

## The Hero's Tragedy: Pedagogical Opportunities in Epic and Romance

The hypocritical Pardoner of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* can indeed state an absolute truth: "Whoso that nyl be war by othere men, by hym shul othere men corrected be."<sup>1</sup> It means people who will be not corrected are made into examples for other people to avoid. *The Pardoner's Tale* is rife with such examples and all point to a true lesson, despite his avowed depravity. It is my argument that epics and romances are also exemplary texts useful to pedagogy. Their heroes face adversaries and trials, and their actions expose the experience of life. These stories are meant to give historical lessons that humans were meant to understand. Paul Merchant wrote, "we are not confronted by a man in a moment in history, but by Man in History."<sup>2</sup> The quote means the stories imitate life in a time unlike our own. Society reflects upon heroic pedagogy because aspire to become a better person.

The epic hero is united in pedagogy and society because the epic hero is the subject of the myth with a lesson. Tales of the hero started from oral tradition with intent to teach their audiences important lessons; and from there they are passed down as myths. Joseph Campbell says: "the myth comes with pedagogical functions that challenge how to live the human lifetime within any circumstance because it can erase anxiety, put them in accord with their inevitability in their lives, and can see positive values."<sup>3</sup> They bring acceptance to life through an ancient pedagogy that is still relevant today. Originally from oral tradition, these myths are now transcribed and translated into literature. Steven R. Phillip quotes Northrop Frye who mentions it

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<sup>1</sup>Geoffrey Chaucer, "Chaucer: The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale." Chaucer: The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale -- An Interlinear Translation., lines 180-1.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Merchant. EPIC. (ROUTLEDGE, 2016), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Campbell, *Power of the Myth, Episode 1: The Hero's Adventure* (first broadcast June 21, 1988 on PBS) a paraphrased from his PBS television show

is impossible to learn literature, but instead students learn from the criticism of literature.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, classrooms need to criticize epics and romances that evokes morals, I suggest using the elements of tragedy. According to Aristotle, tragedy is the deeper truth.<sup>5</sup> After it happens, life is forever changed. Tragedy shows us characters who give into their greater desires at great cost and pay for the error. Thus, tragedy “dissolves into our mortal frame shattering our attachment to forms;”<sup>6</sup> since it shows us how an error in action can change or end life. Tragedy argues ignorance in social decision making. This outlook can relate to sin. Cedric Hubbell Whitman said some viewed the Greek’s as having no concept of sin but instead a concept of ignorance because their profound ethics carried intellectual properties.<sup>7</sup> It shows ethical transgressions., and through literature as a pedagogical device, it can teach students life consequences. Edgar Allan Poe, in his essay “Philosophy of Composition” wrote: “Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones”.<sup>8</sup> That gloominess is the only way to legitimize poetry. The audience notices this with the hero crying and experiencing loss. In heroic literature, the audience sees the elements at play. Aristotle says: “all the elements of epic are present in tragedy, even though not all the elements of tragedy are present in epic”.<sup>9</sup> It may end differently than tragedy, but within the grandeur of the story, the audience can see the tragic elements at play when the hero meets their downfall.

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<sup>4</sup> Steven R. Phillip “The Monomyth and Literary Criticism”, *College Literature* 2, no. 1 (1975),1.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *the Poetics*, Trans. Anthony John Patrick Kenny, (*Oxford Univ. Press*, 2013), 24.

Readers will find Aristotle repeated throughout this argument, but I found him to be most relevant for arguing the *Hero’s Tragedy* because he was the first to split up poetic forms. Being a biologist by trade, he was able to classify and define key terms needed when using effective pedagogy. It drifted into background, but I think it necessary to bring forward, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Campbell, *the Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2008, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Cedric Hubbell Whitman, *Sophocles: a Study of Heroic Humanism*, (Harvard University Press, 1951). 33

<sup>8</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, *The Philosophy of Composition*.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *the Poetics*, 23.

