

WILLIAM MORRIS SOCIETY

in the UNITED STATES

NEWSLETTER,

April, 1987

A. ANNOUNCEMENTS

 The Second Annual Conference on Medievalism sponsored by Studies in Medievalism will take place at the University of Notre Dame, October 8-10, 1987. Papers are invited on all aspects of Medievalism from the end of the Middle Ages to the present and beyond. Papers on art, music, religion, history, and literature are sought, and papers on the scholarship, history, and philosophy of Medievalism will be particularly welcomed. Abstracts of papers should be sent by June 1, 1987 to Leslie J. Workman, Editor, STUDIES IN MEDIEVALISM, 520 College Avenue, Holland, Michigan 49423.

Ms. Judith Kennedy is seeking articles on revision among Victorian writers for a collection which she is editing. For examples of the kinds of articles wanted, see PMLA, November 1985 (the Convention Program), section 422, "Processes of Revision among Victorian Writers," and PMLA, November 1986, section 428, "Revision among Victorian Writers: Motivations and Modes." Send inquiries or articles to Judith Kennedy, Department of English, Kutztown University, Kutztown, PA 19530

"Gilbert and Sullivan and Their Circles" will be the theme of the University of Leicester's 1988 Victorian Studies Conference, tentatively scheduled for early July. Inquiries and proposals for papers should be sent to Richard Foulkes, the University Centre, Barrack Road, Northampton NN2 6AF, England.

Samuel J. Hough, owner of the bookstore, "The Owl at the Bridge," thought that members of the Society would be interested to learn that he has on hand copies of the Omega Press facsimile of the Kelmscott Chaucer. He is selling them for \$50., plus \$2. for postage and handling. His address: 25 Berwick Lane, Cranston, R.I. 02905.

It was reported in the October, 1986 Newsletter that the journal, NINETEENTH CENTURY THEATRE (formerly NINETEENTH CENTURY THEATRE RESEARCH) was being moved from Arizona to the University of Massachusetts. Its editor, Professor Joseph Donohue, announces that the move is now complete, and that this semiannual journal of theatre studies welcomes inquiries, essays, and subscriptions (\$10. for individuals, \$15. for institutions). The address: NINETEENTH CENTURY THEATRE, Department of English, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003.

Dorothy Coles has asked me to give credit, since I failed to do so in the October, 1986 Newsletter, to Julia Stapleton for her work in planning the Icelandic journey which Society members enjoyed last August. Ms. Stapleton was the one who handled all the difficult preliminary work on the bookings. Dorothy writes, "I only took over in the final stages, when it was all easy."

The February-March 1987 issue of AMERICAN CRAFT (Vol. 47, no. 1) contains the first of a three-part series of articles "profiling master bookmakers who are operating small private presses." The first article, "Claire van Vliet's

Janus Press," is by W. Thomas Taylor. The Janus Press is located in northeast Vermont; New England is home to many small private presses, a fact attested to by a recent symposium held in Northampton, Massachusetts during the last half of March and the first week of April, 1987. It was titled "Form and Content: the Art of the Book in the Pioneer Valley." There were several workshops, on topics like bookbinding and papermaking, and lectures by well-known artists and illustrators like Leonard Baskin and Barry Moser.

From March 24 through June 28, 1987 the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York City will hold an exhibition, "Lewis Sullivan, the Function of Ornament." Over 180 drawings, models, examples of ornament, handwork, and photographs will represent the work and influence of the Chicago architect.

B. RECENT EXHIBITIONS

From January 16 through March 15, 1987, an exhibition, "Victorian Bibliomania: The Illuminated Book in 19th Century Britain," was on view at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum in Providence, R.I. Over 70 British books were exhibited, among them volumes from the Kelmscott Press and examples of William Morris's calligraphy.

The exhibition was accompanied by a full-day symposium on February 11, 1987. Jennifer B. Lee, Curator of Printed Books at Brown University spoke on "The History of Books and Printing: An Introduction." Joan M. Friedman, Curator of Rare Books at the Yale Center for British Art, gave a slide lecture on Owen Jones. Martin W. Hunter, an interior designer from New York City, spoke on "Daniel Berkeley Updike of Providence and the British Connection." John R. Burrows, an architectural historian and interior designer from Boston, lectured on "The Victorian Revival in 1987." William Morris's name came up in each of the lectures, and he and his work at the Kelmscott Press are often referred to in the catalogue of the exhibition, VICTORIAN BIBLOMANIA. It is available at RISD's Museum Shop for \$18.

