Robert A. Thom (1915-1969) was an American painter who specialized in historical scenes for commercial patrons. In addition to the “Graphic Communication Through the Ages” series, he painted scenes from the histories of pharmacy, medicine, baseball, and of Illinois and Michigan.
Letter from Society President Michael Robertson .......................... 2

The Lasting Legacy of The Kelmscott Press: Three interviews
by Jane Carlin .......................................................... 3
The Kelmscott-Goudy Press at the Rochester Institute of Technology: An interview with Steven Galbraith and Amelia Hugill-Fontanel, ...................................................... 4
An Interview with Jessica Spring: Designer of our 50th Anniversary Commemorative Broadside ......................... 8
An interview with Chandler O’Leary: Artist, Illustrator, and Social Activist ..................................................... 10

Reclaiming the Homeric Artifact: Morris, The Odyssey, and Political Education by Michelle Weinroth ......................... 14
An African Dog Handler in Burne-Jones’ Life of St Frideswide by Paul Acker .................................................. 20
Angela Thirkell’s Tribute to May Morris
by Mary Faraci .......................................................... 22
Decorative Needlework by May Morris
by Courtney Gifford .................................................. 24
Young Poland: The Polish Arts and Crafts Movement, 1890-1918. Julia Griffin and Andrzej Szczerski, eds. reviewed by Morna O’Neill .................................................. 28
The Routledge Companion to William Morris, reviewed by Courtney Gifford .................................................. 32

Book Notices:
Twenty Years On by Peter Stansky ................................................. 33
Letters From England, 1895: Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling editors: Stephen Williams & Tony Chandler ................................. 34
The Remarkable Lushington Family: Reformers, Pre-Raphaelites, Positivists, and the Bloomsbury Group by David Taylor .................................................. 34

William Morris Society in the U.S. Membership Benefits ........... 35
The Last Word ...................................................................... 36

Website: www.morrissociety.org
Blog: morrissociety.blogspot.com
Twitter @MorrisSocietyUS
facebook.com/The-William-Morris-Society-138704472341/

Submit newsletter articles and items of interest to: us@morrissociety.org

This newsletter is published by the William Morris Society in the United States, P. O. Box 53263, Washington DC 20009. Editorial committee: Florence S. Boos (editor), Brandiann Molby (assistant editor), Brandiann Molby and Anna Wager (associate editors), and Karla Tonella (designer).

GOVERNING COMMITTEE OF THE WILLIAM MORRIS SOCIETY-USA
Michael Robertson, President; Sarah Leonard, Vice President; David Lowden, Secretary; Anna Wager, Treasurer; Jane Carlin, Past President; Adrienne Sharpe, Membership Coordinator;
Florence Boos, Monica Bowen, Melissa Buron, Imogen Hart, Mark Samuels Lasner, Brandiann Molby, Jude Nixon.

LETTER FROM WMS-US
PRESIDENT MICHAEL ROBERTSON

It’s an honor to write my first column as president of the William Morris Society in the U.S. during the Society’s 50th Anniversary year. There’s cause for celebration whenever a small, all-volunteer organization lasts for a decade, much less fifty years. That we’ve lasted so long is a real tribute to past members, board members, leaders and, most of all, to our mission of sustaining the legacy of a great artist and social visionary.

In May we devoted our monthly online program to a history of the WMS-US. We began by acknowledging the organization’s past presidents, from founder Joseph R. Dunlap to the dynamic Jane Carlin. We then read the names of our twenty-two Life Members. Thanks to their generosity, the Society today is in a very stable financial position, able to sustain our programs, increase our benefits to members, and extend our outreach. One of our most important programs is the Joseph R. Dunlap Memorial Fellowship, made possible by Barbara and Andrew Dunlap. This year’s Dunlap winner, Jade Hoyer, an artist and studio art professor, was on hand to discuss her project and show examples of her beautiful and innovative Morris-inspired art.

The centerpiece of the program was a discussion with longtime members Florence Boos and Mark Samuels Lasner. Florence and Mark talked about the Society’s earliest days. We began as the American branch of the British Morris Society, which has its headquarters in the coachhouse of Kelmscott House, Morris’s home in Hammersmith, London. Kelmscott House itself is now a private residence, but Florence Boos talked about her experience living at Kelmscott House in the days when the British Society opened it to visiting scholars, and Florence and her husband stayed in Jane Morris’s bedroom.

Joe Dunlap, who organized multiple U.S. events during the 1960s, started the WMS-US in 1971. From the beginning, the Society had connections with the Modern Language Association (MLA). We later became an Allied Organization and continue to sponsor one or more panels of Morris scholars at MLA, which holds its annual conference at various sites across North America, providing Morris enthusiasts, whether MLA members or not, with the opportunity to gather in person and attend Morris-related events and exhibitions in the host city.

Because of the affiliation with MLA, during its early days the Society was made up largely of literature scholars, along with those interested in book history and book collecting and a substantial cohort of people drawn in by Morris’s socialist politics. That somewhat limited membership grew vastly in June, 1996, when the New York Times Travel section published an article, tied to the centenary of Morris’s death, about Kelmscott Manor, Morris’s Oxfordshire home, and...
THE LASTING LEGACY
OF THE KELMSCOTT PRESS


Four years in the making, with illustrations by the Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones and designed by Morris in every detail, the Kelmscott Chaucer, as it is commonly known, is universally considered one of the most beautiful books ever printed.

William Morris’s “typographical adventure” exerted great influence on the private press movement and modern book printing and illustration which is evident today.

THREE INTERVIEWS
BY JANE CARLIN

Jane Carlin, former Society President, had the opportunity to interview contemporary artists and scholars about the lasting legacy of the Kelmscott Press.

We are delighted to profile artists and scholars that exemplify the fine craftsmanship and ideals of Morris in this series of conversations. Jessica Spring, a letterpress printer in Tacoma, designed a broadside in the spirit of Morris and talks about the influence of Morris on her work. Chandler O’Leary, an illustrator and writer, who often collaborates with Spring, shares her perspectives on the Art & Crafts Movement, and we conclude our conversations with commentary from the caretakers of the Kelmscott-Goudy Press at the Rochester Institute of Technology; Stephen Galbraith and Amelia Hugill-Fontanel.

It is evident that the legacy of the Kelmscott Press, after 125 years, is very much alive. — Jane Carlin
Acquiring the Goudy Kelmscott is rather significant! Can you share the “story” of how the Press came to RIT?

SKG When I first joined the Cary Collection, I had the privilege of spending time with our outgoing Cary Curator, David Pankow. David generously introduced me to the library and showed me the ropes as only he could after spending 32 dynamic years as the curator. As he shared his insights, I took notes. He would occasionally offer ideas for future areas of collection development. A conversation about William Morris prompted him to share with me that our library’s namesake, Melbert B. Cary Jr., had once been an owner of the press on which the Kelmscott Chaucer was printed, and that this press had also belonged briefly to the famous American type designer Frederic Goudy. David informed me that the press was now owned by a law professor named Jethro Leiberman and that at some point I should try to acquire it. I tucked this idea away for the time being.

About three years later, October 18, 2013, I received a text from Amelia Hugill-Fontanel, the associate curator of the Cary Collection, that read “The Cary Kelmscott press is going to be auctioned at Christies 12/6/13.” It had been announced at the American Printing History Association conference that she was attending. I responded “Argh!” I had hoped to acquire the press directly at some point, not at auction. Nevertheless, we immediately went to work thinking of creative ways we might be able to raise the needed funds so we might have a chance at the auction scheduled for less than two months away. Our colleagues in RIT’s Development office, Ann Schilla and Heather Engel, helped us contact Brooks Bower, an RIT alumnus from the School of Printing. Brooks is the CEO of Papercone, a major manufacturer of specialty envelopes. He is also an avid collector of printing presses and an active supporter of RIT. Heather reached out to Brooks about this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our institution. Amelia and I were elated when he generously agreed to support us at auction. If this famous press came to RIT we would give it an active life, using it for teaching and small run editions. We would host visiting printers-in-residence and letterpress workshops.

Of course, there was still the auction! Our strategy was to hire an seasoned hand from the book trade to represent RIT and the Cary Collection as our on-site bidder at the live auction. Our friend Phil Salmon from Bromer Booksellers fit the bill perfectly. The presence of Phil at Christie’s would disguise the fact that RIT was bidding on the Kelmscott/Goudy Press. In the eyes of other potential bidders in the room, Phil could be representing another institute, a private collector, or perhaps even his own company.

Phil and I worked out our bidding strategy in advance of meeting up that morning in New York, but shored up our plans over breakfast. At first we sat together in Christie’s auction room, but as the sale of Albion 6551 approached, I excused myself to leave Phil to his work. Not wanting to be seen by other bidders, I watched the auction from the back corner of the room.

I had no idea how exhilarating the auction process would be. The bidding between Phil and an unknown bidder who had joined the proceedings online seemed to move very, very quickly. That was until the price began approaching the agreed-upon maximum bid. When I say “agreed upon” I mean both by myself and Phil as our bidding strategy, and by
As the price passed $100,000, the minimum bid increment became set at $10,000. When we reached our maximum bid, I believed it was our final hope. If our opponent outbid us by the next $10,000, that would put our next bid at $20,000 over the agreed-upon maximum price. The pace seemed to slow considerably. It seemed like the auctioneer was moving in slow motion. Just when I thought we might have it won, our online opponent bid. We had hit a price that was far beyond what we had planned for. The auctioneer almost playfully asked Phil if he liked the next bid price. I remember having a fleeting thought that the last bid had taken so long, that our opponent might not bid passed this increment. Phil turned to look for me in the room. He found me in the back corner. I nodded yes and quickly stepped out of the room to prevent any more rash reactions. Phil placed our final and successful bid.

I was ecstatic. My heart was racing as I called Amelia and our library director, Shirley Bower. They had been watching Christie’s live stream from Shirley’s office and cheering us on from Rochester. It was such an incredible day for RIT, the Wallace Library, and the Cary Collection. We hoped that it would be the beginning of an exciting new life for the Kelmscott/Goudy Press! As I write this I am happily reminded of all the friends and colleagues who helped make possible the acquisition of the Kelmscott/Goudy Press. I remain grateful.

As I went back into the auction room, I could see Phil talking with a number of folks who had gathered around him, including the press’s owner, Jethro Lieberman. I turned my attention instead to the arrival on the auction stage of the Fender Stratocaster guitar that Bob Dylan had used when he went electric at Newport in 1965. It was to be auctioned an hour or so later. Its presence in the room added to the magic, and surrealness, of the moment.

**SKG** Facilitating moving a 3,000 pound printing press from New York to Rochester took considerable time and planning. The Kelmscott/Goudy Press had been assembled and showcased at an event prior to the auction. A delayed flight had prevented me from attending. So the press needed to be taken apart and carefully packed for transportation. Phil continued to be helpful as we worked with Christie’s on this effort. We hired an art shipper to ensure the safety of the press during its travels. While cast iron is hard, it is also brittle: careful disassembly and packing was a must. On site at RIT Libraries, Amelia measured all the doors and elevators. We needed to carefully plot the press’s path from its arrival to the library’s back entrance, to the second floor and the Cary Collection. We decided that the press would live in our Lowenthal Memorial Press Room, but we needed to make space for it. This required the moving of some seriously heavy equipment: three typestands with about 5,000 pounds of type, a composing stone, and a galley rack. This Herculean task could not have been completed without the planning prowess of Amelia, our building engineers Jason Stryker and Thanh Hoang, and our student employees Megan Moltrop, Amanda Mee, Rebecca Boone, and Augie Park.

