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**VENUS IN MYTHOLOGY, ASTROLOGY AND POETRY: What does the  
portrayal of Venus reflect about the experience of love in Western culture?**

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## **STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY**

I declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to the University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

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<b><u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u></b>	<b><u>PAGE</u></b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>MESOPOTAMIA: THE LAND BETWEEN TWO RIVERS</b>	<b>7</b>
The Star Goddess Inanna	7
The Venus tablets of Amisaduqa	8
Ištar: who ‘loves the king’	11
Astarté: war and death; love and death	12
<b>APHRODITE OF GREECE: THE CLASSICAL AGE</b>	<b>14</b>
Aphrodite: morning and evening star ( <i>Phosphorus and Hesperus</i> )	14
Golden Aphrodite: Χρυσή Αφρογενεία ( <i>Chrysē Aphrogeneia</i> )	15
The Goddess of Love emerges	17
Sappho’s Intimate Aphrodite	20
Aphrodite and the Pre-Socratics	23
‘Dread Aphrodite’: Αθηροδιτε Μελαινις ( <i>Aphroditē Melaina</i> )	26
Plato’s Heavenly Aphrodite/Common Aphrodite	28
Philosophers after Plato	33
<b>APHRODITE INTO VENUS: THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD</b>	<b>35</b>
The Gnostic and the Orphic Texts	35
The Roman Venus	39
The Astrologers’ Venus	41
Aphrodite/Venus and the poets of the Hellenistic period	47
Venus in Virgil: loving mother of Aeneas	48
Horace’s Venus: Cruel Mother of Desires ( <i>Mater saeva Cupidinum</i> )	50
Ovid’s Venus: Mother of Tender Loves ( <i>Tenerorum Mater Amorum</i> )	52
Apuleius’ Jealous Venus	57
Plotinus’ Aphrodite: Soul - the Mother of Love	58
<b>VENUS in THE ‘DARK AGES’</b>	<b>59</b>
The Goddess into Allegory	59
Venus of the poets	61
The Astrology	62
<b>THE NEXT RETURN – THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>67</b>

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation explores the experience of love associated with the planet Venus and its allied goddesses, from a diverse range of cultures and literatures. It asks whether, in spite of this diversity, there is evidence of continuity of themes.

It begins with the ‘Venus Tablets of Amisaduqa’ in mid-second millennium B.C.E. Mesopotamia, and continues with an investigation into the portrayal of the Greek goddess of Love, Aphrodite, in the mythology, literature and philosophy of Classical Greece. From there follows an exploration of the Hellenistic Venus and her portrayal in the texts of the writers and astrologers of the Roman period. The investigation concludes with a glance at the medieval period and the emergence of the ‘allegorical’ Venus in the ‘courtly love’ poetry and in the astrology of the time.

The study includes a variety of texts from these cultures, eras and literatures. It reflects on the continuity of the theme – in spite of the diversity of cultures and period of time – of the tension between the experience of beauty and love, and subsequent longing and loss, in the portrayal of Venus.

A review of available texts is included in this study, from the cuneiform tablets of the Babylonians to the literature of the ancient Greek and later Hellenistic Latin writers, finally pointing to the vernacular poems of Medieval Europe. The texts of poets, philosophers and astrologers who have related to Venus, as goddess or planet of love, are included. Primary sources, in translation, have been used in general, but I have translated some fragments of the Greek and Latin when necessary. The critical appraisal of secondary texts are from the late nineteenth century to the present time.

**VENUS IN MYTHOLOGY, ASTROLOGY AND POETRY: What does the portrayal of Venus reflect about the experience of love in Western culture?**

**INTRODUCTION**

Certain acts dazzle us and light up blurred surfaces if our eyes are keen enough to see them in a flash, for the beauty of a living thing can be grasped only fleetingly. To pursue it during its changes leads us inevitably to the moment when it ceases, for it cannot last a lifetime. And to analyze it, that is, to pursue it in time with the sight and imagination, is to view it in its decline, for after the thrilling moment in which it reveals itself it diminishes in intensity.

Jean Genet's 'Miracle of the Rose'<sup>1</sup>

In the Western world, the human experience of love and beauty has been symbolised by Venus since around the eighth century B.C.E.<sup>2</sup> This mighty goddess had antecedents in Mesopotamia, where the attributes of love and beauty had been connected to the planet Venus from the second millenium B.C.E.

This investigation begins with Mesopotamia and the goddesses of love and war associated with the planet Venus in that civilisation. Venus appears as both a morning and evening star; the first presaging the light to come, and the second presaging the dark of night. The earliest records from Mesopotamia recognise that both the morning and evening star are the same celestial body. A central story in the mythology of the goddess Inanna – one of Venus' earliest deities – has to do with her passionate love of the shepherd Dumuzi, her journey to the underworld, her return to the day world, and the loss of her beloved. The connection between love and beauty and loss and longing, that are associated with Venus from such an early period, will be explored in texts related to her in other cultures and periods.

An exploration of the Greek Aphrodite as Goddess of Love and Beauty, through the perceptions of poets and philosophers from the eighth century B.C.E. through Plato and

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<sup>1</sup> Genet, Jean, *The Miracle of the Rose*, (London: Penguin Paperbacks, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Seltman, Charles, *The Twelve Olympians*, (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1952), [hereafter Seltman, *Olympians*], pp. 78-91.

the late classical period, will follow. The texts will be examined for evidence of the theme of beauty and love being associated with loss and longing. In the Hellenistic period, the appearance of the Goddess of Love in the early astrological texts, the Hermetic mystery texts, and the Roman poetry of the era, will be explored for indication of the theme and any possible resolutions will be discussed. The problems shown through the texts of this period, dealing with the human passion for what Venus signifies, will be deliberated. This investigation will conclude with a brief analysis of the appearance of the allegorical Venus in the 'courtly love' poetry of the twelfth century as well as an examination of the astrology of that time.

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the images associated with Venus, in texts, and to investigate whether love and beauty are consistent themes in the portrayal and if loss and longing are an invariable part of it.

## MESOPOTAMIA: THE LAND BETWEEN TWO RIVERS

### The Star Goddess Inanna

We do not know how it began, but at some point in the development of human consciousness meaningful connections were made between natural events and human activity. People living amongst plants and animals and wind and rain tended to relate to each particular event in such a way that they associated spirits, or gods, with each aspect of nature.<sup>3</sup> Early Babylonian religion is thought to have been similar to other ancient religions in that there were innumerable deities, each a dimension of some aspect of nature and/or human activity. Some became ‘gods’ and were similar to humans, only more powerful; a few became the ‘Great Gods’ and ruled the universe; some became associated with the planets and stars.<sup>4</sup>

It was here in Mesopotamia – ‘The Land Between Two Rivers’- where the moving patterns of celestial bodies were recorded as significant for human beings, some thousands of years ago. By around 2000 B.C.E. each of the planets had a name, and there is evidence that they were worshipped as gods and goddesses. One of the pieces of evidence is that certain deities were represented by the sign for ‘star’ on the most ancient of the pre-historic cuneiform tablets.<sup>5</sup>

Towards the end of the third millenium B.C.E. Inanna was venerated as the planet Venus. Paul Friedrich tells us that she was ‘Inanna of the Dawn’ and ‘The lady of the Evening Star.’<sup>6</sup> The following hymn shows something of the devotion, beliefs and perhaps even the rites of the people who venerated her as the evening star.

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<sup>3</sup> For explorations of how such cultures may have experienced the world see Levy-Bruhl, Lucien, *Carnets*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949), pp. 77-78; and also Tambiah, Stanley Jeyarajy, *Magic, science, religion and the scope of rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 84-86.

<sup>4</sup> Ness, Lester, *Astrology and Judaism in Late Antiquity*, (Michigan: A Bell and Howell Company, 1997), [hereafter Ness, *Astrology in Antiquity*], p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ness, *Astrology in Antiquity*, p. 5; quoting Dhorme, Edouard, *Les religions de Babylonie et Assyrie*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich, Paul, *The Meaning of Aphrodite* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), [hereafter, Friedrich, *Aphrodite*], p. 14.

The planet Venus and the goddess associated with her are already connected to joy and love:

At the end of the day, the Radiant Star, the Great Light that fills the sky,  
 The Lady of the Evening appears in the heavens.  
 The people in all the lands lift their eyes to her.  
 The men purify themselves; the women cleanse themselves.  
 The ox in his yoke lows to her.  
 The sheep stir up the dust in their fold.  
 All the living creatures of the steppe,  
 The four footed creatures of the high steppe  
 The lush gardens and orchards, the green reeds and trees,  
 The fish of the deep and the birds in the heavens -  
 My Lady makes them all hurry to their sleeping places.  
 The living creatures and the numerous people of Sumer kneel  
 before her.  
 Those chosen by the old woman prepare great platters of food  
 and drink for her.  
 The Lady refreshes herself in the land.  
 There is great joy in Sumer.  
 The young man makes love with his beloved.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Venus tablets of Amisaduqa**

According to Nicholas Campion, the Mesopotamians inherited a fascination with divination from their Sumerian predecessors.<sup>8</sup> They looked for signs in all sorts of places; for example, they investigated markings on the entrails taken from dead animals and sought ways of interpreting the marks in relation to events in the present or the future. Later, they observed the repeating patterns in the starry sky and began to see connections between those moving patterns and changing events on earth. At some point they began to systematically record their observations of celestial

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<sup>7</sup> 'The Lady of the Evening' in Kramer, Samuel Noah and Diane Wolkstein's, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer*, (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1983), p. 101.

<sup>8</sup> Campion, Nicholas, 'Babylonian Astrology: Its Origins and Legacy in Europe' Helaine Selin (ed.), *Astronomy Across Cultures: the History of Non-Western Astronomy*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers 2000), pp. 509-554.

phenomena. David Pingree reports that from the last few centuries of the second millennium B.C.E. the belief that the gods signalled their intentions through celestial omens was important enough to lead to systematic observations and mathematically sophisticated models, such as those in the collection of omen tablets called *Enuma Anu Enlil*.<sup>9</sup>

These Mesopotamians (also called the Babylonians), interpreted the movements of the planets as signals sent by the gods to the king to let him know their pleasure or displeasure at his actions, either taken or to be taken. The signals or signs were interpreted and conveyed to the king by a special caste entitled to do so – the priests of their time.<sup>10</sup> Some planets were considered benefic and others malefic, depending on which god they were attached to. From the earliest times, for example, Jupiter (Marduk) and Venus (Ištar) were benign. This was later carried over and taken up by the Greeks when they developed their own astrological systems.<sup>11</sup>

Besides records of eclipses of the sun and moon, it was Venus with its rhythms, its change from morning to evening star, its cycles of radiance, that inspired some of the first continuous observations and codifications of celestial bodies.<sup>12</sup> Anthony Aveni considers the powerful visual impact the cycles of Venus and its brilliance might have had on early observers.<sup>13</sup> The ‘star’ was there in the evening sky, following the sun, presaging the night and the dark, for some of the time; it then disappeared for a period of time, and returned, but this time ahead of the sun, presaging the light and the day. It seems plausible that this rhythm evoked a desire for investigation. It also seems plausible that its brilliance, its heralding the sun, its disappearance, and then its heralding the night had an impact on their interpretation of it.

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<sup>9</sup> Pingree, David, *From Astral Omens to Astrology From Babylon to Bikaner* (Roma: Istituto Italiano per L’Africa E L’Oriente, 1997), [hereafter Pingree, *Astral Omens*], p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Dicks, D. R., *Early Greek Astronomy to Aristotle* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), [hereafter Dicks, *Astronomy*], p. 4, (citing Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, State Archives of Assyria, Vol. 10, (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1993), p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> Rochberg-Halton, F., ‘Benefic and Malefic Planets in Babylonian Astrology,’ in *A Scientific Humanist, Studies in Memory of Abraham Sachs*, (Philadelphia: The University Museum, 1988), pp. 323-28.

<sup>12</sup> Baigent, Michael, *From the Omens of Babylon: Astrology and Ancient Mesopotamia*, (London: Arcana; Penguin, 1994), [hereafter Baigent, *Babylon*], pp. 59-60.

<sup>13</sup> Aveni, Anthony, *Conversing with the Planets* (London: Kodansha International, 1992), [hereafter Aveni, *Planets*], pp. 27-32.

Scholars today have access to the detailed observations of Venus from Mesopotamia, recorded on the famous ‘Venus Tablets of Amisaduqa.’ These were part of a series of omen tablets from the abovementioned *Enuma Anu Enlil*, that belonged to the great library of King Ashurbanipal of Assyria in the seventh century B.C.E. They are thought to have originated in the time of the Babylonian King Amisaduqa sometime between 1646 and 1626 B.C.E.<sup>14</sup>

It is not known precisely when the Babylonians discovered that the morning and evening star were one, but they certainly did know by the time they were writing the Venus Tablets:

In month XI, 15<sup>th</sup> day, Venus disappeared in the West. Three days it stayed away, then on the 18<sup>th</sup> day it became visible in the east...<sup>15</sup>

Generally, the interpretations of signs tended to be dark and ominous. The Old Testament gives a colourful account of the history of the region down to around the eighth century B.C.E. – life was evidently harsh and violent in Mesopotamia. Omens were signs or warnings from the gods, and ritual to ward off evil – apotropaic rituals – were performed to help avert events foretold by inauspicious omens.<sup>16</sup> Venus was most often considered benevolent, particularly when she was the evening star, but she could ‘bring wailing to the land’ when rising as the morning star.<sup>17</sup> However, there are enough benefic descriptions of Venus to indicate her association with good effects. If we look at the next lines of the above Venus citation, we see it reads:

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<sup>14</sup> Campion, Nicholas, *An Introduction to the History of Astrology* (London: Institute for the Study of Cycles in World Affairs, 1982), [hereafter Campion, *History*], p. 10; and Avani, *Planets*, pp. 118-119 for slightly different dating, i.e., 1581-1637 B.C.E.

<sup>15</sup> Campion, *History*, p. 10, quoting Reiner, E., *Venus Tablet of Amisaduqa*, p. 29 quoted in Michael Baigent’s unpublished history of Babylonian astrology.

<sup>16</sup> See Baigent, *Babylon*, pp. 87-89, and Judith K. Bjorkman’s ‘Meteors and Meteorites In The Ancient Near East,’ *Meteoritics*, 8, (1973), p. 107.

<sup>17</sup> Hunger, Herman. (1992). *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings*. (Helsinki, Finland: Helsinki University Press, 1992), p. 254 and Simon Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, (Germany: Verlag Butzon and Bercker Kevelaer, 1970).

Springs will open and  
 Adad will bring his rain and Ea his floods.  
 Messages of reconciliation will be sent from King to King.<sup>18</sup>

Another tablet tells us:

In month Arahsamna, 11<sup>th</sup> day, Venus disappeared in the east...  
 [it stayed away two months, then] Venus became visible in the  
 west: the harvest of the land will prosper.<sup>19</sup>

And so we have joy and lovemaking and rains and reconciliation and harvests that prosper, all associated with the planet Venus in these early records. We shall now explore the natures of some of the goddesses, along with Inanna, associated with the planet Venus in this ancient world.

### **Ištar: who ‘loves the king’**

The Sumerian Inanna had many similarities with the Akkadian-Babylonian Semitic goddesses who eventually became Ištar (Ishtar) in the middle of the third millennium B.C.E. Ištar was also connected to the planet Venus.<sup>20</sup> She was a goddess of war, but she was also goddess of fertility and sexual love.<sup>21</sup> Her association with love and good fortune is seen on this early record, probably from the seventh century B.C.E.:

What is this love by which Ištar loves the  
 King my lord and has [sent] the very best to  
 The king my lord!  
 [Venus] made her [position perfect  
 [.....]she became visible quickly – [a good...]  
 If Venus stays in her position for long:  
 the days of the king will become long.  
 If the rising of [Venus] is seen early: the

<sup>18</sup> Campion, *History*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Baigent, M., *From the Omens of Babylon: Astrology and Ancient Mesopotamia* (London: Penguin Arcana, 1994) p. 61, citing Reiner, E., *Venus Tablet of Amisaduqa*, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> For a brief discussion of male gods associated with Venus, see Avani, *Planets*, p. 61.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich, *Aphrodite*, pp. 12-16.

King of the land will extend the life.

From Issar-sumu-eres.<sup>22</sup>

Ištar who ‘loves the King’ was the descendant of a line of goddesses originating from the great mother goddess who was a deity of both life and death – she gave life, but also took it away. Ištar and her earlier counterpart Inanna were associated with the lust for killing in battle.<sup>23</sup> But she was also goddess of bounty and full storehouses of grain and fruit; she was fruitful, generative, but never maternal. She was a goddess of sex and eroticism.<sup>24</sup> Her love for the shepherd Dumuzi (later called Tammuz) inspires the first recorded love stories, and the themes in these stories repeat and reappear across the earth and across time for millennia.<sup>25</sup> The stories of her love of the shepherd, her disappearance into the underworld, and her return into a new life may be seen as a reflection of the planet Venus’ eastern rising, disappearance, and western setting.

#### **Astarté: war and death; love and death**

There is another lineage of deities connected to the planet Venus. The Phoenician goddess Astarté arose from the goddess lineage of Asherah in the Northern Kingdom of Israel and was still being worshipped in the sixth century B.C.E. as the ‘Queen of Heaven.’<sup>26</sup> Her daughter Anath was connected with the hunt and with fertility and, later, war. They are both considered to be versions of the Old Testament Ashtoreth, who is also Astarté.<sup>27</sup> These goddesses are all deities of war and death, and fertility and love. According to Geoffrey Grigson, it was this particular goddess who ‘sorely tempted the ancient Hebrews.’ He points to Solomon’s struggle with her in the first book of Kings:<sup>28</sup> ‘For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians...’

<sup>22</sup> From Hunger, Herman, *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings*. (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992), p. 16. I am indebted to Bernadette Brady for this invaluable reference and the reference in fn. 7.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of this aspect of the goddess see Baring, Anne and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1991), [hereafter Baring and Cashford, *Goddess*], pp. 169-170 and pp. 203-205; see also Friedrich, *Aphrodite*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>24</sup> See Perera, Silvia Brinton, *Descent to the Goddess: A Way of Initiation for Women*, (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1981), [hereafter Perera, *Descent*] pp. 17-18.

<sup>25</sup> Friedrich, *Aphrodite*, pp. 145-151. See also Baring and Cashford, *Goddess*, pp. 210-222.

<sup>26</sup> Baring and Cashford, *Goddess*, p. 460; also see Old Testament; Jeremiah; 7: 18.

<sup>27</sup> Baring and Cashford, *Goddess*, pp. 454-460.

<sup>28</sup> Grigson, Geoffrey, *The Goddess of Love: The birth, triumph, death and return of Aphrodite* (London: Quartet Book, 1976), [hereafter Grigson, *Goddess*], p. 17.

when several of his seven hundred wives and concubines turned their hearts away from him, to her.<sup>29</sup> She is the goddess to whom incense and burnt offerings were made.<sup>30</sup> It could be suggested that it was her role as goddess of fertility and love that drew the women away from him and his busy nights with too many other wives.

Herodotus (c. 490 – c. 430), the fifth century traveller and writer, wrote that the Persians ‘have no anthropomorphic notions about the deity such as obtain in Hellas.’ They regularly went to the highest mountain peaks to offer sacrifice to their deity, ‘which deity they hold to be the vault of heaven surrounding all.’ There they sacrificed to the sun and moon and to earth, fire and water and the winds. Herodotus reports that, regarding Aphrodite, that they brought in, ‘the worship of Urania (Aphrodite) from Assyria and Arabia. ‘The Assyrians call Aphrodite Melitta, the Arabians, Alilat, the Persians Mitra.’<sup>31</sup>

In the early third century B.C.E., a Greek mythographer, Euhemerus, began a tradition of seeking historical roots for mythical beings and mythical events<sup>32</sup> He maintains that Astarté was originally a flesh-and-blood woman, Semiramis, Queen of the Assyrians, wife of Nimrod, who lived ‘only a few centuries after the Flood,’ and was ‘the woman that made towers and encompassing walls.’ She was said to be everything that embodied female beauty and was ‘beautiful, depraved, lustful and licentious’; and according to Euhemerus, this ‘Astarté’ was responsible for the development of the Chaldean mysteries.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *The Holy Bible*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1898). Old Testament: I Kings: 11:5.

