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Examples of epic in literature

An **epic** is a long narrative poem that is elevated and dignified in theme, tone, and style. As a literary device, an epic celebrates heroic deeds and historically (or even cosmically) important events. An epic usually focuses on the adventures of a hero who has qualities that are superhuman or divine, and on whose very fate often depends on the destiny of a tribe, nation, or sometimes the whole of the human race. The *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid* are considered the most important epics in western world literature, although this literary device has been utilized across regions and cultures.Epic comes from the ancient Greek term *epos*, meaning story, word, poem. The Epic of Gilgamesh is considered by many scholars to be the oldest surviving example of a work of literature. This epic, traced back to ancient Mesopotamia in approximately 2100 BC, relays the story of Gilgamesh, an ancient king descended from the gods. Gilgamesh undergoes a journey to discover the secret of immortality.Characteristics of an EpicThough the epic is not a frequently used literary device today, its lasting influence on poetry is unmistakable. Traditionally, epic poetry shares certain characteristics that identify it as both a literary device and poetic form. Here are some typical characteristics of an epic:written in formal, elevated, dignified stylethird-person narration with an omniscient narratorbegins with an invocation to a muse who provides inspiration and guides the poetincludes a journey that crosses a variety of large settings and terrainsakes place across long time spans and/or in an era beyond the range of living memoryfeatures a central hero who is incredibly brave and resoluteincludes obstacles and/or circumstances that are supernatural or otherwise so as to create almost impossible odds against the heroreflects concern as to the future of a civilization or cultureFamous Examples of Literary EpicEpic poems can be traced back to some of the earliest civilizations in human history, in Europe and Asia, and are therefore some of the earliest works of literature as well. Literary epics reflect heroic deeds and events that reveal significance to the culture of the poet. In addition, epic poetry allowed ancient writers to relay stories of great adventures and heroic actions. The effect of epics was to commemorate the struggles and adventures of the hero to elevate their status and inspire the audience.Here are some famous examples of literary epics:The *Iliad* and *The Odyssey*: epic poems attributed to Homer between 850 and 650 BC. These poems describe the events of the Trojan War and King Odysseus's return journey from Troy and were initially conveyed in the oral tradition.The *Mahābhārata*: an epic poem from ancient India composed in Sanskrit.The *Aeneid*: epic poem composed in Latin by Virgil, a Roman poet, between 29 and 19 BC. This is a narrative poem that relates the story of Aeneas, a Trojan descendent and forebear to the Romans.Beowulf: an epic poem was written in Old English between 975 and 1025 AD. It is not attributed to an author, but is known for the conflict between Beowulf, a Scandinavian hero, and the monster Grendel.The Nibelungenlied: the epic narrative poem was written in Middle High German, c. 1200 AD. Its subject is Siegfried, a legendary hero in German mythology.The Divine Comedy: epic poem by Dante Alighieri and was completed in 1320. Its subject is a detailed account of Dante as a character traveling through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven.The Faerie Queenes an epic poem by Edmund Spenser published in 1590 and given to Elizabeth I. This poem features an invocation of the muse and is the work in which Spenser invented the verse form later known as the Spenserian stanza.Paradise Lost: written by John Milton in blank verse form and published in 1667. Its subject is the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden as well as the fallen angel Satan.Difference Between Epic and BalladBoth epic and ballad works date back to ancient history and were passed down from one generation to another through oral poetry. However, these literary devices feature significant differences. An epic is an extended narrative poem composed with elevated and dignified language that celebrates the acts of a legendary or traditional hero. A ballad is also a narrative poem that is adapted for people to sing or recite and intended to convey sentimental or romantic themes in short stanzas, usually quatrains with repeating rhyme scheme. Ballads typically feature common, colloquial language