

William Morris Society in the United States Newsletter July 1991

THE NEWSLETTER

We've decided to reduce the frequency of U. S. Newsletters to two a year. (Hence the absence of the April issue.) This will not affect the British Newsletter, which will continue to be sent to all U. S. members at the usual quarterly intervals. Our reason for making this change? As some members know, there has been a problem with copies arriving late, due, not to the printing and shipping from England, but to the vagaries and incompetence of the U. S. Postal Service. It has proved difficult, if not impossible, to plan events which people only learn about after they have occurred. The solution to this appears to be separate notices mailed first class to U. S. members only. To do this requires time and money, so to cut labor and costs, the April and October Newsletters are now dropped--for the time being. Since the MLA convention is our major activity of the year (and this year's special event still to be announced) you will receive a circular in late October detailing our plans for San Francisco. Then, from time to time, other mailings will follow. These should be considered supplements to the Newsletter, and not replacements for the two missing issues.

THE 1991 MLA CONVENTION

The Society plans a full schedule of activities for this year's Modern Language Association convention, to be held 27-30 December in San Francisco. There will be two sessions of papers, one scheduled for the afternoon of 27 December, the other held during the main part of the convention. The topics and participants are as follows:

"Morris and Utopia": Margaret D. Stetz (Georgetown University), presiding. Speakers: Florence Boos (University of Iowa), "Female Autonomy in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*;" Isolde Karen Herbert (University of Western Ontario), "Travels Abroad in Iceland and Paris: Morris's Utopian Mapping"; Linda Julian (Furman University), "*News from Nowhere* and Icelandic Sagas: The Bond of Art and Community."

"Morris and 'Abroad'": Charlotte Oberg (University of Richmond), presiding. Speakers: Pedro Beade (Bryant College), "William Morris in Rhode Island: Sydney Burleigh, the Fleur de Lys Shop, and the Art Workers Guild"; Francis Sharp (Department of the Treasury), "Morris and the S. P. A. B. on the Continent"; Pamela Bracken Wiens (Catholic University), "Ultima Thyle, or 'the ends of the earth': The Icelandic Visions of William Morris and Sir Richard Burton."

There will also be the traditional cash bar (hosted by Hartley Spatt), and a business meeting. A reminder about the latter: even though the MLA program will list it as a "closed" meeting, it is in fact open to anyone who wants to come, even--and especially--members of the Society who are not attending the MLA. Technically non-MLA attendees are supposed to get a pass (available from the registration desk) but in practice this is usually not necessary.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR! SPECIAL MORRIS SOCIETY EVENT SCHEDULED FOR 27 DECEMBER IN SAN FRANCISCO

In addition to the activities at the MLA convention we will again have an "outside" meeting. While details have not yet been worked out, this will be an exceptional occasion at an exceptional location. It's likely to take place in the late afternoon of Friday, 27 December and will be within walking distance of the MLA hotels. An invitation will be sent to all U. S. members of the Society.

REPORT ON PAPERS FROM THE 1990 MLA SESSIONS

The following abstracts have been sent by the panelists at the 1990 MLA sessions sponsored by the Society last December:

Session 1: "William Morris and the Fin de Siècle":

Christopher Benfey (Wellesley College), "The Arts and Crafts Poetry of Stephen Crane," presented at the MLA meeting in Chicago last December, is an attempt to situate Stephen Crane's book, *The Black Riders and Other Lines* (1895), in its proper cultural context. Crane's poetry was published in book form by the Boston firm of Copeland and Day, and in the magazines of Elbert Hubbard. Both Frederic Day and Hubbard, the flamboyant leader of the Roycrofters community in upstate New York, were leaders of the Arts and Crafts movement in the United States, and explicit followers of William Morris. It seems more than coincidence that Crane's publishers should have been Arts and Crafts ideologues. And indeed Crane's poetry lent itself, in theme and form, to an Arts and Crafts aesthetic. Its major imagery of

lines, ranges and ranks, its "rough-hewn" avoidance of rhyme and meter, were singularly appropriate for a presentation that emphasized typography, and the "look" of poems on a page.

