



## EDWARD BURNE-JONES (1833-1898)

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Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Phyllis and Demophoön*, 1870

Today's talk is about Edward Burne-Jones. He started life as plain Ned Jones and finished as Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, Baronet, lauded throughout Europe as the greatest artists to have emanated from Britain. He was an outsider for much of his life and his affair in 1870 led to a public scandal and a ten-year isolation but he then became a key figure in the international art world. After his death his art, in fact all Victorian art, fell out of fashion and his reputation did not recover until the 1990s. So how did he begin..

### NOTES

- **Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones**, 1st Baronet (28 August 1833 – 17 June 1898) has been called the **last of the Pre-Raphaelites** and he is associated with a **refined and spiritualised style of beauty**. For much of his life he was an **outsider** in British art, and spending the early part of his life in isolation, but he became a **key figure in the international art world** at the end of the 19th century and a pioneer of the **Symbolist movement**. He challenged society by **disengaging** his art from the **modern world**, offering a **parallel universe based on myth**, legend and the Bible. Working in a wide range of materials, he pioneered a radical new approach to narrative in works created for both public and intimate settings.
- **He had a mystery affair and a quick wit**. His paintings were so painstaking they could take **years to complete** but he did many quick fire sketches of the amusing side of everyday life, such as fat tattooed ladies or caricatures of friends. He started life as plain Ned Jones and finished as Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, Baronet, lauded throughout Europe as the greatest artists to

have emanated from Britain. He hated being in the public eye and was given to fits of depression. He developed intimate friendships with high society women and exchanged up to five letters a day. He was described by a friend as 'Puck beneath the cowl of a monk'. His wife, the long suffering Georgiana, wrote a biography shortly after his death which paints a picture of a man deeply versed in the Bible but with little interest in formal Christianity. He held strong ethical views and was indignant with Britain's treatment of other races but he refused to become politically engaged, unlike his friend William Morris. He was one of the few artists in the nineteenth century who was educated at university rather than art school and so he had a literary approach to his art. He approached his art analytically and built up pictures from numerous sketches of the individual fragments. He ignored the teaching of art schools and used his medium to achieve his own ends. So his watercolour, normally a thin transparent medium, was heavy, thick, opaque and jewel-like. The dreamy otherworldliness of his art **either draws you into his enigmatic world or repulses you.**

### **QUOTES BY BURNE-JONES**

- 'Only this is true, that beauty is very beautiful, and softens, and inspires, and rouses, and lifts up, and never fails.'
- **'The more materialistic science becomes, the more angels shall I paint.** Their wings are my protest in favour of the immortality of the soul.'
- **'I mean by a picture a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be - in a light better than any light that ever shone - in a land no one can define, or remember, only desire.'**

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[https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Edward\\_Burne\\_Jones\\_Victoria\\_n\\_Artist\\_drea/Bv4u7Gf7Z38C?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Edward_Burne_Jones_Victoria_n_Artist_drea/Bv4u7Gf7Z38C?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover) A 361 page book on Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist-Dreamer

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Edward Burne-Jones,  
Georgiana Burne-Jones  
and her children, begun  
1883,  
76 x 53 cm



Edward Burne-Jones (1833-  
1898) by Cundall, Downes &  
Co, or by John Watkins,  
albumen print on card  
mount, published 1864, 9.6  
x 7.2 cm, NPG

Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) by Cundall, Downes & Co, or by John Watkins, albumen print on card mount, published 1864, 9.6 x 7.2 cm, NP  
Edward Burne-Jones, *Georgiana Burne-Jones and her children*, begun 1883, 76 x 53 cm, children Margaret and Philip, sold at Sotheby's December 2010 for £481,250

- Born Edward Jones to a Welsh frame-maker. His mother died six days after he was born and he was raised by his grieving father.
- He attended a good grammar school (King Edward's Grammar School in Birmingham) and was accepted by Exeter College, Oxford. He was one of the few nineteenth-century artists to attend university along with William Morris, Frederic Leighton and Edward Poynter.
- He was quick witted and developed intimate friendships with high-society women and exchanged up to five letters a day. He was very knowledgeable about the Bible but had little interest in Christianity and was described as a "Puck beneath the cowl of a monk". He hated publicity and was given to fits of depression.
- He is often seen as the last of the Pre-Raphaelites as he was a few years younger than the other Pre-Raphaelites and never became a member of the Brotherhood which effectively disbanded in 1855.
- (CLICK) In 1860 he married **Georgiana 'Georgie' MacDonald** (1840-1920), the sister of one of his old school friends and they moved into an 18<sup>th</sup> century house in London. They had **three children**, the eldest Philip became a portrait

painter, the second son died shortly after birth and the third Margaret (1866-1953) married (John Mackail) a friend of Morris, who was to become his biographer. We can see Philip and Margaret in the background of this painting.

- He was a **friend of William Morris** and they founded the Arts & Crafts Movement. His **medieval scenes went out of fashion** after his death **and he dropped into obscurity** but his **reputation has grown since** a major exhibition was held at the Barbican in **1989**. He is now seen to have been very influential on later artists including the Symbolists on the Continent.

## NOTES

- A British 'grammar school' is what in the US would be a free, public high school with an entrance exam for gifted and talented pupils.

## BIO:BURNE-JONES

- **Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones**, 1st Baronet (28 August 1833 – 17 June 1898) was christened plain Edward ('Ned') Jones, in Birmingham, the son of a Welsh frame-maker. His **mother, Elizabeth Coley, died** six days after he was born and he was raised by his grieving father and his housekeeper. He attended Birmingham's **King Edward VI Grammar School** and the Birmingham School of Art (1848-1852) before studying **theology at Exeter College, Oxford**.

## 1850s – UNIVERSITY, MEETS MORRIS AND ROSSETTI, MARRIES

- **In 1853** he **met William Morris** at Oxford because of their mutual love of poetry. The two of them and some of Jones's friends from Birmingham formed the '**Birmingham Set**' which they called 'The Brotherhood'. The Brotherhood read John Ruskin, Gabriel Rossetti and Tennyson, visited churches and adored the Middle Ages.
- **In 1854** Jones undertook his first artistic project, the illustration of a collection of fairy stories called *The Fairy Family*. In 1855 he visited northern France with William Morris to study cathedral architecture and was profoundly moved by **Fra Angelico's Coronation of the Virgin** in the Louvre. Jones discovered Thomas Malory's **Le Morte d'Arthur** which influenced and inspired him throughout his life.
- **In 1856** Morris founded the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* and invited Rossetti to contribute. Under **Rossetti's influence** Jones decided to

become an artist and Jones and Morris moved to Red Lion Square London and Jones was trained by Rossetti. When Burne-Jones decided to become an artist **he was untrained** and so he set about training himself by an extensive and intensive period of drawing under the guidance of Rossetti and by attending Leigh's School. Jones had an **extraordinary imagination** and his mind teemed with images inspired by his deep knowledge of love of medieval poetry. In these first few years he created a series of cartoons for stained glass at Bradford College and he decorated a cabinet with the *Prioress's Tale* from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

- **Also in 1856** Jones became engaged to **Georgiana 'Georgie' MacDonald** (1840-1920), the sister of one of his old school friends who was training to be an artist. The **MacDonald sisters** married a list of famous people, the artist Sir Edward **Poynter**, the businessman Alfred **Baldwin**, father of the future Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, and John **Kipling**, father of Rudyard Kipling. **Jones and Georgiana married in 1860** and moved into an 18<sup>th</sup> century house called the Grange in Fulham. They had **three children**, the eldest Philip became a portrait painter, the second son died shortly after birth and the third Margaret (1866-1953) married John Mackail, a friend of Morris, who was to become his biographer.
- **In 1857 Rossetti won a commission to decorate the inside of the Oxford Union building.** He asked Burne-Jones, Morris, Valentine Prinsep and J. R. Spencer Stanhope to assist. Unfortunately none of them understood fresco techniques and the oil paint they used was peeling from the walls before that had even finished. This group activity bonded the artists together and led to the second phase of Pre-Raphaelitism, in which **hard-edge colours and meticulous detail were superseded by rich dark colours and decorative patterning.** By the late 1850s Burne-Jones was a recognized figure in progressive London-based art circles. He became ill and during his recuperation at Little Holland House in the summer of 1858, he made friends with G. F. Watts and Alfred Tennyson. Ruskin, also, took an interest in him and described him as '**the most wonderful of all the PreRaphaelites ... inferior to Rossetti in depth—but beyond him in grace & sweetness**'.
- **In 1859** Burne-Jones made his first trip to Italy and fell in love with the Sieneese school. He was still influenced by Rossetti as can be seen in his 1860 works ***Sidonia von Bork*** and *Clara von Bork*.

