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Astronomical Imagery in the Work of the Pre- Raphaelite Brother (and Sister) hood

Overview

- Background – The Pre Raphaelite Brotherhood
- Founders and aims (Holman Hunt, Millais and Rossetti)
- Astronomy and Art in work of the PRB
- Later artists
 - George Frederick Watts
 - Arthur Hughes
 - Edward Burne-Jones
 - Evelyn de Morgan
 - Edward Hughes
- Themes: sun/creation, moon, stars

The Pre Raphaelites

Founded 1848

Who were they, what did they do, what interested them?

William Holman Hunt, 1827-1910; John Everett Millais, 1829-96; Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1828-82

Aimed at purer simpler art forms, by looking back to proto-Renaissance and Quattrocento

Emphasised detailed observation of the natural world (scientific precision)

Almost religious-like devotion to truth

Stated aims in manifesto/ declarations

To have genuine ideas to express

*To study Nature attentively in order to
facilitate such expression*

*To sympathise with what is direct, serious
and heartfelt – excluding the conventional*

*And, most indispensable of all, to produce
thoroughly good pictures*

Influences

Strongly influenced by the spirituality of medieval art

Disliked Raphael (1483 - 1520); the 'Grand Manner' and Mannerists of the 16th century

Rebelled against the very formal Royal Academy (1768, Joshua Reynolds)

Observation of nature, scientific study botany, biology, geology, geography – astronomy

John Ruskin (1819-1900). Expanded into Arts and Crafts Movement and Art Nouveau



Holman Hunt,
The Scapegoat
1854-56 (Lady
Lever Gallery;
and smaller
Manchester
version)

Symbolic of
suffering
Messiah, sun
beating down
(*Leviticus*)





John Everett Millais, *Blind Girl*, 1856



Photographs show inversion of colours





Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *L'Amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle* - study



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Dantis Amor*, 1860

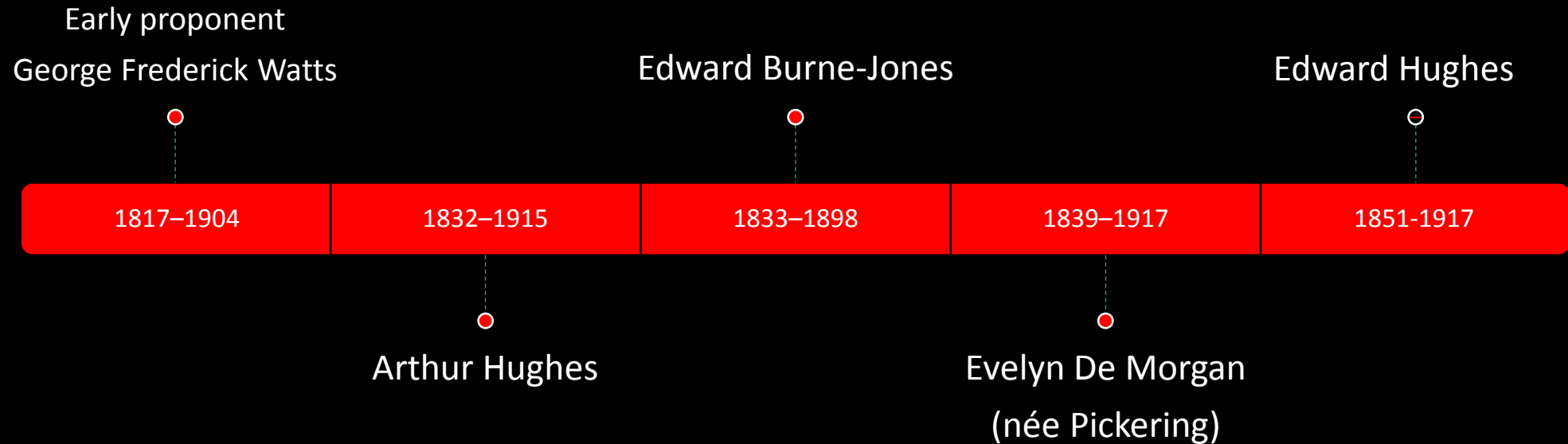
Astronomy as example of observation of nature and the study of science

Astronomy as one of many sources of inspiration that members of the PRB derived from nature

Many Pre-Raphaelites were fascinated by the night sky and used astronomical symbolism to express their ideas

Did they include contemporary astronomical thinking and discoveries?

