

---

---

# CONTENTS

---

---

*List of Illustrations*.....XIII

Gods, Mortals and the Myths They Inhabit ..... 1

## THE GODS

1. Earth and Her Children..... 15

2. The Titans ..... 17

3. The Young Gods Rebel ..... 19

4. Zeus Becomes King..... 22

5. Persephone's Story..... 24

6. Demeter's Wanderings ..... 27

7. Demeter and Persephone ..... 31

8. Athena, Artemis and Apollo Are Born ..... 33

9. Apollo Establishes His Oracle ..... 36

10. Hephaestus's Story ..... 38

11. Hermes the Cattle Thief ..... 41

12. Dionysus Is Born, and Dies, and Is Born Again ..... 45

13. Dionysus and the Pirates ..... 47

14. Aphrodite Experiences Desire ..... 50

## GODS AND MORTALS

15. Prometheus, Epimetheus and the First Men ..... 57

16. Prometheus Steals Fire ..... 59

17. Pandora's Gifts ..... 61

18. Lycaon Tests Zeus ..... 64

---

---

VIII CONTENTS

---

---

19. The Flood .....	66
20. Io's Story .....	69
21. Phaethon Drives the Chariot of the Sun .....	71
22. Europa and the Bull .....	74
23. Callisto's Story .....	77
24. Daphne and Apollo .....	80
25. Artemis and Actaeon .....	83
26. Niobe and Leto .....	85
27. Arachne and Athena .....	87
28. Baucis and Philemon .....	91
29. Hyrieus and His Ox .....	94
30. Orion .....	96
31. Erigone and Icarus .....	99
32. Apollo and Hyacinthus .....	102
33. Leda and Her Children .....	103
34. Melampus and the Daughters of Proetus .....	106
35. Pan and Syrinx .....	109
36. Echo and Narcissus .....	112
37. The Greed of Midas .....	114
38. Tantalus Tests the Gods and Pelops Makes a Bad Decision .....	117
39. Tityus and Leto .....	120
40. Ixion, the Cloud and the Centaurs .....	121
41. The Deaths of Sisyphus .....	125
42. The Daughters of Danaus and the Sons of Egyptus .....	128
43. Asclepius Challenges Death .....	131
44. Minos and Polyidus .....	133
45. Minos and Scylla .....	136
46. Pasiphaë and the Bull .....	138
47. Daedalus and Icarus .....	141
48. Procne and Philomela .....	144
49. Salmacis and Hermaphroditus .....	147
50. Pygmalion and the Statue .....	151
51. Myrrha and Adonis .....	152

---

---

---

---

## HEROES

### PERSEUS

52. Danaë and the Shower of Gold .....	159
53. Polydectes and the Gorgon's Head.....	161
54. Some Weird Nymphs .....	164
55. Beheading Medusa.....	166
56. Andromeda .....	169

### BELLEROPHON

57. Bellerophon and Pegasus .....	171
58. Stheneboea .....	174
59. The Chimera.....	176
60. The End of Bellerophon .....	178

### CADMUS

61. Cadmus and the Serpent's Teeth .....	180
62. Ino and Athamas .....	183
63. The Return of Dionysus .....	186

### HERACLES

64. The Birth of Heracles .....	189
65. Heracles Murders His Family .....	192
66. The Nemean Lion and the Lernaean Hydra .....	194
67. The Ceryneian Hind and the Erymanthian Boar.....	198
68. The Stables of Augeas and the Stymphalian Birds .....	201
69. The Cretan Bull and the Mares of Diomedes.....	204
70. Alcestis .....	206
71. Hippolyta's Belt and the Cattle of Geryon .....	208
72. Cacus and the Apples of the Hesperides.....	212
73. A Journey to the Underworld .....	215
74. Slave to Omphale.....	218
75. A New Wife and New Problems.....	221

---

---

X CONTENTS

---

---

ATALANTA

76. Atalanta ..... 224

ORPHEUS

77. A Marvelous Musician ..... 226  
78. Orpheus the Argonaut ..... 228  
79. Eurydice ..... 231  
80. The Death of Orpheus ..... 235

JASON

81. Chiron and Jason ..... 238  
82. Losing a Sandal and Reclaiming the Kingdom ..... 240  
83. The Lemnian Women ..... 243  
84. Heracles and Hylas ..... 245  
85. The Harpies and the Clashing Rocks ..... 248  
86. Colchis ..... 250  
87. The Tasks ..... 254  
88. Claiming the Fleece ..... 256  
89. Circe and the Phaeacians ..... 259  
90. Home Again ..... 261  
91. Medea in Corinth ..... 264

MELEAGER

92. The Calydonian Boar ..... 267

THESEUS

93. Athena's City ..... 270  
94. Theseus Travels to Athens ..... 273  
95. A Wicked Stepmother ..... 275  
96. A Voyage to Crete ..... 278  
97. The Princess and the Minotaur ..... 280  
98. Theseus Becomes King ..... 284  
99. A Father's Curse ..... 286

---

---

---

---

100. New Brides .....	290
101. The Death of Theseus .....	292

OEDIPUS

102. The Birth of Oedipus .....	294
103. A Troubling Oracle .....	296
104. A Riddle Contest .....	299
105. Revelations .....	301
106. The Theban War .....	304
107. Antigone .....	308

**THE TROJAN WAR**

108. Peleus and Thetis .....	315
109. The Judgment of Paris .....	318
110. A Promise Comes Due .....	320
111. Iphigenia .....	323
112. Protesilaus and Laodamia .....	326
113. Agamemnon and Achilles .....	328
114. Hera Deceives Zeus .....	331
115. Achilles and Patroclus .....	335
116. Achilles and Hector .....	338
117. Achilles and Priam .....	341
118. The Deaths of Achilles and Ajax .....	345
119. Neoptolemus and Philoctetes .....	347
120. The Horse .....	350
121. The Trojan Women .....	354

**THE RETURNS**

122. Atreus and Thyestes .....	361
123. Agamemnon's Return .....	363
124. Orestes's Return .....	366

---

---

XII CONTENTS

---

---

125. A Trial in Athens .....	369
126. Helen and Menelaus .....	372
127. Neoptolemus's Return .....	375

ODYSSEUS

128. Odysseus and Telemachus.....	377
129. Nestor and Menelaus.....	380
130. Calypso .....	383
131. The Princess and the Castaway .....	385
132. A Ghastly Host .....	388
133. Circe .....	391
134. Visiting the Dead.....	394
135. Monstrous Females .....	397
136. The Cattle of the Sun .....	400
137. Home at Last .....	402
138. Penelope and Odysseus .....	406
139. A Contest and a Battle.....	409
140. New Lives.....	414

<i>Ancient Sources for the Myths</i> .....	419
<i>Table of Sources</i> .....	433
<i>Notes on Sources for the Myths</i> .....	439
<i>The Characters of Greek Myths</i> .....	453
<i>Index of Characters</i> .....	459
<i>Acknowledgments</i> .....	477

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# GODS, MORTALS AND THE MYTHS THEY INHABIT

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Imagine for a moment that somehow you've managed to transport yourself back to an ancient Greek city. Look around: you're surrounded by myths. In the marketplace, you see gleaming statues of Athena holding a spear and Poseidon wielding his trident. Nearby, images of Theseus fighting the Amazons look down upon you from a temple. If you're invited to an aristocratic home, you'll be served wine from a bowl painted with a mythic scene and drink it from a cup decorated with another one: Zeus in the form of a bull, surging through the sea with Europa on his back, or the hero Peleus wrestling with the shape-shifting goddess Thetis. If you stay in the city long enough, you'll watch actors performing myths on stage during public festivals—if you're a man, that is. Greek women didn't go to the theater. Women did attend other festivals in honor of the gods, however, where poets recited myths: you might hear about Deianira murdering her husband, Heracles, or Penelope fooling her suitors by means of that most feminine of all contrivances, her loom. If you linger in the city long enough to get married, the song that's sung at your wedding may refer to a great mythic love story, such as that of the doomed warrior Hector and his wife, Andromache. You'll encounter myths in less formal ways, too—as a woman working wool alongside other women who tell myths to pass the time or as a man at a drinking party, where excerpts from the most admired works of the poets are recited.

Nothing in our own culture compares to this—nothing is embraced by all of us with the same fervor and fidelity with which the Greeks embraced their myths. Certainly, there are stories that all of us (or nearly all of us) have at least heard of, but even the

## 2 GODS, MORTALS AND MYTHS

most popular of them have not suffused our cultural landscape as thoroughly as myths suffused that of ancient Greece. We wouldn't be surprised to encounter Harry Potter in a book or a movie or miniaturized as a LEGO action figure, but we'd be very surprised to spot his statue gracing a public building or hear a song about his courtship of Ginny Weasley at a wedding. And, leaving aside a few tenacious exceptions, such as the Bible, Shakespeare's plays and the novels of Jane Austen, even our best-loved stories seldom remain popular for more than two or three generations.

In part, this is because diction and manners tend to become stale and remote as time goes by. Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* was wildly popular for several decades after it was published in 1740. Now, the smaller group of readers who embark upon *Pamela's* pages must be willing to decode some of its words (what exactly is a "sauce-box," anyway?) and accept a narrative premise that may seem bizarre (did children and parents really sit down and write lengthy letters to each other, once upon a time, as Pamela and her parents did?). To continue to thrive, even the most wonderful stories need to be updated. But another reason that stories don't remain popular very long anymore is that nowadays, if authors borrow plots or characters from other authors' works, they run the risk of being called derivative, unless they make their own contributions abundantly clear in some way—by completely changing the time, the setting and the names of the characters, for example, as Leonard Bernstein did for *Romeo and Juliet* when he composed *West Side Story*. In contrast, ancient Greek authors didn't hesitate to borrow plots, times, settings, characters and even details from both earlier authors and their own contemporaries. As long as they did this well, adding their own brilliant touches, there was no shame in it—there might even be acclaim. In the process, they continually refreshed the myths, ensuring that they remained exciting and relevant.

Indeed, in ancient Greece, anyone who wanted to narrate a myth had to think about earlier versions because they could be sure that most of the people in their audience knew at least the basics of the story they were about to tell. What we now call Greek myths, most Greeks considered to be part of their history, relayed by poets



since the time of Homer. When an author narrated one of them, he was doing something like what Cecil B. DeMille did when he retold the story of Moses in his 1956 film, *The Ten Commandments*. DeMille added intriguing new secondary characters (Queen Nefretiri, for instance) and some thrilling new subplots (Moses's romance with Nefretiri, for example), but no one doubted that he was telling the same story as the Bible had told. In fact, the film won awards from Jewish and Christian organizations for presenting the biblical story to a twentieth-century audience so successfully. Nor was DeMille's film disparaged as derivative: it was a huge box-office hit and is still admired for its accomplishments in filmic narration. Forty-two years later, DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* inspired DreamWorks to create *The Prince of Egypt*, an animated version of the biblical story that introduced its own changes and that also met with commercial and critical success.

Similarly, for example, in 458 BCE, when the tragedian Aeschylus retold the well-known story of Orestes in his trilogy of plays called the *Oresteia*, he innovated upon an old story, too. The final part of Aeschylus's version, which focuses on what happened to Orestes after he avenged his father's murder by killing his mother, alludes to the Areopagus, the place in Athens where the court that tried cases of intentional homicide was located. Aeschylus showed Athena establishing that court so that Orestes could be tried by a jury, which was also presented as a brand-new invention within the world of the play. Earlier versions of Orestes's story had resolved his problem in other ways, which has prompted scholars to suggest that Aeschylus revised the age-old tale in order to celebrate recent Athenian civic reforms—particularly those that cleaned up what had become a corrupt and overly powerful Areopagite court. That's not all that Aeschylus's version of Orestes's story is about, of course. If it's well-narrated, the tale of a young man who is forced to kill his mother in order to avenge his murdered father will always be compelling, and Aeschylus narrated it very well, indeed. He gives us foul-breathed Erinyes who pursue Orestes all the way to Delphi and then onwards to Athens; an Apollo who delivers a clever, protoscientific speech in defense of Orestes; and an Athena who deftly transforms the Erinyes, who are furious at having lost their

#### 4 GODS, MORTALS AND MYTHS

prey, into kindlier goddesses who promise to nurture Athens. All of these additions that Aeschylus made to the story, as expressed by his glorious language, revitalized a well-known myth. Aeschylus received first prize for his *Oresteia* at the Dionysia, the great Athenian festival that honored Dionysus, the god of drama, and his *Oresteia* continues to be presented on stage today.

