

Falling in Love with the *Cupid Series*

By Sara Avins-Gagnon

William Adams produced wares for the American market from 1804-1840 “in the dark blue hue.” During this period, romanticized scenes were replacing classical images in popularity, and the *Cupid Series*, produced between 1820-1830, was a nice bridge between the styles. The images of Cupid (God of Love) and his mother Venus (Goddess of Beauty) are depicted in several transfers in this Series. The Rose is also prevalent in these views: in keeping with the symbolism so often used in romanticized images, the Rose is the symbol of Venus.

Romanticism was finding its way into many aspects of music, poetry, literature and the arts of the early 19th Century. Mary Tighe (1772-1810) published a poem in 1805 entitled *Psyche, or the Legend of Love*. 50 copies were privately printed in 1805, and the poem was reprinted in 1811, after Tighe’s death. *Psyche* tells the story of Cupid’s love for Psyche (a mortal of extraordinary beauty) and Venus’ test of Psyche (to see if she is worthy of her son, presumably); Psyche does win the favor of Venus, and Cupid’s love, and eventually winds up as the Goddess of the Soul. In studying the Adams transfers, it seems clear that the inspiration for these wonderful images was Tighe’s poem.

The transfer labeled *Two Cupids Flying* (alternatively *Cupid and Roses*) depicts winged creatures with roses and comes from Tighe’s poem. In this author’s opinion, the images are of fairies, not cupids, because they have butterfly-like wings (and there



Two Cupids Flying, or alternatively, Cupid and Roses. Photo source: TCC Pattern and Source Print Database.



Cupid and Venus with Lyre. Photo source: TCC Pattern and Source Print Database.

are more than one of them). In *Psyche*, Venus gives Psyche a task so that she might prove her loyalty: she is to bring Venus forbidden water. To perform this task, Psyche has to wander into a strange and forbidding country, inhabited by Fairies. The images of fairies and the fountain in the background coincides with the story, as does the presence of roses in the scene, flowers that the fairies so admired.

The transfer image *Cupid and Venus with Lyre* depicts Cupid as an attentive son to the Goddess. The lyre is meant to bring pleasure, and Venus was also the Queen of Laughter, Grace and Pleasure. Another interesting point is that Venus is clothed in a Greek style robe in the image. Usually, Venus is shown fully or partially nude, a way of emphasizing her physical beauties. Obviously, 19th Century modesty dictated that the image of a nude goddess was not ideal on a plate intended for everyday use, and hence her body was draped.

The view *Cupid and Venus Holding a Garland* shows Cupid adorning his mother with flowers as he greets her. It has been written that as Venus walked, flowers blossomed beneath her feet. You can see this happening as a rose sprouts from the Earth near her feet in this image.

The transfer titled *Cupid Surprising a Woman* pictures Cupid sleeping under a rose bush, while a startled woman peers from behind him. The woman in this scene is Psyche, and your author believes the better name for the scene would be *Psyche Surprising Cupid*: in the legend, Psyche was
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never supposed to look at Cupid, yet she leans over him with her lamp to get a first-hand glimpse. In the poem, a drop of burning oil from the lamp falls on Cupid's shoulder, surprising him and sending him into a rage: **not** the ideal way to meet your mate.

Floral borders were very common on transferware during this period. In the *Cupid Series*, the border is sectioned into quarters with "shoelace bows" between the segments. These bows provide a nice visual break. A pie crust border was also included as part of the transfer pattern instead of being molded directly into the edge of the plate, also adding to the decorative appeal of the pattern.

A person could get lost in the beautiful imagery used in the Adams *Cupid Series*. It leaves one dreaming of the blossoming of true love. How romantic is that!

Editor's Note: Sara Avins-Gagnon is a new member of the TCC from Georgia. She has a passion for Cupid transfers and for the Scriptural Series.



Arrangement from the author's collection of Adams' Cupid Series. Photo courtesy the author.



Cupid and Venus Holding a Garland. Photo: TCC Pattern and Source Print Database



Cupid Surprising a Woman, or, as the author suggests, perhaps the title should be Psyche Surprising Cupid. Photo: TCC Pattern and Source Print Database.

It is almost time

TCC ANNUAL MEETING

OCTOBER 21 – OCTOBER 24, DURHAM, NH

Contact Louise Richardson (louiserichardson@yahoo.com)
or Ann Berard (603-585-9479) for ALL the Details.

