

The Odyssey

Examining the Epic Tradition



Who was HOMER?

- Blind poet who lived in the 2nd century A.D
- * author of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.
 - Some people say he was a blind minstrel (a singing poet) who came from the island Chios.
 - Some think there were two Homers.
 - Some think Homer was a woman.
 - Some think that Homer was just a legend.
 - NO ONE KNOWS FOR SURE!

Who was HOMER?

* “Homer” was a model of a RHAPSODE—a member of a class of wandering bards (poets) or minstrels (singing poets). Rhapsodes, “singers of tales,” were historians, entertainers, and myth-makers.

- NO WRITTEN HISTORY only ORAL ACCOUNTS of what happened
- Homer was most famous for his stories about a great war

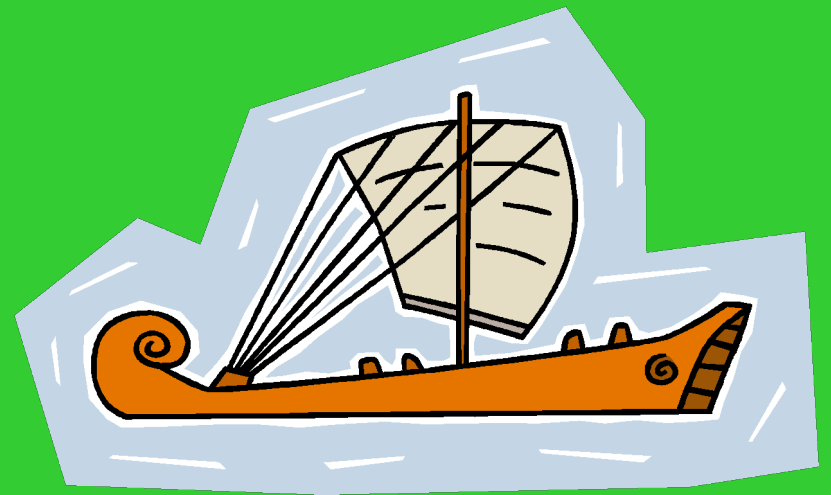
The Iliad

- Homer's first epic story; about the ten-year war fought on the plains outside the walls of the city of TROY whose ruins still exist in western Turkey. The war was fought between the citizens of Troy and an alliance of Greek kings over the world's most beautiful woman, HELEN. She had abandoned her Greek husband, KING MENELAUS, and ran off with PARIS, a prince of Troy.



The Odyssey

* Homer's 2nd epic; about ODYSSEUS, a Greek soldier, and his attempt to return home to ITHACA after the end of the 10-year Trojan War

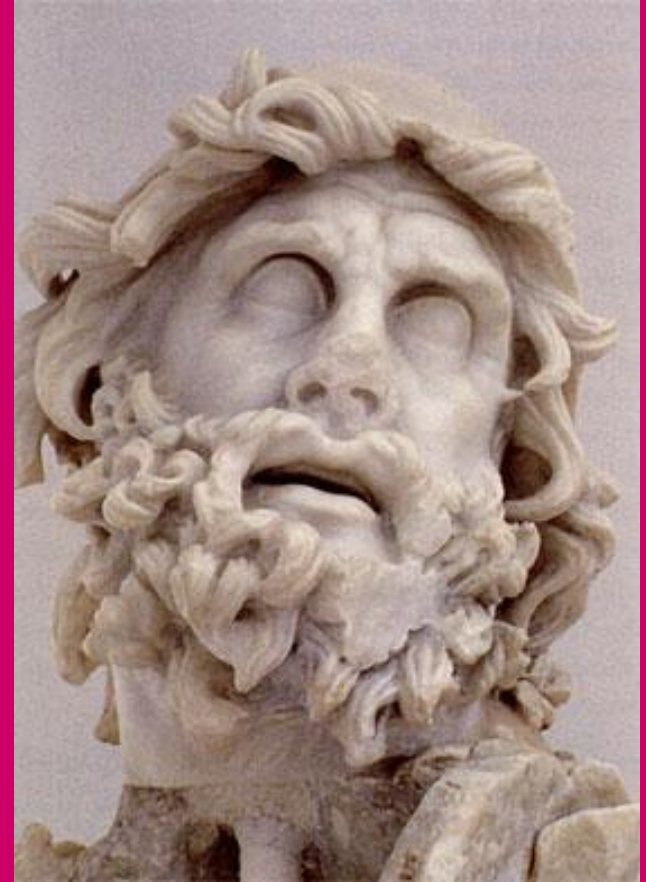


Greece



Odysseus

- **HERO:** a special class of aristocrats placed between gods and ordinary humans
- **Odysseus was a HERO IN TROUBLE**
 - Deal with unfairness
 - Not respected



