# LIT 3101

# LITERATURE OF THE WESTERN WORLD

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**Gerald R. Lucas**
**Fall, 1998 Teaching Schedule**
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| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8:00 am | | CRP-202 | | CRP-202 | |
| 9:00 am | | LIT 3101.001 | | LIT 3101.001 | |
| 10:00 am | | | | | |
| 11:00 am | | Office | | Office | |
| 12:00 pm | | CRP-202 | | CRP-202 | |
| 1:00 pm | | | | | |
| 2:00 pm | CRP-202 | | CRP-202 | | |
| 3:00 pm | | | | | |
| 4:00 pm | | | | | |
| 5:00 pm | Office | | | | |
| 6 - 9 pm | LIT 2010.901 | | | | |

**Additional office hours available by appointment**


*Special Thanks to Silvia Ruffo Fiore*

# INTRODUCTION

**LIT 3101.001 Literature of the Western World I**

**Fall 1998; Tuesday and Thursday 9:30 to 10:45 am; CPR-337**

## COURSE STATEMENT

This course explores the genesis of western literary tradition, and its development through the Renaissance. We will focus on textual studies of the major genres of this period, epic and tragedy, and how those genres influenced later literary works. We will study the these works' continuing contemporary relevance and influence on the history of Continental, British, and American literature, other literary traditions, and the arts in general. Major works covered will include *Gilgamesh*, The Old Testament (excerpts), the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, and works by Sophocles, Ovid, and Dante, among others. Since any survey course has much more literature than one semester-long class can cover, we will attempt to cover only a couple works *very* well, rather than many works only cursorily. Also, this course will *not* address the pertinent British literature of this time; *Beowulf*, *Gawain*, and Chaucer should be studied in your British literature surveys.

## COURSE GOALS

1. To develop and enrich the students' knowledge of early western literature, its cultural, intellectual, philosophical, educational, socio-political-historical contexts, its continuing contemporary relevance, and its influence on the history of British and American literature, other literature, and the arts.

2. To develop and enhance the students' critical and analytical ability to read and understand the literature of these writers, their contexts and significance, through and variety of pedagogical strategies.

3. To develop and enhance the students' ability to think critically and creatively and to write and to speak effectively about literature.

4. To develop an expanded and enlightened vision as to meaningful critical approaches to these writers and the western literary culture based on specific study of literary production and on a broad understanding of their significance to contemporary and later intellectual thought.

5. To develop an appreciation for the diversity of ideals, values, perceptions, and expectations, exemplified not only within the texts of these writers and the societies reflected in their works, but also as represented by the course participants.

This course is beneficial for students wishing to enrich and deepen their knowledge of early western literature and how it influenced subsequent literary and cultural thought. It

will be valuable for students with a variety of general and specific interests, e.g., literary and cultural contexts; social, educational, religious, political, philosophical, and intellectual history; generic development of various types of literature. This course is also essential for prospective teachers of English and American literature. This course will require *active* student involvement, close consideration of the primary texts, the compilation of a portfolio which meets the course standards and requirements, and the fulfillment of all other requirements as specified on the syllabus and under course policies.

## ACTIVE LEARNING

Our study will attempt to emphasize creating a supportive classroom climate for active learning through a positive group building process. Since active learning is student orientated and may appear to involve risk-taking, the course will focus on establishing trust, confidence, and respect between the professor and students and among the students. To advance this climate and encourage the positive outcomes and benefactors of risk-taking, I will be clear, organized, current, and well-prepared, but flexible and personal. I will minimize the pain of student error making by separating learning from evaluating, and I will provide graduated and individualized risk-taking opportunities that will make learning worthwhile and exciting. Students will participate in this cooperative effort to build a supportive classroom atmosphere by coming to class on time and prepared with thoughtfully completed reading/writing assignments, by asking pertinent questions and sharing experiences and viewpoints, by reaching out personally to the professor and other students, by showing cooperation and respect, and providing positive feedback to the professor and peers.

## PROJECTED OUTCOME

The projected outcome of this course is that, based on an enhanced knowledge of western literature's progenitors and a broad understanding of their cultural contexts and subsequent importance, an expanded an enlightened vision will emerge as to meaningful approaches to early western literary discourse and tradition. Moreover, the course subject and approach is intended to

- Nurture a general love for learning
- Empower students with positive sense of competency and skill
- Encourage a curious, investigative spirit and creative, independent thinking
- Foster a deepened and expanded understanding an appreciation of literature as a humanistic discipline

# COURSE REQUIREMENTS

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Hexter, Ralph. *A Guide to the Odyssey*. New York: Vintage, 1993.
Jacoff, Rachel, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*. Cambridge University Press.
Lucas, Gerald R. *Literature of the Western World I Course Booklet*.
Mack, Maynard, ed. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. Vol. 1. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995.

## PORTFOLIO

The topics and readings to be discussed are outlined on the Syllabus below. Each student must maintain and submit for evaluation a course portfolio. This portfolio will gauge your progress in the course and provide a record of your work on this important literature. The portfolio is a 3-inch, loose-leaf binder notebook with section dividers labeled: Writing, Journal Entries, Notes, Presentation Handouts, Group Work, and Miscellaneous Materials; additional sections may be added where appropriate. The portfolio will be assessed at designated times (see Syllabus) during the semester.

## WRITING

LIT 3101 satisfies a Gordon Rule requirement; therefore, a minimum of 6000 words must be written. Several impromptu writing assignments, e.g., out-of-class and in-class responses and "talking papers" prepared for class discussion, will be expected from time to time. Occasionally, or if I suspect some are not completing the assigned reading, I will give short quizzes. Also see Course Contract below for information on how to satisfy this course requirement.

## JOURNAL

The journal should represent your critical and creative ideas and feelings about the literature read, ideas discussed, activities assigned, and all other aspects of the course. Each entry should be dated and kept in the portfolio. Topics for journal entries may occasionally be assigned, but often they will be chosen by the student and they should be no less than 600 words, or two-and-a-half, typed pages. Entries will be submitted for evaluation at given times and may also be shared in class. Also see Course Contract.

## PRESENTATION

Since we cannot cover all the works in this time period that deserve our attention, each student will be responsible for reading a single additional selection and preparing an oral and written presentation of that work for the rest of the class. The oral portions should be a brief, concise report that discuss the work's importance in the western literary tradition. For specific details, see Course Presentation below.

## NOTES

All class notes, reading notes, and personally made notes should be kept for reference. I recommend that you rewrite or type all class notes so that they are legible and orderly.

## CLASS PARTICIPATION AND GROUP WORK

Regular class attendance and active participation in classroom discussion and the class listserv are required. Some assignments will occasionally count for participation, e.g., in-class writing, electronic interchanges, and group work. Students are urged to participate *energetically* and *meaningfully* in all activities, projects, and discussions. All written materials from these activities must be placed in the portfolio. Any group work will only be done in class. Additional assistance can be obtained from the instructor during office hours or by appointment. A final class participation grade will be determined based on my assessment of students' daily class participation and attendance; see "Grading" below. Also see "Class Time" under Course Policies.

## MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS

These materials may include relevant articles form current newspapers, journals, magazines, reports, etc., which relate to the works and authors studies in the course. Since this is a majors-only course, I especially encourage the reading of literary criticism from current journals and scholarly monographs that address the literature and its historical setting. A minimum of three (3) items per work should be included in this section.

## LISTSERV

Various form of electronic discourse will be utilized by the class. Participation in the class listserv, glcomp-l, will be required. Specific assignments will be prompted by the instructor, usually in class. See Listserv below for directions on subscribing.

## EXAMS

A final examinations will be given to test your knowledge of the subject matter, your ability to synthesize this material, and your creativity and in going beyond the discussion and lecture. The final will include vocabulary, identification, and interpretation.

## GRADING

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 25% | 1. | Complete course portfolio |
| 25% | 2. | One midterm essay exam |
| 25% | 3. | One final essay exam including the Self-Assessment Form. Students may not take the final exam unless the Self-Assessment Form is completed (typed) and submitted the class period before the final exam. |
| 25% | 4. | Student attendance and meaningful, prepared class participation as specified on the Syllabus. |

# COURSE POLICIES

## ATTENDANCE / TARDINESS

Repeated absences will not be tolerated; no more than *two* absences (situation pending, see below) will be excused. For each additional absence, one whole letter grade (10%) will be deducted from the final grade. Each student is responsible for signing the attendance sheet during each class session. An arrival to class *after fifteen minutes* from the beginning of class is counted as an absence. It is the student's responsibility to discover what was missed in class and any assignments. I can best be contacted in case of contingencies via email. Only work missed during an excused absence may be made up; quizzes cannot be made up for any reason.

The only absences that will be excused are hospital stays, doctor visits, family emergencies, and natural disasters. All of these excuses, excluding natural disasters, must be accompanied by appropriate documentation or they will not be accepted. Only written excuses will be considered by the instructor when attempting to excuse an absence. Students are encouraged to write the instructor, including appropriate documentation, immediately upon returning to request an excused absence. Excuses will be refused if they arrive more than a week after the absence. If the absence remains unexcused, work cannot be made up.

This attendance / tardiness policy is non-negotiable and will be strictly enforced.

## CLASS TIME

Since discussion and active participation are integral to the learning process, I encourage all type of dialogue and discourse. Therefore, time in class will be spent on discussion of readings, student writing, and exercises with the occasional short lecture. As much as possible, this course will utilize an inductive, Socratic, dialogue approach, interactive, collaborative methods, as well as the traditional lecture format. Quizzes, practice essays, and lectures are designed to benefit the entire group while personal problems and concerns should be handled during the instructor's office hours.

## CONFERENCES

No class time will be spent for formal conferences; however, all students are encouraged to confer with me at least once during the semester to discuss progress. Appointments for conferences may be made at any point throughout the semester, or you may visit me at any time during my office hours. My regular office hours will be posted on my door.

## DEADLINES

Late work is not acceptable and will receive a zero. Allowing for a single contingency, one late assignment will be accepted with a ten (10) point penalty; this assignment cannot be more than a week late or it will not be accepted. It is the student's responsibility to determine what specific work was missed as a result of an unexcused absence. Makeup work for unexcused absences will not be accepted. Quizzes cannot be made up for any reason. Plan ahead and turn in your work on time.

## COURSE BOOKS AND MATERIALS

Course books are integral parts of the class and should be brought daily. When readings are assigned to be discussed in class, please bring a copy of the reading with your reading

notes ready to participate in the discussion. Since this is a literature class, having your book at all times is integral. The Course Booklet contains valuable resource and reference material that you may refer to as you study the literature. The Course Booklet should be read thoroughly and brought to class daily.

## GRADES

Final grades will be based upon a traditional ten-point scale, see Table 1. For an explanation of letter grade distinctions, see Grade Descriptions. See individual classes for grade breakdowns. Students are not in competition with each other; each student will receive the grade s/he earns.

| | |
|---|---|
| A | 90-100 |
| B | 80-89 |
| C | 70-79 |
| D | 60-69 |
| F | 0-59 |

*Table 1: Grades*

## INCOMPLETES

This course will strictly abide by University and departmental policy regarding *Incompletes*. An incomplete can only be given if a *small* portion of the course work is missing and the student is doing otherwise satisfactory work. "I" grades are not assigned automatically, but only upon consultation with me. The student has one semester to remove an "I" grade; otherwise it is changed to an "F."

## LIBRARY RESEARCH DAYS

At least two days during the semester are designated as library research days (see Syllabus). These days, as evident by the name, are assigned for library research and reading on assigned topics relevant to the study of the course work. A report on what was accomplished during each library research day must be filed in the portfolio under "Journal Entries." The specific time when class would normally be held *must* be spent in the library doing research or reading.

## MISCELLANY

Tape recording of classes is not permitted.

## PLAGIARISM

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines plagiarism as "the wrongful appropriation or purloining, and publication as one's own, of the ideas, or the expression of the ideas (literary, artistic, musical, mechanical, etc.) of another," or "a purloined idea, design, passage, or work."

Plagiarism will result in automatic failure of this class and will be pursued to incite the utmost penalty for such dishonesty. Academic falsehood, in any form, will constitute class failure.

# SYLLABUS

This syllabus represents the ideal schedule for our study this semester. Yet, like all best-laid plans, we will probably not be able to keep up with our agenda. Please be flexible and try to look and read ahead whenever possible. We will do our best to stick by this syllabus, but I will inform you verbally whenever there is a change in or an addition to an assignment. Getting these updates is *solely your responsibility*. *THEREFORE, THIS SYLLABUS IS TENTATIVE AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE CONTINGENT UPON THE NEEDS OF THE STUDENTS AND THE PROFESSOR, AND DICTATED BY TIME AND OTHER CONSTRAINTS WHICH MAY AFFECT THE COURSE*. This syllabus reflects only an overview of the assigned reading and other major course assignments. It does not indicate other *specific* class session assignments or activities.

## WEEK 1: AUGUST 25 AND 27

### Tuesday

- Course Introduction
- Review course text
- HOMEWORK: Internet Account (due 9/1); Course Contract (due 9/1); Buy *Course Booklet*; Complete Student Profile (due 9/1)
- READING: *Course Booklet*

### Thursday

- Review course statement and syllabus, and *Course Booklet* materials
- HOMEWORK: Internet Account (due 9/1); Course Contract (due 9/1); Complete Student Profile (due 9/1); Choose Presentation Work (due 9/1)
- READING: from "Genesis" (59-83)

## WEEK 2: SEPTEMBER 1 AND 3

### Tuesday

- Collect Contract; Student Profile; Presentation Choices
- Myth and Religion
- "Genesis"
- READING: from "Job" (83-99)

### Thursday

- "Job"
- The Epic—formalist conventions
- HOMEWORK: Journal 1
- READING: *Gilgamesh* (10-42)

## WEEK 3: SEPTEMBER 8 AND 10

### Tuesday

- The Epic (cont.)
- *Gilgamesh*
- HOMEWORK:
- READING: *The Iliad* (116-145: Introduction; Books I, VI, and VIII)

**Thursday**

- Homer
- *The Iliad*
- HOMEWORK: Journal 2
- READING: *The Iliad* (146-218: Books IX, XVIII, XIX, XXII, and XXIV)

## WEEK 4: SEPTEMBER 15 AND 17

**Tuesday**

- *The Iliad*
- READING for 9/17: Hexter's *Guide* (Introduction); begin *The Odyssey*

**Thursday**

- Begin *The Odyssey*: Critical Approaches
- HOMEWORK: Journal 3
- READING for Week 5: *The Odyssey* (219-49: Books 1-3); Hexter's *Guide* (Books 1-3)

## WEEK 5: SEPTEMBER 22 AND 24

- *The Odyssey*: Heroic Culture
- HOMEWORK: Journal 4
- READING for Week 6: *The Odyssey* (250-319: Books 4-9); Hexter's *Guide* (Books 4-9)

## WEEK 6: SEPTEMBER 29 AND OCTOBER 1

- *The Odyssey*
- HOMEWORK: Journal 5
- READING for Week 7: *The Odyssey* (319-384: Books 10-14); Hexter's *Guide* (Books 10-14)

## WEEK 7: OCTOBER 6 AND 8

- *The Odyssey*
- HOMEWORK: Journal 6
- READING for Week 8: *The Odyssey* (384-451: Books 15-19); Hexter's *Guide* (Books 15-19)

## WEEK 8: OCTOBER 13 AND 15

- *The Odyssey*
- HOMEWORK: Journal 7
- READING for Week 9: *The Odyssey* (452: Books 20-24); Hexter's *Guide* (Books 20-24)

## WEEK 9: OCTOBER 20 AND 22

**Tuesday**

- *The Odyssey*
- HOMEWORK: Finish 1st-half semester's writing

**Thursday**

- Introduction to Greek Tragedy

- Items Due
  - Option One: Five Journal Entries due
  - Option Two: Essay 1 due
  - Option Three: Bibliography and Prospectus due
  - Option Four: Explications 1-3 due
  - Option Five: Project Prospectus due
- HOMEWORK: Journal 7
- READING: Sophocles *Oedipus the King* (585-631)

## WEEK 10: OCTOBER 27 AND 29

### Tuesday

- *Oedipus*
- Greek Tragedy and Beyond
- PRESENTATIONS: Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound*; Sophocles *Antigone*; Euripides *Medea*

### Thursday

- Conclude Tragedy
- Introduction to Roman Literature
- Myth and the Epic
- PRESENTATIONS: Aristotle *Poetics*; Plato *The Symposium*
- HOMEWORK: Journal 8
- READING for Week 11: Ovid *The Metamorphoses* (1065-1091)

## WEEK 11: NOVEMBER 3 AND 5

### Tuesday

- Ovid
- PRESENTATIONS: Plato *The Republic* Books 1-5; *The Republic* Books 6-10
- HOMEWORK:
- READING for Week 12: *The Aeneid* (997-1065: Books I, II, IV, VI, VIII, and XII); Begin Dante

### Thursday

- Library Research Day: No class
- HOMEWORK: Journal 9

## WEEK 12: NOVEMBER 10 AND 12

### Tuesday

- Library Research Day: No Class

### Thursday

- Virgil and the Roman Epic
- Social and National Heroism
- PRESENTATIONS: Apuleius *The Golden Ass*; Petronius *The Satyricon*
- HOMEWORK: Journal 10
- READING for Week 13: Dante *The Divine Comedy*: Inferno (Cantos I-XX: 1692-1773); Essays from Jacoff as assigned

## WEEK 13: NOVEMBER 17 AND 19

### Tuesday

- Dante
- PRESENTATIONS: *The Song of Roland*; Augustine *Confessions*
- HOMEWORK: Journal 11
- READING: *The Divine Comedy*: Inferno (Cantos XXI-XXXIV: 1777-1829); Essays from Jacoff as assigned

## WEEK 14: NOVEMBER 24 AND 26

### Tuesday

- Dante
- PRESENTATIONS: *The Thousand and One Nights*; Boccaccio *The Decameron*
- HOMEWORK:
- READING: *The Divine Comedy:* from *Purgatorio* (1829-1850); Essays from Jacoff as assigned

### Thursday

- Dante
- PRESENTATIONS: Cervantes *Don Quixote* Part I; *Don Quixote* Part II
- HOMEWORK: Journal 12
- READING: *The Divine Comedy:* from *Paradiso* (1850-1868); Essays from Jacoff as assigned

## WEEK 15: DECEMBER 1 AND 3

### Tuesday

- Conclude Dante
- PRESENTATIONS: Machiavelli *The Prince*; Petrarch's Sonnets
- HOMEWORK: Self Assessment
- READING: Catch up on Reading

### Thursday

- Course Review
- Prepare for Final Exam
- Self Assessment Due
- PRESENTATIONS: Rabelais *Gargantua and Pantagruel* Book I; *Gargantua and Pantagruel* Book II
- HOMEWORK: Journal 13

## EXAM: DECEMBER 8

- Items Due
  - Option One: Five Journal Entries due
  - Option Two: Essay 2 due
  - Option Three: Research Essay due
  - Option Four: Explications 4-6 due
  - Option Five: Project due

# COURSE CONTRACT

LIT 3101: Literature of the Western World 1

Your Name_____ Today's Date_____

Your Email Address_____

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Since LIT 3101 is a Gordon Rule course, a minimum of 6000 words must be written by the end of the semester for a satisfactory completion. While you have no choice on the number of words, you may decide on how you wish to accomplish this goal. Below, I list several choices on how you may fulfill your writing requirement; please pick one and turn this signed contract in to me no later than Tuesday, September 1. Please note, regardless of what option you choose, *half* of your writing (i.e. 3000 words) will be due before the mid-term exam during week eight.

## OPTION ONE

Keep a weekly journal (10 entries of 600 words) that addresses aspects of your reading for that week.

## OPTION TWO

Write two, well-polished, 3000-word essays on any aspect of any literature that we have discussed this semester.

## OPTION THREE

One 6000-word research essay that examines an aspect of a work, or works, of literature that we have discussed this semester. A bibliography of at least ten sources and a prospectus is due to me before mid-term.

## OPTION FOUR

Six, 1000-word textual explications of texts that we study this semester. These explications should utilize current critical methods and schools of thought, e.g., feminist, new-historicist, deconstructionist, new critical, Marxist, etc. Each mini-essay should reference at least one critic's work on the same piece of literature.

## OPTION FIVE

A hypertextual project presented in HTML or in PDF format. This project may combine any of the above options, or may be an extensive, annotated bibliography of one of the works or authors that we cover this semester.

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I have chosen option: _____ Sign: _____

# LISTSERV

## SUBSCRIBING

*WARNING: IF THESE INSTRUCTIONS ARE NOT FOLLOWED PRECISELY, THEN YOUR SUBSCRIPTION TO THE LISTSERV WILL BE IGNORED BY THE SERVER.*

To subscribe to the listserv used in all of my classes, type the following command in your email program on one line:

```
subscribe glcomp-l firstname lastname
```

where "firstname" and "lastname" is your real name. (Notice the name of the listserv ends with a lowercase, letter "L"—not a number "1"; if you type a one, it will not work!). Put nothing in the "Subject" line. Send it to:

```
listserv@nosferatu.cas.usf.edu
```

Congratulations, you have subscribed. You should receive conformation of your subscription within minutes.

## POSTING A MESSAGE

In order to send, or "post," a message to the listserv, address it to:

```
glcomp-l@nosferatu.cas.usf.edu
```

Every member of the list will receive your post. When you want to respond to someone else's post, select "Reply" in your email program, and it will automatically address the response for you. Remember, when you reply to the listserv, *all* member receive the message.

## UNSUBSCRIBING

At the completion of the class, you will wish to unsubscribe from the listserv. Again, enter your email program and type the following:

```
unsubscribe glcomp-l
```

and send it to:

```
listserv@nosferatu.cas.usf.edu
```

Do not send an unsubscribe command to the same address that you use to post a message; it will not work.

# COURSE PRESENTATION

In an effort to cover fewer works in a more comprehensive manner while not missing works that all English majors should be familiar with, each student will complete a course presentation. Choose three of the works listed below (just in case you do not get your first choice) on which to do your presentation. Presentations will begin week ten; see syllabus for specific day each individual work must be presented. The requirements are:

## ORAL PORTION

A brief, ten-minute presentation on how the work fits into the western literary tradition, a look at the major themes and concerns in the work, and a introduction to the critical conversations about the work. *Do not simply read your written portion*.

