Reviews


*Visual Words* adds to the ever-growing critical literature of recent years concerned with Victorian visual culture and is one of a number of recent works focussing on the places and spaces in the period where the visual and the textual meet. These include Kate Flint’s *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (2000), Nicholas Frankel’s *Oscar Wilde’s Decorated Books* (1999), Lorraine Janzen Kooistra’s *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Illustrated Books* (1995), Lindsay Smith’s *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry: The Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites* (1995) and Richard Maxwell’s edited collection *The Victorian Illustrated Book* (2002).

Curtis makes the point on his opening page that ‘early in the century the line made by the pencil (the visual/artistic) and the line made by the pen (the textual) were united in the Victorian mind’ (p. 1), and his book explores aspects of ‘visual literacy’ (p.1) in the nineteenth century. The book has a few such assertions in it, which don’t always seem as proved by the evidence as they could be, and this early statement also unproblematically conflates ‘early in the century’ with ‘the Victorian’. The author’s aim in the book is to ‘look at literary history from an art historian’s perspective’ (p.3). Curtis is clearly interested in the visuality of the textual, the myriad ways in which writing comes to be represented in Victorian culture and the various meanings those representations carry, and he leads into the main body of the book with the suggestion that ‘there is in text and its reading something that lends itself to more pictorial modes of investigation’ (p. 4).

Chapter one, ‘Shared lines: pen and pencil as trace’, explores another of Curtis’s assertions; namely that ‘the textual, or written, line came to dominate [as the century progressed] while the drawn line diminished in value’ (p. 9). If this is a way of saying that engraving was on its way out by the end of the nineteenth century, then he has a point, but the engraved (and thus visual) line certainly had its strong moment in the Victorian period, as much of this chapter demonstrates. Curtis considers copy books, aimed at developing and improving handwriting, and the importance of drawing in design education, alongside discussion of the rise of illustrated journals such as the *Penny Illustrated Magazine*, the *Illustrated London News* and the Graphic. Undoubtedly the Victorians ‘read’ their culture through the visual as much as, if not more than, through the verbal. The revival of interest in calligraphy in the early-to-mid Victorian period (to which Morris, of course, contributed) is often associated with the Gothic revival, but here Curtis uncovers such quirky oddities as John Hemm’s *Portraits of the Royal Family in Calligraphy* (1831) and discusses some of the graphic representations of letters as visual ideograms/pictograms in *Punch* and Phiz’s title pages for Dickens’s novels. The Kelmscott Press makes a relatively brief appearance, considered as one of the
late-nineteenth-century ventures which attempted ‘to create high-quality publications stressing the union of drawn line and text’ (p. 35). Morris’s project was, in significant part, to reinstate the vitality and necessity of the visual as an integral part of the written text, but, as Curtis reminds us, by this point in the century the mass publications market was also highly visually aware, with cheap magazines like Comic Cuts selling nearly half a million. The use of ‘visual stills’, which the comic format employed as a narrative technique, anticipated the coming of cinema, and the chapter concludes by considering the ‘threat’ that photography posed to the survival of the graphic line and image.