An extremely ambitious and important exhibition, one which often cites the influence of William Morris's ideas and achievements, opened on March 4, 1987 at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. It is "'The Art that is Life': The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920." The curator's Preface to the 410 page catalogue of the exhibition has at its center a passage from Morris's 1881 lecture, "Art and Beauty of the Earth," and there are over eighty references to Morris or Morris and Company throughout the catalogue. The exhibition's 225 artifacts are displayed in four sections: "Reform in Aesthetics," "Reform in Craftsmanship," "Spreading the Reform Ideal," and "Reform of the Home" and the catalogue has detailed and informative descriptions of each of these artifacts as well as the following seven essays: 1) "The Lamp of British Precedent: An Introduction to the Arts and Crafts Movement" by Wendy Kaplan (the Exhibition Director), 2) "Arts and Crafts: Matters of Style" by Robert Judson Clark and Wendy Kaplan, 3) "American Arts and Crafts Architecture: Radical though Dedicated to the Cause Conservative" by Richard Guy Wilson, 4) "'Dreams of Brotherhood and Beauty': The Social Ideas of the Arts and Crafts Movement" by Eileen Boris, 5) "Spreading the Crafts: the Role of the Schools" by Wendy Kaplan, 6) "House and Home in the Arts and Crafts Era: Reforms for Simpler Living" by Cheryl Robertson, and 7) "A More Reasonable Way to Dress" by Sally Buchanan Kinsey. The exhibition catalogue has dozens of black and white photographs and illustrations and 47 wonderful full-page color plates.

The exhibition will travel to three other sites: the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, August 16 - November 1, 1987; the Detroit Institute of Arts, December 9, 1987 - February 28, 1988; and the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York, April 5 - June 26, 1988.

C. THE NEMLA WILLIAM MORRIS SESSION

At the 1987 Northeast Modern Language Association meetings in Boston, Yvette Grimes presided over a session, given on April 4, 1987, entitled "The Influence of the Norse Sagas on Morris's Work." There were three presentations: Karl O.E. Anderson, of Clark University, spoke on "Morris's Position in the History of Norse Studies in English," surveying an impressive list of British and American authors, from Thomas Grey in 1768 to Gordon Bottomly and W.H. Auden in our century who have written on Iceland and Icelandic literature. He then asserted that William Morris towered over them all, both in terms of quantity (he translated over two dozen sagas and *thaettir* as well as several Eddic poems, and he used Norse themes in a few of his best narrative poems and in several shorter lyrics) and quality (*Sigurd* has been called the greatest epic written in the nineteenth century). Anderson ended his informative talk by reading from Morris's lyric, "Iceland First Seen," offering proof for his sense that Morris's tone in such lyrics is perfect for capturing Iceland's chill and strange beauty.

Lin Haire-Sargent, of Tufts University, spoke on "Mythic Patterns in Morris's Prose Romances," finding ways to apply Lacanian terminology to the roles of heroines in a few of the late prose romances.

Gary L. Aho, of the University of Massachusetts, and Florence Boos, of the University of Iowa, gave a slide-lecture that incorporated passages from Morris's *Icelandic Journals* and 45 slides taken on last August's jaunt to Iceland. They attempted to demonstrate why certain scenes and saga sites moved Morris deeply; in prose that evokes emotion as it provides clean and clear descriptions, Morris left to posterity one of the three or four best travel books ever written on Iceland.

It is pleasant to report that there will again be another Morris session at NEMLA, on the general theme of Morris and the medieval past. Anyone interested in giving a paper at next Spring's meetings, to be sponsored by Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island and to be held in Providence, Rhode Island, should write to Professor Carolyn Collette, English Department, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts.

D. NEWS OF MEMBERS

Joe Dunlap reports that he enjoyed immensely a pair of lectures on "C.R. Ashbee, His Life and Works," given in New York City on April 1, 1987. The lectures, sponsored by the Victorian Society of America, were by Felicity Ashbee, the architect's daughter, and Alan Crawford, his biographer. These same two speakers are scheduled to appear on April 12, as part of the "Sunday Lectures" at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, these given in conjunction with the exhibition mentioned earlier in this Newsletter. Felicity Ashbee will speak on "C.R. Ashbee, Architect, Designer, and Romantic Socialist: A Daughter's View," and Alan Crawford will speak on "The Arts and Crafts Movement" in Britain and America."

Joe Dunlap also wants to remind Society members that an important anniversary is coming up next year, and that it might not be too soon to be planning an

exhibition or symposium to commemorate the slide lecture by Emory Walker on November 15, 1888, for it was William Morris's reactions to this lecture that led to his "adventure" at the Kelmscott Press.

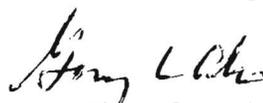
Norman Kelvin reports that volume two of the Collected Letters will be published in October.

Jan Marsh, author of Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood and Jane and May Morris, will be travelling and speaking in the United States next Fall. We hope that she will lecture at the University of Massachusetts in October or November, and she is tentatively scheduled to take part in one of the sessions on William Morris which will be on the program at the Modern Language Association Meetings next December, in San Francisco.

Jack Walsdorf was invited to lecture at the Third Annual Arts and Crafts Convention at East Aurora, N.Y., home of the Roycrofters and Elbert Hubbard, the amiable huckster of the home-spun who claimed to have visited Morris in 1894. Walsdorf spoke on William Morris and his achievements at Morris and Company to an appreciative audience of some sixty crafts enthusiasts. Efforts to restore the Roycrofters shops and enterprises are evidently meeting with some success.

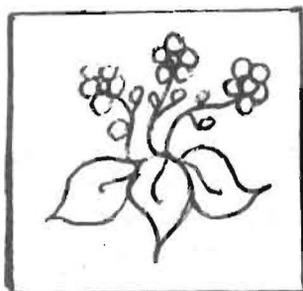
Florence Boos's very detailed and interesting journal of The Society's Icelandic jaunt will appear in this Newsletter in two installments; the first (of eight pages) is attached herewith.

