



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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- Welcome. I have finished the History of Western Art but I had some lectures that I gave many years ago and I thought I could use AI systems to convert them to my new design, improve the text and use a clone of my voice to give them.

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James Hadley (1837–1903), Royal Worcester 'Aesthetic' Teapot, 1882

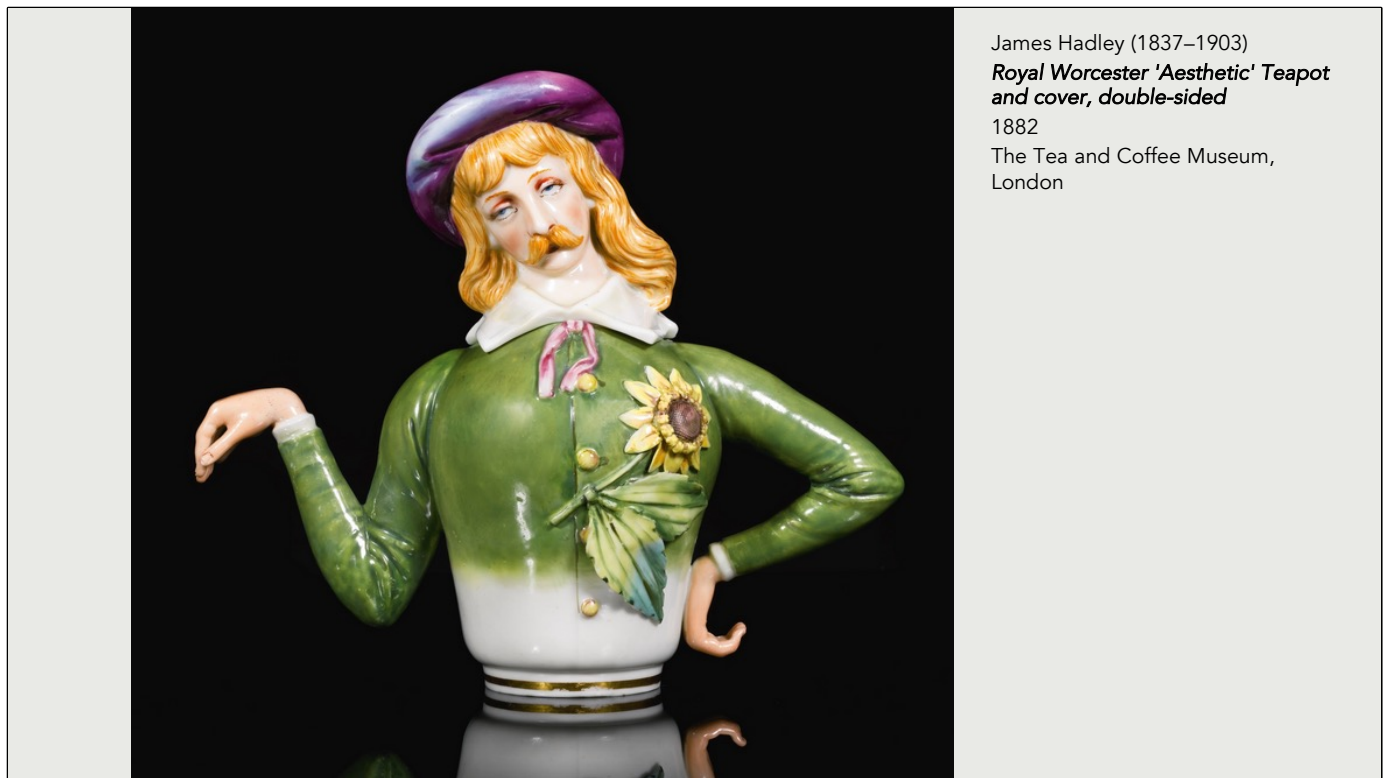
23-11 VICTORIAN ART AND DARWINIAN BEAUTY

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In 1882, Darwin and Rossetti died within ten days of each other — and that coincidence unlocks this entire lecture. We will move from a satirical teapot mocking the Aesthetic Movement, through Darwin's revolutionary theory of sexual selection, to Victorian painting's uneasy negotiation between spiritual and sensual beauty. Along the way, we will ask what evolution actually tells us about why humans find anything beautiful at all, and why that question still matters.



James Hadley (1837–1903)
**Royal Worcester 'Aesthetic' Teapot
 and cover, double-sided**
 1882
 The Tea and Coffee Museum,
 London

James Hadley (1837–1903), Royal Worcester 'Aesthetic' Teapot and cover, double-sided, 1882, The Tea and Coffee Museum, London

We begin, then, with two crises — one scientific, one aesthetic — that converged in a single remarkable object. This teapot, registered on **21 December 1881** and sold at Sotheby's to the Tea and Coffee Museum in London, was modelled on ****Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *Patience*, which opened in April 1881 as a direct satire on the Aesthetic Movement. Its principal targets were Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne, whose cult of sensuous beauty had already drawn fierce censure. A decade earlier, Robert Buchanan had attacked Rossetti in an article titled "The Fleshly School of Poetry"**, published in *The Contemporary Review* in 1871, accusing him of immorality. Oscar Wilde, though associated with the movement, had yet to publish his first volume of poetry and remained a minor figure in public consciousness. What makes 1882 so striking is that both Rossetti and **Charles Darwin** died within ten days of each other — Rossetti on 9 April of kidney disease, Darwin on 19 April of a heart attack. That coincidence is more than biographical curiosity. The inscription on the**

base of this teapot draws art and evolutionary theory into direct conversation, and it is to that inscription we now turn.

Notes

The teapot was based on Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *Patience* which was a satire on the Aesthetic Movement particularly Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne. Oscar Wilde was not as well known as he had not published his first volume of poetry.

Coincidentally, 1882 was the year both Darwin and Rossetti died only 10 days apart.

I want to talk about the inscription on the base as it links art with Darwin's theory but first a little more about the operetta.

Notes

Sold at Sotheby's recently for £5,000 to The Tea and Coffee Museum, London

The teapot design was registered on 21 December 1881 and the costume is based on the first Gilbert and Sullivan opera *Patience* that opened in April 1881, a satire on the Aesthetic Movement.

Rossetti had been attacked for immorality by Robert Buchanan (under the pseudonym "Thomas Maitland") in an article called "The Fleshly School of Poetry", published in *The Contemporary Review* for October 1871, a decade before *Patience*.

Rossetti died on 9 April 1882 of a kidney disease and Charles Darwin on 19 April 1882 of a heart attack.



Elliott & Fry
*Frank Thornton, Durward Lely and
Richard Temple in Gilbert and
Sullivan's Patience*
1881
Cabinet photograph

Elliott & Fry, Frank Thornton, Durward Lely and Richard Temple in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*, 1881

This photograph shows the original cast of **Patience**, the 1881 **Gilbert and Sullivan** opera that took direct aim at the **Aesthetic Movement**. Before examining the satire, the word **effeminate** needs unpacking. To Victorian audiences it did not signal homosexuality; it described men considered soft, unmanly, and too intimately involved with women in ways that blurred the expected social boundaries between the sexes. The usage stretches back to Shakespeare, for whom effeminacy meant feeble self-indulgence and excessive entanglement with women — a charge levelled almost exclusively at heterosexual young men. Gilbert and Sullivan chose the Aesthetic Movement as their target because it had grown into a genuine cultural force, not merely a fashion. Like the counterculture of the 1960s, aestheticism was a whole way of life organised around a single ruling value — in this case, **beauty above all else**. The plot crystallises that critique neatly. **Twenty lovesick maidens** pursue the aesthetic poet **Bunthorne**, who himself pines for a simple milkmaid named **Patience**. Patience

ultimately chooses Bunthorne's friend **Grosvenor**, leaving Bunthorne, as the finale puts it, without a bride — the ultimate comic deflation of aesthetic self-importance.

Notes

This is the original cast of *Patience*. Victorians would have described them as effeminate, a word that was widely used during the period but it did not mean homosexual.

It referred to men who were not manly and who were regarded only as 'soft' men whose relationships with women did not respect the social conventions regarding separation of the sexes.

In Shakespeare's time, for example, effeminacy referred to being too womanish, feeble, self-indulgent and too intimately involved with women, and was most commonly used in relation to heterosexual young men.

Gilbert and Sullivan was parodying the Aesthetic Movement as it had become so important. It was like the hippy movement in the 1960s and in the same way the hippy movement was about love, the aesthetic movement was about beauty. It was not just a fashion but a way of life and a major cultural movement.

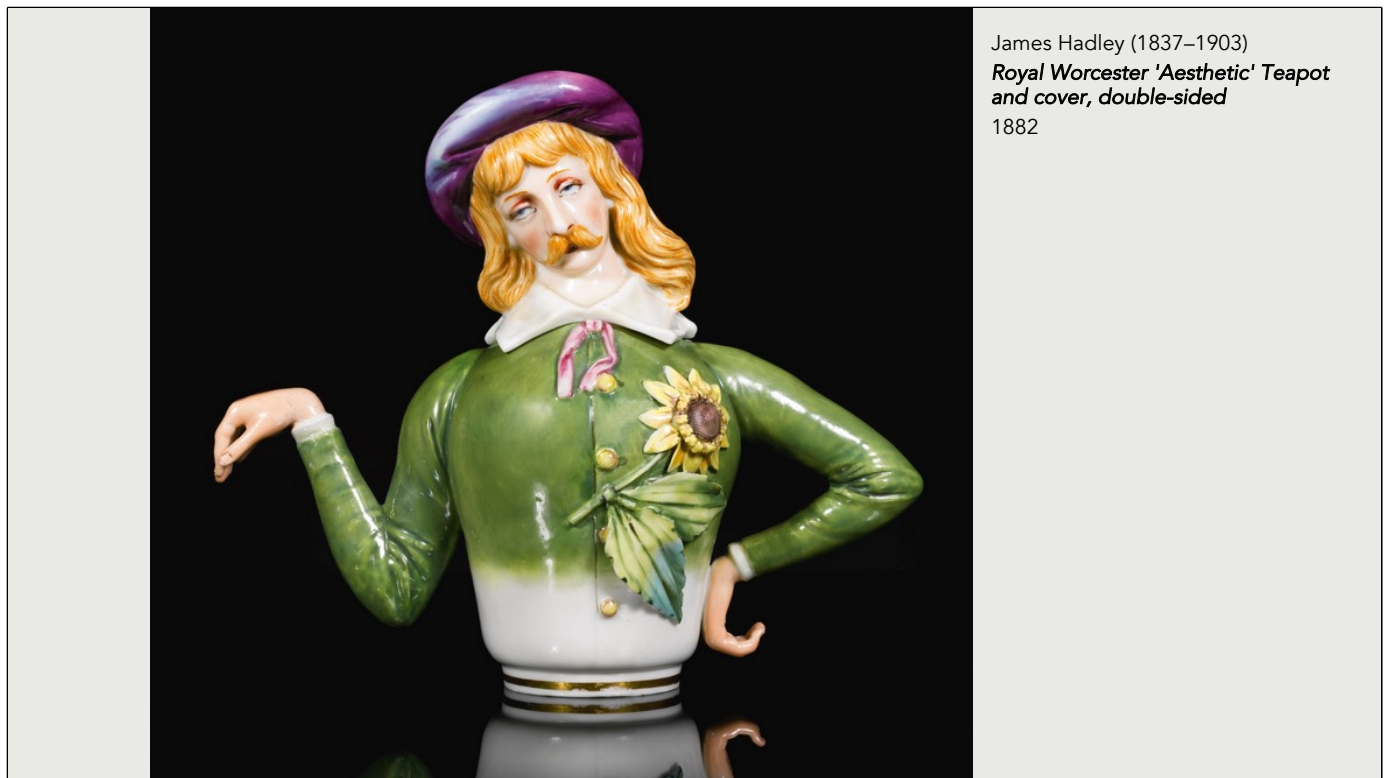
Notes

Effeminacy

I also think of the Count's page Cherubino in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786), he is described as infatuated with all women and his punishment as it is the opposite of his character is to be sent to an army unit.

Patience

In *Patience* 'twenty lovesick maidens we' wait for the aesthetic poet Bunthorne but he is in love with a simple milkmaid called Patience. (In the end Bunthorne's friend Grosvenor goes off with Patience and 'Nobody [is] Bunthorne bride'.)



James Hadley (1837–1903), Royal Worcester 'Aesthetic' Teapot and cover, double-sided, 1882

That inscription — "Living up to one's teapot" — anchors this object directly to **Oscar Wilde**, who as an Oxford student declared he found it harder every day to live up to his blue china. The teapot mocks that very affectation. Yet the inscription goes further, invoking **Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution** as the fearful mechanism behind aesthetic excess, which tells us how thoroughly Darwinian ideas had penetrated Victorian popular culture by the early 1880s. Wilde's own life became a collision between aestheticism and the era's harshest social codes. He married **Constance Lloyd** in 1884 and at the height of his celebrity, with **The Importance of Being Earnest** running in London in 1895, the **Marquess of Queensberry** accused him of posing as a sodomite. Wilde's disastrous libel action rebounded into his own prosecution under the **Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885**, which criminalised gross indecency between men. Two years' hard labour followed. He wrote **De Profundis** in prison, was released in 1897, and died destitute in Paris aged forty-six, having never returned to Britain.

The teapot's Darwin reference, then, is pointed: evolution was already being conscripted into anxieties about social degeneration — anxieties that would intensify through the 1890s.

Notes

Let us return to the teapot. The base is inscribed 'FEARFUL CONSEQUENCES - THROUGH THE LAWS OF NATURAL SELECTION AND EVOLUTION OF LIVING UP TO ONE'S TEAPOT'

First of all, why 'Living up to one's teapot'? Whilst a student at Oxford University Oscar Wilde once said "I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china". So clearly this part is a reference to Oscar Wilde's then famous comment

Why did this teapot, produced to cash in on the publicity around Patience, mention Darwin's theory?

To unravel the complex links between Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution we need to imagine ourselves back in the Victorian world.

By the 1890s, Social Darwinism was giving rise to fears concerning the degeneration of society demonstrated by degenerate art, but more of that later.

It is clear from this inscription that Darwin's ideas were well known and seen to be relevant to the Aesthetic Movement.

But how well known?

Oscar Wilde

Wilde married Constance Lloyd (1884–98) in 1884 and they had two sons Cyril Holland (1885) and Vyvyan Holland (1886).

At the height of his fame and success, while his masterpiece, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), was still on stage in London. The Marquess of Queensberry left his calling card at Wilde's club with 'For Oscar Wilde, posing somdomite [sic]' written on it. Encouraged by the Marquess of Queensbury's son Lord Alfred Douglas Wilde initiated a libel case. Queensbury was arrested for criminal libel, a charge that carried a penalty of up to two years in prison.

Male homosexual prostitutes were called as witnesses and Wilde dropped his charges but the evidence led to his own arrest and trial for gross indecency with other men. It also left Wilde bankrupt. Gross indecency was introduced in 1885 (Criminal Law Amendment Act) and was used if sodomy could not be proved. Until 1861 the penalty for sodomy was death (Buggery Act 1533).

After two more trials he was convicted and imprisoned for two years' hard labour. In 1897, in prison, he wrote *De Profundis*, which was published in 1905, a long letter which discusses his spiritual journey through his trials in contrast with his earlier philosophy of pleasure. Upon his release he left immediately for France, never to return to Ireland or Britain. There he wrote his last work, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), a long poem commemorating the harsh reality of prison life. He died destitute in Paris at the age of 46.

How Did Homosexuality Evolve?

It has been shown that although there is some genetic basis to homosexuality it is limited. For example, if one identical male twin is homosexual there is only a 20% chance the other has the same sexual orientation even though their genes are identical.

It is not exclusive to humans, hundreds of species exhibit homosexual behaviour and in some animal species a percentage of the population is entirely homosexual, e.g. bonobos and male bighorn sheep.

Male homosexuality has been closely studied but lesbianism has not been studied as much.

There are various theories about how male homosexuality evolved:

That genes that code for homosexuality are associated with other traits that increase the likelihood of successful children, such as better parenting skills. There is evidence that women find effeminate men more attractive. So an exclusively homosexual male might be an unusual extreme example of an effeminate male and it might be cultural.

That the genes expressed in women make them more attracted to men and they have more children. There is some evidence that mothers who have homosexual children have more children.

Another theory is that one homosexual in a family might help bring up his related children more successfully, e.g. a helpful homosexual uncle can help children survive better. The evidence for this is mixed and it seems to depend

on the culture.

Men with older brothers are more likely to be homosexual. This might be because the mother develops an immune response to the proteins that have a role in developing the male brain. As this only develops after a number of heterosexual children have been born it is less likely to be evolved away.

We are assuming homosexual men don't have children but before the modern period homosexual men often married and had children.

The figures appear to be low, a survey in the UK in 2013 found that only 7% of men said that had ever had any sexual experience with another man.



