In this large and lavishly illustrated book, Caroline Arscott of the Courtauld Institute offers a thoughtful and sometimes challenging account of the intimate and continuously productive relationship between Morris and Burne-Jones. She does not attempt to cover all aspects of the relationship, giving the reader instead a substantial introductory chapter followed by eight further chapters alternately devoted to one or other of the two artists. For Morris we have ‘The Gymnasium’, ‘Four Walls/ Heart and Flesh’, ‘The Primitive’ and ‘The River’, and for Burne-Jones ‘The Perseus series’, ‘The Briar Rose series’, ‘Burne-Jones’s View of Morris (Interlacings)’ and ‘Stained Glass’. Although a number of Burne-Jones’s works are fully discussed, the balance of attention is in fact given to Morris; the title of the seventh chapter suggests this, and it is also the case that the stained-glass window of the ‘Last Judgment’ in Birmingham Cathedral, the final work discussed, is seen as a tribute to the recently dead Morris. The book concludes: ‘it seems that he found a way of believing that being could survive physical dispersal. In the idea of an energised, material cosmos where there is a form of connection between all apparently separated entities Burne-Jones finally found a correlate, in his own terms, of the vision of embodied cosmic unity which is to be found in the work of William Morris.’ (p. 223)

As this quotation suggests, Arscott does not shrink from grand themes and formulations, and she conveys enthusiasm for the work of both men. The overall argument, though, is that Morris found in ornament a successful way of expressing his vision which eluded the more tentative and self-doubting Burne-Jones. This is linked to the argument that Burne-Jones found himself trapped between
history-painting and ornament – or decoration – and was able to emerge from this ‘bind’ at the very end of his life. Arscott’s argument is developed along New Historicist lines with references to a wide range of contemporary social activities and practices which may not immediately strike the reader as relevant. In the second chapter, for example we are given a detailed reading, with illustrations, of the manuals in physical training written by Archibald Maclaren, who ran the gymnasium in Oxford which both the young men attended; the claim is that ‘there is an evocation of physical strength’ in the early wallpaper designs, which are said to ‘reference the human body’. (p. 29) In ‘Four Walls/ Heart and Flesh’ we encounter, less surprisingly, illuminated illustrations to Froissart manuscripts in the British Museum, but we are particularly encouraged to engage with the ‘Bal D’Ardents’ in which the costumes of the dancers have caught fire; to read these manuscripts with a sense of ‘the sharing of substance between surface and flesh into the depth of the living body’, is, we are told, ‘to read them in terms that are central to Morris’s own project’. (p. 91) In the chapter on ‘The Primitive’ we are led into a discussion of contemporary anthropology and its accounts of art in early societies, with a good deal of attention to the practice of tattooing, especially in relation to Maori culture and to Tawhaio the Maori king, who was brought to London in 1884 and created a sensation. (This accounts for the surprising appearance on the cover of the book of the figure of a tattooed ‘Caroline Islander’ standing between Burne-Jones’s Prince about to enter the Briar Wood and Morris’s Cray design). And the chapter on ‘The River’ provides a quite detailed account, again illustrated, of Victorian angling. This is related to the discussions of the fabric designs of the 1880s, especially of Eyebright and those in the series named after rivers, many of which, as Arscott accurately observes, ‘have a strong diagonal emphasis which does suggest the rush of the current in a river’. (p. 177)

The chapters on Burne-Jones also range widely. In that on the Perseus series, his interest in armour is emphasised, and the idea that armour is ‘a prosthetic extension of the body’. (p. 58) In The Doom Fulfilled, we are told, bodies are central: Andromeda is ‘intact skin’, Perseus ‘anatomised to the subcutaneous muscle’ and the Monster exposed as ‘internal organs and viscera’. (p. 73) This is then related to contemporary military discourse and the development of armaments in the period. In the chapter on the Briar Rose series of four paintings a strong contrast is drawn between the ‘apparently flaking figure of the hero’ and the ‘alternative bodily form (full, burgeoning, invasive, hardy)’ of the briar rose which is shown invading all four canvases, which leads to a consideration of the contemporary literature of horticulture, including the process of grafting. Psy-
Chological suggestions are then put forward: the rose is ‘firstly a hypostatization of the Princess’s body gone wild’ (p. 123), but perhaps also represents the Prince’s unconscious, ‘the hysterical analogue of his trauma’. (p. 124) Nevertheless, and perhaps in some tension with these suggestions, the series overall is seen as indicating a move on Burne-Jones’s part away from the narrative of history-painting towards the non-narrative of the decorative. The chapter on Burne-Jones’s view of Morris draws on his caricatures, in which their two bodies are often amusingly contrasted, and also on some of his more grotesque drawings, as of the tattooed lady Emma de Burgh about whom a good deal of detail is provided. (pp. 158–60) The final chapter, on the stained glass of Morris and Co., offers an account of the network formed by the lead-lines in windows, in relation to Burne-Jones’s welcoming of technical constraints in his work, summarised in his striking remark, ‘I love to work in that fettered way’. (p. 209)

For me, however, the strongest appeal of the book was not to be found in these scholarly excursions, or in its more general ideas. What impressed me were the numerous passages in which wallpapers, textiles and stained glass received the benefit of Arscott’s full critical attention. In these she shows herself to be a very skilled ‘close reader’ indeed, as well as an enthusiast for Morris’s designs. A wide range of these receive illuminating treatment as the book moves forward in its generally chronological way. We begin with the early wallpapers, move on to the more dramatic designs of the middle period and the slightly less crowded river patterns, and end with the fiery power of the Birmingham stained glass. Of _Trellis_ (1862), ‘There is a primitivism here, a turning away from sophistication and elegance in order to find a simple beauty and direct experience.’ (p. 31) But in the 1870s this changes: ‘His most ambitious designs of the period 1872–6 [special attention is given to _Jasmine_ (1872) and _Acanthus_ (1875)] are extraordinary, powerful tangles of plant life’ (p. 32) – the word ‘tangles’ neatly suggesting the increased complexity and energy of these design. Later there is a consideration of ‘the crowded, forceful designs of the 1870s’ such as _Tulip_ (1875), _Columbine_ (1876) and _Honeysuckle_ (1876) (p. 95). ‘Geometry rules the pattern but we are finally made to wonder how geometry can survive in a chock-full visual zone where the mutant clasp of tendrils offers both a pull down and a climbing up and where the pulse of life pushes pattern elements in and out of a three-dimensional complex.’ (p. 97) In a striking and challenging formulation Arscott asserts that ‘the perimeter of the garden of Eden has effectively been breached and the joy of paradise is being explored, subversively, in the realm of toil’, because, for Morris, ‘ornament was always a means to access the world at large’ (p. 103) A design
such as *Pimpernel* (1876) ‘speaks of thickness of substance and the strength of the woven-together system’. (p. 134) In her account of the designs that bring together animals and plants such as *Brother Rabbit* (1882) and *Strawberry Thief* (1883), Arscott notes insightfully that ‘they do not set the animals in opposition to the plant life but show a symbiotic involvement and imply a sharing of substance. The potential spring of the rabbit coming from the muscly back legs is just like the unfurling of a leaf, a common concentrated energy exists in plant and animal life.’ (p. 171) When the discussion moves on to the river patterns, we are told in the account of *Eyebright* (1883) that the design suggests the river by the a way in which the ‘clumps of water plantain arranged along a distinct horizontal line [are] suggestive of the water’s edge’, so that it is ‘hard to escape the suggestion that there is a thematisation here of vision and perspective’. (p. 177) In the other river designs of the 1880s, it is argued, there is less congestion and entanglement than in the designs of the 1870s: ‘This is not achieved by emptying out and flattening the design but by a more sudden diminution of scale from the giant shaggy flowers on their muscular stems, indicating poppies, tulips, sunflowers or marigolds, to the smaller tracery of delicate twisting plants with serrated leaves and spiralling stems; little blossoms and buds, serrated leaves, or tendrils and tiny berries which seem to indicate a layer at some considerable distance in the depth of the pattern.’ (p. 191) Such close observation leads the reader gratefully back to designs that he or she may think he or she knows well, but which are here brought to fuller life. (The lavish illustrations play an important part).