Yours in fellowship,



Gary L. Aho, for the
Governing Committee

Department of English
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01003



With William Morris in Iceland: The First Week

August 1st, 1986 8:15 a. m. Keflavík time

We arrived in Keflavík airport, and drank a peaceful if expensive tea, coffee, and milk as we waited for the British members of the Icelandic tour to arrive seven hours hence. We slept about 2 1/2 hours on the plane; the previous night I only slept about 3. Still, I wanted to begin immediately, in honor of Morris's Icelandic diary, and will try to write daily, as did he. I reread the opening of his diary on the plane, and was impressed at how excited and eager he was, sleepless too (for other reasons) the night before the trip; even Scotland was new to him and he made careful, enthusiastic observations of scenery and intelligent comments on bridges, ships, etc.. He was clearly eager to absorb all he could, and try to live for a while apart from all he knew--including his friends; thus the repeated dream of letters from home. Yet his diary was also designed for his friends, whom he seems to address as "you." The purpose for writing during voyages seems clear, to keep faith that one's dislocations from pattern matter, that one is still connected though detached and underway. Morris enjoyed lying on the boat seeing the waves rise towards him--an impulse to seek the edge of danger?

After I began this, Bill found a kindly Loftleidir employee who let us sleep in a deserted staff lounge, a great relief. At 2:45 p. m. Icelandic time, we rose to meet the British party, gathered by Ruth Ellison, who had come out from Reykjavík. Friendly and well-organized, she distributed maps and lists of places we will visit. She is very vigorous, practical, and precise of manner, and speaks excellent Icelandic. Before the bus drove us off towards Reykjavík, we talked a while with several others. The trip to Reykjavík took us through the familiar featureless lavafields, but the suburbs (Hafnarfjörður, Garðabaer, and Kopavogur) and Reykjavík itself looked beautiful in bright sunlight, with its familiar museums, churches, university, and lake. Bill and I were moved, each in our own way. Despite my regret that I hadn't learned more of the language in our four months here last fall, recognition stirred as I looked at place names, streets, and buildings; so many names now familiar at least, though still strange. Eugene is quite excited by the trip; on the plane he could hardly stop talking about what we would see, and the fact that clouds concealed most of the topography did not quench his zeal.

At Reykjavík, Gary, his twenty-year old daughter Karen, and fellow University of Massachusetts professor Bob Creed boarded. The scenery to the southeast became more interesting, as wide fields of moist mossy grass mounds ("Þúfur") contrasted with deep grey basalt. We noted small, neat farms with bright red, blue, and green roofs; the many fine small churches; handsome sheep and ponies; flying gulls and grey-black-and-white marsh birds ("Fulmar"); and the occasional small waterfalls and many slender rivers which defiled from the mountains.

After a friendly tea we drove south through Selfoss, and on to the farm/guesthouse in Smáratun ("clover field") for the night. It was pleasant to arrive at our first farm; Ruth went to another farm with another group, and Bill struggled to help translate. I felt regret that I couldn't follow the hostess's conversation, and renewed respect for the ordered intricacy of the language. We were served a (too) hearty dinner (bread and cheese for us), including dessert and coffee, and walked out into the fields to view turf-covered sheds, neat verdant fields, and sturdy oxen-like Icelandic cows with their powerful legs and lean bodies.

Bill and Eugene are in one room and I share another with an American doctoral student Holly Dworkin; four men (Nigel Kelsey, Neville Cornwell, Edmund Grant, and Al Vogeler) are in a large room across the way. We made tentative first acquaintances, but the fatigue of travel and minimal privacy left us all with some strains, and bright sun and jet lag woke me at 4:20 a. m., after only four hours sleep.

August 2nd

We stopped briefly at the high falls at Seljalandsfoss (either "seals'-land-falls" or "mountain-dairy-land falls"), slender and attractive. Icelandic vacationers were camped at the base, and one of their small dogs (named "Vaskur," or "Brave") nimbly leaped past Bill and Eugene as they climbed. We then rode on

towards the glacier at Thórsmörk, a gravelly riverbed region rimmed by deep charcoal mountains (A "mörk" is a "boundary-region," often uninhabited, which may be forest, desert, or, as in this case, glacial moraine). To reach a small skógur ("forest"), we had to cross several rivers in our little all-terrain bus, a much easier operation than the horseback fordings Morris casually describes in the Diary. At one point, the driver paused for calculation, then cautiously forded; we clapped appreciatively on the other side. The riverbeds change often with the direction of the melting glacier runoff, so bridges are presumably rather hopeless.

This region depressed Morris, as well it might. I tried to take pictures of some things he mentioned--the glaciers, the flowers (some purple, some white-belled, some white and yellow clover), and especially the birch trees, sturdy scruffy stubbornly pervasive bushes. Meagre looking þúfur on the mountainsides supported goats and sheep; I noticed one striking white goat with black head and markings. One becomes used to the fact that the animals are such an individualized array of composite whites, blacks, greys, tans, and browns--one can never quite predict the markings of a goat or sheep, and a cluster of animals rarely possesses identically-colored coats. One understands why the language has an enormous variety of words which designate different color-patterns of sheep, cattle, and horses. Remnants of counterparts probably survive in many English and Scottish dialects. Our destination, a region of "wooded" hills which border Thórsmörk, is a vacation area; we passed cars parked at the fords along the way, and a great crowd of Icelanders and others had encamped at the foot of the hills.

