

## Two folktales (Vampire beings in Greek folktales)

Aggeliki VELISSARIOU<sup>1</sup>

*This paper attempts to elaborate how the vampire theme is conceptualized in Greek folktales. It's a case study of the Greek folk tales: "Gelloudi" and "The Lamia bride" found in the compilation Paramythokores (2002). The folktale complies with a strict formulaic style of oral narration and the most time-resilient elements of storytelling are the motifs that create the story. We find similar or echoing motifs in folktales globally; some motifs are darker than others, enhancing the agony and thrill of storytelling. Concerning the Greek folktale, the research led to the classification of six dark motifs. Bloodsucking creatures such as Strigla (in Latin: Strigula, Strix), Gello (gelloudi) and Lamia are found in the dark motif of the supernatural. The tales, in this case study, are horror stories, in a sense, but they evolve in a broad form of narration, depriving the reader of gruesome details and delivering a cathartic ending. The vampire theme is not dominating in the first folktale as a result of the combination of three folktale types, whereas the second one focuses solely on this theme. In both cases the creatures are female attacking animals, men and community, symbolizing the heavy price of the birth of a girl in the family, as it was perceived in these traditional communities. A baby girl and a new bride, attack the world of men. They are powerful and feared, they are 'horse-eaters' symbolizing the threat of depriving the established status for men, first by eating their horse and then by eating them.*

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### 1. Introduction/The Greek Vampire in legends and folktales

Dark motifs traveled through time into modern forms of storytelling both in oral and written literature. In written literature they formed a genre known as 'gothic fiction' which became very popular especially in the 19th century mainly in England and the USA (Haggerty 1989). It's a literary genre that combined the classic romanticism novel and the new established ideas about nature through the

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<sup>1</sup> Kindergarten teacher, M.S. in "Cultural Studies and Children's Learning Environments" from AUTH (Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki), [a\\_velissariou@yahoo.com](mailto:a_velissariou@yahoo.com)

physiocratic theory, wrapped in a thrilling and full of dark suspense plot (Haggerty 1989, 1-2). Main characteristics are a dreamlike world, familiar settings – urban and countryside – bringing out unfamiliar and familiar terrors, the forces of nature are overwhelming and have strong impact on the psych, the presence of the supernatural, a macabre and morbid atmosphere creating a state of psychological tension, even madness, for the characters (Haggerty 1989). It is in these realms that we find once again folklore entities, such as vampires, coming back to life in a new elaborate, stylish and personalized form through each writer's perspective. This era gave us fiction masterpieces such as *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, also the important works by E. T. A. Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Dickens, just to name a few.

In Greece, due to the particular historical conditions at the time, namely the Ottoman occupation and the upcoming revolution of the Greeks in 1821, fiction literature at that time was in hibernation. The newly established country from 1830 and on, had many political, economic and practical issues to solve, all related to the shaping of a new Greek identity. This subject is vast, multifaceted and will not be further presented in this paper. However, concerning the dark motifs thriving at that time in popular oral narrations, they remained in the realm of myths and oral compositions, as a characteristic sign of the provincial mentality, still believing in superstition; whereas, the emerging urban culture, considered itself too sophisticated to believe in such stories. So, by the 1840's there is a distinct rotation towards the development of an urban, educated upper class and a lower – mainly agricultural – class, which actually speaks in different linguistic idioms than the upper class. It was not until 1880 and due to the influence of Nikolaos Politis, historian and folklore researcher, when an acknowledgment and interest towards laic culture began to develop among writers and researchers<sup>2</sup>.

Because of these circumstances, themes like 'the vampire' appear in a different aspect in comparison with the western gothic aspect. The vampire characteristic derives from Greek myths embodied in folk legends with creatures like Strix, Empousa, Gello (gelloudi) and Lamia. According to Kakridis (1986), Ekati is a fierce Titan of the night, her signature object is a burning torch, she rules the underworld, the moon and she's feared and respected by humans; in folklore she's linked to witchcraft. One of the creatures she sets upon humans is Empousa, to hunt and feed on babies and children. Gello, is also a type of Empousa; she was a young woman who died as young virgin and ever since she comes back attacking newborn or young children and women in labor or in post labor period. In folklore

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<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is based on the analysis provided by Kiriakidou-Nestoros (1978), in the reference book: *Theory of Greek Ethnography. A critical analysis* (original title in Greek, provided here is the author's translation).

'gelloudia' were considered synonymous to the Stryggai/Strix (Greek: *σπίγγαι, Στρῦγγαι*) and they were described as beings that flew nocturnally, slipped unhindered into houses even when windows and doors were barred, and strangled infants<sup>3</sup>. Lamia was a mythical creature, half woman, half serpent, she ate children, new mothers but was also capable of transforming into a beautiful woman in order to seduce young men and suck their blood<sup>4</sup>.

These creatures have a wide spread of folklore stories all over Greece, according to the documentation of Politis in *Traditions*<sup>5</sup> (*Vol. A'*) (repress 1994, 423-450). The Greek vampire (*vrykolakas*) appears in many folklore legends and stories, but is quite different from Dracula, as we know him. The origin of the Greek vampire according to Politis (1994) documentation, is linked to Greek burial customs and it's a direct result of a person not being buried with the proper ritual or a person having suffered a cruel or unjust death, so he comes back as a vampire to get revenge. Sometimes though, a dead man comes back as a vampire for no apparent reason or just because they want to continue their life. Often, vampirism is seen as punishment from God due to a sinful life. In some legends vampires attack and eat the living, in others they merely scare and annoy them, in others they cause damages to the household. They are also seen as carriers of disease, especially the plague, they breathe fire, they can transform into fire, shadow and animals. There is also a small category of children, even babies, turned vampires that died before being baptized. Generally, all these creatures roam about during the night, so, by day, as they lie vulnerable in their graves, they are dug up and the body is destroyed by puncture, burning, boiling with vinegar, exorcism, slashing, being chopped in pieces or they are re-located on islands because they cannot cross salt water.

