

1996

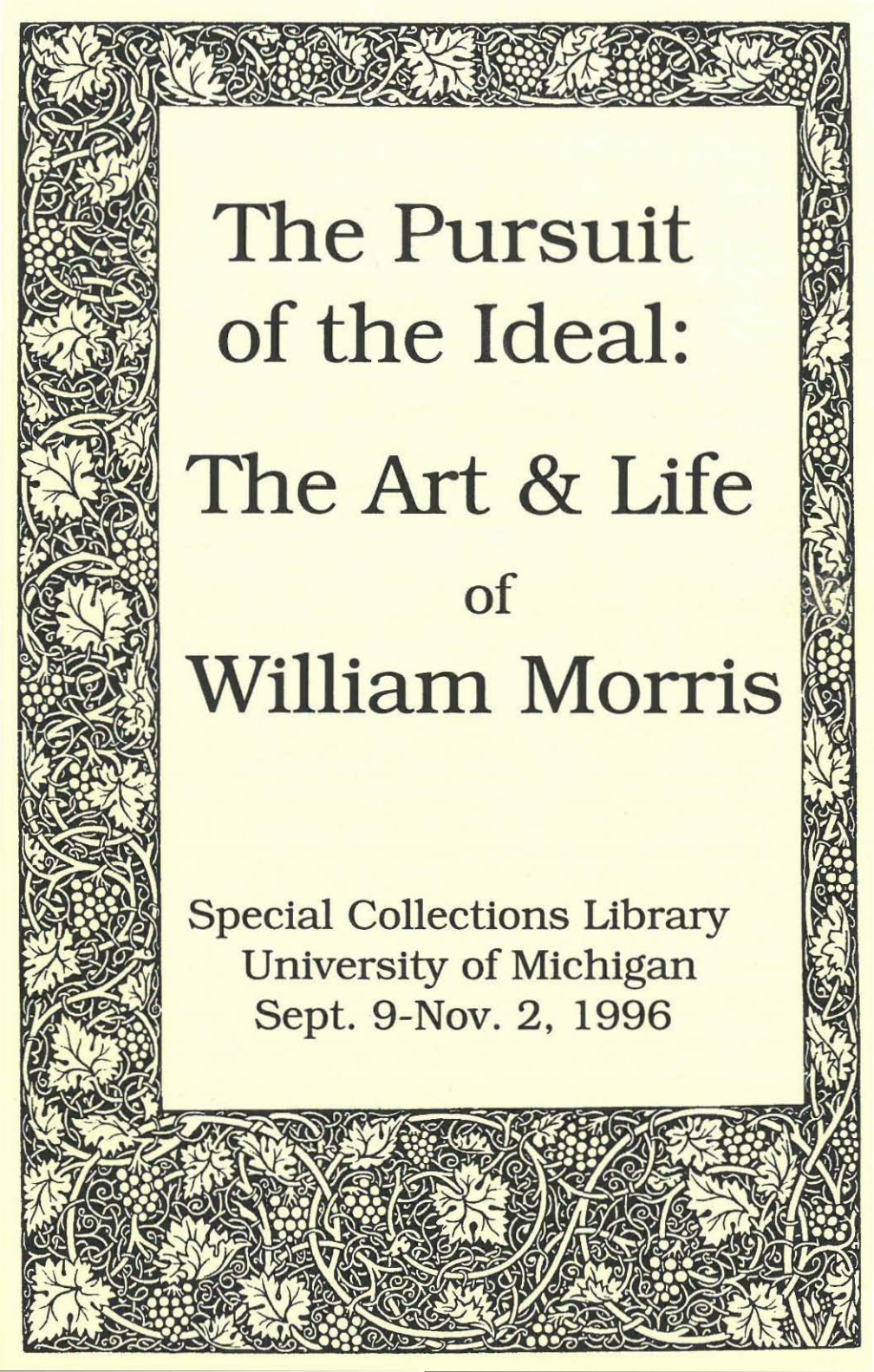
# The Pursuit of the Ideal: The Art and Life of William Morris

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/120271>

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

---

*Downloaded from Deep Blue, University of Michigan's institutional repository*



The Pursuit  
of the Ideal:  
The Art & Life  
of  
William Morris

Special Collections Library  
University of Michigan  
Sept. 9-Nov. 2, 1996

The Pursuit of the Ideal:

The Art and Life

of

William Morris

September 9 - November 2, 1996

Special Collections Library  
7th Floor, Hatcher Graduate Library  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

## INTRODUCTION

Occasionally there appears a person whose prodigious talents force us to stand back in awe. Maybe the person is a poet, maybe a pianist, maybe an inventor, a research scientist, an athlete, a potter. But rarely do we find someone in our midst who excels in many fields, whose seemingly unending vigor reflects vision, intellect, learning, skill, and craft.

Such was the man William Morris: painter, poet, translator, designer, decorator, craftsman, manufacturer, businessman, printer, artist, socialist, reformer, husband, father, friend. To honor this life and commemorate the hundredth anniversary of his death, the Special Collections Library has mounted this exhibit. Included are first and early editions, descriptions and photos of his art, and a fine array of books from his Kelmscott Press. The story describes one of the great Victorians, a man who was at once a dreamer and idealist as well as a realist and pragmatist. At the time of his death, his attending physician is said to have remarked that here lived a man who accomplished "more work than most ten men."

The exhibit is the result of many contributors. Special thanks are due to the three curators: James Blenko (Morris as Writer), Kathleen Dow (Biography and Morris as Craftsman and Manufacturer), and Kathryn Beam (Morris as Socialist and Printer). In addition, other Library staff have provided essential services: Mark Chaffee for sign and brochure preparation, Shannon Zachary and Caroline Duroselle-Melish for constructing book supports, Edward Weber for consultation regarding English socialism, and Matt Navarre and Paul Feschyn for color photoreproduction and matting. The Special Collections Library is especially grateful for funding support from the Department of English Language and Literature, particularly Professors George Bornstein and Theresa Tinkle.



## CASE 1

William Morris, poet, artist, craftsman, and political activist, was born in Walthamstow, Essex, on March 24, 1834. He was the son of William and Emma (née Shelton) Morris, whose affluence was enhanced by successful speculation in the 1840s in a British copper-mining endeavor. The fruits of this investment formed the basis for the younger Morris's inheritance, which provided him with the means to pursue a lifelong search for the ideal in art and life.

After enjoying a comfortable childhood, Morris's formal education began. This included preparatory school at Marlborough College and private tutoring, both of which developed his interest in history and the Classics. Young Morris matriculated at Exeter College, Oxford, in January 1853, with the intention of studying for the Church.

The idea of taking holy orders fell by the wayside as Morris's horizons expanded and he became exposed to the art criticism of John Ruskin (1819-1900) and the social criticism of Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). Ruskin's seminal masterpiece, *The Stones of Venice* (1851), in its reverence for the medieval, presents the Gothic aesthetic as the paragon of beauty. Particularly in the case of architecture, Ruskin writes of the beautiful and artful as being interwoven within the fabric of daily life, not reserved for the hallowed halls of the museum or the homes of the wealthy and aristocratic. This philosophy was embraced and applied by Morris in the creation of his crafts, writings, and books. Carlyle's vehement denunciation of the effects of the Industrial Revolution on the English people and the crass materialism and capitalistic tendencies of the bourgeoisie was also absorbed by Morris. Especially in works such as *Past and Present* (1843), Carlyle's socialistic tendencies point to Morris's social concerns and his later involvement in the Democratic Federation and the founding of the Socialist League and the Hammersmith Socialist Society.

John Ruskin. *The Stones of Venice*. London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1851-1853.

Ruskin's masterwork is open to volume 1, chapter 2, which extols "The Virtues of Architecture." The facing page is the conclusion of chapter 1 wherein Ruskin laments church-dominated architectural design and the "baseness of the schools of architecture and nearly every other art, which have for three centuries been predominant in Europe."

Thomas Carlyle. *Past and Present*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1843.

This opening presents a particularly vehement passage in which Carlyle denounces the materialism and moral corruption wrought by the effects of the Industrial Revolution in England.

While at Oxford, Morris met artist Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), and an intimate and lifelong friendship began. Together they traveled in Europe, and by 1857 they became seduced by the beauty and philosophy of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The Pre-Raphaelites, formed in 1847, espoused the grace, naturalism, simplicity, and romanticism which they saw as integral to the creative output of the Late Gothic and Early Renaissance periods, before the intellectual classicism of the High Renaissance exemplified by the works of Raphael (1483-1520). The key figures in the original Brotherhood were Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), and John Millais (1829-1896).

Rossetti cast the most influence over the others, and this arrangement continued when the first Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood dispersed and a second group of artists and writers gathered around him, attracted again by his charm, charisma, and vision. Of this group, it was Burne-Jones who continued the stylistic tendencies of Rossetti, extending the Pre-Raphaelite period of painting. And it was Morris who found expression for Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood values in poetry and crafts.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *The Tune of the Seven Towers*. Watercolor, 1857. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

This painting is an example of the Pre-Raphaelite ideals of beauty in subject and physiognomy. In this case, a reference is being made to Arthurian legend and the encounter at the fortress of the Seven Towers in Constantinople during the quest for the Holy Grail.

William Morris. *La Belle Iseult*. Oil on canvas, 1858. Reproduced from *William Morris Today*. London: The Institute for Contemporary Arts, 1984.

Jane Burden, later Morris's wife, here acts as the model for the legendary medieval adulteress, Isolde. This is his only known completed work in oil, which caused Morris such frustration that he scrawled on the back of the canvas, "I cannot paint you, but I love you."

Rossetti and Burne-Jones first recognized Jane's features as epitomizing the romantic Pre-Raphaelite ideal of feminine beauty and, consequently, her potential as a model. But it was Morris who married her in 1859. Jane's beauty appealed to Morris's aesthetic sensibility, while her working class background appealed to his belief in the ideal of a classless, egalitarian society. These attractions, however, failed to sustain a harmonious marriage. Despite rearing two daughters, Jenny (1861-1935) and May (1862-1938), the relationship was riddled with infidelity and unhappiness. Most notable was the distress caused by Jane's affairs with Rossetti and the poet, adventurer, and wealthy radical, Wilfred Scawen Blunt (1840-1922).

Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *The Daydream*. Oil on canvas, 1880. Reproduced as the frontispiece for Lucien Pissarro's *Rossetti*. London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, ca.1908.

This is a late example of one of Rossetti's many paintings of Jane in the moody, romantic, Pre-Raphaelite mode.

Upon leaving Oxford in 1856, Morris began an apprenticeship with the well-known Gothic Revival architect, George Edmund Street (1824-1881). Although he stayed for almost a year, the pull of Rossetti was too great, and he became convinced that he should join Burne-Jones in London in order to pursue the life of a painter. As whimsical as it may sound, it was their difficulties in finding aesthetically pleasing yet functional furniture for their new home at 17 Red Lion Square which led Morris and Burne-Jones to enlist architect Philip Webb (1831-1915) to design some pieces, while Rossetti was called upon to collaborate on medieval decorative motifs. This marked the beginning of Morris's career in the decorative arts.

The group that gathered at Red Lion Square was in large part the same as those who participated in the design and construction of Morris's Red House at Upton, Kent. Philip Webb designed the very un-Victorian structure, which, in the pursuit of ideal furnishings, gave birth to Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. "The Firm" was Morris's answer to providing finely made, visually pleasing, functional, and, in theory, affordable furnishings (see Cases 2, 3, 7, and 8).

**The Red House.** Upton, Bexley Heath, Kent. Designed by Philip Webb, 1859. Reproduced from Paul Thompson, *The Work of William Morris*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

These exterior and interior views of Morris's home from 1859 to 1865 show Webb's desire to break away from contemporary architecture by juxtaposing a variety of architectural shapes and angles. The name, Red House, was given to it because of the use of red brick without stucco, a startling novelty in those days.

**The Burne-Jones and Morris Families.** The Grange, Fulham, 1874. Photograph reproduced from Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for our Time*. London: Faber & Faber, 1994.

*Back row, left to right:* William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, Edward Richard Jones (Burne-Jones's father), Philip Burne-Jones (Burne-Jones's son).

*Front row, left to right:* May Morris, Jane Morris, Margaret

Burne-Jones (Burne-Jones's daughter), Jenny Morris, Georgiana Burne-Jones (Burne-Jones's wife).

The decades of the 1860s and 1870s saw Morris at his most active in writing and translating (see Cases 4 and 6), in developing the business of "The Firm," and in studying and creating illuminated manuscripts in an attempt to revive the art of calligraphy. The 1870s also saw Morris become a public activist for both cultural and social causes. He helped found the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings to stave off ruinous restoration or outright destruction of early English buildings. Morris became a leader of the Eastern Question Association, formed to protest Turkish treatment of Christian minorities in their European provinces, and in 1883, he joined the Democratic Federation, followed by memberships in various branches of the socialist movement (see Case 9).

The final years of Morris's full life were devoted to the revival of fine printing. His lifelong love of books and interest in typography combined with fellow socialist Emery Walker's knowledge of printing gave birth to his beloved Kelmscott Press in 1891 (see Cases 10 - 14). The Press issued fifty-three books which were the culmination of Morris's constant pursuit of the ideal. The last few years of his life were plagued by exhaustion, diabetes, tuberculosis, and finally kidney failure. He died in London on October 3, 1896. But, as George Bernard Shaw wrote several days later, "You can lose a man like that by your own death, but not by his. And so, until then, let us rejoice in him."

**Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris.** The Grange, Fulham, ca. 1893. Reproduced from Paul Thompson, *The Work of William Morris*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

One of the last photographs of the lifelong comrades and creative associates. As Morris's health continued to fail during the last year of his life, Burne-Jones wrote that he felt "very frightened ... the ground beneath one is shifting."

Elbert Hubbard. *This then is a William Morris book, being a little journey by Elbert Hubbard, & some letters, heretofore unpublished, written to his friend & fellow worker, Robert Thomson, all throwing a side-light, more or less, on the man and his times.* East Aurora, NY: The Roycrofters, 1907.

This posthumous tribute was written and printed by Elbert Hubbard, who was influenced by Morris's Kelmscott Press productions. The volume is opened to the poignant closing of Hubbard's essay.

## CASE 2

### "THE FIRM"

Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. was founded in 1861 as a direct result of the design, decoration, and furnishing requirements of Morris's home, the Red House. Morris's dislike of almost everything that could be bought ready-made and his distaste for the prevailing aesthetic, shared by his creative circle, suggested the need to form an artistic association. In addition to Morris, the founding members included Peter Paul Marshall, Charles Faulkner, Ford Madox Brown, Philip Webb, Edward Burne-Jones, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

The company prospectus, issued in April 1861, reads in part:

*Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company, Fine Art Workmen in Painting, Carving, Furniture and the Metals.*

The growth of Decorative Art in this country owing to the effort of English Architects has now reached a point at which it seems desirable that Artists of reputation should devote their time to it. Although no doubt particular instances of success may be cited, still it must be generally felt that attempts of this kind hitherto have been crude and fragmentary.

... The Artists whose names appear above hope by association to do away with this difficulty.... They have therefore now established themselves as a firm, for the production, by themselves and under their supervision of -

i. Mural Decoration, either in Pictures or in Pattern work,

or merely in the arrangement of colours, as applied to dwelling houses, churches, or public buildings.

- ii. Carving generally, as applied to Architecture.
- iii. Stained Glass, especially with reference to its harmony with Mural Decoration.
- iv. Metal Work in all its branches, including Jewellery.
- v. Furniture, either depending for its beauty on its own design on the application of materials hitherto overlooked, or on its conjunction with Figure and Pattern Painting. Under this head is included ... every article necessary for domestic use.

It is only requisite to state further, that work of all the above classes will be estimated for and executed in a business-like manner; and it is believed that good decoration, involving rather the luxury of taste than the luxury of costliness, will be found to be much less expensive than is generally supposed.

“The Firm,” as the company was commonly known, upheld the principles of medieval craftsmanship, in contrast to contemporary mechanization and industrialization. These principles included the ideal of the workman-artist, who conceived and executed his or her own work. The motto of the company was best summarized in Morris’s own words: “Have nothing in your houses which you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.”

In practice, “The Firm” concentrated on producing stained glass (secular and religious), furniture, textiles, and wallpapers, and commissioned interior designs, although all of the furnishings mentioned in the prospectus were at some point created. Cases 3, 7, and 8 show a small sample of the creative output of the company.

**Oxford Union Debating Hall.** Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

Several years before the formal organization of the “The Firm,” a preliminary creative collaborative effort was made when Morris, Rossetti, and Burne-Jones impetuously offered to decorate for free the walls of the Oxford Union Debating Hall. They, and a few other minor Pre-Raphaelite artists, were taken with the heavy neo-Gothic architectural shapes and the widespread use of sculptural

decoration with a nature motif found in the newly-built structure. The wall-paintings depict a series of scenes from Malory’s “*Morte d’Arthur*”. Due to faulty fresco technique, the paintings regularly require restoration work.

**Merton Abbey.** Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996; and, Paul Thompson, *The Work of William Morris*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

By the late 1860s, it became evident that “The Firm” needed a facility larger than its London location to handle production. Merton Abbey, an old textile-printing plant near Wimbledon, was chosen in part for its location on the River Wandle. The top photograph shows bolts of cotton being washed in preparation for printing. In the lower left corner, the indigo-discharge fabric printing is in progress (see Case 8). In the lower right, workers operate tapestry looms. Below on the right is shown the Abbey’s carpet weaving looms; and, on the left, hand-printing of chintzes. The carved wooden blocks used in this process are similar to those used by Jeffrey and Company in printing Morris’s wallpapers (see Case 7).

**Wall Cabinet, 1862 and Cabinet and Chair, ca.1865.** Produced by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. Reproduced from Ray Watkinson, *William Morris as Designer*. New York: Reinhold Publishing, 1967.

As a result of Morris’s frustration in finding suitable and pleasing furnishings for the Red House, furniture design became one of the first areas of concentration for the artists/designers. The cabinet, designed by Philip Webb, presents three recurring design elements: the curving hood, the body of the piece supported by thick, carved legs, and painted scenes. The painting on this piece was done by William De Morgan. The “Morris” chair represents the ubiquitous, rush-seated, black-painted, and inexpensive chair designed by William Morris. The chairs were produced well into the middle part of this century.

**Morris & Co. Storefront.** Reproduced from *A Brief Sketch of the Morris Movement and of the Firm founded by William Morris*. London: Privately printed for Morris and Company, 1911.

The company consistently lost money through the years, and was sustained with Morris's income. In 1875, Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. became simply Morris & Co. as Morris reorganized and bought out the other owner-members. Rossetti, Marshall, Faulkner, Webb, and Madox Brown all severed ties with Morris, while Burne-Jones remained a creative collaborator and friend. Though "The Firm" continued, Morris shifted emphasis to wallpaper, textiles, tiles, and other furnishings with which he could utilize his considerable skill in design.

**1 Holland Park, London.** Interior decoration by Morris & Co., 1890s. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

The original albumen prints document the results of the company's interior design commissioned by A. A. Ionides for his home at 1 Holland Park. It is rare to encounter photographic documentation of Morris's efforts in domestic decoration *in situ*. Shown is one of the house's sitting rooms.

### CASE 3

#### STAINED GLASS

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, a good number of English churches had been purged of stained glass, due to the Protestant preference for austere interiors. Thus, Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.'s foray into the design and production of stained glass filled a need and dovetailed with Morris's interest in reviving medieval aesthetics in decoration. Though "The Firm" was not the first in the revival as a whole, it was the first to duplicate successfully some of the techniques of medieval window production. Others simply

painted mass-produced sheet glass, which was not satisfactory to purists.

Throughout the years of stained glass window production, Morris oversaw the design and the subsequent translation into a cartoon with divisions marked for the lead framing. He also directed the craftsmen's assembly of the glass and lead, ensuring fidelity to the cartoon. Equally important to the overall beauty and uniformity of company-produced windows was Morris's, and for a time Philip Webb's, self-imposed responsibility for all backgrounds. As can be seen in these examples, this applies literally to the background itself, but also impacts the overall design of the window and the placement of the artist-designed figure or scene.

