

The one thing that I definitely learned while attempting to write in an alternative genre is just how difficult and time consuming it can be. Being that I had not attempted to write poetry in years, this compounded the issue for me. Although this created an issue where I had to increase my understanding of the use and interpretation of language, by giving myself a form to follow, it helped to actually make things easier. I tend to thrive under specific rules or guidelines, otherwise I'm not sure where to take things or what sort of language to use. The bottom line is that I don't have confidence in my own command of words. By reading different epic poems, and in understanding their meaning and circumstance, I was able to gather somewhat of a greater knowledge of language. However, I realize I have a long way to go. The answer to this is always two things: 1) read, read, read, and 2) write, write, write!

The epic poem can be written in many different forms. There can be a poetic rhyme scheme organized into cantos and stanzas, like in Spenser's *The Fairy Queen*. It could be a running poem with no rhyme and no apparent form like Milton's *Paradise Lost* or like the epic tale of *Gilgamesh*. The important thing, however, is that the poem be of epic proportions. By this, I mean that there is some sort of grand premise. The tale needs to be long, very involved, and very specific. Normally there is a protagonist who the epic will follow through a long period of time and through different places and situations of importance to the story. As in *The Fairy Queen* where the Redcrosse Knight must escort the beautiful maiden the Fairy Queen (a representation of Queen Elizabeth) through dark forests and protect her from terrible monsters.

*The Fairy Queen* itself is written in a rhyme scheme as such: ABABBCBCC. I

enjoyed the rhythm and the rhyme of it all. It kept me interested and encouraged me to read on. For this reason, I chose to write my epic poem in this form. By breaking things up into stanzas and cantos, I was able to better concentrate on specific material or specific events in the story at a time. Each stanza could be about a character or an event. Each canto could, if I had the time to actually complete some, could embody greater events or larger happenings, therefore allowing the stanzas to be more specific. As I said, this form and style offered me an opportunity to see this as a smaller project. I could focus on each part of the story specifically by using snapshots or thought-shots (thank you Demo #1 for enlightening me!).

I have learned that poetry does not have to be this scary and unattainable thing for me. We all know that it can be intimidating to attempt such things. This has always kept me from truly experimenting with all of my heart just how to write poetry. By choosing the epic poem, I was able to make the experience purposeful and relevant to myself. I am political. I am confrontational. I am passionate about social justice. I am extremely interested in historical events. I want to know why things happened and how history developed. This gave me an opportunity to express my feelings and my findings in a way that truly represents an original voice and an original story. I am certainly proud of it.

I will be teaching History, however, and not English. Part of the reason I chose epic poetry was because of its connections with history and its expression of the people living through it. It is an expression of the voice of those who experienced things first hand rather than a boring and mundane historical text. I certainly think that different genres of

writing and expression can help students to get their own minds and their own hearts involved in the History classroom.

By reading a classic historical text, you get an understanding of facts and of dates. But history is not just a chronology of dates and facts. It is a story of people. This story cannot be properly told without attempt to feel or to understand what slavery was like or what the sand on Utah Beach in Normandy felt like. This is why kids read Fredrick Douglass's narrative. This is why we are so often reminded of the voice of Martin Luther King by listening to recordings rather than just reading his words. Students should not be taught about WWII with a disconnect to what war is. They should think critically and question the motives of belligerents like Hitler or Stalin as well as the motives of FDR and Churchill. The use of epic poetry in the History classroom could help to do just that. *The Fairy Queen*, in particular, addresses the Protestant/Catholic issue in England in many different ways.

This leads me to believe that this really could work for a secondary student. Poetry and writing are extremely scary and intimidating things. For this reason, many students never even think to try. In showing students the different ways poetry is written and the different reasons for its existence, we can help to broaden their understanding of poetry in a way that may include their own passions or desires. If a student claims not to be able to write poetry, but is a songwriter or a rapper, it can be pointed out that this, too, is poetry. It can be manifested in ways that kids may not consider or understand. In fact, it may very well be manifested in ways that, although they don't realize it, they do understand.

Regarding writing in general, and the specific tools needed to pass the SATs or to write an effective essay in college, the teaching of writing poetry, and epic poetry in

particular, could be used purposefully. As the list of attributes included spells out, epic poetry contains simile, drama, lyrical style, majestic language as well as an array of literary devices. These things can be taught through alternative genres that, while helping students to think critically, can also teach them to master language and literary devices important in everyday, and even practical, writings. Epic poetry could be used to make the learning of literary devices more interesting than the archaic worksheet that explains what a motif or a symbol is. This is the point, is it not; to get kids involved and interested so they put their own heart into their work? Maybe this will encourage them to read, read, read, and write, write, write and to gain a better command of language. This would be a good thing, no doubt!

## **Defining Characteristics of the Epic Poem**

- ❖ polyphonic
- ❖ lyrical
- ❖ dramatic
- ❖ a long poem or narrative,
- ❖ heroic exploits of an individual or group
- ❖ included are beliefs and culture of her/his society
- ❖ fabulous adventures
- ❖ superhuman deeds
- ❖ polyphonic composition
- ❖ majestic language
- ❖ a large undertaking, ample in scale
- ❖ the writing uses an array of literary devices
- ❖ can include allegory
- ❖ can address historical or contemporary social issues
- ❖ an expression of knowledge of the humanities and of one's "new universal knowledge"
- ❖ a reading of history and of interpretation
- ❖ an insight into social issues and interpretations of the time otherwise ignored by historical text.
- ❖ the use of simile
- ❖

### Bibliography

Homer. The Odyssey. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998.

Jackson, Danny P. The Epic of Gilgamesh. Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci: 1992.

Langland, William. "Piers Plowman." The Longman Anthology of British Literature. Ed. David Damrosch. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1998. 396-423.

