WILLIAM MORRIS

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To deal with Morris in a brief space is particularly difficult. One concentrates on some aspect of his work to give an idea of his scope and thoroughness there, and thus loses the great range and force of his work as a whole. Or else, attempting to depict the variety and many-sidedness of his approach to life and art, one gives a sketchy effect of a jack of all trades. Yet there is a pervasive unity in all his activities which prevents them from ever flying apart in a dilletante and haphazard way, while the very nature of his impulse means that he cannot be satisfied with any single form of expression. My task here is to give some picture of Morris's development as a whole, the sort of man he was, and how his multiple activities come together and relate to one another.

No doubt the years of childhood leave deep marks or patterns of experience in everyone of us; and such imprints are of great importance in determining the form and content characteristic of a writer or artist. They do much to shape certain elements of his outlook, the kind of experience to which he is most responsive, and the general direction of his expression. Often we can only guess at the correlations. But with Morris we can make out with much certainty how the child was father of the man.

Some thirty years ago I wrote: "A traveller along the road from Epping to London in the early 1840s might have seen on the fringe of the forest, in a parkland, a boy riding a pony in a glittering suit of toy armour. He could hardly have guessed how much the game was going to mean to history; for the boy was William Morris, who was going to play that game to the end of his days and by playing it transform in many ways the life of the world". That is, the medieval dream was to stay with him all his days as something to be lived out, not in simple repetitions, but as a force continually modified by reality, yet as continually modifying that reality itself.

Especially important were the years at Woodford Hall, from the age of about six to fourteen. The Georgian mansion was set in a park of some fifty acres, with a hundred acres of farmland. Epping Forest was so near, so familiar, that he claimed later to have known it "yard by yard", and its

hornbeam thickets haunt his prose and verse. May his daughter tells us that "the open air, the wanderings there" in the garden and grounds, "and in the Forest, the making-up of stories about everything he met were his chief amusements; and he would go off by himself visiting any old ruin or an old church, and it was very early that the sight of ancient buildings began to store his brain with pictures that the prodigious memory called up and used later in life." In a house like Woodford there lingered ways of life closer to medieval than to modern England. The family brewed their own beer, made their own butter, baked their own bread. The children at high prime, midway between breakfast and dinner, had a meal of cake and cheese and small ale, and there were traditional games and customs like the masque of St. George on Twelfth Night.

We can see then how William was indelibly affected by the garden, parkland, and forest of his childhood, and by the forms of natural growth, cultivated and wild, that he thus came to know. And we see how this cluster of memories gained its enduring force because it expressed for him freedom and independence. From the outset his enjoyment of nature was linked with a fierce resistance to anything that got in his way and threatened to cut him off from the sources of his delight. Further, as May said, his deep love of garden and forest as the sphere of freedom and happiness was early merged with a love of the past as it stirred his imagination in the form of ancient buildings, craftwork, or other such remnants of ancient ways. Such ways, he felt, were rather a part of his independent life in the world of nature than of the contemporary world about him.

One can show how constantly his early experiences appear directly or with only slight changes in his later work. The scenes of hunting, roasting, feasting in Jason and other writings are derived from the hunts and games that were part of his play with his brothers. He had his own garden, which he tended. Later he recalled "the beautiful hepatica which I used to love when I was a quite little boy." Again: "To this day when I smell a may-tree I think of going to bed by daylight." In News from Nowhere, where he maturely depicts the England of his hopes, which he believes will be realised by political struggle, we find the combination that never ceased to excite him as perhaps nothing else did: a lovely girl merged with his childhood imagery of greenery and flowers. "One of the girls, the handsome one, who had been scattering little twigs of lavender and sweet-smelling herbs about the floor, came up near to listen, and stood behind me with her hand on

my shoulder, in which she held some of the plant that I used to call balm: its strong sweet smell brought back to my mind my very early days in the kitchen garden at Woodford, and the large blue plums which grew on the wall beyond the sweet herb patch -- a collection of memories which all boys will see at once."

