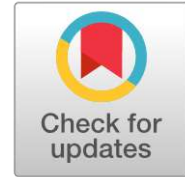# INCREDULITY TOWARD HEROISM: ACKROYD AS A GALLANT STORYTELLER AGAINST THE HEROIC TRADITION

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Abstract

Heroism as an unremitting subject conquers and even haunts literature as well as history. Historical and fictitious heroes are guiding spirits of human beings regardless of time and geography. Historians and writers have so sternly adhered to the ideals of heroism that this fascination has been transformed into hero worship dating back to antiquity, bringing heroism to the forefront as a metanarrative in history and literature. Particularly contributing to the undying predicament of literature caught between the ideal and the real, causes of heroism have been largely left unquestioned putting heroes in the shoes of a messiah. Peter Ackroyd (1949-), renowned for his historiographic metafictions fashioned within postmodernism, dares to challenge this unimpeached -ism in *The Fall of Troy* (2006). In the novel, Ackroyd rewrites the history of Troy and introduces an eccentric half-real hero, Heinrich Obermann, against celebrated heroes of history and literature. Accordingly, this paper reads heroism as a metanarrative and delineates how Ackroyd sketches an atypical hero by acting contrary to traditional heroism and heroic literary tradition in his vibrant postmodern parody, *The Fall of Troy*.

Keywords: Peter Ackroyd, *The Fall of Troy*, postmodernism, heroism, metanarrative, parody

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Heroism and Hero Worship Bewitching the Earth

The words of Victorian novelist Mary Mitford of Napoleon: 'Oh, what a man!... I would have given a limb...to have been concealed somewhere just to have heard him conversing and dictating' (Houghton, 1954, p. 309) unmistakably depicture what heroism meant in the Victorian era. When making a mention of heroism, one cannot miss the Victorian period. Heroism was a serious concern in the Victorian period as echoed in the words of Edmund Gosse: 'The Victorians carried admiration to the highest pitch. They marshalled it, they defined it, they turned it from a virtue into a religion, and called it Hero Worship' (qtd. in Houghton, 1954, p. 305). It was the time when hero worship was thought to be 'the basis of all possible good, religious or social for mankind' and people took 'the great ones of the earth' (Houghton, 1954, p. 305) like Napoleon, Nelson, and Wellington as models and wrote copious books such as *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, *Lectures on Great Men* and *The Red Book of Heroes*. In his famous series of lectures, "On Heroes and Hero-Worship", Thomas Carlyle recapitulates Victorian heroism as such: 'A hero is an exceptional man, so different in degree from the rest of us that he seems almost different in type [...] a revelation of God, hero worship is a religion; or more exactly, the basis of all religion' (Ousby, 1982, p. 157). Thus, Victorian writers created ideal figures to attract readers, and, in Steckmesser's words, they turned into 'professional hero makers' (1997, p. 249) which can be traced in Alfred Lord Tennyson's great poems "The Charge of the Light Brigade", "Ulysses" and "Morte d'Arthur".[1]

Hero worship, which was at its pinnacle in the Victorian period, dates back to ancient Greek religion. The term "hero" in Homeric Greek describes the mortal progeny of a human and a deity. It later refers to a deceased person who is worshipped and offered sacrifices at his tomb or a shrine due to his reputation or his peculiar manner of passing away, which gives him the authority to aid and defend the living. The word heroism

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[1] As a rarely seen example, William Makepeace Thackeray's classic novel *Vanity Fair*, with its subtitle "A Novel without A Hero", embraces a critique of traditional Victorian heroism alongside Thackeray's unconventional stance towards the idea of hero and hero worship. The novel features imperfect Captain Dobbin as a hero who is honest and brave yet ugly and clumsy with large hands, feet, and ears, a closely cropped head of black hair, and a lisp. In the novel, Thackeray questions the concept of heroism and the Victorian inclination to create heroes as such: What qualities are there for which a man gets so speedy a return of applause, as those of bodily superiority, activity, and valour? Time out of mind strength and courage have been the theme of bards and romances; and from the story of Troy down to to-day, poetry has always chosen a soldier for a hero. I wonder is it because men are cowards in heart that they admire bravery so much, and place military valour so far beyond every other quality for reward and worship? (1998, p. 283)