<sup>30</sup> Old Testament: Jeremiah; 44: 18-25.

<sup>31</sup> Herodotus, *Histories – Books I to III*, transl. G. Woodruffe Harris, (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Lim., 1906), [hereafter Herodotus, *Histories*], Vol. I, Bk. I: CXXXI, pp. 56-57.

<sup>32</sup> Eliade, Mircea, *Myth and Reality*, translated from the French by Willard R. Trask (London: Harper Colophon Books, 1963) [hereafter, Eliade *Myth*], pp. 155-156. See also Stenudd, Stefan, ‘Cosmos of the Ancients, ‘The Greek Philosophers on Myth and Cosmology,’ at <http://www.stenudd.com/myth/greek/euhemerus.htm>

[hereafter Stenudd, *Cosmos*], and its reference to Diodorus of Sicily, *The Library of History*, Vol. 3, Bk. VI, translated by C.H. Oldfather, (Cambridge 1970).

[accessed 15 April 2006]

<sup>33</sup> See Hislop, Alexander, *The Two Babylons*, (London: S.W. Partridge & co., 1961 [1916]), [hereafter Hislop, *Babylons*], p. 30, pp. 74-75 pp. 156-158, 304.

In this chapter we have investigated some of the early goddesses of Mesopotamia who were connected to the planet Venus. We have pointed to the planet's particular brilliance and its rhythm of appearance before the light of the sun in the east and its disappearance and reappearance before the dark of night in the west. We have considered the different goddesses, their connections with each other, and the characteristics they shared. We have demonstrated that the goddesses associated with the 'radiant star' – whether Inanna, Ištar, or Astarté – all have a connection to love and to beauty. Inanna and Ištar experience love and loss, through their love of the shepherd. We have seen that all the goddesses are associated with fertility, prosperity, war and death.

We shall now move on to Classical Greece and investigate the Greek Aphrodite, her personification in the mythology, poetry and literature as Goddess of Love, and her encounter with the greatest mind of the age, Plato.

### **APHRODITE OF GREECE: THE CLASSICAL AGE**

#### **Aphrodite: morning and evening star (Phosphorus and Hesperus)**

It is not certain when the astral religion of Mesopotamia found its way into the imagination of the Greeks. In Hesiod there is some evidence that the early Greeks connected the gods with the stars.<sup>34</sup> But there is very little further evidence. Consequently, some scholars assume that although celestial phenomena were known in Homer's time, and some of the stars had been named and were used in relation to men and to gods, the planets as divine powers were not associated with the gods.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Homer himself does not seem to even recognise that Venus is both the morning and evening star.<sup>36</sup> Paul Friedrich says that Homer has drawn her from her Indo-European roots, rather than her Near-Eastern sources.<sup>37</sup> This may be, and there is no evidence

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<sup>34</sup> Hesiod, *Hesiod and Theognis*, transl. Dorothea Wender, (London: Penguin Books, 1973), lines 104-110, p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> Dicks, *Astronomy*, p. 34. For an opposing but unconvincing view see Florence and Kenneth Wood's, *Homer's Secret Iliad: The Epic of the Night Skies Decoded*, (London: John Murray, 1999), p. 63.

<sup>36</sup> *Homer: The Iliad*, transl. E.V. Rieu, (London, Penguin Books Ltd, 1952), [hereafter *Iliad*], Bk XXII, 317-18; XXIII, 226; *Homer: The Odyssey*, transl. E.V. Rieu, (London, Penguin Books Ltd, 1954), [hereafter *Odyssey*], XIII, lines 15-20; 93-94).

<sup>37</sup> Friedrich, *Aphrodite*, p. 82.

before the fifth century B.C.E. that the the Greeks were distinguishing the planets from the stars and connecting them to deities, as were the Babylonians.<sup>38</sup> Pythagoras (569 – 475 B.C.E.) might have been the first (in Greece) to recognise that the morning star (Phosphorus) and the evening star (Hesperus) were the same.<sup>39</sup> There is evidence that he studied in Babylon and brought back knowledge of the sky world.<sup>40</sup> By the time of the invasion of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C.E., there had been at least three hundred years of communication between the Babylonian and Greek cultures. Sky watchers of Greece were not only benefiting from these interchanges but were also adding their own observations and systemisation.<sup>41</sup> Certainly by the time of Plato, the Greeks knew that the bright and beautiful star that rose before the sun at dawn, and the bright and beautiful star that set in the evening after the sun, were the same star, Aphrodite's star.<sup>42</sup>

### **Golden Aphrodite**

#### **Χρυσή Αφρογενεία (Chrysē Aphrogeneia)**

The glorious female personification of love, pleasure and beauty that developed in Greece during the early part of the first millennium B.C.E. shared characteristics with all of the Mesopotamian goddesses, but she was also uniquely herself.<sup>43</sup> Mircea Eliade tells us that Hesiod tapped deeper and more ancient roots than Homer in the telling of his stories, and that he understood that procreation was the way we entered the world, and so he created geneologies.<sup>44</sup> In Hesiod, Aphrodite was born as a result of the violent dismemberment of her father, Ouranus, by his son, Kronos, at the instigation of their mother, Gaia.<sup>45</sup> When the foam of Ouranus' severed members floated over the sea

<sup>38</sup> Seznec, Jean, *Survival of the Pagan Gods*, translated from the French by Barbara F. Sessions, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1972 [1953], Bollingen Series XXXVIII), [hereafter, Seznec, *Pagan Gods*], pp. 37-40.

<sup>39</sup> See 'Pythagoras Phoenician/Greek Mathematician' at <http://phoenicia.org/pythagoras.html> and 'Pythagoras of Samos' at <http://scienceworld.wolfram.com/biography/Pythagoras.html> [accessed 20 March 2006]

<sup>40</sup> For the evidence of the connection between Pythagoras and Plato, see Baigent, *Babylon*, pp. 176-178.

<sup>41</sup> Seznec, *Pagan Gods*, pp. 38-40.

<sup>42</sup> Dicks, *Astronomy*, p. 146 and for a brief description of his contribution of astrology, see Ronnie Gale Dreyer's *Venus: The Evolution of the Goddess and Her Planet*, (London: HarperCollins, 1994), [hereafter Dreyer, *Venus*], pp. 87-88.

<sup>43</sup> See Walter Otto's essay 'Aphrodite,' in *The Homeric Gods*, transl. by Moses Hadas, (New York: Pantheon Books, Ltd., 1954), [hereafter Otto, *Homeric Gods*], pp. 90-103.

<sup>44</sup> Eliade, *Myth*, p. 150.

<sup>45</sup> For a full description see, for example, Kirk, G.S., *The Nature of Greek Myths*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1974), pp. 114-115; see also Otto, *Homeric Gods*, pp. 92-93.

to the shore, Aphrodite ('foam-born'), came into being.<sup>46</sup> This extraordinarily dark beginning gave birth to something wonderful. Hesiod's poem is thought to have been written somewhere during the eighth century B.C.E. and is one of the first Greek references to Aphrodite:

White foam surrounded the immortal flesh,  
 And in it grew a girl. At first it touched  
 On holy Cythera, from there it came  
 To Cyprus, circled by the waves. And there  
 The goddess came forth, lovely much revered,  
 And grass grew up beneath her delicate feet.  
 Her name is Aphrodite among men  
 And gods, because she grew up in the foam [...]  
 Eros is her companion; fair Desire  
 Followed her from the first [...]  
 She has this honour and received this power:  
 Fond murmuring of girls, and smiles, and tricks,  
 And sweet delight, and friendliness, and charm.<sup>47</sup>

We have seen that this sea-born goddess had a complex and powerful lineage that extended over centuries and regions. She arrived on Cyprus, possibly from Cythera, via Crete, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia.<sup>48</sup> According to Baring and Cashford, Inanna, Astarté, Isis, and Aphrodite were all identified with the moon as well as the morning and evening star. Astarté wore, as did Isis in Egypt, a two-horned head-dress that represented the crescent moon, and there is a twelfth century B.C.E. Mycenaean temple on Cyprus dedicated to Aphrodite that is adorned with a star, a crescent moon and a dove.<sup>49</sup> Like her predecessors in their locations and times, she too was 'Queen of Heaven.'

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<sup>46</sup> For a detailed analysis of the etymology of the name, 'Aphrodite,' see Friedrich, *Aphrodite*, pp. 201-202.

<sup>47</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, pp. 192-206, p. 29.

<sup>48</sup> Baring and Cashford, *Goddess*, p. 359. See also Herodotus, *Histories*, Bk. I: CV, p. 45 for her 'lineage'.

<sup>49</sup> Baring and Cashford, *Goddess*, p. 358.

The dove connects Aphrodite with the ‘goddess-queen of Chaldea,’ Mylitta (or Mediatrix), who allowed no blood sacrifice on her altar.<sup>50</sup> Herodotus recounts a custom in Babylonia (of which he disapproves): it seems that every woman born in that land had to go to the temple once in her life and have sexual relations with a stranger. Once she had taken her place in the temple precincts she could not leave until a man had thrown a coin in her lap with the words, ‘May the Goddess Mylitta prosper you.’ Herodotus tells us that Mylitta is the Assyrian name for Aphrodite. Beautiful women were chosen quickly and could then go home; ugly women might have to wait a long time. He tells us that there was a similar custom in parts of Cyprus, Aphrodite’s island.<sup>51</sup> There is a long tradition of ‘temple prostitution’ associated with Ištar, Aphrodite and, later, Venus.<sup>52</sup> Grigson, along with Ginette Paris and Nancy Qualls-Corbett, point to the connection between prostitutes and priestesses in early goddess worship.<sup>53</sup> This is relevant to our inquiry in that the sexual act, which is common to all life, was brought into the domain of the divine in these early cultures through the beautiful women who inhabited these temples – the sacred prostitutes.

### **The Goddess of Love: Aphrodite emerges**

According to Herodotus, Homer and Hesiod first named the gods.<sup>54</sup> They were the first to articulate, describe and give functions and imaginal shapes to the forces they represented. (The word ‘imaginal’ is used here as it was developed by James Hillman in his topology of the soul, and as originally defined by Henry Corbin as ‘the world situated midway between the world of intelligible realities and the world of sense perception.’)<sup>55</sup> Aphrodite is a powerful figure in Homer’s *Iliad*, written sometime during the eighth century B.C.E. It is her gift of Helen – wife of Greek Meneleus – to

<sup>50</sup> Hislop, *Babylon*, p. 157.

<sup>51</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, Bk I: CXCIX, p. 81.

<sup>52</sup> See Friedrich, *Aphrodite*, pp. 21-22, and; Seltman, Charles, *The Twelve Olympians*, (London, Pan Books, 1952), pp. 82-84. See Grigson, *Goddess*, pp. 111-124.

<sup>53</sup> See Paris, Ginette, *Pagan Meditations*, translated from the French by Gwendolyn Moore, (Dallas, Texas: Spring Publications, Inc., 1986) [hereafter Paris, *Meditations*], pp. 52-53, and Nancy Qualls-Corbett’s, *The Sacred Prostitute*, (Toronto, Canada: Inner City Books, 1988), pp. 26-40, and; Grigson, *Goddess*, pp. 117-122.

<sup>54</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, Bk II: LIII, p. 108-9. Also see Marina Warner, *Alone of All her Sex*, (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1985), p. 32.

<sup>55</sup> See Hillman, James, *Archetypal Psychology*, (Dallas, Texas, Spring Publications, 1986), p. 3, and; Corbin, Henry, ‘*Mundus Imaginalis* or The Imaginary and the Imaginal’, translated from French by Ruth Horine, (Ipswich, Golgonooza Press, 1976), [hereafter Corbin, *Imaginalis*], p. 17.

the Trojan prince, Paris, that sets off the Trojan War. In the *Odyssey*, Aphrodite is shown as putting pleasure above marital duty when she makes love to Ares as soon as her husband Hephaestus is away. But she is caught by him in a golden net cleverly hung over the bed, and shamed in front of the gods. She retreats to her own island and recovers. When she is wounded in the *Iliad* (Book V) she is mocked by both men and gods for entering a field – the field of war – where she does not belong. Eliade points to the audience that Homer would have been writing for – the military and feudal aristocracy – to explain why he focused on certain aspects of the gods and goddesses and not others, and how he created a ‘timeless universe of archetypes’ that inspired and educated Greeks for centuries.<sup>56</sup> In the *Iliad*, Aphrodite is depicted as the beautiful Goddess of Love and loving mother of Aeneas. As a fighter she is a ‘weak goddess.’<sup>57</sup> She is seen as a goddess of love and happiness, and as a protectress.<sup>58</sup> She is also seen as raging and vengeful when crossed.<sup>59</sup> It could be inferred that Homer knows the beauty of the moment of love, but he and his chosen audience had little time for the raptures of love and enjoyed more intimacy with the war – Athena’s realm – caused by such raptures.<sup>60</sup>

The *Homeric Hymns* are a collection of hymns – once ascribed to Homer, but no longer – written in the eighth or seventh century B.C.E.<sup>61</sup> The poem to Aphrodite shows a different beginning to the Aphrodite of Hesiod.

Muse, speak to me of the works of Aphrodite,  
The golden one, the Cyprian,  
She who awakens sweet longing in the gods  
and subdues the race of human beings  
And the birds that fly through the air

<sup>56</sup> Eliade, *Myth*, p. 149.

<sup>57</sup> Kirk, G.S., *The Iliad: A Commentary: Volume II: Bks. 5-8*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 69; see *Iliad*, Bk. V, pp. 100-101, and Bk. V, pp. 93-94.

<sup>58</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, pp. 73-74; pp. 101-102, and see Kirk, G.S., *The Iliad: A Commentary: Volume I: Bks. 1-4*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), [hereafter, Kirk, *Iliad*], Bk. 3, pp. 326-7.

<sup>59</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, pp. 74-75 and also see Kirk, *Iliad*, Vol I, Bk .3, pp. 323-325 for an analysis of the encounter between Helen and Aphrodite.

<sup>60</sup> For Athena rousing the men to the love of war, see Homer, *Iliad*, p.52.

<sup>61</sup> See Charles Boer’s Introduction to *The Homeric Hymns*, (Texas, Spring Publications, Ltd., 1970), pp. iii- iv., and Jules Cashford (translator), ‘Hymn to Aphrodite,’ *The Homeric Hymns*, (London: Penguin Books, 2003), [hereafter Cashford, ‘Aphrodite,’ *Hymns*], pp. xii-xiv.

And all the wild beasts and the many creatures  
 That the dry land feeds, that the sea nourishes.  
 All these love what she brings to pass,  
 The Cytherean in her lovely crown.<sup>62</sup>

Here she is truly the goddess whose realm is the love that makes the world go round. She awakens ‘sweet longings’ so that fish and fowl and gods and men draw towards each other; she personifies the pleasurable aspect of procreation. She personifies the beauty that draws all living things into fertility and generation. Pausanias mentions a temple to ‘Aphrodite of the Gardens’ near Athens, with a statue of her, carved by Alcamenes, in the fifth century B.C.E.<sup>63</sup> It had a square shape, ‘like the Figures of Hermes,’ with the inscription: ‘Heavenly Aphrodite is the oldest of the Fates’.<sup>64</sup> Her association with gardens was to come down the centuries and eventually play a central role in the twelfth century love epic, *Roman de la Rose*, where Venus is prominent as the Goddess of Love. Ginette Paris considers this association with gardens an indication of her civilising role in creation: aphrodisiacal art is a matter of making everyday life more beautiful and more ‘civilized.’ The fact that the dazzling beauty she personifies is ephemeral – fades away – is central to her world.<sup>65</sup> This is a significant insight in light of our investigation: it could be argued that the fact that the beauty she represents is so ephemeral becomes a real problem in the ensuing centuries.

But here, she is ‘Golden Aphrodite’ – the Goddess of Love. She is the the love that leads to procreation as, for example, when Aeetes, the son of Helios, wed the daughter of Ocean who ‘was subject to him in love through golden Aphrodite’.<sup>66</sup> She is associated only with youth, presumably as it is only young creatures who procreate. She has nothing to do with that which is not beautiful and graceful. That old age was graceless and ugly, full of complaints and misery was a common theme in ancient

<sup>62</sup> Cashford, ‘Aphrodite,’ *Hymns*, p. 85, lines 1-8.

<sup>63</sup> Otto, *Homeric Gods*, p. 94, (referring to Pausanias, I:19:2, p. 53).

<sup>64</sup> Pausanias, *Guide to Greece: Volume I: Central Greece*, transl. Peter Levi, S.J. (London: Penguin Books, 1971), I:19:2, p. 53. See Otto, *Homeric Gods*, pp. 266-268 for an analysis of this theme.

<sup>65</sup> Paris, *Meditations*, p. 18.

<sup>66</sup> Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homeric: The Theogony* at <http://omacl.org/Hesiod/theogony.html> II, 961. [accessed 1 February 2006]

Greek drama and poetry, as ably demonstrated by Jacob Burckhardt in his classical work on Greek civilisation.<sup>67</sup> In one of the Homeric hymns, this pre-Socratic Aphrodite says that old age is ‘deadly, dispiriting – even the gods abhor it.’<sup>68</sup>

And so Aphrodite has elements of Inanna and Ashtorah and Asherah and Ištar and Astarté and Isis and Mylitta, and probably more deities drawn out of even earlier unnamed divinities of femaleness that echo down through the course of time. But as Walter Otto says, whatever her origins, and from whatever more ancient Oriental goddesses she absorbs characteristics, she becomes something that is unique and particularly Greek. She who arises out of the swirling sea with its foaming memory of patricide, ‘is here no longer a cosmic power but the genuinely Greek Aphrodite, the goddess of rapture.’<sup>69</sup>

### **Sappho’s Intimate Aphrodite**

With this in mind, we now turn to another poet of this era. In the early years of the sixth century B.C.E., an aristocratic woman poet lived on the Isle of Lesbos. She acknowledged Aphrodite as her goddess, and although she was a prolific poet and was read for centuries after her death, we have very little of her work left. What we do have is intensely passionate. Her name was Sappho.

Iridescent-throned Aphrodite, deathless  
 Child of Zeus, wile-weaver, I now implore you,  
 Don’t – I beg you, Lady – with pains and torments  
 Crush down my spirit,  
 But before if ever you've heard my pleadings  
 Then return, as once when you left your father's  
 Golden house; you yoked to your shining car your  
 Wing-whirring sparrows;  
 Skimming down the paths of the sky's bright ether

<sup>67</sup> Burckhardt Jacob, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, transl. Sheila Stern, (London: HarperCollins, 1998), p. 108.

<sup>68</sup> Cashford, *Hymns*, p. 95, line 247.

<sup>69</sup> Otto, *Homeric Gods*, p. 92. See also, Downing, Christine, *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine*, (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1987), p. 232.

On they brought you over the earth's black bosom,  
 Swiftly – then you stood with a sudden brilliance,  
 Goddess, before me;  
 Deathless face alight with your smile...<sup>70</sup>

Sappho is more intimate with Aphrodite than any writer known to us from ancient Greece. It is said, Plato called her ‘the tenth muse.’<sup>71</sup> The goddess speaks directly to her; she comes directly when summoned by the distraught young woman, and asks how she might help to ‘soothe the sting of your passion this time’. She further inquires, ‘Who is now abusing you, Sappho? Who is treating you cruelly?’ The goddess advises her and gives comfort, and Sappho begs, ‘Lady, in all my battles / Fight as my comrade’.<sup>72</sup>

This is no remote divinity but a personal goddess one could live with every day, and it would be surprising if Sappho was the only young woman who felt this way about her. She called on her and spoke to her as naturally as a young Catholic girl of today might speak to her guardian angel. This is a deity who is close to and personal with a young woman who trusts her to help again and again in any love problem. Sappho even dreams of her goddess.<sup>73</sup> And yet she is a great deity, this Aphrodite, and in her ode to her as an evening star, she writes ‘Fairest of all the stars that shine’.<sup>74</sup> Sappho writes of the overwhelming power of the passion caused by love, and so, of course, she addresses her plea to the goddess of love.<sup>75</sup> Her intense and personal involvement may be partly because she is a woman poet, but there was something about Sappho that led other

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<sup>70</sup> Sappho, transl. Elizabeth Vandiver, 1997, <http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/vandiver.shtml> [hereafter Vandiver’s Sappho].  
 [accessed 3 March 2006]

For another, but less satisfying translation see *Lyra Graeca*, Vol. I, ed. & transl. J. M. Edmonds, (London: William Heinemann, 1922), [hereafter *Lyra Graeca*], Bk I:1, p. 183-185.

