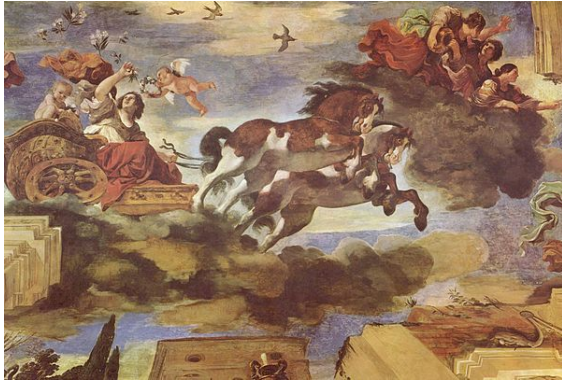


# Aurora (mythology)



*Aurora, by Guercino, 1621-23: the ceiling fresco in the Casino Ludovisi, Rome, is a classic example of Baroque illusionistic painting*

**Aurora** (Latin: [aw'ro:ra]) is the Latin word for dawn, and the goddess of dawn in Roman mythology and Latin poetry. Like Greek *Eos* and Rigvedic *Ushas* (and possibly Germanic *Ostara*), *Aurora* continues the name of an earlier Indo-European dawn goddess, *Hausos*.

## 1 Roman mythology

In Roman mythology, Aurora, goddess of the dawn, renews herself every morning and flies across the sky, announcing the arrival of the sun. Her parentage was flexible: for Ovid, she could equally be *Pallantis*, signifying the daughter of Pallas,<sup>[1]</sup> or the daughter of Hyperion.<sup>[2]</sup> She has two siblings, a brother (Sol, the sun) and a sister (Luna, the moon). Rarely Roman writers<sup>[3]</sup> imitated Hesiod and later Greek poets and named Aurora as the mother of the Anemoi (the Winds), who were the offspring of Astraeus, the father of the stars.

Aurora appears most often in sexual poetry with one of her mortal lovers. A myth taken from the Greek by Roman poets tells that one of her lovers was the prince of Troy, Tithonus. Tithonus was a mortal, and would therefore age and die. Wanting to be with her lover for all eternity, Aurora asked Jupiter to grant immortality to Tithonus. Jupiter granted her wish, but she failed to ask for eternal youth to accompany his immortality, and he became forever old. Aurora turned him into a grasshopper.

## 2 Usage in literature and music



*Aurora Taking Leave of Tithonus  
1704, by Francesco Solimena*

From Homer's *Iliad*:

*Now when Dawn in robe of saffron was hastening from the streams of Okeanos, to bring light to mortals and immortals, Thetis reached the ships with the armor that the god had given her. (19.1)*

*But soon as early Dawn appeared, the rosy-fingered, then gathered the folk about the pyre of glorious Hector. (24.776)*

From Virgil's *Aeneid*:

*Aurora now had left her saffron bed,  
And beams of early light the heav'ns o'erspread,  
When, from a tow'r, the queen, with wakeful eyes,  
Saw day point upward from the rosy skies.*

In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (I.i), Montague says of his lovesick son Romeo

*But all so soon as the all-cheering sun  
Should in the furthest east begin to draw  
The shady curtains from Aurora's bed,  
Away from the light steals home my heavy son...*

In traditional Irish folk songs, such as “Lord Courtown”

“One day I was a-musing down by the Cour-  
town banks  
“The sun shone bright and clearly, bold Nep-  
tune played a prank...  
“There was Flora at the helm and Aurora to the  
stern  
“And all their gallant fine seamen, their course  
for to steer on.

In the poem “Tithonus” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Au-  
rora is described thus:

*Once more the old mysterious glimmer steals  
From thy pure brows, and from thy shoulders  
pure,  
And bosom beating with a heart renewed.  
Thy cheek begins to redden through the gloom,  
Thy sweet eyes brighten slowly close to mine,  
Ere yet they blind the stars, and the wild team  
Which love thee, yearning for thy yoke, arise,  
And shake the darkness from their loosened  
manes,  
And beat the twilight into flakes of a fire<sup>[4]</sup>*

In singer-songwriter Björk's *Vespertine* track, Aurora is  
described as:

*Aurora  
Goddess sparkle  
A mountain shade suggests your shape  
  
I tumble down on my knees  
Fill my mouth with snow  
The way it melts  
I wish to melt into you*

The post-punk rock band The Sexual Side Effects's track  
“Aurora” alludes to the Greek goddess:

*Aurora  
Save me from the fallen shadows  
Pull me out of my dream  
Aurora  
Wade me through the phantom shallows  
Shelter me from the screams*

In Chapter 8 of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, Madame Beck  
fires her old Governess first thing in the morning and is  
described by the narrator, Lucy Snowe:

*All this, I say, was done between the moment  
of Madame Beck's issuing like Aurora from her  
chamber, and that in which she coolly sat down  
to pour out her first cup of coffee.*

### 3 Depiction in art

- *Aurora* by Guercino (1591–1666)
- *The Countess de Brac as Aurora* by Jean-Marc Nat-  
tier (1685–1766)
- *Aurora e Titone* by Francesco de Mura (1696–1782)
- *Aurora and Cephalus*, by Anne-Louis Girodet de  
Roussy-Trioson (1767–1824)
- *The Gates of Dawn* by Herbert James Draper  
(1863–1920)
- *Aurora and Cephalus* by Pierre-Narcisse Guérin  
(1774–1833)
- *Aurora* by Odilon Redon (1840 – 1916).

### 4 See also

- Dawn goddess
- Eos
- Mater Matuta
- Memnon (mythology)
- Zorya

### 5 Notes

- [1] “When Pallantis next gleams in heaven and stars flee...”  
(Ovid, *Fasti* iv. 373.
- [2] *Fasti* v.159; also Hyginus, Preface to *Fabulae*.
- [3] The examples given in translation at TheoiProject are all  
Greeks or Greek-inspired.
- [4] D.A. Harris, *Tennyson and personification: the rhetoric of  
'Tithonus'*, 1986

## 6 External links

- Warburg Institute Iconographic Database (ca 110 images of Aurora)

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### 7.2 Images

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