

## Project Group A5

### The 'Éclat' of the Hero. Aural Representations of the Hero in France from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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The project group studied *éclat* (lustre, radiance) as a form of heroic articulation in fiction and nonfiction texts in France from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Making use of traditional light imagery, the hero's lustre not only describes the hero's impact on, and perception by, society. It also denotes an essential quality of the heroic deed in the sense of an *action d'éclat*, whose public nature it ensures. In addition to historical issues, the project focused on theoretical questions, as the idea of the radiant hero continues to shape our collective imagination and the conventions for portraying the heroic in modern media. The productivity of this approach is manifest in certain results of our investigation, which show how well the concept and its implementation in dramatic and narrative texts also reveal contradictions and ambivalences of the heroic. The counterpart of the hero bathed in light, standing as an exemplary figure (Evidenzfigur) and an idol, is the dazzled audience. The semantic coding of a heroic model on the one hand, and its semantic vagueness (light as an 'absolute' metaphor) on the other, overlap with one another. Moral exemplarity and the transgressive character of the heroic are also expressed in the polysemy of the term *éclat*, which also denotes scandal. The project leader investigated these questions in a historical and theoretical perspective – with regard to the phenomenon of deheroization – in two articles published in 2015 (Gelz 2015a, b).

On the basis of extensive corpora of French literature – both fiction and nonfiction – from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century, semantic features of the term *éclat* were studied in the context of concepts and discourses of heroism and in processes of heroization and deheroization. A paradigm of historical variants of the use of the term emerged that allowed initial conclusions to be drawn about the connection between the term *éclat* and the historically fluctuating phenomenon of the heroic. A second phase of work focused on concrete uses of *éclat* in texts of various genres. Analyses of representative texts of 17<sup>th</sup>-century French drama (dissertation) and of French literature from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (project leader's monograph) considered how specific notions of the heroic, insofar as they were expressed in the term *éclat* and in related terms, were implemented intermedially and in narrative technique and thus became an element of literary communication. A central conclusion of our work is that, whereas the "aesthetics of *éclat*"<sup>1</sup> were largely uniform in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the modes of literary representation of *éclat* changed beginning in the classic period but especially in the early and high Enlightenment, when a social reassessment of the heroic took place. One conclusion of the dissertation is that *éclat* changed from a form of stabilizing articulation to a form a destabilizing reflection especially after the Fronde (1648–1653), a period in which heroism was increasingly criticized. The research associate discussed aspects of his work, especially the topic of intermediality (which was not a major focus of the dissertation), in a series of talks and articles (Posselt-Kuhli / Willis 2014, 2015; Willis 2014a, b; Willis 2015). The articles published with C. Posselt-Kuhli were the result of a fruitful collaboration within the CRC between our project group, focused on Romance languages, and the art history project group B3 "Heroes of Art vs. Heroes of War".

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<sup>1</sup> Elmarsafy, Z. 2001: The Histrionic sensibility: Theatricality and Identity from Corneille to Rousseau, Tübingen, p. 112.

One difficulty in the analysis of these transformation processes was applying the phenomenon of lustre or radiance distinctly to various exceptional figures (heroes, rulers, saints, martyrs). Despite the fact that many sources insist on the constitutive connection between heroism and *éclat*, additional contextualization is sometimes necessary to make heroic lustre intelligible as such. This ‘dedifferentiation hypothesis’ enriches the semantic spectrum of the heroic, for example by adding a sacral dimension to the lustre metaphor (which pertains into the 19<sup>th</sup> century) that, despite the general trend towards secularization, places the hero in the reflected splendour of divine light or the light of a transcendental authority (reason, freedom, nation). Conversely, figures such as rulers, saints and martyrs are heroized in descriptions that draw on the lustre metaphor from the heroic context.

