

THE ESOTERICISM IN SANDRO BOTTICELLI'S *LA PRIMAVERA*

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ABSTRACT:

This article proposes an iconographic and especially iconological interpretation about the picture *La Primavera (Allegory of Spring)* by Sandro Botticelli. This fresh interpretation has a strong esoteric component, characteristic of the period when it was created, which has remained largely unnoticed. But the author of this research maintains that in order to fully understand this picture, it is needed to penetrate the Italian Renaissance Mentality.

KEYWORDS:

Marsilio Ficino – Lorenzo of Pierfrancesco of Medici – Lorenzo The Magnificent – Simonetta Vespucci – Semiramide Appiani.

RESUMEN:

Se propone aquí, en el presente artículo, una interpretación iconográfica y sobre todo iconológica totalmente nueva y definitiva sobre el cuadro *La Primavera* de Sandro Botticelli. Esta novedosa interpretación tiene un fuerte componente esotérico, propio de la época en la cual se realizó esta obra de arte, que, muchas veces, ha pasado totalmente desapercibido. Pero la autora de esta investigación, insiste, en que hay que penetrar en la mentalidad del Renacimiento Italiano y sus escritos para comprender la totalidad de dicho cuadro.

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Botticelli: *La Primavera*. Florence, ©Uffizi. (fig. 1)

PREFACE:

This essay begins with a short review of what has been written until now about Botticelli's *La Primavera*. Later, the main part of the essay is presented. The purpose of this research is not to compile what has been said before, but to bring new information

that can help to envisage the iconographic, and above all, iconological interpretation of this artwork.

- Aby Warburg and Poliziano's *stanze*:

Aby Warburg's thesis of 1893¹, called *Birth of Venus and Allegory of Spring*, it's based on the *stanze*, that is a poem by Poliziano².

- *Allegory of Spring* as a depiction of the Giostra:

By Marrai and Supino. The *Giostra* is a tournament in which Giuliano dei Medici took part and where, apparently, he and Simonetta Vespucci (whose maiden name was Cattaneo) fell in love³.

It is also said that Botticelli was in love with Simonetta, who died in 1476 from tuberculosis at the age of 23, loss that was mourned by Lorenzo the Magnificent and his circle in many verses⁴.

However, Horne and Mesnil affirm that there is no evidence that Botticelli painted the young Simonetta, Marco Vespucci's wife⁵.

Many authors have seen Simonetta in almost all Botticelli's female beauties. The first to support this claim was A. F. Rio and after him and endless series of researchers⁶. I don't confirm neither deny such claim. I just say that the woman in *Allegory of Spring* is not Simonetta. We will see that in the main part of this essay.

- *Simonetta's awakening at the Elysium* by E. Jacobsen.
- *The marriage of the satire Menipo with Mercury* by E. Wickhoff.

¹ E. H. Gombrich, *Imágenes Simbólicas*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1983, p. 69.

² E. H. Gombrich, *ibid.* (note 15), p. 300.

³ E. H. Gombrich, *ibid.* p. 69.

⁴ E. H. Gombrich, *ibid.* p. 69.

⁵ E. H. Gombrich, *ibid.* p. 70.

⁶ E. H. Gombrich, *ibid.* (note 17) p. 301.

- *The mystery of femininity* by W. Uhde⁷.

Those are some of the many titles that have been given to this picture.

- For E. H. Gombrich it is based on *Golden Donkey* by Apuleyo⁸. A text with esoteric traces, but Gombrich provides a completely philosophic explanation for this picture. He believes the central figure is *Venus Humanitas* (Venus Humanity, love towards humankind, to be human), interpreting a letter from Marsilio Ficino to Pierfrancesco of Medici; Gombrich explains that the teenager had to be taught Human Virtue and for that purpose the picture was created⁹. I am not of the same opinion, as I have interpreted the letter in a different way. Gombrich, like Warburg, also believes that the two figures at the right part are Zephyrus chasing Flora.
- Erwin Panofsky, on his book *Renaissance and Resuscitations in Western Art*, also reflects that the *Giostra* it's the answer to this picture, likewise the pastoral *Rusticus*. Also backs Gombrich's interpretation¹⁰.

MY INTERPRETATION:

Allegory of Spring by Alessandro Filipepi nicknamed Botticelli, made by the artist between 1477 and 1482. (Figure 1).

