

BARTON

LIBRARY

Dare to Know

Epic Fiction

Fiction depicting action on a broad scale and often characterized by grandiose treatment of individual and/or national destiny.

A genre in which the narrative focuses simultaneously on the lives of the characters and on a pivotal moment in the history of a social or national grouping, no matter its size. These stories often involve a scope and themes that are grand in scale, language that is descriptive and colorful, a protagonist who is larger than life, and a tone that emphasizes the magnificence of the events. Another key feature of the epic novel is a large amount of detail, which emphasizes emotional points and allows readers to experience the setting. Many newer stories combine an intimate style of narration that accentuates character development with the sweeping events that comprise much of the plot. Epic fiction can easily blend with **domestic fiction**, **fantasy fiction**, **historical fiction**, **Western fiction**, and other genres. Virgil's *The Aeneid* (19 BC), the unknown author's *Beowulf* (700-1000 AD), and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) are early examples of the epic poem. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Sholem Asch's *Three Cities* (1933), and Olivia Manning's *The Great Fortune* (1960) are classic examples of the epic novel.

Common Elements

Long format
Time span encompassed in years
Large-scale backstory or setting in which the story takes place

Individuals and communities
Evocative language
Acts of courage

Benefits of Reading

Encourages patience in readers as they complete a lengthy tome
Offer readers a view of monumental events and situations
Allows readers to cheer on protagonists as

they strive, fail, adapt, and triumph through grand challenges and adversity
Inspires readers to overcome their own trials

Modern Literary Examples

<i>Beneath the Lion's Gaze</i> (2010) by Maaza Mengiste
<i>The Birth of Love</i> (2010) by Joanna Kavenna

<i>Elixir of Immortality</i> (2013) by Gabi Gleichmann
<i>Independent People</i> (2020) by Halldór Laxness

<i>Keeper of the Stone</i> (1994) by Margaret Allan
<i>The Love-Makers</i> (1986) by Judith Gould
<i>Morning and Evening Talk</i> (2009) by Naguib Mahfouz
<i>The Northern Clemency</i> (2008) by Philip Hensher
<i>Oki's Island</i> (2006) by Kenny Kemp
<i>The Porcelain Maker</i> (2023) by Sarah Freethy
<i>Powder River</i> (1985) by Gary McCarthy
<i>The Right Stuff</i> (1979) by Tom Wolfe

<i>Some Came Running</i> (1979) by James Jones
<i>Something Old, Something New</i> (1983) by Lillian Africano
<i>The Tablet of Destinies</i> (2022) by Roberto Calasso
<i>A Traveller at the Gates of Wisdom</i> (2020) by John Boyne
<i>The Valley</i> (1983) by Joel Kotkin
<i>The Walnut Mansion</i> (2015) by Miljenko Jergović