

Lecture

- In the **mid-Victorian period beauty was a problem** for both scientists and artists and I would like to explain **the nature of the problem**.
- In **1859** Charles **Darwin** published ***On the Origin of Species*** and Dante Gabriel Rossetti painted ***Bocca Baciata***.
- **Darwin's problem was that his theory of natural selection could not explain beauty.**
- **Rossetti problem was how to balance the conflict between spiritual beauty and sexual beauty.**
- **As we shall see the two problems were related.**
- Let's jump on to **1882** and look at the **embodiment of beauty – the Aesthete**.

Notes

- *On the Origin of Species* was originally *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* and the sixth edition of 1872 it was changed to *The Origin of Species*.
- It was published on 24 November 1859.
- The other most influential book was Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* in 1867.
- The structure of the lecture is:
 - Beauty was a problem for both scientists and artists.
 - Darwin's theories of natural and sexual selection
 - They imply women select men. But in humans women select men and men select women.
 - In the Victorian period women were limited in their ability to select selected by

men and categorised into Angel, fallen and femme fatale.

- Beauty is the link between Darwin's theory and art but what do we mean by beauty?
- Simple, social and sexual beauty
- How did Victorians deal with sexual beauty?
- Fashion
- Degeneracy



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

- 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.



Original cast members, Frank Thorntonas, Durward Lely and Richard Temple in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*; first produced at the Opera Comique, London, on 23 April 1881. (Cabinet photograph by Elliott & Fry, London, 1881)

- 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'.)



- This song is between the two poets **Reginald Bunthorne** (a 'Fleshly' poet, based on Swinburne) and **Archibald Grosvenor** (an idyllic poet based on Coventry Patmore and William Morris). It **parodies the aesthete** by combining the qualities and occupations of a **normal young man** with their aesthetic and poetical life style in which they have twenty young maidens swooning and waiting for them outside the door.
- **(Play)**
- **Did you hear all the topical references?**
 - **Chancery Lane**, centre of London's law courts. A respectable young man hoping to rise in the legal profession, not an aesthete.
 - **Somerset House**, a massive building on the Strand containing a large number of unaesthetic bureaucrats.
 - **Grosvenor Gallery**, an art gallery for modern art that had just opened in 1877 in Bond Street. It was funded by Sir Coutts Lindsay and his wife Blanche. Its first directors were J. Comyns Carr and Charles Hallé. The gallery proved crucial to the Aesthetic Movement because it provided a home for those artists whose approaches the more classical and conservative Royal Academy did not welcome, such as Edward Burne-Jones and Walter Crane.
 - **Sewell and Cross**, a fashionable London firm of drapers that sold cloth by the yard and tailor-made and 'off the hook' goods.
 - **Howell and James**, jewellers and silversmiths in Regent Street, opened in 1819. In 1881 it added art pottery galleries to the shops.
 - **'Monday Pops'**, held at London's original main concert hall, the St James's Hall, Regent Street. It was famous for its 'Monday Pops' concerts and Ballad Concerts.
 - **Waterloo House**, Pall Mall south side looking towards Trafalgar Square, a well-known fashionable shop for ladies selling dresses, cloaks and carpets.
 - **Francesca de Rimini** was mentioned because of her love for Paolo; a love that landed them both in hell. A historic character from the time of Dante Alighieri and

mentioned by Giovanni Boccaccio. She married Giovanni Malatesta and fell in love with his brother Paolo, who was also married. They had an affair that lasted ten years until they were discovered and killed by Giovanni. Dante in *The Divine Comedy* places them both in the second circle of hell reserved for the lustful. They are trapped in an eternal whirlwind.



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

- 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.

