

Botticelli: the mythology of love

by Stephanie Angel, Modesto Junior College

Mentor: Richard Serros

Introduction

This paper will focus on a group of six mythological paintings and a drawing by the revolutionizing Italian Renaissance artist Sandro Botticelli. These work on the theme of love and have been published as such by author, Frank Zollner, Charles Dempsey and others, and I will examine their conclusions and present the material with observations of my own. Zollner developed an in-depth analysis based on Botticelli's six major works embodying the theme of love and their expressive techniques upon aspects of desire, intimacy, fidelity, reproduction, and authority. Ancient sources such as Lucretius, Ovid, and Virgil, along with contemporary sources, Poliziano and Ficino, also influenced the theme of love through their poetic passages. In this study each image will be examined in a narrative sequence based on a thematic relationship rather than in their chronological sequence as established by art historians. Before developing this thesis w view of Zollner's interpretation of the paintings is in order. Zollner illustrates the central motive of *Minerva and the Centaur* to be the conviction of female control dominating over the lustful male position, while *The Birth of Venus* exemplifies the forthcoming of Venus's arrival not only contributing to the approach of spring but it also projects the arrival of love in its most purest and innocent form. Lastly, Zollner depicts the meaning between Botticelli's two frescoes, *The Villa Lemmi Frescoes*; as one fresco is interpreted to represent the Seven Liberal Arts and Lorenzo Tornabuoni, collectively, to proclaim its purpose as a marital piece, the second, *Giovanna Albizzi, Venus and the Three Graces*, represents female integrity, distinguished throughout the entire composition. Together, these fresco paintings embrace the enchanting journey of love progressing beyond the brink of human morality. While the painting *Mars of Venus* demonstrates female virtue overpowering male authority, *La Primavera* encompasses the significant meaning between the primary nine mythological-themed characters that

project marriage, complimented by passion, affection, and beauty. I will here introduce Botticelli's unfinished drawing, *Allegory of Abundance*, to the above ideas and argue for its inclusion in the overall love-theme and demonstrate fertility as the final step in this relationship. Cooperatively, each of these monumental paintings epitomize a significant exploration of love from varying inclinations that, as a whole, manifest love's intention and course of direction within relationships to form, to develop, and to mature into the ultimate connection, extending beyond humanity's quest for amorousness and sensuality. Without obscuring or diminishing Zollner's interpretation, I perceive both *Mars and Venus* and *Minerva and the Centaur* to exhibit universal dominance, through largely minimizing the male virtue. On the contrary, *La Primavera*, *Birth of Venus*, *The Villa Lemmi Frescos*, and *Allegory of Abundance* expose the paramount female attributes, not only appreciating Venus's diverse levels of affection, desire and fertility, but also unveiling the intellectual measures Venus exemplifies through logic, reasoning, and understanding.

Catalogue of Botticelli Art Works

Giovanna Degli Albizzi Receiving a Gift of flowers from Venus and Lorenzo Tornabuoni presented by Grammar to Prudentia and the other Libera Arts (The Villa Lemmi Frescoes)¹ 1483-84. Fresco transferred to canvas, 238 X 284 and 211 X 284 cm respectively. Both in the Musée du Louvre, Paris. Discovered in 1873 in the Villa Lemmi (formerly Villa Tournabuoni), outside Florence on the road to Fiesole. The full extent of these fragmentary frescoes is unknown, though a series on Jason and the Argonauts was also in the villa that appears to have been related to these works in some way (Zollner, 1998, 101).

Zollner (2005) has provided the basic history and interpretations for these works, including those of Horn, Lightboun, Ettliger. Zollner suggests that these paintings were created for the wedding Lorenzo Tornabuoni and Giovanna Degli Albizzi, as their family owned the villa from 1469 to 1541. While the symbolic content of these images primarily revolves around love, beauty and knowledge, the force of the ideas is

¹ All artworks referred to in this essay are readily online.

presented through the beauty of the women: by their gracefulness, elegance, and loveliness. The left frescos primarily demonstrates female dominance without compromising the elegant aspects of the women, while simultaneously the fresco on the right projects and encircles the female attributes of logic, reasoning, and understanding. Collectively they symbolize the harmonious marriage of the bride and groom. The specific iconography of these paintings is discussed later in the text.