Odysseus

*** Before the Trojan War:**

- Odysseus married Penelope**
- Had one son Telemachus**
- Telemachus was a toddler when Odysseus left for war**
- Odysseus did not want to go to war and tried to avoid his duties**

Odysseus

- In Troy (Trojan War)
 - Brave soldier
 - Good leader
 - Thought of the wooden horse trick—
known for his intelligence and his
strength

Odysseus begins his journey home to Ithaca after fighting for ten years . . .
And it takes him 10 more years to finally make it home!!

- **ATHENA**, the goddess of wisdom and battle, is always by Odysseus' side.
- **POSEIDON**, the arrogant, brutish god of the sea, however, is working against Odysseus.
- Some say *The Odyssey* is really about an argument between Athena and Poseidon.

"An epic is an encyclopedia of the manner, customs, and values that bind a whole civilization together."

--W.T. Jewkes

Both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are EPICS.

****The Iliad* is an EPIC OF WAR and *The Odyssey* is an EPIC OF THE LONG JOURNEY.**

What is an EPIC?

- A long, **NARRATIVE POEM** that tells of the adventures of heroes who in some way embody the values of their civilizations.

* The heroes of epics teach us **VIRTUES** to live by.



EPIC CYCLE

*****Because epics are about heroes, they often follow a HERO CYCLE which we will also call the EPIC CYCLE or the elements of an epic.**

- The main character is a HERO, who often possesses SUPERNATURAL ABILITIES.**
- The hero is charged with a QUEST.**
- The hero is TESTED, often to prove the worthiness of himself and his quest.**
- The presence of numerous MYTHICAL beings, magical and helpful animals, and human HELPERS and companions.**

Epic Cycle Continued

*****The hero's travels take him to a SUPERNATURAL WORLD, often one that normal human beings are barred from entering.**

- The cycle must REACH A LOW POINT where the hero nearly gives up his quest or appears defeated.**
- A RESURRECTION.**
- RESTITUTION--Often this takes the form of the hero regaining his rightful place on the throne.**
- A LESSON learned.**

OTHER EPIC CHARACTERISTICS

- Begins with a statement of the theme (stories were told aloud by people who were illiterate; by stating the theme the listeners would know what the story was going to be about)
- INVOCATION of the MUSE or other deity in which the poet/rhapsode seeks inspiration and help from the gods to tell the long story
 - MUSES: goddesses of the arts
 - CALLIOPE: goddess of epic poetry
- Story begins IN MEDIAS RES or “in the middle of action”—major events have happened before the story begins and those must be told to the reader in the form of a FLASHBACK

More Epic Characteristics

- The epic poets also used **HOMERIC/HEROIC/EPIC SIMILES**.
 - **SIMILE**= comparison between two unlike things using the words “like” or “as”
- For example, in *The Iliad*, Athena stops an arrow from piercing Menelaus. The singer says: “She brushed it away from his skin as lightly as when a mother / Brushes a fly away from her child who is lying in sweet sleep.”
- What two actions is Homer comparing here, and what is he trying to get his reader to understand?

MORE EPIC CHARACTERISTICS

- Frequent use of EPITHETS
- a brief, descriptive phrase that helps to characterize a particular person or thing; "Aeneas the true"; "rosy-fingered Dawn"; "tall-masted ship"; "versatile Odysseus"; "wily Odysseus"; "the noble and enduring man"; "clear-headed Telemachus"; "rosy-fingered Dawn"
- REPETITION: helped rhapsode to remember the story

***Modern examples of the epic of the long journey:**

- Star Wars**
- The Lion King**
- Lord of the Rings**
- The Hobbit**
- Forrest Gump**