**The Good Shepherd**, ca.1857-1861. Stained glass window designed by Edward Burne-Jones for the Congregational Church (later, the United Reformed Church), Maidstone, England. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

An example of one of the first stained glass windows designed by Burne-Jones is this biblical subject interpreted through Pre-Raphaelite sensibilities: medieval dress, introspective or moody countenance, and lush stylized foliage. Shown are the watercolor and ink cartoon on the right, while on the left is the fully realized painted and stained glass window.

**Angel Seated on the Empty Tomb** (left), **Three Marys at the Empty Tomb** (right), and **Pelican on Nest** (roundel), 1862. Designed by William Morris. Commissioned for St. Michael and All Angels (east windows, south aisle), Brighton. Reproduced from Albert Charles Sewter, *The Stained Glass of William Morris and His Circle*. New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1974.

The Gothic Revival church of St. Michael and All Angels, designed by George Frederick Bodley, was one of the company's first church commissions. The **Three Marys** is an example of one of

Morris's early multi-figure compositions in glass, while the *Angel's* idiosyncratic and slightly awkward seat on the tomb suggests an artistic confrontation with composition.

**Angel Seated on the Empty Tomb.** Drawing by William Morris, 1862. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

This pre-manufacturing cartoon shows Morris working out the placement of lead lines, the strips of lead used to hold the painted or colored glass pieces together.

**Minstrel (Woman Playing Lute),** ca.1874. Stained glass window designed by William Morris. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

Though many of "The Firm's" stained glass designs were ecclesiastical commissions, a substantial portion were for domestic decoration. Shown is a Morris window for use in a private home (provenance unknown). Morris's female minstrel's form is seen in several other windows, in different guises, sometimes sprouting wings and a halo. The stylized, foliated, background lights, or quarries, are also a recurring theme, mainly due to their flexibility in accommodating different window sizes while still surrounding the decorative figure.

**King René's Honeymoon,** ca.1863. Four stained glass panels designed as part of the interior decoration commission for the home of painter Myles Birket Foster, The Hill, Witley, Surrey. Reproduced from *The Stained Glass of William Morris and His Circle*. New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1974.

An example of the creative collaboratory that was Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.: (clockwise, from upper left) "Music," designed by Rossetti; "Architecture," by Ford Madox Brown; "Sculp-

ture," by Burne-Jones; and "Painting," by Burne-Jones. It is possible that Morris was instrumental in choosing his childhood favorite Sir Walter Scott's *Anne of Geierstein* as the subject for these windows. Scott's tale of the honeymoon of the fifteenth-century King René of Anjou is recounted through depictions of the King and his bride engaged in the four fine arts of which René was a patron. Note the use of the quarries, here functioning more as a frame than a background.

**Music.** Drawn by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1862. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

Shown is the drawing for Rossetti's section of the quadripartite window, *King René's Honeymoon*. Most noteworthy is the faithful translation of the original drawing to the stained glass medium, as well as Morris's skillful rendering of floor, background, and 'framing' with quarries.

#### CASE 4

Among Morris's many aesthetic passions was an appreciation for language and the written word. After his death, May Morris fondly recalled listening to her father read everything from classical myths to Joel Chandler Harris's "Uncle Remus" stories in a deep, powerful voice. Morris's readerly interests ranged across eras, genres, and oceans, though he could not tolerate the influential poetry of his countryman John Milton.

Morris himself became a prolific and celebrated writer. His literary production, like his reading, was wide-ranging: during his lifetime he wrote poems, translations, book reviews, belletristic essays, short stories, and prose romances, including a number of works advocating English socialism. His best-known writing was his poetry and it has been argued that only his controversial political beliefs kept him from accepting an appointment as Britain's poet laureate.



Although Morris's works are diverse and voluminous, they tend to reflect a number of common concerns: an interest in creating visually pleasing images; a fascination with the medieval and Gothic; and a sense of disappointment with the uniformity, tedium, and injustice of modern industrial capitalism.

*The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, Vol. 1, January-December 1856. London: Bell and Daldy.

In 1856, recent Oxford graduate William Morris and a number of artistically minded friends founded the short-lived *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, a ten-issue experiment in literary miscellany. Morris's many contributions to the publication—from a glowing review of a new poetic volume by Robert Browning to an essay praising the medieval churches of Northern France as “the grandest, the most beautiful, the kindest and the most loving of all the buildings that the earth has ever borne”—anticipate what would prove to be lifelong passions.

As shown here, Morris dramatizes his obsession with medieval architecture in an eerie short story, “A Night in a Cathedral,” which recounts the fearful experiences of a man enveloped, as night falls, by an ancient church's spirits, skeletons, and gargoyles. By the tender age of twenty-two, Morris loved the mythical honor and mystical beauty that he associated with Gothic architecture and medieval literature.

William Morris. *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*. First edition. London: Bell and Daldy, 1858.

Morris continued to write prolifically, as he would for the remainder of his life. Like Malory and Tennyson before him, Morris became captivated by the historical resonance and dramatic potential of the Arthurian myths. Two years after *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, Morris published his first volume of poetry, *The Defence of Guenevere*, a work which included poems contemplating Arthur's tomb and the Christmas mystery of Sir Galahad. Although the volume sold fewer than three hundred copies, it brought Morris to the

attention of London critics, whose responses were profoundly mixed. Some reviewers praised the young poet's ability to describe medieval characters like a contemporary, while others attacked his plain language and archaic subject matter.

*The Defence of Guenevere* highlights two of the great loves of Morris's life. With its dedication to Dante Gabriel Rossetti and its vivid portraits of Arthurian figures, the work reflects Morris's poetic interest in the aesthetic principles and techniques of the Pre-Raphaelite painters. The passage highlighted here points to another primary inspiration for Morris's verse: a certain lady “of ivory/Forehead, straight nose, and cheeks that be/Hollowed a little mournfully.” Jane Burden, whom Morris met in 1857 and married two years later, became the ideal of beauty not only for her husband but for several Pre-Raphaelite artists (see Case 1).

William Morris. *The Earthly Paradise*. London: F. S. Ellis, 1868.

The 1860s proved to be a remarkably busy decade, even by Morris's frenetic standards. Between 1859 and 1868, he married Jane Burden, had two daughters with her, founded his artistic firm Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., designed his first wallpaper, and wrote two long works: *The Life and Death of Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise*.

Reportedly composed during train rides between Morris's Oxford lodgings and London, *The Earthly Paradise* may have been his easiest poem to write: he is said to have penned as many as seven hundred lines a day of what would prove to be his most popular work during his lifetime. The long poem recounts the stories of a group of friends who have reunited after fleeing their diseased city. Both Morris's narrative structure and his fictions reflect his knowledge of earlier literature. His well-travelled storytellers resemble the characters of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, while his stories originate from medieval, classical, Eastern, and Norse legends.

With stories called “The Man Born to be King,” “The Lady of the Land,” and “The Watching of the Falcon,” the poem's popularity has been attributed to its vivid imagery and marked literary escapism. Recent critics have suggested that the poem is more than

mere fantasy, however; the wistful descriptions of utopian life often implicitly lament the boredom and lack of imagination in modern industrial society.

The edition shown here appears to have been designed and laid out without much input from Morris. This rather plain text can be compared with the elaborate ornamentation and typographic imagination that Morris would later exhibit in his Kelmscott Press publications (see Cases 10-14).

*The Grettis Saga*, in *The Arna-Magnaean Manuscript* 551A, 4to. Facsimile edition. Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1954.

*The Story of Grettir the Strong*. Second Edition. London: F. S. Ellis, 1869.

In 1869, Morris's literary interests turned northward. Soon after finishing *The Earthly Paradise*, he met an Icelandic scholar named Eiríkr Magnússon and a great friendship ensued. Morris asked Magnússon for instruction in the language, literary sagas, and myths of Iceland—charmingly, Morris did everything possible to master the island's literature while avoiding Icelandic grammar.

With the help of Magnússon's literal translations and critical guidance, Morris soon produced several lengthy English versions of Icelandic legends: 1869 marked the publication of *The Saga of Gunnlaug Worm Tongue* and *The Grettis Saga*, while *The Volsung Saga* appeared the next year. The austere Icelandic landscape, which Morris visited in 1871 and 1873, greatly influenced him. After one trip, he wrote, "[A] most beautiful and poetic place it looked to me, but more remote and melancholy than I can say, in spite of the flowers and grass and bright sun: it looked as though you might live for a hundred years before you would ever see ship sailing into the bay there; as if the old life of the saga-time had gone, and the modern life had never reached the place." In its static, unspoiled beauty, Iceland seemed to preserve much of what the modern world had lost.

Morris's translations attempt to capture the simplicity and power of the older Icelandic language. His texts make a point of using short, guttural, Teutonic words to remain as loyal as possible to the

sound and choppy action of their originals. More broadly, the Morris sagas reflect an admiration for the honor and resiliency of a people facing violent lives in remarkably stark conditions.

The two editions displayed here illustrate the process of textual evolution. Above is a facsimile of an original Grettis manuscript in medieval Icelandic. The more familiar-looking edition on the right is the fruit of Morris and Magnússon's collaborative efforts. Their text introduced Victorian readers to the ancient legend.

*Völsunga Saga: The Story of the Volsungs and the Niblungs*. London: F. S. Ellis, 1870.

The collaboration between Morris and Magnússon continued into 1870 when Morris translated the Norse Volsung saga into English prose. He believed that the legend was "the Great Story of the North, which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks." In fact, Morris found the Icelandic legend so compelling that six years later he translated it again, this time molding it into a long poem.

Students of Morris's work often point to the different versions of *The Volsung Saga* as an important moment in the writer's artistic development. As Morris threw himself into Northern geography, history, and literature, his characteristic obsession with the past became less escapist and more activist. As he himself wrote, "In Norse literature ... I found a good corrective to the maundering side of medievalism." The younger Morris had never minded a bit of maundering but the maturing writer became increasingly involved in the cause of improving the material conditions of working people. For the next fifteen years, much of Morris's writing was inseparable from his involvement in English socialism.