## WRITTEN PORTION

The written portion of the presentation should include:

- A brief plot summary
- A list of major characters
- A brief discussion of important themes and motifs
- An annotated bibliography of important and current criticism on the work

## WORKS

| | |
|---|---|
| Aeschylus | *Prometheus Bound* |
| Apuleius | *The Golden Ass* |
| Aristotle | *Poetics* |
| Augustine | *Confessions** |
| Boccaccio | *The Decameron** |
| Cervantes | *Don Quixote* Part I |
| | *Don Quixote* Part II |
| Euripides | *Medea* |
| Machiavelli | *The Prince* |
| Petrarch | Sonnets |
| Plato | *The Republic* Books 1-5 |
| | *The Republic* Books 6-10 |
| | *The Symposium* |
| Petronius | *The Satyricon* |
| Rabelais | *Gargantua and Pantagruel* Book I |
| | *Gargantua and Pantagruel* Book II |
| Sophocles | *Antigone* |
| | *The Song of Roland** |
| | *The Thousand and One Nights** |

* Use excerpted text in the Norton Anthology

# PART II:

# COURSE CONTENT MATERIALS

# MYTH

## ORIGIN OF THE WORD

*Mythos*—a story or plot, either true or false. Myths involve rituals (prescribed forms of sacred ceremony), and each myth represents one story in a *mythology*. A mythology is a system of hereditary stories once believed as true, but which we no longer believe.

Poets use myths and mythology as literary conventions and devices because they appeal to a common knowledge and emotional response. Often myths operate as metaphors. In most cases, poets choose their myths carefully and use them symbolically as archetypes for certain traits. Poets often use myths to synthesize the insights of the western culture and past with the new discoveries of philosophy and physical science.

## SOME VIEWS OF MYTH

Joseph Campbell, in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, sums up various theories and definitions of myth: "Mythology has been interpreted by the modern intellect as a primitive, fumbling effort to explain the world of nature (Frazer); as a product of poetical fantasy from prehistoric times, misunderstood by succeeding ages (Müller); as a repository of allegorical instruction, to shape the individual to his group (Durkheim); as a group dream, symptomatic of archetypal urges within the depths of the human psyche (Jung); as the traditional vehicle of man's profoundest metaphysical insights (Coomaraswamy); and as God's Revelation to His children (the Church). Mythology is all of these. . . . For when scrutinized in terms not of what it is but of how it functions, of how it has served mankind in the past, of how it may serve today, mythology shows itself to be as amenable as life itself to the obsessions and requirements of the individual, the race, the age." (382)[1]

- A story—a symbolic fable which sums up an infinite number of more or less analogous situations
- A myth expresses the rules of conduct of a given social or religious group (morals)
- Myths never have an author—their origin is obscure
- An expression of collective and common facts
- The most profound characteristic of myth is that it wins us over, usually without our knowing
- Uses sacred principles
- A myth arises whenever it becomes dangerous or impossible to speak plainly about certain social, religious, or affective matters
- Disruptive power of reason breaks myths down
- "Myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation" (Campbell *Hero* 3).

## LEGEND

Myth of a person.

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[1] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princeton University Press, 1949.

## FOLKTALE

Myth of supernatural beings.

## ARCHETYPE

Archetypes reflect universal, primitive, and elemental patterns whose effective embodiment in a literary work evokes a profound response from the reader. They manifest as narrative designs, character types, images identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature, myths, dreams, and ritualized modes of social behavior. Anthropologist J. G. Frazer, in his work *The Golden Bough*, suggests that an archetype represents elemental patterns of myth and ritual recurring in legends and ceremonies of diverse cultures. Carl Jung sees archetypes as "primordial images" or "psychic residue" of repeated types of experiences in the lives of our ancient ancestors that present themselves in the "collective unconscious" of the human race and give rise to myth, religion, dream, fantasy, and literature.

## ARCHETYPAL PATTERNS

These patterns often recur as underlying patterns or motifs in literature:

- Death / rebirth—grounded in the cycle of seasons and organic circle of human life (Christ, phoenix)
- Journey underground (Odysseus, Aeneas)
- Heavenly ascent (Mary)
- Search for the father (Telemachus)
- Paradise
- Promethean rebel-hero
- Image and role of women as Eve (*femme fatale*) or a Madonna (earth goddess)

## ARCHETYPAL APPROACH TO THE GENRE OF EPIC

The cyclical form of the classical epic is based on the natural cycle, which has two main rhythms: the life and death of the individual, and the slower social rhythm that brings cities and empires to their rise and fall (individual—national). The total action in the background of the *Iliad* moves from the cities of Greece, through a ten-year siege of Troy, back to Greece again. The total action of the *Odyssey* is a specialized example of the same thing, moving from Ithaca back to Ithaca. The *Aeneid* moves the household gods of Priam from Troy to New Troy (Rome). The foreground action begins at a point described in the *Odyssey* as "somewhere" (*in medias res* convention of the epic)—actually it is far more carefully chosen. *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid* begin at a kind of nadir of the total cyclical action—*Iliad*: at a moment of despair in the Greek camp; *Odyssey*: with Odysseus and Penelope farthest from one another, both wooed by importunate suitors; *Aeneid*: with its hero shipwrecked on the shores of Carthage, citadel of Juno and enemy of Rome. From there, the action moves both backward and forward enough to indicate the general shape of the historical cycle.

The appearance of an ambivalent female archetype appears in the epic, sometimes benevolent or sinister: Penelope, Calypso, Circe, Dido, Duessa, Eve, Beatrice, Helen, etc.

# THE ROLE OF MYTH IN THE ANCIENT EPICS

The epics were crucial to Greek civilization. Not only were they the chief relaxation for the Greeks in the early period, but they also performed for preliterate Greeks a number of functions that were essential to their survival. Later, they were to live on a strong element in the art and literature of the western world. For these reasons, it is appropriate to stop here to examine in some detail the nature of the Greek epics and to discuss the greatest of the bards who composed them—Homer.

To the Greeks, struggling to regain a lost glory, the epic songs were entertainment, inspiring history, reminders of a time when to be a Greek was to be strong, brave, noble, and capable of prodigious achievements. They were also lessons in noble and ignoble conduct, and repositories of tales on the ways of the gods. Thus, the bard imparted *instruction* while he gave *delight*. The legends were only a framework to which he added extemporaneous elaboration, designed to fit the needs and temper of a specific audience. Over the years, succeeding generations of bards evolved a technique which depended heavily on a very large number of standardized forms. There was, first of all, an established outline for each legend and a cast of characters whose names and personalities were always much the same. There were also set descriptions for certain recurring places and events, including conventionalized figures of speech. Bards used a huge stock of phrases that fell automatically into verse: “wine-dark sea,” “long-shadowing spear,” “death that lays at length,” “rosy-fingered dawn,” “brazen sky,” “windy Troy.”

The epic drew on several kinds of legends or myths: some concerned with gods, others with gods and humans, and others with humans alone. In the Dark Age, when bards first began to perfect them, myths offered a way of answering hard questions about human nature and the universe for audiences unable to consider these matters scientifically.

The myths made abstract ideas comprehensible by presenting the ideas as they affected real people caught in recognizable events.

The myths concerned with gods were intended primarily to explain religious matters, such as the changes that occurred when one set of gods was displaced by another. The substitution of the Greek gods on Mount Olympus for the old Minoan gods is explained, for instance, by the myth which tells of the brutal struggle between Zeus, ruler of the Olympian gods, and his father Cronos; Zeus finally overcomes his father and throws him into Tartarus, the ancient Hell.

The myths of the gods also addressed many matters other than those directly concerned with the gods' personal genealogies. Sometimes they explained how and why the gods controlled nature. The changing seasons are accounted for in the myth of Hades, god of the underworld, who falls in love with Persephone, the daughter of the earth goddess Demeter, and carries her off to his kingdom. While Demeter grieves, no crops grow, whereupon other gods intercede with Hades, who finally agrees to let Persephone leave the underworld and spend part of the year with her mother.

In other myths, human actions are explained. The Oedipus legend concerns a phenomenon familiar to us: the unconscious desire of a boy to supplant his father in his mother's affections. And many myths about gods and men also point to a moral: Bellerophon acquires a winged horse with the help of the gods, and beaming with pride, he tries to fly it up to Mount Olympus. For his presumptuousness, he is thrown off and maimed, and wanders alone for the rest of his days. Tantalus, greatly favored of the gods, is made to suffer eternal hunger and thirst because at dinner a dinner for them, he served the flesh of his own son.

Still other myths about men are really established versions of history. They are full of action and crisis, violence and suffering, and are amazingly varied in theme. The Greeks refused to shrink from any subject, no matter ho fearful or horrible, and they cared little for happy endings, preferring instead to hear of courageous men who are doomed to be overcome by catastrophe. Very likely these tastes were molded by the hard conditions of their own lives. Among these doomed mortals is Agamemnon, the conqueror of Troy, who is killed by his own wife Clytemnestra, who in her turn is killed by their son Orestes. Heracles, most prodigious of heroes, kills his wife and sons in a fit of madness, and later dies himself in torment. Ajax, a leading warrior in the siege of Troy, goes mad because he is not awarded Achilles' armor when Achilles dies, then kills himself in shame over his behavior.

The myths also contain touches of fellow feeling and even romance. Perseus rescues Andromeda from the Kraken, a sea monster, at the end of the world. Alcestis offers to die in place of her husband Admetus when his life span runs out; Admetus accepts her offer reluctantly and tearfully, and gives her a magnificent funeral. Most myths are full of anecdotal detours that are replete with bits of traditional lore that have little or nothing to do with the main message, but are nevertheless important adjuncts to that message. Like all folk tales, these anecdotes had an immediate appeal and helped to keep the audience attentive and receptive. But unlike much folk wisdom, which is distilled into animal stories, the Greek version is found chiefly in stories of humans. Such tales were closer to them and more relevant to their problems. They also fitted nicely into the careers of wandering heroes such as Odysseus, whose stories were a long series of adventures.

The climax of this creative tradition in legend and song came in the latter part of the eighth century B.C.E. in the poet Homer and his two great epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Little is known about Homer himself, or even if a single man named Homer even existed—he is thought to have lived either at Smyrna or on the island of Chios—but his two masterpieces mark the dawn of European Literature. The old Dark Age epics pro-

vided Homer with the story material and a metric form which subsequently became the meter for all Greek epic poetry: the dactylic hexameter. Twenty-six centuries later, the English poet Alfred Lord Tennyson called Homer's meter "the stateliest measure ever molded by the lips of men," but the rhythms of ancient Greek came not from variations in beat, but variations in the length of syllables—so that Greek dactylic hexameter cannot truly be translated into English. The closet English equivalent in the meter used in Longfellow's poem "Evangeline."

But the Homeric poems are far more than magnificent poems. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* became the source books for Greek religion, and Homer was considered by later Greeks to be the founder of their history, philosophy, drama, poetry, and science. His themes were an endless source of inspiration to Greek artists and orators. For use today, he is a fascinating source of information on the Greek world as it wa sin his lifetime, and the world as he thought it to be in Mycenaean days.

Although he drew upon the myths that had come down to him through the centuries, Homer added much that was his own. His treatment of the main theme in both poems, as well as their individual episodes, is far more sensitive and perceptive. He took the primitive tales of monsters, cannibals, and desperate risks and enlivened them with a generous and tender vision of life. In earlier versions of the tale, Achilles was no doubt a prodigious warrior who killed his enemy Hector and then mutilated his body as a sign of triumph. But Homer's Achilles is moved to give the dead body back to Priam. Similarly, there are many old tales of a wanderer who is cast up from the sea and saved by a princess whom he marries. Homer's wanderer, Odysseus, is also rescued by a charming princess, Nausicaa, but does not marry her. Odysseus has a wife at home, so, instead of marriage, a touching friendship develops between the battered hero and the young girl.

All of Homer's characters, even those to whom he pays little attention—swineherds, ordinary soldiers, serving women, worthless suitors—are real and convincing people. Each episode abounds in the endless variety of human conduct. Homer himself never obtrudes, hardly ever passes judgment. Everything that he has to say is said through the words and actions of his characters. His patrons probably wanted no more than tales of heroism, but he gave them a whole view of the world, of the gods at their appointed tasks, of men and women pursuing their destinies, of every mood from grim vengeance to uproarious farce, of palaces and gardens, remote islands and rock shores. Behind every story his inspiration is at work, seeing humans as they really are, understanding whay they act as they do, portraying them with insight even when they are bad, and when they are good, with warmth and gentle affection.

## MYTH AND THE ODYSSEY

Joseph Campbell, in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, sums up various theories and definitions of myth:

> Mythology has been interpreted by the modern intellect as a primitive, fumbling effort to explain the world of nature (Frazer); as a product of poetical fantasy from prehistoric times, misunderstood by succeeding ages (Müller); as a repository of allegorical instruction, to shape the individual to his group (Durkheim); as a group dream, symptomatic of archetypal urges within the depths of the human psyche (Jung); as the traditional vehicle of man's profoundest metaphysical insights (Coomaraswamy); and as God's Revelation to His children (the Church). Mythology is all of these. … For when scrutinized in terms not of what it is but of how it functions, of how it has served mankind in the past, of how it may serve today, mythology shows itself to be as amenable as life itself to the obsessions and requirements of the individual, the race, the age. (382)[2]

As all of these various theorists attest, the myth seems to be both universal and instructional. Yet, unlike a didactic lecture, myth requires interpretation on a societal and an individual basis. While myth is appropriate to a national identity, it also addresses something very personal: something at the heart of every individual. Homer's *Odyssey* addresses specific cultural concerns of his time, but it also appeals to and concerns all humans at all times. Indeed, a specific culture's heroic ideals will be determined by its myths; however, since myths transcend single cultures, there may exist a universal idea of the hero: a hero for all times.

Odysseus epitomizes the heroic ideals of Homer's era. *The Odyssey*, while it may be a product of myth, has become a foundation of myth itself. *The Odyssey* presents the hero Odysseus—not a perfect human by any means—as a hero that chooses to endure hardships, seek fortune and adventure, and never yield to the caprices of the gods. He becomes stronger because of ostensibly random hardships and continues striving for home—for an idea of his, and his culture's, identity.

*The Odyssey*'s heroic ideal lies in the individual character of Odysseus. It addresses a single hero's longing to reintegrate himself back into his society after a ten-year war. War is perhaps one of humanity's darkest, yet most familiar propensities, and the war at Troy

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[2] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princeton University Press, 1949.

has consumed ten years of Odysseus' life away from Ithaca and his family; how is he supposed to return to that life to reclaim his home and family? Odysseus personifies the Promethean element within the human psyche: i.e., the desire to return to that which has been left behind, but with the ever-present drive to transcend a life of common duties and household gods. Odysseus, after tasting the ravages of war, cannot return peacefully to his previous life. It takes a true hero to reclaim a previous, peaceful existence with the knowledge of humanity's darkest side.

This dark side must be traversed by all humans. Odysseus takes ten years after the fall of Troy to rejoin that which he left behind before his valediction to Ithaca. Yet, the hero must leave the comfort and safety of home in order to discover the value *of* home. While Odysseus travels alone, his journey, his endurance, and his discovery (or *re*-covery) of home represents a boon for all of humanity. Odysseus embodies the reader's own journey through life in search of home.

So war and the return seem representative of the human condition. The belonging to a society (fighting for a communal cause) and then the fight to regain a sense of belonging in a society (the *nostos*) are two seemingly intrinsic and universal aspects of being human. We are all citizens *and* aliens. Perhaps, in a Jungian sense, these archetypes preexisted Homer and were used by the poet, but in another true sense, Homer adopts the archetypes and makes them a part of a pandemic, world mythology.

I seem to be skirting the issue: how does mythology inform or enlighten the hero concept of *The Odyssey*? Well, since Campbell did bring up religion, the pantheon might be worth a look. There seem to be two main gods at work in *The Odyssey*: Poseidon and Athena. The former represents the forces against Odysseus, the latter works for him. Poseidon, whose name means "master," is the most capricious of the gods, given to fits of rage that manifest themselves in tempests and earthquakes. He seems to represent all that is quixotic in nature—a powerful enemy against humanity. Unlike the impetuous and war-like Poseidon, Athena, goddess of prudence and wise counsel, is a defensive god who favors peace. If the gods are perceived allegorically, or mythologically as anthropomorphized elements to explain the occurrences of nature, then Odysseus uses his wisdom to overcome, at least for the time being, those ubiquitous powers.

Yet while Athena and Poseidon play active roles in *The Odyssey*, Prometheus seems to have the most influence on Odysseus. Prometheus, the archetypal trickster, is said to have duped Zeus into choosing the bones and fat of cows for sacrifice, stolen fire from the

gods to give to humanity, created the first human from clay and his own tears, and made Pandora, a gift to man that Zeus cursed. Each of the gods is immortal; i.e., the qualities of the gods are forever present in humans. While the Athena element in humans advocates prudence and wisdom, the Poseidon element rails, war-like, against order. The Promethean element seems to offer a golden mean between the two extremes—not war or peace, but the aspect of humans that keeps us striving against the gods and the nature of the cosmos.

Since I began with Campbell, I will end with him: "myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation" (*Hero* 3). Myth represents that which is mysterious in the universe and within humanity. We are the impetus and the outcome, the beginning and the end. Odysseus and his wanderings have fascinated humans of all cultures for over two-thousand years. Something ostensibly intrinsic in us all yearns for the adventure—the path that will one day lead home.

## NORTHROP FRYE'S FICTIONAL MODES

In the second paragraph of the *Poetics,* Aristotle speaks of the difference in works of fiction which are caused by the different elevations of the characters in them. In some fictions, he states, the characters are better than we are, in others worse, and in still others, on the same level. This passage has not received much attention from the critics, as the importance Aristotle assigns to goodness and badness seems to indicate a somewhat narrowly moralistic view of literature. Aristotle's words for *good* and *bad*, however, are *spoudaios* and *phaulos*, which have a figurative sense of *weighty* and *light*. In literary fictions, the plot consists of somebody doing something. The somebody, if an individual, is the hero, and the something she does or fails to do is what she can do, or could have done, on the level of the postulates made about her by the author and the consequent expectations of the audience. Fictions, therefore, may be classified, not morally, but by the hero's power of action, which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same. Thus:

- If superior in *kind* both to other humans and to the environment of other humans, the hero is a divine being, and the story about him will be a *myth* in the common sense of a story about a god. Such stories have an important place in literature, but are as a rule found outside the normal literary categories.
- If superior in *degrees* to other humans and to her environment, the hero is the typical hero of *romance*, whose actions are marvelous but who is herself identified as a human being. The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to her, and enchanted weapons, talking animals, terrifying ogres and witches, and talismans of miraculous power violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established. Here we have moved from myth, properly so called, into *legend*, *folk tale*, *märchen*, and their literary affiliates and derivatives.
- If superior in *degree* to other humans, but not to his natural environment, the hero is a leader. He has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject both to social criticism and to the order of nature. This is the hero of the *high mimetic* mode, of most epic and tragedy, and is primarily the kind of hero that Aristotle had in mind.
- If superior neither to other humans nor to her environment, the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of her common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience. This gives us the hero of the *low mimetic* mode, of most comedy and realistic fiction. "High" and "low" have no connotations of comparative value, but are purely diagrammatic. On this level, the difficulty in retaining the word "hero," which has a more limited meaning among the preceding modes, occasionally strikes an author. Thackeray thus feels obliged to call *Vanity Fair* a novel without a hero.
- If inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity, the hero belongs to the *ironic* mode. This is still true when the reader feels that he is or might be in the same situation as the situation is being judged by the norms of greater freedom.

Looking over these modes, we can see that European fiction, during the last fifteen centuries, has steadily moved its center of gravity down the list. In the pre-medieval period, literature is closely attached to Christian, late Classical, Celtic, or Teutonic myths. If Christianity had not been both an imported myth and a devourer of rival ones, this phase of

western literature would be easier to isolate. In the form in which we possess it, most of it has already moved into the category of romance. Romance divides into two main forms: a secular form dealing with chivalry and knight-errantry, and a religious form devoted to legends of saints. Both lean heavily on miraculous violations of natural law for their interest as stories.

Fictions of romance dominate literature until the cult of the prince and the courtier in the Renaissance brings the high mimetic mode into the foreground. The characteristics of this mode are most clearly seen in the genres of drama, particularly tragedy, and national epic. Then a new kind of middle-class culture introduces the low mimetic, which predominates in English literature from Defoe's time until the end of the nineteenth century. In French literature it begins and ends about fifty years earlier. During the last hundred years, most serious fiction has tended to be increasingly ironic in mode.

Something of the same progression may be traced in Classical literature, too, in a greatly shortened form. Where a religion is mythological and polytheistic, where there are promiscuous incarnations, deified heroes and kings of divine descent, where the same adjective "godlike" can be applied either to Zeus or Achilles, it is hardly possible to separate the mythical, romantic, and high mimetic strands completely. Where the religion is theological, and insist on a sharp division between divine and human natures, romance become more clearly isolated, as it does in the legends of Christian chivalry and sanctity, in the Arabian Nights of Islam, in the stories of the judges and thaumaturgic prophets of Israel. Similarly, the inability of the Classical world to shake off the divine leader in its later period has much to do with the abortive development of low mimetic and ironic modes that barely started with Roman satire. At the same time, the establishing of the high mimetic mode, the developing of a literary tradition with a constant sense of an order of nature in it, is one of the great feats of Greek civilization. Oriental fiction does not, so far as I know, get very far away from mythical and romantic formulas.

## QUESTIONS

1. Make a heading for each of the five types of heroes mentioned in the selection, and under the appropriate heading, list some heroes from your previous reading. Are there some who don't fit in any category? Why?
2. What would be some of the difficulties on considering the moralistic view of literature that is mentioned in the first paragraph of this selection?
3. What is the basis for classifying a hero as *mythic*? Can you think of any recent mythic heroes?
4. How does Frye's definition of the romantic hero differ from your previous ideas about the romantic hero?
5. What does Frye mean by the term "natural environment" to which the tragic hero is not superior?
6. Is the fact that casual readers prefer realistic heroes a comment on their motives for reading?
7. Is there any purpose in reading about ironic heroes, who are inferior in power and intelligence to ourselves? Explain.
8. Frye says that in the last fifteen centuries has moved its center of gravity down the list from the mythic hero to the ironic hero. Explain how this movement might be a comment on Western Civilization.

# THE EPIC

## DEFINITION

In its strict use by literary critics, the term *epic* or *heroic poem* is applied to a work that meets at least the following criteria: it is a long narrative poem an a great and serious subject, related in an elevated style, and centered on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or the human race. The "traditional epics" (also called "primary epics" or "folk epics") were shaped by a literary artist from historical and legendary materials which had developed in the oral traditions of his nation during a period of expansion and warfare. To this group are ascribed the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of the Greek Homer, and the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*. The "literary" or "secondary" epics were composed by sophisticated craftsmen in deliberate imitation of the traditional form. Of this kind is Virgil's Latin poem *The Aeneid*, which later served as the chief model for Milton's literary epic *Paradise Lost*; and *Paradise Lost* in turn became a model for Keat's fragmentary epic *Hyperion*, as well as for Blake's several epics, or "prophetic books" (*The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, *Jerusalem*) which undertook to translate into Blake's own mythic terms the biblical design and materials which had served as Milton's subject matter.