Indeed in News the movement into the desired future is felt as a return to origins, to childhood realised on a new level. Morris keeps on turning to childhood memories to explain what he feels of the new society. Communism is described as the second childhood of the world. Finally there is the journey upstream (to origins, to childhood): to the house that is Kelmscott, his adult recreation of the early ideal. And this house is felt "from the roof-covered porch to the strange and quaint garrets amongst the great timbers ... to be inhabited for the time by children." The entry is heralded by Ellen's cry, which is Morris's own deepest cry, summing up the forces that have upheld and driven him on all his life: "The earth and the growth of it and the life of it! If I could but say and show how I love it." Hammond argues that it is the child-like part of us that produces works of imagination, and Morris in a lecture of 1866 declares that the best and most useful men are those who have never thrown off their youthful qualities.

It was indeed the fact that in a deep sense Morris never outgrew his childhood, which gave him the peculiar quality that all who met him in later years recognised as child-like or boyish. Mackail remarks:

> Master of himself and therefore of all near him, Morris retained the most child-like simplicity in the expression of his actual thoughts or feelings on any subject, and was as little hampered by false shame as he was guided by convention. In some points he remained an absolute child to the end of his life. If you introduced him to a friend and he had the faintest suspicion that he was there to be shown off, his manners instantly became intolerable. As child-like was another of his characteristics, the constant desire to be in touch with things he loved.

Mackail means literally in touch with things. Here was the need that drove him into craftwork and kept him strenuously at it. From the first glimpse of him at school, when he was incessantly making netting, to the ends of his days, his hands were restless. At Oxford, if he had nothing else to do, we hear of him continually twiddling his watch-chain. It was when Burne Jones drew him into artwork under Rossetti that he at last found the release he needed, a tireless happiness in doing things with hands that reached out at

the world; to feel, test, make something new and vivid out

Yeats noted that the affection he inspired was like
for children; and such comments could be multiplied. T
realise how deep his sources of inspiration lay in what I
garden of enjoyment and the forest of freedom. A neces
make-up which kept him inhabiting those spheres of childl
resistance to all the forces that threatened his life in
outbursts, the blind tempers, that he felt at some trivi
There are endless stories of the uncontrollable way in w
plates or tore down curtains that got in his way. Once
twisted it in his fury, and so on. Not that we ever he
least kind of violence against people. His black rages
obstructions and were usually brief. The missing of a
blind outburst and at such times he might yell and swear
one form of activity in which his uncontrollable furies
singlestick bouts, which he much enjoyed at Oxford; in
liable to forget himself and it was found necessary to p
between him and his opponent.

Such fits of rage show clearly enough the child who
hopelessly cornered, frustrated, shut in (or out) by a p
with all his being but does not understand. Morris's de
garden of enjoyment and the forest of freedom had as its
the total resistance he felt at any thwarting power which
the full exercise of his faculties. And just as the need
release led him in time to a demand that all men should hav
self-fulfilments, so his wild struggle against the obstruct
world, became the struggle on all fronts against tyranny an
against the forces distorting and fragmenting the lives of

Let us look then briefly at the ways in which his de
tree, garden and forest, played a key-part in the develop
decorative designs were essentially an attempt to introdu
points as possible the forms of flower, leaf, bird, which
at Elm House and Woodford Hall. What he felt was not a
wish to reflect and repeat the loved forms; it was a de

principles of growth and to become humanly one with nature. Glasier, going into the main room at Kelmscott House, felt "a delightful sense of garden-like freshness and bloom in the room." Morris's concept of the medieval scene was of a place where nature in the shape of greenery and blossom appeared as a living aspect of the house. In John Ball we read of Will Green's upper room: "The walls, instead of being panelled, were hung with a coarse-woven stuff of green worsted with birds and trees woven into it. There were flowers in plenty stuck about the room, mostly of the yellow blossoming flag or flower-de-luce, of which I had seen plenty in all the ditches, but in the window near the doors was a pot full of those same white poppies I had seen when I first woke up." That is, when he woke into the medieval dream. The flowers bless and guard the vision. In The Lesser Arts of Life of 1882, defending his Firm, he declared:

> To turn our chamber walls into the green woods of the leafy month of June, populous of bird and beast; or a summer garden with man and maid playing round a fountain, or a solemn procession of mythical warriors and heroes of old: that was surely worth the trouble of doing, and the money that had to be paid for it; that was no languid acquiescence in an upholstery.