These vampires didn't find their place in magic folktales. One could argue that the Greek vampire, being linked to death and burial customs, to sin and the Orthodox religion, has no place as a creature of magic. If, according to legends, in order to become a vampire, one must first die, the folktale does not perceive death, sin or injustice in the same way as legends. According to Luthi (2011), death in magic folktales exists as the final punishment of the antagonist or it is temporary and the deceased comes back to life. Sin is never called upon, because things just happen with no explanation (somebody is good or bad, not sinful) and the Orthodox Church never comes to the rescue. On the other hand, Lamia, Strix and 'gelloudi' fit the characteristics of magical folktale creatures, because *they are*, they exist without reasoning. They are mythical, their origins are lost in time like

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<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gello>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theogonia.gr/onta/ll/lamia.htm>

<sup>5</sup> The original title is in Greek, provided here is the author's translation.

dragons, goblins, fairies, giants and others alike. So, they are often portrayed as the villains in a folktale, and this is the case of the two tales analyzed in this case study: *Gelloudi* and *The Lamia Bride*, found in the compilation *Paramythokores* (2002).

## 2. Defining the Greek folktale

In the Greek language the word *παραμύθια* /paramithia/ is commonly used for folktales and fairytales and it derives from the verb *παραμυθούμαι* /paramithume/ which means 'to encourage, to comfort, to soothe, to give advice.' The word itself as a noun, *παραμύθι* /paramithi/, means 'encouragement, consolation' and that is exactly what it provided for its audience (Xatzitaki-Kapsomenou 2002, 41). Greek folktales thrived during the 400 years of Ottoman occupation, in the many villages that existed across, what is now, modern Greece. They were a means of keeping alive the Greek myths, traditions, beliefs, orthodox religion and Greek heritage in general. They were oral narrations past down by gifted self-taught story tellers within the agricultural and stock-farming communities (Audikos 1994, 32). According to Kanatsouli (2007) these stories were not meant for children's ears, but 'childhood' until the 1900s was not conceived as a significant period in a person's life, rather than an unavoidable stage towards adulthood. As a consequence, children were exposed alongside adults in all kinds of folktales, when the community gathered in the long and idle winter nights to warm up and be entertained by the local storyteller.

These oral compositions emerge from the collective experience of the laic culture (Kanatsouli 2007) and according to Milman Perry (Kiriakidou-Nestoros 1978, 174), only oral composition can be truly collective. To elaborate on this concept, 'collectiveness' doesn't mean 'all together' in the sense that everybody adds a chip of narration and a story comes out, this was a task meant for the story tellers only. Wesselki and von Sydow (Kiriakidou-Nestoros 1978, 137) detect active and passive agents of laic culture; the task of preserving and passing on traditions falls upon the active agents. Such agents were the gifted storytellers who had a deep knowledge of their heritage, they were familiar with the 'codes' of the folktale and were able to adapt, enrich and alter them according to the geographical area, the circumstances of narration and the audience's feedback. That is why we have so many variations on each folk tale type spread across all regions of Greece.

As a genre and according to the classification of Nikolaos Politis in the first issue of his periodical *Laografia* (1909) (in Loukatos 1992, 21), folktales are placed in the first of the two categories in which he divides Greek folklore in general. So,

the first category is 'Monuments of oral literature' such as songs, anecdotes, myths, legends, blessings and of course folk tales. The second category is 'Traditional acts' such as architecture, clothing, recipes, birth, marriage, death, worship, laic law, medicine, oracles, witchcraft, spells, games, music and so on. Since folktales were scientifically engulfed as part of each country's folklore tradition, they've been documented, recorded and published several times by profound scholars, thus allowing further research and comparative analysis. The rich body of folktales in Greece and generally in the world, led scholars to view this aspect of the laic heritage as autonomous folk literature that has been established as a specific artistic genre (Audikos 1994).

### 3. The genre characteristics of folk tales

Folktales are imaginary narratives that are conceived as such by the audience, whereas legends, for example, were conceived as real events (Loukatos 1992, 151). According to Bolte-Povlika (in Audikos 1994, 29) "folktales are a narration created by poetic fantasy, inspired especially from the magical [...] where the rules of everyday life don't apply but it is perceived as telling the truth by the audience."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, folktales are drawn both by forces of conservation and change at the same time. They are open to change because they travel in people's 'baggage's' and in that process they are molded with new/different narrations, altering the stories either by enrichment, as local elements are incorporated, or reduction, as former elements are replaced and forgotten (Audikos 1994, Kanatsouli 2007, Luthi 2011). On the other hand, they show an outstanding resilience to morphological change, maintaining their genre characteristics, which are presented using the method of analysis provided by the theory of 'New Criticism' (Eagleton 1996). Folktales, according to Aarne-Thompson<sup>7</sup> (in Aggelopoulou and Brouskou 1994, 12) are classified in 4 categories: animal tales, ordinary/magic tales, jokes/anecdotes and formula tales. This case study features two magic tales and these are the literary characteristics of this category.

#### 3.1. Theme

Magic tales are about characters performing tasks in a world where the natural and supernatural meet, creating the realm of fairytales. The surroundings are not

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<sup>6</sup> This quote is the author's translation.

