

WILLIAM MORRIS SOCIETY

in the UNITED STATES

NEWSLETTER,

April 1, 1985

A. NEW LOGO

 The new logo is offered as a sign of faith that spring and flowers will indeed return again to the cold valleys of New England and a sign that this newsletter has a new editor, Gary L. Aho. Announcements and newsworthy items should henceforth be sent to him in care of the English Department, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, 01003.

B. WILLIAM MORRIS AND GEORGE ORWELL

 The paper by Florence and William Boos, "Orwell's Morris and Old Major's Dream," given at the 1984 MLA convention (reported upon in the last newsletter), called to mind the following passages. Though these strikingly parallel examples are used to support different general points, we are reminded again of the honest and sane values Morris and Orwell shared, and that their best prose achieved strong effects through the use of simple language. The first passage appeared in Commonweal, 5 May 1889 (reprinted in A. L. Morton's edition, Political Writings of William Morris, pp. 210-214), and the second in Orwell's famous essay on picture post-cards, "The Art of Donald McGill." Morris writes, "Philip sober needs protection against Philip drunk, or he may chance to wake up from his booze in a nice mess. Surely we all of us feel that there is a rascal or two in each of our skins besides the other or two who want to lead manly and honorable lives." And Orwell asserts that, "There is one part of you that wishes to be a hero or saint, but another part of you is a little fat man who sees very clearly the advantage of staying alive with a whole skin. . . . His tastes lie toward safety, soft beds, no work, pots of beer."

C. WILLIAM MORRIS IN CANADA

 Hans De Groot, President of the William Morris Society of Canada, extended an invitation to all American Morrisians to attend the second annual William Morris Symposium, organized by the Canadian group in cooperation with University College, the University of Toronto.

I was among a handful of Americans who attended, and I want to record my impressions of the William Morris Society of Canada. First, it is thriving. The majority of its 150 members live in the Toronto area, and many of them (there are fifteen on their Governing Board) are actively involved in the work and fellowship of the Society. Proportionately fewer of them are academics than in America, and their jobs have brought them into contact with Morris's ideas about the arts and crafts, about the human and social necessity of finding joy in work. Jean Johnson, the membership secretary, works at Harbourfront Craft Studio, a large crafts center which trains and nurtures young artisans. From raised walkways visitors can observe them turning pots, dyeing fabrics, shaping glass. It is an impressive operation, one Morris would surely have approved of. John Wichelow, the jovial singing Treasurer of the Society, has designed and is now marketing a colorful chronological "History of World Civilization" wall chart; it is five feet long and includes data on hundreds of events and personages. In a string of nineteenth-century luminaries occur the names of Jane Austen, Napoleon, Marx, and William Morris. Another member of the Canadian Governing Board, Kathy Lochnan, is a curator at the Art Gallery of Ontario, and she has just begun planning--with the help of one of our American members, Carole Silver--a large exhibition on William Morris, which will open in a few years time.

The Canadian group also puts on musical evenings and Victorian galas, and has had elaborate birthday parties for William Morris for the past three years. At meetings last year talks on Morris were given by such important scholars as Northrop Frye and Peter Stansky. As I said at the outset, the Canadian William Morris Society is thriving. Hans De Groot and I have discussed the possibilities of a joint meeting of the Canadian and American Societies, perhaps to be held in Amherst, Massachusetts, during October, 1986. Any suggestions or comments about possible conflicts will be welcomed.

D. PAPERS READ AT THE SECOND ANNUAL CANADIAN SYMPOSIUM, MARCH 21 AND 22, 1985, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

 1. George Johnstone, professor emeritus of Carleton University and well-known poet and translator, spoke on "William Morris and the English of the Sagas," suggesting that those who only castigated Morris's "Wardour-Street English" were likely to overlook some of the powerful effects the Morris-Magnusson renderings can have. He stressed how well Morris knew the sagas and their ethos, and he read and discussed passages from Volsunga Saga and the Heimskringla, moving from the Old Icelandic to the English in memorable and sensitive fashion, making convincing points at every stage.

2. Richard Dellamora of Trent University spoke on "Ruskin, Painters and Prophecy in the 1840's," arguing that The King of the Golden River becomes--if one understands its mythic and psychic "codes"--a central text for understanding not only Ruskin's personal development but also his attitudes toward Art and Nature, and the ways he described the complex dialectics between certain painters, like Turner, and certain landscapes.

3. John Unrau of York University talked about "Ruskin's Changing Attitudes to the English Workman," pointing out that in "The Nature of Gothic" Ruskin had been patronizing to British workers, full of "missionary-minded smugness." But by the 1870's his attitude had changed drastically, and in Fors Clavigera we find wonderfully realistic but sympathetic descriptions of British labourers, these coupled with bitterly scornful portraits of bourgeois reformers. Unrau quoted, with obvious relish, many fine passages.

