# The Pre-Raphaelites

Robert de la Sizeranne

Author: Robert de la Sizeranne
Translator: Andrew Byrd

Layout:
BASELINE CO LTD
33 Ter — 33 Bis Mac Dinh Chi St.,
Star Building; 6th floor
District 1, Ho Chi Minh City
Vietnam



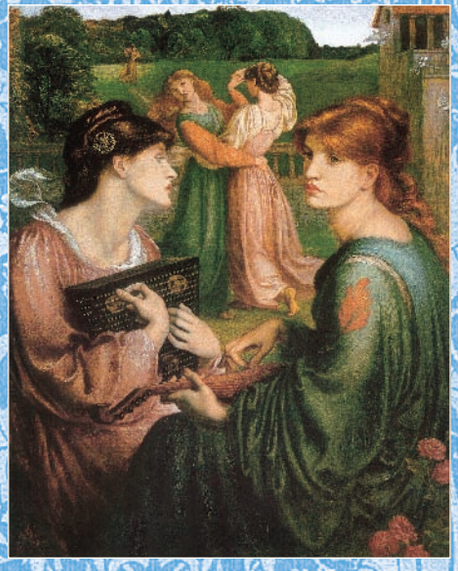
ISBN: 978-1-78042-815-4

Robert de la Sizeranne

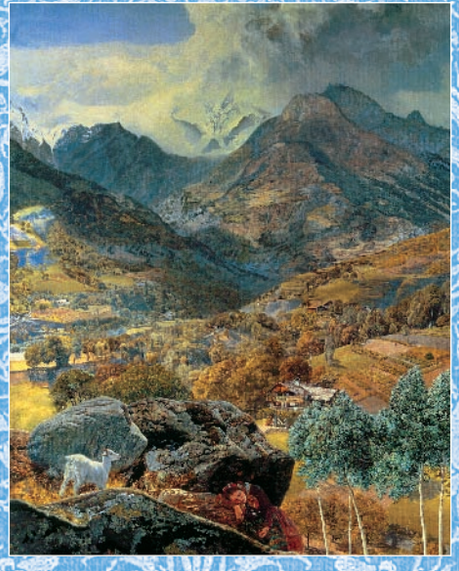
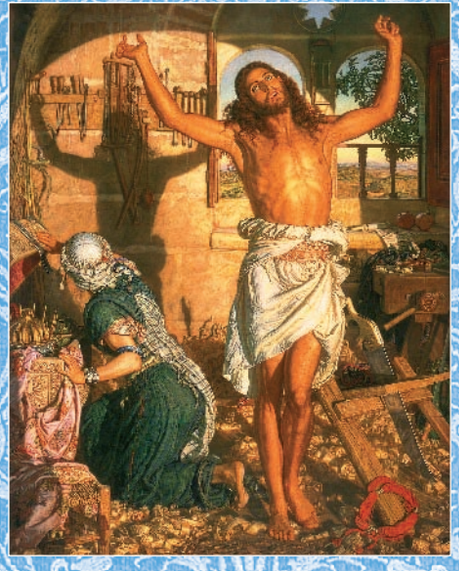
# The Pre-Raphaelites

PARKSTONE
INTERNATIONAL





# *Contents*


I. The Origins of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood 7

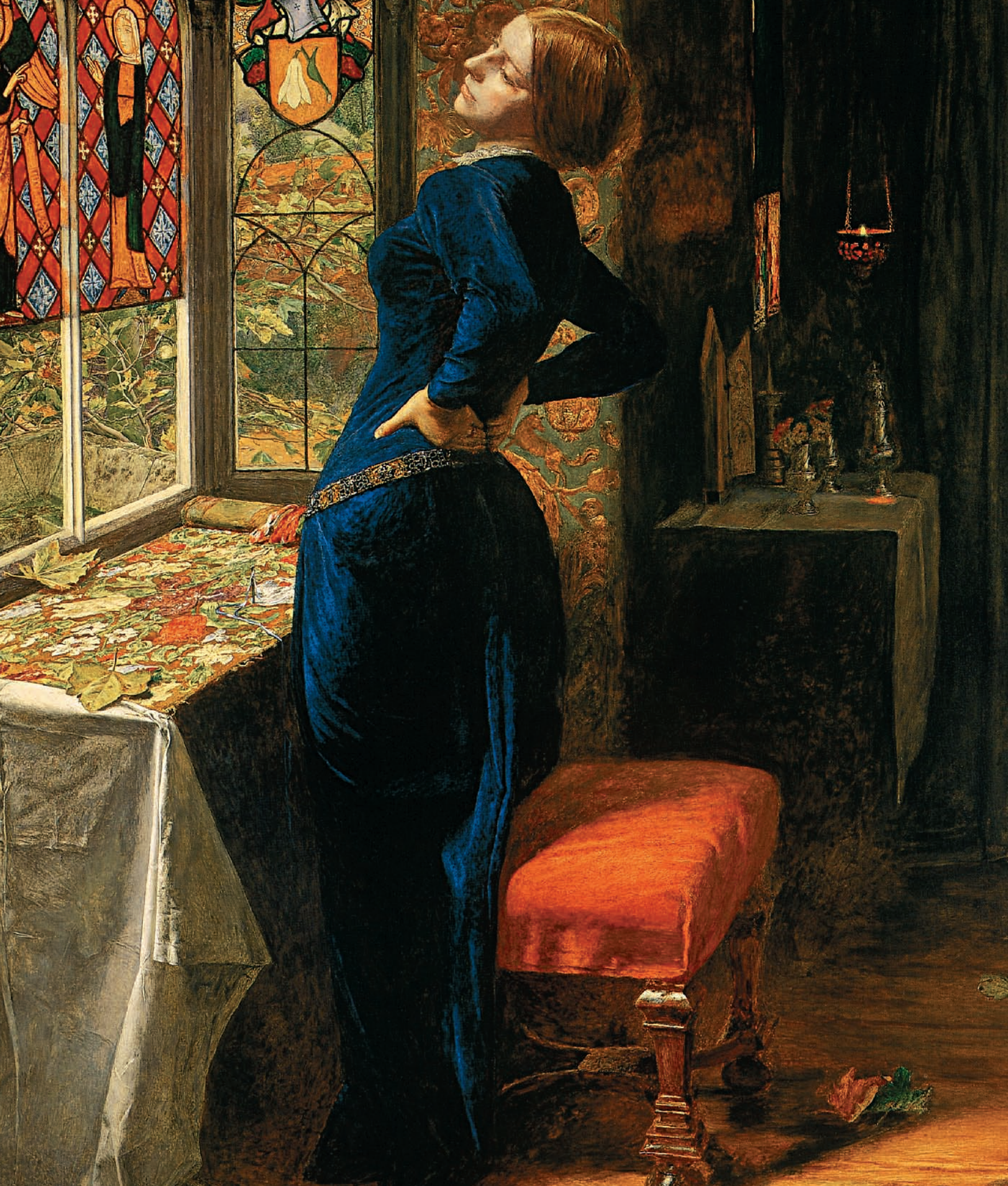
II. The Definition and Results of Pre-Raphaelitism 77

III. Intentions 109

Major Artists 153

Notes 194

Index 196



# I. The Origins of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

## English Art in 1844

Until 1848, one could admire art in England, but would not be surprised by it. Reynolds and Gainsborough were great masters, but they were eighteenth-century painters rather than eighteenth-century English painters. It was their models, their ladies and young girls, rather than brushwork, which gave an English character to their creations. Their aesthetic was similar to that of the rest of Europe at that time. Later, Lawrence painted in England just as Gerard did in France. Walking through the halls of London museums, one could see different paintings, but no difference in manner of the painting, drawing, or even in the conception or composition of a subject. Only the landscape painters, led by Turner and Constable, sounded a new and powerful note at the beginning of the century. But one of them remained the only individual of his species, imitated as infrequently in his own country as elsewhere, belonging no more to a single region of the Earth than a comet belongs to a region of the sky, while the work of the other was so rapidly imitated and developed by the French that he had the glory of creating a new movement in Europe rather than the good chance of providing his native country with a national art. As for the others, they painted, with more or less skill, in the same way as artists of other nationalities. Their dogs, horses, village politicians, forming little kitchen, interior and genre scenes were only interesting for a minute, and even then the artists did not handle them as well as the Dutch. Thus, no one anticipated that out of all this something new and great would emerge. From time to time, a strange lightning bolt illuminated this reasonable and prosaic life. One of Blake's small paintings showed the Prime Minister, Pitt, in the form of an angel wearing a green and gold robe, leading the English parliament, depicted with the appearance of the monster described in the book of Job[1], across the clouds. Then everything was again sleepy and calm; average people, average stories, average painting. Weak, muddy colours layered over bitumen, false and lacking in vitality, the shadows too dark and the highlights too intense. Soft, hesitating outlines that were vague and generalising. And as the date of 1850 approached, Constable's words of 1821 resonated; "In thirty years English art will have ceased to exist."

**John Everett Millais,**
*Mariana,* 1851.
Oil on mahogany, 59.7 x 49.5 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

And yet, if we look closely, two characteristics were there, lying dormant. First, the intellectuality of the subject. The English had always chosen scenes that were interesting, even a bit complicated, where the mind had as much to experience as the eye, where curiosity was stimulated, the memory put into play, and laughter or tears provoked by a silent story. At the Victoria and Albert Museum, one is struck by this British taste for intellectual subjects. There we see scenes from *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, *The Imaginary Invalid* and *The Learned Ladies*, from *Don Quixote*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, images taken from Duncan Gray or of Portia and Bassanio, in short, scenes from the theatre and literature of every country. These paintings are the work of Wilkie, Redgrave, Frith and Leslie. This was the art of the first half of the nineteenth century. It was rapidly becoming an established idea (visible in Hogarth) that the paintbrush was made for writing, storytelling and teaching, not simply for showing. However prior to 1850 it merely spoke of the pettiness of daily life; it expressed faults, errors or rigid conventional feelings; it sought to portray a code of good behaviour. It played the same role as the books of images that were given to children to show them the outcomes of laziness, lying and greed. The other quality was intensity of expression. Anyone who has seen Landseer's dogs, or even a few of those animal studies in English illustrated newspapers where the *habitus corporis* is followed so closely, the expression so well-studied, the look of the animal so intelligent and so different depending on whether it is waiting, feeling fear or desire, questioning its master, or thinking, can easily understand what is meant by "intensity of expression". It is not just "accuracy" that we mean, for this is not a distinctive characteristic of English art. Our wildlife artists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also captured expressions accurately, and yet what a difference there is between Oudry's or Desportes' dogs in the Louvre and Landseer's in the National Gallery in London! But, in the same way that intellectuality was only present before 1850 in subjects that were not worth the effort, intensity of expression was only persistently sought and successfully attained in the representation of animal figures. Most human figures had a banal attitude, showing neither expressiveness, nor accuracy, nor picturesque precision, and were placed on backgrounds imagined in the studio. They were prepared using academic formulas, according to general principles that were excellent in themselves, but poorly understood and lazily applied, fading away with the dimming memory of the old days of Reynolds and Gainsborough.

Such was English art until Ford Madox Brown came back from Antwerp and Paris, bringing an aesthetic revolution along with him. That is not to say that all the trends that have emerged and all the individuality that has developed since that time emerge from this one artist, or that at the moment of his arrival, none of his compatriots were feeling or dreaming the same things that he was. But one must consider that in 1844,

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Mariana,* 1870.
Oil on canvas, 109.8 x 90.5 cm.
Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums, Aberdeen.

**Charles Allston Collins,**
*Convent Thoughts,* 1850-1851.
Oil on canvas, 84 x 59 cm.
The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford.

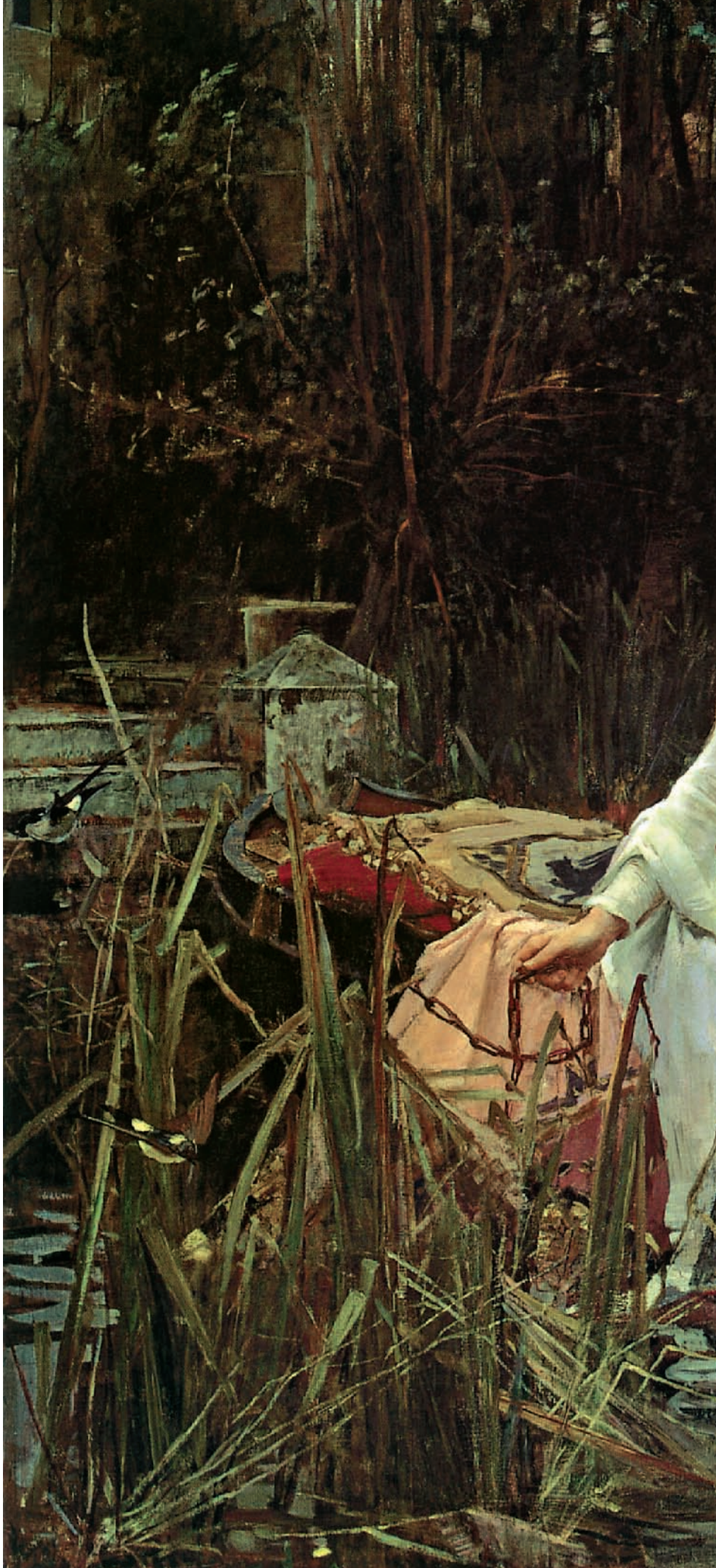
**John Everett Millais,**
*Ferdinand Lured by Ariel,* 1849-1850.
Oil on panel, 64.8 x 50.8 cm.
The Makins Collection, Washington, D.C.

when *William the Conqueror* was exhibited for the first time, no trace of these new things had yet appeared. Rossetti was sixteen years old, Hunt seventeen, Millais fifteen, Watts twenty-six, Leighton fourteen, and Burne-Jones eleven, and consequently not one of these future masters had finished his training. If one considers that the style of composition, outline and painting ushered in by Madox Brown can be found fifty years after his first works in the paintings of Burne-Jones, having appeared in those of Burne-Jones' master Rossetti, one must acknowledge that the exhibitor of 1844 played the decisive role of sower, whereas others only tilled the soil in preparation or harvested once the crop had arrived.[2]

What, then, was in the hand of this sower? In his head was the idea that art was clearly perishing because of the systematic generalisation of forms, and could only be saved by the opposite, that is, the meticulous pursuit of individual traits. In his heart was the indistinct but burning desire to see art play a great social role in England, that of bread rather than sweets reserved for the tables of the rich. Finally, in his hand were a certain elegant awkwardness, a slightly stiff delicacy, and a meticulous attention to detail that he had learned partly from the Gothic school of Baron Wappers in Antwerp, and partly from direct observation of the Primitives. All of this was quite revolutionary, and for that reason must have displeased the conservative spirit of the English. But it was also anti-French, anti-continental, absolutely original and autonomous, so it must have appealed to their patriotism for these reasons. "It was in Paris that I decided to do realistic paintings, because no Frenchman was doing it," said Madox Brown. We shall not stop for the word "realistic", which can have several different meanings depending on the country. Let us retain only this rallying cry against the French school and in favour of a national art.[3]

When Madox Brown arrived in London, the great competition begun in 1843 for the decoration of the new Palace of Westminster was underway and had produced no less than one hundred and forty works signed by the best artists of the day. This aesthetic tournament is an important date in English art history, because it helped then unknown leaders to stand out from the crowd. Watts, a young artist who had learned independently, had just been noticed there. Madox Brown had sent five large compositions. The principal one was an episode from the Norman Conquest: *The Body of Harold brought to William the Conqueror*. These were his first forays down a new path, his protest against old and official art. But no echo had responded to his call. His failure and the contempt of the public were so obvious that the day when the young master received a letter signed with an Italian name — Dante Gabriel Rossetti — in which the writer praised his work and asked to become his student, he had no doubt that this unknown

**Joseph Noel Paton,**
*The Bluidie Tryst,* 1855.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 65 cm.
Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow.



**John William Waterhouse,**
*The Lady of Shalott,* 1888.
Oil on canvas, 153 x 200 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

man was mocking him. A few days later, he presented himself at Rossetti's home. "I was told," recalls the poet, "that a man was asking to see me. This man wanted neither to come in nor to give his name, and was waiting in the corridor. So I went down to see him, and when I arrived at the bottom of the stairs I found Brown holding a large stick in one hand and waving my letter about in the other. Instead of greeting me, he cried out: 'Is your name Rossetti and was it you who wrote this?' I responded in the affirmative, but I was shaking in my boots. 'What is the meaning of this letter?' he asked, and when I replied that I meant exactly what I had said, that I wanted to be a painter and had no idea what I should to do become one, Brown began to realise that the letter was not a mockery but a sincere homage, and he immediately changed from a mortal enemy into the gentlest of friends."[‡] This young man, who appeared so unexpectedly to join ranks with Madox Brown, was only twenty years old. He was the son of an Italian exile, born in the little town of Vasto d'Ammone perched in the mountains of the Abruzzo region. It was because his father, a highlander curious about civilisation, had gone down to Naples and worked for many years as a museum curator that the ideas of art and of great art had entered into his family. It was because this protector of the ancient gods was also a destroyer of modern monarchies, a poet known for his impetuous songs who so incriminated himself that in 1820 the return of the Bourbons saw him thrown onto English soil. And finally, it was because he married the sister of one of Byron's friends, the doctor Polidori, that his children could gather from the memories, passions and grief of the family an echo of all the great patriotic pains that had unsettled the youth of that century. All of these events were perhaps necessary so that, in March 1848, the Gothic art of Madox Brown left some impression other than that of scandal or outmoded charm on an inhabitant of London. While the English remained indifferent to what would become their national art, the young Italian applauded it with enthusiasm and, thanks to the allowance granted by his grandfather Polidori, began his apprenticeship as a painter. Madox Brown, thinking that the first priority was to force this fiery spirit to conform to the rigid discipline of reality, had the future creator of *Dante's Dream* work at copying tobacco boxes. Rossetti, who had gone through his academic courses without learning much, resigned himself to follow the advice that he had requested, for better or for worse. He worked impatiently, passionately, carelessly and in disorder, cleaning his palette with bits of paper that he threw on the ground and that later stuck to the boots of visitors, starting twelve paintings at once, then falling into complete prostration, weary, disgusted with everything and with himself, finishing nothing, no longer wanting to listen to anyone, and rolling on the ground letting out awful moans. Then he disappeared for a month. Madox Brown was not angered, thinking that his student had heard some voices from the heavens calling him to other work. These voices were those of the "trecentists" (thirteenth-century Italian poets) that he listened to in the libraries, as he was trying

**Frederick Sandys,**
*Morgan-Le-Fay,* 1864.
Oil on panel, 61.8 x 43.7 cm.
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, Birmingham.

**John William Waterhouse,**
*The Lady of Shalott,* c. 1894.
Oil on canvas, 120 x 68 cm.
Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds.

**William Holman Hunt,**
*The Lady of Shalott,* 1886-1905.
Oil on canvas, 188 x 146 cm.
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT.

himself to create sonnets and poems. He sent the fruit of his efforts to renowned poets, such as Leigh Hunt, and to others who were less well known, such as William Bell Scott, and asked them, after offering great praise for their verses, what they thought of his. He sent them manuscripts of masterpieces of grace and subtlety such as the *Blessed Damozel* as well as other lesser pieces under the title *Songs of the Art Catholic*, which made these rationalists and Protestants shudder. Then, with his half blind father he took up a discussion on the *Divine Comedy* that the old man had interpreted, and with his brother William Michael and his sister Christina, he gave a dissertation on the halo in the Middle Ages. Everyone in the household wrote verses.[5] No-one understood his temperament at all; that of a dilettante passionate about everything, an improviser speaking about everything at once, an anti-papist revolutionary interested in angels and saints, and a painter concerned with rhythm and rhyme. Oddly enough his prestige grew because of it. Gaunt and dark, with a foreign accent and appearance, a rounded forehead and gleaming eyes, his hair falling down to his shoulders, his beard cut in the style of a Neapolitan fisherman, careless in his dress and covered with stains, he seemed infinitely superior to the average artist to the young people studying painting at the Royal Academy. His passion for the picturesque side of things, his disdain for the discoveries of science, the continuous motion of his mind, and his mysticism crossed with a desire to sell his paintings at very high prices must have completely disconcerted even his close friends. He painted, wrote, painted again, rewrote, fell in love with his model, Miss Siddal, hesitating ten years before finally making up his mind to marry her. Then an unexpected event took this beloved woman away from him, and he threw his manuscripts, his most beautiful poems, into her coffin and refused for seven years to dig them up. Changing his mind, he went forward with an appalling and terrible ceremony, had the manuscripts that had been buried with the dead woman disinterred, and earned an excellent profit from them in pounds sterling. Finally, on his deathbed, after an entire life of complete indifference to religion spent in a milieu of freethinkers and adversaries of Romanism, he asked his appalled friends for priest, a confessor...

While Rossetti was copying tobacco boxes in Madox Brown's studio, one of his classmates at the Royal Academy was making desperate, superhuman efforts to create a place for himself as an independent artist and thus escape from a future in business. His name was William Holman Hunt, and he was twenty-one years of age. His father, a businessman with a small enterprise in the City, had tried everything to dissuade him from his artistic career. But never has fatherly prudence been so obstinately thwarted by destiny. At twelve years old the boy spent his time drawing instead of learning, so he was taken out of school and given a job as a clerk in an auctioneer's office. One day Hunt's new employer caught him hiding something in his desk, and insisted on knowing what it was.

**Sidney Harold Meteyard,**
*"I am half-sick of shadows", said the Lady of Shalott,* 1913.
Oil on canvas, 76 x 114 cm.
The Pre-Raphaelite Trust.

**Walter Crane,**
*The Lady of Shalott,* 1862.
Oil on canvas, 24.1 x 29.2 cm.
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Foundation, New Haven, CT.

He discovered that it was a drawing, and was filled with joy. "It's good," he said. "On our first free day, we will shut ourselves in here and spend the day painting." This lasted for a year and a half, after which the young man was placed in a warehouse run by one of Richard Cobden's agents. There he met another assistant whose principal task was to draw ornaments for the company's fabrics. Naturally, the young Hunt helped him with his task and dreamed more than ever of becoming an artist. Meanwhile, he spent his savings taking lessons from a portrait painter who was a student of Reynolds. One day, an old orange merchant came to his warehouse to offer her produce, and Hunt made such a lifelike portrait of her that word of it spread among all the neighbours and reached the ears of the elder Hunt. The son took advantage of these circumstances to declare that he would be a painter and nothing but, and the exhausted father gave in. For a long time, Holman Hunt struggled with poverty, engaging in various sorts of drudgery to try to escape it. He reproduced the paintings of the masters on behalf of other copyists and retouched portraits that no longer pleased their owners, either because they were not lifelike enough, or because they were too lifelike, or because the clothing in them had gone out of style. He failed the entrance examinations for the Royal Academy twice. After a thousand setbacks, threatened with returning to business or going to work in the countryside with his uncle, a farmer, he finally succeeded.

Fortunately, his career had a few good moments here and there. During his time at the Academy, Hunt met a young man two years younger than himself named John Everett Millais, practically a child, who surprised his masters with his marvellous talent. At fifteen, he had already won a medal for his studies of ancient art. Everything seemed to promise him a most brilliant career. The two young men often spoke about the future, about their own, but also about that of English art, which they found had aged poorly. They spoke of the heavy, dreary, blackish colours that they were taught to use in school, comparing them with the light, lively, musical hues used by the great masters of the past and found in nature, and asked themselves how one could substitute the former for the latter. Hunt was struck by something a passer-by had said to him while he was copying Wilkie's *Blind Fiddler* at the National Gallery: "You will never achieve the freshness of Wilkie if you paint over brown, grey, or bitumen. If you first cover the canvas with neutral colours, certain ones for the shadows and others for the light, like they teach you to do at the Academy, these backgrounds will eventually come out from under your colours and blacken them. Wilkie painted on a white canvas, without a coloured ground, and finished his painting bit by bit like a fresco."[6] This advice from the unknown man came at exactly the right time, not because it was excellent in itself, but because it pointed out a heroic remedy. Hunt and Millais both thought about it and, after examining the few Primitive paintings that they saw here and there in the galleries, they began wondering if their eternal freshness came

**Edmund Blair Leighton,**
*The Accolade,* 1901.
Oil on canvas, 180.9 x 108.5 cm.
Private Collection.

**Walter Crane,**
*La Belle Dame Sans Merci,* 1865.
Oil on canvas, 46.3 x 56.5 cm.
Private Collection.

**John Everett Millais,**
*A Dream of the Past: Sir Isumbras at the Ford,* 1857.
Oil on canvas, 124 x 170 cm.
Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight.


C. BLAIR LEIGHTON 1901

from this straightforward working method, without under-painting and mixing tricks, that the masters before Raphael had imported from fresco painting, where it is unavoidable, into oil painting, where it was later abandoned. In these Primitive masters, where Madox Brown had mostly noticed gestures that were individually created and not learned by rote, poses taken not from a mannequin or the famous figures of masterpieces but from nature, the two young men saw a light, brilliant colour that they set out uncertainly to achieve.