to represent day-to-day life, and they are designed to have universal appeal to humanity as a group. Epic works, however, focus on a certain culture, race, nation, or religious group whose victory or failure determines the fate of an entirety of a nation or larger group but not all of humanity.Character in Epic PoetryAn epic poem can have several characters but the main character is always a historical figure or a legendary hero. Such heroes are of noble birth, having superhuman capabilities, with supernatural elements to help them out in difficult situations. He could be an unparalleled warrior, demonstrating superhuman capabilities before superhuman foes. Other characters could be all and sundry, animals, gods and goddesses, and some other superhumans but not equal to the legendary hero. Its classical examples are *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. Paradise Lost is the best example of an epic in English Literature.Features of Main Character in Epic PoetryThe main traits of the central character of an epic are as follows.The hero is of a noble birth such as Odysseus.He could have superhuman capabilities.He is a good traveler and travels to foreign lands.He is a matchless warrior and could fight supernatural beings.He is a cultural legend and people sing in his praise.He is a humble, sympathetic and compassionate fellow.He surmounts all obstacles including supernatural foes.Structure of Epic PoetryThere are several important points in the structure of an epic poem.The first line states the theme of the poem such as in Paradise Lost.The poem invokes a Muse that has inspired and instructed the poet to write the poem.The poem opens from the middle or *In Medias Res* and then states the main events.The poem includes lists or catalogs of characters, armies, or ships.The poem includes long speeches of the main warriors.The poem has extended metaphors and extended similes written in iambic pentameter.Use of Supernatural Characters in Epic PoemsEpic poems often comprise supernatural characters. Some have gods and goddesses such as in Gilgamesh and *Odyssey*. They help heroes in difficult times. Some have demons and monsters with whom heroes battle and win. Some epics have other supernatural elements with whom the heroes come into contact and win such as Cyclops in *Odyssey*. Some have mythical creatures such as Eris, *Thetis*, Enkidu, and Shamas in Gilgamesh.Origin of Epic PoetryGilgamesh is perhaps the earliest known epic that has survived the ravages of time. It is a Sumerian poem of King Gilgamesh and has been traced back to 3,000 BC. It is stated to have the records of King Gilgamesh. Following that, Mahabharata, the ancient Indian epic, was written in 300BC and comprises more than 200,000 verses, the longest epic. *Odyssey*, *Iliad*, *Paradise Lost*, *Ramayana*, and *Shahnameh* are some other popular epics of different regions.Examples of Epics in LiteratureModern readers may consider any lengthy tale of an ancient hero who embarks on a significant journey to be an epic work. However, though this type of heroic story is common in various forms of literature, prose narratives aren't considered part of the realm of the epic tradition. It's rare for modern poets to choose epic as a literary device; however, epic poetry remains one of the most influential forms of literature.Here are some examples of epic poems in literature:Example 1: Inferno (first canticle of *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri)I am the way into the city of woe,I am the way into eternal pain,I am the way to go among the lost,Justice caused my here to move.Divine omnipotence created me.The highest wisdom, and the primal love,Before me there were no created things,But those that last forever—as do I,Abandon all hope you enter here.This passage is from the first canticle of Dante's Divine Comedy, Inferno, in which the character Dante makes a journey through Hell guided by the ancient Roman poet, Virgil. As Dante approaches the Gate of Hell, he finds these lines inscribed. The poetic lines represent the "voice" of Hell in talking Dante and the reader of Hell's nature, origin, and purpose. This indicates the pathway of what is to come for Dante on his journey through the epic poem. The inscription describes Hell as a city, structured as a contained geographical area bound by walls and harboring a population of souls suffering various levels and means of torment. This is a parallel for the canticle Paradiso and its portrayal of Heaven, which is described by Virgil as the city of God.In addition, the inscription warns that Hell is a place of eternal woes, pain, and loss. Dante witnesses God's intense