Kolbe Academy
Home School

LITERATURE OF CHRISTENDOM
HIGH SCHOOL LITERATURE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Kolbe Academy
Home School

♦ SYLLABUS ♦

Literature of Christendom
High School Literature

COURSE TITLE: Literature of Christendom

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is a companion to History of Christendom, introducing the student to the important works of the period, as well as to the literary styles and conventions developed in this period both those that it borrowed from previous times and those it expanded on or created.

COURSE TEXTS:

BOETHIUS	❖ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Joseph Pearce, Ed. Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2012
DREAM	❖ Anonymous, "The Dream of the Rood" Poem with Study Guide. Kolbe Academy, 2020
BEOWULF	❖ Anonymous, *Beowulf*. Trans. David Wright. Penguin Books: London, 1951.
SONG	❖ Anonymous, *Song of Roland*. Trans. Dorothy Sayers. Penguin Books: New York, 1957.
GAWAIN	❖ Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Trans. J.R.R. Tolkien. Ballantine books: New York, 1980.
DANTE-HELL	❖ Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy: Hell*. Dorothy Sayers, Trans. Penguin books: New York, 1959.
DANTE-PURG	❖ Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy: Purgatory*. Dorothy Sayers, Trans. Penguin books: New York, 1959.
DANTE-PARA	❖ Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy: Paradise*. Dorothy Sayers, Trans. Penguin Books: New York, 1959.
CANTERBURY	❖ Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. Nevill Coghill, Trans. Penguin Books: New York, 1977.
READER	❖ *Literature of Christendom Reader*. Kolbe Academy Press: Napa, 2020
RICHARD III	❖ Shakespeare, William. *Richard III*. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, Eds. Washington Square Press: New York, 1996 The Folger Shakespeare Library.
MACBETH	❖ Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Joseph Pearce, Ed. Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2010.
HAMLET	❖ Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Joseph Pearce, Ed. Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2008.
MIDSUMMER	❖ Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Russ McDonald, Ed. Penguin Books: New York, 2000.
TEMPEST	❖ Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Peter Holland, Ed. Penguin Books: New York, 1999.
CD	❖ Kolbe Academy 11th grade Literature presents: Keep the Faith Lectures by Dr. David White and Dr. John C. Rao. Optional
MLA	❖ *MLA Handbook Eighth Edition*. Modern Language Association of America, 2016.
Boethius	❖ *The Consolation of Philosophy Study Guide Set*. Kolbe Academy, 2020.
Beowulf	❖ *Beowulf Study Guide Set*. Kolbe Academy, Napa, 2020.
Song	❖ *The Song of Roland Study Guide Set*. Kolbe Academy, Napa, 2020.
Gawain	❖ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight Study Guide Set*. Kolbe Academy, 2020.

Dante	❖ *The Divine Comedy*: *Hell*, *Purgatory*, *Paradise Study Guide Set*. Kolbe Academy Press: Napa, 2020.
Canterbury	❖ *The Canterbury Tales Study Guide Set*. Kolbe Academy Press: Napa, 2020.
Shakespeare	❖ *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream Study Guide Set*. Kolbe Academy Press: Napa, 2020.
Reader	❖ *Literature of Christendom Reader Study Guide Set*, Kolbe Academy Press: Napa, 2020

HELPFUL RESOURCES:

- ***Study Guide for Macbeth by William Shakespeare***, Ed. Joseph Pearce, Ignatius Pres
- Books on CD/tape. Many students, especially those new to Kolbe Academy and/or to medieval literature, may find it difficult to follow some of the epic stories at first. Shakespeare, in particular is often more comprehensible when read alongside a visual performance. A great way to help students get started is to listen to the beginning of the book on tape or CD from the library. This can help students pick up on the storyline, characters, and style a bit more easily (Make sure your student follows along with the book while making use of books on CD/tape unless the translation is different. However, a different translation can enhance the student's ability to judge its effectiveness.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- become familiar with the main examples of Medieval literature;
- identify and examine the inter-relationship between the Greek epic (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*), the Roman epic (the *Aeneid*) and the Catholic epic (The *Divine Comedy*);
- identify the Christian virtue of chivalry and its role in Medieval society;
- identify the Christian virtue of courtesy and its role in Medieval society;
- identify the Christian metaphor of the spiritual quest to attain salvation;
- further the study and imitation of these genres: epic, tragedy, comedy, and rhetoric.
- learn to interpret and distinguish the fourfold senses of theological writings: the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the eschatological;
- trace the effect of the Christian world on the development of Medieval literature.

WEEKLY COURSE WORK:

1. Readings: approximately 50 - 150 pages per week
2. Accompanying study guide questions
3. Weekly paper topics are listed in the Course Plan. These papers should be 2-4 pages typewritten, size 12 font, double-spaced or neatly handwritten in cursive. Each paper should be comprised of a strong introduction, body, and conclusion. See the *Weekly Paper Topics Answer Guide* for grading guidelines.
4. Audio lectures (optional), as noted in the Course Plans

5. Key Points sections highlighting the most important concepts that the student should know and consider.
6. Three-Part Midterm and Semester Exams: given halfway through and at the end of each semester in order to assess the student's understanding and retention of material and concepts. These exams along with the exam answer keys are provided in the Course Plan packet.
7. Students seeking Honors for this course must complete the readings, 8 weekly papers each semester, assignments, midterm and semester exams in their totality and as laid out in the course plan.

SKILLS TO BE DEVELOPED:

- Knowledge of the Literature of Christendom and its influence in the history of culture, thought, and belief
- Ability to formulate and effectively communicate a clear, logically-sound argument both in writing and speaking
- Ability to think for oneself

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE:

FIRST SEMESTER

I. Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*

1. Philosophy and Religion
2. This liminal text bridges gaps among several important topics: Christianity, Greek Philosophy, and the legacy of fallen Rome all meet during Boethius' fictional consultation with 'Lady Philosophy'. It tackles the problem of evil and sin, explains our belief in Free Will, and puts the secular concept of 'Fortuna' into true perspective, revealing it to be vastly inferior when compared with the immensity of God's Providence.

II. Anonymous. *The Dream of the Rood*

1. Religious Poem.
2. The finest religious poem in Old English, it depicts Christ as a warrior hero, an ideal of great importance to its audience. The Dreamer in the poem is relating a "vision" that while not necessarily based on an actual dream has the meditative quality and insights of true religious experience.

