

Useful and Beautiful

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William Burges, cabinet and details, National Museum Cardiff, Photos: Kotomi

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

MUSINGS ON TECHNOLOGY: WHAT WOULD WILLIAM MORRIS THINK?

As this edition of *Useful & Beautiful* goes to press, most of us are still under stay home/stay healthy mandates issued by state and local governments as result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of us have been working remotely; dependent on technology to bring the world into our homes and to allow us to continue to work and to stay connected with colleagues, friends, and families. During this period where we are all dependent on Wi-Fi connections, Google, Zoom and other means of electronic communication, I can't help but wonder, what would William Morris think? Morris was no Luddite, a term used to refer to those that oppose technology. But he was opposed to the negative effects of technology associated with the decline of artistry and value in work. While we certainly can agree that our new digital age is not without problems, we also should embrace the opportunity that it provides us to connect through difficult times. The Board of the William Morris Society has been meeting through ZOOM and it is a pleasure to have face to face connections with the many dedicated individuals that support our Society and offer their expertise to ensure our organization moves forward. Conduct a Google search on Morris and literally hundreds of thousands results appear instantaneously. Visit our Twitter and Facebook pages and you will be part a global community that joins together to share their love of William Morris. The timeless designs and beauty of Morris & Co. designs provide us all with a sense of beauty, so needed in these difficult times. And of course, the opportunity for museums and organizations to offer remote learning opportunities have been wonderful during this unique time in history. Today's technology, if used correctly, can also open doors to many that might otherwise not have the chance to experience visits museums, listen to noted scholars, or access digital archives. Morris felt deeply about social justice and I like to think that we can all work to harness technology to reflect the ideals of Morris. In his lecture "Art and Its Producers" (available from www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1888/producer.htm), Morris wrote 'I do not believe we should aim at abolishing all machinery; I would do some things with machinery which are now done by hand, and other things by hand which are now done by machinery; in short, we would be the masters of our machines and not their slaves, as we are now. It is not this or that... machine which we want to get rid of, but the great intangible machine of commercial tyranny which oppresses the lives of all of us.'

While we might at times feel beholden to technology as we suffer from Zoom fatigue, microphones that don't work, or Wi-Fi that cuts out, let's also focus on the positive aspects of how we technology allows us to remain connected and in fellowship!

Stay well,

Jane Carlin
President, William Morris Society.

MEMORIES OF AMIENS CATHEDRAL IN WILLIAM MORRIS'S WORKS

Isabelle Hautbout



Notre-Dame d'Amiens

While on the Isle of Wight for a short holiday, last year, I visited St Lawrence Parish Church in Ventnor, designed by Gilbert and George Scott in 1876 and where Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris and Ford Madox Brown made most of the windows. In a beautifully detailed guide to these stained glass Windows, I was intrigued to find a quote by William Morris, telling his admiration for the cathedral of Amiens, in the North of France, where I live and lecture at the university, which is celebrating in 2020 the 800th anniversary of *Notre-Dame*.

Back home, I started some research and discovered what many William Morris' experts already knew, *i.e.* that Morris first came to Amiens with his sister Henrietta during the summer of 1854, that he made other journeys in Northern France with Edward Burne-Jones and William Fulford from 19th July to 12th August 1855, with Philip Webb and Charley Faulkner in 1858, and that he last went there with his daughter Jenny

in August 1891.¹ Such holidays were typical of the Romantic and middle class renewal of the Grand Tour,² already enjoyed by New Gothic architects such as George Edmund Street (who accepted Morris as an apprentice in Oxford in January 1856) or Gilbert Scott, as well as by John Ruskin, whose stays in Amiens grew longer and longer from 1844 to 1880,³ before the publication of *The Bible of Amiens* in 1884.

In 1855, William Morris and his Oxford friends probably referred to Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in France*, first published in 1843. Their itinerary is well known thanks to John Purkis⁴: they visited churches in Abbeville, Amiens, Beauvais, Paris, Chartres, Dreux, Evreux, Louviers, Rouen, Caudebec, Caen, Bayeux, St-Lô, Coutances, and the Mont-St-Michel.

Three texts published in the newly founded *Oxford & Cambridge Magazine*⁵ in 1856 were directly inspired by Amiens Cathedral. In "The Story of the Unknown Church" (January), the master mason of an old church, on the central porch of which he carved "a bas-relief of the Last Judgment" (p. 30) very similar to the one of Notre-Dame, tells how, after the death of his sister and his best friend (who were engaged), he carved their tomb for twenty years. "Shadows of Amiens" (February) is a descriptive essay. Both texts are by William Morris. It is still



The Last Judgment, central western porch of Amiens Cathedral.

unsure whether he also wrote "A Night in a Cathedral" (May)⁶ or if William Fulford did,⁷ but there are definitely echoes of William Morris' essay in this short story in which the narrator is locked in Amiens Cathedral for a night, like G. E. Street in Winchester when he was 17,⁸ or like Chateaubriand in Westminster in 1822.⁹

On 29th July 1855, William Morris wrote to his mother: "I think I like Beauvais cathedral better than Amiens; the apse of Beauvais must be the finest in the world"¹⁰ and in 1886, he mentions his discovery of Rouen as the greatest pleasure of his past life.¹¹ So why did he only publish texts about Amiens?

It may be because its cathedral is "Gothic pure, authoritative, unsurpassable, and unaccusable", according to Ruskin,¹² following Viollet-le-Duc's view.¹³ What William Morris puts forward are elements which appear to be typical of North France Gothic, according to English guides. He is first struck by "its enormous



Inside Amiens Cathedral

height”, “almost double that to which we are accustomed in English cathedrals”¹⁴: “I think I felt inclined to shout when I first entered Amiens Cathedral; it is so free and vast and noble” (“Shadows of Amiens” p. 101). He also points at the tracery, “that for some time the French were using [...], while we were rendering more perfect the unmullioned system”, as Gilbert Scott explains.¹⁵ Inside the building, he praises the stalls, about which Murray wrote: “in variety of invention and delicacy of execution there is nothing finer of the kind in Europe.”¹⁶ Morris especially loved the history of Joseph, “told in such a gloriously quaint, straightforward manner. [...] I think the lean kine was about the best bit of wood-carving I have seen yet[,] the most wonderful symbol of famine ever conceived. I never fairly understood Pharaoh’s dream till I saw the stalls at Amiens.” (“Shadows of Amiens,” p. 101). But he particularly dwells on the “stories of life and death” (p. 100) carved on the doorways, “[t]he great glory [...] of the French churches,” as Scott also explains.¹⁷ He *reads* them, especially those of the South porch of the *Vierge dorée*, as Ruskin advises in *The Nature of Gothic*¹⁸ and does in the fourth part of *The Bible of Amiens* – “Interpretations”.



Pharaoh’s Dream, stalls. Amiens Cathedral. Photo: Columbia U. Department of Art History and Archaeology

But a better explanation for Amiens’ special place in William Morris’ works may come from the beginning of “A night in a cathedral” (p. 310): “I have seen many cathedrals [...], some of which are perhaps to be placed before this at Amiens; but it still remains in my memory with a peculiar tenderness, – something like the first love of childhood, which the loves of manhood can never efface.” That youth experience was certainly decisive¹⁹ since when he

returned to England in 1855, Morris told his mother that he finally wouldn’t take Holy Orders but would become an architect,²⁰ as if his tour of North France churches had definitely converted him to art. That first appeared to me as a paradox which I wanted to understand better, by seeking in William Morris’ work—from *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* to even much later pieces—hints of these churches, and especially the one at Amiens, inspiring his dedication to Art, but maybe also to Communism, his later but nonetheless ardent passion.

THE CATHEDRAL SEEN BY AN ARTIST AN EMOTIONAL APPROACH

In a letter to Georgina Burne-Jones written from Verona on 16th May 1878, William Morris described Sta. Anastasia as “a very beautiful church, but [which] appeals less to the heart than the head”, proving “neo-classical in feeling”. On the contrary,

Many times I think of the first time I ever went abroad, and to Rouen, and what a wonder it was to me when I first came upon the front of the Cathedral rising above the flower-market. It scarcely happens to me like that now, at least not with man’s work, though it does with some bits of the great world, like the Garda Lake the other day, or unexpected sudden sights of the mountains. Even the inside of St Mark’s gave one rather deep satisfaction, and rest for the eyes, than that strange exaltation of spirits, which I remember of old in France, and which the mountains give me yet.²¹

That emotional—rather than intellectual—approach, explaining Morris’ rejection of the theoretical perfection of so-called restorations, is obvious from the very beginning of “Shadows of Amiens” (pp. 99-100):



Claude Monet, *Vue de Vétheuil*, 1880.

Metropolitan Museum of Art. Wikimedia Commons

Not long ago I saw for the first time some of the churches of North France; still more recently I saw them for the second time; and, remembering the love I have for them and the longing that was in me to see them, during the time that came between the first and second visit, I thought I should like to tell people of some of those things I felt when I was there [...].

And I thought that even if I could say nothing else about these grand churches, I could at least tell men how much I loved them; so that though they might laugh at me for my foolish and confused words, they might yet be moved to see what there was that made me speak my love, though I could give no reason for it.

[...] I think those same churches of North France the grandest, the most beautiful, the kindest and most loving of all the buildings that the earth has ever borne.

Love is everywhere in these lines, sometimes in a surprising way: that of the visitor, which he wants to share as an author with his readers, but even the love *for* and *of* the building, and of humanity in general – thanks to the ambiguity of the pronoun *them* that may not only refer to the churches in the clause “I could at least tell *men* how much I loved *them*” –, the love of the builders (“of all men” and “of God”) having passed through their work.

THE CATHEDRAL IN THE LANDSCAPE

The repetition of the word *love*, as well as of the superlatives, mirroring the one of the visits, gives the impression to feel the writer’s emotion, as well as at the beginning of “The Story of the Unknown Church” (p.29), when the master mason, Walter, describes what he remembers of the church he built in long sentences suggesting a stream of remembrances:

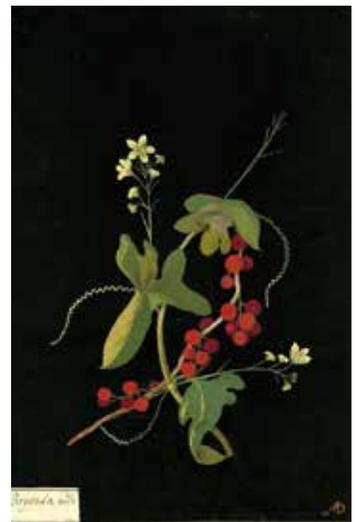
through the boughs and trunks of the poplars, we caught glimpses of the great golden corn sea, waving, waving, waving, for leagues and leagues; and among the corn grew burning scarlet poppies and blue corn-flowers; and the corn-flowers were so blue, that they gleamed, and seemed to burn with a steady light, as they grew beside the poppies among the gold of the wheat.

The exaltation is triggered by a flourishing landscape such as the one that William Morris admired between Chartres and Dreux :

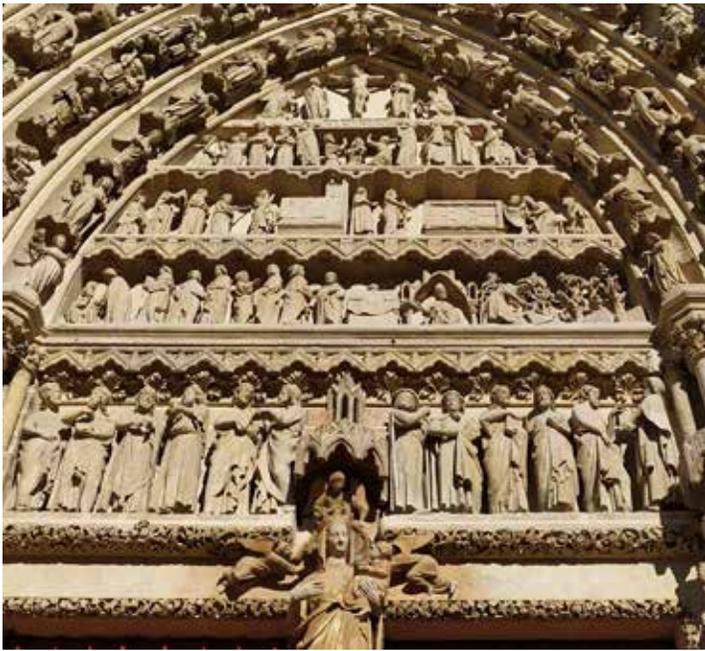
the most beautiful fields I ever saw, looking as if they belonged to no man, as if they were planted not to be cut down in the end, and to be stored in barns and eaten by cattle, but that rather they were planted for beauty only, that they might grow always among the trees, mingled with the flowers, purple thistles, and blue corn-flowers, and red poppies....²²

The short story gives an impression of movement with a wave of repetitions among which only the contrasted colors of the season seem distinct. The paintings of Claude Monet come to the mind, especially his *Vue de Vétheuil* (1880).

Some words also make a connection between nature and the church it surrounds. For instance, just after the image of the corn-flowers which “seemed to *burn*”, we learn that “[t]he old Church had been *burned*”. In the garden nearby, “the hollyhocks too were all out in blossom at that time, great *spires*” — like at the top of a cathedral — “of pink, and orange, and red, and white” (p. 29). It’s also worth paying attention to the wild flowers, several of them being toxic, like “deadly nightshade, La bella donna, [...] deadly, cruel-looking” but also “lush green briony [...] that grows so fast” (*ibid.*) that it may repeat the cycle of life and death embodied by the old and the new church, doomed to disappear too, and symbolized by Crucifixion (mentioned below).



Mary Delany, *Bryonia Alba*, collage of coloured papers with body color and watercolour on black ink. The British Museum



Tympanum of the *Vierge dorée* South porch, Amiens Cathedral

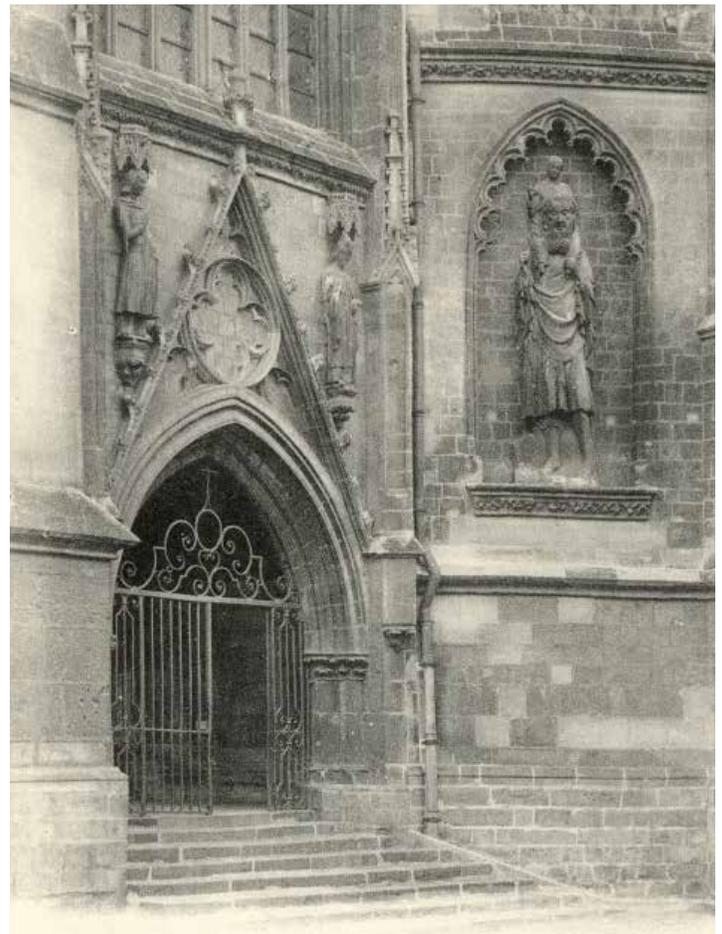


Amiens Cathedral from the East side

So like Ruskin, who started *The Bible of Amiens* “By the rivers of waters” (chap. 1), William Morris considered how the cathedral was rooted in the landscape, and almost made it a natural element among others; “the carved temple-mountain that rises so high above the water-meadows of the Somme” (“Shadows of Amiens” p. 109) could thus be as moving as the mountains would often be for him.

