

VENUS ANADYOMENE:
THE MYTHOLOGICAL SYMBOLISM FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE 19TH CENTURY

By

Jenna Marie Newberry

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment
of
the Requirements of the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN ART HISTORY

University of Wisconsin – Superior

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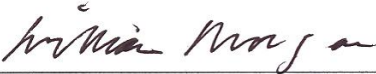
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As members of the Thesis Committee, we certify that we have read the thesis prepared by Jenna Marie Newberry and hereby approve it as fulfilling the thesis requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Art History.




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Abstract:

This thesis includes reading the chosen artworks as a visual interpretation of the written mythological birth of Venus by the sea. Reading the selected painting as visual novels, the pictorial symbolism helps prove or disprove the true theme of the Venus. The writer bases her theory on the inclusion of mythological symbols that represent the Venus Anadyomene; scallop shell, dolphins, Aros, dove, sparrow, girdle, mirror, myrtle, and roses. The comparison of various artists' interpretations of this theme and the symbols they use to recognize the Venus as such is a substantial part of the research. The writer concludes in this thesis that the chosen art pieces are or are not a Venus Anadyomene, and in fact just a female nude entitled and themed fallaciously for an allure or ambiance. Through extensive research in the mythological symbolism of the Goddess of Love, the above-mentioned symbols used by various artists across several eras prove the Venus a true character of mythological history.

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To my loved ones for their support, extreme patience, and a place to always call home. Without you I would not be where I am today. Thank you to all my past and present art educators who have instilled a passion for the arts in me and guided me through the ever-winding educational path.

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CHAPTER ONE

Myth of Venus Anadyomene

Venus Anadyomene, “Venus rising from the sea” has been made famous by many of our great artists since the beginning of time. The Venus herself depicted in various mythological themed art works has given the female nude a name. The Venus Anadyomene is the origin of Aphrodite (Greek)/ Venus (Roman), Goddess of Love, although many versions of her birth and heritage exist, I chose to uphold this version as most credible. Conceived in the womb of the sea after Titan Cronus castrated his father, Uranus, and casted his genitals into the water. Venus was born by the mouth of the sea fully grown and virginal. Upon a scallop shell she was blown to the island shore of Cyprus, by Zephyr, God of Wind, floating gently on the foam of the sea. Droplets of water dripping from her tresses turned to pearls in the shell.

According to Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Evelyn-White translates,

“Ouranos (the Sky) came, bringing on night and longing for love, and he lay about Gaia (the Earth) spreading himself full upon her. Then the son [Kronos] from his ambush stretched forth his left hand and in his right took the great long sickle with jagged teeth, and swiftly lopped off his own father's members and cast them away to fall behind him . . . and so soon as he had cut off the members with flint and cast them from the land into the surging sea, they were swept away over the main a long time: and a white foam spread around them from the immortal flesh, and in it there grew a maiden. First she drew near holy Kythera, and from there, afterwards, she came to sea-girt Kypros, and came forth an awful and lovely goddess, and grass grew up about her beneath her shapely feet. Her gods and men call Aphrodite, and Aphrogeneia because she grew amid the foam, and well-crowned Kythereia because she reached Kythera, and Kyprogenes because she was born in billowy Kypros, and Philommedes because sprang from the members. And with her went Eros, and comely Himeros followed her at her birth at the first...This honour she has from the beginning, and this is the portion allotted to her amongst men and undying gods,--the whisperings of maidens and smiles and deceits with sweet delight and love and graciousness.”¹

¹ Hesiod (translation by Hugo G. Evelyn-White), *Theogony* (Greek epic ca. 8th or 7th B.C.) 176 ff

Evelyn-White translates Homer's writings on her journey by shell,

To Sea-set Kypros the moist breath of the western wind (Zephyros) wafted her [Aphrodite] over the waves of the loud-moaning sea in soft foam, and there the gold-filleted Horai (Seasons) welcomed her joyously. They clothed her with heavenly garments: on her head they put a fine, well-wrought crown of gold, and in her pierced ears they hung ornaments of orichalc and precious gold, and adorned her with golden necklaces over her soft neck and snow-white breasts, jewels which the gold-filleted Horai wear themselves whenever they go to their father's house to join the lovely dances of the gods. And when they had fully decked her, they brought her to the gods, who welcomed her when they saw her, giving her their hands. Each one of them prayed that he might lead her home to be his wedded wife, so greatly were they amazed at the beauty of violet-crowned Kythereia.²