The second chapter, on ‘The hieroglyphic image’, focuses on how paintings of the period incorporated and used text as part of their compositional design. The influence of literary texts on Victorian painting is well known – particularly Pre-Raphaelite painting – and much of this chapter is a discussion of Ford Madox Brown’s Work. Curtis’s interest is in how the textual is made a part of the contemporary in visual representations and he starts with discussions of two other modern-day scenes: William Powell Frith’s Derby Day (1858) and John Orlando Parry’s A London Street Scene (1835). The latter is not well known but deserves to be more so. It is a wonderful depiction of a wall somewhere near St. Paul’s Cathedral with every inch covered in (actual) billboard posters and advertisements. Curtis refers to Brown’s Work (started 1852; completed 1863) as ‘perhaps the consummate modern life painting of the period’ (p. 58) and his analysis of it is extensive and detailed. He extrapolates at some length from the image’s depiction of the installation of a waterworks main pipe to the numerous contemporary discussions about the need for fresh water supplies which were taking place in periodicals of the moment. Curtis’s point here – aside from uncovering some little-known references – seems to be that the debates that the painting depicts were also being discussed in other verbal/visual media of the time. Fair enough, but it doesn’t seem a terribly strong point in the context of the book as a whole. However, no detail of the actual image is left uncommented upon: everything from the biblical quotations on the frame to the significance of the flower symbolism to the detail of the bill posters on the wall to the left of the painting are given attention. Curtis also makes the case for the importance of Brown’s own comments on Work in the 1865 catalogue for the exhibition where it was first shown. Included in this catalogue is also a sonnet Brown wrote for and about the painting. Both are clearly a helpful guide for the viewer, expanding the possible ‘reading’ of the painting. Whilst I cannot claim to have read every interpretation of Work that exists, what is on offer here is certainly interesting, presenting the painting as an art work engaged in a highly-detailed mesh of inter-textual references, both within and beyond the frame of the painting itself.

Chapter three, ‘The art of seeing: Dickens and the visual market’ opens with a discussion of advertising in the period, suggesting that ‘adverts made literacy public’ (p. 105) and that through the development of typefaces for posters ‘text was, in the selling of advertising itself, a “graphic” visual commodity’ (p. 106). Curtis considers some of the adverts that appeared in the original serial parts of Dickens’s novels, noting where they deliberately engaged with the novel itself, including visual aspects of its production and publication. For example, Dakin and Co., who made tea and coffee, produced an advert which mimicked an
illustrated opening page of a Dickens novel. This chapter concludes with an account of popular Victorian portraiture, which Curtis regards as part of the ‘Victorian passion for classifying all things, including the face’ (p. 123). Dickens remains the main focus, with an account of how the author’s portrait figured as an important feature of the marketing of his works in a way that established him as a literary author rather than a Grub Street hack turning out journalistic sketches. The reproduction of Dickens’s portrait on all sorts of everyday objects (both during his lifetime but also continuing well into the twentieth century) is proof of the status of his image ‘as a literary icon’ (p. 135); in the final sentences we are reminded that Dickens’s head appeared on £10 notes as recently as the 1980s.

Following directly on from chapter three, chapter four contains a more detailed consideration of the numerous ‘Portraits of the author’ that appeared throughout Dickens’s lifetime. The range of images presented here is certainly fascinating, and Curtis argues that Dickens’s position as the most photographed, painted and engraved author of the period is part of the novelist’s savvy awareness of the ‘necessity for the writer to create and maintain a visible presence in society’ (p. 151). The many images of Dickens are also, Curtis suggests, about the need of the age for national heroes: ‘in his own lifetime, Dickens’s portrait came to represent all that was successful and morally upright in the Victorian period’ (p. 153). The chapter moves through a discussion of the ‘literary nationalism’ that developed as the century progressed, in which Dickens came to signify as a kind of national cultural icon. It concludes with a more wide-ranging consideration of the representation of the writing hand – starting from the fact that many images of Dickens show him in the act of writing.

Chapter five, ‘The empty biscuit tin’, is the chapter I found the most engaging approaching the work via my own interests in the ‘thingness’ of books in the Victorian period. Curtis continues to sift through the assorted clutter of Victorian culture to consider the iconographic significance of the book as artefact. Noting that by the end of the century books had become part of the necessary furnishing of the well-dressed home, this chapter considers the library and the study as places where books were put on ostentatious display. On a grander, more public scale, Curtis also has a section on the (old) British Library Reading Room, which surely remains in the memory of all those who ever went there as one of the most wonderful spaces in which to experience books. Morris makes a reappearance in a section on book bindings, although it is rightly noted that his attention to making the book beautiful is focused on the interior rather than the exterior. For Morris ‘the book’s tactility, visuality and object presence could make great literature ultimately greater still’ (p. 226). Further sections consider the representation of readers and reading in a number of paintings, picking up some of the same issues as Kate Flint in *The Woman Reader, 1837–1914* (1993), and also the representation of the bible in the period. The chapter, and thus Curtis’s book as a whole, concludes with a reflection on the way textuality is often not far from sexuality, and the ways in which ‘book love’ (or bibliomania) fetishises and sexualises the book. This is encapsulated in an image of Marcel Duchamp’s breast-bound (literally!) cover of *Le Surréalisme* (1947).

