



Reviews

Edited by Rosie Miles

Life and Art at the David Parr House

The David Parr House is a short walk from the centre of Cambridge along Mill Road. Just before the railway bridge you take a right at Gwydir Street. Within a few yards at no. 186 can be seen a small, neat, freshly painted terraced house. A bright white sign attached to the front wall says ‘Life and Art in a Worker’s House’ (Figure 1).

I was interested to see the house after reading reviews before its recent reopening after a two-and-a-half-year conservation and stabilisation project. Here designs and materials created for the upper middle classes by Morris and Co. and other late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Arts and Crafts designers and craftsman had been appropriated by a skilled decorator for their own small terraced house. Could there be something Morrisian about a worker ‘doing it’ for himself? The David Parr House seemed to offer the possibility of at least a partial bridging of the gap between William Morris’s mature communist politics and Morris and Co.’s business in actually existing late-nineteenth-century capitalism.

On my arrival I was greeted by Tamsin Wimhurst who opened the front door into the hall, ushered me into the drawing room, instructed me to sit in one of three armchairs – the others chairs had an assortment of covers and embroidered cushions



Figure 1: David Parr House (photo: David Mabb).

on them – and began to tell me the David Parr story. Parr was employed as a decorator for the Cambridge firm of F. R. Leach and Son. The firm worked with many of the major architects and craftsmen of the time, including George Frederick Bodley, William Morris and Charles Eamer Kempe. David Parr bought the house in 1886, and for over forty years he lived in and decorated his home, until his death in 1927. After Parr's death his granddaughter Elsie Palmer moved into the house, initially looking after her grandmother. Palmer continued to live in the house for the next eighty-five years until she moved into a care home in 2012. Tamsin Wimshurst first saw the David Parr House in 2009, eventually buying it with her partner Mike Muller and transforming it into a charity in 2014. Wimshurst is now chair of the trustees.

The house is a fairly conventional 'two up two down' Victorian brick terrace with a small extended back section. On the ground floor it has an entrance hall running from the front door into the dining room and kitchen past the staircase up to the first floor, with the drawing room off to the right. There is a bathroom at the top of the stairs, under the eaves of the extension, and originally there were two bedrooms. The bedroom at the back was Elsie Palmer's and her husband's. The front bedroom was divided to make two smaller bedrooms and a sort of lobby.

The visitor centre opened in May 2019 and occupies the house next door at 184 Gwydir Street, but when I visited, the visitor centre had yet to open, and the souvenir guidebook written by David Parr's great-great-granddaughter Anna Norman had yet to arrive. There were no labels, wall texts or leaflets in any of the rooms, and nor are there going to be. Instead, the visitor is led through the house on a tour, providing a constantly evolving narrative context and dialogue between the guide and the visitor, and special thanks go to Tasmin Wimhurst, who provided me with the tour. Much of what we discussed appears in this review article.

The tour starts in the drawing room, and it is a quite extraordinary room. The wall to the right of the window is decorated with a large painted Morris decorative design, slightly adapted, which runs around three walls of the room, with huge – at least in relation to the size of the room – flowers and leaves, and two enormous scrolls (Figure 3). It is all painted in dusky greens, pinks and ochres. The design would probably have been drawn by pouncing, a tracing technique which involves pricking tiny holes into paper so chalk or charcoal can be pushed through to create a dot-to-dot copy on the wall. This would have enabled a large consistent pattern quickly to be created around the room. Hanging on this wall are two still life paintings. In front of the wall stands a piano with candlesticks from different periods, a mug with a Union Jack printed on it, framed photos and a vase of dried flowers.

Moving around the room, passing the back of the faux painted oak and gilded



Figure 2: Drawing room, David Parr House (© David Parr House, photo by Howard Rice).

door with elaborate hinges to examine the wall facing the window (which continues the painted design around the room), there is a large sunburst ornament hanging from the elaborate architrave. Hanging below the sunburst in a glitzy frame is a photographic portrait of what looks like a married couple. Perched on a decorative shelf immediately below this is a teapot in the form of a cottage, with a small medallion containing a portrait hanging off the handle of the lid (Figure 2).

To the right in the alcove is a 1970s record player and speakers with a pile of LPs and singles, and other assorted items including a portrait of Queen Victoria on a cheap white laminated shelf. Next to the alcove on the chimney breast, painted a reddish brown on anaglypta, are chinoiserie decorative wooden shelves with an assortment of ceramics and glass. Below on the mantelpiece are objects that include a vase with ostrich feathers, a small reproduction Christmas tree with baubles, old family photographs, small plates and dishes, two large sea shells and a corn dolly.

On the ceiling there is a huge Morris-inspired decoration with a fleshy painted ceiling rose with ochre and brown tendrils and leaves expanding out across the plaster ceiling (Figure 3). This creates the sense of being under a huge Triffid-like plant.

The overall effect is quite overwhelming in the sense that it is far too much to take in. The description above barely touches on the detail and complexity of Parr's decoration and just some of the objects in the room. The environment is intensely packed with material from different cultural and historical contexts. There is



Figure 3: Ceiling and wall, drawing room David Parr House (© David Parr House, photo by Howard Rice).



