



William Morris Society in the United States Newsletter July 1992

MLA IN NEW YORK

The Society will, as usual, sponsor several events at and during the annual convention of the Modern Language Association, to be held this year in New York in late December. Due to the arcane scheduling requirements of the MLA we shall have a single session of papers: the subject is "William Morris and North America" and the speakers and their papers are: Charlotte M. Oberg (Univ. of Richmond), "William Morris and Elbert Hubbard"; John P. Roche (Michigan State Univ.), "Scattered Leaves: Morris's Men in America and the Polemical Magazines"; and Sandi Wisenberg (Art Institute of Chicago), "Miss Emma Lazarus Reports on her Visit to William Morris". All members are invited to a cash bar and an open business meeting. In addition we expect to have some sort of "extra-convention" event, possibly a visit to a library or museum, perhaps combined with a social gathering. Details of all of these activities will be found in a special notice mailed to members in October or November.

MEMBERSHIP

Like all small organizations the Morris Society has had to face the difficulty of maintaining, if not increasing, our membership. This is especially hard in a time of economic distress. In the last six months there has been a relatively small aggregate loss of members due, in part, to the elimination from the rolls of those who have not paid dues for several years. We have taken two (admittedly rather tentative) steps to remedy this decline. There is now an official flyer giving details of activities and including a fill-in form at the bottom. Copies to distribute are available--just ask. In addition, in an attempt to "see what happens", the Society placed a classified advertisement in the March and April issues of "AVISO", the newsletter of the American Association of Museums. The response, while not overwhelming, has been gratifying, with about 30 inquiries leading to a number of new members. If you have any ideas on ways to promote the Society, do let us know.

"DESIGNING UTOPIA" AT THE KATONAH MUSEUM

"Designing Utopia: The Art of William Morris and his Circle", the recent exhibition at the Katonah Museum of Art (16 February-12 April 1992), was a delight. Though not a "blockbuster", the show was comprehensive, covering the many sides of Morris--in a single, largish gallery. The emphasis was on the pattern designs (wallpapers, textiles, tapestries, rugs) but included examples of furniture, stained glass, and ceramics. The pictorial arts were represented by two drawings and a print by Burne-Jones. In terms of printed books, Morris's political side was, surprisingly, not neglected; a variety of socialist publications and manuscripts (many lent by our former Secretary, Joseph R. Dunlap) served as counterpoint to the expected Kelmscott Press editions, including the "Chaucer". The installation deserves special mention; somehow the designer managed to put some 60 disparate objects together without overwhelming the viewer (one of the delightful touches was a free-standing partition, covered in Morris wallpaper and containing a faux corner Arts and Crafts fireplace, against which furniture and art were placed in a "domestic" setting). Among the highlights: "The Passing of Venus" tapestry, re woven in 1926 from a Burne-Jones design (lent by the Detroit Institute of Arts), two Hammersmith carpets, and the autograph manuscript of Morris's lecture "Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century."

Compared to the show's contents and setting, the accompanying catalogue seems rather a disappointment. A lengthy essay entitled "Perspective on Utopia--The Art and Ideas of William Morris", by the show's "guest curator", Stephen Eisenman, provides a decent introduction to Morris's life and theories but no new or particularly illuminating insights. And, sadly, what Eisenman says has no relation to the exhibition itself. The checklist that follows is woefully inadequate. Only minimum information is given, and the entries are marred by muddles, errors, and "typos". Among other things, the name of an institutional lender is repeatedly misspelled, and the descriptions of some of Morris's books are hopelessly mixed-up. One receives the impression that the curator or organizers did not actually examine the items they chose. Some of these faults are mitigated by the look of the catalogue, which, once you overlook the incongruous mixture of Garamond type and Kelmscott borders and initials, is quite handsome. There are many illustrations, including seven pages of excellent color plates and a fold-over cover reproducing "The Passing of Venus" tapestry.

