

Topic Page: [Epic](#)

Definition: **epic** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Long, narrative poem in grandiose style. The earliest known form of Greek literature, epics were originally used to transmit history orally. Using highly formalized language, epics tend to involve gods, men and legendary battles. Homer is the author of two of the most famous epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which effectively established the scope and conventions of the form.

Summary Article: **epic**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

long, exalted narrative poem, usually on a serious subject, centered on a heroic figure. The earliest epics, known as primary, or original, epics, were shaped from the legends of an age when a nation was conquering and expanding; such is the foundation of the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh, of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of the Greek Homer, and of the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*. Literary, or secondary, epics, written in conscious imitation of earlier forms, are most notably represented by Vergil's *Aeneid* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The epic, which makes great demands on a poet's knowledge and skill, has been deemed the most ambitious of poetic forms. Some of its conventions, followed by epic writers in varying degrees, include a hero who embodies national, cultural, or religious ideals and upon whose actions depends to some degree the fate of his people; a course of action in which the hero performs great and difficult deeds; a whole era in the history of civilization; the intervention and recognition of divine or supernatural powers; the concern with eternal human problems; and a dignified and elaborate poetic style. Other works classified as epics are the Indian *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the French *Song of Roland*, the Spanish *Song of the Cid*, the Germanic *Nibelungenlied*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberta*, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and Camões's *Lusiads*. A mock epic is a form of satire in which trivial characters and events are treated with all the exalted epic conventions and are made to look ridiculous by the incongruity. The plot of Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, one of the most famous mock epics, is based on a quarrel over the theft of a lady's curl.

See studies by Sir C. M. Bowra (1961), H. V. Routh (2 vol., 1927; repr. 1968), C. A. Yu (1973), J. Ingalls (1984), and J. K. Newman (1986).

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

epic. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/epic>



The Columbia Encyclopedia, © Columbia University Press 2018



APA

epic. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/epic>

Chicago

"epic." In *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, by Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University. 8th ed. Columbia University Press, 2018. <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/epic>

Harvard

epic. (2018). In P. Lagasse & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia*. (8th ed.). [Online]. New York: Columbia University Press. Available from: <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/epic> [Accessed 14 November 2019].

MLA

"epic." *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University, Columbia University Press, 8th edition, 2018. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/epic>. Accessed 14 Nov. 2019.