

EPIC

DEFINITION:

- An epic is a **long narrative** poem, on a **grand** scale, about the deeds of warriors and heroes.
- It is told in **a formal and elevated style**.
- It centres on a **heroic or quasi-divine** figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation or the human race.
- It is a '**heroic**' story incorporating myth, legend, folk tale and history.

Types of epic poetry

- ▶ Traditional epics
- ▶ Literary epics.

Traditional epics

- ▶ **Traditional epics** are also called '**folk epics**' or '**primary epics**'.
- ▶ This type of epic poetry belongs to the oral tradition and is thus composed orally and generally recited.
- ▶ It was much later that they were written down.
- ▶ They had originally been oral poems about a tribal or a national hero during a warlike age.
- ▶ They were often the result of a number of lays or ballads being gradually joined together by a poet or bard.
- ▶ **Examples** of primary epics:
 - ▶ The Anglo-Saxon **Beowulf**, The Mesopotamian epic **Gilgamesh**.
 - ▶ The Greek epics **Illiad** and **Odysey**

Literary Epics:

- ▶ **Literary epics** are also known as **Secondary epics**.
- ▶ Unlike traditional epics, literary epics were composed by being **written down** in the first place.
- ▶ They were composed by individual poetic craftsmen in deliberate imitation of the traditional form.
- ▶ Notably, from 13th century onwards literary or secondary epic has been the **most prominent** form of epic poetry and in doing so **Virgil** has played the most vital role.
- ▶ Virgil's Latin poem ***The Aeneid*** has been the chief model for almost all literary epics.
- ▶ The Aeneid is a '**heroic**' poem with a '**heroic**' subject told in a '**heroic**' style— it records and celebrates the foundation of Rome by Aeneas after many adventures following upon the Trojan Wars and the fall of Troy.

Some other examples of Literary Epics

- ▶ John Milton's *Paradise Lost*(1667)
- ▶ John Keats' fragmentary epic *Hyperion*(1820)
- ▶ William Blake's several epics or prophetic books *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, *Jerusalem*.

Features of Literary Epics:

- ▶ The hero is a figure of **great national** or even **cosmic importance**.
- ▶ The setting of the poem is **ample** in scale and may be worldwide or even larger.
- ▶ The action involves **extraordinary heroic** deeds in battle or long, arduous perilous journeys.
- ▶ In these great actions the **gods and other supernatural beings** play an active part.
- ▶ Being a ceremonial performance, it is narrated in a **ceremonial style** which is deliberately distanced from ordinary speech.

Major Epic Conventions

- ▶ In an epic, the narrator begins by stating his **argument or epic theme**,
- ▶ He **invokes a muse or guiding spirit** to guide him in this great undertaking.
- ▶ Addresses to the muse the **epic question** and then the answer to it inaugurates the narrative.
- ▶ The narrative starts **in medias res** (“in the middle of things”) at a critical point in the action.

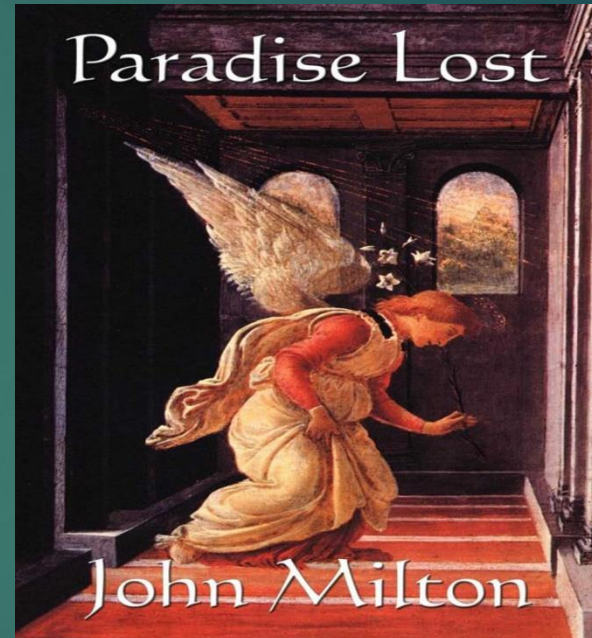
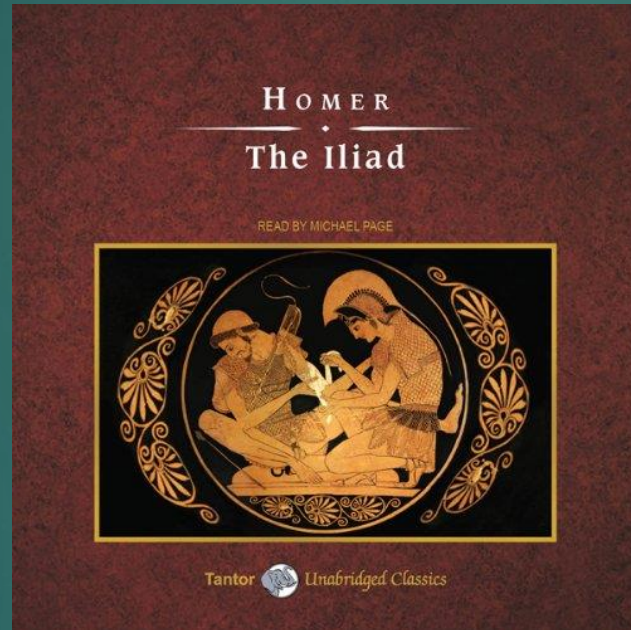
Other popular epics

- ▶ The term epic is also applied to narratives which differ from the conventional model but manifest the epic spirit and grandeur .
- ▶ They become epic in their use of grand scale, scope and the profound importance of their subjects.
- ▶ Examples of such epics are:
 - Dante's ***Divine Comedy***(1321)
 - Spenser's ***The Fairie Queene***(1590-96)

Conclusion

- ▶ Aristotle ranked epic as second to tragedy
- ▶ Renaissance critics regarded epic as the highest of all genres..
- ▶ So epic aspires to grandeur of no common sort and represents a state where men transcend their human limitations.

Cover Pages of Homer's *Illiad* and Miloton's *Paradise Lost*





Thank You

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