MacCarthy, Fiona, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination.*

London: Faber & Faber, 2011. Hardcover, 629 pp., 32 col. and 33 b&w ills. ISBN 978 0 571 22861 4, £25.

Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, Baronet, died in June 1898. By that date the aesthetic world that he had inhabited throughout his forty-year career was being fundamentally questioned. It is impossible to think of him welcoming the rebellious artistic experimentation of the early twentieth-century, let alone its consequences in our own time. Consider Burne-Jones's own definition of an ideal picture, quoted by Fiona MacCarthy in her Preface: 'a 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 ...'. This is about as far removed as one can get from what people expect to see when they visit an art exhibition today. The substitute for Burne-Jones's sensual, emotional and intellectual notion of beauty (shared by most artists and craftworkers of his time and even a generation after) has been an endless 'challenging' of our perceptions and equally interminable doses of 'irony'. Thus in today's de-aestheticised and over-verbalised world, descriptions of art-works are frequently more interesting than the works themselves, and the capacity truly to look at, dream about and interpret our world has been replaced by passive consumption and the re-cycling of para-cultural ephemera – a poor exchange indeed. It is therefore good to be reminded, in this superb biography, of what art and the life of an artist (one of Britain's greatest) used to be about in pre-modernist times.

William Morris, Burne-Jones's lifelong friend, was the subject of a biography by Fiona MacCarthy published in 1994. Whereas she professes to find Morris, for all his prodigious energy and talents, in some senses 'straightforward', she acknowledges that Burne-Jones's character 'can be maddeningly evasive'. He rarely has the heroic kind of consistency in adversity that Morris displays, nor the practical idealism. His emotional life, from the trauma of his mother's death just after she gave birth to him, to the succession of apparently platonic infatuations with younger women that punctuate his later career, was full of insecurities and compensatory behaviours – a rich field for Freudian study. Notwithstanding his belief that artists of his type did not have 'lives to tell', MacCarthy rightly concludes that 'in every work he ever made he gives himself away'. Her biography is therefore a chronicle of, and a commentary on, the events of his life, and at the same time an acutely perceptive analysis of his artistic output. Like all the best biographers, her insights extend well beyond her primary focus and illuminate the lives of Burne-Jones's wide circle of friends and associates. As well as Morris, two people in particular share the stage with Burne-Jones, his wife Georgiana and, for a number of critical years, his patron and friend John Ruskin.

As author of the two-volume *Memorials* (1904), Georgiana provided a comprehensive and loyal account of her husband, although not without subtly indicating the underlying strains in their life together. In amplifying in detail what *Memorials* could necessarily only hint at, MacCarthy gives a scrupulously fair view of a relationship where the wife all too often suffered (deeply) in silence while concealing, even having to collude in, her husband's lapses. Georgie's obvious moral superiority became a source of resentment to the all too fallible Burne-Jones, resulting in a petulant spitefulness on his part, a tendency to caricature her as severe and austere while disregarding the pain he caused her. MacCarthy writes particularly well of their marriage and family life, and of Burne-Jones's one grand and somewhat melodramatic *amour* (with Maria Zambaco), demonstrating how these private turmoils were an important undercurrent in the evolution of his art. Equally penetrating is her discussion of Burne-Jones's relationship with his rather feckless son, Philip, and his beloved daughter Margaret. It is all too typical of the artist's weaker side that, on being offered a baronetcy by Queen Victoria in 1894, he was keen to use Phil as his pretext for accepting it – though clearly relishing the honour himself. For Margaret, who perhaps inevitably grew up to be a quintessentially Burne-Jonesian beauty, his affections were intense and almost beyond the paternal. MacCarthy writes with great wisdom and sympathy about these family emotions, especially the sense of quasi-bereavement experienced by Burne-Jones when his daughter married J. W. Mackail (later the biographer of Morris) and left the family home. She always finds just the right anecdote to illustrate her observations, such as the story of T. M. Rooke seeing Burne-Jones one day in South Kensington, 'looking very white and old'. When asked what troubled him, he explained to Rooke that it was 'the parting' (from Margaret) that had suddenly made him feel his age.

It almost goes without saying that MacCarthy's writing about Burne-Jones's relationship with William Morris is a profound evocation of one of the great artistic friendships. She is especially good at tackling the tension that arose when Morris, to Burne-Jones's consternation, espoused Socialism. It was a situation that exposed deep differences between them, in their personalities and their background circumstances. For Morris, the decision to become a revolutionary and to reject conventional society was certainly noble but also one that he could afford; for Burne-Jones, with all his insecurities, it would have been inconceivable.