A PERSONAL TRANSCRIPTION

Following the letter to Georgina Burne-Jones, that emotion of the spectator (as well as the nightmares triggered by the *Night in the Cathedral*) shows the Gothic nature of the building. The latter also depends on the creation process, on which “The Story of the Unknown Church” focuses, giving “signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck a stone; a freedom of thought”, as Ruskin celebrates it²³: the tomb that Walter makes for his sister and his friend is, indeed, a totally personal, emotional, spontaneous and original piece of art, “carved [...] all about with many flowers and histories, [in which were] carved the faces of those [he] had known on earth” (p. 33).

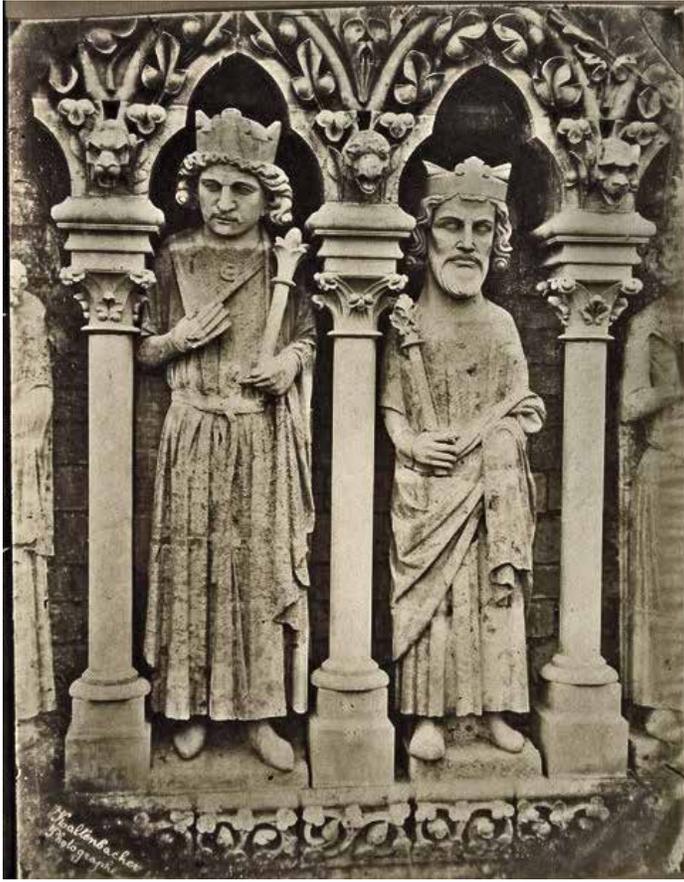


St. Christopher's door, Amiens Cathedral
L. Caron, collection Simon Jeanjean, 1914-1918.
<https://www.unilim.fr/jeanjean/1173>

In “Shadows of Amiens”, William Morris’ position lies between reception and creation as he strives to transcribe with words – that is partly to recreate – his experience of the cathedral. He sometimes gives the impression of an instinctive flow, correcting itself on the go: “Did I say above that one of the faces of the twelve Apostles was the most beautiful in the tympanum? if I did, I retract that saying, certainly, looking on the westernmost of these two angels” (pp. 105-106). This could give an example of the old “instinct for beauty” celebrated in “Art under Plutocracy” (1883),²⁴ thanks to which “every complete man” “made beautiful things” “without conscious effort”.

But the author of “Shadows of Amiens” also confesses many difficulties and sometimes only expresses the visual beauty of the cathedral by telling what a hard task it is (still in front of the two angels at the top of the *Vierge dorée tympanum*): “I am utterly at a loss how to describe it, or to give any idea of the exquisite lines of the cheek and the rippled hair sweeping back from it, just faintly touched by the light from the south-east. I cannot say more about it” (p. 106).

He also seems to be looking for the best angle from which to describe the building and suggests pretty unusual options. The first one is a dynamic view, upwards, from the steeple of another building; then, the cathedral “rises up from the ground” –



Nicolas Charles Kaltenbacher, statues of Amiens Cathedral,
around 1870. Galerie Michel Cabotse

like a plant would grow? – “and above [...] you would see [...] the grey towers and gable, grey against the blue of the August sky, and behind them all, rising high into the quivering air, the tall spire over the crossing” (p. 100). Then he starts a description from behind, giving a lateral view of the eastern chapels with all their roofs and buttresses, to finally open one of the smallest doors, next to the statue of St. Christopher.²⁵

William Morris’ main difficulty, nevertheless, is to *remember* what he saw and what his first feelings were (just like for the narrator of “A Night in a Cathedral”). It is all the more complicated that he uses pictures (possibly those of the Amiens-based photographer Kaltenbacher,²⁶ from whom Ruskin would order illustrations for his *Bible of Amiens*) to describe the porches that he had admired months earlier but which, “though very distinct and faithful, when they show anything at all, yet, in some places, where the shadows are deep, show simply nothing” (“Shadows of Amiens” p.103). Here is the explanation of the title of the essay, emphasizing the faults of a secondary source that has even “considerably dulled [the] memory” of “the day or two [...] spent at Amiens” (*ibid.*). But while acknowledging these limits, William Morris may exemplify the savage *Nature of Gothic*, defended by Ruskin in beautiful humanistic declarations such as “in all things that live there are certain irregularities and deficiencies which are not only signs of life, but sources of beauty.”²⁷

Morris’ difficulty in describing the cathedral doesn’t lead to a spiritual approach to the building. From the very beginning of “Shadows of Amiens” (p. 101), the writer declares: “I did not feel in the least awe-struck, or humbled by its size and grandeur.” “A Night in a Cathedral” does introduce some supernatural references, but these are to Gothic literature and to horrific mental visions. As fear overwhelms him, the narrator, who did not pray with the other visitors when they were still in the church (p. 310), still doesn’t try to do so, but to find comfort in reason, imagination, and aesthetical pleasure. As Helen Timo suggests, his anguish may come from faith loss and mirror William Morris’ preoccupations at the time when he moved from a religious to an artistic vocation.²⁸

That could explain why “Shadows of Amiens” puts forward humane representations in “the most familiar scenes and most simple subjects”.²⁹ At least the writing gives that impression, for example the free direct speech attributed to the Apostles around the Virgin Mary’s death bed, as if they were full of questions about life afterwards: “Ah! and where will she go now? whose face will she see always?” (“Shadows of Amiens” p. 108). William Morris also humanizes the prophets represented above the Mother of God in a kind of humorously disrespectful metalepsis, giving to the characters that they represent the (im)possible feelings of the statues: “old they look, very old, old and passionate and fierce, sitting there for so long” (*ibid.*). In most of the sculptures, William Morris praises the striking expressiveness and liveliness of the bodies, like on the *Vierge dorée* tympanum (left second row from bottom, p. 6):



Details of *Mère Dieu*, western porch of Amiens Cathedral;
Mary’s death (above), the propheta (below)



gloriously-draped figures the monks are, with genial faces full of good wisdom, drawn into quaint expressions by the joy of argument. [...] These other two, one very energetic indeed, with his head and shoulders swung back a little, and his right arm forward, and the other listening to him, and but half-convinced yet (p. 104).



Detail of St. Firmin's life in Amiens Cathedral.

A MODEL OF AESTHETICS

Such figures can also be found inside the cathedral, where Morris distinguishes the coloured representation of St. Firmin's life on the external side of the choir, especially "the



Morris & Co. (design: Philip Webb), *The Tribes of Israel*, 1865. detail of the East window, All Saints Church, Middleton Cheney, Photo: Eric Hardy

priests, bearing the reliquaries [...] with their long vestments girded at the waist and falling over their feet, painted too, in light colours, with golden flowers on them" (p. 102). Of course, the attention to flowers, as well as to other natural patterns all along "Shadows of Amiens" makes us think of William Morris' future decorative designs, but the observation of the *bas-relief* described here brings us more specifically to Middleton Cheney where the stained glass windows produced there by Morris & Co. ten years later (in 1865) for All Saints Church, and for which William Morris worked on natural light colours,³⁰ look as if they could well have been inspired by the memory of Amiens Cathedral.

The texts that the young William Morris wrote after his visit in 1855 thus seem totally coherent with his decision to become an artist, but they can also be connected to the communist ideals that he was to embrace a quarter of a century later.

THE CATHEDRAL AS A SYMBOL OF COMMUNISM



Frederic H Evans, St. George, Kelmscott, 1896. William Morris Gallery.

The link is first made through Ruskin, who did not call for the end of "Useless Toil", "parasites of property", "monopolists of the means of productive labour" nor "capitalist exchange"³¹ but who taught "that the art of any epoch must of necessity be the expression of its social life, and that the social life of the Middle Ages allowed the workman freedom of individual expression".³² In "Art and Industry in the Fourteenth century" (1887),³³ William Morris goes back to "the history of the guilds" and to the example of "the cloth-weavers of Flanders", whose rules made "the accumulation of capital [...] impossible", which is the condition of "a fair livelihood and plenty of leisure". In his socialist conferences, cathedrals, especially the North France Gothic ones were symbols of "The Beauty of Life", of an "art made by the people and for the people as a joy to the maker and the user,"³⁴ and Morris may have been recollecting his youthful admiration for Amiens when he suggested that his audience should: "go into one of our mighty Gothic naves (do any of you remember the first time you did so?) and note how the huge free space satisfies and elevates you".³⁵ Similarly, in "Art under Plutocracy", he condemns how the "art-lacking or unhappy labour" of the modern "system of competitive commerce" has destroyed "decorative art [...]" as a spontaneous and popular expression of the instinct for beauty" and reuses the image of the carved temple-mountain: "Think, I beg you, to go no further back in history, [than to] the sculptured cliffs of the great French cathedrals".³⁶

The celebration of pre-capitalist times, in this conference, could be illustrated by "The Story of the Unknown Church". For instance, the idea that "all men were more or less artists; [...] and the audience for the authors of intellectual art was nothing short of the whole people" can be linked to the end of the short-story :

as I carved, sometimes the monks and other people too would come and gaze, and watch how the flowers grew; and sometimes too as they gazed, they would weep for pity, knowing how all had been. So my life passed, and I

lived in that abbey for twenty years after he died, till one morning, quite early, when they came into the church for matins, they found me lying dead, with my chisel in my hand, underneath the last lily of the tomb (p. 33).

Walter's death after twenty years spent on the same work of art also exemplifies to the extreme that "no great pressure of speed was put on a man's work, but he was allowed to carry it through leisurely and thoughtfully".³⁷



Wall paintings at St. George church. Wikimedia Commons

A NIGHT IN A CHURCH

Other parallels with early texts inspired by the churches of North France can be enlightening. Let's consider the night in the church which finishes *A Dream of John Ball*. In many respects, such as age and dimensions, the church described in chapter 9 is the one of Kelmscott; "the roof of curved wooden rafters with great tie-beams going from wall to wall", as well as the windows, "glazed with white fretwork, with here and there a little figure in very deep rich colours"³⁸ can still be seen at St. George. But it's not the case with the entrance "through the south porch under a round-arched door carved very richly"³⁹ nor of the stalls, "carved more abundantly and beautifully than any of the woodwork I had yet seen"⁴⁰, which rather remind us of Amiens Cathedral. As for the walls, some are "figured all over with stories"⁴¹ in Kelmscott but not with "a huge St. Christopher with his black beard"; that may rather come from Louviers, where William Morris admired the "splendid"⁴² medium-sized (like St. George) church in 1855. These memories are all the more plausible since the narrator mentioned in chapter 2 "a piece of the plain-song of the church, familiar enough to me to bring back to my mind the great arches of some cathedral in France and the canons singing in the choir".⁴³

As a consequence, the night spent "betwixt the living and the dead"⁴⁴ can partly look like a rewriting of "A Night in a Cathedral", in which the narrator, after the "magic of [the] sweetness" of "voices chaunting" (p. 311), when there are still people in the building, can only refer to Mozart's "Requiem" (p. 313), that doesn't soothe his fear of death and of atheism. At least, John Ball's interlocutor addresses the question of the fate of



St. Christopher, Notre-Dame de Louviers

men's works which seems to haunt William Morris' early romances⁴⁵ when he says: "though I die and end, yet mankind yet liveth, therefore I end not, since I am a man".⁴⁶ This secular conception of immortality can explain quite surprising passages in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, like the love declaration, at the beginning of "Shadows of Amiens" (p. 100), to the builders of the cathedral, "still surely living, still real men, and capable of receiving love", or the report of his own death by Walter, at the end of "The Story of the Unknown Church".⁴⁷ Even if the *Dream of John Ball* only finishes in "a little glimmer"⁴⁸, its echoes of the early romances reinforce the idea of a faint but long-term progress.

THE FEMALE MASTER MASON

In *News from Nowhere*, the evolution to communist happiness seems obvious and its scale may be emphasized by a reminiscence from "The Story of the Unknown Church" in which, "beneath" Walter, his "sister Margaret was carving at the flower-work, and the little quatrefoils that carry the signs of the zodiac and emblems of the months" (p. 30), like at Amiens Cathedral, on the bottom part of St. Firmin's porch. In "The Ob-



Signs of the zodiac and emblems of the months (from Capricorn to Twins) on the right lower part of St. Firmin's porch at Amiens Cathedral.

stinate Refusers”, the “rather little woman [...] working with mallet and chisel” on “a carving in low relief of flowers and figures” is not a subaltern anymore; she’s the “head carver”, the “best carver” and the others want to wait for her to start their pleasurable work together: an example of Morris’ support for equality of opportunity for women.⁴⁹

THE CATHEDRAL IN THE FIELDS

One last pattern repetition and variation will finish illustrating the admirable coherence that I’ve been impressed to find in William Morris’ thoughts and images: the one of the cathedral in the fields, that William Morris admired near Chartres and celebrated in “The Story of the Unknown Church”. It reappears in “Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century” at the beginning of which he imagines a traveller arriving by train in a town where they could see a “mountain” of “grey stone traceried and carved,” which they would not want to “mar” by the view of “petty commercialism”, so that they would go across the river, “out in the fields”, where the labourers are, who look “bent and beaten, and twisted and starved”.⁵⁰ Morris reveals afterwards that he’s been thinking of Peterborough, but this introduction also seems to refer to Ruskin’s *Bible of Amiens*, published three years earlier and which starts in a similar way, with the “intelligent English traveller” on the train “half-way between Boulogne and Paris” not stopping in “the Venice of Picardy”⁵¹ where s/he could see a “workless [...] building, and its unshadowed minaret”⁵², which we understand to be *No-*

tre-Dame, which *can* be seen from quite a distance. Therefore, we can think of Amiens Cathedral as a symbol of a radiant past and future when William Morris concludes:

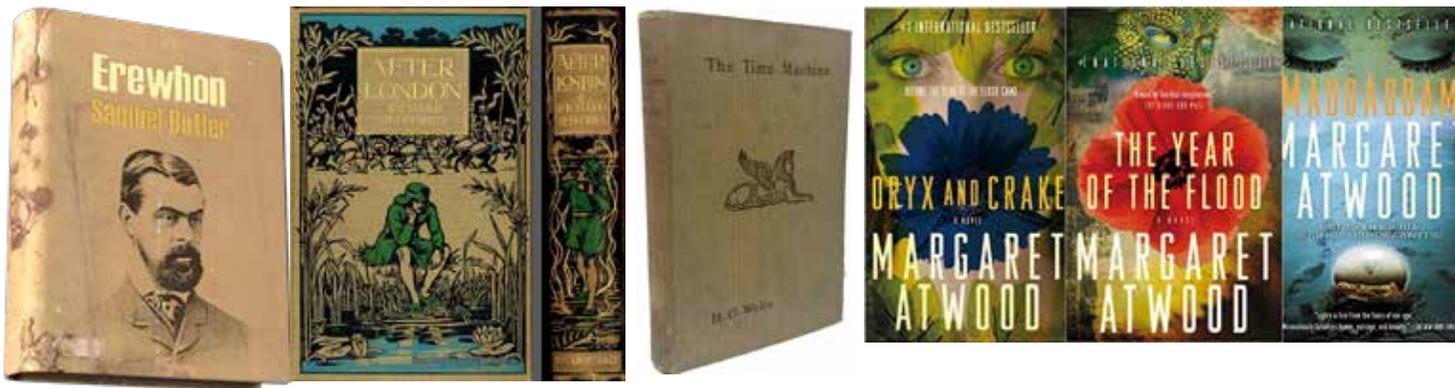
It is not so hard now to picture to oneself those grey masses of stone, which our forefathers raised in their hope, standing no longer lost and melancholy over the ghastly misery of the fields and the squalor of the towns, but smiling rather on their newborn sisters the houses and halls of the free citizens of the new Communes, and the garden-like fields about them where there will be labour still, but the labour of the happy people who have shaken off the curse of labour and kept its blessing only.⁵³



