Judy Rivera-van Schagen
Harold Washington College
jrivera-vanschagen@ccc.edu

Introduction to Literature: Hero and Anti Hero

In this course, we will explore our responses to different works of literature by pursuing the theme of the hero and anti-hero. We will attempt, for example, to answer the following questions: Who is a hero? How or when does a person behave heroically? Do morals and values influence heroic behavior? Does the social, economic, or cultural context of a person affect his or her heroic behavior? The course's primary aim is to better students' understanding of how literature works to elicit a response from the reader, be it emotional or ideological. Classroom discussion, group work, and performance will help develop students' critical ability to read and to write about literature in new and meaningful ways.

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Overview of the Course

Texts

The following texts are read in this course:

> Euripides, *Medea*
> *Beowulf*
> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*
> Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Janet E. Gardner, *Writing about Literature: A Portable Guide*

Theme

The theme of this course, hero and anti-hero, lends itself to many different teaching approaches and innumerable choices of textbooks. With this class and theme I am interested in exploring the students' conception of hero and villain and their perception of how society's ideology controls the individual's definition of these terms.

Since individual work and student participation are essential to this class, I assign a certain amount of secondary criticism as a subject for oral presentations. The student must read the work critically and then present it to the class, applying it to a chosen work. For example, the student presenting on feminism can concentrate on how the portrayal of Medea is the direct result of the male author's concept of the "ideal" woman. And the student presenting on Marxism can connect the portrayal and definition of the characters in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to their social and economic condition. Stanley Fish's Reader Response always becomes a favorite when the students realize that they have been already applying a theory to their readings. Stephen Greenblatt's contention that a literary work must be situated within its historical context is also easily understood and accepted.

To exemplify the transcendence of literature and ideological control, I use films as a teaching tool. For example, before we begin discussing the concepts of hero and villain, we watch a movie such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. This movie is particularly helpful because it portrays a hero who is very "human." Indiana Jones is very much afraid of snakes, a condition that, as the students point out, enables the viewer relate to him as person. Indy is, after all, a person and not a superhero. Similarly, before we discuss *Beowulf*, we watch a movie such as *Mission Impossible* (any movie of this type will actually do) to analyze how the "hero" is actually a construction dependent on society's needs.

After reading and evaluating different works of fiction and nonfiction, the students arrive at a more encompassing definition of "hero": the anti-hero. The anti-hero is neither an absolutely virtuous or villainous individual; the anti-hero is instead an individual who is able to behave heroically if the need arises.

Problems

The main problem in teaching this class is the students' hesitancy and reluctance to engage with the texts because they feel the works are completely disconnected from their own experience. The solution lies in the teacher's ability to help students "abstract the universal from the particular," as Professor Gans aptly notes. In this case, I find that I can ease these feelings of disconnection in several ways:

- By exploring Fish's contention that meaning is created by the engagement of the text and the reader, and that in such an engagement all meanings are equally valid.

- By exploring ideological control. Our epistemological constructs are the result of time and space, so what and who we are, what we know, whom we know, for example, have an important effect on how we "read" the texts. Spence's work is helpful in getting the students to understand how their conceptions and misconceptions are created and how they can be altered.

- By reading the texts closely. Close reading can be done for the first two texts, but usually most students will not need this help to read the third and subsequent texts.

Rationale for the Choice of Texts

As already mentioned, the theme of hero and anti-hero lends itself to multiple interpretations and choices of books. What I find necessary is that the students understand and accept the historical "contextualization" of the works and their characters. What I mean is that students must understand and accept first that all works develop from specific historical situations, and second that although the works develop in contexts that are different and even alien to the students, these works are "valid" representations of the human experience and not simply works of fiction lacking a meaningful connection with them. Medea, for example, invariably meets a negative reaction from the students, who seem unable to contextualize her actions outside a twenty-first-century perspective. After situating Medea within her own historical context, however, their awareness of her limitations in a society where she has meaning only in relation to a man helps them evaluate, in a more just and unbiased manner, her actions and her need to punish Jason in the most symbolic and harmful way.

Although *Beowulf* is received in a more positive manner, Beowulf the character is often also "decontextualized." The students tend to see him as pompous and "full of himself" (a comment made by one of my students). By "recontextualizing" the character, the students can appreciate the importance of Beowulf's actions: his need to demonstrate and even to boast about his physical ability serve as his "calling card" or his "resume" that ensure the trust of both the king and his men. Those around him must believe in Beowulf's ability to combat and destroy the evil represented by Grendel and Grendel's mother.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is an excellent choice for the study of the hero/anti-hero concept; students tend to like the poem because they find Gawain's heroic actions engaging. My class explores issues of morality, values, and their relation to Christianity within a context of chivalry. But the text, like the others chosen, lends itself to many other explorations.

Gulliver's Travels requires close reading so that the satire of Jonathan Swift can be truly appreciated. Such close reading enable the students, most of whom were introduced to Gulliver via children books, to see Gulliver as Swift's vehicle for his criticism of the English society of his time. The recontextualizing of this work is therefore imperative. Often, if not always, Gulliver's self-proclaimed "heroic" actions are not seen as such by the students.

