

# Reviews

Linda Parry (ed.), *William Morris*, (London: Philip Wilson 1996), 384pp, PB £20.00.

The prospect of sitting down to read an exhibition catalogue of this scale from cover to cover is a daunting one and it is not indeed the way that one normally tackles this kind of publication. Yet in this case it has been a very rewarding experience. The eighteen contributors to the catalogue of the 1996 exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum include most of the acknowledged authorities on Morris of our day. The succinctness forced upon the writers by the brevity of their essays often results in lively and entertaining reading and the diversity of the contributors allows justice to be done to the many-sidedness of Morris. The essays are complemented by very full catalogue entries and no other book on Morris comes near it in the number, range and quality of the illustrations, most of them in colour.

I came away from reading this catalogue staggered once again by Morris's prodigious energy and versatility. In curating this exhibition and editing the catalogue as well as in making her own contributions to it, Linda Parry took on a formidable task. The result of her efforts is the single most useful reference work on Morris which one could have on one's shelf. It is, moreover, extremely good value.

The catalogue is divided into three sections, 'The Man', 'The Art', and 'The Legacy'. The first begins with Parry's introduction to Morris's life and work, which provided a useful biographical framework. Fiona MacCarthy's essay gives a sparkling summary of Morris's work as a designer, drawing with particular felicity on Morris's own writings and recorded comments. 'If you want to be comfortable go to bed', Morris's pithy remark on furniture design, is just one example of the way that MacCarthy brings him vividly to life. Unfortunately, this is also an example of what for me is a significant shortcoming of this catalogue, the lack of notation. Proper referencing is surely essential in what is intended to be an enduring work of scholarship and it is irritating that so often one has to guess at sources.

Parry was well-served by all the contributors to 'Morris the Man'. Peter Faulkner had the formidable task of covering all of Morris's work as a writer, arguably the most prolific area of his creative activity. He rises to the occasion with a lucid and wide-ranging account of Morris's poetry and fiction. Charles Harvey and Jon Press provide a valuable summary of their ground-breaking work on Morris as a businessman. Nicholas Salmon does an excellent job of straightening out the complexities of British Socialism in the 1880s and 1890s: his account of Morris's political life is judicious, succinct, and accessible. Chris Miele's recent research into Morris's views on architecture provides a good foundation for a strong account of Morris as a conservationist.

The section on Morris's art opens with painting, the area in which Morris could be said to have been least successful: his early struggles are well-known. Less familiar are his later efforts, particularly in Iceland, which are sympathetically and

rather movingly described by Ray Watkinson. Morris was conscious that his attempts lacked technical underpinning, something he had in common with Rossetti and another example perhaps of an influence that was in some respects baleful. Martin Harrison's essay usefully places stained glass and church decoration in their architectural context; his stress on the importance of the Firm's good relationship with architects such as Bodley and Street is of particular interest. Stained glass was, for obvious reasons, less well represented in the exhibition than some other areas of the Firm's work. The textiles section is the largest in the catalogue, an emphasis justified not only by the strength of the V & A's own collection, but also by Morris's own passion for textiles. Parry's essays on textiles and on Morris as a decorator are particularly good in tracing the development of the distinctive style that came to be associated with Morris and in establishing the Firm's range of clients. (Not the least among them was Burne-Jones, who appears at times to have been spending more on buying the Firm's products than he was earning in designing them). It is especially good to see so many photographs of interiors decorated by Morris and Co. illustrating both Parry's essay on decoration and Leslie Hoskins's excellent summary of Morris's work in wallpaper design. Jennifer Hawkins's lively piece on tiles and glassware gives a good account of the complexities of Morris and Co.'s tile decoration and discusses Morris's personal taste. Frances Collard's essay on furniture, John Nash's on calligraphy, and John Dreyfus's on the Kelmscott Press ensure that no aspect of Morris's prodigious creativity is left unexplored.