I will never forget the day of the press’s arrival. As the moving truck pulled up to the back of the library building, it was
met by a small pool of photographers. It was like a celebrity had arrived on campus. I only recall one moment of anxiety during the unloading of the press. As the staple, the tall main frame of the press, was loaded onto the truck’s hydraulic liftgate it lurched forward. For just a fleeting moment, I imagined this vital part of the press tumbling off onto the concrete below. But two of the movers, seemingly unconcerned by the wobbling staple, calmly pulled back on its cheeks, and held it straight and steady until the lift gently hit the ground.

Thanks to our team’s preparations, the generosity of the movers who stayed to help with the installation, and Jason and Thahn and their students, moving the parts of the press through the building, onto the elevator and into the Cary Collection went even more smoothly than expected.

The arrival of the Kelmscott/Goudy Press at the Cary Collection was a homecoming of sorts. Not only did the press return to a former owner in Melbert Cary, it resides nearby an Albion printing press that had belonged to another former owner, Frederic Goudy.

**How does the Press fit into the overall program at RIT?**

**AHF** Since the Cary Collection’s founding in 1969, its curators have collected books and archival documents in tandem with realia related to letterpress printing. Over five decades, we have accumulated 30 working printing presses and all the accoutrements needed to print, including thousands of fonts of metal and wood type. We preserve these objects through their active use in a variety of educational activities including classes and workshops. Scholars and artists-in-residence have joined college and elementary students alike in creating printed editions using this Cary equipment.

We try to be discerning and collect printing presses that are significant because they are examples of a progressive change in the technology. In this way, we can tell the story of the whole arc of letterpress innovation from the earliest wooden common press models to motorized cylinder presses. The Kelmscott-Goudy Press, which is an Albion-style iron handpress, was acquired mainly because of its illustrious provenance. We had two Albions in the collection prior to the K-G acquisition. However, the K-G is the largest with a platen size of 21 x 29 inches to print a folio format, so apart from the famous work it printed, it does contribute some unique technical qualities to the Cary’s Technology Collection.
Can you tell us a bit about the programs and activities associated with the Press?

AHF The Cary often sponsors open house events that include an activity where attendees get to print their own keepsakes. We first did this for the K-G’s dedication in October 2014. We invited a wood-engraver, Steve Lee-Davis, to carve portraits of Morris and Goudy. I set them in a broadside layout with type from the Lost Goudy Type Collection. For Cary’s 50th anniversary in October 2019, we followed the same event format and printed Frederic Goudy’s comprehensive interpretations of ampersand characters throughout history.

In 2015, Cary was the host for the American Printing History Association’s annual conference themed, “Printing on the Handpress and Beyond.” Marnie Powers-Torrey of the University of Utah ran a workshop on the K-G where participants responded to the query of “It’s 2015. Why Handpress?” Their responses were set in Palatino type and printed in a French-fold pamphlet edition of 150 copies. Richard Minksy, founder of the New York Center for Book Arts, had also spent time experimenting on the press during a week as a visiting artist in 2017.

The K-G is a smooth press to operate. It’s a cornerstone of our printing program now. I have run several limited editions of K-G-printed pamphlets and broadsides in its six years at RIT. I was proud of one in particular: a calligraphic keepsake in 2 colors designed by Jerry Kelly as an insert in a 2016 edition of RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage.

How does it feel to print on a Press used by Morris?

AHF When I plan a printing project on the K-G, I feel a deep commitment to quality—this has to be an exemplar of my best work. All of the people who owned this press before RIT tried to express that same deference to the impact of William Morris on the field of fine printing and craft. It’s thrilling, and humbling—and even stressful, all at the same time. That said, I don’t think that this press should only print jobs that reappropriate the styles and texts of its predecessors. I want to see it used to print fresh, 21st-century works that reflect the ideas and aesthetics of this time.

What makes letterpress printing relevant today?

AHF It never ceases to amaze me how hundreds of years of communication depended upon the arrangement of letters that were cast from metal molds, often in combination with characters that were carved from wooden blocks. Letterpress printing produced the tidal wave of words that have so influenced the movements of our modern age: inciting humans to seek enlightenment or revolution, and share in creative thought. Today our consumption of words is dominated by glyphs made from electrostatic charges and light-emitting diodes on the screen. Is there any place for their analog ancestors in a world where words last as long as our fingers can swipe them away?

Yes, absolutely. Words in print are survivors in the 21st century. But the most exciting development now is that the printed word is transforming into the printed image. The inky words impressed into paper are no longer content to sit monochromatically in lines and columns as they have for generations. They combine at the hands of their compositors to resonate with color, texture, and abstraction. Individual letters and ornaments can work together like cells to construct intricate pictures, or single massive characters demand appreciation of their structural serifs and contours on paper. Sometimes the words originate as pixels, but seem to gain new meaning and respect when they are ultimately printed via letterpress. The letterpress medium is the message! The printed word will endure, often evolving into the realm of fine visual art.

Anything else you would like to share?

AHF I believe that RIT was the best landing place for this printing press. The Cary’s dedication to preservation and education regarding printing history collections is just one aspect of this fit. When I was restoring and reassembling the K-G in 2014, I found on two occasions that pieces were missing or broken. Luckily, I had a collaborative partner on campus in the Mechanical Engineering Department. Their head machinist fabricated the missing parts using computer-aided design and automated lathes. This 129-year-old press is now operational with 21st century parts, and that is such a fitting analogy for how the Cary staff interprets the deep history of communication for our modern patrons.

SKG RIT and the Cary Collection are honored to preserve the Kelmscott/Goudy Press. It has been a great joy to see it restored and used in such creative and dynamic ways. It is our hope that it will continue to inspire new generations of printers and produce exciting new printed works.
A CONVERSATION WITH JESSICA SPRING: DESIGNER OF OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIVE BROADSIDE.

Jessica Spring is the proprietor of the Springtide Press in Tacoma, Washington. She works in a variety of formats including artists’ books, broadsides, and ephemera. She is the recipient of many national and international awards, a consummate and patient teacher, and always has time to share her expertise and love of letterpress with the community. She is a founder of the Tacoma Wayzgoose Festival, held each April to celebrate the printing and paper arts. Her studio space reflects her personality; warm, inviting, and inspirational. Learn more about Jessica at: https://springtidepress.com/

You designed the broadside to commemorate the Kelmscott Press. When you receive a new project, what is your process for design?

Although my ideas are all over the place, my approach is typically to consider the problems and potential solutions. I’m always interested in a fresh approach, making a broadside more relevant to contemporary audiences. I’ll do some sketching and research typically, and a lot of thinking, doubting and rejecting with a few “AH HA’s” thrown in. These happen unpredictably—in the shower, on a walk, driving in the car—and sometimes appear fully realized in my mind. Whether I can follow through to that fully-realized vision is a whole other question.

Can you share the details of the design?

When Jane and I discussed the project, her suggestion was to use a well-known Morris quote (“Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.”) While it’s a beautiful quote, it fell a little flat taking into consideration the pandemic, and the overwhelming number of lives lost and unhoused people. I looked and found an alternative that felt timely, referencing “the future which we are now helping to make.” Thankfully several Morris scholars
found the original source and confirmed he actually wrote it. Using typography as a way to move through time, the broadside goes through historic to more contemporary letterforms. While using so many different typefaces can be a risky “ransom note” approach, the justified type framed with hand-colored floral borders manage to contain the cacophony and accommodate the reader. We worked with Linda Marshall at Washi Arts to consider paper options, deciding on two Japanese papers that worked well with letterpress printing and offer some formality and heaviness.

You work closely with Chandler O’Leary and I know social justice enters into your Dead Feminist project - can you share other examples of how your work as a letterpress printer impacts your community and focuses on social justice.

Given that I have the power of a printing press (even several of them) I take the responsibility of using my voice and privilege where I can. Chandler and I started the series in 2008 and continue to find urgent issues to address and readress, while elevating the voices of women throughout history. More locally, I’ve had the opportunity to work with community groups on various issues from literacy, environment, language preservation, and general Tacoma advocacy, utilizing the press as a tool. Using my voice and lifting up others also works to ensure the relevance of these historic tools and processes: preservation through utilization.

What makes letterpress so popular in this digital age?

People continue to be fascinated with the touch and feel of letterpress printing, an obvious contrast to all the time we spend on screens. It’s also a powerful thing to move from a concept to the printed page, with total control over every step involved. Obviously this had appeal to Morris too, as a publisher who considered every aspect of the process. What’s interesting now is the merging of old and new technologies, like digitally created photopolymer laser cut plates used to print on 19th century presses. A similar revival of interest in Risograph—a low-tech digital duplicator—also allows the ability to publish from thought to print.

What do you think William Morris would say if he was able to time travel to 2021 in relation to the quote printed on the broadside?

Gosh, I hope he’d appreciate it, but printers can be the worst critics. If he woke up in 2021 and took in all the world’s changes, I think he might delight in our effort to continue familiar and valuable traditions, preserving the history by actively engaging in making. Plus he’d have a really cool Morris & Co. face mask, right?
AN INTERVIEW WITH CHANDLER O'LEARY 
ARTIST, ILLUSTRATOR, AND SOCIAL ACTIVIST

Chandler is an illustrator and lettering artist working from her studio in Tacoma, Washington. She has a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, and creates her own line of prints and paper goods under her in-house brand Anagram Press. She also does lettering and illustration work for publications and brands throughout the U.S., and posts her sketchbook drawings on her illustrated travel blog, Drawn the Road Again. She is co-founder, along with Jessica Spring, of the Dead Feminists, a series of broadsides focused on the contributions of women. She works in a variety of mediums, capturing moments in everyday life in a beautiful and whimsical manner. She is passionate about fine craftsmanship and has nothing in her home that is not beautiful or useful!

Learn more about Chandler and her work: https://chandleroleary.com/

Can you share any insights into your own artistic influences? How has the work of Morris and other members of the Arts & Crafts Movement influenced your own work and sensibility?

My own practice is grounded in principles of fine craftsmanship which is a hallmark of Morris. Morris embraced creating items both useful and beautiful but also using technology to further craftsmanship. In my own work, I am greatly influenced by the work of Morris, but also John Ruskin and the many artists that were part of the Arts & Crafts movement. One of the most inspirational places I have visited is the Oxford History Museum, which when built exemplified cutting age technology in its design and construction. An early example of the influence of Morris & Co. can be seen in a cover illustration I did for my alma mater, the Rhode Island School of Design. The decorative lettering and botanical references are definitely an influence of Morris and the Press Morris & Company was all about collaboration. He worked alongside his wife Jane, his daughter May, architect Philip Webb and many of the Pre-Raphaelites. You work closely with fellow artist Jessica Spring on the Dead Feminists project. Can you share a little about how this collaboration began and where you find your inspiration for this project?

Jessica and I are partners; both bringing different strengths to the collaboration—we complement one another. We have found that communication is the key to successful collaboration and sharing ideas and concepts back and forth helps foster creativity. The Dead Feminists series features quotes by historical feminists, tied to current political and social issues. Each limited-edition broadside is letterpress printed from hand-drawn lettering and illustrations. We often start with a “kernel” of an idea that develops and expands through research, reflection and conversation.

The decorative lettering and illustration are reminiscent of the borders seen in many of the Kelmscott press publications.
Do the ideals of social justice, a hallmark of Morris and the A&C Movement, translate into your own practice?