B. J. Robinson (University of Miami), "William Morris and Oscar Wilde's Individualized Romanticism": This paper locates one of Morris's more interesting contributions to the English "fin de siècle" in his influence on Oscar Wilde. This influence appears chiefly in offering Wilde the means by which to obtain in his work a "double perspective," the ability to write a literature of escape and engagement, to mediate between fact and imagination, life and art, a mediation that itself includes both a desire for beauty and a "little bit of socialism."

The paper explores the subjective vision and self-expression in Morris's work, a subjectivity which is allied with Morris's characteristic imaginative realism, which persists throughout his work from "The Defence of Guenevere" to his later romances. Wilde similarly fuses realism and fantasy in his fairy tales, in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (written in a fairy-tale mode), and in his plays with their "unreal" yet mimetic characters. Wilde also fuses realism and fantasy in his version of socialism, described in "The Soul of Man," a socialism which owes several debts to Morris's political writing, primarily in its tendency to release individuals from the pressure of external, objective realities in order to promote subjective vision and self-expression in real life.

Margaret D. Stetz (Georgetown University), "William Morris and Fin-de-Siècle Comedy": In 1887, Morris wrote, staged, and performed in a political satire called *The Tables Turned; or Nupkins Awakened*. The play ostensibly advocates the bringing down of the social order and celebrates revolution. Yet Morris's own unacknowledged middle-class conservatism emerges in the comic aspect of the piece, which in fact turns the audience's laughter against the angry and violent impulses fueling the contemporary anarchist movement. The play thus serves as a thinly veiled criticism of those anarchist factions with which Morris was vying in the 1880s for control of the Socialist League and, ironically, as an apologia for such bourgeois values as good manners, moderation, and tolerance. In doing so, *The Tables Turned* participates in a more general move by British socialist writers at the end of the century--authors such as H. G. Wells, Oscar Wilde, and Helen and Olive Rossetti--to distance themselves from anarchism through laughter and to discredit the anarchists through ridicule.

Session 2: "William Morris and Architecture":

Gary L. Aho, from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, spoke on various associations William Morris, or Morris and Co., had with Chicago around the turn of the century. He mentioned the Morris and Co. windows--St. Cecilia and St. Margaret--in the vestibule of Chicago's Second Presbyterian Church (replicas of windows Burne-Jones designed from Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford), and he discussed the importance of the Tobey Furniture Company; like Marshall Fields and other Chicago firms it carried Morris and Co. products, but it had a unique feature: a William Morris Memorial Room. The room opened in 1903, the same year that Chicago's Morris Society was inaugurated. The Society had ambitious plans for promoting Morrisian ideals through publications and lectures, and judging from the Bulletin the Society published for 14 months, some of these plans were fulfilled, but by 1905 it had turned into a Whitman-Morris Society, and by 1906 the Whitman Fellowship. Aho spoke also on Morris's influence on the founders of Chicago's Hull House, Jane Addams and Ellen Starr; and on another Chicago landmark, the Glessner House. It was designed by H.H. Richardson who visited Merton Abbey in 1882 and thereafter encouraged his clients to purchase Morris and Co. goods. The Glessners did so; the mansion has been called "the most William Morris house in America." Morris and Glessner both had deep interests in the Haymarket Affair. Morris, through letters and in the pages of *Commonweal*, led a campaign to have the anarchists' death sentences commuted, while Glessner, an executive at International Harvester where the strikes and riots had occurred in 1886, was part of a citizens' committee who urged the courts to see that justice was done. The Glessners won, and after the anarchists were hanged, London newspapers celebrated the victory of respectable citizens, and Morris replied, "I rejoice that I have been among the protesters and sincerely hope that I shall never again be known as respectable." The members of that first Morris Society in Chicago were all "respectable" citizens, much more comfortable with some of Morris's ideas about arts and crafts than with his radical politics, and perhaps that is one reason that Morris Society withered so quickly.

