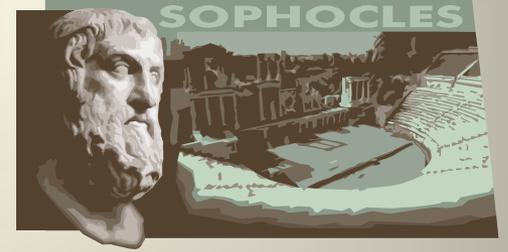


# Do Now

An “Invocation” is the beginning of an epic poem that asks a deity for assistance with a task. (The word literally means “to call upon.”)

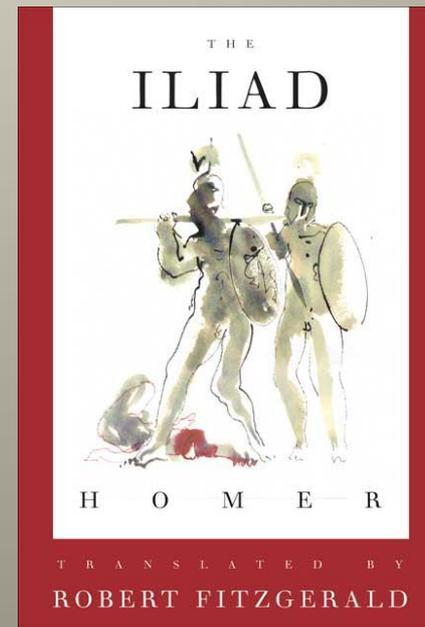
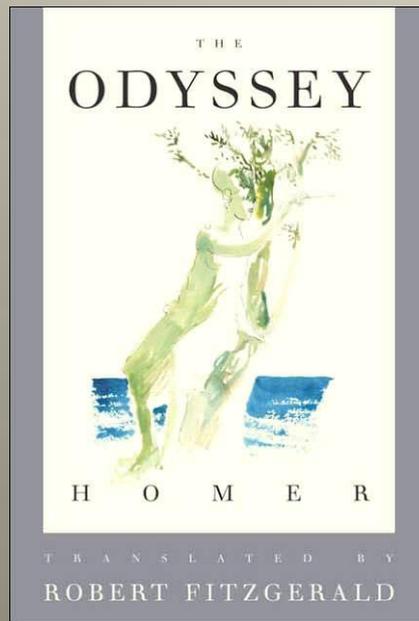
Write an invocation, where you are calling on a deity, either real or imagined, and asking for his or her help.



# The Epic Tradition

# What is an Epic?

- The epic is a long narrative poem on a serious subject representing characters of heroic stature in adventures of great historical, legendary, or religious significance.



# What are the Characteristics of an Epic?

- 1. The setting of the work is vast in scope, covering a whole nation, the world, or even the universe.
- 2. The actions described in the work are **deeds of great valor**, often requiring superhuman strength, intelligence, or endurance.
- 3. **Supernatural forces** (gods, angels, demons) take interest in the action and intervene from time to time.
- 4. An **elevated style and diction**--deliberately distanced from everyday speech--is used throughout the poem.

# Some Epic Conventions

- 1. The poet begins the work by stating his topic and by calling upon the Muse of Epic Poetry for help in rising to the task. This convention is more usually known as the **invocation to the Muse.**

"Tell me, O Muse, of that ingenious hero who traveled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy."

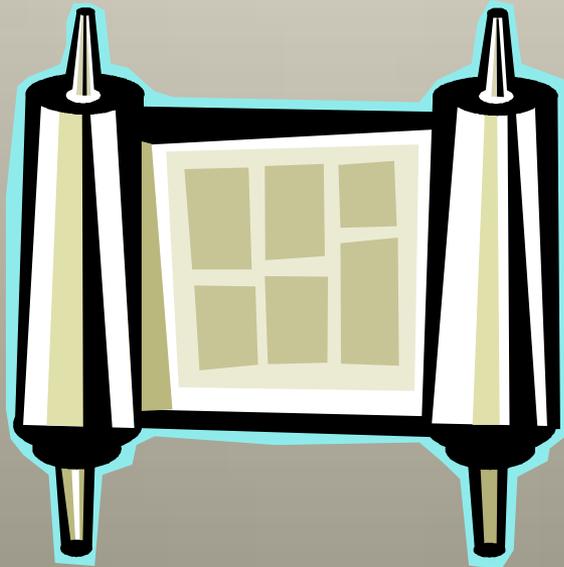
*The Odyssey* by Homer  
Samuel Butler, 1835-1902 (1900)