<sup>71</sup> For this reference see, for example, Symonds, John Addington, *The Greek Poets*, Vol. I, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1901), p. 309, although I have not seen this in any current translation of Plato.

For a fine analysis of Sappho’s Aphrodite, see Warren Castle’s, ‘Observations on Sappho’s “To Aphrodite,”’ *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 89, (John Hopkins Press, 1958), pp. 66-76.

<sup>72</sup> Vandiver’s *Sappho*.

<sup>73</sup> *Lyra Graeca*, Vol. 1, Bk VI, Frag. 123, p. 271.

<sup>74</sup> *Lyra Graeae*, Vol. 1, p 203.

<sup>75</sup> *Lyra Graeca*, Vol. 1, Sappho, 2., p. 187.

poets of the time to call her ‘holy.’ The historian Stringfellow Barr considers that she was closest of all the poets to the Eastern side of the Goddess of Love – Astarté and Ištar – this mix of Asia and Greece giving the capacity for ‘soul wrenching, all-destroying love’.<sup>76</sup> Friederich says that Sappho has incarnated the Goddess of Love’s most fundamental characteristic: ‘her subjectivity, working through the heart, the synthesis of wild emotion and high sophistication.’<sup>77</sup> Whatever the reason, this capacity allows Sappho to feel the beauty and the pain of love without resistance. As we shall see, that is no mean feat.

As extraordinary as this golden goddess appears to be, there are, however, many scholars, particularly in the last twenty years, who see Aphrodite as a reduced, a ‘thinner’ version of earlier, great, Mother Goddesses from earlier ‘matriarchal’ times and cultures.<sup>78</sup> This may be a valid judgement, but it is not within the scope of this study. From the evidence it seems apparent that she is a most powerful goddess to the Greeks. They recognise, through her, an experience that is so powerful and specific that it becomes a whole world for as long as it lasts. It also seems clear that they recognise that the gifts she brings are double-edged: the sweetest imaginable ecstasy, but also the immeasurable pain of loss – for when that joy fades we suffer badly, if these poets and writers are to be believed. As Otto has said, she embodies the ‘rapture of the love embrace.’<sup>79</sup> In recognising or perhaps defining beauty as a central component of this moment of potential creation or procreation – that which lures one into it – these ancient Greeks also seemed to recognise, or perhaps uncover, the ugly and potentially destructive feelings that the loss of this beauty generates. Friederich says that Aphrodite’s love can sometimes feel like hate (think of what Helen endures for Paris) and the consequences of her love can be fatal (the whole of the Trojan war).<sup>80</sup>

The next step is to look at the philosophers who engaged with her realm.

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<sup>76</sup> Barr, Stringfellow, *The Will of Zeus: A history of Greece from the Origins of Hellenic Culture to the Death of Alexander*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963, p. 52-53

<sup>77</sup> Friederich, *Aphrodite*, p. 123.

<sup>78</sup> For examples, see Neumann, Erich, *The Great Mother*, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 1955), [hereafter, Neumann, *Mother*], p. 145; Patrick Curry’s *Astrology, Science and Culture*, (Oxford, Berg, 2004), pp. 22-23; Perera, *Descent*, pp. 16-21; Baring, *Goddess*, p. 352.

<sup>79</sup> Otto, *Homeric Gods*, p. 95.

<sup>80</sup> Friedrich, *Aphrodite*, p. 98-99. For another view of this see Paris, *Meditations*, pp. 100-103.

### Aphrodite and the Pre-Socratics

The philosophers we now call the 'Pre-Socratics' did not recount stories of the gods and goddesses, but they did weave them, as characters with attributes, into their investigations of the origins of the world and the nature of the cosmos. Heraclitus (535 – 475 B.C.E.) gave a brief indication of what he thought of Aphrodite's realm: 'It is hard to contend with passion; for whatever it desires to get it buys at the cost of soul.'<sup>81</sup> It seems that, in his experience, the pain of Aphrodite's gifts was not worth the price and we may assume that, for him, soul and passion were not compatible. The following 'fragment' supports this: 'It is the part of all men to know themselves and to be temperate.'<sup>82</sup> Self-knowledge and temperance were not part of the 'rapture' of Aphrodite's realm.

Parmenides (born c. 515 B.C.E.), on the other hand, puts the goddess at the centre of creation. He ranks the morning star (which he knows is also the evening star) over all other celestial beings, including the sun.<sup>83</sup> He ascribes to the creator-goddess rulership over 'painful birth' and all begetting, and it is she who generated the first god, Eros. In speaking of this goddess, Parmenides is also speaking of the moon, 'Shining by night with borrowed light / always straining her eyes to the beams of the sun.'<sup>84</sup> Of course linking Aphrodite with the Moon has echoes of the Mycenaean temple on Cyprus mentioned above.<sup>85</sup> The goddess of Parmenides is associated with love ('driving men and women into embrace').<sup>86</sup> But neither pleasure nor beauty are stated directly as part of her essence.

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<sup>81</sup> Arthur Fairbanks, transl. and ed., *The First Philosophers of Greece* (Scribner, 1898). Fragment 94. <http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/221hera.html> [hereafter Fairbanks, *Philosophers*] [accessed 3 March 2006]

For a more modern translation see Kirk, G.S, Raven, J.E., and Schofield, M., *The Presocratic Philosophers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983).

<sup>82</sup> See Fairbanks, *Philosophers*.

<sup>83</sup> See <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/presoc/parmends.htm> for translated texts and comments of later authors, including Plato and Plutarch. [accessed 5 March 2006]

<sup>84</sup> Parmenides, *Poem of Parmenides: 'On Nature'*, <http://philoctetes.free.fr//parmenides.pdf> Original Greek text, Diels; English translation: John Burnet (1892), [hereafter Parmenides, *Poem*], see fragments XII through XV. [accessed 6 June 2006]

<sup>85</sup> Baring and Cashford, *Goddess*, p. 358.

<sup>86</sup> Parmenides, *Poem*, Fragment XII.

For Empedocles (490 – 430 B.C.E.), Love and Strife were the two central principles in creation. It was Aphrodite who fitted together all the mortal forms and colours that arose from the mingling of Fire, Earth, Air and Water.<sup>87</sup> She moistened earth in water and hardened it with fire to give warmth and shape to it.<sup>88</sup> It was she who fashioned eyes, which are like lanterns, the pupil being the opening through which the light can shine: ‘Love trapped the elemental fire’.<sup>89</sup> Empedocles says that the earth anchored in ‘the perfect harbours of Aphrodite’, and became mixed with various things and produced blood and flesh.<sup>90</sup> He tells a mysterious story about an exile, a wanderer, who has polluted his hands with blood in what seems to be another world, and who is forced to come down into this ‘roofed-in cave’ where we mortals roam the earth. This is a land of exile, but here there is a goddess, ‘Kypris the Queen’, and wonderful gifts such as incense and music are offered to her, and no blood is sacrificed at her altars.<sup>91</sup> This queen is Aphrodite (from the island of Cyprus, or Kypris), and she makes men have thoughts of love and inclinations towards peace. She is implanted in mortals. She is called ‘joy’, and things are ‘united in love by Aphrodite.’<sup>92</sup> Empedocles’ Aphrodite seems to relieve people from longing and loss, and yet there is a legend that he committed suicide, because of love.<sup>93</sup>

Aphrodite is thus the natural attraction that things have for each other, both for creation and pro-creation. She is the timeless dimension of pleasure that is experienced when things that are potentially creative encounter each other. She is a particular part of the experience of creation itself. She was separated out and given her own world – the moment of love’s beauty – perhaps because the Greeks recognised these fleeting moments and saw them as sacred; the beginning of the day and the end – as the light

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[accessed 15 June 2006]

<sup>87</sup> [kr.geocities.com/hyun\\_sinnayo/presoc.htm#Empedocles](http://kr.geocities.com/hyun_sinnayo/presoc.htm#Empedocles) ‘Presocratic Fragments and Testimonials’ © James Fieser. This text file is adapted from passages in John Burnet’s *Early Greek Philosophy*, 3rd edition, (London: A & C Black Ltd., 1920 [1892]), [hereafter Empedocles, Fragments], Frag. 71.

[accessed 2 February 2006]

<sup>88</sup> Empedocles, Frag. 73.

<sup>89</sup> Empedocles, Frag. 84.

<sup>90</sup> Empedocles, Frag. 98.

<sup>91</sup> Empedocles, Frags. 115-132. See also Hislop, *Babylon*, p. 157.

<sup>92</sup> Empedocles, Frag. 22.

<sup>93</sup> Grigson, *Goddess*, p. 105.

emerges on something beautiful, and just before it fades. Perhaps they needed to remind themselves of the lovely parts, the joyous parts of life. She is that which emerges into this world – transient, ephemeral – bringing delight. When two beings (humans, cows, fish, or even plants) have the potentiality for creation, she is there. In the beauty of it, she is there. She is the delight of it. Living things leap to each other because of her. Yet she is also associated with the civilising impulse: when it is time for this impulse to flower in a society, she is also there, bringing pleasure in beauty, so that which is potential can come into being.<sup>94</sup> She is not only procreative, but creative too. And she announces herself with pleasure and beauty.

But there is also a warning of trouble and distress through her when Hesiod writes the story of Pandora in *Works and Days*. Her gifts are turned to wickedness, on order of Zeus, who sets out to punish Epimetheus (brother of Prometheus) by harming Pandora, his wife. Hermes is told to give Pandora ‘a shameless mind and a deceitful nature,’ and Golden Aphrodite is told to, ‘shed grace upon her head and cruel longing and cares that wear the limbs.’<sup>95</sup> Here is the dark side of her wondrous gift of pleasure in beauty – it evokes ‘cruel longing’, even in those who are graced with the beautiful gifts of the goddess.

In all of creation, there are only three beings – Olympian goddesses – who are unresponsive to Aphrodite’s charms: Athena, Hestia, and Artemis. Otherwise, neither birds nor beasts nor humans, neither gods nor goddesses are free from her power to create ‘sweet longing,’ and to make them helpless with love. In fact, her supremacy is so great that Zeus once caused *her* to fall in love with a mortal, so that she would not ever be able to mock him or the other gods for their weakness and her strength.<sup>96</sup> The early ‘Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite,’ showed her in all her female glory. The fearsome side of her was considered to be the overwhelming power of woman’s allure, which had

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<sup>94</sup> For Aphrodite’s civilising influence see Paris, *Meditations*, pp. 16-19; and Friederich, *Aphrodite*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>95</sup> Hesiod, *Work and Days*, II. lines 65-68.

Fn. 95 continued: *The Online Medieval and Classical Library*, at <http://omacl.org/Hesiod/works.html> [accessed 1 January 2006]

<sup>96</sup> Cashford, *Hymns*, ‘Hymn to Aphrodite,’ pp. 85-97.

to be watched and circumscribed by laws and customs, lest it overcome men and gods.<sup>97</sup>

### **‘Dread Aphrodite’**

#### **Ἀφροδίτη Μελαινίς (Aphroditē Melaina)**

When we look at sixth and fifth century Greek playwrights, we see more of the dreaded side of Aphrodite’s power on the hearts of men and women. Her capacity for revenge is great, and women such as Phaedra, Medea and Tarpeia experience the tragic consequences of her anger and are, in turn, responsible for inflicting terrible tragedy on others. Greece was a culture of heroes rather than kings and there were no goddess queens such as the Phoenician queen Semiramis, no saviours such as Esther, no terrifying and beautiful female leaders such as Jezebel.<sup>98</sup> There were women who received Aphrodite’s blessings and had exceptional lives, such as Rhodopis, a fellow slave with Aesop in the late sixth century B.C.E.<sup>99</sup> Strabo tells the story that this extraordinary woman was said to have inspired the building of the pyramids, such was her beautiful power.<sup>100</sup> There were other legendary women to whom the goddess gave beauty, intelligence, and charm that was so great their legends lasted centuries.<sup>101</sup> The second century travel writer, Pausanias, mentions a shrine of ‘Black Aphrodite’ next to the grave of Lais, the great fifth century B.C.E. courtesan of Corinth.<sup>102</sup> But with the exception of these few women, or a poet such as Sappho, the abyss between the goddess and humans was too great for a real relationship, and often those who felt her awesome power became victims of terrible fates.<sup>103</sup>

However, not for the playwright Aeschylus (523 – 456 B.C.E.) is she ‘dread.’ She is

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<sup>97</sup> For a good discussion of this, see ‘Greek Attitudes towards Women: The Mythological Evidence,’ Walcot, P., *Greece & Rome*, Vol. XXXI, No. 1, April, 1984, p. 43. Also see Jacob Burkhardt’s *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, transl. Sheila Stern, (London: HarperCollins, 1998), [hereafter Burkhardt, *Greeks*]. There is also an excellent list of books on woman in the Greek Classical and the Roman world at [http://www.classics.uiuc.edu/clciv240/books\\_on\\_reserve.htm](http://www.classics.uiuc.edu/clciv240/books_on_reserve.htm) [accessed 6 May 2006]

<sup>98</sup> Burkhardt, *Greeks*, p. 154.

<sup>99</sup> See Burkhardt, *Greeks*, p. 102 for her story.

<sup>100</sup> *Lyra Graeca*, Vol. I, p. 141.

<sup>101</sup> See Paris, *Meditations*, pp. 54-58 and Grigson, *Goddess*, pp. 11-113. Dreyer, *Venus*, p. 85.

<sup>102</sup> Pausanias, *Guide to Greece: Volume II: Southern Greece*, transl. Peter Levi, S.J. (London: Penguin Books, 1971) Bk. II, 2.4 pp. 134-35.

<sup>103</sup> For example, see Euripides’ ‘Hippolytus’ in *Alcestis and Other Plays*, (London: Penguin Books, Ltd. 1965).

wondrous. He speaks of her fertile land on the shore, and tells us that it is she whose voice announces ‘when the fruit is ripe for love’, and she who guards ‘the yet unripened growth.’ She is responsible for the ‘fair richness of a maiden’s bloom’ whom every passer-by looks at with longing and with ‘eyes that waft the wistful dart of love’. Aeschylus says, ‘Holy the deeds of her rite, her craft is secret and mighty / And high is her honour on earth, and subtle her sway of the soul.’ Her child is Desire and so is ‘soft-lipped’ Persuasion and Harmonia whose gift of sweet words, ‘the paths of the rapture that lovers love well.’<sup>104</sup> She is the goddess of love ‘from whom all men derive their greatest joys.’<sup>105</sup> She is the rain that falls onto the wheat, germinating it into life; she is the impulse in nature which causes things to unite into life.<sup>106</sup>

One generation later, Euripides (484 – 406 B.C.E.) expressed the terror produced by the goddess with her awesome ability to render a man helpless with longing and desire in the face of female beauty. In *Medea*, he tells us that when she descends in gentleness, Aphrodite brings delight that no other goddess can bring. He cites her as the goddess of the marriage bed – and the one who knows what crimes can destroy its peace. It is she who breathes honey-laden winds over Athens, her flowing locks adorned by sweet-smelling roses. It is she who sends the *Erotes* (loves) to be enthroned next to *Sophia* (wisdom/knowledge).<sup>107</sup> With Aphrodite, everything thrives, *as long as she is honoured*. At the beginning of *Hippolytus*, she warns those who disrespect her power.<sup>108</sup> (As she did in Homer’s *Iliad*, when Helen began to resist her and protested that she did not want to love Paris.)<sup>109</sup> Euripides calls her ‘dread queen’ here, and he begs her, not to inflict him with raging love or jarring passions through her sharp arrow.<sup>110</sup> Like Sappho he knows the torment of love but, unlike her, this poet fears it. He knows the lure of beauty and even places it next to wisdom, but whatever joyous

<sup>104</sup> All of the above quotes from Aeschylus, ‘The Suppliants’ (pp. 54-87), in *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound: The Suppliants: Seven Against Thebes: The Persians*, ed. and transl. Philip Vellacott, (London: Penguin Books, Ltd. 1982), lines 996-1040, pp. 84-85.

<sup>105</sup> Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*, transl. Ian Johnston  
[http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/aeschylus/aeschylus\\_eumenides.htm](http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/aeschylus/aeschylus_eumenides.htm) , line 260.  
 [accessed 3 May 2006]

<sup>106</sup> Aeschylus, *The Suppliants*, lines 552-4, p. 71.

<sup>107</sup> Euripides, *Euripides Medea and Other Plays*, transl. Philip Vellacott. (London: Penguin Books, 1963), [hereafter Euripides, *Medea*], lines 630-40, p. 36; lines 837-842, pp. 42-43.

<sup>108</sup> Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 1: 763.

<sup>109</sup> Homer *Iliad*, III: 413-417, pp. 74-75.

<sup>110</sup> Euripides, *Medea*, lines 630-640, p 36.

experience he has had of this kind of love, his memory of the suffering of it has not been forgotten.

Erich Neumann, in his classic work, *The Great Mother*, wrote that the Renaissance image of Venus as the Goddess of Love was a mere representation of sexual power, and that this was a reduction from the Great Goddess she had been, before the development of the ‘patriarchate.’<sup>111</sup> Whether this was a reduction or not, her capacity to generate dazzling sexual beauty seems to have been a problem by the fifth century B.C.E. It could be argued that the power she represented was so compelling that something had to be done, and so a philosopher came to the rescue.

### **Plato’s Heavenly Aphrodite / Common Aphrodite**

**Αφρογενεια Ουρανια / Αφρογενεια Πανδημος (Aphroditē Ourania / Aphroditē Pandēmos)**

The fear of Aphrodite’s power, and its focus on sensual pleasure was disturbing enough to exercise the greatest mind of that age, Plato (c. 428 – c. 348 B.C.E.). The Greeks could be said to have had a particular genius for producing gods and goddesses who personified the inscrutable powers that worked through fate. They may also be credited with transforming those personalities into something else – into ideas. We look to Plato for the origination of the world of ideas, the world of the intellect; that world which can only be perceived by the organ of intellect – the perceiving mind.<sup>112</sup> Through Plato, Socrates mentions the Olympian gods and goddesses in his conversations, but it is clear that he is not aiming to support them in the way his more unthinking contemporaries, or, indeed, the State might have done.<sup>113</sup> He was obviously aware of the possibility of celestial phenomena connected to divination and omens, but he did not seem to approve of any sort of divination other than the divine ‘*furor*’ or ‘frenzy’ inspired by a god.<sup>114</sup> He is thought to have received some of his education in the East, and to have been

<sup>111</sup> Neumann, *Mother*, p. 145.

<sup>112</sup> For an excellent discussion of this see ‘The Archetypal Forms,’ in Richard Tarnas’ *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View*, (New York: Ballantine Books, Random House, 1991), [hereafter Tarnas, *Western Mind*], pp. 6-12.

<sup>113</sup> See Plato, *Republic*, 378ff. And Eliade, *Myth*, p. 153. For example of the State’s action against those who did not follow the party line; see section on Protagoras in Cox, D. ‘The Rigid Sky in Greek Philosophy,’ <http://www.sentex.net/~tcc/fgreek.html>

[accessed 10 April 2006]

influenced by the Orphic tradition and by Pythagoras.<sup>115</sup> Whatever the influences upon him, his questions and comments on the nature of reality opened a discourse that still underpins our thinking today. Through him, the realm of Aphrodite was about to undergo a radical change. She would not lose her status, as Goddess of Love, but a new dimension of love was about to be opened, or perhaps, articulated.

