

Edward Burne-Jones's *The Mirror of Venus*: Physical and Intangible Female Beauty*

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The Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) conceived the subject of *The Mirror of Venus* between 1865 and 1867. He painted two versions: a small version in gouache and oil and a larger version in oil on canvas. In composing this subject Burne-Jones was inspired by the poetic and chromatic description of a lyrical stanza on "The Hill of Venus" in the long epic poem *Earthly Paradise*, written by his close friend and collaborator William Morris.¹ This study comprises three parts: Burne-Jones's history of the paintings, his iconographical sources, and an iconological interpretation of *The Mirror of Venus*.

Keywords: Venus, astronomy, beauty, love, mirror, planet, star, water, symbolism, British poetry, Neoplatonism, Aesthetic Movement, Art Nouveau, Symbolists

History of the Paintings

The ownership history of Burne-Jones's *The Mirror of Venus* is most interesting. William Graham (1840-1910)—a Scottish politician, wine merchant, cotton manufacturer, and avid art collector as well as a dear friend of Burne-Jones—purchased from the painter for 890 pounds the first version of *The Mirror of Venus* in 1867 (Figure 1).² In 1873, Burne-Jones started a second version and completed it in 1875 (Figures 2a, 2b, and 2c) for Frederick Richards Leyland (1831-1892), a British shipowner of transatlantic trades who was another admirer of Burne-Jones. In 1877, Leyland purchased this version for 3,575 guineas.³ Both versions were

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¹ See Christopher Wood, *Burne-Jones: The Life and Works of Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898)* (New York: Steward, Tabori & Chang, 1998), 60-61. The late nineteenth century was a time of spiritual uncertainty and restrained sensuality. The desire for fantasizing and escaping from reality is projected in William Morris's long poem *Earthly Paradise*, in particular in the section on "The Hill of Venus." In an imaginary place, a knight frolics with a goddess. Psyche's transformation and self-discovery violate the mores of the Victorian culture.

² Bill Waters and Martin Harrison noted that in August 1869 Graham revealed his artistic interests to Burne-Jones by writing: "I want to have *The Love is Passing* very much and I am to have the little Jew boy—you showed me yesterday—then the *Spring* and the *Venus Mirror* and the *Sleeping Princess Knights*." See Bill Waters and Martin Harrison, *Burne-Jones* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1973), 84 and 87.

³ Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, 2 vols. (London: MacMillan & Co., 1904), 2:61-62. Hereafter cited as GBJ, *Memorials*.

exhibited for the first time in 1877 at the Grosvenor Gallery in London.⁴ Ten years later, in 1886, the small version owned by Graham was sold at a loss (for only 819 pounds) to a British lawyer, Charles Butler, Esq. (1802-1897).⁵ At an unknown date, the large version became part of the Joseph Ruston Collection, which in turn sold it to Christie's in 1898.⁶ Charles Fairfax Murray (1849-1919), a painter, art historian, and art collector, purchased the large version for 5,450 guineas from Christie's in 1904. It is unclear who owned this painting after Murray's death in 1919, but it appears again on September 29, 1924, when Arthur Ruck of London,⁷ the art dealer at Christie's, sold the large version for 5,722 pounds to Calouste Gulbenkian (1869-1895), a British businessman in the petroleum trade and a philanthropist of Armenian origin. Today Burne-Jones's large version is part of the Gulbenkian Foundation Museum in Lisbon, while the small version is in a private collection in London under the auspices of Peter Nahum of the Leicester Galleries in London.⁸

From the time when Burne-Jones's two versions of *The Mirror of Venus* were exhibited at Grosvenor Gallery in 1877, these paintings have been highly praised for their affinity to and combination of classical and Renaissance styles. The writer Henry James, who reviewed the exhibit, remarked upon: "[Burne-Jones's] imagination, his fertility of invention, his exquisiteness of work, his remarkable gifts as a colourist."⁹ These paintings were always coveted by art dealers and collectors, as indicated by sale prices ranging from the 890 pounds paid by Graham to the 5,722 pounds paid by Gulbenkian.

⁴ One of the first literary biographers of Burne-Jones, Malcolm Bell, in his book *Sir Edward Burne-Jones, A Record and Review* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899), 39, 130 and 57, noted:

The year 1877 saw the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery in time for which several works which had been long in progress were carried to completion: both the pictures of *The Mirror of Venus*, the small one, begun as far back as 1867 which was sold at Mr. William Graham's sale for eight hundred and nineteen pounds, and the large one (48 x 78½ inches) begun in 1873, which was exhibited and sold more recently at Mr. Leyland's sale for three thousand five hundred and seventy guineas, and again in May 1898, for five thousand four hundred and fifty guineas.

⁵ Artist's sale, London, 3 April 1886, Lot 19, to Charles Butler, Esq., who bought the painting during this sale from a descendant of the William Graham family.

⁶ Joseph Ruston (1835-1897) was an English engineer and manufacturer.

⁷ He was a special art dealer for Frederick Richards Leyland (1831-1892), who was an important British shipowner and an avid art collector of Pre-Raphaelite paintings.

⁸ See <http://www.leicestergalleries.com/19th-20th-century-paintings/d/edward-coley-burne-jones/12639> (accessed December 4, 2018).

⁹ GBJ *Memorials*, 2:75. See also, Henry James, "The Picture Season in London, 1877," *Galaxy*, (August 1877), cited in John L. Sweeney, ed. *The Painter's Eye. Notes and Essays on the Pictorial Arts by Henry James* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1956), 144; and Kate Flint, "Edward Burne-Jones's *Mirror of Venus*: Surface and Subjectivity in the Art Criticism of the 1870s," in *After the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 152-64.



Figure 1. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Mirror of Venus*, 1865-66. Peter Nahum at The Leicester Galleries, London, UK.



Figure 2a. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Mirror of Venus*, 1873-77. (Inv. 273). Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, Portugal.



Figure 2b. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Mirror of Venus*, 1873-77, det. (Inv. 273). Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, Portugal.

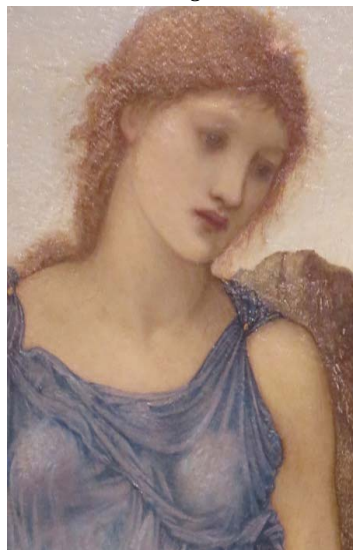


Figure 2c. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Mirror of Venus*, 1873-77, det. (Inv. 273). Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, Portugal.

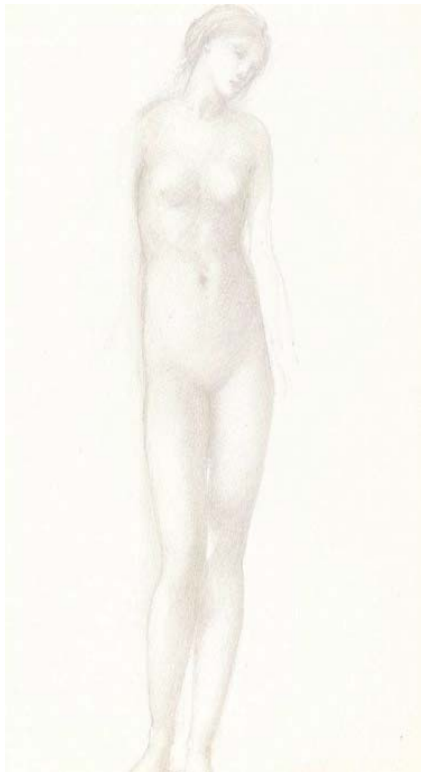


Figure 3. Edward Burne-Jones, *Study of Venus for The Mirror of Venus*, 1873-77, graphite. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Julius S. Held Collection, Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund (Inv. 1983.74.4).