Figure 4: Dining room, David Parr House (© David Parr House, photo by Helena G. Anderson).

something strangely surreal about seeing this appropriation of decorative designs, usually found in larger houses, in the close proximity of a small room. When Parr works for himself, rather than for his employers, the result is a heady, trippy visual experience, where conventional rules of scale have been surpassed. Spending half an hour in the room is not really enough to get anything but a slight grasp on how the juxtapositions of things and surfaces interlace, mingle and collide. It would be possible and desirable to spend an afternoon just looking and reflecting on this room alone.

It is in this mode of very limited selective observation that I will try to describe some different rooms in the house. The dining room is significantly different from the drawing room, the main wall decorations being less flowing and more mechanical. The decoration is painted on a light ground with fruits alternating in deep red and khaki green. Above the picture rail is a beautiful painted shallow strip of rolling flowers, fruits, stems and leaves in golden and dark browns, ochres and yellow creams that are very Morris-like. The architrave has richly painted notches, waves and small flowers in pinks, red, ochre and black. Hanging on one wall there is a dark-framed woodland scene. In one corner a dark wood-polished shelf is fixed directly above the dado rail. Placed on it are family photos and a child's green toy steam train. The chimney breast is covered in a thick textile paper, which was originally used to cover damp emanating from the chimney (Figure 4). The decorative patterning is like a 1950s modernist abstract painting with crosshatched lines and scratches. On the creamy gloss-painted mantelpiece are an assortment of objects, including a couple



Figure 5: Bedroom, David Parr House (© David Parr House, photo by Helena G Anderson).

of plain brown pots, two photos, a postcard and a decorative tea caddy.

In the kitchen the most noticeable feature is a beautiful wall painting above the mantelpiece which is reminiscent of Morris's *Willow Bough* design, but with the addition of large delicate pale blue flowers. Other parts of Parr's kitchen decoration have been painted over, particularly the dark faux painted wood cupboards, which were painted at a later date, presumably to make the room lighter. The rest of the kitchen has been left as it was after being fitted out in the 1950s and 60s.

Upstairs in what is now the largest room at the back of the house is Palmer and her husband's bedroom (Figure 5). The walls are painted in a large, bold geometric leaf pattern. The headboard of Palmer's 1970s bed has a brown smudge where the white fabric got stained with her husband's hair oil, probably Brill Cream. No real attempt has been made to clean it. On one level it is slightly disgusting; on another it is rather liberating, as lived reality bursts out. Covering the mattress is a 1970s flannel sheet in a modernist Bauhaus-style colour grid in muted pinks, lemon yellows and light baby blues. Resting folded up on the sheet at the bottom of the bed is a crocheted blanket in bright colours.

What becomes apparent is that the house has been very closely preserved to be as it was when Palmer lived in it. Being in the bedroom is like intruding into private space. Indeed, it looks as though Palmer has just popped out the door, not yesterday, nor even last year, but sometime during the 1980s, as that is the period of the latest household objects in the house. The contents of the rooms span from the 1880s through to the

1980s, which distinguishes the Parr House quite significantly from many heritage houses. Most of the house and rooms have not been ‘restored’ to a certain period; instead, the project has been to conserve what existed, interestingly along the lines of Morris’s original idea for SPAB. This conservation is carried out fairly consistently across the house, and indeed the house works best where this principle is rigorously applied, and where no sanitising of the past takes place. What occurs is a layering of one history on, in and around another. One life, that of Elsie Palmer, is nested inside another, that of David Parr – although it is not exactly Parr’s life as much as his decorative interior which Palmer’s everyday life has been layered upon.

The Parr house has none of the calm stability that one can experience in visiting large houses previously belonging to the upper middle or ruling class. Instead there are exhilarating juxtapositions of scale, resulting from large decorative designs being embedded within such small rooms.

There are also strange juxtapositions of decorations and objects from different moments in design and cultural history – but many of these result not from David Parr’s original decoration but from the continued interventions into the house’s visual dynamic by Elsie Palmer and presumably her family.

In presenting Palmer’s lived reality embedded and entwined within Parr’s vibrant decorative appropriation, the visitor is given a feeling of being transported into an often cosy but simultaneously unstable world of possibility. Rather than the visitor passively receiving a distanced, hermetically sealed and lost past, the Parr House asks us to think of ourselves within a constantly evolving past that we both belong to and will continue to be part of. The house suggests that rather than the past being fixed, the past was and continues to be malleable, and that the visitor contributes to this by their presence; or to quote Morris’s Preface to Robert Steele’s *Medieval Lore* (1893): ‘the past is not dead, but is living in us, and will be alive in the future which we are now helping to make’.

David Mabb

Fiona MacCarthy, *Walter Gropius: Visionary Founder of the Bauhaus* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019), 347 pp., fully illustrated in colour and b&w, £30.00 hbk, ISBN 9780571295135.

