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A Thematic-Narrative Comparison Between Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* and *Nibelungenlied*

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Abstract

Epics recount the first human experiences and knowledge in a narrative often in a symbolic way. Therefore, they are especially important from different literary, mythology, and anthropology aspects. Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* is the most important Iranian epic, and *Nibelungenlied* (Song of Nibelungen) is the best epic of the Germans. *Shahnameh* belongs to New Persian and *Nibelungenlied* dates back to the Middle German eras. It seems that among the famous epics of the world, these two epics are less compared with each other. Great epic works, due to their origin in various natural, geographical, historical, and cultural contexts, have their own unique narration and special characteristics, along with significant commonalities. This research first narrates a brief summary of the story of both works, although in the case of *Shahnameh*, due to its huge volume, it is limited to a brief outline. Then, it compares common motifs and themes, and then discusses topics and stories with closer and more similarities, which is caused by similarities in the structure of their narrations. The thematic classification of the most important topics in this research includes the amazing characteristics of the hero, heroic tests, climatic (geographical) setting of the story, hero and anti-hero, dream and dream interpretation, treasure hunting, invulnerability, battle with the dragon, the trinity of power in three lands, the tragic disclosure of secrets, death of a hero, vengeful woman, and the marriage of the hero in a foreign land.

Keywords: Comparative Criticism, Epic, Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, *Nibelungenlied*, Siegfried, Siavash, Esfandiar.

1. Introduction

In the comparative study of the epic works of different peoples and nations, in addition to the reflection of the spirits and moods and the process of development of a particular ethnicity, many commonalities in the experiences, thoughts, and ideals of the ancient human societies, as well as the way of narrating them, can be perceived and observed (Zarrinkoob, 1990, p. 68; Neda, 2014). One important aspect of such investigations, which search for human thought in the depths of the past and in the form of narratives, is based on this basis. "Every similarity in epic narrations is not due to influence" (Khaleghi-Motlagh, 2007, p. 135). In explaining such similarities, Jung involves the idea of archetypes and the collective unconscious that have played a role in the structure of human imagination. (Prawer, 2017, p. 57)

Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* is the most important Iranian "epic" (Abrams, 1993, p. 49-51; Cuddon, 1984, p. 225-234; Shamisa, 2004, p. 59-66) and *Nibelungenlied* is the best epic of Germans and Germanic peoples (Trawick, 1994, p. 234). "Although *Nibelungenlied* is called a song, it is an epic story" (Khaleghi-Motlagh, 2007, p. 125). *Shahnameh* is written in New Persian and *Nibelungenlied* in the Middle German eras. In terms of a comparison between *Shahnameh* and *Nibelungenlied*, some articles have been written. The authors of these articles have paid attention to some comparisons in general topics such as the invulnerability, position of women, and the epic genre. The current research, in addition to comparing other themes, tries to examine the narrative similarities of the two epics.

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The study first briefly introduces the two works and provides a summary of them to understand the events of the story as much as possible, after that, the general and subsequently closer similarities in motifs (Sokhanvar, Zamani, 2003, p. 73), the narration, and prominent role-playing elements are examined and explained.

Thematic classification of the most important topics in this research includes the amazing characteristics of the hero and his special training, difficult tests to obtain the status of a hero, the climatic (geographical) setting of the story, the hero and anti-hero, dream and dream interpretation, treasure hunting, invulnerability, the battle with the dragon, the trinity of power in the three lands, the symbols and signs of identification and the disclosure of the secret, death of the hero in the hunting ground, vengeful woman, and choosing a wife from a foreign land.

2. *Shahnameh*: Introduction and Summary

2.1. Introduction

Shahnameh (the Book of Kings) is a long epic poem written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi between 977 and 1010 C.E. (Khaleghi-Motlagh, 2012) and is a national epic of Iran. *Shahnameh* is one of the world's longest epic poems and the longest epic poem created by a single author. It tells mainly the mythical and to some extent the historical past of the Persian Empire from the creation of the world until the Muslim conquest in the seventh century. Iran, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and other regions influenced by Persian culture celebrate this national epic.

The work is of importance in Persian culture and the Persian language. It is regarded as a literary masterpiece, and definitive of the ethno-national, cultural identity of Iran. *Shahnameh* has 62 stories and some 50,000 rhyming couplets, making it more than 12 times the length of the German *Nibelungenlied*.

2.2. Summary

Shahnameh begins with the creation of the universe; it then explains the reign of the first kings of Iran. After the assassination of King Iraj, a merciless war is waged for several centuries between the settled Iranians and the nomadic Turanians of central Asia. This cycle of wars is divided into several "gestes", corresponding to the exploits of the heroes who dominate the action-heroes of superhuman proportions and strength, among whom the famous Rostam stands out. This epic, while dealing mainly with war, contains some splendid love stories (Encyclopedia of Islam, 1986).

