The Impact of Morris and the Kelmscott Press in Germany

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We have to face the paradoxical situation that Morris's work and ideas were virtually unknown in Germany during his lifetime; it was not until his death caused a multitude of essays that he became known to a broader public. Moriz Sondheim, a Frankfurt bookseller and bibliophile, wrote in 1898: "On October 3rd 1896 William Morris died in London. His name was generally unknown in Germany until his obituaries were published. One recognized with astonishment that he was an outstanding artist, an important poet, a popular politician. It seems very strange that the Germans have not concerned themselves with him earlier, for William Morris arouses interest in various areas: he was active in many different fields, and created many works of art, but never anything insignificant because everything . . . bears the stamp of his strong individuality."[1]

Another very enthusiastic appreciation of Morris's work was written by George Swarzenski, later director of the Städel'sches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt. He described Morris as "the great man, to whose name the Arts & Crafts movement is connected . . . if it is ever allowed in history to designate great movements as the work of a single person, we should do it in this case."[2] Rudolf Kautzsch[3] and Otto Grautoff see William Morris in their studies as "the executor of Ruskinian theories, the great pioneer and brilliant pathfinder of the modern art of the book"[4], and as a father-figure of the early German art of the book.

Needless to say, many German artists were inspired by Morris's theories and practical work at the turn of the century. Heinrich Vogeler's title-page to Hofmannsthal's book *Der Kaiser und die Hexe* in the famous Insel-Verlag edition of 1900 shows clearly Morris's influence combined with Aubrey Beardsley's style of drawing. Melchior Lechter absorbed Morrisian ideas in his work as a book illustrator as well as a private press printer at his Einhorn Press. He writes in an exhibition catalogue published in 1910: "Every ornamental . . . decoration should be developed organically from the character of the respective printing-type . . . in other words: two facing pages should unite to form an organic image, a sequence of page-openings should result in a unified book."[5] These are nearly the same words Morris used in his 'Note by William Morris on his aims in founding the Kelmscott Press'.

In 1901 Georg Belwe, F.H. Ehmcke and F.W. Kleukens founded their Steglitzer Werkstatt, in order to transform "l'art pour l'art" attitudes of the *Jugendstil* into a new style stressing both form and function, leading to the German *Werkbundbewegung,* similar in its aims to the English Arts and Crafts movement. They produced "only" ephemera, except Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portugese*, published in 1903 for the Diederichs-Verlag, the first German book printed according to the ideals of the English private presses.[6]

Later on F.W. Kleukens became director of the Ernst-Ludwig press in Darmstadt, creating masterpieces such as the *Buch Esther* or Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*, both published in 1908. F.H. Ehmckes's work at his Rupprecht Press shows clearly that he shared Morris's love for gothic typefaces. In 1908 he paid Emery Walker a visit at his home in Kew, where Walker showed him books of the Kelmscott and Doves Presses, including his magnificent copy of the Kelmscott Chaucer on vellum.[7] Carl Ernst Poeschel, another German printer, and founder with Walter Tiemann of the first German private press, the Janus Press, came to London in order to get in touch with Edward Johnston, Eric Gill and Emery Walker. Deeply impressed, he went back to Germany and published his *Zeitgemäße Buchdruckkunst*.[8] This small volume had immense influence because of Poeschel's attempt to apply the ideas of book design as represented by English private presses to German commercial printing.

The first exhibition of Kelmscott Press books in Germany was held at the Großherzogliches Museum für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe in Weimar in April and May 1905. They were shown together with the work of other English presses, contemporary German books, illustrated books by Beardsley and Housman, first editions of Klopstock, Wieland and Schiller, and Italian and German incunabula, in order to illustrate the development of printing over the centuries and to draw a parallel from fifteenth-century books to the modern revival of printing. The man who planned this exhibition and published the catalogue was Count Harry Kessler, in those days director of the museum, later of Cranach Press fame.[9] While working on the *Großherzog Wilhelm Ernst*-edition for the Insel-Verlag, he persuaded Johnston, Walker and Gill to design these handsome little volumes. They worked for Count Kessler, together with the master printers J.H. Mason and H. Gage-Cole, on most of the ambitious editions of the Cranach Press in the 1920s. One may say that the Cranach Press seems to have been in some ways an English-German enterprise, but Aristide Maillol should not be excluded here: Kessler dedicated Vergil's *Eclogues* to Emery Walker, "the inspirator and friend of William Morris"; Gill illustrated *Das hohe Lied Salomo* with woodcuts and ornamental initials; punches were cut by Edward Prince. The *Hamlet* in Johnston's type with woodcuts by Edward Gordon Craig is a book which would have much pleased William Morris.[10]