## 1860s – BECOMES WELL KNOWN

- **In 1861** Morris founded **Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.** with Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown and Philip Webb as partners, together with Charles Faulkner and Peter Paul Marshall, the former of whom was a member of the Oxford Brotherhood, and the latter a friend of Brown and Rossetti. The firm received positive reviews for the work they exhibited at the 1862 International Exhibition in the Royal Horticultural Society, South Kensington (a site which is now the Natural History and Science Museums) and the business flourished. Its reputation was further enhanced by a commission to decorate **St James's Palace** and **the green dining room at South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert)**. In 1871 the firm was reorganised as Morris & Co. and Burne-Jones continued to contribute designs for **stained glass and tapestries** for the rest of his life. He also worked as an **illustrator and designed books** for Morris's Kelmscott Press (1891-1896).
- **From the 1860s onwards** Burne-Jones broke away from producing pictures with a moral story and became one of the early artists of the **Aesthetic Movement**. In this he broke with John Ruskin and the early Pre-Raphaelites. He wrote to a friend, '**I mean by a picture a beautiful, romantic dream of something that never was, never will be - in a light better than any light that ever shone - in a land no one can define or remember, only desire**'. His personal dream world of beauty and the rejection of scientific facts conflicted with the technology of the industrial revolution and he was much criticised.
- **In 1864** Burne-Jones was elected a member of the **Society of Painters in Water-Colours** (the Old Watercolour Society) and exhibited **The Merciful Knight** followed by many fine watercolours over the next six years.
- **In 1866** Mrs Cassavetti commissioned Burne-Jones to paint her daughter, **Maria Zambaco**, in **Cupid finding Psyche**, an introduction which led to their tragic affair.
- **In 1867 John Ruskin** pronounced on Burne-Jones's early career: '**He did not begin art early enough in boyhood**; and therefore, in spite of all his power and genius, his pictures were at first full of very visible faults, which he is gradually conquering'. Jones was conscious of this and improved his technique by drawing classical casts. His looseness of form continued to be part of his style and it influenced many young artists such as Walter Crane and Simeon Solomon.

## 1870s – AFFAIR, SCANDAL AND OUT OF FAVOUR

- **In 1870**, Burne-Jones resigned his membership of the Old Watercolour Society following a controversy over his painting ***Phyllis and Demophoön***. The features of Maria Zambaco were clearly recognizable in the barely draped Phyllis (as they are in several of Burne-Jones's finest works), and the undraped nakedness of Demophoön coupled with the suggestion of female sexual assertiveness offended Victorian sensibilities. Burne-Jones was asked to make a slight alteration, but instead "withdrew not only the picture from the walls, but himself from the Society." In the next seven years only two paintings were exhibited including ***Love among the Ruins*** (destroyed while being copied but reproduced in oils twenty years later). He continued painting and turned to oils producing the first of the *Briar Rose* series, *Laus Veneris*, the *Golden Stairs*, the *Pygmalion* series and the *Mirror of Venus*. He started work with the fine-art photographer Frederick Hollyer whose reproductions exposed his work to a wider audience.
- **The 1870s** were a terrible period for the Joneses. Following **poor reviews** in the press he stopped exhibiting although he continued painting and he had a **passionate affair** with the artist and model **Maria Zambaco** (1843-1914). She had inherited her father's fortune in 1858 and she and her two cousins were known as 'the Three Graces'. Zambaco led an independent life and travelled around unchaperoned while still unmarried. Their affair led to her trying to commit suicide by throwing herself in Regent's Canal. Georgiana developed a close **relationship with Morris** who wife **Jane had fallen** in love with **Rossetti**. They remained married and continued their close relationships for the rest of their lives. In 1880 Burne-Jones bought a holiday home in Rottingdean near Brighton which they later extended.
- **In 1877** the Grosvenor Gallery opened when the *Days of Creation*, *The Beguiling of Merlin* and the *Mirror of Venus* were shown. In the next few years he exhibited *Laus Veneris*, the *Chant d'Amour*, *Pan and Psyche*, the *Annunciation*, the second series of *Pygmalion and the Image*, *The Golden Stairs* (exhibited in 1880), *Wheel of Fortune* (1883), *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (1884), *The Briar Rose* and *The Story of Perseus*.

## 1880s – RISES TO FAME

- **In the 1880s** he received many honours and in **about 1885** started **hyphenating his name** to distinguish himself from all the other Joneses.
- **In 1885** he was elected an **Associate of the Royal Academy** and exhibited



(for the only time) at the Academy, showing *The Depths of the Sea*. He **formally resigned** his Associateship in 1893.

### **1890s – INTERNATIONALLY FAMOUS BUT THEN SUDDENLY OUT OF FASHION**

- In **1890** the second series of *The Legend of Briar Rose* was exhibited and won the widest admiration. The huge watercolour, *The Star of Bethlehem*, painted for the corporation of Birmingham, was exhibited in 1891.
- A long illness stopped his activity which resumed with more decorative pieces. Ill-health again interrupted the progress of his works, including the vast *Arthur in Avalon*.
- He was made a **baronet in 1894** which annoyed his socialist friends and his wife but was appreciated by his son Philip who had failed his degree at Oxford and was trying to break into high society. The same year he was commissioned to design sets and costumes for the Lyceum Theatre by Henry Irving. It was for *King Arthur* in which Irving and Ellen Terry starred. Burne-Jones was disappointed with the result and wrote 'I hate the stage, don't tell—but I do'. In the winter following his death a second exhibition of his works was held at the New Gallery, and an exhibition of his drawings (including some of the charmingly humorous sketches made for children) at the Burlington Fine Arts Club
- He was devastated by the **death of Morris in 1896** and **died** two years later in **1898**. He became the first artist to have a memorial service held at Westminster Abbey.
- By the early twentieth century he had become completely **out of fashion**. In 1933 there was a centenary exhibition of his work at the Tate Gallery opened by his nephew Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister. However, it was poorly attended and an unremarkable affair. In the **mid-1970s** his work started to be **reassessed** and a biography was published in 1975. Major exhibitions were held in 1989 (Barbican), 1997 (Tate) and 1998 (MoMA, Birmingham and Musée d'Orsay). His work is essentially Victorian but is now seen as **an important stepping stone** to twentieth century art in terms of its influence on international **Symbolism**, and as a stepping stone to the deeper **psychological and sexual insights of the twentieth century**.

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<http://preraphaelitesisterhood.com/sweet-georgie/> Georgiana Burne-Jones  
and her children



Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) and others, 1857, Oxford Union building

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) and others, 1857, Oxford Union building

- **In 1857 Dante Gabriel Rossetti**, one of the Pre-Raphaelites, **won a commission** to decorate the inside of the **Oxford Union library**. He asked Burne-Jones, William Morris, Valentine Prinsep and J. R. Spencer Stanhope to assist. Unfortunately none of them understood fresco techniques and the oil paint they used was peeling from the walls before that had even finished. The influential art critic John Ruskin described them as "**all the least bit crazy and very difficult to manage.**"
- The fresco is in very poor condition today and during the day the light coming through the skylights renders them virtually invisible.

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Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Lucretia Borgia*, 1860-1, Tate Britain



Giulio Romano (c. 1499-1546), *Portrait of Margherita Paleologo*, c. 1531, Royal Collection



Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Sidonia von Bork*, 1860, 33.3 x 17.1 cm, watercolour and gouache on paper, Tate Britain

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Sidonia von Bork*, 1860, 33.3 x 17.1 cm, watercolour and gouache on paper, Tate Britain

Giulio Romano (c. 1499-1546), *Portrait of Margherita Paleologo*, c. 1531, Royal Collection. It has been proposed that the sitter was Isabella d'Este (1474-1539) although she was 50 at the time the portrait could have been painted. The unusual knot pattern was invented for Isabella d'Este and can be seen in a portrait of her by Titian.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Lucretia Borgia*, 1860-1, Tate Britain

- In 1859 Burne-Jones made his first trip to Italy and fell in love with the **Sieneese school**. He was still influenced by Rossetti as can be seen in his 1860 works ***Sidonia von Bork*** and *Clara von Bork*.
- Sidonia von Bork is the main character in **Wilhelm Meinhold's** gothic romance '**Sidonia the Sorceress**', translated by **Oscar Wilde's mother Lady Wilde** and published in **1849**. The novel tells of the evil crimes of Sidonia whose beauty entraps everyone she sees. She bewitches the whole of the ruling house of Pomerania either killing her victims or rendering them impotent and the story ends when she is burned as a witch at the age of 80.
- The details in this painting are taken from the novel but the **costume is based on *Portrait of Margherita Paleologo*** at the time of her marriage to Federico Gonzaga, 1st Duke of Mantua. It is by Giulio Romano and is in the Royal Collection and was on view at Hampton Court where it was seen by Burne-Joneses and Rossettis when they visited together.