Figure 4. Edward Burne-Jones, *Drapery Study*, pencil drawing, *The Mirror of Venus*, 1873-77. Harvard Museums/Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA, USA. Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop (Accession: 1943. 1815).



Figure 5. Edward Burne-Jones, *Study for The Mirror of Venus*, 1866, oil on canvas. Forbes Collection, UK.

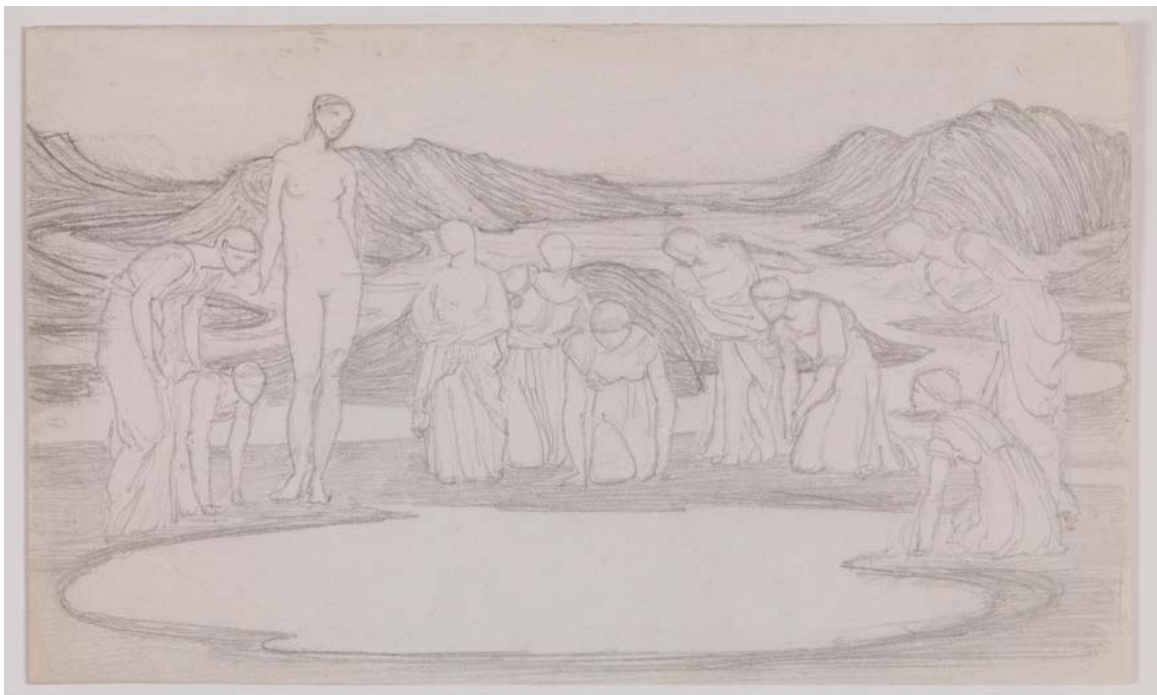


Figure 6. Edward Burne-Jones, *Study for The Mirror of Venus*, 1873-77, pencil drawing. Sotheby's July 13, 2017, London, Lot 3.

Burne-Jones composed numerous small and large drawings for this imagery. Some small studies are at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, while others are at the Tate Britain in London, the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, the Art Institute of Chicago, the National Gallery of

Art, Washington, DC, and Harvard Art Museums (Figures 3 and 4).¹⁰ Some large completed studies are part of private collections in London; others are from well-known collections such as the Forbes Collection and the Elisha Whittelsey Collection.¹¹ Perhaps the Forbes *Study for the Mirror of Venus* of 1866, oil on canvas, was for the small version (Figure 5), while the Sotheby pencil drawing of 1873-1877 (Figure 6)¹² and the charcoal drawing in a private collection in England of 1873-1877 were designed for the large version.¹³ Burne-Jones also designed engravings for the large version; one is displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City as part of the Elisha Whittelsey Collection.¹⁴

Iconography of the Painting

The painting was inspired by William Morris's stanza on "The Hill of Venus" from *Earthly Paradise*. The following short excerpt helps visualize the poetic and chromatic impression that Burne-Jones captured from the poem into the painting.

Therefore, O Venus, well may we
 Praise the green ridges of the sea
 O'er which, upon a happy day,
 Thou cam'st to take our shame away.
 Well may we praise the curdling foam
 Amidst the which thy feet did bloom,
 Flowers of the gods; the yellow sand
 They kissed atwixt the sea and land;
 The bee-beset ripe-seeded grass,
 Through which thy fine limbs first did pass;
 The purple-dusted butterfly.
 First blown against thy quivering thigh;
 The first red rose that touched thy side,
 And overblown and fainting died;
 The flickering of the orange shade,
 Where first in sleep thy limbs were laid;
 The happy day's sweet life and death,
 Whose air first caught thy balmy breath —
 Yea, all these things well praised may be,

¹⁰ The literature on these drawings is vast. See Debra Mancoff, "Unpainted Masterpieces: The Drawings of Edward Burne-Jones," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 32 (2005): 44-55, citing two drawings: Venus's arms and feet, Ref. 1920.1164; and drapery studies Ref. 1920.1151. For some drawings at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, see PDP.2003.1-4, PDP.2005.1-2; at the Tate Britain in London, No. 3982, No. 3982.10, No. 4350; at the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, WA 1908.2, WA 1908.9; and at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Accession NO. 571-4. For Burne-Jones's Sketchbook of Draperies at Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, see *Under Cover: Artists' Sketchbooks*, website Harvard Universities Art Museums, 2006, <https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/297573> (accessed December 4, 2018), Inv. 1943.1915.15.1-44, in particular, Draped Figure (1943.1815.15.8) which is similar to Venus's lower drapery area.

¹¹ Fortunée de Lisle, *Burne-Jones* (London: Methuen and Co., 1904), 181. There is also a monochrome study for the small version in the collection of George James Howard, 9th Earl of Carlisle (1843-1911), an English politician and painter. Burne-Jones drew his portrait, now in a drawing collection of the Delaware Art Museum. In turn, Lord Carlisle also composed a pencil drawing of the artist, Burne-Jones. For the images, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Howard,_9th_Earl_of_Carlisle (accessed December 5, 2018).

¹² Edward Burne-Jones, *Study for The Mirror of Venus*, 1873-1877, a pencil drawing, Sotheby's July 13, 2017, London, Lot 3 (Figure 4). See *The Forbes Collection of Victorian Pictures and Works of Art*, auction cat. 3 vols. (London: Christie's 2003), I:167-68.

¹³ Edward Burne-Jones, *Study for The Mirror of Venus*, 1873-1877, a charcoal drawing, in a Private Collection in England.

¹⁴ Edward Burne-Jones, *The Mirror of Venus*, 1873-1877, an etching on imitation velum by Felix Jasinski, at The Fine Art Society in London. A copy belongs to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City as part of the Elisha Whittelsey Collection, 1959, Accession Number: 59.592.20.