## CHARACTERISTICS

The epic was ranked by Aristotle (in his *Poetics*) as second only to tragedy, and by Renaissance critics as the highest genre of all. The literary epic is certainly the most ambitious of poetic types, making immense demands on a poet's knowledge, invention , and skill to sustain the scope, grandeur, and variety of a poem that tends to encompass the world of its day and a large portion of its learning. Despite numerous attempts over nearly three-thousand years, we possess no more than a half dozen epic poems of indubitable greatness. Literary epics are highly conventional poems which commonly share the following features, derived ultimately from the traditional epics of Homer:

1. The hero is a figure of great national or even cosmic importance. In the *Iliad*, he is the Greek warrior Achilles, who is the son of a Neried, Thetis; and Virgil's Aeneas is the son of the goddess Aphrodite. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam represents the entire human race, or if we regard Christ as the hero, he is both Goad and man. Blake's primal figure is the "universal man" Albion who incorporates, before his fall, man and god and the cosmos as well.

2. The setting of the poem is ample in scale, and may be worldwide, or even larger. Odysseus wanders over the Mediterranean basin (the whole of the world known to the author), and in Book XI, he descends into the underworld (as does Virgil's Aeneas). The scope of *Paradise Lost* is cosmic, for it takes place on earth, heaven, and in hell.

3. The action involves superhuman deeds in battle, such as Achilles' feats in the Trojan War, or a long and arduous journey intrepidly accomplished, such as the wanderings of Odysseus on his way back to his homeland, despite the opposition of some of the gods. *Paradise Lost* includes the war in heaven, the journey of Satan through chaos to discover the newly created world, and his desperately audacious attempt to outwit God by corrupting humanity, in which his success is ultimately frustrated by the sacrificial enterprise of Christ.

4. In these great actions, the gods and other supernatural beings take an interest or an active part—the Olympian gods in Homer, and Jehovah, Christ, and the angels in *Paradise Lost*. These supernatural agents were in the neoclassic age called the *machinery*, in the sense that they were a part of the literary contrivances of the epic.

5. An epic poem is a ceremonial performance and is narrated in a ceremonial style which is deliberately distanced from ordinary speech and proportioned to the grandeur and formality of the heroic subject matter and the epic architecture. Hence Milton's "grand style"—his Latinate diction and stylized syntax, his sonorous lists of names and wide-ranging allusions, and his imitation of Homer's *epic similes* and *epithets*. Also the great *catalogs* of heroes, weaponry, spoils, etc.

## CONVENTIONS

There are also some commonly adopted conventions in the structure and in the choice of episodes of the epic narrative; prominent among them are these elements:

1. The narrator begins by stating his *argument*, or theme, invokes a muse or guiding spirit to inspire him in his great undertaking, then address to the muse the *epic question*, the answer to which inaugurates the narrative proper (*Paradise Lost*, I.1-49).

2. The narrative starts *in medias res*, i.e., "in the midst of things," at a critical point in the action. *Paradise Lost* opens with the fallen angels in hell gathering their forces and planning their revenge. Not until Books V-VII does the angel Raphael relate to Adam the events in heaven which led to his situation.; while in Books XI-XII, after the fall, Michael foretells to Adam future events up until Christ's second coming. Thus Milton's epic, although its action focuses on the temptation and the fall of man, encompasses all time from the creation to the end of the world.

3. There are catalogs of some of the principle characters, introduced in formal detail, as in Milton's description of the procession of fallen angels in Book I of *Paradise Lost*. These characters are often given set speeches which reveal their diverse temperaments; an example is the debate in Pandemonium, Book II.

## THE EPIC SPIRIT

In addition to its strict use, the term *epic* is often applied to works which differ in many respects form this model, but manifest, suggests critic E.M.W. Tillyard in his study *The English Epic and Its Background*, the *epic spirit* in the scale, the scope, and the profound human importance of their subjects; Tillyard suggests these four characteristics of the modern epic: high quality and seriousness, inclusiveness or amplitude, control and ex-

actitude commensurate with exuberance, and an expression of the feelings of a large group of people. Similarly, Brian Wilkie has remarked in *Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition*, that epics constitute a family, with variable physiognomic similarities, rather than a strictly definable genre. In this broad sense, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Spender's *Faerie Queene* are often called epics, as are works of prose fiction such as Melville's *Moby Dick*, and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*; Northrop Frye has described Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* as the "chief ironic epic of our time" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 323). Some critics have even look to the genre of science fiction—in prose and film—for this century's continuing sense of the *epic spirit*.

## EPIC SIMILES

Also called Homeric or extended similes, *epic similes* are formal and sustained similes in which the secondary subject, or *vehicle*, is developed far beyond its specific points of parallel to the primary subject, or *tenor*, becoming the more important aesthetic object for the moment. Essentially, the epic simile is an involved, elaborated comparison imitated from Homer by Virgil, Milton, and other writers of literary epics who employed it to enhance the ceremonial quality of the epic style.

## MOCK EPIC

A *mock epic*, or *mock heroic*, poem imitates the elaborate form and ceremonious style of the *epic* genre, and applies it to a commonplace or trivial subject matter; the high brought low. In a masterpiece of this form, *The Rape of the Lock*, Alexander Pope views through grandiose epic perspective a quarrel between the *beaux* and *belles* of his day over the theft of Belinda's curl. The story includes such elements of epic protocol as supernatural *machinery*, a voyage, a visit to the underworld, the arming of the hero, epic lists, and a heroically scaled battle between the sexes—although with hatpins, snuff, and abusive language for weapons. The term *mock heroic* is often applied to other dignified poetic forms which are purposefully mismatched to a lowly subject; for example, to Thomas Gray's comic "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat."

## EPICAL ACTIONS

1. Deeds of heroes like Beowulf, Hercules, Prometheus
2. Battles against great odds, like Roland
3. Wars between individual heroes as in the *Iliad*
4. Real voyages as in the *Odyssey*; or allegorical voyages through a different terrain as in the *Divine Comedy*
5. Initiation of great enterprises, as the founding of a new city in *The Aeneid*
6. The performing of exploits, great and important; admirable actions accompanied by difficulty, temptations, and danger

## THE EPIC HERO

The epic hero has a double role. He (there are no epical woman heroes as far as I know) is an individual person with an habitual virtue from which his exploits flow, and he is rep-

resentative of the group to whom the exploit is important. Since the performance of the exploit is important because of the group rather than the person, the man may be destroyed, yet the group may be saved. The hero's habitual virtue is specific to the kind of exploit; his goodness is not specific—it simply means that he is serious, and he will cope with the problem. The hero need not be responsible for the existence of his task, but only for its performance.

## THE PRIMARY EPIC

### Literary Tradition

Possible accumulation of lays or episodes. Shaped by a literary artist from historical and legendary materials which had developed in the oral traditions of his nation during a period of expansion and warfare. Composed without the aid of writing, sung or chanted to a musical accompaniment.

### Composition

Looser composition because it was composed for recitation. More episodic—the episodes can be detached from the whole and may be enjoyed as separate poems or stories.

### Heroic Ideal

The heroes in the oral epic are more concerned with their own personal self-fulfillment. The work focuses on the personal concept of heroism, and the self-fulfillment and identity of the individual hero. The national concept is secondary.

### Language

Formulaic, repetitious use of stock phrases and descriptions to aid in oral recitation. Tends toward pleasing the ear rather than the eye. Focus on the spoken word.

### Movement

Cyclical, the theme of the return.

### Cultural Origin

In cultures that have not yet attained a national identity or unity. Greek city-states, etc.

### Examples

*The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, *Gilgamesh*

## THE SECONDARY EPIC

### Literary Tradition

Secondary epics are also called *literary epics.* Composed by sophisticated craftsmen in a deliberate imitation of the traditional form. An attempt to use again in new circumstances what has already been a complete and satisfactory form of literature.

### Composition

More structured and written for readers. The written word. The concern is with the perfection of the word; sentences are carefully fashioned; words and phrases are more carefully chosen. Less use of formulaic repetition.

### Heroic Ideal

The hero is more concerned with national or universal duty than with personal happiness or self-fulfillment (e.g., Aeneas leaves Dido to continue his nation's destiny). In a highly organized society, the unfettered individual has no place. The hero is inspired by service to his nation, world, or cosmos, not by individual prowess. Social ideal replaces personal identity. The hero becomes a symbol for the nation or world as a whole.

### Language

A written ceremony. A deliberate distancing from ordinary speech and proportioned to the grandeur and formality of the heroic subject matter and epic architecture. The "grand," "ornate," and "elevated" style.

### Movement

Toward rebirth. Aeneas leaves old Troy to found new Troy (Rome).

### Cultural Origin

Highly structured cultures and societies.

### Examples

*The Aeneid*, *Paradise Lost*, *The Divine Comedy*

## COMPARISON/CONTRAST BETWEEN THE HEROIC CONCEPTS OF HOMER AND VIRGIL

| Homer | Virgil |
|---|---|
| Composed for recitation and for an audience | Written for readers |
| Freer and looser; less closely patterned | Concerned with perfection of the word—exquisite words |
| Integral/discrete episodes | A stylist—concerned with reader's scrutiny |
| Oral art | Fashions sentences carefully |
| Operates with phrases and formulas | Poetical texture |
| Simplicity, strength, straightforward | Social ideal of heroism |
| Values physical prowess and intellectual wit of the individual | Political (national) ideal of heroism |
| Fame of individual heroes; personal concept of heroism | Sacrifice of the hero's personal identity |
| Self-fulfillment and identity of the individual hero—no national concept | Love concern—romance |

## EPIC CLASSIFICATION

### Iliad

*Menis*—song of wrath

### Odyssey

Tradition of the epic of return (*nostos*). The story of the romance of a hero escaping incredible perils and arriving in the nick of time to reclaim his bride—a master of the house coming back to reclaim his own.

### Aeneid

Develops the theme of return into one or rebirth; the end in New Troy becomes the starting point renewed and transformed by the hero's quest.

### Christian Epic

Carries the same themes into a wide archetypal context; the action of the Bible includes the themes of the three great classical epics: theme of destruction and captivity of the city (Troy) in the *Iliad*; the theme of the return in the *Odyssey*; the theme of building a new city in the *Aeneid*. Adam is like Achilles , Odysseus, and Aeneas—a man of wrath, exiled from home because he angered God by going beyond his limit as a man. A provocation against God is the eating of food reserved for the deity. As with Odysseus, Adam's return home is contingent on appeasing of divine wrath by divine wisdom.

## HOMER

Homer is the name traditionally given to the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the two major epics of Greek antiquity. Nothing is known about Homer as an individual. In fact, the question of whether a single person can be said to be responsible for the creation of the two epics is still controversial. However, linguistic and historical evidence allows the assumption that the poems were composed in the Greek settlements on the west coast of Asia Minor sometime in the 9th century B.C.E.

Both epics relate legendary events that were believed to have occurred many centuries before they were written. The *Iliad* is set in the final year of the Trojan War. This sets the background for its central plot, which is the story of the wrath of the Greek hero Achilles. Insulted by his commander in chief Agamemnon, the young warrior Achilles withdraws from the war, leaving his fellow Greeks to suffer terrible defeats at the hands of the Trojans. Achilles rejects the Greeks' attempts at reconciliation (becoming friends from enemies); however, he finally relents to some extent and allows his companion Patroclus to lead his troops in his place. Patroclus is killed, and as a result Achilles is filled with fury and remorse. He turns his wrath against the Trojans, whose leader, Hector (son of King Priam), he kills in single combat. The poem ends as Achilles surrenders the corpse of Hector to Priam for burial, recognizing a certain kinship with the Trojan king as they both face the tragedies of death and sorrow.

The *Odyssey* describes the return of the Greek hero Odysseus from the Trojan War. The opening scenes show the disorder that has arisen in Odysseus' household during his long absence: A band of suitors is destroying his property as they woo his wife Penelope. The focus then shifts to Odysseus himself. The story tells of his ten years of traveling, during which he has to face such dangers as the man-eating giant Polyphemus and such subtler threats as the goddess Calypso, who offers him immortality if he will abandon his quest for home. The second half of the poem begins with Odysseus' arrival at his home island of Ithaca. Here, exercising great patience and self-control, Odysseus tests the loyalty

of his servants. He plots and carries out a bloody revenge on Penelope's suitors, and is reunited with his son, his wife, and his aged father.

Both epics are composed in an impersonal, elevated, formal verse, using language that was never used for normal speech; the meter that is used is called dactylic hexameter. Stylistically there is no real distinction made between the two works. However, it is easy to see why many readers have believed that they come from different hands. The *Iliad* portrays passions, with insoluble (unsolvable) dilemmas. It has no real villains; Achilles, Agamemnon, Priam, and the rest are caught up, as actors and victims, in a cruel and ultimately tragic universe. On the other hand, in the *Odyssey*, the wicked are destroyed, right prevails, and the family is reunited with normal thinking, particularly Odysseus', who acts as the guiding force throughout the story.

Besides the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the so-called *Homeric Hymns* are a series of relatively short poems celebrating the various gods and composed in a style similar to that of the epics, which have also traditionally been attributed to Homer.

The modern text of the Homeric poems was conveyed through medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, copies of now-lost ancient manuscripts of the epics. From classical antiquity until recently, readers of Homer, although they may not have trusted the spurious tales describing him as a blind beggar bard (travelling story-teller, poet, minstrel) of Chios, and although they may have argued that portions of the texts, such as the ending scenes of the *Odyssey*, were added by another person, generally believed that Homer was a poet (or at most, a pair of poets) much like the poets they knew from their own experience. In short, they believed that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, although of course based on traditional materials, were independent, original, and largely fictional. However, in the last 200 years, this view has changed radically.

The question is often asked: by whom, how, and when were the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* written? A generally accepted answer has never been found. Some argue that they must be by different authors because of small differences in the writing, while other claim that they are drastically changes from the original stories because of the long tradition of oral story telling. No one view on this issue has prevailed, but it is fair to say that practically all commentators would agree on two points. First, that tradition had a great deal to do with the poems' composition, and second, that in the main part of the poem each epic bears the strong impress of a single writer. Meanwhile, archaeological discoveries from the last 125 years, especially those of Heinrich Schliemann, have shown that much of the civilization Homer described was not in fact fictional. Therefore, the epics are to a certain extent, historical documents. As you can imagine, discussion of this facet of them has constantly been intertwined with the debate on the question of their creation.

In a very direct way Homer was the parent of all succeeding Greek literature. Drama, historiography, and even philosophy all show both the mark of the comic and tragic issues that are raised in the epics and the techniques Homer used to approach them. For the later epic poets of Western literature, Homer was of course always the master (even when, like Dante, they did not know the works directly). To his most successful followers, oddly enough, his work was as much a target as a model. Virgil's *Aeneid*, for instance, is a refutation (disagreement) of the individualistic value system of the Homeric epic. The most Homeric scenes in *Paradise Lost*, by the English poet John Milton, are the stanzas describing the battle in heaven, and are essentially comic. As for novels, such as *Don Quixote* (1605), by the Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes, or *Ulysses* (1922), by the Irish writer James Joyce, the more Homeric they are, the more they lean toward parody and *mock epic*. Since Homer's time, in fact, an heroic *ethos* and the erudition necessary to appreciate Homer have never been combined in a serious author, and it seems unlikely that they ever will be.

## VICO AND THE "DISCOVERY OF THE TRUE HOMER"

### Vico's Method

Vico's elements, principles, and method provide the foundation of *The New Science*[3] and are interwoven throughout the work. One really cannot understand any one of these aspects of Vichian thought without at least becoming exposed the others. Vico's *The New Science* approaches history in a cyclical manner, seeing the *corsi* and *recorsi*—the flow and ebb of humanity and its institutions—as recurring death and life of human achievement following the guidance of providence.

The elements of Vico's science are axioms that illuminate the conventional wisdom behind his mythology. Within the outline of the elements, Vico first discusses the fallacies that underlie a misrepresentation of human history: the conceit of nations and the conceit of scholars. They both rest on a conceit that present philosophy provided an initial foundation for both nations and scholarship. Vico suggests that after the flood, men first lived on the mountain, later came down from the mountain to the plains, and then approached the sea [295]. Vico, through this metaphor, shows that the development of human institutions happened gradually—they evolved through time and *sensus communis.*

Vico suggests that men are by nature sociable, and through a critical examination of social institutions, one might dispel the "night of thick darkness" [331]. These principles on which a nation builds its social institutions are religion, marriage, and burial [333].

Yet, just studying the principles of human institutions is not enough; one must also ascribe to a specific methodology. Vico simply starts at the beginning, which relates back to the elements: a discussion of method "must begin where its subject matter began, as we said in the Axioms" [338]. That is, we have to "descend from these human and refined natures [those natures that perpetuate the conceits of nations and scholars] of ours to those quite wild and savage natures, which we cannot at all imagine and can comprehend only with great effort" [338]. Indeed, leaving behind an "evolved" ethos—one based on Cartesian thought—will prove difficult for both Vico's contemporaries and twentieth-century thinkers.

Vico's approach, combining the elements, principles, and methodology, presents a universality of history, or a "rational civil theology of divine providence" [341]. This reconstruction of history, Vico believed, could reconnect humanity with the poetic code. By rediscovering and contemplating its origins, humanity could regain an imaginative sensibility that has been lost in an age of Cartesian thought.

This process begins with what Vico calls "poetic metaphysics," which states that religion was created by a deficiency of human reason [384]. The ancient poets (*giganti*, gentiles, gentes, vulgar people—Vico uses these terms interchangeably throughout the *NS*), in an effort to explain the terrors of nature, react to the thunder and create a cause for the thunder: Jove. This "credible impossibility" became the first religions among the gentiles; through a sheer act of imagination these theological poets give "birth to wonder" which has not been matched since [383, 377, 384]. Since this creation is guided by the providence of God, these gentiles provide the genesis of religious thought and devotion by suggesting that "divine providence watches over the welfare of all mankind" [385]; all things come from Jove, especially the law [398].

"Poetic logic" is concerned with the substance of particulars, or signifiers and the signified. Names, too, come from the gods; the theological poets endowed all sub-

[3] *The New Science of Giambattista Vico.* Trs. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948.

stances—all things—with names associated with their divinities: "By means of these three divinities … they explained everything appertaining to the sky, the earth, and the sea" [402]. So, by means of the particular, a *logos* was developed. The theological poets, unlike the abstract thinkers in the age of men, "attributed senses and passions … to bodies, and to bodies as vast as sky, sea, and earth" [402]. Their *logos* was constructed around *metonymy*, or the vivid image of detail that represents the whole topic. This *logos* became a mythology ("true speech" [401]) out of which grew allegories or fables (archetypes) like Achilles connoting the idea of valor, or Odysseus symbolizing wisdom [403]. Finally, irony, when the image acquired a point of reference of its own and loses the connection to the original signified, represents the point when the cycle of poetic logic can start all over again with new links between the signified and the signifier [408-11].

"Poetic morality" stems from the theological poets' reaction to the thunderbolt of Jove: it made them god-fearing and became the source of their morality [502]. Vico continues: "From this nature of human institutions arose the eternal property that minds to make good use of the knowledge of God must humble themselves" [502]. The fear of Jove sent the giants into their caves where marriage was born out of a need for self-preservation: "Thus poetic morality began with piety, which was ordained by providence to found the nations" [503-4]. Through this initial religious piety, humans grew strong, industrious, magnanimous, and temperate [516].

### Vico's Poetic Wisdom

Vico defines wisdom in his discussion of "Poetic Wisdom": "Wisdom is the faculty which commands all of the disciplines by which we acquire all of the sciences and arts that make up humanity" [364]. Wisdom illuminates "by knowledge of the highest institutions" and leads the spirit to choose what is best [364]. Since Vico states that divine justice regulates all human justice [341] and manifests itself naturally in humanity's institutions, then humanity may derive wisdom by studying what it has built and the process that has precipitated that growth: its own institutions and their creation. Since wisdom comes from God, "the science of eternal things revealed by God" [365], Vico distinguishes between three types of theology: poetic, natural, and Christian.

Vico's road always travels from the beginnings of ideas and institutions to their evolved states; this method holds true for his types of theology as well. The poetic theology constitutes the initial civil institutions of primitive people, or *giganti*; the natural theology is the practice of the "metaphysicians" who "by means of their natural theology (or metaphysics) imagined the gods; how by means of their logic they invented languages; by morals created heroes; by economics founded families, and by politics, cities," *et cetera* [367]; and Christian theology, the apotheosis of wisdom, combines the former two "in the contemplation of divine providence" [366]. I assume, based upon my reading, that a representative of the former group would be Achilles, the mean group would be Homer or Plato, and the latter Saint Augustine or, perhaps, Vico himself.

This theology begins with the age of gods as the simplest people responded in fear to the thunder [178, 377]. This thunder first brings people together into communities and then joins the fearful emotions with this external stimulus to provide the basis of *sensus communis*, a "mental language common to all nations" [161]; in other words, mythology is born. The language of this era is as primitive as the peoples' understanding; made up of yelps and squawks of emotion, humans' first archaic language was based on imagination, and not on reason [185], signs and specific references rather than abstract generalizations. This "poetic wisdom [was] a metaphysics not rational and abstract like that of learned men now, but felt and imagined as that of these first men must have been, who, without power of ratiocination, were all robust sense and vigorous imagination" [375].

Through the imagination of people in response to a higher force, humanity makes societal institutions, ushering in the age of heroes; where all nations have their Joves, all also have their Herculeses [193, 196]. During this age, the people grew stronger, evolved an agrarian culture, and developed a social hierarchy [31]. The cave becomes a feudal fief, and the hero a despot. The language undergoes a similar metamorphosis: crude symbols and words become metaphorical—the language of heroes and poetry [32]. This was a language of "heroic emblems" comprised of "metaphors, images, similitudes, or comparisons, which, having passed into articulate speech, supplied all the resources of poetic expression" [438].

Finally, in the age of men, a Christian theology dominates a language of abstract generalization. This age of monarchies and commonwealths the height of man's accomplishment and also precipitates his downfall, or *recorsi*.

All of these historical groups—the evolution of the historical process from one group to another—are governed by divine providence [366]. By providence, Vico suggests that the progression of history—even the raw age of giants and the present age of Cartesian modernity as he outlines it—is the creation of God and, therefore, concurs with a grand design. Vico suggests that through the study of man's social institutions, which are worldly manifestations of divine justice and the providence of God, humans can understand the principles of universal history, divine justice, and wisdom [368].