To promote and explain the exhibition, the Katonah Museum sponsored a series of programs that included gallery talks, workshops for children and families, and a lecture (8 March) by Robert Brawer on "Envisioning a Commonwealth: Utopias Past and Present". The chief event was a day-long symposium on Saturday, 28 March. Entitled "Collaboration and Innovation: The Enduring Legacy of William Morris", this attracted such a large audience that it had to be moved from the Museum to a larger hall at the nearby John Jay Homestead (and even this wasn't big enough; some potential participants had to be turned away). Morris, it seems, is "hot", at least in one corner of the New York suburbs. Quite a few members of the Society were present. Mark Samuels Lasner introduced the speakers and made some

opening remarks tracing the rise and fall and rise of Morris's reputation over the last century. The first speaker, Peter Cormack (William Morris Gallery) provided an overview in "William Morris: The Man, His, Art, and the Times" with much biographical detail. In "The Influence of the Kelmscott Press" Martin Antonetti (librarian of the Grolier Club) treated, first, Morris's own activities in the book world, and, second, the effect he had on a number of American printers, notably the Californians Ward Ritchie and Ed Grabhorn. Lunch (excellent sandwiches and goodies) followed. Alicia Craig Faxon (Simmons College) came next. Her talk "William Morris, The Pre-Raphaelites, and New Designs for Living", placed Morris as participant in a larger movement in Victorian art and literature. Joseph R. Dunlap concluded the proceedings with his amusing "Reflections of a Collector"--recollections of, among other adventures, visits to Sydney Cockerell and the daughters of the turn-of-the-century Morris enthusiast Harold Peirce.

"THE CORBEL" AND "ARTS AND CRAFTS QUARTERLY"

Members interested in the American Arts and Crafts Movement may like to know two publications. "The Corbel", described as "an annual national directory of arts and crafts movement dealers, crafters, artists", grew out of the mailing list from the Arts and Crafts conferences held at Grove Park, NC. The first issue is expected later this year. To be listed (there is also space for paid advertisements) or for more information write: The Corbel, P. O. Box 70690, Washington, DC 20024&endash;0690.

Now in its fourth volume, *Arts and Crafts Quarterly Magazine* is edited by dealer and auctioneer David Rago. The emphasis is on American furniture and decorative arts, but contributions on broader topics--especially on Morris and on the theoretical side of the British Arts and Crafts--would be welcome. A recent issue had articles on Chinese painting and the Arts and Crafts Movement, Elbert Hubbard, and Rookwood Pottery. The *Quarterly* incorporates a useful department which supplies books (mostly, but not all new titles) connected with turn-of-the-century decorative arts and design. The address and toll-free telephone numbers are: Arts and Crafts Quarterly, P.O. Box 3592, Station E, Trenton, NJ 08629, [800] 648&endash;1431.

WANTED: A HOME FOR ORIGINAL MORRIS WALLPAPER

The illustration at right reproduces a piece of the "Trellis" wallpaper, designed by William Morris in 1864. Not just any piece, mind you; it's a portion from an original roll--and it's for sale. The story is this: Beginning about 1873, various decorating firms began to import Morris and Co. wallpapers into this country. The Boston decorating firm of A. H. Davenport and Company was one of the principal distributors. They went out of business around 1915 (when wallpaper fell out of favor); a portion of their stock, purchased and warehoused by a competitor, Irving and Casson, lay forgotten until the mid-1950s when it was discovered in the loft of a barn. Miraculously, some 800 rolls of wallpaper--American, Japanese, English, French--had survived a half-century of neglect.

The rolls were sold at auction and, passing through other hands, about ten years ago became the property of Arlene Ellis. Mrs. Ellis has since given representative examples to several institutions, including the Cooper-Hewitt Museum and the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. Yet the collection--almost certainly the largest holding of historic wallpapers in private hands--remains intact. Mrs. Ellis is now offering to sell parts of the collection, ranging from small samples to enough pristine, unused rolls to paper a gymnasium. The Morris wallpapers include samples of "Apple", "Trellis", "Acorn", "Fritillary", and "Horn Poppy". There is a substantial amount of the embossed "Sunflower" design (10 rolls, 386 square feet) and, most interestingly, an apparently unrecorded embossed leather version of the "Vine" pattern of 1874 (619 sq. ft., 14 rolls). As for prices, it is fair to say you will have to be quite a capitalist to purchase these works by a socialist--according to an article in "Architectural Digest", the cost of the "Vine" set is \$80,000. But then this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity which ought to appeal to some owner of a historic house or a museum board of directors. The Ellis collection has been written up on a number of occasions, notably in Richard Nylander, "Wallpaper in America" (Boston: SPNEA, 1986), nos. 67&endash;73 and in the August 1982 "Antiques" magazine. Inquiries about the collection should be directed to: Mrs. Arlene Ellis, Box 180, East Sandwich, MA 02537, telephone [508] 888&endash;4885, FAX: [617] 833&endash;1451. Color reproductions and a detailed list of available Morris wallpapers are available upon request.

