

WILLIAM MORRIS SOCIETY IN THE UNITED STATES

NEWSLETTER

January 2013



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On the cover: Elizabeth Siddal's Jewelry Box for Jane Morris, under "Water Willow" by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1871. Image courtesy of the Society of Antiquaries, London.

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, Linda K. Hughes, Elizabeth C. Miller, Mark Samuels Lasner and B. J. Robinson. Please submit articles and items of interest to us@morrissociety.org.

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A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

New Year's greetings to everyone and many thanks to those of you who responded to our fall email blast and ballot for 2013 William Morris Society/US Governing Committee members. We have a terrific group of people serving on the Committee this year, and I am excited to continue my Presidency with their guidance. I will be working closely with Elizabeth Miller and John Walsdorf, Vice-presidents for Programs and Public Relations respectively. Both Liz and Jack have served on the Committee for a year or more and bring a solid understanding of the organization to their new positions. We welcome two new members to the Committee this year. Clara Finley has served 'behind the scenes' for the last year

as "Social Media Coordinator." She will continue to manage our Facebook and Twitter accounts as well as to become more familiar with our website, as she moves towards taking over these responsibilities from long-time Committee member Florence Boos. John Plotz brings his significant academic expertise on Morris to the Governing Committee, and we look forward to the insights he will bring to all of our operations.

We hosted two successful lectures in New York this past fall. In September, Chris Wilk, Keeper of Furniture, Textiles and Fashion at the Victoria and Albert Museum and a trustee of the Emery Walker House, presented on "Emery Walker, William Morris and the best surviving Arts and Crafts interior in Britain." In October, Perdita Hunt, Director of the Watts Gallery, and Richard Ormond, noted Victorian scholar and Chairman of the Watts Gallery Trust, spoke jointly on the artist George Frederick Watts, in "An Artist's Village, Compton, England: A Center of 19th-century Art and Design." Clara Finley writes in more detail on these talks further on in the Newsletter.

Several events are in the planning process for spring 2013 including a March 26th visit to the National Gallery of Art in Washington to tour the exhibition, *The Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design, 1848-1900*. We plan to continue our slate of lecture offerings in New York, beginning with a talk by Frank Sharp, co-editor of the forthcoming edition of *The Collected Letters of Jane Morris*, "Forgiving Janey": A New View of a Remarkable Woman," scheduled for March 6th (for both events, see the announcements on page 3).

At the writing of this letter we are in the last stages of planning an exciting series of panels and off-site events including our annual meeting in tandem with the Modern Language Association conference, this year to be held in Boston. I look forward to the opportunity to meet many of our members in person at this event.

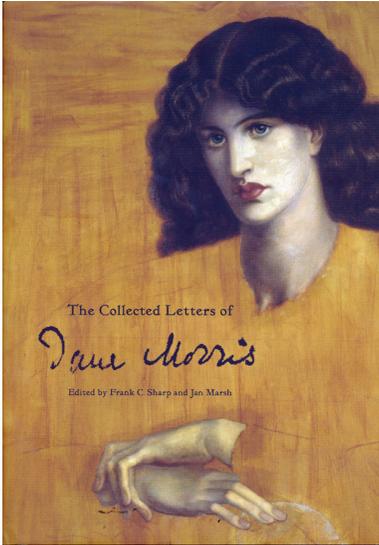
In the spirit of William Morris, I wish you all "the beauty of life" this New Year!

Margaretta Frederick

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THE UNITED STATES ONLINE AT:

www.morrissociety.org

William Morris Society Events 2013



NEW YORK

“Forgiving Janey”: A New View of a Remarkable Woman
Lecture by FRANK SHARP

Tuesday, 26 March, 6 p.m.
Room 523, Butler Library
Columbia University, 535 West 114th Street
Reception to follow

Sponsored by the William Morris Society & Columbia University Libraries

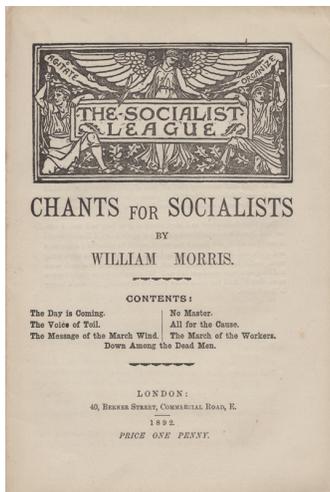
Jane Morris has traditionally been treated harshly by scholars writing on William Morris. When not the subject of outright attack, she has been dismissed as unintelligent, or unimportant. Frank Sharp will discuss his work with Jan Marsh on *The Collected Letters of Jane Morris* (Boydell Press, 2012) and how the wealth of new information provided by the letters reveals a politically engaged (though disenfranchised), culturally aware woman who was involved and assisted in most of William Morris’s endeavors. Her ability to recreate herself given her childhood of dire poverty was accomplished through her own keen intelligence. Sharp will argue for a major re-evaluation of Jane Morris in light of this new evidence. FRANK SHARP is an independent scholar who has written extensively on Morris and his circle.



WASHINGTON, DC

The Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design, 1848–1900
Special Exhibition Tour with DIANE WAGGONER

Saturday, 20 April, 11 a.m.
National Gallery of Art
West Building (meet at 4th Street entrance)
Join us for lunch afterwards



The first major survey of the art of the Pre-Raphaelites in the United States features 130 paintings, sculptures, works on paper, books, and decorative art objects—including both iconic and little-seen works by Millias, Hunt, Madox Brown, Rossetti, Siddal, Morris, and Burne-Jones. In addition to this splendid exhibition from Tate Britain, we shall also see the Gallery’s own special installation, Pre-Raphaelites and the Book, which focuses on poetry, illustration, and book design. DIANE WAGGONER, associate curator in the department of photographs at the National Gallery of Art, was responsible for the 2010–11 exhibition *The Pre Raphaelite Lens*.

Both events are free and open to the public.
For more details and to RSVP contact Mark Samuels Lasner,
marksl@udel.edu, (302) 831-3250.

EXHIBITIONS

The *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design, 1848-1900* is coming to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. It is a version of the Tate Britain exhibition held last Fall, with a second display on Pre-Raphaelites and the Book. Dates of the exhibition: February 17th through May 19, 2013, with a symposium on 8-9 March. For more details about the exhibition, please visit the National Portrait Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. The Society has arranged a group visit with a tour by Diane Waggoner, associate curator of photographs, at 11 a.m. on March 26th (for more details see the announcement on page three.)

How *We Might Live: The Vision of William Morris*, an exhibition at Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park will continue from September of 2012 through July 13, 2013. This exhibition examines the life and vision of Morris with a comprehensive survey of his writings and much work from the Kelmscott Press, including rare and unique items and the Kelmscott *Chaucer*.

American *Little Magazines of the 1890s: A Revolution in Print* will be held at the Grolier Club on February 20th through April 27th of 2013. This exhibition features Morris and Pre-Raphaelite related material.

MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS 2013 & 2014

A report of the Morris Society sessions and events at the Modern Language Association Convention, held in Boston 3-6 January, 2013, will appear in the summer *Newsletter*.

The 2014 Modern Language Association Convention will be held in Chicago 9-12 January. For this we will have one guaranteed session, and will apply for a second, co-sponsored session. Here are the calls for papers:

Morris and the Arts and Crafts in the Midwest: Papers are sought on any aspect of Morris's influence or associations with the Midwest in literature, art, or politics, as well as that of his family or associates. Please send abstracts by 15 March to florence-boos@uiowa.edu.

Pre-Raphaelite, Aesthetic, or Fin de Siècle Children's Books, a session co-sponsored with the Children's Literature Association: Please send abstracts on any aspect of text, illustration, or design by 15 March to florence-boos@uiowa.edu and philnel@ksu.edu.