Milton, John. "Paradise Lost." The Longman Anthology of British Literature. Ed. David Damrosch. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1998. 1757-1904.

Spenser, Edmund. The Fairy Queen. Ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies. London: Everyman, 1996.

## ***The Epic of Ephorona*** as told by Ethan Konett

### **The Argument**

*The Epic of Ephorona is unfinished, and so it has no implicit argument. There is however, an intended criterion that shall quickly be explained.*

*There once was a spirit named Ephorona. She was sent by the gods down to earth to entangle herself within the bodies and the biddings of women and men in positions of power. The idea was that she would attempt, in a covert fashion, to over-take these bodies with her pure and noble spirit and bring forth happiness and equality to all of mankind. In the story it becomes clear that Ephorona is no match for the main antagonist: Greed. Greed is a character that has not yet been developed in *The Epic of Ephorona*, but shall be when the time and place is ripe and fair. Greed assassinates those that take in her noble intentions and Greed poses as those who may lead with her wishes. The gods, therefore, decide to leave Earth and mankind to its own destiny. They retire to the heavens long before man realizes. Thus we are in the current state in the history of man, where secular man poses as the word of the gods and claims to represent these noble constituents.*

## *The Epic of Ephorona*

### Introduction

1

Of darkness and death  
Of toil and condition  
In a dead of small breadth  
I attempt a rendition  
Through study of gods I shall seek their permission  
To pen a fresh verse oft told but forgotten  
A tale full of life, of love, and repression  
Revival of custom once born misbegotten°  
A product of idol from which it was boughten

°References a current lack of allegorical literature.

2

An epic which hither shall duly be told  
Of leaders once present and those that be still  
A specter of wonder hath taken their hold  
And brought forth their power their baron and will  
Some striving for place many home atop Hill°  
Have been chosen by phantoms who afford them great  
guile  
Instilled in their voices a monstrous shrill  
For passions and visions now pilfered beguile  
By interest and lobby both sides of the aisle.

°the U.S. Congress.

3

Home At Last° while cool Purdie shuffles  
Achilles rests his great spite forgotten  
Anew and afresh is this modern kerfuffle  
To life rebels a tale forlorn begotten  
A journey once lived by Fagen° once foughten  
With Becker° to settle to hold down the nether  
A song sung so rich like eighth notes au-gratin  
Like ventures of which we now shall together  
Explore with some depth this fine woven heather.

°*Home at Last*- a Steely Dan song about *The Iliad*.  
Benard Purdie, the drummer, plays in a style he  
calls "the Pudie Shuffle."

°Donald Fagen and Walter Becker = Steely Dan.  
Becker the bass player ("the nether")



## Canto I

1

Inside a man a spirit dwells  
To bring forth redemptive sacrifice  
But in this man a dark force dwells  
Denying salvation great conserve of Eurydice°  
Now back on to Earth its cold is like ice  
This spirit must now find new existence  
Averting sweet lust and pending great vice  
Of Madison's inculcative affluence°  
Will doom thy specter by every caprice  
And never shall love be as ever so nice

°Conserve = husband. Husband of Eurydice is Orpheus. Their story foreshadows Ephorona's fate.

°A reference to Federalism, which has allowed a political aristocracy to reign in the United States.

2

The specter may travel through many a man  
For hoping to find an acceptable suitor  
A leader of will and equality's plan  
For greed and desire to dutifully conquer  
A human with strength that is matched by no other  
The promise of peace is the ultimate vision  
To save all mankind his demise to deter  
And bring forth all life from peril collision  
Must grapple with hate and must bury derision

3

Sweet Ephorona° of noble intentions  
Floats across the waters of the world  
Birthing enlightening Declarations°  
While torpedoes of Pluto beneath her have swirled  
Coaxing and pulling for nether a world  
Adrift an Old Liberal° with democracy  
Ephorona a bout with the cruel demiworld°  
The Greed is the rule of the oligarchy  
This water a mire of the bureaucracy

°Ephor = magistrates of Sparta. . Ephoron nymph = female mayfly that copulates on the surface of the water, only to die soon after.

°Jefferson's Declaration of Independence.

°Classic liberalism = fiscal conservatism

°A world cruel to women

## Canto ?

Mr. Little°, your forte is snarfed  
By a fraudulent small Elijah°  
Napoleon's Heart, a poor man so dwarfed  
The tempest too Grande°, his armee bourgeois  
Great Malcolm to haj, the sanctified Mecca  
Had shown him the truth, the spirit so stark

°Malcolm Little = Malcolm X's birth name.

°Elijah Muhamed = a small man, short man's disease, leader of the Nation of Islam.

°Napoleon's final march with the Grande Armee into Moscow. Many froze to death =Elijah Mohammed's fight with Malcolm X would tarnish his legacy.

Mr. McCone<sup>o</sup> had feared black messiah  
Divide them and conquer so to quell the great bark  
His mission complete retire April dark.

Canto ?

Oh man, oh human man  
Go do thy biddings of thine own  
You create machines that I never can  
God left long ago, his up be thrown  
Thrust into the air, impatience had grown  
My son, the Trot<sup>o</sup>, has left you too  
Young man evolving now as never known  
Laic existence will bring you through  
Destructive times your dying hue.

<sup>o</sup>John McCone, head of the CIA at the time of Malcolm X's assassination. Conspiracies imply CIA connections to the killing and the infighting in the Nation of Islam. X dead in February, McCone resigns in April.

<sup>o</sup>Jesus. "Trot" refers to Leon Trotsky, the communist leader of Red Forces in the Russian Civil War. Exiled by Stalin to Mexico. A "Trot" is what is now a Communist who attempts the political process under the disguise of a Democrat. Jesus a communist? Some say this.