or both; for examples of the genre in Hungarian see Vasvári, "A Comparative Approach" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss4/1>>). This text is sung to the bride as the accompaniment to the rite of combing out her hair and putting it into a bun in the style of a married woman. It belongs to the "instructions to the bride" genre, where older women instruct the bride in what to expect in marriage. The first three stanzas instruct the bride in how to be appropriately subservient to her husband, feeding him the best morsels, being silent about his carousing in the tavern, and keep-

ing her mouth shut even if he beats her. The last stanza recommends to the husband that if his wife should turn out to be *nyelves*, that is, to have a mouth on her, then he should beat her:

Wife, learn to look up to your man / and in whatever he does, don't complain; / if he goes to the pub, keep quiet / even if he skins you, don't wail / if your husband beats you / heigh ho, if your husband beats you! // Keep the fire, turn your distaff and spindle, / While he's cranking up his beer-handle: / while he drinks his fill, suffer drouth / and starve while he's stuffing his mouth / or when he has a feast / heigh ho, or when he has a feast! / Squash and maize are your share: / bake doughnuts for him with fine flour / and dust them with sugar for sweetness / and dot them with grapes for completeness / and serve to your man / heigh ho, and serve your man! // If, husband, your woman turns shrew / and thwarts you in all that you do / then bash her, beat her / kick her teeth in / so she doesn't grumble / heigh ho, and don't let her grumble!

Tanuld, asszony, az uradat megbecsülnyi, és övele mindenekben egyesülnyi;/ ha kocsmába megy, hallgass / ha megnyúz is, ne jajgass / ha urad ver/ hej, huj, ha urad ver!/ Ülj tűzhelre, guzsalyodra, forgass orsót, / mikor urad fog forgatnyi pinteskorszót: / szomjúhozzál, ha iszik // éhen haljál, ha eszik / vagy lakozik / hej, huj, vagy lakozik! // A sült tökököt meg kukoricát, tartsd magadnak, tyiszta lisztből fánkot süssél az uradnak, / cukrocskával cukrozd meg / apró szőlővel hintsd meg / te uradnak / hej, huj, te uradnak! // Hogyha, jó férj, nyelves, léssen feleséged, / hogy ő legyen mindenekben ellenséged, / üssed, verjed oldalát / verd ki néki a fogát / ne morogjon / hej, huj, ne morogjon! (Honko, Timonen, Branch, no. 370)

Already among the earliest silent films there were several adaptations of the "taming of the shrew" story, such as the 1908 Italian *Bisbettica domata*, directed by Lamberto and Azeglio Pineschi. These were based ostensibly on Shakespeare's play but, in fact, owed as much or more to folk tradition. Typical is a 1923 *Shrew* (Dir. Edward J. Collins), which never allows Kate's voice to be represented in any of the 63 intertitles. In it, Petruchio's success in breaking her will in less than 24 hours is celebrated in the following words: "By noon the next day, though famished and weary for want of food and rest, the Shrew, deep in her heart, admired the man whose temper is stronger than her own" (see Hogden 11). The story of Shakespeare in Hollywood begins with Sam Taylor's 1929 Columbia Pictures *Taming of the Shrew* with Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, famous as the first sound film of a Shakespearean play. In this film, Pickford is decked out in a masculine riding habit, boots and a riding crop, her masculine costume reflecting the motif of the "battle of the breeches. Other versions include a 1956 version from Spain (*La fierecilla domada*, Dir. Antonio Román), based more on Spanish tradition than on Shakespeare, the 1953 musical *Kiss Me Kate* (Dir. George Sydney), and Zeffirelli's 1966 *Taming of the Shrew* with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, who, like Fairbanks and Pickford, were a real-life contentious husband and wife on stage and off. There is even a recent pornographic *Shrew*, where her new husband forces Kate to have sex with his servants and with other women, but, interestingly, is never shown having sex with her himself (see Burt; see filmographies in Holderness and MacCullough 44-45; Rothwell 294-340; Wilson 167). The Shakespeare text, as well as the underlying oral tradition, has been appropriated or even reinvented for the political and social aims of many cultures (see Joughin; Bate; Stribrny). Already the Pickford and Fairbanks film's credit line gave attribution to "William Shakespeare, with additional dialogue by Samuel Taylor" (Wilson 21), while *Kiss Me Kate* had saucy lyrics by Cole Porter. Many other films, like the two Hungarian ones I discuss next, make some sort of direct reference as well as a number of intertextual ones to the Shakespeare text. However, in my opinion these films are better categorized as adaptations -- or "tradaptions," radical cultural appropriations (see Salter 123) -- with geographic and temporal settings located in contemporary times at the time of the films' making as well as with the addition of Hungarian traditions of comedy. In 1942, one year before the two Hungarian films appeared, there was an Italian shrew produced, Poggioli's *La bisbetica domata*. During the 1930s and 1940s Hungary had close political and cultural relations with Italy, including the film industry and so it is not surprising that the same plots reappear (see Laura on Hungarian influences on Italian cinema). In *La bisbetica* Catina must be kidnapped and tricked into marrying Pietro. Although a comedy, the film makes deliberate reference to the extracinematic reality of the war when Pietro, on his return to Rome after a long absence, notes how the city has changed. In addition, the characters at one point gather in a bomb shelter during an air raid (see Reich; Martini 260).

