

Florence Boos, ed., *'The Earthly Paradise' by William Morris*, 2 vols. (New York & London: Routledge, 2002), 687 + xxxix pp. (vol. 1) and 779 + lxv pp. (vol. 2), £225.00 hbk, 29 b&w illus. (vol. 1) and 35 b&w illus. (vol. 2), ISBN 04159 41504 (vol. 1), 04159 41512 (vol. 2) and 08153 2104X (set).

IN THIS TALE IS TOLD OF A RECENT EDITION OF 'THE EARTHLY PARADISE', A GOODLY AND FINE ADDITION TO SCHOLARSHIP; BUT THE EDITION COSTS MUCH, WHICH TROUBLES THE REVIEWER, LEADING HER TO

ASK WHOMSOEVER MAY LIKE TO LISTEN WHETHER THE FUTURE OF EDITING MORRIS WILL BE FOUND IN OTHER – VIRTUAL – LANDS.

THERE ARE FEW PEOPLE on the planet who know more about Morris's poetry than Florence Boos. There are also few people who have demonstrated more commitment to making Morris's poetry a subject worthy of serious scholarship and hence of note to the wider community of Victorianists. This latter task is no easy one. Aside from *The Defence of Guenevere* volume, Morris's poetry is still sometimes overlooked by modern scholars who see little in it that merits sustained critical discussion. Boos herself has observed that the 'originality and experimental qualities [of Morris's poetry] might have been better appreciated had he accomplished somewhat less in other areas of life' ('1896–1996: Morris's Poetry at the *Fin de Millénaire*', *Victorian Poetry* 34: 3 (1996), p. 285). Alongside this is the other well-rehearsed view that most of his poetry is too long and rambling. It is therefore welcome that in recent years Routledge have published Boos's two-volume scholarly edition of *The Earthly Paradise* (hereafter *TEP*) as it is one more attempt to counter such dismissals.

Boos has been writing about *TEP* since the 1980s, and her most sustained account of the work appeared in 1991 in *The Design of William Morris' 'Earthly Paradise'* (Edwin Mellen Press). The new edition opens with a 41-page Introduction which sets the poem in the context of Morris's other work, and which also discusses its biographical and critical genesis, the poem's message and design, Victorian historicism and Morris's use of the past, the poem's reception in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and an account of its publication history. This last section includes a rationale for the editorial procedures and decisions that Boos has made, which makes for interesting reading. Morris reviewed the text of *TEP* for the publication of the first single-volume edition by Reeves and Turner in 1890, and made a number of changes in wording and punctuation. The 1896 Kelmscott edition, in press at the time of Morris's death, made further changes, and Boos considers that it is 'this edition ... which most closely embodies Morris's own principles of punctuation and design' (p. 35). She then offers an account of May Morris's editing of *TEP* for the *Collected Works* (the relevant volumes, III and IV, were published in 1910–11). What might come as a surprise is that the *Collected Works* – and the

*Collected Works* as a whole has ever since been taken as the standard edition of Morris's works – 'makes thousands of changes in punctuation and capitalisation from Morris's editions of 1890 and 1896' (p. 36). Boos's conclusion in relation to establishing a copy-text for her own edition is that 'May Morris's decisions as she prepared the 1910–11 text do not create an indefeasible editorial authority for retention of changes in the 1910–11 text whose source and rationale are otherwise unknown. The present edition is therefore based primarily on the 1896 Kelmscott text' (p. 40). As many more recent editions of Morris's writings have been reprints of the *Collected Works* texts, Boos's comments here suggest that a wholesale re-editing of Morris's poetry and prose is now needed.

Undoubtedly these volumes will be the place to start for anyone now working on *The Earthly Paradise*: as well as the extensive Introduction Boos also lists the various early drafts of the individual tales and their whereabouts, and both volumes conclude with a detailed appendix of collations from the Huntington Library manuscript and the three main editions of *TEP* produced in Morris's lifetime. For the person more interested in actually reading the poems the text is well presented, and incorporates the large decorated initials used in the Kelmscott version for headings and sub-sections. The notes to the text also do not overwhelm it – as can be the case with some scholarly editions – but remain helpful (and necessary) in a work so full of allusions to different European mythologies and storytelling.

Both volumes also open with a more-than-usually-generous selection of images related to Morris in the 1860s and '70s, and to *TEP* specifically. These range from paintings and photos of Morris, through relevant paintings and sketches by Burne-Jones, to images of pages from the Kelmscott edition. This range of visual material is welcome, particularly in the context of a work which was initially conceived as an illustrated text. It is also here, I would argue, that the limits of this edition *as a book* start to show themselves. Inevitably, most scholarly editions only reproduce a certain number of images and other visual contextual material, and the more there are, often the higher the price of the book. This is not a cheap edition of *TEP* by any means, and it is unlikely to be encountered by (m)any outside of research universities. Such is the way of academic scholarly book publishing in the early twenty-first century that editions such as Boos's

only find their way into print via expensive hardback editions and very limited print runs. I have often found myself wondering how it is possible to make Morris's writings – particularly, perhaps his poetry – available both to the student in the classroom who knows little about the medieval, classical and Norse literatures in which Morris was steeped, but also to the researcher, via serious, scholarly editions.

The answer may well not lie in the form of the book. For also in the twenty-first century scholarly editions are starting to appear online as 'born digital' projects. Whilst economic issues still remain a clear consideration in terms of the production of such resources – and arguably the production of no major edition will ever be cheap – it is certainly possible that scholarly resources which also exploit the possibilities of their online platform and present a range of contextual visual material (in colour as well as black and white), can be available to anyone able to access the internet (see, for example, *The Rossetti Archive* [www.rossettiarchive.org](http://www.rossettiarchive.org)). Always one to want Morris to be as widely available as possible, Boos has now started work on the *Morris Online Edition* ([www.morrisedition.org](http://www.morrisedition.org)).

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