With regard to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, situating Janie Crawford within a racial, sexist, and "classist" context helps the students understand as such the obstacles she experiences, even when these obstacles are wrapped up in a loving mantle, as is the case of Janie's grandmother (and her first two husbands).

In conclusion, any class that relies on the Great Books for content must develop historically. Some knowledge of the time and place in which the works were created is essential; this historical contextualization of the works must serve as the co-text necessary for the understanding of the primary text.

Secondary Sources

I use secondary sources for two reasons: they provide the material for oral presentations, and they help students expand their own ideas on free will vs. ideological control. Students must be clear on

and be willing to accept that their definition of the concept of hero (and anti-hero) is the result of their internalization of society's ideology.

The authors of theory and criticism referred to in this course may include the following:

- Aristotle, *Poetics*
- Gerry Spence, "Easy in the Harness: The Tyranny of Freedom"
- T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"
- Reader Response
  - Stanley Fish
- New Historicism
  - Stephen Greenblatt
- Feminism
  - Mary Wallstonecraft
  - Virginia Woolf
  - Simone de Beauvoir
  - Kate Millet
  - Elaine Showalter
- Post-Colonialism
  - Edward Said
  - Frantz Fanon
- Marxism
  - Karl Marx

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Coursework

1. *Dialogal journal.* You will be required to keep a journal on the readings assigned; in this journal you will explore any aspect of the work you choose. You will then exchange the journal with a classmate to receive a critical response from him or her. You, in turn, will do the same to either her or his response or to any other aspect of the original response. You and your partner can pursue an issue as long as you wish, or until you both come to a satisfactory conclusion; you can then move on to explore and discuss other issues related to other works. I will also suggest specific issues I would like you to explore with your partner. This journal is worth 150 points.

2. *Analysis papers.* You will be asked to write two 5–8 page double-spaced papers analyzing any aspect of one of the works read for class. You will have to prepare a draft of the paper that will receive comments from your peers during group work. Drafts must be turned in when they are due or your final grade will be lowered. Drafts, like all works done outside class, must be typed. These papers will be graded holistically; that is, I will take content, structure, and creativity into consideration when I grade them. These papers are worth 300 points.

3. *Oral presentation.* You will make a presentation to the class on material provided by me. The presentation will be based on your analysis of a writer's contention on the work of fiction that we will be discussing at the time. I will provide a handout with further explanation at least two weeks

before your presentation, so that you may have ample time to prepare effectively. This presentation is worth 100 points.

4. *Midterm exam.* This exam consists of a short essay responding to one of several prompts addressing the works read up to mid-semester. The midterm exam is worth 125 points**.**

5. *Final exam.* The final exam also consists of a short essay responding to prompts addressing the works read from mid-semester to the end of the semester. The final exam is worth 125 points.

6. *Quizzes and exercises.* To ensure you keep up with the reading, I will give unannounced quizzes throughout the semester; quizzes and exercises cannot be made up. These quizzes and exercises are worth 100 points.

7. *Attendance and participation.* Attendance is not only mandatory but also essential for the successful completion of this course. You are allowed to miss two classes without penalty, but after four absences your grade will be lowered one-third of a letter grade. I will also expect you to come prepared to discuss the work assigned for each class. Finally, when the need arises, I will assign some short works to be completed as homework. Attendance and participation are worth 100 points.

These grading criteria are summarized below:

Journal	150 points
Analysis papers	300 points
Oral presentation	100 points
Midterm exam	125 points
Final exam	125 points
Quizzes and exercises	100 points
Attendance and participation	100 points
	_____
	1,000 points

Final grades assigned have the following values:

A	900–1000 points
B	800–890 points
C	700–790 points
D	600–690 points
F	0–590 points

Policies

Format. Essays should follow the traditional format; i.e., they should have a restricted and specific thesis, with paragraphs supporting it and a well-developed conclusion. All works written for the class must also follow the Modern Language Association (MLA) format. Note: In fairness to those students who turn in their work on time and to ensure that works will be returned on time, late papers will be deducted one-third of a letter grade.

Drafts. All works must be typed and double-spaced. I will not accept any handwritten work except that done in class. You will turn in drafts for all papers at specific times. These drafts will receive comments and suggestions from both your peers and me during assigned workshops. Drafts do not receive a grade, but the final grade will be lowered one-third of letter grade if the draft is not turned in when is due.

You are responsible for all works covered in class during your absences. I will post all materials discussed in class online, so there will never be a time when you are unaware of what is expected of you. Absences, then, are not excuses for not turning in any work due on the time of the absence.

Punctuality is important for this class; lateness interrupts the class and demonstrates a lack of concern and respect for your peers. Lateness, like absences, will affect your grade; four tardies will constitute one absence.

Class participation. This class is based on collaborative effort; therefore, it is important that you participate in an active, meaningful, and consistent way. Participation includes

- *Discussion.* You must come to class prepared to discuss the reading for the day. Discussing the reading will be a natural process if you read the work critically; that is, by asking questions that will lead to more questions and eventually content, by taking notes as the work is read, and by making connections to other readings.

- *Peer work.* You will often be working in groups, so you will be asked to respond carefully, conscientiously, and kindly to your peers' work, providing both oral and written feedback.