The two Hungarian "Shrew" films from 1943 have to be put in the context of film production in the 1930s and 1940s when the repertoire consisted predominantly of cheaply and quickly produced comedies and melodramas. The war had a major effect because, as the influx of Western European and American films halted, Hungary began to produce some fifty films annually, which is as many as were

being produced in Italy and France at the time, and more than ever before or after (see Nemeskürty; Burns). Some 75% of these were comedies taking place in contemporary Budapest, most of them featuring the same small group of popular stars and portraying a fantasy life of the pre-war gentry, with no reference to actual wartime conditions. It must be added, however, that what one critic has called "celluloid therapy," or the diversionary recreational function of wartime cinema, was being practiced in Hollywood at the time just as assiduously as in Hungary (Doherty 180). *Makacs Kata* directed by Viktor Bánky and starring Emmi Buttykay and Miklós Hajmássy, and *A makrancos hölgy* (Dir. Emil Martonffy) with Katalin Karády and Pál Jávör were no exception to the formula films of the period. They combine elements of the shrew story with the influence of earlier Hungarian genre films, as well as some borrowed conventions of thirties American screwball comedy. This is fast-paced escapist entertainment based on the old boy-meets-girl formula turned topsy-turvy that developed during the Depression, combining verbal comedy with elements of slapstick and farce. The characteristic feature of screwball was that it featured independent, strong heroines who were capable of holding their own with men in a battle of words and wills. The heroine thus exhibited an antisocial approach to the traditional male-dominated courtship ritual, and, expressing a sense of self-determination, she risked running away from marriage rather than toward it. The plot involved characteristically a confrontation between an initially antagonistic couple whose ideological or class differences heightened their animosity. Their courtship centered on a physical and verbal "battle of the sexes," which functioned as a form of sublimated sexuality (see Lent; Wexman; Young).

Although in neither of the Hungarian films is the hero a fortune hunter, as in several of the longer traditional versions, the commercial interest continues to be foregrounded. In *Makacs Kata*, Kata is a multi-millionaire heiress whose other, unsuccessful suitor is dubbed a fortune hunter. She agrees instead to marry Peter, whom she believes to be a tramp, so that she can come into her inheritance and become independent from her father. Her plan is to pay off Peter for his services and then divorce him after a month. All the while he goes along with the masquerade, figuring that this gives him one month in which to tame her. Peter is actually a successful engineer but is of peasant origins, so he takes Kata to his mother's thatched-roof cottage in the country to teach her how to be an industrious and obedient wife. The post-marriage segment of the film begins with an establishment shot of the couple arriving in the village in a horse-drawn wagon, from which Kata has just fallen off because she has refused Peter's help. As we will also see in the *A makrancos hölgy*, the narrative contrasts the countryside and the city, privileging the country as the site of authenticity. It is the hero who is able to mediate between the civilized world and nature, to manage conflicts between these two worlds and to educate his wife into recognizing her appropriate role as a traditional wife. She, in turn, obtains eventually a sense of purpose and self-worth from physical labor on the land. In the beginning we see Kata's initial rage at being brought to such a primitive place and her refusal to cook or to do any household tasks. The scene ends with Peter's response, the beginning of the taming ritual: she who does not cook and hungers. The story then moves a month ahead and now we see the newly docile little housewife in her peasant frock working in the courtyard. She has not only been tamed but has found new meaning in physical labor and has fallen in love with her husband. He, it must be added, has assiduously rebuffed all sexual contact and even flirtation with her during the taming period. Kata's fear now is that he does not love her because he treats her so badly and he has even beaten her. It takes a neighborly wise old peasant woman to set her straight about quaint country customs: "So much the better! Hereabouts we say that the man who does not beat his wife does not love her!" ("Hát akkor még jobb! Nálunk azt mondják hogy aki nem veri meg a feleséget az nem is szereti!").