When Plato has Socrates speak of the Olympians, he does so with circumspection, moving gingerly. In the dialogue *Philebus*, he says, when faced with the names of deities that his fear is boundless: ‘I always become more afraid than you would think humanly possible.’<sup>116</sup> When mentioning Aphrodite, he says he would not sin against her by mis-naming her, and so will use Hesiod’s name for her, Aphrodite. It may be that he does this because Aphrodite is a blanket form of address for her, translating literally as ‘foam born’, and perhaps covering all her more local names. Socrates does not agree with Philebus, who says that the true name of Aphrodite is ‘Pleasure’. He says that Aphrodite is ‘single’, but she assumes all sorts of guises. These guises are all pleasurable, but they may lead to things that are not ‘good.’<sup>117</sup>

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates says that if Love is a divinity, then it cannot be evil. He speaks of the four kinds of divine madness: prophetic (with Apollo presiding), initiatory (Dionysus) and poetic (the Muses). The fourth is Eros (with Aphrodite presiding), and he gives this the highest status of the four.<sup>118</sup>

In the *Symposium*, Socrates’ respected teacher – Diotima, the prophetess of Mantinea – tells Socrates about Eros. However, she does not call Eros a god, but a daemon. Like all daemons, his function is to convey messages back and forth between Gods and men, or to be the bridge between the temporal and the eternal. His mother is Poverty and his father Resourcefulness.<sup>119</sup> Diotima tells Socrates that there is a right way of being

<sup>114</sup> See Plato, *Plato: Phaedrus & Letters VII and VIII*, transl. Walter Hamilton, (London: Penguin Classics, Ltd., 1981), [hereafter Plato, *Phaedrus*], 244a, pp. 46-47.

<sup>115</sup> See Baigent, *Babylon*, p. 177, and his further references in his footnotes 23-25.

<sup>116</sup> Plato, *Philebus*, transl. Robin A.H. Waterfield, (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 12c, p. 53.

<sup>117</sup> Plato, *Philebus*, 12c-13a, pp. 53-54.

<sup>118</sup> *Plato: Phaedrus*, 265b, p. 81. See also, 249d-e, p. 56.

<sup>119</sup> For Diotima’s story of Eros’ birth, character and nature, see *Plato: The Symposium*, transl. Walter Hamilton. (London: Penguin Classics, Ltd., 1951), [hereafter Plato, *Symposium*], 203b, pp. 82-83.

initiated into the mysteries of love. It is to start with instances of beauty ‘in this world’. Using them as steps, to continually ascend with ‘absolute beauty’ as the constant aim: from physical beauty, then to moral beauty, then to the beauty of knowledge (whose aim is to know ‘absolutely beauty’) and finally to that ‘absolutely beauty’ itself.<sup>120</sup>

At this point, it could be said that the Greek gift for personification of natural forces turned the personifications into philosophical ideas. Aphrodite, as an experience of beauty, has become the archetype of beauty.<sup>121</sup> In the *Symposium*, Plato introduces the notion of two Aphrodites. He has Phaedrus say that Love is the oldest and most honourable of all the gods, and also the most powerful to help men acquire merit and happiness in this world and in the hereafter. Another guest, Pausanias, holds that the goddess ‘is inseparably linked with Love’.<sup>122</sup> But then Plato splits Aphrodite in two. Socrates asserts that there are two Aphrodites and two Loves as well. The elder Aphrodite is the daughter of Ouranus and has no mother: she is the Heavenly Aphrodite.

Of course, I am not denying that we ought to praise all the gods, but our present business is to discover what are the respective characters of these two Loves. Now the truth about every activity is that in itself it is neither good nor bad. It is not Love absolutely that is good or praiseworthy, but only that Love which impels men to love aright.<sup>123</sup>

The other is the child of Zeus and Dione: she is called Common Aphrodite.<sup>124</sup> In talking about Common Love (‘Pandamos’), Plato says that it is ‘quite random in its effects...is directed towards women quite as much as young men...it is physical rather than spiritual...it prefers that its objects should be as unintelligent as possible, because its

<sup>120</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 2101a-e, p. 94.

<sup>121</sup> For two definitions of the word ‘archetype’ see Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247c-e, pp. 52-53; and for a good discussion of this notion, see Demos, Raphael, ‘Note on Plato’s Theory of Ideas,’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 8. No. 3, (March 1948 pp. 456-460, and; Jung, Carl, ‘Instinct and the Unconscious,’ *The Collected Works*, (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul 1969 [1960]), p. 133:270 and pp. 135-6: 275 (& fn. 8).

<sup>122</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 180e, p. 45.

<sup>123</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 180e, p. 46.

<sup>124</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 180e, p. 45.

only aim is the satisfaction of its desires, and it takes no account of the manner in which this is achieved'. He says that it is only chance that directs it, and its consequences may be good or bad, and 'in all this it partakes of the nature of its corresponding goddess...[who] owes her birth to the conjunction of male and female'.

But the other Aphrodite, the Heavenly Aphrodite, has another 'Love' and she '*has no female strain in her*' (my italics), but springs entirely from the male'. This Aphrodite is older and consequently free from wantonness'. Men who are inspired by this particular Aphrodite are attracted to other men, 'and value it [the 'Heavenly Aphrodite'] as being naturally the stronger and more intelligent.'<sup>125</sup> After this, Plato concludes that it is the duty of all men to honour Love. He honours it and he practises 'the mysteries of Love in an especial degree myself'. He recommends that others do as he does, and he praises the 'power and valour of Love to the best of my ability both now and always.'<sup>126</sup>

In his philosophical dialogues, Plato did something rather extraordinary. He re-created love as an idea – at least in part. In his dialogues, Socrates has conversations about love which bring it powerfully into the light of consciousness, and in the course of these dialogues with his male friends, he challenges the status quo in love relations – particularly between older men and younger men. The notion of an Aphrodite with '*no female strain in her*' is most extraordinary considering who she has been before Plato. He has taken the utterly female goddess of love and beauty out of nature and into a new dimension. In this dimension she can serve, and enoble, the erotic love that springs between man and man, or man and boy.<sup>127</sup>

Plato's development of Aphrodite's realm is radical. He takes the goddess of sensual love and beauty and transforms her world into something abstract; he locates a spiritual goal that can be accessed through appreciation of physical beauty – masculine physical beauty – as long as one continually holds the spiritual in mind, even while enjoying the beauty in front of one's eyes. And he gives instructions – through Diotima – on how

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<sup>125</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 180e, p. 46.

<sup>126</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 211a, p. 94.

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<sup>127</sup> For an excellent and well referenced analysis of sexuality and love relations between men and women and men and boys, see Bowra, C.M. *The Greek Experience*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1958), pp. 26-30.

to reach that goal. The implications of this have engaged male, and recently, female, thinkers ever since. There is evidence that his model was influenced by the Elusian mysteries and their rites and that his way of translating them into his model of love would not have seemed radical to his friends.<sup>128</sup> He moves love from an instinctive reaction to beauty onto a plane which can only be reached by contemplation. Plato opens up, or perhaps identifies, a new plane on which love can exist. He honours the erotic experience – Aphrodite – but leads it away from the senses into a new locality. Plato’s notion of Love having two directions and two ‘mothers,’ both of whom are Aphrodite, opens up a dimension on the intellectual plane that is fundamental to the shaping of subsequent philosophy and later Christian theology. Eight hundred years later, St. Augustine wrote that lust is not the fault ‘of sweet beautiful bodies’, but rather, it is the soul’s perversity to choose the beauty that changes, rather than being led by it to ‘far more excellent and spiritual pleasures’.<sup>129</sup>

Plato has engendered fierce criticism from scholars, particularly feminist scholars of the last century. Ginette Paris has written that Plato's exaltation of the love between males (especially older men to young boys), to the detriment of love between men and women (of even less value, the love between women) has been central to the problems of the religious and political institutions governing the Western world since then.<sup>130</sup> Many would agree. Yet Paul Friedrich maintains that Socrates has told us unambiguously that females are the ones who know the truth about love. He does this when he honours Aphrodite, Sappho, and his respected teacher Diotima.<sup>131</sup> We can speculate endlessly about Plato’s effect on the subsequent centuries. In terms of our inquiry into what Venus tells us about the human experience of love in the Western world, this direct ancestress of Venus, Aphrodite, held onto her position as the Goddess of Love. What Plato did, it could be suggested, is find a new place for the longing and the loss associated with her dimension of beauty. Through Plato’s ‘discovery’ of the archetypal world as a place accessed by contemplation, the loss of beauty becomes a moment in

<sup>128</sup> For a comprehensive view of this, see Finkelberg, Margalit, ‘Plato’s Language of Love and the Female,’ *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (July, 1997), pp. 231-261.

<sup>129</sup> Augustine, St., *City of God*, Vol. I, transl. John Healey. Ed. R.V.G Tasker, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1957 [1945]), Bk. XII, Ch. 8., p. 351.

<sup>130</sup> Paris, *Meditations*, pp. 93-96.

<sup>131</sup> Friedrich, *Aphrodite*, p. 94.

which the soul looks further and ultimately can find ‘perfect beauty’ – the perfect Form of Beauty. Sappho gives in to Aphrodite’s wondrous gifts with all the suffering that was part of it. Euripides begs the goddess to leave him be. Plato offered a solution to the pain of the transient nature of Aphrodite’s wondrous gift. He describes the ephemeral wonder of it as a pointer to something more wondrous, because permanent and real. Whatever else it was, it could be argued that it certainly was a way of dealing with the loss of youth and beauty – find another dimension where the loss and longing can search for satisfaction. The effects of this ‘solution’ have been debated ever since.

Between the time of Plato and the literary, philosophical, and astrological flourishings in the centuries around the birth of Christ, there were several further intellectual developments that affected how men, and perhaps women, imagined their lives. The ordinary (or common) people continued to live at the mercy of the weather, the rulers, the gods and goddesses. But those who had time and opportunity to think, and to learn to think, had new imaginal options as to how they might configure reality. For the people, the gods and goddesses continued to live in the temples, but a new mode of perception was gaining ground, at least amongst the thinkers and philosophers, and the old method of understanding reality through the actions of the often all-too-human Olympians was losing ground. The poets might still have carried on relating to Aphrodite in the old ways; the thinkers considered her split form.<sup>132</sup>

### **Philosophers after Plato**

In 384 B.C.E., Plato’s greatest pupil, Aristotle, was born. He observed nature with an eye that saw consequential action in terms of time. He made a powerful argument for seeing the gods and goddesses as forces of nature. He also believed that the heavenly bodies were gods and that they caused events on earth, but they in turn were moved by the highest cause, which was the ultimate God.<sup>133</sup> He said that some, but not all, of the

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<sup>132</sup> For an analysis of this period, see, Boardman, John, Jasper Griffin and Oswyn Murray, *The Oxford History of the Classical World: Greece and the Hellenistic World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>133</sup> Tarnas, *Western Mind*, p. 65.

ancient myths were correct.<sup>134</sup> He spoke about love as a force – following Empedocles – but he did not, apparently, speak directly about Aphrodite.<sup>135</sup> Natural reason became a perceptive device, and although this way of looking at things may not have taken hold among the populace immediately, it lived on and was developed by those who became fascinated with observing and experimenting with nature and her hitherto mysterious workings. By the time Aristotle was teaching Alexander, the mind and imagination of people were open to many different cosmologies and perspectives, and by the time of Alexander's death (323 B.C.E.), the Greco-Roman world had become a veritable market-place of ideas and philosophies. There were, besides Aristotle and his followers, the Pythagoreans, the Epicureans, the Peripatetics, the Stoics, and the Cynics. All of these philosophies had ideas about love, but they did not always speak about Aphrodite when considering love.

In 311 B.C.E., Zeno, a Syrian, came to Athens. In the course of his lifetime, he developed a philosophy which was sensible and practical, and offered the possibility of a peaceful life. It involved disciplining the mind and heart, and recognising that we lived in a world ordered by God. This 'Stoic' philosophy reminded us that we were given reason, with which we could choose to shape our instinctual impulses in such a way that we could serenely accept whatever fate – or God's plan - brought to us. Stoicism was based on a physical theory that accounted for both celestial and terrestrial life.<sup>136</sup> It held that celestial bodies were divine manifestations, and it deepened the understanding that the regular and cyclical nature of the sun, moon and planets demonstrated the absolute fatedness of terrestrial life. For the Stoic, 'Fate ruled everything, and it was the part of the wise man to move with, rather than against, Fate,' thereby achieving a stoical calm in the face of preordained events.<sup>137</sup> For the Stoics, the starry sky was the 'purest embodiment of reason in the cosmic hierarchy, the paradigm

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<sup>134</sup> For example, see 'On the Heavens' transl. J.L Stocks, Bk. II, Part 1, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/heavens.3.iii.html> [accessed 1 April 2006]

<sup>135</sup> See Aristotle, 'On the Heavens', Bk. III, Part 2. <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/heavens.3.iii.html> [accessed 1 April 2006]

<sup>136</sup> In his monograph, *Fate, Free Will and Astrology*, Robert Zoller has given an excellent account of the Stoic philosophy (Zoller (no date): pp. 95-106.

<sup>137</sup> Tester, Jim, *A History of Western Astrology*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 1987), [hereafter Tester, *History*], p. 52.

of intelligibility, and therefore of the divine aspect of the sensible realm.<sup>138</sup> Consequently, they referred to the gods with respect, as divinities and yet also as expressions of natural laws.<sup>139</sup> Of all the philosophies jostling together, it is perhaps Stoicism that would be most directly influential on the astrology that was still to develop.<sup>140</sup> Whether goddess or idea, the beauty that evoked passionate longing in a man or a woman, even if the longing were for the God, could not sit easily with Stoicism. Therefore, if Stoicism was an influence on the emerging astrology, Venus would have to be re-imagined.

### APHRODITE INTO VENUS: THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

The Hellenistic culture is generally considered to have begun with the death of Alexander in 323 B.C.E. It existed in any part of the Roman Empire where Greek-speaking people lived and continued to communicate their cultural heritage. This included Byzantium, Carthage, and, of course, Rome. It was spread, through Alexander and his successors, from Egypt to India. And, of course, there were Greek colonies in Mesopotamia. This culture has generally been seen as a stage from paganism to Christianity, when Greek and Oriental culture influenced each other, and this rich mixture of ideas and forms was naturally absorbed into Christianity in its early years of intellectual and imaginal development.<sup>141</sup> It was this mix of cultures that also gave birth to astrology as we know it in its present form.<sup>142</sup>

#### The Gnostic and the Orphic Texts

There is a great deal of evidence that Greeks were experimenting with the Babylonian science of star omens from the late third century B.C.E.<sup>143</sup> Hellenistic astrology, which

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<sup>138</sup> So says Hans Jonas, in *The Gnostic Religion*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p. 254.

<sup>139</sup> Jonas, *Gnostic*, p. 103

<sup>140</sup> See Tarnas, *Western Mind*, p. 76-77; Seznek, *Pagan Gods*, p. 40, and; Campion, *History*, p. 22.

<sup>141</sup> See Momigliano, Arnaldo, 'J.G. Droysen Between Greeks and Jews,' *History and Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 2., (1970), pp. 139-143.

<sup>142</sup> See Ness, *Astrology of Antiquity*, pp. 69-73.

<sup>143</sup> Pingree, David, *From Astral Omens to Astrology from Babylon to Bikaner* (Roma: Istituto Italiano per L'Africa e L'Oriente, 1997), p. 23-25

is thought to have first taken shape in Alexandria, included the Babylonian material, Egyptian religious practices, Pythagorean sacred mathematics and Greek Stoicism.<sup>144</sup> Included in this was the philosophy of ‘Middle Platonism,’ which included the Gnostics, the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Chaldaean Oracles*. All of these teachings considered the possibility of astral influences mediating between the high world of the divinities and humanity here on earth.<sup>145</sup>

Aphrodite/Venus was a powerful figure in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which was believed to be the teaching of the Egyptian god Thoth, also called ‘Thrice-Great Hermes.’ It was probably written during the first two centuries of our era, but had elements that came from earlier times.<sup>146</sup> It describes the origins of the universe and the nature of reality, but seems to have developed far from the conceptions of Greek natural reason. Through the Gnostics it influenced the early development of Christianity and the development of Hellenistic astrology. According to Jessie Weston, the *Corpus Hermeticum* harkens back to the mystery cults of Anatolia and the practices of the Phrygian Mysteries with their worship of Attis (Adonis) and that vegetative, Earth God’s relationship to Cybele (later Aphrodite). When discussing the mystery of generation, the *Corpus Hermeticum* states: ‘Now the Assyrians call this Mystery, Adonis, and whether it is called Adonis it is Aphrodite who is in love with and desires Soul, so-called, and Aphrodite is Genesis according to them.’<sup>147</sup>

The Gnostic texts, found in a cave in Upper Egypt in 1945, were written in the second and third centuries of our era, This now-called ‘Nag Hammadi Library’ also shows this cosmogenic dimension of Aphrodite. Here Aphrodite is neither laughter-loving nor golden but she certainly awesome as one of the fundamental generators of the cosmos,

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<sup>144</sup> *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/a/astr-hel.htm#SH1a> [accessed 31 May 2006]

<sup>145</sup> *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/m/midplato.htm> [accessed 31 May 2006]

<sup>146</sup> For discussion of the long controversy over the dating of the texts, see Copenhaver, Brian P. *Hermetica*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), [hereafter Copenhaver, *Hermetica*], Introduction, and, in particular pp. xliii-xliv.

<sup>147</sup> Weston, Jessie L., *From Ritual to Romance: The Secret of the Grail* (Largs, Scotland: The Banton Press, 1991 [1919]), Ch. XI, pp. 150-163, quoting Mead, in *Thrice-Greatest Hermes* [hereafter Weston, *Ritual*], Vol. I, p. 151.

i.e., a cosmogenitor. In this there are traces of the Aphrodite of Parmenides and Empedocles.<sup>148</sup> There is also a strand of scholarship that cites Hesiod as the inspiration for the author's description of Gnostic cosmogenesis.<sup>149</sup> And Plutarch (c. 46 - c.120) states that she is the cosmogenic goddess who created Eros and who 'holds sway over heaven and earth and is sovereign over all beings'.<sup>150</sup> There are two mentions of her in the *Pistis Sophia*, a fourth or fifth century C.E. Coptic text, written originally in Greek, and then rendered into Sahidic – the dialect of Upper Egypt.<sup>151</sup> This text is about the 'Virgin of Light,' which Mead understands to represent 'man's unbiased impersonal mind' that shines into his 'lower mind'. It is connected to justice, purity and virginity.<sup>152</sup> The 'Virgin of Light' is a figure central to the philosophy of Gnosticism and is mentioned in an astrological context. The author of the *Pistis Sophia* is aware of astrological symbolism, as he uses the planetary references accurately: Saturn and Mars (the two 'malifics') are *behind* the 'Virgin of Light' and Jupiter and Venus (the two 'benefics') are *facing* her – and they bring her joy.<sup>153</sup> Mead's translation is respected by Brian Copenhaver, but he warns that it might contain a Theosophical bias.<sup>154</sup> This may be true, but the translation seems accessible and poetic.

In Copenhaver's translation of the *Hermetica* the cosmogenitor is the high 'Father God.' It is God who devised the 'mystery of procreation unto eternity, in which arose the greatest affection, pleasure, gaiety, desire and love divine...the act of this mystery, so sweet and vital'. Venus is connected to fecundity, sensation and growth. She can be identified with the *moment of union*, which can be called 'Venus or Cupid or both'.

<sup>148</sup> See above, Parmenides, and Empedocles, Fragments.

<sup>149</sup> See Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 'Introduction' for a full discussion and also Eliade, *Myth*, pp. 152-154.

<sup>150</sup> Perkins, PHEME, 'On the Origin of the World (CG II,5): A Gnostic Physics', *Vigiliae Christianae*, (Brill Academic Publishers, 1980), and Mansfeld, J., 'Hesiod and Parmenides in Nag Hammadi', *Vigiliae Christianae*, (Brill Academic Publishers, 1981).