- The painting is part of their **interest in the *femme fatale*** and **witches** and the shocking encouraged by the esoteric tastes of their friends Swinburne and Simeon Solomon.

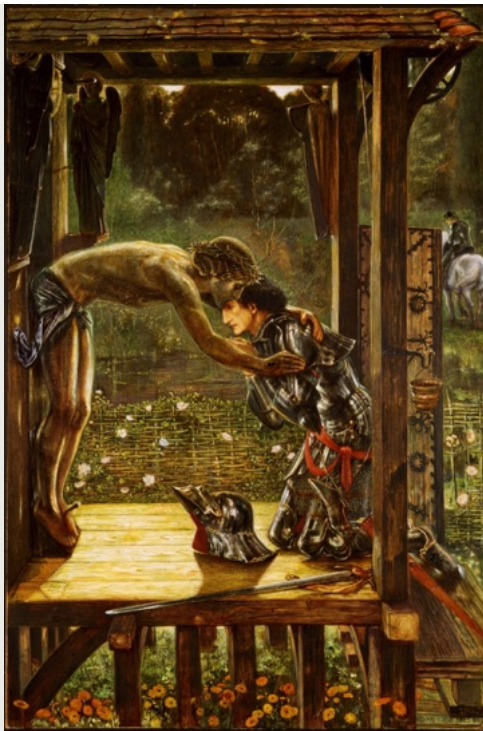
## **NOTES**

- **Rossetti was working on his painting of Lucretia Borgia** at the same time and both figures resemble **Fanny Cornforth** (1835-1909, born Sarah Cox) in their blatant sensuality. Cornforth was Rossetti model and mistress and later housekeeper. Her coarse accent and lack of education shocked Rossetti's friends and family. She gained weight during their relationship and his pet name for her was "My Dear Elephant" and she called him "Rhino".

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- See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_Burne-Jones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Burne-Jones)
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Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Merciful Knight*, 1863, watercolour with bodycolour on paper, 101.4 x 58.6 cm, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery



Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Merciful Knight*, 1863, watercolour with bodycolour on paper, 101.4 x 58.6 cm, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery

- **In 1864** Burne-Jones was elected a member of the Society of Painters in Water-Colours and exhibited *The Merciful Knight* followed by many fine watercolours over the next six years.
- This picture, *The Merciful Knight*, shows the **miracle** which is said to have happened to a **Florentine knight, St John Gualberto**, after he had **spared the life** of his **brother's murderer**. According to the legend, as the knight was **praying** at a way-side shrine, the **wooden figure of Christ** bowed down from his cross and **embraced the knight**, as a reward for his act of forgiveness.
- Despite the fact that *The Merciful Knight* was based on a story that was appealing to many Victorians, its critical reception was not favourable. Ignoring the picture's content, reviewers found fault with Burne-Jones' presentation of it, the *Art Journal* describing it as '**absolutely abhorrent**', the *Spectator* condemning its '**affectation of ungainliness ... and grimace**'. The *Times* complained that '**Mr Jones dwells and works in the 14th and 15th centuries. ... His figures are queerly drawn, stand in contorted attitude, [and] show neither bone, muscle nor curvature of flesh under their robes, while the accessories display utter contempt for keeping or probability**'.
- From the 1860s onwards Burne-Jones broke away from producing pictures with a moral story and became one of the early artists of the Aesthetic Movement. In this he broke with John Ruskin and the early Pre-Raphaelites. He wrote to a

friend, 'I mean by a picture a beautiful, romantic dream of something that never was, never will be - in a light better than any light that ever shone - in a land no one can define or remember, only desire'. His personal dream world of beauty and the rejection of scientific facts conflicted with the technology of the industrial revolution and he was much criticised. The Aesthetic Movement believed in producing 'art for art's sake' rather than using art to make a moral or political point. It has been linked to Symbolism and a personal vision or dream but in Britain artists' of the Aesthetic Movement aimed to produce beauty.

- Despite its poor reception, *The Merciful Knight* and Burne-Jones' other exhibits **attracted important patrons**, and **won him the appreciation of an even younger generation**, who became later his devoted followers. As one of them, **Walter Crane (1845-1915)** remembered the effect Burne-Jones' works had made on him: 'The curtain had been lifted, and we had **a glimpse into a magic world of romance and pictured poetry** ... a twilight of dark mysterious woodlands, haunted streams, meads of deep green starred with burning flowers, veiled in a dim and mystic light.'

## NOTES

- Some of the members of the Old Watercolour Society described it as 'papist' but such accusations had become outdated. In 1864, the same year when *The Merciful Knight* was exhibited, Newman's *Apologia*, his account of the history of the Oxford Movement and his conversion to Rome, was published and received with surprising impartiality. *Apologia* was described as a book which did the most 'to make Protestant Englishmen understand that Roman Catholic Priests might be human and English and large-hearted'.
- This **mystic, often dreamy character** became maybe the most decisive feature of Burne-Jones' mature works remaining dominant even when the medieval character was wearing off, giving way to a classical ideal. While the influence of medieval art and literature was naturally favourable to religious subjects and themes taken from Christian legends, the classical revival brought the dominance of mythological themes in Burne-Jones' art. Accordingly, as his sources of inspiration changed, so did his preference of subject matter, **his mythological paintings far outnumbering the Biblical ones from the 1870s.**" (Éva Péteri, *Victorian Approaches to Religion as Reflected in the Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 121-22)

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'Morris room' or the 'Green Dining Room', opened 1868, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

'Morris room' or the 'Green Dining Room', opened 1868, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

- In 1861 **Morris founded Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. with Rossetti, Burne-Jones** and others (Ford Madox Brown and Philip Webb as partners, together with Charles Faulkner and Peter Paul Marshall, the former of whom was a member of the Oxford Brotherhood, and the latter a friend of Brown and Rossetti).
- The firm received positive reviews for the work they exhibited at the 1862 International Exhibition in the Royal Horticultural Society, South Kensington and the business flourished. Its reputation was further enhanced by a commission to decorate St James's Palace and this project, to decorate the dining room at South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert). The stained glass windows were designed by Burne-Jones and the decoration and ceiling by William Morris and the architect Philip Webb
- In 1871 the firm was **reorganised as Morris & Co.** and Burne-Jones continued to contribute designs for stained glass and tapestries for the rest of his life. He also worked as an illustrator and designed books for Morris's Kelmscott Press (1891-1896).

## NOTES

- "The work of William Morris's company, **Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.**, became **fashionable** following the 1862 International Exhibition, which had led

to a range of decorating jobs for people belonging to its circle of contacts. Within a few years the company had secured **two prestigious London commissions**: to decorate two rooms **at St James's Palace**, and the **West Dining Room of the South Kensington Museum** (renamed the V&A in 1899). Influenced by the Gothic Revival and medieval style, **William Morris** and his collaborators (chiefly architect **Philip Webb** and painter **Edward Burne-Jones**) created a restful, blue-green green scheme for one of three new spaces the Museum had dedicated to refreshments. What became known as the 'Green Dining Room' featured a number of the organic patterns that would eventually make Morris's name as a designer." (V&A website).