It was in this spirit of both tradition and constant innovation that the Greeks told the same myths for more than a millennium, until the coming of Christianity began to mute their voices. Even then, Christianity couldn't silence the myths completely. In the fourteenth century, an anonymous Franciscan monk composed *The Moralized Ovid*, a renarration of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* with allegorizing interpretations that he thought would make it safe reading for Christians. Chaucer redeveloped the myth of Theseus and the Amazons in his *Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare drew frequently on Greek myths and an army of Renaissance painters and sculptors busily represented them for wealthy men. In the seventeenth century, Monteverdi used the myths of Orpheus and Ariadne as librettos for the first operas and Racine revived tragedy with his own tellings of ancient myths. And the reason you're holding this book now is that we still tell them.

Why do we—and why did the Greeks—love these stories? Certainly, one reason is that they do important cultural and social work. Myths explain and endorse the origins of significant institutions, such as the Athenian jury system. Myths help to instill social codes, such as the expectation that hosts and guests will treat each other honorably. Lycaon didn't abide by that rule, and Zeus turned him into a wolf. They reflect feelings that lie deep within the human heart, such as the difficulty of losing a spouse and the dangers of refusing to come to terms with that loss. Orpheus tried twice to retrieve his wife from the land of the dead but failed and ended up dead himself. They warn against the dangers of character flaws such as arrogance: Odysseus boasted about outwitting the Cyclops Polyphemus, and Polyphemus's father, Poseidon, impeded Odysseus's homeward journey for many years.

Other messages are embedded in the myths, too, not all of which make as much immediate sense to their modern readers as those

I've just mentioned. Most strikingly, in myths the Greek gods are so frequently fickle and cruel in their treatment of mortals that the two groups seem to be eternally pitted against one another. The mortals constantly strive to rise above the limits that confine them and the gods repeatedly smack the mortals down. Why would the Greeks want to imagine that the very gods whom they worshipped would behave that way? Part of the answer lies in the fact that myth and worship expressed two extremes. Myths presented dreadful, worst-case scenarios and what one prayed for during worship presented the best that one could hope for. Together, these articulated the human condition—a persistent aspiration and struggle to become something better, which was often thwarted but could never be extinguished. Of course, the biggest difference between gods and mortals was that the former lived forever and the latter were fated to die. The many myths in which a mortal tries to evade that destiny and fails—not only the story of Orpheus, but also the stories of Sisyphus and Asclepius, for example—repeatedly drive home this point. The gods had infinite time, as well as infinite power, to accomplish almost anything they pleased, and mortals who wished to survive for even the small numbers of years that the Fates allotted them had to live according to the rules that the gods imposed and to tolerate their fickle temperaments. That is why this book is called *Gods and Mortals*; the myths that I tell here often express the crucial differences between the two parties. Yet any purpose that a myth serves is secondary to the telling of the myth itself. Unless an author or artist narrates a myth in a lively, engaging way, no one will bother with it—or at least, they won't bother with the version served up by that particular author or artist. "A man killed his mother because she killed his father" is simply a statement. It was what Aeschylus added to that statement that turned it into a myth. So, too, for the poets who came before and after Aeschylus, each of whom created his Orestes with his own twists: Stesichorus, Pindar, Sophocles, Euripides and so on.

I've tried to make the narratives that I'm offering in this book engaging, too, so that the myths will speak to my readers with at least some of the impact that they had in antiquity. To do this, I've not only chosen my words carefully, but also knit into my stories

## 6 GODS, MORTALS AND MYTHS

details about the ancient world in which they're set. I've done this in the hope that if my readers have some sense of the harsher realities of such things as disease and hunger in antiquity, the wilder natural environment that Greek women and men confronted and the tighter social constraints under which they lived, then the myths will resonate more fully. My telling of Pandora's story, therefore, includes details about the household duties of ancient Greek women and the plethora of illnesses that continually lay in wait for human victims. My story of Erigone makes clear how dire a fate it was for a Greek woman to remain unmarried. I've also given some sense of what it was like to worship the gods: my descriptions of Oedipus's and Neoptolemus's visits to the Delphic Oracle express what Apollo's inquirers would have seen and heard at the god's great sanctuary high up in the mountains, and I recount the rituals that the Argonauts performed to appease the anger of the Mother of the Gods. I've woven what we know about the mechanics of ancient looms and the sources of ancient dyes into my story of Arachne and what we know about the ancient way of throwing a discus into my story of Hyacinthus. My stories unfold against the real physical landscapes of ancient Greece and their real fauna and flora.

But as much as I've striven to present my myths within their ancient contexts, I've also been determined not to allow the voices of the ancient authors themselves to dominate my tellings. Although I've drawn my plots and characters from ancient sources and sometimes borrowed their brilliant phrases and imagery, too, I haven't simply translated their narratives into English. Instead, I've created new narratives that have lives of their own. My Odysseus expresses a keener appreciation of his wife's intellect than Homer's did, for instance. And, although the events in my story of Apollo's attempted rape of Daphne closely follow those of Ovid's version, I cast a shadow over Apollo's final action and give Artemis a closing line that is meant to emphasize how little the gods, at least as we meet them in myths, cared about the suffering of their mortal companions.

Indeed, the tone of my stories often parts company with the ancient authors when I narrate rapes or, in the cases of Daphne and Syrinx, attempted rapes. In Greek myths, both gods and mor-

tal men force themselves upon females with alarming frequency, using physical strength, deception or both to satisfy their desires. Ancient narrators often ignored or minimized the damage that these encounters would have wreaked upon their victims. To take but one example, the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* tells us that Hades snatched Persephone away from her friends and dragged her into the Underworld, but leaves it largely up to us to imagine, if we choose, how this was experienced by the young goddess herself. There were some exceptions to the rule: Aeschylus sympathetically narrates the ghastly ordeals that Io suffered after Zeus decided to rape her, and Ovid evokes our pity for several victims, most notably Philomela. In every case of rape that I narrate, I, too, have tried to convey the shock or horror that the woman or goddess felt—and in the one instance where a goddess sexually violates a man (Salmacis and Hermaphroditus), I've tried to imagine how he felt, too. It's worth clarifying, in connection with this topic, that what we now consider to be two separate situations—rape and seduction—were scarcely distinguished in antiquity. At the root of their conflation lay the fact that women were meant to be controlled by men. A girl was under the guardianship of her father until she married, at which point she came under the guardianship of her husband. If she were widowed, either her father resumed his role or another male relative took it on. The guardian's responsibilities included ensuring that the woman did not have sex without his permission. In real life, this meant that she would have sex only with the husband to whom her guardian gave her in marriage. In myths, some fathers seize other, unusual opportunities to give their daughters to men, as well. For example, Thespius gives his fifty daughters to Heracles because he wants a crop of strong grandsons (chapter 65) and Pittheus gives his daughter Aethra to King Aegeus of Athens because he wants to forge a stronger link with that city (chapter 93). Of course, if your wife or daughter were impregnated by a god, you were expected to count it an honor and duly raise the child, as do several men in these stories. And of course, in both real life and myths there were women and men who, through choice or necessity, became prostitutes and there were slaves of both genders who, as their master's property, owed him their sexual favors.

## 8 GODS, MORTALS AND MYTHS

The notes at the end of this book give information about which ancient narrations and artistic representations of each myth inspired my versions. For those who want to read them, I've recommended translations of those narrations in the essay "Ancient Sources for the Myths." Sometimes, I had to draw not only on what ancient authors tell us but also on my own imagination as well, in order to fill gaps in a plot—gaps where our knowledge of how a story proceeded is fragmentary because our ancient sources themselves are fragmentary. For example, we don't know exactly how it was that Zeus managed to swallow his wife Metis when she was pregnant with their child. After thinking about what little the ancient sources do tell us, I concluded that this myth probably sprang from a folk motif that is shared by many other tales around the world and then developed my version in that direction—you'll find it in chapter 4. Whenever I've filled a gap in that way, I've indicated it in the notes.

From start to finish, this book tells 140 myths. There's no magic in that number, other than the magic of compromise. On the one hand, I quickly realized that telling *every* Greek myth I've ever encountered would make for a book too large to lift. But on the other hand, I wanted to narrate not only all of the myths that one would expect to find in an anthology (the labors of Heracles, the story of how Demeter got her daughter back, and so on) but also some personal favorites that aren't told very often nowadays (the story of Icarus, Erigone and some fatal casks of wine; the tale of how Melampus cured the bovine daughters of Proetus; and a fuller reveal of what happened when Menelaus and Helen sailed home after the Trojan War, for instance). I assembled my choices in an order that makes chronological sense, more or less. That is, my narrative starts with the birth of the cosmos and the gods and it finishes with what happened to the Greek leaders as they returned from the Trojan War. In the eyes of the Greeks, that war was the last great event of the heroic age, before the world settled down into the far less glorious age in which they themselves existed. In between the beginning and the end, I tell stories that characterize the ongoing relationship between gods and mortals, those two tribes between which power was so unevenly divided; stories of the

heroes, who challenged the boundary between gods and mortals as they purged the earth of monsters, and of the daring, resourceful women who enabled the heroes to do what they did; and stories of the Trojan War itself, which Zeus brought about in order to quash the burgeoning human population.

Here and there, however, attentive readers will notice that I've had to infringe upon chronology: in chapter 10, for instance, Dionysus advises Hephaestus on how to win a bride, but Dionysus's own birth isn't narrated until chapter 12. It's impossible to arrange Greek myths without a few infelicities of this kind, so tightly entangled are its characters and its events. I say a little more about that entanglement, and the strength that it gave Greek myths, in the essay "The Characters of Greek Myths" at the end of this book. The Greeks themselves certainly knew how to look the other way when chronology threatened to ruin a good story. For instance, although it was events during the wedding of Peleus and Thetis that precipitated the Trojan War, somehow Peleus and Thetis managed to produce a son, Achilles, who was old enough to fight when the war began—and then Achilles himself managed to produce a son, Neoptolemus, who was old enough to join the Greek contingent only nine years later.

Leaving these problems aside, readers who move sequentially from the first chapter, "Earth and Her Children," to the final chapter, "New Lives," will find that the myths I tell earliest sometimes lay the groundwork for those I tell later. However, even if the myths aren't read in the order that I've chosen—even if readers choose to dip into the book here and there, following their own particular interests at any given moment—themes and details will resonate among them. The Greeks, certainly, did not encounter their myths in any fixed sequence. One of the most important ways in which Greek myths were promulgated was through the voices of professional bards who memorized the works of the great poets and then were hired to perform at public festivals and the private parties of the wealthy. In addition, there were poets who could be commissioned to compose new poems to celebrate a glorious athletic victory or a splendid wedding. Those poets often took myths as their subject matter, too. In either case, an audience typically



10 GODS, MORTALS AND MYTHS

didn't know what myth they would hear until a performance began. You might hear the story of Heracles and the Stymphalian Birds on one occasion and then, some days or months later, hear the story of Heracles's birth, or the story of how Perseus (Heracles's great-grandfather) tricked the Graeae, or the story of how the whole cosmos came to exist in the first place. The art that dotted the landscape continuously evoked a variety of stories that defied chronology, as well. As Greek children grew up, they gradually acquired familiarity with many myths and an understanding of how the characters and events of those myths were knit together into a huge, splendid web.

