Reviews


The question of the precise relationship between Morris’s artistic theory and practice, and his political beliefs and engagement, is a recurrent one. Ruth Kinna argues that earlier commentators have posited a tension between romanticism and revolutionary socialism. Thus they have argued either for a transition in which Morris’s socialism effectively displaced the romanticism apparent especially in his earlier poetry, or one in which his socialism has a particular ‘soft’ and non-revolutionary character. Kinna herself dissents from both views, claiming that Morris’s socialism was a complex mixture of ‘radical, revolutionary and Romantic-revolutionary ideas’. Morris, she argues, deliberately avoided being pigeon-holed into particular party positions. But above all, his socialism was always influenced by his Romanticism, his understanding of history and his understanding of the role of art.

The book opens with an account of different assessments and interpretations of Morris, of the relationship between art and socialism, and the nature of his socialism itself. This discussion focuses particularly on Edward Thompson and G. D. H. Cole. The second chapter contains an overview of Morris’s early life and career, and an account of his views on the relation between art and society in general, and ‘commerce’ in particular before he became involved in politics. The book has a chronological structure, but individual chapters also incorporate more thematic discussions. Thus the next chapter, which opens with an account of Morris’s involvement with the Eastern Question Association, and with Anti-Scrape, contains a substantial discussion of the place of memory, dreams and paradise in Morris’s story-telling. Three chapters deal directly with Morris’s socialist thought. One traces its development, in relation to the main currents of socialist thought in Britain; one examines Morris’s critique of capitalism and its consequences for art’s production; one considers his revolutionary politics and strategy through the themes agitate, educate, organise. The summary on the back of the book focuses on News from Nowhere, but discussion of this occurs only in the last chapter, alongside Morris’s late prose romances. Kinna views Morris’s utopia as essentially medieval in tone. She also argues that Morris intended it as a literal description of a desirable future – so that, again, Romanticism is at the centre of Morris’s mature socialist thought. Thus to treat News from Nowhere as simply an exploration of socialist values with which we may concur, rather than a posited potential social structure, is, in Kinna’s view, to miss the point. Overall, Kinna insists that Morris’s socialism was indeed revolutionary, but the romantic impulse and his concerns for art led him to socialism, and were never subordinated to it or abandoned.

This is a compact and readable account of the continuities in Morris’s thought, especially about the dependence of art in all its forms on the conditions of its production, and the destructive effects of commerce or capitalism. It is, perhaps, too compact to be fully successful in providing a critical commentary on earlier
assessments. The first chapter is simply too short to do justice to the variety and complexity of views which have been expressed about the precise relationship between art, Romanticism, utopia and politics. Although Edward Thompson is a key figure discussed here, the arguments developed in the postscript to the 1976 edition of his book are barely mentioned. A fuller discussion of other views might reveal Kinna’s argument to be less new than she suggests. Raymond Williams, for example, also argued that Morris’s romantic Ruskinian critique of capitalism and its forms of work led him independently to a position which was congruent with that of Marx. What is revealed by Kinna’s discussion, though never directly addressed, is the extent to which commentators have sought to assimilate Morris to their own political positions. Even the National Front have claimed Morris for their own, on the basis of The House of the Wolfings in particular. But this emphasises the fact that the commentaries themselves are historically located, and can only be understood in terms of the historical and political positions of the authors, and debates current at the time (not least Williams’s own care, in Culture and Society, not to declare either himself or Morris a Marxist). While in her analysis of Morris’s thought, Kinna addresses its historical and biographical context, her commentary on the commentaries is less successful. She is not helped by the now conventional reference system in which works are identified by the date of publication of the edition referred to, rather than the date of first publication – a system that is intrinsically anti-historical. It is therefore impossible for the reader to determine, for example, when Cole’s assessment of Morris was made. There is also a tension in the book between the approach of political theory, which tends to a systematic treatment of themes and issues, and the more biographical/historical approach necessitated by the developmental question at the heart of the book: continuity or change? On the whole, Kinna moves between these well. However, the thematic sections make it doubly necessary to be able to identify the precise date and source of the illustrative quotations. Unfortunately references are given only to the volume and page of the Collected Works. Most readers will not be in my fortunate position of having immediate access to this, and I think many will find this system frustrating.

In her closing paragraph, Kinna argues that Morris’s beliefs that a socialist England could not be forged without revolution, and that attractive labour could not be realised until capitalism was abolished, make his socialism appear outmoded. I could not disagree more. I share neither her assessment of Thompson’s position(s), nor her reading of News from Nowhere. It is striking, however, that Morris’s work retains the capacity to inspire, and to inspire competing interpretations. In that respect, Kinna’s account will stand as a view of Morris a century on, a welcome contribution to debates which show no sign of ending.

Ruth Levitas

Francis O’Gorman’s book appears in an interesting series of volumes published by Ashgate on the nineteenth century cultural milieu under the general editorship of Vincent Newey and Joanne Shattock.

John Ruskin has always been a difficult man to understand. His writings are littered with moments of sublime brilliance, yet punctuated by some of the most incredible nonsense it is possible to imagine. Nobody has really engaged with this strange madman, who, in a spell of absolute brilliance, produced influential books such as *Modern Painters*, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *Unto this Last*, then fell into the self-indulgence of *Fors Clavigera* and *Praeterita*, before abandoning the world completely for the last eleven years of his life.