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Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898),  
*Portrait of Maria Zambaco with  
Cupid*, 1870, watercolour, 76.3 × 55  
cm, Clemens-Sels-Museum, Neuss



Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), *Portrait of Maria Zambaco with Cupid*, 1870, watercolour, 76.3 × 55 cm, Clemens-Sels-Museum, Neuss

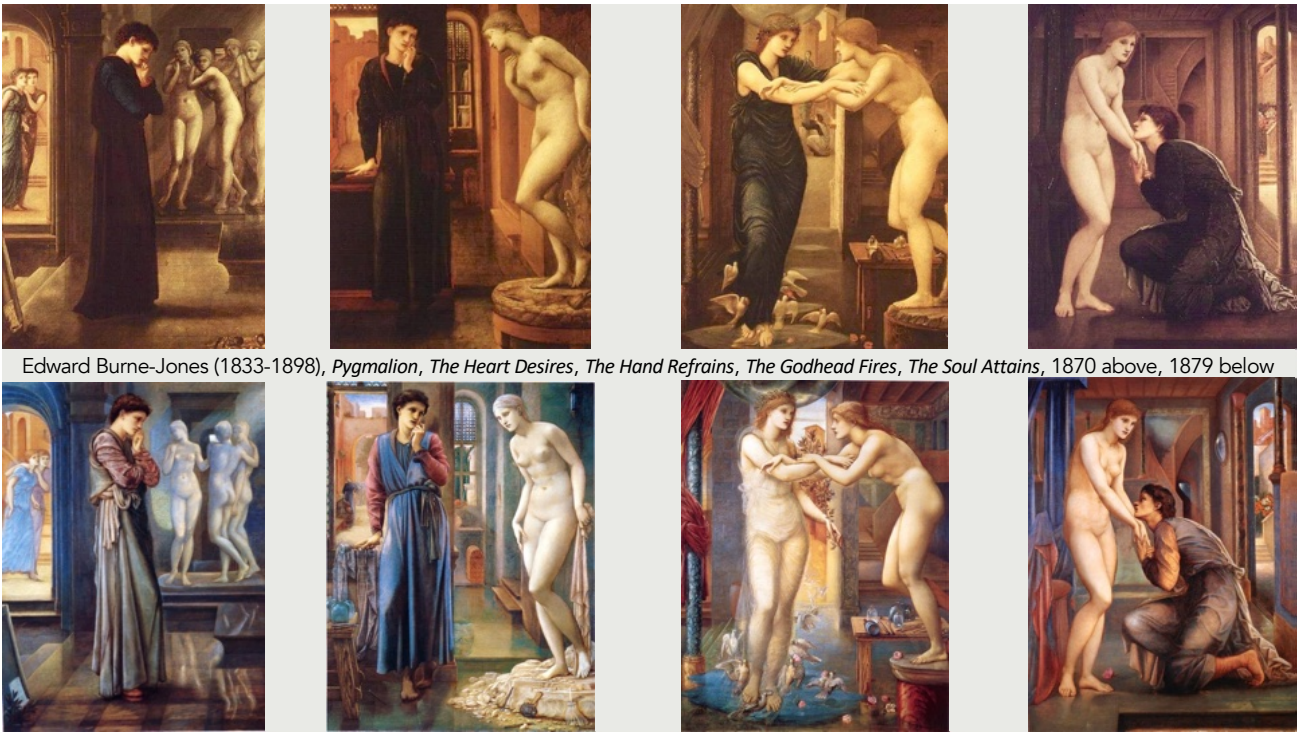
- **In 1866**, Mrs Euphrosyne Cassavetti commissioned Burne-Jones to paint her daughter, **Maria Zambaco** (née Cassavetti, pronounced 'Zam-barko'), in ***Cupid finding Psyche***, an introduction which led to their tragic affair.
- Maria Zambaco (1843, 1914, born Marie Terpsithea Cassavetti) was a British artist and model of Greek descent who was favoured as a model by the Pre-Raphaelites. She was the daughter of a very wealthy Greek merchant (Demetrios Cassavetti and niece of the Greek consul and patron Alexander Ionides).
- Maria and her cousins (**Marie Spartali Stillman and Aglaia Coronio**) were known collectively among friends as "**the Three Graces**", after the Charites of Greek mythology. **After inheriting her father's fortune in 1858**, she was able to lead a more independent life and was **known to go unchaperoned** while still unmarried.
- Maria dedicated herself to art, and studied at the Slade School (under Alphonse Legros) and in the studio of Auguste Rodin in Paris. She worked as a sculptor in the 1880s and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1887 and at the 1889 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in London as well as at the Paris Salon.
- In 1860, her first admirer, George du Maurier, called her '**rude and unapproachable but of great talent and a really wonderful beauty**'. She married **Dr Zambaco** in 1860, initially living with him **in France** where she had

a son and a daughter. The marriage was not a success and she moved **back to** live with her mother in London in **1866**.

- **Which is when she met Burne-Jones**, and they had an affair which lasted until at least January 1869 (some say 1872) and they stayed in contact after. In **1869**, Edward Burne-Jones attempted to **leave his wife** for her, which caused a **great scandal because it became public**. Maria entreated him to **commit suicide** with her by **laudanum overdose** by the canal in **Little Venice** and the police had to be called. Maria and Burne-Jones ran off together, but he was taken ill at Dover, en route for France, after which he returned to his wife, Georgiana. After they broke up, Maria continued to appear in Burne-Jones' paintings as a sorceress or a temptress, such as his last major work of her, ***The Beguiling of Merlin***, and the controversial ***Phyllis and Demophoön***, which we see later. Friends of the Burne-Jones family, such as Rosalind Howard cut Maria socially.

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Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Pygmalion, The Heart Desires, The Hand Refrains, The Godhead Fires, The Soul Attains*, 1870 above, 1879 below

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Pygmalion, First Series, The Heart Desires, The Hand Refrains, The Godhead Fires, The Soul Attains*, 1868-70 and 1875-79, Lord Lloyd Webber

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Pygmalion, Second Series, The Heart Desires, The Hand Refrains, The Godhead Fires, The Soul Attains*, 1875-78, 99 × 76.3 cm, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery

- Mrs Cassavetti also commissioned this entire series of Pygmalion paintings.
- The story of **Pygmalion** comes from **Ovid's Metamorphoses**. Pygmalion decides to live a celibate life as a sculptor as he is appalled by the way debauched lifestyle of the women he knew. He dream of an ideal partner is realised in stone and his love of the **statue brings it to life**. The story was the inspiration for **George Bernard Shaw's play Pygmalion** and later for the musical and film **My Fair Lady**.
- The first series was painted between 1868 and 1870, when **Burne-Jones' affair with his pupil, the painter Maria Zambaco**, was at its height. Although Burne-Jones thought he already had the perfect woman, in his wife Georgie, he was unable to prevent himself from longing for his model and muse, Maria, in a violent internal conflict.
- Burne-Jones was very modern in his depiction of the human form. This is the first painting we have seen today with a man and a woman. As we see the women had masculine traits and the men female traits. This gender-fluid attitude brought him much criticism and charges of effeminacy.

- In the second series painted between 1875 and 1879 the human forms in his pictures were said to be such that '**every man who respects his manhood and every woman who values her honour must regard with disgust**'. John Ruskin wrote to G. F. Watts, both criticised for a '**lack of virility**', that Burn-Jones's imagined worlds meant that he refused to confront the harsh reality of the world **making him in essence a woman**. Even his supporters accepted the charge but defended him as someone who appreciated 'delicate beauty'. **Rudyard Kipling**, his supporter and his wife's nephew, went as far as saying that 'His work was the least part of him' and praised the man, his power, strength, sympathy and jests.

## NOTES

- The second series of Pygmalion is much more accomplished and lighter in tone. It is regarded as one of the artist's most important works.
  - **In *The Heart Desires*** Pygmalion is seen pondering his lonely life, having chosen to remain celibate in disgust at what he saw as the debauched lifestyles of the local women. The statues behind him (in emulation of the *Three Graces*) echo the curious women peering in through his doorway. All five seem fluid, languorous and unself-conscious. Pygmalion, looking above the proliferation of ankles, thighs and buttocks reflected on the floor and pedestal in front of him, is pondering his next creation. His gaze ignores the women around him as he sees in his mind a statue of the perfect female
  - **In *The Hand Refrains*** Pygmalion's perfect woman is revealed. Playing God, he has created woman and now stands back to admire her. He has created her nude despite his contempt for local women and so has now become a voyeur.
  - **In *The Godhead Fires*** Pygmalion prays to Aphrodite for a wife as perfect as his statue and the goddess brings the statue to life.
  - **In *The Soul Attains*** Pygmalion returns home and humbles himself at the feet of his stature, now brought to life.
- **In 1877** the Grosvenor Gallery opened when the *Days of Creation*, *The Beguiling of Merlin* and the *Mirror of Venus* were shown. In the next few years he exhibited *Laus Veneris*, the *Chant d'Amour*, *Pan and Psyche*, the *Annunciation*, **the second series of *Pygmalion and the Image***, *The Golden Stairs* (exhibited in 1880), *Wheel of Fortune* (1883), *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (1884), *The Briar Rose* and *The Story of Perseus*.