The tragic flaw offers pedagogical opportunities in epic and romance because tragedy was a pedagogical device in ancient Greece. Epics and romances share some of tragedy's characteristic in order to teach lessons to the audience. In my argument, I learned that *The Poetics* is a magnificent pedagogical guide in understanding the genres of classical literature. Unlike Joseph Campbell's hero journey which only covers from a character arc perspective, *the Poetic* covers literary elements since it breaks down the poetic frame into three parts: medium, object, and mode. Next, I will address genre; -tragedy, comedy, and epic. After that, I will engage Aristotelian ideas on plot structure, characteristic, and moral character.<sup>10</sup> Then I will explore the vagueness of the tragic flaw. Then I will identify the tragic flaw in these several epics and romance, including the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, *the Iliad*, *the Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain*, and *the Green Knight*, and *the Divine Comedy*. Then I will end with a form of pedagogy that fits this critique for a classroom.

The medium is understanding the use of voice. It is how the writing is spoken. With the use of rhythm and meter, students will look at the voice as the way the piece was spoken.<sup>11</sup> For example, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the text uses alliteration since it constitutes a mnemonic technique of diction.<sup>12</sup> In Simon Armitage's translation, he maintains the alliteration. On lines 1679-80, he translated: "I have tested you twice and found you truthful" and "but think tomorrow third time throw best"; thus, he manipulates the modern English *t* sound.<sup>13</sup> The *t* sound is a voiceless alveolar stop and allows one to speak without using their vocal cords but brings the sound to a stop. Gawain's rhetoric aligns with the poem's alliteration while playing with the

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<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *the Poetics*, 17-41.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *the Poetics*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Batt, "Gawain's Antifeminist Rant, the Pentangle, and Narrative Space.", (The Yearbook of English Studies, vol. 22, 1992), 120.

<sup>13</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Tran. Simon Armitage, (New York: W.W. Norton), 133.

medium.<sup>14</sup> It directly plays with the story's mood. Understanding this classification can help students identify passages from writers because giving them the skills to distinguish the author's voices, but what about action?

Objects are within the story and writing representing action.<sup>15</sup> It is cause and effect behavior. It indicates where the story would go. For example, Beowulf completes a heroic action and is compensated for it. The audience sees Hrothgar giving Beowulf presents for his feats. Accordingly, gaining both reputation and riches, the objects are Beowulf's motivation.

The mode is the structural way the work is written. In classical literature, the mode is separated by narrative or dialogue gave either singular or multiple narrators.<sup>16</sup> It places the medium on the page making the voice physical allow the story to move along. It is very similar to text structure. Text structures are "the ideas in a text are interrelated to convey the message to the reader" and "specifies the logical connections among ideas as well as subordination of some ideas to others."<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, text structure is the container that makes the writing make sense. The words are organized, compiled and put together.<sup>18</sup> This organization works in the student's learning process identifying key components of an argument. Knowing how a text is structured gives students an edge while learning because "awareness of text structures through direct or indirect instruction improves learning"; therefore, students who gain this knowledge on how the text is structure can predict, comprehend, and recall information.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, genre awareness helps communicate the writer's message in the text. It brings the author's communicated purposes and how the reader understands them since students can bring a range of experience

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<sup>14</sup> Batt, "Gawain's Antifeminist Rant, the Pentangle, and Narrative Space.", 120.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *the Poetics*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle *the Poetics*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> "Disciplinary Literacy and Pedagogical Content Knowledge.",45.

<sup>18</sup> "Disciplinary Literacy and Pedagogical Content Knowledge.",46.

<sup>19</sup> "Disciplinary Literacy and Pedagogical Content Knowledge.",46.

awareness and knowledge.<sup>20</sup> The ones I want to expose to students are the ones classified by Aristotle: tragedy, comedy, and epic. I will use key examples from the texts to show how it can work for students.