In 1499 it was among Lorenzo of Pierfrancesco of Medici's properties, according to an inventory discovered in 1976, and was placed on a wall over a divan in hall leading to

⁷ E. H. Gombrich, *ibid.* pp. 70-71.

⁸ E. H. Gombrich, *ibid.* p. 77.

⁹ E. H. Gombrich, *ibid.* pp. 72-77.

¹⁰ E. Panofsky, *Renacimiento y renacimientos en el arte occidental*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1988, pp. 281-284.

Lorenzo of Pierfrancesco's private rooms, at his home at the city of Florence. Later it was moved, according to Vasari, to the Villa di Castello¹¹. So, it was initially in a private place so it could not be seen by people or guests, it was a picture for private use. But who was Lorenzo of Pierfrancesco of Medici? He was born on August 4th, 1463 and died on May 20th, 1503. He was a young cousin of Lorenzo the Magnificent. His father died when he was 13 and Lorenzo the Magnificent became his tutor. He was nicknamed *Il Popolano* (The Populist) and had ups and downs with his cousin.

Lorenzo of Pierfrancesco of Medici was married in 1482 (date when *Allegory of Spring* is finished), with Semiramide Appiani, born in Piombino, a coastal area of the Toscana, in 1464 and died in Florence on March 9th, 1523. Semiramide was the niece of famous Simonetta Vespucci, and that marriage had full consent from Lorenzo the Magnificent. The Appiani family was allied with Lorenzo the Magnificent and owned what by then were the only iron mines of the island of Elba. Semiramide Appiani was the daughter of Jacobo III, the lord of Piombino.

In 1477, date when this picture was started, it has passed a year since beautiful Simonetta had died and I believe this work was made to teach ficinian magic to Semiramide Appiani. Why? Based on the same letter that Gombrich used for his interpretation. Gombrich says that this letter is rare. I believe that if one knows Ficino well enough, this letter is not rare but logical: it is a letter from Marsilio Ficino to the young Lorenzo of Pierfrancesco of Medici in 1477, when he was about 15 years old:

My immense love towards you, excellent Lorenzo, has moved me since long ago to give you a gift. (...) Astrologers say that the happiest man is the one for who Destiny has placed celestial signs in a way that the Moon is not in bad aspect with Mars and with Saturn, and on the contrary is in favourable aspect with the

¹¹ <http://es.wikipedia.org>

Sun, Jupiter, Mercury and Venus (we shall remember those for planets Sun, Jupiter, Mercury and Venus). And like astrologers call happy the man for who Destiny has organized the celestial bodies in that way, the theologians judge joyful who has organized his own self in a similar way. Maybe you ask yourself if that's not asking too much: it certainly is a lot, but, my intelligent Lorenzo, start this task with excitement, because the one who created you is greater than heavens, and you will also be greater than heavens as soon as you decide to look at them face to face. We don't have to look for those things out of us, as all the heavens are in our interior and the forceful energy we carry inside us proves our celestial origin. (...) Last, you must put your eyes upon Venus herself, that is, upon Humanity. (...) Be then careful, as you shall no disregard her thinking maybe that *humanitas* is of earthly origin. (...) As Humanity (*humanitas*) herself is a nymph of excellent graciousness, born from the heavens and loved more than the others by God almighty. Her soul and her mind are the Love and the Charity, her eyes the Dignity and Magnanimity, her hands Liberality and Magnificence, her foot Charm and Modesty. The group is, then, Temperance and Rectitude, Charm and Splendour. Oh, what a refined beauty! How lovely to see her! My dear Lorenzo, a nymph of such nobility has been placed at your hands. If you joined her in marriage and declared her yours, she would sweeten your whole life and make you father of beautiful children¹².

Gombrich says that it's the *Venus Humanitas* the virtue that Lorenzo most empower, and that the children mentioned, are Venus children¹³, like Saturn children, that one as much as the others, have the properties of the planets. I say that when he talks about

¹² E. H. Gombrich, *ibid.* pp. 73- 74.

¹³ E. H. Gombrich, *ibid.* p. 74.

wife and children, he is not referring to a philosophical concept, but to Semiramide Appiani, that's the gift the Ficino wants to make to the teenager. And when he warns not to disregard her because of her earthly origin, it's because at Lorenzo's Circle they got initiated in ficinian magic since a very early age, as the letter written using an astrological and magical language shows, and Semiramide was not initiated in that.

