

# Burne-Jones

DELPHI  CLASSICS

# *Masters of Art*

**Edward Burne-Jones**

(1833-1898)



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*Edward Burns-Jones*

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*Masters of Art Series*

**Edward Burne-Jones**



*By Delphi Classics, 2024*

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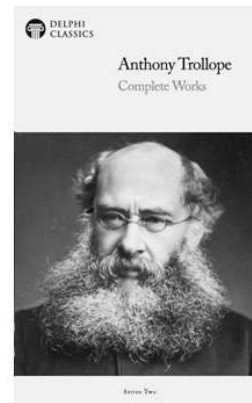
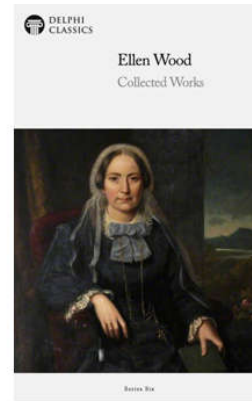
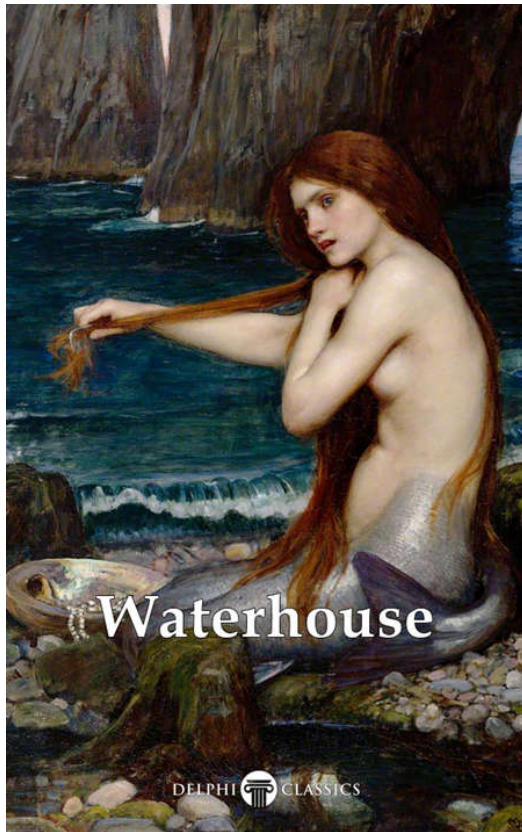
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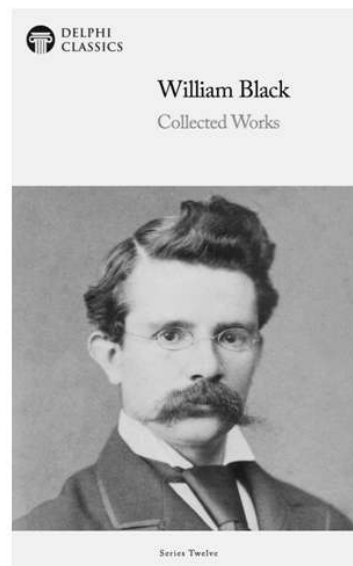
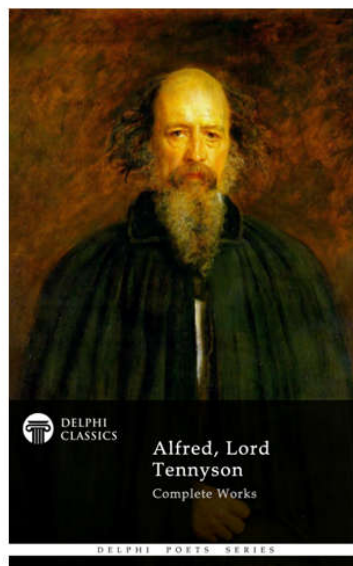
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# THE VICTORIANS



## The Highlights



*Bennetts Hill, Birmingham, c. 1860 — Edward Burne-Jones' birthplace*



*The plaque commemorating the site of the birthplace*





*Bennetts Hill today*



*Burne-Jones as a young man, c. 1858*

## The Highlights



In this section, a sample of Burne-Jones' most celebrated works is provided, with concise introductions, special 'detail' reproductions and additional biographical images.

## Sidonia von Borcke (1860)



One of the leading artists of late nineteenth-century England, Edward Burne-Jones was born in Birmingham, the son of a Welshman, Edward Richard Jones, a frame-maker. His mother Elizabeth née Coley died within six days of his birth and Edward was raised by his father and the family housekeeper, Ann Sampson, an affectionate yet humourless local girl. As a youth, he attended Birmingham's King Edward VI grammar school and from 1848 to 1852 he went to the Birmingham School of Art, before deciding to study theology at Exeter College, Oxford. During his time at university, he became a friend of William Morris, sharing a mutual interest in poetry. The two Exeter undergraduates, together with a group of Jones' friends from Birmingham known as the 'Birmingham Set', formed a society, which they called "The Brotherhood". The members of the brotherhood read the works of John Ruskin and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, visited churches and idealised aspects of the aesthetics and social structure of the Middle Ages. During this period, Burne-Jones discovered Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* which would become a major influence on his art. At that time, neither Burne-Jones nor Morris knew Dante Gabriel Rossetti personally, though they were both widely influenced by his work. They recruited him as a contributor to their Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, founded by Morris in 1856 to promote the Brotherhood's ideas.

Although Burne-Jones had planned to become a church minister, under Rossetti's influence both he and Morris decided to become artists. Burne-Jones left college before taking a degree to pursue a career in art. In February 1857, Rossetti wrote to a friend:

"They have turned artists instead of taking up any other career to which the university generally leads, and both are men of real genius. Jones's designs are marvels of finish and imaginative detail, unequalled by anything unless perhaps Albert Dürer's finest works."