Besides aesthetic discussions, Holman Hunt's other great pleasure was reading. Poets, historians, philosophers and scholars, he devoured everything that came into his hands. Like Flandrin, he trained his mind and his eye at the same time, and after painting all day long, he read all through the night. One evening, one of his studio companions brought him a book by an Oxford graduate that had only recently appeared but was constantly being reprinted: *The Modern Painters*. Holman Hunt leafed through the book, first with curiosity, then with admiration, and finally with enthusiasm. This was not one of those volumes of vague, idle chatter that one is accustomed to categorising as *aesthetics*, a discussion about art by one of those literary renegades who write badly and do not draw at all. It was a swift plea, eloquent and passionate, in favour of naturalist landscapes and rejecting composed academic ones. It was a glittering study full of facts and examples where one sensed the experience of a practising artist behind each theory, a dissertation where one felt that every stroke of the pen had been preceded by a stroke of the brush. And it was also beautifully written, employing the richest, strongest and most concise language that could be imagined. Hunt was captivated. These pages were written by a stranger, but nonetheless seemed to have been created specifically for him, for they expressed so clearly the very things he felt vaguely in his soul. So he spent the night hunched over the book, reading. What then? This, for example: "And it ought to be a rule with every painter, never to let a picture leave his easel while it is yet capable of improvement, or of having more thought put into it. The general effect is often perfect and pleasing, and not to be improved upon, when the details and facts are altogether imperfect and unsatisfactory. It may be difficult, perhaps the most difficult task of art, to complete these details, and not to hurt the general effect; but, until the artist can do this, his art is imperfect and his picture unfinished. That only is a complete picture which has both the general wholeness and effect of nature, and the inexhaustible perfection of nature's details. And it is only in the effort to unite these that a painter really improves. By aiming only at details, he becomes a mechanic; by aiming only at generals, he becomes a trickster; his fall in both cases is sure."[7]

The author also said: "Now it is, indeed, impossible for the painter to follow all this; he cannot come up to the same degree and order of infinity, but he can give us a lesser kind of infinity. He has not one-thousandth part of the space to occupy which nature has;

**Franck Dicksee,**
*Chivalry,* c. 1885.
Oil on canvas, 183 x 136 cm.
The FORBES Magazine Collection, New York.

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*The Perseus Series: The Rock of Doom,* c. 1884-1885.
Gouache on paper, 154 x 128.6 cm.
Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton.

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*The Perseus Series: Perseus and the Sea Nymphs (The Armament of Perseus),* 1877.
Gouache on paper, 152.8 x 126.4 cm.
Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton.

but he can, at least, leave no part of that space vacant and unprofitable. If nature carries out her minutiae over miles, he has no excuse for generalising in inches. And if he will only give us all he can, if he will give us a fullness as complete and as mysterious as nature's, we will pardon him for its being the fullness of a cup instead of an ocean. But we will not pardon him, if, because he has not the mile to occupy, he will not occupy the inch, and because he has fewer means at his command, will leave half of those in his power unexerted. Still less will we pardon him for mistaking the sport of nature for her labour, and for following her only in her hour of rest, without observing how she has worked for it. After spending centuries in raising the forest, and guiding the river, and modelling the mountain, she exults over her work in buoyancy of spirit, with playful sunbeam and flying cloud; but the painter must go through the same labour, or he must not have the same recreation. Let him chisel his rock faithfully, and tuft his forest delicately, and then we will allow him his freaks of light and shade, and thank him for them; but we will not be put off with the play before the lesson, with the adjunct instead of the essence, with the illustration instead of the fact."[8]

The young painter read the book from cover to cover, hoping that before falling asleep he would find what he had been seeking for so long; a call to arms against academic generalisation and a superior model that could be opposed to the academic models. Finally, he came upon this page, the last in the volume and, at the time, the most audacious that had ever been written: "From young artists nothing ought to be tolerated but simple *bona fide* imitation of nature. They have no business to ape the execution of masters; to utter weak and disjointed repetitions of other men's words, and mimic the gestures of the preacher without understanding his meaning or sharing in his emotions. We do not want their crude ideas of composition, their unformed conceptions of the Beautiful, their unsystematised experiments upon the Sublime. We scorn their velocity, for it is without direction; we reject their decision, for it is without grounds; we re-probate their choice, for it is without comparison. Their duty is neither to choose, nor compose, nor imagine, nor experimentalise; but to be humble and earnest in following the steps of nature, and tracing the finger of God. Nothing is so bad a symptom in the work of young artists as too much dexterity of handling, for it is a sign that they are satisfied with their work and have tried to do nothing more than they were able to do. Their work should be full of failures, for these are the signs of efforts. They should keep to quiet colours, greys and browns; and making the early works of Turner their example, as his latest are to be their object of emulation, should go to nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, and remember her instruction rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth."[9] The call to arms had been found.

**John William Waterhouse,**
*La Belle Dame Sans Merci,* 1893.
Oil on canvas, 112 x 81 cm.
Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt.

Who, then, was the writer who, on this page written in 1843, gave the precise formula for realism well before the realists, at the time when Courbet and those like him were still children or barely out of school, still struggling to find their way? He, too, was almost a child. He had written this book when he was but twenty-three years old in a small house in Herne Hill, in the Surrey hills outside London. He had spent several years travelling with his parents in Italy and along the banks of the Rhine in Switzerland, amassing documents, copying paintings, studying leaves and flowers under a microscope, running through the museums and mountains with pencil in hand, sketching the mouldings of a cornice or the grand lines of a glacier. Then, determined to express his admiration for Turner and praise this great artist, he made use of all of his observations and all these examples, and cried out to a stupefied England that nothing in the world was more beautiful than nature and art, and that a great people that expressed itself could became artists whenever they wanted. The product of all this was the first volume of *Modern Painters*. Then, over the next five years, he wrote those prodigious evocations of human monuments and divine things, of ancient thought and vanished inspiration: *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, *The Stones of Venice*, *Aratra Pentelici*, *The Val d'Arno*, *Sesame and Lilies*, *The Queen of the Air*, *The Eagle's Nest*, *Ariadne Florentina*, *Mornings in Florence*, and *Laws of Fesole*.

In these works, this authoritative guide, this sovereign of aesthetics committed himself to curing art of bad taste, but on condition of blind obedience; these works so full of analytic acuity and creativity that one could call them poems of art criticism.[10] John Ruskin (for it was he) delighted the English imagination for forty years with his appreciation of the heavens, clouds, woods, waters and rocks, and raised his country progressively to his level of enthusiasm, whose ridiculous but very sincere expression was aestheticism. Understanding from the outset that his compatriots would not understand if he spoke to them of nature and art only in terms of beauty, he spoke to them of truth and goodness, of usefulness, morals, biblical thought, and the curiosities of science. Though he had a single goal, he used many different approaches. He was by turns a scholar, an historian, an anti-papist, an economic moralist, a poet, a botanist and a geologist, and through his charming and learned discourse he attracted even the most resistant Englishmen to the idea of beauty. All of the winding paths in his historical promenade brought them inevitably to the same point, which was the social mission of art and its supremacy over all other things. This is the man who would protest against railways because they were ugly, who would forgive popes because they loved beauty, who would found aesthetic festivals in convents and museums in working-class neighbourhoods, and who would resurrect the guilds of the Middle Ages because they were picturesque. He would create a workshop in Westmoreland with thirty women working on spinning wheels modelled after those of the Campanile de Giotto, and a workshop in Laxey on the Isle of Man where the black wool

**William Holman Hunt,**
*Two Gentlemen of Verona, Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus,* 1851.
Oil on canvas, 98.5 x 133.3 cm.
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, Birmingham.

**Arthur Hughes,**
*The Knight of the Sun,* undated.
Oil on panel, 28 x 39 cm.
Private Collection.

from the island's sheep was woven without the help of any modern machine, because manual work developed the muscles and made the human body more beautiful. Examples of Ruskin's aesthetic despotism and the submission of his admirers are known throughout England. One day, the great aesthetician declared that he did not understand why apple trees in bloom were never depicted in paintings, since nothing was more "aesthetic" than a blooming apple tree. The following year, the walls of the exhibitions and galleries were covered with apple trees in bloom. Another time, a woman was filled with the desire to copy nature and asked him for advice in choosing a model. "I will send it to you," he responded, and a short while later she found a cart at her doorstep containing an enormous paving stone. She was not astonished, and began meticulously studying this stone. Besides this anecdote, there are many other examples of the punctuality with which the prescriptions of this sovereign of aesthetics were followed. Indeed, a tourist who follows the injunctions of *Mornings in Florence* when visiting the city of Savonarola could leave the banks of the Arno having seen neither the Tribune, nor the Palazzo Pitti, nor the Palazzo Vecchio, nor the Loggia, nor San Marco, nor most of the other things for which one generally visits Florence. But he will have shivered behind the funerary monument of the marquise Strozzi Ridolfi in the cloister of Santa Maria Novella, and ruined his eyesight in a dark chapel of Santa Croce, and it would be a miracle if, while contemplating the Campanile from all directions, exposed to the air with his feet in the mud, he didn't get a stiff neck. Now, these aesthetic stations were shown to around thirty English men and women, for six days in a row, in the order prescribed by Ruskin. These aesthetes could be found peering at the rays of sunlight in the Bardi chapel in front of Giotto as prescribed in Book III, and scrutinising the narrow door in the fresco *The Triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas.* They were seen running from Santa Maria Novella to the Uffizi at a quarter past eleven, just as Ruskin desired, and hurrying from the Duomo to the Spanish Chapel's Chiostro Verde in order to compare the effects of the vaults, without losing a moment looking right or left down the street that they were crossing to avoid weakening the impression on the eyes. Finally, they were seen at the tombstone of Galileo Galilei, at the entrance of Santa Croce. And in the solemn shadow of the temple, listening to the profound and eloquent words of this great admirer of beauty, one experiences a striking sensation. One forgets that this visit is part of an immutable Cook's tour. The magic of the great writer makes it again possible to see these places as part of an aesthetic pilgrimage. One seems to see Brother Egidio and Saint Louis moving silently toward one another in the depths of the old chapel, as in the legend where they see one another for the first time, embrace without exchanging a single word, and leave one another forever...

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*The Wedding of St. George and Princess Sabra,* 1857.
Watercolour on paper, 36.5 x 36.5 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

At the time when the young Hunt read his first work, John Ruskin was not yet a universally-known author whose books were reproduced by the million, but his keen words already


**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*How Sir Galahad, Sir Bors and Sir Percival Were Fed with the Sanct Grael; but Sir Percival's Sister Died by the Way,* 1864.
Watercolour on paper, 29.2 x 41.9 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Sir Galahad at the Ruined Chapel,*
1859.
Watercolour on paper, 29.3 x 33.9 cm.
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery,
Birmingham.

carried authority. However, this authority was only honorary; he was listened to but not followed. To create a revolution in painting, even the most eloquent criticism is not sufficient: one needs painters to do the job. John Ruskin did not find them close to him, and scanned the horizon to no avail, wondering if a few new men might appear whom he could make into his disciples.

## The Pre-Raphaelite Battle

This was the state of affairs in England when, one evening in the year 1848, three young painters who worked in the same studio were taking tea at the home of the most wealthy among them. One was of Italian origin and the other two were English, and they were friends in the same way as sailors who set sail together and depend upon one another for help. They were thumbing through a collection of engravings by Campo Santo de Pise that lay on the table. All three of them were weary of the banalities of their school, and had been searching for several years for a master to whom they could devote themselves in order to escape from general movements, stereotyped poses and expressions traced from the classics, each new tracing diluting the primitive beauty of the original. These frescoes by Campo Santo were a revelation. Thousands of tourists had already passed before them without creating a new school of painting. But these tourists were not tormented by the desire to create a place for themselves away from Leslie, Maclise and Mulready, to blaze a new trail at any cost; they did not have the zeal of these twenty-year-olds...

The young men spoke of simple, individual, conscientious art employing neither formulae nor studio practices, the art of Benozzo Gozzoli and of Orcagna. "In this art, there is only the most meticulous, thorough imitation of nature possible, and the naive expression of religious ideas. Look at the expression of this horse! And see how this hermit prays with all his heart! And what colour should all this be? It should have the colours of van Eyck's work, fresh and brilliant! Colours applied directly to a white canvas... What has made art banal is that there is no longer this direct pursuit of nature. And it was lost quite a while ago! Rubens had already lost it, as had Carrache... even Jules Romain, even Raphael had lost it! To find masters that we can follow fearlessly, we will need to look to the period before Raphael, 'Pre-Raphaelite' art." The night carried on, and teacups were emptied one after the other. When the last one was finished, Pre-Raphaelitism had been born.

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Before the Battle,* 1858,
retouched in 1862.
Transparent and opaque watercolour
on paper, mounted on canvas,
41.4 x 27.5 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*The Bower Meadow,* 1850-1872.
Oil on canvas, 86.3 x 68 cm.
Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester.

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Dante's Vision of Rachel and Leah,*
1855.
Watercolour on paper, 35.2 x 31.4 cm.
Tate Gallery, London.

These three friends were Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais. All three of them had great natural abilities and a furious desire to succeed, and this trio made a perfect whole. Hunt had faith, Rossetti eloquence, and Millais talent. The Italian was more poetic, Millais was more of a painter, and Hunt was more Christian. Rossetti, anxious and agitated, needed to prophesy something, anything, to anyone who came along. The conscientious Hunt needed to believe in something and devote himself to a great cause. The practical and ambitious Millais needed a theory to set him apart from the crowd of skilful painters and was unconcerned with believing or prophesying. They set to work. Rossetti recruited adepts somewhat randomly, Hunt took great pains to conform to the precepts of the cult, and Millais reaped the applause. Seeing the leader, people said "How well he speaks!" Observing the disciple, they said "How devoted he is!" and seeing their friend, "He makes such beautiful things!" Only after many long years did it become apparent that the disciple did not do what he was told, and that their friend was successful only because he did not listen to the leader or imitate the disciple.

In France, these revolutionaries would have been content with supporting the same ideals and going to the same café for meetings. But in England, where three admirers of Shakespeare or Browning could not meet without forming a Shakespeare Reading Society or a Browning Discussion Group, the Pre-Raphaelites created a Brotherhood. And, as all Englishmen have a pronounced taste for following their names with a few different letters, with three or four specimens from the alphabet, they decided that each Pre-Raphaelite Brother would include the initials of his new title, P.R.B, in his signature. They included them in the addresses of their letters when writing to one another, but this sign of brotherhood was most important on their works. Seven of the young painters of the day had the right to call themselves P.R.B. Three talented men, even ones as gifted as Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti, cannot make as much noise as one hundred mediocre ones, and they accepted four other Pre-Raphaelite brothers: Michael William Rossetti, who did not paint; Woolner, who did not paint either, but sculpted sometimes, when he was not in Australia searching for gold with his feet in the icy water and his head in the sun; Stephens, who ended up confining himself entirely to literature; and Collinson, who after having tried in vain to paint Elisabeth of Hungary, converted to Catholicism and entered a seminary, where he was assigned the task of polishing boots to teach him humility. Later, the absent and hopeless members were replaced by three newcomers: Deverell, Hughes and Collins, but these were only helpers. They escorted the trio of founders, gathering and rousing the crowd around them, writing articles, attracting attention and ensuring that the group was noticed. It was Rossetti, Hunt and Millais who had challenged official art. It was they who had to wage the battle and, given their limited resources, either emerge victorious or disappear.[11]

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Venus Verticordia,* 1864-1868.
Oil on canvas, 98 x 70 cm.
Russel-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth.

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
**William Morris** and **John Henry Dearle** (design) and **Morris & Co.** (production),
*Holy Grail Tapestry - Quest for the Holy Grail Tapestries - The Arming and Departure of the Knights,* 1895-1896.
High warp tapestry, wool and silk weft on cotton warp, 244 x 360 cm.
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, Birmingham.

The battlefield that they chose was the illustration of Keats' famous poem *Isabella; or, the Pot of Basil*. This mournful story based on Boccaccio is well known: "Fair Isabel, poor simple Isabel" was the sister of two rich Florentine merchants. In their house, under their command, was the young Lorenzo, who – like all heroes – was quite handsome. The young man and the young woman "could not in the self-same mansion dwell, without some stir of heart, some malady. They could not sit at meals but feel how well it soothed each to be the other by. They could not, sure, beneath the same roof sleep, but to each other dream, and nightly weep." Isabel's brothers quickly noticed the drama that was unfolding before their eyes. As they wished to marry their sister to some great lord, and as they lived in that period well loved by poets when one did not back away from even the most dreadful undertakings, they resolved to murder Lorenzo. One fine morning, they asked him to go hunting near the Apennines, "ere the hot sun count his dewy rosary on the eglantine." They hurried off, passed the Arno, and in a neighbouring forest, killed Lorenzo and buried him deep in the earth.

Upon their return, they explained that the young man had set sail quickly for a foreign country because of some pressing need. Isabel asked them if he would return soon, but got no reply, and they deceived her every day with new stories. Finally, she had a dream that revealed the truth to her. In it appeared Lorenzo, who said to her: "Isabel, my sweet! Red whortleberries droop above my head, and a large flint-stone weighs upon my feet; Around me beeches and high chestnuts shed their leaves and prickly nuts." When morning came, she ran to the forest with her old nurse. Her eyes fell upon the knife that had been used in the murder. The two women dug and dug, and found the corpse. Then, the distraught lover, wanting to keep something of the dead man at any price, cut off his head and carried it back home with her. There she embalmed it and hid it in a flowerpot, under a basil plant that was kept green by her endless tears. From then on, she neglected everything and cared only for her beloved basil. Day and night, she cried over the plant, which grew and flowered wondrously. This astonished her brothers, who looked to see what was under the basil, and though "the thing was vile with green and livid spot," they recognised Lorenzo's head. Appalled, they fled their homeland, carrying away what remained of their victim. But as soon as she no longer had her beloved plant, Isabel fell ill and wasted away. And finally she died, mournfully asking everyone else who approached her and pilgrims returning from faraway lands, what had become of her basil-pot.

This was the drama from which each of the Pre-Raphaelites was expected to depict a scene, rigorously applying the theories of their new school: no imitation of the masters, no generalisation, each figure reproduced from a model and from one single model, outlines as original and individual as possible, painting on an unprepared white canvas,

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*The Golden Stairs,* 1880.
Oil on canvas, 269.2 x 116.8 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*The Challenge in the Desert,*
1894-1898.
Oil on canvas, 129.5 x 96.5 cm.
Collection Lord Lloyd-Webber.

**Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale,**
*The Wise Virgins,* 1901.
Two watercolours on one canvas,
upper panel: 37 x 30 cm;
lower panel: 11 x 30 cm.
Christopher Wood Gallery, London.


AT MIDNIGHT OR AT
THE COCKCROWING
OR IN THE MORNING

and fastidious attention to detail. In a word, earnestness. But, while Rossetti continued talking away and Hunt prepared by meticulously studying every detail of his subject, Millais had already constructed, sketched out, and finished his painting. For the Exhibition of 1849, in which all three of them participated together, only Millais produced a work inspired by Keats.[12]

This work depicts Isabella and Lorenzo seated together at the table, where he is offering her half an orange on a plate. Across from them, on the other side of the table, the two brothers, one cracking a nut and the other lifting his glass to his lips, cast suspicious glances toward the couple. The closest one reaches out to kick Isabella's hound, and this forces the poor beast to cower against the knees of its mistress. Most of the guests in *Lorenzo and Isabella* are eating or drinking, without paying any attention to one another. It looks as though this is a table at an inn. If lovers were able to notice anything apart from each other, Isabella and Lorenzo would have seen the salt cellar overturned on the table, a sinister omen! Behind them, an attentive servant stands with his towel draped over his arm, watching over their banquet. The costumes are those of Florence around the fourteenth century. Hunt declared that this was the most astonishing painting by a twenty- year-old youth that that the world had ever seen, and perhaps he was right. In it, the theories of their school had been scrupulously followed, though by chance. Each figure was painted after a model, and after a single model. Every fold, every wrinkle in the fabric had been reproduced by observing nature. Each vein of the hands, each reflection on a fingernail, and each gleam of light had been copied from reality, "neglecting nothing, selecting nothing". Thus, each character was a portrait: Isabella that of Mrs Hodgkinson, the wife of Millais' half-brother, and Lorenzo that of William Rossetti, who had quite an Italian appearance. The brother who is about to drink is a portrait of Dante Rossetti, and the old invitee who is wiping his lips with a serviette is that of William Bell Scott, a great friend of the Pre-Raphaelites, a mediocre poet, and a poor painter. He left one painting (*The Eve of the Deluge* in the National Gallery), some etchings, and two volumes of his memoirs. He was an eclectic character, and his persistence in wanting to convert minds as resistant as those of Hunt and Rossetti to materialism was amusing.

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*Laus Veneris,* 1878.
Oil on canvas, 122.5 x 183.3 cm.
Laing Art Gallery,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

**John Melhuish Strudwick,**
*The Gentle Music of a Bygone Day,*
1890.
Oil on canvas, 79 x 61 cm.
The Pre-Raphaelite Trust.

**John Melhuish Strudwick,**
*Isabelle and the Pot of Basil.*
The De Morgan Centre, London.

At the same time, Hunt exhibited *Rienzi swearing Revenge over his Brother's Corpse.* A fight had just taken place between several nobles over the division of Rome. We see the young Rienzi dead, stretched out on a shield, and his eldest brother is raising his fist to the sky. It is again Dante Rossetti who posed for this figure. As for the landscape, it was painted after nature, which almost never happened at the time for the backgrounds of historic paintings. The third P.R.B., Rossetti, exhibited a painting depicting *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, not at

the Academy, but at the Chinese Gallery in Hyde Park where his master, Madox Brown, had also sent his famous painting of *Cordelia's Portion*, a scene taken from *King Lear*. Thus, in the spring of 1849 the three P.R.B. and the man who inspired them made their first collective attempt at a new art.

At first, everything went very well. The paintings by Hunt and Millais were hung in prominent places, and the painters were congratulated by many of the people in attendance on the morning of the private view. Their realism did not shock the audience at all, *The Times* was benevolent, and the professors of the Royal Academy were moderate in their criticism. No one had noticed the mysterious letters P.R.B on Isabel's chair, a visible sign of the conspiracy. The Pre-Raphaelites even immediately found buyers, which is a sign of predestination in England as it is elsewhere, or perhaps more so than abroad. They prepared for the exhibition of 1850, and after a short trip to France, galvanised by their success, they created a magazine called *Germ*, in which the Pre-Raphaelite thesis was presented and developed, revealing the meaning of the letters P.R.B. The friends of these innovators gave, in each issue of *Germ*, published from January to April of 1850, the secret of their preferences, their antipathies and their ambitions. This revelation caused a sudden turn of events. The idea that the Pre-Raphaelites wanted to change something in the aesthetic constitution of their country deeply upset the same people that their works had not shocked at all. English conservativism let out a cry of terror. It seems that Raphael had become, like Nelson or Wellington, something unquestionable, and that declaring oneself to be "Pre-Raphaelite" was considered a menace to the security of the British homeland. These events coincided with the 1850 Exhibition, where Millais presented his *Christ in the House of his Parents*, Hunt *The Missionary*, and Rossetti *The Annunciation*.[13] The entire press thundered against them. The great Charles Dickens himself entered the arena and wrote a vigorous diatribe against Millais' painting, which depicted the baby Jesus in his father's workshop. Jesus has just hurt himself with some pliers, and the kneeling Virgin is embracing and consoling him; Saint Joseph is holding his hand. A young Saint John the Baptist is bringing water to dress his wound. Saint Anne is removing the pliers, which are still on the table. An apprentice is adjusting a plank, continuing his work uninterrupted. Here was a new and curiously realistic expression of the dreadful prophecy: "And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends." Dickens wrote: "As you approach the Holy Family of Millais, you must drive out of your head any religious conception, any elevated thought, any connection with the tender, dramatic, sad, noble, sacred, dear, and beautiful, and prepare to lower yourself to the bottom of all this, horrible, shameful, repulsive, and infuriating."[14] The P.R.B. could not even plead against this terrible verdict with an article

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*The Beguiling of Merlin,* 1873-1874.
Oil on canvas, 186 x 111 cm.
Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight.

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*Psyche's Wedding,* 1895.
Oil on canvas, 119.5 x 215.5 cm.
Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.

in *The Germ*, which had been defunct since April for lack of funds. William Rossetti protested in *The Spectator*, but what use was a single voice against this tempest? The purchases stopped and the purses of art collectors snapped shut in indignation. For an entire year, the struggle continued. The P.R.B. persevered and participated in the Exhibition of 1851, but the slander against them knew no bounds. Millais' *Mariana* was disparaged and Holman Hunt's *Valentine and Sylvia* was especially showered with insults. Some went as far as to ask that the Pre-Raphaelite paintings be removed from the walls of the Academy before the end of the Exhibition, now that it was proved beyond a doubt that they offended the audience. They were scorned in the schools, and the students responded to the names of the P.R.B. with jeers. The young painters' families blushed with shame. While working at his business in the City, the elder Hunt even ran into friends who bet him ten pounds that his son's painting would be thrown out of the Exhibition within a fortnight. Some people wondered if he might give in under the pressure of the public's scorn and leave for Australia. Madox Brown, who had not wanted to be an integral part of the Brotherhood but who was interested in it, was filled with desperation at seeing his hopes vanish and his followers ruined. It seemed that Pre-Raphaelitism was lost.

This was when the young man who worked in Denmark Hill rushed up to the movement's defence. With his warm heart, combative spirit, and diverse and brilliant intelligence, John Ruskin could not see such an unequal struggle without feeling indignation and seeing an opportunity for a blazing battle, in which he would fight single-handedly against everyone, armed with the marvellous weapons that nature and his studies had put into his hands. He did not know the P.R.B., but it did not take long for him to disentangle their disorderly cries and discover something that resembled his own words, and he glimpsed in their flawed essays the talent that they promised for the future. These were perhaps the followers that he had dreamed of. He said: "It is rather extraordinary that two young men, one eighteen years old and the other twenty, have conceived an entirely independent and sincere working method, and that they have enthusiastically persevered, no matter what has been done to discourage them or block their way. It is no less surprising that after three or four years of effort, they have produced works that are in many ways equal to the best of Albrecht Dürer's. But the unanimous wrath with which the critics of the press have welcomed them, the profound, cruel, stupid laughter of those who are unable to accomplish either of these unusual things, these are the most unusual of all!" So, in his two memorable addresses to *The Times*, John Ruskin took hold of the official criticism and shook it roughly. The P.R.B. had been reproached for their perspective, and this is one of the very rare questions in art which are subject to demonstration. Ruskin declared that he could find worse errors of perspective in any

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*The Baleful Head,* 1885-1887.
Oil on canvas, 150 x 130 cm.
Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart.

**William Holman Hunt,**
*Isabella and the Pot of Basil,* 1867.
Oil on canvas, 185 x 113 cm.
Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle.