# Some Epic Conventions

- 2. The poet opens his narrative *in medias res* (Latin for 'in the middle of the action'). The preceding history is then supplied at various points throughout the remainder of the work through **retrospective narrative**, similar to the flashback of the modern novel or cinema. Additionally, the author may use **prospective narrative** as well, telling the audience what is to happen later in the work itself or even after the events that the work itself covers.

# Some Epic Conventions

- 3. The poet includes many elaborate **enumerations**--of ships, warriors, armies, gifts/booty, etc.--in the poem. Such a list is called an **epic catalogue**.



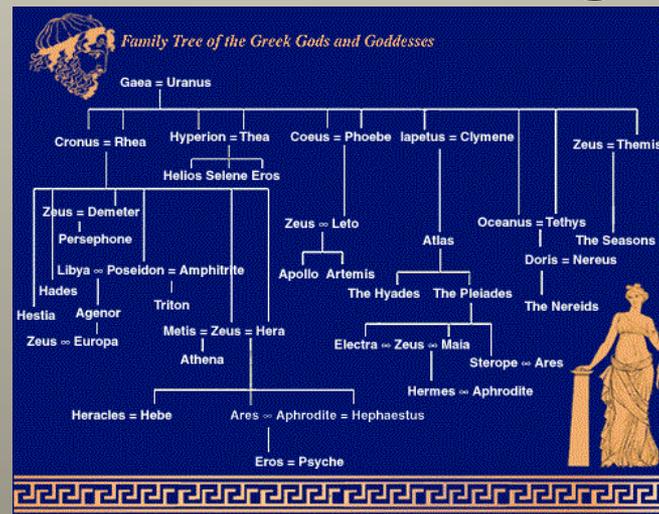
# Some Epic Conventions

- 4. The poet uses extended and elaborate formal speeches by the main characters. Such a speech is called an epic monologue.



# Some Epic Conventions

- 5. The poet gives elaborate family background--**epic genealogy**--for many of the heroes. Because of the importance attached to paternal lineage, the poet will frequently refer to a hero by his **patronymic**, a form of the father's name with an ending meaning 'son of.'



# Some Epic Conventions

- 6. The poet uses long, extended comparisons-- **epic similes**--that make the unfamiliar familiar by stressing its similarity to observable, common phenomena and objects.

**Example:** I drove my weight on it from above and bored it home like a shipwright bores his beam with a shipwright's drill that men below, whipping the strap back and forth, whirl and the drill keeps twisting, never stopping --So we seized our stake with its fiery tip and bored it round and round in the giant's eye.

# Some Epic Conventions

- 7. The poet uses many **epithets**--adjectives or adjective phrases used to point out a characteristic quality of a person, a god, or, less frequently, an animal or an object.

"The great tactician" - This term creates the image of Odysseus as being intelligent, and probably comes his being the initiator of the idea for the "Trojan horse."

"The clear eyed goddess" - This helps the reader imagine that Athena is alert, and wise - farseeing.

# Some Epic Conventions

- 8. The poet uses **formulaic language**, that is, set ("stock") phrases, the choice of which may be dictated solely by metrical considerations. This, along with the **repetition** of such passages, is one of the hallmarks of folk literature

# Some Epic Conventions

- 9. The poet uses **foreshadowing**--hints at or even direct statements regarding the outcome of important events.



# Some Epic Conventions

- 10. The poet uses a wide range of rhetorical and poetic devices: figures of speech (similes, metaphors, etc.), as well as elaborate schemes of words and schemes of construction.