There is another letter, also from the same period, from Ficino to Lorenzo the Magnificent and Bernardo Bembo and says in a paragraph:

“It's worthless to praise a girl in front of a boy, or describe her to him with words if what we try is to awake his love towards her... Point the finger, is possible, to the pretty maiden, and no more words will be needed”¹⁴.

We do not know if Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco finally fell in love with her or not, if he met her before the wedding, which I think happened because of Piombino's proximity.

We do not know if he fell in love with her, but what he did say was that she was “earthly” and he did not like that about her. Perhaps that was the reason because Semiramide was initiated in the ficinian magic, so Lorenzo could fell in love with her, or perhaps they initiated her because she was about to become part of Lorenzo the Magnificent's Circle, circle that was ultimately magic. Let's see:

According to Frances A. Yates in his book *Giordano Bruno and the hermetic tradition*, in the chapter 'Ficino's Natural Magic', he says, first of all, that it is a magic picture, he does not want to go deeper in its interpretation, he does not interpret the picture, but he contributes that the image on the right, normally assigned to Zephyrus, is in fact the *Spiritus Mundi*, that is a channel through which the stellar influences are spread¹⁵. And yes, I believe that it is a completely magical picture, according to Ficino's magic.

¹⁴ E. H. Gombrich, *ibid.* p.76.

¹⁵ F. A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno y la tradición hermética*, Barcelona, Ariel Filosofía, 1983, p. 97.

First of all we observe that it is set on an orange tree forest because it is said that those trees are attributed to Medici's family and yes, it's possible, but we have to consider the magical properties of the orange tree, it's a plant not from Venus, but from Sun, and provides a peaceful environment and amplifies magic powers, so we have the perfect environment for what is going to happen in this picture. Also, the orange trees are in flower, the orange blossom that, as a magical virtues, favours marriages, provides love, peace of spirit and attracts loved ones; it is also associated to brides' purity, invests joy and causes dreams that set the emotional tensions of the subconscious free. It is very useful for meditation.

All this happens because, as Ficino demonstrates in his third book *De Vita*, called *De Vita coelitus comparanda*, he was an expert on the magical properties of the rocks and the herbs as each planet confers specific virtues to the plants and to the rocks. But, above all, he emphasizes the fact that there exist two kinds of magic, a demonic magic, that is illicit and perverse, and a natural magic, useful and necessary. The only kind of magic that he had practiced and advised was the good and useful, the *magia naturalis*¹⁶. This picture is pure ficinian magic and we are going to see why, as Yates say: `Ficino avoids Saturn. *Allegory of Spring* is a talisman essentially Venusian from Botticelli that reflect the mafic of ficinian type ¹⁷. And she does not go any deeper. Let's see my interpretation:

¹⁶ F. A. Yates, *ibid.* p. 100.

¹⁷ F. A. Yates, *ibid.* p. 174.



**Botticelli: *La Primavera*.
Detail. Florence, ©Uffizi.
(fig. 2).**

We start on the right, the *Spiritus Mundi* which is a channel through which the stellar influences are spread, it's about to catch Semiramide, who throws roses out of her mouth (figure 2), the rose inspires feelings of peace and happiness, it's the emblem of love, here is spiritual love and increases clairvoyance, this means that Semiramide speaks of spiritual love and already transmits peace and happiness, and thanks to that way of living her clairvoyance has already been increased because as the *Corpus Hermeticum* says in the 'Secret speech of Hermes Trismegistus to his son Tat at the Mountain' that Ficino translated:

Tat asks his father Trismegistus to teach him the regeneration doctrine, as he has already fortified his spirit against the several illusions of the world (like Semiramide has already done) and he is ready for the final initiation. Trismegistus tells him that the regenerated man is the silent fruit of the intelligent wisdom and that the seed is the true Good placed in him by the will of God. The man who is born in that way will be a new god, son of God, in everything and for everything, fitted with all the Power¹⁸.

So, the man or woman who is born in that way will be a new god. And is seed of good, which is why Semiramide throws roses out of her mouth because as the *Pimander* says, she is seed of the good in her life.

