

Ancient Greek ‘love wishes’

Yiannis Petropoulos

February 8 2018

Preliminaries

a) Sappho fr. 1 (LP)

|₁ ποικιλόθρον' ἀθανάτ' Ἀφροδίτα, |₂ παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε, |₃ μή μ' ἄσαισι
μηδ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα, |₄ πότνια, θῦμον, |₅ ἀλλὰ τυῖδ' ἔλθ', αἶ ποτα κᾶτέρωτα |₆ τὰς ἔμας
αὔδα· ἀίοισα πήλοι |₇ ἔκλυες, πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποισα |₈ χρύσιον ἤλθες |₉ ἄρμ'
ὑπακδεύξαισα· κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον |₁₀ ὄκεες τροῦθοι περὶ γᾶς μελαίνας |₁₁ πύκνα
δίνεντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνωϊθε |₁₂ ρος διὰ μέσσω· |₁₃ αἶψα δ' ἐξίκοντο· σὺ δ', ὦ μάκαιρα, |₁₄
μειδιαίαισ' ἀθανάτῳ προσώπῳ |₁₅ ἦρε' ὅτι δηῦτε πέπονθα κῶττι |₁₆ δηῦτε κάλημι |₁₇
κῶττι μοι μάλιτα θέλω γένεσθαι |₁₈ μαινόλαι θύμῳ· τίνα δηῦτε πείθω |₁₉ βαῖς' ἄγην ἐς
σὺν φιλότατα; τίς σ', ὦ |₂₀ Ψάπφ', ἀδικήεις; |₂₁ καὶ γὰρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει, |₂₂ αἰ δὲ
δῶρα μὴ δέκετ', ἀλλὰ δώσει, |₂₃ αἰ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει |₂₄ κῶκ ἐθέλοισα. |₂₅
ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λῦσον |₂₆ ἐκ μερίμναν, ὅσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι |₂₇ θῦμος
ἰμέρρει, τέλεσον, σὺ δ' αὐτὰ |₂₈ κύμμαχος ἔσσο.

stanza 1 ||₁ You with pattern-woven flowers, immortal Aphrodite, |₂ child of Zeus,
weaver of wiles, I implore you, |₃ do not devastate with aches and sorrows, |₄
Mistress, my heart! stanza 2 ||₅ But come here [*tuide*], if ever at any other time |₆ hearing
my voice from afar, |₇ you heeded me, and leaving the palace of your father, |₈
golden, you came, stanza 3 ||₉ having harnessed the chariot; and you were carried along
by beautiful |₁₀ swift sparrows over the dark earth |₁₁ swirling with their dense
plumage from the sky through the |₁₂ midst of the aether, stanza 4 ||₁₃ and straightaway
they arrived. But you, O holy one, |₁₄ smiling with your immortal looks, |₁₅ kept
asking what is it once again this time [*dēute*] that has happened to me and for what
reason |₁₆ once again this time [*dēute*] do I invoke you, stanza 5 ||₁₇ and what is it that I
want more than anything to happen |₁₈ to my frenzied [*mainolās*] heart [*thūmos*]?
“Whom am I once again this time [*dēute*] to persuade, |₁₉ setting out to bring [*agein*]
her to your love? Who is doing you, |₂₀ Sappho, wrong? stanza 6 ||₂₁ For if she is fleeing
now, soon she will be pursuing. |₂₂ If she is not taking gifts, soon she will be giving
them. |₂₃ If she does not love, soon she will love |₂₄ even against her will.” stanza 7 ||₂₅
Come to me even now, and free me from harsh |₂₆ anxieties, and however many
things |₂₇ my heart [*thūmos*] yearns to get done, you do for me. You |₂₈ become my
ally in war.

Tr. G. Nagy (2015)

b) Carm. conviviale 901 (PMG)

εἶθ' ἄπυρον καλὸν γενοίμην μέγα χρυσίον
καί με καλὴ γυνὴ φοροίη καθαρὸν θεμένη νόον.

