A woman in a book of heroes: Kriemhild in text and image in the sixteenth century

Helena Ord

The *Nibelungenlied*, a Middle High German epic from the early thirteenth century, is arguably the most disputed text in medieval German literature. This statement is rooted in the fact that the epic culminates in an appalling bloodbath, but offers no definitive moral to justify its tragic ending. The significance of Kriemhild, an ambiguous female protagonist that transitions from a compliant wife to a dominant, murderous character, remains one of the biggest points of dispute, due to her exceptionally ruthless portrayal for a courtly woman.

An illustrated page from the *Rosengarten zu Worms*(1418) held in Heidelberg. Kriemhild and her lady-in-waiting reward the victors with a kiss and a wreath.

In fact, her prominent involvement in the text's catastrophic occurrences already appears to have shocked and perplexed medieval audiences: other texts that took up the story of the Nibelungenlied, such as the thirteenth-century texts *Nibelungenklage* and *Rosengarten zu Worms*, attempt to offer more conclusive explanations of Kriemhild's intended role and demeanour. However, whereas the *Nibelungenklage* depicts her in a positive light, absolving her of blame, the *Rosengarten* perpetuates and reinforces the *Nibelungenlied*'s unflattering depiction of Kriemhild as a "vâlendinne" [she-devil]. In this story, Kriemhild challenges the renowned hero Dietrich von Bern and his men to engage in swordfights against her fiancé Siegfried and her relatives in Worms, which results in the bloody defeat of the latter group. Their demise is explicitly blamed on Kriemhild's haughtiness.

This negative portrayal reassesses the cause of Siegfried's death and the downfall of the Burgundians in the *Nibelungenlied*, and ascribes the blame to Kriemhild, foregrounding a consistent and overtly moralistic reading of her character that the source material lacks. Therefore, the *Rosengarten* offers a direct and clarifying response to the *Nibelungenlied*'s ambiguous portrayal of Kriemhild, and it is recognised as a part of the text's reception history in modern scholarship.

Susan Nami

Hero vs. Antihero

When you hear the word 'hero,' certain images come to mind. You might see Superman swooping in to save Lois Lane or picture Harry Potter sacrificing himself to rescue his friends from the evil Lord Voldemort. You might even visualize Simba from *The Lion King* or William Wallace from *Braveheart*.

But what if Superman had bad acne that made it harder for him to get the girl? Or Harry Potter suffered from OCD that sometimes distracted him in battle? What if Simba was too filled with self-doubt to take on the villain Scar?

Enter the antihero. Antiheroes are fascinating characters who have appeared in literature, in film, and on stage for centuries. An **antihero** is a protagonist or other notable figure who is conspicuously lacking in heroic qualities. A **protagonist** is the lead character in a story, the one we root for, the one we follow. He or she takes us on a journey to resolve whatever conflict has arisen.

The antihero is often compared to, and probably derived from, the tragic hero, which can be traced back to the popular stage dramas of ancient Greece. The **tragic hero** is an archetypal hero with one major, or fatal, flaw that leads to his downfall, destruction, and usually death. Macbeth and Hamlet, from Shakespeare's famous tragedies of the same name, are two examples of tragic heroes.

While the antihero is also a flawed character, he has evolved beyond the tragic hero. That's because the antihero's flaws don't always lead to his demise. Instead, they can help him achieve victory and even redemption.

Antihero Characteristics

An antihero is not your typical hero because he doesn't always possess purely good qualities or personality traits. For example, while a hero is courageous in the face of battle, an antihero might be afraid. While a hero is perfectly handsome, an antihero might be too short, too hairy, or too fat. While a hero is self-assured, an antihero might be plagued with insecurities. And while a hero is out for justice and to serve the common good, an antihero might be selfish and rebellious against this same common good.

For these reasons, antiheroes tend to be more interesting and lovable characters. They appeal to the reader because we can relate and connect with them on a more human level.

An Example in Literature

In JD Salinger's classic book *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield is a quintessential antihero. A poster-boy for teenage angst, Holden is moody, cynical, and depressed. He's hardly a typical protagonist.

Upon receiving notice that he's being expelled from his fourth prep school for failing too many classes, Holden embarks on a solo journey to New York City and camps out in a hotel room for three days. He continues to alienate himself as he struggles through the rocky passage from childhood to adulthood.

