

Teaching William Morris edited by Jason D. Martinek and Elizabeth Carolyn Miller. Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2019. x + 308 pp. ISBN 978-1-68393-073-0. \$95.00.

The diverse and distinguished group of contributors to the present volume are all “teachers in the modern classroom.” And the nineteen chapters assembled here, many benefitting from (monochrome) illustrations, are all engaged, in different ways and contexts, in teaching about William Morris. Its character – as a practical volume, pitched at an applied level – contributes to both its charms and limitations.

There is a consensus amongst contributors that teaching Morris is difficult. Many report a resistance to Morris amongst contemporary students – especially undergraduates – and the claim that “there would be no *World of Warcraft* without William Morris” does not dissolve it all. Papermaking and Icelandic sagas can still be a hard sell. There is also tension between the specialization and narrowness of modern university curricula, on the one hand, and Morris’s own breadth of interests (poetry, prose, politics, architecture, furniture, pattern-making, tapestry, typography, and more), on the other. It is not clear how he can be fitted in without succumbing to “the amputative approach” in which you cut off the little bit of Morris that fits your particular course, leaving the rest of his corpus to rot.

The contributors are overwhelmingly drawn from the humanities – predictably dominated by English, Art History, and History – and concerned with how Morris is taught, especially their own experiences of teaching him. Predictable or not, some omissions might still be regretted; there is no serious examination of teaching Morris’s place in the history of socialism, and no contribution here from the more philosophical end of the humanities. The result is something like an informed and practical conversation between teachers about the pleasures and pains of engaging with Morris in the modern university. Its main audience is probably those embarked on the same task, and smart enough to appreciate that reflecting on the efforts of others might clarify and improve their own pedagogy. That putative reader might be helped to think more deeply about how they currently teach Morris, about how they might teach Morris better, and about what teaching him better might involve.

It is as well to admit, however, that this optimistic and pragmatic approach forms an apparent contrast with Morris’s own more abstract and negative views on the purposes and benefits of education. What we might pejoratively call “schooling” – training the young in specialized institutions – seems absent from the social arrangements of *News From Nowhere* (1891). Guest, the suspiciously familiar visitor to the future, confounds his hosts by asking about their “system of education,” the good-natured Dick replying that,