punishment of those who sin, lending to Dante's journey an otherworldly setting that crosses a span of time and memory. The last line of the inscription is an example of the elevated language and tone of Dante's epic poem. Dante's character, as well as the reader, are told to "abandon all hope" upon entering the gate of Hell, implying there is no escape from the Inferno with hope intact. Dante's epic poem is one of the most influential works in the history of literature.Example 2: Orlando Furioso by Ludovico AriostoThis dog won't hunt. This horse won't jump. You get the general drift. However, he keeps on trying,but the fire won't burn, the kindling is wet,and the faint glow of the ember is weak and dying.He has no other choice then but to leftt go and take a nap on the ground there, lyingNext to her—for whom Dame Fortune has moreWoes and tribulations yet in store.Ariosto's epic poem of 1532 is an interpretation of the battles between the Saracen invaders and the Franks. Orlando Furioso is a brave warrior tasked to save his people, indicating a heroic character who is courageous and resolute. However, he suffers from a period of madness due to the seductions of Angelica. This circumstance represents an obstacle for the hero to overcome as a means of fulfilling his journey and destiny in ensuring the salvation of his people. The pairing of valiant duty and passionate love is common in epic poetry. In Ariosto's work, Furioso ultimately recognizes passion as a weakness not befitting of a knight and he, therefore, returns to placing the importance of duty before any other action.Example 3: Don Juan by Lord ByronBetween two worlds life hovers like a star,Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge,How little do we know that which we are!How less what we may be! The eternal surge of time and tide rolls on, and bears afarOur bubbles; as the old bubbles, new emerge,Lash'd from the foam of ages; while the gravesOf Empires heave but like some passing waves.Some poets, including Alexander Pope, wrote mock-epics to satirize heroic verse and its elevated stature which became epic works of their own. In "Don Juan," Byron utilizes the elements of epic as a literary device to reinvent the story of the title character from the Spanish legend of "Don Juan." However, in Byron's work, the story of Don Juan is reversed. Rather than portraying the infamous character as a womanizer, he is presented as someone who is easily seduced by women. This allows Byron as a poet to satirize the legend and character of Don Juan in addition to the epic form of poetry as well.However, though Byron's epic poem is satirical, it is also masterful in its sixteen cantos of ottava rima or eighth rhyme. "Don Juan" features 16,000 lines in which Byron cleverly utilizes elevated language and tone as a nod to traditional epic poetry, but also intersperses a vulgar style of writing as well to subvert the epic tradition.Synonyms of EpicThe distant synonyms for epic are a heroic poem, saga, legend, lay, romance, myth, history, chronicle, folk tale, long story, and long poem. Lengthy narrative poem, ordinarily detailing extraordinary and heroic deeds For other uses of "epic", see Epic (disambiguation). A tablet containing a fragment of the Epic of Gilgamesh Literature Oral literature Folklore fairy tale folk play folksong heroic epic legend myth proverb Oration Performance audiobook spoken word Saying Major written forms Book Drama closet drama Poetry lyric narrative Prose Nonsense verse Ergodic Electronic Long prose fiction Anthology Serial Novelromance Short prose fiction Novella Novelette Short story Drabble Sketch Flash fiction Parable Religious Wisdom Poem genres Fiction Children's Encyclopedic Epic as a cultural adventure coming-of-age crime erotic fantasy horror military paranormal romance science fiction supernatural western Historical Realistic speculative Non-fiction Academic history philology Epistle Essay Journalism Letter Life Nature Persuasive Travelogue Poetry genres Narrative Children Epic Dramatic Verse novel National Lyric Ballad Elegy Epigram Ghazal Hikku Hymn Limerick Ode Cassida Sonnet Villanelle Lists Epic Groups and movements Poets Dramatic genres Comedy Libretto Play historical oral Satire Script Tragedy Tragicomedy History Ancient Classical Medieval Modernist Postmodern Lists and outlines Outline Glossary Books Writers Movements Cycles Literary awards poetry Short story collection Lost literary work Lacuna Theory and criticism Sociology Magazines Composition Language Narrative Free Estate Literature portavle An epic is a lengthy narrative poem typically about the extraordinary deeds of extraordinary characters who, in dealings with gods or other superhuman forces, gave shape to the mortal universe for their descendants.