

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH THE GODS

1.

Olympian gods live in the heights

Their moral code is in the deep

But when you lead immortal lives

Your discipline can go to sleep

(Unless you are a virgin deity

Uninvolved in sexual gaiety)

Let's start off with the simple stuff -

The siblings from the Titan era:

POSEIDON, ZEUS and HESTIA

HERA, HADES, DEMETER.

Since he couldn't long resist her

ZEUS and HERA made a match

(But it's fine to wed your sister

If she's the most convenient catch)

They produced a strapping, fierce son

One more warlike than all others -

ARES – not a popular one

With his parents or his brothers.

2.

There's the blacksmith god HEPHAESTUS

For HERA he had little worth

He was lame so didn't count

She disowned him at his birth

Hurled him early from the Mount
Grasped his leg and flung to earth
ZEUS had countless sons and daughters
Including all the younger gods
Most of them with different mothers
(Both mortal and immortal bods)
Foremost of them was ATHENA
Her mother he had swallow-ed
Not wanting to be overthrown -
As a prophecy had shown.
When his migraine grew still keener
Hephaestus cleaved his father's head
Out the daughter sprang full grown
And also fully armed, it's said

3.

What a contrast – APHRODITE

Dressed in nothing but a nightie
Unreliable and flighty
Took advantage almost nightly
Was she a child of ZEUS, chief god
As Homer says in *Iliad*
Or, as is thought by Hesiod,
(The story now gets very odd)
Was she from briny foam created
Once Uranus was castrated?

That is very hard to swallow,
But that's just the way with myths,
Then there's archer god APOLLO
Twinned with huntress ARTEMIS
Born of Leto, Titaness
A god of talents quite diverse:
Healing, music, sun and verse.

4.

So to the DIONYSUS mess:

His mum Semele, a princess
Fell prey to ZEUS, philanderer,
Her pregnancy, as you'd expect
Raised the jealousy of HERA
Who tricked Semele, made her burn
While ZEUS retrieved his unborn son
Sewed him in his thigh to reach full term -
The first half-god Olympian
Famed for partying and wine
With frenzied revels every time.
Underwater lived POSEIDON
Not a god to be relied on
With his trident causing havoc
In the realm of cod and haddock.
Now we need to track ZEUS' sperm-es
On their way to siring HERMES

In a cave with fair nymph Maia
Where he contented his desire.

5.

Last to a god on the perimeter:

PERSEPHONE, the child of DEMETER -

Here's the bit that is the twister

ZEUS begat her on his sister.

HADES fancied this fine daughter

Took her to his shady quarter

Where her wailing mother sought her

Daily growing ever fraught.

Now, if you're still awake, and keen

You'll know these gods make up fourteen

That's quickly solved for HESTIA

A goddess was of yesteryear

And HADES underground did dwell

Which brings the number down to twelve.

There's more to learn, but not this time -

Apologies for this crude rhyme!

JW