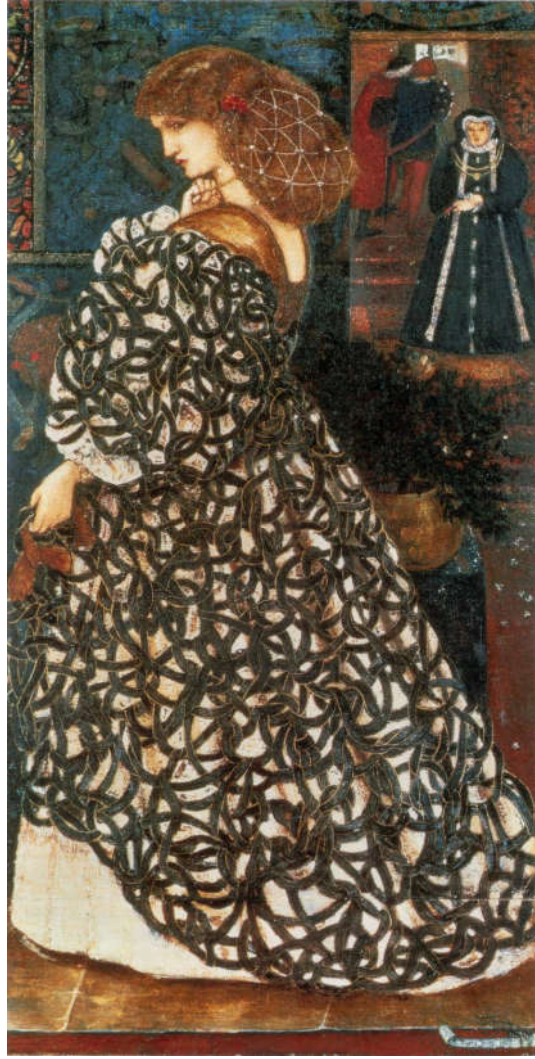
In 1856 Burne-Jones was engaged to Georgiana "Georgie" MacDonald (1840-1920), the sister of an old school friend, who was training to be a painter. They were married on 9 June 1860, after which she continued her own work in woodcuts and became a close friend of the novelist George Eliot. Georgiana gave birth to a son, Philip, in 1861. One of her sisters married the artist Sir Edward Poynter, another sister married the ironmaster Alfred Baldwin and was the mother of the Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, and yet another of her sisters was the mother of Rudyard Kipling. Therefore, Kipling and Baldwin were Burne-Jones' nephews by marriage.

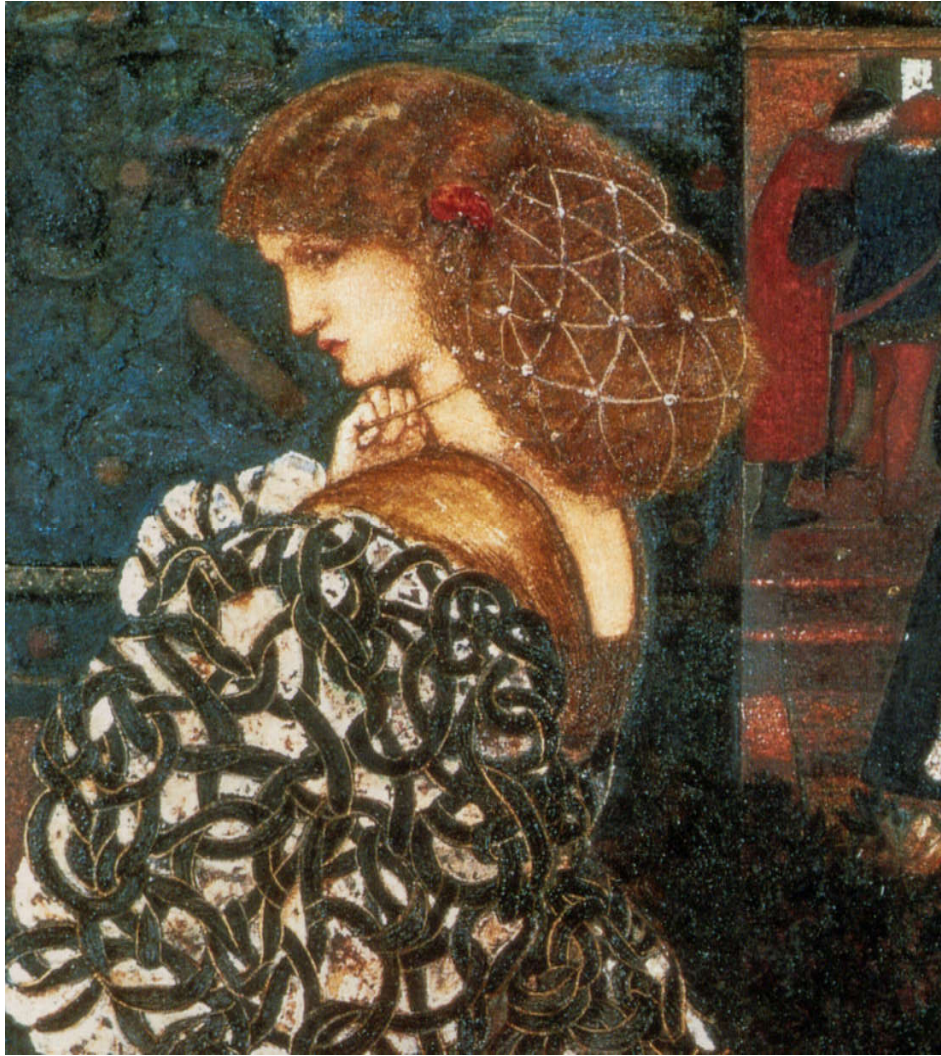
Published in 1847, Wilhelm Meinhold's novel *Sidonia the Sorceress* would provide the inspiration for Burne-Jones' first major work. The tale of the ultimate *femme fatale* had caught imagination of Rossetti and many of his friends in the Pre-Raphaelite circle. The version they read was a translation by Francesca Speranza Lady Wilde, the mother of Oscar Wilde. A gothic romance, it is set in sixteenth-century Pomerania and chronicles the crimes of the evil Sidonia, whose beauty captivates all that see her.