When I was about halfway done writing this book, I began to experiment with these ideas myself. Every few semesters, I teach a course on Greek myths in an auditorium that holds 740 people. Although it's seldom the case that every seat is filled on any given day, there are always at least 600 students present. The course is an elective; no one is required to enroll and I presume that the students are there because they're interested in the topic. And yet, year after year, here and there in the dim recesses of the auditorium, whispered conversations were always taking place while I delivered my lectures. My colleagues told me that I wasn't alone in this experience; it's hard to retain the attention of so many students, especially when you're standing on a stage, far away from most of them.

One semester, I tried something different. The syllabus that I posted at the beginning of the course included neither a day-by-day list of the myths we'd study nor any list of assigned readings to be done before each session. Instead, when the bell rang each day, my teaching assistant dimmed all the lights except for the spotlight over the stage and I walked in from the wings, wearing a cloak like that an ancient bard would wear. Standing front and center, I read aloud one of the myths that I was writing for this book, with as much drama and feeling as I could muster. I chose to read my own versions of myths, rather than ancient versions, because they were shorter, their diction was more familiar to the students, and in some cases they particularly emphasized certain aspects of the myths that I wanted to discuss.



After eight or nine minutes, when I was done reading, my assistant turned up the lights, I removed my cloak and I delivered a lecture in which I discussed the significance of the myth that the students had just heard—how it expressed ancient social and cultural values, how it articulated the Greeks' view of the relationship between gods and mortals, how it served to explain the existence of a certain animal species, rock formation or a ritual, how it fit together with other myths we'd studied that semester and so on. I showed the students ancient and modern works of art that represented the myth. I also showed them excerpts from ancient authors who had told the same myth. I discussed the differences among those ancient versions and between those versions and my own, explaining how the differences changed what the myth was saying. After each session, the students were assigned to read for themselves the myth they'd heard that day and the ancient versions I'd discussed.

I embarked on these performances in the hope that if the students initially experienced each myth as a *story* that someone was telling to entertain as well as educate them, they might engage more deeply with it. It seems to work; a hush falls over the auditorium as soon as the lights go down. More students visit me during office hours, wanting to talk about the myths.

In one version or another, expurgated or straight, Greek myths have been at the center of my world since I was old enough to choose which stories my mother would read aloud to me. Later, I shared them with my own children and grandchildren; one of my sons, who is now an illustrator, has added his own interpretations of some of them to this book. Over the years, these myths have cheered me, amused me and excited me. They've journeyed alongside me when I traveled and comforted me at times of loss. They've chided me when I did things—or was about to do things—that I knew I shouldn't be doing. The least that I can do in return is to tell them again. I hope that the myths, as I'm offering them now on the pages of this book, will engage, entertain and provoke you, my readers, as well.

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# INDEX OF CHARACTERS

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Numbers refer to the chapter(s) in which each character is mentioned.

- Abas:** Son of Hypermnestra and Lynceus; father of Proetus and Acrisius; king of Argos: 42, 52
- Abderus:** Heracles's lover: 69, 70
- Acamas:** Son of Theseus and Phaedra; brother of Demophon; fought at Troy: 101
- Acastus:** Son of Pelias; husband of Astydamia; king of Iolcus; participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 92, 108
- Achelous:** Father of the Sirens; river god: 75, 78
- Achilles:** Son of Peleus and Thetis; father of Neoptolemus; greatest Greek warrior of the Trojan War: 82, 110–19, 121, 134
- Acrisius:** Son of King Abas of Argos; twin brother of Proetus; father of Danaë; king of Argos: 52, 53, 56, 114
- Actaeon:** Son of Autoñoë and Aristaëus; Theban hunter: 25, 81
- Actor:** Theban warrior who defended the city against the Seven: 106
- Admetus:** Husband of Alcestis; king of Pherae; Argonaut and participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 43, 70, 82, 92
- Adonis:** Son of King Cinyras of Cyprus and Myrrha; lover of Aphrodite: 51
- Adrastus:** Brother of Eriphyle; father of Argia; king of Argos; commander of the Seven against Thebes: 106, 107
- Aeacus:** Son of Zeus and Aegina; husband of Endeis; father of Peleus and Telamon; king of the island of Aegina: 108, 110, 127
- Aeëtes:** Son of Helios; brother of Pasiphaë and Circe; father of Medea, Chalciope and Apsyrtus; king of Colchis: 46, 62, 86–89, 91, 133
- Aegeus:** Son of Pylia; brother of Nisus; possible father of Theseus by Aethra and father of Medus by Medea; king of Athens: 45, 47, 93–96, 98
- Aegina:** Daughter of Asopus; mother of Aeacus by Zeus; nymph who is turned into an island: 41, 108
- Aegisthus:** Son of Thyestes and Pelopia; lover of Clytemnestra: 122–24, 128, 129, 134
- Aeneas:** Son of Anchises and Aphrodite; husband of Creusa; father of Ascanius; Trojan prince; escaped to Italy after the war: 14, 114, 121, 127
- Aeolus:** Steward of the winds: 133
- Aerope:** Wife of Atreus; mother of Agamemnon and Menelaus; lover of Thyestes: 122
- Aeson:** Husband of Alcimede; father of Jason; king of Iolcus: 81, 82
- Aethra:** Daughter of King Pittheus of Troezen; mother of Theseus by either Poseidon or Aegeus: 93–95, 99–101, 107
- Agamemnon:** Son of Atreus and Aerope; brother of Menelaus; husband of Clytemnestra; father of Iphigenia, Orestes and Electra; king of Mycenae; leader of the Greek forces at Troy: 33, 110–19, 121–24, 126, 128, 129, 134, 137
- Agave:** Daughter of King Cadmus and Queen Harmonia of Thebes; sister of Semele, Ino, Autoñoë and Polydorus; wife of Echion; mother of Pentheus: 25, 62, 63, 102
- Agelaus:** Suitor of Penelope: 139

460 INDEX OF CHARACTERS

- Agenor:** Son of Poseidon and Libya; twin brother of Belus; husband of Telephassa; father of Europa and Cadmus; king of Phoenicia: 22, 42
- Aglaurus:** Daughter of King Cecrops of Athens; sister of Herse and Pandrosus: 93
- Air:** Primeval substance: 1
- Ajax:** Greek warrior who fought at Troy; from Locris: 110, 121, 123
- Ajax:** Son of King Telamon of Salamis; fought at Troy; was second only to Achilles in skill: 110, 113, 115, 118, 134
- Alcaeus:** Son of Perseus and Andromeda; brother of Electryon, Sthenelus and Gorgophone; father of Amphitryon: 64
- Alcestis:** Wife of King Admetus of Pherae; volunteered to die for her husband: 70
- Alcimedea:** Wife of King Aeson of Iolcus; mother of Jason: 81, 82
- Alcinous:** Husband of Arete; father of Nausicaa and many sons; king of the Phaeacians: 89, 131, 136
- Alcmene:** Daughter of Electryon; wife of Amphitryon; mother of Heracles by Zeus and of Iphicles by Amphitryon: 64, 66, 114, 134
- Althaea:** Sister of Plexippus and Toxeus; wife of King Oeneus of Calydon; mother of Meleager and Deianira: 73, 92
- Amaltheia:** Divine goat who nourished the infant Zeus: 2, 3
- Amazons:** Tribe of warrior women living apart from men on the coast of the Black Sea: 20, 60, 71, 98, 99, 118. *See also* Hippolyta; Penthesilea
- Ameinias:** Man who loved Narcissus: 36
- Amphiaraus:** Descendant of Melampus; husband of Eriphyle; Argive warrior and seer; one of the Seven against Thebes; participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 92, 106
- Amphictyon:** Early Athenian king: 93
- Amphidamas:** Argonaut from Arcadia: 82, 86
- Amphion:** Son of Zeus and Antiope; husband of Niobe; extraordinary musician; king of Thebes: 26, 102
- Amphitrite:** Wife of Poseidon; sea goddess: 45, 90, 96, 108, 115, 135
- Amphitryon:** Son of Alcaeus; husband of Alcmene; father of Iphicles; stepfather of Heracles: 64, 65
- Amyclas:** Husband of Diomedea; father of Hyacinthus; king of Sparta: 32, 33
- Amycus:** Barbaric king of the Bebrycians: 78, 85
- Ancaeus:** Argonaut from Tegea and participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 82, 92
- Anchises:** Father of Aeneas; Trojan prince; lover of Aphrodite: 14, 121
- Androgeus:** Son of King Minos and Queen Pasiphaë of Crete; brother of Glaucus, Deucalion, Ariadne and Phaedra: 96
- Andromache:** Wife of Hector; mother of Astyanax; concubine of Neoptolemus who bore him three sons; eventually wife of Helenus: 114, 117, 121, 127
- Andromeda:** Daughter of King Cepheus and Queen Cassiopeia of Ethiopia; wife of Perseus; mother of Gorgophone, Alcaeus, Electryon and Sthenelus: 56, 64
- Antaeus:** Son of Earth and Poseidon; wrestled travelers to the death: 72
- Antenor:** Trojan nobleman: 112, 121
- Anticleia:** Daughter of King Autolycus of Parnassus; wife of Laertes of Ithaca; mother of Odysseus: 41, 134
- Antigone:** Daughter of King Oedipus and Queen Jocasta of Thebes; sister of Ismene, Polynices and Eteocles: 106, 107
- Antigone:** Daughter of King Eurytion of Phthia; first wife of Peleus: 108
- Antinous:** Suitor of Penelope: 128, 129, 138, 139
- Antiope:** Mother of Amphion and Zethus by Zeus: 26, 134
- Aphrodite:** Wife of Hephaestus; goddess who oversaw sexual passion: 1, 10, 14, 17, 25, 27, 37, 42, 46, 49, 50–52, 62, 69, 76, 83, 85, 86, 91, 96, 99, 108–10, 113, 114, 131
- Apollo:** Son of Zeus and Leto; twin brother of Artemis; god of archery, prophecy and music: 8, 9, 11, 13, 19, 20, 24, 25–27, 31, 32, 35, 37, 39, 43, 44, 52, 56, 61, 62, 65–67, 70, 73, 74, 79, 80, 82, 85, 93, 95, 98, 102–3, 105–6, 108, 112–19, 121, 123–25, 127, 139