The cliff formations at Thórsmörk were starkly jagged and irregular. Its mountains are "palagonite-tuff," formed under glaciers and flat at the top. We passed Stakkholtsgjá ("cape-hill gorge"), an impressive stratum of cave-like apertures under a grey ledge high upon a mountain, like a great opened grimace. These and the other grim rock formations, like so much in Iceland, bear witness to the heedless power of geological events which are no less fearful for being "understood" (what a relief that Thomas Hardy never made it to Thórsmörk). Edmund Grant aptly remarked that "This was nature's own industrial revolution scarring the countryside, completely without human assistance."

The region is full of crumbled rock and black glacial dust which brush off easily, and the ground is covered with thin spongy vegetation and brush. One becomes accustomed to sitting down with relief on one of the natural pillows of stone covered with green brush. Grey-black boulders and rocks of various sizes are strewn about in the wide glacial beds, and some of the crevices and gullies which debouch into them are striking in themselves. In brightest daylight, the sun brightened the moss-green grass somewhat, and we stopped by a solitary mound called Tröllakirkja ("trolls' church") to devour our neatly packed nesti, bundles of yogurts, juices, sandwiches, and pastries. I saw several solitary sheep alone in small pastures, high in the cliffs, sturdily grazing on their long knobby legs--a lonely life. One needs something to personalize such unrelieved expanses of dark stone; the name-giving of "trolls' church" seems similar to the naturally anthropomorphic spirit of Edmund's remark.

Afterwards we drove to the edge of a large glacier whose lake run-off waters in heavy rain seemed rose-colored; large bluish chunks of ice floated in swanlike formations. Refracted by the driving rain and heavy mist, the scene seemed antediluvian; Gary called it "Burne-Jonesish." Bill, Eugene, and I realized we had made a bad mistake not to bring raincoats, hats, and even perhaps boots. Gary, Bob, Dorothy, and I clambered through the blackish glacial residue to the glacier's edge, and gazed up at the grimy knobs of ice which protruded above and ahead of us. I imagined being at the bottom of such a slide as it fell on me. The heavy drenching rain, mossy background, dirty white snow, charcoal soot, murky water, and eerie rose light created one of the weirdest and most memorable scenes of the trip so far.

Near a hayfield and waterfall on the road home, Dorothy Cole identified several flowers for me--among them mustard flower, blue crane's bill, angelica, and cow's vetch. All, presumably, have equally quaint Icelandic names. Eugene picked an angelica to reveal its large tubular root (Icelanders have traditionally eaten its green cousin; it looks no worse than rutabaga). Our dinner included dishes of skýr, the national desert, a sweetened whey which tastes like a slightly tart whipped cream; everyone enjoyed it. Afterwards Edmund kindly translated for me the final chapter of Edvige Schulte's book on Rossetti.

August 3rd

We visited Bergthórshvöll ("Bergthor's knoll"), near Njáll's house, whose burning is the "brennu" of Brennunjalssaga. We all walked together up the knoll to a spot, near a twentieth-century house, where Njáll's farmhouse may have stood. The little hill quietly overlooked plains which extended south to the Westmanneyjar ("Westmann Islands"). En route to another waterfall, Gluggafoss ("Window Falls"), which Morris may have visited, we stopped at Stora Dímon, a large, greenish soft-sloped mountain-formation.

We ate at Hlíðarendi ("Slope-end;" Morris's "Lithend"), a peaceful sheltered site just up the hill from what Morris translated as "Gunnar's Howe" ("howe" = "haugur" = "burial mound") and made the subject of one of his few Icelandic poems devoted to a specific saga hero. Thus he celebrates the lonely steadfastness of the warrior in Njála, whose wraith was observed after his death as it sang in his grave at night:

O young is the world yet meseemeth
and the hope of it flourishing green
When the words of a man unremembered
so bridge all the days that have been,
As we look round about on the land
that these nine hundred years he hath seen. (ll. 25-30)

"Gunnar's Howe," actually a mound in the gully near where Gunnar may have lived, overlooks a wide, pleasant yellow-brown plain, traversed by rivers shining in the sun and once again reaching to the Westmann Islands. The weather was idyllically warm, and it was a peaceful, quiet day. As we sat on the grassy slope above the sunlit church and cemetery and looked out over the bright plain beneath, Morris's epiphany seemed believable; for a moment at least, intense desire and identification can make not only nine hundred years but a millenium seem to fall away.

I began to realize that this little "byggð" below the road--farmhouse, ironsided church with reddish-brown gate and adjacent "churchyard"/cemetery--formed one of the country's most characteristic scenes. We walked through the cemetery, looked at the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century stones, and stood round its high-mounded graves. Bill, Gary, and Dorothy all agreed that it would be a pleasant place to be buried, but I shuddered to think how the winds must howl over this promontory in winter, in the long twilight above the near-empty plains--bleaker than the landscape of Wuthering Heights--the other side of Morris's hymn to steadfastness and the vanished centuries. Had I been one of the women who lived and worked here, I would have found it hard to suppress a grimace that I would be buried within a few miles of where I'd been born and lived out my entire life. It takes no leap of empathy to understand why even a prosperous woman such as Morris's Gudrun might prefer "a stirring life," to such insulation.