Leading and later Pre-Raphaelites whose works included astronomical, and cosmic imagery



George Frederick Watts (1817-1904)

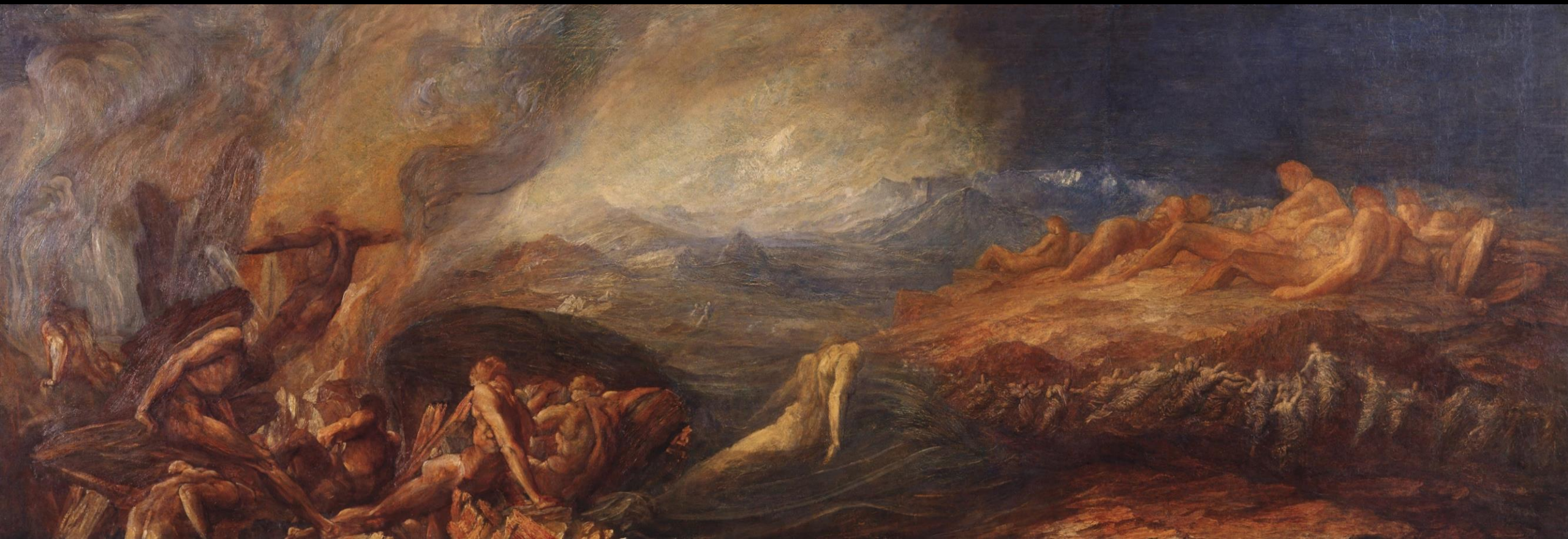
After the Deluge, 1885-92

The moment the sun reappears after the Flood. Watts felt it impossible to depict the Creator ... *that is exactly what I could wish to make those who look at the picture conceive for themselves. The hand of the Creator moving by light and by heat to re-create.*

I have not tried to paint a portrait of the sun – such a thing is unpaintable – but to impress you with the idea of its enormous power.