Burne-Jones painted his interpretation of Sidonia in 1860. He presents her at the court of the dowager Duchess of Wolgast, one of the early intrigues in a career that leads to her execution as a witch. Many of the details of her appearance are taken

directly from Meinhold's description, though the costume is derived from a portrait of Isabella d'Este by Giulio Romano at Hampton Court. This is one of three figure studies, among the earliest extant watercolours Burne-Jones had completed.

For the watercolour, Burne-Jones employed Fanny Cornforth as a model. She was currently the mistress and muse of Rossetti, for whom she also performed the duties of housekeeper. In Rossetti's paintings, the figures modelled by Fanny Cornforth are generally voluptuous, differing from other models, such as Alexa Wilding, Jane Morris and Elizabeth Siddal. In Burne-Jones' depiction of Sidonia, Cornforth stands in profile, occupied by her thoughts, apparently plotting and scheming, as conveyed by the sinister frown. In the background, the staid and squat figure of the Dowager Duchess of Wolgast suggests that she is powerless against Sidonia's stratagems. The *femme fatale's* ornate gown, boasting an intricate, serpentine design that mesmerises the viewer, stresses her imminent victory.





*Detail*



*Detail*





*Detail*



*Detail*



*Detail*



*Burne-Jones with William Morris, 1874*



*Georgiana Burne-Jones, née MacDonal c.1882, photographed by Frederick Hollyer*



*Fanny Cornforth by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, pencil on paper, c. 1865*



*Rossetti's 'Lady Lilith', Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1867, which Fanny Cornforth modelled for*

## The Merciful Knight (1863)



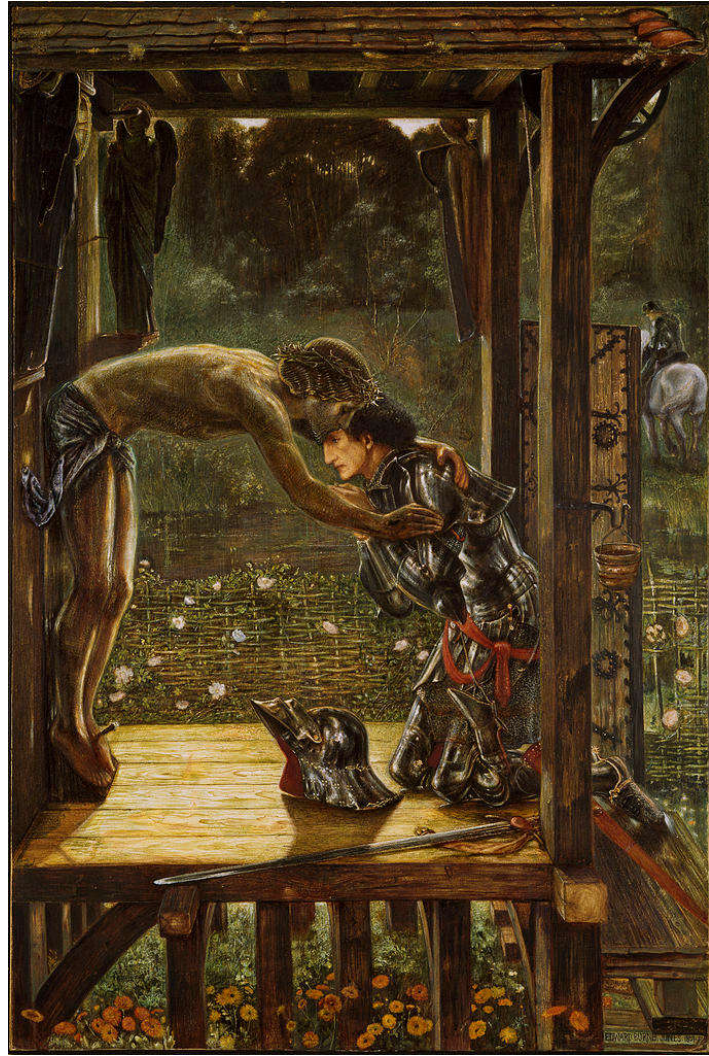
Completed in 1863 and housed at the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, this watercolour is based on an eleventh-century legend retold by Sir Kenelm Digby in *The Broad Stone of Honour, or Rules for the Gentlemen of England* (1822). This book was an attempt to describe the true meaning of chivalry and to revive its practice in modern life. Its hero is the Florentine knight John Gualbert (an anglicisation of Giovanni Gualberto). The explanatory inscription provided by Burne-Jones tells the viewer of a knight that forgave his enemy when he might have destroyed him and how the image of Christ kissed him in token that his acts had pleased God.

John Gualbert was an Italian Roman Catholic saint and the founder of the Vallumbrosan Order. He was a member of the Visdomini family of Florentine nobility. The story goes that on Good Friday he entered Florence accompanied by his armed followers, when in a narrow lane he came upon a man that had killed his brother. He was about to strike the man in revenge, when the other fell upon his knees with arms outstretched in the form of a cross and begged for mercy in the name of Christ, who had died on that day. John duly forgave him and then entered the Benedictine Church at San Miniato to pray, when the figure on the crucifix bowed its head to John in recognition of his noble act. John Gualbert was later canonised.

