

## Book Reviews

---

*Heritage in the Digital Era*, edited by Marionos Ioannides, Addison Alonzo, Andreas Georgopoulos, Loukas Kalisperis, Andre Brown and Denis Pitzalis, Brentwood: Multi-Science Publishing Co., 2010, paperback £58, pp. iv+258.

This volume of articles is a compilation of conference proceedings, which not only provides a useful record for people who attended the conference, but also offers useful insights into what was considered important enough to be discussed and debated within this discipline. The proceedings are from the *14<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Virtual Systems and MultiMedia (VSMM)*, which was held in Limassol, Cyprus in 2008 [website: <http://www.vsmm2008.org/>]. The conference was a collection of experts from around the world who presented on topics surrounding digital heritage. Many of the papers contained in this volume focus on very specific forms of digital heritage management, preservation, and the presentation of it to audiences. A specific focus is on the current emerging technologies used in heritage such as 3D images and digital reconstruction. A selection of articles also focuses on the network ability of sharing resources and information, such as Europeana.

Most of the projects are from Europe, specifically Italy, which has formed a reputation for digital reconstruction of its many archaeological sites, and from the United States. The specific projects described range from websites for public consumption, through Second Life communities, to guidelines for technical heritage creation. The underlying theme through all of them, and one would think through the 2008 conference as well, is the desire to preserve heritage sites for future generations through the latest technological means, from Mt. Rushmore to the Finnish World Fair Pavilion in Paris in 1900. Both Europeana and CULTNAT's databases are discussed as well in their ability to bring digitized culture to the world.

Unfortunately, this edited volume does suffer from a lack of signposting and the articles are not grouped within themes in any way. Though the articles are, generally, well written in a way that could be potentially understood by a layperson, the fact that many of the writers are composing in a foreign language is evident in the lack of editing and difficult grammatical style. In a few places this makes the articles themselves difficult to understand. However, in return, the articles are short and topic specific, with a good table of contents included at the beginning to assist the reader towards those papers that might be most useful to them. The use of illustrations and graphics is, in nearly every paper, quite well done; used specifically to showcase websites and digital recreations, both topics that are touched upon often in these papers.

The book itself is laid out to make use of every single page: a very brief introduction and table of contents leads right into the first article. The work could have benefitted from perhaps more explanation in the beginning, but more specifically I would have preferred if the articles were divided into topic sections rather than combined in no particular order within the book. One thing of use however, since this anthology lacks an index, is that each article is tagged by key words on the title page. Each paper also contains a good use of references, of particularly use to researchers wishing to delve further into the projects and the field at large.

As such, there is no narrative flow to this work, which no doubt reflects the conference. However, since most conferences are divided in some manner by topics, it is a wonder they did not do the same for this anthology of papers. However, for the professional working in the field of digital heritage, the case studies presented here are detailed in their successes (and failures) and would be a welcome point of reference for what museums and companies around the world have been working on in recent years. Though this work is for the 2008 conference, the VSMM

continues to be held annually, and it is hoped that more recent conferences have built upon the topics presented here. Even so, the information contained in these articles was clearly at the forefront of the heritage sector where digital systems are concerned.

Thinking about the audience for this text, this collection would be of use specifically to those in the field of digital heritage, but proves less useful for readers who may only have a casual or general interest in the subject and do not have the background to understand the more digitally specific elements.

This work would also be of use for students who have entered the field (such as those at the newly created United Kingdom Virtual Heritage School at <http://www.v-must.net/schools/united-kingdom-virtual-heritage-school> or the Heritage and Cultural Learning Hub at the University of Birmingham at <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/facilities/hclh/index.aspx>), as there are a number of computer programs and heritage recreations presented within these projects. For someone with a base line understanding of archaeological sites and how recreations are done, this would be a good work to use as a starting point to explore current efforts to make heritage available to the public, the academic and the professional through the latest technological advancements.

For professionals specifically, this work would give them an ability to see what projects have been undertaken, and how they have worked and would therefore be a useful read before similar projects are undertaken in the future.

Nonetheless this book is, like all conference proceedings that are published, a good addition to the literary world, although it could have done with tighter editing of papers and a clearly defined structure that lays out the themes covered in the papers. For the use of conference attendees who desired more information, and for the professional in digital heritage, this is a good compilation of recent projects in the sector from multiple countries.