<sup>151</sup> See <http://www.gnosis.org/library/pistis-sophia/ps003.htm> for Mead's introduction to it. [accessed 1 June 2006]

<sup>152</sup> Mead, G.R.S. 'The Vision Of Aridæus,' *Echoes From The Gnosis* Vol. III. 1907 p. 50. [http://www.webcom.com/gnosis/library/grs-mead/grsm\\_aridaeus.htm](http://www.webcom.com/gnosis/library/grs-mead/grsm_aridaeus.htm) [accessed 1 July 2006]

<sup>153</sup> Mead, G.R.S., *Pistis Sophia*, 6<sup>th</sup> Bk. Ch. 148. <http://www.gnosis.org/library/pistis-sophia/ps153.htm> [accessed 6 June 2006]

<sup>154</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, p. lx.

Venus is the joy and pleasure of love and generation, but she is a creation herself. Her creator is ‘God, this master of the whole of nature.’<sup>155</sup>

Returning to the *Pistis Sophia*, there is a second reference to Aphrodite in a section on the soul. The text is subtle; it refers to Aphrodite as the one who exists here, ‘in the act of begetting,’ and, having earlier told of the suffering of the soul after leaving ‘her father’s house’ and descending into a body, warns the soul of its suffering when it turns away from its ‘perfect husband.’ What is significant here is that Aphrodite is connected specifically to the pleasure of sexual encounter, but is said to be dangerous to the soul.<sup>156</sup> Perhaps this is because the pleasure that Aphrodite brings can seduce the soul away from its ‘real’ non-material home. This may not come from the Platonic rational line of thinking, but it does have a parallel in Socrates’ notion of the ‘heavenly Aphrodite’ and ‘common Aphrodite’. But then, Plato may have received his inspiration from Parmenides and the other pre-Socratics. What we can conclude is that Aphrodite has both a physical and a non-physical dimension of pleasure, joy and beauty from her origins. And this beauty was perceived by the eyes, the imagination and the mind.

There is one more group of texts to consider. According to current scholarship the *Orphic Hymns* were written by several authors sometime during this period – between three hundred B.C.E. and two hundred C.E. Eric Neumann cites the fifty-ninth hymn in which Aphrodite Urania is designated as ‘the eldest of the Moirai.’<sup>157</sup> The ‘Moirai’ are the Fates, and their law is the oldest law. Here too, Aphrodite is Cosmogonitor.

The fifty-fourth *Orphic Hymn*, translated by Thomas Taylor, calls Venus:

Heav'nly [Ourania], illustrious, laughter-loving queen, sea-born,  
night-loving, of an awful mein.' ... And ev'ry tribe of savage  
monsters dire / In magic chains to bind, thro' mad desire... Where  
married females praise thee ev'ry year, / And beauteous virgins

<sup>155</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, p. 79.

<sup>156</sup> ‘The Expository Treatise on the Soul.’ Selection made from James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library*, revised edition. (HarperCollins: San Francisco, 1990).

<http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/exe.html>

[accessed 06 June 2006]

<sup>157</sup> Neumann, *Mother*, p. 231, citing Pausanias, 2, 11, 14. Also see Pausanias reference above; I:19:2, p. 53.

in the chorus join...Come, all-attractive to my pray'r inclin'd, / For  
thee, I call, with holy, reverent mind.<sup>158</sup>

In a footnote to the hymn he writes that the goddess is responsible for uniting form with matter, and although she is a 'supermundane' divinity, she is principally employed in 'beautifully illuminating the order, harmony, and communion of all mundane concerns'.<sup>159</sup>

### The Roman Venus

Before we look at the astrology in which the planet Venus played a part, we shall look at the goddess Venus, who arose in the Greco-Roman period. According to Geoffrey Grigson, the first temple to be built in Rome to Venus (as opposed to Aphrodite) was in 295 B.C.E., and it was to '*Venus Obsequens*'.<sup>160</sup> Scholars consider that she had probably been worshipped around the region for perhaps two hundred years.<sup>161</sup> According to the historian Livy (59/64 B.C.E. – 19 C.E.), the temple was erected by the state and paid for by matrons who had been fined for committing adultery. It was to stand as an admonishment to them.<sup>162</sup> Venus was certainly the Goddess of Love, but for the practical Romans, the loss associated with her fleeting moment of joy was made to be financial.

Over time Venus gathered the attributes of various regional goddesses but her most powerful influence remained the Greek Aphrodite. How precisely the two came together is a mystery, but just as the Greek world was absorbed into the Roman world, so was the great goddess of love, Aphrodite, all but absorbed into the Roman Venus. Ean Begg comments on the temple built in 217 B.C.E. that was dedicated to Aphrodite of Erice (Eryx). He considers it was there that Venus, the 'rustic garden goddess,' who

<sup>158</sup> 'The Hymns of Orpheus', Ch. LIV: 'To Venus', transl. Thomas Taylor, (1792).

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hoo/hoo59.htm>

[accessed 12 July 2006]

<sup>159</sup> 'The Hymns of Orpheus,'; as above.

<sup>160</sup> According to Lewis & Short 'obsequens' has the meaning of 'to comply with, yield to, gratify, humour, submit to', pp. 1242-1243.

<sup>161</sup> Grigson, *Goddess*, p. 219.

<sup>162</sup> Pomeroy, Sarah B. *Goddesses, Whores, Wives & Slave: Women in Classical Antiquity*, (London, Pimlico: Random House, 1994), p. 208, quoting Livy, 10:312.9.

did not have much of a cult in Rome, began to be amalgamated with the great Greek goddess of love.<sup>163</sup> Whatever the history, Aphrodite and Venus were woven together over time. For centuries Roman writers called her by either or both names, and even the early Hellenistic astrologers did that for a time. By the first century B.C.E., Cicero was telling his readers that the name Venus is taken from *venire*, the Latin word for ‘to come’, meaning that she comes to everyone (*‘Venus, quod ad omnes veniat’*).<sup>164</sup> Considering his worldly approach to the gods and goddesses, we might assume Cicero was being somewhat tongue-in-cheek.<sup>165</sup> Grigson has given an etymological analysis of the word ‘Venus’, and he shows its connection to words such as ‘grace or favour of the gods,’ and ‘to obtain this grace divine by worship.’ He also mentions a magical element in the roots of the word.<sup>166</sup> *Klein’s Etymological Dictionary* indicates that the word is associated with ‘reverence’ and ‘veneration’ but also with the Old Indian word for ‘desire’ and ‘love’, and the Old English word for ‘joy’ and ‘to wish.’ And all these words are derivatives of the Indo-European ‘to strive after, wish...to be satisfied.’<sup>167</sup> Klein also informs us that the word *venal* is ‘that which can be corrupted’ or ‘bought’, and the word *venom* is a poison which was originally ‘a love potion’ from its derivation of ‘*Venus*’, which is ‘love, sexual desire’.<sup>168</sup> (In the Catholic Church, a ‘venial’ sin is considered a pardonable sin; not very grave, and not necessarily connected with sex). As Aphrodite transformed into Venus, all of these ideas came with her.

Astrology may have its deep roots in Babylon and Egypt, but it was only in the Hellenistic period that it found a shape that is recognisable even today.<sup>169</sup> According to Franz Cumont, the assignation of names and natures to the astrological planets was connected to their appearance for a time, but in the end the mythological names won out.<sup>170</sup> The astrologers were clearly taking the names of the planets from the deep

<sup>163</sup> Begg, Ian *The Cult of the Black Virgin*, (London, Arkana: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1985), [hereafter Begg, *Black Virgin*], p. 69. For a different view of this, see Grigson, *Goddess*, pp. 215-224.

<sup>164</sup> Cicero, *De Natura Deorum (On the Nature of the Gods)*, transl. H. Rackham, (London: Heinemann, 1933), ii: 27.

<sup>165</sup> See Cicero, *De Divinatione*, (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1979), Bk. I, iii. 5-8. pp. 226-233.

<sup>166</sup> Grigson, *Goddess*, p. 219.

<sup>167</sup> See *Klein’s Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, (London: Elsevier, 2006 [1966]), p. 805a under ‘venerate.’

<sup>168</sup> See Klein, pp. 804 and 805.

<sup>169</sup> For a fuller description of this see Tester, *History* and also Dreyer’s *Venus*, pp. 86-92.

<sup>170</sup> Cumont, Franz, ‘Les noms des planets et l’astrologie chez les Grecs,’ *LiAntiquite Classique*, 4 (1935): pp. 32-33.

tradition of Babylon and Greece into the now Greco-Roman world, and they were ascribing powers to the planets according to their mythological natures. Venus, the beautiful morning and evening star, had dominion over love and beauty. In Hellenistic astrology the planet Venus was considered fortunate but most of the time she simply lessened the disaster the astrologers were predicting or describing.

### **The Astrologers' Venus**

Nigidius Figulus, a Neopythagorean friend of Cicero's, was an astrologer of the mid-first century B.C.E. For him, Venus was a 'benefic,' but could only help a situation if she was in a helpful place in the sky.<sup>171</sup>

Little is left of Figulus' work, but we do have more of Manilius, who is thought to have lived in the early years of the first century of our era, in Rome. Jim Tester tells us that he was not a practising astrologer.<sup>172</sup> He writes about Venus as a goddess of love and generation and sexual pleasure in her appearances as both morning and evening star.<sup>173</sup> He describes a system of houses, or 'temples', that according to Wolfgang Hübner, was unique and was not transmitted elsewhere.<sup>174</sup> The temple of Venus (which is called 'Fortune') is the 'citadel of the sky, where the rising curve attains its consummation, and the downward slope makes its beginning, and the summit towers midway between orient and occident and holds the universe poised in its balance'. Among the stars Venus places 'in the very face of heaven...her beauteous features', from where she rules men's affairs. He assigns to this 'abode' her rulership over wedlock and the bridal chamber itself, 'the marriage torch', and she has charge over 'plying her own weapons.'<sup>175</sup> Manilius, in spite of his 'eccentricity' gives Venus the traditional powers, i.e., love and beauty, but he also gives her more power than later astrologers, by giving her the rulership over the the midheaven (the *medium coeli* or the middle of the

<sup>171</sup> Getty, R.J. 'The Astrology of P. Nigidius Figulus (Lucan I 649-665), in *Classical Quarterly*, 35 (1941), p. 18.

<sup>172</sup> Tester, *History*, p. 44. See pp. 30-44 for a discussion of Manilius and his historical context.

<sup>173</sup> Manilius, *Astronomica*, love and generation in 2.926, 4.258 and sexual pleasure in 3.655, 5.142 and 1.17.8n.

<sup>174</sup> See Manilius, *Astronomica*, II. 856-967, and ; *Les Astres*, Tome I, 'Les Astres et les Mythes La Description du Ciel', (Publications de la Recherche, Université, Paul Valéry, Montpellier, 1996) 'Wolfgang Hübner, 'Les Divinités Planétaires de la Dodecatropos', pp. 307-317.

<sup>175</sup> Manilius, *Astronomica*, II. 923+, p. 155-6.

heavens) and calling this ‘temple’ Fortune. However, no one took this up later, and we do not know from which source he received these ideas.

The work of Dorotheus of Sidon (fl. 25-75 C.E.), is controversial. He is thought to have been writing in the first century of our era.<sup>176</sup> Until recently the only English translation was a ninth century Arabic translation of a third century Persian translation of the original Greek, with possible Indian influences on either the Persian or Arab translations.<sup>177</sup> David Pingree’s translation of the *Carmen Astrologicum* in 1976 (and its reprint in 1993) states that the astrology written under the name of Dorotheus offers a comprehensive view of what kind of astrology would have been practised by the Alexandrians, and by the Roman court astrologers, and even what sort of astrology would have been known to the Hellenised Jews of Palestine at the time of the birth of Christ. It was influential on astrologers for thirteen hundred years.<sup>178</sup>

For the purposes of this investigation, we will only look at Dorotheus’ interpretation of the planet Venus. His descriptions of the action of Venus takes her femaleness and her connection with pleasure into account. He considers Venus *useful* when requesting something: ‘If you ask for the request when Mercury is with Venus and his desire is in front of women and is something pleasing him and he is amused by it then he will grant [it] in this.’<sup>179</sup> The influence of Venus, once the great star goddess of Mesopotamia, has become just useful, and only in certain, specific, circumstances. It seems Venus has become a captive queen and is now a servant, beautiful perhaps, but still a servant. She is not able, on her own, to avert danger or disaster.<sup>180</sup>

Dorotheus contrasts Jupiter with Venus. Jupiter always turns a ‘star’ towards the good when it aspects it, and it always diminishes or even destroys evil. Venus does this too,

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<sup>176</sup> For an analysis of the controversy of his dating and his influence on later astrologers, see Nicholas Champion’s Introduction to *Carmen Astrologicum*, transl. David Pingree, (London: Ascella Publications, 1993).

<sup>177</sup> Tester, *History*, p. 156.

<sup>178</sup> [Campion at nickcampion.com/nc/history/articles/dorotheus.htm](http://nickcampion.com/nc/history/articles/dorotheus.htm) [accessed 20 March 2006]

<sup>179</sup> Dorotheus, *Dorothei Sidonii: Carmen Astrologicum*, ed. and transl. David Pingree, (BSB B.G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1976), V.14: lines 1-7, p. 114.

<sup>180</sup> Dorotheus, *Carmen Astrologicum*, V. 25: lines 31-33, p. 126-127.

but not in ‘momentous affairs’ (unless Jupiter is involved as well). Venus only has power in love, food, perfume, and the like.<sup>181</sup> Love is not, presumably, momentous in the astrology of this writer. He moves between calling her Venus or Aphrodite. He says that Kronos (Saturn) applying to (i.e., approaching or coming into relationship with) Aphrodite, ‘harms the good effect of Aphrodite.’ However, he also says that Aphrodite coming onto the square (an awkward angle) of Ares (Mars) or Kronos (Saturn) provides ‘pleasure and health and honor.’ Zeus [Jupiter] does this too. Both planets have good effect on the malifics (Mars and Saturn) in this case. Later he says, ‘Aphrodite onto Kronos is fine for doing and for everything...Aphrodite onto Zeus disturbs and troubles through women, and plays one’s hopes false.’ Nothing comes out as one wishes. Aphrodite coming to the Sun increases association with women, and it ‘disturbs the soul [and] the domestic life.’ Venus seems to work well with Hermes (Mercury) being beneficial and erotic, and is mostly well with the moon (though there is suffering to do with women).<sup>182</sup>

Claudius Ptolemy (c. 90 – 168 C.E.) wrote his *Tetrabiblos* (literally ‘four books’) in the middle of the second century of our era. In it he brought together the rapidly developing mathematical astronomy of the time with the ancient understanding of the heavens as a home of the gods. He created a system which became ‘the science of astrology.’<sup>183</sup> Ptolemy tells us that he has seen the Mesopotamian records of eclipses of seven hundred years before his time. He has also seen the work of Hipparchus, of the second century B.C.E., who had been using calculations of the Mesopotamians in his work as well.<sup>184</sup> He writes as a ‘scientist’ of his day, but also exhibits a poetic love of the discipline he is researching and investigating.<sup>185</sup> Scholars of the history of astrology consider him a brilliant thinker who was trying to set astrology within the Aristotelian framework so that it would comply with natural reason: to take it out of the religious Babylonian framework and to give it a rational basis.<sup>186</sup> As Richard Tarnas says, he

<sup>181</sup> Dorotheus, *Carmen Astrologicum*, V. 30: lines 9-12, p. 132.

<sup>182</sup> Hand, *Sages*, (CCAG 2: 195-198), pp. 1-4.

<sup>183</sup> Tarnas, *Western Mind*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>184</sup> Ptolemy, C., *Almagest*, transl. and annot. G. J. Toomer (NY: Springer Verlag, 1984), pp. 166; 174-75; 211-12.

<sup>185</sup> See *Greek Anthology*, no. 577, transl. W. R. Paton, (Loeb Classical Library; London: William Heinemann, 1929), Ch. XI, pp. 320 and 321.

<sup>186</sup> Tester, *History*, pp. 67-68.

(and his colleagues) saw astrology as a ‘useful science’ in which planetary combinations in various positions in the sky reflected or coincided with specific events and even personality traits of humans on earth.<sup>187</sup> He also considered the traditional rulerships and general status of the planets in relation to the seasons. Venus was traditionally exalted (in the best position) in Pisces and in detriment (in the worst position) in Virgo, and she was also considered ‘moist’. Thus her power in Pisces was increased, ‘where the beginning of the moist spring is indicated’ – presumably because September, Virgo’s month, was not considered a ‘moist’ month in Greece at that time.<sup>188</sup>

Ptolemy holds that Venus has a wonderful effect when she is the *only* ruler of an event. Her action is like Jupiter, but there is added ‘a certain agreeable quality’. This is most effective with men, and includes fame and honour, happiness and abundance, a fortunate marriage with many children, and, in fact, satisfaction in all ‘mutual’ relationships. Property is increased, life is conducted well, one is reverent to that which occasions reverence. One’s health is good and one is allied with the right leaders, who are elegant. When Venus rules an event, the winds are temperate, moist and nourishing, weather is clear, rain is generous and fertilizing. Concerning animals and the fruits of the earth, Venus gives useful animals, and she is the greatest cause of abundance, fruitfulness and profit of the land.<sup>189</sup> In regard to physical appearance, she ‘has effects similar to Jupiter’s’. However, her subjects are more ‘shapely, graceful, womanish, effeminate in figure, plump, and luxurious’. And their eyes are ‘bright and beautiful’.<sup>190</sup>

Ptolemy has a section on ‘monsters’. If Venus or Jupiter ‘bear witness’, then only sacred or honoured monsters will come into one’s life. Sacred monsters are dogs and cats ‘and the like’, and those that are honoured and seemly are hermaphrodites and harpocratiacs (deaf-mutes) ‘and the like’.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Tarnas, *Western Mind*, p. 83.

<sup>188</sup> Ptolemy, *C. Tetrabiblos, Book I*, transl. Robert Schmidt, (ed.) Robert Hand (Berkeley Springs: The Golden Hind Press, 1994), I.19-20, p. 91.

<sup>189</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, II. 8. p. 187.

<sup>190</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* III. 11. p. 311.

<sup>191</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* III. 8. p. 263

Through Ptolemy's work we can see that, although Venus has dominion over love and prosperity, health and social position, weather, sailing, abundance of crops, and physical beauty in her subjects, so does Jupiter. Venus also confers proper reverence in her subjects, as does Jupiter. However Jupiter does not make his men 'womanish' or 'effeminate [...] plump, and luxurious,' as Venus' influence does. There may be a slight sneer in this judgement, and it is curious. Was Ptolemy taking this from a tradition, or was this a combination of 'natural reason' and observation?

Vettius Valens (c.120 – 175 C.E.) was a younger contemporary of Ptolemy. He took his planetary meanings from an existent tradition, but also, presumably, from his own practice, for, unlike Ptolemy, he was a practitioner.<sup>192</sup> In his work he cites two astrologers – Nchepso and Petosiris - who lived in the second century B.C.E. He does not mention Dorotheus or Ptolemy. He gives Venus (whom he calls Aphrodite) dominion over desire and erotic love, but then he goes on to say that she is 'significant for the mother and nurse'. He connects her with priestly rites, which was traditionally Jupiter's realm, and 'the office of gymnasiarch' (which one would normally associate with Mars), but perhaps there was an element of beautifying in training one's body, even in antiquity. Valens is more conventional when he associates Venus with the wearing of gold ornaments and crowns and friends and companions, reconciliations, music, beautiful form, colour, aromatic arts and arts that involve precious stones and ivory. Valens also gives to Aphrodite, 'reconciliations for the good, weddings, purification arts, euphonies, making music, sweetness of melody, beauty of form, paintings, combinations of variety of colors, purple-dyeing and aromatic arts'. She has dominion over 'the arts or commercial workshops', where emeralds, precious stones and ivory are worked. Valens gives her charge over those who spin gold thread, and those who cut hair and adorn themselves or others with gold and other beautiful artifacts. But she also has rulership over those 'who are fond of play'. In certain positions, the planet 'bestows the office of market-overseer, measures, weights, businesses, workshops, gifts, receipts, laughter, festive rejoicing, ornament, water-chases.' Royal women bring advantage with Venus, and the planet indicates 'the

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<sup>192</sup> Holden, *Horoscopic*, pp. 43 and 49.

nurturing of another’, and, finally, pleasure. The Venusian temperament is warm and moist and naturally wants to be surrounded by ‘beauty of form’ and ‘ornament’.<sup>193</sup>

This astrologer has associated the planet Venus with the Aphroditic/Venusian attributes of love and beauty in some detail. The association with nursing and mothers is odd, until one thinks of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, where Venus’ primary role is as a mother, and a mother who nurses her son when he is hurt. And even as a mother to a son, she shows herself in beauty to him, and he expresses longing for her, in his interaction with her.<sup>194</sup>

Antiochus of Athens lived during the second half of the second century of our era. He was quoted by many later and better known astrologers, but little is known of his life, according to Robert Hand (who is quoting Frederick Cramer).<sup>195</sup> Antiochus says that Aphrodite is the ‘overseer of every desire and delight and pleasure’<sup>196</sup> She ‘rules over comeliness and purity and affection and erotic love.’<sup>197</sup> In his analysis of marriage he considers the planets’ relevant to men (Moon and Venus) and to women (Sun and Mars), and he also refers to Venus and her ‘lascivious’ side.<sup>198</sup> This harkens back to the early Mesopotamian goddesses, but it also gives intimations of the fearful side of her world, perceived by the Greeks: enter her realm of beauty, and you will be caught in something that might destroy you.

