

Reviews

Edited by Peter Faulkner

Frank C. Sharp & Jan Marsh, eds, *The Collected Letters of Jane Morris*, Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2012, 24 b & w, 8 colour illustrations, 487 pp, hbk, £95. ISBN 978 843836766.

This is a book to be welcomed and enjoyed. The editors and publishers between them have produced one which will give pleasure and instruction to all those interested in that remarkable woman Jane Morris. It will strengthen the view that she was not only strikingly beautiful, but also sociable, intelligent and courageous.

The book is very well planned, consisting of a Bibliography, a Chronology of Jane's life, an Editorial Statement, a general Introduction, and then the letters in five parts, 'Jane Burden becomes Jane Morris', 'The Political Years', 'William Morris's Last Years', 'The Morris Legacy' and 'The Last decade', each with its own brief Introduction. This is followed by the positive and well-informed *Times* obituary, and two indices, one of correspondents and one general. The illustrations are well chosen and representative. The lay-out and typography, employing the ITC Golden Type and Adobe Jenson Pro, is most attractive, and the use of Kelmscott Press ornaments to introduce each letter helps to create a truly Morrisian atmosphere. The use on the jacket cover of Rossetti's *Study for the Donna della Finestra*, with its predominantly yellow-brown background, gives an undeniable and appropriate gravitas.

Between the general Introduction and the smaller introductions to the periods from which the letters are taken, the reader is given a clear idea of Jane's developing life. The editors do not avoid controversial areas. In relation to the leasing of Kelmscott Manor, they observe that it 'testifies to her desire to pursue a love affair while also retaining her relationship with Morris'. They do not attribute the affair to an irresistible Rossetti, but suggest that 'Jane encouraged and perhaps initiated the affair', since it can be inferred that Jane was or felt herself to be somewhat neglected emotionally. (p. 11) Rossetti, they suggest, was probably surprised

to find his feelings for Jane becoming 'overwhelming'. At this stage, the editors state, 'the affair ran its course, and Jane returned to her husband'. I was surprised that no reference is made to Jane's affair with Scawen Blunt until six pages later. When Blunt is discussed, the editors again show their awareness of the complexity of human relations. After all, the affair lasted seven years, 'during which Jane's affections were fully engaged, and reciprocated, and endured in terms of mutual affection' until Jane's death. (p. 18) The editors' conclusions about the marriage of the Morrises deserve quoting in full:

... the Morris marriage should not be described as a failure, or even as broken, but as a relationship of true affection that weathered and withstood serious stress without decisive rupture, maturing into tender lovingness. It is evident that after Morris's death Jane wished to be remembered primarily as his widow. How typical that was of the Victorian age it is impossible to say, but its success may be measured against the conventional condemnation of their society. (p. 12)

This strikes me as the most positive account of the marriage that I have encountered.

The editors argue for a more positive view of Jane than they believe to have been previously accepted, producing convincing evidence that she was 'a warm and caring mother' (p. 7), 'a notable housekeeper' (p. 102), 'a warm person with a good sense of humour' (p. 13), and 'an accomplished needlewoman' (p. 6) who consistently showed an interest in her husband's business: they publish a letter of 28 March 1880 to the American Sara Sedgwick Darwin about problems with the American market – 'At last my husband's patience is worn out' – and telling her of George Wardle's impending visit to deal with the situation. They also draw attention to the wide range of Jane's reading and her interest in music, as well as showing that, although she was never drawn to Socialism, her views were consistently those of a radical Liberal. (It has always seemed to me surprising that Jane, a member of one of the most overtly socialist families in Britain at the time, never showed any interest in Socialism, although her daughter May did).

Previously, publication of Jane's letters was restricted mainly to those written to Dante Gabriel Rossetti (edited by John Bryson in 1956 – although the most intimate of these have not apparently survived), and the 145 letters to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, which I edited in 1986. After ten years' strenuous and valuable research, the editors have raised the number of letters to 570. The three main additions here are letters to 'Crom' Price, Sydney Cockerell, and Theodore Watts-Dunton – though it is pleasing to observe that, when asking Cockerell to send copies of a recent Kelmscott Press publication to Swinburne and to Watts Dunton in July 1897, she adds, 'though the latter scarcely deserves anything of literary merit after his Jubilee Ode', identified in the note as his 'Jubilee Greeting at Spithead to the Men of Great Britain', which may be left to speak for itself.

But, as the Editorial Statement points out, the impression that Jane's correspondence was mainly with men is misleading; in fact, that with her women friends was probably equally abundant, but women's letters of the period have survived markedly less than those received by men. Moreover, libraries have not been as scrupulous in cataloguing women's letters: one librarian (gender unspecified) told one of the editors, who had drawn attention to a letter by Jane in the collection, that we 'can't be expected to catalogue every artist's girlfriend'. One hopes this was some time ago. However, there are lively letters to two important women friends, Georgiana Burne-Jones and Rosalind Howard, as well as to other women such as Aglaia Coronio, Marie Stillman, and Katherine Adams.