Chaos, or Chaos passing to Cosmos, 1873-75
(also sometimes called *Creation*)



G F Watts, Later works

Progress, 1888-1904



*Sun Earth and their
Daughter Moon,
1899-1902*





The Sower of the Systems, c 1902

- Fascinated by astronomy, astrology and stargazing; admiration of scientists 'dwelling in a kingdom of infinite wonder'
- Vision of creation of the cosmos – a robed faceless figure, sweeping across space, a swirl of stars and nebulae – centrifugal forces of creation
- Influenced by early long-distance astronomical photos (had observed the rings of Saturn via Sir James South's telescope) – 'a sight that dwarfed all others'. Verges on the abstract



Watts Gallery – Artists' Village
Compton, near Guildford in Surrey.



Arthur Hughes (1832- 1915)

Nocturnal scenes

Caedmon's Awakening

1912-14

[Earliest English poet

fl 657-684]





Arthur Hughes
Carmina Nuptialia,
1869

[16th century
'nuptial songs']

Arthur Hughes

Sir Galahad,
1870



Edward Burne-Jones (1833-98)



Burne-Jones, *Star of Bethlehem*

Burne Jones, *Night* 1870



I AM NIGHT AND BRING AGAIN
HOPE OF PLEASURE REST FROM PAIN
THOUGHTS UNSAID TWIXT LIFE AND DEATH
MY FRUITFUL SILENCE QUICKENETH