And he goes on to link this position with his childhood memories: how he first saw "a room hung with faded greenery at Queen Elizabeth's Lodge, by Chigwell Hatch in Epping Forest," and how the impression it made merged with the feeling for the past roused by Scott's novels, especially The Antiquary with its description of the green room at Monkbarns. Thus his feeling for garden and forest became indissolubly linked with his feelings for the medieval world, its forms of imagery and its systems of craftwork.

The more we consider his ideas about textile design and design in general we see that he is always thinking in terms of a garden of flowers and foliage. "The aim", he says, "should be to combine clearness of form and firmness of structure with the mystery that comes of abundance and richness of detail." Conversely he says of a garden that it should be both ordered and luxuriant. Always there should be a close and organic relation between garden and house. In the world of News from Nowhere this relation has invaded all aspects of life, including clothes. Clara defends the lovely and bright clothes of the people as an aspect of their return to nature. Again I could go on citing indefinitely from Morris or those who have written about him, such as Lethaby, passages that bring out my point. It will be enough

here to mention the letter to Louie Baldwin written in March 1864 just after his fortieth birthday when, in revulsion from London in the spring, he arrives at the idea of the Garden City. In turn the emotions and ideas there set out draw him in time into the fight for the preservation of old buildings, which preluded his socialism.

When he did become a socialist he felt that his idea of the Garden City was not just a pleasant fancy, which might be attempted in a few favoured places, but represented an aim that could really be actualised some day on a general scale. He wanted the whole of England to become a garden where it was not a forest. In Art and Socialism, 1844, he wrote:

> (a) Our houses must be well built, clean and healthy (b) there must be abundant garden space in our towns, and our towns must not eat up the fields and natural features of the country; nay I demand that there be left waste places and wilds in it, or romance and poetry -- that is Art, will die out amongst us.

In Town and Country he demanded that each city should be a garden full of splendid houses. As a socialist he became the first fully-grounded conservationist or ecologist, protesting against the pollution of the earth by a system dominated by the cash-nexus and necessarily involving the fragmentation of man, the destruction of the environment by a purely mechanist concept of production.

In his socialist applications he was thinking in full accord with Marx's call for the breaking-down of the division of town and country. But he also had Ruskin behind him; and further his ideas sprang from his inmost being, from the nexus of attitudes we have traced back to his childhood. He was thus dealing with the theme in a more fully concrete way than Marx could do, developing in his own way the aesthetic aspects of the latter's thinking about which he could have known nothing. (There is a kinship of his idea of the city and the Soviet project of the agrogorod, which came up under Kruschev, but about which little has been done.) What used to be dismissed or smiled at in him as the personal aberration of an artist imperfectly turned socialist can now be seen as the thinking of a socialist, who, precisely because he was an artist, realised with a special fullness and clarity, not only what a truly human society would be like, but also the dire problems that our world was creating for itself by its lunatic waste and perversion of natural resources and its failure to bring any truly human values to bear on the situation.

But before I leave the consideration of Morris's childhood, I should like to glance at another important aspect of his work which goes back to the early years. This is the use of dream-systems in his prose and verse, which were of crucial significance for the working-out of his ideas. One way or another they pervade his work, but can be seen with special force, clearly revealing their central function, in his early romances, in the unpublished novel written in 1872 (at the time of maturing crisis in his relations with Janey and Rossetti), in Love is Enough, in The Dream of John Ball and News from Nowhere. Several times he links the dreams in his writings with the dreams of his own childhood or with the stories he then heard. Thus, in News Morris as the Guest enters the blessed land of communism through a happy dream-fantasy which reveals men in secure union with one another and with nature, and at the end he is dismissed by a nightmare: "Suddenly I saw as it were a black cloud rolling up to meet me, like a nightmare of my childish days, and for a while I was conscious of nothing else than of being in the dark."