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Edward Burne-Jones  
(1833-1898), *The Tree  
of Forgiveness*, 1882,  
Lady Lever Art Gallery



Edward Burne-Jones  
(1833-1898), *Phyllis and  
Demophoön*, 1870,  
watercolour

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Phyllis and Demophoön*, 1870

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Tree of Forgiveness*, 1882, Lady Lever Art Gallery

- In 1870, this work, ***Phyllis and Demophoön*** (pronounced 'demofoon') led to Burne-Jones **resigning** his membership of the Old Water-Colour Society (founded 1804, it later became the Royal Watercolour Society). It caused a mighty controversy as the features of his lover Maria Zambaco were clearly recognisable in the barely draped Phyllis (as they are in several of Burne-Jones's finest works), coupled with the exposed genitals of Demophoön combined with the suggestion of female sexual assertiveness were together too much for Victorian sensibilities.
- In the story, Phyllis, Queen of Thrace falls in love with Demophoön son of Theseus. He departs but promises to return in six months. When he fails to return she hangs herself and is turned into an almond tree by the gods. When he returns she emerges from the tree to forgive her lover.
- (CLICK) Twelve years later Burne-Jones reworked the painting, covering Demophoön but exposing Phyllis. It was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery and quickly purchased. It caused no controversy this time round perhaps because of the wisp of drapery which was originally a stark for Phyllis which he later removed from her. *The Times* still found the picture "**a strange one, its effect repellent in the extreme.**" *The Art Journal* considered the pose and musculature of the bodies exaggerated, giving the composition "**an air of**



**strained and unnatural action, which greatly mars its effect.**" Although a woman emerging from a tree is bound to create some strain. All the critics praised the excellence of the almond blossom and the colour harmonies.

## NOTES

- Burne-Jones was asked to make a slight alteration, but instead "**withdrew not only the picture from the walls, but himself from the Society.**" In the next seven years only two paintings were exhibited including ***Love among the Ruins*** (destroyed by a cleaner but reproduced in oils twenty years later). He continued painting and turned to oils producing the first of the *Briar Rose* series, *Laus Veneris*, the *Golden Stairs*, the *Pygmalion* series and the *Mirror of Venus*. He started work with the fine-art photographer Frederick Hollyer whose reproductions exposed his work to a wider audience.
- "The Lady Lever Art Gallery oil painting dates from 1882 but Burne-Jones had painted this subject earlier. In 1870 he exhibited a large watercolour version at the Old Water-Colour Society. For the most part the two works are very close. Both combine the High Renaissance ideal of painting the human figure from the nude with a Pre-Raphaelite approach to decorative detail. The arrangement of the figures, and in particular the way in which Phyllis clasps her hands around Demophoön, is also similar. However, when the watercolour version was exhibited in 1870 it was greeted with some controversy since **Demophoön was completely naked**. In the oil version drapery is used to discreetly cover him." (Lady Lever Art Gallery website)

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Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898),  
*Laus Veneris (In Praise of Venus)*,  
 1873-78, 122 ×  
 183 cm, Laing Art  
 Gallery

Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), *Laus Veneris (In Praise of Venus)*, 1873-78, 122 × 183 cm, Laing Art Gallery

- In 1866, Burne-Jones's friend, the poet **Algernon Charles Swinburne**, published a **poem called *Laus Veneris*** ('in praise of Venus'). The poem is based on the theme of Tannhauser. **A young knight called Tannhauser falls in love with Venus** and lives with her until he becomes filled with remorse. He escapes seduction and goes to Rome to ask the **Pope's forgiveness**. The Pope tells the knight that it is **impossible** for him to forgive, as impossible as his **papal staff blossoming**. **Three days after** Tannhauser returns to Vienna, **the Pope's staff blossoms**, but **Tannhauser never hears** of this miracle and spends his **life in damnation**. The poem concerns Tannhauser's enslavement to love and his **addiction to physical love and sensuality** reflecting the idea of **Venus's dangerous beauty** and by implication the **danger men face** of being **seduced and enslaved by beautiful women—the femme fatale**.
- **The theme must have resonated with Burne-Jones and his affair with Maria Zambuco. The affair meant that the 1870s** were a terrible period for the Joneses and following **poor reviews** in the press he stopped exhibiting although he continued painting.
- Burne-Jones's wife Georgiana developed a close **relationship with William Morris** who wife **Jane had fallen** in love with Dante Gabriel **Rossetti**. The Burne-Jones remained married and continued their close relationships for the rest of their lives. In 1880 Burne-Jones bought a holiday home in Rottingdean

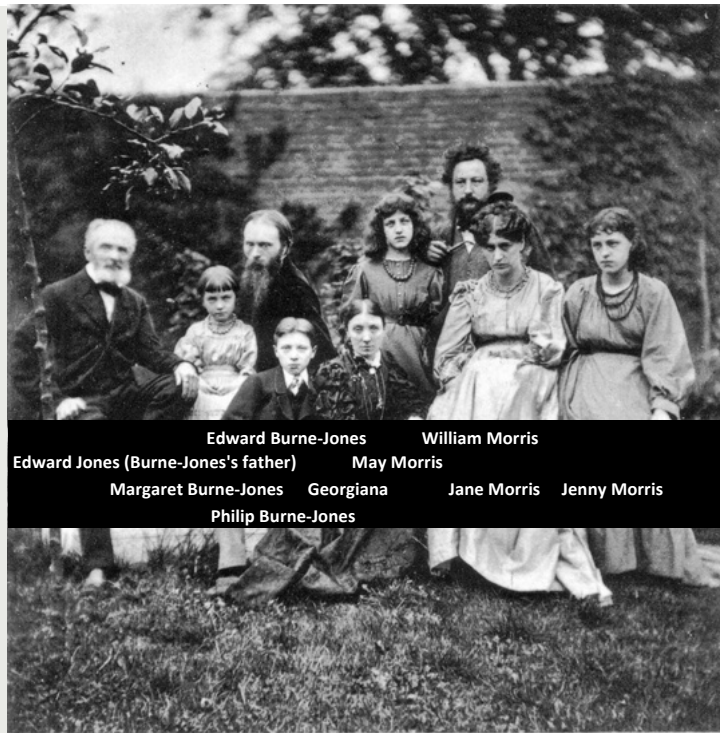
near Brighton which they later extended.

## NOTES

- This scene appears in Swinburne's description:
  - *Knights gather, riding sharp for cold; I know  
The ways and woods are strangled with the snow;  
And with short song the maidens spin and sit  
Until Christ's birthnight, lily-like, arow.*
- In the poem Venus is sad and lonely and we see on the wall a tapestry which depicts Venus in her chariot and love of olden times. Other artists, such as the famous portrait painter John Collier (1850-1934) fail to depict the psychological complexity.
- **The *femme fatale*** is also known as a man eater or in American films a vamp and is associated with vampires and witches who seduce men through enchantment or hypnosis.
- Tannhäuser was a German poet and singer of love songs. Historically, his biography is obscure beyond the poetry, which dates between 1245 and 1265. He later became associated with the legendary account of his journey to Venusberg a fifteenth century story associated with a rising interest in witchcraft.

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The families of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, photographed by Frederick Hollyer (1837-1933) in 1874 in the garden at The Grange, Burne-Jones's home in Fulham

The families of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, photographed by Frederick Hollyer (1837-1933) in 1874 in the garden at The Grange, Burne-Jones's home in Fulham.

**Left to right: Edward Jones (Burne-Jones's father), Margaret Burne-Jones, Edward Burne-Jones, Philip Burne-Jones, Georgiana Burne-Jones, May Morris, William Morris, Jane Morris, and Jenny Morris,** platinotype photograph, 14 x 13.1 cm.

- This family photograph taken in 1874 documents a complex set of relationships. It was taken in **Burne-Jones garden in Fulham** with his **father on the left and William Morris on the right**. Burne-Jones sits with his **two children, Margaret and Philip and his wife Georgiana**. A few years previously he had attempted to leave his wife for his lover Maria Zambaco who had suggested a suicide pact. During the difficult period **Georgiana had developed a close relationship with William Morris whose wife, Jane had fallen in love with Dante Gabriel Rossetti**. Morris and Georgiana were in love and his poetry of the period suggests he may have asked her to leave Burne-Jones but they stayed together.
- **The affair between Edward Burne-Jones and Zambaco continued on and off for years** and during this difficult period Georgiana wrote to a friend, 'Dearest Rosalind, be hard on no one in this matter, and exalt no one, and may we all come through it at last. I know one thing, and that is that there is enough love between Edward and me to last out a long life if it is given us'.