The other critically important friendship in Burne-Jones's career was with John Ruskin. MacCarthy has clearly researched this in depth. Her writing demonstrates unrivalled understanding both of Ruskin's role in the artist's early career and of the deep affinity the two men had for each other, based on similarities of temperament as well as shared tastes in Italian art. Indeed, no other study of Burne-Jones has documented the nature of their relationship with such clarity. It is a central feature of the book and in many ways lies at the heart of Burne-Jones's self-perception as an artist, which was profoundly shaped by an imaginative identification with the painters and craftsmen of the Quattrocento and Cinquecento. That absorption in the art of the past – whether Gothic, Renaissance or Byzantine – characterises Burne-Jones's work in all media. It was fed by his Continental travels and by his amassing of visual reference materials – he was one of the first artists to benefit so amply from the photographic recording of historical artefacts. As with her Morris biography, MacCarthy has followed in her subject's footsteps by looking at the buildings, paintings and sculptures he admired and by reflecting on the atmospheric inspiration of special places, especially in Italy, for the imagined world found in his pictures.

Whilst the subject matter of Burne-Jones's stained glass was more circumscribed, of course, than that of his paintings, he nonetheless placed his Saints and Biblical incidents in the same world of strange and beautiful buildings and landscapes, half-imagined, half-reflected from the pictures (by Mantegna, Botticelli, *et al.*) that he so revered. MacCarthy expressed her deep admiration for Morris & Company's stained glass in her biography of Morris, and she rightly places the designing of windows at the heart of Burne-Jones's artistic activity. It was, literally, a daily (or more often nightly) occupation for him, offering a chance for his impulse to invent and draw to be exercised more spontaneously than in the more laborious work of picture-making. Just as W. R. Lethaby observed that no artist of comparable genius to Morris was ever again likely to devote so much effort to creating patterns for fabrics, wallpapers and other applied arts, it is irrefutably true that, amongst major artists, Burne-Jones was and remains the supreme exponent of stained glass design. Throughout this biography, designs for windows are an accompaniment to the events of the artist's life. His awakening to the expressive potential of the medium came as early as 1855, on his first tour of northern France with Morris. As

g. 4 *(overleaf)*: ail of Edward-rne Jones, *The Beguiling of rlin* (1872-77). Reproduced in Malcolm Bell, *Sir Edward Burne-Jones: A Record and view*, 3rd edn. (London/New k, George Bell & Sons, 1894).

MacCarthy points out, it was at Chartres and Evreux that he recognised in stained glass 'intrinsic qualities quite different from those of easel painting'. She also observes that the earliest of his commissions – where he, rather than Morris, was responsible for selecting the colour scheme – are already pioneering assertions of stained glass as a 'modern art form'. Later, with the founding of the Morris firm, Burne-Jones's and Morris's symbiosis in transmuting drawings into painted and leaded glazing became 'a formidable combination', the designer's 'great élan' and 'sure sense of composition' matched by the master-craftsman's unerring 'instinct for colour and for pattern'. It is good to see Burne-Jones's masterpieces in glass given just as much attention here as his paintings. Quite rightly, MacCarthy points to the glorious scheme of glass for Whitelands College – now tragically mutilated by its insensitive re-installation at Roehampton University – as one of the highlights of his oeuvre. Anyone who experienced the ensemble in its former location at Putney will recall the superlative quality of that procession of single-light female Saints in their spectacular jewel-colours. Next to St Philip's, Birmingham, they were arguably the best of the Firm's late windows.

Having studied Burne-Jones's life and work for the last forty years, and knowing the complexities of his character, I began reading this biography with a little apprehension – would the book really get to the heart of its subject, and would it bring him to life for a modern reader? It does both things triumphantly. As one would expect from Fiona MacCarthy, it is beautifully written and structured as a narrative, with a directness of approach and depth of knowledge – and an emotional engagement – that truly reveal just how wonderful an artist Burne-Jones was. Reading *The Last Pre-Raphaelite* makes one realise that the best of Burne-Jones's work, like that of all great artists, both embodies and transcends its creator's humanity. How fortunate, therefore, for the medium of stained glass that Burne-Jones devoted so much of his talent to working within its disciplines.