3. *Nibelungenlied*: Introduction and Summary

3.1. Introduction

Nibelungenlied (The Song of the Nibelungs) is an epic poem written around 1200 A.D. in Middle High German. Its anonymous poet was likely from the region of Passau (a city in lower Bavaria, Germany). He was an Austrian poet (Khaleghi-Motlagh, 2007, p. 125). The poem was forgotten after around 1500 A.D. but was rediscovered in 1755 A.D.

Dubbed the "German Iliad", *Nibelungenlied* began a new life as the German national epic. It has been called one of the most impressive and certainly the most powerful works of the German epics of the Middle Ages. The poem weaves a tapestry of heroic deeds, love, betrayal, and tragic downfall; and serves as a reflection of medieval values, honor codes, and the intertwining of historical events, and legendary elements. *Nibelungenlied* is split into two parts: 1) The entrance of Siegfried into Burgundians court, marriage with Kriemhild, Siegfried's murder by the Burgundians' vassal, Hagen; and 2) Kriemhild's revenge of Burgundians. In the second part, the poem enjoys the historical core with the description of the decline of the Burgundians' reign in the Rhineland in 436 A.D. and Attila's death in 453 A.D. (Khaleghi-Motlagh, 2007, p. 125).

3.2. Summary

In ancient times, there was a handsome, brave, and famous boy named Siegfried, the son of King Sigmund, in Xanton in the Netherlands. He went after gaining honor and forming a territory, and after a short journey at sea and a long time on land and going through many adventures, his fame reached all the lands. During these journeys and heroisms, he fearlessly killed the Fafnir dragon, ate its heart, soaked in its blood, and thus became invulnerable. Only one part of his body remained vulnerable, between his shoulders. Due to a linden leaf (lindenblatt) sticking to it, it was not stained with dragon's blood. In the continuation of his adventures, Siegfried reached the land of Nibelungen, and with tact and courage, he was able to kill the kings of Nibelungen, win over Alberich the dwarf, and obtain their huge treasure, which in addition to countless gold and jewels, included an invisibility and empowering cloak and a sword soaked in dragon blood.

Nibelungs accepted him as king. Siegfried arranged all the work based on proper order and selected twelve noble warriors as his trusted assistants. On the other hand, in the land of Worms, where the Burgundian kings were ascending to the throne, Kriemhild, the most beautiful maiden, was living with her mother and her three brothers, Gunther, Gernot, and Giselher. Siegfried, who hears about Kriemhild's beauty and falls in love with her, immediately and recklessly goes to Worms to propose to his favorite girl (Behjat, 2021, p. 57-58; Sa'iedian, 1990, p. 943-954).

During his presence in Burgundy, the Saxons and Danes attacked this land. Siegfried volunteers to help Gunther's army fight and together they succeed. Gunther agrees to let Siegfried marry Kriemhild by offering an ominous condition that if Siegfried helps Gunther acquire the warrior-queen of Iceland (Inceland, Isenstein in Iceland), Brünhild will also be his wife. Siegfried does this through his power and magic instruments and marries Kriemhild; however, Brünhild and Kriemhild become rivals, leading eventually to Siegfried's murder by the Burgundians' vassal Hagen with Gunther's involvement. After a while, Kriemhild finds out about the conspiracy and thinks of revenge. The widow Kriemhild is married to Etzel, king of the Huns. She later invites her brother and his court to visit Etzel's Kingdom intending to kill Hagen. Her revenge results in the death of all the Burgundians who came to Etzel's court and many Hun heroes as well as the destruction of Etzel's kingdom and the death of Kriemhild herself. Finally, lord Dietrich, King Etzel, and all the people of the court lament the death of so many heroes (Trawick, 1994, p. 235; Sa'iedian, 1990, p. 943-954).

4. Comparison of the Commonalities in Motifs and the Narration of Two Epics

Beyond the two Iranian and German epics (Safa, 2004, p. 3-6), which appear to be different stories, many similarities and commonalities in terms of structure, events, action, function, and ideas are seen such as general themes including amazing heroic actions, prominence of warriors, war and campaign, battle rituals, happiness and feast, ethnic and national ideals, mythological thinking, the fusion of myth and history, the inevitability of fate, the display of good, along with bad characteristics such as ambition, love, loyalty, evil, trickery, betrayal, jealousy, greed, tragic deaths, and so on. In this research, we have tried to address a number of common motifs and themes in these two works, which are also similar in terms of narration and story, and to investigate and reveal the common and unconscious patterns of ancient epic writers in their creation.