For this reason I read Francis O’Gorman’s *Late Ruskin: New Contexts* with a certain amount of trepidation. O’Gorman sets out to try and reinterpret Ruskin’s later writings from 1860 to his enforced retirement from literary work in the late 1880s. I thought that I would be going down the familiar path flattened by the feet of numerous critics from early in the last century. Instead, I found myself scrambling up hill-sides and falling into lake-side ponds.

The problem with the book lies in its title *Late Ruskin: New Contexts*. The dust-jacket states that the book claims ‘new and distinctive importance for this period of Ruskin’s work, both in terms of Ruskin’s development as a writer and his place in Victorian culture as it moved towards modernity’. However, in the Acknowledgements O’Gorman admits to having had problems with the book. I am afraid that these are only too obvious when you read the text. The blurb suggests that the book has a unity of purpose, when in fact it is a series of essays on various aspects of Ruskin’s later writings. These essays have clearly been written over a number of years – and despite occasional cross-referencing – there are many anomalies and repeated quotations.

I also felt that O’Gorman had no clear idea about the theme of his book. If you read the first two chapters you get the impression that it is about the significance of autobiography in Ruskin’s later work. However, later on the emphasis shifts to Ruskin’s views on femininity and masculinity. The two themes are never really reconciled.

Morris, as usual with books on Ruskin, is conspicuous by his absence. There is no reference to him in the Index, although he is quoted – unattributed – and appears a couple of times in the Notes. It never ceases to amaze me that Ruskinian scholars appear to be completely unaware of the existence of Ruskin’s most important disciple.

Another statement made on the dust-jacket of the book is that it ‘draws on much unpublished material’. This is a claim made about virtually every new book written on Ruskin. Much the same – largely inaccurate – statement was made about the two volumes of Tim Hilton’s biography of Ruskin. I am pleased to report that on this occasion there is a genuine justification for this claim. This is most apparent in Chapter 1. Having spent the last five years researching a book on Ruskin I imagined that I had unearthed most of his family’s correspondence. I was wrong. It turns out that in this chapter O’Gorman has found some letters
from John James Ruskin to the *Cornhill Magazine* of which I was completely unaware. These prove that Ruskin’s father supervised his son’s articles on political economy through the press and was far less antagonistic to their publication than had previously been thought. Indeed, O’Gorman makes a convincing case that the articles that eventually formed *Unto this Last* were – in part – a celebration of John James Ruskin’s life as a wine merchant. This is research of the first order.

However, I was less convinced with O’Gorman’s attempt in Chapter 2 to interpret *Sesame and Lilies* as an autobiographical text. Nor, although O’Gorman shies off saying this, can the book be regarded as offering a radical reinterpretation of Victorian femininity. Ruskin, like Morris, could never free himself from bourgeois conceptions of the correct role for women. Having said this, Ruskin’s role models were hardly ideal: his mother was a bigot, his wife a flirt, and Rose La Touche was a religious fanatic. None of these women can be blamed for their attitudes. However, when Ruskin attempts to define male and female roles there is a reek of hypocrisy that smells far worse than the pyres of dead cattle and sheep recently burning in the British countryside. I am afraid that *Sesame and Lilies* can never be resuscitated.

In Chapter 3 O’Gorman discusses the background to Ruskin’s first ‘Lecture on Art’ which the latter gave at Oxford University in 1870. O’Gorman challenges the established view, as expressed in Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*, that Ruskin’s inaugural lecture indicates that he was an imperialist. Instead, O’Gorman argues that ‘nowhere else, throughout his whole career, did Ruskin issue another statement so boldly colonialist’. This is not true. I can only assume that O’Gorman is unaware of the very dubious comments Ruskin made during him bizarre support for Governor Eyre’s Defence Fund in the mid-1860s. But Ruskin made so many contradictory comments about politics that, by selective quotation, you could made him out to be a liberal, socialist or fascist. O’Gorman’s account is well-balanced and accessible but can hardly be said to offer the reader a ‘New Context’. I might add there are far too many Notes to this chapter many of which should have appeared in the text.

Chapter 4 fails because of its lack of context. Entitled “‘Do Good Work Whether You Live or Die”: Fors *Clavigera*, Usefulness, and the Crisis of the Commune’, it consists mainly of a long, and largely unilluminating, discussion of Letter 6 of *Fors Clavigera*. While most Morrisians are aware that Morris made few contemporary references to the Paris Commune, the same cannot be said of Ruskin. His correspondence shows that he followed the events closely and was only too ready to make his opinions known. In this respect O’Gorman’s detailed concentration on a single document rather defeats its object.

The long titles continue in Chapter 5: “‘Decent, Trim, as Human Dwellings Should be”: Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite Imagination of the 1870s’, Chapter 6: “‘Just the Thing for Girls – Sketching, Fine Art and So On”: Ruskin and Manliness (1870–1920)’ and Chapter 7: “‘Oh Fast Whirling Reader”: The *Bible of Amiens* (1880–85), Tolerance and Autobiography’. All of these plod over familiar territory and can hardly be said to offer ‘New Contexts’. I found it extraordinary that Morris – with his associations with the second wave of the Pre-Raphaelites, his views on ‘manliness’ and his interest in Gothic Churches and early Christian manuscripts – should have fallen through the net rather like a
rather small sand-eel. I suspect that a number of Morrisians might also question O’Gorman’s statement in Chapter 7 that ‘Ruskin was pre-eminent among Victorian Medievalists’.