University of Leicester

Amy Hetherington

*Museum Trouble: Edwardian Fiction and the Emergence of Modernism*, Ruth Hoberman, Charlottesville and London, University of Virginia Press, 2011, pp xxvi-236, Hardback £34.50, Cloth \$39.50

'Original', 'substantial', 'scholastically sound' and 'fascinating to read' are all statements adorning the back of Professor Ruth Hoberman's most recent book. Professor of English at Eastern Illinois University, specialising in *fin de siècle* literature and culture, Hoberman certainly has the pedigree for producing such a praiseworthy book. To bring into contact the museums and literatures of a particular period is certainly a worthwhile task, one not seen enough in the academic canons of either discipline. How much value Hoberman's text adds to this convergence of fields, however, remains open to debate. In the review which follows, the flaws and virtues of *Museum Trouble: Edwardian Fiction and the Emergence of Modernism* will be examined to assess whether it does, in fact, achieve its stated aim: 'to get a better understanding not of how museums work, but of how literary history and the institution of the museum intersect' (7).

A visually appealing and elegant volume, *Museum Trouble* is clearly the product of a great deal of varied research. The diverse images and the bibliography, which ranges from canonical museology texts, through the primary sources of William Henry Flowers and the Museums Association, to the literary and critical writings of authors as heterogeneous as Henry James and Virginia Woolf, attests to Hoberman's myriad research approach. She has drawn from such diverse writings, 'in an effort to convey the dynamism and conflict within museal discourse,' (20). However, here there is a tendency to make the interpretive field too flat – that is to say, all writings are treated equally, with no contextual distinctions made or real historiography conducted. Even more problematically, Hoberman's *interpretations* of these writings are presented in a way that implies their singularity, authority, and correctness. Hoberman's style is engaging and clear, remaining scholarly without falling into incomprehensible theoryspeak. Her approach combines history with comparative textual analysis and interpretation, seeking answers to the 'vexed' question of the relationship between museums, aesthetics and

the rise of modernism, and a better understanding of the 'subjective inscriptions' of individual museum visitors. Importantly, she does not claim to have uncovered precisely how 'actual people' experience museums, but treats this as a survey of how writers used museums to think through issues critical to them. She claims that disagreements and concerns of the turn of the century were made spatial and physical in the museum environment and that these concerns made their way into the *fin de siècle* literature upon which she is focussing here, later contributing to the rise of Modernism.

Hoberman situates her work well, giving a strong historical overview of the museum conditions in her introduction and referring back to it throughout the text. However, she also attempts to bring Edwardian fiction out of the shadow of both the nineteenth century and the modernists, to be seen as a distinct period in its own right. The assumption that literary movements are defined only by historical period goes unquestioned; with this, and the other uncritical approaches to her source material Hoberman is, ironically, disregarding one of the tenets of the idea of modernism – art's self-awareness of its 'precarious status and responsibilities' (Josipovici 2010: 11). Hoberman is often very successful in showing how Edwardian fiction reflected the concerns present in its contemporary museum and art institutions, dealing with such issues as value, expertise, the body and sexuality, empire, unity of knowledge and the imposition of authority both cultural and gendered. This is particularly apparent in chapters one, two and four, which hang together most cohesively as a single set, and in which the most solidly argued and evidenced arguments are made for the value of literary works as historical tools. Chapter four, 'Getting it Wrong: Museumgoers and Their Bodies', is particularly interesting and relevant to the museologist when taken as a historical study of issues current in the academic discourse of the present day – sensuality and sensory history, as well as the politics and ethics of embodiment, sexuality and gender in the museum context.

Though always well written, there are times when *Museum Trouble* feels too reflective, descriptive and musing, and less insightful and provocatively influential. It is made clear at the start that portions of this volume were initially written or apprehended for other purposes, and this makes itself felt in the lack of an overall narrative thread, structure or argument, and the dearth of a rich and substantive conclusion – there is a sense throughout the book that no one argument is being built upon or developed. This is heightened by such chapters as 'Museum Gothic: Objects that 'Tell'', for although it makes interesting philosophical points regarding the nature of material culture objects, it feels out of place, being quite different in tone and topical focus. It devotes itself far more to an argument for the existence of a genre and a description of its formation, and of all the chapters is perhaps the one most based on interpretation rather than evidence – or the treatment of interpretation as evidence, a problem endemic to this book.

In the final chapter, 'Museum Dreams', there is a section in which Hoberman describes Virginia Woolf's possible responses to the British Museum Reading Room and its refurbishment. Here, Hoberman places comparative worth upon her own interpretation of Woolf's use of the word 'dome' as she does upon the writer's more explicit critiques of patriarchy and gender bias. This interpretive slant is given its most emphatic play in her analysis of *To the Lighthouse*, in which she interprets Mrs Ramsey as a 'museum dream' herself; 'Reconfiguring beam and dome to emphasize their underlying ties to patriarchy and domesticity, Woolf imagines an emphatically embodied space conducive to a specifically female creativity' (189). This claim to know Woolf's mind is based on interpretation, the logic and academic context of which is never made entirely clear.