Arscott comes to a triumphant conclusion in her account of *The Last Judgment*, which she calls ‘the most glorious and dynamic of the four windows in the church’. (p. 219) Above, we have the figure of Christ surrounded by a crowd of angels filling the entire upper part of the composition. Moving down, we see ‘an amazing tumbling cityscape where the falling towers lean this way and that as askew, cubic building elements’, and below, ‘the revived dead . . . face randomly in all directions’. ‘The sluggish turmoil of the awakening dead can give way to the vibrating poise of the angels because there is unity of substance between heaven and earth.’ To this she adds: ‘Heaven is within reach, but humanity has been subjected to radical cutting and splicing of flesh to arrive at this point.’ (p. 220) I find this last sentence tendentious in a way that the sentences preceding it were not, which is a way of re-stating my divided response to this highly interesting book. On the one hand I am led to see and explore the Morris’s designs in appreciative detail; on the other, I am asked to follow arguments into areas that seem to lead away from what is most important to me in Morris or Burne-Jones. This
is clearly not because Arscott does not admire Morris’s achievement; she makes her admiration abundantly and attractively clear. Nevertheless she locates him in Victorian culture in ways I sometimes find puzzling. But the book is so lively and challenging that I would urge members to read it and make up their own minds about the questions raised in this review.

Paul Faulkner


The architect Hermann Muthesius (1861–1927) was employed as cultural and technical attaché at the German embassy in London between 1896 and 1903, at the height of Britain’s prosperity and confidence. His brief was to report on British art and architecture, whose ethos and development had come to general notice in Germany through the writings of Carlyle, Ruskin and Morris and the popularity of The Studio magazine and other art journals. He was also instructed to study domestic technology: Crown Princess Victoria had insisted upon the installation of modern bathrooms in the Berlin palace and English developments in hygiene and sanitation were of particular interest. Das englishe Haus was the culmination of his research. Muthesius and his family came to live in ‘The Priory’, Hammersmith, in the same month that Morris died, and to him Morris was already an influential, historical figure, quoted and admired throughout this book but criticised for the earlier, rather excessive, use of pattern in his decorative schemes. Muthesius’s contemporaries were Voysey, Lethaby, Baillie Scott, Lutyens and Mackintosh, the new men of architecture and interior decoration. Some were also his friends.

The English House is the first complete English translation, of the second edition (1908–11), of Das englishe Haus. The book is directed specifically at a German, continental, audience, taking the objective viewpoint of a foreigner and intended to educate and inspire emulation. Its methodology is taxonomic and scientific. Historical developments are delineated in order to emphasise their continuing influence. The first volume relates the historical development of the
English house from the Saxon period and the second its layout and construction, whilst the third examines its interior. However, the largest portion of the book concentrates on developments in architecture and interiors between 1860 and 1904, incidentally providing an affectionate account of English society and its mores, ten years before the irrevocable changes of the First World War. It is this section which makes the book particularly absorbing. The accessible text is liberally illustrated with contemporary photographs, detailed plans of houses and gardens, and engravings. Even the interior of Muthesius’s own house in Hammersmith is illustrated (Vol. 1, p. 75).

Muthesius emphasises the English love of the countryside, their gardens and their homes and the ‘flight into nature’ from towns from the 1860s onwards. (Vol. 2, p. 138) Country living was believed to possess ethical advantages, tied in as it was with notions of security, comfort, morality, tradition, and the appropriate environment for the education of children. He writes, ‘In England one does not “live” in the city, one merely stays there’ (Vol. 1, p. 4) and, ‘metropolitan living conditions make for instability, dissipation and shallowness in human society’. (Vol. 1, 6) The town house is merely an adaptation, under duress, of the house in the country. It funnels its dimensions vertically rather than horizontally. As we might expect, the Arts and Crafts movement is closely identi

It is most instructive to note … that a movement opposing the imitation of styles and seeking closer ties with simple rural buildings … has had the most gratifying results. … The aim is to adapt the house closely to its surroundings and to attempt to make house and garden into a unified, closely-knit whole. (Vol. 1, p. 9)

The following quote could have come from House and Garden in 2009 and illustrates that the philosophy of garden design has not changed in more than one hundred years:

The garden is seen as a continuation of the rooms of the house, almost a series of separate out-door rooms, each of which is self-contained and performs a separate function. Thus the garden extends the house into the midst of nature. At the same time it gives it a framework in nature, without which it would stand like a stranger in its surroundings. (Vol. 2, p. 85)

However, Muthesius is as scathing in his criticism of the landscape architecture of Capability Brown and his disciples as he is of Palladian architecture. His ideal garden makes no pretence of naturalism and he cites Morris, perhaps
contrary to our own received wisdom, who ‘lost no opportunity to emphasise the confusion that he believed lay behind the idea of the landscape garden’.

Like so much else that was new at this time, the small garden at his house in Bexley Heath reflected the earlier concept of a formal garden. … The whole of the artistic community, whether they were members of the circle surrounding William Morris or supporters of the new movement in architecture, was convinced of the superiority of the formal garden over the landscape garden. It was a point in their programme for which the artists of this generation were prepared to lay down their lives. Doubts in the rightness of this conviction are now inconceivable on the part of anyone in England with an interest in the arts. (Vol. 1, p. 217)

_The English House_ is a misleading title. The book makes no attempt to examine ‘tasteless speculative housing … wretched, absolutely uniform small houses’, but rather the ‘sound and unostentatious but finely developed taste of … an up-to-date national art … purely functional, unaffected design that many may already regard as more modern than all the fantastic excesses of a so-called modern style.’ (Vol. 1, p. xxvii) In fact, the majority of the marvellous houses studied by Muthesius are mansions or large country houses. Many of the town houses are huge, and certainly not representative of the dwellings of the majority of the population. He realises that life in such houses ‘of course … assumes the existence of armies of servants and has something strongly patriarchal about it; it also … permits one to doubt whether future social development will allow it to continue for much longer’. (Vol. 2, pp. 238–239) Flats were only just becoming acceptable for middle-class life in Town at this period, but Norman Shaw’s Albert Hall Mansions provided an example of the best on offer. (Vol. 2, 155–160) One of the shortest chapters in Volume 2 concerns itself with houses lived in by the lower middle class, and Shaw’s houses in Bedford Park were also originally intended for the lower middle class, although they enjoyed seven bedrooms in the semi-detached houses and eight bedrooms and a library in the detached houses! (Vol. 1, 134–135)

The servant class and the gentry existed in parallel in the English house; they were inextricably dependant upon each other but treated each other’s space with respect. Houses were zoned and divided internally into spaces for master and mistress, servants and children:

All the arrangements for the smooth running of the service areas were precisely formulated, and rooms were allocated to each individual activity. The service-rooms and living accommodation were designed in such a way as to ensure
that each group formed an independent, self-contained whole, so that masters and servants were now granted the same right of independence, the same privacy that the master and mistress of the household valued so highly for themselves. In short, this was the period that produced the whole far-reaching science of domestic planning … Herein lies the nineteenth century’s true cultural contribution to the English house. This is the work of science and hence a true child of a scientific century. (Vol. 1, pp. 93–94)