4. Peter Morgan of the University of Toronto discoursed upon "Ruskin and the Paris Commune," charting the ways that his support shifted from the Prussians to the French, and finally to the Communards.

5. Jeffrey Spear of New York University gave a slide lecture on Ruskin and Morris, commenting first on parallels between Kierkegaard and Ruskin, focusing on the ways that early and unconsummated passions emerged in their work, in the patterns of their lives. He pointed out that the repetition of "destructive infatuation" was the keynote to Ruskin's life, and he compared the happy childhood experiences of Ruskin and Morris, suggesting that they both attempted to return to such experiences in their final writings.

E. PAPERS READ AT THE NORTH-EAST MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION CONVENTION,
MARCH 28, 1985, IN HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

 1. Robert Keane of Hofstra University gave a slide lecture on "Ut Pictura Poesis: Rossetti and Morris: Paintings into Poems," tracing first the nineteenth-century backgrounds of narrative paintings and commenting upon the use Pre-Raphaelite painters made of literary texts. He then discussed two of William Morris's most opaque poems, "The Blue Closet" and "The Tune of Seven Towers," pointing out clues and cues that Morris apparently noted in Rossetti's pictorial representations and then extended out into his own narrative situations.

2. Michael Liberman of East Stroudsburg University spoke on "Textual Changes in William Morris's News from Nowhere," commenting upon differences between the version serialized in Commonweal and the 1891 Reeves and Turner edition. Morris added several pages to chapters seven and seventeen, and even included one entirely new chapter, "The Obstinate Refusers," in order to make events in his tale conform to political reforms of his own time, which he felt must ultimately lead to still more unrest and even revolution.

3. Mark Cumming of Memorial University of Newfoundland lectured upon "The Hero as Artist in Sigurd the Volsung," drawing attention to attitudes about heroism Morris seemed to share with Carlyle, pointing out ways that Art is seen to "heal and integrate" throughout Morris's epic poem.

After the three papers were read, there was a lively discussion, and Elisa Campbell of the University of Massachusetts was elected chairperson for the 1986 NEMLA session on William Morris. That session will be the fourth consecutive one devoted to Morris at NEMLA conventions.

F. NEWS OF MEMBERS

 Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson's two-volume edition of The Brownings' Correspondence was published last year by the Wedgestone Press in Winfield, Kansas, and G. K. Hall published in 1984 Frederick Kirchhoff's John Ruskin.

Carolyn Collette of Mount Holyoke College reports that she is continuing her work on the political rhetoric of medievalism. At the moment she is researching the public response to Young England's programs and ideas, examining mid-nineteenth century newspaper and periodical accounts. In analyzing public response to Young England she is trying to determine whether either Young England's supporters or critics perceived medievalism as central to their political ideas. Her research to date has revealed that detractors were more likely to focus on medieval "fancies" while supporters considered Young England's proposals and criticisms as alternatives to the kinds of social organization most Englishmen could imagine in the mid-nineteenth century. When the Middle Ages appear in Young England's speeches or in sympathetic accounts of their ideas, the medieval past appears as a realm of example, a source of illustration, and, most interestingly, as a symbol. Morris's own use of medievalism, a subject she has linked to Young England's, suggesting in both cases a common focus in language used symbolically rather than a common political vision, may in time appear as part of a wider phenomenon than has heretofore been understood--the phenomenon of the political rhetoric of medievalism. It may be that what we understand as medievalism has been passed down to us more literally than either Morris or Young England would ever have desired.

As a footnote she also reports that her Old English class, interested in working through its own publishable translation of Beowulf, has begun looking at existing translations. When they discovered Morris's translation, their delight sprang both from a fascination with translating from Old English into a "suitable" form of modern English, and from the sheer pleasure of holding and seeing the Kelmscott edition. The idea of the book took on a new dimension for them. She would be interested in hearing from others who use Morris's Kelmscott printings in their classes.

Larry D. Lutchmansingh from Bowdoin College gave a talk on March 12, 1985, at the Chicago Architectural Foundation on "William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Interior," and he has provided the following summary:

Through extensive examination of slides, the influence of Morris & Co. upon interiors and furnishings was examined, with the emphasis being placed upon the kind of unity of ensemble which Morris and the firm sought after, both among the household crafts and between them and the architectural fabric. It was pointed out that the total design-concept, indeed, played a signal role in the firm's production as well as in Morris's thinking, as indicated in his definition of the decorative arts and architecture as "moulding and altering to human needs of the very face of the earth itself." Finally, attention was drawn to the implicit political dimension of Morris's campaign to restore the decorative arts to their rightful place.

