

## 84. The Shifting Faces of Epic Heroes: Unity and Diversity in Seventeenth-Century English Literary Criticism<sup>1</sup>

Hüseyin ALHAS<sup>2</sup>

**APA:** Alhas, H. (2024). The Shifting Faces of Epic Heroes: Unity and Diversity in Seventeenth-Century English Literary Criticism. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Arařtırmaları Dergisi*, (38), 1387-1405. DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1440032.

### Abstract

Seventeenth-century England, renowned for its epic poems, stands as one of the most fruitful periods in the history of English literary criticism in terms of epic theory. One of the most significant topics of literary criticism during this era is the evolution of epic heroes. The critics at the time had comprehensive knowledge of the existing pagan and Christian traditions of epic heroes which were varied and interwoven. Moreover, the critics of the period were well acquainted with the literary criticisms of late Renaissance Italy and seventeenth-century France. However, they did not simply absorb influences from Greek, Roman, French, and Italian sources. Instead, English critics engaged in an active dialogue with these traditions, interpreting and adapting their ideas in light of their own cultural, historical, and theological context. This enabled critics to create individual approaches towards epic heroes, thereby making English literary criticism diverse but also too fragmented to form a cohesive group. This aspect of the period makes drawing the contours of the epic heroes immensely challenging. However, despite the overriding eclecticism inherent in the literary criticism of the period, this article indicates that there is a surprising degree of consensus on certain characteristics of epic heroes. Accordingly, this article examines the concept of epic heroes in seventeenth-century English literary criticism, focusing on four key aspects: the didactic role of epic heroes, their depiction as paragons of virtue, the significance of their lineage, and the intricate process of Christianising them.

**Keywords:** Epic hero, epic theory, literary criticism, seventeenth-century England

<sup>1</sup> **Statement (Thesis ):** It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation process of this study and all the studies utilised are indicated in the bibliography.

**Conflict of Interest:** No conflict of interest is declared.

**Funding:** No external funding was used to support this research.

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**Source:** It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation of this study and all the studies used are stated in the bibliography.

**Similarity Report:** Received - Turnitin, Rate: 4

**Ethics Complaint:** editor@rumelide.com

**Article Type:** Research article, **Article Registration Date:** 16.07.2023-**Acceptance Date:** 20.02.2024-**Publication Date:** 21.02.2024;

**DOI:** 10.29000/rumelide.1440032

**Peer Review:** Two External Referees / Double Blind

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Arş. Gör., Ankara Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü / Dr. Research Assist., Ankara Sosyal Bilimler University, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Department of English Language and Literature (Ankara, Türkiye), huseyinalhaso@gmail.com, **ORCID ID:** 0000-0002-4615-7797, **ROR ID:** https://ror.org/025y36b60, **ISNI:** 0000 0004 4657 080X.

## Epik Kahramanların Değişen Yüzleri: On Yedinci Yüzyıl İngiliz Edebi Eleştirisinde Birlik ve Çeşitlilik<sup>3</sup>

### Öz

Ünlü epik destanlarıyla bilinen on yedinci yüzyıl İngiltere'si, destan teorisi bakımından İngiliz edebiyat eleştirisi tarihindeki en zengin dönemlerden biridir. Dönemin edebiyat eleştirisinin ele aldığı en önemli konulardan biri, epik kahramanların evrimidir. Çağın eleştirmenleri, zengin ve iç içe geçmiş pagan ve Hristiyan epik kahraman geleneklerine hâkim olmalarının yanı sıra, geç Rönesans İtalyan ve on yedinci yüzyıl Fransız edebiyat eleştirisi etkisi altındalardır. Ancak, bu durum, onların Yunan, Roma, Fransız ve İtalyan kaynaklarından gelen etkileri körü körüne kabul ettikleri anlamına gelmez. Aksine, eleştirmenler bu geleneklerle aktif bir diyalog içinde yer almış ve çağlarının kültürel, tarihsel ve teolojik bağlamları ışığında geleneklerdeki fikirleri ve tartışmaları yorumlamış ve kendilerine uyarlamışlardır. Böylelikle, eleştirmenler, epik kahramanlar hakkında kendilerine has yaklaşımlar geliştirmiştir. Bu durum, İngiliz edebiyat eleştirisini oldukça çeşitlendirmiş ama aynı zamanda, yazınsal bir grup oluşturmalarını engelleyecek kadar bölük pörçük hale getirmiştir. Dönemin bu özelliği, edebiyat eleştirisinde epik kahramanın sınırlarını çizmeyi oldukça zorlaştırıcı bir unsur olarak kabul edilir. Bu çalışma, dönemin eleştirmenlerinin epik kahramanlar konusunda farklı görüşlere sahip olmalarına karşın, bazı konularda, beklenmedik derecede fikir birliğinde olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Bu doğrultuda, bu çalışma, on yedinci yüzyıl İngiliz edebiyat eleştirisinde epik kahraman tartışmalarını dört ana noktaya odaklanarak incelemektedir: epik kahramanların öğretici rolü, erdemli örnekler olarak tasvirleri, soylarının önemi ve Hristiyanlaştırma süreçleri.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Epik kahraman, epik destan teorisi, edebi eleştiri, on yedinci yüzyıl İngiltere'si

### Introduction

The concepts of epic heroes in the literary tradition cover such a wide spectrum of elements and features that it resists any uniform definition of epic heroism since it is a dynamic concept that is ever changing. The constant evolution of epic heroes gradually gives birth to new heroic versions. Academics try to categorise these versions and create models or types to indicate their differences from the preceding and succeeding models, serving as referential points. However, the boundaries of these heroic types are often fluid, and these models may not fully capture the complexity and diversity of epic heroisms represented within them.

In each age, literary critics redefine the concepts of epic heroes through questioning and reevaluating the very norms and precepts of the epic tradition to create an epic hero that they individually believe will fit best to their age. The seventeenth-century English literary criticism is accordingly very rich in terms of

<sup>3</sup> **Beyan (Tez/ Bildiri):** Bu makale yazarın doktora tezinden üretilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

**Çıkar Çatışması:** Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.

**Finansman:** Bu araştırmayı desteklemek için dış fon kullanılmamıştır.

**Telif Hakkı & Lisans:** Yazarlar dergide yayınlanan çalışmalarının telif hakkına sahiptirler ve çalışmalarını CC BY-NC 4.0 lisansı altında yayımlanmaktadır.

**Kaynak:** Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

**Benzerlik Raporu:** Alındı – Turnitin, Oran: %4

**Etik Şikayeti:** editor@rumelide.com

**Makale Türü:** Araştırma makalesi, **Makale Kayıt Tarihi:** 16.07.2023-**Kabul Tarihi:** 20.02.2024-**Yayın Tarihi:** 21.02.2024; **DOI:** 10.29000/rumelide.1440032

**Hakem Değerlendirmesi:** İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Körleme

harbouring views on epic heroes. Unfortunately, apart from Hugh Thomas Swedenberg's chapter "Characters" in *The Theory of the Epic in England 1650-1800* (1944), there is no study dedicated to the concept of epic hero in the seventeenth-century English literary criticism. In this chapter, Swedenberg (1944) solely discusses the topic for five pages (pp. 306-10), later giving extracts from the works of literary criticisms of the period that touches upon the concept of epic hero<sup>4</sup>. This study aims to elucidate the understanding of the epic heroes in seventeenth-century English literary criticism through the lens of four key characteristics: the didactic role, the depiction as a paragon of virtue, the relevance of lineage, and the intricate matter of Christianising the epic hero. The study thus offers a fresh perspective on the interpretation of epic heroism in literary criticism during this significant period in English literature.

Although the seventeenth-century English literary theory is rich when the whole century is taken into consideration, it should be noted here first that English literary criticism prior to the 1650s appears to be relatively sparse with regards to epic poetry, let alone epic heroes. However, in spite of the absence of a single treatise that solely concentrates on the critique of epic poetry, various critics, translators, and philosophers, including Thomas Lodge, Richard Stanyhurst, Philip Sidney, George Puttenham, William Webbe, John Harington, George Chapman, Francis Bacon, and Thomas Hobbes, presented their views on epic poetry and heroism in their Prefaces, letters, introduction to translations, philosophical works and works on poesy. Beginning with Davenant's Preface to *Gondibert* in 1651, which is the first treatise dedicated solely to epic poetry during the period, the literary criticism on epic poetry flourished and not only were there many translations from Italy and France, but also various writers, including John Dennis, Abraham Cowley, John Dryden, and Richard Blackmore wrote works on epic poetry. However, the English critics of the century were "too scattered in subject matter to allow of any logical grouping<sup>5</sup>" (Swedenberg, 1944, p. 29).

