

## TRANSFORMATION OF EPIC GENRES: KHAMSA, EPOS, AND THE NOVEL

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### Abstract

The article provides an extensive discussion of the transformation of epic genres and the poetic interrelation among khamisa, epos, and the novel. In particular, when the poetic connection among these genres is examined through the artistic chronotope, plot, motifs, and the system of images, typological aspects become evident. It is emphasized that a complex study of the typology of khamisa, epos, and novel is of great importance not only for theoretical literary criticism, but also for the development of the methodological foundations of history, sociology, philosophy, and aesthetics.

**Keywords:** Transformation of epic genres, khamisa, epos, novel, typology, artistic plot, motif, detail and system of images, lover–beloved–rival triad, meeting, separation, reunion motifs.

### Introduction

The epos has long been interpreted by scholars as an ancient and all-encompassing genre. Indeed, this folklore genre embodies a vast artistic conception and embraces an extensive plot structure and a system of numerous motifs. In terms of the nature and external appearance of its heroes, as well as their functions and missions, the epos syncretically reflects the features characteristic of pre-existing religious and mythological plots, socio-historical, domestic, and individual phenomena, various folklore genres, and the lyrical, epic, and dramatic types of poetry. It exerts a significant influence on surrounding oral and written genres. While it functions as a form that transforms the shape and content of others, it itself remains unchanged. According to M. Bakhtin, the subject of the epos is primarily the "national epic past" or the "absolute past." Secondly, the epos does not arise from the personal life experience or the artistic imagination of an individual author, but from ancient, fully formed national legends and myths. Thirdly, the time of the epos and its images are separated by a strict distance from the time of the performer (bakhshi) and the listener (or reader). The world of the epos is "the world of forefathers and ancestors," "the first and the best ones." Therefore, the epic world, its heroes, and the depicted reality

are considered absolutely inviolable. In this respect, both the genre and its characters are canonized without exception”.<sup>1</sup> Without a proper understanding of Bakhtin’s concepts such as “absolute past,” “fully shaped legends and myths,” “canonization of genre and heroes,” and the “strict temporal distance between the time of narration and the time of reception,” it is impossible to comprehend the relationship between the khamsa and the epos.

First of all, it should be emphasized that the concept of the “absolute past” encompasses the notions of inaccessibility, idealization, and completeness. This implies that both the performer and the listener maintain an attitude of reverence toward the reality of the epos. For in the epic world, the stories of “ancestors and forefathers,” “the best of the best,” are narrated. For the bakhshi and his audience, this reality is sacred — it is perfect and immutable. The epos merely retells the “absolute past” without contradicting the established truth in any way. Hence, both the genre and its heroes naturally become canonized. A consistent system of genre and poetic components is established, preserved regardless of temporal or spatial change. It is precisely due to this property of canonization that the epos possesses a fixed and well-defined structure, one that allows a complete reconstruction of even those epic samples on the verge of disappearance. The older the epos, the more ancient is the nation to which it belongs. Such epics are distinguished by their perfect preservation of genre-defining systems. The Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh, the Indian Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Greek Iliad and Odyssey, and the Uzbek folk epics *Alpomish* and *Gorogly* all belong to this category.

In the epics of the world’s nations mentioned above, narratives, legends, and tales described in sacred scriptures are reflected to varying degrees. For instance, the motif of the Flood (Noah) appears directly in the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Mahabharata, while in other epics it manifests symbolically. The motifs of “a child being brought as a sacrifice and saved at the last moment” (Abraham and Ishmael), “a plot to kill the hero before his birth” (Moses), “the hero being cast into water” (Moses), “the parting of the sea to open a path for the oppressed” (Moses), “the hero created from light or breath” (Jesus), “the purification of the hero’s heart through the water of paradise” (Muhammad), “the hero’s journey through the three worlds and return to his origin” (Muhammad), and “the hero’s acquisition of a divine gift or weapon” (as in many prophets) — all of these can be found, in direct or symbolic form, in the aforementioned and other epics, folk tales, and stories, all of which are linked to Islamic history. Based on this thesis, it is appropriate to classify the semantic and structural typology common to both the epos and the khamsa as follows:

1. A stagnant state (ignorance) prevails in society or the family before the hero’s birth.
2. The hero is requested from the Creator or divine signs foretell his birth.
3. Various legends about the hero’s future spread in his homeland and beyond while he is still in the cradle.

