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The Battle of the Books - As a mock heroic Epic.

P.G. Eng; Sem-1. 2024

A. Hague

The *Battle of the Books* is the most celebrated literary satire of Jonathan Swift, the first major English satirist in prose. It has been designed as a mock epic. In a mock-epic, a trivial subject is made ridiculous with grand epic treatment. In the words of a critic 'the true genius of the mock-epic lies in travestying the serious Epic, in bringing all the leading features of the epic machinery, lofty incident, character and style to the exaltation of a trivial subject. It treats a trivial subject in such a way as the effect is funny and ridiculous in the extreme.

The mock-epic has its origin in antiquity. But it became a favourite form of writing in the 14th and the early 18th century England. The so called neo-classicists derived rules from the ancients and tried to imitate the true epic style. But, because of their inadaptability, what they produced in the epic style was the mock heroic or mock-epic. In fact, they do not mock at the true epic, but the style used by them is the style of mock-epic in which the trivial is made great and the great trivial. In this concern we can cite 'The Rape of the Lock' and 'The Battle of the Books' as examples.

The general frame work of the *Battle of the Books* is that of an epic. Here, we get the vivid descriptions of the heroes and their weapons, armies facing each other, the epic digressions and the episodes, the interference of the supernatural powers and the individual fightings between the rival heroes. These descriptions bear the stamps of epic style and are the reminiscents of events and incidents of great epics of Homer and Virgil. The Ancients and the Moderns are equipped with horses, bowmen, dragoons and the engineers. There is cohesion among the Ancients, though, their number is small. On the other hand, the

Moderns out-number the Ancients, no doubt, but they are confused. Like the heroes of the old epics, they are equipped with deadly weapons, but in their case, it is the massive weapon, which, conveyed through a sort of engine, is called a quill.

Usually, an epic begins with the invocation to a Muse or a guiding spirit to the reader. Last, Milton invokes the Muse to help him in the great task. In the 'Battle of the Books', Swift invokes the Muse of the History and not the Muse of Epic Poetry. He seeks assistance to describe the Battle.

"Say, goddess, that presidest over history,
who it was that first advanced in the field
of the Battle."

Here, Swift is ruthless in his attack. He invokes this Muse of History just to make a mocking at the very genesis and style of the epic as such.

The armies of both the rival groups, equipped with different lethal weapons of their own style are all in their readiness, confronting each other. Then, there are the detailed descriptions of their respective leaders. When the Battle commences, we get vivid descriptions of Homer, Virgil, Dryden, Wotton, Bentley and others. Combats between the opposing factions have been minutely described. The most remarkable description is that of the adventure of Wotton and Bentley. They are pursued by Boyle and are transfixed with one spear. All these descriptions are in the mock-epic style.

Furthermore, we find epic similes abundantly used in the Battle. The epic similes are formal and sustained in which the secondary subject is developed far beyond the primary one. Swift uses these similes skillfully and is quite successful in enhancing the effects of the fundamental irony.

Wotton and Bentley, going together in search of their enemies, are thus described as when two mongrel curs whom nature greediness and domestic want provoke and join in partnership. Boyle is a young lion in the Libyan plains and Wotton a wild an or a long eared animal. The fight of Wotton and Bentley is described as a woman in a little house that gets a painful livelihood by spinning. The Battle, described here, is caused by the moderns' claim for superiority over the Ancients. It is quite a trivial subject. But Swift has used all the elaborate and dignified epic devices in its description. The consequent result is the mock epic effect to the extreme.

Traditionally, in the action of an epic, gods, goddesses and other supernatural powers take active interest. Here, also we find the active involvement of the supernatural powers in the battle between the Ancients and the Moderns. Fame carries the news to Jupiter and a conference of the supernatural powers is called. Monas favours the moderns, where as Pallas supports the Ancients. Monas avails the support of a malignant deity Criticism. The use of the supernatural elements heightens mock-epic effects.

Besides these, there are epic digressions. The episode of the spider and the bee can be cited. The spider and the bee represent the Moderns and the Ancients, respectively. The hot and the argumentative ~~exchanges~~ ^{exchanges} between them are the views of the rival groups. In a true epic fashion, Swift ~~attributes~~ ^{attributes} the rival groups attributes a semi-divine origin to Denham. "Denham derived his lineage from Appollo, but his mother was of mortal race. The Celestial part Appollo took and

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and made it a star, but she terrestrial lay wallowing upon the ground." Wotton is a son of the goddess Criticism.

Taking in views all these facts we can say that the *Battle of the Books* has been written in a mock-epic style. Here, he has made fun not only of the controversy between the Ancients and the Moderns, but also of the epic manners itself. It has rightly been called a fantasia because the *Battle* is mainly of Swift's imagination. The mock-epic suited his purpose well because it was the only literary form through which he could effectively use satire and irony.