Regarded by many as Burne-Jones' most important early work, the watercolour reveals a new and more personal style, as witnessed in its design, technique and painterly expression. In the memorial biography of her husband, Georgiana Burne-Jones stated that it seemed, "to sum up and seal the ten years that had passed since Edward first went to Oxford". Indeed, the artwork remained one of the artist's personal favourites, which is well-documented. He had been inspired by the theme of knights and chivalry when painting the Arthurian Oxford Union murals, a series of wall decorations in the Oxford Union library building. The series was executed by a team of Pre-Raphaelite artists including Rossetti, Morris and Burne-Jones. Scenes sourced from Arthurian myth would reappear throughout the rest of his career. Many years later in 1894 he borrowed *The Merciful Knight*, intending to produce a large oil version; it was still in his studio at the time of his death four years later.

In the preliminary sketches, the kiss given by Christ appears more passionate, with homoerotic overtones. In the finished version, painted in gouache, the kiss appears more protective and caring, with no sexual implications. Christ's beard appears to serve as a shield over the knight's forehead and melancholic face. The intricate depiction of still life flowers along the bottom of the composition indicates the influence of the Pre-Raphaelite master John Everett Millais.







*Detail*



*Detail*



*Detail*



*Detail*



*Detail*



*Detail*



*A view of the murals of the Oxford Union Society Library at night time*





*Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, where many of Burne-Jones' works are held today*

## Maria Zambaco with Cupid (1870)



Tragedy was to strike in the winter of 1864, when Georgiana became gravely ill with scarlet fever and gave birth to a second son, Christopher, who died shortly after. The family then moved to 41 Kensington Square, where a daughter, named Margaret, was born in 1866. The following year, Burne-Jones and his family settled at The Grange, an eighteenth-century house set in a garden in North End, Fulham, London. It was also the former home of the novelist Samuel Richardson, who penned his famous novel *Clarissa* there. During the 1870's Burne-Jones endured a difficult time, having chosen not to exhibit, following a number of hostile attacks in the press. He also conducted a passionate affair — described by some as the “emotional climax of his life” — with his Greek model Maria Zambaco, which culminated with her trying to commit suicide by throwing herself into Regent's Canal. During this uncertain period, Georgiana developed a friendship with Morris, whose wife Jane had fallen in love with Rossetti. Morris and Georgiana may have been in love, but if he had asked her to leave her husband, she had refused. In the end, the Burne-Joneses remained together, as did the Morrises, though Morris and Georgiana remained close for the rest of their lives.

A popular choice for a model among the Pre-Raphaelites, Maria Zambaco was the daughter of the wealthy Anglo-Hellenic merchant Demetrios Cassavetti and his wife Euphrosyne, as well as the niece of the Greek Consul and noted patron Alexander Constantine Ionides. Maria and her cousins Marie Spartali Stillman and Aglaia Coronio were known collectively among their friends as “the Three Graces”, after the Charites of Greek mythology. After inheriting her father's fortune in 1858, she could lead a more independent life and was known to go around London unchaperoned, although still unmarried.

She had decided to dedicate herself to art, studying at the Slade School under Alphonse Legros and Auguste Rodin in Paris. She worked as a sculptor in the 1880's, sharing studio space in Chelsea with Louise Jopling. She exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1887 and the 1889 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in London, as well as exhibiting at the exclusive Paris Salon. The Pre-Raphaelites especially admired her dark red hair and pale skin. In time, she became Burne-Jones' preferred choice of model, though she also sat for Whistler and Rossetti.

In 1860 she had married Dr Zambaco, an Ottoman-born French dermatologist of Greek origin, who is now considered the first leprologist of the Orient. Initially living with her husband in France, she had a son and a daughter, though the marriage was not a success and she moved back to live with her mother in London in 1866. This was when she first met Burne-Jones, after her mother commissioned him to paint her in a picture of *Cupid and Psyche*. As Maria Zambaco had recently escaped an unhappy marriage, perhaps the artist saw himself as her liberator and rescuer similar to Cupid in the story.

Over the next three years she was his frequent model, his pupil and eventually his lover. The affair would last until January 1869 and they remained in contact for many years later. In 1869 Burne-Jones attempted to leave his wife for Maria, which caused a great scandal. Ultimately, unwilling to leave his loyal wife and their two children, Burne-Jones decided to break with Maria and end the affair. Somewhat cowardly, he

