

Reviews

Edited by Peter Faulkner

Phillippa Bennett & Rosie Miles, eds, *William Morris in the Twenty-First Century*, Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2010, 292 pp. Nineteen illus. most in colour, pbk, £40/€47.50. ISBN: 978-3-0343-0106-0.

Compared to the average collection of essays this is a splendidly presented book. There is an exciting cover and stimulating coloured illustrations. Morris has been well served. Regenia Gagnier's enthusiastic Preface puts the emphasis firmly on the present day, and the introduction by Bennett & Miles carefully charts the leading ideas of the book and explains its plan. The essays are grouped thematically, and one can see that Utopia seems to have more than its fair share of space.

The first two parts bring us up to date with recent work on Morris. In the third section, 'Morris, Politics and Utopia', we find the heart of the book. There are three superb essays which try to confront, tackle or even solve the paradoxes at the heart of Morris's central ideas. They complement each other. Brilliant as usual, in his account of 'Versions of Ecotopia in *News from Nowhere*' Tony Pinkney once again worries at the patches of inconsistency and self-doubt, which have surely been obvious to all but the most uncritical readers. Why are most of the people in the country of Nowhere so feeble, why is their society so lacking in stimulus? Using the medieval four elements he shows that the pure air, water and earth which Ruskin campaigned for are not enough to secure Utopia; we need fire, especially in the metaphorical sense of intelligence and drive. This is why we all think Ellen is such a splendid human being, though she only appears in the second half of the book. She shows liveliness and a wish to get things done; perhaps she will revolutionise Nowhere and shake it from its lethargy.

Piers J. Hale takes these points further in his essay on 'Human Nature and the Biology of Utopia'. It is good to have a historian of science working on Morris. He explains why Social Darwinism could not solve the crisis that the nineteenth century found itself in. It was simply the same old Malthusian beliefs of those

who were benefiting from the Industrial Revolution now transferred to biology and then back into social thinking. Only Neo-Lamarckian ideas could transform human beings quickly, and this is seen in Morris's concern to *make* Socialists. He believed that human nature could be changed, but could the new ideas be passed on to our descendants? Hale comments: 'It might seem that the implications of the fact that Morris based his utopia upon what we would now perceive to be an erroneous biology are that we should give up on the possibilities for humanity that he imagined . . . After all, our own scepticism about the possibility of a radically different future is no less culturally contingent than was Morris's optimism'.

Peter Smith also chooses an impressive topic: 'Attractive Labour and Social Change'. He engages in a grand wrestle with the Ruskinian ideal of manual labour, and Morris's demand for pleasure in work. The inhabitants of Nowhere are fascinated by craftwork as a form of art. Backbreaking manual labour seems to be forgotten, but Smith jerks us forward into the twenty-first century by alerting us to the increasing amount of sweated labour now being undertaken. He notes that Barry King has recently observed how 'in the sweatshops and Enterprise Zones of the Third World, the old disciplines of manual labour have returned with an intensity that recalls the early nineteenth century, rather than the technoutopias of the futurologists'. He concludes by saying of Morris: 'his plea for an ecological approach to socialism seems somehow modestly appropriate when confronted, as we are, by the delusions of mass culture and the neo-liberal view of capitalism as a project without end'.

These three thinkers are bang up to date, and it is refreshing to be allowed an Interlude, which David Mabb entitles 'Hijack: Morris Dialectically'. He points out that Morris thought that interior design would transform everyday life, but that 'today his work is seen as safe and comfortable'. He shows us ten examples of his juxtaposition of Morris's designs with modern life, including some large-scale artworks: but the ironies do not always come across. I think that the *Morris Kitsch Archive* is the best illustration of his ideas, but the irony is on us. I saw a garden trowel, hand-painted with flowers, similar to the one in the coloured plate, in an art exhibition which was meant to demonstrate the artist's homage to Morris. However, you could argue that Morris has now become part of popular culture, and that this would be in accordance with his negative attitude towards High Art.

The next section is concerned with literature but is limited to prose texts. Anna Vaninskaya writes on Germania, which is a 'lost area' to most people. A mythic view of the Germanic tribes can be traced back to Tacitus. Morris was therefore following a common view of their history when he wrote *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains*. Marx found the social order of the early Germans to have been communistic, and Vaninskaya states that 'the

Barbarian society of the Wolfings and the socialist society of Nowhere were the beginning and end terms of a single historical sequence’.

David Latham, announces his subject as ‘Between Hell and England’; he begins by justifying Morris’s flight into Romance. Notice his discussion of ‘the province of Art’, which accumulates meanings until we understand why Yeats admired Morris ‘as a poet committed to extending the jurisdiction of the province of art’. An early reviewer of *A Dream of John Ball* hailed it as ‘a brand-new kind of prose fiction’. The whole of Latham’s essay is like *A Christmas Carol* with the spirits of Christmas Past – John Ball – and Christmas Future – Ellen from *News from Nowhere* – showing us idealised versions of England before we return to the awful nineteenth-century present, which is Hell. Latham concludes that

The ornament of romance involves no evidence of a retreat from the reality of life; it is no such thing for Morris who employs it to show us how to reach towards the heavenly realm of art wherein we find ourselves by embodying the angelic vision of our potential and thereby begin to replace our wishful dreams with the reality of creative deeds.

This very enjoyable and perceptive essay is appropriately followed by ‘Rejuvenating our Sense of Wonder: the Last Romances’. The many aspects of wonder are very well documented by Phillippa Bennett, and the source for the nineteenth century is identified in the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Bennett uses the concept to test the romances to the limit. This careful work pays off: a whole section on buildings in the romances seems quite new. The characters are shown to have inner strength, and their wanderings have a purpose. She ties this in to Morris’s lecture on ‘The Ends and the Means’ – ‘there is no turning back into the desert in which we cannot live, and no standing still on the edge of the enchanted wood; for there is nothing to keep us there, we must plunge in and through it to the promised land beyond’. With regard to the problems of environmental degradation, she brings Rachel Carson and Robert Macfarlane into the argument; there are now so many observers of nature calling our attention to what we have lost, reinforcing the observations of Morris in ‘Art and the Beauty of the Earth’: ‘there is no square mile of earth’s inhabitable surface that is not beautiful in its own way, if we men will only abstain from wilfully destroying that beauty’.

The last section, ‘Virtual Morris’, is clearly sited in the world of today, the world of computers and the Internet. In ‘Editing Morris for the Twenty-First Century’, Rosie Miles discusses ongoing problems. These are mainly concerned with the editing of Morris texts for the new online edition. Of course a great deal of Morris was not re-edited in the old days of ‘book culture’ down to 1980, so there is a great deal to be done. She refers to the ‘the working goal of the Morris Online Edition’ which is ‘to provide readable annotated texts of Morris’s poetry

and selected prose'. Well, yes, but things then get more complicated as our computers ask us to use all their resources to the full. Long descriptions of what might be done are suddenly confronted by thoughts of what Morris might say: 'Is the Morris Online Edition aesthetically attractive as a site? ... Is it beautiful?' And finally, there is more to life than all this, she says, in spite of her enthusiasm: 'We may live part of our lives now looking at screens, but I also hope that frequently we go and sit under an elm tree'.

Thomas Tobin writes on 'Spreading Socialist Ideals via the Internet'. He outlines the varying attitudes of Morris towards the new technologies of his day; there were exploitative machines, and machines which did not operate for profit but helped in the co-operative and therefore socialist process. In our own times we have the Internet, and Tobin discusses whether this could be defined as 'socialist'. I think this is stretching the meaning of the word, and that even 'co-operative' won't do, since huge profits are made from the Internet and not redistributed to the users. Tobin describes the history and progress of the William Morris Society website, forecasting an amazing future; he concludes: 'The Society pledges to continue to develop our website as a socialist enterprise, and, on behalf of the William Morris Society, we welcome everyone's suggestions and involvement'.