<sup>7</sup> Book of reference: *The Types of Folktale. A classification and bibliography*. 1961 (English edition of the work by Antti Aarnes translated and enlarged by Stith Thompson).

surreal, it's business as usual for the personas living out their adventures by tangling dragons, witches, beasts, evil parents, mothers, mothers in law, talking animals, talking objects or even the Devil himself. The protagonist is usually poor yet honest, the smallest of the siblings or the only child, the offspring of kings in disguise, a small or disabled/deformed child, generally it's always the underdog that thrives. There is a main antagonist, magic helpers or suspicious looking characters pretending to be helpers and a task to be carried out by 'the one' (Audikos 1994; Luthi 2011).

### **3.2. Structure**

The narration has "clarity, stability, precision" (Luthi 2011, 112) and the unfolding of the events is linear on the principle of opposite values. There is a status quo/a place where an event occurs throwing off the balance, so a problem, a need, a disequilibrium is created. The protagonist sets off to make it right and the narration concludes with the success of the endeavor and a new happy situation, usually a marriage, is taking place (Luthi 2011).

### **3.3. Timeframe**

Time is not realistic or significant for the narrative, it is relevant and merely symbolic. Sleeping Beauty slept for 100 years, a character could walk for 40 days and 40 nights or simply cross mountains and seas in no time at all. No one gets old, tired or ill -unless this works for the plot- and we never know exactly when 'Once upon a time' is set. Everything and everyone in the folktale are static (Luthi, 2011, 143). The duration of events is clearly symbolic in relation to the importance of the events narrated.

### **3.4. Stylistic characteristics**

Every storyteller narrated in his/her regional dialect. A vivid, fluent and uninterrupted narration was of most importance to catch the attention of the audience. The narration became to life through the use of dialogical parts, pausing at the right moments allowing both storyteller and audience to recruit their thoughts and sometimes people commented on the story. The length of the story could be adjusted by including or excluding episodes from the narrative and by the rhythm of narration. The humor, the violence and the profanity could also be adjusted by the storyteller, considering the composition of the audience and the momentum (Anagnostopoulos 1997, 20-42).

### 3.5. Morphologic characteristics

The stability and precision of storytelling relies mainly on the use of formulaic features, persistent in every folktale such as the use of motifs, the three repetitions of an episode (usually when performing a task, where the first two tries fail and the third succeeds. It's an example of the opposite values). The magical/symbolic number 3 and its derivatives are ever present, also 40 and 7. The storytellers always recite formulaic intros and outros to signify for the audience that they are entering the world of misbelief and at the end to signify the departing from the imaginary world back to the real one (Luthi 2011). The narration itself is broad, lacking of stylistic details, consisting mainly of verbs, nouns and blunt adjectives, eg. a high mountain, a wide sea, a beautiful daughter, a poor man, an old woman. It's the storyteller's wise way of leaving creative gaps, allows the audience to fill in the narrative with their imagination and at the same time is giving him/her creative freedom. The characters are sketched out like paper cuts, flat and consistent in their primary characteristics (Audikos 1994) e.g. the protagonist will not lose faith or be frightened or disappointed, he will take action all way through the narrative. Occasionally there are plot twists and inversions, like an antagonist becoming a helper, evil beautiful women turning good, evil mothers, fathers, brothers or sisters being portrayed as villains.

Lastly the folktale's aesthetic is established on borderline/absolute and opposite values (Luthi 2011), there are no grey areas concerning trade characteristic, only firm adjectives (good/bad, rich/poor, beautiful/ugly, failure/victory, punishment/reward) and no second thoughts concerning actions (what must be done, is always done). The pairing of opposite acceptations is a crucial semiotic function by which we understand and make sense of the world. The folktale utilizes this function instinctively, in order to be clear, understandable and at the same time stint on the narrative (Xatzitaki-Kapsomenou 2001, 101). Opposites represent the way folktales perceive the reality within them, as highly idealized, stylized, strictly structured and absolute. Opposite notions complement each other integrating the meaning and presenting something whole, perfect in a way (Luthi 2011).

### 3.6. Plot

The plot is driven by the actions of the characters, whose feelings are not important for the narrative (Luthi 2011, Xatzitaki-Kapsomenou 2002). According to Dawkins (in Xatzitaki-Kapsomenou 2002, 108) the plot, meaning the narrative, should be distinguished from the episodes, through which the narrative unfolds.

### 3.7. (The significance of) Motifs

Each episode entails several motifs, which according to Thompson (in Xatzitaki-Kapsomenou 2002, 107) are the smallest, independent elements found in folktales. They are time resilient, they are stereotypic in their form, they have numerous and similar variations in neighboring folklore traditions echoing each other and they can be found in all kinds of oral literature such as folktale, folksongs and poems (Meraklis 1993; Audikos 1994). The literary function of motifs is to introduce, bring out and, in the end, create the theme, the plot and the meaning of the tale (Luthi, 2011). Motifs are the means introducing magic, wonder, thrill, fear, agony and katharsis in the narrative.

Many scholars pointed out the significance of motifs in the weaving of the stories, but the Finnish historic-geographic method of folklore studies was developed around the motifs in the tales, rather than the tales themselves. The founders were Julius Krohn (1835-1888), his son Kaarle Krohn (1863- 1933), Antti Aarne (1867-1925) and among other collaborators, Stith Thompson (1885-1976) stood out. Their search focuses on finding the original version of each tale and the original location it was developed (Audikos 199; Kiriakidou-Nestoros 1978). They introduce the term “folklore type” which is the corpus of variations of a single folktale, put together by the similarity and cohesion of the motifs in each narrative (Aggelopoulou, Kaplanoglou and Katrinaki 2004, 10). As mentioned above, folktales were classified in four subgenres: animal tales, ordinary/magic tales, jokes/anecdotes and formula tales. Within these categories, they were put in groups according to the similarity of their context (motifs) and the geographical proximity, under a generic title with a specific letter/numeric code, the folktale type, going by the initials “AT” or “ATU” for Aarne-Thompson-Uther, the latter being a French researcher. Through this research several catalogues were put together, where each folktale type is broken down to episodes and each episode to the motifs documented in the numerous variations of the same tale, as it is told in various geographical regions.