Bhaswati Chakravorty (University of Reading), "The Lady in the Tower: Morris, Architecture, and Poetry": The paper attempts to investigate the connection between Morris's thinking about architecture and his treatment of architectural images in poetry. The first section examines the imaginative process that transforms a response to actual buildings into symbols and images in literature. The second section of the paper analyzes three images of the lady in the tower in the poems "Spell-Bound," "Rapunzel," and "The Story of Sigurd." It argues that Morris's treatment of this gothic image indicates his leanings towards an engaged and activist art.

Charlotte H. Oberg (University of Richmond), "In the Footsteps of Morris and Newman: Ralph Adams Cram and American Neo-Gothic Architecture": Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1942), regarded as one of the foremost American architects of his time though now largely forgotten, achieved his professional success by specializing in Gothic Revival designs for ecclesiastical and collegiate buildings. Cram was, in his youth, influenced by Pre-Raphaelite art and by the writings of Ruskin. Cram also had an early familiarity with and sympathy for the ideas of William Morris, and his mature writings on the need for social and political reform show that, besides his aesthetic preferences, Cram's ideas in many respects coincide with Morris's. However, the greatest impetus for Cram's lifelong devotion to Gothic Revival was his Anglo-Catholic religious faith, which he embraced following a youthful experience of religious conversion at a midnight mass in Rome. Thus, Cram was more truly "medieval" than was Morris, who in early manhood abandoned his early High Church interests and developed a secular ethic more congenial to the modern temperament.

CALLING ALL WEST COAST MORRISIANS

At one time the U. S. branch of the Society had three "chapters," one on each coast and another, based in Chicago, in the Midwest. A number of members have been interested in resurrecting these, with an eye to more local meetings, but the only move to do so has come from Californians Morton Newman and Fay M. Blake, who write: "If you are interested in participating in an informal West Coast group of the William Morris Society, send a note with your name and address to: Morton Newman and Fay Blake, 2398 Parker Street, Berkeley, CA 94704 (Tel.: 415-845-3749). We might decide on a speaker, discussion, or other activity around William Morris's life/work/ideas." Incidentally, Newman and Blake issue *News from Nowhere*, which they describe as a "kitchen table and photocopier newsletter with reviews, cartoons, correspondence, editorial comments *et al* with a Socialist stance *a la* William Morris's politics." It's highly entertaining and copies can be requested from them at the address given above (a contribution towards postage much will be appreciated).

"LOST" MEMBERS

In an attempt to keep our mailing list up-to-date we are looking for the following "lost" members for whom we do not have a current address.

ATTWOOD, SUZY (of Amherst, MA)
BOSSERT, REX (of Stanford University)
CASE, MICHAEL (of Boise State University)
COLETT, CAROLYN (address unknown)
DRESSER, NATHANIEL (of Mars Hill, NC)
GISBON, BARBARA (address unknown)
GOLDEN, J. (of New York City)
HOLZMAN, MICHAEL (of University of Southern California)
JOHNSON, PHILIP
MUNN, SUSAN (of Ashville, NC, then in Canada)
NIELSEN, MRS. K.
PERRIN, JAMES
PERRY, TOM (of Blacksburg, VA)
REESE, SUZANNE
RILEY, MARY