As I said at the beginning, this is really a book of essays rather than a bold attempt to reinterpret Ruskin’s later writings. All the essays are well-written, well-researched and entertaining. However, as there is no Conclusion to the book, one is left wondering what O’Gorman was trying to prove.

*Nicholas Salmon*

Even those of us who admire William Morris’s example as writer, craftsman and political activist should be wary of adopting too reverential an attitude towards him. His political ideas were formed in conditions very different from those of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. While most of today’s fundamental problems – poverty, social injustice, greed, ethnic conflict and colonialism – would have been familiar to him, Morris could hardly have imagined their contemporary manifestations or their long-term consequences in terms of global capitalism, damage to the environment and changes to the climate. In a post-colonial, post-modern and late capitalist world, which has seen the rise and fall of both fascist regimes and the communist bloc, Morris’s ideas take on a very different significance. As John Payne points out, much of the social progress made in the last hundred years has been achieved by ‘democratic socialism operating through parliament and through local government, through the work of the trade unions and other progressive membership organisations’ (p. 4) – that is to say, by means about which Morris had deep reservations.

Such problems are of central concern to John Payne, whose book adopts the journey form of Morris’s own *News from Nowhere*, pausing at a number of locations between London and Kelmscott to investigate and reflect on contemporary issues in the light of Morris’s ideas. Each location offers Payne the opportunity to focus on particular subjects: in Hampton, a battle over an open-air swimming pool and the difference between the heritage and genuinely historical significance of Hampton Court Palace; in Putney the debates of 1647; in Cookham (the village of Stanley Spencer) art, sex and religion; in Reading, work; in Abingdon, nuclear power and risk; at Kelmscott itself, the countryside. In each chapter, the discussion moves between description of contemporary conditions, political and philosophical reflections, and consideration of various texts by Morris, showing how his ideas may or may not be applicable to early twenty-first century circumstances.

It is not a single journey, like that taken by William Guest, nor is it for the most part a journey by water; rather it is a series of forays, some by road, some by rail, to towns and villages along the Thames. Internal evidence suggests that all these trips were taken between 1997 and 1999, during the first two years of the new Labour administration. These dates are crucial to understanding John Payne’s
book, for I suspect that cultural historians in 2050 will see it as a document that catches the mood of the times. One the one hand, there is the sense of elation that eighteen years of Conservative rule had at last come to an end; on the other hand, by 1999 it was clear that the new (New) Labour administration was very different from its predecessors. For the first time, many Labour supporters were forced to confront uncomfortable truths about the ways in which permanent changes had occurred in British society, and to accept that even a Labour government would need to operate within the context of those changes. In the excitement of that symbolic moment when Portillo was defeated, how many paused to consider what kind of politician would come to represent the new administration?

Although John Payne is very alive to the paradoxes of the Labour victory and the ambivalent feelings to which it may give rise, parliamentary democracy is to some extent beside the point, for he does not see it as a likely source of change. He is committed to ‘partnership and local democracy’ (p. 29) as potential engines for progress, replacing centralisation and government action, hampered as they are by ideological and economic constraints. Even at an international level, it is loose, temporary, contingent alliances that are more likely to be successful in tackling problems, rather than permanent treaties between monolithic states or groups of states. On the microcosmic level, therefore, it is by ‘doing citizenship’ (the phrase is Shirley Williams’s) and by participating in democracy in its most local and immediate forms, rather than through the ballot box, that the individual can hope to make a difference. This is most clearly exemplified by one of the earliest ‘cases’ in the book, where Payne shows how local action (aided by a change of control on the Council) saved Hampton’s heated open-air swimming pool.

Payne’s structure and approach have a great deal to recommend them. Another of the ways in which this book is a text of its time lies in its resistance to being readily placed in any particular genre. Like Out of Sheer Rage (1997), Geoff Dyer’s exhilarating book about D. H. Lawrence, its form enables the author to move easily between autobiography, the evocation of place, political commentary and the discussion of texts. In this respect it is also very much in the spirit of Morris, whose transitions between one mode of activity and another were even more rapid and varied. There are some memorable and thought-provoking passages: the critique of history as provided by Hampton Court guides is very sharp and apposite; equally welcome is the way in which Payne interrogates loosely used terms, like ‘rural’ or ‘natural’, which are too readily employed in narratives of decline. He is interesting, too, on the contradictions of supermarkets: they offer ‘choices about how [people] wish to live’ (p. 89), at the same time as raising concerns about price cartels and capitalism’s need to encourage consumption, usually by using advertising to emphasise minimal differences between basically similar products. There is a good discussion of A Dream of John Ball and the way in which its narrator ‘sets up a dialogue with the past’ (p. 60), and Payne makes some useful points about the nature of freedom in News from Nowhere.