In her Preface to this worthy successor to her previous books on Byron, Morris, Burne-Jones, Ashbee, Gill and Spencer, Fiona MacCarthy entertainingly traces the origin of this book to a chair – the Isokon Long Chair she saw and admired in Dunn’s shop in Bromley’s in 1964, designed by Marcel Breuer, a colleague of Walter Gropius in

the Bauhaus. At Dunn's she met the energetic and attractive Jack Pritchard, and she and her husband (the designer David Mellor) became close friends with him and his wife Molly over the next twenty years. The Pritchards offered lively hospitality at their modernist house in Hampstead, full of art and discussions of such topics as the Bauhaus. When the Bauhaus exhibition came to the Royal Academy in the autumn of 1968, MacCarthy was introduced to the eighty-five-year-old Gropius, 'small, upright, very courteous, retaining a Germanic formality of bearing, a reminder of how Gropius had once been the glamorous moustachioed officer in the gold-frogged dress uniform of the Hussars' (p. 3).

At the Bauhaus, Paul Klee had called Gropius the 'Silver Prince'. MacCarthy describes him as 'a man of extraordinary charisma [...] from 1910 to 1930, he was at the very centre of European modern art and design' (p. 3). And he was 'enormously attractive to women', as seen in his relationship with the glamorous Alma Mahler. However, in MacCarthy's view, 'Gropius has more recently failed to register as the fascinating figure that he was in his own time' (p. 4). This is partly due to the powerful attack made on him by Tom Wolfe in 1981 in *From Bauhaus to Our House*, blaming him for numerous high-rise monolithic city buildings. Gropius was also denigrated by Alma Mahler in her memoirs, and is represented as 'wimpish' (p. 5) in films by Ken Russell in 1974 and Percy and Felix Adlon in 2010. MacCarthy's view is quite different: 'I see him as in many ways heroic, a romantic and optimist, a great survivor' (p. 5). She draws attention to his second wife, Ilse Frank, who helped him at the Bauhaus, where she kept a detailed diary, frequently quoted in this book. On the striking loose cover MacCarthy shows a photograph of Gropius taken in New York in 1948, when he was sixty-five, which gives a very severe impression – an impression which her biography sets out to challenge.

Early on, we come across a reference to William Morris. Gropius has often been compared to Morris, 'not totally convincingly' (p. 6), we are told, but they certainly shared 'a belief in the importance to designers of a knowledge of materials and techniques in evolving new forms of construction. From the start Bauhaus teaching had its basis in the crafts' (p. 6). In her defence of Gropius, MacCarthy criticises the accusation arising in the 1970s that he was a Nazi sympathiser. He was not Jewish, but his progressive views made him an obvious target for the Nazis. Thus he had little choice but to go into exile in 1933, first to England, then to America. Nevertheless, 'he never lost his sense of his European past' (p. 7). MacCarthy became increasingly interested by the question asked in the title of the documentary film by Roger Graef in 1967, *Who Is Walter Gropius?* This book provides an authoritative answer to that question.

It does so in three sections. The opening section is called 'First Life. Germany',

and consists of ten chronological chapters: ‘Berlin 1883-1907’, and ‘Berlin 1908-10’; ‘Vienna and Alma Mahler 1910-13’; ‘Bauhaus Weimar and Maria Benemann 1920-22’; ‘Bauhaus Weimar and Ise Gropius 1923-25’; ‘Bauhaus Dessau 1925-26’; ‘Bauhaus Dessau 1927-28’; ‘America 1928’; ‘Berlin 1928-32’ and ‘Berlin 1933-34’. The text is supplemented and enriched by the numerous illustrations. Those in colour in this section show the Fagus factory at Alfeld-an-der-Leine 1913-25; Lyonel Feininger’s preliminary design for the programme of the State Bauhaus in Weimar in 1919; Gropius’s *Monument to the March Dead of the Kapp Putsch* at Weimar cemetery, destroyed by the Nazis but restored after the Second World War; an isometric projection of Gropius’s office in the Bauhaus in 1923; designs for a tea infuser and a table lamp; an isometric projection of a design for the Törten Housing estate at Dessau; the covers of four Bauhaus books 1925-30; the Bauhaus building in Dessau 1925-26 and the associated Prellerhaus accommodation for students and young Masters; a wall-hanging by Anni Albers in 1926; houses for the Bauhaus Masters 1925-26; Gropius’s design for a communal entertainment space for the Deutscher Werkbund section of the exhibition of the Société des Artistes Décoratifs in Paris in 1930, and Gropius’s car design for Adler in 1931. In this section we are told how the young Nikolaus Pevsner showed a copy of a portrait of Morris to Gropius, who expressed his indebtedness to Morris; but Gropius is said to have gone further than Morris and his followers ‘in aiming at a fusion of art and technology for the transformation of the modern world’ (pp. 121-22). Similarly, in her discussion of the opening of the Bauhaus on 13 May 1925, MacCarthy writes of the influence on Gropius of the German architect and designer Peter Behrens, before suggesting the possible influence of Morris and *News from Nowhere* and of C. R. Ashbee’s village in the Cotswolds, but she tells us that:

whereas Morris and the Arts and Crafts idealists were consciously backward-looking in their thinking, romantically recreating an imagined past, Gropius was consciously moving forward at the Bauhaus into a modern world of linked-up thinking, in which art and science, technology, psychology as well as advanced studies in visual perception were combined.

(p. 177)

(Not all Morrisians will accept this account of Morris’s attitude).

