

# Reviews

*Edited by Peter Faulkner*

Rachel Holmes, *Eleanor Marx, A Life*, London: Bloomsbury, 2014, 512 pp, 16 b&w illustrations, Hbk, £25. ISBN: 9780747583844

Eleanor Marx, who was always known as ‘Tussy’, was an amazing person in many ways, and Rachel Holmes has recorded her life in great detail. I heard this biography read on BBC Radio 4 as ‘Book of the Week’ earlier in the year. Even in the abridged version, the depth of Eleanor’s vision, the tremendous pace of her constant activity, and the width of her acquaintance among the Socialist pioneers came over vividly.

Eleanor became a formidable intellectual, yet she had little schooling, picking up almost everything she needed from her father; for example, they began to read Shakespeare together when she was six. She learned much from the constant stream of visitors and refugees who somehow fitted into the Marxes’ home. She began working as secretary for her father when she was fifteen, and soon became his research assistant as he assembled the material for *Capital*. She spoke three languages, and at the age of eighteen left home to teach French in Brighton. Although she became ill and had to return to London, she had established her wish to be an independent personality. She did not wish to be known simply as ‘Karl Marx’s daughter’.

After her father’s death in 1883 she helped Engels with the editorial work needed for the posthumous volumes of *Capital*, and on her own produced further publications from her father’s manuscripts. As a committed Socialist she spoke on public platforms, sometimes with Morris, and if there was a strike or a dispute involving the trade unions she was there, helping to raise funds or writing to the press and politicians. It is worth pointing out that when there was a meeting of so-called ‘Marxists’, she already felt the need on occasions to correct their misinterpretations of her father’s ideas.

She had always kept up with contemporary literature, and had a secret ambition to follow a theatrical career. Her productivity was astounding; ‘Laziness is the root of all evil’, she said, and apart from her work as a socialist she found the

time to translate *Madame Bovary* and several plays by Ibsen. In fact, she pushed Ibsen's ideas about society, and particularly about the suppression of women, upon all who knew her. The first English reading of *A Doll's House* was held at her home. Shaw commented:

at the first performance of *A Doll's House* in England, on a first floor in a Bloomsbury lodging house, Karl Marx's youngest daughter played Nora Helmer and I impersonated Krogstadt at her request with a very vague notion of what it was all about. (p. 254)

It was a ghastly irony that the course of Eleanor's common-law marriage to Edward Aveling could be said to bear a resemblance to that play. As Rachel Holmes points out: 'The intense conflict and contradictions of contemporary marriage that Ibsen gave life to on the stage mirrored the struggles between Eleanor and Edward'. (p. 255) Nevertheless she always stood by Aveling and supported him, trying to ignore the fact that he was regularly unfaithful to her and helped himself to her money whenever he liked. He borrowed from everybody, including Morris and Shaw. It seems that when she finally found out that he had secretly married another woman she committed suicide, but Holmes points out that the evidence is inconsistent, and her friends believed that Aveling had murdered her when he found out that she was going to rewrite her will.

In her book Holmes gives many instances of Eleanor's meetings with Morris, but she does not make it clear how well they got on. Eleanor was for a while a member of the Democratic Federation and attended every meeting of the executive council from August 1884; then she co-operated with Morris against Hyndman, and joined with him to found the Socialist League. Engels wrote to her sister Laura:

There is this to be said in their favour: that three more unpractical men for a political organisation than Aveling, Bax and Morris are not to be found in all England. But they are sincere. (p. 233)

Aveling became the sub-editor of *Commonweal*, with Morris, of course, as editor. But in 1888 Eleanor quarrelled with Morris and the anarchists because she supported parliamentary representation and wished to put up a candidate. When this proposal was outvoted she resigned from the Socialist League, and only saw Morris on a few public occasions thereafter.

Eleanor does not appear, I had assumed, in Mackail's *Life of William Morris*. On the other hand, Morris does appear in Rachel Holmes's biography of Eleanor Marx. There is a considerable difference in emphasis. Who is right? Then I remembered the words of Ray Watkinson, a former President of our Society: 'Whenever you have a problem about Morris, the answer is always to be found in Mackail. Trust Mackail'. So I turned again to Mackail, and found that Eleanor

was there, indexed as one of the Avelings. Mackail uses a letter of Morris to describe how the three of them made the famous joint visit to Oxford, when the students cat-called and one threw a stink bomb; Eleanor is not mentioned because she did not speak. While Mackail may or may not have known Eleanor Marx, I think he did not regard her as being of enough importance to include her in his *Life*. Nor does Fiona MacCarthy define her as a friend of Morris's, though she does give more factual information than Mackail. May Morris, on the other hand, is described by Holmes as Eleanor's 'close friend' (p. 254); she took part in the reading of *A Doll's House* mentioned above, and played Christine Linde. In addition she showed her affection by giving Eleanor many articles from Morris & Co. to furnish her home, though it is not made clear how these were received. May also helped Eleanor with parties for destitute children.

Because Eleanor appears to have known everybody in the Socialist movement of the time, the book is particularly valuable for its insight into her contemporaries; I particularly recommend its account of how Engels ('the General') appeared to a young child. Holmes concludes her book by reminding us:

Many of the freedoms and benefits of modern democracy Britain inherited for the twentieth century and beyond ... were a direct result of the work done by Eleanor Marx and women and men like her. The eight-hour day. The outlawing of child labour. Access to equal education. Freedoms of expression. Trade unions. Universal suffrage. Democratically selected parliamentary representation, regardless of class, religion, gender or ethnicity. Feminism.

To live with Eleanor for a while is to have an opportunity to remember how we got here, where the democratic liberties we enjoy came from. And at what price we let them go. (p. 448)

*John Purkis*

Christopher Newall (with contributions by Christopher Baker, Ian Jeffrey & Conal Shields), *John Ruskin: Artist and Observer*, Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada and London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2014, 376 pp., £37.50. Pbk. ISBN: Canada 9780888849199, UK 9781907372575. *Published in conjunction with the exhibition 'John Ruskin: Artist and Observer' organised by the National Gallery of Canada and the National Galleries of Scotland, and presented in Ottawa from 14 February to 11 May 2014, and in Edinburgh from 4 July to 28 September 2014.*

'John Ruskin: Artist and Observer' was a superb and surprising exhibition accompanied by a comprehensive catalogue. Both the exhibition and the book

offer revelations about Ruskin as an observer of the human and the natural world. We can find throughout evidence of William Morris's mentor.

The exhibition charted the course of Ruskin's life with a selection of one hundred and forty works of art on paper – drawings and watercolours. Ruskin's varying interests emerge through the work, revealing a conflicted and brilliant man, wrestling with aesthetic issues within the tumultuous mid-nineteenth century. In this intimate Ruskin, we see the contradictory burgeoning of modernity. Like Morris, Ruskin spent his life coming to terms with a modern civilisation which was self-aware and self-destructive as no previous culture. This exhibition displayed Ruskin's trials by presenting his private life of observation.