Birth of Venus, 1486. Tempera on canvas, 184.5 X 285.5 cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi. It is highly plausible the Medici family commissioned this painting, but uncertainty still remains at hand. Though most scholars believe this painting was created in 1484, Zollner (2005) believes it was made around 1490, due to the similar colors and landscaping shown in ***Cestello Annunciation*** of 1490. It is suggested that this painting was found in the Medici villa in Castello approximately in the year of 1540 and remained documented there until 1761. It has been in the Uffizi Gallery since 1815.

Zollner (1992 and 2005) interpret this painting to be the arrival of love. While Venus, Goddess of Love, has emerged from the sea, Zephyrus, God of winds, and Aura, the gentle breeze, blow Venus to shore, as they simultaneously hold onto one another. Embracing one another symbolizes the affectionate and secure love Venus thrusts upon couples. Additionally, Venus's elegant posture appears almost statue-like, resembling the classical sculpture "Venus Pudica," an ancient Greek sculpture from 4th century BC that emphasizes Venus concealing her external genitals. To the right of the image, Horae, Goddess of Seasons, holds the presence of Venus by spreading her robe across Venus's body. From the left, a breeze of flowers beautifies the scene, conveying the arrival of spring. Botticelli placed great attention and detail toward creating the figure of Venus by repeatedly tracing across the contour lines to reinforce its clarity and acuity.

La Primavera, 1482. Tempera on poplar, 203 X 314 cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi. Lorenzo de Medici is believed to be the primary commissioner of this painting. Deimling (2007) states the painting was originally painted for Lorenzo the Magnificent but studies project a strong opposition to this assumption. Zollner (2005) states Giorgio Vasari believed this painting was found in the Medici Villa in Castello outside of Florence and was painted for the younger branch of the Medici family, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de'

Medici. No valid evidence has proven a portrait of a significant member of the Medici family to be represented by any of the figures. Based on the Medici documents, Schumacher (2010), it is certain to believe that the original location of the painting was on Via Larga in 1498 and then taken to a villa after 1516. Consequently, accurately dating this painting has developed in a great complexity, ranging between 1477 and mid-1490s. Whether the painting was created before Botticelli's works of the Sistine Chapel or after remains unresolved. In 1815, the painting was transferred from the villa to Uffizi Gallery. By 1853, the painting was taken to the Accademia and then returned to the Uffizi in 1919. It was restored in 1982.

According to Zollner (1992 and 2005), this image involves Venus, Goddess of Love, at the center, as she is exemplified by the arc, which is shaped by the branches of the orange tree, placing emphasis upon her as the primary figure. On the right, Zephyrus, God of Wind, chases Flora, Goddess of Flowers and the Seasons of Spring, as she tosses her flowers across the landscape. On a larger scale, the landscape represents the world. Shifting views across the painting on the far left hand side stands Mercury and The Three Graces. The dominant theme depicted in this image lies in the concept love and beauty. On the contrary, the middle graces of the Three Graces rejects love by simply projecting her middle finger toward Zephyrus as well as all three women turn their backs toward Cupid, the son of Venus, flying above the Goddess of Love.

Minerva and the Centaur, 1480-1482. Tempera and oil on canvas, 207 X 148 cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi. It is suggested that the primary commissioner of this painting is Lorenzo the Magnificent; if this was accurate, then the dating of this painting would be no earlier than 1485. This painting remained in the Medici villa near Castello from 1540 until it was moved to the Palazzo Pitti in 1830. In 1856, it was transferred to the royal apartments, and in 1922, it was finally exhibited at the Uffizi Gallery as a permanent residence (Schumacher 2010). It is believed this image served as a pendant to ***La Primavera***, since it was seen displayed next to it in the bed chamber of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco.

Schumacher (2010) states the location of this image was found in a house of the Pierfrancesco branch of the Medici in a chamber of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco and Giovanni. Zollner (1992) believes this image was created for the Medici family in their home in Florence, Italy. It encompasses the power of strength and the quality of beauty and embraces the critical aspect of authority without compromising the beautifying characteristics. The specific mechanics and techniques projected into his works influenced artists globally, creating a structural guide of mythological figures in compliance with human beings. The male to the left is the centaur, half human half man. Ideologically, this represents the passionate and sensitive side of man, while the animal side depicts the irrational and foolish side of man. To his left is Pallas Athena, Goddess of Wisdom. In the near distance stands a gate symbolizing the limited access for those who have not been permitted. Consequently, Athena clutches the centaur's hair as a warning for trespassing onto forbidden land.

