

## Classical/Mythological Allusions

**Acheron.** One of the four rivers in Hades, the Greek world of the dead. “Acheron” means the river of woe or the river of pain.

**Achilles.** Son of Peleus and Thetis; the leading Greek hero in the Trojan War, whose story is related in Homer’s *Iliad*. His feud with Agamemnon and its resolution form the central theme of that epic. He was killed, in the last days of the siege of Troy, by an arrow wound in his only vulnerable spot, his heel: in his infancy his mother sought to make him immortal by dipping him in the river Styx, but since he held him by the heel, it was the one part of him vulnerable to death. Hence an “Achilles heel” is any point of particular vulnerability. Violent in his anger, prone to lose his temper, impetuous in his hate, merciless to a foe (Priam’s sons), Achilles also was capable of tender love (Briseis, Patroclus). Though he “sulked in his tent” at one point, he had unquestioned courage and strength – the earliest type of tragic hero, who made a choice from which tragic events followed for himself and for his people.

**Adonis.** The surpassingly handsome youth, Adonis, was loved by Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love, while still quite young and was killed by a wild boar (perhaps Aphrodite’s lover Ares in disguise). After his death the anemone flower grew up from his blood. An “Adonis” is a young man of godlike beauty.

**Aeneas.** Son of Anchises and Aphrodite, a Trojan warrior who appears in Homer’s *Iliad* but is better known as the hero of Virgil’s epic, the *Aeneid*. As Virgil tells the story, he is destined to escape from burning Troy, and after many years of wandering and hardship, to land in Italy where his descendants will found a new city and an empire that will hold sway over the nations. Aeneas, like Odysseus, is an archetypal hero. The traits most closely associated with him are piety and faithfulness to family and tradition.

**Aeneid.** Virgil’s epic poem, in Latin hexameter verse. In 12 books, the *Aeneid* recounts the adventures of Aeneas from the time he fled the sack of Troy until the fight in which he killed Turnus, the chief warrior of the Latins, in a duel recalling the battle between Achilles and Hector. Virgil aimed to show the fulfillment of a destiny, that a great empire was eventually to be established by Rome after many hardships were encountered and overcome. Though Aeneas never reaches Rome (founded by his descendants, Romulus and Remus) nor even Alba Longa (founded, according to tradition by his son, Ascanius), he prepared the way. The *Aeneid* furnished Rome and her burgeoning empire with a kind of “national” myth.

**Aeolus.** A god of the winds, ruler of a floating island, who extends hospitality to Odysseus and his men on their long trip home following the Trojan War. “Aeolian” refers to storms or winds. An Aeolian harp is an instrument that makes music by the action of the wind on stretched strings.

**Agamemnon.** Son of Atreus, husband of Clytemnestra, father of Orestes, Electra and Iphigenia, brother of Menelaus. As king of Mycenae, the most powerful city of the Achaeans, Agamemnon was chosen leader of the expedition against Troy (when Helen, the wife of Menelaus, was taken by Paris to that city). At Aulis he was compelled to offer his daughter Iphigenia as a sacrifice to Artemis, thereby incurring the hatred of Clytemnestra. Upon returning home, he was murdered in his bath by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, her lover. His death was avenged by Electra and Orestes. Agamemnon is the subject of the *Agamemnon* by Seneca. Today Agamemnon is most remembered for his military prowess and his tragic death. See also: Trojan War.

**Ajax.** (or Aias). Greek warrior in Trojan War and described in the *Iliad* as being of colossal stature, second only to Achilles in courage and strength. He was, however, comparatively slow-witted and excessively proud. After losing a contest with Odysseus for Achilles' armor, he went mad and killed a flock of sheep. After coming to his senses, he killed himself in shame.

**Amazons.** A mythical race of women warriors who lived somewhere in Asia Minor or perhaps in Scythia, north of the Black Sea. They customarily removed the right breast so as not to hamper use of the bow, admitted men to their company only for breeding, and exiled or killed male offspring. They appear in various legends: for example, Achilles defeated their leader Penthesilea in single combat during the Trojan War; Theseus fought them successfully and married Hippolyta (some sources say Antiope) who bore him Hippolytus; Heracles succeeded in capturing the girdle worn by the Amazon queen by claiming it as ransom for the captured Melanippe. Generally, an "Amazon" today is a particularly robust, masculine and belligerent woman.

**Anchises.** Member of royal family of Troy. The goddess Aphrodite was so enamored of Anchises' beauty that she bore him a child, Aeneas. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil describes how Aeneas carries the aging Anchises on his shoulders from Troy after its defeat by the Greeks in the Trojan War.

**Antaeus.** One of the race of Giants in Greek myth, the son of the earth goddess Gaea and the sea god Poseidon. A wrestler who killed those who could not defeat him, he remained invincible as long as he could renew his strength by touching the earth. He was eventually killed by Heracles who held him off the earth and strangled him. Today someone who must renew the source of his strength might be compared to Antaeus.

**Antigone.** Daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta. After her two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, had been killed in the struggle for the kingship of Thebes, her uncle, Creon, had forbidden, under penalty of death, the burial of the body of Polyneices because he had fought against the city. However, Antigone managed to pour dust over the corpse as a symbol of burial. She was sentenced by Creon to be entombed alive, but she committed

suicide in the cave in which she had been enclosed; and Haemon, son of Creon, to whom she was affianced, also committed suicide. The struggle between Antigone and Creon has been interpreted in its simplest terms as a conflict between private conscience and public duty, between sacred obligations (since the dead had to be buried) and the arbitrary punishment of the state. However, as portrayed in the play *Antigone* by Sophocles, both Antigone and Creon are uncompromising and unyielding, she all through her life, he only until just before the end of the play. Today Antigone is symbolic of family piety and extreme self-sacrifice.

**Aphrodite.** Called Venus by the Romans, Aphrodite was the Greek goddess of love, supposedly born from the foam of the sea on the shores of the island of Cythera. She was given by Zeus in marriage to Hephaestus, the only ugly god, and was many times unfaithful to him. Her son was Eros or Cupid, the winged, impish god of physical desire. Among her lovers were Zeus, Hermes, Ares, Dionysos, and the mortal Anchises. Her symbols are the dove, sparrow, and myrtle tree. Her name is the symbol of love and passion.

**Apple of discord.** Only Eris, goddess of Discord and Strife, was not invited to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. Offended, she came without an invitation and threw among the guests a golden apple with the inscription on it, "To the most beautiful." The apple was claimed by the three goddesses: Hera, Athena and Aphrodite. Since no god wished to settle the dispute, Zeus sent Hermes to Mt. Ida where Paris, son of Priam and Hecuba, was living at the time. Paris was persuaded by Hermes to be the judge. Each goddess offered him a prize if he should decide in her favor. Hera promised power; Athena promised wisdom and success in war; Aphrodite promised the love of Helen the most beautiful woman in the world, wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. Aphrodite's offer prevailed; Paris went to Sparta; Helen went off with him to Troy; and the Trojan War ensued. Today, the expression "throwing the apple of discord" means setting the forces of strife in motion.

**Ares.** The Greek god of war, son of Zeus and Hera; identified with the Roman Mars.

**Asgard.** "Dwelling-place of the Aesir;" home of the gods in Scandinavian and Germanic mythology, where each god had his own palace. It was connected with earth by a celestial bridge, Bifrost, the rainbow. Odin's palace was called Valhalla.

**Atlas.** One of the race of Titans of Greek myth, who was said to bear the burden of the heavens upon his shoulders. Heracles, on one of his adventures, offended that Atlas refused him hospitality, showed him Medusa's head, thereby changing him into the rocky mountain range running east-west across northern Africa. The image of Atlas holding the burden of earth/sky appears frequently in literature. By extension, anyone who supports a weighty burden.

**Aurora.** Latin name of Eos, goddess of the dawn, whom Homer called “rosy-fingered.” She loved several handsome young men, Orion among them, but her most famous mortal lover was Tithonus, son of Laomedon, king of Troy. Memnon son of Aurora and Tithonus, became king of the Ethiopians and later fought in the Trojan War on the side of the Trojans. He was slain by Achilles. Aurora’s tears over her son’s death were said to glisten in the morning dew on the grass. Contemporary reference to Aurora is usually in terms of an Homeric “rosy-fingered” – that is, a romantic description of dawn. The “aurora borealis” is the northern lights, a luminous meteoric phenomenon caused by solar particles.

**Bacchus.** Latin name for Dionysos, and a form of another Greek name for the same god.

**Calchas.** The wisest of the Greek seers at the time of the Trojan War, who accompanied the Greeks to Troy. At Aulis he told the Greeks that they must sacrifice Iphigenia to appease Artemis so that the fleet could set sail. In the *Iliad* (Book 1) he tells Agamemnon that he must give up Chryseis, his prize, to her father, Chryses to stop the plague sent by Apollo against the Greeks. In the *Aeneid*, II, 122. Sinon claims that Calchas was the one who designated him for sacrifice. Calchas died broken-hearted because another soothsayer, Mopsus, proved to be better in predicting things to come.

**Calliope.** The muse of epic poetry. (See Muses.) Also, a musical instrument.

**Cassandra.** The daughter of Priam, King of Troy, Cassandra was loved by the god Apollo. He gave her the gift of prophecy, but as Cassandra resisted his wooing, Apollo saw to it that no one would believe her forecasts. She foretold the fall of Troy, and was taken by Agamemnon as his prize of war. Her prophecy of his end was fulfilled when his wife murdered him. A “Cassandra” is thus anyone with the wisdom of prophecy who is ignored by those who most need to take heed.

**Cattle of the sun.** During one of the adventures of Odysseus on the way home from Troy, he and his men landed on the Island of the Sun with specific instructions not to harm the sacred cattle grazing there. The sailors were becalmed, and without food, and when Odysseus left them to pray alone, they slew and ate some of the sacred animals. The Sun God took almost immediate revenge, destroying their ship and killing all aboard except Odysseus himself.

