

There are other reasons to read the *Aeneid* in Latin. No translation can produce the beauty of the sound and rhythm of Vergil's Latin. The flow of the dactylic hexameter meter can only be hinted at in English. Nuances, allusions, word play, and figures of speech are usually lost, for often they cannot be replicated in translation. In sum, by reading Vergil's *Aeneid* in Latin, the reader gains a greater understanding of the brilliance of this remarkable literary work composed by Rome's greatest poet.

EPIC

Vergil includes in his epic many of the following characteristics found in earlier classical epics, especially the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*:

- *In mediās rēs*, or, beginning in the middle of the story. Vergil begins the *Aeneid* not at the beginning of the story, that is, in the Trojan War, but with a storm that drives Aeneas's fleet onto the coast of Africa, near Carthage.
- Flashback. If the story begins *in mediās rēs*, then the poet must, at some point, tell the story up to that point. Vergil does this in *Aeneid* 2–3, in which Aeneas tells Dido and her court everything that happened to him from the fall of Troy until his arrival in Carthage.
- Invocation. A prayer to the Muse, the goddess of inspiration. When the poet prays for poetic inspiration, he usually summarizes the plot of the epic. Invocations can also appear at important points in the narrative, such as the start of the second half of the epic (Book 7, lines 37 ff.).
- Catalogues or lists, such as the list of heroes and historical figures Aeneas meets in *Aeneid* 6.
- Divine machinery or the involvement of the gods in the plot. The roles of the goddesses Venus and Juno are particularly important in the *Aeneid*.
- Epithets or descriptive phrases used with the name of a hero, place, and the like; for example, *pius Aenēās* (“loyal Aeneas”) and *miserrima Dīdō* (“very unhappy Dido”).
- Similes or comparisons. Some of these are brief while others are longer and take on a life of their own.
- Descent into the Underworld. In *Aeneid* 6 Aeneas descends into the Underworld to see the ghost of his dead father Anchises. His father will show Aeneas the future city of Rome and reveal a moral code sanctioned by the gods.
- Dactylic Hexameter. This meter used by Homer and other Greek poets was introduced to Latin by the poet Ennius and became the standard meter for Roman epic poets. The meter is based on six feet (hexameter) consisting of dactyls (– ∪ ∪) or spondees (– –).