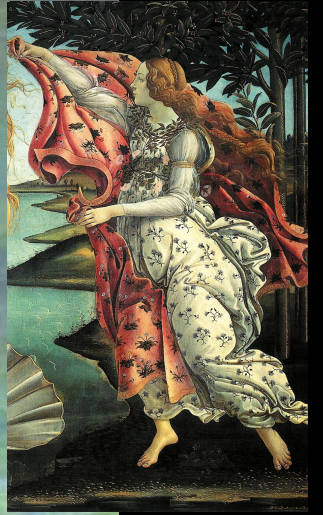


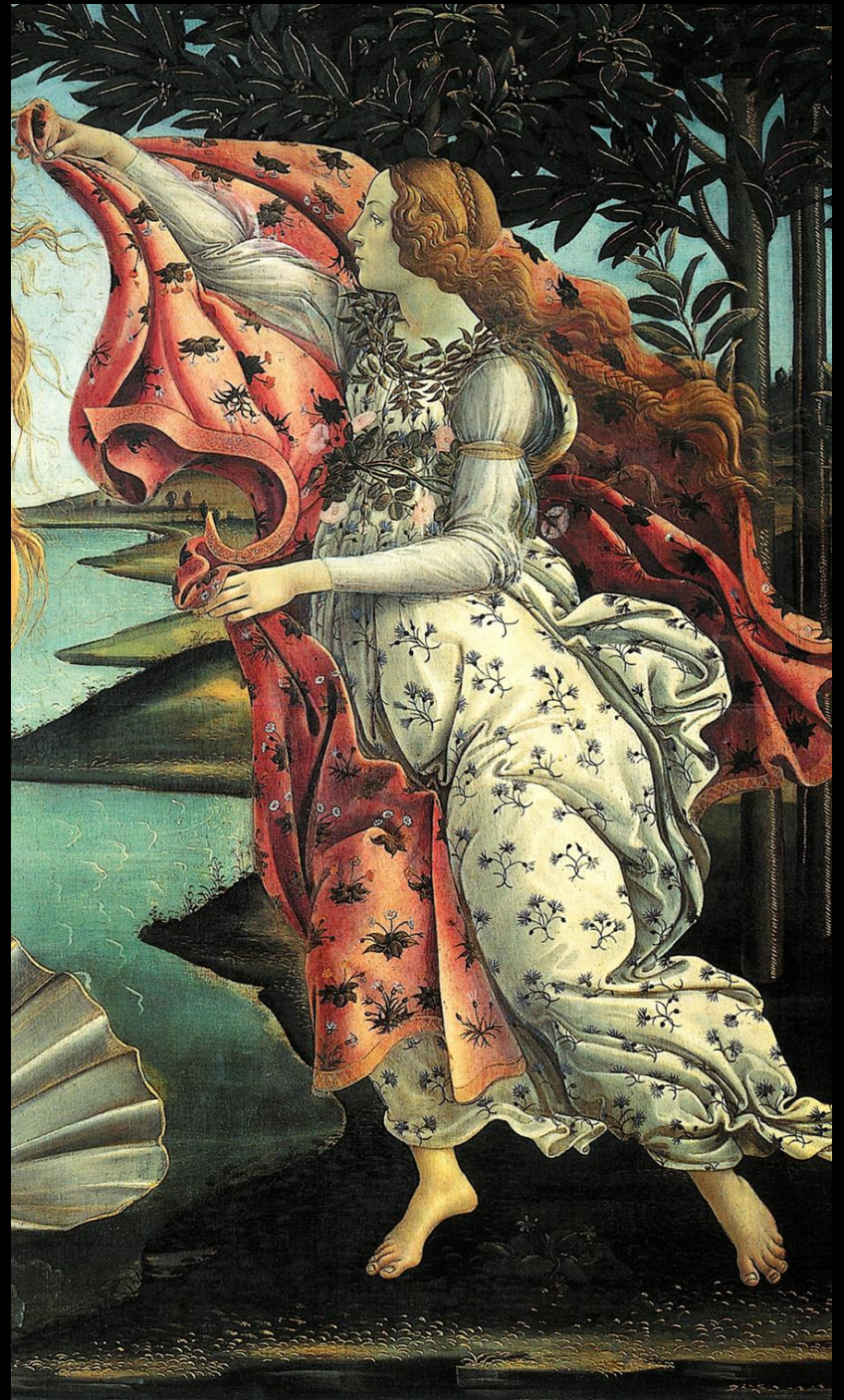


Burne Jones, *Night*, 1870
(cf Botticelli detail of *Primavera*, 1482)



Burne Jones *Evening Star*, 1870
(cf Botticelli detail of *Birth of Venus*, c 1480)







St James's Church, Staveley,
Cumbria 1864-5

East window, Sir Edward Burne-
Jones (made by William Morris)

Crucifixion, Ascension



Burne Jones *Luna 1870s*

*Is the moon tired? she looks so pale
Within her misty veil:
She scales the sky from east to west,
And takes no rest.
Before the coming of the night
The moon shows papery white;
Before the dawning of the day
She fades away.*

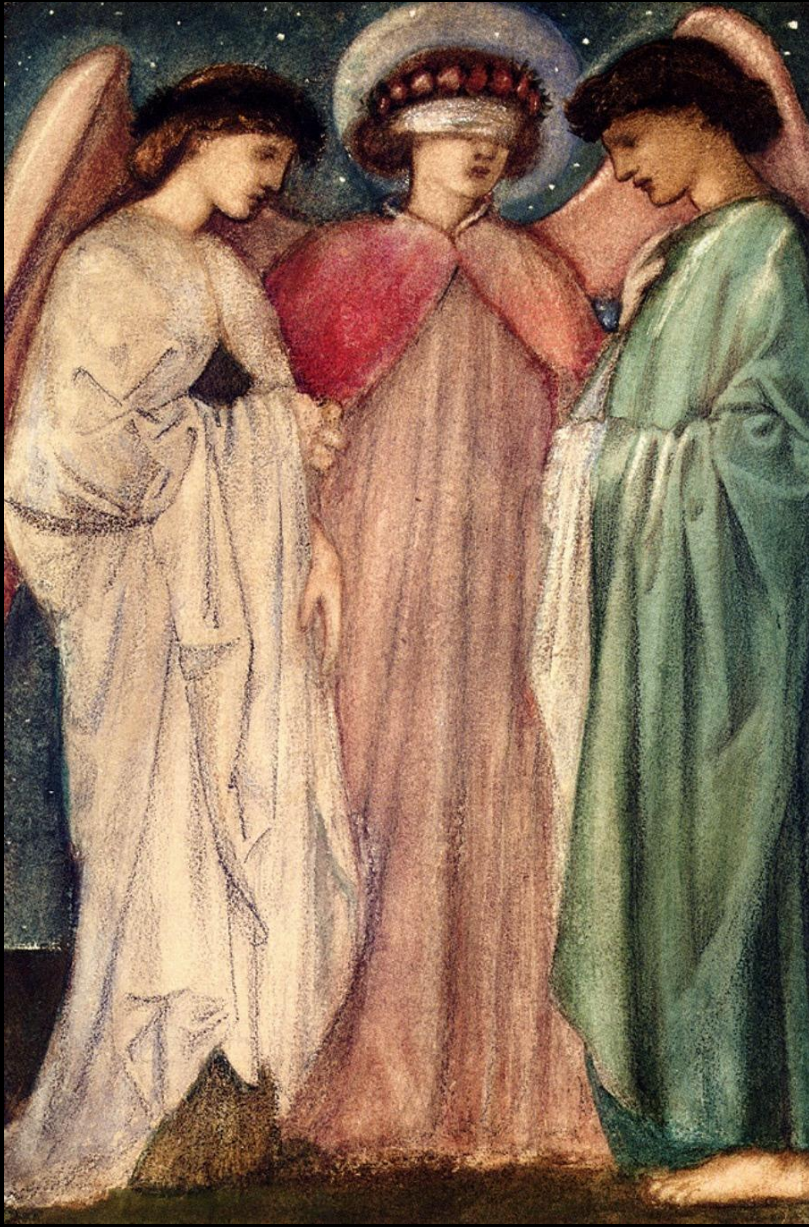
From : Christina Rossetti (1830-94)
Sing Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book 1872



