

‘Almost as good as Iceland on a small scale’: William Morris’s ‘Icelandic Imaginary’ at home

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In his 1899 biography, J. W. Mackail observed that William Morris’s travel to Iceland exerted ‘an importance in Morris’s life which can hardly be over-estimated’. Ever since, scholars and biographers have been fascinated by Morris’s Icelandic journeys (1871 and 1873), as recorded in his *Journals of Travels in Iceland*.¹ As is well known, Morris’s passion for the saga literature of Iceland underpinned his preference for the austere north over the balmy south, a preference which marked him out as an atypical Victorian tourist although, as Peter Preston has noted, the nineteenth century did see increasing numbers of visitors to Iceland and the appearance of published accounts of their journeys (such as Anthony Trollope’s *How the Mastiffs Went to Iceland* in 1878).² While much attention has been given to the impact of his Iceland experience on Morris’s subsequent literary output,³ in this article I wish to sketch the impact of Morris’s Icelandic travels on a more homely scale. In particular, I will consider whether Morris’s fascination with the ‘otherness’ of Icelandic culture, demonstrated both by his Icelandic journals and the artefacts with which he returned, constituted an early example of an attempt to ‘think globally, act locally’ which brought about an altered understanding of home which also influenced the rest of the family. In the wake of recent scholarship which has critically interrogated the ways in which foreign cultures were ‘woven deeply into the texture of English domesticity’ through the incorporation of material objects,⁴ I will explore whether the reception of Icelandic artefacts in the Morris home differed from that exhibited by other Victorian middle-class households, where exotic objects were re-located from colonial or imperial contexts.

Speculating on the ways in which Morris’s immersion in Icelandic culture may have influenced the everyday life of the family, I propose to employ the concept of an ‘Icelandic imaginary’, a term which may require some explanation.

The concept of ‘the imaginary’ has been employed in varying ways by a range of thinkers, from Jacques Lacan to Cornelius Castoriadis, but my usage here corresponds most closely to that formulation of the ‘cultural imaginary’ which Graham Dawson has described as a ‘vast [network] of interlinking discursive themes, images, motifs and narrative forms’ shared by a culture or social grouping, providing a conceptual frame of reference which shapes both the group’s social knowledge, and their internal, psychic lives.⁵ I am suggesting that, in the case of the Morris family, Icelandic literature and culture provided one such network of themes, images, stories, objects, even feelings or states of mind, that the family came to share – in different forms and to varying degrees – but which nevertheless constituted a set of resources, both cultural and emotional, which influenced the inner lives of family members, the dynamics between them, and their perspective on the world beyond the home. As May Morris would later write, reflecting on her introduction to Icelandic literature and culture as a child, ‘we certainly had good material for dreaming ourselves into another life than our own’.⁶ If such exposure to cultural difference enriched the imaginative scope of childhood for the Morris daughters, I will suggest, it also possessed the potential to influence their perspective on a world beyond the home domain.

The question of perspective – in a literal as well as a metaphorical or conceptual sense – was a recurring concern in William Morris’s reflections on his Icelandic journeys. Not only were they themselves unsettling, a sharp disruption from the normal routines of his daily life, but they also seem to have unsettled Morris’s sense of his place in the world, the stability of the location from which he assessed the world around him. Where did he stand? How could he evaluate the experience of travel in such an unfamiliar landscape, outside his usual frame of reference? Writing to Louisa Baldwin days after his return to England in 1871, Morris already questioned both the reliability of his recollections and the capacity of a retrospective account (even one based on his own journal entries) to provide a valuable rendering of his experience:

... it is true that the journey was altogether successful, and that I think I have gained in many ways by it; but it seems such a long way off now, and there is a bit of one’s life gone; and the world so much narrower to me because of it.⁷

Did the journey widen or narrow the world for Morris? Did his journal entries keep the events fresh in the present, or would the process of turning them into a narrative account distance Morris from his own experience? This problem of perspective – of finding a fixed or reliable position from which he could both accurately narrate his travels and evaluate the ways in which the experience of Iceland had changed him – was something which Morris represented differently at separate times. And so it is not perhaps surprising that, in recent years, scholars have debated the global or cosmopolitan impulse in Morris’s writing.