- *Daily work.* You must complete daily assignments promptly. Some of these assignments may be take-home assignments, and others will be done in class.

Conferences. I will gladly meet with you if and when you feel you need such engagement. Please note the office hours that record the times I will be free to meet with you. You should always feel free to come to me to discuss any problem with which I can help you.

Note on deadlines. You are responsible for everything that occurs in class and for meeting all deadlines. Late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade and will be accepted no later than one week past the due date. Please come and talk to me if you are experiencing any problem that might prevent you from completing the work by the assigned time.

Academic integrity policy. Academic dishonesty is unacceptable. All students are expected to accept the responsibility for academic integrity and honesty. Plagiarism is manifested in many ways, including (but not limited to) the misuse of source materials; submitting a paper that wholly or in part uses the exact phrasing of source material; submitting a paper that is closely paraphrased from source material; and submitting a paper written by another person. Any plagiarized work will receive an "F" for its final grade.

Syllabus

Week One
Introduction to the course
Discussion: Thinking critically; ideological control
Reading: Gerry Spence's "Easy in the Harness: The Tyranny of Freedom" (handout)

Week Two
Discussion: Reading critically; drama as literature
Reading: T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (handout)

Week Three
Discussion: The tragic vision
Reading: *Medea.* Points to consider: Is Medea a hero? Anti-hero? Why? Is Jason a hero? Why? Why not? Why aren't Jason's actions critiqued in such a negative manner as are Medea's? Consider also motherhood as an institution used to perpetuate the gender roles that keep society "working." Does motherhood empower women? Men? Does it objectify them?
Discussion: Reading critically
Reading: *Medea*; and *Writing about Literature*, chapters 1 and 7

Week Four
Discussion: Reading critically
Reading: *Medea*; and *Writing about Literature*, chapters 2 and 6
Discussion: The comic vision: Origin of comedy, patterns, characters, and language
Reading: *Writing about Literature,* chapter 3, pp. 38–41
Begin film

Week Five
Continue film
PAPER ON DRAMA DUE
Discussion: Reading and writing about poetry: The nature of poetry
Reading: *Beowulf.* Some points and questions to ponder as you read the poem. Is Beowulf a hero? And if so, what traits of the hero does he possess? Ponder on the following points (for both Beowulf and Grendel's mother), but do not let them limit your reading:
- Physical and mental strength
- Journey theme as a right of passage
- Commitment and determination
- Strong enemies
- Relationship with the law, with men, and with women

Week Six
Discussion: Reading poetry: Diction
Reading: *Beowulf*; and *Writing about Literature*, chapter 5, and review chapter 7
Discussion: Reading poetry: Imagery
Reading: *Beowulf*
JOURNALS DUE

Week Seven
Discussion: Reading poetry: Figures of speech
Reading: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*
Discussion: Reading poetry: Tone, symbolism and allusion, and myths
Reading: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Week Eight
Reading: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*
Review for midterm exam
MIDTERM EXAM

Week Nine
Conferences

Week Ten
Conferences
PAPER ON POETRY DUE

Week Eleven
Discussion: Reading and writing about fiction: Why study literature?
Reading: *Gulliver's Travels*: "A Voyage to Lilliput"
Discussion: Reading fiction: Plot and structure, characters
Reading: "A Voyage to Lilliput"; and *Writing about Literature*, chapter 4, and review chapter 7

Week Twelve
Discussion: Reading fiction: Setting and point of view
Reading: *Gulliver's Travels*: "A Voyage to Brobdingnag"
Discussion: Reading fiction: Tone and style
Reading: "A Voyage to Brobdingnag"
JOURNALS DUE

Week Thirteen
Discussion: Reading fiction: Symbolism and allegory
Reading: *Gulliver's Travels*: "A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms"; and Eugene August's
  "The Only Happy Ending: Divine Comedies in Western Literature" (handout)
Discussion: Reading fiction: Theme
Reading: "A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms"

Week Fourteen
Discussion: Reading critically
Reading: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Discussion: Reading critically
Their Eyes Were Watching God
Film

Week Fifteen
Reading: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Film
PAPER ON FICTION DUE

Week Sixteen
JOURNALS AND PORTFOLIOS DUE
FINAL EXAM

Course Guidelines

Analysis Papers

For each of these two papers, you will write a 5–8 page, double-spaced analysis of any work studied in this course. Each paper should support a main point, or thesis, with analysis of selected passages and quotes (though quotes should constitute no more than 20 percent of your paper). The purpose of the analysis is not merely to summarize the work, but rather to make an argument or present a persuasive interpretation with a main point, supporting reasons, and evidence. This is not to say that you should not include a description of the story; indeed, you will discover the necessity of including a description of relevant parts of the story to be analyzed. But you must go beyond a description, and demonstrate through analysis that you are engaged in critical thinking. Review chapters 6 and 7 of *Writing about Literature* for more help with the writing and research process. The only requirement for each of these papers is that you must consult, analyze, and include at least three secondary sources; these may be theories like the ones discussed in class, or literary criticism of the work chosen.

