

A Study of the Elements of Epic in Antara's Ode

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Epic is an ancient genre that has been the subject of growing attention by many nations and societies since old days, with its emergence in national literature depending on specific historical, social, and cultural circumstances. In the Arabic poems belonging to the Era of Ignorance, despite the absence of these conditions, there is no sign of epopee in the technical sense of the word, but one can find poems in which poets brag about their heroism on the battlefield, their heritage and ancestry while at the same time depreciate people from other tribes. Antara's ode, as a perfect example of such poems, is investigated in the present paper to shed some light on the conventional elements of epopee in this genre and its compliance with epic constructs.

2. Theoretical Framework

A true and perfect epic refers to a fictional poem with heroic, ethnic or national themes that is scene to extraordinary events (Safe, 2000). This genre is completely objective in nature and detached from the poet himself. In this genre of poetry, poet's emotions are not involved in the original story (Razmjou, 2003). In Arabic literature, epic is studied under the title of "Malhameh" and definitions proposed by researchers in this area are not inclusive, with each author sufficing to a couple of structural features and elements of epic.

According to the above-discussed points regarding the definition of this genre, what is meant by epic elements is a series of features that are chiefly used in an epic context. These elements include: fictional nature, struggle between good and evil, national context, dethroned centrality of "I" of the poet, geographic and temporal scope of epic stories, indefiniteness of time and place, mythical structure, miracles, detailed account of weaponry and battles, epic rhythm and tone, epic style, expressive illustrations, descriptions and portrayal of scenes of combat, hyperbole, presence of brave heroes with noble and moral humane attributes, the solitary combat of the hero with his opponent, and love of goddess for him (Shamisa, 2002).

These are the most prominent elements that distinguish epic from non-epic stories. This paper seeks to examine these elements in Antara's ode.

3. Method

In this study, a descriptive method has been adopted. After a brief review of the literal and technical meaning of epic and 'Malhameh' in Arabic literature, and its comparison with the

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complete form of saga, the most important elements of epic in a poetic system are analyzed one by one in Antara's ode to determine the features that resemble that of national epics in this work.

4.Results and Discussion

Antara's ode has a fictional background. In this ode, there are parts in which the poet offers a narrative account of his achievements and conquests so that some of the fictional elements in their basic forms can be distinguished.

The battle of good and evil in this poem is depicted as an internal battle between poet's tribe and their enemies in an attempt to defend their territory, which is basically a representation of the bravery of the poet in the eye of his lover. This ode is epic in style and tone and the poet's use of language (words and phrases), especially literary devices such as simile, metaphor and imagery, description of colors, and the cadence are fraught with epic elements and his exaggerated and hyperbolic manner of narration are similar to epic works. In this ode, the poet depicts a rather unorthodox picture of the hero and his steed and sometimes exhibits behavior that is inconsistent with logic and scientific experience. A portrayal of Arabic society with its manifestations are reflected in this ode. Like the epics of other nations, this work provides information about the culture, habits and customs, and ethics of the pre-Islamic Arabs and their battles, combat strategies and the type of weapons used in those days.

The events of this ode do not go beyond the boundaries of the battlefield and they are restricted to the heroic acts of the poet in part of Ghabra and Dahs battles.

5. Conclusion

Antara's ode with its epic features can be considered as an example of epic genre, but due to the absence of some primary elements of epic works, and its resemblance of epics in secondary elements and details, it cannot be considered as an epic in the true sense of the word. That is, it only bears a semblance of epics and its poems are wrapped in epic format, which is why it makes more sense to call it quasi-epic or epic-like.

In this ode, the battle is between two tribes rather than two nations. The hero is bereft of a stable and accepted identity and he is primarily motivated by his personal intentions. The emergence of the ode has nothing to do with national chauvinism as it is tampered with the poet's emotions and feelings. Unlike other epics in which a woman falls in love with the heroic figure of the story, in this ode the hero is infatuated with his beloved and he is engaged in battles and displays daring sacrifices to catch her attention. The realm of heroic events in the ode is not as widespread as the geographical extent of sagas and it covers only a particular period of time. In short, the absence of mythological themes, emphasis on details of lives and affairs, and specification of the time and location of events make Antara's ode more of a historical work rather than an epic one.

Keywords: Literary genres, Epic, Arab literature in the Era of Ignorance, Antara's ode, Battle.

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