

and 1889 when he retired into his final years of melancholy silence at his Lake District home, Brantwood. But the number of sudden conversions and unconvictions in his life, and inconsistencies of tastes seem to indicate an inherent instability underlying his considerable literary genius. In 1844 he was converted to the merits of Titian, Bellini and Perugino in the Louvre; in 1845 the Tintoretto in San Rocco fired his enthusiasm sufficiently for him to decide to write about Venice. Ruskin's 'unconversion' took place in Turin in 1858 where a sermon in the Valdésian church served to reveal the bigotry and smugness of the Evangelical tradition with which he had been indoctrinated, and Hewison, following research on Turner's erotic drawings published by Ian Warrell in 2003 (*The British Art Journal*, IV, 1), suggests that Ruskin's exposure to the seamier side of his former hero served as a form of release from his own sublimated sexuality, and indeed a liberation from his strict upbringing. The sensuality he discovered in the works by Veronese in Turin aided this relaxing process and he boldly allowed himself to make a drawing (uneroic) on a Sunday for the first time!

Ruskin had a fondness for young girls, indicated by his enthusiasm on seeing the effigy of Ilaria del Caretto in Lucca in 1845, and this was to manifest itself in his devotion to then ten-year-old Rose La Touche from 1858 until her early death in 1875, and later in his attempts to contact her through a spiritualist medium. Rose used to refer to Ruskin as St Crumphet and his devotion to Carpaccio's Saint Ursula, the virgin martyr was connected with his posthumous vision of Rose. He presented his watercolour copy of the head of St Ursula to Somerville College in Oxford, presumably for the edification of the virgin scholars.

Hewison has been working on Ruskin for over 40 years, writing books and exhibition catalogues and this volume is a major addition to the literature. His discussion of the evolution of, and subsequent alterations to, *The Stones of Venice*, which appeared in four different editions in Ruskin's lifetime, is fascinating, indicating how Ruskin changed his mind on many issues after he had liberated himself from his puritanical strictures. By no means the least impressive aspect of the book is Hewison's total command of the extensive literature. Since the 1970s there has been a resurgence of interest in Ruskin studies, many diaries and letters have been published, and the literature has expanded considerably. In 2006 a number of the original daguerreotypes taken for Ruskin surfaced at a provincial sale room. Hewison has incorporated or referred to much of this new literature, and his book will serve as a benchmark for Ruskin studies for years to come. On a practical note, for those unfortunate readers who are not in possession of the 39-volume Library Edition of *The Works of John Ruskin* it would have been useful to have an appendix listing which works are referred to in Hewison's text, rather than merely the volume and page numbers.

In a diary entry of 1841 Ruskin refers to Venice 'the Paradise of cities' and Chamonix as 'my two homes of Earth'. Ruskin's plans to build near Lake Geneva in the early 1860s came to nothing, and instead in 1871 he bought Brantwood, sight unseen, but aware of its location and views over Coniston Water. In his unfinished autobiography, *Praeterita*, the final passage of which he dictated when staying in the seaside resort of Seascale in Cumberland in 1889, he describes his first childhood memory as a visit to Friar's Crag on Derwentwater in 1824, and the Lake District, a Switzerland in miniature perhaps, clearly meant a great deal to him. Ruskin was cared for at Brantwood by Joan and Arthur Severn, but by the time the last of them died in 1931 much of Ruskin's collection had been dispersed and Brantwood was in a poor state. It was bought in 1932 by John Whitehouse who had opened a school based on Ruskinian principles, Bembridge on the Isle of Wight, in 1919. Whitehouse managed to buy back some of Ruskin's possessions, which since 1993 have been administered, together with Brantwood by The Ruskin Foundation. In 1998 a Ruskin Library was built at the University of Lancaster, reasonably near to Brantwood, which although now in

Cumbria in Ruskin's time was in Lancashire. Kevin Jackson's book *The Worlds of John Ruskin*, published by Pallas Athene in collaboration with the Ruskin Foundation, is essentially intended as a general introduction to Ruskin. It provides a clear account of Ruskin's life and interests and is well illustrated with many of Ruskin's own works from the Ruskin Foundation. More is made of the posthumous influence of Ruskin, on people such as Proust, Oscar Wilde and Mahatma Gandhi than in Hewison's book, and the purpose of these books are quite distinct, but they will both be useful.

