

Epic Genre

MS 2015

Epic

- Epic is a long **narrative** poem in elevated style presenting characters of high position in adventures forming an organic whole through their relation to a central **heroic figure** and through their development of episodes important to the **history of a nation** or race. (Harmon and Holman)

Main characteristics of the epic

- Begins in medias res.
- The setting is vast, covering many nations, the world or the universe.
- Begins with an invocation to a muse (epic invocation). Sacred world of Manas
- Begins with a statement of the theme.
- Includes the use of epithets.
- Contains long lists, called an epic catalogue.
- Features long and formal speeches.
- Shows divine intervention on human affairs.
- Features heroes that embody the values of the civilization.

Ready made elements

- The birth of a hero, The growing- up of a hero, Praise of Weapons, Preparations for battle, The Din on battle, Altercations between heroes prior to Battle, Descriptions of Persons and Steeds, Characteristics of famous heroes, Praise of bride's beauty, Description of a dwelling, Yurt, a Feast, Invitations to a Feast, Death of a Hero, Description of a landscape, Nightfall, Daybreak,

The structure of the Manas

- The birth of Manas
- Manas's childhood
- Manas becomes khan
- Manas's fightings
- Manas meets Almamabet
- Manas's marries Kanykei
- Kokotoi's memorial feast
- Graet Battle
- Mana's death

First recordings

- Chokan Valikhanov(1835-1865)
- Officer, secret agent, amateur ethnologist
- In 1856 in Issyk Kul he recorded two days the episode “Kokotoidun ashy” from Nazar Bolot (3,251linesabout feast, horse racing, games, heroic brawling)
- The text held in the Oriental archives at St.Petersburg
- In 1861 he published a brief overview of Kyrgyz epic
- In 1904 Russian translation appeared (prepared by Veselovski)
- In 1971 the manuscript was issued in Alma Ata
- In 1977 Hatto received the manuscript to provide English translation

Wilhelm Radloff(Vasilij Vasilievich Radlov)1837-1918

- German born Russian linguist
- Trips in 1862, in 1869
- Recorded 5 bards:4 among the Bugu tribe in Issyk Kul (1862), 1 among Solto tribe in Tokmok (1869)
- 9 sections: The birth of Manas,Er Kokcho,and Ak erkech, How Almambet came to Manas,the marriage, death, return to life of Manas. Bokmurun, Kozkaman,the birth of Semetei
- Published In 1885 in St Petersburg

Conclusion about first recordings

- Bards didn't have an access to written text, the epic existed in oral form
- Both bards and scholars didn't have time to correct the text
- The text was not very long

Myths about Manas (By Andrew Wachtel)

- 1. Myth: Manas is a unique work of world culture
- Fact: Manas is a quite standard oral epic, not substantially different from others of its genre
- 2. Myth: Manas is a great work of literature
- Fact: Manas is not a work of literature, if by that we mean an edited and fixed text. It is still a living oral epic and its fixed versions have not gone through the editing process that would make them great literary works

Myth 3

- 3. Myth: Manas is more than 1000 years old and based on historical facts
- Fact: We have no idea how old Manas is but it certainly is not remotely 1000 years old. It is not impossible that the work as we know it contains some factual basis, but there is no way to know how much and in any case it is likely to be quite negligible. In any case, Manas as we know it today is an artifact of the Soviet period

Myth 4

- 4. Myth: Manas describes the life and adventures of a Kyrgyz who unified the Kyrgyz tribes and created a Kyrgyz State
- Fact: Manas describes the life of a typical Central Asian strongman. Insofar as there was a prototype, he certainly did not know he was a Kyrgyz, nor did anyone who recited Manas think this until the 20th century. There is no historical evidence to link Manas to any Kyrgyz state, even if one may have existed at some point in the past

Myth 5

- . Myth: Manas is the longest epic in the world
- Fact: Length is not in any way a marker of quality when it comes to epics. And in any case, even if one cares about such things, Manas is not the longest epic, either in terms of number of lines or number of words.

Myth 6

- Myth: Manas is an “encyclopedia of traditional Kyrgyz life.”
- Fact: Manas undoubtedly illustrates some aspects of the life of Central Asian warlords: primarily depicting such traditional pastimes as fighting, hunting, feasting, games. It has a lot less to say about other aspects of life including work, women and their world, children. And how much of what is described relates to traditional life and how much to the 19th century is not at all clear

Myth 7

- . Myth: Manas provides a blueprint for how Kyrgyz should live
- Fact: Literary texts generally do not make good models for living. Choosing selected passages and presenting them as models opens the question as to whether one might not choose different passages to reach completely opposite conclusions. Better to live life than to copy literature