

English 2332

British Literature

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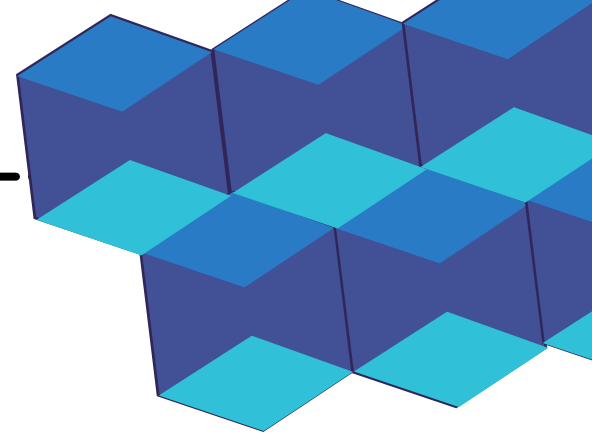
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Epics and Epic Heroes

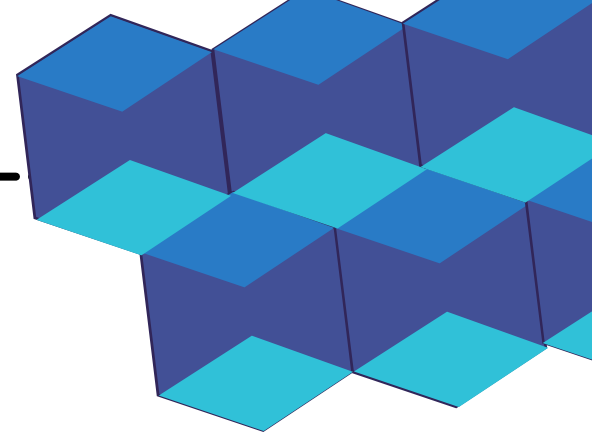


Seven Important Facts Regarding Epics

1. **Aristotle**, in his *Poetics*, states an epic must include:

- characters of a higher type who are meant to be idealized
- an unrestricted time frame; usually the story details years of conflict
- a specified meter count— *dactylic hexameter*
- a omniscient narrator to provide details of action, however, characters can be seen adding their voices to enhance plot

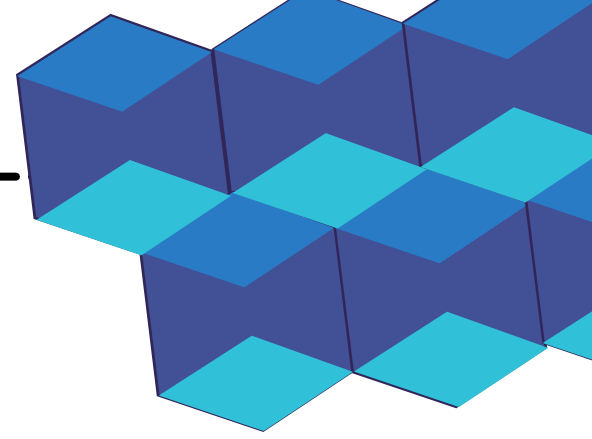
Epics and Epic Heroes



2. Modern definition of an Epic

- the work must be shown as a long narrative poem
- it focuses primarily on the larger-than-life deeds of a larger-than-life hero
- the hero embodies the values of a particular society

Epics and Epic Heroes

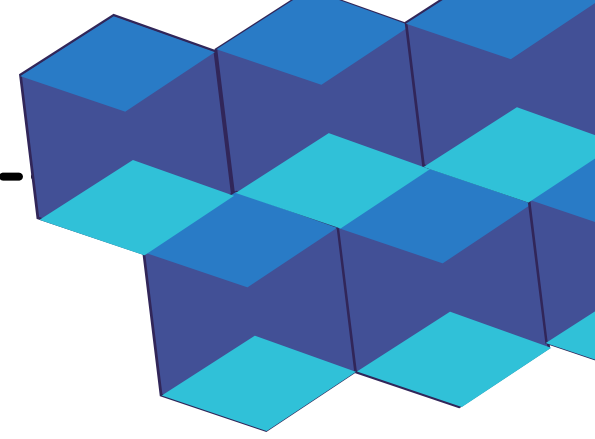


3. Can be called a **heroic poem**

4. *Beowulf*, *The Iliad*, and *The Odyssey* are all epics

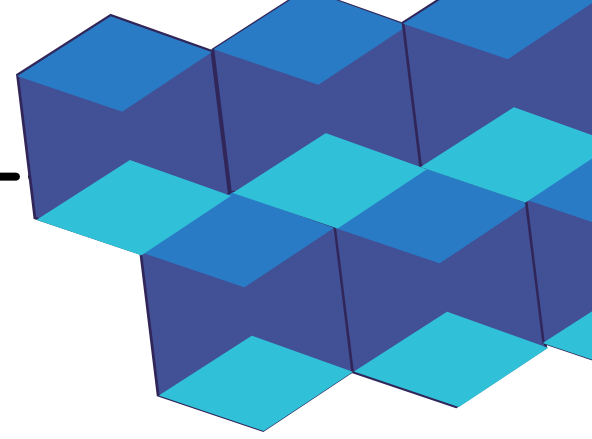
5. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is the oldest known epic

Epics and Epic Heroes



6. Primarily concerned with basic conflicts between good and evil representing fundamental human situations
7. Written in a heavy, ceremonial style in a dramatic, grand scale presentation

