

HOMERIC HYMN TO APHRODITE

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM BLAKE TYRRELL

Muse, tell me the works of golden-throned Aphrodite,
Kypris, who stirs up sweet longing in gods
and subdues the tribes of mortal men,
winged birds and all the beasts,
as many things as the land and the sea nurture.
The works of Aphrodite of beautiful garlands concern all.
Three minds she cannot persuade or deceive.
The daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus, gray-eyed Athena
for whom the works of much-golden Aphrodite are not pleasing.
Rather, wars and the work of Ares please her,
combats, battles, and care for glorious works.
She first taught craftsmen on earth
to make war chariots and carriages sparkling with bronze.
She taught maidens with soft skin in the halls,
putting glorious works in their minds.
Not ever does Aphrodite, loving laughter,
subdue the noisy Artemis of the golden arrow.
For bows please her and the slaying of beasts in mountains,
lyres, dancing choruses, and piercing cries,
shadowy groves and a city of just men.
The modest maiden the works of Aphrodite do not please,

Hestia, whom Kronos of crooked-counsel begat first,
and his youngest, too, in accord with the plans of aegis-bearing Zeus, Lady, whom
Poseidon and Apollo courted.
But she was most unwilling and declined firmly,
and she swore a great oath, which has been fulfilled,
touching the head of her father, aegis-bearing Zeus,
that she would all her days be a virgin, shining among goddesses.
Father Zeus gave her a fine honor in return for marriage.
She received the fat and sat in the middle of the house.
In every temple of the gods, she is honored,
and among all mortals she is of the gods the one venerated.
Their minds Aphrodite cannot persuade or subdue,
but of all others not one has escaped her,
neither of the blessed gods nor mortal men.
She even led astray the thoughts of thunder-delighting Zeus,
who is the mightiest and has the mightiest portion of honor.
Whenever she wishes to deceive his wise mind,
she easily mingles him with mortal women,
eluding his sister and wife Hera,
who is far the best in looks among immortal goddesses.
Kronos and mother Rheia begat her to be most honored.

Zeus who knows imperishable counsels made her
his modest wife, one who knows prudence.

In Aphrodite herself Zeus threw sweet desire in her spirit
for mingling with a mortal man, so that
very quickly she not be free of a mortal bed and
she not boast among all the gods,
smile-loving Aphrodite of the sweet laughter,
that she mingled gods with mortal women
who bore mortal sons to immortals
and that she mixed goddesses with mortal men.
For Anchises, then, Zeus through sweet desire in her spirit,
who at the time in the high mountains of Ida abounding in springs
was tending cattle, looking like the gods in his body.
Beholding him, laughter-loving Aphrodite became impassioned,
and desire did terribly seize her in her heart.

She went to Cyprus and entered her fragrant temple
at Paphos. Here was her precinct and fragrant altar.
She entered here and closed the shining doors.
Here the Graces bathed her and anointed her
with ambrosial oil and such as belongs to gods who ever are,
divinely sweet, an oil redolent with fragrance.
She clothed her body in beautiful garments.
Dressed in gold, laughter-loving Aphrodite
left sweet-smelling Cyprus and sped to Troy,
making her way nimbly high among the clouds.
She reached Ida abounding in springs, mother of beasts,
and went straight across the mountain's sleeping places.
Around her, fawning gray wolves and fierce-eyed panthers,
ravenous for deer, came. And she, on seeing his, was delighted
in her spirit, and in their breast she threw desire, and
they all couched in pairs throughout the shadowy haunts.

She herself arrived at the well-built huts
and him she found left alone from the others,
Anchises, a hero having beauty from the gods.
They were following the cattle throughout grassy pastures,
all of them, but he, left alone from the others,
was wandering here and there, playing the lyre
thrillingly. She stood before him, the daughter of Zeus,
Aphrodite, like an unsubdued virgin in size and looks,
lest he discern her with his eyes and be afraid.
Anchises, seeing her, pondered in wonderment
over her looks and size and glittering clothes.
She was clothed in a dress more gleaming than bright fire. Like
the moon, it shimmered around her soft breasts, a wonder to
behold. She wore coiled bracelets and shining earrings,

and beautiful necklaces were about her tender neck,
beautiful, golden, glittering.

