

Literary Allusions

Aesop. Traditionally the famous writer of fables, mainly about animals. Aesop's fables were not actually written by him: He either collected existing fables or else he wrote them in prose. Today Aesopian fables like that of the fox and the sour grapes are referred to in order to illustrate a universal truth.

Aladdin. The hero of one of the tales of the *Arabian Nights*. Aladdin gets hold of a magic lamp that contains a genie (a spirit in Islamic mythology, also known as a jinn) who will do Aladdin's bidding. Through the genie, Aladdin amasses great wealth and in the end marries the sultan's daughter. Aladdin's lamp is symbolic of any vehicle that will bring instant power and fortune.

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.

Anthony, Mark. Protagonist of Shakespeare's tragedy *Antony and Cleopatra* and Roman general and member of the Roman Triumvirate with Octavian and Lepidus (82-30 B.C.). When the Triumvirate divided Rome's territories, Antony took the eastern provinces. He married Cleopatra and their combined forces lost to those of Octavian at the Battle of Actium (31 B.C.). Shakespeare drew on the events of Antony's final years. In the play, Antony, by pursuing his great love for Cleopatra, causes his worldly fortunes as general and triumvir to deteriorate. He finally commits suicide after his crushing defeat at Actium. He is also known for his funeral oratory to Caesar in *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* by Shakespeare.

Ariel. The sprite of the air who serves Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Ariel can become invisible at will. He embodies the lightness, illumination and spirituality which Prospero employs as principles of his good magic against the brutish evil and ignorance of Caliban. As Prospero had bound him in his service after freeing him from imprisonment by the witch Sycorax, so also does Prospero free him when renouncing his magic at the end of the play. Synonymous with the spirit of lightness and magic

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.

Beelzebub. Literally “the lord of the flies,” the prince of devils, and generally one of Satan’s closest chiefs. He is mentioned in Matthew 10:25, 12:24-27; Mark 3:22, Luke 11:17-19 and figures prominently in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. *Lord of the Flies* is a novel by William Golding.

Brave new world. In Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, Prospero’s daughter Miranda, who has been brought up in isolation on an island, proclaims the words “O brave new world/That has such people in’t” (Act V, 1:182-3), on seeing the persons whom her father has assembled on the island and on whom he has practiced his magic during the play. Aldous Huxley used the phrase ironically as the title of his dystopian novel *Brave New World* (1932). Current usage is generally ironic, referring to the sterile uniformity and bureaucratization of modern life.

Bumppo, Natty. The brave, loyal, “natural man” protagonist of James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823-41), he remains an outcast from white society, preferring the life of the forest and trail. The archetypal frontiersman.

Bunyan, Paul. American folk hero, a lumberman of fantastically huge proportions who figures in all the tall tales of James Stevens

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.

Camelot. In Arthurian legend, the site of King Arthur’s court. By extension, any center of power where youth and beauty hold sway and the arts flourish. The news media dubbed Washington, D.C., Camelot during President Kennedy’s era.

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.

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 which 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.

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.

Creon. (1) Brother of Jocasta (wife of Oedipus) and uncle of Antigone, Eteocles and Polyneices. He was twice king of Thebes. He appears in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*. (2) King of Corinth, father of Glauce. When Jason cast off Medea to marry Glauce, Medea brought about the deaths of both Creon and Glauce.

Crossing the Rubicon. In 49 B.C. Julius Caesar, under ban of Rome, returned from his province of Cisalpine Gaul and precipitated a civil war. The fateful, irrevocable decision to

march against Pompey was made at the Rubicon, a small river separating the province from Italy. Caesar crossed uttering the words, "Jacta alea est" – "The die is cast." Today it means a fateful decision, or a decision from which there is no turning back.

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

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.

Desdemona. In Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604), the gentle-born daughter of a Venetian senator who falls in love with and marries Othello, a Moorish general who is serving in Venice. The treacherous Iago convinces Othello that Desdemona is carrying on an adulterous affair. Though as innocent as she is pure of heart, Desdemona falls into a trap set by Iago. At the play's end, Othello, maddened by mistaken jealousy, murders her.

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.

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."