For example, in her account of what she calls his 'situated cosmopolitanism', Regenia Gagnier describes Morris's persistent depiction of humans as 'distinctly embedded in thick but always interdependent environments'.⁸ Tanya Agathocleous, on the other hand, detects a contradiction in Morris's critique of global modernity, arguing that his 'focus on archaic local customs, dress and language' represents 'the local transcend[ing] the global', fixing place and race in a form of essentialism which does not sufficiently acknowledge cultural or ethnic diversity.⁹ While much of this recent critical discussion has focused on *News from Nowhere*, his journeys to Iceland – long before Morris wrote his 'utopian' novel – saw him already attempting to understand the ways in which collective and individual identities could be sustained in an increasingly inter-connected world. What was it that anchored people to place, history and community when physical mobility was accelerating and the horizon of experience was expanding? And was there an ethical dimension to such anchoring, or, in Gagnier's terms, 'situatedness'?

Evaluating these wider concerns in relation to Morris's Icelandic travels is, of course, further complicated by his personal circumstances at the time of his first Icelandic journey. He left for Iceland shortly after he had taken a joint lease of Kelmscott Manor with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, thus leaving Rossetti and Jane alone (with the children and servants) for the summer of 1871, a circumstance which many have seen as his chief motivation for the trip. Morris, however, articulated other reasons for his journey. In a letter dated prior to his departure, in which he referred to himself as a 'stay-at-home', Morris wrote of Iceland: 'there is nothing to interest most people there but its strangeness and wildness; yet I have felt for so long that I must go there and see the background of the stories for wh: I have so much sympathy'.¹⁰ Morris's journey, then, was framed by contradictory impulses from the outset: he envisaged Iceland as hostile and inhospitable – in terms of weather and landscape, as well as the physical hardship and rigours of travel there – but, at the same time, as familiar and welcoming, through his knowledge of Icelandic literature and through the experiences of kindness and generosity in Icelandic homes and communities which his journal would later enumerate.

Described by his daughter May as a man 'deeply-rooted in the home life',¹¹ Morris opens his *Journals of Travel in Iceland* with a lengthy description of his reluctance to leave British shores, devoting some pages to his journey from home prior to sailing from Scotland in a narrative pause or delay which registers a profound ambivalence about travel. A similar ambivalence is evident in the caricature drawn by Edward Burne-Jones after Morris's return from Iceland in 1871, entitled 'Home Again: William Morris sitting bored in an armchair', in which the intrepid traveller is once more safely ensconced at home but already looking bored and unsettled. Much of the humour here derives from the disjuncture between the caption, speaking of a restless desire for activity and movement, and

the sitter whose ample proportions seem perfectly matched by the over-stuffed chair on which he fidgets. Like the armchair, the upturned glass at Morris's feet indexically signifies domestic comforts – the well-stocked cellar of the Morris household was noted by contemporaries – but the sitter does not seem comforted by such cosy abundance now he is 'Home Again'.

The contradictions Burne-Jones's caricature mocked were also evident in Morris's *Journals*. Like other travel journals, these are rich in detailed observations of the landscape and encounters with local people, but previous scholars have also commented on the unusual features of Morris's account.¹² They are perhaps Morris's most introspective piece of prose writing and present an ambivalent narratorial perspective which shifts from an almost impersonal recording of scenes and events to direct addresses to the reader, from emotionally-charged positive representations of Icelandic culture and landscape to expressions of revulsion or alienation in response to the foreign terrain and the dangers of the journey. Morris often expresses a profound sense of homesickness, which Karen Herbert has described as a 'two-fold pull – backward to Kelmscott and the domestic and forward to Iceland and the heroic'¹³ – provoked by moments when he had failed to register an emotional connection with a place he had so longed to see. While Morris's response to the Icelandic landscape is frequently framed by his knowledge of saga literature, the narratorial persona of the *Journals* emphasises the contrast between the heroic past and his own 'unheroic' mode of travelling as his physical and emotional resources are repeatedly tested by the hazards and hardships of the journey.¹⁴ Throughout his account, Morris portrays himself as clumsy, unathletic and inept, prone to losing vital travel equipment – including the journal notebook itself at one point – and excessively concerned with domestic comforts, such that he becomes solely responsible for the cooking and provisioning of the touring party.