Amiens from Longprè Lès Amiens. Photo: AnnickAmiens

ENDNOTES

- 1 Fiona Mac Carthy, *William Morris. A Life for Our Time*, London: Faber and Faber, 1994, pp. 82, 148, 626.
- 2 See Keith Hanley & John K. Walton, *Constructing Cultural Tourism: John Ruskin and the Touristic Gaze*, Bristol, Buffalo, New York & Toronto: Channel View Publications, 2010.
- 3 See Cynthia J. Gamble, « Sur les pas de John Ruskin à Amiens », *Ruskin – Turner. Dessins et voyages en Picardie romantique*, Amiens: Musée de Picardie, 2003, pp. 9-29.
- 4 “Morris, Burne-Jones and French Gothic: Being an Account of a Walking Tour in France, July to August 1855”, William Morris Society, 1985, <http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu/MorrisBurneJones/FrenchGothic.pdf>.
- 5 See Florence S. Boos, “‘A Holy Warfare against the Age’: Essays and Tales of the ‘Oxford and Cambridge Magazine’”, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2014, pp. 344-368, www.jstor.org/stable/43663253. All issues of the Magazine can be found at <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/ap4.o93.rawcollection.html>
- 6 That was the view of Helen Timo, “A Church without God: William Morris’s ‘A night in a cathedral’”, *Journal of William Morris Studies*, 4.2, summer 1980, p.24 and of J.-M. Baïssus, “Morris and the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*”, *Journal of William Morris Studies*, 5.2, 1982, pp. 3-6. Also see Patrick C. Fleming, « William Fulford, ‘The Set’, and *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*”, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2012, pp. 301–319, www.jstor.org/stable/41638149.
- 7 According to Eugene D Le Mire in his Introduction to *The Hollow Land and Other Contributions to the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996. That’s the most convincing for Florence S. Boos (op. cit.).
- 8 See Helen Timo, op. cit., pp. 25-26.
- 9 François-René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d’outre-tombe* (1849-1850), tome II, livre 8, « Londres, d’avril à septembre 1822 – Une nuit dans l’église de Westminster », ed. Edmond Biré, Paris: Garnier, 1910, pp. 115-118.
- 10 *The Collected Letters of William Morris, vol. I, 1848-1880*, Princeton University Press, 1984, p.16.
- 11 “Less than forty years ago – about thirty – I first saw the city of Rouen, then still in its outward aspect a piece of the Middle Ages: no words can tell you how its mingled beauty, history, and romance took hold on me; I can only say that, looking back on my past life, I find it was the greatest pleasure I have ever had”. “The Aims of Art”, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1888/signs/chapters/chapter5.htm>.
- 12 *The Bible of Amiens*, chap.IV, section 1, p. 88, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/24428/24428-h/24428-h.htm>.
- 13 William Morris strangely ignored Viollet-le-Duc’s restorations on Amiens Cathedral even though they must have been going on when he visited it. See Cyrielle Durox, « Viollet-le-Duc et les chapelles du déambulatoire » & Vincent Brunelle, « Les restaurations de la façade occidentale » in *Aurélien André & Xavier Boniface (dir.), Amiens, la grâce d’une cathédrale*, Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2012, pp. 93-99 & 101-109.
- 14 *Handbook for Travellers in France* (1843), London: John Murray, 1864, p. 17. Also see Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, London: Hugues, 1841, p. 66: “I think the internal vastness of Amiens, Beauvais, Chartres and others of the French churches, should serve as useful examples to us in this respect of the revival of Pointed and Christian architecture in England.”
- 15 *Lectures on the rise and development of Mediaeval Architecture*, London: John Murray, 1879, vol. I, p. 162.
- 16 *Handbook for Travellers in France*, op. cit., p. 17.
- 17 Gilbert Scott, op. cit. p. 165.
- 18 *John Ruskin, The Stones of Venice (1851-1853)*, chap. “The Nature of Gothic” (1853), ed. William Morris, Kelmscott Press, 1892; reprint Pallas Athene, 2011, p. 122.
- 19 Grzegorz Zinkiewicz writes that it was “a lasting fascination, the most vivid and, arguably, happiest experience of his life” (*William Morris’ Position between Art and Politics*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, p. 141). In a research already focused on Amiens Cathedral – “Socialist Aesthetics & The Shadows of Amiens”, Florence S. Boos considers that, despite the general title “The Churches of North France”, suggesting the beginning of a series, the text “had no sequel, most likely perhaps because its statements were interpretative rather than historical, and would have applied more generally to other cathedrals as well” (Kelmscott Lecture, William Morris Society, 2007, p. 38).
- 20 See *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, vol. I, op. cit., “To Emma Shelton Morris”, 11th November 1855, pp. 24-26.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 486.
- 22 Letter to Cormell Price from Avranches, 10th August 1855, *ibid.*, p. 20.
- 23 Ruskin, *The Nature of Gothic*, op. cit., p. 20.
- 24 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1883/pluto.htm>
- 25 In *The Bible of Amiens*, Ruskin has a similar question and answer: “I have never been able to make up my mind which was really the best way of approaching the cathedral for the first time”; “I will not keep you just now to tell St. Honoré’s story [...] for certainly you will be impatient to go into the church; and cannot enter it to better advantage than by this door. For all cathedrals of any mark have nearly the same effect when you enter at the west door; but I know no other which shows so much of its nobleness from the south interior transept” (op. cit., chap. 4, sections 6 & 8, pp. 92, 95).
- 26 According to Emily Eels, “The Victorian at Amiens: Translation and Transposition”, in A. Pinheiro de Sousa, A. Correia; T. de Ataide Malafaia (dir.), *A Palavra e a Imagem*, Lisboa: Colibri, 2007, p. 95.
- 27 Ruskin, *The Nature of Gothic*, op. cit., p. 33.
- 28 Helen Timo, op. cit.
- 29 Ruskin, *The Nature of Gothic*, op. cit., pp. 74-75.
- 30 See Richard Wheeler, David Thompson, Brian Goodey, Riger Bellamy, *William Morris at Middleton Cheney. The Stained Glass in All Saints Church*, Eardisley: Fircone Books, 2019.
- 31 William Morris, “Useful work versus useless toil”, 1884, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1884/useful.htm>. See Peter Faulkner, “Ruskin and Morris”, *Journal of William Morris Studies*, autumn 2000, pp.6-17, <http://www.morrisociety.org/JWMS/14.1Autumn2000/AU00.14.1.Faulkner.pdf>.
- 32 William Morris, “The Revival of Architecture”, 1888, *Fortnightly Review*, May 1888. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1888/revival.htm>.
- 33 “Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century” *Collected Works of William Morris*, vol XXII, pp.375-390. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1887/artandindustry.htm>.
- 34 “The Beauty of Life”, 1880, *Hopes and Fears for Art*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1882/hopes/chapters/chapter3.htm>.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 “Art Under Plutocracy”, op. cit.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 William Morris, *A Dream of John Ball* (1886-1888), Kelmscott Press, 1892, chap. 9, pp. 72, 73, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1886/johnball/chapters/index.htm>.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- 40 *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- 42 William Morris, letter to Cormell Price from Avranches, 10th August 1855, op. cit., p. 21.
- 43 *A Dream of John Ball*, op. cit., pp. 17-18. See William Morris’ letter to Cormell Price from Avranches, 10th August 1855, op. cit., p. 22, for his memories of Vespers sung in Rouen in 1854.
- 44 *A Dream of John Ball*, title of chap. 9.
- 45 See Amanda Hodgson, *The Romances of William Morris*, Cambridge University Press, 1987, chap. 1.
- 46 *A Dream of John Ball*, op. cit., p. 77.
- 47 Cf. “Golden Wings”, published by William Morris in the *Magazine* in December 1856.
- 48 *A Dream of John Ball*, op. cit., chap. 12, p. 106.
- 49 William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (1890), chap. 26, <http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu/newsfromnowhere/ch26.html>.
- 50 William Morris, “Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century”, op. cit.
- 51 Ruskin, *The Bible of Amiens*, op. cit., pp. 1, 2.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 53 “Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century”, op. cit.



WILLIAM MORRIS'S ECOSOCIALISM, THEN AND NOW

Frank Palmeri

William Morris's *News from Nowhere* and his lectures of the 1880s have exerted considerable influence on twentieth and twenty-first century ideas and practices in economics, ecology, and the arts. This influence stems in large part from Morris's rejection of the ideology of progress—his conviction that we should cease making more shoddy, unnecessary commodities to be sold at the lowest price, produced by workers earning barely subsistence wages. He therefore embraced the idea of a stationary economy (like one desired even by Mill) that would reduce or eliminate the ugliness and pollution of industrial, coal-based products and means of (over-) production. In *Nowhere*, Morris anticipated by almost a century the emergence of the theory of a low- or de-growth economy, as well as the



politics of philosophical anarchism (in, for example, the Occupy movement), which does not depend on leaders, hierarchies, or the mediations of representative government.

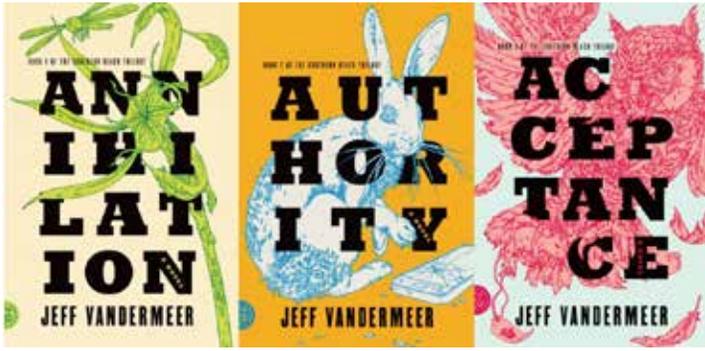
Before assessing the influences of *Nowhere* in its own time and today, it will be useful to place Morris's ideas in the context of other nineteenth-century utopias. Condorcet's utopian vision in the tenth and final stage of his *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795) is neither

socialist nor ecological: it is based on expanding “free trade” and sees little downside in any new technology. However, Condorcet's utopia serves as a precursor of Morris's because of the intensity and conviction with which the visionary sees the future. Both these utopias imply that if it is possible to imagine such a society in some detail, then it might be possible to bring the vision or parts of it into existence. In fact, Condorcet's utopian *Sketch* foresees the establishment of an insurance fund for workers injured on the job, a fund for support in old age, and equal educational opportunities for girls and women. It took more than a hundred and fifty years, but these radical improvements were realized in most European and some de-colonizing countries by the middle of the twentieth century.

To take another example, the inhabitants of the eponymous country described in Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872) decided to restrict their technological advancements to what they had been several centuries earlier, at a stage that closely corresponded to that of the late fourteenth century in northern Italy. They renounced industrial conveniences (for example, railroads and buildings with iron) in order to hold off the possibility that self-replicating and self-perfecting machines could replace humans.

In *Nowhere*, the inhabitants similarly renounce certain technologies, but for a different reason—because they cripple or poison workers. The principal purpose of social life in *Nowhere* is to encourage life and health; hence, the unhealthy or unpleasant work required by some technologies is counterproductive. In addition, every kind of occupation carries with it both an aesthetic and an ethical dimension; art and morality are not opposites in Morris's world, but are intertwined.

Morris's *Nowhere* is closely related to a sub-genre of the ecological novel that recounts the disappearance or the aftermath of the metropolitan center. This re-greening of the city, with London returning to a much earlier stage of technological and social life, can carry apocalyptic or utopian implications. Individual re-greening narratives often contain both energies, and this combination helps constitute the form. In Richard Jefferies' *After London: Or Wild England* (1885), one of the first avatars of this genre, an unexplained disaster has wiped out



almost the entire human species. After a few centuries, all that remains of the Thames Valley is a large lake of oily poisonous effluvia, formed when the mouth of the polluted river silted up and its outlet to the sea was blocked. The Traveler in H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) discovers 880,000 years in the future the remains of only a few of the grandest, or at least largest, buildings of the early industrial age. He is able to hold off the carnivorous Morlocks because he controls the technologies of fire and of time travel, at least as long as he has matches and can find his way back to his machine. These are among the most well-known apocalyptic re-greenings of London.

Morris's re-greening of London as Nowhere does not result from a punitive plague (as in Jefferies or in contemporary work

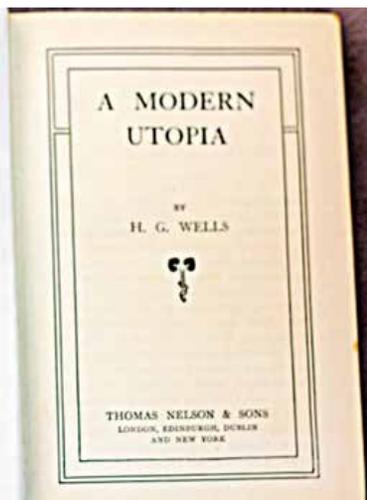
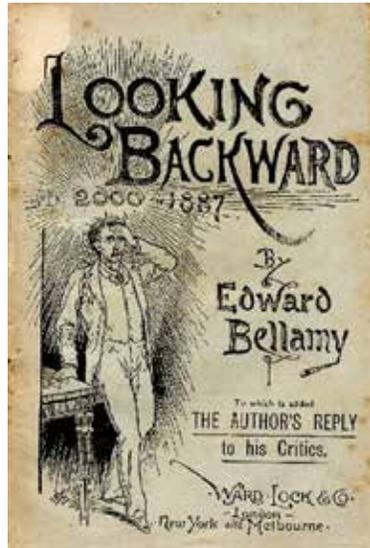
by Margaret Atwood—the *MaddAddam* trilogy (2004–2013)—or Jeff Van der Meer's Southern Reach novels (2014). Neither does it involve Wells's ironic, even Dantesque division of the species into two: the blind cannibal workers on the one hand and child-like human cattle on the other, the latter, descendants of the owners of industry, being small, delicate fruit-eaters, regressive in their verbal, mental, and moral abilities.

Morris also distinguishes his organic utopian society from centrally planned utopias of state socialism, especially the one presented by Edward Bellamy in *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888), but also including earlier utopias by Condorcet and Comte, and Wells' later *A Modern Utopia* (1905). All of these utopian visions assign a central and higher authority to a new clerisy of scientific experts, calculators of chances, predictors of consequences. Nowhere, however, has no need for a separate class of governors, such as Wells' technocratic Samurai or Comte's priesthood of Positivism.

Having noted some of the genres of utopian discourse that influenced him, we can now consider Morris's own ecosocialist thinking and its influence in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Morris clearly rejects the doctrine of progress, meaning the desirability or necessity of progress understood merely as growth of quarterly year-to-year dividends, of sales numbers, of market share. This rejection shows the affiliation between Morris's ecosocialist Nowhere and countercultures in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Among other similarities, both Nowhere and the countercultures question the necessity of adapting the newest technology for an unnecessary but profit-making product. Both ask us to acknowledge the effects of human habitation on the planet, especially in the previous two and a half centuries, including the costs that have been dubbed "externals" because they do not appear on a company's statements of income, outgo, debts, and profits. Both the Nowhere of the late twenty-first century and the countercultures of the late twentieth century recognized the importance of environmental consciousness, an organic outlook, in particular, avoidance of pesticides. These efforts in our world outside the narrative have so far been thwarted by major chemical companies, but we do not know how effective they might be in the long run.