**William Holman Hunt,**
*Claudio and Isabella,* 1850.
Oil on mahogany, 99.7 x 66.8 cm.
Tate Britain, London.


W.HOLMAN HUNT


PRB

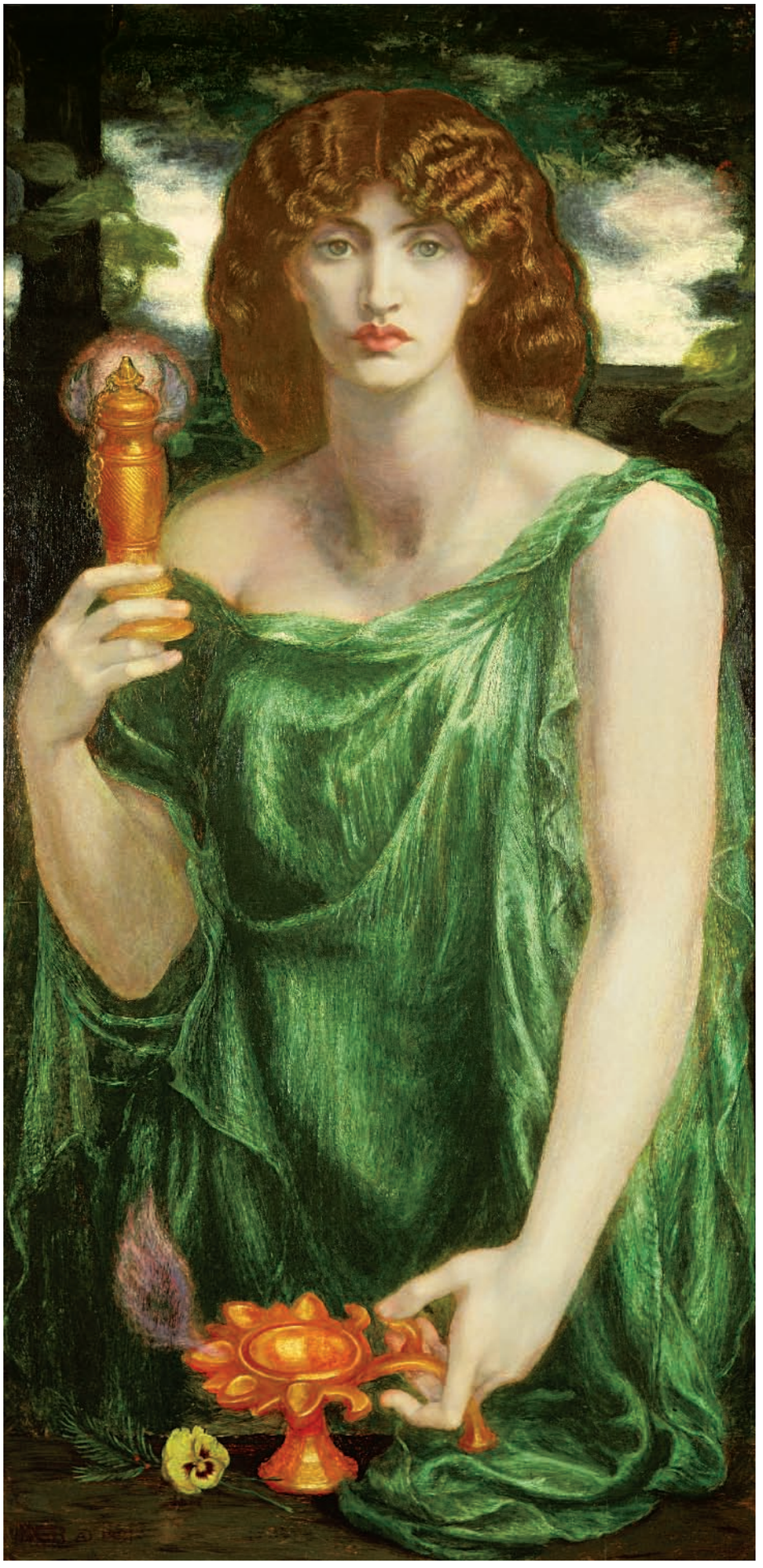
architectural painting by any fashionable painter that one would care to mention. The Brotherhood's fastidious attention to detail had been criticised, but Ruskin established it as one of their strong points, showing that merely from a botanical point of view, the water lily and the *alisma plantago* included in one of their paintings were invaluable, and that it would be impossible to find something worth as much as this part of Hunt's work in terms of truth, energy and finishing in academic painting. It had been proclaimed that the P.R.B.'s works were lacking in effect, that is to say that there were not large areas of shadow which brought out the highlights. This was, for any artist, an important point in the debate. Ruskin, with his sure eye trained through the direct study of nature, spotted everything creative in the Pre-Raphaelite endeavour and hailed it immediately. Just as his praise for Turner in 1843 had led him, by a circuitous route, to give the exact formula of realism, the necessity of defending the P.R.B. led him on this day, May 26th 1851, to give the exact formula for *plein air* some thirty years before the Impressionists: "The apparent lack of shadows," he said, "is perhaps the fault which stands out the most. But if there is indeed a fault, it is not so much in the Pre-Raphaelite paintings than in those they are being compared with. It is the others that are in error, not the Pre-Raphaelites, disregarding the fact that all painting is false, in that it wishes to represent a living ray of light with inert colours. I think that Mr Hunt has a slight tendency to exaggerate reflected light, and if Mr Millais has ever taken a close look at good stained glass, he must have noticed that its colour is dimmer and more sober than the window in his *Mariana*. But overall it is wrong to condemn their paintings, considering that the only light we are accustomed to seeing represented is the dubious light which falls on an artist's model in the studio, and not the sun shining in the fields."[15] Finally, after having cleared these innovators of the accusation of Romanism, which was in those days a dreadful epithet across the Channel, Ruskin declared with his usual imperative confidence that in England, the Pre-Raphaelites had laid "the foundation of a school of art nobler than the world has seen for 300 years." This furious attack against the Academy confused public opinion. The enemy lines drifted uncertainly, afraid that they had been mistaken. The exchange of blows slowed, and the Liverpool Academy dared to take the lead. It awarded a prize to Hunt's *Valentine and Sylvia* and the press coverage generated by the event convinced a Belfast collector to buy the painting without even having seen it. The letter that announced this fact, like the dove seen flying toward the arch in Millais' painting, indicated that a great crisis was past and that new light would soon shine on a calmed world... Pre-Raphaelitism had been saved.

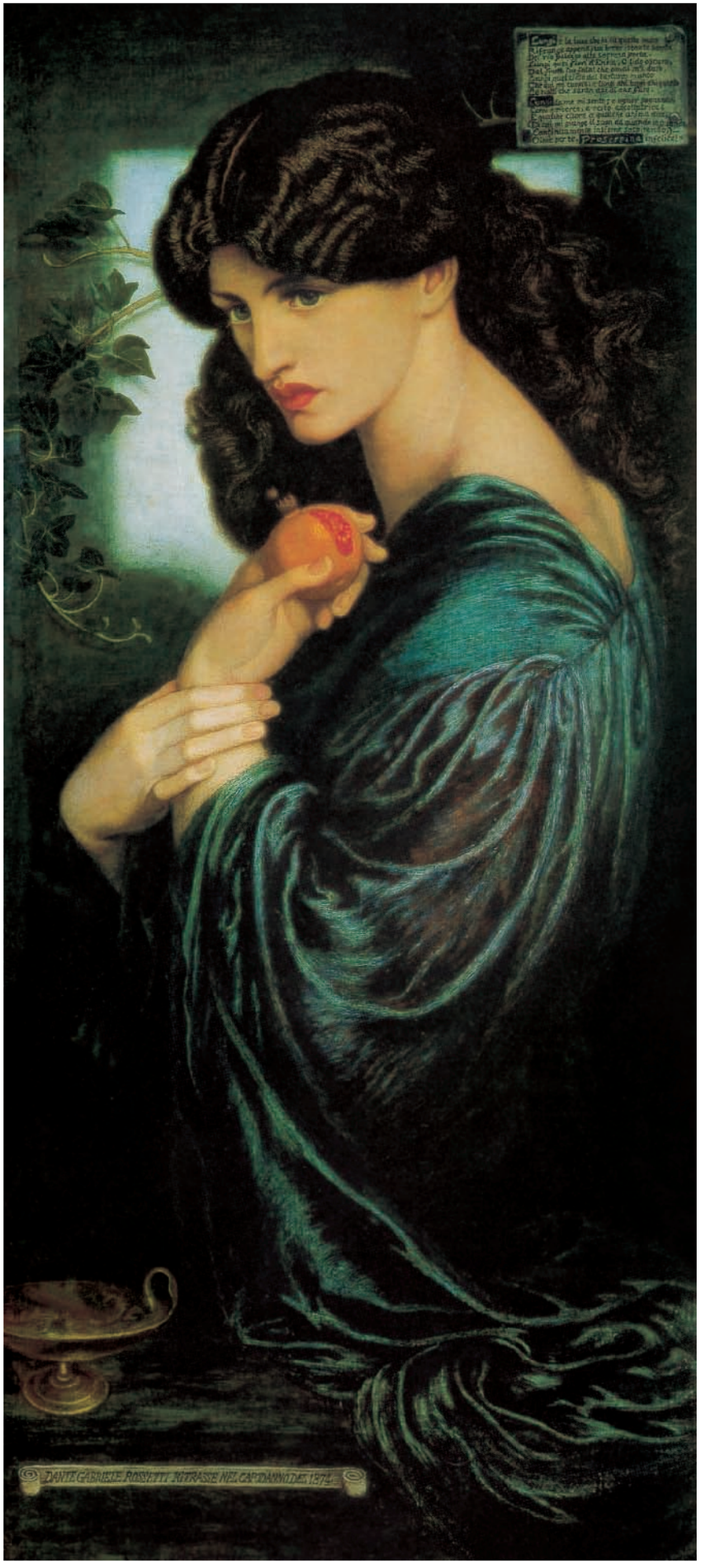
Thus began a period which, though not yet one of triumph, was at least no longer one of persecution. Each year, the Liverpool Academy awarded its prize to one of the P.R.B. brethren. Ruskin generously bought watercolours from Rossetti, and art dealers and rich

**John Everett Millais,**
*Lorenzo and Isabella,* 1849.
Oil on canvas, 103 x 143 cm.
Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Mnemosyne,* 1881.
Oil on canvas, 126.4 x 65 cm.
Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington.

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Proserpine,* 1874.
Oil on canvas, 125.1 x 61 cm.
Tate Gallery, London.

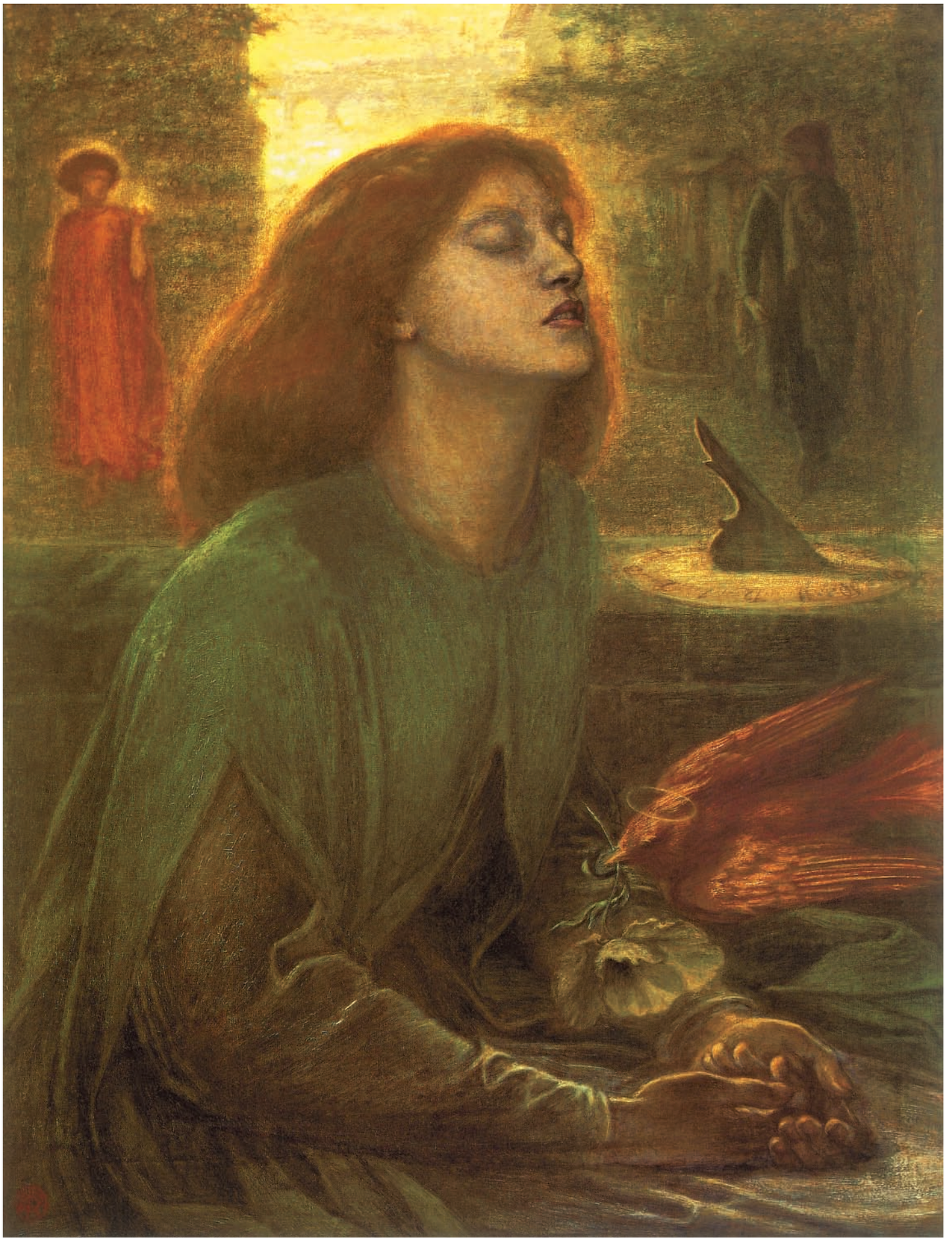



DANTE GABRIELE ROSSETTI HITRASSE NEL CAPODANNO DEL 1874

collectors furnished them with grants. The Pre-Raphaelites redoubled their efforts. Millais, Hunt and Collins, the brother of Wilkie Collins, spent a summer in Surrey to study nature for the backgrounds of their next paintings. There, in the silence and calm of the countryside, they prepared works that will be forever celebrated. These were Millais's *Ophelia* and *A Huguenot* and Hunt's *Hireling Shepherd* and *Light of the World*. The world has perhaps never seen such single-minded devotion in observing details for a background. Millais wanted to paint his Ophelia floating in the river, her face turned toward the sky, her hands half-extended at the surface of the water, opened as if giving a blessing, her body half-stuck in grasses, dead willow leaves, nettles, daisies, and buttercups, her dress and draperies ballooning, slowly losing the lightness that had suspended them at the surface, everything that had been the young woman disappearing beneath the low foliage and the straight reeds, slowly flowing away with the water towards some great river and towards death. Each leaf of the tree that he copied, each verse of the poet whose words inspired him, caused Millais an infinite number of difficulties, for he wanted to remain faithful to both nature and Shakespeare.[16] Beside him, Hunt completed the background of his *Hireling Shepherd* and began that of his *Light of the World*, which depicts Christ crowned with gold and thorns, covered with a long tunic and the cape worn by priests when singing vespers. He carries a lantern and advances through the night in a countryside planted with trees. He stops before a door half hidden by weeds and parasitic plants, and he knocks. It is an expression of these words from the scriptures: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." In order to perfectly reproduce the trees in the background and the ivy in the foreground, without inventing or generalising anything, truthfully and consciously and in the light that the subject demanded, Hunt compelled himself to work outdoors in an orchard for three months at night, from nine in the evening to five in the morning during every full moon.

When the two friends returned to London, they found benevolent, smiling faces and open arms. The hour of their success was approaching, and it came first to Millais at the 1852 Exhibition. His *Ophelia* and *A Huguenot*, though they were still attacked by a few critics, won over the rest of the crowd. Reproductions spread throughout England. One year later, he was elected an Associate Member of the Royal Academy and exchanged the letters P.R.B. for A.R.A. Next, Holman Hunt also triumphed with his *Light of the World*. The most elegant ladies came to visit his studio and admire the painting when it was still on the easel. Later, in 1855, their master and counsellor Madox Brown touched the hearts of the crowd with his *Last of England*, inspired by the departure of several unfortunate friends for Australia, where they had gone to try their luck. He depicted a young couple on a sailing ship, leaving their home country with an expression of deep despair on their faces.[17] As for

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Beata Beatrix,* c. 1864-1870.
Oil on canvas, 86.4 x 66 cm.
Tate Britain, London.



**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrix (Dante Drawing an Angel),*
1853.
Watercolour on paper, 42 x 61 cm.
The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford.

Rossetti, he had not exhibited anything since 1850, but at the end of 1856, feeling that success was certain, he reappeared in public and was greeted with enthusiastic applause. This was not at the Academy, but at an exclusive Pre-Raphaelite exhibition that brought together the principal works of the Brotherhood. On that day he presented the first watercolour of *Dante's Dream*, which remains one of Rossetti's most significant works. Hughes had just come on the scene with his triptych *Eve of Saint Agnes*, inspired by a poem by Keats. In the meantime, Stephens, one of the first P.R.B., had reached the post of critic of *The Times*, the newspaper in which his friends had previously met with so much hostility. Numerous artists hurried to line up under the revolutionary flag. Philosophers and poets, Carlyle, Tennyson, Coventry Patmore, and Dickens himself, the old adversary from the early days, escorted the triumphant victors. Finally, three young men, whose future roles were as yet unknown, arrived from Oxford and asked Rossetti to lead them toward the ideal: they were called Swinburne, William Morris and Burne-Jones.[18]

The Pre-Raphaelites amused themselves making portraits of one another, as soldiers might admire one another and celebrate victory once the battle has ended. And this was certainly a victory. It has been calculated that Millais, Hunt, and Rossetti earned no less than twelve million pounds between the three of them. But this was also the end of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. For a long time, their paintings had no longer been signed with the letters P.R.B. Several of the Brothers had left London: Woolner to go to Australia, Hunt for Palestine, and Collinson to take refuge in a monastery. Deverell died and, at that moment, the group split apart. In 1857, two of the absent Brothers returned, but among those who had not left their country, one of the greatest was distancing himself imperceptibly from the Pre-Raphaelite ideal. To the applause of the academic world, he was creating a more independent and important place for himself; this was Millais. Each of the others was moving off in the direction that his affinities and his most mature talents pointed out for him. Ruskin noticed Millais' defection and raised the alarm, but in vain. Ruskin himself had evolved. Thus, the year 1857 is a decisive date in history, like the year 1846. In 1846, Haydon, the head of the Royal Academy School, committed suicide, and Madox Brown had just exhibited his *William the Conqueror*. In 1857, Madox Brown's school had triumphed and Millais, the head of that school, committed moral suicide. The entire 1850 movement can be situated between these two dates. In 1846, a man sought to create a new movement but was not yet able to amass an army. In 1857, they had all turned to their own specialisations, like soldiers returning home. The troops were dismissed, for they had nothing more to do: Pre-Raphaelitism was victorious.

**Evelyn de Morgan,**
*Hope in the Prison of Despair,* undated.
Oil on panel, 58 x 65 cm.
Private Collection.

# II. The Definition and Results of Pre-Raphaelitism

But who exactly was this victor? It is now time to ask the question, since the tournament is over and he has raised the visor behind which he fought. For "Pre-Raphaelitism" is a term that is more mysterious than explicative, and it should be discussed now that the battle has been won, in order to understand what it meant and what happened during the struggle to lead to its acceptance. It was composed of the most diverse and contradictory elements. There was contempt for Raphael, though Hunt, who is not only one of the Pre-Raphaelites, but the Pre-Raphaelite *par excellence*, tells us in his memoirs that it was the Raphaels in the National Gallery that he admired most in his youth.[19] There was a preference for imitating the thin, hard style of the Primitives, whereas a single glance at the ample bosoms, round shoulders, and sensual mouths of Rosetti's women evokes all the opulence and splendour of the Renaissance. There was realism, "uncompromising truth", forbidding the addition of any imaginary element, but it is precisely the imaginary that is striking when one admires some of the school's works, such as Hunt's *The Light of the World*, or *Dante's Dream* by Rossetti. Some also saw a transcendent idealism, an offshoot of the great Gothic and religious revival that was called the Oxford Movement, and the Rossettists have been considered unconscious but zealous and faithful collaborators with the Keble, Newman and Pusey. This may be the case, but it does not advance the definition of Pre-Raphaelitism much, for to characterise a Pre-Raphaelite picture by saying that it was inspired by the Oxford Movement is like trying to explain the mechanism of a lock by describing the political opinions of the locksmith. The connections between the Rossettists and "Puseyism" (an English theological movement also known as Tractarianism or the Oxford Movement) could have been much stronger and a hundred times more obvious without leading Hunt to paint on a white canvas or Millais to forbid bitumen from his preparations.[20] A more precise and material definition was needed. So Pre-Raphaelitism was reduced to a few processes, such as the meticulous search for the infinitesimal details that Ruskin desired and the substitution of the living model for the mannequin, with the freedom to choose the model that seemed the most appropriate to convey the idea of the Virgin, Jesus, or a hero, and the obligation, once the model was chosen, to stick to it exactly and to copy it scrupulously, without introducing characteristics of any other figure, nor idealising it according to some memory. But this

**John Everett Millais,**
*The Bridesmaid,* 1851.
Oil on panel, 27.9 x 20.3 cm.
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

definition fails completely to include Madox Brown and Rossetti among the Pre-Raphaelites. For Madox Brown never accepted that the artist should avoid fusing several models, and Rossetti, except on two or three occasions, spent his life painting his figures after a mannequin or even after nothing at all, "out of his own consciousness".[21] If one explains the Pre-Raphaelites as Meissoniers from across the Channel, entomologists of painting, this characterises the first works of Millais and Hunt fairly well, but completely ignores those of Rossetti. When one is in the Tate Gallery and studies the *Beata Beatrix* next to paintings by the members of the Academy in 1830, the most striking thing is the absence of detail in the work of the Pre-Raphaelite and its abundance in those by the adversaries of Pre-Raphaelitism. Finally, tired of inventing definitions that all exclude some of the objects to be defined, certain critics elevated themselves to very general reflection, and did something like a village preacher who, having become incoherent in his explanations, decides to start speaking in Latin. "Yes," cried one of them, "the Pre-Raphaelite movement was more than a revolution in the ideals and methods of painting. It was a single wave in a great reactionary tide – the ever-rising protest and rebellion of our century against artificial authority, against tradition and convention in every department of life. It broke out, socially, with the French Revolution; it found voice in the poetic impulse which followed it in Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats; it spread from ethics to politics, it touched all morality and all knowledge, and it affected the whole literature of Europe from philosophy to fiction and from the drama to the lyric poem. Schumann and Chopin breathed it into music. Darwin, by reforming the world of science, laid down in the theory of evolution the basis of this new cosmogony…"[22] Here, one loses one's footing entirely. A school of art that resembles so many things outside art is not clearly differentiated enough from its rivals that, when it is described, one can recognise a painting that belongs to it. The definition of Pre-Raphaelitism is too narrow if we restrict it to the quest for detail, but becomes too large if we extend it to the conquest of a new philosophy. In one case, Pre-Raphaelitism is not really contained, and in the other, it is contained with too many other things. If one insists on the former, one must admit that the Pre-Raphaelites all broke with their aesthetic conventions to differing degrees, and if one adopts the second, one must conclude that they did not have any specific or marked conventions.

But they did. One must remember that this narrow theory of realism was never anything but a training method used by twenty-year-old painters, which they invented to place a necessary tool in their hands, even if they would later abandon it. It was a framework for study, not a plan for execution; a learning manual, not a Bible for an ideal; a path, not a goal.[23]

**John Everett Millais,**
*Autumn Leaves,* 1856.
Oil on canvas, 104.3 x 74 cm.
Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester.

**William Holman Hunt,**
*The Hireling Shepherd,* 1851-1852.
Oil on canvas, 76.4 x 109.5 cm.
Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester.

If, in the moments of exaggeration that are natural in youth, a writer in *Germ* described things differently, he had misunderstood. It is a great error to go looking through *Germ*, where neither Millais, nor Hunt, nor Rossetti explained their ideas, to find the secret of their hopes for art. Let us instead look at their works. Rossetti, in keeping only rarely to the rules that he himself had laid down, proved that in his eyes, painstaking realism was not the goal of art. Millais, by abandoning the Pre-Raphaelite theories starting at the age of twenty-eight, showed even more clearly that he considered them to be constraints from which he should one day free himself. Hunt thinks in exactly the same way: "In agreeing to use the utmost elaboration in painting our first pictures," he said, "we never meant more than to insist that the practice was essential for training the eye and hand of the young artist; we should not have admitted that the relinquishment of this habit of work by a matured painter would make him an apostate Pre-Raphaelite."[24] Finally, even Ruskin, who has often been accused of exaggeration, pointed out as early as 1843, in the book that the young Hunt read at night, that the realistic study of nature was in his opinion only a training method. Immediately after the call to "reject nothing, select nothing and scorn nothing", which is always quoted, come these words which are never cited but nonetheless clarify his thoughts: "Then, when their memories are stored, and their imaginations fed, and their hands firm, let them take up the scarlet and the gold, give the reins to their fancy, and show us what their heads are made of. We will follow them wherever they choose to lead; we will check at nothing; they are then our masters, and are fit to be so. They have placed themselves above our criticism, and we will listen to their words in all faith and humility; but not unless they themselves have before bowed, in the same submission, to a higher Authority and Master."[25] It is therefore neither shocking nor extraordinary that Madox Brown, who was more knowledgeable than his followers, did not constrain himself to their method, or that Rossetti left it behind rather early, after one or two half-works, such as *The Annunciation* and *Found*, or that Millais did the same a few years later. There is no Pre-Raphaelite that did not, at some time, ignore the realist method. Identifying Pre-Raphaelitism with the Pre-Raphaelite theory of the early days leads to the conclusion that the movement was abandoned by all of its members.[26]

Thus, there was something more lasting than the Pre-Raphaelite theory. There was an idea that united these innovators more closely and guided them for longer. But in order to find it, one must leave theory behind and examine their practices, stop consulting the newspapers where the P.R.B. members wrote and go into the museums and the galleries where their paintings are – put simply, one must judge them not by their words, but by

**William Holman Hunt,**
*A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids,* 1850.
Oil on canvas mounted on panel, 111 x 141 cm.
The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford.

**Ford Madox Brown,**
*Walton-on-the-Naze,* 1859-1860.
Oil on canvas, 84 x 174.2 cm.
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, Birmingham.

**Ford Madox Brown,**
*The Hayfield,* 1855-1856.
Oil on panel, 24.1 x 33.3 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

their deeds, by their works. Then one sees, in all of them, and to the same degree, a furious effort, a desperate attempt to escape the inexpressive gestures and lifeless colours of the Academy in 1850. Whatever work one stands before, whatever master one chooses, at whatever period one considers his work, excepting the second half of Millais' life, one finds these two characteristics: original poses and brilliant colour. The heads are perhaps inclined too far in meditation, the arms are sometimes subtly more rounded than necessary to attain a novel pose and express something new with the human body, like the branches of fruit trees that are forced into certain strange poses along a trellis. This desire to delve into the meaning of the slightest gestures, to restore meaning to the most vulgar interplay of muscles, is often carried to the point of mania. But on the other hand, this insistence on original poses often simply means remaining true to nature and changing the false aspect of a classical pose. The colours sometimes shriek from being juxtaposed without transition, from being left raw and unconcealed, and the brushstrokes, clumsily applied while working towards a difficult shade, are upsetting to look at, as the painter's prejudices kept him from covering up his laborious process of trial and error. But, beneficial or not, these same characteristics are seen everywhere. Whether or not these are faults, the expressive originality of poses and the raw brilliance of colour can be seen in any Pre-Raphaelite painting, while they are completely lacking in the works that preceded them. They can be seen in Madox Brown's work *Christ washing Saint Peter's Feet* in the Tate Gallery, in Saint Peter's deeply bowed head, in his furrowed brow, in his knees bent up under his chin and his hands joined around his knee, in all these aspects of the human machine straining to express the state of difficult reflection that envelops the apostle. This is the same highly significant pose that Holman Hunt would later give to the Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, who is listening to the boy Jesus in the Temple. The desire for brilliant colour can be found in the virulence of the basin's copper tones and in Saint Peter's feet. These characteristics are again found in Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*, only a few steps away from Madox Brown's *Saint Peter*. Her head tilts painfully back, her throat opens out like a fan, her eyelids are half lowered and her mouth is half open, her hands rest passively on her knees in an attitude of excessive languor and prostration. She is entirely coloured in green, red, orange, and violet tones, extremely bright, but strong, solid, and even light when compared with the browns of the academic school.[27] We find these characteristics in all of Hunt's works, and also in those of Millais until

**Ford Madox Brown,**
*Pretty Baa-Lambs,* 1851-1859.
Oil on panel, 60 x 75 cm.
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, Birmingham.