FALL TALKS AT THE GROLIER CLUB

The Society has had a very British autumn, with two well-attended talks by UK guest speakers at The Grolier Club (est. 1884) in Manhattan. The lectures were both about special legacies, in brick and mortar, of great Victorian artists and craftsmen: buildings that are in urgent need of funds today. The talks were both followed by wine, warm chatter, and platters of fruit and cheese.

On September 10th, in the book-lined "Morris Room" of the Grolier Club, Christopher Wilk from the Emery Walker Trust spoke about 7 Hammersmith Terrace, Emery Walker's home from 1903. The crowd was treated to Wilk's deep knowledge and light humorous touches as he went through a gamut of Walker-related visuals. The images of 7 Hammersmith were a particular treat, as the house boasts the only authentic Arts & Crafts interior remaining in Britain.

The audience learned about Walker's friendship with Morris, and the extent of Walker's influence on Kelmscott Press activities, especially the design of typefaces. Wilk also spoke of Walker's own work, including his Doves Press, and recounted the fate of Walker's Venetian-inspired Doves Type, which was thrown into the Thames by Thomas Cobden-Sanderson.

The talk finished on a somber note, as Wilk revealed that the Emery Walker House is in dire need of funding. Tours through the delicate site are of necessity small, and so revenue from the tours cannot cover the expenses of preserving the house. To see photos, and to donate, see emerywalker.org.uk, and go to "How you can help." It would truly be a gift to the future of Arts & Crafts studies to keep this house well maintained and accessible.

On the 3rd of October two speakers visited the Grolier Club from the Watts Gallery in Compton, Surrey. The Director, Perdita Hunt, and the Chairman of the Trustees, Richard Ormond CBE, spoke about the gallery and its surrounding "artist's village," as well as the work—both artistic and progressive—of G.F. Watts and his wife, the craftswoman Mary Seton Watts.

Highlights of the talk were the parade of images of Watts's paintings, accompanied by Ormond's excellent commentary; images of Mary's sumptuous, Celtic-inspired interior for the Cemetery Chapel; a photo of Watts in a black armband, which he wore in a period of mourning for all humanity; and Hunt's remarkable stories about the recent restoration of the gallery.

Until recently, the Watts residence Limnerslease, which also contains Watts's studio, had remained in private hands. Happily, however, it has now come up for sale. In light of this opportunity, Hunt presented a powerful appeal for funds to buy the last set piece of the Watts village. To donate to this time-sensitive cause, visit wattsgallery.org.uk, and follow the "Support Us" and "The Limnerslease Project" links.

ELIZABETH SIDDAL'S JEWELRY BOX FOR JANE MORRIS

Paul Acker, Saint Louis University

Visitors to William Morris's country home at Kelmscott Manor may recall the jewelry box or casket kept beneath Rossetti's portrait of Jane Morris, *Water Willow* (see cover). The decoration on the box was designed and painted by Elizabeth Siddal, perhaps with the assistance of her lover (and in 1860, husband) Dante Gabriel Rossetti (although his contribution is not specified in the catalogue raisonné by Surtees), and given to Jane Burden Morris, probably in honor of her wedding to William in 1859. Recently the casket was displayed at the Yale Center for British Art as part of an exhibition called "Making History: Antiquaries in Britain," sponsored by the Society of Antiquaries of London, which among other things owns and manages

Kelmscott Manor. The casket, measuring a "little under a foot long and seven inches high" and modeled on a medieval reliquary, has a gabled lid and is painted on half its sides with the following images, all of them illustrative of "medieval romance," as the exhibition catalogue has it:

Front (three panels)

Left: man in orange gown with belted dagger presents a golden sphere to crowned lady in a white gown; two crowned ladies beside her, one in a red gown with blue cloak, the other in a green gown. Based on Harley MS 4431; see below.

Center: man in frilled green/blue cloak takes the arm of a woman in a red gown, a crenellated wall behind them. Based on Harley MS 4431; see below.

Right: two women (or possibly a woman and a man) standing, one in a red gown with blue cloak, the other in a blue gown. Moon above and reflected below.

Front lid (three panels)

Left: man and woman embracing and kissing in a boat, a sail behind them, moon in sky and water.

Center: decorative panel, yellow suns behind blue clouds, red background.

Right: woman in white, with double peaked headdress and arms resting on balcony, looks down at a man looking up, his hands clasped in an entreating gesture; man on balcony rests his head on his hand.



End Panel

Left: 4 women dancing in a ring; standing figure to left, two seated figures to right.

The remaining sides (back; right end; back side of lid) are unpainted.

In 1984, Jennifer Harris reported an important discovery regarding this casket, namely that the painting on the front center panel was based on a miniature from a medieval manuscript known to have been popular with Morris, Burne-Jones and Rossetti: British Library Harley MS 4431, f. 376. The manuscript is from c. 1414 and contains works by Christine de Pizan accompanied by many illustrations. But Siddal could hardly have painted the wood panel while consulting the manuscript, so another sort of facsimile had to intervene, presumably a rough sketch and/or a watercolor that would reproduce the original's palette. As it happens, such a watercolor survives, painted not by Rossetti but by one of his close associates at this time, Frederick Sandys. I am inclined to think Sandys made this painting for Rossetti, although it is also possible Rossetti consulted the manuscript on his own.

Harris suspected the front left panel might also derive from Harley MS 4431, and compared f. 48, which shows a man kneeling before three women. But in fact (and this is easier to verify now that the MS miniatures are all online), the panel derives from f. 128v, which depicts the Judgment of Paris. The golden sphere is an apple and the three crowned ladies are medieval versions of the goddesses Aphrodite/Venus (the winner of the beauty contest), Athena/Minerva and Hera/Juno.

The other painted panels do not look to derive from the Harley MS, although some of the costumes, especially the double peaked white headdress (front lid right), may do so. The remaining paintings are more likely medievalist compositions designed by Siddal in association with Rossetti. The one quite different composition, that of the ring of dancers on the left end of the casket, strikes me as the one most likely to have been designed by Rossetti himself.

Foot Notes

1 The accompanying digital images were taken by Vanya Daniels for the Society of Antiquaries. I thank Julia Dudkiewicz for arranging that I might see them, and the Society of Antiquaries for permission to reproduce.

2 The casket appears in May Morris's will (d. 1938) and is described as "Mrs. Morris's jewel-case, painted by D.G.R. & Mrs. Rossetti" (Dufty, 111). It was painted presumably in 1859 or shortly thereafter (Siddal died in 1862). Jan Marsh has suggested alternatively that Rossetti gave the box to Jane Morris after Siddal's death "as a memento" (74).

3 I was not able to see the exhibition but I thank Prof. Valerie Allen of John Jay College for doing so on my behalf and answering some questions about the casket.

4 See Harris 68; 70-71; see also Banham and Harris, 120-121; Calloway compares also medieval strong-boxes (175). Harris suggests the casket itself may have been designed by Philip Webb, who of course designed Morris's Red House, where William and Jane resided after their wedding.

5 Calloway, 175. The front left and center panels are the best preserved; all the others are difficult to make out.

6 These shapeless standing figures are more typical of Siddal than those in the two panels based on the Harley MS; see e.g. "Study for Jephtha's Daughter," Marsh, 56 no. 23.

7 The boat is long and shallow, like those in Siddal's *The Passing of Arthur and The Rowing Boat* (Marsh, 51; 69), both c. 1855.

8 The woman in Rossetti's (much later) painting *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-78, Fogg Museum of Art) likewise rests her arms on a balcony, looking down at a lover. Siddal also sketched *The Blessed Damozel*, but the woman extends her arms horizontally from her shoulders, resting them on a trellis (see Marsh, 48).