**Centaur.** Mythic creatures half horse and half man, the centaurs represented to the Greeks the bestial and grotesque aspect of mankind. The successful war of the Lapiths, a Thessalian tribe wholly human, against these monsters, is celebrated on a frieze of the Parthenon. The most famous of the centaurs was Chiron, wise and good, who was Achilles’ tutor.

**Chaos.** According to early Greek cosmology, the condition of the world in its original state, without limits, without the pattern imposed by the mind of god. The Greeks personified Chaos and made it the parent of Night and Erebus. The antonym is “cosmos,” a word which we use to embody the ideas of harmony and beauty. Today chaos signifies any unorganized, ungoverned confused condition.

**Charon.** Son of Erebus; ferryman who transported the souls of the dead across the River Styx to Hades. As a fee, he received a small coin that had been placed in the mouth of the dead at burial. Charon was described as an old man in tattered clothes, sordid and squalid in appearance with unkempt and matted locks. He appears in Book VI of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, in *The Frogs of Aristophanes*, and in Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Dead*.

**Charybdis.** The sea monster, and great hazard to ships, daughter of Poseidon and Gaea. She gulped down huge mouthfuls of water and then spewed them forth. She was later associated with the whirlpool off the Sicilian coast. “Between Scylla and Charybdis” means colloquially to be “between the devil and the deep blue sea,” to be hemmed in by perils with only the narrowest margin of escape. See also: Odysseus.

**Chimaera.** A mythological creature who was lion in her fore-third, goat in her middle-third and serpent in her hind-third. She was supposed to be invincible, but proved an easy contest for the hero Bellerophon, who, mounted on his horse Pegasus, vanquished her with arrows shot from above. Today a chimera signifies a grotesque, fearful creature of the imagination; an illusion. Chimerical means wildly fanciful or fantastic.

**Circe.** In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Circe was a beautiful sorceress who turned men into swine when they arrived at her palace. After Odysseus’ advance guard suffered this fate, the hero himself on advice from Hermes confronted the enchantress, threatened her with his sword and thus broke her magic. After remaining a year with the repentant Circe, Odysseus received directions from her which enabled him to visit with the shades of the dead in Hades. Then, with his en restored to human form, he continued his voyage. By extension, “Circe” today refers to a temptress.

**Cretan bull.** The bull for which Pasiphae, wife of Minos, King of Crete, conceived an unnatural passion. She coupled with the bull by concealing herself in a wooden cow fashioned for her by Daedalus; the issue of the union was the half-man half-bull Minotaur, whom Minos imprisoned in his labyrinth.

**Cronos, or Cronus.** A Titan, son of Uranus and Gaea. His Roman counterpart was Saturn. With the help of his mother, Cronus dethroned his father. During his rule, there was a Golden Age on earth. Because of a prophecy that one of his children would dethrone him, Cronus swallowed them as they were born, but his wife, Rhea, helped Zeus escape and

tricked Cronus into disgorging the other children. Finally, aided by the Cyclopes, some of the Giants, Themis and Prometheus, Zeus and his brothers fought against Cronus and the Titans, defeated them and confined them to Tartarus. The other children of Cronus and Rhea were Hades and Poseidon, Demeter, Hera and Hestia.

**Cumaean, sibyl.** The sibyl or prophetess of the Temple of Apollo at Cumae in Italy who guided Aeneas through the underworld.

**Cupid and Psyche.** A romance with fairy tale elements included by Apuleius, a Latin author (second century A.D.) of North Africa, in his collection called *The Golden Ass*. Psyche, a mortal loved by the god of love, has promised her lover not to try to discover his true identity. He has kept this a secret, only visiting her by night. After many trials and hardships (for Psyche under the urging of her sisters, has broken her promise to Cupid and has found out who he is) all turns out well.

**Cybele.** The earth mother goddess of Asia Minor, identified with the Greek goddess Rhea and the Roman Magna Mater. Worshippers celebrated her cult with orgiastic and often bloody rituals.

**Cyclopes.** Greek, "round eyes;" Cyclops is the singular. According to Hesiod, there were only three Cyclopes, one-eyed Giants who were the sons of the primordial gods, Uranus and Gaea. They provided Zeus with lightning and thunderbolts and were later killed by Apollo. Homer, however, believed there were many Cyclopes, monstrous, gigantic creatures with one eye in the center of the forehead. They live in Sicily and along the west Italian coast, tended sheep, and were cannibalistic. The most interesting story about them is the encounter of their leader, Polyphemus, with Odysseus. To the Cyclopes was attributed the building of huge, prehistoric structures; the word cyclopean is applied to a type of building, still visible in many places such as Mycenae, Greece, and Tarragona, Spain, in which massive stones were piled atop each other.

**Daedalus.** The first artisan-inventor and engineer. Employed by Minos, king of Crete, he fashioned the wooden cow wherein Mino's Queen Pasiphae was able to satisfy her unnatural desire for a bull; the issue of this union, the half-bull half-man Minotaur, was so monstrous he required an extraordinary prison. This Daedalus furnished in the form of the Labyrinth, in which Minos sacrificed to the minotaur twelve Athenian youths and maidens each year – until Theseus succeeded in killing the monster. In order to keep Daedalus in his service, Minos imprisoned him in his own escape-proof labyrinth along with his son, Icarus. Daedalus effected their escape by fashioning two pairs of wings. They flew out; unfortunately, Icarus did not heed his father's warning not to fly too close to the sun. The wax holding the feathers melted and Icarus fell to his death. The modern reference to Daedalus is to his symbolism as an inventor.

**Damon and Pythias (Phintias).** In the story told by Cicero (*De Officiis*, II, x 45) the name is Phintias, but Pythias has become established in English usage. Damon and Pythias, followers of Pythagoras, were named by Cicero as examples of perfect friendship and their names have become proverbial for this relationship, like those of David and Jonathan. The tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse, Sicily, had ordered Pythias to be put to death. The latter begged to be allowed a few days' reprieve that he might look after his family. Damon agreed to become surety for him, agreeing that he himself would be executed if Pythias should not return. On the appointed day, Pythias returned and Dionysius was so overcome by the loyalty of these two friends that he pardoned them both and asked to become a third member of their society of friendship.

**Danae.** The mother of the hero Perseus and daughter of King Acrisius of Argos. The king shut his daughter up in a tower of bronze because an oracle said the girl would bear a son who would slay him. Zeus came down to Danae in a shower of gold and thus impregnated her with Perseus.

**Daphne.** The daughter of the river Peneus, who was pursued by the enamored god Apollo. In flight, Daphne begged the help of the gods and was changed into a laurel tree, which henceforth became Apollo's favorite. Laurel wreaths were the traditional crowns for the finest classical poets and singers.

**Delphic oracle.** The oracle at Delphi on the southern slope of Mount Parnassus. It was very old, having been successfully the possession of the goddess Ge, Themis and Phoebé. During the later tradition the oracle was under the protection of Apollo. The priestess Pythia sat upon a tripod and over a crevice in the rock and, in a deep trance, uttered the incomprehensible Oracles which were then interpreted by a priest. This oracle was the highest authority in religious matters, and it is the source of many prophecies in Greek literature. Inscribed on the temple of Apollo at Delphi there were at least three maxims, known as the Delphic maxims: "Know thyself;" "Nothing in excess;" and "Give security (a pledge) and trouble will follow."

**Demeter.** Identified with Ceres by the Romans; an earth goddess of wheat and grain, who spread knowledge of agricultural arts; daughter of Cronos and Rhea, and mother of Persephone. When the latter was abducted by Hades, Demeter roamed over the earth in search of her. Disguised as an old woman, she came to Eleusis, where she was received kindly by King Celeus and his wife, Metaneira. Eventually Demeter disclosed her identity and instructed that certain rites in her honor should be inaugurated at Eleusis. She taught Triptolemus, a son of Celeus and Metaneira, the agricultural arts and supplied him with a chariot drawn by dragons, in which he traversed the world, passing on her lore to mankind.

**Dido.** The queen of Carthage who received Aeneas after he was shipwrecked on the journey from Troy to Latium. She fell in love with Aeneas and committed suicide after he left her at the command of Jupiter (Zeus). See Aeneas.

**Dionysos (or Dionysus).** Also known as Bacchos to the Greeks, and Bacchus to the Romans, son of Zeus and Semele. At first a god of vegetation, he came to be especially worshipped as the god of wine. He is supposed to have wandered over a great part of the earth, even as far as India, spreading his cult, celebrated in frenzied festivals (see Bacchae; Maenads; Bacchanalia). He became associated with poetry and music; early choral odes known as dithyrambs were connected with his worship and from such choral pieces tragedy developed. In fact, tragedy and satyr plays were presented in Athens at the Greater Dionysia, a festival in honor of Dionysos. Although not included among the Olympian gods in the Homeric pantheon, Dionysos later displaced Hestia when his worship became more widespread. Mystic elements pertaining to regeneration and resurrection became part of the ritual associated with the worship of Dionysos, who was identified with the Egyptian Osiris. (See Adonis; Eleusinian Mysteries; Orphic Mysteries.) Dionysian, originally descriptive of the orgiastic rituals connected with the god, now signifies frenzied, ecstatic, wildly uninhibited rites or activities. Its opposite is Apollonian.

**Dis.** The Roman name for Pluto or Hades, god of the underworld; thus the lower world, Hell. Dante calls one part of his *Inferno* "the city of Dis."

**Dryads.** The tree nymphs (also called "hamadryads") of Greek mythology, specifically Nymphs of the oak tree (dryas meaning "oak" or "tree") but later generalized; they died with the trees they lived in. Most famous of the dryads was Eurydice, the wife of Orpheus.

**Echo.** They nymph of Greek myth, who was hopelessly in love with Narcissus and pined away until nothing was left of her but her voice.

**Elmo, Saint.** In Christian hagiography, the patron saint of sailors. St. Elmo's fire refers to luminous effects surrounding ships during storms or great darkness.