In Frank's Sealed Letter, which Mackail pointed to as of special autobiographical significance, the love-rejection is thus described:

> I fell there before her feet. I caught the hem of her garment. I buried my face in its folds; madly I strove to convince myself that she was but trying me, that she could not speak for her deep love, that it was a dream only. Oh! how I strove to wake, to find myself, with my heart beating wildly, and the black night around me, lying on my bed; as often, when, when a child, I used to wake from a dream of lions, and robbers, and ugly deaths, and the devil, to find myself in the dear room, though it was dark, my heart bounding with the fear of pursuit and joy of escape. But no dream breaks now, desperate, desperate, earnest. The dreams have closed round me, and become the dismallest reality, as I often used to fear those other dreams might; the walls of this fact are closed round about me now like the sides of an iron chest, hurrying on down to some swift river, with the black waters above, to the measureless rolling sea. I shall never more wake to anything like that.

He there expresses the sort of claustrophic dream fear that we would assume to lie behind his blind tempers, his momentary terror at some recalcitrant obstacle. The root-theme of the story is the loss of the earthly-paradise of Woodfall, the separation from his sister Emma.

The importance of the dream in his work lay in his sense that it represented a transitional stage between two levels of being: expressing either total frustration and loss of reality or the moment of triumphant transformation. The dream could thus provide the basis for uniting two divided states of being or periods of time, as in John Ball, while at the same time issuing in a dialectical consciousness that encompassed both the separation and the union. It could be used to bring out the potentiality in a situation, so that the dreamer might move forward in time, into a different level of being, without losing his link with the present, as in News. It thus provided a system of time-sequences which discarded clocktime and evoked dialectical relationships or significances which were veiled at the level of normal consciousness, and so on. Without this sort of dream-system never far from his mind in its workings Morris could not have even begun the adventure of thought and action which his life turned into. It lies at the heart of his creative vision and drive. Interestingly, we know one of the sources of his dream-system, in the Gothic novel. He and his sister Emma used to read Clara Reeve's The Old English Baron "in the rabbit warren at Woodford poring over the enthralling pages till both were wrought up to a state of mind that made them afraid to cross the park to reach home." This romance (with its characters William and Emma) has a dream-sequence which can be seen to underlie those that Morris later developed. The dream-changes are felt to reveal and bring up into consciousness the pattern of buried and secret events or truths. This pattern, lost to normal consciousness, cannot be recovered by direct intellectual effort on account of the deep emotional resistances; but in the dreamform the hidden connections and causes are revealed in symbolic systems and dialectical fusions.

We may claim then that fundamental in Morris's whole creative method is the sense of deep union with the earth through the garden of enjoyment and the forest of freedom, together with a sense of powerful obstructive forces that have to be fought if the union is to be maintained. And the use of dream-systems or sequences which bring out the totality of meanings as nothing else can and which above all express the tension between the actual world and the potentialities obscurely at work all the while within it.

As we said earlier, Morris is not different from other artists or writers in drawing on early experiences. What is remarkable in him is the clarity and fullness with which we can make out those experiences and see how they remained at the centre of his being -- how with steady persistence he went on extending the range and significance of what at the outset was a narrowly personal complex of needs and resistances. Now we can go on to see how the analysed elements reasserted themselves at each phase of his development, enlarging their scope and taking on ever-fuller meanings.

First, in the years before he went to Oxford he had begun to sort out the ideas and attitudes generated by his reactions against the world outside his garden and forest. By his later teens he had arrived at a definite hostility to the ruling values of his society, at least in certain broad ways. When the rest of the family attended the Duke of Wellington's funeral, he rode off on his own to Waltham Abbey: to a place where he could feel in communion with medieval values. When he was forced to accompany the others to the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park, he sat down outside and refused to go in. "Wonderfully ugly," he commented. Before that he had shared in the excitements of the rebellion at Marlborough College, though he was still too much of a lone character to do more than shout with the others. But the lesson went home. Later in 1886-7 he said in a letter that his schooldays had taught him "chiefly one thing," rebellion. For all his aloofness he had tasted something of the spirit of rebellious fellowship. He had also learned much of archaeology and church history from the school library, and had pored over a book like Pugin's Contrasts with its paired engravings polemically underlining the difference between the medieval and the modern worlds. He was already much affected by the Gothic Revival and the Anglo-Catholic or High Church Movement, which his beloved sister Emma favoured. When she married a clergyman, he felt finally thrown out of his childhood world; his sense of isolation and his resistances both intensified. He accepted a future as a High Church priest.