Some of the previously unpublished letters deserve quotation, sometimes for their unexpectedness. For instance, it is difficult to know quite what to make of her letter to Price from Kelmscott Manor on 2 September 1886:

My dear Crom,

When shall we see you here? Don't quite forget your poor old, bald, toothless, broken backed friend. I can assure you that if I am not all that at this moment, I shall be very soon, so please come. I have a new disease called "Socialism on the brain." I forget if I acquainted you with the fact before – if so, pray forgive me, as loss of memory is but another symptom of the same malady.

Always yr. affec. friend

Janey

The editors offer no comment on this, and it bears no relation to any other letter of the time; the next one to Price, dated 6 March, is from Rome and quite different in tone, although it does open dramatically with the question 'I wonder if you have heard of my sudden elopement (not with Scheu) from London. Jenny and a maid and myself came a month ago'. The note gives an account of the Austrian socialist Scheu – 'a frequent visitor to Kelmscott House' – but concludes that 'The allusion to his eloping is not clear'. Was Scheu known to be an admirer of Jane? It would seem that she felt able to indulge her sense of humour – a characteristic that the editors are keen to emphasise – in particular when writing to Price.

Letters to Cockerell tend to be more businesslike, but often contain thoughtful observations. Thus on 11 June 1904 she wrote to him about the suggestion by Longmans that a special edition of Morris's poems might be produced with introductions directed to schools. Jane's response was direct:

About the Earthly Paradise, I fully share your views, as a rule I know that school girls and boys hate the poems they have been made to read and analyse; if they care for poetry, they should read it for pleasure only I believe.

Cockerell replied negatively to the proposal. On 4 March 1912 a letter to Cockerell shows that Jane continued to be politically radical; it was written at the time

of a national miners' strike:

There is nothing cheering in public matters just now. It is a ghastly state of things. I think miners ought to be paid at least twice as much as they seem to get, and all the owners & Jews & financiers & idle rich people generally ought to work in the mines at least one day a week, perhaps by that means a little sympathy might be produced between the different classes – and those poor ponies! I see in one pit 400 have been left to their fate.

We may regret the casual reference to Jews in this context, but there is no evidence of serious anti-semitism in these letters, and abundant evidence of concern for the poor and exploited.

The letters confirm the sense of how demanding for Jane was the role of guardian to her daughter Jenny after her breakdown, despite William's solicitous and supportive attitude towards Jenny, which displayed a sensitivity unusual among Victorian fathers. Numerous letters contain statements like that in a letter to Price of 3 January 1909 from Lyme Regis: 'Jenny keeps us in a continual state of anxiety, attacks every day or night, I am worn out, but can't make up my mind to any change at present; she likes this place and can walk about as usual enjoying it'. Jane could very seldom relax in her concern, and had to be advised by doctors not to sacrifice her own health to that of her daughter. With May her relationship was fortunately less taxing, and it seems to have blossomed in later years. In view of the two titles given to Morris's well-known painting of Jane, it is helpful to find her telling May in July 1901, 'La belle Iseult' is what the dear father always called his picture, and I think we ought to keep to that'. A letter to Price of 12 December 1906 shows Jane's concern over the minor role given to May by Mackail in his life of her father: 'May is hardly mentioned, I think she ought to be brought into notice. I know she was vexed at the omission before'. However, Mackail did not revise his biography. Jane responded at some length when May sought information from her mother as she worked on her edition of her father's works, published from 1910 to 1915. The fragment of a letter probably written in 1909 tells May:

I think you have not given quite enough prominence to the revival of old embroidery. This was entirely due to him. It is not easy to imagine now the great difficulty we had then in hunting up material for starting anything. There were no lessons to be had, everything had to be laboured at for a time often successful, often not but failures were amusing too ... He taught me the first principle of laying the stitches together closely so as to cover the ground smoothly and radiating them properly afterwards. We studied old pieces by unpicking &: we learnt much but it was uphill work fascinating but only carried through by his enormous energy and perseverance.

A passage like this shows Jane thoroughly engaged within memory in the craft activities of fifty years earlier, and supports the editors' contention that in her later years Jane saw herself less as Rossetti's model than as William's supporter.

The editorial work is of the highest quality, the notes to the letters being succinct, accurate and informative. Nevertheless, reviewers must be allowed their measure of censure, if only to show that they have read thoroughly. Warrington Taylor here reassumes his extra 'r', and Scawen Blunt – on one occasion only – is given an 'e' in his first name, while I did not recognise the spelling of Magnusson's first name as Erikur. When, in June or early July 1871, Jane asks Webb, 'Is the spire [of Lechlade church] as old as the church?', the note stating that St. Lawrence was 'rebuilt in the 1870s' does not coincide with the information given in the latest *Pevsner*, that the church was 'restored 1881–2 by F.S. Waller & Son' – and is anyway irrelevant, as Webb answers the question in letter on the next page: 'it was built late in the 14th Century'. I was interested to learn that a memorial window to 'Crom' Price was put into the chapel at Westward Ho! in 1914, but I can find no supporting reference to it in Sewter or Pevsner. Finally, I am not sure why the memorial window to Basil, the son of the Morrises' friends the Birchalls, is said to be 'in a local church' rather than at St. Mary's, Buscot. Basil's is one of several sad examples of children whose early deaths, such a pervasive feature of Victorian life, are recorded in the notes.