Tragedy as an artform represents superior people.<sup>21</sup> It shows people important to society like royalty and the powerful and wealthy. For example, Agamemnon is the high king of the Achaeans. Tragedies are the story of a powerful person's mistake and its dreadful consequences. Tragedy happens within a day, so it is complete within itself and a means to the end.<sup>22</sup> The tension builds and leads to the death or extreme emotional pain and inflicts self-harm upon themselves like Oedipus who gouges his own eyes out after learning that his fate came true. More importantly, it is not about the loss but provocation of emotions. The tragedies provoke the emotions pity and fear. I found pity and fear repeated through repetition in these texts. It seems when they were transcribed, the scribe had the *Poetics* in mind. Campbell explained fear is "the feeling which arrests the mind on the presence of whatever is grave and constant in human sufferings" and pity "unites it with human sufferer and fear unites it with a secret cause".<sup>23</sup> It is a constant feeling of something bad is going to happen to someone and they push it through repetition to foreshadow, yet warn the audience of the hero's mistakes. After the exposure to pity and fear, they can embrace the purification of emotions, also known as the *katharsis*.<sup>24</sup> The audience becomes accustomed to pity and fear because the characters make mistakes for us. The idea of Tragedy presents what-if scenarios where the worse happen to great people. It is set in a reality that they made the ultimate mistake and there is no turning back from their fate. However,

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<sup>20</sup> "Disciplinary Literacy and Pedagogical Content Knowledge.",46.

<sup>21</sup>Aristotle, *the Poetics*, 22-3.

<sup>22</sup>Aristotle, *the Poetics*, 23.

<sup>23</sup>Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 19.

<sup>24</sup>Aristotle, *the Poetics*, 23.

there are stories ending in a humorous way while living with that mistake, and they are called comedies.

Comedy brings us joy and laughter compared to tragedies pity and fear. Campbell says it protects us from the world, unlike tragedy that exposes us to the world since it brings us the joys of life.<sup>25</sup> Comedy is meant to show inferior people where some error or something embarrassing happens.<sup>26</sup> In ancient Greece, no serious interest was taken in comedy, so the information about them became scarce.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, comedy grew as a poetic art form. In the Middle Ages came more comedies. Medieval romances are often comedic and represent a single person's quest for life transcending. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* makes a perfect example. Before he leaves, he is both inferior for being untested. By default, he is symbolized as a perfect knight. When he leaves for his quest, he is given a shield with a pentangle on it to represent both his piety and physicality since five represent spirituality with two plus three, but also his fingers and senses.<sup>28</sup> The poem shows being perfect by default does not keep him from error. On page <sup>187</sup>, it mentions that he was "stained by sin" and that he was no longer the perfect knight.<sup>29</sup> His ordeal with the Green Knight forever changed him and apart of his personality died with the loss of his perfectibility. Therefore, the difference between comedy and tragedy is the people, inferior for comedy and superior for tragedy which leads us to our next genre epic.

Epics are like tragedy with some differences. Like tragedy, Epic represents superior people, especially kings like Odysseus, Beowulf, and Gilgamesh. Those examples portray national and tribal identity; it shows those culture's exceptional people. Furthermore, epics

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<sup>25</sup>Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.*, 19

<sup>26</sup>Aristotle, *the Poetics*, 22

<sup>27</sup>Aristotle, *the Poetics*, 22

<sup>28</sup>Batt, "Gawain's Antifeminist Rant, the Pentangle, and Narrative Space.", 123.

<sup>29</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Trans.* Simon Armitage, 187.

happen over an unrestricted amount of time which adds more grandeur to the story including other incidents to add weight to the poem.<sup>30</sup> For example, the audience sees in the *Odyssey* where Odysseus attempting to journey home and Telemachus is on a quest looking for answers about his father while escaping scheming suitors. Epics can go on for years. For instances, *the Iliad* starts during the ninth year of the war, *the Odyssey* takes about ten years after the Trojan war, and *Beowulf* has a fifty-year time jump. Epics are longer because they show who the readers the people society aspires to be while surrounded by a plot.

The plot is the main events of a story. To drive the story forward, Plot needs action, and characters emotional states are changed by action not speech.<sup>31</sup> For example, Gilgamesh's action of killing Humbaba was followed by fighting the bull of heaven. We see a reaction from the action that causes more action. Moreover, plot has characteristics; such as completeness, scale, unity, and universality and necessity.<sup>32</sup> First, Completeness is the plot's structure of a beginning, middle, and end.<sup>33</sup> A perfect example of a beginning, middle, and end is *Beowulf*. The structure is broken down into the three arcs: the beginning fighting Grendel, the middle fighting Grendel's mother, and the denouement fighting the dragon resulting in his death. Next, we have the scale which is the beauty of objects.<sup>34</sup> Epics make the grand illustration of beautiful objects. In *the Iliad*, both of Achilles's armor radiances beauty. After Hector slays Patroclus who fought and died in place of Achilles, Hector dons Achilles's gear that Patroclus wore. However, through the loss of a friend and his armor, Achilles is given new armor. Its competence is shown from book twenty-one lines 676-82:

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<sup>30</sup> Aristotle. *The Poetics*, 48-9.