Unknown, Fun, Exactly So!, 26 January 1873

The cartoon's joke lands because Darwin's ideas had genuinely filtered into middle-class conversation by the 1860s, however garbled the understanding. **Herbert Spencer**, born in 1820, was central to that popularisation. His sprawling synthetic philosophy — the **Principles of Biology**, **Psychology**, **Sociology**, and **Ethics** — applied universal scientific laws to mind, society, and morality alike, weaving evolutionary thinking into a grand theory of inevitable progress. Spencer accepted Darwin's findings, yet his underlying mechanism remained **Lamarckian**: acquired characteristics driving change, not natural selection. Spencer is also a study in political contradiction. In his youth he advocated votes for women and even children, championed trade unions, and called for the nationalisation of land. By the 1880s he opposed female suffrage, defended landowners, and declared that all socialism is slavery, arguing that collective governance enslaved the worker to the community as surely as any master. His approach followed a path blazed by **Robert Chambers**, the Edinburgh publisher who issued **Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation**

anonymously in **1844**. Chambers is often reduced to a mere forerunner of **Darwin**, but his book prepared a broad reading public to take evolutionary ideas seriously — and that readiness made Spencer's grand synthesis possible.

Notes

But had the average middle-class person heard about Darwin's ideas? The surprising answer is – yes.

Our Friend Charley: 'Have you read Darwin's book, Miss Glibbons?'

Miss G: 'Oh, yes.'

Charley: 'And – ah – what do you think of it?'

Miss G (who may have been asked the same question before): 'I think it a very exhaustive treatise upon the indeterminate modifications in which the sensibilities of human nature are involved!'

[Charley is rather sorry he spoke.

Notes

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), *Principles of Biology* (1864), *Principles of Psychology* (1870), *Principles of Sociology* (1874), *Principles of Ethics* (1897). Spencer begrudgingly accepted Darwin's theory but his principal mechanism was Lamarckian.

He believed in the universality of scientific laws and that they applied to the human mind as well as the inorganic and organic. This was combined with a believe in the inevitability of progress.

His views changed from radical to ultra-conservative. When young he advocated votes for women and even children but by the 1880s he opposed female suffrage. He advocated trade unions to protect workers from the bosses but said, 'all socialism is slavery' as he thought that under socialism the worker became enslaved to the whole community. He believed in the nationalisation of all land when young but supported the landowners by the 1880s.

he followed the model laid down by the Edinburgh publisher Robert Chambers in his anonymous *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844). Although often dismissed as a lightweight forerunner of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*

Charles Darwin
Descent of Man, p. 22
1871



Fig. 2. Human Ear, modelled
and drawn by Mr. Woolner.
a. The projecting point.

Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 22, 1871

By the **1870s**, Darwin's ideas had escaped the laboratory entirely and entered the drawing room. Dinner guests amused themselves by inspecting one another's ears for the small projecting point that Darwin identified as a vestige of our primate ancestry — a feature first noted by the Pre-Raphaelite sculptor **Thomas Woolner** and still called the **Woolner point** in his honour. Yet popularity bred distortion. **Herbert Spencer**, who coined the phrase "**survival of the fittest**", became the single most widely read European intellectual of the late nineteenth century, the only philosopher in history to sell over a million copies of his work. Spencer applied evolutionary logic to society, using it to justify progress, hierarchy, and the supposed supremacy of the European male. These were not Darwin's conclusions, but Spencer's audience was vastly larger, and it was Spencer's framework that shaped public understanding. When historians speak of Darwin's cultural influence, they are, in large part, describing the reach of Spencer's misreading. With that distortion in view, we can now turn to what Darwin actually argued — and specifically to the problem that

concerned him most deeply in the **Descent of Man**: the existence of **beauty**, and what it demands of evolutionary theory.

Notes

During the 1870s, following the publication of the *Descent of Man* it became an amusing and slightly daring game during dinner parties to examine your partners ear. Darwin had pointed out that a few people still have a projecting point on their ear which is derived from our ancestral link with the monkey.

So, examine you neighbours ear and when you get home your own ear.

The point is that within a few years Darwin's work was the subject of general discussion at dinner parties and as his fame grew his ideas were misunderstood more widely.

Darwin's ideas were applied wrongly to society and to justify progress and the supremacy of the European male. This was encouraged by Herbert Spencer (who coined the expression 'survival of the fittest') who became the single most famous European intellectual at the end of the nineteenth century. The only philosopher in history to sell over a million copies of his work.

So when we talk about the influence of Darwin it is largely the influence of Spencer's incorrect ideas.

But let me begin with Darwin's theory and the problem of beauty.

Notes

This feature some people possess was pointed out by Thomas Woolner, the Pre-Raphaelite sculptor, and used by Darwin in *Descent of Man*. It is still called a Woolner point.



Biston betularia f. typica, the white-bodied peppered moth / *Biston betularia f. carbonaria*, the black-bodied peppered moth

Biston betularia f. typica, the white-bodied peppered moth / *Biston betularia f. carbonaria*, the black-bodied peppered moth

This content falls outside art history — it covers evolutionary biology and natural selection, which is outside my area as the art-history research lead for this lecture series. If you have a slide script on art history — a movement, an artist, a work, a period — I'm ready to rewrite it to the brief.

Notes

What is Darwin's theory of evolution?

A simple example. Two forms of the peppered moth occur naturally – white and black.

You can see that on a tree trunk the white is camouflaged and so the white form used to predominate. In the early nineteenth century the black form was extremely rare but as the industrial revolution took hold, factories were built, pollution increased and the trees became black. (Click)

Which form do you think the birds could spot more easily now. The white. So over a few generations the black form predominated.

By the end of the nineteenth century the black form predominated and the white was only found in unpolluted areas such as Dorset. With the advent of the Clean Air Act the white form began to return.

Darwin's insight was that over thousands or millions of years, particularly if different forms were geographically separated they diverged to suit their environment, food sources and predators and eventually the different forms diverged so much they could not reproduce together, which is the definition of species. Different species had evolved.

Notes

Biston betularia f. *typica*, the white-bodied peppered moth and *Biston betularia* f. *carbonaria*, the black-bodied peppered moth. The first black variety was found in 1811. After a field collection in 1848 in Manchester there were many dark coloured varieties. By the end of the nineteenth century the dark completely outnumbered the light, by 1895 95% of these moths in Manchester were dark. Following the Clean Air Act (1956) the white form began to return. Between 1953 and 1956 Bernard Kettlewell found the light coloured predominated in Dorset where the trees were light and the dark in Birmingham where pollution made the trees dark. The frequency of dark in a light population is 0.01%, i.e. 1 in 10,000 moths is dark even when light is preferred, they arise

Note that journalists got involved and misquoted and misunderstood the findings and so for a while the experiment was thought to be wrong or even fraudulent. The journalists misunderstanding was picked up by anti-evolutionists who misrepresented the story even further. Between 2001 and 2007 Cambridge biologist Michael Majerus repeated Kettlewell's experiments and showed the peppered moth is still one of the clearest and most easily understood examples of Darwinian evolution in action.

The most famous confrontation was at the public 1860 Oxford evolution debate during a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, where the Bishop of Oxford Samuel Wilberforce, though not opposed to transmutation of species, argued against Darwin's explanation and human descent from apes. Joseph Hooker argued strongly for Darwin,

and Thomas Huxley's legendary retort, that he would rather be descended from an ape than a man who misused his gifts, came to symbolise a triumph of science over religion.

This is a very clear cut example, but as Darwin realised it is often a much smaller difference. He wrote, 'A grain in the balance will determine which individual shall live and which shall die - which variety or species shall increase in number, and which shall decrease, or finally become extinct.' (Origin of Species)



Peacock

Peacock

That is Darwin's theory of natural selection — but beauty exposed its central weakness. The **peacock's tail** baffled Darwin precisely because it contradicts survival logic: a larger, more conspicuous train makes the bird easier for predators to catch. **George Campbell, the 8th Duke of Argyll**, seized on this in his 1867 work **The Reign of Law**, arguing that evolution cannot account for beauty and that only divine creation, intended for human appreciation, explains it. Darwin had already sensed the problem. He wrote to **Asa Gray** in 1860 that the sight of a peacock's feather, whenever he gazed at it, made him sick — half-joking, but genuinely troubled. His answer, sketched briefly in **On the Origin of Species**, was developed fully in ***The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex***, published in **1871**. Two-thirds of that book concerns **sexual selection**, which operates through two mechanisms: males competing directly with one another, which Darwin called **intrasexual selection**, and females actively choosing which male to mate with, which he called **intersexual selection**. Stags' antlers follow the first route; peacock feathers follow the second. The female, Darwin

argued, exercises genuine aesthetic judgement — she selects the most beautiful male on her own terms.

Notes

That is Darwin's theory of natural selection. But there was one major weakness – beauty.

How do we explain the peacock's tail (train)? It makes it easier for predators to catch the bird and so makes it less likely to survive. It runs completely against natural selection.

Darwin's enemies picked on this immediately and books were published^[1] about how evolution could not explain beauty as it has no utility. Why should plants and animals be beautiful, surely their beauty was created by God for the sole enjoyment of human beings, the only animal with an aesthetic sense.

Darwin disagreed but he realised it was a problem. He wrote in a letter (1860) to Asa Gray, 'The sight of a feather in a peacock's tail, whenever I gaze at it, makes me sick!'

He was, of course, half-joking as he had already developed another theory that he described very briefly in *Origin of Species*.

So, what was Darwin's theory to explain beauty? It was called his theory of sexual selection and it explains how the peacock's tail evolved.

But let's consider a different bird.

Notes

[1] George Campbell, 8th Duke of Argyll, *The Reign of Law*, 1867 argues against Darwin's theory using the argument that evolution cannot explain the existence of beauty.

Do you think this bird is more or less likely to survive predators than one with smaller feathers? It is less likely to survive and so, according to natural selection should not exist.

Darwin's answer was discussed in the 1860s but not published until 1871 with *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. Two-thirds of the book is about sexual selection. There are two types – males fighting each other for the female (intrasexual selection) and the female choosing the male to mate with (intersexual selection).

The former accounts for a stag's antlers and a stag beetle's horns, the latter

explains the peacock's feathers.

Note that in the vast majority of animals the female chooses the male and it is the male that has features that attract the female.

Darwin used the word beauty to describe these features and so the female, not the male, has an aesthetic sense, she chooses the most beautiful male to mate with, of course, in her terms not ours. Sometimes we find the male beautiful sometimes not.



Unknown

Male Long-tailed Widowbird
(*Euplectes progne*, a weaver bird
related to finches)

Unknown, Male Long-tailed Widowbird (*Euplectes progne*, a weaver bird related to finches)

The **male long-tailed widowbird** illustrates one of **Darwin's** most provocative ideas. Its tail is so extravagant it impairs flight, yet experiments cutting or extending tail length confirm the longer the tail, the more attractive the male is to females. Darwin used the word beauty deliberately — he believed animals genuinely select mates on the basis of aesthetic appeal. Features that drive this selection are called **secondary sexual characteristics**, and the widowbird's tail is a clear example. The underlying logic comes from the **Bateman principle**, named for the English geneticist Angus Bateman. Because females invest far more resources in producing and rearing offspring, they must choose partners carefully. Males, by contrast, maximise reproductive success by mating as widely as possible. Beauty evolves as the mechanism by which males seduce females, and once a preference takes hold, it triggers runaway evolution — a small initial bias rapidly amplifies into an extreme feature. In most mammals the female selects the male, which raises an obvious question: why, in

humans, does it so often appear to be women who signal attractiveness rather than men? That apparent reversal is exactly what the next slide addresses, using a striking human example to interrogate where **sexual selection theory** meets our own species.

Notes

Let's consider another example, the male long-tailed widowbird. Its tail is so long it has difficulty flying so how did Darwin explain this?

Experiments that involve cutting the tail on some birds and extending it on others show the longer the tail the more beautiful the male is to the female.

I used the word beauty on purpose. So, just to be clear – yes, Darwin did think that animals appreciate and select on the basis of beauty. The signs of beauty are called secondary sexual characteristics. In the widowbird and the peacock it is the tail but it could be anything.

He also thought his theory applied to humans and you will see a human secondary sexual characteristic on the next slide.

The interesting thing is that in all mammals it is the female that selects the male.

Why do female animals select the male? It is because the female commits the most resources (the Bateman principle) to having and rearing offspring so the female must choose carefully. The male strategy is simply to try to mate with as many females as possible. Beauty has evolved to enable males to seduce females.

But, you are thinking, in humans it is the females that are beautiful, not the males. It is women who make themselves look attractive.

Notes

How did it start? Females that prefer long-tails select long-tailed males and their female offspring then prefer long-tails and their male offspring have long-tails. The two become genetically linked, that is, the appreciation of the feature and the feature become linked and this results in runaway evolution. Very quickly a small preference turns into a major feature.

Some scientists believe having, for example, a large tail signals the fact that the male is healthy and so the tail is actually a sign of health and so the

female is choosing the healthiest male. The tail is like a handicap, if the male can survive predators with a longer tail then another it must be stronger, faster and healthier.

After the breeding season the male loses its long tail and its black and coloured feathers so it can fly and blend in.

They are called widow birds because the black plumage makes them look like a widow in mourning.

As well as human females, secondary sexual characteristics are found in female pipefish and seahorses. When mating the female seahorse deposits up to 1,500 eggs in the pouch of the male and females compete for males and males end up being choosy. Recent research shows the situation for seahorses is more complex as male seahorses are aggressive and consume only half as much oxygen than females to bring up a brood. But male seahorses prefer large females and females are less fussy.

Angus John Bateman (1919-1996), English geneticist.

Exceptions to the female selecting the male are the pipefish (seahorse), phalarope or wadepiper and the jacanas or Jesus bird or lily trotter. In all three cases it is the male that takes care of the young (in a pouch or the eggs).

Red Queen Hypothesis, species must constantly evolve to stay ahead of each. For example, as prey evolve to run faster predators must also evolve to run even faster. It is an evolutionary arms race. It has been proposed to explain the evolution of sex as sexual reproduction increases the speed of evolutionary change. The name comes from the Red Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* who said 'Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place'.



Richard Dighton (1752-1814)
*Caricature of George Bryan 'Beau'
Brummell*
1805

Richard Dighton (1752-1814), Caricature of George Bryan 'Beau' Brummell, 1805

Human social complexity sets the stage here, so let us move from biology into culture. In humans, both sexes display secondary sexual characteristics, which signals something unusual in evolutionary terms: both males and females invest heavily in raising children together. But humans also have culture, and culture shifts. **Clothing, fashion,** and personal adornment change across generations in ways that biological signals simply cannot. Enter **George Bryan Brummell**, known universally as **Beau Brummell**, born in 1778. Inheriting a substantial fortune from his father, he abandoned the powdered wig, introduced tight-fitting pantaloons that evolved into modern trousers, and established the template for the male suit and necktie. He became, in effect, one of the first celebrities in the modern sense — famous primarily for being famous. Was Brummell dressing to attract women? The evidence suggests not. He spent his evenings in brothels and died of **syphilis**, a pauper in a lunatic asylum in **Caen** in 1840, having fled England's creditors in 1816. His dress was performance for other men

— a strategy to elevate and hold social status. This raises a sharper question: if male appearance is so culturally malleable, does any genuine, stable secondary sexual characteristic exist in men at all?

Notes

In humans it is much more complex because we have evolved a complex, close-knit social structure but we have also developed a complex language that enables ideas to be passed to others enabling culture to develop. Both males and females have secondary sexual characteristics, i.e. physical features that attract the opposite sex?

Why? We don't really know but it suggests that unusually, in humans, both males and females are committed to providing resources to bring up children.

Also, in humans as we have culture, an individual's appearance, clothing, markings and colourings can change over time as fashions change.

Consider George Bryan 'Beau' Brummel (1778-1840) who abandoned the wig and introduced trousers, the suit and the necktie. He was one of the first celebrities, someone who is famous only for being famous.

Did Beau Brummel dress to attract women? I doubt it as after the theatre he would end the day in a brothels. He died, by the way, of syphilis and a pauper in France. He was dressing to impress other men to elevate and maintain his status in society.

If clothes change is there a genuine secondary sexual characteristic in men?

Notes

Beau Brummel inherited £30,000 from his father (Wikipedia has one third of £65,000). Spent it all on clothes and gambling and fled to France in 1816 and died quietly in a lunatic asylum in Caen in 1840.

Beau Brummel stopped wearing a wig and wore tight fitting pantaloons which led to the development of modern trousers.

Pitt taxed hair powder in 1795 to help pay for the war against France and to discourage the use of flour which had increased in price owing to poor harvests.

The Macaronis (extravagant English dandies of the 1770s) were described as effeminate. Although it was often used to describe aesthetes and aesthetic art, it appears to have been a general term of criticism. The Macaronis, for example, were men who had been on the Grand Tour, and were described as 'a kind of animal, neither male nor female, a thing of the neuter gender'. However, Macaroni was also described in the same article as 'fond of gambling, drinking, and duelling' and 'it talks without meaning, it smiles without pleasantry, it eats without appetite, it rides without exercise, it wenchers without passion.' Maybe the modern English equivalent for 'effeminate' would be closer to dissolute and lacking moral restraint.