But with what words shall we praise thee —
 O Venus, O thou love alive,
 Born to give peace to souls that strive?¹⁵

The large version of Burne-Jones's *The Mirror of Venus* depicts an imaginary realm, an ethereal hilly landscape with a blue-brightening twilight sky without clouds.¹⁶ This vast landscape has been interpreted as both a physical and a metaphysical realm. Fortunée de Lisle referred to this natural large landscape as a "Peruginesque landscape,"¹⁷ while Christopher Wood called it a "lunar" landscape.¹⁸ Although Wood claimed that the painting is devoid of narrative or historical content, revealing only an aesthetic quest,¹⁹ other scholars consider the painting to contain a subject matter that addresses gender and psychological queries and also makes astronomical allusions.²⁰ This essay interprets Burne-Jones's *The Mirror of Venus* as conflating aesthetic, emblematic, mythological, and planetary symbolisms that are revealed in a cosmic landscape in perfect association with Venus's planetary and astral disposition.²¹

The background of *The Mirror of Venus* shows, in the far distance of the landscape, a seascape surface with muted blue and violet colors that reflect a celestial atmosphere (Figure 2a). This horizon light opens up with atmospheric colors of gold, blues, and violets, suggesting a *sfumato* tonality or a Leonardesque atmosphere. In his

¹⁵ See Florence S. Boos, ed., *William Morris's Earthly Paradise* (New York: Routledge, 2002), February: The Medieval Tale of the Hill of Venus, published in 1868-1870; and Florence S. Boos, "Ten Journeys to the Venusberg: Morris' Drafts for 'The Hill of Venus,'" *Victoria Poetry* 39, no. 4 (2001): 597-616. Another literary source of influence was Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909)'s poem *Laus Veneris*. See <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/pems/45295/laus-veneris> (accessed December 4, 2018).

¹⁶ I want to express my gratitude to Luisa Sampaio, Conservator and Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, for her assistance and information. From email communications on December 4, 2018, it is concluded that Burne-Jones's painting was never restored since its installation at the museum in 1969. Minor touchups were done in 1990 to treat some frail areas of the painting. However, there are no conservation records. In addition, the painting is signed and dated in the lower right hand side with a full name in caps, E.BURNE-JON-1875. It is a most unusual type of signature for Burne-Jones, since he usually signed his art with his initials EBJ. or E.B.J.

¹⁷ In 1904 Fortunée de Lisle described the painting as follows:

The Mirror of Venus represents a group of nine girls, who, wandering in a Peruginesque landscape, have come upon a forget-me-not-surrounded pool in whose clear surface, between the water-lily leaves, they behold their own beauty. Surprised and delighted, they are absorbed in self-contemplation—all but two, who gazing in the limpid depths, have seen, not themselves, but the reflection of the Goddess of Beauty herself, and, looking upwards in speechless adoration, see her standing among them, tall, stately and gentle as a Madonna.

See de Lisle, *Burne-Jones*, 101. For Pietro Perugino's image, see <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/research/the-baptism-of-christ> (accessed December 2, 2018).

¹⁸ Wood, *Burne-Jones*, 61.

¹⁹ Christopher Wood, *Victorian Painting* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1999), 162.

²⁰ See Flint, "Edward Burne-Jones's *Mirror of Venus*, 152-64, for an interpretation on the subject matter being female reflections or spectator gaze of feminine body. For a psychological reading, see Maria Theresa Benedetti and Gianna Piantoni, *Burne-Jones: dal pretafallismo al simbolismo* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1986), 16-17 and 166; and Fabian Fröhlich, "The Mirror of Venus," in *Edward Burne-Jones: Earthly Paradise*, exhibition catalogue at Staatsgalerie Stuttgart Museum (Stuttgart: Hatje/Cantz, 2010), 97-99. And see James Mussell, "Specular Reflections: John Brett and the Mirror of Venus," *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 17 (October 22, 2013), np, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.670> (accessed December 4, 2018), for astronomical implications.

²¹ In "Specular Reflections" Mussell discussed John Brett's astronomical theories. Brett was a fellow artist and astronomer like Burne-Jones, who presented at the Royal Astronomical Society in 1877 a controversial theory about the reflective nature of Venus as a "ball of molten metal enclosed in a glass." Both artists were interested in astronomy and cultivated this interest as visualized in their respective paintings, in particular Burne-Jones. See Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Edward Burne-Jones's The Planet Mars," *Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 15-27; Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Edward Burne-Jones's Luna: A Celestial Sphere," in *The Marriage of Astronomy and Culture: Theory and Method in the Study of Cultural Astronomy*, a special issue of *Culture and Cosmos* 21, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2017): 283-300; and Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Edward Burne-Jones's *The Planets*: Musical Spheres and Visions of a Benevolent Cosmos," *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* 7, no. 7 (July 2017): 1-57.

writings, Burne-Jones highly praised the atmospheric quality of Leonardo da Vinci's landscapes.²² The background also shows hills and a vast meadow area. In the middle ground of the painting and on the right side, a cluster of trees is evidence of the transformation of nature from winter to spring, since these trees are starting to bloom—a gentle reference to the approaching of a new season, spring.

Meanwhile, in the foreground, Burne-Jones unveiled most creatively the narrative of the scene. In this arid surface there is a magic lake or pond surrounded by blooming flowers, suggesting a mythical transformation. All around the pond the edge of the terrain is covered with blue flowers: periwinkle or perhaps *brunnera* (*brunnera macrophylla*), a type of blue spring flower. Other flowers and plants along with creeping myrtle cover the edge of the green grass around the pond. Waterlily pads float freely in the pond. Because it is not yet spring, the lily pads as yet have no flowers (in contrast to the painting of his fellow Pre-Raphaelite painter, Charles Allston Collins's *Convent Thoughts* of 1850 at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford,²³ where the waterlilies are visibly in bloom). The clear and crystalline surface of the water recalls a special type of water: a sacred spring. Burne-Jones's depiction of a gathering of Venus with her nymphs suggests an ancient sacred spring similar to Apollo, Minerva, and Pegasus's magical and mysterious springs.²⁴

Burne-Jones masterfully matched the colors of the females' garments to the colors of these flowers; a visual poetical touch inspired by Morris's colorful poem. The blue colors of the flowers, for example, are coordinated not only with the color of the sky but also and most of all with Venus's blue chemise. Burne-Jones has composed a visual tapestry where the woven threads are variations of colors and textures found in the myriad flowers surrounding the pond.

In *The Mirror of Venus*, next to Venus, there is an upright, blooming myrtle plant that she gently touches. In ancient Roman culture, the myrtle, an earthly plant, was represented as one of Venus's favorite plants because of its aroma and healthy symbolism (Virgil, *Eclogue* VII. 61-63). At the beginning of spring, around April 1, it was customary for Roman women to bathe themselves in water with myrtle scented and wear myrtle crowns on their heads in honor of Venus, the Goddess of Beauty and Mother of Love. Myrtle was also associated with love and possible marriage as well as with marital vows of fidelity.²⁵ Victorian folkloric belief held that a marriage would follow shortly after the blooming of the myrtle.²⁶ In *The Mirror of Venus*, although some of the muses of Venus are crowned with myrtle, others wear veils on their heads, attesting to their maiden nature.

The delicate and careful rendering of the figures in this painting indicates Burne-Jones's fascination for composing a beautiful image, which awakens in the viewer paradoxical feelings: one of spirituality and another of romanticism.²⁷ For the composition and treatment of figures in his painting, Burne-Jones drew from the literary and visual sources of classical and Renaissance traditions. His treatment of the figures recalls the classical motifs of the windblown and wet drapery captured in Phidias's *Isis*, a sculptural deity from the West Pediment of the Parthenon of 437 BCE, now at the British Museum in London—a museum he visited often (compare Figures

²² GBJ, *Memorials*, 2:20 and 273.

²³ For the image, see <https://www.ashmoleanprints.com/image/221379/charles-alston-collins-convent-thoughts> (accessed December 3, 2018).

²⁴ See Gary R. Varner, *Sacred Well: A Study in the History, Meaning, and Mythology of Holy Wells and Water* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009), Chapter 5; and Cheryl Straffon, *The Earth Goddess: Celtic and Pagan Legacy of the Landscape* (London: Blanford, 1997).