I saw the exhibition in Ottawa on a bleak, late-winter day full of energetic snowflakes. On such a day, visual details are subtle and require careful attention – one must look as Ruskin looked, steadily and precisely. The first room of the exhibition brought with it some of the nuance of the outside – a small room with pencil drawings set against muted, blue-grey walls. Once adjusted in this visual narthex, the three subsequent rooms expanded into teeming detail. Without such acclimatisation, the visitor might have been overwhelmed by the volume of detail, the scale of Ruskin's productivity, and the visual presence of his determination. When I sat down during the later spring with the catalogue, I began to grasp the order imposed by the exhibition on the complexity and diversity of Ruskin's work and life. In this brighter light, the sympathetic and sensitive presentation of his art provided evidence of a life spent looking for and finding truths about our visual and created environment.

In a sense, the catalogue reads like an illustrated biography with extensive annotations. The four essays (by Newall, and contributors Christopher Baker, Conal Shields and Ian Jeffrey) serve as a general introduction to the main catalogue beyond. Newall begins with an introduction of Ruskin's obsession with understanding by recording observations, giving an overview of his use of drawing as a method of comprehension. He suggests that these works are contradictory as art in a formal sense, commenting that 'in the first place, their variety of type and technique ... would make them unimaginable as the work of an artist of the period seeking to earn his living', and second, their thematic intensity 'places a gulf between them and the work of most amateur artists'. Newall's conclusion is that though 'drawing was an invaluable stimulus to an ever greater knowledge ... the work of art that resulted was, to [Ruskin's] perception, of no intrinsic significance'. (p. 20)

Christopher Baker's essay explores Ruskin's connection to Scotland. Ruskin's family was from Edinburgh; it was of course in Edinburgh that Ruskin gave his four important lectures in November 1853 which were to make such a marked impression on the young Morris; it was in Scotland that the emotionally confused Ruskin lost his wife Effie to his friend Millais, who was painting the famous

portrait in Glenfinglas; and it was in Scotland that Ruskin's passion for geology found an opportunity for its most intimate expression.

The main interest of the third essay, by Conal Shields, is the relationship between Ruskin's drive for observation and his internal emotional state. The twenty-first century would offer a litany of terms for Ruskin's psychological turmoil which ended in his madness. Fortunately, both in this essay and throughout the catalogue (with one notable exception discussed below), there is no anachronistic analysis and any psychological discussion is limited to the interaction between Ruskin's emotional variability, his drawn observations and his resultant discoveries.

The last essay, by Ian Jeffrey, turns to Ruskin's relationship with daguerreotypes. The exhibition included some examples of this early photographic method which at times offered Ruskin support and at others annoyance at mechanical modernity. He admired the level of detail possible via photographs, and Ian Jeffrey concludes that Ruskin was stymied by his inability to better the daguerreotype for accurate observation. There is an unasked question lingering over this essay, recurring throughout the catalogue: what if Ruskin had concerned himself less with the duty of accuracy and more with art-making as creative impression?

For the reader, as for all those who have been inspired by Ruskin, this book shows his life to have been a bounty of enlightenment. The catalogue of the drawings and watercolours in the exhibition is broken into seven sections delineating Ruskin's life of interests: Architectural Detail and Ornament, Buildings, Towns and Topography, Geology and Foregrounds, Mountains and Skies, Nature Studies, Figures. Within each section, the works are introduced chronologically. This arrangement was less obvious in the exhibition than it is in the catalogue – a function of the singular linear path of a text with its discreet chapters compared to wandering through a series of rooms. It was a pleasure in coming to the catalogue after the exhibition to see this chronology emerge via the work as a visual biography. For those interested in Ruskin as inspiration to Morris, this is where the collection will be most appealing. We see the course of Ruskin's life seven times, each time passed through a different lens. In each instance we see a many-shaded progression from a joyful apprehension of space, material and the process of making, through to an acquiescence of falling short of perfection.

It was in 'Architectural Detail and Ornament' that I most thought of Morris. These images include the eponymous stones of Venice. The drawings vary from plain graphite on paper – clean, often precise inspection of interiors, spandrels, capitals – to more developed ink-wash and watercolour impressions of some broader scenes and some tighter details. My favourite was a careful graphite, watercolour and body colour (an opaque water-based paint) *Spiral Relief* from the North Transept Door of Rouen Cathedral. Though from later in Ruskin's life (1882) the work calls out a love of workmanship, a care for detail and a passion

for a fading age in which labour and beauty are allied. There are many other fine examples of Ruskin's calm brilliance. One such is *Study of a Piece of Brick, to Show Cleavage in Burnt Clay* (1871). This is a superb encapsulation of a world – like an Alpine version of Saint-Exupéry's asteroid – complete with a forest of moss and an exposed cliff of sandy brick. Of the relationship between nature and English manufacture, one would be hard pressed to find a more articulate statement.

The geological section of the catalogue, in which this watercolour is found, contains some of the most loving studies. In fact, Newall repeatedly emphasises Ruskin's fascination and aptitude for geology, especially in Switzerland. Ruskin is cited as famously commenting that had he not discovered Tintoretto in Venice, his major work would have been entitled *The Stones of Chamonix*. (p. 351) 'But Tintoret [*sic*] swept me away into the "mare maggiore" of the schools of painting which crowned the power and perished in the fall of Venice'.

The catalogue is full of such remarks. It is an indication of the absorption of its authors that their text blends so seamlessly with Ruskin's writings. In places, but for the punctuation, the reader could not tell the difference. The jubilant, romantic style makes the book a pleasurable and entertaining read, as well as being informative via its rigorous research. The style does become slightly carried away at times – for example when we are told that in Venice Ruskin enjoyed the periphery of the town 'perhaps to escape the madding crowds of San Marco'. (p. 210) But this is largely forgivable, especially in a work about Ruskin, where an austere style would be far less apposite.

The writers are slightly overindulgent in what could be called Freudian analysis of some of the drawings. We hear repeatedly of 'unfulfilled sexual desires, seen for example in the observation of geological forms unwittingly suggestive of female genital anatomy'. (p. 23) This theme recurs, usually unconvincingly, and yet the qualification that the academic who originally developed this thesis 'now has doubts about it' is provided only as a footnote. (p. 63) Ruskin may have been sexually confused, but it would have been mortifying for him to think of such things directly. For a study which makes such sensitive use of Ruskin's personal materials, it is surprising and uncharacteristic to see this clinical reading applied.

But this is a digression. Just as Newall's reference to Hardy bears some truth of Ruskin's contradictory feelings about Venice, so too may this psychological analysis of his drawings. Ruskin was composed of delicate layers of opposing inconsistencies. If his passions were joined by sexual instincts, it was from under a thick Victorian veneer of emotional constriction. The contradictions wrapped up in these various implications are emblematic of the broader dichotomies which defined Ruskin, made clear in the work of this excellent catalogue and exhibition. From them we discover the Ruskin who coined the phrase 'pathetic

fallacy' in order to instruct artists away from sentimentality and anthropomorphism, and yet we find him set against clouds like an army, playing with the Alps until the mountains broke through 'calmly in the midst of anger'; (p. 60) Ruskin famously insisted that artisans should be allowed to think for themselves, but his drawn designs for the 1854 Oxford Museum (p. 102) are highly detailed and instructional. His texts are rational, balanced, pedagogical, yet his drawings are obsessive, passionate and often incomplete; his written emphasis on technique is belied by his obvious desire to achieve something transcending technique.