Jessica and I have been working together since 2008 on the Dead Feminists Project and most recently on an exhibition at the Washington State History Museum: Votes for Women: 100 Years and Counting, the centennial exhibition of women’s suffrage. Both of these projects bring a commitment to raising awareness of voices that should be heard and embracing inclusion. We strive to tell stories of women that have been left untold – we work to unearth “facts” and research archives to educate and inspire. We are very aware of the position of privilege we have and seek to use our audience to raise awareness and support for others.

With the Dead Feminists, a portion of the proceeds of each piece is donated to a cause that aligns with the issue highlighted by the artwork. Since the inception of the series, we have donated a portion of our proceeds to nonprofits that align with the issues and causes we highlight with our broadsides. In 2016 we inaugurated the Dead Feminists Fund. In honor of the power of women’s work, the Dead Feminists Fund supports nonprofits that empower girls and women to create change in their own communities. Funding is organized under a series of Action Verbs (“Make,” “Grow,” “Lead,” “Tell,” etc.), which translate to micro grant categories. Each year the Fund supports nonprofits with micro grants in one of our Action categories.

Anything else you would like to share about the legacy of William Morris and the Arts & Crafts movement and your own work?
I feel that work as an artist can contribute to social justice and can help educate, raise awareness, and expose the historical record. This past summer [2020] the power of print and of art was reflected in the many protests to bring equity and justice to our communities. This photo of me, along with my collaborator Jessica Spring, showcases the power of print!

Chandler and Jessica at the Families Belong Together march in June 2018, in Tacoma—a protest in response to ICE’s family separation policy at the US-Mexico border.

Ruth Bader Ginsberg (page 11), Simone de Beauvoir, and Shirley Chisholm broadsides were designed and printed by Jessica Spring and Chandler O’Leary
The William Morris Society in the United States is pleased to announce the launch of our new website at https://morrissociety.org/. Years in the making, the new website combines our longstanding digital resources with new offerings, within a totally new design and structure.

We continue to host the full archives of *The Journal of William Morris Studies* and our magazine *Useful and Beautiful*, as well as provide information and resources about Morris, his works, his circle, and our Society. The new website also includes a more robust system for announcing news, events, and publications, and will see the return of our blog.

The website design is reflected across our organization, including in the new logo seen above, which is drawn from Morris’s botanical designs.

As part of this project, we will also soon be moving our membership management system to the Wild Apricot platform. This shift will make it easier for members to join, renew their memberships, and manage their contact information.

The website and logo were designed by Cari Schindler of Cari Schindler Design, a graphic and web designer based in Tacoma, Washington. A devoted team of Society volunteers moved the project from concept to reality. Sarah Mead Leonard, WMS-US Vice President, managed the project and worked tirelessly to prepare the site for launch, assisted by many including Jane Carlin, KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, and Rebekah Greene. The entire WMS-US board contributed their Morrissian expertise. Florence Boos deserves special thanks for making the former site into such a great Morrissian resource. The new website builds upon the foundations laid by Florence and earlier Society volunteers.
RECLAIMING THE HOMERIC ARTIFACT: MORRIS, THE ODYSSEY, AND POLITICAL EDUCATION
Michelle Weinroth

According to his doctor, Morris's death at 62 was the result of excessive exertion. As a prominent leader of the Socialist League, prolific writer, and interior designer, he had "done more work than most ten men." This oft-quoted diagnosis is borne out by the enormity of Morris's public involvements throughout the 1880s. Between 1886 and 1887 alone, his agenda was awash in writing projects, public lectures, open-air rallies, editorial work for *Commonweal*, and the production of multiple interior designs. And if this was not enough, in 1886, after weeks of gout, he took up the challenge of translating Homer's *Odyssey*. It was an extravagant addition to a huge list of involvements. One can only wonder at Morris's decision to undertake such a colossal project amidst his multiple tasks.

Few have remarked on this biographical curiosity. Fiona MacCarthy and E.P. Thompson have commented on it briefly. Morris's literary venture was recreational, they argued. By contrast, William Whitla has stressed that the undertaking was a gesture of political protest against an elite institution of classical translation, with its imperialist transfer of cultural prestige from Greek antiquity to Victorian Englishness.

I wish to revisit this biographical enigma further and consider Morris's baffling choice. Besides asking why Morris sought to scale the walls of classical translation, while juggling countless Socialist League tasks, I will also ask: "What were the consequences of this decision? What effect would the translation bear upon Morris's political praxis?" To the first question ("why"), I offer a two-tiered rationale: 1) Morris embarked on the translation to assert his literary prowess. He remained, even during the peak of socialist activism, a reputed poet, concerned with his artistic selfhood. 2) His decision was also prompted by a need for political clarity. Contending with the challenges of socialist activism, the translation would grant him a mental space for thinking through the ethics and tactics of his own political leadership. He was also concerned with his political selfhood. As he put it to his wife, "I am wool-gathering and must collect my scattered wits by doing some Homer."5

As to the consequences of this venture, I suggest that the immersive experience of translating the great epic would impinge on Morris's sense of political agency, of masculinity and heroism. He would derive from *The Odyssey*’s hero a model of moral endurance. But he would also confront Ulysses's questionable aspects. This tension would press Morris to rethink his role as a propagandist, and transpose the lessons gleaned from the Homeric text into a refurbished mode of political education. The latter would constitute Morris's extra-linguistic translation, a conversion of belletristic art into radical activism.
work, but hard work at that, all the more onerous in light of the heated controversy among Victorian literati on how best to translate the ancient Greek epics. To render the magnum opus under the judging eye of literary peers was particularly daunting. In a letter to F.S. Ellis, Morris described his translation of The Odyssey as “a real one, so far not a mere periphrasis of the original as all others are (my italics).” He, Morris, saw the translation as a challenge that put his literary skill to the test: “the deceitfulness of ambition tempted me to sit up all day doing Homer,” he confessed to May Morris. This impulse that prompted Morris to vie with his literary contemporaries is not only what he self-consciously describes as ‘deceitful ambition,’ but a combative spirit manifested in verse. For with his translation, he had stepped into an arena of vituperative contention, the renowned debate between Matthew Arnold and Francis William Newman on how to render Homer most accurately.

This tussle, known as the Homeric Question, unfolded on grounds of linguistic style, prosody, and meter. But underlying the contenders’ differences was the matter of social class. While Arnold’s emphasis lay on achieving the effect of “nobility,” Newman chose to highlight the demotic sonority of an ancient popular voice by adopting the ballad meter—a choice aligned with a subversive theory proposed in 1795 (by the German classicist F. A. Wolf) that the Homeric epics were “originally a collection of folk lays,” and not the achievement of a genius bard. To Matthew Arnold’s cabal of literati who saw Homer’s lyricism as an emblem of cultural finesse and the academy’s ruling standard of excellence, the idea was outrageous. Against this backdrop, Morris’s so-called ludic project had serious implications, not least because it would tacitly support the controversial theory that the Homeric epic stemmed from an ancient folk, and not from a singular lyricist.

Scandalizing his peers with his iconoclastic quill, Morris would mark his disdain for the elite academy while exhibiting allegiance to another class of men. His translation was thus no light affair; rather, it was tied to an irrepressible calling: to participate, both as bard and political tribune, in the making of socialists.

Figure 3. “The Parnassus” (painted 1509–1510) by Raphael. Homer wearing a crown of laurels surrounded by Dante Alighieri on his right and Virgil on his left.
But being the result of intensive literary labour, the rendering of the great epic would be more than a test of aesthetic skill, and more than an articulation of political dissent; it would be an occasion for self-scrutiny. The effort to decrypt the intended meaning of the host text would guarantee Morris’s self-reflexive fascination with the epic’s central hero. For Ulysses, the archetypal wanderer, would recall the many questing heroes of Morris’s literary imaginary (see *The Earthly Paradise*), men not simply in pursuit of Edenic peace, but striving to know their inner selves. Self-inquiry, so characteristic of Morris and his fictive wanderers, was of a piece with Ulysses’s protracted homecoming – a much-thwarted pursuit of personal identity. Convergences between fiction and reality would allow Morris to paint, but also to parse, life’s adversities. With these similitudes, the work of translating the Homeric epic would have encouraged him to draw inspiration from the hero’s fortitude. Repeatedly disrupted in his journey to Ithaca, Ulysses displays unrelenting stamina just as Morris draws on inner strength to endure repeated setbacks in the struggle for a Heimat he calls Socialism. The Ulyssian model of endurance would have offered him an important tonic in confronting life’s ceaseless tribulations.

But Morris’s admiration for such epic fortitude would have been streaked with reservations. He would perceive in the Hellenic hero significant failings, those discerned by translator Emily Wilson, who calls Ulysses “a complicated man,” heroic, but also flawed: “a liar, pirate, colonizer, deceiver, and thief, … often in disguise, absent … while other people he leads … suffer and die…” The Greek hero is also an intransigent political leader. Upon his return to Ithaca, he imposes his domestic mastery with untrammelled brutality. All this would not have been lost on Morris, who, in the opening lines of his translation, refers in less-than-flattering terms to Ulysses as “The Shifty.”

A severe critic of human barbarity and not least of political treachery, however graphically he may have depicted ancient and medieval violence, Morris would have abjured the Ulyssian model of masculinist authority (and its modern manifestation in men of high standing), marked as it was by arrogance, aggression, and compromised ethics. If Morris was immersed in, and influenced by, a male-dominated Victorian culture, he was resistant to many of its entrenched features. While he never relinquished his manly dignity, over time he would forge an alternative male selfhood, governed by an ethic of moral integrity: i.e., mutual respect, social equality, and collaborative human relations. But precisely in opposing a mainstream culture of masculinist individualism, martial prowess, and Cartesian subjectivity, he would meet repudiation from all quarters, not least from within the Socialist League where he sought “to serve, rather than dominate” (my italics). On the turf of political oratory, where he aimed to educate working-class audiences against the grain of patriarchal pedagogy, he would also encounter major hurdles.

In 1885, Morris confided in Georgiana Burne-Jones and, true to his self-effacing character, made clear his reluctance to lead the Socialist League. “I grieve to have to say that some sort of leadership is required, and that in our section I unfortunately supply that want.” As if ruled by an irrepressible calling, he yielded to the summons. “You see, my dear, I can’t help it. The ideas which have taken hold of me will not let me rest.”

Throughout his League years as leader of the movement, he was encumbered with unsettling responsibilities, contending with street riots and police coercion. The challenge of overcoming
working-class apathy was also an ongoing preoccupation. To excite his audiences with a vision of fulfilling existence was strenuous work, often dispiriting. On February 7, 1887, he wrote in his diary: “My Socialism was gravely listened to by the audience but taken with no enthusiasm … The sum of it all is that the men at present listen respectfully to Socialism, but are perfectly supine and not inclined to move except along the lines of radicalism and trades unionism.”

Beneath these personal musings lay an even deeper recess of interiority, notably the mythological world of the Homeric epic. For Morris was translating the poem while he was recording his thoughts about League propaganda; and if the creative engagement with *The Odyssey* recalled his everyday activist involvements, it would certainly have offered him a sealed textual space for “collecting his scattered wits” and conceiving an ethically sound model of political leadership, distinct from the kind adopted by his contemporaries, whether social democratic (e.g., G.B. Shaw, the Fabians, and H. M. Hyndman) or conservative. These latter groups often governed or led their followings with class contempt. Morris, by contrast, believed that “the mass of the people was indeed educable,” and he would openly contest the class superiority exhibited by his Victorian peers, socialist and non-socialist alike. In 1881, before he took to street politics, he made respect a central feature of his public addresses. “Never speak down to your audience, speak up to the dignity of your subject – that is the rule.” Later, he would advocate a style of political education resting on worker autonomy. The “democratic self-emancipation by the workers,” he argued, “was the only guarantee of a non-authoritarian outcome from a socialist revolution.”