- Apsyrtus:** Son of King Aeëtes of Colchis; brother of Medea and Chalciope: 88, 89
- Arachne:** Daughter of Idmon of Lydia; excellent spinner and weaver: 27
- Arcas:** Son of Callisto by Zeus; prince of Arcadia: 23
- Ares:** Son of Zeus and Hera; god of war; lover of Aphrodite: 8, 10, 14, 25, 41, 43, 48, 61, 62, 68, 69, 71, 85–88, 102, 106, 108, 118, 131
- Arete:** Wife of King Alcinous of Phaeacia; mother of Nausicaa and many sons: 89, 131, 136
- Argia:** Daughter of King Adrastus of Argos; wife of Polynices; mother of Thersander: 107
- Argonauts:** Those who sailed with Jason on the Argo to gain the Golden Fleece: 68, 76, 78, 82–90, 92
- Argus:** Herdsman with 100 eyes who watched over Io: 20
- Argus:** Builder of the Argo and an Argonaut himself: 82, 84
- Argus:** Son of Phrixus and Chalciope; brother of Cytissorus, Phrontis and Melas: 86, 87
- Argus:** Faithful dog of Odysseus: 138
- Ariadne:** Daughter of King Minos and Queen Pasiphaë of Crete; sister of Phaedra, Glaucus, Deucalion and Androgeus; wife of Dionysus; helped Theseus: 46, 96–98, 116, 134
- Arion:** Son of Demeter and Poseidon; marvelous horse; steed of Adrastus: 6, 107
- Arimaspians:** Tribe of one-eyed people living to the north: 20
- Aristaeus:** Son of Apollo and Cyrene; husband of Autoñoë; father of Actaeon; attempted to rape Orpheus's wife, Eurydice: 25, 79
- Artemis:** Daughter of Zeus and Leto; twin sister of Apollo; virgin goddess of the hunt: 8, 10, 14, 19, 23–26, 30, 35, 39, 42, 43, 51, 52, 67, 92, 99, 100, 102, 108, 111, 116, 117, 126, 131
- Ascanius:** Son of Aeneas and Creusa: 121
- Asclepius:** Son of Apollo and Coronis; husband of Epione; father of Machaon, Iaso, Podalirius, Hygeia and Panacea; excellent healer; Argonaut and participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 43, 70, 81, 82, 92, 99, 110, 119
- Asopus:** Father of Aegina; river god: 41, 108
- Asterius:** Husband of Europa; stepfather to Minos, Rhadamanthys and Sarpedon; king of Crete: 22, 46
- Asterius:** Real name of the Minotaur: 46
- Astyanax:** Son of Hector and Andromache of Troy: 114, 117, 121
- Astydamia:** Wife of King Acastus of Iolcus: 108
- Atalanta:** Daughter of Schoeneus, a Theban nobleman; wife of Hippomenes; mother of Parthenopaeus; Argonaut and participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 76, 82, 92, 106
- Athamas:** Husband of Nephele and later Ino; father of Phrixus and Helle by Nephele and Learchus and Melicertes by Ino; foster father to Dionysus: 62, 86
- Athena:** Daughter of Zeus and Metis; goddess of wisdom and crafts; protector of heroes: 8, 10, 12–15, 17, 27, 42, 47, 53, 54, 56, 57, 61, 65, 68, 69, 71, 75, 77, 82, 85, 86, 93, 98, 106, 109, 113, 114, 116, 118–21, 125, 128–31, 137–40
- Atlas:** Titan charged with holding up Sky: 4, 26, 41, 54, 72
- Atreus:** Son of King Pelops and Queen Hippodamia of Elis; brother of Thyestes and Nicippe; half brother of Chrysippus; husband of Aerope; father of Agamemnon and Menelaus: 38, 110, 122, 127
- Augeas:** King of Elis who had filthy cow stables: 68
- Autolycus:** Father of Anticleia; king of Parnassus; sly thief; friend of Sisyphus: 41
- Autoñoë:** Daughter of King Cadmus and Queen Harmonia of Thebes; sister of Semele, Ino, Agave and Polydorus; wife of Aristaeus; mother of Actaeon: 25, 62, 63, 102
- Balius:** One of Achilles's two immortal horses: 108, 115
- Baucis:** Wife of Philemon; peasant woman of Phrygia: 28, 37
- Bebrycians:** Bloodthirsty tribe encountered by the Argonauts: 85

462 INDEX OF CHARACTERS

- Bellerophon:** Son of Poseidon and Queen Eurynome of Corinth; half brother of Deliaides; husband of Philonoë; king of Lycia; killer of the Chimera: 57–60, 127
- Belus:** Son of Poseidon and Libya; twin brother of Agenor; father of Egyptus and Danaus; king of Egypt: 22, 42
- Bias:** Brother of Melampus: 34
- Birds, Stymphalian:** Dangerous birds conquered by Heracles: 68, 69, 86
- Boar, Calydonian:** Murderous boar against which Meleager and other heroes mounted an expedition: 33, 43, 76, 92, 98, 108
- Boar, Erymanthian:** Giant boar captured by Heracles: 67, 69
- Boreas:** Father of Zetes, Calais and Cleopatra; god who was the north wind: 45, 78, 82, 85, 134
- Briseis:** Daughter of Brises from Lyrnessus; war prize of Achilles: 112, 113, 115, 116
- Brises:** Father of Briseis; priest of Apollo from Lyrnessus: 112
- Bull, Cretan (also known as the Bull of Marathon):** Father of the Minotaur by Pasiphaë; given to Minos by Poseidon; captured by Heracles and then again by Theseus: 46, 69, 95, 96
- Busiris:** Wicked Egyptian king killed by Heracles: 72
- Cacus:** Cattle thief killed by Heracles: 72
- Cadmus:** Son of King Agenor of Phoenicia; brother of Europa; husband of Harmonia; father of Semele, Agave, Autonoë, Ino and Polydorus; founder and king of Thebes: 12, 13, 20, 22, 25, 26, 42, 61–64, 102, 106, 107, 126, 130
- Calais:** Son of Boreas; twin brother of Zetes and brother of Cleopatra; winged Argonaut who fended off the Harpies: 78, 82, 84, 85
- Calchas:** Seer who traveled to Troy with the Greek army: 111, 113, 119
- Calliope:** Daughter of Zeus and Mnemosyne; wife of King Oeagrus of Thrace; mother of Orpheus; muse of epic poetry: 77, 80
- Callirhoë:** Wife of Chrysaor; mother of Geryon: 71
- Callisto:** Daughter of King Lycaon of Arcadia; mother of Arcas by Zeus; companion of Artemis: 23, 24, 27, 52
- Calypso:** Goddess who kept Odysseus on her island for seven years: 128–31, 136
- Campe:** Monstrous daughter of Tartarus who guarded his realm: 3
- Capaneus:** Father of Sthenelus; one of the Seven against Thebes: 106, 110
- Cassandra:** Daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecabe of Troy; sister of Hector, Paris and others; seer whom no one believed: 121, 123
- Cassiopeia:** Wife of King Cepheus of Ethiopia; mother of Andromeda: 56
- Castor:** Son of King Tyndareus and Queen Leda of Sparta; twin brother of Clytemnestra; half brother of Helen and Polydeuces; Argonaut and participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 33, 81, 82, 92, 101, 110
- Cecrops:** Father of Aglaurus, Herse and Pandrosus; early king of Athens; part human, part snake: 93
- Cedalion:** Attendant of Orion: 30
- Celeus:** Husband of Metanira; king of Elis: 6
- Cenchreis:** Wife of King Cinyras of Cyprus; mother of Myrrha: 51
- Centaur:** Creatures that were half horse and half human: 40, 67, 73, 75, 81, 98, 104, 126. *See also* Chiron; Eurytion; Nessus; Pholus
- Centaurus:** Son of Ixion and Nephele; father of the first centaurs: 40, 81
- Cepheus:** Brother of Phineus; husband of Cassiopeia; father of Andromeda; king of Ethiopia: 56
- Cephisus:** Father of Narcissus by Liriope; river god of Boeotia: 36
- Cerberus:** Son of Echidna; brother of Orthrus and other monsters; three-headed dog who guarded the gates of Hades: 2, 54, 71, 73, 100
- Cercyon:** Wrestler who challenged, and was killed by, Theseus: 94, 95
- Ceto:** Daughter of Earth and Sea; wife of Phorcys; mother of many monsters: 2, 53, 54

- Chalciopé:** Daughter of King Aeëtes of Colchis; sister of Medea and Apsyrtus; wife of Phrixus; mother of Argus, Cytissorus, Phrontis and Melas: 86
- Chariclo:** Wife of Chiron: 81, 82, 108
- Charon:** Son of Night; ferryman of Hades: 73, 79, 100
- Charops:** Father of Oeagrus; Thracian man who helped Dionysus and became king of Thrace: 77, 78
- Charybdis:** Monstrous whirlpool: 89, 135, 136
- Chimera:** Daughter of Echidna and Typhon; part lion, part fire-breathing goat, part snake; killed by Bellerophon: 2, 54, 58–60, 127
- Chiron:** Son of Cronus and Philyra; husband of Chariclo; wise and peaceful centaur who tutored young heroes: 25, 43, 78, 81, 82, 90, 108
- Chrysaor:** Son of Poseidon and Medusa; brother of Pegasus; husband of Callirhoë; father of Geryon: 57, 71
- Chryse:** Mother of Phlegyas by Ares; Lapith woman: 43
- Chryseis:** Daughter of Chryses; war prize of Agamemnon: 112, 113
- Chryses:** Father of Chryseis; priest of Apollo: 112, 113
- Chrysippus:** Son of King Pelops of Elis; half brother of Atreus, Thyestes and Nicippe: 102, 122
- Cicones:** People whose city was sacked by Odysseus and his men: 132
- Cimmerians:** People who lived in eternal fog at the edge of the world: 54, 134
- Simon:** Athenian statesman who recovered Theseus's bones: 101
- Cinyras:** Husband of Cenchreis; father of Myrrha and Adonis; king of Cyprus: 51
- Circe:** Daughter of Helios; sister of Aeëtes and Pasiphaë; goddess who acquired extensive knowledge of magical arts: 46, 89, 133–36, 140
- Cleopatra:** Daughter of Boreas; sister of Zetes and Calais; wife of King Phineus of Bithynia: 85
- Clite:** Wife of King Cyzicus; queen of the Doliones: 83, 84
- Clotho:** One of the three Fates: 38, 122
- Clymene:** Daughter of Ocean; mother of Phaethon by Helios: 21
- Clytemnestra:** Daughter of King Tyndareus and Queen Leda of Sparta; twin sister of Castor; half sister of Helen and Polydeuces; wife of Agamemnon; mother of Orestes, Iphigenia and Electra: 33, 110, 111, 113, 122–25, 128, 134, 140
- Cocalus:** King of Sicily who accepted Daedalus as suppliant: 47
- Copreus:** Attendant of King Eurystheus: 67, 69
- Coronis:** Daughter of King Phlegyas of Trikke; mother of Asclepius by Apollo: 43
- Couretes:** Guardians of infant Zeus: 2, 3
- Cranaus:** Early king of Athens: 93
- Creon:** Brother of Jocasta; husband of Eurydice; father of Haemon, Megara and Megareus; king of Thebes: 65, 104–7
- Creon:** Father of Glaucus; king of Corinth: 91
- Cretheus:** Grandfather of Jason: 86
- Creusa:** Wife of Aeneas; mother of Ascanius: 121
- Cronus:** Son of Earth and Sky; husband of Rhea; father of Zeus and other children; Titan: 1–4, 81, 89, 125
- Ctesippus:** Suitor of Penelope: 139
- Cybele:** Goddess whom Atalanta and Hippomenes offended: 76
- Cyclopes:** Children of Earth and Sky; large, one-eyed creatures: 1, 3, 8, 43, 70, 132. *See also* Polyphemus
- Cyrene:** Daughter of King Hypseus of the Lapiths; mother of Aristaeus by Apollo; nymph: 25, 79
- Cytissorus:** Son of Phrixus and Chalciopé; brother of Argus, Phrontis and Melas: 86
- Cyzicus:** Husband of Clite; king of the Doliones; welcomed the Argonauts: 83, 84
- Dactyls:** Gods who served the Mother of the Gods: 84
- Daedalus:** Father of Icarus; uncle of Perdix; master craftsman: 46, 47, 96, 97, 116
- Danaë:** Daughter of King Acrisius of Argos; wife of Dictys; mother of Perseus by Zeus: 52, 53, 56, 64, 114
- Danaus:** Son of King Belus of Egypt; brother of Egyptus; father of 50 daughters: 42, 52