The bonobo was called the pygmy chimpanzee and is an endangered great ape with a complex, close-knit social structure that is dominated by the females. The bonobo uses sex and sexual contact to form bonds and reduce tension in otherwise aggressive situations.

Unknown
George Clooney (photograph/image)



Unknown, George Clooney (photograph/image)

The beard has long served as one of art history's most legible markers of masculine authority, desire, and biological fitness. **Charles William Grant's** verse from **1872** distils **Darwin's** theory of sexual selection into blunt cultural currency: females assess, reject, and choose, and beauty — including the beard — becomes a mechanism of survival. This is not mere Victorian whimsy. Darwin argued in **The Descent of Man**, published in **1871**, that the male beard evolved precisely because female preference shaped it over generations. Art registers this logic with striking consistency. From the virile, carefully groomed beards of Roman imperial portraiture to the flowing patriarchal beards of Renaissance painting, artists encoded social and sexual power directly onto the male face. The beard signals maturity, fertility, and dominance — qualities that Grant's poem confirms were already being read back through evolutionary theory by the eighteen-seventies. When we move through the history of the bearded figure in Western art, we are tracking not merely a stylistic convention but a deep structure of how cultures have visualised masculine appeal and

authority. Biology and aesthetics, in this case, turn out to be describing exactly the same thing.

Notes

This is a genuine secondary sexual characteristic – the beard.

In 1872 this poem was written to explain Darwin's theory of sexual selection.

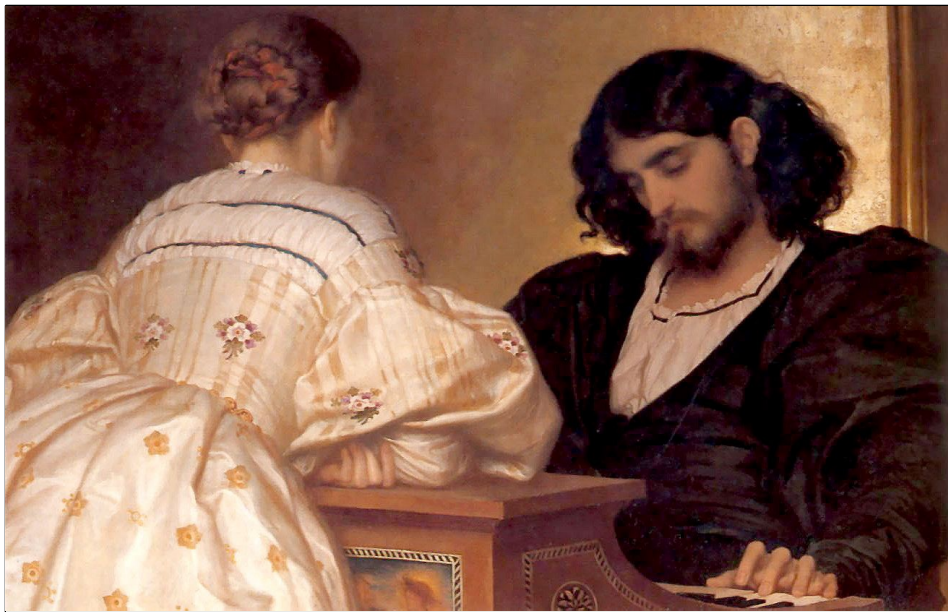
And 'Sexual Selection' was devised
To show that female animals possess
The sensual passions in refined excess:
Though males be wooers, females can
reject,
And from the mass the favour'd one select.
Thus sexual lust all nature
regulates,
And wanton matrons choose their ardent mates
The willing maidens
favour handsome males,
So beauty triumphs, and love's power prevails.

Charles William Grant, *Our Blood Relations, or, the Darwinian Theory* (1872)

Let's consider the beard in art.

Notes

George Clooney is sometimes described as the most handsome man in the world. He was ranked No. 1 in the TV Guide '50 Sexiest Stars of all Time'. He is a political activist, a United Nations messenger of peace, he helped find a resolution for the Darfur conflict in Sudan and raised funds for the 2010 Haiti earthquake, 2004 Tsunami and 9/11.



Frederic Leighton (1830-1896)
Golden Hours
1864
Private collection

Frederic Leighton (1830-1896), *Golden Hours*, 1864, Private collection

Frederic Leighton painted *Golden Hours* in 1864, five years after Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, and it sits at the heart of the **Aesthetic Movement** — the conviction that art exists for beauty alone, not to moralise or narrate. Darwin gives us an unexpected lens here. His theory of **sexual selection** proposes that secondary characteristics — the beard, abundant hair — are not random. They emerge at maturity, are absent in children, and vary markedly between races. The beard fits precisely: it appears only in adult men, and only in men of certain races. Darwin's conclusion is direct — at some point in human history, women in particular populations chose bearded men as partners, and those men had more children. Look at the composition. The woman leans forward, appraising the man as he plays. She is the selector; he performs. **William Michael Rossetti**, reviewing the painting in *Fraser's Magazine*, found the male figure too effeminate for the role, arguing Leighton's choice of model undermined any sense of masculine vigour. **Elizabeth Gitter** argued that abundant hair carries potent sexual meaning in the Victorian imagination, which makes the

woman's cascading hair here anything but incidental — it is itself a signal, directed outward.

Notes

This is *Golden Hours* by Frederic Leighton, painted five years after Darwin published *Origin of Species*. It is an early painting from what is known as the Aesthetic Movement, sometimes called the 'art for art's sake' movement.

The Aesthetic Movement rejected paintings that make a moral point or tell a story and focus on beauty.

Let us apply Darwin's theory of beauty or sexual selection to this painting.

First, the male does exhibit sexual characteristics — according to Darwin the beard is a sexual characteristic.

And second, the female chooses the male — that seems correct — she is leaning over and appears to be judging the male as he tries to attract her.

You might say that we are civilized and there are many other reasons for choosing a mate.

Certainly true, particularly in Victorian times when women and her family selected men with money.

Nevertheless, we still need to explain the beard and other features of both men and women.

In other animals secondary sexual characteristics appear as they mature, they are not present in children or females and they vary greatly from race to race. This all seems to fit the beard. It is only found on men and only men of certain races.

It therefore appears that at some period, in some races, women selectively choose men with beards. That is, men with beards were more likely to have more children.

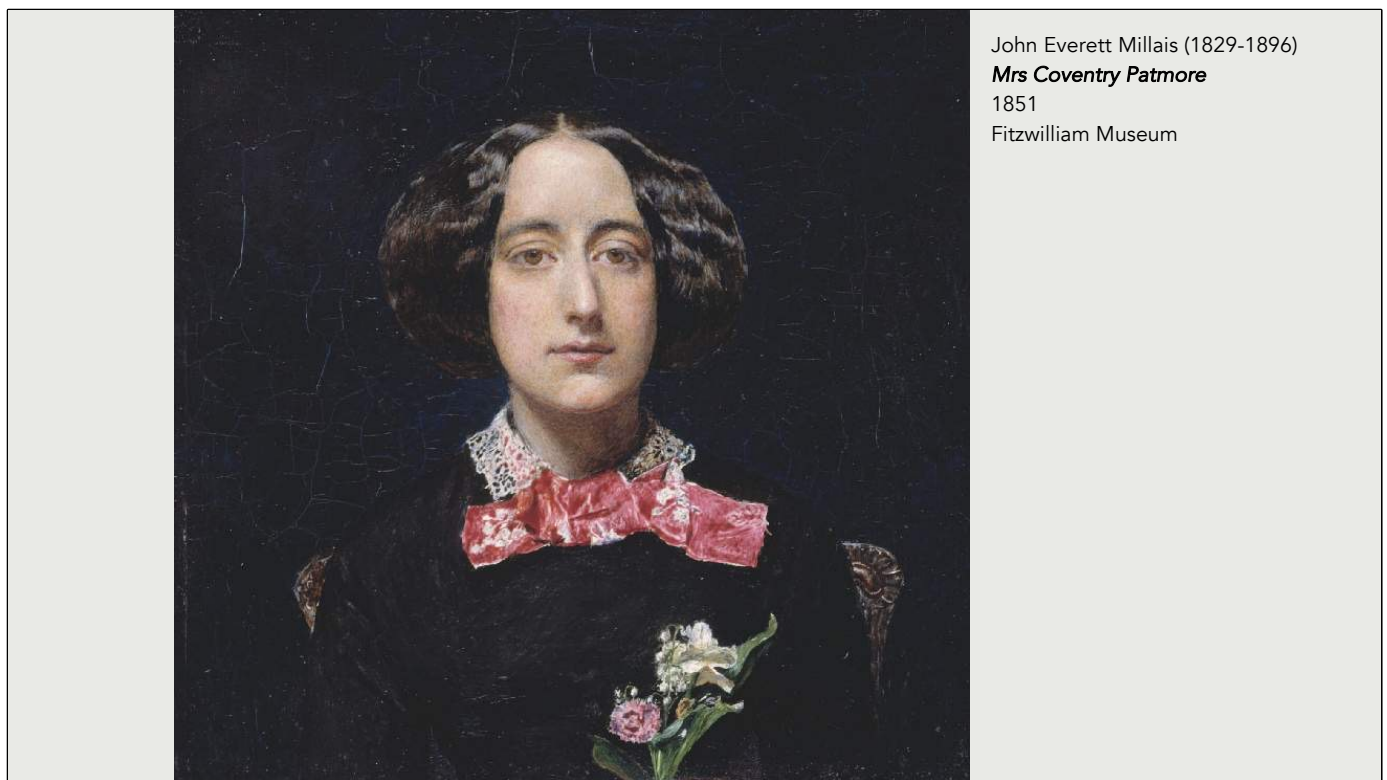
But, you are saying, men also select women. On what basis was this done in the Victorian period?

Notes

W. M. Rossetti on Golden Hours: 'One of his pictures seems to us only just to miss being one of the finest successes of the year, and yet to miss it—the Golden Hours. [...] but the total impression of the picture appears to us to be marred by the effeminate type of the man, who, being engaged in the comparatively sentimental occupation of playing music, needed to be kept up to the point of manliness rather than down to that of suavity. Rossetti went on to make an intriguing point about the model: 'We are aware that this is a portrait, and not an untruthful one, of a Roman model, the same who appears in the study, *A Roman Labourer*, by that very able portrait-painter Mr. Wells. Mr. Leighton is not to be blamed for unmanning a strong face, but we may question his discretion in selecting one wherein beauty is not modified by some robust qualities.' William Michael Rossetti, 'The Royal Academy Exhibition', *Fraser's Magazine*, 70:415 (July, 1864), 57-74 (p. 57).

Elizabeth Gitter wrote: 'The more abundant the hair, the more potent the sexual invitation'. Elizabeth Gitter, 'The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination', *Transactions and Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America*, 99:5 (October, 1984), 936-54 (p. 938). Long hair on men has also had many other associations; Samson said: 'if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me', King James Bible, Judges 16:17. The Franks (420-451 CE) believed 'the royal fashion of long hair was the ensign of their birth and dignity', Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: T. Cadell, 1837), p. 540.

Darwin had to explain how women could select men when there was communal marriages and promiscuous intercourse, infanticide, especially of female infants, early betrothals, slavery and the low estimation in which women are held. He addresses each point and show how some female selection is still possible in many cases. Darwin then imagined 'primeval times' that involved parental love, polygamy or monogamy, no promiscuity, 'powerful and able males' and both sexes choosing attractive partners. It was a time when all 'all the conditions for sexual selection would have been much more favourable'. He explained this was because 'They would have been governed more by their instincts and even less by their reason' and he blamed the later issues of infanticide, early betrothals and promiscuity on the advance in 'intellectual powers'.



John Everett Millais (1829-1896)
Mrs Coventry Patmore
1851
Fitzwilliam Museum

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), Mrs Coventry Patmore, 1851,
Fitzwilliam Museum

Victorian women were categorised by men into three archetypes: the Angel in the House, the fallen woman, and the femme fatale. The Angel in the House originated with **Coventry Patmore's** poem of that name, published between 1854 and 1862, a work idealising his wife **Emily Augusta Patmore** as the model of feminine virtue — selflessly devoted to her children and submissive to her husband. **John Everett Millais** painted Emily three years before the poem appeared, and the portrait gives us the face that defined a cultural myth. That myth does real violence to Emily herself. She was an accomplished poet who criticised her husband's work openly, entertained **Ruskin, Tennyson,** and **Browning,** and wrote children's fiction. She died in 1860, aged thirty-six, leaving her wedding ring to Patmore's future wife with a characteristically generous instruction in her will. The archetype was challenged from the start. **Charlotte Perkins Gilman** declared it extinct as early as 1891, arguing that domesticity was a patriarchal construction, not a biological truth. **Virginia Woolf** went further, writing

in 1931 that killing the Angel in the House was part of the essential occupation of every woman writer. Both women recognised that the ideal was not an honour — it was a constraint.

Notes

In Victorian society women were chosen because of their family, money and beauty and men were chosen because of their family and money.

There are three types of Victorian women defined by men, the Angel in the House, the fallen woman and the femme fatale.

This is the original Angel in the House, Emily Augusta Patmore (née Andrews, b. 1824), painted by John Everett Millais three years before her husband Coventry Patmore wrote the original poem *The Angel in the House* (1854-1862, about 200 pages in four parts).

The poem is about Coventry Patmore's (1823-1896) courtship of his wife Emily who he believed was the perfect woman. The term 'Angel in the House' came to be used as a reference to women who embodied the Victorian feminine ideal. A wife and mother who was selflessly devoted to her children and submissive to her husband.

In fact, I am guilty of abusing Emily Patmore by pigeon-holing her as a submissive wife, in fact as she was a fine poet and criticized her husband's work. Emily was admired by Ruskin, Tennyson, Carlyle and Browning who she frequently entertained. She also wrote children's stories but became ill and died in 1860, aged 36. Emily left her wedding ring for Patmore's second wife stating in her will 'If, in a year or two you are able to marry again, do so happily'. He remarried four years after her death.

As long ago as 1891, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), American feminist and novelist, wrote a short essay entitled *The Extinct Angel* in which she described the angel in the house as being as dead as the dodo. She embraced the theory of 'reform Darwinism' and argued that Darwin's theories of evolution presented only the male as the given in the process of human evolution, thus overlooking the origins of the female brain in society that rationally chose the best suited mate that they could find. Gilman believed the domestic environment oppressed women through the patriarchal beliefs

upheld by society.

Gilman argued that male aggressiveness and maternal roles for women were artificial and no longer necessary for survival in post-prehistoric times. She wrote, 'There is no female mind. The brain is not an organ of sex. Might as well speak of a female liver.' from *Women and Economics* (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard & Co., 1898).

And Virginia Woolf wrote, "Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer." (from a speech given in 1931)

Notes

The Angel in the House

By 1871 the title of the poem had become a catch phrase.

Nel Noddings (b. 1929), American feminist and philosopher views her as 'infantile, weak and mindless' (1989).

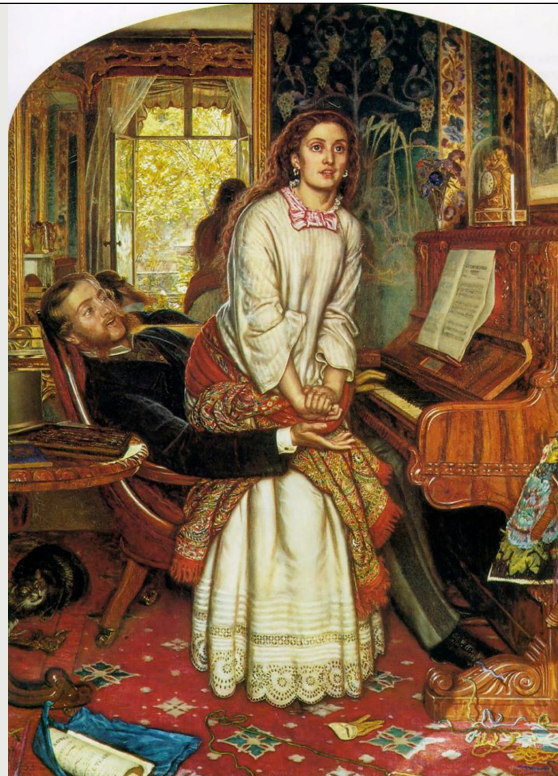
Virginia Woolf satirized the angel in the house, writing in 1931 that 'She [the perfect wife] was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed daily. If there was a chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it ... Above all, she was pure.' (Woolf, 1966) She added that she 'bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her'.

Excerpts from 'Angel in the House'

Man must be pleased; but him to please
Is woman's pleasure;

Daughter to her mother:

Mother, it's such a weary strain
The way he has of treating me
As if 'twas something fine to be
A woman; and appearing not
To notice any faults I've got!



