

HUST 292: RECLAIMING THE CLASSICAL PAST FOR A DIVERSE AND GLOBAL WORLD



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HUST 292: Reclaiming the Classical Past for a Diverse and Global World

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1: Apuleius- Cupid and Psyche

The Story of Cupid and Psyche from *The Golden Ass*, by Lucius Apuleius

Edited and translated by John Shinnars, converted to LibreText format, footnoted, and enriched with illustrations by Brittany Blagburn and Jessalynn Bird.

1. The Life of Apuleius

Lucius Apuleius (c.125 CE-after 170CE) was born in North Africa (in Madaura, or modern Mdaurus, Algeria) to prosperous Berber parents and educated at Carthage, Athens (where he studied Platonic [1] philosophy), and Rome. As a young man, he squandered his inheritance touring Egypt and Asia Minor [2]. During these travels, while he was staying at Oea (modern Tripoli in Libya) in c.156 CE, a student friend convinced Apuleius to marry his widowed mother, Pudentilla, in order to protect her wealth. But the brother of the man previously betrothed to Pudentilla sued Apuleius, accusing him of winning his new wife's love through magic. He also charged him, among other things, with being obsessed with his mirror and having long hair like a gigolo [3]. Apuleius successfully defended himself in court in his surviving *Apologia*, a tour de force of rhetoric [4] and wit. But soon afterwards he left Oea for Carthage, where he lived out his life teaching rhetoric and philosophy and gaining enough fame that a statue of him was erected in his honor. Its base still survives, inscribed "To the Platonic philosopher." Fascinated by Plato, Apuleius wrote two popularizations of his thought: a discussion of Socrates' [5] inspiring *daimonion* called *The God of Socrates* (*De deo Socratis*) and the (perhaps spurious) *Teachings of Plato* (*De dogmate Platonis*). Some of his oratory [6] survives (for instance, an anthology called *Florida*), but many of his works—including another novel, *Hermagoras*, and works on astronomy, arithmetic, zoology, arboriculture, medicine, and music—are lost. He died sometime after 170 CE.

The story of Cupid [7] and Psyche [8] is excerpted from his work called *Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass* (*Aureus Asinus*), which is the first complete surviving Latin novel, although it is based on a Greek original now lost. Written sometime after 161 CE, the story, told in an ornate Latin style both florid and vivid, concerns Lucius who, burning with curiosity to unlock the secrets of magic while visiting Thessaly in Greece, a region infamous for its sorcery, is accidentally turned into an ass. He endures many picaresque comic misadventures in animal form until the goddess Isis [9] restores his humanity in a mystical finale that reflects Apuleius's own interest in eastern mystery religions. The tale of Cupid and Psyche (whose name is the Greek word for "soul") is the most famous story from *The Golden Ass*, occupying books four through six of the eleven book novel. Within the framework of the novel, Psyche's curiosity and its disastrous consequences mirror Lucius's own transmogrifying curiosity. Apuleius's Cupid and Psyche is probably the inspiration for the fairy tale of "Beauty and the Beast." Its most famous recent retelling is C. S. Lewis's novel, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (1956).



Fig. 1. A marble statue of Isis, holding a *situla* and *sistrum*, ritual implements used in her worship (c.117-138 CE), found at Hadrian's Villa (Pantanello), now at the Palazzo Nuovo, Capitoline Museums. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Apuleius's literary description of life as an ass was so convincing that St. Augustine—a fellow North African who extensively cited Apuleius's *God of Socrates* in his monumental fifth-century defense of Christianity called *The City of God*—was unsure whether Lucius's transformation was “fact or fiction.” In any case, Apuleius's posthumous reputation as a great magician prompted Augustine to warn his fellow Christians not to think that Apuleius's miracle-working powers were greater than Christ's. Boccaccio [10] recovered large portions of Apuleius in the fourteenth century and used several of his stories in the *Decameron*. *The Golden Ass* was one of the first works of classical Latin literature to be printed (in 1469).



A man feeding a donkey. From *Byzantinischer Mosaizist des 5. Jahrhunderts*, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

[1] Plato was a Greek philosopher from Athens who was a student of Socrates.

[2] Also known as Anatolia, this is the Western peninsula of Turkey.

[3] A young man paid or financially supported by an older woman to be her escort or lover.

[4] The art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing.

[5] Socrates was a Greek philosopher from Athens.

[6] The art of public speaking.

[7] Roman god of love and passion.

[8] Roman goddess of the soul.

[9] Egyptian goddess of magic and life. For the popularity of her cult in the Roman empire, see <https://dc.uwm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1048&context=rssso>

[10] Giovanni Boccaccio was an Italian writer and Renaissance Humanist.

2. The Allegory of “Cupid and Psyche”

For all its many narrative charms, Psyche’s story may also be understood as a Platonic “allegory of the soul’s journey through life and its final union with the divine after suffering and death” (Howatson, 472). Apuleius much admired Plato’s philosophy, and scholars find Platonic themes running throughout *The Golden Ass*, but especially in the story of Cupid and Psyche. Recall Pausanias’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium* where he distinguishes between Urania, or Heavenly Venus [1], and Pandemos, or Common Venus. Common Venus represents “the love felt by the vulgar, who are attached . . . more to the body than the soul . . . since all they care about is completing the sexual act” (*Symp.* 181B). But Heavenly Venus represents something higher—what Diotima in her speech later will call love of the soul. In Apuleius’s “Cupid and Psyche” we clearly see more of Common Venus in Venus’ hot-tempered character; in a similar way, we can detect two personalities attached to Cupid (Eros) (Kennedy, 2004, xxv). In relation to most of the other gods—especially his mother, Venus, and Jupiter [2]—he is a mischievous boy (see 5.29-30 and 6.22);

but in relation to Psyche he seems much wiser, and more mature and restrained than his young bride. At some moments (e.g., 5.24 & nt. 22), Apuleius even paraphrases Plato to underscore his allegorical intentions.

Though less familiar to us, *The Golden Ass* also alludes to the cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis [3], who intervenes at the novel's end to rescue Lucius. Isis was a goddess popular throughout the Mediterranean world by the Hellenistic era [4]. The wife and sister of the god Osiris [5], and the mother of Horus [6], she was a fertility figure initially associated with Ceres [7] but later connected with Venus. By Apuleius's time, her cult was well-established and celebrated with mystery rituals. In her myth, her husband-brother Osiris was murdered and cut into pieces by his brother, Set [8], a force of evil. Isis gathered the pieces of the slain Osiris who was resurrected but relegated to reign as the god of the Underworld and the dead, but not before he and Isis had conceived their son Horus (the sun god), who ruled the sky. Psyche's trip into the Underworld presumably reflects this aspect of the legend. Some commentators argue that many other features of her story embody ritual elements of the cult of Isis.

[1] Roman goddess of love and beauty.

[2] Roman king of the gods. God of the sky, lightning, and thunder.

[3] Egyptian goddess of magic and life.

[4] Period between the death of Alexander the Great and the creation of the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean.

[5] Egyptian god of fertility, the afterlife, and the dead.

[6] Egyptian god of the sky.

[7] Roman goddess of the harvest.

[8] Egyptian god of storms, disorder, and violence.

Reading Questions:

1. Bearing in mind that Apuleius has embedded these sorts of allegorical features in "Cupid and Psyche," keep an eye out for symbolic meanings as you read the story. What point is Apuleius trying to make?
2. Why is Psyche (the soul) in love with Cupid (love), and why does Cupid insist on hiding his appearance?
3. Why is Venus so furious with Psyche? What symbolic meaning might the four tasks she sets for Psyche have?
4. Why is Psyche so curious? Has she progressed from the beginning of the story to its end? If so, what has her journey taught her?
5. What emotions dominate the story? Why?
6. How would Apuleius define love?
7. What picture of stereotypes of and expectations for marriage and relations with in-laws emerge from the stories of Psyche and her sisters?
8. Why might the tale of Cupid and Psyche have been so popular for decorating Greek and Roman sarcophagi?

See the following examples linked below:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1805-0703-132

<https://pigtailsinpaint.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/u-cupid-and-psyche-on-rom.jpg>

Cupid and Psyche

The young man, Lucius, has accidentally been turned into an ass and, at this point in his picaresque adventures, is the property of a band of robbers. They bring a young noblewoman to their lair whom they have kidnapped to hold for ransom. Frightened and tearful, she is comforted by an old woman, the robbers' housekeeper, who tells her the story of Cupid and Psyche to distract her from her troubles:

Book Four

[28] Once there was a king and queen of a certain city. They had three stunningly beautiful daughters, yet as lovely as the two older ones were, it was possible to find words of praise in human speech adequate to their deserts. But the beauty of the youngest girl was so extraordinary that human language was at a loss either to describe it or to praise it sufficiently. Great numbers of its citizens and visitors gathered in multitudes, attracted by the renown of such a marvelous sight. Struck dumb with admiration by her matchless beauty, they touched their right thumb and forefinger together, pressed them to their lips, and venerated her with religious devotion as if she were the goddess Venus [1] herself [2].



Aphrodite Anadyomene. Fresco from Pompeii, House of Venus, 1st century AD, by unknown ancient Rome artist, photo of Stephen Haynes, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

The news spread through the neighboring cities and nearby regions that the goddess, who was born in the azure depths of the sea and raised by the spray of its foaming waves, had made her divinity visible and dwelled among mortals; or at least that, newly seeded by drops from heaven, the earth—not the sea—had given birth to another Venus in the flower of maidenhood [3].

[29] This unbounded belief grew day by day, and her fame spread to the neighboring islands, then to the mainland, and then to most provinces. Great numbers of mortals made long journeys by land and the deep sea to behold that glorious sign of the times.

No one traveled now to Paphos [4], no one to Cnidus [5], or even to Cythera [6], to gaze thereupon the goddess [7]. Sacrifices at her shrines were ignored; her temples fell into decay; the cushions on which her statues rested were trampled underfoot, her ceremonies neglected; her statues were left without garlands; and her deserted altars were defiled by stone-cold ashes. It was the human girl to whom all prayers were offered up: the divinity of so great a goddess was worshiped in mortal form. When the maiden went out in the morning, the name of the absent Venus was honored with sacrifices and food offerings. When she walked through the streets the people crowded around her, adoring her with garlands and flowers.

The real Venus, seeing that divine honors were being bestowed with such exaggeration on a mortal girl, burned with anger; unable to control her indignation, she shook her head, growled deeply, and said to herself:

[30] “What? Must I, Venus, the ancient mother of nature, the first source of the elements, the nourishment of the whole world, share with a mortal girl the honors due to my divinity? Must my name, held sacred in heaven, be dragged down and profaned by earthly filth? Must I tolerate sharing my divinity in common and the doubts caused by my veneration by proxy? My image is being carried around in a girl born to die. It was pointless for that shepherd, whose just and equitable judgment was confirmed by mighty Jupiter [8], to prefer me, because of my extraordinary beauty, over two mighty goddesses [9]. But this girl who has usurped my honors, whoever she is, won’t be so happy for long. I’ll make her regret her contraband beauty!”

She immediately summons her son [10], that shameless, winged boy whose bad character defies public morality, who wanders around at night armed with torches and arrows [11], going house to house, ruining everyone’s marriage, committing the greatest

offenses with impunity, and never doing the least good. Mischievous as he was by his innate rowdiness, she incites him even more by her words [12]. She takes him to the city in question, and points out Psyche [13]—for this was the girl’s name—to him.



Fresco depicting the punishment of Eros by Venus, found in the House of Punished Love in Pompeii, 25 BC, Naples National Archaeological Museum, Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

[31] She told him the whole story of how that girl’s beauty rivaled her own. Her indignation found vent in groans of rage: “I beg you,” she said, “by the bonds of a mother’s love, by the sweet wounds made by your arrows, by the burning itch, sweet as honey, of your torch, avenge your mother, avenge her to the fullest measure and severely punish this upstart beauty. I make just one request of you; please grant it: let this maiden be seized with the most burning passion for the lowest kind of man, for a miserable wretch whom Fortune [14] has robbed of social position, inheritance, and even security; for a creature so degraded that his equal cannot be found in the whole world.”

She spoke, and her parted lips lavished long, burning kisses on her son. Then she sought the shore nearby. As her rosy feet touched the tops of the rolling waves, suddenly the deep sea sank back clear and calm. At the first wish that her mind conceived, as if she had given her orders long before, sea deities instantly appeared doing her homage. There were the daughters [15] of Nereus [16], singing in harmony, and Neptune [17] with his bristling, sea-blue beard; Salacia [18], with the folds of her gown laden with fish; little Palæmon [19], riding a dolphin; and bands of Tritons [20] leaping about upon the waves on all sides. One trumpeted softly on a noisy conch shell; another sheltered her with a silken canopy from the blazing heat of her enemy the Sun [21]; another held his mistress’s mirror before her eyes; others, yoked two abreast, swam beneath her chariot. Such was the train that attended Venus when she went to pay a visit to Oceanus [22].

[32] Meanwhile, Psyche, for all her marvelous beauty, reaped no benefit from her looks. Everyone gazed at her, everyone praised her, but no one—neither king, prince, nor commoner—came forward to seek her hand in marriage. People admired her divine beauty, but they all admired it as one admires a beautifully finished statue. Long before, her two older sisters, whose commonplace beauty had stirred no acclaim, had made prosperous marriages with kings. But Psyche, the forlorn virgin, lived with her parents, bewailing her lonely solitude, her body weak, her heart aching. She detested her own beauty, so pleasing to everyone else.

The utterly miserable father of the unhappiest daughter, believing that the gods were angry and fearing their wrath, questioned an ancient oracle [23] of the god who is adored at Miletus [24]. He prayed and offered victims [25] to that powerful divinity on behalf of the untaken virgin; he implored for her marriage and a husband. And Apollo [26]—although he was a Greek and an Ionian [27]—as a courtesy to the author of this Milesian tale, replied with this prophecy in Latin [28]:

*On some high mountain’s craggy summit place
The virgin, deck’d for deadly nuptial rites;*

*Nor hope a son-in-law of mortal race,
But a dire mischief, viperous and fierce;
Who flies through æther [29], and with fire and sword
Tires and debilitates whate'er exists,
Terrific to the powers that reign on high;
E'en mighty Jupiter the wing'd destroyer dreads,
And streams and Stygian [30] shades abhor the pest [31].*

The once happy king returned to his palace crushed with discouragement and grief when he had listened to the response of the holy oracle and he explained the command of this ill-omened prophecy to his spouse. There was mourning, weeping, and wailing for several days; but now the hideous fulfillment of this cursed prophecy loomed. The trappings for the most wretched virgin's funereal wedding were set in place. The marriage torch barely flickers with black soot and ashes; the notes of the nuptial flute change into the plaintive strains of the Lydian mode [32]; the joyous songs of Hymen [33] end in howls of mourning; and the bride wipes her tears away with her very wedding veil [34]. The whole city sighed in sympathy, moved by the fate of the stricken house; and, in keeping with public mourning, all business was immediately declared postponed.



Aldobrandini Wedding Fresco, Vatican Library, depicting Roman Wedding Preparations, unknown artist, Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons

[34] But the obligation to obey the mandates of the gods summoned the unfortunate Psyche to the punishment appointed to her. With the most intense sorrow, the rites of that funeral marriage are performed, and the living dead is led forth followed by all the people. The weeping Psyche walks not to her wedding but to her funeral. While her grief-stricken parents, overwhelmed by this disaster, shrank from carrying out the terrible deed, their daughter herself encouraged them with these words:

“Why do you distress your unhappy old age with this ceaseless weeping? Why do you wear out your spirit—and mine too—by ceaseless wailing? Why do you distort your features, which I so revere, by fruitless tears? Why, by torturing your own eyes, do you torture mine? Why tear your white hair? Why do you beat your chest and your hallowed breasts? Are these your illustrious rewards for my matchless beauty? You realize too late that it’s cruel Envy [35] that deals you this fatal blow. When the nations and the people offered us divine honors, when with one voice they called me the new Venus—that was when you should have lamented, shed tears, and mourned me as already stricken by death. Now I understand. I see that it is that name of Venus alone that has destroyed me. Lead me to the rock to which Fate [36] has condemned me and leave me there. I am eager to undertake this happy marriage; I am eager to see my noble husband. Why should I delay? Why should I avoid the coming of the one born to be the end of the whole world?”



Edward Burnes-Jones, *The Wedding of Psyche*, 1895, oil on canvas, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, Belgium, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

After she said this, the maiden fell silent and, with unfaltering steps, joined the solemn procession of people accompanying her. They reached the designated cliff: it was a steep mountainside at the top of which they placed the doomed maiden and left her there alone with the nuptial torches which had lighted their way and were now extinguished by their tears. The people returned, with hanging heads, to their homes. As for the wretched parents, overwhelmed by such a terrible calamity, they shut themselves up in the gloom of their shuttered palace and condemned themselves to perpetual night.

Psyche, trembling with terror on the mountaintop, was weeping bitterly when the sweet breeze of softly blowing Zephyr [37] fluttered around the hem of her dress and billowed out its pleats. His tranquil breath gradually lifted her up and carried her leisurely over the slope of the steep cliff; he gently wafted her down into the bosom of the valley below and leaned her back on a flower-strewn bed of turf.



Plate 6: Zephyr carrying Psyche to an enchanted palace, from *The Story of Cupid and Psyche as told by Apuleius*, Antonio Salamanca, 1530-1560, Public Domain courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

- [1] Roman goddess of love and beauty.
- [2] The first-century CE Roman natural philosopher, Pliny, reports that this was a typical ritual gesture of worshippers.
- [3] The phrase alludes to Hesiod's version of her birth. When the god Chronos castrated his father, Uranus, he tossed his genitals into the sea; Aphrodite was born from the foam (*aphros*) they produced. Homer believed she was the daughter of Zeus and Dione.
- [4] City on the island of Cyprus.
- [5] Greek city in south-western Asia Minor.
- [6] Greek island on the south-eastern tip of the Peloponnese peninsula.
- [7] Various myths said she emerged from the sea at Paphos (in Cyprus) or the island of Cythera, where important shrines were built to her. Praxiteles's famous statue of the naked Venus was at her shrine at Cnidus.
- [8] Roman king of the gods. God of the sky, thunder, and lightning.
- [9] In the "Judgment of Paris," Paris, then a shepherd, later prince of Troy, was asked to choose the most beautiful goddess: Hera (Juno), Athena, or Aphrodite (Venus). He picked Aphrodite, who had bribed him with the gift of the most beautiful mortal women,

Helen of Troy.

[10] Cupid or Eros (Love).

[11] Cupid had two sets of arrows. Golden arrows that would cause a person to fall in love and lead arrows that would cause a person to be disgusted.

[12] On occasion Apuleius breaks into the present tense.

[13] The Greek word for the soul and also the word for butterfly. In art Psyche is often depicted with butterfly wings.

[14] Greek goddess Tyche.

[15] The Nereids, who numbered fifty to a hundred.

[16] A sea god.

[17] Portunus—properly Portumnus—usually meant Palæmon; here it means Poseidon (Neptune), god of the sea.

[18] Poseidon's wife, goddess of the sea. Also known as Amphitrite.

[19] A god of the sea who aided sailors in distress alongside his mother. He had been the mortal Melicertes, whom Zeus deified after Hera caused his mother, Ino, and him to drown themselves.

[20] Mermen who were half-men, half-fish. They were the sons of Poseidon and Amphitrite.

[21] The sun is her enemy because her element is water, his fire. It was also the sun, Helios, who told her husband, Hephæstus (Vulcan) about her adultery with Ares (Mars), *Odyssey*, Bk. VIII. And, as we have seen, well-born women in antiquity valued pale skin untanned by the sun. Throughout this paragraph, Apuleius is showing off his knowledge of myth.

[22] Titan who was the river that encircled the world.

[23] People who interpreted the will of the gods.

[24] Apollo was the patron god of Miletus, a city in Asia Minor.

[25] Animal sacrifices.

[26] Greek god of music, poetry, light, prophecy, and medicine.

[27] Ionia was a region in Asia Minor.

[28] Apollo's imposing temple at Dydima near Miletus was rivaled only by his shrine at Delphi. Apuleius plays with us here as he breaks into the story to point out why Apollo is speaking in Latin, not Greek. "Milesian Tales" was the name given to the stories of Aristeides of Miletus (2nd century BCE). Stories of love and adventure with vaguely titillating details, they are precisely the kinds of tales Apuleius tells in *The Golden Ass*. Petronius likewise sprinkles his *Satyricon* with them. Later authors also use the genre such as Boccaccio in his fourteenth-century *Decameron*.

[29] According to ancient science, the element that makes up the area in the universe above the terrestrial sphere.

[30] Relating to the river Styx.

[31] This translation is from Thomas Taylor's 1822 edition of *The Golden Ass*. In short, Psyche must marry some fierce god that even other gods fear. He is, of course, Cupid, whose love darts even gods can't avoid, but the prophecy's ambiguous description makes him sound monstrous.

[32] Ancient music theory assigned different emotions to different modes (or scales). The Lydian mode expressed sorrow.

[33] Greek god of marriage ceremonies.

[34] Apuleius describes details of Roman wedding customs. It was bad luck if the wedding torch smoked or burned out. The howls (the onomatopoeic *ululatus* in Latin) are the high pitched, rhythmic calls that women in many Mediterranean and Arab countries still make at times of celebration or mourning. The wedding veil (*flammeum*) was in fact flame-colored, i.e., yellow, reminding us that our western "tradition" of white bridal clothes dates only to the nineteenth century.

[35] Phthonos was the personification of envy and jealousy.

[36] Greek goddesses (Moirai) who determined the destiny of each human.

[37] Greeks and Romans alike personified the winds as gods. We have already met Aeolus, chief god of the winds, in Homer. Boreas was the North Wind, especially venerated by the Greeks; Zephyrus (also called Favonius in Latin) was the West Wind, preferred by the Romans. Depending on who was counting, there were up to eight winds assigned to the various points of the compass.

Book V

[1] As Psyche lay gently upon the soft, grassy bed of dewy green, her great mental distress soothed; she fell sweetly to sleep. Refreshed by slumber, she arose with a more tranquil mind. She saw a grove of huge lofty trees and in its center a spring as clear as crystal. Close beside the gliding spring, there stood a royal dwelling, built by no mortal hands, but by divine skill. From the doorway alone you would know that it was the abode of some deity, so magnificent it was and so pleasing to the eye. The panels of the ceiling, of lemon wood and ivory artfully carved, were supported by golden pillars. All the walls were covered with silver bas-reliefs [1] of beasts wild and tame; these things met the eye as soon as you entered. He must have been a miracle-worker, no a demigod [2], no, rather a veritable god, who could carry subtlety of technique so far and could convert so great a mass of silver into lifelike wild animals. The floor itself was a mosaic of precious stones cut to form many different pictures. (Twice and even more are they truly blessed who walk upon gems and jewelry.) The other parts of that palace stretched far and wide were also priceless beyond measure. The walls, sheathed in solid sheets of gold, shone with a splendor beyond compare; indeed, the rooms, the galleries, the very doors, so flashed and sparkled that the palace would have supplied its own daylight had the sun denied its aid. The rest was on the same scale of magnificence so that it was right to think that mighty Jupiter [3] himself had built that celestial palace in order to live among mortals.