The first edition shown here illustrates Morris's growing interest in creating books that were beautiful to behold as well as read. The elaborately patterned binding was designed by Morris and his architect friend Philip Webb, and reflects the ornate qualities of Pre-Raphaelite art. The stamped gold design is an interesting remnant from the days when Rossetti's influence had been so pervasive in the work of both men.

## CASE 6

William Morris. *Love is Enough*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1873, and Hammersmith: Kelmscott, 1897.

Morris's affection for ancient literature led him to experiment with literary form as well as archaic language. In his 1873 work, *Love is Enough*, Morris attempted to imitate the alliterative language and complex metrical structure of old English poetry. As his daughter wrote years later, the work "is the most elaborate scheme the poet ever worked on, and shows his most sensitive touch." Dante Gabriel Rossetti read an early draft of the poem and wrote in a letter that, "The poem is, I think, at a higher point of execution perhaps than anything he has done—having a passionate lyric quality such as one found in his earliest work, and of course much more mature balance in carrying out. It will be a very fine work."

The poem was written in the form of a masque (an elaborate morality play interspersing poetry and music) that was to be performed as part of the wedding celebration of a fictional emperor and empress. Appropriately enough, the masque tells the story of a mighty king who is tested by sickness and age and ultimately abandons his throne for the woman of his dreams. The ruler loses all his power and fame but considers himself blessed in his love.

This elaborate story becomes more poignant when one considers the fact that Morris's own marriage was showing signs of strain. The masque's romantic title can also be read as ironic or wistful.

These two editions illustrate the close link between text and image in Morris's writing. His recent biographer, Fiona MacCarthy, argues that Morris's poem was conceived as a picture book with elaborate borders and woodcut drawings by Burne-Jones. The 1897 edition, published posthumously by Morris's Kelmscott Press, restores the work's intended form, which had been left out of earlier editions. In contrast to the stark printing of the first edition, the opening pages of the Kelmscott edition quickly establish the work as magical and mythical while calling the reader's attention to the young newlyweds who are witnessing the masque.

William Morris. "A Dream of John Ball" in *The Commonweal*, Vol. 2 (No. 44), November 13, 1886.

William Morris. *A Dream of John Ball and A King's Lesson*. London: Reeves and Turner, 1888.

Late in his life, Morris returned to periodical publication, an activity he had largely abandoned after the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* of 1856. In 1885, he began publishing *The Commonweal*, a weekly journal affiliated with a political organization called the Socialist League (see Case 9). Morris printed news, editorials, book advertisements, and calendars of political meetings in the interest of informing and unifying his socialist readers.

The journal also provided a forum for serialized fiction and Morris wrote several politically charged "propaganda romances" for publication. Between November 1886 and January 1887, he published "A Dream of John Ball," a story of a nineteenth-century man who dreamed that he was taking part in the unsuccessful Peasants' Rebellion of 1381. Although John Ball, the peasants' leader, is executed for his part in the revolt, Morris depicts him as a powerful model of the fellowship among workers and a martyr for a noble cause. Ball's sacrifice is presented as merely the heroic beginning of an ongoing quest to bring liberty and purpose to the lives of the poor. Morris described the theme of the work as

the struggle against tyranny for the freedom of life, how that the wildwood and the heath, despite of wind and weather, were better for a free man than the court and the cheaping-town; of the taking from the rich to give to the poor; of the life of a man doing his own will and not the will of another man commanding him for the commandment's sake.

The two versions of "A Dream of John Ball" shown here demonstrate Morris's keen eye for textual layout and book design. *The Commonweal* version is presented matter-of-factly as an austere socialist publication with plain paper and unremarkable printing. When Morris published the work in book form two years later, no mention is made of socialism, but the accompanying couplet and

ornate illustration by Burne-Jones call social and economic inequality into question. Morris worked with the possibilities and expectations of both the periodical and book formats.

William Morris. "News from Nowhere," in *The Commonweal*, Vol. 6 (No. 209), January 11, 1890.

From January to October of 1890, Morris printed another political romance, "News from Nowhere," in *The Commonweal*. Like his earlier romance, "News from Nowhere" recounts the experiences of a nineteenth-century dreamer. The protagonist, William Guest, awakes to find himself in a utopian England in the twenty-first century. After a revolution in 1952, society has lost capitalistic desires for profit and industrial production; instead people create out of a joy in craftsmanship and beauty. Morris was consistent in his writing and living: the wide-ranging painter, designer, craftsman, and writer depicted perfect freedom as the ability to choose one's own economic and creative pursuits. His future society fosters individualism, and even calls some British institutions into question. His citizens, for example, use the otherwise obsolete Houses of Parliament as storage space for excess dung.

"News from Nowhere" was deliberately controversial. The narrative had been written partially as an attack on a recent publication called *Looking Backward*, by American writer Edward Bellamy, in which an ideal society is comprised of citizens comfortably working away at their designated tasks, where every material want is satisfied, and all citizens are rapturous about the wondrous, machine-like utilitarianism. "A horrible Cockney nightmare!" declared Morris.

Many contemporary readers praised the sanity and practicality of Morris's vision, although others were shocked by its suggestion that utopia would be secular. In choosing to emphasize material conditions for his future Britons, Morris marked himself as either refreshingly clear-minded or shockingly impious to those around him.

William Morris. *The Well at the World's End*, in *The Collected Works of William Morris*. London: Longmans Green, 1910-1915. Vol. 19.

Morris continued to experiment with lengthy prose romances but his audiences and literary objectives changed. In 1890, he was unceremoniously ousted as editor of *The Commonweal* and replaced by more anarchic men who advocated armed insurrection and the use of dynamite. Morris suffered deep personal disappointment and political disillusionment. As he wrote, "When we first began to work together there was little said about anything save the great ideals of socialism ... but now our very success has dimmed the great ideals and we have fallen into political methods and subterfuges."

*The Well at the World's End*, written in the early 1890s and first published shortly before Morris's death in 1896, departs from the optimism and rallying cries of the earlier romances. It is a quest-narrative, in which a king's youngest son searches for the magical powers of the water in the well at the world's end. Young Peter finds and hoists the promised golden cup (emblazoned "the strong of heart still drink from me") but his task is not yet finished. He must depart from the Edenic garden around the well and defend his native land against the invading Burg-men.

*The Well at the World's End* concerns itself much more with individual heroism than with the social reform and collective action called for in Morris's other romances. Just as importantly, the work has a note of resignation that does not appear in the fiery "John Ball" or the utopian "News from Nowhere."

The edition shown here is from *The Collected Works of William Morris*, a posthumous compilation of his voluminous writings. The *Collected Works* were edited by Morris's daughter, May, who sheds invaluable biographical light on her father's writings.

## CASE 7

### WALLPAPER

Pattern and pattern-designing played a significant role in Morris's art. Though pattern is evident in every item that he and his company produced, it is the principal element in wallpaper and tiles. In later years, particularly after he assumed sole ownership of Morris & Co., Morris devoted his special talent for pattern to the design of wallpapers, fabrics, embroidery, tapestries, tiles, and linoleum.

Morris looked again to the medieval craftsman as the ideal in pattern creation, particularly in the areas of tapestry and pottery. In this case he had great distaste for the imperialistic pomp and formality of Roman design, preferring the trend toward organic, naturalistic patterns in Byzantine art which came to fruition during the Middle Ages. Despite his continued reverence for the production methods of that period, Morris confined himself to just the designing of the wallpaper while having Jeffrey and Company of Islington actually produce the product. The technique used, however, was the old, labor-intensive wood block method, which produced a less defined edge in contradiction to mass-produced machine-stamped papers.

William Morris. *Some Hints on Pattern Designing*. London: Longmans & Co., printed at the Chiswick Press, 1899.

In this reprint of a lecture that he gave at the Working Men's College in 1881, Morris expands on his directive to artists to "follow nature, study antiquity, make your own art." The book is open to a section in which Morris directs his audience to look to nature for pattern, specifically to that which is commonplace. It is interesting to note that he refers to himself and those present as "we cockneys."

**Fruit or Pomegranate.** Designed by William Morris, 1864. Reproduced from Ray Watkinson, *William Morris as Designer*. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1967.

One of Morris's first wallpaper designs brings to mind stained glass quarries and is reminiscent of the naturalism found in the frescoes of the Florentine painter Giotto (1266?-1337). There is a stylistic and aesthetic contrast with later patterns, particularly in the rigidity of form and overall subtle coloring. The diagonal orientation, as opposed to Morris's favored verticality, is unusual in a domestic paper.

**Acanthus.** Original drawing by William Morris, 1874. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

A lovely example of Morris's skill as a draftsman can be seen in this pencil and watercolor cartoon. The acanthus leaf motif frequently occurred in his designs, and might be interpreted as a way of instilling naturalism into this decorative element of the Roman Empire.

**Willow Bough.** Designed by William Morris, first issued 1887. Reproduced in Edward and Stephani Godwin, *Warrior Bard: The Life of William Morris*. London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1947.

The wallpaper pattern *Willow Bough* is used here as pastedown and free endpaper for the Godwins' monograph on Morris. In *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist* (1936), May Morris wrote, "We were walking one day by our little stream that runs into the Thames, and my Father pointed out the detail and variety in the leaf forms, and soon afterwards this paper was done, a keenly-observed rendering of our willows that has embowered many a London living-room."

**Norwich.** Designed by William Morris, 1889. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

Unlike most of his vertically-oriented patterns, Morris chose a fifteenth-century inspired diagonal meander for *Norwich*. Morris designed a few patterns with this orientation, most commissioned for large, ceremonious rooms. His aesthetic principle here was that gentle diagonals would soften and “embower” overpowering and cold architectural spaces.

**Compton.** Designed by William Morris, 1896. Reproduced from Ray Watkinson, *William Morris as Designer*. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1967.

This wallpaper design was the last designed by Morris before his death. It was commissioned for Laurence Hodson’s house Compton, thus the pattern’s name. It is considered to be one of his finest in its combination of formal drawing and naturalistic vertical flow, with subtle coloring highlighted by flashes of vivid blue.

