

## 'Canon fodder for respectable question marks': Fritz Saxl and the history of the Warburg Library

Review of:

Dorothea McEwan, *Fritz Saxl – Eine Biografie: Aby Warburgs Bibliothekar und Erster Direktor des Londoner Warburg Institutes*, Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2012, 344 pp., 36 b. & w. illus., €39.00 hdbk, ISBN 978-3-205-78863-8.

Anyone with an interest in art historiography will be familiar, in some way, with the life and work of Aby Warburg (1866-1929). Interest in Warburg's scholarship has increased dramatically in the last three decades, and he is now acknowledged as a pioneering art historian and theorist, an historian of mentalities, a cultural semiotician, and a pioneer in the theory and study of collective memory. Furthermore, the library that Warburg accumulated and organized in Hamburg, as an instrument for exploring the influence of pagan antiquity on the European intellectual makeup, has developed into a world-renowned institution: the Warburg Institute in the University of London.

During its German years, Warburg's library attracted and supported the work of a variety of important scholars including Ernst Cassirer, Hans Liebeschütz, Erwin Panofsky, and Edgar Wind. But it was with Fritz Saxl (1890-1948) that Warburg worked most closely, a man he valued as a scholar, librarian, and friend. And yet while Warburg's name has become what Dorothea McEwan calls a 'Gütesiegel' [stamp of quality] for anyone studying art theory and *Kulturwissenschaft*, Saxl remains largely unknown. (9) Many with an interest in Warburg, however, will know the principal events of his career. Saxl became Warburg's scholarly assistant in 1914 and later his librarian. He was of fundamental importance in the transformation of Warburg's private library into the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg* in 1926 and became director of the latter upon Warburg's death in 1929. Saxl oversaw the Library's move to London in 1933 and was the first director of the Warburg Institute that became part of the University of London in 1944.

In addition to being recognized as Warburg's principal assistant, Saxl is often thought of in terms of the way Erwin Panofsky characterized him in 1959: as Warburg's 'chief disciple'. (13) Most broadly stated, Saxl and Warburg were bound by a common interest in the survival of pagan antiquity in Christian Europe. What brought the two scholars together was an interest in *Sterngläubigkeit*, the way this was transmitted from pagan antiquity to medieval and Renaissance thinking and, more particularly, the iconography of planetary representation. To be sure, the purview of Saxl's research was very broad and often different from that of Warburg. While he studied the history of astrology and mythology, antique religions, and the passage from pagan to Christian traditions, he also published research on English

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medieval sculpture, Rembrandt, Titian, and the art and intellectual history of the seventeenth century.

Saxl was convinced, as was Warburg, that visual images could be read as historical documents offering insights into a culture that were in no way inferior to those derived from written texts. Both scholars also shared a multi-disciplinary methodological approach to the problems they set themselves. Saxl described himself in terms similar to Warburg's self-characterization: as an art historian who refused to recognize the borders of academic disciplines. He also mused that he was a 'wanderer through the museums and libraries of Europe, a farm hand tilling the piece of land between art history, literature, natural science and religion'.<sup>1</sup> (196) Yet the question remains for many: who is Fritz Saxl, and what is his place and importance in art historiography?

McEwan's answer to this question, and the justification for her biography, is composed of at least three parts. First, the author emphasizes that Saxl was critical to the functioning, organization, success, and survival of the Warburg Library in its various forms. Especially at the time of Warburg's illness, between 1920 and 1924, and after the latter's death in 1929, Saxl was the 'driving force' [*treibende Kraft*] of the Library. (190) In terms of a reading of Warburg's life and legacy, McEwan emphasizes a fact made by others, such as Hans-Michael Schäfer, but that is often overlooked: that Warburg was not alone in his work.<sup>2</sup> The operation and influence of his library was the result of a collaborative effort; its functioning relied on the skills and services of several individuals who were often highly trained and committed to Warburg's vision and goals.