Enough! Let us conclude with another flourish of welcome for this splendid volume. The editors claim that 'Here in her words we can hear the voice of the "silent woman" of Pre-Raphaelite legend, and enter directly into her world'. (p. 28) They are entirely justified in making this claim.

Peter Faulkner

Sarah Anderson & Karen Swenson, eds, *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology. A Collection of Essays*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, 304 pp., b & w frontispiece, hbk, US\$65.00. ISBN 0815319665.

The fifteen essays in this book include six originally published elsewhere. Two deserve the wider audience this book will give them: Clover's 'Hildigunnr's Lament', and Jochens's 'Vikings. Westward to Vinland: The Problem of Women'. The other four previously published – we are never told exactly where – are: Kress's 'Taming the Shrew: The Rise of Patriarchy and the Subordination of the Feminine', Kalinke's 'Fathers, Mothers, and Daughters', Louis-Jensen's 'A Good Day's Work: Laxdæla saga, Ch. 49', and Scott's 'The Woman Who Knows: Female Characters of Eyrbyggja saga'. The nine additional essays grew out of

Cornell's Medieval Studies Program, and papers delivered at the annual medieval conference at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. Published here for the first time, they include: Borovsky's 'Women and Insults', Eldevik's 'Women's Voices: The Case of *Trójumanna saga*', Hughes's 'The Re-emergence of Women's Voices, 1500–1800', Helgason's 'Gender, Class, and Discourse in *Þrymskviða*', Psaki's 'Women's Counsel in the *Riddarasögur*: The Case of *Parceval's saga*', Shea's 'Male Bonding, Female Body', Straubhaar's 'Ambiguously Gendered: The Skalds *Jórunn*, *Auðr*, and *Steinunn*', Swenson's 'Women Outside: Discourse of Community in *Hávamál*', and, finally, Sigurðardóttir's 'Saga World and Nineteenth Century Iceland: The Case of Women Farmers'.

In her introduction, Anderson asserts that she and her colleagues plan to use the proverb, 'cold are the counsels of women', to 'launch discussion', and to ask 'compelling questions' about the roles of women in medieval Norse societies; of women as both creators and characters in its literature. The essay which does so most convincingly is Clover's. She begins by parsing the memorable encounter in *Njáls saga* between the grieving widow Hildigunn and the warrior Flosi, a relative of her late husband and thus the one who she assumes should revenge his killing. But Flosi prefers mediation. And thus the great encounter, the most notorious incitement/whetting/'hvöt' scene (there are more than fifty in the canon) in Old Norse literature. Hildigunn places over Flosi's shoulders the cloak her husband was wearing when he was murdered. His clotted blood 'dunði' (thundered) down on Flosi. This shocking act is followed by words equally harsh: 'You gave this cloak to Hoskuld and now I return it ... I charge you by all the powers of your Christ, and by your manhood and courage to avenge his death'. And thus his famed response: 'Cold are the counsels of women'. Clover points out that previous critical discussions of this scene have centered on Hildigunn's speech and 'the motif of the bloody token, both of which are richly paralleled in the wider literature'. She argues that 'the key to the passage as a whole lies in understanding it not only as an angry woman's desire for revenge but as a grieving widow's lamentations over her dead husband'. She goes on to discuss, in detailed and convincing exposition, 'hvöt' scenes in two other sagas and in three poetic texts, before moving into examples drawn from anthropology and history, concluding that 'there lies a social reality behind the motif of the whetting woman in Edda and saga, and this social reality is rather more complicated than either literary or social historians have appreciated'. Her essay is capped with ninety-eight packed and excellent end-notes, several of them in themselves authoritative summaries of scholarship, or cool appraisals of controversies.

Jochens's essay opens with a discussion of Vinland and the failure of the Norse to remain there, which she blames on 'factors of sexuality and women which have not yet been fully examined'. She discusses Leif the Lucky's discovery of America as set forth in *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Graenlendinga saga*, often called the Vinland

sagas, as well as the discovery of an actual settlement site at the tip of Newfoundland, at L'Anse-aux-Meadows, where Norse voyagers remained for a few seasons around the year 1000 CE. Offering new insights at every step, Jochens then discusses the roles which women played in later settlement efforts (by the Spanish, French and British), comparing them to their roles in the four phases of the Nordic migrations: to the North Sea islands, to Iceland, to Greenland, and, finally, to Vinland.