William Holman Hunt (1827-1910)
The Awakening Conscience
 1853-4
 Tate Britain

William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), *The Awakening Conscience*, 1853-4, Tate Britain

William Holman Hunt's **The Awakening Conscience**, painted in **1853**, presents the second type of fallen woman — not degraded but mid-revelation. A kept mistress rises from her lover's lap in a rented room in **St John's Wood**, struck by sudden moral awakening as they sing **Thomas Moore's** **Oft in the Stilly Night** together at the piano. Hunt loaded every surface with legible symbolism: a cat toying with a broken-winged bird mirrors her entrapment; a discarded glove signals the prostitution awaiting a cast-off mistress; tangled yarn figures the web she cannot easily escape. **John Ruskin** wrote to **The Times** on **25 May 1854** that even the hem of the girl's white dress carried meaning — how soon, he warned, it might be soiled by outcast feet failing in the street. The model was **Annie Miller**, a barmaid Hunt met when she was fifteen. He planned to marry her on condition she educated herself during his travels to the Middle East; she instead sat for **Dante Gabriel Rossetti**, rupturing their relationship. She eventually married in **1863** and died aged ninety. Whether Hunt intended her as a figure of

genuine redemption or cautionary spectacle, the painting sits squarely within Victorian culture's obsessive regulation of female sexuality.

Notes

This is the second type of woman – a fallen woman.

It is William Holman Hunt's *Awakening Conscience* and shows a kept woman in St John Wood suddenly realising the error of her ways

As they play the piano and sing Thomas Moore's *Oft in the Stilly Night* together she has a sudden spiritual revelation. She gazes into the garden reflected in the mirror representing God's work on earth and redemption is possible signified by the ray of sunlight in front of her.

The painting is full of symbolic elements that are intended to be read.

The cat toying with the broken winged bird symbolizes her plight,

The man's discarded glove warns that the likely fate of a cast off mistress is prostitution.

The tangled skein of yarn signifies the complex situation in which she is trapped.

Ruskin wrote to *The Times* on 25 May 1854, 'the very hem of the poor girl's dress, at which the painter has laboured so closely, thread by thread, has story in it, if we think how soon its pure whiteness may be soiled with dust and rain, her outcast feet failing in the street'.

The Awakening Conscience

The inspiration for this painting was Proverbs: 'As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart'.

Some critics misinterpreted this painting, one thought it was a brother and sister playing the piano but the real meaning was quickly determined. It is a gentleman with his mistress (she does not wear a wedding ring) in the room he has rented for their meetings. Hunt hired a room at Woodbine Villa, 7 Alpha Place, St John's Wood to provide an authentic interior.

The model is Annie Miller (1835-1925), a barmaid Hunt met when she was 15. He fell in love with her and wanted to marry her but only if she educated herself when he was away in the Middle East. When he was away and contrary to his instructions she sat for Dante Gabriel Rossetti and this caused

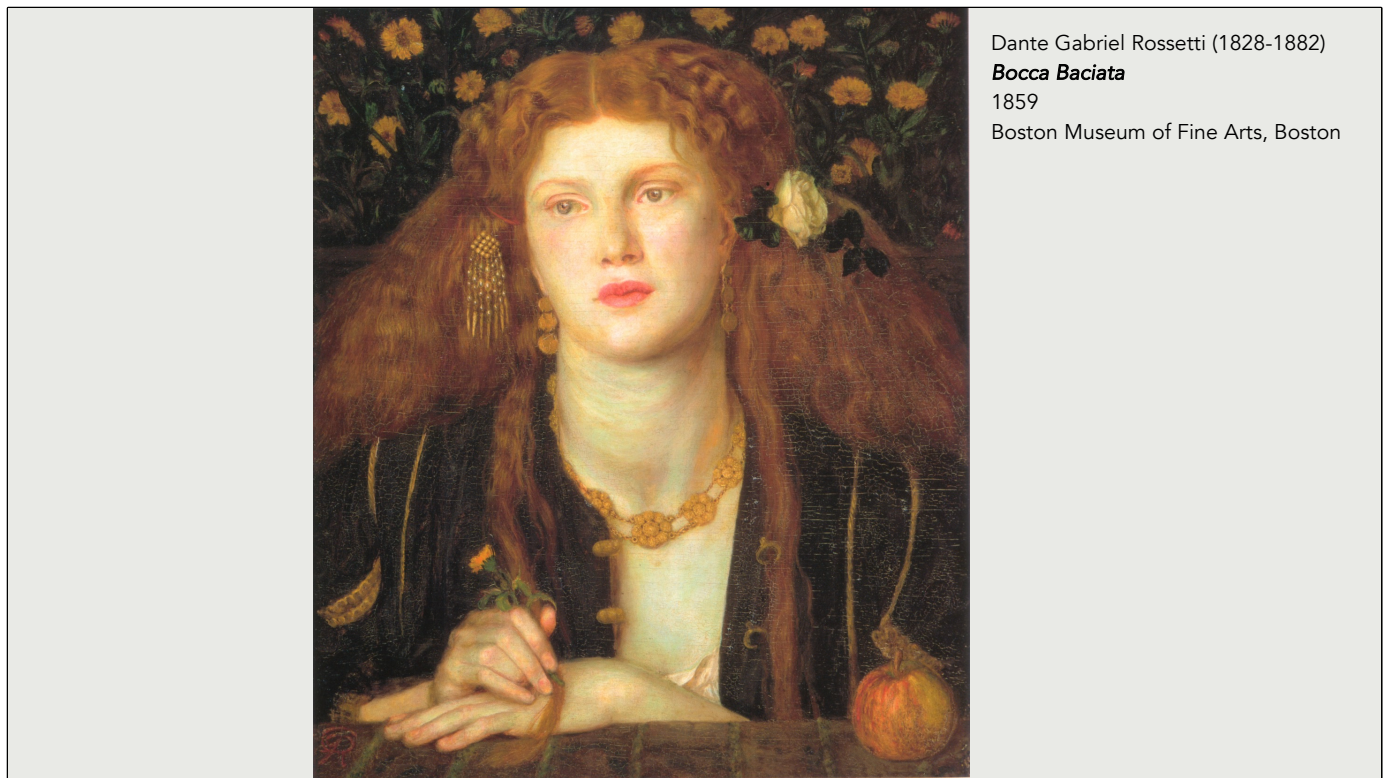
a rift between them on Hunt's return. She became involved with 7th Viscount Ranelagh (pronounced ran-er-lah) and Hunt broke off their engagement. She was going to sue for breach of promise by Ranelagh's cousin Captain Thomas Thomson fell in love with her. And they married in 1863. Years later Hunt met her on Richmond Hill 'a buxom matron with a carriage full of children'. She died aged 90 in Shoreham-by-Sea. It is not known whether she became 'gay' (i.e. a prostitute) but one art historian (Jan Marsh) believes it is likely she remained 'pure'.

Prostitution

'... the French scholar Michel Foucault (reminding us that Victorian attitudes were not confined to Britain), who argued that sex was not censored but subject to obsessive discussion as a central discourse of power, bent on regulation rather than suppression. This helps explain why sexuality looms so large in art and medicine, for example, as well as in studies of the Victorian age. ... Moral panic over prostitution was at its height in the 1850s and early 1860s. In part, this was because it betokened visible female freedom from social control. As daughters, employees or servants, young women were subject to male authority; as whores they enjoyed economic and personal independence. The response was a sustained cultural campaign, in sermons, newspapers, literary and visual art, to intimidate, shame and eventually drive 'fallen women' from the streets by representing them as a depraved and dangerous element in society, doomed to disease and death. ... By the 1870s and 1880s, evolutionary ideas of male sexuality as a biological imperative, which added fuel to many male writings on gender, were countered by those who argued that 'civilisation' enabled humans to transcend animal instincts.' (V&A website)

'The estimate of the number of prostitutes differs depending on who is doing the estimation. The Police Department claimed that there were 7,000 in London while the Society for the Suppression of vice that there were 80,000. Scholars believe that the Society's guess may be closer to the truth. In 1841 Greater London had a population of 2 million. According to renowned historian Judith Walkowitz, a 19th century city would commonly have 1 prostitute per 36 inhabitants, or 1 per 12 adult males, which would yield 55,000 prostitutes. Prostitution was not actually illegal in England.' Prostitutes were 18-22 and generally healthier than other working women and had more free time, more money and had access to public house. It was generally a

transitional occupation and led to marriage to a former client. It was generally believed that it led to a life of dissolution, disease and death. (University of Wisconsin website)



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), Bocca Baciata, 1859, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Dante Gabriel Rossetti painted **Bocca Baciata** in 1859, the same year Darwin published the *Origin of Species*, and the work is now recognised as the founding painting of the **Aesthetic Movement**. The title, meaning "the kissed mouth," refers to **Boccaccio's Decameron**, in which Alatiel, considered the most beautiful woman in the world, survives four years of violent, sexually charged encounter across eight men before returning home to marry a king, her reputation intact. Rossetti chose Fanny Cornforth as his model, commissioned by **George Boyce**, and her full lips, unrestrained hair, broad shoulders, and long neck deliberately broke every convention of the contemporary beauty portrait. The marigolds signify grief and chagrin; the apple invokes the knowledge of good and evil, which in Christian tradition became inseparable from sexual desire. Together they ask us to read the painting as a coded argument about beauty itself. Rossetti's central preoccupation was whether beauty was spiritual or sensual. In 1871, **Robert Buchanan** attacked him in *The Contemporary*

Review for privileging the purely physical, and **William Holman Hunt** condemned the painting for advocating animal passion as art's purpose. Both Darwin and Rossetti treated beauty as a problem. So what exactly do we mean by beauty?

Notes

This is Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Bocca Baciata* ('the kissed mouth').

First let's consider this type of woman, the *femme fatale*.

The title refers to a story (Book 2, Story 7) in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. In the story the heroine Alatiel engages in thousands of sexual encounters with eight men over four years of travel and finally returns home and marries the King of Algarve as a virgin. Alatiel is regarded as the most beautiful woman in the world and the men in the story fight and kill each other over her.

Many men are violently killed in the story but this isn't a notable feature as men's death is unremarkable. Violence against men is pervasive around the world today. Violence against men is noticed far less than violence against women.

It was painted in 1859, the same year Darwin published *Origin of Species* and this painting is now regarded as the first painting of the Aesthetic Movement.

For Rossetti, the problem with beauty was whether it was spiritual or sensual. In 1871 Robert Buchanan (pseudonym Thomas Maitland) criticized Rossetti for only representing the sensual when he wrote 'The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr D. G. Rossetti' (*Contemporary Review*).

Both Darwin and Rossetti were interested in beauty, and for both it was a problem.

So, what do we mean by beauty?

Notes

Rossetti adds a number of symbols, such as the marigolds and the apple, which suggests we need to interpret the painting like a coded message.

Conventionally a marigold, in the language of flowers, signified grief, pain, and chagrin, that is, vexation resulting in humiliation or disappointment. In Christian symbolism, an apple represents temptation although the term 'apple' was not mentioned in the Bible and the fruit in the Garden of Eden

was from 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. Theologians disagree about whether the term 'knowledge' should be interpreted narrowly or broadly but the Bible goes on to say that Eve decided to eat the fruit to make herself wise. Adam needed no convincing and ate the fruit he was given, which suggests the serpent chose Eve as she was the hardest to convince and her decision could be seen as the first example of female sexual power in the Christian tradition.

Rossetti broke new ground with *Bocca Baciata* as the painting marked a distinct change in his style, and it does not fall into any established genre. It was generally admired but Holman Hunt described the painting as advocating 'the animal passion to be the aim of art'.

Rossetti broke most of the conventions associated with female representation in contemporary 'books of beauty' by painting the woman in *Bocca Baciata* with fuller, more voluptuous lips, a less pinched face, unrestrained hair and exotic jewellery, in a more compressed space so we feel physically closer to the head and body, which are pressed close to the picture plane. Also significant were his use of thick oils and sensual Venetian colours.

Rossetti had been commissioned by George Boyce to paint a portrait of Fanny Cornforth and the heavy, idiosyncratic features reinforce the fact that a particular person was being depicted. Its sensuousness can be judged from Arthur Hughes's comment: 'so awfully lovely. Boyce has bought it, and will I suspect kiss the dear thing's lips away before you can come over to see it.'

Rossetti's image has a full face and chin that do not conform to any of the standard types of beauty, and she has a long neck, which, although it was an established attribute of beauty, is so long and wide that it could almost be considered distorted. Rossetti was not painting a conventional 'perfect beauty' but a particular person. However, the title also refers us to a story by Boccaccio suggesting the woman was being used to represent the central character who was described as the most beautiful woman in the world.

She does not meet our eye, and her pose, though conventional, is made disturbing by her expression, which is vacant and charged with a slight sullenness, like a model who has sat for too long. This suggests volition and agency rather than passivity and so it conflicts with the view of the model as an impassive object. Other aspects of agency and female independence are present in the way Rossetti's has represented his model. For example, compared to women in books of beauty, her nose is not slim and pinched and her forehead is narrow, both signs at the time of a lack of refinement. The

shoulders are broad, giving the appearance of physical strength rather than of a delicate and over-refined drawing-room beauty. With her flowing red hair, exotic and excessive jewellery and robust features she could be seen as coarse and sexually experienced. The conventions at the time would therefore label her as a fallen woman.

In the Biblical account, God was unaware of Adam and Eve's transgression as he was elsewhere in the garden, but when he found out he constructed a complex curse, which included women, in future, experiencing pain during childbirth and obeying men. The acquisition of knowledge was concerned with the recognition of each other's nakedness and this implies that it became associated with sexual desire, which sexual selection equates with beauty. This loss of innocence was represented as the expulsion from a perfect garden and this has been interpreted in Darwinian terms as the evolutionary moment that humans developed a sense of right and wrong.

References

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bocca_Baciata



Daisies

Darwin's notebooks distinguish three categories of beauty, and the first of these — simple beauty — anchors everything that follows. Simple beauty is the pleasure we take in the colours, rhythms, and **symmetry** found throughout the natural world: the patterning of a bird's plumage, the geometry of a flower, the regularity of a breaking wave. Darwin argued this response is not arbitrary. Animals that recognised healthy, symmetrical mates or nutritious, brightly coloured plants survived and reproduced more successfully, so the appreciation of these qualities became embedded in neural architecture across species. Because so many animals share **common ancestry**, they share common structures of perception, and therefore respond to similar visual signals. The practical consequence of this is striking. We do not admire a flower purely through cultural conditioning; we admire it because our deep evolutionary history trained perception to seek out exactly these signals. That shared history runs deeper than most people expect: humans share roughly **44 per cent** of their **genetic material** with the honeybee — a figure that reframes our intuition that

aesthetic response is uniquely human. Simple beauty, then, is biological before it is cultural, and recognising that foundation is essential to understanding the two further categories Darwin identified.

Notes

Darwin, in his notebooks, recognised three types

The first I call simple beauty and it is the beauty we find in the colours, rhythm and symmetry of nature and Darwin identified this as an important component of all beauty. We also find beauty in nature in the colour and forms of trees, flowers, birds and other animals. Part of this beauty results from their symmetry and colour and part from the fact that they evolved to attract a pollinator or a mate. Darwin explained this was because of the importance of symmetry, rhythm and colour to survival. He thought it was found in many animals because of our common ancestry and therefore our common neural structures will result in our appreciation of similar forms.

In other words, we find things beautiful that our ancestors found useful, such as flowers.

And remember we now know that we share nearly half (44%) of our genes with the honeybee.

Notes

Genetic sharing chimp 90%, mouse 88%, cow 85%, dog 84%, zebra fish 73%, platypus 69%, chicken 65%, fruit fly 47%, honeybee 44%, roundworm 38%, wine grape 24%, baker's yeast 18%



Darwin, writing in *"Descent"* in 1871, was direct about this: he argued that appreciating a night sky, a landscape, or refined music depended entirely on culture and complex associations, not on any raw biological instinct. I call this category **social beauty**, because it is determined by the particular society in which a person is formed. The history of how Europeans perceived mountains illustrates the point precisely. Before the **eighteenth century**, mountains were not objects of admiration — they were feared as hostile, dangerous terrain. That perception shifted with the intellectual movement around the **sublime**, the idea that overwhelming scale and power in nature could produce an aesthetic response of awe rather than dread. **Edmund Burke** gave that shift its philosophical foundation in his 1757 treatise **A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful**, reframing terror and grandeur as sources of genuine aesthetic feeling. Within a generation, the mountain landscape had been transformed in European eyes from a threat into an object of beauty. Social beauty,

then, is not fixed — it is learned, inherited, and, as Burke's influence shows, actively constructed by thinkers who reshape what a culture is willing to see.