John William Waterhouse, Psyche Opening the Door into Cupid's Garden, Oil on Canvas, 1903, Harris Museum and Art gallery, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

[2] Enchanted by the charm of that beautiful place, Psyche drew nearer, and, growing a little bolder, she crossed the threshold. Soon her pleasure at seeing such beautiful things lured her on, and she looked all about with wondering eyes until, on the far side of the palace, she saw a lofty chamber stuffed with priceless treasure. Nothing wasn't there. But, amid the wonder caused by such enormous wealth, she marveled most that there was no chain, lock, or guard to defend that treasure house of the world. While she was gazing with infinite pleasure upon all these things, a voice without a body spoke out: "Why, mistress," it said, "do you marvel at this great wealth? All these things are yours. Go into your chamber and rest from your weariness on the bed; refresh yourself in

the bath when it pleases you. We, whose voices you hear, are your servants who will eagerly wait on you. When you have looked after yourself, a royal banquet awaits you.”

[3] Psyche sensed a blessing sent by divine providence; and, heeding the words of the formless voice, first of all she slept and then washed away her weariness with a bath. Suddenly, she saw a semicircular table close beside her; and, judging rightly that it held a meal prepared for her in order to restore her strength, she gladly took her place. In a twinkling, wines like nectar [4] and an abundance of dishes with all sorts of food were placed before her as if wafted there by a breath, for no servant appeared. She could see no one at all; she heard nothing but words falling through the air, and her servants were only voices. After that delicious feast, someone entered and, invisible, began to sing; another played the lyre [5] though it could not be seen; then she heard a great number of voices singing in concert, and although no one was visible, it was evident that there was a large chorus.

[4] After all this entertainment, Psyche, seeing that the day was nearing its close, returned to her room. The night was far advanced when a faint sound caught her ear. Trembling for her virginity since she was so entirely alone, she was oppressed by alarm blended with horror; and, more than all possible harms, she dreaded a danger which she did not know. Her unknown husband [6] approached, climbed into her bed, made Psyche his, and hurriedly departed before sunrise. A moment later, the voices-in-waiting in the chamber tended to the slain virginity of the new bride. This state of affairs continued for a long while. It naturally came about that habit made this new existence sweet to her; and the mysterious voices consoled her in her solitude.

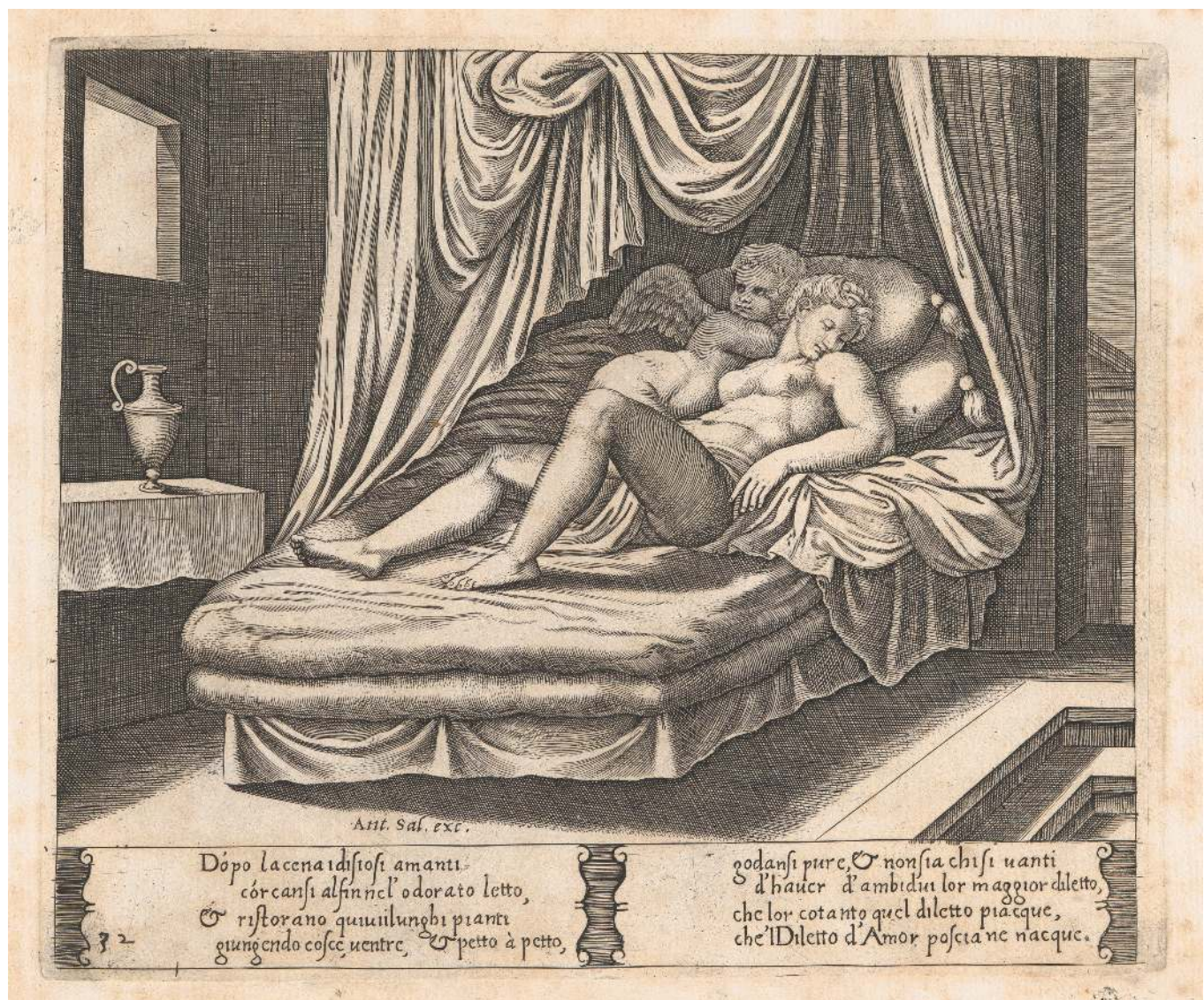


Plate 32- Cupid and Psyche in the nuptial bed, from *The Story of Cupid and Psyche as told by Apuleius*, Antonio Salamanca, Engraving, 1530-1560, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Public Domain, Via Wikimedia Commons.

Meanwhile, her parents grew weary with endless weeping and grief. The news spread abroad, and her two older sisters learned the whole story. Instantly overcome with gloom and grief, they left their homes and rushed to their parents to see them and talk with them.

[5] That same night her husband said this to his Psyche (for though she could not see him, she could touch him and hear his voice): “Sweetest Psyche, my dear wife, Fortune, growing crueler, threatens you with a deadly danger that I urge you to guard against with utmost care. Your sisters, stricken by the thought of your death, are seeking your traces and before long they will reach this cliff. If you chance to hear their weeping, do not reply; do not even look at them. If you do, it will cause the deepest grief to me and terrible disaster for you.” She nodded and solemnly promised that she would follow her husband’s wishes. But as soon as he had disappeared with the night, the poor thing spent the whole day weeping and wailing, repeating again and again that now she really was lost. For, confined in a splendid prison, deprived of human conversation, she could not comfort her grieving sisters or even see them. Spurning bath, food, or anything that would give her strength, she fell to sleep weeping bitterly.

[6] An instant after, her husband came—a little earlier than usual—and lying by her side in the bed, he embraced his still weeping wife and complained: “Is this what my Psyche promised me? Is this what your husband can now expect from you or hope for? All day and all night, even in your husband’s arms, you cling to your pain. Well, now do as you wish and give in to the disastrous demands of your heart. But when you begin to repent too late, remember that I warned you earnestly.” Then, by her pleas and threats of suicide, she forced her husband to agree to her desire to see her sisters in order to soothe their grief and to talk to them. He consented to his new bride’s pleas, and he also permitted her to give them all the gold and jewels she wished. But at the same time he warned her—threatening her again and again—not to follow the evil advice that her sisters might give her about trying to see her husband’s face. Such sacrilegious curiosity would hurl her from the pinnacle of good fortune to ruin, and she would never feel his embraces again. Now much lighter in spirit, she thanked her husband and said to him: “I would rather die a hundred times than abandon this sweetest marriage with you. For I love you passionately, whoever you are; I love you as much as I love my own soul. Cupid himself cannot be compared to you. But, I beg you, grant me one more favor: bid your servant Zephyr [7] to carry my sisters here the same way he brought me.” And, covering him with cajoling kisses, heaping him with honey-sweet words, and entwining him in close embraces, she reinforced her endearments: “My sweet love, husband, your Psyche’s own dear heart!” He reluctantly succumbed to the force and power of her murmurs of love [8] and promised to do all that she asked. With the approach of dawn, he vanished from his wife’s arms.

[7] Meanwhile, her sisters inquired about the location of the cliff where Psyche had been left. They went there with all haste, shed floods of tears, and beat their breasts until the rocks and crags echoed with the sound of their constant wailing. They called out their unfortunate sister’s name again and again until the piercing tones of their shrieking voices spilled down the mountainside and Psyche, in a frenzy of anticipation, rushed from the palace and said: “Why do you needlessly distress yourselves with these woeful lamentations? Here I am for whom you weep. Stop your sad cries; dry your cheeks for so long soaked in tears. Now you can embrace the one for whom you mourned.”

Then she summoned Zephyr and told him of her husband’s commands. Instantly obedient to her order, he wafted them on the gentlest breeze and safely carried them to her. Now they joyfully embraced, hastening to kiss one another; and their tears, which had ceased, fittingly flowed again, stirred up by joy. “Come now,” said Psyche, “enter joyfully this house, our home, and refresh your stricken spirits with your Psyche.”

[8] Having said this, she showed them the vast treasures of that golden palace; she let them hear the chorus of voices at her service; then she splendidly refreshed them with the loveliest bath and the luxuries of a god’s dining table. But now sated by this abundant outpouring of heavenly riches, they began to feed envy deep in their hearts. One of them could not stop asking her very carefully and curiously who was the owner of all these heavenly things, who was her husband, and what sort of creature. But Psyche carefully did not violate her husband’s order or expose her heart’s secrets. Given the situation, she pretended that he was a handsome youth, whose cheeks were just beginning to be shaded with a soft beard, and who passed most of his time in country matters and hunting in the mountains. Then, fearing that if the conversation were prolonged she might slip and betray her secret counsel, she weighed them down with gold and gem-studded jewelry and immediately summoned Zephyr, who carried them back.

[9] This happened instantly. These excellent sisters, as they returned home, were on fire with the swelling poison of envy, and they clamored back and forth: “How blind and cruel and unfair Fortune [9] is. Does it suit you that we, born of the same parents, should bear different destinies? We, who are the oldest, have been married off to foreign husbands to be their serving girls (*ancillae*). Driven from our home and country, we spend our lives far from our parents, like exiles. Yet our young sister, the last fruit of the

fertile soil which her birth exhausted, gets riches such as these and a god for a husband, she who doesn't even know how to make good use of such an abundance of worldly goods. Did you see, sister, the things scattered about that house? Such jewels, such gorgeous dresses, such gleaming precious gems, and, with all the rest, gold everywhere you walk. If she also has a husband as handsome as she says, there is no one happier now in the whole world. It may well be that, as he comes to know her more [10] and his love increases, her husband, a god, will also make her a goddess. By Hercules [11]! this is already true: she carried herself and acted that way. The woman already has her nose in the air and the airs of a goddess, she who has voices for serving girls and commands the very winds. But I'm miserable whom Fate [12] has given a husband older than my father, balder than a gourd, and as tiny as a boy; and he keeps everything in the palace under lock and key."

[10] "And I," replied her sister, "have on my hands a husband all bent and twisted by arthritis, who, for that reason, very rarely gives me any amorous action. I pass almost all my time rubbing his gnarled fingers, hard as any stone, and blistering these dainty hands of mine with smelly ointments, dirty bandages, and reeking poultices. I do not play the obliging role of wife, but ply the backbreaking trade of nurse. You, sister, can see how far you can carry your patience, or, rather—for I'm free to speak my mind—your slavery; for my own part, I can no longer stand the sight of such good fortune fallen to someone unworthy. Remember how proud and arrogant she was with us? Her uncontrolled boasting and showing off revealed her puffed up heart. She reluctantly tossed us some trifles from such a rich store and, quickly bored by our company, she ordered us to be driven out, and, with a puff, we were whistled away. Until I hurl her from such riches into the depths, I'm no woman and I have not a spark of life in me. And if this insult likewise sours you, as it seems, let's plot some practical plan together. First, we must not show our parents or anyone else the gifts we received; and we must pretend to know nothing about her welfare. It's quite enough that we've seen what we wish we hadn't without broadcasting to our family and the whole world how fortunate she is; for wealth is not a blessing when no one knows about it. She will learn that we are her older sisters, not her slaves. For the moment, let's return to our husbands and our poor, if decent, homes; and when we have reflected more deliberately and have made our plans, we will return better prepared to punish such pride."

[11] Any wicked design could not fail to seem good to those two evil-minded creatures. They concealed all their priceless gifts, and, tearing their hair and their cheeks—they well deserved their pain—they renewed their feigned lamentations. And when they had by this means scratched open again the despairing grief of their parents, they left them abruptly and went to their own homes. There, swollen with rage, they conceived a wicked plot—indeed, a murderous one—against their innocent sister.

Meanwhile, Psyche received further warnings from her unseen husband in their nighttime conversations: "Don't you see what danger you're in? Fortune is attacking your outposts. Unless you take strong precautions now, she will soon fight you hand-to-hand. Treacherous she-wolves are straining every nerve to trap you in their wicked snares. Their main goal is to persuade you to see my face; but, as I have often warned you, if you see it, you will not see it. Therefore, if those horrible, blood-sucking witches should return here armed with the most malevolent designs—and return they will, I know—don't talk to them. If your inborn naivete (*genuina simplicitate*) and your tender heart (*animi tui teneritudine*) will not allow you to refuse, at least promise that you will not listen or reply to anything that concerns your husband. For we will soon expand our family, and that womb, until now still a child's womb, contains another child for us, who will be divine if you hide our secret in silence—but a mortal if you desecrate it."

[12] This news made Psyche blossom with happiness. She rejoiced in the comfort of having a divine child; she thrilled at the glory of this future promise, and rejoiced at the honor of being called a mother. She anxiously reckoned up the days and months coming and going, and she marveled at the unaccustomed weight increasing little by little in her fertile womb from such a slight prick. But the two deadly and detestable Furies [13], exhaling the poison of vipers, were already hastening toward her with wicked speed. Thus her husband again warned Psyche during his brief visit: "This is the final day; the decisive moment is at hand. An enemy of your own sex and your own blood now takes up its weapons, strikes camp, arrays its battle line, and sounds the charge. Your wicked sisters, sword unsheathed, aim for your throat. Alas, what dire calamities now surround us, sweetest Psyche! Take pity on yourself and on us; by your scrupulous silence, save your home, your husband, yourself, and our little one from the misfortune of the disaster bursting upon us. You can no longer call them sisters, these wicked women who bear you murderous hatred and trample the ties of blood under foot. Do not look at them and do not listen to them when, perched on the cliff like Sirens [14], they make the rocks echo with their ill-omened voices."



Ulysses mosaic in the Bardo National Museum, Naples, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[13] Psyche replied in a voice broken by tears and sobs: “For a while now, I know, you have tested my loyalty and my discretion; once more again I will prove to you that my heart is firm. But I implore you, order our Zephyr to perform once more his duty; and, since I am forbidden to look upon your divine features, let me at least see my sisters. I beg you, by the waving, fragrant curls of your hair, by your soft, delicate cheeks so like my own, by your breast which burns with an ineffable warmth: as I will at least see your face in our little one, I implore you to yield to my fervent prayers and humble entreaties. Grant me the joy of embracing my sisters, and by that joy refresh the soul of your devoted Psyche. I no longer need to see your face nor will night’s shadows now block the light: I embrace you; *you* are my light.”

Enchanted by these words and her sweet caresses, her husband wiped away the tears she shed with his own curls and promised to grant her request. A moment later he had disappeared before the approaching dawn.

[14] No sooner had they disembarked, than the two plotting sisters journeyed straightway to the cliff without even paying a visit to their parents. They climbed to the summit with the utmost haste, and, not waiting for the wind to transport them, jumped into space with reckless daring. But Zephyr, mindful of the royal commands, received them, though with regret, in the lap of a current of air and set them softly down upon the ground. Without delay, shoulder to shoulder they made tracks at full speed to the palace. They embraced their poor victim, calling themselves—the liars!—her devoted sisters. Covering the treasury of treachery buried in their hearts with their happy faces, they fawned over her: “Psyche, you’re not the little thing you used to be; now you’re a mother. Do you realize what a treasure for us you’re carrying in that little purse of yours? What a joy to our whole family! How delighted we are! How happy we shall be to raise that golden boy! If his beauty matches his parents’, as it surely will, he will be born a veritable Cupid.”

[15] Thus, by fake affection they gradually possessed themselves of their sister’s mind. She gave them chairs at once to rest from the strains of the journey, ordered hot baths to be prepared for them, and finally ushered them into a superb dining hall where they found the rarest, most marvelous, and daintiest dishes. She ordered a lyre to play: lyre notes sang; a flute: it piped up; she called for a chorus: they sang out; and all this music, performed in their presence by invisible musicians, caressed with sweetest melody the senses of those who heard it. But so wicked and perverse were those two women that this melody, sweet as honey, did not soften or pacify them. Always bent upon ensnaring their sister in their nets, they insidiously steered the conversation, asked her who her husband was, where he was born, what family he came from. Then Psyche, in her extreme simplicity (*simplicitate nimia*), forgetting what she had said before, concocted a new story. She said that her husband was from a neighboring province; that he had large sums invested in commerce; that he was middle-aged with a sprinkling of white hair. Then, dwelling no further upon that subject, she loaded them again with magnificent gifts and entrusted them to their windy carriage.

[16] But as they were wafted homeward through the air by the gentle breath of Zephyr, they wrangled back and forth: “What are we to think, sister, of that silly creature’s horrible lie? At first her husband was a young man who had no beard except a recent growth of down; now he is a man of middle age whose hair is silvery white. What sort of man is he to have changed so suddenly from youth to old age in so short a time? Sister, there is no other explanation than this: either this awful woman has lied to us or she

does not know what her husband's face looks like. Whichever of these guesses is true, we must strip her of her wealth as soon as possible. If she doesn't know her husband, it's certain that she has married a god, and, in that case, her pregnancy means the birth of a god. And as soon as she's proclaimed the mother of a divine child—Gods forbid!—I shall instantly plait a noose and hang myself. However, let's return to our parents and spin some lies the same color as hers to agree with what we've said.

[17] Thus inflamed by hate, the sisters disdainfully greeted their parents. They were so agitated that they passed the whole night without closing their eyes. In the morning they flew to the cliff and went down straightaway into the valley thanks to the usual assistance of the breeze; and, squeezing their eyelids together to force out a tear, they began their conversation with the girl with these crafty words: "Here you sit happy and content but ignorant of the great horror and unconcerned by the peril threatening you. But we, who with untiring vigilance give all our thoughts to your interests, are deeply tormented by your danger. Truthfully, we've learned, beyond the possibility of doubt, a secret that we can't conceal from you because we share your misfortunes and your grief. It is a huge serpent with countless slinking coils, a neck swollen with deadly poison, and a deep jaw bloody and gaping that lies stealthily by your side at night. Remember the Pythian oracle [15] who declared that you were destined to marry a ferocious beast. Many peasants who have hunted hereabout and most of the people of the neighborhood have seen him returning at night from his feeding grounds and swimming in the shallows of the nearby river

[18] Everyone says that he will not stuff you much longer with so many sweet delicacies. As soon as your unborn child has matured in your womb, he will devour you as a very tasty morsel. Now the decision is yours: whether you will listen to your sisters, who are so concerned for your precious safety, and will fly from death and live with us free from all danger, or whether you prefer to be buried in the belly this most savage beast. But if living in this remote wilderness with your voices, if making secret, filthy, dangerous love, if the embrace of a poisonous serpent delight you, we, in any case, shall have done our duty as faithful and loving sisters."

Then poor little Psyche, so naive (*simplex*) and tender of heart, was gripped with sadness by these ghastly words. She put out of mind all her husband's warnings, forgot the promises she had made to him, and rushed headlong into a bottomless abyss of misfortune. Trembling, her pale face drained of blood, stammering through half-parted lips, she barely gasped to them:

[19] "Dearest sisters, you are loyal to the duties that your affection imposes upon you. I don't think that those who told you these things are lying. For I have never seen my husband's face; I have no idea what country he comes from. I have heard him speak only at night, and always in low tones. He conceals his condition from me and never fails to leave me at daybreak. When you say that he is some kind of beast I think you are right. He is particularly intent on always making me fear to see his face and threatens me with the most terrible calamities if I should ever try to look at it. So if it's in your power to help your poor sister and save her from such a dangerous plight, this is the moment to come to my aid; for to substitute indifference for the foresight you have shown up to this point will destroy all the benefit of that foresight."

Finding the gates so easily opened and their sister's heart laid bare before them, those wicked women abandoned their secret weapon in its hiding place and attacked the terrified thoughts of the simple (*simplex*) girl with the unsheathed sword of deceit.