4.1. Some General Similarities in Motifs

4.1.1. The Amazing and Distinctive Strength and Training of the Hero to Achieve the Heroic Status

We see a kind of amazing training in *Shahnameh*, especially in the case of heroes such as Zal, Rostam, Sohrab, and Bahman. The heroes are known as the best ones after going through the educational stages and proving their heroic skills in the competition field, and some of them, like Zal and Rostam, are famous with the special nickname of the world champion (superhero). Before reaching this position, epic personality had an amazing childhood and adolescence and he is distinguished in terms of his physical ability and the events that happen to him. Rostam was born by cesarean section, no horse has the strength to bear his weight, so the hero must find an extraordinary horse (Rakhsh). At the age of eight, he kills a white elephant with Sam's mace (Ferdowsi, 1990, vol. 1, p. 175-184). Zal was abandoned in the desert when he was a baby, and the legendary and magical bird Simorgh found him, took him to its nest, and raised him (Ibid, p. 109-115).

In the Nibelungen epic, Siegfried has also amazing beauty, intelligence, and strength since childhood. In the beginning, he is a bully and aggressive person, and due to a misunderstanding, he even kills his trainer, Mimer, a champion and a weapon maker, with a blow of his sword. In the making of swords, he takes extremely heavy hammers as a toy, and from the landing of the blow, he creates a terrifying sight like a thunderbolt, finally, at the beginning of his youth, he wins a championship competition over the rivals from all over his father's territory. Then he goes on an adventure and conquers his own territory (Sa'iedian, 1990, p. 942-944).

4.1.2. Difficult Tests and Outstanding Functions of the Hero

In the epics, after gaining the position of hero and the necessary abilities, the hero uses all his strength and once again participates in a series of battles and difficult stages, and his status as a unique warrior establishes and reaches its peak. At this stage, the actions of the hero in terms of geographical location go beyond the previous stage and perform the most outstanding actions, and the most important events in his life have a decisive effect on his fate and those around him.

In *Shahnameh*, the most famous hero, Rostam victoriously participates in many wars to protect Iran and the Iranians, the most important of which is the war between Iran and Turan. He is the number one hero and the real commander of this series of battles. The end of these battles is the capture and death of the biggest enemy of the Iranians, Afrasiab. An important part of Rostam's outstanding deeds occurs in his Haft Khan (Seven Labors), which are continuous and uninterrupted stages and this is also a prelude to defeating the demons (Divan) of Mazandaran by passing through all of them victoriously and rescuing the Shah of Iran and his army from captivity. In *Shahnameh*, Haft Khan (Seven Labors) forms the most outstanding act of Rostam's heroism due to its continuity and mysterious title. The number "seven" was sacred in ancient Iranian culture and the symbol of perfection and completeness. In Haft Khan, Rostam performs seven victorious acts of heroism: The battle of Rakhsh (Rostam's horse) with the lion, crossing the harsh and burning desert, fighting with a dragon, killing an old witch, fighting with a demon named Olad and capturing him, fighting with Arzhang, the demon, and killing the White Demon (Ferdowsi, 1990, vol. 1, p. 256-270). Rostam's Haft Khan is like the twelve difficult stages of Hercules in Greek mythology.

The most important Siegfried's acts appear after he leaves his fatherland. In this stage, he embarks on adventurous journeys. The risky journey in the epic is one of the important bases of heroism. Siegfried's journey to the icy and distant land of Iceland, the place and territory of the beautiful queen Brünhild while struggling with the difficulties of nature is also his first emotional test, the end of which is a kind of disappointment. After this short voyage, Siegfried begins his journey on land, sometimes he passes through fertile plains and sometimes through deserts and the place of thieves and wild beasts, and on his way, he kills countless numbers of monsters and giants (Sa'iedian, 1990, p. 946-947). Finally, he reaches the land of Nibelungen (see summary). His outstanding action in this land is the turning point of his heroism, by defeating the Nibelungen's kings and removing them, he obtains a great and legendary treasure, captures his own territory, and is known as the King of Nibelungen. He even acquires some magical powers at this stage. The importance of these heroics in the title of Germanic epic is quite obvious. His confrontation with dangerous and continuous difficulties turns this part of the story into a Haft Khan (seven labors) for Siegfried.

