UNRAVELLING THE EVOLUTIONARY TRAJECTORY OF EPIC HEROES: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION

EPİK KAHRAMANLARIN EVRİM SÜREÇLERİNİ KEŞFETMEK: TEORİK BİR İNCELEME

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Abstract

The scholarly investigation of epic heroes encompasses a complex and multifaceted realm, engaging researchers in grappling with the intricate task of defining and categorising these figures, while also endeavouring to comprehend their evolutionary trajectory. Academic discourse on epic heroes has yielded two distinctive approaches. The first group, denoted as the "ubiquitous fallacy group" within this article, employs anthropological, psychoanalytical, historical, and literary perspectives to argue for the temporal and spatial ubiquity of epic heroes at their core, accentuating shared patterns and recurring themes. This article provides a thorough critique of the first group, highlighting the inherent methodological and contextual problems in their analytical frameworks, and revealing their limitations, particularly in terms of selective data and potential oversimplification of complex phenomena. The second group, while acknowledging some generic influences over time, emphasises the impossibility of ascribing a single, stable, or universal form to the concept of epic hero. Although leaning towards favouring the latter approach, this article aims to identify the problems inherent in this group as well. This approach's categorisation of epic heroes, creating heroic models or types to differentiate heroes, is also problematic, given the fluid boundaries between these categories and the potential inadequacy of models in capturing the full complexity and diversity of epic heroism they represent. This article further delves into two distinct analytical frameworks in this group, Doris Cecilia Werner's socio-political reading and John Steadman's "image and ideal" hypothesis, offering potential solutions to address gaps in their theoretical approaches. Accordingly, this article, while presenting fresh criticism on the theories of the evolution of epic heroes, argues that the ever-changing nature of epic heroes defies a uniform ubiquitous definition or categorizations, and offers solutions to fill the gaps in the latest scholarly analytical frameworks.

Öz

Epik kahramanlar üzerine yapılan akademik araştırmalar, karmaşık ve çok yönlü bir alanı kapsar. Araştırmacılar, kahraman figürlerini tanımlamaya ve sınıflandırmaya çalışırken aynı zamanda bu figürlerin evrimsel süreçlerine de odaklanırlar. Akademik alanda epik kahramanların analizi konusunda zamanla iki farklı yaklaşım gelişmiştir. Bu makalede, "evrensellik yanılgısı grubu" olarak adlandırılan ilk grup, antropolojik, psikanalitik, tarihsel ve edebi bakış açıları üzerinden, epik kahramanlardaki ortak kalıplara ve tekrarlayan temalara odaklanmış ve zamansal ve mekânsal açıdan evrenselliklerini vurgulamıştır. Bu makale, bu grubun analiz süreçlerindeki yöntemsel ve bağlamsal problemleri ele alır ve veri seçimlerindeki hataları ve karmaşık durumları basite indirgeyen yaklaşımlarını ortaya koyarak kapsamlı bir eleştiri sunar. İkinci grup ise zaman içinde bazı geleneksel etkileri kabul ederken, epik kahraman kavramına tek, sabit veya evrensel bir biçim atamanın imkânsızlığını vurgular. Bu makale, ikinci gruba daha yakın bir yaklaşıma sahip olsa da, bu gruptaki sorunları da ortaya koymayı hedefler. Örneğin, ikinci grubun kahramanları sınıflandırmak için modeller veya tipler oluşturması problemlidir zira bu sınıflandırmalar arasındaki sınırlar esnek ve geçirgen olabilir. Dolayısıyla, bu modeller, kahramanların çeşitliliği ve karmaşıklığını açıklamada yetersiz kalabilmektedir. Bu makale, ikinci grubun analitik çerçevesinde kullanılan iki önemli analiz yöntemi, Doris Cecilia Werner'ın sosyo-politik yaklaşımı ve John Steadman'ın "imaj ve ideal" hipotezi, üzerinden bu yaklaşımdaki hataları gösterir ve bu hatalara çözüm önerileri sunar. Dolayısıyla, bu makale, epik kahramanların evrimiyle ilgili kuramlara yönelik güncel eleştiriler sunarken, epik kahramanların sürekli değişen doğası nedeniyle tek bir evrensel tanımın veya sınıflandırmanın mümkün olmadığını savunur ve güncel akademik kuramlardaki açıklara öneriler sunar.

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Introduction

According to John Bryan Hainsworth, epic heroes are nothing but "*exploratory besides being celebratory; that is, they are concerned with something beyond themselves, with examining heroism as well as exemplifying it*" (1991, p. 39). Hainsworth's remark underlines that the very concept of epic heroism, which is an ever-changing concept marked by temporal and spatial relativity, is the main dynamic, which ultimately gives momentum to the rise of what appear as epic heroes. The contours of epic heroism are indeed hard to draw. One of the leading scholars of epic studies, Gregory Nagy states that "[t]*he words 'epic' and 'hero' both defy generalisation, let alone universalizing definitions*" (2006, p. 1). The attempt to define what constitutes an epic hero is indeed problematic in itself. Should an epic hero always

> be a king or a demi-god and should his exploits always display his moral excellence? Were the same criteria of moral heroism to be applied to the classical warrior as to the Christian? Or indeed, did the epic hero have to be a warrior at all? And whatever kind of hero he was, should he function simply as a perfect exemplar—a man better than we, a man to be copied? Or should he function rather as an ambivalent portrait of human conduct—a man like ourselves, whose vices were to be shunned as his virtues were to be admired? (Bond, 2011, p. 53).

Bond's questions shed light on the width of the spectrum when examining the epic hero and how transitional the concept of epic heroism has been.