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<sup>1</sup> Бахтин М. Романда замон ва хронотоп шакллари. Тарихий поэтикадан очерклар. Рус тилидан У.Жўрақулов таржимаси.-Т.: Akademnashr, 2015.-Б. 19.

4. The hero differs intellectually and physically from his peers (he surpasses them).
5. The hero disrupts the stagnation in society, evoking either great admiration or severe hostility.
6. The first signs and symbols of the hero's future destiny appear.
7. The hero becomes aware of his mission.
8. The hero embarks on his journey to fulfill that mission, facing trials and adventures along the way.
9. The hero is captured or imprisoned.
10. The hero matures and gains fame while far from his homeland.
11. The hero achieves his goal (union with the beloved).
12. The hero's death or his attainment of the "true homeland."
13. The emergence of songs, legends, and epics about the hero.

Although the *khamisa* is a product of Eastern Islamic literary thought, it also shares numerous typological features with the ancient European genre of the novel. In particular, the Greek adventure novel and the European chivalric romance—both extensively studied by M. Bakhtin—are closely related to the *khamisa* epics in terms of plot and system of imagery.

First, like the *khamisa* epics, European novels possess a three-stage plot structure. The first stage is the "initial encounter," the second is "separation," and the third is "reunion." The events of the work unfold within these three principal chronotopes. M. Bakhtin outlines the structure of the Greek adventure novel as follows: "A young man and woman of marriageable age. Their lineage is unknown or kept secret. Both stand out for their incomparable beauty. They are also exceedingly pure (innocent). They meet unexpectedly, often during a festive celebration, and fall instantly and uncontrollably in love. The young man then encounters a barrier that delays the union—a sequence of extraordinary trials. The lovers search for each other in separation, find one another, lose each other again, and meet once more. Obstacles and adventures follow: the bride's abduction on the eve of marriage, parental disapproval, the lovers being previously betrothed to others (hired or false rivals), their escape together, their travels, a storm at sea, shipwreck, miraculous survival, attacks by pirates, captivity and imprisonment, violation of honor, the beloved's transformation into a purifying sacrifice, wars and battles, enslavement, feigned death, disguise, recognition and misrecognition, false betrayals, attacks on their identity and loyalty, accusations of crime, trials in court, and the testing of youthful purity and devotion. The heroes are reunited with their parents. Likewise, unexpected friends, accidental enemies, omens, prophecies, and miraculous dreams play important roles in their lives. The novel ends on a positive note, with the lovers united." (All emphases by M. Bakhtin.)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Бахтин М. Романда замон ва хронотоп шакллари. Тарихий поэтикадан очерклар.-Т.: Akademnashr, 2015.-Б. 47-48.

The motifs associated with this plot pattern, which Bakhtin developed through his historical-typological study of numerous Greek adventure novels, appear in nearly all of the khamsa epics. For example, the motif of the first encounter and the instantaneous, passionate love functions as the central knot of the plot in Farhod and Shirin (or Khosrow and Shirin), Layli and Majnun, and Bahrom and Dilorom. Without this motif, the subsequent stages of the plot would lose their significance. Each of the three lovers falls in love with his beloved at the very first encounter and lives (or dies) with that pain until the end of his life. However, the chronotopes of the first meeting differ somewhat from those in Greek novels. In the Greek novel, the lover and the beloved meet face to face directly. In the khamsa epics, however, the first encounter occurs through certain artistic details such as a mirror (Farhod and Shirin), a school (Layli and Majnun), or a portrait (Sab'ai sayyor). These devices not only manifest realistically but also acquire symbolic meaning, thereby expanding the scope of the chronotope of the first meeting. This indicates that the encounter is not accidental but inscribed in divine destiny.

