

Reviews

Gary L. Aho, *William Morris: a Reference Guide*. Boston, Mass.: G. K. Hall & Co. 1985. ISBN 0-8161-8449-6.

The appearance of a comprehensive reference guide is one indication that the importance of the author so treated is now generally accepted, and that such an aid has become necessary for the further development of study and research. In Morris's case, as Gary Aho's listings show, such acceptance was slow in coming. At no time after his death did his importance and influence go unrecognised, especially in the Labour movement, and there were important early studies after Mackail, and a spate of publications in centenary year 1934, including such seminal works as Page Arnot's rehabilitation of Morris's socialism and G.D.H. Cole's influential edition of *Selected Writings*, but it wasn't until the 1960s that the steady stream of critical studies attested the wider recognition of Morris's importance, which the existence of our Society has done so much to foster.

Many bibliographical works are drily factual, invaluable in the library and on the scholar's shelf, but with little wider appeal. Gary Aho's work is emphatically not one of these, and we are everywhere aware that it is the product of a lively mind and of a deep understanding of Morris. At the same time, it sets a very high standard in bibliographical compilation, so that it is difficult to believe that it could have been done better. The Preface clearly sets out the scope: 'to list and annotate every book and article about WM, as well as those studies that have significant commentary upon his life, achievement and influence, written between 1897, the year after his death, and 1982.' What is not included is clearly defined, and I found myself regretting that this takes in 'inconsequential recollections', such as 'Kegan Paul's memory of WM swearing in church'. Was this the publisher, I wonder, and what occasioned Morris's impiety? The lengthy Introduction begins with a brief life, which brief as it is should have included some reference to Ruskin's crucially important influence, and this is followed by a valuable 'discussion and review of shifts in WM's reputation as a socialist, as a poet and man of letters, and as a designer', in which, incidentally, our Society is singled out for the contribution it has made in its publications to deeper understanding in these areas.

The main body of the work lists some 1900 books and articles alphabetically by author within the year of publication. The comprehensive coverage, which I have been quite unable to fault, is extraordinary, and a tribute to the resources of the powerful research libraries in the United States, as well as to the determination and persistence of the author. The bibliography alone would have been a valuable work in itself, but what we are offered is an informative and judicious evaluation of each item, varying in length with its importance; a prodigious task, which Gary Aho tells us involved the reading of all but some 50 of the titles listed, including 150 in 14 foreign languages. The result is a fascinating parade of critically assessed writings about Morris from shortly after his death onwards, which can be dipped into anywhere for informative and lively reading, as well as for use as a scholarly tool. The work is completed with an author index, and most importantly a subject index which could hardly be bettered for

its organisation and detail. A landmark in Morris studies, then, for which we must all be grateful, and which is strongly recommended not only to all libraries in the humanities, but also to all those students of Morris who can afford it.

Richard Smith

Peter Faulkner, editor, *Jane Morris to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt: The Letters of Jane Morris to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt together with extracts from Blunt's diaries*. University of Exeter Press. 1986. £15.00.

'Why should there be any special record of me when I have never done any special work?' Jane Morris asked, writing to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt on December 20, 1904. But as Peter Faulkner's admirably edited edition of her letters to Blunt makes clear, there are reasons other than accomplishing 'special work' that can make the record of a person's life memorable and can make us glad to have that record.

A few years ago, the reasons in the case of Jane Morris would all have concerned her role in the lives of William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and possibly Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. Today, however, — that is, in this book, — hers is the central role and Blunt's the supporting one, through the diary entries that shed light on what she wrote. But the change did not occur all at once, and in fact Jane Morris, whatever the fate of other women at authorial hands, has been emerging over the last ten years, like a latent photographic image. First there was John Bryson's edition of the correspondence between Jane and D. G. Rossetti (1976); and more recently she has figured in Jan Marsh's *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (1985) and has shared the central roles in Dr. Marsh's *Jane and May Morris* (1986).

One would like to think that even if there had been no recent development of feminist perspectives on the nineteenth century, these books about Jane Morris would have been written, published, and received with interest. This may not be so, of course, but Peter Faulkner's latest contribution to Morris studies — or indeed the study of the Morrises and *their* circle — has its own quiet force that comes from the material and not wholly from our changed perceptions as readers.