Don Juan. Don Juan Tenorio, son of a prominent 14th century family in Seville, had a reputation for seducing women. He killed the commander of Ulloa after seducing his daughter, and was eventually lured into a Franciscan monastery, where the monks killed him. His life provided the model for the Don Juan legend, utilized by Mozart in his opera *Don Giovanni*, by Byron in his poem *Don Juan*, and by George Bernard Shaw in his "Don Juan in Hell," part of *Man and Superman*. Today used, like Cananova and Lothario, for a man who pursues amorous adventures with many women.

Don Quixote. The hero of Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), who as an old man sets out to accomplish the ideals of knight-errantry. In a suit of armor and accompanied by his

pragmatic squire, Sancho Panza, he experiences a series of sometimes humorous, sometimes comic and sometimes tragic adventures, through all of which he upholds his fervent idealism in the face of the corruptions and brutality of the world about him. Quixotic, derived from his name, means visionary, extravagantly romantic and impractical. See also: Dulcinea Del Toboso; Panza, Sancho.

East of Eden. The place to which Cain was exiled after he killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4:16). John Steinbeck used the phrase as the title for a novel about conflict between brothers. See also: Cain and Abel.

Electra. Daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, and sister of Orestes, whom she had sent away for his safety when Clytemnestra and Aegisthus killed Agamemnon on his return from Troy. Years later, when Orestes and his friend Pylades returned, Electra, filled with hatred for her mother, persuaded him to kill their mother and her lover. Electra later married Pylades. The story of Electra has been told by all three of the great Greek writers of tragedy: by Aeschylus in the *Libation Bearers* (second play of the trilogy, the *Oresteia*); by Sophocles in his *Electra*; and by Euripides in his play of the same name. Hofmannsthal's libretto of Richard Strauss' powerful, violent opera *Electra* (1909) is based on the play by Sophocles. The term "Electra complex" used in Freudian psychoanalysis refers to erotic attachment of a daughter to her father; it is the female counterpart of the "Oedipus complex."

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.

Excalibur. In Arthurian legend, the sword which was embedded in a stone in a churchyard. Excalibur could be withdrawn only by the rightful king of England. Young Arthur was recognized as heir of Uther Pendragon and king when he pulled the sword from the stone.

Fata Morgana. Italian, for "fairy image," also known as Morgan Le Fay, a female fairy in medieval chivalric tales and Arthurian legend; usually controlled by the Demogorgon and involved in various nefarious and treacherous activities. The Fata Morgana is also a mirage seen in the sea or in the air above the sea, especially around the Straits of Messina where Morgan le Fay was reported to live.

Galahad, Sir. One of the Arthurian Knights of the Round Table, son of Sir Lancelot and Elaine, and the most pure and chaste of the knights. He is the rightful occupant of the Siege Perilous and reaches the Holy Grail. See also: Arthur.

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*.

Gawain. In Arthurian legend, one of the knights of the Round Table, a nephew of King Arthur. He is one of the original heroes of the Grail quest, and is described by medieval writers as "sage" and courteous." He is the hero of the great medieval poem "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight."

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 Vergil into the pit of lower Hell.

Godiva, Lady. The patroness of Coventry, England, who sought to have removed certain exactions that Leofric, Earl of Mercia, imposed on his tenants in 1040. According to legend, Leofric agreed to do so if Lady Godiva rode naked through the town at noon. She did so, and he kept his word. All the townspeople stayed indoors but a tailor peeped at her through a window and, in consequence, was blinded. See also: Peeping Tom.

Grail. (Holy Grail, Graal, Sanagraal). The Holy Grail figures prominently in Arthurian legend (see Arthur) as a sacred object. According to the most familiar version, it was a dish or cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper, in which Joseph of Arimathea later caught some of Jesus' blood at the Crucifixion. It was carried to Britain, but the world becoming too sinful for so holy a relic, it disappeared. From time to time, however, it manifested itself to a chosen few. The quest for the Grail occupied many of the knights of King Arthur's Round Table. The legend is known to English readers mainly in the accounts of Thomas Malory in the 15th century and Alfred Tennyson in the 19th. There are medieval French versions by Chretien de Troyes and others. The best known German treatments are by Wolfram von Eschenbach and Richard Wagner. In popular speech and allusion, the Grail still carries some suggestion of ancient religious awe. It often symbolizes any high ideal or object of a spiritual quest.