Passion seized Anchises, and he spoke to her:

"Hello, queen, whoever of the blessed you are, who came
to this house, Artemis or Leto or golden Aphrodite, well-born Thetis or gray-eyed
Athena. Or, you are one of the Graces who keep company with all the gods and are
called immortals. You
are one of the Nymphs who haunt the beautiful groves
or of the nymphs who inhabit this beautiful mountain,
the springs of rivers and grassy meadows.
For you I will make an altar on a look-out,
in a place seen all around, and I will offer beautiful sacrifices
in all seasons. Be kindly toward me in your spirit.
Grant that I be a man preeminent among Trojans.
Make flourishing children for me hereafter and that I
live for a long time and look upon the sun's light happy
among my own people and that I reach the threshold of old age."

She answered him, Zeus's daughter Aphrodite:

"Anchises, most honored among men born on earth,
I am not any god. Why do you liken me to immortals?
I am mortal, and a woman mother bore me.
Otreus is my father, renowned in name, if ever you heard,
who is lord over all well-walled Phrygia.
I know your tongue as well as my own.
A Trojan nurse nurtured me, and she took me from my mother
and tended to me when I was little.
Thus I know your tongue well, too.
Now Argeiphontes of the golden wand carried me off
from the dance for noisy Artemis of the golden arrow.
Many of us nymphs and virgins worth many oxen
were playing, and an endless company encircled us.
From there he carried me off, Argeiphontes of the golden wand.
He led me across the many works of mortal men,
over vast land unowned and uncultivated, that
carnivorous beasts roam throughout shadowy haunts.
I thought my feet would never touch the life-giving earth.
He said that I would be called Anchises' wedded wife
and bear glorious children for him.
But after he had shown me and explained it,
strong Argeiphontes went away among the tribes of immortals.
But I came to you. A powerful necessity was upon me.
By Zeus and your noble parents, I beseech you,
for no base parents would produce such a one.
Lead me, unsubdued and inexperienced of love,
and show me to your father and your mother who knows prudence,
to your brothers born of the same womb.

I will not be an improper daughter-in-law but a proper one.
Send a messenger quickly to Phrygia of rapid horses
to tell my father and mother who knows prudence.
They will send sufficient gold and woven clothing.
Accept these many glorious payments.
Do this, and prepare a feast for your desired marriage,
honored among men and the immortal gods."
Thus the god spoke and cast sweet desire in his spirit.

Passion seized Anchises, and he spoke to her and said:
"If you are mortal, and a woman mother bore you,
and Otreus is your father, renowned in name, as you declare,
and because of the immortal guide you have come here,
Hermes, and you will be called my wife all the days,
not one of the gods nor of mortal men
will hold me back from mingling in your love
right now. Not even if the far-darter himself Apollo
sent forth a painful shaft from his silver bow,
I would prefer, woman who is like goddesses, after
once entering your bed, to sink in the house of Hades."

Thus he spoke, and he took her by the hand. Laughter-loving
Aphrodite turned her face away and lowered her beautiful eyes
and crept into the well-spread bed that had been spread
before for the lord with soft cloaks. Down from above
the hides of bears and deep-roaring lions lay
that he himself had slain in the lofty mountains.
When they entered the well-made bed,
he took off the bright jewels from her body,
the curved brooches and earrings and necklaces.
He loosened her girdle and stripped off her glittering
clothes and put them on a chair studded with silver.
Anchises did. He then by the will of the gods and destiny
lay with her, a mortal with an immortal goddess, unaware.
At the time herdsmen turn the cattle and stout sheep
back toward the stalls from the flowery pastures,
she poured sweet sleep over Anchises
and dressed herself in her beautiful clothes.

When she was dressed, radiant among goddesses,
she stood beside the bed, and her head touched
the well-wrought roof beam, and beauty radiated from her cheeks,
unearthly beauty such as the well-garlanded Cytherea has.
She aroused him from sleep and spoke to him and said:
"Arise, son of Dardanos. Why do you sleep so soundly?
Tell me if I appear to be the same one
you discerned before with your eyes."

Thus she spoke, and he woke up suddenly and obeyed her.
When he saw the skin and beautiful eyes of Aphrodite,
he trembled and turned his eyes aside.
He quickly covered his handsome face with his cloak,
and begging her, addressed her with winged words:
"Right off when I saw a goddess with my eyes,
I realized that you were a god. You did not tell me the truth.
I beseech you by Zeus aegis-bearing,
do not let me live and dwell impotent
among me, but pity me, seeing that a man
who beds immortal goddesses doesn't stay hail and hearty."

