THE MOTIF OF RECOGNITION IN ENGLISH AND THE ALBANIAN BALLADS

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Abstract: Difficult war times and painful family events made people segregate. These events made folk singers create songs where they narrated how people recognized each other after a long time being far away from one another. This time period was known as a very dramatic process fulfilled with strong feelings. Different scops and bards created emotional songs with the motif of recognition between husband and wife (that will be explained with examples from Hind Horn and Aga Ymeri), between brother and sister (that will be explained with examples from Bonnie Farday and Gjon Petrika), and rarely between brother and brother. The aim of this paper is to make a comparative analysis with special emphasis on intersections and the dissimilar points of the English ballads and the Albanian ones which treat the motif of recognition. Since this paper's goal is the comparative approach between ballads of two different literatures of different nations, our methods of analysis will be the narrative method and the comparative method. The narrative method will be used to point out the motif of recognition in each ballad particularly, while the comparative method will be used to make the comparison between ballads Hind Horn and Aga Ymeri where husband and wife recognize each other by a special sign as symbol of their true love, and between ballads Bonny Farday or Babylon and Gjon Petrika where with the help of a mark the identification of brother and sister occurs.

Keywords: motif, recognition, ballad, comparison, similar, different.

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Motifs in English and the Albanian ballads are numerous; however, we decided to take in consideration just the motif of recognition as one of the oldest motifs used in many ballads of different national literatures. The motif of recognition is widely spread in the folklore of several countries, but we are going to talk about this motif merely in the English and the Albanian literature. In this paper we are looking for the ways this motif is realized in these two different literatures. In traditional English and Albanian ballads we have a mixture of dramatic and lyric elements. In the case of our selected ballads for analysis we have mixture of the dramatic scenes of separation during the war times or at any other condition, with that of full emotional recognition between those who set apart. Since ballads deal with people and begin in medias res, the incidents are very important in these recognitions. Recognition comes as a result of a ring as a sign of faithfulness and chastity, a birthmark, a scratch mark, a riddle, a life story or a dialog between the two young people. When husband and wife recognition occurs, most of the time it ends with marriage of the couple. But, we cannot say the same for brother and sister recognition. Sometimes they have a fatal ending. Although, sometimes when we deal with motifs we forget of the main theme of these ballads which have to do with the returning of the lover after a long period of time and this is a crucial moment and the climax because it controls the tone of ballads and indicates us emotionally.

The oldest manuscript of the English ballad Hind Horn dates from the 13th century32 and it deals with the love between a young man and the King’s daughter. Hind Horn has different variants known as A, B, C, D, F, G, and H variants collected and edited by Francis James Child in The English and Scottish Popular Ballads. The tale begins in medias res with a dialogue from where we get some information about the main character that served the king for seven years and earned nothing. He is sent away by the king as he falls in love with his daughter and vice-versa. The young couple exchange gifts with one another. The man gives her a silver wand, while she gives him a golden ring with the assurance that he can count on her faith as long as the ring does not become pale. In a way here we can come across the motif of the pledge of honor all together, because the ring is a symbol of the given word.

As long as this ring keeps its hue
You’ll know I am a lover true
But when the ring turns pale and wan
You’ll know I love another man. 33

33 http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk
Since many years have passed, he felt nostalgic about his beloved one and he looked at the ring. He was warned of the trouble since the color of the ring had changed. Frightened that something happened to the princess, he set the sail and returned into his homeland. The first person he met was a beggar from whom he learned the news. The beggar told him that the king’s daughter is getting married. Besides here we encounter another important motif which is that of disguise. The young man asked the beggar to change clothes and to give him instructions how to get to the castle to meet the young lady. When he approaches the castle, he asks for a glass of wine. As the princess comes down to have a drink with the beggar, he drops the ring into the glass of wine. Once she saw the ring she started questioning where he got that, and he answers that she has given it to him. Even though, he was poor the princess wanted to marry him. Then, he revealed his true identity and finally they got married.