Eclecticism is indeed the most defining characteristic feature of the seventeenth century epic criticism and poetry towards epic heroism and epic heroes. The traditions concerning epic heroism and literary heroes were complex by this time and individual critics could relate to many different preceding models while creating and developing new roles and heroic types themselves. The existing traditions of heroism and epic heroes at the critics' command were composite: both pagan and Christian traditions were varied and mixed. It is worth mentioning that literary criticism on the epic genre and epic heroes was quite extensive both in continental Europe and England. The critics in this study were well-acquainted with previous models of epic heroes through their own readings of literary and critical texts as well as the literary criticisms of late Renaissance Italian criticism and the seventeenth-century French criticism. In this respect, it can be argued that drawing the contours of epic heroism in seventeenth-century England is quite challenging, since it is immensely wide, fluid, and eclectic.

### The contours of epic heroism in seventeenth-century England

It would be beneficial to begin the discussion of the contours of epic hero and epic heroism in the seventeenth-century English literary scene with the naming of the genre. Swedenberg asserts that many epic poets and literary theorists in this period used "Heroic Poem" or "Heroick Poem" to name the genre, which demonstrates how essential epic heroes were for the epic genre (1944, p. 165)<sup>6</sup>. This can indeed

<sup>4</sup> Swedenberg's work also covers eighteenth-century English literary criticism. For more detail, please refer to Swedenberg (pp. 306-34).

<sup>5</sup> However, Swedenberg adds that the only exception to that is the perception of the epic poet as teacher. Please see, Swedenberg's first chapter, "Foundations of English Theory," in *The Theory of the Epic in England 1650-1800* (1944).

<sup>6</sup> Although I agree with Swedenberg in his argument that the naming of the genre as "Heroick Poem" indicates the centrality and significance of epic heroes in the perception of epics during the period, it should also be noted here that the late

be observed in the various epics and theoretical works of the period: *Gondibert: An Heroick Poem* by William Davenant, *Pharonnida: A Heroick Poem* by William Chamberlayne, and *Prince Arthur: An Heroick Poem* by Richard Blackmore. John Dryden and John Dennis, the leading literary critics of the century also used the term “heroick” poem for epics. Although there are exceptions, the theoretical scene is indeed marked by the Aristotelian idea that epic should be “unified by the great action of a central hero” (Werner, 1974, p. 24). The naming of the genre as “heroick poem” therefore directly displays the centrality of epic heroes and their significance.

### Didactic aim of epic & the role of epic hero

One of the few topics on which almost all critics of the age unite is the instructional aspect of epic and epic hero, which is also known as its epideictic or didactic function. The overriding perception of the age is that the epic makes its moral points by inspiring the reader to imitate the hero. This perception was fundamentally shaped by the impact of the late Renaissance Italian literary criticism.

It is crucial here to first briefly examine the late Renaissance Italian literary criticism as it is one of the primary foundations of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century literary theories on epic heroes and heroism in England. The leading Italian theorists and epicists of the period, among whom are Marco Girolamo Vida (*Ars Poetica*, 1527), Ludovico Castelvetro, Giovanni Giorgio Trissino, Gherardo Cinthio (*Discorse Intorno al Comporre dei Romanzi*, 1554), Giambattista Pigna (*I Romanzi*, 1554), Bernardino Daniello (*La Poetica*, 1536), and Torquato Tasso (*Discorsi dell' Arte Poetica*, ca. 1565), influenced the foundations of European literature and literary theories of epic through their literary and theoretical works (Spingarn, 1938, pp. 108-24; Werner, 1974, pp. 27-33). Specifically, the impact of Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata*, already available in Latin and vernacular translations throughout Continental Europe and England during his lifetime, was huge, deeply influencing both poets and theorists (Welch, 2006, p. 42). The translations of famous Italian epics Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* by Sir John Harington and Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata* by Edward Fairfax, in the Elizabethan fin-de-siècle introduced the Italian perspective on epic and the epic hero into the English literary scene especially in the early seventeenth century<sup>8</sup> (Reid, 2013, pp. 1-3).

In a letter addressed to Walter Raleigh, dated January 23, 1589, Edmund Spenser names Italian epic poets, Ludovico Ariosto and Torquato Tasso, among those who influenced him while composing *The Faerie Queene* (1590/1978, p. 15). It is a good instance to observe how intellectual interaction between England and Italy is vibrant as Torquato Tasso’s *La Gerusalemme Liberata* is published in 1581, only nine years before Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser’s acknowledgement of Tasso therefore indicates his close interest in the continental literary world<sup>9</sup> and the extent of Italian influence. The influence of Tasso can also be traced back to Thomas Nashe’s *Teares over Jerusalem* (1593), Abraham Fraunce’s

seventeenth-century English literary scene also features “Heroic plays,” particularly heroic tragedies; hence, this name is perhaps used as a generic marker to differentiate between these genres.

<sup>7</sup> See Rapin’s *Treatise*, p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> For a consideration of the detailed influence of Italian romance epic tradition on the formation of Englishness, construction of English nationhood and identity, please see, Joshua Samuel Reid’s PhD dissertation entitled “Englishing the Italian Romance Epic in The Elizabethan Fin-De-Siècle” (2013), College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky.

<sup>9</sup> Tasso’s fame continued to increase throughout Europe. In 1768, Jean-Jacques Rousseau noted: “Let us not forget to note, for the glory of Tasso, that most of the Venetian gondoliers know a large part of his poem, *the Jerusalem Delivered*, by heart; that some of them know the entire thing; that they pass summer nights singing it by turns from boat to boat; [...] that only Homer before him had the honor to be sung in this way; and that no other epic poem has shared that honor since then” (Welch, 2006, p. 1). Rousseau’s remarks indicate the significant impact of Tasso’s reception both in Italy and continental Europe.

*Arcadian Rhetoricke* (1588) (Brand, 1965, pp. 206-209)<sup>10</sup> Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*, also known as, *The Defence of Poesy* (1595), is another significant work in terms of witnessing the influence of Italian epic theorists on English writers. William Davenant (1651) also acknowledges the Italian influence. Even in his Preface to *Gondibert* (1651), he discusses the innovations proposed by the Italian critics of the late Renaissance and indicates how they depart from the works of the ancient poets (pp. 5-6). He accepts Tasso, "who reviv'd the Heroick flame after it was many ages quenched," as the first of the modern epicists (p. 5). Scholars have examined the influence of the late Renaissance Italian literature and theory on Milton's understanding of the epic genre<sup>11</sup>. In *The Reason of Church Government*, Milton names Ludovico Ariosto among those who inspired him to write his epics in English (1642/2013, p. 89). Milton also cites various Italian poets and literary critics while discussing poetic development, poetry as an educative tool, and the model of the Christian epic in his various letters and non-fiction works, including *Of Education* and *The Reason of Church Government*. It is palpable that the Italian influence on seventeenth century England literary works is great. John Dryden and John Dennis, leading literary critics of the age, also uses various discussions and commentaries of Italians in their works: Dryden calls the Italian poets "the descendants of Virgil in a right line" (*Discourses*, 1667/1881, p. 128) and borrow various ideas, among the most significant in my view, is the notion that Christian heroes don't necessarily need to be portrayed solely as patient, obedient, and submissive; they are equally capable of being active agents in the service of God. (*Discourses*, 1667/1881, pp. 22-23).

Italian criticism also acknowledges the didactic function of poetry<sup>12</sup> since the Italian approach is heavily influenced by Horatian criticism.<sup>13</sup> In *Ars Poetica*, Horace states that the aim of poetry is "to teach and delight"<sup>14</sup> (ca. 19 B.C/1942, p. 333). The primary function of poetry for Horace is moral improvement, an idea which he most probably derived from the practice of Homer who had been accepted as the educator of Greece<sup>15</sup> (Tate, 1928, p. 69). Bernadino Daniello, one of the leading critics of the late Renaissance and translator of Aristotle's *Poetics*, argues that just like a doctor's aim is to cure, a poet's task is to teach, he thus regards teaching as the natural task of a poet; for Girolamo Fracastoro, another significant Italian critic of the period, poetry aims to "describe the essential beauty of things, to aim at

<sup>10</sup> See, Brand, pp. 206-209. (*Torquato Tasso: A Study of the Poet and of his Contribution to English Literature*, Cambridge UP, 1965).

<sup>11</sup> For the impact of late Renaissance literary theory on Milton, please see: Mario Praz, *The Flaming Heart* (Garden City, 1958); J. B. Broadbent, *Some Graver Subject* (London, 1960); C. M. Bowra, *From Virgil to Milton* (London, 1963); Douglas Bush, *John Milton* (New York, 1964); F. T. Prince, *The Italian Element in Milton's Verse* (Oxford, 1954); E. M. W. Tillyard, *The English Epic and Its Background* (New York, 1966), Judith A. Kates's "The Reevaluation of the Classical Heroic in Tasso and Milton" (*Comparative Literature*, 1974, pp. 299-317), Judith A. Kates's *Tasso and Milton: The Problem of Christian Epic* (London, 1984), W. S. Howard's "Companions With Time: Milton, Tasso, And Renaissance Dialogue," (*The Comparatist*, 2004, pp. 5-28), Francesco Brenna's "Milton and Italian Early Modern Literary Theory: A Reassessment of the Journey to Italy", *Milton Quarterly*, 55 (2022), pp. 85-200.

