



2018

The User, the Reader, and the Pocket Cathedral: William Morris's Arts and Crafts Aesthetic and the Decorated Book

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE USER, THE READER, AND THE POCKET CATHEDRAL:
WILLIAM MORRIS'S ARTS AND CRAFTS AESTHETIC AND THE DECORATED BOOK

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN ENGLISH

BY

BRANDIANN A. MOLBY

CHICAGO, IL

MAY 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is a continuation of my M.A. work at Royal Holloway, University of London, and I am grateful to the English faculty at RHUL, in particular to Ruth Livesay and Adam Roberts for their introduction to Victorian London, and to Mary Cowling for her too-short lectures on Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites. This project took shape under the direction of the English faculty at Loyola University Chicago, and I am deeply indebted to Francis Fennell, Jr. for his kind guidance, to James A. Knapp for a grounding in textual studies and word/image theory, to Micael Clarke for her matchless writing center pedagogy, and to Paul Eggert for helping me identify the final theoretical aims of this project. I am also grateful for the tireless efforts of the librarians at the Bodleian Library and Loyola's Cudahy Library.

I thank Amy Kessel, Melissa Bradshaw, and Sherrie Weller for their kind mentorship, and the staff of the Loyola University Chicago Writing Center, whom I have been privileged to work alongside. I am also indebted to each member of the Loyola University Chicago Victorian Society, which has continued, as it began, in the spirit of friendship, camaraderie, and humor.

I wish to offer my particular thanks to Lydia Craig for her peerless revision advice, to Pamela Caughie for her encouragement early in my time at Loyola, and to Josh and Cindy Wallace for their unflagging friendship. I am deeply grateful to Al and Diana Molby, Nate and Katie Molby, and Dan and Lena Troike for their unfailing support.

My deepest thanks to Matt Molby, to whom this dissertation is dedicated.

For Matt

My acquaintance with Morris led me to look at the page of a book as a picture,
and a book as an ornament.

George Bernard Shaw

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INTRODUCTION

Addressing the crowd at the National Association for the Advancement of Art in 1889, William Morris lamented how hard it was to find a well-designed ewer and basin for the bedroom. If you went shopping, he complained, all you would find would be pieces of “crockery with a scrawl of fern leaves and convolvulus over it which [...] gives you no pleasure, still less any idea; it only gives you an impression (a mighty dull one) of bedroom.”¹ Although essentially functional, the set, in Morris’s view, fails in all the important ways: namely to give pleasure to the consumer and the maker and to convey an idea through its form and decoration, even a rather basic idea of the natural world. The only real success of the ewer and basin lies in the fact that its “ornament, that special form which the ineptitude of the fern scrawl and the idiocy of the handle had taken, has sold so many dozen or gross more of that toilet set than of others” and thus is a commercial success even if an artistic and social failure.² For Morris, the impractical designs, too-perfect finishes, and cursory ornamentation found on most household items are not only symptomatic of the wider social decay brought about by industrialism’s progress, but they are actually fueling it.

While it may seem surprising to argue that the ewer and basin have the capacity to influence society, I contend that Morris’s argument is a central, largely unaddressed component

¹ Morris, William. “The Arts and Crafts of Today.” *Art and Its Producers and The Arts and Crafts of Today: Two Lectures Delivered for the Association for the National Advancement of Arts*. Paternoster Row, London: Longmans & Co., 1901. 36-7. Print.

² Ibid.

of his artistic principles. Despite the resurgent interest in Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites over the past twenty-five years, Morris scholarship has not fully addressed the extent to which his career is unified around his exploration and development of his beliefs about the nature and function of the work of art. Precisely because Morris's career was so varied and comprehensive, Morris scholarship has remained largely compartmentalized into separate critical discussions of his prose, poetry, applied arts and crafts, and book designs. With the exception of E.P. Thompson's landmark biography, most early twentieth-century scholarship also largely excised Morris's political activism as either unrelated to his artistic practice or as an aberration on his artistic legacy, and this disunity has prevented critics from tracing the complexity and extent of Morris's contributions to Victorian art, literature, and aesthetics.

To date, the most influential examination of the theoretical implications of Morris's work was Jerome McGann's landmark study of Kelmscott Press books, in which he recognizes the presence of a hermeneutic relationship between Morris's texts and the book's material decoration.³ For McGann, Morris "worked to integrate the poem and its performative medium not by seeking a return to oral traditions of production, but by acknowledging the compositional environment as a necessary condition for the creation of modern poetry [...and in the process undertook] a broad-scale effort to exploit as completely as possible all the resources of the physical media that were the vehicular forms of his writing."⁴ Apart from more recent studies in book history, such as Nicholas Frankel's acknowledgment of the reader's role in the

³ McGann, Jerome. "A Thing to Mind": The Materialist Aesthetic of William Morris." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 55.1 (Winter 1992): 55-74. *JSTOR*. Web. 25 November 2017.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 56

interpretation of Kelmscott books,⁵ subsequent examinations of Morris's texts have largely confined themselves to applying McGann's analysis to newer areas of interest in Morris studies such as ecocriticism, book history, and textual studies.

In an expansion of McGann's claims for "materialist aesthetics" as the defining feature of Kelmscott books, my dissertation maintains that Morris's book designs are the fullest expression of a user-oriented, Arts and Crafts interpretive model that Morris established over his long career as a designer and a craftsman and that goes to the very heart of Morris's aims for revolutionary socioeconomic change. I also propose that Morris's ideas about art, interpretation, and society represent a coherent aesthetic position which informs the full scope of his career from his earliest work as an architect and a painter to his final years as a book designer and publisher. As a means of unifying the various threads of Morris scholarship, my dissertation argues that these different phases of Morris's varied career can be best understood in terms of his materialist aesthetic. Through an analysis of his lectures, I demonstrate that Morris's interpretive model unifies both aesthetics and politics in terms that directly reveal his goals for art as a means of circumventing capitalist commodification and dehumanizing industrial labor. By reading his prose, poetry, and applied designs, I contend that Morris's political aesthetics is key to understanding his model for interpretation, and directly reveals Morris's own beliefs about the relationship between the maker, the user, and the handcrafted work of art. As a result, Morris's Arts and Crafts interpretive aesthetic also helpfully illuminates the complex relationship between text, image, and the reader in Morris's Kelmscott Press books.

⁵ Frankel, Nicholas. *Masking the Text: Essays on Literature and Mediation in the 1890s*. High Wycombe: The Rivendale Press, 2009.

This dissertation is also predicated on the argument that Morris's aesthetic remained relatively consistent throughout his life, and effectively unified his long and varied career. Outside of the work of biographies such as E.P. Thompson's Marxist reframing of Morris's socialism, few scholars have evaluated Morris's ideas about art, politics, and society as representative of a larger philosophical position; instead, critics have confined any discussion of his politics to his utopia *News from Nowhere*, and any evaluation of his standards of ethical craftsmanship at Morris & Co. to his own failure to achieve them. This critical trend has been exacerbated by the fragmentation and compartmentalization that defines Morris scholarship, itself the product of academic specialization and Morris's unusual mastery of such a wide range of artistic media. This disconnect has led to a wider critical failure to acknowledge the consistency of Morris's beliefs, even as they do evolve over the course of his lifetime, as Morris moved away from his early optimistic vision of socialist art and politics as expressed in Ruskinian guilds and Anglo-Catholic neo-monastic communities and towards his later acknowledgment of the limited potential of both art and activism to bring about lasting change in his own lifetime. I propose that his later public pursuit of socialism is in no way inconsistent with the earlier development of his work as an architect, poet, or designer, nor was it a mere vagary or passing interest in the way his work with *The Commonweal* and the Socialist League has often been framed following Edward Burne-Jones's own highly personal resistance to Morris's public activism. Rather, I follow E.P. Thompson in understanding Morris's political activity as the direct outcome and extension of his career, but I extend Thompson's argument to maintain that Morris's socialist and even revolutionary politics was an inseparable component of his aims both for

Morris & Co. and what became known as the wider Arts and Crafts movement. Despite his own frustration with the limits of his philosophy, Morris remained true to his Arts and Crafts principles, and his Kelmscott Press book designs are the culmination of his lifelong project of creating works of art that revolutionize the relationship between the individual and the society that produces it, in the most explicitly Ruskinian terms.

In addition to reframing Morris scholarship around his Arts and Crafts interpretive model, my dissertation also situates Morris's *oeuvre* in the context of Victorian aesthetics more generally. While McGann, perhaps following Nicholas Pevsner,⁶ discusses Morris's influence on modernism, I instead frame Morris's career alongside his contemporaries and discuss his philosophical and artistic contributions to the Victorian avant-garde, and with them, nineteenth-century ideas of interpretation. As a subject of scholarly inquiry, Victorian aesthetics itself remains largely defined by a preoccupation with both fine arts and applied craftsmanship as a means of improving society and the individual. As such, nineteenth-century theorists, politicians, and even engineers all understood arts and design as a sufficient mechanism for generating socioeconomic change, whether that change be capitalist infrastructure improvements, socialist art communes, or government investment in Neo-Gothic buildings as a means of uniting and benefiting the nation. Neo-Gothic architecture in particular becomes a through line for understanding the relationship between art and ethics, as John Ruskin's fervent articulation of the superiority of Gothic buildings gave moral weight to an existing trend in architecture and interior design.

⁶ Pevsner, Nikolaus. *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius*. Penguin Books, 1936. Print.

This nineteenth-century belief in the ethical efficacy of art coincided with the development of an ethically-oriented interpretive model, and I locate that development in the increased artistic attention to word and image over the course of the nineteenth century. From the narrative paintings of William Powell Frith and Augustus Egg to illustrated books such as the Moxon *Tennyson* and *Alice in Wonderland*, many Victorian works of art rely on the viewer to bring together word and image as part of the interpretive process. Rather than being predicated on any pre-existing iconographic narrative, narrative paintings use figures and objects in the genre scene to provide clues for the viewer to piece together the narrative that underpins the realist image. Similarly, nineteenth-century illustrated and decorated books increasingly present visual elements as a hermeneutically-significant means of understanding the narrative and move towards an increasing integration of text and illustration on the page. These nineteenth-century media attempt an increasing fusion of text and image in defiance of or in spite of representational gaps between word and image and in the process directly acknowledge the viewer's involvement in the interpretive process.

Morris's materialist aesthetic unifies and crystallizes these Victorian aesthetic concerns. His theoretical and practical commitment to the unification of decoration and design directly maps onto the unification of word and image posited by the nineteenth-century avant-garde, while his emphasis on decorated household objects reinforces the role of the user in bringing these formal elements together. Additionally, Morris relies on Ruskin's Neo-Gothic determination that an object's means of production, as well as ways in which the object is understood and used, have ethical implications for the user and society more generally. Given

Morris's reputation as the leading artist and designer behind the Arts and Crafts movement, these beliefs comprise a coherent philosophical, economic, and artistic set of principles that directly influenced the development of Victorian art, design, and interpretation across the period.

Through an examination of Morris's lectures, poetry and prose, and works of applied design, I also show that Morris's Arts and Crafts aesthetic stands as a decisive intervention in traditional theoretical discussions of the distinctions between the visual and verbal arts, many aspects of which have been individually discussed by art historians and literary scholars, but never in the wider context of both art-historical, editorial, and literary theory. To that end, I demonstrate that this Victorian ethical aesthetic, or right seeing, is a predominant Victorian interpretive mode, which leverages the formal elements of image and text to reframe the relationship between the viewer, the artist and the work of art. I then apply right seeing as an interpretive model to Morris's lectures and applied designs and demonstrate that Morris's aesthetic extends the model of right seeing in Arts and Crafts terms by altering the means of production and with it, the relationships among the user, the craftsman, and the work of art. Finally, I show how Morris's decorated books participate in his user-oriented aesthetic model, and use that model to show how Morris's book designs in general and the Kelmscott *Chaucer* in particular theorize the interpretive relationship between text, image, and the reader.

In addition to reframing Morris studies within the context of nineteenth-century aesthetics, my dissertation also contributes to many related fields in contemporary scholarship. First, my work reframes Victorian aesthetics by revealing its interest in the combination and incorporation of verbal, visual, and physical media, an interest which scholarly inquiry has not

fully taken into account. With the exception of Susie Anger's recent landmark study of the philosophical, linguistic, and hermeneutic origins of Victorian interpretation, there have been relatively few recent studies of the topic apart from examinations of Rossetti's double works and the early Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood;⁷ rather, most critical conversations about the nature of Victorian media and interpretation intersected with the revival of word/image studies in the late 1990s. Building on the body of Renaissance and neoclassical studies that came to be known by Horace's phrase *ut pictura poesis*, or "as in a painting, so also a poem,"⁸ these late twentieth-century art historians and literary scholars such as Mieke Bal⁹ and Wendy Steiner¹⁰ attempt to re-evaluate the precise theoretical relationship between the verbal and visual arts, and many scholars, including Steiner and McGann, focus on the Victorian and early modernist attention to word and image as elements of the work of art. Steiner undertakes a structuralist evaluation of modernist literature and painting and makes a claim for a kind of "structural correspondence"¹¹ between verbal and visual media based on "the way the media of the two arts function."¹² Conversely, Michael Baxandall relocates the verbal elements of the work of art away from any pre-existing cultural or iconographic components and instead explores the verbal and narrative

⁷ Anger, Suzy. *Victorian Interpretation*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005. Print.

⁸ Hagstrum, Jean. *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism from Dryden to Gray*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958. Print. 9.

⁹ Bal, Mieke. *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Print.

¹⁰ Steiner, Wendy. *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting*. Print. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. Print.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹² *Ibid.*, 50.

elements of eighteenth-century painting and nineteenth-century engineering that are provided by the viewer's own explanation or description. Baxandall's intentionalist study is therefore rooted in the idea that interpretation itself is inherently verbal.¹³ In contrast to this critical exploration of the representational limits of genre, my work examines the extent to which nineteenth-century artists deliberately combined and conflated these generic forms, thereby blurring the interpretive distinction between word and image.

This late twentieth-century interest on the relationship between word and image also refocused attention on the changing relationship in the nineteenth century between the work of art and observing, embodied subject. In this vein, Susan Buck-Morss's "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics" uses Walter Benjamin's analysis of nineteenth-century art and architecture to describe aesthetic experience in terms of its numbing effects on the embodied, physiological subject.¹⁴ Equally influential is Jonathan Crary's watershed *Techniques of the Observer*, which re-situates the Romantic emphasis on the subjective experience of the individual subject within the wider nineteenth-century context of "philosophical, scientific, and technological discourses."¹⁵ Consequently, Crary is able to trace the influence of Victorian visual technologies such as photography on the visual, interpretive perception of the observer or viewer. While Crary confines his analysis to vision, scholars such as Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan extend Crary's

¹³ Baxandall, Michael. *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985. Print.

¹⁴ Buck-Morss, Susan. "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered." *October* 62 (Autumn 1992): 3-41. *JSTOR*. 8 December 2017.

¹⁵ Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. 1990. 9. Print.

visually-oriented argument to incorporate the different aspects of the viewer's physical experience of the work of art.¹⁶ More recently, Regenia Gagnier picks up on Susan Buck-Morris's earlier argument in her discussion of market forces and aesthetics, when she maintains that for Victorian society "the function of aesthetics, then, was to provide aesthetic feeling, to soothe the mind and to harmonize humankind's multiform needs and capacities as they became increasingly subjected to the demands of the marketplace."¹⁷ Significantly, Gagnier also establishes ethics as a significant component of Victorian aesthetics, which she locates as having to deal with "self-regulation" in keeping with her reading of Victorian interpretation in terms of nineteenth-century political economy.¹⁸ Benjamin Morgan's recent study of Victorian aesthetics attempts to bring together McGann's analysis of Morris with this contemporary emphasis on the embodied viewer, and Morgan argues that Morris's philosophies are a somatically-oriented "elaboration of aesthetic experience as a partially intellectual mode of interaction between human bodies and made objects."¹⁹ I follow Morgan's argument that Morris's emphasis on the embodied user is consistent with the development of Victorian interpretation, but I extend this argument to incorporate Morris's Arts and Crafts intervention in nineteenth-century aesthetics, which remains as much political and social as it is embodied in the individual's interpretive experience.

¹⁶ Christ, Carol T. and John O. Jordan. *Victorian Literature and the Visual Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. Print.

¹⁷ Gagnier, Regenia. *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Print. 11

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁹ Morgan, Benjamin. *The Outward Mind: Materialist Aesthetics in Victorian Science and Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Print. 234.

This dissertation also reframes Morris's contribution to Marxist theory. Morris's primary theoretical innovation is his insistence that the social context of an object's production profoundly affects both the consumer and the producer, and I contend that this idea stands in stark contrast to the later twentieth-century Marxist views posited by the Frankfurt School over the function of committed art. While Morris focuses on the application of handicraft as the mechanism by which capitalist exploitation can be revealed and counteracted, the Frankfurt School instead discussed the extent to which such art reveals the nature of class struggle and capitalist exploitation to the working classes, whether it be the avant-garde modernist plays beloved by Bertolt Brecht, the operas idealized by Theodor Adorno, or the critical, essayistic montages of Walter Benjamin. Suspicious of popular art and the ease with which it can be turned to fascist purposes, the Frankfurt School instead promotes the modernist avant-garde for its capacity to create awareness of socio-economic inequalities, failing to recognize the structural imbalances that largely prohibit proletarian access to fine art, however well-intentioned. In contrast to this limited vision, I assert that Morris's earlier socialist aesthetic effectively champions the capacity of handicraftsmanship to solve the social divisions created by the alienation of labor as well as the rampant fetishization that exists within the commodity system.

In addition, my dissertation's focus on the interpretive significance of the book's reader-oriented material form effectively reframes Morris's already lofty position in book history and textual studies and takes steps towards an original contribution to theories of reading and interpretation. Art historians and literary scholars such as Duncan Robinson²⁰ and William S.

²⁰ Robinson, Duncan. *William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and the Kelmscott Chaucer*. London: G. Fraser, 1982. Print.