The following, briefer, section is called ‘Second Life. England’, and consists of four chapters, ‘London, Berlin, Rome 1934’; ‘London 1935’; ‘London 1935-36’ and ‘London 1936-37’. There are only two coloured illustrations, one of Impington Village College in Cambridgeshire, designed by Gropius and Maxwell Fry during

1936-37, and the other the menu and seating plan designed by László Moholy-Nagy for Gropius's farewell dinner at the Trocadero in London on 9 March 1937. The text offers an account of the welcome speech given by the elderly Sir Raymond Unwin, a follower of Morris in the garden city movement, at the dinner given for the opening of the exhibition at the Royal Institute of British Architects' premises in Conduit Street on 15 May 1934. MacCarthy remarks that Unwin 'was not a natural supporter of Gropius's views on pre-fabricated buildings and communal apartment blocks', but he generously 'did his best' (p. 274). He stated, strikingly, that '[i]t is, perhaps, owing to the failure of English architects to appreciate the theories of Philip Webb and Lethaby, which correspond very closely to those of Professor Gropius, that the modern movement is so little understood in this country' (p. 275). MacCarthy agrees strongly with the idea of the relevance of Lethaby, who had introduced workshop training in the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London in 1894. Gropius was very nervous about his own speech on 'The Formal and Technical Problems of Modern Architecture and Planning'. His radical ideas created an excited response, and the young architect Maxwell Fry, who was in the chair, recorded that Gropius 'filled us with a fervour as moral as it was aesthetic' (p. 276). The young Nikolaus Pevsner, who had recently come from Germany to England, was present and was very impressed. In 1936 Pevsner was to publish his influential *Pioneers of the Modern Movement: From William Morris to Walter Gropius*. MacCarthy shows the cover of the book, with its parallel portraits of Morris and Gropius, and quotes Pevsner's praise of Gropius, remarking that '[a]s a number of critics have commented since, Pevsner's accolade to Gropius verges on absurdity' (p. 353). But she judges that by 'aligning Gropius and William Morris', he not only showed his dislike of the National Socialist regime in Germany, but was also 'rather desperately trying to make a role for himself in the country he had fled to' – a strategy on which he was to prove successful, as *The Buildings of England* series shows (p. 353). MacCarthy has previously written about Herbert Read's influential *Art and Industry: The Principles of Industrial Design* (1934), and claims that 'Read transformed Walter Gropius's early halting words into a model of lucidity' (p. 324).

The final section, 'Third Life. America', consists of five chapters, 'Harvard 1937-39'; 'Harvard and the Second World War 1940-44'; 'Return to Berlin 1945-47'; 'Harvard and TAC (The Architects Collaborative) 1948-55' and 'Wandering Star: Japan, Paris, London, Baghdad, Berlin'. Gropius's arrival in America was marked by the exhibition *Bauhaus 1919-1928*, which took place in New York, opening on 6 December 1938, with the intention of clarifying Gropius's ideas for Americans. The accompanying book-catalogue included Gropius's earlier article 'The Theory and Organisation of the Bauhaus', which traced back his influences to Ruskin and Morris.

The coloured illustrations for this section show the Gropius House at Lincoln, Massachusetts, of 1938, and Ise's traditional lobster dinner served there at Christmas 1952; the Pan Am Building in New York, 1958-63, and Herbert Bayer's colourful design for the dust jacket of the catalogue for the 1968 Bauhaus exhibition at the Royal Academy in London. There is also a striking black-and-white photograph captioned: 'Gropius stands proudly at the Pan Am Building, New York, 1963'.

On the final page of the book, MacCarthy asserts the presence in all of Gropius's work of 'a romantic, idealistic undercurrent':

And here he was indeed like William Morris, imaginatively generous in his beliefs. All his life he continued to see art not as an adjunct to life but a necessity. Like Morris he believed that art is life itself. It was architectural soullessness, the despoliation of nature, the denial of community that brought out his fiercest critical opprobrium.

(p. 486)

MacCarthy closes fittingly with a reference to our present situation: '[i]n our age of ever-increasing fragmentation and specialisation his visions of connectedness make Walter Gropius worth listening to still' (p. 486).

The book concludes in a scholarly way with thirty-three pages of Sources and References, followed by a complete List of Illustrations (thirty-four in colour and many more in black-and-white), and by the Acknowledgments, a list revealing something of the extent of MacCarthy's sources and contacts which made this authoritative book possible.

Peter Faulkner

John Holmes, *The Pre-Raphaelites and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 308 pp., 150 colour + b&w illustrations, \$50.00 hbk, ISBN 9780300232066.

There is an exquisite feeling when receiving a book with such strong aesthetic qualities as John Holmes's *The Pre-Raphaelites and Science*. Yale University Press is well known for publishing finely produced volumes, and they do not miss the mark with Holmes's book. This would be a lovely edition for any library or home. *The Pre-Raphaelites and Science* is also a robust and valuable academic work that will be of much interest to Morris scholars.

Holmes's text covers a lot of ground in a very accessible manner which is wonderful to see in a scholarly work. His subject matter addresses many aspects and

influences of science on the Pre-Raphaelites. The book does not simply focus on the inspiration and representation of science in Pre-Raphaelite art, but also expands to architecture and poetry as well, connecting William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones and others to the evolution of scientific thought during the nineteenth century. One of the strengths of the text is the broad range of materials discussed as well as the depth of research and historical coverage including second-wave Pre-Raphaelites.