The subject matter and aims of the remaining essays are indicated in their titles. Kress's short essay is replete with contentious and provocative claims, ones which assume a readership very familiar with the Eddic poems, and all the varied types of sagas. She concludes that the strong and memorable women in these works, like Hildigunn in the *Njála*, 'refuse to be oppressed. They do not succeed, but their protest is everywhere in the text. That is what Old Norse literature is primarily about'. Kalinke's extensive discussion and summary of the rarely read *Víglundar saga* supports her claim that it is unique in medieval Icelandic literature because of the realistic questions it raises about female autonomy in marriage. It is more than just another 'bridal-quest romance', for it includes large doses of Family Saga realism. William Morris would have appreciated this article both for its careful research and because *Víglundar saga* was among the earliest works which he and Magnusson translated. It appeared in *Three Northern Love Stories* in 1875. That book was republished in 1996, as a volume in the Thoemmes Press William Morris Library series.

Louis-Jensen, in an impressive presentation of orthographic and paleographic evidence, argues that 'hermdarverk' (a compound found only in *Laxdæla saga*, within a laconic retort by Guðrún, another famed and cold heroine) should be emended to 'hér nú dagsverkin'; the puzzling 'harmful work' would thus become 'a good day's work'. This reading of the passage adds clarity and an ironic bite to Guðrún's well-known response, and it also recalls scenes in Eddic poems, thus provoking us to see the *Laxdæla* as a 'reworking of the Brynhild legend'. Scott discusses the roles of women in *Eyrbyggja saga*, offering lengthy paraphrases and discussions of key scenes and encounters, providing sometimes provocative comparisons to females in ancient Norse law books such as *Grágás*, and in Chaucer, and even in Ibsen.

And now, in their order of appearance, those essays appearing in print for the first time: Barovsky discusses the etymology of 'blanda' (to blend, mix), and its use in previous contexts, where it is associated, especially in the poetry, with vile insults. So, its use in the *Njála*, in a description of Hallgerðr, another cold woman, perhaps the coldest in the corpus, serves to link her to 'mythic giantesses'. Barovsky argues that Gunnar's wife thus becomes a 'screen upon which cultural anxieties [re sexual roles] are played out'. Eldevik, in a more straightforward and scholarly study, considers the ways women speak out in letters and in

'oral settings' in three redactions of *Trójumanna saga*, the Norse translation of the Matter of Troy. She suggests, for instance, that 'the voices of Helen and Polyxena [in these verses] owe more to Scandinavian cultural traditions than to Ovid'.

Hughes, in yet another thorough and exemplary effort, discusses women writers whose works survive only in paper manuscripts, or fragments, in pieces never before examined, let alone published. She brings to light scores of texts, ranging from poems to tales based on folklore, such as 'wicked step-mother' stories, and the like. The 'Notes' section of her essay runs to twenty-six pages and includes several weighty expositions, as well as descriptions of fifty-one women writers, most of whom lived during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Helgason presents a concise analysis of *Þrymskviða*, the Elder Edda poem about Þórr's retrieval of Mjöllnir, his wonderful hammer, from the thieving giants. And then he asserts that the poem means, or signifies, Þórr's 'encounter with the feminine side of himself'.

Psaki discusses differences between Chretien's story of Perceval in *Li contes del Graal* and the thirteenth-century Norse translation. The native translators condensed or eliminated romance profusions, so that 'for the modern reader it is like going from Cervantes to Hemingway'. Psaki's full commentary on paired passages raises interesting questions, e.g. 'Why should the ideology of service be so explicitly linked to female proponents?' And she suggests that 'the answers lie in a careful gender-oriented rereading of both indigenous and translated sagas'.

Shea's essay also deals with differences between a French original, a *lai* of Marie de France, and its thirteenth-century Norse translation. Her arguments are interesting, but couched in diction which is often opaque; e.g. 'The force of language cannot adequately address the gender division which haunts the subtext of the tale; thus the text turns to the dominance of the visible in order to reassert the appropriate sexual hierarchy': since she uses examples from French film criticism and from Freud on sexuality, her comments on Icelandic women are certainly original. Straubhaar, to counter the widely-held notion 'that skaldic poetry is a man's game, couched in masculine diction, produced for a male audience', discusses three tenth-century Norwegian women who engaged in this intricate art. Her discussions of their verses and the saga contexts in which they appear are uniformly clear and enlightening, and we can thus readily accept her conclusion 'that the question as to whether the realm of poetic creation in the North had always been a male space remains open'.

Swenson, taking on one of the more difficult poems in the Elder Edda, argues that the *Hávamál* is perhaps not as much a pastiche as most critics have asserted, but instead a 'ritual utterance'. And that embedded narratives in the poem and 'the perspective from which they are told encourage a reading of them as symbolic discourse constructing a social definition of women'. Sigurðardóttir reminds us that while the sagas celebrated strong women – those who offer proverbial cold

counsels – medieval Norse law stressed their relative weakness and their lack of rights. She argues that an ‘emphasis on women’s subjugation points to an underlying tension in society between male dominance and female power’. The memorable and formidable women of the sagas are fictional, yes, but there were also, she argues, medieval Icelandic women who wielded actual power, ‘who took on typical male roles as farmers and heads of households’. She discusses three such women in the Sturlunga saga and two from the Family Sagas, and then she jumps to several exemplars from the nineteenth century, one of whom was an administrator in Akureyri during the 1860s, when Morris visited this northern village.