The elements to concentrate on are:

- MLA format and documentation
- Thesis statement
- Topic sentences (very important for the coherence of the paper)
- Transitional words and phrases
- Pronoun reference
- No second-person or first-person plural

Grading Criteria for Papers

Organization: Structure of the essay (one-third of the grade)
- Is the thesis clear?
- Does the thesis govern the paper?
- Has the paper been adequately introduced?
- Is the reasoning clear and correct?
- Are the connections between evidence and ideas clear?
- Are ideas in logical order?

Content: Substance and development of the essay (one-third of the grade)
- Is the length appropriate?
- Is the response appropriate?
- Is the response knowledgeable?
- Do sufficient details, examples, or other data support the points?
- Are terms clearly defined?

Mechanics: Writing effectiveness (one-third of the grade)
- Is the vocabulary appropriate?
- Are the sentences complete, clear, and correct?

- Does the prose conform to Standard American English?
- Is the punctuation correct?
- Do internal citations and Works Cited documentation comply with the MLA format?

Grading Standards for Papers

Grades for any piece of writing may range from A to F and are based on content, context, mechanics, and documentation.

The *A paper* shows originality of thought in stating and developing a central idea. The ideas are clear, logical, and thought-provoking. The paper exhibits the positive qualities of good writing: (1) careful construction and organization of sentences, paragraphs, and the piece of writing as a whole; (2) good choice of words and phrases; (3) clear concentration on a main purpose, with clear, concrete development and firm, relevant support; and (4) virtually no mechanical errors.

The *B paper* has a clearly stated central purpose, logically and adequately developed. Its ideas are clear because it contains some of the positive qualities of good writing: (1) good construction and organization of sentences, paragraphs, and the piece of writing as a whole; (2) good choice of words and phrases; and (3) concentration on a main purpose, with good development and strong support. Although indicating above-average consistency, the B paper lacks the excellence of thought, development, and style which characterizes the A paper.

The *C paper* has a reasonably clear central purpose which receives fairly adequate development and support. It is satisfactorily organized and avoids serious errors in the use of English. It, in fact, has few correction marks on it, but it lacks the quality of thought, development, and expression which would entitle it to an above-average rating.

The *D paper* indicates below-average achievement in expressing ideas correctly and effectively. It usually does not present a central purpose with sufficient clarity and completeness. It may also lack adequate development and support, and fail to present a clear pattern or *organization*. It usually contains some serious errors in the use of English. With more careful proofreading, a better statement of the central purpose, more adequate development, and better support and organization, some D papers might become C papers.

The *F paper* usually lacks a central purpose and is minimally developed or supported. It includes serious errors in grammar, usage, spelling, and sentence structure. The following are some of the weaknesses that characterize F-caliber writing: (1) lack of central purpose; (2) inadequate development; (3) inadequate or unclear support; (4) lack of organization; (5) inadequate or illogical paragraphing; (6) sentence faults; (7) misspelled words; (8) lack of subject-verb agreement; (9) faulty use of tense; (10) misrelated modifiers; and (11) lack of antecedent-pronoun agreement.

Sample Quiz Prompts

Quizzes are normally a one-page response to one prompt. Answer one of the following prompts using *clear, well-organized, and standard prose*. Write as legibly as you can, *double spacing* your answers and writing *only on one side* of the paper. Think *critically* for a few minutes before writing.

1. Discuss how Medea may or may not be considered a hero. You must keep the historical context and the class's definition of the hero as you formulate your response.

2. Arguing that the tragic mode is not reserved only for "the kings or the kingly," Arthur Miller said that "the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were" since, as modern psychiatry proves by basing many of its theories and paradigms on classic examples such as Oedipus, situations experienced by "royal beings . . . apply to everyone in similar emotional situations." Discuss by way of examples how Aristotle and Miller differ or agree on their contentions about tragedy and the tragic hero.

3. Using some of the definitions presented by the class, discuss how Gulliver's apparent colonizing ways make him a hero or an anti-hero.

4. Discuss and explain how understanding the historical context of the poem helps to define Beowulf as a true hero.

5. Aristotle says that a good character must be appropriate. A character, he says, "may be, say, manly; but it is not appropriate in a female character to be manly, or clever." What would he say of Medea? Is she an appropriate character? Is Jason?

6. According to Arthur Miller, what makes a tragic hero truly heroic is his struggle "to gain his rightful position in his society." Choose any of the works read and discuss how the hero meets or does not meet Miller's contention on the tragic hero.

7. How may Janie Crawford's killing of Tea Cakes be considered heroic? Discuss while providing examples.

Response to Readings

Your response to the reading(s) in the course, although often open-ended, subjective, and based on your relation with the text, should demonstrate analytical and critical thought and writing; that is, it should show that you are reflecting on the reading(s) and exploring such reflection. For example, does the reading confuse you? How does it do so? Consider your reflection in any way you choose, but a way that shows logical thinking. Focus on any aspect of literature; for example, character, theme, setting, etc., but do so systematically, and follow whatever the line of thought you choose to a logical conclusion.

- Read with an open mind. Be receptive to new ideas and avoid being too quick to judge, to reject, etc., because you may be preventing yourself from experiencing what the work has to offer.