In addition, methodological difficulties had to be overcome when analysing the phenomenon of *éclat* in the post-revolutionary period. How to describe the hero’s lustre, for example in 19<sup>th</sup>-century middle-class society, when the aristocratic and religious connotations that had long attended the term *éclat* were disappearing or changing? How to legitimate the figure of the hero in a democratic, egalitarian age? In modern times, which are sceptical of heroism, the hero can no longer automatically hark back to a certain heroic (e.g., an aristocratic) model, and thus the hero’s lustre seems increasingly like an indicator of heroization processes that precede any definition of a specific heroic model.

Due to the problematic state of the sources, the dissertation project had to dispense with extensive analyses of performative aspects like lighting, costume design and the affective impact of the portrayal of heroes on stage. This was compensated for, however, by individual case studies. In addition, the chiefly text-centred approach taken to canonical and non-canonical dramas of the period from ca. 1630 to 1680 was supplemented with research methods from the history of emotions.

The above-mentioned collaboration with scholars from the field of art history continued in a workshop with Werner Telesko (Vienna) on the topic of “Inszenierung des Heroischen vom 17. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert” and in the discussion of his guest lecture entitled “Die Aura des Helden – zur Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion des Heroischen in der Kunst der Neuzeit” (13 November 2013). Discussions with the participating project groups (B3, B5, C1) aided in analysing the historico-semantic characteristics of *éclat* and in confirming its status as a transdisciplinary point of intersection within the CRC. The workshop dealt in particular with the intermedial and transmedial nature of the enactment of *éclat* in textual and visual media, for which developments in the realms of political representation, the public sphere and media technology were important. In preparation for the analysis of the literary texts in the corpus, the focus was thus put on visualization techniques such as metaphor, symbolism, allegory and metonymy, as well as on narrative techniques vis-à-vis the appearance, performance and perception of the hero. In a guest lecture (“Sol invictus. Triumphale Auftrittsformen im Theater der Neuzeit”, 23 July 2014), Juliana Vogel described media-specific aspects of the staging of the hero’s *éclat*, in the sense of a special aesthetics of performance, and explained their relevance for our own research. A workshop with Michel Delon (“Das Pantheon im Zeichen von Heroisierung und Deheroisierung”; 17-18 October 2013), in which other project groups (B2, B3, B5) participated, analysed transformations of the heroic in the pivotal time around 1800 in the changing discourses, rituals and medial practices surrounding the Parisian Panthéon. Delon also gave a guest lecture, entitled “Le héros sadien, figure paradoxale et révélatrice” 16 March 2013), which occasioned a discussion of an extremely radical and highly ambivalent shift in the understanding of the hero in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Thus the project group managed to trace changes in and updates to the topic of the hero’s *éclat* in French society before, during, and after the Revolution, and to reconsider them in the context of intermediality.

The (preliminary) results of the project group's research were also presented in numerous papers given at conferences in Germany and abroad. At an international conference in Luxemburg ("La présence de l'éclat dans l'œuvre de Diderot: questions de méthode", 15 October 2013), for example, the project leader discussed the changes the term 'éclat' underwent especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the wake of a critique of martial heroism, the Enlightenment, processes of secularization, and an epistemic refunctionalization of traditional light imagery. Here the focus was on Diderot's critique of art, for whose investigation the aforementioned intermedial nature of the concept of *éclat* was central. To name only one other talk, the paper entitled "Fremde Helden? Zur Ambivalenz des Heroischen in Tristan L'Hermites 'Osman'", given by the research associate at the CRC's conference "Fremde Helden auf europäischen Bühnen 1600–1900" (12-14 March 2015), was not published in the conference proceedings but rather appeared in revised form as a central chapter of the dissertation.

In addition, a *journée d'étude* (14 December 2012) with colleagues from the Université de Strasbourg (Béatrice Guion, Pierre Hartmann) and FRIAS (Henning Hufnagel) helped augment the project group's scholarly network outside the CRC.