derives from the Greek *hērōs*, meaning protector or defender, referring to a demigod. The line between a hero and a god was not always sharp-cut as a hero was more than a human but less than a god (Parker, 2001, p. 306). Heroes are designated by Campbell as 'support for all human life and the inspiration of philosophy, poetry, and the arts' which serve as 'a vehicle for the profoundest moral and metaphysical instruction' (1949, p. 257). Campbell further proposes that the images by which heroes survive have been 'brooded upon, searched, and discussed for centuries: they have served whole societies, furthermore, as the mainstays of thought and life' (1949, p. 256). The bequest of the grand tumuli of heroes left from the Bronze Age manifested in Greek oral epic tradition in Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Stretching to the 20th century, hero worship becomes the title of the 111th episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1992). Heroism indeed has seized the movie screen with copious films, to exemplify, among others, *Ulysses* (1954), *Hercules, Samson and Ulysses* (1963), *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), *Hercules* (1983), *Young Hercules* (1998), *Alexander the Great* (2004), *Troy* (2004), *Beowulf and Grendel* (2005) *Odysseus: Voyage to the Underworld* (2008), *The Legend of Hercules* (2013) and *Thor: Love and Thunder* (2022).

Largely associated with war in the modern world, heroism, yet, seems to divide people into two opposite ends, especially in World War I. Even England, considered to be the most rewarding country after the war, lost more than two hundred thousand soldiers on the front of the Dardanelles (*Çanakkale*), and the country split into two as those for war and those against it. This great divide is found expression in the poems of Rupert Brooke (1887–1915), Wilfred Owen (1893–1918), and Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967) who participated in the war and experienced its trauma. The war caused the extinction of a generation of England, the loss of 20% of the population of France, and the loss of 13% of Germany (Parsons, 2010, p. 37). According to Hynes, this great loss of England is almost a crack in time and separated the present and the past. The atmosphere of heroism and optimism that triumphed in the first days of the war in England later left its place to despair and pessimism (Hynes, 1997, p. xiii). While heroism and patriotism came to the forefront before the war and in the first years of the war, many people like Sassoon, who experienced the true colour of the war and had to face the trauma of it for the rest of his life, labelled the outbreak of the World War II as a nightmare.

The war was also instrumental in the rise of two isms that were influential in many fields, especially in literature and art. Modernism, which was triggered by the tragedy of World War I (1914–1918), altered people's perceptions of reality, and was supplanted by postmodernism due to the upheaval brought on by another war, World War II (1929–1945). Despite their distinctions, both movements foregrounded the plurality of reality, and postmodernism, especially, has questioned metanarratives, to name a few, religion, history, and science, which shape people's perception of reality which found expression in Jean-François Lyotard's famous definition of postmodernism as 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (1984, p. xxiv). It is again Lyotard who coined the word "metanarrative" or "grand narrative" to describe a theory that attempts to provide a totalizing, comprehensive explanation of different historical events, experiences, and social and cultural phenomena by appealing to universal truths or values. That is metanarratives are totalizing narratives about human history and objectives that serve as the foundation for and justification for knowledge and cultural practices. Postmodernism considers metanarratives as tools used by people to exert power over others. Then, in postmodernism, metanarratives appear as ideological concepts that reflect the perspective of the leading group and culture as, I argue, in heroism which largely reflects the dominant group's ideology. The idea of a metanarrative as an all-encompassing explanation or justification for why we do and what we do has come into question with the development of postmodernism. Peter Ackroyd is amongst those postmodernists, including Jeanette Winterson and John Banville, who makes use of storytelling to accentuate the existence of different realities by blurring the lines between fact and fiction and questioning metanarratives. In *The Fall of Troy*, Ackroyd questions history and history writing as metanarratives and rewrites the renowned story of Troy by tracing the footsteps of Homer, the hero of his protagonist Heinrich Obermann, an ardent storyteller like his creator. Rewriting history, Ackroyd dwells on heroism extending to hero worship which has existed ever since antiquity embracing, among others, Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, and Napoleon alongside Beowulf, Hectors, Achilles, and Hercules. Ackroyd introduces his hero Obermann, a bulky, middle-aged archaeologist, by several postmodern tactics such as pastiche, intertextuality, and parody, in contrast to those celebrated heroes. The reader, to exemplify, observes him, hilariously, swimming across the Hellespont and competing in races around Troy. By doing so, Ackroyd reconstructs

and questions heroism which I read in this paper as an example of a postmodern metanarrative.