There were gendered spaces in every home: the cloakroom, the library, the smoking room, the billiard room, the study and the dressing room were all the preserves of the men of the house, while the drawing room, the morning room, the bedroom and the boudoir were spaces under female jurisdiction. Muthesius suggests that: ‘the bedroom belongs essentially to the woman and it might almost be said that the man merely enters it as her guest, as we have seen him doing in the drawing room, the main room of the house’. (Vol. 2, p. 56) Servants’ quarters were also strictly gendered, men and women only generally meeting in order to eat. There were separate work spaces for men and women, and often separate staircases to male and female sleeping quarters. (Vol. 2, p. 64) Rôles were strictly prescribed. The mistress was in charge of all entertaining and visiting but at this period she had little backstairs influence in a large house and according to Muthesius never set foot in the kitchen. (Vol. 2, p. 9) Like a theatre, the servants’ quarters were backstage, the reception rooms stage front. Behaviour was designed to fit the space, one took tea and displayed impeccable manners in the drawing room but relaxed in the billiard room. There were conventions in planning, in the logical placing of rooms and in their orientation, not only to provide privacy for master and servant but to make the best use of climatic conditions. There were rules about furnishings: oil paintings were separated from water colours and water-colours from prints. (Vol. 3, p. 166) The lady of the house slept on the left side of the double bed so that she could be close to the territory on her side of the room, with its dressing table under the window. Days were divided arbitrarily, so that servants could easily replicate duties in one household or another and Muthesius suggests that they would down tools and leave if the conventions were not observed. Mealtimes had a strict timetable, the gentry took a ‘hot breakfast with meat dishes at nine o’clock, a simple hot lunch at one o’clock, tea with bread and butter at four o’clock and a generous main meal (dinner) at seven o’clock. The servants, however, have breakfast at eight, lunch at twelve, a generous meal with tea at five and cold supper at nine o’clock.’ (Vol. 2, p. 10) Visitors need not
question the structure of the day and the machine functioned seamlessly.

The English house was also a place of education and cultural display, although Muthesius continually reiterates the general restraint of the Englishman in decoration and behaviour. Children were taught manners as well as the curriculum in the nursery. Table manners were considered to be particularly important. Little boys were sent away to school at an appropriate age but girls were educated at home. The library with its generous displays of books was considered a most important cultural space and Muthesius describes money being lavished on beautiful books, which few read. The drawing room always had its grand piano, which ‘in view of the fact that the English are probably the most unmusical race in the world … is slightly surprising.’ (Vol. 3, p. 201)

In Volume 3, Muthesius follows historical developments in style and taste in the interior, before concentrating upon the Arts and Crafts house. He loves Robert Adam, ‘the first interior designer in England’ (Vol. 3, p. 42) and compares his achievements with the horrors of High Victorian interiors, where ‘a vulgar mania for display contrived with the cheapest effects’ and the age ‘set a premium on imitation’:

Papier mâché that looked like metal, stucco almost indistinguishable from stone … wallpapers that gave the illusion of marble facings, oil-painting that deceptively imitated woodgrain. (Vol. 3, p. 70)

It is a familiar story, the Great Exhibition of 1851 illuminating the grossness of High Victorian design, the Gothicists being ‘the first to put their finger on the sore place’:

From Pugin onwards it was the belief of the whole Gothic camp that salvation must come from the Middle Ages. Ruskin and Morris shared their belief. By directing attention back to the flourishing state of handicrafts in the Middle Ages, to the solid and workmanlike quality, proficiency and even genius of the old hand-made products, they believed themselves to be pointing to the right road to improvement. … The idea certainly seemed a good one, but they forgot that the social and economic conditions of the two eras were totally different. … The short-sightedness that accompanied their inspiration was essential if they were to storm their way forwards. Once the movement had gathered momentum, another way out emerged: the way of modern art. (Vol. 3, pp. 72–73)

Muthesius admires Arts and Crafts interiors, but for him the work of Adam
and Sheraton ‘had reached a level of artistic perfection that has not yet been equalled in general today, despite all the good work of the new art’:

The only real and important advances [in the nineteenth century] have been made in the fields of comfort and sanitation. And so here too we have to look for real cultural achievement … in work of a scientific character.’ (Vol. 3, p. 87)

Indeed, Muthesius emphasises England’s most important contribution to the scientific and technological developments of the nineteenth century through the use of electricity, gas, water and drainage in the home:

Houses now became veritable networks of pipes, supply-pipes and waste-pipes, pipes of every kind, for hot water, heating, electric light, for the news service, so that they resembled complex organisms with arteries, veins and nerves like the human body. (Vol. 3, p. 88)

He studies the regulations governing sewage and other waste, and the advantages and disadvantages of the available hardware and hot water systems, the appropriate uses of slop sinks and the positioning of water closets:

More important even than the question of comfort in the process of the transformation of the house during the nineteenth century was the question of sanitation. The work done in this field is perhaps seen in the clearest and most concentrated form in the concept of the water-closet. Coming under the heading of necessary, rather than aesthetic, elements in the house, this object is the most outstanding evidence of domestic improvement in the nineteenth century. And England, as the country of its birth, has every reason to be proud of it. (Vol. 3, p. 88)

However, Muthesius is also very susceptible to the dream of beauty and home embodied in the English country house and its closeness to nature:

In general one has the impression that the sequestered character of these houses is deliberate. But he who penetrates into their preserves responds the more overwhelmingly to the beauty of the fairy-tale world that opens up before him. Here is marvellous, paradisian peace, here reigns a higher way of life, consummately cultivated. The house appears before us, surrounded by a mass of flowers, wide lawns resplendent in the richest of greens extend before the downstairs rooms. Beyond them, pergolas, orchards, meadows and woods seem to stretch away into the distance. A perfect, secluded world of its own, a little paradise on earth. Here, if anywhere, is a surviving fragment of the old, placid way of life that stands,
lonely as an island, in the brief transience of the modern world. Life here is lived far from the world, its dissipations apparently unperceived. The owner of the house enjoys an idyllic existence in the bosom of nature, continually in touch with her powerful heart-beat that prevents his vitality from flagging; he is master of his land and of a widely ramifying body of dependants, for whom he cares with patriarchal solicitude. (Vol. 2, p. 33)

Dennis Sharp’s introduction gives an informative overview of Muthesius’s achievements and delightful photographs of Muthesius and his family and servants in their Hammersmith house illustrate the text. Their furnishings form an eclectic mixture of English antiques, Japanese prints and vases and Persian carpets. Janet Seligman’s translation, supplemented by Stewart Spencer, is so good as to be unnoticeable. Volume 3, page 87, carries the same mistake twice: Eastlake’s book is described as ‘Eastman’s influential Hints on Household Taste’, and on page 80, Charles Faulkner, Fellow of University College, Oxford, is described as ‘a civil servant connected with building’. Of course, he was employed ‘drawing nuts and bolts’ for a time, but there was rather more to him than that. It is unclear whether these mistakes are Muthesius’s, or have occurred in translation, but in any event they are perhaps excusable in such large and comprehensive volumes. Das englishe Haus was very influential on the continent, but was not available in an abridged English translation until 1979, although extracts were quoted freely. One of the most important source books for studies of the interior, design, architectural and social histories, this edition is beautifully boxed and presented and decorated in catkin green with a suitably Morrisian pattern. The bindings are in fine linen, the title stamped and decorated in a design in gold, reputedly by Frances McNair. It provides an indispensable source of reference for any library.

Diana Andrews


For several decades of his life, Edward Carpenter was a hero and sage for many radical left-wingers whilst also hated by the conservative establishment. On some issues occupying the fringe, on others a leading spokesperson for a mass move-
ment gathering momentum, he was a gifted communicator and astute networker who nearly always achieved a large and diverse audience for his ideas and opinions. In posterity, he warrants recognition as an early and persuasive exponent of organicism, gender equality, ethical consumption, prison reform, animal welfare, ‘rational’ (i.e. informal and comfortable) dress, sunbathing, naturism, and New-Age spirituality, but perhaps most significant of all, beginning almost as a lone voice, for his courageous advocacy of gay rights. That more than a few of Carpenter’s views no longer appear extreme is in large measure due to his far-reaching vision and hard work. However, towards the end of his life, it seemed that the ethical socialism which he espoused and even personified was out of date, an embarrassing set of cranky causes of which the Labour Movement, determined to maximise popular support and thereby enter government through the ballot box, would best be rid. As the original bearded, sandal-wearing vegetarian, Carpenter’s image remains unfortunate for his reputation.