Notes

We have also learned to find many things beautiful as part of our particular culture and its heritage. This varies from person to person and what they have learnt to appreciate. Darwin wrote:

“Obviously no animal would be capable of admiring such scenes as the heavens at night, a beautiful landscape, or refined music; but such high tastes, depending as they do on culture and complex associations, are not enjoyed by barbarians or by uneducated persons.” Darwin, *Descent*, 1871

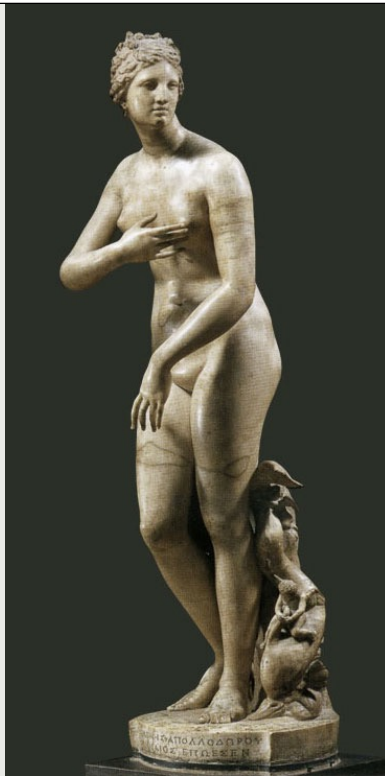
I call this type social beauty as it is determined by the particular society we live in. Remember that prior to the eighteenth century mountains were not regarded as objects of beauty but were feared. It was only with the appreciation of the sublime that mountains slowly became seen as objects of beauty.

Notes

It has been suggested that we evolved to find those landscapes attractive that were the most likely to contain food but the mountains were rarely regarded as beautiful before the eighteenth century.

A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful is a 1757 treatise on aesthetics written by Edmund Burke.

Alexander of Milos (dates unknown)
Venus de Milo
130–100 BCE
Louvre, Paris



Alexander of Milos (dates unknown), Venus de Milo, 130–100 BCE,
Louvre, Paris

Building on our earlier discussion of beauty's varied forms, we turn now to sexual beauty — the type **Charles Darwin** identified through his theory of **sexual selection**. The **Venus de Medici**, already recorded by 1559, was the undisputed ideal of female beauty for centuries, drawing Grand Tour travellers who considered viewing it the cultural pinnacle of any European journey. Then in 1820, a French officer named **Olivier Voutier** encountered a farmer on the island of **Milos** who had unearthed a remarkable statue. Within days, the diplomat **Charles-François de Riffardeau** arranged its purchase, and the sculpture arrived in Paris to enormous fanfare. The French, having surrendered the Venus de Medici to Italy in 1815 after Napoleon's defeat, urgently needed a rival treasure. They proclaimed the new statue — the **Venus de Milo** — a work by the celebrated sculptor **Praxiteles**, placing it firmly in the **Classical period**. When the plinth was found to bear an inscription naming one Alexandros of Antioch as maker — a city that did not exist in the Classical period — the plinth quietly disappeared.

Two surviving drawings confirm it existed. **Pierre-Auguste Renoir** memorably dismissed the Venus de Milo as a "big gendarme." Yet this politically manufactured ideal would go on to shape nineteenth-century assumptions about female beauty and the hip-to-waist ratio central to sexual selection theory.

Notes

The third and final type of beauty is what I call sexual beauty and is what Darwin was explaining in his theory of sexual selection.

This form of classical beauty was not recognised as beautiful by everyone!

Notes

The Venus de Medici was discovered first and although we don't know exactly when it was already known in 1559. Seeing the Medici Venus was a high point of the Grand Tour. When Napoleon conquered Italy there was an attempt to hide it in Palermo but it was found and taken to Paris. When Napoleon was defeated in 1815 it was one of the first works of art to be repatriated to Florence on 27 December that year.

In 1820 a French officer (Olivier Voutier) was touring Milos and met a farmer (Yorgos Kentrotas) who had dug up part of a statue. The soon found the complete statue in two parts and ten days later another French officer (Jules Dumont d'Urville) realised its significance and arranged for the French ambassador to Turkey (Charles-Francois de Riffardeau, later duc de Riviere) to purchase it.

Despite some problems which involved various chiefs being whipped and fined and the most senior Turkish representative was executed, it arrived in Paris and the fun began.

The French announced the statue was by the most famous Greek sculptor Praxiteles before examining it.

When they did they found the plinth had an inscription which read, in Greek, '(Alex)andros son of Menides, citizen of Antioch on the Maeander made this (statue)...'. This was unfortunate in two ways – it was not by Praxiteles and it was Hellenistic not Classical. The city of Antioch did not exist in the Classical period which dated the statue to the Hellenistic period which was regarded in the nineteenth century as a period of decline for Greek art.

So what do you think happened?

The plinth mysteriously disappeared and has never reappeared. We only know of its existence because two detailed drawings were made before it disappeared.

From that point onwards the French who had lost the Venus de Medici successfully promoted the Venus de Milo as the most beautiful Classical Greek sculpture in existence.

So what has this to do with Darwin. Well, one measurement that was thought to define beauty was the hip to waist ratio.

Notes

The Classical Ideal

Hay measured the ratios of famous classical nudes such as the Venus de Medici and the Venus de Milo. In the early part of the nineteenth century it was the Venus de Medici that was regarded as the ideal. The Venus de Milo was not discovered until 1820 and from then on was promoted by the French authorities as the greater treasure. They had been made to return the Venus de Medici to the Italians in 1815 after the Napoleonic Wars. The statue was dutifully praised by many artists and critics as the epitome of graceful female beauty although Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) described it as a 'big gendarme'.

The propaganda from the Louvre included losing the original plinth. We know from two surviving engravings that the plinth included the inscription '...(Alex)andros son of Menides, citizen of Antioch on the Maeander made this (statue)...'. The museum had been promoting the statue as by the much more famous Praxiteles from the Classical period (5th and 4th centuries BCE) but the inscription would make it later (as Antioch did not exist when Praxiteles lived) and move it into the Hellenistic period (323-31BCE). At the time the Hellenistic period was considered as a period of decline and so the evidence was destroyed.



THE VENUS OF MILO; OR, GIRLS OF TWO DIFFERENT PERIODS.
CAPTAIN. "LOOK AT HER BIG FOOT! OH, WHAT A WAIST!—AND WHAT A RIDICULOUS LITTLE HEAD!—AND NO CHIGNON! SHE'S NO LADY! OH, WHAT A FRIGHT!"

George du Maurier (1834–1896)

The Venus of Milo; or, Girls of two Different Periods

1870

Print (published in Punch)

George du Maurier (1834–1896), *The Venus of Milo; or, Girls of two Different Periods*, 1870

This cartoon frames the confrontation perfectly: Victorian fashion versus ancient sculpture, with the chorus shrieking at the **Venus de Milo** over her feet, her waist, and her absent chignon. The joke cuts both ways. The Venus, celebrated since her discovery on **Milos in 1820**, embodies proportions that Victorian corsetry had rendered literally unrecognisable as feminine. **Waist-to-hip ratio** is a genuine secondary sexual characteristic — 0.7 in healthy women — and it signals fertility directly. Women with a ratio of 0.8 or higher show significantly lower pregnancy rates. Victorian dress worked systematically against this signal. The corset compressed the natural waist while the **bustle** exaggerated the hips, producing a silhouette that pushed the ratio toward extremes the body never achieved unaided. **Lily Langtry**, the celebrated beauty of the 1880s, wore measurements of thirty-seven, eighteen, and thirty-nine inches — a ratio closer to 0.46, far below anything biologically typical. Psychologist **Devendra Singh**, who first quantified WHR as an attractiveness indicator in **1993**, found European

men consistently preferred 0.7. The Victorian chorus, trained by their own fashion culture, had genuinely lost the ability to see classical proportion as beautiful.

Notes

And here is an example of fashion confronting classical beauty.

'The Venus of Milo; or, Girls of two Different Periods'

Chorus: Look at her big foot! Oh, what a waist! – and what a ridiculous little head! – and no chignon! She's no lady! Oh, what a fright!

In the Victorian period waists were constricted by corsets which increased the waist to hip ratio sometimes, as with Lily Langtry (1853-1929) 46% (37"-18"-39"). The ratio was further reduced by the bustle.

Notes

Waist-to-hip ration is a secondary sexual characteristic. In healthy individuals it is 0.7 for women and 0.9 for men. Women with a high WHR (0.8 or higher) have significantly lower pregnancy rates. It was first measured as an indicator of attractiveness in 1993. European men find women with a WHR of 0.7 the most attractive, Chinese men 0.6 to 0.8 in Cameroon.



NEXT HIDEOUS "SENSATION CHIGNON."

Edward Linley Sambourne (1844–1910)
Next Hideous "Sensation Chignon"
 1862
 Punch, —

Edward Linley Sambourne (1844–1910), Next Hideous "Sensation Chignon", 1862, Punch, —

Punch magazine's long-running cartoon series offered some of the sharpest cultural commentary on fashion's increasingly strange relationship with the natural world. **Edward Linley Sambourne**, who spent more than forty years at Punch and rose to the position of First Cartoonist in his final decade, produced illustration after illustration lampooning the lengths to which Victorian women went in pursuit of fashionable dress. His cartoons depicted wasps, butterflies, and spiders pressed into service as hats and gowns, transforming living creatures into decorative accessories. The humour was pointed: Sambourne understood that **Darwinian thinking** had made nature newly visible as a system of competition, adaptation, and display, and he turned that logic back on the fashion industry itself. If **natural selection** shaped animal appearance, then what exactly was driving the elaborately ornamented human silhouette? The cartoons implied that fashionable women were engaged in their own species of display behaviour, one no less strange than a bird of paradise fanning its

plumage. Sambourne's work sits at the intersection of **Victorian satire**, **natural history**, and consumer culture, and it reminds us that **Punch**, at its best, was doing genuine intellectual work beneath the comedy.

Notes

Another aspects of fashion and the way it became linked with Darwinian ideas and nature was satirized by Punch.

Punch ran a long series of cartoons showing all sorts of animals being used to create hats and dresses, from wasps to butterflies and spiders.

Notes

Edward Linley Sambourne (4 January 1844 – 3 August 1910) was an English cartoonist and illustrator most famous for being a draughtsman for the satirical magazine Punch for more than forty years and rising to the position of 'First Cartoonist' in his final decade.



Linley Sambourne (1844–1910)
Punch's Designs After Nature: 'Grand Back-Hair Sensation for the Coming Season'
1871
Punch, 1 April 1871

Linley Sambourne (1844–1910), *Punch's Designs After Nature: 'Grand Back-Hair Sensation for the Coming Season'*, 1871, Punch, 1 April 1871

Punch magazine turned its satirical eye on the Victorian fashion industry throughout the **1870s**, using Darwin's well-known association with the natural world as a ready shorthand for readers. The peacock, appearing here as both fashion accessory and evolutionary symbol, connects consumer vanity directly to **Darwin's** arguments about display and selection. That a mass-circulation comic journal could deploy this reference so casually tells us how thoroughly Darwin's ideas had penetrated popular culture within a decade of publication. The stakes were far from merely aesthetic. Punch ran a sustained editorial campaign against the wholesale slaughter of wild birds driven by milliners' demand for feathers and whole bird bodies as hat ornaments. Thousands of species were being stripped from their habitats to satisfy a single season's fashion. By anchoring its critique in Darwinian imagery, Punch made an argument that was simultaneously scientific, moral, and comic — nature had its own logic of beauty, and the fashion trade was destroying it for profit. This campaign contributed to

the groundswell of public opinion that would eventually support formal **bird protection legislation** in Britain, showing how satirical illustration could function as genuine political pressure.

Notes

Or, in this case, a peacock. Again a reference to Darwin's work. It is clear that as these are Punch cartoons aimed at the general reader that Darwin's work was intimately associated with nature and fashion.

In a series of articles Punch waged a war in the 1870s against the wholesale slaughter of birds to satisfy the demand for bird feathers and bird bodies.



William Powell Frith (1819-1909)
A Private View at the Royal Academy
1881
 1883
 60 × 114 cm
 Royal Academy of Arts, John
 Madejski Fine Rooms

William Powell Frith (1819-1909), *A Private View at the Royal Academy* 1881, 1883, 60 × 114 cm, Royal Academy of Arts, John Madejski Fine Rooms

We have seen how aesthetic fashion broke from classical ideals and drew unexpected energy from Darwinian thinking about nature. **William Powell Frith's** painting of the **1881 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition** stages a cultural collision. At its centre, **Oscar Wilde** stands surrounded by women in green, pink, and orange gowns — the uniform of the aesthetic movement — while a portrait of **Disraeli** looms overhead, representing enduring political achievement set against what Frith viewed as ephemeral fashionable posturing. The expressions of figures around Wilde, including the painters **Philip Calderon** and **Henry Stacy Marks**, make the disapproval legible. Naturalist **Thomas Huxley** appears in the crowd, almost certainly included because of his fierce championship of **Charles Darwin**, who had died the previous year. Anthony Trollope stands to the left, notebook in hand, observing what Frith himself described as a family of pure aesthetes in affected study of the pictures. Frith drew directly on **George du Maurier's**

satirical cartoons and on **Gilbert and Sullivan's** operetta *Patience*, first performed in 1881, both of which mocked aesthetic pretension. The painting is not merely social comedy — it records a genuine cultural argument about whether serious art could survive fashionable dilettantism.

Notes

We have seen how fashion rejected classical beauty and how it was linked to Darwin's ideas about nature.

This painting shows what was regarded as the shocking aspects of aesthetic fashion. You can see from the expressions that these new fashions were regarded as shocking and outrageous.

It contrasts lasting historical achievement, as represented by the portrait of Disraeli, with ephemeral fads, represented by Oscar Wilde and the women in green, pink and orange dresses.

The painting by William Powell Frith was influenced by Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *Patience* and the annoyance many artists felt about the fashionable and 'trendy' new art.

(Optionally jump to 'degeneration' slide to save 15 minutes)

Notes

Behind Wilde to the right and glaring disapprovingly are the painters Philip Calderon and Henry Stacy Marks, sculptor Joseph Boehm, and journalist G.A. Sala (bare-headed, in white waistcoat). To the left, behind and immediately to the right of Wilde, are the actors Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, with Frederick Eaton. To Wilde's left are Lillie Langtry, in a white dress, beside the soberly-dressed William Thomson, Archbishop of York. The man with sideburns looking over Thompson's left shoulder is William Agnew, picture dealer and recently elected Liberal MP for South East Lancashire, next to Lord Chief Justice of England Sir John Coleridge.

In the centre of the composition, bearded and dressed in a brown frock coat, stands Frederic Leighton, President of the Royal Academy, talking to a seated woman, Constance, Countess of Lonsdale. The head of surgeon Sir Henry Thompson appears between Leighton and the Countess. Frith himself

appears in the centre of the painting, bare-headed and whiskered, directly below the painting of Disraeli, talking to two women behind the seat.

One of the two women on the other side of the seat, facing away from Leighton, is the heiress and philanthropist Baroness Burdett-Coutts. Having remained a spinster until she was sixty-six, Baroness Burdett-Coutts provoked a scandal in 1881 by marrying her much younger secretary, the American William Ashmead-Bartlett, who became Mr Burdett-Coutts. Baroness Burdett-Coutts is shown in conversation with the younger Lady Diana Huddleston, daughter of William Beauclerk, 9th Duke of St Albans. Their husbands also appear among the standing figures behind the seat. Lady Diana's husband was Sir John Walter Huddleston, the last Baron of the Exchequer and a judge of Queen's Bench. He wears a top hat, and stands just behind and to the left of poet and playwright Robert Browning, the bare-headed and white-bearded figure seen talking to an unknown woman in a green dress. To the right, listening to Browning's conversation, is naturalist Thomas Huxley (probably included due to his trenchant support for Charles Darwin, who had died in 1882). Mr Burdett-Coutts stands behind and to the right of Huxley, reading, with moustache and top hat.

At the left of the painting stands the "homely figure" of Anthony Trollope (who died on 6 December 1882), with full white beard and top hat, noting in a book as he gazes at an "aesthetic" family in the foreground to the right, comprising a woman in green with sunflower buttonhole gazing at the artworks (a professional model, Jenny Trip), a woman in yellow reading her catalogue, and a girl in orange looking up at her. Frith describes them as "a family of pure aesthetes absorbed in affected study of the pictures" with Trollope affording "a striking contrast to the eccentric forms near him."