The study of epic heroes has been a subject of significant scholarly investigation, with researchers grappling with the complexities surrounding their evolution, as well as the difficulties associated with their definition and categorization. In attempts to comprehend the multifaceted nature of epic heroes, critics have put forth diverse templates and analytical frameworks that aim to elucidate their birth, education, lineage, adventurous exploits, physical and mental attributes, nation-building capabilities, confrontations with adversaries, and their role as instructors to the audience. These scholarly inquiries reflect the recognition that epic heroes embody a range of characteristics and undertake a variety of roles within their respective narratives. However, it is important to note that the diversity and richness of epic heroes, across different cultural traditions and historical periods, present challenges in establishing a unified framework for their analysis. The complexities of their characterizations, the variations in their narratives, and the multitude of factors that

shape their roles and actions require a nuanced and contextualised approach to their study. As such, scholars have grappled with the task of developing comprehensive and inclusive analytical models that can accommodate the vast array of epic heroes found in world literature.

There are two dominant hypotheses related to the evolution of epic heroes: the first group argues that epic heroes are ubiquitous, focusing on their similarities across time, and posits that certain variables, which vary depending on the different methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks, lead epic heroes to possess similar characteristic traits, features, and stories. The second group, while acknowledging some generic influences over time, emphasises the impossibility of ascribing a single, stable, or universal form to the concept of epic hero. Although leaning towards favouring the latter approach, this article aims to identify the problems inherent in this group as well. This approach's categorisation of epic heroes, creating heroic models or types to differentiate heroes, is also problematic, given the fluid boundaries between these categories and the potential inadequacy of models in capturing the full complexity and diversity of epic heroism they represent. This article further delves into two distinct analytical frameworks in this group, Doris Cecilia Werner's socio-political reading and John Steadman's "image and ideal" hypothesis, offering potential solutions to address gaps in their theoretical approaches. Accordingly, this article, while presenting fresh criticism on the theories of the evolution of epic heroes, argues that the ever-changing nature of epic heroes defies a uniform ubiquitous definition or categorizations, and offers solutions to fill the gaps in the latest scholarly analytical frameworks.

The "Ubiquitous Fallacy" Group

The first scholarly approach to the evolution of epic heroes centres around identifying shared patterns and recurring themes that highlight the pervasive nature of characteristic features and actions exhibited by these heroes across different temporal and spatial contexts. Scholars belonging to this group employ various disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, history, and literature to elucidate the widespread attributes of epic heroes. Their emphasis on ubiquity, however, gives rise to methodological challenges and biases in data selection, which I refer to as the "ubiquitous fallacy."

A notable issue within this group is the tendency to selectively choose data that aligns with their predetermined formulas, leading to an incomplete representation of epics and myths. Whether employing anthropological, Jungian, or Freudian

approaches, or focusing on generic influences, these studies often suffer from a narrow selection of sources that only serve to reinforce their preconceived notions. As a result, the endeavour to identify universal ubiquity in epic heroes falls short in capturing the full spectrum of these figures and fails to demonstrate their transitional nature, thus resulting in "ubiquitous fallacy." In essence, while this initial group of scholars seeks to explore the common threads among epic heroes, their approach is limited by the selective nature of their data, hindering a comprehensive understanding of the breadth and transformative aspects inherent in the concept of the epic hero.

Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1841) stands as one of the earliest scholarly endeavours to explore the essence and significance of heroes. Originally presented as a series of lectures, Carlyle's work delves into the nature of heroic figures who have left an indelible mark on history and analyses how they were perceived and revered by society. In his discourse, Carlyle categorises heroes into six distinct types, namely the hero as divinity, prophet, poet, priest, man of letters, and king. Central to his argument is the notion that these heroes possess a remarkable ability to captivate and inspire their audiences, leading to a form of worship. Carlyle posits that such devotion, whether rooted in paganism or Abrahamic religions, has the power to uplift and positively influence individuals (1841/2012, pp. 16-17). For Carlyle, heroes occupy a universal role, as he asserts that "*hero worship is the source of all religions in the world*" (Segal, 2013, p. 46).

Significantly, Carlyle highlights the didactic function of heroes by emphasising their transformative impact on human life. He elucidates, *"[i]t is to this hour, and at all hours, the vivifying influence [of heroes] in man's life [...] Hero-worship, heartfelt prostrate admiration, submission, burning, boundless, for a noblest godlike Form of Man"* (1841/2012, p. 17). Here, Carlyle asserts that great men should assume positions of leadership, and the masses should revere and emulate them, learning from their actions and teachings. In this regard, Carlyle assigns a social engineering role to these figures, suggesting that they possess the power to shape society. Another noteworthy aspect of Carlyle's work, as pointed out by Trevor-Roper, is his perception of history as a unified world history. Carlyle embraces the notion that history unfolds as part of a divine plan, with certain pivotal moments requiring the intervention of "great men" to bring about its realisation (p. 229). Although Carlyle does not present a definitive formula for heroism, he hinges on the conceptualization of heroism as an extraordinary feat, achieved by individuals who thrive in the most comprehensive

manner, thereby exerting a profound influence on others and contributing to their improvement. In Carlyle's view, this particular essence represents the unifying element that binds all heroic figures together.