## **NOTES**

- Another close friend was George Eliot, whom Georgiana met in February 1868. The self-educated novelist encouraged her young friend to make up for her lack of education, and Georgiana studied to improve her scant French and German, and took Latin lessons.
- A platinotype photograph provides the greatest tonal range of any chemically developed printing method because the platinum (or often palladium) sits on the surface of the paper rather than in an emulsion as with silver. Platinotype printing ended in 1914 as the platinum was needed to manufacture explosives during WWI.



Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898),  
The Beguiling of Merlin, 1874, 186 × 111 cm,  
Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight

Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), *The Beguiling of Merlin*, 1872-77, 186 × 111 cm, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight

- After they broke up in 1869 (some say 1872), **Maria Zambaco** (1843-1914, pronounced 'Zam-bako') continued to appear in Burne-Jones' paintings as a sorceress or a temptress, such as this, his last major work of her, ***The Beguiling of Merlin*** in which she modelled for the head of Nimue (pronounced 'nee-moo-eh').
- The painting depicts a scene from the Arthurian legend about **the infatuation of Merlin** with the Lady of the Lake, Nimue. **Merlin is shown trapped**, helpless in a hawthorn bush as Nimue reads from a book of spells.
- If we project Burne-jones into the roles he presents into his paintings he sees himself as seduced by the wiles of a temptress rather than an adult making a decision about his life.

## NOTES

- The work was commissioned from Burne-Jones by **Frederick Richards Leyland**, a Liverpool ship-owner and art-collector, in the late 1860s. After a false start blamed on 'poor materials', Burne-Jones began work on the painting proper in 1873, finishing the body of the work by the end of 1874; however, the painting was not first exhibited until 1877 at the opening exhibition of the **Grosvenor Gallery** in London.
- *The Beguiling of Merlin* was purchased by Lord Leverhulme in 1918 and

remains in the Lady Lever Art Gallery.

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Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), *The Mill*, 1882, 91 × 197 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum

Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), *The Mill*, 1870-1882, 91 × 197 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum

- *The Mill* is a vague and **mysterious painting with no particular meaning**. It incorporates styles from the **Aesthetic Movement** and the Renaissance. In the painting, three women wearing simple, Renaissance-style aesthetic dresses are dancing in a garden on a summer evening. On the right of the dancing women, a musician of an indiscernible gender is standing under a loggia. A **mill pond** can be seen behind the women. On the other side of the pond, there are **several nude men**, who are presumably swimming. In the background is an **unspecific landscape** consisting of various designs and types of architecture.

## NOTES

- The dancing women in the painting were modelled upon women known to Burne-Jones personally: from left to right,
  - Aglaia Coronio,
  - Marie Stillman,
  - **Maria Zambaco**
- The three were known among friends as '**the Three Graces**'. Aglaia was the daughter of Constantine Ionides, who, like Burne-Jones, was interested in art. She stabbed herself in the neck and died in 1906, the day after the death of her daughter.
- Marie was a painter, and Maria was Ionides' granddaughter. When he started



the work Marie was still his mistress.

- Shortly after its completion, the painting was displayed at an exhibition at the **Grosvenor Gallery**.
- There are female figures dancing to a tambourine in *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government*, a mural painted by Italian Renaissance artist Ambrogio Lorenzetti between 1338 and 1340, which may have inspired Burne-Jones.

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Edward Coley Burne-Jones (1833–1898), *The Golden Stairs*, 1880, 269.2 × 116.8 cm, Tate



Edward Coley Burne-Jones (1833–1898), *The Golden Stairs*, 1880, 269.2 × 116.8 cm, Tate

- 'This painting epitomises Burne-Jones's interest in **investigating a mood** rather than telling a story. He deliberately made his pictures **enigmatic** and the meaning of this painting has provoked much debate. One view is that the **18 women are spirits** in an enchanted dream. The painting might also be **purely decorative**, conveying the idea of endless movement. The underlying idea, popularised in the 1870s by the critic Walter Pater, is that '**all art constantly aspires to the condition of music**.' (Tate display caption)
- It was designed in 1872, the year after he had been inspired by his visit to Italy. He began the canvas in 1876 and it was shown in the Grosvenor Gallery in 1880 after he rushed to complete it on time. Burne-Jones had been inspired by Piero della Francesca which shows in his light golden flesh tones, broad foreheads, small eyes and their fixed look.
- **The bodies were studied from professional models** such as Antonia Caiva and Bessie Keene and the faces are likenesses of women in his family or friends' families. **Burne-Jones's daughter Margaret is in profile at the top, William Morris's daughter May faces us two-thirds of the way down, The daughter of his patron Frances Graham is at the bottom holding cymbals, behind her is her close friend Mary Gladstone, daughter of W. E. Gladstone, leader of the Liberal Party. Others include Laura Tennant, Mary Stuart Wortly, later Lady Lovelace, and the actress Edith Gellibrand (stage name Chester). Ironically,**

after all this trouble finding models critics complained that all the heads looked as if they were from the same model.

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Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Annunciation*, 1882, stained-glass window, Epiphany Chapel, Winchester Cathedral



Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Annunciation*, 1882, stained-glass window, Epiphany Chapel, Winchester Cathedral

- Rossetti had a contract with Powell's Glass Works to design stained glass windows and he introduced Burne-Jones to them, he began his work as a stained glass artist. Burne-Jones stayed at Powell's from 1857 until 1861, when Morris formed the business of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company, decorating rooms and the furniture in the Gothic Revival style. It was during this period that **Burne-Jones became the firm's principal designer of stained glass**, producing more than **five hundred individual figure subjects**.

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Illustrated London News  
"disgust ... morbid figures ...  
the result of their weak and  
over-wrought physique"

The Magazine of Art  
"Burne-Jones's men were  
effeminate"

Edward Burne-Jones, *The  
Wheel of Fortune*, 1883,  
Musée d'Orsay



Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Wheel of Fortune*, 1875-83, 199 × 100 cm, Musée d'Orsay

- Said by his son to have been Burne-Jones's particular favourite among his finished oil paintings, *The Wheel of Fortune* has always been considered one of his **most powerful and successful compositions**.
- The painting raises **questions about progress** or more accurately a denial of progress. **Progress was the byword** of Victorian Britain and the **growth of Empire** and the enormous number of technical developments and **scientific discoveries** underpinned a belief in a future of continual progress.
- **Burne-Jones was anti-science** and this painting could be seen as his view of the reality of life. The three male figures are a slave, a king and a poet and all three are treated alike by the wheel of fortune. Anyone can rise and anyone can fall at any time for unexpected and unpredictable reasons.
- 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'**. His figures are criticised as being effeminate, a criticism that haunted him throughout his artistic career and a damning criticism in Victorian England.

## NOTES

- Ancient Roman and medieval writers, not least Chaucer, understood fate was random. Chaucer wrote in *The Monk's Tale*,

Thus kan Fortune hir wheel governe and gye  
And out of joye brynge men to sorwe.  
(And thus does Fortune's wheel turn treacherously  
And out of happiness bring men to sorrow.)

- The Rota Fortunae — Wheel of Fortune — was so overused an image that, by Shakespeare's time, it furnished material for comedy (Pistol and Fluellen discuss it in *Henry V*).
- **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 thought 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).
- 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.

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Edward Burne-Jones,  
*King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*,  
1884, Tate Britain

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, 1884, Tate Britain

- This is the painting that reinstated Burne-Jones's career and established him as a famous international artist.
- It is *King Cophetua* (pronounced *coe-FET-you-ah*) and the *Beggar Maid* which was exhibited at the **Grosvenor Gallery**.
- It became Burne-Jones's greatest success of the 1880s for its technical execution and its themes of power and wealth overborne by beauty and simplicity.
- The painting tells the story of prince Cophetua and his love for the beggar Penelophon. Despite his power and wealth he is helplessly in love before the beauty of the poor, innocent beggar maid.
- It was heralded as the '**picture of the year**' by *The Art Journal* and *The Times* wrote, '*not only the finest work Mr Burne-Jones has ever painted, but one of the finest pictures ever painted by an Englishman*'.
- The painting was **exhibited in France** in 1889, where its popularity earned Burne-Jones the **Legion of Honour** and began a **vogue for his work**. It was during the 1890s that his international reputation was at its height. He was an important influence on the French symbolists but their love affair with his work quickly ended as their elitist approach was incompatible with Burne-Jones's decorative work for the 'masses'. He lived long enough to see his reputation fading in the last few years of his life.



