



HOMER'S WORLD

The acropolis of Athens, Greece, was the high point of the city and a place to worship the goddess Athena, the city's patroness.

Examining the Homeric Epics

Composed in Greece around 750–725 B.C., the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are perhaps the greatest masterpieces of the epic form, narrative poetry about a hero's adventures. Both stories were first told orally, perhaps even sung, and it may not have been until several generations later that these traditional stories were set down in writing. The poems are traditionally credited to a blind poet named Homer. Although there have been many translations of the poems into English, Robert Fitzgerald's verse renderings are considered among the best at capturing the poems' high drama and intense emotions. Three important elements of the plot of each epic are the Trojan War, the heroism of Odysseus, and the interference of the gods.

The Trojan War This legendary war seems to have occurred sometime around 1200 B.C. The earliest literary accounts of it, found in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, are elaborated in later classical literature.

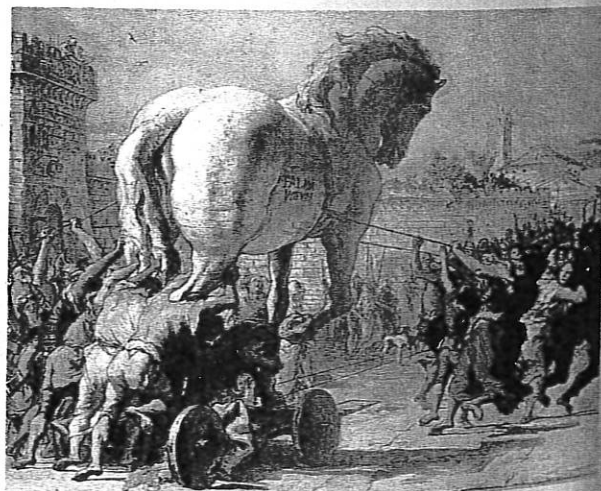
According to legend, the Trojan War began after Paris, a Trojan prince, kidnapped the beautiful Helen from her husband, Menelaus (mə'n-ə-lā'əs), the king of Sparta. Menelaus recruited kings and soldiers from all over Greece to help him avenge his honor and recover his wife. The Greeks held Troy under siege for ten years.

The *Iliad* takes place during the tenth year of this war. It tells the story of the Greek warrior Achilles and his quarrel with Menelaus' brother Agamemnon, ending with the death and funeral of Paris' brother Hector.

COMMON CORE

RL 6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of world literature. RL 7 Analyze the representation of a subject or key scene in two different artistic mediums. RL 9 Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work.

After Hector's death, the Greeks brought the war to an end thanks to the cleverness of Odysseus, ruler of the island of Ithaca. To break the ten-year stalemate, Odysseus thought of a scheme to make the Trojans think that the Greeks had finally given up. He ordered a giant wooden horse to be built and left at the gates of Troy. The Trojans, waking to find it there—without a Greek in sight—assumed that the enemy had fled and left them a peace offering. They took the horse inside the city, only to discover, too late, that it was filled with Greek soldiers and that Troy was doomed.



Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo's *The Procession of the Trojan Horse into Troy*, painted in 1773

The Heroic Story of Odysseus The *Odyssey* deals with Odysseus' adventures as he makes his way home from Troy and with events that take place on Ithaca just before and after his return. The first excerpts that you will read depict some of the wanderings of Odysseus after his departure from Troy with a fleet of 12 ships carrying about 720 men. This time his opponents are not military ones. Instead, he encounters various monsters who try to devour him and enchanting women who try to keep him from his wife, Penelope. The final excerpts describe Odysseus' homecoming and his reunion with Penelope and his son, Telemachus. In addition to great strength and courage, what sets Odysseus apart from others is a special quality that has been called his craft or guile: the ingenious tricks he uses to get himself out of difficult situations.

The Intervention of the Gods and Goddesses

Adding another dimension to the human struggles recounted in Homer's epics are the mythic elements—the conflicts among the gods and goddesses on Mount Olympus (ə-līm'pəs). In Homer's time, most Greeks believed that their gods not only took an active interest in human affairs but also behaved in recognizably

human ways, often engaging in their own trivial quarrels and petty jealousies. For example, Athena, the goddess of war and practical wisdom, supported the Greek cause in the Trojan War and championed Odysseus, while Aphrodite (əf'rə-dī'tē), the goddess of love, sided with Paris and his fellow Trojans. The story of Odysseus' return from Troy contains some notable instances of divine interference. Odysseus has Athena on his side, but he has displeased the gods who were on the side of Troy. Furthermore, as you will see, he angers another god during one of his first adventures and still another later on. As a result, he is forced to suffer many hardships before he manages to return home.