Peterson²¹ have described Morris's contribution to book arts at length, but scholars have not addressed the implications of Morris's participation in wider nineteenth-century formal innovations in book design. In fact, contemporary scholarship is only beginning to acknowledge the true extent to which *fin-de-siècle* decorated books attempted to elide the distinction between text and illustration on the printed page. In his examination of Aubrey Beardsley's illustrated edition of Wilde's *Salome*, Nicholas Frankel states that "as a book, the [illustrated] text calls on its reader to perform a silent act of imagination at [...] the moment when the reader's imagination is made most self-conscious."²² However, Anna Sigridur Arnur's evaluation of Stéphane Mallarmé's book designs closely parallels my own reading of Morris's aesthetic ambitions for his decorated books. For Arnar, "what makes Mallarmé's determined and profound rethinking of the book so prescient is his recognition of it as a tool or 'instrument' focused no longer on a fixed object but on the very process of reading," since through his decorated books of poetry, "Mallarmé sought to initiate a new poetics that would radically alter everyday life by empowering readers as independent creative agents."²³ I extend this line of reasoning and argue that Mallarmé was not alone in his search for a reader-oriented interface with political and social ramifications. Rather, Morris's book designs participate in and expand the combination and juxtaposition of text and image used by mid-century Victorian illustrated books to create a

²¹ Peterson, William. *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. Print.

²² Frankel, Nicholas. *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996. 65. Print.

²³ Arnar, Anna Sigridur. *The Book as Instrument: Stéphane Mallarmé, the Artist's Book, and the Transformation of Print Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. Print. 10, 1.

radically reader-oriented handcrafted interface that blurs the hermeneutic distinctions among text, image, and decoration.

Throughout this study, I use the terms aesthetic, mimetic, and hybrid to describe elements of Morris's theoretical model, but my usage is somewhat oblique to their mainstream deployment. The *OED* defines the word aesthetic as "of or relating to perception by the senses; received by the senses," or "to the perception, appreciation, or criticism of that which is beautiful," and aesthetics as "the philosophy of the beautiful, a system of principles for the appreciation of the beautiful," or "the distinctive underlying principles of a work of art, the works of an artist, a genre."²⁴ While this link between perception and sensation has been explored by philosophers and theorists from Immanuel Kant to Walter Pater to Terry Eagleton,²⁵ I follow Jerome McGann's term "materialist aesthetic" and extend the philosophical valence of aesthetic to refer to a model of interpretation, or a series of interpretive relationships between the viewer or reader, the work of art, and the environment in which the work of art operates. I also confine my use of the term hermeneutic to the specifically textual or linguistic implications of interpretation in keeping with the word's origins in Biblical exegesis and textual scholarship.

I also put pressure on the theoretical implications of the word mimesis. Mimetic art has historically been understood as an attempt to represent real life in an artistic medium; however, mimesis is defined as much by its failure to achieve that goal as by its limited success in doing so. Plato himself acknowledges as much when he observes that the artist, whether a poet or

²⁴ "aesthetic, n. and adj." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2017. Web. 6 January 2018.

²⁵ Eagleton, Terry. "The Ideology of the Aesthetic." *Poetics Today* 9.2 (1988): 327. *JSTOR*. 9 December 2017.

painter, “knows nothing of true existence; he knows appearances only,” and thus can only create works that are “thrice removed from the truth” without reference to transcendent reality and any corresponding moral virtue.²⁶ Additionally, mimesis, like all forms of representation, is defined by its limits. While Plato first describes the philosophical ramifications of this representational gap, and Michel Foucault calls it an “essential void,”²⁷ Norman Bryson maintains that mimesis always reveals its ideological and cultural freight through its stylistic choices at the “place at which the ‘join’ between cultural and natural worlds lies hidden, as a kind of blind spot or blank stain within social consciousness: travelling through time and across the shifting cultural spaces, its invisible accompaniment and participation is vital to the process of cultural reproduction.”²⁸ These structural limitations that define mimetic art and ensure that it remains dependent on three elements to be successful, namely the representation itself, the mediating artist, and the real-world object or experience against which the art is to be measured.

My use of the term mimesis is predicated on this tripartite theoretical structure, particularly as expressed in the Renaissance model of linear perspective. According to the perspectival model of interpretation, the lines of sight between the viewer and the work of art are designed to parallel those of the artist and the real world, and the viewer’s physical and spatial alignment with those lines of sight creates the effect of reality. In my discussion of narrative

²⁶ Plato. *The Republic of Plato*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. 3rd Ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888. 284-7. Print.

²⁷ Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. Print. 16.

²⁸ Bryson, Norman. *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983. Print. 15.

painting in Chapter 1, I extend this model to maintain that the viewer's visual alignment with the representational world of the work of art occurs within the interpretive, or mimetic space generated by these lines of sight and effectively occludes the distinction between the world of the representation and the viewer's lived experience. In Chapter 2, I also rely on this usage of the term mimetic as I expand this model to discuss the relationship between interpretation and use for Morris's handcrafted works of art. Since Morris's household objects have a range of use that is not confined to the space between the painted canvas and the viewer, this interpretive model expands this interpretive, or mimetic space outward into the built environment in which the work of art operates and into the socioeconomic relationships of society more broadly. Mimesis as a theoretical model is predicated on the fact that the gap between representation and reality cannot be overcome; nonetheless, I argue that nineteenth-century art interpretation is predicated on this blurring of the representational and the real, which becomes a primary driver of the ethical inflection of nineteenth-century art from Hogarth to Dickens.

My application of the terms *hybrid* and *composite* to refer to nineteenth-century painting and decorated books is perhaps the most tenuous definition in the dissertation, since both words are generally confined to Blake's highly individual work in poetry, printing, and the visual arts, or to the earlier medieval illuminated manuscripts to which his work is indebted. Despite Blake's lack of influence in his own lifetime and his limited influence in the early Victorian period, nineteenth-century art is nonetheless defined by a combination of text and image together in increasingly composite forms. This combination or hybridization has not gone unnoticed by art historians and book history scholars like Michael Hancher, who notes that John Tenniel's

illustrations for *Alice in Wonderland* challenge “the idea that illustration is secondary and epiphenomenal [to the text, an idea which] has some justification in the early history of the words *illustrate* and *illustration*.”²⁹ What is more, these scholars have not shied away from referring to this hybridization in terms of Blake’s innovative style, and McGann himself characterizes Morris’s book designs as a Blakean intervention in Victorian print media.³⁰ I therefore build on the work of McGann, Frankel, and Arnar to show that Victorian book designs participate in this nineteenth-century trend. I also argue that Blake’s own work directly influenced the development of Victorian aesthetics via his rediscovery by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Although Rossetti’s debt to Blake has been well documented, it is possible to trace two distinct influences on the development of nineteenth-century composite or hybrid media, one stemming from a late-eighteenth century interest in the relationship between the verbal and visual arts, and the other from the mid-century influence of Rossetti and the later Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the subsequent rise of the Arts and Crafts movement. Therefore, I apply the terms hybrid and composite to the work of artists such as Ford Madox Brown, Rossetti, Oscar Wilde, and Morris at points throughout the dissertation to demonstrate that nineteenth-century artists and designers recognize the artistic potential and interpretive significance of these hybrid combinations of media.

To this end, my first chapter, entitled “Right Seeing: The Victorian Visual Ethics of Interpretation,” lays the contextual foundation for Morris’s Arts and Crafts model of

²⁹ Hancher, Michael. *The Tenniel Illustrations to the “Alice” Books*. Athens: Ohio State University Press, 1985. Print. 113.

³⁰ McGann, 55.

interpretation by tracing the arc of Victorian aesthetics from the moral and social urgency of mid-century realism and the rise of Pre-Raphaelitism through to *fin-de-siècle* decadence. Through an analysis of Victorian narrative paintings such as Augustus Egg's *Past and Present* and Ford Madox Brown's *Work*, as well as illustrated books such as Charles Dickens's and H.K. Browne's *Bleak House* and J.M. Whistler's *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, I contend that the integration of text and image in these composite works of art foregrounds the viewer or reader's role in interpretation. I also draw on Norman Bryson's art-historical theories of Renaissance linear perspective to demonstrate that these composite verbal-visual works of art leverage their verbal and visual elements to further involve the viewer or reader in the mimetic world of the work of art and thereby prompt the viewer towards an ethical interpretive response.

Chapter Two, entitled "Morris & Co.: Architecture, the Neo-Gothic, and the Revolutionary Potential of the Arts and Crafts," situates Morris's socialist aesthetic principles in the context of this Victorian ethics of interpretation. Through an examination of Morris's lectures and works of applied design, I show that his determined pursuit of revolutionary socioeconomic change is entirely bound up in his aesthetic model, which is predicated on the user bringing together the formal and decorative elements of the handcrafted household object as part of the process of interpretive use. I also draw on Susan Buck-Morris's reading of Walter Benjamin's dialectical images to posit that Morris's aesthetic presents works of handicraft as objects capable of reshaping the existing built environment by virtue of their means of production and thereby generating lasting socialist, socioeconomic change.

In Chapter Three, “The User and the Reader: Morris’s Arts and Crafts Aesthetic and the Decorated Book,” I examine Morris’s lectures on his principles of book design, his unfinished designs for a decorated volume of *The Earthly Paradise*, and the Kelmscott Press edition of *News from Nowhere* to establish that his decorated books extend his interpretive model to describe the hermeneutic relationship between the reader, the text, and the material form of the book itself. I expand Florence Boos’s analysis of the frame structure of *The Earthly Paradise* to demonstrate that the reader becomes a self-conscious participant in the failed utopian journeys of both texts, and along with the protagonists only achieves consolation by participating in the community created through the process of reading and storytelling. I therefore argue that Morris’s utopian fictions reveal the paradoxical tension at the heart of his aesthetic model between the revolutionary capacity for and the utter inability of either the user or the handcrafted work of art to generate individual improvement or wider socioeconomic change.

My dissertation concludes with a chapter entitled “The Pocket Cathedral: The Kelmscott *Chaucer* and Morris’s Arts and Crafts Aesthetic,” which situates the Kelmscott Press’s monumental decorated volume of *The Collected Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* as the fullest expression of Morris’s architectural user- and reader-oriented interpretive model. I argue that the Kelmscott *Chaucer* is defined by its presentation of text, image, and decoration as equivalent hermeneutic elements, and that this visual unity pushes Morris’s aesthetic model towards a dyadic interpretive relationship between the reader and the decorated book. By expanding Roman Ingarden’s theories of architectural interpretation and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the embodied artist, I argue that the material form of the *Chaucer* foregrounds the

interpretive relationship between the embodied reader and the work of art. I conclude with a reading of the *Chaucer's* illustrated version of *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* as a means of establishing the inseparability of interpretation and creative craftsmanship in Morris's aesthetic model. My project therefore demonstrates that Morris's Kelmscott Press book designs are predicated on the user's interpretive engagement with the material object to bring together word and image, form and function, and decoration and design in terms of Morris's Arts and Crafts model of interpretive use. By reframing our understanding of text and image in Victorian interpretation, my dissertation provides a means of unifying our critical understanding of Morris's wide-ranging body of work, reveals his contribution to Victorian aesthetics, and expands our theoretical understanding of the interpretive relationship between word, image, and the reader.

CHAPTER ONE

RIGHT SEEING: THEORIZING THE VICTORIAN VISUAL ETHICS OF INTERPRETATION

In Ford Madox Brown's monumental painting *Work*, a stocky blonde navvy of perfect Saxon physiognomy digs beneath a road in Hampstead to install a water main under the street. He is surrounded by his fellow workmen, some of whom are laying bricks and digging the trench underneath the scaffolding which covers the worksite, while another takes advantage of the beer-seller's presence to slake his thirst. To the left of the navvies, a series of pedestrians make their way down the narrow stretch of road still open to them to carry out their business, and the many figures that are ranged around it, from poor ragged children to the wealthy father and daughter on horseback, follow the curve of the road as it eventually intersects with a parallel street far in the background of the picture. Interestingly enough, the viewer of the painting is not alone in his observation of the scene, as two men at the far right of the picture, recognizable from Brown's accompanying catalogue description as Thomas Carlyle and F.J. Maurice, also observe the busy scene before them, while Carlyle himself looks back at the viewer to draw further attention to the viewer's interpretive visual alignment with the work of art. Their gazes draw the viewer further into the world of Brown's social realism, thereby ensuring that the viewer himself is a complicit participant in the social structure and labor economy of the picture, with all of its philosophical and ethical ramifications.

Drawing on an analysis of Victorian narrative painting and illustrated books, as well as the work of A.W.N. Pugin, John Ruskin, and Thomas Carlyle, this chapter traces the development of an ethics of vision that I consider to be a series of preoccupations or assumptions entirely characteristic of Victorian hermeneutics and which define nineteenth-century hybrid verbal-visual works of art. As Suzy Anger notes, ethics has long been acknowledged as a component of Victorian interpretation, given its debt to Biblical hermeneutics and exegesis.¹ However, scholarship has not addressed the extent to which this ethically inflected view of interpretation informs the nature and development of Victorian aesthetics. Instead, critical discussions of Victorian interpretation have focused on the technical, technological, and even physiological aspects of vision. Ruskin studies in particular has long been dominated by analyses of visual interpretation, and notable criticism by Robert Hewison² and Elizabeth Helsinger³ discusses the extent to which Ruskin's emphasis on the individual viewing subject informs his understanding of the relationship between art, nature, and culture. Earlier critics such as Garrett Stewart also use the rise of photographic technologies as a means of understanding "the aesthetics of visual imagery in Victorian narrative," which Stewart describes as being rendered in a kind of ekphrastic "verbal evocation of visual art."⁴ However, Jonathan Crary's landmark study *Techniques of the Observer* shifted critical discussion of Victorian aesthetics decisively towards

¹ Anger, Suzy. *Victorian Interpretation*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005. Print. 15.

² Hewison, Robert. *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976. Print.

³ Helsinger, Elizabeth K. *Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982. Print.

⁴ Stewart, Garrett. "Reading Figures: The Legible Image of Victorian Textuality." *Victorian Literature and the Visual Imagination*. Ed. Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. Print.

this relationship between visual technologies and the objective, even scientific observational capacity of the individual viewer,⁵ and recent scholarship has been dominated by expansions of Crary's work. Critics such as Luisa Calè and Patrizia Di Bello account for multi-sensory, materialist, and even phenomenological analyses of the viewing subject,⁶ while scholars such as Norman Kelvin⁷ and Colin Cruise⁸ use interarts comparisons to discuss the extent to which *fin-de-siècle* authors and critics attempted to combine multi-sensory experience into their works of art. Similarly, David Peters Corbett describes Rossetti's double works as an attempt "to provide a new order of visual representation which could deal with modern experience in this revelatory way."⁹

Following the work of both Crary and Jerome McGann, scholars have used this Victorian emphasis on visual perception and the viewer to explore the influence of Victorian interpretation on modernism. Building on earlier Pre-Raphaelite studies of the relationship between the verbal and visual arts,¹⁰ Elizabeth Prettejohn credits this Pre-Raphaelite attention to visual detail as

⁵ Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. 1990. Print.

⁶ *Illustrations, Optics and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Literary and Visual Cultures*. Ed. Luisa Calè and Patrizia Di Bello. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.

⁷ Kelvin, Norman. "The Painting as Physical Object in a Verbal Portrait: Pater's 'A Prince of Court Painters' and Wilde's 'The Portrait of Mr. W.H.'" *Victorian Aesthetic Conditions: Pater Across the Arts*. Ed. Elicia Clements and Lesley J. Higgins. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.

⁸ Cruise, Colin. "Critical Connections and Quotational Strategies: Allegory and Aestheticism in Pater and Simeon Solomon." *Victorian Aesthetic Conditions: Pater Across the Arts*. Ed. Elicia Clements and Lesley J. Higgins. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.

⁹ Corbett, David Peters. "'A Soul of the Age': Rossetti's Words and Images, 1848-73." *Writing the Pre-Raphaelites: Text, Context, Subtext*. Ed. Michaela Giebelhausen and Tim Barringer. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009. Print. 81-100.*pg#

¹⁰ Stein, Richard L. *The Ritual of Interpretation: The Fine Arts As Literature in Ruskin, Rossetti, and Pater*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975. Print.

being the ultimate origin of the kind of experiential immediacy for the viewer that is generally ascribed to impressionism and modernism,¹¹ while Rachel Teukolsky similarly revives Victorian visual aesthetics more broadly as being the ultimate origin of modernist aesthetics and formalism.¹² In contrast to these definitions of Pre-Raphaelitism or Victorian aesthetics in terms of subsequent movements, I argue that the full scope of Victorian aesthetics has a great deal to offer contemporary scholarship in terms of its innovative combination of word and image, which goes far beyond the efforts of early Pre-Raphaelitism.

In addition, I maintain that Victorian interpretation, even as it evolves, shifts, and develops remains defined by its longstanding commitment to ethics, the extent of which remains under-addressed by scholars. In his analysis of Ruskin's art criticism, George Landow notes the influence of ethics on Victorian aesthetics when he maintains that "More than any other quality, what made Victorians Victorian was their central emphasis upon social responsibility, a basic attitude that differentiates them from their immediate predecessors, the Romantics. In terms of the arts, Victorians defined themselves by combining Augustan emphasis upon the general accessibility of art and its social effects with romantic emphasis upon artist's general feeling and imagination."¹³ While it is worth noting that this Victorian emphasis on ethics may be understood in Foucauldian terms as one of many discursive systems of power and social control, a reading reinforced by Andrew H. Miller's extended discussion of perfectionism as an

¹¹ Prettejohn, Elizabeth. *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000. Print. 97.

¹² Teukolsky, Rachel. *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.

¹³ Landow, George P. "How to Read Ruskin: The Art Critic as Victorian Sage." *John Ruskin and the Victorian Eye*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993. Print. 54-55.

inseparable component of Victorian ethical and moral improvement, the pervasiveness of ethics throughout the period only reinforces the need for a more comprehensive study of its influence on artistic production, criticism, and interpretation.¹⁴ Further, as I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, these nineteenth-century aesthetic emphases on both ethics and generic hybridity form a significant component of William Morris's own works of applied craftsmanship and his understanding of the nature and function of the work of art.

