
RESURRECTION, SACRIFICE AND INCEST IN THE ALBANIAN AND THE ENGLISH BALLADS: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract: Resurrection, sacrifice and incest as motifs can be found in the literatures of all nations. Even though, they are at the root of any creation of folk cultures, in each culture, these motifs appear with special features. The aim of this paper is through examples to show how these three motifs were treated in ballads of two different literatures, the English and the Albanian. Our objective is through a comparative approach to find the similarities and differences between them. We decided to analyze at least two ballads for each of the motives, coming from English and the Albanian literatures. The concrete research has three main steps: a) to show the particular characteristics of each ballad, b) to find the meeting points between them, and, c) to find what makes them different. After all the analysis we did we concluded that there are some differences between them and that they have some specific characteristics. But the most specific thing is that although these ballads belong to two different nations and cultures they have some meeting points. The main method of research will be the comparative method because we explore songs of two different literatures.

Keywords: resurrection, sacrifice, incest, ballads, English, Albanian

The religious elements - Christian or Islamic - that are encountered in some ballads or which have been introduced in the plot of the epic poems are not just random or casual. They have been introduced by a normal process of the external pressure of the social milieu through centuries. The presence of these elements is occasionally observable in both English and Albanian ballads. The first motif that we are going to investigate in this research paper is the myth of death as part of human existence and the resurrection is the myth of rebirth which stands for hope for an oath fulfillment or as a solution for a problem seen as unresolvable. The hero in the ballad is very important person for the family as well as the society. He is the one who raises from his grave when his people are most in need. When he dies he is reborn with the help of great supernatural powers, specific for each culture. Second important motif that this paper takes in consideration is that of human sacrifice. Sacrifice can take different connotations in combination with other words. However, we are interested in the dictionary meaning of sacrifice as a noun. According to the Oxford Dictionary, sacrifice is defined as *an act of slaughtering an animal or person or surrendering a possession as an offering to a deity*, and self-sacrifice is defined as *the giving up of one's own interests or wishes in order to help others or advance a cause*. (Oxford Dictionaries) The term self-sacrifice is more appropriate for our analysis since it has to do with human sacrifice for the sake of others. The third and the last motif of our study is that of incest which is closely interwoven with the motif of recognition and that of forbidden love. We are going to examine how incest is characterized and we will try to find out how the incest is realized in ballads.

The motif of resurrection is a very common motif in many legends and myths of diverse cultures and literatures around the world, especially in the literatures of nations that live in the Balkans. In the Albanian ballads the motif of rebirth is interconnected with the motif of the pledge of honor by smaller brother who dies but raises from his grave to bring his sister home as a fulfillment of a given word (called Besa in Albanian) to a dying mother. She has not seen her daughter from the time when she got married far away. In the Albanian literature there are several versions about resurrection such as Constantine and Doruntina (Dhoqina), Little Ali or Little Hysen, Halil Garria, Constantin's Besa and others.



Constantine and Doruntina by Ismail Lulani, 1987

The legend is as follows there was a mother of nine sons (somewhere twelve sons) who were brave heroes and a young daughter who was grow up but no one could dare to marry her. One day from very far away, there came a person who asked for the maiden's hand. None of brothers agreed except the youngest one who was Constantine. He who promised to his mother that he will bring Doruntina whenever she wanted. She got married but she had to travel for seven day to arrive at her husband's house. After she got married all her brothers went to a war and all of them died as martyrs. Then a sorrowful mother left alone started to ask where Constantine was to bring Doruntina (Dhoqina) back to her as he had promised because she could not face that loss alone:

Constantine, my son, where are you?

While alive, you made a promise,

This was what you said on parting:

'Be I dead or be I living

I'll return to you Dhoqina!'

Constantine, my son, where are you?

What now of your word of honour? (Zoto: 2006, p. 57-59)

Then Constantine woke up from the grave, his body did not decay only to keep the pledge of honor he made to his widow mother. The gravestone transformed to a black horse and the graveyard soil became a saddle. Then he passed seven mountainous ranges and met Dhoqina dancing. She was happy and surprised that she was seeing her brother after a long time and asked what has happened because no one visited her from the time she got married. He answered that her mother wanted to see her. Even though she had her own children she did not doubt at all and immediately agreed to go. While they were traveling Doruntina seized that something was wrong and started asking questions until they arrive home:

Constantine, oh dearest brother,

What has happened, what's the matter?

What's that heavy smell that's coming

Off your arms and mighty shoulders?"

