

عظماء شرفيون و غربيون بوصفهم أبطالاً

في عيون النقاد4

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المخلص

يسعى هذا البحث إلى معالجة شخصية البطل في الأعمال المختارة التي تركز على بعض الأفراد الشرقيين و الغربيين، الذين اشتهروا ببطولاتهم التي اتخذت أشكالاً مختلفة. و سيبدأ البحث بتعريف نقدي لمصطلح البطل ثم سينتقل إلى الكشف عن الكيفية التي يؤكد بها النبلاء شخصياتهم البطولية بسبب مآثرهم البارزة في الشجاعة و
8النبيل.

Colossal Eastern and Western Figures as Heroes in the Eyes of Critics

Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the hero figure in selected works that focus on certain Eastern and Western individuals who were famed for their heroism that took different forms. It will start with a critical definition of the term "hero" and then proceed to reveal how magnanimous people assert their heroic characters by reason of their outstanding attributes of courage and nobility.

Introduction

This paper will first look at the concept of the "hero" in definitive dictionaries of literary terms. First of all, according to *Cuddon's Dictionary of Literary Terms*, "A hero and heroine are the principal male and female characters in a work of literature"^[1]. If we continue to explore the meaning of the hero and his characteristics in ancient and modern Eastern and Western dictionaries, we will find that the hero in general is a person with physical and psychological features that distinguish him from other people and his characteristics are related to courage. Secondly, according to *Fowler's Dictionary of Literary Terms*, "In the classical myth, heroes had superhuman powers; they conversed with gods (sometimes, like Achilles or Theseus, they were demigods)"^[2]. In addition, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines the hero as: "The main character in a narrative or dramatic work"^[3]. Thus, we find that the hero is a person who is famous for his bravery and nobility, and he is the main character

in poems, stories and plays. For Northrop Frye, heroes can be classified into certain categories. He states:

The first type is "the mythical hero". This hero is god-like, superior in kind to both his environment and other men; the second is the "romantic hero", who is superior in degree both to other men and to the environment; the high mimetic hero is superior in degree to other men but not to his environment; the low mimetic hero is superior neither to other men nor to his environment; and the last is the ironic hero, who is inferior to other men and to his environment. ^[4]

We can see that through time, the hero has diminished in stature from a god-like man to one who is inferior to the average person. Even the meaning of the word "hero" has changed, as W. H.

Auden indicates:

Heroes are divided into three parts: the "epic hero", the "tragic hero", and the "comic hero". The "epic hero" is similar to Frye's "mythical and romantic types", the "tragic hero" would

correspond to the "high mimetic mode", and the "comic hero" would correspond to the "low mimetic and absurd types". [5]

Having looked at these definitions of the hero as a figure, I believe that it is apt to discuss some examples of the heroic figures from certain Western and Eastern works. Here I have chosen to follow the hero's career in order to formulate a proper vision of his heroism. The heroes of Uruk, Gilgamesh and Enkidu, are our first heroic figures.

Enkidu and Gilgamesh

The Epic of Gilgamesh consists of two parts and each part is concerned with one of the heroes (Enkidu and Gilgamesh). However, the first part gives us Enkidu who is a young man favored above all others in animal strength, manly enterprise and high spirits, until he is struck down with a fatal sickness in punishment for having trespassed against the gods. Enkidu can

be regarded as the first hero in literature who is closely linked to the gods, and he often deals with strange beings. He is partly human, partly animal and partly divine. At the same time, we find him dealing with the forces of nature, which are depicted in a lively way. Enkidu is a legendary hero and if the legendary hero is the first stage of the image of heroes in literature, then the epic hero is the middle stage between the legendary and tragic heroes. Looking at the stages between the legendary hero and the tragic hero, we can find that the qualities of the legendary hero begin to disappear from the hero and turn into a tragic hero. It is known that the epic hero existed earlier than the tragic hero. However, the legendary hero existed much earlier than both epic and tragic heroes. We can conclude that even epic and legendary heroes can undergo tragic experiences and become completely tragic heroes. While reading the story of Enkidu, we can feel that Enkidu is not only a legendary hero, but he is also a great noble tragic hero because he fought like a tiger, helped his

best friend, and taught him the meaning of morals and friendship.

Moreover, he stopped Gilgamesh from raping women and girls in Uruk. Nevertheless, Enkidu made a mistake by standing against the gods and this mistake leads to his own suffering and death and hence, he becomes a tragic hero. We feel pity on Enkidu because he is a great warrior, man and friend who died for his own friend. But we are afraid of facing such a tragic end especially after sacrificing everything for our friends and family.