²⁵ James Hall, *Dictionary of Symbols in Art* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1974), 219.

²⁶ Alice M. Coats, *Garden Shrubs and Their Histories* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), section on *Myrthus*.

²⁷ De Lisle, *Burne-Jones*, 101.

7 and 2b).²⁸ Burne-Jones's linear and slender treatment of the female figure, in particular of Venus, reveals his appropriation of Botticelli's lyrical delicacy of Venus in his paintings of the *Primavera* and the *Birth of Venus* (compare Figures 8 with 3 and 2b). Italy was a country Burne-Jones visited often for artistic inspiration.²⁹



Figure 7. Phidias, *Isis or Deity*, West Pediment, Parthenon, 437 BCE, det. British Museum, London, UK.

Although the focus of this short essay is on Burne-Jones's large version of *The Mirror of Venus*, some comparative observations with the smaller version reveal interesting creative variations (compare Figures 1 and 2a). For example, in both versions Burne-Jones created a *nymphaeum* ruled by Venus. In the landscape of the large version, Burne-Jones employed a rich and brilliant palette, while in the small version he used an atmospheric tonality. In the large version, Burne-Jones elaborated on the flowers around and inside the water pond, which he did not do in the small version. Likewise, his treatment of the muses' poses and attire, and also their individual reactions when seeing their reflections in the water, is more complex in the larger version. In the small version, Venus is depicted as an angelic classical figure covered with a wet-drapery motif and a transparent golden veil. Her head is surrounded by a halo decorated with stars, alluding to her metaphysical nature as the Goddess of Beauty. She is also crowned with myrtle, alluding to her physical nature as the Goddess of Fertility. In the large version, Venus is depicted with transparent celestial-blue attire and her hairdo

²⁸ The pencil drawing of a draped figure (at the Harvard Museums/Fogg Museum is probably a study for Venus's drapery. See *Under Cover: Artists' Sketchbooks* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Universities Art Museums, 2006), Inv. 1943.1815. See also Benedetti and Piantoni, *Burne-Jones*, 166. The pencil drawings for the figure of Nimue (Vivien), signed and dated E.B.J. 1872 (Inv. 1993) and *Lavinia in the Palace of Latinus* of 1874 (Inv. 1927.01), both at the Fitzwilliam Museum, suggest designs or studies for the figure of Venus in *The Mirror of Venus*. Venus (Nimue or Lavinia) is visualized as an elongated and slender female figure enveloped in a classical veil where the treatment of the folds as a wet-drapery motif reveals and conceals her sensuality and her body shows affinity with Phidias's sculptures. Burne-Jones's drawings for *The Beguile of Merlin* of 1870-1874 at the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight, Manchester, and *The Planets* of 1866 at the Torre Abbey Museum, Torquay, show affinities with design for *The Mirror of Venus*.

²⁹ See Liana De Girolami Cheney, *Edward Burne-Jones's Mythical Paintings* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), Chapter on Botticelli and Burne-Jones; and GBJ, *Memorials*, 1:197 and 200, and 2:2, 25-27, 64-65, and 334. For the images, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primavera-\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primavera-(painting)) and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Birth_of_Venus (accessed December 4, 2018).

is ornamented with a bright star placed in the center of her head. This motif refers to yet another aspect of Venus: her planetary nature or astral divinity. In the small version, however, Venus wears a dual crown: a nimbus with stars and two garlands of myrtle. This evergreen plant motif alludes to Venus as a Goddess also of a terrestrial, earthly realm.

Burne-Jones's cultural symbolism reflects his professional knowledge of the ancient mythologies bequeathed to him by the classical tradition of his English cultural milieu, i.e., his training in the classics at Oxford and his visual familiarity with the extensive classical collection displayed at the British Museum, which he visited often.³⁰

Iconology of the Painting

In *The Mirror of Venus*, Burne-Jones focused on three symbolic aspects of the nature of Venus: an earthly and physical Goddess of Fertility; a divine and metaphysical Goddess of Love; and a celestial and astral Planet Venus (Figure 2a). His depiction of Venus presents the mythological deity as a symbol of ideal female form and the embodiment of physical beauty, which arouses love.³¹

Burne-Jones consulted illustrated manuscripts and emblematic books narrating romantic stories, such as Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Romance de la Rose* (1236-1276)³² and Francesco Colonna's *The Dream of Poliphilo* (1499).³³ In 1859 an illustrated 1500 edition of the *Romance de la Rose* was on display at the British Museum. Burne-Jones was so enamored with this tale that he would take friends, such as George Boyce (1826-1897), a Pre-Raphaelite watercolorist and art collector, to admire the saga of love because it represented the art of love as a discipline beset with difficulties and requiring the slow development of self-knowledge.³⁴ Also, from his classical studies at Oxford during his earlier years, Burne-Jones was familiar with this type of illuminated manuscript at the Bodleian Library.³⁵

The first part of the *Romance de la Rose* recounts a Lover's dream in which he enters into a magical garden with courtly virtues and notices the fountain where Narcissus fell in love with his own image (Figure 9).³⁶ This imagery refers to the spring on Mount Helicon that was created by the winged horse Pegasus when he struck a rock with his hoof so forcefully that it burst into a spring. Seeing his reflection in the spring,

³⁰ Waters and Harrison, *Burne-Jones*, 9-24.

³¹ The mirror as an attribute of Venus is conventionally associated with the subject of the Toilet of Venus, where the goddess admires her reflected beauty. See Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style," *Art Bulletin* 58, no. 3 (September 1976): 374-94, <http://www.collegeart.org/pdf/artbulletin/Art%20Bulletin%20Vol%2058%20No%203%20Cropper.pdf>. See Malcolm Bull, *Mirror of the Gods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 220, for the development of the iconography of the Toilet of Venus, originating in Venice because of the association of the city with the sea, commerce, and prostitution paralleling these aspects with Venus, born from the sea and Goddess of Love and Pleasure.

³² See John V. Fleming, *The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

³³ This book, published in 1499 by the Venetian Aldine Press, was considered the most beautiful book printed in the Renaissance. See Mark Samuel-Lasner, "Note on Burne-Jones's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*," *Pre-Raphaelite Review* 1 (1978): 110; Waters and Harrison, *Burne-Jones*, 81-83; L. Fierz-David, *The Dream of Poliphilo: The Soul in Love* (Dallas, TX: Spring Publishers, 1987); and Joscelyn Godwin, *The Strife of Love in a Dream* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), ed. and trans. English edition.

³⁴ Penelope Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), 68, n. 5.

³⁵ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Romance de la Rose*. MS Douce 195. Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK, for the image of Narcissus, see Folio 001v.

³⁶ See Albrecht Classen, *Water in Medieval Literature: An Ecocritical Reading* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 48, n. 81, on scholars who have dealt with the symbolism of the fountain; 49, n. 83, on scholars who studied the symbolism of water; and Claudia Sticher, *Wasser: Symbol des Lebens und des Glaubens* (Stuttgart: Katholische Biblewerk, 2014).

Narcissus fell in love with his own beauty.³⁷ The pool of Narcissus is a “quintessential mythical mirror symbol.”³⁸ The water in *The Mirror of Venus* functions symbolically like a mirror: it too has reflective properties. As well, in a mirror the real image is illusory, since it is the reverse of reality. Likewise, the water’s reflection also presents an imaginary or distorted vision of reality. Water as a mirror projects the physical traits of the person looking at the reflection of the water—the human face, an inanimate object, an abstraction of the self—but it also projects the human subliminal desires of love of self and the dream of love visualized in the reflection.³⁹ Burne-Jones employed the water pond reflection in the same way that the authors of the *Roman de la Rose* employed the water reflection as a mirroring instrument that provides “access to a new vision of the self or the soul of the self.”⁴⁰ Burne-Jones’s *The Mirror of Venus* was compositionally influenced by the enclosed water pool garden as well as by the symbolism of the love associated with water. The water, like the mirror, is a medium, the link between a human person and that person’s dreams.⁴¹ The visual projection provides the muses with two types of illumination: a visual and descriptive self-image, and insight into the desire of the soul seeking love.