In Greek mythology, Zeus, and in Roman mythology, Jupiter, was the Father God and therefore no gods or goddesses had power over him, not even in their own realms, except for Aphrodite/Venus. She could cause him to be overpowered by love.<sup>199</sup> Her Babylonian antecedent, the star deity of Babylon, had been powerful in her own right,

<sup>193</sup> All of the above in Valens, Vettius, *Anthology Book I*, transl. Robert Schmidt and (ed.) Robert Hand (Berkeley Springs: The Golden Hind Press, 1993), Bk. I, pp. 4-5.

<sup>194</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, transl. John Dryden, (New York, Airmont Publishing Co. Inc. 1968), [hereafter Virgil, *Aeneid*], Bk. II, p. 40.

<sup>195</sup> Introduction by Robert Schmidt, in Antiochus of Athens, *The Thesaurus*, transl. Robert Schmidt, and (ed.) Robert Hand, (Berkeley Springs: The Golden Hind Press, 1993), [hereafter Antiochus, *Thesaurus*], vii-viii., quoting Frederick H. Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics*, (Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 1954) pp. 187, 188.

<sup>196</sup> Antiochus *Thesaurus*, Part I, Ch. 8, p. 9.

<sup>197</sup> Antiochus, *Thesaurus*, Part II, Ch.8, p. 52.

<sup>198</sup> Antiochus *Thesaurus*; see Robert Hand’s comments on this on page 62 and in footnote 1 of that page.

<sup>199</sup> Cashford, *Hymns*, pp. 85-97.

with no deity above her. In the astrology that emerged out of the many streams of influence in the Hellenistic period, Aphrodite/Venus has kept her identity as queen of her own realm; she has power over love and pleasure and beauty. But she is always less powerful than Jupiter, whereas the Father of the gods is still supreme, and here he is wholly benevolent, effecting everything he touches with his good influence.

Venus is diminished, and so are her realms; the realms of love and beauty and the pleasure that is such a deep part of love's beauty. Plato may have split her world in two, but she was then still important enough to be the subject of much consideration and given a home in his world of Forms. In making Venus a lesser benefic (lesser than Jupiter) in what could be seen as an elaborate, divinatory, board-game, it could be argued that the Hellenistic astrologers reduced the realm of love and beauty to something almost manageable. After all, as Friedrich points out, fertility and procreation are the 'substantive basis' for the power of this goddess.<sup>200</sup> Sexuality is the means by which life perpetuates itself. Beauty is its lure, and the pleasure of that beauty is the beginning of love. In the astrology that developed during this time and place, Venus was associated with beauty and love and was helpful in certain circumstances, but by becoming a lesser benefic, her realm was does not seem fundamentally significant. Love and beauty and longing and loss were not part of this new astrology, unless it was the loss of something as earth-bound as a goat.<sup>201</sup>

### **Aphrodite / Venus and the poets of the Hellenistic period**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of September, 46 B.C.E. Julius Caesar dedicated a temple to 'Venus Genetrix' in Rome, to fulfil a vow he had made to her. The temple honoured her as 'Mother Venus' – mother of the Roman people and goddess ancestor of his own family line. According to myth, Venus gave birth to Aeneas, the hero who was to father the Roman nation.<sup>202</sup> (According to Manilius, Julius Caesar 'boasted descent from Venus'.)<sup>203</sup> There is an alternative view: that Mars gave birth to Romulus and Remus

<sup>200</sup> Friedrich, *Aphrodite*, p. 95.

<sup>201</sup> See *Lyra Graeca*, Vol. 1, p. 191, fn. 2 for a reference to goats sacrificed to Aphrodite Pandemos. (cf. Luc. *D.Mer.* 7).and Sappho's Frag. 7 mentioning the fat of a white goat she sacrifices to Aphrodite.

<sup>202</sup> Cashford, *Homeric Hymns*, pp. 93-96.

<sup>203</sup> Manilius, *Astronomica I*, transl.G.P. Goold, (London, William Heinemann, Ltd, 1977), lines 798-99.

and it was they who founded Rome. For the purposes of this inquiry, that is perhaps interesting because of what Ovid did with Venus in his great works on Love. But we will come to that later. For the moment it is noteworthy that Venus' role as mother and patroness of marriage, becomes highlighted in the Hellenistic period. Kate Cooper, in her book about the idealization of women in late antiquity points to the fact that Venus had been patroness of marriage from the time of Augustus. The pragmatic Romans had domesticated the Goddess of Love so to encourage marriage – and thereby, hopefully, concord – amongst the ruling classes.<sup>204</sup>

### **Venus in Virgil: loving mother of Aeneas**

Virgil (70 – 19 B.C.E.) was the last of the classical authors who wrote directly from the myths of old Greece. His *Aeneid* took its inspiration and stories from Homer's epic tales, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In Virgil's great lyric poem, Venus is a central character. She is the mother of Aeneas, the hero and founder-to-be of Rome. She helps him throughout his adventures, both intervening on the ground, in the battle field, and also on high, in passionate arguments with the other Olympians involved in the war. She first appears to her son in the woods, disguised as a 'virgin of the Spartan blood.'<sup>205</sup> She reveals herself to Aeneas at the end in all her beauty and her grace, 'the Queen of Love.'<sup>206</sup> When he discovers who she is, he chastises her for disguising herself, but nevertheless follows her directions. That she comes to speak with her son in the disguise of a young girl is not unprecedented. In the early Homeric Hymn, she has done the same with Aeneas' father, Anchises, when she had fallen in love with him and set out to seduce him.<sup>207</sup> Now she is seducing her son, but into action and courage, and she chooses a disguise which is against her type but appropriate for her purposes. In the end she reveals herself to him through showing her beautiful neck – just as she had done with his father.<sup>208</sup>

<sup>204</sup> Cooper, Kate, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity*, (London: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 93.

<sup>205</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bk I, p. 20.

<sup>206</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bk I, p. 23.

<sup>207</sup> Cashford, *Hymns*, 'Hymn to Aphrodite', pp. 88-89.

<sup>208</sup> Cashford, *Hymns*, 'Hymn to Aphrodite', p. 92, (line 181); Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bk. I, p. 23.

Later, she argues on behalf of love when Aeneas is so taken with rage that he is about to kill Helen, who has taken shelter in Vesta's temple. Venus comes to Aeneas, with her radiant goddess eyes: 'Not in her own star confess'd a light so clear / Great in her charms, as when on gods above / She looks, and breathes herself into their love.'<sup>209</sup> She tells her son not to take unmanly vengeance on Helen, who is not at fault, her love of Paris, and the destruction following from it, having been decreed by the gods. Here Venus is wise and kind on behalf of love. When speaking of Helen, she is speaking of a distressed woman who has done nothing we know of to deserve her fate. Yet in the *Iliad* she is kind to Helen only until Helen resists – then her wrath is fierce indeed. Helen immediately gives in.<sup>210</sup> This theme, that one *must* give in to love or suffer Aphrodite's wrath, is common with the poets. We have seen it in the early Greek dramatists and we shall see it again.

Venus is most herself – beautiful for the sake of love – when, with a voice full of 'the charms of love' and, later, 'soft embraces' she seduces her husband Vulcan into making weapons for her son.<sup>211</sup> She is perhaps more surprising when she heals her son's wounds with various substances mixed together with the juice of medicinal herbs.<sup>212</sup> Her role as guardian and rescuer of her son has its precedent in Homer, of course, but here it is emphasised. In the *Iliad* she tries to rescue Aeneas and not only fails, but is wounded herself.<sup>213</sup> In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Venus rescues her son from despair when they are driven to an unknown shore. She leads him to Carthage, his friends, and Queen Dido.<sup>214</sup>

Virgil redeems Venus through his epic poem.<sup>215</sup> He shows her wondrous 'golden' beauty, but he also shows her power and dignity.<sup>216</sup> In Homer, Aphrodite had lost her

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<sup>209</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bk. II, p. 55.

<sup>210</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, Bk. III, lines 383-448, pp. 74-75. For a discussion of Helen's relation to the divinity, see Schein, Seth L., *The Mortal Hero; An Introduction to Homer's Iliad*, (London, University of California Press, 1984), pp. 22-24.

<sup>211</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bk. VIII, p. 223.

<sup>212</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bk. XII, p. 334.

<sup>213</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, Bk. V, lines 310-428, pp. 100-103.

<sup>214</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bk. I, pp. 19-24.

<sup>215</sup> See Selznec, *Pagan Gods*, pp. 86-87 for a elucidation of this.

<sup>216</sup> For an excellent discussion of this theme, see Nehr Korn, Helga, 'A Homeric Episode in Vergil's *Aeneid*,' *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 92, No. 4, (Oct. 1971), pp. 566-584.

war-goddess ancestry. In Virgil, Venus shows not only her Aphroditic roots, but also whispers of her Oriental deep ancestry. And, it may be that because Virgil is a Roman, he presents her as a devoted mother. Greek Aphrodite is becoming Roman Venus. Beauty and love are still her themes, but expanded from the moment of erotic encounter to moments of perfect love – timeless moments, even when between a mother and her child. And this moment too, so full of divine presence, is also full of potential loss and subsequent longing. When Aphrodite imagines that her son will die, she wails to Zeus, and he comforts her with the story of Aeneas' future glory as Founder of Rome.<sup>217</sup> This Roman writer, Virgil, with his capacity to honour the Roman value of motherhood as well as the ancient Greek deities, has shown how the goddess herself has had to experience potential loss and longing that are part of her wondrous gift. It is not through erotic love, in this case, but through the passionate love of her child that she, the Goddess of Love, feels the pain that is, arguably, intrinsic to her dimension.

### **Horace's Venus: Cruel Mother of Desires (*Mater saeva Cupidinum*)**

Horace (65 B.C.E. – 8 C.E.) was one of the great lyric poets of the Augustinian period. The son of a freedman, he had been educated in Athens, and thus had 'the gorgeous and vivid splendour of Greek religion' with which to furnish his 'duller sphere of Roman mythology.' This is according to one of Horace's early and great twentieth century commentators, John Marshall, who concluded that Horace, along with other 'sane and plodding...sensible and practical Roman folks,' would never really believe in the exotic and mysterious Greek religious views, i.e., gods or goddesses.<sup>218</sup> This is credibly contradicted by D.R. Dicks, though Dicks agrees that the poet held a sceptical attitude to horoscopic astrology.<sup>219</sup> Whatever his religious views, Venus is truly alive in Horace's poetry. He asks her to guide his admired contemporary, Virgil, when he is travelling by ship.<sup>220</sup> He sees her dancing with the Graces in Spring.<sup>221</sup> He writes of her dangerous effect on vain young men, such as Paris.<sup>222</sup> In Ode XIX he calls her 'stern'

<sup>217</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bk. I, pp. 17-19.

<sup>218</sup> See John Marshall's 'Introduction' in *The Complete Works of Horace: Translated by Various Hands*, (London, J.M. Dent & Sons, no date), [hereafter, Horace, *Odes*], p. xviii.

<sup>219</sup> Dicks, *Astrology and Astronomy in Horace*, (Offprint from: *Hermes. Zeitschrift für klassische Philologie* 91.1963), pp. 60-73.

<sup>220</sup> Horace, *Odes*, Bk. I: III, p. 4.

<sup>221</sup> Horace, *Odes*, Bk. I: IV, p. 5.

<sup>222</sup> Horace, *Odes*, Bk. I: XV, p. 16.

or ‘cruel’ because she causes him to long for things he would rather not, and to attend to her shrine rather than write war poems.<sup>223</sup> Horace is very clear about the power of love and its elements of pain and longing.

At one point he commiserates with a fellow poet who has fallen in love with someone inappropriate: ‘Venus decrees, whose joy it is to bind / Body ill-matched with body, mind with mind, / In her stern yoke, a gruesome jest.’<sup>224</sup> And he remembers when he was ‘shackled in the delicious fetters’ of an unsuitable woman.<sup>225</sup> At another point he renounces love, but then begs Venus for help when he loves again.<sup>226</sup> Elsewhere he begs her to spare him from her torments – he is old now and does not want to feel her ‘soft tyranny.’ He tells her to go where she will have a ‘richer feast’, where young men and women play and there is incense and dancing and music ‘of the flute’s sweet voicing.’<sup>227</sup> The odes seem to be written by a man who has loved passionately in his life and is now mourning the loss of Venus’ kind of love: age has taken away his right to her grace. This is the old Greek theme of the gods hating old age (which Aphrodite told us about some eight hundred years before).<sup>228</sup> Longing and loss are implicit in this theme.

In another ode he calls on Venus’ protective element, developed so well in Virgil through the love of her son. Horace is looking for deities who might bring help to sinful Rome, and Venus is one of those deities. She is ‘the smiling goddess from Mount Erice.’ As mentioned earlier, Venus, and her ancestress goddesses of love, were connected to prostitution from antiquity.<sup>229</sup> Horace’s ‘smiling goddess’, and the women who served her had a long history on Mount Erice.<sup>230</sup> They had certainly been associated with protection and prayer in the Persian Wars during the fifth century, B.C.E.<sup>231</sup> The connection between beauty and love and longing and loss are clear when

<sup>223</sup> *Horace Odes I: Carpe Diem*, transl. David West, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995), [hereafter West’s *Horace*], Ode, XIX, p. 19.

<sup>224</sup> Horace, *Odes*, Bk. I: XXXIII, p. 29.

<sup>225</sup> See West’s *Horace*, Bk. I.33, p. 14.

<sup>226</sup> Horace, *Odes*, Bk. III: XXVI, p. 84.

<sup>227</sup> Horace, *Odes*, Bk. IV, Ode I, p. 91.

<sup>228</sup> Cashford, *Hymns*, p. 95, line 247.

<sup>229</sup> See Grigson, *Goddess*, p. 219 for the connections with prostitutes and the Venus of Eryx.

<sup>230</sup> Friedrich, *Aphrodite*, p. 22, and Seltman, *Olympians*, pp. 82-84.

<sup>231</sup> Seltman, *Olympians*, pp. 82-83.

sacred prostitutes offer sacrifice to their goddess for the protection of young men in war. How she will protect 'sinful Rome' is another question.

Horace never married, although, if we are to believe his poems, he fell in love many times and often with girls. Though he approved of men marrying, he did not wish to enter that battle-field himself. Though he lived in the middle of a political society, he was not a political animal. He did have the grace of friendship with one Manaeus, who was close to Augustus, and therefore he enjoyed political favour all of his life.<sup>232</sup> Horace's Venus – in whatever realm she inhabited for him – was a potent presence; he feared and respected her, and he both wanted her gifts and wanted to be free of them. She was, without question, the Goddess of Love.

### **Ovid's Venus: Mother of Tender Loves (*tenerorum mater Amorum*)**

Ovid (43 B.C.E. – 7 C.E.) has been a controversial figure for scholars throughout history, particularly for modern scholars.<sup>233</sup> R.O.A.M. Lyne tells us that Ovid's world was a '*demi-monde* just outside respectable society'.<sup>234</sup> The classicist Peter Green compares the poet's work with the poems and stories of Dorothy Parker, 'who transmuted the raw material of a sensuous, desperately neurotic life into brittle and witty works of art.' He wonders as many modern scholars to do, whether Ovid liked women at all.<sup>235</sup> But there are others, who believe he did like women very much.<sup>236</sup> Read without *a priori* assumptions, Ovid's work suggests that he had the normal instincts of a man towards women: he felt all the delight and frustration, wonder and confusion that men often feel for their wholly opposite 'other'.

Venus is at the heart of Ovid's amatory poems. *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, and *Remedia Amoris*, are the poems of his youth, although the goddess continues to figure in the

<sup>232</sup> See Griffin, Jasper, 'Cult and Personality in Horace', *The Journal of Roman Studies* (1997), p. 58.

<sup>233</sup> For a comprehensive discussion see Wade C. Stephens, 'Cupid and Venus in Ovid's Metamorphoses,' *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 89, (1958), pp. 286-300. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press), p. 286-7 & footnote 4.

<sup>234</sup> Lyne, R.O.A.M., *The Latin Love Poets from Catullus to Horace* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), [hereafter Lyne, *Love Poets*], p 240.

<sup>235</sup> See Peter Green's Introduction to *Ovid: The Erotic Poems*, transl. Peter Green, (London: Penguin Classics, Ltd. 1982), pp. 66-68.

<sup>236</sup> See Alan H.F.Griffin's, Ovid's 'Metamorphoses', *Greece & Rome*, 2nd Ser., V. 24, No. 1. (Apr.1977), [hereafter Griffin, *Greece & Rome*], pp. 57-70.

works of his middle years – *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid is important for the purpose of this inquiry because he gives practical instruction on how to deal with the love engendered by Venus. His work remained influential for centuries.<sup>237</sup> It can even be seen today, each time one person gives love advice to another.<sup>238</sup> ‘The Art of Love’ (*Ars Amatoria*) is a sophisticated poem for a worldly Roman audience. It is ironic and sharp, teasing, witty and at times cynical. It probably reflected much about the emotional and sexual concerns of sophisticated Romans, and it does show an understanding of human nature and Ovid’s experience of the joys and sorrows of passionate love. Many scholars believe that he, along with many of his contemporaries, did not believe in the gods, but used them to illustrate psychological truths.<sup>239</sup> In the third book of *Amores*, he says, ‘Either God is a name without substance and feared for naught, moving people through stupid trustfulness, or, if there is a god, he is in love with the tender fair girls and too quick to ordain that they alone may do all things.’<sup>240</sup> He says that he understands the problems of the gods who have eyes and hearts themselves and are obviously as susceptible to beauty and as helpless as any human man.<sup>241</sup> The youthful perspective of these works seems to be relevant to his attitude to love and his manner of writing.<sup>242</sup> And, Plato notwithstanding, the Goddess of Love considers herself best known in youth.<sup>243</sup>

Ovid was writing at the same time as Virgil and Horace in Caesar Augustus’ Rome. In this poet, Venus is rarely seen without her son, ‘you who are arms and hands to me, and all my power’.<sup>244</sup> Cupid (or Amor), the God of Love, is supreme. He can even wound his mother-goddess with *his* own arrows, causing her to fall in love.<sup>245</sup> Unlike Homer

<sup>237</sup> For the transmission of Ovid’s work through the centuries, see Peter L. Allen’s, *The Art of Love: Amatory Fiction from Ovid to the Romance of the Rose*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992) [hereafter Allen, *Art of Love*], pp. 111-117.

<sup>238</sup> For example; the ‘agony auntie/uncle of daily newspapers and weekly magazines throughout the Western world.

<sup>239</sup> See Veyne, *L’Elegie erotique romaine: l’amour, la poesie, et l’occident* (Paris, Seuil, 1983) p. 131 and Lyne, *Love Poets*, pp. 85-86.

<sup>240</sup> Ovid, *Ovid: Heroides . Amores*, transl. Grant Showerman (revised G.P. Goold) (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1996 [1914]), [hereafter Ovid, *Amores*], Bk. III, iii. lines 23-35, p. 457.

