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Editorial: Analyzing Processes of Heroization

Theories, Methods, Histories

The collaborative research centre SFB 948 "Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms"

Often, prominent theoretical approaches to heroism have had a universalizing outlook. Examples include the lectures of Thomas Carlyle on heroes and 'great men', Ralph Waldo Emerson's work on the heroic, and the influential model of the 'hero's journey' by Joseph Campbell. Campbell's model has been used in modern media products as a template to create hero quest-narratives (such as in the case of *Star Wars*) more often than it has been used to explain the existing heroic phenomena of the past. Another more contemporary approach of this kind is "Heroism Science" (Allison et al.), which models the heroic as a template for personal growth and leadership studies. In contrast, the interdisciplinary collaborative research centre (*Sonderforschungsbereich*) SFB 948 at the University of Freiburg in Germany is interested in the differences and similarities of the multifarious forms of the heroic, their uses and relevance, as embedded in concrete cultural and historical settings. The SFB is not concerned with "the hero with a thousand faces" (Campbell); instead, we are examining the many faces of the processes of heroization in connection with embedded socio-cultural and historical practices and contexts.

This special issue introduces to the international academic community several core texts on the heroic by the SFB. Most of the core texts were originally written in German. The SFB's full title, "Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms. Transformations and Conjunctures from Antiquity to the Modern Day", encapsulates its aim: since its establishment in 2012, it has brought together more than fifty scholars from the disciplines of history, literary and cultural studies, visual culture, sociology, archaeology, Islamic studies, sinology and theology – all are developing transdisciplinary approaches to studying the heroic in the *longue durée*. The research outline of the first funding phase (2012 to 2016) focused on historical periods, its eighteen projects investigating case studies ranging from Graeco-Roman antiquity to the early twentieth century. The sixteen projects of the second funding phase (2016 to 2020) extended the period of investigation to include the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries and also widened the cultural scope of the case studies beyond Europe and North America, notably through case studies on China and the Middle East, as well as by emphasizing transcultural dynamics. The results of this research are documented in a broad range of publications (see the overview at www.sfb948.uni-freiburg.de/en/publications/). An ongoing, collective effort is being applied to the completion of the *Compendium heroicum*, an online encyclopedia that introduces the SFB's basic concepts and theoretical approaches, as well as important heroic phenomena from specific cultural contexts (www.compendium-heroicum.de).

On the contents and methodological approach of the study of the heroic at the SFB 948

At the SFB 948, the object of research is the heroic in its multiple representations and expressions in cultural contexts (see von den Hoff et al.). These representations and expressions are analyzed, firstly, in the contexts of historical change and transformation; secondly, in transcultural and transnational comparison and thirdly, focusing on their forms of construction and representation in different media. Rather than formulating a singular definition, collaborative work at the centre has developed its research strategies out of multiple heuristics. These have been developed in close conjunction with the different case studies that present themselves in the various fields in which heroic phenomena appear in different forms, in different contexts of

production and reception, and with different cultural aims (see, for example, the historical constellation around 1800 that Asch studies).

In contrast to the essentializing notion that heroes are 'just there', and that one can or must describe them in their singularity, we claim that heroic figures are the result of cultural processes of meaning-making. Instead of re-narrating the singular history of a person or fictional character-type, or studying the psychic dispositions of heroic individuals, as in social-psychological approaches (see Franco et al.), the SFB's research is focused on the processual dynamics which constitute the 'hero' as an *effect* (see Schlechtriemen), and, to a certain extent, as a cultural *affect* constellation (see Zink). Special consideration is given to the multiple constellations of actors, the dynamic boundary work that heroic figures perform in cultural contexts, and the different forms of their mediated representation. Following from this, our approach regards heroization as a socio-cultural process and aims to analyze heroic figures and phenomena in their interactional relations.