- Read the story more than once. Look for ideas, details, and words that you may have overlooked the first time.

- Use your imagination. Actively engage with the characters, setting, etc. Put yourself in the place of the narrator.

- Allow your feelings to play a part in the reading. Respond with your feelings as well as with your mind.

- Try to see the story as a whole. Examine its parts as important components of the unit.

- Examine your reactions. Were you confused? Why? Were you appalled? Why? What standards or expectations did you bring to the reading?

- Talk to other readers. Use their reactions, confusion, and questions as learning tools. Explore your readings with others.

Oral Presentation Guidelines

The purpose of these reports is to present the class with critical works addressing different aspects of the texts we will be reading throughout the semester. We will read and present these materials for two reasons: to be exposed to the ideas different people have on the texts, and to have subjects for the analysis of rhetorical devices. Because these secondary sources are important for the understanding of the primary texts and for the development of critical reading, you must make the author's ideas as clear as possible to your audience that has not read the work.

When you are assigned a secondary work to report on, read the work as soon as possible. Read it critically; read it more than once and prepare a report on it.

Work out the essay's (or the theory's) thesis. That is, in one sentence, summarize what the essay is about. Then begin breaking down the essay into its major points—as well as any minor points that may be especially pertinent to this class. You must discover and describe the author's attitude in the essay. Analyze how any major ideas are supported or argued in the essay.

From this analysis, prepare a brief report for the class. The report should be between 10 and 15 minutes in length *at the most*. Usually it is best to work from notes, rather than to read a fully written out essay to the class. In most case, these oral reports will serve as an entry into additional discussion. You need to prepare your own observations, reactions, or questions to follow the oral report. Be prepared for questions from the class and the instructor.

You must provide the class with a handout of your report. This handout must adhere to the following format (makes sure you provide the title of the work):

- Brief (one-paragraph) biographical information on the author (if applicable)

- Summary of the work to be discussed (one paragraph)

- Discuss or call attention to your insights into this text. Focus on an important quote or a pivotal passage that highlights a central theme, issue, or conflict in the piece.

- Provide textual (or artistic) links with other critical works, or show the work's application to poems, stories, books, films, or artwork.

You may decide to use a traditional format where you talk for the whole time; *however, you must involve the class in a meaningful way*. Keep your time restrictions in mind. Class participation can be

anything from: a crossword puzzle based on key words from your presentation, a true/false or fill-in-the-blank quiz, or asking for examples of works to which the critical perspective can be applied.

You will receive (usually at the next class) a check-sheet indicating your performance on the oral report assignment. The check-sheet will list the following items:

- Thoroughness: Were all the main ideas included?

- Accuracy: Was the information in the report correct?

- Clarity: (1) Was the language of the report clear, and (2) was the speech of the presentation clearly audible, that is, how were volume, pace, and enunciation?

- Unity: Was the thesis clear, were the major points emphasized, was the report well organized, and did it hang together as a unit?

- Handout: It should be clear enough to help the understanding of the report.

Aristotle and the Nature of Tragedy

Since we will be discussing and analyzing our concept of the hero/anti-hero, we must also discuss and analyze Aristotle's concept of the tragic hero. Aristotle composed the first treatise on poetry (literature), establishing the rules that critics follow today. In his famous work *Poetics*, he establishes his concept of literature and how it affects and is affected by reality. Aristotle defines tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions."

Tragedy, to Aristotle, is beneficial for the society because of its *cathartic* effects. Tragedy effects feelings of pity and fear in the viewers, therefore purging such feelings from them.

To Aristotle, plot, the most important element of tragedy, develops in certain steps including:

1. *Representation of an action* (*mimesis*). An imitation of a real-life event which, necessarily, must reflect the moral role of the writer. This mimesis consist of "self-contained single action"; that is, it must deal only with those events and actions that concern the tragic hero.

2. *Reversal, recognition, and suffering.* These major elements of tragedy "occur near the conclusion of the tragic play because they are necessary and probable results of the early elements of exposition and complication."

- *Reversal* (*peripeteia*): from good to bad, or a change.

- *Recognition*: "a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune" In some tragedies the reversal and recognition occur together, producing surprise.

- *Suffering* (*pathos*): "a destructive or painful action, such as death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds, and the like." This "destructive or painful action," according to Aristotle, should be caused by "those who are near or dear to one another."

Some Traditional Characteristics of Tragedy according to Aristotle

1. The action—or the condition of the tragic person—moves from good fortune to bad fortune, from an exalted state to a fallen state, from honor to dishonor. The tragic action ends in catastrophe.

2. The tragic person is neither a saint nor a villain, but a person who combines good and bad, admirable and despicable, heroic and foolish qualities. If anything, the tragic person involves the whole community in some way.

3. The tragic person commits some error or has a flaw in his or her character. Sometimes, the error and the flaw are inextricably connected.

4. Traditionally, the flaw of the tragic person is *hubris*, an arrogant pride that leads the tragic person to think of himself as something of a god, as someone who is above and better than other mortals.

