

THE FANTASY FORMULA IN CHRISTOPHER PAOLINI'S *ERAGON*

Rif'ah Inayati*

Abstrak: Sebuah karya sastra dapat dikategorikan sebagai sebuah karya sastra populer apabila berhasil mendapatkan perhatian dari masyarakat luas. Masalah yang muncul kemudian adalah bagaimanakah cara untuk menganalisis karya sastra tersebut? Apakah dapat dilakukan dengan cara yang sama dengan yang dilakukan pada apa yang disebut sebagai "High Literature"? Oleh sebab itu, studi ini ditujukan untuk menganalisa sebuah karya sastra populer yang ditulis oleh Christopher Paolini, berjudul *Eragon* dan menemukan formulanya.

Kata Kunci: Fantasi, Karya Sastra Populer, *Convention*, *Invention*, *Archetypes*, *Formula*

Introduction

Nowadays, many people regard literary work as their way to have a relaxation, either high literature or popular literature. High literature refers to literary works that can only be criticized by people who have a good understanding on literary works. Meanwhile, literary work can be regarded as popular literature when it gains a good appreciation from the society. Then, the question is, can we use the same method in analyzing those two kinds of literatures? In this case, this study will analyze one of popular literature by figuring out the formula that constructs it.

Formula literature is a kind of literary art. Therefore, it can be analyzed and evaluated like any other kind of literature. There are two central aspects of formulaic structures, their essential standardization and their primarily relation to the needs of escape and relaxation.

Standardization, in important ways, is the essence of all literature. Standard conventions establish a common ground between writers and audiences. Without at least some form of standardization, artistic communication would not be possible. Well-established conventional structures are particularly essential to the creation of formula literature and reflect the interests of audiences, creators and distributors. Audiences find satisfaction and a basic emotional security in a familiar form, in addition, the audience's past experience with a formula gives it a sense of what to expect in new individual examples, thereby increasing its capacity for understanding and enjoying the details of a work (Cawelty, 1976:8-10). It explains the existence of convention and invention. The formulaic pattern of work becomes a convention through several repetitions and creates its own world. To have a certain quality and interest, an author should have their own version of formula. It depends on the author's ability to invent some ingenious new type of mystification. But these unique and special

* Rif'ah Inayati adalah dosen Program Studi Sastra Inggris Universitas Trunojoyo

characteristics must coincide toward the fulfillment of the conventional form.

Another major characteristic of formula literature is the dominant influence of the goals of escape and entertainment. It deals with the use of literature as a means of temporary escape from frustrations of life, stories in this modes are commonly defined as subliterature (as opposed to literature), entertainment (as opposed to serious literature), popular art (as opposed to fine art), lowbrow culture (as opposed to highbrow culture), or in terms of some other pejorative opposition. In this case, escapism can be defined as our capacity to use our imaginations to construct alternative worlds into which we can temporarily retreat (Cawelty, 1976:13).

As shaped by the imperatives of the experience of escape, these formulaic worlds are constructions that can be described as moral fantasies constituting an imaginary world in which the audience can encounter a maximum of excitement without being confronted with an overpowering sense of the insecurity and danger that accompany such forms of excitement in reality. This makes it possible for the reader to enjoy and get an inner pleasure by reading the works. Much of the artistry of formulaic literature involves the creator's ability to plunge the reader into a believable kind of excitement while, at the same time, confirming our confidence that in the formulaic world things always work out as we want them to (Cawelty, 1976:16). It is the essence of a popular literature that mass has a great contribution to the production of the work itself.

Based on the explanation above, it is appropriate for the writer to use the deterministic theories in writing this paper. It deals with Marxian and Freudian ideas to the explanation of literature. It assumes that art is essentially a contingent and dependent form of behavior that is generated and shaped by some underlying social or psychological dynamic (Cawelty, 1976:24). In short, people and societies have an important role in determining the works of literature.

According to Marxian theory, mass has a great contribution on the production of the literary works. It deals with the power among the society. A work of literature can be popular when many people like to read it. It is stated that a work of art of any period achieves this quality by expressing a high level of social awareness (Selden, 1985:26). It can be proved by a huge number of selling copies. The novel *Eragon*, written by Christopher Paolini is publishing sensation, selling over one million copies in only six months in 2003. *Eragon* has spent 98 weeks on The New York Times Bestseller List, and 21 consecutive months on Publishers Weekly Young Adult Fiction Bestseller List, including nine months at the first. The novel came out in paperback in May and again shot the top of both The New York Times and Publishers Weekly charts and has been published in 37 countries in total over 2 million copies are in print. It appears consistently on USA Today's Top 50 Best Selling Books List and The Book Sense Bestseller List (www.alagaesia.com).