Second, McEwan believes that Saxl's work with and for Warburg was critical to the latter's specific achievements as a scholar. Such commentary on Saxl as exists has devoted itself to his corpus of published work that was distinct from Warburg's research. But McEwan wishes to emphasize the exchange of ideas between Saxl and Warburg. In her introduction, the author states that she will demonstrate the way in which the two scholars constituted a type of *Forschungsgemeinschaft* [research group]. She says she will do this by focusing on three particular examples that illustrate their close cooperation in the period 1924-29: Warburg's interest in, and thinking on, Rembrandt's *The Oath of Claudius Civilis and the Batavians*; the research conducted by both scholars into the history of astrological imagery; and the composition of the *Mnemosyneatlas*, the now famous collection of images compiled by Warburg that was meant to demonstrate the ways in which antiquity provided the material for the European language of pictorial representation.

<sup>1</sup> 'Saxl selbst nannte sich einen Wanderer durch die Museen und Bibliotheken Europas, einen Landarbeiter, der das Stück Boden zwischen Kunstgeschichte, Literatur, Naturwissenschaft und Religion beackere'.

<sup>2</sup> Hans-Michael Schäfer. *Die Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg: Geschichte und Persönlichkeiten der Bibliothek Warburg mit Berücksichtigung der Bibliothekslandschaft und der Stadtsituation der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin: Logos-Verlag, 2003.

Third, in addition to emphasizing that Saxl's multi-disciplinary method was the hallmark of his research, teaching, and published work, the author claims that it has continued to influence research until the present day. Saxl, she asserts, connected Warburg's personal research concerns to an historical discipline that has been taken up and developed by others; he made Warburg's research methods available to a variety of multi-disciplinary researchers. It is in this respect that his contribution to art historiography is to be appreciated.

Preceded by an introduction, the book is composed of twenty-four short chapters in which Saxl's biography is chronologically organized. McEwan's text is clearly written, detailed, and extensively footnoted. In addition to thirty-six black-and-white illustrations and a bibliography, there are four appendices. The first comprises a comprehensive bibliography of Saxl's published and unpublished work. The second is a selected collection of letters and assorted texts. The third is composed of the trust deed, dated 1944, by which management and control of the Warburg Library was vested in the University of London. Also included is Ernst Gombrich's 'Introduction' to Hugh Honour and John Fleming eds, *A Heritage of Images* which is a collection of Saxl's lectures published in 1970.<sup>3</sup> The fourth appendix comprises a list of reviews of *Heidnisch-antike Weissagungen in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten* [*Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther*], the book Warburg published in 1921.

McEwan is frank about the preliminary nature of her project. She hopes that her book will be an impulse to more intensive research on Saxl, explaining that further study of his ideas and influence will constitute an important contribution to the study of the history of scholarship. 'This biography makes a first step,' she explains, 'even if it remains incomplete and cannot yet be given greater substance with further facts regarding Saxl's life and work'.<sup>4</sup> (196) Thus she describes her concluding remarks as a place for questions to be raised, rather than for answers to be provided. How are Saxl's research interests and multi-disciplinary methodology to be defined? Was he the individualist and non-conformist portrayed by his colleague Gertrude Bing in a volume of memorial essays published in 1957?<sup>5</sup> Or was he, more accurately, a scholar breaking new ground in a novel field of enquiry? These questions, the author hopes, will motivate further inquiry into Saxl's life and work.

In writing Saxl's life, McEwan has drawn principally upon his extensive official, or business correspondence as a scholar and in his various capacities as Warburg's aid and successor. She has examined the correspondence between the two men, beginning in 1910 and lasting until Warburg's death in 1929, in particular

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Honour and John Fleming eds. *A Heritage of Images: A Selection of Lectures by Fritz Saxl*, Harmondsworth: Penquin, 1970.

<sup>4</sup> 'Ein erster Schritt ist mit dieser Biographie getan, auch wenn sie Stückwerk bleibt und (noch) nicht durch weitere Fakten zu Saxls Leben und Wirken erhärtet werden konnte'.

