**Qualities of an Aristotelian Tragic Hero**

1. The tragic hero is a character of noble stature and has greatness.  Must ALSO embody nobility and virtue as part of his/her innate character.
2. Though the tragic hero is pre-eminently great, he/she is not perfect.  Otherwise, the rest of us–mere mortals–would be unable to identify with the tragic hero.
3. The hero’s downfall, therefore, is partially her/his own fault, the result of free choice, not of accident or villainy or some overriding, malignant fate. In fact, the tragedy is usually triggered by some error of judgment or some character flaw that contributes to the hero’s lack of perfection noted above.  This error of judgment or character flaw is known as ***hamartia*** and is usually translated as “tragic flaw” (although some scholars argue that this is a mistranslation).  Often the character’s ***hamartia*** involves ***hubris*** (which is defined as a sort of arrogant pride or over-confidence).
4. The hero’s misfortune is not wholly deserved. The punishment exceeds the crime.
5. The fall is not pure loss. There is some increase in awareness, some gain in self-knowledge, some discovery on the part of the tragic hero.
6. Though it arouses solemn emotion, tragedy does not leave its audience in a state of depression. Aristotle argues that one function of tragedy is to arouse the “unhealthy” emotions of pity and fear and through a ***catharsis*** (which comes from watching the tragic hero’s terrible fate) cleanse us of those emotions.  It might be worth noting here that Greek drama was not considered “entertainment,” pure and simple; it had a communal function–to contribute to the good health of the community. This is why dramatic performances were a part of religious festivals and community celebrations.

* The hero discovers his fate by his own actions, not by things happening to him.
* The hero sees and understands his doom, and that his fate was revealed by his own actions.
* The hero’s downfall is understood by Aristotle to arouse pity and fear.
* The hero is physically or spiritually wounded by his experiences, often resulting in his death, or a fate worse than death.
* A tragic hero is often of noble birth, or rises to noble standing
* The hero learns something from his/her mistake.
* The hero is faced with a serious decision.
* The suffering of the hero is meaningful.
* There may sometimes be supernatural involvement (in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, the witches provide prophecies which Macbeth acts on; in *Hamlet*, the visit from his father’s ghost prompts the action of the play).
* The *Shakespearean* tragic hero dies at some point in the story, for example, *Macbeth*. Shakespeare’s characters show that tragic heroes are neither fully good nor fully evil.