Days of Creation, 1870-76, Fogg Art Museum



Religious subjects in nocturnal settings



Burne Jones, *The First Marriage* and *Jacob's Ladder*

Evelyn De Morgan (née Pickering, 1839-1917)

- Depiction of astronomical features, especially the moon
- Victorian sentimentality about sun, moon and stars ...
- And/or more serious underlying themes and scientific influences?
- Follower of Burne-Jones, married to William De Morgan (Arts and Crafts movement)
- Well-educated, involved in women's education and suffragettes
- Father-in-law, Augustus de Morgan - well-known mathematician and astronomer (named crater on the moon; tutor to Ada Lovelace)

Evelyn De
Morgan
*Dawn and
Dusk, 1886*





Evelyn De
Morgan

*Evening Star
over the Sea
(1900-19)*

Evelyn De Morgan (c 1900-19)



Night and Dawn
(night crouching below moon and stars)



Twilight - 'light from the sky when sun below the horizon'



Sunbeam and Summer Shower



Sleeping Earth and Wakening Moon, 1900



*Sleep, Death and the
Children of the Night, 1883*



Moonbeams Dipping into the Sea, 1900

Symbolism of material or spiritual worlds



Earthbound, 1897



Worship of Mammon, 1909



- Accurate depiction of astronomical features in art?
- More about Victorian sentimentality
- Ropes seem to be ... that bind the moon to the earth – in a daily round

But

- Underlying astronomical themes – looked upwards in a way not done before?
- Scientific influences? well-educated
- Links to Augustus De Morgan and Ada Lovelace



Edward Hughes (1851-1917)

*Influenced by Arthur Hughes
and William Holman Hunt*

Hughes, The Weary Moon, c 1900

*Night with her
Train of Stars 1912*



*The sun/ Closing his benediction/ Sinks, and the darkening air/ Thrills with a sense of the triumphing night—
Night with her train of stars/ And her great gift of sleep (poem by Margaritae Sorori)*



