Reviews


This beautifully illustrated full-colour book, published to coincide with the Victoria and Albert's exhibition of the same name, is a fitting tribute to the featured practitioners whose aim was to 'create beauty in everyday things'. It is divided into four sections on the arts and crafts, of which those examining Britain and Europe are the largest, with America and Japan making up shorter sections. The publication features an impressive range of international contributors, each analysing the development and impact of the arts and crafts movement on their respective countries.

Beginning in Britain around 1880, arts and crafts was the first movement to be directed at the reform of art at every level. At its heart was the aim of improving domestic design and reforming industry, thereby elevating the status of the crafts. The movement took its name from the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, founded in London in 1887, although within a short time it became widely admired, its ideals spreading throughout the world. Karen Livingstone, joint editor of the book with Linda Parry, and curator of the exhibition, places the movement in context by describing John Ruskin's firm belief in the joy of work and in the natural beauty of materials and how this influenced the young William Morris. 'The Nature of Gothic', from Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*, was to become a cornerstone on which arts and crafts ideals were later founded. It was Ruskin who, in 1878, acknowledged that Morris 'was the only person who went straight to the accurate point of the craftsman's question'. In 1891 Morris was elected President of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society; it was to be a post he held until his death in 1896.

Morris's ideas were adopted by successive organisations: the Art
Workers Guild, the Century Guild, the Central School of Arts and Crafts and the Glasgow School of Art. Britain proved the model for workshop practice, the revival of techniques and a spirit of collaboration that allowed for individual expression. Concern for the decreasing role of the crafts worker lay at the heart of the arts and crafts movement in Britain. The Industrial Revolution had destroyed many of the traditional ways of working and it became the aim of arts and crafts campaigners to champion the revival of traditional crafts, advancing a return to a simpler way of life. Education became an important vehicle with which to spread arts and crafts ideas, and to teach specific skills. Women as well as men participated in thriving regional art schools, offering a plethora of craft skills. In 1896 the Central School of Art opened in London, led by W. R. Lethaby and specifically devoted to the proliferation of arts and crafts ideals. Rural communities throughout Britain also benefited from the new-found interest in utilising local skills and resources, such as the flourishing of the Langdale Linen industry in the Lake District and Newlyn Copper in Cornwall. The importance of the city during this period is juxtaposed with that of the countryside, interesting parallels being drawn between the rural idyll with the productivity of the cities born from the Industrial Revolution. Fascinating chapters cover such diverse subjects as the book arts, graphics, metalworking, architecture in gardens, jewellery and photography of the movement.

The adoption of arts and crafts in Europe gave rise to an abundance of creativity, much of which was based on Ruskinian and Morrisian principles as their translations became readily available. Throughout Europe textiles came to be seen as a vital part of the totally designed interior. The quality of textiles as intrinsic to the arts and crafts home reached a high level of excellence, partly due to the fact that many of the movement's leading architects and designers became involved in textile production. The artists of Central Europe initiated a quest for honesty and purity. Inspired by peasant villages, the aim was to create a national style based on folk art. They envisaged a future national community which reconciled tradition with modernity in the spirit of national revival. As in England, some European art critics believed that art could be a factor in the social reforms that would lead towards the rise of socialism. Russian artists established workshops and a museum of peasant artefacts. They borrowed motifs from the folk art of
peasant communities and the sensitive reworking of these patterns led to a new decorative style. The aim was not to revive obsolete crafts but 'to capture the still-living art of the people, and give it the opportunity to develop'.