The final section discusses Morris's legacy. In 'The Morris Who Reads Us' Norman Kelvin begins by examining the ways in which the younger generation in the 1890s constructed an ideal of Morris which corresponded to their needs; this serves as a prelude to a complex and stimulating analysis of Morris's significance at our own *fin de siècle*. Clive Wainwright plays devil's advocate in his essay, 'Morris in Context', arguing that Morris's legacy has been inflated and that equally talented contemporaries have by comparison been neglected. While it is certainly true that monographs on figures of the stature of Webb and Street are long overdue, Wainwright overplays his hand in claiming that in most of the disciplines Morris tackled he could not compete with professionals. The catalogue gives ample evidence to the contrary.

The last essay is Paul Greenhalgh's 'Morris after Morris'. He is right, in my view, to suggest that Morris's significance for today lies in his attempt to make his life all of a piece, what he describes as 'the *ethic*, the ideological and psychological underpinning of all Morris's activities' (p. 362). His essay brings this examination and celebration of Morris's life and work to a fitting conclusion.

Christine Poulsom.

Norman Talbot, *Betwixt Wood-Woman, Wolf and Bear: The Heroic-Age Romances of William Morris*, (New Lambton, Australia: Nimrod Publications 1997), 24pp. Full details can be obtained from Nimrod Publications & Babel Handbooks, PO Box 170, New Lambton, NSW 2305, Australia.

Even among aficionados of William Morris's work, the prose romances written during the last decade of his life are relatively little known. They are not easily available except in the *Collected Works* – there have been a number of paperback reprints, but none has stayed in print for very long. Let us hope that this does not prove to be the fate of the two fine texts recently produced by Talbot with the Thoemmes Press, *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* in 1994 and *The Story of the Glittering Plain & Child Christopher* in 1996. Two of the earliest romances, *The House of the Wolfings* (1888) and *The Roots of the Mountains* (1889), are perhaps the least read of all. So it is a particular pleasure to see attention paid to these 'heroic-age' romances, by such a knowledgeable enthusiast for Morris's prose fiction as Norman Talbot. This book is the second of the Babel series of handbooks on fantasy and science-fiction writers, of which Norman Talbot is also the general editor, and which is published in the hope of 'making a case for the quality' of the chosen works.

Can such a case be made, in the brief compass allowed by the format of the series? Talbot's study accurately and entertainingly defines some of the main thematic concerns of the romances. He energetically elaborates on their treatment of the relations between nature and culture, between the individual hero and his community, and between icons of femininity and masculinity – all of which do indeed find powerful expression in the romances. Talbot is particularly concerned to illuminate the operation in the romances of the concept of totemism, which provides a way of exploring ideas about the power of the natural world. Talbot skilfully demonstrates how the notion of a connection between a warrior and his totemic animal, particularly a bear or a wolf, lies close to the heart of Morris's fiction and poetry from *Sigurd the Volsung* onwards, and he shows how the idea of beast-possession is important in the Icelandic saga literature which Morris so loved and which offered him so much imaginative stimulus. Analysis of this kind is especially welcome because it takes the romances seriously. In asserting both the narrative interest and the intellectual coherence of the romances, Talbot does them a necessary and valuable service.

The concentration on such a specialised interest as totemism, however, does seem somewhat at odds with the description of this publication as a 'handbook'. In order fully to discuss Morris's use of totemic imagery, Talbot is continually drawn into analysis of other works (Icelandic sagas, Morris's later romances) which distracts the reader's attention from the heroic-age romances which are the book's ostensible subject. And this, in turn, leaves him little space to address additional issues which would seem appropriate in an introductory guide. One aspect of the romances with which new readers need most help is their idiosyncratic language; yet this, including even the innovative combination of verse and prose in *The House of the Wolfings*, merits only a brief paragraph here. But what I missed most from this study was any significant sense of the late-nineteenth-century intellectual or literary contexts within which the romances were written. There are tantalisingly brief references to solar mythology, to Aryanism, to concepts of empire and to developments in anthropology, all of which cry out for explanation for the non-specialist reader. And the specialist may discover specific textual references which are equally tantalising because the basis for including them is left unclear: why, for example,

mention Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, but not his earlier, and arguably more relevant, *Totemism*?