<sup>241</sup> Ovid, *Amores*, Bk. III, iii. lines 41-46, p.459.

<sup>242</sup> For a thoughtful discussion of Ovid’s culture and generation as influencing his poetry see Griffin, *Greece & Rome*, pp. 42-50.

<sup>243</sup> Cashford, *Hymns*, ‘Hymn to Aphrodite,’ p. 95, line 247.

<sup>244</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, Bk V, line 365: p.126.

<sup>245</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, Bk X, lines 525-30, p. 239.

and Virgil, Ovid does not think Venus and her son alien to war. His use of war rhetoric is unique and sets a precedent that was followed for centuries: ‘Every lover is a soldier, and Cupid has a camp of his own...The age that is meet for the wars is also suited to Venus.’<sup>246</sup> We might think of the well-known saying: ‘all’s fair in love and war.’ In *Amores*, Ovid begins by telling us that he was about to write of ‘arms, and the violent deeds of war’, when Cupid came and threw him off balance.<sup>247</sup> He is outraged - he considers resistance, but realizes that those who fight Love are assailed more bitterly than those who give in quickly.<sup>248</sup> And so he stretches forth his hands to his Master (Eros), ‘to be bound, submissive to thy laws.’ From thenceforth, he says, he is a willing slave.<sup>249</sup> He speaks of ‘Conscience’ and ‘Modesty’ as personages who are foes in the camp of Love, and ‘Caresses’, ‘Error’ and ‘Madness’ as those who follow in the train of Love.<sup>250</sup> Later the medieval love poets will use his allegorical style to tell their stories of Venus and love.

In the war of love, the lover can play all sorts of games with the beloved, feign anger or tears (and no matter if the beloved is mistress or slave-boy), for Venus lends deaf ears to love’s deceptions. Ovid advises tricks and strategies.<sup>251</sup> Yet he is shocked when his mistress seeks material as proof of his love. He reasons that Cupid is a naked child and has no pockets to hold gain: love is free. Venus and her son are not mercenary, but they are certainly playful and wicked. When a lawyer has been burned by love and pleads for leniency, Venus laughs at him from her neighbouring shrine.<sup>252</sup>

As a worldly Roman, this poet relates to Venus as a goddess, but also knows her as an astrological planet and is more natural with it than Horace is when he speaks of ‘Babylonian calculations.’ In *Amores*, an old woman comments on the bad luck the young and beautiful girl in her charge has been having with love. She ascribes it to Mars having hindered her, but now Venus is coming into a good placement in the

<sup>246</sup> Ovid, *Amores*, I. ix, 1-2, p. 355.

<sup>247</sup> Ovid, *Amores*, I. i. lines 1-5, p. 319

<sup>248</sup> Ovid, *Amores*, I. ii. lines 18-19, p. 323.

<sup>249</sup> Ovid, *Amores*, I. ii. lines 20-21, p. 323.

<sup>250</sup> Ovid, *Amores*, I. ii. lines 30-32; 35-38, p. 325.

<sup>251</sup> Ovid, *Amores*, I. viii, lines 81-86, p. 353.

<sup>252</sup> Ovid, Ovid, *The Art of Love and Other Poems (Ars Amatoria)*, transl. J.H. Mozley, (London: William Heinemann, Ltd. 1969), [hereafter Ovid, *Ars.*], I: lines 85-88, p19.

zodiac, and a rich lover is desiring her. Mars has gone off now, trying the souls of men in wars far away and ‘Venus is reigning in the city of her Aeneas,’ which is, of course, Rome. Now the girl will have better fortune.<sup>253</sup>

In describing the birth of the world, when stars, earth and sea all appeared the same, mankind appeared after beasts and birds and fish. But mankind was uncouth, and no one knew each other. ‘Beguiling pleasure’ softened humanity’s ‘fierce spirits’ and each creature found a mate and ‘artlessly did Venus accomplish the sweet act.’ Each bird, each fish ‘in mid-sea finds one with whom to unite in pleasure.’<sup>254</sup> There are resonances here of the cosmogonitrix goddess, the goddess of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the mystery cults from the East. Ovid compares the secret rites of Venus with the great and secret rites of Ceres, the Eleusinian Mysteries, or ‘the great ceremonies devised in Samothrace’.<sup>255</sup> He obviously knows the rites, and uses the notion of their deep secrecy to tell his beloved that she must keep her own beauty rites a secret, too.<sup>256</sup> He mixes the most sacred with the more profane, and he shows Venus as that particular and unique deity who touches the world, from the depth of the sacred mysteries of life and death, to the superficiality of the dressing room mirror and the arts practised before it: ‘Why must I know the cause of the whiteness of your cheeks?...There is much that it befits men not to know; most of your doings would offend, did you not hide them within.’<sup>257</sup>

In *The Remedies of Love* Ovid tells us to avoid leisure if we want to avoid love: plant vines, work the soil; go to war; stay busy. Leisure makes way for love; avoid leisure and you will avoid love.<sup>258</sup> He takes the Roman respect for the labour of war and farming and turns it to good effect. He is both teasing and delightfully sensible. For men, he advises how to find a lover, win and keep her, and then how to get rid of her.

<sup>253</sup> Ovid, *Amore*, I.viii. lines 28-34, p. 349.

<sup>254</sup> Ovid *Ars*, II. lines 476-482, p. 99.

<sup>255</sup> Ovid, *Ars*, II. lines 601-603, p. 107. Also see Carl Kereyni’s *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, translated from the German by Ralf Menheim, (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1976), for a scholarly view of the Eleusian Mysteries and for Aphrodite’s connection with them, as goddess of ‘divine marriage.’

<sup>256</sup> Ovid *Ars*, II. lines 603-608, pp. 108-109.

<sup>257</sup> Ovid *Ars*, III. 225-235, p. 135.

<sup>258</sup> Ovid, *The Erotic Poems*, ‘Cures for Love,’ transl. Peter Green, (London, Penguin Classics, 1982), [hereafter Ovid, ‘Cures,’], pp. 243-244, lines 135-168.

And then he does the same for women. He writes of love as the activity of ‘busy leisure’, but not of ‘unproductive idleness’.<sup>259</sup> Here he is speaking as a pragmatic Roman: his advice on the pain of longing and loss that are part of Venus’ gift of love are taken up with humour and with practical wisdom.

But the pragmatic Ovid is often overcome by the passionate Ovid. At the end of the *Amores* the poet is weary of love and its ‘battle field.’ He calls out, ‘Seek a new bard, mother of tender Loves!’ He is going back to war epics.<sup>260</sup>

Ovid’s last work was *Metamorphoses*. He wrote it so that he, the most famous poet in the world, would soar, ‘undying, far above the stars...immortalized by fame.’<sup>261</sup> This work, that so influenced medieval culture, depicts Venus as many sided: she punishes those who offend her – by causing them to fall hopelessly in love; by turning them into bulls (or prostitutes); by turning them into birds.<sup>262</sup> She also shows tenderness: she answers Pygmalion’s prayer and gives life to the beautiful statue he has created and loves. (She even attends their wedding).<sup>263</sup> In *Metamorphoses*, the tale of Venus and Adonis is told – the ancient tale of love and loss with its deep roots in the ancient Eastern world. It touches on the mystery rites, but shows Venus as wild and possessive.<sup>264</sup> However, by the end of the tale, from Adonis’ blood she has created a flower – the anemone. It is a flower of ‘brief duration’, and reminds us of the brilliant but quickly fading beauty of Venus and her realm of love.

Both Horace and Ovid showed their feelings for the power of Venus, and demonstrated their experience for the beauty that generates love. Both experienced the loss and the longing that seem to be intrinsic to such divine experiences. Whether these poets were misogynist, cynical, satirical is a critical discussion beyond the scope of this paper.

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<sup>259</sup> Sadlek, Gregory, M., *Idleness Working: The Discourse of Love’s Labor from Ovid through Chaucer and Gower*, (Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2004). For text, see Ovid, ‘Cures,’ p. 244; lines 168-198.

<sup>260</sup> Ovid, *Amores*, III: xv. p. 509.

<sup>261</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Bk. XV, lines 878-9, p. 359.

<sup>262</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Bk. X., 224-250, p. 231; XIV, 495-510, pp. 324-5.

<sup>263</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Bk. IV, lines 533-4, p. 108; Bk. X., 260-297, p. 232.

<sup>264</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Bk. X, lines 515-739, pp. 239-245, and lines 731-739, p. 245.

Venus appears as the Goddess of Love, and Beauty. In both poets, longing and loss are intrinsic to her realm. Of the two, Ovid seems to have known her best, and he experienced the greatest longing and loss in his exile; but still, in the despair of that experience, he retained, at least some of the time, his sense of grace.<sup>265</sup>

### **Apuleius' Jealous Venus**

If Venus is a harsh mistress in Ovid, she is much worse for the author Apuleius (c.124 - c.170). Ovid might have known about the mystery schools, but Apuleius was deeply involved in that world. Lucius Apuleius came from a wealthy and well-connected family, and lived in the Roman colony of Madaura, in Morocco. He was educated at Carthage and Athens, where he became attracted to Platonic philosophy. After a series of wild and painful adventures, he became initiated into the mysteries of Isis, and was devoted to her for the rest of his life. He became a lawyer in Rome and travelled widely in Asia Minor and Egypt, a lifetime student of philosophy and religion.<sup>266</sup> His depiction of Venus, and his wariness of her, may stem from his worship of the Hellenised Isis, in spite of the fact that Isis does say that many goddesses, including 'Paphian Venus', are all just other names for herself.<sup>267</sup> Apuleius shows the Goddess of Love in a bad light, particularly in the tale of 'Cupid and Psyche.' In this famous story, told by Apuleius in the middle of his masterpiece, *The Golden Ass*, the author depicts Venus as a jealous, vengeful goddess with few redeeming features. When Eros, sent by his mother Venus to punish Psyche for the reverence others show for her beauty, the God of Love falls in love with her himself. They have a short time together before Psyche loses Eros due to her foolish reliance on her jealous sisters' advice. The rest of the tale is about the punishing trials Psyche undergoes before she is allowed to win back Venus' son – and, in the end, only through the wise intervention of Jupiter, who pacifies the ill-tempered goddess and brings her back to sweetness.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>265</sup> See Ovid, *Tristia . Ex Ponto* transl. Arthur Leslie Wheeler, (London, William Heinemann, 1924), 3.14 but then 3.7. pp. 153-157 then pp. 129-131.

<sup>266</sup> Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, transl. Robert Graves, (London, The Penguin Classics, 1956), [ hereafter Apuleius, *Golden Ass*], pp. 17-18.

<sup>267</sup> Apuleius, *Golden Ass*, Bk. XI p. 547.

<sup>268</sup> Apuleius, *Golden Ass*, pp. 114-157. See Paris *Meditations*, pp. 96-99 for a considered psychological analysis of this tale and Aphrodite's role in it.

There is much modern scholarship on Apuleius' tale, and what it signifies in the development of Western culture about the relationship between men and women and their relationship to soul. For example, the archetypal psychologist, James Hillman, uses the story of Venus, Eros and Psyche to demonstrate how Venus would keep the soul from developing a relationship with more differentiated aspects of love and beauty. He cites Plato as having helped to release the soul from its undifferentiated femaleness by splitting Aphrodite's realm.<sup>269</sup> Hillman's analysis has merit, but both he and Apuleius may simply be showing that they honour other deities: the wondrous but fleeting beauty of Venus' domain, with its attendant longing and loss, may not be their natural realm.

### **Plotinus' Aphrodite: Soul - the Mother of Love**

Plotinus (204 - 270 C.E.) followed Plato in his discussion of love and its generation through beauty, and beauty as that which calls forth love. For Plotinus, the origin of love is 'the longing for beauty itself'. We long for this beauty and seek it here 'below', but it is the Beauty 'above' that we are seeking.<sup>270</sup> Aphrodite is soul 'because of the beauty and brightness and innocence and delicacy of soul.'<sup>271</sup> For Plotinus, male gods are Intellect, and the female gods their souls.<sup>272</sup> For this Neo-Platonist, love is the activity of soul reaching out to the Good, and Aphrodite is soul. He does not consider Venus Pandamos a degraded Venus, as Plato does; rather she is a noble and worldly Venus. In fact, it is this Venus who is the 'image' of the beauty that draws one's soul to celestial beauty.<sup>273</sup> She is also 'in charge of matrimony' (although, since there is no matrimony 'in heaven', there is the implication that this is a lesser duty of the goddess).<sup>274</sup> Plotinus considers that it would be impossible for anyone to be attracted to anything they did not consider beautiful. Armstrong, his translator, points his readers to the fact that Plotinus had absorbed the Hellenistic notion, originally from Plato, that the

<sup>269</sup> See Hillman, James, *Myth of Analysis: Three Essays in Archetypal Psychology*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1978). p. 67, and *Anima*, Hillman's, *Anima: An Anatomy of a Personified Notion*, (Dallas: Spring Publication, 1985), pp. 29, 69-70.

<sup>270</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads III*, transl. A.H. Armstrong, (Loeb Classical Library) (Harvard Conn: Harvard University Press 1967), [hereafter Plotinus *Enneads, III*], III.5. pp. 169-171.

<sup>271</sup> See Fairbanks, *Philosophers*, Fragment 94 for the opposite notion in the pre-Socratic, Heraclitus.

<sup>272</sup> This and the quote above, both Plotinus, *Enneads III.5* and 3.15-20. p. 197.

<sup>273</sup> For an excellent discussion of this see Wind, Edgar, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1968 [1958]), [hereafter Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*], pp. 138-39.

<sup>274</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads, III*, 5, p. 175.

soul can only be attracted to beauty and is repulsed by ugliness.<sup>275</sup> This harkens back to the Greek Aphrodite.

Plotinus' notion of Venus seems more gentle and peaceful than earlier or later notions of her. Edgar Wind states this as one of the 'more refreshing paradoxes of Neoplatonism.'<sup>276</sup> He points to Plotinus' contrast between the placidity of Venus and the restless nature of her son, Eros, in *De Amore*: 'If the soul is the mother of Love, then Venus is identical with the soul, and Amor is the soul's energy'.<sup>277</sup> Plotinus uses the stories and myths, and Plato's discussions, to show how beauty creates longing and love, and how one might appreciate beauty to find a way to God, who is the greatest beauty.<sup>278</sup> Armstrong maintains that Plotinus attached little value to the myths and allegories he used. For the purposes of this inquiry that is irrelevant. When speaking of love and beauty and soul he refers to Aphrodite/Venus and he deals with the pain of loss and longing of her exquisite realm as Plato did, by referring her to another dimension,. But he says she is the soul itself. In his treatise, 'Are the Stars Causes?' he says that the planets do not cause experiences, but they do signify experience. This may imply that he does not believe that Venus 'causes' love or beauty; but she is the signature of it.<sup>279</sup>

## VENUS IN THE 'DARK AGES'

### **The Goddess into Allegory**

In 330 C.E., the Roman Emperor Constantine – the first emperor to become a Christian - declared Constantinople a 'New Rome.' During this period, Rome was ostensibly still ruling the empire, but under the surface, a groundswell of Christianity was rising, with ardent missionaries preaching all over Europe. The pagan cosmologies were being absorbed, when not destroyed, by the new and powerful Christian cosmology. Ginette

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<sup>275</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, III, 5. pp. 168-9.

<sup>276</sup> Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*, p. 119.

<sup>277</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI, ix, 9.

<sup>278</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, III 5.

<sup>279</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads II:3,7*, 'On Whether the Stars are Causes', p. 69.

Paris has written of the ‘religious experience’ of the moments granted by ‘Golden Aphrodite,’ when one sees ‘an incandescent beauty’ in another person. She writes of the sequence that is part of Aphrodisiacal love: from sexual attraction to beauty, from beauty to ecstasy. And she writes of the general suspicion with which the Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – view such a ‘religious’ experience.<sup>280</sup> The early Christian fathers rewrote the old cosmology: the gods were turned back into humans, and their stories were used as examples of how not to behave.<sup>281</sup> By humanising the old deities, the new deities could be exalted. Venus, and some of the other Olympians, were kept alive in their celestial homes through the astrology that continued to survive, but as Christianity gained ground so she slipped out of the public discourse and went underground for some centuries.

Through this period, poetry and literature found new forms – or rather found old forms and re-worked them – to express what was going on in the abandoned realms of pagan mythology. C.S. traces what he calls the ‘steady decline of mythology into allegory.’<sup>282</sup> W.A. Neilson writes at length about the ‘age in which mythology had ceased to be more than a poetic convention’.<sup>283</sup> However, although the pagan gods might have disappeared from their heavenly homes to be replaced by the Christian god and his community of saints, the canny old gods simply found a new abode. Lewis speaks of the ‘other world’, which is not the world of religion, but the world of imagination: ‘the land of longing, the Earthly Paradise’.<sup>284</sup> This has resonance with the imaginal world described by Henry Corbin, ‘the world situated midway between the world of intelligible realities and the world of sense perception’.<sup>285</sup> It was the poets who pointed us to the ‘new life and the new dwellings’ of the gods.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Paris, *Pagan*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>281</sup> Stenudd, *Cosmos*.

<sup>282</sup> Lewis, C.S., *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986 [1936]), [hereafter Lewis, *Allegory*], p. 73.

<sup>283</sup> Neilson, William Allan, ‘The Origins and sources of the *Court of Love*,’ in *Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, Vol. VI, (Boston, Ginn & Company, 1899), [hereafter Neilson, *Court of Love*], pp. 8-23.

<sup>284</sup> Lewis, *Allegory*, p. 76.

<sup>285</sup> For an extended description of this ‘world’ see Corbin, *Imaginalis*.

<sup>286</sup> Lewis, *Allegory*, p. 76.

Lewis also writes of the war between the new religion and the old rites and religions and philosophies which showed itself now as an internal battle – a *bellum intestinum*. This was a war that took place in the psyche and, through the device or vehicle of allegory, the ancient deities reappeared. Here, the Goddess of Love found her way back into the imagination of those who had time to dream. But she was no longer on Olympus. She was in a new realm, the realm of allegory, and she was at constant war, not with other deities, or even humans, but with a whole host of personifications within the psyche.<sup>287</sup>

### **Venus of the poets**

Allegory had been part of Western literature at least since Homer. C.S. Lewis cites Dante as maintaining that its true history began with the classical Latin poets.<sup>288</sup> However, in the early Middle Ages it flowered into a new literary genre, as a poetic form. This form rose to its height in the High Middle Ages with ‘courtly love’ poetry, but its particular antecedents lie in the fifth century C.E.<sup>289</sup> Prudentius (348 – c. 405) was a Christian Latin poet, and is considered by Lewis to be the first to write the kind of poems that led to the later Medieval courtly literature.<sup>290</sup> In a poem called ‘Psychomachia,’ (literally, ‘soul/psyche’ – ‘battle/contest’), he writes, ‘War rages, horrid war / Even in our bones; our double nature sounds / With armed discord.’<sup>291</sup> Venus, as the Goddess of Love, is one of the figures who took part in the soul battles, but she also appears in the gentler poetry of the Christian poets of this period. She is seen in Claudian (fl. C.400) with her son, Cupid, in a wondrous golden palace where even the leaves on the trees love each other.<sup>292</sup>

In a poem from the late fifth century, Venus is seen dwelling a cave, dazzlingly bright with jewels, and taming a proud young man into love. This appearance of the goddess of love is in a lyric poem by Sidonius Apollinaris, an aristocratic Gallo-Roman Catholic

<sup>287</sup> For a clear distinction between a mythic figure, an allegorical figure, and a personification; see Murray, A.S., *Mythology*, (London, W. & R. Chambers, Limited, 1892), p. 10.

<sup>288</sup> Lewis, *Allegory*, referring to Dante, p. 48 and also fn. 1 and 2, p. 48.

<sup>289</sup> Lewis, *Allegory*, (1936) p. 68.

<sup>290</sup> Lewis, *Allegory*, pp. 63-75

<sup>291</sup> Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, 902, p. 72.