What do we learn from the book? First, what a very complex person Jane Morris was. As Peter Faulkner observes in his Introduction, citing Dr. Marsh's *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood*, Jane, whose background was about as humble as could be (her father being a stable hand in Oxford 'living with his wife and four children in the impoverished Holywell Street area') quite ably — after her marriage to William Morris in 1859 — 'adapted to her new social situation. Her natural intelligence and the encouragement of Morris's friends — people with remarkably unVictorian attitudes to class — helped her to take an equal place in friendship with people like Georgiana Burne-Jones . . . and Rosalind Howard, later the . . . Countess of Carlisle.' What the present volume shows, too, is how well she managed her relationship with the wealthy, aristocratic womanizer, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, who, by his own later admission, fell in love with her primarily because she had been loved by Rossetti, the 'one nineteenth-century poet who interested' Blunt, a poet himself, though a very minor one. This strange affair, carried on intermittently, largely at Kelmscott House

and Kelmscott Manor, and begun when Jane was forty-four and Blunt forty-three, not only survived middle age and old age, but seems to have grown into a genuine friendship between a man and a woman.

The letters begin in 1884, a year after they met, and although Faulkner rightly says it is not clear how soon they became lovers, by February 1885 she was writing from Bordighera, where she had gone for a stay: 'I think of you often and wish I could see you and talk with you and wander about these valleys with you — of course I know all this is impossible and utterly foolish, but the thought recurs again and again . . . I hope to send you a Valentine of violets tomorrow.' From then on, what she establishes in her letters to Blunt is a theme of affection, punctuated from time to time with desire and longing. But this correspondence continues to near the very end of her life — 1913 (she died the next year), and what finally happens is that the desire is transformed into the solid tie of friendship of which I spoke. The themes that mark the early letters — that is, the people and problems in her life she discusses with him — continue to the very end. These are Jenny's health, May's marriage to Sparling (when first introduced, impending; when finally mentioned, dissolved), Jane and D. G. Rossetti — particularly his letters to her; her view of her marriage to Morris; and, until 1896, Morris and his own activities, particularly the Kelmscott Press.

After Morris's death, in the final period of letters in this book, those that began in 1897, there is something gallant about Jane Morris and Blunt, both fairly old by Victorian notions (she fifty-eight in 1897; he fifty-seven) keeping alive their fugitive past, in which, in her way, she had been more loyal than he; and during which she had, oddly, helped to enlarge Blunt's appreciation of her husband. As part of the matter of this triangle, there is, surely, an untold story as to how it came about that the Kelmscott Press published Blunt's *Love Lyrics and Songs of Proteus* as its third production, postponing Morris's own books and adding to the delay in issuing *The Golden Legend* in order to get it done. Was it Jane Morris's persuasion? We do not know. But her letters to Blunt show (as do Morris's to her) that she took a keen interest in the Press, as well as, predictably, a very special interest in Blunt's book. Morris's generosity in the matter — for such it probably was — may have been a special reason for Blunt's admiration of him. That Blunt did admire him is, under the circumstances, a form of generosity in Blunt, too; and as his diary entries show, he was always ready to praise achievement and was perceptive of forms of character strength not obvious as such to everyone.

It has been noted by several of the authors who have dealt with Jane Morris recently that she had a genuine love of literature, and although Blunt disparages her taste and judgment, regarding them as merely learned, there is an ironic vindication of her abilities in her comments about his own book. Referring to one group of poems in it, she wrote on January 3, 1892: 'I think the "Woman's Sonnets" the finest poems,' the finest, that is, in the book. They were written not by Blunt but by Lady Gregory (his lover in 1883) and included in the book as his own; since Lady Gregory was, arguably, a better poet than Blunt, there is perspicuity here on Jane Morris's part, to say the least.