**Elysian Fields.** Called "The Elysian Plain" in Homer's *Odyssey* (IV, 563), a blessed and happy land at the world's end, ruled by Rhadamanthus, a judge of the dead. Here a select few favored by the gods come to a kind of paradise where "life is easiest for men," and where there is no snow, storms or rain. In Book VI of the *Aeneid*, Virgil places the Elysian Fields in the Lower World and to them are admitted the purified souls of all who have led an upright life. These souls spend their time joyously in a region of eternal spring and sunlight. One of the most beautiful boulevards in Paris is named Les Champs Elysses, "The Elysian Fields." In contemporary usage, another name for paradise. See also: Earthly Paradise; Islands of the Blessed.

**Endymion.** The best-known version of the story of Endymion is that he was a young and extremely handsome shepherd with whom Selene, the Moon, fell passionately in love, and that at her request Zeus granted him a wish. Wanting to remain perpetually young, Endymion asked for eternal sleep. Each night Selene came down to kiss him without him



being aware of her presence. The story forms the theme of Keats' long poem *Endymion* (1818), which opens with the famous line, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever."

**Eos.** The goddess of dawn, called Aurora by the Romans. Rosy-fingered, Homer's epithet for the goddess, has been frequently repeated in English poetry.

**Erebus.** Darkness; from Erebus and Nyx (Night) were born Hemera, "Day" and Aether, "Sky," according to Hesiod. Later poets identified Erebus with Hades or Hell, a meaning it retains.

**Erinyes.** Also known as the Furies from the Latin, Furiae. Primitive avenging spirits called upon to punish crimes, especially those committed against one's kin. They were merciless. In artistic representations, they look stern and fierce, but not ugly, are winged, and may carry or be encircled by snakes. The most famous reference to them is their pursuit of Orestes for his murder of Clytemnestra, his mother. The conflict is resolved in the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, the last play of his trilogy the *Oresteia*, in which the Furies and Orestes plead their cases before a court in Athens at which Athena casts the deciding vote of acquittal. The Furies are appeased when Athena promises them honor and a permanent home in Attica. Moreover, their name is changed to the Eumenides, "The Kind Ones." The interpretation is that the rule of tribal custom and revenge has given way to a code of law where all factors, including intent are weighed in judging the penalty for a crime.

**Eros.** Identified with Amor (love) or Cupido (Cupid, desire) by the Romans. In early Greek cults, Eros, the spirit of loveliness in youth, was a powerful primal force arising from Chaos (according to Hesiod). Later, he became the god of romantic love, was held to be the son of Aphrodite, and was represented as a mischievous, winged boy carrying torches and shooting arrows at gods and men that caused the victims to fall in love. Eros today refers to sexual love or the sexual instinct (libido). See also: Cupid and Psyche.

**Gaea or Gaia.** Greek personification of the earth as goddess. Gaea is the mother or source of Uranus (the Heavens) and joined with him to produce the Titans, among others.

**Galatea.** The sculptor Pygmalion scorned living women for their imperfections, and resolved to create a perfect woman. In revenge, Aphrodite caused him to fall in love with a cold stone statue, but finally relented and brought it to life as the mortal Galatea. The inspiration for G. B. Shaw's play *Pygmalion* and the musical *My Fair Lady*.

**Garden of the Hesperides.** The garden where Hera's apples were guarded by the nymphs called Hesperides and by a dreaded dragon. One of Heracles' labors was to bring back the golden apples.

**Gautama.** The full name of the historical Buddha (meaning "enlightened one") who founded Buddhism was Gautama Siddhartha.

**Geryon.** In Greek myth, the monstrous son of Chrysaor and Callirhoe, with three merged bodies and three heads. He owned a cannibalistic herd of cattle and a two-headed dog, Orthus, who guarded them. Heracles killed Geryon and Orthus and presented the herd to Eurystheus. In Canto 17 of Dante's *Inferno*, Geryon is the winged monster of fraud who bears Dante and Virgil into the pit of lower Hell.

**Golden fleece.** The fleece of a pure gold, winged ram. Phrixus and Helle escaped Boeotia by flying on the ram's back, but only Phrixus reached Colchis. In some versions, Phrixus gave the ram as a gift to Aeetes, king of Colchis, who offered it as a sacrifice to Zeus. The golden fleece hung from a tree in a sacred grove in Colchis, until Jason and the Argonauts stole it with the help of Medea and carried it off.

**Gordian knot.** Gordias, a peasant, became king of Phrygia when the Phrygians, in obedience to an oracle, crowned the first person to drive up to the temple of Zeus in a wagon. Gordias tied the wagon's yoke to the pole inside the temple with an extremely complex knot. The oracle decreed that whoever was able to untie it would become emperor of Asia. Alexander the Great cut the knot with a single stroke of his sword. Hence a "Gordian knot" is any complex problem, and "cutting the Gordian knot" is a particularly decisive way of solving it.

**Graces.** The graces were three daughters of Zeus: Euphrosyne (Mirth), Aglaia (Splendor) and Thalia (Good Cheer); the embodiment of charm and beauty they give life its grace and loveliness.

**Greeks bearing gifts.** A reference to the Trojan Horse devised by the Greeks (Odysseus) as a stratagem to enter Troy in order to destroy the city. See Laocoon and Sinon.

**Hades.** The brother of Zeus, lord over the world of the dead. The name is also used to signify the lower world itself, more commonly referred to today as hell.

**Halcyon.** Halcyone, daughter of Aeolus and wife of Ceyx, dreamed of her husband's shipwreck and death. She found the body on the shore the next morning and after three days of extreme grief, cast herself into the sea. She and her husband were then changed into kingfishers, birds whose nesting time always occurs when the surface of the sea is very peaceful. Today the term means particularly calm and happy, as in the phrase "halcyon days."

**Harpies.** Literally, "snatchers, robbers." They were considered personifications of the winds that could carry persons away, or as souls of the dead that could snatch away the souls of the living. They are depicted as winged maidens or as repulsive-looking birds with heads of maidens and long claws. In modern usage, a "harpy" means any grasping person, generally female but sometimes male, or a mean-tempered, shrewish woman.

Hecate. At first considered a mighty goddess who helped men to achieve success in war, to acquire wealth or to gain good crops, she was later identified with her cousin Artemis. According to some versions, Hecate was one aspect of the triple-formed Artemis, who was Selene, the moon-goddess, in the sky, Artemis on earth, and Hecate in the underworld.

Finally, she became a goddess of the lower world, of witchcraft, ghosts, magic and necromancy. She was especially worshiped at crossroads, since these were associated with magic. She appears briefly with the Weird Sisters in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and today represents the spirit of ancient witchcraft.

**Hector.** In the *Iliad*, the oldest son of Priam and Hecuba, husband of Andromache, the father of Astyanax. Hector typifies the greatest virtues of the code of the ancient warrior, preferring death to dishonor, but he also possesses the most outstanding human virtues: compassion, affection, loyalty, piety, devotion to family and parents. While Achilles is sulking in his tent, Hector fights with the greatest of the other Greek warriors and carries the fighting to the Greek ships. Finally he kills Patroclus, the dear friend of Achilles, and strips him of Achilles' armor. Achilles then comes out to fight and drives the Trojans back behind their walls, but Hector remains to fight Achilles alone. With the help of Athena, Achilles mortally wounds Hector, drags his body around the walls of Troy and denies it burial. Finally, the gods intervene to cause Achilles to allow the body to be buried. As the *Iliad* began with the wrath of Achilles, the Greek hero, it ends with the funeral of Hector, the Trojan hero. See also: Trojan War.

**Hecuba.** Wife of Priam, king of Troy, and mother of many children, among them Hector, Paris, Cassandra, Polyxena, Polydorus. In the *Iliad*, she witnesses one sad scene after another as so many of her sons are slain, culminating with the killing of Hector by Achilles and the desecration of his body. When Troy is taken, Hecuba falls by lot to Odysseus. The grief and despair she feels over her own fate are exacerbated by the news of the sacrifice of her daughter Polyxena on the tomb of Achilles. To pile sorrow on sorrow, she has to prepare for burial and broken body of her little grandson Astyanax, son of Hector and Andromache, whom the Greeks have just killed. All this is poignantly told in *The Trojan Women* (415 B.C.) by Euripides. Hecuba has become a symbol of intense grief and devastating misfortune. See also: Trojan War.

**Helen of Troy.** Daughter of Zeus by Lea (wife of Tyndareus), and sister of Clytemnestra, Castor and Pollux. Helen grew into the most beautiful woman in the world, and her many suitors agreed among themselves that whoever eventually married her would be defended by others. She married Menelaus, and when Paris carried her off to Troy, the Greek leaders organized the expedition against Troy. After the end of the Trojan War, Helen returned with Menelaus to Sparta. Her name signifies the power of a woman's beauty to change the course of history. See also: Apple of Discord.

**Helicon.** A mountain in Boeotia, an ancient Greek district northwest of Athens, the dwelling place of the Muses; here flowed the Hippocrene, a spring that inspired poetry. Today a reference to poetic inspiration.

**Helios.** The Greek sun god (corresponds with the Roman Sol), the son of Hyperion.

**Hellas.** The Greek name for Greece after the time of the Homeric poems. The Greeks themselves were called Hellenes, though Homer refers to them as Achaeans. Greece comes

from the Latin word Graecia, which Romans formed from the name of the first tribe in Hellas with which they came into contact.

**Hellenic.** Adjective referring to the culture of Hellas, or Greece, from about the date of the First Olympiad, 776 B.C., to the death of Alexander the Great, 323 B.C. See also: Hellas.

**Hephaestus.** Known to the Romans as Vulcan, the god of the forge and the guardian of fire. Ugly, and also lame, he had a gentle and kind disposition, which was often taxed by the affairs of his wife, Aphrodite, goddess of love. He crafted the glorious armor of the gods, made Achilles' famous shield, and produced Zeus' thunderbolts and Artemis' arrows.