British influences were also transmitted to Scandinavia through magazines such as The Studio, although the arts and crafts movement also provided an excellent means for these countries to demonstrate their own culture. The aim of reviving and maintaining the heritage of traditional peasant work was paramount. Scandinavian decorative arts began to attract worldwide recognition by combining features of the mainstream international crafts movement with those of a national rural character. The Swedish social and design reformer, Ellen Kay, echoed Morris’s ideals when she declared in her book Beauty for All (1899), ‘Not until nothing ugly can be bought, when the beautiful is as cheap as the ugly, only then can beauty for all become a reality’. The Wiener Werkstatte (Viennese Workshop) in Austria applied a purist arts and crafts approach, producing only handmade goods, having similarities to C. R. Ashbee’s Guild of Handicraft. The Sezession, with Gustav Klimt as president, stated, ‘We recognise no distinction between high art and minor art, between art for the rich and art for the poor. Art is everyone’s property’.

The section on the arts and crafts in America explores the art of the East Coast, and Western North America, and examines the progressive work of Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School. Wright believed that careful and controlled use of the machine was acceptable and his relationship with industry is clearly explored. Other key figures who were synonymous with Chicago are also highlighted. Joseph Twyman and Oscar Lovell Triggs were active in Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century and, interestingly, were both founder members of the world’s first William Morris Society. Karen Livingstone argues that the American movement was more widely embraced as a whole than in Britain. As in Europe, artists such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Greene and Greene and Tiffany were influenced by the traditional crafts; in this case, those of indigenous Americans. In Japan, aspects of German Jugendstil were just one of several Western influences that informed the development of its Mingei (folk craft) movement. This movement flourished in Japan in the period 1926 to 45, almost forty years later than in Britain, America and Europe. The
folk crafts concept emerged at a time when rapid change was causing Japan to look to its past for stability and guidance, as had occurred in Europe. Increasing westernisation resulted in Mingei being formed as a hybrid 'between east and west'. It became a diverse range of both European and Asian sources, resulting in a nationwide campaign for the recognition of historical folk crafts and new work based on them. A new generation of artist-craftsmen is charted, highlighting the communal enterprise of Bernard Leach and Tomimoto Kenkichi, amongst others.

This fine publication contains a comprehensive bibliography, both general and for each individual chapter. This is followed by a list of objects in the exhibition, and an index which is usefully arranged in two parts: by name and by subject. Not only does this publication chart the history of each country's particular development of arts and crafts philosophy, but attempts to place this within a global milieu. It is the connections made, particularly by Karen Livingstone, between various cultures and histories that makes this volume such a fitting testament to the movement. The challenge that the editors must have faced to cover such a wide range of arts and crafts work within an international context should not be underestimated. Offering familiar details alongside new and challenging theories, the book enforces the reader's awareness of the internationalism of the movement and is suitable for all who are interested in this much-loved period of art history, whether expert or amateur.

Helen Elletson

This excellent book was originally published in 1994, and the paperback edition includes a new chapter on recent trends and a fully up-to-date reference section. As Lesley Hoskins points out in her Introduction, wallpaper has tended to be placed low in the hierarchy of the decorative arts, so that its history was little studied before the
twentieth century, by which time very little of the evidence before the eighteenth century remained. Moreover, wallpaper is fragile and easily damaged. But research is now, in addition to finding more samples from the past, illuminating the theories of design from which they derived and the significance of technology in their development.

Hoskins has brought together the work of an international group of experts, who provide a wide-ranging account of the history of wallpaper, from Geert Wisse on its ‘Manifold Beginnings’ in single-sheet papers from the end of the fifteenth century to Mary Schoeser in ‘Off the Shelf’, on trends in design and consumption since the 1970s. French design plays the leading part in the period up to 1870, and developments in the USA become increasingly important in later periods. British designs before the twentieth century are discussed by Anthony Wells-Cole in ‘Flocks, Florals and Fancies: English Manufacture 1680–1830’ and by Joanna Banham in ‘The English Response: Mechanisation and Design Reform’. It is of course in this chapter that Morris appears most significantly, though Banham is at pains to present him within the wider movement in which Pugin, Henry Cole, Richard Redgrave and Owen Jones played important parts. Banham gives a clear account of the Design Reform Movement, but argues that its achievements were ‘more theoretical than practical’ in that their ‘call for simple, flat effects fell on deaf ears as far as the majority of consumers were concerned’ until well into the twentieth century. The Design Reformers were mainly concerned with block-prints, and machine-printing often remained impervious to their ideas. Of Morris she remarks:

Morris’s reputation towers over the second half of the 19th century and, understandably, many historians have over-estimated the impact of his wallpapers, particularly on the popular end of the market. For, despite his avowed intention to produce ‘an art made by the people, for the people’, the patterns of his firm were printed by Jeffrey and Co., almost all of them by hand, and retailed at prices that the working class could not possibly afford (between 3s and 16s a roll). They were bought instead by those aesthetically minded sections of society who inhabited fashionable new areas of Oxford and London. (pp. 147–48)

Morris’s designs also appealed to equivalent buyers in Boston, Philadelphia and New York, Paris, Frankfurt and Berlin, and in
Australia. Banham reproduces ‘Daisy’ and ‘Jasmine’, remarking on the ‘organic’ quality of the latter, and stating that such patterns were to be ‘immensely influential in the late 19th century both in Britain and abroad’. Morris is presented as a beneficiary of the increasing interest in interior design from the 1870s. His work is said to be ‘something of a compromise between the extreme realism of pre-Reform floral patterns and more formalised designs’. This is clearly true in a sense, but the word ‘compromise’ seems to me inappropriate to a man who always followed his own creative intuitions.

Morris also features in the following chapter, ‘Proliferation: Late 19th-Century Papers, Markets and Manufacturers’. In her thorough account of the situation in the United States, Joanne Kosuda Warner reminds us that Morris patterns had been imported since 1870 by J. M. Bumstead of Boston, and at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876 Jeffrey and Co. had displayed designs by Morris and Walter Crane which were much admired. However, a quotation from the magazine *Carpentry and Building* in 1884 suggests that American wallpaper manufacturers were making their own response:

> There was a time when if one wanted a good paper for his wall he must pay the enormous prices asked by William Morris and Co. of London. Now he can find quite as good a design as Morris ever made by looking over the stock of any first-class American papers at not more than one-third of the price of the no better papers from England. (p. 173)

Warner offers no comment on this striking claim, but reproduces ‘The Perdita’, which is described, accurately, as ‘a paper in William Morris style by Thomas Strahan and Co. of Chelsea (Massachusetts)’ from the 1880s.

The last reference to Morris occurs in relation to the designer Edward Bawden in the mid-twentieth century. As an admirer of Bawden’s work, I was pleased to learn that his interest in wallpaper design was stimulated by seeing Morris’s ‘Daisy’ pattern in one of the period rooms at the Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924.

One final ‘design’, to which it is interesting to imagine Morris’s likely response, is taken from Mary Schoeser’s chapter ‘Limited Editions: 1995 to Today’. Entitled ‘Wallpaper Gnawed by a Rat’, from the Swedish design group Front, who are keen to avoid ‘established meth-
ods and conventions', it is produced by giving a roll of plain paper to a rat, which chews it and so produces 'repeated holes unique to each piece and only revealed by hanging the gnawed paper over a patterned paper' – a colour illustration is provided.

Lesley Hoskins and her contributors have produced a wide-ranging and accessible survey of their subject, though I found nothing here about the revival of interest in Morris designs in the post-war period, which I believe extended to wallpapers as well as textiles. But this is a fine and attractive book – if a little heavy to hold for long – with useful features like a glossary, list of reference collections accessible to the public and of suppliers of historic patterns. This paperback version is excellent value and a credit to its publishers.

Peter Faulkner

There is no shortage of studies on the subject of Victorian medievalism, as the editors of this collection admit. Holloway and Palmgren situate their book within a tradition of scholarly monographs stretching over thirty years, and state their intention to continue the interdisciplinary approach of Florence Boos’s History and Continuity: Essays in Victorian Medievalism (1992). Although predominantly literary in its focus, this collection thus attempts ‘to reflect how medievalism permeated Victorian society’ (p. 5) socially, culturally and aesthetically, and moves chronologically from Pugin to Baden-Powell in addressing the diverse influences and interpretations that constituted medievalism in the nineteenth century.