Figure 8. Botticelli, *Venus*, det. *Birth of Venus*, 1485. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy.

³⁷ See Richard S. Caldwell, ed., *Hesiod's Theogony* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing/R. Pullins, Company, 1987), *Theogony*, 1-8.

³⁸ See Amy Kincaid, “Self, Psyche and Symbolism of the *Roman de la Rose*,”

http://psyartjournal.com/article/show/todeyself_psyche_and_symbolism_in_the_roman_d (accessed February 5, 2018).

³⁹ Ibid, section on *The Mirror*.

⁴⁰ Ibid, section on *The Mirror*.

⁴¹ J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York: Public Library, 1962), 201.



Figure 9. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Pool of Narcissus*, det. from *Romance de la Rose*. MS Douce 195, Folio 001v. Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK.

Francesco Colonna's Venetian Renaissance tome *The Dream of Poliphilo* (*Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*) is another fairy tale dealing with the tribulations of love and dreams.⁴² Burne-Jones owned a copy and praised it for its magical illustrations.⁴³ Colonna's *Poliphilo Resting at the Bank of the River* (Figure 10) recalls the imagery of Narcissus's pool in the *Romance de la Rose* (Figure 9) and also influenced the pose of one of the muses in Burne-Jones's *The Mirror of Venus* (compare Figures 11a and 11b with 9 and 10). Another woodcut from Colonna's book, *The Fountain of Adonis* (compare Figures 12 and 2a), likely influenced Burne-Jones's depiction of the gathering of the muses around a pond and some of their poses.

In *The Mirror of Venus*, the earthly landscape evokes the coming of the season of spring, the natural realm of Venus. The Earthly and Astral Goddess Venus has invited nine muses or nymphs to her realm. Upon arriving at the magic pond, they are surprised to see themselves reflected both physically (their bodies) and metaphysically (their essences) in the transparent pool of water. They realize that they are searching for beauty and love in the cosmic realm of Venus.

⁴² See Godwin, *The Strife of Love in a Dream*, Introduction.

⁴³ Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones*, 108, n. 5. Burne-Jones admired these woodcut illustrations and so he appropriated them for the imagery of *Cupid and Psyche*. See Waters and Harrison, *Burne-Jones*, 82, for a discussion of close parallels between Morris's *The Earthly Paradise* and Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*.



Figure 10. Francesco Colonna, *Poliphilo at the River* from *Dream of Poliphilo* (Venice: Aldine, 1499).



Figure 11a. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Mirror of Venus*, 1873-77. (Inv. 273), det. Reversed figure for comparison.
Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, Portugal.



Figure 11b. Edward Burne-Jones, *Study for The Mirror of Venus: Maiden*, 1866, pencil drawing. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK.

By selecting and depicting the classical myth of Venus's love—the reflection of her muses in a pool or mirror of water or a mirror of water, the young beautiful females posing for the viewer's gaze and arousal—Burne-Jones gave physicality to his aesthetic conception of female beauty, i.e., *furor artisticus*. He suggested that Venus not only personified the earthly realms of both Love and Fertility but also the spiritual realms embodying astrological and philosophical conceits.⁴⁴ His depiction embodied the sensory aspects both of seeing (the reflected image) and of touching (the flowers and the pond).

⁴⁴ Although the personifications of Vanity and Prudence traditionally are also shown looking into a mirror, Venus's attribute is associated with her reflective luminous power and not with negative or positive behavioral actions.



Figure 12. Francesco Colonna, *Venus at the Fountain of Adonis with the Muses*, from *Dream of Poliphilo* (Venice: Aldine, 1499).

The presence of Venus as the Goddess of Love recalls, as well, her association with her birth: she was born from water, the sea. Burne-Jones adroitly referred to this event by depicting a seascape in the distant background of *The Mirror of Venus*, while in the foreground Venus transmits love to her muses through their reflections in the pond. Venus's pool of love contrasts with Narcissus's pool of love. His love is self-contained and only reflective of his self-love,⁴⁵ while Venus's pool of love expands to all her lovers' souls—those of her muses and her followers of love. The reflections of the muses relate to their desires and dreams about love. Perhaps another reason why there are no flowers on the waterlily pads is because their dreams are as yet unfulfilled, akin to waiting for flowers to blossom in springtime. The muses' corporeal wishes and intellectual fantasies merge into their reflections in the realm of Venus.

Since Antiquity, the image of Venus in literature and in the visual arts has been defined in terms of physical beauty. In Latin the word *Venus* (*phosphorous*) meant "the luminous one." This appellation alludes to the dual

⁴⁵ In the *Roman de la Rose*, the pool of Narcissus is a symbolic spiritual awakening, while Venus's pool possesses healing powers that grant the muses the ability to love the self as well as others because their multiple images are reflected in the pool. See Martin A. Danahay, "Mirrors of Masculine Desire: Narcissus and Pygmalion in Victorian Representations," *Victorian Poetry* 32 (1994): 35-53, esp. 46-47; and C.G. Jung, *On the Nature of the Psyche*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge Classics, 2001).

nature of Venus as both a terrestrial and a celestial goddess.⁴⁶ In conventional imagery, Venus holds a mirror in order to see her luminous beauty, as visualized in the third century CE Roman mosaic now at the Musée National du Bardo in Tunisia (Figure 13). The classical representations depicting her holding a mirror (*speculum*) convey two meanings: the physicality of the object (mirror) and the abstract allusion of mirroring (the reflection); hence a self-reference to Venus's dual nature. She magically connects her luminous nature (reflection of light) with the astral refraction as a source of life, love.



Figure 13. Roman mosaic, *Venus*, 3rd Century CE. Musée National du Bardo, Tunisia.

In the *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, Georgiana MacDonald recounted how fascinated her husband was with the study of astronomy. She wrote: “He kept astronomical books at his bedside, and often turned to them when unable to sleep.”⁴⁷ She described him saying: “I terrified myself in the night with more astronomy.”⁴⁸ In another passage, Georgiana repeated: “Astronomy had a great fascination for him [Burne-Jones]—almost a

⁴⁶ See Marsilio Ficino, *Symposium*, I:3, in *Opera Omnia*, 2 vols. (Basel: Petri, 1561); Sears Reynolds Jayne, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (Washington, DC: Spring Publications, 1985), 116-17; and for a study on the impact of Marsilio Ficino's Neoplatonism and Italian Renaissance art, see Liana Cheney, *Botticelli's Neoplatonic Images* (Potomac, MD: Scripta Humanistica, 1993).

⁴⁷ See GBJ, *Memorials*, 2:304.