As in the Greek adventure novels, the heroes of the khamsa epics also experience the torments of separation for various reasons: parental disapproval or long-standing tribal enmities between the lovers (Layli and Majnun), the intrigues of deceitful rivals (Farhod and Shirin), or the lover's fall into the temptation of desire (Sab'ai sayyor), among others. In Greek adventure novels, the lovers' reunion marks the conclusion of the plot—this is where the narrative ends. In the khamsa epics, however, the main events begin precisely after the motif of reunion. For the lover who, after enduring diverse adventures and trials during separation, finally attains the beloved, the most difficult and painful tests begin from that very moment. The plots of the khamsa epics often conclude with the death of the protagonists—a stage entirely absent from the adventure novel.

Y. E. Bertels, when describing the plot of Nizami's Khosrow and Shirin—from Khosrow's arrival in Madain after his father's death and his accession to the throne, to the revolt of Bahram Chobin, who takes advantage of Khosrow's conflict with his courtiers, and finally Khosrow's flight to Shirin's land—writes the following: "If Nizami's intention had been merely to write a chivalric romance, the poem should have ended at this point. However, his aim was different. He was not interested in the external narration of events, but in the dramatic conflict of characters and psychological problems. Therefore, the part of the poem that we have recounted can only be regarded as a kind of extended introduction. The main part of the poem, in fact, begins precisely here." (Emphasis added – U. J.).<sup>3</sup> It is evident that the typological similarities between the khamsa epics and the European novel terminate at a certain point. From this point onward, the khamsa epic begins an independent movement. This can be likened to the motion of a space rocket on the verge of breaking free from Earth's orbit. Once the rocket rises to a certain altitude, it discards its auxiliary engines; similarly, the plot of the epic, having ascended thus far through the

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<sup>3</sup> Бертельс Е.Э. Избранные труды. Низами и Фузули.-М.:Издательство восточной литературы, 1962.-С. 223.

motifs of the novel (originally developed within folk love stories), begins from this moment to cast off its excess parts and continues its flight independently.

Second, the plot of the khamsa epics, like that of the Greek adventure novels, is built upon the concept of trial. The motif of trial serves as an independent, unifying system and a concrete conceptual framework across the genres situated between oral and written literature—such as epos, novel, dastan, novella, story, and fairy tale. All of them, essentially, are structured around trials. The historical and cultural roots of this concept are extremely deep. The notion that “life itself is a trial” has existed among humankind for millennia. The process of trial unfolds along paths, and along these paths the hero (and indeed every real person) encounters various tests of fate. In the relatively canonized genres of artistic literature, this process takes place in the heavens and the underworld, across the seas and lands of the earth, through forests, mountains, caves, deserts, and thickets—indeed, throughout the three worlds. The system of categories that ensures the harmony of time and space within these processes forms the poetics of the chronotope. Consequently, a system of chronotopes associated with specific spatial names emerges: “road chronotope,” “sea chronotope,” “desert chronotope,” “forest chronotope,” “mountain chronotope,” “cave chronotope,” “city chronotope,” “street chronotope,” “palace chronotope,” and so forth. Yet, all the countless forms of chronotopes are unified and given aesthetic meaning only through the central figure—human life itself. More precisely, the depiction of a human life directed toward trials of destiny within a given temporal-spatial framework constitutes the chronotope of the literary work. The diverse and unexpected trials of fate determine both the nature of the hero and the artistic concept of the work. Such is the eternal model of life’s reality. For this reason, M. Bakhtin referred to the earliest Greek novels as “adventure novels built on trials.”<sup>4</sup>

The heroes of the khamsa comprehend their path of trials through divine destiny. In the second poem, the lover embarks upon his path of trial after seeing the image of the beloved in a mirror. Along the way, he sails the seas as in the Greek novels, is attacked by pirates, finds friends, encounters a storm, survives it, and continues to endure numerous subsequent trials. This path of trial, in accordance with its scope, extends across the three worlds. Ultimately, the lover first reaches the beloved and finally attains the abode of the Eternal Beloved. Majnun encounters Layli for the first time in a school garden—an event that also carries profound symbolic meanings. King Bahrom’s love, compared to that of Farhod and Majnun, is somewhat baser; his trials lie primarily along the valleys of desire. The path of desire leads him, in the end, to the underworld—to the abyss of death. The journey of Iskandar Dhu al-Qarnayn, by contrast, unfolds in all four of the khamsa works almost along the same map as outlined in the Qur’an. This path—one of virtue, justice, and enlightenment—serves not only the hero and his surroundings but the happiness of all humankind. Iskandar’s path of trials passes through lands, cities, villages, seas, rivers,