[1] With regard to oral tradition, epic poems consist of formal speech and are usually learnt word for word, and are contrasted with narratives that consist of everyday speech where the performer has the license to recontextualize the story to a particular audience, often to a younger generation.[2] The English word epic comes from Latin *epicus*, which itself comes from the Ancient Greek adjective *epikos* (ἐπικός), from *epos* (ἔπος,[3] 'word, story, poem'.[4] In Ancient Greek, 'epic' could refer to all poetry in dactylic hexameter (*epea*), which included not only Homer but also the wisdom poetry of Hesiod, the utterances of the Delphic oracle, and the strange theological verses attributed to Orpheus. Later tradition, however, has restricted the term 'epic' to heroic epic, as described in this article. The first edition (1835) of the Finnish national epic poem Kalevala by Elias Lönnrot Originating before the invention of writing, primary epics, such as those of Homer, were composed by bards who used complex rhetorical and metrical schemes by which they could memorize the epic as received in tradition and add to the epic in their performances. Later writers like Virgil, Apollonius of Rhodes, Dante, Camões, and Milton adopted and adapted Homer's style and subject matter, but used devices available only to those who write. The oldest epic recognized is the Epic of Gilgamesh (c. 2500–1300 BCE), which was recorded in ancient Sumer during the Neo-Sumerian Empire. The poem details the exploits of Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk. Although recognized as a historical figure, Gilgamesh, as represented in the epic, is a largely legendary or mythical figure.[5] The longest written epic from antiquity is the ancient Indian Mahabharata (c. 3rd century BC–3rd century AD).[6] which consists of 100,000 ślokas or over 200,000 verse lines (each śhloka is a couplet), as well as long prose passages, so that at ~1.8 million words it is roughly twice the length of Shahnameh, four times the length of the Rāmāyana, and roughly ten times the length of the Iliad and the Odyssey combined.[7][8][9] Famous examples of epic poetry include the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh, the ancient Indian Mahabharata and Rāmāyana in Sanskrit and Silappatikaram and Manimekalai in Tamil, the Persian Shahnameh, the Ancient Greek *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, the Old English *Beowulf*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the Finnish *Kalevala*, the German *Nibelungenlied*, the French *Song of Roland*, the Spanish *Cantar de mio Cid*, the Portuguese *Os Lusíadas*, the Armenian *Daredevils* of Sassoun, the Old Russian *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the Secret History of the Mongols, the *Kyrgyz Manas*, and the *Malian Sundiata*. Epic poems of the modern era include Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, Mircea Cărtărescu's *The Levant* and Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*. Paterson by William Carlos Williams, published in five volumes from 1946 to 1958, was inspired in part by another modern epic, *The Cantos* by Ezra Pound.[10] The first epics were products of preliterate societies and oral history poetic traditions.[citation needed] Oral tradition was used alongside written scriptures to communicate and facilitate the spread of culture.[11] In these traditions, poetry is transmitted to the audience and from performer to performer by purely oral means. Early 20th-century study of living oral epic traditions in the Balkans by Milman Parry and Albert Lord demonstrated the paratactic model used for composing these poems. What they demonstrated was that oral epics tend to be constructed in short episodes, each of equal status, interest and importance. This facilitates memorization, as the poet is recalling each episode in turn and using the completed episodes to recreate the entire epic as he performs it. Parry and Lord also contend that the most likely source for written texts of the epics of Homer was dictation from an oral performance. Milman Parry and Albert Lord have argued that the Homeric epics, the earliest works of Western literature, were fundamentally an oral poetic form. These works form the basis of the epic genre in Western literature. Nearly all of Western epic (including Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*) self-consciously presents itself as a continuation of the tradition begun by these poems. In his work *Poetics*, Aristotle defines an epic as one of the forms of poetry, contrasted with lyric poetry and drama (in the form of tragedy and comedy).