In their Introduction, the editors emphasise the fact that whilst Victorian medievalism had its roots in eighteenth-century scholarship, it quickly became a significant part of nineteenth-century popular culture. Nonetheless, its ‘paradox’ lay in the fact that it was ‘a movement which was at the same time both individual and collective in its possibilities’ (p. 2). Victorian medievalism was, it seems, all things to all men (and, to a lesser extent, all women), and supported
simultaneously ‘the Victorian need for reform and reverence, deep faith and spectacle’ (p. 7). This happily indiscriminate appropriation of the Middle Ages is assessed in chapters dedicated to a range of writers, including Robert Browning, Charlotte Yonge, Matthew Arnold, Adelaide Proctor and Algernon Swinburne. There are also individual chapters on Pugin – whose medievalist approach aimed ‘to counteract modern social alienation by reconfiguring the spaces within which people live’ (p. 32) – on the ‘counter-medievalism’ of Protestantism, on the ‘performance’ of medievalism on the Victorian stage and on the decline of the chivalric ideal in the early twentieth century. Comprehensive in scope and specific in detail, there is much to interest scholar and lay reader, specialist and generalist, in the themes and subjects covered by this book.

Of particular interest to Morris enthusiasts are the two chapters dedicated to his writings. Richard Frith contributes a study of Sigurd the Volsung and Lori Campbell writes on The Wood Beyond the World, and it is encouraging as well as gratifying to find that Morris is recognised as being of sufficient stature and significance to warrant two chapters – a privilege enjoyed by no other nineteenth-century writer in this collection! Both these chapters address the diversity and complexity of Morris’s own ‘medievalism’ and concur in their conclusion that his poetry and fiction made an important and original contribution to the wider movement.

Frith’s discussion of Sigurd the Volsung focuses on Morris’s deep admiration for ‘the Norse heroic code’ (p. 122) and the qualities of courage and endurance that characterise the heroes and heroines of the Icelandic sagas. The poem is, he claims, ‘the most important literary result’ of Norse medievalism in the nineteenth century (p. 117), and assumes an equivalent stature in this context to that of Tennyson’s Idylls of the King in the Arthurian tradition. There is a rather dismaying moment early in the chapter when Frith concludes that on the basis of his political lectures, A Dream of John Ball and News from Nowhere, ‘Morris can be situated relatively easily in a basically conservative medievalist tradition’ (p. 118) – a tired and flawed interpretation which has surely been refuted by enough Morris scholars to make its reappearance here surprising – but fortunately in his discussion of Sigurd he is more persuasive and insightful. Frith charts the influences and motivations that inspired Morris’s turn to the literature of the
Great Old North, and, in particular, his enthusiasm for the *Völsunga Saga*, before assessing Morris's achievement in this epic poem. He detects in *Sigurd* a distinct move away from what he describes as the 'often wearying emotionality of The Earthly Paradise' (p. 124) towards the vigour and stoicism of the Sagas, and provides a brief discussion of some of the ways in which Morris adapted the original narrative in order to 'enhance' (p. 125) its contemporary appeal. Nonetheless, Morris's own form of Norse medievalism in *Sigurd* was, Frith concedes, not always palatable to a Victorian readership. Despite his attempts to 'mediate the Volsung story for a nineteenth-century audience', he was not prepared to 'compromise the Old Northern qualities for which he valued it'; he wanted 'simultaneously to universalise the tale and to retain its cultural specificity' (p. 127). This, together with the sometimes 'forbidding' (p. 127) aspects of verse form and diction, Frith claims, limited the accessibility of the poem overall. There is an echo of those well-rehearsed arguments about inaccessibility of style and diction in the later prose romances here, and were Norman Talbot alive he might well take Frith to task for implying that the occasional need to adjust and attune to Morris's mode of writing is a problem rather than an effort well worth making and more than adequately rewarded. Nonetheless, Frith presents an informed and enjoyable discussion of one of Morris's most remarkable and compelling works, and argues convincingly for it as 'a truly important document of Victorian medievalism' (p. 130).