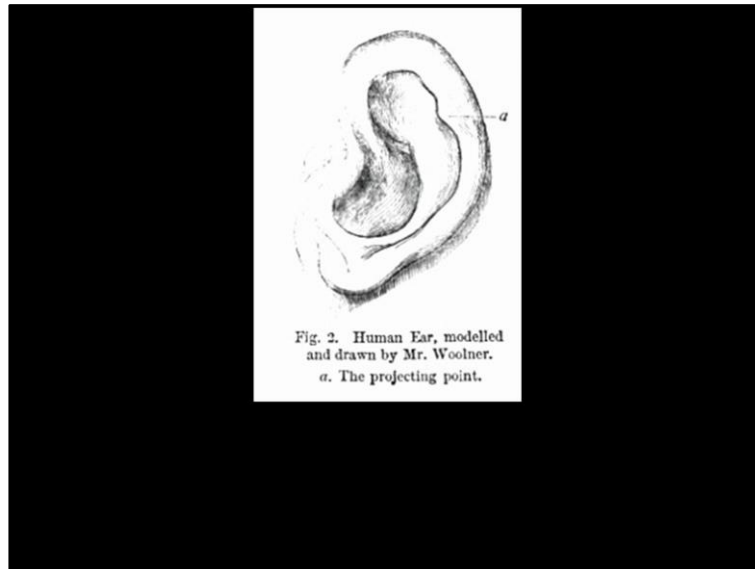


Fun, Exactly So!, 26 January 1873

- 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 belief 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*

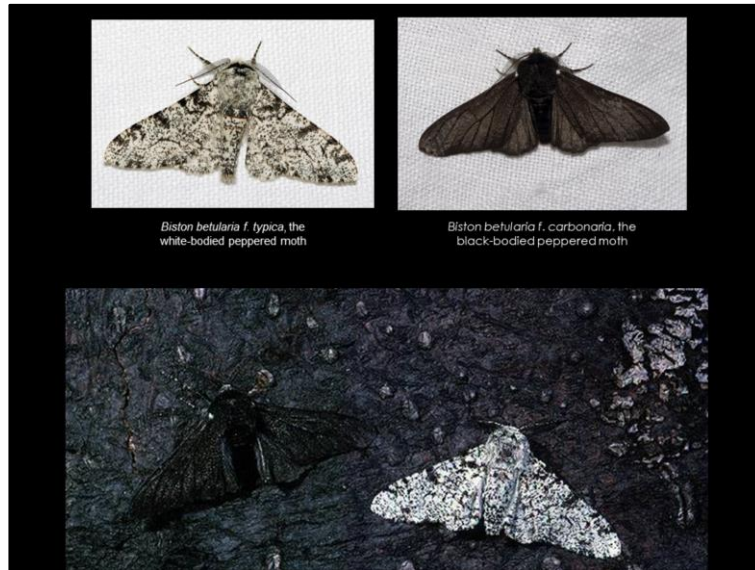


Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man*, p. 22

- 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

- 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 formed 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*)



Indian Blue Peacock, relative of the pheasant and chicken, Animalia Chordata Aves
Galliformes Phasianidae Pavo

- 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.



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

- 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 than 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 wader 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'.



Caricature of George Bryan 'Beau' Brummell by Richard Dighton (1805)

- **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 wenchs 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.



George Clooney (b. 1961), American actor, director and political activist

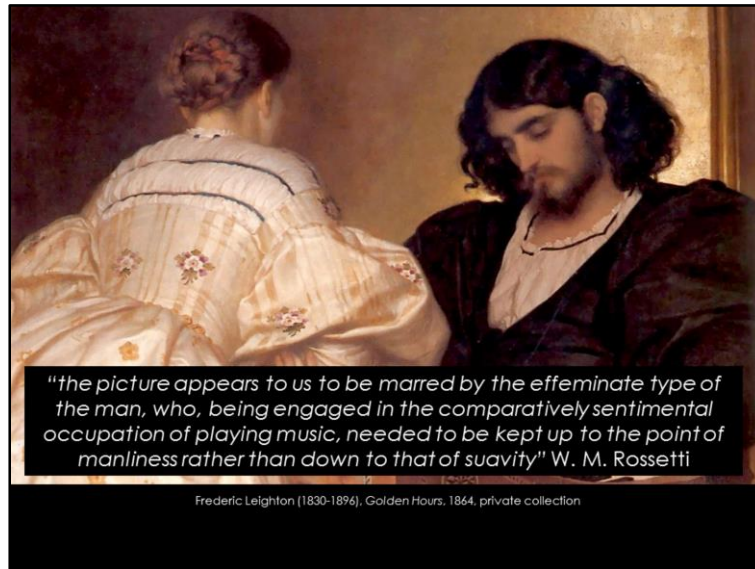
- This is a genuine secondary sexual characteristic – **the beard**.
- In 1872 this **poem** was written to explain Darwin's theory of sexual selection.
*And 'Sexual Selection' was devised
To show that female animals possess
The sensual passions in refined excess:
Though males be wooers, females can 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