The book’s cover is particularly striking. Against a glacial white background appears a photographic reproduction of a manuscript leaf from *Möðruvallabók*, a fourteenth century ‘book’, whose scribes had copied out the several of the Family Sagas, among them the best in the corpus, the incomparable *Njála*. The leaf the editors chose includes the confrontation between Hildigunn and Flosi which Clover used to begin her fine essay, and within that memorable encounter is the proverb which provides the book’s title: *Cold Counsel*. Those two words are here repeated in stylised blue script, the letters bent over, as if by a cold wind. The full title is burned across the manuscript; and from top to bottom are the lines of script, standing out against the cold white. This cover suggests the chill mysteries of the island which gave birth to the sagas, and to the monastic establishments where the ancient narratives were carefully copied down and bound into codices such as the *Möðruvallabók*. Unfortunately, within the frontispiece copy and also on the title page, this name appears as ‘Möðruvallaból’. There are other typos, in both old Norse and English, of course less prominent than this, but they all suggest, as do changes in typescript and format in a few of the essays, that the volume was put together with undue haste.

Gary L. Aho

Malcolm Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Book Covers*. The New Chapel, Shepton Beauchamp, Somerset, TA19 0JT: Richard Dennis, 2012, 120 pp., 99 colour images, pbk, £14. ISBN 9780955374180.

This is a fascinating companion volume to an exhibition named ‘From Rossetti to Voysey: Arts & Crafts Stamped Book Cover Design’, previously on show at Blackwell in the Lake District (until 12 July 2012). One therefore hopes that someone else will display this highly original exhibition before it is dispersed. The books come from Malcolm Haslam’s own collection.

In fact, if you collect printed materials from the late nineteenth or early twen-

tieth century you will probably find you have books with stamped covers. The cloth was often green or blue and the design may be picked out in black ink or gold leaf. Stamped covers continued to be produced until the book-jacket was invented. Book-jackets came into general use after 1914.

This book contains three essays, notes on publishers and artists, and a full catalogue. Haslam explains that early in the nineteenth century, books were either unbound, or supplied in boards, which were usually covered in blue paper; at the bookbinders they could be bound in leather, but this was an expensive process. Casing, which means that the cloth-covered boards and spine could be glued to the book as a single unit, began during the eighteen-thirties; also, a special lever-action press with a heater was used to stamp a design on the cloth. By mid-century there were a variety of elaborate covers with clashing colours which we used to think of as hideous. Ruari McLean studied these in *Victorian Book Design and Colour Printing* (1963), and they are now thought of, more generously, as typically Victorian. But during the 1860s, even in the heyday of this fashion, Rossetti was designing simple bindings for his sister's poems, and Morris issued a special cover for *Love is Enough* in 1872. These were ahead of their time. Other important covers illustrated in this volume include Philip Webb's *The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs* 1870, Walter Crane's *Grandmother Dear* 1878, Selwyn Image's *The Tragic Mary* 1890, and Morris's own design for *The Earthly Paradise*, 1891.

Though Morris only produced two covers, Haslam concedes that his influence on book design was enormous. He taught people to admire the appearance of a 'beautiful Book'. Haslam tells of a meeting which showed the world that the stamped book cover had overcome the initial prejudice against it. The Society of Arts mounted an exhibition of 'historical and modern bookbindings' in 1888; the assistant secretary of the society, Henry B. Wheatley, gave a paper on 'The Principles of Design as Applied to Bookbinding'. He stated that 'some of the finest specimens of modern cloth binding are due to Mr William Morris, to whom art owes so much'.

Haslam mentions that some Arts and Crafts designers were unhappy with the processes of production. Only the design was hand made and the rest was performed by machine. Against this one might say that the finished works seem to solve the problem which plagued Morris when he said he was 'ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich'. Books could be produced by an industrial process in quite large numbers and therefore more cheaply, so that ordinary folk could own a beautiful cover. As Aymer Valance put it in the *Art Journal* (1892):

The shapely fashioning and the decoration of the most ordinary objects is the art which will penetrate to the East-End dwelling of Lazarus ... Thus the talent that else had been fruitlessly perverted can be employed in an apostolate of culture.

Haslam reminds us that 'cloth-covered volumes were being issued in their mil-

lions each year, and, even if only a small fraction of the total had well-designed covers ... there should have been at least some impact on the public at large'. Considering the selection on display all together, we can see how many of them are quite amazingly well designed, and that the taste for these covers had spread widely. The catalogue includes designs from Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden and of course the USA.

