

mentality. 'Because "middle-classness" resided in such attributes, attendance at concerts and exhibitions became more than a pleasure: it was her work, and she took it seriously.' Such seriousness of purpose extended even to shopping and entertainment – all of which were crucial signifiers in the development of a distinctive middle-class identity.

Such a methodological approach is certainly welcome within the existing literature on the Victorian urban world which all too frequently underplays the relationship of women to the public sphere. Yet within this rewarding social history, the authors occasionally overplay their hand. For outside of philanthropy, Glasgow's mid-Victorian civic scene, as with so many other nineteenth-century cities, remained determinedly male. This had begun to shift by the latter decades of the century, and Gordon and Nair are right to draw attention to the acceleration of female civic

engagement, but the leaders of civil society, the elected councillors, the urban iconography – even the public rhetoric – were consciously male in their civic republican, or later municipal socialist, ambitions.

Within the authors' time frame, there is also room for doubt about attributing such a strong role to female involvement in the initial creation of middle-class identity. By the 1880s and 1890s, it was perhaps more a question of class affirmation rather than rhetorical or cultural construction. Nonetheless, Gordon and Nair have produced a highly scholarly and readable history which not only qualifies some of the traditional analyses of the period, but also contributes to the growing body of work on the Victorian middle class which makes the subject one of the most exciting areas of cultural, social and intellectual history today.

Tristram Hunt

The Dominion of the Dead

Robert Pogue Harrison

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ROBERT POGUE HARRISON'S *The Dominion of the Dead*, says its cover, poses a few clear questions. How do the living maintain relations to the dead? Why do we bury people when they die? And what is at stake when we do? What Harrison really explores is how dead people and dead things live among us and determine who we are and what we do, and why and how we let them exert their influence.

Harrison correctly argues that the dead 'indwell' in almost everything human: 'graves, homes, laws, words, images, dramas, rituals, monuments, and the archives of literature'. To be human is to bury, for, as Vico observes, '*humanitas* in Latin comes first and properly from *humando*, burying'.

Harrison's scope is wide. He tracks the dead from primitive man and early cities to the twentieth century, in Homeric Greece Vergilian epic, Renaissance literature, nineteenth-century Sardinian mourning ritual, and the philosophy of Kant and Heidegger. He demonstrates that from well before recorded human

history onward, the dead have controlled the living.

Harrison offers an astute reading of the famous confrontation between the Lycian Glaucus and the Greek warrior Diomedes in Homer's *Iliad*. He links the genealogical obliteration of Glaucus with the radical form of memorialisation of dead soldiers in Maya Lin's Vietnam veterans' memorial in Washington, D.C.

It is unfair to fault a book for something it does not intend to do. But someone needs to treat the big cultural changes regarding death identified in Michael Lesy's *The Forbidden Zone* (1987). We are now in a period where, arguably for the first time in history, human beings are encouraged to avoid thinking seriously about death and where the memorialisation of people and things dead is discouraged.

Students of warfare may consider Harrison's writing style irreverent or silly. He knows that the subject of death forced Joseph Conrad and Abraham Lincoln to

think and write simply and clearly. Soldiers in Vietnam described death with the three words 'There it is'. Yet his writing is emptily abstract and opaque, e.g. 'As images of posterity [ruins] reveal the primordiality of the temporal law that holds sway over their obsolescence.'

This is unfortunate because Harrison has fine things to say. In discussing an incident in Conrad's *The Mirror of the Sea* where the sea swallows quickly and completely a foundering Danish brig, he observes that from Homer onward the sea is an awful 'irresponsible power', a force 'defiant of any and all humanization' in the literal sense of humanity as defined by Vico.

Navy men fighting in the Pacific in the Second World War (Paul Fussell, *The Boys' Crusade*) had the same response: 'Out here the war life was all there was: no history was visible, no

monuments of the past, no cities remembered from books.' And no trace of the dead to give their lives meaning.

Tom Palaima

The Motoring Age The Automobile and Britain, 1896-1939

Peter Thorold

Profile Books x + 294pp £20 ISBN 1 861 97378 0

Drive On! A Social History of the Motor Car

L.E.T. Setright

Granta Books ix + 400pp £25 ISBN 1 862 07628 6

CARRIAGE FOLK' was a label with a clear social message in 1900. It was an easily understood way of depicting the upper class and the privileged status of those who owned, or controlled, their own personal transport. A hundred years later 'car folk' or 'motorist' had no social meaning whatever. It seemed as if everyone had a car, or soon would have, and notwithstanding that there was no such thing as society 'the great car society' embraced by Margaret Thatcher was perceived as socially inclusive.

Status might attach to particular kinds of car; one might be able to read social

class or aspiration into a Rolls or Mercedes, for example. But a car as such