Carpenter belongs to the left-libertarian strand of political theory and agitation. For him, ‘democracy’ was, in Sheila Rowbotham’s summary, ‘neither political nor economic, but a new way of being human, a new manner of encountering others’ (p. 71); and his manifold convictions coalesced around a concept which, from around 1909 onwards, he would describe as ‘The Larger Socialism’, a model of living which would bring, as Rowbotham says, ‘new forms of associating and relating, a new aesthetic of the everyday in harmony with nature’ (p. 315). This vision derives a great deal from Henry David Thoreau’s green anarchism, Walt Whitman’s robust humanism, and William Morris’s promotion of fellowship and the need for beautiful surroundings and intrinsically rewarding work.

However, the mature Morris insisted on the imperative to redistribute wealth as a prerequisite for social harmony and universal personal fulfilment. Furthermore, unlike Carpenter, Morris was convinced that nothing short of revolution was required to achieve this goal. Yet even if, in common with Morris, he wanted these changes to occur as soon as possible, Carpenter appears to have differed from him by believing in the possibility of eventually achieving full social and economic justice through a series of gradual reforms, instigated through cultural channels and led by enlightened (progressively minded) individuals and groups. Rowbotham scrutinises this issue further: ‘He developed a pragmatic approach to strategies for change, proposing that accepting there could be differing ways of journeying to a broadly similar destination would save a great deal of fruitless argument about how to bring about change.’ (p. 455)

Probably more than any of the early British socialists, Carpenter deserves to
be credited with showing that dissidence, organisation and agitation can be fun: ‘(he) swept his socialists, adorned in delightful clothes, into a whirl of festivals, play-acting, dances, music and frequent holidays’. (p. 315) Here Rowbotham could easily be describing the late 1960s as experienced by the middle-class youth of Western Europe and the USA; indeed, it was at that time that Carpenter’s attitude and ideals gained widespread currency, even if few people realised this heritage. The ‘simple life’, not only advocated but clearly exemplified by Carpenter, was not one of arbitrary self-denial. Quite otherwise; freed from unnecessary material burdens and the endless business of making money, it created space for more pleasure in its participants’ daily experience. It also possessed the altruistic advantages of less consumption of finite resources and more proximity to socioeconomic equality than the conventional lifestyles from which it was so strikingly different. As Carpenter himself promised: ‘We will show in ourselves that the simplest life is as good as any, that we are not ashamed of it … and we will so adorn it that the rich and idle shall enviously leave their sofas and gilded saloons [sic] and come and join hands with us in it’. (quoted, p. 77) In Rowbotham’s assessment:

The utopian energy which carried Carpenter and his friends along in the early 1880s overflowed into subsequent decades, inspiring ventures in communal living and working, progressive educational experiments, alternative diets, fashion and décor. It also fostered ideas about ethical consumption and a conviction that theorising social change involved living some part of the future in the here and now. (p. 105)

What most distinguishes Carpenter in the milieu of utopian craftspeople who followed on from Morris was ‘his belief that transforming society must include nature, the body and sexuality’. (p. 185) His decision, in 1893, to write about these matters, including homosexuality, was, as Rowbotham observes, ‘consistent with Carpenter’s tendency to seek out broad alliances rather than to isolate himself’. (pp. 189–90) Moreover, the other three pamphlets which he wrote then gave Homogenic Love apparent objectivity as a subject of study and implicitly moral legitimacy as an actual orientation: ‘He could appear as a writer on sexual topics in general, rather than a homosexual pleading a case’. (p. 190) Homogenic Love is historically important as ‘the first British statement by a homosexual man, linking emancipation to social transformation’. (ibid) Also significant, ‘By writing his [other] sex pamphlets alongside Homogenic Love, Carpenter fostered a connection between new sexual relations, the emancipation of women and the creation of a free society’, which was ‘a remarkable step because the affinity
between them was [at that time] by no means self-evident’. (p. 209) The book entitled Love’s Coming of Age, in which all of his sex pamphlets were collected, was published in 1896, and it was mostly in this format that they were read. Even if the contents of this volume ‘implied far more than met the eye’, it is the prime instance of Carpenter ‘at his most adroit when presenting extreme views in a moderate tone, an ability which enabled him to appeal to a broad constituency’. (p. 218) Rowbotham comments: ‘His guile cleared countless paths into the next century’ (ibid.).

Far from being merely a polemicist, ‘Carpenter’s approach to social change was imbued with the idea of personal action’. (p. 77) When he abandoned a conventionally respectable position in Cambridge academia to work instead as a lecturer for industrial workers in Yorkshire, and subsequently took on a small-holding where he himself engaged in manual labour and carried its produce to market with a pony and trap, it was a career path previously unknown and incomprehensible; and it was downright shocking for being not only rejection but a direct challenge to the prevailing values of late-Victorian society. Most daring of all, he openly – albeit without proclamation – lived at Millthorpe Cottage in a permanent gay partnership with George Merrill, a former razor-grinder, who worked the land alongside him. This too exercised a prophetic function: ‘To a new generation the two men’s life at Millthorpe assumed mythical qualities of cross-class comradeship, ascetic self-sufficiency and utopian communal life’. (p. 261) Even if they ‘may not have been quite as the pilgrims perceived them’ (ibid.), in the perception of many gay, lesbian and bisexual people they were idealised as ‘culture heroes, the exemplars of a free union which transcended the grim externals of everyday codes and laws’ (ibid.).

Carpenter argued: ‘If anyone will only think for a minute of his own inner nature he will see that the only society which would ever really satisfy him would be one in which he was perfectly free, and yet bound by ties of deepest trust to the other members’. (quoted, pp. 244–5) Rowbotham adds that ‘Carpenter also thought people could only be free when they cared for their neighbours as well as themselves’. (p. 245) This principle, of individual freedom achieved and maintained through the intricate personal relationships voluntarily entailed in yet also necessary for the maintenance of community life, highlights another strong ideological connection with Morris, who championed ‘that true society of loved and lover, parent and child, friend and friend … which exists by its own inherent right and reason, in spite of what is usually thought to be the cement of society, arbitrary authority’ (‘True and False Society’, 1888). In this matter, it also
positions him alongside Peter Kropotkin as a champion of mutual aid as the main requirement of a genuinely free society. When Carpenter spoke of ‘The Religion of Socialism’ (a term which Morris had occasionally used in his journalism), he meant – in Rowbotham’s summary – ‘a democracy of personal relationships based on respect for all human beings and a solidarity which embraced all living creatures’. (p. 315) However, on a few occasions in his writings, notoriously, his usual kindness and respect for fellow humans failed to include Jews (that is, presented as a category; his actual treatment of individuals did not differentiate between Jews and others). Carpenter’s anti-Semitism must be recognised alongside his other – generally liberal – attitudes in an honest depiction and appraisal of the man, which Rowbotham has scrupulously provided in this biography. She shows how ‘Carpenter’s life at Millthorpe had taught him that change had to be acceptable to local people and this meant it must grow out of existing roots’ (p. 311); yet, being unwilling to accept the status quo of rural society that included an almost rigid social hierarchy and severe deprivation for the least fortunate people, he ‘dreamed of a transformed co-operative rural community with allotments, public playgrounds and public cricket grounds’. (ibid.) The youth club established by Carpenter and Merrill in a barn in nearby Holmesfield was a success. Thinking beyond local concerns, Carpenter also ‘imagined afforestation schemes and proposed that “wilder moors and mountains” should be preserved by county councils or by the State as animal and bird sanctuaries, nature reserves where everyone could wander’ (ibid.), in this respect adopting the vision first set forth by William Wordsworth (in his case specifically regarding the Lake District), and shared most influentially by John Ruskin and John Muir, as well as Morris, culminating in the national parks of Britain, the USA and other countries.