I wish I were a lovely pendant [or vessel], big, fine [i.e. unsmelted] gold,
and a lovely maiden would wear [or carry] me with purity in her heart.

c) Ancient Egyptian (?banquet) song, in Hughes Fowler, p.41

‘Would that I were/ her delicate signet ring,/ her finger’s sentinel!/ I’d see then her
love/ each and every day.../ And it would I/ who’d stolen her heart.’

d) anon. ix (Page 1981, p. 319)

εἶθ' ανεμος γενόμεν, συ δε <δη> στείχουσα παρ' αυγὰς
στήθεα γυμνώσαις και με πνέοντα λάβοις.

If only I had become the wind, and if only going out of doors, you bared your breasts
and received me as I blew.

**1.) Rhianos, poet and scholar—in fact, an editor of Homer; b. 275 BCE
AP 12. 142 = x. 3254-5 (HE)**

Ἴξῳ Δεξιόνικος ὑπὸ χλωρῆ πλατανίστῳ
κόσσυφον ἀγρεύσας, εἶλε κατὰ πτερύγων
χὼ μὲν ἀναστενάχων ἀπεκώκυεν ἱερὸς ὄρνις.
ἀλλ' ἐγὼ, ὃ φίλ' Ἔρωσ, καὶ θαλεραὶ Χάριτες,
5 εἶην καὶ κίχλη καὶ κόσσυφος, ὡς ἂν ἐκείνου
ἐν χερὶ καὶ φθογγὴν καὶ γλυκὸ δάκρυ βάλω.

Dexionicos, having caught a blackbird with lime under a green plane-tree, held it by
the wings, and it, the holy bird, screamed complaining. **Would that I**, dear Love
[Eros], and blooming Graces [Kharites], **were even a thrush or a blackbird, so that
I might pour forth my cry and my sweet tears in his hand.**
(Loeb tr., modified)

2.) Anacreontea 22 (West) (2nd–4th c. CE) Tr. Campbell, p. 193 (slightly modified)

ἡ Ταντάλου ποτ' ἔστη
λίθος Φρυγῶν ἐν ὄχθαις,
καὶ παῖς ποτ' ὄρνις ἔπτη
Πανδίουνοσ χελιδῶν.
5 ἐγὼ δ' ἔσοπτρον εἶην,
ὅπως ἀεὶ βλέπῃς με·
ἐγὼ χιτῶν γενοίμην,
ὅπως ἀεὶ φορῆς με.
ὔδωρ θέλω γενέσθαι,
10 ὅπως σε χρῶτα λούσω·
μύρον, γύναι, γενοίμην,
ὅπως ἐγὼ σ' ἀλείψω.
καὶ ταινίη δὲ μασθῶ,
καὶ μάργαρον τραχήλω
15 καὶ σανδαλον γενοίμην·
μόνον ποσὶν πάτει με.

titulus: ἄλλο εἰς κόρην

10 Stephanus: σεῦ cod. 12 Brunck: ἀλείφω cod.

Once Tantalus' daughter [sc. Niobe] became a stone standing among the Phrygian hills; once Pandion's daughter [sc. Philomela] became a bird and flew, a swallow. **If only I could be a mirror, so that you would always look at me; an undergarment, so that you would always wear me; water, that I might wash your skin; perfume, lady, that I might anoint you; a band for your breast, a pearl for your neck, and a sandal would that I became—only trample me [imper.] underfoot!**

2b) C. P. Cavafy, 'The mirror in the entrance'

Ο καθρέπτης στην είσοδο

Το πλούσιο σπίτι είχε στην είσοδο
έναν καθρέπτη μέγιστο, πολύ παλαιό·
τουλάχιστον προ ογδόντα ετών αγορασμένο.