Venus and Mars, 1487-1488. Tempera and oil on poplar, 70.6 X 176.8 cm. London, The National Gallery. Without a provenance, the challenge becomes increasingly difficult for historians to accurately date this image. The date for this painting has been narrowed down between 1476 and 1486. Purchased by Alexander Barker in 1868 in Florence, this painting has been at the National Gallery since 1874.

Schumacher (2010) mentions Simone Renhardt (2003, pp. 65-66) stance upon ***Venus and Mars*** as tribute to the marriage between Jacopo di Giovanni Salviati and Lucrezia de' Medici. Several sources have interpreted the figure arrangements of ***Venus and Mars*** to be Neoplatonic or philosophical; however, in the text of Schumacher (2010), Davies (1961) opposes to this view. Zollner (1992) interprets Venus, Goddess of Love, to lie attentively next to Mars, God of War, as she maintains her concentration upon his presence. While Mars drifts off into a deep sleep, the children surround him find ways to entertain themselves; one child, specifically, projects a ridiculing action by blowing minerals into Mars's ear from a seashell. The children create a satirical, comical effect to enlighten the mood of the image. All six figures lie in the loop of myrtle trees, which is a sacred aspect to Venus since it represents love as a whole. Though Mars represents aggression and violence, those characteristics are nearly stripped from him as he lies

almost naked, vulnerable to all his surroundings. Additionally, female virtue over male authority is encompassed as the overall theme portrayed in this image.

Allegory of Abundance 1480-85. Pen, brown ink, brown wash over black chalk and pink tinted paper, white high-lighting; on the left two putti and a cornucopia in black chalk, 31.7 X 25.3 cm. Department of Prints and Drawings, British Museum, London. The five putti, cornucopia, and the fertile female collectively represent the everlasting result of sensuality and desire in relationship to marriage resulting in the baring of children. This unfinished drawing fails to provide a clear explanation as to which painting this drawing was originally intended for. Hypothetically, this drawing could have served as inspiration for his assistants. There are no other paintings or drawings directly connected to this composition. Nevertheless, its subject matter clearly relates it to the paintings discussed in this paper.

Historians have noticed similar stylistic techniques between this drawing and many of his other works, particularly the paintings discussed in this essay. The exquisite form and unique characteristics of this drawing are seen to be similarly conceived in each of Botticelli's philosophically and mythological-themed works.

Sandro Botticelli: Biography

Sandro Botticelli, born in 1445 in Florence, Italy, is widely known as one of the greatest masters of art in the Renaissance era, as well as the leader of the second poetic era in Quattrocento Florentine art. Born as Alessandro Di Meriano Filippi, Sandro acquired his nickname "Botticelli," meaning "little barrel," through a goldsmith that he worked for.

He was the youngest of five children. His older brother, who had grown to become a successful broker, was his primary care taker. At a young age, Botticelli's father allowed him to work as a goldsmith's apprentice. A few years later, artistic recognition was spotted by Fra Filippo Lippi, a follower of Piero Della Francesca, who noticed Botticelli's great focus and attention on linear perspective. Botticelli eventually became Lippi's assistant. Lippi was generally known for his use of color and decorative details incorporated into his church altarpieces. During this period Botticelli began to develop and discover his unique personal style of linear and to perfect his mastery of

perspective. By the age of fifteen in the early 1460s, Botticelli is suggested to have entered the workshop of Andrea Verrocchio, where he worked alongside Pietro Perugino and Leonardo Di Vinci.

Botticelli emphasized contour lines in both a complex and metamorphic method. Religious and mythological concepts were two other themes incorporated into his pieces. On a broader outlook, Neo-Platonism, a philosophical perspective prominent in Medici circles that was concerned with ideal forms, was dominant in all of his works, allowing him to perfect harmonious balance and perfection of form in all of his works. A few modern interpreters suggest Botticelli's central theme reflects gloomy and depressing aspects. However, I perceive his works to encompass various elements that strongly oppose this standpoint. It is noticed that his style ranges on a scale from gentleness to dramatic intensity, which is shown in the paintings later discussed in this essay.