NEW BOOKS AND A JOURNAL

There is a "special 50% off phone-in offer" on a new book of potential interest, *Pre-Raphaelitism and Medievalism in the Arts*, edited by Llana de Girolami Cheney, published by the Mellen Press. We use the word "potential" because the publicity release, while speaking of "the rich tapestry of Pre-Raphaelite art and literature" and an "interdisciplinary interpretation" in the essays, does not say who the contributors are. At any rate the price is (apparently) half of the usual \$79.95 when ordered by phone ([716] 754&endash;2788) using Visa or Mastercard.

Syracuse University Press has established a new "Utopianism and Communitarianism" series under the general editorship of Gregory Claeys of the University of London and our member Lyman Tower Sargent of the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Most of the announced books deal with American topics, but may be of interest to Morrisians: among the titles, *The Unpredictable Adventure: A Comedy of Women's Independence* by Claire Owens, with an introduction by Miriam K. Harris and *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference* edited by Carol Kolmerton and Jane Donaworth. For information contact Lyman Tower Sargent, Department of Political Science, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 8001 Natural Bridge Road, St. Louis, MO 63121. Mr. Tower may also be contacted regarding the journal *Utopian Studies*, established by the Society for Utopian Studies. Now in its third volume (with two 150&endash;200 page issues per year), the journal seeks articles of high quality and book reviews.

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

"Colonialism at Home and Abroad" is the theme of the 1993 conference sponsored by the Interdisciplinary Nineteenth Century Studies (INCS) meeting. The venue is Arizona State University, Tempe, the dates 31 March to 3 April 1993. According to an announcement, the topic should be interpreted broadly to include issues of race, gender, nationality, regionalism in art and literature, ethnic art and literature, resistance and responses to colonialism. Abstracts of proposed papers (two pages in length) must be submitted by 21 October 1992. These and other inquiries go to: Julie F. Codell, Director, School of Art, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287 (telephone: [602] 965-3468, FAX: [602] 965-8338). A related event is a separate symposium on Ruskin and Victorian art, to be held on 3 April in conjunction with the exhibition "John Ruskin and the Victorian Eye", at the Phoenix Art Museum.

The Midwest Victorian Studies Association's 1993 conference will be held 16-17 April at Roosevelt University in Chicago. The topic, "Victorian Urban Settings" is described in the following terms: "The Victorian city was a laboratory for new modes of expression. Its galleries, theaters, music halls, books, and institutions opened new avenues for the arts and the exchange of ideas. This conference seeks a conscious look at the setting of the visual and literary arts, music, theater, architecture, and urban planning, as they embraced or rejected the Victorian city." Send six copies of a proposed paper (or abstract) to: D. J. Trela, Executive Secretary, Midwest Victorian Studies Association, Box 288, Roosevelt University, 430 South Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60605.