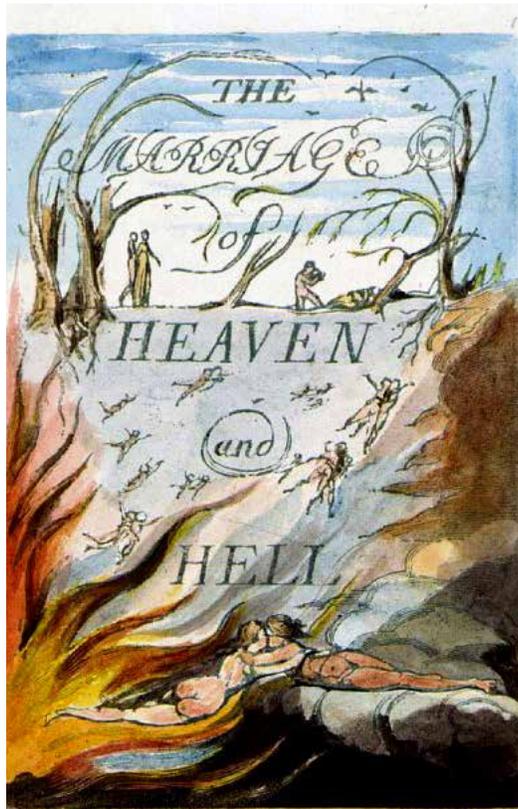
As an alternative to "progressive," mechanical, and dehumanizing processes of production, Morris championed the use of low-tech means for the making of goods by individual craftsmen that would be both beautiful and useful. From such convictions he developed the textile designs for Morris and Co. (based mostly on vegetable and avian forms) and the book designs of the Kelmscott Press, which find a response in the movement toward craft production of goods in the 1960s. His emphasis on the local and the organic anticipates the turn away from industrial farming and oil-based long-range transportation of foods. Despite Morris's aspirations, the workers employed by Morris & Co. were not individual craftsmen; they were well-paid, yet still salaried workers for Morris who executed his designs. (I omit Morris's immense impact on the Arts and Crafts movement, because it has been discussed so ably by others.)

Not only Morris's aesthetics, but also his ethics and economics depend on the belief that most people enjoy making things that are both useful and beautiful. For Morris, each of us



has an artist inside, as later for Gramsci, each of us is a philosopher. It may well be that, judging other people by himself, Morris exaggerates the extent to which most of us can find so much satisfaction in our work that it becomes a species of creative play. Visitors observed that in a morning, Morris could move from translating Homer to painting a portrait to writing a newspaper column and back again through the sequence. Most of us are not so multi-talented. However, Morris does not say that we are. His idea is that each person possesses some creative energy that can find expression in some happy ways in arts, crafts, outdoor occupations, and physical activity, in contributing something useful and pleasant to the store of the community. His idea deserves to be taken seriously, even if we do not believe that his conception of human nature is entirely accurate. As Morris would ask through the old antiquarian, “What human nature? The human nature of paupers, of slaves, of slaveholders or the human nature of wealthy freemen?” (Chap. 14).

Two other principles of life in Nowhere helped to shape later social visions. Communes and land trusts played an important role in countercultural experiments of the 1960s and 1970s in the US and elsewhere, although the proportion of the ecological and the socialist varied from place to place and time to time. Secondly, Morris exerted an influence on later thinkers through his emphasis on the local and the Green. The establishment of decision-making power in neighborhood councils or motes, even where there used to be a metropolis, is a mark of a related de-centralization. In Nowhere, small is

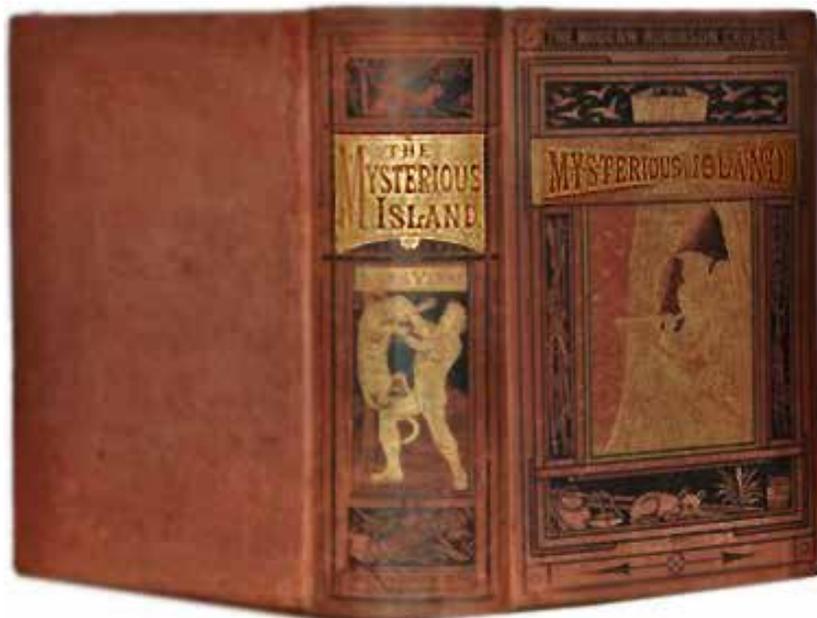


beautiful, even in cities. Green should be an important part of every block, giving the city a horizontal orientation, rather than a vertical one based primarily on steel, concrete, and glass. From this sense and this filiation with Morris’s Nowhere flowed the City Beautiful movement, and the mark it made on notable American cities, including Washington, D. C.; Denver, Colorado; and Coral Gables, Florida and Spokane, Washington, both self-named the City Beautiful.

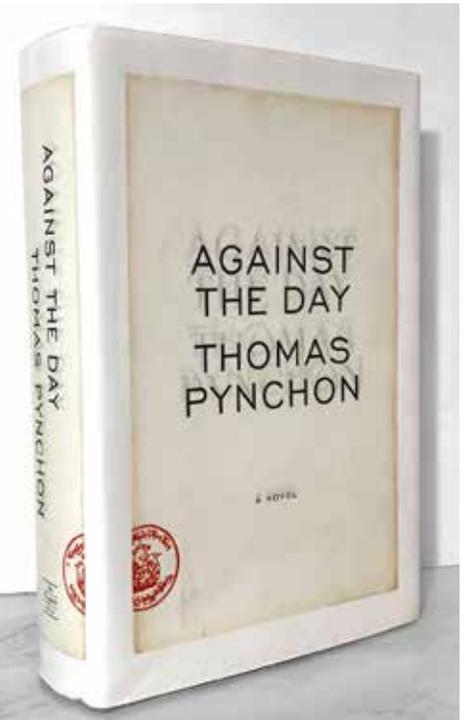
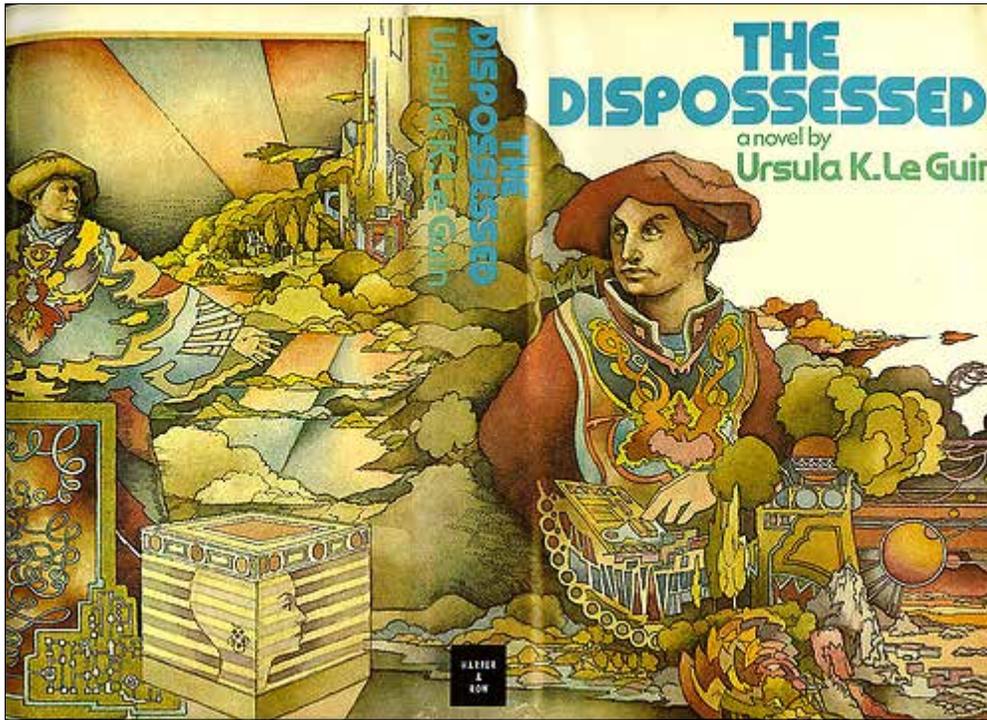
Although science fiction and utopia often occur together, as in Jules Verne’s *Mysterious Island*, Morris’s *Nowhere* functions rather as a work of anti-science fiction. The protagonists of Robinsonades such as Verne’s preserve the faith that their knowledge will enable them to overcome obstacles and threats by bringing to bear more sophisticated technologies on their problems.

By contrast, the inhabitants of Nowhere view with deep skepticism the widespread introduction of new technologies or new applications of old ones. The reasons for their attitude are both aesthetic and ethical: they are concerned that the new technology, like many in the nineteenth (and twentieth) century, will be ugly or will produce ugliness; and that its production and use will be unhealthy or dangerous to workers, users, or both.

Therefore, Morris’s good society will not be dependent on constantly improving technological devices surpassing previous technologies and reshaping the social forms that accompany them without altering the basic opposition between owners and workers. Following Ruskin, Morris defines true wealth as the possibility for happiness, which he grounds on health and the full expression of the energies of the body and mind (“The Society of the Future,” 1887). In the second half of *News from Nowhere*, Morris lyrically celebrates the sensual beauty of nature and of the human body as part of nature. In fact, the beautiful, fit, young body of Ellen functions as a metaphor and a synecdoche for nature and for the re-greened land along the Thames. Morris makes clear that he rejects ascetic renunciations. Here his attitude resembles that of Blake in the “Proverbs of Hell” (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1794): “As the caterpillar chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on, so the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys.”



An ecological life means a simple life, without cheap, ugly unnecessary objects, decorations, or playthings. Morris’s idealization of late fourteenth-century northern



Italy may be dismissed as exaggerated (although exaggeration falls within the purview of satire, a form in which he is also working). But Morris's medievalism is complex rather than merely regressive. When a reaping festival is held in Nowhere in what used to be a church, the prevailing attitude does not involve a return to religious beliefs or practices, whether Christian or pagan: there are in Nowhere no doctrines or beliefs concerning one divinity or many, no priesthood or hierarchy of believers; apparently no beliefs or concerns at all about things spiritual. Such materiality aligns with the celebration of the physical beauty of the human body, the "human form divine" (Blake again), as well as the beauty and sufficiency of all that exists. If we have enough and distribute it more fairly, as in Nowhere, Morris implies, we have no need for more, for growth. We would have no need for quantitative measures of wealth if we could put into effect the Ruskinian punning neologism that "wealth" is the opposite of "illth"—in others words, that wealth is health.

As with religion, so with government. When Guest asks his antiquarian source how they manage politics in Nowhere, the response makes chapter 13 the shortest in the book: they manage just fine for politics, the old man answers, because they have none. The old party politics was only a sham, shadow-boxing between two factions of the ruling wealthy class. In the new way in Nowhere, decisions concerning the common good are made at the local level; they are discussed in advance and voted on by all; and consensus is sought. Morris's anarchism is related to and results from his view that we can all take a creative satisfaction in producing or performing some kind of useful work, that we will be living more fully if we do so.

Although such anarchism does not appear frequently in speculative or utopian fiction, it does figure in some ecosocialist speculative fictions from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For instance, Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) focuses on the "ambiguous utopia" that results when a community of anarchist dissenters from one planet is allowed to settle on a twin planet severely lacking in resources. In this novel, the anarcho-socialism precedes the ecological imperative to waste as little as possible in an inhospitable environment. Still, the difficult environment takes some of the luster off the anarchist utopia, and shows the hidden constraints in the system of "voluntary" job assignments. Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day* (2006) depicts a number of small utopian communities in the years around 1900, the most important being a resort in southern France. In a world in which anarchist dynamiters fight plutocrats and their thugs, anarcho-socialism again predominates and ecological concerns emerge only rather late in the novel. When residents of the anarchist utopia at Yz-les-Bains are asked how they get things done, if there are no rules and no government, they reply as the Nowhereians do, that pretty much everyone agrees on what needs to be done, and they decide how to do it together (*AtD*, p. 933; *Nowhere*, chap. 15).

Morris's ideas and practices in economics, politics, and art follow from and seek to address the harms to human societies and ecological networks caused by industrial processes and capital markets; his work thereby helps us theorize the current and necessary turn away from high-tech, carbon-based, and hierarchical production, distribution, and government, so that we will be able to say that utopia is not only Nowhere; it is Now here.



A RETURN TO NO. 8 RED LION SQUARE:
 J.P. SEDDON'S 1898 HOMAGE TO THE ARTISTS BEHIND THE DECORATION OF
 KING RENÉ'S HONEYMOON CABINET IN 1861

David Kopp

As ever with these young artists, there is a certain quality in all this work that one cannot define in a single word—an intensity of vision, and a simplicity of setting down, that make the scenes of medieval life they picture, however fanciful, a bit of life as it was lived; we are looking through a peep-hole at a medieval town; it may not have been exactly thus and thus, but the invention is vivid and human, and looking from afar, the twentieth century can greet the fifteenth century with understanding and fellowship.¹

In 1860, William Morris' medieval-styled Red House in Upton was completed. Designed by architect and friend Philip Webb to be a "Palace of Art," Morris famously brought in his friends and fellow artists to aid in the decoration of the new house which he and wife Jane would occupy for five years early in their marriage. Working together as a kind of medieval guild of artisans, Morris, Jane, Edward Burne-Jones and his wife Georgie, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his wife Lizzie Siddal, Phillip Webb and Ford Madox Brown designed and created furniture, metal works, murals, glass, and embroideries for the project. As they worked together, one in the merry group suggested that a firm be established to produce like items to those that they had created for Red House. Already in January of 1861, Burne-Jones told the painter, George Price Boyce, that "he and Morris and Rossetti and Webb were going to set up a

sort of shop where they would jointly produce and sell painted furniture."² In April of that year, Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. ("The Firm") was established with Morris as *primus inter pares*. Taking offices at 8 Red Lion Square, not far from the flat he and Burne-Jones shared prior to Morris' marriage, he wasted little time in promoting the Firm with a prospectus which listed a wide range of talents in mural decoration, wood carving, stained glass, metal work, and furniture. As Fiona MacCarthy suggests: "In arriving at this list the Firm was drawing on considerable resources of skill and of experience. As painters Madox Brown and Rossetti were already well established. Brown, then forty, was, as indeed he seemed, much the oldest of the partners, the most productive and high powered.

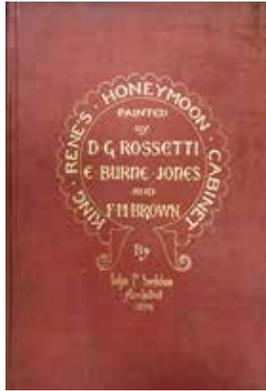


John Pollard Seddon by Hans Olaf Heyerdahl (1857–1913)

His work dominated the exhibitions of the Hogarth Club and he had already designed stained glass for James Powell & Sons. It has been said that the Firm was his original suggestion."³ Madox Brown and Rossetti both knew the Seddon brothers.

