

PRESSED FLOWERS: BURNE-JONES, *THE ROMAUNT
OF THE ROSE*, AND THE KELMSCOTT CHAUCER

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Edward Burne-Jones was a bookish sort of artist. When they were at Oxford together, he and William Morris delighted in illuminated manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and read poetry together in the evenings. There Burne-Jones first came under the spell of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, not through his paintings but rather through the older artist's illustration for the poet William Allingham's "The Maids of Elfen-Mere," which was "the most beautiful drawing for an illustration" the young student had ever seen; he considered its weirdness and aural and visual evocativeness "such as only a great artist could conceive" (Burne-Jones, "Essay" 60). Burne-Jones's first artistic forays were inspired by and took the form of book illustrations, for Archibald MacLaren's *The Fairy Family* in the 1850s, for example. In the mid 1860s he worked on an extensive suite of illustrations for Morris's *Earthly Paradise*, and from the same period through the 1870s, while achieving significant success as a painter and as a designer for Morris's firm, he worked with Morris on a number of illuminated manuscripts of texts ranging from Virgil's *Aeneid* to the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. And after Morris founded the Kelmscott Press in 1891, they collaborated on various printed books, the most elaborate of which is *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Ornamented with initials, initial words, borders, and type designed by Morris, as well as 87 illustrations by Burne-Jones, this substantial volume was hand-printed on linen paper or on vellum. Finished in 1896, shortly before Morris's death and just two years before Burne-Jones's, it represents in many ways the culmination of their careers as book-loving artists.

There is a considerable literature on the Kelmscott Press and its place in Victorian print culture and Morris's political evolution, yet Burne-Jones's decorative scheme for the Chaucer (and those of other Kelmscott books) has received comparatively little scholarly attention. The most comprehensive overview of the illustrations has been offered by the curator and art historian Duncan Robinson (*Companion*), while Velma Bourgeois Richmond, a Chaucer scholar, has insightfully analysed the Chaucer portraits within the