Similar to Plato's cave, Vico uses the metaphor of the dark forest. Vico, like Plato's philosopher, is attempting to lead humanity out of the dark forest by illustrating the history of human development; by an understanding of this development—a development guided by the providence of God—humans might return to "piety, faith, and truth which are the natural foundations of justice as well as the graces and beauties of the eternal order of God" [1106]. So rather than acting from a selfish, Cartesian "I," we may learn to think in terms of "an eternal and infinite good" [1110]. Piety, then for Vico, seems to be the foundation and end of wisdom.

### Vico's Homer

Vico, in his imaginative search for the true Homer, uses the language of reason combined with creative speculation and inductive hypothesizing. Homer, for Vico, is a metaphor for the citizens of ancient Greece. He did not exist as a man, but as a much more powerful entity who lived in the cultural consciousness of the entire nation. Homer himself became a myth—a integral myth for the emergence of Greek polity, poetry, and philosophy.

Vico suggests that Homer was the codifier of Greek culture. Homer, according to Vico, lived about 460 years, encompassing the time when marriage laid the foundation for Greek civility to when philosophers inserted philosophy into the texts of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* [901]. There could not have been a single man named Homer that could have written the entirety of Greek philosophy, poetry, and social institutions [897]. Yet, opines Vico, since Homer is considered the father of poetry, is venerated by the Greek philosophers, and is representative of all aspects of Greek decorum, he must be a product of the culture that came before and after.

Yet Homer, the idea of the poet, does not contain "sublime esoteric wisdom" like the later philosophers, but "base sentences, vulgar customs, crude comparisons, local idioms, licenses in meter, variations in dialect" and makes men into gods and gods into men [787, 883-8, 893-6]. Vico cites Achilles as a poor choice for a hero who should encompass sublime esoteric wisdom [786]. Also, the fact that many Greek cities claim the honor of having birthed Homer and the variety of dialects used in his epics, Vico interprets as evidence of his non-existence as a single person [788]. Additionally, Vico suggests that the

Homeric epics, because they contain elements that do not fit into any one age—games, painting, writing, luxury and pomp, clothing, *et cetera*—that the poems "were composed and complied by various hands through successive ages" [804].

Vico's language throughout *The New Science*, and particularly in "Discovery of the True Homer," is very rational, yet his exploration remains faithful to the methodology he outlined previously. He starts with the particular, Homer, and fits him into the development of the gentile nation of Greece. In examining the history of Greece and attempting to fit the particular into the general, Vico speculates about the age in which Homer lived and his birthplace. Yet, since the two poems encompass what seems to be the entirety of Greek culture for about 500 years, he concludes that Homer himself was a fable constructed by a nation to codify its culture, poetry, and philosophy.

The true Homer, to Vico, is an institution. Homer's "sublimity is inseparable from popularity," and this popularity "first created heroic characters for themselves" from imagined universals; these ideas are products of poetic metaphysics [809]. In an effort to remember history and orient itself within nature, the culture narrates, in heroic language, its common history "enlarging particulars in imagination" [816]. It creates, via the poetic metaphysics, fables that explain nature without reflection, or a "lie that under every aspect has the appearance of the truth" [891]. These fables, then, become the remembered history of a gentile culture. This remembered history, in the form of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, were written by its personification: Homer.

So the poet Homer used memory in three different ways to illuminate the history of Greece: "memory when it remembers things, imagination when it alters or imitates them, and invention when it gives them a new turn or puts them into proper arrangement and relationship" [819]. History, then, for Vico, is a bunch of fables that are compiled by poets, and represent the foundation for a modern culture.

### The Birth of Reason

"Where does grammar come from?" asked on of my students one morning after complaining about another assignment. His question, while meant to be distracting, made me think of Vico and treat the question, in private, as very serious. Grammar, as part of the classical trivium, was the first instance of literary criticism. Grammar, as the contemporary student might interpret the word, is only part of the picture; indeed, grammar is the logical construction of words, but grammar is not itself, at least at its origins, logical. If Vico's method of speculative hypothesizing were utilized in this matter, then certainly grammar cannot have existed before humanity's need to express itself. Therefore, grammar cannot be based solely on reason. Northrop Frye, in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, suggests that "grammar and narrative are the same thing" (244). Later, Frye states, reminiscent of Vichian thought, that there is "no evidence whatever that man learned to speak primarily because he wanted to speak logically" (332). So if grammar was born out of a non-rational need for expression, then Vico's theory involving the origins of language and civilization seem most probable.

The rational, logical structuring of words is only a part of language. The other part of grammar is a reaction to language that already exists, like Homer's epics. These epics, written in the third age of poets as a inaccurate culmination of the fables from the first two ages, precipitates a culture which produced them. Vico calls this process Homer. So long before Aristotle structured a grammar of poetics, Homer, the cultural mythology, constructed poetry from a people's reaction to nature.

Homer is not a philosopher—a thinker, like Plato, that logically orders the abstract—but a poet who is the product of a cultural reaction—reactions based on emotional, imaginative, and particular stimuli. These stimuli, avers Vico, are Homer's "proper

materials" derived from "quite vulgar feelings and hence the vulgar customs of the barbarous Greece of his day" [781], and not a manifestation of the "sublime esoteric wisdom" of the philosopher [780]. The poet's material is not the rational abstract, but the particular product of imagination: "credible impossibility" [383]. Through the poet's imagination religion and society are constructed from his creative responses to the environment. In addition to his own responses, the poet's subjects and his audience are the *giganti*; in an effort to tame and order the feral nature around him, the poet helps tame "the ferocity of the vulgar" [782]. The vulgar certainly would not understand sublime wisdom, nor would a poet of the vulgar be privy to such sagacity. His poetic wisdom—the first wisdom found in poetry—was created by the poet's heroic mind.

Wisdom provides not only for the individual. Vico, in his speech "On the Heroic Mind," states the pursuit of wisdom does not end with the individual, but must benefit the whole human race: "Prove to be heroes by enriching the human race with further giant benefits" (244). Homer's enrichment of humanity comes in the form of culture, language, and imagination—not one man's—but all creative individuals that came before him. Homer is heroic by recording that national identity for future generations of Greeks and all of the Western tradition. Homer takes from the community in order to help a greater community; his lesson is not certainty, but the truth of the *sensus communis*.

While Vico does not grant Homer Plato's "sublime esoteric wisdom" [780], he does suggest that Homer is the most "sublime of all the sublime poets" [807]. Homer was not endowed with a conscious wisdom, evidenced by the immoral actions of his heroes and gods, but his poetry, because it was a product of the *sensus communis*, contained poetic falsehoods that were, nevertheless, universals, and therefore true. His poetic characters, since they were created by this powerful communal imagination, possess a sublimity and uniformity in that they are archetypal manifestations of Greek particulars: Achilles represents heroic valor, Odysseus, heroic wisdom [809]. These particulars, in the language of poetry, become synecdoches—parts that stand for the whole—and personifications of Greek ideals.

So Homer represents Vico's idea of the Heroic Mind. Homer, whose individual existence is in question, stands for the entire Greek identity. He constructs a knowledge out of the community based on imagination and observation of his *milieu*. His poetry is not a manifestation of a single man's rational thought, but is a holistic gestalt of three ages of Greek consciousness and identity. Homer preserves the *giganti* for the rational man who will come after him. Homer is not the individual, but the whole. By an understanding of Homer's accomplishments, we, as seekers of wisdom, may shape ourselves into the wise and humane person that is actuated in the public life of the community.

In other words, Homer is memory. Vico gives memory three different aspects: "memory when it remembers things, imagination when it alters or imitates them, and invention when it gives them a new turn or puts them into proper arrangement and relationship" [819]. Not only are poets "the first historians of nations" [820], but they, as Aristotle observed later, are imitators—not of nature—but of humanity. Yet this memory is not the rational, Cartesian kind, but is colored by imagination and fables. Again, the poetry offers not certainty, but truth—truth in that these fables and imagination are the products of the community, and must be true. The verse of the poet, then, aids memory and perpetuates social institutions and ideals.

Contrary to Descartes' philosophy, creative imagination precedes rational thought. Vico believed that the synthesis of reason and creativity produces meaningful human thought; the study toward this *scienza* may be achieved through the study of the liberal arts, one (but intimately tied to the rest) of which, is grammar. So, "where does grammar come from"? Certainly, grammar has its foundations in the particular "night of thick

darkness" [331] before reason shed its abstract light to dispel that darkness. Logic and reason grew out of creativity and disorder, and one must give a nod to their ubiquitous purveyor: Homer.

## A Vichian Lexicon

Ages: The three ages of man are: (1) the age of the gods, in which the gentiles created the first institutions of religion, marriage, and burial derived from the imaginative universal (Jove and the metaphysical poets); (2) the age of heroes, in which social structure and great deeds separated the heroes from the plebs (Hercules); (3) age of men, in which reason dictated that men were equal in human nature and the first democracies were established (Homer marks the beginning) (*NS* 20).

Barbarism of Sense: a manner of poetic thinking and action characteristic of how primitive man organized the civil world; primitive poetic thinking; reaction of *giganti*.

Conceit of Nations: Ideas of empty magnificence; each nation believing itself to have been first in the world.

Conceit of Scholars: Ideas of impertinent philosophical wisdom; those who believe that what they know must have been eminently understood from the beginning of the world.

*Corso e ricorso*: The cyclical genesis, development, decline, and rebirth of the ages of man.

Fantasia: The making imagination.

*Giganti*: giants; vulgar; the people of the age of gods; the descendants of Ham, Japheth, and Shem who had renounced the religion of Hoah; gentiles isolated from Hebrew. See Barbarism of Sense.

Heroic Mind: The mind that has a knowledge of the whole, the ability to position itself within that whole, and a drive to "engender God-inspired marvels" (*HM* 233). Varene suggests that "the grasp of the whole through specific study is the flower of wisdom, … the true heroism of the mind, and the eloquence of thought" (21). Fiore interprets the Heroic Mind: "The nature of heroism in learning means that the student engages in a self-constructive, self-directed, and essentially non-rationalist dynamic process whereby all of the disciplines are absorbed and understood in relation to each other and to the world" (Pedagogy 14).

Humanism: The remembrance and recovery of all that is human; imaginative, recollective study of the past; retrieval of the past.

Imaginaton: Recovering what was; recollection, memory.

Jove: An imaginative universal. The "credible impossibility" which Vico states is the proper material of poetry: "it was believed [by the metaphysical poets] that the thundering sky was Jove. … All this is to be explained by a hidden sense that nations have of the omnipotence of God" (*NS* 120). Also see *NS* sections 374-84.

Memory: The recollective imaginative universal; the art of grasping the providential order of things (Fiore). Vico divides memory into three types: (1) memory when it remembers; (2) imagination that alters or imitates; (3) invention that gives a new order or interpretation (*NS* 313).

Myth: Fabulated history. "True speech … a fantastic speeh making use of physical substances endowed with life and most of them imagined to be divine" (*NS* 127-8).

Night of Thick Darkness: A metaphor for primitive man's socio-cultural context (Fiore). This concept may be likened to Plato's proverbial cave.

Poetic Wisdom: The first wisdom of the *giganti*; a wisdom based on feeling and imagination, not rational or abstract; the "robust sense and vigorour imagination" that constructs the imaginative universal (*NS* 116).

Poets: The first historians; Poets should invent sublime fables suited to the popular understanding so the vulgar may learn the virtue that the poets have taught themselves (*NS* 117).

*Scienza*: Wisdom speaking; knowledge of the whole; of things human and divine, with a direction toward prudence.

*Sensus communis*: The sense that founds a community; thinking, speaking, acting well in common life; that which binds communal life; a common perspective spontaneously attained through language and custom.

# OLD TESTAMENT

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION / WRITING

1. The significance of the fact that God forbids eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Why should the knowledge of "good and evil" be forbidden? *Are* there kinds of knowledge that it is risky for human beings to have?

2. The role of the serpent. Is the serpent a way of passing the buck—of saying it's not *our* fault?

3. Cain and Abel, symbolic of two different ways of life, farmers and pastoral nomads.

4. Discuss Joseph's statement to his brothers: "So now it was not you that sent me hither but God" (45:8).

5. "This dreamer cometh . . .": Joseph as visionary and a man of action.

6. Discuss the function in the story of the following motifs: Joseph's clothes; dreams and their interpretations.

7. Why do you think Joseph put the cup in Benjamin's sack?

8. Job (in Chapter 31) makes the claim that his life has been virtuous and devoted to the worship of God and so does not deserve the calamities that have fallen on him. He asks God for an answer, but the voice from the whirlwind does not address his question at all. Why does Job accept God's assertion of divine power and not press for an answer to his question? Why is he satisfied with what he is given? Do you find the end of the dialogue satisfactory?

9. Recast in your own language the core of the arguments offered by the three comforters in "Job." How do they differ form one another?

10. Discuss the statement that although God does not answer Job's complaint he "reveals himself personally to him and shares with him the vision of his cosmic resonsibilities."

# GILGAMESH

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION / WRITING

1. Dreams are so recurrent in *Gilgamesh*, and so important. They serve as a vehicle of communication between gods and mortals, anticipating events symbolically, but accurately. What narrative function do they serve? That is, why is it useful to know what is going to happen before it does?

2. Discuss the relationship between civilization and nature as characterized by Enkidu. Are these two forces necessarily at odds?

3. What do we mean by "civilized"? How is Enkidu "civilized"? What does he gain? What does he lose?

4. What is the role of women in *Gilgamesh*? Look especially at Ishtar and the prostitute.

5. Discuss Humbaba as a metaphor. Is Humbaba a threat to Uruk; does its death serve society in any way?

6. Compare the tyrannical Gilgamesh from the epic's beginning with the sagacious monarch of the epic's end. How has Gilgamesh grown? How does his knowledge benefit his community?

7. One critic has called *Gilgamesh* a "tragedy of mortality." Discuss possible meanings. Is there any evidence in the poem that the citizens of Uruk believe in an afterlife?

# THE ILIAD

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION / WRITING

1. Freedom and responsibility. To what extent are the decisions made by the heroes independent, individual decisions? Discuss, along these lines, Agamemnon's decision to take Briseis from Achilles.

2. Discuss the statement: "Mortality is a human creation, and though the gods may approve it, they are not bound by it."

3. Aristotle said that the man who incapable of working in common, or who in his self-sufficiency has no need of others, is no part of the community, like a beast or god. Discuss the figure of Achilles in the light of this statement.

4. Compare and contrast the relationship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu with that of Achilles and Patroclus.

5. In spite of the constraints imposed by the formulaic language of the oral tradition, Homer, according to one critic, "sees his people as individually distinct and makes us aware of their individuality." Discuss the ways in which Homer succeeds in presenting as differentiated individuals Hector, Nestor, Ajax, Odysseus, Agamemnon, Priam, Phoenix.

6. Homer's preferred medium of poetic comparison is simile rather then metaphor and his similes are "extended": the simile does more than establish a likeness between A and B, it goes on to describe B in great detail, some of the details not like A at all. Yet these details, the apparent development of B for its own sake, often do suggest points of comparison that lie below the surface and often, too, they make significant comments on broader aspects of the situation in which they appear. Discuss the function of the extended simile in the following passages: VI.503-14; XIX.373-80; XXIV.476-84; XXII.26-32; 194-251; XVIII.207-14; 316-23

# THE ODYSSEY

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Compare and contrast the heroes' ideal in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. What is your response to Odysseus as a hero? Achilles?

2. Discuss hospitality as a criterion of civilization in the *Odyssey*. Discuss contemporary attitudes to the role of hospitality as a criterion of civilization.

3. Analyze and assess Telemachus' growth to manhood, the stages of his assumption of responsibility, and the recognition of the fact by others.

4. Discuss the portrayal and role of women in the *Odyssey*.

5. List and differentiate recognitions of Odysseus, intended and unintended.

6. Discuss the complicated nature of the relationship between Penelope and Telemachus as mother and son.

7. There are interesting differences between the *Iliad*, which focuses on an argument between Achilles and Agamemnon and its consequences, and the *Odyssey*, which is a romance-adventure story that set the trend for later novelists. Why would Homer suddenly change styles? Is there serious evidence for the idea thet the two epics were written by two or more authors?

8. Compare and contrast the motivation of Odysseus with those of his crew and those of the suitors.

9. The *Odyssey* is about 2700-years-old. Do you think the feelings and needs shown by the people in this epic are still important today? Which experiences or people in this story did you most identify with?

10. Two ancient Greek critics, Aristophanes and Aristarchus, thought that Homer ended his poem on the lines: "So they came / into that bed so steadfast, loved of old, / opening glad arms to one another" (XXIII.298-300). In other words, they thought Book XXIV unnecessary. What in fact does Book XXIV contribute to the epic?

11. Discuss the symbolic/metaphorical significance of the following:
    - Odysseus' encounter with Agamemnon in Hades
    - Odysseus' encounter with his mother in Hades
    - Odysseus' encounter with Achilles in Hades
    - Odysseus' encounter with Ajax in Hades
    - Polyphemus and Cyclopsland
    - Menelaus' story of his wanderings
    - Calypso's Cave
    - Circe
    - Telemachus' search and journey
    - Odysseus' use of disguise and revelation and recognition

## QUESTIONS ON THE ODYSSEY

1. Identify the following:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Athena | Agamemnon | Poseidon | Achilles |
| Polyphemus | Ajax | Cyclops | Sirens |
| Telemachus | Scylla | Mentes | Charybdis |
| Nestor | Thrinacia | Menelaus | Eumaeus |
| Pisistratus | Argus | Helen | Antinous |
| Calypso | Irus | Hermes | Eurymachus |
| Scheria | Penelope | Phaeacians | Eurycleia |
| Nausicaa | Ctesippus | Aeolus | Phemius |
| Lotos-Eaters | Laertes | Autoycus | Circe |
| Tiresias | Laestrygonians | | |

2. Summarize the plot for each of the books in the *Odyssey*.

3. To what extent does the geography of Odysseus' journey coincide with the actual geography of the Mediterranean?

4. List as many incidents as you can in which Odysseus puts people to the test to see if they are loyal to him or even whether they are decent human beings.

5. What is the basic characteristic of Odysseus' personality that motivates all of his acts?

6. What drive motivates Odysseus' crew? Think of how they act in the bag of winds episode.

7. What is the Greek meaning of Odysseus' name? How does this apply to him?

8. In what ways does the heroic concept presented in the *Odyssey* differ from that in the *Iliad*? Can you speculate on why this might be so?

9. What is the major structural device used to unify the various episodes?

10. What does Circe represent?

11. Why are there so many women characters in the *Odyssey*? List the major women figures and their function.

12. How is the image of women represented?

13. Discuss the various female stereotypes found in the *Odyssey*. Connect these stereotypes to an understanding of the cultural context.

14. Point out where Odysseus conceals his identity or uses a disguise. Speculate on what this means.

15. Why do you think, the gods are less important in the *Odyssey* than they are in the *Iliad*?

16. Why does Odysseus withhold his identity form King Alcinous?

17. Why is it necessary for Odysseus to descend into the underworld?

18. Study the long interview between Odysseus and Athena in Book XIII. Compare their relationship with that of Job and God. What does this comparison reveal about the religious attitudes of the Hebrews and the Greeks?

19. Whether male or female, to what extent and in what ways are we all Telemachus?

20. In showing us how Odysseus' dog, Argos, was kept, what is Homer telling us about condition in Ithaca?

21. In the *Odyssey*, servants play important roles. How does Odysseus treat Eumaeus and the cowherd? What values might Homer be trying to teach through his treatment?

22. What characteristics of Odysseus and Penelope's marriage bed might suggest the strength and endurance of their love?

23. Do you know of any other stories, movie, or TV shows in which the hero appears in a disguise? What do these heroes often learn while they are in disguise?

24. Suppose Odysseus were a modern general who fought a war for ten years and was missing for another ten years. What emotional problems might he (or she) face after that ordeal? What changes might he (or she) find in the home and family after twenty years?

25. Do you think Odysseus' revenge on the suitors and the maids is excessive or too brutal? Explore this question from Odysseus' viewpoint (remember he was a rightful king) and from your own modern viewpoint.

# QUIZ ON THE ODYSSEY

1. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* date back to _____ (which century?).

2. Achilles' heroic action is motivated by _____.

3. Odysseus' monologue to King Alcinous' court begins in book _____ and ends in book _____.

4. Odysseus saves himself from the Cyclops by _____ _____.

5. The Bag of Winds was given to Odysseus by _____.

6. Odysseus remains with Circe for _____ year(s) and with Calypso for _____ year(s).

7. At the end of Odysseus' stay with Circe, she says he must _____ in order to _____.

8. Scylla is a _____, and Charybdis is a _____.

9. In order to protect his men against the sirens, Odysseus makes them _____ and _____.

10. Odysseus' man _____ schemes to kill and eat the divine food of _____.

11. Calypso lives on the island of _____ while Circe lives on the island of _____.

12. Odysseus' patron goddess is _____.

13. _____ tells Menelaus that Odysseus is with Calypso.

14. Calypso offers Odysseus the temptation of _____.

# READING QUIZ ON THE ODYSSEY

Match the columns. Put the letter from column B next to the correct answer in column A.

| A | B |
|---|---|
| 1. folk tale | A. Odysseus' mother |
| 2. Athena | B. Calypso's island |
| 3. *in medias res* | C. messenger of the gods |
| 4. Tieresias | D. forger of armor |
| 5. epic simile | E. "Ulysses" |
| 6. Proteus | F. Odysseus' legitimate son |
| 7. invocation to the muse | G. Goddess of Wisdom |
| 8. Hermes | H. conventional beginning of epics: in the middle of the action |
| 9. epic convention | I. *Aeneid* |
| 10. Anticleia | J. journey device |
| 11. literary epic | K. Odysseus' godmother |
| 12. Aeaea | L. whirlpool |
| 13. mock epic | M. blind soothsayer and underworld guide |
| 14. Tennyson | N. *Iliad* |
| 15. archetype | O. myth of a god |
| 16. Telegonous | P. myth of a man |
| 17. structural parallelism | Q. a religion in which we no longer believe |
| 18. Ogygia | R. Carl Jung |
| 19. traditional epic | S. extended comparison |
| 20. Eurycleia | T. epic poet's request for divine assistance |
| 21. myth | U. catalogues |
| 22. Hephaestus | V. Circe's island |
| 23. legend | W. "Rape of the Lock" |
| 24. Charybdis | X. Old Man of the Sea |
| 25. Telemachus | Y. Odysseus' illegitimate son |

# POEMS AND SONGS INSPIRED BY THE ODYSSEY

## CIRCE, MUD POEMS (EXCERPT)

**Margaret Atwood**

People have come from all over to consult me, bringing their limbs
which have unaccountably fallen off, they don't know why,
my front porch is waist deep in hands, bringing their blood
hoarded in pickle jars, bringing their fears about their hearts,
which they either can or can't hear at night. They offer me
their pain, hoping in return for a word, a word, any word
from those they have assaulted daily, with shovels, axes,
electric saws, the silent ones, the ones they accused of being
silent because they would not speak in the received language.