Equally, however, there were many places where Payne’s book made me feel uneasy. One general difficulty is that on occasions the book’s miscellaneous character and its freedom from generic constraint work against it. The flow of facts, opinions and speculations is such that the text often seems very remote from
Morris, who sometimes appears to be brought back into the argument perfunctorily, almost as an afterthought. In biographical terms, some of Payne's assertions about Morris and sex seem ill-considered in comparison with Fiona MacCarthy's finely nuanced account of this area of his life. It is too glib to conscript him, in his Oxford years, to a view that saw 'girls as models, girls as fun, girls as sex partners' (p. 168). As E. P. Thompson and others have shown, desire, necessity and action were complex and interlinked terms throughout Morris's life. It is true that he loved the fraternity of Oxford and was in many ways as conflicted in his view of women as most other Victorian man, but he was not simply one of the boys. Elsewhere, Payne's criticism of the predictive element in *News from Nowhere* - that the revolution did not take place when and how Morris said it would - seems to me to miss the point. Those who applaud Morris's Marx-influenced historical account of how the change came (and I am one) are not awarding him points for the accuracy of his predictions. This part of the book is impressive for the daring of Morris's imagination and the courage of his vision, both quite exceptional in the nineteenth century. *News from Nowhere*, like other future fictions, has less to tell us about real futures than about the substance of fear and hope at the time at which they were first written and read.

It is disappointing to have to point out that there are many errors of fact in the book. The years of Conservative government are given as 1979–87 (p. 31) and 1979–98 (p. 83) as well as correctly as 1979–97. A sentence on page 5 gives the impression that Fiona MacCarthy's biography was published in 1996, while on page 14 it is dated to 1995, although in a footnote on the same page its date is given correctly as 1994. J. W. Mackail becomes J. M. Mackail throughout. The capitalisation of book titles is different in the text and in the footnotes. There are also some stylistic lapses: disconcerting shifts in tense in mid-sentence; a general reluctance to use commas; incomplete constructions; and capital letters inappropriately applied.

Sometimes, too, Payne's remarks appear to vitiate his own arguments. The 'sights and sounds of the river' (p. 30), for which he feels affection, include aircraft approaching Heathrow and the riverside boat clubs. To some (including Payne himself elsewhere in the book) the former may seem an example of noise pollution, while others might see in the latter a survival of a pursuit determined by class. Payne's proper scepticism about certain influential versions of the past is slightly undermined by his own use of 'timeless' and the fustian 'greensward'. His praise for Prince Charles's Youth Business Trust as enabling 'a committed staff to promote ideas of enterprise and economic independence among young people' (p. 83) sounds like brochure language and sits ill with his arguments elsewhere that the British people should be citizens rather than subjects. And his wholly admirable questioning of the myth of the underclass needs to be more fully developed in terms of current conditions.

But I do not wish to end my account of Payne's interesting and stimulating book on a negative note. The inconsistencies I have been discussing inevitably lead to questions about where John Payne himself stands on these issues. Asking such questions, however, is very salutary for readers of John Payne's book and highlights one of its strengths, for in seeking to define the author's position, readers are likely to reflect on their own. We belong to the National Trust in a
country where nationhood is a hotly contested concept. We are members of English Heritage at a time when ‘English’ can have disturbing connotations and where ‘heritage’, with its tendency to commodify both art and the past, is for some a dirty word. I re-read Payne’s book, and am writing this review, after the terrible events of 11 September. Inevitably, many of the issues he raises need now to be seen in an entirely new light: above all, we are being forced to think globally (and this is not the same thing as globalism or global capitalism) in ways unimagined by Morris and his contemporaries. News from Nowhere, whose up-river journey is the starting-point for Payne’s book, may now seem very parochial and English in its concerns. In ‘How We Live and How We Might Live’, Morris speaks of the importance of maintaining ‘an active mind in sympathy with the past, the present and the future’ (quoted p. 34). The uncertainty of the future may make an active engagement with it much more difficult to achieve. Yet, stunned as many of us are by what people can do to one another in the name of belief or commitment, perhaps we need Morris more than ever, to remind us of the more hopeful and positive ways in which life may be lived.

Peter Preston
Morrisians are likely to have a positive attitude to More's *Utopia* in view of Morris's own admiration for the book. In the Foreword he wrote in 1893 for his Kelmscott edition of Ralph Robinson's Tudor translation of More's Latin, Morris saw More historically, writing that he should be seen 'rather as the last of the old than the first of the new'. More's text kept alive the spirit 'of the medieval Communist tradition, the spirit of association', and so pointed forward towards 'the hopeful and practical progressive movement of today'. Morris admired the 'sensitive clearness and delicate beauty of style, which make the book a living work of art', but the main value of the book lay in its 'steady expression of the longing for a society of equality of condition'.

It evidently did not occur to Morris that a new translation of More's book would be of much value, and it is true that we can get the drift and gist of More's thought from Robinson's. But maybe Utopia is more approachable for us now in modern English. If so, Clarence Miller's translation, attractively produced by Yale at a reasonable price, is to be recommended. In his Introduction, Miller (unlike Morris) concentrates on stylistic matters – in particular, the length of More's sentences, and his diction, which is said to reflect the 'universalist, absolute, all-or-nothing cast of his mind' and to help persuade the reader of the reality of Utopian society. Miller argues that 'Utopia has not fared as well as it deserves in English'. He respects Robinson's version, but criticises those of Gilbert Burnet...
G. C. Richards (1923), H. V. S. Ogden (1949), Paul Turner (1965), Sheehan and Donnelly (1989), and Robert Adams (1975 and 1995), all of whom are said to have failed to do justice in various ways to the variousness of More's Latin. Miller's claim is that he has tried to 'translate all the details of the Latin in idiomatic English that matches the simplicity, complexity, or even unusual strain of the Latin'. How far this translation goes beyond its predecessors I am not in a position to say, but it is undoubtedly vigorous and readable. Let us end with a passage from near the end of Book II that might have appealed to Morris; Hythloday (whose name means 'pedlar of nonsense') concludes:

From my observation and experience of all flourishing nations everywhere, what is taking place, so help me God, is nothing but a conspiracy of the rich, as it were, to look out for themselves under the pretext of serving the commonwealth.