<sup>5</sup> Gertrude Bing, "Fritz Saxl. 1890-1948," in Donald James Gordon ed, *Fritz Saxl, 1890-1948: A Volume of Memorial Essays from His Friends in England*, London: Nelson, 1957, 1-46.

detail. This consists of hundreds of letters and postcards and is preserved in the Warburg Institute Archive. McEwan is extremely well-prepared to write Saxl's biography on the basis of these sources. As the now-retired Institute's Archivist, she began cataloguing Warburg's correspondence in 1993. A database entitled 'The Aby Warburg Correspondence Archive in the Warburg Institute Archive' was completed in 2010 and contains 37,845 abstracts. As a result of this work, the author has a very thorough knowledge of the extensive written communication between Saxl and Warburg. In fact, the present volume is preceded by two others by McEwan treating the same correspondence. The first, *Das Ausreiten der Ecken*, examined the years 1910 to 1919, while the second, *Wanderstrassen der Kultur*, covered the period from 1920 to 1929.<sup>6</sup> In these books, McEwan presented Saxl as equally, if not more important than Warburg in the development and institutionalization of the latter's lifework.

McEwan's portrait is not based, however, solely upon Saxl's exchange of letters with Warburg. She also draws upon the corpus of Saxl's published work. But her focus is on the material preserved in the Warburg Institute Archive. This includes a large collection of Saxl's correspondence with several other scholars, with members of the Warburg family, and with the many publishers, editors, librarians, administrators, and officials with whom he was in contact. Saxl's working papers, the Institute's annual reports, the correspondence of its other members, such as Gertrude Bing, as well as Warburg's diaries and working papers have all contributed to the reconstruction of Saxl's life and work. Nor is McEwan's purview limited to what is preserved in the Warburg Institute. She has also drawn upon sources preserved in the Austrian National Library and State Archives, the Vienna University Archive, the Library of Heidelberg University, as well as the Hamburg University Archive and that of M.M. Warburg & Co. Unfortunately the Warburg Bank Archive in Hamburg Kösterberg is not yet open to the public.

But ultimately, McEwan emphasizes that she has found few documents related to Saxl in archives other than that of the Warburg Institute. Furthermore, Saxl left almost no private papers; he kept no journal, and there are no other significant, unpublished sources from his hand. The reviews of his published work naturally restrict themselves to his scholarship, and not to his work with and for Warburg. Thus it is principally the correspondence preserved in London that has allowed McEwan to reconstruct Saxl's professional life in substantial detail.

Often quoting from the correspondence at length, the author claims that it has allowed her to study themes and issues that have not received sufficient attention, or that have been completely overlooked. But much to her credit, McEwan is also honest about the limitations that the nature of her sources has imposed upon her project. She understands that the correspondence cannot provide a complete picture of Saxl's life and work and that her portrait must remain a partial one.

<sup>6</sup> Dorothea McEwan, *Das Ausreiten der Ecken. Die Aby Warburg – Fritz Saxl-Korrespondenz 1910 bis 1919*, Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 1998 and *Wanderstrassen der Kultur. Die Aby Warburg – Fritz Saxl-Korrespondenz 1920 bis 1929*, München und Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 2004.