Ackroyd and His Postmodern Stance on History and History Writing

Even though it is a term that cannot be fully defined, postmodernism has shaken the values of people, their perception of reality, and their beliefs in science, religion, identity, and history. In line with the concept of relativity, postmodernism argues that reality is a man-made concept that reaches us through interpretations, and there are different truths rather than a single truth, and different histories rather than a single history. In *The Fall of Troy*, Ackroyd, with the story of the archaeologist Heinrich Obermann, depicts the view of postmodernism on history, specifically centering on heroism. In the novel, Ackroyd treats history as an epistemological narrative written by humans and draws attention to the elements of fiction that transform the historical facts defended by historians into historical narratives by removing the border between fact and fiction. The novels of Ackroyd, an English biographer, poet, novelist, critic, and the winner of the Somerset Maugham Award and two Whitbread Awards, who started his career by writing poetry and biographies of celebrated literary figures such as T. S Eliot (1984), Charles Dickens (1990), William Blake (1995), Geoffrey Chaucer (2004) and William Shakespeare (2005), are among the best examples of historiographic metafiction, a term coined by Canadian literary theorist Linda Hutcheon in the late 1980s and incorporates fiction, history, and theory. Hutcheon defines historiographic metafiction as: 'those well known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages, [and to] the theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs' (1998, p. 5). Biography writing also formed the basis for Ackroyd's novels, to name a few, *Hawskmoor* (1985) and *Chatterton* (1987), displaying the problematic view of postmodernism towards history writing. As Brian Finney notes, writing about Eliot helped Ackroyd to apply postmodern techniques imitation, and pastiche in his works (1992, p. 245).

Blurring the line between fact and fiction, Ackroyd-renowned for the quantity of his output, and the variety of styles adopting copious voices-typically questions history writing and its authenticity by creating different narratives of historical texts. Zekiye Antakyalıoğlu defines Ackroyd's novels as 'intertextual and parodic reproductions of

histories illuminating his ideas on the indeterminacy of historical discourses" (2009, p.20). Similarly, in his thirteenth novel, *The Fall of Troy*, Ackroyd attempts to reveal the narrative structure of history writing, which is shaped by people's interpretations and imagination, according to the postmodern view, just like the writing of a literary work that is frequently mirrored in his hero Obermann's words: 'I am here to re-create Troy' (2007, p. 84). Not tallied in his main oeuvre, *The Fall of Troy* (2006) does not get the spotlight off itself particularly compared to his well-received historiographic metafictions such as *The Great Fire of London* (1982), *Hawksmoor* (1985), and *Chatterton* (1987). Yet, as I argue in this paper, *The Fall of Troy* is worth attention by its critique of heroism and hero-worship, everlasting concerns of human beings.

Pursuant to the characteristics of historiographic metafiction, which Hutcheon lists in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, the most central features of biography and novel are that they both remove the boundaries between storytelling and history and emphasize the linguistic elements of writing and the fictionality of the world. These attributes couple Ackroyd together with other postmodern historiographic novel writers. As discussed by Raymond Federman, to Ackroyd, history is a kind of reflection into which anything can be included since the past can be read and inserted into any desired meaning. For Ackroyd, history is also about something that never happens as it is portrayed, and its inside is invisible to outsiders. Therefore, there is no limit to what can be said about history within reason. Ackroyd believes that historical narratives are merely versions of what actually happened. For him, every event or life story can have different versions, which raises some questions about the most reliable and the true version (1993, pp. 9-10). In *The Fall of Troy*, as Federman claims for *Chatterton*, Ackroyd shows us how other versions of a life story can be edited and rewritten with its hidden parts. Similarly, Sue Gaisford says of Ackroyd: Historical accuracy is of no importance to Ackroyd. For him, there is no limit to separating real and imaginary, biography and novel. For Ackroyd, there is only a wide road where all troublesome truths gallop on his neck as he fearlessly swings his wide-bladed sword as builds his exotic stories out of nothing (2006). Thus, postmodern historiographic novel writers, like Ackroyd, in Serpil Oppermann's words, 'create interesting and brand-new accounts of different historical periods, societies and people. These can be considered as new expressions of historical texts' (2006, p. 51). In a like manner, Hayden White accentuates the narrative feature of

history writing as follows: 'Real events should not speak, should not tell themselves. Real events should simply be and narrative is the solution for the studies of translating knowing into telling' (1987, p. 2). Postmodernism, then, considers history writing as a process created by human beings that is at the center of the historiographic novel. That is, the historiographic novel, in Hutcheon's words, encompasses 'a problematized rethinking of the nature of [...] historical documents" (*Critical Discourse*, 1988, p. 378) which comes to flesh and bone in *The Fall of Troy*.