Another strength is Holmes's discussion of lesser-known Pre-Raphaelite figures and connected friends such as John and Rosa Brett, the O'Shea brothers and the architects Benjamin Woodward and Alfred Waterhouse, rather than simply focusing on Millais, Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown. Rossetti does, however, become a figure representative of the change of thought around science for he was seemingly ambivalent about it at first and then seems to abandon it completely. However, there are some strong scientific links in Rossetti's art and poetry. Holmes highlights that there are few of the Pre-Raphaelites and their extended circle who had any formal training in science except for the sculptor John Lucas Tupper who studied anatomy; yet, the scientific observational mode is alive and well in much Pre-Raphaelite art, architecture and poetry.

One of the primary sources that Holmes uses for his study is *The Germ*. From the beginning of the book we understand how *The Germ* addressed and supported a new kind of art modelled on science. The positioning of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in relation to science is primarily centred on Frederick George Stephens's essay 'The Purpose and Tendency in Early Italian Art' which was published in the second issue of *The Germ* in 1850. In this essay Stephens states that science helps the moral purpose of art and he emphasises an observational mode espoused by Ruskin and others in the Pre-Raphaelite circle in the production of art. The duty to record faithfully and accurately that Ruskin would call for is very much present in the Pre-Raphaelites. Stephens's thought and framing of science becomes what Holmes returns to frequently in his discussion of the theory and practice of science in the Pre-Raphaelites.

John Herschel's call for experimentation is another framework that has specific scientific valence and Holmes demonstrates this through the convincing example of John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* (1852). Millais's need to reproduce physical conditions in order to paint is very scientific in nature and speaks to experimentation in both the artwork and the creation. Holmes also provides a direct example of scientific principles in art by referencing the presence of ether in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel* (1850). Such direct reference to science in art is rare, Holmes reminds us, and many of the examples he offers are of how scientific methods provide a set of guiding principles in the creation of art. One piece that both references and uses

science as a guide is William Dyce's *Pegwell Bay, Kent – A Recollection of October 5th, 1858* (1858-60) which is an example of geology as a science of precise observation, but also science in practice as the women in the picture are picking shells.

An ecological approach is present in Pre-Raphaelite work where there is an emphasis on the ethical value and experience of the world we live in. Ruskin's push for artists to be more scientific than scientists is seen in Rosa Brett's *Thistles* (1860) and John Brett's *Val d'Aosta* (1858) where *Thistles* in particular highlights a careful ecological study. John Brett's *The Glacier of Rosenlauri* (1856) is also a wonderful piece of natural science and geology, reminiscent of Ruskin's *Aiguilles de Chamonix* (1849), and Brett's work graces the cover of *The Pre-Raphaelites and Science*. Holman Hunt's well-known *Our English Coasts* (1852) is identified as one of the richest animal studies done by the Pre-Raphaelites and the individuality of each sheep demonstrates that the observational mode is not simply for flora but also fauna.

It is the third chapter that is the highlight of the first section of Holmes's book providing close readings of art and poetry in relation to facial and bodily depictions to address embodiment and psychology. Two contrasts in this chapter are the studies of Holman Hunt's *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* (1850-51) and Dante Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1849-50) which trace the artists' changes to bodily and facial expression and how this links to psychological representation. This chapter highlights the need to understand anatomy coupled with psychology in order to paint the embodied mind. There are some great references in Holmes's work, and one of my favourites is J. W. Jackson's critique of Holman Hunt's *The Scapegoat* where he 'both praised and critiqued Hunt's painting on scientific grounds, lauding the artist for his thorough "antiquarian research" [...] but proclaim[ed] the picture to be a failure nonetheless because of his neglect of the principles of physiognomy' (p. 109). The laboratory type conditions under which Hunt painted were seemingly not sufficient for him to get the science right.

There is also a lot in this book for those who are interested in architecture. The Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH) is presented as an example of scientific and artistic collaboration. From its vision to the expressive capitals done by the O'Shea brothers to columns made of a single stone and labelled for teaching purposes, scientific representation abounds in this museum. Ruskin's love for wrought iron (even though that same material failed as part of the original design of the museum roof) demonstrates the experimental aspect of architecture and design. The OUMNH is presented through many pictures and examples in the text which demonstrate the level of detail present in the museum design and reinforce scientific and ecological symbolism.

Chapter nine on the Natural History Museum is in contrast to chapter five on

the OUMNH to demonstrate scientific influence before and after 1859 on this architectural project. There was no collective build with the Natural History Museum but instead much critique and a movement towards elements being designed by hand but machine made, which was of course very disappointing to someone like Ruskin. What this chapter does well is to summarise how architecture is in the service of natural theology while poetry highlights scientific naturalism.