<sup>12</sup> There are also some other Italian critics, Bernardo Tasso, Castelvetro and Robertelli who either disregard the didactic function or prioritise delight over teaching (Spingarn, 1938, p. 55). However, I will not elaborate on their perspective since seventeenth-century English criticism is deeply influenced by Horace's ideas, which will be discussed in detail in a later section of the Introduction.

<sup>13</sup> The origins of the idea of didactic function of poetry and the poet as the teacher is a matter of debate. Some argue that the concept of the poet as the educator already existed in Ancient Greece; however, it faded, especially after Plato and Aristophanes, until its rebirth in the Augustan age (Campbell, 1924, pp. 28-29). Campbell further claims that "Horace's views on literature are derived primarily from himself" (68). Tate, on the other hand, argues that "the Greek traditional view of the function of poetry did not die out"; he thus sees Horace's views as "not original [nor] a departure from recent Greek criticism" (p.65). For detailed discussion of the topic, please see, J. Tate's "Horace and the Moral Function of Poetry" in *The Classical Quarterly*, 22.2 (1928) and A.Y Campbell's *Horace* (1924), pp. 28-55, pp. 67-70. It should also be noted that the argument related to the didactic function of the poetry is solely based on Horace since Aristotle's *Poetics* attaches no such feature to Epic, which indicates the importance of Horace's views to Italian criticism.

<sup>14</sup> The idea of instructional poetry and various arguments that Horace supports this idea can also be found in his *Epistles*; however, I will not go into detail about the arguments in that book since it was not available to Italian criticism at the time; therefore, it did not influence the Italian criticism in question.

<sup>15</sup> The dominant perception of Homer as the chief educator of Greece indicates the gravity of his epics on the Greek people. This perception can be traced back to various authors of antiquity. Please see, W. J. Verdenius's "Homer, The Educator of the Greeks" for detailed discussion of Homer's educative impact throughout Ancient Greece.

the universal and ideal, and to perform this function with every possible accompaniment of beautiful speech, thus affecting the minds of men in the direction of excellence and beauty” (Spingarn, 1938, pp. 48-49). This rhetoric of didacticism can also be observed in Giraldo Cinthio who asserts that it is the poet’s aim to condemn vice and to praise virtue (Spingarn, 1938, p. 49). Both Daniello and Fracastoro acknowledge the significance of poetry as an instrument of instruction. Antonio Sebastiano Minturno also accepts Horace’s perception of the instructive and delightful characteristic of poetry and furthers it by adding another feature that is “to move” which can be defined as an aim to evoke passions in the reader (Spingarn, 1938, p. 52). In the light of this didactic purpose, “Renaissance epics are constructed not so much as “autonomous literary works but as demonstrations of an ethical system” (Vickers, 2007, p. 524). Spingarn (1938) also argues that the overriding conception of the function of epic for Italian critics of the sixteenth century was ethical which “was as an effective guide to life [and] even when delight was admitted as an end, it was simply because of its usefulness in effecting the ethical aim” (p. 58). Hence, didacticism appears as the “must have” defining characteristic of the epic for Italian Renaissance criticism.

English literary critics of the late sixteenth century, whose influence continued into the seventeenth century, also share this didactic perspective: Sidney presents a list of epic heroes, including Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas, Turnus, and Rinaldo, and states that an epic hero of this kind “doth not only teach and move to truth, but teacheth and moeth to the most high and excellent truth” (1595/1973, p. 30). Hence, he emphasises the instructional feature of epic heroes as moral exemplars. John Harrington’s *a Briefe Apologie of Poetrie*<sup>16</sup> also underlines the morally instructional aspect of epic poetry: “I beleuee that the reading of a good Heroicall Poeme may make a man both wiser and honester” (1591/1970, p. 210). Swedenberg draws attention to the fact that at the end of each book of *Orlando Furioso in English*, Harrington “appends an interpretation of the moral to be found in the book,” (1944, p. 40) which indicates the focus on the didactic elements found in epic poems. Although both Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) and William Webbe’s *Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586) do not directly focus on the nature and structure of epic poetry in detail, they “emphasize the didactic purpose of poetry” (Werner, 1974, p. 4). Even though Werner asserts that Webbe does not specifically concentrate on the epic genre, Webbe’s analysis of Homer’s epics and their role in literature provides a glimpse into his perspective on the instructional feature of epics:

His [Readers’] mind may be well instructed with knowledge and wisdom [sic] [...] a Prince shall learne not onely courage and valiantnesse, but discretion also and pollicie to counter with his enemies, yea a perfect forme of wyse consultations with his Captaines and exhortations to the people, with infinite commodities” (1586/1904, pp. 234-35).

Hence, Webbe’s remarks indicate the range of ways in which Homer’s oeuvre could offer instruction to a prince. Furthermore, he declares that from “manifold and dangerous adventures of Vlisses [Odysseus], may a man learne many noble vertues” (1586/1904, p. 235), highlighting once more the significant role of epic heroes in the didactic nature of epics.

Here, special attention should be given to the views of Francis Bacon, an English philosopher and statesman of the seventeenth century, who is widely regarded as one of the founders of the scientific method and an influential figure in the development of modern philosophy. He states that heroic poetry shows people that “there is agreeable to the spirit of man a more ample greatness, a more perfect order, and a more beautiful variety than it can anywhere (since the Fall) find in nature” (1605/2011, p. 343),

<sup>16</sup> Here, I would like to touch upon the fact that Harrington’s *Apologie* is actually prefixed to his translation of *Orlando Furioso*; hence, it is palpable that his arguments are deeply influenced by a Tassonian touch.

thereby indicating his belief in the ability of poetry to improve humankind. In his *Advancement of Learning* (1605), He furthers this argument by stating that since

the acts or events of true history have not that magnitude which satisfieth the mind of man, poesy feigneth acts and events greater and more heroical; because true history propoundeth the successes and issues of actions not so agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, therefore poesy [Heroic poetry] feigns them more just in retribution, and more according to revealed providence; because true history representeth actions and events more ordinary and less interchanged, therefore poesy endueth them with more rareness, and more unexpected and alternative variations. So as it appeareth that poesy serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and to delectation<sup>17</sup>. (1605/2011, p. 343)

Bacon's observation highlights the prevalent belief in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century that heroic poetry could be used as a source of moral instruction and improvement. This is significant as it shows that even a philosopher like Bacon, who recognized the importance of education and its role in personal growth and societal progress, saw value in using heroic poetry and epic heroes for instruction.

This concept of the epic genre as a demonstration of an ethical system extended to seventeenth-century English literary criticism. It is at the core of the discussions and is crucial to understand the period's epic heroes' didactic function. Two significant literary critics of the century, John Dennis and John Dryden, similarly hold the view that epic poetry has instructional value. Dennis argues that precepts are marked by the instruction of philosophical theory and they "were too shocking to be Persuasive: Because they shew us our faults too directly" (1696/2011, p. 4) and furthers his argument: "[T]he best way to teach [is to] convey it by Example; that is, by Action" (1696/2011, p. 6). Dennis also asserts that epic poetry teaches its audience through the example of epic heroes: "That the Action is only fram'd for the Instruction; and that it is design'd for a proof of the Moral; that every part of that Action ought to be a gradual Progress in the proof" (1696/2011, p. 8). Accordingly, it can be argued that Dennis perceives the educational imperative of epic poetry as being principally conveyed via epic heroes, which subsequently underscores the paramount importance of these characters within the respective genre.

Dryden, the chief critic of epic theory in the seventeenth century, also argues, "[a]n heroic poem (truly such) is undoubtedly the greatest work which the soul of man is capable to perform. The design of it is to form the mind to heroic virtue by example; it is conveyed in verse that it may delight while it instructs" (*Discourses*, 1667/1888, p. 117). Dryden's comment reveals his emphasis on the didactic goal of epic poetry, which should not be defined by precepts but rather by the actions and traits of epic heroes as exemplars of virtue. To fulfil this aim, he stresses the importance of entertainment while targeting educational objectives. In the Preface to his translation of *The Art of Painting* from Italian, Dryden expresses that "the Moral (as Bossu observes) is the first business of the Poet, as being the ground-work of his Instruction" (1695/2011, p. xix). This again underscores how didacticism recurs in his works, underlying the great significance the critic gave to the topic. In the Preface of the translator to Monsieur Bossu's *Treatise of the Epick Poem*, W.J states that "The Epick Poet, to back all, makes use of frequent Examples, the strongest Arguments to perswade Men to be Vertuous" (1695/2011, Preface).