Lori Campbell's chapter on *The Wood Beyond the World* approaches this narrative from the academically popular perspective of the 'Woman Question'. In this romance, Campbell argues, 'Morris develops a unique brand of medievalism irrevocably pre-occupied with the challenges he witnesses in late Victorian society, especially regarding gender' (p. 170). It is a large claim, and one that Campbell aims to support through her detailed analysis of *The Wood Beyond the World* together with wider reference to Morris's other romances, especially *The Story of the Glittering Plain* and *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*. Generally, Campbell asserts, Morris's 'opinions on gender equality remain clouded by avoidance and contradiction' (p. 169) and it is arguably in his last romances that 'the depiction of empowered femininity occurs most prominently' (p. 172). Campbell's first statement begs a rejoinder which there is no space to offer here, but she does pres-
ent an interesting discussion of the relationship between Walter, the Maid and the Lady (whom she insists on calling the Mistress) in *The Wood Beyond the World*, and compares the female roles in this romance with that of the Hostage in *The Story of the Glittering Plain* and Birdalone in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*. There is much to engage enthusiasts of the last romances in this chapter, and Campbell displays a lively and thoughtful response to the narratives and a genuine appreciation of their merits. Where her analysis does fall into difficulty, however, is in her claims that Morris's characters essentially represent nineteenth-century female stereotypes; the role of the Hostage, according to Campbell, 'suggests the secondary place of the female in Victorian society' (p. 175), whilst the Lady 'clearly reads as a fictional embodiment' (p. 181) of the New Woman. There is a sense of selective reading to fit a preconceived argument here, a perennial danger with these narratives. The last romances are notoriously slippery – they refuse to be constrained by academic theories and specific thematic interpretations. This does not mean that approaches such as Campbell's are invalid, only that the type of claims and assertions she makes are highly subjective. Such subjectivity and selectivity are also apparent in the discussion of *News from Nowhere*, which, Campbell argues, 'maintains the Victorian status quo by promoting the female's ability to choose the positions of wife and mother that had previously been prescribed to her' (p. 178). Whilst there might be some truth in this claim, it conveniently ignores the far more complex and autonomous roles of characters such as Ellen, Philippa, and even Clara, who also chooses temporarily to be the lover of someone other than her husband. But these observations aside, Campbell does present a thought-provoking discussion of some much-neglected narratives in this chapter and succeeds in demonstrating that Morris's 'medievalism' is far from conventional.

It is a long way from *The Wood Beyond the World* to the battlefields of the First World War, and Holloway and Palmgren's collection concludes with Sandra Martina Schwab's claim that 'chivalry received its final deathblow on the battlefields of Europe' (p. 229). Interestingly, this contradicts Holloway and Palmgren's own suggestion in the Introduction that the spirit of romance is alive and well in the twenty-first century, as demonstrated by the cinema successes of *The Lord of the Rings* and *King Arthur* and the continuing popularity of role-play
computer games. Hence, 'though critics regularly predict the death of medievalism', Holloway and Palmgren assert, 'it seems entrenched in [our] culture' (p. 4). It is a heartening observation, not least because it implies there will be a readership for Morris’s Sigurd and the last romances for quite some time to come.