Archetypes

Carl Jung first applied the term archetype to literature. He recognized that there were universal patterns in all stories and mythologies regardless of culture or historical period and hypothesized that part of the human mind contained a collective unconscious shared by all members of the human species, a sort of universal, primal memory. Joseph Campbell took Jung's ideas and applied them to world mythologies. In A Hero with a Thousand Faces, among other works, he refined the concept of hero and the hero's journey— George Lucas used Campbell's writings to formulate the Star Wars saga.

Recognizing archetypal patterns in literature brings patterns we all unconsciously respond to in similar ways to a conscious level.

The term archetype can be applied to: • An image • A theme • A symbol • An idea • A character type • A plot pattern Archetypes can be expressed in • Myths • Dreams • Literature • Religions • Fantasies • Folklore

Heroic Archetypes: 1. Hero as warrior (Odysseus): A near god-like hero faces physical challenges and external enemies 2. Hero as lover (Prince Charming): A pure love motivate hero to complete his quest 3. Hero as Scapegoat (Jesus): Hero suffers for the sake of others 4. Transcendent Hero: The hero of tragedy whose fatal flaw brings about his downfall, but not without achieving some kind of transforming realization or wisdom (Greek and Shakespearean tragedies—Oedipus, Hamlet, Macbeth, etc.) 5. Romantic/Gothic Hero: Hero/lover with a decidedly dark side (Mr. Rochester in Jane Eyre) 6. Proto-Feminist Hero: Female heroes (The Awakening by Kate Chopin) 7. Apocalyptic Hero: Hero who faces the possible destruction of society 8. Anti-Hero: A non-hero, given the vocation of failure, frequently humorous (Homer Simpson) 9. Defiant Anti-hero: Opposer of society's definition of heroism/goodness. (Heart of Darkness) 10. Unbalanced Hero: The Protagonist who has (or must pretend to have) mental or emotional deficiencies (Hamlet, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest) 11. The Other—the Denied Hero: The protagonist whose status or essential otherness makes heroism possible (Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison, The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan) 12. The Superheroic: Exaggerates the normal proportions of humanity; frequently has divine or supernatural origins. In some sense, the superhero is one apart, someone who does not quite belong, but who is nonetheless needed by society. (Mythological heroes, Superman)

Types of Archetypal Journeys

1. The quest for identity 2. The epic journey to find the promised land/to found the good city 3. The quest for vengeance 4. The warrior's journey to save his people 5. The search for love (to rescue the princess/damsel in distress) 6. The journey in search of knowledge 7. The tragic quest: penance or self-denial 8. The fool's errand 9. The quest to rid the land of danger 10. The grail quest (the quest for human perfection)

One of a kind: Literary heroes and their gangs – Authorial images in literary biopics

Sigrid Nieberle

Reinventing a heroic character in literary history often means rethinking the unique man's differentiation from common people. Especially in the first half of the 20th century, literary biopics told stories about (more or less) intellectual gangs with one of a kind among them. It is the gang itself who identifies the 'genius' – similar to modern societies which supposedly single out the artist as an exceptional personality. Sometimes the members of gangs struggle and fight over the process of determining who deserves acknowledgement in terms of poetics, politics and ethics, and sometimes they have to constitute themselves as a homogeneous group which defends its core values against the oppressive society. Gangs are high-grade dynamic societies within society, crossing of the frontier between the illusion of (socio-economic) homogeneity on the one side and heterogeneous rivalry on the other side. The resulting ambivalence concerns both the relationship of the gang members with each other and at the same time the gangs' relationship with society.

Second only to literary film adaptation, the literary biopic is a crucial genre through which film takes part in the construction of literary history. At the same time, the literary biopic proves to be a tremendously accessible genre, as it communicates social and ethical values by both educational and entertaining means. Biographical narrations benefit from people's interest in each other as well as in exceptional characters. In his essay The Biography as an Art Forum for the New Bourgeoisie, Siegfried Kracauer (1995) made it very clear that the biographical genre enables bourgeois escapism. The lack of self-confidence and intrinsic values in times of economical and moral crisis tends to intensify the readers' focus on historic role models. Without any doubt, such movies have been competed successfully with printed books to be the top-tier medium for biographical story telling since the interwar period. As biographic medium, they offer alternatives to sociopolitical problems as well as appealing concepts of leadership. Biopics on specific authors are especially revealing as they conceptualize what writers can achieve within and for society. Thus, they represent a particularly metareflexive genre. Narrating intellectual gangs and their leaders forays deep into these possible worlds and encourages the audiences to think and explore the opportunities the films make them aware of. Gangs function as allegorical constructs which, standing in for the audience and the national collective at the same time, accumulate ideological discourses, pervading the

gang (intradiegetically) and contemporary audience, that is, society (extradiegetically).

