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Heroic Legends and Epic

Gholam Ali Izadi¹

Abstract

In the current study, Romance, as a literary style that has some similar and dissimilar features to epic story, has been compared and contrasted to epic. Some common qualities of romance and epic are: extraordinary plot of events, fictitious story, long story, being preceded by oral narration, express the events that happened in distant past, supernatural cases in story, supporting hero and opposing anti-hero, superstitious and witchery in both of them, the presence of bravery, knighthood and forecasting elements in both. Both stories are based on contrasts or the world is viewed as opposite poles, and characters of both are considered to be “flat”.

Epic and romance have dissimilarities. Romance stories are oriented toward love and passion besides the bravery. The top hero of epic is degraded in romance to a lower position. The bravery spirit in romance is reduced and there is a possibility of defeating romance’s hero. However, the hero of epic is undefeatable. The hero of epic pursues greater goals in relation to heroic deeds. The descriptions of the battle are more precise and poetic in epic while romance is incapable of providing exact descriptions of wars. Epic is a source of glory and pride. However, romance is folksier. Therefore, this study investigates the commonalities and the differences between epic and romance.

Keywords: Story, Narration, Epic, Romance, Character.

¹ Lecturer of department of Persian language & literature, Faculty of Islamic Azad University, Shoushtar Branch, Iran.

Introduction

Story is one of the most important resources that has recorded the identity of the ethnic groups and has left those records for the future generations. The primary type of story has been identified as epic. Epic has emerged after the benediction and psalm that were common in the primitive communities. It is a product of a time in which human being got together and common social needs rose. We know that epic and romance are two important literary forms in ancient literature. Epic has been investigated widely; however, romance has not been approached widely specifically in Iran. What are the commonalities and dissimilarities in these two significant and effective forms?

In the current research study, we attempt to investigate the similarities and the dissimilarities of epic and romance and draw a conclusion from that. The first form of epic stories was mythical and was formed in myth culture. This is the very original form of epic. However, the second form of epic stories which is heroic is more popular for its athletic practice. Heroic epic is a description of bravery and individual or group wars of a nation's heroes. In this form of epic, heroes are introduced as great men and national heroes and knowing about their venture is a source of pride. Romance is a story of imagination and wonder that brings up the bravery of knights in an unrealistic context and oriented toward folk literature. A number of elements can be considered in the formation of romance. But the two elements of "war and heroic action" and "love" are more significant. Although romance has inherited many qualities of epic, it also has considerable differences with epic. In this regard, no comprehensive and independent study has been conducted. We can only find hints of this topic in the glossary of literary terms. Detecting the limits and borders between romance and epic is of significant importance.

Discussion

Epic as a term is derived from the Greek word "epos" and it holds meanings of word, speech, story, song, and heroic poem. It is a story that speaks of the heroes' deeds and the events that might happen. Deeds and events are extraordinary and are attributed to the destiny of a tribe, a nation or a human race (Anooshe, 1997: 533). According to Safa (1984) epic is a representation of civilization or a part of nations' civilization in a time that existed (p. 10). Shamisa (1994) argues that epic is reporting manifestation of early times and the history of the primary world. Epic emerged when people began to step in the route of the glory and civilization. It is a narration of wars that happened for independency, ejecting or defeating

enemy or acquiring fame, wealth and welfare. Epic refers to a time when different tribes and clans were unified and formed a nation. Thus, epic story of any nation is expressive of its ideals and reveals their endeavor for glory and independency for the next generations (Shamisa, 1994: 47).

We are well aware that each literary style emerges and becomes popular in a context where the required condition is set for that and it continues to exist as long as the society embraces it. This is also true for epic. It emerges in accordance with the requirements. When the requirements including social security are provided to some extent and the collective reasoning overcomes the national feeling, epic is no longer fit for the time and it is replaced by another literary style.

Before losing its popularity, epic generates other styles to hold its heritage. Styles including history, romance, ethical stories and etc. As Khaleghi Motlagh (2007) states, in Iran romance was before epic and in epic we can also find romance and after epic it was also existed (p. 179). We must accept that romance and epic have their own worlds and readers must create the requirements to enjoy reading epic and romance. If these requirements of acceptance are not created, these stories might seem childish.