Phillipa Bennett

Paul Greenhalgh was formerly on the staff of the V&A, where he curated the *Art Nouveau* exhibition in 2000, and is now President of NSCAD University in Canada. In this wide-ranging and ambitious book, he offers an account of the development of Western art since the eighteenth century, which he argues centres on the idea of simplicity. This idea he traces to the humanistic thinkers of the Enlightenment, who, in response to the social process of modernisation, rejected religion and tradition and looked forward to a new world to be founded on rationality and progress. Evidence is given to show that this simplifying idea found its full embodiment in the Modernism of the early twentieth century, only to falter and founder from the 1970s as various forms of Postmodernism asserted the irrelevance of the grand narrative of Modernism along with all the other grand narratives of history. The design of the book itself is suggestive of the position Greenhalgh occupies: the typography is plainly modernist, but the use of bright colours decidedly post-modern. The result is a brash and visually attractive book.

Greenhalgh is fond of triads, and claims that modernity passed through three stages, the speculative – that of the Enlightenment; the material – from the mid-eighteenth century; and the ideological – from 1890 to around 1980. He sees it as Utopian in its ambition to create a better world by using the power of technology, and coming to an end when Postmodernism exposed its contradictions and evasions. Greenhalgh also sees the ways in which artists engaged with moderni-
ty as triadic: for him, they represent 'three dispositions', namely Idealism, Radical critique, and Reportage. The Idealists – his main concern in this book – saw themselves as participating in the Utopian process of re-ordering society; the radical critics drew attention to all the dangers and inhumanities of modernisation; and the reporters simply recorded without taking sides.

Morris is given a significant position on this story. He first appears as part of the Design Reform movement of the nineteenth century, along with Viollet-le-Duc in France and Gottfried Semper in Germany, all of whom 'foregrounded an idealist approach to theory and practice', which was to lead in the twentieth century to 'the definitive rise and triumph of an art-led modernist idealism, which penetrated all forms of practice' and developed into 'a Utopian vision intended to reform the entire built environment'. This is said to have developed in parallel with the view of an artist like Mondrian that 'his paintings were a template for a total mode of existence' (p. 31) – though we are not told much about what this mode of existence would have been like. But there was clearly a Utopian enthusiasm at work here. Greenhalgh points out that this could take both benevolent and dangerous forms, so that for him it brings 'into uncomfortable proximity such progenitors and polemicists as William Morris, Oscar Wilde, Frank Lloyd Wright, H. G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, Adolf Hitler and Pol Pot' (p. 39). Greenhalgh likes making challenging lists of this kind, to stimulate the reader to examine his or her presuppositions about a subject like Utopianism. This listing can be found again in a discussion of 'The Metaphysics of Institutionalisation' – Greenhalgh is drawn to abstraction nouns – where he contrasts enthusiasts for change and technology, exemplified by Prince Albert, Lenin, Mussolini, J. F. Kennedy, Margaret Thatcher and George W. Bush, with those resistant to change and technology, specifically Captain Ludd, William Morris, the Pennsylvania Dutch, Mahatma Gandhi, Pol Pot and the Dalai Lama. The convincing point that emerges from this is that attitudes to technology and change can take all sorts of political forms: 'It was the politics of destruction or augmentation of the natural order, according to one’s point of view' (p. 69).

Morris finds himself in another list a little later under the heading 'Artistic Responses to Technology':

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From the romantic outbursts against machine conformity through the last three centuries, of William Blake, Charles Baudelaire, William Morris, Tristan Tzara, Andre Breton, Jean Baudrillard and many others, to the euphoric celebrations of mechanised power of Josiah Wedgwood, Joseph Wright of Derby, Christopher Dresser, F. T. Marinetti, Fernand Leger or Serge Chermayeff, arts commentators had a very strong sense of what technology was doing to them. (p.73)

But the fullest account of Morris occurs in a long section on ‘Alienation’, in which the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement are very fairly and illuminatingly described. Greenhalgh observes: ‘The division of labour was rejected in favour of fabrication that allowed the workmen, as social beings, to engage ideas and skill’.

