

An important theme throughout the book is Burne-Jones's distaste for the commodification of art and his constant desire to create work that would be seen by the widest possible public, not just by plutocratic picture-collectors. It was especially appropriate, therefore, that it was for the city of Birmingham – the artist's birthplace – that he created two masterpieces, featured in the penultimate chapter, in his later career. The huge *Star of Bethlehem* watercolour (1887-91) was painted for Birmingham's new public art gallery and was a re-working of a design first produced for tapestry. The four stained glass windows for St Philip's Cathedral, Birmingham, were made between 1885 and 1897 and are the culmination of his forty-year engagement in the craft. Rager discusses these major public works in the context of Burne-Jones's many other depictions of the Nativity, stressing especially the ways in which he articulated the role of the Magi as symbols of worldly power and wealth subordinated to simple humanity. Quoting the artist's conversation with the scholar Sebastian Evans, she highlights Burne-Jones's syncretic (or transcendent) theology, which acknowledged that belief in the vital 'possibility of betterment' could be translated into 'any religious language you please: Christian, Buddhist, Mahometan, or what not'.

The concluding chapter is a brief but penetrating essay on the meaning of Burne-Jones's painting *The Wheel of Fortune* (1875-83), which for Rager communicates 'the pervasive egalitarian message embedded' in all the artist's work. Whilst not defining it in such precise terms, Burne-Jones himself spoke of 'a force' impelling him to confront contemporaries, through visions of beauty, with a perpetual protest against their accepted values and aspirations. Andrea Wolk Rager's elegantly designed book cannot be too highly recommended, not only as a work of exemplary art history, but also as an invaluable statement of the perennial function of thoughtful creativity in motivating social change.

Peter Cormack

Florence Boos (ed.), *William Morris on Socialism: Uncollected Essays* (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2023) 432 pp., £125.00 hbk, ISBN 9781474458085, £90 Ebook (epub), ISBN 9781474458108, £125 Ebook (PDF), ISBN 9781474458092.

There have been several collections of Morris's essays over the years: some are in the *Collected Works* edited by May Morris and some in her two later volumes *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*. Other print anthologies include those by G. D. H. Cole, A. L. Morton, Eugene Le Mire, and most recently by Owen Holland. Moreover, many of Morris's lectures are freely available on line at the William Morris Internet Archive, part of the Marxist Internet Archive (MIA). A sceptic might wonder whether there

is really a need for another such volume. The short answer is 'yes'. This is a wonderful resource, both in terms of the essays themselves and the commentary by Florence Boos, who brought Morris's *Socialist Diary* into print forty years ago. And since anything Morris-related by Boos promises to be fascinating and the scholarship impeccable, I was excited to be invited to review it. My sense of anticipation was mixed with curiosity, first because I was unclear in what sense these essays were 'uncollected', and secondly because I wondered what they might add to our understanding of Morris's socialism.

Only one of the twenty-six items in the book is widely known and reproduced, 'How I Became a Socialist', included here because of its importance. Of the remainder, four are not available elsewhere and a further seven only digitally at the William Morris Internet Archive (MIA). Three more were similarly available online only until included in Holland's 2020 collection. Nine others were excerpted by May Morris in *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, but are incomplete both there and at the MIA. Sixteen of these pieces are therefore newly transcribed in full from the manuscript sources for the first time – itself no small task. Many, but not all, of the manuscripts are held in the British Library; others are scattered or lost. There is also a newspaper report of Morris's last known socialist lecture, 'One Socialist Party' from January 1896. These essays are, then, genuinely 'uncollected', in that they are either wholly unavailable elsewhere, unavailable in print, or available only in abridged form. And while the MIA is a wonderful resource which I have used extensively over the years, the experience of reading Morris's essays sequentially, with useful contextualisation, in a nicely-produced book (good paper, decent ink, adequate margins) is entirely different and much more pleasurable and gives a real sense of the continuity and changes in Morris's views over his last eighteen years. Boos also draws our attention to how much further work might be done in collecting Morris's writings on other topics.

The essays are arranged chronologically in three parts: the first, 1878-1881, covers Morris's transition from liberalism to socialism; the second the phase of Morris's most intense socialist activity from 1883 to 1889; the third the period from 1891 to 1896, including six pieces from the very end of Morris's life published in 1895 and 1896. Each essay is prefaced with a short introduction, often including the dates and places of each lecture's delivery. This locates Morris's lectures in his socialist campaigning and in the movement as a whole. 'Misery and the Way Out', for example, was delivered nine times by Morris from 1884 including to an audience of 3000 in Edinburgh, but Boos records that it was also read 'by others' in Bradford and Leeds in 1886. I was puzzled by this. What, I wondered, were they reading from? Several of Morris's lectures, such as 'Monopoly: or How Labour is Robbed' and 'Useful Work

versus Useful 'Toil' (not reproduced here) were published as penny pamphlets, and others appeared in journals such as *Commonweal*; Boos's headnotes imply that this one was not. A little digging revealed that Liverpool University Library houses the Glasier Papers, which include a handwritten copy of 'Misery and the Way Out' made by John Bruce Glasier, dated 1885, 'for use of Bradford branch of the Socialist League'. It would be interesting to explore whether the text corresponds precisely to Morris's manuscript, but in any case it is testament to Morris's generosity, Glasier's industry, and the status of Morris in the socialist movement at the time.

