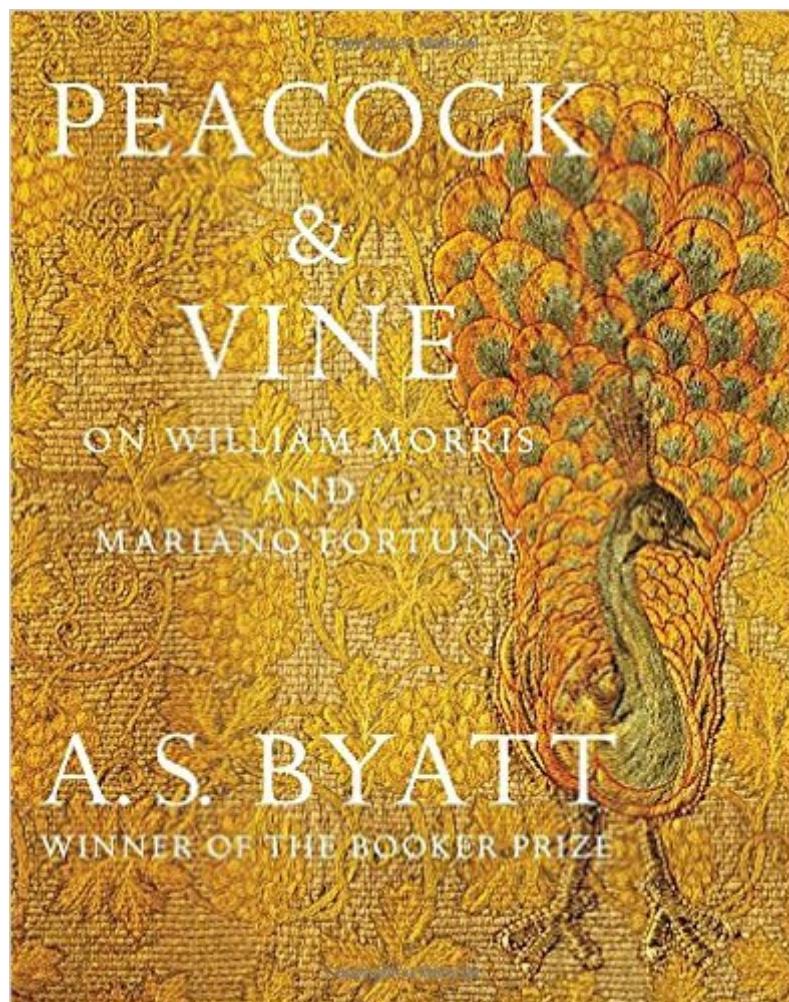


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Peacock & Vine: On William Morris And Mariano Fortuny



Synopsis

From the winner of the Booker Prize: A ravishing book that opens a window into the lives, designs, and passions of Mariano Fortuny and William Morris, two remarkable artists who themselves are passions of the writer A. S. Byatt. Born a generation apart in the mid-1800s, Fortuny and Morris were seeming opposites: Fortuny a Spanish aristocrat thrilled by the sun-baked cultures of Crete and Knossos; Morris a member of the British bourgeoisie, enthralled by Nordic myths. Through their revolutionary inventions and textiles, both men inspired a new variety of art that is as striking today as when it was first conceived. In this elegant meditation, Byatt traces their genius right to the source. Fortuny's Palazzo Pesaro Orfei in Venice is a warren of dark spaces imbued with the rich hues of Asia. In his attic workshop, Fortuny created intricate designs from glowing silks and velvets; in the palazzo he found happiness in a glittering cavern • alongside the French model who became his wife and collaborator, including on the famous "Delphos" dress • a flowing, pleated gown that evoked the era of classical Greece. Morris's Red House outside London, with its Gothic turrets and secret gardens, helped inspire his stunning floral and geometric patterns; it likewise represented a coming together of life and art. But it was a "sweet simple old place" • called Kelmscott Manor in the countryside that he loved best • even when it became the setting for his wife's love affair with the artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Generously illustrated with the artists' beautiful designs • pomegranates and acanthus, peacock and vine • among other aspects of their worlds, this marvel-filled book brings the visions and ideas of Fortuny and Morris to vivid life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Peacock & Vine” is a long essay in which the author compares and contrasts Morris and Fortuny and their art. Both men were polymaths who were designers and artists who worked in several media. Fortuny is best known today for his ingeniously permanently pleated dresses that were totally different from the fashions of his day; Morris is known as a pre-Raphaelite who set about to bring beauty to the homes of everyone with beautiful rugs, wallpaper, and fabrics. Both also painted and had amazing energy. They never interacted; they lived a generation apart and in different countries, but they shared a work ethic and love for beauty. This work does not go deep enough to be a dual biography; it’s more about how the work of these men affected Byatt. She admits that their art made her think deeply about making an artistic mark upon the world. This is a little jewel box of a book; the front of the dust jacket is a Morris tapestry (with peacock) in warm umbers and golds while the back is a painting of Fortuny’s studio. A huge number of photographs illuminate the text. And, as always, Byatt’s writing is lush and beautiful. There is one odd spot; in the section “Pomegranate” (a motif used by both Morris and Fortuny quite a lot) she states that Morris’s first attempt at painting pomegranates didn’t turn out well; they look more like lemons. The piece in question actually *does* have pomegranates, in the upper right hand corner; below that are, indeed, lemons—you can tell not just by the shape & color but by the thorns on the branch; in the lower left are peaches, and in the upper left are oranges. I find it odd that the author didn’t catch that.

The book reads like the most luscious of love poems to both Fortuny and Morris and their passion for fabrics, design, nature and symbols. A.s. Byatt is here at her best.

Anything by A.S. Byatt is excellent.

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