Ackroyd's Obermann as A Postmodern Eccentric Hero

Reflecting on the different narratives of historical texts and questioning history writing, Ackroyd 'discursively reconstructs the historical reality on which his novels are grounded especially by using the gaps and ambiguities he detected in the official history', and shows 'how the history writing expands to multiple and variable meanings' (Oppermann, 2006, p. 76) as in *The Fall of Troy*. The gaps regarding The Trojan War such as the uncertainty of its location and the mystery of the Trojan horse take us to the true identity of Obermann, the protagonist of *The Fall of Troy*. When Hissarlik and Troy are mentioned, the first name that springs to mind is Heinrich Schliemann (1822–1890), the 19th-century German archaeologist, who is identified with Hissarlik and Troy excavations. Schliemann thought about many different places before deciding on the location of Troy in Hissarlik thanks to British Frank Calvery, who bought a part of the region. Even today, many scholars have doubts about the location of Troy. However, since Schliemann's excavations in Hissarlik in 1871, neither more popular alternatives have been proposed for the location of Troy, nor have these alternatives been widely accepted. In parallel with White and Hutcheon's views on history writing, *The Fall of Troy* tells the story of Heinrich Schliemann, who turns into Heinrich Obermann, and his efforts to find the old city of Troy by taking Homer's *The Illiad* as his guide. Heinrich Schliemann was the first to claim to have found the location of Troy. As in *The Fall of Troy*, it is his father who tells the story of Troy to young Schliemann. Fascinated by the story, Schliemann decides to rediscover Troy and comes to Turkey in the early 1860s. Using Homer's work, *The Iliad* as a map, Schliemann resolves that the Trojan War took place in Hissarlik, the Dardanelles (Çanakkale). Rewriting the story of Troy and Schliemann, Ackroyd reveals the narrative feature of history writing. More importantly for the purpose of this paper, Ackroyd challenges traditional heroism and presents Obermann, an atypical hero, a

heavy-set, middle-aged, bald archaeologist, gripped with old stories, especially with those of Homer.

Before switching to Ackroyd's brilliant postmodern hero, it would be appropriate to flick through the characteristics of a traditional hero. A hero is typically someone who exemplifies great bravery and strength and might put his life in danger or give it up for the greater good. A hero must demonstrate virtues and upstanding morals and overcome struggles. A typical hero embarks on a journey, whether it be actual or metaphorical, where he must use his abilities to go through difficulties, and battle monsters, and other forms of evil, proving that good ultimately wins over evil. Heroes can also adopt a more contemporary form where they do not travel physically but dive into a deeper spiritual journey without ever leaving their hometown. Besides the classic heroes such as Gilgamesh, Odyssey, and Beowulf, there are modern heroes such as Luke Skywalker and Harry Potter. Luke Skywalker from *The Star Wars Series* has to put forth the effort to fend against bad powers in order to keep the universe free from oppression. He displays some traditional heroic traits in a contemporary setting when he battles Darth Vader and saves Princess Leia. Harry Potter faces countless obstacles over the course of the seven volumes in the series, which put his bravery, wit, and emotional stamina to the test. Harry's involvement in these trials is meant to demonstrate that virtue ultimately prevails over evil, which, in the context of *The Harry Potter Series*, primarily manifests as Lord Voldemort and his adherents. The major features of heroes can be listed as follows: Valor, strength, conviction, resolution, helpfulness, candidness, and moral integrity. In a study conducted by Gash and Conway (1997), children listed the traits of their favorite heroes as such: beautiful, brave, brilliant, caring, confident, dresses well, friendly, gentle, good, good-looking, helpful, honest, kind, loving, loyal, rich, skillful, strong and warrior. The children gave names to heroes from a variety of fields, including family, movies, television, politics, religion, music, sports, and other broad categories. Yet, it is noteworthy that they chose beauty, fame, good looks, and wealth as essential qualities of heroism. The fact that heroic figures are frequently portrayed as being beautiful, pretty, or good-looking in fairy tales, cartoons, or motion pictures, however, may not be surprising (Eco, 2004; Klein & Shiffman, 2006).

