

Morphological Analysis of a Story in Elahi-Nameh (Divine Letter) of Attar

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Received: November 6 2013

Accepted: December 2 2013

ABSTRACT

One way of understanding the traditional Persian fictional literature is to check them with new and morphological methods of structural analysis. The purpose of this paper is to describe the building components of a story in Elahi-Nameh of Attar in order to discover the structural patterns of this story. This kind of literary criticisms is called morphology. Accordingly and with regard to building components of this story, the chosen story in Elahi-Nameh of Attar has been separated into different speeches, actions, heroes, moral lessons, time and space.

KEY WORDS: Attar, Elahi-Nameh, morphology, story.

INTRODUCTION

Attar is one of the greatest Sufi poets and great men in the Iranian literary history. His story telling ability and style is like professional story-tellers. The stories narrated by Attar are often serious, pithy and sometimes painful and thus have moral-educational aspects. The majority of these stories are short, but always informative (Zarrinkoob, 1991, p. 62).

Attar's works are like a treasure of precious words, preaches, advice and ethical orders or scientific wisdom. His poems and words have no color of pretension and boastfulness and this fact increases the validity of his poems. Besides, these poems and words have lots of literary and artistic values.

One way to familiarize the public with their past is to convert the language and format of ancient literature into the language and forms that are used today which can be best done in the form of morphological analysis of the scholar's works. In this respect, understanding the elements of each of the stories, studying the background history, recognizing the in fra structure, knowledge about morphology and detailed and subtle comprehension of stories deemed as essential. Furthermore, it is necessary that this literary work have the capacity for being analyzed thereof. Stories and anecdotes have many diverse and varied themes that are mainly drawn from everyday life and as such they are so important. Depending on the conditions and requirements, each story may possess mystical, educational, moral and other purposes. Hidden meanings and purposes of the stories can be inferred and understood by understanding their elements and details. As such, we can do the mentioned acts via using one of the practices of literary criticisms known as morphology. In fact, morphology is a technique that divides the narratives and stories into smaller elements and details in order to facilitate the act of detecting the relationships between diverse elements. Morphology makes explicit the anatomy of tale and narrative in a story. If a text can be divided into smaller components, it suggests that this tale and story have had a backbone and therefore redigestible. In other words, morphology helps us to reach to a better, more complete and more accurate understanding of each topic. We have chosen a story in Elahi-Nameh of Attar and we will analyze it via using a morphological analysis.

The story of Anushirawan and arboriculturer:

Once upon a time, Anushirawan was traveling to a place when he saw an old man who was planting trees. That old man was very old and his waist bent. The king returned to him and came closer and said: O you old man! You are very old and you are about to die. Why and for whom you are planting such trees? The old man answered: O king! Others planted for us and we plant for others as well. Everyone should take as steps as he can in order not to let the order of the world be distorted. Anushirawan became happy by his words and gave the old man a bag of gold. The old man added: O king! See that my tree bore fruit today and there is no need to look for it for 10 years. The king became extremely happy and donated him all the land, village and spring freely and continued his way. O you dear! Today, you must work as far as you can because no gain will be obtained without enduring pain.

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1. Speeches

By speeches, we mean all the words expressed by protagonist that are quoted by Attar. These speeches include the majority of what we have in mind and those sentences which have been expressed by the protagonist such as dialogue, questions and answers, description, etc. Actually, the backbone of any story or narrative is these speeches.

Classification of speeches

Overall, the speeches can be classified from different perspectives:

“The first one is from the perspective of *the speaker* in which case, two categories emerge: the speeches of story-teller and the speeches of protagonists (story heroes)” (Sarami, 2009, p. 258).

“The second one is from the perspective of *quality and condition*; that is, how serious or humorous is a story. Regarding this point, one can include the satire and humor in this category” (ibid).

“The third one is from the perspective of *oral or written format of speeches*” (ibid). Regarding this and with regard to the chosen story in Elahi-Nameh of Attar, it can be said that all the speeches of this story are of oral type.

“The fourth one is the perspective of the *need for response* (dialogue and conversation) and *no need for response* (monologue or soliloquy)” (ibid, p. 259). Regarding this, dialogues can be divided into *face to face* and *distance discussions*. Distance discussions are oral messages. But face to face discussions can be categorized into these types: Regular discussions, questions and answers, description and conclusion of the story events.