4.1.3. Climatic (Geographical) Setting of the Story

The events of both Iranian and German epics, unlike Greek and Latin epics, often take place on land. In *Shahnameh*, a sea voyage is not seen. At the time of creating the epic, Iranians did not have much connection with the sea, but sometimes there are references to the sea and crossing them, which are often large and raging rivers of the plateau of Iran. In Rostam's battle with the Akvan demon (who does everything upside down), this demon throws Rostam into the Caspian Sea. He saves himself by swimming (Ferdowsi, 1990, vol. 3, p. 136-143). Probably, this demon is a symbol of storms and sea whirlwinds. The role of the sea in *Nibelungenlied* is a bit bolder. Siegfried goes to Icenland (the island of Iceland), twice to meet Prince Brünhild on a voyage (Sa'iedian, 1990, p. 945, 954).

4.1.4. Hero and Antihero

In *Shahnameh*, several anti-heroes (Cuddon, 1984, p. 46) appear in different parts of the epic (Zahak, Afrasiab, Shaghad, etc.). In connection with the end of Rostam, Shaghad is the most hated of them. He is the murderer of the first hero of *Shahnameh*, Rostam. Shaghad is Rostam's half-brother. He becomes Kabul king's groom and stays in his court but he is always jealous of Rostam's heroisms, and finally, due to his clever and malicious plot, Rostam falls into a deadly covered well full of poisonous and sharp weapons and dies (Ferdowsi, 1990, vol. 4, p. 351-358).

The antihero in *Nibelungenlied* is Hagen, a ruthless and deceitful courtier. His deception is implemented in two stages. First, with the false intention of supporting Siegfried on the battlefield, he misuses the naivety of Kriemhild and learns from her language about the hero's vulnerable point. In the next stage, he arranges a false contest to bring water from the spring. By the side of the lonely spring, he kills the hero with his javelin (or by shooting an arrow) from behind his head (Sa'iedian, 1990, p. 957, Behjat, 2021, p. 57-58). The remarkable point about the antihero's fate is that in the epic of *Nibelungen*; Siegfried's wife, Kriemhild takes revenge and kills Hagen long after, but in *Shahnameh*, Rostam himself in the last moments of his life kills Shaghad, who was hiding behind an old and rotten tree, by throwing an arrow (Katouzian, 2012, p. 34). He is among a few heroes, and maybe is the only one who takes revenge on his killer and kills him before his death shortly after being injured.

4.1.5. Dream and Dream Interpretation

In *Shahnameh*, the function of dream and its interpretation can be seen many times. Dreams are prophetic and sometimes give good news and sometimes tell about an ominous incident. Most of the important events have been inspired to the heroes and kings before happening, in their dreams. Such as Siavash's dream; he sees in his vision that a mountain of fire surrounds Siavashgerd (the city he had built) and burns it, and he interprets it as his own death (Ferdowsi, 1966, vol. 3, p. 139-141). These dreams are accompanied by symbolic elements in some cases like the example above.

In *Nibelungenlied*, Kriemhild's symbolic dream predicts the tragic side of the story, Siegfried's murder (Sa'iedian, 1990, p. 945). Kriemhild has a dream of a falcon that is killed by two eagles. Her mother interprets this to mean that Kriemhild's future husband will die a violent death and Kriemhild consequently resolves to remain unmarried. However, later, seeing Siegfried, she falls in love with him and changes her decision. This dream, which at the same time tells of both love and misfortune, leaves a painful impact on the whole future life of Kriemhild.

4.1.6. Treasure

Shahnameh mentions the seven treasures of Khosrow Parviz and the treasure of Jamshid. Khosrow Parviz's treasures are a sign of his political authority and the splendor of his court. Each of these treasures has a name and was provided by the ransom and tribute of various countries that were obedient to him (Ferdowsi, 1990, vol. 7, p. 165-167). Jamshid's treasure is also found by King Bahram Gur. In addition to many gold coins, this treasure contains two golden cows, that's why it is also called the cows' treasure (Ganj-e Gavan). Therefore, he feels that he does not need this treasure and orders that all of them should be distributed among the widows, orphans, and poor people. Finding and distributing this treasure among the needy is an opportunity for him to preach to his friends, and those around him, and he warns them from greed and from the world (Ferdowsi, 1990, vol.5, p. 299-302). Finding the treasure and having it in *Shahnameh* is a testimony to the king's fruition and splendor and a part of the various events that occur in his life, and it is a confirmation of worldly welfare and his legendary wealth.