As this review suggests, *Visual Words* is a detailed work, considering an eclectic
range of material. There's undoubtedly a tendency these days – no doubt liked by publishers – to have wide-ranging titles for monographs which actually are more limited in scope, and inevitably this work is highly selective in the choices it makes to consider how words are made material in the Victorian period. This is certainly a book which fits well with the current rebranding of the subject of Art History as 'Visual Culture'. Reading Visual Words is a bit like rummaging through Dickens's Old Curiosity Shop: you are bound to be surprised at what you find amidst all the Victorian bric-a-brac that speaks of the relationship between the visual and the textual in the period. The book is amply furnished with black and white illustrations, and although it is not always an easy read, and the price is likely to mean it ends up mostly in academic libraries, it is another example of the interesting range of titles coming out of Ashgate’s ‘Nineteenth Century Series’ and of the publisher’s commitment to scholarly monographs on visual culture.

Rosie Miles


The essays in both these volumes were first presented at the 1997 conference in Milan on John Ruskin and Modernism, but their covers promise markedly different experiences. The Palgrave volume shows a dignified engraving of Ruskin's head from *Great Thoughts from Master Minds*, 1897 – a volume not elsewhere alluded to – while the Italian cover is colourfully modern (though less easy to read). It is not easy to see on what principle the two volumes were divided, though there are more Italian contributors to the Cerutti book. Cianci and Nicholls offer essays on Pater, James, Worringer, Eliot (two), Pound, Lewis and Lawrence, as well as more general topics like Myth and Modernity, while Cerutti includes accounts of Proust, Yeats, Pound, Fry, Stokes, Stevens, Stieglitz and Venturi, Landscape and Modernity. Cianci and Nicholls have the better index, but Cerutti has illustrations and a Bibliography.

Both volumes obviously deal with the same historical situation, one in which Ruskin appeared as a Great Victorian patriarch and therefore a figure to be rejected by the first modernist generation, but one whose ideas had often challenged Victorianism and held promise for development in the twentieth century. Cianci and Nicholls also point out in their lucid Introduction that the hostility was often less towards Ruskin than towards Ruskinism, quoting Lawrence's comment that 'the deep damnation of self-righteousness . . . lies thick all over the Ruskinite, like painted feathers on a skinny peacock' (this makes the sub-title of the Cerutti volume something of a surprise). They argue that it was in literature rather than the visual arts that Ruskin's reputation sank lowest (a
questionable assertion, in my view), and attribute this in part to the influence of the Cambridge critics – Richards, Empson, and Leavis – who, it is claimed, concentrated exclusively on the literary properties of the modernist texts they discussed, neglecting the importance of ‘the stimulus and challenge provided by the visual and plastic arts in this period, both in Britain and on the Continent’. Perhaps I am too much in that Cambridge tradition myself, but it seems reasonable to me to believe that literary critics should be seeking literary excellence in the works they read; if the ‘stimulus and challenge’ does not transpose itself into literary achievement, it seems to me irrelevant. Cianci and Nicholls’s claim is that there was at the time ‘a fundamental shift from music to painting as a model for a new avant-garde language’. While we can certainly see some writers, like Lewis and Pound, for whom this makes sense, I am wary of the generalisation, as well as of the view that other arts can be of central importance to someone who is primarily a writer.