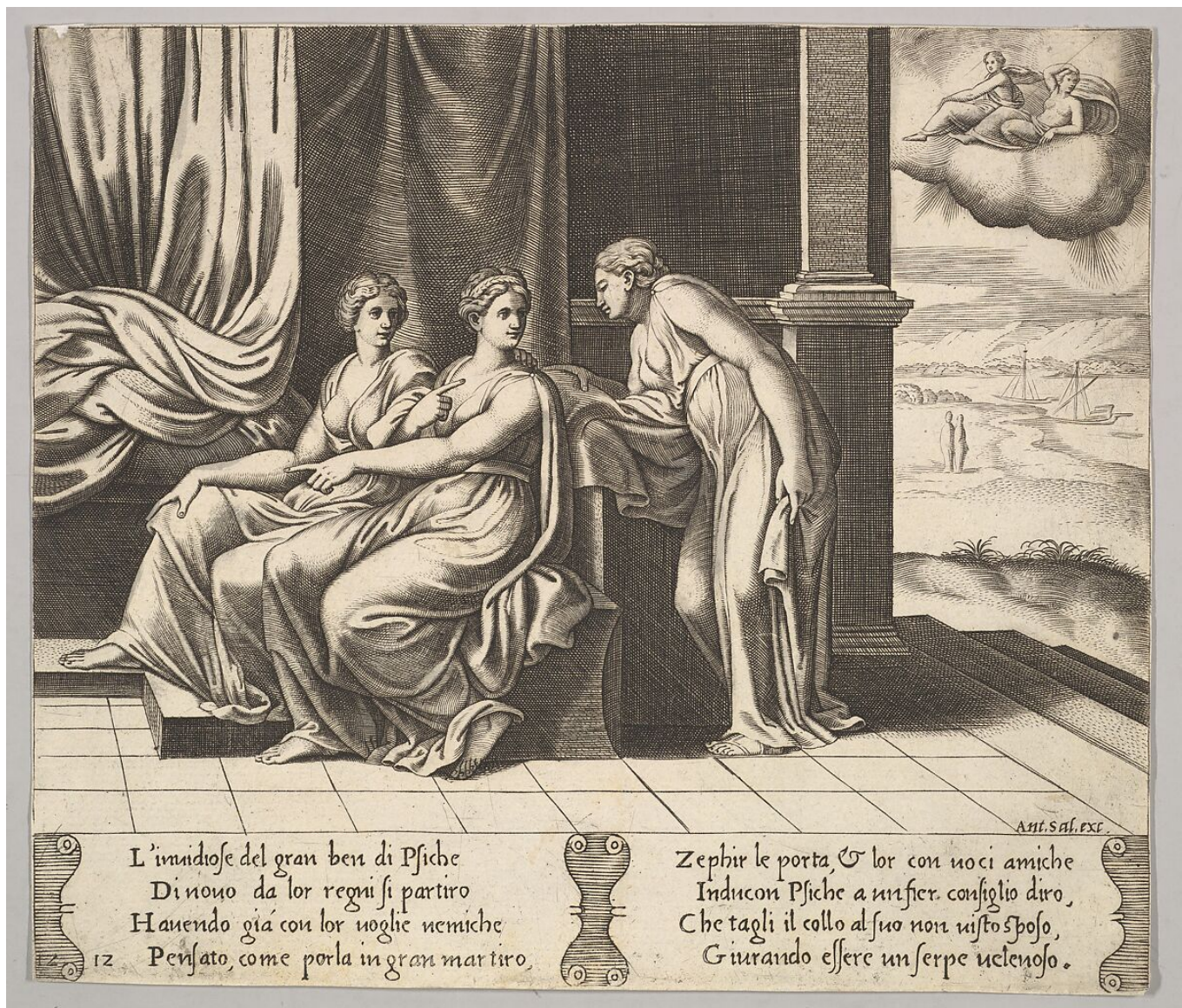


Plate 12: Psyche's sisters persuade her a serpent is sleeping with her, from *The Story of Cupid and Psyche as told by Apuleius*, Antonio Salamanca, 1530-1560, Public Domain courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

[20] "Since the ties of blood," said one of them, "compel us to disregard all danger when your safety is at stake, we will show you your one means of escape, which we have thought about for a long, long time. It is this. Take a keen-edged knife, whet it to an even sharper edge by stropping it gently over your palm, and conceal it in your bed on the side where you usually lie. Get a lamp, fill it full of oil so that it will shine brightly, and place it somewhere behind the bed curtains. Cloak all these preparations in the utmost secrecy. Then, when he has slithered into the room and gotten into bed as usual, when he has stretched himself out and is fast asleep and breathing deeply, slip out of bed, tiptoe barefooted, take the lamp from the dark place where you have hidden it, and use its light to seize the lucky moment to carry out your noble purpose. Grasping the two-edged weapon, boldly raise your right hand high and strike the nape of that terrible serpent's neck a mighty blow, cutting off his head. Our presence shall not fail you; we will be anxiously waiting and, as soon as you have assured your safety by his death, we will speedily carry you and all this treasure away; then we will marry you, a human being, to a *human* husband."

[21] Inflaming with such words the heart of their already thoroughly agitated sister, these two quickly left, fearing to be anywhere near such a crime. The same breeze which had always brought them there bore them to the summit of the cliff and, hurrying away, they boarded their ship and departed.

But Psyche was left alone, except she was not alone because the maddening Furies harassed her; grief washed over her like the waves of the sea. Although her plan was formed and she was determined to carry it out, although her hands were preparing for the crime, still she hesitated. Her resolution was shaken; a thousand conflicting feelings strove for mastery in her heart: she hurries, yet hesitates; she is bold, yet afraid; she is angry, yet despairing; in a word, in one and the same body she hates the beast but loves the husband. But as evening approached and with it the darkness, she hurriedly made everything ready for her shocking crime. Night had come and with it her husband; and, after one skirmish in amorous combat, he had fallen into a deep sleep.

[22] Then Psyche, though weak in both body and spirit, was filled with strength furnished by brutal Fate. She fetched the lamp and grasped the knife; her courage switched her gender. But as soon as the light revealed the secret within the bed, she saw the gentlest of brutes, the sweetest beast: *Cupid himself, that beautiful god, gracefully sleeping*. At that sight the lamp flickered joyously and the knife repented its impious, sharp edge. As for Psyche, stopped in her tracks at such a sight, she sank to her knees out of her head, faint, deadly pale, and trembling. She sought to hide the weapon, but to hide it by plunging it into her breast; and she would surely have done that had not the blade, in dread of so terrible a crime, slipped from her rash hands and escaped her. And now, though faint and confused, she feels her spirit revive as she continues to gaze upon the beauty of that divine face. She sees the gracious, flowing locks of his golden head seeped in ambrosia [16], his milk-white neck, his rosy cheeks over which fall graceful curls while others cluster about his brow and crown. Their sheen was so brilliant that it made the very rays of the lamp waver. On the flying god's shoulders gleamed dewy wings of sparkling beauty, and though they were at rest, the delicate down that fringed them kept wantonly quivering. The rest of his body was as smooth and splendid; in short, he was so made that Venus [17] had no cause to regret giving birth to him. At the foot of the bed lay a bow, quiver, and arrows—the mighty god's benevolent weapons.



Guiseppe Maria Crespi, *Cupid and Psyche*, 1707-1709, oil on canvas, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

[23] Psyche cannot feast her eyes enough upon them. In her curiosity, she touches, examines, and admires her husband's weapons; she draws an arrow from the quiver and tests its point upon her fingertip. As she held it, her fingers shook; she grasped it too tightly and pricked herself deeply enough that a drop or two of rosy blood reddened her skin. Thus, unwittingly, Psyche fell in love with Cupid. Burning with ever-growing lust (*cupido*) for Cupid (*Cupido*), she leaned over him staring at him with passionate longing; then she smothered him with kisses from her puckered lips parted and full of lust, fearing only that he would awaken too soon. But while she wavered bewildered in her smitten heart, so aroused by such beauty, suddenly, the lamp—was this black treachery, was it poisonous jealousy, or was it that it itched to touch so fair a body and kiss it, as it were?—spurted a drop of scalding oil from its bright flame upon the god's right shoulder. Rash and insolent lamp! You worthless aide to love. You burned the very god who kindles every flame—you whom some lover first invented so that he could see the one he desired even after night fell. At that burning touch, the god leapt up and, seeing the foul tokens of her broken promise revealed, without a word he flew away from the sight and touch of his most unhappy wife.

File:Antakya Archaeological Museum Eros and Psyche mosaic 6044.jpg

Sleeping Eros about to be robbed of his quiver by Psyche. Mosaic from Samandaği, third century AD. Antakya Archaeological Museum, Inv. 1021. Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[24] But as he rose, Psyche quickly seized his right leg with both hands. A wretched appendage, she hung on to him as he rose higher and flew through the cloudy regions; but, wearied at last, she floated softly to earth [18]. Her godly lover did not abandon her as she lay on the ground, but swooped down to a cypress tree nearby and from its topmost branch spoke to her, deeply angered: “Simple-minded (*simplicissima*) Psyche, I forgot the commands of my mother, Venus. Instead of addicting you with love for a poor wretch of the basest rank, instead of dooming you, as she ordered me, to the worst marriage, I flew to you as a lover. I acted thoughtlessly in this, I know, and I, the famous archer (*sagittarius*), wounded myself with my own arrow: I made you my wife. Did I do this so you would think me a beast? So that your knife would cut off my head which holds the eyes that adore you? How often I appealed to your prudence; what kindly counsels I lavished on you! Your excellent advisers will quickly pay for the wicked lessons they have given you. But I shall punish you only by my flight.” Having said this, he stretched out his wings and flew away.

[25] Psyche, lying prone upon the ground, followed her husband’s course as far as her eyes could see him and distressed her heart with the bitterest laments. When his beating wings carried her husband into the heights and out of sight, she ran to the bank of a nearby river and threw herself into it headfirst. But the gentle river—in honor of the god whose habit is to inflame the very waters [19], and moved by fear as well—immediately bore her upon his waves uninjured and laid her on the flower-strewn turf of his bank. It chanced that at that moment Pan [20], the rustic god, was sitting on a low hill close by the river embracing the mountain goddess Echo [21] there on the ground and teaching her to repeat all sorts of pretty little songs [22]. Near the bank, she-goats were frolicking about or browsing upon the grass. The goat-legged god saw the weak and heartsick Psyche, whose misfortune was not unknown to him. Kindly calling her to his side, he comforted her:

“Pretty girl, I’m just a country boy (*rusticanus*), a goatherd; but, thanks to my great age, I have gained a great deal of experience. Now, if my guess is right—and this is what wise men actually call divination [23]—from your stumbling and often faltering steps, your too pale body, your constant sighs, and your tear-stained eyes, you are totally love-struck. Listen to me: don’t leap off cliffs again or try to kill yourself in any other way. Abandon your sorrow and put away your grief. Instead, worship Cupid, the greatest of gods, with your prayers. Since he’s young, self-indulgent, and wanton, your fawning submission to him will win him over.”



Edward Burne-Jones, *Pan and Psyche*, 1872-74, oil on canvas, Harvard Art Museums, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[26] Thus spoke the shepherd god. Psyche made no reply, but venerated his saving power and went her way. After wandering exhausted, she followed an unfamiliar path and came to the city where the husband of one of her sisters reigned. Psyche, having made sure that it was so, asked her presence to be announced to that sister. She was speedily led before her, and after they had exchanged embraces and greetings her sister asked the reason for her visit. She answered: “You remember the counsel that you two gave me: you told me that a beast, masquerading as my husband, passed his nights with me, and you urged me to slay him with a double-edged knife before he could gulp poor me down his greedy jaw. At first I did as we agreed; but when I saw his face by the lamp’s light, I beheld a wonderful and heavenly sight: it was the son, yes, *the son*, of the goddess Venus; it was Cupid himself lying quietly asleep. Astonished by such a beautiful sight and confused by the cravings of a violent passion, I was at a loss how to control my good fortune. Suddenly—a terrible accident!—the lamp bubbled out a drop of boiling oil upon his shoulder. The pain awoke him instantly and, when he saw me armed with steel and fire, he cried: ‘Your crime is too awful. Leave my bed this instant and take your things with you [24]. Now I will marry your sister’—he mentioned your name—‘in a solemn ceremony.’ And he instantly ordered Zephyr the wind to blow me out of his palace.”

[27] Psyche had barely finished speaking when her sister, aroused by insane desire and wicked jealousy, told her husband a lie concocted on the spot to the effect that she had just learned that her parents were dead, and set sail at once. She hastened at her utmost speed to the cliff and, although a different wind was blowing at the time, blinded by her hopes, she gasped: “Take me, Cupid, take a spouse worthy of you; and you, Zephyr, attend your mistress.” And then, with a great leap, she threw herself off the cliff. But she failed to reach her destination even in death, for the jagged rocks tore her limbs apart and scattered them—just as she deserved—and she perished with her mangled entrails easy fodder for the birds and wild beasts. Nor was the punishment of the second sister long delayed. In due time, Psyche, resuming her wanderings, reached another city where her other sister lived. Seduced by a similar false tale and burning to supplant her younger sister by a criminal marriage, she also hastened to the cliff and fell to her death in the same way.

[28] While Psyche, intent on finding Cupid, wandered over the earth, he, still suffering from the wound inflicted by the lamp, lay groaning in his mother’s bedchamber. But a seagull, that snow-white bird that skims along the surface of the waves brushing them with its wings, plunged down into the ocean’s depths. Landing near lovely Venus who was bathing and swimming, it told her that her son was confined to bed suffering from a severe burn, was grief-stricken, and uncertain of being cured. It said that it had heard from the lips of people everywhere rumors and gossip about the bad deeds of the whole family of Venus: “Cupid is up in the mountains whoring it up, and you, Venus, are amusing yourself by swimming under the sea. Consequently, there is no more pleasure, grace, or charm in life; everything is neglected, gone to seed, and shabby. There are no more marriage bonds, no more mutual friendships, no more affection for children—just enormous squalor and sordid, loathsome matings.” Thus did that talkative and meddling bird chatter in Venus’ ear, tearing her son’s good name to tatters. Consumed with rage, Venus instantly cried out: “So that hopeful son of mine has a girlfriend now? You, who alone serve me lovingly, tell me her name who has seduced a tender and beardless boy. Is it someone from the tribe of nymphs, or from the number of the Seasons, or from the chorus of the Muses, or from my own attendant Graces [25]? The chatty bird, unable to stop talking, said: “Mistress, I’m not quite sure, but if I recall correctly, he has fallen madly in love with a young girl named Psyche.” Indignant, Venus shouted, “What! He really loves that Psyche, the rival for my beauty, who tries to steal my very name? So the little sprout thinks I’m a whorehouse madam (*lena*)! He only knew about that girl because I pointed her out.”

[29] Screaming this, she rose hurriedly from the sea and hastened to her golden bedchamber. Finding her injured son there just as she had been told, at the very doorway she began bellowing at the top of her lungs: “Well, isn’t this a pretty picture—so becoming to our family tree and your good character! First you trample your mother’s, no, your *queen’s*, orders underfoot. Why didn’t you soil my rival with a low class love? And at your age—just a boy—you take her in your unrestrained and immature embraces so that I have to endure my enemy as my daughter-in-law. Doubtless you presume, you worthless, unlovable, little seducer, that you are my only noble-born son and that I’m too old to become a mother. But I want you to know that I’ll have another son who will be a much better one than you are. In fact, to make you feel even more shame, I’ll adopt one of my young slaves, and I’ll him give your wings, your torch, your bow, and your arrows; the whole outfit belongs to me, and I didn’t give it to you for you to use it like this. For nothing from your father Vulcan’s [26] wealth was used to equip you.

[30] “You’ve been badly raised since you were a baby; you have violent hands and so often you’ve irreverently shot at your elders. You mother-killer; you even strip me bare, your own mother, every day. Haven’t you shot me countless times and ignored me as if I were a widow? You don’t even fear your stepfather, Mars [27], that great and mightiest of warriors. What am I saying? You’re always setting him up with mistresses to my torment. But now I’m going to make you repent for your tricks; you’re going to feel pain and bitterness over this marriage of yours. But what shall I do now that I have become the laughing-stock of the whole world? Where shall I hide my head? How to stop this little lizard? Shall I implore the help of my foe, Sobriety [28] (*sobrietas*), whom I

have so often insulted to gratify my son's extravagance? Must I seek advice from that coarse woman so careless of how she looks? I shudder at the thought; but revenge has its consolations which should not be scorned. So I must turn to Sobriety and no other. She will thoroughly punish this little fool: she will empty his quiver, blunt his arrows, unstring his bow, and extinguish his torch; and she will restrain his body with the sharpest remedies. I'll consider this insult atoned for when she has shaved off those shiny golden locks through which I have so often passed my fingers, and when she has clipped those wings which my bosom dyed white from its flowing springs of nectar."

[31] Having spoken, she rushed furiously forth from her palace, wrath stirring her bile. But she was at once stopped by Juno [29] and Ceres [30]. Those goddesses, seeing her enraged expression, asked why such a savage frown marred the beauty (*venustas*) of her sparkling eyes. "You have come at the perfect moment to calm the violence burning in my breast," she said. "I beg you, use all your power to find out for me where that runaway Psyche has fled [31]. For both of you surely are aware of the widespread gossip about my family and the deeds of my son better left unsaid." Then, aware of these events, they tried to soothe Venus' fierce wrath: "What, my lady, has your son done so wrong that makes you determined to thwart his pleasure and work to destroy the one he loves? Is it a crime, we ask you, if he takes an eager liking to a pretty girl? You can't be unaware that he is a man and a young one at that; and surely you haven't forgotten how old he is? Is it because he wears his years so prettily that he still seems a boy to you? You are a mother and, what is more, a woman of sense; are you always going to take an obsessive interest in his amorous games, hold his excesses against him, disapprove of his lovers, and condemn your own skills and pleasures in that charming boy? What god or mortal will put up with you when you scatter passionate love (*cupidines*) on people everywhere but forbid the lovers in your own family to love, and shut down the common [32] workshop for women's weaknesses (*vitium*)?" Fearing his arrows, the two goddesses thus flattered the absent Cupid with this gracious defense. But Venus, indignant that they were treating the insults she had received as a laughing matter, turned her back on them, and, with rapid steps, went on toward the sea.



Photograph by Yair Haklai of Giovanni Benzone's sculpture *Cupid and Psyche*, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.
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- [1] A relief where the figure slightly protrudes from the background.
- [2] Minor deities, often the offspring of a god and a mortal.
- [3] God of the sky, thunder, and lightning.
- [4] The drink of the gods.
- [5] A stringed musical instrument.
- [6] "Unknown husband" is "*ignobilis maritus*." As well as "unknown," *ignobilis* can also mean "low born" or "ignoble," reminding us that Venus has ordered Cupid to find just such a husband for Psyche.
- [7] God of the West wind.
- [8] The phrase is "*vi ac postestate Venerii*," where *Venerius* implies sexual love and, obviously, evokes Venus.
- [9] Greek goddess Tyche.
- [10] The phrase is "*procedente consuetudine*," which could also mean "as he has more sex with her."
- [11] Mythological hero known for his strength. Son of Zeus and Alcmene.
- [12] Greek goddesses (Moirai) who determined the destiny of each human.

- [13] Goddesses of vengeance.
- [14] Half bird, half woman creatures who lured sailors to destruction by their voice.
- [15] The high priestess serving at the Delphi Temple of Apollo fulfilled the role of oracle and was known as the Pythia.
- [16] The food of the gods.
- [17] Roman goddess of love and beauty.
- [18] Surely a paraphrase of Plato's *Phaedrus*, an extensive discussion of the ascent of the soul: "but when, through its inability to follow God, the soul fails to see, and through some mischance is filled with forgetfulness and evil and grows heavy, it loses its wings and falls to the earth" (Ph. 248c).
- [19] That is, Cupid's amorous power also warms sea creatures.
- [20] Greek god of the wild, shepherds, and flocks.
- [21] A mountain nymph cursed by Hera to only be able to repeat things she had heard.
- [22] An odd detail since Echo's voice, cursed by Hera, could only repeat what was said to it. In one version of her story, Echo spurns Pan's advances and he orders his followers to tear her to pieces. Apuleius could be suggesting here that Pan is singing to himself and enjoying the effect of an echo/Echo repeating his song—like singing in the shower.
- [23] The practice of seeking knowledge of the future or the unknown by supernatural means.
- [24] The phrase "Take your things with you" (*tibi res tuas habeto*), in which a husband returned his wife's property to her, was the typical formula for making a divorce in ancient Rome.
- [25] Nymphs (Greek for "maiden") were feminine personifications of natural objects like trees and rivers. The Hours were the daughters of Jupiter who regulated the seasons. The nine Muses presided over the various branches of the liberal arts. The Graces were three more daughters of Jupiter (named Aglaia, Euphrosyne, and Thalia) who personified the grace and beauty that make life enjoyable; they usually accompanied the Muses.
- [26] Roman god of fire, metalworking, and forges.
- [27] Roman god of war.
- [28] Greek goddess of restraint.
- [29] Roman queen of the Gods, also the goddess of marriage, family, and birth.
- [30] Venus is the child of Jupiter and Dione, so Juno, the wife of Jupiter and queen of heaven, is her step-mother. Ceres, the Roman version of Demeter, was the goddess of agriculture, the earth-mother. The sister of Jupiter, she is Venus' aunt.
- [31] "*Psyche illam fugitivam*" (that runaway Psyche) suggests an escaped slave, a theme that continues throughout the narrative of Psyche's search for Cupid.
- [32] Apuleius may be punning on the double meaning of *publica* ("common"), which also means "prostitute," i.e., a "public woman."

Book VI

[1] Meanwhile, Psyche wandered all about restlessly seeking her husband as her heart's desire grew ever stronger. However angry he might be, she hoped to appease him, if not by her wifely endearments then at least by slavish pleading. Seeing a temple on the summit of a steep mountain, she said to herself, "How do I know that my lord does not dwell there?" She headed toward the top with quick steps even though she was worn out from her constant wanderings. Hope and her solemn vow spurred her on. When she had bravely climbed to that great height, she entered the sanctuary [1]. She saw sheaves of wheat in great heaps, some of it woven into wreaths, and also ears of barley. There were also scythes and all the implements of harvest; but everything was scattered about in confusion, as happens when careless laborers toss them aside in the heat of summer. Psyche carefully sorted each of these things, arranging them in their proper place. It seemed to her that she should not neglect the shrines and ceremonies of any of the gods but implore the kindly compassion of all of them.

[2] While she performed this task with diligent and conscientious care, Ceres [2] noticed her and called to her from a distance: “Ah, poor Psyche! Venus [3] is furious and painstakingly searching for your tracks over the whole world. She seeks the death penalty for you and exerts all her divine power to be revenged on you. But here you are looking after my things. Are you thinking of everything except your own safety?” Then Psyche dropped to her knees, bathed the goddess’s feet with her abundant tears, swept the ground with her hair, and begged her protection with the most fervent prayers: “By your right hand, which bears the fruits of the earth, by the joyful ceremonies of the harvest, by the secret mysteries of your baskets [4], by the winged chariots of the dragons that serve you, by the furrows of fertile Sicily [5], by the ravisher’s chariot, by the earth which imprisons Proserpine [6], by the subterranean scene of her gloomy wedding, by the torches by whose light you beamed forth from the infernal regions after you had recovered her, and by all the other consecrated mysteries which Eleusis [7], your Attic shrine, veils with an awe-inspiring silence, take under your protection the ill-fated life of Psyche, who kneels suppliantly at your feet [8]. Let me lie hidden for just a few days amid these piles of grain until time calms the fury of that fierce goddess, or at least until a little rest restores my strength, worn out by my toils.”