⁴⁸ See GBJ, *Memorials*, 1:58.

terrible one.”⁴⁹ One year after his trip to Italy in 1871, Burne-Jones composed a list of the paintings he was working on, mentioning that he had made “an oil picture of *Luna*, in tones of blue.”⁵⁰ After the death of his friend and soul mate, William Morris, Burne-Jones decided to delve further into astronomy. He stated: “So I’ve had to take to my astronomy again.”⁵¹

For Burne-Jones, Venus as a female symbol partakes of celestial and terrestrial faculties which are imparted in the natural and divine realms, as visualized in Italian Renaissance illuminated manuscripts, in particular in Cristoforo de Predis’s *Venus* in the *De Sphaera* of 1470, at the Biblioteca Estense in Modena (Figure 14). For example, in the celestial zone, Venus is associated with the Sky Goddess Luna (Moon), who controls the vicissitudes of the sea cycles as well as the natural female cycles. As a planet or sphere, Venus expresses the active instinctual desire for pleasure and love, because “love was born on the birthday of Venus.”⁵² As a terrestrial planet, Venus rules the arts and those individuals who master them: as a heavenly planet, with the assistance of the zodiac signs of Libra and Taurus, Venus guides the art of beauty and love. Hence, in de Predis’s imagery, she is depicted nude, holding a mirror, with flowers and jewelry.⁵³ In *The Mirror of Venus*, Burne-Jones cleverly substituted or transferred the traditional attributes assigned to the mythological figure of Venus to his Venus, i.e., the mirror with its reflective powers becomes a pool of water in which her nymphs can see their own reflections. The flowers held by Venus in de Predis’s work now ornament the borders of the pond. Her commonly worn jewelry of pearls becomes a single star crowning her hairdo, which honors her terrestrial royal birth as well as her celestial divinity. The luminous star Burne-Jones bestowed upon his Venus’s head is a symbol of her planetary light and thereby connects her with ancient cosmological, philosophical, and psychological implications.

Burne-Jones’s early studies of the Seasons and the Planets (Figures 15 and 16a) inspired the creation of *The Mirror of Venus*.⁵⁴ The astral imagery of Burne-Jones’s *Venus* from the *Planets* cycle wonderfully reveals his pursuit of art and beauty (Figures 16a and 16b). For his cartoon on the *Planet Venus*, Burne-Jones wrote a Latin inscription in the scroll above the imagery, *Stella Candida Veneris*, identifying the planet Venus as a brilliant star (Figure 16b).⁵⁵ The heading is the *clavis interpretendi* for the imagery. In a starry sky, a young and

⁴⁹ See GBJ, *Memorials*, 2:304.

⁵⁰ See GBJ, *Memorials*, 2:30. *Luna* is an oil painting on canvas (101 x 71 cm; 39¾ x 28 in.) and signed with initials “EBJ” at the lower left. Alexander Ionides (1840-1898) owned the painting. Before his death it was sold anonymously to Christie’s London, 1 March 1897, lot 121, then reacquired by Christie’s London in 1898 and sold as lot 21 on 15 May 1902 to Agnew R.H. Benson (1839-1912). The painting was eventually purchased and was part of the Collection Yves Saint Laurent et Pierre Bergé in Paris, who sold it to Christie’s (lot/sale 1209), 23-25 February 2009, Paris. See <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/-paintings/-sir-edward-coley-burne-jones-bart-ara-rws-5157409-details.aspx> 2009. After the 2009 Christie’s sale, the painting became part of a private collection. The description of the painting, the size (101 x 71 cm. (39¾ x 28 in.)), materials (oil on canvas), and the signature with the monogram of “EBJ” on the lower left of the painting attest to and coincide with the description of the painting mentioned by GBJ, *Memorials*, 2:30.

⁵¹ See GBJ, *Memorials*, 2:303.

⁵² Jayne, *Marsilio Ficino*, 120. Ficino goes on elaborating on the nature of love as well as passions, stating: “Love follows and worships Venus and is seized by a desire for the beautiful, since Venus herself is very beautiful.”

⁵³ Solange de Mailley Nesle, *Astrology: History, Symbols, and Signs* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1985), 134-35.

⁵⁴ Unfortunately, nothing remains of the drawings or studies for the *Seasons* cycle. The *Planets* cycle is a derivative creation from the compositions of the *Seasons* cycle but focusing on astral sovereignty. There are cartoon drawings of the *Planets* because they were to be transformed into strained glass panels. See A. C. Sewter, *The Stained Glass of William Morris and His Circle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 208; and Cheney, “Edward Burne-Jones’s *The Planets*, 1-57.

⁵⁵ See Bell, *Edward Burne-Jones: A Record and Review*, 102-02, for a discussion of four designs on the *Seasons* cycle as an earlier conception for the *Planets* cycle.

beautiful female transits the heavens while riding on a bull and holding scales.⁵⁶ The constellations of Libra and Taurus, symbolized by the bull and scales, guide the planetary vicissitudes. Venus is dressed in classical and Renaissance attire with the motif of “wet drapery” modeling her body. A gold and tooled nimbus surrounds her head, creating an aura of divinity.

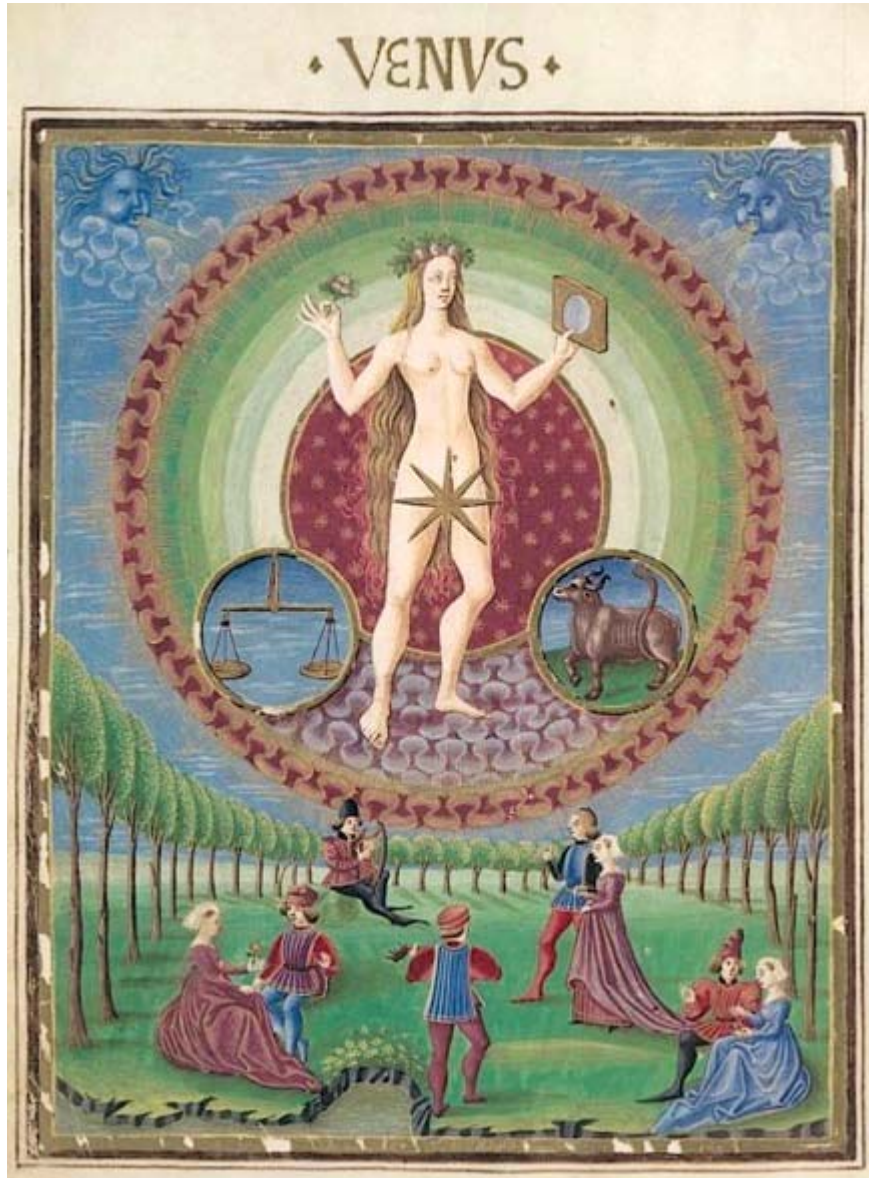


Figure 14. Cristoforo de Predis, *Venus*, 1470, det. f.9v from *De Sphaera*, Biblioteca Estense, Modena, Italy.