Peter Preston devotes his 'Afterword' to what is virtually a review of the present volume, taking the wind out of the present writer's sails. In the comparable 1996 volume (the *Centenary Essays*) the contents included literature and specifically three essays on the poetry. There were several studies of the Arts and Crafts movement. In this 2010 collection there is one essay on the crafts and a condensed section on literature; poetry is nowhere. He modifies these remarks as the essay progresses but says that this shows how the emphasis has changed during the twenty-first century.

Though I enjoyed reading the book, I felt that there are not enough difficult texts under discussion, though as Preston says: 'all the essays in this volume actually include subtle and illuminating readings of at least parts of Morris's texts'. Most authors concentrate on ecology and society, and do not consider the survival of Morris's work in literature and art. I am concerned about the effect of this selective approach on the general reader. Apart from the essay on May Morris's embroidery there is little about the crafts he inspired. For example, fine printing, which gets no mention, flourishes. Stained glass is back as a viable art form, and in Pembroke College, Cambridge, last week I sat with my back to a window full of Ted Hughes' imagery – if you face it you get no work done. The poems and the early contributions to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* are being allowed to fade from consciousness. Even in the twenty-first century there are students reading *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems* for the first time, the 'great poems of desire', as Isobel Armstrong is allowed to cry out from the far side of our text. (p.234) We must not elevate Morris into the ideal *Guardian* reader,

without thinking of his impatience with the endless debates of his own day, and his demand for revolution. But, as I write, it looks as if the twenty-first century will have its share of that.

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John Purkis

William E. Fredeman *et al.*, eds, *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. 9, The Last Decade, 1873–1882: Kelmscott to Birchington, 1880–1882*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer with the Modern Languages Research Association, 2010. 730 pp., 1 colour & 4 black-and-white illustrations, £125. ISBN 9781843842279.

It is a pleasure to salute the publication of the Rossetti correspondence for the last two years and three months of his life. This fine volume follows the organisation of its predecessors in beginning with a statement of principles from the editorial board (now consisting of Roger C. Lewis, Jane Cowan and Anthony Harrison); a list of illustrations (the main one being a small reproduction of *Dante's Dream* as the frontispiece); a list of the numerous abbreviations occurring in the text, including those for the sources used in the annotations, and a small number of recently located letters not included in earlier volumes (none of great importance). Each of the three years of this volume is preceded with a note of the Major Works of the year, a Summary of the year's letters, and a Chronology. Then we have the fully annotated letters. But there is not a great deal of unpublished material here, so that our sense of Rossetti's final years is not significantly changed.

Although Rossetti had largely withdrawn from society by 1880, that year was productive for him: he wrote a number of sonnets and *The White Ship*, added to the earlier narrative poem *Sister Helen*, and made important contributions to the reissue by Anne Gilchrist of the *Life of Blake* and to a lengthy article on Thomas Chatterton by Watts-Dunton; and he worked on three important paintings, *The Day Dream*, *La Pia de' Tolomei* and *Dante's Dream*. His most frequent correspond-

ents were F. J. Shields, who often came to paint with Rossetti, who instructed him in the use of oils, and Watts-Dunton, who conducted much business for him, including matters of jury service and income tax, as well as engaging in literary discussions. Other letters were exchanged with his mother, brother, sister-in-law and sister; with patrons such as Leonard Valpy, William Graham and Constantine Ionides; with old friends like Brown, Scott, Stephens and Dixon, and of course Jane Morris; and with new correspondents, particularly the young provincial Hall Caine, who was preparing an anthology of sonnets for publication and was keen to embark on a literary career. Rossetti's letters to him are, the editors remind us, 'the most literary letters of all he wrote'.

A similar pattern was followed in 1881, although there was a slowing down in the later part of the year. He published *Ballads & Sonnets* and *Poems: New*, for which he wrote a number of additional poems, including the ballad 'The King's Tragedy', which he later called 'a ripper'. Of paintings, he worked on *Mnemosyne*, *The Salutation of Beatrice* and *Found*, as well as the chalk study for *Desdemona's Death-Song*. In September, *Dante's Dream* was sold to the city of Liverpool. Following an unfortunate visit to Cumberland with Caine and Fanny Cornforth in late 1881, during which Fanny tried to persuade him to make a will in her favour, and his consumption of chloral rose dangerously, the tone inevitably becomes sadder. Rossetti rallies briefly to conduct a correspondence with the French critic Ernest Chesneau, who had asked him questions about the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, in connection with a book he was to publish in Paris in 1882 called *La peinture anglaise*. But time is running out, as he is well aware. His last, dictated, letter, on 5 April 1882 is to his kindly patron, Frederick Leyland, asking him to supply a little more wine of the kind he had recently sent, and ending, 'I am feeling very weak today'.

Some of Rossetti's more attractive characteristics continue to find expression. Despite his poor handling of his own finances, which even Watts-Dunton could not greatly improve, he was consistent in his generosity to those he felt needed support. He also gave generously of his time and knowledge to help Anne Gilchrist in revising *The Life of Blake*, and to help the young Hall Caine to develop a literary career by offering judicious criticism and encouragement. Readers may warm to his advice on 12 March 1880 when he felt that Caine was writing criticism in a pretentious manner: 'surely you are strong enough to be English pure & simple. I am sure I could write 100 essays on all possible subjects ... without once experiencing the "aching void" which is filled by such words as "mythopoeic" & "anthropomorphism". I do not find life long enough to know in the least what they mean. They are both very long and very ugly indeed – the latter only suggesting to me a Vampire or a Somnambulant Cannibal'. His own language could still occasionally take an attractive slangy turn, as when he tells Caine on 24 August 1880, 'Don't trouble yourself for a moment about the bloke

in question. No doubt he is a skunk'. His turn of phrase to his brother's wife Lucy, on 4 Feb. 1881 is lively, as he sends love to her children, whom he seldom cared to see, 'from their phantasmal uncle'. Congratulating Brown on his impressive work-rate on 30 Dec. 1880, he remarks that by comparison, 'I feel like one of the Seven Sleepers'. A particularly attractive moment occurs when Rossetti meets the collier and poet Joseph Skipsey. He describes the meeting in a letter to Caine of 27 June 1880: 'He is a working miner, & describes rustic loves & sports & the perils & pathos of pit-life with great charm, having a quiet humour too when needed ... The other night, as I say, he came here, and I found him a stalwart son of toil and every inch a gentleman. In cast of face he recalls Tennyson somewhat, though more bronzed & brawned. He ... recited some beautiful things of his own with a special freshness to which one is quite unaccustomed'. Rossetti's response here is not inhibited by class, although the writing may be felt to be somewhat uneasy.

Ample evidence is given in the letters of Rossetti's taste as a late-Victorian Romantic. On 12 March 1880 he writes in a P.S. to Caine, 'Did you ever read Christopher Smart's "Song to David" – the only great *accomplished* poem of the last century? The *unaccomplished* ones are Chatterton's. Of course I mean earlier than Blake and Coleridge and without reckoning so exceptional a genius as Burns'. And on 26 March he tells Caine, 'The 3 greatest English Imaginations are Shakespere, Shelley & Blake. I grudge Wordsworth every vote he gets'. Other letters spell out his critical view of Wordsworth, which is not unlike Morris's view. He tells Caine on *ca* 10 September 1880 that 'Primary vital impulse was surely not fully developed in his Muse'. In correspondence with Buxton Forman, he writes enthusiastically about Keats. He also approves of Tennyson's work, telling Caine on 2 November 1880 that 'all poets nowadays are redundant except Tennyson', by which he means that only Tennyson uses every word with proper care. Similarly, he tells William Davies on 16 March 1881, in a discussion of the danger of producing 'redundant' poetry which offers 'meandering narrative, empty declamation, or mere jagged jargon', 'The only man who has husbanded his forces rightly, & whom you can never open at the wrong page, is Tennyson'. He also praises the work of his old friend, and Morris's, R. W. Dixon, in a letter to Caine of 17 March 1881: 'His finest passages are as fine as any living man can do'. But when Dixon sends Caine two sonnets from his friend the young Roman Catholic priest (and at the time unpublished poet) Gerard Manley Hopkins for his poetry anthology, and Caine in turn shows them to Rossetti, his response is negative: 'I cannot in any degree tolerate Mr Hopkins's sonnets, though perceiving well that he is an able man'.