As a means of contextualizing my subsequent discussion of Morris's own participation in and contributions to Victorian aesthetics, this chapter attempts to coalesce these ethically inflected hermeneutic assumptions into a critically useful model of interpretation that I term "right seeing." I contend that these assumptions, which are characteristic of nineteenth-century British aesthetics, emphasize the wider social and ethical ramifications of interpretation by using word and image to reframe the traditional hermeneutic relationship between the artist, the work of art, and the viewer. Using the examples of narrative painting and illustrated books, this chapter first traces the origins and development of "right seeing" and then demonstrates the period's reliance on this set of hermeneutic assumptions as it shifts and changes across the period all the while relying, often self-consciously, on the reader or viewer to bring together both textual and visual elements to arrive at a "right," or both correct and ethical, interpretation. My use of the term "right seeing" is thus an acknowledgment of the extent to which Victorian artists and critics understood ethics and interpretation to be inherently linked, even as these critical assumptions often remained on the level of presupposition. Finally, this chapter traces the shifting

¹⁴ Miller, Andrew H. *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008. Print.

manifestations of and responses to “right seeing” across the later Victorian period and demonstrates the extent to which the critical and creative contributions of Victorian artists and theorists from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Walter Pater to Oscar Wilde are a response to this ethics of vision. This chapter stands in contrast to current scholarly trends which would treat the visual culture of the period with reference to industrial, technological, or the scientific innovations which may have influenced their development. Instead, my discussion of Victorian interpretation focuses on the ways in which both narrative paintings and illustrated books as composite media juxtapose, combine, and incorporate text and image to foreground the role of the viewer or reader and thereby draw attention to the wider ethical implications of the viewer, the work of art, and the interpretive process.

Narrative Painting and Victorian Aesthetics

As a means of tracing the establishing the presence and critical significance of this viewer-oriented, ethical hermeneutics, I begin with a discussion of the development of English narrative painting, which exemplifies the period’s generic experimentation with hybrid media and reveals the broader nineteenth-century recognition of the relationship between ethics, the viewer, and the work of art. This increasing awareness of the relationship between art and ethics increased alongside a wider cultural awareness of the role of art in society, and was evidenced, as Morris Eaves notes, by the growing desire for an English school of the fine arts in keeping with Britain’s imperial geopolitical standing.¹⁵ Buoyed by the founding of the Royal Academy, Joshua Reynolds’ eclectic form of neoclassicism reigned supreme in English painting, and by the turn of

¹⁵ Eaves, Morris. *The Counter-Arts Conspiracy: Art and Industry in the Age of Blake*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992. Print.

the nineteenth century there was a widespread concern in the field of the fine arts about the increasingly derivative nature of the English style.



Figure 1. *The Derby Day*, William Powell Frith. 1856-58, oil on canvas, Tate Britain, London. *Artstor*.

While the swirling brushwork of John Constable, Thomas Gainsborough, and Reynolds himself remained a testament to their technical mastery, their blurred landscapes in browns and blues were beginning to go out of fashion just at the time when Reynolds' influence on English art education through the Royal Academy schools could not have been higher, and this academic tension between eighteenth-century Neoclassicism and the growing trend for the ethically inflected, applied designs of the Neo-Gothic remained unresolved well into the nineteenth century. Even by the early 1850s an English national school of painting remained ostensibly elusive, so much so that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was still attempting to fill that perceived gap with their medievalizing iconography. John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Brown were still using "Sir Sloshua" as their favorite bogeyman precisely because his *Discourses on Art* was a required text at the R.A. schools, and in Ruskin's defense of the PRB in

Pre-Raphaelitism, he optimistically remarks that the PRB will be the inspiration for, if not the source of, this hoped-for, uniquely English painterly style.¹⁶

What Ruskin does not discuss is the fact that, by 1851, English painting had already developed a unique and sophisticated generic mode predicated on the self-conscious incorporation of narrative and linguistic elements. Given Eaves's contention that English painters were attempting to match their national reputation for literary greatness,¹⁷ it is unsurprising that English painters would trend towards a kind of unification of the sister arts of painting and poetry and take up narrative painting, which by the nineteenth-century was a well-established European genre.¹⁸



Figure 2. *The Railway Station*, William Powell Frith.. 1863, oil on canvas, Royal Holloway Collection. *Artstor*.

¹⁶ Ruskin, John. *Pre-Raphaelitism*. New York: Wiley, 1851. Print.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁸ Baxandall, Michael. *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985. Print. 102.

In England, narrative painting was a nineteenth-century, largely realist extension of this treatment of word and image, which, in contrast to traditional historical, literary, or Biblical painterly genres, relies on the viewer's knowledge of a pre-existing narrative as the basis for interpretation.



Figure 3. *A Private View at the Royal Academy, 1881*, William Powell Frith.. 1883, oil on canvas, Royal Academy of Arts, London. *Artstor*.

Drawing from the kinds of social currency required to interpret genre paintings, as well as from the nineteenth-century realism popularized by painters such as Gustav Courbet and Jean-François Millet, Victorian narrative paintings are predicated on the individual viewer's capacity for visual, rational, and even scientific observation to understand the narrative being presented. Designed as a kind of observing activity, exercise, and even entertainment, these pictures also could serve as social commentary or as an impetus for the viewer's ethical action. Artists such as William Powell Frith led successful careers producing and reproducing immensely popular

images such as *The Railway Station* and the monumental *The Derby Day* that would that function in just this way. In 1881 Frith was still producing large-scale genre pictures of this kind, and the success of his *A Private View at the Royal Academy, 1881* demonstrates the staying power of the genre across the period.



Figure 4. *The Last Day in the Old Home*, Robert Braithwaite Martineau.. 1862, oil on canvas, Tate Britain, London. *Artstor*.

As an example of narrative painting, Robert Braithwaite Martineau's 1862 *Last Day in the Old Home* works along these lines, telling the story of an aristocratic family dealing with the fallout of their financial ruin caused by the drinking and gambling of the wastrel, spendthrift father. While upon initial examination, the painting appears to tell the story of a family relaxing

together at their ancient family seat, the viewer is called upon to examine each of the characters in the picture in turn, and to evaluate their surroundings as a means of making sense of the scene she is presented with. From the father and his young son, whose similarity in person and in demeanor does not bode any better for the future of the family, to the grandmother receiving legal paperwork about the sale of the home from the family retainer, to the pitiful outstretched hand of the young wife, who is all too aware of the fruitlessness of her attempts to restrain her husband's excesses, the painting is a poignant scene of the family's loss of their financial stability and their social position as landowners and employers. The house itself is thus as much a character as the figures, with its coffered ceilings, Elizabethan paneling, and ancestral portraits all of which indicate the extent and even the suddenness of the family's decline and directly call upon the viewer's deductive and interpretive skills to generate the narrative correctly, or "rightly," from the various elements within the picture.

While even the title of a narrative painting such as *Last Day in the Old Home* is a verbal element that informs the viewer's interpretation of the work, Victorian narrative paintings also draw upon multiple verbal and visual components to draw attention to the necessity of the viewer's engagement or act of seeing. *Past and Present* exemplifies this trend with its tripartite nature and its clear incorporation of textual elements as part of the interpretive process.

The work is primarily composed of three paintings, each depicting part of the story of the woman's fall, in a manner that directly recalls William Hogarth's *The Rake's Progress*. The first picture, *Misfortune*, shows the revelation of the woman's adultery, while the second picture *Prayer* depicts the extent of her children's subsequent ruin as they mourn their father's death five

years after the events in the first scene. The third picture, *Despair*, shows the mother and her new baby under the bridge, which suggests prostitution as well as the shadow of suicide. In addition to being composed of multiple individual pictures, *Past and Present* reinforces its social and moral critique through its titular allusion to the work of Thomas Carlyle, while also relying on accompanying lines from a fictional letter or diary entry to reinforce its darkly didactic narrative of wifely adultery, broken marriage, and ruin: “August the 4th - Have just heard that B - has been dead more than a fortnight, so his poor children have now lost both parents. I hear she was seen on Friday last near the Strand, evidently without a place to lay her head. What a fall hers has been!”¹⁹



Figure 5. *Past and Present, No. 3. Despair*, Augustus Egg. 1858, oil on canvas, Tate Britain. *Artstor*.

¹⁹ Augustus Egg. *Past and Present, No. 1. Misfortune*. 1858. 1858, oil on canvas, Tate Britain, London. *Tate*. Web. 12 Feb. 2017.

This hermeneutic preoccupation with generic hybridity at first seems to be a far cry from the kind of stylistic innovation that patriotic critics were hoping for, primarily because such hybridity is a direct result of the wider seventeenth- and eighteenth-century interest in *ut pictura poesis* and literary pictorialism. Throughout the eighteenth century, critics and art historians debated the representative limits of the verbal and visual arts, and this school of criticism came to be known by Horace's injunction *ut pictura poesis*, or "as in a painting, so also a poem."²⁰ By the Victorian period, however, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's decisive intervention in the sister arts debate ensured that it was no longer a fashionable topic of critical and philosophical interest, and as George P. Landow notes, the debate became instead "a weary tradition, so popular in the eighteenth century, that had all but died out" by the time Ruskin addresses the respective limitations of the verbal and visual arts in *Modern Painters III*.²¹ Concomitant with this philosophical decline, narrative painting "flourished in a period that had already denounced it," mainly because, as Julia Thomas notes, Lessing's "idea that a painting could not unfold in time, and was thus unable to assume a narrative function, came to be seen as a rigid rule imposed from the outside, and one that could therefore be broken."²²

Rather than exploring the distinctions between text and image, nineteenth-century visual artists, inspired by artists such as Hogarth and J.M.W. Turner, pushed the boundaries of verbal and visual media through their combination and incorporation, rather than by their separate

²⁰ Hagstrum, Jean. *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism from Dryden to Gray*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958. Print. 9.

²¹ Landow, George P. "Ruskin's Version of *Ut Pictura Poesis*." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 26.4 (Summer 1968): 521. Print.

²² Thomas, Julia. *Victorian Narrative Painting*. London: Tate Publishing, 2000. Print. 9, 11.

exploration. Hogarth's own influence on English narrative painting cannot be overstated, since his most famous works, such as *The Rake's Progress* and *Marriage à-la-Mode*, are composed of series of canvases each of which depicts a scene in the narrative sequence. Like the Victorian artists that built on his legacy, Hogarth's work helped popularize genre paintings and social realism, all of which carried with them a healthy dose of overt morality. While a twenty-first century viewer may take Hogarth's ethical overtones to be somewhat heavy-handed, his pictures's formal structure foregrounds the viewer's involvement in the pictures while at the same time reinforces the ethical content of the work as a significant component of the range of meanings available to the viewer. In the process, Hogarth's works prefigure the generic incorporation of text and image that defines narrative painting. Rather than inviting the viewer to construct a narrative from visual elements, Turner expanded hybrid verbal-visual paintings in a different manner, by providing the viewer with a poem that accompanied his innovative and increasingly abstract paintings. Turner's brilliantly colored skiescapes with their swirling vortices challenge the limits of visual perception and of visual representation, while his inclusion of textual elements with the pictures or in exhibition catalogues invites the reader to understand the painting more fully through accompanying verbal components. Perhaps the best-known example of his later idiosyncratic style is his 1818 *Snow Storm: Hannibal and His Army Crossing the*

Alps, which included lines from his *Fallacies of Hope* in the accompanying RA catalogue.²³



Figure 6. *Snow Storm: Hannibal and His Army Crossing the Alps*, J.M.W. Turner. Exhibited 1812, oil on canvas, Tate Collection, London. *Artstor*.

However, in Turner’s work, as in other early Victorian hybrid works of art, “the relationship between the poem and the picture is tenuous; neither ‘illustrates’ the other [...], yet there is a clear connection between the two which suggests that although Turner perceived poetry as an

²³ “Craft, treachery, and fraud - Salassian Force,
Hung on the fainting rear! then Plunder siez’d
The Victor and the captive, - Saguntum’s spoil,
Alike became their prey; still the chief advanc’d,
Look’d on the sun with hope; - low, broad, and wan;
While the fierce archer of the downward year
Stains Italy’s blanch’d barrier with storms.
In vain each pass, ensanguin’d deep with dead,
Or rocky fragments, wide destruction roll’d.
Still on Campania’s fertile plains—he thought,
But the loud breeze sob’d, ‘Capua’s joy’s beware!’”

qtd. in Wilton, Andrew. *Painting and Poetry: Turner’s Verse Book and His Work of 1804-1812*. Tate Gallery, 1990. Print. 180.

accessory to some of his paintings, he could also allow his literary and visual imaginations to take off from a common starting-point in directions of their own.”²⁴ Thus both Turner and Hogarth exemplify this trend towards increasing generic hybridization through formal innovation.

This generic hybridity challenges the analogical limitations of *ut pictura poesis*, since the formal conflation of verbal and visual components requires an interpretive engagement that goes well beyond the viewer’s traditional role in understanding an iconographic picture. Julia Thomas maintains that “the success of the narrative picture can be partly attributed to the fact that it was the ‘sister’ not so much of poetry but of the novel, with which it shared story-telling devices,” and in order to arrive at an interpretation of the work of art, the viewer must interpret the textual and visual elements together as equally significant to the construction of the narrative, and in this way, elide the traditional sister arts distinctions between word and image and time and space.²⁵ Narrative painting succeeded in blurring these traditional distinctions to the extent that, as Kate Flint notes, Victorian artists, critics, and viewers all “assumed, in fact, that paintings could be written about using the same vocabulary and employing the same modes of discussion, which were conventionally regarded as appropriate to prose fiction. [...] The belief which underpinned this, not so much theorized about as taken, undiscussed, as a common working supposition, was that ‘language’ was a concept which applied across media” which gave rise to “the popular, if usually unarticulated, critical premise that stories so told should be subject to the same criteria as

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Thomas, 12.

verbal fiction.”²⁶ While Landow asserts that Ruskin’s participation in the sister arts debate may have been so critically unfashionable as to be “striking,” when his interest is understood from the perspective of Victorian painterly practice, particularly Turner’s own artistic and even theoretical engagement with the question, Ruskin’s revival of the *ut pictura poesis* distinctions is in keeping with the later Victorian artistic awareness of the formal potential of verbal-visual hybridity.²⁷ Like the twentieth-century critics that would follow him,²⁸ Ruskin is unable to posit any means of overcoming the inherent distinctions between time and space and instead is forced to assert “a bifurcated aesthetics” that describes painting and poetry’s mimetic capacities in generically constrained terms.²⁹ Similarly, Victorian hybrid media, and narrative painting in particular, instead attempt to elide the traditional distinction between text and image by directly calling on the participation of the viewer to construct the narrative himself, rather than relying on any existing knowledge of a historical, mythological, or literary subject, and this participation gives the viewer an element of authority over the narrative that remains largely missing in traditional works of art.

In addition, the viewer is also invited to participate in the work of art by virtue of his unique status as part of the society depicted in the painting. As an extension of genre scenes and the realist mode characteristic of mid-Victorian painting, narrative paintings largely depict

²⁶ Flint, Kate. *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*. Cambridge UP, 2000. Print. 198-99.

²⁷ Landow, George P. *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971. Print. 43.

²⁸ Steiner, Wendy. *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982. Print. 39.

²⁹ Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, 109.

contemporary Victorian society, whether it be the public works of Brown's *Work*, the domestic tragedy of *Last Day in the Old Home*, or the fallen woman of *Past and Present*. This emphasis on nineteenth-century realism allows the viewer's knowledge and even identity as a member of society to give them hermeneutic authority over the picture. The viewer's increasing interpretive authority was also a hallmark of the technological innovation and subsequent social change that defined Victorian society. In *Techniques of the Observer*, Crary maintains that nineteenth-century painting, with all of its accompanying representational and technological innovations, must be understood with reference to a corresponding change in the observing subject, whose vision and perception were embodied and embedded in the world, rather than occupying the fixed, detached observing point of Renaissance linear perspective. While Crary attempts "to recover that difference" through an examination of the observer, I contend that the ethics or "rightness" of visual interpretation are as significant to understanding Victorian hybrid media as the technological and philosophical recognition of the observing practices themselves.³⁰ These nineteenth-century media such as narrative painting and illustrated books both define and participate in this ethically inflected hermeneutics which draws attention to the ethical ramifications of the viewer's role in the interpretive process, the viewer's relationship to the work of art, and the nature of the work of art itself.

Linear Perspective and Right Seeing

Like much artistic practice, fine art interpretation in the early nineteenth century fell along heavily Neo-classical lines, and in keeping with this preference for Neo-classical and

³⁰ Crary, 23.

Renaissance styles, linear perspective and mimesis remained the reigning model for this Victorian visual and ethical hermeneutics, or “right seeing,” even as its theoretical deployment developed over the course of the period. Drawing on Brunelleschi’s unpublished techniques, Leon Battista Alberti’s Renaissance study presents linear perspective as a rational, geometric artistic method that artists can employ to achieve a more perfect representation in keeping with humanist ideals. By mathematically orienting the painting around a single, fixed viewpoint from which the picture must be seen, Alberti is able to ensure “that all lines perpendicular to the plane of the picture will recede toward a single vanishing point.”³¹ This visual organization posits a fixed viewer, and therefore, any painting structured around fixed perspective presents itself as scientifically analogous to what the eye sees, and thus by extension, as a more perfectly mimetic image. Linear perspective thus “denies its own artificiality and lays claim to being a ‘natural’ representation of ‘the way things look,’ [...] or ‘the way things really are,’” and due to this elision of representation and referent, it remains the definitive marker of painterly realism.³² Famously, Alberti compares the blank surface upon which he is about to work to an open window, and this metaphor was extended and codified by later critics into a central theoretical element of perspectival realism.³³ If the canvas functions like an open window, then the painting becomes an opening for the real world which is brought about by the visual alignment of the viewer, the canvas, and the painter’s own visual perspective into a single artistic projection. In

³¹ Lindberg, David C. *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976. Print. 150.

³² Ibid.

³³ Elkins, James. *The Domain of Images*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999. Print. 46-47.

this way, the painting's status as an imitation of reality is effaced by its analogical equivalence to real life.