This method, although it received critique, provided the most solid scientific way, until now, of documenting, analyzing and studying folktales. It created a common ground/language among folklore researchers so as to communicate, share and compare their work (Audikos 1994, 74). This paper uses the Finnish method of breaking down and analyzing the two folktales as presented in chapter 3.



### 3.8. Dark Motifs

'Dark motifs,' in comparison with the rest motifs, incorporate certain characteristics which, as the narrative unfolds, create an atmosphere that suggests danger, fright, thrilling events and agony. When narrating, enhancing the impossible tasks and dangers in the story, brings out the importance of the achievement of the protagonist and the satisfaction of his/her triumph is even greater for the audience, the katharsis is greater. This literary function of dark stories is as old as time and in this way the audience, including -and especially- children, learn about fearful aspects and the danger of loss as part of life; but also learn that we are equipped to overcome such situations, through the paradigm of the protagonists in the stories (Abbruscato and Jones 2014). According to Bruno Bettelheim and Peter Hunt (in Abbruscato and Jones 2014, 41-47) dark tales help built the psychic of young people and lead to psychological maturity and the development of a healthy emotional world. Also, according to Kate Bernheimer (in Abbruscato and Jones 2014, 41), "it is precisely the inclusion of such motifs that make the fairy tale world real: it is violent; and yes, there is loss. There is murder, incest, famine and rot – all these haunt the stories, as they haunt us. The fairy tale world, is the real world."

Research of references and research within the four volumes of *The Greek Folktale Catalogues*, put together by Aggelopoulou, Kaplanoglou, Katrinaki and Brouskou (1994, 1999, 2004, 2007), in continuance to the work that A. Megas began and M. Meraklis inherited and passed on, under the influence of N. Politis back in 1910 (Aggelopoulou and Brouskou 1994, 12), led to the distinction of six categories of dark motifs in Greek folktales (Velissariou 2020):

#### 3.8.1. *The supernatural*

In folktale the natural and supernatural world are not distinct, nor separated. Supernatural creatures coexist with humans, which often themselves possess extraordinary powers. The encounters between them are nothing short of ordinary and the reaction is always a firm action. A folktale character, especially the protagonist, doesn't get scared or ambiguous of the task at hand. Any supernatural antagonist is met with certainty and effectiveness (Xatzitaki-Kapsomenou 2002, Luthi 2011). So, in the Greek folktale, one finds creatures and entities like fairies, Lamia, Strix, Gello (gelloudi), Satan, dragons (in some cases it means giants, in others the beast), hobgoblins, demonic animals etc. We also come across humans with extraordinary powers, like witches (using spells and enchantments) and oracles, as well as talking animals. These accountancies, due to the kindness or manipulation of the protagonist, often become 'magic helpers' providing him/her

with advice or magic objects like disappearing rings and hats, swords that attack on demand and hand mills that produce whatever is wished. Lastly in folktales there are magic natural elements, like springs with immortal water or trees with immortal apples and fruit or nuts that become garments or jewelry.

### *3.8.2. Dangerous beauty*

In certain folktale types there is the motif of an evil/demonic beautiful princess, usually she's the daughter of a queen witch or Satan. She takes pleasure into witnessing her young pursuers fail in the task thrown to them – in order to win her hand in matrimony – as they end with their head chopped off or impaled. These princesses' beauty is so dangerous, yet so magnetic, that the protagonist will do anything to win her. He succeeds at the impossible tasks, usually with the assistance of magic helpers, and manages to turn her either by some skillful trickery or by disenchantment, literary pulling out of her demonic creature that possessed her, like worms, snakes or bugs (Luthi, 2011).

### *3.8.3. Cruelty*

In folktales there is cruelty, but not unnecessary cruelty or violence just for the sake of it. In the folktale there are actions and reactions. Cruelty is introduced in the form of punishment for unjust or malevolent actions, and it is equivalent to the gravity of the act itself. If a cruel act is bestowed upon an 'innocent' it's always corrected before the end. In compliance with the formulaic rules of storytelling, cruelty and violence is broadly narrated, sparing the audience of any gruesome details, thus making it a non-traumatic experience (Luthi 2011, 288-292). Moreover, the characters are so paper cut, lacking of psychological depth and humanity, that we can't imagine them bleeding or even hurting; we do not become attached to them in any way, so cruelty doesn't really affect us. The therapeutic aspect of folktale is that when evil is defeated and punished, the natural order of things falls into place, justice is done, kindness triumphs and the audience is left with an afterglow.

### *3.8.4. Murder*

Death is an ambiguous notion in folktales. Actual death comes only through the punishment of evil or the early, and frequent, loss of one or both parents of the protagonist. The notion of murder, applies in the case of an 'innocent' being killed. An 'innocent' could be a member of the family of the protagonists or the protagonist himself/herself, killed by a relative. In some cases, innocent children are being sent to be eaten by witches, dragons or are even cannibalized by their

parents. Murder in folktales is usually a family affair. In any case and in the known accordance, order is restored and the unjustly killed are brought back to life.