- 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

- 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

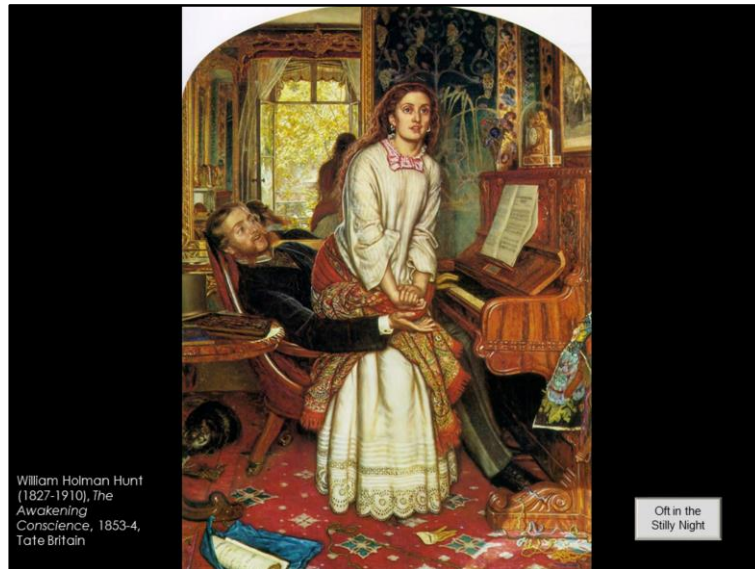
The Angel in the House

- 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

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Annie Miller*, c. 1860, black ink, pen and brush, National Museum of Fine Arts, Stockholm

- This is the **second type** of woman – **a fallen women**.
- 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 sign 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 her 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'.

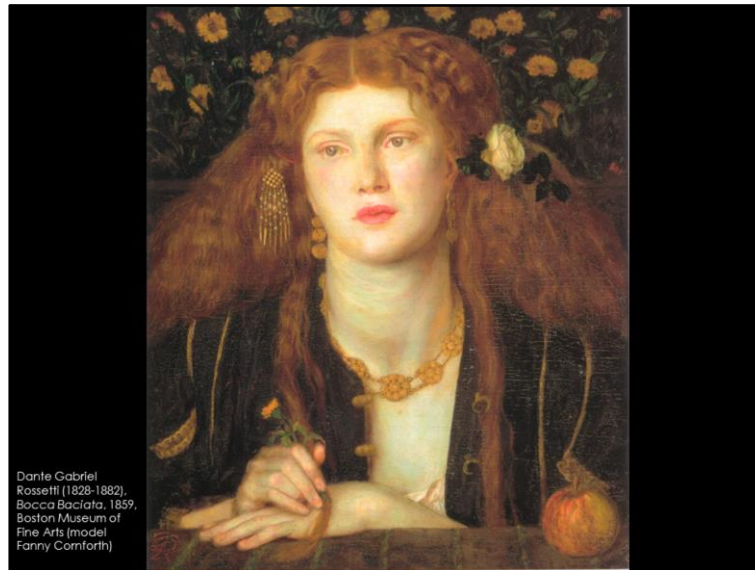
Prostitution

- '... 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 (model Fanny Cornforth)

- 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 women 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.

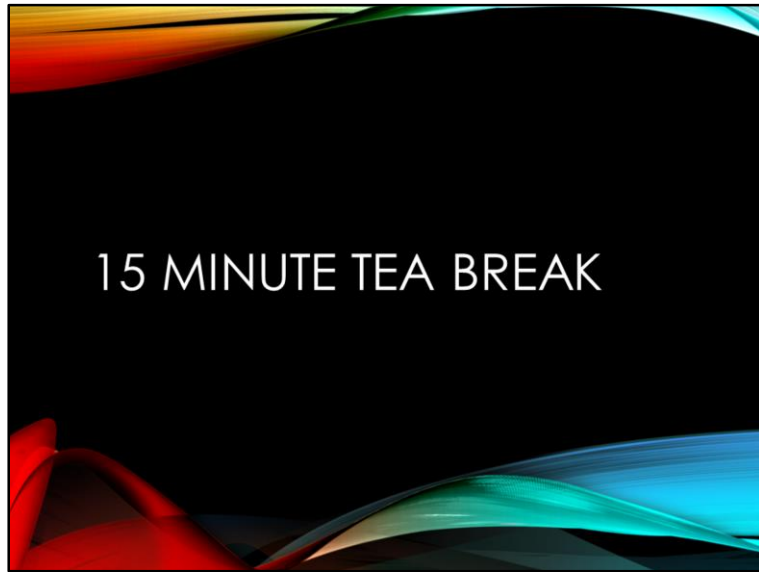
- Conventionally a **marigold**, in the language of flowers, **signified grief, pain, and chagrin**, that is, vexation resulting in humiliation or disappointment. In Christian symbolism, an **apple** represents **temptation** although the term 'apple' was not mentioned in the Bible and the fruit in the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



