

# The Role of Metamorphosis in Anglo- Saxon Ballads, Albanian Ballads and Frontier Warrior Songs

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## Abstract

This article aims to point out the role of metamorphosis in Anglo- Saxon ballads, Albanian ballads and frontier warrior songs. The Anglo- Saxon ballads and Albanian frontier warrior songs and ballads came into existence a long time ago and they had a certain number of influences which as a result had their great impact on their creation, development and circumstances when and where they were composed. They were created as a consequence of some special historical, cultural and social development. It has to be emphasized that those influences were of different character and size such as human, non-human or divine ones and the compositions of songs or ballads were inspired and conditioned by a lot of circumstances. Metamorphosis is used to express that never- ending process and of course it is transforming. The changes are either positive or negative and consequently people may perceive different good or bad feelings. It is related to the magic world and the unrealistic one and sometimes it is a beautiful feeling when a human being transforms into a rose and showing a form of life continuation after death but in many cases it transforms into a non-desirable object or animal. It is a quick transformation from one thing to another and it may have either positive or negative effects on the audience.

**Keywords:** ballads, metamorphosis, epic songs, transformation, development.

## Introduction

In order to evaluate some of the motifs and realities expressed in Anglo-Saxon ballads and Albanian ballads and frontier warrior songs there are taken some examples of them and also seen their way of expressing in them in the first forms of early literature that was the oral one. The concept of metamorphosis is expressed in various ballads and frontier warrior songs and in many cases it is combined with together with some other motifs

The study aims at examining a number of ballads and frontier warrior songs Anglo-Saxon and Albanian ones and see the points they have in common or not. It tries to analyze and put into confrontation them bearing in mind the realities of each

nationality and culture. As they are explored they show the concept of peculiarities each culture has, too. The concept of metamorphosis is connected with a lot of conditions that were related with the time they were created, the social background of the people whom they were dedicated to and in addition the ones that created them and the possibilities that were given to the bards to express themselves.

### **Methodology**

This study aims to analyze comparatively the similarities and differences expressed in ballads and frontier warrior songs. There are highlighted and contrasted motifs in ballads where they are used and there is shown their common utilization in literary master pieces.

### **Objective of the study**

This study aims to investigate the relationship between the Anglo- Saxon ballads and Albanian ballads together with frontier warrior songs. It studies the socio - educative factors according to the model of early literature. The social period when they were created was an important influential factor that had its consequences in early periods of literature expressed orally and transmitted by word of mouth.

### **Research question**

What is the relationship between Anglo- Saxon ballads and Albanian ones and frontier warrior songs from the point of view of certain motifs such as metamorphosis?

### **Variables**

In order to check the relationship between the Anglo- Saxon ballads and Albanian ones and frontier warrior songs there are taken some analysis of some ballads or frontier warrior songs that were either in Albanian or Anglo- Saxon literature. The materials are taken from the written versions that were collected and printed in the following years by Fransis Child; The English and Scottish popular ballads and Albanian ballads and frontier warrior songs.

### **Discussion**

This study found that there are significant relationships between the Anglo- Saxon ballads and Albanian ones and frontier warrior songs. In the early literary times people called bards were motivated to create ballads and frontier warrior songs in order to evocate some qualities of the people that in some cases paid or rewarded them. There exists a significant relationship between them although they were not near from the geographic position. There is present the fact that they express a similarity in the way how metamorphosis is treated in them.

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historical, cultural and social development. It has to be emphasized that those influences were of different character and size such as human, non-human or divine ones and the compositions of songs or ballads were inspired and conditioned by a lot of circumstances. There were a lot of situations and things which helped their topic, course of story and character development and made them resistant to the long line of time. It is to be mentioned and also to be taken into consideration the period, place and also of great importance is the level of composers of ballads and songs. In many cases they were simple people coming either from the medium class of society or in the case of Albanian frontier warrior songs they were just people who were called bards, paid or rewarded for that job, who accompanied the heroes in their battles and whose main role was to transmit and echo the deeds of the warriors or other characters and subjects, in the majority of instances the good ones by the word of mouth, so important for the time when the written form was not developed yet. They had a really high value because they are the ones who glorified the heroes but they had the mission to transmit the first forms of literature, too. They were people who mostly were not so highly educated how to create them but they were guided by how their mind, reason and sometimes their heart perceived and they reacted towards them.