**John Brett,**
*Glacier of Rosenlaui,* 1856.
Oil on canvas, 44.5 x 41.9 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

**John Brett,**
*Vale of Aosta,* 1858.
Oil on canvas, 88 x 68 cm.
Private Collection.

well after he is supposed to have abandoned Pre-Raphaelitism. It is simply that they were achieved by a great variety of means. Some, such as Hunt and Millais early on, sought to attain original poses through the scrupulous observation of nature, which is an excellent place to learn originality because it offers an inexhaustible mine of new sights. While these painters devoted themselves to copying the distinctive characteristics of a particular model, Rossetti obtained the effect by reaching deep into his mind, straining his imagination, and forbidding his dream to speak until he had completely stripped it of all acquired forms, of all things drawn from the masters' paintings. Thus he rarely painted his figures after nature, and many of them came directly from his imagination. Hunt and Millais sought new, varied, strong colours from the landscapes of Surrey, which they observed and copied in *plein air*, while Rossetti obtained them through audacious experiments in the studio, unexpected juxtapositions, and continuous changes in his palette, excursions whose futility often drove him to despair.

Finally, we find these characteristics in the work of one of their contemporaries, one of the winners of the Westminster competition 1844, who is never mentioned among the Pre-Raphaelites because he was neither a member of the Brotherhood nor one of its close friends. Working alone, he simultaneously accomplished the same reform as the Pre-Raphaelites through the same methods. I am speaking here of George Frederick Watts. He was older than most of the P.R.B., and had deplored the colourist practices of the Academy for even longer than they had. These practices are well known, and were similar in both France and England around 1850. One began by covering the canvas with bitumen and warm tones, with reddish brown, for example. Then, over this base which never truly dried since it contained bitumen, one added touches of cool tones, thereby immediately obtaining transparency and enchanting transitions. This method delighted beginners and more skilful painters alike with its ease. This devilish beauty later faded: the colours obtained from these highly thinned mixtures became muddy and dark. The reliefs, which were not supported by a sufficient thickness of colour, flattened out and receded into the canvas. The bitumen, which never hardened, lay trapped under the dried colours like water under ice and pushed its way out when subjected to changes in temperature, cracking the surface of the masterpiece. While Hunt and Millais were experimenting with painting on a plain white canvas, Watts also dared to take a course opposed to that of the misguided Academy. He decided to use only solid colours, resigning himself to the fact that he would not be able to obtain transparency rapidly and easily. Moreover, instead of painting over

**Thomas B. Seddon,**
*Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehoshaphat from the Hill of Evil Counsel,* 1854-1855.
Oil on canvas, 67.3 x 83.2 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

**Ford Madox Brown,**
*An English Autumn Afternoon, Hampstead: Landscape,*
1852-1855.
Oil on canvas, 72 x 135 cm.
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, Birmingham.

robust grounds, he used very light ones, and waited for them to dry completely so that they would behave like canvas or wood. He assumed that if these light colours re-emerged with time, they would lighten his painting instead of darkening it, which is indeed what happened. Today, none of this is a secret, but at the time when Watts, Hunt, and Millais were starting out, it took rare insight to understand it and great energy to act.[28] Finally, worried about mixing colours with different bases and producing disastrous chemical combinations, Watts had the idea of placing colours next to each other instead of layering them. For example, if he wanted to create a reddish-yellow hue, instead of mixing red and yellow paint together he would add a touch of red next to a touch of yellow. As much as possible, he substituted juxtaposition for mixture, since beyond a certain distance they produce approximately the same effect on the eye. These processes, which the pointillists of today celebrate as new discoveries, connect Watts to the great Pre-Raphaelite school. He sought the same things as they did, original poses and strong colours, at the same time that they did, and though he was not a member of their group, its spirit was a continuous inspiration to him.

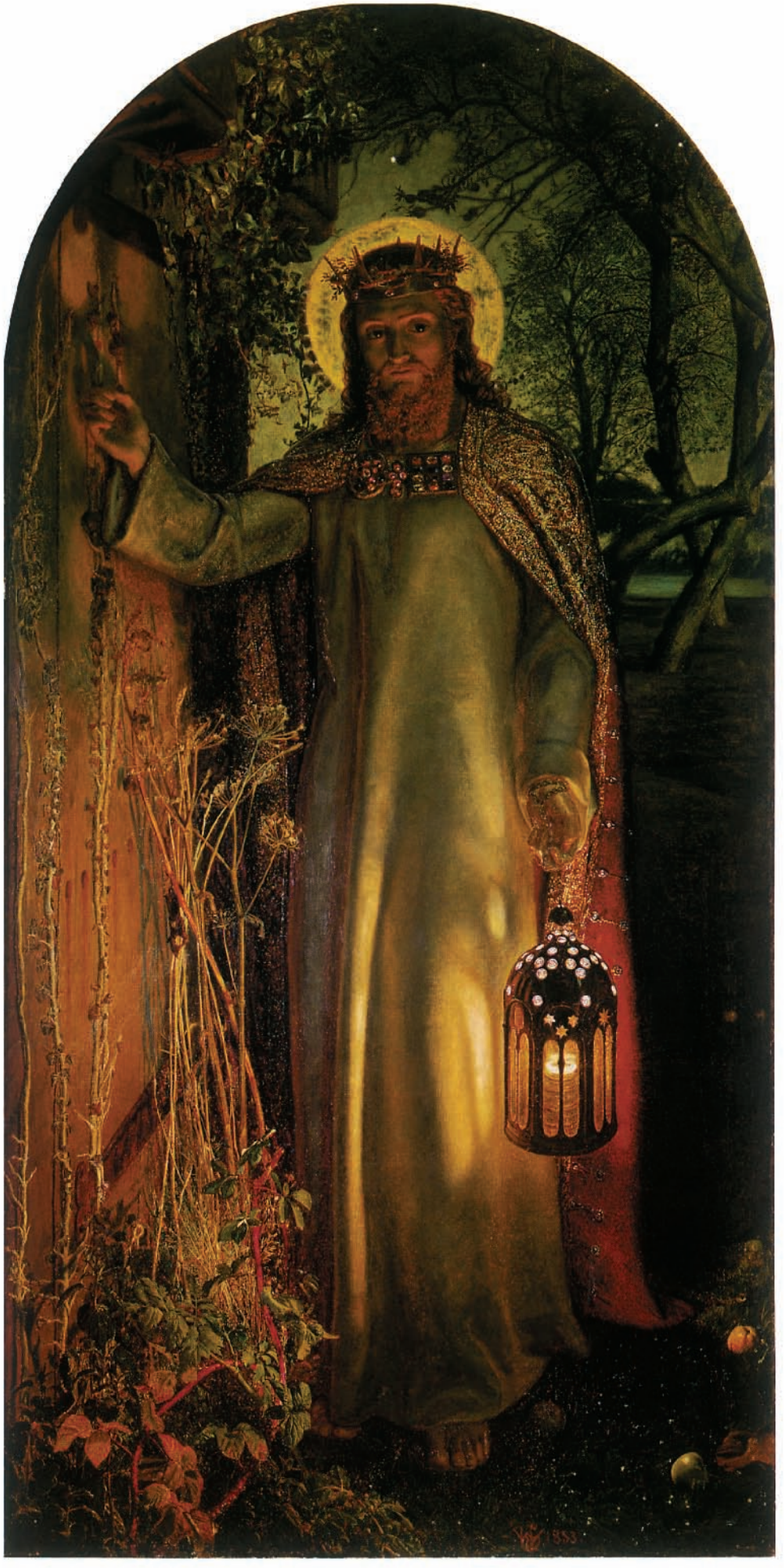
Thus, taken as a whole, from Madox Brown to Millais and from Watts to Rossetti, from the Westminster cartoons to *The Last of England*, from *Isabella and Lorenzo* to the *Huguenot*, and from *The Annunciation* to *Dante's Dream*, the 1850 movement was the following: new men, seeking a new art, substituting curious, individual, novel poses for banal and generalising ones, and strong colour applied without underpainting, glittering with juxtapositions, for fluid colour reinforced by superpositions. In short, expressive lines instead of decorative ones and bright colours instead of warm ones. This, put simply, is what Pre-Raphaelitism was. And the rest is only mincing words.[29]

**William Holman Hunt,**
*Our English Coasts, 1852 ("Strayed Sheep"),* 1852.
Oil on canvas, 43.2 x 58.4 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

**William Holman Hunt,**
*The Shadow of Death,* 1870-1873.
Oil on canvas, 281 x 248 cm.
Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester.

**William Holman Hunt,**
*The Light of the World,* 1851-1853.
Oil on canvas, 125.5 x 59.8 cm.
Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester.

But there is a residue of truth that to be found in the depths of the Pre-Raphaelite theories, and this "precipitate" that remains in the still used for the analysis, after the concepts of high aesthetics have disappeared in smoke, should not be disregarded. To seek, as in the details of a Meissonier, precise movements instead of vague movements, and achieve, as through the extravagant imagination of Gustave Doré, expressive forms instead of purely decorative ones, is a great step, and this is exactly the step that needed to be taken in 1850. When generalisation reigns supreme in academic art, in a school, this school is lost; it becomes necessary, through some process, to undo the bundle of rules, throw away the stereotypes, break the moulds, chase away the models who strike poses



like Jupiter thundering or Venus emerging from the sea of their own accord, and mix up all of the pompous lines that express no particular attitude, but only a state of the body and the spirit applied to an entire set of ideas and feelings, because in this case mere skilfulness is taught instead of careful study, and the student is led to the result without understanding the means. When one wishes to outline from memory Tatius' arm throwing the javelin (from the painting of *The Sabines*), one must stop and ask if this is the most personal pose that he can be given. This is not because generalisation in art should be forbidden (whenever art is elevated, it generalises), but because in order to attempt the expression of a general idea, one must know the specific ideas that gave rise to it. Before permitting oneself to make an image that summarises, one must know what is being summarised. Before making an image that ennobles, one must understand that which ennobles. In a word, in order to speak in literary language, one must be able to speak in common language. The Academy in 1850 could no longer do this. For them, the generalisation of forms was no longer the highest challenge to be tackled when one had overcome all others, but a collection of inherited recipes, magic formulae that are passed on without analysis, which are to be used without understanding what is behind them.[30]

The step taken with colour was no smaller. No one would think to reprimand Titian, Rembrandt, or van Dyck for their warm tones, nor be scandalised if they obtained them through painting over layers of robust colour. But the formulae which tried to codify their processes without truly understanding them are deplorable, and because they facilitate that which should be done with difficulty, because they spare a necessary effort and make it possible for the student to easily attain passable results, they are unable to give him the means to achieve better. From the day when a school begins producing excellent copyists of old paintings instead of training its students to create, it is in the wrong. When it teaches the avoidance of difficulty instead of the skills to fight against it, it loses its reason for being. Achieving transparency by painting over bitumen is easier than doing so through laying down solid colours individually. Achieving contrast through the false opposition of blackish and luminous regions is easier than obtaining it from a correct relationship between colours. But this easy contrast is of lesser quality and this easy transparency is a peril for the future. The bitumen with which Haydon conscientiously coated his canvases before painting, probably to obtain the subdued colour that the English had held in such high esteem since Reynolds, the large areas of black that the members of the Academy included in their compositions to restrict the light to the chosen places, these are the traditions that needed to be broken at any price.

**Ford Madox Brown,**
*Jesus Washing Peter's Feet,* 1852-1856.
Oil on canvas, 116.8 x 133.3 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

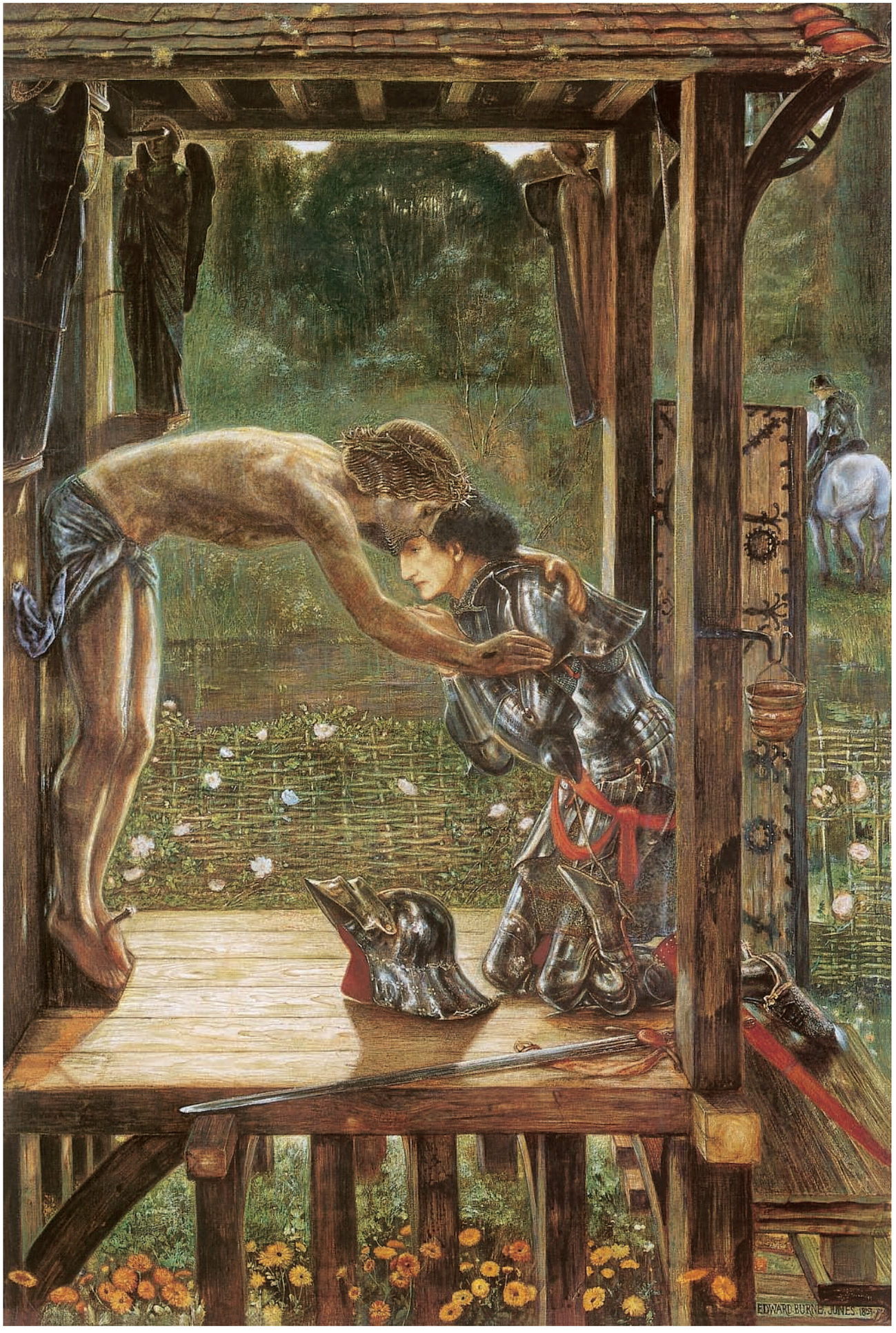
**William Holman Hunt,**
*Plain of Esdraelon from the Heights above Nazareth,* 1877.
Oil on canvas, 41 x 75 cm.
The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford.

The Pre-Raphaelites, by always painting on a white canvas and always using "the solar system", as Ruskin said, for their lighting[31] – that is to say *plein air* with no preconceived ideas about light – went perhaps too far, but in doing so they saved English painting. When one examines the early Pre-Raphaelite paintings, Millais' *Lorenzo and Isabella*, for example, one is astonished by the naturalist and even impressionist discoveries that this twenty-year-old painter made thanks to the subtlety of his eye. There is no diffuse shadow without bright points, without reflections of the surrounding luminous objects. There are imperceptible gleams even in cast shadows, shadows of the nostrils in the figure of Lorenzo, and of the hair ribbons in that of Isabella, and this continuous dispersion of the effect brings fluttering light and lively animation to even the driest painting. It is bright and joyous compared with the best academic paintings of 1849. This same quality, though to a lesser degree, can be seen in Hunt's paintings; there is no region completely enveloped in shadow. Everywhere that the painter saw light, he painted it, down to the tiny hand of the kneeling child who is holding a fly-swatter, in the painting *Finding Jesus in the Temple*. This laborious, tireless, exasperating search for the varied effects of the sun, for its blows and counterblows, its upstrokes and downstrokes, its arpeggios and trills, its floods and trickles, its thousands of reflections and counter-reflections, selecting nothing, is upon first glance disconcerting and irritating, like the story of a nasty fairy that forces a poor girl to find a pearl necklace scattered in the forest. But bit by bit, the skein unwinds, the threads untangle, and the whole that nature desired appears, and though the colours remain quite unpleasant, the bright spots are seen to correspond and harmonise, and the pearls are strung together one by one to form the necklace. Upon first looking at Holman Hunt's *Unwatched Flock*, this painting resembles a wound.[32] These blood-red sheep in indigo bushes, on rocks like nougat under an uncompromising sky, lead us to think of the worst excesses of our luminists, and one wonders if this may be one of the first manifestations of the *plein air* school – if the purple hair of Mr Besnard did not somehow descend from the red sheep of Holman Hunt by some bizarre filiation. But though these works are imperfect, they are valuable as attempts. These tones placed boldly next to one another are often garish, but sometimes yield a strong vibration. With all his extravagance, Hunt made colour sing, and it had been in a deep sleep before he came along. Sometimes this is but a brief flash, but in its light we see how right the P.R.B. were to leave the studio for the fields and leave misunderstood tradition for nature, even if they revealed it imperfectly. All this is but a single word, but those who pronounced it had a vague premonition of the fertility of

**Ford Madox Brown,**
*The Last of England,* 1855.
Oil on panel, 82.5 x 75 cm.
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, Birmingham.

**William Holman Hunt,**
*The Finding of the Savior in the Temple,* 1854-1860.
Oil on canvas, 85.7 x 141 cm.
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, Birmingham.

**William Holman Hunt,**
*The Triumph of the Innocents,*
c. 1883-1884.
Oil on canvas, 156.2 x 254 cm.
Tate Britain, London.


EDWARD BURNE JONES 1857

countering the "Renaissance system" with the "solar system". Indeed, the P.R.B. often passed quite close to modern discoveries, and several times they stammered out the first words of an aesthetic revolution. We have the same impression when looking at them as when reading Vauban's *Dixme Royale*; this is a new world, not yet clearly visible, but half-revealed through prophecy and premonition. Thus, it is incorrect to say that by reducing Pre-Raphaelitism to original lines and bold colours, we lessen its role; on the contrary, we enlarge it. The name of the Pre-Raphaelite magazine was well chosen, for their work contained the *Germ* of all contemporary painting.[33]

Whatever their theories or those of their friends were, whatever goals they established or were identified with, the Pre-Raphaelites profoundly changed the idea of line and colour for their compatriots. Perhaps without knowing it, and certainly without understanding very clearly, they introduced in England the habit of clearly expressing a subject through meaningful poses and pursuing vivid colour with simple, direct means. Could this give England new masterpieces? We can respond only by looking at the principal manifestations of contemporary English painting, but it surely must have given England new works and a national art. Perhaps the Pre-Raphaelites did not win the war that they were waging, but they won another. Perhaps they could not prove that nature is the last word in art, but they proved that it is the first, and that the efforts of a host of talented and strong-willed men, whatever the goal that they choose may be, are never wasted.

When we look today, in retrospect, at this band of Pre-Raphaelites riding off to conquer the Holy Land of art, we seem to see one of the last crusades. They all started off in 1848, wearing the same armour and fighting under the same flag. How many arrived home in 1895? Some, like Deverell, died along the way, before they could see the shining roofs and towers of the Holy City. Others, like Millais, became kings of some island and forgot, among the honours showered upon them by the infidels, the purpose of their expedition. Still others, passing by some monastery on a hillside, told themselves that the road was quite long and their return quite uncertain. They stepped inside, drawn in by the bells, those sirens of the heavens, and no-one knows what became of them... Some made their way all the way to the Jerusalem of art and planted their flag in its soil. But which flag? It had certainly changed, the Pre-Raphaelite standard of the early days! The wind of battles and the patina of the years had cooled its uncompromising colours! Nevertheless, it flutters atop one of the high points of the century, as a testament to the noblest attempt, the most tremendous effort undertaken by modern artists. And we can say of Pre-Raphaelitism that it was not useless for the rejuvenation of an old world.[34]

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*The Merciful Knight,* 1863.
Watercolour, 101.4 x 58.6 cm.
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery,
Birmingham.

# III. Intentions

What then does such a singular art aim at? Obviously something other than merely pleasing the eyes. "You will find that the art whose end is pleasure only," says Ruskin, "is pre-eminently the gift of cruel and savage nations, cruel in temper, savage in habits and conception; but that the art which is especially dedicated to natural fact always indicates a peculiar gentleness and tenderness of mind." "The greatest art creates beauty, but does not make beauty its purpose," adds Collingwood. Thus English painting has a goal that can shed some light on its distinctive features, an idea behind the face or the painting that explains its flaws, a programme which is not that of depicting beautiful torsos and rich draperies. One is convinced, when looking at these masters' works, as when reading those of their critics, that this extra-aesthetic goal has a high place, perhaps the highest, among their preoccupations.

This goal is first of all to address all the faculties of man: spirit, intelligence, memory, conscience, heart, and not only that part of us which sees, which is moved by seeing, and which imagines. "Art," said Mrs Russell Barrington, "should elevate us through its imagery to a more complete view of the human condition than that provided by everyday life." Ruskin adds that "perfect art reveals the entire man." To do this, the artist himself must have a complete form of intelligence. Turner and Walker were of this sort, but all of the worthwhile painters resembled the artist-poets William Blake, Bell Scott and Rossetti, in the extent of their knowledge and interests. William Morris, who made tapestries and stained glass, was also a fine poet and the most appealing writer for the socialist party. Leighton spoke many languages. Burne-Jones, who went to Oxford, was an exquisite scholar of legendary literature, Watts was a philosopher, Hunt was an exegete, and Alma-Tadema was an archaeologist. Poynter gave lectures as Reynolds once did. Mr. Stephens and the late Hamerton had always written better than they painted, Hook was interested in sociology, and Birket Foster in ornithology. Millais and Herkomer both brilliantly expressed ingenious ideas on all the arts, and the latter lectured on them at Oxford. We are struck by the breadth of their culture. All of the questions pronounced in this world found an intelligent echo in their studios. All of the winds that passed over the masses incited a particular vibration in the souls of these artists. When painting was not

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Horatio Discovering the Madness of Ophelia,* c. 1864.
Oldham Gallery, Oldham.

being done in Mr. Cl...'s studio, there were lectures on theology, and when *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* had finished walking through the flower garden, among M. Il. Il...'s rhododendrons in Hampstead, Mr. Gladstone came there to prepare a speech on Home Rule. Such artists could act upon all of the spectator's faculties because all of theirs were active, and they could teach a lot because they had themselves learned much.

What they taught us is above all their idea of work. The sort of improvisationist who makes a horse or a *Harmony* in two days, like Fromentin or Whistler, and who asks two hundred guineas for it under the pretext that he has been preparing it for thirty years, is extremely rare among the English. Most of their artists share a disdain for easy success, are persistent in their work, and are determined to never be satisfied so long as they still find something better in themselves than in their work. They have conscience, if this word, the most beautiful that can be said of a man, had not already lost its value by being abusively applied to artists in whom it is completely lacking. Madox Brown spent four years making his *Last of England*, which includes only two main figures, and fifteen years painting the frescoes in Manchester Town Hall. Mr Hodgson said of Walker that "no artist has ever struggled so much while working. It was painful to watch him."[35] Hunt spent an entire life of continuous labour on a few small paintings, as many as some painters exhibit in a year on the Champs de Mars or in a club. Watts painted hundreds, but he kept all of them in his studio, considering that only two out of this number did not need any retouching. Burne-Jones spent seven years planning and executing his *Briar Rose*, which does however include four panels, each containing several figures. He sketched his *Wheel of Fortune* in 1871, but did not begin painting it until 1877, and finished it in 1883. One must read Mr Hamerton's stories about camping in the moors of Lancashire to imagine the effort and time that a Pre-Raphaelite could devote to studying a tuft of ferns in the field, frond by frond. In his tar-sealed wood and tile hut, which predated Mr de Nittis's famous *roulotte* by ten years, Mr Hamerton had to endure cold, humidity, gusty wind, the curiosity of peasants who came along, believing that they had seen him executing the turns and attacks of night hunters, and the inane questions of neighbouring country gentlemen, and all of this for months on end.[36] This same desire for accuracy inspired Mr. Boot to paint his ocean and river scenes from on board a studio-boat equipped to travel in both salt and fresh water, which he named the *Thelis* and whose voyages are well-known among English artists. Alma-Tadema was very productive, this is true, but he professed and proved through his own example that nothing is accomplished without difficulty. He showed no leniency toward his own work. If one bit, which had cost him a thousand efforts, seemed useless or dangerous to him: "Art lives

**Edward Robert Hughes,**
*Midsummer Eve.*
Watercolour and gouache on paper mounted on cardboard,
114.4 x 76.2 cm.
Private Collection.

**Arthur Hughes,**
*Ophelia,* 1852.
Oil on canvas, 68.7 x 123.8 cm.
Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester.


There is a willow grows aslant the
brook, That shows his hoar leaves
in the glassy stream; There
with fantastic garlands
did she come. Of
crow-flowers,
nettles,
daisies,
and


long purples. There on the pendant
boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang: an
envious sliver broke. When
down the weedy
trophies and herself
Fell in the
weeping
brook

on sacrifice!" he would say, and would scrape it off. If an entire work did not seem good to him, he destroyed it without hesitation, in a valiant caprice. In 1859, one of his paintings sent to the Brussels exhibition was refused by the jury. It depicted a fire. He asked his friends to come see this painting in his studio, to tear holes in it and pass through it like a door. He gave the example himself, by jumping headfirst into the flames of his painting. This joking about was not without courage. It demonstrated the necessity of effort, the price of steadfastness, and the strength of the will. This was the first lesson given by English painting.