Restart with Punch cartoon and fashion if time short and miss out Darwin's three types of beauty.



- 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%



- 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.



Venus de Medici, 1st century BCE marble copy of a bronze Greek original, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, first example of unrivalled beauty
 Alexander of Milos, *Venus de Milo*, 130-100 BCE, Louvre, right, found by French, became prime example of beauty. Formerly thought to be by Praxiteles.

- 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.



George du Maurier, *Punch*, 1870

- 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.



Linley Sambourne, 'Next Hideous "Sensation Chignon"', Punch, 1862

- 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, *Punch's Designs After Nature: 'Grand Back-Hair Sensation for the Coming Season'*, Punch, 1 April 1871

- 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 (23 5/8 × 44 7/8 in), Royal Academy of Arts, John Madejski Fine Rooms

- 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)

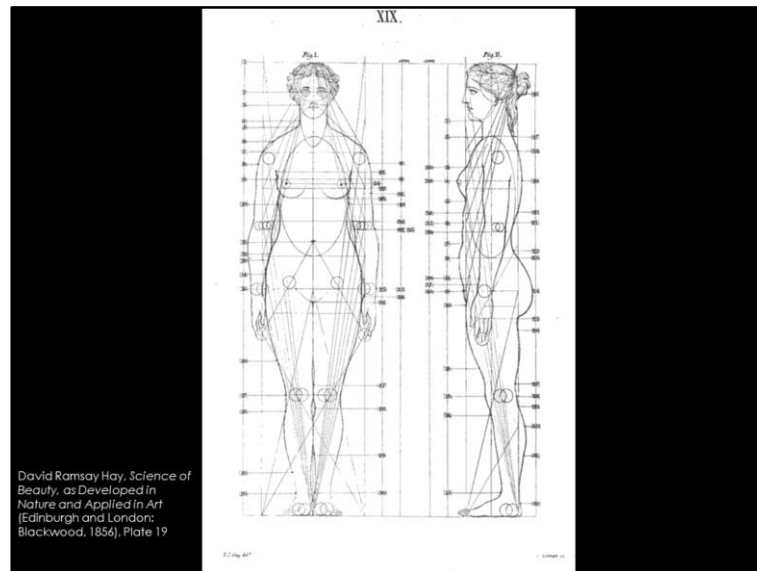
Notes

- 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.



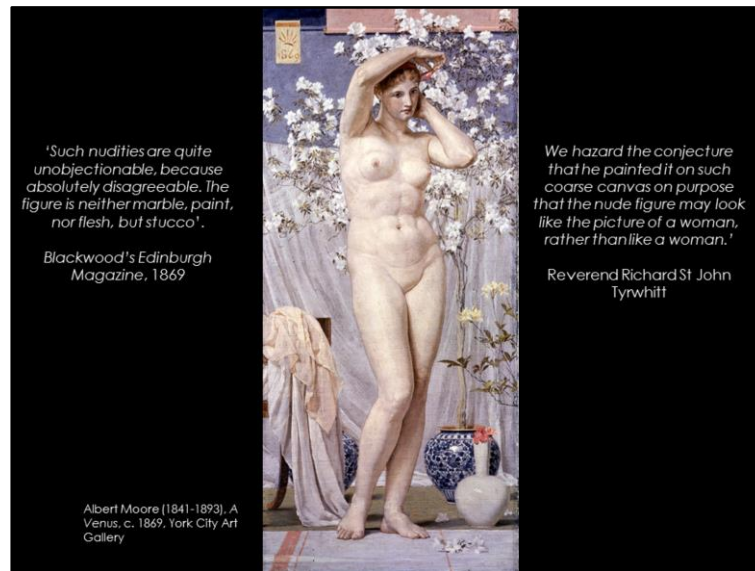
David Ramsay Hay, *Science of Beauty, as Developed in Nature and Applied in Art* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1856), Plate 19