III. Anonymous. Selection from *The Ancrene Riwle*.

1. Sermon for Anchoresses.
2. The *Ancrene Riwle* is an anonymous text, in the form of a sermon using parable, almost certainly intended for anchoresses in their hermitages. It compares Christ to a Knight and furthers the image of Christ the Warrior fighting for Mankind.

IV. Anonymous. *Beowulf*

1. Epic Tragedy

2. The differences with *The Iliad* can be used to begin to define the differences between the Greek Tragic hero and the Christian Tragic Hero. Beowulf's status as a Christian hero is much debated but can be viewed considering the growing Christian influence of the time and the growing Christian ideals traceable in the poem's hero. Beowulf also continues to track the evolution of pagan attitudes towards luck and fate—here called *wyrd*—and the Christian understanding of God's will.

V. Anonymous, *The Song of Roland*

1. Epic Tragedy
2. The differences with *Beowulf* can be used to define the differences between the early Christian tragic hero and the later Christian tragic hero and his growth as a moral figure responsible to God. The Christian Hero rises to the test of putting Love of God before all other loves.

FIRST SEMESTER (second half)

IV. Anonymous (The Pearl Poet), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

1. Epic Comedy
2. The poem is a story of King Arthur's Court and can be compared to more serious tales of the quest for the Holy Grail. It is best understood as a comedic treatment of a knight's often-contradictory two-fold vow to his Lord and to his Lord's Lady. It is a masterpiece, interweaving in singular episodes an air of moral gravity and comedy. In it the Christian knight faces a test of arms and of temptation.

VII. Alighieri, Dante; *The Divine Comedy: Hell*

VIII. *The Divine Comedy: Purgatory* (selections)

IX. *The Divine Comedy: Paradise (selections)*

1. Christian Epic
2. *The Divine Comedy* stands alone as the most complete poetic record of the journey of a soul on its way to God. It draws on the virtue of the pagan world and the truth of the Catholic Church, uniting in one vision the medieval idea of devotion to the Lady (Beatrice), of the solitary knight holding to an ideal in troubled times, and of a quest for redemption.

SECOND SEMESTER

X. *Literature of Christendom Reader + The Canterbury Tales*

1. Collection
2. The Kolbe *Literature of Christendom Rea*der brings together a handful of important genres and authors from the Middle Ages. These can be roughly categorized into Grail Quests, Female Mystics, and Medieval Society and Drama. During these weeks, the student will read selections from the following: The Welsh Mabinogion, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Julian of Norwich, Chaucer, and the anonymous play *Everyman*.

XI. Shakespeare, William. *Richard III*.

1. History Play.

2. This History play casts the usurping King Richard in the role of an arch villain. The power of language is a key theme in the play, and the struggle between an individual and their conscience, both concepts that Shakespeare continued to develop in later plays.

XII. Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*.

1. Tragedy
2. Macbeth's blind pursuit of power ends in his ruin and that of his family. Once again, we see the vast gulf that can exist between what someone says and what they mean, and the corrupting influence of power on the uninformed conscience.

SECOND SEMESTER (second half)

XIII. Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*.

1. Tragedy
2. Hamlet is a study of the hero not only torn by competing inner demands but also pressed on every side by treacherous foes. Words and their meaning set the stage for a play that asks more questions than it answers about identity, morality, and justice, beginning with the opening line: "Who's there?"

XIV Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

1. Comedy.
2. The changing fortunes of earthly lovers are told against the background of the warring rulers of the faerie realm. In Shakespeare's Green World—the transformative realm that exists outside of normal life, in this case, the forest—misplaced passions obstruct the smoothing of the tangled webs of true Christian love.

XV. Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*

1. Comedy/Mystery Play
2. Shakespeare's last play sets forth his belief in ultimate reconciliation and redemption. The highly eschatological themes work on multiple levels for Shakespeare as an author, Prospero as a character, and the audience as human beings with their eyes fixed on Heaven.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Ed. M.H. Abrams. Eighth Edition.
- *A Modern Reader's Guide to Dante's The Divine Comedy*. Joseph Gallagher
- *The Allegory of Love*. C.S. Lewis (For an understanding of Courtly Love)

1. *The Quest for Shakespeare*. Joseph Pearce.
2. *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*. J.R.R. Tolkien
3. *The Figure of Beatrice*. Charles Williams
4. There are many other excellent translations of the works read in the first semester.

COURSE PLAN METHODOLOGY:

- Be sure to reference the introductory portion, glossaries, afterwards, timelines and notes of your textbooks. They are full of valuable information and helps for understanding the texts.
- Use the Study Guide questions to prime the day's reading. Quickly scan the day's questions before reading the passage to take in the range of ideas covered that day and to help the student recognize important facts and concepts as reading proceeds. Read. Answer the questions. Review answers before the start of the next day's reading. This is a good way to train the memory.
- Advise the student to read the first time through for the value of the story itself. Preparation including reviewing the course plan and study guide should help the student make connections between the story and the underlying ideas. However, such connections are made stronger on a second reading, either of portions or of the whole text. These books are classics because they invite multiple readings and further study.
- Use the Paper Topics Answer Key to guide discussion before writing papers. The idea is to ask questions that will lead your student to arrive at specific points on and perceptions of the work. Pre-writing and pre-testing discussions, without giving actual answers, are standard operating procedure.
- Family discussions on the materials and lessons are highly effective means to foster deeper considerations of the materials. Use the Key Points from the course plan, the paper topics and study guide questions as a basis to start these discussions at home with your students.

DIPLOMA REQUIREMENTS:

Summa Cum Laude students must complete the entire Kolbe Academy proposed curriculum as written. Summa students must fulfill the requirements for the Kolbe Core (K) or Kolbe Honors (H) course as outlined in this Literature course plan. In 9th grade, ***Summa*** students must pursue the (H) designation in at least one of the following courses: Theology, Literature, or History. In 10th grade, ***Summa*** students must pursue the (H) designation in at least two of the following courses: Theology, Literature, or History. In 11th grade, ***Summa*** students must pursue the (H) designation in all three of the following courses: Theology, Literature, and History. In 12th grade, ***Summa*** students must pursue the (H) designation in all of the following courses: Theology, English, Literature, and History. ***Magna Cum Laude*** and ***Standard*** diploma candidates may choose to pursue the (H) or (K) designation but are not required to do so. If not pursuing either of those designations the parent has the option of altering the course plan as desired. ***Magna Cum Laude*** students must include a combination of 5 years of English and Literature courses in high school, two of which must be Literature. ***Standard*** diploma students must include a combination of 3 years of English and Literature in high school.