Edward Burnett Tylor's study conducted in the late nineteenth century on epics and hero myths from diverse cultures stands as a significant scholarly contribution of the period. Tylor's investigation aimed to identify a shared pattern in the characteristics and deeds of epic heroes. His findings revealed a recurrent set of attributes, including noble lineage, exposure and subsequent rescue in infancy, acquisition of exceptional education and training, the act of saving their nation, and eventual elevation to the status of a national hero (Tylor, 1871/1920, pp. 281-282; Meyers, 2015, p. 18). While Tylor draws examples from a range of mythological traditions, such as ancient Greek, Roman, Slavonic, Germanic, Spanish, Turkish, and Brazilian contexts (1871/1920, p. 282), it is crucial to acknowledge that his hypothesis relies on a limited sample size. Therefore, it fails to observe the evolution of epic heroes. For instance, noble birth, which Tylor sees as one of the main features of epic heroes, does not necessarily always appear as the main characteristic of epic heroes. An interesting example of this transformation in epic heroes is *El Cid*. The hero of this circa twelfth-century Castilian epic is a bastard who possesses no economic or political power but has a willing heart and courage. His story is that of the "*transmutation of courage into economic power, and then of wealth into lineage, the highest in the land*" (Elliott, 1980, p. 245). His deeds and story are a clear message to the lesser nobles of the time: if a bastard "*could lift his kin to the level of royalty [...] through his participation in the Reconquista, then other nobles of his class could legitimately aspire to the same heights of success by invading Arab-controlled lands*" (1980, pp. 245-56). What is remarkable here is that *basileos*, the royal or high-born lineage and rank, which is considered to be one of the defining characteristics of epic heroism in classical antiquity transforms into the very opposite in the character of El Cid. Hence, the case of El Cid is an indicator of how the narrative purpose of epics may dramatically alter its epic heroes. Consequently, Tylor's overarching conclusion fails to fully capture the breadth and diversity of epic heroes as seen in the case of El Cid. Tylor's approach exhibits a tendency to selectively highlight characteristics and actions that align with his hypothesis, while potentially overlooking or neglecting other pertinent features of these heroes.

Despite these limitations, Tylor's theories exerted a captivating influence on a cluster of academics in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Europe. The allure of his work was such that it sparked an unprecedented surge in the scholarly examination of epic heroes and mythological heroes. Tylor's research acted as a catalyst, stimulating further inquiry and prompting scholars to explore the intricate complexities and variations within hero myths across different cultural contexts and historical periods. While Tylor's conclusions may have been excessively broad, his contributions to the field of epic hero studies cannot be understated.

In the late nineteenth century, a series of studies conducted in Germany held significance not only in their own right but also due to their profound influence on future theories pertaining to epic heroism. The German scholars of the period, although they differed in many areas, underlined the similarities in the heroes of the epics and myths. Adolf Bastian, which was later also supported by Adolf Bauer, put forth the argument that the similarities observed among heroes could be attributed to the inherent disposition of the human mind, suggesting that these shared traits were intrinsic to human nature, whose manner of "*manifestation* [is*] identical at all times and in all places*" (Rank, 1914, pp. 1-2). The ubiquity of epic heroes, according to Bastian, therefore was caused by human nature itself. However, no further scientific explanation is provided apart from a showcase of similarities in hero myths (qtd. in Rank, 1914, pp. 1-2). Another trend in Germany during this period was "original community" theory, promoted by figures like Theodor Benfey and Rudolf Schubert, argued that the common attributes of heroes go back to the earliest stages of human culture, proposing that these narratives initially emerged within closely related communities, particularly among Indo-Germanic peoples (Rank, 1914, pp. 2-4). Over the course of history, hero myths have undergone a process of evolution and expansion, becoming ingrained in cultures worldwide. This phenomenon suggests the notion of a common origin for these myths, which spread across different regions through migrations. This approach, which was later supported by figures like Julius Braun and Rudolf Shubert, focused on the question of where these myths originated in the first place, rather than how they dispersed and reached specific peoples, as emphasised by Rank (1914, p. 3). However, with the emergence of new archaeological discoveries in Babylonia, the place of origin shifted to Mesopotamia as it was deemed to predate India. This shift highlights the speculative nature of this approach, as it appears to be driven by the pursuit of identifying a singular source for these myths without substantial evidence to support such claims.

Moving into the early twentieth century, Otto Rank, a student and colleague of Sigmund Freud, put forth a psychoanalytical interpretation of epic heroes. Rank suggested that these figures were characterised by their unique birth circumstances and the symbolic fulfilment of repressed desires. Furthermore, he posited that their actions were driven by a deep-seated motivation to overthrow the figure of the father[1] (Rank, 1914, pp. 7-12). In his analysis, Rank compiles a diverse array of hero narratives, encompassing regions such as Babylonia, Persia, ancient Greece and Rome, and mediaeval Europe, effectively identifying shared commonalities among them: The hero typically arises from distinguished parentage, often a king's son, amidst challenging circumstances like continence issues or secret parentage. A prophetic warning precedes or accompanies the pregnancy, cautioning against his birth and posing threats to the father. He is set adrift in a box on water but rescued and nurtured by animals or common people. Upon maturity, he sets out on a diverse journey to find his parents, seeking revenge on his father and gaining recognition, eventually achieving honours (Rank, 1914, p. 61). His conviction lies in the belief that these myths represent manifestations of the innate human faculty of imagination (Rank, 1914, p. 8). Moreover, he ascribes the prevalence of epic heroes across various epics and myths to the fundamental workings of the human psyche, a perspective largely influenced by Freud's impact on the author during that period[2].

It is important to note that the methodologies employed by these writers were not without their flaws. They selectively chose epic and mythological heroes that conformed to their overarching hypotheses, resulting in broad conclusions being drawn from limited samples—a methodological approach reminiscent of Tylor's earlier work. The aforementioned studies demonstrate the complexities inherent in the analysis of epic heroism. While they offer valuable insights into the underlying patterns and psychological interpretations of hero myths, it is crucial to approach their findings with a critical lens. The tendency to selectively focus on heroes that align with preconceived notions or overarching theories may limit the scope of understanding and hinder a comprehensive examination of the diverse range of hero figures found across different cultural contexts and time periods. Therefore, a

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[1] For an in-depth analysis of the relations between father and hero please see Rank's *The Myth of the Birth of Hero* (1914), pp. 61-73.

