

Epic

Definition of Epic

The word epic is derived from the Ancient Greek adjective, “*epikos*”, which means a poetic story. In literature, an epic is a long [narrative](#) poem, which is usually related to heroic deeds of a person of an unusual courage and unparalleled bravery. In order to depict this bravery and courage, the epic uses grandiose [style](#).

The hero is usually the representative of the values of a certain culture, race, nation or a religious group on whose victor or failure the destiny of the whole nation or group depends. Therefore, certain supernatural forces, [deus ex machina](#), help the hero, who comes out victor at the end. An epic usually starts with an invocation to muse, but then picks up the threads of the story from the middle and moves on to the end.

Difference Between an Epic and a Ballad

A [ballad](#) and an epic both are poems, which narrate stories. However, a ballad is shorter in length than an epic, while it is composed to be sung on some occasions, and not narrated. They are also known as folk ballads as well as popular ballads. Most of the ballads have unknown origin and source and usually pass on orally from generations to generations. On the other hand, an epic poem tells a story, but about the heroic ideals of a specific society. The actual difference between the two is the length and the fact that one is usually meant to be sung, while the other is to be narrated. Both differ in style where a ballad is composed in a simple language, while an epic demonstrates mastery in style such as *Paradise Lost*.

Examples of Epic from Literature

The Epic of Gilgamesh (~2000 BCE)

Perhaps, the Epic of Gilgamesh is the first example of an epic. It tells the story of the life of an Assyrian king, Gilgamesh. Like all other epics, the narrative of this epic revolves around the themes related to gods, human beings, mortality, legacy and seduction. Like other epics, it is also composed in a grand style. Gilgamesh is a young arrogant king due to his being half-god and half-human. His strength and masculine beauty becomes a constant source of trouble for others. Therefore, gods grow sick of Gilgamesh's arrogant and troublesome [attitude](#) and decide to teach him a lesson. He is made to fight his [antagonist](#), Enkidu, and then go on a long journey to bring the plant of life — a journey on which he learns the lessons of life. Although the epic is written nearly 4,000 years ago, critics are unanimous that it is a human work.

The Iliad (800 BCE)

Iliad is another example of an epic. It was written by the popular Greek poet, Homer. It relates the story of the Trojan wars, involving themes of courage, boldness, love for one's country and [nostalgia](#) of family. However, it describes many legends related to the siege of Troy, the events took place before the siege, the gathering of the warriors prior to the siege and the causes of the war. Later, the epic foretold the looming death of Achilles and the destruction of Troy. The style of narration is grand, and suits an epic poem — the reason that it is still one the most celebrated work of antiquity.

Paradise Lost (1667)

Written on the same traditions but on a different subject, *Paradise Lost*, is an English epic by yet another blind poet of English origin, John Milton. It also is known colloquially as the Protestant Epic. In this epic, Milton argues Satan's fall from the heaven as well as Adam and Eve's fall from the Garden of Eden. Despite his blindness, Milton did not stop from explaining "the ways of God to men." He has depicted Satan as a highly complex [character](#), who is at war with God. Despite his different subject, Milton has used several epic devices introduced by Homer such as invocation to the muse, extended similes and grand style.

Function of Epic

As the epic poem is the earliest form of poetry, it is the earliest form of entertainment as well. Epics were written to commemorate the struggles and adventures of kings and warriors. The main function of epic poetry was to elevate the status of the hero among the audiences to inspire them to be ready to perform heroic actions. Epic obtained most of its themes from the exploits performed by legendary characters and their illustrious ancestors. That is why these exploits became examples for others to follow, and still lived in books. It is through epics, models of ideal heroic behavior were supplied to the common people. Moreover, epics also were collections of historical events not recorded in common history books — the reason that they are read today to be enjoyed and be informed regarding the past.

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