#### *3.8.4. Cannibalism*

Cannibalism is a common motif in myths baring an ethical prohibition redrawn from the social, human aspect. They are perceived as metaphors, symbolisms that give a pedagogical paradigm about ethics and hubris (Aggelopoulou 2004). Folktales, descending from the long line of oral narration, from the time of myths carrying the motif of cannibalism but with a differentiated literary function. Myths were a 'holy' narration about Gods, heroes and man, whereas folktale, even though it is an imaginary narrative, it's about the world of man only (Audikos 1994). So, in folktales, cannibalism becomes less of a symbolic, ritual act and more of a gruesome, dark motif fit for villains only.

#### *3.8.5. Incest*

Incest is also a motif found in myths, but it was always perceived as a breach, a moral violation of kindred relations. It's a global common ground that incest is a diversion (Aggelopoulou 2004). In folktales, incest is mostly attempted between father and daughter, after the loss of the wife/mother. The daughter in order to escape this terrible fate either flees in disguise or in hiding, either cuts off her hands to become undesirable. The heroine suffers great ordeals, until she meets her rescuer, but then suffers in the hands of her mother-in-law before her final redemption. It's evidential of woman's place in traditional communities, and unfortunately in many modern ones, that the female victim is seen as the offender, in the sense of being provocative by nature, due to her sexuality, instigating the forbidden desire. Only when she's acknowledged for her innocence by another male, her husband, she regains her dignity.

### **4. Presentation of the two folktales**

The two folktales presented here, according to Aggelopoulou (2002, 287-291), are listed under the same folktale type (AT 315A: The Cannibal Sister) but they are combined with two more folktale types (AT 300: The Dragon Slayer, AT 590: The Prince and the Arm Bands) and there are 114 documented variations all over Greece.

#### 4.1. The plot of 'Gelloudi' (AT: 315A, 300, 590)<sup>8</sup>

Once upon a time a King and a Queen with 12 boys prayed for a daughter. They didn't know that the baby girl that was born, was a 'gelloudi.' The cattle started dying mysteriously. The king asks of his sons to take turn in guarding the stable to find out who's responsible for the deaths. They all fail except of the youngest son, who connects the killings to their baby sister, by following the trail of blood leading from the stable to the cradle. The King asks everyone to leave and orders the Queen to leave with the youngest son. They stopped to rest and the son ate three magic fruit and from their seeds three trees grew. They came upon a castle where 40 dragons lived. The son kills them all but one, who hides only to be found by the mother Queen sometime later. The son had found a fiancé in a nearby castle and often left his mother alone to go hunting. The mother secretly begins an affair with the surviving dragon and soon plots to kill her son before he finds out about the affair and kills the dragon.

She sends her son on three impossible missions. First, she asks for the immortal water (guarded by 40 dragons) pretending illness. When the son succeeds, she asks for the immortal apple (guarded by 40 dragons also) pretending she's not well yet. When the son succeeds, she asks him to visit their old home to find out what has become of their family and secretly hopes that he will be eaten by the gelloudi. His fiancé has been helping him all this time (she's the magic helper) with advice and by secretly replacing the immortal elements with regular ones. Before he leaves, he asks her to watch his bow and if it bleeds, she should send his hounds for assistance.

He meets his gelloudi sister, she has eaten everything and everyone in the surroundings. She eats his horse bit by bit while he's banging a drum so she can hear him. A magic helper in the form of a mouse appears and replaces him in banging the drum while he escapes. She runs after him and they come across the three trees. He climbs on the first but she cuts it down, he jumps on the second she cuts it down and while on the third the bow bleeds and the fiancé sends his three hounds. The hounds eat the gelloudi making sure that not a little bit is left behind, or she will be reborn.

When he returned to his mother she wants to know where his bravery/strength derives from. He finally reveals that he has three golden hairs on his head. The mother cuts them off, the son loses his strength and she and the dragon cut him in 40 pieces and bury him. The fiancé digs him up, reassembles his body, pours the immortal water on him, places the two immortal apples on his eyes

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<sup>8</sup> Found in Aggelopoulou 2002, 210-219.

and he is revived. Time passes, the three golden hairs grow back and he regains his strength. Then he enters the castle and cuts up his mother, the dragon and their two children. The hounds eat their remains and he happily marries his fiancé<sup>9</sup>.

#### 4.2. The Plot of Lamia Bride (AT: 315A)<sup>10</sup>

A wealthy father marries his first-born son to a beautiful bride which is indeed a blood sucking Lamia and starts drinking the blood of the cattle. The brothers take turns in staking out to find who or what is killing the cattle and fail. The youngest son finds out eventually and asks to leave the castle, without warning anyone. His parents give him their blessing in the form of blood in a small bottle. He travels and eventually marries. In the meanwhile, the Lamia ate everyone and built a castle from their bones. He goes back wondering what has happened to his kin and warns his wife that if the blood in the bottle changes, she should send his dogs to rescue him. He confronts his Lamia sister-in-law. She eats his horse bit by bit while he's banging a drum so she can hear him. A magic helper in the form of a mouse appears and replaces him in banging the drum while he escapes. As she's running after him the blood in the bottle foams and the bottle brakes, but his wife is chatting with a neighbor and doesn't notice. Instantly though, three trees spring in his path and he climbs on the first but the Lamia cuts it down, he jumps on the second, she cuts it down also and while he is on the third his dogs chew their bonds and run to help their master. The dogs eat Lamia making sure that not a little bit is left behind, or she will be reborn. At the end he happily returns to his wife<sup>11</sup>.