There are many other insights into Jane Morris for the reader of this edition. They reveal that after Morris's death she grew closer to her daughters, perhaps becoming

closer than she had been during his lifetime. And she reports to Blunt in December, 1905, Jenny's 'wonderful recovery' from her lifelong illness. 'Those attacks have almost left her, and she is more like herself than she has ever been since the illness began — . . . all this . . . is a puzzle to her doctors.' The same doctors perhaps who, when Morris was alive, had seen Jenny violent and suicidal, according to Blunt's diary for 1893. But best of all the letters show Jane Morris managing the odd mix of selves, the one who always addresses her letters to 'My dear Mr. Blunt' (with one exception, a salutation reading 'Caro mio' in 1888), and the one who grows more independent as true friendship develops. '[W]e have neither, that I can remember, ever called the other by our Christian names,' Blunt said in his diary entry for May 7, 1891. He added: 'I wonder whether it was so with Rossetti.' It was not, so far as Jane Morris's letters to Rossetti are evidence (he was 'My dearest Gabriel' in one surviving letter of 1879 and was always at least addressed as Gabriel). What the contrast suggests, among other possibilities, is an invisible class barrier felt by her, for surely if she had begun he would have followed. Yet there is something clear-eyed about her always in her estimate of those born in high station, including Blunt. She seems to know that they are, after all, human, and she seems to know this because she knows herself. Bored, ill, under intolerable stress because of the illness of others, she is able to enjoy herself when the opportunity occurs, is able to make the most of little, and is always able to feel — even greatly, when the opportunity appears. It is as if she knew that her capacity to feel, to feel for another, was, in her world, special, equal in importance to the 'special work' of others.

Peter Faulkner's presentation of the material is effective, and gives shape to the implicit narrative. The edition is divided into three parts, corresponding to the three phases of the friendship between Jane Morris and Blunt (1883–1890; 1891–96; 1897–1913). There is a brief Introduction to the entire volume, and there is a prefatory note to each section, pointing to its main theme and emphasis. There is also an Afterword, a summary statement of what has been disclosed here. And the letters are well annotated, always concisely, always informatively. The use of material from Blunt's diaries is skilful and adept, and Faulkner makes the diaries serve as the most illuminating annotations of all for the letters. Altogether this is a valuable addition both to what may still be called Morris studies and to that growing body of literature concerned with Victorian women. This book will affect — perhaps alter — our view of William Morris and of moments in his career; and will make us realize how sad it is that he seems to have had so little of the love of this woman who was so ready to love. The book also makes us realize how truly isolated Jane Morris was at times; though we always knew this, we experience it here. Finally, the book reveals how, in that complex world of art, politics, class, wealth, and desire in which she lived, she managed to subordinate the first four to the last; and ultimately convert the last into its very opposite: enduring friendship, which also subordinated to itself all that might have separated Blunt and herself.

Norman Kelvin

Amanda Hodgson, *The Romances of William Morris*. Cambridge University Press. 1987. Hardback £22.50.

Amanda Hodgson's book is that rare thing, a critical text that is thoroughly readable, yet closely argued and compact. Her main thesis is that the young William Morris had major doubts about the social relevance of the romance form, and had to wait until the last prose romances for the full flowering of his literary genius.

She begins with the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, and concentrates on the prose stories, which she sees as a product of Morris' love-hate relationship with the Middle Ages, highlighting his doubts about the uses of an historical escapism: 'if the artist tries to recall the past, to make it part of the present, does he only succeed in destroying its vitality . . . does he render it powerless by fixing it in one particular mould?' (p. 31).

Dr. Hodgson's second point is that the young Morris was temperamentally unsuited to the idea of the happy ending. As a result, he found himself questioning not just the medieval backdrop to his tales, but also the formal requirements of the genre in which he was writing. The natural result is the underlying pessimism of the tales in *The Earthly Paradise*, with the possible exception of 'The Lovers of Gudrun'.

How does Morris overcome these difficulties? His solution is both elegant and characteristic. When he discovers Marxism, his doubts about the organic, progressive nature of history, and the links between past and present virtually disappear, and he can go on to create 'his greatest literary achievements, the prose romances of his final years' (p. 81).