5. Tragic action arouses pity and fear, and it purges these emotions.

6. Although it may contain comic or humorous elements, tragedy is marked by high seriousness, almost solemnity.

Aristotle on Character

In the Characters there are four points to aim at. First and foremost, that they shall be good. There will be an element of character in the play, if (as has been observed) what a personage says or does reveals a certain moral purpose; and a good element of character, if the purpose so revealed is good. Such goodness is possible in every type of personage, even in a woman or a slave, though the one is perhaps an inferior, and the other a wholly worthless being. The second point is to make them appropriate. The Character before us may be, say, manly; but it is not appropriate in a female Character to be manly, or clever. The third is to make them like the reality, which is not the same as their being good and appropriate, in our sense of the term. The fourth is to make them consistent and the same throughout . . . (Aristotle, *Poetics*)

Characteristics of Divine Comedies

1. Divine comedies possess the traditional comic action that moves from bad fortune to good fortune, from catastrophe to harmony.

2. The opening catastrophe of a divine comedy always involves an estrangement between the human and the divine; the final harmony always involves a reconciliation between the human and the divine.

3. Tragedy achieves its effect by arousing, then, purging, fear and pity; divine comedy arouses similar feelings, but it achieves its own effect by a reversal which transforms them into relief and joy—relief

in the knowledge that life's tragic possibilities can sometimes be avoided, and joy in the knowledge that suffering, although it must be endured, can be transcended.

4. Although the tragic hero and the divine comic hero resemble each other in that neither is preeminently virtuous or villainous, the tragic hero is initially marked as being fortunate in rank, intelligence, abilities, or in some other way, while the divine comic hero is initially marked as being unfortunate, as enduring exile or some other adversity.

     Tragedy presents its hero as a great person who makes a mistake or is flawed; divine comedy presents its hero as a flawed or unfortunate person who achieves greatness. The tragic hero falls from an eminence that is seen as godlike; the divine comic hero rises to an eminence that is truly godlike.

5. The traditional failing of tragic heroes is hubris, or an arrogant pride stemming from a belief that they are more than mortal and can behave accordingly; the principal virtue of divine comic heroes is a humbled awareness of their human limitations. (Walter Kaufmann's term "humbition" may serve to describe this quality.) Paradoxically, by recognizing their humanity, divine comic heroes achieve godlikeness.

6. The divine comic hero is marked by an ability to suffer, to endure a kind of death, and to be reborn.

7. Often the divine comic hero's rise to godlikeness is aided or mediated by a guide, companion, or mentor. This character is sometimes a person of the opposite sex who embodies the wisdom which the hero seeks, thereby suggesting a reconciliation of gender opposites as a means to godlikeness. Even when the mentor or guide is a person of the same sex, this character nevertheless possesses wisdom which the hero lacks.

8. Most tragedies and divine comedies share a similarity of tone: although humorous elements may exist in these works, the dominant tone of both tragedies and divine comedies is a serious one.

(Source: Eugene R. August, "The Only Happy Ending: Divine Comedies in Western Literature")

Literary Terms

1. *Character*: The representation of a person in a play, short story, novel, or poem.
    o *Flat character*: Character with a one-dimensional personality or who represents a stereotype.
    o *Round character*: Character who exhibits a realistically complex combination of traits, including mixed emotions, conflicting motivations, and divided loyalties.
        ▪ *Protagonist*: Lead actor or principal figure in a work of literature.
        ▪ *Antagonist*: Opponent or counterforce who sets up a central conflict in a play or story.
    o *Foil*: Character who reflects traits the main character lacks.

2. *Genre*: A type or category used to classify discourse and literary works; how literary works are grouped together according to form, technique, or subject matter.
    a. *Fiction*: Any narrative in prose or verse that is wholly or in part a product of the writer's imagination. The essence of fiction is narration. The different types of fiction include:
        o Novels
        o Short Stories
        o Romances
        o Parables
        o Myths
    b. *Nonfiction prose*: Works that are not solely the product of the writer's imagination but of evidence. They include:
        o Works of criticism
        o News reports
        o Historical and biographical works
        o Creative nonfiction
        o Diaries and journals
        o Fictionalized biographies
    c. *Drama*: Any literary work designed to be performed; its essence is the development of character and situation through speech and action.
    d. *Poetry*: a wide variety of spoken and written forms, styles, and patterns.

3. *Image*: Any concrete detail that speaks directly and vividly to our senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch and not just a vivid visual impression.

4. *Irony*: Humorous effect produced when an overt or surface meaning is negated by a different meaning representing the writer's or the speaker's true intentions.
    a. *Verbal irony*: A deliberate contrast between what is said and what is meant.
    b. *Irony of situation*: A contrast between what the reader expects to happen and what really happens, especially when the reader should have known better (dramatic irony).

5. *Plot*: According to Aristotle: the arrangement of events. "A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end . . . A well constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end haphazardly, but conform to these principles."
   Stages of plot:
      o Exposition
      o Conflict
      o Rising action
      o Crisis/climax
      o Falling action
      o Resolution/conclusion

6. *Point of view*: Perspective from which the reader sees the events of a story; the angle from which a story is told. The types of point of view include:
   a. *First-person point of view*: One of the characters narrates the story, seeing and knowing only what the individual can observe from his or her limited point of view.
   b. *Third-person omniscient point of view*: The writer may write as an "all-seeing" author, knowing not only the behavior but also the private thoughts and feelings of the characters.
   c. *Third-person objective*: The writer acts as the impartial observer, offering little or no editorial comment.