Romance is a category of poetic and prosaic stories that inherited many features of epic. But it has oriented to folk literature compared to that of royal and courtier literature. Besides the knighthood aspects, love is also basic in romance stories. Romance is made of two essential elements of love and knighthood. Romance has a long history in Iran. Khaleghi Motlagh (2007) mentions instances of “Odati and Zariadess” which belongs to Medes and Achaemenid and “Bijan and Manijeh” which is the love story of Shahnama (epic: contrastive phenomenology of heroic poem, p. 180). Romance in Iran has lasted long and it has lived up to Qajariyyeh with the tale of Amir Arsalan. Since romance is not considered as formal or courtier, it continued to exist with intensity and infirmity. And works are left in this regard such as Hamzenama, Iskandarnama, Darabnama tartosi, Darabnama Beyqami, Firuz Shahnama, Abu Muslim Nama, Hoday and Hodayoun Khajavi Kermani, Haft Peykar Nezami, Hussein Kurd, and Samak-e Ayyar. In Europe, the class of knights has led to the popularity of knighthood literature and accordingly romance. In Iran the class of Ayyaran made the romance stories known. Ayyaran have active and outstanding role in the Iranian romance stories and these stories revolves around their bravery deeds.

Despite the common qualities of romance and epic, differences also exist that give romance an independent identity. What seems to be common between epic and romance are as follow:

1. Both epic and romance are created in a long form of story. Different narrations might be available of these types of stories. The narrator and the narration are of highly importance. Sometimes a narrator through artistry might make a glorious story out of a simple one. Thus, the narrator has more privilege. Narration and storytelling are so significant that success and popularity of a story might rely on the abilities and artistry of the storyteller or the narrator. Usually the writer or the story writers are forgotten but the narrator name stays. Many times we have witnessed the presence of the narrator name in epic and romance stories. And the documenting is also done relying on the narrator. The various narrations that are heard of a single story reveals the significance of the narration. Narrators were often accompanied by minstrels that used to convert the story to a song or a performance. These peddler singers for instance troubadours in the south of French in medieval ages have always been in the civilized countries. Anyway, many of these stories were composed and accompanied by musical instruments and songs.

2. Before the written forms of epic and romance, they were told verbally from heart to heart.

3. Epic and romance tell the stories of distant past. These stories are far from our times in a way that we cannot be certain about the exact time and place. And the time and place remains unknown and vague. And even if we believe that they hold historical information; the vagueness of the individuals, places and the events narration that causes obscurity of that information. And the narrator's lack of knowledge with history and geography is another obstacle.

4. Romance and epic tell stories of extraordinary events and unreal with evasion of sense. Demons, monsters, talking birds, elves, talking animals, and talking trees are present in these kind of stories. Magic and witchery and unnatural beings in epic and romance are indispensable. Witches and magicians who act for or against the heroes. One element that is raised in the critic of contemporary stories is that of being true are similar to the truth. This element is absent in epic and romance. The truth that exists in epic and romance is exclusive to that story and it is not fit to common sense. It requires its own sense. Epic is regarded as the poem of a nation in its early life or its childhood (Anooshe, 1997: 533). It is very true of romance and epic because the events are processed in a childish and simple way and full of unusual events. It is ancient and belongs to a time when human mind has not developed yet.

5. Everything in these stories sounds unusual even eating and drinking. A distinguishable instance of this abnormality is Rostam's birth, his large body, his unique horse, his food eating and drinking. As another instance, we might refer to Hamze yelling, in Hamzenama. It

was horrible in a way that he warned his friends in advance, or that 30 or 40 meters length for some characters. However, exaggerations seem necessary for these stories.

6. Both epic and romance are imaginative and are created out of imagination. Even if they have origin or source, they are developed in imaginations in an excessive way that they lose their originality.

7. In epic and romance, superhuman and heavenly forces exist that act for or against the heroes. And the hero applies these forces to win the battle or the conflict. Their contribution ends the conflict for the hero's favor. In the Iranian national epic, the lord and the creator of the world is the major recourse for the heroes. However, they also ask help from other resources like the roc. In Greek well-known epic "Iliad" contribution is required from different god or goddess including Zeus. In romance, aid is asked of prophets and Imam. These forces might help the hero without his requirement. And they tend to rescue the hero from immediate danger in critical moments. Khidr (peace be upon him) is present in the Iranian stories and has been helpful and rescuing. And this is known as been exclusive to Iran (Jafari Ghanavati, 2004: 16-17).

