

Epic Beginnings

The Odyssey—Book I

Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many devices, who wandered full many ways after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy. Many were the men whose cities he saw and whose mind he learned, aye, and many the woes he suffered in his heart upon the sea, seeking to win his own life and the return of his comrades. Yet even so he saved not his comrades, though he desired it sore, for through their own blind folly they perished—fools, who devoured the kine of Helios Hyperion; but he took from them the day of their returning. Of these things, goddess, daughter of Zeus, beginning where thou wilt, tell thou even unto us.

[Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. A. T. Murray. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974.]

The Iliad—Book I

Anger be now your song, immortal one,
Akhilleus' anger, doomed and ruinous,
that caused the Akhaians loss on bitter loss
and crowded brave souls into the undergloom,
leaving so many dead men—carrion
for dogs and birds; and the will of Zeus was done.
Begin it when the two men first contending
broke with one another—

[Homer. *The Iliad*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1975.]

The Aenied—Book I

Of arms I sing, and of the man, who first from the coasts of Troy exiled by fate,
came to Italy and Lavinian shores; much buffeted he on sea and land by force of
powers above, through cruel Juno's unforgiving wrath, and much too enduring in
war also, till he should build a city and bring his gods to Latium: whence came
the Latin race, the lords of Alba, and the walls of lofty Rome.

Tell me, O Muse, the cause; wherein thwarted in will or wherefore angered,
did the Queen of Heaven drive one so excellent in goodness to traverse so many
perils to face so many toils. In heavenly breasts can such resentments dwell?

[Virgil. *Virgil's Aenied, Books I-VI*. Introduction by H. R. Fairclough and Seldon L. Brown. New York: Benj. H. Sanborn & Co., 1931.]