To Homer's audience, the *Odyssey*, with its interfering gods and goddesses and its strange lands and creatures, must have seemed as full of mystery and danger as science fiction and fantasy adventures seem to people today. Just as we can imagine aliens in the next galaxy or creatures created in a laboratory, the ancient Greeks could imagine monsters living just beyond the boundaries of their known world. It was not necessary for them to believe that creatures such as one-eyed giants did exist, but only that they might.



Eros

God of love (also known as Cupid)

Aphrodite

Goddess of love and mother of Eros

Apollo

God of music, poetry, and prophecy

Athena

Goddess of war, wisdom, and cleverness

Muses

Daughters of Zeus (three shown here), often viewed as sources of divine inspiration

Detail of a frieze representing a procession of mythological divinities. Oil on plaster. Chateau de Malmaison et Bois-Preau, Rueil-Malmaison, France. Photo © Gerard Blot/Art Resource, New York.

Homer: The Epic Poet

Shadowy Figure Although the ancient Greeks credited a man named Homer with composing the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, scholars have long debated whether Homer really existed. There are many theories about who Homer may have been and when and where he may have lived. According to ancient accounts, he lived sometime between 900 and 700 B.C., possibly on the island of Chios in the eastern Aegean Sea, and he was blind. Most modern scholars agree that the Homeric poems are the work of one or two exceptionally talented bards—singers who made up their verses as they sang.

Oral History Homer's epics are all that remains of a series of poems that told the whole story of the Trojan War. In later centuries, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were memorized by professional reciters, who performed them at religious festivals throughout Greece. They were also the first works read by Greek schoolchildren. By 300 B.C. many slightly different versions of the poems existed, and scholars began to work at restoring them to their original form.

Models for the Ages Homer's epics became models for many later writers, including the Roman poet Virgil, who wrote his own epic in Latin. Poets

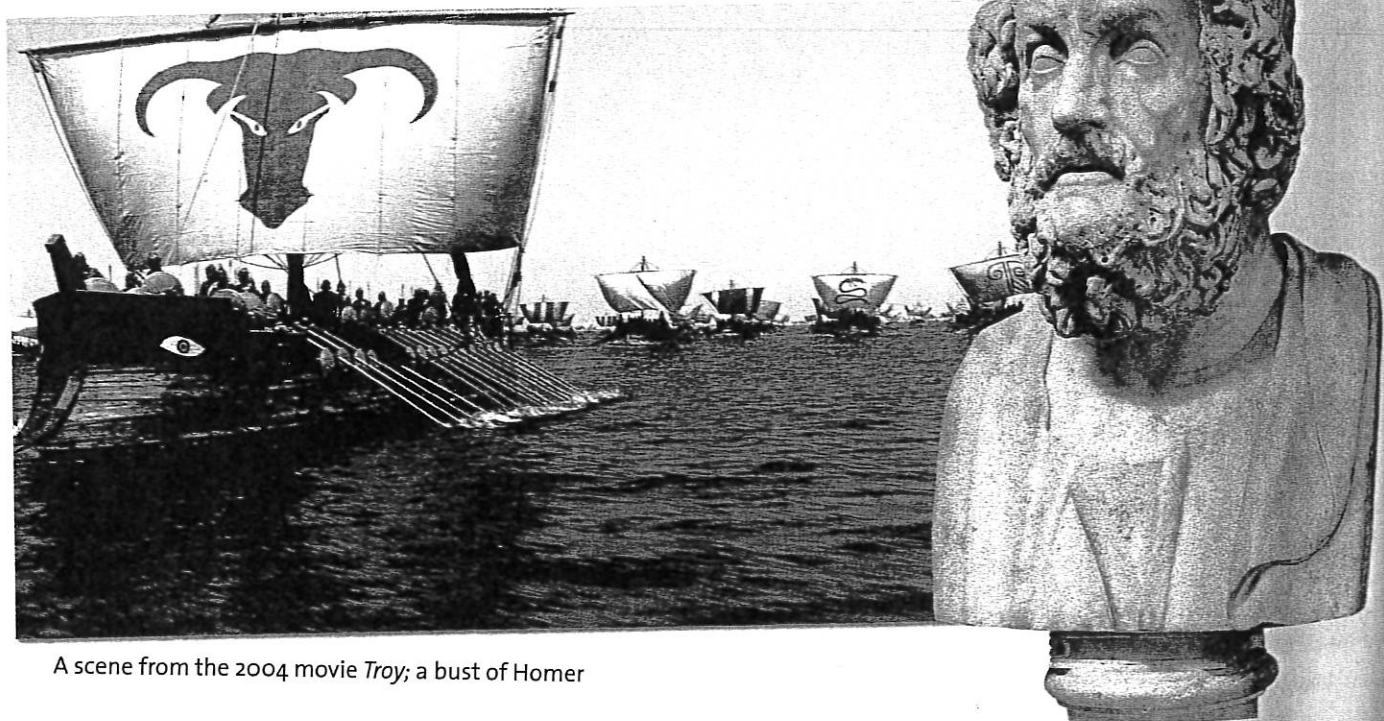
throughout English literature, from Chaucer in the Middle Ages to Shakespeare in the Renaissance to Keats in the Romantic era, have found inspiration in Homer's epics. Moreover, by helping to shape classical Greek culture, the epics contributed to the development of many later Western ideas and values.