KOLBE CORE (K) AND HONORS (H) COURSES:

- Students pursuing the **Kolbe Core (K)** designation should do the readings. **Kolbe Core students need to complete at least 4 of the 14 weekly papers each semester;** they should have discussions or write informal essays in response to the rest of the weekly paper topics as these are major themes and will appear in some way on the final exam.
- Students pursuing the **Kolbe Honors (H)** designations must do all of the readings. **Honors students need to complete 8 of the 14 weekly papers each semester;** they should have discussions or write informal essays in response to the rest of the weekly paper topics as these are major themes and will appear in some way on the final exam.
- For students who are not seeking the Kolbe Core (K) or Honors (H) designation for this course, parents may alter the course as they so desire, and any written sample work is acceptable to receive credit for the course each semester.

SEMESTER REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:

Designation*	**No Designation**	**K**	**H**
Course Title	**Literature of Christendom**	**Literature of Christendom**	**Literature of Christendom**
Semester 1	1. Any TWO samples of written and graded work	1. *Complete* Midterm 1 Exam 2. *Complete* Semester 1 Exam	1. *Complete* Midterm 1 Exam 2. *Complete* Semester 1 Exam 3. 8 Paper Topic Essays
Semester 2	1. Any TWO samples of written and graded work	1. *Complete* Midterm 2 Exam 2. *Complete* Semester 2 Exam	1. *Complete* Midterm 2 Exam 2. *Complete* Semester 2 Exam 3. 8 Paper Topic Essays

***Designation refers to designation type on transcript. K designates a Kolbe Academy Core course. H designates a Kolbe Academy Honors course.**

The Kolbe academic advisor will verify that the required work was completed successfully and award the Kolbe Core (K) or Honors (H) designation. The Kolbe academic advisor has the final decision in awarding the designation for the course. If you have any questions regarding what is required for the (K) or (H) designations or diploma type status, please contact the academic advisory department at 707-255-6499 ext. 5 or by email at advisors@kolbe.org.

♦♦♦ FIRST SEMESTER ♦♦♦

KOLBE ACADEMY WELCOME WEEK (OPTIONAL)	
CD	Kolbe Academy 11th grade Literature presents: Keep the Faith Lectures by Dr. David White and John C. Rao. (The lectures included in the course plan are for educational use only.)

1-3. Medieval Literature: "Christianity in the High Middle Ages": Song of Roland; Chivalric Romance; The Divine Comedy (3 lectures);
4. "Dante's Guide to the Modern Church" (1 lecture);
5-7. Later Medieval Literature: "Christianity in the Late Middle Ages": Petrarch; Chaucer; The Early Renaissance and the English Drama (3 lectures); The above lectures are by Dr. David White.
8. Historical Background: "The Church in the Early Middle Ages" (1 lecture). Dr. John Rao.
9-11. Shakespeare in a divided Age: "Protestant Rebellion and Catholic Reform": (3 lectures)
12. The End of a Unified Religious Tradition: "Milton and Two Traditions" (1 lecture)

🗝 Key Points the Medieval Literature Lecture CDs, while optional, provide an excellent introduction to the study of the Medieval Literature. Important concepts laid out therein are the Medieval ideas of:

- The Christian understanding of the individual with personality, a transcendent fate and free will;
- The Christian King served by knights who aid his establishment and defense of a moral order (a united front before the world and in service to God);
- The Christian as part of a well-ordered world united in religion;
- The Chivalric Ideal on the field of battle (the emphasis on deeds and honor in battle, and of fairness to prisoners);
- The Chivalric Ideal and life in Court (the virtues of humility, courtesy, and maintaining moral order in one's personal conduct);
- The Chivalric Ideal and life in Society (service to God, kinsmen, the oppressed);
- The value of stories to entertain, to teach, to offer worship, to lead the soul to God;
- The role of the poet, the singer of *Chansons du Geste*, the *jongleur;*
- The Christian Knight tested in tales of Chivalric Romance;
- The Christian Knight tested in tales of the Spiritual Quest;
- The Chivalric Ideal and Courtly Love (a vow of service to a lady, the art of poetry practiced as a means of winning the lady, the emphasis on elegance in speech and dress);
- The conflict between a vow made to a knight's Lord and to his Lord's Lady;
- The effect of abandoning a Christian ideal of love and marriage;

Key Points in the Lectures:

- *The Song of Roland* and the metaphor of the Crusade
- Charlemagne as the prototype of the good Christian king
- The high place of poetry in medieval society
- The high value placed on the ancient poets
- Rome as the center of the temporal and spiritual realms
- The duty of service to family, nation, guests (courtesy), one's temporal Lord and God (God as the highest)
- The Northern France Songs of Deeds and the Southern Courtly Love tradition
- The poet of love who focuses more on the lover than the beloved

- The individual knight in a fallen world on a quest to find redemption for himself and society
- The individual as a pilgrim and part of a pilgrim people
- The rise of the individual

PROSODY

Prosody means the form of versification used by a poet in any given work of poetry. The term covers rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, meter, the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables (that is of feet and the number of feet per line) and stanza form -- covering the whole range of sonic effects used in poetry. When we take account of these sonic devices, we are said to have scanned the poem. Poetry also operates on a visual level, which can range from the use of simple description and imagery to the use of sophisticated metaphors and similes. Each, in turn, may further serve as a symbol. A well-crafted poem illustrates beautifully the notion that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts". In the end, all the component parts of a poem serve the idea the poet meant to convey to the reader. In the works read in this course the types of prosody include the following.

ALLITERATIVE MEASURE

The Old English form used in *Beowulf*. (Although, we are reading *Beowulf* in a prose translation). *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* uses the alliterative measure and the translation we are using in the course retains it. This form of poetry was used from the time of the invasion of England by the Germanic tribes until the time of the Norman Conquest or from ca. 400 to 1066 A.D. Alliteration is the repeating of consonant sounds at the beginning of a word such as in the common phrases "look before you leap" or "you can bet your bottom dollar". The alliterative measure creates cohesion in a line of poetry by alliterating on four stressed syllables per line. Two alliterations occur in the first half, and two in the second half. Each half of the line is called a hemistich. The line is broken by a natural *caesura* or pause. The number of unstressed syllables in a line could vary so that the number of syllables per line would not be the same. Generally, however, the total syllable count in any given line runs between 10-12. The alliteration is marked in the example below:
W'hen in this w'orld of change; of w'renching, w'oeful fortune/S'ome s'eed or s'park of hope can s'till the c'easeless pain. The example holds strictly to the rule in both lines. Occasionally, the number of stressed or alliterated syllables varied. Sometimes the first hemistich carried three stressed syllables and sometimes the second hemistich carried only one stressed syllable. The end syllables are not rhymed.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight was written at a time when the alliterative measure was being revived. The translation we are reading has recreated the alliterative measure and retained the bob-and-wheel ending.