### 5. The analysis of the two folktales

These two folktales are basically variations of the same story/theme (The Cannibal Sister), but the first tale, *Gelloudi*, is a combination with two more folktales types (The Dragon Slayer, The Prince and the Arm Bands), which are also found as autonomous themes in other tales. This is a very common literary function in storytelling, which helps expand the stories and gives greater freedom to the storyteller to evolve and retell stories in different ways. The tale of *Lamia Bride* consists only of the Cannibal Sister theme, which plays out in the same structure in both tales (the female creature appears in the family, brothers stakeout in turns

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<sup>9</sup> Narrated by Euaggelia Xatzi, from Otho in Karpathos.

<sup>10</sup> Found in Aggelopoulou 2002, 219- 222.

<sup>11</sup> Narrated by the grandfather (age 84, illiterate) of Maria Sabani, from an undocumented village in Viotia.

and fail, youngest is protagonist, leaves castle, finds wife/ fiancé, goes back to confront evil sister, horse is eaten, banging drum, magic helper, chase, three trees, warning objects, the dogs eat creature). Minor variations are found in small details of how these elements/motifs are developed in both stories but these variations don't change the structure nor the theme. In the *Greek Folktale Catalogues*, in accordance with the Finnish historic-geographic method, each theme is analyzed into folktale types and each type into episodes and each episode into motifs; it's like a Russian Doll. Motifs are versatile and it's in the formulation of motifs that we find all these little twists and differences since, according to Thompson (in Xatzitaki-Kapsomenou 2002, 107), "[...] motifs are the smallest structural elements in folktales. They are autonomous units, thus capable of thriving in various literary habitats"<sup>12</sup>.

The dark motifs featuring in both tales are various and plenty, creating a thrilling, reach and dense narrative. Firstly, in both *Gelloudi* and *Lamia Bride*, we find the dark motif of the 'supernatural' in the creatures featuring in the story which are: gelloudi, Lamia, 40 dragons, magic helpers (fiancé, mouse, dogs) and magic objects (fruit, bow, bottle of blood). There is also the dark motif of murder, in the killing of an innocent. This motif is found only in *Gelloudi* and it concerns the murder of the son by the dragon and the mother; of course, he comes back to life by the assistance of a magic helper, his fiancé, to take revenge and do justice. The third dark motif, 'cruelty,' comes as punishment with no remorse for all the villains in both folktales. Gelloudi and Lamia are devoured by the dogs, the mother and the dragon are chopped, as they did to the innocent son. The fourth dark motif is 'dangerous beauty,' this time found only in *Lamia Bride*, which is consistent to the characteristics of these creatures, since they can transform and hide their grotesque nature, in order to seduce men and kill them.

Last but not least, we find the dark motif of 'cannibalism', because both gelloudi and Lamia eat everyone, except the youngest brother, and this is presented forehand in the title of the folktale type itself (AT 315A: The Cannibal Sister). In this particular motif we locate the theme of vampirism in Greek folktales. Further analysis reveals the true nature of the superstitions surrounding the Greek vampire and the differences between folklore and folktales. So, in folklore the Greek vampire feeds mainly on animals, the male vampire threatens to do harm, scares and annoys people or in some cases assists them; he's capable of making people sick if they consume food that he has touch and he's linked to the plague. He can also blend in among the living, even marry, and only a suspicious eye could notice the details that betray his true nature or be recognized by a familiar face as

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<sup>12</sup> This quote is the author's translation.

decided (Politis 1994, A', 423-450). In these laic stories there is no mention of cannibalism, or even consuming humans in any way.

The female Greek vampires known as Strix, Lamia, Gello (gelloudi) are a different species. According to Politis (1994, A', 363-374), Lamia dwells in forests, cricks, gorges, springs where she usually brushes her long fair hair or weaves, both actions are characteristic to the perceived feminine gender. They are described as unusually tall and beautiful but their true nature is grotesque, because their form combines both human and animal characteristics (goat or donkey legs). So, their beauty is misleading and dangerous because they actually kill and eat animals, men and children, they even bake them in the oven. When a human comes across their presence, the consequences are catatonia, fever, nightmares and madness. The Strix resembles more in the witch's image and whatever supernatural powers they have derive from their affiliation with the dark forces. They are old, sometimes there are three sisters each with one tooth, one eye, one ear, forming again a grotesque incomplete form of a human split in three. Strix can't transform, like Lamia, because she's born this way within human families or maybe their mother was a Strix as well, whereas Lamia is related to fairies and possess such supernatural abilities. Gelloudia are basically babies being born as Strix, which can kill from a very young age. In some legends Strix 'borrows' boats at night and sails like men (in traditional societies there were no women captains). They fly on canes (like the brooms of witches), they suck the blood of newborns and they cannibalize on men, women and children.

A safe assumption that can derive from the above, is that when it comes to introducing the theme of vampirism in the Greek folktale, due to its characteristics concerning the blending of the natural and supernatural world, as well as the literary function of death, the Greek vampire doesn't fit the formulaic characteristics of folktales. They are not perceived as magical creatures due to their 'after death' vampirism, which resembles the ghost spectrum, the uneasy souls of the dead. Lamia, Strix and Gello on the other hand acquire the specifications of magical, supernatural beings and fit the literary context of Greek folktales. To elaborate more, firstly there is no reasonable explanation of the origins of gelloudi and Lamia, which fits to the absolute and stylized nature of storytelling. We don't know why things happens, at least it is not explained in the narrative, they just do and the personas in the story react to them. Also, their existence is not linked or presupposed to the physical death, gelloudi is born just like that in the family and Lamia deceives the family she marries into presenting herself as a beautiful bride. Death in folktale is either non-permanent or serves as punishment and is absolute, that is why there are no ghosts or hauntings in folktales. For these reasons the Greek vampire is a legend, to be found only in some religious tales, but the female

vampire, dissenting from myth is proper material for the ordinary/magic tales. The folktale after having established formulaic features and strict rules about the narrative, gives storytellers the freedom to include whichever folklore elements they find fitting. In this sense we locate the interesting detail featuring in both tales, about the total devouring of the creatures, because, as documented by Politis (in Aggelopoulou 2002, 289) they can be reborn from the slightest bit of their body.