Appertaining to Ackroyd's hero Obermann, all the traits of traditional heroes are ruined. Obermann is neither young, handsome, nor honest. He appears as a 55-year-old

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bald archaeologist regarding archaeology as an instinct rather than science. He is sometimes a hero under the protection of Gods and sometimes is the God himself but always a storyteller. Obermann identifies himself not only with heroes but with Greek Gods such as Zeus and Poseidon. Such a God is worthy of a goddess. At the beginning of the novel, our middle-aged hero marries Sophia Chrysanthis, a young Greek woman. The very reason for marrying her is that she knows ancient Greek and can read Homer's texts. He frequently describes his wife as a Greek goddess. Throughout the text, he tries to prove to his wife that he is strong, agile, and young and has nothing short of heroes. For example, when his young wife warns him that he eats too much at breakfast, Obermann tells that it is okay since he is very healthy and agile: 'I am tough. I am energetic. Who else do you know to swim in the sea at dawn? Or ride an hour before breakfast?' (2007, p. 9). He, recently married, takes his wife to the Dardanelles where he excavates to find Troy. When the couple arrives in Hissarlik, Obermann, pointing to the people digging the ground, says to Sophia 'I am opening a new world […] and it is like a scene of battle […] We are the warriors beating on the gates' (2007, pp. 31-32). He hence refers to the new history he is writing by categorizing himself with the heroes fighting on the battlefield.

Heroism, yet, should not be only in words but manifest itself in actions. In Chapter 7, the reader witnesses Obermann determined to become a hero and swim across the Hellespont, which Sophia thinks is impossible. Obermann is resolute to show his heroism to his wife: 'I will swim on your behalf. I will be your champion' (2007, p. 62). I read this swimming venture of our hero as a parody of the famous swimming scene in *Beowulf*. Beowulf swims for seven nights and dodges various sea monsters, and finally comes to shore. This story is one of the narratives Beowulf tells King Hrotgar to verify that he can defeat Grendel: 'When the going was heavy in those high waves, /I was the strongest swimmer of all' (Greenblatt, 2006, lines 533-534). Beowulf adds: 'My sword had killed/ nine sea-monsters. Such night dangers and hard ordeals I have never heard of/ nor of a man more desolate in surging waves' (Greenblatt, 2006, lines 574-577). Beowulf's story turned out to be positive as he beats Breca in this swimming match and later kills Grendel. As for Obermann's, it cannot be said to be positive, however, he declares himself immortal just like Beowulf: 'We are immortal here! We will conquer the land now. I will swim across the Hellespont and proclaim it to be ours!' (2007, p. 63).

As a part of the parody, Obermann unbuttons his shirt and pants to expose an old-looking bathing suit below. Sophia bursts out laughing: 'It is what my father wears!' (2007, p. 64). Obermann replies: 'Your father is fit. So am I' (2007, p. 65). He enters the water while calling Poseidon, then shouts and doves headfirst into the waves. As he moves toward the island, the water speckles all around him. Sophia has never witnessed such a ruckus and sees the men laughing and pointing at Obermann from a neighbouring fishing boat that is jogging on the water while they are repairing their nets. He possesses the appearance of a little sea monster as he gurgles and snorts in the depths. In a short period of time, he arrives at the outcrop of rock. He hoists himself up onto it and starts leaping around, waving, and calling to her like a child who is happy to see her. Then he doves back under the water and swims toward the coast. A few moments later, she notices him waving from the water once more, but there is something strange and frenetic about the gesture. He then vanishes below the surface. He is having some sort of trouble. He surfaces once more, but he is not swimming. She cannot hear what he is saying to her due to the strong wind. She then starts yelling and waving at the fishermen who are still repairing their nets. She points at Obermann while yelling 'Imdat! Imdat!' [Help] (2007, p. 58) in Turkish. Her cries for assistance alert one of the men, who directs the others to the swimmer. They quickly grab their oars and head in his direction. Obermann once more submerges beneath the water. Then she observes them squeezing Obermann aboard.