- **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

- 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*

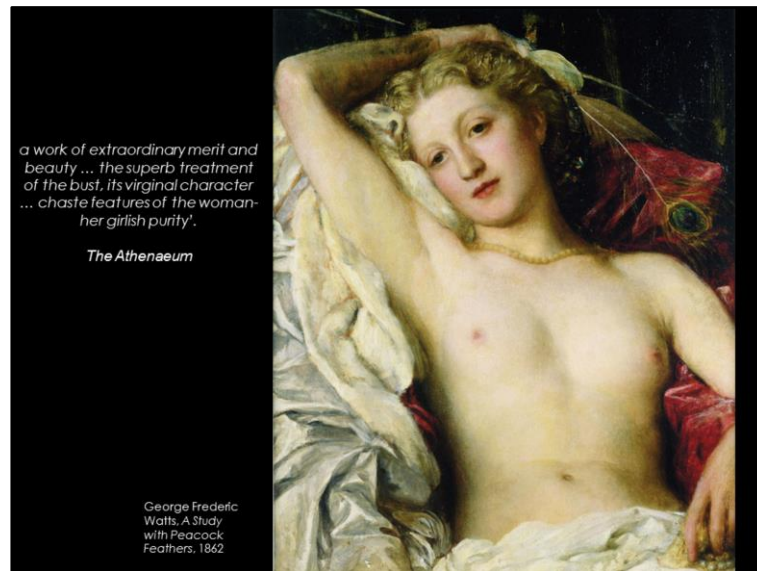
Review) that 'fleshliness' should be equated with immorality.

- 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

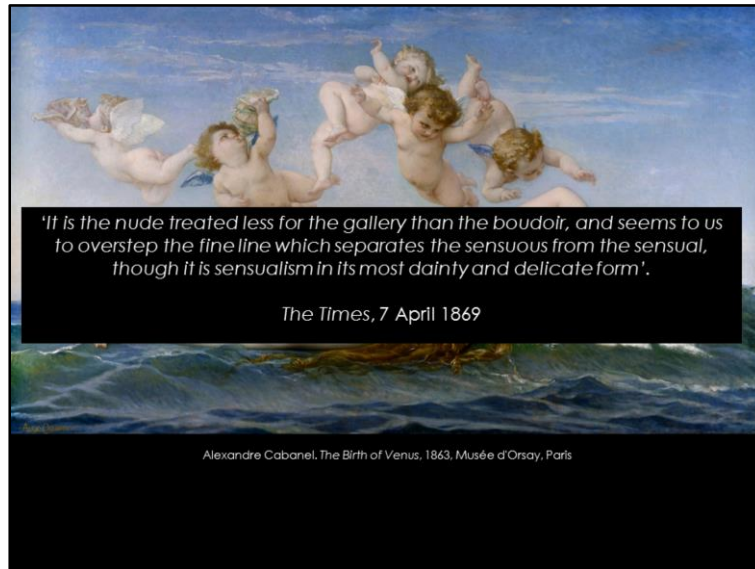


George Frederic Watts, *A Study with Peacock Feathers*, 1862, private collection, also known as *Nude with Peacock Feathers* and *The Amber Necklace*

- 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.

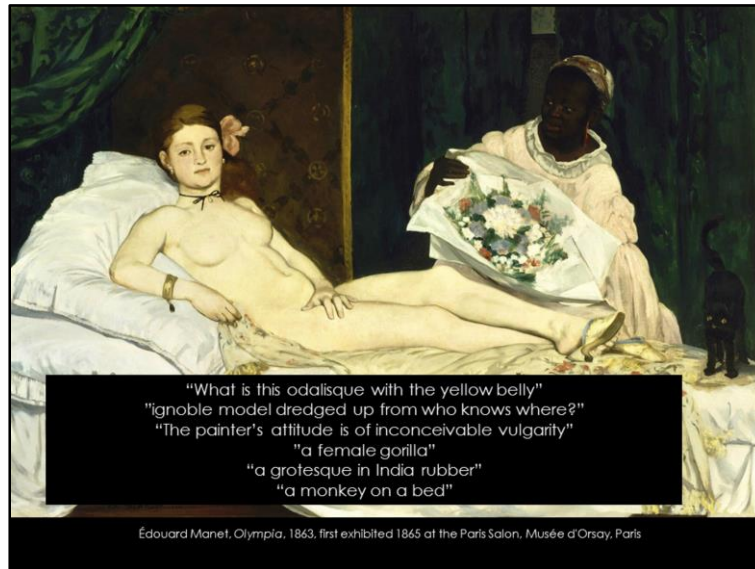


Alexandre Cabanel. *The Birth of Venus*, 1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

- 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.

