

Epic poetry is one of the main forms of poetry, as are [lyrics](#) and [drama](#). Epic poetry tells a dramatic story. There are characters in the story. It is usually long, and takes place in different settings.

Beowulf is a typical example, written in [Old English](#). Well-known people who wrote epics were [Homer](#), [Virgil](#), [Ovid](#), [Dante](#), [Edmund Spenser](#) and [Milton](#). [William Wordsworth's](#) *Prelude* plays with epic ideas though the poem is [autobiography](#).

Characteristics

Epics have seven main characteristics:

1. The [hero](#) is outstanding. They might be important, and historically or legendarily significant.
2. The setting is large. It covers many nations, or the known world.
3. The action is made of deeds of great valor or requiring superhuman [courage](#).
4. [Supernatural](#) forces—gods, angels, demons—insert themselves in the action.
5. It is written in a very special style ([verse](#) as opposed to [prose](#)).
6. The poet tries to remain objective.
7. Epic poems are believed to be supernatural and real by the hero and the [villain](#)

Conventions of epics:

1. It starts with the theme or subject of the story.
2. In epics inspired from [Western civilization](#) the writer invokes a [Muse](#), one of the nine daughters of [Zeus](#). The poet prays to the Muses to provide divine inspiration to tell the great story.
3. Narrative opens *in medias res*, or in the middle of things, usually with the hero at his lowest point. Usually flashbacks show earlier portions of the story.
4. Catalogues and genealogies are given. These long lists of objects, places, and people place the finite action of the epic within a broader, universal context. Often, the poet is also paying homage to the ancestors of audience members.
5. Main characters give extended formal speeches.
6. Use of the epic simile.
7. Heavy use of repetition or stock phrases.
8. It presents the heroic ideals such as courage, honor, sacrifice, patriotism and kindness.
9. An epic gives a clear picture of the social and cultural patterns of the contemporary life. *Beowulf* thus shows the love of wine, wild celebration, war, adventure and sea-voyages.