FRENCH ALLITERATIVE MEASURE

The Old French form used in *The Song of Roland* is called the French alliterative measure. The line lengths are usually of 10 syllables. One difference between the prosody used in the French *chansons du geste* (the genre of the *Song of Roland*) and that of the Old English is that the final syllables of the lines are assonanced together -- they use the same vowel-sound. English speakers are so used to rhymes made hard and crisp by consonants that we sometimes forget vowels are involved at all. However, if we take a poem such as *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* by Robert Frost, we can learn how a poet uses vowel sounds to good effect. For example: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep./But I have promises to keep,/And miles to go before I sleep,/And miles to go before I sleep" recreates the effect of pausing hushed and quiet in the snow with rich vowels throughout, the

repetition of the "s" sounds and the assonanced vowels in the end rhymes. This last is like what we will find in *The Song of Roland*. Keeping the poem's sonic devices in mind helps us gain more from reading the poem.

In the French alliterative measure each line is end-stopped, that is the thought in one line doesn't continue into the next. Once again, a *caesura* divides each line. Like the Old English style, there are at least four stressed syllables per line. The first hemistich has two stressed syllables, but the second hemistich may have more. It is common in poems such as *The Song of Roland* for the form of words to be changed to fit the count of stressed syllables in the line or the assonance in of the word at the end of the line. That is why King Charlemagne may be referred to as Charles, Carlon, or Charlemagne throughout the poem. The stanzas or laisses do not have a set length. The stressed, alliterated syllables and the assonance that ends each line are marked in the following example taken from Laisse 66 from *The Song of Roland* as translated by Dorothy Sayers.

> H'igh are the h'ills, the valleys d'ark and d'eep, (notice the alliterated letter changes in the second half)
> Gr'isly the r'ocks, and wondr'ous gr'im the st**ee**ps. (notice the "r"s are not the first letter in the word)
> The French p'ass through that day with p'ain and gr**ie**f; (only two true alliterations, but repeated "r's")
> The bruit of' them was heard f'ull f'ifteen l**ea**gues. (Slight alliteration. Some near assonance in bruit/full)
> But when at l'ength their fathers' l'and they s**ee**, (Only two alliterations)
> Their own l'ord's l'and, the l'and of Gascon**y**, (Three alliterations)
> Th'en th'ey remember th'eir honours and th'eir f**ie**fs, (Four, truest conformity to the alliterative measure)
> Sw'eethearts and w'ives wh'om they are fain to gr**ee**t.(fain could be marked as near alliteration with w's)

Notice that the translator's art is not exact. But by using assonance (repeating vowel sounds) or near assonance (the repetition of close vowel sounds), the translator can lend fullness and cohesion to the line. Notice how the translator never compromises on the assonantal sounds of the end words. The lines are alliterated and end-assonanced to help in reciting the poem. The poem is much more easily memorized when a strong pattern has been established. Note also, to avoid confusion, that Dr. White puts more stress on the assonance in the line rather than on the alliteration. Either way, the goal is to make a long poem easy to memorize for recitation.

TERZA RIMA

Terza Rima is an Old Italian form of poetry used by Dante Alighieri in *The Divine Comedy*. *Terza rima* uses a three-line stanza as the name implies; the stanza itself is called a *terzain*. It uses a rhyme scheme that links up to the next *terzain* in a tight aba, bcb, cdc, ded pattern. The interlinking of the rhyme by repeating the rhyme of the second line in the first and third line of the following stanza weaves the *terzain* together. The example below is taken from *The Divine Comedy: Hell*, Canto II. ll. 73-78. Virgil is recounting the words Beatrice spoke to him when she first asked him to accompany Dante on a journey through Hell and Purgatory.

> Beatrice am I, who thy good speed beseech; (a)
> Love that first moved me from the blissful place (b)

Whither I'd fain return, now moves my speech. (a)

'Lo! When I stand before my Lord's bright face (b)
I'll praise thee many a time to Him.' Thereon (c)
She fell on silence; I replied apace. (b)

The line length used with *terza rima* is the hendecasyllable or a line of eleven syllables. It has five stressed syllables placed so that the accent falls on every other one. It's similar in rhythm to the iamb in English. The iamb is a foot in English poetry that is made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Think of the line "*the "ra'in was so'ft and lig'ht and swe'et"* with the stresses put in. In the example taken from *The Divine Comedy* above, you can see that the translator sometimes used 10 syllables per line, and sometimes 11. Several English poets have written using *terza rima*. One famous example is that of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*.

IAMBIC PENTAMETER AND THE HEROIC COUPLET

The heroic couplet is based on **iambic pentameter**. The iamb is the basic unit consisting of a two-syllable foot made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. The iamb is said to be based on the human heartbeat. It is a fundamental measure in English poetry and can be adapted to many purposes. When it is used in a short line, of say 4 feet, it can have a comical or dramatic feel. Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* uses iambic tetrameter (4 feet per line) to create a mock epic. When it is used five feet per line as in **iambic pentameter** it can have an elevated feeling and is well suited to epic and dramatic poetry. Shakespeare used iambic pentameter in his plays (though he played with forms of poetry within a single play). If we scan a portion of Polonius' famous speech of advice to Laertes in *Hamlet*, it looks like this:

Th'is a'bove a'll: to th'ine own se'lf be tr'ue, (Notice how the first foot is a spondee, 2 stressed syllables)
And i't must fol'low, a's the ni'ght the d'ay, (true iambic pentameter)
Thou ca'nst not th'en be fa'lse to a'ny m'an. (true iambic pentameter)

Iambic pentameter is used down to the present age. It is not a favorite in our era of free verse, but is rediscovered by poets and playwrights from time to time. Robert Frost used iambic pentameter in his poem *Mending Wall*. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall" the poem begins. Once again, the first foot is a spondee as in Polonius' speech above. Now, we've come to the heart of the matter. A spondee leads off Romeo's line, "Oh she doth teach the torches to burn bright", spoken on catching his first glimpse of Juliet. The spondee is especially well suited to beginning a line, especially when the work is meant to be recited or performed. All poetry is meant to be recited or performed. It is impossible to get the full effect of poetry unless it is read aloud. Poetic devices are not just handy terms teachers love to pass on for the sake of testing students. They are very real devices developed to convey a message to the ear of the listener. The sonic effects they create can stir one's emotions, create tension and suspense, capture the essence of a character, comment ironically on the literal words in the poem, speed the story along, create mood or take the reader to the heights or depths of a human experience. The works read in this course must be read aloud to be fully appreciated. Whenever you find yourself losing the meaning of a few lines, try reading it aloud. The effort will pay off in increased comprehension and enjoyment.