## TILES

**Tulip and Trellis.** Designed by William Morris, 1870. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

Decorative tiles were also designed and made by Morris and his company. In the case of *Tulip and Trellis*, the design was shared with William De Morgan, a former designer with Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., who had started his own tile and pottery works in 1869. This sharing of designs was uncommon, but was probably a collegial gesture. All Morris and De Morgan tiles were hand-painted on tin-glazed earthenware blanks from Holland. The simple perpendiculars and floral motif of this design lend themselves well to the repetition inherent in using tiles as a decorative element.

## CASE 8

### TEXTILES

Morris designed textile patterns during a comparatively short period of time, concentrated in the ten years immediately succeeding his assumption of control of “The Firm” in 1875. The pattern-designing challenges posed by textiles, tapestries, and rugs were much more complex than those of wallpaper. In his wallpaper designs, Morris concentrated on the visual effect of direction in patterns, while textiles demanded another approach. Textiles used as decorative elements are rarely seen flat. Rather drapes and folds occur, even to some extent on hanging tapestries. This led Morris to concentrate more on the role of color.

Morris, ever searching for the ideal and often dissatisfied with what was produced for mass consumption, found the available dyes disappointing on his first printed cottons. This dissatisfaction led to his investigation into antique dyeing processes, the use of plants and other organic materials, and, later on, weaving as a means of providing the desirable richness and depth missing from even the most finely dyed printed fabrics. He spent considerable time at the dye works of Thomas Wardle, whose company became the supplier for Morris & Co. of dyes, dyed yarn, and thread.

Edward Burne-Jones and daughter May Morris appear as collaborators in this aspect of Morris’s creative career: Burne-Jones as a tapestry designer, and May as a carpet, tapestry, and embroidery designer. In later years, as Morris devoted the bulk of his time to the Kelmscott Press, fewer new patterns were designed, and a number of wallpaper patterns were translated to fabrics.

Arthur Sanderson & Sons Ltd. of London was commissioned to produce Morris & Co. wallpaper patterns in 1930, followed later by textile production. Using a web browser that displays graphics, examples of their current offerings may be viewed online at <http://www.cuny.cuny.edu/wmorris/sanderson.html>. The Massachusetts-based J. R. Burrows & Company, “historical-design merchants” and purveyors of Arts & Crafts items, produce a number of Morris’s carpet patterns. One of their clients is Kelmscott Manor, the



former country home of William Morris. Burrows's line of Morris carpet designs may be viewed at <http://www.burrows.com/morris.html>.

## PRINTED FABRICS

**Tulip and Willow.** Printed chintz design by William Morris, 1873. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

The *Tulip and Willow* pattern was Morris's second fabric design. Its busy, dense willow leaf background is characteristic of designs from the 1870s. The frustration he felt in attempting to achieve the desired shade of blue in printing this pattern led Morris to study with Wardle to learn the indigo-discharge fabric-printing method. This procedure was time-consuming and laborious, employing the use of chemical "resists" to define the rest of the design before bathing the fabric in large vats of temperamental indigo dye.

Shown are Morris's original drawing in pencil and watercolor, the first printing using an unsatisfactory Prussian blue dye (a chemical dye with an iron base, developed in 1810), and the final realization, printed in 1883 at the Abbey using the indigo-discharge technique.

**Bluebell.** Printed chintz design by William Morris, 1876. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

This exquisite pencil and watercolor drawing is said to have been inspired by a medieval Flemish linen. The sketch is representative of Morris's characteristic method of blocking out the design in pencil, then filling in color, working from the center outward.

**Snakeshead.** Printed cotton design by William Morris, 1876-1877. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

Morris became familiar with Indian textiles through Wardle, who not only printed, but also imported, fabrics and threads. The vividness and hue, as well as the less-sinuous, more stylized repeat pattern, point to an Eastern influence. Morris says of *Snakeshead*: "I don't know that I don't like it best of all that we have done."

## TAPESTRIES

**Angeli Laudantes and Angeli Ministrantes.** Drawings (1877 or 1878) and tapestries (1894) designed by Edward Burne-Jones. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

Burne-Jones's designs were originally intended for execution in stained glass, but were also woven into tapestries years later. The chalk drawings are approximately the same size as the woven tapestry and, following the weaving method used at Merton Abbey, were probably photographically reproduced to size, embellished by hand with background and borders, then mounted next to the loom for use as a cartoon. Morris insisted on high-warp looms for tapestries. These looms consist of vertical frames with mirrors in front which reflect the face of the tapestry so that the weaver may see what he or she is doing.

**The Woodpecker.** Tapestry designed by William Morris, ca.1880. Reproduced from Ray Watkinson, *William Morris as Designer*. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1967.

In that portion of "The Firm" devoted to tapestry design, Morris played a relatively minor role in design. Somewhat similar to stained glass window production, he concentrated his efforts on backgrounds and borders while Burne-Jones and others drew the figurative elements. The exception to this was *The Woodpecker* tapestry, the only piece completely designed by Morris. It contains some of his signature motifs: the stylized naturalism of the fruit, the vivid splash of blue for the glorious acanthus leaves, and the verticality of the composition. Although he did not produce a significant number of designs, Morris felt that "The noblest of weaving arts is Tapestry, in which there is nothing mechanical: it may be looked upon as a mosaic of pieces of colour made up of dyed threads." He was enamored with the process, and went so far as to have a loom set up in his bedroom.

## EMBROIDERY

**Acanthus.** Coverlet or wall hanging designed by William Morris, ca.1880. Reproduced from *William Morris*, edited by Linda Parry. London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996.

The acanthus leaf is the design motif in this piece embroidered by May Morris with silk and satin threads. Morris himself had begun embroidering as far back as the early Red Lion Square years. His daughter May became exceedingly skilled in the craft, and even tried her hand at design as well as execution. So adept was she, that in 1885 she was installed as the head of Morris & Co.'s embroidery works. Her intuitive understanding of her father's designs, fostered by familial closeness and a sharing of philosophies, allowed her to interpret and color these patterns without in any way hindering Morris's artistry.

## CASE 9

Eminent as poet, novelist, translator, artist, and printer, William Morris also gained a place in the history of socialism. His boyhood wanderings in Epping Forest solidified the intense romantic in his nature, and it was, therefore, not a long step to harboring utopian dreams of a just and happy society:

If this belief from heaven be sent,  
If such is nature's holy plan,  
Have I not reason to lament  
What man has made of man?

Wordsworth -

from "Lines Written in Early Spring"

Although this vision prevailed during the years when Morris gained his reputation as poet and designer, it was not until 1883 that his conviction of the industrial revolution's dehumanization of mankind brought him to socialism. Morris joined the Democratic Federation, a league of London workingmen's radical clubs, and when this was disrupted by factional strife the next year, became a leader of the new Socialist League, financing such projects as their journal, *The Commonweal*, and exhorting groups of laborers to fight for a new society. In September 1885 in a turbulent courtroom where demonstrators were being severely sentenced to hard labor, Morris was charged with creating a disturbance and assaulting a constable; his denials under questioning were accepted by the otherwise harsh judge. When haranguing a street-corner gathering in July 1886, Morris was arrested by a vigilant policeman but discharged without trial. Unquestionably these incidents, which were reported internationally, embarrassed the judiciary and gained sympathy for the socialist cause. On "Bloody Sunday," the Trafalgar Square Riot of 1887, in which police attacked a crowd insisting on the right to free speech, Morris spoke from a cart but escaped the truncheons that killed three and injured more than two hundred. This forceful, though merely fractional, use of state power convinced Morris that a socialist revolution was not possible in his time and that the chief task before him was education. His tracts and pamphlets employed both prose and poetry.

E. Belfort Bax and William Morris. *"The Manifesto of the Socialist League."* London: Socialist League, 1885.

One of Morris's first tasks in the Democratic Federation was to write a declaration of principles which was published in 1883 as a manifesto, "Socialism Made Plain." The text was not adequate, however, for the more mature thinking of the group that broke away from the Federation in late 1884. When Morris and several others established the Socialist League, they rewrote the manifesto. One of the leading intellectuals in the organization was Ernest Belfort Bax, described as a "hard-shell Marxist economist." Together he and Morris wrote the new "Manifesto," co-edited *The Commonweal*, and worked jointly on a series of articles, "Socialism from the Root Up," later published as *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* (1893).

William Morris. *"Monopoly or How Labour is Robbed."* Hammersmith: Hammersmith Socialist Society, 1893.

The Hammersmith Branch of the Democratic Federation was formed at Kelmscott House on June 14, 1884 (see map). There were ten founding members, all of whom contributed to establishing a group not entirely divergent in theory from other branches, but yet quite distinct in character. Artistic and literary influences were more apparent; occasionally the branch rejected Federation policy.

It maintained its singular characteristics even after it became a branch of the Socialist League. It met in the Coach House, originally a stables that was converted to a workroom for Morris & Co. Subjects of the lectures were more varied than most, and members of the audiences sometimes included Oscar Wilde, H. G. Wells, W. B. Yeats, and even a very young Gustav Holst.

During the late 1880s, a growing number of Socialist League members began to associate themselves more closely either with anarchism or the old Federation. After much in-fighting, the Hammersmith Branch finally severed its connection and in November of 1890 the Hammersmith Socialist Society was formed. The Society published many of Morris's earlier lectures. He first delivered this one during the winter of 1887, a time when he was devoting much of his energy to speaking engagements throughout the greater London area.

William Morris. *"Useful Work versus Useless Toil"* and *"True and False Society," The Socialist Platform*, Numbers 2 and 6. London: Socialist League, 1886 and 1888.

Morris was active in the socialist movement as a writer, speaker, organizer, financial supporter, and all-around, general worker. Several of his essays, such as these, were published as part of the Socialist Platform series. Many of his other titles are advertised on the back pages of these little pamphlets.

William Morris. *Chants for Socialists*. New York: New Horizon Press, 1935.

"The Day is Coming" is the first in this collection of seven poems. Morris wrote it in 1883 when he was just beginning to apply his talents to the socialist cause. The poem is a rousing call to action. It apparently made quite an impact at the time, as *The Christian Socialist* reported that it was read from the pulpits of several London churches.

Letter, William Morris to John Glasse, 1886 February 10, reproduced in *Unpublished Letters of William Morris*, introduced by R. Page Arnot. London: Labour Monthly, 1951.

Morris participated in street gatherings and demonstrations with his characteristic vigor and commitment. Even when the meetings turned into confrontations with the police, Morris stayed in place, usually on the speaker's platform.