Since it is very normal that a popular literature has a great chance to be transformed into a movie form, a big movie studio is attracted to make a movie form of *Eragon*. The film which is produced by 20th Century Fox is released in December, 15th 2006. The film brings the more popularity to the

novel. It casts by Edward Speleers, Sienna Guillory, Jeremy Irons, John Malkovich, Robert Carlyle, Joss Stone and many more. The placement of these promising stars also has an important function in attracting the people's intention. In many times, people decide to watch a movie after the stars. That is why, it is very important to choose promising stars to be successful in the market. After the press released of the movie, the novel is republished with different cover. The cover used to depict a dragon changes into the picture of the artists act in the movie, such as Edward Speelers, Sienna Guillory, Jeremy Irons and John Malkovich.

In psychoanalytic interpretation of literature, it is difficult to dismiss the compelling idea that in literature as in dreams of unconscious or latent impulses find some disguised form of expression. Formula stories may well be one important way in which the individuals in a culture act out unconscious or repressed needs, or express latent motives that they must give expression to but cannot face openly. Since a popular work is a form of escapist work, it tends to construct new disguises or to confirm existing defenses against the confrontation of latent desires (Cawelty, 1976:26). For example, in high literature, we may find a revelation of hidden guilts in the life of protagonist. This will not happen in escapist form of work. In this kind of work, the inquirer protagonist and the hidden guilts are conveniently split into two different characters, the protagonist and the antagonist, the good one and the bad one. It may because the readers simply will not like the story if the hero is turned out to be the evil. Heroes are not marble models. Fear, love, terror and shame do not slip off their surface since the story is got to be real and psychologically truthful. But the readers will not accept a hero who is also the evil. A hero must fight the evil.

Analysis

Eragon is the first novel of Christopher Paolini. He was only fifteen when he started to write this novel. *Eragon* is the first sequel of the inheritance trilogy. He started to write these fantasy novels derived from his fond of magical stories. At the first time, he wrote it only for himself, and then his parents tried to publish it privately through their own publishing house. But now, his novels have turned out to be the bestseller in several charts of magazines. Its popularity spreads out not only in America but also in the whole world. Then why can it be so popular? This paper is intended to be the study on the popular literature of *Eragon* written by Christopher Paolini.

A. Convention

Convention is a formulaic pattern of works which has been accepted widely by the societies through several repetitions. It is said that people will be easier to accept and enjoy the form of works which have been already familiar to them.

A. 1. The World of Magic

Talking about fantasy novels cannot be far away from the world of magic. Fantasy novels are always about magic. There will always be witch, spell, curse, shade, etc.

In *Eragon*, we can also find easily the existence of magic in the story. Being a dragon rider, Eragon is shocked by his ability in using magic. He gets his new ability from his closely tied with his dragon, Saphira. But it does not come easily to him. He has to learn the elf's ancient language, which is believed to have power in magic, for the spells are in the form of this language. In the development of the story, he has to prove his ability in magic by fighting the shade named Durza. His triumph in beating the shade emphasizes his existence as the hero of the story.

Why does the writer insert magic in the story? It is simply because people love magic. Eragon finds it is very exciting to use magic and the reader can feel this excitement when they read the book. Then they imagine this excitement as if they can use it too. They can have whatever they want to have or do whatever they want to do. That is why, people always love magic. But they cannot find it in the real life, they only can find it in the fantasy novels. That is the reason why many people enjoy in reading fantasy novels.

A. 2. Magnificent Imaginative Creatures

All writers of fantasy novels always create several imaginative creatures to support their story. They build the story not just involving the human being but also their created creatures. Some similar creatures have been used by different writers, for example, the elves, the dwarves, unicorns, fairies and also dragons.

In writing his novel, Paolini also uses some of those creatures. Besides human being, Paolini writes about the elves, the dwarves and also the dragons. In this manner, he does not need to give a detail explanation because the readers have been already familiar with those creatures.

The elves are fairies which are usually portrayed to have pointed ears. They have magical power. Even their language is used as the spell of magical words. They also have amazing ability in battling. Their equipments are famous as well hand made. In this novel, the elves have an important role because they who teach Eragon to be a dragon rider including how to use the elves' language as a magical word.

The dwarves are usually portrayed as small creatures, living in a cave or underground to mine gold, silver and diamond. They have a skill in making equipments from metals. In this novel, they appear to live in their city which is built inside the Beor Mountain.