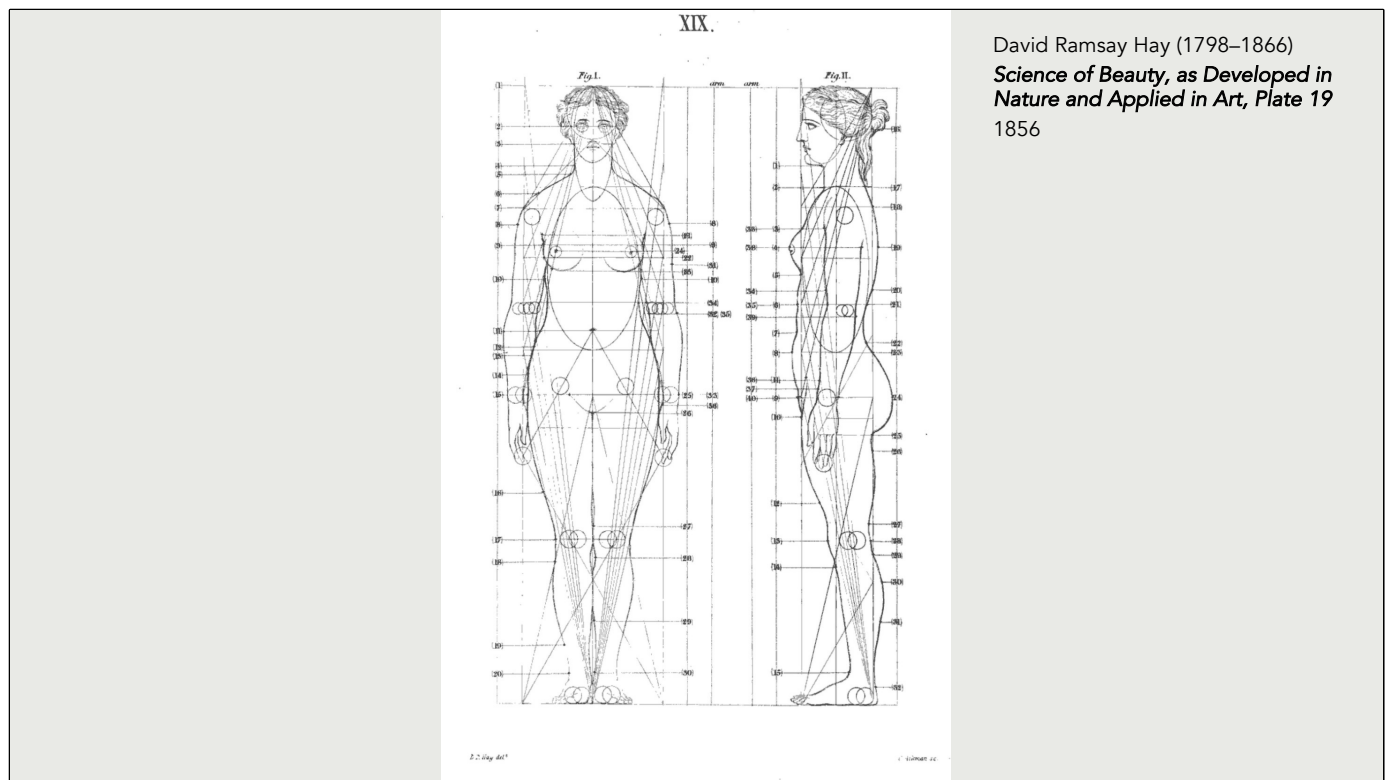
Cartoonist George du Maurier, with moustache and hat, stands immediately behind; to the left, behind him, hatless, is illustrator John Tenniel. Further left, between Trollope and the edge of the painting, are novelist Mary Elizabeth Braddon and musician Sir Julius Benedict.

To the right behind Trollope are a group of four politicians – the right-most, the Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone, faces a bearded Sir Henry Stafford Northcote; the tall hatless man behind Gladstone is Home Secretary Sir William Harcourt; behind and to the left of Northcote is Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster John Bright.

The paintings on the wall accurately reproduce the exhibits at the 1881 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. A second portrait of Disraeli is visible on the

wall behind Langtry. On the wall at the right, above Wilde's opponents, is the similarly angry-looking central figure in John Collier's *Last Voyage of Henry Hudson*. John Everett Millais at the extreme right is looking at Lawrence Alma-Tadema's painting *Sappho and Alcaeus*, accompanied by a myopic connoisseur. On the left wall are Heywood Hardy's *Sidi Ahmed ben Avuda* and the Holy Lion to the left; James Sant's *Daughters of Arthur Wilson, Esq.* further right, and J. W. Waterhouse's *A Summer's Day in Italy*.

Frith was inspired by the satirical cartoons of George du Maurier (whose head is visible between the orange and green attired aesthetes at the left) and by Gilbert and Sullivan's popular operetta *Patience*, first performed in 1881. The aesthetic costumes are characterised by features such as gigot sleeves and the "Watteau pleats" seen in the figure to the left of Wilde, wearing pink. The women in the centre along with the one to the right of Wilde with the child represent normal fashionable clothing of the day. These aspects of dress and pose, along with the myopic figure next to Millais, show the influence of Watteau's painting *L'Enseigne de Gersaint* ('The Shop Sign of Gersaint') of 1720-21, his last masterpiece.



David Ramsay Hay (1798–1866), *Science of Beauty, as Developed in Nature and Applied in Art*, Plate 19, 1856

Fashion and beauty were subject to constant reinvention in the Victorian period, yet some thinkers pushed back against that instability by searching for permanent, objective laws of beauty. **David Ramsay Hay** was a Scottish interior decorator who, in **1850**, decorated Holyrood House for **Queen Victoria**. That professional life ran alongside a serious theoretical project: Hay believed beauty was not a matter of taste but of measurable geometry. His **Science of Beauty**, published in **1856**, argues that beautiful forms — whether human bodies, vases, or buildings — share specific angular ratios, and that these same ratios correspond to the intervals of the **musical scale**. Crucially, Hay measured angles rather than lengths, because angular ratios remain constant across bodies of different sizes. He considered this a rediscovery of knowledge the **ancient Greeks** possessed and subsequently lost, and he even translated buildings such as the **Parthenon** into musical chords. The Victorians accepted the male nude in art without great anxiety, but female sexual beauty required careful

management. One consistent strategy was to invoke the cold white marble of classical antiquity. The material itself — inert, achromatic, hard — and the weight of classical association together drained sensuality from the represented form, elevating it into something intellectual rather than physical.

Notes

Fashion and beauty were subject to fads and change.

Some artists such as David Ramsay Hay studied beauty scientifically looking for a universal and eternal truth.

Hay studied proportions of men and women and buildings scientifically. The assumption was that the body incorporates certain formal ratios that we inherently find beautiful. It is not sexual it is all in the ratios.

Hay was a Scottish interior designer who worked for Queen Victoria. In his spare time he studied the beauty and he published the Science of Beauty in 1856.

His theory is difficult to describe briefly but it is based on measuring the ratio between key angles of the body, or anything we find beautiful, such as vases or architecture. He then related these ratios to the ratios between musical intervals which we also find beautiful. He believed he had rediscovered a theory of beauty that was known to the ancient Greeks but had been lost.

The Victorians had no problem with the male nude in art but how did they deal with female sexual beauty in art? They devised strategies for suppressing the sexual element.

One of their strategies was to represent beauty by referring to the cold, white marble statues from the ancient world. The material and the classical associations both helped elevate such statues away from the sensual.

Notes

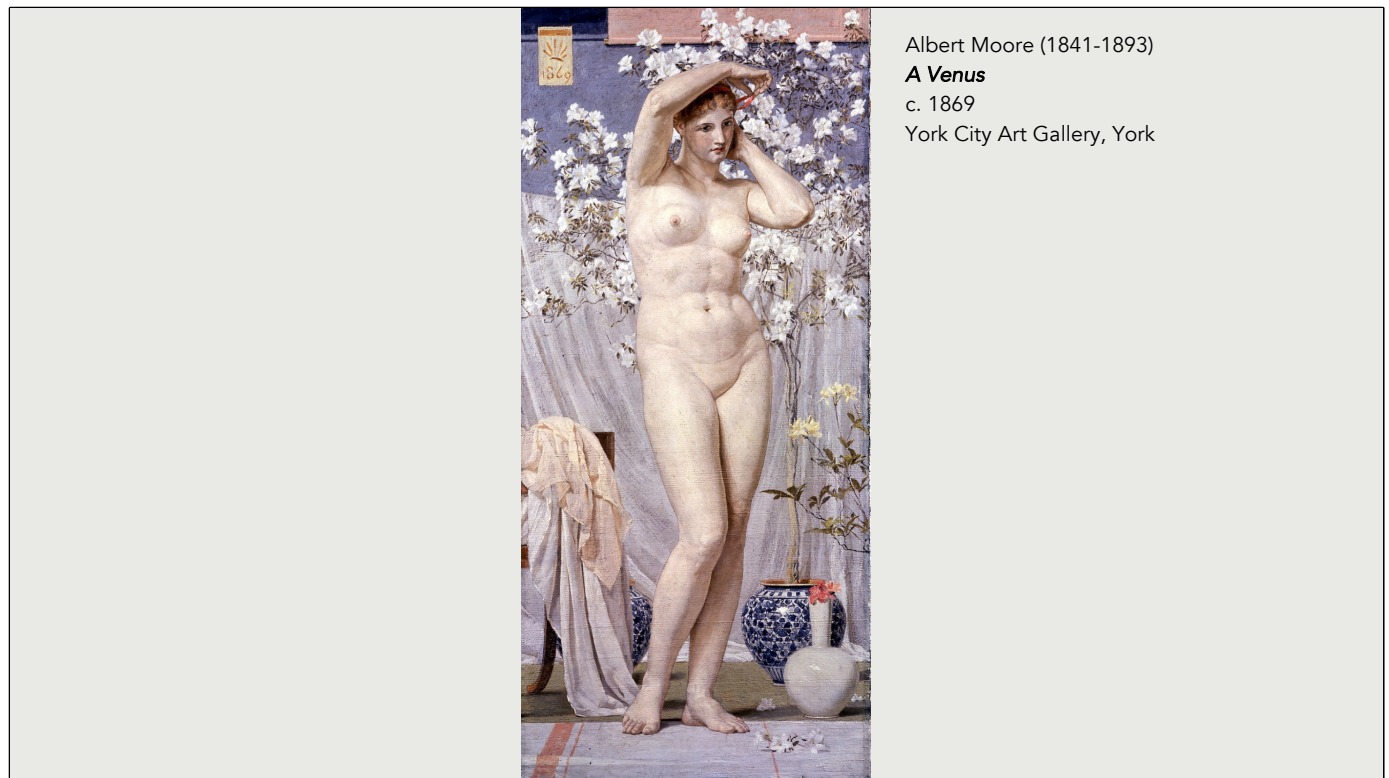
David Ramsay Hay

Hay was Scottish artist, interior decorator and colour theorist who, in 1850,

decorated Holyrood house for Queen Victoria.

Hay wrote a number of books concerning beauty which were based on his theory that the beauty of all forms is based on certain ratios related to the musical scale. He believed this had been discovered by the ancient Greeks but lost. His work attempts to recreate the lost ratios by careful measurement of classical temples and classical nudes. He relates the physical ratios of the forms to musical ratios and is even able to write musical chords that represent certain buildings, such as the Parthenon.

This plate shows some of the measurements he made of the angles he found in female forms we find beautiful. He measured angles rather than ratios of length and breadth as he found that stayed constant for larger and smaller bodies. He found the same angular ratios in beautiful male bodies as in beautiful female bodies even though other ratios changed.



Albert Moore (1841-1893)
A Venus
 c. 1869
 York City Art Gallery, York

Albert Moore (1841-1893), *A Venus*, c. 1869, York City Art Gallery, York

Rossetti's struggle to balance the spiritual and sensual in painted beauty leads us directly to **Albert Moore**, who pursued a different solution entirely. Moore's technique in **A Venus, painted in 1869**, was to transform the texture of skin itself. By allowing the coarse canvas to show through, and by rendering flesh with a cool, marble-like surface, he invoked the associations of classical sculpture — antiquity, learning, aesthetic distance — rather than living, breathing femininity. The intent was to redirect the viewer's response from desire toward purely decorative appreciation. The gamble did not fully pay off. **Atkinson** condemned the figure as neither marble, paint, nor flesh but stucco. Yet **Sidney Colvin** reviewed the work enthusiastically, placing him on the side that valued precisely this refined artificiality. At a breakfast hosted by **Frederic Leighton**, the artists present divided sharply: **Moore, Leighton, Poynter**, and Prinsep argued that painted flesh was a purely decorative matter, while Rossetti and Boyce insisted it must read as true to life. **Reverend Richard St John Tyrwhitt** identified what was actually happening: the coarse canvas ensured the painting looked

like a picture of a woman, not a woman herself — decorative beauty deliberately kept at one remove from physical desire.

Notes

I said earlier about the problem Rossetti had finding an acceptable way to represent beauty as a balance between the spiritual and the sensual.

This is Albert Moore who used another technique for de-sexualising the nude which was to change the texture of the skin. A marble-like skin was associated with classical sculptures and therefore learning and antiquity.

Albert Moore allowed the canvas to show in his *A Venus* (1869). However, he went too far for some critics who described it as masculine, but it was enthusiastically reviewed by Colvin.

It was a difficult balancing act for the artist; Atkinson described the painting as a 'repellent picture of "Venus," borrowed apparently from the Venus of Milo. Such nudities are quite unobjectionable, because absolutely disagreeable. The figure is neither marble, paint, nor flesh, but stucco'.

Reverend Richard St John Tyrwhitt, champion of what he called 'chaste nudities' made a point that applies to all these techniques, 'We hazard the conjecture that he painted it on such coarse canvas on purpose that the nude figure may look like the picture of a woman, rather than like a woman.'

Notes

At a breakfast party at Leighton's house the subject of painting flesh was discussed. The artists presented divided into two groups, Leighton, Moore, Poynter and Prinsep argued it was merely decorative and Rossetti, Boyce and Colvin argued it should be rendered as characteristically true to life. Colvin fleshiness was a virtue and he argued Moore was forsaking nature in exchanged for refined artificiality and he said Moore's *A Venus* 'whether this purely decorative system is adequate for the painting of human flesh.'

In 1871, Robert Buchanan argued in 'The Fleshly School of painting' (Contemporary Review) that 'fleshliness' should be equated with immorality.

If female physical beauty did evolve from male mating preferences it could correspond to traits associated with reproductive success. This is known as

the signal theory of beauty. We respond to certain signals that suggest reproductive success. One of these is the waist to hip ratio. In men it is 80-90% and in women 70%. If we examine film stars such as Audrey Hepburn, Marilyn Munroe, Playboy bunnies and Miss Americas the ratio is from 68% to 72%. And this ratio best predicates what people of all ages, genders and races find attractive.

This is A Venus by Alfred Moore. So what is the waist to hip ratio? It is a surprisingly high 75%, approaching the male body form.

Moore and other artists were negotiating a maze of desire and impropriety by painting the nude in such a way that it looked like pigment on canvas and so emphasized the decorative beauty of the image while minimizing the danger of it being associated with sexual desire. The artist and the viewer therefore had to negotiate symbolic associations, such as a classical setting, that enabled the two aspects to be socially segregated.

Barbie (current model) has a waist to hip ratio of 66%, pre-1997 it was 54.5%

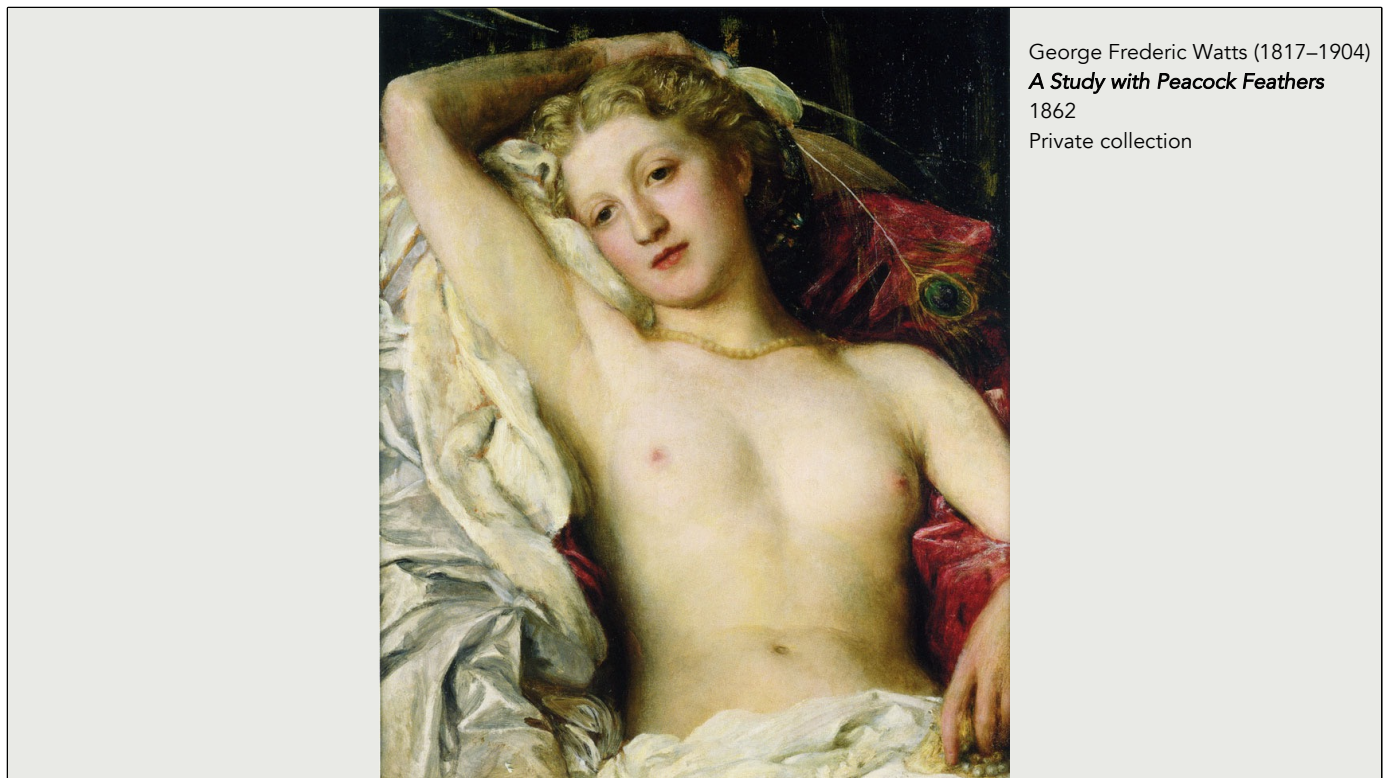
Venus de Medici is 38"-32"-42" so has a waist to hip ratio of 72%

Lily Langtry was 37"-18"-39", so was 46% (57% later in life)

References

http://harvardwrites.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/HW_Liu.pdf

Frank Marlowe, Coren Apicella, and Dorian Reed, 'Men's Preferences for Women's Profile Waist-to-Hip Ratio in Two Societies', *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 26:6 (2005), 458-68



George Frederic Watts (1817–1904), *A Study with Peacock Feathers*, 1862, Private collection

Watts's **A Study with Peacock Feathers**, painted in **1862**, presents one of the period's most contested images. The **peacock feather**, central icon of the **Aesthetic Movement**, carried charged associations: Darwin's critics repeatedly cited the peacock's tail as evidence against natural selection, making it a symbol at the intersection of beauty, science, and debate. The **Athenaeum** reviewed the work in **1865**, praising the superb treatment of the bust, its virginal character, and what the critic called the subject's girlish purity. That language reveals a Victorian logic we must reckon with directly: pre-pubescent girlhood signified innocence precisely because it preceded sexuality, making the semi-nude figure legible as pure rather than provocative. Female nudes were broadly acceptable in Victorian exhibition culture provided they met an unwritten set of conventions. The figure had to read as classical, mythological, or biblical in context. Her body had to appear impermeable, motionless, and passive — closer to marble than flesh, as we saw with **Albert Moore**. She could not return the viewer's gaze.