An impediment to an appreciation of Ruskin for a younger audience is his allusive, impressionistic and oracular prose. The socialist principles that Ruskin and his followers fostered was in a misguided way to result, from the 1960s onwards, in a watering down of the educational system in England, so that Ruskin's prose is largely unintelligible to most people who have left school within the last 40 years. The idea of a comic-strip version of his work would probably have filled Ruskin with disgust, a word he frequently employed, but such an edition of *Unto this Last* now exists. This socialist tract, the title of which refers not to cobblers but to the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (*Matthew* 20.14), inspired Mahatma Gandhi, and together with 'The Nature of Gothic', extracted from *The Stones of Venice*, was one of Ruskin's most influential texts. The comic version translated as *How to be Rich, what to do with it when you've got it!* is written by Kevin Jackson and sponsored by the Ruskin Foundation.

Edward Burne-Jones: The Earthly Paradise

Texts by Sean Rainbird, Matthais Frehner, Christofer Conrad, Annabel Zettel, Simon Oberholzer, Vera Klewitz, Katharina Wippermann, Fabian Fröhlich, John Christian, William Waters and Peter Nahum

Hatje Cantz ISBN 978-3-7757-2517-0 £35

Simon Poë

This splendid book was published to accompany the exhibition of the same name shown at the Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, and the Kunstmuseum in Bern during 2009-10 [see review in Exhibition Reviews]. As the exhibition did, it addresses itself to Burne-Jones as the creator of applied and decorative art, particularly of narrative picture sequences originally intended for specific domestic interiors. Eight paintings and cartoons from his *Perseus* cycle – commissioned in 1875 by Arthur Balfour for the drawing room at 4 Carlton Gardens and bought for the Staatsgalerie in 1971 – formed the core of the exhibition. The book offers a comprehensive account of this important aspect of Burne-Jones's *oeuvre* and makes a very useful addition to the literature on the artist.

It also highlights the importance of Burne-Jones's friendship with William Morris and of the symbiotic working relationship the two men enjoyed until the latter's death in 1896. In 1892 Morris asked himself what was at once the most important product of art and the thing most to be longed for, and answered 'a beautiful house'. Burne-Jones, as John Christian asserts at the beginning of his contribution to the book, is not an artist who can usefully be considered in isolation and the Morris firm, of which he was an active member from its foundation in 1861, is only the most important of many contexts in which his work can be viewed. Morris, of course, was a poet as well as a designer, and his second-greatest desire was for 'a beautiful book'. Several groups of paintings featured in the exhibition had their first incarnation as drawings made by Burne-Jones for the unrealised illustrated edition of his long poem-cycle *The Earthly Paradise* (1868-70), and the book under review borrows its title from that 'book that never was'. It makes clear the extent to which the painted versions, produced for schemes of interior decor, some of them perhaps more familiar now as individual works of fine art seen generally

out-of-context, were first conceived, not only as groups, but as elements of collaborative *gesamtkunstwerke*. Indeed, the Morris & Co interiors in which they figured seem to have induced an almost synaesthetic response, the boundaries between poetry, painting and design blurring in the minds of their beholders. The dining room at 1 Palace Green, for instance, incorporating the *Cupid and Psyche* frieze and decorated by the firm, was described as glowing 'like the page of an illuminated missal'. The house that contained it was designed for George Howard by Philip Webb, who also designed Red House for Morris, and Rossetti famously said that Red House was 'more a poem than a house'.

Burne-Jones stated that, for him, a picture was 'a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be – in a light better than any light that ever shone – in a land no one can define, or remember, only desire' and there is a series of self-caricatures in which he shows himself trying to enter this longed-for dream-world, actually attempting to step into a picture, only to find himself tumbled on the floor, the canvas torn, the dream spoiled. There is something magnificently quixotic, perverse and self-contradictory about the whole enterprise of putting art like this at the service of interior design, of incorporating it into something as mundane as a dining-room. The practical man – the illustrator, the decorator, the maker – did not always co-exist easily with the dreamer in Burne-Jones, but both sides were integral parts of his nature. No doubt this internal conflict, between the desire to make dreams real at the same time as keeping them undefiled, was one reason he found some of these projects so difficult to finish.