[2] Over the course of his academic journey, Otto Rank's perspectives on the aforementioned matter underwent significant changes. For a comprehensive understanding of these evolving views, please see Nancy Gordon Seif's article titled "Otto Rank: On the Nature of the Hero," published in *American Image* in 1984 (Vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 373-384). Seif's work sheds light on the shifting stances of Rank concerning this particular issue.

balanced and nuanced approach is essential in order to appreciate the multifaceted nature of epic heroism and the intricacies involved in its interpretation.

Among this "ubiquitous fallacy" group, Joseph Campbell requires special attention due to its great influence on the studies related to epic heroism both in academic circles and popular culture. In his seminal work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell postulates the existence of a shared pattern in the origins, backgrounds, actions, and journeys of epic heroes across different cultures and time periods. Campbell's hypothesis of the monomyth stems from the belief that the human desire to create myth is an inherent aspect of human nature, universally present among individuals regardless of their geographic or temporal context (1949/2004, p. 30). To support his theory, Campbell draws upon a wide range of examples from diverse mythological traditions, employing the theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung as analytical frameworks.

The major academic rebuke of Campbell's formula issues from the way that it is deeply characterised by "*a certain kind of universalizing, archetypal comparativism*" (Miller, 1994, p. 6). Although Campbell uses various examples, his selection method is not all-inclusive; he rather focuses on those aspects of the stories that justify his formula. Huffman further critiques Campbell's methodology, highlighting its lack of cohesion and all-encompassing scope. According to Huffman, Campbell's analysis within each specific chapter is too discriminatory and narrowly focused, making it difficult for the individual examples to collectively support his overarching hypothesis (1996, pp. 70-72). An illustrative example of this methodological flaw can be found in Campbell's treatment of the origins of the epic hero and the significance of virgin birth. While Campbell presents various examples from different cultural contexts, such as Aztecs, Buddhism, and Roman literature, to emphasise the importance of this motif, he encounters inconsistencies when using Arthurian legends to support another argument. Huffman points out that Campbell's analysis of Arthurian legends contradicts his claims about virgin birth, as Arthur's birth in these legends is not attributed to a virgin mother but rather the result of a union between Uther Pendragon and Igraine, the wife of the Duke of Cornwall (Huffman, 1996, pp. 71-72). This example demonstrates the failure of Campbell's supposedly comprehensive formula to work consistently even within his own selected samples.

Campbell's approach inadvertently falls into the academic fallacy of cherry-picking, wherein he selectively highlights examples and data that align with his hypothesis while disregarding or overlooking conflicting cases and data. This

methodological flaw undermines the comprehensive and inclusive nature of Campbell's formula for heroes, raising doubts about the validity and applicability of his monomyth theory. It underscores the importance of critically evaluating and considering a broad range of evidence and examples in the study of epic heroism to avoid a reductionist and overly simplistic understanding of this complex phenomenon.

Perhaps the most influential of this group is Mikhail Bakhtin. In his *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin argues that epic is characterised by a national epic past, national tradition—not based on an individual's experiences— and lastly by epic distance, which separates the real world from the heroic epic world (1981, p.13). He also sees the epic hero as a shadow of his literary ancestors, disconnected from the age in which it is created (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 13-14). Therefore, Bakhtin argues that epic heroes share similar characteristics and actions due to their inherent connection to the lineage of their literary ancestors. Haydon argues that Bakhtin's reading of epic genre results from the fact that he sees epic "*as a self-contained mode of writing* [...] *whose only reference system is a kind of 'golden chain' of great epicists* [...] *who exist primarily to interact with one another, and therefore outside of their own histories*" (2012, pp. 15-16). Bakhtin's "creed," as Haydon terms it, caused epic heroes to be analysed primarily in the light of heroic traditions. While it is true that there exists a strong interconnectedness and influential tradition within the genre, it is important to consider the personal intentions of individual poets and the specific socio-cultural and historical contexts in which each epic is created. Understanding the purpose and significance of the epic heroes depicted in these works requires an appreciation for these broader factors.

Hence, the "ubiquitous fallacy group" while trying to find a universal mould for epic heroes, fails to capture the wide range of epic heroes and deeper understandings of the poets' intentions and the nuances of their approaches to the epic hero and heroism. The fundamental problem of this group, as I have already explained, is their methodological approach. Every single study in this group, whether they have anthropological, Jungian or Freudian approaches or focus on generic impacts, is marked by the problem of selective data. Their selection of epics and myths is not all-inclusive since they only use stories that justify their formula. Hence, the attempt to find universal ubiquity in heroes ends in failing to capture the width of the "epic hero" spectrum and to demonstrate how transitional these figures are.

The Second Group: Categorising Epic Heroes

The second group of academics' approach towards the evolution of epic heroes dramatically differs from the first group. Contrary to the ubiquitous fallacy the first group had, this approach is marked by the desire to differentiate the distinct characteristic features and actions exhibited by epic heroes across different temporal and spatial contexts. In an effort to reflect the transformation and adaptation of epic heroes, various critics in this group have attempted to categorise them based on various models, such as the Homeric, Virgilian, Ovidian, Hagiographical, Patristic, Miles Christi, Christiad, Saints, Knights, Dantesque, Renaissance, Allegorical, and Ordinary Christian. It is worth noting that this list is not exhaustive and could potentially be expanded upon. The categorisation can be based on a variety of generic principles like lineage, *arete* (moment of excellence), physical strength, warrior status, religious traits, apotheosized virtues, nation building, and paragon of virtue status. Additionally, the categorization can be influenced by spatial and temporal factors: specific spaces and times can suggest particular traits that are deemed heroic, hence resulting in spatial and temporal classifications.