Among several of Botticelli's famous masterpieces is Adoration of the Magi (1475-1476) Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy; a theme painted at least seven times by him. The magi are portrayed by members of the Medici family, the most dominant and wealthiest family's in Europe at the time. Botticelli executed the theme in his painting to project the significant leadership roles of the Florentine tradition that was often portrayed by the Medici family. Furthermore, Botticelli incorporated a self-portrait looking out at the viewer at the right of this composition.

The subject matter of the Madonna of the Magnificat (c. 1481) Uffizi Gallery, Florence, suggests that it was created as a gift for a newborn child or for a newlywed couple. In this painting, the Virgin Mary is portrayed holding baby Jesus, while two angels on either sides of Mary place a crown atop her head, signifying her as the "Queen of Heaven."

A most significant piece by Botticelli is La Primavera (1482), also located in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence. This piece is rather one of his most popular of all paintings, attracting the attention of spectators from all different levels. As one of the most prevalent works in Western art it has become one of Botticelli's trademarks. La Primavera entails mythological figures or personifications a garden, welcoming the spring season. This

inspirational spring theme is suggested to be stemmed from a poem by Poliziano. A great deal of symbolic and mythological meaning is incorporated into this painting that encompasses the concept of love. Though we are not certain as to who commissioned this painting, Zollner (2005, p. 210) points out with near certainty that the original location of this painting was in the bedroom of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco's wife, Semiramide Appiani, in their house on the Via Larga in Florence. Zollner also points out that "There have probably been more interpretations of Botticelli's Primavera than of any other painting in the history of western art" (2005, p. 210).

The works of Botticelli were often commissioned by the Medici family, one of the most powerful family's in Europe at the time. Botticelli performed the majority of his networking through the traveling opportunities he had with the family. He was able to meet highly respected individuals, as well as collecting additional material to further produce his paintings. In exchange for these opportunities, the Medici family was often the primary subject in several of Botticelli's paintings.

Later in the years, changes in Botticelli's style began to emerge through the influence of Savonarola. Savonarola, an Italian Dominican friar and preacher, was very alluring in the public eye, speaking upon subjects of death and the wrath of God. Being a monk and a civic leader in Florence, his influence was greatly overpowering. After the death of Savonarola and his corpse being burned in the center of Florence, many followers escaped the city's perimeters, while Botticelli was said to have stayed. From this time on, most of Botticelli's painting projected a religious theme, speaking out to individuals through the detailed symbolic characteristics.

Taking another turn in his style, Botticelli's technique began to appear perplexed, in a way that he could not decide on which style to make his signature. A contributing factor to his confusion was that he willingly accepted challenging projects that the majority of artists refused to start. This complex feeling often reflected through his works, creating an inconsistent form for his viewers. Later on, at the time of his death at sixty-five, many of his incredible masterpieces were overshadowed by the rising masters, Michelangelo, Raphael, and Leonardo Di Vinci. Because of this occurrence, his works remained unspoken of until four hundred years after his death. As a final note, today, Sandro

Botticelli is credited and will continue to be eternally recognized as one of the greatest master artists of the Renaissance period.

The Love Connection

The ancient mythology incorporated into Botticelli's work originally stemmed from the Middle Ages. During this time period, it was uncommon to find large paintings of heroes and gods. Likewise, finding half-naked or nude figures in art works was almost inconceivable prior to the techniques and mechanisms of Botticelli. Because of the great influence of Andrea Mantegna's works, portraying a positive incline and ancient idea, as well as the influence of mythological ideas, Sandro Botticelli quickly adapted to the ancient Greek concepts; from there, he further incorporated these conceptions into his paintings that were predominantly commissioned by the Medici family. Between 1470 and 1481, Neo-Platonism boomed throughout the general public, stimulating cultural connections from one city to the next. With reference to Basta, "It was Cosimo the Elder who wanted to create the Accademia Neoplatonica, a place—the villa in Careggi, to be precise—where intellectuals could fully dedicate themselves to reading, studying and translating Greek and Latin texts and meet to discuss them," (Basta, 2004, 34). Neo-Platonist ideas soared throughout the works of Botticelli. Consequently, various discussions arose amongst his spectators, developing their own interpretations and evaluations of his paintings.