If, as the Homeric debates show, *The Odyssey* served as a tool of patrician education in upper-class halls of learning, Morris’s aim would be to convert it into an instrument of democratic instruction well beyond the ivory tower. The diary already hints at what might have been a revolution in Morris’s approach to political teaching, spawned by his candid acknowledgment that the challenge of stirring his crowds and expanding their mental horizons was formidable. His self-appraisals suggest that he was keen to level the power relations inscribed in his speeches and propagandist stature. His lectures from the 1870s onwards increasingly exhibit his tacit rhetorical philosophy: i.e., that socialist education should not be imperious if it is to be in itself revolutionary. Conquering minds from a superior pedestal or ex cathedra authority would only reinforce the hierarchical edifice of existing society. If the consciousness of the masses could be manipulated through the contrivances of rhetoric, the result would only reproduce the yawning chasm between charismatic leaders (masters) and their besotted (enslaved) followings.

On this logic, Morris recognized that the language he adopted, the content of his lectures, the length of his delivery, the extent of his ‘preachiness’ or fellowship, and the degree of his confidence—all contributed to the effectiveness (or failure) of his propaganda. Empathy with, and recognition of, the working man’s sensibility would mark the parameters of his appeals and dictate the public’s reception. For Morris’s radical education was decidedly not the discourse of a socialist apostle from on high, but the efforts of a figure who, through repeated encounters with workingmen, displayed sensitivity to human frailty. Combined with this was his both vigilant and inspiring counsel: he encouraged his fellow men to act, hope, and resist, while never lapsing himself into idealism. For all his utopianism, he would not offer false promises; and for all his class privilege, he would strive for fraternity over paternalism.

Significantly, Morris’s published translation of *The Odyssey* does not feature in the pages of *Commonweal*, although it is advertised for sale in its classified columns. The monumental work could not have been rendered as socialist propaganda without considerable adaptation. Twenty-four books of “antiquarian” English verse may not have been widely accessible to the average reader. Moreover, in its English translation, Homer’s text was tied to the 19th-century epic, a genre typically steeped in the affirmation of empire and state power, wholly unsuited to Morris’s socialist stance. Nor would the medievalist idiom he adopted in his translation have dispelled mainstream views that *The Odyssey* was a literary icon of highbrow English culture. Arguably, then, he could
only deploy The Odyssey for his self-transformation as political actor and educator. And this private use of the poem would paradoxically incur, if not coincide with, a shift in his discursive voice. In working through Homer, Morris would affirm his political identity, but discover the disjuncture between the conservative resonances of the epic mode and his atypical socialist rhetoric. The Ulyssian narrative would inspire him, but also trouble him, exposing the flaws of political leadership embodied in Ulysses and, mutatis mutandis, in Victorian men of public office. The Odyssey would prompt him to choose another path, and another authorial medium, grounded in principles of equality rather than iniquitous hierarchy.

Scant on introspection, massive in scale, and conveyed with a lyrical authority, The Odyssey heralded a story of superhuman feats, but also of social privilege, deceit, and aggressive political supremacy. For Morris, it would ultimately have been incompatible with his educative ideals. By the mid-to-late 1880s, Morris would return to the prose romance as his preferred literary medium. This would coincide with his farewell to the epic form. Henceforward, he would cease to translate or mimic the “great works” of classical antiquity, even though elements of The Odyssey still surfaced in his later oeuvre. His political teachings would be governed by a new portrayal of heroes, notably of Norse character, and resistant to hero-worship. The Norse sagas presented him with alternative models of heroism contingent on mutual respect, self-knowledge, stoicism, and endurance. In contrast with modernity’s pantheon of individualistic figures (e.g., captains of industry, romantic artists, or military men enraptured by fantasies of personal glory), the Norse (notably Icelandic) heroes were grounded in, and indebted to, their collectivist community.

The problem of epic heroes raises questions about idolatry, about the public’s irrational reception of great men, but also of an exalted past. If Morris harboured a powerful sense of historical precedent, he resisted slavish imitation or worship, be it of rare books, artifacts, or people. He pondered the lessons of the masters, weighed the value of charisma, understood its disarming effects and, most crucially, sought to distinguish inspiration from intoxication. His subversive translation of Homer can thus be seen as a refusal of enslavement to myths such as those harboured by men who bathed in the radiant aura of antiquity. Still, while not enslaved to the past, he would embrace his cultural inheritance, reconceiving it in a quasi-foreign tongue. Simulating the speech patterns of the people, coining a language rooted in the sensuous rhythms of collective labour, his antiquarian idiom was emblematic of communitarian relations; it contested elite literary forms and the top-down structures of educational discourse that defined the transmission of patrician English culture through the celebration of great works and great men.

Morris’s translation marked a transformative moment in his own political thinking about socialist agitation. And this re-evaluation of League propaganda involved recasting heroic prototypes, typically invoked for purposes of winning political consent. With this turn, he would resist the exalted address of traditional oratory and focus instead on dialogical conversation, calling into question the transformative impact of declamatory propaganda or ex cathedra lectures to workingmen, speeches that maintained clear class divides, and only served to boost the morale of the crowds without radically changing their thinking.

Groping for a strategy that would guarantee greater equality between educators and their disciples, Morris revealed the preliminary signs of such innovation in his serialized romances with their emphasis on a hitherto suppressed dimension of political expression: authorial interiority. Here subjectivity supplanted epic speech with other modes of communication: e.g., dramatic monologue and self-interrogating personal commentary. The disarming declamation associated with

Figure 7. “The Norwegians Land in Iceland year 872.” Painting by Oscar Wergeland (1877)
a leader of imperious rhetorical power (e.g., W. E. Gladstone) would be replaced by a more tempered and personalized address, the kind evidenced in Morris’s rendering of John Ball’s meditative speeches to the populace. Allof authority would be replaced by comradely feeling, and intoxicating charisma would dissolve into sober but moving speech.39

Here, Morris was tracing the first outlines of an alternative political education,40 aimed at cultivating working-class autonomy; but he was also reshaping the discourse of the educators. As he saw it, workers would not become “Socialist men” if they depended on the theoretical precepts of an elite vanguard of intellectuals and leaders, or relied on the institutions of parliament. But nor would they achieve this autonomy if their political educators persisted in donning the mantel of paternalism.41

In appropriating the great epic for socialist ends, Morris underwent an ideological odyssey. He was already a committed socialist in 1886, but by reclaiming Homeric poetry for popular ends, he would deepen his radical politics; he would not only seek to transform others (i.e., make socialists), he would eventually transform his own discourse, reshape the language of his political pedagogy, striving to annul its embedded class divisions. Paradoxically, it was Morris’s farewell to the epic form that enabled this transformation. To be sure, Homer’s poem was inspirational, but it was also catalytic. And like all catalysts, it would disappear once its service had been rendered. The Odyssey would carry in its narrative the emboldening appeals of socialist rhetoric, the tropes of fortitude, survival, and longing for home; but for Morris, it was the prose romance that would radicalize the politics of socialist speech.


ENDNOTES

3. Thompson, 432; MacCarthy, 54, 541.
8. Ibid, 510.
12. Morris’s family referred to his vocalized method of translating ancient Greek into English as “bumble-beeing.” Qtd. in Thompson, op. cit., 177.
14. See, in particular, Morris’s depiction of the bloodshed in Book 22 of The Odyssey.
18. Ibid, 479.
19. Ibid, 480.
25. Morris was conscious of the perils of deploying the ex Cathedra style. As he put it in his diary, “…we had a fair meeting there of most attentive persons, though I guess I tried their patience as I got ‘lectury’ and being excited went on and on till I had gone on too long.” See Boos, op. cit., 54.
31. Ibid.
36. On Morris’s antiquarian idiom as the voice of the people, see Whita, op. cit., 99-100.
37. As Nicholas Salmon points out, Morris’s Socialist chants “were primarily written to be sung at meetings of the SDF and SL. Yet on close examination it can be seen that they were all directed at the enlightened working men who were already committed to the Cause.” See “The Communist Poet-Laureate,” William Morris’s Chants for Socialists,” Journal of William Morris Studies, 14.3 (Winter 2001): 48.
39. For a discussion of John Ball’s political rhetoric, see Weinroth, “Redesigning the Language of Social Change,” op. cit., 50-53.
41. Thompson, op. cit., 458; 459.
AN AFRICAN DOG HANDLER IN BURNE-JONES' LIFE OF ST FRIDESWISE

Paul Acker

In recent years, Jan Marsh and others have documented the presence of African subjects and Afro-European models in Victorian art. Among the Pre-Raphaelites, Edward Burne-Jones depicted the traditionally African King Balthazar in his triptych *The Annunciation and the Adoration of the Magi* from 1861 (Tate Britain Gallery) and again in the 1881 tapestry for William Morris and Co., *The Adoration of the Magi* (Musée d'Orsay, with a cartoon in the Victoria & Albert Museum). In the broadside ballad “King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid,” the King is said to be from Africa, and so he appears to be in Burne-Jones’ paintings by that name from 1861 and 1884 (Tate Britain). But what is most likely his earliest use of an African subject, and one that has been entirely overlooked, is found in Burne-Jones’ 1859 stained glass window for Christ Church Cathedral, depicting *The Life of St Frideswide* (patron saint of Oxford, d. 735).

In 1861, William Morris set up his ‘Firm’ and had various of his associates design stained glass; eventually Burne-Jones would become the sole designer. In his earliest designs for stained glass, however, Burne-Jones was working for Powell and Sons, and the Frideswide window is far busier in its composition than the other Oxford cathedral windows that he later designed for Morris. *The Life of St Frideswide* is laid out in four panels or lights, with additional material above them in the tracery. Each light has four sections depicting scenes from the saint’s life chronologically from the top of each light on down. Thus the first panel (1.1) shows the child Frideswide being taught by the spirits of St Cecilia and St Catharine; the final panel (4.4) depicts the saint on her deathbed. Along the way, in panels 2.2 and 2.3, Frideswide is being hunted down by King Algar, who wishes to abduct her. Men are beating the bushes and carrying lanterns, and one man (in 2.3) is leading paired hounds on a leash. That man is unmistakably of African heritage, in both the stained glass panel and the cartoons for it, which Burne-Jones painted over in oils (Cheltenham Ladies’ College).

Burne-Jones often sought out medieval or early Renaissance sources for his depiction of medieval subjects. The death of Frideswide scene certainly partakes of medieval iconography, and resembles the “Lamentation over the Dead Christ” section of the fresco by Giotto in the Arena Chapel, Padua, which Burne-Jones knew from a woodcut published by the Arundel Society in 1851. The fixture on the wall behind Frideswide’s deathbed derives from a cistern and basin in a 1503 woodcut by Albrecht Dürer (“The Death of the Virgin”), previously adopted by Burne-Jones’ mentor Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

It thus seems likely that Burne-Jones might have found a medieval model for his African dog handler, perhaps from an illuminated hunting manual like the *Livre de la Chasse* of Gaston Phoebus. Among all the surviving European manuscripts of this text visible online, however, I have found no such image, and none of these manuscripts were owned by the London and Oxford libraries available to Burne-Jones. But one manuscript currently in the Morgan Library in New York City (M.1044, acquired in 1983, dated 1406-7) was in England during Burne-Jones’ time, when it was MS 10298 in the Thomas Phillipps collection (acquired by him before 1837). Its folio 49r depicts a dog handler training his hound to sniff a deer’s ‘fumets’ or scats, and the man is dark-skinned and African in appearance.