A Living Tradition Artists of all kinds continue to draw on Homer's work. In 1922, the Irish writer James Joyce published his groundbreaking novel *Ulysses* ("Ulysses" is a Latin form of Odysseus' name), in which he turned a day in the life of an ordinary man into an Odyssean journey. In 2000, the Coen brothers' film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* told the story of a Depression-era Ulysses, an escaped convict returning home to prevent his wife from marrying another man. The 2004 movie *Troy* is a more straightforward adaptation of Homer's *Iliad*.

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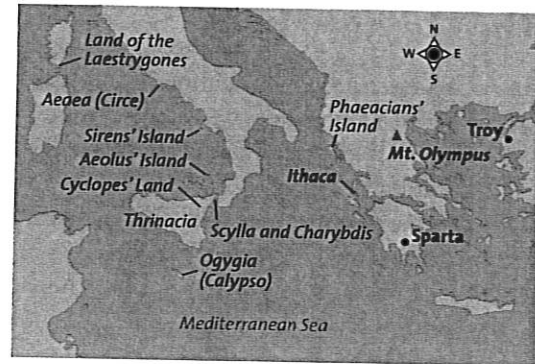
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A scene from the 2004 movie *Troy*; a bust of Homer

People and Places of the *Odyssey*

You will find it helpful to become familiar with important people and places in the *Odyssey* before you begin reading. The map identifies real places mentioned in the poem, such as Troy, Sparta, and Ithaca. It also shows where later readers have thought that some of the imaginary lands visited by Odysseus could have been located, after applying Mediterranean geography to Homer's descriptions. Following is a list of important characters. All Greek names used in Robert Fitzgerald's translation have been changed from their original spelling to a more familiar, Latinized spelling.



IMPORTANT CHARACTERS IN THE *ODYSSEY* (in order of mention)

BOOK 1

Helios (hē'lē-ōs')—the sun god, who raises his cattle on the island of Thrinacia (thrĭ-nā'shə)

Zeus (zōōs)—the ruler of the Greek gods and goddesses; father of Athena and Apollo

Telemachus (tə-lēm'ə-kəs)—Odysseus' son

Penelope (pə-nēl'ə-pē)—Odysseus' wife

BOOK 5

Hermes (hūr'mēz)—the god of invention, commerce, and cunning; messenger of the gods

Calypso (kə-lĭp'sō)—a sea goddess who lives on the island of Ogygia (ō-gĭj'yə)

Laertes (lā-ūr'tēz)—Odysseus' father

BOOK 9

Alcinous (āl-sĭn'ō-əs)—the king of the Phaeacians (fē-ā'shənz)

Circe (sūr'sē)—a goddess and enchantress who lives on the island of Aeaea (ē-ē-ə)

Cicones (sĭ-kō'nēz)—allies of the Trojans, who live at Ismarus (ĭs-mār'əs)