The Villa Lemmi Frescoes reflect the Seven Liberal Arts as personifications, emphasizing the importance of knowledge and intellect within a social gathering, or simply a relationship between two individuals. Grammar, the young lady in a white gown and a rusty, red cloak, leads Lorenzo to her sisters, the arts. To the right of Grammar stands Rhetoric, dressed in green. Adjacent to her stands in a gold-reflected robe, holding a scorpion, Dialectic. Sitting in an emerald green and lavender robe is Arithmetic, quite recognizable by the paper containing numerical content. At the bottom right sits three women who are, from left to right, claimed to be Music, Astrology, and Geometry. Draped in a bold, burgundy coat, predominantly projected above all the other women is strongly interpreted to be Phronesis, mother of Philology. Each element fused into this painting projects knowledge and intellect throughout the entire scene,

connecting and igniting the significant attributes necessary for the foundation of a healthy relationship.

Additionally, the foremost objective of *Giovanna Albizzi, Venus and the Three Graces* was directed toward the Seven Liberal Arts. As the Three Graces and Venus are illustrated to the right, Giovanna Albizzi is to the right; this, in turn, exemplifies the portrait as the significance of the female role. In the text of Zollner, "This group consists of allegorical figures who are further distinguished from each other by the sandals of the young woman in front, for they signify her as Venus, the goddess, with the Three Graces," (Zollner 1992, 109). With reference to a painting discussed later in the text, this painting contains distinct and relevant features that are found in *La Primavera*. It signifies intelligence, chastity, and endless journey to seek a man. Scholars have interpreted both paintings to stand as Botticelli's finest works of all his masterpieces, by projecting love's journey continuing beyond death as a significant virtue between individuals in committed partnership.

In the *Birth of Venus*, the goddess, is portrayed as the central figure in the composition, elegantly standing in the contraposto position, partially concealing her breasts and genitals. On the left-hand side, the God of Winds, Zephyrus, and his spouse Aura, the gentle breeze, glide toward Venus, as they project their gentle, unyielding breeze, and embrace one another's affection and presence. It is depicted that the primary objective of their breeze is to lead and guide Venus to shore. To the right of Venus stands the Goddess of Seasons, Hora, who waits for Venus's arrival, welcoming her with her red, floral cloak, signifying the season of spring's arrival. As Venus is driven by the Wind of Zephyrus and received great enthusiasm by Horae, she awaits to ignite the season of spring upon Venus; as a whole, this scene was entirely influenced by the Greek nymist, Homer:

"Of august gold-wreathed and beautiful Aphrodite
I shall sing, to whose domain belong the battlements
Of all sea-laved Cyprus where, blown by the moist breath of Zephyros,
She was carried over the waves of the resounding sea

In soft foam. The gold-filleted Horae,²

Happily welcomed her and clothed her with heavenly raiment," (Zollner 1992).

With similar elements as Homer, Poliziano executes the arrival of Venus through his poetic passage in which Botticelli adopted:

"And born within [the white foam],

In rare and joyous acts

A maiden with a heavenly race

By playful zephyrs is pushed to the shore.

She travels on a sea-shell; and it seems that the heavens rejoice,³ (Zollner 1992).

The shell that she arrives on is illustrated as a sea shell that enabled her journey.

Through this, Botticelli significantly brings forth the arrival of love in its purest form.

La Primavera, noted today as one of the largest fifteenth century mythological themed painting on panel, illustrates nine mythological-themed characters. On the far left stands Mercury, with a red cloak draped around his body. Next to his left stand three women holding one another's hands, the Three Graces, each clothed in light, sheer dresses. Centered in the middle, Venus dressed in a dusty gray dress, holds her crimson-colored drapery. Above her, flies a Cupid, a blind-folded child with wings who is directing a bow and arrow toward the Three Graces. Toward the right stands Flora, Goddess of Seasons, in a flowered drapery, where she is holding an assortment of flowers. On the far right appears to be a Chloris in translucent material, who is alerted by the fierce indigo-colored figure, Zephyrus.

Several of the objects included in this composition play a leading role that ties the entire meaning together. For instance, the snake-entwined caduceus and winged shoes worn by Mercury demonstrate his existence as the messenger of gods and god of merchants and thieves (Zollner 1992). Mercury's presence depicts his efforts of driving away the winter winds for the sake of spring's arrival. Mercury's objective is expressed in Virgil's

² Homer, "To Aphrodite," in: *The Homeric Hymns*, ed. Apostolos N. Athanassakis, Baltimore and London 1976, p.55.