Caine did not include the sonnets in his anthology, which in view of Hopkins's later reputation, looks like a lost opportunity. But Rossetti could on occasion go beyond Victorian taste, as in his liking for the poetry of Donne; 'Do you know Donne?' he asks Caine on 11 April 1880. 'There is hardly an English

poet better worth a thorough knowledge, in spite of his provoking conceits & occasional jagged jargon'. He is not often negative in his judgments, though he does say in a letter to Christina of 6 August 1881 that he is sending her 'a little vol.' by Augusta Webster, which 'seems (like George Eliot's lyrics) written without vocation'. The editors remark, in a Note on a letter to F.G. Stephens of 11 August 1881, which includes statement, 'I don't know that Pater ever wrote a line about me', that Rossetti 'disdained the admiration and professed "indebtedness" of "aesthetes" such as Pater and Wilde'. He was certainly dismissive of Wilde's 1881 book *Poems* – some of which derived their forms from Rossetti himself – telling Jane on 1 October 1881: 'I saw the wretched Oscar Wilde book, & glanced at it enough to see clearly what trash it is. Did Georgie say Ned really admires it? if so, he must be driveling'.

Some of the letters shed light on Rossetti's views of the relative demands of painting and poetry. On 9 June 1881 he tells Caine of the hard work he has been putting in on *Dante's Dream*, and adds, 'Poetry is a d--d deal more [comfortable]'. Not that poetry came easily to him. Although he insists, writing to Caine on 17 February 1881, that he has no time for those who would lay down 'rigid rules for rhyme' in English sonnets, he adds at the end, 'I would not be too anxious, if I were you, about anything in the choice of sonnets except the brains & the music'. The application of intelligence is essential, as he insists more powerfully to Caine on 8 March, through the layout of his sentence:

You have much too great a habit of speaking of a special octave, sestette, or line.

Conception, my boy,

Fundamental Brainwork,

is what makes the difference in all art. Work your metal as much as you like, but first take care that it is gold & worth working.

Rossetti's poetry is as much the product of thought as of inspiration. As he remarked to Christina, when sending a sonnet for his mother on 19 January 1881, 'With me, Sonnets mean Insomnia'.

Rossetti's complete adoption of a British persona is shown in his slighting references to French culture. Flaubert died in May 1880, and Rossetti writes to Watts-Dunton on the 26, suggesting that he should write a pamphlet on 'the Poetry of Nero & the latest French Muse'. He goes on: 'It seems Flaubert got as bloated as his practical prototype above-named before he went bang. It really ought to be done, with a hint (such as might be) at the Marquis by the way'. The editorial Note tells us that Rossetti elsewhere compared Flaubert with Sade, and saw *Salammbô* as the product of a decadent culture. In a similar mode he tells Jane on 14 February 1881 that he has received 'a huge fussy folio of lithographed sketches from the *Raven* by a French idiot named Manet, who certainly must be the greatest & most conceited ass who ever lived'. It is therefore a relief to finding

Rossetti, writing to the French critic Ernest Chesneau in an unpublished letter of 31 March 1882, remarking, ‘The composition by Gustave Moreau struck me greatly, particularly as I am so ignorant of the present state of art in France that his name is quite new to me. Few indeed are the painters capable of this clear projection of the spiritual beauty, and the artistic qualities are as high as the conception’.

References to Morris are not numerous, and are usually sardonic. A letter to Jane on *ca* 18 March 1880 remarks that ‘the Member for Lechlade is only dallying with the fish tribe and angling for some much better kind of game’ – Morris’s political commitment was always a puzzle to Rossetti. On 11 June Rossetti writes to Caine about a letter he has received from the young poet William Watson, who, he is afraid, has misunderstood some advice from Rossetti: ‘he seems to think I wished to persuade him from following narrative poetry. Not in the least – I only wished him to try his hand at clearer dramatic life. The dreamy romantic really hardly needs more than one vast Morris in a literature – at any rate in a century’.

This is a view of Morris’s poetry which has often recurred. In an unpublished letter of 14 July, Rossetti, perhaps deriving his information from Jane, writes, ‘I hear that Top goes on with his enormous “Sampler” which promises no visible use or outlet for sale. He has already spent two years on it and has now established a complete school of embroidery in his coach-house, he teaching & paying girls to produce the article. A large number of the available products have sold rapidly’. The editors provide a Note which says nothing about the Sampler – presumably the tapestry panel ‘Vine and Acanthus’, on which Morris spent 516 hours – or the Hammersmith rugs, but states that increasing business was to lead Morris to move his ‘tapestry and embroidery works’ to Merton Abbey during the following year.

On 10 August 1880 Rossetti tells Fairfax Murray, in an unpublished letter, ‘Morris & family have taken the funny freak of spending a week going up the river in a big boat – I suppose with a sort of gondola cabin. I fancy it sounds rheumatic though romantic. The editors’ Note is inaccurate; the ‘article’ it refers to on ‘The Expedition of the Ark’ by J.M. Baissus in *JWMS* vol. 3, no.3 (Spring 1997) is actually a transcription of the notes Morris made on the journey at the time. The Note states that the journey was from Kelmscott House, Hammersmith, to Lechlade, missing the point about the original Kelmscott as its destination. It then also claims that the journey provided ‘the basis for the Arcadian adventure of The Guest in WM’s utopian romance *News from Nowhere* (1890), as he travels by boat up the Thames Valley from twenty-first century London to medieval Oxfordshire for a harvest feast, the climax of the romance – it takes place in an ancient manor house closely resembling Kelmscott Manor’. It is strange to find such an ill-informed account in a scholarly work. Even stranger perhaps is the

Note to an emotional letter to Jane of 3 September 1880 in which Rossetti imagines inventing political news for her: 'I wish I could create news. It wd. be worse than useless to tell you that Gladstone had hanged himself: the river is too near at Kelmscott for such tidings to be safe'. The Note states that the prime minister was 'the darling of socialists such as WM and his political associates especially in foreign policy matters – his loss, DGR humourously (*sic*) supposes, would have driven them to despair'. Did Morris really feel so enthusiastic for Gladstone?

The later references are less contentious. On 26 November, Rossetti writes to James Noble, who had asked whether he had a copy of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*. Neither he nor his brother has a copy, but Rossetti remarks, quite accurately, that 'it was published about 1856 & contains a good many prose tales of rather a Fouqué character by Wm Morris who was then still at Oxford'. On 14 February 1881 Rossetti writes to Jane with what seems to him surprising news about Morris's recent behaviour: 'The Courtesy of Topsy will be getting into the Percy Anecdotes when reprinted'. Rossetti had been asked by his patron, Valpy, to ask Morris whether he would help with the decoration of some schools in Bath in which Valpy was interested. Rossetti had written, he says, 'to Top as to a bear notorious for the sores of heads', only to hear back from Morris that he had told Valpy that he would be pleased to 'draw out a scheme of decoration gratuitously!!! What is happening to Top? His wrap-rascals [loose-fitting overcoat] must for the future be made with a case for wings'.

Unfortunately, as a Note tells us, no correspondence between Morris and Valpy has been found. Rossetti writes on a similar subject in an unpublished letter to Scott on 16 February; it had fallen to him to send to Morris a copy of Victor Hugo's *Le pape*, which he had expected would annoy Morris and cause him to 'hurl forth the book on the head of the passing stranger'. But 'the regenerate Top' had responded politely. 'I wrote to him that if he does not take care, his Courtesy will get into the Percy Anecdotes and his nimbus will eventually cost a deal at Queen Square for lacquered metal & punches of symbolic design'. No such letter appears here; perhaps it was no more than an intention. But it would seem that, for whatever reason, Rossetti believed that Morris's behaviour had become less interestingly dramatic than it had been. On 6 March Rossetti writes to Jane, alludes to Topsy's having become 'unnaturally courteous', and says that he has written to remonstrate with him. 'I hope he may yet return to his old Adam'. The last reference, to Jane on 18 July 1881, refers to a recent visit by Watts-Dunton to the Morrises. Watts-Dunton had been 'enraptured by the enormous democratic obesity of Top. O for that final Cabinet Ministry which is to succeed the Cabinet d'aisance of his early years!' The Note, from Bryson, refers to 'the three-seated privy at Kelmscott Manor', but this was hardly an experience of Morris's early years.