I spend my days with my head pressed to the earth, to stones,
to shrubs, collecting the few muted syllables left over; in the
evenings I dispense them, a letter at a time, trying to be fair,
to the clamoring suppliants, who have built elaborate stair-
cases across the level ground so they can approach me on
their knees. Around me everything is worn down, the grass,
the roots, the soil, nothing is left but the bared rock.

Come away with me, he said, we will live on a desert island.
I said, I am a desert island. It was not what he had in mind.

---

I made no choice
I decided nothing
One day you simply appeared in your stupid boat,
your killer's hands, your disjointed body, jagged as a shipwreck,
skinny-ribbed, blue-eyed, scorched, thirsty, the usual,
pretending to be—what? a survivor?

Those who say they want nothing
want everything.
It was not this greed
that offended me, it was the lies.

Nevertheless I gave you
the food you demanded for your journey
you said you planned; but you planned no journey
and we both knew it.

You've forgotten that,
you made the right decision.

The trees bend in the wind, you eat, you rest,
you think of nothing,
your mind, you say,
is like your hands, vacant:

vacant is not innocent.

---

This story was told to me by another traveler, just passing through. It took place in a foreign country, as everything does.

When he was young he and another boy constructed a woman out of mud. She began at the neck and ended at the knees and elbows: the stuck to the essentials. Every sunny day they would row across to the island where she lived, in the afternoon when the sun had warmed her, and make love to her, sinking with ecstasy into her soft moist belly, her brown wormy flesh where small weeds had already rooted. They would take turns, they were not jealous, she preferred them both. Afterwards they would repair her, making her hips more spacious, enlarging her breasts with their shining stone nipples.

His love for her was perfect, he could say anything to her, into her he spilled his entire life. She was swept away in a sudden flood. He said no woman since then has equaled her.

Is this what you would like me to be, this mud woman? Is this what I would like to be? It would be so simple.

---

It's the story that counts. No use telling me it isn't a story, or not the same story. I know you've fulfilled everything you promised, you love me, we sleep till noon and we spend the rest of the day eating, the food is superb, I don't deny that. But I worry about the future. In the story the boat disappears one day over the horizon, just disappears, and it doesn't say what happens then. On the island that is. It's the animals I'm afraid of, they weren't part of the bargain, in fact you didn't mention them, they may transform themselves back into men. Am I really immortal, does the sun care, when you leave will you give me back the words? Don't evade, don't pretend you won't leave after all: you leave in the story and the story is ruthless.

## HOME AT LAST

**Walter Becker and Donald Fagan**

I know this super highway, this bright familiar sun
I guess that I'm the lucky one
Who wrote that tired sea song, set on this peaceful shore
You think you've heard this one before

Well the danger on the rocks is surely past
Still I remain tied to the mast
Could it be that I have found my home at last
Home at last

She serves the smooth retsina, she keeps me safe and warm
It's just the calm before the storm
Call in my reservation, so long hey thanks my friend
I guess I'll try my luck again

## ITHAKA

**Constantine Cavafy**

As you set out for Ithaka
hope your road is along one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:
you'll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thought raised high,
as long as rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
wild Poseidon—you won't encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope your road is along one.
May there be many summer mornings when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you enter harbors you're seeing for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind—
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to learn and go on learning from their scholars.

Keep Ithaka always on your mind,

Arriving there is what you're destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you're old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you wouldn't have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you have become, so full of experience,
you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

## ULYSSES

**John Ciardi**

At the last mountain I stood to remember the sea
and it was not the sea of my remembering
but something from an augur's madness:
sheep guts, bird guts, ox guts, smoking
in a hot eye. Was this my life? Dull red,
dull green, blood black, the coils still writhing
the last of the living thing: a carnage
steaming into the smokes of a sick dawn.

I had planted the oar at the crossroads, there in the great goat dust
where the oaf waited, chewing a stalk of garlic.
"Stranger," he said, "what have you on your shoulder?"
"A world," I said, and made a hole for it,
watched by the oaf and his goats. I gave him money
for the fattest goat and asked to be alone,
and he would not leave me. I gave him money again
for a peace-parting, and he would not go.
"Stranger," I said, "I have sailed to all lands,
killed in all lands, and come home poor. I think
blood buys nothing, and I think it buys
all that's bought. Leave me this goat and go."
Why should I want this blood on me? The goat
stared at me like an old man, and the oaf
sat chewing garlic. This much had been commanded.
Was the rest commanded, too? Was it my life
or the god's laughter foresaw me?
I prayed in anger:
"O coupling gods, if from your lecheries
among the bloods of man, a prayer may move you
to spare one life, call off this last sad dog
you have set on me. Does heaven need such meat?"

The heavens lurched on unheeding. The fool stayed:
would not be sacred off, and would not be whipped off.
Then he raised his staff against me.
Was it my life
or the gods' laughter answered? I hacked him sidearm
across the middle: almost a stunt for practice—
dead level, no body weight to it, all in the shoulder
and wrist, and not three feet to the whole swing.
But it halved him like a melon! A chop
the ships would have sung for a century!
…But there were no ships, and the oar was planted unknown
in a country of garlic and goat turds,
and what lay fallen was rags and bones.
"Take him, then!" I cried.
"Who else could stomach such a dusty tripe?"
I made the pyre with the planted oar at its center,
and as it flamed, I raised the libation cup,
but mouth the wine and spat it at the blaze.
The fire roared up like Etna. "At your pleasure!"
I shouted back, and threw the dead clown in,
first one piece, then the other. The horns of the flame
raped him whole and blew for more. The goats
stood watching, huddled like old crazy men
in a chorus round the fire, and one by one
I slit their throats and threw them to their master.
I say those goats were mad: they waited there
as if the fire were Medusa: the blood of the dead
ran down the legs of the living and they did not move,
not even to turn their heads. And in the center of
the flame went blood-mad in a shaft to heaven.

It was dark when I turned away. I lost my road
and slept the night in a grove. When I awoke
I found a shrine to Apollo, a marble peace
leaned on by cypresses, but across his belly
a crack grinned hip to hip, and the right hand
lay palm-up in the dust. On the road back
I came to many such, but that was the first
of the cracked gods and the dusty altars.
I returned to the sea, and at the last mountain
I stood to remember, and the memory
could not live in fact. I had grown old
in the wrong world. Penelope wove for nothing
her fabric and delay. I could not return.
I was woven to my dead men. In the dust
of the dead shore by the dead sea I lay down
and named their names who had matched lives with me,
and won. And they were all I loved.

## ULYSSES AND THE SIREN

**Samuel Daniel**

SIREN. Come, worthy Greek, Ulysses, come,
Possess these shores with me;
The winds and seas are troublesome,
And here we may be free.
Here may we sit and view their toil
That travail in the deep,
And joy the day in mirth the while,
And spend the night in sleep.

ULYSSES. Fair nymph, if fame or honor were
To be attained with ease,
Then would I come and rest me there,
And leave such toils as these.
But here it dwells, and here must I
With danger seek it forth;
To spend the time luxuriously
Becomes not me of worth.

Siren. Ulysses, be not deceived
With that unreal name;
This honor is a thing conceived,
And rests on other's fame.
Begotten only to molest
Our peace, and to beguile
The best thing of our life, our rest
And give us up to toil.

ULYSSES. Delicious nymph, suppose there were
Nor honor nor report
Yet manliness would scorn to wear
The time in idle sport.
For toil doth give a better touch,
To make us feel our joy;
And ease finds tediousness, as much
As labor yields annoy.

SIREN. Then pleasure likewise seems the shore
Whereto tends all your toil,
Which you forgo to make it more,
And parish oft the while.
Who may disport them diversely,
Find never tedious day,
And ease may have variety
As well as action may.

ULYSSES. But natures of the noblest frame
These toils and dangers please,
And they take comfort in the same
As much as you in ease,
And with the thoughts of actions past
Are repeated still;
When pleasure leaves a touch at last
To show that it was ill.

SIREN. That doth opinion only cause
That's out of custom bred,
Which makes us many other laws
That ever nature did.
No widows wail for our delights,
Our sports are without blood;
The world, we see, by warlike wights
Receives more hurt than good.

ULYSSES. But yet the state of things require
These motions of unrest,
And these great spirits of high desire
Seem born to turn them best,
To purge the mischiefs that increase
And all good order mar;
For oft we see a wicked peace
To be well changed for war.

SIREN. Well, well, Ulysses, then I see
I shall not have thee here,
And therefore I will come to thee,
And take my fortunes there.
I must be won that cannot win,
Yet lost were I not won;
For beauty hath created been
T' undo, or be undone.

## THE CYCLOPS AND THE OCEAN

**Nikki Giovanni**

Moving slowly…against time…patiently majestic…
the cyclops…in the ocean…meets no Ulysses…

Through the night…he sighs…throbbing against the
shore…declaring…for the adventure…

A wall of gray…gathered by a slow touch…slash and
slither…through the waiting screens…separating into
nodules…making my panes…accept the touch…

Not content…to watch my frightened gaze…he clamors
beneath the sash…dancing on my sill…

Certain to die…when the sun…returns…

*Tropical Storm Dennis*
*August 15-18, 1981, Florida*

## THE SEA CALL

### Nicos Kazantzakis

*When Odysseus met Teirestias in the underworld, the prophet told him that he would reach home, but would then take another journey to a land where people live who know nothing of the sea. In this excerpt from a modern sequel to the* Odyssey *by the twentieth-century Greek poet Nicos Kazantzakis, Odysseus has returned to Ithaca. Sitting by the hearth with his family, his eyes alight with excitement, he relates his adventures. But then…*

Odysseus sealed his bitter lips and spoke no more,
but watched the glowering fire fade, the withering flames,
the ash that spread like powder on the dying coals,
then turned, glanced at his wife, gazed on his son and father,
and suddenly shook with fear and sighed, for now he knew
that even his native land was a sweet mask of Death.
Like a wild beast snared in the net, his eyes rolled round
and tumbled down his deep eye-sockets, green and bloodshot.
His tribal palace seemed a narrow shepherd's pen,
his wife a small and wrinkled old housekeeping crone,
his son an eight-year-old drudge who, trembling, weighed
with care to find what's just, unjust, dishonest, honest,
and though all life were prudence, as though fire were just,
and logic the highest good of eagle-mountain men!
The heart-embattled athlete laughed, dashed to his feet,
and his home's sweetness, suddenly, his longed-for land,
the twelve gods, ancient virtue by his honored hearth,
his son—all seemed opposed now to his high descent.
The fire dwindled and died away, and the four heads
and his son's smooth-skinned calves with tender softness glowed
till in the trembling hush of Penelope's wan cries
broke in despair like water flowing down a wall.
Her son dashed and stood upright by his mother's throne,
touched gently with a mute compassion her white arm,
then gazed upon his father in the dim light, and shuddered,
for in the last resplendence of the falling fire
he could discern the unmoving eyes flash yellow, blue,
and crimson, though the dark had swallowed the wild body.
With silent strides Odysseus then shot back the bolt,
passed lightly through the courtyard and sped down the street.
Some saw him take the graveyard's zigzag mountain path,
some saw him leap on rocks that edged the savage shore,

some visionaries saw him in the dead of night
swimming and talking secretly with sea-demons,
but only a small boy saw him in a lonely dream
sit crouched and weeping by the dark sea's foaming edge.

## AN ANCIENT GESTURE

### Edna St. Vincent Millay

I thought, as I wiped my eyes on the corner of my apron:
Penelope did this too.
And more than once: you can't keep weaving all day
And undoing it all through the night;
Your arms get tired, and the back of your neck gets tight;
And along towards morning, when you think it will never be light,
And your husband has been gone, and you don't know where, for years,
Suddenly you burst into tears;
There is simply nothing else to do.

And I thought, as I wiped my eyes on the corner of my apron:
This is an ancient gesture, authentic, antique,
In the very bet tradition, classic, Greek;
Ulysses did this too.
But only as a gesture,—a gesture which implied
To the assembled throng that he was much too moved to speak.
He learned it from Penelope…
Penelope, who really cried.

## ODYSSEUS

### W. S. Merwin

Always setting forth was the same,
Same sea, same dangers waiting for him
As though he had got nowhere but older.
Behind him on the receding shore
The identical reproaches, and somewhere
Out before him, the unraveling patience
He was wedded to. There were the islands
Each with it women and twining welcome
To be navigated, and one to call "home."
The knowledge of all that he betrayed
Grew till it was the same whether he stayed
Or went. Therefore he went. And what wonder
If sometimes he could not remember
Which was the one who wished on his departure
Perils that he could never sail through,
And which, improbable, remote, and true,
Was the one he kept sailing home to.

## ULYSSES

**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel; I will drink
Life to the lees. All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Next the dim sea. I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known,—cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honor'd of them all,—
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains; but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
to whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill
This labor, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.
There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail;
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me,—
That ever with a frolic welcome took

The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads,—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.
Death closes all; but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends.
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,—
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

## THE LOTOS-EATERS

"Courage!" he said, and pointed toward the land,
"This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon."
In the afternoon they came unto a land
In which it seemed always afternoon.
All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;
And like a downward smoke, the slender stream
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.

A land of streams! some, like a downward smoke,
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;
And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke,
Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.
They saw the gleaming river seaward flow
From the inner land: far off, three mountain-tops,
Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,
Stood sunset-flush'd: and, dew'd with showery drops,
Up-clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.

The charmed sunset linger'd low adown
In the red West: thro' mountain clefts the dale
Was seen far inland, and the yellow down
Border'd with palm, and many a winding vale

And meadow, set with slender galingale;
A land where all things always seem'd the same!
And round about the keel with faces pale,
Dark faces pale against that rosy flame,
The mild-eyed melancholy Lotos-eaters came.

Branches they bore of that enchanted stem,
Laden with flower and fruit, whereof they gave
To each, but whoso did receive of them,
And taste, to him the gushing of the wave
Far far away did seem to mourn and rave
On alien shores; and if his fellow spake,
His voice was thin, as voices from the grave;
And deep-asleep he seem'd, yet all awake,
And music in his ears his beating heart did make.

They sat them down upon the yellow sand,
Between the sun and moon upon the shore;
And sweet it was to dream of Fatherland,
Of child, and wife, and slave; but evermore
Most weary seem'd the sea, weary the oar,
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.
Then some one said, "We will return no more";
And all at once they sang, "Our island home
Is far beyond the wave; we will no longer roam."

### CHORIC SONG

#### I

There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,
Or night-dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.
Here are cool mosses deep,
And thro' the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep."

#### II

Why are we weigh'd upon with heaviness,
And utterly consumed with sharp distress,
While all things else have rest from weariness?
All things have rest: why should we toil alone,
We only toil, who are the first of things,
And make perpetual moan,
Still from one sorrow to another thrown:
Nor ever fold our wings,

And cease from wanderings,
Nor steep our brows in slumber's holy balm;
Nor harken what the inner spirit sings,
"There is no joy but calm!"
Why should we only toil, the roof and crown of things?

**III**

Lo! in the middle of the wood,
The folded leaf is woo'd from out the bud
With winds upon the branch, and there
Grows green and broad, and takes no care,
Sun-steep'd at noon, and in the moon
Nightly dew-fed; and turning yellow
Falls, and floats adown the air.
Lo! sweeten'd with the summer light,
The full-juiced apple, waxing over-mellow,
Drops in a silent autumn night.
All its allotted length of days
The flower ripens in its place,
Ripens and fades, and falls, and hath no toil,
Fast-rooted in the fruitful soil.

**IV**

Hateful is the dark-blue sky,
Vaulted o'er the dark-blue sea.
Death is the end of life; ah, why
Should life all labour be?
Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,
And in a little while our lips are dumb.
Let us alone. What is it that will last?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and parcels of the dreadful past.
Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
To war with evil? Is there any peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?
All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave
In silence; ripen, fall and cease:
Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease.

**V**

How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,
With half-shut eyes ever to seem
Falling asleep in a half-dream!
To dream and dream, like yonder amber light,
Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height;
To hear each other's whisper'd speech;
Eating the Lotos day by day,
To watch the crisping ripples on the beach,
And tender curving lines of creamy spray;
To lend our hearts and spirits wholly

To the influence of mild-minded melancholy;
To muse and brood and live again in memory,
With those old faces of our infancy
Heap'd over with a mound of grass,
Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass!

**VI**

Dear is the memory of our wedded lives,
And dear the last embraces of our wives
And their warm tears: but all hath suffer'd change:
For surely now our household hearths are cold,
Our sons inherit us: our looks are strange:
And we should come like ghosts to trouble joy.
Or else the island princes over-bold
Have eat our substance, and the minstrel sings
Before them of the ten years' war in Troy,
And our great deeds, as half-forgotten things.
Is there confusion in the little isle?
Let what is broken so remain.
The Gods are hard to reconcile:
'Tis hard to settle order once again.
There is confusion worse than death,
Trouble on trouble, pain on pain,
Long labour unto aged breath,
Sore task to hearts worn out by many wars
And eyes grown dim with gazing on the pilot-stars.

**VII**

But, propt on beds of amaranth and moly,
How sweet (while warm airs lull us, blowing lowly)
With half-dropt eyelid still,
Beneath a heaven dark and holy,
To watch the long bright river drawing slowly
His waters from the purple hill—
To hear the dewy echoes calling
From cave to cave thro' the thick-twined vine—
To watch the emerald-colour'd water falling
Thro' many a wov'n acanthus-wreath divine!
Only to hear and see the far-off sparkling brine,
Only to hear were sweet, stretch'd out beneath the pine.

**VIII**

The Lotos blooms below the barren peak:
The Lotos blows by every winding creek:
All day the wind breathes low with mellower tone:
Thro' every hollow cave and alley lone
Round and round the spicy downs the yellow Lotos-dust is blown.
We have had enough of action, and of motion we,
Roll'd to starboard, roll'd to larboard, when the surge was seething free,
Where the wallowing monster spouted his foam-fountains in the sea.

Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind,
In the hollow Lotos-land to live and lie reclined
On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind.
For they lie beside their nectar, and the bolts are hurl'd
Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds are lightly curl'd
Round their golden houses, girdled with the gleaming world:
Where they smile in secret, looking over wasted lands,
Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring deeps and fiery sands,
Clanging fights, and flaming towns, and sinking ships, and praying hands.
But they smile, they find a music centred in a doleful song
Steaming up, a lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong,
Like a tale of little meaning tho' the words are strong;
Chanted from an ill-used race of men that cleave the soil,
Sow the seed, and reap the harvest with enduring toil,
Storing yearly little dues of wheat, and wine and oil;
Till they perish and they suffer—some, 'tis whisper'd—down in hell
Suffer endless anguish, others in Elysian valleys dwell,
Resting weary limbs at last on beds of asphodel.
Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
Than labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar;
O, rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.

### Questions on "The Cyclops and the Ocean"

1. What do you think would have happened if the Cyclops in the *Odyssey* had not met Odysseus? What does the reference say about the tropical storm in the poem?

2. Is the metaphor of the Cyclops an appropriate one to use in describing a tropical storm or a hurricane? Explain.

3. What words here imitate sounds? What sounds do the words suggest?

4. What are *screens*, *panes*, *sash*, and *sill* all related to? What do the words suggest about the point of view of the speaker?

### Questions on "The Sea Call"

1. In the *Odyssey*, when Penelope finally accepts that Odysseus is her long-absent husband, he weeps. In the last two lines of "The Sea Call," a small boy reports having seen Odysseus weep after Odysseus has left his home. Compare the hero's mood in the two literary pieces.

2. What words does the poet use to create a visual image of the dying fire?

3. Why might the poet choose the image of an animal snared in a net to describe Odysseus?

4. What are some examples of alliteration in these lines?

5. Considering what you know of Odysseus' life, which of the sightings do you find most appropriate?

### Questions on "An Ancient Gesture"

1. Judging from what you know about Penelope, what do you think the word *this* might refer to in line 2?

2. What do you think a modern-day woman might do that is comparable to Penelope's actions of weaving and unraveling?

3. What is the significance of the repetition of the first line?

4. Do you think this is a fair comment to make about Odysseus? Explain.

### Tennyson's Portrayal of Ulysses and the Lotos-Eaters

1. How does Tennyson adapt the Homeric characteristics and episodes for his own artistic purposes and his own age?

2. How does the speaker of Tennyson's "Ulysses" compare to the character of Odysseus in the Greek legend.

3. How does Tennyson's treatment of Lotos land compare to the version in the *Odyssey*?

4. Why do you think Tennyson resorted to the use of Greek myth?

# THE AENEID

## SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LITERARY EPIC

Difference in the condition of the composition leads to a difference in the character of the poetry. Because Homer composed for recitation, his composition is in some ways freer and looser than Virgil's. Both of Homer's poems have a majestic plan—less closely woven than the *Aeneid*; their episodes are more easily detached from the whole and may be enjoyed as separate poems. The Greek epic poet composes on a grand scale, and could not always expect to recite his poems in their entirety; therefore, Homer's epics share looser methods of composition—though they are not a collection of separate lays. They are single poems with single plans and consistency of language. *Homer's art is oral—Virgil's is written*. Virgil writes for the readers—i.e., he operates less with phrases and formulas than with single words; he fashions sentences carefully and individually; he takes care to avoid omissions, contradictions, and inconsistencies; he uses carefully planned poetic texture and exquisite choice of words and significance. Homer's oral epic is characterized by it simplicity, strength and straightforwardness, movement of lines, splendid climax, singleness of effect, and unbroken maintenance of tragic or heroic mood. The real difference between primary and secondary epics results from distinctions of origins and character—whether oral or written.

The difference in methods of epic composition coincides with another difference—social and spiritual. Oral epics display the heroic spirit and societies that hold heroic standards of conduct; literary epics have heroes, but a different conception of heroism and of human greatness and come from societies which cannot be called heroic. The heroic world values prowess and fame of the individual hero—Achilles surpasses other sin strength and courage (which will win him honor and renown after death), and he is ruthless to any who frustrate or deride him. He is cut off from intercourse with common men and lacks allegiance except to his personal pride—what matters is his prowess. Homer's heroism is a reflection of men's desire to be in the last degree self-fulfilled—to satisfy their own ambitions in life with much ado. Achilles lives mainly to win glory and assumes that it is right, but his life is darkened by suffering and he dies for his belief in heroic manhood. The doom of a short and glorious life hanging over Achilles is tragic for the most noble and gifted of Greek men.