Lotus Eaters—inhabitants of a land Odysseus visits

Cyclopes (sĭ-klō'pēz)—a race of one-eyed giants; an individual member of the race is a Cyclops (sĭ'klōps)

Apollo (ə-pōl'ō)—the god of music, poetry, prophecy, and medicine

Poseidon (pō-sīd'n)—the god of the seas, earthquakes, and horses; father of the Cyclopes who battles Odysseus

BOOK 10

Aeolus (ē-ə-ləs)—the guardian of the winds

Laestrygones (lēs'trĭ-gō'nēz)—cannibal inhabitants of a distant land

Eurylochus (yūr-lĭ'ə-kəs)—a trusted officer of Odysseus'

Persephone (pər-sēf'ə-nē)—the wife of Hades, ruler of the underworld

Tiresias (tĭ-rē'sē-əs) of Thebes (thēbz)—a blind prophet whose spirit Odysseus visits in the underworld

BOOK 11

Elpenor (ēl-pē'nôr)—one of Odysseus' crew, killed in an accident

BOOK 12

Sirens (sĭ'rənz)—creatures, part woman and part bird, whose songs lure sailors to their death

Scylla (sĭl'ə)—a six-headed sea monster who devours sailors

Charybdis (kə-rĭb'dĭs)—a dangerous whirlpool personified as a female sea monster

BOOK 16

Athena (ə-thē'nə)—the goddess of war, wisdom, and cleverness; goddess of crafts

Eumaeus (yūr-mē'əs)—a servant in Odysseus' household

BOOK 17

Argos (är'gōs)—Odysseus' dog

BOOKS 21–23

Antinous (än-tĭn'ō-əs)—a suitor of Penelope's

Eurymachus (yūr-rĭm'ə-kəs)—a suitor of Penelope's

Philoetius (fĭ-lē'shəs)—a servant in Odysseus' household

Amphinomus (äm-fĭn'ə-məs)—a suitor of Penelope's

Eurynome (yūr-rĭn'ə-mē)—a female servant in Odysseus' household

Eurycleia (yūr'ĭ-klē'ə)—an old female servant, still loyal to Odysseus

The *Odyssey* in Art

Artists have been representing images and events from the *Odyssey* since the seventh century B.C., when Greek artists painted Odyssean images and scenes as decoration on ceramic urns and vases. Since then, artists have continued to tell Odysseus' story in painting, sculpture, and other media.

Throughout the unit, you will see how numerous artists have interpreted this epic in a range of styles and forms. As you look at the art illustrating each episode, ask yourself what the artists were trying to show about each part of the story and what their own attitudes toward characters and events may have been.

Looking at Art You've seen how understanding a writer's craft can help you appreciate the beauty and meaning of a literary text. In the same way, knowing about artists' techniques can help you understand and appreciate their work. The following list of terms and related questions may help you identify and think about the choices each artist made. Consider how these choices have contributed to the meaning and beauty of each piece.

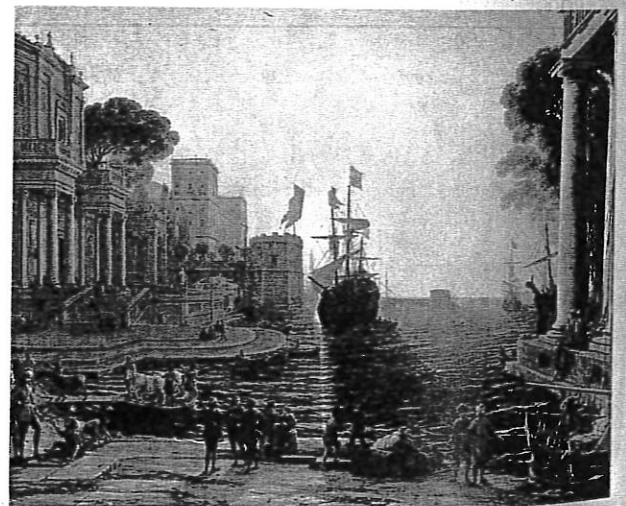
Term	Questions
composition	What shape or space is emphasized?
material	Has the artist used paint, clay, pencil, ink, or some other material?
function	Is the piece useful, decorative, or both?
color	Does the piece have a broad palette (range of colors) or a limited one?
line	Are the lines clean, simple, rough, ornate, or jagged?
shape	Does the piece have large, bold shapes or smaller, more complex ones? Are they geometric or organic (free-form)?
texture	In painting, are the brush strokes distinct or smooth looking? In sculpture or ceramics, is the surface polished or rough?
scale	Does the piece show large things or small ones?
representation	Are the images realistic, stylized, or abstract?