But continuing with the picture, above the *Spiritus Mundi* and Semiramide there is a laurel, plant from the Sun, not from Venus, whose magical properties are to purify and open the psychic conscience and also makes new beginning more accessible (like Semiramide who is beginning her initiation in Ficino's magic), it was used by Apollo

¹⁸ F. A. Yates, *ibid.* p. 46.

priestess to magically induce the prophetic visions. The *Spiritus Mundi* arrives unexpected because living the life she lives and using the laurel, the *Spiritus Mundi* will arrive unexpected; I mention an example to make it more easily understandable: it's like when we ask a researcher who made an important discovery how he reached that result, and he answers 'It came unexpected' or 'I had a brilliant idea', it's because, when we are working continuously on something for a long time, we are continually in contact with that subject, and we reach a point in which the answer comes unexpected. That's what happened to Semiramide with her continued chaste and pure life. On the ground and the grass there are also roses.

Then there is Flora (figure 3), who is not Simonetta Cattaneo, neither Semiramide, Flora will bring many things in this initiation journey to Semiramide: All the flowers that carries have magical properties that will be conferred to Semiramide:

- Violets: increase the clairvoyance and the positive spiritual energy.
- Cornflower: grants prophetic dreams and bolsters psychic powers and clairvoyance.
- Strawberry: tames and sweetens people. Gets friendships.
- Rose: inspires feelings of peace and happiness. Helps us to feel well in our body by removing any doubts about our appearance and looks. Refreshes the brain. Contributes caution and good judgement. Love's emblem. Increases clairvoyance.
- Hyacinth: it's a flower from Venus.

- Iris or fleur-de-lis: a Venus flower. In times of the Ancient Rome it was used for purification. It is said that Greeks allowed chaste people to collect them, only to perform magic ceremonies.

- Spray-carnations: it is not a Venus plant, but a Sun plant. It has magical properties.

- Mayflower: plant from Mars and Venus. Invests bravery, strength and desire. Protects the garden and the home. Brings the true magic to home. Contributes health protection and healing.

- Forget-me-not and houseleek, I have

not found information about them.

Flora contributes all this to Semiramide.



Botticelli: *La Primavera*. Detail. Florence, ©Uffizi. (fig. 3).

Let's see now the figure in the centre (figure 4), who I affirm is Semiramide Appiani¹⁹, but I don't think that she is portrayed as the goddess Venus. I propose the following explanation:



Botticelli: *La Primavera*. Detail. Florence, ©Uffizi. (fig. 4).

It is Semiramide, after having obtained all the properties gifted by Flora. Also, on the grass, we can see the Mayflowers that we remember bring us the true magic. Semiramide appears prevailing, beautiful, self-confident, after having received all those virtues through Ficino's magic, exalted by a myrtle, a Venus plant, that brings great personal attraction and success, she is watching, but she is not looking at us, she is looking at herself, because this picture was intended for her, it was for her to contemplate, I repeat, she is looking at herself after her magical transformation, yes,

¹⁹ Sergiusz Michalski in his article 'Venus as Semiramis: A New Interpretation of the Central Figure of Botticelli's *Primavera*' (www.jstor.org/stable/1483740?seq=3), says that the figure in the center is Semiramide Appiani, but he does not go any further in the interpretation of this picture.

magical transformation; because as Marsilio Ficino says in *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*, third book of the *De Vita*:

“It is known by experience that if one operates the elaboration in the proper ways and is able to endure it, mutates in some way, after the rare purification and its hidden property, the spirit’s own quality, the body’s nature and partly the mood’s movement, and almost regains the youth, in a way that seems to rebirth: and from here origins the tradition of Medea and the magicians often restoring, using particular herbs, that youth...”²⁰.

So Semiramide has been reborn, she is in a new spiritual conscience, ready to learn the great cosmos mysteries, as Frances A. Yates declares in the book *Giordano Bruno and the hermetic tradition* in the chapter ‘Renaissance Magic and Science’, it says: ‘The Renaissance Magic as a factor responsible of fundamental changes in the human conception about the cosmos’²¹. Now, Semiramide, calm and revived, shows us her right hand, another spectacle, but before, above her, we have the *Divinus Cupido*, not Cupid, no (figure 5). The *Divinus Cupido* is the Divine Love that has filled the Sacred Place, as is manifested in a passage of the *Asclepius*, esoteric work translated by Ficino, when Hermes Trismegistus, Asclepius, Tat and Ammon gather together in an Egyptian temple²². And the *Divinus Cupido* points with his arrow’s fire to one of the Three Graces, we will see why later.



Botticelli: *La Primavera*. Detail. Florence, ©Uffizi. (fig. 5).

²⁰ M. Ficino, *De Vita*, Pordenone, Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Immagine, 1991, pp. 357-358.

