

Project Group C4

Competing Semantics and Medializations of the Heroic in British Magazines between 1850 and 1900

Principal investigator: Prof. Dr. Barbara Korte; research associate: Christiane Hadamitzky

Magazines for a general public afford insight into the socially widely strewn semantics of the heroic in Victorian culture. On account of their especially close connection to the lifeworld of their readers and the great variety of article types, these magazines are excellent sources for shades of meaning of the heroic and claims of its relevance to society. Nevertheless, this popular medium for representing the heroic had yet to be studied.

Drawing from the numerous titles on the rapidly expanding British periodicals market starting in 1850, we analysed a selection of the most high-circulation and/or influential family, women's, and children's magazines between 1850 and 1900. This allowed us to identify general tendencies while also considering the specific heroic profiles of individual magazines. These profiles are the result of the various ideological positions of the individual publications and their producers as well as the gender, the social strata, and the ages of their intended sub-audiences, which can be determined more precisely for magazines than for books. To gain access to semantics of the heroic and strategies of its production, we employed both the more global perspective of *distant reading* (see Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading*, London 2013) and *close readings* of individual articles.

On a database (The Heroic in Victorian Periodicals), we documented and analysed articles including statements on the heroic, in most cases at five-year intervals. The database includes more than 2,000 searchable entries and also makes the material accessible for future users. The analyses reveal a complex coexistence and overlapping of diversified conceptions of the heroic with different profiles in family, children's, and women's magazines. We found clear evidence for the relevance of the categories gender and age in the treatment of the heroic for the sub-audiences of a diversified magazine market. Even in magazines which differed in the way they profiled the heroic, we succeeded in establishing general tendencies in a synchronic as well as a diachronic perspective. For example, moral heroes with a proven character were clearly preferred to transgressive hero figures. Accordingly, there was a preference for hero admiration rather than hero worship, since only exemplary heroes are capable of inspiring others to imitate them. The popular magazines of the Victorian period propagated heroic figures and qualities primarily as models for everyday civil behaviour and limited instances of exceptional heroism to a socially compatible extent, which at the same time enabled the increased inclusion of women (albeit still within much more narrow bounds than men) as well as actors from the middle and lower classes in herorization processes. The democratizing attribution of heroic qualities in the course of the nineteenth century – regarding both the persons eligible for herorization and the types of heroizable acts – was thus accompanied by a domestication of the heroic. Despite the high transformational dynamics of British society in the period covered by the study, the analysis demonstrated that the heroic and its codes remained an element that imparted meaning and encouraged a sense of community throughout the period under study and served social and political functions as a point of reference and a stabilizer of norms. A further significant result is the strongly marked reflexivity towards the heroic in all of the analysed magazines: The medium does not just present different

expressions of the heroic and its meanings but also puts intensive 'work' into reaching an understanding of the heroic: Different traditional and new figurations of the heroic are explicitly differentiated, related to each other, and assessed for their relevance to society.

The doctoral dissertation written by Christiane Hadamitzky (*'Homely, Easy and Attainable for All': The Representation of Heroism in Victorian Periodicals 1850 to 1900*) confirms these tendencies. It studies the medium of the popular magazine less in a global than in a detailed perspective, with in-depth analyses of individual factual and fictional articles. The dissertation focuses on the family magazine *Chambers's Journal* (CJ) yet also compares its heroic profile to those of two other popular magazines, *The Leisure Hour* (LH) and *Fraser's Magazine* (FM). These three magazines are well suited for comparison on account of their consistently high circulation and the differences in their thematic orientation and intended readership: The low-priced CJ – a publication that has hardly been the subject of any research at all up to now – was targeted at readers from the lower-middle and the educated working classes, with a didactic intent but without a programmatic political or religious orientation. LH aimed at a similar but explicitly Christian audience, while FM was a conservative publication that sought to appeal more to classically educated readers. Moreover, the publisher Chambers permitted a comparison of the heroization strategies of his magazine with those of its other products, such as schoolbooks and anthologies. Since the publisher's archive in Edinburgh is still being maintained, it was also possible to investigate the background of operations at the company. Overall, in the diachronic perspective the dissertation also revealed a coexistence of different conceptions of the heroic and a shift in the 'heroic personnel' towards the middle of society. Here as well, there is a conspicuous abundance of meta-heroic texts that reflect on the modes of production and functions of the heroic. The term 'hero(ine)' becomes a synonym for 'role model' in many texts in CJ and LH, and the focus shifts from the heroic deed itself to heroic virtue. It is increasingly no longer great deeds that are admired but the values motivating the behaviour incorporated by heroized figures (especially *endurance* and *selflessness* and, for the Christian-leaning *Leisure Hour*, *faith* and *piety*). This shift is important for the didactic functionalization of the heroic, as it can thus be integrated into the reader's lifeworld. In FM, by contrast, whose content is marked by the legacy of earlier contributors like Thomas Carlyle, the heroic is located more frequently in the domain of the exceptional and is used by the heroes, following Carlyle's example, as a figure for dissociating the elite from the masses. However, *Fraser's* also shows that propagating only the values of conservative elites was no longer marketable in times of increasingly significant middle classes; the magazine ceased publication in 1882.

In the overall context of the SFB, the project group succeeded particularly in furnishing evidence in support of theories on the democratization of the understanding of the heroic by placing its accent on a popular medium. Besides gender, the issue of social class also turned out to be an element in which the extension of the social reach of the heroic is clearly manifested. Studies on magazines for young readers showed that there was a strong tendency to functionalize the heroic for educational purposes in the second half of the nineteenth century. In particular, the project group illustrated how various old and new concepts of the heroic exist side by side and how the heroic is contoured differently for particular markets and sub-audiences. In addition to the magazine material, the group also demonstrated this on the popular genre of gift books, for which a database was also created.

Publications of the Project Group

- Hadamitzky, C. / Korte, B. (eds.) 2017: DATABASE: The Heroic in Victorian Periodicals, <https://heroics-in-periodicals.ub.uni-freiburg.de/>. DOI: 10.6094/SFB948/heroics-in-periodicals. [including B. Korte "Profiling the Heroic Through Magazines of the Victorian Period: Introduction", DOI: 10.694/UNIFR/11214.]
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- Korte, B. 2016: *Chums* (1892–1932): Heroes and Things in a British Boys' Periodical, in: U. Bröckling / B. Korte / R. von den Hoff (eds.), helden. heroes. héros, E-Journal zu Kulturen des Heroischen 4.1: Heroes and Things – Heroisches Handeln und Dinglichkeit, pp. 33–41. DOI: 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros./016/01/04.
- Korte, B. 2015: Viele Helden für viele Leser: Das Heroische in viktorianischen Publikumszeitschriften, in: R. G. Asch / M. Butter (eds.), Bewunderer, Verehrer, Zuschauer. Die Helden und ihr Publikum (Helden – Heroisierungen – Heroismen 2), Würzburg, pp. 93–114.
- Korte, B. 2014: ›Helden-Opfer‹ am Hellespont. Homerische Echos in britischen Weltkriegsromanen um 1920, in: B. Beßlich / D. Martin (eds.), ›Schöpferische Restauration‹. Traditionsverhalten in der Literatur der Klassischen Moderne (Klassische Moderne 21), Würzburg, pp. 305–319.