It is difficult to say more about these art-objects without the use of illustration so I propose to describe one book in detail. Catalogue no. 49 is *The Works of Tennyson*, vol. VI, published by Macmillan & Co in 1884. The colour of the cover is an Arts and Crafts dark blue which also broader green; spread across the cover are tiny pairs of golden acorns arranged diagonally in a 'net design'. This is clearly influenced by Morris's work. The cover is unsigned but it is by Lucy Orrinsmith (i.e. Lucy Faulkner), who had worked with Morris before her marriage. For information about this somewhat neglected artist, see *JWMS XIX* No. 2, Summer 2011. There, Emma Ferry writes about 'The other Miss Faulkner' and mentions this cover on p. 54. Though this is the only stamped book cover by Kate Faulkner which is known, the entry says that it is likely that she designed many more because her husband was Art Director for a firm of bookbinders. We are told that such firms offered clients the right to a stamped cover when they asked for their books to be bound. The same cover design was used for a reprint of the Moxon Tennyson in 1893 (information from Peter Faulkner).

I found that this catalogue opened my eyes to a neglected area of Morris's influence, and I think that the William Morris Society might consider placing some of these books in our library. Look out in your attic for fairytale collections from your great-grandmother's childhood. I hope you will be pleasantly surprised by what you find.

John Purkis

Robert Llewellyn, *News from Gardenia*, London: Unbound, 2012, 224 pp., hbk, £9.99 .ISBN-13 9781908717122. Kindle edition £5.99.

Didcot power station is a mysterious place. Viewed from the river, whether the Thames Path or the water, it does not dominate the landscape, but rather floats in it, materialising to right or left, ahead, behind. The sinuous bends of the river allow the land somehow to refuse it. The sense of dislocation this produces is comparable to that which opens of *News from Nowhere*, when Morris (or 'Guest') returns home to Hammersmith at night, half notices the absence of the lights on the bridge downstream, and wakes in the morning in a transformed world.

Robert Llewellyn's *News from Gardenia* is a homage to Morris, inspired by reading *News from Nowhere* in 1978 when in his twenties. By my calculation, that makes him now in his late fifties, the same age that Morris was when he wrote his utopia. The homage is explicit in both the novel and the book design. The body text is set in LTC Cloister, designed by Morris Fuller Benton during the early twentieth century and based on the work of the fifteenth-century type designer Nicholas Jenson. The chapter headings are in Troy, and the initial letters of each are adapted from Morris's designs for the Kelmscott Press. The book was typeset by Bracketpress – whom we have come across before as the producers of the wonderful 2012 poster quoting Morris's response to Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1887: 'Hideous, revolting and vulgar tomfoolery. One's indignation swells almost to bursting point'. Morris perhaps would have preferred a more intensely black ink, but care has been taken with the design. The publishers too are unconventional. Unbound has revived publication by subscription, with the names of the supporters printed in the last pages of the book. This one is fully subscribed (although people can still add their names), which is testimony to some combination of faith in the author and interest in the genre of utopia itself.

The first problem for a utopia is always how to get the visitor, the observer from this world, in. In *News from Gardenia*, Didcot power station is the point of transition, although it is more Wellsian than Morrisian, and does not exploit the sense of dislocation produced by the landscape. Gavin Meckler is an emotionally challenged engineer who flies his electrically-powered light aircraft into a mysterious cloud which casts no shadow located over the power station. When he emerges, the power station has transmuted into an intense blue line of electric power fed by a solar kite several miles up, giving the new society free energy. Gavin lands in a field of oil seed rape, and is met by the people of the new world who even recognise the model of the plane, to be told he has come through a fold into the year 2211: both the cloud, and he, are an anomaly. Homage to Morris is immediate. The old man called in to explain matters to Gavin is called William; and Gavin, who at this point is wondering whether he has died and gone to heaven, says 'Maybe this William bloke was actually God'.

In this future, most people spend most of their time in decentralised communities growing food; they are vegan gardeners, and I was reminded of the rebel God's Gardeners in Margaret Atwood's dystopian *The Year of the Flood*. As Morris notes how healthy the inhabitants of Nowhere are, so Llewellyn stresses the absence of obesity. No-one is fat. There is no organised government, no banking system, no military forces, no police or judiciary and no civil service. The population of Britain has fallen to 20 million. Lots of houses have been pulled down, much land is reforested (though it's not clear why since the solar energy must limit carbon emissions). People mainly live collectively in large houses, which are all retrofitted with insulation and roofed with solar materials. Metals and plastics

are recycled from the waste of our own society: there is plenty of them. This apparently low-tech society does however have both an energy and an information grid. Information is accessed through a flexible sheet much like a piece of paper which everyone carries. The Book will provide a map, a recipe and historical information on demand, although it is not at all clear how the information gets there.