Edward Burne-Jones, *Psyche at the Shrines of Juno and Ceres* (Palace Green Murals), Public Domain via Birmingham Museums Trust

[3] Ceres replied: “Your tears and your prayers have touched my heart, and I wish I could help you. But Venus is my kinswoman; the bonds of a longstanding friendship unite us. Furthermore, she is a noblewoman, and I cannot afford to be in her bad graces. So leave this temple immediately, and count yourself lucky that I do not put you under arrest.”

Being thus repulsed contrary to her hope, Psyche went her way and her heart was doubly oppressed. She retraced her steps and saw, in a shadowy wood which lay in the valley, a temple of expert workmanship. Determined to neglect no path to better fortune, no matter how doubtful, and to implore the help of every god, she approached the sacred portals. She saw precious gifts and garments embroidered with gold letters hanging from the branches of the trees and from the doorposts; these recorded the name of the goddess to whom they were offered and thanks for the blessings she bestowed. Then, kneeling and clasping the altar still warm [from sacrifice] with her hands, she offered this prayer after wiping away her tears:

[4] “O sister and spouse [9] of mighty Jupiter [10], whether you abide in your ancient shrine on Samos [11] which glories in your birth cries, your infant wailings, and your upbringing; or whether you dwell in the blessed temple of lofty Carthage [12], which

adores you as a virgin coming from heaven riding a lion; or whether you rule over the renowned walls of the Argives [13] near the banks of the Inachus [14], which proclaims you the bride of the Thunderer [i.e., Jupiter] and the queen of the goddesses, may you—whom all the East reveres as Zygia, and all the West, Lucina—be Juno [15] the Savior (*Iuno Sospita*) [16] to me in my terrible misfortune. Deliver me, worn out from my great toil, from the imminent peril which I fear. For I know that, even unbidden, you help pregnant women in times of danger.” She prayed in this way and Juna instantly appeared before her, in all the imposing majesty of her divinity, and replied: “I truly wish I could answer your prayers. But decency does not allow me to go against the will of Venus, my daughter-in-law, whom I have always loved as my own child. And then there are the laws that forbid me from protecting runaway slaves against their masters’ will [17].”

[5] This latest shipwreck of her fortunes absolutely terrified Psyche. Unable to find her winged spouse and abandoning all hope of safety, she gathered her thoughts: “What aid for my misery can I now seek or hope to obtain when even goddesses, despite their goodwill, cannot help me? Where can I turn now, trapped in such snares? What roof, what darkness even, will conceal me so that I can escape the inescapable eyes of mighty Venus? Now you must take on a manly spirit (*masculum animum*). Bravely renounce empty hope. Give yourself up voluntarily to your mistress; your submission, though belated, will soften her rage. And who knows, maybe you will find the one you have been seeking for so long in his mother’s house.” Ready for the uncertain result of surrendering—rather, for certain destruction—she considered how she should begin her entreaties.

[6] Meanwhile, Venus, abandoning earthly solutions to her search, headed for heaven. She ordered made ready the chariot that Vulcan [18] the goldsmith had carefully adorned with exquisite artistry and given to her as a wedding gift before their marriage. Where the artist’s file had incised the metal was clearly visible and the result was even more precious than the gold lost through the filing. Four white doves [19] from among the numerous doves nesting about their mistress’s bedroom flew joyously to meet her, and, with a turn of their soft-hued necks, passed their heads through a yoke gleaming with precious stones. Their mistress seated herself and they flew merrily upward. Frisky sparrows [20] chirping boisterously attended the goddess’s chariot; other birds, singing sweetly with soft, honeyed melodies, announced the goddess’s coming. The clouds parted, heaven opened its gates to its daughter, the upper air welcomed the goddess with transports of joy, and the mighty Venus musical escort had no fear of encountering eagles or rapacious vultures [21].



Pietro da Cortona, Chariot of Venus, 1622, Tempera on Canvas, Capitoline Museum, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

[7] Instantly she turned her course toward Jupiter’s royal fortress, and, with a haughty petition, demanded the services of Mercury [22], the messenger god (*dei vocalis*), which were necessary to the success of her plans. Jupiter’s dark brow nodded his assent. Triumphant Venus, accompanied by Mercury, once more descended to earth and she earnestly said to him: “My Arcadian [23] brother, you certainly know that your sister Venus has never accomplished anything without the aid of Mercury; you also know how long I’ve been unable to find that female slave hiding from me. There is nothing else to do now except for you, in your office as Junald (*praeconium*), to proclaim publicly that there will be a reward for the person who finds her. Carry out my request speedily, and clearly point out her distinguishing characteristics so that if anyone is accused of the crime of illegally hiding her, he will not be able to defend himself with ignorance as an excuse.” With that, she gave him a handbill (*libellum*) containing Psyche’s name and other details, and then at once returned home.

[8] Mercury did not neglect to obey. Dashing about all the nations of the world from one end to the other, he carried out his duty, making this announcement as ordered: “A slave named Psyche, a king’s daughter, and belonging to Venus, has fled from her

mistress. Whoever can detain her or point out the place where she lies hidden is requested to give notice to Mercury, who makes this announcement, behind the Murcian Pyramids [24]. He shall receive, by way of reward for his information, seven sweet kisses (*savia suavia*) from Venus herself, and a last one, even sweeter, with a deep thrust of her honeyed tongue.”

When Mercury had made this announcement, the zeal of every mortal man was aroused in rivalry, each craving such a priceless reward. This put an instant end to Psyche’s hesitation. She was already within a short distance of her mistress’s gates when she saw coming toward her one of Venus’ household servants named Habit (*Consuetudo*) [25], who quickly shouted at the top of her lungs: “So, you worthless slave, you’ve finally begun to realize that you have a mistress. Are you going to claim not to know how much work it cost us looking for you? That kind of nerve would fit your character. Luckily, you’ve fallen into my hands and now you’re clutched in the claws of hell (*Orcus*); you’re about to meet swift punishment for such disobedience.”

[9] She twisted her hands fiercely into her hair and dragged away Psyche, who offered no resistance. When Venus saw her ushered in and brought before her, she burst into a high, loud laugh, as when one is furiously angry; then, shaking her head and scratching her right ear [26], she said: “At last, you condescend to come and greet your mother-in-law. Or perhaps it’s your husband, now dangerously ill from the wound you inflicted, whom you’ve dropped in on? But have no fear, for I will offer you a welcome befitting a good daughter-in-law. Where,” she asked, “are my servants Anxiety (*Sollicitudo*) and Sadness (*Tristities*)?” And when those two came, she abandoned her to their tortures. Following their mistress’s orders, they relentlessly whipped poor little Psyche with a scourge, tortured her with other torments, and then brought her back before the goddess’s sight. Again Venus roared with laughter. “Just look! The slutty allure (*lenocinium* [27]) of her swollen belly ought to move us to sympathy. From it shall come the glorious offspring that will make me a happy grandmother. And I’m just so happy: I’ll be called a grandmother in the very flower of my youth; the child of this horrid slave will be called Venus’ grandson. But how absurd! I’ll call him my grandson in vain, for this marriage was made between social unequals; it was consummated in the country, without witnesses and without his father’s consent; it could not be a lawful marriage, and so the child will be a bastard, if we even allow you to give birth to it at all.”



Edward Matthew Hales, *Psyche at the Throne of Venus*, 1883, oil on canvas, Russell Coates Art Gallery & Museum, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

[10] As she finished speaking, she pounced on Psyche, ripped her clothes into a thousand pieces, tore out her hair, fiercely shook her by the head, and knocked her down with the utmost violence. Then she took wheat, barley, millet, poppy seed, chickpeas, lentils, and beans and mixed them all together into one pile. She said to her: “Seems to me that you’re such an ugly little slave that you’ll win your lovers only by doing drudge work for them. So now I’m going to test your skills. Sort out this heap of different

grains that I've mixed together; place each kind in a pile by itself, grain by grain. Before evening, you must submit your work for my approval."

She pointed to the huge heap of grain and went off to a wedding feast. Psyche did not even consider putting her hand to that confused and inextricable mass; instead, overwhelmed by the cruel command, she sat numb and silent. But then an ant, that tiny insect which dwells in the fields, recognizing the enormous difficulty of the task, had compassion on the misfortune of the wife of a powerful god. Cursing the mother-in-law's cruelty, he ran quickly here and there summoning and collecting all his neighbor ants: "Take pity, you busy children of the all-producing earth. Take pity and hurry to help the wife of Cupid, a charming girl in distress." Wave upon wave of the six-footed folk came running. With the greatest zeal they sorted out the whole stack grain by grain; and, after making a separate pile of each kind, they at once disappeared.

[11] At nightfall Venus returned from the wedding feast, drunk with wine, fragrant with balsam, her whole body swathed with dazzlingly beautiful roses. Seeing the miraculous diligence of the work, she cried: "It wasn't you, most wretched girl, it wasn't your hands that did this work; it was he whom, to his undoing and yours, you chose to seduce." And tossing her a piece of coarse bread, she went to bed. Meanwhile, Cupid, imprisoned in an isolated apartment in the depths of the palace, was kept in close confinement, partly so that his oversexed, extravagant lifestyle (*petulanti luxuriae*) would not inflame his wound, partly so that he would not encounter his beloved. Thus the lovers—apart though beneath the same roof—endured a miserable night.

As soon as Aurora [28] had begun her ride across the sky, Venus summoned Psyche and said to her: "Do you see that grove of trees? It follows the long banks of a river whose deep currents flow from a source nearby. Sheep with shining fleece the color of gold graze there unguarded. I propose that you go there right now, pluck a tuft of their priceless fleece by whatever means it takes, and bring it to me."



Giulio Romano, *Psyche's Second Task* (1526–28), [Palazzo del Tè](#), Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

[12] Psyche willingly set out, not to obey her command, but to find rest from her misfortunes by hurling herself headlong from the rocks into the river. But from the river a green Reed—the nursemaid of soothing music—blown upon (*inspirata*) by a divine breath, made this prediction with a sweet, gentle rustling: "Psyche, harassed by so many troubles, do not pollute my sacred waters by your unhappy death, and do not approach those dreadful sheep right now. For they store up heat from the blazing sun and go

mad in a wild frenzy. Then, with their sharp horns and foreheads hard as rocks, and sometimes with their poisonous bites, they are the brutal death of mortals. Until the midday sun has sunk a little and lost its heat and the river's fair breezes have calmed the flock down, you may hide beneath that lofty plane tree which drinks from the river just as I do. As soon as their frenzy calms and the sheep have relaxed, shake the leaves of that grove of trees nearby and you will find golden fleece clinging here and there to the branches."

[13] Thus the honest and kind Reed pointed out to wearied Psyche the means of ensuring her safety. She listened carefully, which she did not regret, and did not fail to carry out the instructions. Following them point by point, she easily accomplished the theft and, gathering the delicate, yellow gold to her bosom, carried it back to Venus. But she gained no favor from her mistress for carrying out this second, dangerous task. Venus knit her brows, and, smiling bitterly, said: "I can't help noticing that someone else did this deed in your name just like the last one. But now I'm going to test once and for all whether you are genuinely brave-hearted and have particular good sense. Do you see the jutting cliff on the summit of that lofty mountain? From it issues, in black waves, a gloomy stream which flows down into a neighboring valley to empty into the swamps of the Styx and feed the growling currents of the Cocytus [29]. In this little jar bring me without delay ice cold water drawn from the deepest part of the spring where it gushes from the summit." With that, she gave her the polished crystal bottle, threatening her with the most awful punishment if she failed.

[14] Psyche hurried with swift steps to the highest peak of the mountain, sure to find there at least the end of her miserable life if nothing else. But as soon as she neared the ridge she realized the immensity of the task and the murderous obstacles in the way. For the rock rose to a giddy height and was so rugged and slippery it was inaccessible; and from the center of its stony craw it vomited out the horrible stream flowing directly from a fissure. It ran down the steep slope through a narrow, concealed channel it had worn and plunged into the valley below. In the crags cut into the rocks, to the right and left, fierce dragons slithered along with long, craning necks and lantern-eyes bound to sleepless vigil, their pupils on guard and never veiled from the light. The very waters themselves could speak, and they warned: "Go away! What are you doing? Look out! Where are you going? Beware! Fly! You're going to die!" The impossibility of the task turned Psyche herself to stone. Her body was there, but she had lost her senses. Crushed by the weight of the inescapable danger, she was deprived of even the last consolation of shedding tears.

[15] But the suffering of that innocent soul did not escape the steady gaze of a benevolent Providence. All of a sudden, Supreme Jupiter's royal bird, that plundering eagle, spread its wings and flew to her side. He remembered his ancient service when, led by Cupid, he carried off the young Phrygian [30] destined to be the god's cup-bearer [31]. He flew down from the ethereal realm's lofty summits in order to revere the god's divine power by helping his wife in her task at the right moment. Flying in front of the girl's face, he said: "Simple (*simplex*) creature that you are and unused to such tests, do you think that you can steal—or even touch—a single drop from that holiest and most awful stream? Have you not heard it said that the gods, even Jupiter himself, fear these waters of the Styx, and that the oaths that mortals swear by the power of the gods, the gods swear by the majesty of the Styx [32]? But give me your bottle." Without a pause, he snatched it and, swaying his heavy wings like oars, he sailed right and left through the midst of those dragons with their jaws lined with savage teeth and their flickering, triple-forked tongues. When the raging waters threatened him that he should leave unharmed while he could, he told them a lie, saying that he sought them by Venus command and was her servant. He thus obtained easier access to the stream.



Léon Davent after Guilio Romano, *Jupiter Bringing Water of the Styx to Psyche*, c.1540, engraving, National Gallery of Art, Open Access.

[16] Psyche joyfully took the filled bottle and swiftly carried it to Venus. Yet even then she was unable to win the furious goddess's approval or appease her. Now threatening her with even greater and worse disgraces, she said with a deadly smile: "Well, I think you really must be some sort of deeply skilled and wicked sorceress to have obeyed my commands so precisely. But there is still one more thing, my little sweetie, which you must do for me. Take this box"—she handed it to her—"and hurry to Hades (ad Inferos), to the death-heavy hearth of Orcus himself [33]. Then present the box to Proserpine, and say: 'Venus begs you to send her a little of your beauty, enough for just one short day will suffice. For she has used up what beauty she once had in nursing her sick son and it is completely gone.' But lose no time in returning because I have to be anointed with it before attending the theater of the gods."

[17] With that, Psyche finally felt that she had reached the end of her luck. Casting aside the veil of illusion, she clearly realized that this time she was being sent forth to a quick death. How could she doubt it, since she was being forced to descend on her own feet to Tartarus and the spirits of the dead [34]? With no further delay, she headed for the first high tower that she saw, intending to throw herself from its summit; for she thought that she could get down to Hades directly and quite nicely (*pulcherrime*) that way. But suddenly the tower started speaking, and it said: "Why are you trying to kill yourself by jumping, you poor thing? Why are you now rashly giving up in face of this last danger and this task? If your soul is once and for all parted from your body, you will indeed go to the lowest depths of Tartarus, but it will be impossible for you to return from there."

[18] "Listen to me: Sparta [35], a noble city of Greece, is not far away. Look for Tenarus [36] which is near it, hidden off the beaten track. It is Pluto's (*Dis*) breathing hole, and its yawning gateway reveals a road untraveled by mortal foot. As soon as you cross the threshold of this opening, it will lead you in a straight line to Orcus's palace. But above all, do not go empty-handed into that dark realm. In each hand carry morsels of barley-flour kneaded with honey, and also have two coins in your mouth. When you have traveled some distance on this deadly path, you will meet a lame ass laden with sticks, and his driver, also lame. He will ask you to pick up some sticks that have fallen from his load. Say nothing, but pass on silently. Soon you will come to the river of the dead. Charon [37], first of all, demands payment for ferrying passengers across to the far shore in his boat of sewn-together skins. (It seems that greed lives even among the dead; for neither Charon nor that great god, the father of the Underworld, does anything for free. Thus the poor man, before dying, must procure the money for his passage (*viaticum*), and if he does not have his bronze coin in hand, no one will let him breathe his last breath.) You will give one of your coins as a fare to that filthy old man; but he must take it himself from your mouth. Nor is this all: while you are passing over this sluggish river, a dead old man, floating on the surface, will raise his rotting hands and implore you to lift him into the boat. Do not be moved to pity; it is not permitted."



John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, Charon and Psyche, 1883, Private Collection by Roy Miles Fine Paintings, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[19] Once you have crossed the river and gone a little way, old spinning-women weaving linen will beg you to lend them a hand for a while. But you are not permitted to touch their cloth. For this is but one of many traps which the watchful Venus will set to make you drop at least one of the morsels you are carrying. And do not think that losing those barley cakes is insignificant. If you lose one of them, the light of day will be forever denied you. For next you will see a huge dog with three enormous heads [38], a monstrous and horrific creature, who, with its savage barking, terrifies the dead (though in vain since it cannot injure them). An unsleeping sentinel stationed at the very threshold of Proserpine's dark halls, it stands guard over Pluto's vacant house. Tame it with one of your cakes and you will easily pass by it. Then you will go straight to Proserpine, who will receive you cordially and kindly. She will urge you to take a comfortable seat and eat a sumptuous dinner; but you must sit on the ground and ask for coarse bread. Then tell her why you have come, take what she gives you, and retrace your steps. Ward off the fierce dog with the remaining morsel, give the second coin to the greedy ferryman, cross the river, and, after retracing your steps, you will see once more the constellations of the starry heavens. But above all I warn you most particularly about this: do not desire to open or examine the box you bear or be curious about the treasure of divine beauty concealed within it."



Plate 26- Psyche enters the underworld giving an offering to Cerberus, with two elderly women at left, from the Story of Cupid and Psyche as told by Apuleius, Antonio Salamanca, 1530-1560, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[20] Looking into the future in this way, the tower unwrapped the gift of its prophecy. Without delay, Psyche set out for Ténarus. Duly taking the coins and the cakes, she swiftly descended the path to the underworld. She passed in utter silence the lame ass-driver and gave the ferryman his toll. She ignored the entreaties of the floating corpse; she spurned the sly requests of the spinners; with a cake she calmed the fury of the terrible dog, and at last she entered Proserpine's dwelling. She did not accept the soft chair and the rich food hospitably offered to her, but, sitting humbly on the ground at the feet of the goddess and content with some coarse bread, she delivered Venus' message. She at once accepted the box, filled in secret and securely closed. She used the last cake to quiet the barking dog, gave her last coin to the ferryman, and returned from the underworld far more invigorated than when she went down. When she saw once more and adored the white light of day, though she was eager to complete her task, rash

curiosity seized her mind. “What a fool (*inepta*),” she said. “Here I am, holding the beauty of the goddesses. Shouldn’t I pluck just the tiniest bit of it for me? It might prove pleasing to my beautiful beloved.” With these words, she opened the casket.



John William Waterhouse, *Psyche Opening the Golden Box*, 1904, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[21] There was no beauty inside it; there was nothing at all— except a hellish, truly Stygian sleep which, as soon as she raises the lid, overcomes her and pours a dense cloud of deep slumber over all her limbs, possessing her on the very spot where she collapsed. She laid there motionless, nothing more than a sleeping corpse.

But Cupid, his wound fully healed, had recovered his strength. Unable to endure Psyche’s long absence, he escaped through the narrow window of the room in which he was confined. On his wings, strengthened by the long rest, he flew more quickly than before to his Psyche’s side. Carefully brushing away the cloud of sleep and shutting it away again in the bottom of the box, he roused Psyche with a harmless little prick from one of his arrows. “So, poor little thing (*misella*),” he said, “once more you have almost died from your curiosity. But waste no time and quickly carry out the task my mother ordered you to do. I myself will see to the rest.” With that, the winged lover took flight, and Psyche straightaway delivered Proserpine’s gift to Venus.



Antonio Canova, *Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss* found in the [Musee du Louvre](#), Paris, Public domain via Wikimedia Commons



Edward Burne-Jones, Cupid Delivering Psyche, Museums Sheffield, Public Domain

[22] Meanwhile, morose Cupid, devoured by too much love and dreading his mother's sudden sobriety, turns to his old weapons/tricks [39]. Flying straight up through heaven on his nimble wings, he appeals to mighty Jupiter, and pleads his cause before him. Then Jupiter pinches Cupid's little cheeks, draws his hand to his mouth to kiss it affectionately, and says to him: "My lordly son, you have never paid me the honor owed to a god. With your darts you have wounded over and over this heart of mine wherein the laws that govern the elements and the motions of the stars are conceived, and you shame me by causing me to fall into earthly lusts, contrary to the laws, especially the *Lex Julia* [40]. You have wounded my good name and reputation in the eyes of public morality by making me commit disgraceful adulteries and by foully transforming my serene countenance into serpents, flames, wild beasts, birds, and herds of cattle [41]. However, mindful of my moderate nature and that you grew up in my arms, I will grant you all you wish; but on condition that you be on your guard against your rivals—and that if there is some girl of surpassing beauty on earth just now, you should pay me for my current generosity by giving her to me."

[23] Having spoken, he ordered Mercury to summon all the gods immediately to a conference, and declare that if anyone of the celestial company should fail to attend, he would be liable to a fine of ten thousand *sesterces* [42]. Thanks to this threat, the celestial amphitheater was soon filled; and Jupiter, seated on his lofty throne, addressed them in these words: "

You conscript [43] gods, whose names are written on the white roll of the Muses [44], you are all well acquainted with this young fellow whom I raised with my own hands. I have decided to rein in the hot impulses of his early youth with some bridle. He has been the daily talk of the whole world long enough, ill-famed for his adulteries and his seductions of all sorts. Every opportunity for him to offend in this manner must be removed; the riotous living of his boyhood must be tied down with nuptial chains. He has chosen a young girl whom he robbed of her virginity. Let him keep her, let him hold her, let him embrace Psyche and enjoy her love forever." Turning then to Venus, he added: "And you, daughter, do not be gloomy. Do not fear that your exalted family pedigree and your rank will be affected by this marriage to a mortal. I will fix it so that this is not a marriage between unequals but legitimate and in accordance with civil law." Immediately he ordered Mercury to go and bring Psyche up to heaven. Offering her a goblet of ambrosia, he said: "Take this, Psyche, and become immortal [45]. Cupid will never free himself from the bonds which bind him to you; these marriage vows between you shall be perpetual.