Another very interesting aspect of these tales and the characteristics of both Lamia and gelloudi, is the commonality of the two episodes featuring the encounter between brother and 'cannibal sister.' The episodes begin with the motif of the horse being eaten bit by bit, while the 'cannibal sister' announces to the brother that she first ate a thigh, then another thigh, then the front legs, then the head, then the whole horse. Each time she playfully asks him "How many legs did your horse have?" "Four," "I reckon it has three now" and so on, until she says "How many horses did you have?" "One," "Well now you have none!" Then comes the banging drum motif and the magic helper, because she decides to eat him tomorrow after filling up with the horse and gives him a drum to bang so she can hear him, noted that the brother suggests the devouring of his horse first, in order to win time. There is a touch of black humor here, which appears often enough in similar episodes, maybe so as to lighten the atmosphere in the audience or to show that the protagonist is not afraid. This episode is so common in similar stories that Lamia and gelloudi are referred to as 'horse-eaters' and, as noted by Aggelopoulou (2002, 290-292), this has a specific symbolism. The horse in traditional communities symbolizes the established impowered status of men. On the other hand, according to folklore, these female creatures threaten men either by seducing and killing them or by taking their place e.g. as boat captains<sup>13</sup>, and by depriving them of their symbols.

In male dominant societies women are often seen as a threat towards the status quo. Domination, in any form, is established by rules oppressing certain groups and this dynamic, sets a constant fear towards the oppressed revolting. These rules are translated in traditions, beliefs, religions, social behavior and constitutional laws that conserve the desired status. Nevertheless, the oppressed always tend to rebel domestically, within the established status, or socially, clashing head on the oppressing status. A classic example and fitting to this analysis is the witch hunt of medieval -and not so medieval- times. In the Greek society at the time that folktales evolved and were very popular, witch hunting was not a practice for the Greeks, due to the Ottoman occupation and the Orthodox religion, which did not take guidelines from the Pope. But consistent to patriarchy,

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<sup>13</sup> Documentations 827 and 828 in Politis 1994, (volume A'), 371-372.



ignorance and illiteracy, the narrative of female demons and witches thrived in the local communities. Consequently, and according to Aggelopoulou (2002, 290-292) these tales suggest, that women within a male dominant, traditional and provincial society are actually feared and are considered a threat. They eat cattle, horses, their family, the whole community. This symbolizes the birth of a girl in the family baring a heavy toll on the domestic savings, because of the dowry the family has to provide to get her married. An unmarried woman at that time would carry the stigma of a spinster, bring shame on the family, expose herself to gossip and probably would end up being called a 'witch.'

Gello and Lamia, according to myth, attack mainly women and children, which probably derives from the dangers of childbirth for both mother and newborn, due to high infant mortality at that time and the unforeseen complications of childbirth (Puhner 1996). It was a very delicate period for the household when a new baby was born because mother and child were very vulnerable and due to lacking of professional medical care, they were basically helpless. In these communities medicine was usually practiced by elder women who used herbs to make soothing decoctions, ointments and other traditional methods with a pinch of superstition, blessings and prayers. Depending on their character and place in the local community, in some cases they were thought of as witches. Generally these methods were often inadequate<sup>14</sup>. There was also the fear of a child being born disabled in some way, which is portrayed in the many motifs in folktales about children being born deformed but baring extraordinary abilities (Puhner 1996, 86-87). But, especially in *Gelloudi*, there is an inversion of traditional belief about infant vulnerability, creating a local motif, an ecotype, instead of a baby being attacked, it's the baby gelloudi that is attacking the world of adults (Aggelopoulou 2002, 290). It must be noted that in Karpathos, the Greek remoted island in the Dodecanese, where *Gelloudi* is narrated, local women form much empowered communities retaining century old traditions, especially in the mountain village Olymbos, where the everyday dress is still the traditional outfit.

The significance and the literary function of blood in these folktales is somewhat different than one would expect in a cannibalistic-vampire story, but it is consistent to formulaic characteristic of non-actual and non-realistic violence in folktales. Cruelty is served only to the well-deserving villains and gruesome, splatter storytelling is excluded. Only rough, broad narrations suggest the violence, the cannibalism, the blood bath that actually takes place. In both tales it is stated that the creature feeds on the blood of the cattle, so vampirism and then cannibalism, since they proceed in eating everyone, is a fact. Vampirism is linked to

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<sup>14</sup> Traditions and superstitions concerning birth, new mothers and infants as well as traditional medicine practices are documented in Politis 1994 (volume A' and B').

blood but cannibalism is not, there is no documented Greek folktale, at least to my knowledge, where cannibalism is narrated as a bloody incident. In *Gelloudi*, blood clearly suggests danger and it is used as a warning. The youngest son, the protagonist, follows the trail of blood leading to his baby sister's cradle, thus making the connection between her and the animal killings. There's no blood nowhere else in the scene, only where it serves the continuance of the plot. This motif is found in similar hunting episodes. Nothing is superfluous in the narration for the sake of building up the tension. This function is served by the three repetitions of this episode, because it's at the third one that the family solves the riddle and the youngest son is acknowledged as the protagonist. The audience was warned about the gelloudi from the storyteller and all this time it's in anguish over the uncovering of the gelloudi by the poor family whose cattle is being eaten, and possibly them later on. The second significance of blood is to warn the fiancé for the imminent danger her beloved is in. A magical bow bleeds, foreshadowing a possible death and the hounds are set to the rescue. This motif is also very common in similar episodes, where the protagonist is in danger and back up arrives from a helper (brother, sister or a beloved partner).