<sup>4</sup> Бахтин М. Романда замон ва хронотоп шакллари. Тарихий поэтикадан очерклар.-Т.: Akademnashr, 2015.-Б. 46.

mountains, and forests. This journey leads the hero to a great realization: that man comes into the world empty-handed and leaves it in the same way. From the point at which this profound realization is born—where the earthly journey ends—the hero enters the beginning of a new life, an infinite path. It is precisely here that the khamsa epics surpass the Greek novel—in their independence, universality, artistic conception, and the poetics of chronotope.

The third issue concerns the typological relationship between the system of characters in the Greek novel and that of the khamsa epics. At the center of the Greek adventure novel stands a triadic structure: a “pure (innocent)” young man—the lover; a girl worthy of him in every respect—the beloved; and another suitor who opposes their love, employing every means possible to stand in their way—the rival. This triad originates, first, from the triad of Adam, Eve, and Satan in the sacred scriptures; second, from the realities of life itself (for in every love relationship or pair of individuals drawn toward one another, there inevitably exists a third figure—this is a natural law of life); and third, from the earliest syncretic and synthetic forms of artistic consciousness in literary tradition. Whatever chronotope one may examine within the novel, all three of these figures—or at least one of them—appears. Such artistic universalism within the triad operates either directly or indirectly. In certain episodes within the chronotope of the work, even if one or more of the triad members are not physically present, the paths of the lover and beloved, though separated, remain connected—one thread always leads back to one or all of them. M. Bakhtin calls this point of separation in the paths of the lover and beloved “accidental dischronotopy.”<sup>5</sup> In this state, the two figures move along different paths and through different times, while the rival alternately intervenes in the path of the lover or the beloved, striving to prevent their reunion. Yet even during these stages of temporal and spatial separation, their paths remain bound by invisible ties—rivals, friends, parents, nurses, travelers, animals, birds, sea creatures, insects, the elements of water and air, and so on. They never separate absolutely. This demonstrates that the relationship within the triad encompasses a universal temporal-spatial dimension, spanning all three worlds. For this reason, the triadic system finds unimpeded entry into the structure of all literary genres.

The same triadic system functions in the khamsa epics as well. However, in essence, the characters of the khamsa differ from those of the Greek novel in several key respects—and even surpass them in certain aspects. First, all the khamsa characters are “chosen” from among humankind—extraordinary individuals who stand apart from others in their own time and place as well as in later historical and artistic contexts. From a terminological perspective, they embody the type of the *abror-insān* (the pure or righteous man). For instance, Farhod is known from infancy as one endowed with incomparable pain and passion; Majnun is solitary within society, rejecting all social norms, a bearer of a destiny

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<sup>5</sup> Қаранг: Бахтин М. Романда замон ва хронотоп шакллари. Тарихий поэтикадан очерклар. -Т.: Akademnashr, 2015.-Б. 46.

(path) that intersects with no one else's. Iskandar, from his earliest steps, overturns existing orders and breaks established patterns, proving through his nature, talent, and wisdom that he was created for a great mission. Throughout his life he strives unwaveringly to fulfill the command of the Eternal Beloved (the Creator) and leaves the world having remained steadfast upon that path. (It is likely that this very plot related to Iskandar later degenerated into a materialized form within European chivalric romances, where the hero's entire activity is directed toward overcoming obstacles to his union with the beloved.) Though the image of King Bahrom may seem narrower and more worldly, his mad love, extraordinary decisions, and unique tragedy distinguish him from ordinary men. The characters of the Greek novel, in contrast, seem like smaller modules—materialized reflections—of the khamisa's archetypal figures and plots, moving within a narrower chronotopic framework and limited aims and thoughts.

In general, the issues discussed above indicate the necessity of a special historical-typological study of the long-standing traditions of world artistic thought. A comprehensive examination of the typology of the khamisa, the epos, and the novel is of great importance not only for theoretical literary studies but also for the advancement of the methodological foundations of history, sociology, philosophy, and aesthetics.

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