Hope Nash Wolff says:

At this tragedy, Gilgamesh loses all his unthinking self-satisfaction and becomes a raging, questioning Achilles; and yet he suffers no tragic or glorious end, but he returns quietly home, defeated in his demand for a better life.

[6]

We can say that a hero stops to be a hero when he loses force.

Therefore, Enkidu, in his sickness, mourns his ability to act until the moment he dies. In addition, Gilgamesh returns defeated to

Uruk because he could not attain immortality and was not able to do anything:

Gilgamesh saw a pond whose water was cool,
He went down into it to bathe in the water.
A snake caught the scent of the plant,
It came up and carried the plant away,
On its way back it shed its skin. [7]

After Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh was controlled by fear, not force. A question arises here: Can we regard Gilgamesh or Enkidu as heroes then? Wolff says: "Gilgamesh doesn't keep our faith at the last, because he continues to live, after accepting death. We look at Gilgamesh who still sleeps" [8]. However, I believe that Enkidu's death changes Gilgamesh forever. Before Gilgamesh's journey, immortality for him was to conquer death, to live forever. After his journey, he realizes two things: first, when he saw immortality in front of him, he realized that immortality is boring because doing the same thing every day is boring. Secondly, immortality only suits the gods and our immortality is in our

heroic and noble actions and achievements. In other words, to have a good reputation among people is our immortality as human beings. According to *The New Encyclopedia Americana*: "A hero is a half-god or a person who is immortalized by his deeds and achievements" [9].

The role of the gods in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is great. The gods created Gilgamesh as two-third divine and one-third human and gave him extraordinary strength and good looks. After people complain about Gilgamesh for being a ruler who does not treat his people well, the gods created Enkidu who is equal to Gilgamesh.

Ishtar plays a great role and creates many problems in the epic. As a result, we see that gods are real characters who control the fate of the hero. The epic hero may depend on his mind in solving the problems that confront him, but before that he depends on the help and support of the supernatural powers and gods. The gods even warn the hero of his enemies as in

Enkidu's dreams. Enkidu gives us a lesson that we have to be loyal to our friends and Gilgamesh teaches us the meaning of immortality. Both of them are famous until nowadays and we can view them as great heroes who gave the world the foundation of the concept of friendship and immortality and changed the world by their fights and lessons. However, some people like Wolff, do not regard Gilgamesh and Enkidu as heroes because they failed in their missions in searching for immortality, in fighting against the gods and because they were supported by the gods; their victories were the outcome of the gods, not the outcome of their own power and will. They also fell due to their excessive disrespectful arrogance which offended the gods. Therefore, they died because they suffered as part of their divine retribution.

Thus, the concept of the hero here is controversial, but in addition, the common thing among heroes is a journey or an adventure. Both Gilgamesh and Enkidu went on different journeys to achieve mortality. If we follow Frye's and Auden's

classifications of the heroes, we can view Gilgamesh and Enkidu as "Mythical or Epic heroes". If we continue to look for the details of the hero's journey, we will find that the hero's journey is really complex and this complexity is represented in the journey of Shakyamuni Buddha, a colossal Eastern hero, to reach the stage of enlightenment.

Shakyamuni Buddha

A majestic representation of the difficulties of the adventure in the hero-task is presented in the traditional legend of the Great Struggle of Buddha. Shakyamuni Buddha is the founder of the Buddhist religion and was the crown prince of the great Shakya Kingdom. Campbell says: "The young Buddha was groomed to be a king in accordance with the wishes of the royal family. However, when he was about 29 years old, he learned the deep suffering experienced in life by people" ^[10]. Therefore, he left his palace life in order to find the causes of the suffering

and the means to overcome it. He went and saw, for the first time: sickness, old age and death. Joseph Campbell says:

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation initiation–return. A hero leaves the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. ^[11]

He even reduced himself to a mere skeleton by living on a few dried beans and a sip of water a day, but then he realized that extreme asceticism (namely, living a simple life without physical pleasure) cannot bring him spiritual enlightenment. He understood that being neither a prince nor an ascetic would enable him to attain enlightenment. He gave up everything to discover the depths and truths of suffering. To have the heart to care so much about others and to sacrifice willingly for them, is an ability to create a positive impact on people's lives. Therefore,

he spoke to everyone with equal respect and made a long and lasting effect on people's lives. Thus, a hero is one who gives and asks for nothing in return. After his tough journey to achieve that spiritual awakening, he taught us four noble truths: everyone in this life is suffering in one way or another, suffering comes from desire. But it is possible to stop suffering and achieve enlightenment. And the last truth is about the Middle Way. In other words, neither extreme asceticism nor extreme wealth was the path to the enlightenment. Campbell says:

When Buddha was sitting beneath the tree, he was approached by the god of love and death. The dangerous god approached on an elephant and carrying weapons in his thousand hands. He was surrounded by his army, which extended twelve leagues before him, twelve to the right, twelve to the left, but Buddha remained unmoved beneath the Tree. And the god then assailed him, seeking to break his concentration. ^[12]

We can see a clash between Buddha on the one hand, and the god and the god's army on the other hand. Almost all heroes,

like Enkidu, have a clash with the gods. The role of the gods is significant in these works because the gods influence human beings through dreams and visions. They are the ultimate governing force for human beings and the reason of their suffering or victories. However,

The god finally flung his razor-sharp discus angrily, and bid the towering host of the army to let fly at him with mountain crags. But Buddha only moved his hand to touch the ground with his fingertips, and thus bid the goddess Earth bear witness to his right to be sitting where he was. The elephant fell upon its knees in obeisance to Buddha. The army was immediately dispersed, and the gods of the worlds scattered garlands.

[13]

Thus, after winning this victory before sunset, Buddha acquired knowledge of his previous existence and the chain of causation.

He achieved the perfect enlightenment.

Each person has a certain aim and dream and he or she works hard to achieve that aim. Nevertheless, some heroes fail to

achieve it after sacrificing everything they had and that is why they experience tragic suffering and such heroes are tragic heroes. On the other hand, other heroes can achieve what they want and teach people all around the world. Hence, all kinds of heroes can offer us a certain message and we understand this message differently. Buddha is similar to Gilgamesh in a way. Both of them had a long, tough and impossible journey to complete and they are heroes to some people. Buddha is a hero to some people because he gave up everything he had and tried to stop people's suffering. On the other hand, people in China do not like Buddha at all because Buddha calls for ending the social structure of China by encouraging people to leave their families and jobs to become monks and nuns. Moreover, Chinese people have destroyed about 6.000 Buddhist temples. However, according to Frye's and Auden's classifications of the heroes, we can think of Buddha as a "Romantic hero" or "Epic hero" because his journeys were made to attain a spiritual enlightenment and to

make people acquire and understand the moral lessons in life. Having looked at these Eastern heroes, let us proceed to consider some Western heroes.

Socrates

The best examples of Western heroes were presented during the classical Greek period. I think that the first hero philosopher was Socrates. Socrates was an ancient Greek philosopher. His style of philosophizing was to share his thoughts in public conversations about some human ideas and through skillful questioning, he showed that his listeners did not know what they were talking about. Will Durant says: "Athens condemned Socrates to death, accusing him of moral corruption"^[14]. Socrates was widely hated in Athens, because he embarrassed people by making them appear ignorant and foolish. However, he was a critic of democracy, he rejected the city's gods, and he inspired disrespect for the authority among his youthful followers (though that was not his intention). He was

convicted and sentenced to death by poison. He had two choices: either to go on an exile or to die. He chose to die rather than to be exiled, because escaping would show disrespect for the laws and would harm the reputation of his family. Socrates believed in deity, but this conception is completely different from the typical Athenians' belief. While to Athenians, gods were human-like and confused figures, Socrates believed gods to be perfectly wise. Moreover, he saved Alcibiodes's life. Kenneth Seeskin remarks: "Socrates showed his heroism when he risked his own life to save Alcibiodes during the Potidea, Delium, and Amphipolis war" ^[15]. Additionally, Socrates aimed at creating a better society. A hero is someone who is just and derives motivation from injustice in the community to fight for the rights of the helpless and voiceless people. A hero is one who chooses to go against the state to promote the welfare of the weak. Socrates spent his entire life seeking to understand society's beliefs. Heroes are often humble people who do not even know how

great they are. Socrates did not see himself any wiser or better than others, because he believed that all people have knowledge. A hero is not necessarily a perfect human being: since human beings can make mistakes, so can heroes. Although heroes seem to have a superior thinking ability, their thinking can be flawed. Although the act of taking poison can be seen in terms of weakness from one point of view, it is also a heroic act. A hero is an individual who is able to stand for what is right regardless of pressure or death. Socrates refused to run away and accepted to face the death penalty as a lesson to others. I have already indicated that a hero goes against the state and society, but heroism is not necessarily about going against the law. We can see that Socrates' acceptance of the death sentence demonstrates his respect to laws. Socrates motivated so many people to always stand for what is right regardless of the situation. Socrates had a passion for truth. Even when facing death, he chose truth. I believe that true heroism is standing by

the truth and seeking what is right. However, some people ignore Socrates because he was hated by Athenians as a result of being poor and with no political influence and he did not pay attention to his family members. I think Socrates can fit in with Frye's term of "High Mimetic heroes", or under Auden's term of "Tragic heroes". He sacrificed everything for defending the truth. His environment killed him because of its fear. On the other hand, Socrates' student, Plato, presented a different version of heroism.