²¹ F. A. Yates, *ibid.* p. 184.

²² F. A. Yates, *ibid.* p. 53.

Now we move to the Three Graces (figure 6) who I affirm are Ficino's Three Graces,



Botticelli: *La Primavera*. Detail. Florence, ©Uffizi. (fig. 6).

that is the planets Jupiter, Venus and the Sun, it is affirmed by Marsilio Ficino on the third book of the *De Vita*, fifth chapter titled: 'The Three Graces are Jupiter, the Sun and Venus; and Jupiter it's the Grace between the other two, and is specially suitable to us'²³. Ficino's Three Graces are antidepressant for the authors and the scholars, and in that case it could be a studious Semiramide; they are also antidepressant for the melancholic moods, it is also possible that Semiramide had a gloomy mood, typical from geniuses during the Renaissance, as Ficino says in the chapter I just named:

²³ M. Ficino, *ibid.* p. 233.

“If we devote ourselves primarily to Venus, we won’t have the favour of the Sun anymore; if the Sun, Venus will leave. Therefore, to embrace the three graces simultaneously we need to resort to Jupiter, able to communicate”²⁴.

That’s why I say that the Grace on the left is the Sun, the one on the middle (like connecting the other two) is Jupiter, and the one on the right is Venus. Also Ficino says “Like in the Sun series, the inferior man admires the superior, in the Jupiter series, he adores it; in the Venus series the inferior is raised to the superior with loving zeal (that’s why the *Divinus Cupido* points to Venus with his arrow) and is transferred to the other”²⁵. Also, (figure 6) Venus is also, because of the pearls she wears on her hair and the ruby hanging around her neck that points her love to Mars and it’s typical of the Three Graces²⁶. Venus and the Sun are also, in a shameless and refined way, praising the female sex, like praising the woman above Jupiter’s head, the great communicator, like exalting the woman, and in second place, his role as communicator. It is not the first time that the Art, through gestures, talks or manifests the male or female sex, or even the coitus, as I remember in a Lucrezia Borgia’s picture from Pinturicchio.

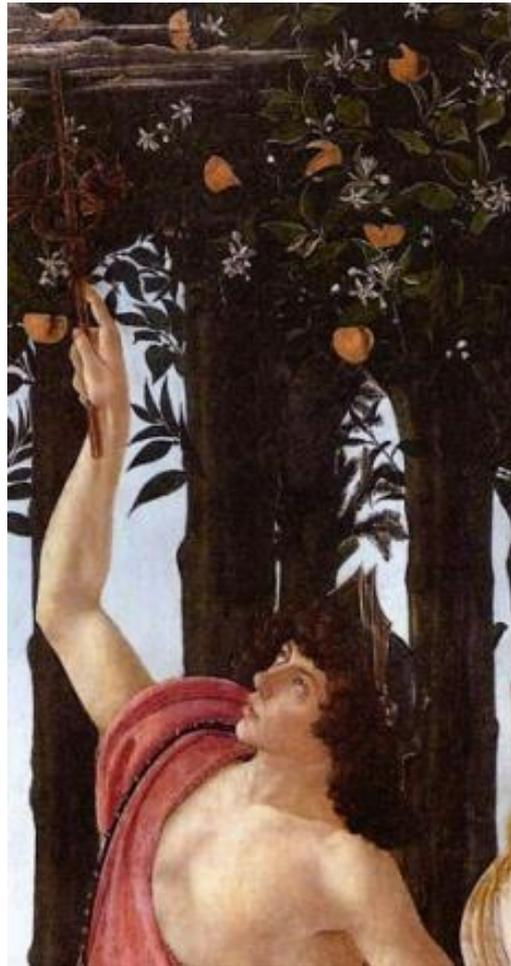
²⁴ M. Ficino, *ibid.* pp. 233- 234.

²⁵ M. Ficino, *ibid.* p. 236.

²⁶ M. Ficino, *ibid.* p. 285.

Last, we have Hermes/Mercury (figure 7), who as Ficino says, is together with the Moon, messenger for the Three Graces²⁷, and in the context of Mercury the inferior always learns from the superior and consents to be persuaded by it²⁸. So Hermes/Mercury clears with his caduceus the clouds of ignorance, (figure 7) so we can see the Eternal Wisdom. This picture is a talisman, Hermes/Mercury will show the secrets of the *Pimander* after witnessing the harmonic dance of the three planets, the Three Graces.

