Ilmiy tadqiqotlar va ularning yechimlari jurnali
Aoka guvohnoma № 323759 ISSN: 3060-4818

THE EVOLUTION OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL HERO IN ENGLISH LITERATURE: FROM MILTON'S REBEL FIGURE TO JOYCE'S MODERNIST REINTERPRETATION

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Abstract: This article explores the transformation of mythological and archetypal heroes in English literature from the seventeenth century to early modernism. The study investigates how religious and classical mythological figures were gradually reinterpreted through psychological, philosophical, and artistic perspectives in the works of John Milton, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and James Joyce. Special attention is devoted to the processes of individualization, internal conflict, symbolic reconstruction, and the deconstruction of heroic identity. Milton's Satan is examined as an intermediate literary model combining mythological, tragic, and psychological characteristics. The article also analyzes the Romantic reinterpretation of the Promethean archetype and the emergence of the Byronic hero as a symbol of existential rebellion. Furthermore, Joyce's "mythological method" is studied as a modernist strategy for integrating myth into ordinary human experience. The research is based on comparative, archetypal, hermeneutic, and mythopoetic approaches. The findings reveal that the mythological hero in English literature gradually moved away from sacred collective functions and evolved into a fragmented and subjective literary consciousness representing the spiritual and cultural crises of modernity.

Keywords: mythological hero, archetype, Romanticism, Modernism, Milton, Satan, Prometheus, James Joyce, mythopoetics, psychologization, rebellion, Byronic hero, English poetry, deconstruction, literary evolution

INTRODUCTION

The reinterpretation of mythological heroes occupies an important place in the historical development of English literature. In ancient and medieval traditions, mythological characters primarily represented sacred values, collective morality, and cosmological harmony. However, beginning from the Renaissance and continuing through Romanticism and Modernism, literary consciousness increasingly shifted toward the exploration of individuality, psychological experience, and subjective perception [1].

This transformation significantly influenced the literary representation of mythological figures. Heroes previously associated with divine order and collective symbolism gradually became psychologically complicated personalities experiencing moral conflict, alienation, and existential uncertainty [2]. English literature of the seventeenth to twentieth centuries demonstrates this transition particularly clearly.

One of the earliest and most influential examples of such reinterpretation can be observed in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In Milton's poem, Satan is no longer portrayed solely as a theological embodiment of evil. Instead, he becomes a rhetorically powerful and internally conflicted figure whose rebellion reflects philosophical and psychological dimensions of human consciousness [3]. This literary transformation later influenced Romantic writers, especially Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron.

Romantic literature further expanded the concept of the rebel hero. Shelley transformed the Promethean archetype into a symbol of ethical resistance and spiritual freedom, whereas Byron developed the image of the isolated and internally divided individual known as the "Byronic hero" [4]. By the twentieth century, James Joyce radically reconstructed classical mythology through his

"mythological method," where heroic narratives were transferred into the fragmented space of modern urban existence [5].

The present research aims to examine how mythological heroes evolved in English literature from sacred archetypes into individualized and psychologically fragmented literary characters. The article also investigates the literary mechanisms that contributed to this transformation, including psychologization, symbolic inversion, and modernist deconstruction.

LITERATURE ANALYSIS

The issue of mythological transformation has been widely discussed in international literary scholarship. Carl Gustav Jung interpreted archetypes as universal psychological structures rooted in the collective unconscious and reflected in mythology, religion, and literature [6]. His theory provides an important framework for understanding the evolution of rebellious and tragic heroes in English literature.

Joseph Campbell expanded archetypal criticism through his theory of the "heroic journey," arguing that mythological narratives symbolize stages of spiritual and psychological development [7]. Campbell's concepts are particularly useful in analyzing the transformation of Satan and Prometheus into individualized literary figures.

Among Asian scholars, literary critic Northrop Frye contributed significantly to myth criticism by emphasizing the cyclical and structural role of myths in literary history [8]. In addition, Indian scholar Meenakshi Mukherjee examined how modern literature reconstructs mythological patterns within contemporary cultural conditions, especially through psychological reinterpretation and symbolic fragmentation [9]. In Uzbek literary studies, DSc. Professor Qozoqboy Yo'ldoshev extensively analyzed artistic interpretation and mythopoetic thinking in world literature, emphasizing the transformation of archetypal images in modern literary discourse [10].

Another Uzbek scholar, DSc. Professor Hamidulla Boltaboyev, investigated comparative literary processes, cultural symbolism, and the evolution of artistic consciousness in English and world literature [11]. His research on literary modernism and symbolic structures was particularly valuable in examining James Joyce's reinterpretation of mythological narratives.

Despite considerable scholarly attention to Romanticism and Modernism, insufficient analysis has been devoted to the continuous evolution connecting Milton's Satan, Romantic rebel heroes, and Joyce's anti-heroic modernism within a unified mythopoetic framework. This article attempts to address this gap through an integrated comparative analysis.

METHODOLOGY

The study applies several interconnected research methods, including comparative literary analysis, archetypal criticism, mythopoetic interpretation, and hermeneutic analysis.