*Ruskin Artist and Observer* reveals a man wrestling with profound issues not only of art and representation but of cultural value and observable understanding of our world. The fact that he was also struggling with his own conflicting passions and vicissitudes is palpable in the art. For the scholar and viewer of this work within the complete *oeuvre*, this makes Ruskin an embodiment of modernity.

*Leopold Kowolik*

Keith Hanley & Brian Maidment, eds, *Persistent Ruskin. Studies in Influence, Assimilation and Effect*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 215 pp., 2013, 15 b&w illustrations, Hbk, £60.00. ISBN 9781409400769

The complex and expansive nature of John Ruskin's work necessarily provokes a range of responses. He was Eurocentric, but highly influential in Japan and India, opposed democracy while championing education for working people, and adopted a critical position which was simultaneously anti-capitalist, counter-revolutionary and Christian. *Persistent Ruskin* is a stimulating collection of essays which addresses some of these tensions and contradictions.

The mismatch of Ruskin's ideas with the mid-Victorian working class is analysed by Lawrence Goldman in a thoughtful and convincing essay. Using a specific dispute between Ruskin and T. J. Dunning, a leading Trade Unionist, Goldman shows that rejection of orthodox Political Economy isolated Ruskin from workers and unions. As Chartism declined during the 1860s, labour activists sought to make themselves credible within the mainstream reform movement, but Ruskin's agenda was too radical to help consolidate this position. His individualism can also be traced in St George's Museum, which he established in Sheffield in 1875. Marcus Waithe shows that Ruskin dedicated much of his energy to capturing images of Venice as 'preserved traces of irreversible destruction'. (p. 51) Part of Ruskin's purpose is explained by his desire to evoke the contemporaneous loss of cultural heritage, interesting in the context of the foundation of SPAB by Morris and others at about the same time. Rachel Dickinson counters

the facile characterisation of Ruskin as the ‘embodiment of Victorian misogyny’ (p. 53) in a fascinating chapter which traces his unorthodox approach to gender. Ruskin’s involvement with Winnington Hall, a residential school in Cheshire, shows that he encouraged progressive female education, and while Dickinson concedes that Ruskin concurred with the ‘separate spheres’ doctrine, she argues that his understanding of it was far more progressive and nuanced than many commentators have acknowledged.

Brian Maidment highlights the extent to which Ruskin used periodicals as outlets for his writing, and goes on to assess three journals which had Ruskinian allegiances, expressed through both their content and physical appearance. The ‘failure’ of Ruskin’s early writing is pursued in Francis O’Gorman’s detailed contextualisation of his support for the Pre-Raphaelites. He argues that Ruskin’s interventions were motivated by a sense that his early writings had failed: he had not secured understanding of Turner’s work and had little success ‘in transmitting the redemptory meanings of a crumbling Venice’. (p. 82)

Peter Yeandle provides a sketch of the ‘Ruskinian’ dramatist Henry Arthur Jones, paying particular attention to his play *Wealth*, witnessed by William Morris and George Bernard Shaw on its first night in 1889, while Andrew Leng traces a critique of Ruskin in Roger Fry’s art-historical writing. Fry’s attempt to reinstate Raphael’s *Transfiguration* as a canonical work of art is seen as a conscious attempt to overturn Ruskin’s condemnation of the same painting. Beginning with his interest in Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, Anuradha Chatterjee discusses Ruskin’s attitude to clothing and suggests that it infused the way in which he understood architecture. While Ruskin showed little interest in convenience, he believed that women who wore the right clothes could ‘symbolise the moral integrity of their body as well as that of society’. (p. 134)

Chatterjee then examines the ways in which Ruskin used textile analogies to describe architectural decoration and how terms such as ‘chaste’, ‘fair’ and ‘pure’ align his approach to architecture with that of textiles and female beauty. Melissa Renn provides a fascinating glimpse into art education during later nineteenth-century America. She discusses the rivalry between Charles Herbert Moore (a follower of Ruskin) and William Morris Hunt (influenced by the French ‘Barbizon’ painters) and the subsequent debate between ‘Barbizon Boston and Ruskinian Harvard’. (p. 146) Hers is an enlightening essay which gives a good sense of Ruskin’s legacy in a specific context. Another is offered by Mark Stiles who describes Ruskin’s influence on the building trade in Sydney. While architects read the *Seven Lamps of Architecture* and the *Stones of Venice*, they were more interested in architectural development than social reform. Labourers were far more interested in *Unto this Last* and *The Crown of Wild Olive*, as this gave them ways of arguing for the rights of labour, although the ideas of the Ruskin and the British Fabians were abandoned in about 1900 in favour of a more radical

Marxist agenda.

Tony Pinkney's Chapter: 'Ruskin, Morris and the Terraforming of Mars' takes an intriguing look at *News from Nowhere*. He argues that it was written at a pivotal moment and is one half of two influential Utopian models. While Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* presented a 'centralised, urban, highly technologised future', (p.173) *News from Nowhere* was an explicitly Ruskinian counter-argument. Pinkney sees Morris's novel as progressive but problematic: how could Ruskin's Gothic-derived Utopianism be transformed into an alternative future which possessed some credibility for the late nineteenth century? Symptoms of this dilemma are evident in the boats powered by a strange unexplained power source, and the character of Boffin the Golden Dustman: both signal the misfit between Ruskinian Gothic and a credible future. Pinkney argues that the questions raised by *News from Nowhere* were developed in interesting ways in the science fiction of the 1960s and 1970s. Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* and Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* are interpreted with these themes in mind, but the series which articulates these ideas the best is Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars Trilogy. Pinkney claims that in this series: 'the most advanced texts of the postmodern science-fictional utopian tradition that Ruskinian ideals of anti-dualistic, unalienated labour continue to have their enduring impact even today, with the interplanetary scientist having replaced the Gothic craftsman as that ideal's most persuasive contemporary embodiment'. (p. 178) What is more, Morris's work is at the root of this tradition: *News from Nowhere* 'contains within itself the science-fictional seeds of all the utopias' published after 1890. (p. 178)

Keith Hanley places Ruskin's career within the Judaeo-Christian tradition of cultural dissemination. Ruskin's self-imposed exile from the norms of Victorian society and his biblical education made his authorial stance and attitude analogous to that of a prophet or missionary. Although from one perspective Ruskin might be seen as a Eurocentric cultural imperialist, Hanley demonstrates the profound influence of his ideas in Japan during the early twentieth century, and India during the 1950s. Ghandi's translation of *Unto this Last* was subject to major deletions, condensations, simplifications and omissions, but retained Ruskin's central critique of capitalism.

There is plenty of good, original analysis in this book and those seriously interested in Ruskin should read it. Some interesting themes emerge, such as the mismatch between Ruskin's mid-Victorian writing and his late nineteenth-century audience, and the idea that his agenda was too radical to fit neatly into mainstream reformist ideas. Gaps are inevitable in a book such as this, perhaps the largest being the lack of attention paid to Ruskin's influence on the physical world. Authors discuss architecture, paintings and theatre, but most of the analysis is centred on the literary productions of Ruskin or those influenced by him. As Morris's career shows so well, Ruskin's influence on the physical appearance

of Victorian Britain is arguably one of his most prominent areas of influence, and some analysis of Ruskin's material legacy would have enriched this collection.