When he went to Oxford in 1852 he was keyed-up to look for ways of widening his revolt. The chance encounter with Burne Jones, leading to their lifelong friendship, provided just the basis he needed. He had found a true friend and was no longer alone; and this friend, introducing him to the other Birminghamites at Pembroke College, gave him a wider circle of which he could feel warmly a member. These others came from industrialised areas and through them he gained his first direct knowledge of what was happening to people in

the factory world. While still much stirred by the High Church Movement and the advocates who opposed industrialism from the angle of the landed gentry, by the Young Englanders and by writings like Charlotte Yonge's Heir of Redclyffe, he became aware of the Christian Socialists and turned rather to Kingsley than to Newman. His revolt was above all broadened by his reaction to Carlyle and Ruskin. Carlyle's Past and Present presented the medieval world as an organic community with a man-to-man responsibility, and made a powerful attack on the modern world as held together only by the cash-nexus. "Our life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under the due laws-of-war, named 'fair competition' and so forth, it is a mutual hostility. We have forgotten everywhere that Cash-payment is not the sole relation of human beings." Ruskin in his Stones of Venice carried on this sort of position, linking it explicitly with the question of art and deepening the critique of industrialism.

The chapter on the Nature of Gothic became Morris's evangel and continued to stir him till the end of his days, when he printed it as one of his Kelmscott books. Ruskin stressed how medieval buildings showed "the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone," while post-Renaissance structures, with their split between architect and craftsman, their set patterns and frigid finish, were "full of insults to the poor in every line." Morris absorbed the faith that all work should be a form of art, of self-fulfilment, of love; and Ruskin helped him to break from religious formulations by removing the medieval craft-virtues from the Catholic Church and deriving them from the craftsman's status and his pleasure in production.

Further attacking division of labour, Ruskin summed up: "It is not truly speaking, the labour that is divided, but the men: -- Divided into mere segments of men -- broken into small fragments and crumbs of life; so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin, or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin or the head of a nail." Some thirty years later, in 1883, Morris, making some notes for his own use by translating passages from the French version of Capital, wrote at the top of the sheet: "It is not only the labour that is divided, subdivided, and portioned out betwixt divers men: it is the man himself who is cut up, and metamorphased into the automatic spring of an exclusive operation. Karl Marx." He had followed out Ruskin's deep-probing intuition into its full range of applications; the personal, social, political-economic, and artistic aspects are all brought together and

realised in terms of a dialectic of human development.

But in 1853-5 he was still far from grasping all the implications of Carlyle's and Ruskin's thought. He could not be satisfied with general points of criticism, however just. If the clue lay in the medieval world, he needed to know what world in its full concrete and existential nature. So he read all the chronicles, romances, poems of the period he could get hold of, as well as studying the art. The one form of expression of which he had any mastery was that of words, so he strove to define what he had learned of medieval man in his own poems and romances. He had thus to achieve in himself the medieval condition before he could safely confront the modern world in all its divisive and treacherous involvements. Then only could the full consequences of the struggle for the whole man, for the ending of the division of labour and of the fragmentation of the worker, be truly recognised, understood, and acted upon. And because of the ceaseless inner pressures (based ultimately on the criterion of what I have called the garden of enjoyment and the forest of freedom), he could not halt at some point of compromise along the way, as other men could.

It was to take him three decades to work out this problem: to realise the medieval situation as strongly and clearly as was possible in his world. This long phase began with the poems and romances of the Defence of Guenevere and came to its conclusion with the successful extension and stabilisation of the Firm. Morris had to live it all through to the obsessed, exciting, and often bitter end before he could return to the consideration of Carlyle's and Ruskin's critique and ask himself what it fully implied in the struggle against his world.