Yet even as this book fails to contain its insights within the restrictive 'handbook' format, it affirms the necessity for continued scholarly study of the romances and asserts their literary appeal to a more general audience. I hope it will encourage people to read them – and publishers to get them into print and keep them there.

Amanda Hodgson.

Brian Keeble, *Art: For Whom and For What?*, (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press 1998), 169 pp. ISBN: 0 903880 695 HB £30; ISBN: 0 903880 709 PB £14.95.

The first thing to be said about this book is that it is a most attractive work of art in itself, worthy of all 'The anonymous craftsmen' to whom it is dedicated, and a credit to the Golgonooza Press. The author tells us in the Introduction that the Press has been indebted over the years to Alan Goodfellow for its typographical quality, and that the digitized version of Eric Gill's Golden Cockerell typeface has been used 'in tribute to Gill's craftsmanship'. The result is a treat for all of us who enjoy good typography and book design. This is complemented by the inclusion of eight illustrations of Samuel Palmer's wonderful series of landscapes, starting with 'The Rest on the Flight into Egypt' of 1824–5 through the six superb sepia wash drawings of 1825, all from the Ashmolean Museum, and ending with 'A Hilly Scene' of 1826 from the Tate. A book, therefore, to delight the eye.

But of course Brian Keeble's aim is primarily to challenge the minds of his readers, and he does this by presenting a forceful and well-integrated argument for what the Introduction calls Tradition, which is opposed to 'modern, secular man's dream of an earthly paradise of material prosperity' based on advanced technology. The author's position is made clear in the following succinct assertion:

The ancient and widespread tradition of the handicrafts as instruments of livelihood and devotion, conceived and elevated to a condition of a spiritual discipline, allowed man to live for millennia in harmony with himself, in harmony with his fellow men and in harmony with nature. The industrial system, on the contrary, after only two centuries, has been seen to set man against himself, man against man and man against nature. It threatens crisis in all directions. (p. 4)

We can see in this formulation what we may term the metaphysical basis of Keeble's argument, which is that art should not be self-assertion but 'an effort to realise the intrinsic coherence of things as we participate in it [the Real] and as it comprises the essential order of being'. That we are in the presence of a religious view of reality is attested to by the use of capital letters – the Real, for example – and the epigraphs to the book, from Albert the Great and Meister Eckhart, and by the emphases in the account given of the anti-technocratic tradition. The Introduction suggests, fairly enough, that 'this radical call for a change in the use of the mind' can be found in Blake, Ruskin, Morris, Gill and others, but those discussed in

most detail here are the religious artist/craftsmen Samuel Palmer, Eric Gill, David Jones, and the potter Michael Cardew to whom the last chapter is devoted; backed by the theoretical work of Ananda Coomaraswamy. The book's last words are Cardew's: 'all real progress is the progress of the soul'.

Morris obviously has to feature in this book for his critique of industrialism, but Keeble is well aware that Morris does not belong fully to the tradition that he is celebrating. His vision is thus contrasted with that of Gill; while Gill's centres on God, Morris's centres on '*an imagined earthly paradise* never to be adequately realised in the affairs of men'. Keeble adds, 'There is nothing of the dreamer in Gill', with an obvious implication for Morris. Morris is nevertheless presented as preceding Gill in making the important distinction between the tool and the machine, and 'How We Live and How We Might Live' is quoted with agreement on the consumer's helplessness against 'the gambler' who proffers the goods. Later in the discussion of Gill Keeble clearly locates the difference between Morris and the religious tradition. He comments that Morris, whom he challengingly describes as holding 'an idealist position', 'assigned no place to sin in the operation of human creativity. He had, therefore, to attach to the reform of society a quasi-religious value – a paradise on earth in some future time: Utopia'. He then quotes from 'Four Letters on Socialism', to the effect that 'Socialism does not recognise any finality in the progress and aspirations of humanity'. This does bring out the contrast between the two positions, though admirers of Morris might be inclined to call the religious position the idealist one, and to see the stress on sin as leading to a kind of political defeatism by which hope of justice is deferred to a future world. We might then go back in our minds to the assertion in the Introduction that in pre-industrial societies 'man . . . lived in harmony with his fellow men', and wonder how often in human history this has been true.