Landscapes When you look at a Homeric landscape, ask questions like the ones that follow. See if the answers help you understand each artist's purpose.

- Which of the following two landscapes is more **realistic**? How so?
- What **material** has each artist used? Which do you prefer, and why?
- Look at the **composition** of each piece. What part of the scene is emphasized in the painting? What is emphasized in the collage?
- Describe the **mood** and **tone** of each piece. Which is more lush, and which is more spare? Consider the techniques that created these differences.



200s: *Ulysses and the Sirens*, Roman. Mosaic, 130 cm x 344 cm. Musée du Bardo, Tunis, Tunisia. © Bridgeman Art Library.



About 1650: *Ulysses Returns Chryseis to Her Father*, Claude Lorrain. Oil painting.

Portraiture As you look at a portrait, ask yourself what the image suggests about the character or characters being depicted. Try to identify the techniques that helped the artist create that impression.

- What does the **position** of the characters tell you about the scene rendered in terra cotta?
- Consider the difference in **dimension** between the two pieces; one is flat, while the other is in **relief**. How does that difference affect the feel of each piece?
- The pastel drawing is a highly **abstract** figure, as opposed to a realistic one. What do you think of it? Why might an artist choose such an abstract style?



About 460–450 B.C.: Terra cotta plaque showing the turn of Odysseus



1911–1932: *Ulysses*, Georges Braque. Pastel drawing.

Narrative Art Most of the artwork in this selection tells a story in one way or another. Consider how the artist's choices of what to include and emphasize affect your sense of the events portrayed in each work. Compare and contrast how these events are presented in visual form with how they are presented in the text.

- One of the following pieces is a decorative scene painted on a useful object, and the other is a book illustration. How does each piece's **function** affect its **style**?
- Compare the **backgrounds** on which the two scenes are painted. How does each background affect the way you view and understand the scene?
- Which scene makes more sense to you? Explain.



About 450–440 B.C.: Clay urn showing Odysseus slaying Penelope's suitors



About 1915: Illustration from *Tales of the Gods and Heroes* by Sir G. W. Cox, Innes Fripp. Hermes, messenger of Zeus, urges the nymph Calypso to release Odysseus.

COMMON CORE

Included in this workshop:
RL 4 Determine the figurative meanings of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone. **RL 5** Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. **RL 6** Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of world literature. **RL 10** Read and comprehend stories and poems.

The Epic

Extraordinary heroes and hideous monsters. Brutal battles and dangerous voyages. Spectacular triumphs and crushing defeats. The epic tradition, still very much alive in today's movies and novels, began thousands of years ago with the orally told epic poem. In ancient Greece, listeners crowded around poet-storytellers to hear about the daring exploits of a hero named Odysseus. With its storm-tossed seas, powerful evildoers, and narrow escapes, it's no wonder that Homer's *Odyssey* remains one of the most famous epics in Western literature. It captivates us because it is a compelling narrative and a window into a time and place different from our own.

Part 1: Characteristics of the Epic

In literature, an **epic** is a long narrative poem. It recounts the adventures of an **epic hero**, a larger-than-life figure who undertakes great journeys and performs deeds requiring remarkable strength and cunning. As you journey through many episodes from the *Odyssey*, expect to encounter the following elements.

THE EPIC AT A GLANCE

EPIC HERO

- Possesses superhuman strength, craftiness, and confidence
- Is helped and harmed by interfering gods
- Embodies ideals and values that a culture considers admirable
- Emerges victorious from perilous situations



EPIC PLOT

Involves a long journey, full of complications, such as

- strange creatures
- large-scale events
- divine intervention
- treacherous weather



EPIC SETTING

- Includes fantastic or exotic lands
- Involves more than one nation



ARCHETYPES

All epics include archetypes—characters, situations, and images that are recognizable in many times and cultures:

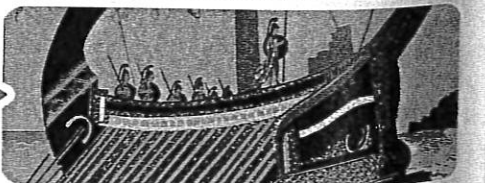
- sea monster
- buried treasure
- epic hero
- wicked temptress
- suitors' contest
- loyal servant