When we grasp these points we are able to estimate the originality of the early poems. What matters for Morris is the degree of intensity with which he enters into the life of his medieval characters. He creates a new form, which is at once the climax of the romantic idiom, and the transformation into its opposite. The romantic vision, reviving what Keats might call the very "feel" of medieval life, is merged with a sharp emotional realism. The diction is often archaic, yet its effect is of a casual direct speech wrung-out at the height of an experience that reaches to the depths. A naive energy, half-unconscious of itself, is driven by the desperate dramatic moment to fight in a sort of joyous anguish for the releasing truth, against a fierce current of resistances. The immediacy of sensuous imagery,

a sort of iconic present, exists by contrast with a situation of loss, danger, threat; and we are simultaneously drawn into the medieval moment and into our own present sphere of existence where the balances are very different but where the loss and emptiness encloses. (A full analysis would show that the poems in part belong to the school of the Spasmodics with its sense of crisis and its attempt to realise a purpose in life by grappling with the contemporary situation in something like its existential immediacy.) A key-role is played by the dream-mechanism, which merges past and present, and expresses the transformative element in life as well as revealing the gaps to be closed. History fades into dream-transformations, which yet in turn, by the concrete force with which the persons and situations are realised, conjure up reality and compel us into a moment of deep choice. (The time-layers in 'Geoffrey Teste Noire' show the method in its full complexity.) The struggle of free men for a brotherly world appears in 'Svend' and 'Gertha's Lovers', but Morris cannot yet make it central in his world-picture.

Entangled with this phase were the various plans worked out with Burne-Jones for a monastery or cloistral brotherhood, which was to engage in a holy war with the age. Steadily Morris's interest in secular and art matters grew stronger till at the end of his second expedition to northern France he and Burne Jones talked fervently on the quay of Le Havre and decided to dedicate themselves to art. "That was the most memorable night of my life." The brotherhood plan was diverted into the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine which Morris financed for a year. He went to be trained as an architect under Street in Oxford, while Burne-Jones entered the London artworld under Rossetti. The pull of the latter was too strong and soon Morris moved into it. Now at last his craft-powers were released, first by trying to draw and paint as a disciple of Rossetti, then by finding a wider sphere of activity in the work of the group painting the walls of the Oxford Union. He realised at last that his mind and hands were happy in the making of things, and only then.

Still under Rossett's influence he married Janey and now wanted to build for himself a world which would carry over as fully as possible what he felt to be the medieval virtues. With the aid of Webb and the artists he had come to know through Rossetti he built Red House. The idea of a dedicated brotherhood in cloistral conflict with the age had become that of a group of artists working together to produce a small enclave in which the ruling values of the Victorian world were in all respects rejected. The medieval community had contracted to Morris's home-circle. From one angle then Red House and its

projects appear as a retreat, but only if we subtract it from the whole complex drive in Morris, which needed always to unite theory and practice on the best available terrain of the moment, and yet at the same time to keep on finding an ever-wider sphere of reference for the activities thus liberated. He had got inside the medieval world concretely in the poems and romances; the next step was to find some point d'appui on which to begin building that world afresh within the existing hostile system. No matter how small the point, it would serve as the basis for wider and fuller constructions. Bigger schemes at this phase would have merely been replicas of Pugin and the Gothic Revival or would have fallen quite flat.

The poem leading into this phase was Scenes from the Fall of Troy: Troy the beleagured city in which the Trojans fight to hold Helen, the beauty of the world. The next step was to find some way of carrying the values of Red House outwards, into society, so that the dream-existence would turn into a real conflict of art seeking to embody the whole man within a society of endless self-division. Burne-Jones says the idea came to Morris "of beginning a manufactory of all things necessary for the decoration of a house. Webb had already designed some beautiful table glass made by Powell of Whitefriars, metal candlesticks, and tables for Red House, and I had already designed several windows for churches, so the idea grew of putting our experiences together for the service of the public." Mackail says no single person started off the idea, but Madox Brown and Rossetti played their part in begetting it. All these artists had done a certain amount of industrial designing; the importance of Red House was that it made them think of a comprehensive attack on the problem. For Red House Morris had been using his inherited money, which by the mid-60s was beginning to fail him. Now he had to face the contradiction that while he wanted to use the stored artistic powers of the group for the benefit of mankind, for the restoration of values opposed at all points to the rule of the cash-nexus, he had in fact to embody his crusade in a money-making organisation willy-nilly fighting for its existence in the competitive world he hated and wanted to supplant.