In epic often witches and super forces might aid the hero to become aware of secrets that are useful in a battle. For instance, Rostam has heard about Esfandiyar's death from the roc. And with the contributions of the roc and Zal, he was able to recover and kill Esfandiyar eventually. In Romance also we find a witch or an old man who knows secrets helps the knight. Besides Arthur the king we find Merlin, besides Firuz Shah we can refer to Titus Hakim. Hamze (peace be upon him) was aided by Omar Umayya Ramzi; Alexander was aided by Khidr (peace be upon him). Abu Muslim through dreaming was aided by the prophet and holy Imam.

8. Both epic and romance had a heroic grounding. And they provide a context in which knights and heroes could reveal their artistry. Knighthood in both stories is essential and critical element. This type of literary style is sometime referred to as knighthood literature. Since knighthood is impartial in romance and epic stories.

9. Epic and romance both speak of a glorified world. A world in which men and women with power and sacrifice and with seriousness take part in great and dangerous actions. Epic and romance are a description of the bravery and victories of the heroes and the honors that they have acquired.

10. Dragons and killing dragons are famous in epic and this kind of action can be seen in romance, too. In Firuz Shahnama, for instance, Bahman the son of the king Firuz kills a dragon. Although in the battle two elves, friends of Firuz Shah, aid him.

11. In epic we can see that forecasting of the hero's destiny is common. The hero might be always afraid of his fate even the destiny of the invulnerable might be forecasted. In many stories of Iran, the forecasting of Jamasap in Jamasap book has been raised. Jamasap has predicted Esfandiyar's fate in Shahnama and also forecasted the Abu Muslim Khorsani's ejection.

In Iskandarnamah, Arastatalis has forecasted everything. And in Firuz Shahnama, Titus Hakim does this forecasting. Gillian Beer (2004) considers this feature as originated of idealism in romance and he states that "as romance is interested in ideals, it always holds a forecasting element" (p. 11).

12. Dreaming, similar to forecasting, relates fate to the heroes' deeds and behavior. The heroes might receive an enunciation or they might see how a horrible incident happens. Dreams follow a more sensible route in epic than romance. In romance, specifically in Abu Muslimnama excessive use has been made of dreams. All dreams are truthful and bring good and happiness. Abu Muslim is warned of his enemies. For example, when Mahyar the Jew has taken Abu Muslim home as a refuge and the enemies know about it, he was informed of that in dreams and escaped immediately. Or the patients are healed in dreams like Barftme from Damascus was injured in his foot and the prophet (peace be upon him) healed him. Dreams cause an internal revolution in individuals and they are converted to Shia religion such as Shirvan Gabr who saw the prophet in his dreams and then converted to Islam and joined Abu Muslim.

13. There was a belief in both epic and romance that a hidden treasury was left from the past. For instance, Bahram implicitly refers to Jamshid's treasure and says: "as I am young and healthy, why should I look for Jamshid treasure" (Shahnama, p. 337).

In romance these types of beliefs also exist. In the end of Samake-Ayyar, a treasure inherited from the past is to Farokhrooz the son of Khorshid Shah. In Hamzenama it is mentioned that Hamze (peace be upon him) reaches the land of treasure. In Abu Muslim Nama, Ahmad Zamji finds the treasures of Soleyman (peace be upon him) and brings it to Abu Muslim. In Firuz Shahnama this feature is also seen.

14. In epic different and special horses and arms are named and they hold unique value. For instance we find special and talking heroes in Iliad. Or in Shahnama Rakhsh, Rostam's horse, and Sam's mace, Bahram's lash or Bayan tiger which is Rostam's armor are stated. Romance influenced by epic has also applied specific arms and horses. For instance, Abu Muslim axe is made of the steel that Imam Ali has left to the blacksmith. He also had Jamshid Jam's dirk and Imam Hussein's sword.