464 INDEX OF CHARACTERS

- Danaus, Daughters of:** Murdered their husbands; tortured in the Underworld for their crimes: 42, 52, 79, 100
- Daphne:** Daughter of Peneus; nymph who followed Artemis; pursued by Apollo: 24
- Darkness:** Primeval entity: 1
- Dawn:** Wife of Tithonus; mother of Memnon; goddess who preceded Helios across the sky each morning: 14, 21, 118
- Day:** Primeval entity: 1
- Death:** God who brought death: 41, 57, 70, 91, 115, 116
- Deianira:** Daughter of King Oeneus and Queen Althaea of Calydon; sister of Meleager and Tydeus; wife of Heracles; mother of Hyllus: 73, 75
- Deioneus:** Father of Dia; father-in-law of Ixion: 40
- Deiphobus:** Son of King Priam and Queen Hecabe of Troy; brother of Hector, Paris and others; husband of Helen after Paris died: 116
- Deliaes:** Son of King Glaucus and Queen Eurynome of Corinth; half brother of Bellerophon: 58
- Delos:** Island that agreed to let Leto give birth to Artemis and Apollo upon her soil: 8
- Delusion:** Goddess who misleads people: 116
- Demeter:** Daughter of Cronus and Rhea; mother of Persephone by Zeus; goddess of grain and human fecundity: 3–7, 12, 18, 19, 27, 38, 51, 65, 73, 77, 78, 80, 86, 95, 101, 107, 108, 114
- Demodocus:** Bard who entertained the Phaeacians: 131
- Demophon:** Son of King Celeus and Queen Metanira of Eleusis; nursling of Demeter: 6
- Demophon:** Son of Theseus and Phaedra; brother of Acamas; fought at Troy; king of Athens: 101
- Desire:** Primeval force: 1
- Deucalion:** Son of Prometheus; husband of Pyrrha; survivor of the Flood: 19, 23, 52
- Deucalion:** Son of King Minos and Queen Pasiphaë of Crete; brother of Ariadne, Phaedra, Glaucus and Androgeus; king of Crete: 99
- Dia:** Daughter of Deioneus; wife of King Ixion of the Lapiths; mother of Pirithous by Zeus: 40, 114
- Dictys:** Brother of Polydectes; husband of Danaë; foster father of Perseus: 53, 56
- Diomed:** Wife of King Amyclas of Sparta; mother of Hyacinthus: 32
- Diomedes:** King of the Bistones; had mares who ate human flesh: 69, 70, 73
- Diomedes:** Son of Tydeus; fought in the second Theban War and at Troy for the Greeks: 110, 114, 119
- Dione:** Daughter of Atlas; wife of King Tantalus of Lydia; mother of Niobe and Pelops: 26
- Dionysus:** Son of Zeus and Persephone and then son of Zeus and Semele; god of wine and drama; 10, 12, 13, 19, 20, 25, 31, 35, 37, 48, 51, 62, 63, 67, 74, 77, 78, 80, 81, 98, 102, 108, 114, 117
- Dioscuri:** Name given to Castor and Polydeuces: 33. *See also* Castor; Polydeuces
- Doliones:** Hospitable people visited by Jason and the Argonauts; ruled by Cyzicus: 83, 84
- Dryops:** Shepherd whose daughter gave birth to Pan: 35
- Earth:** Primeval entity: 1–5, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19–21, 23, 29, 30, 32, 39, 51, 54, 61, 72, 74, 77, 93, 109, 113, 114, 125, 126
- Echidna:** Daughter of Ceto and Phorcys; mate of Typhon; mother and grandmother of many monsters; half human, half snake: 2, 16, 54, 59, 66, 94, 104
- Echion:** One of the five Spartan ancestors who emerged from the serpent's teeth; husband of Agave; father of Pentheus: 63
- Echion:** Son of Hermes; twin brother of Eurytus; Argonaut and participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 82, 92
- Echo:** Mother of Iynx by Pan; nymph who loved Narcissus: 36
- Egyptus:** Son of King Belus of Egypt; brother of Danaus; father of 50 sons: 42, 52
- Eidothea:** Daughter of Proteus; sea nymph: 126



- Eileithya:** Daughter of Zeus and Hera; goddess who oversaw childbirth: 8, 10, 19, 64, 91, 108
- Elara:** Daughter of King Minyas of Orchomenus; mother of Tityus by Zeus: 39
- Electra:** Daughter of King Agamemnon and Queen Clytemnestra of Mycenae; sister of Orestes and Iphigenia; wife of Pylades: 124
- Electryon:** Son of Perseus and Andromeda; brother of Alcaeus, Sthenelus and Gorgophone; father of Alcmena: 64
- Elpenor:** One of Odysseus's men: 134, 135
- Empousai:** Shape-shifting demons: 126
- Endeis:** Wife of King Aeacus of Aegina; mother of Peleus and Telamon: 108
- Epaphus:** Son of Io and Zeus; husband of Memphis; father of Libya; king of Egypt: 20–22, 42
- Epimetheus:** Son of Themis; brother of Prometheus; husband of Pandora; father of Pyrrha: 15, 17, 19
- Epione:** Wife of Asclepius; mother of Machaon, Iaso, Podalirius, Hygeia and Panacea: 43
- Eriboea:** Athenian woman desired by Minos: 96
- Erichthonius:** Son of Hephaestus and Earth; early Athenian king; part human, part snake: 10, 93
- Erginus:** Argonaut from Miletus: 78
- Erigone:** Daughter of Icarus; Athenian maiden: 31
- Eriynes:** Daughters of Sky and Earth; vengeful defenders of familial rights: 1, 41, 42, 48, 62, 79, 89, 100, 105–7, 116, 125, 128. *See also* Semnai Theai; Tisiphone
- Eriphyle:** Sister of Adrastus; wife of Amphiaraus: 106, 134
- Eris:** Goddess of discord: 108, 109
- Eros:** *See* Lust
- Eteocles:** Son of King Oedipus and Queen Jocasta of Thebes; brother of Polynices, Antigone and Ismene; defended Thebes against the attack of the Seven: 106, 107
- Eteoclus:** One of the Seven against Thebes: 106
- Eumaeus:** Odysseus's faithful swineherd: 137–39
- Euneus:** Son of Jason and Queen Hypsipyle of Lemnos: 83
- Euphemus:** Son of Poseidon; Argonaut and participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 82, 85, 92
- Euphorbus:** Trojan warrior: 115
- Europa:** Daughter of King Agenor of Phoenicia (or Phoenix of Phoenicia); sister of Cadmus; wife of Asterius; mother, by Zeus, of Minos, Rhadamanthys and Sarpedon: 20, 22, 23, 25, 27, 42, 44, 46, 52, 61, 114
- Eurycleia:** Odysseus's faithful old nurse: 128, 138–40
- Eurydice:** Wife of Orpheus; nymph: 79, 80
- Eurydice:** Wife of King Creon of Thebes; mother of Haemon, Megara and Megareus: 107
- Eurylochus:** One of Odysseus's men: 133, 136
- Eurymachus:** Suitor of Penelope: 139
- Eurynome:** Sea goddess who nurtured Hephaestus: 10
- Eurynome:** Daughter of King Nisus of Megara; wife of King Glaucus of Corinth; mother of Bellerophon by Poseidon and Deliades by Glaucus: 57, 58
- Eurystheus:** Son of King Sthenelus and Queen Nicippe of Mycenae; cousin of Heracles who set labors for the hero: 66–69, 71–73, 84, 122
- Eurytion:** Centaur who attempted to kidnap Pirithous's wife, Hippodamia: 40
- Eurytion:** Geryon's herdsman: 71
- Eurytion:** Father of Antigone and father-in-law of Peleus; king of Phthia; Argonaut and participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 82, 92, 108
- Eurytus:** Father of Iole and Iphitus; king of Oechalia: 74, 75
- Eurytus:** Son of Hermes; twin brother of Echion; Argonaut: 82
- Evander:** Italian king who welcomed Heracles: 72
- Fate/Fates:** Three goddesses who determined the length and quality of each mortal's life: 4, 26, 38, 45, 64, 65, 70, 71, 92, 97, 105–9, 111, 115, 116, 118, 126. *See also* Clotho
- Force:** Primeval entity: 16



466 INDEX OF CHARACTERS

- Galinthias:** Friend of Alcmena; servant of Hecate: 64
- Geryon:** Son of Callirhoë and Chrysaor; had three bodies and heads; killed by Hercules: 71–73
- Gigantes:** Massive, snake-legged creatures born from Earth; tried to topple the gods: 1, 37, 74, 127
- Glaucē:** Daughter of King Creon of Corinth: 91
- Glaucus:** Son of King Minos and Queen Pasiphaë of Crete; brother of Ariadne, Phaedra, Androgeus and Deucalion; resurrected by Polyidus: 44
- Glaucus:** Son of King Sisyphus of Corinth; husband of Eurynome; father of Deliades and stepfather of Bellerophon; king of Corinth: 57, 58
- Glaucus:** Sea god: 84
- Glaucus:** Lycian ally of the Trojans: 118
- Gorgons:** Snake-haired daughters of Phorcys and Ceto: 2, 25, 53–57. *See also* Medusa
- Gorgophone:** Daughter of Perseus and Andromeda; sister of Alcaeus, Electryon and Sthenelus; wife of King Oebalus of Sparta; mother of Tyndareus: 33, 64
- Graces:** Goddesses who oversaw the graceful aspects of life and attended Aphrodite: 1, 14, 17, 50, 108, 114. *See also* Pasithea
- Graecae:** Three daughters of Ceto and Phorcys who shared a single eye and a single tooth; born old and gray: 2, 53, 54
- Hades:** Son of Cronus and Rhea; husband of Persephone; ruler of the Underworld, which is also called Hades: 3–7, 12, 29, 41, 53, 54, 62, 73, 78–80, 100, 107, 134
- Haemon:** Son of King Creon and Queen Eurydice of Thebes; brother of Megara and Megareus; fiancé of Antigone: 107
- Harmonia:** Daughter of Ares and Aphrodite; wife of King Cadmus of Thebes; mother of Semele, Ino, Agave, Autonoe and Polydorus: 25, 26, 62, 102, 106
- Harp/Harpies:** Fast, voracious raptors with women's faces: 25, 41, 78, 85
- Hebe:** Daughter of Zeus and Hera; wife of Hercules; goddess of youth: 75, 108
- Hecabe:** Wife of King Priam of Troy; mother of Hector, Helenus, Paris, Polyxena, Cassandra, Polydorus and many others: 109, 112, 114, 117, 121
- Hecate:** Titan who sided with Zeus; goddess of childbirth and magic; companion of Persephone: 2, 4, 5, 7, 16, 27, 64, 77, 80, 86–88, 99, 126
- Hector:** Son of King Priam and Queen Hecabe of Troy; brother of Paris, Cassandra, Helenus and many others; husband of Andromache; father of Astyanax; greatest of the Trojan warriors: 112–19, 121, 127
- Helen:** Daughter of Zeus and Queen Leda of Sparta; twin sister of Polydeuces; half sister of Castor and Clytemnestra; wife of Menelaus, Paris and Deiphobus; mother of Hermione; most beautiful woman in the world: 33, 100, 101, 109–12, 114, 119, 120, 122, 126, 127, 129, 134, 137, 140
- Helenus:** Son of King Priam and Queen Hecabe of Troy; brother of Hector, Paris, Cassandra and others; second husband of Andromache; seer; best of the Trojan warriors after Hector: 119, 121, 127
- Heliades:** Daughters of Helios; sisters of Phaethon, for whom they wept: 21
- Helios:** Father of Circe, Pasiphaë, Aeëtes, Phaethon and others; god who drove the chariot of the sun across the sky each day: 2, 4, 5, 8, 21, 30, 44, 46, 54, 64, 68, 71, 72, 80, 89, 91, 114, 122, 133, 134, 136
- Helle:** Daughter of Athamas and Nephele; sister of Phrixus and half sister of Learchus and Melicertes; flew on the golden ram: 62, 71, 83
- Hephaestus:** Son of Hera; husband of Aphrodite; god of blacksmithing and other crafts: 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22, 25, 27, 30, 40, 62, 68, 69, 72, 83, 86, 91, 93, 94, 97, 106, 108, 116, 118, 131
- Hera:** Daughter of Cronus and Rhea; wife of Zeus; goddess who watched over married women and mothers: 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 14, 20, 25, 34, 36, 39–41, 45, 62, 64–66, 71–73, 75, 77, 82, 86–89, 91, 102, 108, 109, 113–15, 123
- Heracles:** Son of Zeus and Alcmena; husband of Megara, Deianira and Hebe; father of Hyllus, Lamos and many other children; killer of many monsters; Argonaut; great-