The **heroic couplet** takes iambic pentameter one-step farther. It end rhymes the lines in pairs. It was the favorite meter of Chaucer and is used in *The Canterbury Tales*. In these lines from *The Knight's*

Tale we can feel the triumph of Theseus in battle: "Now when Duke Theseus worthily had **done**/Justice on Creon and when Thebes was **won**,/That night, camped in the field, he took his **rest**,/Having disposed the land as he thought **best**". Of course, the word "best" in the last line finishes off the sequence with more power than if Chaucer had switched the third and fourth line and had ended the sequence with the word "rest". Poets pay attention to such things. Chaucer used the form to both grand and comic effect. As a master, he also used iambic pentameter with every other line rhyming. The every-other-line rhyme scheme lends a down-to-earth flavor to his tale; and in general, it has a less elevated feel than *The Knight's Tale*. The heroic couplet was later developed into the two-line aphorism during the neo-classical period. Alexander Pope brought this art form to its peak with such lines as "A little learning is a dangerous thing; drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring: there shallow draughts intoxicate the brain, and drinking largely sobers us again". For students to drink deeply of the full meaning of poetry and to avoid intoxicating their brains they will have to learn prosody well.

THE GROWTH OF THE VERNACULAR

The Medieval period is a fascinating one in terms of language. Latin was the *lingua franca* of the period, uniting the world. At the same time great writers were arguing for the use of the vernacular in literature and creating classic works that proved their point. The works read in this course were first written in Old English (*Beowulf*, *The Dream of the Rood*), a West Midlands English dialect (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*), Middle English (*The Canterbury Tales* and much of *the Literature of Christendom Reader*), Old French (*The Song of Roland*), and Old Italian (*The Divine Comedy*). The course finishes up with Shakespeare, who brought us into the modern era. The student who compares a page of Old English or Middle English with a page of Shakespeare can get a glimpse of the changes that occurred in the English language.

WEEK 1		
READING	BOETHIUS	Read the Introduction by Goins and Wyman, and the Translators Note; then read Books I, II, and III of the text of the *Consolation of Philosophy*.
Study Guide	*Boethius*	Do questions for Books I-III
Assignment	**Paper Topic: Explain Boethius' idea of Fortuna and her Wheel. How does this compare to the other type of structure for life found in the text: the Christian idea of God's will/Providence for our lives? Be sure to use evidence from the text to support your answer, and to explain how Fortuna and God's will differ—not just a definition of each.**	

Introduction – Boethius: 480-524A.D.; *The Consolation of Philosophy*: 523A.D.

Boethius, an incredible thinker, statesman, and scholar, penned *The Consolation of Philosophy* from prison around 523 A.D. His crime? Offending the Arian king Theodoric, who had only recently ceased to admire and respect Boethius, and was now instead having him tortured and, ultimately, executed. Prior to his imprisonment, Boethius, born only four years after the fall of Rome, was uniquely poised between the pagan Roman cultural inheritance and the early medieval world of scholasticism and Christianity that he was to help build. Boethius is, in fact, the source of our terms *trivium and quadrivium*, which are some of the most important foundations of Classical education.

Besides his writing, translations, and scholarship, Boethius also contributed to Western culture by recognizing that the world in which he lived had strayed from not only Classical, but also Christian and moral ideals. This realistic acceptance of living in but not of a fallen world can be seen translated later by different cultures in medieval texts like *Beowulf*, or Dante's *Divine Comedy*. But where a story like *Beowulf* is tinged with a sense of doom, Boethius' book is indeed a "consolation".

The modern age, he tells us in *The Consolation*, values luck and fame, but are too short-sighted and selfish to see the temporary nature of such things. Instead of placing their hope in God, they place it in as much material honor and wealth they can build up in this life. Writing from prison, Boethius exemplifies Christian hope as he explains—through the fictional conversation he has with "Lady Philosophy"—that the very existence of the fleeting types of success that men crave prove by contrast the loving Providence of God. Lady Philosophy gently draws him through a series of verbal "remedies" in which she consoles him for having 'bad luck' in this world but assures him of his ability to merit an eternal reward through a continued life of virtue.

A unique feature of *The Consolation* is that Boethius does not use overtly Christian terminology to make his case for a Divine Creator who watches over His Creation. Instead, he draws upon Classical philosophy and logic to support his worldview. He confronts complex issues like the problem of evil in the world—why do bad things happen to good people—and the mechanism of Free Will—how can we possess Free Will if God knows all things, past, present, and future? Using Classical reasoning, and with the help of this philosophy personified—Lady Philosophy—Boethius begins to build a tower of thought that begins with basic truths and moves on to higher things, just as his predecessor in thought, Augustine, had used common sense and his own life as a foundation upon which to discuss complex concepts of time, memory, and grace. The footnotes in our text (Ignatius Press edition) are rich with a web of references and connections that show not only Boethius' extensive learning, but also his extensive influence on generations to come.