However, my disagreement with these generalisations does not mean that I did not enjoy and learn a good deal from this volume. In particular, I found that Andrea Pinotti’s account of the attitudes to the Gothic of Ruskin and Worringer helped to clarify a number of complex issues, while Dinah Birch writes with characteristic lucidity on Ruskin’s legacy of myth to Modernism. Laurel Brake’s account of the ‘dialogical’ relationship between Ruskin and Pater illuminates both writers, though it is, reasonably enough, Pater’s legacy to Modernism rather than that of Ruskin that is emphasised. In view of the quotation from Lawrence given above, it is not surprising that Stefania Michelucci’s contribution, On Ruskin and Lawrence, is one of the liveliest, though I am not convinced that Lawrence’s telling Louise Burrows in a letter of 1911 that he had enjoyed The Defence of Guenevere can provide a secure basis for the claim that Lawrence derived his views of Ruskin significantly from reading Morris. Finally, the two essays on Eliot are both impressive. The editor, Cianci, writes on ‘Tradition, Architecture and Rappel a l’Ordre’. He argues that in the post-war period, as attempts were made to move towards the assertion of ‘rational order’ (albeit within the overall terms of the modernist poetics), ‘architecture came to occupy a central position as both an art and a practice symbolic of stability and rationality’. He relates this to Eliot’s ‘London Letter’ of May 1921 deploring the Church of England’s irresponsible attitude towards nineteen London churches, some by Wren, which it proposed to sell for demolition, and to other relevant material, including the poem ‘Lune de Miel’. Ronald Bush, in ‘Eliot and Ruskin: Second Thoughts’, gives a clear exposition of Eliot’s changing attitudes to Ruskin in terms of ‘absorption, rejection, and positive second thoughts’. He offers a perceptive reading of ‘Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar’, with its ironic view of Ruskin’s influence, but sees ‘A Cooking Egg’ – which took as its starting point a letter of Ruskin’s about his feelings for Rose la Touche – as particularly perceptive in exposing aspects of Ruskin’s self-absorption which Eliot may also have feared in himself. Thus Eliot put Ruskin out of his mind for several years, only to return to him in the Thirties of the Great Depression. In 1931 he wrote in the Criterion about the dubious value of economics when ‘offered as a pure science unfettered by moral principles’, and asserted ‘we need another Ruskin’. In his absence, Bush suggests, Eliot himself now took on the role of (pessimistic) ‘cultural moralizer’,
and became the author of Notes Toward a Definition of Culture and, far more subtly, the Four Quartets.

Cerutti begins the lively Introduction to the volume he has edited by referring to a sign seen in a shop in Leicester in 1993 which claimed to quote Ruskin's views on quality, and uses this to suggest both the breadth of Ruskin's appeal and the extent to which his social message was misunderstood - 'Ruskin's socialism', he tells us, was 'an urban legend that grew up at the very time his repute as a writer was rapidly failing'. Cerutti gives an account of Ruskin's rejection in the early twentieth century, but claims that things have changed so radically that 'he is now thought of as our contemporary'. This formulation can be accepted only if it is taken to mean that his ideas are of interest today, rather than that we should ignore the historical context in which they arose. At all events, the essays that follow necessarily explore that context as well as relating Ruskin to a range of modern writers. I found Emma Sdegno's account of Ruskin and Roger Fry, with its generous acknowledgement of Graham Hough's pioneering essay on the subject, particularly illuminating in its detailed discussion of Fry's essay on Claude as a response to Ruskin's dismissal of the artist, and as a defence of Cezanne. Paul Tucker considers 'Adrian Stokes and the “Anti-Ruskin Lesson” of British Formalism', showing through careful examination, which concludes with considering the respective attitudes of Ruskin and Stokes to Venice, that their divergences, though significant, are far from total. Both men saw 'visual art as a potent symbol of salvation', and 'concern with form in both is inseparable from consideration of the process of creating it and of the materials in which it is created' - in which we may feel proximity to Morris (who features less than one might have expected in these essays).