The heroic ideal of personal prowess did not exist for the writers of literary epics. Virgil has a different conception of human worth and lived in a society from which Homer's heroes were remote and alien. Hi work is traditional in form, but it is shaped by the present. The "secondary" epic is an attempt to use again in new circumstances what is already a complete and satisfying form of poetry. The fundamental difference between the literary epic and the oral epic is in the circumstances of their origins. The literary epic was born from a society where the unfettered individual had no place and where a different conception of heroism reigned. The hero of the literary epic sacrifices himself for his society, not individual prowess or happiness. A social ideal replaces the personal ideal which was anarchic and anti-social. The epic, in the hands of Virgil, became a national expression of the philosophy of Rome; Aeneas stands for Rome. The hero of the literary epic point to a moral—represent the ideals of society and self-sacrifice. They, then, have a didactic purpose: to inspire, elevate, and instruct readers—to appeal to their hearts and minds. They did not share the idea that poetry merely beguiles hours of leisure or stimulates to a refined enjoyment. They believed that their art was serious—a way to make hu-

mans better, but that stern moral task did not diminish their artistry. The literary epic's primary concern is truth.

Sensual pleasures were alien to the spirit of the literary epic. Homer's heroes enjoy food and drink, but they are interested more in their loot. The sordid and fantastic aspects of live-making are confined to gods who are free from limitations of human life and from its obligations to live nobly. But by heroic standards, men do not indulge their passions and appetites—they keep them under control. In the one great love episode of the *Aeneid*, Dido's passion for Aeneas is treated in a tragic spirit and takes its place in the poem as a fearful obstacle which the hero has to overcome in his moral progress and is the prelude of disasters to come in the political relations between Carthage and Rome.

Literary epic flourishes not in the heyday of a nation, but in its lost days or aftermath. At such a time, a poet surveys the recent past with its record of dazzling successes and asks if they can last. Virgil wrote at a time when the Roman world turned with weariness and relief from vaulting ambitions of the Caesarean age to the rest and quiet promised by Augustus. He works the transition from the restless years of the Republic with its strong personalities and struggles, to the long peace when few men mattered.

Writers of the literary epic set themselves to adapt the personal heroic ideal to unheroic times and to proclaim in poetry a new conception of man's grandeur and nobility in social and nationalistic terms.

## IMPORTANT DATES

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| B.C.E. | 753 | Legendary founding of Rome by Romulus |
| | 509 | Republic is established |
| | 264-241 | First Punic War with Carthage |
| | 218-201 | Second Punic War ends with Roman triumph—Hannibal |
| | 149-146 | Third Punic War—Rome besieges and destroys Carthage |
| | 60 | 1st Triumvirate: Pompey, Caesar, Crassus |
| | 49-48 | Civil Wars |
| | 44 | Caesar is assassinated |
| | 43 | Octavian is elected consul—2nd Triumvirate: Antony & Lepidus |
| | 41 | Mark Antony meets Cleopatra in Egypt |
| | 31 | Antony and Cleopatra are defeated by Octavian at Actim |
| | 27 | Octavian become Emperor—title of Augustus |
| | 4 (circa) | Birth of Jesus |
| C.E. | 14 | Augustus dies |
| | 54 | Nero is Emperor |
| | 64 | Rome burns giving Nero an excuse to persecute Christians |
| | 79 | Mt. Vesuvius erupts burying Pompei and Hurculaneum |
| | 161 | Marcus Aurelius is Emperor |
| | 303 | Intense persecution of Christians under Deocletian |
| | 395 | Roman Empire divided into Eastern and Western halves |
| | 410 | Alaric, Visigoths, captures and sacks Rome |
| | 452 | Attila, Huns |
| | 455 | Vandals sack Rome |
| | 476 | Odoacer, Germanic chieftain, deposes last Western Emperor of Rome |

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Virgil deliberately models his poem on Homer; the first six books are Aeneas' *Odyssey*, the last six his *Iliad*. Sometimes specific incidents from Homer are imitated, yet though the relation to the model is in every case clear, Virgil makes the material serve his own, different purpose. Discuss the nature and effect the Virgilian adaptation of:
   A. Odysseus' interview with Ajax in Book XI of the *Odyssey* with Aeneas' interview with Dido in Book VI of the *Aeneid*
   B. Homer's description of the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad* Book XVIII with that of Aeneas' shield in the *Aeneid* Book VIII
   C. Odysseus' story of his wanderings at the court of Phaeacia with Aeneas' account of the Fall of Troy and his subsequent wanderings at Dido's banquet

2. Discuss the character of Aeneas as an epic hero. Is it justified to compare him to Achilles and Odysseus? Or is it better to compare him to Moses of Exodus and Jesus of the Gospels? How would he compare to later heroic figures such Beowulf, Roland?

3. Give your interpretation of the love story of Dido and Aeneas. Concentrate on their degree of free will, what actually happened, how much of a bond this amounted to for Aeneas, and the conflicting claims of love and duty as they appeared to Aeneas. Do you feel Dido was wronged by Aeneas? What, if anything, should he have done differently?

4. Imagine a situation in which Dido and Aeneas came before a jury to state their cases in their love dispute. Assume that even the gods and goddesses can be called as witnesses. Determine who is responsible for Dido's death. Write a script for this scenario.

5. Compare the portrayal of the gods in Homer to those in the *Aeneid*. Be specific with each god.

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What are the characteristics of Aeneas as an epic hero?
2. Would you say that Virgil's characters are realistic persons?
3. What is the overall tone of Virgil's writing?
4. What is his attitude toward history?
5. How would you evaluate the realism of Turnus as a character?
6. Why is it necessary for Turnus to die?
7. How would you evaluate the realism of Dido as a character? as a woman?
8. Who are the two major god influences? What doe the represent and how do they function in the structure of the work?
9. What solution does Virgil work out at the end of the epic? What is the nature of the new Roan heroism?
10. How does Virgil socially bridge the gap between Rome's past, present , and future? Cite four important episodes which show this.
11. Why is the father image so important with Virgil?

## READING QUIZ ON VIRGIL

Match the columns. Put the letter from column B next to the correct answer in column A.

| A | | B | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Visit to the Underworld | A. | Book VIII |
| 2. | Pallas | B. | Father of Turnus |
| 3. | Description of Aeneas' shield | C. | Rules the Forest of Avernus and of the Dead |
| 4. | Creusa | D. | Turnus' sister |
| 5. | Rhadamanthus | E. | Book VI |
| 6. | Daunus | F. | Burning River of Hell |
| 7. | Sack of Troy | G. | Aeneas' Trojan wife |
| 8. | Phlegethon | H. | Book IV |
| 9. | Juturna | I. | Aeneas' friend |
| 10. | Tragedy of Dido | J. | Book II |
| 11. | Elissa | K. | Dido's husband |
| 12. | Anna | L. | Aeneas' guide to the Underworld |
| 13. | Juno | M. | Goddess of marriage and patron of the Greeks |
| 14. | Sibyl | N. | Dido's sister |
| 15. | Sychaeus | O. | Another name for Dido |
| 16. | Iulus | P. | Aeneas' father |
| 17. | Venus | Q. | Convinced Trojans to accept the horse |
| 18. | Lavinia | R. | Another name for Ascaius, Aeneas' son |
| 19. | Sinon | S. | Aeneas' Italian wife |
| 20. | Anchises | T. | Aeneas' mother |
| 21. | Charon | U. | Another name for Troy |
| 22. | Rhea Silvia | V. | The Roman Hephaestus |
| 23. | Vulcan | W. | The ferryman of the Underworld |
| 24. | Vesta | X. | Goddess of the Hearth |
| 25. | Ilium | Y. | Mother of Romulus and Remus |
| 26. | Laocoon | Z. | Legendary founders of Rome |
| 27. | Pietas | AA. | Priam's son who Aeneas meets in the Underworld |
| 28. | Romulus and Remus | BB. | Aeneas' heroic virtue |
| 29. | Augustus | CC. | Formally known as Octavian; astute Roman leader during Virgil's time |
| 30. | Deiphobus | DD. | Warned the Trojans of Greek treachery |

# OVID

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

1. In the opening sections of the *Metamorphoses*, the account of creation (5-80) and the story of the flood (262ff.) bear remarkable resemblances to the biblical stories of creation and flood in "Genesis." Compare and contrast them in detail and in the fundamental ideas underlying them.

2. Ovid drew on the rich mythological literature for his stories of transformation, but he added a new element to these tales of changed forms. One critic suggest that "By . . . fleshing out the story, by inspecting the emotions and psychological problems of the characters, . . . by weighing the reasons for the metamorphosis and the feelings of the human spirit inside the changed body, Ovid gave new life and meaning to the myth." Discuss this analysis of Ovidian technique for the transformation of (a) Lycaon; (b) Daphne; (c) Io.

# LA COMMEDIA (THE DIVINE COMEDY)

## MEDIEVAL ALLEGORY

Allegory may be defined in many ways: from the general and somewhat cryptic view that it is a story that represents another story, to allegory as a "vexatious bitch" (Leonard 7). Despite Leonard's ostensibly flippant definition, her view of allegory is generally accurate in that a solid definition is difficult to tie down. Allegory[4] is taken from the Greek word *allegoria*, meaning to "speak otherwise." Allegory is generally an extended metaphor in the form of a story or poem that has a literal meaning and a meaning that is derived from outside the narrative itself. Allegory will often employ symbolism, personification, and typical characters (Ackerman 137). Characters in allegory usually represent abstract qualities or virtues whose actions convey a significance often unrelated to the literal narrative. These allegorical meanings may represent political, personal, or satiric ideas, but mostly the religious relating to the Scriptures within medieval allegory (Robertson 289).

Medieval allegory, states Miller, should be regarded as a "habit of mind than as any rigid system of artistic composition" (270). When discussing medieval allegory, most critics concur that a firm understanding of the audience is necessary to comprehend the significance of allegorical tropes, or it *sentence*. Robertson explains that the *sentence* is what the text implies, not what it literally says (287). That is, states Bloomfield, the *sentence* is the "fruit," or the significance of the literary work beyond its literal interpretation (301).

This *sentence*, or pith of the allegorical matter, can, in most cases, be viewed in four ways: literally, allegorically, tropologically, or anagogically. The literal reading addresses facts or history—things which actually occur; the allegorical refers to the church and its relationship to people generally; the tropological is concerned with the spiritual constitution of the individual, sometimes called the moral; and the anagogical pertains to the universal, unchanging soul and heaven. Dante, in his *Convivio*, calls such an interpretation a *polysemous* meaning: a multiple meaning that can be derived form a single text.[5] The medieval mind, suggests Robertson, moves freely and easily between these realms of allegory as they pertain to the Scriptures (293-4).

However, the act of allegorical interpretation is not limited to the Scriptures in the Middle Ages: "creation itself is an allegorical book" as well as things created in it (Robertson 296). A language of clerkly authority developed to help in the analysis of the Book of Nature and the pagan classics as well as the Scriptures (Miller 271-2). Since God created nature, and through direct revelation He transmitted the words of the Bible to His scribes, both the Bible and Nature offer humanity a guide to charity and salvation if it can interpret the signs correctly (Ackerman 137-8). The language of clerkly authority, then, attempts to order and understand these tropes of the physical world that represent the ineffable word of God that is beyond human comprehension (Ackerman 138).

So, according to Isidore of Seville, the Christian poet draws upon established tropes for his *alieniloquium*, seven of which are the most important: irony (deriding through praise), antiphrasis, aenigma, charientismos, paroemia (proverbial expression), sarcasm,

[4] For general definitions of allegory, consult Holman and Hamon's *A Handbook to Literature*, Cuddon's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, and Frye's (et. al.) *The Harper Handbook to Literature*.

[5] This is not to say that every poem deemed "allegory" will contain all of these polysemous levels: "not everything in a long allegory can be or need be allegorical, just as not everything in a comedy can be comic" (Leonard 10). Seemingly, only Dante in his *Divine Comedy*, was successful (or cared about being so) in incorporating all of the levels of allegory (Ackerman 139).

and astysmos (sarcasm without bitterness). These figures were understood by the medieval audience, but, states Robertson, are almost unknown to even sophisticated audiences today (288).

Whatever the case, allegory attempts to make sense out of the world of *individual* human experience and how it relates to the "more real" world of *universal* human experience; the literal sense is an imperfect world of human action compared to the figurative sense of an idealized, perfected humanity (Leonard 11).

While Ackerman suggests that the effectiveness and appropriateness of allegory within a particular work falls within the purview of the critic (137), others posit that allegory is only present within literature when the author or narrator explicitly states that he/she intends a meaning other than the literal, exemplified by Chaucer's Clerk:[6]

> This storie is seyd nat for that wyves sholde
> Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee,
> For it were inportable, though they wolde,
> But for that every wight, in his degree,
> Sholde be constant in adversitee
> As was Grisilde; therefore Petrak writeth
> This storie, which with heigh stile he enditeth. (*ClT* 1142-8)

Finally, Bloomfield discusses the point that the literal level of a work is just as important as an allegorical level. Without the literal level of language, there can be no interpretation, and no art (315). The greatness of all art, Bloomfield states, lies in its literal sense: "a work of art is not only what it says, but also what it is" (317). His point suggests that while medieval allegory may instruct its listeners, it is the literal level that delights them and makes the interpretation possible.

## MORE ON ALLEGORY

There are two main modes of allegory:

1. Historical or Political Allegory in which the characters and the action represent, or "allegorize," historical personages and events. So in Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), King David represents Charles II, Absalom represents his natural son the Duke of Monmouth, and the biblical plot allegorizes a political crisis in contemporary England.
2. Allegory of Ideas in which the characters represent abstract concepts and the plot serves to communicate a doctrine or thesis. The central device in the typical allegory of ideas is the personification of abstract entities such as virtues, vices, states of mind, and types of character; in the more explicit allegories, the preference is specified by the character's name.

Various literary forms may be regarded as special types of allegory, in that they narrate one coherent set of circumstances which signify a second order of correlated meanings. A *fable* is a short story that exemplifies a moral thesis or a principle of human behavior; usually in its conclusion, either the narrator or one of the characters states the moral in the form of an *epigram*. Most common is the *beast fable*, in which animals talk and act like the human types they represent. See Aesops' fables, Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*, and Orwell's *Animal Farm* for a couple well-known examples of beast fable.

[6] See Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, pages 89-91.

A *parable* is a short narrative presented so as to stress the implicit but detailed analogy between its component parts and a thesis or lesson that the narrator is trying to bring home to us. The parable was one of Jesus' favorite devices as a teacher.

An *exemplum* is a story told as a particular instance of the general text of a sermon. This device was extremely popular in the Middle Ages. Chaucer's *The Pardoner's Tale* preaches on the theme that greed is the root of all evil and incorporates as an exemplum the tale of the three revelers who set out to find Death. They initially find a heap of gold, for which they kill one another—ultimately succeeding in their quest. The term exemplum is also applied to tales used in a formal, though non-religious, exhortation.

## COSMOLOGY AND IDEA

Dante's age was highly legalistic. People wanted exact definitions of their status in society and of their expected behavior. They considered most of their relations to others a rigid contract, with reciprocal obligations. A great school of law had been recently established in Bologna, to revive the Latin *Corpus Juris*, or civil law. Vigorously developing its canon law, the church had many conflicting areas of jurisdiction. Which, for example, should try a murderer or a sinful friar?

People wanted their universe and governments clearly defined. So *degrees* or virtue and *degrees* of sin were definitely clarified. There was a range of categories and encyclopedias of knowledge. Dante had, himself, started a categorization of all knowledge. *You must think of Dante's universe as rigidly hierarchical.* Everything was set in stages, rank by rank: orders of plants and beasts—of classes and government—of church officials—of the very angels, who were subdivided into nine ranks. Within humans, the body was lower than the mind; and within the mind, the senses were lower than reason. This dominant image of hierarchy—of a natural, fixed place for everything—fostered *otherworldliness*. Since life, and death, were progressions up or down, the world was only a transitory place. *Paradise*, with its degrees of blessedness, was above; *Hell*, with its downward steps, was within.

The earth was the center of the universe, around which moved nine spheres: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, fixed stars, *Primum Mobile* (motion), and beyond these the abode of God, the *Empyrean*. Each of these spheres was on of the *nine heavens* through which a soul mounted to Paradise. Hell had to be placed farthest from God's light. Therefore, it must be at the very center of earth, a funnel with narrowing ledges. It nine ledges, or *circles*, balanced the nine heavens. The River Lethe (forgetfulness) led from the bottom pit of hell out to the Mount of Purgatory on the underside of the world—which Dante thought was entirely of water.

With so much progressing to do—in one direction or another—each individual was a *pilgrim in life*. Actual pilgrimages and Crusades were filled with the wonder and excitement of travel. Figuratively, Dante is the soul-on-pilgrimages. His allegorical vision can be called a soul-pilgrimage, or *psychomachia*.

In this *psychomachia*, we will see that *sin is a violation of proper place and progression*. In God's universe of hierarchies, or natural order, each persona and thing had its duty to strive toward perfection—fulfillment in its own perfect form. Perfect form and fulfillment, for humanity, was union with God. Sin was improper use. Sin was impediment to orderly progress. One could *choose* either sin or salvation. A wrong choice brought punishment, and punishment was understandable. Punishment was keeping the sin one had chosen and living with it to its ultimate development. This final development of sin was its horrible *distortion* in hell.

# THE SYMMETRY OF DANTE'S ART

## THE HAND OF GOD OPERATING IN THE UNIVERSE

| | Hell | Purgatory | Paradise |
|---|---|---|---|
| Portrayal of God | As Judge | Merciful | Loving |
| Atmosphere | · dramatic<br>· realm of fire and ice<br>· world of nature (instinct)<br>· the sense dominate<br>· unmitigating retributive punishment<br>· mimetic power<br>· natural order<br>· will: perverted passions and reason<br>· blackness<br>· noise | · lyrical<br>· realm of harmony and music<br>· corrected reason and faith<br>· world of poetry<br>· imagination dominates<br>· remedial purification<br>· drama of the mind<br>· order of grace<br>· faith: divine revelation<br>· colors<br>· music | · metaphysical<br>· realm of light<br>· faith and contemplation<br>· world of intellectual and spiritual freedom (perfect choice)<br>· "recreation of man"<br>· unmitigating joy<br>· perfection of silence<br>· glory of God<br>· contemplation: mystical ecstasy<br>· light<br>· silence |
| Mental Attitudes | · repudiation of punishment<br>· lack of community<br>· punishment (damnation) | · acceptance of purgation<br>· mutual goodwill<br>· catharsis (purgation) | · earned reward<br>· perfect community and ideal state<br>· apotheosis (glory) |
| Dante's Response | · awestruck, childlike, vindictive spectator<br>· emotional reactions such as fainting, anger, etc.<br>· individualized, personal response | · emerges a fully developed protagonist<br>· graciousness, cheerfulness, helpfulness to others | · Dante's individual personality fades |

# STUDY GUIDE ON DANTE

## CRITICAL APPROACHES TO DANTE'S WORK

- Textual Analysis
- Intellectual Context
- Cultural and Aesthetic Context
- Biographical Background
- Comparative Study
- Modern Relevance
- Influence on Other Literature

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Name a few of *The Divine Comedy*'s literary antecedents.

2. Cite some reasons why Dante admired Virgil and why he chose him as a guide.

3. Why is this poem aptly called a "Divine Comedy"?

4. What relationships do you see between Cantos II (*Inferno*) and V? In the portrayal of Beatrice? Of Francesca? In the kind of love they experienced? In the kinds of literature they respond to? What does Beatrice's name mean?

5. Who are the sinner whom Dante portrays most sympathetically? Romantically inclined readers sometimes forget that these great figures were, in Dante's view, mortal sinners. What details confirm the sinful nature of each of these figures? In what way do Dante's own reactions to these sinners influence the way in which we see them?

6. Are there any damned souls that you believe Dante unjustifiably put in hell? Why?

7. To what extent is it valid to identify Dante the poet with Dante the pilgrim?

8. Read Tennyson's poem "Ulysses" (see page 59). Compare Tennyson's and Dante's view of Ulysses. What kinship does Guido da Montefeltro (*Inferno* XXVII) have to Ulysses?

9. What relationship does Dante establish between love for art, love for women, and love for God?

10. Read the part of Plato's *Symposium* where Socrates expounds his philosophy for the love of God? What relation doe this have to the *Commedia*?

11. Point out the diverse ways in which classical ideas, classical images, and classical mythology function in this work.

12. Why does Dante consider betrayal the most serious sin? How does Dante feel about "lukewarm" people?

13. Explain at least three levels on which we can interpret *The Divine Comedy*.

14. Read a good annotated edition of Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Cite lines in Eliot which reflect Dante's influence.

15. Can you cite subsequent artists who were influenced buy Dante's portrayal of Francesca and Paolo?

16. Of what significance is Dante's interest in numerology? How does the form of the poem reflect its interest?

17. Describe allegory in your own words.

18. In what ways does the *Inferno* reflect a concern for this work? What relationship does Dante establish between his world and the life to come? What poetic devices and religious concepts help to establish these relationships?

19. What is *terza rima*?

20. How does Dante achive verisimilitude in his description of the afterlife?

21. Speculate on why Dante may have written this work.

22. Is there any evidence in the work which suggests that Dante, the poet, was highly conscious of writing a poem, that is, a work of art, and not simply a moral treatise?

23. What qualities in Hell are particularly striking to you?

24. What idiosyncrasies are revealed in Dante's ethical outlook in Hell?

25. Indicate how the Francesca episode, the Ulysses episode, and the Count Ugolino episode are parallel in structure and theme.

26. Can Dante's poem be enjoyed by those who do not share his faith?

27. How would you characterize Dante's concept of women?

28. What is the meaning of the term *dolce stil nuovo*?

29. What is the meaning of Beatrice's name?

30. What would you say is the most striking and memorable thing you learned from your reading of Dante? Of what value has its study been to you?

## SUGGESTED PAPER TOPICS ON DANTE

1. The portrayal of Virgil
2. Dante's view of Ulysses and how it compares / contrasts with that of Homer's and Tennyson's
3. The influence of Dante on Eliot's *The Waste Land*
4. Dante's influence on subsequent artists
5. The use of classical images and mythology
6. The textual analysis of a single canto.
7. The comparison / contrast of two or three cantos
8. The influence of Virgil on Dante
9. Herny Wadsworth Longfellow's "Dante"
10. The Rivers of Hell
11. The modern relevance of Dante
12. The political allegory in the *Inferno*—Hell as a symbol of the City in Chaos
13. The spiritual and personal development of the narrator—Dante the Pilgrim
14. Dante's use of the journey
15. The relationship between love and sin
16. *The Divine Comedy* as Christian epic.