🗝 **Key Points**

Consider:

- ❖ The frame story which allows Boethius in prison to present his readers with a visit from Lady Philosophy

Book I:

- ❖ Note the footnotes on the elegiac meter that Boethius uses
- ❖ The loss of Fortune's favor and her "cheating face"
- ❖ The literary tradition of a wise female figure coming to advise the hero
- ❖ The symbolism of Lady Philosophy's garb
- ❖ Lady Philosophy's disdain and dismissal of the poetic Muses
- ❖ Lady Philosophy's 'remedies', large and small
- ❖ Lady Philosophy teaches through examples from history
- ❖ Boethius' initial indignation and defense of his actions
- ❖ Boethius' influence on Chaucer
- ❖ Divine Providence vs Fortune/Luck

Book II:

- ❖ The fickleness of Fortune
- ❖ Comparison of Boethius' wrong-thinking to a disease
- ❖ The explanation of Fortune's work as more or less fair
- ❖ The smaller 'poultices' applied to Boethius' 'wound' first
- ❖ Lady Philosophy's recognition of Boethius' moral life and accomplishments
- ❖ Boethius' acknowledges that fate is not to blame
- ❖ The false possession of earthly wealth or glory
- ❖ Fortune's impermanence
- ❖ The glory of Rome's empire

Book III:

- ❖ Boethius' eagerness to be purged of his wrong-thinking
- ❖ Men pursue 'Good', but sometimes mistake lower things for the ultimate achievement
- ❖ Pursuing earthly things leads to unhappiness
- ❖ The difference between Goodness and Blessedness
- ❖ The illusion of earthly power
- ❖ The metric introductions to each section contrast the sweetness of God descriptions of earthly wealth and fame
- ❖ Our earthly existence is transitory
- ❖ Men often stray from pursuing blessedness
- ❖ God is the source of authentic blessedness
- ❖ Interweaving of Platonic ideals of form and ideas with the Christian belief in God
- ❖ The earth's imperfections represent a flawed reflection of God's perfection
- ❖ God *is* blessedness itself
- ❖ Metaphor of the body for the 'limbs' of blessedness
- ❖ Participation in God's Goodness is the source of life
- ❖ All living things inherently desire permanence, found only in God
- ❖ The ordering or 'steering' of the universe and creation
- ❖ Boethius asks if God, who is all-powerful, can do evil (this will be discussed in Book IV)

Discuss:

- ❖ Lady Philosophy's progression of Boethius' healing through logic
- ❖ The way each argument builds upon a previous, proven argument
- ❖ Why Fortune is nothing more and nothing less than what she claims to be—it is men who mistake her for a more permanent source of happiness
- ❖ The relationship between the poetic sections of the text and their subsequent prose sections

WEEK 2, DAYS 1-4		
READING	BOETHIUS	Read Books IV-V Suggested reading: "The Ladder of Knowledge and the Ascent to Wisdom" and "How Boethius Built a Bridge" (in the back of the book)
Study Guide	*Boethius*	Do questions for Books IV-V
Assignment	**Paper Topic: How does Boethius explain the problem of evil? What is one example that he or Lady Philosophy uses to explain how evil works in the world? Be thorough.**	

***The Consolation of Philosophy:* 523A.D.**

In the second half of The Consolation, Boethius tackles two big topics: 'Why do bad things happen to good people?' and 'How can we have Free Will if God knows everything, past, present, and future?'. Having applied smaller remedies in Books I-III, forming the simpler foundation of distinction between Good and Evil, earthly goodness and heavenly blessedness, Lady Philosophy now finds Boethius ready for more complex treatments. She continues to use dialectic (question and answer) and clear, strong examples to illustrate her points one step at a time, allowing both Boethius and the reader to easily follow her logic.

As she explains that no matter how much evil men may seem to prosper in this life, they are actually reaping their own misery, Boethius begins to understand that Justice is a much more subtle concept than simply meting out earthly reward and punishment according to moral deserts. His desire for earthly justice for himself is transformed into a desire for the rewards of blessedness, and a strong Faith in God's care for the just, wise man.

The Consolation finishes with Book V and a discussion of Free Will. Like his question about evil, Boethius' query about our choices in the world of an omniscient God requires a more subtle answer than is first apparent. Gently building upon Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas of Time and Reason, Lady Philosophy explains that since God experiences His knowledge outside of time—in an instant, one could say—His omniscience encompasses our choices without dictating what we choose. Humans, experiencing linear time, come to the same knowledge of our choices moment by moment, as we make our decisions.

🗝 Key Points

Consider: How this half of the text builds on the arguments proved in the previous half

Book IV:

- Mostly concerned with the idea of Justice in the world
- Lady Philosophy's lesson that evil is weak and good is strong
- Natural vs unnatural: how good and evil acts work with or against human nature
- Boethius' rapid response to her 'remedies' means that she can speed up the process by tackling several concepts at once
- Lady Philosophy defines evil as an absence
- Evil men do not 'exist' the same way as good men
- Will and ability (voluntas vs potestas)
- Evil is its own reward/punishment—evil men do not prosper even if they appear to
- The crown of the wise man will never fade or go away
- Evil men are like animals; c.f. Shakespeare's Hamlet Act IV, scene 4 when you read it
- Comparison of the good man among evil 'beasts' to Odysseus and Circe in metrum 3

- So why does God permit evil, if it ruins man's nature, asks Boethius
- Lady Philosophy explains how the unpunished sinner is more miserable than one who has been justly punished
- Discussion of Fate—in the pagan, Classical sense, and in the Christian sense described by Lady Philosophy

Book V:

- Mostly concerned with the question of Free Will considering God's foreknowledge
- Chance
- Rational natures must have Free Will or they would lose their reason
- Boethius fears that a God who knows everything before it happens would preclude the need for a personal relationship with Him
- God's foreknowledge is not constrained by Time; He knows all in an instant, including all our free choices
- No contradiction between Free Will and God's Providence/omniscience
- Text ends on a very hopeful note, reminding Boethius of the love and care of God and the reward of the Just

Discuss:

- The problem of evil and the way it is reconciled with a good and loving God
- Boethius' desire for justice
- The relationship between our God-given Reason and pursuing Blessedness
- Platonism and Neoplatonism and their influence on Boethius' writing
- How Free Will can exist concurrently, harmoniously, with God's omniscience
- The resolution of the text: does Boethius feel 'consoled'? Why or why not?

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">WEEK 2, DAY 5</th></tr>
<tr><td>READING</td><td>DREAM/ READER</td><td>Read The Dream of the Rood (The Dream of the Rood Poem and Dream of the Rood Study Guide Questions are printed in the same booklet).

Read The Ancrene Riwle from the Kolbe Literature of Christendom Reader.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Study Guide</td><td>Dream</td><td>Answer the Study Guide questions. (The Dream of the Rood Poem and Study Guide Questions are printed in the same booklet).</td></tr>
<tr><td>Optional Assignment</td><td colspan="2">Write a catalog poem based on The Dream of the Rood. Keep a list of all the names by which the Rood is called. For example, Glory Tree. Use that list as a source for writing a catalog poem. A catalog poem uses a list of names or items and enlarges upon each by making a special point or insight based on that name. If you have read the Iliad by Homer, you may remember the famous ‘Catalogue of Ships’ section, which operates upon a similar principle to the medieval catalogue poem. The poem is written with each new item introduced flush left at the margin. A catalog poem on the names of the Holy Mother follows. The art of the catalog poem is in placement of the lines and in giving a clear and justified insight in each. Notice that rhyme is not used.