Morris’s influence is said to have extended to ‘such diverse practitioners as Art Nouveau designers Emile Galle and Henri van der Velde, modernist architect and first director of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius, and seminal modern potter Bernard Leach’ (p.93). Following Morris, Walter Crane is quoted on art as ‘the spontaneous expression of the life and aspirations of a free people’. Greenhalgh notes of Crane that ‘His socialism edged into a kind of anarchist Utopianism that was not unusual within the Movement’ (p. 94). We can see this now as part of the complex process of social development in the early twentieth century as the Labour movement tried to mitigate the power of capital.

A later reference to Morris concerns Arts and Crafts’ hostility to Aestheticism, which is attributed to ‘a draconian moralism learned from Ruskin’ as well as, more persuasively, to ‘an inherent dislike of cosmopolitanism’ (p. 134). A more stylistic point is made in the discussion of the development of simplicity as an artistic ideal in the wake of the Great Exhibition. Greenhalgh draws attention to two aspects of this in relation to the Design Reform movement. He claims that in the later nineteenth century ‘nature became the stylistic template for advanced design’ (p. 161). But nature had to be treated in particular ways, through conventionalisation and through seeking to reproduce its structural logic. Morris is referred to under the first principle, as one of those ‘committed to the ordering of nature on the surface of things’ (p. 162), though Christopher Dresser is Greenhalgh’s preferred example of a designer embracing both principles.

The story that Greenhalgh tells here thus includes Morris as one of
its significant participants. But, as implied earlier, Greenhalgh sees Modernism as having faltered under Postmodernist criticism in the 1970s – he refers particularly to work by Theodor Adorno in politics, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard in social philosophy, and Stephen Jay Gould in science, all of which is said, convincingly, to have contributed to the loss of belief in progress and the assertion of a sceptical relativism that are characteristic of Postmodernism. However, Greenhalgh is bold enough to go beyond this point. In his final section, he discusses ‘The Ingredients of the Next Modern’, the movement, ideology or style that he hopes will emerge from the debris of the Postmodern to justify the claims of art in the near future by asserting its universality. In this context, Greenhalgh asserts, ‘One of the grand voices for the past is of use here’ (p. 253). He then quotes a well-known passage from William Morris’s 1883 lecture ‘The Lesser Arts’: ‘I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few …’ Greenhalgh suggests that ‘If we substitute “progress” for “art” in this statement, we have the beginnings of a politics of progress’ – clearly the idea or ideal that he wishes to promulgate. The idea of progress is not to be abandoned, but it must be extended:

Progress should always engage with the excitement of human achievement, in the joy of moon-landings. But there should be no joy anywhere while half of us are starving to death. (p. 253)

I am slightly uncomfortable with the use of ‘us’ here; starvation is fortunately uncommon in the West where we and Greenhalgh live. But it is a matter of both surprise and acclamation that a writer today should show himself unafraid to claim a grand future for art in the service of a universal human ideal, and pleasing to find him using Morris as an inspiration for that project.

Peter Faulkner

The story of John Millais’ betrayal is one of the most familiar in art history: as a young man he was the leading light of the Pre-Raphaelite avant-garde, but after roughly ten years of inspirational work his style became conventional and he ‘sold out’, producing – in quick succession – crowd-pleasing pot-boilers, portraits of his rich friends and sugary genre paintings of children; his trademark for the remainder of his long career.

Paul Barlow, who is Lecturer in the History of Art at the University of Northumbria and has published widely on many aspects of Victorian art, investigates the truth of this story, examining the paintings rather than the man and his myth. He initially looks at neither the paintings’ social context nor their subject matter, preferring to analyse closely their pictorial qualities. In doing this Barlow studies not only the artist’s work from his Pre-Raphaelite period, but also that of the (often despised) subsequent thirty years. This fresh approach leads to startling claims.

The first is that Millais never completely submitted to ‘academic’ conventionality.

