

Margaret Stetz, *Facing the Late Victorians: Portraits of Writers and Artists from the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007, 158 pp. Pbk, US\$ 49, ISBN-13: 978-0874139921.

This is a rare example of an exhibition catalogue which stands almost equally well – and more permanently – than the display it illustrates. Most artwork items are represented by a full-page picture, and most are originally monochrome, so lose little in black-and-white reproduction. The seventy two images of figures from the British arts fields during the *fin-de-siècle* period encompass a variety of media, from the fine finished pencil drawings of Swinburne by Rossetti and Blanche Lindsay by George Howard, through lithographs of Pater, Beardsley, Sargent, Shaw, Yeats and Henry James by William Rothenstein, to lively caricatures of Wilde, Le Gallienne, Hall Caine and himself by Max Beerbohm, and celebrity photos of Tennyson, Arnold, Meredith, Olive Schreiner, E. Nesbit and others. Whatever the medium, all are ‘quality’ images, none is run-of-the-mill, and the selection is a tribute to the judgement and taste of the collector, Mark Samuels Lasner, known to all Morrisians through his long-term role in the US chapter of the Society.

Women feature in the selection: Ellen Terry, George Eliot, Frances Arnold, Ida Nettleship, Alice Meynell, Sarah Grand, Violet Manners, Ella D’Arcy, ‘George Egerton’, and the composite Michael Field among the sitters, in addition to those

already mentioned (the 'New Woman' representation being a particular specialism of Margaret Stetz, catalogue author and, one guesses, co-curator), and Helen Allingham, Sarah Eddy and Violet Manners among the artists. There are self-portraits by Sickert, Will Rothenstein, Beerbohm, Harry Furniss, Phil May, Joseph Pennell and Rudyard Kipling.

The spectrum of portrait modes, from solemn to comic, from thumbnail to full *mise-en-scène*, provides more than diversity, however. Stetz's introduction, which succeeds in being concise and scholarly, informative and witty all at the same time, explains how the portrait image in its various guises functioned and grew as a marker of fame in the late nineteenth century. Careers were advanced by portrait photos – as today, writers required a literal public face in order to take their rightful place on the literary scene. Artists recognised the value of self-presentation in staking their claims to celebrity. A whole raft of pictorial conventions came to dominate the visual world. The public became adept not just in consuming portraiture through the purchase of 'famous men' (and women) photos, attending exhibitions and reading illustrated magazines, but also in decoding appearances by perceiving character in facial features. As Stetz writes, images of faces, including those of artists and writers, were inescapable accompaniments to daily life, making the physical appearance of the producer inseparable from the circulation and reception of literary texts and art works.

As previously, whether for public or private consumption, the images were produced by those with skill and training, as the box camera was not yet available for amateur snaps, and the demand was high. Simultaneously, the age in which print culture was paramount was also fast-moving and irreverent, supporting what may be called the serious satirists, producing cartoon-style portraits that pricked pretensions but also underlined the sitters' status. To be lampooned by Furniss, May or Max was to be recognised, the face to go with the 'name'.

Whistler and Wilde were masters of this cultural phenomenon. Our dear Morris, by contrast, was largely averse to self-advertising, and the limited number of portrait photos of him testify to his reluctant agreement to sit – and indeed to sit still, when he might be getting on with the thousand other tasks he had set himself. He did agree to a few shots, largely it seems as fund-raising for the Socialist movement. As a result, while Burne-Jones is represented in the Samuels Lasner collection by one of George Howard's detailed drawings, and Janey Morris by Rossetti's soft pencil study of her asleep on the sofa, Morris himself is seen only in the large group photo of the Hammersmith Socialist League shot in the garden of Kelmscott House, on an unrecorded occasion in the late 1880s. He is one alongside two dozen other men – visually dominant with his white hair and beard, but not centrally-placed – standing behind the nine seated women members, including Jenny and May. The photograph is uncertainly attributed

to Frederick Hollyer, who had taken the well-known group shots of the Morris and Burne-Jones families in 1874 and was a proponent of photography as an art form. This image looks less accomplished, in the immortal style of the class photo. But it is a corrective to the self-regarding solo images which form the majority of those here reproduced, offering yet another aspect to the rich sampling of late-Victorian portraiture.

A final plum is the cover image, reproduced in colour, of a composite portrait of current celebrities produced as a Christmas card for Cope's tobacco firm in 1883. Victorianists can spend a happy hour identifying the myriad figures, from Gladstone to Millais, Browning to Cetswayo. Above all, atop the fairground of publicity, stands the irrepressible Oscar, with signature sunflower.

*Jan Marsh*

(‘Today we love the Flemish primitives [fourteenth century]’). And the vitality of TAKORA Kimiyoshi Futori, as well as his answer to the question, ‘What do you aim to create with your work?’ – ‘Make people happy!’

*Peter Faulkner*