³ "E dentro natat in acti uaghi et lieti, Una donzella non con human uolto, Da zephiri lasciui spinta a proda, Gir soura un Nichio; et par chel ciel ne goda." Angelo Poliziano, *Stanze per la Giostra*, l.99.5-9, cite in: Horne, Botticelli, p.149.

Aeneid, (Dempsey 1992), “Go forth, my son, summon the zephyrs and glide on thy wings . . . so carry my words down through the swift winds,⁴” (Dempsey 40). Based on the powers of the caduceus ascribed by Virgil, Botticelli effectively demonstrates Mercury’s role through his body language. According to Hesiod, the Three Graces, Aglaia, Euphrosyne, and Thalia, exemplify liberality: “Their faces are cheerful, as are ordinarily the faces of those who bestow or receive benefits. They are maidens because benefits are pure and undefiled and holy in the eyes of all; and it is fitting that there should be nothing to bind or restrict them, and so the maidens wear flowing gowns, and these, too, are transparent because benefits desire to be seen⁵,” (Dempsey 34). Their harmonious dance unites one’s marriage, demonstrating love given, love received, and love rejected. Below Cupid, Venus is recognized by her elegant figure and her symbolic image of purity, sensuality, and fidelity. A poetic passage from Bartsch (Dempsey 1992) describes Venus’s delicate presence: “Nourishing Venus, wherever you come you’re your great power empire without end is yours; heaven and earth celebrate your rites: you nourish joy, and with delightful love you feed your flocks of every kind: soft repose of men, eternal pleasure of the gods, you, who calm the heaven, the winds, and the storms,⁶” (Dempsey 42). The insight to the powers Venus beholds refers to her ability to calm the clouds and winds, for springtime will arrive.

Prior to her existence as the goddess of spring, Flora was a nymph named Chloris. That was until Zephyrus, God the West Wind, stripped her of her duties by just a single touch: “It was spring, and I was roaming; Zephyr caught sight of me; I retired; he pursued and I fled; but he was the stronger, and Boreas had given his brother full right of rape by daring to carry off the prize from the house of Erechtheus⁷,” (Dempsey 32). Through the metamorphosis of Chloris transforming into Flora, it clearly signifies marriage between Flora and Zephyrus. Though Flora felt forced to wed with the God of Winds, she eventually developed an affectionate love toward her husband. The

⁴ Wind, op. cit., p. 122; see also Virgil, *Aeneid*, IV.223ff. See also Boccaccio, op. cit., II.vii: “Vento agree Mercurii est.”

⁵ Seneca, *De beneficiis*, I.iii.2ff.

⁶ Bartsch, *Le peintre graveur*, 204.

⁷ Ovid, *Fasti*, v.193-222.

blossoms and oranges not only depict Flora's desire for fertility and children, but specifically, the oranges portray an imperative concept representing the wealth and power the Medici family. As a great social influence amongst the community, Botticelli's symbolic figures and objects in *La Primavera* collectively characterize the entire composition to encompass the intrinsic value of passionate love, pure fidelity, and healthy reproduction within a compatible marriage.

As a subsequent piece to *La Primavera*, *Minerva and the Centaur* shares similar features as *La Primavera*, thus, continuing the narrative perspective from marriage to female dominance over male authority. The force exerted upon the centaur by Minerva is briefly described by Chiara Basta, "She carries a large shield on her back and holds a ceremonial halberd in her hand. She is shown holding the centaur, a monstrous creature half man and half horse, by the hair. His expression lies between a frown and sadness," (Basta 1994, 120). The centaur's half man, half horse symbolizes their lust toward a woman, hungry for her passionate intimacy and thirsty for her sensual pleasure. The animalistic, lower body qualities signify male aggression and sexuality, yet fails to override the prevailing female weight. Minerva personifies wisdom, which demonstrates her authoritative gain over man (Zollner 1992). This overpowering action will lead the couple to dive into a deep, intimate state of sex.