Would Burne-Jones have had an opportunity to view and sketch from this manuscript? Phillipps kept his collection...
in his house in Middle Hill, Worcestershire and his press in the nearby Broadway Tower. He arranged to have printed a pamphlet about his *Livre de la Chasse* manuscript, including its chapter headings (the miniature discussed here is for chapter 29). The most we can surmise is that the pamphlet made Burne-Jones aware of the manuscript, which he might then have seen either in London or Middle Hill (Phillipps was often in London and became a trustee of the British Museum in 1861). As it happens, Burne-Jones stayed with William Morris and their families in Broadway Tower in 1876 and subsequent years, after Phillipps had relocated to Cheltenham in 1863 and Burne-Jones’ college chum Cormell Price was leasing the place.

Paul Acker is Professor Emeritus of English at Saint Louis University. He is currently finishing a catalogue of manuscripts in New York City libraries for the *Index of Middle English Prose*.

**Endnotes**


2 For images, see the Burne-Jones Catalogue Raisonné in progress, eb-j.org.


4 See for instance Rossetti’s “The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice: Dante Drawing the Angel,” a watercolor from 1853. The fixture is often wrongly identified as a porcelain toilet; see my letter in the *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS), September 20, 2019, p. 6.

5 For a list, see A. Smets and V. van den Abeele, “Manuscrits et traités de chasse français du moyen âge,” *Romania* 116 (1998), 347-348. British Library Additional MS 27699 was acquired in 1867, too late for Burne-Jones to consult it for the Frideswide window. None of the manuscripts reproduced online of the *Master of Game* (an English translation and adaptation of the *Livre de la Chasse*) contain relevant miniatures.

6 See Thomas Phillipps, *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum*, available online through the Hathi Trust.

7 *Le livre de la chasse*, ed. H. Dryden (Daventry: Barrett, 1844). The pamphlet was among works printed for Phillipps “at other presses,” according to Henry G. Bohn, *Appendix to the Bibliographer’s Manual of English Literature* (London: Bohn, 1864), pp. 225, 234. The Bodleian library provides online digital versions of their two copies of the pamphlet. I thank Maev Brennan, Meghan Constantinou and Scott Ellwood for arranging to send me a scan of the Grolier copy, which has color miniatures tipped in from another source. I also benefited from the assistance of Maria Molestina-Kurat and Sylvie Merian of the Morgan Library. Jan Marsh directed me to the twitter feed medievalpoc (People of Color), which on October 20, 2018 posted an image of Aelbert Cuyp’s painting from 1650-55, “Huntsmen Halted,” in which the Dutch hunstmen are accompanied by a young African servant tending to their dogs and horses.

8 See the article on Phillipps in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (available online to subscribers).


In “Morris Biographies,” Michael Robertson examines the heretofore unexamined force of the “Morris/Burne-Jones circle.” In the tradition of ‘nineteenth-century life-writing,’ Robertson writes, J.W. Mackail was chosen as the biographer because he was the “son-in-law of Morris’s eldest and closest friends, Edward and Georgiana Burne-Jones” (Routledge). Looking back through William Morris studies in the twentieth century, one appreciates how much the Burne-Jones family honored the circle. Not only did the son-in-law write the biography with respect for the Morris/Burne-Jones circle, but also his daughter, Angela Mackail Thirkell, remembered the friendship throughout her career. William Morris, admired for his works and words like, “You cannot educate, you cannot civilise men, unless you can give them a share in art,” poured so much grace and love on the Burne-Jones household that the granddaughter gave May Morris an afterlife in art—however humbly Thirkell described her own books.

Completing the work after the death of Burne-Jones, the son-in-law hoped to draw on the past “guidance and encouragement” of the circle:

This biography was undertaken by me at the special request of Edward Burne-Jones. I will not attempt to say how much it owes to his guidance and encouragement, nor how much it has lost by their removal. (Mackail, Life 1: vii).
John Mackail’s daughter too would continue to be guided and encouraged to honor the memory of the Morris/Burne-Jones circle. The author of reviews, the well-received childhood memoir, *Three Houses*, and the entertaining Barsetshire novels, Angela Mackail Thirkell remained grateful for the favors their family enjoyed from the hands of her grandparents’ friend, William Morris. Aware of the criticism around her father’s biography, for example, Angela Thirkell manages to make her 1955 review of a William Morris biography, *Romantic to Revolutionary* by E.P. Thompson, speak for her family’s fond admiration of the gifted William Morris. Reporting her conversations with her grandmother about the Jane Morris and Rossetti affair and noting the letters donated to the British Museum, Thirkell insists on her personal devotion to her grandmother’s respect for the privacy of the Morris family.

The Morris letters were released after Thirkell died. Among them are included some notes about May Morris’s and Mrs. Morris’s unhappiness with J.W. Mackail:

On 7 July 1900 May Morris wrote to Anne Cobden-Sanderson:

> My annoyance at your choice of Mr. Mackail to lecture on my Father quite put out of my head something else I meant to say […]. I don’t doubt for a moment Mackail’s capacity to making a neat job of it, but it will not be what it would be in Lethaby’s [architectural theorist] hands… I hope I can depend on you for not letting my dislike of his handling this subject known to Margaret or Lady Burne-Jones. It would be really grief to me to hurt their feelings: I wish I were able to keep my opinions more closely bottled. For Heaven’s sake don’t give me away” (Frank and Marsh, n.1 326)

Although Thirkell died before the letters were published, her notebook drafts in the Brotherton Collection reflect her caring approach to the conclusion of the review: “The book is on the whole rather a study of Morris as Socialist than as craftsman and writer.” Thirkell strikes: “though these aspects of him are also treated.” She continues, “Of the writer, treatment of the social-political side I am not qualified to speak. He has gone into each aspect of the many-sided Morris fully and over conscientiously, and reviewers less ignorant than myself will do full justice [sic] him full justice” (Brotherton). For the published version, Thirkell thanks the writer for honoring Morris’s work while distancing herself from the “socio-political side”:

> Of the socio-political side I cannot speak as I know nothing about it, but here Mr. Thompson has collected an immense amount of material which should be of use and interest to all students of the earliest days of the movement. (WMS Newsletter)

Thirkell is so careful in distancing herself from the “socio-political” in her 1953 review, that she would not have offended May.
DECORATIVE NEEDLEWORK
BY MAY MORRIS

Courtney Gifford

In 1893, just three short years before the death of her father William, May Morris published her book, Decorative Needlework. May was very closely involved with Morris & Co’s embroidery group, having become the head of the department in 1885. She not only embroidered her father’s designs, but also created her own. Having originally learned embroidery from both her mother, Jane, and her aunt, Bessie Burden, she also attended The National Art Training School (the future Royal College of Art). Later, she taught at the London School of Art and was the co-founder of the Women’s Guild of Arts (Boos, p.65). In addition, according to Rowan Bain, May’s “talent and status as a designer-maker helped elevate embroidery from a domestic craft to being considered a serious art form” (Bain, p.32). In short, May was eminently qualified to write a book about needlework and its place in the late 19th century. She, too, knew that she was well situated to write the book and had confidence in her experience, asserting that the book was “written from practical knowledge of the subject” (Dedicatory Note).

However, at the same time, she also maintains her humility, saying that “the booklet does not profess in any way to be exhaustive, but should be useful as a keynote to further study” (Dedicatory Note).

May’s book is interesting as a guide to needlework and embroidery as compared to more recent works on the same subjects, since embroidery has lately had a resurgence in popularity, particularly among younger generations. There are so many stitch guides and pattern guides published currently that it is almost
overwhelming to choose from among them. The advent of instructional videos and pictorial guides, such as on YouTube and social media pages like Instagram and Pinterest, means embroiderers are currently spoiled for choice. May's book gives some guidance on specific stitches, but even she says that embroidery is learned “far more easily by word of mouth than by book” (p.13) — books can give you the basic information you need, but seeing it done in person is much easier. May Morris likely never imagined the options that are available to current stitchers. With that in mind, her book is much more interesting for the insight it offers into her feelings on design. This is the major point severely lacking in current embroidery guides, which show stitch diagrams or provide designs to copy or places to buy embroidery kits, but do not advise on how to create your own patterns or where to derive inspiration. As an amateur embroiderer, I find those aspects of this textile art to be just as rewarding as the finished product itself. May’s book is a treasure for these design lessons alone, as well as for the insight the book gives us into her personality and how similar she and her father were in their ideas and opinions.

May spends much of her book teaching and commenting about the elements of good design and how to accomplish that, more so than explaining specific stitches, although a few are diagrammed throughout the ten chapters. We can see that her concept of design does not stray far from that of her father. In her “Dedicatory Note,” she sets up her premise on design for the entire book, that “…the desire of and feeling for beauty, realized in a work of definitive utility, are the vital and essential elements of this as of all other branches of art, and that no one of these elements can the embroideress neglect or overlook if her work is to have life and meaning” — in essence, beauty and utility go hand in hand. We would be hard pressed not to compare that to the oft quoted (and potentially overused), “Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be beautiful or believe to be useful,” by William Morris, which graces T-shirts, mugs, and prints galore. In addition, “although beauty was the aim all were made to be appropriate for their use. This pragmatism is the most overriding characteristic of [William Morris’s] work” (Parry, p.136). May concurs, and believed that without both elements, work would be “discarded in a month as out of date,” but if they are both present, the item will be “guarded as long as may be against the unavoidable wear and tear of time” (Dedicatory Note).

May spends a portion of the book enumerating the history of embroidery from various countries. However, these only serve as precursors to the period she prefers among all others, the Middle Ages. She describes this as “a period of that art which repays all thought and search and fills one with joy, to the art of the middle ages…where everything is instinct with life and originality in the handiwork of man” (p.5). Since that time period ended, she believed that “progression is downwards… [and] design and invention are less markedly beautiful, and the early simplicity slowly gives place to a luxuriance and lavishness that marks the beginning of all decay” (p.6). “Later work degenerates” and “verges perilously upon the vulgar in its extravagance” (p.9), which does not match the “repose and gravity of the best times” or the “simple dignity and graciousness of mediaeval work” (p.9). She believed that the latter half of the 19th century produced many works of “actual ugliness and vulgarity” (p.9). She not only does not mince words in her opinion, but it clearly mirrors that of her father. “Morris and his colleagues drew inspiration from the medieval period of many different countries” (Opie, p.180). It was the “simple medieval domesticity which he loved” (Opie, p.181), and he derived much “medieval inspiration” for his various mediums (Frederick, p.214). May wanted to bring back the style of embroidery important in medieval times, declaring that “modern embroidery does not compare favorably with that of any period, but it is the very antithesis to the early art, and it is indeed time that something was done to raise it to a higher level” (p.10). Perhaps her book was an attempt to elevate embroidery in the late 19th century to that higher level.