Nonetheless, the many letters Saxl exchanged with Warburg and others opens a window onto three aspects of his biography. The first and most limited, because most difficult to reconstruct, is his personal life. While this is, admittedly, also of least importance to McEwan's project, the correspondence simply offers little insight into anything outside of Saxl's professional activities. Understandably, we hear most about his personal life as the author recounts his early years. We learn something, for example, about his rigorous education, under the supervision of his father, in Latin, Hebrew, Greek, and Sanskrit. We also hear about his relation to Judaism, and details of his marriage and family life.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the glimpse McEwan provides into Saxl's life beyond his scholarly activities is that which emerges from the time of the 1914-18 war. From 1915 to 1918, Saxl served as an officer in an artillery unit of the Austro-Hungarian army on the Italian front. The correspondence with Warburg during these years is often about research plans and the books that Warburg posted to Saxl. But the latter also sent brochures and articles about socialism to his employer. In fact, Saxl emerges from his correspondence as a convinced internationalist, pacifist, and socialist, and thus, in many respects, the very opposite of Warburg. In one missive to Hamburg, he wrote that the most important post-war battle was that against the hatred of other nations. The end of hostilities in 1918 was greeted by Saxl with optimism and hope for a better world. He was enthused by the proclamation of a democratic republic in Austria and organized popular exhibitions to highlight the brutality of war. This response contrasts starkly with Warburg's despair and mental breakdown in the wake of Germany's defeat.

Another important contrast between the two men emerges first in McEwan's account of Saxl's life immediately following the war. He and Warburg had very different views on popular art education. Warburg once dabbled in this at Hamburg's *Volksheim* in 1905. But the exhibition that he organized on Dürer was a failure due to the ambitious intellectual demands made on his working-class audience. He was much more comfortable speaking to Hamburg's patrician elite with whom he mingled in the societies to which he belonged, and who he invited to lectures in his Library. By contrast, Saxl saw art and culture as more than the domain of the wealthy and was convinced of the efficacy of popular education. Part of his work for the Austrian government, immediately following the war, was the organization of exhibitions in Vienna and lower Austria. He would go on to organize popular exhibitions as teaching tools in Hamburg during the 1920s and in London in the 1930s and 1940s.

These differing opinions about the nature of, and audience for art education and, more importantly, the contrasting political and social views expressed by Warburg and Saxl, are briefly discussed by McEwan. But they do not feature in a significant or sustained way in her analysis of their relationship. Perhaps insufficient sources do not permit the author to explore this dimension at greater length or in more depth. But given that much of the book is about the intellectual

kinship of these two men, the reader may wish to know more about how these fundamental differences shaped and affected their relationship.

The second aspect of Saxl's biography into which the correspondence provides insight is the course and principal events of his scholarly career. Born in Vienna, he studied art history and archaeology in the city with Max Dvořák, Franz Wickhoff, and Julius von Schlosser. He also spent one semester with Heinrich Wölfflin in Berlin. Completing his doctoral dissertation on Rembrandt in 1912, under Dvořák's supervision, Saxl also developed an interest in the history of astrology and myth. The similarity of interests and research methods shared by Saxl and Warburg is emphasized by McEwan, especially as she recounts the early years of their relationship leading to Saxl's employment by Warburg in 1914. Warburg supported the younger scholar in the years following the completion of his doctorate; he recognized that Saxl shared his research concerns and that his profound learning and similar methods could lead to fruitful cooperation.

McEwan provides summaries of Saxl's research interests and several of his published works as the biography unfolds, be this the two volumes of his *Verzeichnis astrologischer und mythologischer illustrierter Handschriften des lateinischen Mittelalter* (1915 and 1927) or his *Mithras. Typengeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (1931).<sup>7</sup> But while the reader is provided with a primer in Saxl's ideas, the author concentrates on his correspondence to reconstruct the practical events behind the completion of these scholarly projects. For example, when discussing Saxl's first *Verzeichnis*, McEwan narrates details of his research trip to Italy, in 1913, in search of illuminated astrological manuscripts in libraries and archives. The reader learns of Saxl's extensive finds in the Vatican Library. We also hear of his frustrations with the insufficient length of the research stipendium granted by the *Akademie der Wissenschaften* in Heidelberg, his inability to work daily in the Vatican Library, the unwieldy nature of his camera, and the need for more film. This is the approach taken by McEwan throughout a text conceived less as an intellectual biography than as both a more general recounting of the events of Saxl's professional life, and a more particular examination of what his correspondence reveals.

