

THE CONCEPT OF THE HERO IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Burkhonov Mekhriz Salokhiddin ugli

Lecturer, Department of Language Teaching Methodology,

Urgut Branch of Samarkand State University.

mehruzburxonov819@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20697187>

Abstract. This thesis examines the historical development of the hero in English literature. It focuses on the transformation of the heroic image from the physically powerful warrior of Old English literature to the morally complex and psychologically ambiguous protagonist of modern fiction. The analysis demonstrates that the concept of heroism changes according to the social, cultural, and ethical values of each literary period.

Keywords: hero, heroism, English literature, epic hero, tragic hero, Byronic hero, antihero.

The hero is one of the most important and enduring figures in literature. In English literary tradition, the image of the hero has developed in accordance with historical, cultural, and social changes. While early heroes were mainly characterized by physical strength, military courage, and loyalty, later literary works presented heroes whose greatness was connected with moral responsibility, intellectual independence, psychological endurance, and resistance to injustice.

In Old English literature, the hero is represented as a brave warrior who protects his people from external threats. Beowulf, the protagonist of the Old English epic *Beowulf*, is a typical example of the epic hero. He possesses extraordinary physical strength and fearlessly fights against Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon. His heroism is based on courage, loyalty, honour, and self-sacrifice. Beowulf's actions reflect the values of Anglo-Saxon warrior society, in which personal reputation and service to the community were highly respected.

During the medieval period, the heroic ideal became associated with chivalry and Christian morality. The knights of Arthurian literature were expected to demonstrate courage, loyalty, generosity, religious devotion, and respect for others. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon warrior, the medieval knight had to possess not only physical strength but also moral discipline. Therefore, medieval literature expanded the concept of heroism by connecting military courage with ethical and spiritual values.

The Renaissance introduced a psychologically complex type of hero. William Shakespeare's tragic protagonists, including Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, and King Lear, possess both admirable qualities and personal weaknesses. Hamlet, for instance, is not a traditional warrior hero. His heroism is expressed through his intellectual search for truth, his moral concerns, and his struggle against corruption. Shakespeare's tragic heroes demonstrate that an individual may be courageous and noble while remaining vulnerable to doubt, ambition, jealousy, or error.

Romantic literature developed the image of the rebellious and isolated hero. The Byronic hero, named after Lord Byron, is usually proud, intelligent, emotionally troubled, and alienated from society. This character rejects conventional values and resists social restrictions. The Byronic hero is morally ambiguous and cannot be classified as entirely virtuous or immoral. His appearance represents an important change in English literature because heroism becomes associated with individuality, freedom, and resistance.

Victorian literature often presented ordinary individuals as heroes. In the novels of Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontë, heroism is not determined by physical strength or noble origin. It is expressed through honesty, perseverance, compassion, and moral independence. Jane Eyre is a significant example of the Victorian moral hero. Although she faces poverty, social inequality, and emotional suffering, she protects her dignity and refuses to abandon her principles. Her character demonstrates that moral courage can be more important than physical power.

In twentieth-century literature, the traditional hero was frequently replaced by the antihero. The antihero may be weak, passive, uncertain, alienated, or morally ambiguous. This type of protagonist reflects the social instability, wars, political conflicts, and psychological crises of the modern world. Unlike traditional heroes, antiheroes do not always achieve victory. Their heroism may consist in preserving their identity, dignity, or humanity under difficult circumstances.

Contemporary English literature has further expanded the concept of heroism. Modern heroes may come from different social, cultural, ethnic, and gender backgrounds. They are often ordinary people who confront discrimination, injustice, personal trauma, or identity conflicts. Contemporary heroism is frequently associated with resilience, empathy, responsibility, and the courage to defend personal values.

In conclusion, the concept of the hero in English literature has undergone a significant transformation. The Anglo-Saxon warrior developed into the medieval knight, the Renaissance tragic protagonist, the Romantic rebel, the Victorian moral individual, and the modern antihero. This development shows that heroism is not a fixed literary category. It changes according to the ideals and problems of society. Nevertheless, the hero remains an important figure who confronts danger, injustice, moral conflict, and personal limitations. The evolution of the literary hero reflects the changing understanding of courage, dignity, responsibility, and human strength.

Adabiyotlar, References, Литературы:

1. Anonymous. (2000). *Beowulf* (S. Heaney, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company.
2. Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G. (2015). *A glossary of literary terms*. Cengage Learning.
3. Brontë, C. (2006). *Jane Eyre*. Penguin Classics.
4. Byron, G. G. (2004). *Childe Harold's pilgrimage*. Project Gutenberg.
5. Campbell, J. (2004). *The hero with a thousand faces*. Princeton University Press.
6. Frye, N. (1957). *Anatomy of criticism*. Princeton University Press.
7. Shakespeare, W. (2003). *Hamlet*. Arden Shakespeare.