# *The Odyssey*

By Homer

# Homer

- Many believe that Homer was a blind Greek poet who wandered from town to town chanting his poetry to the accompaniment of a lyre.
- Some say that the lyrics were not written by one person but are instead a collection of Greek

# Homer the Poet

- Authorities do not agree exactly when Homer lived. Dates vary anywhere from the 1100s to the 600s B.C.
- Where he was born is unknown.
- The poetry was written down around the latter part of the sixth century B.C. (Before that it had been recited by minstrels.)
- Historians don't know if Homer was real or fictional. Some say he was a solo author; others say his stories were actually written by many people over many centuries.

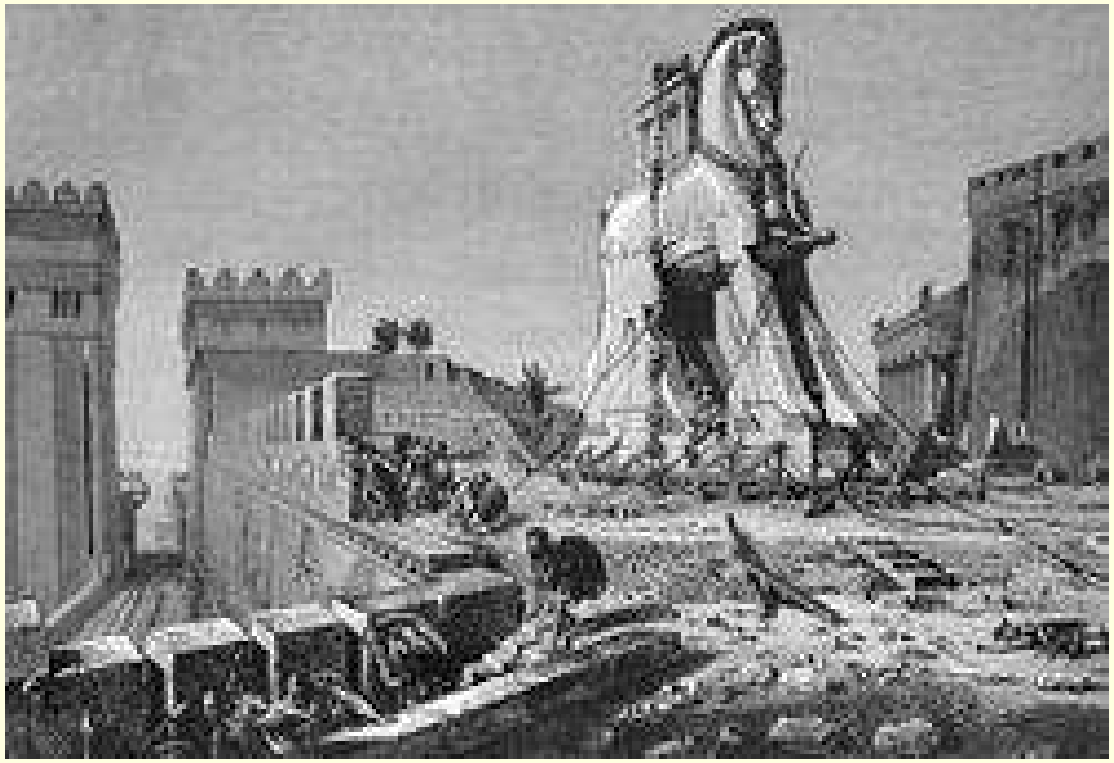
# Features that Make Homer's Poetry Classics Are:

- Simplicity of language
- Swift movement of narrative
- Creation of characters with uncomplicated motives
- Actions that are true to human nature
- Plots that blend the joys of living with the tragic sense of life
- Long musical lines (in the original Greek version)

# The Trojan War

- The Trojan War (around 1200 BC) was fought after Helen, the wife of King Menelaus of Sparta, was kidnapped by Prince Paris, the son of King Priam of Troy.
- After battling for 10 years, the Greek, Odysseus, conceived a clever plan to make a gift of a large wooden horse to transport hidden soldiers into the heart of Troy.
- The plan worked, and once the horse was inside the city walls, the soldiers emerged at night and opened the gates to admit the rest of the Greek army. The Greeks killed the Trojans and burned the city.