Joel Snyder extends this idea by examining how Alberti's open-window metaphor also provides equal access to the painter's own vision. Instead of focusing solely on Alberti's window, Snyder also locates Alberti's metaphorical innovation at the point at which the mental comparison of imitation to reality occurs. Snyder maintains that "what Alberti did was to conceive of this mental construct, the image, as a picture [...]; he also provided a method by means of which that image could be projected and copied by art."³⁴ In making the mental image created in the painter's mind analogous to the painting itself, Alberti is also able to present the painting as though it is the accurate, unmediated depiction of what the painter visually sees. Thus, "the process of seeing has exact counterparts in depiction because seeing is the construction of a picture out of pictorial elements that proceeds, systematically in an ordered sequence," and this sequence is the grid-like construction of a perspectival projection.³⁵ Consequently, Alberti's theory extends the idea of mimesis by creating equivalences between the painter's own visual and/or mental image of reality, the projection of that image onto the painting, and reality itself, all of which the viewer is given access to through his physical alignment with the visual perspective assigned by the linear geometry of the painting.

In terms of the critical presuppositions that constitute "right seeing," the creation of this mimetic or interpretive space is the source of the work of art's influence on the individual

³⁴ Snyder, Joel. "Picturing Vision." *Critical Inquiry* 6.3 (1980): 499-526. Print.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 522.

viewer, as well as the viewer's own subsequent ethical engagement with society generally. As Amy Woodson-Boulton notes, "The idea that art was 'readable and could thus speak to anyone, regardless of education level, relied on treating paintings as 'windows' onto their subjects, making the surface of the painting itself transparent," and was so deeply rooted in Victorian aesthetics that perspectival interpretation informed the philosophical and aesthetic justification for the creation of free and open museums.³⁶ As a theoretical model linear perspective recalls, at least in part, the classical extramission theory of vision, which posited that "a stream of light or fire issues from the observer's eye and coalesces with the sunlight [...] stretching from the eye to the visible object."³⁷ Linear perspective thus maintains the possibility of a one-to-one correspondence between the visual perspective of the artist that is perfectly attainable and understandable by the viewer. While this model is Renaissance in origin, Ruskin describes this mimetic space when he maintains that "between the painter and the beholder, each doing his proper part, the reality should be sustained; and after the beholding imagination has come forward and done its best, then, with its help and in the full action of it, the beholder should be able to say, I feel as if I were at the real place, or seeing the real incident. But not without that help."³⁸ Thus for Ruskin, the viewer's visual alignment with the work of art, and thus by extension with the artist's own visual field, enables the generation of an interpretive space and in

³⁶ Woodson-Boulton, Amy. "'Industry Without Art is Brutality': Aesthetic Ideology and Social Practice in Victorian Art Museums." *Journal of British Studies* 46.1 (January 2007): 47-71. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 November 2017. 50.

³⁷ Lindberg, 4-6.

³⁸ Ruskin, John. *Modern Painters Volume III. The Works of John Ruskin*. Vol. 5. Ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1904. Print. 185.

the process blurs the distinction between the real world and the work of art. By occupying this mimetic, interpretive space, the world of the work of art extends into the lived experience of the viewer, thereby enabling the viewer to simultaneously identify with both visual fields and creating the perception that the work of art is an extension, and not merely a representation, of reality itself. By making the ideal actual, this mimetic space is thus the source of the transformational and even ethical improvement of the viewer. In terms of the classical teach-and-delight model of aesthetics, the viewer's participation in this mimetic space can be extended outward to society more generally through the viewer's subsequent engagement with society. In a work of art that does not directly posit the ethical or moral improvement of the viewer, the viewer's participation in mimetic space is no less transformative because of his alignment with the perspective, both visual and figurative, presented by the work of art.

Before I discuss the extent to which Ruskin and other Victorian critics participated in this interpretive mode, I would like to point out the similarities between this characterization of the viewer's involvement in the mimetic interpretive space of linear interpretation and the postcolonial recognition of the ethical and sociopolitical implications of the reader's or speaker's involvement and participation in a given language or dominant discourse. While the work of theorists such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin,³⁹ and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak⁴⁰ have established the potential for such participation to implicate the speaker in systems

³⁹ Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffin, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.

⁴⁰ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999. Print.

of violence or oppression,⁴¹ any hegemonic potential remained largely unrecognized by earlier Victorians artists and critics who instead optimistically understood the viewer's interpretive participation to be a site of potential ethical and social improvement. That said, the similarities between these two theoretical positions are in no small part due to the philosophical preeminence and elasticity of the linear perspectival model, which forms the fundamental framework of philosophical systems from phenomenology to existentialism as a means of variously characterizing intersubjective relations. This philosophical durability reinforces my contention that the ethical emphasis of Victorian aesthetics can productively be understood as an earlier extension of the perspectival model. As I demonstrate in the analysis that follows here and in later chapters, the mid- to late-nineteenth century artistic and critical practice marks a shift in the treatment of the perspectival model towards an ever greater involvement of the viewer in and extension of this mimetic or interpretive space. Contemporary scholarship would likely agree with Victorian artists and critics who regarded as this increasing implication of the viewer in the interpretation of the work of art as the potential source for a more ethical relationship between self and other, since, in terms of the perspectival model, the objectivity of the viewer's interpretive position is increasingly compromised. However, as I will later demonstrate, over and against the perspectival viewer's complicity in both the mimetic space and the real world, Victorian works of art that participate in "right seeing" also retain the possibility and even necessity of a "right" or correct set of interpretive possibilities, a position which is problematic in terms of contemporary ethics because of its reliance on an othering inherent in the structure of

⁴¹ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (Autumn 1985): 243-264. *JSTOR*. 28 Jan. 2018.

perspectival model. This ethical tension between the possibility of objective “rightness” and the necessity of a subjective interpretive perspective nonetheless remains a defining feature of Victorian aesthetics and can be traced back to this nineteenth-century reliance on the interpretive model of linear perspective.

In *Modern Painters*, Ruskin himself models the socioeconomic improvement posited by “right seeing” as an interpretive mode, since throughout the five volumes he directly addresses the reader with his express intention of attempting to enable the viewer to see by means of the text, and in the process Ruskin treats as equivalent the reader’s visual experience of nature and of the fine arts almost in terms of the Victorian iteration of *ut pictura poesis*. Throughout *Modern Painters*, Ruskin describes his own experience of nature, sun, clouds, and rain in the most expansive and detailed terms, as when he describes the experience of looking at clouds:

The clouds [...] have, as has been before observed, pure and aërial greys for their their dark sides, owing to their necessary distance [...] from the observer; and as this distance permits a multitude of local phenomena capable of influencing colour, such as accidental sunbeams, refractions, transparencies, or local mists and showers, [...] the colours of these clouds are always changeful and palpitating; and whatever degree of grey or of gloom may be mixed with them is invariably pure and aërial.⁴²

In long passages such as these, filled with lush description, Ruskin gives forth on the subject of rocks, flowers, and Alpine aiguilles, and his verbal translation of these experiences is designed to blur the reader’s own experience of reading with his own actual experience of being outdoors. In the process, the reader occupies the mimetic space of the text, and thereby is challenged not only to understand Ruskin’s treatment of his own experiences of the natural world, but to perceive

⁴² Ruskin, John. *Modern Painters Volume I. The Works of John Ruskin*. Vol. 3. Ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1904. Print. 939-94.

nature itself in terms of Ruskin's own description. This heavily didactic tone of Ruskin's work is in keeping with the structure of perspectival mimesis in both theory and practice, as well as with his own understanding of the function of the work of art in society.

However, Ruskin also concedes that this mimetic space may be created by works of art that are not strictly or traditionally perspectival, as is the case with Turner, and later, the early PRB. In his defense of Turner's style, Ruskin directly addresses the critical charges, stating that

the reader may perhaps be saying to himself: '[...] Turner does not give me the idea of nature; I do not feel before one of his pictures as I should in a real scene. Constable takes me out into the shower, and Claude into the sun [...] but Turner keeps me in the house, and I know always that I am looking at a picture.' I might answer to this: Well, what else should he do? If you want to feel as if you were in a shower, cannot you go and get wet without help from Constable? [...] But if you want to sit in your room and look at a beautiful picture, why should you blame the artist for giving you one?'⁴³

By Ruskin's reckoning, Turner does not deny mimetic realism, but Turner's work also does not strictly operate within the painterly conventions of the day and therefore his paintings should not be accepted or rejected in mimetic terms. Ruskin's insistence on the improvement of the individual through the observational and hermeneutic process thus flows from his participation in the aesthetic model of "right seeing."

Similarly, Ruskin's defense of the PRB in *Pre-Raphaelitism* demonstrates the extent to which "right seeing" as an interpretive model is entrenched in Victorian art criticism. As articulated by Ruskin in *Pre-Raphaelitism*, early PRB paintings were roundly faulted by critics for formal perspective errors, the misuse of light and shade, and an overt reliance on traditional imagery and iconography that trended dangerously close to the Anglo-Catholic. Dickens's

⁴³ Ruskin, *Modern Painters Volume III*, 170.

scathing review of Millais' *Christ in the House of His Parents* follows this critique in its condemnation of the painting on the grounds of its "subversion of all known rules and principles of perspective," and locates those perspectival errors in the painting's overt realism, which Dickens interpreted as grotesque in its detail and therefore sacrilegious.⁴⁴



Figure 7. *Christ in the House of His Parents*. John Everett Millais. 1849-50, oil on canvas, Tate Britain. Artstor.

This critical conflation of linear perspective, painterly realism, and mimesis demonstrates the extent to which mimesis and ethics is a central component of Victorian art interpretation in general and "right seeing" in particular. In keeping with the perspectival norms Norman Bryson describes as the Natural Attitude, any use of linear perspective is painterly shorthand for mimetic realism in its purest form. Building on the later model of Albertian linear perspective, Bryson

⁴⁴ Dickens, Charles. "Old Lamps for New Ones." *Household Words* 12 (June 1850): 12-14. Print

argues that traditional Western painting is predicated on the idea that a painting offers a uniquely unmediated, perfectly mimetic access to the real world, and is able “to transport intact the [visual] event within that space into the corresponding mental space within the consciousness of the viewer.”⁴⁵ Thus this Albertian visual alignment of the real world, the viewer, and the mimetic perspectival painting effaces the presence of the physical representation itself and it is this physical disappearance that creates the mimetic effect. Therefore, Dickens’s criticism of Millais’s unconventional use of realistic detail demonstrates a misalignment of Dickens’s stylistic expectations with the mimetic visual and verbal content of the work of art, since the critics do not want to accept that if the painting is not fully realistic in accordance with Reynolds’ Grand Manner and nineteenth-century convention, the painting would still operate mimetically in terms of linear perspective by transmitting the visual field of the artist directly to the viewer.

Demonstrating his own personal stylistic preference for realism softened by visual convention, Dickens and the other critics are essentially responding to the paintings’s ability to position them, as the viewer, within a visual reality of the picture and elide the distinction between the world of the picture and the “real world.” That the artist’s style is not conventionally realistic only reinforces the painting’s claim to perspectival mimesis, and the critics’ discomfort only further emphasizes the ultimate success of the PRB’s mimetic realism within the context of “right seeing” as an interpretive model.

In addition to the concept of transformative mimetic space, Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* is perhaps the fullest expression of the idea that the interpretation of a work of art carries ethical

⁴⁵ Bryson, Norman. *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983. 12. Print.

weight, an idea that defined early Victorian aesthetics. Throughout the five volumes, Ruskin slowly develops this idea of an interpretation as an ethical act as he deepens and develops his own aesthetic model, but this idea takes on greater significance beginning in the 1856 Volume IV when he begins to account for ethical ramifications of the picturesque. Arriving at this analysis through his repeated interactions with the impoverished and malnourished Swiss villagers on his artistic expeditions, Ruskin argues that the idealized portrayal of ruin in neoclassical painted landscapes is inherently unethical because it effectively prompts the viewer to valorize the painterly “expression [...] of suffering, of poverty, or decay, nobly endured by unpretending strength of heart” without any interpretive recognition of the incumbent loss of livelihood, social stability, and economic decline.⁴⁶ Instead, Ruskin “want[s...his] reader to understand thoroughly [...] that] the picturesqueness is in the unconscious suffering [...] and the entire denial of all human calamity and care, in the swept proprieties and neatnesses of English modernism.”⁴⁷ Thus for Ruskin, it is incumbent on the viewer to cultivate

the love for the lower picturesque [...] with care, wherever it exists: not with any special view to artistic, but to merely humane, education [...] since] it will constantly lead, if associated with other benevolent principles, to a truer sympathy with the poor, and better understanding of the right ways of helping them; and, in the present stage of civilization, it is the most important element of character, not directly moral, which can be cultivated in youth.⁴⁸

Ruskin relies on representational realism as a marker of ethics in and outside the world of the work of art. For Ruskin, works of art that idealize ruin not only fail to account for but effectively

⁴⁶ Ruskin, John. *Modern Painters Volume IV. The Works of John Ruskin*. Vol. 6. Ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1904. Print. 14.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

mask the economic hardship of which ruin is a visual marker. Ruskin therefore wants realism and not idealism because of his recognition of the ethical implications inherent in representational styles. Ruskin increasingly returns to this idea of the moral and ethical imperative for correct, or “right” interpretation throughout his career, and his fullest articulation of this concept comes in *The Stones of Venice*, written much at the same time as *Modern Painters* III and IV,⁴⁹ where he argues that the creativity and flaws of the craftsman-produced object are demonstrative of the creative, ideological, and personal freedom of the workman and should be valued by the consumer above the dehumanizing uniformity constrained by the industrially manufactured commodity. In each instance, Ruskin directly addresses the reader, declaring “you are put to stern choice in this matter. You must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both,” thus directly linking the viewer’s act of interpretation as key both to the ethical improvement of the individual viewer but also as the catalyst for wider socioeconomic change.⁵⁰

Illustrated Books and Right Seeing

Like works of narrative painting, Victorian illustrated books also rely on the viewer’s perspectival interpretation as the means by which the work of art attempts to effect change in both the individual reader and society more generally, and in the process exemplify what I maintain are the primary interpretive assumptions that constitute “right seeing.” As these examples show, Victorian book illustration is as heavily influenced by William Hogarth’s moralizing tradition of print reproductions as by the ethically inflected conventions of narrative

⁴⁹ Introduction. *The Works of John Ruskin*. Ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. Vol. 5. Ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1904. Print. xv.

⁵⁰ Ruskin, John. “The Nature of Gothic.” *The Stones of Venice. The Works of John Ruskin*. Vol. 10. Ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1904. Print. 192.

painting and the fine arts, and these interpretive assumptions retain their sway over Victorian aesthetics throughout the period, even as Victorian critics and artists develop models in response to “right seeing” as an interpretive mode. The first of these hermeneutic assumptions is that the viewer or reader sees the work of art “rightly,” or correctly and ethically, and in keeping with the tendency in Victorian aesthetics to posit ethical ramifications of interpretation for the reader, right seeing is rooted in the idea that there is a correct interpretation or range of interpretations of the work of art, that this interpretation is possible and attainable, and that the act of interpretation is ethically inflected. Additionally, illustrated books, as a primarily text-based medium that is accompanied and enhanced by a visual work of art, throughout the Victorian period increasingly draw attention to the fact that text and image must be interpreted together as a means of arriving at the interpretation.

Carrying with it all of the moral weight of the Neo-Gothic movement more generally, A.W.N. Pugin’s 1836 *Contrasts* stands as heavily didactic example of how composite illustrated works of art rely on viewer to interpret the moral virtues of Gothic architecture through contrasting illustrations of Neo-classical and Gothic buildings, edifices, and urban scenes. Pugin argues that “the great test of Architectural beauty is the fitness of the design for the purpose for which it is intended, and that the style of a building should so correspond with its use that the spectator may at once perceive the purpose for which it was erected.”⁵¹ Pugin’s text attempts to demonstrate this principle by affording the viewer a series of opportunities to see the rightness of Gothic and Catholic styles over what he regards as entirely Protestant, neoclassical

⁵¹ Pugin, Augustus Welby Northmore. *Contrasts: or A Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages, and the Similar Buildings of the Present Day*. New York: Humanities Press, 1969. Print. 1.

architecture. Pugin's speciality as an architect is ecclesiastical architecture and its decoration, and many of his illustrations focus on royal chapels, parochial churches, and altars, but in illustrations such as "Contrasted House Fronts," "Contrasted Public Conduits," and most famously, "Contrasted Residences for the Poor," Pugin's ethical message is perhaps conveyed most strongly to the viewer.



Figure 8. "Contrasted Residences for the Rich and Poor,"
A.W.N. Pugin. 1841. *Artstor*.

His “Contrasted Residences” is a masterclass in the evils of utilitarian social welfare that arise from the use of a rational, modern architectural style, and throughout the full-page illustration, the viewer is invited to remark on the deplorable charity being dispensed by the eighteenth-century, “rational” poorhouse, and to applaud the Christian virtue exercised by the society which erected the Gothic edifice. While Pugin’s eighteenth-century panopticon of a poor house quite literally enslaves society’s most vulnerable with whips and chains and openly sells the bodies of the deceased for dissection, the contrasting heavily medievalizing master welcomes needy children and gives employment to those in need. Without leaving a great deal of room for misinterpretation, the text calls upon the reader to reckon which contrasting architectural vision is the ethical one. Pugin’s determination to uphold the social virtues of Gothic architectural style may seem heavy-handed, but his illustrated text is predicated on the idea that there is a “right” or correct way to understand both the architectural style and his illustrated text, and that this interpretation has ethical ramifications for the reader and for society in general.

In keeping with this insistence on the ethical and correct possibilities of interpretation, works of art that participate in “right seeing” carry with them the assumption that any act of interpretation has ethical implications. Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré’s 1872 illustrated *London: A Pilgrimage* self-consciously positions the reader as an active participant in the interpretive process and thereby makes the reader complicit in the ethical ramifications of what and how he sees. The book itself is the result of a three-year collaboration between author and illustrator, who walked the streets of London together to gain material for their survey of the industrialized capital, and throughout the text, the book also directly invites the reader to be a

third participant in the artists's pilgrimage. In the final passage from the introduction, Jerrold's narrator states

on Sunday night [...] Doré suddenly suggested a tramp to London Bridge. [...] By night, it appeared to his imagination, the scene would have a mournful grandeur. We went. The wayfarers grouped and massed under the moon's light, with the ebon midnight stillness, there was the most impressive solemnity upon the whole which penetrated the nature of the artist. 'And they say London is an ugly place!' was the exclamation. 'We shall see,' I answered.⁵²

This use of "we" is both an invitation and a prerequisite, since the reader is necessary to the success of their carefully noted observations of the city, and throughout the book, the narrator and illustrator consistently and directly speak to the reader, who is enjoined to "observe this lemonade-vendor,"⁵³ to marvel at the lack of visual distinction between the crowds of people gazing at the animals at the zoo and the animals themselves, and to "perceive in the scenes which have caught the attention of the Pilgrims" as much detail as the author and illustrator can pack into their volume.⁵⁴ *London: A Pilgrimage* therefore equates the reader's act of interpretation with his identity as a member, however temporary, of London society. In the process, the illustrated text is predicated on the reader's activity as key to continuing, and arguably increasing, the charitable activity of the reader outside the text to maintain the social cohesion of the city and Victorian society more generally.