HISTORY OF THE KELMSCOTT PRESS

William S. Peterson's long-looked-for *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure* has just been published in this country by the University of California Press. This is a major event in Morris studies, for Peterson's book will immediately become the standard reference on the subject, complimenting his bibliography and completely superseding all earlier accounts. First setting the stage with a chapter on Victorian printing practices, he then covers Morris's work in the book arts pre-Kelmscott, before turning to the Press itself, its founding, operation, and closing. There are specific sections devoted to the Chaucer and, most interestingly, to "the story of three books," in which Peterson's use of previously neglected sources is most telling. (The account of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's connection with the Press--through Jane Morris--and of his "Love Lyrics and Sonnets of Proteus" is especially well told.) In conclusion, Peterson argues that, as we look back from our technological present, the Kelmscott Press may "seem, more and more, like the end rather than the beginning of something good." This is a controversial view which runs against the "party line" which has Kelmscott and Morris initiating a brilliant and still-continuing "revival of printing." Speaking of the technology of book production, *The Kelmscott Press* is a rather handsome production, designed (we suspect by its author) in a manner evocative of the books it is concerned with. There are numerous illustrations--not just the usual title-pages and woodcuts, but also prospectuses, Burne-Jones caricatures, manuscripts, and photographs of the people involved--and appendices contain a checklist of the Kelmscott publications (truncated from Peterson's bibliography) and the text of Emery Walker's lecture of November 1888, which started the ball rolling. The price is \$95.00, but do not rush out and buy it--yet. The Society has made an arrangement with the University of California Press which should result in the book being offered to U. S. members at a discount. A prospectus/order form should reach you later this summer.

OUR NEXT PUBLICATION; THE TABLES TURNED

We are making progress on our next publication, a facsimile of Morris's play, *The Tables Turned, or Nupkins Awakened*, with an introduction and ancillary matter by Pamela Bracken Wiens. There is still some question of which copy of the first edition to reproduce (libraries are often reluctant to allow such rare and fragile pamphlets to be photographed), but the editorial matter and discussions with printers are on schedule. Plans for the volume include a cloth or board binding and some typographic niceties.

OTHER NEW BOOKS

Though it comes almost after the fact, the Christina Rossetti exhibition at Bryn Mawr has engendered a publication, *Christina Rossetti in the Maser Collection*. This handsome book contains essays by the two collector-donors, Frederick and Mary Louise Maser, and the text of the 45 Rossetti letters on display. In "Collecting Christina" Frederick Maser tells the story of how and why they acquired various items (including four copies of "The Germ"), incidentally discussing some bibliographic problems in several first editions. Mary Louise Maser's "Living with Christina" is a succinct biographical account of the poet's

life and works, an excellent prelude to the annotated texts which follow. Copies are available from the Bryn Mawr College Library, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010.

We have also received word that Harry N. Abrams, Inc. will publish this fall *William Morris Authentic Decor* which "Shows how to apply Morris's principles of color and craftsmanship while retaining the spirit of the modern home. Authentic Decor is the first book on William Morris to demonstrate how his work can be applied and enjoyed in today's interiors." The price is \$45.00; the publicity release did not include the author(s) name(s).

VICTORIAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Victorian Literature and Culture, edited by Adrienne Munich and John Maynard, is the successor (actually continuation) of the journal *Browning Institute Studies*. In keeping with the new title, articles are sought on all areas of Victorian literature--fiction, poetry, prose--and all areas of Victorian cultural history, including relations among the various arts--literature, fine arts, architecture, music--and studies of interactions of cultural or social issues with the arts. Since "VLC" will be a substantial volume (published by AMS Press, New York), there is room for longer articles not usually accepted by other scholarly journals. There will also be a section of book review essays. For further information contact either of the editors: Adrienne Munich, Director of Women's Studies, SUNY-Stony Brook, Stony Brook, NY 11794; John Maynard, Department of English, New York University, 19 University Place, Room 225, New York, NY 10003.