*Jim Cheshire*

Yisrael Levin, *Swinburne's Apollo: Myth, Faith, and Victorian Spirituality*, Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013, viii + 167 pp., Hbk, £60. ISBN 9781409430469.

William Morris once remarked to Sidney Cockerell that, 'In Religion I am a pagan'. To contemporary ears, this might well connote little more than that Morris was uninterested in matters of religion, and that his preoccupations were very much of a this-worldly nature. It is certainly true that Morris lost his Christian faith at Oxford without any apparent struggle, and that the creeds he adopted during his adult life – whether of aestheticism during the 1850s and 1860s, or the Socialism of the 1880s and 1890s – bear little enough relation to the Christianity of mainstream Victorian culture. But, as an increasing body of scholarship is showing, we need to be cautious about eliding non-Christian nineteenth-century world views with twentieth- and twenty-first century agnostic rationalism.

A few decades ago, the idea of a book on 'faith' and 'spirituality' in the work of Morris's lifelong (if not particularly close) friend Algernon Charles Swinburne might well have seemed simply laughable. We may not have known much about Swinburne, but we knew that he was perhaps the most vituperative, most notorious antitheist of the whole grand tradition of dissent against Victorian bourgeois complacency. Today, in comparison with other poets of comparable stature, we still know shamefully little about Swinburne. Although his reputation reached its nadir well over half a century ago, significant publications concerning him continue to come at a trickle, rather than as the free-flowing stream which would be required for us to gain a really well-rounded picture of this paradoxical and many-faceted figure. Yisrael Levin's is the most important critical monograph on Swinburne since Margot K. Louis's *Swinburne and his Gods*, published some twenty-four years ago. And although Levin's work does not quite bear comparison with that of Louis, or that of her equally illustrious predecessors Jerome McGann and David Riede, it nevertheless makes a significant contribution to our understanding of both the poet and his world – and particularly of the still-emerging field we might call 'alternative Victorian spiritualities'.

That Swinburne was a devotee of Greek literature and of all things Hellenic is not news; he is one of the most famous of all Victorian Hellenists, and as a young man amazed his contemporaries with his facility both for reading and composing

Greek verse, and indeed for capturing what was seen as the 'spirit' of Greek tragic poetry in his first masterpiece, *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865). What Levin succeeds in teasing out is the extent to which Swinburne's Hellenism, and in particular as it related to the deity Apollo, was more than simply a literary trope. In his first chapter, Levin explores the place of 'Apollo in the Nineteenth Century'. He points out that for many Victorians who had lost or were losing their Christian faith, Apollo could easily function as a kind of substitute Christ – one requiring only poetic belief.

The popularity of Apollo was further increased by the work of the eminent German mythographers Ottfried Müller and F. Max Müller. In particular, Max Müller's *Comparative Mythology* (1856), which viewed all mythologies as 'essentially solar mythologies that depict humanity's and nature's response to the sun's diurnal and seasonal progress', (p. 20) exerted a widespread influence – including on Morris, as critics of *Sigurd the Volsung* have long realised. Swinburne's most important poetic predecessors in Apollonian devotion were Keats and, especially, Shelley, whose 'Song of Apollo' melds poetic and religious belief in a way which more materialistically-minded Victorians rarely followed: for Arnold, and for Barrett Browning, for example, Apollo remains essentially a literary device.

The next two chapters chart the development of Apollonian imagery in Swinburne's earlier work: first, *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) and *Poems and Ballads* (1866), and then the political volumes *Songs before Sunrise* (1871) and *Songs of Two Nations* (1875). Yet, while these volumes – and especially *Poems and Ballads* – have absorbed much of the scholarly interest in Swinburne's work, they are almost peripheral to Levin's thesis. Apollo in these poems remains what he was for so many of Swinburne's contemporaries: a mythological character. However, by the time the two political volumes were published, Swinburne had already made his great Apollonian breakthrough, in a work written in 1868 but not published until 1878 – his elegy for Baudelaire, 'Ave Atque Vale' (1868).

With this poem, Swinburne's Apollonianism passes from the mythological to the mythopoeic. That is, in the terms which Levin takes over from Riede's discussion, it ceases simply to recount myths generated in the past, and begins to create its own, drawing on those ancient myths and yet distinct, an original response to the poet's experience of the world. Such mythopoeia, as both Riede and Levin suggest, is characteristic of the Romantic poets, but had come to seem all but impossible in the industrial, utilitarian England of the mid-nineteenth century. In 'Ave Atque Vale', Apollo, the god of the sun and the god of poetry, is not only (as he was to the Romantics) an ambivalent, bittersweet source of artistic inspiration; he is a father-figure, to Baudelaire and by extension to all poets. Swinburne thus makes Apollo an analogue not of Christ, as was usual, but of the Christian God the Father.

From these relatively modest beginnings, Swinburne's Apollonian myth blos-

somed over a number of years, perhaps reaching its zenith (to use an appropriately solar term) in 'On the Cliffs' (1880), a brilliant though labyrinthine poem in which the god's presence is moderated through 'a poetic environment where Apollo's presence is manifested in a convoluted matrix of mythopoeic figures' (p. 104), principally a bird and the poet Sappho (which two figures are closely identified with one another). In this and other poems, Apollo becomes for Swinburne not just a figure whose story is to be told, but a presence to be felt, awed by, and even interacted with.

Levin goes on carefully to trace Swinburne's developing response to the figure and the presence of Apollo in a series of works of the 1880s – including, pleasingly, 'Off-Shore', a remarkable poem hitherto virtually ignored by criticism. He notes, though, that in his final period during the 1890s, Swinburne turns away from Apollo as a source of inspiration. In what is arguably the greatest poem of that decade, 'A Nympholept' (1894), the 'presiding god' is not Apollo but Pan. The point is not, however, a 'replacement' of one god with another (in the way that the speaker of the 'Hymn to Proserpine' [1866] regrets the usurpation of the old gods by Christ), but rather Swinburne's growing sense of the inadequacy of all spiritual systems, and the primacy of the immediate, nympholeptic moment.

Another, more banal but perhaps not wholly inapposite way of saying this is that Swinburne, like so many other Victorians, came to realise that a god in whom one does not believe can never ultimately replace one in whom one does. The various new-minted nineteenth-century religions – of art, humanity, republicanism, and indeed Socialism – while they were and may still be valuable as sets of ideas, all ultimately proved inadequate when they came to be seen by some as substitutes for actual metaphysical systems. Viewed this way, Swinburne's Apollonianism makes him seem less distant than he might otherwise appear from the concerns of his contemporaries. It may also, perhaps, help to make him a more human figure than perhaps he has sometimes seemed. Crucially, though, work such as Levin's also makes it clear that ideologies such as Swinburne's Apollonian poetics can and should be viewed seriously as alternative spiritualities. To speak condescendingly, as critics of earlier generations did, of the 'Victorian muddle about God', is both unfair to the rigour of Victorian spiritual exploration, and blind to humanity's tendency to make gods for itself in every age, including our own.