Whilst she does conduct some interesting analytical readings, such as her Baudrillardian-flavoured approach to the works of E. Nesbit, she also risks intentional fallacy and retrospective attribution of ideas and intentions. This is again related to *Museum Trouble's* tendency to treat all its sources identically – a problem if, as Hoberman has done, an author chooses to use both primary and secondary sources in multiple genre and literary forms, without distinguishing those forms or highlighting their flaws and benefits. There is, as a result, a lack of clarity as to the central source basis and the focus of argument throughout, and this certainly plays into many of the aforementioned flaws of this volume.

There is much to be commended in *Museum Trouble* – deep and broad research and a solid writing style. But it presents more a comparative survey than a true study of the intersection between museums and literature, these media presented as mirrors, rather than

as combinatory melting pots. In the end, it is too safe and underwhelming. Though it highlighted some literary works in which museum academics and practitioners might be interested, it made no innovative argument, no demand for analytical and academic development. 'Scholarly' it certainly is in parts, but it is also highly interpretive and at times, therefore, deeply flawed as a piece of historiography. For scholarship to move forward, more excitement and commitment to disruption combined with solidly evidenced statements and theoretical structure is needed than *Museum Trouble*, for all its merits, offers.

## Reference

Josipovici, G. (2010) *Whatever Happened to Modernism?*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press

University of Leicester

Jennifer Walklate

Pinning Down The Past: Archaeology, Heritage and Education Today, Mike Corbishley, Heritage Matters Series: volume 5. Boydell Press, Woodbridge. ISBN 9781843836780 Hard Back, 384 pages, numerous illustrations. £25.

For more than 40 years, Mike Corbishley has been at the forefront of educating people about the value of archaeology, first as a teacher, then with the Council for British Archaeology as its Education Officer. Moving on to English Heritage as Head of its Education Service, he was instrumental in introducing free educational visits to their sites, an enlightened policy that has embedded school visits to heritage sites as a common element in teaching across the U.K. Currently, he is running a module on Education in Archaeology at University College London that continues to foster work of the highest quality.

Given this background, it is unsurprising to find that this substantial volume in the *Heritage Matters* series is packed with practical advice on how to incorporate archaeology into all elements of teaching and the curriculum. The advice is backed up by case studies presented in boxed text format ranging across the UK but also Europe and Merv in Turkmenistan. While there is an undoubted wealth and richness of experience captured here that is unlikely ever to be paralleled, this reviewer worries that the volume is not entirely successful in achieving what it sets out to do. Knowing the author, there is an awareness that he will want this volume to be read widely by those involved in teaching at all levels – not just in schools but also in museums and in adult education classes – but the intended audience is likely to be put off by two elements. First, the book is a daunting proposition. Nearly 400 pages long, I find it difficult to believe that busy professionals will find the time to use it. Second, there is not enough guidance on how to use the book. Despite its size, the text is very readable although the design, using boxes of text and case studies at the end of chapters, perhaps makes the text over-fussy. On reading the chapters it becomes clear that the best way to use the book is to dip in and read individual chapters relating to the subject area you are interested in or that you are teaching. This is especially so for those working in the museum context who might not find the site-based sections useful, but will certainly benefit from reading those chapters relating to museums-based education. One fears, however, that this volume will be perceived as being of benefit solely to archaeologists and teachers. In actuality, educators based in most museums will find something of benefit and interest to them in engaging children with the historic environment but they just may not realise it unless they read it. This is an enormous pity and I hope that I am proved wrong: setting the price at the remarkably low level it is will certainly help it to find an audience.

In terms of production, it is clear that enormous care has been taken with the text. Despite its size, the volume has remarkably few errors and is extremely readable, not using the baffling language that can sometimes assault those outside the profession reading archaeological works. The sole exception is on p.52 where a sentence referring to a CBA (Council for British Archaeology) survey of programmes is clearly incomplete. Even so, the sense is still clear.

Mistakes too are rare: on p.259 the area of Merv is given the wrong totals, which have been ascribed to hectares and acres and should be reversed to make sense, but I struggle to find more examples.

I earnestly hope that this book does find the audience it deserves as it is witty, well-written and full of passion for its subject. In this, it reflects its author who has dedicated his working life to make archaeology interesting and relevant to so many people.

Ironbridge International Institute for Cultural Heritage

Roger White