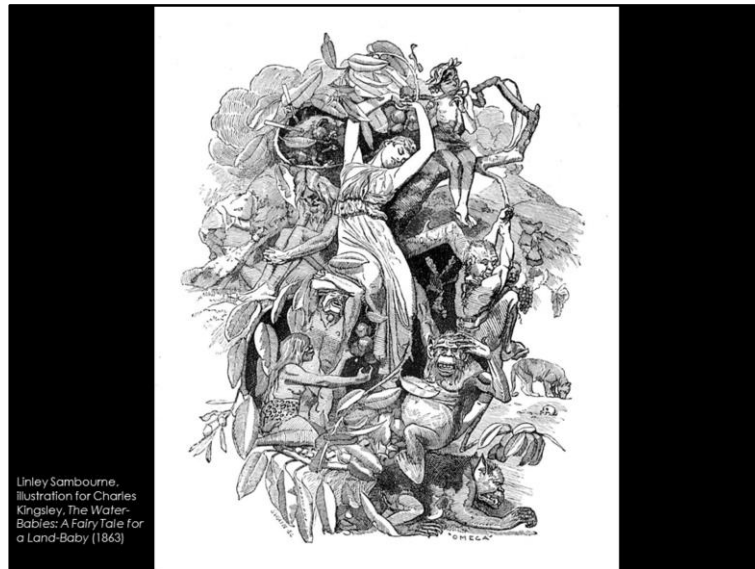


Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, first exhibited 1865 at the Paris Salon, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

- 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, illustration for **Charles Kingsley, *The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby*** (London: Macmillan, 1898, first published 1863), p. 230

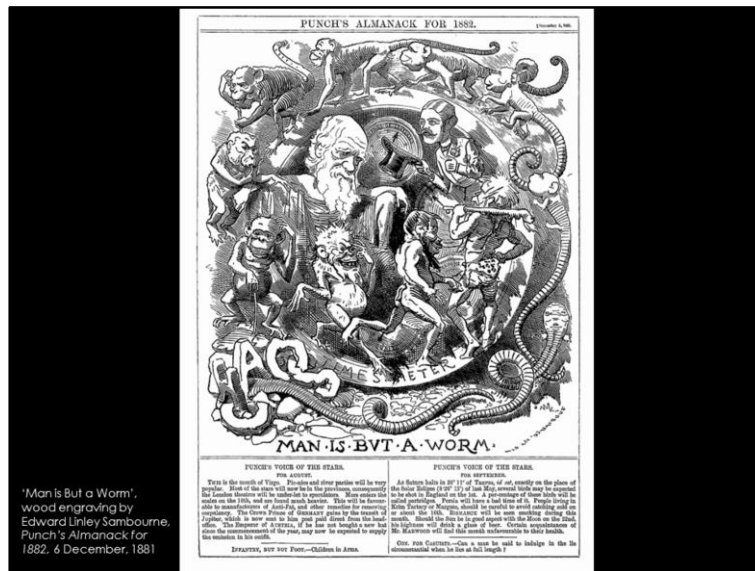
- **The final interplay between science and beauty I would like to discuss is degeneration.**
- This is concerned with **progress**.
- Although the concern about **degenerate art** did not develop until the 1890s this illustration **from 1863 spells out the danger**.
- In *The Water Babies*, Kingsley 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.