"Smoke and powder from my rifle

For I've been at war, in battle."

"Constantine, oh dearest brother,

What is in your hair that's glaring,

Flaring that it almost blinds me?"

"Do not worry, my good sister,

Just the dust whirled from the highway."

"Constantine, oh dearest brother,

What's the matter with our house here,

Why has it been painted over,

Has perchance misfortune struck it?"

"Do not worry, fair Dhoqina,

It's just mother who's grown older.

She no longer liked the colours,

Thus she had the house repainted

Black as symbol of her aging,

Nothing more and nothing less," he

Told her at their destination. (Zoto: 2006, p. 57-59)

When they arrived at her mother's house he said to Doruntina to enter the house and that he was going to come later because he wanted to go to church. However, he went back to his grave while Doruntina knocked the door and called her mother to open it. Her mother astonished asked who brought her and Doruntina unknowingly answered that Constantine brought her. She did not know that all her brothers had died. The mother opened the door and that was the moment when the mother told her that Constantine and all other brothers were dead. Both of them died soon after they told to each other what had happened and that Constantine had raised from his grave only to fulfill his oath.

The ballad from the Scottish Border which treats the motif of resurrection of the dead brother is *Proud Lady Margaret*. This ballad is about the dead brother who revives from the sleep of death to teach her sister humbleness. This ballads has five version that you can read in Francis J. Child's collection *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. We are going to examine 47B. The story told in this ballads goes on between a very proud sister and a dead brother. One summer night the dead brother rises from the grave and comes to persuade her that what was she doing

was wrong. He meets her looking down the castle where she lived and the dialogue between them starts. In the beginning he said that he was interested in marrying her. He said if he can win her love he was ready to die for her but her response is that many man did the same in addition all of them died:

‘For here am I a courtier,
A courtier come to thee,
And if ye winna grant your love,
All for your sake I’ll dee.’
‘If that ye dee for me, sir knight,
Few for you will make meen;
For many gude lord’s done the same,
Their graves are growing green.’(Child, 1882-1898)

He felt sorry for the answers he had received from his sister. He says that he is a courteous knight but she does not believe him because of his clothes. The brother says that he comes from a family with pedigree and that he was ready to do for her what no one has done before. To test his wit she asked some riddles and according to the answers that he will give she would decide to marry him or not. Surprisingly he answered all of them. Therefore, Margaret decided to marry him but firstly she wanted to tell him that she also comes from a wealthy family since her father and her mother owned nine castles and she is the only heir. She told him that she had a brother but he went far away and she did not know whether he is alive or not. Then he reveals that he was his brother’s ghost:

‘If your father’s laird o nine castles,
Your mother lady ower three,
I am Willie your ae brother,
Was far beyond the sea.’
47B.22 ‘If ye be Willie, my ae brother,
As I doubt sair ye be,
But if it’s true ye tell me now,
This night I’ll gang wi thee
‘Ye’ve ower ill washen feet, Janet,
And ower ill washen hands,
And ower coarse robes on your body,
Alang wi me to gang.
47B.24 ‘The worms they are my bed-fellows,
And the cauld clay my sheet,
And the higher that the wind does blow,
The sounder I do sleep.
47B.25 ‘My body’s buried in Dumfermlin,
And far beyond the sea,
But day nor night nae rest coud get,
All for the pride o thee. (Child, 1882-1898)

He was there to teach her humility to leave off her pride because one day she will regret. It would be better to be in church with a wedding gown than to be mentioned in the morning prayers. He said that she was beautiful and wise but her pride goes beyond her wit. And if she did not want to go to hell than she had to pay attention to her behavior.

47B.30 ‘You’re straight and tall, handsome withall,
But your pride owergoes your wit,
But if ye do not your ways refrain,
In Pirie’s chair ye’ll sit.
47B.31 ‘In Pirie’s chair you’ll sit, I say,
The lowest seat o hell;
If ye do not amend your ways,
It’s there that ye must dwell.’
47B.32 Wi that he vanishd frae her sight,
Wi the twinkling o an eye;
Naething mair the lady saw

But the gloomy clouds and sky. (Child, 1882-1898)

At the end, we can say that the moral message of this ballad is that people usually are the victims of their own pride in love, in family member's relations, the relations with friends and so on. That's why many of them are left alone.