This group's endeavour to differentiate and categorise epic heroes represents a remarkable and insightful undertaking, shedding light on the unique attributes of myths, epics, and the cultural contexts in which they originate, as well as providing valuable insights into the intentions of individual poets. This pursuit holds significant importance in facilitating a deeper understanding of the diversities inherent in epic heroes across various cultures, geographical regions, historical periods, and even among different poets. By undertaking the task of classification, scholars and critics strive to identify and delineate the varied traits and characteristics exhibited by epic heroes, thus revealing the multifaceted nature of these literary figures. Through this process, a spectrum of heroic attributes emerges, demonstrating the wide-ranging depictions and interpretations of heroism across diverse myths and literary works.

The act of categorising epic heroes also offers a window into the complexities of cultural expressions, as it illuminates how these legendary figures are shaped by the beliefs, values, and norms of the societies in which they originate. This exploration not only enhances our comprehension of the heroes themselves but also provides invaluable insights into the broader cultural landscapes of the respective civilizations. Furthermore, this analytical pursuit enables us to recognize the dynamic nature of epic heroes, as their portrayal and significance undergo transformations as they traverse different cultures, geographic settings, and

historical epochs. Each poet's creative vision, artistic choices, and unique perspective contribute to the ever-changing representations of these iconic figures.

The types of epic heroes, however, lead to an illusion that there are concrete and strong lines that separate these types from one another. Marianne Ailes underlines the fluidity of categorizations of epic heroes and states that "*composers of texts play with and exploit the audience's expectations which may be partly defined by the generic markers used in a text*" (2014, p. 255). Although each model may appear to have distinct characteristics, the fluidity among these heroic types makes it impossible to draw a strict line between them. Therefore, categorising the epic heroes and creating types and sub-models unintentionally leads to the idea that there are strong lines of connection between models. Weiner argues that the classical epic hero, which is modelled after the Homeric hero, is "*distinguished by extraordinary valour and martial achievements; [he is] an illustrious warrior of great descendance*" (qtd. in Renehan, 1987, p. 99) and he dies "*in the pursuit of honour and glory*" (Schein, 2013, p. 69). However, as Gregory Nagy observes, even Homeric heroes like Achilles, Odysseus, Sarpedon, and Memnon, while having certain common points, dramatically differ from each other in terms of their characteristic traits, actions, and stories. This indicates that even Homer's heroes do not necessarily present a single model. Furthermore, Steadman argues that even in antiquity Homer's oeuvre was reinterpreted and redesigned; for instance, Neoplatonists, rejecting the violent aspect of previous age, used Homeric songs for the purpose of natural and moral philosophy and further states that "*[t]he heroic concept had outgrown the heroic song; the epic itself needed to be transformed from within, reinterpreted and thoroughly moralised in order to accommodate newer and more spiritual ideals*" (Steadman, 1975, p. 151).

Another hero concept that presents a good example of fluidity is the "Christian warrior" epic hero, also known as *miles Christi*[3] (the soldier of Christ). The concept combines military prowess and moral virtues of Christianity with the addition of certain characteristic traits, modesty, devoutness, and asceticism (Iwanczak, 2012, n.p). However, Elliott draws attention to the colossal changes in the concepts of Christian epic heroes in hagiographical epics[4] and argues, "*[q]ualities other than spear-rattling may define heroic action, and wars may be fought on more than one battlefield*" (1980, p. 242). Elliott's remark underlines how the martial prowess, which is considered to be the hallmark of epic heroism of *miles Christi* cease to exist in

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[3] In some texts, it is also referred to as *miles Christianus.*

[4] Works like Prudentius's *Peristephanon* and *Vie de Saint Alexis.*

hagiographical epics which shows a dramatic change. However, it should be noted here that even in some hagiographical epics, the epic heroes are endowed with martial skills. The example of St. George is indicative of this situation. This suggests that there is not a single, uniform concept of the Christian epic hero that can be applied to various genres within the category of Christian epic literature, and that there is even fluidity in the portrayal of epic heroes within sub-genres such as Christian hagiographical epics.

Hence, it is safe to argue that epic heroism indeed covers such a wide spectrum of elements and features that it resists any uniform definition of epic heroism since it is a dynamic concept that is ever changing. The constant evolution of epic heroes gradually gives birth to new heroic versions. Academics try to categorise these versions and create models or types to indicate their differences from the preceding and succeeding models and create referential points. However, the boundaries of these heroic types are often fluid, and these models may not fully capture the complexity and diversity of epic heroisms represented within them.

Two significant analytical frameworks towards the evolution of epic heroes marked by the second group's demeanour are Doris Cecilia Werner's socio-political reading and John Steadman's "image and ideal" hypothesis. Doris Cecilia Werner argues that epic is indeed a vibrant genre and epic heroism does change since *"each age defines [it] in accord with its own needs"* (1974, p. 11). To support her argument, she draws upon examples from T. Higgin's *Secular Heroic Epic Poetry of the Caroline Period* (1953), which explores the intricate connections between the politics of the sixteenth century, particularly the Tudor dynasty, and the works of poets such as Spenser, Warner, and Drayton. Werner highlights how these poets depict the House of Tudor as a re-emergence of King Arthur, demonstrating the profound impact of contemporary politics on the epics and their heroes. Additionally, she examines the neoclassical epics of the seventeenth century, illustrating their close integration with the political climate of the time. These epics often present the reigning monarch as the culmination of long-standing legends, as seen in Edward Howard's *British Princes* (1669) with Charles II and Richard Blackmore's *Prince Arthur* (1695) with King William (Werner, 1974, p. 12).

