

The Epic

**a long narrative poem in elevated style
presenting characters of high position in
adventures forming an organic whole
through their relation to a central heroic
figure and through their development of
episodes important to the history of a
nation or race**

Characteristics of the Epic

- The hero is of imposing stature, of national or international importance, and of great historical or legendary significance.
- The setting is vast, covering great nations, the world, or the universe.
- The action consists of deeds of great valor or requiring superhuman courage.
- Supernatural forces—gods, angels, and demons—interest themselves in the action.
- A style of sustained elevation is used.
- The poet retains a measure of objectivity.

Common Devices of the Epic

- The poet opens by stating the theme, invoking a muse, and beginning the narrative *in medias res*—in the middle of things—giving the necessary exposition later.
- The poet includes catalogs of warriors, ships, and armies.
- There are extended formal speeches by the main characters.
- The poet makes frequent use of the epic simile—an elaborate, involved, and ornate comparison.

Traits of the Epic Hero

- is significant and glorified
- is on a quest
- has superior or superhuman strength, intelligence, and/or courage
- is ethical
- risks death for glory or for the greater good of society
- is a strong and responsible leader
- performs brave deeds
- reflects the principles of a particular society