9 From the photos I have seen, the back panels certainly look unpainted, and a restoration report by Rachel Scott likewise mentions the "unpainted back panel." Harris however asserts that "the paintings on the rear" have been "almost completely obliterated by an unsuccessful previous restoration" (68).

10 The miniature illustrates the lover and lady from "Cent balades d'amant & de dame."

11 Lucy Freedman Sandler informs me she recalls as recently as the late sixties that one could have a manuscript placed in a glass case in the British Museum and then copy it with watercolors. Siddal does not in fact reproduce the color palette; in the original, the man's coat is red and the woman's dress is blue; Siddal renders these as green and red respectively. Siddal includes the crenellated wall in the background but not the rose trellis.

12 The watercolor is owned by the Birmingham Art Gallery and may be seen on www.pre-raphaelites.org (part of the gallery's website, www.bmag.org), where it is called "Scene from a fifteenth century Illuminated Manuscript." Another Sandys watercolor given the same title derives from Harley MS 4431, f. 143, illustrating "The Duke of True Love" from Christine de Pizan's *Le Duc des vrais amants*.

13 Siddal includes the yellow flecks on the lady's headdress, where Sandys does not.

14 This and many other mythological themes illustrate Christine's "L'Épître Othéa."

15 Cf. Christine's own headdress, depicted on fols. 3 and 4.

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Paul Acker is a poet and professor of English at Saint Louis University. His books include *Revising Oral Theory: Formulaic Composition in Old English and Old Icelandic Verse* (1998) and *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology* (co-ed. 2002).

A MODERNIST ECHO: BRYHER'S
VISA FOR AVALON AND
MORRIS'S *EARTHLY PARADISE*

Elizabeth Lloyd-Kimbrel

In 1965 the then well-known British historical novelist Bryher wrote an atypical novella, a “science fantasy” titled *Visa for Avalon* that was published in the United States but never in the United Kingdom. At the time, Bryher’s British publishers claimed that the book was too different from her usual work and the British reading public wouldn’t buy it, literally and figuratively. More probably (and as Bryher suspected), the topographical, social, and political parallels to real life in Britain were a bit too close for comfort. Tightly written and with a sly humor, *Visa for Avalon* is a near-contemporary story about the impending end of a comfortable and inattentive way of life, of people caught between an uncaring, impotent status quo (the Government) and an uncaring, destructive avant-garde (the Movement). This precise yet fictive world was never a utopia, but it was once a green and pleasant land that is now approaching a dystopian tipping point, much as Camelot succumbed to its internal divisions.

Part from Bryher’s use of “Avalon” in the book’s title, however, any mythic elements in her recounting of ordinary lives turned desperate seem ancillary, if noticed at all. But Bryher’s story plays on several levels, and she trusts her readers will be more aware than her characters. For *Visa for Avalon* is Bryher’s variation on a theme, a rumination on “the Matter of Britain” that becomes “what’s the matter with Britain.” Like a verso of William Morris’s persona at the opening of *The Earthly Paradise*, Bryher the far-from idle singer means to resurrect—out of empty days and heavy trouble and bewildering care—names no longer remembered, memories taken quite away. And like T. H. White’s backward-looking Merlin instructing the juvenile once and future king, she offers, through the particular, a cautionary tale for Wart and all, a tale both Arthurian and Delphic, recalling that oracle’s confounding challenge: know thyself.

Born Annie Winifred Ellerman, the daughter of one of the wealthiest men in Britain, Bryher took her authorial (and ultimately legal) name from the smallest of her beloved ancient Isles of Scilly, which are located thirty miles off the tip of Cornwall. Bryher believed in the importance of origins, of remembering beginnings. In her 1958 memoir *The Heart to Artemis*, she writes that the original “Matter of Britain” goes back to our remote past when traces of religions brought in by foreign traders under the Romans still existed in isolated Welsh

and Cornish valleys. Most scholars now work on the later versions that arose after the Norman Conquest and that were deeply affected by the Christianity of that time. To like and study one or the other is a matter of individual preference, but it is unscientific to ignore the fact that the first tales belong to an age when Norman Christianity was unknown in Britain.

To Bryher—being more chronicler than romancer—the Matter of Britain was a composite story, communal and individual, ancient and ongoing, Arthurian and older, idyllic ideal and veiled warning. The chivalric Arthur and his cohorts came to be the principal embodiment of national memory, but the elements were in place before Arthur formally had his name, when he was part of an earlier time. In her historical novels, Bryher retold Britain’s story from ground level—where people did not know they were becoming part of “history”—and ranged from the sixth century to the twentieth, without enchantments, without Arthur himself, but with those qualities of identity, honor, hope, tenacity, glory, and tragedy that became his, and that make the tradition timeless and adaptable. So when she decided to write *Visa for Avalon*—and as befits one grounded in history and originally trained in archaeology—she took a well-known, complex, and highly elaborated-upon idea and brought it down to earth, closer to its origins, simultaneously de-mystifying it and making it magical in a different way.

Bryher’s historical fictions use the past as a prism through which some present might be viewed, not unlike William Morris or T. H. White. With *Visa for Avalon*, though, she reverses and uses the future to glance at a present that seems to know no past, using the Arthurian legend as subliminal commentary. Her little science fantasy is unusual within its genre because it is a before story—before the fall, the terror, the loss—the change is impending, but it has not yet happened; there is only, as Layamon’s *Brut* has it, the threat of Mordred with his hordes, waiting in the rain on the banks of the Tamar.

In legend, Arthur is taken to Avalon only after he has fought hard against the evil that would destroy his ideal. The principal protagonists in *Visa for Avalon* do not fight back against the Movement or the Government. There is no heroic Arthur-figure, but there are several ordinary people who put themselves in jeopardy to help others—Lawson the consul, who seems very by-the-book, but who knows what the situation requires; Bert the canny cabdriver, who risks his safety for two strangers and who may be the anticipation of an underground effort against the Movement; Alex, who plays fast and loose with the rules and earns, but also must choose, his return to Avalon; Augier, who

manipulates the airport authorities; and Owen who can “see through the sky.”

With Augier, Bryher explicitly invokes Ogier the Dane, national hero and Charlemagne’s invincible paladin, who in old age is brought by Morgan Le Fay to Avalon to be rejuvenated and meets Arthur there, according to the Continental romances; who sleeps beneath Elsinore awaiting Denmark’s call, according to Danish legend; and who wins new life and lives happily ever after with his faery wife Morgan Le Fay “in the happy land of Avallon,” according to William Morris’s *The Earthly Paradise*. *The Earthly Paradise* is itself a story of wanderers fleeing a pestilence and seeking a “nameless city in a distant sea.” It is no accident that *Visa for Avalon* starts in late summer, at the end of holiday time. Bryher greatly admired Morris and means to recall particularly the August section of *The Earthly Paradise* that recounts the story of Ogier. She even says as much on the flyleaf of the 1965 edition of the novel, a sideways dare to her readers. (In all tellings of Ogier’s story, his great adversary is the Saracen champion Bréhier—which looks and sounds quite like “Bryher” and may be an inside joke on the author’s part.) In *Visa for Avalon*, true to his legendary persona, Augier is impatient of bureaucrats and protocols, a native of Avalon who does not like being away from it or his wife for too long, but he is dutiful and willing to risk danger to ferry complete strangers to safety.

