

The main figures of speech used in Albanian and Anglo-Saxon epic songs and ballads

PhD (C.) Danela Bala- Kraja
University of Shkodra

Abstract

When we speak about ballads we have to take into consideration the fact that they were written a long time ago and were mainly composed by simple people to report events from their lifespan and in some instances their intention was to commemorate their different important events as they were witnessing them. Ballads and epic songs were full of emotions as they transmitted information and feelings not only about people's lives in verses but they also introduced important historical events such as battles or duels to protect their own boundaries, personal and family honour but they were also dedicated to their mothers, fathers, siblings, sons, daughters, boyfriends or girlfriends and to simple aspects of life. The mental development was different from the one we have today and consequently that reality was reflected even in the style or figures of speech of ballads or epic songs that have arrived till nowadays in the form they were originally written not being elaborated.

Keywords: Figure, Albanian, Anglo-Saxon, songs.

Introduction

Ballads and epic songs are usually composed in a simple style at the beginning which goes on with a rising one as they lay out the nature of characters' descriptions. Some of the main figures of speech displayed in them are: epithet, metaphor, anaphora, hyperbole, alliteration, simile, irony, personification and so on.

As above mentioned their style is simple and that simplicity is demonstrated in their plot elaboration which in many cases is directly mentioned in the title or the first beginning verses. This can be seen in the Albanian epic song 'Halili mas deket' 'Halil after death' or the Anglo-Saxon ballad 'The unquiet grave'. Bards when composed them took the figures of speech by their concrete, natural environment, different natural phenomena, mountains, forests, rivers, weather, sun and moon observations that helped to create better delineation, more vivid descriptions of ideas, stories and to be nearer to the listener or reader.

One of the most common and frequently used figure of speech is epithet which is found in several Anglo-Saxon ballads. They are short, easy to understand but very usable and they are often found ready in the form of clichés and are mainly used in ballads such 'the green grass', 'the salt sea' 'the shadowy hills' horses are described as 'milk- white', 'berry- brown' lips as 'rosy' or 'rugby- red', corpses and tombs are 'clay- cold', beds like that of Barbara Allen 'soft and narrow'. Moreover, they fulfill the sentence meaning and one of the above mentioned epithets is illustrated in the ballad in the verses from 'Lord Lovel':

He order'd the grave to be open'd awide,
And the shroud to be turn'd around;

And then he kiss'd her *clay cold* cheeks,
Till the tears came trickling down, down, down
The epithet 'clay cold' is also found in 'The Unquiet Grave'.
You crave one kiss of my *clay-cold* lips;
But my breath smells earthly strong (Quiller-Couch, 2014);

Another important and recurrently used figure of speech is hyperbole which is a figurative expression that is used quite often in 'The wedding of Halil' or 'Beowulf'. In fact they were written in a period they had different notions and one of them was the time and for instance the concept of years was shorter. It seemed the bards were so proud of them and therefore sometimes they intentionally exaggerated the portrayals' descriptions and their deeds making them braver, more lovable in front of readers and their capacities were higher than common people. The bards used it to give a stronger impact and to describe better their personages accompanied by exclamatory sentences that make a closer connection with the listeners and simple people. Ballads and epic songs were kind of informing people because that was the only mean of information. Albanian epic songs such 'Martesa e Mujit' 'The marriage of Gjeto Basho Muji', 'Muji e Behuri' 'Muji and Behuri' are full of hyperboles.

The hyperbole used in the epic lay 'Beowulf' is very expressive and powerful.

And moreover, I have heard seafarers say-
men who have carried rich gifts to the Geats
as a mark of my esteem- *that in the grasp
of his hand that man renowned in battle
has the might of thirty men* (Heaney, 2000).

The main heroes' hyperbolic gestures in the frontier warrior songs and epic lays were not created aimlessly, their heroes continuously survived in duels or battles with people or other monstrous creatures having their superpowers which they used for good deeds. They represent the real phenomena treatment based on the critical thinking development of a certain historic period of time.