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 Leda (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.

Homer. Commonly accepted as the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, although for a long time various scholars argued that these were the works of different writers. No details of his life are known for certain. He is supposed to have been blind, and is often referred to as "The Blind Bard." It is not known where he was born, although tradition has it that he came from a city in Asia Minor, such as Smyrna, or from an Aegean island, such as Chios. His date has been fixed as anywhere from the ninth century B.C. down to the seventh. The epics of Homer, held in reverence in the classical age as in our own, formed the basis of the literary education of the ancient Greeks and contain a treasure house of Greek mythology. Today, "Homeric" carries the suggestion heroic, larger-than-life.

Iago. The villain and personification of evil in Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello* (1604). He incites Othello to such rages of unfounded jealousy against his wife, Desdemona, that eventually Othello kills her. Few characters in world literature rival Iago for pure malevolence.

Imogen. In Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (1609), Cymbeline's daughter. An incarnation of supreme virtue, she is faithful, forgiving, loyal, courageous and independent.

Jabberwock. A monster, resembling a dragon, described in Lewis Carroll's nonsense verse ballad "The Jabberwocky," in his *Through the Looking Glass* (1872).

Jekyll and Hyde personality. In Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the good Dr. Jekyll invents a drug which transforms him into the evil Mr. Hyde, along with an antidote which will return him to his better self. Ultimately, Mr. Hyde is driven to murder and when he is unable to make the antidote, he commits suicide. "Jekyll and Hyde" has come to refer to the "split" personality or someone who exhibits wildly contradictory character traits.

Jeptha's daughter. When Jeptha, judge of Israel, led the people against the invading Ammonites, he vowed to sacrifice to God, as the price of victory, the first creature who came to meet him on his return. This proved to be his daughter, his only child, but Jeptha kept his vow, after allowing her two months to go into the mountains to bewail the fact that she was dying a virgin (Judges 11:29-40). The theme of the rash promise is a common one in folklore, often with the detail added that the person making the vow expects to be greeted by his dog. Today, the story is remembered for its tragic quality, recalling the Greek legend of Iphigenia. Jeptha's daughter is also alluded to by Hamlet in *The Tragedy of Hamlet* as he speaks to Polonius about Ophelia.

Lady of the Lake. In Arthurian Legend she is Vivian or Viviane, the wily mistress of Merlin, living in an imaginary lake. She stole Lancelot in his infancy, raising him in her lake, and presented him in his manhood to King Arthur. The sword Excalibur was her gift to Arthur.

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 the poem "Leda and the Swan" by W.B. Yeats.

Limbo. The first circle of Dante's hell, in which the virtuous pagans are placed. They do not suffer torture, but have no hope of seeing God; hence, any inconclusive or indefinite condition or place.

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 Aeetes, 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.

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.

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*.

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. Sipylus 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.

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*.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Priam. The king of Troy, husband of Hecuba and father of Hector, Paris, Troilus (see Troilus and Cressida), Helenus, Deiphobus, Polydorus, Polyxena, Cassandra and others. In one of the greatest scenes in ancient literature, near the end of Homer's *Iliad*, he went to Achilles to ask for the body of his dead son Hector. He was slain by Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles, during the sack of Troy.

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).

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.

Round Table. King Arthur and his 150 knights sat around a table supposedly made round by the magician Merlin in order to prevent arguments about precedence from breaking out. One of the

major symbols of Arthurian legend the Round Table also refers generally to Arthur and his group of knights.

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."

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.

Sulk like Achilles in his tent. After Agamemnon had taken away Briseis, the girl who was Achilles' prize, Achilles retired to his tent and did not take part in the war against Troy until after his friend Patroclus was killed. The expressions "sulk like Achilles," "a sulking Achilles" or "sulk in his tent" are applied to anybody who withdraws from active participation in an undertaking because of a personal grievance, affront or insult. See also: Trojan War.

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.

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 made 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.

White Elephant. The sacred animal of Thailand, formerly Siam, is the white elephant. When the king wished to cause someone's ruin, he gave him a white elephant, which was very expensive and brought no profit. Hence a "white elephant" is an object, hobby or luxury ruinously expensive to maintain. See Hemingway's short story "Hills Like White Elephants."