In this context, it is crucial to pay special attention to William Davenant who was one of the leading figures of the century both as a writer and critic. His Preface to *Gondibert* is a landmark in the history of English literary criticism as this is the first critical treatise devoted exclusively to the epic genre. Connell draws attention to its gravity as follows: "Rarely, indeed, has prefatory matter so completely

<sup>17</sup> It is worth mentioning that Bacon expressed scepticism towards the notion of hidden meanings within Homer's poetry. Please see *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, Chapter I, pp. 8-9. Cf. Swedenberg, 1944, p. 30 and p. 40.

overshadowed the reputation of the work it was intended to dignify” (p. 64). In his analysis of the Preface, Swedenberg characterizes it as “a curious amalgam of established theory and freedom of thought” (p. 43). Harbage (1971) on the other hand contends that the true value of Davenant’s Preface is its intent to break free from the confines of the established theory as it aims “to shatter the gyves of epic tradition and lead the way to a new poetic ideal” (p. 109). Both critics present valid arguments, as Davenant’s work is undeniably remarkable for its compilation and commentary on contemporary continental influences, while simultaneously representing a revolutionary departure from the norms of its time. However, it is worth noting that the latter aspect of the work takes precedence, as Davenant himself explains his intention is to “sail in uncharted seas [and] not venture beyond the established path” (1651/1971 p. 3). This attests to Davenant’s innovative aspirations within the realm of epic poetry as conveyed through his work.

The didacticism of epic poetry and epic hero is indeed central in the theoretical debates in Davenant’s Preface. The vein of correspondence between Davenant and Hobbes indicates that their views are in line with the established perception that epic heroes and poems should serve a didactic purpose, aimed at shaping the manners of people. The speaker of the epic, presented in the poem as the Lombard poet, recognizes this parallel and draws a comparison between poets and physicians: “Poets the old renown’d Physitians [sic] are, / Who for the sickly habits of the minde, / Examples as the ancient cure prepare (I.iv.6). Within this context, it is apparent that the comparison being made is between poets and physicians, with the distinction being that poets seek to remedy the afflictions of the mind and improve it, rather than treating physical ailments. Therefore, the poet can be regarded as a mental healer for Davenant<sup>18</sup>. Dowlin (1934) argues that the instructional aim is so central to Davenant’s Preface that his “theory can be reduced to the simplest terms: Moral improvement is the goal of poetry” (p. 17). Notably, Davenant contends in the Preface that religion, army, policy, and law, which he refers to as the chief aides of government fail to shape the people; thus, they need a “collaterall [sic] help” from poetry (1651, p. 37). Edward Schiffer (1992) argues Davenant’s emphasis on the assistive role of poets results from the fact that he believes “each of these groups [of Government] is likely to distrust the others” (p. 566). As many scholars indicate Davenant’s daring remark truly sheds light on the gravity of his didactic intent in his epic poetics and how he desires to engineer the society<sup>19</sup>. (Ezell, 2017, p. 13, Gath, 2018, p. 116, Harbage, 1970, p. 188). This is so central to Davenant that his “style, themes, and narrative are direct consequences of his attempt to produce a work that will operate “for the honor and benefit” of his nation” (McDayter, 1997, p. 43). In “Hobbes’s Answer to the Preface,” which was published in the Preface of Davenant’s epic, Hobbes puts an emphasis on the pedagogical significance of epic poetry. He asserts, “Precepts of true Philosophy [...] fayle, as they have hitherto fayled in the doctrine of Morall vertue, there the Architect (Fancy) must take the Philosophers parte upon herself” (1651/1971, pp. 49-50). Furthermore, Hobbes posits that anyone who “undertakes an Heroique Poeme (which is to exhibite a venerable and amiable Image of Heroique vertue) must not onely be the Poet, to place and connect, but also the Philosopher” (1651/1971, p. 50). This observation highlights the dual nature of epic poetry, encompassing both a work of art and an embodiment of civil engineering philosophy.

Furthermore, this central didactic task of epic, according to Davenant, can be fulfilled via the “Heroes vertues in Heroick Song” (1651/1971, I.iv.8). Davenant’s assertion acknowledges the long-standing tradition wherein poets offer exemplars of heroic virtues through their epic poetry. This is achieved by

<sup>18</sup> Daniello had already drawn a comparison between a poet and a physician, emphasizing the physician’s goal of curing and the poet’s responsibility of teaching, thereby considering teaching as an inherent function of poetry (Spingarn, 1938, p. 48). This perspective predates Davenant’s, highlighting Daniello’s possible impacts.

<sup>19</sup> One of the first critics to acknowledge Gondibert’s focus on ethical guidance is Isaac Disraeli. For Disraeli’s detailed views please see Harbage (1970), p. 278.

portraying the distinctive traits and deeds of epic heroes, suggesting that Davenant perceives the educational objective of epic poetry to be realized through these protagonists (1651/1971, 50). This assertion underscores the pivotal role of epic heroes in fulfilling the didactic objective of epic poetry. Consequently, it can be reasonably inferred that both Davenant and Hobbes reached a consensus on the critical function of epic heroes in the didactic purpose of epic poetry.

Another important figure of the century who touched upon the didactic function of epic heroes is John Milton. Although he does not have a work of literary criticism, he presented his views on the issues of epic poetry in his political and philosophical works. In *The Reason of Church Government* (1642), after touching upon the significance of the great epicists of ancient Greece, Rome and modern Italy, he states that England also needs one (p.89). He further focuses on epics' educational function: “[I]n every Nation; and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu and publick civility, to ally the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune [...]” (1642/2013, p. 90). Here, Milton emphasizes the power of epic poems to educate and shape the values of a nation beyond the traditional role of religious sermons. Milton suggests that epics possess the ability to instil virtue and promote public civility among a large population. He believes that through epic poetry, the disturbances of the mind can be alleviated, and emotions can be attuned to righteousness. By highlighting the didactic potential of epics, Milton implies that they offer alternative avenues for educating young people. The placement of this remark immediately after discussing the great epics of the past indicates his recognition of their educational value. Milton sees epic genre as a means to convey moral and civic lessons, suggesting that they can contribute to the moral development and intellectual enrichment of individuals and society as a whole.

Accordingly, it is safe to argue that the concept of the instructional function of epic poetry was well-established in sixteenth-century England, and this idea would continue to flourish in the English literary theory of the seventeenth century. Therefore, it is evident that didacticism is a prominent characteristic of epic poetry in seventeenth-century England, and the epic heroes serve as a vehicle to accomplish this objective.

### **Epic hero as a paragon of virtue**

Another defining characteristic that closely aligns with the didactic objective of epic heroes is their role as a “paragon of virtue.” The general perception of the age was that the epic conveys its moral messages by encouraging the reader to emulate the hero. The didactic feature attributed to epics is significant in terms of delving to the roots of the epic heroes as paragons of virtues since at the foundation of their evolution lies the desire to teach what is right through their characteristics and actions. In this respect, the concept of epic hero in this period is altered into an exemplary figure marked by paragon of ideals because “[i]f the purpose of the epic was to teach by example, the poem's excellence would depend on the excellence of its exemplary hero” (Bond, 2013, p. 43). The critics believed that poets would “inspire a greater improvement in the moral character of his readers if he presented them with a paragon of wisdom, virtue, and bravery” (Bond, 2013, p. 60). The hero envisaged was to excel in every specific feature attributed to him, which ultimately served the didactic function of the poetry.

The concept of the ‘paragon’ epic hero blossomed in Italian criticism and influenced English literary thinking. This idea can well be found in *Ragionamento sopra le Cose pertinenti alla Poetica*<sup>20</sup> in which Agnolo Segni, a lecturer at the Florentine Academy, declares that “true poets include universals and in the things that they invent they include their excellence and the perfect example” (qtd. in Bond, 2013, p. 61). Cinthio states that the “actions of the hero set out to imitate [...] the idea perfect” (2014, p. 176). Various other Renaissance critics and poets, including Tasso, Paolo Beni, Ludovico Dolce, Trissino, and Jason Denores, reflect this prevailing consensus of the age that the hero should be an epitome of virtue (Vickers, 2007, p. 521). They argued that literature, as opposed to history was not restricted by facts; this ultimately gave the poet the “liberty to idealize his characters and their achievements for the sake of entertainment and instruction” (Bond, 2013, p. 60).

Although the instructional aim of epic is based on the theories of Horace, the method to reach this end, idealizing the hero, is based on Aristotle’s arguments relating to the difference between history and poetry. Many Italian critics, including Daniello, Segni and Tasso, embraced Aristotle’s claim that there is a “distinction between history, which presents things as they are, and poetry, which presents them as they could or should be” (Vickers, 2007, p. 512). In this respect, the poets were not bound by the factual portrayals of heroes or events, which enabled them to idealize their hero as exemplary figures.