Yisrael Levin is to be commended for his patient and careful reading of Swinburne, and especially of the later work – a task which is not easy, but which is ultimately one of the most rewarding experiences in late-Victorian studies. There can now be no doubt, in my view, that it is on Swinburne's later work that his reputation as a great nineteenth-century poet must stand. My most significant regret is that Levin has for the most part confined his discussion to those later poems which are already comparatively well-known, rather than delving more

frequently into the byways of Swinburne's mature *oeuvre*. Nevertheless, this is a significant and very welcome addition to Swinburne criticism. If it encourages its readers to explore further, it will have performed a valuable service.

*Richard Frith*

Oliver S. Heal, *Sir Ambrose Heal and the Heal Cabinet Factory 1897–1939*, Wetherby, West Yorkshire: Oblong Creative, 2014, 396 pp., 586 illustrations. Hbk. £58. ISBN 9780957599239.

My aesthetic education began soon after the end of World War II, when my father would take us 'up to Town' so that we could visit the National Gallery (for Art) and Heal's (for Craft). I was therefore favourably inclined to the subject of this book before I saw it, and I can now happily declare the book to be a splendid one, for which Oliver Heal and Oblong Creative deserve the highest praise. It is a large (and heavy, thanks to the quality of the paper), 330 x 240 mm, with a dust-jacket in colour showing a Mansfield 235 fumed-oak wardrobe from 1898, an excellent example of Arts and Crafts work of the time.

Oliver Heal is the grandson of Sir Ambrose Heal (1872–1959), and has had access to a wide range of material which he has organised into a clear and illuminating account. The firm originated with John Harris Heal, from Wiltshire, who set up a feather-dressing business in London in 1810, moved it to Tottenham Court Road in 1818 and to its present site in 1848, by which time it had developed into a bedding factory. It extended its range during the nineteenth century, but only achieved its high status as the result of the leadership of Sir Ambrose, as I shall refer to him, in order to distinguish him from the author of this book. Heal shows Sir Ambrose to have been a remarkable man, designer and retailer, patron of the arts, scholar and author, who 'expanded the firm and turned it into a major force in British design development in the first half of the twentieth century'. (p. 3) He was evidently a complex person, talented, serious, competitive, uncompromising, a great organiser, winning respect rather than affection. He was highly successful; indeed, the design historian John Gloag wondered in 1953 whether any other furniture designer had had 'such an individual and far-reaching effect'. (p. 3) Yet, Heal tells us, he has received little attention recently. Heal seeks to restore his grandfather's reputation, in particular by giving a full account of the work of Heal's Cabinet Factory, located within the business, from 1897 to 1939.

Sir Ambrose was, like Morris, educated at Marlborough; he then spent six months in France, and returned to take up an apprenticeship with James Plunkett, a respected Art Furniture manufacturer in Warwick. He started work at

Heal's Bedding and Upholstery workshops in 1893, and in 1895 became a salesman there, and married Rose Rippingale, who was twelve years his senior. His closest friend at the time was his cousin Cecil Brewer, who encouraged his interest in architecture and design; Brewer designed the Mary Ward Settlement in Tavistock Place (1898) and was a member of the Art Workers' Guild. He also designed the attractive Voyseyesque house, the Fives Court at Pinner, where Heal began his married life, although Rose sadly died in 1901. Ambrose remarried in 1904, to Edith Todhunter, the daughter of the Irish playwright and friend of the Yeats family. He was thus very much part of the aesthetic world of the time, and the Arts and Crafts movement.

This can be clearly seen in the decoration of the two houses in which he lived, both of which were significant enough to be shown in *Country Life*; first Brewer's Fives Court (which incorporated an area in which he could play fives, one of his favourite competitive games). There was a squash court at the next house, the late medieval Baylins, near Beaconsfield, to which the family moved in 1919. This building was restored with advice from the SPAB, and later extended by the architect Edward Maufe, whose wife Prudence was Ambrose's mistress and a close colleague at Heal's. MacDonald Gill painted the oak beams, and Sidney Barnsley was commissioned to provide a fine oak dresser. In these houses, Heal was able to pursue his design work, and also to write scholarly books on London trades and tradesman, which were – as the illustrations show – produced to high typographical standards. He made a substantial collection of books from private presses, including the Kelmscott Press.

In connection with Ambrose's membership of the AWG from 1906, it is mentioned that he 'maintained that he had known William Morris', (p. 34) but unfortunately no revelations follow. Heal's scholarship is usually impeccable; so it is a pity that Morris – acknowledged as a source of inspiration for Ambrose – is said to have started 'the Firm' in 1861 from his home in Red Lion Square rather than from Red House. But Fiona MacCarthy is appropriately quoted as saying that 'At Morris and Co., as at Heal & Son later, the great selling point was the sense of a personal artistic control'. Sir Ambrose was involved in efforts to revive the Arts and Crafts movement after the financial failure of the 1912 exhibition, and was an early and active member of the Design and Industry Association, whose logo he designed in 1915. He was knighted for 'services to industrial arts and crafts' in 1933, and received the accolade of Royal Designer for Industry in 1939.

The second part of the book is called 'Retail is Detail', and shows conclusively how effective Ambrose was in this sphere. Heal describes the handsome shop that Cecil Brewer built in Tottenham Court Road, later extended by Sir Edward Maufe, and replacing the Italianate building of 1854, as 'a testament to A.H.'s vision'. (p. 264) The building, in its combination of elegance and practicality, exemplified Sir Ambrose's positive qualities. The delightful colour poster of 1928

by R.P. Gossop (p. 54) offers a floor-plan showing the wide range of products available, as well as the Bedding Factory with which the family business originated, and the Mansard Gallery, in which important exhibitions of art and design were arranged by Prudence Maufe, and attracted much public interest. The account of what the shop was like during the 1920s is enlivened by references to *Service*, a play about a store very like Heal's, written by Dodie Smith, who, I was surprised to learn, worked at the shop from 1923 to 1932, had an affair with Ambrose, and wrote about these matters in her autobiography. Staff at Heal's were encouraged to dress informally and interact with customers; she apparently 'purchased an orange shawl with a border of magenta roses, to be worn with a magenta dress and flat green shoes'. Sir Ambrose's response was that 'If she wants to dress up as a Polish peasant there seems to be no reason to stop her'. (p. 57)

Altogether, it is clear that Sir Ambrose succeeded in taking Arts and Crafts ideals into the business world. Although Heal quotes Pevsner on three occasions, he does not mention that in *Pioneers of Modern Design*, Pevsner praised – and illustrated – the wardrobe shown at the Paris Exhibition of 1900, which for him embodied a spirit akin to that of Voysey: 'the close atmosphere of medievalism has vanished. Living amongst such objects, we breathe a fresher air'. (The wardrobe is illustrated here on p. 159, where it is noted that Ambrose told a committee in 1907 that the Exhibition had been 'of no benefit to the firm'). It is notable that Pevsner goes on to state that 'Even more important historically than such exhibition pieces of Heal's was their production for the ordinary market', which he dates to the 1898 catalogue of Heal's Plain Oak Furniture. Heal is thus placed by Pevsner firmly within the developing tradition of modern design.