[24] Instantly a magnificent wedding feast appeared. Upon the couch of honor lay the husband, holding Psyche to his heart; next below them Jupiter reclined with his Juna; then all the gods and goddesses in their order [46]. Then Jupiter's cup-bearer, that young

shepherd, served him a cup of nectar, the wine of the gods; Bacchus [47] (*Liber*) served the other gods. Vulcan cooked the meal; the Seasons [48] bedecked everything with roses and other flowers; the Graces [49] sprinkled balsam; the Muses raised their melodious voices. Apollo [50] made the strings of his lyre sing; lovely Venus danced gracefully to the sweet music she had supplied: the Muses sang in chorus, a satyr played the flute, and a young Pan made his reed pipes speak.

Thus did Psyche pass lawfully into the hands of Cupid; and, when the time for birth came, a daughter was born to them, whom we call Pleasure [51] (*voluptas*).



Eros (Cupid) and Psyche mosaic, Gaziantep Zeugma Museum, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[25] Such was the story that the crazy, drunken old woman told to the captive girl. Standing not far away, by Hercules [52]! I was distressed that I didn't have a tablet and stylus to write down such a lovely tale.

[1] Literally *pulvinares*, which refers to the cushions inside the temple sanctuary on which the statues of the gods rested. The wheat and farm tools Psyche sees inside the temple are votive offerings made to the goddess Ceres.

[2] Roman goddess of agriculture

[3] Roman goddess of love and beauty

[4] The Eleusinian mysteries—so called because only initiates knew the details of the ceremonies held at Eleusis, just west of Athens—were one of the major celebrations of Greek religion. Held in September-October, one feature of these harvest-oriented mysteries was a procession in which secret, sacred implements were carried concealed in a basket or box.

[5] A Mediterranean island just off the coast of Italy.

[6] Daughter of Ceres, queen of the Underworld, Roman goddess of Spring, flowers, and vegetation.

[7] A town in Greece.

[8] In this list Apuleius both rehearses the main points of the myth of Demeter (Ceres) and her daughter, Proserpine (Persephone), and outlines features of the Eleusinian mysteries themselves. Pluto (or Hades), god of the underworld, carried off Proserpine from Sicily into his realm and forcibly made her his wife. Demeter went down to the underworld and rescued her daughter, who was

allowed to live above ground only through half the year. Demeter filled the earth with all fertile, growing things during this joyful reunion but plunged it into desolation and sterility when Proserpine had to return to the underworld during winter.

[9] Juno.

[10] Roman king of the gods, god of the sky, thunder, and lightning.

[11] A Greek island off the Western coast of Turkey. Juno is the patron goddess of the Samos and has a sanctuary on the island called the Heraion.

[12] A Phoenecian city-state located in modern Tunisia.

[13] The Greeks.

[14] A river in the mountains of western Argolis that feeds into the Aegean Sea.

[15] Queen of the gods, Roman goddess of marriage, family, and birth.

[16] Here Psyche rehearses Juno's most noted temples and names. *Zygia* alludes to her role as goddess of marriage and derives from the Greek *zygos* or "yoke," which evolves into our word "join." *Lucina* in Latin means "bringing to light" and alludes to her role as goddess of childbirth, since she brings newborns into the light.

[17] A provision of the second-century BCE *Lex Fabia*.

[18] Roman god of fire, metalworking, and forges.

[19] Doves are a symbol of Venus.

[20] Sparrows are a symbol of Venus.

[21] Eagles and vultures are symbols of Jupiter.

[22] Roman god of thieves, travel, and trade.

[23] Mercury was said to have been born in the mountains of Arcadia in Greece.

[24] A spot on Rome's Aventine Hill near a shrine dedicated to Venus of the Myrtles (*Murcia*), a plant sacred to her.

[25] Apuleius is punning here: a secondary meaning of *consuetudo* is illicit sexual intercourse.

[26] Pliny claimed that the throne of Nemesis, goddess of revenge, was behind the right ear.

[27] Apuleius's use of *lenocinium* is difficult to convey in English. Primarily it means the occupation of pimp; secondarily it means allurement or excessive, deceptive, or flattering adornment. "Slutty allure" is my solution.

[28] Daughter of Hyperion, the Greek sun god, and goddess of dawn who rides her chariot across the heavens to usher in daylight.

[29] The ancients listed five rivers that flowed into and through the Underworld: the Phlegethon, Acheron, and Lethe, and, most famous, the Styx and Cocytus. The Styx (from the Greek word for "hateful") formed the boundary between earth and the Underworld. The Cocytus took its name from the Greek word for wailing or lamentation (*kokyτος*). Generally it was believed that the dead had to pay the ferryman Charon to cross the Styx into Hades, though sometimes the Cocytus was substituted.

[30] Phrygian was a kingdom in the Western part of modern day Turkey.

[31] Ganymede, the beautiful boy snatched into Olympia either by an eagle or by Jupiter, who had fallen in love with him, in the form of an eagle. The image of Ganymede carried aloft by an eagle became a favorite motif in western art from Hellenistic times onward, especially during the Renaissance.

[32] Hesiod wrote that any god who violated an oath sworn by the Styx was struck unconscious for a year and afterwards was exiled from the other gods for nine more years (*Theogony*, 775).

[33] Orcus is another name for Pluto (or Dis), the god of the Underworld, and also for the Underworld itself.

[34] Tartarus is the poetic word for the Underworld, used somewhat in the way we use "Hades" for "Hell." More specifically, it denotes that region in Hades where those who have offended the gods are punished.

[35] Greek city-state in south-eastern Peloponnese.

[36] A town in Greece which is thought to be near the entrance of the Underworld.

- [37] Ferryman who allows souls to properly enter the underworld.
- [38] This is the watch dog Cerberus (or “Fluffy” in Harry Potter’s world). “To give a sop to Cerberus” is an adage meaning to use something trifling to accomplish a greater purpose. It is based on Virgil’s *Aeneid* (vi, 417) where Aeneas in his trip to the Underworld uses the same cakes described above to distract Cerberus long enough to pass by him.
- [39] Apuleius employs clever wordplay here. The Latin proverb “*revertere ad armillum*” (literally, “to return to the wine bottle”) means to return to old habits/tricks. Apuleius changes *armillum* to *armile*, which means “armory.” A second level of pun may be the similarity of *armile* to *amor*. Note also that “sobriety” here recalls Venus’s handmaiden Sobriety who chastised Psyche.
- [40] The *Lex Julia* outlawing adultery was issued in 18 BCE in the reign of Augustus Caesar.
- [41] Jupiter seduced both the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone in the form of a serpent, both the goddess Nemesis and the mortal Leda in the form of a swan, the boy Ganymede in the form of an eagle, the nymph Boetis in the shape of a goat, and the mortal Europa in the form of a bull. This doesn’t count the women he encountered as a shower of gold (Danae), an ant (Eurymedousa), a shepherd (Mnemosyne), the goddess Artemis (Kallisto), etc.
- [42] A small silver coin.
- [43] A title of respect meaning “chosen” or “elect” applied to Roman senators.
- [44] Deities of creative inspiration.
- [45] Ambrosia was the food of the gods; nectar, their drink. (Though sometimes, as in this version, they are confused.) To consume either one of them made a human immortal. In Greek, ambrosia means “immortality.”
- [46] Notice that Apuleius has his wedding banquet arranged in the style of the Roman *triclinium* where dinner guests eat lying on their sides around a three-sided table. Compare the Gospel of John (13:22) where this mode of dining explains John’s position at the Last Supper.
- [47] Roman god of wine, theater, and ritual madness.
- [48] Goddesses of the seasons and time. Also known as the Horae.
- [49] Goddesses of charm, beauty, nature, human creativity, goodwill, and fertility who were also the attendants of Aphrodite.
- [50] God of music, prophecy, and medicine.
- [51] Goddess of pleasure, enjoyment, and delight.
- [52] Mythological hero known for his strength, the son of Zeus and Alcmene.

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2: The Trial of Neaira- Annotated with a Critical Introduction and Questions

The Trial of Neaira



Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Phryne revealed before the Areopagus* (1861), Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons. The courtesan Phryne had been accused of profaning the Eleusinian mysteries by letting down her hair and wading, naked, into the sea (presumably in allusion to the origins of Aphrodite, goddess of love). According to legend, when it appeared that the jury would condemn Phryne, her male advocate, Hypereides, disrobed her before the Areopagite court, which then found in her favor.

Background for the Trial of Neaira [neh-EYE-ruh]

All information is drawn from Debra Hamel, *Trying Neaira: The True Story of a Courtesan's Scandalous Life in Ancient Greece* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), unless otherwise cited.

What is the nature of this text?

It is one of about one hundred speeches delivered in Athens's law courts which had survived. Speech-writers composed speeches for themselves and others to deliver in court or the Athenian assembly. Although attributed to Demosthenes, the speech "Against Neaira" was probably composed and certainly delivered by Apollodorus. Those bringing cases in courts, both prosecutors and defenders, often deliberately misrepresented information or lied to sway the jurors, even when it came to describing the laws the jury was supposed to enforce. There were no professional juries or judges in Athens.

Who was Neaira?

Neaira was a foreigner (*metic*), an immigrant to Athens from Megara (although she was born in Corinth, a port city). She would have spoken Doric Greek, not Attic Greek and would have sounded as if she had an 'accent' to Athenians. When brought to trial (c. 343-340 BCE), she was fifty-something. She had been sold as a child to the keeper of a brothel in Corinth, but eventually won her freedom and had married Stephanos, a citizen of Athens. It was this relationship that was under attack by Apollodorus. It was illegal for Athenian citizens to formally marry non-citizens, although other relationships were tolerated (lover, mistress, customer, prostitute). Apollodorus brought Stephanos and Neaira to trial and, if convicted, Neaira would have faced re-enslavement and Stephanos a heavy fine. The case was the product of a long-standing feud between the two men; Apollodorus saw an attack on Neaira as a way to punish Stephanos.

Neaira appears to have been born around 400-395 BCE and was sold to a brothel-keeper Nikarete (a former slave herself), who appears to have kept several girls at a time, some of whom were mentioned by name in Philetairos' play, *The Huntress*, written in the early 360s BCE. In ancient Greece, prostitution was common, legal, and regulated, particularly in port-towns and cities. Prostitutes occupied a range of statuses. Streetwalkers (*pornai*) were often slaves and/or foreigners imported from "barbarian" (non Greek-speaking) cultures. They wore heavy makeup, distinctive clothing, and frequented red-light districts with convenient alley-ways. Others worked out of whorehouses where the workers displayed themselves semi-naked and catcalled to customers from windows and roofs (the opposite of how respectable women were meant to behave). *Pornai* charged customers by the service and/or position assumed, and prices ranged between 1/9 and 2/3 of a skilled worker's daily wage.

Auletrides, very often slaves, were hired to play music on the *aulos* at symposia or drinking parties where males were entertained by "flute-girls," young male flute-players, and courtesans (*hetairai*). Plato's symposium was exceptional in that the flute-girls were dismissed after performing music and the male guests indulged in conversation. Other accounts of symposia suggest a more raucous atmosphere with entertainment by musicians and acrobats of both genders. It was generally assumed that the entertainers were available for sex. Athens had regulations for this group of workers as well, female musicians were not to be paid more than two drachmas per evening. Ten officials, the *astynomoi*, were responsible for ensuring customers did not bicker over the same girl. If more than one man was interested in hiring an individual player, the competitors were to draw lots and the winner could hire her. It may be that the players earned extra for services beyond musical entertainment.

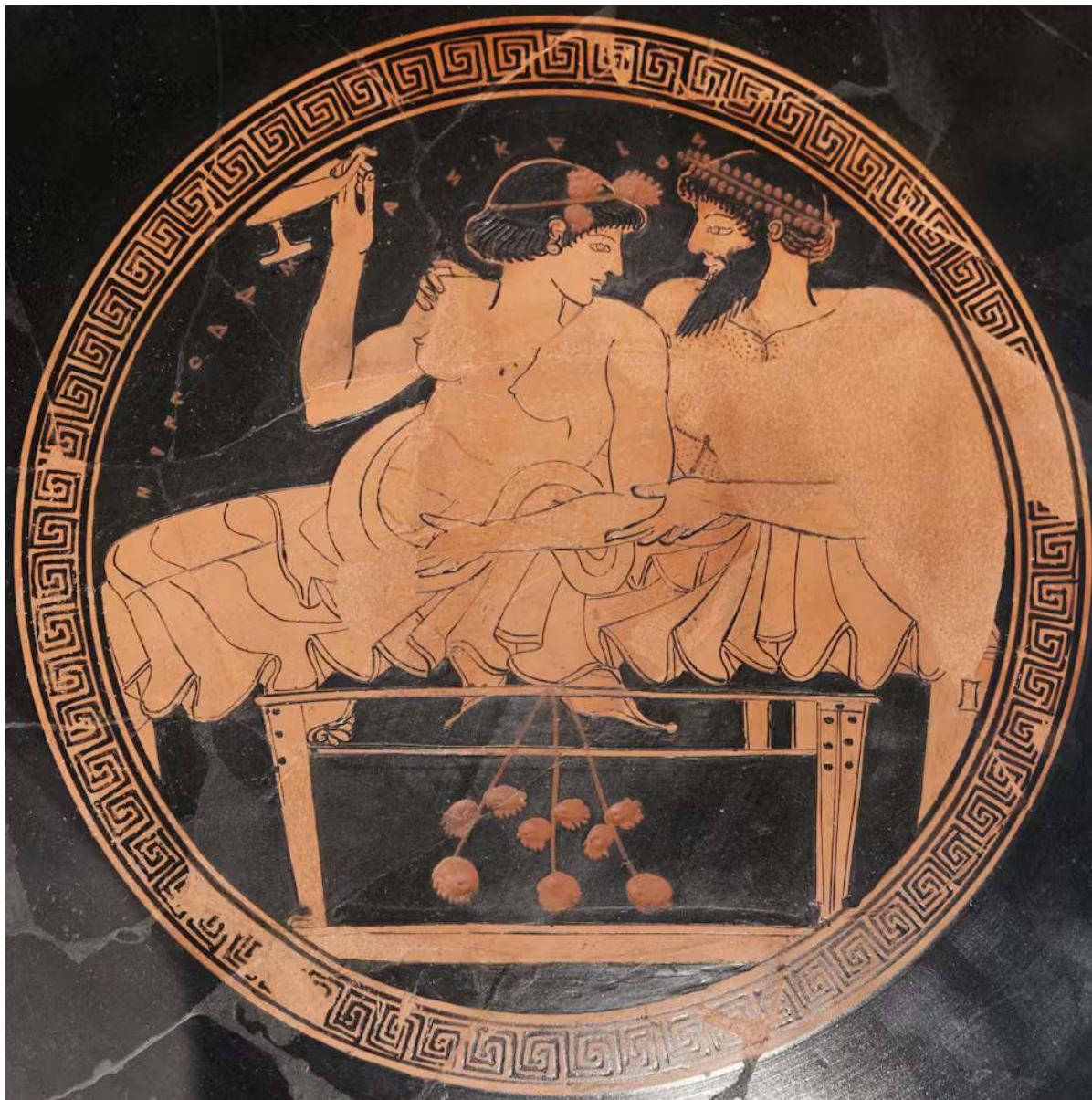


Brygos Painter, Red-figured cup from Athens, c. 490-480 BCE, ceramic, British Museum, London, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons. A male guest at a symposium watches a girl (possibly a slave) dance for his entertainment.



Nikias painter, Symposium scene: banqueters playing the kottabos game while a girl plays the aulos, Attic red-figure bell-krater, c. 420 BCE, National Archaeological Museum, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

At the expensive end of the spectrum were *hetairai* or “female companions,” who were paid by the period of time they kept the customer company, as much as ten drachmas per evening for conversation, musical performance, and potentially sex. Similar to geisha in Japan, euphemistic language and gift/favor exchange were the rule. The famous courtesan Theodote supposedly said: “If someone has become my friend and wants to treat me well, he is my livelihood.” Unlike *pornai*, highly successful *hetairai* could choose their customers and how many favors they wished to bestow.



A man and a courtesan reclining on a bench during a banquet; Tondo from an Attic red-figure kylix, circa 490 BC. Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Men, women, and sex in Ancient Greece:

There were few avenues for sex outside of marriage in ancient Greece. Most Athenian men did not marry until they were nearly thirty and relations with free women were rigidly restricted. Male adulterers and rapists could be legally killed if caught in the act. Female adulteresses and/or prostitutes could not marry or participate in public religious ceremonies. Prostitution involved both sexes differently; women of all ages and young men were sex workers and served a mostly male clientele. Prostitution was legal and in Athens, was taxed by the state. Unmarried Athenian men could take a male lover, visit prostitutes, or avail themselves of the slaves of their household (with or without those slaves's consent).



Attic red figure cup depicting hetairai and youths, Fitzwilliam Museum, Creative Commons via Wikimedia Commons.

Poorer free women worked in shops and selling in the marketplace. However, respectable and well-to-do free women were meant to remain at home, oversee the household slaves, engage in textile production (spinning, weaving, embroidery), and bear children. Spartan women were exceptions. When men who were not members of the household visited for business or dinner, free women were expected to sequester themselves in the women's quarters. However, women did leave their homes for religious festivals and funerals and to visit neighbors. Women could be wooed by gaining access to their slaves. At least one adulterer succeeded. The orator Lysias's *On the Murder of Eratosthenes*, describes the case of a woman seen at a funeral by Eratosthenes, who gained access to her slave girl and the two conducted an affair while her husband was in another portion of the house. The enraged husband discovered the two lovers and delivered the speech defending himself against the charge of murdering Eratosthenes *in flagrante* (caught in the act).

Lysias:

The orator Lysias was a customer of Metaneira, Neaira's fellow *hetaira*, also owned by Nikarete. Lysias was a *metic* or free foreigner who lived in Athens. After Athens surrendered to Sparta in 404, Sparta installed the "thirty tyrants" in Athens, who promptly began executing prominent individuals and seizing their assets. Lysias brought one of them to trial circa 403 BCE for extorting and stealing money from him, forcing his brother to commit suicide, and seizing hard assets from himself and his brother, including slaves. Lysias would assist the overthrow of the Thirty and restoration of democracy, and became a well-known speech-writer for those appearing in court. Lysias brought Metaneira and Neaira to Athens for the Eleusinian mysteries, a nearly week-long festival in honor of the goddess Demeter. Neaira would visit Athens again with Nikarete to attend the Great Panathenaia, a festival celebrated in honor of Athena. People flocked to Athens to see contests in music, chariot races, foot-races, dancing, sacrifices, and a sacred procession to the Acropolis to present the image of Athena with a new robe. It appears that Neaira had formed some kind of relationship with Simos of Thessaly, a member of a leading aristocratic family in Thessaly. Neaira and others of Nikarete's slave girls appear to have been in high demand as companions and entertainers as well as prostitutes, but we ought to remember that as a slave, Neaira would not have had the choice of clients that free and famous *hetairai* enjoyed.

At a certain point, Nikarete decided that Neaira was at her sell-by date and she was purchased by two of her long-time customers, Timanoridas of Corinth and Eukrates of Leukas. The two men paid 3000 drachmas for Neaira (an average slave cost about 300-600 drachmas). There appears to have been no friction generated by the arrangement. After one or both of the men were preparing

to get married, the two men offered Neaira the chance to purchase her freedom for 2000 drachmas on the condition that she not stay in Corinth. This is where the even more interesting period of Neaira's life began.

Reading Questions:

Read the *Trial of Neaira* and do your best to answer the following questions.

1. How did one achieve and lose citizenship in Athens and what was the status of foreigners (*metics*) and slaves in Athens?
2. Theomnestus actually opens the case: what is his relationship to Apollodorus? What is the back-history between the accusing parties and Stephanos?
3. What is Theomnestus actually trying to do in his speech? Who is he targeting and why?
4. What do the earlier lawsuits between Stephanos and Apollodorus tell us about Athenian society's attitudes towards government, citizens, slaves, and women? (see, for example, sections 6-8, 9-10).
5. What cases and charges did Apollodorus bring and did he provide convincing proof (sections 16 and following)?
6. What do we learn of the life of a courtesan? (sections 18-48, 107-117)?
7. What does the fact that some of Neaira's former clients came to Corinth to help her buy her freedom say about the nature of their relationships, particularly Phrynion? What impression of Phrynion do we get from Apollodorus' speech? (sections 30, 33)
8. What did Neaira stand to gain from her relationship with Stephanos, according to Apollodorus? What did Stephanos stand to gain? What property did he possess? (sections 39, 50, 65)
9. What is a sycophant? (sections 26-7, 43)
10. What were common penalties inflicted on men caught in the act of adultery in Athens? (section 41)
11. How does Phrynion behave towards Neaira and why? (section 40) How does Stephanos come to her defence and what is the result? (sections 40, 46, 48)
12. What is the story of "Neaira's" daughter Phano and her son? (sections 50-61) What do we learn of Athenian marriage, divorce, and inheritance laws from Phano's and Phrastor's marriage?
13. What does Stephanos' conduct when finding Epainetos *in flagrante* with Phano in his household tell us about Athenian attitudes towards sex? (sections 64-5) What interpretation does Apollodorus try to put on the episode and why? (sections 65-70) What did Stephanos and Epainetos stand to lose or gain?
14. What do we learn about Athenian society from Phano's second marriage? (sections 72-5, 80-3, 85-7)
15. Apollodorus' imagined reaction of the Athenian wives, daughters, and mothers of the jurors is an interesting male projection of attitudes on the women of Athenian citizens? What does he imagine the female reaction would be and why does he depict their reaction in the way he does (sections 110 and following)? Did Athenian women have an investment in preserving the distinction between citizen and *metic*? Wife and courtesan?
16. What do we learn of Stephanos' and Neaira's relationship? (sections 118-25)?
17. Why do Stephanos and Neaira refuse to hand their slaves over for torture (sections 120 and following)?

The Trial of Neaira, more commonly known as Demosthenes [really Apollodorus], Against Neaira:

This translation is adapted from *Demosthenes with an English translation*, by Norman W. and Norman J. DeWitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1949). I have altered some terms and the spelling of some names.

[1] Many indeed are the reasons, men of Athens [1], which urged me to prefer this indictment against Neaira, and to come before you. We have suffered grievous wrongs at the hands of Stephanos and have been brought by him into the most extreme peril, I mean my father-in-law, myself, my sister, and my wife; so that I shall enter upon this trial, not as an aggressor, but as one seeking vengeance. For Stephanos was the one who began our quarrel without ever having been wronged by us in word or deed. I wish at the outset to state before you the wrongs which we have suffered at his hands, in order that you may feel more indulgence for me as

I seek to defend myself and to show you into what extreme danger we were brought by him of losing our country and our civic rights.