She answered him, Zeus' daughter Aphrodite:
"Anchises, most renowned of mortal men,
cheer up, and do not fear too much in your breast.
No need to fear suffering some evil from me or from the other
blessed ones, since you are dear to the gods.
There shall be a son for you, who will rule among Trojans.
To his children children shall be born continually.
His name shall be Aeneas because awful
grief held me because I fell into the bed of a mortal man.
Godlike among mortal men shall be
those of your lineage in both looks and stature.

Surely counselor Zeus carried off blond Ganymede
on account of his beauty to be among the immortals and
pour wine for the gods in the house of Zeus,
a wonder to see, honored by all the immortals.
He draws the red nectar from a golden bowl.
But unforgettable grief gripped Tros in his heart. He did not
know where the divine whirlwind had carried off his son.
He mourned him constantly all the days.
Zeus pitied him, and gave him as payment for his son
high-stepping horses who carry immortals.
He gave them as a gift for Tros to have. The guide
Argeiphontes told him all at Zeus's command,
how his son would be immortal and ageless like the gods.
When he heard the news from Zeus,
he no longer mourned but rejoiced in his heart within.
Joyfully, he rode his horses with whirlwind feet.

So, too, golden-throned, early-born Eos carried off Tithonios
who, of your lineage, resembled the immortals.
She went to ask the dark-clouded son of Kronos
for him to be immortal and live all the days.
Zeus nodded consent and fulfilled her desire.
Fool, lady Eos did not think in her breast
to ask for youth and the rubbing away of destructive old age.

As long as very lovely youth held him,
delighting in golden-throned, early born Eos,
he dwelled beside the streams of Okeanos at the earth's ends.
But when the first gray hairs began to flow
down from his beautiful head and noble chin,
the lady Eos kept away from his bed.
She kept him in the halls and cherished him,
giving him food and ambrosia and beautiful clothes.
But when hateful old age drove down on him,
and he couldn't move or lift his limbs,
Then this seemed the best plan to her in her spirit.
She put him in a chamber and closed the shining doors.
His voice flows unquenchingly, but there is no strength
as there was before in his bent limbs.
I would not choose for you to be of this sort among immortals,
immortal and living for all days.

But should you live as you are now in looks and body,
you would be called my husband.
And no ache would envelop my wise mind.
As it is, old age will quickly envelop you,
pitiless, that stands beside men,
destructive, wearisome, which gods hate.
It will be a great reproach for me all days
because of you among the immortal gods
who used to fear my tittle-tattles and schemes
by which I mingled all the immortals with mortal women.
My purpose used to subdue them all.
As it is, my lips will no longer ? to name
this among immortals, since I was seized by reckless blindness
stubborn and not to be named, and I was deprived of sense.
Bedding a mortal, I put a child beneath my girdle.

When he first sees the sun's light,
the deep-bosomed mountain nymphs,
who inhabit this great and divine mountain,
shall nurture him. They follow neither mortals nor immortals.
They live a long time and eat ambrosial food,
and they ply the beautiful dances among the immortals.
With the Silenoi and keen-sighted Argeiphontes
they mingle in philotês in the recesses of passionate caves.
At their birth, pines and lofty oaks spring up
on the fertile earth, beautiful and flourishing on high mountains,
towering things. Men call them the shrine
of the immortals, and no mortal hews the with iron.
But when the portion of death stands nearby,
the beautiful trees wither on the earth, their bark shrinks
away around them, and their branches fall. Together,

their life's spirit and the nymphs' leave the sun's light.

The nymphs shall keep and rear my son.
When he reaches much-loved adolescence,
the goddesses shall bring him to you and show you your son
That I may tell you all I have in mind,
toward his fifth year, I shall come to you with my son.
When you first see his bloom with your eyes,
you will rejoice at seeing. He will be very like the gods.
You will bring him immediately to windy Ilion.
If any one of mortal men ask you
who is the mother who put the child beneath her girdle for you,
remember and speak as I order you.
"He is the offspring," they say, "of a nymph as pretty as a
flower bud, one of those who inhabit the mountain clothed
in wood.

But if you blurt out and boasts foolishly
that you mingled in love with garlanded Kythereia,
Zeus will grown angry and blast you with a smoldering thunderbolt.
All is said. Think now in your mind.
Refrain from naming me. Heed the wrath of the gods."
So saying, she darted up toward the windy heaven.
Farewell, goddess who watches over well-founded Cyprus.
I began with you and will turn to another song.

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