Exploring the Function of Heroes and Heroines in Children's Literature from around the World. ERIC Digest.

Author: Singh, Manjari - Lu, Mei-Yu

A content analysis of award winning children's books from around the world indicates some character traits that are universally appreciated. These include: personal courage, caring for others, perseverance, resourcefulness, a belief in oneself, and optimism. Through books children can see heroes and heroines in different regions who respond to issues such as racial, ethnic, and religious strife in ways that demonstrate courage and resilience. While different societies may value similar character traits, how these traits are expressed can vary in different regions. Descriptions indicating cultural variations in how character traits are manifest, help children gain a sensitive understanding of how universal traits can also be unique.

There are universal criteria for evaluating and selecting high quality children's literature whether this is for young or older readers, for boys or girls. However, additional considerations need to be taken into account while introducing books from other countries to children.

1. Authenticity: While most books are created by authors writing within their own country and in their local language, some books are written by non-native authors. Authors from both groups provide readers with different views-as insiders and outsiders-about a specific culture. The jacket flap and the back of a book are often good places for readers to identify the author's origin, as well as the resources and research he/she used to create the story. This information can be crucial when the author is not from the society in which the story takes place.

2. Context: Context is important in understanding meaning. When introducing children's literature from other countries, some terms and concepts may be unfamiliar to the readers. Wherever possible, readers should be provided with information regarding foreign vocabulary or concepts. This can be integrated into the story, shared as footnotes, or provided in a glossary.

3. Perspectives: Stories and illustrations for children are never neutral, but reflect the world view held by the author/artist. It is therefore critical to check for perspectives toward particular socio-economic and cultural groups both in written text and illustrations.

4. Translation: Translation is the art of recreating a story by remaining true to the tone, style, plot, characterization, and emotion that the original author expressed. Whenever possible, ask people from the particular language group to check the

accuracy of concepts, language, and meaning, or even better, to compare the original and translated text.

5. Illustration: High quality illustrations in a picture book not only complement the written text but also provide an alternative way for readers, especially the very young, to interpret the story. Although artist styles and media of presentation may vary, it is important that these styles are true to the characters and the context they depict.

Robin Hood: Development of a Popular Hero

by: John H. Chandler

Robin Hood is a part of our popular culture, and has been for over 600 years. This outlaw of medieval England has seemingly appeared everywhere. Medieval chroniclers like Andrew of Wyntoun (c. 1420) and Walter Bower (c. 1440) happily accepted Robin's existence, and his wide appeal led to brief mentions in various texts. Scholars have long searched for the origin of Robin Hood, for an identifiable, historical outlaw in the Sherwood or Barnsdale area. The opening quote from Langland's Piers Plowman (c. 1377) is Robin's first appearance in a text, be it literary or historical, and it is not a shining reference. Sloth suggests songs of Robin Hood are widely known in taverns, implying he is a popular figure without a literary pedigree. Clearly, Robin Hood is of no importance to the aristocracy, but he holds some currency in popular circles. Sloth's familiarity with drinking songs about Robin Hood, but utter lack of knowledge of things spiritual, also reflects the concern of the Church for the souls of people who likely attended mass grudgingly, but could readily recite popular songs. Later texts similarly present Robin as a popular figure, and few strictly medieval documents featuring Robin survive.

Robin and his fellows were a popular subject in early printed texts, with their low price and wide appeal, and it is in the early days of printing that he finally comes into his own as a literary figure. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, antiquarians were especially invested in finding the sources of their national culture and heroes, and Robin proved to be of special interest to the English. They not only reviewed these early plays and poems for clues to the historical identity of the figure, but also scoured historical and legal records to find any information that may have led to a proof for his identity. Despite the efforts of authors like P. Valentine Harris, no verifiable Robin Hood emerged from the historical record. Today, most scholars accept Robin as a literary invention, based in part on other figures like Gamelyn and Fouke fitz Waryn, as well as real-life outlaws. Any search for the ideal Robin Hood,

a dispossessed noble who robs from the rich to give to the poor, is doomed to failure. That Robin is a modern figure whose individual characteristics were added in different stages.