Apart from Marxism, there is also the Icelandic influence. Dr. Hodgson devotes a chapter to *Sigurd the Volsung*, showing how the sagas provided Morris with a suitable image of heroic action — not the irrational violence and excess of medieval chivalry, but rather the stoicism and courage of the Viking ideal. These virtues are seen as socially useful, and encourage a firm belief in the relevance of the romance convention.

Armed with these insights, Morris can go on to produce his last prose romances, including *A Dream of John Ball* and *News from Nowhere*. In these tales his heroes are at one with history and with nature, and can look forward to a happy ending, an epoch of rest.

So far so good. But what about the last romances? Are they really Morris' best work, better even than *Sigurd the Volsung*? The trouble is that something like *The Well at the World's End* is especially hard for the critic to reduce or analyse, being almost pure story from beginning to end. It is one of the virtues of her book that Dr. Hodgson manages to deal with the last prose romances in a reasonably short space, thereby maintaining the clarity and punch of her argument.

On the debit side, the very logic of her approach seems to work against her. No one can deny that in Morris' last writings 'each moment brings us nearer to the ultimate romance happy ending — the Socialist society' (p. 194), but formal qualities are not enough. Other factors must be taken into account when assessing the artistic power of any fictional text, and in the end I am not convinced that the formal perfection of the last romances is necessarily more satisfying or affecting than the kind of broken, disjointed structure, that so often characterises the earlier tales, whether in verse or prose.

All the same, Amanda Hodgson's book is full of splendid stuff, and deserves a lot of success. And there can be no doubt that the last romances have languished in the literary doldrums for far too long. This book makes a valuable contribution to the process of rehabilitation.

Andrew Dodds

Dorothy A. Harrop, *Sir Emery Walker 1851–1933*. The Nine Elms Press 8vo, 1986. 350 copies, printed at Whittington for Harold Smith, signed by the author. 32 pps. + notes and bibliography. Mauve willow-pattern paper covers.

One would so like to know whether Walker could ever be provocative, good fun, just a little satirical. All the minutes he kept for those golden evenings of the Hammersmith Socialist Society — were they ever amusing, as such occasions must humanly have been, or merely conscientious, precise? Did he say anything witty, in all his life? Among so much passion as surrounded him, the laughter and the anger, his voice is never heard.

Emery Walker is remembered, revered, as the helpful behind-the-scenes man without whom no Revival of Printing by William Morris and his followers would have been possible; from whose lecture to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1888 Morris went home resolving to design his own types. He was the one who knew how to do it, like a practical man among enthusiasts for electricity who never in their lives mended a fuse. Ready to advise, technically expert, historically competent, a man of taste, each successive aspirant confessed a debt to him.

At first Dorothy Harrop set out, it seems, to disinter the man himself. 'I was intrigued by the personality of Emery Walker whose name occurred again and again . . . but who, and what, was this *eminence grise* . . . ?' Her essay is wonderfully clear as to what, but we are taken no further into the who of her question, Emery Walker's personality, still stranded upon such vague rocks as 'his gift for friendship and his unfailing willingness to help any who sought him out'. T.E. Lawrence's careful phrase in his letter of sympathy to Dorothy after her father's death called him 'both a figure and a person'. The figure is well outlined here, his person remains entombed.

Miss Harrop has performed a neat and necessary task, especially in sifting and placing his early activities, clarifying, mapping his varied life. On his early association with the Dawsons, father and son, especially with Alfred who founded the Typographic Etching Company, and on the new printing processes he learned there, her essay has helpful passages. There is apt quotation from Walker's 1882 review of Joseph Cundall's book on Holbein, to show his admiration for earliest printing before he and Morris met, and our attention is drawn to an edition of *The Pied Piper* from 1884 which 'clearly owes much to Walker'. She is equally clear in tracing the complexities of Morris's socialist affiliations, though most of which Walker accompanied him after their first acquaintance in 1883 or 1884.

After the private presses get launched Dorothy Harrop becomes a little mechanical in repeating the received accounts — all these people whose quite different private types were 'modelled upon Jenson' for instance. 'The art of printing had been at a low ebb throughout the nineteenth century' is not really an acceptable judgement, nor is a

vague comment as to ‘unsuitable or mechanical illustration and ornament and poor quality bindings’. Illustration and ornament remain open themes for debate, but what was wrong with Victorian bindings? Most were plain cloth, unexceptionable; wonderful work was done by a scattering of fine binders throughout the land, for book collectors — if only such were available now! And the time for severe frowns upon exuberant bindings of issue has long passed.