EPIC THEMES

Reflect such universal concerns as

- courage
- a homecoming
- loyalty
- the fate of a nation
- beauty
- life and death



MODEL: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EPIC

Here, the Greek (Achaean) king Menelaus is speaking to his wife, Helen. He recalls the moment when he and Odysseus hid with their fellow soldiers inside a giant wooden horse, waiting to attack the Trojans. Formerly a Trojan herself, Helen stood outside the horse and called to the soldiers inside, mimicking the voices of their wives. As you read, notice the characteristics of an epic that are revealed.

from **BOOK 4:** *The Red-Haired King and His Lady*

“In my life I have met, in many countries,
foresight and wit in many first rate men,
but never have I seen one like Odysseus
for steadiness and a stout heart. Here, for instance,
5 is what he did—had the **boxed** nerve to do—
inside the hollow horse, where we were waiting,
picked men all of us, for the Trojan slaughter,
when all of a sudden, you came by—I dare say
drawn by some superhuman
10 power that planned an exploit for the Trojans;
and Deiphobus, that handsome man, came with you.
Three times you walked around it, patting it everywhere,
and called by name the flower of our fighters,
making your voice sound like their wives, calling.
15 Diomedes and I crouched in the center
along with Odysseus; we could hear you plainly;
and listening, we two were swept
by waves of longing—to reply, or go.
Odysseus fought us down, despite our craving,
20 and all the Achaeans kept their lips shut tight,
all but Anticlus. Desire moved his throat
to hail you, but Odysseus’ great hands clamped
over his jaws, and held. So he saved us all,
till Pallas Athena led you away at last.”

Close Read

1. King Menelaus mentions several heroic traits that Odysseus exhibited while carrying out his plan to defeat the Trojans. One trait has been **boxed**. Identify two more.
2. What archetype does Helen represent? Explain your answer.
3. Reread lines 8–10 and 23–24. Explain how the gods interfered in the episode that Menelaus is describing.

Part 2: The Language of Homer

Because the language of Homer was ancient Greek, what you will read is an English translation. The *Odyssey* has been translated many times, and each translator has interpreted it differently. Read these two versions of the opening of Book 2. The first is written in verse and has a more formal **tone** and **diction**—closer to the original—while the second is written in prose and is less formal.

TRANSLATION 1

When primal Dawn spread on the eastern sky
her fingers of pink light, Odysseus' true son
stood up, drew on his tunic and his mantle,
slung on a sword-belt and a new-edged sword,
tied his smooth feet into good rawhide sandals,
and left his room, a god's brilliance upon him.

—translated by Robert Fitzgerald (1961)

TRANSLATION 2

Dawn came, showing her rosy fingers
through the early mists, and Telemachus
leapt out of bed. He dressed himself,
slung a sharp sword over his shoulder,
strapped a stout pair of boots on his lissom
feet, and came forth from his chamber
like a young god.

—translated by W. H. D. Rouse (1937)

The Greeks who first experienced the *Odyssey* did not read a written version; they heard it as a live performance. Singing or reciting, a poet kept the audience enthralled with **epic similes**, **epithets**, and **allusions**.

- A **simile** is a comparison between two unlike things, using the word *like* or *as*. Homer often develops a simile at great length, so that it goes on for several lines. This is known as an **epic simile**. In this passage from Book 20, an angry Odysseus is compared to a sausage being roasted over a fire.

His rage
held hard in leash, submitted to his mind,
while he himself rocked, rolling from side to side,
as a cook turns a sausage, big with blood
and fat, at a scorching blaze, without a pause,
to broil it quick: so he rolled left and right, . . .

- An **epithet** is a brief descriptive phrase used to characterize a particular person or thing. When a poet needed to fill out a line, he'd add an epithet with the right meter and number of syllables. Odysseus is known by various epithets, including "son of Laertes" and "raider of cities."
- An **allusion** is a reference to a famous person, place, or event. To help his audience picture what he described, a poet might have made an allusion to something they already knew. For instance, when Odysseus' son first sees the palace of Menelaus, he says, "This is the way the court of Zeus must be." Every Greek would have understood this allusion to the ruler of the gods.