



Mrs. Mai



**LITERARY TERMS & THEMES IN
THE ODYSSEY
ENGLISH 9**



Epic Characteristics


- Epic • A long poem telling a story about the actions of heroes and gods
 - Elevated style of diction; formal, objective, dignified tone
 - Focused on exploits of an epic hero or demigod who represents the cultural values of a race, nation, or religious group
 - The hero's success or failure determines the fate of an entire people or nation
 - Takes place in a vast setting – covers a wide geographic area; typically takes place in the remote past

Epic Characteristics, cont.

- Gods or supernatural beings frequently take part in the action and affect the outcome; supernatural intervention often implies two simultaneous plots
- Poem begins with *invocation* of a muse to inspire the poet; poet often states the theme or argument of the whole work
- The narrative begins *in medias res*
- *Main protagonist often undergoes a terrifying journey*



Epic Hero

- Epic hero • A “larger than life” person who takes on a dangerous journey.
 - He possesses the character traits most valued by the culture who tells his story.
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Simile

- Simile • comparison of two things using the words like or as •
“caught two in his hands like squirming puppies”

Epic Simile


- Epic Simile - defined • long, detailed version of a regular simile • Often uses phrases like –
 - just that way
 - just so
 - just as
 - even as
- When reading, it feels like the speaker is getting lost on a tangent.

Epic Simile Example

- Epic simile – an example “Sometimes in farmyards when the cows return well fed from pasture to the barn, one sees the pens give way before the calves in tumult, breaking through to cluster about their mothers, bumping together, bawling. Just that way my crew poured round me when they saw me come.”



Metaphor

- Metaphor • A comparison where you call one thing something it is not. • Using one thing to represent something else
 - Ex. But [Polyphemus] seemed rather a shaggy mountain reared in solitude.
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Epithet

- A “formula” or repeated descriptive phrase, used in an epic poem. It is most often associated with characters, but can also be found to describe things:
 - Wine-dark sea
 - Rosy fingers of Dawn
 - God-like Odysseus; Odysseus, man of many turns
 - Gray-eyed Athena

If tales were told orally, how would this technique help the audience?

In medias res

- When a story or tale begins in the middle of the action. Often this is done to grab the attention of the listener or reader – you are thrown into the middle of an exciting part of the story and then your narrator will take you back in time to understand what has led up to the thrilling moment. The story leading up to that moment will be told through flashbacks to explain the “back story”.
- -What TV show or movie uses this narrative technique?

Synechdoche


- Figure of comparison in which a word standing for part of something is used for the whole of that thing or vice versa; any part or portion or quality of a thing used to stand for the whole of the thing or vice versa.
 - "Aragorn: You have my sword.
Legolas: And you have my bow.
Gimli: And my axe." - *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, directed by Peter Jackson
 - In *The Odyssey*, Homer writes, "All hands aboard;/come, clear the beach and no one taste/the Lotus, or you lose your hope of home."

Litote

- Litotes, derived from a Greek word meaning “simple”, is a figure of speech which employs an understatement by using double negatives or, in other words, positive statement is expressed by negating its opposite expressions.
- Ironical understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of its contrary (e.g., *you won't be sorry*, meaning *you'll be glad*).
- Similarly, saying “She is not a beauty queen,” means “She is ugly”.



Poetic Justice

- Poetic Justice • When a character gets what he deserves • When the most fitting reward or punishment is doled out to a character.
 - What example can you give from a movie you have seen?
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Hospitality

- Hospitality is welcoming people into your home, sharing your best food and wine.
- Treat guests as if they were one of the gods...
- Travelers provided valuable information!




Temptation

- Food and luxuries, sexual pleasure
 - Immortality and fame
 - Give in to anger, lose control
 - Forget our past – enjoy only the present
 - Intellectual knowledge
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Loyalty/Perseverance

- Penelope remains loyal to Odysseus for 20 years!
 - Odysseus, in his own way, remains loyal to his wife and perseveres in his goal to reach home.
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What to Pay Attention to...

- *The Odyssey* is about a journey – both spiritual as well as physical.
 - Odysseus “grows” as a hero – what does he learn from each of his conflicts?
 - Telemachus “grows” into manhood. What does he need to learn?

Aren't we all on a journey, after all?