As regards types of embroidery, May insisted that there were two: pictorial, in which surfaces were covered “entirely…like the canvas of a picture,” which she believed was primarily done by professionals; and decorative, whereby “woven stuff is ornamented,” such as aprons, dresses, hats, tablecloths, cushions, and various other home wares (p.12). The only significant difference from current embroidery today is that pictorial embroidery, during this resurgence of popularity, is often attempted by amateurs as evidenced by the overwhelming number of social media pages. I would also hazard a newer third category that I will loosely term “messaging.” These pieces often have just a little supporting decorative stitching but mainly focus on a phrase, quote, or message (examples, @b.z.creations and @ohmygollyembroidery on Instagram). As an activist like her father, May might even have appreciated the sheer volume of sites and social media pages dedicated to political and social activism messages through embroidery (see @sirensongstitchery, @badasscrossstitch, and @tinypricksproject on Instagram; and Snarly & Modern (S&M) Embroidery and Cross Stitch on Facebook for a few examples).

May does spend a bit of time discussing actual stitches and types of embroidery in the 1890’s. Much of this remains the same today: the name of individual stitches such as chain, button hole, feather, stem, long and short, satin, and French knot. But even in their similarities, the way she discusses them is elevated above your typical current embroidery guide. She is not just discussing how physically to create the stitch, but the best circumstances in which to use each stitch, such as when a finished piece would face heavy use, or how to use certain stitches to fill a space effectively (as with long and short, tapestry, or chain stitch). She spends time describing which stitches are best for solid colors versus gradations; which would be best for embroidering figures / people since some are more
laborious; and when simply not to embroider at all — she says you can “display [your] skill every bit as much in leaving out as in putting in” (p.37). She goes on to discuss color hue choice, as well as line shape and contrast in both color and in design elements.

Further, the book addresses using frames versus loose fabric when stitching, and May recommends this choice is often based on which stitch you are using. This differs from today’s embroidery, at least for amateurs, which primarily uses a hoop or frame to keep the fabric tight and eliminate gathering or puckering around stitches. May actually preferred loose fabric when working with chain stitch, which I would never try without a frame, but this could speak to my lack of experience rather than necessity.

May even describes when she thinks a stitch is in “bad taste and out of place in embroidery,” as she feels is the case when French knots are used to “comical” effect as sheep fleece (p.22). She believes this use is trying too hard to match the realism of the natural world, which is sharply in contrast to how she felt design should be approached. She believed one must ‘reject work that looks more ‘real’ because it is full of over-confident attempts to realise what is beyond its limited power” (p.39), and that objects and designs should not be “re-presented… but translated” (her italics) (p.87). She also is quite emphatic that “simplicity is one of the first pinnacles of this art” (p.40).

May agreed with her father in design concepts, as William had an “abhorrence of realism” and an “insistence on the conventionalization of natural forms” (Hoskins, p.200). May, too, believes one should not try to copy exactly and preferred “flat and simple colours” rather than that “which is a laborious, pretentious effort to imitate nature in her own colours” (p.30-31). In short, designs should be “a symbolic representation of its splendor” (Bain, p.28). This approach at simplification was something we see with William’s concept of design as he showed a “mastery of [the] flat, repeating pattern” (Hoskin, p.198) rather than trying to match nature in all her glory. In keeping with this idea, May said that designs should be “filled by forms in certain rhythmical sequence” (p.83) and that they should “symmetrically [cover] a certain defined space” or the final product’s design doesn’t meet its function (p.87).

William too believed in his own interpretation of the natural world and stated in his lecture “Making the Best of It” in 1880 that “ornamental pattern work…must contain three qualities: beauty, imagination, and order” (Bain, p.16). May agreed and said a design is worthy if it has beauty and is personal to the maker, or it would be “wanting in character and vigor, in a word, lifeless” (p.80-81). If it is “pleasing to the eye” and “suitable to the materials” and “future use of the article” (p.82), then she
considered a design and finished product to be a success. She also stated that “design is the very soul and essence of beautiful embroidery” (p.79).

Next, May seems as if she was as exacting as her father with her final product and extols “cleanliness and neatness without which your work will be naught” (p.75). William also “allowed nothing to pass until he was quite satisfied that it was right both in colour and design” (Hoskins, p.198). May, “like her father, sought to elevate standards of craft and design” (Bain, p.28).

Design and perfectionism aside, during her commentary at times May even exhibits the socialist activism she shares with her father. She criticizes the “very fine lady, who loves to accumulate dainty linen, fine as gossamer, wrought by what under-paid work-girl she does not know or care” (p.3). She also is against “decorating except for the very rich” (p.3). Similarly, William believed in “work as pleasurable” and that “work is essential; but what is also essential is that it be carried on under social conditions that allow the natural pleasure in work to be experienced” (Klein, p.349). Further, he “[challenged] industrial manufacturing and its dehumanizing effect on workers by promoting quality handmade production, to agitating for full-scale revolution” (Bain, p.8). Lastly, William insisted “that in addition to providing for workers’ physical wellbeing, socialists also had a duty to provide them intellectual and aesthetic opportunities” (Sharp, p.394).

Finally, the author’s personality is evident throughout the book. At one point while describing when to use metal threads (notoriously difficult then, as now) she shows her humorous side when she states, “...you don’t want to have your high priest look as if he were cut out of tin-foil” (p.117). She also jokes about the historian Vasari’s tendency to exaggerate because his “imagination, which was lively at times, [was] not likely to err on the side of understating the case” (p.61). She is also opinionated and (rightly) is not sorry for it: she had “a belief [that] the power of beauty is a wholesome thing, and I make no apology for preaching it by the way” (p.117). Her tone is also accessible — while discussing a stitch, she digresses with a long example and then returns to her original thoughts with, “I have not forgotten that we were considering a certain group of stitches,” (p.40), as if she were having a conversation with a friend.

May believed that “embroidery deserves to be taken seriously,” (p.118) whether it is treated as an art or simply to fill an “idle hour” (p.121). I think anyone who takes embroidery seriously themselves and has an affinity for her and her father’s work will find something to enjoy in her book. Embroidery is “fit to gladden the eyes of all who believe that everything beautiful that is made serves its due purpose in enriching the treasury of the world” (p.117).

References
Note: All references are noted within the text by author’s last name except with the primary source, May Morris’s Decorative Needlework, in which case only page numbers are listed. May and William are named by their given names to avoid confusion between the two.

Bain, Rowan; William Morris’s Flowers, 2019, London, Thames & Hudson Ltd. in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum.


The most widely available printed copy is for sale from companies such as Amazon or on Ebay based on a scanned copy in the New York Public Library acquired in 1898. It is also available on the Internet Archive (https://archive.org/) scanned from a copy at the University of California digital libraries.


See also:

• “10 Contemporary embroidery artists” https://www.textileartist.org/10-contemporary-embroidery-artists/
• “19 Artists Creatively Pushing the Boundaries of Embroidery” https://mymodernmet.com/embroidery-artists/
While I was researching my doctoral thesis on the Arts and Crafts artist Walter Crane in the early 2000s, I spent time visiting collections in Germany and Hungary. I was tracing the influence of a traveling exhibition of Crane’s work across Central Europe, from the curatorial program of the painter Hans Thoma at the Karlsruhe Kunsthalle to the collecting policies of the Iparmûvészeti Múzeum (Museum of Applied Arts) in Budapest. Crane’s career retrospective began in London at the Fine Art Society in 1891, and journeyed across the United States and Canada before it went on to Berlin and the principal cities in Germany. From there, it traveled to more than 20 European cities, from Vienna and Prague to Brussels and Basel, before arriving in Lwów (then part of Galicia, now known as Lviv, in Ukraine) and Budapest by 1900. By tracing Crane’s international reputation, I hoped to demonstrate the ways in which the quintessentially English Arts and Crafts movement was also an international phenomenon. After these efforts, I felt I deserved a vacation, and I booked a weekend in Kraków.

Although I did not realize it at the time, my vacation in Kraków was not much of a break from the international reach of the Arts and Crafts movement. I followed the suggestion of a guidebook to poke my head into the Kraków Medical Society House (Towarzystwo Lekarskie Krakowskie) and asked the porter if I could look at the stained glass window Apollo: the Copernican Solar System designed by Stanisław Wyspiański in 1903 (figure 1). A swirling, towering male figure steps forward in a vortex of blue and green, his golden torso fractured into rays of purple and red. Upon closer examination, it is apparent that the god is strapped to a lyre, as the poetic and mythic understanding of the solar system (around Apollo, the figures of Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Earth, Luna, and Venus seek to escape) is now bound by Copernicus’s empiricism.

This striking and vivid window is part of a triptych that Wyspiański designed as a kind of medical gesamtkunstwerk with painted frieze and decorative metal railings for the stairwell. A wealth of art historical connections swirled through my head, from the color-saturated glass that Edward Burne-Jones deployed in his windows for the Cathedral Church of St. Philip in Birmingham (1885) to the swirling figures of Philosophy (1900, destroyed), one of Gustav Klimt’s rejected paintings for the University of Vienna’s Great Hall. I searched in vain for a discussion of Wyspiański’s life and art in English, and I settled instead for a used copy of a Polish monograph on the artist from 1958.

Seeing Wyspiański’s Apollo in the flesh gave dramatic, if dematerialized, form to the realization that the Arts and Crafts movement was an international phenomenon informed by cosmopolitanism as well as romantic nationalism. For this reason, I was delighted to encounter Young Poland: The Polish Arts and Crafts Movement, 1890-1918 (Lund Humphries, 2020), edited by Julia Griffin and Andrzej Szczerski. This
beautifully designed and gorgeously illustrated volume (with every work of art reproduced in color) considers the artists, designers, architects, and craftspeople associated with Young Poland, the movement to celebrate applied arts and crafts as an expression of national identity at the time when Poland was no longer an independent country.

This publication is the first in English to give a complete account of the movement, one of two main outcomes for the Young Poland (Młoda Polska) research project, spearheaded by the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow, the National Museum in Kraków, and the Polish Cultural Institute, London with support from the Polish Minister of Culture and National Heritage. This framework suggests the collaborative nature of this partnership as well as the significant resources devoted to presenting this important aspect of Polish culture to English-speaking audiences in general. London art-viewing audiences will have the opportunity to encounter Young Poland firsthand when the second outcome, an exhibition at the William Morris Gallery, opens on October 8, 2021. This display, curated by Julia Griffin, Andrzej Szczerski, and Roisin Inglesby, senior curator at the William Morris Gallery, in partnership with the National Museum in Kraków, will run until January 22, 2022. As the website notes, this exhibition will be the first outside Poland to explore the arts and crafts of Young Poland, and it will allow visitors to view more than one hundred and fifty works across a range of media. The publication offers a tantalizing preview of the visual richness promised by the exhibition, as well as the appropriateness of displaying such works at the William Morris Gallery.

This volume makes a significant contribution to a growing body of literature that places the Arts and Crafts movement in a global context. It builds upon sweeping histories provided by the exhibition and publication International Arts and Crafts, edited by Karen Livingstone and Linda Parry (London: V&A, 2004) and Rosalind Blakesley’s The Arts and Crafts Movement (London: Phaidon, 2006) by providing a focused and meticulously researched study of a single national context. The volume, and the Arts and Crafts practices it describes, acknowledge the complicated history of Poland as a modern nation. Poland ceased to be a national political entity in 1795 with the forced abdication of King Stanisław II August Poniatowski and the partitioning of a country to Prussia, Russia, and Austria. (Poland as an independent country would return to the map of Europe in 1918.) The book explores the idea that the art of Young Poland could provide a national artistic culture without a nation.