The five artists chosen for this paper all capture these verbal descriptions with various styles and techniques of pictorial story lines. Sandro Botticelli and Adolph-William Bourguereau translate the verbal text of the Venus' birth by sea into elaborately designed and intelligently thought out illustrative novels that the audience can read and comprehend as the myth unfolds across the canvas. The lightness of the hues chosen by Alexandre Cabanel and Bourguereau exhibit the master colorists capabilities of capturing the purity and chaste demeanor of Venus's origin. These artists take us on a pictorial journey over various eras of some of the greatest masterpieces portraying the birth of Venus.

² Homer (translation by Hugo G. Evelyn-White), *Hymn 6 to Aphrodite* (Greek epic ca. 7th to 4th B.C.)

CHAPTER TWO

Antiquity and Pompeii

One of the first and most famous of Venus' arrived in Rome deteriorated and beyond repair. If not for the record and written imagery of the antiquity artist Apelles', "Venus Anadyomene" in Pliny the Elder's Natural History, the Venus' depiction could have been changed forever in the course of art history. Apelles is thought to have painted Alexander the Great's mistress, Campaspe as the original Venus rising from the sea. The vision of a female nude emerging from the sea with wet tresses is inspired from the stories of the ancient Greek courtesan Phryne swimming nude in the sea during festivals.

In the beginning of the first century around seventy-nine AD, some five hundred years after the first accounts of Apelles' Venus, Mount Vesuvius erupted, destroying and covering the Italian city of Pompeii with volcanic ash and pumice. Pompeii was accidentally rediscovered over fifteen thousand years later under four to six meters of debris, revealing many Venus inspired artifacts. Excavations have uncovered details of daily lives that were once lived in this prosperous Roman Empire. Art in this case is one of the best historical markers and documentation aid to better understand the lives of Pompeii's citizens. Etruscan inscriptions were found that emphasizes the theory that the Etruscans once captured Pompeii. In the first century BC, Pompeii may have been captured by Cumae, a Greek colony that explains some artifacts found with Greek influences, including the goddess of love. The architecture and enlarging of the town was due to the Samnites conquering Pompeii in the fifth century BC. In the final years of after the fourth century BC, Pompeii remained loyal and forever part of the

Roman Empire. It was used as a gateway between the sea trade that would travel its way up to Rome, thus the Greek and Roman cultures intertwining.

Collected evidence shows the details of everyday life, including shop names, inscriptions, business professions dealing with laundry and wine, even the worlds first marketing pun has been discovered buried within the Pompeian ruins. The art of Pompeii is everywhere, in the mosaics on the floor, in the secret erotic chambers, and especially in the architecture. Each building discovered seems to have served its own purpose whether for a food market, mill, and bar for cold and hot drinks, restaurants, a hotel, a gymnasium, theaters, and an amphitheater. The amphitheater was designed and built with sophistication that marvels modern historians with its attention to crowd control details. The architecture of the aqueducts fed into equally exquisite designs of swimming pools used mostly for aesthetics, fountains, and baths. Among the architecture, Pompeii has many other well-preserved art forms including frescoes, paintings, sculpture and pottery. The art reflects the everyday life and awes art historians with their advance works and innovated Pompeian styles.

Most of the walls were covered in paintings and the floors in mosaics to complete an overall decorative style of living. Mythological themes depicting love and sex were extremely popular. The paintings tend to be a light, airy, graceful technique that is very difficult to obtain in fresco. The visual taste of the homes is of high standards. Floors rarely were covered in rugs, but the mosaics were elaborate floor coverings. The furniture that was found is uniform and designed to a particular style of the houses. Gardens were a major room in most houses; they were given just as much if not more detail than the rooms themselves. The gardens allowed fresh air and light to enter the entire house and were often walled with paintings as well. One such garden and house is that of the House of the Marine Venus which displayed one of the first

Venus', the *Venus Anadyomene*. (Figure 1) This may have been one of the first nude Venus' of the region based off of the records of Apelles' Venus. Other accounts of the Venus were recorded as fully clothed before this. Across the garden is yet another mythological image, that of Mars, over looking the garden. The Three Graces that are found in Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (Figure 2) are also depicted through out Pompeii. One of the houses has a fourth style fresco of the three graces in a similar pose of lounging and casual demeanor.