Plato

Plato associated the concept of heroism with politics, not morals. Plato was deeply influenced by Socrates. Moreover, we can see Plato's admiration for Socrates throughout his works. Ari Kohen says:

Plato manages to turn the ignoble death of his mentor into a virtuous triumph for two reasons: first, he suggests that Socrates has an intimate

understanding—perhaps even an appreciation— of his morality and actively choose to die. Secondly, he demonstrates that in choosing to give up his life— Socrates sacrifices himself for those with whom he identifies, both his friends and even the Athenians at large who seem to be his enemies. In Socrates' trial and execution, Plato establishes his mentor as a moral hero who gives up his life to benefit others. ^[16]

Plato did not only talk about heroes, but also talked about gender distinction. Plato plays a major role in establishing the traditional gender distinction. Dominic Stefanson notes: "For Plato, the female is irrational and man is rational. As the hero is the supreme rationalist, it is incumbent upon the hero to expunge any feminine traits from his character" ^[17]. Hence, for Plato, the hero is a male of exceptional ability who is just talented in his activities and in being so, he becomes a model of inspiration for others.

Stefanson says:

Plato politicizes the notion of heroism by compelling the hero to enter into the service of

the state. Plato transforms the heroic man into a citizen. Plato wants heroism to continue to prosper in an era that came to see political activity as an unavoidable component of man's existence. Yet the ideals of heroism in Plato remain hierarchical and aristocratic. ^[18]

In other words, if someone wants to be a hero, he/she has to be a politician or to be a skillful citizen for the benefit of the state. Plato demonstrates how a great man can and must contribute to the well-being of the city-state. The hero becomes a ruling citizen. He is a citizen in the sense that his actions contribute to the wellbeing of the city-state. Plato believes that Socrates died in the name of truth. He was fully aware of what he needed to do to avoid death, and no one doubts his intellectual ability to have done so, but he chose to die for truth. A well-balanced life where reason and truth control everything is the key to the heroic life for Plato. Plato associates the hero with the political position and he believes that a successful community is one that is equally balanced. The hero can do anything to the highest

standard, but he is obliged to exercise his heroism in the unavoidable theatre of the state action. Plato talks about this idea in his work *The Republic*. He talks about the concept of the "philosopher king", whose key notion is that the philosopher is the only person who can be trusted to rule the state well. Philosophers are both morally and intellectually suited to rule: morally because it is in their nature to love truth and learn so much that they are free from the greed and lust that tempt others to abuse power and are so intellectual that they can gain full knowledge of reality by themselves. The city can get such knowledge by putting aspiring philosophers through a demanding education, and the philosophers will use their knowledge of goodness and virtue to help other citizens achieve their best. According to Plato, the hero is dictated by the demands of true knowledge and the interests of the common knowledge. Moreover, the hero has a rational mind that gains access to the highest level of truth and knowledge. Armed with true knowledge,

any person can bring internal harmony to his life and to the community. Many historical figures have been put forward as examples of philosopher kings. For example, one of the most important people who is related to the philosopher kings is Archytas. Not only was Archytas a philosopher, mathematician, music theorist and astronomer, but he was also a skillful military general and a popular political leader. However, although Aristotle revered his teacher, Plato, his philosophy departed from Plato's in many important aspects. Such a contrast is famously suggested in the painting of the Italian Renaissance painter Raffaello Santi. This painting comes under the title "The School of Athens" which depicts Plato and Aristotle together in a conversation, surrounded by scientists, philosophers and artists. Plato, holding a copy of his dialogue Timeo, points upward to the Heavens; Aristotle, holding his Etica, points outward to the world. Hence, we note that Aristotle talked about the hero, or rather the tragic hero in a different way.