<sup>31</sup> Aristotle. *The Poetics*, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Aristotle. *The Poetics*, 26-9.

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle. *The Poetics*, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Aristotle. *The Poetics*, 26-7.

And he hurled his sharp spear from a strong hand  
 a hard true hit on Achilles' shin below the knee!  
 But the tin of the fire-new armor round his leg  
 let loose an unearthly ring-back the spear sprang  
 from the wondrous gear it struck, not punching through:  
 the gift of the god Hephaestus blocked its force.<sup>35</sup>

The unearthly ring embodies the durability and strength of that armor. Overall, emphasizing the beauty behind that objects reflecting upon the divine power protecting the mortal flesh. Third, we have unity. It is everything that happens not necessarily to the main character, but it is the outside sources that move the plot.<sup>36</sup> In *Sir Gawain and Green Knight*, while Gawain plays the awkward game of courtly love, Bertilak hunts because it adds weight to the plot since those scenes happen outside but around Gawain. Lastly, there is universality. It is based on what would happen instead of what happened—making literature more philosophical than historical.<sup>37</sup>

Universality can be explored by critical thinking. For examples, what if King Arthur stood up to the green knight, or if Gawain got his head cut off? What if Agamemnon never stole Achilles's lover, and Achilles fought the whole duration of the war, would Hector have the chance to be glorified as a Trojan war hero? Understanding the characteristic of plot will help students explore more ideas and arguments. Overall, Plot does have characteristic but there are two types of plot.

Simple and complex are two types of plot. Simple is when change happens without reversal or discovery.<sup>38</sup> Heroic literature is not simple, and their plots are complex and

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<sup>35</sup> Homer, *The Iliad Trans.* Robert Fagles, (New York: Penguin), 1991. 539

<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, *The Poetics*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *The Poetics*, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *The Poetics*, 29.



constituted by reversals and discoveries.<sup>39</sup> Reversal is the change of direction or fortune. For example, the gods allowing Odysseus to return home. His direction changed because he was left unable to travel by sea which took him on a journey to find a way home. Following that we have discovery. Aristotle says it changes after learning information, so ignorance changes to knowledge and love into hate.<sup>40</sup> *Agamemnon* is a logical example of discovery. In the tragedy, his wife, Clytemnestra discovers that he sacrifices their daughter to win the Trojan war, so she kills him for it. On lines 1417-21, she says her reason:

...he killed his own  
 Child, born to me in pain, my well-beloved.  
 Why did you not drive him from hearth and home  
 For that foul crime, reserving your stern judgment  
 Until I acted.<sup>41</sup>

When looking at it, she knew along what he did their daughter and played a seemingly unknowing role. Her discovery changes her love for him into a bitter hatred where she went as far as to commit the act of murder knowing she will be exiled for it. She made a judgment based on the need he had to pay with his life for being a kin-slayer. The complexity of the plot made it within her character as a mother to make such an action.

Character is the second most important next to plot.<sup>42</sup> Characters work with objects that drive the plot forward. For example, Beowulf shows he is heroic in his action when he rips off Grendel's arm. On lines 785-79, the text states:

A God-cursed scream and strain of catastrophe,

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<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, *The Poetics*, 30.

<sup>40</sup> Aristotle, *The Poetics*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Aeschylus, *The Oresteia of Aeschylus*, Trans. George Thomson, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1938), 45.

<sup>42</sup> Aristotle, *The Poetics*, 25.

The howl of the loser, the lament of the hell-serf  
 Keening his wound. He was overwhelmed,  
 Manacled tight by the man who of all men  
 Was foremost and strongest in the days of this life.<sup>43</sup>

Defeating Grendel was a feat no one could accomplish before Beowulf. Even in the opening, it states Hrothgar's impressive lineage to reflect on the power of Grendel. If they could not stop him who could? After Grendel's scream, the author compliments Beowulf's strength and puts him in a fighting tier above other humans. The act of stopping this monster deemed Beowulf as a hero. Aside from physical actions, characters act in the choices they make.

