Episodic Stories in Persian Epic Narratives and Their Connection with Fairy Tales
(Case Study: *Shahnameh* and *Bahmannameh*)

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introduction

Structural unity is an essential element in epic narration, as the epic work has a beginning, middle, and end to reach its ultimate goal. This essence has been considered since the time of Aristotle. In Persian epics, despite the dominance of cohesive plot over the narration of each story, in the macro-structure fashioning the collection of stories within a work, in some cases we come across episodic stories lacking a clear causal relation with the stories before and after them. In such cases, we encounter narratives in multiple levels. This particular form of narration is the ground for the core discussion in Ferdowsi's *Shahname*. While some scholars assert that *Shahnameh* is episodic and structurally incoherent, others admit to a coherent structure, disregarding the idea that its episodic nature has spawn the structure to break. The episodic nature of such stories as "*Rostam and Sohrab*" and "*Bijan and Manijeh*" has long been considered by scholars, but apart from these two, there are other episodic stories in *Shahnameh*. In addition, in other Persian

epics, despite being more integrated in structure (and, of course, more abridged) than *Shahnameh*, episodic stories could still be unmasked. Unveiling these episodes is possible through carefully distinguishing between the "pattern fashioning the episodes" and the "macro and recurrent pattern fashioning the structure of the work." These pieces also lose the coherent connection with what comes before and after them in the narrative line of the work; consequently, they are deemed sub-episodic narratives. This can indicate the structural difference between the stories of this ilk and other epic stories. The recurrence of such a characteristic in Persian epic narratives leads us to explore what this feature is and discover why. The questions that arise in this regard could be answered adopting a critical approach: What is the essence of the structure of episodic narratives? What mythological archetypes shape the structure of these pieces? How is the process of embedding them within the macro and integrated structure of epic narratives? And, how do they relate to the macro-structure fashioning epic narratives? In order to achieve reliable results, and of course to keep the paper at a reasonable length, the two important epics of *Shahnameh* and *Bahmannameh* have been selected as the excerpt in this study.

materials and methods

Eleven episodic stories have been gleaned through a thorough examination of the two works of *Shahnameh* and *Bahmannameh*. The titles are as follows: *Rostam and Tahmineh*, *Akvan Div*, *Bijan and Manijeh*, *Shapoor and Mehrak's daughter*, *Bahram Gur and four sisters*, *Bahram Gur and Barzin's daughters*, *Bahram Gur and the daughter of an old jeweler*, *Bahram Choobin in the palace of the woman*

of magic, *Bahman meets a fairy*, *Barzin Azar and daughter of Borasp*, *Rostam of Tur and daughter of khan of China.*

With an all-inclusive perspective toward the totality of the narrative of these stories, as well as the functions and elements that make up their structure, the recurrent narrative minima in the structure of the stories are extracted as follows: (1) disappearance of a creature, (2) giving reports, (3) receiving reports, (4) prohibition, (5) violation of prohibition, (6) mediation, (7) absence (departure of the hero), (8) deformation, (9) Deception (Evil), (10) Conflict (Battle), (11) Elimination of Evil, (12) Marriage (Wedding), (13) Return.

These minima are the recurrent and reduced elements in the structure of such stories that cannot be further broken down with respect to the structure, act as materials and codes in the structure of the mythological narrative, and play a fundamental role in the formation, permutation, and conveyance of the mythological narrative. Such a characteristic, on the one hand, is the tool to convey and articulate myth in various forms, and on the other hand, due to the stability of these codes (despite the variety of superstructures and forms), it is possible to investigate the mythological deep-structures, as well as evolution of structures. In the structure of the episodic stories under study, the chain of narrative minima corresponds to the same sequence of thirteen extracted minima; in other words, certain minima with the same sequence are repeated in the structure of episodic stories. Although the number of these minima is not the same in all stories or all the supposed minima are not included in one story, their sequence has been preserved and each minimum is in its supposed place within the story structure, elucidating the distinct structure of episodic stories in epic narratives. This structure owns its

distinctive characteristics that make it significantly different from the macro-structure fashioning epic narratives in terms of the type and structural position of narrative minima. For instance, the initial change in episodic stories that leads to movement in the story world occurs with the "disappearance of a creature (usually a horse and sometimes a bird of prey)." The function of "evil" in these stories is almost identical to that of "deception" and, unlike the function of "evil" in epic stories, it is not grounded on conflict. Moreover, unlike epic narratives, the element of "conflict or battle" in these stories is not based on war and fierce rivalry, and instead issues such as love, affection and female attraction play a significant role. These elements mark the existence of patterns and deep-structures that are not analogous to the macro-structure of epic in episodic stories, therefore leading to a break with the structure of epic narrative. The recurrence of a similar structure in these pieces also signposts the existence of a unique deep-structure in them that could lead our way to narrative origins that are not the same as the narrative origin of "epic".

discussion and results

The scrutiny of mythological deep-structure of the eleven episodic stories in this paper (based on the extractive structure) shows that all of these episodic pieces hinge on the structure of fairy tales. The remarkable recurrence of episodes based on fairy tales within epic narratives, and their structural and deep-structure incongruity with the macro-structure of epic narratives, reveals the existence of a particular narrative style or tradition for fairy tales dating back to a farther past than Ferdowsi's and other epic poets of the Islamic era. On the other

hand, the remarkable differences between the deep-structure and superstructure of these episodes denote the great antiquity of mythological deep-structures, as in terms of the roles, characteristics, and actions of fairies, they maintain considerable connections with the traditions related to the goddesses of fertility and viridity. Despite the replacement of rituals like Zoroastrianism with these ancient rituals (and even ritual enmity with fairies in Zoroastrianism), the narrative form of fairy tales continued to evolve along with the evolution of epic narratives until the later periods of Iranian epic narration. However, due to the demonic reading of fairies in Zoroastrianism, the visible manifestation of fairy tales turned out to be more latent in the formal literature of the Sassanid era, and this has been effective in disguising the pattern of fairy tales from superstructure to deep-structure of episodic stories. The mythological root, antiquity, global spread, and the attractiveness of fairy tales among the masses, are the reasons these stories have stood the test of time among Persian narrative traditions. Since the main source of fairy tales in epic narratives has been folk tales, they have usually entered epic works through oral and popular narratives generation to generation, far from the direct intrusion of the ruling ideologies and power structures. The reason explaining the episodic nature of fairy tales within the macro-structure of epics is on the one hand the informal current of narration of these stories, and on the other hand the essential difference between the structure and deep-structure of fairy tales and the deep-structure based on heroic familiarization in epic stories. Despite the noticeable dissimilarities between the structure of episodic stories and the macro-structure of epic narratives, but given the importance of structural unity and cohesion in

the of epic narratives, epic narrators within oral and generation-to-generation narration, in order to link these stories with the archetypal and conventional structure in epic stories, they have used the connecting elements that act as a link between "episodic stories" and the "macro-structure of the work." These connecting elements embody some elements of heroic familiarization or elements of the dragon-slaying myth; nonetheless, the inclusion of such elements and the episodic nature of these stories, together with their lack of structural connection with the macro-structure of the epic are evident, all remarking the essential difference between fairy tales and epic stories.

Keywords:

Epic, Unity, Episodic Stories, Myth, Fairy Tales.

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