Aristotle

Aristotle gives a complete definition of the tragic hero:

A Tragic Hero is a literary character who makes an error in judgment that inevitably leads to his/her own destruction. A man does not become a hero until he can see the root of his own downfall. ^[19]

Moreover, Richard Dutton gives a definition of the tragic hero and remarks:

This is a sort of man who is not conspicuously virtuous or just and whose decline into misery is not caused by vice and depravity, but rather by some flaw or error: a man who enjoys prosperity and an eminent reputation, like Oedipus and Thyestes. ^[20]

For Aristotle, a tragic hero is a man of some social standing and personal reputation, however, he is flawed and this flaw leads to his downfall. We assume that this downfall leads to the hero's death but it can lead to the hero's awful suffering. Almost all

tragic heroes come from a place of elevated status in the society; tragic heroes' experiences are more dramatic than those of common men because tragic heroes are falling from grace. Moreover, tragic heroes are too proud and too stubborn to take the advice of those who are warning them. All tragic heroes experience a sharp turning point during their journey. Once the climax in the plot has occurred, the tragic hero will find out that he or she, in fact, has caused the central suffering. In tragedy, the meaningful existence of the hero is created by his death or suffering. Unfortunately, in spite of this self-realization, the hero is unable to change his or her tragic fate. The best example of a tragic hero is Oedipus the King. Oedipus is superior to the people who are around him because he is the king, but at the end of the play, his environment rejects him because of his flaw. Therefore, he becomes inferior to his environment. We can think of him as a "High Mimetic hero", according to Frye's classifications of the heroes. However, the hero's image is really

and truly represented in Homer's works and we can see a detailed representation of the hero through Homeric figures.

Homeric Heroes

Homer created a different kind of heroes in his works *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, as Stefanson says:

The Homeric hero is a man of transparent action who is never incapacitated because he acts upon his instincts. He soars above humanity and performs deeds that assure him of everlasting fame and glory. The Homeric hero is a warrior prince who lives in the absence of the state. He rules his community as a patriarch who places his personal quest for glory above the dictates of the common good. The Homeric hero is consequently limited in his ability to act as a model of emulation from those who live in the state. [21]

The Homeric hero is a man, only a warrior can be heroic and only a male is physiologically capable of being a warrior. Homeric heroes are not interested in politics; they are community leaders

whose individual brilliance serves primarily themselves. Homeric heroes cannot serve as models for citizenship because they lack self-restraint and the subordination to the common interests of the community that mark a citizen. Stefanson says:

The definition of the hero is inextricably linked to Homer. Hero comes directly from the Greek "hērōs" (singular) and "hērōēs" (plural), as used by Homer to describe his main protagonist. In the ancient world, the term "heros" was already in use to describe the great men of the Homeric epics. ^[22]

The meaning of the word "hero" is derived from the Homeric epics. The understanding of the notion of heroism throughout ages depends on the understanding of the protagonists of the Homeric epics. The greatness of the Homeric hero rests on his ability to act in all circumstances. The Homeric hero is never incapacitated, regardless of how difficult circumstances become. Besides, he has the ability to tackle a problem quickly, decide what to do, articulate that decision and then enact it. The

Homeric hero goes to the battle and risks his own life to defend the community and at the same time, attain glory and fame for himself. In other words, helping the community is not the hero's primary motivation or intent. Heroes sometimes defend their communities against external aggression, yet at other times, they pull their communities into unnecessary conflicts. However, in both cases the hero is driven by personal interests. For instance, the conflict between Paris and Menelaus over Helen shows us how heroes can pull entire communities into essentially private conflicts with disastrous consequences for the whole community. Besides, the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles occurs over a woman called Briseis. Both Agamemnon and Achilles are awarded a woman as a trophy of war. This conflict emerges as an interesting parallel to the cause of the Trojan War itself. Both heroes killed a great number of people because of one woman. We may say that the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon characterizes both men. Agamemnon, for all his greatness as a

king and military commander, is jealous, greedy and selfish. At the same time, Achilles shows firm determination and stubbornness. The Homeric hero lacks the drive for self-sacrifice that is necessary for citizenship. Definitely, Homeric heroes, according to Frye's and Auden's characterization of the heroes, come under "Mythical or Epic heroes".

As a conclusion, we can note that there are many kinds of heroes and each kind is unique and has its own qualities and characteristics. We have an obvious change in the concept of heroism throughout different ages. All heroes have nobility, courage and power and are willing to face different difficulties and obstacles in order to help people and the state. However, Homeric heroes are different. They want to assist people and the state so that they can achieve fame and glory for themselves and they are a little bit far from nobility. They are selfish and mean, however, they are admired by people because of their power and authority.

Notes

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