The unflattering depictions and persistent awareness of his own limitations in an environment which 'modern life [had] never reached'¹⁵ did not, however, preclude Morris's attention to the hardships of life experienced by Icelanders, giving the *Journals* a strong sense of immediacy, grounded in the present of daily existence and events. As May Morris recounted in her Introduction, her father 'was moved by the Iceland of to-day as well as by the Iceland of the past, his interest keenly aroused by a place which the currents of commercial life swept by leaving it unchanged'.¹⁶ Morris's awareness of the poverty and 'incessant privations of the Icelanders', moreover, was also grounded in the realisation that this remote, foreign place was subject to the intrusion of 'foreigners' – as May Morris terms them ('the French principally, I think', she continues) – whose superior marine technology allowed them to monopolise the 'abundant harvest of the deep-sea fishing', a resource the Icelanders could ill afford to relinquish.¹⁷ First-hand observation strongly impressed upon Morris that late nineteenth-century

Iceland was unavoidably connected to an increasingly global maritime economy in which the islanders were poorly-equipped to compete. However mixed the motives may have been behind Morris's journey, then, his Icelandic travels were not an escape but a means to learn the *inescapability* of connections to others, near and far, for good or ill, through the physical circumstances of travel.

If the *Journals* depicted the limitations of self-reliance – in such a harsh environment, May Morris observed, 'rigorous hospitality [becomes] a necessity'¹⁸ – they also, however, articulated Morris's desire for 'that thin thread of insight and imagination which comes so seldom to us, and is such a joy when it comes' which he associates with the solitary contemplation of the Icelandic landscape.¹⁹ As Philippa Bennett has noted, *Journals of Travel in Iceland* at times registers Morris's unease with mountainous landscapes which mark an ambivalence about the sublime as a means to epiphany.²⁰ At the same time, these landscapes also seem to represent for Morris the transcendence of the self, or at least a heightened awareness of its limitations. Calling the self into question in this way also seemed to bring Morris back to a sense of connection with the world: the 'insight and imagination' he sought was not a solipsistic, inward-looking phenomenon but an imaginative awareness which could be shared and communicated through the literary rendering of his experience.

For Morris, there was a continuity of purpose, a desire to transcend what he saw as the temptation of self-absorption, in any location: just as travel was not a means of escape so, on his return to England, the domestic was not a space of retreat. Morris's 'Icelandic imaginary' at home was a means by which he sought to retain the insights he had gained on his journeys, with the result that at times he seems to describe a form of cognitive estrangement arising from this new perspective: he saw England framed by Iceland and the familiar now seemed lacking in comparison. In letters written on his return, the frame of reference for such comparisons is (understandably) often geographical or meteorological, but the differences he observes in the natural environments of the two countries allow him to continue thinking about his own altered sense of self. Iceland had given Morris a new frame of reference for describing not only the mundanities of weather or landscape but a new understanding of – and distance from – what he called 'ones [*sic*] grumbling life'.²¹ On one occasion, as Morris described in a letter to Aglaia Coronio, the sight of the night sky at home recalled Iceland: 'tonight all my travel there [in Iceland] seemed to come back on me, made solemn and elevated in one moment, till my heart swelled with the wonder of it'.²² In this instance, the sublime – represented by the 'wonder' of the solitary viewer, dwarfed by the scale and distance of the stars – brings Iceland and England together through the observer's emotional response ('my heart swelled'). Iceland, then, marked a watershed in Morris's self-understanding and his sense of how to engage with the world while at home, a response which went beyond the traveller's insights into

a new and different place, to become an aspiration to register an ethical relation which connected every domain of life, near or far. As Harvey and Press observe, after 1871 Morris seemed to be ‘a man increasingly eager to take part in the affairs of the everyday world’.²³

Morris’s fascination with the material culture of the past was an important means by which he sought to maintain an ethical connection with the larger social world which began at home. He attended closely to the proximate without precluding awareness of a wider web of obligation, connection or influence, both past and present. The William Morris Gallery now includes over thirty items Morris brought back from Iceland (originally donated by Mary Lobb, after the death of May Morris), including silverware, an embroidered bodice, slippers, and carved horn objects, although it is known that he brought back a great deal more. The assumption that an interest in the archaic – in customs, dress and language – is synonymous with a kind of aesthetic detachment or cultural essentialism is, I think, challenged by Morris’s attachment to Icelandic material culture. Such artefacts bore the mark of the hands and lives of others – the craftspeople who had made them, the women and men whose everyday practices were shaped by their usage – and while they had been removed from their context of origin, they were not necessarily de-historicised by their relocation. Such traces of Icelandic culture were always for Morris a physical embodiment of relations between people, objects and landscape grounded in the specificity of time and place, and their presence in his own home was a daily reminder of alterity in the midst of the everyday. Morris’s focus on specificity and particularity was not at the expense of a global or cosmopolitan perspective, but provided a means of emphasising the differences as well as the connections between cultures within Victorian modernity and, more particularly, within the intimate spaces of everyday life.