It has others to offer, numerous and useful, about the phenomena of nature, the events of history and the meaning of life. "All great art is to some degree didactic," said Ruskin, "the principal goal of popular art should be didactic." Here we have the explanation, and to a certain degree the excuse, for the minute details and prodigious accessories that encumber most English paintings to the detriment of the whole. They are intended to teach the onlooker. It is not out of conceit over his ability, dexterity and virtuosity that the English painter studies every detail of a flower or a rock; it is so that a dicotyledone is not confused with a monocotyledone, or a granitic terrain with a schistose terrain. Remember that one of the first P.R.B., Collins, included an *Alisma plantage* in one of his paintings and thereby won over the botanists. Mr. Chesneau told the story of a scholar, surprised to find one of Hunt's paintings (*The Hireling Shepherd*) in a zoological museum. He was moved to recognise an admirable depiction of a death's head sphinx moth in the foreground, as well as a *Geranium roberlianum* and other plants painted with so much scientific precision that this work could have been used in a natural history lesson.[37] "Thus," said Ruskin, "it is not at all a question of taste whether one prefers a finished painting or an unfinished one. It is simply a question of whether one wants to see truth or falsehood, and those who are inclined to prefer darkness to light or illusion to fact would do better to devote themselves to anything but art." He did not hesitate to declare that the primary goal of the painter should be to scientifically teach the laws of the universe and the facts of history. He thought badly of a painting that teaches us nothing about the geological composition of the landscape, or the families of plants that grow in it, or the architectural ruins that lie in it: "Nor do I myself see," he said, "wherein the great difference lies between a master and a novice, except in the rendering of the finer truths of which I am at present speaking. To handle the brush freely, and to paint grass and weeds with accuracy enough to satisfy the eye, are accomplishments that a year or two's practice will give any man: but to trace among the grass and weeds those mysteries of invention and combination by which nature appeals to the intellect; to render the

**Arthur Hughes,**
*April Love,* 1855-1856.
Oil on canvas, 89.9 x 49.5 cm.
Tate Gallery, London.

**John William Waterhouse,**
*Ophelia,* undated.
Oil on canvas, 102 x 64 cm.
The Pre-Raphaelite Trust.

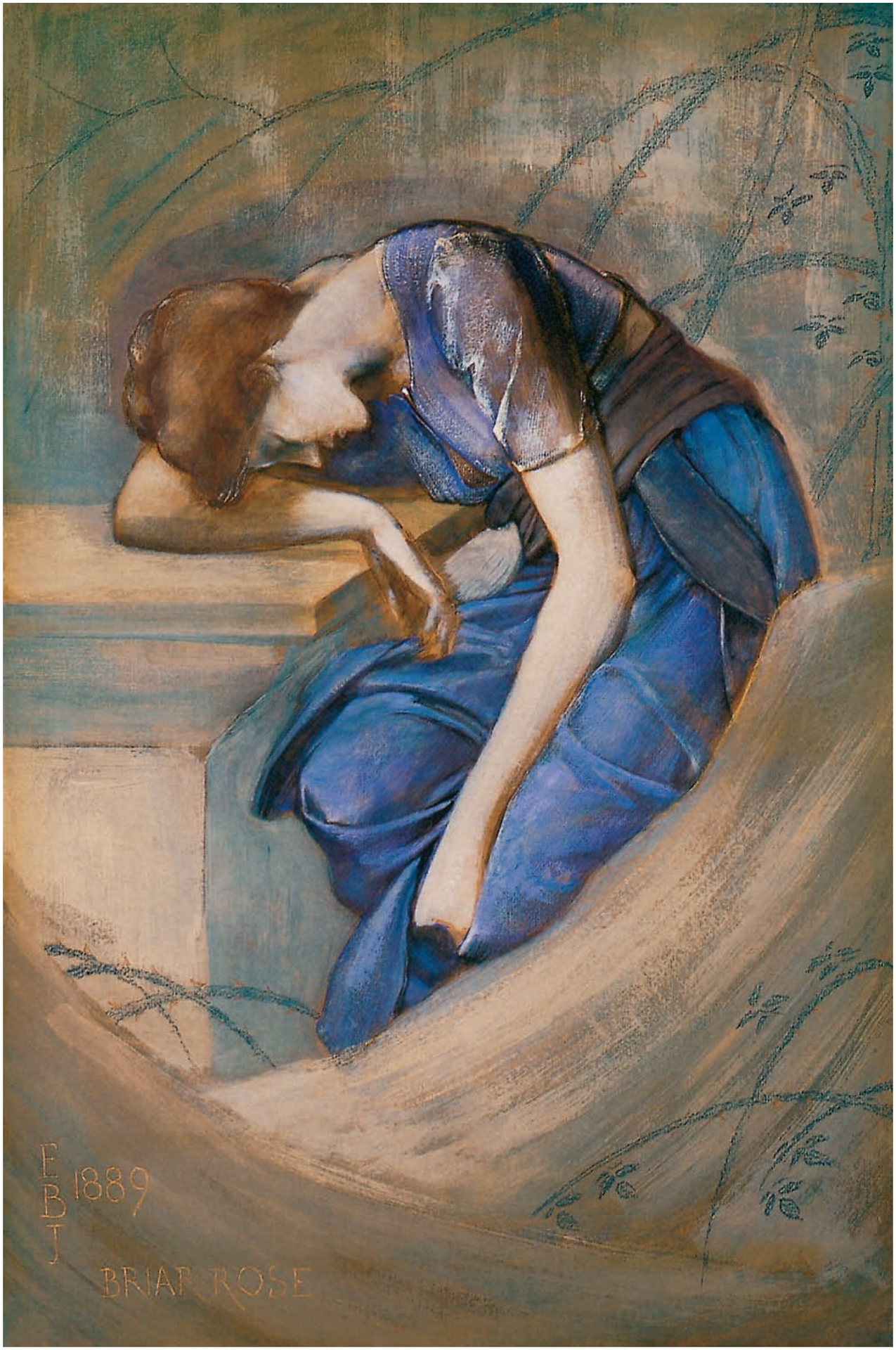
**Arthur Hughes,**
*Ophelia,* 1871.
Oil on panel, 33.3 x 21.1 cm.
The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford.

delicate fissure, and descending curve, and undulating shadow of the mouldering soil, with gentle and fine finger, like the touch of the rain itself; to find even in all that appears most trifling or contemptible, fresh evidence of the working of the Divine power 'for glory and for beauty,' and to teach it and proclaim it to the unthinking and the unregarding: this, as it is the peculiar province and faculty of the master-mind, so it is the peculiar duty which is demanded of it by the Deity."[38]

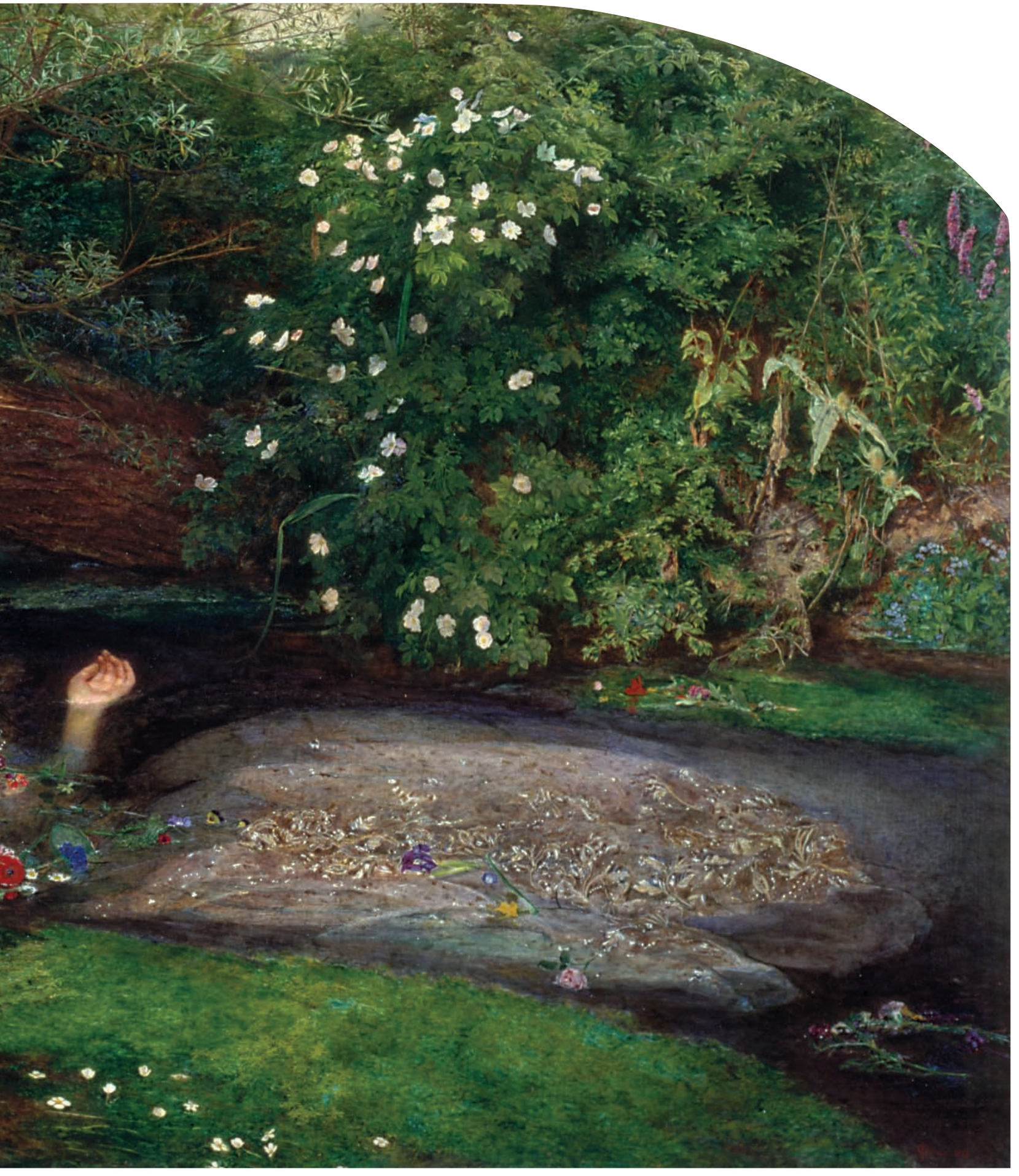
This last point reveals the depths of English thought. Art should be didactic, but this is not an end in itself. It is because by using the minute to show us how admirable creation is, it inspires us to praise our Creator. Ruskin, already an old man, wrote on September 16th, 1888, in Chamonix: "All that is involved in these passionate utterances of my youth was first expanded and then concentrated into the aphorism given twenty years afterwards in my inaugural Oxford lectures: All great Art is Praise." Watts, criticising Haydon, states that "All art that has had real and lasting success has popularised some great principle of mind or matter, some great truth, or some great paragraph in the book of nature." Hunt clarifies this goal by saying: "I believe that any enlightened person who goes into a museum and familiarises himself with all the details of creation and their relationships to the most ancient and recent events, will instinctively grow certain of the Creator's existence, His greatness, and His power to one day make love and justice reign!" Even those who do not assign such a clearly religious purpose to art give it a moral one, believing like Blake that "If you want to degrade humanity, the surest way it to first degrade the arts."[39] One of their critics said that they argued *ad nauseam* when deciding if Burne-Jones' figures should be forbidden as immoral because they had a "pessimistic" expression. All the great English artists seem to agree that the entire population expects a sermon and a moral example from them.

But though this is quite a beautiful purpose, it appears at first glance to be somewhat fanciful. The majority of the people are neither artists nor truly capable of enjoying works of art. But they should be; and this is the most original idea that contemporary England has on art, its creation, and its usefulness. According to them – Ruskin, Burne-Jones, William Morris, Walter Crane, Richmond, Holiday, and all the neo-Pre-Raphaelites – all the members of a democracy should take part in the infinite moral pleasure provided by aesthetics. Art, according to their principles, should be both very noble and very democratic; it should say the most philosophical things, and say them to everyone. It should elevate the man who produces it, that is to say everyone, because it should be produced by everyone, and it should elevate those who appreciate it, again everyone,

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*The Briar Rose Series - Study for 'The Garden Court,'* 1888-1889.
Bodycolour and chalk on paper laid onto prepared board, 89 x 59 cm.
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, Birmingham.


E
B
J
1889
BRIAR ROSE

**John Everett Millais,**
*Ophelia,* 1851-1852.
Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 111.8 cm.
Tate Gallery, London.



because everyone is called to appreciate it. "It is shameful for an honest artist," said William Morris, "to enjoy that which he has created by himself, just as it would be shameful for a rich man to live and eat copiously in the midst of soldiers dying of starvation in a siege." But how can a workman, a carpenter, a mason, or a weaver offer himself artistic pleasure? First of all, by creating artworks, respond the English. But to do so, it was not at all necessary that he become a painter or perform music. He must simply introduce an aesthetic element into his craft, the humble work with which he has been entrusted. Morris went on: "The development of the lower classes should not be gone about backwards, by giving the workmen museums and concerts, but by giving them back their primitive role, by striving to make homes, clothing, utensils, furniture, and all the tools of daily life both useful and beautiful for everyone. What is an artist, if not a worker who is determined, whatever happens, to produce exceptional work? And what is the decoration of furniture, of any object, if not an expression of the pleasure that the craftsman feels from succeeding in his work?"[40] Morris also wanted all working-class people to learn the basics of design, not the art of drawing strictly speaking, but the means towards this end; a general ability in practising the arts. If this is not sufficient for them to begin producing aesthetic designs, the artists themselves should also participate, unashamed to apply their genius to the curve of a chair-back or the decoration of a pan. This collaboration would profit both of them, for "the artist who does not know how to work with his hands ends up completely forgetting the characteristics of the matter that he is supposed to dominate and creates mediocre works, and the workman with no artistic ideal can only produce standardised goods." This is the tradition of the heroic days of art. In the past, the same man provided the mind that conceived and directed, the arms that laboured, and the expert hand that chiselled, modelled or painted. Today, unfortunately, the different sorts of artists are as separate from one another as they are from the various other professions. "By this division of labour," said Ruskin, "you ruin all the arts at once. The work of the Academician becomes mean and effeminate because he is not used to treat colour on a grand scale and in rough materials; and your manufactures become base, because no well-educated person sets hand to them. And therefore it is necessary to understand, not merely as a logical statement but as a practical necessity, that wherever beautiful colour is to be arranged, you need a Master of Painting; and wherever noble form is to be given, a Master of Sculpture."[41]

This is what the English did in the Arts and Crafts movement, at whose exhibitions a craftsman signed his work just as a member of the Royal Academy signed his paintings. The most sensitive artists, the most subtle thinkers transform their dreams into carpet

**John Everett Millais,**
*The Huguenot,* c. 1852.
Watercolour and pen and ink on paper, 13.3 x 8.7 cm.
Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford.

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Ecce Ancilla Domini! (The Annunciation),* 1849-1850.
Oil on canvas, 72.4 x 41.9 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

**Arthur Hughes,**
*The Annunciation,* 1872-1873.
Oil on canvas, 61.2 x 35.8 cm.
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, Birmingham.


DGR
March 1850

designs or hearth screens. Burne-Jones decorated glazed pans and pianos and painted mosaic tiles for churches. Herkomer designed elaborate decorations for plates. Walter Crane, Richmond, Holiday and twenty others devoted their rare talents to the most common work. Looking around the restaurant of the South Kensington museum, one finds that one is in the midst of enchanting décor by the great poet William Morris, surrounded by figures drawn by the great symbolist Burne-Jones, and that one is eating venison with redcurrant jelly or rhubarb pie!

If works of art were produced in this way by everyone, would they remain the privilege of a few, as paintings have? No, they must become the property of everyone. Only then can they truly achieve the status of useful works. "When you see delicate and harmonious colours and beautiful designs in the manufacture of windows; when you see pretty dresses in the streets expressing the beautiful forms of the women who wear them with the grace of flowers; when you feel a certain sense of balance and harmony in colour in the most common arrangements of paper and paint in your interiors; when your beds have gracious lines; when you find books on the table whose printers and illustrators considered them to be works of art as much as literature, and thus experience a double pleasure because they satisfy more than one of your senses, then you will begin to think that something has happened, that a new spirit has come upon the country to make such refinement possible for the common citizen, when before it would have been impossible."[42]

If we still wish to use the designs of the great creators of palaces, paintings, and aristocratic pomp, may they at least be used in palaces which anyone may enter, in paintings that everyone can see, and in great popular exhibitions. This was Watts' idea. It was also Ruskin's, and he considered that the great works of the Middle Ages owe their existence and their splendour to this idea. "The first role of art was to express truth or beautify something useful. In the thirteenth century, art expressed a religion that souls were still able to understand, and decorated the buildings of citizens whose greatest happiness came from private honour and public magnificence. Public, because their ways were simple. Monuments that served the people as a whole were constructed by the painters, sculptors, jewellers, blacksmiths, embroiderers, and carpenters who composed, along with the merchants, a large third estate. At this time, they constructed the walls of Milan, the *Naviglio Grande* canal that carries water thirty miles from Tessin to Milan, the two storage facilities at Genoa, the walls on their banks, and their aqueducts. These immense public works employed legions of workmen and artists, who in those days were not distinct groups, as every artisan was a bit of an artist. They were paid reasonably and worked nobly for the city as best they could."[43]

**John Everett Millais,**
*The Return of the Dove to the Ark,*
1851.
Oil on canvas, 88.2 x 54.9 cm.
The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford.

**John William Waterhouse,**
*A Naiad (Hylas and a Water-Nymph),*
1893.
Oil on canvas.
Roy Miles Fine Paintings, London.

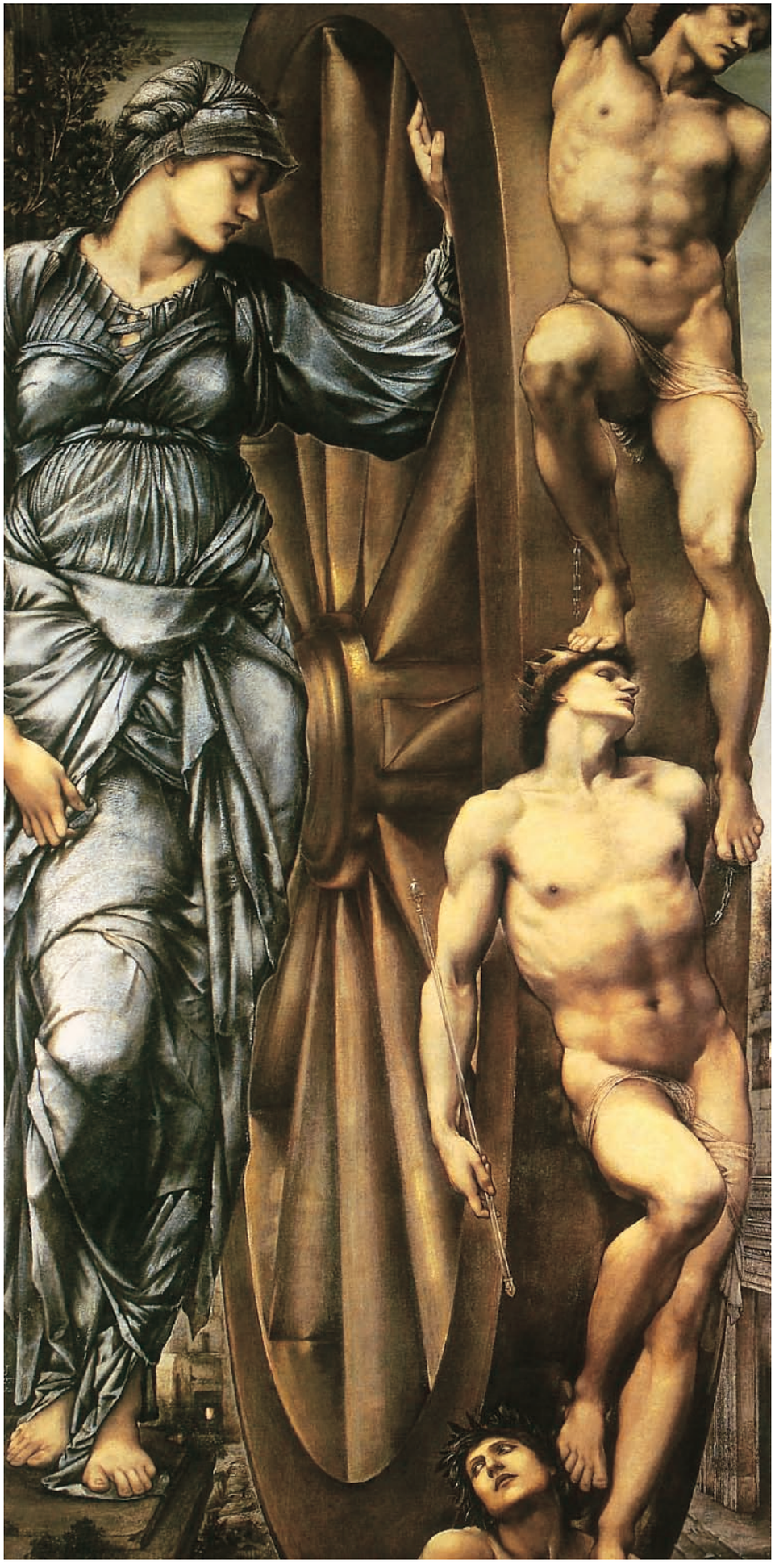
When it is seen in this way, art will truly moralise the people, because it will no longer be something outside their lives, that happens above them like diplomacy, without demanding anything from them and without giving them any pleasure. It will moralise them because it will ennoble common, daily work, thereby "bringing the workman hope and pleasure in the place of fear and pain." It will finally become "an art made by the people, and for the people, as happiness to the maker and the user."[44]

These are certainly noble goals, but there is one more that seems to stand out in the minds of the English, that they may speak of less, but which they think of more. It is not enough for art to be suggestive, didactic, moral, or popular; it must also be national. It must be English. Except for some rare exceptions, all great British artists are clearly opposed to foreign (i.e. French) influence: Watts, Hunt, Burne-Jones and his entire school, Strudwick, Holiday, Stillman, Rooke, Walter Crane, Spencer-Stanhope, Spence… it is quite obvious. In Alma-Tadema this is less visible, although we should not forget the originality of his compositions, and that a part of his training took place at Baron Wappers' school in Antwerp. Leighton, who studied just about everywhere, studied less in France than in Italy and Germany, and Herkomer did not study there at all. Finally, Millais, who resembled a Frenchman when compared with his colleagues, distances himself so much from them by his colours that one could pick out his paintings among thousands of others. Their critics demand above all that they remain English. Phillips says of Walker "…he had that special quality which can never be too highly praised: despite his innovations he remained national in feeling and character." He adds that though this innovator's art had its faults, "the simple fact that it was born of the English soil and national in terms of colour made it successful." Harry Quilter says of Poynter that "…he was educated in an insular fashion, and had very little sympathy for modern art. What the French call the *grands contours du dessin* are totally lacking in his work." Mrs Barrington, praising Millais, informs us that "his feeling is invariably pure, transparent, and deeply wholesome. Fortunately, these qualities contrast with the crude scarecrows and disagreeable suggestions so prominent in the art patronised by the French." And to ensure that we know exactly what this French taste is, she warns us elsewhere that it is, "in terms of sentiment, a search for mediocrity." When addressing his students, Ruskin said of the Greeks that they were "to be looked at sometimes. Not continually, and never as a model for imitation. For you are not Greeks; but, for better or worse, English creatures; and cannot do, even if it were a thousand times better worth doing, anything well, except what

**John William Waterhouse,**
*Hylas and the Nymphs,* 1896.
Oil on canvas, 132.1 x 197.5 cm.
Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester.

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*The Wheel of Fortune,* 1875-1883.
Oil on canvas, 200 x 100 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

**George Frederick Watts,**
*Love and Death,* 1862.
Oil on panel, 152.4 x 50.8 cm.
Private Collection.



your English hearts shall prompt and your English skies teach you." At the opposite pole of aesthetics, Millais said: "There is among us a band of young men who, though English, insist on painting with a broken French accent, all of them much alike, and seemingly content to lose their identity in the imitation of French masters, whom they are constitutionally, absolutely, and in the nature of things, unable to copy with justice either to themselves or their models."[45] And none of them doubted that the hearts and skies of England could inspire art superior to that of any other period and country. "That sketch of four cherub heads from an English girl, by Sir Joshua Reynolds, at Kensington, is an incomparably finer thing than ever the Greeks did," says Ruskin. And Millais adds: "Place an outstanding Rembrandt, an outstanding Reynolds, and an outstanding contemporary work side by side; judge them taking into account the difference due to ageing, and you will find that there are few reasons to complain of the decline of art. On the contrary, you will be proud of our art of today."[46] They draw their hopes from quite unexpected comparisons, and in *The Two Paths*, there is a comment from Ruskin that is worth an entire book of aesthetics: "The dominion of the seas seems to have been associated, in past time, with dominion in the arts also: Athens had them together; Venice had them together; but by so much as our authority over the ocean is wider than theirs over the Aegean or the Adriatic, let us strive to make our art more widely beneficent than theirs, though it cannot be more exalted; so working out the fulfilment, in their wakening as well as their warning sense, of those great words of the aged Tintoret: *Sempre si fa il Mare maggiore*."[47]

Seen in this way, in its entirety, contemporary English art was born of a great effort, a tremendous obstinate aspiration toward the noble, philosophical, and national. It did not appear spontaneously, as it did in some countries, from the joy of admiring and seeing, from the happiness of forgetting, through the splendid forms of nature and the beings that fill it, the indifference of this nature, the baseness of these beings, and even the torment of our own thoughts. It was a labour of duty, not a labour of love.[48] It came into this world either to ennoble life, or to teach about life, or to improve life. It did not come to live its own life, free and joyous, to develop without moral or philosophical teachers, with all the vitality and opulence of the vines of southern France. It tried to achieve all goals except that of being itself, as we imagine that God is: for nothing, for the sole pleasure of being. Thus, English art is related to everything: to science through its details, to psychology through its poses, to patriotism through its autonomy. It is only beauty itself to which it is not necessarily connected, and to which it does not necessarily seek to be connected. It reaches its roots deep, very deep into the soil from which it was born. It emerged from national life and dreams, or at least from their most solemn and contemplative elements. It found its

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid,*
1880-1884.
Oil on canvas, 293.4 x 135.9 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

**Arthur Hughes,**
*The Brave Geraint,* c. 1860.
Oil on canvas, 23 x 36 cm.
Lady Anne Tennant Collection.


A HUGHES

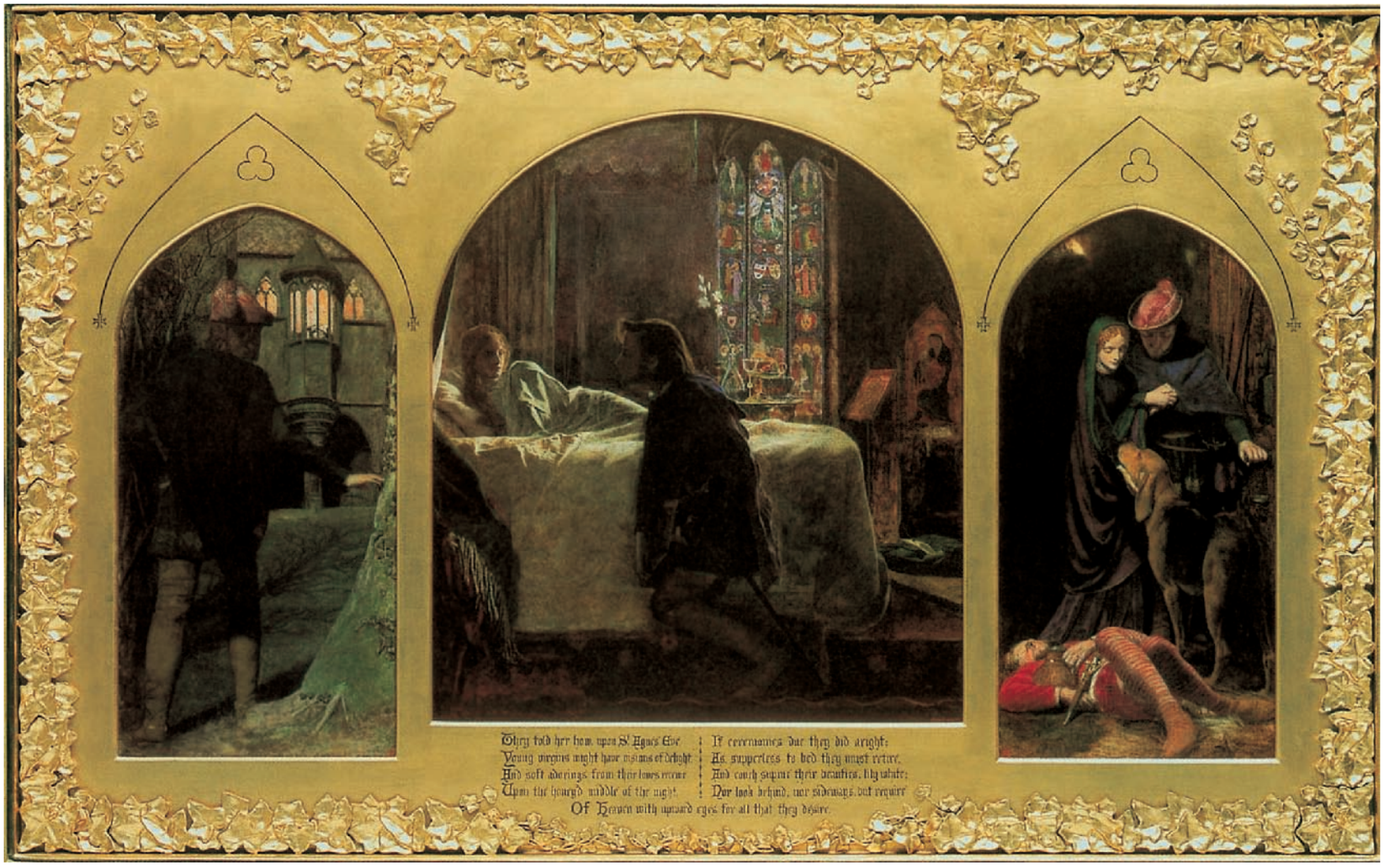
inspiration in the ideas, feelings and prejudices of the most intellectual class in England. Tearing up any painting from the National Gallery would be like tearing up an English flag! Its masters were autonomous, were unreluctantly and dauntlessly Anglo-Saxon or British, and if it were true that a great people expressing themselves necessarily produce great art, English art would be the greatest in the contemporary world.