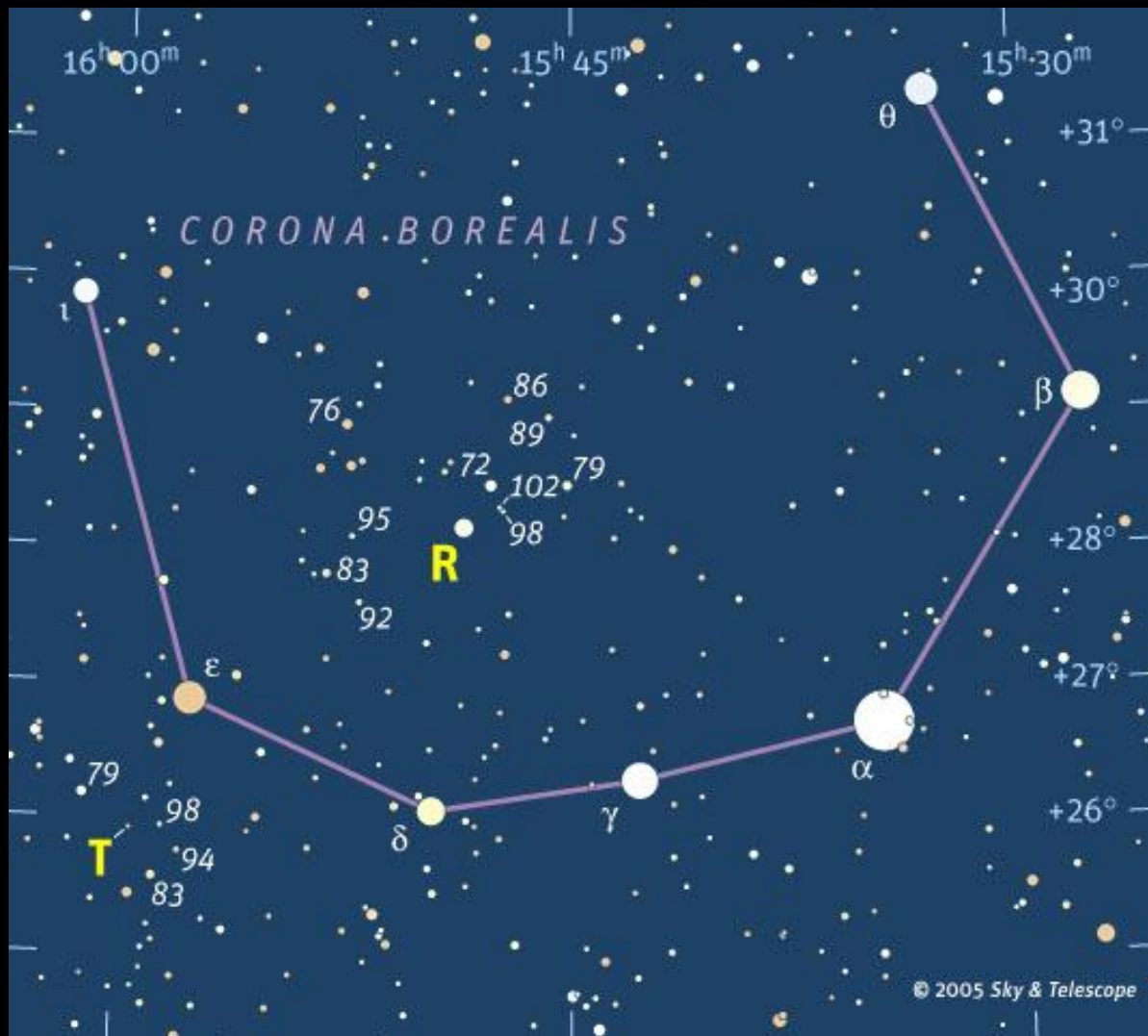
Night with her train of stars
(detail)



Edward Hughes
Night

[sold at Christies 2004]