Choices are a form of action that moves the plot forward.<sup>44</sup> Hrothgar made a choice by letting Beowulf into Heorot. From lines 371 to 383, Hrothgar states how he knew Beowulf when he was younger and that he was here to "follow up on an old friendship," and God guided him to Heorot to fight Grendel.<sup>45</sup> In the universality of it all, Hrothgar could have denied entrance to Beowulf for being an outsider, but he used the old friendship as the perfect excuse to allow him in their halls. In such dialogue, it is revealed to the audience where these characters stand on their morals. We call this moral character *ethos*.

Moral character shows the ethical nature behind the character. Moral character is meant to show the reader the character's intelligence and logic.<sup>46</sup> Greek literature is morally conscious of the intellectual content of ethics, so wrongdoing and folly go together.<sup>47</sup> For instance, Hector's refusal to give Helen back to Achaeans. In book twenty-two lines 136, he announces: "why, I

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<sup>43</sup> *Beowulf*, Trans. Seamus Heaney, (New York, NY: Norton & Company, 2001), 53.

<sup>44</sup> Aristotle, *the Poetics*, 35.

<sup>45</sup> *Beowulf*, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle, *the Poetics*, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Whitman, *Sophocles*, 33

could promise to give back Helen. yes. and all her treasures with her, all those riches Paris once hauled home to Troy in the hollow ship and they were the cause of all our endless fighting”<sup>48</sup>; thus, he knew that given Helen back could have ended all the fighting, yet he let the war continue. He showed us that his folly allowed the death of so many people including himself. When characters speak it reveals their nature. Moral character is what gives character’s their personality like a good man has upright morals and a bad man has low morals.<sup>49</sup> Look at Sir Gawain, despite the awkward tension, he tries his best to maintain his duty as a knight in the game of courtly love. In contrast, Paris is an excellent example of low morals. In *Iliad*’s book three, during his duel against Menelaus, he promised if he lost, he would give Helen back. He loses but Aphrodite saves him. Helen suggests he should go back to the battle, instead, he refuses and makes love to her. Paris expresses low morals because he did not keep up with his promise. His choice of lust over peace shows his logic; ultimately, causing Troy’s downfall.

When the heroes meet their downfall, it corresponds to their hero’s tragic flaw *hamartia*. Arguably, this concept has no clear meaning and is based on theory. It is a very abstract theory. Among scholars, the tragic flaw provoked controversy over its true meaning because “Critics seem to have considered it almost impossible to decide exactly what this old term means”; so, they argue its various meanings: a moral error, moral defect, or moral arbitrary.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, the tragic flaw can mean almost anything relating to error—it is a matter of perception which can help students use their critical thinking skills. Whitman says it “survived through its sheer vagueness and unbounded adaptability” and he continues to explain that it is not a great evil or offense, but an action rooted in ignorance; therefore, he explained how Aristotle found the tragic

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<sup>48</sup> Homer, *the Iliad*, 545.

<sup>49</sup> Aristotle, *the Poetics*, 15.

<sup>50</sup> Ho Kim, “ARISTOTLE’S ‘HAMARTIA’ RECONSIDERED.” (*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 105, 2010), 1.

