

The Heroic Feast and its Poetics in the Russian Epic Tradition

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ABSTRACT: The article is devoted to the study of the image of the heroic feast and bragging in Russian epics. The author analyzes these structural elements in detail and focuses on the rules of behavior at the feast. The author concludes that feasting and bragging play an important role in the plot of the epic and have a didactic character.

KEYWORD: Heroic epic, bylina, hero, feast, bragging, typical formula, epic rule

Many epics begin with a description of a princely feast, where guests brag, unlike a certain hero, who becomes the main character of this epic. On the contrary, he tries in no way to attract the attention of those present and the prince. This is what stands out against the background of the overall picture of the feast.

Researchers claim that boasting at a feast in epics is considered the norm. She gives information to the host of the feast (the prince) about the hero and the tactics of behavior towards him. S. V. Kozlovsky calls this norm "an instrument of manifestation, with the help of which it was possible to change, confirm and increase one's status" [7, p. 114]. He is sure that boasting can be used "as a kind of indicator of assessing the social significance of the hero's actions" [8].

Bragging in the description of the feast is a common place and looks like this:

Everyone got drunk at the feast,

Still , you 've had enough of honest,

All at the feast and bragged.

Another boasts a good fellow with a good horse,

Another brags about yes silk port,

Another praises villages with squats.

Another praises cities and suburbs.

The other one boasts of a wide yard.

A strong man boasts of a great strength,

The rich brags about wealth / gold treasury,

The smart brags about his native father / mother,

And the mad / stupid / cunning brags about his young wife / sister [11, p. 203].

The typical formula showing the manner of bragging in the epic "shows not only the hierarchy (who and what), but also the attitude to who and how (reasonably / stupidly) brags" [7, p. 116]. The analysis of bragging in the epics shows that the heroes brag about horses, strength, grit, the rich brag about wealth (cities with suburbs, villages, a silk port, a wide courtyard, a golden treasury), the smart - parents, and the stupid - a young wife or sister.

It should be noted that those who have a high position in society brag. Bragging is permissible only at an honorable feast and only after any significant achievements, that is, a hero cannot boast of a heroic feat that he has not yet accomplished. The boast of the hero Svyatogor with his strength (he wants to turn the earth if there was a pillar and a ring in the pillar) is performed outside the feast, this is unacceptable, because society condemns it, and "consequently puts the braggart outside the law" [8]. Such boasting is unacceptable. Svyatogor's bragging is one of the reasons why this mighty hero has become a thing of the past, giving way to another hero – Ilya Muromets, whose life was spent in exploits performed to protect the Motherland from foreign invaders.

Bragging takes the form of a dialogue that begins with a question about the reason for the hero's non-participation in the feast:

Why don't you brag about anything,
Don't eat, drink or eat,
Don't you try white swans?
Or did you not like the cup,
Or was the place bad,
Or was the drunk making fun of you? [4, p. 281].

Such a question from the prince to the heroes makes them tell about their exploits or riches.

According to R. S. Lipets, the description of the feast scenes in the epics included an element of the narrator's own boasting [9].

It should be remembered that one of the meanings of the verb "to brag" in the Russian language is to tell, "to talk on vacation" [5]. F. I. Buslaeva claimed that "the bragging of heroes at a feast is the content of epics" [3]. This means that the feat that the hero boasts about is certainly included in the plot of the same epic.

An example of this is the story of Ilya Muromets about how he caught a Robber Solovey.

- Why are you a good fellow, you don't brag about anything?
- And what will I brag about?

Am I bragging about that?

- I'll wait for the morning, Sunday mass

I wanted to come from the city of Murom,

Karacheeva is coming from the village.

And how I was driving here by the way,
 And there is a great power under the city of Chernigorod,
 And a great power, a considerable one;
 I've beaten that great force here;
 And I came to the city of Chernigorod
 And ask the peasants of the city of Chernigorod,
 And ask about the right-of-way.
 They showed me a straight path, –
 It has not been driven on this path for thirty years;
 There were already three great outposts on it:
 As the first outpost, there were dark forests and black mud;
 As I arrived here to two outposts,
 And I got off with a good horse,
 And with my left hand I lead the horse, with my right hand I tear the oak tree,
 And how do I tear up the oak tree and tear it up by the roots;
 How did I get through here and the mud is black and the dark forests,
 And I arrived at the third outpost,
 I came here to the river Smorodinka.
 And the Solovey Rokhmanovich is sitting there,
 He's a thief-dog sitting on nine oaks:
 I shot him from nine oaks [2, p. 350].

The heroes also brag about their wealth. For example, Duke boasts of his possessions in Galich (Volhynia, Korel, India) and satirically speaks about the boyars of Moscow of the XVI - XVII centuries.

Ah, you are a brave good fellow!
 What are you not drinking, not eating,
 Don't you talk to anyone, don't you brag?
 Isn't a feast for you and not according to reason,
 Or did you have nothing to eat,
 Or is the person poor, there is nothing to brag about?
 Duke Stepanovich said to him:
 - Oh, you, sunshine, Vladimir of Kiev!
 I have wealth and more than yours,

I was left an orphan by my father,
 And I'm not used to eating black bread,
 And my mother's,
 The honest widow Amelfa Timofeevna,
 There are white stone chambers,
 Floors and environment of one silver,
 The hooks of the breakout on the bulat are paid.
 Those stoves were glazed,
 The broom was silk,
 The water was honey,
 Rolls are baked from cereals.
 Eat a roll, but you want another one,
 And eat the other one, the soul burns on the third,
 If you eat the third one, then you will be full.
 And there is no silver and gold account
 A wide courtyard on seven versts,
 And the fences are gilded [10, pp. 678-679].