"Right seeing" is thus also defined by "seeing," or by the viewer's central role in the interpretive process, and as is the case with Victorian narrative painting and other hybrid media,

⁵² Jerrold, Blanchard and Gustave Doré. *London: A Pilgrimage*. London: Anthem Press, 2005. Print. 6-7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

the reader of an illustrated book must also overcome any disconnects between text and image as a means of interpreting the work as a whole. Henry Mayhew's seminal four-volume series *London Labour and the London Poor* is fairly straightforward, somewhat scientific work of investigative journalism which attempts to comprehensively document the essential factual characteristics of the lives of the working poor on the streets of London. Its scope and faithful accumulation of detail is rooted in Mayhew's belief that more accurate knowledge of the actual living conditions of London's working-class people could result in more targeted and therefore more successful charitable ventures. This approach is complicated by the fact that Mayhew's own visual assessment of working-class individuals is often colored by his physiognomic judgment of those of other classes and ethnicities, particularly the Irish, who are characterized by their "low foreheads and long bulging upper lips."⁵⁵ Interestingly, Mayhew himself clearly has trouble relying on stereotypes as a mode of seeing, since he has trouble reconciling "the pretty faces of the one or two girls [...whose] black hair [...] and their large grey eyes with the thick dark fringe of lash, seemed out of place among the hard features of their companions."⁵⁶

While Mayhew's "looking" or "seeing" reflects his own acculturated preconceptions, the juxtaposed illustrations support his charitable determination to document the facts about London's working-class lifestyles. Each illustration is an etching created from original photographs of the individuals on the streets, and the four volumes are filled with street scenes of costermongers, crossing-sweepers, dustmen, and even a very young boy working as a mudlark as

⁵⁵ Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor*: Vol. 2. London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1967. Print. 116.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

he collects bits of salable debris from along the Thames.⁵⁷ Although this process of reproducing the image results in a somewhat fixed, even uncanny facial expression in the image of the person, the fact that they are drawn from photographs strengthens the journalistic enterprise through this use of artistic realism. Conversely, this photorealism is a surprising move away from Victorian physiognomic class stereotypes, and effectively humanizes the individuals in the pictures in keeping with the journalistic tone of the work. By using photography-based etchings to cut out the physiognomic and socioeconomic stereotypes that Mayhew himself is subject to in his verbal descriptions, the illustrations offer the reader an alternate means to see the suffering of the working poor and thereby arrive at an appropriate ethical understanding and subsequent charitable action.

In addition, works of art that participate in the a series of hermeneutic assumptions of “right seeing” also carry with them the idea that the work of art can promote the reader’s ethical and charitable activity and thereby create wider social change. This increased attention to the artistic aspect of illustrated books and hybrid media directly intersects with the Victorian belief in the ability of the arts to uniquely engage with ethical and social issues, a belief which raises the question of whether such engagement produces any measurable social improvement or demonstrable ethical action from the reader or viewer. It is not my purpose here to demonstrate whether these works of art actually did bring about any measurable social change; rather, I am concerned in this chapter with demonstrating that Victorian artists and authors believed that art was an effective means of doing so and consequently produced works of art that the reader or

⁵⁷ Ibid., 58.

viewer could interpret with reference to socioeconomic issues. *Bleak House* provides an example of this leveraging of verbal and visual elements in its visual portrayal of its lower-class characters.

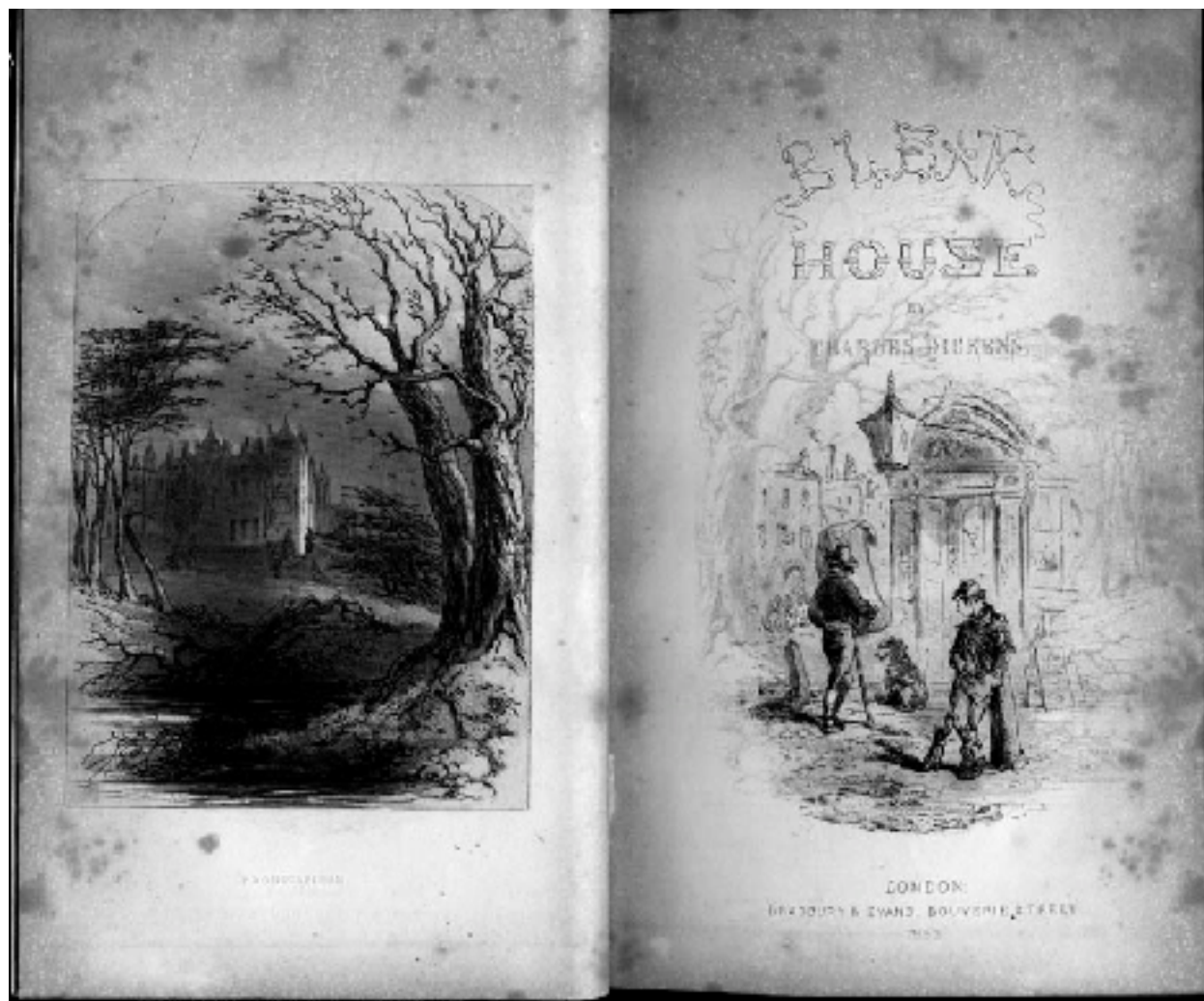


Figure 9. “Frontispiece (Chesney Wold) and title-page by ‘Phiz’ of the Bradbury and Evans edition of Dickens’s ‘Bleak House,’” H.K. Browne. 1853. Scanned by George P. Landow. *Victorian Web*.

Bleak House was written midway through Dickens’s career and appeared in nineteen monthly installments from March 1852 to September 1853, each with two illustrations by his longtime

illustrator Hablot Knight Browne, otherwise known as Phiz.⁵⁸ The illustrated novel was the product of a long and careful collaboration between the two men, and “from the early years of their association the novelist and illustrator followed a standard pattern of collaboration: for each forthcoming monthly number, Dickens would give the subjects of the two illustrations [...] and include proof copy or bits of manuscript whenever possible. Browne would execute these as drawings and submit them, time and distance allowing, to Dickens, who would either approve them or suggest alterations.”⁵⁹ The title page illustrations remain of particular interest to scholars, since they were among the earliest completed illustrations and “were planned with their ultimate position at the opening of the bound edition in mind.”⁶⁰ While Dickens was later to sever this professional relationship because of Browne’s increasing unwillingness to submit to draft revisions, the *Bleak House* illustrations remain of lasting interest to both scholars and readers because of their dramatic departure midway through the novel from Browne’s usual and much more conventional visual style.

Throughout the novel, the illustrations rely on physiognomic types for their dual depictions of both class and morality in keeping with this pseudo-scientific system of visual representation. Jo is arguably the poorest, most vulnerable character in the entire book, and while his face is never seen in its entirety, what facial features we are given certainly correspond to

⁵⁸ Ford, George and Sylvère Monod, “A Note on the Text.” *Bleak House*, by Dickens, New York: Norton & Co., 1977. Print. 806.

⁵⁹ Steig, Michael. *Dickens and Phiz*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978. Print. 21.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

lower-class, somewhat apelike features of the Celtic racial stereotype. In the title page illustration, Jo displays a marked prognathism that corresponds to his social rank. Since Jo is arguably the most socially precarious character in *Bleak House*, his physiognomy heightens the sympathy with which he is depicted in both text and illustration. While this visual depiction may serve to make a Victorian reader more sensitive to his plight, the fact that Jo is treated so sympathetically by the text despite, or in fact because of his stereotyped visual depiction effectively energizes the novel's argument for greater charitable action for London's needy working poor, while at the same time pointing the reader towards ethical action as an appropriate response to the socioeconomic concerns of the work as a whole. Dickens involves the reader/viewer in the ethical deficit of the status quo of the novel, thereby ensuring that the reader is not only part of the problem but key to its solution. In contrast to the reader of *London: A Pilgrimage*, who is invited to participate in and is situated as part of the charitable status quo, *Bleak House* makes changing the reader's visual and ethical framework central to its interpretation. This reliance on right seeing as a hermeneutic framework in no way undercuts the range of interpretations or meanings afforded by the novel's complexity, including the contemporary recognition that physiognomy is entirely racially prejudicial and therefore ethically untenable; rather, *Bleak House* draws attention to the ethical ramifications of both the text and the interpretive process as part of those range of meanings. The success of this in the nineteenth century is evidenced by the reputation of Dickens' novels in various Victorian social reform movements, as well as by the fact that Virginia Woolf is later able to comment that Edwardian novels that still participate in this literary tradition "leave one with so strange a

feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction [and] in order to complete them it seems necessary to do something—to join a society, or, more desperately, to write a cheque.”⁶¹

In addition to prompting the viewer towards individual ethical action and improvement, works of art that draw on the critical assumptions of “right seeing” also carry with them the idea that the work of art itself is an effective mechanism by which wider social improvement can be brought about, in both the individual reader and the society in which he operates. The idea that the work of art is sufficient to generate socioeconomic change would become the hallmark of the Arts and Crafts movement and forms a central component of Morris’s aesthetic model as I discuss in Chapter 2; however, this concept is also expressed in Victorian art and design throughout the period. Charles Heygate Mackmurdo’s 1883 *Wren’s City Churches* exemplifies this concept in Mackmurdo’s impassioned pamphlet proposing the architectural preservation of the eponymous churches, and simultaneously demonstrates the persistence of “right seeing” into the late nineteenth century. Written to convince the public of the need for their preservation in perpetuity as part of England’s cultural patrimony, Mackmurdo’s illustrated text is predicated on the idea that “the preservation of these buildings can be ensured by means only of their general appreciation,—a means so difficult, and so distant in attainment, that these churches’ life must still for some time be considered in jeopardy.”⁶² In order to cultivate this “general appreciation,” Mackmurdo jettisons his Neo-Gothic training and instead leverages what are purely Ruskinian arguments about the relationship between architecture and society to argue in favor of the

⁶¹ Woolf, Virginia. *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*. Hogarth Press, 1924. Print.

⁶² Mackmurdo, Arthur Heygate. *Wren’s City Churches*. Sunnyside, Orpington, Kent: George Allen, 1883. Print. iv.

preservation of Wren's neoclassical buildings. Mackmurdo maintains that Wren's churches, as works of art that are both products and exemplars of Enlightenment virtue and neoclassical ideals, can be understood and interpreted both through the range of their utility and also through the contemplative interpretation.



Figure 10. "Wren's City Churches," Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo. 1883. *Artstor*.

In this way, Mackmurdo is able to contend that the individual who reads his text, as well as those individuals who interact with the churches themselves, are able to effectively interpret them as works of art, since "silent though it seems to be, even architecture, reading lightly its lithic

language, we find fraught with high strung human feeling, as impassioned and full of character as poetry or painting.”⁶³ Mackmurdo therefore argues in classic Ruskinian fashion that these churches have a reciprocal relationship benefiting the society that engages with them in keeping with the ethical framework of their means of production, and that relationship is rooted in the interpretive engagement of the viewer or user, whose act of interpretation is the conduit for that socioeconomic change. In light of this contention Mackmurdo’s characterization of an architectural group becomes clear, since “each member viewed as having been placed and planned with designed relation to other members around it; and in conscious and chosen connection with the whole.”⁶⁴ This argument is as much strategic as aesthetic, since Mackmurdo intentionally describes the churches as being fully and indissolubly integrated into the infrastructure of London, and that their use as a kind of interpretation is thus the conduit by which their neoclassical virtues can be conveyed to the individual user and to the city and culture of London more generally. Mackmurdo’s pamphlet works on two levels and perfectly exemplifies the idea that this ethics of interpretation, or “right seeing” is linked to the work of art’s individual potential to generate socioeconomic change.

Work and Victorian Interpretive Ethics

Having described ways in which I see these Victorian critical assumptions coalescing into aesthetic mode or even an interpretive model, I return to Ford Madox Brown’s *Work* as an example of mid-century “right seeing” at its fullest extent. *Work* stands as a hybrid verbal-visual

⁶³ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 25.

work of art, exemplifies this ethical hermeneutics, and stands as the culmination of Brown's participation in "right seeing" through his mid-career association with the early Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

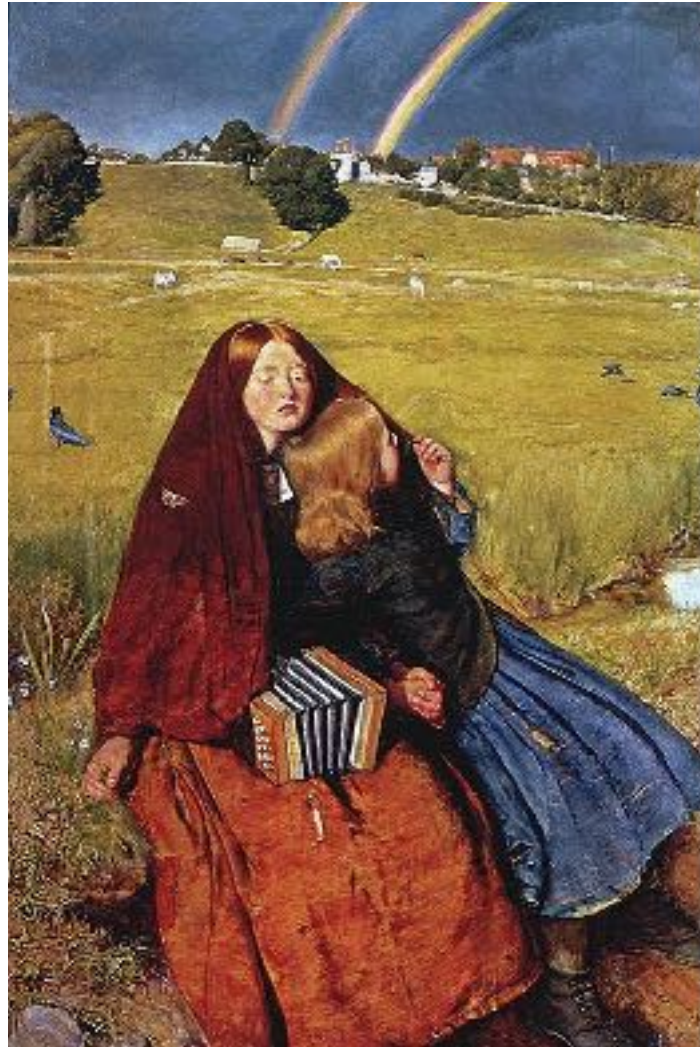


Figure 11. *The Blind Girl*. John Everett Millais. 1856, oil on canvas, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. *Artstor*.

Not only does *Work* form part of a short-lived Pre-Raphaelite wave of social realism which included paintings such as Rossetti's unfinished *Found* (1854-5), Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (1854), and Millais' *The Blind Girl* (1856), but this direct conflation of the literary

and the pictorial is, I contend, a direct result of Rossetti's influence on Brown's style and Brown's own relationship with the early PRB, since throughout the 1850s Rossetti became increasingly reliant on sonnets and poems as both an inspiration for and an intrinsic component of his double works. Although Millais's own works do not fully participate in "right seeing" as an artistic and interpretive mode and instead trend towards more traditional iconographic subjects and styles, and the PRB would move past social realism toward the more detached decadence of Rossetti and the applied designs of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts, the PRB's short-lived emphasis both on social realism and on verbal-visual hybridity marks the point at which the Brotherhood most closely hewed to "right seeing" as a kind of model for critical and creative practice. It is also worth noting here that Morris's identification and collaboration with the second-wave Pre-Raphaelites at the outset of his career is a mark of his subsequent adoption of this ethically inflected interpretive mode.