Hamze (peace be upon him) sat on Isaac horse and had two swords under the title of Qmqam and Samsam. Then he also got Sam's mace and after reaching the land of wizards, he won a horse named "Ashqardiv zad".

15. One of the qualities of epic is setting the story based on opposing or conflicting differences. In the context of epic, two poles of good and evil are always raised and the story is also ended with these two poles. The good forces are controlled by a benevolent prince and the evil forces, wizards and internals are controlled and commanded by the foul. Evil forces enter the world of stories and fight against the good forces.

These apposing elements sometimes are shown in heaven in the form of different gods and sometimes they are demonstrated as demons, monsters and angels and sometimes they are humans in a battle of two apposed kings, armies and knights. Thus, we always find a good-natured king is confronted by a villainous one. And besides a popular hero, anti-hero is also seen; "though, the matter of opposite poles is not only significant in epic stories but also it is seen in many other ancient stories (Mahindoost, 2001: 122).

The opposing elements sometimes appear in stories at the level of heaven in the form of different gods, sometimes at the level of demons and angles and sometimes at the level of human being in the form of a battle of two opposing kings, armies and heroes.

Thus in epics there are always good and evil kings or hero and antihero." However this bipolar issue exists not only in epic but also in most of old tales" (Mihan doust, 2001: 122). Almost most of the heroic stories consist of mutual battle so epic is considered as a narration based on heroic axis and battle with evils.

Antiheros, who encounter heroes, appear as human being or creature more powerful than humans with evil power. In epic there is battle among demons, magicians, dangerous creatures and so. Magicians and demons, who are killed in their certain manner or survive after multiple failures, make a difficult situation for heroes. So the climax of epic narration is

supernatural actions. Orlich Marzolf regards the transformation of magician as an Iranian characteristic (Jafari Ghanavati, 2005: 122).

Romance also revolves around the battle between good and evil by being under the influence of epic. Northrop Frye analyzes this issue in terms of artistic and social approaches. He claimed: "human being lives in two worlds: natural world and the world of art. Man strives to create the world according to artistic world. Central to this attitude in romance, is the polarization of worlds: a desirable and the undesirable world" (Frye, 2005: 83).

His social analysis of romance is as follows: "romance is colloquial social form including a revolutionary quality. The battle between two poles in battlefields represents that on pole is pleasant and another one is odious. Hero's action in battlefield is social-revolutionary (Frye, 2005: 179).

In *Aboumoslem nameh* and *Hosein Kord*, two religious beliefs encounter. Believers of each religion advocate their beliefs. This manner continues to the end of the story. In *Amir* also this struggle exists. Moreover, there is a religious point of view in *Hamzenama* and of the most important reasons for battle, is spreading Ebrahim's religion.

Firouz Shahname and *Darabname* revolve around facing the aggressors. Battles occur to preserve the country. In *Eskadrname* triumphing over countries is mentioned as a desirable feature. Eskandar the great conqueror respects people who welcome him and fight with opponents. His significant characteristics remind us of Kourosh and he is paralleled with Zolgharnein. In this narration Eskandar's opponents are represented as unreliable, coward and perfidious people.

According to the opposition principle, each pole remains until the end of the story and it brings about the existence of 'static' character. In both epic and romance the main characters are static. It leads to talking about sovereignty of fate as if they have no role in advancing their life. Frye claims that "It is natural that when the story contrasts the two poles, the characters appear symbolically or allegorically" (Frye, 2005: 77).

Sometimes in religious romances dynamic characters appear. This issue revolves around change of religion. For instance in *Aboumoslem nameh* it was repeated multiple times that some Muslims chose Shia. In this book Imam Ali's epithet is *Aboutorab* and people like *Shah ghor*, *Bakhtazmay Esfahani* and *Zarbad Tbrizi* who did not know it, eventually found that they showed hostility to Imam Ali's followers with blind eyes.

In epic and romance, identity and the quest to discover it play the main role. According to Fry: “there is a relationship among fantasy, reality and peace in romance which coalesces with identity. Most of romances begin with leaving identity and come to an end by returning to it” (Fry, 2005: 77).

Even if all the heroic actions in romance and epic are mere fantasy, identity would be an exception. The hero in epic searches for his identity, so do tribes and generations. Romance and epic provide a context for heroes and tribes to introduce their identity.