However, it is Clive Wilmer's essay 'Sculpture and Economics in Pound and Ruskin' that is particularly successful in establishing links and showing their importance. Wilmer begins by suggesting that both Ruskin and Pound experienced and expressed a 'sense of humility in the face of divine order', and that 'divinity, for both of them, is earthed in material things'. Hence their shared enthusiasm for carved stone, and their sense that what men build is a measure of what Ruskin called 'national life and character' - which in the modern world is, for both men, debased by the usurious operations of the market. Wilmer follows Guy Davenport in arguing for a parallel between Fors Clavigera and The Cantos, both works dismissed by unsympathetic critics as disorderly ragbags ironically preoccupied with social order (a criticism that is perhaps dismissed too easily through the use of the distinction that has been proposed between the Organic and the Contextualist approaches to history). Wilmer admits that his evidence cannot be conclusive, but refers to Pound's experiences of the Ruskinian circle around the journal The New Age, to which he contributed from 1911 to 1920, and particularly to his enthusiasm for the work of the young sculptor Gaudier-Brzeska, who came to London in 1911 and was killed on the Western Front in 1915. Pound admired Brzeska and his work, which was directly carved, exemplifying what Pound called 'energy cut into stone'. This relationship between the artist and his material was of course what Ruskin valued in the Gothic. It was being enacted for Pound by Brzeska, and perhaps this was the route that led him back to Ruskin, whose praise of a carved capital in Verona in The Stones of
Venice (the illustration is reproduced) is taken up in Pound’s great denunciation of usury in Canto XLV. Finally, Wilmer suggests, Ruskin’s challenge to conventional political economy in Unto This Last may be seen as parallel to Pound’s taking up C. H. Douglas’s idea of Social Credit. Both men’s ideas in this area are considered eccentric, and are marginalised, but they must remain of importance until our modern societies have solved the serious problems which Ruskin and Pound sought to solve.

These conference papers, then, succeed in reminding us that Ruskin’s modernist successors never succeeded in forgetting him completely. But his influence as considered here seems various and diffuse, and impossible to focus into any particular politics. It is no criticism of these books that Saler’s recent account of the ‘medieval modernists’ like Frank Pick, drawing their social ideals from Ruskin and Morris and applying them in the world of the London Underground between the wars, offers a more definite picture than anything encountered here.

Peter Faulkner

This is a preliminary review, whose main aim is to celebrate the appearance of the first two volumes of the D. G. Rossetti letters, covering the years from his boyhood to his early maturity — if that is the term for someone who so determinedly avoided the conventional attributes usually accruing to that term. The edition is the final work of the great Pre-Raphaelite scholar W. E. Fredeman of the University of British Columbia, who sadly died in 1999, before he could see these volumes now finely published by D. S. Brewer. It will replace the indexless four-volume edition of Rossetti’s letters edited by Doughty and Wahl and published by the Clarendon Press in 1965–7, which Fredeman describes as constituting ‘an editorial nightmare, containing every possible kind of error save forgeries’ (p. xix), as well as including roughly only half of the potential correspondence. The index to the present edition is a work of art in itself, and will make it of great value to all those able to get access to it: the high price is a regrettable but inevitable function of the market for such books in present conditions.