Through its incorporation of text and image into a composite verbal-visual work of art, Holman Hunt's monumental painting *Work* directly participates in the series of presuppositions that constitute this Victorian ethics of visual interpretation. The composite nature of the work is demonstrated by the extent to which Brown himself describes and even interprets the picture in his verbal catalogue entry, thereby foregrounding the viewer's experience to arrive at a correct and ethical interpretation. Brown's catalogue describes the workmen laboring in the hot sun, and the young navy in particular, as "the heroe[s] of the picture," but they are surrounded by representatives from every class and station, from very poorest of society along the bottom of the frame, represented by the chickweed seller, "who has never been taught to work," the ragged

children, and the Irish refugee family, to the very wealthiest, with the gentleman and his daughter on horseback who pause at the top of the hill when they see the road closure, while even the intellectual classes are represented by the two standing figures of Thomas Carlyle and Frederick Maurice, the intellectual workers, “who are the cause of well-ordained work in others” and who appear to be taking in the entire scene in much the same way as the viewer.⁶⁵



Figure 12. *Work*, Ford Madox Brown. 1852-65, oil on canvas, Manchester Art Gallery. *Artstor*.

Each individual character, from the well-dressed lady “whose only business in life is to look beautiful for our benefit” to the “idlers in the neighborhood” who “Bobus [...] from *Past and*

⁶⁵ Brown, Ford Madox. “An Exhibition Catalogue. An exhibition of *Work* and other paintings by Ford Madox Brown at the Gallery, 191 Piccadilly (opposite Sackville Street), 1865.” *Manchester Art Gallery*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Oct. 2016.

Present” [...] has “hired [...] to carry his [sandwich] boards,” is thus defined by their socioeconomic position, which is demonstrated visually not only by their clothing, work, and other markers, but also spatially in their physical relationship to the construction site, which forms a visible pyramidal structure that directly references the hierarchical nature of society itself.⁶⁶

While the painting’s reliance on such visual detail enables the reader to construct a story in accordance with the conventions of narrative painting, the work of art’s equivalent reliance on textual sources requires the viewer to account for text and image together as part of the interpretive process. Apart from the literary references within the picture, the painting itself surrounded by four Bible verses painted on the frame, which Julian Treuherz characterizes as

stern Biblical quotations on the moral necessity and egalitarianism of labour: ‘I must work while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work’ (John 9:4); ‘Neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day’ (II Thessalonians 3:8); ‘Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings’ (Proverbs 22:29); ‘In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread’ (Genesis 3:39).⁶⁷

Additionally, Ford Madox Brown composed two separately displayed textual components for *Work* as part of his one-man exhibition in February 1865; the first of these is a sonnet, which opens with the unsurprising exclamation “WORK! Which beads the brow, and tans the flesh, / Of lusty manhood, casting out its devils!”⁶⁸ The sonnet does not deviate overmuch from this overtly

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Treuherz, Julian. *Ford Madox Brown: Pre-Raphaelite Pioneer*. Manchester: Manchester Art Gallery 2011. Print. 193.

⁶⁸ Brown, Ford Madox. “Work,” lines 1-2, qtd. in Treuherz, 193.

ekphrastic mode, and throughout directly references details within the picture, such as the “beauteous tripping dame with bell-like skirts, / Intent on the small scarlet-coated hound, / Are ragged wayside babes not lovesome too?”⁶⁹ The second, more lengthy text is his heavily iconographic catalogue description, which has dominated the critical reception of *Work* since its initial publication. The catalogue’s comprehensive, interpretive nature has led most scholars to simply confine their reading of the picture within the scope of Brown’s own analysis, to the extent that the most skeptical of critics argue that it either “strives to control and contain”⁷⁰ the viewer’s independent judgement or “surreptitiously [...exercises] a subtle judgment upon critical interpretation.”⁷¹ However, the success of Brown’s realism is the ability of the contemporary viewer to understand the picture without access to the catalogue entry, since Brown’s viewer/reader will have access to the textual elements on the frame, but not necessarily all of the textual elements Brown created as an aid to interpretation. In this way, Brown’s conflation of text and image is such that it is nearly impossible to tease out where the text ends and the interpretation begins, and this complex weaving together of representational forms foregrounds the reader/viewer’s interpretive activity and directly supports *Work’s* participation in right seeing as a hermeneutic model.

In keeping with the perspectival structure of interpretation, the viewer’s visual and spatial relationship to the picture involves the viewer in the mimetic space generated by the interpretive

⁶⁹ Ibid., lines 9-10.

⁷⁰ Curtis, Gerard. “Ford Madox Brown’s *Work*: An Iconographic Analysis.” *The Art Bulletin* 74.4 (December 1992): 623-636. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Sept. 2016.

⁷¹ Dart, Gregory. “The Reworking of *Work*.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27.1 (1999): 69-96. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 Sept. 2016.

process. Additionally, the work of art's generic hybridity blurs any hermeneutic distinction between reading the text or viewing the painting. The viewer/reader must therefore interpret word and image together, read the visual depiction of the characters with the catalogue description and Bible verses to arrive at an interpretation. Although the reader's interpretation is not in any way prescribed by the ethical impetus of this hermeneutic model, the picture's generic incorporation of text and image entrenches the thematic content of the work of art, namely, labor as a social bond among the social ranks and various occupations represented within the picture. Furthermore, the reader/viewer forms the central component of a visual hermeneutic triad of picture/viewer/artist in keeping with the mimetic conventions of linear perspective. By providing the reader/viewer with unmediated access to Brown's visual perspective of the Hampstead Heath street scene in his role as the painter, the painting visually elides the distinction between the real world and the viewer's mimetic, mediated experience of the world of the painting. *Work* also demonstrates the necessity of social rank by locating the viewer or reader as part of the social hierarchy of the painting through the perspectival model of interpretation and the concurrent generation of mimetic space. In the world of the picture then, labor is a social glue that ties all ranks, classes, and races together in one harmonious, unified whole, and in Protestant and bourgeois terms, is the primary means of individual and social improvement. The viewer/reader then is not necessarily prompted to act in direct response to the picture, although there is some gesture towards charitable activity in the lower classes. Instead the viewer is rather called upon to reframe his own conception of himself in relationship to society more generally, and to do his own work as befits his rank and station as part of Victorian society. As a consequence, the reader

or viewer is thus physically situated as an active participant within the hierarchical social structure of labor established by the painting in keeping with the logic, if we can call it a logic, of “right seeing.”

In this way, the viewer is also positioned as the primary mechanism for wider social engagement, and with it, the potential for social change. Since interpretation is an ethical act, which it is incumbent on the viewer to understand correctly and ethically, the viewer’s engagement with the work of art is simultaneously an act of interpretation and an acknowledgment of his position within the social stratification of labor presented within the picture. That acknowledgement is ethically freighted, since the painting requires the reader/viewer to recognize and reckon with his own work in “the real world” as both maintaining and positively contributing to society as a whole. Additionally, the act of interpretation is also a kind of labor, so the viewer’s active engagement with the work of art also simultaneously reinforces the viewer’s position as a contributing member of society within the mimetic world of the painting itself. The painting does not overtly address any one kind of moral or ethical problem within the status quo, apart from the need for charitable activity concurrent with the productive participation in the labor structure celebrated by the picture, nor does the hermeneutic framework of the painting attempt to dictate the meaning or range of meanings for the viewer. However, the painting’s thematic preoccupation with labor as central to social reform thus both figuratively and literally positions the viewer simultaneously within the mimetic world of the painting and the “real world.” In this way, *Work* leverages the visual ethics of interpretation to engage the viewer as an agent for positive engagement with society. *Work* thus operates on two levels, not

only using right seeing as an interpretive mode, but self-consciously establishing this ethics of vision as a key part of charitable social improvement and thus as an essential component of the hierarchical framework of Victorian society.

In addition, *Work's* reliance on the interpretive model of picture/viewer/artist self-consciously reveals the orientation of text/image/reader as a second triad of interpretive elements in works that operate in terms of "right seeing." This second interpretive triad is also spatially oriented, although in a less programmatic and codified manner than traditional linear perspective would provide. The viewer/reader's act of interpreting text and image together as one work of art is thus analogous to the viewer's alignment of his vision with the painted expression of the artist's vision on the canvas. "Right seeing" thereby generates two simultaneous, yet analogous modes of interpretation, and this interpretive doubling creates the self-referential mode characteristic of all such works of art. While J. Hillis Miller describes the dialogic relationship between text and image as an endlessly recursive process of doubling, this doubling is not simply a formal feature of a hybrid work of art, but rather a structural element within the hermeneutic process of "right seeing."⁷² In this way, the doubly self-referential nature of *Work* is the result of its formal verbal-visual hybridity in keeping with "right seeing" as an interpretive mode. *Work* shows you how to see rightly, not only through the formal elements of the picture, but also through its verbal components, such as Brown's catalogue entry, which simultaneously models "right seeing" for the viewer. What is more, *Work* shows people seeing "rightly" within it, Carlyle and Maurice in particular, and outside of it, namely both Brown and the viewer, and this

⁷² Miller, J. Hillis. *Illustration*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992. Print. 111.

self-referential quality implicates the viewer as a tacit presence within the picture itself. In contrast to Renaissance artists such as Diego Velázquez or Jan Van Eyck whose perspectival incorporations of the viewer work on the level of portraiture, the mimetic space generated by works that participate in right seeing is much more interested in activating the viewer as a social and ethical participant in and outside the world of the work of art. *Work* thus shows you what to see, how to see it, the available meanings of what you're seeing, and the ethical ramifications for your own life and society more generally. As a hermeneutic model, right seeing therefore attempts to create the conditions for the type of social change it is promoting through its incorporation of the viewer into the process of interpretation.

Rossetti's Expansion of Right Seeing and the Development of Victorian Aesthetics

No discussion of the shifting trends in Victorian aesthetics would be complete without a discussion of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whose innovative, genre-bending work provides particularly useful context for the intersection of Victorian ethics and interpretation as well as for William Morris's own aesthetic model, given the extent of his collaboration with Morris and his own interest in book illustration and cover design. Rossetti's early foray into criticism with his 1848 short story *Hand and Soul* and his distinctive hybrid verbal-visual double works can be understood as a significant expansion of right seeing as an interpretive mode which would inform the direction of later nineteenth-century critical and artistic practice. Written at the very beginning of his career, *Hand and Soul* has historically been understood as his artistic manifesto, and the short story lays out an interpretive model that both participates in and expands the critical assumptions of right seeing in terms of the Victorian generic hybridity that would define his

entire body of work. *Hand and Soul* is a fictional frame story that documents the art historical and textual recovery of the work of Chiaro di Messer Bello dell' Erma, an Italian primitive artist. In describing the course of Chiaro's career as a painter, the text establishes Chiaro's artistic philosophy and creative style as an authoritative counter-narrative to Vasari's sweepingly definitive description of Renaissance art history. In the process, the frame structure of *Hand and Soul* presents an aesthetic model of interpretation on two levels: that of Chiaro's own artistic practice and that of the narrator's interpretive experience of his paintings; in both instances, this aesthetic is an expanded iteration of right seeing.

Chiaro's fictional career is defined by his search for an artistic style that would both bring him fame while at the same time creating positive, ethical social change in his audience, and his failure to do so calls into question the efficacy of many of the primary aspects of right seeing, at least as far as it would be understood in terms of Victorian social realist art such as *Work*. As soon as he has achieved his ambition to become a famous painter, "Chiaro set a watch on his soul, and put his hand to no other works but only to such as had for their end the presentment of some moral greatness that should influence the beholder: and to this end, he multiplied abstractions, and forgot the beauty and passion of the world."⁷³ While his turn away from 13th-century realism in the mode of Cimabue and Giotto towards allegory and symbolic representation was a critical success and earned him distinguished commissions, Chiaro's confidence in the ethical potential of his art is shattered by a Pazzi-like conspiracy which desecrated his church frescoes to the extent that "there was so much blood cast up the walls [...]"

⁷³ Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. *Hand and Soul*. London: Ellis, 1869. Print. 9.

that it ran in long streams down Chiaro's paintings."⁷⁴ This disconnect between the viewer's visual engagement with his works of art depicting Peace and other virtues and the conspirators' utter lack of ethical and moral transformation prompts Chiaro's existential crisis, in the middle of which he exclaims: "Wherefore through me they shall be doubly accursed, seeing that through me they reject the light. May one be a devil and not know it?"⁷⁵

Chiaro's lament prompts him to have a vision of his own soul, and Chiaro's conversation with his muse demonstrates the extent to which Chiaro's artistic and interpretive process expands the model of right seeing away from the mimetic expression of the real world and reframes it in terms of the artist himself. At this point in his career, Chiaro can create works of art that are mimetic in their realism, as well as being abstractly representative of various virtues, but these paintings do not produce the ethical effects of a teach-and-delight aesthetic in any lasting or meaningful way. In order to bring about the kind of ethical and thus artistic success that Chiaro longs for, his muse declares that he must make works of art that are not mimetic of the exterior world but rather of Chiaro's own interior landscape, and she presents this mimetic goal in terms of perspectival realism.⁷⁶ She declares herself to be "an image, Chiaro, of thine own soul within thee," and as such is accessible to Chiaro through his own visual perception.⁷⁷ In addition, Chiaro locates this vision within the mimetic space of perspectival realism, since "as the woman stood, her speech was with Chiaro: not, as it were, from her mouth or in his ears; but distinctly

⁷⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 14.

between them” so that “the speech seemed within him and his own.”⁷⁸ Since her words arise from the space between Chiaro and the image, her words are a product of the mimetic space within a perspectival field. Additionally, she charges him to paint in light of his mimetic vision of his own soul, which in her terms is possible only when “thou lean over the water shalt thou see thine image therein: stand erect, and it shall slope from thy feet and be lost.”⁷⁹ By describing his artistic goal in terms of the mirrored surface of the water, Chiaro’s personal aesthetic is framed in terms of perspectival realism.

In *Hand and Soul*, the narrator’s own visual experience of Chiaro’s painting of his vision is also described in terms of this expanded model of right seeing, since the narrator is brought into mimetic alignment not with the image on the canvas of the young girl, but with the soul of Chiaro himself as expressed through the painting. When he finds the painting in the gallery, he declares it to be beyond mere verbal description, “for the most absorbing wonder of it was its literality. You knew that figure, when painted, had been seen; yet it was not a thing to be seen of men.”⁸⁰ The narrator’s interpretive wonder at the work of art also comes only when he is able to physically occupy the space required of him to achieve perspectival mimesis, since when he returns to the gallery the next day, he finds “a circle of students was round the spot, [...and he must contrive] to find a place whence I could see my picture, and where I seemed to be in nobody's way.”⁸¹ The narrator is also “vexed” when an Englishman asks him ““to stand a little

⁷⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁸¹ Ibid.

more to this side, as you interrupt my view” since, “standing where he asked me, a glare struck on the picture from the windows, and I could not see” the picture.⁸² This moving in and out of the painting’s interpretive space corresponds to the harmonious alignment of the narrator with Chiaro himself by means of the visual interpretation of the painting, which enables the narrator to perfectly commune with the spirit of Chiaro. Conversely, others within the gallery, such as the Frenchman working at his own easel, understand the narrator’s communion with the picture, but as the Frenchman is pursuing his own artistic reflection of his soul and does not occupy the same angle of vision, he does not experience the same connection with Chiaro’s picture that is generated by the narrator’s own interpretation of that work of art. Therefore, Rossetti’s aesthetic expands the perspectival model of right seeing by shifting the mimetic space generated by the interpretive process towards the artist himself and away from the representation of the external reality shared by society.

On another level, however, the reader of the text of *Hand and Soul* effectively occupies the position of the narrator as viewer, with all of the ramifications of this aesthetic for the reader’s own interpretation of the story. The reader participates in interpretation of the painted work of art through the narrator’s ekphrastic descriptions, and while the reader is prevented from direct communion with Chiaro through his painterly expression of his own soul, that remove is softened by the misunderstanding of the other visitors to the art gallery. Like the other observers, whose ability to understand is constrained by their physical and visual alignment with the work of art, the reader is unable to fully grasp the significance of Chiaro’s work because the reader

⁸² Ibid., 21.

understands it only obliquely through the text, rather than through the direct visual experience of the image. Thus in keeping with the logic surrounding the earlier iteration of right seeing, only those that directly view the picture, in this case by standing in front of it, have any kind of transformative interpretive experience with the picture. The reader's lack of complete comprehension is therefore echoed by the misunderstanding of the other art students who are in the same position, both literally and figuratively. Thus only the narrator, through his physical alignment with the work of art, has the transformative experience of the picture, with all of its ethical and moral improvement, and the reader is instead left with a sense of what he has lost and what he might gain in the future through similar interpretive experiences.

Rossetti's inward-turning adaptation of right seeing is not merely visual but also somewhat transcendently personal, and its alteration of mimetic space has ethical ramifications somewhat oblique to those less personal works of art that participate in aspects of this interpretive mode. Despite Rossetti's own contention that his mimetic shift retains the ethical traction of social realism or Victorian genre pictures, this representational move towards the artist puts greater emphasis on the viewer/artist's perspectival relationship and de-emphasizes the function of the work of art itself as part of the interpretive triad. As a consequence, Rossetti's iteration of this Victorian interpretive ethics attempts to quietly transform individuals through their visual engagement with the artist's mimetic depiction of his ideal and purest self as expressed through the work of art, while any wider social action comes through that transformation of the individual and is thus ancillary to the work of art, as well as its production, interpretation, and reception. In this way, Rossetti's aesthetic effectively steps back from the

moral and social engagement posited by earlier social realistic works that rely on right seeing, whatever his Carlylean work ethic would posit. Despite this theoretical disconnect, Rossetti's aesthetic still maintains, at least rhetorically, the necessity and the possibility of individual improvement and through the interpretive process and thus occupies an intermediate position between Victorian right seeing and its final iteration in *fin-de-siècle* decadence.