Finally, the project made deliberate efforts to communicate its work to the general public. One occasion was a panel discussion with Claire Doutriaux (ARTE) and Tobias Scheffel (literary translator) in the context of the exhibition "Helden-Karambolage", a collaboration between the project group, the ARTE programme "Karambolage", the Freiburg Literaturbüro, the Freiburg Kommunales Kino, the University of Freiburg's Frankreich-Zentrum and the Centre Culturel Français in Freiburg (3 July 2014). Furthermore, the project group's academic work was complemented by radio interviews: on sport and heroism (in connection with the German national football team's return from Brazil), on Deutschlandradio Kultur, Schweizer Rundfunk and Nordwestradio (all on 16 July 2014); and on the current status of the heroic in the context of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, on Hessischer Rundfunk (22 January 2015).

### **Publications produced by project group A5**

- Gelz, A. 2016a: Der Glanz des Helden. Über das Heroische in der französischen Literatur vom 17. bis 19. Jahrhundert (Figurationen des Heroischen 2), Göttingen.
- Gelz, A. 2016b: Le Parc des Princes: Stadien der Heroisierung in der französischen Literatur des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts (Montherlant – Perec – Echenozin), in: A. Aurnhammer / U. Bröckling (eds.), Vom Weihegefäß zur Drohne. Kulturen des Heroischen und ihre Objekte, Würzburg, pp. 221–238.
- Gelz, A. 2015a: 'L'éclat du héros' – Formen auratischer Repräsentation des Helden im Frankreich des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts zwischen Bild und Text (Mme de Lafayette, Diderot), in: *Comparatio – Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* 2, pp. 217–235.
- Gelz, A. / Helm, K. / Hubert, H.W. [et al.] 2015b: Phänomene der Deheroisierung in Vormoderne und Moderne, in: *helden. heroes. héros. E-Journal zu Kulturen des Heroischen* 3.1: Faszinosum Antiheld, pp. 135–149, DOI: 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros/2015/01/13.
- Gelz, A. 2015c: Darstellungsformen, Medien und Ästhetik, in: Gelz, A. [et. al.], *Das Heroische in der neueren kulturhistorischen Forschung: Ein kritischer Bericht*, H/Soz/Kult, 28.07.2015, pp. 90–97, <http://www.hsozkult.de/literaturereview/id/forschungsberichte-2216>.

- Posselt-Kuhli, C. / Willis, J. 2015: "La Gloire du Val-de-Grâce" ou l'artiste en héros chez Molière et Pierre Mignard, in: Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature, vol. XLII, no. 83, pp. 409–441.
- Posselt-Kuhli, C. / Willis, J. 2014: «La voilà, cette main, qui se met en chaleur» – Intermediale Heroisierungs-strategien bei Molière und Pierre Mignard am Beispiel des Gedichts *La Gloire du Val-de-Grâce*, in: helden. heroes. héros. E-Journal zu Kulturen des Heroischen 2.2: Mediale Strategien der Heroisierung, pp. 49–68, DOI: 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros./2014/02/05.
- Willis, J. 2015: Pierre Corneille's "Cinna ou la clémence d'Auguste" in Light of Contemporary Discourses on Anger (Le Moyne, Descartes, Senault), in: K. Enenkel / A. Traninger (eds.), Discourses of Anger in the Early Modern Period, Leiden, pp. 331–354.
- Willis, J. 2014a: Emotions and Affects of the Heroic – An Analysis of Pierre Corneille's Drama "Nicomède", in: helden. heroes. héros. E-Journal zu Kulturen des Heroischen, Special Issue 1: Languages and Functions of the Heroic, pp. 24–35, DOI: 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros./2014/QM/05.
- Willis, J. 2014b: Metamorphosen des Heldenkörpers in Pierre Corneilles Dramen "Le Cid" und "Horace", in: T. Hiergeist [et al.] (eds.), Corpus. Beiträge zum 29. Forum Junge Romanistik, Frankfurt, pp. 265–281.