Thomas Seddon (1821 - 1856) was an artist and a student of Madox Brown. He identified with the Pre-Raphaelites and painted several subjects in the Middle East travelling

in the company of William Holman Hunt. His most famous work, *Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehoshaphat* (1854-55), was admired by John Ruskin. His younger brother John Pollard Seddon (1827-1906) was an architect in partnership with John Pritchard and a mentor to C. F. A. Voysey who worked for him in his architectural office.⁴ Like Morris, Seddon was an ardent disciple of Ruskin. “The Renaissance,” Seddon wrote in 1852, “was the exhumed mummy of Paganism set up in its place... and the corpse of Classic Art, we hope, will be decently re-interred; for then, and not until then may we with some reason expect the tide will flow again and Art in every branch be advanced to the vantage point of modern times over those that are bygone, in the absence of superstition and the increase of science.”⁵ As an established gothic revivalist architect, he and Pritchard were responsible for several church restorations, including Llandaff Cathedral, where Seddon engaged Rossetti to create a triptych reredos. In 1861 he designed the now famous King René’s Honeymoon Cabinet as his own drafting and writing desk and commissioned its decoration to the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. In 1898, nearly fifty years after the Cabinet’s creation, he told the story of the involvement of the Firm’s principal artists in a small treatise entitled *King René’s Honeymoon Cabinet, Illustrated from photographs of the panels painted by D. G. Rossetti, Sir E. Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown, etc., with a drawing by the author.*



The book was published by B.T. Batsford⁶, 94 High Holborn, London, and printed in limited quantity by Bradbury, Agnew & Co. In the December 3, 1898 issue of the *Athenaeum*, the following advertisement appeared in a list of new books available from Batsford:

KING RENÉ’S HONEYMOON CABINET. A Monograph. By JOHN P. SEDDON. Architect. Illustrated by 10 Photographic Reproductions of the Cabinet, and the Panels, Painted by the late Sir E. BURNE JONES. DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, and FORD MADOX BROWN. Large 8vo. cloth, price 5s. net. Forty Copies only of a LARGE-PAPER EDITION of the above have been printed on Hand-made Paper and specially bound in cloth gilt, price 10s. 6d. net.⁷



Seddon dedicates the work to Mrs. Walter De Hoghton Birch, “My Daughter and Quondam Assistant, to whom I owe much in various attempts to realize the unity of the several fine arts and their accessories, which the Cabinet was designed to illustrate.”(v) The book begins with a Preface which provides a history of the piece since its creation in 1861. The six chapters that follow provide a detailed description of the Cabinet: its design, construction and ten painted panels. A final chapter gives an account of the hereditary lineage of the subject of the Cabinet, King René of Anjou.

PREFACE

Marshall and Faulkner took a stall in the “Medieval Court” at the 1862 International Exhibition to show the wares of the new Firm. May Morris quotes a letter from Charles Faulkner to Cornell Price: “Our firm has arrived at the dignity of exhibition at the great exhibition, where we have already sent some glass, and shall shortly send some furniture, which will doubtless cause the majority of the spectators to admire.”⁸ The King René Cabinet was included in the Exhibition. According to Seddon, “at the close of which application to purchase it was made to the author by the authorities of the South Kensington Museum; but it remained in his possession until 22nd April, 1897, when he made it a wedding gift to his daughter, Mrs. Birch, to whom it now belongs.” (vii) That same year, Seddon again allowed the piece to be shown as a part of a collection of the works of Ford Madox Brown in the Spring Exhibition of 1897. Remarkably, Seddon includes a slightly deprecating critique from one of the daily papers: “The design of the piece of furniture is inexpressibly clumsy and bad, but the decorations which it serves to enframe are of the rarest beauty.” To which Seddon adds a footnote, “The author alone being responsible for the general design, hopes that opinions may differ upon this point.”(vii)

Aesthetic tastes had changed between 1861 and 1897, but even at the 1862 Exhibition the neo-medieval furniture of the firms of Morris, William Burges and Seddon and Sons were criticized for being irrelevant and impractical: “...their hangings, their music stand, their sofa, their chests, would all suit a family which might suddenly be awakened after a sleep of four centuries, and which was content to pay enormous prices suitably to furnish a barn.” (*The Building News*)⁹ By 1897, however, there was one noteworthy difference: the artists who painted Seddon’s Cabinet had each achieved success and fame. As a result, the value of their works had increased manifold—a fact keenly observed by Seddon in the Preface:

The continually increasing appreciation by the public of almost all the creations of the gifted artists who assisted in the decoration of this cabinet—Ford Madox Brown, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Sir Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris, Valentine Prinsep, and others—may, it is thought, render a short account of the cabinet and its paintings and decoration acceptable; the more so as it has become his-

torically interesting in the sense of being almost a unique example of an attempt during the current century of such a combination of the fine arts, and quite so when the high reputation attained by most of the collaborateurs upon it is considered.(viii)

Seddon also uses the Preface to clarify the utility of the piece and the *raison d'etre* of its decorative scheme: "... it was not intended as 'a sideboard,' but simply as a utilitarian piece of office furniture, to hold his own professional drawings, and an illustration of the theory¹⁰ he was urging elsewhere, and has never since ceased from urging, 'namely, *that in the unity and fellowship of the several arts lies their power.*'" (viii)

CHAPTER I. THE DESIGN OF THE PIECE OF FURNITURE.

John Seddon's father was an established cabinet maker in London (Seddon and Sons), and the King René piece was, therefore, spared no expense in materials or craftsmanship:

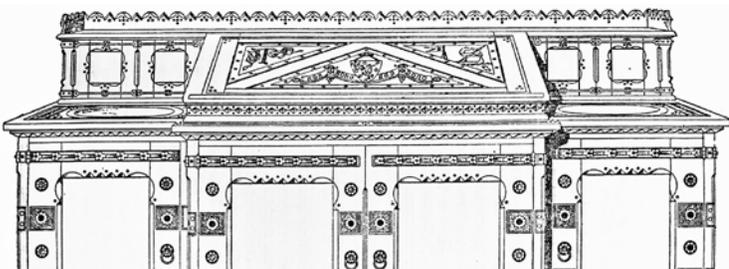
The cabinet is constructed entirely of oak, with its surface slightly polished, and profusely inlaid with root of oak, and with other woods of varying tones, such as ebony, purple wood, box, mahogany, &c.; the hinges and handles are of wrought and painted metal work. The whole piece of furniture is about nine feet long and nearly five feet high I am responsible for the decoration of the metal work and inlaid woodwork, of which perhaps that on and around



the desk at the top are the principal, and as they consist merely of a somewhat jocular treatment of the armorial bearings of my family, with an assumed punning motto, "Non sono dono," I need say nothing except that the figure of the lion rampant on the shield was drawn specially for me by my kind friend William Burges, then my constant fellow student.(2)



Seddon provides an elevation of the Cabinet which shows the placement of the large decorative strap hinges and inlaid decoration on the sloping desk. This portion could be raised to facilitate an architectural drawing to be studied more easily. Even the spandrels under this sloping desk were decorated with



inlays representing, in humorous anthropomorphic metaphor, the disagreements between an architect and his client. And, the flat table tops on either side of the desk "have as decoration inlaid copies of mazes, one of which is taken from that on the floor of Amiens Cathedral."(2) The design also incorporated ten panels which were to be painted – the four large panels below and the six small panels above (four in front and one at each end). These were given special attention by Seddon: "Each panel is surrounded by chamfered and gilt edges to the styles, which gives a slight isolation to each picture, while their connection as a series is emphasized by the treatment of the metal hinges and bands of inlays."(2)



Seddon concludes this brief chapter with another suggestion as to the extreme value of the art of the painted panels and the relative insignificance of his own craft as a furniture designer:

Whether successful or not in the share I have taken in this attempt to combine simplicity of form with splendour of colour and the highest quality of painting, it is not my place to judge; it will at least be allowed that I have not spared the choicest of materials in trying to realize my theory; and if hereafter it should be judged otherwise, nothing can be simpler than to take out the panels and frame them for sale by auction, and burn the case.(3)

CHAPTER II. WILLIAM MORRIS, POET AND DESIGNER,
“MESSRS. MORRIS, MARSHALL, FAULKNER & CO.,
DECORATIVE FIRM.”

This chapter provides insight from Seddon’s recollections of the workings and relationships in the early days of the Firm at 8 Red Lion Square.

The cabinet, with its metal work and inlayings, having left the hands of the cabinet makers (Seddon and Sons), may be said to have been completed... but as the author was seeking further decorative treatment, and was intimate with all the members of the newly established decorative firm, Messrs. Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., he gave to his friend¹¹ William Morris, the poet and designer, a commission to have the ten panels painted with subjects illustrative of the Fine Arts—Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, and Music—with other of the lesser or subsidiary arts.⁽⁴⁾

Though the Firm was not given the opportunity to design or construct the cabinet, Seddon’s relationship with both Ford Maddox Brown and Dante Gabriel Rossetti as well as his ability to give the Firm more work as a church architect were perhaps reason enough to accept a commission to decorate a cabinet made by a rival firm.

Seddon lists the seven members of the Firm as Morris, Webb, Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Ford Maddox Brown, Marshall, and Faulkner. Morris is identified as “manager.” Curiously, the author suggests that Philip Webb was instrumental in the project: “It may be easily imagined that the advice of Webb (the architect) was the most according to knowledge, and doubtless was deferred to by the others, who had little practice but were enthusiasts as to the use of painting for decorations, and were brimful of zeal, and instinct with talent to respond to the novel call upon them.”⁽⁴⁾ Webb, however, whose own St. George Cabinet, painted by William Morris and also featured by the Firm at the 1862 Exhibition, did not list the King René cabinet in his book of accounts with the Firm¹², and it is doubtful that he had any formal involvement with the piece designed by a fellow architect. Regardless, Seddon credits Morris with much of the success of the commission:

To William Morris, however, probably was due the actual invention of the precise method adopted of connecting the artists’ paintings with the architect’s crude framework of the cabinet.¹³ This he did with his usual keen decorative sense, by preparing the panels to receive the paintings by introducing the cusped arches and corbels at the top, with their spandrels enriched with the armorial bearings in circles, and delicately diapered surfaces and borderings, like those in the medieval illuminated manuscripts he was so fond of; and lastly, by preparing gilt backgrounds for the figures themselves, decorated with diapers of black lines and dots, to secure a harmony of treatment throughout.⁽⁵⁾

CHAPTER III. “ARCHITECTURE”
BY FORD MADDOX BROWN.

In the first of the chapters to discuss the individual panels, Seddon credits Maddox Brown with the idea of using a “series of imaginary incidents in the ‘Honeymoon’ of King René ... to express the various fine arts intended to be represented on the panels of the cabinet, that royal amateur and highly cultivated man being well known to have attained considerable skill in all those arts, as also in prose and poetry.”⁽⁶⁾ For most mid-Victorians, Duke René of Anjou was an obscure figure from the 15th century world of Provence known only to readers of Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* and Walter Scott’s final Waverly novel, *Anne of Geierstein* (1829). Scott portrays René as a pathetic ruler in his dotage who has lost most of his lands and wealth due to war and medieval power struggles. A king without a kingdom, he is still beloved by his people as *Le bon Roi René*, but can offer them only his art as entertainment. In the fertile medieval imagination of the Pre-Raphaelites, he is rescued from Scott’s foppish portrayal and is transformed into the young and archetypal *rex artis*. Seddon refers to Brown’s own description and intentions as to the subject for his and the other paintings in the series:

King René was titular King of Naples, Sicily, Jerusalem and Cyprus, and father of our celebrated and unfortunate Margaret, Queen to Henry VI, of England. He was poet, architect, painter, sculptor, and musician, but he was most unfortunate in his political relations. Of course, as soon as he married he would build a new house, carve it and decorate it himself, and talk of nothing but that but that all the ‘Honeymoon’ (except, indeed, love).¹⁴ It is twilight when the workmen are gone. Finished study for a picture.⁽⁷⁾

Seddon, the architect, admits that Brown’s painting (Figure 3) is his favorite: “The King is shown with his new Queen seated lovingly on a bench in what would seem to their working *atelier*; the King is provided with his working implements (some of them of a very modern character, to wit, a set of proportional compasses, and a rough T square) and sundry rolls of drawings, and has a plan of his palace spread out at his feet.”⁽⁷⁾ Maddox Brown used his own visage for the facial features of the King,¹⁵ but the other painters clearly departed from this model.





CHAPTER IV. "PAINTING" AND "SCULPTURE"
BY SIR EDWARD BURNE-JONES

Edward Burne-Jones was still a largely unknown artist at the time he worked on the René Cabinet in 1861; yet, he was assigned two of the four large panels. Seddon does not annotate the Burne-Jones panels other than to provide a general description of the scenes:

In the first of these (Painting) the King is shown seated and drawing the figure of a woman, with his Queen standing over him, contemplatively observant of this work. In the third panel (Sculpture) he is in a standing attitude,



with hammer and chisel in hand, dressed in a richly embroidered sort of dressing-gown. He is occupied in carving a statue, while his spouse, with hands tightly clasped, is apparently quite fascinated in watching the result of her husband's skill, which, however, is hardly sufficiently to be accounted for in the unfinished condition of the block of stone on which he is exercising this, one of his numerous artistic avocations.(8)

The dress of the figures and the detail of their garments reflect a studied approach to the medieval theme of the Cabinet, and, it is interesting to note the use of Morris' own "Daisy" pattern on the gown of the Queen in the Sculpture panel. Unlike Brown and Rossetti, Burne-Jones places his figures in profile; allowing for the Queen to stand behind the King, and also creating a two-dimensional quality characteristic of medieval painting. A somewhat humorous comment by May Morris referencing the artist members of the Firm, advises that Burne-Jones took great liberty in allowing the Queen to look on as her husband worked: "None of the artists in question would have allowed that!"¹⁶

CHAPTER V. "MUSIC" BY DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

Seddon is clearly uncomfortable with this painting's place in the general scheme of the design: "It might be questioned whether Music is, as a rule, such a handmaid to Architecture as to entitle it to the equal position given to it in this quartet of the Fine Arts..."⁽⁹⁾ Ultimately, the inclusion of Music as one of the four arts of the King may have been based on Walter Scott's *Anne of Geierstein* where René is described as

a troubadour who speaks of the "joyous science of Minstrelsy and Music."¹⁷ Seddon also seems at odds with the scene of Rossetti's painting, where the Queen is artist musician at the keyboard of the small organ and the architect King is reduced to pumping the bellows to provide the wind while he kisses her:



The amorous King is here in a lighter mood, and evidently well satisfied with his spouse and himself— whether from the fact that he is resting from his labours, or because they have jointly brought them all to a successful termination— and her special branch of art, Music, is to crown their joint efforts. How far professional architects and artists may approve of such amateur efforts as these coming to so harmonious an end, we need not closely inquire. ... At any rate, Rossetti seems to have seized such an opportunity to produce one of his 'cuddling pictures,' and was not to be thwarted."⁽⁹⁾

Rossetti may have based the composition of the scene on his slightly earlier drawing of St. Cecilia in the series he did illustrating Tennyson's "Palace of Art" (1856-1857). In that work, St. Cecilia receives a passionate kiss from the Angel behind her. An interesting detail rendered in the Music panel is the list of Rene's four titular kingdoms carved into the side of the organ case.

CHAPTER VI. "GARDENING" BY
GABRIEL DANTE ROSSETTI, "EMBROIDERY" BY
VALENTINE C. PRINSEP, R.A. AND "POTTERY," "WEAVING,"
"METAL WORK," & "GLASS BLOWING," BY OTHER ARTISTS



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Illustration to 'The Palace of Art' St Cecilia, wood engraving by Dalziel after a design by Rossetti; published in Moxon's *Poems of Alfred Tennyson*.