The heroic battles created in a mythological hyperbolized plan are representing the reality of that time that was transmitted as a legend. The environment they were created is also important because it gives a better concept owing to the fact they are described as huge creatures that dry fountains when they drink water or when they move or ride horses they need very big fields that go in good proportion with their bodies, struggling weapons as they are so huge and powerful that they are able to carry out easily very big rocks.

Furthermore Albanian and Anglo – Saxon epic songs are characterized by the use of some formulas that are represented in the form of clichés which were ready and easy for their creators to be used. Many of the Albanian stanzas begin with these kinds of lines that are directed to God and by the ending they are usually defined they use the same lines that express their wish to agree with what has happened and the desire to be helped by God and to be under his protection and so echoing the heroic deeds of the frontier warriors to be remembered and not forgotten for a long period of time. So they can be found in 'Martesa e Mujit' 'The marriage of Gjeto Basho Muji', 'Fuqia e Mujit' 'Muji's strength', 'Omeri i Ri' 'Young Omer'

So the lines that are in 'Fuqia e Mujit' - 'Mujo's strength':

Lum e lum për t'madhin zot,
Nu' jem' kanë e zoti na ka dhanë!

are also cliché lines are also used in the beginning of the epic poem 'Omeri i Ri' 'Young Omer':

Lum e lum për t'Lumin Zot.
Nu' jemë kanë e Zoti na ka dhanë!

.....
Kështu m'kan thanë, se atje nuk jam kanë (Palaj, 2005).

The formulas do not stand alone because they are accompanied by the refrain repetition which is in nearly every stanza and is used not only for the purpose of helping bards to remember or memorize better the story dedicated to heroes or ballads whose plots are about simple people's lives but also for other purposes such as to create an ironic environment for instance 'The Cruel Mother' although there plot is about an inhuman act of murder contrary to the role of mother that is usually to protect especially her children, nature goes on with life describing how the flowers were flourishing as nothing had happened.

She sat down below a thorn,
Fine flowers in the valley,
And there she has her sweet babe born
And the green leaves they grow rarely.
"Smile na sae sweet, my bonny babe, "
Fine flowers in the valley,
And ye smile sea sweet, ye'll smile me dead,
And the green leaves they grow rarely (Kennedy, 1987).

The epic refrain which is often used by Albanian and Anglo- Saxon bards as well has some other intentions as well. They repeat some verses in different parts of the song to make a connection between stanzas and to make the lines livelier, to make listeners or readers more curious by creating suspense. This can be seen in the stanzas of 'Rozafa' legend or 'Lord Randal'.

"And what did she give you, Lord Randal, my son?
And what did she give you, my handsome young man?"

.....
" And what gat your leavins, Lord Randal, my son?
And what gat your leavins, my young man? (De Roche, 1988)

Description is another important device used in ballads and epic songs which is used not only to describe the main personages but also other seemingly secondary particular features about their clothes, horses, swords, knives and palaces. They bear nearly the same importance as their owners because they are near them all the time not only to help them when combatting but to create a better idea of their capacities, too. So a queen dresses in silk that is described as 'grass green silk' or leather as 'Spanish leather'. Descriptions as the one mentioned are sometimes naive because the bards were maybe peasants that described how they perceived the rich people's lives. This may be one of the reasons why the ladies' skin is described as milk- white, lily- white, or snow- white. In Albanian ballads and epic songs descriptions usually are simpler because they are describing peoples' towers which are simple but there are also instances when there is mentioned for example gold as in 'The marriage of Gjeto Basho Muji'. One of the most beautiful, impressive descriptions is the portrayal of Tanusha in 'The marriage of Halil'. The bards were inspired by the alpine pastures and mountains to describe her beauty so her eye with cherries or her face with the

red apples in the trees.

Gja ma t'mir s'shef njeri nën ket diell!

Vetulla e saj ndrejt si fiskaja

Shteku i ballit si shteku i malit,

Kur merr hana me pranue,

Syni i saj si kokrra e qershis,

Ftyra e saj si kuqet molla n'degë... (Palaj, 2005)

A perfect and gentle description of the girls' beauty is also given in the Scottish ballad 'Bessi Bell.'