- est of Greek heroes: 16, 20, 33, 64–75, 78, 82–86, 90, 93–96, 98, 100, 104, 108, 110, 114, 115, 119, 122, 127, 134, 139
- Hermaphroditus:** Son of Hermes and Aphrodite: 49
- Hermes:** Son of Zeus and Maia; a tricky, clever god; guides the dead to Hades: 7, 11, 13, 14, 17, 18, 20, 28, 29, 32, 35, 40–42, 49, 53–56, 62, 64, 73, 82, 108, 109, 112, 117, 122, 124, 125, 128, 130, 133, 136
- Hermione:** Daughter of King Menelaus and Queen Helen of Sparta; wife of Neoptolemus and Orestes; mother of Tisamenus: 110, 127, 129
- Herse:** Daughter of King Cecrops of Athens; sister of Aglaurus and Pandrosus: 93
- Hesperides:** Daughters of Atlas; tended a garden in the far west: 72, 79, 90
- Hestia:** Daughter of Cronus and Rhea; virgin goddess of the hearth: 3, 4, 14, 16, 70, 108
- Hind, Ceryneian:** Swift hind that once was the nymph Taygete; pursued by Heracles: 67, 69
- Hippocoön:** Son of King Oebalus of Sparta; half brother of Tyndareus: 33
- Hippodamia:** Daughter of King Oenomaus of Elis; wife of Pelops; mother of Atreus, Thyestes, Nicippe and others: 38, 122
- Hippodamia:** Wife of King Pirithous of the Lapiths; kidnapped by Eurytion the centaur: 40, 98, 100
- Hippolyta:** Amazon queen; conquered by Heracles: 71, 73, 85
- Hippolyta:** Wife of Theseus; mother of Hippolytus; Amazon queen: 98, 99
- Hippolytus:** Son of Theseus and Hippolyta: 43, 51, 99
- Hippomedon:** One of the Seven against Thebes: 106
- Hippomenes:** Husband of Atalanta; beat her in a race: 76
- Hundred-Handers:** Sons of Earth and Sky: 1, 3
- Hycinthus:** Son of King Amyclas and Queen Diomedea of Sparta; beloved by Apollo: 32
- Hydra:** Daughter of Echidna and Typhon; nine-headed water snake; killed by Heracles: 2, 54, 66, 67, 69, 71, 75, 119, 127
- Hygeia:** Daughter of Asclepius and Epione; skilled at healing: 43
- Hylas:** Young lover of Heracles; Argonaut: 68, 82, 84
- Hyllus:** Son of Heracles and Deianira; husband of Iole: 75
- Hymen:** God who blessed weddings: 48, 79
- Hyperbius:** Theban warrior who defended the city against the Seven: 106
- Hypermnestra:** Daughter of Danaus; wife of Lynceus; mother of Abas: 42, 52
- Hypseus:** Father of Cyrene; king of the Lapiths: 79
- Hypsipyle:** Mother of Euneus by Jason; queen of Lemnos who welcomed the Argonauts: 83, 87
- Hyrieus:** Foster father of Orion; Boeotian farmer: 29, 30
- Iambe:** Attendant of Queen Metanira of Eleusis: 6
- Iaso:** Daughter of Asclepius and Epione; skilled healer: 43
- Icarius:** Athenian farmer; father of Erigone: 31
- Icarus:** Son of Daedalus: 47
- Idas:** Twin brother of Lynceus; Argonaut and participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 33, 82, 92
- Idmon:** Father of Arachne; Lydian dyer: 27
- Idmon:** Seer; Argonaut: 82, 84
- Inachus:** Father of Io; river god of Argos: 20
- Ino:** Daughter of King Cadmus and Queen Harmonia of Thebes; sister of Semele, Autonoe, Agave and Polydorus; wife of Athamas; mother of Learchus and Melicertes; stepmother of Phrixus and Helle; foster mother of Dionysus; became the sea goddess Leucothea: 25, 62, 102, 130
- Io:** Daughter of Inachus; mother of Epaphus by Zeus; identified with the goddess Isis: 20, 22, 36, 42, 52, 56, 61, 71, 72
- Iobates:** Father of Stheneboea and Philonoë; king of Lycia who set tasks for Bellerophon: 58–60
- Iolaus:** Son of Heracles's half brother Iphicles: 66, 67
- Iole:** Daughter of King Eurytus of Oechalia; sister of Iphitus; wife of Hyllus: 74, 75

468 INDEX OF CHARACTERS

- Iphicles:** Son of Alcmena and Amphitryon; half brother of Heracles; father of Iolaus; participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 64–66, 92
- Iphigenia:** Daughter of King Agamemnon and Queen Clytemnestra of Mycenae; sister of Electra and Orestes: 111, 123, 124, 126
- Iphitus:** Son of King Eurytus of Oechalia; brother of Iole: 74, 139
- Iris:** Daughter of Zeus and Hera; messenger of the gods: 7, 8, 85, 108, 115, 117
- Ischys:** Arcadian man; lover of Coronis: 43
- Isis:** Egyptian goddess of the moon; identified with Io: 20
- Ismene:** Daughter of King Oedipus and Queen Jocasta of Thebes; sister of Polyneices, Eteocles and Antigone: 106, 107
- Isse:** Nymph loved by Apollo: 27
- Itys:** Son of King Tereus and Queen Procne of Thrace: 48
- Ixion:** Husband of Dia; father of Centaurus and (perhaps) Pirithous; king of the Lapiths: 40, 81, 114
- Iynx:** Daughter of Pan and Echo; nymph who became the love charm called an iynx: 36, 86, 91
- Jason:** Son of King Aeson and Queen Alcimede of Iolcus; husband of Medea; father of Euneus by Queen Hypsipyle of Lemnos and two sons by Medea; leader of the Argonauts and participants in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 16, 33, 56, 68, 70, 78, 81–92, 133
- Jocasta:** Sister of Creon; wife of King Laius of Thebes; wife and mother of Oedipus; mother of Polyneices, Eteocles, Antigone and Ismene: 102, 104, 105, 134
- Labdacus:** Son of King Polydorus of Thebes; father of Laius; king of Thebes: 102
- Ladon:** River god: 35
- Ladon:** Son of Echidna and Typhon; dragon who guarded the apples of the Hesperides: 72
- Laertes:** Husband of Anticleia; father of Odysseus; participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar; king of Ithaca: 41, 92, 128, 134, 138, 140
- Laestrygonians:** Cannibals who ate some of Odysseus's men: 133
- Laius:** Son of King Labdacus of Thebes; father of Oedipus; husband of Jocasta; king of Thebes: 102, 105
- Lamos:** Son of Heracles and Queen Omphale of Lydia: 75
- Lampetia:** Daughter of Helios; tended his herds on Thrinacia: 136
- Laocoön:** Trojan nobleman: 120
- Laodamia:** Wife of Protesilaus: 112
- Laomedon:** Father of Tithonus and Priam; king of Troy: 14, 119
- Lapiths:** Fierce tribe of people from northern Greece: 32, 40, 43, 79, 98
- Learchus:** Son of Ino and Athamas; brother of Melicertes and half brother of Phrixus and Helle: 62
- Leda:** Daughter of King Thestius of Pleuron; wife of King Tyndareus of Sparta; mother of Clytemnestra and Castor by Tyndareus and Helen and Polydeuces by Zeus: 27, 33, 52, 78, 82, 100, 109, 126, 127, 134
- Leocritus:** Suitor of Penelope: 139
- Leodes:** Suitor of Penelope: 139
- Leto:** Mother of Artemis and Apollo by Zeus; goddess: 8, 26, 39, 102, 108, 114, 115, 117
- Leucothea:** Sea goddess who once was Ino: 62, 130
- Libya:** Daughter of King Epaphus and Queen Memphis of Egypt; mother of Belus and Agenor by Poseidon: 22
- Ligurians:** Italian tribe that tried to steal cattle from Heracles: 72
- Linus:** Music teacher of Heracles: 65
- Lion, Nemean:** Son of Echidna and Typhon; lion with impenetrable skin; killed by Heracles: 2, 66, 67, 69, 71
- Lirioppe:** Mother of Narcissus by the river Cephisus; river nymph: 36
- Lotus-Eaters:** People who ate only lotus and tempted Odysseus's men to do the same: 132
- Lust:** God of sexual desire (= Eros); sometimes called a primeval force; sometimes called the son of Aphrodite and Ares: 1, 14, 24
- Lycaon:** Father of Callisto, Nyctimus and many others; king of Arcadia: 18, 19, 23

- Lycomedes:** Grandfather of Neoptolemus; king of Scyros: 101, 110, 119
- Lycurgus:** Thracian king who attacked Dionysus: 77
- Lycus:** King of the Mariandynoi; welcomed the Argonauts: 85
- Lynceus:** Twin brother of Idas; Argonaut and participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 33, 82, 90, 92
- Lynceus:** Son of Egyptus; husband of Hypermnestra; father of Abas: 42, 52
- Lysa:** Goddess who inflicted madness: 65
- Machaon:** Son of Asclepius and Epione; skilled healer; served at Troy: 43, 110
- Maenads:** Maddened women who followed Dionysus: 63, 77, 80
- Maera:** Faithful dog of Erigone: 31
- Maia:** Mother of Hermes by Zeus; goddess: 11
- Mares of Diomedes:** Mares who ate human flesh; belonged to Diomedes, king of the Bistones: 69
- Medea:** Daughter of King Aeëtes of Colchis; sister of Chalciope and Apsyrtus; wife of Jason and later Aegeus; mother of Medus and two other sons; expert in the uses of plants and drugs: 16, 86–91, 95
- Medus:** Son of Medea and King Aegeus of Athens; king of Persia: 95
- Medusa:** Daughter of Ceto and Phorcys; mother of Pegasus and Chrysaor by Poseidon; Gorgon who turned all who gazed at her into stone; killed by Perseus: 53, 55–57, 71, 72, 134
- Megapenthes:** Son of King Proetus of Tiryns; king of Tiryns and later Argos: 56
- Megara:** Daughter of King Creon and Queen Eurydice of Thebes; sister of Haemon and Megareus; wife of Heracles; mother of 8 sons: 65, 134
- Megareus:** Son of King Creon and Queen Eurydice of Thebes; brother of Haemon and Megara; defender of Thebes against the Seven: 106
- Melampus:** Brother of Bias; seer from Pylos, from whom a line of great seers descended: 34, 44, 106
- Melanippus:** Warrior who defended Thebes against the Seven: 106
- Melanthius:** Goatherd lackey of Penelope's suitors: 139
- Melas:** Son of Phrixus and Chalciope; brother of Argus, Cytissorus and Phrontis: 86
- Meleager:** Son of King Oeneus and Queen Althaea of Calydon; brother of Deianira and Tydeus; Argonaut; organized party to hunt the Calydonian Boar: 33, 73, 75, 82, 92, 100
- Melicertes:** Son of Athamas and Ino; brother of Learchus and half brother of Phrixus and Helle; became the god Palaemon: 62
- Melpomene:** Daughter of Zeus and Mnemosyne; mother, by the river god Achelous, of the nymphs who became the Sirens; muse of tragedy: 78
- Memnon:** Son of Dawn and Tithonus; Ethiopian warrior who fought for Troy: 118
- Memphis:** Wife of King Epaphus of Egypt; mother of Libya: 22
- Menelaus:** Son of Atreus and Aerope; brother of Agamemnon; husband of Helen; father of Hermione; king of Sparta: 110–14, 118–20, 122, 126–29, 137
- Menestheus:** Distant cousin of Theseus who deposed him: 101
- Menoetes:** Friend of Geryon: 71
- Mentes:** Taphian trader; friend of Odysseus; Athena disguised herself as him: 128
- Mentor:** Nobleman from Ithaca; Athena disguised herself as him: 128, 129
- Merope:** Daughter of King Oenopion of Chios; raped by Orion: 30
- Merope:** Daughter of Atlas; wife of King Sisyphus of Corinth: 41
- Merope:** Wife of King Polybus of Corinth; adoptive mother of Oedipus: 102, 105
- Metanira:** Wife of King Celeus of Eleusis; mother of Demophon and 4 daughters: 6
- Metis:** Daughter of Ocean and Tethys; first wife of Zeus; mother of Athena; goddess with exceptional intelligence: 3, 4, 8, 125
- Midas:** Very wealthy king of Phrygia: 29, 37
- Miltiades:** Athenian commander to whom Theseus appeared during a battle: 101
- Minos:** Son of Zeus and Europa; brother of Rhadamanthys and Sarpedon; husband of Pasiphaë; father of Ariadne, Phaedra, Androgeus, Deucalion and Glaucus; king