The volume concludes with seven informative appendices: 1 gives full details

of the material about the relationship of Rossetti and Hall Caine from 1879 to 1882; 2 provides an illuminating account of the negotiations – in which Caine played a helpful part – for the sale of *Dante's Dream* to the city of Liverpool; 3 gives a chronology of the composition of the two 1881 books *Ballads and Sonnets* and *Poems: New*; 4 offers bibliographical summaries of these two volumes; 5 is a list of the reviews of the two volumes; 6 is a well-balanced account of the relationship between Rossetti and Fanny Cornforth during these years; and 7 gives details, with photographs, of the Rossetti memorials at Birchington and in Chelsea. It is interesting to find that Madox Brown, about whose 'dogmatic Atheism' Rossetti warns Caine in a letter of *ca* 10 August 1880, agreed, at the instance of the elderly Mrs Rossetti, to produce the memorial in the churchyard at Birchington in the form of a Celtic cross. This is an impressive book, for which all the editors are to be congratulated, above all, of course, though too late, William E. Fredeman, the great Pre-Raphaelite scholar who inaugurated the edition.

Peter Faulkner

Regenia Gagnier, *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization: On the Relationship of Part to Whole, 1859–1920*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 219 pp. £50 (no price on copy reviewed). ISBN 9780230247437.

Regenia Gagnier's book operates on at least three levels. First, it provides an intricate survey of a set of reflections on individualism, individuality and will from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Second, it presents a normative argument in defence of a particular conception of individualism. Third, holding these two dimensions together, it adopts a methodological approach which draws on what Gagnier calls the integrative evolutionary science pioneered by Victorian writers. Though the book is pleasingly comfortable to hold, its size is misleading, for the ideas packed within the covers are complex and difficult; and whilst the writing is clear, Gagnier's mastery of her material and her concise, confident handling is challenging for anyone less familiar with the terrain. She moves effortless from Darwin, Spencer and Arnold to Freud, Trotsky, Said, Adorno and Derrida, capturing short, focused studies of Alice Meynell, John Davidson, Charles Leland and William Morris, on the way. The introduction is helpful and it sets out the aims and the structure of the argument very well. Nonetheless, her book is for daytime, not evening reading and it demands careful concentration.

The discussion of the principal idea – the relationship of part to whole – is organised thematically. Models of Victorian liberalism are set out in the first chapter: Pater and James feature here. The second chapter uses a study of new womanhood to probe concepts of the self and ideas of independence and auton-

omy. The third picks up a structuring idea raised in the introduction – decadence – in order to consider emerging psychologies of the will: Yeats, Wilde and Hardy appear in this discussion, but the theoretical frames come from Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Durkheim. The fourth chapter examines philanthropy and the ways in which ideas of individual responsibility and self-reliance became mapped on to different understandings of elite-mass relations. Art education provides an interesting platform for this analysis. The last chapter, which includes a discussion of Morris, examines ways in which the ethics of individualism supported different conceptions of identity, internationalism and nationalism.

Gagnier's normative argument is threaded through these chapters and its force comes from the background account she gives of the rightward drift of European ideas towards the end of her period and a sustained critique of current systems of neo-liberal globalisation – the embodiment of a lop-sided individualism which Victorian individualists showed to be faulty. Knowing both where Europe went and where it now is, she presents an ideal relationship of part to whole which allocates priorities to values of interdependence and mutual development; an ideal which is democratic rather than aristocratic, plural not uniform, distinctive not separatist and other- rather than self-regarding. It is cosmopolitan, but rooted in internationalism not Western exceptionalism. In developing this conception, Gagnier's aim is 'to keep alive models of freedom that are not confined to free markets, choice that is more than consumer choice, liberalism that is not neo-liberalism, and an individualism that is more than the maximization of self-interest'. (p. 163) As she says, Morris was also a great exponent of this conception, and her powerful re-statement of his principles is a joy to read.

The author describes her approach as 'an analytic of part and whole' (p. 163) and this makes sense of the organisation of the book. Her main claim indeed emerges from the interrelationship of the chapters, supported by the particular, detailed discussions of the individual writers, artists and philosophers contained within them. Yet there is another aspect to her approach which complicates the analysis but also provides a foundation for the greater picture of wholeness that she wants to present. This draws on the synthetic philosophy associated with Spencer, Darwin and others, which took ideas of organic development and the relatedness of all forms of life as a starting point for social-scientific research. Gagnier highlights her enthusiasm for this approach in the introduction when she discusses contemporary biology: micro-metabolisms, global ecological and evolutionary time. (p. 12) At this stage, the significance of this work to her project is not entirely clear. Yet following the discussion of Morris, Gagnier returns to the themes of dynamic adaptation, relatedness and complexity to show the ways in which the principles of part to whole which she seeks to defend rely on the recognition of the interplay between nature, culture and technology and the rejection of the methodological individualism which supports the neo-liberal project.

Given the aims of the book, it is not surprising that Gagnier emphasises the discussion of individualisms over the analysis of concepts of community, collectivism and so forth. The idea of wholeness emerges from the analysis of the parts; the ways in which Victorians and early twentieth-century figures conceptualised these balancing concepts are secondary to her purpose. Yet the effect of their neglect can be distorting. In the second chapter, for example, she argues that Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* was untypical of new-woman literature because it 'represents a woman negating all relations'. Against this she says, 'Woman-created New Women were not so rigidly independent. They wanted autonomy, individual development, but they wanted it through *relationship*'. (p. 63) The rich survey she presents is persuasive in showing that this was generally the case.

But it was not universally so. When Dora Marsden cut her ties with the anarchists, accusing them of being woolly humanitarians and adopted the label 'egoist', she did so precisely because she wanted to assert a principle of self-mastery which was limited only by will. In one of two brief notes, Gagnier mentions Marsden's journal the *The Egoist* as an antidote for those otherwise fearful of the mass and as a source of later strength for Nietzsche's 'good Europeans'. (p. 115) Marsden's unattractive treatment of the 'herd' and the stupidity of common people is ignored. Was Marsden an extreme case, an exception who demonstrates a rule? Probably. Nevertheless her exceptionalism points to an important aspect of early feminism and radical individualism which Gagnier's discussion passes over lightly, namely the relationship between autonomy and commitment.

Ideas of commitment and concomitant concepts of sacrifice and compassion were strong themes in late nineteenth-century socialist thought. The martyrdom of the Haymarket anarchists in 1887 was an inspiration in this respect, and the involvement of women in the Russian Revolutionary cause was another. Reflections on both seeped into literature: penny dreadfuls as well as more serious work. While the ideals which socialist martyrs embodied were sometimes considered irreconcilable with autonomy – this was Marsden's claim – others contested this view and interpreted them as heroic expressions of autonomy. This was Morris's position: mastership was integral to fellowship. And Gagnier, too, makes this point towards the end of the book when she discusses Morris's cosmopolitanism: 'we need to give up vulgar notions of socialism that see it as incompatible with individualism or with freedoms and choice that modern citizens have come to expect'. (p. 150) However, the idea of commitment does not feature strongly in Gagnier's discussion though it seems relevant to her ideas about ethics, and my feeling is that its analysis would have enriched the broader thematic claims which she wants to make. That said, this is a rich, thoughtful and thought-provoking book and its message is important.

Ruth Kinna

Mervyn Miller, *English Garden Cities: An Introduction*, London: English Heritage, 2010, 116 pp., £9.99. ISBN 9781848020511.