The next stop was one of our more interesting, a preserved farmstead at Keldur (which means either "springs" or "swamps," depending on the context), where Morris actually stayed in 1871, a series of 6 or 8 turf-covered attached compartments, of course a very large bústaður by 19th century standards. At the back of one compartment we saw a kitchen in which Morris had cooked a meal, with its dark hearth, small skyhole opening to the top, and small side window, extremely cramped even in bright summer with no fire.

We also entered a parlour, relatively light (I now realize) as such rooms go; a room which may have been used for eating; another for storage; a kind of cellar with side huts, probably used to store dried food; and a room which seemed a workplace. A small turf-roofed buttery was set directly on a small stream, and beyond were two large, handsome, smooth turfed mounds in the fields, adjacent to each other and almost lushly symmetrical in their contours, perhaps animal-shelters.

Karen teased Gary, "Do you feel excited to see a place visited by your hero?" For me, the answer was yes: after thousands of miles, I am grateful finally to see something which is much as Morris saw it. Perhaps it made the scene seem more authentic that the sky was grayish and overcast, more typical than postcard beautiful.

Late in the day we stopped at Oddi, whose quiet, dignified church, built

after Morris's trip, is the handsomest we have seen so far. Affixed to several stones were stone plaques engraved with two hands clasping each other--love in farewell. One grave inscription was Matthew V:7, which Bill and I looked up in the church's sumptuous Bible, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"; we wondered who might have expressed this tribute to whom, and in gratitude for what. The stones were unusually old and some were partly effaced. Bill struggled for a while to decipher one long inscription, then asked Ruth for help, but in vain. Lost. We all climbed to a nearby hill and looked down on the church, graveyard, and sloping fields beyond. As we left, we admired a stone mounting block from which people once climbed to their horses. We had a relaxed dinner, Eugene and I talked, and I studied Morris's diary. It was an affectionate conversation and I made progress with the diary, but was tired the next day.

August 4th

A very full day; I hope I can remember it in some detail. We left our farm at Smáratun and drove by Laugarvatn en route to Skálholt. Laugarvatn ("hot spring lake") is set in a valley from which plains and attendant hills slowly rise into the mountains above, a configuration which I remembered distinctly from last fall. Low green mountains surround Skálholt, whose black and white church and carefully-designed interior was one of the finest things we've seen. Over the altar hangs an impressive blue-tinted mosaic of Christ of the ships, by Nína Tryggvadóttir. It seemed appropriate to fuse the tale of Christ and the fishermen with the latter's Icelandic counterparts. There are stained-glass windows on the side by Gerður Helgadóttir, with attractive brightly colored bits of glass and heavily leaded panes, arranged so that one can trace in abstract gradations from yellow-and-blue to red-and-blue a progression from annunciation to ascension.

The church's crypt contained a museum of Icelandic gravestones of several centuries, many in Latin. Bill lingered over them to decipher what he could, and Eugene offered suggestions as he looked on. One could see an evolution in the stones' style from century to century. As always when I look at such monuments, what most depresses me is how meager and conventional they are--not to mention how few were the dignitaries who could afford such relatively elaborate and expensive tributes.

I duly took a photograph of one ancient stone tomb of a medieval bishop, Páll Jónsson. Next to the church stands a handsome adult-education school, with a small display of modern paintings. As we drove away from the cathedral we stopped at the large stone commemorating the site of the 1550 execution of the Catholic bishop of Hólar, Jón Arason, with two of his sons; later, in the north, we will see his church and a bell-tower which commemorates his execution. Before his death, he is supposed to have proclaimed, "The world is a bitter cheat if I must meet my death while Danes sit in judgment" (John Hood, Icelandic Church Saga, London, 1946, 155); I thought of Thomas More. We then left the region, to me one of the more pleasant of the country; its gentle valleys and distant lakes under low mountains give a comfortable beauty to the simple "cathedral," as simple and plain as a new England wooden church or Quaker meeting-house.

We stopped at Gullfoss, ("gold falls") where we all clambered for quite a while along assorted ledges next to the rushing waters, divided roughly into two falls, and I took pictures of basalt rifts and gorge. We are now again northeast of Skálholt, in a region of grass-covered black basalt, much rockier and more lava-covered but cut by beautiful, clear blue rivers. The falls are massive and Niagara-like, but mercifully without the latter's rotating restaurants nearby. Close by, we were so overpowered by sound and spray that we became a bit numb.

We drove on from Gullfoss to Geysir. Morris considered this a conventional tourist site, but I enjoyed it very much. There is something lively and interesting about the bright-reddish oxidized gravel and sand which cover the ground and hills beyond. The small geysir Strokkur ("churn") erupted several times, fairly unusual in such a brief period. Bill shared Morris's reaction, and walked down the hill for coffee, but returned later to look for Eugene. We passed many vigorously bubbling pots, some with pipes inserted, a comically direct conjunction of natural forces and human calculation. One hole was quite orange, and another reflected two shades of a deep translucent turquoise. The grass-covered nearby hills and their motley gathering of grazing sheep provide a more mundane background for these cheerfully bubbling fissures.