However, the author suggests that the idea of retail is still regarded with suspicion in academic and artistic circles, and this is the reason why Sir Ambrose's reputation is lower than it should be. He argues that Sir Ambrose should be celebrated as much for his development of the firm as for his design work; but he also demonstrates in the third part of the book how wide-ranging and high-quality the work at 'The Cabinet Factory' was; this section, occupying 146 well-illustrated pages, gives a full account of the factory's impressive output from 1895 to 1939. We are shown a man who showed great distinction in a number of roles. Heal concludes modestly that his work will 'provide a solid foundation for future studies', and goes on to claim that, 'taking everything together, it seems indisputable that A.H. was an important figure in the realms of furnishing, retailing and design in the early part of the last century'. (p. 267) It is a claim that the book amply justifies.

There are six appendices of supplementary information, including one on 'A.H. as Author', a substantial Bibliography and a good Index. The 586 illustrations, including many in colour, give the reader a good sense of the range and quality of the work of the company and of Heal's contribution to it. It is difficult

to see how this piece of work could have been better done; I can only recommend it enthusiastically. The price is necessarily high, but the book is invaluable.

*Peter Faulkner*

Virginia Chieffo Raguin, *Stained Glass Radiant Art*, Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2013, 112 pp. Pbk US\$20. ISBN 9781606061534.

*Stained Glass Radiant Art* is a short introduction to stained glass, based on the collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum, acquired in 2003. Virginia Chieffo Raguin is a distinguished scholar of stained glass and the author of one of the well-known general studies of the medium.

The book adopts a thematic approach which assumes no prior knowledge from the reader. The three main sections describe the process of manufacture, the function of stained glass within an architectural context, and the influence of artists and patrons. Shorter sections follow which describe patterns in collecting stained glass and issues relating to conservation and display.

Despite being aimed at a wide audience, *Stained Glass Radiant Art* does not shy away from the insights of cultural history: this is no simple chronological survey of stained glass. Raguin goes to considerable lengths in order to stress that a glazing scheme was 'a corporate enterprise dependant on a patron'. She stresses that stained glass can 'transform our experience of space', (p. 9) and sees it as comparable to contemporary installation art in its ability to respond to lighting conditions and the physical interaction of viewers. In a similar way, the book stresses that medieval and Renaissance stained glass was not seen as a 'minor art' (a theme close to the heart of William Morris) but was a medium which attracted the best artists of the period. Several interesting comparisons are offered which connect stained glass to manuscript illumination and panel painting. One of the best aspects of the book is the sustained attention given to the technical aspects of glass painting. Raguin works hard to describe the ways in which glass painters achieved subtle effects in their resistant medium via graduating and modifying coats of enamel wash and silver stain.

However, the book encounters difficulty in relating a balanced history of stained glass, concentrating as it does on just one museum collection. From the evidence presented, it would appear that most of the Getty collection dates from the late-medieval period or the Renaissance; many illustrations of earlier windows are photographs of those in gothic cathedrals. As a result, much of the book concentrates on the later periods, which could leave the reader with the misleading impression that stained glass reached its peak during the Renaissance. Later stained glass barely merits a mention, and statements such as 'only toward the

end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries was stained glass considered an art in its own right and a subject worthy of scholarly investigation' is a contentious claim and arguably a distortion of the attention paid to stained glass from the mid-Victorian period onward. (p. 90) When Raguin discusses post-Renaissance culture, it is in the context of explaining the ways in which collecting stained glass has partly determined what we see in museums today. The book does not concern itself with the revival of stained glass during the nineteenth century, and does not mention William Morris or any of the other major figures of the Victorian revival.

The production values are good, and the photographs of the museum objects excellent, although a couple of the *in situ* images are less accomplished. People who buy this book as a supplement their visit to the Getty museum will probably have purchased just what they need: it will aid comprehension and appreciation of this collection. As a more general introduction to the history of stained glass, the book is less satisfying, and probably not the best way to build a balanced perspective on the subject.

*Jim Cheshire*

Roger Fieldhouse & Richard Taylor, eds, *E.P. Thompson and English Radicalism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013, 258 pp. Hbk, £65. ISBN 9780719088216

How to do justice to E.P. Thompson? Renowned historian, prolific journalist and essayist, lecturer, socialist and peace campaigner, he also published a novel (*The Sykaos Papers*), and a collection of poetry. Thompson was one of the principal intellectuals of the Communist Party in Great Britain after the Second World War, and although he left the party in 1956 over the Soviet invasion of Hungary, he remained a Marxist, playing a key role in the first New Left in Britain during the 1950s. He was a vocal left-wing critic of the Labour governments of 1964–70 and 1974–79, and an active member of CND. During the 1980s he played a crucial role in the formation of the European Movement for Nuclear Disarmament (END), and became the leading intellectual of the peace movement.

Published to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Thompson's most famous book, *The Making of the English Working Class*, this collection of essays explores in some detail the diverse range of activities and interests of this 'passionate and romantic polymath'. (p. 1) While it is not a biography of Thompson, it does present a coherent, almost chronological account of his intellectual and political activities. It is argued that there was an essential unity and coherence to Thompson's work, and that this is signified by the title of the book, which deliberately links Thomp-

son and 'English radicalism', defined as 'that particular English tradition, dating approximately from the seventeenth-century Civil War (with traces back to the fourteenth-century Peasants' Revolt), which emphasises freedom, equality and democracy, within the framework of the law'. (p. 2) Thompson, they say, was a 'quintessentially English radical' who named Vico, Marx, Blake and Morris as his chief theoretical inspirations.

The most interesting aspect of the book for members of the Society is that it clearly emphasises the influence of Morris upon Thompson, and in so doing brings us to a greater understanding of Morris himself. For Morrisians Thompson is best known for his magisterial biography of Morris, first published in 1955. The book was originally intended to be a short article, building on the earlier work of Robin Page Arnot, in which Thompson aimed to reclaim Morris as a Marxist revolutionary; both from those on the right who had effectively ignored his political activities and emphasised instead his literary and artistic life, and those on the left who had attempted to portray him as an ethical or a sentimental socialist. But Thompson was seized by Morris, or as he later said, Morris 'claimed him', and when *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* was eventually published it was over 800 pages long. Thompson joined the William Morris Society immediately it was formed, as member No. 61, and remained a member until his death in 1994. On 4 May 1959 he lectured to the Society in the Hall of the Art Workers' Guild on 'The Communism of William Morris'. During the interim he had, like many others, broken with the Communist Party, and he now re-assessed Morris's Communism. This proved to be an important staging post on the way to his much revised biography, published in 1977. The subsequent publication of this lecture by the Society in 1965 is still an excellent short introduction to Morris's politics, and to his contribution to Marxist theory.