flaw to be a form of moral fault or failing.<sup>51</sup> Aristotle's thoughts on the tragic flaw are very similar to the premise of comedy—some kind of error.<sup>52</sup> It is rooted in action. For example, when looking at the tragedy *Agamemnon*, he sacrificed his daughter to the gods in order to win the war. It was his piety that made him ignorant to his wife's feelings which caused his demise. It was not an act of malice or vice, but a way to end the war. It was a long war, so his decision was a means to the end. Thus, without having any clear meaning, it gives students opportunities to argue passages rooted with ignorance that leads to hero's downfall, moral failing, or *katharis* (provoking of pity and fear). Its vagueness is the pedagogical power that it lets students choose and argue. Now, I pinpointed what seems to be the tragic flaw from each text: *Epic of Gilgamesh, the Iliad, the Odyssey, Beowulf, the Divine Comedy, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh's* tragic flaw is mortality because it challenges immortality for the human experience. Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk, is two-thirds god and one-third mortal. He takes all the men for his army and all the women for his lust, and no one wants to challenge him. He never knew the value of life and seems to take advantage of it. It affects his people negatively. They fear him. They pray to the gods remove him, so they can create Enkidu, a rival in strength. At first, Gilgamesh and Enkidu fight, then they develop a close bond. In book seven, after the battle, Enkidu has a dream and states: "I dreamed that we had offended the gods...Therefore one of the two must die."<sup>53</sup> After they kill Humbaba and the bull of heaven, Enkidu is punished, so the gods chose to kill him. Gilgamesh bears witness to Enkidu dying a slow, painful death. He comments:" I was terrified by death";<sup>54</sup> It sends him a journey seeking immortality. His tragic

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<sup>51</sup> Whitman, *Sophocles*, 36.

<sup>52</sup> Aristotle, *the Poetics*, 22.

<sup>53</sup> *Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. Stephen Mitchell, 141.

<sup>54</sup> *Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. Stephen Mitchell, 167.

flaw is fearing death. However, after meeting with the immortal, Utnapishtim, his flaw supports his discovery. Gilgamesh learns true immortality is not a physical state, but a mnemonic one. Be great and they will remember your song. And, death is a part of life, and no matter how stubborn one is, it is inevitable.

Achilles's tragic flaw is his stubbornness because at the expense of the gods, it costs him his best friend's life. Agamemnon takes away his prize, so Achilles refuses to fight in the war even though his friends are fighting. However, Achilles announces his reason: "He cheated me, did me damage, wrong! But never again, he'll never rob me blind with his twisting words again";<sup>55</sup> through his perspective: "The Trojans never did me damage, not in the least."<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, it is his excuse refusing to not fight on Agamemnon behalf. On the other hand, Hector succeeds on the battlefield as the major threat to Achaeans. After Hera incapacitates Zeus, he reveals his's plan to make Hector die a hero; thus, Achilles making preordained to kill him, so the gods wait until the time Hector is worthy. Hector needed to kill Patroclus to give Achilles incentive to join the battle. It was within the discovery of Patroclus's death and his own rage towards the Trojans unleashing Achilles's full battle fury. He played into the god's hands and lost his closest friend. It was art for the gods, but a tragedy for humankind. Achilles is insolent towards Agamemnon, but it is mortal squabble which is less threatening then disrespect towards the gods.

*The Odyssey's* tragic flaw is insolence because the characters project disrespectful behavior towards the words of the gods. The suitors use all his resources and are asked to leave. They refuse Telemachus and a sign from Zeus. In contrast, Odysseus, he is trying to make it home. The suitors and Odysseus reflect through their insolence to the gods. In book nine,

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<sup>55</sup> Homer, *the Iliad*, 264.

<sup>56</sup> Homer, *the Iliad*, 82.

Odysseus blinds the Cyclops. Odysseus is known to be tricky and clever; first, he tells the Cyclops his name was “nobody”; then, after blinding him, he tells the Cyclops his real name.<sup>57</sup> The cyclops prayed to Poseidon so that Odysseus could never make it home, and his father heard his prayer. In book one, with Athena’s request to let Odysseus return home, the gods mention Poseidon’s plan “and now for his blinded son the earthquake god— though he won’t quite kill Odysseus— drives him far off course from his native land.”<sup>58</sup> Blinding the cyclops begins the insolence because it caused his downfall which kept him from home for ten years. In his defense, it was not an act of maliciousness since the Cyclops was eating his friends. When the gods are disrespected, they punish people. When insolence happens in *the Odyssey*, the characters are punished through their values: Odysseus is home and suitors are their lives. Odysseus survives and wins, but pity and fear were still intact. He defended his men, but was he willing to be a martyr for them?

