

This book is a radical modification of the monographic project. To give two artists equal significance; to consider their relationship while paying full attention to the specific qualities of each artist's work; and to grapple, simultaneously, with the fraught tensions between fine and decorative art, as represented by Burne-Jones and Morris respectively, are challenges that Caroline Arscott takes on, and meets, in this extraordinary volume. In the literature on Victorian art we are accustomed to reading about networks, particularly 'brotherhoods' and 'circles', but the dual-protagonist model that Arscott adopts is unfamiliar in this field and beyond. It is a brave strategy, risking falling somewhere between the safe single-artist study, sure to find a market among devotees, and the broad survey that offers something for everyone – but the gamble pays off. Without self-consciously addressing the question of its structure, *Interlacings* implicitly makes a strong case for the binary paradigm.

A glance at the table of contents threatens at first to undermine the originality of the two-artist model, since after the Introduction the book is divided into alternating chapters on Burne-Jones and Morris. We might applaud this decision as a prudent one, allowing teachers to assign a relevant chapter to a class more readily, and enabling scholars of either artist to pick and choose their passages. While this arrangement may be less bold than the title leads the reader to expect, it has an important function. By focusing on the work of each artist in turn, Arscott prevents the need for balance from cutting short her detailed visual analysis of key examples. Because we know, during a chapter on Morris, for example, that Burne-Jones will have his place in the spotlight in the next chapter, we are free to concentrate fully on the present argument. Towards the end of the book, once our sense of the author's take on each artist has become more established, the two strands become more integrated. For example, Chapter 7, 'Burne-Jones's View of Morris (Interlacings)', and Chapter 9, 'Burne-Jones: Stained Glass', interpret Burne-Jones's art as informed by his working through of his responses to Morris's patterns.

Two is an unpopular number in a postmodern context, discredited as it is by deconstructionist approaches. In this book, however, the Burne-Jones/Morris dichotomy does not constitute a restrictive or closed framework; it operates as a framework in a productive sense. By reflecting conclusions about Burne-Jones and Morris's work back on one another, Arscott keeps the argument fuelled with regular, redirecting jolts of energy, as though, when the reader is in danger of following one artist alone too far, an electric shock sets her or him back on the correct path. A parallel is found in the book's discussion of the relative advantages of the 'pictorial' and 'decorative' modes of working, where the author claims that Burne-Jones found the 'discipline of the decorative' to be an 'enabling framework' (p.209).