In this biography, the roll-call of individuals whom Carpenter knew is so impressive as to be almost overwhelming. Here are George Bernard Shaw, Tom Mann, Keir Hardie, Tom Maguire and virtually every other notable early British socialist; Arts-and-Crafts practitioners such as C.R. Ashbee; the composer Granville Bantock; writers ranging from Walt Whitman to Olive Schreiner to Rabindranath Tagore, and those of the next generation including E.M. Forster, Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke and Robert Graves; the sexologist Havelock Ellis; the birth-control campaigners Marie Stopes and Margaret Sanger; and the leading feminists Charlotte Despard, Constance Lytton and Isabella Ford. Morris, who qualifies under several of the above categories, is often mentioned by Rowbotham, most valuably in comparison with Carpenter, as a means to define
the latter’s views. For instance:

Both men’s politics arose from a longing for free and equal human relations and both imagined these as enabling individuals to realise aspects of themselves denied under capitalism. Morris and Carpenter were utopians in the sense that they regarded politics as the means to an end; the end being a new way of living. Their conception of socialism was broad in sweep, carrying perceptions, relationships, daily life, the environment and art along with it. (p. 83)

Most of us would endorse this assessment of Morris’s final political perspective. Moreover, when we read that, around 1910 or ’11, as Carpenter travelled around Britain delivering his lectures on ‘Beauty in Civic Life’, ‘he kept extending the scope of syndicalism to include the making of beautiful things, the creation of beautiful surroundings, beautiful clothes and beautiful people’, (p. 320) we might be reminded of News from Nowhere, even though it is not cited on this occasion. Rowbotham remarks that Carpenter ‘never quite shed his Morris-style suspicion of parliament as a means of securing change’ (p. 317); but they differed in their preferred methods of achieving their largely similar ideal societies. Morris, who was not concerned with ‘spiritual redemption’, envisaged himself ‘working alongside workers or sharing craft skills with them, not as a deliverer or a seer’. (p. 84) In contrast, Carpenter was ‘in essence an ideas man’ who would undertake a practical role solely from his sense of duty. (p. 176) He ‘devised a flexible version of socialism with anarchist stripes which put the emphasis on changing everyday living and behaviour’. (p. 1) Perhaps that emphasis is not so different from Morris’s as Rowbotham supposes. However, there were also ‘significant differences’ between their personalities and outlooks. Morris appears to have been uncomfortable in most social interactions outside his small circle of trusted friends, whereas Carpenter’s usual manner was genially self-assured even with strangers and he was rarely flustered by antagonism. And Morris – in this respect a typical middle-class Victorian – was unwilling to discuss sexual matters, whereas Carpenter – even by today’s standard – was clearly at ease with sexuality and discussing that topic. (see pp. 83–4) Rowbotham observes: ‘These personal and psychological dissimilarities meant the two men were never close, despite the confluence in their politics’. (p. 84) Carpenter emerges as a true Morrisian, though not a doctrinaire follower; as someone who, in the light of his own experience and judgement, and following his own inclinations, both developed and augmented the key principles formulated by Morris. It would be difficult to exaggerate Carpenter’s importance in applying Morris’s ideals to daily life in
a back-to-the-land context, demonstrating its practicality and enduring appeal. The legacy of that example endures and indeed flourishes today. Forster paid tribute to Carpenter thus:

The two things he admired most on earth were manual work and the fresh air, and he dreamed like William Morris that civilization would be cured by their union. … What he wanted was News from Nowhere and the place that is still nowhere, wildness, the rapture of unpolluted streams, sunrise and sunset over the moors, and in the midst of these the working people whom he loved, passionately in touch with one another and with the natural glories around them. (quoted, pp. 441–2)

This utopian dream resonates especially strongly in our current situation of economic crisis, social disintegration, constant war, rapidly dwindling natural resources and impending environmental catastrophe. It seems that the time is ripe for Carpenter to be remembered and reassessed.

It is staggering to learn that, eighty years since his death, this is the first substantial biography of Edward Carpenter. Being a distinguished social historian and a prominent socialist-feminist, Sheila Rowbotham is superbly qualified to undertake this challenge. The resulting book is wholly worthy of its subject: comprehensive yet sufficiently detailed, sympathetic whilst also candid and prudent, and eloquently written yet with the full scholarly apparatus of notes and sources. It is to be hoped that this excellent account of his life and outlook will help to re-establish Carpenter’s position as one of the most significant early British socialists, as a crucially important sexual revolutionary, and as a pioneer of sustainable living, and that it will accordingly encourage further study of his ideas and example.

Martin Haggerty


‘Ten years to read, ten years to write’: Herbert Tucker self-deprecatingly quotes Coleridge’s formula for ‘the epic labour he never accomplished’ to describe his own labours in producing this monumental book. Behind Coleridge’s formula lies, of course, an allusion to the Odyssey and its hero’s twenty-year journey home:
easy to say that this book about the epic is itself an epic, as if by epic one meant no more than ‘long’, yet Tucker has certainly been on an extraordinary journey and visited some marvellous and little-known places. The book, in short, is a remarkable scholarly achievement, bringing under review an astonishing range of epic poems, some of which are well-known whilst others have defeated their few readers ever since their publication. Tucker reckons to discuss in detail about thirty-six poems, whilst contextualising them with knowledgeable allusions to literally hundreds more; when I say that these are all epic poems (which in this context does indeed mean long) you will begin to get some idea of the scale of the project and the scholarly labours which underlie it.

Yet this massive accumulation is itself part of the point of the book, which is aimed in large part at correcting the notion that epic was a dead or exhausted genre during the nineteenth century – though indeed reports of its demise long predate the starting-point, 1790, of Tucker’s volume. This is not merely a matter of an inert literary history, as though by reminding us of so many long-forgotten poems one could correct a misapprehension just as one might seek to refute the death of God by pointing to the persistence of extensive treatises of theology long after Darwin and Nietzsche. Rather, Tucker seeks to argue that epic as a genre in the nineteenth century carries significant cultural energies not satisfied, especially, by its apparently triumphant competitor, the novel. These energies are above all related to epic’s capacity to tell a story central to the origins and destiny of a collectivity, be it tribe, ethnos, nation or humanity. From Blake, Scott, Wordsworth, Southey and Byron at one end of the long nineteenth century, through to Hardy (The Dynasts), Swinburne, Alfred Noyes and Charles Doughty at the other, Tucker provides detailed and sophisticated readings of the epic corpus, on a decade-by-decade basis, which track the fortunes of the genre and its capacity to speak to the historic transformations of nineteenth-century Britain and its place in the world. One of the principal actors in what is nevertheless a very large cast is William Morris, whose Earthly Paradise attracts substantial discussion as well as Sigurd the Volsung, but whose The Life and Death of Jason, epic translations, and The Pilgrims of Hope also receive significant mentions.

Tucker’s essentially chronological method nevertheless means that The Earthly Paradise and Sigurd the Volsung appear in different chapters and thus, according to Tucker’s chosen method, in very different contexts. The earlier poem, published in the 1860s, features in a chapter on ‘the mythological epic’, and thus makes its bow alongside Tennyson’s Idylls of the King, George Eliot’s The Spanish Gypsy, and Browning’s The Ring and the Book – not to mention, though Tucker certainly
does, Alexander Smith’s *Edwin of Deira* (1861), William Stigand’s *Athenäis: or, The First Crusade* (1866), the anonymous *The Last Crusader* (1867), and Jean Ingelow’s *A Story of Doom* (1867). Whether these very diverse poems do in fact belong significantly together on any other basis than sheer contemporaneity—whether, in other words, it is possible to trace in them and the decadal transformations which the whole book chronicles anything like the intimations of a *zeitgeist*, to which Tucker is persistently drawn—is perhaps the hardest question to put to the whole project. However, the immediate contrasts of *The Earthly Paradise* with its strongest compeers is indeed illuminating: with Eliot’s poem on the basis of their figuring of ethnic loyalties; with *The Ring and the Book* as poems built on multiple and contradictory perspectives; and with *The Idylls of the King* on their differing anthological re-use of mythological material. Considering that Morris is almost one of the heroes of Tucker’s book, the account which emerges of *The Earthly Paradise* is surprisingly unsympathetic, and is cognate with E.P. Thompson’s repudiation of the poem fifty years ago in *William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary*. Although Tucker pays due attention to the elaborate braiding of the various tales in the poem, he finally judges their organisation in the anthology to be a way of permitting their co-existence in a form of consumerism, similar to that which haunts the work of Morris and Co.—a consumerism which renders available and equivalent the mythological inheritance of Europe. This is a hard judgment, but one which prepares for the fine assessment, in the following chapter, of the very different aesthetic which governs *Sigurd the Volsung.*