The book's structure mimics that of the decorative schemes. It is a collaborative enterprise: a series of self-contained essay-chapters, some very short, none very long, mostly from different hands (not more than two by any author) in more-or-less chronological order, that carry the narrative forward in fits and starts, exploring interlocking themes as they go. The essays 'talk' to one another, just as pictures arranged around a room are able to do, so the book is less linear than continuous, single-author texts tend to be.

The foreword, by Sean Rainbird and Matthais Frehner, prevents us from forgetting that this English-language version is a translation from the German when it assures us that 'Fuseli, Turner, Constable, Whistler – probably these are all that would occur to an art-lover on the Continent if asked to name the great British painters of the nineteenth century'. In 'The Pilgrimage to the Earthly Paradise: Beauty and Truth in Edward Burne-Jones', Christofer Conrad suggests that lovers of Pre-Raphaelite art are members of a 'highly elitist club... very familiar with heroic songs, the legends of saints, allegorical treatises and sophisticated poetry'. I enjoyed the way this made me feel as if I were a character in a novel by J-K Huysmans, but the British branch of the Pre-Raphaelite fan-club is actually more broad-based than Conrad seems to realise (later, he describes Broadstairs in Kent as being in 'a remote part of the kingdom' and so I think we're safe in assuming that he's never visited).

He also introduces the idea of pilgrimage as a model at once for Burne-Jones's journey through life, his protagonists' progress through the various sequences of pictures, and, perhaps, of our own progress around the exhibition or through the book. Annabel Zettel, in 'A Feast of Storytelling: Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris', even finds an explanation for Burne-Jones's unwillingness to acknowledge that a painting was finished in his suggestion that each of them was 'a symbol of life itself' (so that completing a picture became a sort of 'little death'). Burne-Jones lost his appetite for this open-ended process of re-working and re-telling when Morris died and their regular Sunday morning talking-and-working sessions came to an end.

Zettel uses her second essay, '*Belle et Blonde et Colorée: The Early Gouaches*', and a discussion of *Sidonia von Bork* and *Clara von Bork* (both 1860), to introduce the autobiographical element with which Burne-Jones's work is permeated. She quotes him as say-

ing that there are 'only two kinds of women, those who take the strength out of man and those who put it back; but the destructive ones are outside blame, since they are acting only in accordance with their nature'. These two archetypes, which populate his paintings, were represented in his life by his wife Georgiana and by his mistress Maria Zambaco.

Matthais Frehner, in '*St George and the Dragon, 1865-67*', does not trouble to conceal his impatience with Victorian reticence in presentation of sexual matters (sneering 'how could it be otherwise in a time of high collars and tight corsets?') as he had better have done. Also, quotations in his essay, translated into German for the original publication, have been sloppily re-translated back into English for the edition under review rather than given correctly, though they retain their quotation marks. For instance, the authentically Morrisian 'on the whole I see that things are in a muddle' takes on the blandly mid-Atlantic 21st-century form 'there is complete chaos there'. These things are irritating (members of that 'highly elitist club' will certainly spot the mistake) and come between the reader and the useful points that Frehner makes. He emphasises the extent to which Burne-Jones's work anticipates European Symbolism and his illustrations bring together a sequence of paintings that the curators were unable to assemble for the exhibition.

There is something about the tales of love, betrayal and transformation that Burne-Jones and Morris drew on for subject-matter, about the 'essential ambiguity' (to borrow MaryAnne Stevens' pivotally important formulation from her 'Towards a Definition of Symbolism') of the work that they crafted from this material, and about the way their relationships (the 'entanglement' of Maria, Ned, Georgie, Topsy, Janey and Gabriel) took on a mythic quality of their own and echoed the literary originals, that demands but resists interpretation. Plain statement can make it seem banal, and in any case it dances ahead of one like a will o' the wisp and refuses to be pinned down. They themselves recognised how self-defeating any attempt to be explicit would be (and it is this that Frehner mistook for mealy-mouthed prudishness, I think).