THE LITERARY PIRATE OF PORTLAND

In 1891, at the age of 39, Thomas Bird Mosher of Portland, Maine, embarked on a remarkable publishing career which lasted until his death in 1923. His specialty was the reprinting of British writers neglected by the ordinary firms, often, if not usually, in flagrant violation of copyright law. In his magazine, *The Bibelet*, and in numerous volumes--ranging in size from tiny gift books to quartos, all well-printed in a distinctive typographic form--Mosher brought the works of Rossetti, Dowson, Wilde, Swinburne, "Vernon Lee", Yeats, William Sharp, and others to the attention of American readers. Morris was one of his favorites, and indeed a few of Mosher's earliest efforts, notably an edition of Arnold's *Empedocles on Etna*, were produced in Kelmscott-imitation form. (Mosher incidentally produced the first reprint of *The Germ*.) Long looked down upon by fellow publishers, booksellers, and book collectors alike, Mosher's publishing was in fact a significant achievement and an important (though not always desired) link in Anglo-American literary relations. Or so Jean-François Vilain and Philip R. Bishop argue in their extensive exhibition, "Thomas Bird Mosher and the Art of the Book", on view from 15 May-15 August 1992 at Paley Library of Temple University in Philadelphia. Vilain (a collector) and Bishop (an antiquarian bookseller who trades under the name "Mosher Books") have also written a fully illustrated catalogue due for publication sometime this summer. For details write to: Jean-François Vilain, 1915 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103 or Philip R. Bishop, P. O. Box 111, Millersville, PA 17551.

PRE-RAPHAELITE MYSTERIES

Marilyn Ibach has brought to our attention a pair of "thrillers" which center round valuable Pre-Raphaelite paintings. Never mind A. S. Byatt's 600-page *Possession*, these are appropriate holiday reading for Morrisians--a bit "lighter," too. In John Malcom's *Sheep, Goats and Soap* (Scribner's, 1991), art expert and amateur sleuth Tim Simpson is bidden by an old college friend to look at some Victorian art; murders (three) and deception follow. Doran Chelmarsh is an antiques dealer who, in Mollie Hardwick's *The Dreaming Damsel* (St. Martin's Press, 1990), gets into serious trouble when she discovers a portrait of Elizabeth Siddal. Of the two, Hardwick's is the better book, and not only for the dust jacket which bears a reinterpretation of Millais's "Ophelia"; the author's previous historical novels include the stories behind the *Upstairs, Downstairs* television series.

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO

The catalogue for last winter's exhibition, "William Morris and the Kelmscott Press", will be published in September by the Friends of the University of Miami Library. It includes an essay on William Caxton and William Morris by Thomas A. Goodman and full descriptions of the books in the show by Bonnie J. Robinson. The January "Newsletter" will have the full details.

Our edition of Morris's play, *The Tables Turned*, is still in limbo; negotiations with two publishers continue and we hope for a successful publication plan in the near future.

A number of Morris and Burne-Jones related items will be offered in an upcoming auction, scheduled for November, at Christie's in New York. The books, letters, and art works are part of a collection of material by the Pre-Raphaelites and their associates formed by a distinguished librarian and bibliophile. Your President-cum-newsletter writer will be among the eager bidders, no doubt.

WILLIAM MORRIS AT THE ORSAY MUSEUM: BY ISABELLE WILLIAMS

In France, Impressionism is usually considered to be the predominant, if not the only worthwhile event in 19th century art and it is only rarely that mention will be made of any other artistic movement. Even the Symbolists are only briefly mentioned and rarely acknowledged as an important school of artists. Consequently, this standpoint leaves little room for any investigation of foreign Art. Very little is known about the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and hardly more about the Arts and Crafts Movement, which are described, if at all, as some sort of obscure, eccentric and even esoteric occurrences.

Therefore, it was with no great expectations that I made up my mind not to leave Paris without paying a visit to the new 19th century museum recently opened in the totally transformed shell of the old "Gare

d'Orsay," the decrepit skeleton of which had haunted the landscape of my Parisian childhood. Inaugurated on July 14, 1900, the railway station was considered a triumph of modern architecture in as much as the whole metallic structure had been hidden behind facades of stiffly Academic stone and stucco work. The restoration of the building has revealed the audacity of the metallic frame through the addition of rigorously plain satellite chambers and terraces branching off a central axis.

Although the museum has rapidly been nicknamed the "Impressionist" Museum, it was created to display many of the 19th century pieces from the national collections which space limitation made it impossible to exhibit in *Le Louvre*. Although few surprises were therefore to be expected, it was with much excitement that I discovered in the museum guide the existence of a "Decoration" room chapter subtitled "Pugin, Morris, Webb, Mackmurdo, Jeckyll, Godwin, Sullivan". I immediately knew where to start my visit and proceeded, map in hand, to fly by some exquisite Daumier clay figures, and some interesting paintings by Moreau, Whistler and Puvis de Chavannes.