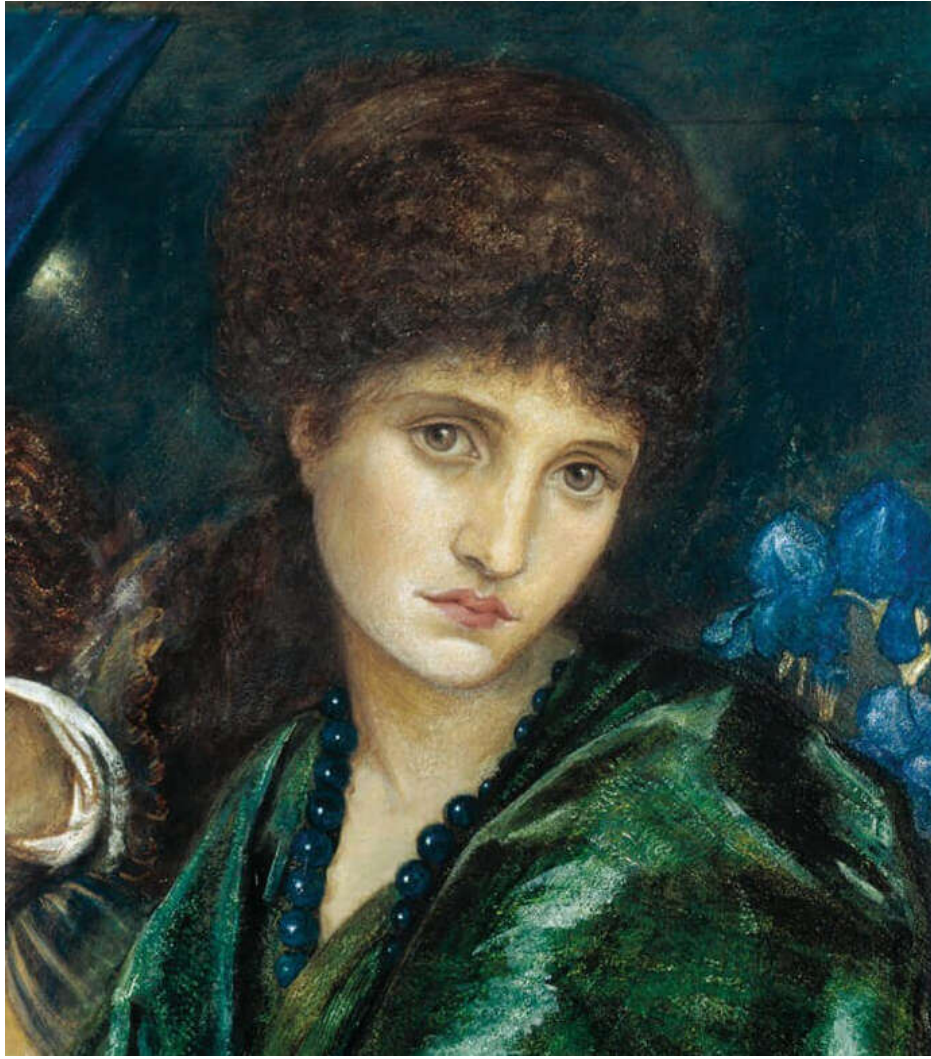
escaped abroad in the company of Morris, which precipitated an extraordinary scene, described by Rossetti in a letter of January 1869 to Ford Madox Brown:

“Poor old Ned’s affairs have come to a smash altogether, and he and Morris, after the most dreadful to-do, started for Rome suddenly, leaving the Greek damsel beating up the quarters of all his friends for him and howling like Cassandra. . . . She provided herself with laudanum for two at least, and insisted on their winding up matters in Lord Holland’s Lane.”

After the affair was finished, Maria continued to appear in Burne-Jones’ paintings, often as a sorceress or a temptress. Her mother remained his loyal patron. The following canvas effectively reveals the seductive power Maria exerted on the artist. The storm of their passion having passed, the former lovers eventually recovered their senses, and Burne-Jones was able to continue his work, exorcising his passion for Maria by incorporating her likeness into some of his most memorable paintings. This allegorical portrait was painted as a birthday present for her mother in the summer of 1870, while Georgie and the children were on holiday with George Eliot and G. H. Lewes at Whitby. The canvas is signed and dated on the arrow of Cupid, whose presence confirms that the female is Venus. She holds the flower of a white dittany, which symbolically represents passion. Likewise, the book reveals a miniature of Burne-Jones’ other canvas *Le Chant d’ Amour* (1868-77), now held in New York’s Metropolitan Museum. The 1870 portrait of Maria has numerous similarities with two 1868 oil paintings by Rossetti of Jane Morris, which are also representative of an illicit affair, *The Blue Silk Dress* (Society of Antiquaries, Kelmscott Manor) and *Mariana* (Aberdeen Art Gallery). Maria’s wistful and pouting expression certainly hints that Burne-Jones was still not quite fully recovered from the ardour of the affair.

Maria died in Paris in 1914 and her body was returned for interment in the family sarcophagus at the Greek Orthodox necropolis of the South Metropolitan Cemetery at Norwood, where she is recorded under her maiden name.