In Ruan, Bryher’s historical novel of sixth century Wales and Cornwall, a sadder but wiser minor character says, “Ice and fog are the last ordeals on the sea.... What happens when you reach the island is another story and I may not speak of it.” The island could be the loadstone rock about which Morris’s sailors are also circumspect, for “upon no shipman’s card its name is writ, / Though worn-out mariners will speak of it / Within the ingle on the winter’s night.” It could be safe harbor or dangerous shoals, or both. In *The Earthly Paradise*, Ogier confronts “ill sea” and “fearful storm” (figuratively and literally), earning an island of love and happiness and eternity. What happens next in *Visa for Avalon* is left to the refugees—and to the reader’s imagination about what awaits, about who may, or may not, come again.

1 Susan McCabe, “Introduction,” *Visa for Avalon* (Ashfield, MA: Paris Press, 2004; New York: Harcourt, Brace, World, 1965), xiv-xv. Pagination for *Visa for Avalon* is from the 2004 edition of the work.

2 The Matter of Britain is the name given collectively to the stories (both chronicles and romances) that comprise the legendary history of the British Isles, centering for the most part on King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Tied to Britain’s national identity - its idea of self and of honor - the phrase first appears in a 12th century Breton *chanson de*

geste, “Chanson de Saines”: “There are but three literary cycles that no one should be without: the matters of France, of Britain, and of great Rome.”

3 Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis: A Writer’s Memoirs [Artemis]* (Ashfield, MA: Paris Press, 2006; London: Collins, 1963), 161. Pagination for *The Heart to Artemis* is taken from the 2006 edition of the work. In her youth, Bryher was influenced by the works of G.A. Henty and Jessie L. Weston, especially Weston’s work on the Gawain legend.

4 *Civilians* (1927 - London during World War I), *Beowulf* (1948 - the London Blitz), *The Fourteenth of October* (1952 - Saxon view of 1066), *The Player’s Boy* (1953 - Elizabethan/Jacobean theatre), *Ruan* (1960 - 6th century Wales, Cornwall, Scilly Isles), and *This January Tale* (1966 - Britain after the Battle of Hastings).

5 Readers of Bryher’s *Ruan* may be forgiven, though, if they see Arthur in the unnamed king who is being mourned and buried on the Isles of the Dead at the start of the novel, and whose death marks the beginning of the end for the old ways and the old religion (e.g., Ruan’s uncle, the Druidic priest who was advisor to the dead king, just like Merlin was to Arthur).

6 World War I changed the world and Bryher turned from archaeology to writing, publishing, and philanthropy, becoming an intimate and integral part of the ex-patriate artistic and intellectual community in Europe during the 1920s and 30s.

7 In Geoffrey of Monmouth’s telling, Arthur may yet return; in Malory’s, he dies.

8 *Visa*, 148.

9 William Morris, “August: Ogier the Dane,” *The Earthly Paradise: A Poem*, Vol. 1 [of two volumes] (London: F.S. Ellis, 1868), 647.

10 Morris, “Prologue: The Wanderers,” *The Earthly Paradise*, 5.

11 Also (and as Bryher well knew because of her direct experience of them), for Britain World War I started in August and World War II started just at August’s end, on the first of September.

12 Ameer Ali’s *A Short History of the Saracens* was preferred childhood reading for the young Miss Ellerman. See *Artemis*, 75.

13 Bryher, *Ruan* (New York: Pantheon, 1960), 117.

14 Morris, “Ogier,” *The Earthly Paradise*, 626.

This article is adapted/excerpted from Elizabeth Lloyd-Kimbrel’s essay, “Come Again? The Contexts of Bryher’s *Visa for Avalon*” in the *Utopial Dystopia* issue of *Topic: The Washington & Jefferson College Review* (Summer/Fall 2010). Ms. Lloyd-Kimbrel is an independent scholar specializing in biography and British literature, as well as a poet, editor, and longtime WMS-USA member. She is also an ABD who, after many years away, is returning to the doctoral fold in hopes of completing a dissertation, perhaps on Bryher’s historical novels.

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WITH WILLIAM MORRIS IN ICELAND: THE FIRST WEEK

Florence S. Boos
Photography by Gary Aho

In honor of the William Morris Society's forthcoming trip to Iceland 18-27 July 2013, we are reprinting the following account of a 1986 Morris Society trip which originally appeared in our April 1987 Newsletter.

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 had slept about 2 1/2 hours on the plane; 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 Loftleiðir 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 lava-fields, 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.



Law Rock at Thingvellir, August 4th

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.



Fording a river near Thórsmörk, August 2nd

August 2nd

We stopped briefly at the high falls at Seljalandsfoss (either “seals’-landfalls” 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 *púfur* 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 Coles, 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 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 dessert, 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 Bergþórshvoll ("Bergthor's knoll"), near Njál'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 Njál's farmhouse may have stood. The little hill quietly overlooked plains which extended south to the Vestmannaeyjar ("Westmann Islands"). En route to another waterfall, Gluggafoss ("Window Falls"), which Morris may have visited, we stopped at Stóra Dimon, 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. (II. 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 millennium seem to fall away.

I began to realize that this little "byggð" below the road—farmhouse, iron-sided 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.

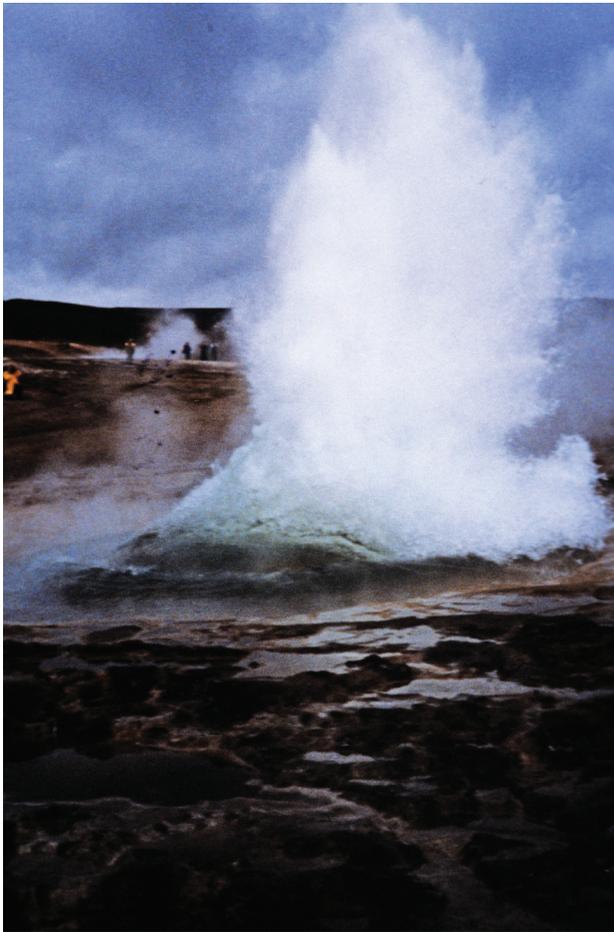
We also entered a parlor, relatively light (I now realize) as such rooms go; a room which may have been used for eating; another for storage; a kind of cellar with side huts, probably used to store dried food; and a room which seemed a workplace. A small turf-roofed buttery was set directly on a small 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



Geysir in Action, August 4th

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 with its 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 8 photographs 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 dignified "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 dark 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 intervention. 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 at Laugarvatn, which shone beautifully under blue mountains in the sun, up the roads through glacial moraines, and west to Þingvellir (“Thing Fields”). Þingvellir 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 Þingvallavatn (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 Peningjá (“Money Gorge”); some tourist conventions do seem universal.