# The Trojan War

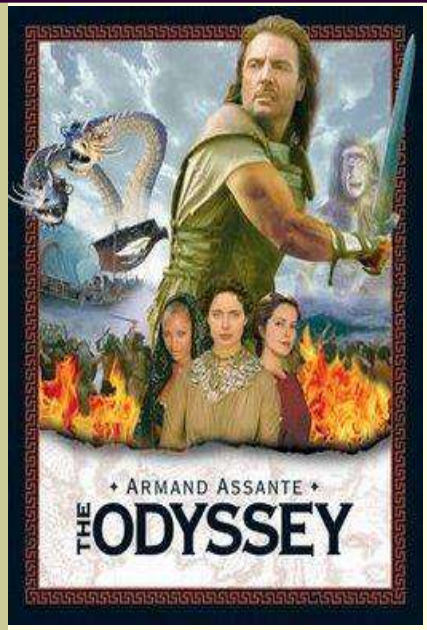


The Trojan War was considered a myth until Troy was excavated in the late 19th century

# The Actual City of Troy

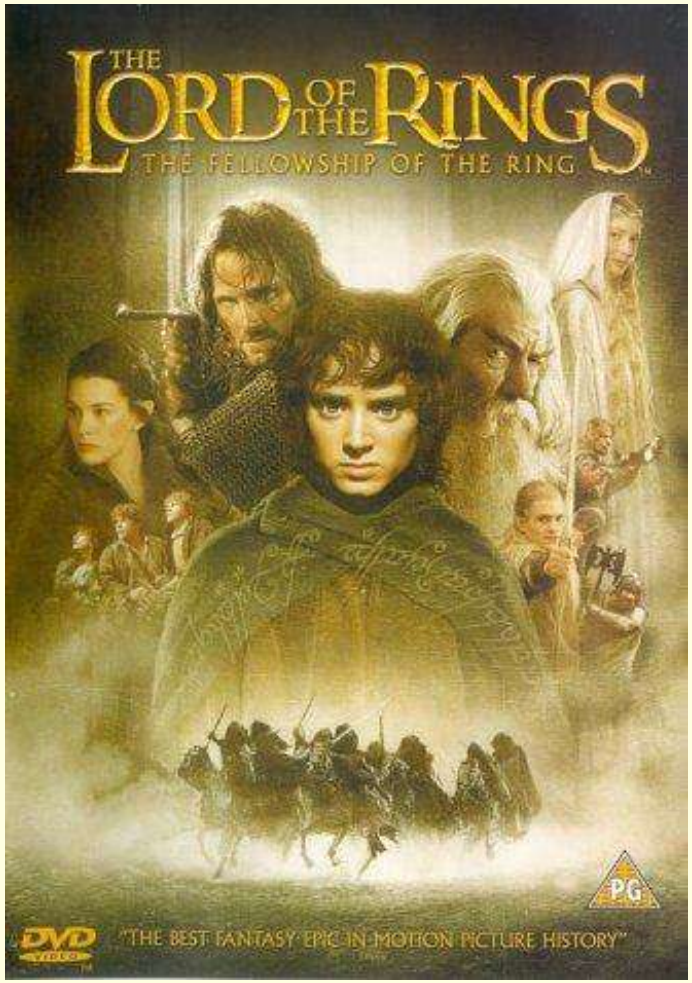
- Troy has been destroyed and rebuilt several times.
- The earliest discovery found a primitive city with stone walls, well-built houses, and hoards of precious metals.
- In our century, explorers have found evidence of at least nine cities, some destroyed by earthquakes, other by plundering and fire. They believe the one Homer wrote about was on

# Odysseus




- Odysseus was a king of **Ithaca** in Greek mythology. He and his wife **Penelope** had a son named **Telemachus**. When **Paris** kidnapped **Helen of Troy**, **Menelaus** needed Odysseus' help. Odysseus did not want to leave his family and kingdom and fight, so he pretended to be insane, but **Palamedes** put **Telemachus** in the path of a plow Odysseus was using in a field. Odysseus swerved to avoid the boy which revealed his

# The Odyssey: An Epic Poem




- **Epic:** A long narrative about the adventures of a hero whose actions affect a nation or group of people

- *They Odyssey* is an **epic poem.** Examples of epics are Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy or the *Star Wars* movies created by George

# Epics typically have the following elements:

- A suffering city or nations and its people
- A love interest for the hero
- Member(s) of a royal family
- At least one deity, who supports the hero
- At least one deity, who works against the hero
- Dangerous supernatural creatures
- Great deeds such as battles (against monsters, armies, antagonists, and supernatural elements), finding magical objects, destroying magical objects, saving other characters in danger
- Oaths, curses, and prophesies
- Many real or imaginary locations with dangers on the way to a new place

# Characteristics of an Epic

- Long narrative poem
- Can't be told at one sitting
- Tales are complex (revolves around several characters)
- Spans many years
- Tells the adventure of a hero
- Starts in the middle
  - ***In medias res*:** beginning a story at its midpoint; flashback is used to reveal previous actions.