I see this Venus fresco as a true Venus Anadyomene, the way in which she reclines and seems to be floating towards you patiently waiting her arrival on the shores of the island of Kythera or Cyprus. The iconography surrounds her and embraces her freshly born mind, body, and soul. The Aros ride on dolphins along side her chariot shell as the cloth that cloaks her newly born body is floating in the breeze behind her reclining pose. Her body is adorned in gold jewelry that was recited in the Greek epic, "...heavenly garments: on her head they put a fine, well-wrought crown of gold, and in her pierced ears they hung ornaments of orichalc and precious gold, and adorned her with golden necklaces over her soft neck and snow-white breasts".³ In her hand it almost appears as though she is holding Mercury's caduceus. If it is indeed the caduceus, a symbol of commerce and negotiation, it may be a symbol of the reciprocity and sea trade between the Greeks and Romans. As she floats upon the sea bringing a balanced exchange of goods to both lands, she is a symbol of not only the rebirth of purity and virginity but also the symbol of a pure bond between two empires.

³ Homer (translation by Hugo G. Evelyn-White), *Hymn 6 to Aphrodite* (Greek epic ca. 7th to 4th B.C.)

CHAPTER THREE

Sandro Botticelli

Alessandro di Mariano Filipepi, also known as Sandro Botticelli, was one of the premier Florentine painters of the Renaissance. His nickname means “little barrel” which was given to his brother and was later passed down to him. It is thought that he worked under the watchful eye of Filippo Lippi and then later became the master to Filippo Lippi’s son, Filippino Lippi. Many of his commissions were secured through his close ties with the prominent Medici family in Florence. Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici supposedly commissioned all three paintings within a few years of each other. While Botticelli takes from Lucretius and Ovid’s mythological poetry to create a series of paintings for the Medici family, he is also thus translating one artist’s work into another---the poet’s into the visual artist’s. He is changing a verbal artistic interpretation of the poet into a visual Neo-platonic vocabulary; *Primavera*, *The Birth of Venus*, and *Pallas and the Centaur* connect with these Neo-platonic ideas.

“In Renaissance and Renascences, Erwin Panofsky advanced the bold argument that the true Renaissance only occurred when classical forms of expression (embodying pathos, in Aristotelian terms) were for the first time united with classical content (or ethos)”.⁴ This started in the last quarter of the fifteenth century with Botticelli in Florence and other artists including Filippino Lippi. Botticelli’s mythologies in the Uffizi are considered some of the earliest Renaissance paintings to depict mythological tales. Visiting the Uffizi, one will find all three of Botticelli’s most famous mythological paintings in one room, the “Botticelli Room.” This room contains *Primavera*, *The Birth of Venus* (Figure 2), and *Pallas and the Centaur* among others.

⁴ R.W. Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978.), 124.

The Medici was one of the main families trying to revive the ancient Roman and Greek arts and philosophies. They accomplished this revival of classical antiquity by commissioning Neo-Platonic mythological paintings that hung in their private estates; Botticelli's mythological paintings are prime examples of these Renaissance paintings. His paintings are both classical and modern; the figures' linear flowing elongated bodies depict the classical myths. The Medici's were a big part of the humanist society doing all they could do to relive Roman and Greek antiquity so it is not surprising that they wanted representations of classical myths. With their friends, they formed their own society to try to bring back Plato's and Aristotle's theories.

The Medici and their followers kept villas in the country, thus separating business from pleasure. Botticelli's mythology paintings were among those chosen to hang in these villas out of the church and public's watchful eyes. Although the paintings contained pagan gods and goddesses, they were related to Christianity through the philosophy of Neo-Platonism. By integrating the church concepts with the philosophy, artists could continue to generate similar art that translated these philosophies into contemporary thoughts. One example being Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, could have been thought of as the ultimate love, that being God. The Medici family was so involved in the transition of classical and mythical that they believed these legends contained the mysterious truth of the power of love and beauty.