Rossetti's influence on right seeing is thus an advancement on the ideas of mimesis, the role of the viewer, and the nature of the work of art. Rossetti's double works operate in terms of *Hand and Soul's* interpretive aesthetic, while at the same time bending traditional generic constraints in their implicit assertion that neither painting nor poem can be correctly understood without visual reference to each other as equivalent and complementary interpretive components of a composite visual-verbal work of art, and this hermeneutic duality can be demonstrated through the well-known example of *The Blessed Damozel*. Rossetti's double works are so called because he usually “[executed] a picture and then [...] wrote] a poem—typically a sonnet or a pair of sonnets—that comments and elaborates upon the pictorial work” in a self-conscious effort, like many Victorian painters, to create twin works of art that challenge traditional limitations of painting and poetry as independent media.⁸³ However, in the case of *The Blessed Damozel*, Rossetti wrote the first version of the poem in 1847, which he revised for publication in *The Germ* in 1850 and again for his first volume of *Poems* in 1870. Unlike his other double works, Rossetti wrote the poem before he painted the picture, of which he also created two versions: the Fogg oil (1871-77) and a later replica for Frederick Leyland (1879-81).

⁸³ “Rossetti Doubleworks.” *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Archive*. Ed. Jerome McGann. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 November 2015.

The Blessed Damozel is a clear example of the extent to which Rossetti attempts to push the limits of painting and poetry, and the composite verbal-visual nature of his mournful early poem and subsequent painting necessitates that they be understood as hermeneutic foils of each other.



Figure 13. *The Blessed Damozel*, D.G. Rossetti. 1877, oil on canvas, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum. *Artstor*.

The painting itself depicts a young woman at half length, with “stars in her hair” and holding a bunch of lilies and poppies, “[leaning] out / From the gold bar of heaven,” and gazing dreamily

outward and perhaps downward.⁸⁴ She is surrounded by groups of figures, as below her is a Botticellian trio of angels, while above her are groups of lovers embracing, “newly met / ‘Mid deathless love’s acclaims.”⁸⁵ Below the main picture is a predella, showing the lover himself reclining on the grassy bank of the river, looking upward as he dreams of his beloved damozel. While the poem has certain structural and poetic differences from the painting, such as the speeches by the lover and the damozel who hope for reunion after the lover’s death, as well as the dramatic “time like a pulse [...shaking] fierce / Through all the worlds,” which the painting does not even attempt to portray, the fact the picture can be easily described in reference to the poem is due to the fact that Rossetti has included the first four stanzas of the poem on the bottom rail of the frame, thereby inviting and requiring the viewer to understand both pictures with reference to the poem and vice versa.⁸⁶

In terms of Rossettian right seeing, *The Blessed Damozel* is characterized by its generic experimentation through its tripartite, verbal-visual hybridity, which directly supports Rossetti’s artist-centered adaptation of linear perspective. This generic hybridity self-consciously requires the viewer/reader to be an active participant in the process of interpretation, and Rossetti’s frames are not outside the scope of the work of art but rather both liminal and central components of the work of art. Rossetti’s own frame designs, his outsourcing of frame designs to the firm Foord and Dickinson, and his work with book designs and book covers demonstrate his

⁸⁴ Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. “The Blessed Damozel.” *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Archive*. Ed. Jerome McGann. N.d. Web. 30 November 2015. Lines 2, 6.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, lines 37-38.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, lines 50-51.

interest in not only the craft of paratextual elements but their interpretive significance as part of the work of art, interests he would share with Morris. Rossetti's frames are formal, hermeneutically significant elements of the double work that move past the verbal-visual hybridity of earlier PRB and nineteenth-century paintings and instead attempt to remove all distance between text and image in defiance of *ut pictura poesis*'s analogical constraints. Additionally, *The Blessed Damozel*'s tripartite structure of predella, painting, and text, or text-on-frame, creates multiple viewpoints for the viewer's interpretive activity. These visual perspectives parallel the multiple poetic viewpoints of the damozel, her lover, and the lover's dream vision within the poetic text, and in the process. However, this multiplicity effectively blurs the respective positions of reader or viewer, primarily because the textual and visual elements are similarly hermeneutically indistinct throughout the work of art. While in terms of right seeing, the work's verbal-visual hybridity privileges the viewer's hermeneutic authority, *The Blessed Damozel*'s overlapping verbal and visual fields simultaneously subvert and circumvent the viewer's own perspective, since the artist's vision is thus the most stable perspective in the work of art's interpretive triad. Therefore, the work of art privileges the artist's own perspective in strictly Rossettian terms.

As a consequence, Rossetti's theoretical extension of mimesis accounts not for the realism of the work of art but for the emotional realism of the artist's own experience. Through their visual and spatial alignment with the work of art, the viewer/reader is thus brought within the mimetic space of the painting, but rather than being faced with any ethical or social problem, the viewer instead experiences the internal landscape of the artist as expressed by the work of art.

For *The Blessed Damozel*, that landscape is a Beatrician vision of Rossetti's own ideal poetic, personal, and heavily biographical relationship with his muse, in this case, his wife Lizzie Siddal. The viewer is thus altered through this harmonious communication with the artist himself and the work of art, but any individual moral or ethical transformation is somewhat beside the point in comparison with the communion between artist and viewer. The duality of Rossetti's double works enables text and image to function as companion elements that do not even attempt to express identical meanings or to describe identical objects or formal elements of each other in an ekphrastic manner. Instead, the painting and poem often function as counterpoints to one another, the content of one of which remains oblique to the verbal or visual element, and this hermeneutic incompleteness that drives the viewer's participation in the interpretive process.

However, Rossetti's mystical and highly individual treatment of the subject-matter complicates this relationship between painting, poem, and pre-existing text, since the picture must be interpreted in light of the text provided, or with only the symbolic imagery presented in the painting, since it is highly likely that the viewer will have very little idea of the essential story that ostensibly grounds the picture. In this way, the picture becomes unmoored from any iconographic grounding and interpretation becomes even more subjective and viewer-based, and this interpretive fluidity pushes Rossetti's work towards *fin-de-siècle* decadence. In so doing, double works such as *The Blessed Damozel* ultimately challenge right seeing's own predilection for hermeneutic accuracy and right interpretation through their unique, highly individual iconography. What is more, *The Blessed Damozel* also challenges the definitional limitations of what constitutes an individual work of art, since its dual nature forces the viewer to account for

both works, or aspects of both works, as a means of creating an accurate interpretation. As an adaptation of right seeing, Rossetti's interpretive model moves away from its origins in social realism and directly fuels the rise of aestheticism and *fin-de-siècle* decadence.

Aestheticism as a Later Development of Right Seeing

Following Rossetti's intervention in Victorian aesthetics, the *fin-de-siècle* period marks the expansion of right seeing as an interpretive model to its greatest extent, and the theoretical writings of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde as well as the illustrated and decorated books of the period perfectly exemplify the final development of this aesthetic model in the nineteenth century. Taken as a statement of Pater's aesthetic ideals in response to the critical assumptions of right seeing, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* centers the act of interpretation on the reader's own experience rather than on a mimetic engagement with the artist's "soul" or an experience of the "real world." Pater's aesthetic maintains the spatial and visual interpretive triad of linear perspective, but places such an increased emphasis on the viewer's own experience of the work of art as to efface all other elements of right seeing. Pater establishes this reorientation towards the viewer by maintaining that the visual and sensory experience of the work of art is the primary goal of interpretation. Pater declares that "at first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects [...] when reflexion begins to play upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence; [...] each object is loosed into a group of impressions—color, odour, texture—in the mind of the observer."⁸⁷ Pater therefore privileges the viewer's visual and wider sensory field as the primary element of the perspectival interpretive triad. This emphasis

⁸⁷ Pater, Walter. *The Renaissance*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1928. Print. 219.

on the sensory experience of the work of art also further attempts to dissolve, rather than simply to efface, the remaining generic constraints of *ut pictura poesis*, so that, as Pater maintains, “if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, [...] it contracts still further: the whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind.”⁸⁸ Thus Pater’s act of reading Morris’s poetry outdoors on a summer’s day is inseparable from his interpretation of that poetry, and he is able to contend that “not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses?”⁸⁹ This sensory conflation is predicated upon the viewer’s ability to process multiple generic and sensory perceptions all together, and rather than simply requiring the viewer to bring together text and image, as is the case with an earlier illustrated book, the sensory experience of Pater’s viewer is indistinguishable from the visual interpretive engagement with the work of art.

In contrast to Rossetti's treatment of the work of art as mimetic of the artist’s “soul,” Pater’s work of art is therefore mimetic of the reader’s experience. In Pater’s treatment of mimesis, the work of art is no longer inseparable from or perfectly representative of the real world, and the act of interpretation thereby removes any accompanying ethical ramifications for the reader. In contrast to the earlier urgent moralizing of right seeing, Pater argues that “art comes to you, proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 220.

pass, and simply for those moments' sake."⁹⁰ The extent to which this criticism is reliant on the reader/viewer's experience of the work of art is evidenced by the fact that Pater begins his conclusion with a lengthy, poetic description of "our physical life," in all of its transient glory.⁹¹ Instead of any lasting personal or ethical improvement, the work of art is to be best understood in terms of its sensory effect on the reader, and that experience provides the complete interpretive experience, even if, or perhaps because, that satisfaction is by its very nature fleeting.

Pater's interpretive model transforms the nature of the mimetic space created by the act of interpretation. Rather than being the physical space defined by the viewer's alignment with the linear perspective of the work of art that elides any distinction between the representation and reality, Pater's interpretive space enables the work of art to be representational of nothing so much as the viewer's own experience. By making the ideal actual, Pater's work of art enables the viewer to experience the ideal beauty and fleeting sensory pleasure of the work of art itself. This self-referential aesthetic therefore proposes, perhaps tautologically, that the viewer experiences nothing but his own experience as part of the interpretive process. Thus the work of art has value only for its own abstractly aesthetic qualities, and is the origin of "art for art's sake" simplicity. Although Pater's own readings of individual works of art, such as *La Gioconda*, are ostensibly critical essays, Pater's critical practice remains rooted in this sensory engagement of the viewer or reader with the work of art. By weighting the interpretive aesthetic of right seeing towards the viewer and away from the mimetic potential of the work of art, and even from the artist himself,

⁹⁰ Ibid., 223.

⁹¹ Ibid., 218.

Pater's aesthetic strips interpretation of its ethical potential or duty towards society and instead enables the hermeneutic experience to insulate the individual from any social and ethical ramifications of their interpretation or of the work of art.

Oscar Wilde's aestheticism is an expansion of Pater's model, and his *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic is the fullest extension of nineteenth-century right seeing as a critical mode. Both "The Critic as Artist" and the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* stand as concise delineations of Wilde's aesthetic, which pushes the model of right seeing into *fin-de-siècle* decadence and towards modernism. In short, Wilde's aesthetic is a further extension of Rossetti's artist-focused hermeneutic model, both in its conflation of the critic-as-viewer with the artist and in its amoral definition of mimesis. The preface to *Dorian Gray* therefore reads like a bulleted list that directly responds to each of the primary critical presuppositions that constitute right seeing. Beginning with Wilde's definition of the artist, the preface famously declares that "the artist is the creator of beautiful things," and in this concise statement, the preface establishes a model of artistic production that is removed from the classical poet/prophet and the teach-and-delight model that informs right seeing's earlier aesthetic.⁹² Expanding on Rossetti's idea that the artist must paint his "own soul," Wilde also moves one step further away from Rossetti's self-referential model of mimesis and instead merges the process of artistic production with the act of interpretation, maintaining that "that is what the highest criticism really is, the record of one's own soul. It is more fascinating than history, as it is concerned simply with oneself."⁹³ With this position, Wilde

⁹² Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray. The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. Harper Perennial, 1989. Print. 1027.

⁹³ Ibid.

slides the artist into the same theoretical space as Pater's viewer, whose self-referential experience of the work of art as the hallmark of interpretation directly maps onto Wilde's own contention that the work of criticism is inseparable from the interpretive process. By conflating critical and creative practice, Wilde is able to maintain that "the critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things," and any "diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital [...since] When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself."⁹⁴ While at points Wilde's aesthetic appears to step back from this position and instead posit a dialectic relationship between criticism and interpretation, either iteration of his aesthetic model effaces the distinction between critical and artistic practice and thus nearly entirely removes the artist as a direct participant in the perspectival interpretive triad.

In contrast to the idea that the act of visual interpretation is an ethical act linked to the socioeconomic influence of the work of art, Wilde replaces the ethically charged mimetic space of right seeing with the critic/artist's amoral experience. Wilde's artist does not even pay lip service to "ethical sympathies," since "an ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style," and as a consequence Wilde's aesthetic challenges the notion that the work of art can create social change.⁹⁵ In the model of right seeing, the work of art generates mimetic space in keeping with its capacity to alter the ethics of the individual viewer, but for Wilde, the work of art, however representational, does not necessarily create any transformational mimetic

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

space. Instead, the viewer's experience of the transcendent beauty of the work of art is the final ideation of the viewer's own identity, so that "all art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. [...] It is the spectator and not life that art really mirrors."⁹⁶ Wilde's rather humorous and poetic aphorism "The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass" effectively demonstrates this lack of mimetic space, since Caliban will see nothing but himself. The work of art is a mirror reflecting the viewer and his own experience, rather than being a representational focus for the generation of perspectival, mimetic, and personally transformative space.⁹⁷

Additionally, Wilde maintains that "thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art [...] and] vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art," thereby reducing ethics to elements of paint and canvas.⁹⁸ Wilde thus reinforces the amoral nature of artistic representation, in direct contradiction of the assertion that generic hybridity was a more effective means of establishing the viewer's interpretive, and therefore ethical relationship to the work of art. The development of critical opinions from the critic's own interpretation is the hallmark of a work of art, since "criticism is no more to be judged by any low standard of imitation or resemblance than is the work of [a] poet or sculptor. The critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticizes as the artist does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

passion and of thought.”⁹⁹ In keeping with his aesthetic model, Wilde treats any generic hybridity as a focus for the artist, first and foremost: “They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only Beauty. / There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. / Books are well written or badly written. That is all.”¹⁰⁰ Beauty is thus a kind of amoral virtue, which cannot, rather than ought to, convey anything but its own aesthetic qualities, and the composite experience of different genres of the beautiful only enhances the viewer’s amoral aesthetic experience. Wilde’s inward-facing act of interpretation therefore effectively effaces the right-seeing viewer and any concurrent social change. It is worth noting here that many of these theoretical statements preface a novel remarkable, like much of Wilde’s *oeuvre*, for its moral symbolism and its allegorical treatment of the relationship between art, ethics, and the aesthetic experience. This playful Wildean juxtaposition of the determinedly amoral and the apparently didactic demonstrates the extent to which Wilde is acknowledging that the novel could be understood in terms of the ethical aesthetics of right seeing and instead is offering an alternative interpretive model which would replace the earnest reader with the aesthetically detached critic.¹⁰¹

“Art for art’s sake” is thus the final nineteenth-century development of right seeing. Wilde’s framework is a rejection of the medieval Neo-Gothic as an ethical, artistic, and social model in favor of a return to Neo-classicism as a cultural and aesthetic ideal. By abandoning the moral earnestness of the Neo-Gothic, Wilde is turning away from the socially engaged aesthetic

⁹⁹ Wilde. *The Critic as Artist. The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. Harper Perennial, 1989. Print. 1026-27.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 1040.

model posited by Pugin, Ruskin, and Morris, as I discuss in Chapter 2, all of whom champion the idea that the work of art is both constitutive of and shaped by the society that produces it. Wilde retains some idea of art as having a social function, but only through critical practice, and he still retains the “art for art’s sake” distance from the viewer’s ethical improvement that is the hallmark of aestheticism. Instead, Wilde maintains that the social distance posited by the Neo-classical ideal is an artistic virtue, enabling the purer experience of the work of art itself as the highest aesthetic model, in direct contradiction of the utility championed by the Arts and Crafts movement. Arguing against the craftsman ideal of Ruskin and Morris, Wilde maintains that “we can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely. / All art is quite useless.”¹⁰² By moving away from the ethics of right seeing, Wilde instead posits, unlike the Arts and Crafts, that that work of art’s relationship to the user is only effective inasmuch as that integration is linked to the sensory perception of beauty, and he declares that “we must turn to the decorative arts: to the arts that touch us, not to the arts that teach us.”¹⁰³ As I discuss in Chapter 2, Morris’s aesthetic model posits the idea that this tactile integration of the user with the applied arts is a primary mechanism for social improvement, but Wilde arrives at a different conclusion and instead declares that this sensory perception of the beautiful is an end unto itself. By the same token, Wilde argues against the insistent moralizing of earlier narrative painting, maintaining that “modern pictures are, no doubt, delightful to look at. [...] But they are quite impossible to live

¹⁰² Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray. The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. Harper Perennial, 1989. Print. 1027.

¹⁰³ Wilde, “The Critic as Artist,” 1050.

with; they are too clever, too assertive, too intellectual. Their meaning is too obvious, and their method too clearly defined.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, by removing socioeconomic and individual improvement as the ultimate goal of interpretation, the work of art becomes of aesthetic interest only for its formal elements, which are considered without reference to their immediate context or effect on the user, viewer, or reader. Nearly inverting the direction of Arnold’s injunction towards objectivity, Wilde counters Arnold’s assertion that “the proper aim of Criticism is to see the object as in itself it really is.” Instead, Wilde maintains that Arnold’s contention “is a very serious error, and takes no cognizance of Criticism’s most perfect form, which is in its essence purely subjective.”¹⁰⁵ In this way, Wilde effectively refocuses the triadic interpretive model so as to center on the viewer’s dyadic relationship to the work of art, and this final, *fin-de-siècle* iteration of right seeing prefigures the modernist emphasis on the formal elements of the work of art at the expense of the viewer, the artist, and the context from which the work of art arises and in which it operates.

In keeping with Wilde’s decadent iteration of right seeing as an interpretive mode, his 1894 Matthews and Lane edition of *Salome*, illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley, epitomizes Wilde’s amoral reader-focused work of art. By harmonizing text and image into a composite work of art that enhances the viewer’s experience of the beautiful, Beardsley’s illustrated *Salome* attempts to leverage the formal elements of the decorated book together with the composite nature of Wilde’s closet drama to create the most multi-sensory experience for the reader and thus the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1028.

highest iteration of the aesthetic art form. While narrative painting waned in popularity towards the end of the Victorian period, the hybrid verbal-visual medium of decorated books developed as an individual art form across the nineteenth century. Throughout the period, various publishers, artists, and designers created and responded to author's texts and public demand, as, for example, Lewis Carroll's determination to retain complete control over the integration of text and image throughout the publication process of *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) largely prefigures the level of verbal-visual integration that would define the illustrated books of the 1880s and 1890s. In Chapters 3 and 4, I discuss the extent to which Morris's own book designs for the Kelmscott Press participate, in terms of Morris's own aesthetic model, in this progression towards an increasing integration of text and image in book design, but this wider generic progression also directly parallels the increasing aesthetic emphasis on the reader's hermeneutic experience of the work of art that grows throughout the later decades of the nineteenth century in keeping with Wilde and Pater's aesthetic model. Similarly, the private press movement and the increasing vogue for decorated books that approach the level of medieval illumination demonstrate this trend for the conscious integration of text, image, and the reader as part of the interpretive process, and Beardsley's edition of Wilde's *Salome* is no exception to this rule.