We came back once again past Laugarvatn, which shone beautifully under blue mountains in the sun, up the roads through glacial moraines, and west to Thingvellir ("Thing Fields"). Thingvellir is situated on an elevated fissured lava plain cut by Almannagjá ("Everyone-gorge"). Impressive mountains to the east look down on the river Öxará ("Axe River"), whose many little green islands gradually open out into Thingvallavatn (a "graben lake," formed in a depression between parallel faults). Stopping at this site was the event of the day, and, given its obvious significance for the Icelanders and for Morris, perhaps even of the trip. After seeing it twice, I appreciate its distinctiveness the more. Its massive basaltic colonnades gradually force each small human visitor down toward the lake. One understands clearly why the medieval Icelanders chose to set up their "booths" here each year.

We ate first in a scrub tree "forest" nearby, in light drizzle and chill, then drove to an outlook above the Öxará. The weather improved as we walked down through the solemn towering colonnades, and I realized that if I had been an Icelander in 1000 A. D., I too would have been impressed and frightened at the stern solemnity of the colonnade march, and by association by the "lögberg" and the laws proclaimed from it. We gathered around the "rock," beneath the flag of Iceland which overlooks flags of other Scandinavian nations, then passed over the Öxará to Flosi's Leap, incorrectly described by Morris's guides as the site of the law-rock. I leapt over a narrow part of the divide; he did have quite a jump, but desperation gives strength. Eugene tossed some aurar into the waters of Peningagjá ("Money Gorge"); some tourist conventions do seem universal.

We left Thingvellir the way Morris approached it, through a barren region to the north, past Meyjarsæti ("maiden's seat"), and up into a high plateau called "Kaldidalur" ("cold valley;" aptly named). The Thing-fields must have seemed even more impressive to him as he came down from this desert plateau. As we drove, the landscape became steadily more mountainous and deserted, and the road more rudimentary (several times Ruth remarked that the narrow gravel tracks had obviously been moved since she last came through). For a while we rode over lava-covered fields and gray sand slopes beneath folding hills, among them Skjaldbreiður ("Shield-broad"), in the distance on our right. We stopped once on the windswept heath (no cliché, here) to examine the ground by some frozen rivers (in August) and look up at the edges of Thórisjökull and Geitlandsjökull, the latter a small appendage to the vast Langjökull. Comparison with "moonscapes" here are quite appropriate. A traveller stranded here overnight without shelter might well freeze, even in midsummer. Morris surely felt a stronger version of our reaction, as he trotted slowly along in the wind and looked up at black cliffs and distant ice.

In its gloomy way, the region directly north of Thingvellir made me obscurely grateful for my human limitations, my little envelope of thought and warmth. Surely Morris was in fact as distracted here as he could possibly have been from his marital difficulties and other worries. In its deathly quiet way, the wilderness was, of course, also a test of self-reliance for these travellers in their late thirties. Less stubbornly resourceful people, deprived of our bus and emergency radio, would never take this leg of the trip for "pleasure." After this, Morris was better able to bring to his marital and business complications the mixture of sympathy, detachment, and determination they required.

After the long drive north through mountains, we descended into more green pastures above the Hvítá ("White River"), and berthed in various farmsteads near Húsafell, the three of us and Neville, Ed, Holly, and Karen at the venerable farm Fljótstunga ("river tongue"), where May Morris stayed in 1926. The farm was turf-roofed until 1933; the old homestead is now the barn. The next day the present co-proprietor Ingibjörg Bergthórsdóttir showed us a 1913 Longmans pocket edition of A Dream of John Ball, which May inscribed to her father, Bergthór Jónsson, along with a very attractive picture of herself weaving, which none of us had seen before. Good for May to have reached this outpost on horseback in her mid-60's. Ingibjörg explained that her grandfather Jón Pálsson actually met Morris, but he died when she was nine, and she had heard no stories from him of Morris's visit to Kalmanstunga, the adjacent farm. Her farm, nestled halfway up the hillside, appears in the Grettissaga, and has been worked continuously since the beginning of the millennium.

The evening conversation was interesting. Ingibjörg and her husband, an amiably silent man, were helped by their son, who studies agronomy in Norway, and

is uncertain whether or not he wants to take over the farm. Ingibjörg has a substantial library of books in English, Danish, and German, and as we watched the evening news, her brother, a meteorologist, appeared on television as the reader of the weather report. She also lent us a German thesis, written by a student who had stayed with them, which studied Fljótstunga as a representative middle-size farm.

A secondary school teacher visited us after dinner, with recordings of passages from Njála and other sagas by Einar Olafur Sveinsson, one of which I was happy to buy. The teacher then held forth rather sententiously on the virtues and faults of English and American literature, while the son grew visibly annoyed. We all departed the table except the son and Bill, who struggled to finish the conversation with a quiet handshake.