These paintings were greatly influenced by the period in which they were executed, the patrons, the painter himself, and also by other artistic works. Paintings of such subject matter were generally painted for personal preference and viewed only by the patrons in their villas. All of these attributes will play a large role in the way spectators not only view these paintings, but also how they visualize the Neo-Platonic period. In Neo-Platonic times in Florence, art combined both Platonic pagan figures and symbolic Christian figures. The Medici believed that

the body was of heavenly earth. Love and beauty conquered all, and to be surrounded by lavish paintings of mystical themes was the culmination of this belief.

Botticelli transformed the beautiful lyrics of poets and the linear curves of sculptors into flowing allegoric art. He took the subjects of his mythological paintings from sculpture as well as from poetry: “for all their similarities of bright and joyful imagery we cannot ignore the differences between these verses and Botticelli’s painting...Botticelli was a past master at the art of translating literary texts into exact as well as expressive pictorial equivalents”.⁵ In his paintings, Botticelli used the poetry of the ancients to link the pagan world and Christian worlds together, thus incorporating Neo-Platonic ideas. Botticelli’s main objective was to put visually what the poet put in words. In his book The Portrayal of Love (1992), Charles Dempsey tells us “...not to refer to the subject of the Primavera as a “mythology,” but better instead to call it...a favola, which is the invariably used by Renaissance writers to designate the subject of a painting or poem based on the material of ancient myth”.⁶ This same concept can be applied to *The Birth of Venus*.

The Birth of Venus is thought by some to have been commissioned by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici specifically for the Medici Villa at Castello around the year 1485. Lightbown however argues that “*The Birth of Venus* was not mentioned in the 1499 inventory of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, therefore it must have been commissioned by another patron and then passed into the Medici family through Duke Cosimo de’ Medici or his father Giovanni, probably by inheritance or purchase”.⁷ Like the *Primavera*, *The Birth of Venus* was painted in tempera, but on canvas rather than on wood. Canvas was originally used for

⁵ Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 160.

⁶ Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992), 27

⁷ Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 152-53.

processional banners and became popular for commissions due to the cheaper cost of canvas than a wood panel.

It is believed that Botticelli took the pose of Venus from the antique Roman sculpture *Venus Pudica* or the *Medici Venus*. The Humanist philologist and poet Angelo Poliziano, also known as Politian, wrote of Venus' birth, and Botticelli must have referred to his work and relied on it when painting the sea and wind. Politian's Stanze like that of the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite gives a vivid description that may have influenced Botticelli's interpretation. Homer's lyrics seem to be the most coherent description that goes along with *The Birth of Venus* imagery.

From Lightbown's book, Politian's Stanze reads

...blown by the lascivious Zephyrs to the shore, riding on a shell, and the sky seems as if rejoicing at the sight. You would say the foam and the sea were real, and real to the shell, real the blowing of the winds. You could see the goddess with eyes resplendent, and the sky and the elements laughing about her: the Hours treading the sand in white robes: the breeze curling their long and pliant hair: not one, yet not diverse, their countenances, as seems proper for sisters. You would swear the goddess was really issuing from the waves, squeezing her tresses with her right hand and with the other covering the apple of sweetness, and that when her sacred and divine foot was imprinted on it, the sand clothed itself in grasses and flowers. Then might you see how the three nymphs welcomed her with cheerful and lovely semblance into their midst and wrapped her around with a starry dress.⁸

He goes on to describe the original text of the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite,

I sing of beautiful Aphrodite, whose temples are girdled with golden flowers, who is obeyed by the flowery sea-girt land of Cyprus, whither soft Zephyr and the breeze wafted her in soft foam over the waves. Gently the Horae received her, and clad her in divine garments.⁹

⁸ Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 159.

⁹ Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 161.

Botticelli's mythological paintings created within years of each other seem to complete a mythological circle of Neo-Platonic ideas during the time of the Renaissance. Botticelli, though completing only a few mythological paintings before painting strictly religious scenes, has helped to revive and relive Roman antiquity in the Italian Renaissance. Botticelli painted many biblically themed commissions and only completed a few of the allegorical paintings that were popular amongst the Medici and their Neo-Platonist followers.¹⁰ The Medici family played a large role in the rebirth of Platonic theories by commissioning such paintings for their private viewing. Botticelli restores the ancient poets' lyrics by capturing them within the strokes of his paintbrush to create such a series of masterpieces that would survive and tell their Neo-Platonic themes centuries later. These paintings having many hidden meanings, some of which we will not ever know has helped to bring forth the thinking and theories of Plato and Aristotle. The classical art of poets and sculptors are reborn through Botticelli: "In art, these Neo-Platonist ideas were translated into allegorical and symbolic images: images drawn from pre-Christian mythology, and interpreted as symbols for concepts acceptable to Renaissance Christians".¹¹