Peter Cormack

Becksmann, Rüdiger, *Die mittelalterlichen Glasmalereien in Freiburg im Breisgau.*

Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi, Deutschland, Band II: Baden und Pfalz, Teil 2, 2 vols. Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 2010. Hardcover, 816 pp., 418 col. and 880 b/w ills. ISBN 978 3 87157 226 5, 138€.

It would be an understatement to say that this work has long been anticipated. The author himself, in outlining the project, takes his involvement with it back to 1965 and states that it has preoccupied his entire professional career. That it has taken so long to appear can certainly not be put down to the author's lack of application, for Rüdiger Becksmann is an astoundingly prolific scholar of medieval stained glass (for a recent bibliography, see Hartmut Scholz, Ivo Rauch and Daniel Hess, eds., *Glas. Malerei. Forschung. Internationale Studien zu ehren von Rüdiger Becksmann*, Berlin, 2004, pp. 331-36). His accomplishments and contributions to the field are enormous, and in many ways, his long and fruitful career has laid the groundwork for the complexities involved in this superb coverage of the stained glass from the picturesque city of Freiburg im Breisgau which lies between the Upper Rhine valley and the romantic Black Forest of southwestern Germany. Coincidentally, this is also where Becksmann is now based, at the German CVMA Research Centre in Freiburg.

mittelalterlichen Glasmalereien in Baden und der Pfalz (ohne Freiburg i. Br.), CVMA Deutschland, Band II, Teil 1 (Berlin, 1979). As Corpus Vitrearum monographs are intended to do, this two-volume work provides a solid foundation for all future study of the stained glass produced in this important centre of art production and patronage. It also provides a key contribution to an already solid library of German Corpus volumes.

Freiburg's position in the Upper Rhine region was central in determining its artistic character. It lies between the artistic centres of Strasbourg to the north and Basel to the south, with Colmar to the west on the opposite bank of the Rhine. It was also well connected with Constance and Zurich to the east. Until the end of the fifteenth century, in fact, the people of Freiburg turned alternately to Strasbourg and Basel for workshops to create the stained glass in their churches since the city does not appear to have sustained a significant stained glass workshop of its own before that time. In the late fifteenth century, Strasbourg, with its widely influential glazing cooperative, dominated stained glass production in Freiburg, but by the early sixteenth century, Hans von Ropstein had established a brilliant and prolific workshop at Freiburg, which was responsible for all of the magnificent Late Gothic glazing of the early sixteenth century. Much of Ropstein's output, as well, was executed to designs by Hans Baldung Grien, now regarded as one of the most important German artists of the early sixteenth century, which makes it of interest far beyond the usual disciplinary confines to which the medium of stained glass is all too frequently relegated.

The thoroughness with which Becksmann has tackled his material is particularly impressive considering the complexities of its history. The vast majority of the known stained glass produced at Freiburg has either been moved around within the church for which it was created or else dispersed more widely. Conversely, much stained glass produced elsewhere has found its way to Freiburg to fill gaps in church glazing there. Thus, Freiburg Münster, formerly a parish church but now – perhaps more appropriately, considering its scale and elaboration – the seat of an archbishop, currently contains panels of stained glass both from other churches in Freiburg and from churches in other cities. Much of this displaced glass comes from churches which were deconsecrated and demolished in the wake of the French Revolution and through the Napoleonic era. This situation, in fact, has left Freiburg Münster as the only church in the city which still contains pre-modern stained glass. The Dominican and Carthusian monasteries there no longer survive, yet a considerable amount of stained glass from both still exists in the Münster and in museums, including the Augustinermuseum in Freiburg which, after the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg and the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt, contains the most significant collection of stained glass in Germany.

These extensive peregrinations of stained glass have left the German CVMA Committee with an almost intractable problem: how to cover all of this displaced glass systematically and consistently. The approach that has generally been adopted is that where the original provenance of a panel of stained glass is known, it is covered in the volume pertaining to its site of origin. This approach has had a significant impact on the organization of this book and Becksmann's earlier volume on the rest of Baden and Pfalz (Becksmann 1979). Thus, the stained glass in one of the many memorable windows in Freiburg Münster, nave window sXXI, with its dramatic tracery compartment containing St Michael and the Dragon boldly framed by an asymmetrical (early 19th-century) curtain, is not actually covered in this volume but in Becksmann 1979 (pp. 93-114, Abb. 116-40), since all of the glass