This letter is particularly interesting in that Morris recognizes that "if the price is not too high" a certain amount of disruption in the streets is necessary when the goal is social revolution. The specific circumstances in February 1886 involved a street march led by H. M. Hyndman, the leader of the Democratic Federation with whom Morris had significant disagreements, causing the schism that led to the creation of the Socialist League. In this instance, Hyndman's marchers began breaking windows, and a riot ensued.

Dr. John Glasse is identified in the second paragraph of page three as a Scottish minister who served as host when Morris's speaking tours included Edinburgh. The correspondence between Glasse and Morris extended from February 1886 to March 1895.

William Morris. *"The Tables Turned; or Nupkins Awakened."*  
London: Office of *The Commonweal*, 1887.

In order to raise funds for *The Commonweal*, Morris wrote his only play, this political mini-farce. First performed on November 15, 1887, it included Morris himself in the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The plot concerns the trial of a socialist accused of sedition and incitement to riot and murder. The prejudiced judge, Mr. Justice Nupkin, finds that by the end of the trial, he, and not the defendant, is the one sentenced to the farmer's life, forced to renounce his city ways and spend his time digging in the fields.

The play was such a success that it was performed at least ten times during the winter of 1887/88. It received one professional review written by William Archer, drama critic for *The Pall Mall Gazette*.

R. B. Cunninghame Graham. *With the North-west Wind ...* Berkeley Heights, N. J.: Oriole Press, 1934.

Walter Crane (1845-1915), designer, illustrator, and painter, met Morris as part of the second group of Pre-Raphaelites. Their lives and interests continued to intersect, first with joint projects in designing textiles, tapestries, and stained glass, and then in illustrations for Morris's books, and cartoons for the periodicals *The Commonweal* and *Justice*.

This publication, prepared in honor of the hundredth anniversary of Morris's birth, begins with this small sketch by Crane. The caption identifies the scene: "William Morris speaking from a wagon in Hyde Park, May 1, 1894." The other contributions in this book are tributes by Edward Carpenter and R. B. Cunninghame Graham, both first printed in 1896 at the time of Morris's death.

Morris has received many varied tributes since his death. Among them is the remark made by literary critic George Sampson when he was summing up Morris's amazing career: "His whole strength of purpose was dedicated to the reconstitution of modern life, upon conditions that would bring beauty to all men." Morris's enlightened socialism still beckons to our contemporaries in the Green Movement and other groups advocating humane social change.

## CASE 10

Emery Walker. [Notes for] "*Letterpress Printing and Illustration*," in William S. Peterson's *The Kelmscott Press: A History ...* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

By 1888 Morris was beginning to move beyond his preoccupation with socialism and direct his attention once more to activities he had promoted during the 1860s and 1870s. A first Arts and Crafts Exhibition was scheduled for October and November of that year at the New Gallery in Regent Street. To Morris's surprise many items were on display by artists and craftsmen who were living out his early teachings, actually representing the first circle of Morris admirers and pupils among the next generation of architects, printers, sculptors, decorators, metal workers, etchers, etc. Morris admitted, "I believe they are getting on pretty well."

Morris & Co. participated in the Exhibit with displays of furniture, stained glass, embroideries, fabrics, textiles, tapestries, and calligraphy. But not one of Morris's own books was there. Perhaps this was a reflection of the fact that his own writings were still inadequately printed.

Nothing would probably have come of this omission, however, had it not been for one of the six lectures held in conjunction with the Exhibit, a talk entitled "Letterpress Printing and Illustration," given by Emery Walker on November 15, 1888. Although the lecture was never published, it was reviewed by Oscar Wilde in the *Pall Mall*

*Gazette* of the following day. Wilde describes the content of the lecture and emphasizes that the two dozen lantern slides containing illustrations of early printed books and manuscripts were the most striking and valuable feature of the talk. Walker used the slides to show comparisons between the horrors of Victorian typography and the most beautiful books of the past, especially those produced by printers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The pages shown here are Walker's own lecture notes listing the slides he used, along with details he wanted to emphasize. The original notes in manuscript are in the collections of the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas.

William Morris. *The Art and Craft of Printing: Collected Essays by William Morris*. New Rochelle, N.Y.: Elston Press, 1902.

Morris was strongly influenced by Walker's Arts and Crafts Exhibition lecture. Seeing the work of the finest early printers projected onto the screen prompted Morris to want to design his own type. The lecture was the catalyst for the founding of the Kelmscott Press.

It did not happen right away, however. For over a year Morris studied type design, drew on his previous exercises with letterforms and calligraphy (during the 1860s and 1870s), set himself to master new skills, and worked with the Chiswick Press to publish three more of his own titles: *A Tale of the House of the Wolfings* (1889), *The Roots of the Mountains* (1890), and *Gunnlaug Saga* (1891). In each of these he tried to achieve with an existing commercial enterprise the ideal that was becoming more clearly formed in his mind. But each time the attempt fell short.

His goal in forming the Kelmscott Press was articulated in this essay which Morris wrote "after the fact." On November 11, 1895, he responded to a London bookseller writing on behalf of an American client who was preparing a paper on the Kelmscott Press. The client, Carl Edelheim of Philadelphia, published Morris's response in *Modern Art*, 4 (Winter 1896). It then became the opening essay of the last book printed at the Kelmscott Press in March 1898, a year and a half after Morris's death. The publication shown here includes the frontispiece designed by Edward Burne-Jones, intended

originally for an 1866, aborted, illustrated edition of *The Earthly Paradise* (see Case 4).

Brown University Library. "*William Morris and the Kelmscott Press: An Exhibition held in the Library of Brown University ... October 9 to December 31, 1959.*" Providence, R. I.: Brown University Library, 1960.

Before the Kelmscott Press could actually begin to publish Morris needed to gather the appropriate workers. The letter reproduced in this exhibition catalog identifies William Bowden, a master-printer who had printed Morris's *News from Nowhere* for Reeves and Turner before he retired, as Morris's first choice for compositor and press-printer. Bowden accepted the invitation and was soon joined by his son, William Henry Bowden, and his daughter, Mrs. Pine. The letter is equally significant in revealing Morris's attitude toward the whole endeavor by calling it "the little typographical adventure I am planning."

Fiona MacCarthy. *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994.

Other members of the Kelmscott Press community are pictured here. Certainly one of the key persons in the success of the operation was Emery Walker, pictured in the lower left of the right-hand page. Walker (1851-1933) was a master printer, typographic designer, and engraver. He invented the process-engraving technique, and over the years acquired an extensive knowledge of printing history and methods of graphic reproduction. Morris had the extreme good fortune of finding Walker as a neighbor near Kelmscott House, Upper Mall, Hammersmith, very close to the cottage at No. 16 Upper Mall that became the first premises of the Kelmscott Press. Walker was the technical expert and a gifted artisan who has been described by William Peterson as "the quiet, unassuming yet infinitely knowledgeable adviser." Sydney Cockerell (1867-1962), pictured on the lower left-hand page, considered Walker to be a virtual partner with Morris, stating that "no important step was taken without his advice and approval."

In the group picture, Emery Walker is the fourth man from the left in the back row. The others in that picture mentioned in the caption are May Morris, the younger daughter, and Henry Halliday Sparling, a comrade in the Socialist League and May's husband from 1890 until their divorce in 1899.

On loan from the Hatcher Graduate Library.

William Morris. *The Roots of the Mountains* ... London: Reeves and Turner, 1890.

One of the last books Morris published before the Kelmscott Press was this title, the second of the three printed at the Chiswick Press under the direction of Charles T. Jacobi. Morris tried with all three titles to work with special types, to fill in white space with text or ornaments, to achieve a certain relationship between the sizes of the top, bottom, and side margins, and to persuade the binders to use some material besides plain cloth.

He was somewhat successful in some of these battles: in this book, for example, he was able to have the running title and page numbers in the top corners either omitted or moved elsewhere, with the head-lines being replaced by side-notes in the upper margins. For Morris these changes contributed to the unity of the single page and the double-page spread, one of his principal goals with his Kelmscott publications.

*The Roots of the Mountains* is a prose romance about Gothic tribes in the Italian Alps in the early Middle Ages. It has been called a political romance in that it describes a community of tribes overcoming old hostilities in their united and successful stand against the Huns, a force representing oppression and violence.

In addition to the regular edition shown here, two hundred fifty copies of a special edition were also issued. These were printed on Whatman paper and bound in a printed linen made at the Morris factory at Merton Abbey. Morris was generally pleased with the appearance of this book, but his failure in some of the negotiations made him even more determined to start his own press.

## CASE 11

Henry Morris. *Guilford & Greene*. North Hollis, Pa: Bird & Bull Press, 1970.

One of Morris's first obstacles in establishing his press was the difficulty in finding a supplier for the kind of paper he wanted. His goal was a product with the appearance of handmade fifteenth-century paper, durable, and free from bleaching chemicals. It must be made entirely from linen rags (no cotton), with the pulp having been laid on a mold in which the chains and wires were not woven too regularly. Only then would the paper not display the monotonous ribbed surface he disdained in contemporary paper.

Emery Walker suggested the firm of Joseph Batchelor and Son, and on October 22, 1890, Walker and Morris visited the mill located in the village of Little Chart, near Ashford, Kent. Morris carried with him a sample of his ideal paper, a Bolognese paper made in 1473. He was relieved to discover that Batchelor could imitate it quite well, and from then on he used Batchelor paper for all Kelmscott Press books.

Morris designed three watermarks for his paper: Flower (a conventionalized primrose), Perch (a fish with a leafy sprig in its mouth), and Apple (the fruit with no other decorations). All three designs stand between the initials W. M. The facsimile shown here is one of the Flower design. The original was sent to Batchelor as an enclosure with this letter. The date of the letter is October 23, 1890, the day following the visit to Little Chart. Earlier in the letter Morris orders paper in two sizes, 16" x 11" and 16" x 22," assuring Batchelor that "we need not take cost into account."

Stephen Langton, d. 1228. *Laudes Beatae Mariae Virginis*. Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1896.