Mervyn Miller is an acknowledged expert on the Garden Cities Movement, with substantial publications to his name, on Letchworth, Hampstead Garden Suburb and the visionary town planner, Raymond Unwin, amongst others. It is therefore not surprising that English Heritage has turned to him in order to write the latest in their series of introductory books in their 'Informed Conservation' series. *Garden Cities: An Introduction* is the twenty-second in the series, and, like the others, short, and none the worse for that.

The idea of Garden Cities will always be associated with Ebenezer Howard (1850–1928), and his book *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*. Howard's idea originated in social and environmental concerns, a reaction to the failure of the nineteenth century industrial city portrayed as 'Coketown' by Charles Dickens in *Hard Times*. A vision of 'the peaceful path to real reform' as he called it, the book set out the vision over one hundred years ago, and in an age of a degrading environment, rising inequality and increasing social disharmony, it holds plenty of relevance for us today.

Howard was not a landowner, but a parliamentary reporter who transcribed lengthy debates, committees and government commissions, and never trained as an architect. George Bernard Shaw famously wrote of him as being one of those heroic simpletons who do big things while our prominent worldlings are explaining why they are utopian and impossible. He was influenced in his thinking by John Ruskin, Peter Kropotkin, Henry George, by the utopianism of Thomas More and William Morris, and by the experiments of nineteenth century paternalistic industrialists such as Robert Owen at New Lanark, Sir Titus Salt at Saltaire, and Colonel Edward Akroyd at Akroydon, who had quickly learned the economic, social and advertising value of model living.

The approach was further developed by William Lever at Port Sunlight (named after his top-selling brand of soap) and George Cadbury at Bourneville, but *Garden Cities* was a much more ambitious concept. When it was published in 1898, Howard's book felt like an idea whose time had come. By June 1899, a Garden City Association, later to become the Town and Country Planning Association, had been formed; within a year or so, the Association had recruited prominent supporters and raised a significant amount of capital. Two architects, Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin – both influenced by Morris, and the 'simple life' philosophy of Edward Carpenter – were crucial in turning the ideas into reality, which was, and is, Letchworth Garden City, Welwyn Garden City, both in Hertfordshire, Hampstead Garden Suburb in North London, and Wythenshawe in Manchester.

It is also town planning. That concept barely existed when Howard's book was

published, but by 1909 the Town Planning Act, the cornerstone of British town and country planning, had been passed. It is difficult to imagine today the impact of town and country planning on politicians and social reformers during the first half of the twentieth century, although Winifred Holtby's *South Riding*, recently dramatised by the BBC, gives a flavour of the excitement and possibilities which it opened up for people across the country, eager for progressive change after the horrors of World War I.

The book takes these major developments sequentially – Letchworth, Hampstead Garden Suburb ('the suburb salubrious'), Welwyn, and Wythenshawe, exploring why developments took place when they did, the advantages and the disadvantages of each site, the extent to which they conformed to Howard's vision, in practise providing – this is after all a book published by English Heritage – much very interesting detail on layout, house design, the different architects whose work can still be seen, and some of the major modifications these places have undergone since their original construction. Miller takes the reader through the realisation of each development, beginning in September 1903 in a marquee south of Baldock Road, with pouring rain lashing the canvas, where Earl Grey declared the estate which became Letchworth open.

The chapters on Garden City homes and the 'spirit of the place' provide delightful detail on how the new residents lived, and what they did. The 'simple life' was certainly part of the deal, especially in Letchworth, which became notorious nationwide, with pacifism, internationalism, vegetarianism, temperance, Esperanto and Theosophy all playing their part, leading to a number of literary and theatrical parodies. The reader is supplied with plenty of images, both contemporary and current, and dozens of photographs to illustrate what garden cities look like, and what anyone taking a day out to explore these locations today might hope to see.

Miller's assessments of these initiatives are pithy and to the point. Of Hampstead Garden suburb he writes that it '... represented the architectural ideals of the Garden City Movement to perfection, (but) in planning terms it fell short of attaining Howard's comprehensive vision, being somewhat two-dimensional, restricted to institutional and residential elements and lacking provision for local employment'. Of Welwyn – which he considers to be by far the most successful in realising Howard's vision – he states, '... whether its success was and remains due to convenience for London commuters is a moot point. Its achievement in building a genuinely new city was, however, of huge importance in influencing later experiments in town planning; it was the conduit through which Howard's garden city ideas flowed into the post war era of reconstruction, of which Welwyn Garden City itself became a significant part'.

However, probably because of the restrictions of the brief, Miller does not address the influence of the Garden Cities on the New Towns Movement which

followed the Second World War, let alone the effect of this kind of thinking and planning on practise around the world, from America to India. The New Towns Act 1946, the work of Town and Country Planning Minister Lewis Silkin, and the role of the Commission for the New Towns are dispatched in less than three pages. So, while the book celebrates the successes of the Garden Cities movement in an accessible and informative way – and there is plenty to celebrate – it does not address some of the failures and the lessons to be learned. If Miller had been given room to discuss whether Howard's vision really worked and what we can draw today from these very substantial and long lasting experiments, for a future where sustainable living in constrained environments will become a much more pressing priority, it would have been a more interesting book.

Martin Stott

Royal School of Needlework Handbook of Embroidery (1880) by Letitia Higgin, edited by Lady Marian Alford. With an introductory essay by Lynn Hulse, London: RSN Archive D2, fol. 27 v. Royal School of Needlework, 2010, £20. ISBN 9780956645500.

The re-issue of Leticia Higgin's 1880 *Handbook of Embroidery* is very welcome. Not only has it long proved an invaluable technical guide for embroiderers but also, in later years, a very useful historical source. Despite being a story about the formation of a book, this volume is particularly useful for textile historians for its well-researched introduction, which traces the evolution of the original publication and provides a survey of the foundation in 1872 of the Royal School of Needlework, Britain's most enduring professional embroidery workshop, which, having weathered the vagaries of fashion for almost one hundred and forty years, continues to practise to this day.

During the mid 1980s I was approached to see whether I would be willing to write a history of the School. My predecessors at the Victoria and Albert Museum had declined the opportunity to arrange a centenary exhibition at the Museum in 1972, finding few surviving archives and so, with a full-time job and limited time for research, I too reluctantly refused. I am pleased to say that with her introductory essay Lynn Hulse should be congratulated for achieving much more than seemed possible some years ago. Her thirty-six-page Introduction (with seven additional pages of footnotes) is packed with information discovered not just in the organisation's archives but also from a wide range of sources, as the extensive bibliography testifies. She has identified (often with biographical notes) many of the main personalities involved in the 1880's publication but, more significant, the early years of the School and its important role in the revival of hand

embroidery during the later part of the nineteenth century. Hulse was employed as Archivist and later Tutor in Contextual Studies at the Royal School: it is a tragedy that lack of funds has forced the termination of her contract, for without an understanding of the School's history and purpose its teaching is likely to suffer.

The craze for canvas-work embroidery (referred to in later years as embroidery by numbers) took Britain by storm with the widespread import during the 1820s of German printed patterns and bright merino wools to complete the panels. Skills developed over centuries and handed down through families were abandoned for these kits, which demanded no more than an ability to hold a needle and thread and follow a printed or painted guide. Hundreds of versions of historical, biblical and literary scenes were embroidered and this type of work became so popular that many haberdashers' shops at the time were referred to as 'Berlin Warehouses'.

Fortunately not all nineteenth century embroidery lacked innovation and artistic individuality. Exponents of ecclesiastical embroidery, produced almost exclusively in convents and other religious institutions, maintained and increased the technical excellence of their work as the revolution in, and expansion of, church building spread throughout Britain. Using designs by many of the leading architects and designers of the day, church needlework outshone anything produced in the home. It was feared that domestic embroiderers would never again aspire to the same heights.

The architect George Edmund Street, an expert on medieval embroidery and keen designer of needlework for his own churches, was one of the first to record the potential demise of domestic production. In a lecture of 1863 printed in *The Ecclesiologist* magazine he stated 'Is it possible for anyone to feel any joy in the contemplation of the work in which so many ladies pretend to find pleasure – that contemptible system of cross-stitch work, which requires no sense, no thought, hardly any manual dexterity on the part of the worker; and which, be the worker good, bad or indifferent, produces the same hard formal absence of good results?'