*Beowulf*’s tragic flaw is martyrdom because, at the end of the poem, he suffers a terrible death and leaves the Geats vulnerable to invading forces. As the king, Beowulf ruled for fifty years, and no one wanted to challenge him as he ruled. Beowulf announces: “No king of any neighboring clan would dare face me with troops, none had the power to intimidate me.”<sup>59</sup> He was overall powerful and was no longer threatened by humanistic threats, Beowulf enters a higher tier of combat—the dragon. Although representing greed, Dragons guard treasures but have no need for the treasure.<sup>60</sup> The dragon is binding of one’s self to one’s ego and captured in your own dragon’s cage”;<sup>61</sup> Against the dragon, he is fighting a reflection of his years of

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<sup>57</sup> Homer, *the Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles, (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 223.

<sup>58</sup> Homer, *the Odyssey*, 80.

<sup>59</sup> *Beowulf*, 185.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Campbell, Joseph Campbell, Power of the Myth, Episode 1: The Hero's Adventure (first broadcast June 21, 1988 on PBS

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Campbell Joseph Campbell, Power of the Myth, Episode 1: The Hero's Adventure (first broadcast June 21, 1988 on PBS

accomplishments. It is poetic that Beowulf fights an enemy no one wants to fight. On the other hand, it is the only way for Beowulf to die a hero. His people respect and accept his choice, but at what cost? Against Grendel he hardly struggled and against Grendel's mother, he fought to survive, so against the dragon, it was a sacrifice; ultimately, he becomes a martyr because he sacrifices himself to defeat the dragon. The thane, Wiglaf, that fight alongside him says: "often when one man follows his own will many are hurt"; thus, Beowulf followed the dragon in death and the many that are hurt are his people due to their newfound vulnerability.<sup>62</sup> It stills us with pity and fear for Geat's leadership. Beowulf sacrifices himself for the people's greater good, but at the cost of future defense. It is his tragic flaw mayordom that allows the Geats vulnerable for attack by the Franks and Frisians. That is vulnerability is of the human experience, but we cannot help the way we are.

The *Divine Comedy's* tragic flaw is original sin because humankind was infected with sin since Adam and Eve's fall from paradise. In *the Inferno's* Canto XI, Virgil mentions original sin, he says:

"By this, recalling the old testament  
Near the beginning of Genesis, you will see  
That in the will of Providence, man was meant  
To labor and to prosper. But usurers  
by seeking their increase in other ways,  
scorn nature in herself and followers."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Beowulf*, 207.

<sup>63</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: The Inferno, the Purgatorio, and the Paradiso*. (Trans. John Ciardi New York: New American Library, 2003), 93.

Sin is like a virus that spreads and causes other sins, we pay interest for them. It is the norm; thus, sin became human desire. The poem begins with Dante in the dark wood of error and confronts the She-Wolf of Incontinence. Ironically, the error is what makes a tragedy or comedy. Pushes one's selfishness and desire, She-Wolf pushes herself towards Dante because she tests his self-restraint. However, Virgil, human reasoning, arrives. It is a silly plot device—which makes it a comedy! It plays on tragedy using the repetition of pity and fear, yet tragedy is for the living, not the dead. Moreover, Dante goes through the Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso; ultimately, he witnesses the afterlife. In the inferno, it may seem tragic because of the punishment, but they are dead. Those people gave into their greater desires, but Dante witnesses the deeper into hell the less pitiful it is. They pay back in torment for their sins. Now, Purgatorio purges people of their sins. They are the people who sinned but are not evil. They are purged of their human desires. Lastly, Purgatorio, free from sin, is eternal peace in space. It is alien to Earth and shows a lack of humanity in exchange for peace. Overall, the removal of sin is the loss of human desire. It is a comedy because the poem's only living person is Dante. It uses tragedy as a literary device for the fate of all humankind. It plays on our duty to fight our humanistic desires.

*Sir Gawain and the Green knight's* tragic flaw is duty because he must maintain this chivalric code, but he values his own life. Gawain wore a girdle the lady gives him because she says it will protect one from injury. Gawain lies about it which causes him failed. Gawain made a pact with the green knight when he was in the form of the lord: "what I win in the woods will be yours, and what you gain while I am gone you will give to me."<sup>64</sup> When he gained the girdle, he held onto to it and did not keep up with pact. The green knight says to Gawain: "it was loyalty you lacked...but you loved your own life."<sup>65</sup> In chivalry, the eighth commandment is "thou shalt

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<sup>64</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 95.

