

thinker's manifesto challenging a new wave of American protectionist literature.—*Itibari M. Zulu, University of California-Los Angeles.*

Thompson, Susan O. *American Book Design and William Morris*. 2nd ed., with new foreword by Jean-Francois Vilain. New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Pr.; London: The British Library, 1996. 318p. \$49.95 cloth (ISBN 1-884718-25-6). \$34.95 paper, (ISBN 1-884718-26-4, LC 96-31223).

The new edition of Susan Otis Thompson's *American Book Design and William Morris* has been supplemented with a foreword by Jean-François Vilain; otherwise, it is a reprint of the 1977 edition. The book originated as Thompson's 1972 doctoral dissertation for the School of Library Service, Columbia University, where she later taught until the school's closing in 1992. In this book, Thompson attempts the first comprehensive survey of American book designs and designers influenced by William Morris. By the final decades of the nineteenth century, Morris—the English poet, social theorist, and designer—had helped to turn widespread dismay over the negative effects of industrialization into an international Arts and Crafts movement. Thompson's study focuses on U. S. response to Morris's final venture, the Kelmscott Press, from its first publications in 1891 to the early years of the twentieth century. In so doing, she provides a context for understanding the artifactual value of a wide range of commercial and private press publications from this period.

Much work on the history of printing in the United States and on William Morris's influence has been published in the past two decades. Nevertheless, a century after Morris's death, evaluation of the significance of his influence on American book design remains challenging. To what degree was Morris's style simply copied as the latest Euro-

pean fashion? In what ways was the idiom of incunabular printing, as interpreted by this inspired, if nostalgic, Englishman, transformed to satisfy the growing sophistication of a much more recently formed nation?

Thompson has brought us a long way toward answering such questions. To demonstrate the scope and speed of the Kelmscott Press's impact in this country, she has compiled a body of primary evidence in the form of turn-of-the-century "Morrisian" books and contemporary commentary upon their designs and designers. Her introductory chapters on the state of publishing in the late nineteenth century, and on the distinguishing characteristics of various Classical and Romantic book styles of the period, are helpful, though somewhat dated given the greater understanding of Victorian style that has developed in the decades since Thompson's analysis was first published. More attention might have been given, for instance, to clarifying the relationship of the Kelmscott Press's interpretation of Renaissance and Gothic styles to larger revivalist trends. Morris himself began his career in a prominent Gothic Revival architectural firm, and closer analysis of this long-lived style, including an illustration or two, would have been particularly useful. Gothic Revival style was thoroughly integrated with Kelmscott influence in the work of many American typographers and book designers, most notably Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, himself a Gothic Revival architect.

Morris's pre-Kelmscott influence on Victorian book design also is deserving of consideration. For instance, as Thompson points out, Morris, in his Kelmscott days, decried the printing of special large-paper copies of literary works because this practice spoils the proportions of the margins. Ironically, Morris was responsible for initiating the practice he later abhorred. Large-pa-

per copies became a standard feature of his publications by the 1870s, long before he founded the Kelmscott Press and more than a decade before they were commonplace elsewhere.

The main body of Thompson's text, and its most useful feature, is a survey of the book designs and designers in the principal U. S. publishing centers of the period: Boston, Chicago, and New York. The centers are treated in the chronological order in which they were affected by Morris's influence; a few designers and publishers are singled out for individual treatment. An impressive bibliography of design examples supplements the information given in the text. Significant gaps in her coverage are noted by Vilain in his preface. Yet Vilain's preface, if not entirely uncritical, does little to address the most frustrating aspect of Thompson's study: the limited use to which this considerable documentation has been put. Because much of the text consists of the enumeration of examples interspersed with quotations, this material might have been better organized as a catalog with a general introduction.

The chapter on American versions of Kelmscott types which follows the survey is helpful, but it is not clear why

it should come at the end of the book and have no illustrations. Typefaces are a major feature of Thompson's stylistic criteria, yet most people are not fluent in the many faces she names. A concise, illustrated discussion of the significant features of the various Arts and Crafts fonts early in the text would have gone a long way toward making the many later references to them meaningful.

Thompson's concluding chapter, titled simply "Chronology and Perspectives," provides an overview of the year-by-year rise and then diminution of the direct influence of Kelmscott Press style in the United States, and a brief discussion of shifting critical acclaim. She concludes by arguing for the value of printing as interpretation and for the enduring value of the hand-printed book as a vehicle for personal expression. This position has found much support in the past two decades.

Although one wishes for the benefit of the author's experience in the form of a fully revised version, *American Book Design and William Morris* remains valuable as a resource for anyone interested in understanding this important turning point in the development of U. S. printing and graphic design.—*Jeanne-Marie Musto, Harvard University.*