In the beginning they were transmitted and preserved orally being under the company of musical instruments in some cases, too, but later on there were some personalities such as monks and priests, publishers or writers who considered their importance and took the effort to initiate the process of their collection and documentation. With the passing of the time as they were collected different variants of the same ballad flowered sometimes with different names, places or characters but their essential main theme was in general the same in all of them. It is worth mentioning that the age when they were written was a completely different reality from the one we have nowadays and of course they had an utterly another mentality and psychology, education, development and character and as a result they were reflected on their topic, plot development and character description.

As a consequence of the above mentioned facts authors sought for different solutions to help their creation and ability to resist and not to be forgotten or disappeared and they were highly emotionally and spiritually transmitting a lot of feelings and internal states of being, too. Some of the characters which had the role of the antagonist had a huge mythological nature and the main heroes had to be really strong physically, convinced in their aim, dedicated and pure in their hearts in order to fight and win against them. Apart these in some other instances there were other means which were so helpful to the creators of these initial pieces of art. Some of them were figures of speech and themes metamorphosis, one of them, is used in poetry and prose and in many instances its use and presence was really powerful and useful to solve certain weird, difficult and complicated situations and conditions. Anglo- Saxon ballads and Albanian frontier warrior songs and ballads had a lot of important characters who in many cases were defined as the main heroes or heroines and as a result of being so

they were the ones who were usually worn with important qualities and influential skills such as their wisdom and strength. Ballads and songs endings or conclusions sometimes had a closing which was not successfully, so easily accepted or liked by the large audience. Maybe common people were not satisfied by the way how their favourite personages' fates and lives ended. Maybe they had in mind or wanted that their likeable personages had another solution and as in some ballads it was not possible to be achieved or allowed as long as the main characters were alive, it happened after their life cycle ended and they were realised when they were dead.. In the ballad 'Kostandini and Doruntina' one of the brothers gave his word of honour to allow his sister to get married but in a country that was far away from his and he promised that he would take his sister to see her family at a given time at a certain frequency. A misfortune happens he dies but his mom goes to his grave continues to ask to keep his promise and send his daughter because after the great disaster happened to their family all her 12 sons died. He arose from his grave and goes to take his sister and send her to meet her mother. When he goes to take her the tombstone turned into a stallion, while the graveyard soil became a saddle.

Constantine, my son, where are you?

What now for your word of honour?

Thus complained the widowed mother,

Longing for her distant daughter.

From the grave arose Constantine,

Tombstone turned into a stallion,

Graveyard soil became a saddle.<sup>1</sup>

Metamorphosis is that means whose function may be called as a regulator in that way as it gave a little hope of life continuation. It also gave the satisfaction that certain life decisions that were decided either by people's will or destiny were not the right ones when they were alive but after the their life cycle finished or their fate changed. Metamorphosis works hard to make wonders and whose function is to regulate some things that were impossible to be solved by the usual flow of events and so its presence intervenes to strongly regulate or compensate some of them. In some ballads it is also helped by magic transformations such as in the ballad 'Kamp Anyone' a girl called Isabel is transformed into a monster by her stepmother. This spell can be broken only if Kamp Anyone kisses her three times and Isabel tries to convince him by behaving in a way that he can do that. He offers her three magical things that will protect her such as a belt, a ring and a sword.

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<sup>1</sup> Balada Shqiptare, Vladimir Zoto, Tirana Dasara 2006,pg 57- 59. Translated from the Albanian by Robert Elsie

Metamorphosis is present also in 'The Laily Worm and the Machrel of the Sea'. Kidnapping is not only committed by men but by women too as in 'Alison Gross' a witch (the queen of the fairies) who wants to seduce a man and when she does not succeed she transforms him. So transformation is present in the ballad 'The laily worm and the Machrel of the sea' where a young boy is transformed into a worm by his stepmother and his sister into a mackerel.

I was but seven year auld  
When my mither she did die  
My father married the ae warst woman  
The warld did ever see.  
For she has made me the laily worm,  
That lies at the fit o the tree,  
An my sister Masery she's made  
The machrel of the sea.<sup>1</sup>

It may be combined with the magic as in 'The Twa Magicians'.