Descriptions of story-teller:

Description is one of the verbal techniques applied by Attar when he is trying to narrate a story. Certainly, descriptions help the audience to visualize scenes, actions, characters far better and make it possible for them to gain a better and more accurate understanding of story elements. The majority of descriptions inserted into the stories in Elahi-Nameh of Attar are reworded by the story-teller and this represents the dramatic and admirable ability of Attar. The statuses of description in the chosen story are as follow:

Description of character by the story-teller:

Description of a bent waist old man with white hair who was planting trees.

Conversation (dialogue):

It is a speech which does not finish by the end of speaker's sentences and thus requires a response expressed by an audience or audiences (Sarami, 2009, p. 259). The tangible conversations included in the chosen story in Elahi-Nameh of Attar are as follow:

Question and answer:

Anushirawan asked old man that why he is planting trees and the old man answered that O you the king! Others planted for us and we plant for others as well.

2. Actions (behaviors):

Regarding the chosen story, all the actions are natural and real. These include:

Arboriculture:

The old man was planting trees from the very start of the story.

Donation:

Regarding our chosen story, we read that when Anushirawan heard the very wise response of that old man, he donated all the land, village and spring to him (Attar, 2010, p. 69).

3. Moral lessons

The most prominent feature in the stories of Attar is that they are rich in emotional approach as well as philosophical messages. Attar is a perfect and mystic person and we can learn to live philosophically via reading his stories thoroughly. Attar's stories are mingles of goodness and evilness, bitterness and sweetness and over all mixture of contradictions. The most prominent moral lesson inferred from the chosen story is as follow:

The necessity to maintain order:

Regarding the story of Anushirawan and the arboriculturer, it is asserted that everybody should do as proper and required acts as possible in order to maintain the order of this world.

4. Protagonists (heroes):

Although we counted the speech, thoughts and actions as the core elements of a story, heroes are created via a mixture of these moral elements. Heroes are the characters of stories who are inspired by the human thoughts and tongue; that is, every hero is the axis of his own story. All heroes of this story are normal and natural and there is no supernatural hero in it. The heroes of this story are:

People, who can be categorized into the following two groups:

Courtiers: Generally speaking and with regard to gender of humankind, courtiers are male or female that can be sub-categorized into the kings, princes, ministers, secretaries, influential individuals and even privileged persons. This suggests that the presence of Anushiravan and his generosity indicate his remarkable feature.

Ordinary people: This group of heroes comes from different social strata and do not bear any special names and prestige and thus, have simple and ordinary characters. It is possible and it does not matter that this hero is a woman or a man. Whoever, she/he is considered as the hero of the story. He/she can be like this old man who was planting trees and he could please Anushiravan by his wise words and obtained the gold and silver bag.

5. Time and place:

Time and space are the two intertwined concepts that do not play a special role in the story. Attar rarely designates a name for time and place. Regarding the chosen story, we can see that time of story is in contemporaneous with the reign of King Anushiravan and as such, place of the story has a lower importance compared to time of the story. Place, as a container in which fictional events occur, does not often affect the conveyance of the message of the story and therefore is used less in the stories of Attar. Regarding the ancient folktales, less attention has been directed toward the time and place of stories and removing the details has led the audience to travel in the course of time and from the real world to story world and imagine those places and locations as he/she wishes. Consequently, Attar uses such vague and general places like urban, garden places and etc. in his stories.

Conclusion

Having studied and examined the chosen story, it was concluded that this story of Elahi-Nameh was extremely succinct and concise. Attar introduces the characters mostly via using direct methods. Dialogue has a special status in this story because this didactic element is present in the majority of his stories and, in some cases, some stories are run only by quoting dialogues. Moreover, there is no serious attention toward details of time and place of story and the scenes have been designed and sketched via very brief and transitory descriptions. Having meticulously looked, we can find that the logic of the story is based on reality and that Attar has tried to stretch a natural glaze over the elements and dominate a realistic climate in the story. The obtained results suggest that Attar has instilled moral and spiritual concepts via simple and unadorned language and into diverse forms of speech. Finally, it is accepted and believed that Attar has handled it well and in a proper way.

Acknowledgment

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest in the research.

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