Her form had to be generalised and idealised, with working-class models' bodies routinely altered to remove any mark of lived experience. Not every critic accepted this framework, and a fierce debate ran through the press.

Notes

This semi-nude figure, George Frederic Watts's *A Study with Peacock Feathers*, 1862, poses a bigger problem.

The peacock feather was a major icon of the Aesthetic Movement and I believe it was related to the scientific study of beauty as the peacock was one of the primary examples Darwin's critics used against his theory of natural selection.

It was described by *The Athenaeum* (1865, 'Winter Exhibition', Royal Academy) as a work of extraordinary merit and beauty, the critic wrote about 'the superb treatment of the bust, its virginal character' and the 'chaste features of the woman'. He also praised her 'girlish purity'.

We must recognise that in the Victorian period, a pre-pubescent girl was pure and virginal and therefore not suggestive.

Female nudes were acceptable during the Victorian period if they loosely followed certain unwritten guidelines, a convention for painting an acceptable nude. It had to be:

Classical, mythological, historical or biblical (suggested by the surroundings or symbolism)

Impermeable (hard and unyielding, like marble as we saw with Albert Moore's painting)

Motionless (like a statue)

Passive, not exciting carnal desire or emotion

Doesn't meet your gaze (so demure and pure)

Generalized (not a specific woman)

Idealised (no marks or moles, the bodies of careworn working class models were altered to look perfect and unblemished)

In summary, a female nude was acceptable if there was a classical element and it could be seen as pure.

Not all critics agreed and a debate raged in the press.



Alexandre Cabanel (1823-1889)
The Birth of Venus
1863
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Alexandre Cabanel (1823-1889), *The Birth of Venus*, 1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Cabanel's **Birth of Venus**, shown at the **Paris Salon of 1863**, attracted Napoleon III as a buyer and sparked a debate about the boundaries of acceptable nudity that crossed the Channel. When the painting appeared at the French Gallery, Pall Mall, in **1869**, **The Times** drew a sharp distinction between the sensuous and the sensual, writing that it "oversteps the fine line which separates the sensuous from the sensual, though it is sensualism in its most dainty and delicate form." The critic positioned it as a work made for the boudoir rather than the gallery — an implicitly French failing, since British nudes of the period were rarely subjected to the same charge. In Paris, the response was almost entirely the reverse: the painting was widely admired, and **Cabanel** was appointed professor at the **École des Beaux-Arts** that same year. The contrast reveals how national context shaped moral judgement of the same image. The year 1863 became known as the Year of the Venuses precisely because the Salon was saturated with female nudes, yet it was not Cabanel's polished goddess who would ultimately cause the

greater scandal — that distinction fell to **Manet's** *Olympia*.

Notes

This was shown in Paris Salon in 1863, known as the 'Year of the Venuses' because of the number of nudes on show. It was purchased by Napoleon III. It was shown in the French Gallery, Pall Mall, in 1869 and was censured by The Times.

Very few British nudes were labelled as sensual, a term that was reserved for French paintings, such as Cabanel's Venus which was censured by The Times on 7 April, 1869,

'It is the nude treated less for the gallery than the boudoir, and seems to us to overstep the fine line which separates the sensuous from the sensual, though it is sensualism in its most dainty and delicate form'.

However, it was widely admired in Paris and Cabanel was made a professor of the École des Beaux-Arts the same year.

What was to cause a scandal in Paris was Manet's Olympia...

Notes

The Times critic went on to say, 'Mr Cabanel's Parisian Aphrodite makes no aim at that robust and chastened beauty of form and that grandeur of colour that lifts the Venuses of Titian and his Venetian contemporaries into a region from which impure suggestion is banished, except for the impure.'

The Society of Women Artists 153rd Exhibition at the Mall Gallery removed a painting by Leena McCall, Portrait of Ms Ruby May, Standing that showed pubic hair in July 2014. It was described as 'too pornographic and disgusting'. Perhaps more controversially she was smoking a pipe. The breasts of the woman in the painting were covered but it ass replaced by a nude.



Édouard Manet (1832–1883)
Olympia
1863
130.5 x 190 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Édouard Manet (1832–1883), *Olympia*, 1863, 130.5 x 190 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

That tension between spiritual and sensual beauty sets up our next subject perfectly — but first, **Manet's *Olympia* of 1865** demands attention as a case study in how social convention shapes what counts as acceptable nudity. Manet modelled the composition directly on **Titian's *Venus of Urbino* of 1538**, yet the result scandalized Paris. Critics reached for extraordinary cruelty: one called her a "female gorilla," another a "grotesque in India rubber." The disgust was not arbitrary. Unlike Titian's *Venus*, *Olympia* — modelled by **Victorine Meurent** — stares back at the viewer with flat, unapologetic directness, refusing any mythological or historical alibi. The name itself was street slang for prostitutes. The canvas is also large, a scale conventionally reserved for history painting, which made the provocation impossible to ignore. Her relatively slender body struck contemporaries as girlish rather than womanly, and **Charles Baudelaire** declared thinness more indecent than fullness. Yet **G. F. Watts** painted similarly slight female figures for London audiences with little controversy. The difference was Watts's

cultivated reputation for moral seriousness. **Social convention**, not the body itself, determined whether nakedness read as spiritual elevation or raw sensuality — a distinction **Darwin** would have found biologically meaningless, given that bodily beauty evolved through sexual selection.

Notes

You could go too far even in Paris where Manet was censured for his *Olympia* in 1865.

Although it was modelled after Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538) it created a scandal. The majority of critics attacked the painting with unmitigated disgust...: "What is this odalisque with the yellow belly, ignoble model dredged up from who knows where?" [And] "The painter's attitude is of inconceivable vulgarity", that 'female gorilla', 'a grotesque in India rubber ... a monkey on a bed'.

A real woman looks out of the painting and there is no attempt to suggest a historical or mythological event. The name *Olympia* was associated with prostitutes. It is a large canvas (130.5x190cm) that is normally associated with history painting. Finally, *Olympia* is fairly thin by the artistic standards of the time and her relatively undeveloped body is more girlish than womanly. Charles Baudelaire thought thinness more indecent than fatness. But this reminds us of *Watts*, so why was that accepted by the more conservative London art world.

The answer, I think is *Watt's* respectability and reputation.

Beauty depends on social conventions that determines whether it is seen as spiritual or sensual but, as Darwin said, bodily beauty has evolved through sexual selection and so is inherently sensual.

Let us consider the other link between Darwin and art – the idea of progress, and the opposite degeneration.

Notes

The models were Victorine Meurent and Laure.



Linley Sambourne (1844–1910)
Illustration for Charles Kingsley, The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby, p. 230
 1898

Linley Sambourne (1844–1910), Illustration for Charles Kingsley, *The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby*, p. 230, 1898

Closing this lecture, we turn to degeneration — the dark counterpart to Victorian faith in progress. **Charles Kingsley** wrote ***The Water-Babies*** in 1862 to 1863, partly as a satire on **Darwin's** **On the Origin of Species**. Within it, **Linley Sambourne's** illustration tracks a group called the **Doasyoulikes** through a grim visual sequence: idle humans, who do whatever they like, descend first into cavemen, then apes, and are finally shot by the explorer **Paul Du Chaillu**, who had returned from Africa in the early 1860s with the first widely circulated accounts of gorillas. Kingsley's satirical point was precise — evolution carries no guarantee of improvement. Darwin himself understood that natural selection has no direction; organisms do not march steadily upward in complexity or virtue. This anxiety had older roots. **Edward Gibbon** in **The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire**, published between 1776 and 1789, had already shown that great civilisations collapse. After Darwin, that fear attached itself to the human body and the human race — feeding what became, by the 1890s, a full

ideological obsession with **degenerate art** and degenerate peoples.

Notes

The final interplay between science and beauty I would like to discuss is degeneration.

This is concerned with progress.

Although the concern about degenerate art did not develop until the 1890s this illustration from 1863 spells out the danger.

In *The Water Babies*, Kingsley tells of a group of humans called the Doasyoulikes who are allowed to do "whatever they like" so gradually lose the power of speech, degenerate into cavemen and then gorillas that are shot.

Kingsley was making the point that evolution does not necessarily imply improvement, it can lead to degeneration.

The idea was clear, for example in Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire* (1776-1789) but following Darwin's ideas it was linked to the degeneration of the human race and social Darwinism.

Notes

As early as 1862-3 and written partly as a satire on Darwin's *The Origin of Species* was Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*.

It was very popular in England but fell out of favour because of its dismissive or insulting references to Americans, Jews, Blacks, Catholics and the Irish.

Kingsley also (controversially, nowadays) likens the Doasyoulikes to the natives of Africa, by mentioning that one of the gorillas shot by Du Chaillu "remembered that his ancestors had once been men, and tried to say, 'Am I Not A Man And A Brother?', but had forgotten how to use his tongue."

We can see in Linley Sambourne's illustration that the Doasyoulikes degenerate. At the top they are sitting around playing musical instruments and as they are not working hard they gradually degenerate, first into cavemen, then apes and finally beasts. The last Doasyoulike is shot by Paul Du Chaillu who was very famous at the time the book was written.

He had just returned from Africa in the early 1860s with the first stories of

gorillas, like, he thought a cross between humans and apes, as intelligent as humans and extremely violent.

The point being made by Kingsley is that evolution does not imply progress. As Darwin was aware evolution has no direction, we are not getting more and more evolved or better and better.

Some people say, 'but surely we are more advanced than bacteria?' Their argument is that over millions of years the complexity of organisms increases but this can be explained without progress.

Life starts out as simple as it gets so over time it will obviously get more complex and over a long period very complex. However, there is no direction and no steady progress. Evolution is all ups and downs.

The woman is a fairy who is teaching Tom, the water baby about life. She shows him a book which contains colour pictures illustrating the history of the Doasyoulikes.

Little pigs ran about crying 'Come and eat me' and they waited until the pigs ran against their mouths and took a bite.

"Why," said Tom, "they are growing no better than savages.", "And look how ugly they are all getting," said Ellie. "Yes; when people live on poor vegetables instead of roast beef and plum-pudding, their jaws grow large, and their lips grow coarse, like the poor Paddies who eat potatoes."

no hierarchy of worth, only of adaptation, and Darwin — with quiet insistence — never let his readers forget it.

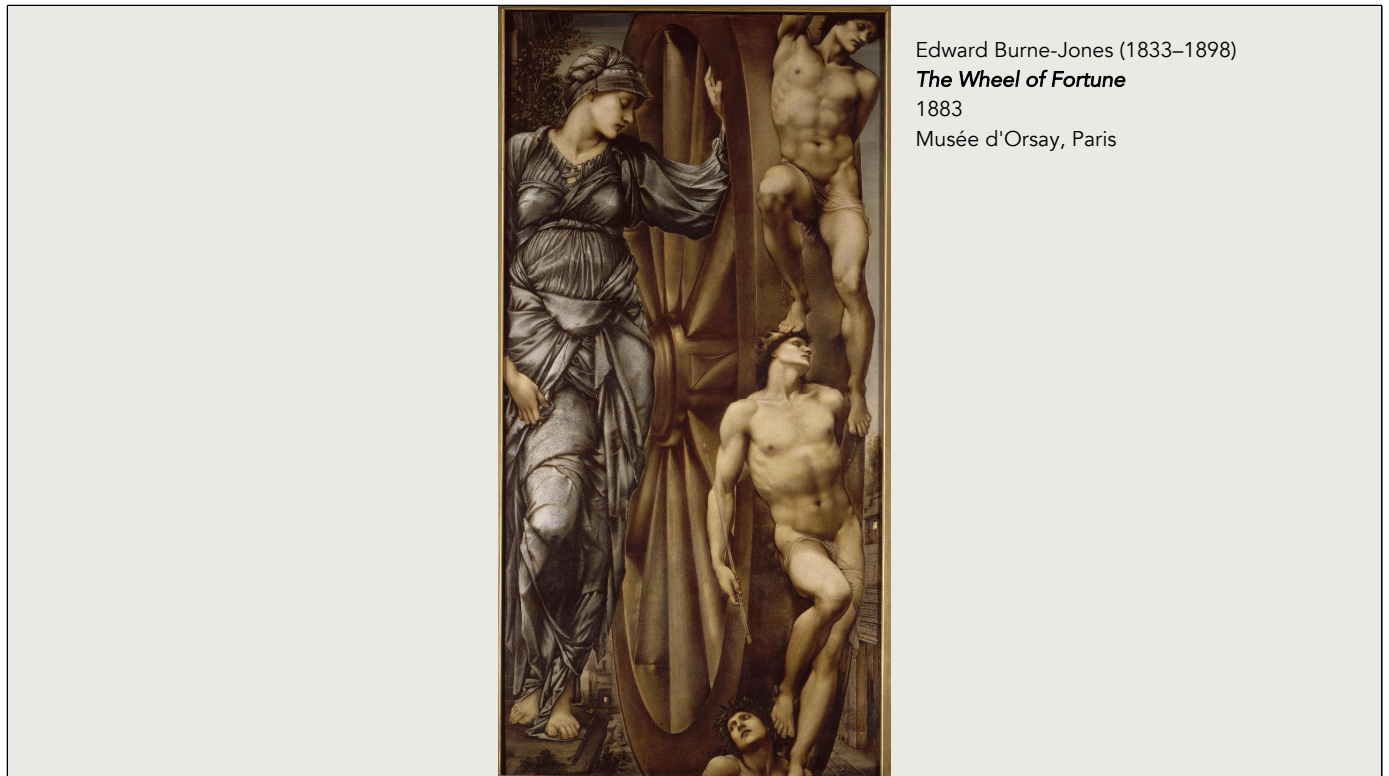
Notes

This is a typical cartoon showing progress in the form of a transformation, in this case from worm, through money, caveman, Victorian gentleman and finally Darwin.

It was shown in 1882 the year Darwin died.

Darwin's final book was *The Formation of Vegetable Mould, through the Action of Worms* and in it the ever humble Darwin wrote about worms,

It may be doubted whether there are many other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world, as have these lowly organised creatures.



Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), *The Wheel of Fortune*, 1883, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

The dominant Victorian assumption linked **Darwinian evolution** with inevitable progress, yet not every artist accepted that narrative. **Edward Burne-Jones** offered a striking counter-image in ***The Wheel of Fortune***, exhibited at the **Grosvenor Gallery in 1883**. In place of an ascending ladder, the painting presents Fortune turning a great wheel before three male figures — a slave, a king, and a poet — whose positions rise and fall by blind chance rather than merit or design. Fortune herself stands with eyes closed, indifferent to outcome, a figure Burne-Jones developed from his 1871 sketches of **Michelangelo's Delphic Sibyl** on the Sistine ceiling. The blind, impersonal quality of her turning maps directly onto **natural selection** as Darwin described it: random variation, indifferent to the future, favouring only what suits the present moment. Critics, however, read the painting through the lens of **degeneration**, a concept carrying real anxiety in late Victorian culture. The *Illustrated London News* reacted with disgust, condemning the figures' weak and over-wrought

physique, while the **Saturday Review** found the men effeminate, contrasting them unfavourably with what it called the vigorous masculinity of the ancient Greeks. The painting thus became entangled in fears that society itself might be running backwards.