In the story, much space is devoted discussion of technology, partly because Gavin is more interested in how things work than in people. There is a system of underground communication tunnels, pods which transport people and goods around the world at miraculous speeds, and above all, the grid. All of this is more Bellamy or Wells than Morris. But if this is, as Llewellyn claims, a future where we get everything right, I would be distinctly uneasy about this impersonal grid named GAIA (Global Artificial Intelligence Arrangements) which not only allows instant access via the Book to huge amounts of information, but which knows where everyone is at any moment (cue Wells's *A Modern Utopia*). It also knows when you run out of your favourite shampoo, and automatically delivers it: useful, but creepy. Presumably that is how census counts are possible without any centralised organisation. We are given a quick trip round the world, not all of which is part of the new nonecon; China, India and the Mid-West of America still use money and formal economies, although India is in transition to the new way of being. There has not been a revolution, but a proliferation of small conflicts. Rather, governments handed power to corporations, which were then unable to sustain social organisation; perhaps the process of local resilience resembles most that aspired to by the Transition Towns movement.

I read Llewellyn's novel at a single four-hour sitting, and enjoyed it. There is a certain grim humour in Gavin's failure to understand social relationships, either in 2011 or 2211. But this bafflement makes it difficult to distinguish here between the authorial view and that of the central protagonist (just as in Huxley's *Island* you are always looking over the shoulder of Will Farnaby). Gavin's response to women is concerned only with whether they are beautiful, so the text reproduces rather than challenging this. We meet historian Paula quite early on, when her mother refers to her as 'a lovely girl' but not 'overly blessed in the looks department'. (p. 35) Gavin observes: 'She was big-boned – I think that's the kindest way of putting describing her. She wasn't fat by any means, but she was a solid looking lass'. (p. 42) She is 'heavyset'. 'Her hand was not only enormous, it was clearly very strong. ... Her voice was deep, not quite like a man's but very deep for a woman'. (p. 54) William may defend Paula as 'a perfectly delightful woman', (p. 35) but this is also a society where he can address a pretty young woman in these terms: 'Hallo Grace, you wanton hussy. You're looking even more extraordinarily attractive today'. (p. 25) I found this annoying rather than amusing. Grace seems to be Llewellyn's equivalent of Morris's Ellen. If both are projected male fantasies, at least in Ellen's case the attraction is a primal energy and passionate love of the

world and of life; and this may indeed be true of Grace, although we do not see that: either she is merely desperate for Gavin's body, or that is the fantasy of a man incapable of human empathy.

Utopias tend to provoke the reader to argue about the nature of the good society. I was slightly distracted by finding myself arguing over small details and errors. The Book tells Gavin his wife was born on 19 September 1979 and died in December 2073, and he responds 'Blimey, she made it to 98 years old'. No, actually, that's 94. London has become a lake, with its tall buildings drowned, because of a rise in sea levels. I mused on the topography here. Surely it would be sea? And if sea levels rise sufficiently to drown London, would Kew, Richmond and Chelsea still be above water? Since the fall on the whole navigable length of the river is just 234 feet (*ca* 71 m) and it is tidal below Teddington, would not most of the Thames valley be flooded and the whole topography of southern England change?

And then there is the ending, which, as in most utopias, is ambiguous. Extracting the visitor is as tricky as getting him in. When the anomalous cloud reappears over Didcot, Gavin feels compelled to take off, in an ending more like Wells's *The Time Machine* than the fade-out from *Nowhere*. But I wondered why. Gavin has read the historical account of his disappearance, in which he is presumed to have ditched at sea. His wife remarried and had children whose descendants are still living; he already knows that he did not get back. Other 'anomalies' have stayed and made their lives in the future, notwithstanding their sense of dislocation: why not Gavin?

All utopias, including *News from Nowhere*, can be criticised for their inconsistencies, omissions and implausibilities and many for their dubious gender politics. But one of the strongest claims for Morris's utopia is that it fosters the 'education of desire' rather than (or as well as) operating in purely literal terms. It fractures the taken-for-granted nature of the given world, and produces not just a cognitive depiction of an alternative social structure, but the experiential sense of inhabiting another world with its differing set of accompanying needs, wants and satisfactions. That is one of the reasons why Morris is so often commended for writing that very rare thing, a utopia in which we might want to live. Gavin's character, I felt, did not help here.

But as Llewellyn says, it is much more difficult to write a utopia than a dystopia, much harder to form a positive image than to exaggerate the evils of the present into a terrible warning. It is harder to do this now than when Morris was writing, for there is less real optimism about the future. All credit must be given to Llewellyn for trying. It is essential that we do, individually and collectively, imagine the alternative futures we might make and debate them – even if, in the end, I felt that the book underlined Morris's extraordinary achievement, and how challenging it is to try follow in his footsteps. The importance of *News from*

Gardenia, like any utopia, lies not the response of this reader to the society outlined, but in whether or not it helps us to continue imagining and arguing over the better future we need to build.

Ruth Levitas

Peter Preston, *Working with Lawrence: Texts, Places, Contexts*, Nottingham: Critical, Cultural and Communications Press, 2011, 299 pp, pbk, £19.99. ISBN 9781905510313.