More – not Hythloday – added at the side: 'Note this, reader!'

Maybe we can see in More's concern with an England being over-run by sheep at the expense of men the early stirrings of a concern with the environment that has become so important in our own time. Jonathan Bate's important book is a call to us to value what may be termed Green literature, especially poetry, in the context of the continuing destruction of the environment. He notes that while two of the radical movements of the Sixties, feminism and post-colonialism, had an immediate and decisive impact on literary criticism, the third, environmentalism, is only just beginning to do so. This may be due, he suggests, to the fact that while women and post-colonial writers could – and did – make their own cases effectively, the Earth needs humans to do so on its behalf. But in fact, he argues, poets from the Romantic movement onwards have been doing so, even if literary criticism has not. He writes eloquently about a number of relevant poets: Wordsworth above all, but also Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Keats, Clare, Rilke, Holderlin, Edward Thomas, Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, Basil Bunting, Ted Hughes, Gary Snyder, Aime Cesaire, Kamu Brathwaite and Les Murray. In all these, he believes that the attentive listener may hear the voice of The Tempest's Ariel, the spirit of place. Bate ends with this statement, following the quotation of Stevens's 'The Planet on the Table': 'If mortals dwell in that they save the earth and if poetry is the original admission of dwelling, then poetry is the place where we save the earth'. Even if we accept the special meaning given here to the concept of 'dwelling', this seems extreme. However much we may value poetry, it is surely impotent to save the earth, except as a literary experience. Surely Bate does not want only this.

Looking at the list of the poets discussed, we note that the Victorians are not represented. This is very odd. How can Tennyson, say, or Hopkins be omitted? And what about Morris? Here Bate seems to have a blind spot. There are two references to Morris in the book. The first is insignificant, contained in a quotation from Oscar Wilde. The second runs thus:
In an earlier chapter I quoted Lord Byron's exasperated remark about Leigh Hunt's poetical systematizing: 'When a man talks of system, his case is hopeless'. When ecopoetics is translated into political system, its case, too, is hopeless. It may become fascism (Dacre), or romantic neofeudalism (Ruskin), or utopian socialism (William Morris, Murray Bookchin), or philosophical anarchism (William Godwin, Peter Kropotkin). Whatever it becomes, it ceases to be ecopoetics.

This seems to me thoroughly muddled, and disturbingly congruous with the apparent lack of politics in Bate's conclusion. Obviously poetry is different from prose discourse, but how can the two be thought of as in competition? We surely need a poetry that will help to carry the value to humanity of the earth, and a politics that will help us to save it. However even if that point is taken, it is surely obtuse of Bate to argue that Morris's writings belong to the same genre as the others he refers to. Does he really think that Morris's poetry, and News from Nowhere, are unimportant in the context of the earth? This is a very disappointing aspect of Bate's book, but I feel that there is enough strength in his overall argument, and in his accounts of the works that he does admire (which include some novels, like Peacock's Headlong Hall and Melincourt, and W. H. Hudson's undervalued Green Mansions) to make it worth attention. It is only to be hoped that in a second edition Bate will look more carefully at his dismissal of politics, and get round to discussing the Victorian contribution to the tradition he admires, including that of William Morris.

Peter Faulkner
As well as the major movements like Romanticism, Neo-classicism, Symbolism and the like, during the long nineteenth century, European artists were apt to form smaller groupings and fraternities, which proved variously useful to their members, artistically and socially, and variously useful to subsequent historians seeking ways to discuss congeries of individuals.

The present book is derived from an academic panel of the same title convened by Will Vaughan of London University, eminent scholar of German Romantic painting and more lately of British art, together with Laura Morowitz of Wagner College New York, whose field is the fin de siècle. As a collection of essays it does not aspire to cover the whole territory, but includes a disparate range of (often loosely defined) brotherhoods, of which several are interestingly unfamiliar even to students of the century.

Vaughan himself for instance looks at les Mediateurs, a.k.a les Barbus (from their innovative habit which then became a popular signifier of The Artist). Also known as les Primitifs, these were lesser-known French painters from the studio of David who in the turbulent 1790s withdrew to settle in the former monastery of Chaillot outside Paris. A contemporary wrote excitedly of discovering the group
of artists who wore Phrygian costume, ate nothing but vegetables, lived in common and whose 'pure and hospitable life' was 'a living picture of the golden age'.

Although nothing much came of the scheme, it was a model for subsequent brotherhoods such as the more famous Lukasbund, or Nazarenes, six young Viennese artists who settled in 1810 in a part-secularised monastery in Rome, and were the first to reclaim technique and inspiration from pre- and early Renaissance painters. The fraternity is discussed here in terms of Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (society) by Mitchell B. Frank, who argues somewhat against the evidence that throughout its existence the Lukasbrüder were both exclusive and inward-looking and engaged with the wider world.

The recent exhibition from the NationalGalerie in Berlin reminded us how strong the Nazarene influence was in Britain, thanks to Prince Albert's enthusiasm. It fed naturally into the formation of the PRB, founded by seven young British artists on the last day of 1848, and about which more than enough has probably been written. The best-known home-grown avant-garde group, this Brotherhood found no available monastery, though they did briefly aspire to communal living in Chelsea.