7. *Setting*: Place and time of the story, often providing more than a mere backdrop for the action of a story or play. Setting can be the social, political, historical, religious, and physical context of the story.

8. *Structure*: The arrangement the writer chooses for the development of the story's plot.

9. *Style*: The writer's unmistakably personal way of using language and words, thereby giving shape to a work of literature.

10. *Symbol*: An object or action that has acquired a meaning beyond itself. Traditional symbols carry a range of familiar associations (e.g., snow for purity), but the writers may develop their own language of private symbols that readers have to respond to and decode. There are two types of symbols: universal/cultural and contextual.

11. *Theme*: The recurring, unifying subject, idea, or motif of a literary work. More specifically and pointedly, the term "theme" may stand for the answer that a literary work as a whole seems to give to the questions it raises. Most contemporary writers refuse to "spell out" a thematic message, preferring instead to let readers ponder implied or suggested meanings.

12. *Tone*: The human quality or emotional connotations that reveal the writer's attitude toward the subject and toward the reader. Tone can be lighthearted, frivolous, bitter, gloomy, ironic, etc.

Origins of Old English to 800 AD

Celtic Settlements (Prehistory of England)

According to scholars, the land known as England had been inhabited for 50,000 to 250,000 years before recorded history began. Paleolithic humans inhabited this area when there was no channel separating England from the European mainland. Neolithic humans, the possessors of stone tools, agrarian practices, domesticated animals, and burial practices, lived in this area from around 5000 BC. The Stone Age lasted until around 2000 BC, and the ensuing Bronze Age settlements existed until around 500 BC. The early Celts moved to this area during the last centuries of the Bronze Age and dominated it until the first centuries of the Iron Age (in England).

The Celts lived not only in England but had migrated to most parts of Western Europe by the time of Christ. The Celts never named this area, but Latin writers later referred to it as "Britannia" (island of the Bretons). The Celts concentrated in small groups, lacking the central political unity which is necessary to create an empire. Their language was probably first Gaelic and later Britannic, derived from Welsh, Breton, and Cornish.

Romans in England

Julius Caesar invaded Celtic England in 55 BC and again in 54 BC. His interest was not so much to take over the land as it was to retaliate for the union of the British and the Gallic Celts who had fought him on the Continent. Caesar was not successful in his intention, but he did establish his forces in the southwest. In 43 BC the Romans, under the rule of Emperor Claudius, did make a serious attempt to occupy the land, and did so again between 78 and 85 BC. Agricola, the Roman governor of Britain, took over the southern and midland Celtic area and its people. The Romans never did overcome the Celts of the northern mountains and the western area of Wales. In the second century AD, the northern Celts pushed the Romans south of the Humber River. As a reaction to this setback, Emperor Hadrian had the 73-mile-long "Hadrian's Wall" constructed around 121–27 AD This wall served as defense against the northern Celts and later the Picts.

By the end of the fourth century AD, the Romans rulers were forced to recall their forces from England in order to help defend against the Germanic tribes who had began to infiltrate their homelands. These Germanic tribes were kin to the Teutons who would settle in England around the second half of the fifth century. The Angles, Saxons, and Jutes shared with the Goths, Vandals, Franks, and Danes a Germanic history and culture. These migratory peoples would later challenge the Roman control of western Europe. *These related Germanic cultures are intertwined in <u>Beowulf</u>.*

The Romans left the area around 410, leaving the Romanized British Celts at the mercy of their kinsmen from the north and west. The end of the Roman occupation enabled the Gaelic Scots (Irishmen) from the west and the Britannic Picts from the north to take control of the area and end the Celtic dominance south of the Humber River.

Germanic Occupation

According to the historian Venerable Bede, the Celts asked the Germanic Jutes for help against the Picts and the Scots, offering them the island of Thanet in exchange. The Jutes obliged and, led by the brothers Hengest and Horsa, eventually settled in Kent and the Isle of Wight. *Hengest may be the same person referred to in <u>Beowulf</u>.* The Saxons had settled in Sussex by 477 and in Wessex by 495. *King Arthur, of the Arthurian legend, supposedly helped fight the Saxon advance to the west.*

After the Saxons, the Angles from south Denmark invaded East Anglia and the area between the Humber and Thames rivers. By 547 they had set up another area of dominance in Northumbria. By the fifth century the Saxons and Angles dominated the midland of England, and by the seventh century, the Anglo-Saxons' heptarchy made up the political division of the land later to be named after the Angles—England. This heptarchy consisted of Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia, populated by the Angles; Kent, settled by the Jutes; and Essex, Wessex, and Sussex, controlled by the Saxons.

Originally the name "Anglo-Saxon" referred to the Saxons in England, to differentiate them from those on the Continent; by the sixteenth century, the name referred to both the people and the language of England. By the year 1000, the English people were called "Angul-cynn," race of the Angles. The word "Englisc" predates the term "Englalond," which came into use around 1000.