Werner's conceptualization of evolution of the epic heroes is true to some extent since epic heroes may be influenced by political, cultural, religious, economic, and societal norms and needs of their ages; however, it is reductive and overly broad since poets are not simply by-products of their times. Werner's panoramic view disregards

the sui generis nature of texts and the distinctiveness of their narrative purposes. Each poet questions and revalues the very norms and precepts of the age individually and comes up with different answers to the problems and questions. Werner's perspective does not fully consider the fact that the evolution of epic heroes arises not only from the influences of the time period in which they are created, but also from the unique approaches and ideas of individual poets.

In her scholarly analysis, Werner posits that the works of William Chamberlayne's *Pharonnida* (1659) and William Davenant's *Gondibert* (1651) reflect a recurring feature in epic heroes: the depiction of heroic figures exhibiting valour without ambition (Werner, 1974, p. 89, 102). Furthermore, the author emphasises the portrayal of Almanzor, the antagonist in *Pharonnida*, as a character characterised by ambition, which is deemed a heroic vice in seventeenth-century England (Werner, 1974, pp. 89-90). According to the author's interpretation, ambition is negatively perceived during this period, leading the epic poets to deliberately fashion their heroes without this trait, resulting in shared characteristics and actions. The validity of this interpretation gains support when considering the socio-political context of the seventeenth century, marked by widespread conflicts, regicide, civil unrest, exiles, and significant loss of life.

The calamitous events of the seventeenth century, as argued by the Royalists, were attributed to the ambition-driven actions of figures within the Parliamentarian forces. Hence, ambition appears as the root cause of the sedition against the crown which can be observed in the political works of Thomas Hobbes written at the time. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes indicates that one of the driving forces that propelled the Parliamentarian forces to wage war against the monarchy, thereby jeopardising the political stability and social harmony was ambitious leaders of the Roundheads for they "*think themselves wiser, and abler to groyalistsovern the public, better than the rest; and these strive to reform and innovate, one this way, another that way; and thereby bring it into distraction and civil war*" (1651/1998, p. 113). Consequently, ambition, as posited by Hobbes, played a crucial role in fuelling the rise of sedition during this period.

Werner contends that both William Chamberlayne and William Davenant, eminent epic poets of the period supporting the Royalist cause, espouse the notion that ambition embodies peril, capable of fomenting societal upheaval and leading to substantial human suffering. Consequently, the prevailing socio-political events of their time serve as impetus for these poets to depict their epic heroes as devoid of

ambition, a response to the exigencies of their historical milieu. This perspective lends support to Werner's socio-political reading, wherein the evolution of epic heroes is analysed through the lens of the era's demands, which in turn are shaped by the contextual backdrop. However, upon closer examination of the epic heroes, a conflicting reality becomes apparent.

Davenant's perspective on ambition is multifaceted and encompasses several layers, as evidenced by his own words in the preface to *Gondibert*:

> Ambition (if the vulgar acception of the Word were corrected) would
> signifie no more then an extraordinary lifting of the feet in the rough
> ways of Honor [...] and hath a warmth (till it be chaf'd into a Feaver)
> which is necessary for every vertuous breast: for good men are guilty
> of too little appetite to greatnesse (1651/1971, pp. 13-14).

Davenant's interpretation of ambition here elucidates the multifaceted nature of the concept, delineating two distinct dimensions: one characterised by "fever" and the other by "warmth." In this respect, Davenant actually does not necessarily present ambition neither an innate feature nor a devilish vice altogether. The "fever" level of ambition indeed poses a threat to both individuals and societies at large. This concept is deeply marked by Hobbesian conceptualisation of ambition as a vice driven by the feeling of discontent and desire for power, honour, and recognition. This drive propels individuals to battle for their self-interest, which can endanger not only their personal lives but also the political equilibrium and social harmony of the nation. Owing to its historical and political relevance tied to the Civil War events, and Hobbes's commentary on it, Davenant could readily connect with this feverish ambition.

On the other hand, Davenant introduces the concept of a "warm" ambition, which he considers essential for virtuous individuals. This form of ambition serves as a positive force, motivating individuals to reach their potential and achieve greatness in their lives. Davenant suggests that when ambition is directed towards noble goals, it can be a source of inspiration and fulfilment. However, unbridled and uncontrolled, it can transform into a perilous obsession for both the individual and society at large. Consequently, Davenant posits that ambition, in itself, is neither inherently good nor bad, but rather its moral characterization depends on its degree of intensity within individuals. Thus, individuals bear the responsibility to temper their ambition, ensuring it serves as a constructive motivation rather than a destructive force.

Davenant's epic hero, Gondibert, embodies this multi-layered conceptualization of ambition. He is not portrayed as lacking ambition but rather possesses a moderate ambition that propels him towards realising his potential. In this regard, Davenant diverges from the prevailing socio-political impact of his age concerning the perception of ambition. Analysing Davenant's epic hero through the lens of the "demands of the age," as Werner does, overlooks the complexity of Davenant's conceptualization of ambition and the poet's intentions with his protagonist.

In summary, Werner's assertion regarding the evolution of epic heroes being influenced by the characteristics of their respective ages holds some validity, as these heroes can indeed be shaped by the socio-political milieu and prevailing norms of their time. However, her analysis falls short by neglecting to consider the individual poet's distinct perspectives and creative intentions. The development of epic heroes results not only from the broader contextual influences but also from the unique artistic contributions and intellectual nuances of the poets themselves, thereby necessitating a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic nature of epic heroism.