Notwithstanding this swimming adventure described by Ackroyd is cut short, it is not much different from the swimming story that Beowulf tells for lines exaggeratedly. Obermann has a cramp in his foot but he is saved which is a miracle by Greek Gods to him: 'I know. It was a miracle […] Athene was watching over me. She saved me from the sea-god, just as she saved the heroes of Greece. I am under her protection!' (2007, p. 66). Then, once again, Obermann puts himself in the shoes of heroes, particularly in Beowulf. After Beowulf, it is time to become the God-like Achilles, the peerless hero of all times:

> His Mars-like presence terribly came brandishing his spear.
> His right arm shook it, his bright arms, like day, came glittering on
> Like re-light, or the light of heav'n shot from the rising sun. (2002, p. 475)

These are Homer's words for the Greek hero Achilles right before his encounter with Hector in *The Iliad*. The fight between Achilles and Hector, the Trojans' best warrior,

in the Trojan War is one of the cherished heroic accounts in history and literature. As Homer explains, Hector is the oldest prince of Troy and a formidable warrior. After Hector murders Patroclus, a close friend of Achilles, Achilles and Hector clash. Achilles pursues Hector back to Troy while slaying other Trojans. When they arrive at the city walls, they come face to face, and Hector, unexpectedly, resorts to flight. Achilles javelins Hector in the neck and kills him in the duel. One of the most significant moments in *The Iliad* occurs when Hector dies, which marks a turning point in the renowned epic. Hector's largely discussed flight transforms into a quizzical chase by the pen of Ackroyd since Obermann's next heroic act is to race with young Thornton around the circuit of Troy. Alexander Thornton is an English archaeologist who comes to Troy to work on the clay tablets Obermann and his team discovered, which might put an end to his excavations. Taking Thornton as his rival, Obermann proposes a duel to him: 'I challenge you to race with me three times around the circuit of Troy. Just as Hector and Achilles did. They ran three times around the city in heroic contest. Shall we be heroes? Shall we follow their steps?' (2007, p. 192). Thornton accepts the duel and Obermann gives their route in line with Homer's description in *The Iliad*:

> So be it. You have spoken. Tomorrow we will run where Homer has described. They began before the great gates of Troy, just beneath the wall. They passed the watch-tower and the wild fig tree before they came upon a wagon track and the two fair flowing fountains that feed the Scamander. They passed the washing tanks, where we have found the stone cisterns. That is our course. (2007, p.193)

Expectedly, the prize will be 'immortal glory' (2007, p. 193) and Obermann has already chosen the role of Achilles, the winner, for himself and says to Thornton: 'As do we all. In justice, as Hector, you are allowed to begin the race. I give you thirty seconds' (2007, p. 193). The next chapter, Chapter 21, consists of a parody of the famous fight scene between Hector and Achilles. As the narrator states, Obermann and Thornton appear the following morning in shorts and linen shirts in front of the stone blocks of Troy, much to the amazement of the Turkish workmen. They are given a metal cup filled with spring water. When compared to Thornton, who is still young enough to preserve his slim and strong frame, Obermann is a heavy-set man with the typical stoutness of middle age (2007, p. 194). Obermann says to his son Telemachus, the name of the son of Odysseus in Greek mythology: 'You will go ahead of us and supervise the course. You will observe our progress, like the gods who watched the flight of Hector. You have the start

of thirty seconds, Mr. Thornton' (2007, p. 194). Sophia is taken aback by her husband's poise. In a ten-mile race, how could he possibly compete with this fit young man? In the early morning sun, he is already sweating. However, he appears enthusiastic and committed: 'You will be the fawn, Mr. Thornton, and I will be the hound. Once you have started from the covert, on this bright morning, I will track you through the glades and groves' (2007, p. 194) again referring to Homer. Thornton starts to sprint around the track. Obermann counts out loud for thirty seconds while keeping an eye on him. Then, after giving his wife a kiss, he runs after him. He races much faster than she anticipates, cutting through the air with ease. However, he keeps a little chance of catching Thornton, who runs with the speed and focus of a trained runner.

The two men vanish from view. Thornton ultimately re-enters the view, moving at a slightly slower pace but showing no signs of pain. Obermann shows up a few minutes later; he develops a steady, rather quick pace that seems to fit him: 'I am fit!' he calls to Sophia. 'My daily swim has toughened me! I am an eagle darting through the clouds to the plain!' (2007, p. 195). Sophia is shocked when, after the third circuit, Obermann comes out by himself. Even though he is still in the distance, she beckons to him: 'Where is Alexander?' (2007, p. 197). Obermann does not respond until he stands next to her: 'Hector is sprawled in the dust.' 'Why? What has happened?' 'I did not wait to discover' (2007, p. 197). Obermann chuckles, but his gait remains unchanged until he arrives at the stone blocks marking the finish line of the race: 'Achilles has triumphed! […] Where is the wreath for the victor? Do you not wish to congratulate your glorious husband?' (2007, p. 195). Obermann wins the race, and what happened to Thornton remains a mystery. According to his account, a huge boulder of unknown origin was thrown at him and sprained his ankle. For Obermann, who has nothing to do with honesty, this is no excuse and the winner of the race is himself just like Achilles, most probably by a trick. The race is also likened to the story of the hare and the tortoise in Aesop's Fables. Obermann says, referring to Thornton: 'The hare is limping, but he is still healthy' (2007, p. 174). According to the story, Obermann is a turtle who is not expected to win, while Thornton is a rabbit who is likely to win but loses. That is how the middle-aged and arrogant Obermann considers himself to be a god-like hero and compares his race with young Thornton to the heroic fight between Achilles and Hector. That is how Achilles and