470 INDEX OF CHARACTERS

- of Crete: 22, 44–47, 69, 96, 97, 99, 104, 114, 134
- Minotaur:** Son of Pasiphaë and a bull; monster with a man's body and a bull's head; his birth name was Asterius: 46, 69, 95–97, 133
- Minyas:** Father of Elara; king of Orchomenus: 39
- Mnemosyne:** Mother of the Muses by Zeus; grandmother of Orpheus and the Sirens; Titan who controlled memory: 1, 2, 77, 78, 80
- Mopsus:** Seer who sailed with the Argonauts: 56, 82, 84
- Mother of the Gods:** Goddess who was often equated with Rhea or Cybele: 78, 84, 99
- Mountains:** Primeval entities: 1, 2
- Muses:** Nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne who watched over the arts: 77, 79, 80, 108, 118. *See also* Calliope; Melpomene
- Myrmidons:** Soldiers created out of ants; fought with Achilles at Troy: 110, 112, 115, 118, 127
- Myrrha:** Daughter of King Cinyras and Queen Cenchreis of Cyprus; mother of Adonis: 51
- Myrtilus:** Son of Hermes; charioteer of Oenomaus: 38, 122
- Narcissus:** Son of Cephisus and Liriope; handsome young man: 36
- Nausicaa:** Daughter of King Alcinoos and Queen Arete of Phaeacia; helped Odysseus: 131, 136
- Nemesis:** Goddess of retribution: 36
- Neoptolemus:** Son of Achilles; husband of Hermione; father of sons by Andromache; fought at Troy; king of Molossia: 119, 121, 127, 129, 134
- Nephele:** Cloud shaped into the form of a goddess to fool Ixion; wife of Athamas; mother of Centaurus, Phrixus and Helle: 40, 62, 67, 81
- Nereids:** Daughters of Nereus; sea nymphs: 19, 45, 56, 89, 96, 108, 118, 137. *See also* Eurynome; Leucothea; Psamathe; Thetis
- Nereus:** Sea god; also called the “Old Man of the Sea”: 56, 72, 84, 96, 108
- Nessus:** Centaur killed by Heracles: 75, 104
- Nestor:** Father of Pisistratus and other sons; Argonaut and participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar; fought at Troy; king of Pylos: 82, 92, 110, 113, 128, 129, 137
- Nicippe:** Daughter of King Pelops and Queen Hippodamia of Elis; sister of Atreus and Thyestes; half sister of Chrysippus; wife of King Sthenelus of Mycenae; mother of Eurystheus: 122
- Night:** Primeval entity: 1, 79
- Niobe:** Daughter of King Tantalus and Queen Dione of Lydia; sister of Pelops; wife of King Amphion of Thebes; mother of 14 children: 26, 27, 102, 117
- Nisus:** Son of Pylia; brother of Aegeus; father of Scylla and Eurynome; king of Megara: 45, 57
- Nyctimus:** Son of King Lycaon of Arcadia: 18
- Ocean:** Husband of Tethys; primeval entity: 3, 4, 21, 35, 54, 71, 72, 81, 114, 116, 134
- Odysseus:** Son of King Laertes and Queen Anticleia of Ithaca; husband of Penelope; father of Telemachus, Telegonus and Ptoliporthes; fought for the Greeks at Troy; king of Ithaca: 41, 110–13, 115, 118–21, 128–40
- Oeagrus:** Son of Charops; father of Orpheus by Calliope; king of Thrace: 77
- Oebalus:** Husband of Gorgophone; father of Tyndareus and Hippocoön; king of Sparta: 33
- Oedipus:** Son of King Laius and Queen Jocasta of Thebes; adopted son of King Polybus and Queen Merope of Corinth; husband of Jocasta; father of Antigone, Ismene, Polynices and Eteocles; king of Thebes: 102–6, 134
- Oeleus:** Argonaut from Locris: 82, 86
- Oeneus:** Husband of Althaea; father of Meleager, Tydeus and Deianira; king of Calydon: 73, 75, 92, 106
- Oenomaus:** Father of Hippodamia; king of Elis: 38
- Oenopion:** Father of Merope; king of Chios: 30
- Omphale:** Mother of Lamos by Heracles; queen of Lydia: 74, 75

- Orestes:** Son of King Agamemnon and Queen Clytemnestra of Mycenae; brother of Electra and Iphigenia; husband of Hermione; father of Tisamenus: 111, 123–25, 127–29, 134
- Orion:** Son of Earth; foster son of Hyrieus; mighty hunter: 29, 30, 134
- Orpheus:** Son of Calliope and King Oeagrus of Thrace; husband of Eurydice; marvelous musician; Argonaut: 37, 77–80, 82–84, 89
- Orthrus:** Son of Echidna; brother of Cerberus and other monsters; Geryon's two-headed dog: 71
- Palaemon:** Melicertes's name after he became a god; watched over athletic festivals: 62
- Palamedes:** Clever man from Euboea; fought at Troy: 110
- Pan:** Son of Hermes and the daughter of Dryops; father of lynx by Echo; god of the forest and flocks; half goat: 18, 27, 35–37, 74, 99
- Panacea:** Daughter of Asclepius and Epione; skilled at healing: 43
- Pandarus:** Lycian ally of the Trojans: 114
- Pandion:** Father of Procne and Philomela; king of Athens: 10, 48
- Pandora:** First woman; wife of Epimetheus; mother of Pyrrha: 17–19, 43
- Pandrosus:** Daughter of King Cecrops of Athens; sister of Aglaurus and Herse: 93
- Paphos:** Son of Pygmalion and his statue; father of King Cinyras of Cyprus: 50, 51
- Paris:** Son of King Priam and Queen Hecabe of Troy; brother of Hector, Cassandra, Helenus and many others; husband of Helen; warrior: 109, 110, 112–14, 116, 118, 119, 121, 126
- Parthenopaeus:** Son of Atalanta; one of the Seven against Thebes: 106
- Pasiphaë:** Daughter of Helios; sister of Circe and Aeëtes; wife of King Minos of Crete; mother of the Minotaur, Glaucus, Deucalion, Androgeus, Ariadne and Phaedra: 44, 46, 69, 96, 133
- Pasithea:** One of the younger Graces, whom Hera gave in marriage to Sleep: 114
- Patroclus:** Cousin and best friend of Achilles: 110, 112, 115–18, 121
- Pedasus:** Mortal horse of Achilles: 115
- Pegasus:** Son of Medusa and Poseidon; brother of Chrysaor; winged horse tamed by Bellerophon: 57–60, 127
- Pelagus:** Early king of Argos; welcomed Danaus and his daughters: 42
- Peleus:** Son of King Aeacus and Queen Endeis of Aegina; brother of Telamon and half brother of Phocus; husband of Antigone and later Thetis; father of Achilles; king of Phthia; Argonaut and participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 76, 82, 90, 92, 108–11, 115, 117, 126, 134
- Pelias:** Brother of King Aeson of Iolcus, from whom he stole the throne; father of Acastus and several daughters; uncle of Jason, whom he sent after the Golden Fleece: 81, 82, 87, 90, 108
- Pelopia:** Daughter of Thyestes and, by him, mother of Aegisthus: 122
- Pelops:** Son of King Tantalus and Queen Dione of Lydia; brother of Niobe; husband of Hippodamia; father of Atreus, Thyestes, Chrysipus and other children; king of Elis: 38, 102, 105, 122
- Penelope:** Wife of Odysseus and later wife of Telegonus; mother of Telemachus and Ptoliporthes; cousin to Helen, Clytemnestra, Castor and Polydeuces; clever and resourceful woman: 110, 128, 134, 137–40
- Peneus:** Father of Daphne; river god: 24, 79
- Penthesilea:** Daughter of Ares; Amazon who fought as an ally for the Trojans: 118
- Pentheus:** Son of Agave and Echion; king of Thebes: 25, 63, 102
- Perdix:** Nephew of Daedalus; clever inventor: 47
- Periclymenus:** Theban warrior who defended the city against the Seven: 106
- Periphetes:** Son of Hephaestus; attacked travelers with his club; killed by Theseus: 94, 95
- Persephone:** Daughter of Demeter and Zeus; wife of Hades; mother of Dionysus; queen of the Underworld: 5–7, 12, 13, 21, 27, 41, 73, 77–80, 100, 134

472 INDEX OF CHARACTERS

- Perseus:** Son of Zeus and Danaë; husband of Andromeda; father of Alcaeus, Electryon, Sthenelus and Gorgophone; killed Medusa; king of Tiryns; founded Mycenae: 20, 33, 38, 52–57, 64, 66, 72, 114, 122
- Persuasion:** Primeval force: 17
- Phaea:** Depraved old woman who nurtured the Crommyonian Sow; killed by Theseus: 94
- Phaeacians:** Hospitable people who lived on an island in the ocean: 89, 130, 131, 136–37
- Phaedra:** Daughter of King Minos and Queen Pasiphaë of Crete; sister of Ariadne, Glaucus, Androgeus and Deucalion; wife of Theseus; mother of Acamas and Demophon: 99–101, 134
- Phaethon:** Son of Helios and Clymene; prince of Ethiopia: 21
- Phaethousa:** Daughter of Helios; tended his herds on Thrinacia: 136
- Philemon:** Husband of Baucis; peasant man of Phrygia: 28, 37
- Philoctetes:** Thessalian who fought with the Greeks against Troy; friend of Heracles: 75, 110, 119
- Philoetius:** Faithful cowherd of Odysseus: 139
- Philomela:** Daughter of King Pandion of Athens; sister of Procne: 48
- Philonöë:** Daughter of King Iobates of Lycia; sister of Stheneboea; wife of Bellerophon: 60
- Philyra:** Daughter of Ocean; mother of Chiron by Cronus: 81
- Phineus:** Brother of King Cepheus of Ethiopia; fiancé of Andromeda: 56
- Phineus:** Husband of Cleopatra; king of Bithynia; hosted the Argonauts: 78, 85, 86, 89
- Phlegyas:** Son of Ares and Chryse; father of Coronis; king of Trikke: 43
- Phocus:** Son of King Aeacus of Aegina and Psamathe; half brother of Peleus and Telamon: 108
- Phoenix:** Father of Europa; king of Phoenicia: 114
- Phoenix:** Tutor of Achilles: 110, 115, 119, 127
- Pholus:** Centaur who hosted Heracles: 67
- Phorcys:** Son of Earth and Sea; husband of Ceto; father of many monsters; looked like a fish from the waist down: 2, 53, 54
- Phrixus:** Son of Athamas and Nephele; brother of Helle and half brother of Learchus and Melicertes; husband of Chalciopie; father of Argus, Cytissorus, Phrontis and Melas; flew on the golden ram to Colchis: 62, 82, 83, 86, 88
- Phrontis:** Son of Phrixus and Chalciopie; brother of Argus, Cytissorus and Melas: 86
- Pirithous:** Son of Dia and Ixion (or Zeus); husband of Hippodamia; king of the Lapiths; best friend of Theseus; participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 40, 92, 98–100, 114
- Pisistratus:** Son of King Nestor of Pylos; friend of Telemachus: 129
- Pittheus:** Father of Aethra; king of Troezen; very clever man: 93–95, 99
- Pleiades:** Seven sister goddesses whom Orion tried to rape; Zeus turned them into doves and then stars: 30
- Plexippus:** Brother of Althaea and Toxeus; uncle of Meleager; participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 92
- Podalirius:** Son of Asclepius and Epione; skilled healer; served at Troy: 43, 110
- Polybus:** Husband of Merope; adoptive father of Oedipus; king of Corinth: 102, 105
- Polydamna:** Wife of Thon, warden of the port of Canopus: 126, 129
- Polydectes:** Brother of Dictys; king of Seriphus: 53, 56
- Polydeuces:** Son of Queen Leda of Sparta by Zeus; twin brother of Helen; half brother of Castor and Clytemnestra; Argonaut and participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 33, 78, 81, 82, 85, 92, 101, 110
- Polydorus:** Son of King Cadmus and Queen Harmonia of Thebes; brother of Semele, Agave, Autonöë and Ino; father of Labdacus; king of Thebes: 29, 102
- Polydorus:** Son of King Priam and Queen Hecabe of Troy; brother of Hector, Paris, Cassandra and many others: 112, 121