## **NOTES**

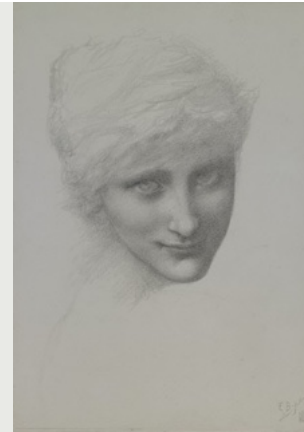
- The tale was familiar to Burne-Jones through an Elizabethan ballad published in Bishop Thomas Percy's 1765 *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* and the sixteen-line poem *The Beggar Maid* by Alfred Tennyson.
- The artist's wife Georgiana Burne-Jones felt '*this picture contained more of Edward's own qualities than any other he did.*'

## **REFERENCES**

See

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King\\_Cophetua\\_and\\_the\\_Beggar\\_Maid\\_\(painting\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Cophetua_and_the_Beggar_Maid_(painting))  
)

Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898),  
*The Depths of the Sea*, 1887,  
watercolour and gouache on wove  
paper mounted on panel, 197 x 76  
cm, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard



Study of the mermaid's head  
for 'The Depths of the Sea',  
Lady Lever Art Gallery

Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), *The Depths of the Sea*, 1887, watercolour and gouache on wove paper mounted on panel, 197 x 76 cm, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard. Replica of oil painting (private collection) finished in 1886 and exhibited at the Royal Academy that same year.

Study of the mermaid's head for 'The Depths of the Sea', Lady Lever Art Gallery

- A smiling mermaid pulls a naked young man to the bottom of the sea. But **what is the meaning** of the painting? **Has he been drowned** by the mermaid or did **he willingly embrace her**? Burne-Jones intended the painting to be '**suggestive**' and '**indefinite**'. Is it an **investigation of desire, fear and fatal attraction**. Is the mermaid and example of the **femme fatale**.
- Burne-Jones wanted to ensure the underwater figures were painted accurately so he borrowed a tank from a friend, Henry Holliday, and filled it with tinted water.
- Also at the Tate exhibition was a beautiful study drawing for the mermaid in the Depths of the Sea. It is the face of Laura Tennant, wife of Alfred Lyttleton, who died in childbirth in 1886 while the oil painting was being painted. Burne-Jones told Alfred 'I am painting a scene in Laura's previous existence.' Laura Lyttleton was a young beauty, member of the Souls and a noted heartbreaker. Georgie Burne-Jones wrote of her in her husband's biography: "Laura, the daughter of Sir Charles Tennant: in our house she so fascinated us all that we called her 'The Siren'".
- Burne-Jones was an influence on the **Symbolists**. Symbolism was a reaction

against realism and its attempt to represent reality in its gritty particularity including elevating the humble and the ordinary over the ideal. Symbolism was a reaction in favour of spirituality, the imagination, and dreams and its symbolism was intensely personal, private, obscure and ambiguous.

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Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Rock of Doom*, 1884-5, 155 x 130 cm, The Perseus Cycle, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Rock of Doom*, 1884-5, 155 x 130 cm, *The Perseus Cycle*, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

- **The Perseus Cycle** is based on a number of Greek myths. Essentially it is a heroic tale of knight-errantry and the triumph of good over evil. Perseus, son of the God Zeus is sent to rescue the beautiful Andromeda and kill the Gorgon Medusa.
- It is a series of large oil paintings **commissioned in 1875** for the **London home** of the British statesman and arts patron **Arthur Balfour** (1848-1930). Burne-Jones worked on the series **for ten years, but never completed** all the paintings due to ill health.
- **In the 1880s** he received many honours and in **about 1885** started hyphenating his name to distinguish himself from all the other Joneses.
- **In 1885** he was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy and exhibited (for the only time) at the Academy, showing *The Depths of the Sea*. He formally resigned his Associateship in 1893.

## NOTES

- Perseus kills the Medusa (one of the three Gorgon sisters) by only looking at in the reflection of his shield. On his return flight to Seriphos Perseus discovers Andromeda chained to a rock. Her mother Cassiopeia had aroused the wrath of the sea god Poseidon by insulting the Nereids, and the flooding of their island could only be stopped by the sacrifice of Andromeda to the sea monster

Cetus (related to the Greek word for whale). Perseus has the head of the dead Medusa in the sack as its gaze will still turn people to stone. He is barefoot and his phallic sword hangs from his waist.

- The Perseus series is based on a number of Greek myths. Essentially it is a heroic tale of knight-errantry and the triumph of good over evil. Perseus, son of the God Zeus is sent to rescue the beautiful Andromeda and kill the Gorgon Medusa. The legend has been popular in art since antiquity. Rubens, Titian and Delacroix all painted aspects of it. Burne-Jones depicts the main episodes to form a coherent and engaging narrative.
- His general working method was to make various studies for parts of each scene using watercolour, then to assemble those into a full-size study painted using bodycolour (gouache) on paper. The **series of studies was eventually completed**, and is now exhibited in the Baring Room of the **Southampton City Art Gallery**, where it gives the best impression as to how the finished series might have looked. The series **starts** with *The Call of Perseus* (1877), followed by *Perseus and the Graiae* (1877-80), *Perseus and the Sea Nymphs* (1877), *The Finding of Medusa* (1882), *The Death of Medusa I* (1882), *The Death of Medusa II* (1881-2), *Atlas Turned to Stone* (1878), *Perseus and Andromeda* (1876), ***The Rock of Doom\**** (1884-5), the ninth painting above, ***The Doom Fulfilled\**** (1888) and ***The Baleful Head\**** (1885). Because of ill health the final series in oils was never completed and the completed canvases (indicated with an asterisk) are now on display in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

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Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Doom Fulfilled*, 1888, 153.8 x 138.4 cm, *The Perseus Cycle*, Southampton City Art Gallery

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Doom Fulfilled*, 1877, 153.8 x 138.4 cm, *The Perseus Cycle*, Southampton City Art Gallery

- Another painting in the Perseus Cycle painted some years earlier and now in the Southampton Art Gallery.
- In this picture *The Doom Fulfilled* **Perseus frees Andromeda and does battle with the serpentine sea monster**. The Cetus is sometimes alleged to be fifty foot long but here is shown as a giant anaconda. Surprisingly it is the same colour as Perseus's armour. Is Burne-Jones indicating that both Perseus and the monster are similar in that they are fighting for ownership of Andromeda?
- In one version Perseus slays the monster by driving a sword into its back, in another by showing it the head of Medusa. Andromeda looks on apparently calmly

## REFERENCES

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Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Baleful Head*, 1885, 153.7 x 129 cm, *The Perseus Cycle*, Southampton City Art Gallery



Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Baleful Head*, 1885, 153.7 x 129 cm, *The Perseus Cycle*, Southampton City Art Gallery

- In order to convince Andromeda that he is the son of Zeus and claim her hand in marriage Perseus shows her Medusa's head, taking care to look only at the reflection in the water.
- When it was shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1887 a critic (F. G. Stephens) found "the poetry of the design . . . strikingly in harmony with the subject," and judged that the painting would "no doubt take a place inferior only to *King Cophetua* and *The Golden Stairs*".

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Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Briar Wood*, 1890, Buscot Park

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Legend of the Briar Rose*, second series, 1890, Buscot Park

- The paintings depict a moment in the story of "Sleeping Beauty", the title of the series coming from the version presented by the Brothers Grimm in their collection of 1812.
- It shows the discovery of the sleeping soldiers by a Knight. In their slumber they have become completely entwined by the barbed thorns of the Briar rose.
- Running beneath each of the major panels is an inscription of a poem by William Morris, under *The Briar Wood* the inscription reads:

*"The fateful slumber floats and flows  
About the tangle of the rose;  
But lo! the fated hand and heart  
To rend the slumberous curse apart!"*
- Note the work is part of the *The Legend of the Briar Rose*, second series, 1890, ***The Briar Wood, The Council Chamber, The Garden Court*** and ***The Rose Bower*** all at Buscot Park in Oxfordshire
- **In 1890** the second series of *The Legend of Briar Rose* was exhibited and won the widest admiration.
- **A long illness stopped Burne-Jones working** which resumed with more decorative pieces. Ill-health again interrupted the progress of his works, including his last work the vast *Arthur in Avalon*.



- He was made a **baronet in 1894** which annoyed his socialist friends and his wife but was appreciated by his son Philip who had failed his degree at Oxford and was trying to break into high society.