In the scope of such an essay it could have been attractive to trace the character of Walker’s typographic style, from *House of the Wolfings* through Kelmscott to Doves and beyond, including the slim Hammersmith Socialist Society series. His formula exists for all to see, whether decorated by Morris or plain at the Doves. We follow him via Newdigate, in Morris’s *Collected Works*, to the Shakespeare Head Press: blocks of type were the order, with minimal letter-spacing.

Nobody would want to deny that the farcical dumping of Doves type from Hammersmith Bridge represents ‘one of the most dramatic incidents in the history of printing’, but its drama lay in Cobden-Sanderson’s crazy diary entries, the puerile passions of that septaugenarian. Historians of the episode generally forget that Rickett’s Vale Press types also rest under the Thames, and Eragny types beneath the English channel; that the Kelmscott types were not to be used again, and Ashdene types with their matrices were melted by Hornby’s order in 1941. These were the poems others must not plagiarise.

Dorothy Harrop has provided a helpful essay, listing and limiting what Walker achieved. If an extended entry for the *Dictionary of National Biography* had been invited, this would have supplied it ably. Anyone working upon Walker in future will gratefully use it, and the Nine Elms Press produces it attractively. It would be civil and conventional to hope the author goes on to write a longer study of her subject, but it seems Walker lies well and truly buried at Sapperton, his voice beyond recall.

Colin Franklin

Norman Jewson, *By Chance I Did Rove*. Gryffon Publications 1986.

Sitting very comfortably, the reader could find these reminiscences endearing. They exude the sanctity of elderflower wine, and calm the mind with suggestions of ‘country characters’ on garden gates, passing the time of day. For Norman Jewson, it never snows in Sapperton.

In *By Chance I Did Rove*, first published in 1951, Jewson records his life as a young man in Sapperton before the First World War, and his working friendship with Ernest Gimson. The Introduction by David Gould to this new edition is oddly eulogistic. We are told that ‘Norman’s style is so simple and direct that a sense of reality is never absent’, and yet that Jewson ‘does not dwell at length’ upon the abject poverty of the countryside during the period of which he writes. No, he does not. He does not mention it. Perhaps it is unfair to Jewson, whose book is part of the genre of ‘country’ books that appeared (understandably) in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, but we of the 1980s cannot escape the less honeysuckled view of rural life presented in Ronald Blythe’s *Akenfield*. Jewson’s contact with Sapperton life seems too often to be through his gardeners.

Jewson's prose may be 'simple and direct', but it is ponderous, and his reminiscences jumbled and unconvincing. His sense of humour is parenthetically Edwardian. Take for example his description of the difficulty of harnessing an ass; a quarryman came by and 'helped me to harness the now by no means patient ass, who very naturally had decided that I had turned the simple operation of harnessing into an uncomfortable experience, which he intended to resist as strongly as he could in the future'. Such is typical too of the length and weight of a Jewson half-sentence.

What value does the book have now, 36 years after it was first published? As art historian, Jewson prefers the gentlemanly approach. Here is a view on architecture: 'beyond was a house of the gracious but unpretentious refinement that characterises architecture of the time of Charles II'. And on paintings, writing of A.J. Munnings: 'In his depicting of country characters he came near to Breughel in some of his early work.' There is some useful information on Cotswold building techniques: mortar, for example, in the absence of sand was made with *road-drift* and lime. There is also information on wages (masons and carpenters 7d an hour, labourers 5d.) Two cottages built by Ernest Barnsley above Daneway Hill cost £400 the pair. Jewson also provides anecdotes on the subject of the Daneway tunnel.