For those who had remained at home, however, without the benefit of first-hand observation and cross-cultural encounters which the traveller had experienced, how were the ‘handicrafts of the Island’, particularly the silver-work and embroideries, to be understood and apprehended?²⁴ How did the rest of the Morris family – Jane, Jenny and May – respond to the traces of Icelandic culture, displaced from their original context of production and usage, and now encountered at home? Jenny and May Morris were already familiar with the literary culture of Iceland, but on their father’s return in 1871 he brought back ‘silver girdles’ and ‘embroidered bodices’ for his daughters to wear.²⁵ May’s recollections imply that such gifts were not merely dress-up items but were incorporated as part of ordinary dress and – given that the Morris girls were known for their unusual, if not eccentric, dress compared to more typical middle-class girls’ fashion – these exotic additions would not necessarily be anomalous with other elements of their attire.

Morris’s most valued gift to his daughters, however, was an Icelandic pony

named Mouse whom Morris had ridden during the first journey and who became much loved by the family. While a pony may be unremarkable as the object of a Victorian girl's affections, May's account of Mouse gives a powerful sense of his dislocation, as a 'lonely little beastie' who she imagined missed the 'frolic and incident and hard life' to which he was accustomed.²⁶ According to May, Mouse would habitually occupy a corner of the field with the best view of the road and its horse traffic, where 'he stood ... day-long with his head stretched forward, the very type of a philosopher who had known the world.'²⁷ In an anecdote related by Mackail, May further described the consequences of Mouse's loneliness in his new environment:

[Mouse] got enormously fat on our coarse thick plentiful English grass, with little to do; and I used to imagine him lonely, and yearning for the fun and clatter and hardships of his Iceland life among his friends. ... One day, when the hunt passed through our home-meadows, the excitement of horses and hounds was too much for the lonely philosopher; he threw up his head and, fat as he was, bundled over a hedge and actually followed the hounds a good way.²⁸

Mouse's isolation at Kelmscott was, then, two-fold: not only separated from his native environment, he also suffered from isolation from others of his species. May does not, however, note any deficiencies in the family's treatment of the pony and she stresses that Mouse's life was far better than the more typical fate of imported Icelandic ponies – an underground existence working in British coal mines 'where they never saw daylight again'.²⁹ While the Morris girls may have learned some hard truths about the global traffic in animals through the gift of a pony, May's account also implies that the 'otherness' of Mouse – marked by his foreign origin and his species difference – provided some insight into what Donna Haraway calls 'ethical relating, within or between species'.³⁰ At odds with the concept of ownership, an ideal of reciprocity between human and animal is expressed through the child-like sense of a preternatural connection with the pony May described. 'He was no mere animal in the Kelmscott life', she recalled, 'but a personality, and we children often exchanged wistful glances with him, wishing the stupid barrier between three playmates might be removed'.³¹ There is, nevertheless, an ambivalence in these recollections of Mouse, not least owing to their melancholy tone which gives a hint that there may not have been such a clear distinction between her father's benign appropriation of an exotic animal and the nefarious purposes of mine owners. In rare moments like these in her *Introductions*, there is the barest suggestion that the adult reflecting on her childhood experience may see things more critically than she did then but May refrains from any explicit criticism of her parents, especially her father.

At times in her introductions to her father's *Collected Works*, May offers a form of autobiography in which, paradoxically, the daughter forges a distinctive