Processes of heroization are fundamentally structured by collective ascriptions. These ascriptions stand in a relationship of contiguity with aspects of Max Weber's concept of charisma (see Ebertz) as that which predicates the affective charge of heroes by a collective of admirers (see Zink) that often try to imitate their role models (see von den Hoff et al., *Imitatio*). To a large degree, heroic figures are culturally active as representations, aesthetically shaped by various media and their genres, and readable in cultural sign-systems due to the knowledge of heroizing codes, narratives and the "structures of feeling" (Williams) they afford. This prefiguration by mediatized forms, their conventions and affordances, is fundamental for the shape in which we construct and encounter the heroic in culture. Literary traditions have a far-reaching influence in the context of heroizations, travelling across and through different cultures both temporally and spatially, as well as being subject to remediations and differentiations. It has been argued, in this context, that heroes "may only exist in real life because they are pre-figured in literature" (Korte/Lethbridge 2, referring to Bohrer 942). Similar aspects concerning the aesthetic construction of heroization also pertain to the (audio) visual arts and other material cultural products (see also Falkenhayner/Korte/Bensch/Hardt).

As an entry-point of research, two main approaches have proven productive in our collaborative work on the heroic since 2012. On the one hand, research can commence at any point where male and female 'heroes' are explicitly mentioned, or in which, in an adjective mode, a 'heroic deed' is invoked. On the other hand, typological approaches have also been used. In this sense, the following five features can be employed as characteristics of the heroic: 1) extraordinariness, 2) affective and moral charge, 3) autonomy and transgression, 4) agonality, and 5) a strong, human agency (see Schlechtriemen). The analysis of anti-heroes also enables the identification of various types (see Bröckling, *Negations*). Typological approaches offer the advantage that aspects and forms of the heroic can also be found even when the semantics of heroic ascriptions are not explicitly used, but their structure and type point towards contexts of heroization. Our analysis focuses on how heroic figures are constituted, constructed and received within specific cultural, historical and mediated contexts. This approach resonates with Max Jones' proposal to investigate heroic phenomena "as sites within which we can find evidence of the cultural beliefs, social practices, political structures and economic systems of the past" (Jones 439). Additionally, this approach significantly broadens Jones' approach due to the large number of case studies investigated in the work of the research centre, and its breadth concerning different cultures and time periods – from antiquity to the contemporary globalized and mediatized cultures of the present, and from Europe and North America to the former Soviet Union, the Middle East and Asia. This approach aims to establish what Wittgenstein termed 'family resemblances' (32) of different processes of heroizations (as opposed to clearly differentiated categorizations of the processes). The approach was also influenced in part by the dynamics of the distribution of agency discussed in the "ideal typological field" that Bernard Giesen set up in his 2004 monograph *Triumph and Trauma*, in which he establishes the types of the triumphant and the tragic hero, the perpetrator and the victim. Giesen's concepts proved useful for discussing aspects of the agency distribution concerning heroes and their audiences, and the heroes' dependence on the ambiguous relationship with their admirers, who can turn against them. Similar to Jones' approach, Giesen describes heroes as "cultural imaginations of identity" (1) which have to be "enacted" in social practices (see Gölz). As such constructions of and for group identities and differences, approaches from the sociological study of "boundary work" (see Lamont/Molnár) have also been influential in establishing aspects of the cultural work that heroes and heroizations perform (see Schlechtriemen).

Not least, the analysis not only has to include the textual (narrative and rhetorical) forms by

which heroic figures are shaped. Research must take into account the canonized forms of the representation of the heroic in other forms of media, especially visual and audiovisual media (see Korte/Falkenhayner/Hardt/Bensch). This might include conventions of representation such as the *hero shot* or the *radiance* of the hero (see Gelz). This approach also enables the comparison of different liminal figures and their social embedding such as the victim, the martyr, and the hero within their social context (see Gölz).

Notes on the collection of texts

All texts have been conceived in the context of the research conducted at the SFB. The choice of texts was guided by addressing more general aspects of processes of heroizations, beyond singular case studies. The article by Gölz has been written (in English) for the present issue, while the article by Bröckling (*Modernity*) is an abridged translation of a chapter in a book that will appear in 2020. All other texts have previously been published in German in different contexts, hence their heterogeneity in terms of their length and form (see the overview of first publications). By minimalizing editorial changes, we wish to document the different phases of research at the SFB. It was also a prerequisite that the collected texts had not been published previously in English. Major English-language publications have developed from research work at the centre, including the edited volumes *Heroes and Heroism in British Fiction since 1800* (Korte/Lethbridge), *Tracing the Heroic through Gender* (Hauck et al.) and *Heroism as a Global Phenomenon in Contemporary Culture* (Korte/Wendt/Falkenhayner).

Acknowledgments

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