We left Þingvellir the way Morris approached it, through a barren region to the north, past Keyjarsæti (“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 Þorissjökull and Geitlandsjökull, the latter a small appendage to the vast Langjökull. Comparison with “moonscapes” here are quite appropriate. A traveler 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 Þingvellir 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 earlier travelers 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 Hvíta (“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 Longman pocket edition of *A Dream of John Ball*, which May had 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 Kalmannstunga, 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. Ingibjorg 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. Ingibjorg 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 and exchanged 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 Sturluson’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 [former Honorary Secretary of the UK Society]. 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 purpose on my return. In the stillness, one can to some extent waive need for day-to-day reinforcement and recover a sense of the ultimate purposes of one’s endeavors.

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



Surtshellir, August 6th

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 evoked 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 passageway, 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 proboscis 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 compact bodies and short legs maneuvered 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 skýr.

August 7th-8th [To Geitaskarð near Blönduós]

From Geitaskarð, we began the long drive to the other farmhouse on the other side of Blönduós, handsome again by its elegant bright blue firth, under layers of striated gray clouds. At one point Húnafljórdur seemed to divide neatly into a shining glassy blue layer and another deep, rougher blue one close in. We then

traveled down to Vatnsdalur, one of the most beautiful valleys we've seen (Morris's "Water-dale"). Green tunsteads 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 Þingeyra, 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 marveled 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 firth 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 room-like structure within. From the crest of the fortress we had another beautiful outlook, 360 degrees, headlands to the left and right, the firths 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 Ahvammstangi, 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 Geitaskarð, 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.

Update

In the 26 years since this journey Nigel Kelsey and Edmund Grant (d. 2007), Socialist Party activist and William Morris Society member, have died. Holly Dworkin Cooley received the 2007 William Morris Society Award.

Florence Boos is the author of The Design of William Morris's The Earthly Paradise (1991) and editor of several of Morris's works, including The Earthly Paradise (2001). She is the general editor of the Morris Online Edition, <http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu>, and her book Love and Work Enough: The Early Writings of William Morris is forthcoming from Ohio State UP.

RETURN TO NOWHERE: REVISITING MORRIS'S UTOPIAN ROMANCE

George W.J. Duncan

[continued from January 2012 Newsletter]

Chapter 13

The time had come for explanations. Ellen began: 'So then, neighbour, what brings you here - and if I might ask - and now?'

The way she asked the question was peculiar, implying that she thought that there was something out of the ordinary about me, and my visit. Of course, that was completely correct, but I had no way of knowing just

how much she had figured out. I thought back to when Claire had commented that her mother would certainly want to speak to me. Did Claire also have an inkling of the unexplainable circumstances of my visit?

I told much the same story I had related at the Hammersmith Guest House the previous day, but at the same time I sensed that I could be more transparent with Ellen.

‘I’m sure the name William Guest must mean something to you - am I right?’

Ellen’s eyes opened wide at this remark and she gave a quick, knowing glance toward her daughter. Both women nodded yes, but didn’t say a word, waiting anxiously to hear what I would say next.

Sensing their eagerness and approval, I continued, ‘It seems he visited here some twenty years ago, and after he returned home, he wrote a book about his experiences. I read his book, and wanted to visit as well. To see what he saw, to meet the interesting people he met. So here I am.’

‘Did you get here the same way? That is, do you know how William Guest travelled to our - um - time?’

As I suspected, Ellen did understand that William Guest was a man from another time, and thus to the people of Nowhere, a time-traveller. Obviously, she

had shared this information with Claire, and maybe old Hammond knew the same thing too, and recorded it in his leather-bound notebook. However, based on the reaction of the people I met at the Guest House, they were not privy to this information. It now made complete sense that Claire gave me old Hammond’s notebook to read so as to prepare me for meeting her mother, so that I would not be on my guard about discussing the actual circumstances of my visit.

Instead of answering the question about my means of arrival in Nowhere, I decided to offer some information about William Guest and who he really was.

‘Your guest, that is, the man who invited you to address him as William Guest, was actually named William Morris. He told all of you that he was originally from England, and that was indeed true, but by way of explanation said that he had been away for some time, and upon returning, found his home country much changed.’

Ellen spoke up and said, ‘After spending much time with Guest, and talking to him a great deal, I did realize that he used to live here, since he was so familiar with many local places, even though they were greatly changed from what he remembered. But the things he described were from a time too long ago to be directly known by any living person - even someone as long-lived as our old Hammond.’



Edmund Hort New, Bird's-Eye View of Kelmscott Manor, photomechanical engraving, ca. 1899 from the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, on loan to the University of Delaware Library.

I completed her thought: ‘So you figured out that Guest was some sort of time-traveller.’

‘Well, yes, that’s right,’ Ellen said, ‘though I must say that it seems quite impossible. In all my reading I have never come across a true account of time travel.’

‘Until now, I guess,’ I stated.

Chapter 14

Ellen, who had been sitting on the edge of the table-desk while we spoke, suddenly got up and suggested that we go for a walk. It seemed as though she wanted to talk some more about William Guest and his mysterious appearance (and disappearance), but not necessarily in the company of her daughter.

She slipped on a pair of sandals that stood near the door, and after saying goodbye to Claire, we went down the hall and made our way outside. Claire stayed behind to continue the project that she was working on when I appeared and turned her day upside down. I looked forward to maybe seeing her later.

We talked as we left the building, and walked along the streets surrounding the British Museum, scarcely noticing other people or our surroundings as we focussed on each other.

‘Tell me more about William Morris,’ Ellen asked, ‘I mean, who he was - really.’

‘What year is this?’ I asked, just to get the timeline straight.

‘It’s 2122. Why is that important?’

I began by saying that I didn’t know William Morris personally, but I did know of him, because he was a person of considerable historical importance.

‘William Morris wrote *News from Nowhere* in 1890. He was born in 1834, so he was in his mid fifties by that time. His visit, apparently his only visit to your time, happened twenty years ago, which would be 2102.’

Ellen was taken aback by just how far back in time Morris had come from.

‘1834. That’s astonishing. He was born even before Victoria was crowned. So very long ago. Such a different time.’

‘Morris was a man of such diverse talents, it’s sometimes difficult to describe who he was. You know, he is held in such high esteem, that societies have been formed in several countries to celebrate his life and accomplishments, long after the time of his death.’

Ellen looked sad at the mention of Morris’ death. I suppose she had not considered that he had passed on, but imagined that somehow he still lived on, in his own time. In a way, I thought, he did live on through

his work and influence. In this sense Morris was very real to me, and to others who considered themselves “Morrisians.” I attempted to capture the essence of this remarkable person, trying very hard not to leave out anything of importance.

‘In his day, Morris was widely known as a poet, and several significant books of poetry were written by him and published here in England. But he was much more than that. He was a writer of prose, an artist, a craftsman, a publisher of fine books and the owner of a successful firm. William Morris was also an early advocate for Socialism, historic preservation and environmental protection. He loved the romance of the Middle Ages, and *News from Nowhere* embodies his major ideas about how the world he knew and abhorred could be transformed into a kind of earthly paradise. He characterized himself as a “dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,” I added.

I realized that I sounded like a professor giving a lecture, and it occurred to me that Ellen might not understand everything I was saying from her perspective. I had described *News from Nowhere* as a literary work - a vision of the future created by Morris out of his imagination as he longed to see it.

‘The story goes like this,’ I began to explain. Ellen was intensely interested in what I was saying, but some of it was clearly going over her head. ‘Morris had attended a political meeting where people were debating what a potential new society would be like if the system of Capitalism they knew and detested could be overturned by revolution. He went home after that meeting, and went to bed with his head filled with thoughts of the future.’