From the beginning, artists, publishers and printers involved in the new German *Buchkunst* were divided into two groups: the followers of William Morris and the supporters of T.J. Cobden-Sanderson's "pure typography". In the years before and after World War I Morris's ornamental style lost influence: the Janus Press followed Cobden-Sanderson's "ideal book" and Ernst-Ludwig Press changed its approach to book design from *Art nouveau* to a more austere style, dedicating its Shakespeare edition to "T.J. Cobden-Sanderson, the brilliant printer of the German Faust *in memoriam*". E.R. Weiss stated in 1911: "Following the movement from the beginning [I] came from the ornamental style . . . almost auto-didactically to the appreciation of the purely typographical book."[11]

There may have been other than simply artistic reasons for this development. William Morris and his ideas, especially his socialist ideas, seemed inappropriate in the political climate of the late Wilhelminian era. Otto von Schleinitz wrote in a lengthy essay: "He [Morris] was consulted by government authorities as an expert in spite of his arrest because of . . . aggression against a policeman . . . . He was not only a revolutionary in the sense of today's zeitgeist, but also in the field of Arts and

Crafts, one who has grown into a despot on occasion, like many reformers before him".[12]

In the 1920s there was a further decrease of Morris's influence on book design in Germany. Only a few mentions can be found from that time.[13/14] This changed in 1934 with a flood of articles commemorating the centenary of Morris's birthday.[15-17] Of special interest is the William Morris issue of *Philobiblon*,[18] containing essays by May Morris, Joseph Batchelor, Frederick Goudy and the famous scribe Rudolf Koch, who characterized Morris as "the greatest of all who made books in the last centuries", in his moving and sometimes nationalistic words: "We cannot understand that William Morris was an Englishman. He belongs as much to us Germans ... as anyone born in our country." Nevertheless, Morris and Koch were kindred spirits striving for an idea book created by ideal craftmanship.

After the war, especially in the 1950s, one can speak of a "Morris renaissance" in Germany, beginning with the biographies by Hermann Zapf[19] and F.A. Schmidt-Künsemüller.[20] Zapf writes in his preface: "We in Germany, however, cannot think it our duty to go in for imitating his means of graphic expression. His work was unique in his own time in England, and so it has to be looked upon as closely connected with the problems of art and society of that time. But the German craft of the book of today should emulate the ideal of working as honestly and devotedly as Morris did, in order to gain equal distinction."

This new interest in Morris's life and work led to the idea of two major exhibitions of Kelmscott Press books. In 1954 an exhibition was held at the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz, on the one hand to celebrate Morris's 120th birthday, and on the other hand to honour the Wiesbaden bibliophile Karl Theodor Wunderle, who presented his collection of private press books, including twenty six Kelmscott Press volumes, to the museum, where they are for the most part on permanent display.[21] Together with the earlier donation of Richard Doetsch-Benziger, the Gutenberg Museum owns an almost complete run of Kelmscott books, the largest public collection on the Continent.

In 1958 another exhibition of Kelmscott Press items took place under the motto "The typographical adventure of William Morris", at the Klingspor Museum in Offenbach, originated by the William Morris Society. The same exhibition was shown in Berlin, London, Antwerp and other European cities. The Klingspor Museum was founded in 1953 as a museum for calligraphy and the art of the book, based mainly on the library of Karl Klingspor,[22] director of the Klingspor foundry. One of the most treasured collections of the museum is that of the private press books of Karl Klingspor, including six Kelmscott volumes, bound by the famous bookbinder Ignatz Wiemeler.[23] The highlight surely is the Kelmscott Chaucer, bound in white pigskin, the same material Cobden-Sanderson used for the forty eight special copies bound at the Doves Bindery. Altogether there are twelve Kelmscott books, and a file with trial pages, order forms and other ephemera, in the Klingspor collection.

The interest in Morris and his Kelmscott Press in the 1950s may be seen in relation to Germany's cultural isolation during the Nazi period. Morris described himself as a "dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time", but since the 1960s he seems to be "out of our time", too. I should like to add some personal experiences, in order to illustrate this statement: my daily contact with young librarians shows that most of them do not even know Morris's name. Hans-Christian Kirsch's excellent biography[24]

was remaindered at bargain prices: Morris's essays on the art of the book, edited by William S. Peterson,[25] are only to be found in special libraries; and the centenary of the foundation of the Kelmscott Press went by unnoticed in Germany. On the other hand, I discovered that the audience was very interested and attentive during my lectures on Morris at the Gutenberg and Klingspor museums. So I proposed an exhibition to be held at the Gutenberg Museum in 1996, to commemorate the centenary of the printing of the Kelmscott Chaucer. Dr. Hanebutt-Benz, director of the museum, is enthusiastic about the project and has arranged for a Morris exhibition to take place next year, in order to give many people the opportunity to see the books printed by William Morris at the Kelmscott Press – perhaps for the first time – and to encounter his life, work and ideas.

