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Regenia Gagnier, Individualism, Decadence and Globalization: On the Relationship of Part to Whole, 1859-1920, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 219 pp. ISBN 978-0-230-24743-7

Regenia Gagnier's book operates on at least three levels. First, it provides an intricate survey of a set of reflections on individualism, individuality and will from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Second, it presents a normative argument in defence of a particular conception of individualism. Third, holding these two dimensions together, it adopts a methodological approach which draws on what Gagnier calls the integrative evolutionary science pioneered by Victorian writers. Though the book is pleasingly comfortable to hold, its size is misleading for the ideas packed within the covers are complex and difficult; and whilst the writing is clear, Gagnier's mastery of her material and her concise, confident handling is challenging for anyone less familiar with the terrain. She moves effortlessly from Darwin, Spencer and Arnold to Freud, Trotsky, Said, Adorno and Derrida, capturing short, focused studies of Alice Meynell, John Davidson, Charles Leland and William Morris, on the way. The introduction is helpful and it sets out the aims and the structure of the argument very well. Nonetheless, her book is for daytime, not evening reading and it demands careful concentration.

The discussion of the principle ideas – the relationship of part to whole - is organised thematically. Models of Victorian liberalism are set out in the first chapter: Pater and James feature here. The second chapter uses a study of new womanhood to probe concepts of the self and ideas of independence and autonomy. The third chapter picks up a structuring idea raised in the introduction – decadence – to consider emerging psychologies of the will. Yeats, Wilde and Hardy appear in this discussion, but the theoretical frames come from Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Durkheim. The fourth chapter examines philanthropy and the ways in which ideas of individual responsibility and self-reliance mapped on to different understandings of elite-mass relations. Art education provides an interesting platform for this analysis. The last chapter, which includes a

discussion of Morris, examines how the ethics of individualism supported different conceptions of identity, internationalism and nationalism.

Gagnier's normative argument is threaded through these chapters and its force comes from the background account she gives of the rightward drift of European ideas towards the end of her period and a sustained critique of current systems of neo-liberal globalisation – the embodiment of a lop-sided individualism that Victorian individualists showed to be faulty. Knowing both where Europe went and where it now is, she presents a ideal relationship of part to whole that prioritises values of interdependence and mutual development; an ideal that is democratic rather than aristocratic, plural not uniform, distinctive not separatist and other- rather than self-regarding. It is cosmopolitan, but rooted in internationalism not Western exceptionalism. In developing this conception, Gagnier's aim is 'to keep alive models of freedom that are not confined to free markets, choice that is more than consumer choice, liberalism that is not neo-liberalism, and an individualism that is more than the maximization of self-interest' (163). As she says, Morris was also a great exponent of this conception, and her powerful re-statement of his principles is a joy to read.

Gagnier describes her approach as 'an analytic of part and whole' (163) and this makes sense of the organisation of the chapters. Her main claim indeed emerges from the interrelationship of the chapters, supported by the particular, detailed discussion of the individual writers, artists and philosophers contained within them. Yet there is another aspect to her approach which complicates the analysis but also provides a foundation for the greater picture of wholeness that she wants to present. This draws on the synthetic philosophy associated with Spencer, Darwin and others, which took ideas of organic development and the relatedness of all forms of life as a starting point for social scientific research. Gagnier highlights her enthusiasm for this approach in the introduction when she discusses contemporary biology: micro-metabolisms, global ecological and evolutionary time (12). At this stage, the significance of this work to her project is not entirely clear. Yet following the discussion of Morris, Gagnier returns to the themes of dynamic adaptation, relatedness and

complexity to show how the principles of part to whole that she seeks to defend rely on the recognition of the interplay between nature, culture and technology and the rejection of the methodological individualism that supports the neo-liberal project.

Given the aims of the book, it is not surprising that Gagnier prioritises the discussion of individualisms over the analysis of concepts of community, collectivism and so forth. The idea of wholeness emerges from the analysis of the parts and the ways in which Victorians and early twentieth-century figures conceptualised these balancing concepts is secondary to her purpose. Yet the effect of their neglect can be distorting. In the second chapter, for example, Gagnier argues that Grant Allen's The Woman Who Did was untypical of new woman literature because it 'represents a woman negating all relations'. Against this she says, 'Woman-created New Women were not so rigidly independent. They wanted autonomy, individual development, but they wanted it through relationship' (63). The rich survey she presents is persuasive in showing that this was generally the case. But it was not universally so. When Dora Marsden cut her ties with the anarchists, accusing them of being woolly humanitarians and adopted the label 'egoist', she did so precisely because she wanted to assert a principle of self-mastery that was limited only by will. In one of two brief notes, Gagnier mentions Marsden's journal the The Egoist as an antidote for those otherwise fearful of the mass and as a source of later strength for Nietzschean 'good Europeans' (115). Marsden's unattractive treatment of the 'heard' and the stupidity of common people are ignored. Was Marsden an extreme case, an exception who demonstrates a rule? Probably. Nevertheless her exceptionalism points to an important aspect of early feminism and radical individualism which Gagnier's discussion passes over lightly, namely the relationship between autonomy and commitment. Ideas of commitment and concomitant concepts of sacrifice and compassion were strong themes in late nineteenth-century socialist thought. The martyrdom of the Haymarket anarchists in 1887 was an inspiration in this respect, and the involvement of women in the Russian revolutionary cause was another. Reflections on both seeped into literature: penny dreadfuls as well as more serious work. Whilst the ideals that socialist martyrs embodied were sometimes considered

irreconcilable with autonomy – this was Marsden’s claim – others contested this view and interpreted them as heroic expressions of autonomy. This was Morris’s position: mastership was integral to fellowship. And Gagnier, too, makes this point at towards the end of the book when she discusses Morris’s cosmopolitanism: ‘we need to give up vulgar notions of socialism that see it as incompatible with individualism or with freedoms and choice that modern citizens have come to expect’ (150). However, the idea of commitment does not feature strongly in Gagnier’s discussion though it seems relevant to her ideas about ethics, and my feeling is that its analysis would have enriched the broader thematic claims that she wants to make.