self-identity through the influence of her father's forceful ideas and personality. It is a strikingly persistent feature of the Morris family dynamics that May shadowed her father's interests – in literature, design and politics – and so her shared affinity for Iceland was in keeping with this pattern of emotional identification. Icelandic culture permeated her daily life as a child, not only through what she could physically see or touch – from a pony to items of dress – but through the imaginative resources her knowledge of Icelandic literature provided. It was after her father returned from Iceland, for instance, that May recounts taking up the habit of 'roof-riding like Glam at Thorhall-stead' (from *The Story of Grettir the Strong* that her father had translated with Eiríkr Magnússon), by which she meant climbing astride the gabled roofs of Kelmescott Manor, much to her mother's distress.³² Never restricted by narrow views of feminine decorum in her upbringing, May here shows how the imaginative resources of her literary education at home allowed her even further liberties in enlarging her scope of play activities to include the kind of physical adventuring more typical during this period of boys than girls. While she notes her mother's fears for her safety on this occasion, it is interesting that May does not record any reprimand for her re-enactment of heroic endeavours on the grounds of inappropriate feminine behaviour. During the late 1870s, when, as a teenager, May travelled to Italy for the first time with her mother and sister as the guests of the Howard family, May also employed an Icelandic frame of reference in order to push the boundaries of socially acceptable behaviour. Rosalind Howard confided in a letter that 'somehow the [Morris] girls do not take so kindly to Italy as I hoped & May the youngest said to-day she would rather be in Iceland!'³³ May had, of course, never been to Iceland, so her declaration – as well as being a rather adolescent response to the hospitality of others – was a statement of affiliation with her (absent) father while also distinguishing herself from her mother who was passionate about the beauties and benefits of Italy and who, after this first visit, returned regularly to escape English winters, sometimes accompanied by Jenny.³⁴

Jane Morris's love of Italy did not, however, preclude her own attention to Icelandic culture. In two sketches which post-date Morris's travels to Iceland, Rossetti depicted Jane wearing Icelandic dress, doubtless gifts from her husband. Her long history of modelling for the artist necessitated wearing a variety of costumes so it is impossible to judge whether these Icelandic dress sketches reflected Jane Morris's everyday apparel or an exotic variation for the artist to capture. In the first, she wears an Icelandic blouse with its distinctive embroidery patterning, together with the kind of decorative silver work on the high-waisted girdle which was also typical of traditional Icelandic dress. Rossetti's sketch is almost ethnographic in that the focus seems as much on capturing the detail of the exotic elements of costume as the distinctive physical features of Jane Morris, as described by Virginia Surtees:

In Icelandic dress, three-quarter-length, [she is] seated on a sofa facing to front, wearing a long-sleeved embroidered bodice and a full skirt gathered at the waist into a metal girdle which rises to a pointed yolk fastened with ornamental clasps.³⁵

The second sketch, however, much more impressionistic in style, was also very different in tone. This time, the folds and fullness of the Icelandic blouse echo the sinuous positioning of Jane's arms (one thrown back, above her head, the better to display the shape of her neck as she leans back against a sofa cushion with closed eyes), and the pose is more in keeping with other Rossetti sketches stressing the languorous sensuality of the sitter. Jane wears no belt or girdle, so the blouse falls in drapes more suggestive of a chemise or nightdress than day clothes. Clothed in signifiers of her husband's travels, Jane's dress symbolically represents Morris's absence from Kelmscott and, in these sketches, Icelandic dress thus became part of the currency through which the fraught emotional dynamics linking Jane, Morris and Rossetti were conveyed.³⁶

If Rossetti's sketches cannot provide objective verification of Jane Morris's own feelings and attitudes, however, another association between her and Iceland sheds a somewhat different light on her connection with the island which so fascinated her husband. A letter she wrote during the summer of 1882 reveals that she was involved, together with Morris, in forming a committee for Icelandic famine relief (an extreme winter had been followed by a cold summer, devastating agriculture on the island). While the name of William Morris attracted more high-profile support, such as from the Lord Mayor of London and the Danish ambassador, Jane seems to have sought to raise subscriptions for the fund among her friends and acquaintances.³⁷

This admittedly isolated reference to an interest in Icelandic affairs by Jane raises more questions than it answers. To what extent was Iceland an ongoing topic of interest and conversation in the household? How extensive was Jane's knowledge of Iceland? And how deep was her commitment to the cause? As is so often the case with aspects of Jane Morris's life, the remaining fragmentary evidence precludes full understanding from emerging. As I have argued elsewhere,³⁸ however, the degree to which Morris and Jane shared opinions, values and ideas has often been underestimated, as has her degree of engagement with current affairs and issues of her day, and it therefore seems unlikely that she would have involved herself in a campaign to which she had no personal sense of commitment.