However, Rene Le Bossu, who is one of the leading French critics on epic poetry in the seventeenth century, opposes the Italian approach to perfect epic heroes and presents an alternative to it. Before delving into French criticism’s approach towards ‘paragon’ heroes, it would be beneficial to briefly touch upon the influence of French criticism on English epic poetry. Various English epic poets and critics, including William Davenant, Thomas Hobbes, and Abraham Cowley, were influenced by French criticism during their days in exile in France (Swedenberg, 1944, p. 15). Le Bossu’s impact was especially significant due to his “moderate tone, more judicious than judicial, [which] appealed to the scientific temper of his age” (Sambrook, 1997, p. 75). His *Traitédu Poème Epique* (1675) was welcomed and embraced by the English poets and critics so warmly that its dramatic influence continued till the early eighteenth century which can be observed from the newspapers of the period. In *The Post Boy* (London, England), dated 05 February 1718, it is stated:

A Second Edition of Monsier Bossu’s Treatise of the Epic Poem; containing curious Reflections, very useful and necessary for the right Understanding and Judging of the Excellencies of Homer and Virgil: Done from the French, with a Preface upon the same Subject<sup>21</sup>. (p. 2)

It is significant that public interest in the work continued till the middle of the eighteenth century, as new editions of the work continued to be printed. The translator<sup>22</sup> of *Traitédu Poème Epique* comments on Bossu’s approach as follows:

What he takes from Aristotle and Horace he explains, improves and refines: What is his own, though never so judicious and rational, he lays down not in a dogmatical, magisterial way, but by way of problem; and what he asserts with an air of confidence, though not his masters’ thoughts, yet seem to be natural deductions from what they have wrote about it. (1695/2011, Preface)

<sup>20</sup> This critical work, composed in 1576 as a revision of lectures given in 1573, was published posthumously in 1581, following the death of its author, Segni (Weinberg, 1974, p. 31, p. 309). It offers valuable insights into contemporary debates and issues surrounding the aim of poetics.

<sup>21</sup> To view the original archival document that contains this excerpt, please refer to Appendix A.

<sup>22</sup> The identity of the translator is unknown except his/her initials: W. J.

Hence, it can be clearly established that Bossu was an influential figure in the seventeenth-century English literary scene.

Bossu differs from Italian critics on the point of ‘paragon’ heroes. He opposes the idea of perfect heroes on the grounds that readers may indeed learn from negative examples, from evil, flaws, and failures, as well as good (Swedenberg, 1944, 24). Bossu bases his arguments on the practice of Homer and Virgil and most significantly on Aristotle’s arguments, “neither the Ancient Poets, nor the Masters of this Art ever thought of placing their Heroes in so high a Sphere” (1695/2011, p. 173), arguing that even these figures did not make their heroes perfect figures. He further lists a number of heroes from *Iliad* and *Aeneid* and underlines that the flaws in their characters and actions provide readers with examples from which they may learn the bitter consequences of such misdirected action. Bossu stresses that “a Hero, should be neither *good* nor *bad*. But he would have him be between both, neither advanced above the rest of Mankind by his Vertue, and his Justice, nor sunk below them by his Vices and Wickedness” (1695/2011, p. 175).

It is remarkable that both Italian criticism and Le Bossu draw upon the theories of Aristotle; yet, they arrive at two different sides of the same coin. The Italians base their perception of the epic hero as a paragon of virtue on Aristotle’s differentiation between history and poetry. In contrast, Bossu formulates his view of the flawed epic hero from Aristotle’s understanding of the hero as a man possessing both good and bad qualities.

However, it should be noted here that Bossu’s approach is not shared by all French critics of the age. Rene Rapin and Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, leading critics like Bossu, share the Italian perception of a perfect hero. Rapin states that epic “sets before them [the audience] / the Idea of a virtue much more perfect / than History can do” (1674/2011, p.75) and further comments on this issue as follows: “All [action] must go in a direct line to establish the merit of the Hero, and to distinguish him from all others: as the figures in a Table ought to have nothing so shining either by the colours, or by the lights that may divert the eyes from the principal figure” (1674/2011, pp. 76-77). Rapin’s remarks highlight the importance of the epic hero as central to the epic and how the unfolding action should reveal the characteristic traits of the hero, showing him to be a perfect and exemplary figure to the audience. In the same vein, Boileau exhorts, translated by Dryden as follows: “Choose some great Hero, fit to be admir’d, / In Courage signal, and in Virtue bright” (1680/2011, p. 43).

The seventeenth-century English critics also touch upon this issue. One of the leading figures of the period, Sir John Denham, defends the use of exemplary figures in epics. In his, “To the Honourable Edward Howard Esq. upon his Poem of *The British Princes*,” which was first published in Edward Howard’s *The British Princes* (1669), he comments as follows:

When Poesie, joyns profit, with delight,  
Her Images, should be most exquisite,  
Since man to that perfection cannot rise,  
Of always virtuous, fortunate, and wise:  
Therefore, the patterns man should imitate,  
Above the life our Masters should create. (pp. 9-14)

According to Werner, here Denham indicates that the ethical value of an epic poem lies in the portrayal of the epic hero as possessing virtues superior to those of actual people. He also implies that the poet’s

responsibility lies not in presenting these characters realistically, but in portraying them as moral role models superior to individuals in real life. In other words, the moral benefit of an epic poem is embodied in its depiction of virtuous heroes (Werner, 1974, p. 145). In his *Anacrisis: or, A Censure of some Poets Ancient and Modern* (c. 1635), Sir William Alexander, First Earl of Stirling, boldly defends perfect heroes: “[W]here-the Praise of an *Epick* Poem is to feign a Person exceeding Nature, not such as all ordinarily be, but with all the Perfections whereof a Man can be capable; every Deficiency in that imaginary Man being really the Author’s own” (qtd. in Spingarn, 1908, p. 184). Alexander’s striking remark indicates that in his view any imperfection in the epic hero is a reflection of the poet’s deficient aptitude.

Dryden admits that there are certain modern critics who contend that an epic hero need not be entirely virtuous. Yet he himself exhibits some inconsistency in his own views on this subject, as he presents divergent opinions in his various works that may appear to be in conflict. In his “Of Heroique Playes,” Preface to the *The Conquest of Granada* (1672), he states Homer and Tasso, whom he accepts as the fountains of epic poetry, “made their Hero’s men of honour; but so, as not to divest them quite of humane passions, and frailties” (1672/1808, p. 25) while in his dedication to Aeneas in his translation of *The Works Of Virgil* (1697), Dryden states that he personally believes that “where a character of perfect virtue is set before us, it is more lovely; for there the whole hero is to be imitated” (1806, p. viii). Dryden’s latter statement suggests that a role model epic hero is more appealing to the reader, making it better suited to meet the educational purpose of epic poetry. In the Dedication, “To the Most Honourable John, Lord Marquis of Normandy, Early of Mulgrave,” in his translation *The Works of Virgil* (1697), he furthers his argument: “The shining quality of an epic hero, his magnanimity, his constancy, his patience, his piety, or whatever characteristical virtue his poet gives him, raises first our admiration. We are naturally prone to imitate what we admire” (1697/1806, p. vii). As a critic who values the instructional value of epic poetry, Dryden’s later views therefore indicate that a perfect hero is the ideal fit for the didactic aim. Hence, although there are some exceptions, the general tendency of the epic criticism of the period was the epic hero to excel in every attribute assigned to them, which ultimately contributed to the educational purpose of epic poetry.

### The lineage and status of the epic hero

Another significant theoretical discussion of the period was on the lineage of epic heroes, with their ancestry and status being deemed crucial. Criticism of the late sixteenth century, which was still influential in the following century, promoted high-born heroes: in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), George Puttenham states that epic heroes should be kings and great princes (1598/1983, p. 40); in *An Apology for Poetry*<sup>23</sup>, Philip Sidney does not specifically focus on the lineage of an epic hero; however, he does underline the importance of ancestry and nobility in determining the worth and heroic qualities of characters in general (1595/1973, pp. 7-9). Bernadino Daniello also states that epic should deal with the “illustrious deeds of emperors and other men magnanimous and valorous in arms” (Vickers, 2007, p. 518). This idea of a hero’s lineage, according to Vickers, is taken from Horace’s famous statement that epic is about “the deeds of kings and captains and the sorrows of war” (2007, p. 518). Hence it is required of epic heroes that they should possess high rank and great importance, as a prince or distinguished commander. This stance was entirely reasonable since the major classical and Renaissance epic works featured such heroes, and additionally, as it was believed that the action of an epic should revolve around a significant and compelling event, it was only fitting for the main character to be proportionate in status

<sup>23</sup> Although generally accepted as the epitome of Renaissance literary criticism, *Apology for Poetry* does not elaborate on the nature and structure of epic poetry in detail.

to the action that they carried out (Swedenberg, 1944, p. 306). On the other hand, Michael West argues that the issue of noble birth is quite ambiguous for Spenser, since the poet acknowledges the significance of lineage, yet firmly insists that “breeding is more a matter of manners than of blood” (1973, p. 1014) and puts emphasis “on the qualities of behaviour as the surest index to breeding” (1973, p. 1015)<sup>24</sup>. Bossu follows the ideas of Horace on the lineage of an epic hero by arguing that he should be high-born: “a man of high rank and lofty importance, usually a prince or a great military leader” (1674/2011, p. 2). Dryden also shared the same view and argued it would be appropriate for an epic hero to be a magistrate, general or king (p. 22). Blackmore also states that “[t]he Action must be Illustrious and Important; Illustrious in respect of the Person, who is the Author of it, who is always some Valiant, or Wise, or Pious Prince or great Commander” (1696/1729, p. 8). Accordingly, predominant view in such theoretical discussions in seventeenth-century-England was that epic heroes should be of noble or royal birth, possessing a high rank and great importance, as a prince or distinguished commander.