In the cartoon, Venus is also crowned with a large hairband that holds together her tresses and accentuates her forehead, which is decorated with a seashell and a pearl. These aquatic attributes relate to Venus's divine

⁵⁶ In their astral navigation they both touch the earth: both the bull and Venus have one foot resting on earth while the other is suspended on air, thereby alluding to their dual roles as heavenly and earthly creatures. See Cheney, Edward Burne-Jones's *The Planets*, 1-57.

birth from the sea.⁵⁷ They also allude to the terrestrial nature of the deity born from the fertility and union of the sea and the sky.⁵⁸ Venus lifts a mirror to admire her reflection. The mirror alludes to the luminosity that Venus radiates as an astral and physical form.⁵⁹ As a symbol of natural and physical luminosity, Venus gazes at the mirror to observe her dual nature: her physical beauty (*venustas*) as a female, and her spiritual beauty (love) as a deity.⁶⁰ In *The Mirror of Venus*, Burne-Jones visualized this conceit by adorning Venus's head with a star and by depicting a seascape with the atmospheric light in the background of the painting (Figures 2a and 2c).⁶¹

In the painting, Burne-Jones has conflated the physical beauty of the landscape with the metaphysical beauty of the feminine form—Venus and the nymphs. They are dressed *all'antica*, each reacting differently when viewing their reflections in the water, while Venus in her contrapposto stance and classical attire ponders the moment. In visualizing this artistic suspension, Burne-Jones has created what the poet Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1778) referred to as a “pregnant moment” in his description of the marble statue of the *Laocoön*

⁵⁷ See also Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, trans. Barbara F. Sessions (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), 258-62; and Jean Seznec, “Le manuels mythologiques et leur diffusion en Angleterre à la fin de la Renaissance,” *Mélanges d'histoire d'archéologie* 50 (1953): 276-92. The emblematic tradition was also an important artistic and literary source for Burne-Jones, in particular, Otto Vaenius's *Amorum emblemata* (Antwerp: Henrik Swingen, 1608, English trans. Richard Verstegan, 1615-20); Vincenzo Cartari, *Le Image de i Dei degl'Antichi* (Venice: Francesco Marcolini, 1556), http://emblems.let.uu.nl/v1608_introduction.html (accessed December 4, 2018); and Garrett A. Sullivan, et al., *The Encyclopedia of English Renaissance Literature*, 3 vols. (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 3:1011, for emblematic influences in the art and literature of Otto Vaenius or Otto van Veen. For Cartari's English translation, see Stephen Batman's *The Golden Booke of the Leaden Gods* (London: Thomas Marshe, 1577), cited in Robin Patrick Healey, *Italian Literature Before 1900 in English Translation: An Annotated Bibliography 1929-2008* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 456, entry 7618. See also John Mulryan, *Vincenzo Cartari, Images of the Gods of the Ancients: The First Italian Mythographer* (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2012), 406-07, for the influence of Cartari's *Images* in Pre-Raphaelite art and poetry, in particular, p. xxviii. Mulryan noted that Dante Gabriel Rossetti employed Cartari's *Images* in his art because his father owned a copy. Today this copy is located in the Avery Library at Columbia University (edition from Venice, 1647, call #A7760 C242). Mulryan also noted that William Blake's imagery was influenced by Cartari's Greek and Roman mythology. Burne-Jones trained in the classics at Oxford and, with the artistic connections of Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites, undoubtedly had knowledge of Cartari's planetary conceits and text.

⁵⁸ See Hesiod, *Theogony*, ed. Glenn W. Most (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 2007), lines 153-206, esp. 173; and William Sale “Aphrodite in the Theogony,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 92 (1961): 508-21.

⁵⁹ See J.C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 106; and Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Blackwell, 1994), 131, 464, 924.

⁶⁰ *Venustas* is a complex concept about beauty based on Vitruvius's theory of beauty and delight in architecture. Venus as a planetary star becomes symbol of light and beauty embodying the qualities of *venustas*. See Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, ed. Morris Hickey Morgan (New York: Dover, 1960), 259; Anthony Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 274-75; Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450-1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 15-18; and David Hanser, ed., *Fimitas, Utilitas, Venustas: Architecture and Society* (Dubuque, IA: Kendal Hunt, 1984).

⁶¹ In Antiquity the planetary transit of Venus was viewed as formed by two different planets or stars: Vesperus, an Evening Star; and Eosphorus, a Morning Star. See Stefano Zuffi and Alessandra Novellone, *Arte e Zodiaco: Storia, misteri e interpretazioni dei segni zodiacali nei secoli* (Rome: Sassi, 2009), 67. Burne-Jones included them separately in his drawings for the *Planets* cycle. In 1898 he also completed, for the tale of Cupid in Psyche, drawings and paintings for *The Passing of Venus* based on Petrarch's poems about the triumph of Love and Baccio Baldini's *The Planets and Their Children* (e.g., *The Transit of Venus*), a collection of Renaissance engravings about planetary influences. See Gwendolyn Trottein, *Les Enfants de Venus: Art et Astrologie à la Renaissance* (Paris: Lagune, 1993), 90-113. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City has a study in brush, gouache, and metallic paint on cardboard, while the Tate Britain in London has other drawings. These studies were used by Merton Abbey Tapestries Works to weave two tapestries in wool, silk, and linen in 1908 and 1922. One was destroyed by fire and the second is at the Detroit Institute of Arts. For the images, see <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/340951> and <https://www.dia.org/art-collection/object/passing-venus-35754> (accessed December 5, 2018).

and his Sons.⁶² This aesthetic pause is a suspended moment in space and time in art, where the artist achieves the most poignant outcome in form and meaning for the viewer to grasp: the essence of the artwork. Nothing needs to be added or deleted in the imagery for the viewer to capture its beauty and meaning.



Figure 15. Edward Burne-Jones, *Spring, Study of the Seasons*, 1864, drawing. Private Collection, UK.

⁶² In 170-50 BCE the Rhodes sculptors Hagesandros, Athanadoros, and Polydoros carved the original marble group. A copy was discovered in the Baths of Trajan in Rome in 1506, now on view at the Vatican Museum, Vatican City; see https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/bd/Laocoon_and_His_Sons.jpg/780px-Laocoon_and_His_Sons.jpg (accessed December 3, 2018). See Sarah Lippert, *Space and Time in Artistic Practice and Aesthetics: The Legacy of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing* (London: IB Tauris, 2017).



Figure 16a. Edward Burne-Jones, *Planet Venus*, 1866-70, cartoon. Torquay Museum of Art, Torquay, UK.



Figure 16b. Edward Burne-Jones, *Venus*, det. *Planet Venus*, 1866-70, cartoon. Torquay Museum of Art, Torquay, UK.