Not that such issues were to come to the forefront for some time (twenty years indeed). For long Morris was mainly taken up by the arduous struggle to keep the venture alive and to expand it effectively. The Firm, launched in 1861, set out to challenge contemporary taste and to produce works such as mural decorations, either pictures or pattern carvings (especially as applied to architecture), stained glass in harmony with mural decoration, metal work

in all branches including jewelry, furniture using figure or pattern painting, embroidery, stamped leather, and "every article necessary for domestic use." As the Firm grew, it produced also a variety of wallpapers and textiles, tapestries, carpets. Morris experimented with dyes and did illuminated books of poetry, and so on. Not that there was anything new in attempting to link art and industrial design. What was new in the Firm was the way in which its values were thoroughly thought-out and comprehensively applied; the question was not the adaptation of art to industry, but the working-out of systems of production in which art had the first and last word, art reunited with craft.

Near the end of his life, in 1894, Morris summed up the impulses which led him into the Firm and which the experience there intensified:

> Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilisation ...
> The hope of past times was gone, the struggles of mankind for many ages had produced nothing but this sordid, aimless, ugly confusion; the immediate future seemed to me likely to intensify all the present evils by sweeping away the last survivals of the days before the dull squalor of civilisation has settled down on the world ... Was it all to end in a counting-house on the top of a cinder-heap, with Podsnap's drawing-room in the offing? ... As far as I could tell, scarce anyone seemed to think it worth while to struggle against such a consummation of civilisation.

The long poem The Earthly Paradise was the expression of the first period of the Firm, a tapestry poem that could be composed at the loom and in this sense represented an art closely linked with work. There is protect against the existing world but in passive terms. "Forget six counties overhung with smoke." The quest is there, but stands outside the series of tales; and quest and tales are connected with the seasons, the changes of the earth, but not in a way that overcomes the pervasive sense of transience and defeat, and vindicates the sensuous essence of love and enjoyment. The work thus perfectly reflects Morris's role in the Firm where he was seeking to recreate medieval craft-integrity without any serious struggle to change society so that the craft-activities would become a part of common life.

In a way, however, the poem develops internally its own self-criticism and moves to more active positions, as with 'The Lovers of Gudrun'. By the late 1860s Morris had turned to Norse themes, feeling the need to offset the elegiac elements by a recovery of the heroic. This turn was linked with a revulsion from Rossetti, to whom Janey had turned. When they took Kelmscott

Manor so that Rossetti could stay there as well, he felt the need of a sharp break and went off to Iceland. The impact of that island strengthened the effect that the sagas had had on him. Here he found a living society with much of the communal values of the sagas still vigorously surviving; a poor but tenacious community with a folk-culture and some genuine elements of clan-equality. He was able to convince himself, with a new force and clarity, that life could indeed be different than it was in England: that the values he had prized in the medieval world were not irredeemably lost, but could be revived and extended on new levels.

Not that he gained this faith without prolonged struggle. He wrote Love is Enough, a striking technical experiment with its interwoven series of levels, which uses the dream-method for an evocation of love by a sort of sheer hopeless devotion. His break-through came, however, with Sigurd the Volsung, which is written throughout with sustained passion, with an effect of true epical surge. Its tragic picture of a world doomed by omnipresent hatreds and treacheries reflected what he had come to feel unreservedly about his own society; its heroic note was what he needed to nerve himself for the outright struggle against that society. He summed up all that the sagas and the Icelanders had given him, and cleared the ground for the full attack on all that he felt to be dehumanising in English society, in all industrialised societies.

Not that he moved easily into that attack. As always he had to feel the ground securely under his feet before he could let himself go -- with the result that when he did let himself go, it was the whole of himself that was moved. So far had he isolated himself from politics in the days of building up the Firm that in 1868 William Michael Rossetti noted down his surprise at finding that he took an "interest in politics" and that he even held views "quite in harmony with the democratic principles of [Burne] Jones, Swinburne," and himself. In 1876 came the decisive turn outwards and Morris joined in the Liberal-Radical agitation against Disraeli. What had stirred him was the question of peace, which had come up through the dangerous tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the possibility of England supporting the Turks against the Slavs. He now for the first time encountered working-class politicians, such as those of the Labour Representation League. In 1877 he wrote for the Eastern Question Association a pamphlet, Unjust War: To the Working-Men of England, which, though concerned with the war-issue and not with the internal social situation in England, shows how quickly he had gone