

The Birth of Heroic Epic from Pastoralist Folklore (The Genesis of Pastoralist Folklore)

Pastoralist tribes had a different dualist philosophy of religion based on the opposition of the good god of heaven, protector of his chosen people, and the bad fallen god of the underworld, representing tribal enemies. If their religious beliefs started from totemism and animism, their oral folklore developed from totemistic and animistic tales. Ural-Altaic hunters practiced matrimonial exogamy with kidnapping brides or paying bride price (*kalym*) to their fathers. This explains the key motif of their **totemistic tales**, stories about elopements of brides from inimical tribes worshipping other totem cults. Their plot told how either the husband or his wife transformed into a totem animal, when their taboo was broken and their totem animals were offended. Later animal partners were humanised and mysterious husbands changed into animist spirits dwelling in waters, mountains or rocks. Spirits were friendly or unfriendly according as they belonged to one's own or inimical tribe.

Another favourite motif appeared in **cannibal tales** about ogres and ogresses intriguing to kill and eat little children that have gone astray in the wood. Their motifs reflected the customs of voluntary hermitage that prescribed old people to abandon their clan and live alone in the wilderness. Little heroes escape from the ogre's hut and set out on a flight using magic tricks with a comb that transform them into things. Such witchcraft appears also in **heroic tales** relating about young heroes fighting with sorcerers.

Heroic tales later developed into heroic songs and voluminous compositions of **heroic epic**. The heroic folklore of Christian crusaders and Muslim mujahedins in Africa focused on four genres¹: heroic epic about the hero's duels (Swahili *tendi*), his childhood (Swahili *maulidi*), raids (Arabic *magházi*) and conquests (Arabic *futúb*). Their motifs revealed the old folk customs of head hunting and warrior's initiation, which measured the warrior's prestige by numbers of his trophies. Young novices boasted of animals they had killed and scalps of enemies they had defeated. They wore their skulls or scalps tied to the saddle of their horse or displayed them on posts of their palisade fence in front of their house. In Homeric and medieval times head hunting grew into trophy hunting but otherwise the ethical codex of the warrior's prestige continued in the same wake.

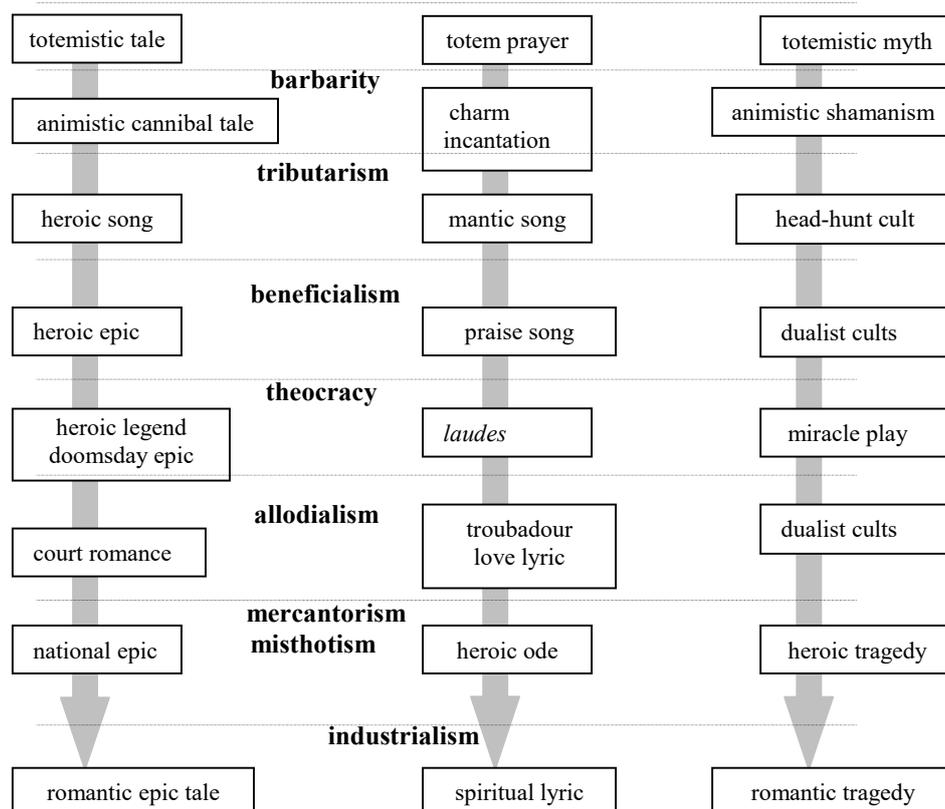


Table 1. *The genesis of genres in pastoralist literature*

The cult of personal duels between warriors had parallels in similar combats between shamans, sorcerers, medicine men and bards. The motifs of magic flight from an ogre's castle reappeared in medieval legends

¹ V. Klíma, K. Růžička, P. Zima: *Literatura černé Afriky*. Praha: Orbis, 1972, p. 66.

about saints fighting with monsters and heathen priests. Medieval hagiography may be divided clearly into **heroic miracles** about miraculous wonders worked by saints and mysteries about martyrs, martyrdom and stoic suffering. The latter reflected the spirit of Christian ascetism descending from agriculturalist folklore, the former reflected the ethical code of **pastoralist heroism** indulging in describing combats and miraculous deeds. Many Christian legends about saints working miracles were just religious versions of heroic songs and plain continuation of shamanist sorcery from the times of the heathen past.