BOOKWAYS

Members will be interested to learn that W. Thomas Taylor, the Austin, Texas printer and bookseller, has embarked on a new quarterly, "Bookways," designed "to bring the best in articles, reviews, and book arts news to people who make and enjoy fine books." The emphasis is on "contemporary" (e. g., new) books, but we have the suspicion that "antiquarian" aspects will not be entirely ignored--the prospectus mentions columns of news from around the world (exhibitions, auctions, and the like), and the book reviews announced include one of a book on Eric Gill. We wish this venture well, and hope it will succeed where others ("The Colophon," "American Book Collector," and "Fine Print" sadly come to mind) have not. Subscribers will also receive two other publications, "The Best of Bookways," and the newsletter of the Iowa Center for the Book. There are also incentives for signing on, free copies of books issued by Taylor, including Colin Franklin's "The Ashendene Press" and Joseph Blumenthal's "Bruce Rogers: A Life in Letters." The basic rate is \$46.00 per year (first class postage additional, various rates for foreign subscribers, two years, etc.). Write to: Bookways, W. Thomas Taylor, 1906 Miriam Avenue, Austin, TX 78722.

MORRIS IN MINNESOTA

"A Kelmscott Centennial" was the overall rubric given to an exhibition and associated events held this Spring at the Minnesota Center for Book Arts in Minneapolis. The show, which attempted to demonstrate Morris's "influence" on three of his "heirs," Leonard Baskin, Claire Van Vliet, and Victor Hammer, will travel to UCLA Special Collections (15 July to 15 September), John Hay Library, Brown University (7 October to 29 November), and Arizona State University Library (10 December to 30 January 1992), each participating institution supplying its own Kelmscott material. The programs included a series of talks and a symposium, "The Ideal Book: Three Views" (9 April), in which our member, William S. Peterson, was one of the participants. While Morris was obviously crucial to what this was all about, and while the show contained eleven Kelmscott Press titles (including the Chaucer), the connection with these contemporary artists is somewhat questionable. Of the three book "heirs," Leonard Baskin is the one closest to Morris: among the greatest of living illustrators, he is also a designer, engraver, sculptor, and collector; like Morris, a master of various activities. Victor Hammer and Van Vliet come out of traditions rather foreign to Morris: the Renaissance for one, the "avant garde" for the other: what they have in common with him is, again, craftsmanship and the desire that the book be an aesthetic object. (I hesitate to think what Morris would have said of Van Vliet's three-dimensional "books.") Whatever one thinks of the philosophy behind "A Kelmscott Centennial" it gave and will give many people the opportunity of learning about Morris and seeing some of his books. The illustrated catalogue, which contains an essay (a cogent argument for the "heirs") by the organizer Betty Bright, is available from Bob Giles, Minnesota Center for Book Arts, 24 North Third Street, Minneapolis, MN 55401. The price is \$11.00.

OTHER EXHIBITIONS

The centenary of the Kelmscott Press occasioned "The Art of the English Book from William Morris to Eric Gill," held last winter in the Millberg Gallery at the Princeton University Library. (There was also an opening talk by Sebastian Carter, of the Rampant Lion Press, Cambridge, England). As Dale Roylance describes the exhibition in the Spring 1991 issue of the "Princeton University Library Chronicle," it did indeed include some of the library's "greatest treasures" of the period, among them the Kelmscott Chaucer (bound by Cobden-Sanderson), Beardsley drawings, the Golden Cockerell "Canterbury Tales." Princeton's curator of manuscripts, Jean Preston, lent a number of items relating to Ricketts and Shannon, to fill in the gap between Beardsley and the Ashendene Press.

There are also rumors of other Kelmscott-inspired exhibitions at three locales, Stanford University (presumably the spectacular collection of Sanford and Helen Berger), Connecticut College (New London), and the University of Miami. If these take place, the next Newsletter will have details.

More definite is the Katonah (NY) Museum's scheduled "Designing Utopia: The Art of William Morris and his Circle." Although a relatively small exhibition, this will cover Morris's work in all the arts and

include textiles, furniture, ceramics, wallpapers, books, manuscripts, and drawings drawn from public and private collections along the East Coast. The dates are 15 February to 19 April 1992. Expect further details in the January Newsletter.

