

William Morris and the Uses of Violence, 1856-1890 by Ingrid Hanson. London: Anthem Press, 2013. 230 + xxi pp. ISBN 978-0-8572-8319-1. £60; \$99.

In *William Morris and the Uses of Violence*, Ingrid Hanson makes the case that, in William Morris's writings, "war is presented as necessary because the people can only become a unified body through it." Reading Hanson's "analysis of the phenomenology and philosophy of violence by which Morris delineates a complicated ethical position," I was reminded of a passage from Yeats's late poem, "Under Ben Bulbin":

when all words are said
And a man is fighting mad,
Something drops from eyes long blind,
He completes his partial mind,
For an instant stands at ease,
Laughs aloud, his heart at peace.

By Hanson's reading, Morris too is after such completion of the partial mind, and finds it best completed in moments of violent agonistic engagement with a world that will yield more to violence than to any other means of persuasion. What are we to make of the discrepancy between Hanson's Morris and the radical, socialist, and in large part pacifist-leaning artist whom estimable scholars like Florence Boos have described?

Hanson is interested in a wide variety of ways in which violence shapes or flavours Morris's work: moments when he seems to praise violence for its emancipatory power or its attachment to an earlier, easier time, as well as moments when he holds up its horrific effects as symbols of all that deforms present as well as past societies. Throughout the book runs a sense that, in his writing at least (oddly, Hanson does not discuss Morris's forays into the book arts, visual material, and other artisanal practices), Morris finds violence ultimately appealing because it is both a signpost and a gateway to a "physical, experiential basis for knowing."

Hanson finds in Morris an almost Bataille-like allure of the haptic, a Bergsonian commitment to direct physical immersion rather than abstract, disembodied Cartesian pathways. By Hanson's account, Morris (Morris before 1890 that is: it is not clear why the book's scope ends six years before Morris's death in 1896) finds in violence a not-quite-rational, not conventionally moral way of "knowing and being in the world." Hanson proposes that "this kind of violence" offers "a way of reshaping the material world, reach[ing] beyond the logic of Enlightenment rationalism to suggest a more interactive, embodied epistemology."