At this point, I reminded myself that my personal experience was somewhat similar to the beginning of *News from Nowhere*. I knew that eventually I would have to explain to Ellen how I arrived at the Hammersmith Guest House, even though it didn’t really compute in my mind. An extraordinarily vivid dream, I would say, but then, how would Ellen react to being a character in a dream, when she was for all I could see, a real person in the here and now, and not a creation of my subconscious mind.

‘When William Morris, or as you were introduced to him, William Guest, awoke the next morning, he found himself in bed, but not at home. He had somehow been transported to the Hammersmith Guest House, built on the same site as his old dwelling.’

‘And thus began his adventure,’ Ellen observed. ‘Extraordinary . . . extraordinary.’

Chapter 15

All of a sudden, we simply stopped talking, finding ourselves at a greenspace somewhat removed from the busy, built-up area surrounding the museum. Ellen noted the silence between us, and the place where we had arrived without consciously trying.

‘The Memorial Garden,’ she said, with a reverent tone in her voice. Ellen said this softly as she looked into the garden, rather than at me. She seemed filled with sadness, and quietly and gently, she embraced me in a way that implied she would not soon let go.

‘And you, dear neighbour, are you a dreamer like William Morris?’

I decided not to answer, but rather to maintain my silence on this topic for the time being.

Something about being in this place, this Memorial Garden, and our conversation about William Morris and the amount of time that had passed since he lived in his own interval in history, had touched Ellen very deeply.

‘What’s the matter? You seem so sad right now,’ I said to her in a low voice, with her embrace as tight as before.

Ellen pulled back to look at me and explained that this was the burial place of old Hammond, someone who had been a great influence upon her thinking, as well as a dear friend. So this was a cemetery, in the midst of the city, ringed with young trees, and much more formally landscaped than I would have expected from a people so enchanted with the re-introduction of the natural world into their lives.

The greenspace was divided into quarters with gravelled pathways. At the centre was a circular colonnade made up of lightly-proportioned columns vaguely classical in design. Inside the colonnade there were benches for people to rest and contemplate the memory of their deceased friends and relatives. I couldn’t see any headstones, at least, not the standing type.

Ellen walked me to the central space, leading me by the hand. Once there, I could see that the names of the deceased were engraved into a low stone wall that formed the base of the colonnade. We went up to a spot on the west side, and there I saw the simple text:

“Richard Hammond Sr., 1996 - 2117.”

Old Hammond indeed. These were a long-lived people, that was certain. But I wondered to myself if old Hammond was an exception.

‘I hope my dear friend is looking kindly upon us from some celestial realm, perhaps with William Morris at his side, pleased that we are thinking fondly of them both,’ Ellen said.

I was surprised to hear her speak of an afterlife, when from my reading of *News from Nowhere*, I had understood that the new society had pretty much cast off the old religions in favour of what old Hammond had called the “Religion of Humanity.” I couldn’t resist asking Ellen to explain this apparent contradiction in what I thought I knew about the people of Nowhere.

‘So just now, were you suggesting that you believe in life after death? Do you think that old Hammond is in heaven, or something like that?’

‘It’s true that at the time when William Guest, that is, William Morris, made his visit to us, religion and the belief in an afterlife that went with it, were practically non-existent among us,’ Ellen explained. ‘Our lives in the here and now are so pleasant, and so complete, that no one really yearns for a future existence where life is supposedly perfect. It’s hard to imagine anything better than this. But yes, I do believe that somehow the essence of our being lives on, though I can’t say exactly how, or in what form. I believe our life force burns too brightly to be extinguished by death.’

‘What changed your mind?’, I asked. ‘Was there a religious movement - a revival of the old beliefs?’

Ellen responded, ‘It started with old Hammond, a deep thinker and a man of extraordinary wisdom. As he became aware of his human frailties as his body aged, he began to reflect on the mysteries of this world, and of this life. He spoke of how we, as humans, were capable of vast amounts of knowledge but there must still be things out of our reach. It was the beauty of the earth, the majesty of the night sky, and the wonder of our society’s great advances that led old Hammond to the conclusion that there was a higher power, a creative force that people have variously called “god” or “the gods” at work to bring all of the elements of the universe together in a harmonious whole.’

‘Old Hammond’s way of thinking was at first limited to his family members, and his immediate circle of friends. It was quite a reversal of what our people had come to believe, and a big change from old Hammond’s philosophy. Some thought he was experiencing the beginning of dementia, given his advanced age.’

‘And now, has this new way of thinking caught on with more of your people, or is it still limited to only a few,’ I wanted to know.

‘Well, everyone is free to think whatever they like, and believe what they will, so not everyone has come around to this idea of religion reborn. It’s very much a personal choice,’ Ellen stated, ‘and as for me, yes, I believe that there is more to all this (as she made a gesture with her hands to indicate the world around



Edmund Hort New, Unidentified scene (Kelmescott?), photomechanical engraving, ca. 1899 from the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, on loan to the University of Delaware Library

her) than we can experience with our five senses. But what about you? What do you believe?’

In my time, religion was a huge topic, and a controversial one at that. After a moment of reflection, I answered Ellen’s question, hoping that I wouldn’t say anything to offend her.

‘I’m not certain what I believe. I’m still exploring the whole idea of spirituality and I haven’t made up my mind yet. But what I can tell you is that in my world, religion has become one of the most divisive forces amongst our people. Thousands have died, and many more have suffered terribly from religious conflicts. For some, religion has become a means to justify unspeakable acts of cruelty and oppression of those who hold different beliefs from them. We’ve experienced a terrible backslide in our advances in human rights and social justice. It’s difficult to talk about it.’

Ellen looked concerned, and at the same time, puzzled, by my comments. ‘I find it hard to understand how this horror can be tolerated. Surely something is being done to convince the oppressors that their ways

cannot continue, that they would better direct their passion toward peace.’

‘Well, our governments have tried to respond to the violence and atrocities done in the name of religion with more violence, and that has not gone well. I don’t know where it all will end.’

While we had been talking, the sky had clouded over and threatened rain. As the first drops fell, Ellen and I headed back in the direction of the British Museum. By this time, it was late afternoon, and we changed the topic of conversation to what we might have for dinner that evening.

Chapter 16

When we returned to Ellen’s office, we found that Claire had gone. She had left a note saying that she decided to call on some friends who lived near the market, and she would likely spend the night with them. She wished me well, and expressed her pleasure in meeting someone so interesting. I was pleased to see that Claire had left a gift for me, along with the note. It was a deep green tunic in the same style as many of the men of Nowhere wore. This was a very thoughtful gift, because wearing it would enable me to blend in with the general population, so I wouldn’t get stared at so much, or have to constantly explain myself to the people I met.

Ellen and I exited the museum once again, and we went to a half-timbered building a couple of streets away that looked like a classic English pub. Ellen told me, before we entered, that this was a popular meeting place for those who embraced the new religion. She went on to say that this new religion didn’t have a name that everyone could agree upon, so it was simply referred to as “the faith.”

We were greeted at the door by an older woman with a broad smile and warm eyes, whom Ellen seemed to know well. We were not introduced, as our host was only with us for a moment as she was in the middle of bringing out a platter of delicious-looking food to a table of eager diners. We found our way to a small table near the front windows, and even though it was crowded, we seemed to be in our own little world as we remained focussed on each other, and our intense conversation.

Ellen spoke first as we settled into our chairs. ‘I’m glad that Claire had left when we got back to the museum. I wanted to tell you, without her being present, that Dick Hammond, whom you know from your reading of William Guest’s account, is Claire’s father. You see, Dick and I became involved together shortly after the hay harvest in the year of Guest’s visit. We didn’t plan it. Far from it. It just happened, as these things will. Clara understood, but of course she was upset. So that

Chapter 17

explains why Dick ended up in the west country, where I lived for some time, and where Claire was born, and why Clara is at Hampton Court. We're all still friends, but the situation is a little awkward.'