In this review I will write about the impression we get from these letters of the young Rossetti to his friends and family. A more comprehensive review by Jan Marsh will appear in the summer issue of the *Journal*. The Rossetti we encounter in these letters is a young man full of life and energy, conscious of his family responsibilities at the same time as developing his talents as poet and painter. He is above all an enthusiast, writing with vigour to his range of artistic friends, Allingham, Boyce, Deverell, Hunt, Munro, Bell Scott, Stephens, J. L. Tupper (the last previously unknown to me) and above all Madox Brown, and with great self-confidence to slightly senior figures like Browning and Ruskin. Along with the
engaging enthusiasm, less desirable qualities also make their occasional appearance, in the forms of procrastination and the borrowing from all and sundry of the ‘tin’ of which he was always in such need. His vocabulary is youthfully inscribed with current slang – though the editor admits himself at a loss over the distinction implied in an invitation to Gilchrist in November 1861 which begins ‘Two or three blokes and a cove are coming here on Friday evening’ (another invitee, Brown, was told that the attendants would be ‘A few blokes & coves – not to say worse – ’). In similar terms in early 1857 Rossetti had written to L. C. Dickinson of the young Morris and Jones that ‘they are both stunners as artists and bricks as coves’. The range of Rossetti’s interests was already focussed on the aesthetic rather than the political; for all his admiration of some of Ruskin’s writings on art, he found the first section of Unto this Last unreadable, asking Allingham, ‘Who could read it, or anything about such bosh?’

When Rossetti writes of poetry or painting, it is always with full and intelligent engagement. This is particularly felt in the longer letters, such as one to Bell Scott in May 1853 which includes some remarks on the Royal Academy (‘The hanging this year has teemed with more flagrant injustice within my own knowledge than on any previous occasion’) and the ‘Spasmodic’ poet Alexander Smith (‘The Life-Drama has nothing particular in its structure, except that it seems to bear vaguely towards the favourite doctrine that scoundrelism is a sacred probation of the soul’), or that to Allingham in August 1855 about Tennyson’s Maud (‘much is surely artificial, & some very likely rubbish’), or another in November full of enthusiasm for Browning (‘What a magnificent series is “Men & Women”. Of course you have it half by heart ere this’) or another in December 1856, with its admiring response to the recently published Aurora Leigh and its account of the folding of the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, or one to C. E. Norton in July 1858 about the early stages of the decoration of the Oxford Union debating chamber (‘Jones’s picture is a perfect masterpiece, as is all he does’). This last remark is characteristic of the enormous generosity that Rossetti brought in his responses to work that he admired, evidence of his human warmth that comes out also in the more sombre context of his response to the deaths of friends, most movingly that of Alexander Gilchrist suddenly from scarlet fever in December 1861. Rossetti’s admirable concern for Gilchrist’s widow Anne and her children comes out in the following correspondence, only one instance of the trouble he was prepared to go to for others in such sad circumstances. We may relate this to his constant and genuine concerns over Lizzie, despite his response to other stunners like Fanny Cornforth, the ‘fair original’ of Bocca Baciata, as he told Boyce in September 1859, whose pronunciation of marigolds as ‘merrygoes’ delighted him.

The one letter to Morris, of May 1857, ends with a typically jolly play on words: ‘You no doubt know of Ned’s up and downs. I hope he’s getting round – not in the wombat sense however – that seems far off indeed’. Similar word-play underlies the lively and improbable sketch of Christina destroying all the surrounding furniture with a hammer, entitled ‘Christina Rossetti in a Tantrum’ and inspired by a quotation from The Times: ‘Miss Rossetti could point to work which could not easily be mended’. These volumes contain many attractive black-and-white illustrations; some of them formed part of the letters, but others
appeared elsewhere, like the well known and expressive frontispiece and title-page of *Goblin Market*; by contrast, the striking pen-and-ink study for the title-page of *The Early Italian Poets*, reproduced here, was evidently not used for the book of 1861.

For many reasons, then, these handsome volumes are to be warmly welcomed by all of us interested in the Pre-Raphaelites and the Morris circle. A quick reading such as mine has been does not allow for consideration of the extent to which these letters are already available, or of the scholarship embodied in Fredeman’s notes, but what we might describe as their pre-PC male tone sometimes grates, as when the otherwise splendid index (to a volume ending in 1862) describes Jane Morris as ‘wife of William Morris and serial adulteress’. No such moral severity is expressed in the summary accounts of Swinburne (‘poet’), Solomon (‘painter & draftsman’) or Fanny Cornforth (‘DGR’s model and companion’). Perhaps it would be fairer to end with Fredeman’s judicious summary of this period of Rossetti’s life, to which these letters give us such splendid access: ‘The Rossetti of the early letters . . . [is] impelled by enthusiasm, curiosity and an innate joie de vivre; and, most important of all, as yet unburdened by responsibilities and guilt, and blessedly unaware of the physical and psychological maladies that would beset him in the inexorable march of time’.