Morris as we know took a secular humanist position, whereas Keeble's preferred craftsmen/thinkers take a religious approach. But it may be unhelpful to make the contrast too simple, or to give it centrality. For industrial capitalism has created enormous problems along with its benefits, and these problems cannot be ignored or expected to solve themselves. If for Morris Socialism was the answer, it was a Socialism that embodied the insights of the craft mentality, in which human fulfilment is found in creative work, though not in pointless toil. The great value of Keeble's book is that it stimulates us to think again about these matters. In particular, the chapter 'Are the Crafts an Anachronism?' raises fundamental questions for those of us trying to see how Morris's ideas are relevant in the world of today. And if secularist Morrisians like myself want to criticise the religious approach for neglecting politics, we must acknowledge the challenge of the fact that the religious tradition has indeed produced the work of Palmer, Gill and Jones – to say nothing of the Middle Ages – and a book like the present one made with such meticulous concern for function that it is a pleasure to contemplate. (It might have been useful if it had included a Bibliography for those of us less aware of the tradition that Keeble is evidently so familiar with).

Peter Faulkner.

Rikky Rooksby, A. C. Swinburne. *A Poet's Life*, (Scolar Press 1997), 322pp, £25.00.

Sally Peters, *Bernard Shaw. The Ascent of the Superman*, (Yale: Yale University Press 1996), xvi + 328pp, £15.00.

Rikky Rooksby has written a clear account of Swinburne's life, emphasising its events rather than analysing his achievement. His advantage over previous biographers, as he fully acknowledges, is the access he has had to the numerous unpublished letters to and from Swinburne that have been transcribed and annotated by Terry L. Meyers over the last twenty five years. It does not seem to me that these have dramatically changed the picture of Swinburne from that provided by earlier biographers, though it certainly provides useful corroboration of what was known about the flamboyant poet and his strange divided life. As Rooksby remarks in the Introduction, 'Running through his life is an impulse to mastery or selfless abandon . . . He made gods of his heroes – Hugo, Landor, Mazzini, Shakespeare – and found abandon and self-transcendence through writing and reading his poetry, through art and beauty, alcohol and flagellation' (p. 5). Thus he was fated to be one of the butts of Buchanan's 'The Fleshly School of Poetry', along with Rossetti and the less exuberant Morris. Rooksby does not have anything new to tell us about this unfortunate affair – indeed, those of us reading the book from the Morris point of view will find little that is unexpected. We hear of the meeting in the autumn of 1858 during the painting of the Oxford Union murals, the review of *Jason*, the favourable remarks about 'Gudrun' and the reservations about Morris's '*trailing* style' elsewhere, the refusal to follow Morris into the SDF, the dedication of *Astrophel* to Morris in 1894 and the Kelmscott *Atalanta*, and the reference to an 'unbroken friendship' after Morris's death.

But there is a good deal of interest in the following account of Swinburne's response to reading Tennyson's *The Holy Grail and Other Poems*, in a letter to Thomas Purnell in December 1869: 'How admirable is Tennyson's new-style Farmer – and how poor his old-style Idylls of the Prince Consort – Morte D'Albert . . . My first sustained attempt at a poetic narrative may not be as good as Gudrun – but if it doesn't lick the Morte D'Albert I hope I may not die without extreme unction.' He went on to claim that the narrative style was 'modelled not after the Chaucerian cadence of *Jason*, but after my own scheme of movement and modulation in *Anactoria* . . . On board ship I mean to make the innocent Iseult ask Tristram about the knights and ladies, and him tell her of Queen Morgause of Orkney and her incest with the 'Blameless king', and other larks illustrative of the Alberto-Victorian purity of the court'. Soon after this, having written what he considered an orthodox Christian poem for his mother, Swinburne talked of publishing it and 'enjoying the remarks of the great Briton on my conversion and return to the fold of faith and resumption of my sullied baptismal robe. There ought to be more joy over me in the Galilean camp than over ninety and nine Topsies that need no repentance' (pp. 174-5). This follows from his running joke with Morris about the praise given to the 'Christian viewpoint' of *The Earthly Paradise* in *The Athenaeum* in December 1869.

