

EPIC

An Epic is a long narrative poem on a serious subject written in a grand style. The subject of the Epic is a great hero or a nation or a tribe or a community. There are two categories of Epic.

- 1) The Primary Epic or Folk Epic. This is usually based on the life of a heroic figure and traces the hero's achievement.
- 2) The Secondary Epic or Literary Epic is based on the life of a legend and is generously embroidered with poetic imagination.

Homer's Iliad and Odyssey are primary epics and Virgil's Aeneid and Milton's Paradise Lost are secondary epics. Tragedy and epics are considered the highest literary genres by Aristotle. The writer of the literary Epic faces great challenges.

The Literary Epic follows certain conventions derived from the primary epics of Homer:

- 1) The Hero must be a man of exceptional greatness. Achilles in Iliad and Adam in Paradise Lost.

- 2) The epic hero takes a long journey. Odysseus in Odyssey wanders in the Mediterranean region and in the later books goes in the underworld.
- 3) The setting encompasses vast space, for example Paradise Lost is set in Heaven and Hell.
- 4) The supernatural element is commonly present in the epic. God and Goddesses take active part. Apollo, Zeus, Thetis and Athena are such characters in Greek Epics. Jehovah, Christ and the angels play their distinct roles in Paradise Lost.
- 5) Epics are Comprehensive and serious.
- 6) The Epics begin with Invocation and Proposition.
- 7) The action begins in the middle of the things.
- 8) The Epic employs poetic devices like Homeric Epithet and Homeric simile. These poetic devices help the poet to develop a word picture.
- 9) The Literary Epic usually contains a list of main characters introduced with details about their achievements and temperament.
- 10) Other works which display the features of Epic like theme, setting and scope are also considered epics for example, Dante's Divine Comedy and Spenser's Faeries Queene.