[2] When the people of Athens passed a decree granting the right of citizenship [2] to Pasion and his descendants on account of services to the state, my father favored the granting of the people's gift, and himself gave in marriage to Apollodorus, son of Pasion, [3] his own daughter, my sister, and she is the mother of the children of Apollodorus. Inasmuch as Apollodorus acted honorably toward my sister and toward all of us, and considered us in truth his relatives and entitled to share in all that he had, I took to wife his daughter, my own niece.

[3] After some time had elapsed Apollodorus was chosen by lot as a member of the senate [4]; and when he had passed the scrutiny and had sworn the customary oath, there came upon the city a war and a crisis so grave that, if victors, you would be supreme among the Greek peoples, and would beyond possibility of dispute have recovered your own possessions and have crushed Philip [of Macedon] in war; but, if your help arrived too late and you abandoned your allies, allowing your army to be disbanded for want of money, you would lose these allies, forfeit the confidence of the rest of the Greeks, and risk the loss of your other possessions, Lemnos [5] and Imbros [6], and Scyros [7] and the Chersonese [8].

[4] You were at that time on the point of sending your entire force to Euboea [9] and Olynthus [10], and Apollodorus, being one of its members, brought forward in the senate a bill, and carried it as a preliminary decree to the assembly, proposing that the people should decide whether the funds remaining over from the state's expenditure should be used for military purposes or for public spectacles. For the laws prescribed that, when there was war, the funds remaining over from state expenditures should be devoted to military purposes, and Apollodorus believed that the people ought to have power to do what they pleased with their own; and he had sworn that, as member of the senate, he would act for the best interests of the Athenian people, as you all bore witness at that crisis.

[5] For when the division took place there was not a man whose vote opposed the use of these funds for military purposes; and even now, if the matter is anywhere spoken of, it is acknowledged by all that Apollodorus gave the best advice, and was unjustly treated. It is, therefore, upon the one who by his arguments deceived the jurors that your wrath should fall, not upon those who were deceived.

[6] This fellow Stephanus indicted the decree as illegal, and came before a court. He produced false witnesses to substantiate the slanderous charge that Apollodorus had been a debtor to the treasury for twenty-five years, and by making all sorts of accusations that were foreign to the indictment won a verdict against the decree. So far as this is concerned, if he saw fit to follow this course, we do not take it ill; but when the jurors were casting their votes to fix the penalty, although we begged him to make concessions, he would not listen to us, but fixed the fine at fifteen talents in order to deprive Apollodorus and his children of their civic rights, and to bring my sister and all of us into the most extreme distress and utter destitution.

[7] For the property of Apollodorus did not amount to as much as three talents [11] to enable him to pay in full a fine of such magnitude, yet if it were not paid by the ninth prytany [12] the fine would have been doubled and Apollodorus would have been inscribed as owing thirty talents to the treasury, all the property that he has would have been scheduled as belonging to the state, and upon its being sold Apollodorus himself and his children and his wife and all of us would have been reduced to the most extreme distress.

[8] And more than this, his other daughter would never have been given in marriage; for who would ever have taken to wife a portionless [13] girl from a father who was a debtor to the treasury and without resources? Of such magnitude, you see, were the calamities which Stephanus was bringing upon us all without ever having been wronged by us in any respect. To the jurors, therefore, who at that time decided the matter I am deeply grateful for this at least, that they did not suffer Apollodorus to be utterly ruined, but fixed the amount of the fine at one talent, so that he was able to discharge the debt, although with difficulty. With good reason, then, have we undertaken to pay Stephanus back in the same coin.

[9] For not only did Stephanus seek in this way to bring us to ruin, but he even wished to drive Apollodorus from his country. He brought a false charge against him that, having once gone to Aphidna [14] in search of a runaway slave of his, he had there struck a woman, and that she had died of the blow; and he suborned some slaves and got them to give out that they were men of Cyren [15], and by public proclamation cited Apollodorus before the court of the Palladium on a charge of murder.

[10] This fellow Stephanus prosecuted the case, declaring on oath that Apollodorus had killed the woman with his own hand, and he imprecated destruction upon himself and his race and his house, affirming matters which had never taken place, which he had never seen or heard from any human being. However, since he was proved to have committed perjury and to have brought forward a false accusation, and was shown to have been hired by Cephisophon and Apollophanes to procure for pay the banishment or the

disenfranchisement [16] of Apollodorus, he received but a few votes out of a total of five hundred, and left the court a perjured man and one with the reputation of a scoundrel.

[11] Now, men of the jury, I would have you ask yourselves, considering in your own minds the natural course of events, what I could have done with myself and my wife and my sister, if it had fallen to the lot of Apollodorus to suffer any of the injuries which this fellow Stephanus plotted to inflict upon him in either the former or the latter trial, or how great were the disgrace and the ruin in which I should have been involved.

[12] People came to me privately from all sides encouraging me to exact punishment from my opponent for the wrongs he had done us. They flung in my teeth the charge that I was the most cowardly of humankind, if, being so closely related to them, I did not take vengeance for the injuries done my sister, my father-in-law, my sister's children, and my own wife, and if I did not bring before you this woman who is guilty of such offensive impiety toward the gods, of such outrage toward the commonwealth, and of such contempt for your laws, and by prosecuting her and by my arguments convicting her of crime, to enable you to deal with her as you might see fit.

[13] And as Stephanus here sought to deprive me of my relatives contrary to your laws and your decrees, so I too have come before you to prove that Stephanus is living with an alien [17] woman contrary to the law; that he has introduced children not his own to his fellow clans-men and demes-men [18]; that he has given in marriage the daughters of courtesans as though they were his own; that he is guilty of impiety toward the gods [19]; and that he nullifies the right of your people to bestow its own favors, if it chooses to admit anyone to citizenship; for who will any longer seek to win this reward from you and to undergo heavy expense and much trouble in order to become a citizen, when he can get what he wants from Stephanus at less expense, assuming that the result for him is to be the same?

[14] The injuries, then, which I have suffered at the hands of Stephanus, and which led me to prefer this indictment, I have told you. I must now prove to you that this woman Neaira [20] is an alien, that she is living with this man Stephanus as his wife, and that she has violated the laws of the state in many ways. I make of you, therefore, men of the jury, a request which seems to me a proper one for a young man and one without experience in speaking—that you will permit me to call Apollodorus as an advocate to assist me in this trial.

[15] For he is older than I and is better acquainted with the laws. He has studied all these matters with the greatest care, and he too has been wronged by this fellow Stephanus so that no one can object to his seeking vengeance upon the one who injured him without provocation. It is your duty, in the light of truth itself, when you have heard the exact nature both of the accusation and the defense, then and not till then to reach a verdict which will be in the interest of the gods of the laws, of justice, and of your own selves.

[16] The wrongs done to me by Stephanus, men of Athens, which have led me to come forward to accuse this woman Neaira, have been told you by Theomnestus. And that Neaira is an alien woman and is living as his wife with Stephanus contrary to the laws, I wish to make clear to you. First, the clerk shall read you the law under which Theomnestus preferred this indictment and this case comes before you.

Law: “If an alien shall live as a husband with an Athenian woman in any way or manner whatsoever, he may be indicted before the Thesmothetae by anyone who chooses to do so from among the Athenians having the right to bring charges. And if he is convicted, he shall be sold, himself and his property, and the third part shall belong to the one securing his conviction. The same principle shall hold also if an alien woman shall live as a wife with an Athenian, and the Athenian who lives as a husband with the alien woman so convicted shall be fined one thousand drachmae [21].”

[17] You have heard the law, men of the jury, which forbids the union of an alien woman with an Athenian, or of an Athenian woman with an alien in any way or manner whatsoever, or the procreation of children. And if any person shall transgress this law, it has provided that there shall be an indictment against them before the Thesmothetae, against both the alien man and the alien woman, and that, if convicted, any such person shall be sold. I wish, therefore, to prove to you convincingly from the very beginning that this woman Neaira is an alien.

[18] There were these seven girls who were purchased while they were small children by Nikarete, who was the freedwoman [22] of Charisius the Elean and the wife of his cook Hippias. She was skilled in recognizing the budding beauty of young girls and knew well how to bring them up and train them artfully; for she made this her profession, and she got her livelihood from the girls.



Statue of a young girl, marble, 300 - 275 BCE, Archaeological Museum of Brauron, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[19] She called them by the name of daughters in order that, by giving out that they were free women, she might exact the largest fees from those who wished to enjoy them. When she had reaped the profit of the youthful prime of each, she sold them, all seven, without omitting one—Anteia and Stratola and Aristocleia and Metaneira and Phila and Isthmias and this Neaira.

[20] Who it was who purchased them severally, and how they were set free by those who bought them from Nikarete, I will tell you in the course of my speech, if you care to hear and if the water in the water-clock holds out. I wish for the moment to return to the defendant Neaira, and prove to you that she belonged to Nikarete, and that she lived as a prostitute letting out her person for hire to those who wished to enjoy her.

[21] Lysias, the sophist [23], as the lover of Metaneira, wished, in addition to the other expenditures which he lavished upon her, also to initiate her; for he considered that everything else which he expended upon her was being taken by the woman who owned her, but that from whatever he might spend on her behalf for the festival and the initiation the girl herself would profit and be grateful to him. So he asked Nikarete to come to the [Eleusinian] mysteries bringing with her Metaneira that she might be initiated, and he promised that he would himself initiate her.



A votive plaque known as the [Ninnion Tablet](#), depicting elements of the [Eleusinian Mysteries](#), discovered in the sanctuary at Eleusis (mid-4th century BCE)

[22] When they got here, Lysias did not bring them to his own house, out of regard for his wife, the daughter of Brachyllus and his own niece, and for his own mother, who was elderly and who lived in the same house; but he lodged the two, Metaneira and Nikarete, with Philostratus of Colonus, who was a friend of his and was as yet unmarried. They were accompanied by this woman Neaira, who had already taken up the trade of a prostitute, young as she was; for she was not yet old enough.

[23] To prove the truth of my statements—that the defendant belonged to Nikarete and followed in her train, and that she prostituted her person to anyone who wished to pay for it—I will call Philostratus as a witness to these facts.

Deposition: “Philostratus, son of Dionysius, of Colonus, deposes that he knows that Neaira was a slave of Nikarete, to whom Metaneira also belonged, that they were residents of Corinth, and that they stayed at his house when they came to Athens for the mysteries, and that Lysias the son of Cephalêus, who was an intimate friend of his, established them in his house.”

[24] Again after this, men of Athens, Simus the Thessalian came here with the defendant Neaira for the great [Panathenaea](#). Nikarete came with her, and they lodged with Ctesippus son of Glauconides, of Cydantidae; and the defendant Neaira drank and dined with them in the presence of many men, as any courtesan would do. To prove the truth of my statements, I will call witnesses to these facts.

[25] Please call Euphiletus, son of Simon, of Aexonê, and Aristomachus, son of Critodemus, of Alopecê. Witness statement: “Euphiletus son of Simon, of Aexonê, and Aristomachus son of Critodemus, of Alopecê, depose that they know that Simus the Thessalian came to Athens for the great Panathenaea, and that Nikarete came with him, and Neaira, the present defendant; and that they lodged with Ctesippus son of Glauconides, and that Neaira drank with them as being a courtesan, while many others were present and joined in the drinking in the house of Ctesippus.”



Courtesans drinking at a symposium. From *Hetären aus Baumeister: Denkmäler des klassischen Altertums* (1885) vol. 1, p. 365. Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

[26] After this, you must know, she plied her trade openly in Corinth [24] and was quite a celebrity, having among other lovers Xenocleides the poet, and Hipparchus the actor, who kept her on hire. To prove the truth of my statement I cannot bring before you the testimony of Xenocleides, since the laws do not permit him to testify.

[27] For when on the advice of Callistratus you undertook to aid the Lacedaemonians [Spartans] (369 BCE), he at that time opposed in the assembly the vote to do so, because he had purchased the right to collect the two per cent tax on grain during the peace, and was obliged to deposit his collections in the senate-chamber during each prytany. For this he was entitled to exemption under the laws and did not go out on that expedition; but he was indicted by this man Stephanus for avoidance of military duty, and being slanderously maligned in the latter's speech before the court, was convicted and deprived of his civic rights.

[28] And yet do you not count it a monstrous thing that this Stephanus has taken the right of free speech from those who are native-born citizens and are lawful members of our commonwealth, and in defiance of all the laws forces upon you as Athenians those who have no such right? I will, however, call Hipparchus himself and force him either to give testimony or take the oath of disclaimer, or I will subpoena him. Please call Hipparchus.

Deposition: “Hipparchus of Athmonon deposes that Xenocleides and he hired in Corinth Neaira, the present defendant, as a courtesan who prostituted herself for money, and that Neaira used to drink at Corinth in the company of himself and Xenocleides the poet.”

[29] After this, then, she had two lovers, Timanoridas the Corinthian and Eucrates the Leucadian [25]. These men seeing that Nikarete was extravagant in the sums she exacted from them, for she demanded that they should supply the entire daily expenses of the household, paid down to Nikarete thirty minae [26] as the price of Neaira's person, and purchased the girl outright from her in accordance with the law of the city, to be their slave.

[30] And they kept her and made use of her as long a time as they pleased. When, however, they were about to marry, they gave her notice that they did not want to see her, who had been their own mistress, plying her trade in Corinth or living under the control of a brothel-keeper; but that they would be glad to recover from her less than they had paid down, and to see her reaping some advantage for herself. They offered, therefore, to remit one thousand drachmae toward the price of her freedom, five hundred drachmae apiece; and they bade her, when she found the means, to pay them the twenty minae. When she heard this proposal from Eucrates and Timanoridas, she summoned to Corinth, among others who had been her lovers, Phrynion of Paeania, the son of Demon and the brother of Demochares, a man who was living a licentious and extravagant life, as the older ones among you remember.

[31] When Phrynion came to her, she told him the proposal which Eucrates and Timanoridas had made to her, and gave him the money which she had collected from her other lovers as a contribution toward the price of her freedom, and added whatever she had gained for herself, and she begged him to advance the balance needed to make up the twenty minae, and to pay it to Eucrates and Timanoridas to secure her freedom.

[32] He listened gladly to these words of hers, and taking the money which had been paid in to her by her other lovers added the balance himself and paid the twenty minae as the price of her freedom to Eucrates and Timanoridas on the condition that she should not ply her trade in Corinth. To prove that these statements of mine are true, I will call as witness to them the man who was present. Please call Philagrus of Melitê.

Deposition: "Philagrus of Melitê deposes that he was present in Corinth when Phrynion, the brother of Demochares, paid down twenty minae as the price of Neaira, the present defendant, to Timanoridas, the Corinthian, and Eucrates, the Leucadian; and that after paying down the money Phrynion went off to Athens, taking Neaira with him."

[33] When he came back here, bringing her with him, he treated her without decency or restraint, taking her everywhere with him to dinners where there was drinking and making her a partner in his revels; and he had intercourse with her openly whenever and wherever he wished, making his privilege a display to the onlookers. He took her to many houses to raucous parties and among them to that of Chabrias of Aexonê, when, in the archonship of Socratidas (373 BCE), he was the victor at the Pythian games [27] with the four-horse chariot which he had bought from the sons of Mityls, the Argive [28], and returning from Delphi [29] he gave a feast at Colias [at the temple of Athena [30] Colias], to celebrate his victory, and in that place many had intercourse with her when she was drunk, while Phrynion was asleep, among them even the serving-men of Chabrias [31].



Pedieus Painter, Musician supporting a drunken banqueter, Tondo from an Attic red-figure kylix, c. 510 BC, Louvre Museum, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[34] To prove that these statements of mine are true, I will bring before you as witnesses those who were present and saw for themselves. Please call Chionides of Xypetê and Euthetion of Cydathenaeum.

Depositions: “Chionides of Xypetê and Euthetion of Cydathenaeum depose that they were invited to dinner by Chabrias, when he celebrated with a banquet his victory in the chariot race, and that the banquet was held at Colias; and that they know that Phrynion was present at the banquet, having with him Neaira, the present defendant; that they themselves lay down to sleep, as did Phrynion and Neaira, and that they observed that men got up in the night to go in to Neaira, among them some of the serving-men who were household slaves of Chabrias.”

[35] Since, then, she was treated with wanton outrage by Phrynion, and was not loved as she expected to be, and since her wishes were not granted by him, she packed up his household goods and all the clothing and jewelry with which he had adorned her

person, and, taking with her two maid-servants, Thratta and Coccalinée, ran off to Megara. This was the period when Asteius was archon at Athens (372 BCE), at the time you were waging your second war against the Lacedaemonians [Spartans].

[36] She remained at Megara [32] two years, that of the archonship of Asteius and that of Alcisthenes; but the trade of prostitution did not bring in enough money to maintain her establishment—she was lavish in her tastes, and the Megarians were stingy and ungenerous, and there were but few foreigners there on account of the war and because the Megarians favored the Lacedaemonian side, while you were in control of the sea; it was, however, not open to her to return to Corinth, because she had got her freedom from Eucrates and Timanoridas on the condition that she would not ply her trade in Corinth;—

[37] so, when peace was made in the archonship of Phrasicleides, and the battle was fought at Leuctra (371 BCE) between the Thebans [33] and the Lacedaemonians [Spartans], this man Stephanus, having at the time come to Megara and having put up at Neaira's house, as at the house of a courtesan, and having had intercourse with her, she told him all that had taken place and her brutal treatment by Phrynion. She gave him besides all that she had brought away from Phrynion's house, and as she was eager to live at Athens, but was afraid of Phrynion because she had wronged him and he was bitter against her, and she knew he was a man of violent and reckless temper, she took Stephanus here for her patron [34].

[38] He on his part encouraged her there in Megara with confident words, boastfully asserting that if Phrynion should lay hands on her he would have cause to rue it, whereas he himself would keep her as his wife and would introduce the sons whom she then had to his clansmen as being his own, and would make them citizens; and he promised that no one in the world should harm her. So he brought her with him from Megara to Athens, and with her three children, Proxenus and Ariston and a daughter whom they now call Phano.

[39] He established her and her children in the cottage which he had near the Whispering Hermes [35] between the house of Dorotheus the Eleusinian [36] and that of Cleinomachus—the cottage which Spintharus has now bought from him for seven minae; so the property which Stephanus owned was just this and nothing besides. There were two reasons why he brought her here: first, because he would have a beautiful mistress without cost, and secondly, because her earnings would procure supplies and maintain the house; for he had no other income save what he might get by unethical matters.

[40] Phrynion, however, learned that the woman was in Athens, and was living with Stephanus, and taking some young men with him he came to the house of Stephanus and attempted to carry her off. When Stephanus took her away from him, as the law allowed, declaring her to be a free woman, Phrynion required her to post bonds with the polemarch [until her status was proven] [37]. To prove that this statement is true, I will bring before you as a witness to these facts the man himself who was polemarch at the time. Please call Aeetes of Ceiriadae.

[Deposition]: "Aeetes of Ceiriadae deposes that while he was polemarch, Neaira, the present defendant, was required by Phrynion, the brother of Demochares, to post bonds, and that the sureties of Neaira were Stephanus of Eroadae, Glaucetes of Cephisia, and Aristocrates of Phalerum."

[41] Now that Stephanus had become surety for her, and seeing that she was living at his house, she continued to carry on the same trade no less than before, but she charged higher fees from those who sought her favors as being now a respectable woman living with her husband. Stephanus, on his part, joined with her in extorting blackmail. If he found as a lover of Neaira any young alien rich and without experience, he would lock him up as caught in adultery with her, and would extort a large sum of money from him.

[42] And this course was natural enough; for neither Stephanus nor Neaira had any property to supply funds for their daily expenditures, and the expenses of their establishment were large; for they had to support both him and her and three children whom she had brought with her, and two female servants and a male house-servant; and besides Neaira had become accustomed to live comfortably, since heretofore others had provided the cost of her maintenance.

[43] This fellow Stephanus was getting nothing worth mentioning from public business, for he was not yet a public speaker, but thus far merely a disreputable person, one of those [sycophants] who stand beside the platform and shout, who prefer indictments and informations for hire, and who let their names be inscribed on motions made by others, up to the day when he became an underling of Callistratus of Aphidna [38]. How this came about and for what cause I will tell you in detail regarding this matter also, when I shall have proved regarding this woman Neaira that she is an alien (*metic*) and is guilty of grievous wrongs against you and of impiety towards the gods;

[44] for I would have you know that Stephanus himself deserves to pay no less heavy a penalty than Neaira here, but even one far heavier, and that he is far more guilty, seeing that, while professing to be an Athenian, he treats you and your laws and the gods with such utter contempt that he cannot bring himself to keep quiet even for shame at the wrongs he has himself committed, but by

bringing baseless charges against me and against others he has caused my colleague to bring against him and against this woman a charge so grievous that it necessitates inquiry being made into her origin, and his own wasteful extravagance being brought to light.

[45] So, then, Phrynion brought suit against Stephanus for having taken this woman Neaira from him and asserted her freedom, and for having received the goods which Neaira had brought with her from Phrynion's house. Their friends, however, brought them together and induced them to submit their quarrel to arbitration. On behalf of Phrynion, Satyrus of Alopecê, the brother of Lacedaemonius, sat as arbitrator, and on behalf of Stephanus here, Saurias of Lamptrae; and they added to their number by common consent Diogeiton of Acharnae.

[46] These men came together in the temple, and after hearing the facts from both parties and from the woman herself gave their decision, and these men acceded to it. The terms were: that the woman should be free and her own mistress, but that she should give back to Phrynion all that she had taken with her from his house except the clothing and the jewels and the maid-servants; for these had been bought for the use of the woman herself; and that she should live with each of the men on alternate days, and if they should mutually agree upon any other arrangement, that arrangement should be binding; that she should be maintained by the one who for the time had her in his keeping; and that for the future the men should be friends with one another and bear no malice.



Examples of Greek gold jewelry, including earrings and dress pins, from the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford). Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[47] Such were the terms of the reconciliation effected by the arbitrators between Phrynion and Stephanus in regard to this woman Neaira. To prove that these statements of mine are true, the clerk shall read you the deposition regarding these matters. Please call Satyrus of Alopecê, Saurias of Lamptrae, and Aristogeiton of Acharnae.

[Deposition]: "Satyrus of Alopecê, Saurias of Lamptrae, and Diogeiton of Acharnae depose that, having been appointed arbitrators in the matter of Neaira, the present defendant, they brought about a reconciliation between Stephanus and Phrynion, and that the terms on which the reconciliation was brought about were such as Apollodorus produces."