I didn't know quite how to respond to this revelation, so I simply nodded in acknowledgment that I had heard what she said, and understood.

After a light dinner, followed by several glasses of a delightful white wine, we found our way back to Ellen's office at the British Museum. It was after 10 p.m. by the time we returned, and getting to be time for bed. I had observed during my visit that there was limited night time lighting in Nowhere. Much like the time period of the 19th century that I knew from my study of history, people turned in early after sunset, and arose early at sunrise.

We went into another office a couple of doors down the hall from Ellen's, where we sat on a large wooden bench that had a beautifully-decorated canopy, painted with figures from an old story or myth with which I was not familiar. We talked for a while, but this time, not of serious things. The wine had lightened the mood, and we spoke about food and local customs and the plans for the next day. I was not returning to the Hammersmith Guest House that night.

'Tomorrow,' Ellen told me, 'we will retrace William Guest's journey up the Thames. We'll likely get as far as my cottage at Runnymede. I can't wait to show you my lovely garden. I don't spend as much time there as I'd like, with all my research here, but I make sure to get home at least once or twice a week.'

Ellen excused herself, and returned a few minutes later with some bedding, which she arranged on the seat of the bench. She then took me out into the hall and showed me a room where I could wash up. The room held the same kinds of appliances I would have found in a bathroom in my own time, but their design was somehow different, more organic and less sterile looking than the white porcelain I was used to.

After I washed up, I went back to the room where I would be sleeping, where I found Ellen waiting for me. She came up to me at once, and we embraced. She kissed me warmly, just once, and bid me goodnight.

I wasn't sure where Ellen would be sleeping. Her office did not have a bed or a couch, so her living quarters must have been elsewhere in the building. As I got comfortable in my improvised bed, I lay awake for a little while, thinking about the events of the day and what tomorrow would be like. I didn't think too much about whether or not I would awake the next day here, or at home. For a while, I held out some hope that Ellen would return and I would get to spend the night with her, but that did not happen.

When I awoke the next day, I found Ellen sitting at the end of the bench, looking at me as if she had been waiting patiently for me to awake on my own. She appeared well-rested and had changed to a pretty white dress that showed off her lightly tanned skin and golden hair. This morning, she wore the silver bracelets that William Guest had mentioned in his description of her in *News from Nowhere*.

Breakfast was laid out on a table in one corner of the room, consisting of a pot of tea, bread and jam, and fruit. Ellen had brought in a glass vase of cut flowers to decorate the setting. It was a wonderful way to begin the day. She must have been up for a while to prepare all of this.

By the door, I saw that there were two bags packed with what I presumed to be the things we needed for our journey up the Thames. Outside, the sun was just coming up, bathing the room in a soft, watery light that came in through the uncurtained window.

Ellen saw that I needed some time to wake up, and said, 'I'm going to attend to some matters in my office, so while I'm gone why don't you get dressed and washed, and when I get back, we'll sit down to breakfast.' Then she added, 'Is tea all right? I hope so. I wasn't sure if I should bring tea or coffee. Myself, I prefer tea, but I suppose you'll think that so typically English of me,' she joked.

I quickly got dressed, and freshened up in the room down the hall. I returned to the room where I had spent the night, and found that I was alone for the time being. Pouring myself a cup of black tea, I stood by the window, contemplating the day that was just beginning. Soon, Ellen appeared in the doorway and we sat together at the breakfast table, enjoying each other's company and a delightful meal.

We ventured from the museum and found our way to a livery, where we hired a horse and carriage. 'Would you like to drive?,' Ellen asked, turning to me with the reins in her hands.

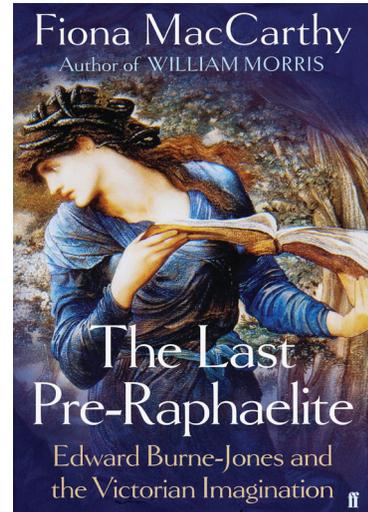
I was intimidated by this invitation, having never been this close to a horse before my visit here, and certainly never having driven a horse and carriage. Still, I wanted to appear competent, so I agreed to give it a try.

'I haven't done this before, but I'm happy to give it a go. Would you mind showing me the basics,' I asked.

So, with some jerky starts and stops, we were off. My difficulty mastering the operation of the horse and carriage made me think of the time I tried to drive a friend's car, which had a standard transmission. The experience was about the same.

BOOK REVIEWS & NOTICES

Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination*



Eventually, Ellen took pity upon me, and in the interest of efficiency, she took the reins. ‘Not too bad for a first try, but if you don’t mind, I think our horse needs a bit of a break from all these false starts. The poor dear doesn’t know what to make of you.’

When we arrived at the Thames, we stopped at a group of wooden docks designed for the mooring of small watercraft. A man came up and attended to our horse, leading him to a nearby stable. Ellen walked over to a small, colourfully-painted kiosk, and knocked on the door. In an instant, a bearded gentleman opened the door, and she entered the building. When she came out, she was carrying a metal box about the size of a brick, which looked to me like some type of mechanical device. Ellen beckoned me to join her, and we went out onto one of the docks, where a sort of rowboat was tied up.

The boat was painted in multiple colours and decorated with representations of mythical sea creatures. Although it was a rowboat in its general appearance, there was an enclosed area at the stern that had some levers and buttons mounted on a control panel. Recalling from the book the description of the river barge that ran by what William Guest described as “force”, I assumed this craft had a back-up engine if people tired of rowing upstream.

Ellen saw me looking at the boat, and seemed to read my thoughts. ‘Did you think we would be rowing up the Thames this morning? We can try, if you like, but maybe you would prefer something easier.’ With that, she opened a compartment below the control panel, and inserted the metal box she had obtained from the kiosk.

‘So your boat runs by force?’ I asked, then went on to say, ‘And by force, I presume you mean electricity?’

Ellen responded, ‘Electricity, yes, that is it. We don’t use much in the way of machinery here, you know, since we like to do most things ourselves. But after many years of trial and error, for certain tasks, we have developed a means of generating and using what some call “force,” which we store in devices like the one you saw. I couldn’t tell you much about how it all works. There are neighbours that specialize in that.’

I guessed that whenever Ellen travelled between her cottage and London, she left the device, a kind of battery, at the dockside facility to be re-charged.

[to be continued]

George Duncan is senior heritage planner in Markham, Ontario and an architectural historian interested in the documentation of Ontario’s heritage buildings, local history and cultural landscapes. He has authored several books, including York County Mouldings from Historic Interiors (2007) and Thoreau MacDonald’s Sketches of Rural Ontario (2004), and has recently published a chap-book concerning Ontario’s vanishing barns, William Morris and his World. After learning about Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, he now sees their influence wherever he goes.

Printed by the Harvard University Press, 2012, \$35.00 from publisher; \$23.10 on Amazon; available in e-book and Kindle.

Fiona MacCarthy’s 629-page *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination* subsumes a myriad of dramatic details into a sweeping narrative of Burne-Jones’s artistic, marital and emotional life, and the social and artistic networks in which he lived. MacCarthy has made a sustained attempt to research Burne-Jones’s early life and education; his expeditions to Italy in search of new models for his art; the extent to which the patronage of D. G. Rossetti, John Ruskin and Ford Madox Brown aided him in his early work; and his growing appetite in later life for the cultivation and society of wealthy patrons and well-placed friends. The volume’s extensive index helps readers access the work’s many references to other artists, events and personages of the time.