The second motif for analysis is that of sacrifice. There are many ballads which treat the theme of sacrifice, however this time we are going to take in consideration the motif of self-sacrifice. The ritual of human sacrifice, of walling up is used in the ballad about the foundations of castles and bridges, have found a wider spread in our territory (the Balkans). In our national literature you can read a very old and beautiful legend on immurement titled *Rozafa*.



Legjenda e Rozafës (Seci,2016)

The setting of this legend is Shkoder, one of the oldest cities in Albania. Three brothers decided to build a castle. They worked all the day, but during the night that castle fell down. One day as they were building the wall an old man greets them. They told him what happens during the night and ask him if he knows any solution. The old man tells them to immure a person if they wanted the castle to stand. The three brothers decided to wall up the one of their brides, the one who will bring the lunch for them tomorrow. The oldest brothers told their wives what was going on, but the youngest one was very sincere and he did not. Next day when lunch was ready the son's mother asked the oldest bride to send the lunch but she said she was sick, when she asked the second one she answered she was going to her mother for a visit, and finally she asked the youngest and the third bride. She responded that her son was very small and he needed her mother. However, the mother told Rozafa that they will take care about her son. When she arrived, the three brothers were working. When her husband saw his wife felt very sorry, and when he thought of his son his heart was burning inside. They told her that they have decided to sacrifice and wall up the person who was going to come at the lunch time. And here comes the climax of the ballad. She did not complain but she said to leave one eye, one hand, one foot and one breast outside because she thought about her little son:

I plead
 When you wall me
 Leave my right eye exposed
 Leave my right hand exposed
 Leave my right foot exposed
 For the sake of my newborn son
 So that when he starts crying
 Let me see him with one eye
 Let me caress him with one hand
 Let me feed him with one breast
 Let me rock his cradle with one foot ...

The Legend of Rozafa, the Woman Buried in the Foundation of a Castle (The Legend of Rozafa , 2015)

Building castles was not just building castles. With the castle of Rozafa started the building of the whole city of Shkodra. The castle was the symbol of strength and protection from external dangers. Sometimes there is a need for martyr and in this ballad that martyr was Rozafa.

From the research so far we cannot find any English Ballads that deals with the motif of walling up or immurement. However, there are numerous ballads with the same motif but from other literatures especially from nations that live in the Balkans.

The third and the last motif for research is the motif of incest. In ballads and folk songs the motif of incest is combined with that of recognition (sister-brother recognition). In the English ballads there are cases when incest is consummated and brings about tragic consequences as in the ballad *The Sheath and the Knife*. In such cases it is tainted by sin; otherwise, it comes about too late for the main heroes to prevent or avoid a disastrous outcome, such as incest or premeditated murder. Conversely, sometimes the act of incest is not consummated, because it often is interrupted by the sudden intervention of a bird who speaks, as in the Scottish "Bonny Farday" as well as in the Albanian ballad "Gjon Pretika". Furthermore, in 'Olympia and Vllastar' a black-winged bird flies round the tent of the young man warning that "brother is kissing his sister"; in the other ballad 'Ali Borxhalia' a dove nestles between the couple in bed and "doesn't allow them to snap (join)"; in 'Gjon Pretika' recognition of brother and sister occurs during an exchange of bitter words, and then brother and sister embrace each other and collapse weeping. In fact, the Albanian ballads totally exclude the possibility of the consummation of sex between brother and sister. This is primarily due to the patriarchal mentality of the Albanians which strictly forbids incest.

In conclusion, the treatment of the motifs of resurrection, sacrifice and incest in both Albanian and English ballads might imply that such ballads should have been composed at a similar phase of social and historical development. When we made a comparison of the motif of resurrection in the Albanian ballad *Constantine and Doruntina* and with the English ballad *Proud Lady Margaret* we realized that in both of them the dead brother rises from his grave-Constantine raises to fulfil his pledge of honor and the other brother raises to give a lesson to his very proud sister. In both of them the description of the brother's appearance is similar, one example is that they were wearing dusty clothes. Mutually, they return to their graves after they fulfil their aims.

When it comes to the second motif that of sacrifice or self-sacrifice in walling up in the construction of a castle, in Albanian literature we have the ballad of Rozafa, but there is not a pair of the same in English ballads. There are ballads with the same motif in other literatures, but not in English culture.

Finally, the motif of incest had already been forbidden by the collective morals in a society based on monogamy and couple marriage. But, unlike Scottish ballads where incest takes place, in the Albanian ballads incest is not executed, the marriage of brother and sister is not consumed – recognition in due time, at the right moment, or some mysterious force prevents it from taking place.

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