Finally, the correspondence also offers insight into the workings of the Warburg Library, the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg*, and the Warburg Institute. While the principal facts and events are familiar to scholars with an interest in Warburg, McEwan provides details that fill out and sharpen the picture. This is especially the case for the period beginning with Warburg's mental breakdown in late 1918 following which Saxl was appointed interim director of the Library by the Warburg family. He officially took up this position in April 1920 and remained as director until Warburg's return to Hamburg, in 1924, from the Bellevue Sanatorium in Kreuzlingen, Switzerland where he had been confined. Saxl had spoken with Warburg about transforming his library into a research institute as

<sup>7</sup> *Index of Illustrated Astrological and Mythological Manuscripts of the Latin Middle Ages; Mithras: Investigations in Historical Typology.*

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early as April 1914; he envisioned a private library, open to scholars and students, and it is in his position as interim director that his real importance emerges as an administrator and organizer. During Warburg's absence from Hamburg, Saxl was in constant correspondence with him about all matters concerning the Library and was his spokesperson in absentia. But most importantly, Saxl organized and systematized the Library, publicized its role as a research institute, and organized lectures and their publication.

McEwan's account of these years is also one of a relationship, and she demonstrates that both Saxl and Warburg had great respect for one another. It will come as no surprise to anyone who has read any of Warburg's correspondence that he did not hesitate to criticize Saxl. As the author emphasizes, Warburg seldom found words of praise. But the nature of the relationship presented by McEwan is that of a true friendship. In a letter posted in December 1911, Warburg said to Saxl that 'I cannot value your time and your life higher than my own; cannon fodder for respectable question marks'.<sup>8</sup> (21) A critical juncture in this relationship came with Warburg's confinement to the Bellevue Sanatorium. The author emphasizes that Saxl's work for and with Warburg during this particular period played an important role in the latter's recovery. His aid was critical in helping Warburg prepare his now famous 'A Lecture on Serpent Ritual'; he provided books, prepared illustrations, and typed the text. When Warburg published *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten* first as an article in 1920 and as a monograph in 1921, Saxl worked to recruit reviewers to disseminate Warburg's ideas and encourage and support him during his illness. But while Warburg spoke of Saxl as a junior partner and valued his scholarly thoroughness, McEwan is left with a question: did he ultimately appreciate Saxl's great administrative and organizational achievements that enabled the transformation of a private library into an internationally-recognized teaching and research facility?

Saxl became director of the Library from Warburg's death in 1929 and would remain in this capacity through its transformation into the Warburg Institute in London and his own death in 1948. McEwan's account of the Library's move to London in 1933 is more circumspect than that presented with the often cursory explanation that it resulted from the threat embodied in the Nazi seizure of power. While this certainly played an important role in the Library's search for a new home, financial troubles in the wake of the Great Depression, concern for a stable environment in which the continuance of research could be guaranteed, as well as the fear that Hamburg University would be dissolved, all contributed to the decision to leave Germany. The correspondence reveals that Saxl preferred Rome as the location for the Library's new home, and that New York and Jerusalem were also considered as possibilities.

<sup>8</sup> 'Ihre Zeit und Ihr Leben kann ich nicht höher einschätzen als das meinige: Kanonen-futter für respektable Fragezeichen'.

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Ultimately, London was considered the city most willing and able to house the Library and, in the closing chapters of the book, McEwan details and emphasizes Saxl's critical role in establishing this new home. This involved the physical organization of the Library; the consolidation of its precarious finances; the building and deepening of contacts with British academia; the organization of lectures; and the continuation of publication series begun in Hamburg - the *Journal of the Warburg Institute* and *Studies of the Warburg Institute* - that Saxl believed were critical to the Library's survival. Indeed, McEwan believes that if Saxl had died earlier than he did, the Library would never have become the Warburg Institute. Fortunately, this was not the case and, as its first director, Saxl was granted the title of 'Professor of the History of the Classical Tradition in the University of London' in 1945, just three years before his death.