August 5th

. . . At one point Ruth led us to "Snorri's Stone," an impressively heavy rock which was presented to us as a traditional test of strength. A few members of the party tried vainly to budge it, and finally a group raised it together with great difficulty ("Drops of water turn a mill. . . ."). Near Reykholt Gary was able to visit with a ninety-year old farmer with whom he had stayed in 1974, a vigorous author of several books in which he expresses his firm belief in life on other planets. Gary smilingly returned with the latest. One can argue, after all, that the old farmer's projections are a reasonable variant of the common belief in Icelandic "huldufolk"--"hidden people." It would be mildly surprising if such a remote, sparsely populated, desolately beautiful landscape did not inspire fond fantasies of unseeable kinspeople (as in Ireland). By now all three of us were quite cold, and we were relieved to be able to buy scarves and hats in Reykholt.

After a pleasant indoor picnic lunch and conversation, we walked down to view Snorri Sturlusson's tenth-century bath, Snorralaug, a small circular pool formed by the hot spring Skrifla, and connected by a dark tunnel to a nearby farmhouse. Here, according to the Sturlunga Saga, Snorri was murdered in 1241, and the Norwegian sculptor Gustav Vigeland's dignified statue of him stands solemnly in front of the local school and the now-familiar simple church. Perhaps it is the influence of Snorri's stone, but I have come to find it depressing and ominous that all the stories we have heard so far are the exploits of knife-, club-, and spear-wielding men.

We finally stopped at Gilsbakki ("ravine bank"), where Ruth has worked most summers since she first came here as a student. We walked about in the large sheep shed and tried out clipping shears, as Ruth described the fatigue in the hands that comes from thousands of compressions in a few hours. We peered over the edge of the huge ravine that gives the area its name, and collected samples of wool from the fences. As we gathered together for group photographs by the ironclad shed, I looked up into the horse pastures nearby, and contemplated their many colored horses--white, speckled gray, black, and even one steel-gray (there are also steel-gray cows, new to me).

Afterwards we walked out to a secluded glen where the priest at Gilsbakki arranged to say his farewell to Morris and the others. We walked first along a river, past a bank with long smooth grasses, then down to a grass-edged pond used for swimming, and back over a short stretch of land to the river, where we rested in the leafy enclosure where Morris said goodbye.

Later in the afternoon, we visited Barnafoss ("children's falls;" legendary site of the drowning of two young children), cut through a lava plateau covered with floral vegetation to the deep turquoise river below. Above the falls is a kind of natural stone arch, only fully apparent to the eyes from above, a good configuration. The scene was less grand in scale than Gullfoss, but even more beautiful--in part, because more accessible. We all climbed a good deal, and took many pictures.

After dinner I wrote seven cards before I succumbed to sleep while working on an eighth, to Dick Smith. I felt sorry I hadn't been more informed about Morris's journey before the trip, but found the farm's stillness and remoteness very peaceful. As I sat at my makeshift desk, I could look out the window down the valley in the lingering summer light. Here too, I felt genuinely remote from

home--like Morris, I hope I may be able to confront it with greater wisdom and purpose on my return. In the stillness, one can to some extent waive needs for day-to-day reinforcement and recover a sense of the ultimate purposes of one's work.

August 6th

On the bus in the morning light, I was again struck by the beauty of the steep green pastures under the glacial mountains. We passed several lava fields, creviced in places but sometimes smooth, and covered everywhere with the characteristic lichen and spongy moss that is so pleasantly soft to walk on (if sometimes deceiving), and dotted with tiny flowers: white, yellow, and purple thyme, campion, gentian, cow's ear. In marshy areas a cottony-like tufted plant grows called bog-grass. The ground became bleaker and rockier, the bus bumped on, and we approached Surtshellir ("black cave"), Iceland's largest lava cave; according to the travel brochure, it is only two kilometers from our farm, hard to believe.

With Ingibjorg's son as a guide, we made our way to the rim, torch-sticks in hand. Parts of Surtshellir, it seems, provided refuges for outlaws; as we descended, thoughts of the lonely and gloomy life in its interior evoke Aristotelian pity and terror. We only ventured a few hundred feet into the cave--a cautious two-hour journey to the first outland "apartments" and back. At its large gaping mouth, boulders of lava clearly break off from time to time and join the debris, a sobering thought. Nigel bravely hoped to make the trip, with his painstakingly wrapped knees, but had to give up, and Edmund stayed behind to keep him company.

We crawled over large spiked stones for the length of a couple city blocks, across a glacier-carved aperture, through a darker, mossy passage, and up into a side-channel, where we found the "apartment." Finally, we stood cheerfully in the strange, room-like passages, and took pictures by the eerie, smoking light of our flares. Ruth narrated a tale in which some saga "heroes" blinded and castrated a luckless opponent in the cave, and it was all too easy to believe. The útlagar ("outlaws") lived by stealing sheep until they were finally hunted down and killed.

Surtshellir is in the region of the Grettissaga, and its bleakness makes understandable the tale of that grim hunted man. Grettir had few redeeming traits to my mind--his first significant act, at fourteen, was to kill someone who wouldn't let him mount a horse, and he seems to have killed almost everyone else he encountered thereafter--but he would have relished Ruth's tale. In their introduction to the saga, Magnússon and Morris describe him, too favorably, I believe, as "a man far above his fellows in all matters valued among his times and people, but also far above them all in ill-luck, for that is the conception that the story-teller has formed, of the great outlaw. . . he is the same man from beginning to end; thrust this way and that by circumstances, but little altered by them; unlucky in all things, yet made strong to bear all ill-luck; scornful of the world, yet capable of enjoyment, and determined to make the most of it. . . ." Morris had afterthoughts later, when he viewed one of Grettir's actual hideouts.

