

## Book Reviews

*William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and the Kelmscott Chaucer* Duncan Robinson, Gordon Fraser, London ISBN 0 86092 038 0 price £25.00

In roughly one hundred pages Duncan Robinson's scholarly study sets out the background to the production of the most famous book to issue from the Kelmscott Press—*The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*—in which at the end of their lives these inseparables realised a hope of their youth: the housing of the works of the Father of English poetry in a fittingly imagined volume. Robinson quotes Burne-Jones's words to his daughter Margaret in giving her the copy he had just received from the binder. "I want particularly to draw your attention to the fact that there is no preface to Chaucer, and no introduction, and no essay on his position as a poet, and no notes, and no glossary; so that all is prepared for you to enjoy him thoroughly." There is a good deal of his typical wry humour in that, but it probably expressed feelings which Morris shared about the poet whom he felt to be very specially his own master. This simplicity of editorial stance is a complete contrast to the splendour of the physical production and the elaboration of its nearly ninety illustrations—among the finest of Burne-Jones's work—and the rich borders and initial letters which were in effect Morris's own last work as a designer. "A little like a cathedral" Burne Jones called the book: so it is. It is also in a special way the shrine of a long fellowship in art. The two men met in Oxford in 1853: in 1856 they began their careers as artists: in June 1896 the first two copies of the Chaucer came into their hands: four months later Morris was dead: two years later again, Burne-Jones had followed him. The slow evolution of this book had been their daily concern for nearly six years.

In three sections or chapters, twenty five pages only, and eighty plates, we are given the outline of Morris's life and work, leading to that last act of the Kelmscott Press; a description and analysis of Burne Jones's designs for the *Chaucer*, finally an account of the finishing of it in Morris's last days. In this short text, and in parallel, through the illustrations, we have a great deal of information, visual and verbal, taking us, as to the images, from studies for earlier, abandoned projects for the *Earthy Paradise*; through Burne-Jones's studies and sketches, Catterson Smith's transcriptions of these with the aid of Emery Walker's platinos, to the finished pages and lastly that remarkably robust design for the binding by Morris himself, executed by Douglas Cockerell. This is, so to speak, the biography of a great book, and due acknowledgement is made to many sources and helps: of which the indispensable are: Halliday Sparling's 'Kelmscott Press and William Morris': Sydney Cockerell's 'Short Description' Joseph 'Joe' Dunlap's 'The Book that Never Was', and Paul Needham's 'William Morris and the Art of the Book', which one might regard as a sort of godfather of the present volume. Thanks are due to Duncan Robinson for a valuable addition to Morris literature and a new introduction to the '*Chaucer*'.

*William Morris Textiles*

Linda Parry, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London ISBN 0 297 781960/1 price £20.00 hardback, £9.95 paperback

Publishers too often lavish powers of invention on the volumes they utter, which may be very satisfying to their blurb writers but bear little relation to what we discover when we take the book in hand. In this case, though, we may quote from the inset text on the back cover a true description. "This is the first comprehensive survey of the many hundreds of original, colourful textiles produced by Morris and Co. between 1875 and 1940, and the very varied, often highly specialised processes involved are discussed in detail. Also included, for the first time, is a fully illustrated, definitive checklist of Morris and Co.'s patterns for printed textiles." Barbara Morris will review it.

*The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies, Vol. III Number 2, May 1983.*

Edited by Francis Golfing from 272 Middle Hancock Rd. Peterborough, New Hampshire USA. Twice yearly \$10 or single copy, \$7.50.

This issue, while maintaining its flow of critical pieces on the literature, leans more towards the visual, in its use of illustrations, always well chosen, and articles—on the Moxon Tennyson; Perspective in P-R Poetry and Painting—Landscape and the role of the Liverpool Academy in the mid-C19—Thackeray's treatment of the life of the artist—and an account by Shelah Horvitz of her own Lady of Shalott drawing (reproduced). Ruskin and Pater figure on the critical side, and Christina Rossetti and William Allingham are, justly, disengaged from Rossetti's long shadow to stand in their own right. Two unpublished letters of Ruskin are annotated by Frank Miles; and for fun there is a typical Burne-Jones 'Fat Lady' cartoon.

R.W.