Here, the argument asserts that Morris runs counter to the spirit of its age which is, broadly speaking, both imperialist and progressivist; epic is cognate with this spirit when it tells stories which assimilate the multiple cultures and mythologies of the world to a master narrative which culminates in the force for good which is visible around its readers in the hegemony of Britain. Whilst *The Earthly Paradise* might be thought to be a precursor of such a world-view, at least in its ambition to gather together for the reader’s pleasure the cultures of Europe, *Sigurd the Volsung*, Tucker argues, takes a sharp swerve away from this progressivist narrative, and offers instead a vividly realised alternative to modernity. Tucker couples *Sigurd* with Swinburne’s *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882); both poems tell stories which refuse to anticipate a finer future in which their darkly tragic histories will have been dialectically overcome. The general account of the poem is accompanied by a discussion of Morris’s prosody, both here and in his epic translations of the *Aeneid*, the *Odyssey* and *Beowulf*; Tucker’s engagement with Morris’s archaicing manner manages to relate the larger argument which he
makes in relation to Morris, to the details of his swinging anapaestic/dactylic line. This is a welcome extension to the book's argument, which generally proceeds by attention to matters of narrative development and destiny.

Readers who wish to dip into this large book in search of arguments specifically about Morris will find, then, lots to reward them: an extensive engagement with Morris's poetry, couched in an argument which places it in a widely-understood generic context. Here, for good and ill, both The Earthly Paradise and Sigurd the Volsung look less eccentric, and can be seen to be grappling with problems which other contemporary poets were addressing also: how to represent the mythological material of the past and of other cultures; how to tell those stories in such a way as to relate them, or perhaps not, to the present; how to tackle multiple perspectives in a world lacking ultimate authority; how to make these old stories count in a modernity which understands itself as based upon an idea of progress. Morris, in this generous account, offers distinctive answers to these questions, answers which vary at different moments in his career and with widely varying aesthetic and indeed political implications. However, this is not a book solely about Morris; its value is to place his poetry in the context of a genre whose remarkable transmutations it extensively traces. So the task which it performs is accomplished as much for Wordsworth and Browning and Southey and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and many others, as it is for Morris; as is the way with all transformations of our understanding, the reference to the whole changes how we see the part, just as our understanding of the part is a condition of our seeing the whole. This at least is the book's ambition; if at times there is a problem of seeing the wood for the trees, for the most part the book's astonishing scholarship genuinely subserves that transformative purpose.

Simon Dentith


Hardman and Co. was a manufacturer of great importance during the 1840s, both in terms of the development of English design and the direction of the Gothic Revival. The Hardmans were an old Catholic family from Lancashire who by the mid-1830s were in the button-making business in Birmingham. Their
story becomes pertinent to the narrative of English design when John Hardman junior met A.W.N. Pugin in about 1837, a point which marked a personal and professional relationship which lasted for the rest of Pugin’s life. Almost immediately Hardman began making ecclesiastical metalwork to Pugin’s designs, and in the mid-1840s was persuaded to begin producing stained glass as well, largely because of Pugin’s dissatisfaction with the leading glass painters of the day. Almost uniquely among the great Victorian church furnishers, an extensive archive survives, shared by Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Birmingham City Archives, the Birmingham Archdiocesan Archives and the Lightwoods House collection. The latter location is the site for the continuing activities of the Hardman firm.

Inevitably Michael Fisher’s book is centrally concerned with Pugin, a subject difficult to write about with much originality in the wake of Rosemary Hill’s excellent recent biography. Despite this, the book supplies some much needed commentary on the production of ecclesiastical metalwork during the 1840s, a subject which has received less attention than the stained glass of the same period. Fisher highlights the tension between the industrial methods of Hardman’s manufacturing and Pugin’s call for the revival of medieval craftsmanship: ‘Large quantities of brass rod, tubing and twists were bought in for the stems and branches of candlesticks, and for rails. The bowls of chalices and ciboria could be spun rather than beaten up, and components for the bases of candlesticks such as lion-feet and angel-figures could be cast rather than chased.’ (p. 23). Here Pugin emerges not as a Romantic but as a pragmatist, willing to use industrial methods if the mechanical processes did not interfere with the aesthetics and function of his designs. An examination of the broader activities of the Hardman firm during the 1840s rightly highlights the firm’s pioneering role as a complete church furnisher: at this date Hardman’s were surely years ahead of their rivals in the breadth of the ecclesiastical items they could make or supply. Some individual commissions were of an extraordinary scale, notably those connected with the funeral of Lord Shrewsbury, where the needlework alone cost £540, the price of a modest new church. (p. 126) A novel area of Hardman activity is uncovered through a discussion of their repair and restoration of medieval metalwork and statuary. Although a contemporary conservator might wince at the approach adopted, documentary sources detailing the type of treatments used by Victorian restorers are rare and can be studied in this instance in some detail.

Scholarship on the work of the firm after Pugin’s death is much needed. Fisher provides vital information on the work of John Hardman Powell, a designer of
major significance in his own right, and on less well-known figures such as Joseph Aloysius Pippet and his son Elphege Pippet, who are both represented in the book by illustrations of very attractive sketches and designs from archival sources.

At times the book can read too much like a long list of commissions, a format which provides more description than analysis, and a lack of contextual information makes it difficult to form a picture of how Hardman related to the other Victorian church furnishers. An odd characteristic of Fisher’s approach is that he seems compelled to evaluate much of the later Hardman material in the context of Pugin’s theories. While many historians admire Puginian Gothic, and find a lively character emerging from his writing, few would still subscribe to his theories, yet even a window of 2006, in Peoria, Illinois, is defended from the charge of employing a non-Puginian style of face painting. (p. 177) In fact the firm’s adherence to the mainstream Gothic Revival style into the later Victorian period could be interpreted as rather entrenched and reactionary. This leaves some interesting questions unanswered: in what sense, for example, did the Arts and Crafts Movement influence the firm? And if there was no impact, why not?

There are moments when the approach of the book is stretched to accommodate recent commissions in an incongruous way. An example is the description of the use of Gothic in a decidedly postmodern setting in Japan, where Western-style wedding ceremonies have become fashionable, leading to the construction of replicas of European cathedrals furnished in some instances by the Hardman firm. To suggest that this is anything to do with ‘the power of Gothic to reinvent itself’ (p.171) is dubious at best.

The production values really let the book down. Many errors have by-passed the proof readers, such as several pages where the endnote numbers appear full size instead of superscript. The photography in places is poor, particularly of the stained glass where much of the face-painting is invisible owing to over-exposure. The graphic design is quite basic and at times a little amateurish, as in the unconvincing bold typeface used to introduce each chapter, and the awkwardly cropped images. Despite these faults the book retains its value in highlighting the significance of the Hardman firm and pointing towards the potential for future research.

Jim Cheshire


Although the publishers have kindly provided a review copy of Desperate Romantics, members of this Society are clearly not the target audience for this publication, and may well be put off by the melodramatic title, the grotesque cover based on the face of a snarling lady apparently chewing a flower in ‘Love’s Shadow’ by Arthur Sandys (a painting nowhere referred to in the book), and by the statement on the cover that it offers, ‘In conjunction with a major TV drama, the scandalous story of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood’. On the other hand, the book is well produced and well illustrated, shows that Moyle read widely in the relevant background – and foreground – material, and she quotes fully and effectively from letters by the major protagonists, as well as from recent biographers and critics. A strong narrative movement is achieved, especially in the central chapters, although I am not clear as to why the 1862 inquest on Lizzie appears where it does (p. 139); her death is described much later (p. 195). The writing unfortunately fails to avoid cliché: all too often we hear of ‘dark secrets’ and metaphorical ‘bomb blasts’; participants tend to ‘snap’ and to fall ‘madly’ in love (perhaps not in that order), and to ‘pour out’ poetry. In this context it is hard to see the potentially witty remark that Morris’s designs ‘have become part of the fabric of English life’ (p. 291) as more than a worn-out metaphor.