#### The problem of Christianising the epic hero

Another important debate surrounding epic heroes during this period was particularly challenging: the religion of epic heroes. The central question in these discussions was whether or not epic heroes should be Christianised, and, if so, how this should be achieved. Another question posed was whether or not Christianity itself should be heroised. Examining these questions in depth requires a nuanced analyses of the various understandings and interpretations of heroism within the Christian doctrine and discourse, which vary and even contradict one another. The intersection of Christianity and heroism has also a long and multifaceted history in literature, as exemplified by sub-genres such as hagiographical epics, patristic epics, Christiads, saints’ lives, and chronicle histories. The merging of Christianity and heroism in these sub-genres resulted in the emergence of different traits for heroes. Hence, the nuanced interplay between these two subjects poses a challenge when considering the concept of epic heroism within a Christian context in the literature of seventeenth-century England.

The theoretical consideration of Christianising the epic hero in literary theory began in Renaissance Italy and later spread to seventeenth-century France, and ultimately to England. Michael West states that at the heart of this desire lay the aspiration “to create an ideal figure, reminiscent of both the chivalric knight and the Christian Everyman, who might fit into a heroic poem that should at the same time rival and eclipse the epics of classical antiquity” (1973, p. 1013). This aspiration resulted from the idea that “Christianity provides material for poetry that is vastly superior because it is more ‘true’ than even the most profound thoughts of pagan antiquity” (Werner, 1974, p. 55).

The chief critic and epic poet on this issue whose ideas penetrated the very core of the discussions is Torquato Tasso. The Italian critic argues that epic poem “must deal with the history, not of a false religion, but of the true one, Christianity” (qtd. in Spingarn, 1938, p. 120). Tasso projects an idea of epic and the epic hero, revised in the light of the modern Christian world. In this respect, although the influence of Homer and Virgil and their heroes on Tasso is great, the epic hero, for him, should also be adapted to the Christian world. In his *Discorsi dell’arte poetica* (1587), he notes:

I do not know why whoever wishes to invest the idea of the perfect knight with form—as some modern writers seem to have intended—should deny him praise for piety and religion and figure him as impious and idolatrous. If the zeal of the true religion cannot, without manifest incongruence, be

<sup>24</sup> For example, in *The Fairy Queen*, the character Calepine challenges the conventional wisdom of “blood will out,” by convincing Matilde, a woman without children, to adopt an orphan, highlighting the importance of education in forming one’s character (VI.iv.35). For an in-depth discussion of the supremacy of nurture over lineage in Spenser’s work, please refer to Michael West’s article titled “Spenser and the Renaissance Ideal of Christian Heroism,” pp. 1014-16.

attributed to Theseus or Jason or others like them, abandon Theseus and Jason and the others and choose, instead, Charlemagne, Arthur, and their like. (qtd. in. Bond, 2013, p. 65)

Tasso grounds his argument on the idea that the best way to teach Christian ethics in Christian Italy is to have a Christian hero. He justifies the necessity of a Christian epic hero by arguing that they are more suited to be exemplary figures for a Christian audience since “when the pupils are Christian princes, what better hero for them to learn from than the perfection of Christian leadership?” (Bond, 2013, p. 66). Tasso’s theoretical arguments on the Christian epic hero can be found in practice in his work, *La Gerusalemme liberata* (1581)<sup>25</sup>. The widespread success of his magnum opus throughout Europe demonstrates that the public embraced this concept, leading English poets to be well aware of the feasibility of Christianising the epic hero.

Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, a prominent French critic during the seventeenth century, offered a different perspective on this topic in his renowned work *L’Art Poétique* (1674).<sup>26</sup> Despite being written in the second half of the century, Boileau’s critical work reflects the ideas of French criticism dominant in the early part of the century. In this work, he opposes the fusion of the characteristics of pagan and Christian epic heroes (Huntley, 1947, p. 114-15). He contends that the greatest literary excellence had been achieved by Greek and Latin authors. As such, he believed that later writers should imitate the content and style of ancient masterpieces, which were rooted in the pagan world. Therefore, he argues that replacing the heroes of classical antiquity with Christianity is wrong:

Our pious Fathers, in their Priest-rid Age,  
As Impious, and Prophane, abhorr’d the Stage:  
A Troop of silly Pilgrims, as ‘tis said,  
Foolishly zealous, scandalously Play’d  
(Instead of Heroes, and of Love's complaints)  
The Angels, God, the Virgin, and the Saints.  
At last, right Reason did his Laws reveal  
And show’d the Folly of their ill-plac'd Zeal. (III, ll. 79–80, 85–86).

According to Habib, Boileau’s point here is that “religious zeal is misplaced in substituting angels, virgins, and saints for classical heroes” (2008, p. 282) and Boileau further “countenances even those aspects of classical paganism that directly contradict Christian teaching” (2008, p. 282). Boileau is against the fusion of Christian elements into epic because he believes “for the Christian God to remain pure and true, his domain of portrayal must be restricted to the gospels and theology; he must not be allowed access to the province of poetry” (Habib, 2008, pp. 282-83). Boileau holds the belief that poetry and Christianity occupy separate domains and should not overlap. According to M. Elizabeth Anthony (1911), Boileau’s stance stems from his belief that Christianity is not strong enough to support epic poetry as effectively as the ancient pagan religions did (p. 93). This viewpoint is based on the idea that the ideals

<sup>25</sup> Certain characteristics like impiety, idolatry and adultery are omitted in his hero. For instance, his hero Goffredo –unlike Homer’s Odysseus, who yields to both Calypso and Circe, or Virgil’s Aeneas who falls in love with Dido – never succumbs to the seduction of the heretic sorceress Armida (Bond, 2013, p.67). Hence, what differentiates Goffredo from the pagan Odysseus and Aeneas, who stray from their path due to seductions is his Christian faith. In this respect, obeying the ethics of Christianity is presented as the fundamental impetus that makes Goffredo superior to pagan heroes. However, here it should be noted that Tasso’s heroes are not static but change within the frame of the action. Please see Mario D’Alessandro’s dissertation, “The Evolution of the concept the hero in the epic poetry of Torquato Tasso”, for a detailed analysis of change in Tasso’s epic heroes.

<sup>26</sup> It was translated into English by Dryden himself. Dryden gives lots of references to Boileau in his works on epic criticism, which again indicates Boileau’s standing.

promoted by Christianity, which prioritise obedience, humility, and submission, qualities that directly contrast with the active heroism displayed by epic heroes in the Greek and Roman literary traditions, which Boileau considers to be the greatest literary traditions.

In *Discourses on Satire and Epic Poetry* (1667), Dryden directly challenges Boileau's approach and asserts that the problem does not lie in the teachings of Christianity, but rather in the writers who are unable to effectively incorporate Christian elements into epic poetry: "Christian poets have not hitherto been acquainted with their own strength. If they had searched the Old Testament as they ought, they might there have found machines which are proper for their work; and those more certain in their effect, than it may be the New Testament is, in the rules sufficient for salvation" (*Discourses*, 1667/1881, p. 34). In Dryden's view, it is not Christianity as a whole, but rather the limited understanding of Christian writers that has hindered the realisation of the rich potential within their religion for inspiring epic poetry and heroic figures. He later further elaborates on the problem of a lack of the traditional forms of heroism inherent in Christianity posed by Boileau:

[I]t is true that [...] the fortitude of a Christian consists in patience, and suffering for the love of God whatever hardships can befall in the world—not in any great attempt, or in performance of those enterprises which the poets call heroic, and which are commonly the effects of interest, ostentation, pride, and worldly honour; that humility and resignation are our prime virtues; and that these include no action but that of the soul, [...] on the contrary, an heroic poem requires to its necessary design [...] some great action of war, the accomplishment of some extraordinary undertaking, which requires the strength and vigour of the body, [...] in short, as much or more of the active virtue than the suffering. [...] God has placed us in our several stations; the virtues of a private Christian are patience, obedience, submission, and the like; but those of [...] a general or a king are prudence, counsel, active fortitude, coercive power[...] as well as justice. (*Discourses*, 1667/1881, pp. 20-21)

Dryden's answer to Boileau here is highly significant in terms of shedding light on the debates surrounding the problem of Christianising the epic hero or heroising Christianity at the time. He agrees that the fortitude of a Christian is demonstrated through the ability to endure hardships and suffering for God and that humility and resignation, which he sees as the core values of Christianity, and which, while appropriate for the private sphere, are not fit for the more public concerns of epic. He tries to justify the adaptability of Christianity for epic heroism on the grounds that God placed people in different "stations" and that, unlike an ordinary Christian, the position of a Christian leader requires active characteristic traits. Dryden adduces examples from Tasso's use of active Christian heroism in his epic to demonstrate that Christianity is compatible with epic heroism (*Discourses*, 1667/1881, pp. 23-25). It is clear, then, that Dryden did not consider the passive traits expected from an ordinary Christian suitable for an epic poem. Instead, he attempted to find compatibility between the traditional characteristics of an epic hero and those found within Christianity, seeking to Christianise the epic hero rather than heroise the ordinary Christian. This viewpoint was also the dominant perspective in the literary criticism of the seventeenth century.