William Morris, who had worked in Street's office for a short period during his youth, had already come to the same conclusions. Ignoring the prevailing commercial trends, he had revived traditional skills and by 1872, the year that the Royal School of Art Needlework was founded, there was already a strong body of feeling within artistic circles that things needed to change. Morris taught himself traditional embroidery techniques soon after leaving Oxford, by completing an intensively worked and eccentric looking hanging of his own design for his rooms in Red Lion Square in London. Over the next four years he designed two quite separate sophisticated embroidery schemes for the furnishing of Red House, gaining confidence within that short time and mastering which techniques produced the right effects and how to teach these to others.

Street and Morris were not alone in advocating an improvement. Many male artists and designers were involved in the push for change and this gave the campaign credibility within the wider artistic world. However, it was left to wealthy and influential members of British society, both men and women, to provide the means to make this happen.

The Royal School of Art Needlework, as it was initially named, was founded by Lady Victoria Welby, wife of a Baronet and Conservative MP, and opened in 1872 with premises over a bonnet shop in Sloane Street, London. Its aim from the outset was to concentrate on secular embroidery. Lady Welby's intentions were not only to provide teaching of traditional techniques but also a means of employing 'distressed gentlewomen in reduced circumstances', a theme echoed in a number of philanthropic projects at the time. Output would concentrate on the completion of orders and commissions for new work but also adapting, transferring, repairing and copying historic pieces at a time when the London antique trade was burgeoning.

Despite any urgency brought on by their circumstances, it was not easy for potential employees to gain employment at the School. Apart from demonstrating considerable skills with the needle, applicants required two references from 'respectable members of society' and were expected to live within commuting distance. Successful applicants were then put through an initial course of technical training consisting of nine five-hour lessons for which they paid a fee of £5. Once employed, they worked seven hours per day.

Lady Welby's main support came from the ranks of British aristocracy and included Viscountess Down and the Countesses Spencer, Brownlow and Cowper. From the beginning women took on the role of directing the School's activities with men taking care of funding – very much in line with the average middle-class Victorian home. The Managing Committee for 1880 comprised twelve women with seven men forming a separate group to control finance.

Royal patronage provided an important early seal of approval. Princess Helena of Schleswig-Holstein, Queen Victoria's third daughter, became President, and in 1875 the School acquired its royal prefix when the Queen agreed to become patron. The School was beginning to exhibit political and social clout, and within two years of opening, an increase in orders enabled the number of qualified embroiderers employed to rise from twenty to eighty-eight, with twelve staff dealing directly with administration.

It is not clear who was responsible for artistic direction during the early days. Some practising artists and designers seem to have been involved on the periphery, but only three of those listed as Committee Members can be identified as possessing artistic qualifications. These are Lady Charlotte Schreiber, the traveller and collector, Madeline Wyndham, friend and client of William Morris and

a member of 'The Souls' artistic set based around Clouds, her country house in Wiltshire, and Sir Coutts Lindsay, water colourist and founder of the Grosvenor Gallery.

In 1875 the School moved to larger premises on Exhibition Road. By then there were several separate departments specialising in different types of embroidery, and the School began what history has shown to be its most important artistic period. Many embroidery designs were produced in-house, but a separate fund was set aside for the purchase of work by leading free-lance designers of the day. An advisory panel of 'gentlemen skilled in decorative work', including Lord Leighton, Edward Burne-Jones, Alma Tadema and the architects William Burges and G.F. Bodley was formed, and then superseded by a permanent Art Committee which advised on all new commissioned work. Madeline Wyndham seems to have been instrumental in involving William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, and some of their designs pre-date the move to South Kensington. Other notable recruits were Fairfax Wade, Selwyn Image and Walter Crane, the most successful of all, whose relationship with the School continued for twenty years.

The School acquired a stand at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876. It was the largest project taken on to that date and Bessie Burden, Jane Morris's sister, is said to have directed some of the work. The large and impressive stand displayed crewelwork curtains, hangings and screens designed by Walter Crane and William Morris. Despite suffering heavy financial losses, the School's work was universally applauded. In later years Candace Wheeler, one of the founders of the American Aesthetic Movement, cited it as one of her greatest influences. The School developed a continuous following in the US, owing in part to the publication there of the *Handbook*, and various offshoots over the next few years.

Returning to the main subject of this book, one can only admire the decision to go into print with the *Handbook of Embroidery* in 1880, at the height of the School's popularity. As already indicated, the *Handbook* is a technical manual on traditional embroidery with sections on materials, stitches, equipment and types of needlework. It also includes a section on finishing and one on frames and framing. Instructional linear drawings are scattered throughout. The book ends with twenty-five illustrations of commercial designs by the School. Just three are from the studio, the rest by fashionable designers of the time including Walter Crane, William Morris Fairfax Wade, Gertrude Jekyll, and Selwyn Image.

Lynn Hulse's research follows, blow by blow, the routes followed by Lady Marian Alford, the formidable Vice President of the School, in sponsoring, organising and editing the publication. Letitia Higgin, who was the third author to be considered, had already submitted the text of a book on embroidery to the Managing Committee, who approved its publication. A Lancashire woman, she

was one of three sisters employed by the School and, at the time of publication, was the School's assistant secretary. Lady Alford's editing of the submitted text and the problems she encountered with a proposed second volume, is a torturous read and it is difficult to decide which of the individuals involved was most to blame for the abandonment of the later project owing to a dispute over copyright. Lady Alford, clearly devastated by the lack of support from the School, resigned in 1883; Leticia Higgin left a year later. However, her career blossomed, as she went on to found the Society of Associated Artistes, a London business specialising in costume embroidery, and continued to write for the *Art Journal* and *The Magazine of Art*.

The new book is divided into two separate sections, the illustrated Introduction, followed by the re-printed *Handbook*, which is cleverly printed on cream paper in order to differentiate it from the new text. It is physically attractive and easy to handle, although the lack of an index makes it a difficult book for an historian to dip into. But that is not the book's true purpose and practising embroiderers will find it just as useful as when it was first published one hundred and thirty-one years ago.

Linda Parry

Penny Sparke, Anne Massey, Trevor Keeble & Brenda Martin, eds, *Designing the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today*. Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, June 2009, 320 pp., 100 b&w illus. Hbk, ISBN 978-1-84788-288-2, £75.00: pbk, ISBN 978-1-84788-287-5, £27.99.

Designing the Modern Interior brings together nineteen contributors and editors, many drawn from the pioneering design-history stable at Kingston University, but also springing from Sheffield, Oxford, the Royal College of Art, the Bard, the University of Vienna and the broader international academic community. The contributors' fields include cultural studies and sustainable design as well as architectural and design history: there has been a surge in studies of the interior during the last ten years. The Arts and Humanities Research Board Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior, formed by the Royal College of Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Bedford Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London, is one manifestation of this.