On Gimson, *By Chance I Did Rove* provides a useful account of the establishment of Gimson and the Barnsleys at Sapperton under the patronage of Lord Bathurst. It includes a paean to Gimson's character, including information on the songs Gimson liked to sing, and Gimson's favoured mode of transport (a bicycle, with a book to read propped on the handlebars). The piece concludes mercifully on a note of realism: 'Rightly or wrongly I felt that he set a standard of life too rigid for ordinary people like myself to attain to.' There is also a note of realism in the account of conflict between Waals and Gimson, the former demanding finish even on simple pieces, the latter happy to let some work go more cheaply.

But Jewson's view of Gimson's furniture is naive: did he really believe Gimson was always concerned to reveal the construction of his pieces (even on 'state furniture')? And was Jewson really so ignorant of the transparently 17th century origins of Gimson's furniture as to insist that it represented a 'completely new style'?

And the book is annoying for giving only the minutest hints of what could have been truly interesting documentation, viz. p. 96, 'I happened to be doing some wood-carving at the time, making some little carved and painted figures for Miss May Morris, for Kelmscott Manor'. What were they? Later, Jewson hints at the methods of restoration used by the SPAB. What were they? Jewson does not even fill us in on his own work for SPAB, at the Priests House, Muchelney, Somerset, or in his work for Ernest Barnsley at Rodmarton.

Perhaps we should read the book on holiday, as a record of an idyll, of gentle walks with Gimson, remarking on flora and fauna rather than architecture. Or as a series of anecdotes: Jewson treats us to a good sprinkling of rural Murder Mysteries, and right at the end to a hint of ghostery in the tale of Lady Juliana Gainsborough's unquiet spirit. There is also a nice vignette of Max Beerbohm, in Sapperton in spats, and a record of Max's discomfiture after a gaffe delivered to W.H. Davies.

But it is hard to understand the motive for republishing the book now in a new format, given that a good second edition appeared in 1973 (in Jewson's lifetime: he died in 1975), which could have been reprinted. In 1951, it could have been seen as part of the post-war need to celebrate the peace of the English countryside. In 1973, it could have been seen as an introit to the work done on Gimson (the Leicester exhibition of 1978) and Ashbee (the 1981 exhibition, and Fiona MacCarthy's *The Simple Life* of the same year, culminating most recently in Alan Crawford's remarkable life of Ashbee).

To republish in a new format in 1986 seems to beg questioning of motive. And to republish without proofreading seems mere folly. Letters appear upside down (e.g. p. 114), Max appears as Max Beerholm (p. 123), and Dante Gabriel as 'Rosetti' (p. 125). The paper attempts to make a compromise between modern printing methods and a fashionable yellowing of the page. The illustrations are, for some inexplicable reason, less good than the edition of 1973. It is the kind of printing, and perhaps the kind of book, which this reviewer cannot but think Morris would have deplored. And it does not further our understanding of the motives or methods of the Cotswold School. Perhaps we should not blame Jewson, who was first writing it in 1951, but may we question the value of a (badly-printed) new edition of such a work in 1986? Are we in a position to be consoled by ill-presented dreams?

Nicholas Friend

J.S. Ryan, editor, *The Nameless Wood. Victorian Fantasists — Their Achievements — Their Influence*. University of Queensland, St. Lucia 4067, Australia. ISBN 0 9588544 0 8.

T. Pinkney, editor, *News from Nowhere. Journal of the Oxford English Faculty Opposition*. Wadham College, Oxford. No. 1. April 1986; No. 2. October 1986.

Although Morris had no belief in English as a university subject, he would I think have been pleased by the kind of interest in his work shown in these publications, both produced in the form of typescripts. In each he features as a radical and subversive thinker and writer.

The Australian publication contains fourteen papers given at the Second Annual Conference of the Mythopoeic Literature Society of Australia in 1986. Of these, two are directed to works by Morris. Of these, Norman Talbot's 'Heroine as Hero: Morris's Case against Quest Romance in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*' is the more persuasive. His argument is basically that *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* goes beyond the preceding romances, in which the heroines often play important and active roles, to offer in Birdalone a figure through whom Morris challenges the more masculine quest-tradition. He dissents from Carole Silver's view in *The Romance of William Morris* that Birdalone is severely criticised within the text; on the contrary, Dr. Talbot argues that the text celebrates her refusal 'to fit into male expectations about nice girls in quest-romance.' (p. 68) The case is argued by claiming that the Castle of the Quest is inhuman in its restrictive artifice, and that Birdalone's flight from it is a necessary part of her search for self-fulfilment. Her behaviour is, in the best sense, natural, and it forces Arthur to confront reality rather than remain trapped