SCHIMMEL SALE

On 17 May the auction house of Christie's New York sold "The Stuart B. Schimmel Collection of the Book Arts" which contained many items of Morris interest. Mr. Schimmel, a distinguished collector of fine press and illustrated books, has been a member of this Society since near its inception, and his gathering of Morris autograph letters, Kelmscott Press titles, and related ephemera formed a central part of his library, which also contained (among other things) a complete Ashendene Press collection. Among the high-spots: a copy of the Chaucer, bound in pigskin by Cobden-Sanderson to Morris's design (sold with three trial leaves), 24 holograph letters from Morris to Alfred Kent (an important series dealing with the paper used at the Kelmscott Press), an original design for 13 ornamental initial letters, and Sydney Cockerell's copy of *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung* (Kelmscott edition, with various drawings, etc. inserted). Prices are high (the Chaucer brought \$38,000.00) but not as mind-boggling as those paid two years ago in the sale of the Doheny library.

MISCELLANEOUS

Hot on the success of A. S. Byatt's *Possession* comes another novel with a Burne-Jones reproduced on the dust jacket and in the advertisements. This time it's "Drowning" by Lee Grove with (of course) "The Depths of the Sea" from the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard. Unlike *Possession*, however, the plot appears to have little to do with the picture: it's the story of a Palm Beach family, of (to quote the ad in "The New York Times Book Review") "Memories of passion, drowned in regret," whatever that means. And still more Burne-Jones—the recent recording of Debussy's "Pelleas and Melisande" by Charles Dutoit and the Montreal Symphony has on its CD box a reproduction of "Danae and the Brazen Tower." Very appealing, but not as appropriate as one of the stage designs the artist did for the first London production of the Maeterlinck play on which the opera is based.

There may be a way, if anyone is willing to pay for it, for Morris's other typefaces—the "Troy" and the "Chaucer," as well as those used by other private presses, to be put into a digital format for computer use. According to a press release Monotype Typography is expanding its "North American Custom Type Service" to (among other things) "transform existing faces from one format into another, and to design or redesign complete typeface collections." The results can be produced in Postscript "fonts" usable by both IBM and Macintosh computers and in more traditional Monotype formats. For information telephone (312) 855-1440. If anyone splurges for the typefaces used by Ricketts or Cobden-Sanderson, let me know.

The Society was mentioned in Anne Matthews's article, "Deciphering Victorian Underwear and other Seminars," in *The New York Times Magazine* for 10 February 1991. The article—not, by far, the worst of the current crop of media "exposes" of academia—concerned the recent MLA convention in Chicago. We came in under the more social side of things: "Scholarship is thirsty work. Daily at 5:15 P.M., M.L.A. attendees pour out of meetings in search of the many cocktail receptions sponsored by allied organizations and specialized societies (political correctness sometimes lessens after hours). An observer may drop in on the Cervantes Society, the William Morris Society, the gay and lesbian literary group, then pause at the Marxist cash bar, liveliest of all."

A SHOPPING GUIDE TO MORRIS IN THE UNITED STATES: FURTHER LISTINGS

Additions welcomed, and will be included in future Newsletters.

Pottery Barn
P. O. Box 7044
San Francisco, CA 94120
(415) 421-3400

William Morris mirror and frames, with borders printed in a modern (and garish?) version of a wallpaper design. The mirror is 20 by 24 inches; the frames come in three sizes. [Reproduced in their catalogue.]

Saxony Carpet Company, Inc.
979 Third Avenue (D and D Building)
New York, NY 10022
(212) 755-7100

"Biltmore" Wilton carpet, 100% worsted wool, adapted from a Morris design. Available in a forest green color scheme for use in wall to wall carpeting or as a bordered area rug. [Reproduced in the Home Design section, "The New York Times," 7 April 1991, p. 42]. For information contact Len Andolino, National Sales Manager.

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WEBMASTER@MORRISOCIETY.ORG

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Contacts: United States: us@morrissociety.org • United Kingdom: uk@morrissociety.org • Canada: info@wmsc.ca

Updated 2 July, 2011