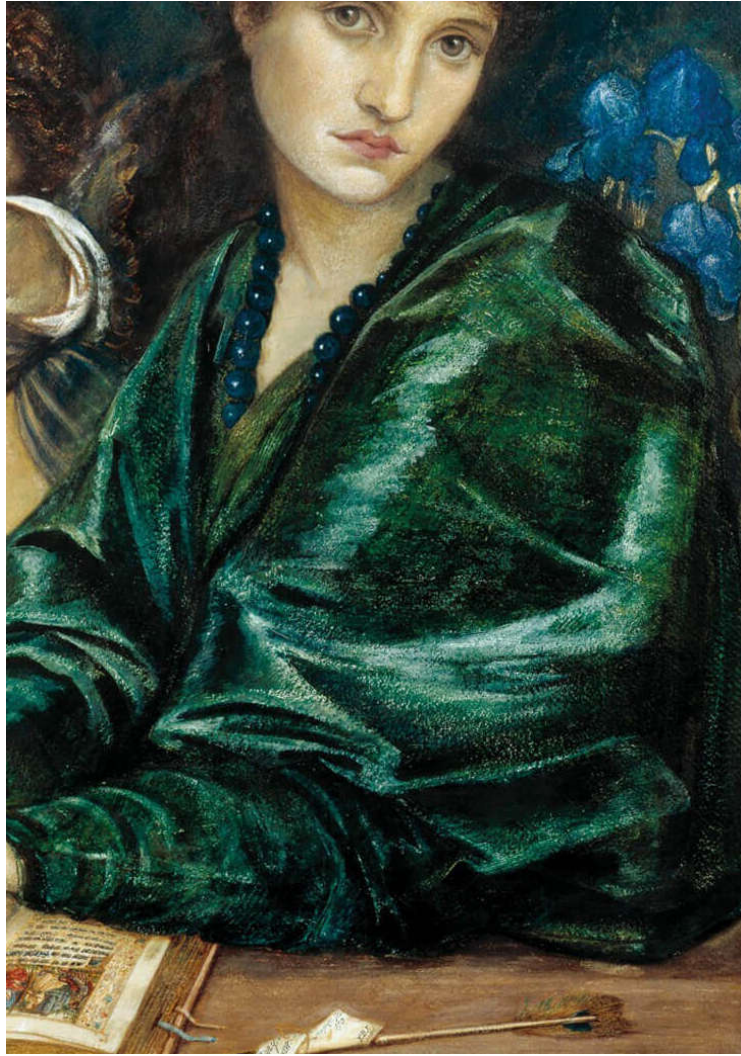




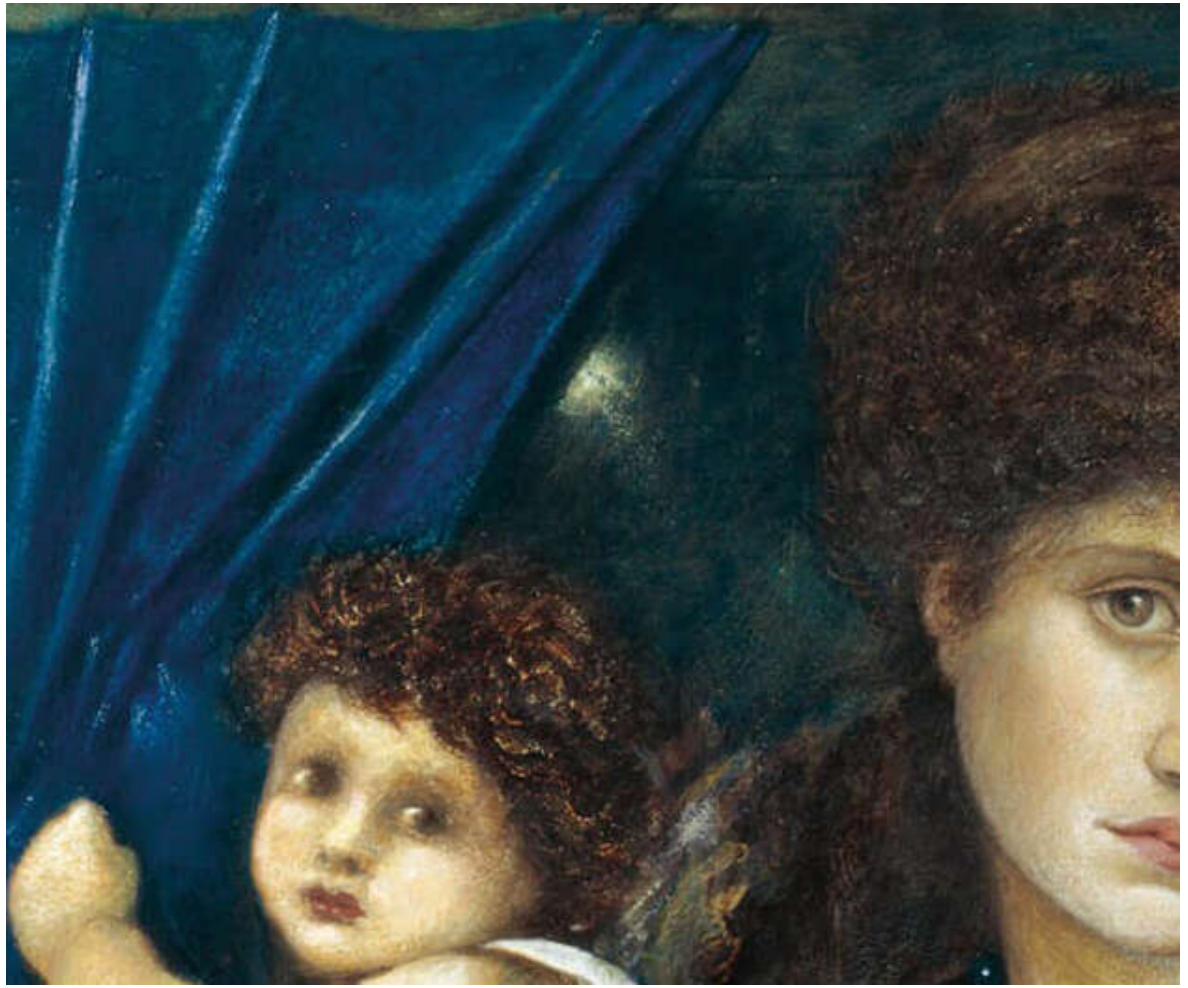
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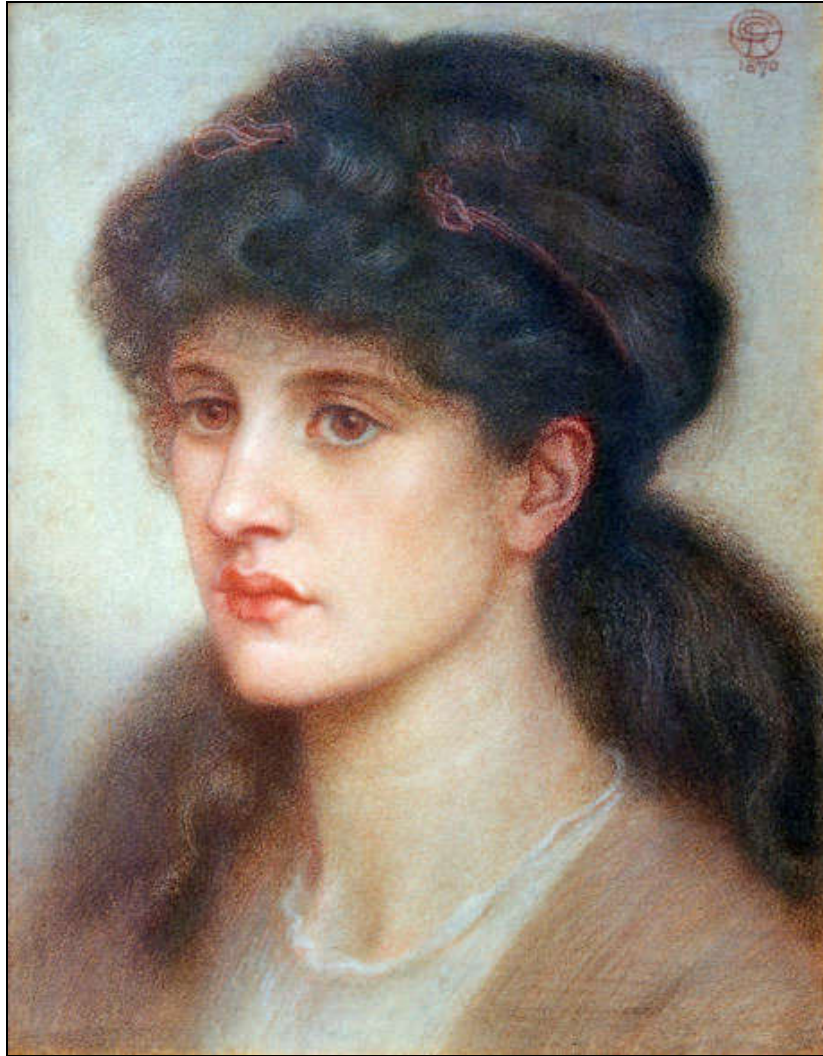


