

Unassessed Assignment Week 2

Translation of 119-127

We, numerous nymphs and much-courted maidens,
were playing like children, while an immense crowd circled around us.
From there, the gold wand-bearing Slayer of Argus carried me off.
He led me to the many fields of mortal men,
much was unowned and untilled, through which
flesh-eating beasts would roam down from the shaded mountain streams.
I did not expect to touch life-giving Gaia with my feet.
He said that I should summon myself as the wedded wife to Anchises' bed
and bear famous children for you.

Commentary on 33-44

Lines 33-44 are significant in their characterization of Aphrodite. The author of the hymn describes in detail Aphrodite's ability to sway Zeus. She is depicted as an immensely powerful goddess who has minor limitations. Additionally, the excerpt casts her trickery as an important facet of how she operates. Both create a character whose portrayal will be subverted in the lines following 44.

The excerpt begins with a contrast between whom she has power over and whom she does not. Line 33, "τάων οὐ δύναται πεπιθεῖν φρένας οὐδ' ἀπατῆσαι," reinforces to the audience what has been said in lines 7-32: Aphrodite is unable to affect Athena, Artemis, and Hestia.¹ Line 7, "τρισσὰς δ' οὐ δύναται πεπιθεῖν φρένας οὐδ' ἀπατῆσαι," is near identical to Line 33 which employs "οὐ δύναται" to further emphasize her powerlessness with respect to these three goddesses. Lines 7 and 33 effectively bookend where her power is constrained. Faulkner addresses these two lines as ending the prior part "with strikingly clear ring-composition"² The

¹ *H. Hom.* 5.7-33

² Faulkner, 2008, p. 118

composition also appears to connect Athena to “αἰγιόχοιο Διός” in line 8, allows Artemis to stand alone without a mention of Zeus, and then returns to “Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο” with noun and adjective reversed in lines 23 and 27 as the section wraps up with a description of Hestia.³ Lines 34-35, however, open with sharp difference stating that nothing of gods or men “πεφυγμένον” Aphrodite.⁴ The participle creates an image of the goddess who is not simply dominant over gods and men but is able to capture any aspect of these two groups which may try to flee her. The mention of Zeus in line 36 builds up Aphrodite’s power by starkly stating she acts “εὖτ’ ἐθέλοι” as well as “ῥηιδίως” in lines 38 and 39, respectively.⁵ The repetition of superlatives, “μέγιστός... μέγιστης... τιμῆς,” serve to remind the audience that, despite Zeus being the greatest of the gods and holding the greatest honor, his heart can be controlled by Aphrodite.⁶ Faulkner elaborates, “[t]here is more than a touch of irony in this line, placed as it is between two verses which espouse Aphrodite’s ability to conquer the ‘greatest’ of all gods in love,” which seems like an intentional compositional choice by the author to show Zeus, despite his position at the top of the pantheon, is trapped by Aphrodite.⁷ Ultimately, the passage focuses more so on her power over Zeus which sets the stage for Zeus’ desire to turn the tables on her.

Aside from showing her power over gods and men, the lines connect Aphrodite to deception through several words. “πεπιθεῖν... ἀπατῆσαι” in line 33, repeating the same infinitives from line 7, explores how she usually wins over a god or human’s φρήν.⁸ Concerning Athena, Artemis, and Hestia, she is unable to do so by persuasion or deception but, concerning others, she is. This is confirmed by the appearance of a compound participial form of the verb ἀπατάω in line 38: “πυκινὰς φρένας ἐξαπαφοῦσα.”⁹ Here, Aphrodite uses deception on Zeus’ shrewd heart.

³ *H. Hom.* 5.8-27

⁴ *H. Hom.* 5.34-5

⁵ *H. Hom.* 5.36, 38-9

⁶ *H. Hom.* 5.37

⁷ Faulkner, 2008, p. 121

⁸ *H. Hom.* 5.7, 33

⁹ *H. Hom.* 5.38

The disparity between “πυκινὰς” and “ἔξαπαφοῦσα” bring to mind Zeus’ wisdom then impairs it by claiming he is subject to and powerless over Aphrodite’s tricks. Finally, Aphrodite’s deception goes unnoticed by Hera which is brought up with another participle, “ἐκλελαθοῦσα,” in line 40 and is bolstered by the later appearance of the superlatives “ἀρίστη” in line 41 and “κυδίστην” in line 42.¹⁰ Aphrodite’s sneakiness is illustrated through the fact that she can escape the notice of Hera who is called both the best in terms of beauty and the noblest of Cronos’ children. Faulkner comments that “ἐκλελαθοῦσα” “never has the meaning in epic ‘to escape notice’, as the simple form of the active verb does” favoring the interpretation that Aphrodite makes Zeus forget all about his beautiful wife Hera.¹¹ However, Nagy translates the word as “unbeknownst,” Tyrrell as “eluding,” and Evelyn-White as “unknown” while West aligns with Faulkner translating the participle as “putting out his mind.”¹² Although there is a divergence present, the sense is clear that Aphrodite is so mischievous that she can either hide her actions from Hera or convince Zeus to lose memory of his marriage. The two participles, “ἔξαπαφοῦσα” and “ἐκλελαθοῦσα,” are affixed with the prefix ἐξ/ἐκ. Aphrodite not only tricks Zeus and goes unseen by Hera but does so thoroughly. Along with power, the deception of Aphrodite can overcome gods like Zeus whose later actions feel weightier given the frequency of Aphrodite’s tricks.

These dozen lines lay the foundation for a dramatic reversal for Aphrodite. The goddess who bested Zeus with her own power and deceit will experience the chief god’s own might and, in the process, will be humanized in this hymn.

¹⁰ *H. Hom.* 5.40-2

¹¹ Faulkner, 2008, p. 126

¹² Nagy, 2018; Tyrrell, p. 1; Evelyn-White, 1914; West, 2003, p. 163

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