

*Evelyn & William De Morgan: A Marriage of Arts & Crafts* edited by Margaretta S. Frederick. New Haven: Yale UP, 2022. 176 pp. + 99 colour + b/w illus. ISBN 0-300-25968-1. \$50.00.

*The Poems of Evelyn Pickering De Morgan* edited by Serena Trowbridge. Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2022. 142 pp. + 5 b/w illus. ISBN 1-906469-73-3. \$14.00.

Two books on the technically accomplished but in many ways puzzling late Victorian painter Evelyn Pickering De Morgan, until relatively recently understudied, have arrived in the same year. Each book is announced by a full-colour cover reproduction of one of her more characteristic pictures (she produced over a hundred oil paintings across nearly four decades of professional life). Seen individually, as they are here, they are striking: richly coloured, finely detailed, Italianate in style, symbolical rather than realistic in subject matter, they strongly recall the Burne-Jones of *Chant d'Amour* (1868-77) and *The Mill* (1870-82) and perhaps the late allegorical paintings of George Frederic Watts (though most of De Morgan's pictures stick to Burne-Jones's hard edges, not Watts's softer focus). "Burne-Jonesian ... and even Wattsian Pre-Raphaelitism," Jan Marsh calls the style in her swift-moving, skillful, and comprehensive essay in *A Marriage of Arts & Crafts*. Burne-Jones, it must be said, pronounced Evelyn's work "an eclectic mixture of Mr Watts and me and old Florentine work. They look like some undiscovered bad 15th-century painting of Florence, if such a thing were possible." He went on to say – sounding a bit like Ruskin lecturing Christina Rossetti on her supposed failure to master prosody – that she ought not to try figure painting at all but stick to "pretty views, flowers and every beautiful thing in nature." Such are the put-downs to which women are subject. But Burne-Jones, like Ruskin with Christina Rossetti, underestimated not only the skills but the persistence of the woman whose work he so readily dismissed, as these volumes testify.

*The Angel of Death* (1880), on the cover of the slim paperback that collects De Morgan's early writing, shows a dark angel, winged and scythe-bearing, gently embracing a still-young person of indeterminate gender seated on a rock overlooking a valley somewhere in Renaissance Italy. *Night and Sleep* (1878), the cover of the beautifully produced Yale collection, depicts two androgynous figures flying over a mountainous twilit landscape, one unfurling a dark cloak while the other scatters scarlet poppies. The figures are elegant of line, their colours glowing and balanced, the artist evidently alive to both possibilities for an always decorative art. The two pictures might have been among those that Burne-Jones saw when he visited De Morgan's studio.