The access to the "Decoration" room is made difficult by the confusion the map creates for the visitor who finds himself at the end of the central axis without having seen any trace of this particular left-hand-side satellite. The only posted sign refers to French Architecture 1850&endash;1900 and Viollet-Le-Duc whom it seems inconceivable to associate with Pugin, Webb or Morris. Finally, with the help of a maintenance person (as neither guides nor guards seem to ever be on duty), I embarked up a series of metallic flights of stairs, the aspect of which led me to believe I had unwittingly trespassed onto the remaining scaffolding of the building and would soon find myself flung into the metal stomach of a futuristic whale.

Eventually, I found myself in the extremely small first room of a remote mezzanine overlooking the first floor. The first piece to catch my eye was a sideboard by Webb and Morris, very dark and massive with a wealth of luscious polychrome decoration. The walls are covered with panels from the Carlisle wall decorations for which Edward Burne-Jones painted the "Story of Cupid and Psyche" murals. The gold naturalist floral decor of the panels and beams is a perfect illustration of Morris's power as a designer. The freshness of his inspiration is revealed by an indigo bird wall hanging which greets the visitor right at the top of the stairs. Certainly, the most refined if not spectacular piece is a very simple oak table, approximately dated 1862 and designed by Webb for Morris & Co. The rectangular plane of the table itself is delicately underlined by scrolls harboring a slim middle drawer. The legwork is particularly elegant, based as it is on rectangular and triangular construction lines.

In the next room, a couple of William de Morgan's 1880's Eagle pieces are sharing a case with some of Dresser's utensils. The glowing red Eagle dishes seem quite forlorn in this fairly stark room and might have found a more suitable place next to Morris's works. It is also quite a pity that Edward Burne-Jones's poetic "Wheel of Fortune" should have been exiled into the Symbolist room as opposed to having been deemed a rightful addition to the visual world of Morris.

Finally, it is of the utmost irony that the Firm room should indeed be naught but the antechamber of the French Architecture/Viollet-Le-Duc exhibit and that Morris's carefully crafted pieces should cohabit with samples of the very architectural trends the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings fought against. However, this inappropriate match which could be counted upon to enable the average museum visitor to compare the genuineness of Morris's style with the spectacular, yet shallow decorative samples of Viollet-Le-Duc's mural paintings for the chapels of Notre-Dame de Paris. Hopefully, the very awkwardness of conception of the Orsay "Decoration" room will cause a few lost visitors to stop long enough to think!

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENTŠ

What follows is a direct quotation from a letter (addressed to "Dear Professor") sent us by The Continental Historical Society, 3145 Geary Blvd., San Francisco, CA 94118, telephone [415] 389&endash;0917:

We wish to update you on the progress of what The Melbourne Age called 'The Greatest Literary Controversy of All Time'--Queen Victoria's unsuspected authorship of the Alice book: Our annotated edition of *Alice in Wonderland* is now in its second year of classroom use on both sides of the Atlantic, most recently having been adopted as required reading for English majors in a course in literary criticism at Austin College, Sherman, Texas. We have had a submission accepted by the *Journal of the College Language Association*. The article is entitled: "New Credit to Queen Victoria as Author: Also Wrote the Alice Books."

No, we are not making this up. The letter, which offers gratis copies of the book, *Queen Victoria's Alice in Wonderland*, is accompanied by a second sheet containing perceptive comments from no fewer than 34 academics. "An extraordinary work that deserves to be taken seriously by the academic community", says a professor of humanities at a respected New York college; "Excellent! A very useful edition for the hordes of today's 'post-structural' philosophers, linguists, and critics", claims a professor of religious studies; and a teacher in South Carolina even agrees with the theory, "I think that it is highly possible that Queen Victoria wrote *Alice in Wonderland*." Is this all for real? Will some member order the book and let us know. PLEASE.

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