Once Morris had found his skilled employees, solved the problem with paper, rented space in Hammersmith, installed his equipment, including a Demy Albion press and a Super Royal



Genuine Albion Press, he still had to locate a supplier of ink. Again he searched for a pure product without chemical additives, made from linseed oil, lampblack, and turpentine. Most of the inks he tried had been thinned for use on rotary and cylinder presses, with the result producing a gray, washed-out appearance. With the Albion hand presses, Morris wanted a thicker, slower-drying, very black ink.

Following yet another suggestion from Emery Walker, Morris contacted a German manufacturer, Gebrüder Jänecke of Hannover. Although his pressman complained of the unusually stiff consistency and the excessive work required to mix it and ink the plates, Morris persevered, especially after the ink supplied by the English firm of Shackell, Edwards and Co. caused yellow stains on some pages.

*Laudes Beatae Mariae Virginis* is the first book Morris printed in three colors, the only other one being *Love is Enough* (see Case 6). The Jänecke black ink is here contrasted with blue and red, both supplied from commercial sources. The blue was made from ultramarine ash by the firm of Windsor and Newton. The red ink may have been made by Shackell, Edwards and Co., although Morris was never fully satisfied with his reds, and tried many different sources.

For this publication of a section of an early thirteenth-century English Psalter, Morris printed the line from each Psalm in red, followed by a quatrain in black which applies the Psalm to the Virgin.

Plinius Secundus *Historia Naturalis*. Venice: Nicolaus Jenson, 1472.

The story is told that on the way back to Hammersmith after Emery Walker's 1888 lecture, Morris turned to Walker and said, "Let's make a new fount of type." And so — the Kelmscott Press began.

Morris studied the large photographs made from Walker's slides. He compared the work of the earliest printers using his own collection of medieval manuscripts and incunabula and the many books he owned on the subjects of printing, typography, and calligra-

phy. He had learned through his work with Jacobi that imitating old type faces was not enough. He needed to draw out the essential qualities from the best specimens and fashion his own beautiful designs.

The result in 1890 was Golden type. The letterforms are based on the Roman type designed by fifteenth-century Venetian printers Nicolaus Jenson and Jacobus Rubeus. Specifically Morris worked with Jenson's printing of Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* (Venice, 1476). The copy shown here was printed a few years earlier than the one Morris is said to have used.

Jacobus de Varagine, ca.1229-1298. *The Golden Legend of Master William Caxton Done Anew*. Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1892. 3 vols.

A close examination of individual letters reveals how Morris adjusted Jenson's designs to suit himself. Morris's page looks darker due to his thicker strokes, and his slab-like serifs are indeed quite different from Jenson's. But his goal was letters "pure in form; severe ... solid, without the thickening and thinning of the line ... and not compressed laterally." Most critics think that he succeeded, although the famous master of typography in the early twentieth century, Stanley Morrison, described them as "positively foul."

*The Golden Legend* is a medieval collection of Saints' lives. Morris intended it to be the first book produced at his new press — hence the name of the type. But its length and problems in securing an adequate paper supply forced a delay, and it was not actually finished until November 1892. The ornamental borders were designed by Morris; the wood-cut illustrations were drawn by Edward Burne-Jones.

## CASE 12

Pablo de Santa Maria, Bp., d. 1435. *Scrutinium Scripturarum*.  
Strassburg: Johann Mentelin, ca. 1474.

Morris had barely finished his designs for Golden type before he began work on a Gothic type. Gothic (or blackletter) type had been the most common typeface in northern Europe during the fifteenth century and well into the sixteenth century. Just like Roman type, the designs were originally copied from handwriting styles. But contrary to the round, open feel of Roman, Gothic is characterized by narrow, tall, pointed designs, acute angles, an absence of curves, and heavy black strokes. Called Textura in Germany, it was the type Johannes Gutenberg designed in the early 1450s for his 42-line Bible.

Given Morris's attraction to medieval forms, it is understandable that he would want a type similar to the old-style Gothic patterns. As before, he studied fifteenth-century originals, especially the work of Peter Schöffer at Mainz, Johann Mentelin at Strassburg, and Günther Zainer at Augsburg. He even experimented with printing his last pre-Kelmscott romance, *The Story of Gunnlaug*, in a replica of one of William Caxton's types. (Caxton was the first printer in England, establishing a shop near Westminster Abbey in 1476.)

Caxton's blackletter, however, was the extreme Gothic that Morris wanted to avoid. He found the letters too compressed and generally illegible. Instead he admired the Rotunda type that developed in Germany. This was a Gothic with some Roman influences that was used for legal and classical texts; it was considered too informal for liturgical and biblical material. A sample of Rotunda is shown here in a work printed by Mentelin in 1474. Mentelin was the first printer in Strassburg. He is perhaps best remembered for a 49-line Latin Bible (1460) and for an edition of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, which he printed in Roman type in 1477.

William of Tyre, Archbishop of Tyre, ca. 1130-ca. 1190. *The History of Godefrey of Boloyne and of the Conquest of Iherusalem*.  
Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1893.

There are certainly many similarities between the Gothic type Morris designed and the particular version of Rotunda that Mentelin used in 1474. Some of the more obvious can be seen by comparing capital letters, the E with rounded upper and lower arms and the S with a horizontal middle stroke; and lower case letters such as the h with the characteristic Gothic hook to the left, the g that is almost a duplicate, and the e with an inclined crossbar. But Morris wanted a semi-Gothic, one that would be legible to Victorian-era readers. Therefore, there are many differences as well: the d that does not bend left and the omission of tied letters (or ligatures) and contractions which in early printing had carried over from scribal cursive writing.

Morris called his new design Troy type, named after *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, the first book in which it was used. His initial plan was to use the Troy for his folio editions — it is an 18-point size. But even in *The Recuyell...* he realized he needed a smaller font for prefatory matter, glossaries, and the like, so he had a 12-point version cut by his favorite punchcutter, Edward Prince. This he called Chaucer type since it was principally intended for the great work of the Press, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

In *The History of Godefrey of Boloyne*, Morris used Troy for the text, Chaucer for the Table of Contents and Glossary, and ornamental borders and decorated initials which he designed. It is the fourth of the Press's Caxton reprints, the others being *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (November 1892), *The History of Reynard the Foxe* (January 1893), and *The Order of Chivalry* (April 1893).

Paul Needham. *William Morris and the Art of the Book: with Essays on William Morris ...* New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1976.

The most obvious quality of the books published by the Kelmscott Press is their decoration. Morris himself said, "It is only natural that I, a decorator by profession, should attempt to ornament my books suitably...." Some observers would say that the "suitable"

decoration became ostentatious, with lavish initials, borders, and illustrations interfering with the goal of simple communication. Others would support Morris, describing his work as the ideal of the harmonious whole, successful in the artistic integration of word and picture.

Morris stated his beliefs on decoration in a speech on printing which he gave before the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. He said:

...the ornament, whatever it is, whether picture or pattern work, should form part of the page, should be part of the whole scheme of the book.... Therefore, granted well-designed type, due spacing of the lines and words, and proper position of the page on the paper, all books might be at least comely and well-looking: and if to these good qualities were added really beautiful ornament and pictures, printed books might once again illustrate...that a work of utility might be also a work of art....

Morris provided 644 designs of initials, borders, frames, side ornaments, and printer's marks during the life of the Kelmscott Press. Thirty-four of these were variations of the letter T. Shown here are three initial Is and one of the Ts which Morris cut into one block of wood. Emery Walker used this row of letters to prove to Morris that electrotype duplicates could be used in Kelmscott Press books "without artistic loss."

Euclid. *Elementa Geometriae*. Venice: Erhard Ratdolt, 1482.

Morris's designs were again the results of much study of medieval and Renaissance illuminated manuscripts and incunabula. One printer in particular who inspired him was Erhard Ratdolt (ca.1447-ca.1527), an artist who worked in Venice from 1476 to 1486, and then returned to his native town of Augsburg. He printed in both Gothic and Roman type, taking great care with ornamentation. He was one of the first printers to use *entrelac* initials, i.e., decorated initials used at the beginning of chapters or sections of text in which

the letter formed part of an interlaced design or tracery.

In this first printing of Euclid's famous *Elements of Geometry*, Morris could not help but find ideas for his own trellaced initials. On the pages shown here there are six different versions of the letter S. Clearly Ratdolt engraved many variations, experimenting with the shape of the letters as well as the vines and flowers.

### CASE 13

William Morris. *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*. Hammersmith, Kelmscott Press, 1892.

*The Defence of Guenevere* is the fifth book published by the Press. Some of the initials are surprisingly like those of the early printers. On these pages, for example, the similarity between the S and some of those drawn by Ratdolt is striking.

Morris was quick to assure his critics and associates that he was not intentionally copying precedent, and, indeed, his designs continued to change and develop throughout the life of the Press. Biographer Fiona MacCarthy reports that even during his last illness, Morris spent what strength he had in designing new ornaments and borders for publications still in process.

John Ruskin. *The Nature of Gothic*. Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1892.

In addition to the decorated initial, Morris also used borders and frames. The frame around the beginning of this text is the simple border which he used in all of the first five books of the Press. Morris designed full, three-quarter, half, quarter, and corner borders for his books. In *The History of Godefrey of Boloyne* (see Case 12) the various sized borders are used throughout. Most of his books,

however, are like this one, with decoration limited to a single border, decorated initials, and small decorations such as the paragraph symbol used here. This small mark is conspicuous in books published by William Caxton in the 1470s and 1480s.

The full border serves as an excellent means of understanding another of Morris's principles of book design. When he said that the text block should be in the proper position on the page, he meant that the margins around the text should vary in width. They should be in a fixed proportion to one another: "the hinder edge (that which is bound in) must be the smallest member of the margins, the head margin must be larger than this, the fore [i.e., the outer] larger still, and the tail largest of all."

Morris was not always successful in carrying out his formula. Sometimes, in order to fit in the shoulder notes which he preferred over the running title, the fore-edge margin became wider than his theory would dictate. Then the tail or bottom margin turned into a broad expanse of blank paper, which was exactly counter to another goal, that of a dense, black, richly-covered page.