Epics and Epic Heroes



Two Types of Epics Exist

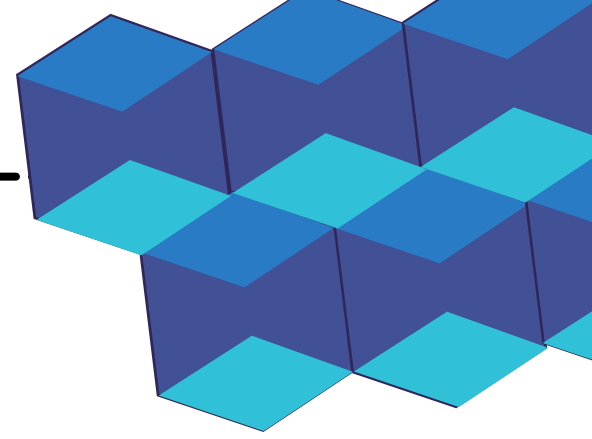
1. Folk Epic

- Originally composed in the oral tradition; memorized passages passed from story-teller to story-teller; each generation adds and tweaks material (examples: *Beowulf*, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*)

2. Literary Epic

- Originally composed in written form, and therefore have *not* changed over time (examples: *Paradise Lost*, *The Aeneid*)

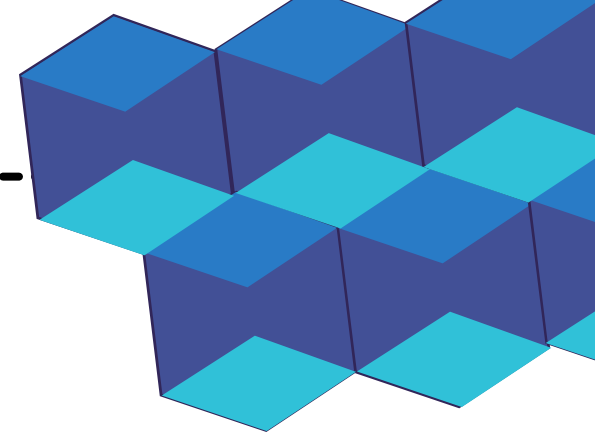
Epics and Epic Heroes



Nine Characteristics for Epic Stories

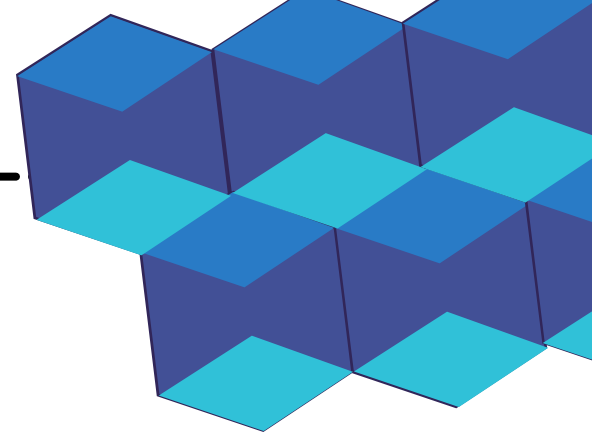
1. The author/narrator will ask for assistance in telling the story, either to a specific **Muse** or higher deity
2. The story begins **in medias res**, but will entail many flashback scenes
3. The language will utilize **epic similes**, elaborate analogies to establish the grand nature of the text and the hero's extraordinary capabilities
4. A **broad setting** is utilized, including elements of the known, natural world, as well as realms of the supernatural, such as the Underworld (Greek) or the magical Otherworld (Welsh)

Epics and Epic Heroes



5. Establishes an **epic theme** in the opening sections
6. Contains long lists of information, such as secondary characters or weapons; referred to as **epic catalog**
7. Use of **epithets**, secondary name of primary characters and descriptive stock phrases utilizing compound structures
8. Characters will provide long-winded and **formal speeches**
9. **Divine intervention** will occur frequently

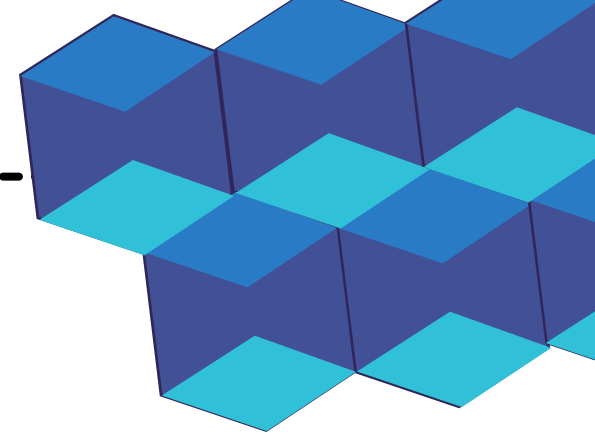
Epics and Epic Heroes



Seven Expectations of the Epic Hero

1. The **protagonist** is a great leader who can be easily identified with a specific society or people; usually can trace his heritage to a major god, thus appearing larger-than-life; his/her birth is likewise of noble stature
2. The hero must undertake a extraordinary **journey** to prove worthiness of himself and his people; consequently he will perform great deeds along the path of his wandering; often shown in battle
3. **Gods or magical creatures** will guide the heroes through the action of the story; heroes may fight supernatural forces

Epics and Epic Heroes



5. Heroes gain a sense of **immortality** for their actions
6. However, they maintain a recognizable sense of **humanity** due to their typical human emotions, despite their immortal bloodline
7. These characters will build worthiness through their networks and connections with **average people** in their society