Besides the headnotes to each piece, Boos offers a substantial introduction to the whole, reflecting on consistency and change in Morris's views, and characterising the substance of Morris's socialism in terms of four themes: anti-imperialism; socialism as radical equality; commitment to peaceful revolution; and the need for socialist unity. Anti-imperialism is a starting point for Morris, initially in his speeches for the Eastern Question Association against war with Russia and extending to his consistent support for Irish Home Rule. (Morris's views on Ireland are another under-explored theme in the literature.) And as Boos writes, 'A few years later he would follow Marx in also viewing [colonial] wars as a necessary byproduct of capitalism's hunger for expanding markets' (p. 6).

Radical equality is, as Boos says, central to Morris's socialism – or to use the term Morris does, 'equality of condition'. Morris's terminology cuts through any nonsense about 'equality of opportunity' versus so-called 'equality of outcome', as socialism was later pilloried for pursuing uniformity. Morris asserts firmly that equality of condition would develop 'the great variety of capacity existing in the individuals of the race, and which socialism would foster as sedulously as the present system depresses it' ('Socialism', 1885, p.198).

The later pieces, written towards the end of Morris's life, are fascinating. Boos sees both Morris's commitment to nonviolence and his wish for socialist unity as consistent themes in his socialism; I read the later pieces as showing a distinct shift in his later years. In these late pieces his wish to avoid a cataclysm and to bring about social transformation by peaceful and electoral means is palpable, but I read him as unconvinced, hoping against hope. Certainly Morris is campaigning for the formation of one socialist party, having himself been participant in schisms in the 1880s. But also palpable is his fear that it will not be full socialism that will result, and merely an amelioration of the conditions of the working class. He fears that people will not want socialism enough. For, as he said in 'How I Became a Socialist' some years earlier, 'civilization has reduced the workman to such a skinny and pitiful existence, that he scarce knows how to frame a desire for any life much better than that which he now endures perforce' (p. 321).

There is of course room for differences of interpretation, or at least differences of emphasis, in reading these essays. One issue where I differ from Boos is the influence of Marx. She argues that '[t]hough respectful of Marx ... [Morris] also held to the conviction that socialism is fundamentally an ethic, not a deterministic science', continuing that 'he largely avoided specialist terms such as "surplus value," "commodity fetishism," and "exchange value" in his attempts to convey this ethic in jargon-free language to radical, reformist, and working-class audiences' (pp. 179-180). It is true that Morris tries always to express himself in terms accessible to ordinary people: that is one great strength of his political writing, although he does occasionally use the term 'surplus value' (e.g., 'Socialism', p. 200). This and other Marxist concepts such as labour power and ownership of the means of production are woven through his lectures. Nor is he wholly free from determinism: 'We Socialists ... believe that we know why these classes exist and how they have grown into what they are, a growth inevitable indeed, but so far from being eternal that it will itself destroy itself and give place to something else, a society in which there will be no rich or poor', and 'all we have to do is to help [in] developing the obvious and conscious outcome of this progress' ('Socialism', 1885, pp. 186, 193.). For me, reading these essays in full underlines how thoroughly Morris understood and shared much of Marx's analysis of capitalism. But the long-standing attempt to claim Morris for 'ethical' rather than 'economic' socialism sets up a false opposition. I defy anyone to read the first volume of Marx's *Capital* without registering the moral outrage that informs it. Morris's approach to ethics and economy is both/and rather than either/or: 'We of the Socialist League ... condemn not only the obvious evils of modern Society, but also the ethics and the economy of which they are the result' ('The Political Outlook', 1886, p. 208). The economic basis of socialism is equality of condition, the ethical basis the 'full recognition of man as a social being' ('Why I Am A Communist', p.328).

Of course, even the most scrupulous of readers can be guilty of 'confirmation bias', tempted to stress the aspects of Morris's argument that chime most closely with their own. I don't claim to be any exception to this. All the more reason for others to read this collection for themselves, and reflect on Morris's words here embedded in a commentary of meticulous scholarship by Florence Boos.

Ruth Levitas

Marcus Waithe, *The Work of Words: Literature, Craft, and the Labour of Mind in Britain, 1830–1940* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), x + 307 pp., £90.00 hbk, ISBN 9781399512299.

Marcus Waithe's *The Work of Words* is an ambitious, important study of the mostly