A close inspection of the quick and free brushwork of, for instance, *The Eve of St Agnes* (1863), his portrait of *Louise Jopling* (1879) and *Caller Herrin*’ (1881), reveals how the artist experimented with a technique close to that used by innovators such as Whistler and Manet. However, Millais did not let these pictorial innovations take over the entire canvas, unlike Whistler and the French Impressionists who created almost purely visual works that anticipated abstraction. Millais always made his stylistic innovations readable to a wide audience by integrating them into a narrative context.

Barlow further suggests that Millais did not ‘sell out’. It cannot be denied that the artist painted a large number of commercial images, which were widely reproduced. Barlow agrees that this could be construed as Millais’ way of cleverly riding the wave of emerging mass consumerism, to which William Morris objected so much. Neither did Millais have any qualms about ‘ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich’; he accepted vast sums of money from them in exchange for
their portraits. Still, Barlow argues, Millais remained true to his artistic identity: both in the child paintings and his portraits of the great and the good he experimented with pictorial expression, while he based the compositions on the profound underlying themes that run practically through his entire career: those of struggle, transience and beauty.

Even while Millais was involved in popular work he kept painting complex 'serious pictures', although they often proved difficult to sell. These include The Knight Errant (1870), The North-West Passage (1874) and Mercy – St Bartholomew's Day 1572 (1886). In his analysis of such pictures Barlow looks beyond the overt masculine (often Imperialist) 'heroism' unmistakably present in a number of these representations and so rediscovers Millais as an artist who carefully studied, as well as understood, the art of the past and the present, and then integrated it into his own work. Barlow points out that, in The North-West Passage alone, Millais synthesises artistic influences as diverse as Whistler, Vermeer and Rembrandt. Elsewhere in the text Barlow brings to light how skillfully Millais was able to adapt stylistic elements of masters such as Titian, Velazquez and Reynolds.

Whereas previous studies usually focused on Millais' early, Pre-Raphaelite, period, Barlow approaches the artist's oeuvre as a whole. The thematic outline of the book makes it clear that Millais' style developed through several phases, often one from another, but that these did not occur in a neat chronological order. For example, as early as 1853 signs of Millais' post-Pre-Raphaelite manner were evident: The Order of Release, 1745 shows a departure from elaborate representations of nature, so typical of Pre-Raphaelite art at that time. However, botanical accuracy was to return to his later work frequently, even in a picture as late as The Little Speedwell's Darling Blue (1892).

In his final chapter, Barlow evaluates Millais' legacy. Why does the myth of Millais' rebellion, and the subsequent betrayal of his youthful talent, live on to this day? In his post-Pre-Raphaelite period, the artist did move towards populism. Although he kept experimenting with his style, he incorporated these innovations into popular narratives allowing a larger audience to appreciate his art. Barlow states, 'this should no more be seen as evidence of Millais “selling out” as an artist than that Dickens “sold out” as a writer' (p. 74). Millais did not see his art as part of a counter-culture; rather ‘[...] he saw [it] as fully a part of the social
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and intellectual culture in which he participated [...]’ (p. 199) and ‘He sought a modernity in art that rejected neither the past nor a popular appeal’ (p. 200). Modernist critics of the twentieth century, like Clement Greenberg, found this populism to be irreconcilable with their view of art as belonging to an avant-garde elite and even regarded it as a dangerous step towards the propagandistic representations favoured by totalitarian regimes. Consequently, they kept the story of Millais’ betrayal alive. Barlow argues that it is time we tried to understand Millais’ art within its own intellectual context and not that of the Modernism that reacted against it.

Paul Barlow’s engagingly written book helps us to appreciate John Millais’ work with a fresh eye. Moreover, the points he raises about Millais might well open similar discussion about other Victorian artists, and *Time Present and Time Past – The Art of John Everett Millais* is therefore a valuable instrument for any student of Victorian painting. For a book that has so many interesting ideas to convey about the painterly aspects of Millais’ work, it unfortunately includes only black-and-white illustrations. As a companion to the text, readers should visit www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/millais_john-everett.html, which has many excellent colour reproductions of Millais’ pictures.

*Nic Peeters*