



# Aphrodite

*Pierre Louys*

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## Aphrodite Pierre Louys

Originally published in 1896, this famous French classic depicting courtesan life in ancient Alexandria, is considered a graceful mixture of licentiousness and erudition, and made Pierre Louys (1870-1925) famous in his day.

It has been called the most fascinating love tale ever told - the modern classic which eclipses in exotic beauty and simplicity all the works of the ancients who wrote on the theme of sensuous live. Charming and exquisite as this masterpiece is, it is nevertheless a true historical document of early Greek morality (set about fifty years B.C.E.). It is unquestionably the greatest of French love novels, and in its day, the best-selling work by any living French writer (350,000 copies), inspiring a host of translations, as well as dramatic and operatic adaptations.

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Présentation de l'éditeur

The erudite Prodicos of Ceos, who flourished toward the end of the first century before our era, is the author of the celebrated apologue which St. Basil recommended to Christian meditation: "Herakles between virtue and voluptuousness." We know that Herakles decided for the first, and was thus enabled to accomplish a certain number of great crimes against the Hinds, the Amazons, the Golden Apples and the Giants. If Prodicos had limited himself to that, he would have written only a fable of readily comprehended symbolism, but he was a clever philosopher and his repertory of tales, "The Hours," which was divided into three parts, presented the moral truths under their three different aspects which correspond to the three ages of life. For little children he was pleased to propose as an example the austere choice of Herakles; to youths he doubtless related the voluptuous choice of Paris; and I imagine that, to ripe men, he said nearly this: "Odysseus was wandering in the chase one day, at the foot of the mountains of Delphi, when he met on his path two virgins who held each other by the hand. The one had hair of violets, transparent eyes, and grave lips; she said to him: 'I am Arete.' The other had softly tinted eyelids, delicate hands and tender breasts; she said to him: 'I am Tryphe.' And they said together: 'Choose between us.' But the subtle Odysseus responded wisely: 'How could I choose you are inseparable. The eyes which have seen you pass one without the other have glimpsed but a sterile shadow. Just as sincere virtue does not deprive itself of the eternal joys which voluptuousness brings to it, so luxury would go ill without a certain grandeur of soul. I will follow you both. Show me the way.' As he finished, the two visions melted together and Odysseus knew that he had spoken with the great goddess Aphrodite." Présentation de l'éditeur

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Pierre Louys (10 December 1870 – 6 June 1925) was a French poet and writer, most renowned for lesbian and classical themes in some of his writings. In 1891, he helped found a literary review, *La Conque*, where he proceeded to publish *Astarte*, an early collection of erotic verse. He followed up in 1894 with another erotic collection in 143 prose poems, *Songs of Bilitis*. Louys was named Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur on 31 December 1909 for his contribution to French literature as a man of letters. He was promoted to Officier de la Légion d'honneur on 14 January 1922.

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