

Seduction through φιλότης: Aphrodite's Method in the *Homeric Hymn*

This paper examines Aphrodite's method of seduction in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, focusing on her allusions to societal contracts through her references to marriage and φίλος, including its derivatives, particularly φιλότης. Previous scholarship has noted Aphrodite's explicit references to marriage, but no one to my knowledge has examined how and why she uses this language as part of her seduction. Sowa (1984), for example, analyzes lines 108-142 in the hymn as a seduction type scene such as those found in epic—Zeus' seduction by Hera and that of Paris by Helen— and identifies certain thematic characteristics, including preparation for seduction, lies told by the seducer, and departure of the seducer. Bickerman (1976) on the other hand, finding fairy tale motifs in the hymn, sees Aphrodite's seduction of Anchises and post-coital departure as a reversal of the expected fairy tale roles. She also argues that the hymn presents our first example of sexual attraction in Greece. Recent commentators of the hymn such as Faulkner (2008) and Olson (2012) seem to understand an implicit connection between marriageability and the promise of sex.

However I will argue that Aphrodite alludes to societal contracts, particularly those of marriage, in order to put Anchises at his ease so that he will sleep with her. The motivation behind her choice of seduction method can be broken down as follows: She needs to convince him a) that she is a mortal girl (it is dangerous for mortal men to sleep with goddesses); b) that she comes from a similar social background and thus would make a good match; c) that she is of marriageable status; d) that her marriage to him is sanctioned by the gods. Implicit in b-d is that her marriageability and the promise of marriage itself will entice Anchises more than mere beauty and charm. Indeed, after her speech Anchises adumbrates Aphrodite's qualities, ending with:

[if] you are going to be called my wife (ἐμὴ δ' ἄλλοχος) for all time -
in that case, no god or mortal human
will prevent me from sleeping with you immediately (ἐνθάδε)
here and now (αὐτίκα νῦν)...(148-51).

Why does Aphrodite choose the prospect of marriage as her mode of seduction? When she first appears, Anchises is stunned (θαύμαιεν) at her physical appearance (εἶδός τε μέγεθός τε καὶ εἶματα σιγαλόεντα, 84-5), and after a description of her elaborate attire (86-90) we are told that *eros* seizes Anchises, (Ἀγχίσην δ' ἔρος εἶλεν 91), meaning that Aphrodite's beauty has captured his attention. It is only after Aphrodite spins her fabrication, ending with the injunction that Anchises offer a lovely (ἱμερόεντα) wedding feast, that she casts lust into his heart (γλυκὸν ἕμερον ἔμβαλε θυμῷ, 143).

As Faulkner (2008, 26) notes, the *Hymn to Aphrodite* "has often been called the most Homeric of the *Hymns*," based on the large number of verses identical (or nearly so) to lines in Homer, its use of Homeric formulae, and archaic language. While we must be cautious in attributing intentional *imitatio* to the hymn's poet, the number of similarities with the Homeric epics and Hesiod "are significant enough to suggest direct imitation" (Faulkner 2008, 35). Keeping this in mind, I submit that Homeric and Hesiodic parallels may offer insight into Aphrodite's motivation in using the particular language of marriage to invoke socially binding contracts characterized by φιλότης. I specifically consider Circe's "seduction" of Odysseus in *Od.* 10-330-47, scenes of truce in *Iliad* 3 and 7, and Agamemnon's negotiation to Achilles in *Iliad* 9. My analysis entails evaluation of previous studies on the concept and meaning of Homeric φιλότης. Of the two Homeric seduction scenes in which a female seduces a male (*Od.* 10 and *Il.* 14), Hooker (1987), notes that the immediate effect of φιλότης is the "replacement of strife with

harmony," though I fail to see this in the Hera-Zeus seduction episode. Benveniste (1973) offers a more convincing argument that φιλότης designates a contract between two Homeric φίλοι which is manifested through actions of hospitality, such as exchanging gifts, reminders of ancestral ties, and matrimonial alliances. Aphrodite invokes this specific type of relationship in order to convince Anchises that she means him no harm.

Bibliography

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