As is well known, Theodore Watts took Swinburne off to Putney in 1878 and tried, successfully but at a cost, to rehabilitate him. In 1887 the first official selection

of his work, *Selections from Swinburne*, was published, and Rooksby calls its 'repression of his earlier poetry' a matter of 'unrivalled audacity', two thirds of the book consisting of post-1880 work. And in 1887 too Swinburne was able to celebrate 'the blameless queen' in a Jubilee Ode. Nevertheless, he was not made Laureate on Tennyson's death in 1892 despite support in *The Times* and *The Bookman*, having in 1890 published 'Russia: An Ode' which called for the assassination of the Czar. Moreover, he remained staunchly anti-Christian to the end, insisting to Watts that the Burial Service should not be read over his grave. Nevertheless, it would seem that the Rector of Bonchurch disregarded this wish. Rooksby quotes from the detailed account of Helen Rossetti: 'He [the Rector] went on talking, but I felt perfectly ill with disgust. Emery Walker, who was standing near me, murmured "scandalous". I answered "It's disgraceful. I can't stand it"' (p. 286). Walker had come with May Morris, and it seems appropriate to find them united in these radical sentiments at the grave side. There is a photograph of the funeral, but like the others it is disappointingly hazy.

To move from Rooksby equable tone to Sally Peters' dramatics is a reminder that biography can be managed in very different ways. This is a book with an urgent argument, challenging previous biographers' assumption that Shaw's sexuality is of little importance. On the contrary, Peters sees it as central to the role he sought to create for himself in the world, that of Superman. A sentence from the Preface will give the flavour of her writing and an indication of her theme: 'To probe the mystery of man and artist, I have forged my own method, using everything from existential phenomenology to popular culture to track down clues. I have isolated the themes of Shaw's life – his recurring patterns and passions – piecing them together to disclose the kaleidoscopic mosaic of his 'world design', the pattern formed of his life choices. To sweep away the obscuring clutter, I have included only those facts and events, whether known or just unearthed, that are significant in telling his story' (p. x). Peters is here claiming to know the Shaw story better than anyone else, through a kind of intuitive awareness. No doubt other Shaw scholars will feel uneasy with this; and, in any case, is there only one story to be told about a person's life, particularly that of someone as complex as Shaw? At all events, Peters' account is given with immense bravado that sweeps the reader along and convinced me that she knew Shaw and his works very well indeed. Her thesis is that Shaw's sensibility was homosexual, in the sense of inversion defined by Havelock Ellis and the Urning as praised by Edward Carpenter. 'Beyond the anomalies of colour blindness and criminality, of genius and inversion that Ellis described loomed the prospect of the ultimate anomaly, the supreme incarnation of the curious reversal: the superman. By pursuing his vision of the purified Urning-invert as prototypical superman, Shaw counteracted the threat of degeneracy and decay that lurked for him in the dread either/or option of sexuality' (p. 194).