The tension between science and theology is also an important subject of the book and as such Holmes divides his book into two sections using 1859 and the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* as the demarcation. The second part of the book explores moments where natural theology and scientific naturalism are at odds. Of the post-1859 chapters, chapter seven is of most importance to those interested in Morris as Holmes provides a skilful analysis of the reception of *The Earthly Paradise* to scientific scholars. Edward Burne-Jones is also framed in this chapter as an investigative artist alongside Morris who investigates the political implications of evolutionary theory through socialism and design. As *The Germ* is the focus of the first part of the text, Holmes shifts his attention to *The Fortnightly Review* in this chapter where Morris published four poems and his translation of 'The Saga of Gunnlaug the Worm-tongue'. John Morley also becomes a figure of importance in the second half of the book, as someone sympathetic to Morris and his emphasis on the working class. Some poems highlighted in this seventh chapter do not make direct reference to science but show the influence of scientific naturalism nevertheless and how Morris was respected by those with scientific leanings due to the accessibility of *The Earthly Paradise*. The critics that Holmes cites in his work 'explicitly or implicitly identify Morris's attention to detail as painterly' (p. 195). *The Earthly Paradise* is thus a scientific enquiry examining both narrative and nature.

The Pre-Raphaelites and Science demonstrates how the Pre-Raphaelites used art to trace a moral legacy but also how they helped form the 'physical, emotional and cultural landscape of Victorian science' (p. 255). The discussion of non-explicit connections to science in art and architecture does not seem tenuous at all due to an abundance of historical and contextual research. Canadians, like myself, will appreciate how *The Pre-Raphaelites and Science* ends with a nod to Canada and the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). Holmes examines how the ROM uses architectural design to convey a particular scientific philosophy and it is good to see trans-Atlantic connections made. From the excellent close readings and examples of art and architecture, exposition on Morris's poetry that puts Morris and his work in dialogue with science, Holmes's book will prove to be a touchstone study and a valuable contribution to Victorian scientific representation and analysis.

Ann Gagné

Emelyne Godfrey, ed., *Utopias and Dystopias in the Fiction of H. G. Wells and William Morris: Landscape and Space* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), xviii + 282 pp., £89.99 hbk, ISBN 9871137523402.

This book begins with a brief foreword by the distinguished critic Patrick Parrinder in which he claims that it gives us ‘a greatly enriched sense of both the links and the differences between two of our most visionary modern writers’ (p. viii). This seems to me to be a reasonable claim, although the balance of material is tilted towards Wells: of Morris’s writings, only *News from Nowhere* gets much attention, while there is a good deal of discussion of *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *A Modern Utopia* and even the little-known *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island*.

The book emerges from a conference held at Kelmscott House in September 2013 titled ‘Social Fabrics: Utopias and Dystopias in Relation to the Works of William Morris and H. G. Wells’. Emelyne Godfrey provides an ‘Introduction: Tomatoes and Cucumbers’, which contains plenty of material about utopias, dystopias and anti-utopias, presented with more energy than clarity; I would have preferred a more chronological organisation. This is followed by Michael Sherburne’s ‘Setting the Scene’, which accomplishes its task succinctly and accurately. There follow thirteen articles arranged in five sections: I will focus on the articles that include discussion of Morris.

In her ‘Imaginary Hindsight: Contemporary History in William Morris and H. G. Wells’, Helen Kingstone points out that History was a new academic subject in Oxford and Cambridge during the 1870s, so that historians were wary of writing about recent events, preferring the more definite past. Thus it was left, paradoxically, to writers of utopias like Morris and Wells to write about contemporary history. In this context, Kingstone discusses *News from Nowhere* and Wells’s ‘A Story of the Days to Come’ (originally published in the *Pall Mall Magazine* in 1899), arguing that the two stories are part of an already existing tradition, but that they ‘are distinctive for the explicitness and glee with which, far from skating round the issue, they claim imaginary hindsight in order to write their present as history’ (p. 45). Kingstone argues convincingly that Morris is ‘deliberately hazy’ in his account of the revolution in *News from Nowhere* as he wants to offer ‘a “vision” of an idyllic world rather than a dogmatic blueprint for how to achieve it’ (p. 51).

Tony Pinkney writes with characteristic energy about ‘Problems in Utopia from the Thames Valley to the Pacific Edge’. He begins by considering Wells’s formulation of the idea of the ‘kinetic utopia’ in *A Modern Utopia*, contrasting it with our usual assumption of utopia as ‘a finished society’ (p. 91). For Pinkney, kinesis is a liberating concept, allowing the reader much freedom, although it does not always have positive

results – *A Modern Utopia* includes a chapter entitled ‘Failure in a Modern Utopia’ (p. 92). Pinkney draws attention to the scene with the road-menders which Morris added to the 1891 book version of *News from Nowhere*, and which constitutes ‘an indirect tribute to Morris’s mentor John Ruskin’ (p. 94). He then asks what we are to make of a very similar scene on the second page of Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Pacific Edge* (1990), and claims that Robinson’s *Mars* trilogy of the 1990s shows that he was well aware of Morris’s work. We are therefore entitled to see the scene in *Pacific Edge* as referring us back to Morris. More boldly, Pinkney proposes that a later utopia may show the reader ‘problematic aspects of the earlier work that were barely visible before’, and also ‘alert us to untapped narrative resources in the earlier text which might remedy these newly revealed problems and emergent crises’ (p. 95). Pinkney concludes with a demanding question which is far from easy to answer:

Can we rethink – i.e. conceptually reconstruct and then narratively sequelise – all the classical utopias of the past in the light of Wells’s [...] notions of kinetic and critical utopia, and might not that operation be a significant initial part of opening our own imaginations to the ultimate possibility, not just of rewriting the canonical utopias of the past, however interestingly, but of moving beyond them to a fully fledged new utopia of our own?