Botticelli chose to depict this female in the nude classically versus biblically clothed, such as the Virgin Mary, which was popular of the time. He clearly is portraying the Venus' sea birth by means of the union of heaven (Urania) and water (the sea foam), which was a purely divine and sacred love. If portraying the love of the god Zeus (Jupiter) and the Titian Dione, then the painting would portray a more earthly and profane sexual love with a much less virginal impression of modesty.¹² The way in which she tries to cover her breasts and genitals is more of the chaste pose of the Venus Pudica that shies away from her depicted demeanor of eroticism

¹⁰ Elena Capretti, *The Great Masters of Italian Art* (Antella (Firenze): Scala, 2003), 55.

¹¹ Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 161.

¹² Clare Gibson, *The Hidden Life of Art: Secrets and Symbols in Great Masterpieces* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2006), 64.

and carnal appetite of the Venus Pandemos.¹³ Botticelli's Venus will be one of the most influential images for the other three artists I have chosen to recognize in this paper as well as numerous other artists not mentioned.

Zephyr is the winged god of the western winds who blew Venus across the sea after her fully matured birth by the sea foam. He is often associated with the spring due to the warm Mediterranean winds he brings with his wife Flora, Goddess of flowers, who is entangled within his arms. I believe this to actually be her counterpart Chloris who is generally depicted nude with Zephyr in tow. While on land awaits Flora, wearing the symbolic Myrtle around her neck, has already changed into the goddess of flowers by the wind, Zephyr. When all three are painted together it is the act of new life that grows and forms in the spring, or in this case the new life of the Venus. Her scallop shell symbolizes the femininity and purity of generating new life especially in a marine setting. Its appearance resembles the female genitalia as well as the functioning aspects of the womb protecting the precious and vulnerable life; which thrives in the protective shell or womb. The roses that drift from the embodiment of Zephyr and Flora/Chloris are a symbol of the love of Venus. They are beautiful, fragrant, and the colors ranging from the snow white to the blood red symbolize the every entity of sexuality from the purest form to the most carnal. Red is the extreme of sexual maturity while the white implies innocence and the mixture of the two captured in the pink middle tone is just that the middle ground between pure love and sexual desire.

¹³ The Venus takes on many names and meanings through out history. For further definitions of the previously mentioned Venus' please reference cited resources.

CHAPTER FOUR

Titian

The master painter of color and landscapes, Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1488–1576), known as Titian was a famous student from the Venetian School. Thought most likely to have been a pupil of Giovanni Bellini as well as Giorgione¹⁴. Starting out with bold contrasting colors and developing into a master of harmonious color combinations. His techniques consist of thumb marks, brush scratches as well as strategically placed blobs of paint. His style developed and changed throughout his career and to follow that stylistic journey is extraordinarily interesting. Late in his career Titian's main patron was Phillip II who gave him liberty with subject, interpretation, and style but rarely followed through with payment. He drifted back and forth between devotional pieces and mythological subject matter, and often rediscovered themes of the past and gave them new life with his more dramatic scenes and complex poses.¹⁵

The Venus Anadyomene (Figure 3) is one of his first mythological themed pieces but the lack of content compared to the other allegorical paintings makes me skeptical of its true genre. The Venus of Urbino has multiple symbols of the Venus including the roses (love of a couple), dog sleeping (marital fidelity), and the myrtle plant on the windowsill (Venus plant). If capable of such pictorial writing, then why withhold on this particular painting.

The deep and dark coloring of the water and sky create an enveloping backdrop to the light and illuminated female form. It looks as though a storm may have just passed or simply that night is falling and the sky has a pinkish hue to the horizon. The way her hair drapes around her shoulders and cascades down, the tips floating in the water draws your eye from the top of

¹⁴ Giorgione and Titian painted together and worked so closely that now some of their works are intertwined and cannot be distinguished from one another.

¹⁵ Capretti, *The Great Masters of Italian Art*, 58.

the picture plane to the bottom. Her limbs, hair, and body create interlocking “s” shapes that adds to the composition. She appears to be completely unaware of eavesdropping eyes watching her ring out her dripping wet locks as she has a serene and unconscious look in her face.