*Peter Faulkner*

This the first history of the Caseg Press and such a history, as the author observes, ‘has been long overdue’ (p. 11). There is a wealth of detail in the book which will be of interest to Morrisians even if Morris had no direct influence on the work of the Press. The book draws on letters, diaries and interviews and in the short space of a review it is impossible to do it justice. I offer here an overview of the book and raise a few questions that it suggests.

Smith focuses on the work of John Petts, whom she identifies as the main artistic force behind the Press. Although not a biography the chronological structure of the book allows the development of a certain amount of biographical detail which helps illuminate Petts’s artistic work. Smith deals with Petts’s middle-class upbringing in north London, his decision (despite family opposition) to become an artist, and his progress through Hornsey School of Art and the Royal Academy, where he was to meet Brenda Chamberlain whom he was soon to marry. Chamberlain came from Wales and never liked London. As Smith points out, she had an aversion to modern technology so strong that she eschewed the bus for walking no matter what the weather. It was Chamberlain who prompted the move to Llanllechid in north Wales in 1937 and it was the move to Wales that made it possible for Petts to realise his ambition of running a private press.

Operational from 1937 to 1951, the Caseg Press produced greetings cards featuring engravings of local scenes, figures, etc., produced by Petts and Chamberlain themselves. It was always a commercial venture and its founders
hoped to be able to make a living from it while maintaining their own artistic independence. Smith notes that although Petts originally wanted to be a painter, he had from an early stage of his artistic training excelled at etching and typography, skills he was able to combine in his work for the Press. Later he was to develop his skills as a book illustrator while Chamberlain developed as a writer and poet.

Although the Caseg Press participated in and benefited from the Welsh cultural revival of the 1930s and 1940s, Smith stresses that the move to Wales was not an attempt to establish a ‘Welsh colony’ or a search for ‘an autonomous Welsh political identity which placed them at odds with English culture’, but rather it was a way for Petts and Chamberlain to ‘embrace[ ...] Wales as a place of recuperation from the “ills” of urban existence’ (p. 11). Through its participation in the Welsh literary and cultural revival, moreover, the Caseg Press attracted the patronage of writers such as Glyn Jones and Gwyn Jones, and others including David Lloyd George and the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth.

Smith offers a sensitive discussion of the impact of the Second World War on the Press and on the relationship between Petts and Chamberlain. On the one hand the War led to collaboration with the poet Alun Lewis, and so to the highpoint of the career of the Caseg Press, the production of the Caseg Broadsheets, which won the praise of Robert Graves, amongst others; on the other, the War ultimately both disrupted the work of the Press and led to the separation and divorce of Chamberlain and Petts. Although he was initially a Conscientious Objector, Petts later volunteered for war work, eventually becoming a war artist and a teacher within the armed forces. Petts’s background as an engraver had equipped him with skills that helped in unexpected ways during the war. He had developed ‘a straight eye’ which helped him when it came to ploughing (p. 46) and later, in the RAMC, it ‘equipped him for the task . . . of directing with confidence the fine point of a blood needle into the centre of a collapsed vein’ (p. 72). In the later stages of the War his artistic work came to the attention of Christopher Sandford, head of the Golden Cockerell Press, and hence to commissions for that more famous private press. After the War Petts refounded the Caseg Press at Llanystumdwy with the assistance of his new wife, Kusha, and Jonah Jones, whom he had met in the army. In the harsh conditions of the post-war period, however, it became increasingly difficult to make ends meet, and after Petts accepted a post with the Arts Council in Wales he had less time for the work of the Press, so it was ended in 1951. By this time he was becoming less interested in engraving and printing and he retrained as a designer of stained glass.