# Characteristics of an Epic Hero

- Humanity
- Strength
- Bravery
- Steadfastness
- Spirit of adventure
- Generosity
- Loyalty
- Respect for elders
- Manners
- Pride

# Social Values of the Epic Hero

- Family
- Respect for the dead
- Represents his community
- Values women and elders
- Creates a legacy
- Honors the gods

# Elements of the Epic Hero Cycle
# The hero:

- Is often possessed of supernatural abilities or qualities.
- Is charged with a quest.
- Is tested, often to prove the worthiness of himself and his quest.
- Encounters numerous mythical beings, magical and helpful animals, and human helpers and companions.

# More Elements of the Epic Hero Cycle

- Must reach a low point where he nearly gives up his quest or appears defeated.
- Experiences a regeneration of energy/determination.
- Finds restitution. Often this takes the form of the hero regaining his rightful place on the throne.

# Greek Hero

- **Birth/Origin:** Sons of gods or royalty
- **Quest:** Heroes are called upon to make a journey -- to battle some beast that plagues the community or to retrieve something of value that was lost.
- **Goal:** Always for the good of the community
- **Journey:** The quest is not always clear. The hero frequently

# Greek Hero - continued

- **Danger:** Despite the trials, battles, or temptations, the hero feels isolation and alienation from his community. There is a real danger of him "giving up."
- **Friends:** They provide the hero with support, but they do not understand the hero fully and therefore are not the help he needs. The hero must accomplish the task alone.
- **Guides:** They can help the hero, but often their powers are limited.

# Greek Hero - continued

- **Darkness:** Because the hero is alone, he often retreats into despair and darkness

- **Success:** Ultimately a hero is always successful in his quest because he prevails over despair and he emerges from the darkness

# Point of View: Third Person Omniscient

A common form of third-person narration in which the teller of the tale, who often appears to speak with the voice of the author himself, assumes an omniscient (all-knowing) perspective on the story being told.

# Invocation:

An invocation is an address to a deity, usually for help of some sort.

The epic traditionally begins with an invocation to the Muse (a request for help in the telling of the tale). In fact, in an oral culture, the storyteller is considered merely a vessel through which the gods (particularly the Muses) speak.

There are traditionally nine Muses, each presiding over a different genre of literature. The traditional Muse of epic poetry is **Calliope**, although Homer does not address her by name in his invocation at the beginning of *The Odyssey*.

# Narrative Drift

Homer is constantly interrupting the narration to elaborate on an aspect of what he is talking about. If he mentions a gift of wine, he will explain not only the history of the gift but the history of the giver. He rarely introduces a character without alluding to that character's genealogy and often follows this with an aside in the form of a story that is told with the same vividness as the main story.

# Epic Simile

Homer loves similes (a comparison between two seemingly unlike things using "like" or "as"). They can be found everywhere in *The Odyssey*. Homer often expands upon a simile, putting it into motion so to speak. These expanded similes are called **Homeric** or **epic similes**.

# Examples of Epic Similes

*As a man will bury his glowing brand in black ashes,off on a lonely farmstead, no neighbors near, to keep a spark alive*, so great Odysseus buried himself in leaves and Athena showered sleep upon his eyes.

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.

# Epic Catalogue

A list (usually long) of people, things, or attributes. It is a device used particularly by ancient and oral literatures. Examples in Homer's *Odyssey* include the many catalogues of dead heroes and women in Book XI.

# Epithets

Homer repeatedly describes many of his characters or objects in his story with the same phrase. This phrase is called an epithet. Epithets are:

- Common epic elements which allow the reader to easily identify the character or object.
- Stress a quality of what they are describing. (The same character often is given several different epithets.)
- Were chosen to fit the meter of the line.

# Examples of epithets used in *The Odyssey* are:

- "The great tactician" - This term creates the image of Odysseus as being intelligent, and probably comes from his being the initiator of the idea for the "Trojan horse."
- "The clear eyed goddess" - This helps the reader imagine that Athena is alert, wise and farseeing.
- "The man of twists and turns" ( Odysseus)
- "The bewitching nymph" (Calypso)

# Hubris:

Overreaching pride, resulting from the overconfidence of a protagonist. In Homer, it is usually directed against the gods, for example the belief that one accomplished some act without their help or the belief that humans do not need the gods in their everyday lives.