Titian’s Venus Anadyomene is true only in the name through the lack of visual symbolism. The missing symbols, except the shell, eludes to a beautiful nude female captured bathing in the sea not the actual birth of the Venus by the mouth of the sea. She wrings her wet tresses as if just being submerged beneath the sea crests. The shell a mere afterthought of a painting originally painted to capture the beauty and intimacy of a frolicking nude with no witnesses but sea creatures. The size contrast between female and shell is an alarming sign that it was painted in after the painting was complete. Maybe it was added in as a selling point, giving the nude a theme such as the Venus Anadyomene might have boosted its artistic appeal. Whether this holds the exact theme of Venus Anadyomene, or it is merely a nude female form, one can not argue that it is not a masterpiece and appeals to a wide audience who are ever faithfully in love with her.

CHAPTER FIVE

Alexandre Cabanel

Alexandre Cabanel's paintings were deep and refined with an attention to detail that made them increasingly popular in the late nineteenth century. At a young age the French painter was painting and attending art school at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts near Montpellier until his move to Paris just before the forties. He went on to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Although he was unsuccessful in obtaining many of the awards in which he strived for in his beginning career, he was granted a scholarship to Rome, allowing him to live in Italy for a number of years. He became increasingly successful accumulating numerous medals such as the First Class Medal of the World Exhibition as well as the Cross of the Legion of Honour. Through out his early career Cabanel's genre focused mostly on historical and biblical themes until the 1860's when he began painting subject matter that appealed to him. Coming into his own as a colorist of soft pastel with a light mother-of-pearl effect launched his career and captured the eye of many famous successful patrons. Amongst these patrons was Napoleon III, the Emperor, who purchased the *Nymph abducted by a Faun* from the Salon show of 1861. Two years later the infamous *The Birth of Venus* (Figure 4) was submitted to the Salon and was also purchased by the Emperor. Theophile Gautier named the Salon of 1863, the "Salon of Venus" because of the number of mythological female nudes by writer Theophile Gautier.¹⁶

The lightest of color used in Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus* alludes to the lightness and enlightenment of relaxation, amplifying the reclining nudes placid demeanor and virginity. The

¹⁶Andreas Blühm, *Alexandre Cabanel: Tradition of Beauty* (München: Hirmer Verlag, 2011), 12.

contraposto twist of the figure with the melodramatic swoop of the arm over the face comes directly from his previously loved painting of *Water*, which hangs above one of the four doors of the Say Mansion each representing one of the four elements. The second time around Cabanel removed the putti from the focal point and Venus herself takes over the entire front of the picture plane of *The Birth of Venus*. Her hair has been deepened, adding more to her allure and purity. Theophile Gautier wrote, “One might say, one has drawn aside curtains to reveal a young woman asleep; she reclines on her bed, the crest of a wave, stretches out her arm, pulls up a leg up, abandons herself to the waves that rock her, and surrenders her skeins of long hair like seaweed to the rhythm of the blue water. The swell makes her body arch and accentuates her youthful charms all the more strongly.”¹⁷ She is indeed an ideal beauty who captured the heart of the classical Emperor Napoleon as well as many others.

This painting may contain some iconography of the Venus but lacks some of the most obvious of symbols, such as her chariot shell or accompanying dolphins. Cabanel’s Venus Anadyomene, *The Birth of Venus* (Figure 4) seems more of a portrayal of her yearly rebirth or and purification as she plunges into the sea for her annual cleanse. It also maybe a Venus Anadyomene captured at the absolute moment of birth and her chariot shell drawn by dolphins has not yet arrived to deliver her safely to shore. His newfound success in the mythological genre may have pushed him to create more myths, the Venus was the result of this success. Theming the composition a myth, justified the seductiveness of female form to the public eye. Cabanel himself was quoted, “. . .usually the subject is merely a pretext to hint at or to express an underlying ideal, an ideal for which the public is more receptive on account of its familiarity

¹⁷Theophile Gautier in ‘Salon de 1863’ in *Le Moniteur universel*, 13 June, 1863, in *Alexandre Cabanel: Tradition of Beauty* (München: Hirmer Verlag, 2011), 31.

with the subject”.¹⁸ Even though some of the iconography is missing I believe it still a Venus Anadyomene, but not in the sense of what we are used to seeing. If we step outside the painting and examine the frame, the symbol of the shell is found on the out most corners of the framework, though still missing within the painting itself. Cabanel studied the great Italian painters which were pictorial novels at there greatest, if not for written documentation then I would write this off as a Venus Anadyomene and simply defy it as a female nude due to lack of iconography.