John Steadman's "image and ideal" hypothesis is another important theory that seeks to explain the evolution of epic heroes. Like Werner, Steadman's theory takes into account the emerging norms and precepts of the time period, but also incorporates the influence of genre's conventions. He argues that the transition of the epic heroes is characterised by the disparity between *"the heroic values conventional in the epic tradition and those of the poet's own society"* (1975, p. 151). As an example, the conversion of a pagan epic hero[5] into a Christian one may result in a clash between the traditional characteristics of the epic hero, such as martial prowess, boasting, ambition, and the doctrines of Christianity, which emphasise obedience, humility, and submission. This conflict, according to Steadman, arises because the Christian image of the hero is at odds with the heroic ideals rooted in the generic tradition (1975, p. 151). Steadman's theory sheds light on the fact that the evolution of epic heroes is a complex and nuanced process that poses challenges for poets. The poet cannot simply add or modify one characteristic of the hero without considering the potential impact of such a change on the overall structure of the epic hero.

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[5] By "pagan epic heroes," Steadman refers specifically to epic heroes originating from the epic traditions of Ancient Greece and Rome. These include, but are not limited to, characters depicted in works by Homer (such as Achilles, Sarpedon, Glaucus, and Diomedes in the *Iliad* or Odysseus in the *Odyssey*), Apollonius of Rhodes (such as Jason in the *Argonautica*), and Virgil (like Aeneas in the *Aeneid*). Such heroes typically exhibit qualities like martial prowess, boasting, and ambition, which are aligned with the valorised traits of their respective pagan societies.

While Steadman's hypothesis is a widely-used theory for analysing epic heroes and provides valuable insights, it is still too broad and inadequate for fully analysing the complexity of epic heroes. In my opinion, Steadman's hypothesis has three significant defects. The first defect is its emphasis on the overriding influence of the norms and needs of the time period on poets, similar to Werner's perspective. While it is true that poets are influenced by the society in which they live, they cannot be reduced exclusively to the dominant political, cultural, religious, economic, and societal norms and precepts of their time. This said, poets may challenge and revalue these very norms in their own way. Maurice Bowra touches upon this issue as follows:

> The writers of literary epic set themselves a task of uncommon difficulty when they tried to adapt the heroic ideal to unheroic times and to proclaim in poetry a new conception of man's grandeur and nobility. Each had his own approach, his own solution, and his own doubts and reservations (1962, p. 32).

This is particularly relevant in seventeenth-century England, a period marked by wars, political, religious, and social conflicts, where there were few common grounds on which people could unite, let alone expect poets to share a similar perception of epic heroes who would demonstrate normative values and act as role models for their audiences.

The second defect of Steadman's theory is its singular focus on the generic conventions of epic heroism. The range of epic heroism throughout history is so diverse that epic heroes may even exhibit conflicting characteristics. In this regard, Steadman falls into the same error as Bakhtin by overly emphasising the generic influences within the borders of epic tradition. It should also be underlined here that the margins of these heroisms are not clear-cut; epic heroisms are transitional and fluid. Hence, the models and traditions that the poets use or react against need to be carefully analysed to truly grasp the innovations that the poets present in their epic heroes. Lastly, one of the limitations of Steadman's "image and ideal" hypothesis is its lack of consideration for the complexity of the arguments made by poets. To give an example from the seventeenth century English epics, although both William Davenant and John Milton's epic heroes, respectively in *Gondibert* (1651) and *Paradise Lost* (1667), possess martial prowess, Davenant justifies it on philosophical and political grounds using Hobbesian arguments, while Milton's arguments are rooted in theological discussions. While the poets may have the same surface-level idea of martial prowess, their underlying arguments are based on different foundations. These differences in argument may have varying effects on the

transformation of the epic heroes. Therefore, it is important to carefully analyse each epic hero individually, as failing to consider these independent variables that significantly influence the epic heroes can result in oversimplified generalisations that do not fully capture the depth of the ideas behind the creation of new epic heroes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of epic heroes is a complex and multifaceted field that has attracted significant scholarly attention. Researchers have grappled with the challenges of defining and categorising epic heroes, as well as understanding their evolution over time. Within time, there appeared two distinct groups towards analysing the evolutionary trajectory of the epic heroes: the first group argues that epic heroes are ubiquitous, focusing on their similarities across time, and posits that certain variables, which vary depending on the different methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks, lead epic heroes to possess ubiquitous characteristic traits, features, and stories. Their sheer structuralist approach to interpret the epic heroes through to find similarities lead them to a condition I term "ubiquitous fallacy" in this group.

It is indicated in this article that a notable issue within this group is the tendency to selectively choose data that aligns with their predetermined formulas, leading to an incomplete representation of epics and myths. Whether employing anthropological, psychological, historical, and literary perspectives or focusing on generic influences, these studies often suffer from a narrow selection of sources that only serve to reinforce their preconceived notions. As a result, the endeavour to identify universal ubiquity in epic heroes falls short in capturing the full spectrum of these figures and fails to demonstrate their transitional nature, thus resulting in "ubiquitous fallacy". In essence, while this initial group of scholars seeks to explore the common threads among epic heroes, their approach is limited by the selective nature of their data, hindering a comprehensive understanding of the breadth and transformative aspects inherent in the concept of the epic hero.