The book discusses how the modernising impulse in interior design began during the Victorian period, and places the modern interior in a broad, multi-disciplinary context:

Given the breadth of its manifestations, meanings and influences – the modern interior can be linked to architecture, which is visible in plans, axonometrics and photographs etc.; to the idea of theatre, as, that is, a ‘stage set’ for its occupants which invokes discussions about interiority; as an extension of the body, linked to the world of fashion; and as a represented, mediated ideal connoting a modern lifestyle. (p. 3)

A clear structure divides the text into four chronological sections, almost books within a book, each with an introduction giving an overview of the contents and the period covered, followed by illustrated case studies. In her lucid general introduction, Penny Sparke lays out the purpose of the book as:

... to portray the modern interior as both linked to the experience of modernity in all its complexity and as it was addressed by architects, decorators and others who sought to find visual, material and spatial means of expressing that modernity, the modernists among them. In adopting this approach the book’s main aim is to provide students of the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century interior, practitioners who intervene in the design of interiors, and anyone else interested in the spaces we inhabit, with an understanding of why they look as they do and convey the meanings that they do, and with a sense of both the context of, and the key themes that informed, the development of the interior in the period in question. (p. 1)

Emma Ferry’s introduction to the section on the late nineteenth-century describes the lasting influence of Nikolaus Pevsner’s *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1936) as it tried to persuade the English that architectural history was a line of progress culminating in the ‘Authentic Modern Movement’

The dominance of this approach explains the early tendencies of architectural and design historians working on the nineteenth century to focus upon the use of new materials and building types; to highlight the work of designers like Morris and Mackintosh; and to trace the emergence of the avant-garde rather than popular revival styles. (p. 15)

Mid-twentieth century exhibitions of Victorian and Edwardian decorative arts deliberately sifted items of extreme, bad or derivative taste. Peter Floud’s introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition ‘Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts’ (1952) at the V&A is quoted:

We have deliberately eliminated what was merely freakish or grotesque. At the same time we have purposely left out a whole host of Victorian designers whose work was unashamedly based on the copying of earlier styles. (p. 17)

It was not until the 1970s that a more inclusive approach to Victorian design was

employed and the period was more honestly represented.

Modernism spawned a variety of slightly confusing terms. 'Modernisation' bred 'modern' which was followed by 'modernism', 'modernity', 'modernist', 'modernistic' and 'moderne'; the International Style, 'streamlined' or 'surreal', 'contemporary', 'retro' or 'minimal'. Elsa Lanchester described 'the spacious bareness around me' in the modernised flat she shared with Charles Laughton, (p. 7) and modernist housing was designed to look practical, rational and functional. It sought to use new materials and mass-production techniques and to bring modern housing within the reach of the majority of the population. It was antihistoricist and antidecorative. German and Fennoscandian expatriates Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Josef Albers, Elliel Saarinen, Walter Knoll and Mies van der Rohe disseminated modernism in the United States, whence it was transported to the rest of the world. However, there are great contrasts in modernity's manifestations. Mies van der Rohe, for instance, provided ascetic, spare settings 'in which decoration is provided only by the shadows that fall on their white walls', (p. 8) whilst the Bloomsbury Group, also defined as 'modern', covered their Omega furniture and walls with pattern and figurative designs. The Bloomsbury set may be seen as signalling their British roots through 'the amateur traditions and whimsical iconographies of the Arts and Crafts movement'. (Note 10, p. 91) Charles and Ray Eames gave the nod to comfort and to decoration as a form of personal expression, while living in a house composed of mass-produced, industrial components and sharing the same furniture designs in their domestic interior and their work space. Their collection of objects proved that everything can be of decorative value, from Japanese pottery to a beautiful pebble.

Modern housing has not always been easy to live in. Edith Farnsworth found the transparency of the house Mies van der Rohe designed for her most uncomfortable. Other modernist icons, such as Corbusier's Villa Savoye, 'were not exactly cherished family homes but rather showcases or second residences, used to entertain large parties rather than to accommodate the messiness of everyday reality'. (Christopher Reed, p. 128) Corbusier's houses could be unpractical, however functional they appear. Most mass housing in Britain continued to employ conventional brick construction in the Georgian style as being less expensive and more appropriate to the national environment than new materials and production methods. Far from serving the working class, the modernist style in Britain was embraced most strongly by the bourgeoisie, who suddenly found themselves with fewer servants in the first half of the twentieth century and could thus appreciate its spare rationality.

Homophobic and sexist rhetoric could be used in criticisms of the interior. Corbusier's gendered *Towards a New Architecture* opens by defining 'houses and moth-eaten boudoirs' as feminine spaces which undermine the masculinity of the men who live in them, leaving them 'sheepish and shrivelled like tigers in a

cage'. (p. 80) Christopher Reed describes a playful, home-grown style of British modernism, which he labels the 'Amusing style'. The products of the Omega workshops and the style showcased, for instance, by the Sitwell House in *Vogue* in 1924, with its exotic mélange of baroque furniture laid with silver, tribal artefacts and modern art, are certainly amusing. They were popular among emancipated young women and therefore vilified by the likes of Paul Nash and Wyndham Lewis, who longed for professional, male, modernist, interior designers.

Indeed, the first half of the twentieth century did witness the rise of the professional interior designer. At first designers were female, such as Syrie Maugham and Sibyl Colefax. Elsie de Wolfe had been an early pioneer, through her 1913 book, *The House in Good Taste*, in which she made the apposite comment, 'you will express yourself in your home whether you want to or not.' (p. 71) After the Second World War however, prominent, male, interior designers such as David Hicks and John Fowler came to the fore, often working directly with architects. In London the Royal College of Art hired the architect Hugh Casson to set up an interior-design course. Interior decoration was increasingly linked with fashion, feature films and holiday destinations as fantasy interiors proved an important part of the experience in hotels, cinemas, cafes and cruise ships. Magazines devoted entirely to the interior helped disseminate new trends and products and the Ideal Home Exhibition became a fixture of the London scene.

Beauty had been redefined. Elizabeth Darling of Oxford Brookes University describes Mies van der Rohe's buildings, such as the Villa Tugendhat, Brno, of 1929–31, as containing abstract rooms with 'eloquent silences'. (p. 109) The filled living space of the nineteenth century is contrasted with the emptied living space of the twentieth century:

It is as though nature had entered the house in the grain of the wood, the fibres of the fabrics, the design of the cut onyx, the surface of the water in the winter garden ... nearly all of these surfaces are smooth, gleaming, and they often reflect light. Paintings, hitherto conventional components of living rooms, were replaced by the experience of framed nature. (pp. 111–112)

Latterly, there has been a post-modern reaction. Trevor Keeble describes how technology is now often used in a 'fetishistic and emblematic manner' in Joseph shop interiors, the domestic interiors of Future Systems, railway stations and airports. Memphis used colour, decoration, and the juxtaposition of materials and forms to challenge conventional understanding and, it appeared, to reject all trace of modernist 'honesty'. (p. 222) Internal spaces have been created by Foster Associates at the Royal Academy and the British Museum by glazing in previously external space. Another trend is the conversion of disused industrial space, for instance Herzog and De Mueron's redevelopment of the Bankside Power Station into Tate Modern. Alison J. Clarke, Professor of Design History at the University

of the Applied Arts, Vienna, describes how 'an ever complex and rapid system of style obsolescence is a defining feature of a late capitalist society'. (p. 270)

Unhinged from preexisting hierarchies of cultural capital, the new vernacular of style is interwoven in the processes of riddance that has come to define contemporary dwelling, be it the project of 'making-room' or decluttering or passing on. ... The occupants of British dwellings, as they rearrange, declutter, modernise and retrofit their interiors, use style in constant processes of remembering and expelling. (p. 271)

The final contribution in the book, by Anne Chick of Kingston University, describes the Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZED) which aims to encourage sustainable living. This partnership of the Peabody Trust, Bill Dunster Architects and the BioRegional Development Group has developed innovative housing for social and key workers in Wallington, Surrey. The central aim of the development has been the reduction of the ecological domestic footprint. 'Key to this ambition was the aim to assist inhabitants to change the default decisions of their daily lifestyle to ones which are sustainable'. (p. 277) The development aims to eliminate carbon emissions owing to energy consumption, and to reduce water consumption by 33%, power consumption by 60%, space heating needs by 90% and private fossil-fuel car mileage to 50% of the UK average.

Designing the Modern Interior is well referenced fully indexed, and contains a large bibliography. It provides an excellent example of academic rigour, presented with interest, and clarity in prose and print. The black and white illustrations and plans are relevant. This particular reader found the sans serif type difficult to read for long periods, but it looks beautiful and is totally appropriate to its subject. Apart from one contributor's misuse of brackets, the editing and presentation are exemplary. The prose is accessible, with no indulgence in the exclusive academic vocabulary or strangled syntax which can so mar academic books for the general reader. The content succeeds in its aims of offering an introduction to the broad themes evinced in interior design since the Victorian era.