Their leading light, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, forms the link with the fraternity of most interest to readers of this Journal - the seven-man partnership launched in 1862 as Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., and dissolved at the end of 1874. While a design and decorative business might not, strictly speaking, qualify as a brotherhood, it is worth recalling that at the outset some members had hopes of marketing their art work through the Firm too, and certainly the social aspect of the enterprise was initially as important as the profits.

It is hard to find a link to the next essay, by Rosalind Polly Gray, on the Russian artists who during the 1870s were invited to live and work at Abramtsevo near Moscow, unless it is that the instigator, railway tycoon Savva Mamontov, shared a notion of adapting traditional arts and crafts to the modern age. As well as painting and sculpture, Abramtsevo nurtured literary and theatrical productions, and various forms of applied arts, while the main thrust of its artistic philosophy was the recovery and resurgence of Russian identity, from what Gray calls a nationalistic cultural perspective.

Across the globe in Boston, the Visionists were united by their counter-cultural interests in the esoteric and occult. The cover of their magazine, The Knight Errant, echoes the precious medievalism of its British fellows, but the group was innovative in including women in equal numbers, and covering a range of verbal and visual art forms. Sarah Kate Gillespie makes out a good case, but ultimately the Visionists appear to have been as cracked and comic as the Order of the Golden Dawn, etc. There is however a startling photo by F.Holland Day, in a sequence showing himself as Christ on the cross, suffering the agony of death, which harks back, in a rather sado-masochistic way, to Nazarene asceticism.

The last two essays cover initiation rituals in Parisian ateliers, by Susan Waller, and the exclusion of three major artists from the professional networks owing to their gender, by Jane Mayo Roos. The first provides a fascinating sidelight on studio life, and raises the question as to whether similar practices were followed in elsewhere. The second studies the careers of Bonheur, Morisot and Cassatt.
showing how each depended heavily on the support of a ‘sisterhood’ or network of female friends and relatives, because they could not join in with the boys.

There is thus something for (nearly) everybody in this volume. Unfortunately for our purposes, the essays on the PRB and William Morris are the weakest, being undertaken by young scholars – Jason Rosenfeld and Amy Bingaman respectively – who have seemingly not studied all the (admittedly vast) literature on their topics. As a consequence, however, there are a number of challenging ideas which may stimulate debate as well as dissent. Thus, for example, Bingaman reads Morris’s relation to Red House ‘as akin to that between a child and his toys’, with the lessons provided by this serious play causing his subsequent shift ‘from a radical dependence on fraternity to a more conventionally modern . . . reliance upon patriarchal economy’. Some might observe the exact reverse, in the shift from privileged individual pleasure to radical dedication to socialist communalism – or indeed no shift at all, given that the ideal lifestyle depicted in News from Nowhere is similar to that projected thirty years earlier at Red House.

Though her essay is titled ‘The Business of Brotherhood’, Bingaman does not focus on relations between the partners in MMF & Co, but on the social relations between the men and women of a select inner circle, materialised in a number of selected objects: the painted jewel box that once belonged to Jane Morris, the Prioress’s Tale wardrobe, the St George cabinet, Morris’s illuminated Book of Verse, and his two surviving easel paintings, La Belle Iseult and the unfinished Aphrodite now at Kelmscott Manor.

There are some missing and misplaced details here. The absent jewel box decorations were not erased by unsuccessful restoration, and it is likely that the casket itself was gifted to Jane as a memento after Elizabeth Rossetti’s death, rather than as an unfinished wedding present. The Prioress’s wardrobe has interior decorations by Morris, while the exterior figure of the Virgin is not evidently drawn from Jane. If La Belle Iseult has the message ‘I cannot paint you but I love you’ inscribed on the back in Morris’s hand, this is exciting news, but where is the evidence? In A Book of Verse, the graphic difference between the first page, with a picture by Burne-Jones and decoration by George Wardle, and the last page, with a little triptych by Fairfax Murray and decoration by Morris, does not seem to support an analysis of ‘stark contrast’ between disintegration and shining synthesis. It is merely the result of different hands.

Details are one thing, however. The bigger issue is the contention that the ‘first half’ of Morris’s career was characterised by the desire to integrate love, friendship, labour and business, while the second half saw a division between his idealism, socialism and medievalism on one side and his commitment to business and family on the other, and that his abandonment of painting around 1870 (actually 1874) marked this change, together with ‘a re-evaluation of his relation to materiality and representation’, and a movement from medieval to renaissance inspiration in his later designs. Though inadequately argued here, and much muddied with polemical assertions about women being dolls in the toys’ Red House amid undefined ‘economies of desire’, the thesis is worth debate. Did Morris like so many others give up on dreams of integrating life and ideals as he matured? Or did he invest his dreams successively in different projects, artistic, personal and political? Or did his ideals of love and friendship alter with
experience, as they often do? In the context of brotherhood, one might also suggest that in both the Socialist League and in Morris & Co. he enjoyed much of the communal spirit and active enterprise that he and Burne-Jones had aspired to as students, with the added benefit of being a leader (in the League) and the boss (in the business).

Jan Marsh
It is a pleasure to recommend these two attractive books based on the Arts and Crafts Collections in the Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum, the first a reprint from 1994, the second new in 1999. No doubt all members who can do so have visited the Cheltenham Collections and have enjoyed what they saw. These two books can serve both as reminders for those who have been to Cheltenham and as encouragement to those who have not yet done so. In addition, as well as being a pleasure to look at, they are both of considerable scholarly interest.