She turnd herself into an eel,  
To swim into yon burn,  
And he a speckled trout,  
To gie the eel a turn.<sup>2</sup>

There are other motifs that accompany transformation such as continuation of human life even after death 'Biseda e Halilit me vdekjen- The talk of Halil with death', 'Varri i trazuar- The Unquiet Grave'. There are transformation from human beings to birds or flowers. There is the case of metamorphosis of Agë Hasan Aga's sister who in the end of the ballad after her brother dies turns into a cuckoo because she cannot bear the fact that he died and she prays God to transform her into a cuckoo. Another example would be that of the 'Snake boy'. A couple who did not have children for a long time prayed God so that they could become parents like all the other couples and their prayers were heard and fulfilled because after 9 months there was born their sun but he was not born like the other newborn babies but like a snake. Years pass and the snake asks his family to get married and his desire was realized. After his marriage his mother asks her daughter-in-law how can she bear the fact to sleep with a snake and she stays awake all night to see him at night while he was asleep. During

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<sup>1</sup> Fransis Child, The English and Scottish Popular ballads, volume 1 pg 315 Dover Publications, New York 1965

<sup>2</sup> Fransis Child, The English and Scottish Popular ballads, volume 1 pg 400 Dover Publications, New York 1965

the night he transformed into a handsome young man and his mother sees him transforming into a handsome young man while he takes off his shirt or skin. The snake boy told his mother that he had to keep that snake skin for 6 other years and then turn into normality as a human being but he unfortunately would die because his mother burned the snake skin. Barbara Allan is another example of metamorphosis. She is a young maid, who is buried in the same church with her beloved. Their love may continue after their death because as long as they were alive they could not be together as a couple because she not answer back his love. It is said that a briar grows from her grave while a rose from his. Other examples would be 'The three ravens', 'The twa corbies'. Supernatural and magic are other motifs and also means that accompany transformation and they work together to give a better understanding of the ballads. The idea of life continuation after death can be seen even in this ballad where a slain knight is lying somewhere on the ground and scavenger birds converse with one another about eating him but he is guarded by his hawk and hound and in the end a fallow doe comes to his body kisses his wounds and bears him away and so the ravens cannot eat him. Misfortune and death accompanies in many cases the main characters. They either cannot bear or resist death and they are transformed into cuckoo with their request so they can keep crying all the time or they may also be changed into stones and cannot say anything but accept the reality how it is.

Downe there comes a fallow *doe*,  
As great with yong as she might goe.  
She lift up his bloody hed,  
And kist his wounds that were so red <sup>1</sup>

In the ballad "The Unquiet Grave" the talk that the dead has with the living ones is similar with 'Halili në varr- Halil in the tomb'. In some songs in 'Muji and Halili Cycle' there are some fairies who have such a bad personality that if people are walking in their mountains, in the place where they stay and they happen to forget and continue speaking where and when they are sleeping they get up in a bad mood and as a punishment they transform people into stones. Even the main character in the Albanian frontier warrior songs Muj is transformed from a fellow that was weak into a strong one by just drinking milk given by the fairies as a reward of taking care of their children while they were away.

As it is seen from all the examples metamorphosis was a good means in the hand of the bards or people who sang and recited them. They were there to help the authors solve certain situations that were impossible to be in natural situations.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph de Roche, The Heath Introduction to Poetry, D.C Heath and Company, Lexington, Massachusetts, Toronto, 1988 The Three Ravens, pg 39

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## Conclusion

In conclusion naturally metamorphosis in literature is related with the magic but it sometimes may be a born deformity and in order to cease its kind of curse the person has to wait for a certain number of years until it ends. As people are transformed into a non- desirable objects or animals they have to fulfill some conditions so that they can turn back to normality. Change can be for a positive or negative ideas, people's desires or tricks. Metamorphosis is commonly found in old literature and this helps understand their reality. Transformation may occur to simple people but also to those of high social level. Its help is to unite a couple but also to isolate them in their unrealised life as long as they were alive. The main heroes or heroines had different responsibilities and their sacrifice is a national, social or family duty that made family members' personality sacrifice and overcome their desires although they wanted to have a personal life full of feelings and emotions and the main themes of that time were based on bravery, heroism, honour and duty and maybe their special loyalty. As a result metamorphosis helped literature to fulfill some duties in some cases while in other ones it was a process of life continuation.

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