¹⁸ Alexandre Cabanel to family member, Paris, 30 May, 1863, in *Alexandre Cabanel: Tradition of Beauty* (München: Hirmer Verlag, 2011), 32.

CHAPTER SIX

William-Adolphe Bouguereau

William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825-1905) was a French academic painter who painted a wide range of subject matter; portraits, genre paintings, religious scenes, allegories and mythological themes. His mastery of the eternal beauty of the female nude and dreamy realistic styles of idealized themes were well received by wealthy art patrons but criticized by fellow artist of the time such as Edgar Degas. The Impressionist Movement has over shadowed the talent and mastery of realism that Bouguereau is known for but did not seem to effect his artistic career. He started young, much like Alexandre Cabanel, attended the governmental art program at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux, and then transferred to the center in Paris, while spending sometime in Italy on scholarship. The basis for the art schools were based on historical themes because those were considered the most virtuous and morally sound versus other themes such as still life and landscapes were only what the artist themselves could see and had no story line. This could be the over all influence that impacted not only Bouguereau but Cabanel as well.¹⁹

Bouguereau would exhibit at many locations, including the annual exhibit at the Salon in Paris. He preferred submitting a variety of themes; religious, myths, and portraiture to show his diversity of subject as well as skill and the ability to portray different techniques and emotions. The limitless poses a human form can do, was one inspiration for all the nudes he captured in paint. A lecture at the Institut de France in 1885 quoted Bouguereau, “Antiquity reveals what an inexhaustible source of variegated inspiration nature is. With a relatively restricted number of

¹⁹ Fronia E. Wissman, *Bougeureau* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Art, 1996), 9-17.

elements---a head, a bust, arms, a torso, legs, a stomach,---how many masterpieces she made! Then why seek out other things to paint or sculpture?"²⁰ Bouguereau, like Cabanel used his successful renderings multiple times through out various paintings. The female figure that captures the limelight of the entire center picture plane in *The Birth of Venus* (Figure 5), was enlarged from a female bather in *The Nymphaeum*. The timeless standing pose comes directly from Botticelli's Venus but was transformed with her raised arms in Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' more erotic Venus, and morphs one more time in Bouguereau's less sensually erotic Venus. She bares her body completely with arms innocently pulling her hair back, unafraid of her femininity, sexuality and nudity.²¹

A truly themed Venus Anadyomene, Bouguereau's *The Birth of Venus* with numerous symbols visually telling the myth of the Goddess of Love to its viewer. The grace and elegance in which she sways in an "s" curve contraposto oozes the sex appeal of one of the most beautiful and seductive goddesses with a soft innocence to the coloring. She rides upon her scallop shell, which almost appears to be pulled by a symbolic dolphin steered by Aros. She is beginning to pull her hair to the side as if to wring out the droplets of water that will be turned to pearls with instant contact with her shell. I find this to be one of the most beautifully composed and true to myth paintings since Botticelli's Venus. The composition encircles the Venus with allegorical bodies of sea creatures and symbolic icons of her embodiment of character.

²⁰ Wissman, *Bouguereau*, 86.

²¹ Wissman, *Bouguereau*, 86-87.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1: Unknown Pompeian Artist, *Venus Anadyomene*. ca. 79. Fresco. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, Naples, Italy

Image found on the Theoi website.



Figure 2: Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, ca. 1484, Tempera on Linen, The Uffizi, Florence.

Image found on the Virtual Uffizi website.



Figure 3: Tizano Vecellio. *Venus Anadyomene*. ca. 1520. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Image found on the National Gallery of Scotland's official website.



Figure 4: Alexandre Cabanel. *The Birth of Venus*. 1863. Oil on Canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Image found on the Musée d'Orsay's official website.



Figure 5: William-Adolph Bouguereau. *The Birth of Venus*. 1879. Oil on Canvas. Musée D'Orsay, Paris.
Image found on the Musée d'Orsay's official website.

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