The writing of Saxl's life is an ambitious project and McEwan has surveyed and integrated a large volume of material to narrate its principal features. With such a large purview, this inevitably means that while certain events and issues are covered in detail, others are treated in summary fashion. And yet the book is successful within the limits that it has set itself. Consequently, we need to be clear about what these limits are, what the book is not, and what the author has not set out to achieve. While reading through its pages, one might be reminded of Ernst Gombrich's biography of Warburg, first published in 1970.<sup>9</sup> But unlike Gombrich's book, which synthesized and gave a definite interpretation of Warburg's working papers and the corpus of his published work, McEwan's portrait is not intended as a sustained analysis, nor as an integrated interpretation of Saxl's thought and scholarship.

While emphasizing that Saxl expanded Warburg's questions concerning late antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, the author presents no substantial critical analysis of the manner in which this was so. Only short passages are devoted to the substance of the major products of his scholarship: his dissertation on Rembrandt; his work on astrological symbolism and the two volumes of his *Verzeichnis*; the *Habilitationsschrift* that he presented to Hamburg University in 1922 entitled *Antike Götter in der Spätrenaissance: Ein Freskenzyklus und ein Discorso des Jacopo Zucchi* [*Antique Gods in the Late Renaissance: A Fresco Cycle and a Discourse by Jacopo Zucchi*]; and his publications on Mithras. On pages 190-91, the author provides a list of the lectures that Saxl gave between 1935 and 1948. The range of subjects is impressive, but there is no detailed discussion of any of this work. McEwan does not look beyond the mechanics of Saxl's contacts and dealings with the representatives of the Vienna School to discuss the substance of their differences. Furthermore, Saxl's place within art historiography, and a detailed examination of

<sup>9</sup> Ernst H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970.

his influence on art-historical scholarship, while serving as a justification for the biography, is not the subject of her account.

As noted above, McEwan states in her introduction that she will examine three specific examples of the way in which Warburg and Saxl constituted a type of research group in the later 1920s. In 1925, Warburg commissioned Carl Schubert to paint a copy of Rembrandt's *The Oath of Claudius Civilis and the Batavians* (1661/62). While providing some detail as to why the image interested Warburg, McEwan explains that he was directed to the painting by Saxl, and states that the latter explained to Warburg that scenes depicting the swearing of an oath, with hands laid on crossed swords, were often to be found in popular images during the seventeenth century and used to disguise contemporary political subjects. But unfortunately, we do not hear anything significant about the substance of Saxl's Rembrandt research and how this might have influenced Warburg's perspective on the picture. The interest that both scholars shared in the history of astrology also continued into the last years of Warburg's life. But McEwan's discussion of this subject is confined to a summary of Warburg's ideas and a repetition of the fact that this interest first brought him into contact with Saxl.

In respect to the composition of the *Mnemosyneatlas*, the author emphasizes Saxl's enthusiasm for the project, provides some details of his participation in it, and relates that he searched through libraries and image archives in several European countries looking for images with whose help the processes of transmission could be documented to a particular theme. The rest of her discussion is devoted to the manner in which the atlas was composed. Thus, at the end of chapter twelve, the reader is left wondering whether there was more intellectual substance to the supposed research group formed by Warburg and Saxl than the author has recorded. The question also remains as to whether, on the basis of what McEwan relates, one can actually speak of a significant exchange of ideas. Instead, Saxl emerges in this account as very much a junior partner working in pursuance of Warburg's research agenda.

Simply put, McEwan has not set out to write an intellectual biography. She has left this for future researchers and, instead, has set herself the important task of relating the mechanics of Saxl's career. As a result, the book is more reportage than analysis and interpretation. The four large appendices, which comprise almost one hundred pages, add to the book's documentary character. This approach can sometimes make for dry reading, but it fulfils the very necessary function of establishing and arranging the basic facts upon which future research can build.