The two books are organised in the same way, with a group of introductory essays followed by a series of catalogue entries; they are well illustrated throughout, with a high proportion of colour in the later book. *Good Citizen’s Furniture* takes its title, as we discover from the quotation under the striking photograph of the interior of Sidney and Lucy Barnsley’s house in Sapperton, given opposite the title page, from Morris’s ‘The Lesser Arts of Life’ of 1882: ‘So I say our furniture should be good citizen’s furniture, solid and well made in workmanship’. A fuller version of the quotation begins the text proper, neatly juxtaposed with an illustration for Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* showing a flashy ‘garret master’ exploiting a poor furniture maker. Morris’s position in relation to the Arts and Crafts Movement is fittingly acknowledged in the opening chapter, as also in the first section of the catalogue – the first five objects in the collection come under the heading ‘William Morris and his Circle’. But since this is the Cheltenham Collection, it is fitting that the discussion moves on through ‘The Arts and Crafts Movement in the Cotswolds’ to ‘Arts and Crafts at Cheltenham’, and that the catalogue takes us through a rich roll-call of furniture makers working in the Cotswolds from Voysey, Ashbee, Baillie Scott, Lethaby and Gimson, to living makers like Oliver Morel, Hugh Birkett, Alan Peters, John Makepiece and Tony McMullen.

*Simplicity and Splendour* takes its title from Walter Crane in *The English Revival in Decorative Art* in 1911: ‘The great advantage and charm of the Morrisian method is that it lends itself to either simplicity or splendour’, setting
the quotation beneath a photograph of Emery Walker’s dining room at 7 Hammersmith Terrace. The opening section of the text gives us an account of the Arts and Crafts domestic interior in the context of the quotation from Crane, followed by ‘Defining the Arts and Crafts Movement’ (which, in reminding us of the important Emery Walker Library at Cheltenham, shows the Kelmscott Chaucer along with letters from Jane and William Morris) and ‘Artistically Attired: Arts and Crafts Dress and Jewellery’ (not an area in which we would expect to find Morris prominent, although we are reminded that Elizabeth Siddal, Jane Morris and Georgiana Burne-Jones ‘all wore loose-fitting artistic dresses’, and were presumably pioneers in doing so). There is a wonderful full-page photograph of a pensive May Morris in a striped dress and bead necklace, holding a guitar, as well as a more familiar one of Jane on a divan in 1865, and William in his working smock (and round hat) in 1876. The colour illustrations are a great pleasure, and take us from de Morgan pottery and tiles, through a range of Ashbee’s work for the Guild of Handicraft, and Alfred Powell’s for Wedgwood, to Liberty dresses and art pottery from Bretby and the Ruskin Pottery, glassware and a reading lamp by Gordon Russell, to Eric Gill’s 1920 limestone carving ‘Nativity’ and Ashbee’s splendid 1900 semi-grand piano – a visual feast. The catalogue takes us from ‘William Morris and his Circle’ (20 items) through Voysey, Gimson, and the Birmingham School to Eric Sharp, Michael Cardew, and recent craft commissions: Alan Evans’s grille for the entrance to the Art Gallery, Bryan Feddon’s commemorative plaque for the opening of the extension in 1989, Chinks Vere Grylls’s stained glass window, and the plaque for the Summerfield Galleries by the Cardozo Kindersley Workshop. The emphasis is thus, appropriately, on the continuing vitality of the tradition of workmanship to which Morris contributed so much. Both books are thus thoroughly worthy of their subjects and a credit to Cheltenham.

Peter Faulkner


It is a great pleasure to introduce these very attractive books to any of our members who are not yet familiar with them. They are part of Phaidon’s remarkable Architecture in Detail series, which provides thorough and finely illustrated accounts of specific buildings of historical importance. The size and quality of the illustrations, including plans and elevations as well as photographs of the highest quality, give the reader a wonderful developing intimacy with each building. Originally, each was treated in a separate book, as is the case with St Andrew’s, Roker, in this review, but now Phaidon have started to produce, at a reasonable price, volumes like Arts & Crafts Houses I, each of which combines three important buildings – in this case, Webb’s Red House, as discussed by the