It is surely no accident that Morris enthusiasts often involve themselves in D.H. Lawrence studies (and *vice versa*). In a passing comment in *The English Utopia* (1952), the Communist historian A.L. Morton drew an important parallelism between the two figures, remarking of Morris that ‘it was in Marxism that he found the road, thereby escaping the heartbreak and frustration which D.H. Lawrence suffered in our own time in attempting the same quest without the essential clue’. A few years later, in that seminal book *Culture and Society* (1958), Raymond Williams wrote that ‘Lawrence is very close to the socialism of a man like Morris ... In his basic attitudes he [Lawrence] is so much within the tradition we have been following, has indeed so much in common with a socialist like Morris, that it is at first difficult to understand why his influence should have appeared to lead in other directions’. Ever since I first read the closing lines of *News from Nowhere* about ‘people engaged in making others live lives which are not their own, while they themselves care nothing for their own real lives – men who hate life though they fear death’, I have felt that this is a perfect analysis of the Industrial Magnate, Gerald Crich, in Lawrence’s masterpiece *Women in Love* some thirty years later. So it is surely not just the biographical fact that he lived and worked in Nottingham which made Peter Preston, former chair of the Morris Society who died last year at the age of 67, a committed student of both Morris and Lawrence.

Just how vigorous a scholar of Lawrence Peter Preston was is made clear in this collection of his essays, as is his admirable institutional role in developing Lawrence studies at Nottingham University and elsewhere. Here he tells the story here of his own early, sixth-form encounters with Lawrence’s work, and he seems to have escaped the Leavisite framework which for many of us dominated our first reading of Lawrence. F.R. Leavis only receives one mention in this collection, whereas I recall being taught at university by a charismatic Leavis clone, Roy Littlewood, who drummed *Women in Love* into us so deeply as the Bible of English Studies that my fellow male students and I desperately wanted to be

Rupert Birkin from that novel, while all the female students no less passionately wanted to be Ursula Brangwen. Escaping Leavisite dogmatism is certainly a boon for Preston, since he is able to give proper weight to *Sons and Lovers*, a novel Leavis undervalued, and more generally to the whole question of Lawrence as our first great working-class writer who however – so perplexingly from a Morrisian-socialist viewpoint – turned in his later works against the social class from which he himself came.

The book opens with two fine essays on violence and on silence in *Women in Love*, and that is surely the kind of centrality this great work deserves. If one wanted to stress continuities between Ruskin and Morris and Lawrence, then *The Rainbow* (with the commanding image of Lincoln Cathedral at its heart) might be a better bet, but to stake a claim for Lawrence as supreme modernist innovator in the novel, then, yes, *Women in Love* is the necessary text. We are still struggling to find a succinct description which encapsulates the extraordinary achievement of that book: Terry Eagleton's 'the most philosophically avant-garde fiction of English modernism' is a strong contender; and Preston's two essays certainly extend our sense of this novel's paradoxically destructive vitality. They are followed by two pieces which set out the case for a high valuation of that late-comer to the Lawrence canon, *Mr Noon* (first published in 1984), and a shrewd study of Lawrence's essays on the theory of the novel. Beyond this literary-critical core of the collection, there is a good deal of lively analysis of Lawrence's travel writing and of his own cultural reference points (Bunyan, *Hamlet*).

Preston points out in the Introduction that re-reading his essays for publication has made him aware 'of the extent to which I have read Lawrence with the grain, seeking always to follow the direction of his thinking, his language'; and this, certainly, is where I feel a real generational difference from this book, much as I admire it. For the literary theory revolution in English studies during the 1980s has prompted many of us to read 'against the grain' (to borrow the title of Eagleton's 1986 essay collection). In the wake of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and others, it is not the conscious intentions of authors which preoccupy us, but rather the textual unconscious, the ways in which literary works undermine their official thematic logic in discrepant imagery or subversive narrative detail. That literary theory revolution makes itself felt around the edges of Preston's book (a couple of references to Mikhail Bakhtin, for instance), but does not impinge on it in a formative manner.

At the end of his Introduction to this collection Peter Preston announces that he is working on a book to be entitled *Lawrence after Lawrence: the Author in British Culture 1930–2010*, a volume which will now sadly not see the light of day, though some of its chapters-to-be have appeared in various other Lawrence collections. I wonder, though, whether we might not expand his announced focus here and develop it to include his passion for William Morris too. We might then

envisage a book on romantic anti-capitalism, the cultural tradition to which both Morris and Lawrence belong, in our own postmodern world, in the age of digital communications and economic globalisation. We would then be asking not just about local references to those two writers in subsequent authors or other media, but, in more political vein, about the adequacy or otherwise in our own time of the romantic anti-capitalism they both so powerfully represent. Can a romanticism which so forcefully assails capitalism in the name of organicist values from the past really match up to the cultural, technological and political complexities of today? Or does it necessarily generate an ecological politics wedded to models of social simplicity which, for us in the early twenty-first century, seem utopian in the bad sense rather than good? On the evidence of *Working with Lawrence*, Peter Preston's would have been a wise and steady voice for us in that necessary debate, a voice of which we are now, alas, deprived.

Tony Pinkney