Example:
Queen of Heaven who reigns with her Son.
Mother of Good Counsel; guide us through our days.
Mother of Mercy; remember us in our weakness.
Seat of Wisdom; teach us to love God’s law.
Arc of the Covenant; pray we grow in holiness.
Tower of Ivory; grant us strength in time of need.
Star of the Sea; greet us with your radiance upon our entrance to heaven.</td></tr>
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Introduction - 8th Century – The Dream of the Rood

The Dream of the Rood is the finest religious poem in Old English. In it a dreamer experiences a vision of the Holy Rood, the cross of Christ. The poem is in three parts. The dreamer first alerts us to the nature of his dream and the beauty of the Rood; then, in the longest and most notable section the dreamer tells us how the Holy Rood itself addressed him, relating the events the rood was witness to on the day of our Lord’s Passion; finally, the dreamer accepts the charge to tell others what he has seen and to live with unwavering faith throughout the rest of his life so that he might become a saint ready for heaven.

To be given a vision of the Rood is a rare and a good thing. The dreamer, in a sense, is being given a glimpse of the Cross of Christ, as it will appear shortly before His coming in judgment. “…then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” (Matthew 24: 30)

We have no exact date for *The Dream of the Rood*. It exists in a 10th-Century manuscript found in Vercelli, Italy; its author too is unknown. Parts of the Rood’s speech were carved on a stone cross from the 8th Century, the Ruthwell Cross, now in Scotland. *The Dream of the Rood* belongs to an age that produced religious poetry in abundance, but its wondrous vision and fine language have made it memorable. In it Christ is pictured as a young conqueror, a warrior who endured suffering and pain as He triumphed over sin and death. The Rood too has suffered and will share in Christ’s victory. At the end of the poem we see that the victory of Christ included his descent into hell to redeem those

who died before Calvary. Redemption is the theme of the poem through the transformation of mankind and of creation.

The Ancrene Riwle

The Ancrene Riwle is an anonymous text but was probably written by a priest to be delivered, along with Holy Communion, to anchoresses. Anchoresses were early female religious (before the introduction of religious orders for women) who lived in a hermitage-like cell, alone, where they practiced penance and prayed for the world outside. The *Ancrene Riwle* describes Christ and the Mystery of His Passion in terms familiar to the priest's audience: a brave knight, who so loved the beloved lady that he was willing to die for her, even if her hardness of heart caused her to reject him. The knight is Christ, the lady, the Church and within the Church, all of mankind. The beautiful and complex metaphor is explained in this sermon and goes hand in hand with *The Dream of the Rood*'s comparison of Christ to a warrior dying on the battlefield to defeat death and sin. It will also be relevant to our discussion of courtly Christian knights when we read *The Song of Roland*.

🗝 Key Points

Consider:

The Dream of the Rood

- **Note lines 1-24 form an invocation**
- Images of light
- The different names given the Rood
- The presence of the angels, holy spirits, men and all creation acknowledging the cross of Christ
- Redemption and honor through suffering both in the transformation of the rood and the observer
- **Note lines 25-120 form the Rood's address**
- The human participants in the passion who are referred to as strong foes
- The presence of fiends acting their part in heavenly warfare
- The degradation of the rood as it shares in the suffering of Christ
- Christ as a bold Hero and a Knight
- The removal of Christ's body by His followers
- Echoes of the pieta
- Christ's burial amid mourning
- The Rood's felling
- The recovery of the Rood by Christ's followers (relics) and its adornment by them
- The Rood's elevation as a beacon of redemption and healing
- The crowning of Mary (lines 91-94)
- His words on the Last Judgment
- Mercy for those who seek God's kingdom through the Cross
- **Note lines 121-155 form the Dreamer's response**
- The Dreamer's desire to seek the Rood and honor it
- His reflection on friends who preceded him to Heaven
- His hope of Heaven
- Christ's victorious journey into Hell to open Heaven to the just
- Christ's entry into Heaven
- The Communion of Saints

The Ancrene Riwle:

- The lady besieged
- The knight who loves her unto death
- The hard heartedness of the lady
- The selfless sacrifice of the knight
- The symbolism of the knight as compared to/explained by the very Body of Christ on the Cross

Discuss:

- The *Dream of the Rood* as a vision
- The contrasting images of the Rood as splendid and degraded
- The contrast between the magnificence of the Rood and the dreamer's sinful state
- The nature of Christ as a warrior as pictured in the poem
- Christ as knight and warrior—He sets the ideal standard for the Christian knight, and we can compare His behavior and traits to other knights and protagonists we will see in later texts.
- The sense of a glimpse of heaven and of how all things are being redeemed
- The receptivity of the dreamer to the message of the Rood
- The Catholic doctrines regarding the Crowning of Mary, Holy Relics, the Communion of Saints, the Harrowing of Hell, the Last Judgment.
- *The Ancrene Riwle* as a sermon—what does this tell us about the audience of the original text?
- Discuss the metaphors in the text

WEEK 3		
READING	BEOWULF	Beowulf: Read the "Introduction", "A Note on the Translation", "Sutton Hoo and Beowulf", Genealogical Tables and Section 1 to Section 18 of the book. Refer to the tables to keep the familial relationships straight. Optional: Read "The Author, Manuscript, and Bibliography of Beowulf."
Study Guide	*Beowulf*	Do questions for Section 1 – Section 18
Paper Topic	**Paper Topic: Discuss the virtues of King Hrothgar. State why or why not you think he is a worthy king. Use examples from the book to support your answer.**	
Summary	*Beowulf* begins and ends with the burial of a king. The poem is divided into two parts. In the first Beowulf delivers the Danish kingdom from the murderous rampages of Grendel. In it we are introduced to the life of the Danish aristocracy, to the tradition of the great hall, to the *scop* who sings of the mighty deeds of men and to the bonds of duty that call a man to sacrifice or to vengeance. Pay attention to the great king Hrothgar, to his Queen, and to his relationships with Beowulf and his other retainers. Note the divisions based on rivalry and old feuds. The foreshadowing of the coming rebellion and destruction of Heorot are also to be noted.	

Introduction to Beowulf
8th Century (700 A.D.)