In *Nibelungenlied*, treasure is one of the most important motifs of the story. It shapes and affects all elements of the story from the beginning to the end. In the first part of the poem, Siegfried gets the treasure of *Nibelungen* by killing two kings who are brothers and jointly rule the land of *Nibelungen* (Sa'iedian, 1990, p. 945). After Siegfried's murder, Hagen removes this treasure from Kriemhild's reach and throws and hides it at the bottom of the Rhine River. This behavior of Hagen causes Kriemhild's hatred and sense of revenge to intensify. One of Kriemhild's important goals at the end of the story is to get this treasure back from her brother Gunther and Hagen, and both of them refuse to reveal its hiding place until the end of their lives. Basically, the highest aspiration of the Germanic hero is to grab "Hört" (treasure) (Behzad, 2017, p. 459), the symbol of strength and power, and to preserve it with all efforts and not surrender it to the enemy at any cost even at the inevitable moment of death. Both Gunther and Hagen die in this way (Seyyed Hosseini, Sa'adat, 2002, p. 2605).

4.2. Closer Similarities

4.2.1. Invulnerability

The most important similarity that can be found between the two epics is the motif of invulnerability. Invulnerability as an extraordinary issue and an exceptional power is rooted in the human desire for immortality. In the mythology of the world, there are a few people who are famous as invulnerable (Shamisa, 2004, p. 92-94), and Esfandiar is one of the most prominent ones in the mythology of Iran, and he is also known to most of the researchers of the world mythology. Esfandiar is the greatest hero of *Shahnameh* after Rostam. According to a narration in *Zaratosht-Nameh* (the book of Zoroaster, in the 13th century C.E.), which also takes its narration from an older source, the prophet Zoroaster gave the blessed pomegranate fruit to Esfandiar and made him invulnerable, and this is because Esfandiar was a supporter of the religion of Zoroastrianism.

There are different stories about the reason for Esfandiar's vulnerability. According to another story, Esfandiar took a dip in a mythical river at the behest of Zoroaster and became invulnerable but Esfandiar's eyes did not enjoy this feature because he had to close his eyes while diving and this organ remained still vulnerable (ibid, p. 93; Eslami Nodoushan, 2011). Finally, following a dispute between Rostam and Esfandiar, Rostam, with the guidance of Simorgh (the legendary bird that supports Rostam), aims an arrow at Esfandiar's eyes and kills him.

Siegfried becomes invulnerable by killing and plunging into the blood of a dragon called Fafnir (Der gehörmte Siegfried). His vulnerable point is the place between his two shoulders where a leaf from the linden tree fell on him and as a result, did not come into contact with the dragon's blood. Hagen kills him by hitting him there (Seyyed Hosseini & Sa'adat, 2002, p. 2606). Both heroes, like other invulnerables, have a vulnerable point in their bodies, and they all die at a young age. This weak point is a sign of human weakness and incapacity against fate.

4.2.2. Battling the Dragon

One of the recurring topics in Iranian mythology and epics, including *Shahnameh*, is dragon killing. Dragon slaying is a heroic tradition that can be seen in the epics and stories of other nations and has become an important motif and archetype (Shamisa, 2004, p. 75-76). Both Rostam and Esfandiar kill dragons in their Haft Khans (Seven Labors). Dragon slaying is a symbol of the hero's confrontation with the most powerful and formidable demonic force and victory over it.

Siegfried kills Fafnir the dragon with his sword, and Rostam cuts off the dragon's head with his sharp sword, and of course, his horse Rakhsh also helps him. Esfandiar's method of killing the dragon is different. The breath of the dragon is poisonous, so he thinks of a plan in such a way that he sits in a box placed in a chariot that is equipped with sharp and cutting weapons, and as soon as the dragon opens its mouth, he enters the dragon's palate. As a result of the sharp weapons, the dragon's body is injured from the inside and becomes weak, and after that Esfandiar comes out of the box and gives the final blow to the dragon's brain with a sword and kills it (Ferdowsi, 1990, vol.4, p. 250-253). Killing the dragon at the hands of Rostam and Esfandiar is an indicator of their extraordinary physical and intellectual power at one point in their heroic actions. In the case of Siegfried, it is beyond that, and his invulnerability specialty is related to killing the dragon and being immersed in its blood; a power that has a lasting effect on the events of the hero's life until the end of the story.

4.2.3. Trinity of Power in Three Lands

In *Shahnameh* and *Nibelungenlied*, the division of territories is based on the sacred number "three". Fereydoun has three sons named Salm, Tur, and Iraj and divides the world between them. He gave Rome and the West to Salm, and China and Turan to Tur, who was called Turanshah, and also gave the kingdom of Iran to Iraj. The two older brothers, Salm and Tur, due to jealousy and greed for Iraj's territory, kill him in a treacherous and cowardly manner after inviting him. Later, Iraj's grandson, Manouchehr, takes revenge after puberty and kills Salm and Tur, and Fereydoun abdicates in favor of him (Ferdowsi, 1990, vol. 1, p. 71-106; Safa, 2004, p. 469; Katouzian, 2012, p. 27). The issue of dividing the kingdom by the king between his sons has counterparts in other Indo-European myths. For example, Herodotus has reported the Scythian example. Such a myth can also be seen in German legends. In ancient poems, it is said that the ancestor of the Germanic people was called Mannus. He also divides the land of the Germans among his three sons.