## Conclusion

In the light of all the discussions above, it becomes apparent that eclecticism is indeed the defining characteristic of the seventeenth-century English literary criticism's approach towards epic heroes. The existing traditions of heroism and epic heroes at the critics' command were composite: both pagan and Christian traditions were varied and mixed. Even more importantly, the critics in this study were well-acquainted with the literary criticisms of late Renaissance Italy and seventeenth-century France. However, the seventeenth-century English literary criticism did not simply absorb influences from Greek, Roman, French, and Italian sources. Instead, English critics engaged in an active dialogue with

these traditions, interpreting and adapting their ideas in light of their own cultural, historical, and theological context. This enabled critics to create individual approaches towards epic heroes, thereby making English literary criticism diverse but also too fragmented to form a cohesive group. This aspect of the period makes drawing the contours of the epic heroes immensely challenging. However, amidst the diversity inherent in the literary criticism of the seventeenth century, this study indicates that there is a surprising degree of consensus on certain features of epic heroes. The prevailing concept of the epic hero in seventeenth-century English literary theory may be broadly defined as a nearly perfect<sup>27</sup> figure with high-born lineage<sup>28</sup>, often holding a distinguished rank as a prince or commander, with actions and characteristics deeply influenced by Christianity. Surely, there are exceptions to this broad definition; however, this is the overriding concept in the literary criticism of the period. The only unequivocal agreement among critics is that these epic heroes form the epicentre of the epic narrative, encapsulating the didactic moral that the poet seeks to impart. Therefore, from the critics' perspectives, epic heroes play an essential role in embodying the moral lessons the poet aims to convey.

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<sup>27</sup> For treatises that promote the concept of the 'perfect' epic hero, please see Sir William Alexander's *Anacrisis: or, A Censure of some Poets Ancient and Modern* (c. 1635, p. 208), Davenant's *Discourse Upon Gondibert* (1650, p. 53), Sir John Denham's "To the Honourable Edward Howard Esq. upon his Poem of *The British Princes*" (1669, lines 9-14), Dryden's dedication to Aeneas in his translation of *The Works Of Virgil* (1697, p. 122). Cf. for opposing views: Dryden's "Of Heroique Playes," Preface to the *The Conquest of Granada*, Blackmore's *Preface to Prince Arthur* (1695, sig.b). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the notion of an ideal epic hero gradually faded away. To explore the shifting concept of the perfect epic hero during this time, please refer to Swedenberg's presentation of a wide range of literary treatises from the period (1944, pp. 316-33).

<sup>28</sup> For works that defend high-born epic heroes, please see Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589, p. 40), Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* (1595, pp. 7-9), Davenant's *Discourse Upon Gondibert* (1650, p.43), Dryden's *Discourses on Satire and on Epic Poetry* (1692, p. 22), the Preface to the translation of Rene Le Bossu's *Treatise of the Epick Poem* (1695, p. 2), Blackmore's *Preface to Prince Arthur* (1695).

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Appendix A: *The Post Boy* (London, Greater London, England) dated 05 February 1718, page 2.

*This Day is publish'd.*  
 [1.] The Scotch Epique not infallible: Or, Animadver-  
 sions on Mr. John Cowley's Remarks on the Reverend Dr.  
 Bentley's Sermon preach'd the 5th of November 1715, with an  
 Explanation of the Principles of Predestination, and of Univer-  
 sal Redemption, and of Grace. Printed for J. Bettenham at  
 the Crown in Peter-Nether-Row; price 1 s.

*This Day is publish'd.*  
 [1.] The Devil and the Doctor: Or, the Tragi-Comic  
 Comedians, an Amphiglossical Satyr, for suppressing the Turgeat  
 Bile of the Quack; and a Satyr Poem: By Dr. Byfield.  
 Namque est scribitur, et scri-  
 bitur. -----  
*Bile tumet.* -----  
 Sold by J. Bettenham at the Crown in Peter-Nether-Row; price 1 s. 6 d.  
 Where may be had, Pandora's Box, a Satyr against Snuff; And the Royal  
 Martyr; or, Fanatick Piety; the 2d Editions; price 6 d. each.

[2.] A second Edition of Monsieur Bossu's Treatise of  
 the Epic Poem; containing many curious Reflexions, very useful and ac-  
 cessary for the right Understanding and Judging of the Excellencies of  
 Homer and Virgil; Dons from the French, with a Preface upon the same  
 Subject. By W. J. To which are added, An Essay upon Satyr, by Mon-  
 sieur d'Acier; and a Treatise upon Pastoral, by Monsieur Fontanelle.  
 To which will be prefix'd, A new Preliminary Discourse, and the Life of  
 the Author. Printed for J. Knapton and M. Clements in S. Paul's  
 Church-yard.

*Just publish'd, the third Edition corrected of*  
 [1.] The Tragedy of Sir Walter Raleigh; as it is Acted  
 at the Theatre in Lincolns-Inn-Fields. Printed for John Pen-  
 erton at the Buck over-against S. Dunstan's Church in Fleet-  
 street, and John Watts at the Printing-Office in Wild-Court  
 near Lincolns-Inn-Fields; price 1 s. 6 d. NB. There are a small  
 Number printed on Superfine Royal Paper for the Curious.

*This Day is publish'd.*  
 [1.] Reports and Pleadings of Cafes in Assize for Of-  
 fences, Nuisances, Lands, and Tenements; shewing the Manner of Proceed-  
 ing in Assizes of Novel Diffinites, from the Original to the Judgment and  
 Execution; as well where the Demandant and Tenant appear, as where  
 either of them makes Default: Nothing of ths Kind being ever before  
 publish'd; with Observations on every Cafe, very necessary for all Clerks  
 of Assizes, Attorneys, &c. To which is added, Writs of Assize, &c. By  
 John Lilly Esq. Author of the Practical Conveyancer. To which is  
 added, A Prefatory Discourse; shewing the Nature of this Assize, and  
 Reasons for putting it in Practice. Printed for John Hoake at the Three-  
 de-Luce against S. Dunstan's Church, and Tho. Woodward at the Inner-  
 Temple Gate in Fleet-street.

*This Day is publish'd, the third Edition, of*  
 [1.] The Characters of Theophrastus translated from the  
 Greek. By Eustace Budgell Esq. Printed for Jacob Tonson  
 at Shakespear's Head in the Strand; price 1 s.

*In a few Days will be publish'd, the 2d Edition corrected of*  
 [1.] Major Pack's Miscellanies; consisting of Original  
 Poems and Translations; with two Essays upon Study and Conversation;  
 In this Edition are added, Select Elegies; translated from Catullus, Tibul-  
 lus, and Ovid; with an Essay upon the Roman Elegiac Poets. Also some  
 Memoirs of the late Esq. NB. The 2d Editions will be sold  
 separate, to perfect those Gentlemen's Books, who bought the former Im-  
 pression. Printed for E. Curll in Fleet-street. Where may be had, Major  
 Pack's Life of Pompeius Atticus, with Remarks; price 1 s. 6 d. Also  
 Nooning, a Poem; price 4 d.

*Just publish'd, the following BOOKS.*  
 [1.] I. Of the Law of Nature and Nations; and Books  
 written in Latin, by the Baron Puffendorf, Counsellor of State to his late  
 Swedish Majesty King Charles XII. Done into English, by  
 Basil Kennet, D. D. late President of Corpus-Christi College in Oxford;  
 the 3d Edition, carefully corrected, with two Tables. To which are now  
 added, All the large Notes of Mr. Barbeyrac, translated from his last  
 Edition; printed at Amsterdam in 1715.

II. The whole Critical Works of Mr. Rapin; containing a Comparison  
 between Demosthenes and Cicero, for Eloquence; Homer and Virgil, for  
 Poetry; Thucydides and Livy, for History; Plato and Aristotle, for  
 Philosophy; and the Opinions of the wise Men of all Ages upon their  
 Doctrine, and the different Advantages of their Sects: His Reflexions on  
 Eloquence in general; and particularly on that of the Bar and Pulpit; on  
 Aristotle's Treatise of Poetry; with a large Preface by Mr. Rymer; upon  
 History; on Philosophy in general; on Logic; on Morality; on Phys-  
 icks; on Metaphysics; on the Use of Philosophy in Religion; translated  
 into English, by Basil Kennet, D. D. and others; the 2d Edition cor-  
 rected, in 8vo.

III. The Solitary or Carthusian Gardener; containing the Method to  
 make and cultivate all sorts of Gardens; with many new Experiments  
 therein, and Reflexions of the Culture of Trees; written in French, by  
 Francis Gentie, Lay Brother of the Order of Carthusians, and above 30  
 Years Gardener to the Charter-House at Paris; in two Parts. Also the com-  
 plete Florist; or, The Universal Culture of Flowers, Trees, and Shrubs,  
 proper to embellish Gardens; with the Way of raising all sorts of Par-  
 ticles, Greens, Knots, Porticoes, Columns, and other Ornaments: The  
 Whole illustrated with many Cuts, and with the Fable and Moral of  
 each Plant; by the Sieur Louis Liger d'Auxerre, newly done into Eng-  
 lish, in 8vo.