Beowulf has fascinated the English-speaking world, fostering debate of one kind or another since its first publication (1833) and later translation into modern English (1837). The many scholars who undertook its translation and interpretation over the next century advanced many conflicting theories about its meaning and authorship, turning the poem into a treasure trove for philologists, historians, and mythologists – few of whom ever discussed it for the power of its poetry. But it is the power of its poetry and of its story that has kept it as a standard text in the Western Tradition; and it was a devout Catholic scholar, J.R.R. Tolkien, who helped the academic world see Beowulf for the beautiful poem it is. Beowulf is a much-imitated poem, influencing contemporary westerns, science fiction, fantasy and film. Some of its themes include the man who fights for personal glory who later fights for larger truths, the warrior acting in service to a king and the band of brothers-in-arms that act to deliver a town.

Written in Old English, *Beowulf* presents a look, grammar and vocabulary that are foreign to modern speakers of English. Nevertheless, the poem is the first work in the English literary tradition. *Beowulf* may have been written anywhere from the middle of the 7th Century to the end of the 10th Century A.D. Traditionally it is dated at around 700 A.D. It was written in England, but its events take place in Scandinavia. The poem was written by a Christian but tells the tale of a pagan hero. It represents the high tradition in literature and is caught up with the exploits of kings. It is an epic poem concerned with the founding of nations. It shows a world that has lost the unity and organization of the Roman World.

It was first part of a vast oral tradition, sung out by a court poet or *scop* who would have lent his voice, gestures and intonations to its recitation accompanied by a lyre. Any poet undertaking to write the tale would have had to have been steeped in the history and lore of the Germanic tribes; he would have had to believe in his skills as a literary artist if he had any hope of capturing the vibrancy of a spoken poem. The fact that we still read *Beowulf* today means that he must have succeeded. We however will be reading it in prose translation.

The most debated point about the poem regards its Christian character. The difficulty arises in the conflict between the values of the old pagan warrior culture and Christian culture. Under a warrior

code, a man fought for fame because that was the only way for him to gain immortality. Immortality was gained when a poet recited the heroic deeds of a man in the hall at night. Under the Christian code a man is to work for God's glory and for the spread of His kingdom. Immortal beatitude may have granted him if he endures in faith. These two points form the opposite poles to frame the debate on *Beowulf*. What should be remembered is that all cultures will understand Christianity in accordance with whatever structures under gird that society. Christianity however transcends culture even as it redeems it, for nothing exists outside of God's creation. If Christ first was seen as a warrior and not as a suffering servant in order to be comprehended by the Danes, Geats, and other Germanic peoples it is merely an instance of a pre-Christian people recognizing in their culture some aspect of the Christian truth. Christ, after all, is a conqueror, triumphing over sin and death.

What we know of the actual historical persons of the poem is sketchy at best. Hrothgar's great hall of Heorot has been identified with the village of Leire on the island of Seeland in Denmark. Studies of the area continue to this day. There was also a King Hgelac who lived in 521 A.D. He died, as in the poem, in a campaign against the Franks. Gregory of Tours wrote of him as King Chlochilaich in his *The History of the Franks*. Archeologists have been further excited by the discovery of Sutton Hoo of an ancient burial mound like that described for Scyld Skefing in the story. Most important for an understanding of the poem is an awareness of the cultural practices of the time. The warrior culture depended on loyalty to a tribal lord or king. The king's men or retainers were expected to fight and die for him. In return, they received the spoils of war or *wergild*. The king had to be a worthy man, strong in battle and generous to those who served him. Society operated on a strict code of vengeance that required that should a life be taken, even by accident, the survivor's relations would avenge his death or exact a payment or man price from the wrong doer's family. The code led to many blood feuds between families. A protracted feud could sometimes be halted through establishing alliances through marriage, but such ploys did not always work. Two such alliances will be spoken of in the poem: one a tale sung out by the *scop* at the feast celebrating Beowulf's victory over Grendel's mother, the other the report made by Beowulf upon his return to Hgelac's court of Hrothgar's daughter's engagement. Both instances are meant to comment on the doom that accompanies human life, as both marriages were utter failures in stemming the violence between their respective families.

A general air of doom pervades *Beowulf*. Though mankind can triumph over the evil that menaces it from without, it is not able to defend against the evil that lies in its own heart. Hrothgar's great hall will be burnt; Beowulf's kingdom will fall into rival factions; but not before a great hero's story is told. Beowulf himself is almost untouched by the blood feuds that prove so destructive to his times. He wins glory for his name; but not wholly in service of self, but in service to others. His patience and unwavering loyalty win the throne of the Geats for him in honorable fashion. He undertakes his last exploits to save his people. In a poem not known for wringing emotion from its readers, we mourn the death of Beowulf.

🗝 Key Points

- Note how the book begins with Scyld Scefing's fate as a castaway.
- Note how Scyld Scefing is honored in burial. See Appendix II, Sutton Hoo and Beowulf.
- The story begins in earnest with the kingship of Hrothgar, grandson of Scyld Scefing. It is his building of the great Hall Heorot as a symbol of power, wealth and generosity and the subsequent events in Heorot that forms the first half of Beowulf.
- Note the singing of the song of creation that incites Grendel's animosity.
- Note the reference to Grendel as a descendant of Cain.
- Note all Biblical and Christian references in the work. Written by a Christian poet recalling a

Pagan past.

- The foreshadowing of Heorot's destruction
- Blood feuds and vengeance
- The royal life in the hall
- Hrothgar's feeling for his men
- Beowulf as the deliverer who seeks glory
- God's protection of Hrothgar's throne
- The role of the *Scop* (bard or musician/poet) to spread the fame of noble men
- Pagan practices that survive into the era of Christian conversion
- Hrothgar's history with Beowulf's father
- Hrothgar's payment of the man-price to settle a feud between Beowulf's father and the Wolfing's
- Hrothgar's belief that God sent Beowulf to the Danes
- Beowulf's past exploits
- Unferth's jealousy and culpability
- Wealhtheow's offer of the cup of honor to Beowulf
- Beowulf confronting Grendel with his bare hands
- Grendel's fate
- Beowulf's spreading fame
- The story of Sigemund
- The story of Heremod
- The dreadful rebellion of Hrothrulf's alluded to at the victory banquet
- The story of Finn (for more on this, see Tolkien's translation, *Finn and Hengest*. Firebird Distributing, New Ed edition, January 8, 1998)
- The threat to peaceful succession after Hrothgar dies