However, an important question emerges as one reads this book: is it a biography of Saxl or a history of the Warburg Library? The title and subtitle point to a tension at the book's core. On the one hand, McEwan wants to paint the portrait of a scholar, librarian, and administrator of singular importance who merits the recognition that an individual portrait affords. But the book's subtitle solidly frames Saxl, and his achievements, as an assistant to Warburg and places him within an

institutional history. Thus the picture becomes at least a double, if not a group portrait, and it is this image that the book sustains.

For the period from 1914 to 1929, the account of Saxl's life is not partly about his relationship with Warburg; it is principally so. Many passages in the first half of the book are devoted to Warburg himself; he is the lens through which Saxl's early development is seen and the latter's interests are often described in terms of Warburg's concerns. As the biography progresses, Saxl is pictured as devoted to Warburg and his work. McEwan speaks of his untiring efforts to bring his employer's research into circulation in Germany, Austria, and England. Furthermore, she emphasizes that it was thanks to Saxl's farsightedness that the library of a private scholar developed into a research centre for multi-disciplinary research in the field of the history of ideas. But while this needs to be emphasized, the book often reads more as an institutional history than a biography. This is especially the case as the author recounts the history of the Library from the time of Warburg's death. In fact, there are moments when Saxl disappears as the protagonist of the story to become but one character in a more comprehensive history of an institution that, it should be noted, has been narrated elsewhere and to which the correspondence explored in this book does not consistently provide new or significant insights.

Of course, context is essential to good biography. Furthermore, the reading of Saxl's life offered by McEwan is in many ways inevitable: the simple fact is that his career was very closely bound up with that of the Warburg Library. As the author explains, Saxl remained true to his mission, the establishment of the Warburg Institute in London, above and beyond the pursuance of his own scholarship. Many readers may conclude that Saxl's greatest achievement was indeed his administrative and organizational contribution to what became the Warburg Institute. In the final analysis, this seems to be McEwan's opinion.

And yet, given that the book presents itself as a biography, and that the author states that 'Saxl was and remained an individualist his entire life,' the reader may expect his individual features to be given greater emphasis such that a personal portrait would emerge in sharper relief.<sup>10</sup> (198) Ultimately, it is incorrect to see Saxl simply as a devoted disciple of Warburg and, while McEwan understands this, her biography might do more to remedy this image. In his 'Introduction' to *A Heritage of Images*, Gombrich hints at fundamental intellectual differences between Saxl and Warburg. This fact should play an important role in writing Saxl's biography, but it would require a closer analysis of his scholarship than McEwan has set out to undertake.

Bringing Saxl out of Warburg's shadow would also require an exploration of his relations with other scholars. His collaboration with Erwin Panofsky, for example, would be critical to this undertaking. It was with Panofsky that Saxl published *Dürers 'Melancholia I'* in 1923. About the book itself, the correspondence

<sup>10</sup> 'Saxl war und blieb lebenslang ein Individualist ...'

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discussed by McEwan provides us with the positive reception it received in scholarly circles. But she offers no analysis of the monograph's content. A fuller treatment of the relationship between Saxl and Panofsky is presented in chapter twenty-two. But again, the author recounts only the mechanics and provides no significant detail as to its intellectual substance.

This does not diminish the fact that McEwan's biography is an ambitious study that surveys and integrates a large body of material. It clearly demonstrates that Saxl was critical to the functioning and survival of the Warburg Library in its various forms. Consequently, it will appeal to scholars interested in this history. As noted above, McEwan has not undertaken an intellectual biography; analysis and interpretation of the substance of Saxl's scholarship awaits further research, as does a specific and detailed account of his influence on art historiography. Respectable question marks remain. This book, however, provides the necessary outlines of a career and corpus of scholarship worthy of further exploration.

**Mark A. Russell** is an associate professor in the Liberal Arts College of Concordia University, Montreal. He has published *Between Tradition and Modernity: Aby Warburg and the Public Purposes of Art in Hamburg, 1896-1918* (New York and Oxford, 2007) and is currently researching the history of the Hamburg-Amerika Linie and its luxury passenger liners.

mark.russell@concordia.ca