<sup>65</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 179.



never lie, and shalt remain faithful to thy pledged word;” therefore, Gawain broke his sense of duty and failed against the Green Knight.<sup>66</sup> However, it was not because Gawain was evil, but was afraid to die. His fear of death makes him fail his duty. The Knights of the Round honor his failure and don similar griddles around them to show respect for Gawain, yet that does not make things better for Gawain. With the tragedy within comedy, a part of him died from this ordeal and he can never attain that perfect nature again. He was known for that perfect nature—so the one thing that gave him an edge. He knows no choice but to live with his error. He is punished by it following him every day.

. Mortality, stubbornness, insolence, martyrdom, original sin, and duty are the tragic flaws of the text. Mortality allows students to make the best choices for their lives. Stubbornness teaches them sometimes the greater good needs for one to put their personal opinions aside. Insolence teaches them not to be insulting towards others. Martyrdom asks if the risk is worth the reward. Original sin shows we are not perfect. Duty teaches us sometimes we learn when our image of ourselves becomes broken. I chose these texts because they are classics that withstood the testament of time.

Overall, *hamartia* is rooted in error, and I do not want it to be the absolute truth. Using Aristotle as a model to push forward from understanding the functions and genres to understand the tragic flaw can help students. I argue this for the sake of perception. I think it is more beneficial for students to see it for themselves. Exploring the text, Students ask what parts are relevant to today’s society. How can the hero’s story help students improve their moral morale? Using the poetic as a basis, it helps classify the technical side of literature by being present with terms in order like medium, object, mode, tragedy, comedy, epic, narrative, and character. They

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<sup>66</sup> "The Ten Commandments of Chivalry." Nobility and Analogous Traditional Elites. July 30, 2014.

are the steps that lead us into arguing the tragic flaw. First, the medium helps students rehearse it orally. Second, objects help students see how humans act towards their desires. Then Mode helps the students understand it on the page. Next, the three classical genres: tragedy, comedy, and epic, teaches the students indication of what form from errors, pity, and fear. Then, narrative exposes students to the complexity of the plot. Lastly, character unmasks the hero's moral standing, and if possible, how they gained growth from their reversal and discovery. Those eight terms prepare students to understand the tragic flaw. Ultimately, the tragic flaw is an abstract practice, but it tackles the uses of critical thinking and argument. Its pedagogical power lies in the vagueness. I chose these specific texts because, in translation, they use the repetition of pity and fear. It helps them break down the complexity alongside the *Poetics*. However, there needs to be a form of pedagogy that allows being practiced.

Critical Learning Pedagogy, or CPL, is a theory that allows students to read with or against canon literature. CPL has five literary dimensions: canonicity, contexts, literary elements, reader, and assessments.<sup>67</sup> Canonicity asks: "why does this book even matter?"; next, contexts cover the historical periods for understanding the text; third, literary elements expose the text's ideology and themes; reader connects the student to the text; Finally, Assessment reveals student's personal connections and critical understanding.<sup>68</sup> In building the scheme of the tragic flaw, it allows students to recall and organize the information in an abstract knowledge structure.<sup>69</sup> For a semester or a school year, it would be best to put this pedagogy into practice. When practicing the five dimensions in the classroom, students can ask about the text's relevance, historical background, and ideology. Reading for homework is where the students

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<sup>67</sup> Carlin Borsheim-Black, Critical Literature Pedagogy: TEACHING CANONICAL LITERATURE FOR CRITICAL LITERACY." (*Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 58, no. 2 (2014)), 125.

<sup>68</sup> Carlin Borsheim-Black, Critical Literature Pedagogy, 124-129

<sup>69</sup> "Disciplinary Literacy and Pedagogical Content Knowledge.", 46.

make the connections to the text and themselves. I propose the best way to know if the scheme works are assigning a term paper at the end. The vagueness allows for a more concentrated close reading. It gives a variety to argue. I plan to see different arguments from each student. The hero is something aspire to be. Times have changed and society becomes more progressive over time, but we should not shut out the people from the past because they can audience the beauty of life.

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