(p. 104)

An article by Sarah Faulkner (no relation of mine, by the way) entitled ‘Dark Artistry in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*’ opens with a reference to the passage in *News from Nowhere* in which Old Hammond explains to Guest that ‘[e]ach man is free to exercise his special faculty to the utmost, and every one encourages him in so doing’, and contrasts this ‘appealing vision of creative freedom and shared community’ with the vivisections conducted by Moreau, ‘a man who has “exercised his special faculty to the utmost” to horrible effect’ (p. 175). His ‘passion for scientific discovery’ is driven not by concern for the community but by ‘his own individual obsession’ (p. 179).

Maxim Shadurski’s “‘Flowers and a Landscape were the Only Attractions Here’: The England of Wells and Morris in Aldous Huxley’s Interpretation’ takes an unexpected starting point, Aldous Huxley’s dystopian *Brave New World* (1932). In a letter in May 1931, Huxley wrote: ‘I am writing a novel about the future – on the horror of the Wellsian Utopia and a revolt against it. Very difficult. I have hardly enough imagination to deal with such a subject, but it is none the less interesting work’ (p. 224). Huxley criticises Wells’s belief in the World State, which Wells believed to be the necessary basis for any account of a modern Utopia – the opposite of Morris’s emphasis on England in *News from Nowhere*. Morris’s utopian England had been

replaced by Wells's dystopian treatment of England in *The Sleeper Awakes* (1899, 1901), and it is this dystopia that Huxley satirises so effectively.

Clare Holdstock draws our attention fittingly to the built environment in her concluding article 'Modernist Ideals: The Utopian Designs of William Morris, Peter Behrens and the Social Housing Schemes of Mid-Twentieth-Century Sheffield'. She begins with a description of the negative image given in a short Channel 4 film about the Aylesbury Estate (1963-77) in Southwark, 'an archetypal British housing estate now subject to a major regeneration scheme' (p. 241). She then quotes from Ben Campkin's *Remaking London* of 2014 on how the media have, since 1980, taken to presenting such housing estates in negative terms. Holdstock refers with evident approval to Campkin's suggestion that 'the notion that Modernist social housing encapsulates social ills has been employed as a smokescreen by politicians and media alike as a means to implement laissez-faire governmental approaches to urban planning' (p. 242). Following the argument of Nikolaus Pevsner in *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1936), she is able to show the continuity of constructive thinking from *News from Nowhere* through the architectural work of Peter Behrens in Germany during the 1920s – influential on Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier – to those creating some social housing schemes in twentieth-century Britain. Holdstock argues that Morris was in the same camp as the Modernists, as against 'postmodern, hyper-capitalist projects which litter London, such as the Shard' (p. 245). As such, 'Morris's penchant for green space directly influenced a Modernist appetite for the concept of the "garden city", which is evident in the writing of such figures as Le Corbusier' (p. 246). She draws attention to a number of recent buildings that embody this ideal: Sainsbury's 2000 eco-millennium store on Greenwich Peninsula, the High House Production Park in Thurrock and the Royal Opera House's Bob and Tamar Manoukian Production Workshop of 2010 (p. 246). On a larger scale, Holdstock discusses two housing estates in Sheffield that replaced local slums, Gleadless Valley (1955-62) and Park Hill (1957-61). The models for both estates derived from the ideals of European Modernism, but these estates are problematic in our current economic climate: '[c]ompared to the shiny postmodern Shard or the planned pseudo-Morrisian Garden Bridge, they are now being left in a state of decay' (p. 253). Holdstock concludes polemically:

The alternative understandings of spatial systems in terms of built and social space in the line of Modernism explored here still offer hopeful alternatives to capitalism, especially with regard to the spatial and social problems inherent in the appalling inequality evident in twenty-first-century postmodern projects such as the Garden Bridge or the Shard. Indeed, the enduring fascination

with Morris's interpretation of medieval spatial practices and Wells's embrace of both past values and technology in the creation of utopia suggests the spirit of a latent Modernism as a force for good. Arguably there could still be room for these alternative understandings of spatial systems in our present and our future.

(p. 254)

I would like to think that this is not merely wishful thinking. At all events, Holdstock's essay provides a constructive conclusion to an often interesting (if somewhat uneven) book.

Peter Faulkner

Eleonora Sasso, *The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism: Language and Cognition in Remediations of the East* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 160 pp., 11 b&w tables, £75.00 hbk, ISBN: 9781474407168.

Somewhat surprisingly, in this age of fantasy literature, the tales known in the West as the Arabian Nights, featuring Aladdin, Ali Baba, Zubeida/Zobeide and others have largely dropped to pantomime status. Thanks to Edward Lane's bowdlerised versions, for decades from 1840 on, the stories enjoyed the kind of popularity associated with Harry Potter today, becoming favourites with all ages. Georgie Burne-Jones described Lane's book as a 'priceless treasure' that 'entranced all of us' when given by William Morris to her sister Agnes in 1856, and nine years later Agnes herself wrote home of a 'jolly evening' spent with Ned drawing, Georgie sewing and herself reading aloud the 'most delightful' Story of Joodar from the Arabian Nights. Like Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, the archaic tales exerted a powerful escapist influence over the whole Pre-Raphaelite generation.