Indeed, Mercury will make you feel and discover in your own spirit, once the clouds are cleared, what the *Corpus Hermeticum*



Botticelli: *La Primavera*. Detail. Florence, ©Uffizi. (fig. 7).

says, remembering that it was translated by Ficino: 'The intellect, or Tat, originates from God's essence itself. In the men, that intellect is God, and that's the reason some of them are gods and their humanity is so close to divinity'²⁹.

So, if you do not become like God, you will not be able to understand him, because each thing it's only understandable by another which is similar to it. Raise yourself to reach a greatness above any measure, free yourself from your body, go beyond any time, become Eternity and then you will understand God. Convince yourself that nothing is impossible for you, think you are immortal and you are in position to

²⁷ M. Ficino, *ibid.* p. 233.

²⁸ M. Ficino, *ibid.* p. 300.

²⁹ F. A. Yates, *ibid.* p. 51.

understand everything, all the arts, all the sciences, the nature of every living thing. Raise until placing yourself above the highest peak, go down lower than the most abyssal depth. Experience in your interior all the feelings of what has been created, of the fire and the water, the wet and the dry, imagining you are everywhere, over the land, in the sea, in the sky. Imagine you have not been born yet, that you are inside the womb, that you are a teenager, that you are old, dead, beyond death. If you manage to embrace with your thought all the things as a whole, times, spaces, substances, qualities, and quantities, you will be able to understand God³⁰.

That's what this picture pretends.

This artwork has a magical power since the beginning, since the wood that forms it, as we know is tempera on panel. Why is this way? As is expressed in the chapter sixteen of the Third book of Ficino's *De Vita*, titled; 'Heaven power and the energy of the ray from which it is known that the images bring the strength': And it says:

"That's why doctors demand images to be made not with any metal or wood, but with a particular one, to which the heavenly nature has naturally provided the virtues that serve to the precious purpose, as if it had matured already. So the art excites the virtue, present in the seed"³¹.

Also mention that in the same book, Marsilio Ficino says that:

"The planets rays (as the astrologers say) can imprint on the images, like they do on other things, powers hidden and extraordinary, different to those who are known. They are not private facts of the soul, they are alive and gifted with sense and have maximum

³⁰ F. A. Yates, *ibid.* p. 50.

³¹ M. Ficino, *ibid.* p. 323.

effectiveness over the spirit. They are then diverse energies according to each star and their rays also change depending on the planet or star”³².

A lot has been said about the light that this picture, Botticelli’s *Allegory of Spring*, has. It is a dim and celestial light that I think represents the rays from the three planets (The Three Graces) that take part in this artwork.

But how acts this image, this picture? How do we act in front of it? Or rather, what did Semiramide Appiani do in front of that magical picture? According to Ficino:

It’s an Arab tradition that, when images are made according to the ritual, our spirit completely immersed in the artwork and in the stars through imagination and emotion, joins with the spirit of the world itself and with the astral radiations that move the spirit of the world; that union causes the spirit of the world to pour any star spirit over the image, that is a vivifying virtue, the one that is specially harmonized with the spirit of the artwork’s (the ritual) author. And an artwork done and provided with essences or perfumes that influence the air, the rays, the operator’s spirit, the material from which the image is made. And I say that perfumes, because of their own nature so close to the spirit and the air, and when they are thrown to the fire, common to the star rays, if they are solar or youthful, effectively influence the air and the spirit, to timely acquire, under the rays, the virtues of the Sun of Jupiter then dominating; and the spirit influenced and enriched with those gifts can, thanks to a passion more than impetuous, not only intervene its own body, but also effect similar qualities over a near body, especially if it’s of a weaker nature. About the material, specially hard, that the image is made of, I affirm that it hardly can have any effect, even a small one,

³² M. Ficino, *ibid.* pp. 319, 321.

from the perfumes or the imagination of the ritual performer; but, regarding the spirit, it is so influenced by the perfume, that becomes one with it³³.

So, Semiramide Appiani placed herself in front of the picture, burned some essences from plants or flowers, perhaps ingest some of those plants or several of them in an infusion or potion and performed the ritual according to what Marsilio Ficino tells us that was made with the images. We know that according to the 1499 inventory of Lorenzo of Pierfrancesco of Medici's properties this picture was in the hall of the private rooms of Lorenzo of Pierfrancesco, that is, the couple's private rooms. As we can see it was a private picture of Semiramide.