So far, the similarities between epic and romance have been discussed, from now on the differences will be focused on:

- 1- Obviously epic is a narration with heroic theme, strength and masculinity in which women play no role. Heroic actions appear in epic for preserving national honor. Battle does not occur merely for representing skills, but it includes national, global or philanthropic targets. Epic revolves mainly on championship but romance focuses on both championship and love.

In European romance, love keeps its independence according to the culture. But in Iranian romance love is influenced by championship.

Perhaps people who have read European romances more than Iranian ones, contradict this opinion and find love more significant in romance. Since in knight literature, a pure and sincere love was considered in romance called courtly love. This love put emphasis on purity and chastity of lovers. Later, European romance changes from pure love into a sexual and sensual love and eventually it enters a triangle love in which a married woman fell in love with another man. Tristan and Isolde, similar to Veis and Ramin, can be taken as an example.

In Iranian romances love appears with its certain cultural background. In Veis and Ramin, contrary to Veis’s expectation, Ramin hates her and marries Gol. In Samak Ayar, death of Mahpari is taken for granted and Khorshid shah choses another wife. In Hodaya and Hodayoun, Hodaya courts another lady. Hamze’s behavior does not befit a beloved and after his death, Hamze frequently decides to marry. This examples that love acts as a motivation for heroes. Meanwhile in some of our romances, love plays no role. Firouz Shahnama or Abomoslem nameh are the examples. So Iranian’s romances is mainly based more on a heroic element rather than love.

- 2- War in epic is more significant than romance. Heroic battles are essential, but in romance they are not, except for religious and national romances in which battle is necessary.

Epic battles occur to achieve great goals. Rostam and Esfandiyar fought for Iran, but in romance no great goal can be traced. For instance, Khorshid mah fought with Machin army for possessing Mahpari and his only target was possessing that woman.

Reading epic and realizing heroic actions, instigates resistance and warlike spirit in people, but reading romance does not do so. Epic enhances national pride by reminding us of ancestors' honors. A reader gets easily accustomed with epic but they cannot do so with romance except for its national or religious style. For example Aboumoslem in Aboumoslem nameh is a favorite character for being a national and religious hero or Firouz shah is familiar as a champion for fighting with Iran's enemies. Aside from these examples, romance cannot bring national pride as epic.

The fate of a nation is in the hand of the hero and he should try his best to save and preserve his country. In Ferdosi's Shahnama, in a dialogue between Rostam and Esfandiyar in which Esfandiyar mentions his services arrogantly, Rostam, by reminding his actions, teaches Esfandiyar that his actions have been carried out at the critical stage and everybody is indebted to him. In many other situations Rostam is the savior of Iran. It is noticeable that when Rostam, on Keykhosro's order, called Iran's army to fight with Touranian and Iranians take refuge to mountain, hungry, defeated and wounded, touranian call other armies for help but suddenly Rostam and army of Sistan appear. Rostam fights and kills Ashkbous at the first day and kills Kamous at the second day. This issue changes the fate of battle for the benefit of Iranians and collapses the enemy army.

In romance this is not noticeable. In romances, like Firouz Shahnama, which their epic characteristic is dominant, Firouzshah's battle with enemies might be necessary but the person's own benefits are preferred to the nation.

National hero exists in epic but in romance this status does not develop. Risks during the battle threatening hero's life is daunting for the nation. Even after centuries, the reader get influenced, but in romance defeat of the hero is nonsense and its dangers are not important for the reader for he knows that the hero will finally be saved.

The nature of epic is that hero's fate is ambiguous. His battle is mixed with successes and failures and it frightens the reader. In some epics the hero will be killed and it makes tragedy but the hero of romance won't be in trouble and he will be saved.

Unlike the saying "Shahnama has happy ending", the hero of epic is often killed and that is a sad ending. Epics do not always result in success. Even some of conquerors in epic cannot be considered as success. For example defeating Rostam or Esfandiyar brought no honor for him. Before this battle, Rostam attempted to prevent this disaster but failed to do so.

But romance usually has a happy ending.