Morris, we are told, led Thompson 'intellectually towards a broader, more liberal interpretation of Marxism'. (p. 8) David Goodway reinforces this in Chapter 3, with a stimulating discussion of what he regards as the key section of Thompson's biography, the fourth and final part, 'Necessity and Desire', and this point was confirmed by Thompson himself in his lecture to the Society. While acknowledging Morris's profound debt to Marx, he admits that he was originally wrong to suggest that Morris's moral critique of society was dependent upon Marx's economic and historical analysis. 'That is not the way in which I look upon the question now. I see the two as inextricably bound together in the same context of social life. Economic relationships are at the same time moral relationships; relations of production are at the same time relations between people, of oppression or co-operation; and there is a moral logic as well as an economic logic, which derives from these relationships. The history of the class struggle is at the same time the history of human morality'. (*The Communism of William Morris*, p. 17) Thompson insists that Morris's analyses are a necessary

complement to those of Marx, because without them the concept of ‘the whole man’ becomes lost, as happened with the later Marxist tradition. It is therefore Morris who led Thompson to his rejection of orthodox Communism, and to his realisation that the overthrow of capitalist class power would not of itself lead to a Communist society: ‘the construction of a Communist community would require a moral revolution as profound as the revolution in economic and social power’. (*Ibid.*, pp. 18–19)

This debate is the source of Thompson’s ‘Socialist humanism’, a key theme illustrated throughout the book, and given detailed analysis in Chapter 6 by Kate Soper. It refers to a libertarian communism; Thompson’s attempt to rescue the ‘moral imagination’ from the ‘philistinisms’ of both social democracy and of Stalinist communism; from the deadening process of bureaucratisation. He recognised that both socialism and capitalism could become obsessed with economic growth at the expense of other human values. It also encompasses Thompson’s emphasis upon human moral autonomy, and his assertion of the authentic Marxist dialectic of human beings as both ‘made’ by historical circumstances and active in their making. This discussion fed into his analysis of social class and his rejection of static, sociological definitions of the concept. For Thompson, ‘class is defined by men as they live their own history’ (*The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963, p. 11), and he focused on the circumstances people found themselves in, their interactions and struggles, during which they came to an understanding of their identity as a class. In other words, the process of struggle leads to the discovery of class and class-consciousness; class struggle comes before class.

Thompson is probably best known today for his historical work on British radical movements during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and in Chapter 4 Theodore Koditschek gives an illuminating account of Thompson’s Marxist history. *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), still in print fifty years on, is widely regarded as a canonical work of social history, and according to Professor Eric Hobsbawm ‘almost certainly the most influential single book of history in the Anglo-Saxon radical Sixties and Seventies’. Thompson’s intention, he said, was ‘to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the “obsolete” hand-loom weaver, the “Utopian” artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity’. (p. 13)

Previously social historians had focused on the tangible – wages, strikes, living conditions, the Chartist movement – but Thompson was much more concerned with what he referred to as ‘human experience’. His detailing of workshop customs, communal rituals, failed conspiracies, popular songs, and other fragments of social history alone make his book a riveting read. But running through it was also a searing indictment of capitalist exploitation, and a refusal to accept that capitalism was inherently superior to other economic and social models.

Koditschek acknowledges the ground-breaking nature of the work, suggesting that it opened up an 'unexplored continent of history', (p.71) but he also points out its omissions, and suggests that others of his works, notably *Customs in Common*, have better stood the test of time. Nevertheless, he argues that historians of other times and places will be rewarded by reading Thompson. 'His sensitive explorations of the subtle dialectic between structure and agency can provide, if not a model, at least an inspiration. They reveal a master historian at work, and show some of the possibilities for applying theory to the complex, messy arenas of irrepressible human action and entangled human affairs'. (p. 90)

Thompson was never a conventional historian, and elsewhere in the book I was particularly drawn to Roger Fieldhouse's Chapter 2 on 'Thompson: the adult educator', which recounts his seventeen years working in the Department of Extramural Studies at the University of Leeds. It is the account of his teaching which is fascinating, variously described as inspirational, stimulating and challenging: 'It is as advocate, innovator and practitioner of a "bottom-up" approach to adult education, always valuing his students' contributions and enthusiastic to learn from their experiences, that Thompson as teacher should be remembered'. (p. 43) Living in Halifax, and working largely in the industrial towns of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Thompson was able to gather much of the material which eventually emerged as *The Making of the English Working Class*, and in Chapter 3 David Goodway examines the way in which this book grew out of Thompson's day-to-day work at the University. Thompson acknowledged his debt to the members of his tutorial classes in his preface, and I for one am left regretting the fact that I was not a student of his. From Leeds he moved to the University of Warwick in October 1965, as Director of the Centre for the Study of Social History, but resigned just six years after taking up the post, disgusted at the commercial turn the University was taking. His resignation was accompanied by a lengthy pamphlet outlining his intellectual and political objections to the University's direction, and pouring scorn on 'the species *Academicus Superciliosus*', the academic staff who, he said, were defrauding their students.

Thompson, like Morris, was no mere theorist or polemicist, but an activist too. He played a pivotal role in the early New Left's attempt to create a new political and social movement (Chapter 8), and in the peace movement (Chapter 9). Unlike most Marxists, he did not believe that the campaign for peace should be subordinate to class conflict and the attainment of socialism: they were both part of the same struggle to create a truly democratic and just society. After 1956, again like Morris, he became increasingly suspicious of orthodox political parties and the State. He wanted a new social movement to undermine the orthodoxies of both East and West. In *END*, says Richard Taylor, 'his inimitable combination of moral passion, scathing polemic and a "feel" for the popular mood of concern over the mounting nuclear and political threat acted as the catalyst for a new,

mass international movement'. (p.189) His was also a concern that free, informed public debate and human rights were being undermined. Michael Newman suggests that Thompson's ideas are still relevant today, that his work forces debate, while Richard Taylor argues strongly that the revolutions of 1989 and beyond in Russia and Eastern Europe owed much to the political activists of END and to their campaigns for peace and human rights.

The editors and contributors to this collection of essays make clear that they are admirers of the man and his work. These are generally sympathetic analyses, but this is far from being a hagiography. Thus it is suggested that Thompson possessed sentimental loyalty to pre-1956 Communism, an irrational aversion to George Orwell, that he underestimated the importance of gender, race and ethnicity in his studies of the English working-class, that there was a form of cultural nationalism in his work, a romanticism about elements of the past, and that he was difficult to work with. Nonetheless this 'man of many parts' exerted a profound influence; his work and example retain a contemporary resonance as we once again face rising tension between East and West. William Morris spent fifteen years of his life struggling to create a revolutionary tradition within a society unripe for revolution; Thompson 'with all his might . . . struggled to keep open the common footpaths of radical inquiry', and to present alternatives to bureaucracy, the impersonal power of the state, and the subordination of human values to the pursuit of economic growth. Romantics both, revolutionaries both, one cannot understand Thompson without reading Morris, and anyone interested in Morris and his legacy would benefit from reading Thompson.

In conclusion, the editors include three examples of Thompson's writing 'as illustrations of Thompson's inimitable style', always 'rich, erudite and engaging'. (pp. 3–4) These are taken from *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), *The Peculiarities of the English, I* (1965), and *Warwick University Ltd* (1970). If readers are not yet convinced of the need to read Thompson, then these extracts should surely lead them to do just that.

*Martin Crick*

Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2013, 268 pp. Pbk, £19.99. ISBN 9780230231979.

In 2011 Michael Truscello made a documentary *Capitalism is the Crisis* (available online) which challenged the idea that the 2008 crash exposed imperfections in an otherwise healthy system, and promoted radical alternatives to capitalism. Ruth Levitas's book is framed by a similar set of concerns. She identifies a pressing need for social change and argues that market instability, growing inequality, loss

of public services, financial mismanagement and ecological disaster can only be resolved via elaboration of alternative ways of living. Utopia meets this need and the aim of the book is to show how, via its elaboration as the Imaginary Reconstitution of Society (IROS).