The second group, while acknowledging some generic influences across time, emphasises the impossibility of the concept of epic heroism having a single, stable, or essentialist universal form. Although this approach is more valid for analysing the essence of epic heroes, it also harbours problems. This approach's insistence on creating models or types of epic heroes to indicate their differences from the preceding and succeeding models leads to the illusion that there are concrete and strong lines that separate these types from one another. However, the boundaries of these heroic

types are often fluid, and epic heroes do not necessarily fit into one single mould of categorization. Hence, these categorisations fail to capture the complexity and diversity of epic heroisms represented within the epic heroes. From the examples of Werner and Steadman's approaches, it is indicated that this group's methodological problem lies in the dramatic focus on the impacts of the context of the periods in which the epics are composed. The evolution of epic heroes may indeed be influenced by a multitude of contextual factors, including political, cultural, religious, economic, and societal norms and needs of their respective ages. While these influences play a role in shaping epic heroes, it is underlined that it is essential to recognise the agency and creativity of individual poets since poets are not merely products of their times, but active participants who question and revalue the prevailing norms and precepts of their era. The unique approaches and ideas of individual poets contribute to the dynamic nature of epic heroism and give rise to new heroic versions.

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Summary

The study of epic heroes has been a topic of significant scholarly investigation, with researchers grappling with the complexities surrounding their evolution, as well as the difficulties associated with their definition and categorization. Scholars have put forth diverse templates and analytical frameworks to comprehend the multifaceted nature of epic heroes and elucidate their birth, lineage, exploits, attributes, and roles within their narratives. Within the academic circles there two distinct approaches towards the epic heroes emerged.

The first group's approach to the evolution of epic heroes centres around identifying shared patterns and recurring themes that highlight the pervasive nature of characteristic features and actions exhibited by these heroes across different temporal and spatial contexts. Scholars belonging to this group employ various disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, history, and literature to elucidate the widespread attributes of epic heroes. Their emphasis on ubiquity, however, gives rise to methodological challenges and biases in data selection, which I refer to as the "ubiquitous fallacy." This article indicates that the "ubiquitous fallacy group", while trying to find a universal mould for epic heroes, fail to capture the wide range of epic heroes and deeper understandings of the poets' intentions and the nuances of their approaches to the epic hero and heroism. The fundamental problem of this group, as I have already explained, is their methodological approach. Every single study in this group, regardless of their critical frameworks, is marked by the problem of selective data. Their selection of epics and myths is not all-inclusive since they only use stories that justify their formula. Hence, the attempt to find universal ubiquity in heroes ends in failing to capture the width of the "epic hero" spectrum and to demonstrate how transitional these figures are.

The second group of academics' approach towards the evolution of epic heroes dramatically differs from the first group. Contrary to the ubiquitous fallacy the first group had, this approach is marked by the desire to differentiate the distinct characteristic features and actions exhibited by epic heroes across different temporal and spatial contexts. In an effort to reflect the transformation and adaptation of epic heroes, various critics in this group have attempted to categorise epic heroes into distinct models. Although this article favours this group's approach to analyse the evolution of epic heroes, it is indicated that there are also problems inherent in this group as well. This article argues that the boundaries of these heroic types are often fluid, therefore, these models or types of epic heroes may not fully capture the complexity and diversity of epic heroisms represented within them. This article further delves into two distinct analytical frameworks, Doris Cecilia Werner's socio-political reading and John Steadman's "image and ideal" hypothesis, within the second group and offers solutions to fill the gaps in their theoretical approaches. Werner's approach is marked by the idea that epics and epic heroes are defined by the over-riding socio-political philosophies and precepts of the age in which they are composed. It is argued that Werner's assertion regarding the changing nature of epic heroes due to the influences of their respective ages is partially valid, as these heroes may indeed be influenced by the political, cultural, religious, economic, and societal norms and needs of their time. However, her analysis falls short by disregarding the unique perspectives and narrative intentions of individual poets. The evolution of epic heroes arises not only from the broader contextual influences but also from the creative and intellectual contributions of the poets themselves and the epic traditions, rendering a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic nature of epic heroism.

As for Steadman's "image and ideal" hypothesis, which is a widely used analytical framework used while analysing the evolution of epic heroes, is remarkable in the sense that it takes into account the impact of epic genre's conventions and contextual needs of the time in which epic heroes are composed. He underlines that there is always a clash between the ideals within the epic tradition and the image created in the light of contemporary needs. This article argues that there are three defects in Steadman's hypothesis and offers suggestions to overcome them. The first defect is its emphasis on the overriding influence of the norms and needs of the time period on poets, similar to Werner's perspective. While it is true that poets are influenced by the society in which they live, they cannot be reduced exclusively to the dominant political, cultural, religious, economic, and societal norms and precepts of their time. This said, poets may challenge and revalue these very norms in their own way. Therefore, the poets' personal responses to the events and philosophies of their have to be carefully taken

into account while analysing epic heroes. The second defect of Steadman's theory is its singular focus on the generic conventions of epic heroism. The range of epic traditions throughout history is so diverse that epic heroes may even exhibit conflicting characteristics. In this regard, Steadman falls into the same error as Bakhtin by overly emphasising the generic influences within the borders of epic tradition. It should also be underlined here that the margins of these heroisms are not clear-cut; epic heroisms are transitional and fluid. Hence, the models and traditions that the poets use or react against need to be carefully analysed to truly grasp the innovations that the poets present in their epic heroes. Lastly, one of the limitations of Steadman's "image and ideal" hypothesis is its lack of consideration for the complexity of the arguments made by poets. It is argued that characteristic features and actions of epic heroes are not always indicators of the reasons beneath their evolutionary trajectory. The poets' personal arguments while creating the features and actions has to be taken into account to better understand their trajectory. It is underlined that distinct epic heroes may have similar features and actions; however, poets may base them on different arguments which directly alter the meanings intended with these features and actions.