Hector's struggle in the Trojan War is amusingly parodied by Ackroyd. Making use of parody, Ackroyd entertainingly involves the reader in his questioning of heroism.

Ackroyd takes his questioning of heroism and parody to the extreme as his hero sets his sights not only on being a hero and a god but also on a goddess. In chapter 19, Obermann organizes an expedition to Mount Ida, 'the place where the seed of all Troy's woes was sown [...] [and] Athene, Aphrodite, and Hera contested for the golden apple?' (2007, p. 173). It is the story of the judgement of Paris in Greek mythology. Aphrodite, Hera, and Athena, the three most beautiful deities of Olympus, compete for the reward of a golden apple addressed 'To the Fairest'. The event where Paris has to choose between Aphrodite, Athena, and Hera for who is the fairest and most attractive is known as The Judgement of Paris. He decides on Aphrodite since she promises to give him Helene, the most beautiful woman, as his wife, which results in the kidnapping of Helene and triggers a series of occasions that brings about the Trojan War. Obermann, obsessed with storytelling, Homer, and Greek mythology, tells the story as such:

> There is always truth in these ancient stories. Athene appeared to Paris in shining armour and promised him supreme wisdom if he awarded the prize to her. Hera appeared in all the majesty of her royal state, and promised him wealth and power. Aphrodite approached him with the enchanted girdle around her waist, and promised him a bride as beautiful as herself. (2007, p. 174)

Obermann, looking at the ruins of Troy, which was destroyed out of the relationship between Paris and Helene, copies this famous story in a way that can be considered as a foreshadowing of the relationship between his wife, Sophia, and Thornton. In Obermann's story, Sophia takes the place of Paris, and the goddesses are replaced by Obermann himself, Thornton, and the priest Harding. The prize is a marble head. Obermann says to Sophia: 'Sophia, you must choose between us and award it to the most deserving [...] We will line up before you. Mr. Harding is the most devout. I am the most adventurous. Mr. Thornton—well, he is the most handsome' (2007, p. 182). They are in front of the three alder trees, and the full moon gives them the appearance of soundless and unmoving figures of marble for a brief moment. Between them and Sophia, the sculptured head is on the ground. With this parody of the celebrated Greek legend, Acroyd changes the roles of men and women, inflicting quite a wound on male-oriented heroism.

At the end of the novel, like a typical epic hero, Obermann dies and a funeral ceremony is organized for him. This burial also reminds many attentive readers of Beowulf's famous burial. Beowulf fights a monster to save his country despite his advancing age and pursuant to the heroic paradox, which requires living and dying heroically and finally becoming immortal, and dies in a heroic manner. A unique kind of burial worthy of Beowulf's glory is arranged. In accordance with tradition, Beowulf is placed in a pyre prepared for him and burned. His ashes, with smoke reaching the sky, are placed in the mausoleum. Nobles and his people gather around the funeral in great mourning:

> The Geat people built a pyre for Beowulf,
> stacked and decked it until it stood foursquare,
> hung with helmets, heavy war-shields
> and shining armor, just as he had ordered.
> Then his warriors laid him in the middle of it,
> mourning a lord far-famed and beloved.
> On a height they kindled the hugest of all
> funeral fires; fumes of woodsmoke
> billowed darkly up, the blaze roared
> and drowned out their weeping, wind died down
> and flames wrought havoc in the hot bone-house,
> burning it to the core. (2006, lines 3137-3148)