The initial supposedly forced marriage of Kata in the *A makrancos hölgy* also centers on money. The suitor and the father, who is only too eager to be rid of his daughter, invent a ruse where the latter owes the suitor a lot of money, but the suitor will forgive the debt instead of bankrupting them if Kata marries him. At the wedding reception, Kata (Karády) -- like Mary Pickford in an earlier version -- shows up in a riding outfit with riding crop (this is the same outfit she wears on her honeymoon). As in *Makacs Kata* the groom, Paul (Jávör), believes that the way to tame his bride is to take her to the country. He takes her to a rundown room in an inn where the bed collapses under her. He then starves her by serving her "cold tea, hard cheese, and stale bread." But Paul makes the mistake of wanting to tame his bride in one day rather than one month. Here the film depicts a traditional wooing scene in the most kitschy Hungarian style, with Paul and a group of gypsies serenading Kata at her

window. Although at first the scene seems conventional, the lyrics -- which is also the main musical number in the film -- are actually an example of typical verbal sparring between the antagonistic couple, with the man expressing his wish to have a wife as docile as his pet bird: "Once I had a white-winged crested dove ... whom I fed from my palms ... Would I only have such a gentle lover, I would be the happiest man on earth!" ("Volt nekem egy fehérszárnyú bóbikás galambom? tenyeremből etettem ... Lenne csak egy ilyen kedves, rendes, csendes, szelid párom, én lennék a legboldogabb ezen a világon"). Kata counterattacks by calling him a *kuvasz* (Hungarian sheepdog) and insulting him as an "impudent fellow who doesn't know how to deal with women." While the traditional wooing scene in films focuses on the woman's resistance but is supposed to end with a close-up of "the kiss" and the fade out (which represents the woman's relieved surrender to the erotic will of the man), here the scene ends instead in slapstick with Kata shoving away the ladder on which the overconfident Paul is standing by her window and he falls into a pile of hay where he will be forced to spend the night. The scene is acted by Karády and Jávor clearly with irony, directed both at the shrew tradition and at folksy country values. Karády, who has been called the Hungarian Marlene Dietrich and who was the reigning diva of wartime Hungary, was perfectly cast in this role, with her somewhat mannish eroticism and alto voice. In terms of history, the irony is heightened by the fact that the following year both Jávor and Karády were arrested by the Gestapo. Karády, faring no better with the communists, left Hungary in 1949, and this put an end to her career. Her films could not be shown nor her records re-released until the late 1970s (Kelecsény 15).

As a form of modern popular ritual, films can be considered to constitute a significant cultural practice that helps define and demonstrate processes which are socially sanctioned, such as appropriate courtship behaviors. By such an approach sexual desire is not simply considered a Freudian drive but rather as a cultural construct shaped by a social agenda that is built around material interests and relations of power (see, e.g., Wexman 3-5). As Hodgson and a number of the authors writing in *Shakespeare and National Culture* (Joughin) discuss, "Shakespeare" has become an important part of the global commodification of culture. Shakespearean texts function as cultural capital that circulates in and has been appropriated in the service of many national cultures in order to symbolize a remarkable number of social and political struggles. Ultimately it has become a "fetishized cipher through which varying groups claim authenticity or legitimacy for particular social or cultural platforms" (Healy 214). The filmic adaptations of the shrew tale in interwar Hungary thus appear at a fortuitous moment, repackaging the old battle of the sexes into seemingly light escapist farce at the same time as they promote the pre-war values of gentry life and the supposedly purifying effect of harmonious life on the land.

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