The book is profusely illustrated with reproductions mainly of Petts’s work, but also some of Chamberlain’s. Smith notes that while Chamberlain ‘preferred painting’ and ‘took to lino because it was softer and, therefore, quicker and freer to handle’ than wood, Petts ‘preferred to battle with the intractable surface of wood because it enabled him to attain a sculptural clarity of form’ (p. 30). I have to say that my preference is for Petts’s linocuts, particularly Huw Scwd, The Rabbit Catcher (1936) and The Waits (1940). With these works there is a strong sense of line and a contrast of black and white, although I feel that some of his later works, his wood-engravings for Against Women or Väinämöinen, for example, are too heavy and tend towards caricature. From the period of the War,
his strongest works are Debris Searcher, from Caseg Broadsheet No. 1 – a truly disturbing image, owing much to Vorticism and Expressionism – and his pen and ink drawings as a war artist. His discovery of Byzantine art and its impact on his art is best demonstrated by his Athens Self-Portrait; another work in ink and watercolour from the same period, and showing the same influences, She of the Sea, seems weak and indistinct by comparison. Smith points out that ‘Petts and Chamberlain harboured an ambivalent attitude to modernism in that while they were aware of international developments, they drew on indigenous romantic traditions in forging their own distinctive style. The main trends of European modernism are never conspicuously present in the work of either artist’ (p. 11). Good as it is, much of Petts’ work feels dated, and could easily have been produced 30 or 40 years earlier. This in itself may have contributed to the relative obscurity of the Caseg Press.

The book is well produced in a quarto format with the illustrations clearly reproduced on a good heavy matt art paper which allows the text to be read easily. I have only two quibbles: first, given the wide text measure, a rather larger indentation at the start of the paragraphs would have helped the reader; second, the chosen typeface – New Baskerville – is a little weak by comparison with the often robust etchings reproduced next to it. However, although the designers have avoided the classical margins that William Morris would have used, the layout is clear and balanced and works very well. It is a pity that the colour wood-cuts towards the end of the book could not have been reproduced in colour, but that would no doubt have added too much to the production costs. Criticisms aside, Smith has opened up a fascinating area of investigation. It would be interesting to see something more on Petts’ career as a designer of stained glass – for which colour reproductions would be a necessity – and on the artistic work of Brenda Chamberlain.

David Gorman

The conscious revival of the Gothic style of architecture begins in the seventeenth century when Gothic as the customary building method was not quite exhausted. It was first chosen by connoisseurs like Horace Walpole, the author of *The Castle of Otranto*, the first Gothic horror tale, for its decorative and association qualities manifest in his house at Strawberry Hill (1748). But it quickly became a very serious enterprise indeed: one that was quintessentially Victorian and part of the nineteenth century religious revival. As to its merits it was to generate much earnest, influential and sometimes violent moral and aesthetic debate extending into architectural and design theory. Its adherents covered England from end to end with a great variety of buildings of all types and sizes in a variety of mediaeval styles. Towards the end of the nineteenth century it gave birth to the Arts & Crafts movement.

Michael Lewis’s book provides a brief but comprehensive introduction to the
history and theories of the style in Europe and the USA, but gives the incorrect impression that it was confined to these areas. One of the best things about the book is the large number of well chosen and reproduced illustrations. Unfortunately the book contains a number of small errors. For example Lewis tells us that Butterfield once dismissed Philip Webb as an apprentice because he had participated in a student competition. The culprit, in fact, was William Lethaby, the construction of whose church at Brockhampton is incorrectly described. It also seems odd to describe Red House as rambling when its planning is rather tight and economical, derived from a close study of Butterfield’s domestic buildings rather than the vernacular tradition as the author supposes. Nevertheless as an overall and beautifully illustrated outline it is to be recommended.

Godfrey Rubens