For the women of the Morris family, then, Iceland remained an imaginary location: never seen or experienced first-hand, its presence was nonetheless felt in varying ways within the domain of everyday life. In her introduction to *Journals of Travel in Iceland*, May Morris described the impact of her father's journeys on

the family thus: 'Iceland, till then a spot on the map that one often forgot to draw in, ... and so far off it didn't matter ... became and has been ever since a real thing, at once overpoweringly beautiful and overpoweringly melancholy'.³⁹ Morris, we might say, 'drew' Iceland in for his family in two ways. First, he brought a distant and foreign location close to home and gave it a conscious proximity within a global perspective. At the same time, he 'drew' in Iceland in another sense: as an aesthetic construction imbued with an emotional resonance, embodied in the material objects he brought home as well as the stories to which he introduced his family. Previously unfamiliar cultural objects and practices were incorporated into a home environment where the aesthetic was always privileged and in which there was already an unusually heightened awareness of the contexts of production and consumption in daily life. We might say, then, that a dual perspective – in which domestic objects or homely practices were understood as connected to larger networks of cultural reciprocity – was encouraged in the Morris household, from the Red House days onwards.

Morris's 'Icelandic imaginary' was not, however, without its blind spots. His journals are silent on the question of Iceland's colonial status – an omission which is puzzling, given Morris's anti-imperialist, anti-nationalist politics, even prior to his conversion to socialism. And the presence of the melancholy Mouse, his adopted name suggesting that he has been reduced in scale by his transplantation to the bucolic ease of Kelmscott, may strike a discordant note with twenty-first century readers more sensitive to the ethics of animal well-being and the trade in exotic species. But while Morris aestheticised Iceland for his family, the meanings or connotations associated with this place were not fixed: from one perspective, Iceland could seem distant or insignificant; from another, it could also make home seem tame by comparison, lacking the grandeur of 'the terrible & tragic' which Morris found in Iceland, a reminder that perspective can shift dramatically according to one's location and awareness of the co-existence of other lives.

In a typically humorous letter to his family, Morris once described Kelmscott Manor beset by flooding and torrential rain as 'almost as good as Iceland on a small scale'.⁴⁰ The country home which May called their own 'Earthly Paradise' and which many others warmly described as a place of tranquillity and hospitality, is here compared with the wild terrain and unforgiving conditions of Iceland. While proximity to the river meant that Kelmscott Manor was (and still is) prone to flooding, Morris's image measured home against a wild and distant place in terms he hoped his family would find both amusing and reassuring (it's *almost* Iceland, but it's not). In a sense, Morris's immersion in Icelandic culture always provided a scale against which he could measure (and critically evaluate) both global modernity and English domesticity and understand the imbrication of the two. At the same time, it also provided a set of shared references and allusions which permeated the mundane aspects of family life, showing the ways in which

the ordinary and the exotic, the aesthetic and the workaday, the serious and the humorous, were always inter-related in the Morris household.

If nineteenth-century Iceland provides another instance of the ways in which Victorians appropriated foreign cultures, through the incorporation of the literature and material artefacts of other places in their homes, and the increasing scale of global travel and tourism, it also demonstrated the permeability of boundaries – of self, of nation – which such expanded horizons made possible. In the same year that May Morris had declared her preference for Iceland to a dismayed Rosalind Howard, Thomas Hardy – in the opening chapter of *The Return of the Native* – noted an emerging shift in the sensibilities of modern travel:

The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the mournful sublimity of a moor, a sea, a mountain, will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind. And ultimately, to the commonest tourist, spots like Iceland may become what the vineyards and myrtle-gardens of South Europe are to him now.⁴¹

The Return of the Native's complex exploration of the conflicting loyalties and ethical tensions which exist between home and abroad, between our place of origin and the appeal of the exotic, informs Hardy's prescience here concerning the relentless growth of adventure tourism for restless moderns. Even here, however, Hardy's association of the Icelandic landscape with 'thinking' through our emotional connections with spaces and our place in them, signalled by his description of 'the mournful sublimity of a moor, a sea, a mountain', brings us closer to a sense of the power of the 'Icelandic imaginary' for the Morrises to remind them that on a rapidly shrinking planet, nowhere was 'too far off to matter'. It is a reminder which remains salient in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, Vol. I, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1899, p. 240. (Afterwards Mackail)
2. Peter Preston, '“The North Begins Inside”: Morris and Trollope in Iceland', *Journal of The William Morris Society*, Vol. XIV, No. 2 (2001), pp. 8–28 (Afterwards Preston). See also the recently published Mike & Kate Lea, eds, *W.G. Collingwood's Letters from Iceland: Travels in Iceland 1897*, by W.G. Collingwood & Jón Stefánsson, Cardiff: R.G. Collingwood Society, 2013, 150 pp. (reviewed *JWMS* Vol. XX, No. 4, Summer 2014, p. 95).
3. Jane Cooper summarises early examples in Jane S. Cooper, 'The Iceland Journeys and the Late Romances', *Journal of The William Morris Society*, Vol. V, no. 4, 1983–4, pp. 41–43. More recently, see Charles Harvey & Jon Press,