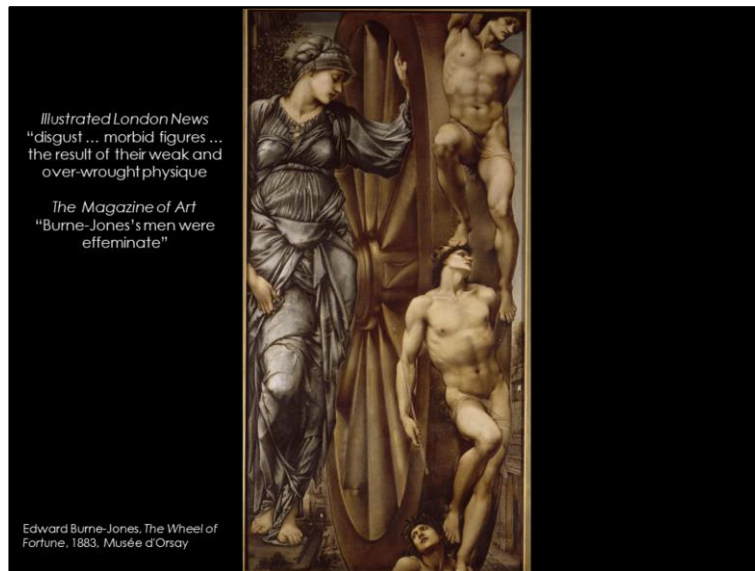
- He had just returned from Africa in the early 1860s with the first stories of gorillas, like, he thought a cross between humans and apes, as intelligent as humans and extremely violent.
- The point being made by Kingsley is that evolution does not imply progress. As Darwin was aware evolution has no 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.*"



'Man is But a Worm', wood engraving by Edward Linley Sambourne, *Punch's Almanack for 1882*, 6 December, 1881, preface, n.p.

- 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.



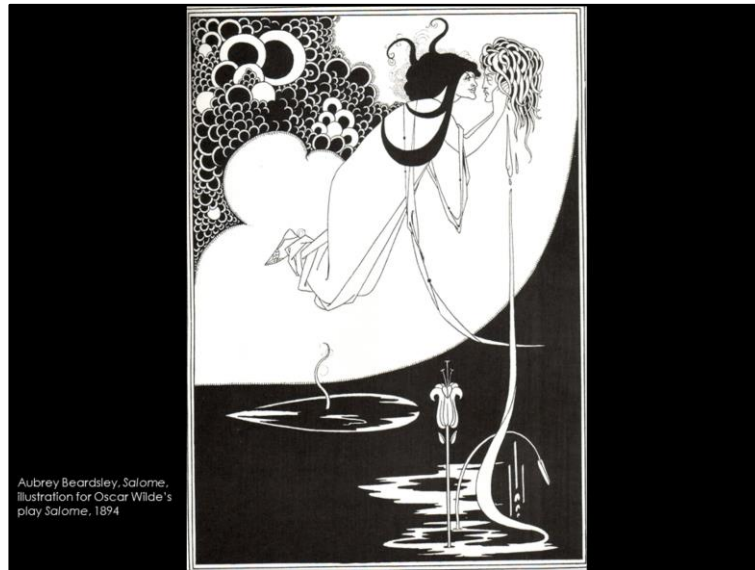
Edward Burne-Jones, *The Wheel of Fortune*, 1883, Musée d'Orsay

- **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, *Salome*, illustration for Oscar Wilde's play *Salome*, 1894

- 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 publicly 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.

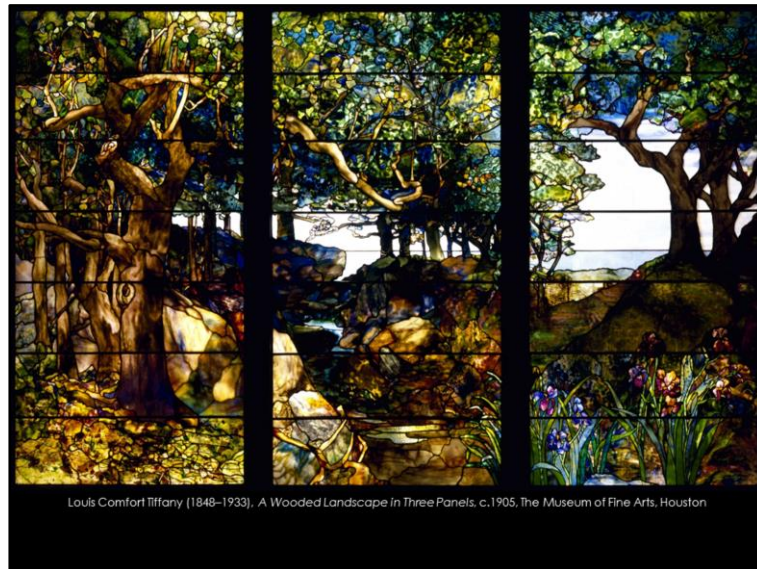
Notes

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

- **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.



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