**Hera.** Called Juno by the Romans, daughter of Cronus and Rhea, sister and wife of Zeus, goddess of marriage, protectress of married women. She was the mother of Ares, Hebe, Hephaestus, and Eileithyia, a goddess of childbirth. Hera was one of the three goddesses who contended for the Golden Apple (see Apple of Discord) awarded to Aphrodite by the Judgment of Paris. A great part of her time and energy was spent in thwarting the amorous designs of Zeus or in wreaking vengeance upon the women he loved or their offspring (see Heracles). Most myths and ancient poems depict her as petty, jealous, wrathful and implacable.

**Heracles.** Known to the Romans as Hercules. Noted not only for his prodigious strength but also for his good nature and compassion, he has the longest list of exploits of any of the Greek heroes; in fact, many deeds that may have been accomplished by lesser heroes were later attributed to him. Heracles' feats began in the cradle, where he strangled two serpents that Hera, jealous of this child produced by the love of Zeus and the mortal Alcmena, sent to kill him. Hera's enmity followed him throughout his life. It brought on the madness which led him to kill his wife Megara and their children. On the advice of the Delphic Oracle, he then performed the celebrated Twelve Labors (see Labors of Heracles) to expiate his crime. After their completion, Heracles married Dejanira. How he met his death is told in the story of the "Shirt of Nessus." From the funeral pyre, his soul rose to take its place among the gods; a reconciliation was effected with Hera. He then married her daughter Hebe. For other incidents related to Heracles, see Argonauts; Alcestis. Heracles is the archetype of the powerful and fearless hero. The most frequent references are his twelve formidable labors ("herculean" tasks).

**Hermes.** Known as Mercury to the Romans; son of Zeus and Maia. As an infant, he fashioned a lyre out of tortoiseshell and stole the cattle of Apollo. Noted for his inventiveness, he also became the god of traders and thieves, the messenger of the gods, and conductor of souls to the lower world. In art, he is generally represented as a young god wearing a wide hat called a petasos, winded sandals (talaria), and carrying a wand with serpents twined about it (Caduceus).

**Hestia.** Goddess of the hearth and one of the twelve Olympian deities. See also: Olympians, The Twelve.

**Hippolyta (or Hippolyte).** Queen of the Amazons and, according to some myths, the mother of Hippolytus by Theseus. One of the twelve Labors of Heracles was to bring back the girdle of Hippolyta. In some versions, he killed her in order to get it, while in others she gave it to him willingly. In some myths, she is called Antiope, while in others the two are sisters.

**Hippolytus.** The son of Theseus and the Amazon queen Hippolyta (in some versions her name is Antiope), Hippolytus was a handsome and chaste youth dedicated to Artemis, virgin goddess of the hunt, and utterly indifferent to love. Phaedra, whom Theseus married after Hippolyta died, fell madly in love with the young man, but he spurned her advances. In despair, Phaedra hanged herself, claiming that Hippolytus had seduced her and so shamed her into committing suicide. Theseus cursed his son and called upon the sea god Poseidon to fulfill his curse. A sea monster rose up and frightened the horses of Hippolytus; the chariot overturned and the innocent young man died of his wounds.

**Hubris.** Overweening pride, arrogance or insolence which causes a man to violate the moral code of the gods and ultimately to challenge them directly. An example is Capaneus who saved himself from death in a raging storm by grasping a rock jutting out high on a cliff. Still hanging over the waters, he taunted Zeus with his skill and fortune; promptly the rock broke and Capaneus was dashed to death.

**Hydra.** A mythical beast with nine heads, one of which was immortal and the others possessed of the power to grow back as two when chopped off. Killing the Hydra was one of the Labors of Heracles. Today a very complex and troublesome situation, which presents fresh difficulties as soon as one element is resolved, might be described as hydra-headed.

**Hymen.** Also called Hymenaeus, son of Dionysos and Aphrodite, he is the god of marriage; represented as a handsome youth carrying a torch, and as leader of the wedding chorus and marriage feasts.

**Hyperion.** A Titan, son of Uranus and Gaea, husband of Thea, father of Helios, or the Sun, Selene, or the Moon, and Eos, or the Dawn. Homer also refers to Helios as Hyperion. Hyperion is often identified with the sun.

**Hypnos.** Also Somnos (in Roman mythology), god of sleep. Father of Morpheus, god of dreams.

**Icarus.** The son of Daedalus, who was provided with wings of wax and feathers by his father during their escape from the Labyrinth of Minos. He failed to heed his father's warning not to fly too near the sun, and fell to his death when the wax melted.

**Ichor.** A clear fluid, the blood of the gods.

**Ida, Mount.** (1) A mountain in Asia Minor noted as the scene for both the carrying off of Ganymede and the Judgment of Paris, also the place from which the gods watched the

battles around Troy. (2) A mountain in Crete where Zeus was said to have been born. See also: Trojan War.

**Iliad.** The great Greek epic poem by Homer, the first surviving piece of European literature, generally dated before 700 B.C.; from "Ilium," one of the names of Troy. Divided into 24 parts, called books, its basic themes are the Trojan War and the wrath of Achilles. The action covers 47 days of the tenth year of the war. Deeply offended because Agamemnon, leader of the Greeks, had taken the maiden Briseis from him Achilles withdrew from combat and "sulked" in his tent. Achilles reentered the fight to avenge the death of his bosom friend Patroclus, slain and stripped of his armor by Hector, the Trojan hero. Achilles slew Hector and dragged his body around the walls of Troy. Hector's father, the Trojan King Priam, aided by Hermes in disguise, gained permission from Achilles to have Hector's body buried. The *Iliad* ends on a quiet note with the funeral of Hector. An epic of battle and death, the *Iliad* is filled with the peculiar sadness and moments of compassion that only war can arouse. The action takes place on two levels, divine and human, with the gods taking part in the affairs of men and at times suffering with them.

**Iris.** Iris ("Rainbow") was goddess of the rainbow and messenger of the gods in the *Iliad*, and also in Virgil.

**Isis.** The principal goddess of ancient Egypt, an equal of her husband-brother Osiris and her son Horus. She is a fertility/nature goddess, and there are many mystery cults associated with her; in addition, she is the patron of mariners and the goddess of the moon. The cow is her sacred animal.

**Janus.** One of the oldest Roman deities, depicted with two faces, one facing forward, the other facing to the rear. He was thus a god of vigilance and wisdom, knowing the past and looking to the future. He was also the god of doors (Latin, *ianuae*) and came to be the god of exits and entrances or beginnings and endings. Originally, he was a god of light who opened the heavens at dawn and closed them at sunset. In time of peace, the doors to his temple were closed, but they were open in time of war. He is described by Virgil in the *Aeneid* (VII, 607 ff). Today, the reference is usually "two-faced" in the sense of deceitful or double-dealing.

**Jason.** The Greek hero, son of Aeson, king of Iolcus. His throne was usurped by his uncle Pelias, and Jason was sent into exile, where he was raised by the centaur Chiron (see Centaurs). When Jason returned to claim his throne, he was told by Pelias that he could have it in exchange for the Golden Fleece. Jason set out in the ship *Argo* with a number of other famous heroes (the Argonauts), and arrived at Colchis where the Fleece was kept by King Aetes. With the help of the king's sorceress daughter, Medea, who had fallen in love with him, Jason obtained the prize and returned to Greece. Jason thereafter became king of Corinth and had two children by Medea. Later, however, Jason cast off Medea to marry Glauce. Medea avenged herself by killing her successor and her own two children. She then fled to Athens. Jason is said to have become an outcast later in his life and to have been killed by the falling prow of his old ship.

**Jove.** From Latin Jovis, an older name of Jupiter (Jovis pater, "Father Jove") See Zeus. Invoked in the old-fashioned, mild expletive "By Jove!"

**Juggernaut.** (Jagganath). A Hindu god, thought to be the remover of sin. During one of his festivals, when his image is placed on a great car and drawn to the temple, many of his fanatical worshipers would supposedly cast themselves beneath its huge wheels in the hope of achieving heaven immediately. Hence "juggernaut" has come to mean some machine of war, or ritual practice, which crushes the people ruthlessly or, more loosely, any powerful, destructive force.

**Karma.** In Hindu and Buddhist thought, the sum total of one's actions and experiences in all previous earthly incarnations; it determines the nature of the next incarnation.

**Krishna.** One of the greatest of the Hindu gods, the deity of light, fire, storms, the heavens and the sun. One of the most popular Hindu gods, his cult experienced a resurgence in the 1960's and attracted many young American followers. See also: Shiva.

**Labors of Heracles.** (Hercules). Imposed on Heracles by his cousin, King Eurystheus of Tiryns, the Twelve Labors were: (1) the killing of the supposedly invulnerable Nemean lion (he choked it and tore off its skin with its own claws); (2) the slaying of the many-headed Lernean Hydra, the water-serpent, with the help of his nephew, Ioleus; (3) the capturing alive of the Erymanthean boar, accomplished by casting a net over it in a field of snow; (4) the capturing of the Sacred Hind of Arcadia, after a year's pursuit, only to release it when Artemis claimed it; (5) the destruction of the Stymphalian birds; (6) the cleaning of the Augean Stables; (7) the capture of the man-eating mares of Diomedes, the Thracian king; (8) the procuring of the girdle of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons; (9) the capture of the Cretan Bull; (10) the capture of the Oxen of Geryon, who lived far to the west; (11) the fetching of the Golden Apples of the Hesperides; (12) the most difficult labor, the removal of Cerberus from Hades. Heracles succeeded and then returned the dog to the Lower World. By extension, any near-impossible task or series of tasks. See also: Heracles.

**Labyrinth.** The building containing a maze which Daedalus constructed for King Minos of Crete as a place in which to confine the Minotaur. Each year, fourteen Athenian youths, sent as tribute for the murder in Athens of Androgeos, son of Minos, were offered up to the Minotaur in the Labyrinth. Today, "labyrinthine" signifies extremely intricate, tortuous.