Marilyn Ibach, working now at the Library of Congress and slated to give a talk on Morris and Company stained glass at the 1985 MLA meetings in Chicago, has drawn my attention to an article by Rowland Elzea, "The Viking Ship from 'Vinland,'" which appeared in Tiller (March-April 1984). This article recounts the history of the Viking windows Burne-Jones designed for a residence in Newport, Rhode Island, and the reappearance of one of them, a Viking Ship roundel, at a 1984 auction in Philadelphia, a rather amazing reappearance since the windows were removed from the mansion in 1934, and not seen since 1937.

Florence Boos reports that she will be teaching at the University of Iceland in Reykjavik during next fall semester. She will undoubtedly peruse the Morris and Magnusson correspondence at the National Library and ride ponies across the same terrain that William Morris explored in 1871 and 1873.

Jack Walsdorf reports that he has sold 675 volumes of his fine William Morris collection to the University of Maryland at College Park. Mr. Walsdorf will be exhibiting the remainder of his Morris collection--some 300 volumes--at a convention of the Washington Library Associates in Seattle, from April 21-28. He is still interested in Kelmscott Press volumes and will now try to put together a complete set along with all prospecti issued by the Press.

William Peterson of the University of Maryland is of course delighted that the Walsdorf Collection now resides in the Rare Books Room at his university. He also reports that he lectured on the Kelmscott Chaucer on March 10, 1985, at Loma Linda University in Riverside, California.

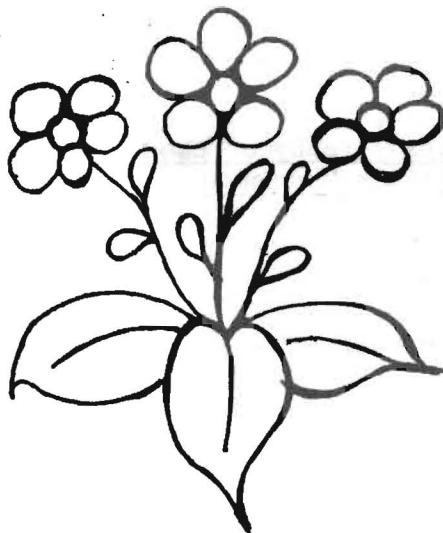
Joseph R. Dunlap recently finished reviewing two important works on William Morris: William Peterson's A Bibliography of the Kelmscott Press (cited in the last newsletter) and William Morris and the Middle Ages, a catalogue--with four preliminary essays--of an exhibition held at the Whitworth Museum in Manchester from September to December, 1984. He reports that "the amount of information in these books is considerable." The review will appear in the American Book Collector. He also reports that Raymond and Betty Elzea are beginning work on an exhibition on William Morris and His Associates, planned for 1987, at the Delaware Art Museum in Wilmington.

Jeremy S. Scanlon, owner of the enterprise, "England Afloat" (mentioned in the last newsletter), reports that berths are still available for Thames trips next summer and fall.

Peter Stansky's Redesigning the World: William Morris, the 1880's and the Arts and Crafts is now out and was reviewed twice in The New York Times, once adequately--on 20 February, 1985--by Michiko Kakutani. Adequately, except for one line, stating that Morris "sparked the restoration movement in architecture." (Perhaps the verb is a typo for "spiked.") Kakutani points out that Stansky, as demonstrated also in his work on Orwell, "has a talent for taking a representative figure and using that life to illuminate larger social and political issues." This important new study of Morris is available from the Princeton University Press.

Gail Weinberg reports on the success of an exhibition at the Bell Gallery of the List Art Center of Art in Providence, Rhode Island. Sponsored by students in Brown's Art Department, it was titled "Ladies of Shallott: A Victorian Masterpiece and its Contexts," and it ran from February 23 to March 24. It was accompanied by a four-part lecture series: on February 28 Elicia Faxon from Simmons lectured on Rossetti and his models; on March 7 George Hersey from Yale lectured on Hunt's "The Awakening Conscience"; on March 14 Alice Hauck from Providence College lectured on Ruskin and Pre-Raphaelite Medievalism; and on March 21 W. E. Fredemen from the University of British Columbia lectured on "Pictures of an Exhibition: Late Victorian and Early Modern Perspectives on Pre-Raphaelitism." She also reports that an exhibition called "The New Path: Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites" opened at the Brooklyn Museum on March 29, and that an accompanying symposium featuring six lectures will take place in the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens on April 20.

Several members of the Society have been interviewed recently by Dan Murray of Vancouver, B. C. He is preparing a radio biography of William Morris which will be aired on CBC next fall or winter. He plans to distill some fifty hours of interviews down to three one-hour segments for the program "Ideas."



Yours in fellowship,

A handwritten signature in cursive ink that reads "Gary L. Aho".

Gary L. Aho
for the Governing Committee