In the division of the territories in *Nibelungenlied*, we are faced with another aspect of the division based on the number "three". The division is not based on the will of the king and the father, although family and kinship ties are effective and form the relationship between these realms and the course of events of the story. In the Germanic epic, there are three territories: the land of the Nibelungen, the Burgundians centered on Worms, and the territory of the Huns. The land of the Nibelungen is ruled by Siegfried. In the first part of the poem, the name of Nibelungen refers to the two hostile brothers who rule jointly a race of dwarfs; Siegfried kills these two brothers and becomes their successor. That is why he and his soldiers are called Nibelung and he is the king of Nibelungen. In the second part, this name refers to the Burgundians who, after Siegfried's death, seized the Nibelungen treasure and chose this name for themselves (Seyyed Hosseini & Sa'adat, 2002, p. 2607). Unlike the other two realms (Burgundy and the Huns), Nibelung is a legendary land located in the underworld and the owner of a great treasure hidden in a cave (Sa'iedian, 1990, p. 947). In this epic, each group that has control over this treasure is called Nibelung.

The Burgundians were one of the German tribes who settled in a part of the west of present-day Germany after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. In 411 A.D., they crossed the Rhine River and established a kingdom in Worms, which was founded by the Celts before them (McEvedy, 2004, p. 420; Map of Huns and Burgundians domains). Historically, Attila, the king of the Huns, in his advances in Western Europe (463 A.D.), caused heavy damage to the Burgundians (Seyyed Hosseini & Sa'adat, 2002, vol. 4, p. 2606), which is reflected in this epic in an inaccurate and a different way.

The Huns: They with Asiatic (Altaic) origins created a huge empire in Central Europe. They lived in the area between the Volga River and the plains of Hungary. From the 5th century, they invaded a lot of lands around the Danube River. Attila took control of the Hun Empire in 424 A.D. and an important part of these invasions were done by him. Attila died suddenly in the spring of 453 A.D. while advancing towards Rome and his empire collapsed immediately. Contrary to what happened in history that Attila attacked the Burgundians' territory and destroyed them (McEvedy, 2004, p. 189), in *Nibelungenlied*, the Burgundians were first invited to Attila's court on the Danube bank and then were all killed there.

In the final summation of the base of the two epics, it can be said that the main geographical setting of the Germanic epic is relatively limited and includes areas in Central Europe from the banks of the Rhine River (in present-day Germany) from one side and the banks of the Danube in the west of Hungary from the other side, in addition to two trips to the island of Iceland in the northwest of Europe. The epic background of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* covers large parts of western and central Asia due to the historical background of several vast Iranian empires, and its events take place in three empires and large territories of Iran, Rome, and Turan (See Safa, 2004, p. 250-253; Le Strange, 1958; Bakhtiari, 2014).

4.2.4. Symbols and Signs of Identification and Disclosure of Secret

In *Shahnameh*, the bead is used as a sign of race and descent in several places and can identify family ties and family authenticity. After marrying Tahmine and when Rostam separates her, he gives Tahmine the bead he has on his arm and asks her to tie it to her hair if the child is a girl and to his arm if he is a boy. When Rostam unknowingly tears his child's liver, the bead reveals a terrible secret and causes his child to be identified (Ferdowsi, 1990, vol. 2, p. 169-250). Hoday, the daughter of Bahman, puts her infant son Darab in a box and leaves him in the water, and orders a royal jewel to be tied to his arm (Ibid, vol.2, p. 12). When Darab becomes a powerful young, this jewel becomes a sign that Darab is the son of Hoday (Ibid, vol. 2, p. 21).

In *Nibelungenlied*, we also see the function of the revealing sign that suddenly changes the course of the epic. These two signs are Brünhild's ring and belt. On the night of the wedding, Brünhild refuses to be at her husband's bed and even binds his hands and feet. Siegfried, wearing a cloak of invisibility, intervenes and defeats Brünhild. In that darkness, Brünhild imagines that her husband Gunther has defeated her and surrendered (Sa'edian, 1990, p. 955). Siegfried then takes her ring and belt which are symbols of defloration. Afterward, Brünhild no longer possesses her once-great strength and says she will no longer refuse Gunther. Siegfried gives the ring and belt to his own newlywed, Kriemhild. A year later, in an argument between Brünhild, the queen of the Burgundy, and Kriemhild, over which one, Gunther and Siegfried, is more powerful and high-ranking, Kriemhild reveals the secret by showing the ring and the belt. Brünhild realizes the trick they have played on her and immediately wants revenge for the insult that has been done to her (Seyyed Hosseini & Sa'adat, 2002, vol. 4, p. 2606). Hagen plots to kill Siegfried in order to restore Brünhild's honor. Gunther tries to stop Hagen but ultimately concedes.