- Polyidus:** Descendant of Melampus; seer: 44, 45, 47, 57, 104
- Polymestor:** King of Thrace: 112, 121
- Polynices:** Son of King Oedipus and Queen Jocasta of Thebes; brother of Eteocles, Antigone and Ismene; husband of Argia; father of Thersander; one of the Seven against Thebes: 106, 107, 110
- Polyphemus:** Argonaut from Thessaly: 82, 84
- Polyphemus:** Son of Poseidon; Cyclops who ate some of Odysseus's men: 132, 133
- Polyphontes:** Theban warrior who defended the city against the Seven: 106
- Polyxena:** Daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecabe of Troy; sister of Hector, Paris, Cassandra and many others: 121
- Polyxo:** Old nurse of Hypsipyle of Lemnos: 83
- Poseidon:** Son of Cronus and Rhea; husband of Amphitrite; god of the waters, earthquakes and horses: 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 22, 27, 29, 30, 38, 45, 46, 55–57, 60, 62, 69, 71, 72, 82, 84, 90, 93, 94, 96, 99, 100, 108, 115, 123, 128–32, 134, 136, 140
- Power:** Primeval entity: 16
- Priam:** Son of King Laomedon of Troy; husband of Hecabe; father of Hector, Paris, Cassandra and many others; king of Troy: 14, 109, 112, 114–19, 121, 123
- Procne:** Daughter of King Pandion of Athens; sister of Philomela; wife of King Tereus of Thrace; mother of Itys: 48
- Procris:** Athenian princess who cured Minos of an illness: 46, 134
- Procrustes:** Predator who deformed people to fit his bed; killed by Theseus: 94, 95
- Proetus:** Son of King Abas of Argos; twin brother of Acrisius; husband of Sthenoboea; father of Megapenthes and several daughters; king of Tiryns: 34, 52, 56, 58, 60
- Prometheus:** Son of Themis; brother of Epimetheus; father of Deucalion; Titan who helped create men and fought for their advancement: 4, 8, 15–17, 19, 20, 46, 72, 86, 87, 108, 109
- Propoetus:** Man from Cyprus whose daughters denied Aphrodite's existence: 50
- Protesilaus:** Husband of Laodamia; Greek warrior at Troy; first to leap ashore: 110, 112, 115
- Proteus:** Father of Eidothea; sea god: 126, 129
- Psamathe:** Mother of Phocus by King Aeacus of Aegina; sea nymph: 108
- Ptoliporthes:** Son of Odysseus and Penelope; brother of Telemachus; half brother of Telegonus: 140
- Pygmalion:** Father of Paphos by the statue he created; Cypriot sculptor: 50–51
- Pyldes:** Son of King Strophius of Phocis; husband of Electra; best friend of Orcestes: 124
- Pylia:** Mother of King Nisus of Megara and King Aegeus of Athens: 45
- Pyrrha:** Daughter of Pandora and Epimetheus; wife of Deucalion; survivor of the Flood: 17, 19, 23, 52
- Pythia:** Apollo's prophetess at Delphi: 44, 74, 93, 102, 103, 127
- Python:** Enormous snake killed by Apollo: 9, 19
- Rhadamanthys:** Son of Zeus and Europa; brother of Minos and Sarpedon; judge in the Underworld: 22, 65, 114
- Rhea:** Daughter of Earth and Sky; wife of Cronus; mother of the older Olympians: 2–4, 7, 81. *See also* Mother of the Gods
- Salmacis:** Nymph of a pool near Halicarnassus: 49
- Samothracian Gods:** Gods who oversaw mysteries on Samothrace: 80
- Sarpedon:** Son of Zeus and Europa; brother of Minos and Rhadamanthys; settled in Lycia; fought as a Trojan ally: 22, 115
- Satyr:** Creature that was part human and part horse: 126. *See also* Silenus
- Scamander:** River god of Troy: 116, 117
- Schoeneus:** Father of Atalanta; Theban nobleman: 76
- Sciron:** Son of Poseidon; predator who kicked people over a cliff along the Saronic Gulf; killed by Theseus: 94, 95, 101
- Scylla:** Daughter of King Nisus of Megara: 45
- Scylla:** Monster with six dog heads; killed some of Odysseus's men: 89, 135, 136



474 INDEX OF CHARACTERS

- Scythians:** Fierce tribe living on the north-west coast of the Black Sea area: 20
- Sea:** Son of Earth who later mated with her; primeval entity: 1–3, 8, 17, 19, 51
- Seasons:** Goddesses; often attended Aphrodite: 1, 108
- Selene:** Goddess of the moon: 2, 4, 43
- Semele:** Daughter of King Cadmus and Queen Harmonia of Thebes; sister of Ino, Agave, Autonoe and Polydorus; mother of Dionysus by Zeus: 12, 13, 25, 62, 63, 102, 114
- Semnai (or Semnai Theai):** New name of the Erinyes after Athena brokered an agreement with them: 106, 125
- Silenus:** Old satyr who was a favorite companion of Dionysus: 37
- Sinis:** Son of Poseidon; evil man who tied travelers between pine trees and tore them apart; killed by Theseus: 94, 95
- Sinon:** Greek warrior who tricked the Trojans into accepting the horse: 120
- Sirens:** Daughters of Melpomene and Achelous; became creatures who were part bird, part goddess; sang to lure ships to their doom: 78, 89, 110, 135
- Sirius:** Orion's dog; became the Dog star: 30
- Sisyphus:** Husband of Merope; father of Glaucus; king of Corinth; accomplished trickster; tortured in Tartarus for his crimes: 41, 42, 57, 79, 134
- Sky:** Son and later husband of Earth; father of the Titans and others; primeval entity: 1–4, 8, 12, 14, 51, 53, 54, 72, 77, 125
- Sleep:** God who brought sleep: 79, 88, 114, 115
- Solymoi:** Fierce tribe that caused trouble for King Iobates of Lycia; conquered by Belerophon: 60
- Sow, Crommyonian:** Daughter of Echidna and Typhon; vicious, gigantic sow; killed by Theseus: 94
- Sphinx:** Daughter of Echidna and Typhon; part lion, part woman, part eagle; loved riddles; was defeated by Oedipus: 2, 54, 104–6
- Stheneboea:** Daughter of King Iobates of Lycia; sister of Philonoë; wife of King Proetus of Tiryns: 58, 60
- Sthenelus:** Son of Perseus of Tiryns and Andromeda; brother of Alcaeus, Electryon and Gorgophone; husband of Nicippe; father of Eurystheus; king of Mycenae: 64, 66, 122
- Sthenelus:** Son of Capaneus; participated in the second attack on Thebes and the expedition to Troy: 110
- Strophius:** Father of Pylades; fostered Orestes; king of Phocis: 124
- Styx:** River in the Underworld by whose waters the gods swore their greatest oaths; also, the goddess of that river: 4, 6, 8, 12, 14, 21, 85, 118, 130
- Syrinx:** Nymph pursued by Pan: 35
- Talthybius:** Herald of the Greek army at Troy: 121
- Talus:** Huge bronze man who patrolled the coast of Crete: 90
- Tantalus:** Son of Zeus; husband of Dione; father of Pelops and Niobe; king of Lydia; tortured in Tartarus for his crimes: 26, 27, 38, 41, 42, 79, 122, 134
- Tartarus:** Primeval entity and place beneath Earth where the worst transgressors were punished: 1, 3, 4, 38–42, 57, 122
- Taygete:** Nymph; follower of Artemis who was turned into the Ceryneian Hind: 67
- Telamon:** Son of King Aeacus and Queen Endeis of Aegina; brother of Peleus and half brother of Phocus; father of Ajax; Argonaut; king of Salamis: 82, 84, 108, 110, 134
- Telegonus:** Son of Circe and Odysseus; half brother of Telemachus and Ptoliporthes; husband of Penelope: 140
- Telemachus:** Son of Odysseus and Penelope; brother of Ptoliporthes; half brother of Telegonus; husband of Circe: 110, 128–30, 134, 137–40
- Telephassa:** Wife of King Agenor of Phoenicia; mother of Cadmus and Europa: 22
- Telphousa:** Nymph of a spring in Boeotia: 9
- Tereus:** Son of Ares; husband of Procne; father of Itys; Thracian king: 48
- Tethys:** Wife of Ocean; primeval entity; sea goddess: 3, 35, 114

- Themis:** Mother of Prometheus and Epimetheus; goddess who brought order to the cosmos; counselor of Zeus and briefly his wife: 2, 4, 15, 19, 108, 109
- Thersander:** Son of Polynices and Argia; fought in second attack against Thebes; king of Thebes; joined Greek expedition to Troy: 107, 110
- Theseus:** Son of Aethra and King Aegeus of Athens (or Poseidon); husband of Hippolyta and Phaedra; father of Hippolytus, Acamas and Demophon; king of Athens; killer of the Minotaur and other dangerous creatures or people; participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 33, 40, 69, 92–101, 106, 107, 110
- Thespius:** King who lived near Heracles; his 50 daughters all conceived sons by Heracles: 65
- Thestius:** Father of Leda; king of Pleuron: 33
- Thetis:** Wife of Peleus; mother of Achilles; Nereid; nurtured Hephaestus as an infant: 10, 82, 89, 108–18, 127
- Thon:** Husband of Polydamna; warden of the port of Canopus: 126, 129
- Thyestes:** Son of King Pelops and Queen Hippodamia of Elis; brother of Atreus and Nicippe; half brother of Chrysippus; father of Aegisthus, Pelopia and other children: 38, 122
- Tiphys:** Steersman of the Argo: 84, 85
- Tiresias:** Blind Theban seer; advised many people, including, after his death, Odysseus: 63, 64, 105, 107, 133, 134, 136, 137, 140
- Tisamenus:** Son of Hermione and Orestes: 127
- Tisiphone:** One of the Erinyes: 25, 62
- Tithonus:** Son of King Laomedon of Troy; father of Memnon by Dawn: 14
- Tityus:** Son of Zeus and Elara; attempted to rape Leto; tortured in Tartarus for his crime: 39, 41, 42, 79, 100, 134
- Toxeus:** Brother of Althaea and Plexippus; uncle of Meleager; participant in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar: 92
- Triton:** Son of Poseidon and Amphitrite; sea god who helped the Argonauts: 90
- Tydeus:** Son of King Oeneus of Calydon; brother of Meleager and Deianira; father of Diomedes; one of the Seven against Thebes: 106, 110
- Tyndareus:** Son of King Oebalus and Queen Gorgophone of Sparta; husband of Leda; father of Castor and Clytemnestra; stepfather of Helen and Polydeuces; king of Sparta: 33, 109, 110, 122, 134
- Typhon:** Son of Earth and Tartarus; primeval opponent of Zeus; father of many of the monsters born to Echidna; 3, 9, 16, 59, 66, 94, 104
- Xanthus:** One of Achilles's two immortal horses; spoke to Achilles: 108, 115, 116
- Zephyr:** God who was the west wind: 32, 89, 129, 133
- Zetes:** Son of Boreas; twin brother of Calais and brother of Cleopatra; winged Argonaut who fended off the Harpies: 78, 82, 84, 85
- Zeus:** Son of Cronus and Rhea; king of the gods; husband of Metis, Themis and, finally, Hera: 3–5, 7–30, 33, 36, 38–46, 48, 51–54, 60, 62–68, 70, 72–75, 77, 78, 82–86, 88–90, 93, 96, 100, 102, 105, 106, 108–18, 120, 121, 123, 125, 126, 128, 130, 133, 134, 136–39