Taken together, the essays in Young Poland provide a thorough account of ways in which scholars can address a national school or movement even as they acknowledge the cosmopolitan nature of the late nineteenth-century art world. The volume considers this topic in three sections. An introductory section includes a preface by Allison Smith, Chief Curator at the National Portrait Gallery in London, who had previously been lead curator of nineteenth-century art at Tate Britain (2000-2017), where she curated Symbolist Art in Poland: Poland and Britain c. 1900 in 2009. While Smith lays out the broader art historical context for what follows, an introduction by the volume’s editors lays out the stakes for the project by providing a working definition of “Arts and Crafts” and suggesting the rich discussion to follow by outlining the key artists and organizations.

The seventeen essays that follow are divided into two parts. “Part 1: The Making of the Polish Arts and Crafts Movement: Key People, Places, and Ideas,” has ten essays from a number of contributors. Taken together, they explore the connections between arts and crafts in Poland and Britain as well as the major contributions of the central artists, sites, and organizations of Young Poland such as Stanisław Wyspiański and his work in Kraków, Stanisław Witkiewicz and the “Zakopane Style,” Karol Kłosowski, and the Kraków Workshops, a commercial collective established in 1913. Of special interest to members of the William Morris Society will be the first two essays in this set: Andrzej Szczerski’s account of the reception of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Poland, and Julia Griffin’s exploration of the “parallel lives” of William Morris and Stanisław Wyspiański. The final essay, by Barbara Bogoczek and Tony Howard, considers the life and work of the artist and poet Maria

Figure 2. Stanisław Witkiewicz, The House Under the Firs in Koziniec, built for Jan Gwalbert Pawlikowski, 1896-1897. Private property, Zakopane
According to contemporary critics it was thanks to the books. Schemes were identical with the thoughts contained in shape, print quality, layout, ornamentation and colour. They begin to succumb to it. Beauty has entered the printers and publishing houses; on the market has marked a turning point.

As Szczęski acknowledges, any discussion of Polish art must also address pan-European movements and international cross-currents, as the artists and designers discussed in the volume visited London and Paris, studied in Munich and Vienna, and participated in international exhibitions. Nevertheless, Szczęski establishes that British art appealed to Polish artists and designers “as an ideal standard in national art” (33). With craft practice in the foreground, Young Poland reveals how artists focused on the idea of “Poland” as a nation through its unique cultural traditions rooted in folk tradition. At the heart of Griffin’s exploration of the “parallel lives” of Wyspiański and Morris is a striking visual comparison of pattern designs by each artist. Morris’s “Trellis” wallpaper (1862) established a visual grid that supports, literally and metaphorically, the fanciful profusion of Wyspiański’s “Pansies” (1897) (figure 3). Griffin draws out their shared interests in history, nature, architectural preservation, and politics, alongside a “superhuman work ethic” (44). These connections, and the beautiful color illustrations, offer a tantalizing glimpse of the visual richness of the forthcoming exhibition.

Young Poland concerned itself equally with the creation of a comfortable home and national culture, as in the creation of the “Zakopane Style” and the work of Stanisław Witkiewicz. Zbigniew Moździerz, writing in collaboration with Anna Wende-Surmiak, describes the encounter between the young artist Stanisław Witkiewicz and Zakopane, a village in the foothills of the Tatras (the highest range of the Carpathian Mountains). Traveling there as treatment for tuberculosis in 1886, he marveled at the vibrant craft traditions of the Podhale Highlanders and the local efforts to sustain them. Witkiewicz had finally found the Polish expression of the vernacular architecture he admired as an art student in Russia. In his House Under the Firs (1896-7; figure 3) a rough-hewn granite foundation supports a wooden villa of spruce carved with typical Podhale motifs such as the star, the lily, and the parzenica, a heart-shaped motif. Decorated outside and in, adorned with painted motifs and kilim weavings, the House Under the Firs was a distinctly Polish iteration of “the House Beautiful.”

As an amateur architect, Witkiewicz replied upon the knowledge of local carpenters and masons to design homes and interiors. He also experienced first-hand the struggle to promote the Polish vernacular to an international audience. The fate of the architectural model of the House Under the Firs suggests the frustrated national ambitions of the Zakopane Style. Witkiewicz sent the model, created by skilled Highland carpenters, to be exhibited in the Austrian Pavilion at the Exposition Universelle in Paris 1900. Yet a friend who visited the display looked in vain for the model and wrote to Witkiewicz that it remained in its crate due to lack of space.

If Witkiewicz championed the Zakopane Style in architecture, the artist and teacher Karol Kłosowski looked to figurative lacework and traditional paper cutting (as demonstrated by figure 4) as a distinctly Polish craft vernacular. As he noted,
his appointment to the School of Lacemaking (1913-31) had an explicitly political dimension, as the authorities in Lwów encouraged him to transform “the character of the school from the Austrian-German tradition to a distinctly Polish spirit, by getting rid of the excessive Art Nouveau influence and instead basing lace designs on native motifs” (119). For Kłosowski, the humble papercutting, traditionally employed in rural villages as window decoration, exemplified Polish national heritage: rustic, domestic, ornamental, decorative, and, crucially, in danger of disappearing (thanks to the influx of cheap German prints on the Polish market).

By detailing the ambitious projects and ideals of Wyspiański, Witkiewicz, and Kłosowski, among others, the essays in Part 1 reveal the extraordinary skill and beauty, as well as the political challenges, of Polish art in the late nineteenth century. The second part of the book shifts to consider “Objects and Craft Practices in Focus.” The seven essays in this section consider a range of topics under this rubric. Five essays focus on specific media or types of objects (furniture, textiles, ceramics, “the book beautiful,” printing) while two essays consider projects, both of them related to childhood: Edward Bartłomiejczyk’s design for a nursery and the children’s toys and Christmas-tree decorations created by the Kraków Workshops. The bird toys designed by Zofia Stryjeńska and the Kraków Workshops are especially charming (figure 5). In this organization, the volume follows a recent trend in art museum publications to balance broader historical overviews with attention to individual works of art. It works well here, especially since so much of the material considered in Part 1 related to site-specific interiors or projects. In the second section, the reader understands how the artistically inclined Polish consumer might have interacted with the arts and crafts of Young Poland.

**Endnotes**


2. https://youngpolandartsandcrafts.org.uk/


---

**WILLIAM MORRIS AT THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION CONVENTION, WASHINGTON, D. C., JANUARY 2022**

The Morris Society is fortunate to be able to sponsor two sessions at the annual MLA Convention in Washington, D. C., to be held January 7th-9th, 2022.

**The International Morris: The Morris Circle and the World**

- **Morris and Continental Socialists**
  - Frank Sharp, NYC
  - Morris, Ruskin, and Early Twentieth-Century Socialism in China
  - Nan Chang, Fudan University

- **Moncure Conway Goes East**
  - Margaret Seltz, University of Delaware

- **Flora-graphic Empire: Illustrated Flower Hybrids and England’s Empire**
  - Emily Cadger, University of British Columbia

- **Moderator: Florence Boos, University of Iowa**

  **The Pre-Raphaelites and Print Culture**
  - Co-sponsored session with the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP)

  - **“Illustrating History in The Germ”**
    - Courtney Krolezyk, Rutgers University

  - **“Enigma Variations: Looking at Burne-Jones and Morris’s ‘Cupid and Psyche’ Prints”**
    - Mark Samuels Lasner, University of Delaware

  - **“Pre-Raphaelite Print Legacies and ’The Lark’”**
    - Rebecca Mitchell, University of Birmingham

  - **“Ornamental Borders: Paratext and Imperial Britain”**
    - Jennifer Rabedeau, Cornell University

- **Moderator: Lise Jaillant, Loughborough University**

  We will also gather for a dinner and Pre-Raphaelite-related outing. Non-members who wish to attend should contact florence-boos@uiowa.edu.
Published in October 2020, *The Routledge Companion to William Morris* (Routledge Art History and Visual Studies Companions), by Florence S. Boos (Editor), provides a thoroughly researched and scholarly tome critically addressing the many varied aspects of William Morris’s life. The book comments on the wide variety of roles that we associate with Morris: artist, activist, socialist, poet, author, publisher, businessman, preservationist, Pre-Raphaelite, architect, and leader of the Arts and Crafts movement. It also tangentially addresses his many personal roles as friend, son, brother, husband, and father.

The book touches on numerous aspects of Morris and his work with a view to more recent critical analysis. As stated by Boos, “The sheer multiplicity of Morris’s endeavors has repeatedly intrigued observers, who have sought to grasp their underlying patterns and sources of creative power and, even more importantly, to apply these in variegated ways in the present” (p. 1 Introduction, Boos). There are over 100 years of critique and commentary about Morris, but part of his appeal is his continuing relevance in modern times. Perhaps what touches us most is best stated by Fiona MacCarthy: “What is special about Morris is the way in which his ideas and personality have outlasted events and issues of the time into our own aspirations and concerns” (Boos 3); Introduction, from *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*.

This book gives an updated vision and interpretation of Morris’s plethora of work by current experts on Morris and related fields, with detailed information about each contributor presented. The book is not written as a biography or a presentation of his works, but more as an evaluation and analysis of his work and influence. *The Routledge Companion to William Morris* is a “study of William Morris rather than a biography” (Robertson 32); “Morris Biographies,” Michael Robertson, regarding E. P. Thompson’s book *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*.

There are 24 contributors to this compendium, each of whom comments upon an aspect of Morris’s life or works as set forth in five sections: Part I, Morris’s Life, Family, and Environ; Part II, Art: Preservation, Interior Design, and Adaptation; Part III, Literature: Poetry, Art, Translation, and Fantasy; Part IV, Literature and Socialism; and Part V, Books: Collecting and Design. As Boos states, “The vastness and multiplicity of Morris’s endeavors precludes any one writer from dealing adequately with it all…” (Boos 3), necessitating numerous authors to address so many aspects of Morris’s life.

Within the five sections of the book, we find a variety of subject matter ranging from (but most certainly not limited to) Morris’s treatment in biographical works devoted to him as a reflection of the time written and their authors’ relationships to Morris; and Morris’s views on women and the feminism of his time. We also learn about his business acumen and success; his architectural background and conservationism; the “Morris...
Style” design and aesthetic; and his influence on artists and their works. There are also articles regarding his poetry, classical influences, Icelandic sagas, and influence on current “fantasy” literature; his transition from liberalism to socialism and his activist writings; his own book collecting; and the Kelmscott Press and the aesthetics of reading.

This book is well written and researched and provides a wide variety of expertise throughout its 22 articles and the Introduction. Each of the highly qualified authors provides compelling evidence of his or her commentary and conclusions, and background research is annotated fully, thus providing avenues for additional exploration. Many chapters also introduce subjects for future inquiry as there is still much to interpret and explore.

The book is expensive so Morris Society members should use the code FLR40 on the Routledge website to receive a 20% discount. The volume is not necessarily written for someone just embarking on an interest in Morris who is looking for a more general history or summary of Morris’s accomplishments. It is also not meant to be a “coffee table book” showing his creations, as the photos and illustrations included focus mainly on support of each chapter/article rather than a full presentation of his portfolio of work. It might be better suited to those who already have general knowledge of Morris and want to delve deeper into a more modern analysis of his works.