Notes

Darwin never thought evolution had anything to do with progress. '((In my theory there is no absolute tendency to progression, excepting from favourable circumstance!))', Notebooks.

However, the assumption that evolution and progress were linked became commonly accepted. This was partly because most people regard it as common sense that we are more highly evolved than other animals. Also, there were linked by

Not all artists though progress was inevitable. This painting by Edward Burne-Jones shows the Wheel of Fortune.

A different metaphor, we are not ascending the ladder of evolution but evolution is like a wheel some go up and other go down.

There is a deeper link to Darwin's work, which must be approached indirectly through an understanding of the role of degeneration in late Victorian thinking. If we can go down then we must take care society does not degenerate.

This painting was regarded by many critics as degenerate. The Illustrated London News regarded The Wheel of Fortune with 'disgust' and the morbid figures the result of their weak and 'over-wrought physique'. The figures were described as marred by the painter's solemn affectation of 'poetic melancholy', which had become monotonous and used as a trick. The Magazine of Art thought it effete and lacking originality and it pointed out that 'the Greeks were men, and did man's work' but Burne-Jones's men were effeminate, 'The Picture Galleries-5', Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art, 55:1440 (2 June, 1883), 697-98 (p. 698).

Notes

This idea of change was picked up by artists but it was not always progress. This is Burne-Jones The Wheel of Fortune.

It shows Fortune turning a large wheel in front of which are three male figures representing from the top, a slave, a king and a poet.

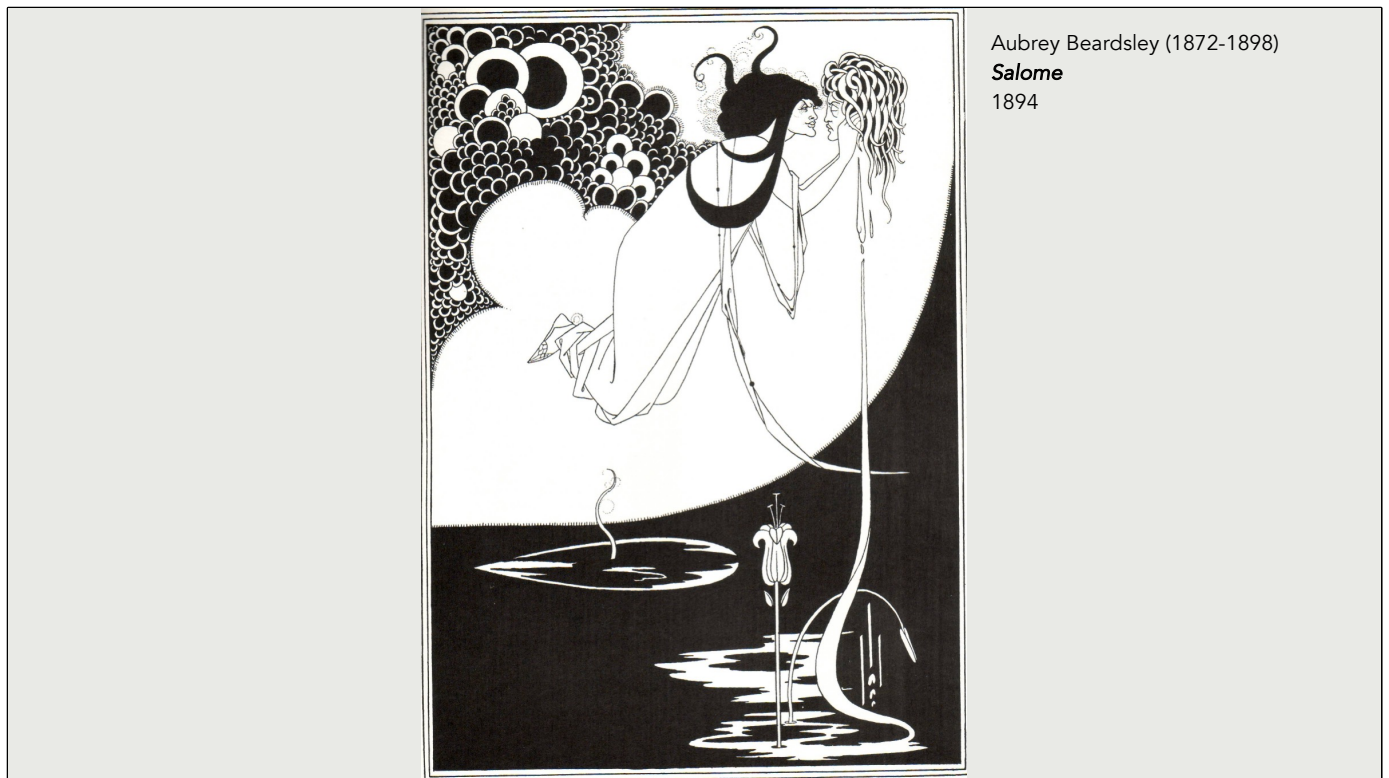
Fortune is an intricately dressed figure with her eyes closed and her hand on the wheel. The implication of the symbolism is that Fortune turns the wheel of life randomly backwards and forwards, which results in good or bad luck to everyone whether they are king or slave.

In Darwinian terms, the painting shows a strong woman controlling the fate of three similar looking men. If Fortune represents nature then the painting could be seen to symbolize the blind chance associated with natural selection. Natural selection is blind in the sense that although a random variation may be more or less suited to its current environment it is blind to the future. A new variation will only survive if it is of benefit to the individual not if it could be of benefit to future generations, for example, the human eye can only have evolved through minute variations if every change made the individual possessing it better fitted to its environment.

Critics had a problem with the painting representing 'neither body nor spirit nor animal nor vegetable, but only an idea.'

There are many versions of the painting including part of the Troy Triptych (1872-1898, Figure 152). In 1871, Burne-Jones went to Rome and sketched Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling and the figure of Fortune is based on the Delphic Sibyl (1509, Figure 153). Elements such as hands and feet are based on Michelangelo's Captives (1519-1536, Figure 154) which he recorded in his sketchbook on the same trip and the Dying Slave in the Louvre (1513-16, Figure 155), of which he owned a small plaster copy. The version now at the Musée d'Orsay took years for Burne-Jones to complete, and was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1883.

Other versions include one now in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; one in gouache and blue grisaille, 1870, Carlisle City Art Gallery; a watercolour, 1872-74, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham Public Libraries as well as numerous sketches and studies.



Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898)
Salome
 1894

Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898), *Salome*, 1894

In **1892**, **Max Nordau** published **Degeneration**, arguing that art associated with the Aesthetic Movement signalled a mental pathology threatening European civilisation. The artists targeted by that abuse wore the label proudly. **Aubrey Beardsley** is the clearest example. His late illustrations are dark, grotesque erotica, and he was direct about his purpose: "I have one aim — the grotesque. If I am not grotesque I am nothing." His illustrations for **Oscar Wilde's** play **Salome** demonstrate exactly that commitment. Rehearsals began in London in 1892 but were halted by the Lord Chamberlain, since depicting Biblical characters on stage was illegal, and the play was not performed publicly in England until **1931**. The grotesque is not mere shock. As James Luther Adams argues in **The Grotesque in Art and Literature**, it forces confrontation with what culture pushes to the margins — the body, repression, social oppression — things central to human experience yet denied a place within accepted norms. Beardsley gives those outcasts form and presence. He stands as a genuine bridge between the sentimental moral narratives of much **Victorian** painting

and the unflinching ambition of modern art to reckon honestly with the human condition.

Notes

In 1892 Max Nordau published *Degeneration* arguing that Pre-Raphaelite art and the work of the Aesthetic Movement were a result of a mental disease which, if not checked, could lead to the degeneration of European civilization. This is a final example of what critics called Decadent or Degenerate art. A term of abuse that was picked up and used proudly by the artists themselves.

Beardsley's late images are dark and sometimes grotesque erotica. Beardsley said, 'I have one aim—the grotesque. If I am not grotesque I am nothing.' This image is from his illustration of Oscar Wilde's (1854-1900) play *Salome*. Rehearsals began in London in 1892 but were stopped by the Lord Chamberlain as it was illegal to depict Biblical characters on the stage and was not performed publically in England until 1931.

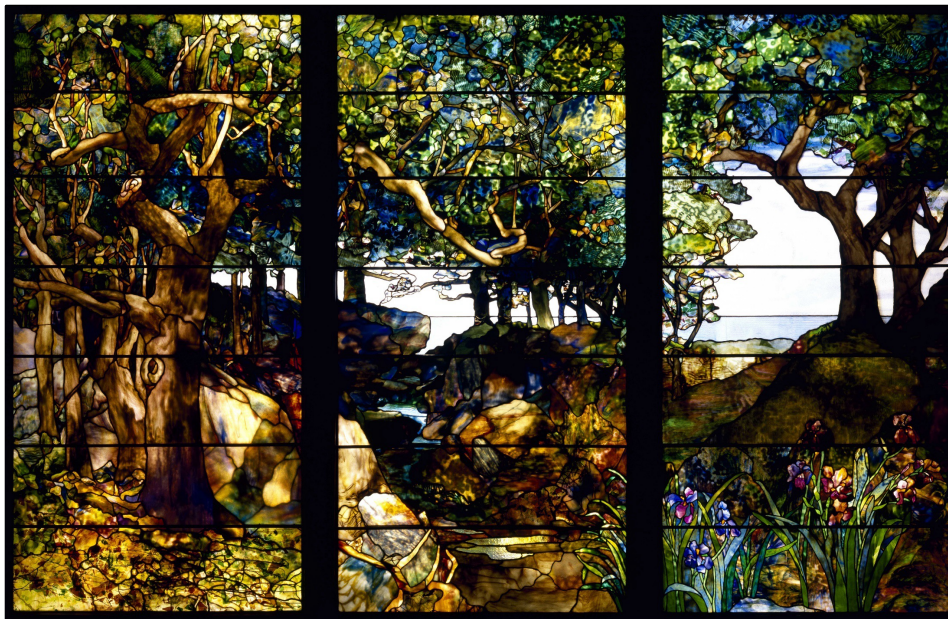
Beardsley tackles difficult subjects honestly and with a powerful graphical approach. He can be seen as a gateway between the sentimental, moral narrative of many Victorian paintings and the attempt by modern art to understand the human condition.

Notes

What is the grotesque? It is widely used in religious art, we need only think of Hieronymus Bosch, and in modern art, such as Francis Bacon. The grotesque refers to aspects of human existence we would rather not think about such as oppression of social groups, our relationship to our physical body or the repression of emotional forces. It is a way of showing and dealing with things that do not fit our cultural norms. In our denial we push to the periphery things that are at the core of our experience. It confronts us with questions we would rather not address about the nature and character of the world. The artist is the one that takes these grotesques, these misfits and outcasts and gives them life but they are not welcome as they violate what we consider good and rational. But they are still our children and they return to mock us. (*The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, 1997, ed. James Luther Adams).

The Grotesque and John Ruskin

John Ruskin had a unique view of the grotesque. He distinguished between the noble and the ignoble grotesque. Ruskin believed that the infinite variety and detail of the world around is impossible for an artist to represent, so all art fails. The noble grotesque is an artist sincerely trying to represent the inexpressible and the ignoble is when an artist uses cheap or simple tricks or is sarcastic or cynical. An example he gives is putting wings on a person to represent an angel, which is ignoble. He admired Rossetti's Annunciation because the angel Gabriel is not shown with wings. The artist has thought about the problem is sincerely trying to find a solution. Ruskin would have found Beardsley ignoble simply because he thought all references to sex were sordid.



Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848–1933)
A Wooded Landscape in Three Panels
 c.1905
 The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848–1933), *A Wooded Landscape in Three Panels*, c.1905, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Not all artists within the Aesthetic Movement embraced Decadence — some instead turned toward the decorative innovation that defined **Art Nouveau**, flourishing between **1880 and 1910**. **Louis Comfort Tiffany**, born in 1848 in New York, stands as the American figure most completely identified with this shift. His father founded **Tiffany and Company** in 1837, but Louis rejected jewellery retail for studio practice, declaring his guiding purpose as the pursuit of beauty. Inspired by **William Morris** and the British Arts and Crafts Movement, he brought the same conviction — that decoration is art — to an extraordinary range of materials: ceramics, enamels, mosaics, and above all, glass. Tiffany patented new colouring techniques and pioneered the **copper foil method**, edging individual glass pieces before soldering them together, which allowed far greater precision than traditional leading. He coined the term **favrite** — from the French for handmade — to describe all his glass production, and launched his celebrated lamp designs in 1895. Alongside collaborators including

Candace Wheeler and **Samuel Colman** through the Associated Artists, he redefined American interior design, bringing science, craft, and colour into a unified artistic vision that closed the century on strikingly ambitious terms.

Notes

Not all artists associated with the Aesthetic Movement were associated with Decadent art.

This was the beginning of 'new art' or Art Nouveau which spanned the period 1880 to 1910.

Louis Comfort Tiffany is the American artist who is most closely associated with the Aesthetic Movement and the Cult of Beauty.

He declared his goal as the 'pursuit of beauty' and he experimented with painting, interior design, ceramics, enamelling, jewellery and mosaics but his speciality was with glass. He patented new techniques for colouring glass and began to 'paint' pictures using glass by layering different textures, thicknesses and colours.

Summary

In summary, we have looked at the interaction between science and art during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Beauty was the central problem as it needed to be explained by Darwin and it needed to be represented by artists, such as Rossetti. Artists had to conform with the cultural standards of the day otherwise they were labelled as sensual.

Progress and the opposite, degeneration, were also central topics for both Victorians scientists and artists.

Science, particular Darwin's ideas became distorted and were called upon to justify all sorts of cultural decisions about race, the poor and women.

Art was at the forefront of change and grappled with the representation of beauty and progress in many controversial and sometimes not so controversial ways.

Notes

Louis Comfort Tiffany (February 18, 1848 – January 17, 1933) was an American artist and designer who worked in the decorative arts and is best known for his work in stained glass. His father founded Tiffany & Company in 1837 to make and sell luxury jewellery.

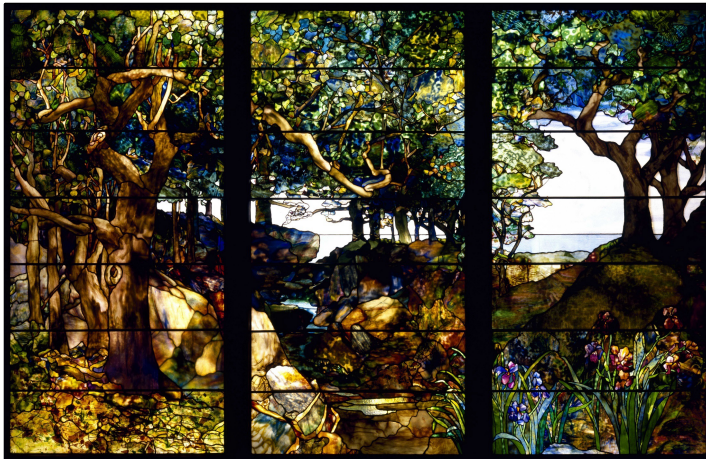
He is the American artist most associated with the Art Nouveau and Aesthetic movements. Tiffany was affiliated with a prestigious collaborative of designers known as the Associated Artists, which included Lockwood de Forest, Candace Wheeler, and Samuel Colman. Tiffany designed stained glass windows and lamps, glass mosaics, blown glass, ceramics, jewellery, enamels and metalwork.

He came to fame in 1882 when he redecorated The White House for President Chester Alan Arthur.

He founded the first Tiffany Glass Company in 1885 and developed the copper foil technique of edging the glass in copper foil and then soldering it together.

His use of coloured glass was motivated by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement in England.

He started to use the term *favrile* ('French 'handmade') to describe all his glass and started to make his famous Tiffany lamps in 1895.



Louis Comfort Tiffany
(1848–1933)
A Wooded
Landscape in Three
Panels
c.1905

23-11 VICTORIAN ART AND DARWINIAN BEAUTY

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK



This talk has traced the extraordinary entanglement of Darwinian science and Victorian aesthetics — from a satirical teapot and the Aesthetic Movement's cult of beauty, through sexual selection, secondary sexual characteristics, and the peacock's troublesome tail, to the contested female nude, the degeneration anxieties of the 1890s, and Beardsley's defiant grotesque. What emerges is not two separate histories but one: beauty, in the Victorian period, was always already a biological, moral, and political argument.



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