As we started back, Neville and Holly turned up missing, and we were worried till we reached the clearing midway, and learned they had emerged from another shaft further down the cave, after venturing through what for a while was complete darkness. As we approached the light at the end of the tunnel, I contemplated what human beings will do in the name of pleasure, edification, and "adventure." All but three of the group are older than we are, and I am impressed by their vigor. When we emerged, Edvige stretched out on the ground in exhaustion, and quoted in her own language the lines in which Dante celebrates his escape from hell: "And after this I saw the stars."

Later, back on the "road" we stopped to view a lava formation said to resemble a troll's face--a proboscid profile, framed by the usual scrub-birch, sturdy gnarled trees which struggled against the wind. We stopped for lunch at a sheltered lava formation nearby, and paused briefly at our farms to deposit those who did not want to rent riding horses, en route to Bjarnastaðir, a nearby farmstead with horses. We waited a while for the horses by the Hvítá, and contemplated again its many little falls and turquoise water. The sturdy Icelandic hestar--ponies, really--did well by us. Their large bodies and short legs maneuver

well over the stony ground. Eugene and I enjoyed our two hour circuit along a river and through some wooded flat terrain. Trained in four ordinary gaits, the horses can also do a fifth, more elegant "running walk," which one of the guides demonstrated for us. Bill awaited us back at Fljótstunga, and we ate our usual vegetarian meal of salad, bread, and skyr.

August 7th [To Geitaskard near Blönduós]

August 8th

From Geitaskard, we began the long drive to the other farmhouse on the other side of Blönduós, handsome again by its elegant bright blue firch, under layers of striated gray clouds. At one point Húnafjörður seemed to divide neatly into a shining glassy blue layer and another deep, rougher blue one close in. We then travelled down to Vatnsdalur, one of the most beautiful valleys we've seen (Morris's "Water-dale"). Green tun-steads surrounded neat red-roofed two- or three-building farmhouses, and Vatnsdalur's striking parallel rivers seemed to coil and undulate like ribbons, until the dale finally became a watery pasture of grassy islets and soft green mounds. Largish hills, formed by a landslide, appeared on our right all clustered together. We rode round a beautiful small, still blue lake into a region in which Grettir killed one of his opponents, Glámur the Undead, at Thórshall-stead. Afterwards, we entered a beautiful broad valley, green and yellow-green, with carefully ploughed fields and dirt heaped boundaries (from digging for drainage) and passed several diminutive waterfalls, clear and dignified against the dark brown and gray rock. For waterscapes, this has been our best day yet.

At the top of Vatnsdalur we continued south past Hóp and Hausar, and passed the site of the temple of Ingimund, a Celtic priest who made an early attempt to Christianize Iceland. At our stopping point at Forsaeludalur ("shadow dale"), we stood together on a knoll looking south toward a cluster of conflating ridges and hills. "Shadow-dale" is the name of a valley in Roots of the Mountains, and this one looked appropriately lush and protecting; Morris obviously shared Icelanders' interest in the differences between the "characters" of one valley and another.

. . . . We then drove further north to Thingeyra, site of the first Icelandic monastery in 1133, now marked only by a farmhouse and nineteenth-century church. When I walked along the tufted fields to find a good angle for a picture, I marvelled that the crevices in the ground were so large that rivulets could run through them, and walked with care. Against the headlands, with the river behind and Húnavatn to the left, the site looked indeed like a dignified outpost of early Christian history. I could imagine readily enough that one might embrace Christianity here, at the edge of the known world, as an explanation for the meaning of one's quiet and isolated life. When we left, we again drove past the firch and small mounds, and around the Hóp's handsome large oval of deep blue. We passed endless sheep, of course, often mere white and black specks in the distance, usually one or two black in a cluster of white. I saw one sheep frolic and jump, and laughed aloud.

At Borgarvirki ("castle fortress") we unwrapped our lunch, then climbed the huge castle-like formation atop a hill at the head of the peninsula. It was windy and cold on a mild August day, and I felt astounded and depressed to think that humans had built this laborious structure, workers and slaves dragging huge black stones painfully upwards to set them on the others. Borgarvirki is constructed in a rough crater-like circle, with a smaller stone roomlike structure within. From the crest of the fortress we had another beautiful outlook, 360 degrees, headlands to the left and right, the firchs in front of us, and Hóp behind. According to Morris's map, his group didn't reach the virki, but he described the legend of its founding, and stayed at two farmhouses in the area, one nearby and another at a site we passed on our route south.

At five or so in the afternoon we arrived at Hvammstangi, a town of seven hundred people. All seemed cheerful until our driver Stefan severed a tendon in one of the baths. Although ordered by the doctor to return home, he managed with some pain and discomfort to drive us home. As we returned through the Waterdale region towards Blönduós, the rivers shone silver in the end-of-day light. At Geitaskard, we had a late dinner about 8:15, and talked a bit afterwards to unwind. I then wrote in this journal until about 11:30 p. m. One week of this strenuous and interesting trip is over.