Those of us not primarily concerned with Shaw may perhaps remain agnostic about his sexuality, while admitting the force of Peters' writing here, and turn to the question of his relationship with Morris. For Peters, Morris is one of a number of father-figures that Shaw substituted for his own unsuccessful father in the context of his powerful mother. She has nothing of substance to add to what we know

about Shaw and Morris, or Shaw and May, but conveys well Shaw's admiration for both. Some errors of detail occur – Morris is referred to as one of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and Kelmscott House is placed in Hammersmith Terrace, no doubt because that is where May went to live after her marriage to Sparling. There is also a tendency to exaggeration in the account of the Morrises; there is a reference to 'Morris's wondrous home' in Hammersmith and to 'May's splendid home on the Thames'; the dinners after Socialist meetings in the coach-house are said to have taken place 'in a room of otherworldly splendour'; Shaw found an 'elegant haven' with the Sparlings; and May was to end her days 'in the medieval splendour of Kelmscott Manor'. There is even a reference to 'the radical chic Socialist League' putting on the play *Alone*, with Shaw and May among the performers, in January 1885; I doubt if Ladbroke Hall was quite so smart. But Peters is sardonically accurate in summing up Shaw's later account of the end of his relationship with May: 'In his reminiscence of May, Shaw created an idealized version of a love triangle, assigning a celestial motive to both May and himself. In blaming the broken marriage on a violated Mystic Betrothal, he invoked a romanticised fate, casting himself as love's fool and not its villain. In so doing, Shaw artfully rewrote history' (p. 149). In note 24 on p. 277 she also corrects Holroyd's misreading of Shaw's later remark that he was no longer certain 'that Morris was not right' in his commitment to revolution.

Peters neatly summarises Shaw's 1936 'Morris as I knew him' as 'Shaw's myth-laden tribute to that intellectual father and his paradise' (p. 199), a paradise then lost in the mists of memory. She also notes that in 1906, when Shaw had gone to Paris to sit to Rodin, he lunched with Cockerell and told him that, after meeting Rodin, 'only Morris had made such an impression of greatness on him' (p. 235), and that he gave Rodin a Kelmscott *Chaucer* as the appropriate gift. And that Shaw arranged at this time for the young photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn to photograph him nude, after his morning bath, in the pose of Rodin's *Thinker*, which had just been installed outside the Pantheon. Unfortunately, this is not among the several good photographs in this attractively produced and stimulating book in which we may also note the description of *Candida*, the modern Pre-Raphaelite play of 1894, as 'in part an attempt to link himself to the aura of the Morris paradise' (p. 163).

Peter Faulkner.

Michelle Weinroth, *Reclaiming William Morris: Englishness, Sublimity, and the Rhetoric of Dissent*, (Montreal & Kingston/London/Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press 1996), 302pp., £35.00. ISBN 0-7735-1439-2.

The first thing readers of this journal need to know about this book is that it is not about William Morris – or rather, that Morris appears only as a bit player in an argument about the rhetoric of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), principally in the 1930s. Thus although the cataloguing information references it first to Morris (political and social views), and then to Morris (influence), it is not, as its title seems to suggest, an account of the range of appropriations and misappropriations of Morris – which might be expected to include a wide range

of commentators, as well as a judgement of their accuracy or otherwise in the light of Morris's own views. If it is unjust to criticise the book for being about something else, it is not, I think, unfair to criticise the title for being misleading: a more accurate title would be *Englishness, Sublimity and Dissent: Robin Page Arnot, William Morris and British Communism in the 1930s*.

The central argument concerns the forms of argument and rhetorical style of the CPGB, its claims to scientific rationality of discourse and its failure to live up to these claims; and the failure of this discourse to engage with the innate nationalism of Englishness, and thus its failure to persuade and to achieve popular hegemony. The significance of Morris in this is that in Conservative representations, notably that by Stanley Baldwin at the 1934 Morris Centenary Exhibition, he is made to stand for 'Englishness'. His reclamation, specifically by Arnot in his *William Morris: A Vindication*, is taken as prototypical of communist discourse of the period. Woven through the argument is an aesthetic theory derived from Kant which also counterpoises conservative and communist aesthetics in terms of beauty and sublimity.