IV. The Divine Oeconomy, or, Universal System of the Works and  
 Purposes of God towards Men, demonstrated in Six Volumes: Contain-  
 ing 1. The Oeconomy of the Creation. 2. The Oeconomy of Sin. 3. The  
 Oeconomy of the Restoration before the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. 4.  
 The Oeconomy of the Restoration after the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.  
 5. The Oeconomy of the Co-Operation of Man, with the Operation of  
 God. 6. The Oeconomy of Universal Providence; with two Letters in  
 Vindication of this System; written Originally in French, by Peter Poi-  
 set; and now translated into English.

Printed for R. Bonwicke, T. Goodwin, J. Walthoe, M. Wotton, S.  
 Manfroy, R. Wilkin, B. Tooker, R. Smith, and T. Ward.  
 [1.] Whereas I have been some time since inform'd  
 in Publick, and of late in Private, that I have given Offence to the Family  
 of the Hampdens, in the second Volume of my History of England,  
 Page 417. Lin. 28. Sec. in which I was misled by Mr. Sanderson's History  
 of King Charles the First, Pag. 623. I here freely acknowledge my Er-  
 ror, and I promise to expunge that Passage in the next Edition of my His-  
 tory. I farther promise to do the same with respect to any other Mistake or  
 Fault that shall before that time be fairly and justly charged upon me,  
 since no Man ought to be ashamed of doing Justice, to the perfitting in it.  
 L. A. U. E. C. H. A. R. D.

*Just publish'd, the second Edition of*  
 [1.] Mr. Archdeacon Echard's History of England,  
 from the first Entrance of Julius Caesar and the Romans; to the conclusion  
 of the Reign of King James II. and Establishment of the Protestant  
 Queen Mary upon the Throne. In 3 Volumes in Folio. With Compleat  
 Indexes. Also the 4th Edition of Mr. Echard's Ecclesiastical History, in  
 2 Volumes in Octavo, which begins where Dean Prideaux's Connection  
 ends; and which the Dean in his 3d Vol. page 628. is supposed to be the  
 English Reader to the Ecclesiastical History of Mr. Dives Echard.  
 This is the best kind in the English Tongue. Both printed for  
 J. Tonson at Shakespear's Head against St. Dunstan's Church in Fleet-street.

[2.] A Catalogue of very valuable Books, chiefly in  
 English, a few Greek, Latin, French, &c. Consisting of History, Divi-  
 nity, Law, Physick, Mathematicks, Voyages, Travels, &c. several large  
 Paper, and beautifully done in Morocco, Russia, Turkey, or Tortoiseshell  
 Bindings, the rest generally gilt Backs or letter'd. Which continues to be  
 sold very cheap, (the Price being fix'd in each Book) at Mountague's Caf-  
 fee-House in Sheer-Lane next Temple-Bar, this Day being the 7th of this  
 instant February; at Nine in the Morning. Catalogues may be had gratis  
 at the Rainbow Coffee-House at Westminster-Hall Gate; at Old Man's  
 Coffee-House, Charing-Cross, at the Rainbow Coffee-House, Fleet-bridge,  
 at the Crown Coffee-House behind the Royal-Exchange, and at the Place  
 of Sale.

*BOOKS.*  
 [1.] The Libraries of Mr. Serjeant Goodwin, and Thomas  
 Earby Esq; both deceas'd, being a Collection of many valuable and ac-  
 countable Books, in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Dutch, Italian, and Spanish  
 Classics cum Not. var. & Delph. in Greek, Lat. Eng. Italian and Spanish  
 of the best Edit. in some large Paper (amongst which are Patini Numifera,  
 a Vol. Museum Wormianum la Couronne de Normandie, Blouin's Geograp.  
 Portugueze I. Sionary. Obras de Don Diego de Saavedra, Propocipus Hiti-  
 Gr. Platonis Op. Bibliotheca Cosmianus olim Seguriana a Montfaucon-  
 Bayli's Hist. and Critical Dict. a Vol. Sandford's Coronation of King  
 James II. Noblemen's Seats. 2 Vol. Dugdale's Baronage, a Vol.  
 Duke of Newcastle's Hofmannsch p. Harris's Lexicon, a Vol. State  
 Travels, 3 Vol. in 8vo. Hist. of the East-India Company's Hist. of  
 England, 3 Vols. Collier's Ch. Hist. 2 Vol. Cokes Reports, 2 Vol.  
 Best Statute at large, 3 Vols. Madox Formulare, 3 Vol. MSS. &c.)  
 which beggins to be sold very cheap (the price being put in each Book) at  
 W. Meare at the Lamb without Temple-Bar, on Monday the 9th of  
 Februry 1718 at Nine in the Morning. Catalogues may be had this  
 Evening at the Rainbow Coffee house, Westminster-Hall; at Man's  
 Coffee-house at Charing-Cross; at Child's in S. Paul's Church-yard; at  
 Mr. Strahan in Cornhill; and at the Place of Sale.

ADVERTISEMENT S.

*To be SOLD or LETT.*  
 A T Rippon in Yorkshire, a very good large Dwelling-  
 House and Gardens pleasantly situated, and well planted  
 with Will Fruit to the South-Sun, with Back-Kitchen, Brew-  
 House, Cellar, House and Stable; likewise near adjoining to it  
 five Acres of Meadow-Ground well fenced, and well watered, the  
 of Mrs. Gill at Rippon, or of Mr. Thomas Roebuck at the Office  
 of Ordnance in the Tower, and you will know the Particulars.

Rath and Cirencester Stage-Coach to London,  
 through Oxford, sets out on Monday the 26th of this inst. January,  
 from the Ram-Inn in Cirencester, and from the White Horse-Inn in Fleet-  
 street; and on every Monday and Friday following, and returns  
 the Stage in two Days at the easy Price of 17 s. 6 d. And in Summer Season  
 from Bath to the White Horse-Inn in two Days, and on the same Days,  
 at the Price of 1 l. 5 s. Perform'd (if God permit) by  
 Edw. Billiton and John Baker.  
 NB. The Coaches lie the first Night from each Place at the New-Inn  
 in Oxford.

*To be sold by AUCTION.*  
 ON Thursday the 12th of this instant February,  
 the Household Goods of William Johnson Esq; deceas'd, brought  
 from his House at Blackwall, to his late Dwelling House in Surry-street  
 in the Strand; consisting of fine wrought and Silk Beds and Bedding,  
 Window-Curtains and Chairs, and very large Looking-Glasses, Tapestry  
 Hangings, fine right India Japan Cabinets, and other India Japan Goods,  
 and a large parcel of China Ware, &c. The Goods to be seen on Satur-  
 day, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday before the Sale. The Sale will  
 begin at Eleven o'Clock, and continue daily till all are sold.

A Certain Person presents a Machine unknown  
 in these Parts, with which he can in a very commodious Manner,  
 with eleven Men clean all Rivers, Channels, and Standing Waters of the  
 Mud to the clear Ground, from a to 3000 Cubical Feet in one Day, tho'  
 the said Mud be 50 or 60 Fathom in the Water from the Shore; he can  
 bring it to the Land, and put it in a Place out of the Way; the said Ma-  
 chine being so commodious, that it may be carried in a Waggon to any  
 Place where it is wanted, and offers to make it at his own Charges; and if  
 it does not answer his Proposals, he desires nothing for his Machine, or any  
 other Charges: If any Gentlemen have Occasion for the said Machine, or  
 the Inventor may be heard of at the White Hart in Abchurch-Lane.

*To be sold by AUCTION.*  
 ON Thursday and Friday the 12th and 13th in-  
 stant February 1718-19, a fine Parcel of Household-Goods of a Lady  
 lately deceas'd, at her late Dwelling-House in Gold-Square in Crutched-  
 Friars near Tower-Hill, the front House with a Hatchment over the Door;  
 the Goods consisting of rich Crimson Geneva Damask Beds, and several other  
 Beds, Down and Feather Beds, and a rich Cabinet from the Island of Japan  
 Glasses, Sconces, and Original Pictures, fine Linen, and all other  
 Sorts of Household-Goods; the Goods to be view'd on Monday, Tuesday,  
 and Wednesday, the 9th, 10th, and 11th; and Thursday and Friday till  
 the time of Sale; which will begin exactly at One of the Clock each Day.  
 The House to be Lett. Catalogues to be had at the Place of Sale.

*Now are made publick.*  
 THE most incomparable Colick Drops, which  
 perfect the Cure in a short time, and in a few Minutes remove  
 the Wind Colick, to the Comfort and Admiration of those that do try  
 them. These excellent Drops were never expos'd to the Publick but  
 lately, but have always been successful in private Families, and others  
 which have experienced them. Besides the use of the Colick, these are  
 admirable for healing green Wounds, by washing the Sore with them, and  
 that in a very short time. Sold only by William Huxley, Haberdasher  
 of Hats at the three Flowers-de-Luces against S. Dunstan's Church, Fleet-  
 street.

LONDON: Printed for John Morphew near Stationers-Hall. 1718.