[Terms of reconciliation]: "They have reconciled Phrynion and Stephanus on the following terms: that each of them shall keep Neaira at his house and have her at his disposal for an equal number of days in the month, unless they shall themselves agree upon some other arrangement."

[48] When the reconciliation had been brought about, those who had assisted either party in the arbitration and the whole affair did just what I fancy is always done, especially when the quarrel is about a courtesan. They went to dine at the house of whichever of the two had Neaira in his keeping, and the woman dined and drank with them, as being a courtesan.

To prove that these statements of mine are true, call, please as witnesses those who were present with them, Eubulus of Probalinthus, Diopeithes of Melitê, and Cteson of Cerameis.

[Deposition]: “Eubulus of Probalinthus, Diopeithes of Melitê, and Cteson of Cerameis, depose that after the reconciliation in the matter of Neaira was brought about between Phrynion and Stephanus they frequently dined with them and drank in the company of Neaira, the present defendant, both when Neaira was at the house of Stephanus and when she was at the house of Phrynion.”

[49] I have, then, shown you in my argument, and the testimony of witnesses has proved: that Neaira was originally a slave, that she was twice sold, that she made her living by prostitution as a courtesan; that she ran away from Phrynion to Megara, and that on her return she was forced to give bonds as an alien before the polemarch. I wish now to show you that Stephanus here has himself given evidence against her, proving her to be an alien.



"Wedding preparation", Sicilian, the Adrano Group, 330-320 BCE. Clay, glaze, added white, blue, yellow. Pushkin museum, Moscow. Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[50] The daughter of this woman Neaira, whom she brought with her as a small child to the house of Stephanus, and whom they then called Strybele, but now call Phano, was given in marriage by this fellow Stephanus as being his own daughter to an Athenian, Phrastor, of Aegilia; and a marriage portion [39] of thirty minae was given with her. When she came to the house of Phrastor, who was a laboring man and one who had acquired his means by frugal living, she did not know how to adjust herself to his ways, but sought to emulate her mother's habits and the dissolute manner of living in her house, having, I suppose, been brought up in such licentiousness.

[51] Phrastor, seeing that she was not a decent woman and that she was not minded to listen to his advice, and, further, having learned now beyond all question that she was the daughter, not of Stephanus, but of Neaira, and that he had been deceived in the first place at the time of the betrothal, when he had received her as the daughter, not of Neaira, but of Stephanus by an Athenian woman, whom he had married before he lived with Neaira—angered at all this and considering that he had been treated with outrage and hoodwinked, he put away the woman after living with her for about a year, she being pregnant at the time, and refused to pay back the marriage portion.

[52] Stephanus brought suit for alimony against him in the Odeum in accordance with the law which enacts that, if a man puts away his wife, he must pay back the marriage portion or else pay interest on it at the rate of nine obols [40] a month for each mina

[41]; and that on the woman's behalf her guardian may sue him for alimony in the Odeum. Phrastor, on his part, preferred an indictment against Stephanus before the Thesmothetae, charging that he had betrothed to him, being an Athenian, the daughter of an alien woman as though she were his own. This was in accordance with the following law. Read it, please.

[Law]: "If anyone shall give an alien woman in marriage to an Athenian man, representing her as being related to himself, he shall lose his civic rights and his property shall be confiscated, and a third part of it shall belong to the one who secures his conviction. And anyone entitled to do so may indict such a person before the Thesmothetae, just as in the case of usurpation of citizenship."

[53] The clerk has read you the law in accordance with which this fellow Stephanus was indicted by Phrastor before the Thesmothetae. Stephanus, then, knowing that, if he were convicted of having given in marriage the daughter of an alien woman, he would be liable to the heaviest penalties, came to terms with Phrastor and relinquished his claim to marriage portion, and withdrew his action for alimony; and Phrastor on his part withdrew indictment from the Thesmothetae. To prove that my statements are true, I will call before you as witness to these facts Phrastor himself, and will compel him to give testimony as the law commands.

[54] Please call Phrastor of Aegilia. [Deposition]: "Phrastor of Aegilia deposes that, when he learned that Stephanus had given him in marriage a daughter of Neaira, representing that she was his own daughter, he lodged an indictment against him before the Thesmothetae, as the law provides, and drove the woman from his house, and ceased to live with her any longer; and that after Stephanus had brought suit against him in the Odeum for alimony, he made an arrangement with him on the terms that the indictment before the Thesmothetae should be withdrawn, and also the suit for alimony which Stephanus had brought against me."

[55] Now let me bring before you another deposition of Phrastor and his clansmen and the members of his gens, which proves that the defendant Neaira is an alien. Not long after Phrastor had sent away the daughter of Neaira, he fell sick. He got into a dreadful condition and became utterly helpless. There was an old quarrel between him and his own relatives, toward whom he cherished anger and hatred; and besides he was childless. Being cajoled, therefore, in his illness by the attentions of Neaira and her daughter

[56] they came while he lay sick and had no one to care for him, bringing him the medicines suited to his case and looking after his needs; and you know of yourselves what value a woman has in the sick-room, when she waits upon a man who is ill—well, he was induced to take back and adopt as his son the child whom the daughter [Phano] of this woman Neaira had borne after she was sent away from his house in a state of pregnancy, after he had learned that she was the daughter, not of Stephanus, but of Neaira, and was angered at their deceit.

[57] His reasoning in the matter was both natural and to be expected. He was in a precarious condition and there was not much hope that he would recover. He did not wish his relatives to get his property nor himself to die childless, so he adopted this boy and received him back into his house. That he would never have done this, if he had been in good health, I will show you by a strong and convincing proof.



Marlay Painter, Marriage procession: the bride is driven in a chariot from her parent's home to that of her husband, Attic red-figure pyxis, 440-430 BCE, © Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons.

[58] For no sooner had Phrastor got up from that sickness and recovered his health and was fairly well, than he took to wife, according to the laws, an Athenian woman, the legitimate daughter of Satyrus, of Melitê, and the sister of Diphilus. Let this, therefore, be a proof to you that he took back the child, not willingly, but forced by his sickness, by his childless condition, by the care shown by these women in nursing him, and by the enmity which he felt toward his own relatives, and his wish that they should not inherit his property, if anything should happen to him. This will be proved to you even more clearly by what followed.

[59] For when Phrastor at the time of his illness sought to introduce the boy born of the daughter of Neaira [Phano] to his clansmen and to the Brytidae, to which gens [42] Phrastor himself belongs, the members of the gens, knowing, I fancy, who the woman was whom Phrastor first took to wife, that, namely, she was the daughter of Neaira, and knowing, too, of his sending the woman [Phano] away, and that it was because of his illness that Phrastor had been induced to take back the child, refused to recognize the child and would not enter him on their register.

[60] Phrastor brought suit against them for refusing to register his son, but the members of the gens challenged him before the arbitrator to swear by full-grown victims that he verily believed the boy to be his own son, born of an Athenian woman and one betrothed to him in accordance with the law. When the members of the gens tendered this challenge to Phrastor before the arbitrator, he refused to take the oath, and did not swear.

[61] To prove that these statements of mine are true, I will bring before you as witnesses the members of the Brytid gens who were present.

Witnesses: "Timostratus of Hecalê, Xanthippus of Eroeadæ, Evalces of Phalerum, Anytus of Laciadae, Euphranor of Aegilia and Nicippus of Cephalê, depose [testify] that both they and Phrastor of Aegilia are members of the gens called Brytidae, and that, when Phrastor claimed the right to introduce a son of his into the gens, they, on their part, knowing that Phrastor's son was born of the daughter of Neaira, would not suffer Phrastor to introduce his son."

[62] I prove to you, therefore, in a manner that leaves no room for doubt that even those most nearly connected with this woman Neaira have given testimony against her, proving that she is an alien—Stephanus here, who now keeps the woman and lives with her, and Phrastor, who took her daughter [Phano] to wife—Stephanus, since he refused to go on trial on behalf of this daughter

when he was indicted by Phrastor before the Thesmothetae on the charge that he had betrothed the daughter of an alien to him who was an Athenian, but had rather relinquished the claim to the marriage portion, and had not recovered it;

[63] and Phrastor, since he had put away the daughter of this Neaira [Phano] after marrying her, when he learned that she was not the daughter of Stephanus, and had refused to return her marriage portion; and when later on he was induced by his illness and his childless condition and his enmity toward his relatives to adopt the child, and when he sought to introduce him to the members of the gens, and they voted to reject the child and challenged him to take an oath, he refused to swear, but chose rather to avoid committing perjury, and subsequently married in accordance with the law another woman who was an Athenian. These facts, about which there is no room for doubt, have afforded you convincing testimony against our opponents, proving that this Neaira is an alien.

[64] Now observe the base love of gain and the villainous character of this fellow Stephanus, in order that from this again you may be convinced that this Neaira is not an Athenian woman. Epænetus, of Andros, an old lover of Neaira, who had spent large sums of money upon her, used to lodge with these people whenever he came to Athens on account of his affection for Neaira. Against him this man Stephanus laid a plot.

[65] He sent for him to come to the country under pretense of a sacrifice and then, having surprised him in adultery with the daughter of this Neaira, intimidated him and extorted from him thirty minae. As sureties for this sum he accepted Aristomachus, who had served as Thesmothete, and Nausiphilus, the son of Nausinicus, who had served as archon [43], and then released him under pledge that he would pay the money.

[66] Epænetus, however, when he got out and was again his own master preferred before the Thesmothetae an indictment for unlawful imprisonment against this Stephanus in accordance with the law which enacts that, if a man unlawfully imprisons another on a charge of adultery, the person in question may indict him before the Thesmothetae on a charge of illegal imprisonment; and if he shall convict the one who imprisoned him and prove that he was the victim of an unlawful plot, he shall be let off scot-free, and his sureties shall be released from their engagement; but if it shall appear that he was an adulterer, the law bids his sureties give him over to the one who caught him in the act, and he in the court-room may inflict upon him, as upon one guilty of adultery, whatever treatment he pleases, provided he use no knife.

[67] It was in accordance with this law that Epænetus indicted Stephanus. He admitted having intercourse with the woman, but denied that he was an adulterer; for, he said, she was not the daughter of Stephanus, but of Neaira, and the mother knew that the girl was having intercourse with him, and he had spent large sums of money upon them, and whenever he came to Athens he supported the entire household. In addition to this he brought forward the law which does not permit one to be taken as an adulterer who has to do with women who sit professionally in a brothel or who openly offer themselves for hire; for this, he said, is what the house of Stephanus is, a house of prostitution; this is their trade, and they get their living chiefly by this means.

[68] When Epænetus had made these statements and had preferred the indictment, this Stephanus, knowing that he would be convicted of keeping a brothel and extorting blackmail, submitted his dispute with Epænetus for arbitration to the very men who were the latter's sureties on the terms that they should be released from their engagement and that Epænetus should withdraw the indictment.

[69] Epænetus acceded to these terms and withdrew the indictment which he had preferred against Stephanus, and a meeting took place between them at which the sureties sat as arbitrators. Stephanus could say nothing in defense of his action, but he requested Epænetus to make a contribution toward a dowry for Neaira's daughter, making mention of his own poverty and the misfortune which the girl had formerly met with in her relations with Phrastor, and asserting that he had lost her marriage portion and could not provide another for her.

[70] "You," he said, "have enjoyed the woman's favors, and it is but right that you should do something for her." He added other words calculated to arouse compassion, such as anyone might use in entreaty to get out of a nasty mess. The arbitrators, after hearing both parties, brought about a reconciliation between them, and induced Epænetus to contribute one thousand drachmae toward the marriage portion of Neaira's daughter. To prove the truth of these statements of mine, I will call as witnesses to these facts the very men who were sureties and arbitrators:

[71] [Witnesses] "Nausiphilus of Cephalê and Aristomachus of Cephalê depose that they became sureties for Epænetus of Andros, when Stephanus asserted that he had caught Epænetus in adultery; and that when Epænetus had got away from the house of Stephanus and had become his own master, he preferred before the Thesmothetae an indictment against Stephanus for illegal imprisonment; that they were themselves appointed as arbitrators, and brought about a reconciliation between Epænetus and Stephanus, and that the terms of the reconciliation were those which Apollodorus produces."

[Terms of Reconciliation]: “The arbitrators brought about a reconciliation between Stephanus and Epaenetus on the following terms: they shall bear no malice for what took place regarding the imprisonment; Epaenetus shall give to Phano one thousand drachmae toward her marriage portion, inasmuch as he has frequently enjoyed her favors; and Stephanus shall put Phano at the disposal of Epaenetus whenever he comes to Athens and wishes to enjoy her.”

[72] Although this woman [Phano], then, was acknowledged beyond all question to be an alien, and although Stephanus had had the audacity to charge with adultery a man taken with her, these two, Stephanus and Neaira, came to such a pitch of insolence and shamelessness that they were not content with asserting her to be of Athenian birth; but observing that Theogenes, of Cothocidae [44], had been selected by lot as king, a man of good birth, but poor and without experience in affairs, this Stephanus, who had assisted him at his scrutiny and had helped him meet his expenses when he entered upon his office, wormed his way into his favor, and by buying the position from him got himself appointed his assessor. He then gave him in marriage this woman [Phano], the daughter of Neaira, and betrothed her to him as being his own daughter; so utterly did he scorn you and your laws.

[73] And this woman [Phano] offered on the city's behalf the sacrifices which none may name, and saw what it was not fitting for her to see, being an alien; and despite her character she entered where no other of the whole host of the Athenians enters save the wife of the king only; and she administered the oath to the venerable priestesses who preside over the sacrifices, and was given as bride to Dionysus [45]; and she conducted on the city's behalf the rites which our fathers handed down for the service of the gods, rites many and solemn and not to be named. If it be not permitted that anyone even hear of them, how can it be consonant with piety for a chance-comer to perform them, especially a woman of her character and one who has done what she has done?

[74] I wish, however, to go back farther and explain these matters to you in greater detail, that you may be more careful in regard to the punishment, and may be assured that you are to cast your votes, not only in the interest of yourselves and the laws, but also in the interest of reverence towards the gods, by exacting the penalty for acts of impiety, and by punishing those who have done the wrong. In ancient times, men of Athens, there was sovereignty in our state, and the kingship belonged to those who were from time to time preeminent by reason of their being children of the soil, and the king offered all the sacrifices, and those which were holiest and which none might name his wife performed, as was natural, she being queen.

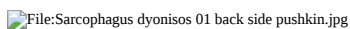
[75] But when Theseus settled the people in one city and established the democracy, and the city became populous, the people nonetheless continued to elect the king as before, choosing him from among those most distinguished by valor; and they established a law that his wife should be of Athenian birth, and that he should marry a virgin who had never known another man, to the end that after the custom of our fathers the sacred rites that none may name may be celebrated on the city's behalf, and that the approved sacrifices may be made to the gods as piety demands, without omission or innovation.

[76] This law they wrote on a pillar of stone, and set it up in the sanctuary of Dionysus by the altar in Limnae (and this pillar even now stands, showing the inscription in Attic characters, nearly effaced). Thus the people testified to their own piety toward the god, and left it as a deposit for future generations, showing what type of woman we demand that she shall be who is to be given in marriage to the god, and is to perform the sacrifices. For this reason they set it up in the most ancient and most sacred sanctuary of Dionysus in Limnae [46], in order that few only might have knowledge of the inscription; for once only in each year is the sanctuary opened, on the twelfth day of the month Anthesterion [47].

[77] These sacred and holy rites for the celebration of which your ancestors provided so well and so magnificently, it is your duty, men of Athens, to maintain with devotion, and likewise to punish those who insolently defy your laws and have been guilty of shameless impiety toward the gods; and this for two reasons: first, that they may pay the penalty for their crimes; and, secondly, that others may take warning, and may fear to commit any sin against the gods and against the state.

[78] I wish now to call before you the sacred herald who waits upon the wife of the king, when she administers the oath to the venerable priestesses as they carry their baskets in front of the altar before they touch the victims [48], in order that you may hear the oath and the words that are pronounced, at least as far as it is permitted you to hear them; and that you may understand how august and holy and ancient the rites are.

The Oath of the Venerable Priestesses: “I live a holy life and am pure and unstained by all else that pollutes and by commerce with man, and I will celebrate the feast of the wine god and the Iobacchic feast in honor of Dionysus in accordance with custom and at the appointed times.”

File:Sarcophagus dyonisos 01 back side pushkin.jpg

Sarcophagus with Dionysian scenes, 210s CE, Pushkin museum, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

[79] You have heard the oath and the accepted rites handed down by our fathers, as far as it is permitted to speak of them, and how this woman, whom Stephanus betrothed to Theogenes when the latter was king, as his own daughter, performed these rites, and administered the oath to the venerable priestesses; and you know that even the women who behold these rites are not permitted to speak of them to anyone else. Let me now bring before you a piece of evidence which was, to be sure, given in secret, but which I shall show by the facts themselves to be clear and true.

[80] When these rites had been solemnized and the nine archons had gone up on the Areopagus [49] on the appointed days, the council of the Areopagus, which in other matters also is of high worth to the city in what pertains to piety, forthwith undertook an inquiry as to who this wife of Theogenes was and established the truth; and being deeply concerned for the sanctity of the rites, the council was for imposing upon Theogenes the highest fine in its power, but in secret and with due regard for appearances; for they have not the power to punish any of the Athenians as they see fit.

[81] Conferences were held, and, seeing that the council of the Areopagus was deeply incensed and was disposed to fine Theogenes for having married a wife of such character and having permitted her to administer on the city's behalf the rites that none may name, Theogenes besought them with prayers and entreaties, declaring that he did not know that she was the daughter of Neaira, but that he had been deceived by Stephanus, and had married her according to the law as being the latter's legitimate daughter; and that it was because of his own inexperience in affairs and the guilelessness of his character that he had made Stephanus his assessor to attend to the business of his office; for he considered him a friend, and on that account had become his son-in-law.

[82] "And," he said, "I will show you by a convincing and manifest proof that I am telling the truth. I will send the woman away from my house, since she is the daughter, not of Stephanus, but of Neaira. If I do this, then let my statement that I was deceived be accepted as true; but, if I fail to do it, then punish me as a vile fellow who is guilty of impiety toward the gods."

[83] When Theogenes had made this promise and this plea, the council of the Areopagus, through compassion also for the guilelessness of his character and in the belief that he had really been deceived by Stephanus, refrained from action. And Theogenes immediately on coming down from the Areopagus cast out of his house the woman, the daughter of this Neaira, and expelled this man Stephanus, who had deceived him, from the board of magistrates [50]. Thus it was that the members of the Areopagus desisted from their action against Theogenes and from their anger against him; for they forgave him, because he had been deceived.

[84] To prove the truth of these statements of mine, I will call before you as a witness to these facts Theogenes himself, and will compel him to testify. Call, please, Theogenes of Erchia.

Witness deposition: "Theogenes of Erchia deposes that when he was king he married Phano, believing her to be the daughter of Stephanus, and that, when he found he had been deceived, he cast the woman away and ceased to live with her, and that he expelled Stephanus from his post of assessor, and no longer allowed him to serve in that capacity."

[85] Now take, please, the law bearing upon these matters, and read it; for I would have you know that a woman of her character, who has done what she has done, ought not only to have kept aloof from these sacred rites, to have abstained from beholding them, from offering sacrifices, and from performing on the city's behalf any of the ancestral rites which usage demands, but that she should have been excluded also from all other religious ceremonials in Athens. For a woman who has been taken in adultery is not permitted to attend any of the public sacrifices, although the laws have given both to the alien woman and the slave the right to attend these, whether to view the spectacle or to offer prayer.



Woman pouring a libation [drink offering]. Detail from an Attic white-ground lekythos, ca. 460 BC, British Museum, © Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons

[86] No; it is to these women alone that the law denies entrance to our public sacrifices, to these, I mean, who have been taken in adultery; and if they do attend them and defy the law, any person whatsoever may at will inflict upon them any sort of punishment, save only death, and that with impunity; and the law has given the right of punishing these women to any person who happens to meet with them. It is for this reason that the law has declared that such a woman may suffer any outrage short of death without the right of seeking redress before any tribunal [51] whatsoever, that our sanctuaries may be kept free from all pollution and desecration, and that our women may be inspired with a fear sufficient to make them live soberly, and avoid all vice, and, as their duty is, to keep to their household tasks. For it teaches them that, if a woman is guilty of any such sin, she will be an outcast from her husband's home and from the sanctuaries of the city.

[87] That this is so, you will see clearly, when you have heard the law read. Take it please.

[Law]: "When he has caught the adulterer, it shall not be lawful for the one who has caught him to continue living with his wife, and if he does so, he shall lose his civic rights and it shall not be lawful for the woman who is taken in adultery to attend public sacrifices; and if she does attend them, she may be made to suffer any punishment whatsoever, short of death, and that with impunity."

[88] I wish now, men of Athens, to bring before you the testimony also of the Athenian civic body, to show you how great care they take in regard to these religious rites. For the civic body of Athens, although it has supreme authority over all things in the state, and it is in its power to do whatsoever it pleases, yet regarded the gift of Athenian citizenship as so honorable and so sacred a thing that it enacted in its own restraint laws to which it must conform, when it wishes to create a citizen—laws which now have been dragged through the mire [52] by Stephanus and those who contract marriages of this sort.

[89] However, you will be the better for hearing them, and you will know that these people have debased the most honorable and the most sacred gifts, which are granted to the benefactors of the state. In the first place, there is a law imposed upon the people forbidding them to bestow Athenian citizenship upon any man who does not deserve it because of distinguished services to the Athenian people. In the next place, when the civic body has been thus convinced and bestows the gift, it does not permit the adoption to become valid, unless in the next ensuing assembly more than six thousand Athenians confirm it by a secret ballot.

[90] And the law requires the presidents to set out the ballot boxes and to give the ballots to the people as they come up before the non-citizens have come in and the barriers have been removed, in order that every one of the citizens, being absolutely free from interference, may form his own judgment regarding the one whom he is about to make a citizen, whether the one about to be so

adopted is worthy of the gift. Furthermore, after this the law permits to any Athenian who wishes to prefer it an indictment for illegality against the candidate, and he may come into court and prove that the person in question is not worthy of the gift, but has been made a citizen contrary to the laws.

[91] And there have been cases before now when, after the people had bestowed the gift, deceived by the arguments of those who requested it, and an indictment for illegality had been preferred and brought into court, the result was that the person who had received the gift was proved to be unworthy of it, and the court took it back. To review the many cases in ancient times would be a long task; I will mention only those which you all remember: Peitholas the Thessalian, and Apollonides the Olynthian, after having been made citizens by the people, were deprived of the gift by the court.