**Laius.** King of the Greek city of Thebes, husband of Jocasta and father of Oedipus. Informed by the oracle that his newborn son Oedipus would kill him, Laius gave the child to a herdsman with instructions to put the child to death. However, the man took pity on the baby and left him on a mountain where a shepherd found him and raised him. When full-grown, Oedipus encountered his unknown father on the road, the two began to argue, and Oedipus killed Laius, thus fulfilling the oracle's prophecy.

**Laocoon.** Priest of Apollo at Troy during the Trojan War. Chosen by lot to act as priest of Neptune (Poseidon) because the Trojans had stoned the previous priest for alleged neglect of duty, Laocoon was making a sacrifice to the god at the shore when two immense snakes came out of the sea and strangled his two sons and Laocoon himself. The Trojans believed this was a punishment for his having committed prior sacrilege against the temple of Apollo. Part of the story is dramatically told by Virgil in Book II of the *Aeneid*. The large statue (made during the Hellenistic period) of Laocoon and his sons, now in the Vatican Museum, is a study in the expression of terror and agony. See also: Trojan Horse.

**Leda.** The wife of Tyndareus but loved by Zeus, who appeared to her in the form of a swan. The result of their union was Helen, who ultimately caused the Trojan War. Leda's other children were Castor and Pollux and Agamemnon's wife, Clytemnestra. See "Leda and the Swan" by W.B. Yeats.

**Lethe.** The river of forgetfulness, one of the rivers over which the dead shades traveled on their way to Hades.

**Lilith.** According to legend, the first wife of Adam, created equally with him, and banished from Eden after it was impossible for them to live in harmony. She was supposed to have borne him a flock of devils as children, and later was regarded as an evil spirit presiding over desolate places and especially dangerous to women in childbirth. She was associated with the screech owl in Isaiah 34:14. In the Middle Ages, she was one of the devil's temptresses, and these devilish associations cling to her name.

**Lotos-Eaters (Lotophagi).** On his homeward journey from Troy to Ithaca, Odysseus came to the land of the Lotos-Eaters, a people who ate of the sweet fruit of the lotus, or lotos (*Odyssey*, IX, 82-104). When some of the men whom he had sent to search out the land tasted this, they forgot to come back, lost all desire to return home, and had to be dragged back to the ships by force. The term lotus-eater is applied to a daydreamer, to a person who is oblivious of the world about him. Tennyson's poem "The Lotos-Eaters" (1833) is an enchanting study of this theme of detachment and disengagement from the world, based upon the episode in the *Odyssey*.

**Medea.** Enchantress, daughter of Aetes, king of Colchis; niece of Circe, she fell in love with Jason when he and the Argonauts came to Colchis in quest of the Golden Fleece. By her magical arts, she helped him attain it. She fled with the Argonauts, and while they were being pursued by her father, she cut up her brother Absyrtus, whom she had abducted, and threw his parts into the sea to delay her father's pursuit. When they reached Iolcos in Greece, she killed Pelias, Jason's uncle, who had sent him in search of the Fleece. Driven out



of Iolcos, Jason and Medea took refuge in Corinth. When Jason decided to abandon Medea and to marry Glauce, daughter of Creon, king of Corinth, Medea sent the princess a poisoned robe which brought about the death of Glauce and her father. Medea also slew the children that she had borne Jason and escaped to Athens under the protection of King Aegeus, father of Theseus. She tried to poison the latter, but her scheme was thwarted and she fled to Colchis. Today Medea is most often associated with vengefulness, jealousy and sorcery.

**Medusa.** One of the three Gorgons, the only one who was mortal, with appearance so terrible that everyone who looked upon her was turned to stone. In one version, Athena punished her for lying with Poseidon in Athena's temple by turning her hair into snakes. Medusa's head was cut off by Perseus, who presented it to Athena, and the goddess placed it in the center of her aegis (protective device) which she wore as a shield on her breastplate.

**Menelaus. King of Sparta.** The abduction of his wife, Helen (See Helen of Troy), provoked the Trojan War. Menelaus, who is mentioned frequently in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, fought in the war and eventually recovered Helen when the Greeks won.

**Mephistopheles.** In medieval demonology, one of the seven chief devils. In Goethe's *Faust*, the devil-figure who tempts Faust into concluding a pact with the forces of evil, then tries to lead him into perdition. He is famous for his wit, rationality, cynicism and earthly wisdom.

**Midas.** A legendary monarch of Phrygia in Asia Minor, who, in return for his hospitality to Silenus, was granted a wish. He wished that everything that he touched would turn to gold. However, when even his food turned to gold, he begged to have to gift withdrawn. He had to bathe in the Pactolus, in which gold was found thereafter. A person who is very successful in business, with whose involvement "everything turns to gold," is said to have the "Midas touch."

**Minotaur.** A fabulous monster (literally, Minos' Bull), half-man and half-bull, the Minotaur was the offspring of Pasiphae, the wife of Minos, the king of Crete. When Minos refused to sacrifice a bull the god Poseidon had given him, Poseidon punished him by making Pasiphae fall in love with it. The Minotaur was shut up in the Labyrinth built for Minos by Daedalus. In revenge for their killing one of his sons, Minos demanded that the Athenians send seven boys and seven girls every nine years (or, in some versions, every year) to be devoured by the Minotaur. On the third occasion, the Athenian hero, Theseus, volunteered to go and he succeeded in killing the monster.

**Mnemosyne.** Goddess of memory, a Titaness (see Titans), daughter of Uranus and Gaea, loved by Zeus to whom she bore the nine Muses.

**Morpheus.** The god of sleep and dreams. The word morphine (a narcotic painkiller made from opium) derives from the god's name.

**Mount Olympus.** The dwelling place of the Greek gods, in Thessaly, in northern Greece. Olympian in current usage means majestic and superior, with a suggestion of remoteness, serenely aloof and indifferent to man's fate.

**Muses.** The nine muses, the patron goddesses of man's intellectual and creative endeavors, were the daughters of Zeus and the goddess of memory, Mnemosyne. They were Clio, history; Calliope, epic poetry; Erato, love poetry; Euterpe, lyric poetry; Melpomene, tragedy; Polyhymnia, songs to the gods; Thalia, comedy; Terpsichore, the dance; Urania, astronomy. It was traditional for poets to invoke the muse or muses at the beginning of their works and either ask them for inspiration or attribute the creation of the work to them. The mountains of Helicon, Pierus, and Parnassus are associated with the muses. See also: Pierian Spring.

**Narcissus.** A beautiful youth who spurned the love of all others and became enamored of his own reflection in a pool of water. As he bent forward, fascinated by his own image and trying to embrace it, he fell and drowned in the pool. Hence "narcissism" has come to mean excessive self-love.

**Nemean lion.** The first Labor of Heracles was to kill the Nemean lion. When he found that the lion's skin could not be penetrated by arrows or hurt by his club, Heracles seized him and squeezed him to death.

**Nemesis.** The daughter of Erebus (hell) and Nyx (night) and the goddess of vengeance. A synonym for retribution. Commonly used today to refer to a persistent and unconquerable rival, enemy or stumbling block.

**Nepenthe.** From the Greek nepenthes, "driving away pain and sorrow." A drug described in the fourth book of the *Odyssey* as one that brings forgetfulness of every sorrow; hence, any agent that induces euphoric states and enables people to forget their pains and miseries.

**Nike.** In Greek, "victory." Statues of the goddess, Victory, were set up by the ancient Greeks to commemorate military victories. Two examples are especially noteworthy today: the Nike, or Winged Victory, of Samothrace, now in the Louvre; and a set of statues of Nike in various poses in the temple of Athena Nike on the Acropolis of Athens.

**Niobe.** Daughter of Tantalus and Dione, wife of Amphion (a son of Zeus), who boasted of her numerous offspring (varying in number from five to twenty according to legend). Niobe held herself superior to Leto, who had only two, Apollo and Artemis. The goddess Leto heard her and called upon her two children for vengeance. Apollo killed all of Niobe's sons, Artemis all her

daughters. Niobe fled to Mt. Siplyos in the land of her father in Asia Minor, where she was transformed into a rock. The most famous literary allusion to Niobe occurs in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (I, ii, 149): "Like, Niobe, all tears," which is Hamlet's description of his mother's behavior at his father's funeral.

**Nirvana.** In the Buddhist religion, the state in which the drives toward material wealth, earthly fame, and immortality are destroyed and the soul is released from the cycles of reincarnation; hence a state of blissfulness and enlightenment.

**Nymph.** Any of a large number of minor female deities associated with trees or water and represented as beautiful, eternally young maidens; generally they were attendants of the more powerful gods. They were not immortal, but were usually sprightly and friendly to human beings. Oceanids were associated with the sea; Nereids with salt and fresh water; Naiads with springs, rivers and lakes; Oreads with mountains; Napaiae with glens and dells; Alseids with groves; Dryads with forests and trees. Many nymphs became famous in their own right as, for example, Thetis, mother of Achilles.

**Odin.** The greatest of the Scandinavian gods (called Woden or Wotan by the Anglo-Saxons); god of wisdom, poetry, war and agriculture.

**Odysseus.** Hero of the *Odyssey*, son of Laertes, king of Ithaca. Also known as Ulysses, or by his Latin name, Ulixes. It was he who proposed that the unsuccessful suitors of Helen (see Helen of Troy) among whom were the most powerful men in Greece, should vow to protect Helen, whom he himself had wanted to marry before he married Penelope. This decision led to the Trojan War. Although he was involved in some of the battles of the Trojan War, he was noted more for his strategy and counsel. He was one of the three legates sent by Agamemnon to Achilles to settle the quarrel between that hero and the leader. He was also concealed in the Trojan Horse. For his adventures after the fall of Troy, see the *Odyssey*. After his return home to his wife Penelope and son Telemachus, who had waited for him for 10 years, Odysseus resumed his wanderings. To Homer, Odysseus was the "man of many wiles"; to some he was a schemer and a trickster; to others (like Robert and John Fitzgerald Kennedy in our time, whose favorite poem was Tennyson's "Ulysses"), he is the embodiment of the human mind at its best: courageous, able to overcome obstacles, inquiring, indomitable - "to strive to seek, to find and not to yield." See also: *Iliad*.