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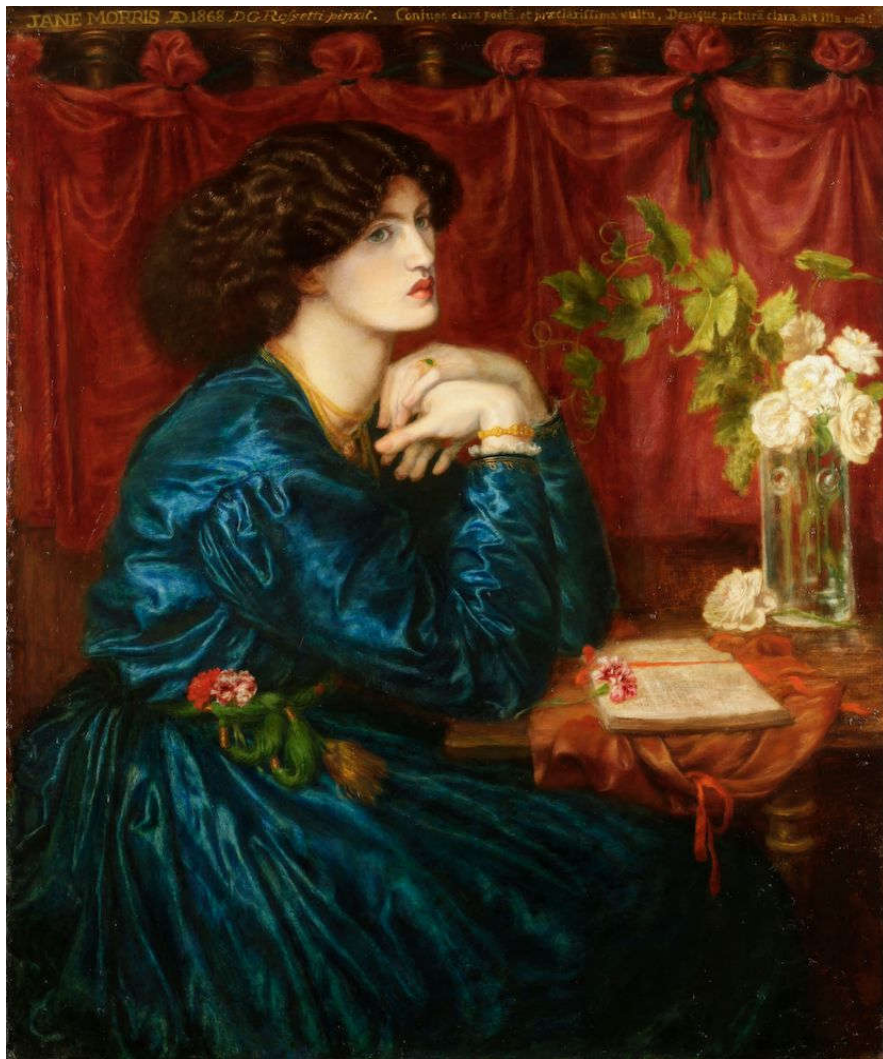




*Rossetti's 1870 portrait of Maria Zambaco, private collection*



*'Le Chant d'Amour' (The Love Song), Metropolitan Museum, New York, 1868-77*



*'The Blue Silk Dress' by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1868*



*Burne-Jones' studio inside The Grange, Fulham*

## Pygmalion (First Series) (1870)



Around the same time, Burne-Jones completed work on what would become his first series of four paintings, based on his friend William Morris' poem 'Pygmalion and the Image', published in the first volume of the collection *The Earthly Paradise* (1868). The four paintings are

