

History and Poetics in the Early Writings of William Morris, 1855-1870 by Florence S. Boos. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2015. xii, 322 pp. + 17 colour plates, 23 b/w illus. ISBN 978-0-8142-1289-9. \$91.95.

Florence Boos has provided a wealth of insight and knowledge of William Morris's literature, socialism, and art over many years. Her recent study of Morris's early writings continues this tradition with a valuable exploration of Morris's life and work through research that traces his shifts of style and literary evolution. Boos uses Morris's 1858 *The Defence of Guenevere* as a watershed text in Morris's career, and the eight chapters of her work mark that separation. The first five chapters speak to Morris's life, influences, and work leading up to *The Defence*, and the final three chapters closely analyze the sources, gender depictions, and medievalism in *The Defence*. There are clear threads traced by Boos, from the importance and influence of Morris's family and friends on his literature and art, to the attempt to reconcile his art and politics as a complex ethical question, and his love of architecture – specifically the artistic craftwork of building ornamentation. In this work, Boos also looks at Morris's appreciation and study of languages such as Latin, French, and Old Norse, the latter being seen in Morris's adventures and love of Iceland. All of these threads allow the reader to engage in a more holistic view of the polymath Morris, making *History and Poetics in the Early Writings of William Morris* a thought-provoking, accessible read.

Morris is often seen as a man of contradictions, and Boos engages with these contradictory tendencies. She does not dismiss these contradictions as immaturity, but rather reads them as both a strong conviction to find an ethical way of being and a result of his living "out of time." Morris's focus on the medieval highlights the importance of history, but more than that it highlights the importance of writing and engaging with the period as though one was of that period. Early in her work Boos demonstrates the reflective nature of Morris, noting that he was aware of his position and privilege. The ever-present tension of his background and the will of his parents who attempted to guide him towards the church caused Morris to be independent and determined in his studies and career. But it is Morris's closest friends, like Edward Burne-Jones (Ned) and Phillip Webb who were to be both the most supportive and, at times, the most critical of his work and his artistic and socio-political goals. It is the sharing of, as Boos puts it, "complementary intellectual and emotional needs" between Ned and "Top" (the nickname given to Morris) that helped shape Morris's early life. The "Oxford Brotherhood," the group of friends Morris met at Oxford, which also included Charles Faulkner, Richard Watson Dixon, and Cornell Price, formed the basis of the artistic communal society he espoused for the rest of his life. Boos