Recognized for the affectionate atmosphere in his works, Botticelli creates unique and remarkable love scenes within these paintings; one of which, *Venus and Mars*, consists of the dominant relationship of Venus over Mars. The ancient philosopher, Marsilio Ficino, contributed as a significant influence through his chapter on Eros describing the relationship between Mars and Venus: "Mars is outstanding in strength among the planets because he makes men stronger, but Venus masters him... Venus, when in conjunction with Mars, in opposition to him, or in reception ... often check his malignance ... she seems to master and appease Mars, but Mars never masters Venus,"⁸ (Zollner 1992). Ficino's influencing passage outlined the storyline for which Botticelli executed within his painting. The descriptive elements of Ficino's writings are

⁸ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on the Symposium*, 5.8. (1339), cited in: Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, p. 67.

virtually infused in the body language and facial expressions of Venus and Mars. As a whole, Venus's prevailing figure dominates the presence of her husband. Through this, it enables her to exert her force upon him, luring him to comply with her sexual desire.

To balance the arrangement and meaning, the mythological god and goddess complement one another, exemplifying the central importance of the composition as a whole. The key purpose of this painting suggests to be a gift of a newly celebrated wedding. It was often noted that it was hung above a "lettuccio," or a large day bed, as a significant attribute to the sensual and captivating love between the newlyweds. With Mars having the bipolar characteristics of anger and unpredictability, Venus's involvement is essentially to help suppress the tension that arises within Mars. "Here too, however, we are concerned less with the triumph of love over warlike violence than with the surmounting of sensual desire through one's enlightened love of God. In a manner similar to that encountered in *Primavera*, the painting depicts the duality of love as expounded by Ficino. As god of war, Mars embodies violent desire; in contrast to Venus, he is portrayed almost naked" (Deimling 2007, 48). Venus is represented as a sensual symbol for the pleasure and faithfulness of her husband. The overwhelming sexual desire for one another is what ignites physical intimacy between the two of them. The *Allegory of Abundance* can be interpreted as the final level reached in a relationship. The pregnancy and children can be strongly interpreted to be the lasting result from the sexual intimacy committed between Venus and Mars. The main female figure, interpreted to be Venus, demonstrates her female attributes through her body language and facial expression. The children represent the healthy fertility of Venus; simultaneously, the fertility applies to almost all women in the general society. Through the exquisite softness, shadows, and highlights of the drawing, Botticelli arranged an exceptional drawing (had it been completed, scholars would possibly have been able to determine which painting, if it had survived, it was originally intended for). Overall, this piece not only has relevant aspects related to the previously discussed paintings, but it also encompasses and ties together the entire narrative, with fertile reproduction lasting as the significant and most unifying quality within a healthy, stable relationship.

Conclusion

Botticelli's paintings have been shown to be a wonderful spring from which flow love and eternal beauty. Each of his paintings illustrates an essential quality that is critical to a healthy relationship or partnership. *The Villa Lemmi Frescoes* project the knowledge, intellect, and female virtues that establish the foundation of a well-grounded relationship. Next, the *Birth of Venus* is interpreted to be the arrival of love. I have examined it to be love's arrival into a relationship, infused with colorful elements of spring and gentle winds of winter to ensure the continuing momentum of love. Marriage is ignited through *La Primavera*, uniting a couple through the messenger, love accepted, and the metamorphosis of spring. Female dominance is then demonstrated in *Minerva and the Centaur*, as she takes control over her lustful husband. Once control has been established, the image of female dominance is further identified in *Venus and Mars*, as the sexual intimacy was conquered by Venus. As a lasting effect, fertile reproduction is successfully identified in the unfinished drawing of *Allegory of Abundance*. Altogether, each painting provides the fundamental steps in achieving and maintaining a healthy, intimately-rich relationship.

Bibliography

Basta, Chiara. *Botticelli*. New York: Rizzoli, 2004.

Deimling, Barbara and Michael Claridge. *Sandro Botticelli: 1444/45-1510*. Köln, Taschen, 1994.

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

Hall, James. *A History of Ideas and Images in Italian Art*. New York: Harper & Row, 1983.

Hartt, Frederick, and David G. Wilkins. *History of Italian Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2011.

Lightbown, R. W. *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work*. New York: Abbeville, 1989.

Poletti, Federico, and Sandro Botticelli. *Botticelli*. Munich: Prestel, 2011 (Italian Edition 2007).

Schumacher, Andrea and Luchinat Cristina Acidini. *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion : An Exhibition Organized by the Städel Museum, Frankfurt Am Main, November 13, 2009-February 28, 2010*. Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje/Cantz, 2010.

Zöllner, Frank. *Botticelli: Images of Love and Spring*. Munich: Prestel, 1992.

Zöllner, Frank. *Sandro Botticelli*. Munich: Prestel, 2005.