Morris has had a long ranging and enduring influence on literature, art, conservation, and politics, and there is something for everyone in this book, regardless of their own personal Morris focus. The book allows for a “critical and scholarly emphasis on the different aspects of Morris’s personality and work [that] has shifted over time in line with the drastic alterations in the political and artistic landscape” (p 3 Introduction, Boos) of the early 21st century. The wide-ranging articles combine to show Morris as a complex and multi-faceted man. Although referring specifically to his design work, the following statement by Margareta S. Frederick could also apply to all of Morris’s contributions when she says, “Morris was a pioneer whose multifarious lines of inquiry 150 years ago can be seen reflected in the 21st century....” (p 221, “William Morris and Interior Design”, Frederick). I highly recommend the book if you are looking to delve deeper into modern critical analysis of William Morris’s life and longevity.

Plate 12.2 Morris’s Illumination of Horace’s Odes

TWENTY YEARS ON: VIEWS AND REVIEWS OF MODERN BRITAIN
BY PETER STANSKY

In Twenty Years On, Peter Stansky discusses aspects of modern Britain and its past. What has continually fascinated him is how Britain copes with change. Although as prone to violence and disruption as any other developed nation, it likes to think of itself as calm and peaceful, a country village. Yet beneath the surface, there is great turmoil, as so many British detective stories testify.

Beginning with an account of becoming a historian, Stansky, drawing on his writings of the last twenty years, dwells on those areas of British life that he’s made his own, particularly William Morris, the Bloomsbury Group, and George Orwell. In these essays, he skillfully interweaves culture, art, politics, and society.

As a successor to his earlier collection, From William Morris to Sergeant Pepper (1998), Twenty Years On contains brilliant examinations of important aspects of modern Britain. Though Twenty Years On is Stansky’s most recent work, it represents a lifetime of passion and expertise.

Students, scholars, and enthusiasts will enjoy learning from one of the world’s leading experts on British history and culture. Simply click the link below and select your preferred online retailer. Available in both paperback and ebook.

https://books2read.com/twenty-years-on
LETTERS FROM ENGLAND, 1895:
ELEANOR MARX AND EDWARD AVELING
EDITORS: STEPHEN WILLIAMS & TONY CHANDLER

These never-before translated dispatches from London to a Russian journal by Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling offer a unique insight into their lives and radical politics, and the Victorian England in which they wrote. The collection is edited by Stephen Williams and Tony Chandler, and translated by Francis King.

These ‘letters’ from Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling to a Russian socialist journal provide dissections of the major political and cultural trends of their day from a distinctive Marxist perspective. The editors’ introduction and notes offer perceptive commentaries on Marx and Aveling’s productive but troubled partnership during this period, as well as a full account of their approach to British mid-1890s oppositional politics. This book will be necessary reading for those interested in the intellectual and personal relationships within the Marx-Engels circle, and socialist and feminist history more generally.

— Florence Boos, University of Iowa

Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling’s letters from England (to Russia), published for the first time in this wonderfully scholarly and readable edition, lead us through the revolutionary politics and practical reforms of 1895 Britain in the company of a dramatic milieu of international socialists – trades unionists, journalists, exiled revolutionaries, refugees – from which were forged the powerful social democratic parties of Europe.

We also encounter Keir Hardie, the London Trades Councils and the TUC, who among others advocated for government investment in factories and public works to relieve Britain’s four to five million unemployed, abolition of the Poor Law, an eight-hour day, reform of the House of Lords, and land reform.

The letters alternately hector and inform: Edward’s rash and sectarian judgements give way to Eleanor’s warmer, more thoughtful intelligence - even as the tragedies of her later life unfold.

— Sally Alexander, Emerita Professor of Modern History, University of London, founding editor of History Workshop Journal

THE REMARKABLE LUSHINGTON FAMILY: REFORMERS, PRE-RAPHAELITES, POSITIVISTS, AND THE BLOOMSBURY GROUP

BY DAVID TAYLOR

Drawing on previously unpublished archival materials, this study spans three generations of the Lushington family. It investigates their personal histories through the themes of social, artistic, and cultural history. The author analyzes the Lushington family’s relationships with well-known figures like Lady Byron, Queen Caroline, and members of the Bloomsbury Group. Most importantly, this study examines Lushington family members’ roles within larger trends, including abolitionism, the Pre-Raphaelite movement, and Positivism. It was Vernon Lushington, Positivist, writer, and lawyer, who introduced Edward Burne-Jones to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, thus linking the two generations of Pre-Raphaelites. Lushington maintained close friendships with the Rossettis, with William Morris and his family, with Holman Hunt and others in their circle, and Arthur Hughes was commissioned to do portraits of the Lushington daughters in a recently rediscovered painting. And one of the daughters, Kitty, was the inspiration for the eponymous Mrs. Dalloway in Virginia Woolf’s novel.

Some praise for the book:

“As important members of the circles around Byron and the Romantics in the early nineteenth century, Pre-Raphaelite writers and artists in the Victorian period, and Virginia Woolf’s Bloomsbury world in the modernist age, several generations of the Lushington family played central roles in the story of British literature and culture. David Taylor charts this lost history and illuminates it with wit, scholarly intelligence, and a dedicated researcher’s passion.” -- Margaret D. Stetz, University of Delaware

“Without any need for fame, the Lushingtons knew and influenced an astonishing number of public figures and events throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. This is a fascinating book about a family with their fingers in every pie.” -- Julian Fellowes, creator of “Downton Abbey”

“At the core of this fascinating study are the riches of the Lushington archives. David Taylor has not only used this resource to the fullest, but has also followed the threads outwards into the life of the nation. He paints a vivid and engaging picture of a cultivated, well-connected, and affluent professional family of individuals who took full and creative part in all that they encountered.” -- Gillian Sutherland, Newnham College

David Taylor obtained his PhD at the University of Roehampton London. He is a longtime member of the UK Morris Society.

— Mark Samuels Lasner
William Morris Society in the U.S.

Membership Benefits

• The semiannual Journal of William Morris Studies (printed; available online with 2 year gap)

• The semiannual Useful and Beautiful, the illustrated magazine of the WMS-US (printed; then available online after two months)

• The quarterly illustrated magazine of the UK William Morris Society (pdf; not available online)

• Invitations to WMS-sponsored events, including in-person gatherings around the U.S. and frequent online talks

• Opportunities to participate in our Member/Maker events showcasing arts and crafts projects

• Our online newsletter filled with information, links to Morris-related sites, and member profiles

• Associate Membership in the UK William Morris Society, including discounts to in-person events

• 10% discount on the WMS-UK tour to Iceland in July 2022

• 10% discount on all Arts & Crafts Tours to the UK

• Special 50th anniversary gift for new members: letterpress William Morris broadside

• As a member, you’re not only deepening your knowledge of William Morris. You’re also supporting important research (through WMS publications & fellowships) and joining a diverse community of artists, writers, craftspeople, collectors, teachers, scholars, and social activists.

UPCOMING

ARTS AND CRAFTS TOURS:

Join Arts and Crafts Tours as we examine the roots of the movement traveling in small groups through of the United Kingdom, as well as Europe to see some of the most fascinating places, people, and artifacts of the era.

William Morris and His Influence
(July 31 - August 8, 2021)

Our tour will trace many of the events and locations associated with Morris’s hugely prolific career, while also examining his fruitful collaborations with many of the leading artists, designers and architects of his time and his subsequent influence on later craft-workers. We begin in London, where Morris spent the greater part of his life and where outstanding examples of his work can be seen at the Victoria & Albert Museum and at Holy Trinity Church, Chelsea.

The Women of the Arts and Crafts Movement
(September 18 - September 26, 2021)

Examine the work of women who designed and created beautiful buildings and objects. The tour will be based on the series of articles we are now writing and collecting and which can be seen on our website. On this tour, we will be looking at work in museums and in private collections. As always you will meet and talk with scholars, authors, collectors and current craftworkers and artists

Art and Soul:
The Soul of the Arts and Crafts Movement

As we examine the work of the artists, designers and craft workers of the Arts and Crafts Movement, we find so much of their work was done for churches. We can begin with AW.N. Pugin who designed Catholic churches all over the country. We might continue with Giles Gilbert Scott in whose office G.E. Street trained, and it was in Street’s office that William Morris and Philip Webb met which led to the extraordinary work of Morris and Company.

Our tour will take us to many of their masterpieces as well as some marvelous small chapels and churches throughout the country such as the glorious St Andrew’s Roker often called the Cathedral of the Arts and Crafts by J.D Sedding, who also designed Holy Trinity Church, Sloane Street in London. And in London the magnificent All Saints, Margaret Street by William Butterfield.

https://artsandcraftstours.com

Arts and Craft Tours
110 Riverside Drive, Suite 15-E
New York NY 10024
+1 212 362 0761
Morris on the Motivations for His Socialism

I have had some 55 years experience, I won't say of the world, but of myself; the result of which is that I am almost prepared to deny that there is such a thing as an individual human being: I have found out that my valuable skin covers say about a dozen persons, who in spite of their long alliance do occasionally astonish each other very much by their strange and unaccountable vagaries; by their profound wisdom, their extreme folly, their height of elevation, and their depth of baseness. So that when I tell you of my so-called personal desires for and hopes of the future the voice is mine, but the desires and hopes are not only mine, but are those of... many others....

Now I will ask what draws men into the Socialist ranks at this stage of the movement? I mean of course what makes them genuine socialists... Is it intellectual conviction deduced from the study of philosophy or from that of politics or economics in the abstract?.. The first stage must have been the observation that there is a great deal of suffering in the world that might be done away with... Now in this respect the corporation which I call I is not at all peculiar: from the earliest time that I can remember catching myself thinking... the thought was from time to time thrust upon me that the greater part of people were ill-fed, ill-clad, ill-housed, overworked... These thoughts made me uncomfortable and discouraged and took the flavour out of my amusements and my work... so of course I thrust them aside as much as I could. Yet I was conscious that I was acting a shabby part in doing so, for I was not such a fool as not to see clearly that these degraded persons that came between me and my pleasure had not degraded themselves, and that consequently there was something or other which a strong and honest man could attack. In all this there was nothing peculiar; you would say that a natural sense of the injustice of our Society was growing up in me....

But in what followed I was perhaps peculiar. I was indifferent honest, I was by no means strong; for I must tell you that one of those persons inside my skin is the peaceablest, and another the laziest of all persons -- in that again I am not peculiar.... Well the time came when I found out that those unpleasant thoughts about the greater part of the population were intimately connected with the very essence of my work.... the result of all that was that I was quite ready for Socialism when I came across it in a definite form, as a political party with distinct aims for a revolution in society. My position then, which I am sure has been and is the position of many others, was profound discontent with the whole of modern life, a feeling of the deadly sickness of the world of civilization, which if I could have found no outlet for it would have resulted in sheer pessimism....

My Socialism began where that of some others ended, with an intense desire for complete equality of condition for all men; for I saw and am still seeing that without that equality, whatever else the human race might gain it would at all events have to relinquish art and imaginative literature, and that to my temperament did and does imply the real death of mankind -- the second death. Of course with the longing for equality went the perception of the necessity for the abolition of private property; so that I became a Communist before I knew anything about the history of Socialism or its immediate aims. And I had to set to work to read books decidedly distasteful to me, and to do work which I thought myself quite unfit for, and get myself into absurd messes and quarrel like a schoolboy with people I liked in order to become a practical Socialist -- which rank I have no doubt some of you don't think I have gained yet. But all that did not matter because I had once again fitted a hope to my work and could take more than all the old pleasure in it; my bitterness disappeared and -- in short I was born again.

Now I repeat that I would not have said a word of all this, but that I know that what has happened to me has happened to other people though not quite in the same way.

"How Shall We Live Then," 1889, 1890