Now, should this great effort be despised or should it be imitated? Neither one nor the other. When we consider the careers of men like Watts, Hunt, and Burne-Jones, we regret that great painting is not necessarily the reward for magnificent ideas, and that harmony of colour flows from other sources than the dignity of lives. Regrettably, we find proof here that intellectual and moral culture, a deep understanding of the subject, unremitting manual work, and a sense of the high purpose of art are not sufficient to produce good painting, and it was the English who demonstrated this fact. One is troubled to find that the people with the most particular point of view and the most national bearing, the people who played the most inimitable role in this world, expressed itself in vain through the fine arts: if it did not yet have the sensitive eye of a colourist and the confident hand of an illustrator, it might have produced interesting works, but never beautiful ones. When looking at these paintings, in which the suggestive side of the subject is better grasped and the plastic side more poorly grasped than perhaps anywhere else, one is troubled to see that certain theories, though upheld by the most eminent minds and applied by the most meticulous hands, have been refuted by the facts. But, we salute this mistake as the noblest one that has ever been made. We count these errors among those that bring more honour to humanity than many successes do, and one imagines that perhaps, in the immaterial order of things where nothing is lost, they will give the nation that saw them emerge a right to success in the future. As for imitating them, this would be even worse than ignoring them. It is not that the English do not possess precisely some of the qualities that are lacking in other painters, such as the in-depth study and serious development of a subject and the persistent search for novel poses. If we could do in aesthetics what can be done so well now in agriculture – restore the precise life-giving element that is lacking in the soil – we could learn a lesson from their example and be supported by it. But crude imitation that amounts to a pastiche of the form given to an artist's figures, copying their features, the equilibrium of their poses, and the devices of composition, is always at fault, whether the model to be imitated is Raphael or da Vinci. The only intelligent imitation consists of seeking inspiration in the guiding ideas of an art and not its works, observing its rules and not its examples, drawing on its sources and not its products. The Pre-Raphaelite idea is that one must be oneself; by copying any Pre-Raphaelite

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Paolo and Francesca,* c. 1867.
Watercolour on paper, 43.7 x 36.1 cm.
National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne.

**William Holman Hunt,**
*The Eve of St. Agnes,* 1848.
Oil on canvas, 77.4 x 113 cm.
Guildhall Art Gallery,
Corporation of London, London.

**Arthur Hughes,**
*The Eve of St. Agnes,* 1856.
Oil on canvas, 71 x 124.5 cm.
Tate Gallery, London.


They told her how, upon St Agnes Eve
Young virgins might have visions of delight
And soft adorings from their loves receive
Upon the honeyed middle of the night
If ceremonies due they did aright;
As supperless to bed they must retire,
And couch supine their beauties, lily white;
Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require
Of Heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire.

forms whatsoever, we become someone else. The argument "Burne-Jones is original; I resemble Burne-Jones, therefore I am original," may be worth something as a syllogism, but that does not make it any less absurd. Ruskin wrote "The only doctrine or system that I consider my own is the rejection of that which is dogmatic rather than experimental, and that which is systematic instead of being useful: thus, my true followers will never be 'Ruskinian.' They will not follow my directions, but the feelings in their own souls and the will of their Creator." And all the Pre-Raphaelites thought in the same way. Consequently, to imitate them is not to understand them; to borrow their formulae is to violate their creed; to follow them is to abandon them.

So another kind of imitation is possible. It consists of drawing inspiration from the ideas that made Watts and Burne-Jones original, a return to the source from which they emerged; but this is also dangerous. For the skilfulness and awkwardness, the tenderness and strength, even the spice and attractiveness of these masters should not make us forget that this source is artificial, and that artifice is not art. The somewhat paradoxical pleasure that we find in their deviations from nature, their refinements of grace, their exaggerations of emotion, their stylistic neologisms, their subtle grimaces, and their mysterious gestures, in all of these efforts to act on the mind rather than the eye, should not lead us out of the broad daylight of complete, honest beauty. For this pleasure is in reality more intellectual than aesthetic; it is that which we feel from Browning and Swinburne, not from van Dyck or Velázquez. It flatters the conceit of the thinker more than it excites the feelings of the artist. It is mixed with selfish motives, psychological curiosity and intellectual complacency. One can taste it for a moment, like a nameless and undated liqueur that is a combination of several different batches, which amuses the palate by intriguing it. But one should not make this one's habitual drink, and certainly not peddle the recipe and recommend its manufacture. For if it is unimportant which bottle one chooses, as long as it is intoxicating, it is nonetheless important not to mix all the bottles together, because by playing this game one does not become drunk, but a drunkard, and one's taste is forever dulled. The intellectual artist, the psychological artist, in a word the "intentionist" artist, torments himself for ten years over a great painting to express the ideas that his brother, the poet or novelist, could obtain in ten lines, and with livelier and more profound results. And during this time the painter forgets to provide us with sensations that a writer can never give. When Benozzo Gozzoli wanted to give a theological explanation of the *Triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas* over the heresiarchs of

**James Collinson,**
*The Renunciation of St. Elizabeth of Hungary,* c. 1848-1850.
Oil on canvas, 120 x 182 cm.
Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg.

**William Holman Hunt,**
*Rienzi Vowing to Obtain Justice for the Death of his Young Brother, Slain in a Skirmish between the Colonna and the Orsini Factions,* 1849.
Private Collection.


INRI
Requiem æternam dona


Crónica
Troya

his day, or when Perugino attempted to illustrate the ideas of Isabella of Mantua in *The Battle of Love and Chastity* (two paintings from the Primitive Gallery in the Louvre), they manage to give us a vague theology or a confused poem, but they do not match the marvels of the Uffizi or the Riccardi Palace. Forcing the plastic arts to express something of the human soul is quite simply uprooting them, accommodating them to other fields which are not noticeably enriched in the process. For when a painter tries to make a painting suggestive, the composition is overloaded, the limbs twist out of shape, and the details multiply in order to inform us of his thought or throw us into the domain of hypothesis. Forms are no longer chosen for their beauty or for their truth, but for what they signify or for their mystery. In a way, they are used merely as rebuses.

The anecdotal rebus of Hogarth and the psychological rebus of Burne-Jones; all English painting oscillates between these two terms, which seem to be two extremes and yet have something in common, if one considers how far they are from the normal point of view from which a subject is treated. And the pleasure that an aesthete feels when guessing the meaning of one of Burne-Jones' rebuses quite resembles the pleasure that some bureaucrat might feel when deciphering those little symbolic tables found in the final pages of a newspaper. This pleasure is certainly legitimate, but it can hardly be called aesthetic, and cannot serve as a benchmark for evaluating works of art. Of all the errors that threaten contemporary art, of all the paradoxes of impressionism, naïve qualities of realism, and stereotypes of academic painting, among all this insipidity, coarseness, ignorance, and presumption, there is no theory worse than that of "intentionism" in art, because there is no other that so surely abolishes art itself. By following other paths, one goes astray in the aesthetic domain; by following this one, one leaves it entirely. Let us never abandon the beautiful French qualities of logic, order, harmony, simplicity, and moderation, which were Italian, which were Spanish, which were even Flemish, at the times when Italy, Spain, and Flanders were blessed by the hand of fortune which bestows artists on nations, or were the lands where the vagabond named Genius sought asylum. But if we must one day sacrifice these qualities, let it be to some great principle of art where aesthetic feelings elate us, where it is particularly the eyes that are conquered, where we find ourselves captivated by a philosophy that is a torment and not a thing of literature, that is a vanity but a thing of beauty, one of those that Keats tells us, in a famous verse, "is a joy for ever." And let us be especially wary of theories that pretend to expand the role of art by making it into an intermediary for ideas or sentiments, for affirmations or doubts, theories that give the artist some other mission than to express beauty

**Walter Howell Deverell,**
*Twelfth Night, Act II, Scene III,* 1850.
Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 132.1 cm.
Christie's images, The FORBES Magazine Collection, New York.

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*The Tune of the Seven Towers,* 1857.
Watercolour on paper, 31.4 x 36.5 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*Wedding Banquet of Sire Devrevaunt,* 1860.
One of three murals for the Red House reception hall.
Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

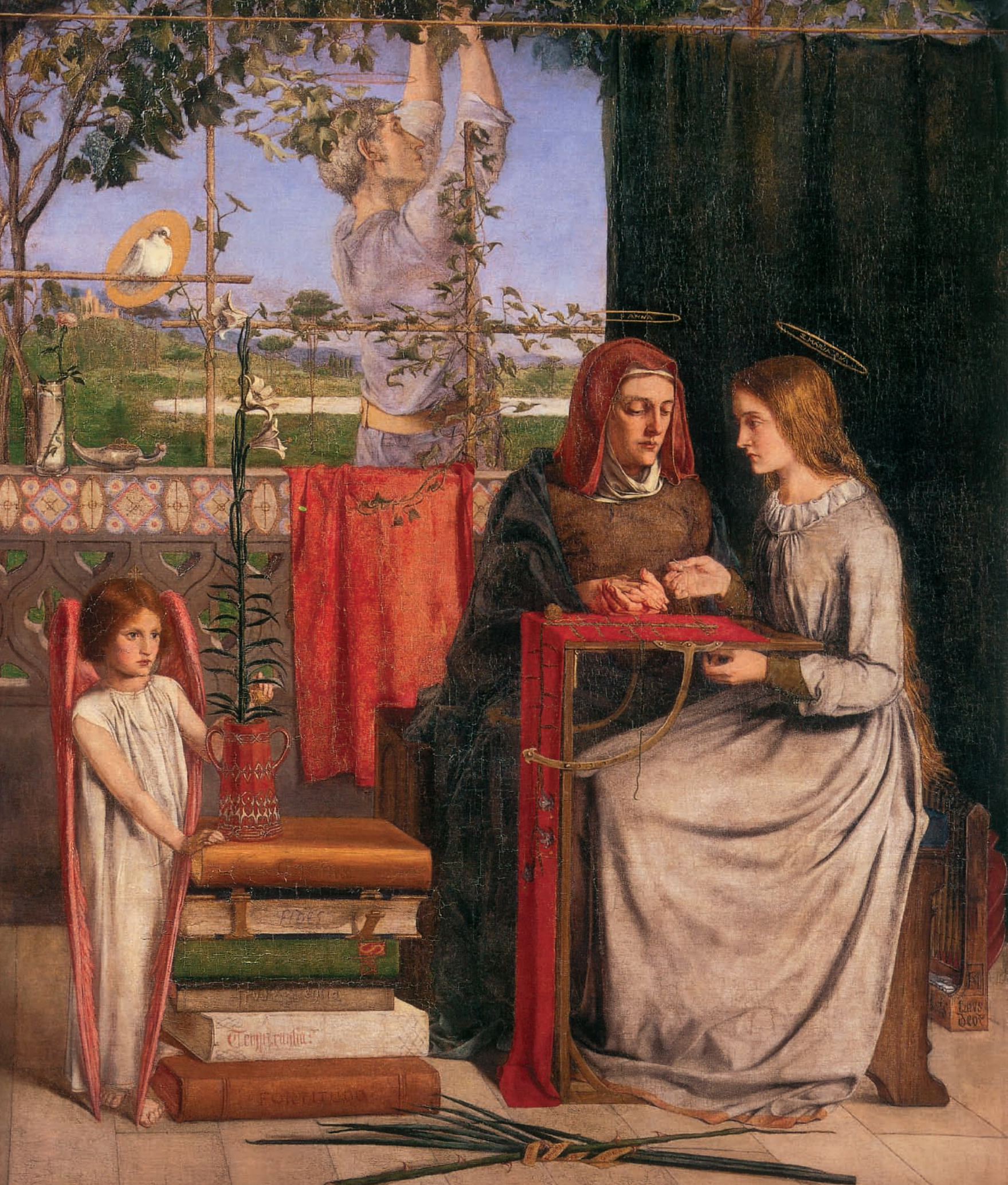
without sentences, without intentions, and without evangelism, as if there were something in the world which deserved to have beauty as its servant, interpreter, or herald! Let us be wary of those erroneous principles that claim to expand art by leading it astray, deepen it by destroying its foundations, or elevate it by subjugating it!

When one walks through the Umbrian room in the National Gallery, one sees a small painting made by Raphael when he was seventeen years old, *The Knight's Dream*. A young lord, dressed in armour, has fallen asleep against a shadowless laurel tree; to his left and right stand two differently dressed women. One holds out a book and an unsheathed sword, the other a flowering sprig of myrtle. The first is duty, and the second is pleasure. The handsome adolescent, at the verge of crossing the threshold into his adult life, has stopped here to sleep. He sleeps gracefully and happily on this old shield that whispers battle hymns in his ear. The two women's arms hold their gifts out toward him, tirelessly, as if they were two tree branches, each holding one beautiful ripe fruit. These two figures are so tempting that perhaps the clever youth would like to keep one without losing the other, to follow both of them at once, and in his state of indecision, in his unwillingness to make a choice, in order to give himself a bit more time, he does not wake, thinking that as long as they see him sleep, these two goddesses will not leave. And for four hundred years he has slept, still tempted, still undecided, and Raphael's knight will now probably never awaken. However, in the background shine beautiful blue horizons where one would love to walk with one's joys and sorrows, far from space and time, breathing the eternal atmosphere that, in works of art, bathes the figures that a painter who lived but a day has created.

Every young, restless artist who is looking for new paths to follow, who goes to England and falls into a daydream while looking at *Briar-Rose* or *Love and Death*, resembles this sleeping knight. Not in the sense that he is caught between good and evil, between duty and pleasure, but in the sense that two forms of art call to him, and these are but divinities or illusions in a dream. On one side, Burne-Jones's nymph offers him the myrtle of legend, and on the other, Watts' virtue offers the naked sword of morality. If he follows either of them, he will certainly be lost. May he look instead to the background, to those winding paths, curving valleys, blue-tinged mountains, and flowing waters. May he return now and always to nature, the only counsel that one may listen to without suspicion, the only enchantress that one may follow without remorse. The English painters were great tempters; let us admire them, not imitate them.

**Ford Madox Brown,**
*Cordelia's Potion,* 1867-1875.
Oil on canvas, 55.9 x 77.2 cm.
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*The Girlhood of Mary Virgin,*
1848-1849.
Oil on canvas, 83.2 x 65.4 cm.
Tate Britain, London.


S. ANNA
S. MARIA VIRGO
Temperantia
LAVS DEO

# Major Artists

# William Holman Hunt (London, 1827 - London, 1910)

**John Everett Millais,**
*William Holman Hunt,* 1854.
Pencil and watercolour, 20.3 x 17.8 cm.
The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford.

William Holman Hunt came from an impoverished family and did not enjoy the same material comfort and encouragement as Rossetti and Millais. One of his paternal ancestors had left England to fight for the Protestant cause, returning with William of Orange but never regaining his property. Hunt's father found himself working as the administrator of a municipal warehouse, with tastes above those typical of his social standing. He loved books and images and encouraged his son to follow art as a hobby, but not as a profession. At twelve years of age, Holman Hunt worked as an office employee but devoted his free time to reading, drawing and painting, and at sixteen he began his career as an independent artist. In 1844 he entered the Royal Academy, where he met John Everett Millais, who was around fifteen years old at the time. He began exhibiting his work in 1845 at the Royal Manchester Institution and in 1846 at the Royal Academy and the British Institution. In 1848, Hunt and Millais, along with Rossetti, initiated the Pre-Raphaelite movement and Hunt subsequently painted *Rienzi vowing to obtain Justice*, a good example of their new principles. In 1850, the painting *A Converted Christian Family sheltering a Missionary* was sold to Thomas Combe, who became his patron, friend, and adviser. Additionally, this scene taken from the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* was praised highly by Ruskin in his letters to *The Times*. He declared that there had been nothing like this study of draperies and details since Albrecht Dürer. The painting won a prize in Liverpool and is considered to be one of the most beautiful works of Hunt's youth. In 1852 he exhibited *The Hireling Shepherd*, *Claudio and Isabella*, and *The Unwatched Flock* (at the time called *Our English Coasts*). For three of his works, Hunt had obtained £50 and £60 in Liverpool and Birmingham, but in 1851, he was so discouraged by the declining sales of his paintings that he decided to abandon art and devote himself to agriculture, intending to emigrate. In 1854, however, he achieved his first great success with the painting *The Light of the World*, an allegorical representation of Christ knocking at the door of the human soul. This painting made a great impression on Hunt's contemporaries. *The Awakening Conscience* appeared at the same time and depicted a tragic moment in which a girl leading a life of sin is struck by the memory of her innocent childhood and stands up suddenly from the knees of her lover.

**William Holman Hunt,**
*The Awakening Conscience,* 1853.
Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 55.9 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

**William Holman Hunt,**
*London Bridge on the Night of the Marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales,* 1863-1866.
Oil on canvas, 65 x 98 cm.
The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford.

In January of 1854, Holman Hunt left England for Syria and Palestine, driven by the desire to depict the story of the Scriptures through painting, "immersed in the people and the conditions of life of ancient Judaea." The first product of this idea was *The Scapegoat*, a rejected and solitary animal on the salt-encrusted banks of the Dead Sea, with the Edom Mountains in the background. This painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1856, with three landscapes of the Middle East. In 1857 he collaborated with Moxon in publishing the poems of Alfred Tennyson. His 1860 painting *Christ in the Temple* was one of his most elaborate and admired works. Like all his important paintings, it was the fruit of years of work. The work was difficult to complete; a series of obstacles considerably slowed its execution, including a sentence akin to excommunication for all of the Jews who posed for it (the sentence was later lifted). This painting, exhibited in London and many provincial towns, attracted crowds.

In 1865 Hunt married Fanny Waugh. They left England together in August 1866, but during quarantine in Florence, Fanny gave birth to a boy and died shortly afterwards. Hunt returned to England in September 1867 and paid homage to Fanny the next year by returning to Florence. In 1869 Hunt was elected a member of the Royal Watercolour Society, which also counted Edward Burne-Jones among its members. In August of the same year he returned to Jerusalem. His next great religious painting was *The Shadow of Death* of 1871, an imaginary incident in the life of Jesus. Weary after a day of work, Jesus raises his arms, which cast the shadow of his coming crucifixion on the wall, thus frightening his mother.

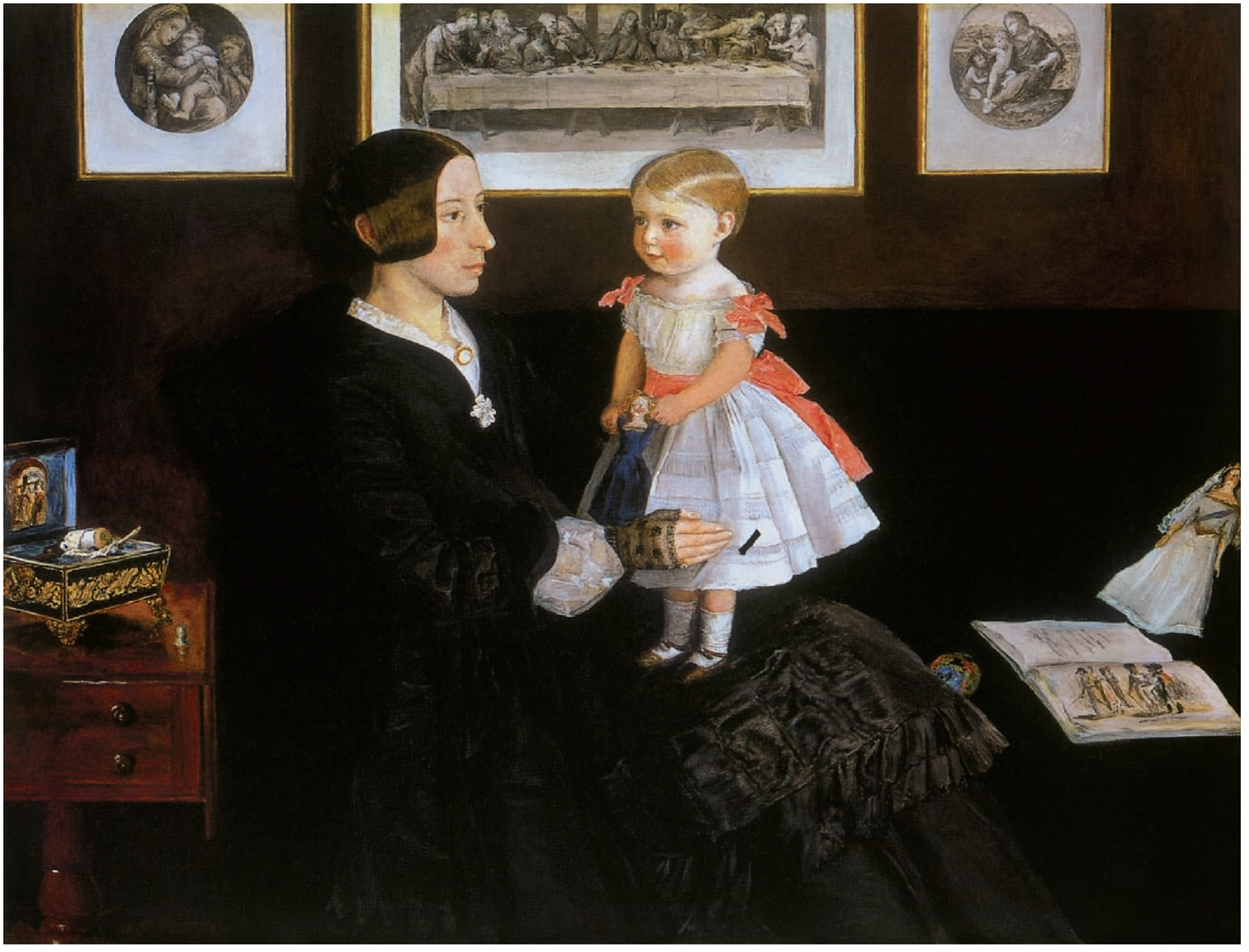
In 1875, after marrying the sister of his deceased wife, Hunt returned to Jerusalem where he began his painting *The Triumph of the Innocents*, which was one of the most important works of his life. The subject is an imaginary episode of the Flight into Egypt where the Holy Family is accompanied by a procession of innocents illuminated by a supernatural light. After coming back to London in 1878, he preferred to show his works in galleries or exhibitions less public than the Royal Academy.

The first retrospective of his work took place in London in 1886. He was awarded the Order of Merit in 1905 and published his autobiography.

Holman Hunt occupies a slightly different position to that of other artists, and he was not at all affected by art movements after 1850. He possessed a strong and constant personality and used particular working methods, and his stated ambition was to "serve as high priest and expounder of the excellence of the works of the Creator." He devoted too much time to each of his works to make very many, but their power makes up for their small number.

**William Holman Hunt,**
*The Scapegoat,* 1854-1855.
Oil on canvas, 87 x 139.8 cm.
Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight.


Surely he hath borne our Griefs, and carried our Sorrows
yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of GOD, and afflicted.
THE
SCAPE - - GOAT.
And the Goat shall bear upon him all their
Iniquities unto a Land not inhabited



# Sir John Everett Millais (Southampton, 1829 - London, 1896)

**William Holman Hunt,**
*John Everett Millais,* 1853.
Pastel and colour chalk, 32.7 x 24.8 cm.
National Portrait Gallery, London.

From very early on in life, Millais demonstrated an exceptional gift for painting. In Jersey, where he spent most of his childhood, he briefly attended school before being dismissed. His mother then took charge of his education, placing a particular accent on history, literature, and poetry. He later said that it was she who taught him everything. The local drawing teacher, Mr Bessell, gave him a basic artistic education. At that time, the German painter Edward Henry Wehnert lived in the region, and he also participated in Millais' education. In 1835 the Millais family moved to Dinan in Brittany, where the young John Everett drew officers of the Dinan garrison with great skill. Realising his potential, the family decided to move to London to allow the young artist's talent to completely develop. At nine years old, he was introduced to the President of the Royal Academy, Sir Martin Archer Shee, who predicted that he would conquer the art world. He studied at Henry Sass Preparatory Art Academy in Bloomsbury and, at the age of eleven, he was the youngest student to enter the Academy, where he obtained numerous prizes and honours. He met Hunt in 1844, and in 1846 he exhibited his painting *Pizarro seizing the Inca of Peru* at the Royal Academy. At the beginning of 1848, Millais, Hunt and Rossetti, disappointed by the theory and practices of English art, which they found too conventional and academic, initiated the Pre-Raphaelite movement, hoping to break with tradition. According to Millais, Pre-Raphaelitism had a single purpose; to "present Nature on the canvas." The first painting he made in accord with this principle was the banquet scene inspired by Keats' poem *Isabella* (1849). Millais devoted all his effort to painting the minute details of nature and the characters in this painting. The story is told forcefully and the expressions of the figures are captivating.