Morris gets his due in both of these books. In the composite volume, the significance of Morris for Red House is hardly likely to be undervalued. Hollamby puts it like this: ‘the design of the house was a unique work of collaboration between artist/designer, client and architect ... Red House thus became a blend of the romanticism of Morris and the pragmatism of Webb, united in a common philosophy of art and architecture largely derived from Ruskin ... ’ Hollamby concludes with a reference to Pevsner’s view of the continuity between the Arts and Crafts movement and Modernism, remarking that Morris and Webb’s belief in the importance of the everyday and the unpretentious was passed on to ‘many young architects and students in the the 1930s – committed disciples of the “modern movement”’. In relation to the second house in the book, Trevor Garnham presents Lethaby justly as a follower of Morris, and remarks that the ‘aura of Morris pervades Melsetter House and he was, perhaps, the decisive influence on Lethaby’s thinking’. He goes on to quote Lethaby’s remark: ‘in the sphere of art he [Morris] has been more to me than any other man. In some curious way I was born to feel, understand and love Morris’s work’. It is pleasant to learn that Theodosia, the young wife of Thomas Middlemore who commissioned the building of the house, was a friend of May Morris, who designed embroidery wall hangings for her. In her Introduction to the composite volume Beth Dunlop quotes May on Melsetter House: ‘It seemed like the embodiment of some of those fairy palaces of which my father wrote with great charm and dignity. It was a place full of homeliness and the spirit of welcome, a very lovable place. And surely that is the test of an architect’s genius: he built for home life as well as dignity’. Here May clearly puts Lethaby in the tradition of Webb. The third architect represented in the book, Lutyens, was not as close to Morris as either of the others. Brian Edwards remarks: ‘Though Lutyens had come under the influence of William Morris and his circle whilst briefly a student at the art school in South Kensington ... he was by inclination a romantic. From William Morris and Philip Webb he had absorbed the ideals of honest craftsmanship and the virtue of simplicity ... ’ While it seems strange to dissociate Morris from romanticism, this nevertheless acknowledges the importance of Morris for the young Lutyens. Edwards sees the three main influences on the architecture of Goddards as Gertrude Jekyll, Philip Webb and William Lethaby. In looking at these three houses, as these books enable us to do albeit vicariously, we are made vividly aware of Morris’s importance for the architects, as well as the craftsmen, of the Arts and Crafts movement.

A second volume of Arts & Crafts Houses consists of Mackintosh’s Hill House, Helensburgh, Voysey’s The Homestead, Frinton-on-sea, and Greene and Greene’s Gamble House at Pasadena, California. Prior’s splendid church now appears along with Mackintosh’s Glasgow School of Art and Bernard Maybeck’s First Church of Christ, Scientist, at Berkeley, California, under the title Arts & Crafts Masterpieces.

E. S. Prior is less well known than the three architects so far looked at. His practice was quite limited and there is no available monograph on his work. But
he produced some fine buildings, of which the church at Roker is perhaps the most remarkable. As we learn, Prior had a Cambridge academic background (as well as excelling there at the high jump) before being articled to Norman Shaw; he set up his own practice in 1880. Garnham argues that Prior was driven in his architectural work by an ‘uncompromising logic’ which could lead to ‘buildings that often appear ungainly, even puzzling, but of great originality’. He then remarks that ‘The catalyst seems to have been contact with the ideas of William Morris’. Morris’s ideas were circulating influentially in the 1880s, with particular emphases which Garnham states thus: ‘The decisive moves made by Morris were to disengage Ruskin’s linking of hand-work with Christian moral sentiments, and to recognise that Ruskin’s higher aims for art would require some preliminary groundwork’. From this stance, Prior was able to express the priorities involved in his naming of the Art-Workers’ Guild, moving the emphasis in architectural practice from ‘artistic sketchmanship to workmanship’. We are given a detailed account of Prior’s 1889 paper to the Edinburgh Art Congress on the importance of texture in architecture, which Garnham sees as extending Morris’s position; a footnote tells us that in the discussion after the paper, Prior disagreed with Morris’s view that ‘there could never be an iron architecture’ – though quite what that means is not explained. Certainly Prior was prepared to be innovative in his use of materials, but within the tradition to which Morris contributed so much. Garnham reminds us that Prior had a distinguished academic career, and wrote four important books on the Gothic tradition. It is to be hoped that this thorough account of Prior and his work will help him to become better known.

These opulent volumes are not cheap, but they are very good value, particularly in the composite form. If you can afford them, and enjoy Arts and Crafts architecture, you will not regret your purchases.

Peter Faulkner

This is the biography of a London suburb, of its planning and social life, from the time of its creation a hundred years ago until to-day. It is a well-researched history of tenant co-partnership in the creation of Brentham, a collection of a dozen or so streets just south of Pitzhanger Park in Ealing. It tells of the struggle to control its subsequent development and of a group of residents, who in recent times determined to tell the story of this forgotten but important piece of town planning.

It starts with brief but comprehensive survey of the Garden City movement and the various trends of thought that informed and influenced the builders. These were drawn from John Ruskin’s essay ‘On the Nature of Gothic’ in *The Stones of Venice*, William Morris’s *News from Nowhere*, Ebenezer Howard’s *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, Raymond Unwin’s various publications of city building including *The Art of Building a Home* (his office was responsible for the original layout), Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, and the Fabians. A second thread of the
story traces the life of carpenter Henry Vivian whose brain-child Brentham was, and of the Labour Association which built much of the suburb. It explains too the working of co-partnership in the finance of the project, which differed in an important way from that of the co-operative movement; but both were united in opposition to any revolutionary notions. Co-partnership enabled houses to be built by skilled building workers for themselves and other tradesmen.

A very well illustrated and detailed catalogue of the dwellings and plans tells of Brentham’s chequered history and of the architects and others who were responsible for the house designs. Most of these drew their forms and decoration (sometimes with unfortunate consequences) from Arts & Crafts architects, particularly Unwin, who designed a few of the houses. The influence of Baillie Scott and Voysey is there, as is that of A. J. Penty, though he is not mentioned. He worked in Unwin’s office from 1908 to 1914, and during that time designed the two entrance buildings to Hampstead Garden Suburb. These clearly influenced the design of Brentham’s Institute. Penty, who was the author of *The Restoration of the Gild System* (1906), must have had much in common with Vivian.

Well designed and produced, the book is a valuable addition to the early history of town planning and will certainly encourage one to pay a visit to Brentham.

*Godfrey Rubens*