- 3- The hero of epic is a great man with great goals and actions. Passing through the seven stages is so laborious. In Iranian epic there are only two stages (khan): seven stages of Rostam (haft khan Rostam) and seven stages of Esfandiyar (haft khan Esfandiyar). Rostam's goal of bearing such dangers is saving Shah Kavous which was a significant figure in Iran. Esfandiyar also attempts to pass the seven stages for compensating Gashtasb's defeat and releasing the sisters from Arjasp's.

The goals are great and the path is very dangerous. But in romance, the hero passes the dangerous path to reach his ideal woman. His goal is not as lofty as epic. It reveals the glory of epic and the plainness of romance.

- 4- The battlefield in epic is described gloriously and masculinity and chastity are represented. It is a serious genre. But in romance the descriptions are shallow, as if the author escapes any description. The author calls his readers to battle repeatedly as if they see they were present in battlefield but in romance, scenes are represented illogically and one scene is repeated in all battles. For instance all Aboumoslem's battles with Nasr's army are described in the same way. It indicates the plainness of romance.

There are different ways of battles in epic and one of the significant points in epic is training types of battles. But in romance one type is repeated that much that the reader can predict what will go on. For example in Hamzenama, Hamze gets ready for wrestling after sword and mace and he yells before wrestling. Since his cry is very terrible and disturbing for army and horses, Omar Omayyad informs the army by throwing his hat in the sky. Hamze knocks his opponents to the ground after every yell and forces them to convert to Ebrahim's religion to stay alive.

- 5- The hero in epic has a distinct and important status in society. He maintains his nobility and chastity and commitment to morality. European romances also put

emphasis on nobility and a man by achieving knighthood after passing ordeals represents his commitment to ethics.

Heroes of European romances are kings or nobles who attempt to preserve their ethnicity but in Iranian romances they are kings or princes who preserve their ethnicity or cunning people having their own principles and ethics.

However cunning people also emphasizes the principles and chivalry and romances are filled with their characteristics but ethnicity and class division are not clear in Iranian romances due to being under influenced by plainness. It does not matter from which class the cunning person is, so nobility and chivalry is not significant.

- 6- Hero's morality motivates him to fight against the opponent and avoid cowardice and craft, but in romance with all emphasis on nobility, crafts and ruses like anesthetizing or poisoning do exist. Samak Ayar forwards his actions based on deceit without attending to battle.
- 7- Hence raid in epic, unlike romance, is rarely to be seen. In Hamzenama this feature does not exist since it was written in the fifth century, the time when epic was dominant, but in other romances raid occur multiple times.
- 8- An epic character is semi-divine and sacred emerged from eternity, however romantic character is not a divine character even if it is rooted in history.

Michel Zarafa regards the heroes of myths and legends, unlike heroes of romance, as eternal characters with no history (Zarafa, 2007: 157).

- 9- Epics are created by great poets, epic writer is a top artist in his land but romances have unknown or unfamiliar poets.

So epic has a glorious, accurate style but romance has not a powerful style. In epic, the poet does not interfere in narration but in romance, the narrator brings imbalance to the narration through his extreme bias. For example Tartousi in Aboumoslemname curses Marvanian.

Or in Hosein Kord a reader notices some severe insults, and it shows that the author of romance cannot be disinterested.

- 10- In epic, unlike romance, there is no obscene word and the poet employs allusions to introduce issues.
- 11- Epics are usually written in verse with distinct rhythm. European romance is also written in verse but Iranian romance is written in prose for its plainness.

In different periods, court prevents its poets to write colloquial poems so immature poets with no artistic skill try writing such narrations.

Conclusion

Epic is a national, glorious and aristocratic genre narrating glory, significance, majesty and effort to protect a nation. Its result is transferring cultural heritage to next generations and motivating national and chivalry spirit in them.

Romance is derived from a thought at a lower level. Romance also searches for identity and includes battles not as significant as epic. The glory in epic is eternal and divine. Epic is written in a serious and glorious style combined with people's attitudes. It is much more motivating than romance.

Romance includes love beside battles and heroes. In epic women have no voice but in romance women interfere in actions. Since romance poets are not educated people, it has taken colloquial attitude. Superstition and bias and illogical actions are noticeable in romance. But in epic a reader can notice a wisdom and aristocracy.

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