MacCarthy also acquaints her readers with the quirky extravagance and intermittent eloquence of Burne-Jones’s letters, scattered in a bewildering maze of public and private collections. These reveal that he “love[d] mosaics better than anything else in the world,” for example; sincerely mourned the loss of the family cat (“the beautiful hair oriental beauty [sic] that moaned, gasped and gave birth” [381]; execrated the neo-classical monumentality of St. Paul’s (“let it chill the soul of man and gently prepare him for the next glacial cataclysm” [359]); and thought that “the best in me has been love and it brought me the most sorrow” (xxiv).

It also brought sorrow to others. Burne-Jones was a serial pursuer of women as well as a gifted and

charming conversationalist. MacCarthy documents his extended and extensively documented affair with Maria Zambaco, whom he pursued to Paris and perhaps Italy, as well as a series of ambiguously platonic liaisons with young, handsome, intelligent and initially unmarried women, among them May Gaskell, Violet Maxse and Frances Graham Horner. In MacCarthy's gentle formulation, Georgiana Burne Jones was constrained to "put up for years with her husband scribbling those discursive, entreating, intimate illustrated letters to his adored women in another room" (xxii).

One of the biography's major merits, in fact, is MacCarthy's attention to Georgiana Burne-Jones, a thoughtful and accomplished woman who dutifully focused her *Memorials* almost entirely on her husband. MacCarthy offers the most extensive account we are likely to have of Georgiana's upbringing, her early artistic and musical endeavors, her reactions to her husband's deceptions and infidelities, her central role in the management of his affairs, and her socialist convictions and active engagement in feminist endeavors until her death in 1920.

MacCarthy also explores in considerable depth Burne-Jones's friendship with Morris, as one would expect of the author of *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*, and throws the contrasts between the two friends' choices and convictions into critical relief. She accepts Burne-Jones's claims to be a "radical" and "bitter Republican," but makes clear that these failed to temper his dislike of feminism and contempt for socialism, as well as his gratitude for the company of aristocratic friends and acceptance of a baronetcy at the ascendance of his career. He did share Georgiana's contempt for 'liberal' imperialism, however, not to be taken for granted in an extended family which included Rudyard Kipling and Alfred and Louisa Baldwin.

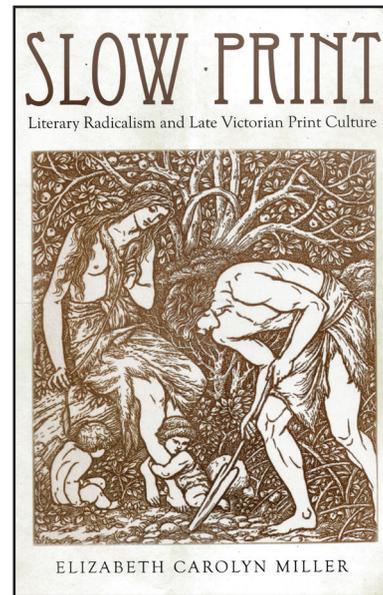
MacCarthy's summary evaluation of the two friends is that Burne-Jones "was the greater artist, though Morris was unarguably the greater man" (xxii), a comparison which elides (or at least diminishes) Morris's personal ideal of the "lesser" arts; widely held views that poetry is a 'high' art; Morris's role in the foundation of the nascent Arts and Crafts movement; and his creation of the most influential fine-arts press of his time.

Biography too may be an example of Morris's "lesser" arts. MacCarthy's elegiacally entitled *The Last Pre-Raphaelite* is more than a study of a craftsman of uncommon painterly grace. It is a memorial of the sensibilities and contradictions of an entire generation of ardent young men (and women) who sought to formulate new ideals and challenged the verities of their often philistine 'betters.'

Florence S. Boos

Elizabeth Carolyn Miller

Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture



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This book explores the literary culture of Britain's radical press from 1880 to 1910, a time that saw a flourishing of radical political activity as well as the emergence of a mass print industry. While Enlightenment radicals and their heirs had seen free print as an agent of revolutionary transformation, socialists, anarchists, and other radicals of this later period suspected that a mass public could not exist outside the capitalist system. In response, they purposely reduced the scale of print by appealing to a small, counter-cultural audience. "Slow print," like "slow food" today, actively resisted industrial production and the commercialization of new domains of life.

Drawing on under-studied periodicals and archives, this book uncovers a largely forgotten literary-political context. It looks at the extensive debate within the radical press over how to situate radical values within an evolving media ecology, debates that engaged some of the most famous writers of the era (William Morris and George Bernard Shaw), a host of lesser-known figures (theosophical socialist and birth control reformer Annie Besant, gay rights pioneer Edward Carpenter, and proto-modernist editor Alfred Orage), and countless anonymous others.

Slow Print is available from the Stanford University Press website, www.sup.org, and at amazon.com.

THE LAST WORD

ICELAND FIRST SEEN

Lo from our loitering ship a new land at last to be seen;
Toothed rocks down the side of the firth on the east guard a weary wide lea,
And black slope the hill-sides above, striped adown with their desolate green:
And a peak rises up on the west from the meeting of cloud and of sea,
Foursquare from base unto point like the building of Gods that have been,
The last of that waste of the mountains all cloud-wreathed and snow-flecked and grey,
And bright with the dawn that began just now at the ending of day.

Ah! what came we forth for to see that our hearts are so hot with desire?
Is it enough for our rest, the sight of this desolate strand,
And the mountain-waste voiceless as death but for winds that may sleep not nor tire?
Why do we long to wend forth through the length and breadth of a land,
Dreadful with grinding of ice, and record of scarce hidden fire,
But that there 'mid the grey grassy dales sore scarred by the ruining streams
Lives the tale of the Northland of old and the undying glory of dreams?

Oland, as some cave by the sea where the treasures of old have been laid,
The sword it may be of a king whose name was the turning of fight:
Or the staff of some wise of the world that many things made and unmade.
Or the ring of a woman maybe whose woe is grown wealth and delight.
No wheat and no wine grows above it, no orchard for blossom and shade;
The few ships that sail by its blackness but deem it the mouth of a grave;
Yet sure when the world shall awaken, this too shall be mighty to save.

Or rather, O land, if a marvel it seemeth that men ever sought
Thy wastes for a field and a garden fulfilled of all wonder and doubt,
And feasted amidst of the winter when the light of the year had been fought,
Whose plunder all gathered together was little to babble about;
Cry aloud from thy wastes, O thou land, "Not for this nor for that was I wrought.
Amid waning of realms and of riches and death of things worshipped and sure,
I abide here the spouse of a God, and I made and I make and endure."

OQueen of the grief without knowledge, of the courage that may not avail,
Of the longing that may not attain, of the love that shall never forget,
More joy than the gladness of laughter thy voice hath amidst of its wail:
More hope than of pleasure fulfilled amidst of thy blindness is set;
More glorious than gaining of all thine unfaltering hand that shall fail:
For what is the mark on thy brow but the brand that thy Brynhild doth bear?
Lone once, and loved and undone by a love that no ages outwear.

Ah! when thy Balder comes back, and bears from the heart of the Sun
Peace and the healing of pain, and the wisdom that waiteth no more;
And the lilies are laid on thy brow 'mid the crown of the deeds thou hast done;
And the roses spring up by thy feet that the rocks of the wilderness wore.
Ah! when thy Balder comes back and we gather the gains he hath won,
Shall we not linger a little to talk of thy sweetness of old,
Yea, turn back awhile to thy travail whence the Gods stood aloof to behold?