[92] These are not events of long ago of which you might be ignorant. However, although the laws regarding citizenship and the steps that must be taken before one may become an Athenian are so admirably and so securely established, there is yet another law which has been enacted in addition to all these, and this law is of paramount validity; such great precautions have the people taken in the interest of themselves and of the gods, to the end that the sacrifices on the state's behalf may be offered in conformity with religious usage. For in the case of all those whom the Athenian people may make citizens, the law expressly forbids that they should be eligible to the office of the nine archons or to hold any priesthood; but their descendants are allowed by the people to share in all civic rights, though the proviso [53] is added: if they are born from an Athenian woman who was betrothed according to the law.

[93] That these statements of mine are true, I will prove to you by the clearest and most convincing testimony; but I wish first to go back to the origins of the law and to show how it came to be enacted and who those were whom its provisions covered as being men of worth who had shown themselves staunch friends to the people of Athens. For from all this you will know that the people's gift which is reserved for benefactors is being dragged through the mire, and how great the privileges are which are being taken from your control by this fellow Stephanus and those who have married and begotten children in the manner followed by him.

[94] The Plataeans, men of Athens, alone among the Greeks came to your aid at Marathon [54] (490 BCE) when Datis, the general of King Darius [of Persia], on his return from Eretria [55] after subjugating Euboea [56], landed on our coast with a large force and proceeded to ravage the country. And even to this day the picture in the Painted Stoa exhibits the memorial of their valor; for each man is portrayed hastening to your aid with all speed—they are the band wearing Boeotian [57] caps.

[96] And they fought together with you and the others who were seeking to save the freedom of Greece in the final battle at Plataea [58] against Mardonius, the King's general, and deposited the liberty thus secured as a common prize for all the Greeks. And when Pausanias, the king of the Lacedaemonians, sought to put an insult upon you, and was not content that the Lacedaemonians had been honored by the Greeks with the supreme command, and when your city, which in reality had been the leader in securing liberty for the Greeks, forbore to strive with the Lacedaemonians as rivals for the honor through fear of arousing jealousy among the allies;

[97] Pausanias, the king of the Lacedaemonians [59], puffed up by this, inscribed a distich upon the tripod [60] at Delphi [61], which the Greeks who had jointly fought in the battle at Plataea and in the sea-fight at Salamis [62] had made in common from the spoils taken from the barbarians, and had set up in honor of Apollo [63] as a memorial of their valor. The distich was as follows: "Pausanias, supreme commander of the Greeks, when he had destroyed the host of the Medes [64], dedicated to Phoebus [65] this memorial." He wrote this, as if the achievement and the offering had been his own and not the common work of the allies;

[98] and the Greeks were incensed at this, and the Plataeans brought suit on behalf of the allies against the Lacedaemonians before the Amphictyons for one thousand talents, and compelled them to erase the distich and to inscribe the names of all the states which had had a part in the work. This act more than any other drew upon the Plataeans the hatred of the Lacedaemonians and their royal house. For the moment the Lacedaemonians had no means of dealing with them, but about fifty years later Archidamus, son of Zeuxidamus, king of the Lacedaemonians, undertook in time of peace to seize their city.

[99] He did this from Thebes [66], through the agency of Eurymachus, the son of Leontiadas, the Boeotarch, and the gates were opened at night by Naucleides and some accomplices of his, who had been won over by bribes. The Plataeans, discovering that the Thebans had got within the gates in the night and that their city had been suddenly seized in time of peace, ran to bear aid and arrayed themselves for battle. When day dawned, and they saw that the Thebans were few in number, and that only their first ranks had entered—a heavy rain which had fallen in the night prevented them from all getting in; for the river Asopus was flowing full and was not easy to cross especially in the night;—

[100] so, when the Plataeans saw the Thebans in the city and learned that their whole body was not there, they made an attack, overwhelmed them in battle, and destroyed them before the rest arrived to bear them further aid; and they at once sent a messenger

to you, telling of what had been done and of their victory in the battle, and to ask for your help in case the Thebans should ravage their country. The Athenians, when they heard what had taken place, hastened to the aid of the Plataeans; and the Thebans, seeing that the Athenians had come to the Plataeans' aid, returned home.

[101] So, when the Thebans had failed in their attempt and the Plataeans had put to death those of their number whom they had taken alive in the battle, the Lacedaemonians, without waiting now for any pretext, marched against Plataea. They ordered all the Peloponnesians with the exception of the Argives [67] to send two-thirds of their armies from their several cities, and they sent word to all the rest of the Boeotians and the Locrians [68] and Phocians [69] and Malians [70] and Oetaeans [71] and Aenians to take the field with their entire forces.

[102] Then they invested the walls of Plataea with a large force, and made overtures to the Plataeans on terms that, if they would surrender their city to the Lacedaemonians, they should retain their land and enjoy their property, but that they should break off their alliance with the Athenians. The Plataeans refused this offer and answered that they would do nothing without the Athenians, whereupon the Lacedaemonians besieged them for two years, built a double wall about their city, and made repeated assaults of every conceivable sort.

[103] When the Plataeans were quite worn out and were in want of everything, and despaired of safety, they divided themselves by lot into two groups; some of them remained and endured the siege, but the others, waiting for a night when there was rain and a heavy wind, climbed over the wall of circumvallation, unseen of the enemy, cut down the sentinels, and got safely to Athens, but in a desperate plight and beyond all expectation. As for those who remained behind, when the city was taken by storm, all who had reached manhood [72] were killed and the women and children were made slaves—all, that is, save those who, when they saw the Lacedaemonians [73] advancing, got secretly away to Athens.

[104] Once more I would have you observe in what way you granted the right to share citizenship with you to men who had thus signally manifested their good will toward your people, and who sacrificed all their possessions and their children and their wives. The decrees which you passed will make the law plain to everybody, and you will know that I am speaking the truth. Take this decree, please, and read it to the jury.

Decree: "On motion of Hippocrates [74] it is decreed that the Plataeans shall be Athenians from this day, and shall have full rights as citizens, and that they shall share in all the privileges in which the Athenians share, both civil and religious, save any priesthood or religious office which belongs to a particular family, and that they shall not be eligible to the office of the nine archons but their descendants shall be. And the Plataeans shall be distributed among the demes and the tribes; and after they have been so distributed, it shall no longer be lawful for any Plataean to become an Athenian, unless he wins the gift from the people of Athens."

[105] You see, men of Athens, how well and how justly the orator framed the decree in the interest of the people of Athens by requiring that the Plataeans, after receiving the gift, should first undergo the scrutiny in the court, man by man, in order to show whether each man was a Plataean and one of the friends of the city, so as to avoid the danger that many might use this pretext to acquire Athenian citizenship; and by requiring further that the names of those who had passed the scrutiny should be inscribed upon a pillar of marble and should be set up in the Acropolis [75] near the temple of the goddess [76], to the end that the favor granted to them should be preserved for their descendants and that each one of these might be in a position to prove his relationship to one of those receiving the grant.

[106] And he does not suffer anyone to become an Athenian in the later period, unless he be made such at the time and be approved by the court, for fear that numbers of people, by claiming to be Plataeans, might acquire for themselves the right of citizenship. And furthermore, he defined at once in the decree the rule applying to the Plataeans in the interest of the city and of the gods, declaring that it should not be permitted to any of them to be drawn by lot for the office of the nine archons or for any priesthood, but that their descendants might be so drawn, if they were born from mothers who were of Attic birth and were betrothed according to the law.

[107] Is not this a monstrous thing? In the case of those who were neighbors and who had shown themselves of all the Greeks by common consent to have conferred the greatest benefits upon your state, you thus carefully and accurately defined regarding each one the terms on which they should receive the gift of citizenship; are you then thus shamefully and recklessly to let off unpunished a woman who has openly played the harlot throughout the whole of Greece, who treats the city with outrage and the gods with impiety, and who is a citizen neither by birth nor by the gift of the people?

[108] Where has this woman not prostituted herself? To what place has she not gone in quest of her daily wage? Has she not been everywhere in the Peloponnesus [77], in Thessaly [78] and in Magnesia [79] in the company of Simus of Larisa [80] and Eurydamas son of Medeios, in Chios [81] and most of Ionia [82], following in the train of Sotadas the Cretan, and was she not let

out for hire by Nikarete so long as she belonged to her? What do you suppose a woman does who is subject to men who are not her kinsfolk, and who follows in the train of him who pays her? Does she not serve all the lusts of those who deal with her? Will you, then, declare by your vote that a woman of this stamp, who is known by everybody beyond all question to have plied her trade the whole world over, is an Athenian citizen?

[109] What honorable deed will you say that you have done, when people ask you, or with what shame and impiety will you yourselves say that you are not chargeable? For up to the time when this woman was indicted and brought to trial, so that you all learned who she was and what acts of impiety she had committed, the crimes were her own, and the state was merely guilty of neglect; and some of you knew nothing of the matter, and others learning of it expressed their indignation in words but in fact had no means of dealing with her, seeing that nobody brought her to trial or gave an opportunity of casting a vote regarding her. But now that you all know the facts and have got her in your own hands, and have the power to punish her, the sin against the gods becomes your own, if you fail to do so.

[110] And when each one of you goes home, what will he find to say to his own wife or his daughter or his mother, if he has acquitted this woman?—when the question is asked you, “Where were you?” and you answer, “We sat as jury.” “Trying whom?” it will at once be asked, “Neaira,” you will say, of course, will you not? “because she, an alien woman, is living as a wife with an Athenian contrary to law, and because she gave her daughter, who had lived as a harlot, in marriage to Theogenes, the king, and this daughter performed on the city’s behalf the rites that none may name, and was given as wife to Dionysus.” And you will narrate all the other details of the charge, showing how well and accurately and in a manner not easily forgotten the accusation covered each point.

[111] And the women, when they have heard, will say, “Well, what did you do?” And you will say, “We acquitted her.” At this point the most virtuous of the women will be angry at you for having deemed it right that this woman should share in like manner with themselves in the public ceremonials and religious rites; and to those who are not women of discretion you point out clearly that they may do as they please, for they have nothing to fear from you or the laws. For if you treat the matter with indifference or toleration, you will yourselves seem to approve of this woman’s conduct.

[112] It would be far better, therefore, that this trial should never have taken place than that, when it has taken place, you should vote for acquittal; for in that case prostitutes will indeed have the liberty to live with whatever men they choose and to name anyone whatever as the father of their children, and your laws will become of no effect, and women of the character of the courtesan will be able to bring to pass whatever they please. Take thought, therefore, also for the women who are citizens, that the daughters of poor men may not fail to make a marriage.



Two Women of Archaic Athens making preparations for a wedding, from a vase painting from the 5th century BC, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

[113] For as things are now, even if a girl be poor, the law provides for her an adequate dowry [83], if nature has endowed her with even moderate attractiveness; but if through the acquittal of this woman you drag the law through the mire and make it of no effect, then the trade of the harlot will absolutely make its way to the daughters of citizens, who through poverty are unable to marry, and the dignity of free-born women will descend to the courtesans, if they be given license to bear children to whomsoever they please, and still to share in all the rites and ceremonies and honors in the state.

[114] I would, then, have each one of you consider that he is casting his vote, one in the interest of his wife, one of his daughter, one of his mother, and one in the interest of the state and the laws and of religion, in order that these women may not be shown to be held in like esteem with the harlot, and that women who have been brought up by their relatives with great care and in the grace of modesty and have been given in marriage according to the laws may not be seen to be sharing on an equal footing with a creature who in many and obscene ways has bestowed her favors many times a day on all comers, as each one happened to desire.

[115] Forget that I, the speaker, am Apollodorus, and that those who will support and plead for the defendant are citizens of Athens; but consider that the laws and Neaira here are contending in a suit regarding the life which she has led. And when you take up the accusation, listen to the laws themselves, which are the foundation of your civic life, and in accordance with which you have sworn to cast your votes, in order that you may hear what they ordain and in what way the defendants have transgressed them; and when you are concerned with the defense, bear in mind the charges which the laws prefer and the proofs offered by the testimony given; and with a glance at the woman's appearance, consider this and this only—whether she, being Neaira, has done these things.

[116] It is worth your while, men of Athens, to consider this also—that you punished Archias, who had been hierophant [84], when he was convicted in court of impiety and of offering sacrifice contrary to the rites handed down by our fathers. Among the charges brought against him was, that at the feast of the harvest he sacrificed on the altar in the court at Eleusis a victim [sacrificial animal] brought by the courtesan Sinop, although it was not lawful to offer victims on that day, and the sacrifice was not his to perform, but the priestess'.

[117] It is, then, a monstrous thing that a man who was of the race of the Eumolpidae [85], born of honorable ancestors and a citizen of Athens, should be punished for having transgressed one of your established customs; and the pleadings of his relatives and friends did not save him, nor the public services which he and his ancestors had rendered to the city; no, nor yet his office of hierophant; but you punished him, because he was judged to be guilty;—and this Neaira, who has committed acts of sacrilege against this same god, and has transgressed the laws, shall you not punish her—her and her daughter?

[118] I for my part wonder what in the world they will say to you in their defense. Will it be that this woman Neaira is of Athenian birth, and that she lives as his wife with Stephanus in accordance with the laws? But testimony has been offered, showing that she is a courtesan, and has been the slave of Nikarete. Or will they claim that she is not his wife, but that he keeps her in his house as a concubine? Yet the woman's sons, by having been introduced to the clansmen by Stephanus, and her daughter, by having been given in marriage to an Athenian husband, prove beyond question that he keeps her as his wife.

[119] I think, therefore, that neither Stephanus himself nor anyone on his behalf will succeed in proving that the charges and the testimony are false—that, in short, this Neaira is an Athenian woman. But I hear that he is going to set up some such defense as this—that he is keeping her, not as a wife, but as a mistress, and that the children are not hers, but were born to him by another woman, an Athenian and a relative of his, whom he will assert that he married at a earlier date.

[120] To meet the impudence of this assertion of his, of the defense which he has concocted, and of the witnesses whom he has bribed to support it, I tendered him a precise and reasonable challenge, by means of which you would have been enabled to know the whole truth: I proposed that he should deliver up for the torture the women-servants, Thratta and Coccalinê, who remained loyally with Neaira when she came to Stephanus from Megara, and those whom she purchased subsequently, while living with him, Xennis and Drosis;

[121] for these women know perfectly well that Proxenus, who died, Ariston, who is still living, and Antidorides the runner, and Phano, formerly called Strybel, who married Theogenes, the king, are children of Neaira. And if it should appear from the torture that this man Stephanus had married an Athenian wife and that these children were borne to him, not by Neaira, but by another woman who was an Athenian, I offered to withdraw from the case and to prevent this indictment from coming into court.

[122] For this is what living with a woman as one's wife means—to have children by her and to introduce the sons to the members of the clan and of the deme, and to betroth the daughters to husbands as one's own. Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households. If, therefore, Stephanus had previously married an Athenian woman, and these children are hers and not Neaira's, he could have shown it by the most certain evidence, by delivering up these women-servants for the torture [86].

[123] To prove that I so challenged him, the clerk shall read to you the deposition regarding these matters and the challenge. Read the deposition and then the challenge.

Deposition statement: "Hippocrates, son of Hippocrates, of Probalinthus, Demosthenes, son of Demosthenes, of Paeania, Diophanes, son of Diophanes, of Alopecê, Deinomenes, son of Archelaus, of Cydathenaeum, Deinias, son of Phormides, of Cydantidae, and Lysimachus, son of Lysippus, of Aegilia, depose that they were present in the agora [87], when Apollodorus challenged Stephanus, demanding that he deliver up the women-servants for the torture in regard to the charges preferred against Stephanus by Apollodorus concerning Neaira; and that Stephanus refused to deliver up the women-servants; and that the challenge was the one which Apollodorus produces."

[124] Now read the challenge itself which I tendered to this Stephanus.

Challenge: “Apollodorus tendered this challenge to Stephanus in connection with the indictment which he preferred against Neaira, charging that she, being an alien (metic), is living as a wife with him, a citizen. Apollodorus is ready to receive for examination by the torture the women-servants of Neaera, Thratta and Coccalinê, whom she brought with her from Megara, and those whom she subsequently purchased while living with Stephanus—Xennis, namely, and Drosis—women who have accurate knowledge regarding the children of Neaera, that they are not by Stephanus. These are Proxenus, who died, Ariston, who is now living, Antidorides the runner, and Phano. And if they agreed that these children are Neaira’s, I demanded that Neaira be sold as a slave in accordance with the law, and that her children be declared aliens (metics); but if they agreed that the children are not hers but were born of some other woman who was an Athenian, then I offered to withdraw from the action against Neaira, and if the women had been injured in any way as a result of the torture, to pay for the injuries sustained.”

[125] On my tendering this challenge to Stephanus, men of the jury, he refused to accept it. Does it not, then, appear to you, men of the jury, that a verdict has been given by Stephanus here himself that Neaira is guilty under the indictment which I preferred against her, and that I have told you the truth and produced testimony which is true, whereas whatever Stephanus may say to you will be wholly false, and he will himself prove that he has no sound argument to advance, inasmuch as he has refused to deliver up for the torture the women-servants whom I demanded of him?

[126] I therefore, men of the jury, as an avenger of the gods against whom these people have committed sacrilege, and as an avenger of myself, have brought them to trial and submitted them to be judged by you. It is now your duty to render the verdict which justice demands, knowing well that the gods, against whom these people have acted lawlessly, will not be unaware of the vote each one of you shall cast. It is your duty to be avengers in the first place of the gods, but also of your own selves. If you do this, you will be held by all men to have given an honorable and just decision on this indictment which I have preferred against Neaira, charging that she, being an alien, lives as his wife with an Athenian citizen.

[1] A Greek city.

[2] Only men were considered citizens. Greek society was structured in a hierarchy of male citizens, semi-free laborers, women, children, slaves, and foreigners.

[3] A wealthy banker.

[4] Athens was the first city to establish a recognizable form of democracy.

[5] A Greek island in the North of the Aegean Sea.

[6] A Turkish island in the Northeastern section of the Aegean Sea. Once an Athenian colony.

[7] A Greek island in the middle of the Aegean.

[8] An ancient Greek colony in the Southwestern part of the Crimean peninsula.

[9] A Greek Island near Athens.

[10] An ancient Greek town.

[11] A unit of measurement equal to 26 kilograms as well as that same amount of silver.

[12] The Athenian year was divided into ten prytanies, each a little over one of our month’s time.

[13] A dowry can also be referred to as a portion.

[14] One of twelve ancient towns in the Greek region of Attica.

[15] A city in Libya.

[16] Loss of the right to vote.

[17] Non-citizens were known as metics. Metics were in a legal gray area between being citizens and foreigners.

[18] Members of the same township in Attica in Ancient Greece.

[19] A serious charge. This is what Socrates had been condemned of, leading to his death by suicide (instead of exile).

[20] Respectable women were not referred to by name in Greek courts but by reference to their male relatives or husbands.

[21] Ancient Greek currency.

- [22] In the social hierarchy, freedpersons were above slaves but did not possess the status or rights of citizens.
- [23] A teacher of philosophy and rhetoric.
- [24] A city in south-central Greece.
- [25] A Greek island located in the Ionian Sea.
- [26] Ancient unit of measurement and money.
- [27] Games similar to the Olympic games, but held every four years at Delphi.
- [28] Another name for Greek.
- [29] A Greek town that was home to a temple to Apollo (and its oracle) as well as a temple to Athena.
- [30] Goddess of wisdom, crafts, and war.
- [31] Chabrias served twelve times as one of Athens' board of generals and had his statue put up in the agora as thanks for his victory over the Spartans at Naxos.
- [32] Greek town located in West Attica.
- [33] People from the city of Thebes (located in central Greece).
- [34] In Athens, resident aliens (*metics*) were required to have citizens as patrons and sponsors.
- [35] Greek god of trade, thieves, and travel.
- [36] Eleusis is a Greek town in West Attica.
- [37] The polemarch was a civil magistrate with jurisdiction over strangers and temporary residents.
- [38] A well known orator and politician of Athens.
- [39] A dowry given to a woman at her wedding.
- [40] An ancient Greek coin worth 1/6 of a drachma.
- [41] A rate of 18 percent, less than most credit cards.
- [42] A gen is a group of individuals who share a common ancestor.
- [43] The chief magistrate.
- [44] A city in Ancient Attica.
- [45] God of wine, ritual madness, and theater.
- [46] A settlement that eventually became Sparta.
- [47] This month fell around February/March.
- [48] The victims were the sacrificial animals. The baskets contained flour and salt, which was dusted on the animals' heads.
- [49] An outcropping of rocks located in Athens Northeast of the Acropolis.
- [50] Government officials with executive and judicial powers.
- [51] A court.
- [52] A swampy or boglike area.
- [53] A condition of an agreement.
- [54] A Greek town in Southeastern Boeotia and the site of a battle between the Greeks and the Persians.
- [55] City in Greece.
- [56] Greek island near Boeotia.
- [57] Boeotia is a region in Central Greece.
- [58] A city in central Greece.

- [59] The Spartans.
- [60] A three-legged instrument used in rituals and for offerings.
- [61] A town in mainland Greece home to the Temple of Apollo and the site of its oracle.
- [62] Ancient Greek city-state on the Eastern coast of Cyprus.
- [63] God of prophecy, medicine, and light.
- [64] An ancient people who lived in a region known as Media which is between present-day Northern and Western Iran.
- [65] Another name for Apollo.
- [66] A city in central Greece.
- [67] Another name for Greeks.
- [68] Based in Central Greece, they were an ancient Greek tribe that inhabited an area known as Locris.
- [69] People who lived in the ancient region of Phocis located in central Greece.
- [70] A tribe of ancient Greece.
- [71] A tribe of ancient Greece.
- [72] Around the age of 17 or 18.
- [73] The Spartans, Athens' rivals.
- [74] An ancient Greek physician.
- [75] An ancient citadel located above Athens on a rocky outcropping.
- [76] The Parthenon was dedicated to Athena as she was the patron of Athens.
- [77] A peninsula in Southern Greece.
- [78] Once known as Aeolia, it is a region in Northern Greece.
- [79] On the west coast of northern Greece.
- [80] A town in Thessaly.
- [81] An island off the Ionian coast.
- [82] An ancient region along the Western coast of Turkey.
- [83] Money or property given to a groom by a bride's family.
- [84] A priest-king serving the temple at Eleusis.
- [85] Priests at Eleusis who maintained the Eleusinian Mysteries.
- [86] Slaves could not give evidence in court unless it was extracted by torture, but this could occur only if both sides in the case agreed to it. The two sides would agree to the questions to be posed and the methods used, which would be inflicted in public.
- [87] An open space used for public assemblies and markets.

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