

MYTHOLOGY AND SYMBOLISM IN TWO WORKS OF RODDAM SPENCER STANHOPE'S MATURITY

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I: *Love and the Maiden*

Blonde and beautiful, a young woman dressed in a sky-blue tunic worn over a pink shift and a white blouse is lying on grass speckled with daisies, under an olive tree. She wakes to find herself surveyed by an equally beautiful half-naked youth. He has pink-gold wings, a golden bow, and a wreath of roses in his hair. Shamelessly, he has pulled aside the flower-laden branch of a rhododendron to secure an uninterrupted view of the lovely girl. A little way off, her companions – three other girls and a young man – dance on, beneath a row of cypress trees, oblivious in the clear light of the mediterranean morning. On the further shore of an inlet three bathers can just be discerned beneath the walls of a coastal town, whose terraces tumble towards the sea.

Supporting herself on one hand, she raises her other in an ambiguous gesture, which could be a half-hearted attempt to hold him off, a plea for quiet – or a salute. In a moment of silent equipoise, the grey eyes of the perfect girl confront the appraising stare of the irresistible god of love.

Aestheticism and Symbolism

It must be admitted that the categories into which we organize artists and their work seem to exist primarily for our convenience as critics and historians, and often fail to tell the general reader much about the artists in question. As often as not, the names of these categories were given by journalists (Impressionism being only the most famous example) and though the accounts they represent have a certain broad-brush effectiveness, they rarely bear close examination. Viewed up close the distinctions blur. Nevertheless, I think that before I proceed to consider *Love and the Maiden* (fig. 1; 1877), which I tried to evoke above, or *The Waters of Lethe by the Plains of Elysium* (fig. 2; 1879), a quick