Dragons always appear in almost fantasy novels. They are portrayed as fabulous creatures which are looked like crocodiles or snakes, usually have wings and claws. They have an ability to breathe out fire, often portrays as the guardian of a valued treasure. In this novel, dragon is the most important part

of the story. This convention of creatures makes it easier for the readers in enjoying to read the novel.

A. 3. Horrible Imaginative Creatures

Besides those magnificent creatures, there are also horrible creatures that are created by the writers of fantasy novels. Some of them are giants, trolls, cyclops and basilisk. They are portrayed to have horrible features.

In this novel, Paolini creates a new race of horrible creatures which are called the urgals, kulls and ra'zac. They appear to be monster-like with terrifying appearance.

The existence of these horrible creatures somehow brings a certain excitement to the reader. As Cawelty stated in his book that horror is the most puzzling sort of entertainment, judging from the immense popularity of the formula and the great enjoyment audiences derive from it, people take enormous delight in being scared out of their wits, at least in fantasy (Cawelty, 1976:47). Perhaps, that is the reason why people are still eager to read it, despite of the existence of the horrible creatures.

A. 4. The Hero's Journey and Missions

Just like the adventure novels, fantasy novels are always depicting the journey of the heroes. The journey is always about resolving a mission, whether the mission is for revenge or saving the heroine.

In fantasy novels, the hero is always a superhero with a super power. Eragon here, is portrayed to be a superhero by having ability in magic. He has his journey, firstly to take a revenge on the death of his uncle and also to save Arya, the elf who appears in his dreams. Eragon as the hero here, represents the goodness. As we all know, the good always wins. The harder the obstacles are, the stronger the hero is. That is why, in completing his journey, he finds many obstacles that emphasize his resoluteness.

A. 5. Separation

In fantasy novels, we can find a separation in which the hero has to leave his family and relatives and go to have his journey in solving his missions. But at the end of the story, there will always be a reunion of the hero and his family or relatives.

In Eragon, we can see that he has to leave his village and go to take a revenge on the death of his uncle. He starts his journey in solving his missions. But in this case, because Eragon is the first part of a trilogy, we can find the reunion in *Eldest*, the second part of the trilogy.

B. Invention

To have a certain quality and interest, an author should have their own version of formula. It depends on the author's ability to invent some ingenious new type of mystification. But these unique and special

characteristics must coincide toward the fulfillment of the conventional form. It is very important for a writer to create an invention despite of the existing convention to give a more value to his work.

B. 1. The Hero is a Common Man

The existence of a hero in fantasy novels does not have to be questioned anymore. In every fantasy novel, there have to be a hero. In this case, Paolini uses a new formula of a hero in his novel. The hero who is usually used to be a noble man comes from a Nobel family, such as king or prince, he creates his hero comes from an ordinary man. Before founding the egg, Eragon is just a poor farm boy. His life is totally changed after he found the mysterious blue stone.

Thereby, the writer wants to contribute the dream of each of the readers so that they can imagine them selves as the hero. It maybe because them selves are ordinary people so it is much acceptable for them to have the hero who comes from ordinary man.

B. 2. The Dragon as an Independent Race

Usually in such fantasy novels, dragons are categories as animal creatures, with a complex behavior. In this novel, Paolini portrays the dragons as an independent race just like human beings. They live side by side with the other races. Those are human, elves and dwarves. In many times, dragons are portrayed to be evil creatures, but in this novel dragons are characterized to be high civilized as an independent race. They are known with their power so that many people want to be a dragon rider, the one who can rule over them.

B. 3. The Tough Woman Character

In classical stories, the hero used to save a beautiful weak young woman comes from noble family, such as a princes, but in this novel, Eragon must save a tough smart independent beautiful elf. She knows much about magic and can fight even better than Eragon. In the end of the story, they have to fight side by side in defending Tronjheim, the city of the Dwarves. It makes sense that in present days, we can easily find women with strong characters and have the same position with men in the society. In its way, it presents the character of American women at present.

B. 4. Companionship

In the convention of fantasy genre, the hero of the novel usually has to struggle alone in solving his missions. We will not find a companion who helps him to overcome the obstacles. But in new fantasy novels, it is invented that the hero is accompanied by someone or a group of people. Sometimes, the companion is pictured as dumb or fool men.

In this novel, in doing his journey, he is accompanied by Brom who is used to be a rider himself. He places himself as a guider to teach Eragon to be a good rider.

B. 5. Physical Appearance of the Hero

The hero in convention of fantasy genres is depicted as a muscled middle-aged man. Just like in the story of Hercules, he is depicted as a muscled middle-aged man. While in the invention, the hero is usually pictured as a young slim man with a feminine and romantic look. In this novel, it is represented by the appearance of Eragon as the hero of the story.