Simon Oberholzer, in 'Edward Burne-Jones's *Pygmalion*', combines discussion of Burne-Jones's muse and mistress Maria Zambaco with an analysis of the series comprising *The Heart Desires*, *The Hand Refrains*, *The Godhead Fires* and *The Soul Attains* (1875-8), in which Burne-Jones said something about the nature of creativity and his complicated longings as a man and an artist. Galatea, the statue created by Pygmalion and warmed into life for him by Venus, has Maria's face (Oberholzer reproduces the beautiful graphite study of 1870), but instead of embracing her (he also reproduces Jean Léon Gérôme's frankly sensual *Pygmalion* of c1890 for contrast) the artist falls to his knees in mute adoration. After Maria, Burne-Jones's close relationships were with unattainable aristocratic girls. It would be too crude to say simply that he came to use sexual frustration as one of the engines of his creativity, but several of the writers here quote his remark that 'lust does frighten me, I must say' and Morris (through Pygmalion) speaks of 'love... that all wise men fear, but yet escape not'. Paintings and poems are shot through with longing but also with a profound ambivalence towards the objects of desire. Consummation, like the completion of a painting, is endlessly deferred. Vera Klewitz, in 'Goddess or Femme Fatale? The Sculptress Maria Cassavetti-Zambaco', is over-simplifying when she says that Burne-Jones used his creativity 'to get over his *amour fou*' for Maria (on the contrary, he kept it simmering for years by using her image in painting after painting). Nor is his acknowledgment that he 'left so much unsaid' quite the same thing as regretting that he had given insufficient expression to his feelings, as Klewitz also suggests.

In 'The *Cupid and Psyche* Series for 1 Palace Green', Katharina Wippermann gives a useful account of this work from its commissioning in 1871 to its final installation ten years later. '*The Mirror of Venus*' by Fabian Fröhlich is like a small panel filling up an awkward space in the architecture (or a short piece of recitative between

arias). His 'The *Perseus Series*', on the other hand, is a more substantial essay and includes several very stimulating ideas. He suggests that Burne-Jones's Medusa (punished by Minerva for defiling her temple by allowing Neptune to seduce her there) is a 'fallen woman': following Morris ('O ye, be merciful, and strike me dead!') the artist represents her, not as a monster, but as a gaunt, still beautiful woman who wishes only to die. In *The Doom Fulfilled* (1885-8), Perseus, in his black, scaly armour, is almost indistinguishable from the serpentine coils of the monster. The contrast is not between man and giant snake (the symbolism not being difficult to decipher) but between them and Andromeda's naked vulnerability. Perseus, as Fröhlich eloquently puts it, is 'wrestling with an undesirable part of himself'.

In his masterly exposition of the complicated history of the *Briar Rose* series, a theme that preoccupied the artist for fully a third of a century (1862-95), John Christian, doyen of Burne-Jones scholars, eschews this sort of analysis, only remarking fastidiously and with some asperity that Burne-Jones's employment of his daughter Margaret as model for the sleeping princess 'has led to much psychological speculation'.