Ένα εμορφότατο παιδί, υπάλληλος σε ράπτη
(τες Κυριακές, ερασιτέχνης αθλητής),
στέκονταν μ' ένα δέμα. Το παρέδωσε
σε κάποιον του σπιτιού, κι αυτός το πήγε μέσα
να φέρει την απόδειξι. Ο υπάλληλος του ράπτη
έμεινε μόνος, και περίμενε.

Πλησίασε στον καθρέπτη και κυττάζονταν
κ' έσιαζε την κραβάτα του. Μετά πέντε λεπτά
του φέραν την απόδειξι. Την πήρε κ' έφυγε.

**Μα ο παλαιός καθρέπτης που είχε δει και δει,
κατά την ύπαρξίν του την πολυετή,
χιλιάδες πράγματα και πρόσωπα·
μα ο παλαιός καθρέπτης τώρα χαίρονταν,
κ' επαίρονταν που είχε δεχθεί επάνω του
την άρτιαν εμορφιά για μερικά λεπτά.**

(Από τα *Ποιήματα* 1897-1933, Ίκαρος 1984)

The Mirror in the Entrance

In the entrance of that sumptuous home
there was an enormous mirror, very old;
acquired at least eighty years ago.

A strikingly beautiful boy, a tailor's shop-assistant,
(on Sunday afternoons, an amateur athlete),
was standing with a package. He handed it
to one of the household, who then went back inside
to fetch a receipt. The tailor's shop-assistant
remained alone, and waited.

He drew near the mirror, and stood gazing at himself,
and straightening his tie. Five minutes later
they brought him the receipt. He took it and left.

But **the ancient mirror**, which had seen and seen again,
throughout **its lifetime of so many years**,
thousands of objects and faces—
but the ancient mirror now became elated,
inflated with pride, **because it had received upon itself
perfect beauty, for a few minutes.**

Translated by Daniel Mendelsohn

3) Longus, *Daphnis & Chloe* I. 14.3; II. 2. 2

εἶθε αὐτοῦ σῦριγγ ἐγενόμην, ἴν' ἐμπνέη μοι· εἶθε αἶξ ἴν' ὑπ' ἐκείνου νέμωμαι.

I wish I could be his syrinx, so he could breathe into me! I wish I could be a goat, so I could be in his flock!

οἱ δὲ ἐν ταῖς ληνοῖς ποικίλας φωνὰς ἔρριπτον ἐπὶ τὴν Χλόην καὶ ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τινα Βάκχην Σάτυροι μανικώτερον ἐπήδων καὶ ἠύχοντο γενέσθαι ποιμνία καὶ ὑπ' ἐκείνης νέμεσθαι, ὥστε αὐτὸν πάλιν ἢ μὲν ἤδετο, Δάφνις δὲ ἐλυπεῖτο.

Meanwhile the men in the wine presses flung manifold compliments at Chloe and pranced madly about her like satyrs about a maenad, praying to be turned into sheep and pastured by her, so that now she was pleased and he was pained.
(Loeb tr. [2009])

4) 'Plato' i. 584–5 (Page, *FGE*, p. 162) = *AP* 7. 669

ἀστέρας εἰσαθρεῖς, ἀστήρ ἐμός· εἶθε γενοίμην
οὐρανός, ὥς πολλοῖς ὄμμασιν εἰς σὲ βλέπω.

You are gazing at the stars, my star. Would that I could become the sky, **so that I might look at you with many eyes.**

5) 15th or 16th century folk song, in Pernot (1931), 38, no. 24

Χιλιδονάκι να γενώ, στην κλίνην σου να έλθω,
να κτίσω την φωλίτσα μου εις τα πρόσκεφαλά σου,
να κιλαδώ, να σε ξυπνώ, πάντα να με θυμάσαι

May I become a little swallow, so that I might come to your bedside,
so that I might build my little nest on your pillow,
so that I might chirp to wake you, so that you might always remember me.