Besides talking about convention and invention, in analyzing popular literature, we are talking about archetypes and formulas of the literary structure. From the explanation above, we can draw some archetypes and formulas of the fantasy genres. According to Cawelty in his book entitled "Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular culture", archetype is a universal or transcultural conceptions of literary structure. We can say that it is a general conception of literary structure. It is a common general truth. Meanwhile, formula is a combination or synthesis of a number of specific cultural conventions with a more universal story form or archetype. So, formula is a specific form which is found in a specific literature.

C. Archetypes

C. 1. Journey

In fantasy novel, there will always be a journey taken by the hero of the novel. During this journey, the hero must struggle to face many obstacles in order to solve his mission.

C. 2. Mission

The hero in fantasy novels always take a journey in order to resolve a mission given to him. The mission can be to save someone who is usually appeared to be a woman or to take a revenge on someone's death.

C. 3. Obstacles

The existence of the obstacles appeared during the hero's journey emphasize the existence of the hero him self. The more obstacles, the more powerful the hero is.

C. 4. Imaginative Creatures

There are many imaginative creatures that can be found in the fantasy novel. Those are magnificent creatures or horrible creatures. We can take into account some creatures such as elves, dwarves, dragons, giants etc.

C. 5. Magical Power

In fantasy novels, we can found the use of magical power by the characters of the novel. Usually, the hero appears with this kind of power.

D. Formulas

D. 1. Companionship

It is usually can be found only in American fantasy novels. In taking his journey, the hero of the novel is usually accompanied by someone or a group of people. Often, this companion is represented as a dumb fool man. This formula is regarded to be the Americanes of fantasy novels.

D. 2. The Physical Appearance of the Hero and Heroine

Nowadays, American fantasy writers are prefer to put slim, simple, ordinary, young men with a romantic and feminine performance as the hero of the novels. It is also happened on the woman character of the novels. They are presented as smart, simple, ordinary, brave woman. And in many times, this woman does not necessarily have to be a beautiful woman. It represents American thought of a woman that brain and bravery are more important than physical appearances.

D.3. Real-like Story

In order to be easily understood by the reader, the writer of a literary work has to make his work reasonable. It can be by giving the facts or testimony to give more power on the story. In many times, the author's credibility also works on supporting the popularity of the work. As Cawelty stated that moral fantasy can also be distinguished from the more mimetic form of physical or material fantasy in which the writer imagines a world materially different from ordinary reality, but in which the characters and the situations they confront are still governed by the general truths of human experience (Cawelty, 1976:38).

Working in speculative fiction, the writer must consider that he has an audience that is fairly well grounded in the real world. It is better for him to serve them best by making everything as real as possible, anything that will bring the readers into the writer's universe and imagination so that the readers can imagine themselves wandering around the writer's imagination world. Further, fantasy is regarded as one of many ways to say something truthful about what it is like to be alive because fantasy novel shows the people how to respond to the great questions and quandaries of life, for example, what is the meaning of life and death or how do we deal with joy and sorrow. It also talks about honor, courage, making the best decisions, try to do the right thing and dignity. The essence is that it is got to be real and psychologically truthful. People like to read fantasy novel maybe because fantasy novels still talk about these truths and have a powerful effect on the heart and they cannot get it from anywhere else (Taken from the interview between Phillip Pulman, Tamora Pierce and Christopher Paolini, conducted by David Weich for Powells.com, July 31, 2003).

Paolini in writing his novel tries to make it real-like by adding some facts to support the story. In order to support the

imaginative places he has created, he draws the map of his imaginative world. It allows the readers to imagine all the places mentioned in the story. He also creates language for each race he creates, for example, the elves' language and the dwarves' language. To create these languages, he does some library researches. For example for the elves' language, he takes it from the ancient Norse's language. And to make it more real, he adds how to pronounce his created word and also the meaning of his created language in the end page of the novel.

He also creates his hero as real as possible. Although his hero is a super hero with magical power, he is still a human being with fear, shame, love, loyal, curiosity and anger. This real-like character has a powerful effect on the readers because they have been acquainted with this kind of character in their real life.

Conclusion

In popular literature, the important thing to be analysed is the reason why a certain literary work becomes popular among the society. We can see now, from the analysis above that *Eragon*, as one of popular literature, has provided the readers with a complete package of a popular literary work. It includes the convention, invention, archetypes and formula that distinguish one literary work with another by answering the mass demand.

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