4.2.5. Death of the Hero in the Hunting Ground

The death of the main hero of the two epics takes place on the hunting ground. In *Shahnameh*, when Rostam approaches Kabul, the king of Kabul goes to meet Rostam by trickery, and while apologizing, he invites Rostam to a feast and takes him to a hunting ground in which Shaghad has ordered to dig several wells the size of Rostam and Rakhsh in advance. These wells had been piled up with spears and blades and their openings had been covered with dust and straw, and when Rostam and his horse arrived at that place, they fell into the well and died from the wounds of arrows and spears. Hagen also cunningly lures Siegfried to a hunting ground while he is unarmed and treacherously spears him from behind when he is bent over a spring to drink water (Seyyed Hosseini & Sa'adat, 2002, vol. 4, p. 2606).

4.2.6. Vengeful Woman

The main story of *Nibelungenlied* is based on revenge (Trawick, 1994, p. 234,236). Kriemhild takes revenge for the blood of her husband Siegfried from his brothers and their vassal Hagen. Kriemhild who is both guilty and innocent at the same time, is driven to these terrible deeds because of the grudge she has in her heart against Hagen the killer of her husband, Siegfried. This grudge, fueled by cruel insults to her becomes more brutal and sinister hour by the hour. Her marriage with the powerful and bloodthirsty Attila is only to achieve her wish for revenge. The pleasant maiden and tender-hearted wife of the first part gives her place in the second part to the dark-hearted hag who leads a family of heroes to destruction and death. Her revenge is not only against Hagen but also includes her brothers, who also support and care for her compassionately in the beginning (refer to the summary of the story).

The theme of revenge has an important place in *Shahnameh*, and the most important story of *Shahnameh* in this regard is revenge for Siavash's murder (Kine Siavash) (Safa, 2004, p. 238). Siavash's wife, Farangis, although in revenge for the death of her husband, is marginalized in this story, and revenge is carried out by men but among all the women in *Shahnameh*, almost the character image of a vengeful woman like Kriemhild can be seen in her appearance and actions in lower ranks. Like Siegfried, Siavash is the epitome of innocence. He is a very honorable, magnanimous, and courageous young son of King Kay Kavus of Iran who, after a series of events, takes refuge in Afrasiab, King of Turan, Iran's stubborn enemy. Afrasiab welcomes Siavash with splendor and gives his daughter Farangis (another heroine of *Shahnameh*) to him as his wife. But then his jealous and malicious brother Garsivaz deceives him and falsely convinces him that Siavash is in secret contact with the Iranian court and must be killed.

Afrasiab is to a certain extent comparable to Gunther and Garsivaz is very comparable to Hagen. Siavash inevitably tries to escape to Iran but is caught. After Farangis's pleas and tears have no effect in changing Afrasiab's decision, she curses her father with all her heart. By order of Afrasiab, lonely and helpless Siavash's head is cut from his body in a distant place. Farangis gave birth to a son named Kay Khosrow. The Iranian hero Giv comes to Turan and crosses the Amu Darya (Oxus River) with Kay Khosrow and Farangis to go to Iran (a reminder of Kriemhild's crossing of the Danube to enter the land of the Huns). After hearing the news, Afrasiab chases them, (reminder of the hindrance of Hagen), but Giv, Farangis, and Kay Khosrow ride a horse across the wide and roaring river miraculously. Kay Khosrow becomes the king of Iran, fights with his Turanian grandfather Afrasiab, defeats him, and finally kills

Afrasiab and his brother Garsivaz, who was the instigator of Siavash's murder (revenge from consanguineous relatives, similar to Kriemhild's revenge from his brother and uncle). Although Farangis is not the executioner of revenge, she is satisfied with her father's death by cursing him. By escaping from Turan and taking her son to Iran, which is destined to punish his father's murderers, she prepares the ground for revenge (Ferdowsi, 1966, vol. 2).