The death of our hero Obermann is very sudden but similar to the story of Paris and Helen, it is all because of a woman. Realizing that what her husband is telling her is just stories that have nothing to do with reality, Sophia elopes with Thornton. Obermann, who is chasing after them, is struck by his own horse, Pegasus, which his son Telemachus rides and causes his death. Following this abrupt death scene, the novel comes to an end with the funeral of Obermann in Troy just like the funeral of Beowulf at the end of Beowulf. Sophia decides that Obermann should be buried in Troy, to which he devoted his life:

> The men and women who had worked at the excavations lined up in two processional rows, between which Obermann was carried to a great mound placed in the center of the palace courtyard. The pyre was constructed of wood and cloths soaked with naphtha, upon which Leonid, Thornton and Kadri Bey placed the body [...] Leonid then lit the pyre with a flaming brand. The cloths and the wood burned quickly, and Obermann was enveloped in flame. The constant wind had dropped. The watchers remained silent as a thin column of smoke rose towards the cloudless sky. (2007, p. 215)

Like Beowulf, Obermann's corpse is placed on a pyre and burned. This is a form of death attributed to heroes as an Anglo-Saxon tradition. A structure, typically made of wood, known as a funeral pyre, is used to burn a body as part of a funeral ritual or execution. A body is put on or underneath the pyre, which is subsequently lit on fire, to perform the cremation. The term "pyre" (the anglicized form of the Greek word for fire) is also used to refer to the altar flames that were used to burn animal sacrifice portions as an offering to the gods in ancient Greek religion. Funeral pyres were also used in Germanic and Roman culture (Fernando, 2006). In line with the parody, Obermann is accompanied on his last journey by simple clothes, not by magnificent shields or helmets. Also, it's not a dragon that kills him, but a simple horse. However, Obermann's ashes, like Beowulf, reach the sky with the easing of the wind. That is how the funeral scene of Obermann transforms into a parody of the funeral of Beowulf. Thus, the immortal heroes Beowulf, Archilles, and Hector become fictitious characters whose heroism is questioned in the story of Acroyd and his hero Obermann, where harmless horses replace the fierce beasts with which the heroes fight and heroically die. By doing so, it needs hardly mention that Ackroyd takes his side and prefers the real over the ideal in the undying dispute of the literary realm.

Final Remarks

While it is questioned from time to time, heroism is an inevitable part of history and literature due to its vital role in real life. Heroes are essential components of stories because they give readers a major figure who embodies virtue, morality, courage, and strength. Readers grow to trust and identify with them. The classic stories, epics in particular, provide readers with an illustration of a morally upright person they can aspire to be like, a role model to imitate. In *The Fall of Troy*, Ackroyd playfully centers on heroism and hero worship which has existed ever since antiquity and turned into a religion in the Victorian period. Not only Victorians but copious writers stick to this concept of heroism and accordingly to a certain definition of a hero, creating a heroic literary tradition dating back to classic literature transforming heroes into the messiahs of literary texts. Today, the concept of heroism, which is often mentioned with war, can be read as a metanarrative since it reflects the ideology of the powerful group, as it has recently manifested in the Ukraine-Russia war. If we pay regard to the fact that World War I could have ended much earlier, but that it was continued for years in line with the

interests of those in power and cost the lives of countless people, and that perhaps the most significant motive for continuing the war was heroism, heroism appears as a very well-told, influential and everlasting metanarrative.

In *The Fall of Troy*, Acroyd dwells on heroism as if to prove Lyotard's definition of postmodernism as incredulity toward metanarratives. In parallel with the theories of Hutcheon and White, Ackroyd pictures the questioning point of view of postmodernism against history writing in the framework of heroism. In this context, Ackroyd foregrounds that both history and history writing are man-made and fictional in which the border between history and storytelling, and fact and fiction are removed. Ackroyd depicts an archaeologist who substitutes stories for scientific knowledge and believes in imagination over science. To Obermann- a half-real character-, a parody of the 19th-century German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, archaeology is a matter of instinct and Homer's *The Iliad* is a historical document. It is also important that as the subject of his novel, Ackroyd chose the story of Troy, which is a cult in both history and literature, through which he aptly questions the accuracy of historical facts while emphasizing the narrative structure of history. By Ackroyd's story of (re)construction and questioning of heroism, the reader is introduced to Obermann, an unconventional hero- ugly, clumsy, tricky, undignified- put against traditional heroes- handsome, honest, strong, dignified- and heroism. Although Ackroyd's favor is almost apparent, it is unquestionably up to the reader to choose between the ideal and the real, especially regarding those heroes in literature.

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