The comparative approach allows the identification of similarities and distinctions in the representation of mythological heroes across different literary movements. Through comparison, the article traces the gradual transformation of sacred mythological figures into individualized literary personalities.

Archetypal criticism, primarily based on Jungian and Campbellian theories, is used to analyze recurring mythological structures such as rebellion, alienation, sacrifice, and existential struggle [6][7]. This method helps explain the symbolic continuity between Milton's Satan, Shelley's Prometheus,

Byron's Manfred, and Joyce's Leopold Bloom.

The mythopoetic method is employed to examine how literary texts reconstruct mythological narratives and adapt them to changing philosophical and historical contexts. Particular attention is paid to symbolic inversion, reinterpretation of sacred motifs, and the deconstruction of traditional heroic ideals.

Hermeneutic analysis is applied to interpret rhetorical structures, internal monologues, narrative perspectives, and symbolic imagery within the selected texts. The study focuses on literary representations of psychological fragmentation, moral conflict, and subjective consciousness.

Primary literary sources include Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, Byron's *Manfred* and *Cain*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*. Additional theoretical and critical sources related to myth criticism, Romanticism, and Modernist aesthetics were systematically reviewed.

RESULTS

The research demonstrates that the evolution of the mythological hero in English literature reflects a gradual movement from collective sacred symbolism toward subjective psychological representation.

The analysis of Milton's *Paradise Lost* reveals that Satan occupies an intermediate position between the traditional religious antagonist and the modern literary hero. Unlike the biblical image of Satan as absolute evil, Milton portrays him as a reflective and rhetorically persuasive figure characterized by tragic consciousness and intellectual independence [3]. This reinterpretation introduced psychological depth into mythological representation.

The study also confirms that Milton's Satan significantly influenced Romantic literature. In Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, rebellion becomes associated with ethical resistance rather than destructive violence. Shelley's Prometheus symbolizes spiritual freedom, moral endurance, and the rejection of tyranny through intellectual and ethical superiority [4].

Byron's literary heroes present a more pessimistic version of the rebel archetype. Characters such as Manfred and Cain experience internal division, existential isolation, and emotional alienation. Their rebellion does not lead to liberation but intensifies psychological fragmentation and loneliness.

The analysis of Joyce's *Ulysses* demonstrates a radical transformation of the heroic model. Through the "mythological method," Joyce transfers epic mythology into ordinary urban existence, where heroic action is replaced by everyday experience [5]. Leopold Bloom functions as an anti-hero whose ordinary life reflects the fragmentation and uncertainty of modern consciousness.

Overall, the findings suggest that mythological heroes in English literature progressively lost their sacred and universal status, becoming representations of psychological crisis, individual identity, and modern cultural instability.

DISCUSSION

The transformation of mythological heroes in English literature reflects broader intellectual and philosophical shifts within European culture. Traditional mythological systems emphasized sacred order, collective values, and cosmic hierarchy. However, literary developments from the seventeenth century onward increasingly focused on individual consciousness, psychological conflict, and existential uncertainty [12].

Milton's reinterpretation of Satan demonstrates how mythological and theological narratives can be transformed into philosophical and psychological discourse. Satan's rhetorical power, self-awareness, and tragic isolation contributed to the emergence of the modern rebel hero.

Romanticism further deepened the internalization of the heroic image. Shelley interpreted rebellion as a morally constructive force aimed at liberation and ethical transformation. Byron, however, emphasized the tragic consequences of radical individualism and existential alienation [13]. This contrast reveals the dual nature of Romantic ideology, balancing utopian aspirations with psychological despair.

Modernism introduced a new stage in the evolution of mythological representation. Joyce's deconstruction of classical mythology reflects the collapse of universal heroic structures within twentieth-century culture. In *Ulysses*, mythology survives only as a fragmented narrative framework integrated into ordinary experience [14]. Heroism is no longer associated with transcendence or collective meaning but becomes part of subjective interpretation and everyday existence. From an archetypal perspective, this literary evolution demonstrates the gradual weakening of collective mythological consciousness and the emergence of fragmented modern identity.

Conclusion

The conducted research confirms that the mythological hero in English literature underwent a profound transformation between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. This process involved the gradual decline of sacred and collective meanings and the emergence of psychologically individualized literary consciousness.

John Milton initiated this transformation by presenting Satan as a complex and internally conflicted figure rather than a purely theological antagonist. Romantic writers such as Shelley and Byron further developed the archetype of rebellion, emphasizing freedom, moral resistance, existential isolation, and subjective experience. James Joyce completed the deconstruction of classical heroism by integrating mythological structures into fragmented modern reality. The study demonstrates that the evolution of the mythological hero is characterized by psychologization, symbolic reinterpretation, internal conflict, and the fragmentation of identity. These literary processes reflect broader cultural changes associated with secularization, modernity, and the crisis of universal values.

Consequently, the mythological hero evolved from a sacred representative of collective order into a subjective literary construct shaped by psychological experience and interpretive openness. This transformation remains highly significant for contemporary literary criticism and modern understandings of identity, mythology, and artistic consciousness.

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