Eleonora Sasso's book is the first to examine critically these matters. It does so on a basis provided both by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and by the newish discipline of cognitive linguistics, which as far as I understand it studies the reciprocal relationship between language and conceptual thought. The result is a dense and highly theorised analysis including a good deal of what is elsewhere called intertextuality; it is also brisk and compact, at just around 130 pages of main text, with four chapters followed by an appendix. The 'remediations' in the sub-title refers to using the same materials in different media.

One of Gabriel Rossetti's earliest writings, composed at age seven and preserved by his admiring mother, was a short piece dramatising *Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp*.

In 1840 there came fifteen illustrations featuring several jinn and including episodes from the tale in which Princess Amine is first scarred and then whipped for speaking to an old man. In Sasso's view, Rossetti, the singer of bodily beauty, is obsessed with dark horrific orientalism. Later, he would compare translation to Aladdin's search, rejecting 'precious fruits and flowers' for the goal or 'lamp alone' (e-book, chapter 1, para. 5). He would also draw the Princess Parisade, from the story of two sisters who envied the third, shown holding the magic barrel of golden water that restores life to those bewitched. There follow accounts of *Cassandra*, *Troy Town*, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, *The Beloved*, *Astarte Syriaca* and *Mnemosyne*, concluding that all Rossetti's 'Oriental illustrations, paintings and double works of art are blended spaces combining different visions of the Orient, thereby allowing new insights to appear, along with a new understanding of Orientalism, in order to alter our original cognitive models' (chapter 1, final para).

The chapter on the cognitive grammar of *Oriental Fairy Tales* by Christina Rossetti and Ford Madox Ford (who was nephew to her sister-in-law, not to Christina, although the Italian word *nipote* may cover both relations) provides a useful gloss on the story of Zobeide as a source for the petrification in Christina's juvenile poem 'The Lost City', which also draws on Sleeping Beauty imagery, and for the profusion of exotic fruits in both that poem and *Goblin Market*. Referencing visits by Zobeide's sisters to a fruit shop and a silk merchant who demands a kiss in payment, Rossetti 'lifts characters, plots, settings and themes out of their original Oriental environment' placing them in 'her new blended space, to allow new insights and understandings' (chapter 4, para. 16). While such borrowings and blendings are the bedrock of poetry – and Rossetti's verse is exceptionally rich in textual allusions – new, precise links add depth and wealth to critical reading.

So, non-academic readers must forgive the brambles of theory that overgrow the simpler literary fields here, with the frequent conceptual metaphors cited as LOVE IS PAIN OR THE EAST IS CORRUPTION, always in SMALL CAPS, and curious tables like parallel boxes entitled 'Function-advancing propositions in the Fourth Voyage of Sinbad and Goblin Market' (chapter 4, figure 4.2), or an oval diagram representing Ruskin's 'mental space configuration' (chapter 3, figure 3.2) around Aladdin's lamp. Through these thickets, Sasso's exploration often resembles Burne-Jones's *Briar Rose* paintings.

While Lane's standard Victorian *Thousand and One Nights* inevitably has a sensual sub-text owing to its harems, eunuchs and slave-girls, Algernon Swinburne and Aubrey Beardsley preferred the version written by Richard Burton, traveller and translator of the *Kama Sutra*. Given Morris's voracious reading, one wonders if he read Burton's 1885 text, but it was not available when he was writing the *Earthly*

Paradise tales discussed by Sasso under the heading ‘Forbidden Doors, Treasures and Words’. His admiration for Islamic design in Persian carpets and Iznik ceramics also came later. Aladdin, the Fifth Weezer’s Tale and Hasan of Basrah are the Eastern stories reworked in *The Earthly Paradise* – a declared compendium of traditional tales – as are ‘The Writing on the Image’, ‘The Man who Never Laughed Again’ and ‘The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon’, where the chief cognitive or conceptual metaphors invoke suffering caused by love and desire. The expositions are a bit confused, however, and the reader must wait for the sixty-page appendix, which provides simpler summaries alongside long extracts from the Victorian texts – rather redundant as regards the very familiar and easily accessible *Goblin Market*. Comparable examples from the *Nights* would have been more helpful to many of us.

In respect of Morris, then, the book is unsatisfactory, but its subject is full of potential in illuminating his poetry and prose, from the intricate framing and distancing of *Love is Enough* to *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, where Birdalone recalls the Oriental shape-shifting bird-lady, as Sasso notes in passing. Marvels abound in the late romances, while Morris’s narrative style surely has affinities with that of the *Nights*. The volume given to Agnes Macdonald had a lifelong influence, constantly affirmed by his leisurely reading aloud to family and friends.

Beyond literary concerns, responses to the *Thousand and one Nights* intersect with personal and political attitudes towards the ‘East’ – Turkey, Arabia, India – in the Victorian era in ways that are still current today. In this respect Eleonora Sasso opens a lode-bearing seam.

Jan Marsh