## **NOTES**

- The same year he was commissioned to design sets and costumes for the Lyceum Theatre by Henry Irving. It was for *King Arthur* in which Irving and Ellen Terry starred. Burne-Jones was disappointed with the result and wrote 'I hate the stage, don't tell—but I do'. In the winter following his death a second exhibition of his works was held at the New Gallery, and an exhibition of his drawings (including some of the charmingly humorous sketches made for children) at the Burlington Fine Arts.
- The figures in this canvas are almost identical to those in the first version (now at the Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico), though the young courtiers on the right now have closed rather than open mouths. Burne-Jones could not have been satisfied with the composition, however, and introduced some elaborations to the oil that was finally exhibited at Agnew's and is now at Buscot Park.

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The Council Chamber



The Garden Court



The Rose Bower



Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Rose Bower*, 1890, Buscot Park  
View of the Saloon at Buscot Park showing two of the major panels – *The Garden Court* and *The Rose Bower* – in their context between the adjoining panel

- These are the remaining three paintings of the four-part Briar Rose series now at Buscot Park.
- *The Council Chamber* shows **the members of the council sleep**, as does the King who is slumped on his throne. Under the draped curtains and through the window further soldiers can be seen sleeping. Under *The Council Chamber*, the inscription by William Morris reads:
  - "*The threat of war, the hope of peace,  
The Kingdoms peril and increase  
Sleep on, and bide the latter day  
When Fate shall take her chain away.*"
- *The Garden Court* shows **the weavers having fallen asleep at their loom**. The walls of the castle form the backdrop to the painting as do arches of roses. The inscription reads:
  - "*The maiden pleasance of the land  
Knoweth no stir of voice or hand,  
No cup the sleeping waters fill,  
The restless shuttle lieth still.*"
- *The Rose Bower* shows **the sleeping beauty lies on her bed surrounded by her slumbering attendants**. The rose is seen encircling the drapery in the

background. The inscription reads:

- "*Here lies the hoarded love, the key  
To all the treasure that shall be;  
Come fated hand the gift to take  
And smite this sleeping world awake.*"

## **NOTES**

- Burne-Jones created two other series of paintings on the same subject.
  - The *Small Briar Rose* series was completed before the Buscot Park series. All three paintings – *The Briar Wood*, *The Council Chamber*, *The Rose Bower* – are now in the Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico.
  - The *Third Briar Rose* series was completed after the Buscot Park series. The three paintings have been split between three collections. *The Garden Court* is in Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, *The Council Chamber* is in the Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington and *The Rose Bower* is in the Hugh Lane Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin.

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Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Love Among the Ruins*, 1870-73, 1894 and 1898

Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Love Among the Ruins*, 1870-73, 1894 and 1898

There is a copy produced by Burne-Jones in 1894 after the original was damaged (95.3 x 160 cm), now at Wigtwick Manor, West Midlands.

- A couple are seated amongst ruins with a column covered in briar roses at their feet. At the left there is a door decorated with a frieze of putti with a courtyard beyond.
- **This is a painting that spans Burne-Jones active life.** He first painted it in watercolour and gouache between 1870 and 1873. The title is from a **Robert Browning poem of 1855** but the lovelorn mood is taken from Burne-Jones own life. The woman is inspired by his former mistress, the Greek heiress Maria Zambaco.
- When he painted this five foot watercolour the affair was over, the elopement had failed, and she had tried to take her own life. She would haunt him for the rest of his life. The painting became one of the artist's **most admired and exhibited works** before it was damaged after being sent to the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Paris, in 1893.

## NOTES

- The painting was being prepared for a photogravure reproduction when it was damaged. Burne-Jones painted this oil painting in 1894 and restored the watercolour in 1898 after he discovered that ox-gall could remove the egg

white, weeks before his death. The restored watercolour came up for auction at Christie's, London on July 11th 2013 and **sold for £13.2 million**, almost three times its top estimate and the most ever realised for a pre-Raphaelite work and the most realised for a British work on paper.

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Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon*, 1881-1898

Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon*, c. 1881-1898, 279 cm × 650 cm, Museum of Art in Ponce Puerto Rico

- *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* is considered by some to be Burne-Jones 'last and greatest work'. It is certainly **epic in scale**. It was commissioned by the Earl of Carlisle to hang on a wall in his library and it is massive, **over six metres wide**. Burne-Jones started it in **1881** and worked on it **for 17 years**.
- During the 1880s many of **his friends died** and he increasingly **felt isolated** and aware of his mortality. In 1896, Burne-Jones was devastated by **the death of his lifelong friend William Morris** and he died three years later. He became the first artist to have a memorial service held at Westminster Abbey.
- He agreed the commission should be cancelled but **continued to work on the giant canvas**. He immersed himself in the work and identified himself with Arthur. He wrote, '**above all the picture is about silence.**' Towards the end of his life he wrote, '**I need nothing but my hands and my brain to fashion myself a world to live in that nothing can disturb. In my own land I am king of it.**' His widow described *Arthur* as a 'task of love to which [the artist] put no limit of time or labour.' The day before he died he was still working on *Arthur*.
- It was loaned to the Tate in 1929 and when the war started in 1939 it was removed from its stretcher, rolled up and stored in a box. In 1963 the owner's decided to sell it through Christies where the famous art critic **Brian Sewell** was working at the time. It was delivered only a week before the sale and when removed from the box 24 years of spiders and detritus fell out. To try to **unroll**

the heavy canvas it was tacked to a tapestry bar which was slowly raised.

- **Christie's Chairman, Peter Chance, arrived** and as he reached the centre of the canvas it began to tear from the bar. Chance was a short man and the **rapidly curling canvas surrounded and enclosed him**. He fought his way out damaging the canvas. Some say that the person trapped in the canvas was Brian Sewell himself but this is the way he tells the story. **A canvas should never be rolled face in** but that is what happened as it fell and the floor was covered in paint flakes and the painting was **extensively damaged**.
- Sewell called a friend, Joan Seddon, who was a **restorer** and they **both worked on it for 30 hours**, from Friday to Monday morning, **repainting the flowers**. Nothing was said and it was sold to the founder of the **Ponce Museum of Art in Puerto Rico**. Burne-Jones was out of favour at the time so there was **no objection to its export** and the Museum relined, cleaned and stretched it. When the Ponce Museum was being refurbished in 2009-10 the work was shown at Tate Britain together with Leighton's *Flaming June*. Brian Sewell saw the painting for the first time in 45 years and was appalled by the quality of the irises, bluebells and forget-me-nots but he could not tell if it was his work, restorers at the Ponce Museum or one of Burne-Jones assistants, or even by Burne-Jones himself.
- During the Edwardian period **Burne-Jones became hopelessly out-of-fashion in the art world**, much of which soon preferred the major trends in Modern art, and the 100th anniversary of his birth was a **sad affair that was poorly attended**.
- **In the mid-1970s his work started to be reassessed** and a biography was published in 1975. Major exhibitions were held in 1989 (Barbican), 1997 (Tate) and 1998 (MoMA, Birmingham and Musée d'Orsay). His work is essentially Victorian but is now seen as an important stepping stone to twentieth century art in terms of their symbolism, and psychological and sexual insights. Introspection.

## **NOTES**

- During the Edwardian period **Burne-Jones became hopelessly out-of-fashion in the art world**, much of which soon preferred the major trends in Modern art, and the 100th anniversary of his birth was a **sad affair that was poorly attended**. It was opened on 16 June **1933 by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin**, a **nephew of Burne-Jones**, at the Tate Gallery in

London. In his opening speech at the exhibition, Mr Baldwin expressed what the art of Burne-Jones stood for:

*In my view, what he did for us common people was to open, as never had been **opened** before, **magic casements of a land of faery** in which he lived throughout his life ... It is in that inner world we can **cherish in peace**, beauty which he has left us and in which there is peace at least for ourselves. The few of us who knew him and loved him well, always **keep him in our hearts**, but his work **will go on long after we have passed away. It may give its message in one generation to a few or in other to many more**, but there it will be for ever for those who seek in their generation, for beauty and for those who can recognise and reverence a great man, and a great artist.*

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## EDWARD BURNE-JONES (1833-1898)

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Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Phyllis and Demophoön*, 1870

- I end with the painting that I think tells us a lot about his life, otherworldly, he lived in a world of myths and legends yet the real world kept intruding as it did with his affair with Maria Zambuco the model for Phyllis here.
- We now see him as a stepping stone from Romanticism to Symbolism and then into a time he never lived to see and would not have understood; the early twentieth century with its Cubism, Fauvism and abstraction.
- Thank you again for your attention and I hope to see you soon.