**Oedipus.** "Swell-foot" in Greek. Laius and Jocasta, king and queen of Thebes, were warned by an oracle that their son would kill his father. Therefore, at birth he was given to a shepherd to be left to die on Mt. Cithaeron; his hands and feet were bound and a nail driven into his feet. A shepherd of King Polybus of Corinth found the child and brought him to the king and his wife, Merope. Oedipus grew up thinking they were his real parents. When he heard one day that they were not, he went to Delphi to consult the oracle, where he was told that he was destined to kill his father and marry his mother. Persisting in his belief that the rulers of Corinth were his parents, he left that city. At the meeting of three roads near Delphi, he met Laius and, unaware of his identity, killed him in a quarrel. As a reward for solving the Riddle of the Sphinx, he was made king of Thebes. Oedipus married Jocasta and fathered four children by her: Antigone, Ismene, Eteocles and Polynices. A plague struck Thebes; to lift it, the oracle ordered that the murderer of Laius be

discovered and driven out. After Oedipus called in Teiresias, the blind seer to help, the evidence clearly pointed to Oedipus. Jocasta committed suicide; Oedipus put out his eyes and wandered from Thebes until he died in Colonus. His tragic story and the stories of some of his children are told in *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus* by Sophocles, and *Seven Against Thebes* by Aeschylus. See also: Oedipus Complex.

**Old Man of the Sea.** (1) In Homer's *Odyssey*, Proteus, capable of assuming any form, but obliged to tell the truth if he can be caught and held. (2) Nereus, a sea god. (3) In the *Arabian Nights*, the Old Man of the Sea is a frightful old man who fixes himself tightly on Sinbad's shoulders and will not let go, obliging Sinbad to carry the burden for many days before he gets the old man drunk and shakes him off. Evokes the title of Hemingway's novella *The Old Man and the Sea*.

**Olympic Games.** One of the four sacred festivals (the other three were the Pythian Games at Delphi, the Isthmian games at Corinth and the Nemean games at Nemea) of the ancient Greeks, held every fourth year in July on the plain of Olympia in Elis in honor of Zeus, and consisting of all types of sporting and athletic contests, beginning and ending with sacrifices to the gods. In modern times, the tradition was reestablished in 1896, with games held every four years since then, excepting the years of the World Wars.

**Omphalos.** Literally "navel." In the mythology of ancient Greece, the oval-shaped stone in the temple of Apollo at Delphi marking the exact center of the world. Hence, source, mystical center. See also: Delphic Oracle.

**Oracles.** In ancient Greece, the pronouncements made by a priest or priestess and supposed to be the reply of a god to some inquiry made by a mortal; or the sacred shrine where such a pronouncement was made. The oracle of Apollo at Delphi (see Delphic Oracle), of Zeus at Dodona and of Asclepius at Epidaurus were the most renowned. Today, oracle signifies an authoritative or infallible utterance, with the suggestion of divine inspiration.

**Orestes.** The son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, and brother of Iphigenia and Electra. After Agamemnon's departure for Troy, his mother took Aegisthus as her lover and sent Orestes into exile. On reaching manhood, Orestes returned and killed the adulterers to avenge his father's murder. Pursued then by the Furies (see Erinyes) as a murderer, he was eventually exonerated by the gods and ascended his father's throne. Subsequently, as one legend reports, he married Hermione, daughter of Menelaus and Helen, and lived to a very old age.

**Orion.** The hunter of Greek mythology, in some legends the companion of Artemis and in others slain by her. After his death, he took his place in heaven as one of the constellations.

**Orpheus.** The master musician and lyre-player, son of Apollo and Calliope, whose music had almost magical properties, able to tame wild beasts and reconcile contending parties. His wife Eurydice was killed by a snake and Orpheus resolved to journey to Hades and convince the King of the Dead to allow her to go back with him to the upper earth. Hades consented on condition that Orpheus not look at her while he led the ascent; Orpheus violated the condition as he was emerging into the light and Eurydice fell back into Hades.

Orpheus was subsequently dismembered by the Furies (see Erinyes), and ascended the heavens as a god, his lyre becoming the constellation Lyra. Today orphic signifies occult, oracular. See also: Orphic Mysteries.

**Osiris.** One of the chief gods of ancient Egypt, forming a trinity with his wife-sister Isis and son Horus; originally a wise king who spread civilization throughout Egypt and other parts of the world. He married his sister, Isis, who ruled in his place while he traveled over the world. Upon his return, Set, his evil brother, had him murdered but Isis restored him to life through magic arts. Osiris, "The Good One," and Set represent the forces of good and evil, night and day, in conflict.

**Pallas Athena (Athene).** Pallas is part of the full, formal name of Athena. See Athena.

**Pan.** Called Faunus by the Romans; the Greed god of nature, fertility, forests, wild animals, and of shepherds and their flocks. He invented the syrinx, a flute of seven reeds. Depicted as half-man and half-goat, he was very playful and lecherous.

**Pandora.** According to Hesiod, the first mortal woman, created out of clay by Hephaestus at Zeus' order to punish Prometheus for creating and helping man. The punishment was to be the releasing of all manner of evil into man's world. All the gods participated in clothing and adorning her and giving her charms and skills, both for good and evil practices. Hence, her name, Pandora, from Greek pan, "all," and dora, "gifts." She was sent down to Epimetheus, who readily accepted and married her, in spite of the warning of his brother Prometheus, who had advised him not to accept any gift from the gods. Pandora carried with her a jar (or box) containing all types of illness and evil but also Hope, which alone was tightly sealed at the bottom. She opened the jar allowing all the troubles that have plagued mankind ever since to escape. Only Hope remains. Today a Pandora's box is a source of unexpected and ever-increasing trouble.

**Pantheon.** A temple devoted to all the gods (from Greek, pan, "all," theon, "of the gods"); specifically, the Roman domed edifice built by Hadrian from 120 to 124 A.D. and incorporating the porch of a structure built by Agrippa in 27 B.C. It became a church in 609 A.D., and is still standing. The word pantheon often means a selected group of eminent individuals, such as those honored in a hall of fame.

**Paris.** Son of Priam and Hecuba, also known as Alexandros. Because of a prophecy that he would be the cause of Troy's ruin, he was exposed to the elements but was found by a shepherd. While taking care of sheep on Mt. Ida, he was approached by Hera, Aphrodite and Athena to render a decision in the famous Judgment of Paris. For choosing Aphrodite, he was rewarded with the most beautiful woman in the world – Helen (see Helen of Troy). Although he was in love with a nymph named Oenone, he went off to Sparta to take Helen away with him to Troy. In the Trojan War, Paris was rather lackadaisical, priding himself more on his beauty than on his valor, and angering both Helen and Priam by his irresponsibility. However, he is supposed to have shot down the arrow that killed Achilles. He himself was wounded by Philoctetes with one of the arrows that had once belonged to

Heracles. Paris returned to Oenone begging her to heal his wound but she refused and then took her own life. See also: Apple of Discord.

**Parnassus.** The mountain in Greece consecrated to Apollo and the nine Muses; hence, the home of poetry and music.

**Pasiphae.** The wife of Minos, legendary ruler of Crete. As punishment for Minos' refusal to sacrifice a white bull, the god Poseidon made Pasiphae fall in love with the bull. Their union produced the Minotaur, a monster half-man and half-bull. The Minotaur was confined in the Labyrinth at Cnossos on Crete.

**Patroclus.** Bosom friend of Achilles, beside whom he fought in the Trojan War. When the Trojan hero Hector killed Patroclus, Achilles left off sulking in his tent and returned to battle in order to avenge his beloved friend by slaying Hector. The friendship of Achilles and Patroclus is proverbial.

**Pegasus.** The winged horse that arose from the blood of Medusa when Perseus cut her head off. Helped by Athena, Bellerophon caught Pegasus, mounted him and thus killed the Chimaera. Trying to ascend to heaven on Pegasus, Bellerophon fell to earth and was lamed, but the horse continued to rise and became a constellation. Because of the association of the winged horse with the Muses (supposedly the Hippocrene spring arose on Mt. Helicon, where the Muses dwelled, at the touch of Pegasus' hoof), "to mount Pegasus" means to do creative or inspired work.

**Pelops.** Son of Tantalus, king of Lydia. To test the gods, Tantalus killed his son Pelops, carved him up and served him at a banquet to which the gods were invited. The gods were not fooled: Pelops was restored to life (missing his shoulder, replaced with ivory, that Demeter consumed) and Tantalus punished with a horrid torture in hell. Pelops lived on to become king in Elis and to father Atreus and Thyestes. The "ivory shoulder of Pelops" is a person's distinguishing characteristic.

**Penelope.** The wife of Odysseus and mother of Telemachus who waited for her husband ten years while he fought in the Trojan War and ten more while he journeyed home. She resisted the amorous overtures of over 100 suitors. When the suitors became insistent, she agreed to marry one once she had finished weaving a shroud for Odysseus' father. Each day she wove, and each night unwove that day's work. Penelope is the prototype of faithfulness, loyalty and steadfastness. Penelope's weaving is a metaphor for an endless task.

**Persephone.** Also known as Kore, "The Maiden," and called Proserpina (Proserpine) by the Romans. Daughter of Zeus and Demeter, abducted by Hades to be his queen in the Lower World; Demeter wandered grief-stricken over the earth in search of her daughter until Zeus made an effort to have Persephone restored to her. However, while in the Lower World, Persephone had eaten some seeds of a pomegranate, which bound her there forever. Nevertheless, a compromise was worked out by which Persephone had to remain in the Lower World part of the year but could go back to the earth the rest of the year. This

alternation of dwelling below the earth and upon it is a form of nature myth symbolizing the cycle of seasons.