**John Everett Millais,**
*Mrs. James Wyatt Jr. and her Daughter, Sarah,* c. 1850.
Oil on mahogany, 35.3 x 45.7 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

**John Everett Millais,**
*The Order of Release 1746,*
1852-1853.
Oil on canvas, 102.9 x 73.7 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

**John Everett Millais,**
*Portrait of John Ruskin,* 1853-1854.
Oil on canvas, 78.7 x 68 cm.
Private Collection.

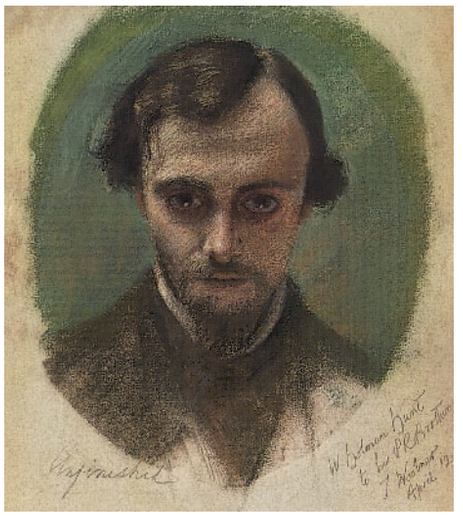
His painting *Christ in the Home of his Parents* depicts an imaginary incident in the life of Jesus, treated in a simple and realistic manner, which provoked religious as well as artistic authorities. Charles Dickens described this Christ as a "hideous, wry-necked, blubbering, red-haired boy", and *The Times* called the painting "disgusting". The rest of his strictly Pre-Raphaelite paintings such as *Mariana*, *A Huguenot*, and *Ophelia* were greeted with less hostility, thanks to Millais' growing renown and the support of John Ruskin, who espoused the Pre-Raphaelites' cause in his letters to *The Times* and in his articles on Pre-Raphaelitism. In 1851, Millais, who had until then refused to read *Modern Painters*, in which the principles of Pre-Raphaelitism were presented, met Ruskin and his wife Euphemia (Effie). With his brother William, in July 1853, he left for Callander in Scotland for three months, accompanied by the Ruskins. During this trip he fell in love with Effie and painted a portrait of Ruskin standing in front of a landscape, thus illustrating the critic's attitudes toward Nature and the future. In 1854 Effie obtained the annulment of her marriage to Ruskin, making it possible for her to marry Millais in 1855. The young couple moved into Annat Lodge where Millais painted *Autumn Leaves*, whose light and colour deeply moved Ruskin. The couple's first child, Everett, was born the next year. From 1860 to 1869, he devoted all of his creative energy to making more than eighty illustrations for the novels of Anthony Trollope, thus becoming the most prolific illustrator of the 1860s in England. In 1863 Millais was elected a member of the Royal Academy, an institution derided by the Pre-Raphaelites. Having progressively distanced himself from the Pre-Raphaelites, he finally separated himself from them completely to turn toward such great masters as Rembrandt and Velázquez, and to paint the portraits of influential people. Millais always had the support of the public. When he left Pre-Raphaelitism for sentimental, expressive painting, he was followed by an even larger crowd. When he abandoned expressive subjects for portraits, the crowd continued to grow, and he finally moved on to nudes. Fame reached out to him and tirelessly protected him for forty-five years. He also contributed to the creation of the National Portrait Gallery and encouraged Henry Tate to found the eponymous Tate Gallery. Millais never refused honours; he accepted the Légion d'Honneur from the French government in 1868, and in 1885 Queen Victoria raised him to a baronetcy. The apex of his career was his election as President of the Royal Academy in 1896. After suffering from throat cancer for several years, he died in August 1896 and was buried at Saint Paul's Cathedral. Millais was one of the greatest painters of his time and devoted his virtuosity and power to breathing new energy into English painting.

**John Everett Millais,**
*Christ in the House of his Parents, ("The Carpenter's Shop"),* 1849-1850.
Oil on canvas, 86.4 x 139.7 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

**John Everett Millais,**
*The Woodsman's Daughter,* 1851.
Oil on canvas, 84 x 65 cm.
Guildhall Art Gallery,
Corporation of London, London.

**John Everett Millais,**
*The Blind Girl,* 1856.
Oil on canvas, 80.8 x 53.4 cm.
Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery,
Birmingham.

# Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London, 1828 - Birchington, 1882)



**William Holman Hunt,**
*Dante Gabriel Rossetti,* 1853.
Pastel and colour chalk, 28.6 x 25.9 cm.
Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester.

The son of an Italian poet, Dante Gabriel Rossetti showed a propensity for painting and drawing very early in his life. Thus, he left school early to begin his apprenticeship. He enrolled in Cary's Art Academy and was admitted to the Royal Academy Antique School in London around 1846. Except for one trip to Belgium, where he was able to admire the paintings of van Eyck and Memling, Rossetti was far from being an experienced traveller and had not been influenced by other types of painting. He was very impressed by certain works by Ford Madox Brown, and worked under the supervision of this artist, whose remarkable technique helped him acquire the rigour and precision that he had not yet attained. Out of great generosity, Brown took charge of Rossetti's training without receiving any financial compensation, and had him work in genres such as still-life. It is not surprising that with the help of such a master, as well as that of Millais and Hunt, Rossetti quickly mastered his art. Rossetti's enthusiasm led him to propose the creation of a "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood" along with Hunt and Millais. Though Brown was invited to join them, he refused.

The first of Rossetti's works as a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was *The Childhood of Mary Virgin*. This painting, as well as those that followed, received a glacial reception. However, the following year he presented his *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (*The Annunciation*) at the exhibition. This is the event that established his reputation. He typically treated subjects related to medieval legend, primitive Italian poetry, and old English ballads. The only notable exception was the painting *Found* begun around 1852, which was Rossetti's contribution to the Victorian style that Holman Hunt was particularly fond of. The subject of the painting is a confrontation between a young woman who has given in to the vices of urban life and her former sweetheart, who is appalled to find her in such a state. Rossetti never finished this energetic and moralising painting, which was far removed from his habitual style. In fact, he disapproved of didactic art intended to improve the condition of humanity, and the naturalism that such subjects necessitated. Nevertheless, this painting remains one of his uncontested masterpieces. In 1856, he allied himself with William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones who had the greatest admiration and affection for him.

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Found,* begun in 1869 (unfinished).
Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 88.9 cm.
Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Collection of Pre-Raphaelite Art, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington.

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Beatrix Meeting Dante at a Wedding Feast, Denies him her Salutation,* 1855.
Watercolour on paper, 34 x 42 cm.
The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford.

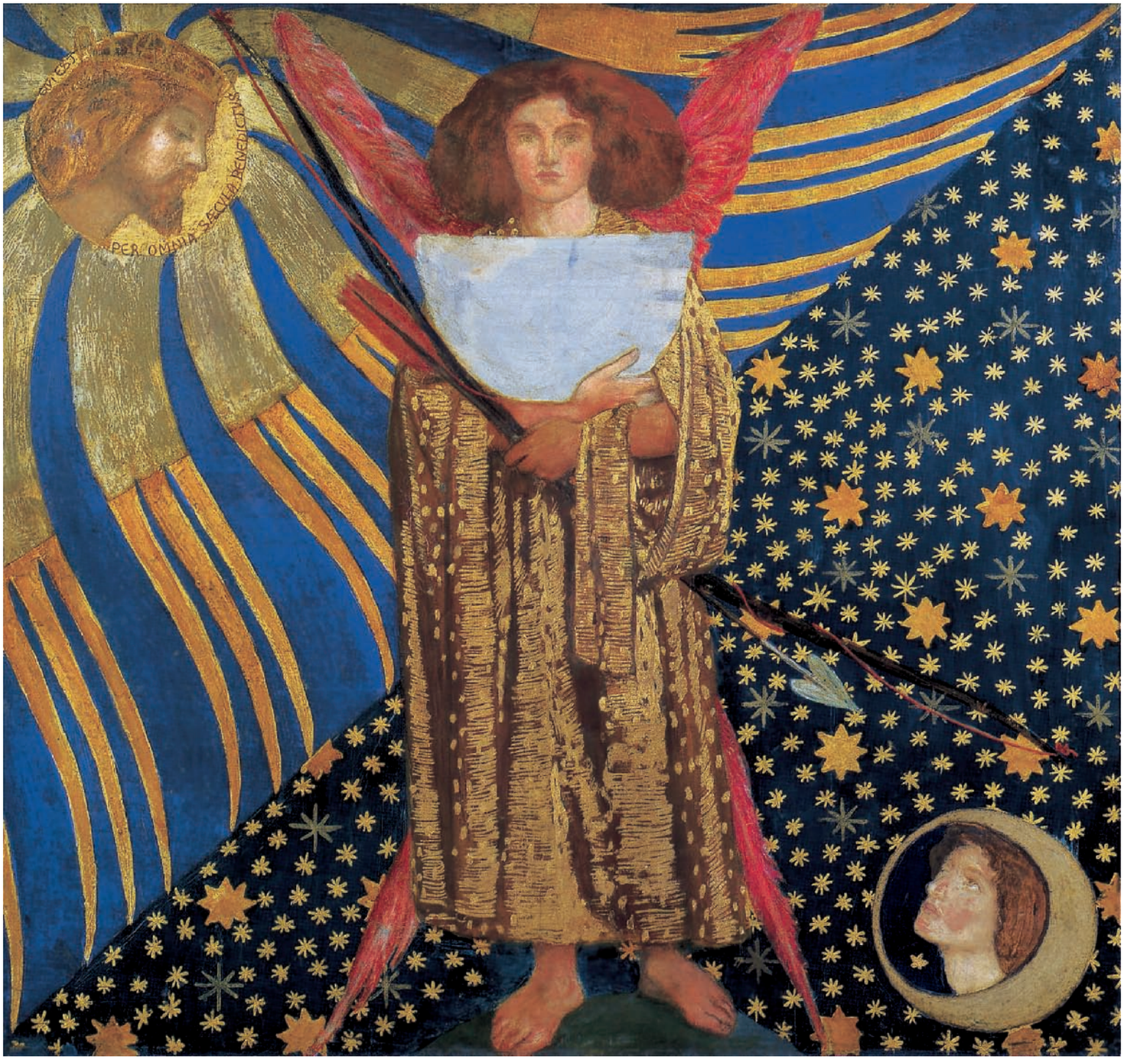
Throughout his life, Rossetti was passionate about literature. He began his translation of the thirteenth century *Italian Lyrics* in 1846, and not long after he published a first version of his remarkable poems, *The Blessed Damozel* and *Sister Helen*, which was later revised. In December of 1850 the first issue of *The Germ* was published. Rossetti held the position of verse and prose poet for this periodical, whose goal was to promote the principles of Pre-Raphaelitism through criticism and examples; each edition was to contain an engraving. *The Germ* was the collective property of all members of the Brotherhood, but the venture was far from being a financial success and only four issues were published. In 1861 Rossetti actively helped renew taste in stained glass by producing new designs.

In 1860 Rossetti married Elisabeth E. Siddal, who was herself a painter of merit. Mrs Rossetti, whose health was delicate, delivered a stillborn child in 1861 and died the following year from an overdose of laudanum.

Her death overwhelmed Rossetti with sadness, and he buried the manuscript of his poems with her. It was not until 1869 that he disinterred the manuscript, which he published the following year. For the rest of his life, he pursued poetry and painting. Around 1868 he began experiencing insomnia, which deeply disturbed his social life. His circle of friends shrank to only a close few, and he spent much time with William Morris in Kelmscott, Oxfordshire. In 1881 he published *Ballads and Sonnets*, and he also left us his translation of Dante's *Vita Nueva*. In the last years of his life he seemed completely unaware of his growing fame. Unable to sleep without the help of chloral hydrate, he died on 9th April 1882 following health complications.

Both directly with the Pre-Raphaelites and indirectly through the Arts and Crafts movement, Rossetti had considerable influence on numerous areas and left his mark on the poetic technique of his day. Combining Italian sensuality and love of form with the dreamy imagination of more northerly regions, the unique universe of this artist still fascinates us today through his writings and paintings.

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Dantis Amor,* 1860.
Oil on mahogany, 74.9 x 81.3 cm.
Tate Gallery, London.


EVANGELIUM
PER OMNIA SAECULA BENEDICTUS

# Ford Madox Brown
# (Calais, 1821 - London, 1893)

**Dante Gabriel Rossetti,**
*Ford Madox Brown,* 1852.
Pencil, 17.1 x 11.4 cm.
National Portrait Gallery, London.

Ford Madox Brown's father was a retired navy purser and his mother's family came from Kent. His paternal grandfather was the Scottish doctor John Brown, who established the "Bruonian" theory of medicine. Ford Madox Brown had no brothers or sisters. He spent his youth shuttling between England and the Continent, and at the age of six showed a strong inclination for drawing and painting. In 1835 he took classes at Bruges from a student of David, Gregorius, but the fundamental part of his education began in 1837, under Baron Wappers, who was considered a great authority in Antwerp. From his earliest years, Brown showed remarkable strength in drawing and painting, as evidenced by a portrait of his father, completed when the boy was fourteen years old. Orphaned at nineteen, Brown lived modestly but nonetheless travelled around Europe. In 1841 he married his cousin Elizabeth Bomley and left for London in 1844. Then in 1845-1846 he explored Rome, where he admired the work of the Nazarenes, a small group of nineteenth-century young German painters who held the opinion that art should serve a moral or religious purpose. They also advocated a return to the spirit of the Middle Ages.

**Ford Madox Brown,**
*Chaucer at the Court of Edward III*,
1847-1851.
Oil on canvas, 372 x 296 cm.
Art Gallery of New South Wales,
Sydney.

In 1846 Brown moved to London where his wife succumbed to tuberculosis, leaving one daughter, Lucy, who married William M. Rossetti in 1874. After a short time as a widower, Brown took Emma Hill as his second wife. She posed for many of his paintings. In 1848 Brown was contacted by Rossetti and agreed to give him lessons. Through Rossetti, Brown became associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement. He shared some of their principles, such as that of remaining true to nature, and though he was sometimes considered to be their inspiration, he refused to join the group. Brown's art is characterised by profoundly theatrical historic scenes and reinforced by a meticulous attention to detail. For example, in his painting *Chaucer at the Court of Edward III*, begun in Rome in 1845 and completed in London in 1848, one can spot in the crowd certain members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Landscapes like *An English Autumn Afternoon*, demonstrate this. At the beginning of his career, he simply used landscapes as backgrounds, as the Pre-Raphaelites did, but he later painted them for their own merit. In his landscapes, nature is not glorified but described as it is, and Ruskin reproached him for this. Brown also had a passion for contemporary subjects; *"Take your Son, Sir"* he addresses the same theme of prostitution as Rossetti did in *Found*. In *Work*, he treats the subject of the new industrialised society and glorifies the progress of modern England. Finally, in *The Last of England*, he explores the economic emigration that he himself considered when his career was at a low point. This painting was inspired by the departure of the Pre-Raphaelite sculptor Thomas Woolner. In 1865, independently of the Royal Academy, he organised an exhibition of his works in London around *Work*. Besides his work as a painter, Brown also created designs for stained glass, and until 1874 he was a member of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., a design firm founded by William Morris. He also painted many portraits and even self-portraits, and he occasionally gave lectures. In 1878, he devoted himself to decorating Manchester City Hall.

Brown was never a highly remunerated or popular artist. For half his life he had difficulties with money, and even when his situation improved he was never truly well off. Though as a young man he seemed to have a certain future as a successful painter, his life took another direction after some disappointments and difficulties. From 1868 he suffered from gout, and he died after an attack of apoplexy.

**Ford Madox Brown,**
*"Take your son, sir"*, c. 1851-1892.
Oil on canvas, 70.5 x 38.1 cm.
Tate Britain, London.


**Ford Madox Brown,**
*Work,* 1852-1865.
Oil on canvas, 137 x 197.3 cm.
Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester.


WHILE IT IS DAY FOR THE NIGHT COMETH WHEN NO MAN CAN WORK.
SEEST THOU A MAN DILIGENT IN
HIS BUSINESS? HE SHALL
STAND BEFORE KINGS.
EAT OF THY FACE SHALT THOU EAT BREAD.

# Arthur Hughes
# (London, 1832 - Kew, 1915)


**Arthur Hughes,**
*Self-Portrait,* 1851.
Private Collection.

Arthur Hughes was the third and final son of Edward and Amy Hughes. In 1838 he entered Archbishop Tenison's Grammar School, and it was in this establishment that he took his first steps in drawing. At fourteen, he entered the School of Design at Somerset House in London where he studied under Alfred Stevens, a Belgian painter close to the Impressionists. He was accepted the following year, in 1847, at the Antique School of the Royal Academy, where he won several prizes. In 1849, his painting *Musidora* was exhibited at the Academy.

In 1850, while he was a third-year student at the Royal Academy, he discovered Pre-Raphaelitism by reading all four issues of the periodical *The Germ*, and was immediately enthused. He began painting according to Pre-Raphaelite principles. He was particularly interested in their desire to remain true to nature and their love of literature. Like them, he enjoyed the poems of John Keats and Tennyson, whose verses he later illustrated. He met Rossetti, Brown, Hunt and the sculptor Alexander Munro, and adopted their ideals. He also met the woman who would become his wife, Tryphena Foord.

In 1852 he met Millais and exhibited his first painting created according to Pre-Raphaelite principles: *Ophelia*. This painting depicts Ophelia a few moments before her death, unlike that of Millais where we see her floating at the surface of the water. The first time it was exhibited, the painting was hung in an inconspicuous location, but Millais noticed and appreciated it. The next year, Hughes began a painting entitled *Orlando in the Forest of Arden*, in which he paid particular attention to the background. However, the painting was not chosen by the Royal Academy in 1855. Not letting himself be discouraged, Hughes replaced the figure of Orlando with a man and woman promising one another eternal love. In this form, the painting was accepted and exhibited in 1859.

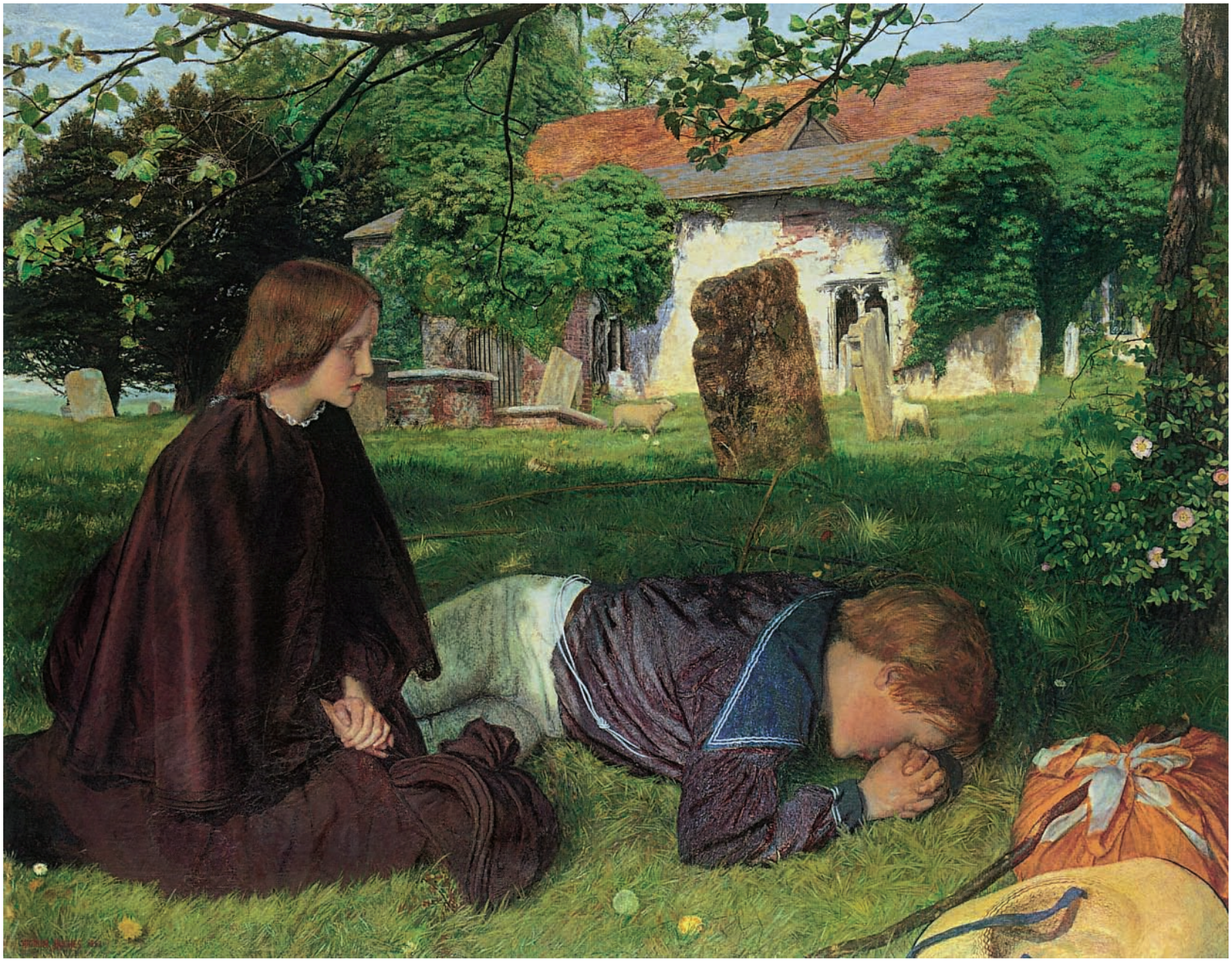
**Arthur Hughes,**
*The Long Engagement,* 1859.
Oil on canvas, 107 x 53.3 cm.
Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Birmingham.

In November 1855, he married Tryphena Foord at Holy Trinity Church in Maidstone, and they later had five children. She posed as a model for many of his paintings, including *April Love* in 1855-1856. This painting earned him the praise of Ruskin, who particularly appreciated the detailed vegetation. It was purchased by William Morris, who then presented it to Edward Burne-Jones.

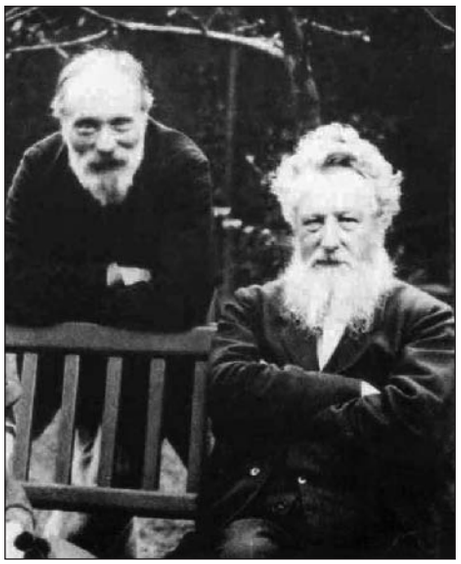
In 1855 Hughes began a career as an illustrator and worked with George MacDonald. In 1856 he painted *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, inspired by John Keats' 1820 poem. Like his *Ophelia* of 1852, this triptych painting is surrounded by a golden frame engraved with verses from the poem that inspired it.

As with *April Love*, Ruskin was delighted: "A very noble painting [...] Madeline's face is exquisite." In 1857, he collaborated with Burne-Jones, Rossetti, and Morris in painting the walls of the Oxford Union Library. The following year, he moved to London, then travelled to Italy in 1862. At various times in his life, Hughes held teaching posts at South Kensington Schools and Working Man's College. The last exhibition of his works while he was still living took place at the Royal Academy in 1908. He spent the last years of his life in isolation surviving on a Civil List Pension, and he died in Kew, not far from central London. Hughes was never part of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, but was very close to all the members and embraced their principles quite early. Though timid and reserved, he was much appreciated by the Brothers and was one of their most faithful followers.

**Arthur Hughes,**
*Home from Sea,* 1863.
Oil on panel, 50 x 65 cm.
The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford.



# Sir Edward Burne-Jones (Birmingham, 1833 - West Stratton, 1898)



**Anonymous,**
*Portrait of Burne-Jones and Morris.*
Private Collection.

Ned Burne-Jones was an only child. He lost his mother a few days after his birth and was raised by his Welsh father, who was deeply affected by the death of his wife and had difficulty accepting the presence of his son. Consequently, the young Edward was often left to himself and found comfort in drawing. From 1844 he studied at King Edward's School in Birmingham; at first envisaging a career in commerce, he nevertheless studied the classics, and would maintain this interest throughout his life. His fascination with mythology was particularly lasting. Additionally, the young Burne-Jones loved painting and his work showed promise. In Birmingham, his drawing teacher was Thomas Clark, a landscape painter who exhibited at the Royal Academy. In January 1853 he entered Exeter College, Oxford at the same time as William Morris who, like him, was attracted by the Oxford Movement and wanted to enter the priesthood. They had a deep friendship and shared a passion for the Middle Ages as well as for the writings of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin. Soon, Burne-Jones took up painting and drawing again. He studied Italian paintings and engravings by Dürer in the University galleries, but felt the greatest enthusiasm for the works of a contemporary English painter, Rossetti. Like Morris, Burne-Jones decided to abandon his aspirations to the priesthood to pursue his artistic career.

**Edward Burne-Jones** (design) and
**Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.**
(production),
*Elaine,* 1870.
Stained and painted glass,
86.3 x 51.4 cm.
Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

In 1856 he met Rossetti, who became his mentor, and left the University shortly thereafter to take up residence in London. He moved to 17 Red Lion Square with Morris, into an apartment formerly occupied by Rossetti, from whom he had taken informal lessons. Rossetti strengthened their desire to reintroduce the formal purity, stylisation, and high moral value of medieval art works into contemporary art. In the same year, Burne-Jones met his future spouse Georgiana (Georgie) MacDonald, the sister of a school friend and the daughter of a Methodist minister. Recognising his student's talent, Rossetti soon declared that he had nothing more to teach Burne-Jones, and in the autumn of 1857 they worked together decorating the walls of the Oxford Union. However, none of the painters involved had mastered the fresco technique, and the paintings were already crumbling soon after their completion. In 1859 Burne-Jones travelled to Italy and visited Florence, Pisa, Sienna, and Venice. By the end of the 1850s, Burne-Jones' work was stylistically similar to that of Rossetti. His feminine ideal was also similar to Rossetti's, characterised by abundant hair, strong chins, long necks and androgynous bodies hidden under large medieval robes. In 1860 he painted the two portraits *Sidonia von Bork* and *Clara von Bork*, then in June of that year he married Georgiana, whose sisters had married Sir E. Poynter, the future President of the Royal Academy, and Lockwood Kipling, father of Rudyard Kipling. The couple's home was in Bloomsbury.

In 1861 Burne-Jones was a founder of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., for whom he was the principal stained-glass artist, creating more than five hundred designs.

Though he was most strongly influenced by Rossetti, he also benefited from contact with other artists such as G.F. Watts. In 1862 Burne-Jones and Georgiana accompanied Ruskin on a trip to Milan and Venice.