Christianity in England

The first contact the Celts had with Christianity was through their experience with the Romans during the third century. Some of these people remained Christians even after the Teutons settled in England in the fifth century. In the sixth century, Irish missionaries sent to convert the Scots also introduced Christianity to the Northumbrians. In 597 St. Augustine, a Roman Benedictine monk, was appointed by Pope Gregory I to convert the central and southern lands of England. With the support of King Ethelbert, who had married a Christian Frankish princess and who by the end of the sixth century had become the most powerful ruler of the lands south of the Humber, Augustine began the work that would later win him the title of "Apostle of the English." The conversion of King Ethelbert to Christianity paved the way for Augustine's success; by the end of the seventh century almost all the English had converted, due partly to St. Aidan in the north and Augustine in the south. However, the Anglo-Saxons' Germanic myths and pagan rituals survived beneath the philosophy and theology of Christianity. For example, the terms *wyrd* (fate, doom) and "providence" were hardly distinguishable from each other. *These elements are characteristics of <u>Beowulf</u>.*

"Englisc" Language

During their invasion of England, the Germanic tribes spoke a language that was derived from the common language of the early Teutonic peoples. By the fifth century, the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes spoke separate dialects derived from the common language and were, therefore, able to understand each other; this language is known as *Old English*.

Literature

Being the greatest influence in the formation of Old English, the West Saxon dialect was used to preserve the vernacular literature. Since they relied on oral tradition to maintain their histories, the Germanic tribes, invaders of England, did not keep records. It was not until the advent of Christianity that records began to be maintained; examples of Old English vernacular survived because of this important commitment. The earliest Old English work that exists is King Ethelbert's code of law (ca. 600). The chronological authenticity of Old English works is difficult to establish, since these works are preserved in copies that were composed many years after they were created. *Beowulf*, the earliest and most important of the Germanic epics, was probably created in the oral tradition around the first half of the eighth century (around the same time of the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*).

York and Canterbury were the main centers of learning in England during the late seventh and eighth centuries. The Venerable Bede and Alcuin were from York. The scholars of Canterbury continued their work in Latin and Greek. Cædmon, the first known English poet, became prominent around 670 at the Abbey of Whitby. The well-known poem "Widsith" belongs to this period of Old English (ca. 650–700). The speaker of this poem, the *scop*, is the far traveler who talks about his experience with the Germanic kings and their gifts to him as reward for his talent. The works of this time portray customs and rituals practiced by the Germanic tribes; for example, the tradition of making legal payments for offenses, the *wergild*, or "man-price," was a payment made by the murderer to the slain man's family. *Comitatus*, or "brotherhood of man," was a group whose members vowed allegiance to the chieftain and in return expected his good will; they also believed in the "heroic ideal of excellence" in kingly behavior. But despite heroic ethics, the hero still struggles against forces, natural or supernatural, that are indifferent to his survival, honor, or nobility. This type of literature, as evidenced in *Beowulf*, offered the possibility that dignity could be achieved by demonstrating skill and courage during the pursuit of communal goals.

The Rules of Courtly Love

Andreas Capellanus (Twelfth Century)

Love is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex, which causes each one to wish above all things the embraces of the other and by common desire to carry out all of love's precepts in the other's embrace.

The Rules

I.   Marriage is no real excuse for not loving.
II.   He who is not jealous cannot love.
III.   No one can be bound by a double love.
IV.   It is well known that love is always increasing or decreasing.
V.   That which a lover takes against the will of his beloved has no relish.
VI.   Boys do not love until they arrive at the age of maturity.
VII.   When one love dies, a widowhood of two years is required of the survivor.
VIII.   No one should be deprived of love without the very best of reasons.
IX.   No one can love unless he is impelled by the persuasion of love.
X.   Love is always a stranger in the home of avarice.
XI.   It is not proper to love any woman whom one would be ashamed to seek to   marry.
XII.   A true lover does not desire to embrace in love anyone except his beloved.
XIII.   When made public love rarely endures.
XIV.   The easy attainment of love makes it of little value; difficulty of attainment makes
          it prized.
XV.   Every lover regularly turns pale in the presence of his beloved.
XVI.   When a lover suddenly catches sight of his beloved, his heart palpitates.
XVII.   A new love puts to flight an old one.
XVIII.   Good character alone makes any man worthy of love.

XIX.   If love diminishes, it quickly fails and rarely revives.
XX.   A man in love is always apprehensive.
XXI.   Real jealousy always increases the feeling of love.
XXII.   Jealousy, and therefore love, are increased when one suspects his beloved.
XXIII.   He whom the thought of love vexes eats and sleeps very little.
XXIV.   Every act of a lover ends in the thought of his beloved.
XXV.   A true lover considers nothing good except what he thinks will please his
             beloved.
XXVI.   Love can deny nothing to love.
XXVII.   A lover can never have enough of the solaces of his beloved.
XXVIII   A slight presumption causes a lover to suspect his beloved.
XXIX.   A man who is vexed by too much passion usually does not love.
XXX.   A true lover is constantly and without intermission possessed by the thought of
         his beloved.
XXXI.   Nothing forbids one woman being loved by two men or one man by two women.