**Perseus.** The son of Zeus; a model Greek hero. He killed the Gorgon, Medusa, punished Atlas by transforming him into a mountain, rescued Andromeda, won her for his wife and remained faithful to her. He rescued his mother from the base desires of Polydectes, whom he also transformed into stone, conferring his throne on the fisherman Dictys. Perseus ruled well on the throne of Argos and Tiryns and founded Mycenae.

**Phaeton.** Son of Apollo and Clymene. His reckless driving of the chariot of the sun posed a threat to heaven and earth. Zeus killed him with a thunderbolt.

**Phoebe.** A female Titan, the mother of Leto, with whom Zeus fathered Apollo and Artemis. The first moon goddess, her name passed on to Artemis and, in the form phoebus (meaning “shining one”), became one of the epithets of Apollo. In literary allusion, Phoebe signifies the moon.

**Phoebus.** Literally, “bright.” Another name for Apollo, the sun god.

**Phoenix.** (1) The great bird of myth, said to consume itself in flames every 500 years and rise to another life out of its own ashes. The mythical bird is thus a symbol of resurrection. (2) The old man who serves as mentor to Achilles in Homer’s *Iliad*.

**Pleiades.** The seven daughters of Atlas and Pleione. When they were pursued by Orion, Zeus decided to help them outrun him, since three had been his mistresses. They became a constellation fixed in the heavens, although only six stars are visible because one would not show herself for shame at having married a mortal man.

**Polyhymnia.** Muse of sacred hymns and songs. See: the Muses.

**Polyphemus.** The Cyclops (see Cyclopes) who imprisoned Odysseus and his men in his cave and devoured two at each meal. Odysseus blinded him and escaped with his remaining men tied beneath the bellies of Polyphemus’ sheep.

**Pomona.** The goddess of fruit trees and bride of Vertumnus, the god of seasons.

**Poseidon.** The god of the sea, one of Greece’s Twelve Olympian gods (see Olympians, The Twelve), son of Cronos and Rhea, and brother of Zeus and Hades. His symbol was the trident, his gift to man was the horse. In Homer he is given the epithet “earthshaker,” as god of earthquakes. He competed unsuccessfully with Athena for dominion of Attica, and with Hera for Argos.

**Prometheus.** The son of the Titans Iapetus and Clymene; his name means “forethought.” He is the brother of Atlas, Menoetius and Epimetheus (“afterthought”). Superior to all the gods in guile and fraud, he is famous for having stolen fire from the heavens and given it to

man. He was punished by Zeus by being chained to a rock and having his liver chewed daily by a vulture for 30 years until he was freed by Heracles. He refused Zeus' gift of a bride, Pandora. In addition to giving man fire, Prometheus reportedly fashioned the first mortals from clay, and taught them to raise plants and use them for medicines, to cultivate the land, and to tame horses. He also invented numbers. Prometheus is cited in allusions for his inventiveness, his shrewdness and for the sufferings his genius brought him. "Promethean" means daringly creative and original.

*Proserpina*. Roman name for Greece's Persephone, goddess of the underworld. Called Proserpine in English.

**Proteus**. A lesser sea god, son of Oceanus and Tethys, to whom Poseidon gave the power to utter the truth and the ability to change his form. "Protean" means changeable, versatile, able to assume many roles.

**Psyche**. A mortal girl loved by Eros, the god of love, who visited her each night on condition that she not ask his name or look on his face. One night Psyche lit a lamp and saw the god asleep; he awoke and fled, leaving Psyche at the mercy of his mother, Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Psyche wandered long in search of Eros, and eventually she was united with him and made immortal. She has since come to symbolize the human soul.

**Pygmalion**. A youthful sculptor who spurned the love of all women, thereby incurring the wrath of Aphrodite. To satisfy his own demand for ideal beauty, he created a perfect woman in marble, naming her Galatea. Then Aphrodite had her revenge, making Pygmalion fall in love with the statue which could not return his love. In this one instance, however, Aphrodite relented, and transformed the statue into a woman of flesh and blood. Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, and the popular musical comedy based on it, *My Fair Lady*, are modern adaptations of the legend. Pygmalion's myth is a cautionary tale about how the pursuit of ideal beauty may ultimately destroy all feeling in the artist, enslaving him to an ever colder and more lifeless art.

**Pyramus and Thisbe**. Lovers whose parents opposed their meeting. Consequently, they agreed to a tryst in an outlying district. Thisbe, arriving first, was attacked by a lion. She fled and dropped her scarf, which the lion, having just eaten some animal, bloodied with his mouth. When Pyramus arrived and saw the bloody scarf, he thought that Thisbe was dead, so he killed himself. Thisbe returned, saw the body of her lover, and killed herself. The most popular version of the story is the hilarious play presented by the artisans in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595).

**Ra**. Originally the supreme deity of Egypt, god of the sun, creator of the first universe. When he grew old, men rebelled against him and with the result that he became bitter at their ingratitude and retired to the heavens. He was represented in many forms, notably



with the head of a hawk above which there was a disk. After about 2750 B.C., Ra was especially worshiped by the Pharaohs, who called themselves, "Sons of Ra."

**Rhea.** One of the 12 Titans, goddess of the earth and fertility and wife of Cronos, to whom she bore Zeus, Hera, Demeter, Hades, Poseidon and Hestia. Because of a prophecy that his children would dethrone him, Cronos devoured each of them at birth. Rhea, however, tricked him when Zeus was born, presenting him with a stone swaddled like a baby. Zeus escaped, fulfilled the prophecy, overthrew his father and became the chief deity, head of the Olympian gods. See also: Olympians, The Twelve.

**The Riddle of the Sphinx.** After unknowingly killing his own father, Oedipus encounters the Sphinx at the gates of Thebes. She has the city completely cut off, stopping all who would enter and posing a riddle to them; the wrong answer brings their death, while the correct one would break the Sphinx's power. The riddle runs: What creature goes on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon and three in the evening? Oedipus' correct answer: "Man, who as a child crawls on all four, as a man walks on two legs, and as an old man hobbles leaning on a staff." This answer made Oedipus savior of the city and consort of the widowed Queen Jocasta, his mother.

**Romulus and Remus.** Legendary twins associated with the founding of Rome. In one myth they are the children of Mars and Rhea Silvia. Since their mother was a Vestal Virgin, the twins were supposed to be drowned, but they were rescued by divine intervention and suckled by a she-wolf. Later, Romulus killed Remus and went on to found Rome, name the city after himself and declare himself the first king. According to another myth, they were the offspring of Ilia, the daughter of Aeneas and Lavinia, his Latin bride.

**Sacred cow.** This expression is one of the very few to come into English from Hinduism. The origins of the cult of the cow are not known for certain; it was not introduced to India by the Aryan invaders, who were beef-eaters, and the edicts of Ashoka (third century B.C.) show that the slaughter of cows was not yet prohibited. Today however, the Hindu taboo against killing cows or eating beef is even more powerful than the Jewish and Moslem prohibition against eating pork. In American usage a sacred cow is anything – a creed, institution or person – so revered as to be beyond public criticism.

**Satyrs.** Lesser gods of the forest with bodies of men, legs and feet of goats, hair over all their bodies and short horns on their heads. Attendants of Dionysos, they represented the vital forces of nature, and were famous for their lust. Nowadays, satyr is another term for a lecher.

**Scylla and Charybdis.** Since Scylla was loved by Poseidon, Poseidon's jealous wife, Amphitrite, transformed her into a monster with dogs' heads. Her fixed habitation was a cave in the Strait of Messina. Opposite her was another monster, Charybdis, who lived on the Sicilian side of the strait. Charybdis, the daughter of Poseidon and Gaea, had been thrown into the sea and transformed into

a monster by Zeus. As a ship passed close to Scylla, she would pull the sailors up to devour them; if the ship avoided her, it would have to pass by Charybdis, which would suck up the sailors. Actually, Scylla was associated with the rocks and Charybdis with a whirlpool. Hence, the expression “between Scylla and Charybdis” means to find oneself between two dangers where escaping from one means falling prey to the other – or “out of the frying pan into the fire”; or “between the devil and the deep blue sea.”

**Selene.** A moon goddess, daughter of Hyperion. She fell in love with the beautiful shepherd boy Endymion, who was plunged into a perpetual sleep so that she might come to him always in his dreams.

**Shiva.** The third member of the Hindu Trimurti, along with Vishnu and Brahma. In this trinity, Shiva is the destroyer, a terrible creature depicted with numerous arms and three eyes, surrounded by snakes and the skulls of the dead and followed by demons.

**Sibyls.** Prophetesses whose origin was ascribed to the East. Their number was variously given as from four to ten. Some, like the Delphic (see Delphic Oracle) and the Cumaean Sibyl, were inspired priestesses of Apollo. One of the best-known is the Cumaean Sibyl, who guided Aeneas through the Lower World. The Sibylline Books played an important role in Roman history. Michelangelo incorporated famous painting of the Libyan, Delphic, Cumaean, Persian, and Erythraean Sibyls into his magnificent fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican.

**Silenus** (plural: Sileni or Silenoi). Minor Greek gods of the forest, the Sileni were often confused with the Satyrs but were depicted as older, were shown with horse’s ears, sometimes with the tail and legs of a horse. Though they lacked the Satyrs’ reputation for lechery, they were almost constantly intoxicated. They had, however, a reputation for wisdom and prophecy.

**Sirens.** In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the sea goddesses who lured sailors to destruction on the rocks with their enchanting, irresistible song. Odysseus and his men pass them safely because only Odysseus, chained to the mast, can hear them, while his men have their ears plugged. Today a seductive and beguiling woman may be called a siren.

**Sisphyus, Burden or labor of.** For a variety of misdeeds on earth Sisyphus, king of Corinth, was punished in Tartarus by being compelled to roll a huge stone up a hill. No sooner had he pushed it to the summit than it rolled down again. Thus Sisyphus’s labor never ended. Hence, a ceaseless and fruitless task that must be repeated is called a burden or labor of Sisyphus or a Sisyphean task.