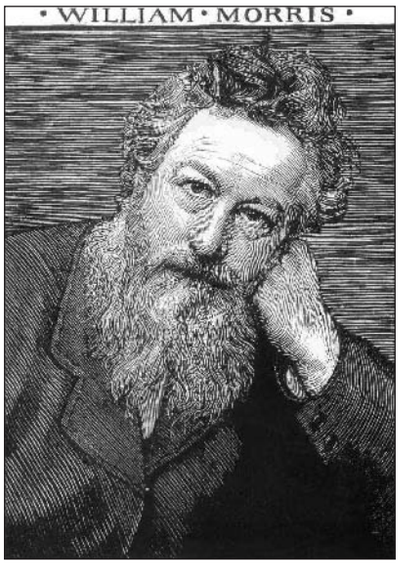
In 1864, watercolours including the *Merciful Knight* (1863) earned him election to the Royal Watercolour Society. His adored daughter Margaret was born in 1866, and she became his confidante and a frequent model for his paintings. In 1870, after a conflict, Burne-Jones stepped down from the Royal Watercolour Society. His affair with Mary Zambaco, one of his models, provoked a scandal, and these successive problems incited him to retire to Fulham, west London.

Two successive voyages in Italy in 1871 and 1873 enriched his knowledge of the High Renaissance. In 1877 he triumphed at the Grosvenor Gallery with *The Beguiling of Merlin* and *The Mirror of Venus*. In 1886 he took part in the annual exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Society, where he exhibited numerous works created for Morris. These works attained high prices at auction, and people began to collect his designs.

In 1889, after his success at the Paris Universal Exhibition, he was awarded the Légion d'Honneur by the French government, and in 1894 he was raised to the baronetcy by the Queen. In 1895, though already ill, he executed fifty-seven illustrations for the *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, published by Morris' Kelmscott Press. However, his health was slowly failing him and in 1898 he died of cardiac arrest.

**Edward Burne-Jones,**
*Clara von Bork 1560,* 1860.
Watercolour and gouache,
34.2 x 17.9 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

# William Morris
# (Walthamstow, 1834 - Kelmscott, 1896)




**Anonymous,**
*Portrait of William Morris.*
Private Collection.

William Morris was a designer, poet, decorator, writer, and architect. He was the third of nine children of William Morris, a rich Lombard Street broker, and his wife Emma. He learned to read very early, and at four years old he was already familiar with all of Sir Walter Scott's novels. He studied with his sisters' governess and went to school for the first time at nine years old. In 1848, after the death of his father, William entered Marlborough College, where he was influenced by the Oxford Movement. It was in this same year that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was founded.

In 1853 he went to Exeter College in Oxford at the same time as his friend Edward Burne-Jones, intending to enter the priesthood. Both belonged to a circle of aesthetes fascinated by an idealised vision of the Middle Ages, whose purpose was to "lead a crusade and a holy war against the contemporary era." The members of this small group called themselves a brotherhood and read books together on theology, ecclesiastical history, and medieval poetry, as well as Tennyson's poems and the writings of Ruskin. In 1855, still accompanied by Burne-Jones, he took a tour of the great Gothic cathedrals of northern France, and the two friends abandoned the priesthood to fully devote themselves to art. In early 1856 Morris began an apprenticeship with the architect George Edmund Street, during which he met his future collaborator Philip Webb. At the same time, he founded *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* and met Rossetti, who incited him to immediately abandon architecture for painting.

**William Morris,**
*La Belle Iseult,* 1858.
Oil on canvas, 71.8 x 50.2 cm.
Tate Gallery, London.

In 1857 he participated in the decoration of the Oxford Union Library's walls. This was also the year that Morris met the woman who would be his wife and muse, Jane Burden. She was also one of Rossetti's preferred models. In 1858 he published his story *The Defence of Guenevere*, which is now considered to be one of the most beautiful Victorian poems. The next year he married Jane Burden, and in 1859 they moved into the Red House designed for them by Philip Webb. After fitting out the house, Morris decided in 1861 to establish a decorating business with Rossetti, Webb, Burne-Jones, Madox Brown, Faulkner and Marshall. Morris and Burne-Jones were the firm's principal designers but the entire Pre-Raphaelite community worked there, along with Arthur Hughes and William de Morgan.

In parallel with his decorating work, Morris began studying the Icelandic language in 1868, and with Eiríkr Magnússon he published his first translations of Icelandic sagas, *The Saga of Gunnlaug Worm-Tongue* and *The Story of Grettir the Strong*. Between 1868 and 1870 he published the four parts of *The Earthly Paradise*. After these accomplishments in decoration and literature, Morris became interested in politics. For him, the Socialist movement seemed to be the only solution to the problems of Victorian society, particularly the complications emerging from the industrial revolution.

In 1871 Morris and Rossetti became co-proprietors of Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire. Rossetti was very close to "Topsy", his nickname for William, and Jane Morris, with whom he had an affair. In 1874 Morris took sole possession of Kelmscott without Rossetti, and for purely commercial reasons became the sole owner of the firm, known thereafter as Morris & Co.

Though he was becoming more and more involved in politics, he found time in 1875 to publish *Sigurd the Volsung* and *Fall of the Nibelungs*. In 1877 he founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and gave his first public lecture on the decorative arts. In 1884 Morris wrote numerous essays on socialism that were read throughout England and Scotland. In the same year, he left the Social Democratic Federation and founded the Socialist League. In 1891 he founded the Kelmscott Press in Hammersmith, which published the *Kelmscott Chaucer* in 1896. This book was typeset by Morris and illustrated by Burne-Jones, and is an outstanding example of Morris' ideas. He was skilled at combining beauty and utility in everyday objects, and though he was a poor painter, he helped to promote the Pre-Raphaelite ideal of beauty through his work. Like the Pre-Raphaelites, he fought for a more beautiful world, a return to the aesthetics of the Middle Ages, and a more demanding attitude towards the art objects that surround us. He died in 1896 and was buried in the cemetery of Kelmscott village.

**William Morris,**
*The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer,* 1896.
Book published by Kelmscott Press.
Paper, 42.5 x 29.2 cm (page).
Art Gallery and Museum, Cheltenham.

**William Morris** and **John Henry Dearle** (design) and **Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.** (production),
*The Orchard,* or *The Seasons,* c. 1863.
Tapestry woven in wool, silk and mohair on a cotton warp,
221 x 472 cm.
Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

# the works of Geoffrey Chaucer now newly imprinted

HERE BEGINNETH THE TALES OF CANTERBURY AND FIRST THE PROLOGUE THEREOF

WHAN that Aprille with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours yronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open eye,
So priketh hem nature in hir corages;
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engeland, to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

BIFIL that in that seson on a day,
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay,
Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght were come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye,
Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.


laidst bitten mead and bare shorn
the world without is waste and worn
but here within our orchard close
the guerdon of our labour shows


O valiant earth O happy year
that works the threat of winter near
and hangs aloft from tree to tree
the banners of the spring to be

# Notes

1 At the Tate Gallery, No 1110. *The Spiritual Form of Pitt Guiding Behemoth.*

2 Ford Madox Brown, born in 1821, died in 1893. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, born in 1828, died in 1882. Edward Burne Jones, born in 1833, died in 1898.

3 Harry Quilter M.A. *Ford Madox Brown, the teacher of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Holman Hunt.* — See also: Ford Madox Brown, *Of the Mechanism of a Historical Picture.*

4 William Bell Scott, *Autobiographical Notes*, vol. I, London, 1892.

5 See the entire scene in William Bell Scott. *Autobiographical Notes*, vol. 1. On Rossetti, read: Joseph Knight, *Life of Dante-Gabriel Rossetti*, London, 1887, William Sharp, *Dante-Gabriel Rossetti, a Record and a Study.* London, 1882, Esther Wood, *Dante-Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite movement.* London, 1894, W. Holman Hunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* in the *Contemporary Review*, May, June, and July, 1886 and in the *Chambers Encyclopedia*, F. Q. Stephens, P.R.B., *Dante-Gabriel Rossetti*, in *Portfolio* of May 1894, Harry Quilter, *Preferences in Art*, London, 1892, Myers, *Essays Modern*, London, 1883, William Michael Rossetti, *Ruskin, Rossetti, Pre-Raphaelitism - papers, 1854 to 1862.* London, 1899, Edouard Rood, *Rossetti et les Préraphaélites anglais.*

6 See Redgrave, A *Century of Painters of the English School.*

7 John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. II, ch. III, § 18. *Necessity of finishing Works of Art perfectly.*

8 John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. I, ch. V, § 9. *The Imperative Necessity, in Landscape Painting, of Fullness and Finish.*

9 John Ruskin. *Modern Painters*, vol. II, ch III, § 21. *The Duty and After Privileges of all Students*, 1843.

10 Ruskin's works were handled by a special publisher, Mr. George Alleu of London, who had them printed far from unaesthetic factories in the middle of fields filled with flowers and fruit. It is even said that these precious books were shipped to London without using the railway, so that unaesthetic steam engines would play no part in their distribution. On Ruskin, cf *Ruskin et la Religion de la Beauté* (Hachette) and *The Life and Work of John Ruskin*, by W. G. Collingwood.

To give some idea of the enormous popularity of these very costly works, in 1886 alone 2,122 copies of *Sesame and Lilies* were sold, as well as 1,273 of *Frondes Agrestes*, 93 of the large illustrated edition of *The Stones of Venice*, etc., without counting the "pirated" American editions that true Ruskinians forbid themselves to read, preferring that if they cannot afford the expense of the original volumes they should remain ignorant of the words of the master rather than hear them in this vulgar and tainted form.

11 On the fashion in which Rossetti recruited Woolner, it is interesting to read this comment from Harry Quilter: "It is possible that Woolner was never a Pre-Raphaelite by choice, because we found out that it was Rossetti who had claimed him as his own, because of the principles according to which he had written (according to Rossetti) *My Beautiful Lady.* It seems that this poem was not written according to any principles, and that Rossetti, as he was looking for converts, had decided while admiring the poem that his appreciation could only have come from the fact that these verses were Pre-Raphaelite. *Preferences in Art.*

12 Nearly every year in London there was an exhibition in the Guildhall of already famous works by great contemporary artists. These works were borrowed from individuals or museums.

13 This painting, in the Tate Gallery, entitled *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, is in some ways a good example of Pre-Raphaelitism. One of the principles of this school was given by Ruskin: "Take things as they probably happened, and not according to the rules of art developed under Raphael." If we look at this *Annunciation*, considering that it was painted in 1850, we see that it constituted a revolution in the direction of simplicity and humility, and to a certain degree realism in religious painting. Ruskin asks us to compare "this Virgin waking from her sleep on a pallet bed, in a plain room, startled by sudden words and ghostly presence which she does not comprehend, and casting in her mind what manner of Salutation this should be," with the Madonnas of the Old Masters, "dressed in scrupulously folded and exquisitely falling robes of blue, with edges embroidered in gold (see, for example, in Room III of the National Gallery, *The Annunciation* by Filippo Lippi), sitting under exquisitest architecture, receiving the angel's message with their hands folded on their breasts in the most graceful positions, and the missals that they had been previously studying laid open on their knees… Rossetti's *Annunciation* differs from every previous conception of the scene known to me, in representing the angel as waking the Virgin from sleep to give her his message. The Messenger himself also differs from the angels as they were commonly represented, in not depending, for recognition of his supernatural character, on the insertion of bird's wings at his shoulders. If we are to know him for an angel at all, it must be by his face, which is that simply of youthful, but grave, manhood. He is neither transparent in body, luminous in presence, nor auriferous in apparel; wears a plain, long, white robe, casts a natural and undiminished shadow, and although there are flames beneath his feet, which upbear him, so that he does not touch the earth, these are unseen by the Virgin… Mr Rossetti, in this and his subsequent works of the kind, thought it better for himself and his public to make some effort toward a real notion of what actually did happen in the carpenter's cottage at Nazareth, than merely to produce a variety in the pattern of Virgin, pattern of Virgin's gown, and pattern of Virgin's house, which had been set by the jewellers of the fifteenth century." *The Three Colours of Pre-Raphaelitism* and *The Art of England*, cited and analysed in the excellent *Handbook to the Tate Gallery*, by Edward T. Cook.

14 Household Words, June 15th, 1850.

15 John Ruskin, *The Pre-Raphaelite Brethren*, letter to the editor of *The Times* (May 30th, 1851) reprinted in the *Arrows*, Vol.I. — Ruskin said elsewhere: "Every Pre-Raphaelite landscape is painted, down to the last brushstroke, *en plein air*, after nature itself." *Lectures on Architecture and Painting.*

16 "There is a willow grows ascaunt the brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples.
There on the pendent boughs here coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;
When down her weedy trophies, and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide;
And, mermaid-like, a while they bore her up:
Which time, she chanted snatches of old times;
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indu'd
Into that element: but long it could not be
Till that her garments heavy with their drink,
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death." Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act IV, scene 7.

17 *The Last of England* is in the Guild Museum in Birmingham.

18 In the Tate Gallery one can see four of Rossetti's works: *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, *Beata Beatrix*, *Rosa Triplex*, and the *Portrait of Mrs William Morris.*

19 "We did not state then or afterwards that there was no healthy art after Raphael, but it seemed to us that art after him had been weakened by the disease of corruption and that it was only in older works that we could find perfect health." "It was in somewhat of a spirit of paradox that we decided that Raphael, the prince of painters, was the inspiration for current art, for we saw very well that the practices of contemporary painters were quite distant from that of their supposed master." Holman Hunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.*

20 See John Everett Millais, *Some Thoughts about Art of to-day, Magazine of Art*, 1888.

21 Regarding Madox Brown, all of the historians agree that it was precisely

# Notes

this question that kept him from officially adhering to the brotherhood. One reads in the memoirs of F.G. Stephens, P.R.B.: "C. Brown refused to join the society mainly because of an excessive principle that these painters adopted for a while. This principle was that when a member had found a model whose appearance matched his ideas, he had to paint it exactly, down to the last hair, so to speak." *Portfolio*, May 1894. As for Rossetti, we find these words from Madox Brown in *Preferences in Art*, cited by Harry Quilter: "He (Rossetti) had nothing against studying draperies on mannequins, as is generally thought. On the contrary, far from detesting mannequins, he had two or three built at great cost." And later, Harry Quilter says of Rossetti: "He had a habit of doing his watercolours in around fifteen days and without a model (so much for the theories of the P.R.B.!)".

22 Esther Wood, *Dante-Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement.*

23 "This opinion was given to students, not to artists, not in order to make paintings, but to open their eyes to nature and guide their hands with a broader and freer method." Collingwood, *Art Teaching of John Ruskin.*

24 *The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.*

25 John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. II, ch. III, § 21. *The Duty and after privileges of all students*, 1843.

26 From the beginning, the common sense of Millais made him realise that their system was exaggerated. William Bell Scott recounts that at the beginning of the Brotherhood, he went to see the young artist in his workshop where he saw an engraving by the Italian Agostino Lauro, dated 1845, and entitled *Meditation*, depicting a young girl seated under some trees. "Every leaf of every plant, better than that, each half of each leaf, branching off from the central stem, even in the shadow, was carefully represented, and the design of the young girl's dress, as well. I was looking at this engraving, when Millais, leaving his easel, said: 'Ah! You're looking at that. It's quite Pre-Raphaelite, isn't it? We haven't made it there yet! As for me I won't even try. It's absurd. Nature is nature and art is art! Isn't it? We would kill ourselves doing that!'", W. Bell Scott, *Autobiographical Notes*, vol. I.

27 This painting depicts Dante's Beatrice, seated on the balcony of her father's palace in Florence. The young girl is depicted against the horizon with eyes closed and is having, at this moment, a vision of new life. Through the window, we see the Arno, a bridge, and the towers and palaces of the city in which Dante and Beatrice spent their life until the fateful month of June 1290, when she died - the entire city was like a widower, and stripped of its dignity. Near her, a sundial marks the fateful hour, and the sunlight forms a sort of natural halo around her. A glowing red dove, like that of the Annunciation, brings her a white poppy, the mystic flower in which Rossetti wanted to unite the symbols of death and chastity. The face of Beatrice is reminiscent of Rossetti's wife, who had already died. In the background, we see the poet Dante attentively looking at the figure of love, which is carrying a flaming heart and moving off to the left side of the painting, seemingly beckoning him to follow. "I did not want to represent death," writes Rossetti, "but Beatrice's anguish, suddenly vanished in ecstasy. Through her closed eyes, she is conscious of this new world mentioned in the last words of the *Vita Nuova*: *quella beata Beatrice che gloriosamente mira nella faceia di colui qui est per omnia scula benedictus.*"

28 Mrs Russell Barrington, *Catalogue of Paintings by G.F. Watts, R. A., on the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, 1884, *The Works of Mr George Frederick Watts, R, A.* (Pall Mall Gazette, extra), Harry Quilter, *The Art of Watts.*

29 When these lines were written, the new memoirs of Eugene Delacroix appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes.* He says "the dry school" when speaking of the Pre-Raphaelites, and in fact these words define it sufficiently for a painter.

30 Philip Gilbert Hamerton, one of the combatants of the early years, describes Pre-Raphaelitism as "a violent and beneficial reaction against indolent synthesis in favour of laborious analysis, and against mental inactivity in favour of emotions and new ideas." *Thoughts about Art*, London, 1889.

31 "The third error (made by the official critics) was to think that the P.R.B. had no system of light and shadow. They may simply respond that their system of light and shadow is exactly the same as that of the sun, which according to me is superior to that of the Renaissance, however brilliant it was." J. Ruskin, *Pre-Raphaelitism.*

32 It was painted after nature on the cliffs near Hastings in 1853. Ruskin affirms that "the pure natural green and gold of the grasses in this seaside study, are seen to be accurate after one minute of attention. If you remain in front of this painting for a long time, bit by bit, it will elevate you to that peace that one hopes to find in the glory and calm of summer." *Art of England.*

33 This is one more reason to consider Madox Brown's training at Baron Wappers' school in Antwerp to be one of the sources of Pre-Raphaelitism. Here is how Jules Breton, who worked in the Belgian painter's studio, described his methods: "He taught those that painted to decompose planes into strokes placed one next to the other, as in mosaics, and to colour the shadows with ardent hues, the midtones with greenish greys, and the highlights with yellow and pink, to express vibrancy and life. We see that our Impressionists did not invent anything." *La Vie d'un Artiste*, Paris, 1890.

34 Here are examples of how Pre-Raphaelitism is seen as a whole by two writers who are otherwise not entirely favourable towards it: "The influence of this school on the last quarter-century has been indisputably beneficial. It led to the direct study of nature, by according little value to conventional rules based on antiquity. Though it was mistaken in unjustly dismissing principles of composition based on centuries of experience, it nonetheless led to a very positive reform." George H. Shephbro, *A Short History of the British School of Painting.* "All things considered, English art was more improved than spoiled by what was called the Pre-Raphaelite heresy, for the zeal and the earnestness of its followers served to counterbalance the problems caused by a great number of false paintings, which were produced by painters concerned only with making money, who were only working to sell." Richard Redgrave, R. A., *A Century of Painters of the English School.* And to appreciate the influence that Pre-Raphaelitism had, even in branches of art quite distinct from painting, one must read the words of the great decorator Walter Crane: "To find the origins of our Revival, we must go back to the days of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Though none of its members was a decorative designer in the strict sense, except D.G. Rossetti, through their resolute and enthusiastic return to the direct symbolism, frank naturalism, and poetic or romantic feeling found in the art of the Middle Ages, combined with the power of modern analysis and an intense love of detail, they directed attention toward branches of design outside painting." Walter Crane, *The English Revival of Decorative Art*, Fortnightly Review.

35 Hodgson, *An Artist's Holiday.*

36 Hamerton, *A Painter's Camp.*

37 Ernest Chesneau, *La Peinture anglaise.*

38 *Modern Painters*, vol. II. *Of the Foreground.*

39 Cited and approved by Wiliam Hunt in *Talks about Art.*

40 William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art.*

41 Aratra Pentelici, *Of the Division of Arts.*

42 Walter Crane, *The English Revival of Decorative Art.*

43 John Ruskin, *Val d'Arno*, passim.

44 William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art.*

45 Sir John Millais, *Thoughts on our Art of To-day.*

46 Ibid.

47 John Ruskin, *The Two Paths.*

48 "It may be doubted whether the national mind has turned to art from the pure love for it." P.G. Hamerton, *Thoughts about Art*, London, 1889.

# Index


**A** **Anonymous**

*Portrait of Burne-Jones and Morris* 185
*Portrait of William Morris* 189

**B** **Brett, John**

*Glacier of Rosenlaui* 88
*Vale of Aosta* 89

**Brown, Ford Madox**

*Chaucer at the Court of Edward III* 174
*Cordelia's Potion* 151
*An English Autumn Afternoon, Hampstead: Landscape* 92-93
*The Hayfield* 85
*Jesus Washing Peter's Feet* 98
*The Last of England* 103
*Pretty Baa-Lambs* 87
*"Take your son, sir"* 177
*Walton-on-the-Naze* 84
*Work* 178-179

**Burne-Jones, Edward**

*The Baleful Head* 63
*The Beguiling of Merlin* 58
*The Briar Rose Series - Study for 'The Garden Court'* 119
*The Challenge in the Desert* 52
*Clara von Bork 1560* 187
*The Golden Stairs* 50
*King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* 135
*Laus Veneris* 55
*The Merciful Knight* 106
The *Perseus Series: Perseus and the Sea Nymphs (The Armament of Perseus)* 31
*The Perseus Series: The Rock of Doom* 30
*Psyche's Wedding* 60-61
*Wedding Banquet of Sire Devrevaunt* 149
*The Wheel of Fortune* 132

**Burne-Jones, Edward** (design) and **Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.** (production)

*Elaine* 184

**Burne-Jones, Edward, William Morris** and **John Henry Dearle** (design) and **Morris & Co.** (production)

*Holy Grail Tapestry - Quest for the Holy Grail Tapestries - The Arming and Departure of the Knights* 48-49

**C** **Collins, Charles Allston**

*Convent Thoughts* 10

**Collinson, James**

*The Renunciation of St. Elizabeth of Hungary* 143

**Crane, Walter**

*La Belle Dame Sans Merci* 26

*The Lady of Shalott* 22-23

**D** **Deverell, Walter Howell**

*Twelfth Night, Act II, Scene III* 146

**Dicksee, Franck**

*Chivalry* 28

**F** **Fortescue-Brickdale, Eleanor**

*The Wise Virgins* 53

**H** **Hughes, Arthur**

*The Annunciation* 125

*April Love* 114

*The Brave Geraint* 136-137

*The Eve of St. Agnes* 141

*Home from Sea* 183

*The Knight of the Sun* 36-37

*The Long Engagement* 180

*Ophelia* 112-113, 117

*Self-Portrait* 181

**Hughes, Edward Robert**

*Midsummer Eve* 111

**Hunt, William Holman**

*The Awakening Conscience* 154

*Claudio and Isabella* 65

*A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids* 82

*Dante Gabriel Rossetti* 169

*The Eve of St. Agnes* 140

*The Finding of the Savior in the Temple* 104

*The Hireling Shepherd* 80-81

*Isabella and the Pot of Basil* 64

*John Everett Millais* 161

*The Lady of Shalott* 19

*The Light of the World* 97
*London Bridge on the Night of the Marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales* 156-157
*Our English Coasts, 1852 ("Strayed Sheep")* 95
*Plain of Esdraelon from the Heights above Nazareth* 100-101
*Rienzi Vowing to Obtain Justice for the Death of his Young Brother, Slain in a Skirmish between the Colonna and the Orsini Factions* 144-145
*The Scapegoat* 159
*The Shadow of Death* 96
*The Triumph of the Innocents* 105
*Two Gentlemen of Verona, Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* 34

**L** **Leighton, Edmund Blair**
*The Accolade* 25

**M** **Meteyard, Sidney Harold**
*"I am half-sick of shadows", said the Lady of Shalott* 20

**Millais, John Everett**
*Autumn Leaves* 79
*The Blind Girl* 167
*The Bridesmaid* 76
*Christ in the House of his Parents ("The Carpenter's Shop")* 165
*A Dream of the Past: Sir Isumbras at the Ford* 27
*Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* 11
*The Huguenot* 122
*Lorenzo and Isabella* 66
*Mariana* 6
*Mrs. James Wyatt Jr. and her Daughter, Sarah* 160
*Ophelia* 120-121
*The Order of Release 1746* 162
*Portrait of John Ruskin* 163
*The Return of the Dove to the Ark* 127
*William Holman Hunt* 155
*The Woodsman's Daughter* 166

**Morgan, Evelyn de**
*Hope in the Prison of Despair* 74

**Morris, William**
*La Belle Iseult* 188
*The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* 191

**Morris, William** and **John Henry Dearle** (design) and **Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.** (production)
*The Orchard*, or *The Seasons* 192-193

**P** **Paton, Joseph Noel**

*The Bluidie Tryst* 12

**R** **Rossetti, Dante Gabriel**

*Beata Beatrix* 71
*Beatrix Meeting Dante at a Wedding Feast, Denies him her Salutation* 170-171
*Before the Battle* 42
*The Bower Meadow* 44
*Dante's Vision of Rachel and Leah* 45
*Dantis Amor* 173
*Ecce Ancilla Domini! (The Annunciation)* 124
*The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrix (Dante Drawing an Angel)* 72-73
*Ford Madox Brown* 175
*Found* 168
*The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* 152
*Horatio Discovering the Madness of Ophelia* 108
*How Sir Galahad, Sir Bors and Sir Percival Were Fed with the Sanct Grael; but Sir Percival's Sister Died by the Way* 40
*Mariana* 9
*Mnemosyne* 68
*Paolo and Francesca* 138
*Proserpine* 69
*Sir Galahad at the Ruined Chapel* 41
*The Tune of the Seven Towers* 148
*Venus Verticordia* 47
*The Wedding of St. George and Princess Sabra* 39

**S** **Sandys, Frederick**

*Morgan-Le-Fay* 17

**Seddon, Thomas B.**

*Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehoshaphat from the Hill of Evil Counsel* 90

**Strudwick, John Melhuish**

*The Gentle Music of a Bygone Day* 56
*Isabelle and the Pot of Basil* 57

**W** **Waterhouse, John William**

*La Belle Dame Sans Merci* 33
*Hylas and the Nymphs* 130
*The Lady of Shalott* 14–15, 18
*A Naiad (Hylas and a Water-Nymph)* 128-129
*Ophelia* 116

**Watts, George Frederick**

*Love and Death* 133

## Art of Century Collection

- Abstract Expressionism
- Abstraction
- American Scene
- Arts & Crafts
- Art Déco
- Art Informel
- Art Nouveau
- Arte Povera
- Ashcan School
- Baroque Art
- Bauhaus
- Byzantine Art
- Camden Town Group
- COBRA
- Constructivism
- Cubism
- Dadaism
- Expressionism
- Fauvism
- Free Figuration
- Futurism
- Gothic Art
- Hudson River School
- Impressionism
- Mannerism
- Minimal Art
- Naive Art
- Naturalism
- Neoclassicism
- New Realism
- Pop Art
- Post-Impressionism
- The Pre-Raphaelites
- Rayonnism
- Realism
- Regionalism
- Renaissance Art
- Rococo
- Romanesque Art
- Romanticism
- Russian Avant-Garde
- School of Barbizon
- Social Realism
- Surrealism
- Symbolism

In Victorian England, with the country swept up in the Industrial Revolution, the Pre-Raphaelites, close to William Morris' Arts and Crafts movement, yearned for a return to bygone values. Wishing to revive the pure and noble forms of the Italian Renaissance, the major painters of the circle such as John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt, in opposition to the academicism of the time, favoured realism and biblical themes over the affected canons of the nineteenth century. This work, with its captivating text and rich illustrations, describes with enthusiasm this singular movement which notably inspired Art Nouveau and Symbolism.