It is interesting to note that this text by Ruskin was the fourth book of the Press. It is a reprint of Ruskin's famous chapter, "On the Nature of Gothic" from his *The Stones of Venice* which was published in 1853 while Morris was an undergraduate at Oxford. Morris was strongly impressed by Ruskin's indictment of the Industrial Revolution and celebration of medieval architecture (see Case 1), and remained so throughout his life.

Alfred Lord Tennyson. *Maud, a Monodrama*. Hammersmith, Kelmscott Press, 1893.

The solid, dark block of type which Morris always sought proved to be most difficult to achieve when printing poetry. His solution was to print the opening stanzas as paragraphs separated usually by small leaf ornaments or numbers, although sometimes allowing a line of white between the rectangular stanzas.

The example shown here also illustrates his solution to the nearly blank page that normally is opposite page one of a text. By

designing a title page with a hand-lettered title engraved against a background of floral or vine ornaments enclosed in a border that mirrors the border of page one, Morris has not only filled in the white space, he has also created a double-page spread that artistically is a single unit. Even the crease in the center exposes a minimum of white. The result is usually a most beautiful resolution to the challenges of poetry, and Morris used this format in twenty of the fifty-three Kelmscott books, including his collections of Coleridge, Rossetti, Keats, Shelley, and Swinburne, as well as a few of his prose titles such as *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (1892), *The History of Reynard the Foxe* (1893), *The Order of Chivalry* (1893), *The History of Godefrey of Boloyne* (1892), and others.

*Maud* was an unusual commission for the Kelmscott Press. Morris printed the work, but it was published by Macmillan & Co., London. It also was one of the few titles that was a solidly profitable production, costing the Press £ 202 14s. 1d. and Macmillan £ 400.

William Shakespeare. *The Poems of William Shakespeare ...* Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1893.

In February 1893, Morris finished work on a collection of Shakespeare's poems, including "Venus and Adonis," "The Rape of Lucretia," the *Sonnets*, and "The Lover's Complaint." The poems were edited by Frederick S. Ellis (1830-1901), a long-time friend, bookseller, and publisher, who also edited fourteen other Kelmscott books. For this collection Morris and Ellis decided to use Shakespeare's original spelling, a decision that may have been one cause of the book's unusual popularity.

Displayed here is one of the three printer's marks Morris designed for the Kelmscott Press. This is the first, intended for the octavos and small quartos. The second, used in the larger quartos such as *The History of Godefrey of Boloyne*, is the name Kelmscott in black letters surrounded by leafy vines drawn in outline. The third is the word Kelmscott in a long rectangle filled with a floral design. This mark was used only in the *Chaucer*.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Poems Chosen out of the Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1896.

This small volume contains just thirteen poems. Morris needed to be persuaded that there were even this many of Coleridge's poems worthy of reprinting. In one undated letter to F. S. Ellis, he noted only four poems which interested him: "Christabel," "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Love," and "Kubla Khan."

For all of this lack of enthusiasm, however, the finished book reveals some beautiful and careful work, although there are uncharacteristic features as well. For example, there is a greater amount of white space and use of red ink than is usual, and the layout of a double-page spread can be rather complex, as in this opening. Perhaps the date of the book, combined with Morris's attitude toward Coleridge as a writer, may explain some of these alterations. The book was issued in April 1896, and by then Morris was well into his final illness. He was very weak and not able to walk much, and his attention to details concerning the Press centered primarily on the *Chaucer* (see Case 14), which was completed on June 26, 1896, just three months before his death on October 3.

#### CASE 14

Geoffrey Chaucer. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer Now Newly Imprinted*. Facsimile edition. London: The Basilisk Press, 1974.

*The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* is the culminating work of the Kelmscott Press. It is the most ambitious, the most richly ornamented, the one revealing the most integration between text, ornament, and illustration. It is the logical conclusion to all of Morris's theories and tendencies in art, design, and book production. Professor William S. Peterson of the University of Maryland calls it the "litmus test which measures one's response to Morris's work as a printer."

It certainly was a book long in the making. Morris was

thinking of printing a Chaucer when he first designed his Troy and Chaucer type in 1891. And, of course, Chaucer had been one of the great discoveries of Morris and Burne-Jones at Oxford in the 1850s. Morris's own poetry was frequently compared with Chaucer's, and Caxton's 1484 second edition was one Morris had studied for years.

Following the design of the type, work began with the borders as early as February 1893. Burne-Jones and William H. Hooper, principal wood-engraver for the Press, created eighty-seven illustrations from 1892 through 1895. F. S. Ellis was assigned the difficult task of securing permission from the University of Oxford's Clarendon Press to reprint texts they had just published in 1894. Printing began in August 1894, and by early 1895 another press was acquired in order to hasten the project along. Thus, even while all the other printing jobs were in process, work on the Chaucer was never far out of mind. During Morris's last year, he finished designing a special pigskin binding for a few of the copies, and engraved the title page.

This 1974 facsimile edition is opened to Morris's engraved title and borders, and the first of Burne-Jones's illustrations. The picture depicts Chaucer reading from a book and standing in a garden lush with the April growth described in the opening stanza. Morris contributed to this illustration by drawing the plants in the garden.

Both this volume and the *Companion Volume* are bound in a cloth printed by Liberty of London, using the pattern "Larkspur" which Morris designed in 1874.

*A William Morris Broadside Illustrating Two Stages in the Design of the Kelmscott Chaucer*. San Francisco: The Grabhorn Press, 1934.

The Grabhorn Press printed this broadside on dampened, hand-made paper for members of The Book Club of California in honor of the hundredth anniversary of Morris's birth (March 24, 1834). It provides an excellent means of appreciating the difference in size between Troy and Chaucer types.

Morris's original plan was to print his *Chaucer* in Troy type in a single column. After seeing a trial page (like this one on the right),

Morris realized he would need to use a double-column format in a type reduced to at least a pica, or 12-point, size. The reproduction on the left contains the same lines as those on the right, but they occupy just a portion of the second column. Thus the basic design of the book was established: a folio on the Perch paper with two columns of sixty-three lines each.

Carl Purington Rollins. *A Leaf from the Kelmscott Chaucer, Together with a Monograph*. New York: P. C. Duschnes, 1941.

This single leaf comes from an original, incomplete copy whose pages were distributed along with a short essay by Rollins. It is an example of a typical page of the text containing the normal decorated initials and shoulder note in red ink.

Morris could have used any one of many published texts for Chaucer's works. Certainly *The Canterbury Tales* had been reprinted repeatedly since Caxton's first edition of 1478. But, as would be expected, Morris searched for texts as close to the originals as he could find. Fortunately there were a few late nineteenth-century scholars who also believed that the original Chaucer should be determined and studied, not the later glosses and conjectures of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century editors. Morris turned to the work of F. G. Furnival, founder of the Chaucer Society, and to Walter W. Skeat of Cambridge University who had just completed in 1894 a monumental six-volume edition based on six early Chaucer manuscripts. After several petitions to the Clarendon Press, permission was finally granted for the Kelmscott Press to use Skeat's version of the poems. The text of *The Canterbury Tales* is based on the Ellesmere manuscript, an illustrated copy of the text that was at the time considered to be the most accurate extant version.

Geoffrey Chaucer. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer; a Facsimile of the William Morris Kelmscott Chaucer* ... Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1958.

The section of "The Wife of Bath's Tale" in which the poor old woman succeeds in eliciting a statement of submission from her new husband, thereby allowing her wrinkled, scraggly body to emerge miraculously from the dirty rags as young, firm flesh, was selected by Edward Burne-Jones for two of his illustrations. Morris positioned them on two facing pages along with the appropriate portions of text. It is a fine example of the goal of both artists, to bring the illustrations and text as closely together as possible.

This is in contrast to the tradition of illustrating *The Canterbury Tales* that began as early as the fifteenth-century Ellesmere manuscript. In that copy, as well as every other edition until the late-eighteenth century, the illustrations were limited to a portrait of the individual pilgrim, each mounted, and placed near the decorated initial at the beginning of the tale. Any depiction of the tale's action, if illustrated at all, would have been merely a simple tableaux. Burne-Jones broke completely with this custom, omitting entirely portraits of the pilgrims (except for Chaucer himself who is not mounted). Nor does he include a drawing of the procession of pilgrims or of them gathered at the Tabard Inn in Southwark the night before they set out for Canterbury. Both of these scenes had become conventions of Chaucer's earlier illustrators.

Duncan Robinson. *A Companion Volume to the Kelmscott Chaucer*. London: The Basilisk Press, 1975.

The *Companion Volume* to the 1974 facsimile edition contains two essays by Duncan Robinson, one reviewing Morris's "little typographical adventure" with the Kelmscott Press, and the second examining the woodcut illustrations by Burne-Jones. The volume then presents facsimiles of eighty-five of the finished drawings for the half-page illustrations. These original drawings were made in pencil on sheets of white cartridge paper measuring 129 x 172 mm. They are now housed in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, England.



The drawings for “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” are complex and reflect the moral dilemma of the knight. Robinson describes the scene as follows:

The knight’s honour, as well as his life, is at stake in his obligations to an unattractive spouse. His revulsion separates them.... And yet he must submit to her demands of his own free will before the story can have a happy ending.

Burne-Jones illustrates this tension in the stance of the knight, facing away from his haggard bride, “clearly preferring the look of the hard narrow bench” on the right to the bed which frames the picture to the left. The center of the room is an empty gulf between the knight and his wife, with the eye drawn to the doorway and steps, the means of escape for the knight. But once the knight submits to the woman’s judgment, agreeing to follow her decisions, her body is rejuvenated, and in Plate 13, the figures begin to reach for one another.

The pencil drawings, beautiful though they are, were too fine for W. H. Hooper to engrave. Again, Emery Walker devised the solution. The originals were photographed, and another artist, Robert Catterson-Smith, reworked the prints, marking the lines and shadings so that they could be rephotographed onto woodblocks and then cut by Hooper. This was a meticulous and complicated procedure, but the success of it is evident from the pages displayed here.

Special Collections Library  
7th Floor, Hatcher Graduate Library  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1205  
(313) 764-9377

Open 10 am to 5 pm Weekdays  
10 am to 12 Noon Saturdays

Please plan to visit our upcoming exhibition:

"From Papyri to King James:  
The Transmission of the English Bible"

Opening December 4, 1996