The book opens with a dense theoretical introduction – betraying its origins as a doctoral thesis – which leads into the detailed analysis of the content, form and rhetorical style of the four texts which constitute the main subject matter of the book: Baldwin's speech; Arnot's pamphlet; Jack Lindsay's poem 'not english: a reminder for May Day'; and a lecture by E. P. Thompson delivered in 1951. The latter three texts are treated as exemplars of communist rhetoric in three different periods. The analysis of Arnot occupies nearly half the book. Rather than an assessment of Arnot's representation of Morris, the author argues reasonably enough that the pamphlet tells us rather more about Arnot and the CPGB than it does about Morris himself (although this was not necessarily true for the original audience of the pamphlet).

Judged as a piece of discourse analysis of the selected texts, there is much that is interesting here. I was particularly struck by the comparison drawn between the structure of Arnot's piece and Lenin's fulminations about misrepresentations of Tolstoy. Judged as an account of the discourse of British communism, the selected texts are required to bear too much weight; and despite correspondence with an impressive roll-call of old CPGB members, there are some surprising gaps in the bibliography, such as Noreen Branson's (1985) history of the Party between 1927 and 1941. The author argues that since this is a work of discourse analysis rather than of cultural history, the question of representativeness is less pressing. However, even those sympathetic to the form of analysis and the consequent need to focus on a narrow range of texts may feel that if they are claimed to stand for communist discourse as a whole, their representativeness is a crucial question.

If I have understood the author's argument about nationalism correctly, I am not wholly convinced. The crucial point that 'Englishness' was a 'fundamentally imperialist construction of national belonging, with exclusive and excluding features' has been consigned to a footnote. The context in which communists juggled nationalism and internationalism was one in which these were set up as antithetical by the ruling class, and where nationalism was profoundly racist; 'internationalists' was an anti-semitic code for Jews, many of whom were Party members in the 1930s. Spain, too, is a crucial issue for Party members' perceptions

of the relationship between nationalism and internationalism. A cultural history which placed more emphasis on the context of real events might also lead to a different interpretation of specific examples of discourse. And again, it is perhaps surprising that there is not very much discussion of Morris's position on these issues.

But I may not have understood the argument at all. This book is far from easy for an academic reader, and virtually inaccessible to a lay public because of the opacity of the writing. Doctoral theses are, by their nature, often somewhat abstruse academic exercises, and there is no requirement, or reason, that they should appeal to a wide audience. But for these reasons, perfectly good theses do not necessarily make good books. It is perhaps ironic that a thesis about British communists' failure to engage with the concerns of 'the people' and to communicate with them should itself founder on the problem of communication.

Ruth Levitas.

Nicola Gordon Bowe and Elizabeth Cumming, *The Arts & Crafts Movements in Dublin and Edinburgh*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press 1998), 232pp., ISBN 0-7165-2579-8, HB £29.50.

This book is a valuable addition to the scholarship of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Based on two exhibitions at the Edinburgh Festival in 1985, about a third is devoted to an outline of the Arts and Crafts movement in Edinburgh with a catalogue, and about two-thirds to a short essay and catalogue of works relating to the Dublin Arts and Crafts movement.

In tracing the ways in which the Arts and Crafts in Edinburgh and Dublin grew out of the English movement, Bowe and Cumming establish Morris as a key figure. Sometimes his influence was direct and personal. In Edinburgh he took part in the event that signalled the beginning of the Arts and Crafts movement there: the second congress of the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry, 1889, at which he gave the presidential address to the Applied Art section. In Dublin Morrisian principles were directly imported by the Yeats sisters, Lily and Elizabeth, who had worked in May Morris's embroidery workshop. They returned to Dublin in 1902 to work in the Dun Emer workshops, and later to found the Cuala Industries, which included a successful press run by Elizabeth, who had been influenced and advised by Emery Walker. More generally Morrisian principles pervaded attempts to establish Arts and Crafts movements in both Edinburgh and Dublin. The Edinburgh Social Union, for example, aimed to improve the quality of life for the working classes through education and recreation, in particular the teaching of the applied arts. In Ireland the depressed state of the economy made efforts to revive or establish cottage industry of vital social significance; the efforts of the formidable Lady Aberdeen, wife of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, to revive lace-making, were very much part of a wider social agenda that was concerned with housing and health.

