

Lec .10

Narrative Poetry

Narrative poetry gives a verbal representation, in verse, of a sequence of connected events, it propels characters through a plot. It is always told by a narrator. Narrative poems might tell of a love story (like Tennyson's *Maud*), the story of a father and son (like Wordsworth's *Michael*).

Sub-categories of narrative poetry are for example: epic, mock-epic or ballad.

Epics usually operate on a large scale, both in length and topic, such as the founding of a nation (Virgil's *Aeneid*) or the beginning of world history (Milton's *Paradise Lost*), they tend to use an elevated style of language and supernatural beings take part in the action.

The mock-epic makes use of epic conventions, like the elevated style and the assumption that the topic is of great importance, to deal with completely insignificant occurrences. A famous example is Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, which tells the story of a young beauty whose suitor secretly cuts off a lock of her hair.

A ballad is a song, originally transmitted orally, which tells a story. It is an important form of folk poetry which was adapted for literary uses from the sixteenth century onwards. The ballad stanza is usually a four-line stanza, alternating tetrameter and trimeter

The purpose of a didactic poem is primarily to teach something. This can take the form of very specific instructions, such as how to catch a fish, as in James Thomson's *The Seasons* or how to write good poetry as in Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism*. But it can also be meant as instructive in a general way. Until the twentieth century all literature was expected to have a didactic purpose in a general sense, that is, to impart moral, theoretical or even practical knowledge.