Bessie's hair's like a lint-tap,

She smiles like a May mornin',

When Phoebus strats frae Thetis' lap,

The hills wi' rays adornin',

White is her neck, soft is her hand,

Her waist and feet fu' gently,

Wi' ilka grace she can command,

Her lips, O vow! They're dainty (Quiller-Couch, 2014);

The description is used not only with the purpose to describe girls' or women's beauty but also the battles, duels of the heroes, places where they live, feelings so in general their life and everything that is related to it.

There are other important figures of speech whose effects and power can be felt when listening or reading ballads and epic songs such as: anaphora, assonance, alliteration and onomatopoeia.

Alliteration is used to connect better the thought as well and that is followed by caesura by repeating the same sound to make it reach a higher and more beautiful musical rhyme. The following lines are a good illustration to show their connection.

Listen!

The fame of Danish kings

In *days* gone by the *daring* feats

Worked by those heroes are all known to us.

A good example of alliteration can be found in 'Martesa e Halilit' 'The marriage of Halil'as well.

"Kah kam vlla e kah kam motër

deksha pra, n'u martosha" (Palaj, 2005)

Anaphora is another device that is often used because it gives a special tone and timbre to the verses and emphasizing them more. It is the repetition at the beginning of verses of one word or some words so that the theme and motifs are better connected with the characters and are transmitted easier and better to the listeners or reader and makes that they will look forward to going on with the verses to learn what has happened. Here are some lines from 'Gjergj Elez Alia' that show how they are connected:

I a lan varrat me ujt e gurrës nand-vjeçe,

I a lanë varrat me ata lott e syve;

Dy copash zemra e djalit iu ka da,

Dy sytë në ballë motrës ia ka lshue,

Dy rigë lot për faqe i kanë shkue,

Dy fjalë kullës djali ia ka fjakrue.

This device creates special impressions in the ballad: 'There is a lady sweet and kind':

Her gesture, motion and her smiles,

Her wit, her voice, my heart beguiles

Epiphora is another device which consists of using the same word or word at the end of every line and it is used to create a special environment and that repetition is used to fix better a certain topic, theme or motif.

Assonance together with consonance are powerful devices to help the verse structure because when they are used together they create the internal rime of the verse. So assonance is the use of the same vowels in the verse such as 'lake and fate' while consonance can be found at the end of the verses where consonants are the same while vowels differ such as *bill-ball, born- burn*. There are also the visual rhymes that are used such as *word -lord, blood - food- good*.

Ballads and epic songs continue to be beautiful because of the mission, originality, the language, themes and motifs they have. They are special because they have a rich vocabulary that corresponds to the environment they were created by using different figures of speech, their original style, techniques and colours which make easier and more beautiful for us to understand that period of time and how the events happened and how people reacted in different situations. They help to pass easily from one event to the other without creating monotony when there are being described special phenomena. The songs grow with their presence and become more dynamic and colourful by describing different phenomena. They begin with setting the scene, the background and then go on with revolts or duels passing to the happiness they have when they celebrate a victory.

The figures of speech are connected to the theme and its point of view and so nowadays figures of speech cannot be the same but they are excellent example of tradition and if we want to go on creating other masterpieces we must follow in their steps.

References

- Child Fransis James, 'The Scottish and English popular songs', Boston: Little, Brown and company, 1857 .
- De Roche Joseph 1988 The heath Introduction to poetry, Massachusetts/ Toronto D. C. Heath and Company, Lexington.
- Elsie, Robert and Mathie Janice: (2004): Songs of the Frontier Warriors, Wauconda, Illinois: Bolchazy Corducce Publishers.Inc.
- Garnett, James M.,(1912) Beowulf Boston, Ginn & Company.
- Heaney, Seamus: (2000) A new verse Translation, Bilingual edition, New York, Farrar Straut and Giroux.
- Palaj Bernardin, Kurti Donat, (2005), Eposi i kreshnikeve dhe balada, Tiranë, Plejad.
- Quiller-Couch Arthur 2014 The Oxford book of ballads, Oxford at the Clarendon Press.
- Zoto, Vladimir (2006) Balada shqiptare, Tiranë, Dasara.