In *Lamia Bride*, the presence of blood functions in a similar way. The beautifully put trail of blood leading to unravel the identity of the cattle killer, is missing and it has been replaced with the motif of the Lamia entering the barn in total silence and sucking the blood of a cow. Silence in folktales, according to Luthi (2011) increases the tension in a scene because it suggests danger, whether someone is entering a big, silent castle or a dark, silent forest, it's unnatural and eerie. So, blood is mentioned only to signify the non-human nature of the woman. The protagonist, decides not to warn anyone and to leave his home. This surprising development is justified by the narrator because he refers to the protagonist with the word 'child' or 'boy,' automatically implying a character not fully matured and of poor judgement. His parents, in their ignorance, give him their blessing to go and make his luck, in the actual form of a small bottle filled with their blood. So, in this episode blood signifies family bonds and the actual blood line of the boy. At the episode of the final confrontation with Lamia, blood again is used as a warning when it foams and breaks the glass bottle once the protagonist climbs the third and last tree. But, unlike *Gelloudi*, his wife takes lightly of his request to closely watch the bottle of blood and send his dogs. So, when the times comes, she notices nothing due to her chattering, a demining alleged female characteristic, but his dogs sense the danger and run to his aid. It seems that this protagonist is less of a righteous hero and deserves a lesser bride than the protagonist in *Gelloudi*.

## 6. Conclusions and thoughts

There are many similarities and some crucial differences between the two tales. They basically narrate the same story, but *Gelloudi* is a richer narration knitting together three folktale types. They are both rich in dark motifs, especially *Gelloudi*, and cannibalism is the one that identifies with vampirism in the form of two mythical blood sucking creatures. Blood has the literary function of a sign of warning, instead of being used to enhance acts of cruelty and cannibalism. These scenes are dry of blood and emotion; they are narrated in a simple manner. Also, black humor is used to lighten the tension and the eerie atmosphere. We find strong female characters but also a threatening female presence spreading chaos among the family in *Gelloudi*, depicting the traditional, patriarchal perspective of the troubles daughters bring upon the family having to keep their virginity, to get married, the accumulation of a much-needed dowry in order to do so and so on. But there was also the danger of the deceiving and treacherous woman, in *The Lamia Bride*, who seduces with her appearance or is indifferent to her husband, in either case males come out as victims of these female characters.

The portraying of the male and female characters in these two narrations is very interesting. Could it be that the narrator's point of view influences the episodes and the motifs she and he chose to narrate? Obviously, it does. *Gelloudi* is narrated by a woman from the unique Greek island of Karpathos. Her narration portrays strong female characters both in villains and companions. Two female antagonists, *Gelloudi* and the mother, attack the status quo. A baby is killing adults and a mother plots to murder her own son. Opposite them stands a young woman with all the foresight and knowledge to pass the correct information, take the correct actions and defeat them by supporting her partner. He wouldn't have been able to succeed in the tasks or be revived from death without her help. He knows that and trust her with his life, asking her to watch out for him when he leaves to confront his sister. *Lamia Bride* on the other hand, is narrated by a man, who warns about the deceiving and dangerous beauty of women in the character of Lamia, justifies poor decision-making by implying the immaturity of the protagonist and portrays an uncaring, unworthy woman by his side, vicariously giving him all the credit for his heroic act. The narration is concluded with the praising of the dogs saving him from 'the Lamia bride', whereas *Gelloudi*, concludes with the protagonist returning to his fiancé, free to marry her. They are both formulaic endings but they each leave the audience with a different sensation.

The main theme of both folktales and main theme of the majority of ordinal/magic tales and myths globally, is the eternal battle between good and evil.

According to Ricoeur (2005), myths and symbols attempt to decode and create a narrative to rationalize the silent and confusing experience of man and evil. Evil, as a matter of ethics, is correlated to sin, but it is also a matter of causing unbalance/disturbance to the natural laws. Evil, as an immoral act, brings suffering and pain for the victim (obviously) and the offender, in the form of punishment, that formulates in psychological and actual pain. Myths and folklore connect the existence of morale evil to the allure of man to the dark forces. Evil is demonized and has to be defeated (Ricoeur 2005). Demons are grotesque figures, they are a molding of creatures creating a physic incomprehensible to logic (Harpham 1982). So, deviating and deformed physic is the main characteristic of demons, because it states the non-human, the liminal (Puhner 1996). The demonic nature is an inverted nature, where normal demonic behavior such us drinking blood, killing enfants and children, children killing adults, is abnormal human behavior (Johnston 1995). Once again, the formulaic feature of inversion and conceptual opposites appears as a key literary function creating the plot, the characters and giving meaning to the story itself. The inversion doesn't stop at the definition of human and non-human, but it is sometimes used to inverse the inversion. This means that in folktales, characters perceived as typically villains, even Strix, can turn out to be magical helpers and demonic beautiful maidens are turned to kindness. It's the wise way of the folktale to tell us that man has both goodness and evil in him, and the choices we make feeds either the one or the other, revealing our nature. The psychoanalytic perspective of Karl Jung (in Luthi 2011, 311), interprets the actions taken by the characters in the folktales as the multiple aspects of man -the one man-. "The foul and the unworthy belong to me and form my existence and being, they are my shadow [...] Even darkness appertains to my gestalt."<sup>15</sup>

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