Diana Andrews

Matthew Crawford, *The Case for Working with your Hands or Why Office Work is Bad for us and Fixing Things Feels Good*, London: Penguin, 2011, 246 pp., pbk, £8.99. ISBN 9780141047294.

If you have looked under the bonnet of a modern car and found yourself bewildered and distressed by futuristic machinery which does not resemble an engine, you might find some solace in *The Case for Working with Your Hands*. Matthew

Crawford despises what he describes as 'the layers of electronic bullshit that get piled on top of machines', (p. 7) and sees this as a symptom of a much wider cultural malaise which deskills workers and makes false promises of freedom through consumer culture. It soon becomes apparent that the author has led an interesting life. From the age of nine to fifteen he lived in a commune; he then worked as a mechanic and as an electrician before developing an interest in philosophy while studying for a Physics degree, which led to a PhD in the history of political thought. He was then appointed as executive director of a Washington think tank, but lasted only a year before resigning to set up his own motorcycle repair shop. This unusual career trajectory forms the substance of much of the book: biographical episodes are analysed through the filters of philosophy and socio-cultural research, to build up a critique of contemporary attitudes towards work.

Crawford's basic premise is that manual work is undervalued, both intellectually and socially. He explains his passion for motorcycle maintenance in some detail and builds up a sustained critique of the 'contemporary office', the 'knowledge economy' and global corporate structures which distance workers from the products of their labour. He traces this attitude to the development of 'scientific management' during the early-twentieth century, which sought to concentrate knowledge in the hands of a managerial élite who broke down the labour into small segments to be carried out by an unskilled (and therefore cheap) workforce. He describes how wages became compensation for work which lacked fulfilment, and typifies the modern condition in the figure of the mortgage broker who climbs Mount Everest during his summer holiday: 'the exaggerated psychic content of this summer vacation' (p. 181) sustains his vacuous professional life.

Crawford examines the frustrations of office work in a chapter entitled 'The Contradictions of the Cubicle'. He sees a fundamental contradiction in the way that corporations portray themselves as 'results-based' and 'performance-oriented', (p. 126) but suggests that when there is nothing material being produced, it is difficult to judge objectively how well an employee has performed. He contrasts this arrangement to that of a machinist in a factory: if the part the worker has produced does not meet specification, he has failed and the worker and employer find a way of correcting this failure. In an office environment, when employees are working towards ambiguous goals, success and failure are more difficult to evaluate. As the nature of corporate work is ill-defined, offices become timid places which lack any concrete sense of individual responsibility, which gives rise to anxiety, stress and the timidity of political correctness.

Crawford believes that the education system consistently undervalues and misunderstands craft skills. The 'new capitalism' demands a flexible workforce and so higher education concentrates on 'open' education which stresses the ability to learn new things and celebrates 'potential rather than achievement'.

(p. 19) By contrast, teaching a student to be a plumber or an electrician is seen as ‘closed’, making the egalitarians fear ‘that acquiring a specific skill set means that one’s life is *determined*’. (p. 19) The role model of the ‘open’ education is the management consultant, ‘who swoops in and out and whose very pride lies in his lack of particular expertise’. (p. 20)

Against the banality of office work Crawford attempts to explain the ‘cognitive richness of the skilled trades’. (p. 21) This argument is chiefly delivered *via* descriptions of his own education in the subtleties of motorcycle maintenance. Such work is skilled, presents mental as well as physical challenges and demands a nuanced approach. Respect for manual skill is elaborated in the description of the author’s rite of passage in being allowed to help ‘Chas’, a skilled mechanic and machinist, rebuild the engine of his VW Beetle. Skilled mechanics must care for their work; be involved. The bad mechanic is illustrated by the author’s favourite passage from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, where poor mechanics misdiagnose and damage the bike. Finding the real mechanical fault requires a certain attitude lacking in the poor mechanic: ‘finding this truth requires a certain disposition in the individual: attentiveness, enlivened by a sense of responsibility to the motorcycle’. (p. 98) By examining the Greek root of the word ‘idiot’, Crawford then explains that someone who is idiotic fails to appreciate their public role, and does not connect their work with any public responsibility. This theme is developed throughout the book: working communities surrounding the skilled trades are shown to be healthy and intrinsically social. Gurus of motorcycle maintenance can teach an apprentice things a text book or diagnostic program never will, and apprentices gain entrance to the culture of skilled work by earning respect from the skilled workers. Crawford’s commentary on the value of manual work is underpinned by a range of philosophical thought, particularly Aristotle, and the attempt to lead a good, happy life is presented as intrinsically connected to working with one’s hands.

Someone influenced by the socialism of William Morris might be tempted to describe the politics of the Crawford’s book as confused. On one side many of the anti-corporate arguments will be familiar to those who have read socialist critiques of capitalism and consumer culture, and much of the material about the value of manual work can be traced to writers such as Richard Sennett and Michael Polanyi. But far from being a socialist, Crawford agrees that defending the right to private property is ‘a pillar of liberty’ (p. 209), and is a self-confessed ‘gearhead’ devoted to petrol-guzzling motorcycles. He describes his mentor ‘Chas’ with some enthusiasm as ‘once a classical guitar-playing Buddhist vegetarian ... now a gun freak and brilliant misanthropist’. (p. 84) He is explicitly contemptuous of political correctness and his own turn of phrase is unashamedly laddish. Sometimes this is funny and engaging, as in his concise exegesis of Aris-

tote: 'In English, this teleological understanding of happiness gets condensed in the proverbial saying "Happy as a pig in shit"'. (pp. 192–3) At times his bawdiness is far less appealing: 'Volkswagens ... tend to get passed around like a reasonably priced sex worker'. (p. 95)

Uncritical love of the language of the mechanic is integrated into his theory of work. Crawford admires the 'speed shop' (a specialist garage containing skilled mechanics) enormously, and suggests that one way in which an aspiring mechanics are vetted by the other workers is by their ability to return insults: 'If he is able to return these outrageous insults with wit, the conversation will cascade toward real depravity; the trust is pushed further and made reciprocal. If the young man shows promise, that is, if he is judged to have some potential to plumb new depths of moral turpitude, he may get hired: here is someone around whom everyone can relax'. (p. 183) Are we to understand that the implicit sexism in this scenario is a laudable way of furthering a culture of meaningful work?

The focus on the local, the personal and the specific is connected to a theme in Crawford's book which seeks to develop a critique of global universalising trends. In a biographical anecdote he describes arriving in India aged sixteen and feeling alienated by smells and unfamiliar sensations. He explains how his anxiety was suddenly overcome by a feeling of kinship with a group of Indian electricians performing a task which was familiar to him: 'They were currently encountering the world in a way that was familiar to me, orientating to it through a set of concerns I knew well, and the consciousness behind their eyes I took to be the same as my own'. (p. 200) In this and in other areas he champions the solidarity of working-class culture against the blandness and false rhetoric of corporate globalisation. Personal engagement is necessarily superior to 'systems of universal ethics' which are criticised for being both 'dreary' and 'abstract'.

There are many admirable aspects to this book. It is very lively and readable, especially considering the complexity of the subject and the large number of sources employed in order to support the argument. Crawford's thoughts on the nature of meaningful work are a refreshing departure from what he describes as 'the kind of mysticism that gets attached to "craftsmanship"', (p. 5) and he distances himself from a sentimental yearning for the 'simple life' in favour of an aim to 'rehabilitate the honour of the trades' – a project surely very close to the heart of William Morris. The specific aims of the book are articulated and argued convincingly and many readers will find themselves won over by his assertions about the devaluation of manual work. The problem, however, is what to do about it and here (inevitably) the book is less convincing. A mistrust of collective ideals is all very well, but this prevents Crawford from really confronting the corporate culture he clearly loathes. It is difficult to envisage how small-scale capitalism might be a remedy for the ills articulated in this book, or how this might exist

without corporate capitalism. I applaud the broad approach of this book but the reactionary political stance is troubling, and I cannot help thinking that being a mechanic is not quite as fulfilling as being a philosopher and mechanic.

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