NOTES

This article is dedicated to Sue and Douglas Martin.

[1] Sondheim, Moriz, *William Morris. Zeitschrift für Bücherfreunde*. 2, 1898/9, pp.10–20.
[2] Swarzenski, Georg, *William Morris und die Entwicklung des modernen dekorativen Stils in England*. Neue Deutsche Rundschau. 9, 1898, pp.198–210.
[3] Kautzsch, Rudolf: *Die neue Buchkunst*. Weimar, 1902.
[4] Grautoff, Otto: *Die Entwicklung der modernen Buchkunst in Deutschland*. Leipzig, 1901.
[5] Bänfer, Carl, *Der Beitrag Melchior Lechters zur Buchkunst des Jugendstils*. Westfalen. 36, 1958, pp.255–280.
[6] Lechner, Herbert, *Geschichte der modernen Typographie*. München, 1981.
[7] Ehmcke, 'Fritz Helmuth: Erinnerungen an Emery Walker'. *Archiv für Buchgewerbe und Gebrauchsgraphik*. 71, 1934, pp.17–20.
[8] Poeschel, Carl Ernst: *Zeitgemäße Buchdruckkunst*. Leipzig, 1904. (Reprinted with an epilogue by Hans Peter Willberg. Stuttgart, 1989.)
[9] Schuster, Gerhard/Pehle, Margot: *Harry Graf Kessler. Tagebuch eines Weltmannes*. Marbach, 1988, p.151. Kessler's diaries were also published in English: *The Diaries of a Cosmopolitan: Count Harry Kessler 1918–1937*. Translated and edited by Charles Kessler, London, 1971.
[10] Müller-Krumbach, Renate, *Harry Graf Kessler und die Cranach-Presse in Weimar. Mit einem Beitrag von John Dreyfus und einem Verzeichnis der Drucke der Cranach-Presse*. Hamburg, 1969. Pages 86–88 show interesting similarities between Morris's Golden type, the Doves type and the Cranach Press Jenson-Antiqua. Concerning the Cranach Press italic, see John Dreyfus's excellent study, *Italic Quartet*. Cambridge, 1966.
[11] Eyssen, Jürgen, *Buchkunst in Deutschland*. Hannover 1980. pp.13–14.
[12] Schleinitz, Otto von, 'William Morris'. *Zeitschrift für Bucherfreunde*. 11, 1907/8, pp.27–44, 59–78, 107–124, 146–165, 191–212.
[13] Koch, Rudolf, 'William Morris'. *Offenbacher Sendbrief*, 1923. (see 18).
[14] Windisch, Albert, 'William Morris als Drucker'. *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch*. 4, 1929, pp.238–248.
[15] Ehmcke, Fritz Helmuth, 'Was bedeutet William Morris für unsere Zeit?' *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch*. 9, 1934, pp.261–270.

[16] Bettmann, Otto, 'William Morris'. *Gebrauchsgraphik*. 11, 1934, no. 4, pp.50–57.

[17] Meiner, Annemarie: 'William Morris. Zum 100. Geburtstag am 24. März 1934.' *Imprimatur*. 5, 1934, pp. 118–127.

[18] *Philobiblon*. Vienna, 7, 1934.

[19] Zapf, Hermann: *William Morris*. Scharbeutz, 1949.

[20] Schmidt-Künsemüller, Friedrich Adolf: *William Morris und die neuere Buchkunst*. Wiesbaden, 1955.

[21] Presser, Helmut, *Morris-Drucke und andere Meisterwerke englischer und amerikanischer Privatpressen*. Mainz, 1954.

[22] Halbey, Hans Adolf: *Karl Klingspor*. Offenbach, 1991.

[23] All the bindings are described in: Londenberg, Kurt: *Ignatz Wiemeler. Werkverzeichnis*. Hamburg, 1990.

[24] Kirsch, Hans-Christian: *William Morris – ein Mann gegen die Zeit*. Köln, 1983.

[25] *Morris, William: Das ideale Buch. Aufsätze und Beiträge über die Buchkunst* ed. W.S. Peterson. Göttingen, 1986.