The hyperbolized "Wide courtyard on seven versts" and the abundance of gilding are typical features of the description of wealth. V. Propp notes that here "a feature characteristic of the description of other parts of the courtyard and buildings is reflected – this is a passion for gold, gilding" [12, p. 492].

The description of Duke and Stavr's dialogue with Prince Vladimir shows that Duke and Stavr are richer than the Kiev boyars.

What is this fortress in Kiev
 From the Grand Duke Vladimir?
 From me, Stavr Boyar,
 A wide courtyard is no worse than the city of Kiev,
 And my yard is seven versts away.
 And the palaces are made of white oak,
 The palaces of grey beavers are covered,
 The ceiling in the palaces of black sables.
 The floor is made of one silver,
 Hooks and breakdowns on bulat are gilded [6, pp. 90-91].

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The epic formula of bragging is also inherent in the epics of the Novgorod cycle. In the epic about Sadko, he describes his wealth and opportunities as follows:

– And how much will I have to brag about
And with your uncountable gold treasury to me:
And th on my own I will uncountable gold treasury
And I will buy up like all the goods of Novgorod,
And how all the goods are thin and kind,
And that there will be no more goods on sale in the city [10, p. 646].

Sadko is depicted in opposition to the merchant part of the population of Novgorod. He despises them and wants to humiliate them with the help of his wealth by buying all their property. V. G. Belinsky states that "this strength and prowess are based on endless funds, the acquisition of which is possible only in the trading community. The Russian man is brave in everything and loves to show off his prowess in everything... Sadko buys goods in Novgorod not out of calculation, not out of need, but because he diverged and the sea is knee-deep to him" [1, p. 417].

Bragging about family members is a special formula in the epics, as it is divided into blamed and approved action. Bragging by his wife or sister is condemned, bragging by his parents is approved.

This is explained by the fact that the wife belongs to another family and cannot be considered as "property" [8]. Often in the epics, someone who brags about his wife is called unreasonable or insane. Whereas the boast of parents in the epic is approved, recognized as intelligent or reasonable. "Apparently, this is bragging about fame, merits, works of a kind. The hero can be proud of these "works" because he is an integral part, a continuation of the family" [8].

Bragging about a sister is also condemned in the epic, because there is no braggart's own merits here. Researchers note that brothers, when portraying their sisters, speak only about their positive moral qualities. But, as V. Y. Propp notes, "not a word is mentioned about the qualities of the girl herself, about her moral virtues or shortcomings... Brothers boast not of their sister's virtues, but that she is well locked up" [12, p. 421]. Such a formula depicts a girl in a terem (in a closed space), who is there in captivity. V. Ya. Propp asserts the anti-bogatyr orientation of such a formula [12, p. 421].

I am surprised at the two Petrovich brothers,
Petrovich, Borodovich brothers:
Why don't you, brothers, brag?"
They say soon to the brothers, these are the speeches:
- You be alive, you're our red sun,
You are a very affectionate Prince Vladimir!
We have nothing to brag about;
After all, are we bragging about that,
By bragging about his own sister,
Who is Nastasya Petrovna's darling all the time:

My dear sister is sitting with me,
 She is sitting in a tall new terem
 She sits behind many overseas,
 So that the sun does not bake her red,
 So that the violent winds do not wind up,
 So that the good people do not see,
 To Russian mighty heroes,
 All the tall ones are good to her [2, p. 69].

In the epic about Sukhman, we can see a special case of bragging, where it means the departure of the hero into exile:

- What are you, Sukhman son Dolmantyevich,
 You don't eat, you don't drink, you don't eat,
 You don't touch the white swan,
 Aren't you bragging about anyone?
 Sukhman son Dolmantyevich will speak up:
 - Oh, you are Vladimir of Kiev.
 Give me the time of the day in the morning,
 Day from morning till evening,
 I'm going to take a dry ride through the backwaters today.
 I'll bring the swan alive into your hands,
 And on yours on the oak table [10, pp. 568-569].

Sukhman's refusal to brag is explained by the fact that he has nothing. But at the same time, he doesn't want to stay in this company. "Refusal to brag is an expression of hidden opposition" [12, p. 389]. Sukhman, under the pretext of catching and bringing the prince a live swan, leaves the unwanted feast. It can be assumed that by the word "swan" the hero means any living sacrifice or bride for the prince.

Bragging at a feast in the epic "Dunai" also has a special meaning. Dunai boasts that he is the best shooter and again, breaking the rules, boasts of his wife. V. Propp on this occasion claims that "such boasting shows that the Danube, despite the success of his enterprise, has not been reborn into a true hero who would have a place among the Kiev heroes" [12, pp. 151-152].

– There is no better me than a good fellow in all of Kiev!
 no one dared to go to woo the glorious Prince Vladymir
 on the Queen Opraxia , –
 I got married myself and married people,

I am a fighter myself and a dashing fellow,
And I'm a good shot with a tight bow! [10, pp. 106-107].

Heroes should not talk about their superiority over others [12, p. 152]. His wife answers the words of Dunai and compares him with other heroes and with herself. Boastfulness and addiction Dunai to wine leads to tragedy [1].

Summarizing the above, it can be argued that bragging in the epic has a dual character. At first glance, you can brag only at a feast and only those feats or merits that are on the account of the hero. But you can't brag about yourself, your wife, your sister, or put yourself above others. Violation of this epic rule leads to tragic consequences.

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