We have to remember that it was not rare, we are in Marsilio Ficino's circle and in Pico della Mirandola's circle. Pico della Mirandola was an expert in Cabalistic Magic and it's known that both Pico and Ficino practised the magic. Why not Lorenzo the Magnificent, who many times saved Pico from his problems with the Church? Why not everybody surrounding them? Including Simonetta, including, of course, Semiramide, we know that during the Renaissance, the figure of the woman is also revived. As Franz Cumont says in his conferences of 1905 in Paris about *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*:

“Astrology's religious character, always maintained, at the expenses of logic, because planets and constellations were not only cosmic forces whose influence benign or malefic weakens or reinforces depending on the revolutions of an itinerary fixed since forever; they were also divinities who observed and understood, who became happy or grieved, who had voice and sex, who were fertile or sterile, placid or savage, giving or dominating”³⁴.

³³ M. Ficino, *ibid.* p. 361.

³⁴ E. Garin, *El Zodiaco de la vida*, Barcelona, Ediciones Península, 1981, pp. 9- 10.

Also add, as Eugenio Garin contributes:

“It was the Neoplatonic tradition in general what revived with strength among the Greek Fathers, even in their most reckless manifestations, in a recovery of Hellenism that sometimes was disconcerting. It was not only about a greater knowledge and comments made by Aristotle through a return to the vigour and rigour of the origins, not even a simple integration between Aristotelianism and Platonism and more complete contact with the Arab richness of thought. There was above all a rediscovery of the Hellenic epoch, when in the Greek culture had converged oriental contributions of all kind. Precisely in that environment we witness the singular encounter between the magical-astrological doctrines of the Latin Middle Ages, in which the ancient legacy had penetrated through the Islamic world, and the Hellenic positions, reencountered in the Greek sources”³⁵.

In 1439 the Council for the unification of the churches moved from Ferrara to Florence and that was very important, because George Gemisto Pleton, restorer in Mistra of the cult to the pagan gods, announced, talking to the Florentines themselves, the near end of the Hebraism, Christianity and Islamism, because all the men and women would convert to the religion of the truth, the Gentile’s religion³⁶, it seems as if George Gemisto Pleton announced the truth of Marisilio Ficino, his religion that was so particular, that united Magic, Astrology, Paganism and Christianity. We shall remember that:

“The hermetic texts will be a point of constant reference for Ficino, a privileged testimonial of the *prisca theologia*, a remarkable document that exposes *arcana misteria*, worthy of being placed by Lactantius between the Sibyls and the Prophets

³⁵ E. Garin, *ibid.* p. 86.

³⁶ E. Garin, *ibid.* p. 87.

(*inter Sybillas et Prophetas*). However: precisely that perspective found confirmation and metaphysical and theological foundation of the astrology and the magic. Not without reason has observed Frances Yates that the third book of *De Vita*, full of magic, is more a large exegesis of Hermes (from the *Asclepius*) than a comment of Plotinus. The affirmation can be widely understood: Ficino will do no other thing than to evocate and retake the Trismegistus again and again”³⁷.

Eugenio Garin also contributes something really crucial in my opinion: “The world as an artwork could be the title of all Ficino’s philosophy; the world figurative, animated, live of the astrologers and wizards”³⁸. “It’s in this universal harmony where Ficino justifies the astrology, and the magic too, as consonance of the whole”³⁹. Now I am going to quote some Garin’s words, because if I am quoting him, is because I want to show in this current research, that I base myself on recognised researchers of prestige to reach my interpretation and conclusion: Talking about Ficino, Garin says:

“It’s not enough to construct the perfect archetype of the world, neither to just observe it; it is also needed to interiorize it through intense meditation and the contemplation of its painted image at home where we live. The man-microcosm, so, has to adapt to the macrocosm with the technique of the images, tune in and perform the perfect harmony, identifying himself with the life of the whole and with the power of the whole. Art and magic get together...”⁴⁰.

This that Garin says about what Marsilio Ficino thought, matches exactly the interpretation that I have given to Botticelli’s *Allegory of Spring*, when I say that Semiramide Appiani interiorized her picture and meditated with it, in addition to performing the magic ritual; Ficino comments that is important to have the magical

³⁷ E. Garin, *ibid.* p. 95.

³⁸ E. Garin, *ibid.* p. 107.

³⁹ E. Garin, *ibid.* p. 107.