Walter R. Nelles believes that the ring does not change color because her thought has changed, or because she loves another man, or because she has lost her maidenhead. On the contrary, the change of color takes place because she is in danger; unless Horn comes to her rescue she will be forced into an obvious marriage.34 We strongly support this idea taking in consideration that the princess tries to get any information about her beloved one whereas he is alive or dead. That’s why Hind Horn hurries and sails to his homeland to meet the princess and marry her because he knew the consequences.

When it comes to the Albanian ballad Ymer Agë Ulqini (other variants Ago Ymeri or Ymer Aga) we can say that the motif of recognition of husband and wife in this song is closely linked with the motif of promise, in Albanian literature known as BESA. The newly-wed couple is bound to keep the promise of loyalty for a fixed period of time which is nine years and nine days. When he hears that the king sends him to a war in foreign lands, he urgently goes home to inform his parents and his beloved one, and to ask his wife how long she will wait for him. In the beginning she says nine days. He is saddened and says that Spain is not that near. At that moment, his wife promises that she is going to wait for him nine years and nine days, and he promises that he will come back within nine years and nine days. If he does not return in that period of time she is allowed to marry another man.

**Më thuaj sa do të më presësh ti mua moj vasha ime ?**

Do të të pres nëntë ditë
Nëntë ditë janë pak moj vashë,
udha ime është e gjatë dhe lufta është e gjatë,
se kjo luftë bëhet në dhe të largët.
Në më do siç të dua
të më presësh nëntë vjet e nëntë ditë.
Si të shkojnë të nëntë vjetë e të nëntë ditët e unë të mos ktchem
 ti vashë martohu e trashëgohu
se kështu qënka thënë, atëherë unë s’do të jem gjallë.35

Ymer Agë Ulqini fought in his first war, in his second fight he got wounded, and in his third fight he was captured and sent to a prison built with high walls where brave soldiers were kept. He had high moral so he ate, drank and sang with other soldier to motivate them. After a long period of almost nine years in prison, one night he dreamed as his house was ruined, his father has died, his mother lost her sight, his wife got married and his sister was left alone. From that moment he had no food, no drink and sang no song. This was unusual for him and king’s daughter wanted to know what happened to him. He told her the dream and asked here to help him go home. King’s daughter wanted something as assurance. He had nothing to give except his Albanian pledge of honor that he will return. Princess knew his character so she decided to help him. Ago Ymeri travels for 3 days and nights and when he arrives in Ulqini he discovers that his wife is being married. He stops the wedding guests and says that he has a message from Ymer Aga for the bride. When he approached the bride he asked whether she can recognize Ymer Aga. She explained that she had spent one night with him and the only thing that she can remember was a sign in his right arm. When he pulls his shirt she sees the mark and Ymer Age Ulqini’s true identity reveals. He takes his wife and goes home to meets his mother. Than he tells them that he has to go back because he had promised king’s daughter that he will be back. The king understands what has happened and decides to kill his daughter. Her only desire was to wait until the sunset because Ymer Aga promised to come back. The king did not believe and while they were preparing to cut


35 [https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ymer_Ag%C3%AB_Ulqini_(k%C3%ABng%C3%AB)](https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ymer_Ag%C3%AB_Ulqini_(k%C3%ABng%C3%AB)}
princesses head, Aga Ymeri returns. He saves her but saves himself and his friends too. Because of this, Spanish King decides to free Ymer Aga and his nine friends.

As we said in the beginning of this research paper, the recognition also occurs between brother-and-sister in ballads in English and Albanian language, such as Babylon and Gjon Pretika. The English variant Babylon is also known as American variant Bonny Farday, Scottish variant The Bonnie Banks O’Fordie, other variants are known as The Banished Man or as Duke of Perth’s Three Daughters. This ballad has different variants in all Scandinavian counties with few small differences.