- *The Heart Desires*, 1868-70
- *The Hand Refrains*, 1868-1870
- *The Godhead Fires*, 1868-70
- *The Soul Attains*, 1868-70

The model for Series One was the Italian-born Antonio Corsi, an extremely popular choice for artists at the time, including John Singer Sargent and Pierre-Auguste Cot. Corsi would later achieve fame as silent movie star. In each of the four oil paintings, sculptural figures in the background represent the Four Seasons or Horae. The canvases tell the story of Pygmalion, the Cypriot sculptor that created a statue of an ideal woman, since no model of female perfection existed in real life. The tale is narrated by the Roman poet Ovid in Book Ten of *Metamorphoses*. The story goes that the statue was so beautiful that the sculptor fell in love with his own artwork and asked Venus for the creation to come to life. Venus answered his prayers, granting the statue the gift of life, leaving Pygmalion and his statue united.

Morris had intended that each poem of *The Earthly Paradise* would be illustrated with wood engravings in the style of fifteenth-century book illustrations and that the volume would be printed at the premises of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. at Queen Square, Bloomsbury. Georgiana's *Memorials* recounts the optimism and excitement felt by Morris and Burne-Jones as they planned their ambitious project. However, it was eventually abandoned and the only completed set of illustrations was that for 'Cupid and Psyche' (in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery collection), the first of *The Earthly Paradise* tales to be written, constituting seventy of the more than one hundred illustrations Burne-Jones prepared for the collection. Ultimately, only one illustration featured in the final publication: an engraving by Burne-Jones of three young maidens printed on the title page.

*The Heart Desires*, the first painting in the series, can be interpreted as a prologue to the classic tale of ideal love and human aspiration. Burne-Jones depicts the young sculptor, lost in thought, in what appears to be a museum. Although we cannot see the work being contemplated, the sculptured trio of the Graces in the background provides the clue to his thoughts. The figures are illuminated by a light source shining down on their sculpted forms, while the reflection on the glossy marble floor hints at the artistic ideal for which Pygmalion strives.

The second scene, *The Hand Refrains*, has greater focus on the smooth perfection of the female form that the sculptor has created, which is underscored by the pile of rough chippings at her feet. The third scene portrays Venus, accompanied by her traditional doves, breathing life into Pygmalion's creation, Galatea. The final scene

illustrates the sculptor's awe, as he kneels before his creation in admiration, bestowing a tender embrace on Galatea's arms.

Burne-Jones would reprise the subject again a few years later for a second series, which was completed between 1875 and 1878 and is housed complete today in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. The sequel series features a lighter and more pastel-like interpretation of the story, with figures more in keeping with the style of Rossetti.



*The Heart Desires*



*The Hand Refrains*

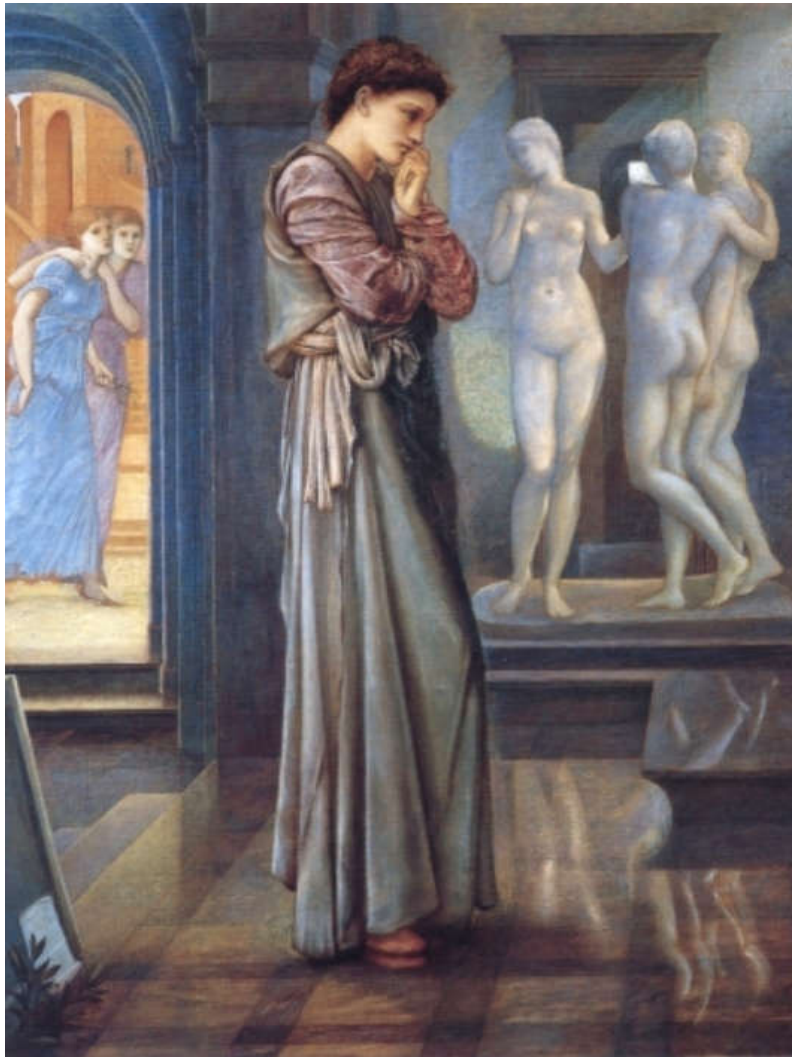




*The Godhead Fires*



*The Soul Attains*



*An example from the second series: 'The Heart Desires', 1878*



*Antonio Corsi*

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*End of Sample*