Seddon's objective for the Cabinet was to show Architecture as the principle Art complemented by the arts which support it. In his 1889 lecture on *Gothic Architecture*, Morris expressed a similar idea: "...a work of architecture is a harmonious cooperative work of art, inclusive of all the serious arts, all those which are not engaged in the production of mere toys, or of ephemeral prettinesses."¹⁸ In 1861, Morris and the others in the Firm would have had the Red House experience close at hand on which to base the subjects of the six smaller panels. Seddon, however, is somewhat skeptical of the selection:

The subjects which occupy the six smaller panels which are placed in the upper part of the cabinet are perhaps not quite so happily chosen representatives of the arts subsidiary to architecture as those already described. That by

Rossetti, for instance, intended for "Gardening," may possibly find its *raison d'être* here in the fact that King René and his spouse were notably fond of horticulture....(10)

As an architect, it is surprising to find Seddon questioning the inclusion of Gardening as a supporting art. Morris certainly knew it to be integral in any architectural effort. Jan Marsh states that Morris and Webb at Red House "carefully planned to create the garden alongside, or even ahead of the house."¹⁹

Morris seems to have planned the six subsidiary arts panels on the top of the cabinet as a kind of "Labors of the Months" – an image with which he would have been familiar from medieval manuscripts. During the Red House effort, women and men worked together to achieve the decorative result, and, it is not surprising, therefore, to see women represented in four of the six small panels on the Cabinet. Seddon gives credit to only two of the small panels, and it is curious that he was not informed of the artists responsible for the other four. He comments that Rossetti's gardener "is doing her work in rather amateurish fashion, and seems to be quite 'up a tree' at it. Mr. Prinsep's lady, with a wimple, looks more at her ease with her embroidery frame." (10) Valentine Prinsep was with Morris and the others for the Rossetti-led painting of Arthurian scenes on the walls of the Oxford Union Library (1857). His "Embroidery" panel is his only known contribution to the Firm. Seddon is sarcastic when describing the female figures for "Pottery" and "Weaving":

... another—a servant maid—is perhaps more likely to be humbly occupied in the cleaning of, rather than in fashioning pots and the weaver with her shuttle in hand and head bound round with a kerchief, may be considered as a type of the modern working girl, before the date of the Factory Acts, plying her trade in the modest cottage home of her parents.(10)

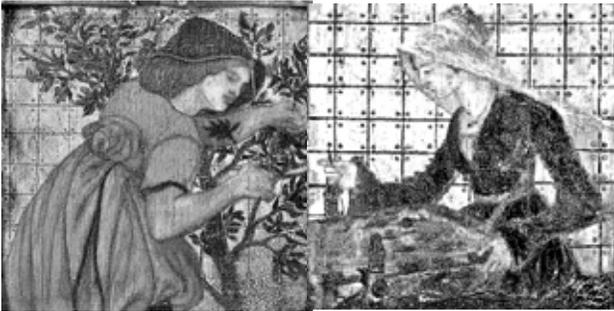
We do not know who the models were in these small paintings, if indeed there were any, but Fiona MacCarthy believes the smith in "Ironwork" to be "a sturdy William Morris."²⁰

CHAPTER VII. THE HEREDITARY EARLS OF ANJOU.
BY GEORGE H. BIRCH, F.S.A.

To better establish the historical context for King Rene, Seddon includes this final chapter written by his friend, George H. Birch, who was at the time the Curator of the Sloane Museum. The chapter provides the complete lineage of the Earldom of Anjou dating from the 9th century as well as the manner in which the various titles came to be associated with it. As far as the Firm and its decoration of the Cabinet, there is little information of interest save for the description of the heraldry associated with Rene. In the four large panels, Morris included a different coat of arms in the upper left corner of the background design, one for each of the four titular crowns held by the Duke – Jerusalem, Cyprus, Sicily, and Naples.

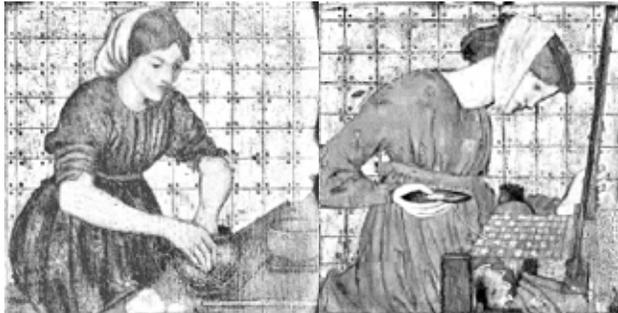
CONCLUSION

On June 17, 1898, Edward Burne-Jones died. Later that year, John Seddon wrote and published his monograph. Intended as both a tribute to the artists of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. as well as an effort to ensure for his daughter a documented provenance for the Cabinet, Seddon accomplished both; while simultaneously giving a modern reader an opportunity to understand a bit more about the early days of the Firm which would go on to play such a large part in the life of William Morris, his family, and friends. As for the Cabinet itself, though the South Kensington Museum failed to obtain it after the 1862 Exhibition, its successor, the Victoria and Albert Museum, did acquire it in 1927 where it resides today in the British Galleries.



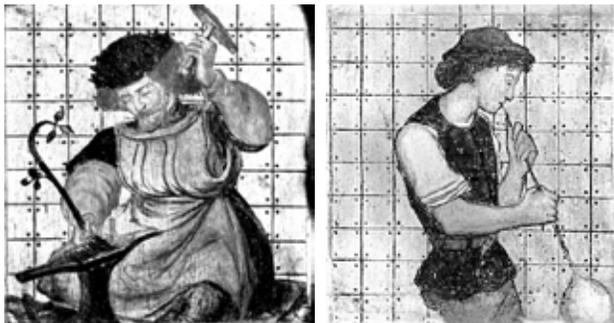
Gardening

Embroidery



Pottery

Weaving



Ironwork

Glass blowing

ENDNOTES

- 1 May Morris, *William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist*, 33.
- 2 Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination*, 129.
- 3 Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris, A Life for Our Time*, 172.
- 4 Durant, S., 'Voysey and Seddon, and the era of his youth', *The Orchard* (no.1, 2012), 20.
- 5 Seddon, John Pollard, *Progress in Art and Architecture with Precedence for Ornament*, v.

- 6 B.T. Batsford, founded in 1843, was the leading publisher of art and architectural books in England.
- 7 *The Athenaeum*, No. 3710, December 3, 1898, 800. The author's copy is one of the 40 printed on hand-made paper and was originally in the collection of the noted bibliophile Maxwell David Eugene Clayton-Stamm. It is inscribed M.D.E. Clayton-Stamm, Callow House, Virginia Water, Surrey, 1928.
- 8 May Morris, The Introductions to *The Collected Works of William Morris*, vol. 1, 41.
- 9 Banham and Harris, *William Morris and the Middle Ages*, 130.
- 10 A reference to his own lectures and publication, *Progress in Art and Architecture with Precedence for Ornament*. Like Morris, Seddon admired Medieval Art for its unity of craft and art, "for then it was universal, and sought with whatever material was at hand to embody the creations of the mind." *Progress in Art and Architecture*, 16.
- 11 It is curious that Seddon is not a correspondent of Morris if indeed they were friends. No extant letter exists in those of Morris collected by either Kelvin or Henderson.
- 12 William Lethaby, *Philip Webb and His Work*, 41.
- 13 Seddon includes a footnote here: "Part of this decoration was also the work of Mr. Val C. Prinsep."
- 14 The suggestion of William Morris, Jane and Red House in this description of René cannot be ignored.
- 15 Kenneth Bendiner, *The Art of Ford Madox Brown*, 141.
- 16 May Morris, *William Morris*, 33.
- 17 Walter Scott, *Anne of Geierstein* [1829] 2000, 326.
- 18 William Morris, *William Morris on Architecture*, 143.
- 19 Jan Marsh, *Red House*, 55.a
- 20 Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris*, 180.

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PHOTO CREDITS

- D.G. Rossetti's "St. Cecilia," (1856). Courtesy of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.
- King René's Honeymoon Cabinet (1861). Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

THE RENAISSANCE OF INTEREST
IN VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN BRITISH
DECORATIVE ARTS SINCE 1952

Peyton Skipwith

'Over the past year the Victoria and Albert Museum has been conducting a nation-wide search for the most elusive of all antiques — namely those of the recent past.

*It is easy enough to get information about the original production of these objects, for contemporary periodicals and archives are full of details; but the problem is to find what has become of them now, for, as a result of changing fashions and the dislocations caused by two wars, few of this class of Victorian and Edwardian furnishings are still in their original position or ownership.'*¹

Given the immense popularity today of mid-and late-nineteenth-century British fine and decorative arts, ranging from the Gothic Revival to William Morris and the Arts & Crafts Movement, it is hard to appreciate that there was a long period during which the aesthetics of Morris and his immediate precursors—Augustus Pugin, William Burges, Owen Jones, Bruce Talbert and Christopher Dresser among them — were virtually written out of design history. Although through the 1960s I witnessed at first hand the burgeoning revival both of interest and of scholarship with regard to such works, we are lucky to have Peter Floud's record of the state of ignorance and prejudice as it existed a decade earlier. I have drawn unashamedly on Peter Floud's text, as well as on the extensive press-coverage of the 1952 exhibition for the current article, in order to try and understand the almost total lack of awareness of the designers of the period that existed seventy years ago. Even as late as 1960 Floud could write 'Although William Morris is acknowledged to be the most influential figure in the history of the decorative arts in Europe during the last hundred years, his wallpapers, which spread his influence far more widely than any of his other productions, are now virtually unknown. Only two are now regularly printed, few have been illustrated (and then almost always in black and white), and the only way of familiarizing oneself with them is to examine the surviving examples kept at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the William Morris Gallery at Walthamstow.'²

Peter Floud (1912-1960) as head of the Circulation Department at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, devised and curated the ground-breaking 1952 exhibition *Victorian and Ed-*

wardian Decorative Arts, and was uniquely qualified both to record the aesthetic scene as he found it as well as laying the ground for a new generation of scholars and scholarship. In curating the exhibition, he was ably assisted by five colleagues — Hugh Wakefield, John Lowry, Elizabeth Aslin, Barbara Morris and Shirley Bury. Following Floud's premature death the latter three carried on



Peter Floud

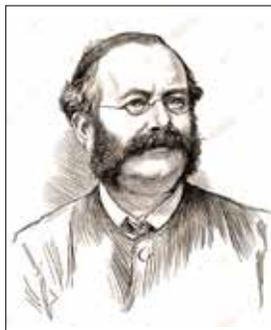
his pioneering work both through exhibitions and publications, and I had the privilege of benefitting from their knowledge and friendship. A month before the opening of the exhibition Floud gave a talk on the BBC's Third Programme, the text of which was printed in the September 11th issue of *The Listener*. This is the clearest and best informed survey of the pervasive and almost universal ignorance with regard to the great Victorian pioneers that existed at that time, and of how such a state had come about.

In the introductory preamble to his talk Floud spoke of 'the special problems that crop up as soon as you try to tackle Victorian art in a scientific spirit', and went on to describe the 'extraordinary ignorance about decorative arts under Victoria — I mean furniture, pottery, glass, carpets, silver, jewellery, and so on [...] This ignorance is all the more extraordinary when you think of the number of erudite books that there are on English furniture, silver and pottery of the earlier periods. All this scholarship seems suddenly to stop about 1830.'

1830 was the terminal date set by the Antique Dealers' Association after which works did not qualify for inclusion in the annual Grosvenor House Antique Dealers' Fair, which was to remain the world's premier showcase for art and antiques for several decades to come. This deprived all later works the chance of exposure to the Fair's international audience of museum curators, collectors and dealers who regularly attended. It was, as Floud also pointed out, the date 'at which the main series of permanent exhibitions at the Victoria and Albert Museum ends. It seems to be accepted as a sort of magic dividing line separating off what is serious from what is not.' He then stated



Augustus Pugin



William Burges



Owen Jones



Bruce Talbert

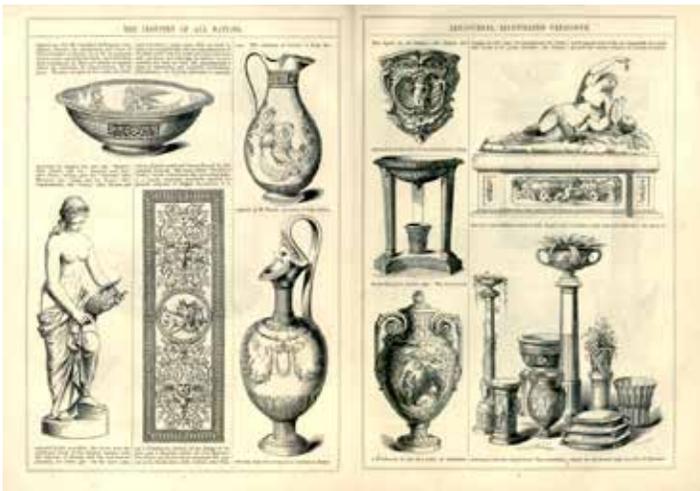


Christopher Dresser

that the reason normally given for stopping at 1830 was a widespread belief that since that time there had been a progressive debasement of aesthetic standards, thus, according to this theory, the further you got from the eighteenth century the worse things became, and whatever had merit was merely a hangover from the Regency period. Needless to say, he stoutly refuted this prejudice, declaring that the designers of mid-Victorian England 'in their writings, in their own productions, and in their influence, have certainly as much right to serious consideration as have the eighteenth-century cabinet-makers and silversmiths.' He suggested the cut-off date, if there had to be one, should at least be moved to 1838, the year of Queen Victoria's coronation, in order to bring the whole of the Victorian period 'within the orbit of respectable academic research.'



The Crystal Palace, Grand International Exhibition, 1851



Pages 2 & 3 of the Illustrated Catalogue

Interestingly, he ascribed much of the blame for the universal ignorance of Victorian design to the illustrated catalogue of the Great Exhibition of 1851. 'I know of no more depressing and disillusioning task than to sit down with the catalogue, hoping by careful cross-referencing and comparisons to sort out from the thousands of illustrations some stylistic trends to act as guiding threads to the taste of the period. At first one is amused by the freaks and oddities, but saturation point is

quickly reached and nausea sets in. The utter senselessness and banality and hideousness of the carved gutta serena umbrella stands and the escritoirs enriched with rustic figures in perforated brass, and so on, is bad enough, but it is made infinitely worse by the text, which manages to give equal praise to every object, in a series of meaningless clichés which do duty in rotation like members of a stage army.'

The pall cast by the 1851 exhibition and the ubiquity of its effect on furnishing and interior decoration was widespread. In reviewing the 1952 exhibition of Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts the *Times Educational Supplement's* critic wrote that: 'The Victorians were romantics: they desired strength and richness. But with their romanticism went its invariable tendency to exaggeration. On top of this the middle classes rose to power and wealth, and they wanted the symbols of it. The boom was on.'³ In *North and South*, published three years after the Great Exhibition, Elizabeth Gaskell described the newly wealthy Mrs Thornton's drawing-room as blazing forth 'in yellow silk damask and a brilliantly-flowered carpet. Every corner seemed filled up with ornament, until it became a weariness to the eye.' This eye-weariness was to become the popular perception of Victorian taste for much of the next hundred years, conjuring up images of dark gloomy houses with over-stuffed furnishings; a vision closely associated in people's minds with Queen Victoria's years of seclusion at Balmoral and Osborne House, following the death of the Prince Consort in December 1861. The result was such that collectors came to think that all mid-Victorian objects should be heavy and over-decorated and rather ludicrously pretentious; if they did not comply with this pre-conception they could not be authentic. The irony of this was that, as Floud went on to point out, dealers actively searched for such objects, which tended to be preserved while the rest disappeared without trace, thus, over time this led to a completely one-sided popular stereotypical view of mid-Victorian design. This became pervasive and established its right to acceptance by the simple means of eliminating its rivals, so that 'by the time the scholars come along to redress the balance all the material evidence with which they can do so has already disappeared.' In Floud's view Victorian and Edwardian design had become the 'victim of [both] academic indifference and dilettante enthusiasm.'

Moving on from his description of the prevailing view of the Victorian aesthetic Floud described in practical terms the difficulty of tracing objects for the exhibition. He cited particularly Owen Jones's remarkable designs — furniture, carpets and woven silks — for Alfred Morrison's homes at 4 Carlton House Terrace, London and Fonthill in Wiltshire, which had been sold off in about 1905 when Morrison's descendants tired of Owen Jones. 'We have tried to follow up every possible clue, however remote, but after a year's hard work all we have been able to salvage is one inlaid table and chair — a good deal the worse for wear — in use at a Police Training College, an un-

important inlaid bracket in a second-hand dealer's, one carpet still belonging to the descendants of one of Owen Jones's patrons, one other carpet, a silver vase, and two or three damask fragments [...] I am sure that when they are shown in our exhibition they will demonstrate Owen Jones's real importance as a designer, even though the great bulk of his work has completely disappeared.' In the event it proved impossible to trace any items made for Alfred Morrison, but the table and chair, from the police sergeant's sitting room, which were lent to the exhibition by the Home Office, as well as the wall bracket, were identified as having been made for James Mason of Eynsham Hall in the early 1870s. The rarest of Jones's fabric fragments had been found 'stuffed in the letterbox of an elderly lady to keep out the draughts.'