[12] Epic poetry agrees with Tragedy in so far as it is an imitation in verse of characters of a higher type. They differ in that Epic poetry admits but one kind of meter and is narrative in form. They differ, again, in their length: for Tragedy endures, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit, whereas the Epic action has no limits of time. This, then, is a second point of difference; though at first the same freedom was admitted in Tragedy as in Epic poetry. Of their constituent parts some are common to both, some peculiar to Tragedy; whoever, therefore knows what is good or bad Tragedy, knows also about Epic poetry. All the elements of an Epic poem are found in Tragedy, but the elements of a Tragedy are not all found in the Epic poet. — Aristotle, *Poetics* Part V Harmon & Holman (1999) define an epic: 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. — Harmon & Holman (1999)[13] Harmon and Holman delineate ten main characteristics of an epic:[13] Begins in medias res ("in the thick of things"). The setting is vast, covering many nations, the world or the universe. Begins with an invocation to a muse (epic invocation). Begins with a statement of the theme. Includes the use of epithets. Contains long lists, called an epic catalogue. Features long and formal speeches. Shows divine intervention in human affairs. Features heroes that embody the values of the civilization. Often features the tragic hero's descent into the underworld or hell. The hero generally participates in a cyclical journey or quest, faces adversaries that try to defeat them in their journey, and returns home significantly transformed by their journey. The epic hero illustrates traits, performs deeds, and exemplifies certain morals that are valued by the society the epic originates from. Many epic heroes are recurring characters in the legends of their native cultures. In the Indian mahākāvya epic genre, more emphasis was laid on description than on narration. Indeed, the traditional characteristics of a mahākāvya are listed as [a] [b] It must take its subject matter from the epics (Ramayana or Mahabharata), or from history. It must help further the four goals of man (pursuهارthas). It must contain descriptions of cities, seas, mountains, moonrise and sunrise, and accounts of merrymaking in gardens, of bathing parties, drinking bouts, and love-making. It should tell the sorrow of separated lovers and should describe a wedding and the birth of a son. It should describe a king's council, an embassy, the marching forth of an army, a battle, and the victory of a hero.[16] Classical epic poetry recounts a journey, either physical (as typified by Odysseus in the *Odyssey*) or mental (as typified by Achilles in the *Iliad*) or both.[17] Epics also tend to highlight cultural norms and to define or call into question cultural values, particularly as they pertain to heroism.[17] In the proem or preface, the poet may begin by invoking a Muse or similar divinity. The poet prays to the Muses to provide them with divine inspiration to tell the story of a great hero.[18] Example opening lines with invocations: Sing goddess the baneful wrath of Achilles son of Peleus - Iliad 1.1 Muse, tell me in verse of the man of many wiles - *Odyssey* 1.1 From the Heliconian Muses let us begin to sing - Hesiod, Theogony 1.1 Beginning with thee, Oh Phoebus, I will recount the famous deeds of men in pious arts - *Argonautica* 1.1 Muse, remember to me the causes - *Aeneid* 1.8 Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire - *Paradise Lost* 1.6-7 An alternative or complementary form of proem, found in Virgil and his imitators, opens with the performative verb "I sing". Examples: I sing arms and the man - *Aeneid* 1.1 I sing plods and their captain - *Gerusalemme liberata* 1.1 I sing ladies, knights, arms, loves, courtesies, audacious deeds - *Orlando Furioso* 1.1-2 This Virgilian epic convention is usually placed strongly in the opening lines of the poem, but may be found throughout the work. In the case of the *Odyssey*, the poet begins with a prayer to the Muses, but also invokes the Muse of Epic poetry, Calliope, and the Muses of lyric poetry, Apollo and Terpsichore. In the case of the *Iliad*, the poet begins with a prayer to the Muses, but also invokes the Muse of Epic poetry, Calliope, and the Muses of lyric poetry, Apollo and Terpsichore. In the case of the *Odyssey*, the poet begins with a prayer to the Muses, but also invokes the Muse of Epic poetry, Calliope, and the Muses of lyric poetry, Apollo and Terpsichore. 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