- Art, Enterprise and Ethics: The Life and Works of William Morris*, London: Frank Cass, 1996, pp. 68–82. (Afterwards Harvey & Press)
4. Suzanne Daly, *The Empire Inside: Indian Commodities in Victorian Domestic Novels*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011, p. 5. See also John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, 288 pp., and Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
 5. Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, London, New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 48. See also, for example, Cornelius Castoriadis's formulation of the 'social imaginary' in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987, 418 pp.
 6. May Morris, ed, *The Collected Works of William Morris*, London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1911–1915, 24 Vols; Vol. VIII, p. xxviii. Hereafter *CW*.
 7. Norman Kelvin, ed, *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, Vol. I, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 150. Hereafter Kelvin.
 8. Regenia Gagnier, 'Morris's Ethics, Cosmopolitanism, and Globalisation', *Journal of William Morris Studies*, Vol. XVI, Nos 2–3, 2005, pp. 21, 20.
 9. Tanya Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible Worlds*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 159.
 10. Kelvin, p. 132.
 11. *CW*, Vol. VIII, p. xviii.
 12. See, for example, Preston, and Karen Herbert, 'Travels Abroad in Iceland and Paris: Morris's Utopian Mapping', *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, Vol. I, 1992, pp. 24–29 (Afterwards Herbert). Also Frederick Kirchoff, 'Travel as Anti-Autobiography: William Morris's Icelandic Journals', in George P. Landow, ed, *Approaches to Victorian Autobiography*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1979, pp. 292–310. (Hereafter Kirchoff)
 13. Herbert, p. 25.
 14. Kirchoff, p. 294.
 15. *CW*, Vol. VIII, p. 15.
 16. *CW*, Vol. VIII, p. xxi.
 17. *CW*, Vol. VIII, p. xxi.
 18. *CW*, Vol. VIII, p. xxii.
 19. *CW*, Vol. VIII, p. 131.
 20. See Philippa Bennett, 'Rediscovering the Topography of Wonder: Morris, Iceland and the Last Romances', *Journal of William Morris Studies*, Vol. XVI, Nos 2–3, 2005, pp. 40. For Morris's changing perspective on the meaning of Iceland's mountains, see also Harvey & Press, pp. 75–76.
 21. To Charles Eliot Norton, October 17, 1871; Kelvin, p. 152.

22. To Aglaia Coronio, September 14, 1873; Kelvin, p. 198.
23. Harvey & Press, p. 80.
24. *CW*, Vol. VIII, p. xxi.
25. *CW*, Vol. VIII, p. xxviii.
26. *CW*, Vol. VIII, xxix.
27. *CW*, Vol. VIII, xxix.
28. Mackail, Vol. 1, pp. 274–275.
29. *CW*, Vol. VIII, p. xxix.
30. Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003, p. 50.
31. *CW*, Vol. VIII, p. xxix.
32. *CW*, Vol. VIII, p. xxix.
33. Rosalind Howard to Lady Stanley, December 10, 1878; Castle Howard Archives.
34. For more on the significance of Italy for Jane Morris, see Wendy Parkins, “‘That Venturesome Woman’: The Italian Travels of Jane Morris”, *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, Vol. 16, Fall 2007, pp. 66–87.
35. Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882): A Catalogue Raisonné*, Vol. 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 179. (Afterwards Surtees)
36. Perhaps the best example is Rossetti’s portrait *Mrs William Morris (The Blue Silk Dress)*, to the frame of which Rossetti attached the Latin verse inscription which translates as: ‘Famous for her husband, a poet, and most famous for her face; so let this picture of mine add to her fame’. (Surtees, p. 176)
37. Frank C. Sharp & Jan Marsh, *The Collected Letters of Jane Morris*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012, p. 123–124.
38. See Wendy Parkins, *Jane Morris: The Burden of History*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013, pp. 99–109.
39. *CW*, Vol. VIII, p. xviii.
40. To Jane Morris, November 9, 1875; Kelvin, p. 276.
41. Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 10.