Bonny Farday is a classical ballad about three sisters and a brother. As usual, this ballad starts in medias res with no information why the brother was banished and how he lost his connection with his family especially with his three sisters. The story is as follows, three sisters (Jury, Flow’r, Rosemary) went out in a field of flowers. While they were singing and pulling flowers, there comes an unknown boy presented as a robber who asks the first sister if will she marry him or otherwise she will die. She refuses, he kills her and buries her to make flowers company. He meets the second sister asks her to marry him, she refuses and she ends the same way as her sister. When it comes to the third and the youngest sister, when he shows in front of her she refuses and says that she is not going to marry a person that killed her sisters. She told him she has a brother and when he will understand what he has done to his sisters he will kill him too.

Among my kin my brother strong,
Jury, Flow’r and Rosemary,
Among my kin my brother strong,
Will kill you for this very wrong.
Jury, Flow’r and Rosemary.

What name, what name, what name, my fay?
Jury, Flow’r and Rosemary,
What name, what name, what name, my fay?
My brother’s name is Bonny Farday.
Jury, Flow’r and Rosemary.

In this ballad we see that the sister and brother recognition is realized as a result of their dialogue where he understands the catastrophic deed he has done and this ballad ends with fatal consequence. He commits a suicide and asks his sister to bury him together with his sisters.

Come dig my grave full wide and deep
Jury, Flow’r and Rosemary,
Come dig my grave full wide and deep
And place my sisters at my feet.
Jury, Flow’r and Rosemary.

Similar to English ballad Bonny Farday, in Albanian Literature is the traditional song Gjon Petrika. This is a painful song of a brother and sister recognition. One day the beautiful girl was singing in the mountains with the idea that nobody hears her; however, the entire army was listening to her beautiful voice. Some of the songs lines were kush asht trim e kush asht djal / per me nxan blegen ne mal (who is brave and who is the boy/ who can catch me in the mountains).

Gjon Petrika a young boy, ridiculed by the content of the song goes and catches her. He pulls her by her hair; then she says that she is not alone that she has a brother. Then the dialogue between them starts. He asks where was her brother and she answers that he is somewhere in the army. She tells that his name was Gjon and that he had six fingers on his hand and six toes on his foot. Then Gjon realizes that she is Fasil, his sister, and makes known that he is Gjon. They hug one another and die of grief. In the place where Gjon Petrika died quince germinated, and where Fasile died, pomegranate germinated. So, in this ballad we come across the motif of metamorphosis also.

37 For more information, look at The English and Scottish Popular Ballads. volume I, edited by Francis James Child in 1882, pg. 171-173
38 http://www.contemplator.com/child/farday.html  
40 http://www.forumishqiptar.com/threads/22696-Ballada-p%C3%A9Br-Rinjohjen
Similarities and differences between ballads Hind Horn and Ymer Agë Ulqini are as follows: first, husbands in both ballads served the king. Second, both of them were sent far away. Third, mutually husbands and wives exchanged gifts. In Hind Horn the symbol of recognition is the ring, whereas in Ymer Agë Ulqini the recognition symbol is the mark on Agas arm. Fourth, in English ballad the period of waiting is seven years while in the Albanian one the wife has to wait for nine years and nine days. Fifth and last, both traditional ballads have a happy ending where couples get married.

Sameness and contrasts between Bonny Farday and Gjon Petrika are: main, both ballads are about sister and brother recognition. Another, in both ballads girls refuse to marry, following with the recognition which in English song occurs as a result of a dialogue, while in the Albanian one the recognition occurs as a result of a dialogue between brother and sister, as well as six fingers and toes as symbol. Next, equally those songs have a tragic ending. In Bonny Farday, brother kills himself of pain that he killed two of his sisters, while in Gjon Petrika the brother and the sister die of grief that they could end up with incest between brother and sister.

In conclusion, this quick survey of selected English and the Albanian ballads points out some common features between all of these ballads with a special emphasis on the motif of recognition as one of the numerous motifs which characterize ballads in the English literature and ballad of the Albanian literature. With this paper we would like to help students and teachers of literature especially those who deal with comparative literature as field which builds bridges between two different literatures and nations as well.

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