<sup>292</sup> Neilson, *Court of Love*, pp. 15-16.

bishop, written for a bride and groom.<sup>293</sup> Another aristocratic Roman Catholic of this time was Boethius (c 470 – 524), who was not a bishop, but a philosopher and translator of Aristotle, Plato and Porphyry. His *Consolations of Philosophy* – not a Christian work – was written in prison before his execution, and it has been translated and read since his death. When writing poetry he writes naturally about the celestial bodies. In one poem he addresses the heavens themselves, ‘where the stars still keep their ancient peace...’ He observes how Love goes on its ‘deathless way’ [and] ‘ugly Hate...is exiled from the shore of stars’ and he asks ‘Lovely Venus’ what to do if love leaves the world, and he asks her to renew love.<sup>294</sup> In this period there is another bishop – this time from Padua – who refers to the goddess playing beautifully naked amongst the flowers. This bishop, Ennodius (473/4 - 571), recounts how her son, Cupid, complains to her that their old empire is lost, and now ‘cold virginity’ possesses the world. ‘Arise! Shake off your sleep!’ he tells her. But she replies: ‘We shall be all the stronger for our rest. Let the nations learn that a goddess grows in power when no one thinks of her.’<sup>295</sup>

### **The Astrology**

There is little Western astrology from this period; what we do have is generally from the Arabs. However, the first notable astrological writer among the Arabs was a Greek, Theophilus of Edessa (c.695-785), who wrote, ‘...in matters of love, Venus.’<sup>296</sup> James Holden acquaints us with Theophilus and some of the Arabic astrologers, and from his reports, it appears that they generally stuck to the notion of Venus in its role as ‘minor benefic,’ useful in love and friendship, signifying women, ‘effeminate men,’ clean clothing and, makers of stringed instruments. She also rules those sect leaders who ride camels (rather than asses or ‘broken-down horses’).<sup>297</sup> This is only surprising when one

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<sup>293</sup> For more information on this thoughtful observer of his times, see ‘The Fall of the Roman Empire Revisited: Sidonius Apollinaris and His Crisis of Identity’ by Eric J. Goldberg <http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/EH/EH37/Goldberg.html> [accessed 2 February 2006]

<sup>294</sup> *Medieval Latin Lyrics*, ed. Helen Waddell, (Middlesex, Eng: Penguin Books Ltd, 1968 [1929]), p. 65.

<sup>295</sup> Lewis, *Allegory*, 1979, p. 78 citing Ennodius, *Carm. Lib.I*, iv, lines 1-4 (ed. Hartel in *Corp. Script. Ecclesiast.* Vol. vi, pp. 29-52).

<sup>296</sup> Holden, James, *A History of Horoscopic Astrology*, (Tempe, Az., American Federation of Astrologers, 1996), [hereafter, Holden, *History*], p. 101; quoting from Theophilus’ *Works on Elections for Wars and Campaigns and Sovereignty*.

<sup>297</sup> Holden, *History*, pp. 99-129, (specifically pp. 108, 123, 111-112.)

has not seen a string of camels gliding across the desert with the grace of dolphins at sea – beautiful indeed. From the excerpts gathered and shown here, Venus is still identified with love and beauty. She does not seem central to the astrology, nor is she central to the poets or philosophers. It would be interesting to know what was the place, if any, of passionate erotic attachments in these ‘dark’ centuries. Did they disappear? Or were they simply hidden from public view, unarticulated, deeply private?

### THE NEXT RETURN – THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Venus did return again. Her next appearance in the West is within the ubiquitous and powerful cosmology of the Christian Church. She arose as a central figure in the poetic literature of the late Middle Ages. She rode in on the wave of a new civilising influence that began to emerge in the twelfth century, arising, as it did, from many quarters. Classical Greek and Roman texts – from Aristotle to astrology – had been coming in from Moorish Spain for nearly a hundred years.<sup>298</sup> The Crusades had started at the end of the eleventh century and continued through the twelfth and, according to Barbara Tuchman, something had to be done with the young knights, whose Christian ideals and martial activity were often at odds with each other and disruptive to public peace. This led thinkers to contemplate, and the Benedictines to institute, a code of chivalry, wedding social behaviour with spiritual values and goals.<sup>299</sup>

By the eleventh century, Ovid had become a standard text in the monastery schools. By the twelfth century he had come to the forefront of classical writers – one German Benedictine remarked that reading secular texts such as Ovid was searching for ‘aurum in stercore’ (gold amidst dung) but recommended him nonetheless for education and

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<sup>298</sup> See Sez nec, *Pagan Gods*, pp. 52-53, and also Rougement, Denis de, *Love in the Western World*, (Princeton, N.J. For details of this complex period in regard to returning texts, see Geanakoplos, Deno J., *Byzantine East and Latin West: Two Worlds of Christendom in Middle Ages and Renaissance: Studies in Ecclesiastical and Cultural History* (Oxford: Gasil Blackwell, 1966), [hereafter Geanakoplos, *Byzantine*], Chap. II, first page; Lisa, Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 35-37; and Holden *Horoscopic*, p. 129. Princeton University Press 1983).

<sup>299</sup> Tuchman, *Distant Mirror*, p. 62.

writing skills.<sup>300</sup> His rhetorical style and his subject matter were copied by clerics and poets throughout Europe, however, not always to the same effect. The learned theologian monk, Alan de Lille (1128 – 1202) wrote the *Complaint of Nature* (*De Planctu Naturae*) in which he depicted Venus as ‘licentious’ and myrrh breathing,’ and the author of unspeakable sexual crimes of the past – Helen of Troy, Pasiphae and the bull, Myrrha and her father, Medea and Narcissus.<sup>301</sup> Later texts, such as Andreas Capellanus’ *De Arte Honeste Amandi* (*The Art of Courtly Love*) began to return Venus to her status as queen of beauty and love again.<sup>302</sup> This text appeared in the court of Marie of Champagne, the daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine, whose grandfather is said to have been the ‘first troubadour’ and who had been William, ninth Duke of Aquitaine (1071-1127).<sup>303</sup> Andreas’ long poetic work is considered to have been secretly written by ‘Queen Eleanor’ and ‘Princess Marie’, and led to the emergence of the ‘courtly love’ phenomenon. In this poetic work, the details of proper behavior between lovers are debated and judged.<sup>304</sup> It cannot, however, honour Venus completely, as the Medieval Church and its heavenly hierarchy had to still win over any worldly or pagan deity.<sup>305</sup> Today, the assessment of the courtly literature is largely negative.<sup>306</sup> However, whatever the merits or faults of ‘l’amour courtoise’, it certainly brought Venus with her beautiful experience of love, longing and loss back into the minds and imaginations of those who had the time to read, and listen to song.<sup>307</sup>

<sup>300</sup> See Allen, 1992, pp. 111-117 for this quote and the for the transmission of Ovid’s work through the centuries.

<sup>301</sup> Alain of Lille [Alanus de Insulis], d. 1202., *The complaint of nature [De Planctu natura]*, translated by Douglas M. Moffat, (Yale studies in English, 1908), [hereafter Alanus, *Complaint*], p. 37.

<sup>302</sup> Burns, *Courtly Love*, p. 29 and fn. 9.

<sup>303</sup> Rougemont, *Love*, p. 117.

<sup>304</sup> Burns, *Courtly Love*, p. 29 and fn. 9. See also Lewis, *Allegory*, pp. 32-43 on its content and potential social implications.

<sup>305</sup> See Lewis, *Allegory*, pp. 32-43 for a good explanation of this

<sup>306</sup> See Kelly, Douglas, *Medieval Imagination: Rhetoric and the Poetry of Courtly Love*, (Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), [ hereafter Kelly, *Medieval*], p. xiv, and; for a six page bibliography of recent feminist literature on the phenomenon, see, Burns Jane E., ‘Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 27, No. 1, (University of Chicago Press, 2001), [hereafter, Burns, *Courtly Love*], pp. 23-57. See also Rougemont, *Courtly Love*, pp. 121-122 for a brief succinct analysis of it.

<sup>307</sup> For the origin of the term ‘courtly love’ as well as a survey of the social and literary phenomena, see Benton, John F., ‘The Court of Champagne as a Literary Centre’, *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*, 36:4, pp. 551-59. (Published by *The Medieval Academy of America* in Oct. 1961). He refers to the original article by Paris, which I have not been able to find: Paris, Gaston, ‘Etude sur les roman de la table ronde: Lancelot du Lac’ *Romania*, 12 (1883) 459-534.

Love, longing and loss were embedded in the great love affair of the century, that of Heloise and Abelard. Recent scholarship has shown that their tragedy was regarded with ‘wonderment and compassion’ rather than the scorn that earlier commentators had suggested.<sup>308</sup> Stephen Jaeger gives evidence of the public’s sympathy for the couple and for love, by citing a poem of the period in which ‘Venus and her disorderly and joyous train not only win over Pallas but are welcomed in the temple of learning and even God seems pleased with the coupling of harmony and prudence and wisdom in the temple’.<sup>309</sup>

Their love affair appeared again in the next century, in the most famous love epic of the Middle Ages – the *Roman de la Rose*.<sup>310</sup> This ‘huge, dishevelled, violent poem of eighteen thousand lines,’ was written by two men separated by twenty-five years; Guillaume de Lorris in 1245 and Jean de Meun in 1268.<sup>311</sup> A seminal poem, it influenced many subsequent writers – notably, in England, Gower, Thomas Usk and Chaucer, who became ‘The poet of Venus’<sup>312</sup> – and gave Venus status as the ‘Queen of Love’ who helped the ‘Dreamer’ of the poem fight through all the battles to win his love – the rose in the garden of a castle. As with Ovid, there is an enormous amount of scholarship devoted to this work, much of it judging the poem to be cynical – especially the second half. Perhaps the problem is the complex nature of the intellectual and imaginal world in which the poem was written. In the end Venus, together with her son Cupid, wins battles over Reason, Nature, and a host of figures such as Chastity and Jealousy, who would have kept the Dreamer from his goal.<sup>313</sup> This was a personal triumph, according to Lewis, fought in the realm of the

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<sup>308</sup> See Dronke, Peter, *Abelard and Heloise in Medieval Testimonies*, (Glasgow: The University of Glasgow Press, 1976), p. 31.

<sup>309</sup> Jaeger, Stephen, C., *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press., 1999), pp. 171-173.

<sup>310</sup> Radice, Betty, (translator), *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, (London: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 64.

<sup>311</sup> The quote is from Lewis, *Allegory*, p. 137. For a analysis of the presumed unity or disunity of the aims and intents of the two authors, see the ‘Introduction’ to Lorris, Guillaume de, (1245) and Jean de Meun (1268), *Roman de la Rose*, transl. Charles Dahlberg, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 3-4.

<sup>312</sup> See Lewis, *Allegory*, pp. 161-162.

<sup>313</sup> Lorris, Guillaume de, (1245), and Jean de Meun (1268), *Roman de la Rose*, transl. Charles Dahlberg. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), lines 21740-61.

imagination, the 'land of longing.'<sup>314</sup> But through it, the dreamer was also acquiring a spiritual potency that had been prefigured in the writing of a great Arab mystic the century before. Ibn 'Arabi (1165 - 1240) had described a form of love between men and women that generated mystical love between the divine and the human, the Creator and the creature.<sup>315</sup> He had spoken of the Creator as being the Creative Feminine, and the 'motif of Beauty as theophany par excellence'. He saw God as perfectly beautiful, and beautiful women as the mirrors through which men could find the image in themselves. Beauty has a 'spiritual potency' that is fundamentally creative, and it is this potency which generates love in man.<sup>316</sup> The congruence between the Arabic mystic's vision (with its Neo-Platonic traces) and the attempts of the dreamer to achieve his rose and thereby win love are striking.<sup>317</sup>

Astrology was part of the life of the Medieval period. According to Ernst Cassirer, 'The Christian Middle Ages were able neither to dispense with astrology nor to completely overcome it.'<sup>318</sup> The great astrologer of the Middle Ages is considered to be Guido Bonatti and he carried on the theme of Venus as a minor benefic and significant for love; for 'middling friendship'; 'true youth'; delight and beautiful things, but, like the Hellenistic astrologers, he is wary of Venus.<sup>319</sup> Later, in the fifteenth century, Renaissance astrologer Marsilio Ficino spoke of her music being voluptuous and wanton.<sup>320</sup> But he also quoted the Orphic *Hymn to Venus*: 'You rule the three Fates and create all things that are in the heavens, on the earth and in the

<sup>314</sup> Lewis, *Allegory*, pp. 166-167.

<sup>315</sup> Corbin, Henry, *Creative imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, transl. Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series XCI, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, (1981 [1961]), [hereafter Corbin, *Sufism*], Ch II, 3: 'The Dialectic of Love,' p. 149. For a discussion of Ibn Arabi's personal experience of mystical love, see Lutfi, Huda, 'The Feminine Element in Ibn 'Arabi's Mystical Philosophy,' *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, Department of English and Comparative Literature, (Cairo: American University Press, 1985).

<sup>316</sup> All of the above from Corbin, *Sufism*, pp. 162-164

<sup>317</sup> For a discussion of the Arabic development of profane love in this period see Giffen, Louis Anita, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The development of the Genre* (London: University of London Press Ltd., 1971). For the influence of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus on this movement and Avicenna's contribution, see p. 145; fn. 12 and p. 146.

<sup>318</sup> Cassirer, Ernst, *The Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, transl. M. Domandi, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 19. See pp. 98-100 for his analysis of Medieval astrology.

<sup>319</sup> Bonatti, Guido (1994 [1491]), 'Liber Astronomiae,' Part II, ed. Robert Hand and transl. Robert Zoller, Berkeley Springs: The Golden Hind Press. Part II: Chap XIII, p 4; Ch. VI., p. 62; Ch. XI, Part II, p 100; Part III, p .13, Part III, p. 22-23.

<sup>320</sup> Kaske, Carol, and John Clark, *Three Books on Life*, (Binghamton, New York, 1989), Bk. III, chap. 21, p. 124.

sea.<sup>321</sup> Through his translations of Plato and Plotinus he brought back her two natures – heavenly and earthly – and managed to combine them in yet a new way.<sup>322</sup> He said quite clearly that love is ‘the longing for beauty.’<sup>323</sup> But his Christian / Platonic philosophy was more complicated than that and, as a celibate priest he also said, ‘Venus herself is but Diana to me.’<sup>324</sup> This would have been inconceivable before the Roman Catholic Middle Ages. There is no sense of longing or loss in anything Ficino writes about Venus – and yet he develops the notion of ‘Platonic love’ in which two people love each other because of their shared love of Plato; thereby furthering spiritual development in each other. Following our theme, this can readily be seen as a way of describing, and bearing the sacrifices that passionate, celibate friendship entails. Ficino, the passionate, celibate, priest and astrologer has brought Plato’s and Plotinus’ Aphrodite and her realm right into the heart of his relationship life.<sup>325</sup> It would be interesting to know how many people who have been awakened to love by dazzling beauty, then lost it and longed for it, found creative and graceful ways of living their lives afterwards.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation we have been investigating Venus in the mythology, literature and poetry of the Western tradition. We have been inquiring what her portrayal might reflect about love in the Western world. To this end, the investigation began with the star deities of Mesopotamia – particularly Inanna, Ištar and Astarté – and their connection with the beautiful morning and evening star and its association with love in the star literature of the time. We have reflected on the visual impact the cycle of Venus might have had on early star gazers – appearing before the sun in the morning, then disappearing and returning again to follow the sun down into the dark

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<sup>321</sup> Ficino, Marsilio, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, transl. Janye, Sears, (Dallas, Tx: Spring Publications, Inc., 1985) [hereafter Ficino, *On Love*], p. 100.

<sup>322</sup> Ficino, *On Love*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>323</sup> Ficino, Marsilio, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, Vol. 1, (London: Shephard-Waywyn Ltd, 1975), p. 91. Also Ficino, *Love*, pp. 52-58.

<sup>324</sup> Ficino, Marsilio, *Three Books on Life*, transl. Carol Kaske and John Clark, (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, (1989 [1489]), *Liber de Vita*, 3.XXV, p. 383.

<sup>325</sup> Ficino, Marsilio, *Opera Omnia*, 2 Vols. (continuous pagination), (Basil, 1576), Facsimile, Turin, 1959, 716.

of night. It has been established that in early Mesopotamian records, Venus, the 'radiant star' has been sometimes associated with 'wailing in the land,' and her associated goddesses were deities of war and death. But in general, the omens associated with Venus were of good fortune, joy and love and associated goddesses were of love and fertility. In the mythology of Inanna and Ištar there is a connection between love and loss – both of them suffer longing and loss through their love of the shepherd Dumuzi / Tammuz.

When the goddess Aphrodite arose in the Greek world of Homer and Hesiod, she absorbed many of the attributes of the earlier Mesopotamian deities, although she shed their dominion over war and death. In myths and stories Aphrodite did enter the battle-field on occasion, but only to protect those she loved. In her mythology she also suffered longing and loss – through the death of her beloved Adonis. Aphrodite emerges in Greece as a goddess of the most dazzling beauty and that, perhaps, became her most prominent characteristic. She was the Goddess of Love – the goddess of the rapture of love. She was there in the moments when two creatures came together for the purpose of pro-creation. She was the joy, the beauty and the delight of that moment.

However, it became evident early on in Greek literature that the fleeting, ephemeral quality of that bliss left loss and longing in its wake. In the fifth century B.C.E. Plato developed his world of ideas, and Aphrodite's realm was split between 'heavenly' and 'common' love. It has been suggested here that this might have offered a solution to the tension between the delight of love and the pain of its fading. Plato's ideal world offered the potential of finding the eternal in the temporal – relieving the suffering of the, sometimes, dreaded moments of such wondrous fleeting beauty. In looking at the texts in this way, Plato's ideal world might have offered a solution to the loss and longing that followed the fading of youth or beauty or love. The pain could be overcome, if one held the heavenly and eternal beauty in mind while enjoying the earthly and ephemeral beauty.

From Classical Greece our investigation has taken us to the Hellenistic world of the Greco-Roman period. The poets wrote to Venus and of her wondrous realm – they wrote passionately of the longing and loss that was inevitable when one fell in love with beauty. Ovid offered the first known works of practical advice – entertaining and witty – in dealing with the suffering connected to the love generated by Venus. The Neo-Platonist Plotinus spoke more seriously of love. He further developed and elaborated Plato’s idea that heavenly beauty was the spiritual goal, and earthly beauty was the means through which to arrive at the eternal. It is suggested that he was, again, offering a solution to the suffering caused by the temporality of the beauty and joy that love can bring.

The astrology that developed during this period gave Venus status as a benefic planet, but a minor one; Jupiter being the greater. Venus retained dominion over love and beauty; when well placed, these things prospered; when badly placed there was a diminishment of what she ruled. The evidence of the texts suggests that the things Venus ruled did not have great status in the astrology constructed during this time; beauty and love and longing and loss did not figure highly here.

This study concluded with a brief look at the Medieval period, in which Venus appeared once again, as an allegorical figure, in the ‘courtly love’ poetic phenomenon of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries where various authors struggled to come to terms with her sexual power within the overarching Christian cosmology. Their solutions were complex and often convoluted and once again, this study has noted the tension between the beauty that lures one into the delights of love and the pain of its either real or potential loss. In the astrology of the period, Venus continued to have rulership over love and beauty, but there is no evidence that her sphere was particularly significant nor is there acknowledgement of the tension between beauty, love, longing and loss.

In summary, this investigation has shown that by examining the texts where Venus appears, from Mesopotamia to the Hellenistic period and beyond, there is evidence of a theme of tension between beauty and love, and longing and loss. After the thrilling

moment of love, longing and loss seem inevitable. The response to beauty with longing, and the experiences of love and loss that are associated with it, are written into the nature of Venus. Furthermore, if my argument has been sound, many of the texts can be read as searching for ways to eliminate the suffering that is caused by this tension. This does not appear in the Hellenistic or Medieval astrology, but otherwise can be seen as a consistent theme, in non astrological literature, in spite of the diversity of the cultures, eras and types of literature investigated. This tells us something about the Western perception and experience of love. It is suggested that looking at Venus in this way has merit, and warrents further research in other cultures and also in the later centuries of our own culture.

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