⁴⁰ E. Garin, *ibid.* p. 108.

image at home, like Semiramide had it at her home in Florence, at the hall of her private rooms, above the divan. When Garin says that the man had to perform the perfect harmony, art and magic get together, he was clearly talking about the magic ritual that Ficino describes in *De Vita*.

On the other hand, the society of that time, lived daily with the astrology, as Marsilio Ficino observes in his *De Vita*, in the chapter XXV titled: `The observation of the stars for the conception of children, in cooking, in building and room caring, in assembling the wardrobe; and to the point that it's licit to pay attention to those things'⁴¹; in that chapter Ficino ardently defends the use of the stars for such matters, because he say it's following Nature's pace. I will quote just the dressing example, to make it they resorted to Venus, and also the planet Venus had to be favourable when the dress was worn for the first time. What was achieved with that? That the dress, every time is worn, contributes joy to the body and the soul. And people did this in the times of Botticelli's *Allegory of Spring*. As can be seen, my interpretation it's completely integrated in the times of that artwork, as I believe that should be: Not seeing a picture from our times, from the 21st century, but entering the thought and lifestyle of the times that our artwork is about. As Garin says in one of his books:

“The images, like the rest of nature itself, have a soul, a meaning; stopping at the fantastic image, like limiting ourselves to a pure physical conception of nature, and not descending to the deepest spiritual direction, to the artist (human or divine it doesn't matter, because the only artist is the Logos) intention; to remain at the surface, it's the biggest mistake”⁴².

Erwin Panofsky also tells us regarding Marsilio Ficino's thought:

⁴¹ M. Ficino, *ibid.* p. 401.

⁴² E. Garin, *L'umanesimo italiano*, Bari, Editori Laterza, 1978, p. 110.

“It is also understood that (leaving aside necromancy and demonism) there is not, in principle, difference between the medicine, the magic and the astrology. When I devote myself to a particular activity or behave in a particular way, when I go for a walk at a particular time, when I play or listen to a particular piece of music, when I eat a particular food, smell a particular perfume or take a particular medicine, I am doing essentially the same that when I wear an amulet manufactured under favourable conditions, of a particular substance and with the image or symbol of a particular planet or constellation: In all those cases I am exposing myself to the influence of the cosmic spirit modified by the spheres and elements it has passed through. Because if the medicine prescribed by a doctor contains, for example, mint, this humble plant has acquired its healing properties thanks to having accumulated the spirit of the Sun combined with the spirit of Jupiter”⁴³.

⁴³ E. Panofsky, *Renacimiento y renacimientos en el arte occidental*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1988, p. 267.

CONCLUSION:

According to both letters from Ficino, one to Lorenzo of Pierfrancesco of Medici and the other to Lorenzo the Magnificent and Bembo, it clearly refers to Semiramide when Gombrich thinks that is pure Ficinian philosophy. I think that he talks about Semiramide so Lorenzo of Pierfrancesco of Medici falls in love with her, but he thought that she was earthly, that she was not initiated in the Ficinian magic that his master Marsilio had taught him all his life, for this reason the picture of *Allegory of Spring* is made, so Semiramide can be initiated in what everybody else was already initiated in the circle of Lorenzo the Magnificent, that's the reason because the picture is started during the times of those letters and gets finished for the wedding. Although it's possible that Lorenzo of Pierfrancesco saw her and fell in love with her, or maybe not, that we do not know, we do not know his feelings, but we know that this picture had the purpose of initiating Semiramide in the Ficinian magic so Lorenzo of Pierfrancesco could fall in love with her even more and also she could be integrated in the circle of Lorenzo the Magnificent, that is where her life was going to take place. To end this conclusion I would like to quote some Marsilio Ficino's words from the *De vita*, collected in *Saturn and the Melancholy*:

Always remember that because of our mind wishes and inclinations and because of the ability of our *spiritus* we can easily and quickly enter under the influence of those stars that express those inclinations, wishes and abilities; so, by moving away from the earthly things, by the leisure, the solitude, the persistence, the theology, and the esoteric philosophy, by the superstition, the magic, the agriculture and the pain we enter under Saturn's influence⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ R. Klibansky; E. Panofsky; F. Saxl, *Saturno y la Melancolía*, Madrid, Alianza Forma, 2004, p. 256.

The one who writes those lines about Botticelli's *Allegory of Spring* is also daughter of Saturn.

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