Also pastoralist lyric differed a lot from the agriculturalist tradition of choral hymnology. Pastoralists had their own tradition of individual prayers whispered by shamans and medicinemen on behalf of their patients. Prayers expressed positive wishes addressed to the good-natured monotheist god, charms and incantations expressed negative wishes addressed to inimical bad-natured spirits. Pastoralist shamans prayed to their god protector in pious prayers and reviled bad spirits in charms and songs of blame. Their bards in royal services praised their lords in songs of praise and reviled their enemies in songs of exorcism and vituperation. They conducted poetic contests like knights engaging in tournaments. Exulted odes about brave heroism praising their lords changed into feelings of anger and contempt when challenging foes in songs of blame.

Totemistic tale – one animal species hunts another but rescues from killing a young attractive female and resolves to kidnap her and make her his wife. Their peaceful marriage is disturbed by quarrels due to her and her babies' totemic identity; the hunter's animal kin reproaches her for wearing different fur-clothes and demands her to wear the hide of their own animal totem.

Uralo-Altaic key motifs: patriarchal exogamy, patrilocal marriage, patrilinear descendency, polygyny, tribal totem, totemic fur clothing, elopement of brides, bride price (*kalym*), agnate kinship, evil spirits, world egg, world tree, world duck, comb magic, hero worship, hunting and breeding big game, wide brimmed hats.

Hunters' wooing tale – a hunter meets a beautiful girl in the neighbourhood of a foreign tribe and abducts her against her will to his home; their happy marriage life is marred by their different totemistic identity; they offend their partner's totem animal by breaking its taboos:

- **son's account** (male endomythium) – one of parents' sons brings home an animal bride that agrees to get married and turns into a human being; he hates her to wear her own totem's fur-clothes and offends her by burning them; she feels humiliated and flees from his camp,
- **daughter-in-law's account** (female exomythium) – some parents' daughter is kidnapped from their camp and her brothers set out on a travel to search for her so as to rescue her from the kidnapper's camp,
- **childbirth account** (female exomythium) – parents' daughter gets married to a bridegroom from a different tribe; their marital happiness is disturbed by expected childbirth; mother begets a baby but clads it in the fur of her own totem; her husband, her fellow-wives and his relatives accuse her of giving birth to an animal child.

Animistic courting tale – a girl is abducted from her home by a forest spirit and her brothers decide to set out on an expedition and rescue her.

Dynamistic courting tale – a girl is kidnapped by a mighty chieftain spirit or an evil wizard inhabiting an unconquerable forthill. Her brothers are determined to bring her back, but she is locked in the wizard's inassaultable castle. Brothers want to set her free and during their escape they mask themselves like roadside rocks and bushes. The story-teller explains these masking tricks as black magic and enchanting metamorphoses.

Pastoralist tale – three brothers compete to show who will be the best guardian of the patriarch's herds, who will bring him the most wondrous magic objects and who is the ablest heir of his heritage (*The Phoenix Bird*).

Heroic chant – pugnacious princelings unite and extend their tribal domains with the aid of suites of hired warrior heroes. These heroes abandon their clans and lead an adventurous life in the services of the princes' majesty. The prince adopts them into his court and family, he treats them in the same way as a patriarch treats his sons. Families disintegrate, fathers encounter in duels with their sons, warriors' acquisitive ethics wins over clannish blood bonds.

Dialogics – the dialogisation of *Minnesang* in timocratic societies of estates, parliaments, orders and guilds provided with privileges according to

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| <p>property census. With the rise of parliaments, knights' tournaments, theological disputations at ecclesiastic synods and councils there appears also a corresponding trend to lead poetic altercations between various estates, castes, sexes and crafts. Such dialogisation of social discourse promotes the vogue of amorous estrifs, pastorellas, contests and duels in all cultural layers. Their fashion also contributes to the popularity of jongleurs' performances, dramatic mysteries, miracles and moralities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estrif – amorous courting between a knight and a gentlewoman. • Altercation – poetic disputation about social advantages of the knights' secular standing and the monks' ecclesiastic estate. • Pastorella – an amorous dialogue staging a scene of courting between a nobleman and a fictitious figure of a shepherdess in Arcadia. • Allegoric strife – dream visions concerning quarrels between social advantages of knights and monks leading a quiet life in monasteries. • Miracle – a dramatic performance about miraculous deeds of saints. |
| <p>Renaissance novella – a series of funny erotic stories plotted into a frame narrative about a party of fellow-travellers telling their recollections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renaissance lyrics – amorous poetry determined for solitary domestic reading without an instrumental accompaniment of the lute. • Idyll – a bucolic eclogue about quiet life in the countryside environment. • Epyllion – a small lyric genre with an epic plot telling about a romantic love between a mythological shepherd and a beautiful shepherdess. |
| <p>Baroque theatre – alongside with the weakening of Renaissance absolutism there emerges a revival of court life in tragedy, ballet and masque.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elegy – nostalgic elegiac amorous lyric confessions, in which the poet expresses his feelings of Platonic passionate love to a fictitious mistress. • Amorous novel of tragic passions – chivalric erotic romances in prose. • Romantic amorous tragicomedy – moving mythical love stories. • Baroque tragedy of passions – drama of an intellectual titan's stoic revolt against the despotism of an unscrupulous tyrant. |
| <p>Romanticism – the breakdown of liberal dialogic discourse and a return of dramatic forms to romantic epic; court revels revived in upper-class parlours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Romantic novel – noble heroes reign in parlours and clothe tragedies of emotional passions into literary forms of bourgeois prose. • Byronic lyric tale – a titanic hero fulminates against his era's pettiness. |
| <p>Western novel: 'penny dreadfuls', 'dime novels', pulp magazines.</p> |

Table 2. *The genesis of heroic epic from hunters' folklore*

Extract from Pavel Běliček: *Systematic Poetics II. Literary Ethnology and Sociology*. Prague 2017, pp. 203-207