The emphasis is, of course, placed on the characters with the most colourful private lives, and necessarily renders those lives less private. In order of the amount of attention given, these are Rossetti with Lizzie Siddal, Jane Burden and Fanny Cornforth; Ruskin with Effy Gray; Effy with Millais; Ruskin with Rose LaTouche; Holman Hunt with Annie Miller, Fanny Waugh and her sister Edith; Burne-Jones with Mary Zambaco and May Gaskell. The behaviour of these people was certainly often disorderly and neurotic, driven by emotional needs and compulsions of which they seem often to have been unaware. But the artists among them have come to be known for their work, and we are inevitably given an unbalanced view of that work in a book of this kind, because the works of art are discussed in detail only if they can be seen as having psychological interest. The art criticism is unsubtle if enthusiastic; for instance, the remarkable claim is
made that these artists would ‘raise British art to new, unimagined heights’. (p. 7)

So much for Turner?

Morris and Georgiana remain comparatively quietly in the rear. Their treatment is indeed among the best features of the book, although there are a number of factual inaccuracies in it: Morris’s family investment was in the copper mines of Devon Great Consuls rather than in Cornish tin (p. 172); Morris and Burne-Jones were not ‘former theological students’ (p. 171; theology was not studied at undergraduate level until 1869); *The Defence of Guenevere* was not well received (p. 211); Morris did not turn down the Poet Laureateship in 1892, he was sounded out about it; Georgiana was not a socialist (p. 290). However, both receive the respectful treatment their behaviour deserves, and their relationship is treated sensitively. Morris is praised for his ‘moral generosity’ in allowing Jane to be at Kelmscott Manor with Rossetti in 1871 and for his ‘intellectual altruism’ (p. 275), but his suffering at the time is also emphasised, particularly as expressed in his well-known letter to Aglaia Coronio in 1875. The account given of Morris’s friendship with Georgiana I found convincing. Moyle speculates that the ‘writing about love in Morris’s unfinished novel was perhaps inspired specifically by his strong and current feelings for Georgie’, but concludes that they behaved more responsibly than their spouses: ‘They did not, it seems, extend this brief indiscretion into a fully flung affair. Instead they became companions.’ (p. 276)

I am not sure, however, that Morris’s writing about love in the novel deserves to be called an indiscretion, which seems to be the implication. Nor do I feel that the description of Morris as Georgiana’s ‘second husband’ (p. 290) is felicitous. However, it is good to find Moyle giving praise to Georgiana’s ‘vivid and generous’ life of her husband. (p. 291)

To return to the question of the book’s – and presumably the TV programme’s – target audience. Moyle claims to be aiming to bring the Pre-Raphaelites alive for ‘a new public’ (p. xi), though I think it unlikely that people will read this book or watch the programme who are not already aware of the Pre-Raphaelites of whom so many images are in circulation. What they will find is a lively and largely accurate account of the lives of these remarkable people, presented in terms more melodramatic than realistic, very much in the spirit of our own over-excited times. We can nevertheless hope that such readers or viewers may be led on to look more deeply into the achievements of these people whose lives, if maybe falling into the romantic category, were certainly not consistently desperate.

In contrast, Jenny Ridd’s *A Destiny Defined* is an appealing work of amateur enthusiasm – quotations are not referenced, and the writing is utilitarian. But
the story is very well worth reading. The author and her husband bought 5, High Street, Hastings, in 1997, and lived there for seven years. This was the house in which Lizzie and Gabriel had spent time during the idyllic early days of their relationship in the summer of 1854, and awareness of this led Ridd to undertake research on the Pre-Raphaelites so that she could understand accurately what had taken place there. The book is the result of her research, which – surprisingly, in view of Violet Hunt’s reputation for inaccuracy – shows that the account given in her 1932 book *The Wife of Rossetti: Her Life and Death* is accurate in many of its details, especially about Hastings and the house. Chapter 3 explains how the small fishing town of Hastings developed into ‘a resort second only to Brighton in its reputation’ during the period of the Napoleonic Wars, which prevented foreign travel. Prints show us the fish market in 1824, and, by contrast, the new adjoining town of St. Leonards in around 1830, and the railway station of 1851. We are also reminded that a strong reason for the couple’s choosing Hastings was Rossetti’s friendly relations with three young women artists connected to the place, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, Bessie Parkes and Anna Mary Howitt.

The main emphasis necessarily falls on the 1854 visit and on the domestic arrangements. Ridd was able to identify the room occupied by Lizzie from the seven drawings of her made there by Rossetti, and demonstrates this in her illustrations (pp. 8 and 9). An archaeological dig even produced a toilet bowl from a garden outhouse in use at the time of the visit. More appealingly, perhaps, a layer of wallpaper from a nineteenth-century closet, dated by an expert to the 1850s, corresponded to Violet Hunt’s description. (pp. 56–7) Ridd gives as detailed account of the whole period as the evidence allows, with Rossetti coming and going while Lizzie remained for ten weeks, and worked on a number of drawings, including that for ‘Clerk Saunders’. Concerned about Lizzie’s health, Rossetti moved from the Cutter Inn to be nearer to her, and Ridd discusses the room he was most likely to have taken when he moved into 5 High Street, on the first floor, and the alternative possibility, in the attic. From there, he wrote no fewer than ten letters to various correspondents. On May 8th the couple visited Scalands Farm, near Robertsbridge, which belonged to Barbara Leigh Smith’s brother, and Lizzie was drawn there by Rossetti, Howitt and Leigh Smith; these sketches make an interesting group. (pp. 60–2) Ridd points out that the couple climbed more than once to the summit of the East Hill, a considerable achievement for the ailing Lizzie; they also visited other visitor attractions and carved their initials on some carved arches opposite 5 High Street – although these have been eroded since. In all, Ridd has calculated, Lizzie spent some ten weeks in Hastings, while Rossetti
was there intermittently for something like four. Nevertheless, our President Jan Marsh (who evidently encouraged the research) is quoted as having suggested to Ridd that the poems ‘Sudden Light’ and ‘Love’s Nocturn’ may well have been written there, and Ridd finds Hastings scenery in the 1859 poem ‘Even So’.

The narrative move on to familiar territory concerning the deterioration of the couple’s relationship after the return to London, and then describes — in rather more medical detail that I could relish — Lizzie’s return there as her health failed, in April 1860. Finding that her sympathetic former landlady, Mrs. Elphick, had given up 5 High Street, she took lodgings with the Chatfield family at 12 East Parade, next to the Cutter Inn. By this time, Rossetti had not seen Lizzie for the best part of two years, but on hearing of her illness he made his way to Hastings, and shortly afterwards proposed marriage to her. The wedding took place on 23 May 1860 in St. Clement’s church, of which an attractive print is shown (p. 79). Sadly, as we know, this was not the prelude to happiness and fulfilment; a year later Lizzie gave birth to a stillborn baby girl, and less than a year after that died of an overdose of laudanum.

The book is attractively produced in a large format, with Rossetti’s sensitive painting of Lizzie creating a fine cover. It is well illustrated, unpretentious, informative and enjoyable — and apart from its main focus also tells us such facts as that the grave of Whistler’s mother may be found in the local cemetery. It is good indeed to find that enthusiasts like Ridd and her husband are still active, and that a local publisher will support their work.