In addition to Owen Jones Floud cited the difficulty of tracing objects designed by both Christopher Dresser and William Burges. In Dresser's case he said that although he and his team had compiled a list of more than thirty different firms for whom he designed a thousand or more items 'our strenuous efforts have only succeeded in salvaging about twenty-five objects, and of these more than half are pots in the design of which he had only a part share.' In the case of Burges, he deplored the recent sale of many pieces which had been specially



The Great Bookcase, William Burges. Photo: Howard Stanbury



Christopher Dresser, Soup Plate, 1896, Brooklyn Museum

designed for Cardiff Castle 'without any record having been kept of the names and addresses of the purchasers—all that has now disappeared.'

In the event, the exhibition included two pieces of Dresser's furniture—a sideboard and a corner cupboard, made for George Chubb (1st Baron Hayter)—which were lent by the Medical Missionary Association in one of whose hostels they had ended up. It also included a set of fire irons lent by Miss Nellie Dresser, a claret jug, two tea pots—one *en suite* with sugar bowl and milk jug—eleven pieces of pottery, a quilt and some fragments of woven silks and wallpapers. Burges was represented by three major pieces of furniture—the golden bed and wash stand designed for the guest bedroom at Tower House, Kensington, and the great painted book case from the 1862 International Exhibition, which Kenneth Clark had had the foresight to purchase for the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, despite the fact that he described it at the time as 'not acceptable to present taste.'⁴ This latter was described by Reyner Banham, in an otherwise perceptive and sympathetic review as being 'notable only for its depressing ugliness.'⁵ A view shared by several other critics. Like it or not, Burges's furniture attracted more comment than any other items in the exhibition: James Dudley in *The Daily Worker* singled out the bed, which he referred to as a 'sleeping contraption'. Despite the fact that he regarded it as over-elaborate and verging on the ridiculous, he felt that it symbolised 'all the characteristics of Victorian decoration [...] an example of superb craftsmanship, a striking aspect which applies to the whole exhibition without reservation.'⁶

Not surprisingly the reviews covered the whole gamut from the proudly Philistine, as in the headline 'Exhibition of White Elephants'⁷ and the comment that 'Those who lived in those days and those who actually have never seen such monumental bad taste will enjoy it,'⁸ to the thoughtful and

well-informed, by such writers and critics as Stephen Bone, Reyner Banham, John Brandon-Jones, Furneaux Jordan, Harold Nicholson and John Betjeman. Stephen Bone, whose artist father, Sir Muirhead Bone, had lent a Mackintosh cruet designed for Miss Cranston's tearooms, was ambivalent about the exhibition declaring the designs by Alfred Stevens and Pugin to be unsatisfactory on the grounds that they were produced so mechanically. In summing up his reactions he came down on balance 'against the mid-Victorians. Most of their designers — even those who were famous and admired — were very bad indeed, but there remain Owen Jones, Godwin and Morris (of very unequal importance) and later, in Edwardian times, with the work of Mackintosh, Walton and the Cotswold furniture designers we find art recovering from perhaps the worst catastrophe it has known.'⁹ Perhaps the most bizarre review was that penned by the cartoonist Nicholas Bentley for an unidentified magazine in which he averred that 'There is nothing here that the most self-conscious Philistine could fail to understand, unless it be how anyone professing a love of art could design or produce anything so dreary, mean, ill-proportioned, uncomfortable, unserviceable, inept and obtrusively quixotic as most of the household goods here on show.' He went on to berate the 'sorry influences of William Morris, Burne-Jones and Walter Crane', but declared that 'they are by no means the worst offenders. A dozen others show work that is even uglier and more inappropriate than theirs, culminating in the hideous eccentricities of C.R. Mackintosh, an artist whom my friend John Betjeman has sought from sympathies that I understand but do not share, to drag from his well-earned obscurity.'¹⁰

Betjeman himself admitted to taking the opportunity, when nobody was looking, of opening drawers and cupboards, declaring them all well-made, before continuing in a rather whimsical manner: 'What is a hefty oaken table in the Philip



Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, 'The White Rose and the Red Rose', Painted gesso over hessian, with glass beads, 1902



Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh and Charles Rennie Mackintosh

Webb and William Morris style without the earnest garden city free-thinkers of King Edward's reign sitting round it and eating raw shredded cabbage and nuts? What are the tapering tables in white enamel and art nouveau panels on the walls without long ladies in white with opal and silver necklaces?¹¹ Despite the absence of long ladies in white, Mackintosh was very well represented with nine pieces of furniture, mostly lent from the collections of the University of Glasgow, plus a clock, light fittings, cutlery, the cruet lent by Muirhead Bone, a clock and a silver casket inlaid with semi-precious stones. This impressive Glasgow group was ably supported by works by the Macdonald sisters, Jessie Newbery, Talwin Morris and Jessie King. Though surprisingly nothing by Herbert McNair.

Betjeman's slightly mocking reference to the 'hefty oaken table in the Philip Webb and William Morris style', underlines the neglect of such pieces and draws attention to an item mentioned in two of the reviews, namely that such a table, described as 'the first piece of furniture ever designed by Philip Webb' had recently been sold at auction for twenty two shillings 'within a few minutes from the museum without its knowledge. It has now disappeared.'¹² At that time two auction houses, Coe's in South Kensington and Bonham's in Knightsbridge, were in easy walking distance of the V & A.



The Immortals at the Glasgow School of Art (Back Row: Frances Macdonald Middle Row L-R: Margaret Macdonald, Katharine Cameron, Janet Aitken, Agnes Raeburn, Jessie Keppie, John Keppie. Front Row L-R: Herbert McNair, Charles Rennie Mackintosh.) 1894

This enormous exhibition consisting of a total of nine-hundred and sixty exhibits was a triumph of research and organisation. Floud, in his broadcast had described how ‘The material disappears because no-one has bothered to point out its importance, and the more it disappears, the more difficult it is for anyone to become aware of its importance.’ The tide had now turned and through this vast display the Museum had, like it or not, demonstrated its importance.

It is worth quoting Reyner Banham’s review, cited above, at greater length, not just for the capitals with which he commences, but for his sympathetic understanding of the essential purpose behind the exhibition: ‘EYE-POPPING, HAIR-RAISING RICHNESS, for though the V & A have sliced history thin, they have sliced it for plums — known works by known masters. [...] This exhibition could be the death of fashionable Victoriana, for the imposing seriousness of what is to be seen here reveals the tawdriness of the interior decorators’ XIX Century fancy. This is the real line of Victorian-Edwardian advance, the work of originals and innovators out of step with mass-produced taste. The impact of all this assembled richness is staggering, one’s preconceived ideas of the near past begin to crumble under a flood of revelation.’¹³

It was not just in the field of taste and aesthetics that things were changing; it was a total reassessment of the period as seen from a mid-twentieth-century perspective. Regardless of the personal politics of the numerous artists, architects and craftsmen whose work was included in the exhibition, they had, whatever their personal feelings, all worked in Britain at the period when it was the world’s dominant political, industrial and military power, at the centre of a vast Empire. The first cracks in this hegemony came with Britain’s humiliation at the hands of Boers in South Africa. This was followed by two World Wars, the depression years of the 1930s and the gradual loosening of the ties of Empire. At the time of the exhibition large swathes of London and the other big industrial cities were still suffering severely from the effects of the German bombing, which had brought Britain virtually to its knees. Britain was enduring years of grim austerity and high taxation during which death-duties reached a crippling 90%. Impoverished aristocrats and landowners were forced to abandon or demolish their large country houses, most of which had been requisitioned by the government for the duration of the war for military or institutional use. John Harris in the prologue to *No Voice From The Hall: Early Memories of a Country House Snoopier* describes how ‘the traveller through England after 1945 journeyed in a dream-like landscape, so many empty mansions standing forlornly in their parks, all in a vacuum, awaiting the return of their owners to decide their ultimate fate.’¹⁴ As late as 1955 one such country house was demolished every two and a half days. These houses and castles, of course, covered all periods from early medieval to high Victorian; among the latter was Anthony Salvin’s masterpiece, Bayons Manor, Lincolnshire, a

pseudo-medieval castle with gatehouses and battlements, baileys and barbicans built for Sir Charles Tennyson-d’Eyncourt, which was demolished as late as 1965. Harris describes ‘wallpapers fluttering off the walls, the hammer-beamed Great Hall a wreck, panelling ripped off and splintered, wonderful carved stone Puginesque chimney-pieces defaced.’ Given the scale of such mass vandalism and cultural destruction, recording the authorship of wallpapers, fabrics, furnishings and chattels was a minor consideration. Added to these national woes was the death in February 1952 of King George VI, the monarch who, throughout the war, had remained in London and shared his peoples’ suffering.

However, not everything was doom and gloom. In autumn 1946, as part of the nation’s struggle to recover, and to help boost the export drive, the Victoria & Albert Museum mounted the optimistically titled exhibition ‘Britain Can Make It’ — popularly known as ‘Britain Can Make It, But Can’t Have It’ — of well-designed new manufactures, and five years later



Bayons Manor was built between 1836 and 1840.
Photo: Charles Hind Postcard Collection

the centenary of the Great Exhibition was marked both by an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the popular Festival of Britain on the South Bank of the Thames, which was in the process of being finally cleared of the remaining vestiges of bomb damage. Although conceived as a forward looking exhibition with its Skylon and Dome of Discovery, it included a healthy dose of nostalgia, especially in the Lion and Unicorn Pavilion. Despite the often iconoclastic enthusiasm of young architects and city planners eager to sweep away the past and build a new world — even the Palace of Westminster and Piccadilly Circus were under threat — a remarkable amount survived.

The 1952 exhibition was designed to mark the centenary of the founding of the V & A’s immediate precursor, the Museum of Ornamental Art at Marlborough House. Peter Floud concluded his talk with the words: ‘In preparation for our exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum we have made a beginning, and we hope that when the results of our research are displayed in October, they will be sufficiently unexpected to persuade others to follow our lead.’ It was, indeed, a spectacular beginning, but it took much of the next two decades

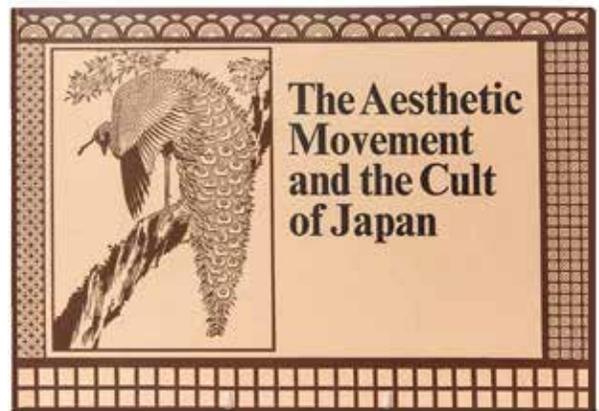
to sort out, identify and rehabilitate the work of those artists, craftsmen and designers whom Floud and his team had done so much to identify. The slim hundred and fifty page catalogue, measuring just 9 1/2 x 5 1/4 inches (24.2 x 13.3 centimetres), was described by Bernard Hughes in *Country Life* as 'probably the most comprehensive source book yet compiled in connection with Victorian decorative art',¹⁵ but lamented that at the price of four shillings it would be beyond the reach of some visitors to the exhibition. Despite this it became a bible for a new generation of scholars, dealers and curators. In addition, the Victoria and Albert Museum issued a further booklet with thirty-two illustrations ranging from a group of Summerly's Art Manufactures from the mid-1840s to a cabinet on stand by Ernest Gimson of 1910 'newly photographed for the purpose' and priced at five shillings.

When I joined the staff of The Fine Art Society in London's New Bond Street in May 1961 the revival was still, if not in its infancy, at least in its pre-pubesence. The Fine Art Society, then the oldest surviving art dealers in Bond Street, had become frozen in time. Behind its facade designed by E.W. Godwin its galleries were still furnished with the tables and chairs commissioned from George Faulkner Armitage in the 1870s. It was one of the few galleries that showed works by artists such as G.F. Watts and George Clausen and sculptors of the 'New Sculpture' School including Alfred Gilbert, George Frampton and Hamo Thornycroft. Sir John Rothenstein, whom I got to know well in the early 1970s told me that he had never been into the gallery during his years as Director of the Tate Gallery because we only showed unfashionable works. It was this perceived unfashionableness that brought us into contact with one of the pioneer collectors, Charles Handley-Read, who, with his wife, Lavinia, had haunted the 1952 exhibition. It also placed us in the forefront of the burgeoning interest in the fine and decorative arts of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain.

In October 1968 we mounted a major exhibition 'British Sculpture 1850-1914' with over two hundred exhibits; the exhibition was curated by Lavinia Handley-Read. The climate had changed a little since 1952, but not greatly, and reviews once again ranged from the Philistine to the thoughtful. On balance they were largely favourable — or at least considered — apart from that by Nigel Gosling who described the exhibition as a 'dismal assembly of metalwork [...] and provincial bric-a-brac'.¹⁶ The reviewer in *The Evening Standard* commented on the unfamiliarity of the material; a state of affairs he ascribed in part as due to the fact that 'There is no book on the subject, there have been no exhibitions and most museums seem to be ashamed to show what they possess'.¹⁷ Another critic noted that 'every now and then an exhibition comes along which offers an entirely new experience...[this] is such a one, for not only does it show us something that has been almost completely neglected, but forces us to look at an era with new eyes'.¹⁸ Similar responses were evoked the following year by our exhibition 'The Earthly

Paradise' of work by Cayley Robinson, Joseph Southall, Charles Gere, Arthur Gaskin and other painter-craftsmen of the Birmingham School. The central core of this exhibition came from the collection of Lord Blanesburgh, who had bequeathed it on his death in 1946 to the Royal Caledonian School at Bushey in Hertfordshire. Two decades later the School's Trustees decided to sell the collection, and approached Christie's, who cherry-picked the Munningses and Boudins and a few other works, but told them that they had no records of any of these other artists, so they turned to us. The exhibition proved a sensation, especially attracting young artists of the David Hockney, Peter Blake generation from the Royal College of Art. It also coincided with the exhibition at Leicester Museum & Art Gallery, mounted by Lionel Lambourne to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Ernest Gimson. A number of critics, perceiving an affinity, linked the two exhibitions.

In 1972, enthused by Charles Handley-Read, we mounted, in conjunction with Michael Whiteway, the first of our major 'period' exhibitions, 'The Aesthetic Movement and the Cult of Japan'. This included major items of furniture and decorative arts by Christopher Dresser, E.W. Godwin, Philip Webb, William Morris, William de Morgan, as well as paintings and drawings by Whistler, Burne-Jones, Albert Moore, Orchardson and others. The critics were largely favourable, though one old client, who had been in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp, was



reduced to apoplexy by our use of the words 'cult of Japan' in the exhibition's title. As with all our major exhibitions it was part loan, part selling, and I still have my priced copy of the catalogue, which gives a fair indication of how under-appreciated these works still were, though a far remove from the twenty two shillings paid for the Philip Webb table at the time of the V & A's 1952 exhibition. A William De Morgan panel of sixty-six tiles designed by William Morris for a house in Devon was priced at £1,250, while Christopher Dresser's black lacquered wardrobe decorated with stylised panels of owls, lotuses, etc and made for Bushloe House was £1,100. A little Whistler oil on panel, *A Beach in Holland*, was priced at £2,850, and Burne-Jones's eleven feet high, five panel screen, *The Rivers of Life or The Worship of the Lamb* (1874-5), at £10,000 was the most expensive item in the exhibition. The panels were the original full-size cartoons for the five light Morris & Co east window at

All Saints Church, Allerton, Liverpool, which Burne-Jones had subsequently worked up in pastel to create this screen for Lord Plymouth's Mayfair town house.