within his own idealism. Dr. Talbot makes an interesting linguistic point in showing that, at least in the earlier part of the romance which Morris had time to revise, the language is carefully used to make value-judgements, the 'Northern' diction used outside the Castle contrasting with the 'French' vocabulary of the Castle. This suggests the kind of textual attentiveness shown in the article, which makes it an excellent stimulus to further thought. It would be interesting to know whether an out-and-out feminist would be prepared to see the romance as acceptably challenging the 'male' values usually expressed in the quests. Certainly the case for such a reading is well made here.

The other article with a strong Morris element is Anne Cranny-Francis's 'The Education of Desire: late nineteenth-century utopian fiction and its influence on twentieth-century feminist fantasy.' Its framework is Rosemary Jackson's account of the subversive potential of fantasy literature. Fantasy, she suggests, 'reveals reason and reality to be arbitrary, shifting contrasts, and thereby scrutinizes the category of the "real"'. (quoted p. 82) Dr. Cranny-Francis goes on to argue that contemporary feminist writers who have used this mode do so with similar subversive effect to Victorian fantasists, of whom Morris in *News from Nowhere* is the chief example. The discussion of Morris's book leads to the assertion that the emphasis is 'not on the utopian figure or society constructed in the narrative, but the reality of which it is a kind of satiric obverse.' (p. 87) While one cannot help agreeing that the book does contribute a powerful criticism of contemporary English society, it does not seem to me that the reader chooses between giving his or her attention to the present or the future. The two elements surely co-operate in the reader's experience, and so provide the book with an attractively positive air which naturalistic writing of the period, like that of Gissing, so depressingly, if understandably, lacked. Most of the article is in fact devoted to *News from Nowhere*, and the writers of modern feminist fantasy make a surprisingly brief appearance at the end, represented by Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* and Samuel Delany's *Triton*. Perhaps the original audience was more familiar with this material than I am; I would certainly have liked further discussion here. Finally, to return to Rosemary Jackson's statement quoted earlier, I doubt whether Morris would have accepted its scepticism about 'reason and reality'. To regard them as 'shifting' human conceptions is one thing; clearly every society has its own notions of them. But to call them 'arbitrary' surely takes the argument too far: mankind is not in a position to ignore its material circumstances and to term whatever it cares to construct within the mind 'reality', as modern literary critics sometimes seem to assume.

The Oxford publication, which it is intended to publish twice-yearly, presumably until the Establishment surrenders and modernises its English syllabus, is obviously a more youthful and polemical enterprise. I think Morris would have enjoyed being invoked in a subversive way against a too-rigid academic system, as in the title and in Tony Pinkney's article in No. 2., 'Nineteenth-Century Studies: As They Are and As They Might Be'. As an English academic with a Cambridge background, I found the case put forward for change a strong one. On the other hand it seemed to me that Mr. Pinkney's polemical approach led him to give a misleadingly negative view of Matthew Arnold and George Eliot (both in my view powerful social critics) in order to

clear the stage for Morris, who appears in the mixed company of Clough, Ruskin and Lewis Carroll. The article is written in the vocabulary of the new literary theory, which would certainly disconcert the uninitiated reader; for instance, we are told that 'the linguistic bewilderments that in *News from Nowhere* (his, not ours — hopefully) generate much of the dialogue are not attributable to the free play of the signifier but rather to great epochal shifts in social semantics.' (p. 54) Linguistic bewilderments indeed! Mr. Pinkney might want to argue that new insights can only be conveyed in new language, but it does seem to me that a greater effort could be made by younger critics to communicate in language such as that used by Morris in *Commonweal*. Otherwise, a new elite is created in the battle against classicist elitism. However, these are the reflections of crabbed middle age. It is good to find Morris exciting and stimulating radical young minds in Oxford, as well as more established ones in Australia.

Peter Faulkner