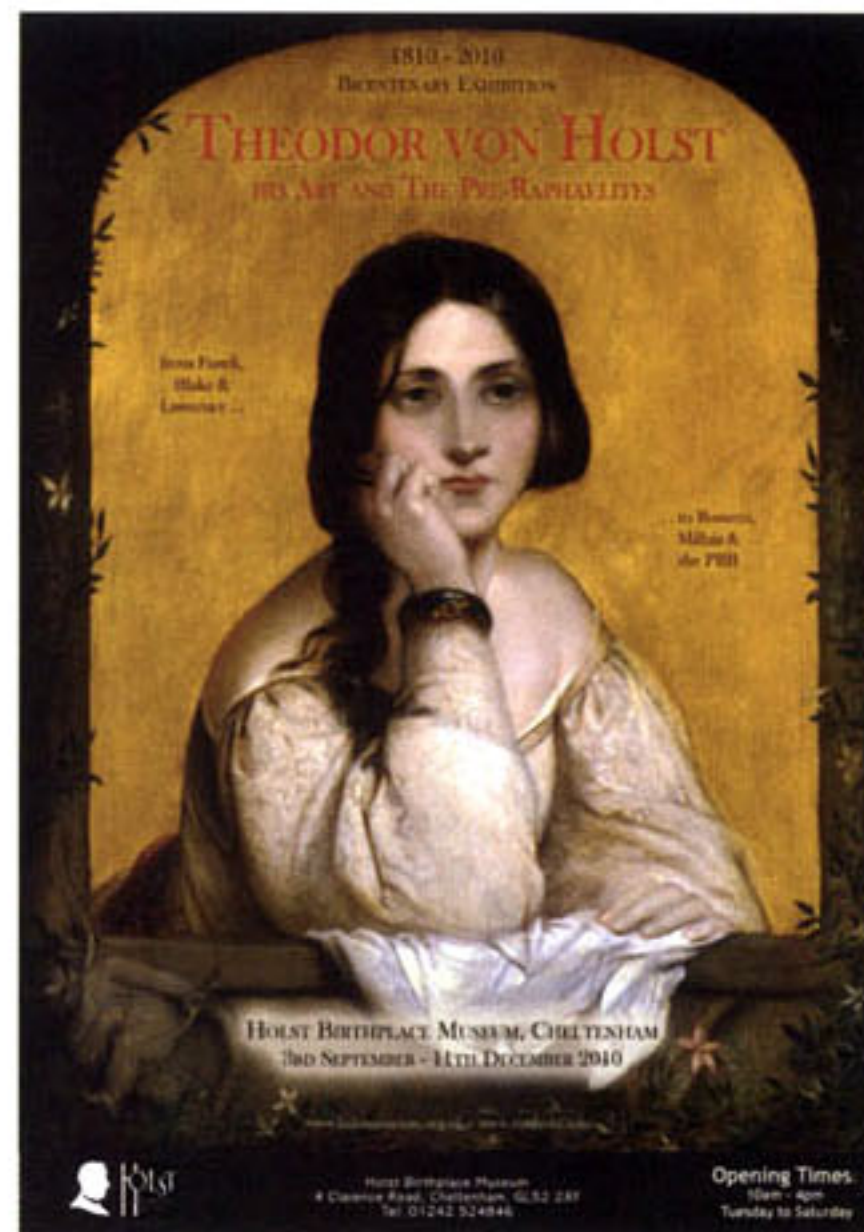
In 1881, Morris moved into workshops at Merton Abbey and set up his own looms. In his second essay in the book, 'The Quest of the Sangreal and Religious Themes', Christofer Conrad discusses the tapestries woven there to Burne-Jones's designs and balances his earlier examination of the pilgrimage motif with a consideration of the quest. Burne-Jones, he suggests, saw in Galahad's quest for the grail a model of his own search for perfect beauty. (Morris, on the other hand, relished Malory's violence and eroticism as much as his mysticism, and in 1858, in one of the poems in *The Defence of Guenevere*, called the knight a 'poor chaste body'.)

In his *Life of William Morris*, Burne-Jones's son-in-law JW Mackail suggested that in the verses that frame the stories in *The Earthly Paradise* Morris had written 'an autobiography so delicate and so outspoken that it must needs be left to speak for itself'. At the start of the final essay in the collection under review – 'Past and Present: Edward Burne-Jones, His Medieval Sources and Their Relevance to His Personal Journey' – William Waters and Peter Nahum make a similar claim for Burne-Jones and his work. 'Edward Burne-Jones' they declare, 'is unique among British nineteenth-century artists in using his creativity to explore and interpret his own psyche'. We are not so discreet today as Mackail felt compelled to be, and it is the elaboration of this claim, from a variety of perspectives, that makes this book such a gripping read and such an essential addition to any library of 19th-century British art-history. Burne-Jones, as John Christian asserted in his essay, 'is the perfect art-historian's artist' and the authors of this collection have done him complete justice.

EXHIBITION NEWS



A view in the Lune Valley, Lancashire, from Caton looking north-east towards Gressingham by Joseph Francis Gilbert (1791-1855) (above) is in 'Green and Pleasant Land', an exhibition of romantic topographical paintings of Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries, at **James Harvey British Art, 15 Langton Street, London SW10 0JL, 13-24 September**, Monday-Friday 10-6, any other time by appointment tel 020 7352 0015. The next exhibition at James Harvey (**7-15 October**) will feature **landscapes and still-lives** by **Alistair Erskine** (b 1959), including views of the Dordogne



A bicentenary exhibition celebrates the art of Theodor von Holst, 'from Fuseli, Blake and Lawrence to Rossetti, Millais and the PRB'. **Holst Birthplace Museum, Cheltenham, 3 September-11 December**



'Treasures from Budapest: European Masterpieces from Leonardo to Schiele', **Royal Academy of Arts, London 25 September -12 December** John Constable *The celebration of the General Peace of 1814 in East Bergholt* by John Constable, 1814