In both provincial centres, the Arts and Crafts movement had a distinctive quality which stemmed from a sense of history, place, and cultural identity. More than in London, the Arts and Crafts movements in Edinburgh and Dublin were part of a

broader cultural revival that included literature, music, a concern to document oral tradition, and in Ireland, the revival of Gaelic. As one would expect the Irish movement was more politically charged than in either London or Dublin, and its practitioners were often advocates of Home Rule. The biographies in the Dublin section of the book often record involvement with nationalist politics: the most extreme example is that of the painter and wood-carver, Constance Markievicz, who abandoned art for politics, took part in the Easter Rising, and received a commuted death sentence.

The catalogue entries and potted biographies offer a wealth of detail and cover a fascinating range of material. The brilliant embroidery and enamelwork of Phoebe Traquair in Edinburgh and the stained glass and book illustration of the dazzlingly inventive Harry Clarke in Dublin stand out (and also represent some of the cross-currents between the two cities, for Traquair was a Dublin-born artist). Equally memorable in its way is the extraordinary doll's house, 'Titiana's Palace', designed for 'Her Iridescence' by Major Sir Nevile Wilkinson, originally intended for his small daughter, and now in Legoland, Denmark.

The major strengths of the book lie in the thoroughness of its documentation and its retrieval of forgotten work and lives. Nevertheless its form suffers from being tied too closely to that of the original catalogues. The result is sometimes rather fragmentary and occasionally repetitious, particularly in the Dublin section. It is irritating when a catalogue entry is simply recorded without description or illustration; though this may have been acceptable in the context of the original exhibition, it is less so in a book intended to function independently of it. More unfortunate is the lack of footnoting, an omission that is inexcusable in a work of serious scholarship such as this, particularly one published by an academic press. The authors and their work should have been better served.

Christine Poulson.

#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Anne Anderson** is a lecturer at the Southampton Institute and has written extensively on Burne-Jones and the aesthetic movement. She is also on the committee of the Victorian Society.

**John Christian** is an acknowledged expert on Burne-Jones and the Pre-Raphaelites. Amongst his many publications he recently supplied the Introduction to Lund Humphries' reprint of the *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones* (1993).

**Peter Faulkner**, the previous editor of the *Journal*, is the author of *Against the Age: An Introduction to William Morris* (1980), and edited *William Morris: The Critical Heritage* (1973) and *William Morris: Selected Poems* (1992).

**Penelope Fitzgerald** won the Booker Prize in 1979 for her novel *Offshore*. Her biography of Edward Burne-Jones, first published by Michael Joseph in 1975, has recently been reissued by Sutton Publishing.

**Mary Gilhooly** has an MA in Victorian Art and Architecture. She currently works part-time in the archive of a dance college. Mary is on the committee of the newly-formed Friends of the Red House.

**Amanda Hodgson** is the author of *The Romances of William Morris* (1987). Her recent Kelmscott Lecture is due to be published soon by the William Morris Society.

**Ruth Levitas** lectures on sociology and has recently been elected to the committee of the William Morris Society.

**Christine Poulson** is vice-chair of the Society and a Research Fellow at the Centre for Nineteenth Century Studies at the University of Sheffield. Her book, *The Quest for the Grail: Arthurian Legend in British Art 1840-1920*, is to be published by Manchester University Press later this year.

**David Rodgers** is the curator of the William Morris Society's collection at Kelmscott House. He has recently written books on both William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

**Nicholas Salmon** is the editor of the *Journal*. His 1996 Marx Memorial Lecture has just been published in the *Bulletin of the Marx Memorial Library*.

**Ray Watkinson** is the author of *William Morris as a Designer* (1967), *Pre-Raphaelite Art and Design* (1970), and, with Teresa Newman, *Ford Madox Brown and the Pre-Raphaelite Circle* (1991).