The following year we staged a major Arts and Crafts Movement exhibition, covering the years 1880 to 1920. Despite the fact that most old prejudices had been overcome, a fair amount of ignorance regarding designers and their importance still prevailed, especially in the corridors of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). 1968, the year of our exhibition, was also the year that the British government introduced Value Added Tax (VAT). In drawing up the guidelines the authors of this tax realised that certain categories of items would, over time, reappear in the market, so with regard to these, rather than taxing the purchaser, the dealers would be taxed on their profit margins. The categories so defined included works of art, antiques (which were by definition more than a hundred years old), secondhand cars, and an ill-defined category called 'Collector's Items.' In the lead up to our Arts and Crafts exhibition, in which none of the objects were more than a hundred years old, it fell to me to try and get some clarification from HMRC with regard to this category 'Collector's Items'. Initial approaches were fruitless and merely elicited the response that we were the experts, but, at the same time, they reserved the right to come back to us any time up to three years after any sale and challenge us to justify why we had paid tax on the margin scheme. Obviously, this was unacceptable as one cannot run a business that way. I was then obliged to select half a dozen items and justify to HMRC why they should be categorised as 'collector's items within the meaning of the Act'. I chose a clock by Charles Rennie Mackintosh and a tile by William De Morgan, which had featured on the covers of the *Burlington Magazine* and *The Connoisseur*, respectively, plus some Morris textiles and metalwork by W.A.S. Benson, all of which had been bought by museums. This was still not sufficient to convince the tax authorities that they should be categorised as 'collector's items', though they did concede the fact that collectors might like to own them.

Following this impasse, I was summoned, along with our company secretary and the tax partner from our legal advisers, to a meeting at the Headquarters of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. The initial discussion was totally inane with one of the officials explaining that he quite appreciated that if William Morris had owned the coffee cups we were drinking out of, this would make them collector's items 'within the meaning of the Act', but if he had 'merely designed them' he did not think that that was sufficiently close. After three hours of fruitless discussion, I decided to play what I regarded as our trump card (though my colleagues were more sceptical of success), and threatened to refer Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to the Race Relations Board. In response to their puzzlement I drew their attention to the category following 'Collector's Items' in their pamphlet which was headed 'Ethnography', which they defined as pertaining to 'the customs, habits and tastes of any



Edward Burne-Jones, "Paradise, with the Worship of the Holy Lamb,"
circa 1870s, watercolor version of screen,
"The Rivers of Life or The Worship of the Lamb."

people past or present.' I pointed out that if the items we had been discussing had been made by Aborigines they would have readily accepted them as collectibles, and that if they were going to discriminate against William Morris because he was a Welshman and Charles Rennie Mackintosh because he was a Scot, I would have no option but to make such a referral. Three months later they rather grudgingly wrote to accept the fact that works by Morris, Mackintosh, Gimson, Barnsley, *et al.*, were indeed 'Collector's Items' within the meaning of the Act. Sanity had finally prevailed.

1. Extract from the Victoria and Albert Museum's Press Release issued 23 October 1952 prior to the opening of the exhibition of Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts.
2. Peter Floud, "The Wallpaper Designs of William Morris," *The Penrose Annual*, Vol. 54, 1960.
3. *Times Educational Supplement*, 24 October 1952.
4. Charlotte Gere, 'Charles Handley-Read as a Collector in his own Words', *The Decorative Art Society, 1850 to the Present*, 41, 2017, p. 103.
5. *Art News and Review*, 15 November 1952.
6. *Daily Worker*, 29 October 1952.
7. *Nottingham Journal*, 24 October 1952.
8. *Sport and Country*, 12 November 1952.
9. Stephen Bone, *Manchester Guardian*, 24 October 1952.
10. Unidentified press cutting.
11. *Daily Telegraph*, 24 October 1952.
12. *The Cabinet Maker*, 25 October.
13. Op. cit., 5.
14. John Murray, 1998.
15. 7 November 1952.
16. *The Observer*, 13 October 1968.
17. *Evening Standard*, 14 October 1968.
18. *Investors Chronicle*, 4 October 1968.

CONTRIBUTORS

Isabelle Hautbout is a lecturer at the University of Picardy Jules Verne where she studies modern French and English literature, from the 19th century onwards, especially its connections with religion.

Frank Palmeri has written three books, most recently *State of Nature, State of Society: Enlightenment Conjectural History and Modern Social Discourse*, as well as “Plutocratic Dystopia, Workers’ Utopias in Pynchon’s *Against the Day* and Morris’s *News from Nowhere*,” *Orbit* 5(2): 5 (Sept. 2017), 1-27. His current book project is *Disciplining Radical Satire in Nineteenth-Century England: Narrative, Caricature, and the Political Imaginary*.

David Kopp, Litt.D., is adjunct professor of Arts and Letters at Drew University, Madison, NJ.

Peyton Skipwith is a leading authority on British arts, both fine and decorative, of the 1870-1940 period. He retired in 2005 as Deputy Managing Director of The Fine Art Society in New Bond Street, where he had worked for forty-four years. He is a past Master of the Art Workers’ Guild and past President of the Double Crown Club, and is currently an Associate Director of Arts & Crafts Tours and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries (London),

ANNOUNCEMENTS

COLLEGE ART ASSOCIATION, INAUGURAL WILLIAM MORRIS SESSION

William Morris (1834-1896) has never seemed more present. As an artist, designer, poet, printer, preservationist, socialist, environmentalist, and pacifist, Morris’s life and work seem to speak to the most pressing concerns of our current moment, from climate change and resource allocation to income inequality and socialism. In 2021, we will celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the William Morris Society in the United States, an organization dedicated to furthering knowledge of Morris’s life and work. Remarkably, it also marks the first appearance of the WMS-US as an affiliated society of the College Art Association.

This session aims to highlight Morris’s influence on art and artistic discourse up to the present day. What are the most pressing questions for scholars today in relationship to Morris’s work? What new perspectives are they bringing to Morris’s work? How can William Morris’s life and work provide new perspectives on artistic practice and art history? What is the legacy of the Kelmscott Press? How are contemporary artists and designers such as Jeremy Deller, Bob and Roberta Smith, Kehinde Wiley and others engaging with Morris, his art, and his writings? We welcome submissions from artists and

designers, as well as a wide array of scholars, including but not limited to historians of medieval art, British art, American art, architecture, and photography as well as writers on contemporary art. Morna O’Neill will provide further details in our electronic newsletter to members as they become available, and proposals should be sent to her at morna.oneill@gmail.com.

MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION TORONTO CONVENTION JANUARY 7-10, 2021

Session 1:

Morris and His Circle: Biography, Archives, Artifacts Moderator: Florence S. Boos, University of Iowa

- **Morris and Continental Socialism**
Frank Sharp, New York, NY
- **William Morris and Icelandic Tourism**
Livia Woods, University of Illinois, Springfield
- **William Morris’s Religion of Paganism**
Pavel Godfrey, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
- **Morris’s *News from Nowhere*: Beyond the Controversies**
Michelle Sue Weinroth, University of Ottawa

Session 2:

Co-sponsored with the TM Book History, Print Cultures, and Lexicography Forum

William Morris and the Arts and Crafts: Reception and Influence

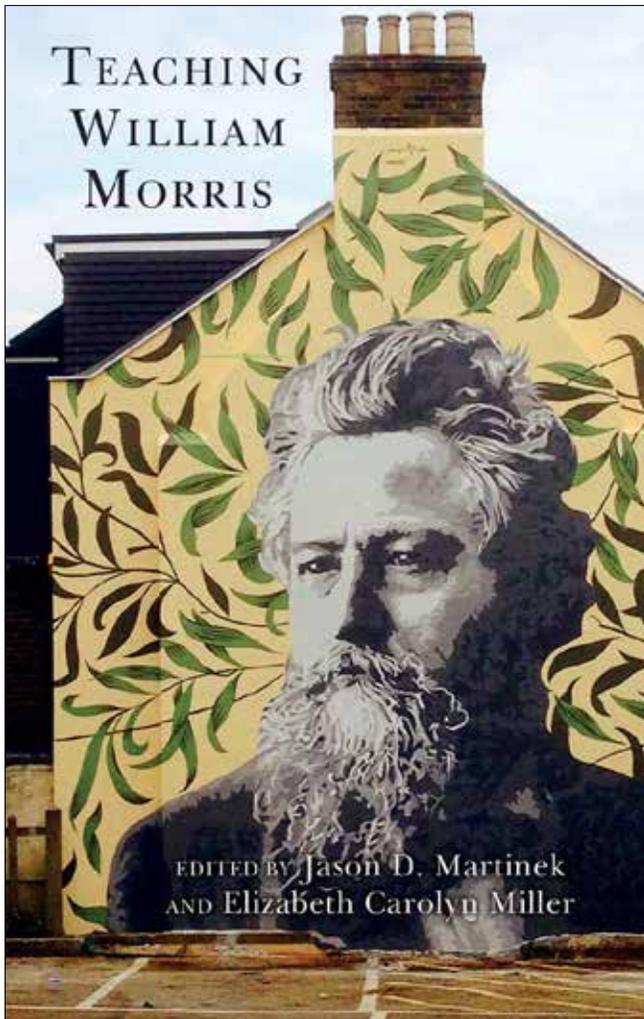
Moderator: Nhora Lucia Serrano, Hamilton College

- **William Morris, Celebrity, and American Arts and Crafts**
Meghan Freeman, Manhattanville College
- **Reading in Utopia: Community in Morris’s Arts and Crafts Circle and His Decorated Books**
Brandiann Molby, Loyola University of Chicago
- **Women’s Perspectives in Arts and Crafts Culture: The Case of and for Olive Cockerell**
Alicia J. Carroll, Auburn University

The MLA has stated that they anticipate the convention to be held at least in part in physical form, and that in any case, the sessions will occur, either in person, digitally, or in some blend of these two forms. This first part of this statement has to be taken with some caution in view of the fact that visitors to Canada are now required to quarantine for 14 days on arrival; this would have to change before U. S. residents could participate.

A joint social event with the William Morris Society of Canada is tentatively planned. For information on times, locations, and attendance passes, please see our website and/or email Florence-Boos@uiowa.edu.

New William Morris resource books

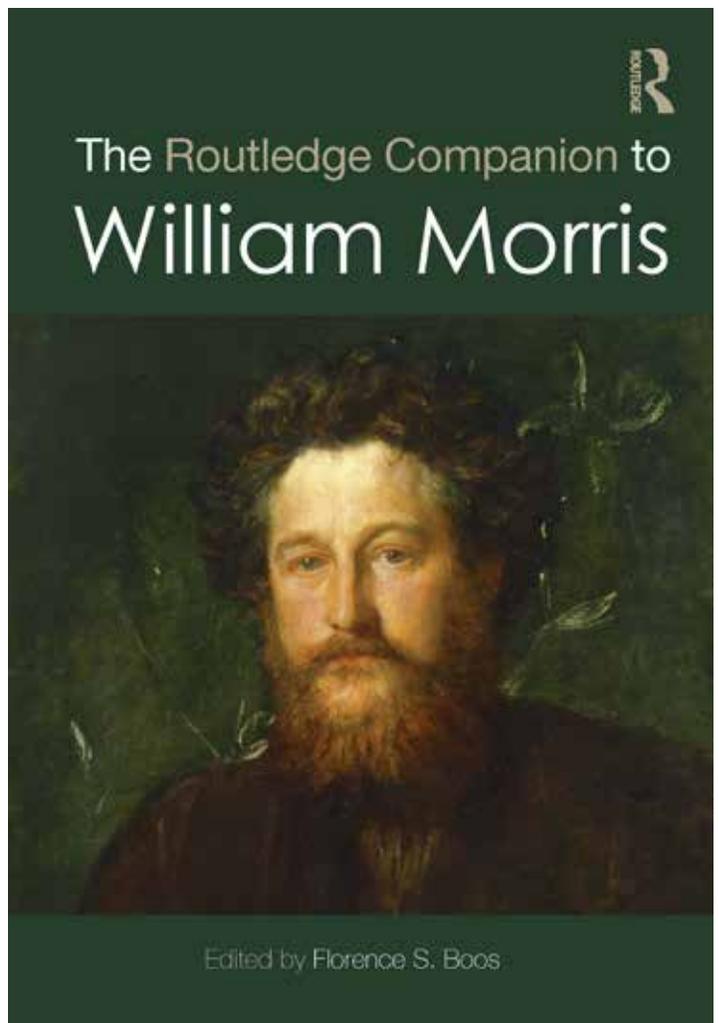


Teaching William Morris

Editors Jason D. Martinek and Elizabeth Carolyn Miller

How do you teach someone like Morris who made significant contributions to several different fields of study? And how, within the exigencies of the modern educational system, can teachers capture the interdisciplinary spirit of Morris, whose various contributions hang so curiously together? *Teaching William Morris* gathers together the work of nineteen Morris scholars from a variety of fields, offering a wide array of perspectives on the challenges and the rewards of teaching William Morris. Across this book's five sections—"Pasts and Presents," "Political Contexts," "Literature," "Art and Design," and "Digital Humanities"—readers will learn the history of Morris's place in the modern curriculum, the current state of the field for teaching Morris's work today, and how this pedagogical effort is reaching well beyond the college classroom.

318 pages. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2019. Available in hardcover and e-book formats. Please order for your library!



Forthcoming *The Routledge Companion to William Morris* (Routledge Art History and Visual Studies Companions)

by Florence S. Boos (Editor)

This *Companion* draws together historical and critical responses to the impressive range of Morris's multi-faceted life and endeavors: his homes, travels, family, business practices, decorative artwork, poetry, fantasy romances, translations, political activism, eco-socialism, and book collecting and design. Each chapter provides valuable historical and literary background information, reviews relevant opinions on its subject from the late-nineteenth century to the present, and offers new approaches to important aspects of its topic.

Morris's eclectic methodology and the perennial relevance of his insights and practice make this an essential handbook for those interested in art history, poetry, translation, literature, book design, environmentalism, political activism, and Victorian and utopian studies.

632 pages—52 color and 60 b/w illustrations. Routledge Publishing, Fall 2020. Please order for your library!

THE LAST WORD

William Morris on Radical Equality (and a Final Warning)

Quotations Arranged Chronologically

In sober earnest I say that no man is good enough to be master over others; whatever the result to them, it at least ruins him: equality of fellowship is necessary for developing the innate good and restraining the innate evil which exists in every one. ("Socialism," 1885)

[Socialism must] offer a chance of happiness to every one; that is to say, an opportunity for the full development of each human life: it denies the title of society to any system which degrades one class to exalt another;...an injury to one will be an injury to all....("Socialism," 1885)

Let me begin then...by telling you what the nature of my ideal as a Socialist is. . . it is complete equality of condition for all. That is to my mind the aim of Socialism stated in the fewest possible words: any sacrifice that is necessary for its attainment is worth making: no further mastery over the powers of nature that we may gain can be a substitute for it; without it freedom, education, happiness, in one word, progress, is impossible. . . we must attain it, there is no second course open to us, whatever great change as yet undreamed of lies before the world must be reached through this.... ("Equality," 1888)

Do we not understand the pleasures of fellowship, the joy of converse with our equals: the advantage of the give and take which ought always to be between two [persons] good-tempered and useful to society, whatever the different caliber of their minds may be? ("Equality," 1888)

We may have in appearance to give up a great deal of what we have been used to call material progress, in order that we may be freer, happier and more completely equal. ("How Shall We Live Then," 1889)

Now this view of Socialism which I hold today, and hope to die holding, is what I began with:.... nor when I had become conscious of the wrongs of society as it now is, and the oppression of poor people, could I have ever believed in the possibility of a partial setting right of those wrongs. In other words, I could never have been such a fool as to believe in the happy and "respectable" poor. ("How I Became a Socialist," 1894)

It remains to ask what real Communism is, and the answer is simple: it is a state of Society the essence of which is Practical Equality of condition.... This is its economical basis; its ethical basis is the habitual and full recognition of man as a social being, so that it brings about the habit of making no distinction between the common welfare and the welfare of the individual.... In short I can see no other system under which men can live together except these two, Slavery and Equality. ("Why I Became a Communist," 1894)

[Those discontented with their present position will seek] to have their affairs under their own control; ...to work happily and unwastefully, restore that of the earth's surface which is spoilt and keep that which is unspoilt, to enjoy rest and thought and labour without fear or remorse,...let them say,...let us use [our wages] now as best we may, yet not so much for the present profit we may get out of them as for hastening the realization of the new Society, the time when at last we shall be free because we are equal. ("What We Have to Look For," 1895)

[U]nless [these egalitarian principles] are once again to become the root principles of a true society, I for my part can see nothing for it but a continuous degradation of our false society until it disappears in a chaos caused by greed and suffering. ("The Present Outlook of Socialism in England," 1896)