**Sphinx.** In Greek, “strangler,” a monster with the body of a lion, wings, and the breasts and face of a woman. The best-known Sphinx of Greek mythology is the one that beset Thebes

and propounded a riddle to all whom she met. Death was the penalty for those who failed to solve it. See: Riddle of the Sphinx. After Oedipus answered the riddle correctly, the Sphinx, mortified, killed herself. The Egyptian Sphinx, famous in the colossal statue of Gizeh, preceded the Greek version. Egyptian statues show the Sphinx in a recumbent position, wingless, with the face of a man (sometimes the pharaoh) and the body of a lion. Today a person given to enigmatic pronouncements might be called a sphinx.

**Styx.** The river which flows around Hades. The dead are ferried across the river by the boatman Charon. "Stygian" thus denotes darkness and dread.

**Symplegades.** Two dangerous rocks ("clashing rocks, clashing cliffs") guarding the entrance to the Black Sea. They crushed ships passing between them by moving together. The Argonauts lost only one rudder when they sailed through these rocks. Legend has it that after the Argonauts' successful pass-through, the Symplegades merged to a solid rock.

**Tartarus.** A region of the underworld, where Zeus imprisoned the Titans and sent the worst of sinners for punishment; a place darker than night, surrounded by three walls and the river of fire, Phlegethon. The name was also used poetically for the Lower World as a whole. See also: Hades.

**Teiresias.** Blind prophet who plays a role in a number of Greek myths, and literary works, most notably in *Oedipus Tyrannos* of Sophocles. According to one legend, Teiresias had been both a man and a woman, and because of this Zeus and Hera called upon him to settle a dispute over whether men or women experience greater pleasure in love-making. Teiresias said that sex is nine times more pleasurable for a woman, an answer that so angered Hera (who had been insisting that men enjoy sex more) that she struck him blind. To make up for this misfortune, Zeus bestowed on Teiresias the gift of prophecy.

**Thanatos.** Greek personification of death.

**Theseus.** Son of Aegeus, king of Athens, and Aethra. Aegeus had placed his wife and young son in Troezen in Argolis, the birthplace of Aethra, and had imposed a test of strength on him. Theseus was supposed to lift a great rock, remove from under it a sword and sandals (see Arthur) and carry them to Athens. He succeeded. On his way to Athens by land he had many adventures, among them the encounter with Procrustes. In Athens he encountered Medea, killed the bull that Heracles had brought from Crete (see Cretan Bull) and that was laying waste to Marathon. He volunteered to go to Crete to kill the Minotaur and thus end the yearly tribute of 14 young men and women exacted by King Minos as punishment for the murder of his son Androgeus in Athens. Theseus had promised his father to hoist white sails as a sign of his safe return from Crete, but he forgot and Aegeus drowned himself in grief when he saw the black sails. (The Aegean Sea is named for him.) Theseus then succeeded his father as king of Athens. He fought against the Amazons and married Hippolyta, who bore him a son, Hippolytus; then he sent her away and married Phaedra, sister of Ariadne. See also: Daedalus; Labyrinth; Pasiphae.

**Thor.** Also known as Donar (“Thunder”) in the Old German, God of thunder, often considered a god of war. In some areas of the Teutonic world he was held to be a son of Odin, in others, Odin’s equal or superior. He was more renowned for his physical feats than for his mental dexterity. He often left his large palace on Asgard to roam over the world, frequently accompanied by Loki, who supplied schemes and advice. Thor possessed a number of magic objects, a hammer, a pair of iron gloves with which to hold the hammer, and a magic girdle that renewed his strength. A long list of exploits was ascribed to him, especially encounters with giants and monsters. Once, his hammer was stolen as he slept. Loki discovered that the giant Thrym had stolen it and concealed it and would return it only if he could have Freya as his wife. Loki persuaded Thor to disguise himself as Freya, go through a long pre-nuptial ceremony, and thus recover the hammer as a customary gift before the wedding. Then, Thor killed Thrym and his fellow-giants. On another occasion, Thor fought with the huge serpent Midgard and forced the latter to take refuge under the sea. At “The Twilight of the Gods” (Ragnarok), Thor and Midgard, who will come up from the sea for the final battle, will meet in combat again. Thor will kill the serpent but himself will die from breathing the air that has been filled with poisonous fumes emitted by Midgard. Thursday and Donnerstag (German for “Thursday”) are named after Thor.

**Titans.** Children of Uranus and Gaea, the Titans, often called the Elder Gods, were deities of the early Greeks. They represent either primitive forces of nature or abstract qualities. Hesiod lists 12 as the original Titans: Six males, Cronos, Oceanus, Coeus, Iapetus, Hyperion, Crius; and six females, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne, Theia, Phoebe, Tethys. Later writers also placed some of the children of Titans among the Titans, e.g., Prometheus, son of Iapetus and Clymene, herself the daughter of Oceanus and Tethys. The Titans, with the exception of Oceanus, revolted against Uranus, deposed him, and made Cronos ruler of the world. Cronos married Rhea. Eventually, their children headed by Zeus and aided by the Giants and other divinities, fought for ten years against Cronos and almost all the Titans. The Titans were defeated and placed in Tartarus. Zeus then became ruler in place of Cronos, but by lot his brothers Poseidon and Hades received the power over the seas and the lower world respectively. The adjective “titanic” – of enormous size and power – is a reminder of the Titan’s role in Greek mythology.

**Trimurti.** Trimurti, which literally means three shapes, refers to the three forms taken by the godhead in Hindu mythology: Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer.

**Tristram (or Tristan) and Isolde (or Iseult or Isoude).** Tristram, a knight who lived at the time of the Round Table, fell passionately in love with Isolde, the daughter of the king of Ireland, but was bound by oath to obtain her hand for his uncle, King Mark of Cornwall. Mark and Isolde were married, but Tristram and Isolde continued to love one another with a hopeless love. Tristram summoned Isolde to his deathbed, instructing the messenger to hoist white sails if she consented to come and black sails if she refused. Isolde came, but Tristram was lied to and died

when he heard the sails were black. Isolde collapsed and died when she saw the dead Tristram, and the lovers were buried side by side. Theirs is one of the great loves of Western literature and the subject of numerous legends and stories.

**Troilus and Cressida.** In Homer's *Iliad* Troilus is a son of Priam and Hecuba. He is killed by Achilles during the Trojan War. The story of Troilus and Cressida stems from Latin works of the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. and from medieval writers. It was developed by many authors, notably by Chaucer in *Troilus and Crieseyde* (c. 1385), a verse romance, and by Shakespeare in the play *Troilus and Cressida* (c. 1609). In the Shakespearean play, Cressida is the daughter of Calchas, a Trojan priest who has defected to the Greeks (in mythology, he is a Greek). She and Troilus are in love (the corrupt Pandarus acts as their go-between) but are separated when the Trojans agree to give Calchas his daughter in return for three Trojans held as captives by Diomedes. Though they have exchanged pledges and tokens of eternal love and vows of constancy, Cressida soon forgets her promises and falls in love with Diomedes. Her name has become a byword for fickleness.

**Trojan Horse.** In the tenth year of the Trojan War, despairing of taking the city by storm, the Greeks resorted to a stratagem. They had an artisan fashion a huge wooden horse, inside which armed men were concealed. The fleet then sailed away, ostensibly for Greece but actually to an island nearby. As told by Virgil (*Aeneid*, II) they left behind a pretended deserter named Sinon who convinced the Trojans that the horse was an offering to the goddess Athena to expiate the sins they had committed against her and that, if it were taken into the city, Troy would be safe. The Trojans had to make a breach in the walls to get the huge horse into the city, and at night Sinon released the men, who then sacked and burned the city. In the meantime, the fleet had returned. The expression "Trojan horse" means a gift or offering made to worm one's way into the confidence of another and then to harm the recipient.

**Uranus.** Personification of the heavens. Gaea (the Earth), emerging from primal chaos, produced Uranus and then coupled with him to produce, among others, the Titans. Cronos, a Titan, separated heaven from earth. Uranus is also the name given to one of the planets in the solar system.

**Valhalla.** The banqueting hall of the Norse gods, where fallen warriors went after death. Hence, a kind of heaven.

**Vedas.** The most ancient of the Hindu sacred texts. See also: Upanishads.

**Vestal virgins.** The virgins chosen to serve in the temple of Vesta (Hesta). Their training began before age 10 and lasted 10 years; their actual service in the temple lasted for another 10, and instruction of new vestals for 10 more. The virgins, sworn to purity, had the primary duty of keeping the sacred fire of the goddess burning on the altar. Grave penalties were imposed on the vestals if they broke their vows, and equally grave ones on anyone who insulted them. Today, often used ironically for questionably virtuous female characters.

**Vulcan.** The Roman name for the Greek god Hephaestus.

**Zephyrus.** The god of the west wind; also the wind itself.

**Zeus.** The most powerful god of the Greeks, ruler of the heavens. Identified with Jupiter (hence Jove) by the Romans. Son of Cronos and Rhea, brother of Hades, Poseidon, Demeter, Hera and Hestia, and husband of Hera. He and his brothers overthrew their father and divided the world by lot, Zeus gaining the heavens and upper world. With the help of the Giants and Prometheus, Zeus conquered the Titans. Zeus was the supreme ruler of the gods but could not overrule the Fates nor could he always dictate to Hades or Poseidon. Within these limits, he presided over the destinies of man, was looked upon as the giver of laws, the dispenser of justice, the father of gods and men. He was the wielder of the thunderbolt, the hurler of lightning, wore the aegis (the shield bearing the head of the Gorgon), and carried the scepter; his favorite bird was the eagle. Before (and after) he married Hera, Zeus had many amorous adventures. Hence his name stands for a kind of legendary master of amours, as well as the mythological father of gods and men. Phidias' statue of Zeus was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.