Peter Faulkner


I should put my cards on the table immediately. I was trained as an undergraduate in that Eliotic-Leavisite version of modernism for which the Metaphysical conceit — that taut, compacted, muscular mode of verse which supposedly represents a utopian fusion of senses and intellect — was the poetic ideal, to be admired in Shakespeare or Donne, and recreated, if possible, in the challenging metaphors and rugged syntax of their modernist successors. From such a standpoint, much
Victorian verse, from early Tennyson onwards, was the cultivation of a dream-world, a realm of quiescent Lotos-Eaters or pastoral Scholar-Gypsies glad to see the back of an inimical industrial modernity; and its poetic resources were as pale and eviscerated as its stance towards social experience. Even now, decades later, as a confirmed William Morris enthusiast, I still feel the force of this case in opening a volume of Morris’s poems. While *The Pilgrims of Hope* is certainly a bold attempt to push poetry towards contemporary experience, I’d take a lot of persuading that ‘The Tune of the Seven Towers’ or even ‘The Haystack in the Floods’ from *The Defence of Guenevere* or many of the tales in *The Earthly Paradise* are worth spending much time or interpretative energy on; Morris’s own limiting self-description as the ‘idle singer of an empty day’ sums them all up well enough.

‘So, ever must I dress me to the Wight’, declares Morris’s Guenevere at one point; and it has been the defence of Morris’s verse, rather than of Guenevere herself, that many recent critics have devoted themselves to. No one (as far as I know) has successfully done for Morris’s poetry what Christopher Ricks so brilliantly did for *Paradise Lost* in *Milton’s Grand Style* (1963), i.e., defend it by showing its internal responsiveness to those very values of semantic subtlety and sensuous enactment of meaning which Eliot and Leavis had invoked to dismiss it in the first place. Recent defenders of Morris have rather tended to invent new general frameworks of interpretation for his poetry, to situate it in wider cultural contexts whereby its distinctive formal features can once more be productively understood as (in Fredric Jameson’s term) socially symbolic acts. Isobel Armstrong, for example, in her magisterial *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (1993), invokes a whole Ruskinian aesthetic of the Gothic ‘grotesque’ as a way of homing in on the distinctiveness—and, she would argue, radicalism—of Morris’s *Defence of Guenevere* volume. Lindsay Smith, in her *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry: The Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites* (1995) also works with the Ruskin.

It is, therefore, an arduous business being a defender of Morris’s verse, involving a capacity for work as prodigious as the author’s own. Substantial scholarly labours will be required to build the interpretative frame or machine into which one proceeds to feed the poetry, but one then quickly risks getting caught in a kind of ‘winner loses’ logic. For the more erudite and wide-ranging the hermeneutic apparatus one constructs, and thus in theory the more persuasive one’s detailed poetic readings then become, the more unlikely it appears after all that the Morris texts would truly need all this massive dedi-
cated effort on their behalf if they were really that good in the first place.

Elizabeth K. Helsinger’s book certainly cannot be faulted on the scholarly front. It is a beautifully researched and beautifully produced book, which argues that its two poet-artists successfully renewed British poetry by radically ‘translating’ the values of one medium – the visual arts – into those of another: poetry itself. Helsinger reminds us that there was indeed a vein of modernism – Poundian rather than Eliotic-Leavisian – which was admirably open to Pre-Raphaelite poetic influence, and, moreover, that some postmodern poetry, especially those trends associated with Language Poetry, has understood Rossetti, Morris and Swinburne as inspiring predecessors in their revelations of linguistic possibility. Helsinger’s command of romantic and Victorian poetics and cultural history is superb (many of her footnotes are trenchant scholarly essays in their own right); her frameworks of interpretation, such as the history of European colour theory or the genre of the uncanny Gothic portrait tale, are always boldly inventive; and her discussions of individual poems beautifully turn wider cultural theory to close, practical-critical account. We are offered subtle demonstrations of how Rossetti’s early poems on paintings, with their liminal figures so intently attending to extra-sensory intimations, offer to kickstart a new mode of historically self-conscious English verse; the story is extended to Rossetti’s Gothic portrait tales and poems and to his ‘picture-sonnets’ in later chapters, where new capitalist relations of artistic reproduction and reception transform his understandings of both art and poetry. Helsinger’s attention to the varied colour-codings, and disorientating discolourations, of Morris’s *Defence of Guenevere* poems will stand as a surely definitive account of its subject for years to come. This thematics of colour is then pushed forward to *The Earthly Paradise* tales, where more gently decorative and therapeutically repetitive – perhaps occasionally even utopian – colour gradations replace the startling expressionistic disjunctions of the earlier volume.

Helsinger also gives us a sustained meditation on Rossetti and Morris’s book-illustrating and book-making practices, the latter, in particular, being seen as attempts to ‘restore a kinaesthetic knowledge that Morris – like others after him – saw as damaged or warped by the demands of contemporary life and labor’. The ‘others’, as a footnote indicates, include in Helsinger’s mind the German Marxist theorist Walter Benjamin, and that is certainly a comparison it would be intriguing to pursue in more detail. Alas, the ‘Big Book’ version of *The Earthly Paradise* planned by Morris and Burne-Jones during the mid-1860s – that ‘golden age’ of Victorian book illustration – with its two or three hundred illustrations, never came to fruition; and perhaps indeed it is more satisfying as a ‘book that never was’
– in Joseph Dunlap’s fine phrase – than one which was actually produced, being left more open thereby to cultural or political thought-experiments of our own. Helsinger makes a spirited argument for the importance of the Big Book, particularly in her suggestion that it would have ‘demanded a certain ceremonial, probably social ritual of reading. It was a book for reading aloud’, which ties in neatly with her key insistence, elsewhere in the volume, on the constitutive sociality of Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic practices, on the ways the artists inhabit and restructure rooms, and invent new possibilities of relationship in such decorative spaces.

Has Elizabeth Helsinger, then, by the end of this fine study convincingly made her case for the Pre-Raphaelite verse of Rossetti and Morris as a formidable new start in English poetry? She has certainly shown how fruitful the three strategies that she finds in their Pre-Raphaelite poetry – attention, repetition and translation – can be in producing remarkable new readings of these works; but has she also persuaded us that they constitute a powerful new reorientation of English verse? There are odd, confessional moments in the book which suggest that she may not have fully persuaded herself, moments where a Mephistophelean voice of doubt creeps in, as when she acknowledges in a parenthesis that ‘(This studied simplicity [of a Rossetti poem] could have the unintended effect of appearing more perversely mannered to Victorian and modernist audiences than the conventions the PRB was rejecting ...’). Yes, indeed! Or moments of troubling historical frankness, as when she concedes, after all her suggestive arguments for the ways in which the Big Book might be thought to therapeutically restore damaged kinaesthetic knowledge, that poor Georgiana Burne-Jones was reduced to pricking herself with her needle to stay awake as Morris read great swathes of it out loud to her.

My own feeling is that we ought to be somewhat suspicious of the contemporary fascination with Pre-Raphaelitism. Perhaps it is indeed the first of the European avant-gardes, perhaps, as Helsinger claims, it did indeed in some ways embody and reflect critically on London’s modernity (articulated in the Great Exhibition of 1851), as Charles Baudelaire and later Walter Benjamin did upon the modernity of the Parisian arcades; but still, there is so much that is hopelessly mannered, class-specific and backward-looking about such art and poetry, so much, today, that is nostalgically ‘English’ in its current reception and appreciation, that one often turns from it all with relief to the later, more truculent and abrasive European modernisms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. William Morris himself had to wade through and out of Pre-Raphaelitism, first by immersing himself in the world of Icelandic sagas and then by crossing that even tougher ‘river of fire’ which led to his socialist
commitment; and *The Pilgrims of Hope* will thus in my view always be a more admirable Morrisian text, for all its own internal problems, than ‘The Defence of Guenevere’. Rossetti never did get out of Pre-Raphaelitism, and vanished into aesthetic obsession and personal darkness in his later years. One cannot but admire the intellectual resourcefulness with which scholars such as Armstrong, Smith and now Helsinger have developed their ambitiously complex frames for re-interpreting Pre-Raphaelite poetry; yet the scholarly equipment, though often highly illuminating, always seems to me so very much in excess of its object, a matter of taking a sledge-hammer to crack that historically rather limited nut which Pre-Raphaelite verse has proved itself across the decades to be.

*Tony Pinkney*