Borrowing as well from Plato's conceit on *furor poeticus* (an intellectual inspiration), Burne-Jones revealed the frenzy of the artist, *furor artisticus* (the creative process) in the conception of this unusual imagery and theme. Here, I am associating Burne-Jones's creative inspiration with the Platonic and Renaissance Neoplatonic concept of *furor poeticus*, or poetic inspiration, which derives from the writings of the Greek philosopher Plato (d. 348 BCE) that were later translated and commented upon by Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), an Italian Renaissance physician and philosopher. Ficino explained in his Orphic writings and in his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (7:14) that there are "four divine furors: first poetical, then mythical, third prophetic and amorous fourth" ("Quatuor ergo divini furoris sunt speties. Primus quidem poeticus furor, alter mysterialis, tertius vaticinium, amatorious affectus est quartus").⁶³

For Platonic philosophers (Plato, Plotinus, and Ficino), the planetary gods and goddesses represented poetic analogies of celestial and psychological functions.⁶⁴ They described the operational principles of action, heart, and mind as psyche or persona with emotions, desires, and thoughts orbiting the luminaries of the self and ego. Burne-Jones employed these classical metaphors to express his artistic quest for a canon of art. His aesthetic quest is reminiscent of that of the Italian Renaissance aesthetics or Neoplatonism. In this philosophy, "beauty consists of a certain charm [grace]" ("pulchritudo vero gratia quaedam est"), as something spiritual that transcends sensual experience and makes us long for the origin of what we perceive.⁶⁵ A visual example in Florentine Renaissance art is Botticelli's *Primavera* of 1475, at the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, which emphasizes this spiritual concept of ideal beauty rather than the physical reproduction of beauty as it exists in nature. Favoring this concept, Burne-Jones elaborated on the Neoplatonic aesthetic ideal by creating an idealized image that combines beauty and arouses love: "Only this is true, that beauty is very beautiful and softens, and comforts, and inspires, and rouses, and lifts up, and never fails," Burne-Jones said.⁶⁶ This notion is at the heart of the paradigm of the British Aesthetic Movement.⁶⁷

Coda and Conclusion

Under the influence of his kindred spirit artist and friend, William Morris, Burne-Jones appropriated Morris's curvilinear and decorative designs, adding his own colorful effects for the composition of *The Mirror of Venus*. As a member of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Burne-Jones emphasized the aesthetic quest to

⁶³ See Michael J. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 41-67; Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, 3 vols. (New York: Ginko, 1985), 1:14-20, in particular Marsilio Ficino's letter to Peregrino Agli on *De divino furore*; and Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Giorgio Vasari's *Fine Arts* from the *Vite* of 1550," *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* 7 (February, 2017):162.

⁶⁴ Burne-Jones was likely aware of Walter Pater's philosophical writings, particularly *Plato and Platonism* (London: MacMillan, 1893), 241-44, where Pater discussed Plato's notions of Beauty and Nature. See also Robin Spencer, *The Aesthetic Movement: Theory and Practice* (London: Studio Vista Ltd., 1972), 37; and Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Burne-Jones: Mannerist in an Age of Modernism," *Pre-Raphaelite Art in Its European Context*, ed. Susan Casteras and Alicia Faxon (Cranbury, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, Associated University Press, 1995), 103-16. Burne-Jones's *Venus* manifests an assimilation of Renaissance Neoplatonism—the Christianization of pagan myths or the secularization of Christian religion—with classical astral constructions.

⁶⁵ See Davide Stimili, *The Face of Immortality: Physiognomy and Criticism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 29, nn. 116 and 118, citing Ficino's Second Oration from his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*. See also Ficino, Fifth Speech, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3 on *Plato's Symposium*; and Joscelyn Godwin, *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes, 2002), 32, 36, on the planets and their association with the cult of Venus.

⁶⁶ See William Gaunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), 152, and Spencer, *The Aesthetic Movement*, 37.

⁶⁷ See Lynn Federle Orr and Stephen Calloway, eds., *The Cult of Beauty: The Victorian Avant-Garde 1860-1900* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2012).

compose beautiful art for “art’s sake,” camouflaging the conceit of meaning.⁶⁸ Burne-Jones searched for a classical metaphor to express his dreams and existence, i.e., a pursuit for a canon of art that results in his adage: *To love beauty*.⁶⁹

Hence Burne-Jones established through the Arts and Crafts Movement or the British Aesthetic Movement the artistic roots—in terms of curved lines, richness in coloration, and androgynous figure treatment—that were emulated by Art Nouveau artists.⁷⁰ He created ambiguity between the idealized and real forms of feminine beauty, between the realms of real and the dream, and proposed a new type of symbolism which is revealed through the painted image but whose conceit is for the viewer’s subconscious to interpret. This is another artistic paradox where the subject matter and its interpretation vacillate between the ambiguity of real and imaginary worlds, ancient and modern times, tangible and ethereal experiences, and conscious versus unconscious states of being—as can be seen in the work of Art Nouveau artists, e.g., Alphonse Mucha’s *Dance* of 1898, a poster in a Private Collection;⁷¹ Élisabeth Sonrel’s *Spring*, 1900, a postcard in a Private Collection in France;⁷² Gustav Klimt’s *Portrait of Emile Louise Flöge* of 1902, at the Historical Museum of the City of Vienna in Austria;⁷³ and Aubrey Beardsley’s *Venus* of 1895, a pen and ink drawing for the frontispiece of *Tannhauser*, at the Higgins Art Gallery in Bedford, UK.⁷⁴ In his art, Burne-Jones continued to question the various aspect of physical beauty versus intangible beauty; this dilemma also concerned artists of the Art Nouveau and Symbolist movements, as seen in Jean Delville’s *The Death of Orpheus* of 1893, at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Brussels, Belgium;⁷⁵ and *The Silver Tiara* of 1911, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, by Fernand Khnopff, an artist-friend of Burne-Jones.⁷⁶

In *The Mirror of Venus*, Burne-Jones combined his personal quest for the narrative while paralleling the British Aesthetic Movement in his artistic pursuit of beauty. For him beauty was a visual necessity, a code to live by; one of his chief aims was to live beautifully and be surrounded by beautiful things. He visualized his definition about the meaning of a painting: “I mean by a picture a beautiful, romantic dream of something that never was, never will be—in a light better than any light that ever shone—in a land no one can define or

⁶⁸ See Gaunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy*, 152; and Spencer, *The Aesthetic Movement*, 37.

⁶⁹ Gaunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy*, 152, and Spencer, *The Aesthetic Movement: Theory and Practice*, 37.

⁷⁰ See Gabriele Fahr-Becker, *Art Nouveau* (Cologne: H.F. Ullmann, 2015).

⁷¹ For the image, see

https://www.allposters.com/-sp/Dance-Posters_i2914719_.htm?AID=96280778-&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIRNL8k7-H3wIVmEsNCh0GtASXEAQYBSABEgKcy_D_BwE (accessed December 5, 2018); and see also Philippe Thiébaud, *Mucha et l’Art Nouveau* (Paris: Éditions du Chêne, 2018).

⁷² For the image, see <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/111675265729458870/?lp=true> (accessed December 4, 2018); and see also Gérald Schurr and Pierre Cabanne, eds., *Dictionnaire des Petits Maîtres de la peinture, 1820-1920*, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions de l’Amateur, 1996-2003), 2:422-23.

⁷³ For the image, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emilie_Louise_Fl%C3%B6ge#/media/File:Gustav_Klimt_049.jpg; and for an interpretation on the meaning of the painting, see gov.au/vienna/assets/pdf_file/0007/119392/ViennaArtandDesign.pdf (accessed December 4, 2018).

⁷⁴ For the image, see

<https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-aubrey-beardsley-frontispiece-for-venus-and-tannhauser-160100925.html> (accessed December 4, 2018). See also Linda A. Zatlin, “Aubrey Beardsley and the Shaping of Art Nouveau,” in *Bound for the 1890s: Essays on Writing and Publishing in Honor of James G. Nelson*, ed. Jonathan Allison (Buckinghamshire: Rivendale Press, 2007), np.

⁷⁵ For the image, see <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/jean-delville-the-death-of-orpheus-orphee-mort> (accessed December 4, 2018). See also Brendan Cole, *Jean Delville: Art Between Nature and the Absolute* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Press, 2015).

⁷⁶ For the image, see <https://www.wikiart.org/en/fernand-khnopff/the-silver-tiara-1911> (accessed December 4, 2018). See also Jeffery Howe, *The Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff* (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1982); and Wildman and Christian, *Edward Burne-Jones*, 33-36.

remember, only desire—and the forms divinely beautiful—and then I wake up.”⁷⁷

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⁷⁷ See David Cecil, *Visionary and Dreamer: Two Poetic Painters, Samuel Palmer and Edward Burne-Jones* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 143, quoting from a letter Burne-Jones wrote to William Morris.

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