4.2.7. Merit and Marriage Test in Choosing a Spouse from a Foreign Land

Perhaps Goshtasp, the Iranian prince and hero (then king of Iran) is comparable more than any other heroes in *Shahnameh* to Siegfried in the *Nibelungenlied* epic. Goshtasp leaves the court of his father King Lohrasp in protest and anger and goes to the land of Rome. When he arrived in Rome, he looked for a job for a while, but there was nothing suitable for him. During this time, he introduces himself with another name (Farrokhzad) and becomes a guest of a reliable friend of the Iranian kings' race. Roman Caesar had three daughters. The Roman custom for marriage was such that when the girl reached marriage age, all suitors came and Caesar's daughter chose one of them. The name of the eldest daughter of the Roman emperor was Katayoun. The night before the proposal ceremony, Katayoun dreams that a beautiful stranger with a royal demeanor is present at the ceremony that will be held the next day; she goes towards him and chooses him as her spouse by giving him a bouquet of flowers.

The next day morning, suitors from the aristocracy come to the court and Katayoun does not like any of them. Caesar orders another ceremony to be held in which people from different classes will participate. This time Goshtasp participated in the ceremony because of his host's insistence. As soon as Katayoun saw Goshtasp, she recognized him and told Caesar that she would marry this person. Despite the initial opposition, Caesar gave in to Katayoun's insistence but said that if she married him, she would have to leave the palace. Katayoun and Goshtasp (Farrokhzad) got married and left the palace and settled in a country house. Sometime later, in the marriage of his second and third daughter, Caesar sets difficult conditions for the suitors, which include killing a very dangerous wolf and a scary dragon that have disturbed the peace of the people and the country.

The Roman suitors, being unable to do the work, find out in a mysterious way that only Goshtasp (Farrokhzad) is capable of doing such a thing. They reach out to Goshtasp and he destroys both evil creatures, but it is announced that two Roman suitors have done the job. Then, in a ceremony in the presence of Caesar, Goshtasp shows great skill in the art of playing polo. Caesar likes him very much and, in conversation with Goshtasp, he realizes that he is actually the slayer of the wolf and the dragon and apologizes profusely to him and Katayoun. He assigns an important place for him in his palace. The next great service of Goshtasp to Caesar is defeating the Khazar country, which brings his merit and valor to the peak. In the following, Goshtasp, who was called to succeed his father from Iran's court, reveals his real name and position on the border of Iran and Rome. He establishes peace between Rome and Iran, which were on the verge of war, and with the full satisfaction and respect of Caesar, he brings Katayoun with him to the court of Iran with stunning splendor. Goshtasp rules Iran with his wife Katayoun for many years (Ferdowsi, 1990, vol. 5, p. 145-176).

In the *Nibelungen* epic, Siegfried goes to Burgundy to propose to Kriemhild, after performing outstanding actions such as slaying the dragon and possessing the treasure and land of the Nibelungen, he helps Burgundians a lot to show his valor and worthiness in defeating the king of the Saxons and the Danes. A little while later, he single-handedly rescues Kriemhild, who is kidnapped and held captive by a dragon and a formidable giant. After that, when Siegfried wants to marry Kriemhild, Gunther makes another difficult action as a condition for this union. Siegfried must help him marry the proud queen of Iceland, Brünhild, after overcoming a series of difficult trials. Siegfried admits that, and comes out victorious (Sa'edian, 1990, p. 955).

As it can be seen, both the epic heroes Goshtasp and Siegfried must overcome evil creatures such as dragons and powerful enemies (Khazars, Saxons) who intend to attack in the test of worthiness and marriage. However, it should be noted that Siegfried goes through this process before marriage, while the hero of *Shahnameh* does it after marriage; because in the Iranian example, the hand of fate is more obvious and the bride plays a more important role in choosing a husband, in addition to that, the dream that each of the princesses has with their marriage determines a different fate for them.

5. Conclusion

What makes us place each part of literary works in the same category and in specific literary genres according to their stylistic, structural, and content characteristics is based on the general and recognizable similarities between them. Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* in New Persian literature and *Nibelungenlied* in Middle German literature are classified in the epic genre. In examining these two ancient epics, we find that despite belonging to two different cultural, linguistic, and historical fields, their similarities have gone beyond the general aspects in many cases. In addition to the significant resemblances in the characters, the epic actions, motifs, events, motivation, and feelings, the two epics also possess narrative aspects and structures.

In the general comparison of the two epics, the hero's amazing power and training, the difficult tests and outstanding functions of the hero, the type of climate and geographical background, the confrontation between the hero and the anti-hero, the role of dream and the interpretation

of it, and treasure hunting have been investigated. The closer similarities in the theme and narration can be seen and evaluated in topics such as invulnerability, the battle with the dragon, the trinity of power in the three lands, the symbols of identification and the disclosure of the secret, the vengeful woman, the test of worthiness and marriage and the choice of wife from a foreign land. In this comparison, the existence of common and unconscious patterns in the intellectual foundation of ancient epic writers is well evident.

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