# TRAGEDY

## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

- Mimetic Perspective—the sudden and catastrophic fall of a great person from fortune to misfortune.
- Affective (audience response) Perspective—arouses a catharsis of pity and terror.
- Causal relationship between character and fate—character contributes to destiny.
- Character not eminently good or noble, a mean between goodness and depravity. Possesses a *hamartia*, tragic flaw or simply a mistake in judgement.
- Universe is not perfectly ordered; achieves balance between order absurdity. Great people seem to die while the mediocrity rule.
- Tragic protagonist dies bravely.
- Tragic protagonist achieves a degree of *anagnorisis* or enlightenment; also an acceptance of his/her flaw.
- Tragic protagonist makes important choices. Her/his choices matter because they effect more than just the tragic protagonist.

## SOME VIEWS ON TRAGEDY

### Aristotle, The Poetics

A tragedy must not be a spectacle of a perfectly good man brought from prosperity to adversity. For this merely shocks us. Nor, of course must it be that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity; for that is not tragedy at all, but the perversion of tragedy, and revolts the moral sense. Nor again, should it exhibit the downfall of an utter villain: since pity is aroused by undeserved misfortunes, terror by misfortunes befalling men like ourselves. There remains, then, as the only proper subject for tragedy, the spectacle of a man not absolutely or eminently good or wise, who is brought to disaster not by sheer depravity, but by some *error or frailty*. Lastly, the man must be *highly renowned and prosperous*—an Oedipus, a Thyestes, or some other illustrious person.

### Maynard Mack, "Tragic Form and the Jacobean Tragedies" (1970)

- First, the hero. The Shakespearean tragic hero, as everyone knows, is an overstater. His individual accent will vary with his personality, but there is always a residue of hyperbole. This, it would seem, is for Shakespeare the authentic tragic music, mark of a world where a man's reach must always exceed his grasp and everything costs not less than everything.
- I think most of us believe that tragic drama is in one way or other a record of man's affair with transcendence.

### R.B. Heilman, "Tragedy and Melodrama"

Tragedy should be used to describe the situation in which a divided human being faces basic conflicts, perhaps rationally insolvable, of obligations and passion; makes choices, for good or for evil; errs knowingly or involuntarily; accepts consequences; comes to a new, larger awareness; suffers or dies, yet with a larger wisdom.

### A.C. Bradley "The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy" (1904)

- A tragedy is a story of human actions producing exceptional calamity leading to the death of a man of high estate.
- In almost all [of Shakespeare's] tragic heroes we observe a marked one-sidedness, a predisposition in some particular direction, a total incapacity, in certain circumstances, of resisting the force which draws in this direction; a fatal tendency to identify the whole being with one interest, object, passion, or habit of mind. This it would seem, is, for Shakespeare, the fundamental tragic trait… It is a fatal gift, but it comes with it a touch of greatness, and when there is joined to it nobility of mind, or genius, or immense force, we realize the full power and reach of the soul and the conflict in which it engages acquires that magnitude which stirs not only sympathy and pity, but admiration, terror, and awe.
- The central feeling [in a Shakespearean tragedy] is one of waste.
- [At the end of a Shakespearean tragedy] we remain confronted with a world travailing for perfection, but bringing to birth, together with glorious good, evil which it is able to overcome or by self-torture and self-waste. And this fact or appearance is tragedy.

### Arthur Miller, "The Tragedy of the Common Man" (1941)

In the sense of having been initiated by the hero himself, the tale always reveals what has been called his "tragic flaw," a failing that is not peculiar to grand or elevated characters. Nor is it necessarily a weakness. The flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing—and need be nothing—but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation, are "flawless." Most of us are in that category.

### Clifford Leach, "The Implications of Tragedy" (1950)

Thus the equilibrium of tragedy consists in a balancing of Terror with Pride. On the one hand, we are impelled to withdraw from the spectacle, to try to forget the revelation of evil methodized; on the other, we are aroused to withstand destiny, to strive to meet it with the fortitude and the clear eyes of the tragic figure. This feeling of Pride comes into full existence when the hero knows his fate and contemplates it: it is essentially distinct from the *hubris* which he may display, but which we cannot share in, before his eyes are opened.

### A.P. Rossiter, "Shakespearean Tragedy" (1961)

- Suffering beyond solace, beyond any moral palliation, and suffering because of human greatness which is great because [it is] great in passion: that, above everything else, is central to Shakespeare's conception of tragedy.
- But this is not the whole picture. Not only is the vulnerability to fortune of human distinction Shakespeare's theme; its special liability to intense suffering and destruction. He also emphasizes the precariousness of its very quality of greatness.

### G.B. Harrison, "Shakespearean Tragedy" (1968)

Courage and inevitable defeat: when we confront the great literature of tragedy from our everyday world, it is perhaps these two qualities that strike us most forcible, for the first in any society is rare and the second is a prospect most men find intolerable. Without courage or endurance, the exceptional action or commitment which characterize tragedy would not be undertaken or sustained; without defeat, it would not be placed in the perspective of the ordinary world. … Courage without an overpowering challenge can be mere bravado or foolishness (and thus comic). Defeat without a great attempt can be mere pathos.

### Marilyn French, Shakespeare's Division of Experience (1981)

On a level quite above the immediate values of the play [*Antony and Cleopatra*] feeling is the quality most affirmed by it, indeed by all the tragedies. For this reason, Aristotelian categories seem to me quite irrelevant to Shakespeare—and even to Greek tragedy. A fall, a flaw, a recognition: the pattern must be stretched into a one-size-fits-all dimension to fit the plays.

### Northrup Frye, Anatomy of Criticism

*Anagnorisis* is not simply an awareness by the hero of what has happened to him, but the recognition of the determined shape of the life he has created for himself, with an implicit comparison to the uncreated potential life he has forsaken.

### Geza Roheim, Magic and Schizophrenia

In every primitive tribe we find the *shaman* in the center of society, and is easy to show that he is either a neurotic or psychotic, or at least that his art is based on the same mechanisms as a neurosis or psychosis. The *shaman* make both visible and public the systems of symbolic fantasy that are present in the psyche of every adult member of society. They are the leaders in an infantile game and the lightening conductors of common anxiety. They fight the demons so that others can hunt prey and in general fight reality.

### Chaucer's Monk, The Canterbury Tales

Him that stood in great prosperity
And is yfallen out in high degree.

## OEDIPUS REX

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION / WRITING

1. The theme of sight and blindness; its importance in a play that turns on human ignorance of the truth.

2. Oedipus is a figure representative of human confidence that our intelligence makes us master of our world.

3. Trace the patterns and discuss the significance of the following images throughout the play: (a) Oedipus as hunter; (b) Oedipus and plowman; (c) Oedipus as sailor-helmsman.

# MISCELLANY

## LOVE CONVENTIONS

### OVIDIAN LOVE (FROM ART OF LOVE)

The Ovidian Tradition was not romantic. To quote F.A. Wright in his introduction to *The Mirror of Venus*, "the Ovidian idea of love consisted in the animal instinc between the two sexes and its gratification. Of Platonic love, spiritual love, romantic love, the Romans knew very little. Love for them was almost entirely physical, a thing of the senses." The Ovidian tradition does not, therefore, see the beloved as an object of worship nor the relationship as edifying. Sensual love is extolled with zest and gusto, but as a means or gratification, not elevation. Characteristics:

- women were vastly inferior to men, though necessary for utilitarian purposes
- love was not romanticized as was found outside of marriage
- love is an animalistic, passionate gratification and not an elevation

### PLATONIC LOVE

The antithesis of the Ovidian Tradition is the tradition of Platonic Love with its elevation of spiritual love over sensual passion. The Platonic tradition presents the conception of love as a ladder whereby the soul might ascend from physical to spiritual 1ove. The beloved is simply a step on this ladder, and one reaches the higher rungs of the ladder by leaving the lower ones behind. Thus, the original object of human love (the beloved) has fallen out of sight before the soul arrives at its spiritual object. Characteristics:

- love is an elevated, spiritual state
- it was the contemplation of the perfect and absolute beauty; separate, simple and infinite beauty (terrestrial beauty was a shadowy reflection of it)
- love followed a chain: a. love of physical beauty; b. love of a beautiful soul; c. love of the universal soul; d. love of God

### COURTLY LOVE (AMOUR COURTOIS)

Somewhere between the merry sensuality of Ovid and the ecstatic spirituality of Platonism is the tradition of Courtly Love. Courtly love resembles the Ovidian convention in that it is not supersensous: its aim is physical consummation, its object of love physical beauty. It differs from the Ovidian tradition in its interpretation of the nature of love. In the Courtly system, love is seen as an ennobling passion, the lady as an object of worship, and the conventions of courtship as religious rituals. The lady, furthermore, is venerated not simply as an ideal of physical beauty, but as an image or reflection of an ideal of spiritual beauty. Characteristics:

has its origins in southern France (12th century) and was celebrated by the poetry of the *troubadours*

- idealized women—put them on a pedestal for worship
- the lover was stricken by the beauty of his lady and he was ennobled by his feelings making him worthier of his venerated mistress

- as marriage was still seen as business, love had to be found outside of matrimony, usually with someone else's wife—adultery was glorified and romantic as opposed the arranged convenience of marriage
- influenced by the medieval tradition of devotion to the Virgin Mary, but it became secularized in its evolution as the earthly mistress replaced the celestial goddess
- the courtly love tradition spread to England and appears in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*—but the tradition does not really manifest itself in English literature until the 16th century (via Petrarch) in the sonnet sequences of Sidney, Spencer, and Shakespeare
- there are four universal elements: a. the four marks of courtly love are humility, courtesy, adultery, and the religion of love; b. the love is desire; c. it is an ennobling and dynamic force; d. it generates a cult of the beloved

## PETRARCHAN LOVE

The Petrarchan Tradition further spiritualizes Courtly Love. It maintains the principal tenets of the Courtly Tradition, but allays them with Neo-Platonic spirituality. The Petrarchan lover, like his Courtly antecedent, is humble before the lady; courtesy remains one of his cardinal virtues; he undergoes an apprenticeship of obedient service; and there are still overtones of adultery (the beloved is always someone else's wife); the lady remains an object of worship, although, to quote Dr. Silvia Ruffo-Fiore, "Petrarch's often drastically humanized portrayals suggests that he did not fully accept the exalted view of the lady." Yet love is still seen as ennobling, and, in theory at least, this elevating passion seems to be primarily spiritual. In the Courtly tradition, physica1 consummation was seen as the proper reward for the lover's unquestioning submission and devoted service. Conversely, the Petrarchan lady appears to be worshipped for the purity and virtue which denies the distribution of these favors. Petrarchan love is by definition unrequited.

## NEO-PLATONIC LOVE

Neo-Platonism revives the Platonic conception of love as a ladder whereby man ascends to God. But whereas Platonic Love totally rejects sensual love in its ascent to heaven some Neo-Platonists held that love may reach the divine without always abandoning the human, justifying the mutual sexual love of man and woman as a reflection of the divine union, and thus a means of elevation and illumination. Most Neo-Platonists, however, rejected sensual love as inferior to spiritual love, a necessary step which must be abandoned in the ascent to God. Thus, Neo-Platonic love, unlike Courtly and Petrarchan love, is the mutual love of two equal partners, a mating of souls instead of bodies. Like the Courtly and Petrarchan traditions, however, Neo-Platonic love is always seen as an ennobling passion. Characteristics:

- Neo-Platonic love tried to justify a continuing physical relationship on the quest for the love of the spirit—this view also endorsed a mutual and reciprocal relationship

# PART III:

# A BRIEF WRITER'S REFERENCE

# KEEPING A CLASS JOURNAL

Joan Didion, in her essay "On Keeping a Notebook," clarifies two important reasons for keeping a journal: "We forget all too soon the things we thought we could never forget;" and "Keeping in touch is what [journals] are all about." One reason we read literature is to learn about ourselves as humans; in an effort to clarify that position between the text and ourselves, we must write down our responses before our imperfect, soft machine looses the wisdom we wanted to keep. A place to record thoughts and observations, a journal can be a good source of ideas for writing. It is a place to record your reactions to class activities, assignments, readings, projects, and any other aspects related to the course. A class journal provides practice for the writing process and promotes critical reading and thinking. A class journal is *not* a personal diary; therefore, you must be selective in the kind of material and the quality o f the comments included. You may add clippings, photocopies, pictures, cartoons, and even tapes and videos to your journal portfolio as a way of expanding the traditional written expression. You may use your journal entries as a source for project topics and other writing assignments. A reading journal entry is an effective way to interact with a text, and a place to develop and store your reflections on what you read, such as an answer to a question you may have posed in the margin of a text or a response to something discussed in class. You may, for instance, want to reflect on why your opinion is so different from that of another student, or you may even make an entry in the form of a letter to an author or from one character to another. Journal entries are a good place to pose a series of questions about the text you are reading using the techniques of brainstorming (the discovery technique of listing ideas or questions without editing), focused freewriting (concentrating on a single topic issue), and writing nonstop for a set amount of time without editing. The journal entry provides the opportunity to explore your critical, analytical, and creative interpretations of a text. It will allow you to articulate questions for literary analysis on plot, characters, point of view, tone, imagery, symbolism, setting, form, theme, appeal, person, etc. It will help you to conceive a thesis idea about a literary text and offer the opportunity to initiate drafting a statement of that thesis and the development of details to support it. The class journal is an excellent way to advance your reading, thinking, and writing skills, to enhance your academic performance, and to promote your personal development.

## SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR JOURNAL ENTRIES

1. Course content, requirements, and expectations as stated on the syllabus.
2. Any aspect of the lecture presented by the professor.
3. Any aspect of the reading assigned for a particular class.
4. Any aspect of the in-class group work or class discussion.
5. A more extensive treatment of a topic written on during the in-class writing portion of the class session.
6. Select a 10-20 line portion or more of a poem you read for a class session for your critical/analytical response.
7. Write a poem that imitates the style and content of a poem you were assigned to read for a particular class.
8. Write a response to the event of the writer's life as described in a textbook head note or in other reading you have done.
9. Select a *significant* prose passage in an assigned reading and analyze its meaning and relevance to the work as a whole.
10. Discuss the relevance of piece of literature read for the class to an article on a contemporary issue from a newspaper of magazine.
11. Discuss the relevance of a work beyond the discipline of literature.
12. Discuss how you would "teach" a particular work if you were the professor.
13. Select a work by an author you really disliked and describe the reasons why you disliked it.
14. Select a work by an author you really liked and describe the reasons why you liked it.
15. Select a passage that gave you difficulty and discuss the reasons why it was difficult.

## MODES OF INQUIRY: GARDNER'S ENTRY POINTS

- NARRATIONAL—may involve either *fictional* or *non-fictional* presentations of the concepts being studied and can result in either written or verbal products.

- LOGICAL / QUANTITATIVE—involves numbers, data, reasoning, and the use of processes to solve problems.

- FOUNDATIONAL—focuses on the big *why* and *what if* questions that relate to the topic. Students may write out ides or share these verbally. This is a pretty abstract level and may only interest a few students.

- AESTHETIC—involves an artictic view of the world and may include artistic, musical, or physical ways of interacting with the topic.

- EXPERIENTIAL—involves students directly with hands-on approaches with materials that embody or express the concept.

# GOOD ADVICE FOR NOTE TAKERS[7]

## GO TO CLASS

Even though you can get notes elsewhere, without hearing the lecture and participating in the discussion, you will probably not have the prior knowledge or cognitive framework necessary to assimilate the externally provided notes.

## TAKE MANY NOTES

There is a significant relationship between note completion and achievement. Those not permitted to review notes will recall from 34 to 78% of any information they recorded, but only 5 to 34% of information they did not record.

## TAKE PARAPHRASES OR SUMMARIES

Paraphrases serve a reconstructive function because they help students to construct factual information that was originally unnoted.

## REVISE NOTES FOLLOWING THE CLASS

To fill in the omissions or gaps in notes and then personally integrating lecture content. Active integration organizes ideas in memory and facilitates retrieval. Typing summaries and paraphrases of your class notes as soon as you can after the class will help you learn the content in your own way. Do not try to organize and process curing class; wait until you have time to link similar ideas in to a cohesive whole.

[7] Modified from Kenneth A. Kewra "Acquiring Effective Notetaking Skills: An Alternative to Professional Note Taking." *Journal of Reading*, January 1984.

# PREPARING A PROSPECTUS

An important assignment for this course (for some of you) is the preparation and the submission of a 10-15 page critical/analytical paper. A crucial step in the writing of this term paper is the preparing of a prospectus—a clear, concise statement of the literary question you propose to explore in the paper. Sometimes it is helpful, at first, to phrase the statement in the form of a question. Such a prospectus should include the following parts:

## PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

Define as explicitly as possible the particular topic to be investigated or demonstrated in the paper. Express the topic in a clear, concise sentence and then offer a brief paragraph (5-6 sentences) which elaborate the pertinent and related aspects of this topic to be developed in the paper.

## JUSTIFICATION OF THE TOPIC

Justify the selection of this topic in terms of 1) what it will reveal about the meaning of the work and what it will add to an understanding of the work studied, and 2) what it will contribute to your own intellectual development. Your justification should include both the literary and personal dimensions to which the topic will contribute.

## PRELIMINARY PLAN (METHODOLOGY)

Define the procedure and methodology you will use in exploring this topic. Will you use biographical criticism, textual analysis of passages, comparison and contrast, etc.? How will you organize and structure your paper? To what extent will you need to refer to secondary (critical) sources? How much will be your own ideas?

## PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

List the primary and secondary sources which will be the most useful, or necessary for a study of this topic. Follow the Modern Language Association (MLA) Style Sheet in listing your sources. *Entries must be exact in terms of punctuation, spacing, etc.*

# SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD WRITING[8]

**Dennis Holt**

Not all good writing is the same. A business letter, a note passed to the back of a class, advertising copy, a lab report, a letter to the editor, a scholarly paper, an essay exam, a poem—each of these writing tasks carries its own demands: good poems make bad memos, popular magazine articles make poor scholarly papers. Moreover, there is probably no rule, however specific, that some good writer has not turned on its head: good writing should be clear, yet some writers are masters of obscurity; good writing should be logical, yet some writers charm us with their digressions. Writing across the curriculum is an exercise in diversity. A glance at their professional journals is enough to show that historians, chemists, philosophers, management specialists, political scientists, mathematicians, and teachers of literature don't have identical expectations. So we can't give you formulas for success, except, perhaps, that you should be ready to adapt. Despite this diversity, the following general characteristics of effective writing apply broadly to many kinds of academic and workaday writing.

## ATTENTION TO AUDIENCE, PURPOSE, AND FORM.

Who are you writing for? What are you trying to accomplish? What form should your writing take? As the chart below shows, you can understand the varied demands of different writing tasks by analyzing them in terms of their audience, purpose, and form. Effective writing takes each of these questions into consideration.

| | AUDIENCE | PURPOSE | FORM |
|---|---|---|---|
| FREEWRITING | for myself | to help me think | none |
| BUSINESS LETTER | to a customer | to apologize graciously for an oversight | short formal letter |
| MEMO | to my boss | to clear up a misunderstanding | short formal memorandum |
| LAB REPORT | for the head of the lab | to provide a clear and reproducible record of methods and results | formal lab report |

[8] Reprinted from *Writing Across the Curriculum: A Student's Handbook.* Cape Girardeau, MO: Writing Outcome Program, Southeast Missouri State University

| | AUDIENCE | PURPOSE | FORM |
|---|---|---|---|
| ARTICLE IN A SCHOLARLY PERIODICAL | for experts in the discipline | to advance understanding of current questions in the discipline | structure prescribed by the periodical |
| ESSAY EXAM | for my professor | to demonstrate my understanding of course content | short one to four paragraph essay |

The purpose of most college writing assignments is to evaluate students' competency in a subject matter or skill; therefore, it should be evident from what you write that you have the competencies your instructor expects of you. Instructors should not have to guess your meaning. As a general rule, this means that you should explain basic concepts in detail and give specific examples of them. In fact, even though you write for the professor, you might better imagine that your audience is a classmate who needs to have things explained from the ground up. You should also attend carefully to the professor's formal guidelines. These often reflect standards of the discipline directly tied to its methods and assumptions (for example, lab reports), and your ability to adhere to these guidelines reflects your understanding of course content. Occasionally, professors will give an assignment that specifies your audience and the formal context (for example, to review a concert recital for the local newspaper). In these instances you should take special care to attend to questions of audience, purpose, and form.

## ACCURACY AND PLAUSIBILITY

Most writing assignments in the content areas ask you to relate conceptual and factual content. You should write sentences that clearly and accurately relate this content. If you write that "the atom *NaCl* is common table salt," your chemistry professor won't be impressed. Perhaps you know that *NaCl* is a molecule, rather than an atom, but if you use the wrong word it won't look as though you do. If your music appreciation textbook draws a distinction between baroque, classical, and romantic music, don't call Bach, Mozart, and Chopin classical composers (even though you might find all their works in the classical section of your local music store). If your political science instructor distinguishes Marxist, socialist, and anarchist political theories, don't refer to all of them as communist systems of thought. And if your psychology instructor has discussed mean, median, and mode, you are well-advised not to speak generally of "the average score." Many courses give you a vocabulary in which to express their content. Take care to use that vocabulary precisely. And don't forget: truth matters. Though written tests are often contrasted with objective tests, as though the evaluation of written material is merely subjective, usually your writing is evaluated with respect to its content as well as its quality of expression.

## CLEAR FOCUS

A good piece of writing establishes and maintains a clear and appropriate direction. Your topic should clearly relate to the question or assignment. It should not be too broad, too narrow, or irrelevant. If your instructor asks you to write a review of an article on the use of computers in medicine, you shouldn't review an article on computers in modern society even if it discusses their role in medicine; and, of course, you shouldn't review an article on computer imaging in space exploration. Having chosen an appropriate topic, you

should stay on topic from beginning to end. In a review of computers in medicine, don't drift into a discussion of the dehumanizing effects of life-sustaining technology in medicine—unless it relates directly to a point about computers. In the traditional expository essay, the focus is usually established by a thesis statement that occurs in the first paragraph. But this is not the only way to establish focus; a well-chosen title is often sufficient. For example, if your instructor permits, place the title of your review at the top of the paper (e.g., A Review of "Expert Systems in Medical Diagnosis", James Moltke, *Journal of Medical Diagnostics*"), and then commence directly with the business of summarizing and evaluating the article. This is acceptable as long as your purpose and direction are evident. in any case, make sure that your writing stays on track.

## DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

Good writing develops key points by providing supporting detail. include enough detail to get the job done, and use detail that's relevant to the point you're developing. The quantity of detail depends on your audience and purpose. A newcomer to town will need more detailed directions on how to get to your apartment than a long-time resident. A clinical report should include every observation relevant to diagnosis. Generally, it is better to provide too much detail rather than too little. The kind of detail depends on the nature of the point you are developing. Descriptions, generalizations, directions, position statements, and arguments—each of these might be developed in a different way. you might describe a friend with personal anecdotes, illustrate generalizations with examples, clarify directions by specifying a sequence of steps, explain a position by contrasting with alternative positions, and develop arguments by anticipating objections and responding to counter-arguments. Detail makes your writing vivid, plausible, and effective. There is no better way to show your instructors that you have mastered course content—whether the content is critical thinking, aesthetic judgment, theories of management, public relations, or organic chemistry—than by demonstrating a command of detail.

## ORGANIZATION

Good writing is well-organized. A love letter will ramble, perhaps, and in that way convey spontaneity, warmth, and intimacy. But in academic and professional writing it is always advisable to distinguish separate points and arrange them in a logical and effective order. Sentences are organized into paragraphs, and paragraphs are organized into essays. As an example of paragraph organization, examine the section on focus above. The importance of focus is asserted in the first sentence, and two pieces of advice, each developed separately with examples, follow. The final sentence is a restatement of the first sentence. You could make a short essay of this paragraph by expanding the first sentence into an introductory paragraph, developing the two pointers as separate paragraphs, and incorporating the last sentence into a summary paragraph reviewing the advantages of staying on track. Some kinds of academic writing follow specific models of organization. Research reports in the natural sciences are often structured as follows: introduction, methods and materials, results, discussion, and conclusions. Problem-solution papers usually contain the following components: statement of problem, background information, suggested solutions, evaluation of solutions, and solution proposal. Whether you follow a prescribed format or design the structure of your essay as you write it, organization is based on the expectations of your reader and the logic of what you want to say. The best method of organization is the one that helps you to communicate most effectively.

### STYLE

Style is the mood or image evoked by a piece of writing. Styles vary: They can be idiosyncratic or anonymous, familiar or formal, terse or serpentine, direct or indirect. Style is determined by word choice, sentence structure, transitions, and, more generally, by the tone and rhythm of your prose. Just as body language conveys one's attitude and personality, these factors convey the style of a piece of writing. A unique style is one of the finest accomplishments of great writers. Most of us, in most situations, are less concerned with developing a unique style than with adopting and sustaining a style that fits the occasion. The style of a piece of writing should be appropriate and consistent. Much academic writing is formal. One reads an academic paper to learn more about a particular subject or to scrutinize a new approach to an area of inquiry, not to get in touch with the feelings of the writer. For that reason, some professors will ask you not to write in the first person. Others, however, want to hear what you have to say in your own voice or will ask you to assume a particular role in your writing (e.g., write an autobiography of the element Helium; write a letter to a prospective customer comparing the advantages of three strains of grass seed). Almost all readers prefer reading smooth prose—writing that artfully signals transitions and conveys that the writer is in control.

### CORRECTNESS

A revised piece of writing should be correct. It should be free of commonly recognized errors in grammar, mechanics, spelling, punctuation and word choice. Too many people confuse correctness with good writing. Good writing is far more than attention to the conventions of English. Problems with accuracy, focus, development, organization, and style are the most common cause of failure to communicate. Nevertheless, errors are an embarrassment, and they certainly do detract from the credibility of your presentation.

## HOW TO WRITE A SUMMARY[9]

**Dennis Holt**

Suppose that you have just finished reading a magazine article and a friend asks, "What's it about?" She doesn't want you to read the whole article to her or to describe it in great detail. Rather, she expects you to share the article's general topic (Was it about computers, the environment, basketball?) and relate its major points. Your friend has requested a summary—a brief description in your own words of the article's essential features.

It is hard to summarize information unless you understand it fairly well. That is one of the main reasons instructors ask students to write summaries. A summary can indicate to your professor whether you have read a book or article and understood it. Summary writing is also an important component of term paper research. Before you synthesize your sources into a report or term paper, you need to have a good grasp of them individually. Writing summaries of your sources can help you to understand them. Writing summaries will also help you reduce your reliance on the exact words of other writers. You are more likely to integrate their ideas and their information, rather than their words, into your own thinking.

A good summary captures the essence of a piece of writing in your own words and is, of course, much shorter than the piece you have summarized. Unfortunately there are no universal rules that determine precisely how short a summary should be. The abstracts

[9] Reprinted from Southeast Missouri State University's Memos to Students, Fall 1989, Volume 1 (3), 1-2.

that appear at the beginning of scientific articles are usually no more than 100 words in length because editors impose this word limit. Your instructor might expect you to summarize the same article in 300 to 500 words. When writing a summary for your own research purposes, you can make it the length that best suits your needs. In any case, when writing the summary for someone other than yourself, determine in advance how long the summary should be.

Having determined the length of your summary, you now face the hard part—to write a concise, accurate account of the article or book in your own words. This is difficult because you must first achieve a basic understanding of the material and, second, you will need to fight the natural tendency to rely on the exact wording of the text. It is also difficult because usually there is no place in a summary for your own opinion—your evaluation of the article or book—and it is not easy in many instances to separate your personal reaction from the intended substance of the article or book.

Don't expect to produce an accurate and polished summary with one reading of the piece to be summarized. If an article is complex or rich in information (as it is likely to be if you are preparing the summary for a class), you will need to read it several times. If a book is too long to read more than once, you will still need to scan it, glance through it, and reread significant passages; also you will want to take notes as you read. Highlighter pens are useful, but not permitted if the magazine or book is not your own. And in any case active notetaking is more likely to help you make the selective distillation of material that summarizing requires.

## TIPS ON WRITING

1. Read the topic prompt several times and think about what it means and what knowledge you have about it.
2. Jot down on scrap paper any ideas or phrases that come to mind as you are reading and rereading the tropic prompt.
3. Decide on a way to structure and organize your discussion of the topic, i.e., what main points or central ideas you will develop in the second, third, and fourth paragraphs of your essay. Those are the paragraphs where the development occurs, where you give examples, cite evidence, etc. Decide which main point would come first, which second, and which third. Think of at least on good specific example for each main point in paragraphs two, three, and four.
4. In the introduction, your topic sentence should rephrase or restate the text of the prompt. Then go on in the introduction to overview the three main points you will develop in the subsequent paragraphs.
5. The conclusion should summarize and restate—*using different words*—what you have discussed in the essay. Aim to look at the overall purpose of the essay to present the big picture in the conclusion which will tie everything together.
6. Aim to be as creative, imaginative, and as interesting as you can, especially in introducing and concluding your essay.
7. Each paragraph in your essay should have a topic sentence which is then developed in the paragraph with examples and discussion.
8. The essay as a whole should have a thesis idea or controlling concept to which all the main points relate.
9. As you proceed in the writing of your essay, stop periodically to read and reread what you have written and make changes and corrections.
10. Periodically return to the topic prompt, reread it to determine that what you have written suits the topic.

11. As you are writing, consider that you are trying to communicate to others in an intelligible way; to do so, you must use appropriate vocabulary and follow grammatical rules.
12. As you write, try to project yourself as the reader of your essay and imagine what the reader would need to know before your essay can become intelligible, what the reader's expectations might be, and whether you are fulfilling those expectations.
13. Write with this formula in mind: R.A.F.T.—Role of the writer; Audience needs and expectations, Format in terms of manuscript, grammar, and style; Topic parameters and quality ideas.

## WRITER'S CHECKLIST

### General

- Have you followed the specific instructions for this assignment?
- Have you followed the format expected of writers in this discipline?
- Does your paper meet the minimum word requirement?

### Organization and Content

- Have you begun with an appropriate introduction which clearly outlines the scope and purpose of your paper?
- Is your paper logically organized into paragraphs?
- Have you provided sufficient details to support your main points?
- Are all the details relevant to the purpose of your paper?
- Have you used transitions to help the reader understand the relationships between the ideas in your paper?
- Does your paper reach an appropriate conclusion?
- Would it be easy for the intended reader to understand your points?
- Do you communicate a thorough understanding of your subject?

### Mechanics and Usage

- Have you written in standard English?
- Did you write what you meant to write?
- Are you sentences easy to understand?
- Is your language appropriate for the assignment and for the intended reader?
- Are your punctuation, grammar, and spelling correct?
- Does your final draft conform to college/professional standards for appearance of written work?

### Documentation

- Have you made a clear distinction between the ideas of your sources and your own personal ideas?
- Have you carefully acknowledged *all* sources of information?
- Have you followed correct documentation and bibliographic form as specified by your instructor?

# WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE

## KINDS OF CRITICAL PAPERS

### Explication (Textual Analysis)

Trace the full meaning and implications of the writer's language. Listen for the full implication of a word, a phrase, a figure of speech. Spell out full meaning of key words and phrases.

### Studying a Character (Character Analysis)

Write a coherent account (or trace the contradictions) of a character. Bring together from different parts of a story evidence that helps you understand a fictional person. The more fully developed a character is, the less likely she or he is to fit into a simple category. Note contradictory traits.

### The Central Symbol

Trace the role of a symbol that is central to the work as a whole. Note recurrences of the symbol. What does it reveal about the structure? The theme? Even when a symbol is not actually repeated, it can assume a central role because it sums up many of the meanings that a work has been developing.

### Tracing the Theme

Trace the underlying theme that gives unity of purpose to a work as a whole. When you state the theme, you try to sum up in a sentence or a paragraph the dominant idea that seems to pervade it, that gives it shape and direction. A theme is not a *lesson*, or *moral*, but it is organically related to the whole; it may be nowhere explicitly stated, but may emerge gradually. Isolate "thematic passages" for explication and analysis. Focus on key terms that recur at crucial points.

### Defining a Critical Term

Sharpen a reader's understanding of an important critical term by applying it to a key example. Tragedy, epic, comedy, tragicomedy, force, theatre of the absurd, protagonist, subplot, dénouement, etc.

## ORGANIZING THE CRITICAL ESSAY

### Focus on a Major Issue

For unity and coherence, work toward an interpretation that adds up and that is systematically supported; ask "What question am I trying to answer? What is the issue that I'm going to solve or focus on?" Narrow down a large, sprawling subject.

### Follow a Logical Order

Avoid a chronological order; avoid a thinly disguised plot summary; restrict your use of chronological order to situations where it serves a definite purpose. When you do present material in chronological order, make your reader see that this is the most effective procedure for getting a view of the whole. When you trace the spiritual growth of a major character, for example, you may have to follow the major stage presented in the work, but, in general, try to abandon chronological order. Instead, focus on given points of evidence from different parts of the same work. Arrange your material under several logical

headings and supporting evidence should be brought in from different parts of the work for each heading.

### Comparison and Contrast

Consider other works by the author, or by other authors that point out dramatic similarities or differences.

### Work toward Synthesis

Experiment with patterns of organization that allow you to work conflicting elements into a more comprehensive perspective. Try to find different versions of the same idea, several ways of looking at the same thing. Work in a *dialectical* fashion, from thesis through antithesis to a hoped-for synthesis.

## SOME GUIDELINES FOR CRITICAL WRITING

### Use Citations

Make generous use of the author's own words. Make ample use of striking, revealing, memorable quotations, but always be analytical and interpretive.

### Focus on Subjectivity

Explain and defend your personal likes and dislikes, but base subjective judgment on objective fact.

### Remember Art

Do not quote from an imaginative creation as if it were a documentary report or a sociological study. Art is not a photographic reflection of historical reality. Before you cite a novel or a play as evidence of actual historical conditions, remember that an author may idealize or satirize, glorify or belittle.

### Consider Style and Rhetoric

Make an effort to get into the spirit of the work, to respond to its characteristic method. Pay attention not merely to what is said, but also to how it is said. Consider how the style contributes to communicating the theme.

### Don't Ape Critics

Repeat critical opinions only if you have questioned them or made them truly your own. Do not simply substitute a critic's ready-made opinion for your own honest interpretation and reaction. If you cite a critic approvingly, show why you think he or she is right.

# ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS:

## A GUIDE TO CRITICAL THINKING (3RD EDITION)

M. Neil Browne and Stuart M. Keeley; 1990, Prentice Hall

Browne and Keeley (1990) suggest that critical thinking requires a set of attitudes and skills which are built around a series of critical questions. For these authors, critical thinking refers to the following: (1) Awareness of a set of interrelated critical questions, (2) Ability to ask and answer critical questions at appropriate times, and (3) Desire to actively use the critical questions. The critical questions to which the authors refer include:

1. What are the issues and the conclusion?
2. What are the reasons?
3. What words or phrases are ambiguous?
4. What are the value conflicts and assumptions?
5. What are the descriptive assumptions?
6. What is the evidence?
7. Are the samples representative and the measurements valid?
8. Are there rival hypotheses?
9. Are there flaws in the statistical reasoning?
10. How relevant are the analogies?
11. Are there any errors in reasoning?
12. What significant information is omitted?
13. What are your own value preferences in this controversy?

## CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

1. Expressing problems clearly: to describe succinctly a complex situation or body of information
2. Identifying central issues: to extract critical ideas in a piece of reading
3. Making comparisons: to identify how two or more ideas are similar/different
4. Determining relevance: to decide if and how things are related to one another

5. Formulating questions: to create questions that seek answers to objectives
6. Analyzing information: to translate information into meaningful ideas
7. Distinguishing fact from opinion: to separate proven, true statements from those that reflect a personal viewpoint
8. Monitoring consistency: to compare whether two or more items are in agreement or opposition
9. Distinguishing fake from accurate image: to examine a widely-held belief and determine whether or not this belief is based on fact
10. Identifying assumptions: to recognize unstated beliefs
11. Recognizing ideologies: to deduce underlying beliefs from actions or statements
12. Drawing conclusions: to use information to find an answer or to form an opinion
13. Synthesizing information: to pull together a series of facts to form whole patterns or general statements
14. Drawing inferences: to form conclusions from information that is not stated directly but is suggested by other facts
15. Perceiving cause and effect relationships: to examine the causal links among given events or ideas
16. Predicting consequences: to determine the logical effect of an event or action on the outcome of future events or actions
17. Identifying alternatives: to identify one or several different methods to achieve a goal and to recognize the possibility of other goals
18. Testing conclusions: to decide whether a statement is supported by known facts
19. Demonstrated reasoned statement: to support a given opinion or statement

# SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING A BOOK CRITIQUE[10]

**Jim Eison**

One type of learning activity that faculty commonly assign students is to select a book relevant to our course and prepare a written critique. Many instructors provide their students with clear and specific guidelines for preparing book critiques; when completing these assignments, it is always wise to pay close attention to whatever helpful information your instructor provides. Other instructors, however, allow students the freedom to write critiques in their own fashion (i.e., without providing explicit instructions); in such instances, the following suggestions may prove helpful in getting started. The comments that follow pertain primarily to critiques of non-fiction texts; they are less appropriate to assignments involving literary criticism.

First and foremost, when selecting a book make certain to pick a topic area that you are truly interested in learning more about; this will make completing the assignment enjoyable. It is also important to locate a text that is neither too simplistic nor too technical; seek a librarian's assistance if you are having problems finding this type of text. Locate two or more texts to select among and then skim through the Table of Contents and the first two chapters to evaluate the appropriateness of your selections. Don't be afraid to change selections if your first choice later proves to be too dull or difficult for you.

When reading the book, read for both comprehension and retention; as you read, take notes identifying both the author's main points and your own personal observations. Write down definitions, short quotations, etc. that you might want to refer to later. The more notes you take the better; your writing time will be reduced significantly if you have a good set of notes to work from. As you read, don't be afraid to criticize or raise questions about the material. Allow yourself ample time to prepare a careful and critical analysis; this will probably take more time than you anticipated.

To help begin the writing process, set aside your notes for a short period of time and begin to jot down any ideas you have about what you have read. Let the writing help you to discover your thoughts and feelings; don't worry about the quality of this writing. Write down everything that comes to mind; your thoughts need not be in complete sentence form. you might list these ideas without worrying about issues of organization or sequence.

Later, as you start organizing your material, it is wise to create an outline for your paper. Decide what topics will be included and then arrange these topics in a logical order. It is also helpful to insure that you have assembled enough information to write the paper. You have now finished the first half of the task and it's on to the writing of your book critique.

When you begin to prepare your first draft, assume that readers have not read the text; summarizing accurately the author's main points is essential. Your summary should be (a) selective (i.e., include only major points or ideas); (b) comprehensive (i.e., it should highlight the entire text and not just the first few chapters); and (c) be written in your own words (i.e., don't string together a continuous series of quotations). Remember also that a book critique is more than just a summary of the text; it is your analysis and critical view of the material. Your analysis might identify the positive features of the book (i.e.,

[10] Reprinted from Southeast Missouri State University's Memos to Students, Fall 1989, Volume 1(4), 3-1.

the concepts or ideas you found most provocative, valuable, etc.)—why you feel this way. Your analysis should also identify possible weaknesses and limitations of the text. Again, indicate why you feel this way. Sometimes it is helpful to compare this book to others written on the topic; make the comparisons as specific as possible. Indicate how this material relates to you and the life experiences you've had. When analyzing the material, cite as many specific examples as possible to illustrate your point.

The more you know about the topic, the more insightful your critique will be. It is helpful therefore to seek additional reading material on the topic; as you analyze the strengths and limitations of the text, this additional information should be integrated into your critique. Your critical analysis should be done thoughtfully; know that this will take time, energy, creativity, and concentration.

In writing the critique, it is helpful to begin with an introduction that states why the book is important. Try to capture the reader's attention and arouse his or her curiosity; sometimes a well chosen quote or an eyebrow raising statistic can help accomplish this task. Describe the critique's topic and provide a brief outline of your paper. Your outline should provide a coherent and clear structure; follow it closely. Make certain that your thoughts have also been organized within each paragraph; each sentence should lead smoothly into the next. Choose your vocabulary carefully; look for words that clearly and precisely describe your ideas. A dictionary and thesaurus are invaluable tools at this stage of writing. Pay attention to the basic rules of grammar, spelling, and proper word usage. A poorly written paper will cause a reader unnecessary difficulty (i.e., they will lose interest in what you have written). Solicit help from others (e.g., your fellow students, your instructor, the writing center) to improve your first draft; revise your critique based upon the feedback you receive.

Be certain to provide proper documentation for each assertion you make. The purpose of a reference or a footnote is to direct the reader to the source of the information cited. The format in which the reference is reported should be consistent with the traditional style of the subject discipline; consult the appropriate style manual (e.g., *The Modern Language* Association; *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*; *The Chicago Manual of Style*).

Remember to end your critique with a concluding paragraph. Rather than stopping abruptly with your last thought, conclude your paper with a few brief summary remarks.

Two final suggestions worth your consideration are: (1) allow ample time for the assignment—to write an adequate critique will probably require several hours of time after your reading has been completed, and (2) take pride in your work—make your critique an indicator of the fine job you can do when you put your mind to it.

# EDITOR'S CHECKLIST

## PROOFREAD

(If you do not want to read your paper, why should I?)

## SPELLING

Look up words about which you are unsure; do not rely on your computer's spell checker.

## CONTRACTIONS

Avoid them (don't, won't, it's).

## POSSESSIVES

Do not confuse with plurals and vice versa.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| example: | singular possessive—society's<br>plural possessive—societies'<br>plural—societies<br>possessive—its (no apostrophe)<br>contraction—it's (meaning "it is") | example: | singular—hero<br>plural—heroes<br>singular possessive—hero's<br>plural possessive—heroes' |

## PRONOUNS

Number (singular or plural) must agree with its antecedent (singular or plural). It is therefore wrong to write: "Each person has <u>their</u> biases" or "Everyone has <u>their</u> quirks." The antecedent ("person" or "everyone") is singular and therefore the pronoun deriving it must be singular: "Each person has his (or her) biases" or "Everyone has her (or his) quirks."

## TENSES

Do not switch back and forth from past to present tense; be consistent. When writing about literature always use the present tense.

## PARAGRAPHS

For practice be certain each paragraph has at least four sentences. Most should have more; but do not run paragraphs together. Paragraphs should flow logically from one topic to another utilizing transitions.

## SENTENCES

Every sentence must be a complete sentence. Do not run complete sentences together. When a sentence is complete, end it.

## NARRATIVE VOICE

Use active-voice verbs as much as possible and do not refer to yourself with personal pronouns such as I, we, my, our, etc.

### QUOTATIONS

Introduce all quotations with a colon (:) unless it is a short quotation integrated into the body of your sentence. Block quote more than four lines of quoted material. Only quote when you cannot use your own words.

### MARGINS AND FONTS

Avoid large margins and fonts. They make it appear as if you are short on words and that you think you can slip a short paper past your professor.

### PLAGIARIZING

Do not borrow quotations or conclusions or paraphrase another person's work without identifying the source. Class lectures do not need to be cited, but do not regurgitate class lecture material either—*I know my own stuff.*

### CONCLUSION

Write a good one summarizing your findings, adding general comments that include a larger significance.

### PROOFREAD

(Again)

# MLA DOCUMENTATION STYLE (4TH EDITION)

The Modern Language Association's documentation style makes citing sources effortless with a series of parenthetical notes and a single *works cited* page at the document's end. Listed below are sample citations that one will use most frequently; however, for a complete guide to MLA style consult your English handbook or the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, fourth edition.

· *Quotations within the document's text are cited in parentheses containing only the author's name and page number:*

Rushdie believes that "redescribing the world is the first step towards changing it"—to replace the migrant's "triple disruption" of place, language, and social norms with a new language of displacement and mongrelization (Prasch 312).

· *Or, if the author is named within the text, only the page number need be cited:*

Jussawalla suggests that Rushdie is disavowing any solidarity with people of the Third World because he has essentially become assimilated into a British colonial citizen and has adopted an Orientalist perspective (112-4).

· *If citing more than one source by the same author, use an abbreviated form of the work's title—usually the first noun in the title:*

He was accepted by the *whites*: "he fooled them into thinking that he was *okay*, he was *people like us*" (*Verses* 43).

· *End notes are used only for comments or explanation, never for citation. A Works Cited page appears at the end of the document. References are given in alphabetical order and the names of books either underlined or italicized (preferably the latter if you are using a computer); whichever you choose, use it consistently throughout, e.g.:*

Works Cited

Jussawalla, Feroza. "Resurrecting the Prophet: The Case of Salman, the Otherwise." *Public Culture* Vol. 2 no. 1 (1989): 106-117.

Kennedy, X.J., Dorothy M. Kennedy, and Sylvia A. Holladay, eds. *The Bedford Guide for College Writers*. 3rd ed. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin Press, 1993.

Prasch, Thomas. "Contested Ground: Center and Margin in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*." *West Virginia University Philological Papers* Vol. 38 (1992): 39-45.

Rushdie, Salman. *The Satanic Verses*. New York: Viking/Penguin, 1988.