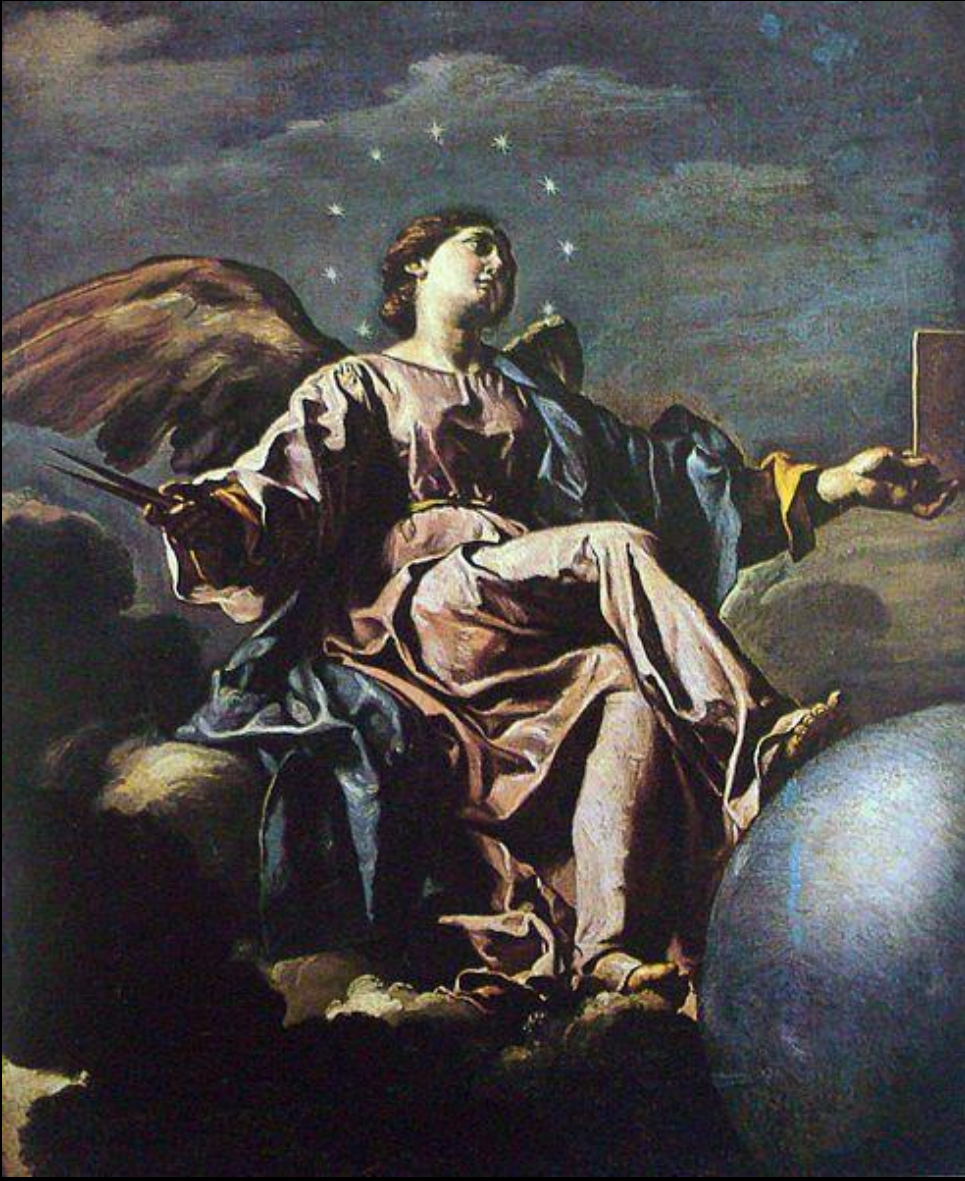




Princess Ariadne of Crete helped Theseus defeat the Minotaur. They sailed off together but he abandoned her on Naxos. The god Dionysus found her weeping and fell in love.

At their marriage, Ariadne wore a crown/circlet of stars which she tossed into the sky, where the crown became the constellation Corona Borealis





Francesco Cozza, *Allegory of Astronomy*, 1670
(Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro)



Simon Vouet, *The Muses Urania and Calliope*, 1634
(NGA Washington)

With thanks to Professor Ron Olowin for source material

More Scientific Comparisons



Jean-François Millet, *Nuit Étoilée*, 1850-65



Karl Nordström (1855-1923)
Nuit étoilée



Conclusions (Thoughts and ideas)

Astronomical features in the work of
the PRB and its followers

Different, more naturalistic
(scientific?) approach than before

Especially featuring sun, moon, stars

Role of educated female artists in the
late 19th century

Showing links to observation and
astronomy at the time?