The book is organised in three sections. Each presents a series of important arguments. The first develops the idea presented in Levitas's earlier *The Concept of Utopia*, which outlines utopia as method. The argument relies on a particular concept of utopia which Levitas interprets as a universal desire for a better way of living. The concept of utopia as desire generates a hermeneutic method of inquiry, and is linked to prefigurative or transformative practices, and to the holistic sketching of alternative societies.

The second section presents an account of the development of sociology as an academic discipline, and argues that institutionalisation led first to a turn to science, and away from utopia, and subsequently to a revival of interest in utopia via a postmodern lens. This return, while welcome, wrongly treats utopia as a goal, and encourages the anti-utopians' embrace of utopia. For Levitas, steering sociology back towards a conception of utopia as method facilitates a 'push forward to a less cautious and more imaginative engagement with possible futures, in which utopia is understood as a creative form of sociology'. (p. 149) The final section, which examines IROS as method, contains three parts. The 'archaeological mode' interrogates ideas of the good society by the excavation of social and economic policies, the 'ontological mode' is about the subjects and agents of utopia and raises issues of wellbeing, flourishing and happiness, while the 'architectural mode' turns to questions of institutional design. Levitas does not treat these aspects of IROS independently. Not only are questions of human flourishing intimately linked to conceptions of institutional design: both must also be subjected to archaeological critique. As a method, then, IROS is about uncovering the assumptions which underpin social alternatives. 'The method of utopia' as IROS, Levitas argues, is 'the construction of an integrated account of possible (or impossible) social systems as a kind of speculative sociology'. (p. xiv)

The purpose of developing this framework is not just to recommend a particular approach to utopia and to sociology – in the furtherance of IROS – but also to advance a particular set of principles. Central to these is what Levitas refers to as the 'ethic of grace'. In the first part of the book she turns to Paul Tillich in order to define grace as 'the reunion of life with life, the reconciliation of the self with itself'. (p. 13) Towards the end, she discusses grace with reference to the work of Roberto Unger:

Acts of grace entail refraining from attacking another's exposed or heightened vulnerability. ... This echoes some vernacular uses of the terms grace, gracious and graciousness, which include the practice of passing over or covering for the

weaknesses or social lapses of others rather than exposing or confronting them, thus collaborating in a mutual process of saving face. (p. 188)

Grace is embedded in utopia as method, and features at every level of Levitas's analysis. The results are mixed. While grace serves as a vehicle to explore some rich ideas about being, it also serves to weaken the analytical force of utopia as method and muddy the relationship with IROS. On the one hand, the concept of utopia as desire (on which the framing of utopia as method draws) is 'analogous to a quest for grace'. (pp. xii–xiii) Since grace is already part and parcel of utopia, it is not surprising to find that it emerges as a 'recurrent theme' when utopia is used as a hermeneutic method. (p. 14) On the other hand, utopia as method is concerned with 'the potential institutions of a just, equitable and sustainable society which begins to provide the conditions for grace'. (p. xviii) In this sense, it appears to be identical to IROS rather than a route to it, for IROS, too, is 'always essentially an attempt to establish the institutional basis of the good life of happiness, and the social conditions for grace'. (p. 65)

The range of Levitas's reading is impressive. Bloch, Bauman, Rawls, Rorty, Erik Olin Wright and Michael Young are just some of the authors who feature in the text. Her analyses are not only distinctive but also help carry the broad arguments of the book. The resonance she finds between her ideas and those of other authors fleshes out perfectly the secular humanist values which inform her thinking and a commitment to their realisation which is compelling. Nevertheless, her tendency to reference multiple sources in succession sometimes threatens to ride roughshod over important philosophical differences, for example between Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship, Morris's principle of fellowship, John McMurray's conception of mutual recognition and Emmanuel Levinas's transcendent Other. (p. 187) Moreover, the richness of the discussion can make unraveling the dimensions of utopia as method quite difficult.

Such problems are exacerbated where Levitas avoids explicit commentary, as she does from time to time in Morris's case. Morris occupies an important place in the book and is a presence throughout. He appears as a pioneer of utopian sociology, alongside Edward Bellamy and H.G. Wells, and, by his understanding of art's transformative role, as an exponent of 'the possibility of grace'. (p. 215) Yet it is not clear how far Levitas wishes to endorse Paul Meier's account of Morris as orthodox Marxist, which paints him as an advocate of proletarian dictatorship (p. 80), and if so, how this Morris fits either with Absensour's view of Morris as an exponent of the 'utopian marvelous' who wanted 'to awaken and energize desires so that they might rush toward their liberation' (p. 114), or Phillippa Bennett's reading which points to 'the desire to reclaim wonder'. (p. 196) Levitas offers a description of *News from Nowhere* in the book's second section, as well as an account of Morris's utopianism at the end. And discussions along the way suggest

that utopia as method allows for the possibility of different interpretations (with the possible exception of Jameson's 'flat-footed literalism'). (p. 121) Moreover, she finds the commonality of Absensour's Morris and Bennett's visionary in their attempt to express the 'existential depth' of humanity which Levitas treats as an idea of grace. But this raises another question: if the hardwiring of grace into utopia makes the interpretation of particular utopias and romances secondary to the project of IROS, what role does utopian or dystopian writing play in the elaboration of utopia as method?

The privileging of sociology, freed from both the straightjacket of 'science' and the idea of utopia as a totalising blueprint, provides one answer. The story Levitas tells of sociology's evolution, principally in UK academic institutions, underplays the influence of Althusserian structuralism and resistance to American historical sociology documented by Craig Calhoun. However, Levitas's main point is to show how the explosion of publishing outside academia – notably feminist utopian fiction – revitalised sociological traditions and promoted utopian sensibilities in sociological theory. The resulting fusion provided 'a way of reading utopia that engages with the actual institutional structure of the present and the potential institutional structure of the future'. (p. 126) Her conclusion reserves an important place for the analysis of utopian writing. Creative works which 'push the limits' of 'possible imagination and imagined possibility' are the mainstays of critical sociology. (p. 125) But not everything goes, because the value of utopias is assessed by the standards of utopia as method and the commitment to IROS. Notwithstanding her criticism of Jameson, Levitas thus argues that utopias should be read literally – though not exclusively so – because '[w]ithout a certain element of closure, specificity, commitment and literalism about what would actually be entailed in practice, serious criticism is impossible'. (p. 125) This view implies a narrowing of IROS's compass of utopian writings. It is not clear that an outlandish, satirical work such as *bolo'bolo* can find a home in this project, notwithstanding its cultural significance. Nor is it clear that heterotopias sit well within IROS's field.

IROS provides plenty of space for practical utopian experimentation. 'Occupy', for example, is mentioned at several points in the text. But Levitas's desire to enter into the imaginary reconstruction of society classifies utopia in a particular way and to meet her specific purposes. It is not a coincidence that her final reflections on reconstruction are UK-centric, even though she finds examples of practical utopias across the world. As a call for development of an imaginative and critical approach to sociology, *Utopia as Method* is powerful. But the binding of utopia, understood as method, to sociology, seems less persuasive.

Ruth Kinna