Beardsley's edition of *Salome* is one of the finest *fin-de-siècle* decorated books, and its illustrations to Wilde's play have become so iconic as to be inseparable from, and even eclipse the reputation of Wilde's text. In its fullest conflation of text, image, and the reader's interpretive and creative intervention in the work of art, Beardsley's *Salome* can be understood as a *gesamtkunstwerk*, or complete or composite work of art of the kind Richard Wagner, Edvard

Munch, and later Bertold Brecht would only begin to approach. While the rhythmic repetition of lines in *Salome*, perhaps epitomized by the “I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan,” and the early repetitive association of Salome with the moon reinforces the audible qualities of the text, and the illustrations themselves provide a visual counterpoint to the play, as a closet drama the text leaves space for the reader’s experience in a way that directly supports Wilde’s conflation of creative and critical practice in his aesthetic model.¹⁰⁶ Nicholas Frankel notes the necessity of the reader’s imaginative interpretive and thus creative inclusion in the text in his reading of Salome’s dance of the seven veils. While Frankel notes that “it is linguistically one of the least auspicious moments in the play, a bland stage direction (‘Salome dances the dance of the seven veils’), italicized and bracketed from the play’s more fanciful dialogue,” “in stage performances, we might say *Salome* dances for us; [...since] the text calls on its reader to perform a silent act of imagination at this particular moment. [...] It is almost a figure for the imagination, or at least a sign ‘in’ the work of the moment when a reader’s imagination is made most self-conscious.”¹⁰⁷ The reader’s experience and its translation into artistic practice are also modeled by the act of reading itself, since as a closet drama the line between performance and reading is blurred; therefore, as the reader performs, interprets, and reads the illustrated text, the reader is effectively creating a new work of art in keeping with Wilde’s ideal model of unified critical and creative practice. What is more, the generic conflation of text and image foregrounds the reader’s interpretive activity when understood as a script for a staged performance, and the illustrated text

¹⁰⁶ Wilde, Oscar. *Salome. The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. Harper Perennial, 1989. Print. 559.

¹⁰⁷ Frankel, Nicholas. *Oscar Wilde’s Decorated Books*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. Print. 62, 65.

also serves as a template or a score for the holistic inclusion of multiple media as part of the audience's experience.



Figure 14. “The Climax, or the Kiss; Salome with the Head of John the Baptist (illustration for the play *Salome* by Oscar Wilde),” Aubrey Beardsley. 1893-1894, pen and ink. *Artstor*.

Therefore, *Salome* as a decorated book attempts to create an entire sensory experience for and with the reader, of which the illustrations and the text are inseparable components in keeping with Wilde's aesthetic privileging of the reader as both critic and artist.

Beardsley's *Salome* also stands as a late-wave iteration of *fin-de-siècle* right seeing, since the reader's interpretive experience of the beautiful is prioritized over the mimetically and ethically transformative experience of the work of art. This experience is reinforced by the illustrations, which are not so much ekphrastic or even strictly illustrative of the text, as is the case with Beardsley's iconic illustration "The Climax." The curving floating figure of Salome and the iconic dripping head of Jokanaan maintain only the loosest illustrative correlation with the text of the play; nonetheless, Beardsley's illustrations are complementary components of the decorated book as a whole and are therefore as inseparable from the reader/viewer's interpretive experience of the book as the text itself. This amoral experience of the beautiful is further reinforced by Beardsley's shocking imagery and the sexual content of the play, all of which Wilde includes in order to support his contention that they are part of the experience of the beautiful rather than demonstrative or constitutive of any ethical experience on the part of the reader. Frankel describes this effect when he declares that "Beardsley's *Salome* drawings [...] tease us with the prospect that they contain dangerous and perverse meanings, if only by the sheer profusion of undraped body parts and sex organs dispersed throughout. [...] However,] it would be far more accurate to say that Beardsley's drawings seduce meaning, draining it away from the sign, so that finally what you see is what you get."¹⁰⁸

In this way, *Salome* merges the viewer's and artist's experience, so that their interpretive experience of the work of art is self-reflective rather than immersively mimetic in an exterior reality, and the mimetic space generated by interpretation is only transformative because of the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 73.

decontextualized, amoral experiential beauty of the work of art. Beardsley and Wilde's daringly decadent book requires the reader to deliberately set aside any moral or ethical misgivings about the content of the text and illustrations and refocus on the rhythmic haunting beauty of the text and the exotic simplicity of the accompanying illustrations. In the process, the reader is forced to acknowledge the art for art's sake beauty of the reading experience without the necessity of any corresponding ethical and social change. In this way, the reader's interpretation of Beardsley and Wilde's *Salome* is thus an amoral, non-transformative ethical experience that is decontextualized from his everyday experience of society in keeping with Pater and Wilde's aesthetic model.

Whistler, Ruskin, and Victorian Aesthetics

James Abbott McNeill Whistler's account of the Whistler-Ruskin trial in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* similarly demonstrates the extent to which this theoretical shift away from the earlier critical and ethical assumptions of right seeing was regarded by Victorians as a foregone conclusion. The trial itself was the dramatic result of Whistler's libel charges against Ruskin for his *Fors Clavigera* review of Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold* in which he colorfully and pugnaciously described Whistler's innovative picture as a work "in which the ill-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approached the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen, and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."¹⁰⁹ The trial transcripts and testimony for and against the artistic quality and economic value of Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold* can thus be understood as a manifestation of the then-current dominance of aesthetic

¹⁰⁹ Ruskin, John. *Fors Clavigera. The Works of John Ruskin*. Vol. 27. Ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1904. Print. 160.

iteration of right seeing and the countercultural, and even outmoded understanding of the social function of the work of art in keeping with early Victorian social realism.



Figure 15. *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, J.M. Whistler. 1875, oil on canvas, Detroit Institute of Arts. *Artstor*.

In the trial, the work of art's potential for direct social action is moot, in keeping with Wilde and Pater's insistence on the experience of the work of art, rather than its effects. Instead, Whistler's defense of his painting is rooted in right seeing's final aesthetic iteration, in contrast to Ruskin's more ethical view of the function and production of works of art, while Burne-Jones's testimony

in favor of Ruskin is also representative of the extent to which his painterly style, as the direct inheritor of Rossetti's aesthetic, runs increasingly counter to Morris's and Ruskin's moral centeredness. During the trial, Burne-Jones maintained that "a picture ought not to fall short of what has been for ages considered complete finish," and Whistler's *Nocturne* instead "is good in colour, but bewildering in form; and it has no composition and detail. [...] it shows no finish—it is simply a sketch [...] and it would be impossible to call it a serious work of art."¹¹⁰

Burne-Jones's support of "completeness" of finish and detail is represented in Whistler's trial transcripts as upholding Ruskin's and Frith's testimony against Whistler. Any objections to the picture, while not discussed in these terms, therefore effectively center on the idea of mimesis, since the picture is described variously as lacking in detail and bewildering in form. Francis Fennell contends as much in his analysis of the strategy of Ruskin's defense lawyers, which he maintains "was hampered by an apparent confusion over tactics [...] with the result that Sir John Holker's] questioning should have been designed to merely demonstrate that Ruskin's opinion about Whistler was shared by other art critics and was therefore 'fair' [...] but instead] was demanding that art be representational. According to that narrow standard, Whistler was of course judged a failure, and Holker could proclaim that Ruskin's denunciation was wholly warranted."¹¹¹ Thus Frith's description of Whistler's *Nocturne* can be understood in strictly mimetic terms, when he declares: "I cannot see anything of the true representation of water and atmosphere in the painting of 'Battersea Bridge.' There is a pretty colour which pleases the eye,

¹¹⁰ Whistler, James Abbott MacNeill. *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*. New York: Dover, 1967. Print. 15, 17.

¹¹¹ Fennell, Francis L. "The Verdict in Whistler v. Ruskin." *The Victorian Newsletter* 40 (Fall 1971): 17-21. Print. 19.

but nothing more.”¹¹² Frith’s description echoes Whistler’s own earlier testimony: “I did not intend it to be a ‘correct’ portrait of the bridge. [...] As to what the picture represents that depends on who looks at it. To some persons it may represent all that is intended; to others it may represent nothing.”¹¹³ It is ironic that Ruskin, and even Burne-Jones as a late wave Pre-Raphaelite, should condemn the picture for its lack of mimesis, which was at the heart of the early criticism of the PRB. However, Ruskin’s failure to reckon with the stylistic development away from mimetic social realism, with all of its ethical inflection, is merely another indicator of the extent to which late Victorian aesthetics had by this point shifted away from early right seeing and towards an “art for art’s sake” sympathy with the individual viewer. Thus Frith’s point that Whistler’s picture has “a pretty colour which pleases the eye” would be, in Whistler and Wilde’s reckoning, a mark of the painting’s success in its adherence to the aesthetic interpretive model, rather than its failure as a “serious work of art.”¹¹⁴

However, Burne-Jones’s characterization of *Nocturne: Blue and Gold* as a “sketch” doesn’t really address the extent to which Burne-Jones’s own work increasingly adheres to this aesthetic iteration of the Victorian ethics of interpretation. Burne-Jones’s *The Golden Stairs* and most strikingly, *The Mill* all stand as examples of his increasing participation in the *fin-de-siècle* interpretive model, in contrast to his earlier adherence to traditional iconographic and literary subjects, if not strictly to Victorian social realism. Firstly, these pictures are lacking in narrative or iconographic significance, and while *The Mill* remains perhaps the most ambiguous of Burne-

¹¹² Whistler, 17.

¹¹³ Ibid., 8.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Jones's works, both *The Mill* and *The Golden Stairs* more effectively set a mood than tell a story or teach a lesson.



Figure 16. *The Golden Stairs*, Edward Burne-Jones. 1880, oil on canvas, Tate Britain, London. *Artstor*.

The Mill participates in the aesthetic iteration of right seeing, since the painting posits an interpretive model of artist-work of art-viewer. However, the lack of verbal-visual hybridity, and even of iconography, refocuses the interpretive attention on the work of art itself, rather than the viewer or even the artist, as is the case with Rossetti's own aesthetic model. In this way, the

picture uses its lack of narrative to its advantage to create a work of aesthetic effect rather than ethical improvement, since the picture confounds the viewer's attempts to extract any sort of narrative or symbolic significance by its very direct referencing to Botticelli, late medieval religious art, and even to Rossetti, all in a heavily Italianate, Renaissance style.



Figure 17. *The Mill: Girls Dancing to Music by a River*, Edward Burne-Jones. 1870, oil on canvas, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. *Artstor*.

However, the explicit significance of any such references slips away from the viewer at the point of recognition, and in the process creates a distance between the viewer and the attainment of any sort of unity with the mimetic space of the work of art. The eponymous mill, which includes curious archways, bridges, and even dwellings, is similarly mysterious because it appears to be more decorative than industrial, or even functional. Although both paintings certainly correspond to Burne-Jones' own ideals of "finish" and "completeness," they do not attempt anything close to earnest social realism, and instead circumvent the generation of any transformative mimetic space.

To the extent that the paintings do create a mimetic effect through Renaissance perspective and style, the paintings confound the viewer's engagement with that mimesis through the paintings' lack of iconographic or narrative significance. While the viewer is involved in the mimetic space of the picture, he is therefore only effectively incorporated into the aesthetic effect of the picture itself, in keeping with Pater, Wilde, and Whistler's aesthetic ideal, and in contrast to Rossetti's interpretive model, which refocuses the mimetic space on the artist's own authentic expression of his "soul." The work of art thus defies the creation of an ethical or even of a correct interpretation, since it cannot be misinterpreted for anything other than itself. As a work of art, then, its interpretation is beyond error, since its Italianate beauty is sufficient justification for its presence and for the viewer's engagement with it. As a focus for critical practice, the work of art also achieves the standards set up by this aesthetic reinterpretation of the critical assumptions of right seeing, since the experience of its beauty provides a springboard for both critical and creative activity in keeping with Wilde's decadent and self-referential interpretive model.

These pictures demonstrate the extent to which the earlier iteration of right seeing as layered with moral and social urgency has almost completely disappeared by the end of the nineteenth century, thereby creating space for more modernist approaches to both critical and artistic practice. If the lack of ethical purpose and social import is gone from the work of art, and its beauty and expressiveness is sufficient to justify its categorization as a work of art, then the work is sufficient unto itself. This dropping away of moral and social concerns creates space for the modernist rise of formalism, since this aesthetic interpretive triad effectively eliminates the

viewer/reader/user and replaces him with the artist-as-critic, while at the same time stripping away the necessity and even the virtue of social engagement from the artist, the viewer, and the work of art itself. Thus there is very little distance between “art for art’s sake” and the well-wrought urn, when understood in terms of the development of nineteenth-century interpretive aesthetics.

CHAPTER TWO

MORRIS & CO.: ARCHITECTURE, THE NEO-GOTHIC, AND THE REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL OF THE ARTS AND CRAFTS

While scholars have often noted with pleasure Edward Burne-Jones' colorful comment that the Kelmscott *Chaucer* was to be a "pocket cathedral," Morris scholarship does not address the extent to which William Morris's own characterization of good book design as "architectural" helpfully illuminates the legacy of his wider medieval and Romantically inspired aesthetic.¹ In contrast to twentieth-century scholarship which compartmentalized Morris's career in terms of his poetry, politics, or interior designs, I contend that Morris himself defines his entire *oeuvre*, from his earliest attempts at painting and embroidery to his poetry and novels to his fabrics and wallpapers, in terms of architecture and the decorated interior, since for him the built environment is the fullest, most politically revolutionary expression of his Arts and Crafts ideal. As a means of making sense of the scope of Morris's architectural aesthetic, this chapter describes Morris's definition of the work of art through his expansion of the nineteenth-century interpretive mode of right seeing that I develop in Chapter 1. Morris's aesthetic deliberately leverages that model's spatially oriented, tripartite interpretive structure in Arts and Crafts terms by altering the means of production and with it, the relationships among the user,

¹ Burne-Jones qtd. in Peterson, William. *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. Print. 164.

the craftsman, and the work of art, and in the process redefines the domestic space as a new kind of built environment defined by its unification of the useful and the beautiful.

Although Morris's wide-ranging career extends across much of the Victorian period and is thus intertwined with the changing shape of Victorian ethical aesthetics I describe in Chapter 1, here I take a non-chronological, thematic approach to my analysis of Morris's aesthetic as a means of structuring my argument and also opening space within Morris studies for wider examinations of the full scope of his theory and practice. This is because I see little distinction between the philosophical framework that informs the poetry, prose, and patternwork that Morris produced throughout his lifetime and his later theoretical articulation of that framework in lectures from the 1880s and 90s. Interestingly enough, only an analysis of Morris's statements on architecture brings this continuity to the fore, as Mark Swarnarton's study of Morris's Ruskinian architectural theory makes clear.² The positions Morris takes throughout his discussions of the relationship between politics, art, education, economics, and society do not represent a significant departure from his earlier work in the 1860s and 70s, but rather are lectures given and published in an effort to make the public more aware of the political urgency in supporting a craftsman-based economic structure. Conventional wisdom about Morris is often dismissive of his impassioned pursuit of the craftsman ideal as hopelessly idealistic at best and self-consciously hypocritical at worst, and this received interpretation is generally accompanied by a misreading of Morris's turn towards political activism in the 1870s as his personal abandonment of craftsmanship as a socioeconomic reality and as an artistic ideal. By this logic, the Kelmscott

² Swenarton, Mark. *Artisans and Architects: The Ruskinian Tradition in Architectural Thought*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989. Print.

Press of the 1880s and 90s becomes merely the escapist project of an aging artist who recognizes the essential untenability of his entire artistic and social philosophy. While Morris's socialism is undoubtedly idealized and became increasingly unattainable as industrialization and market capitalism entrenched themselves in English society, Morris's writing and lectures from the 1870s and 80s demonstrates the extent to which he continued to regard craftsmanship as the most effective and ethical way of improving the livelihood of people from every social class through its ultimate aim of rebuilding and reconstituting the very framework of Victorian society, in spite of its increasing unfashionableness over the course of his career. Consequently, I contend that reading Morris's writings about handicraft against the products of his craftsmanship establishes a more accurate trajectory for Morris's career, while ultimately providing a means for understanding how Morris viewed the nature and function of a work of art and with it, the interpretive process.

In addition to more recent examinations of Morris's work at the Kelmscott Press, current critical analyses of the nature of Morris's utopian socialism come the closest to establishing a thoroughgoing evaluation of Morris's beliefs about the nature and function of the work of art and of the interpretive process. In particular, ecocritical examinations of Morris's utopia *News from Nowhere* frame his conception of the natural world as inseparable from the built, architectural environment. In this vein, Nicholas Frankel discusses the relationship between decoration and the work of art in Morris's utopia and maintains that "decorative artifacts, like the human lifestyles into which they are integrated, come to seem expressions of the living environment,

products of an unfolding ‘evolution’ that encompasses both nature and culture.”³ Frankel therefore argues that “decoration does not merely exist in things, [...but] also embodies a mode of perceptual experience, with the potential to transform the perceiver’s relation to the world and to other human beings [...so that] decorative objects are in Morris’s eyes finally the catalysts that call upon human subjects to engage with a world beyond themselves.”⁴ Frankel’s reading thus approaches a kind of aesthetic model in its characterization of the relationship between the work of art and the natural world.

Scholars also attempt to address the relationship between Morris’s utopian aesthetics and socialist ethics as a means of resolving the tensions or inconsistencies in his aesthetic model between the natural world, the built environment, and the socioeconomic fabric of his ideal commonwealth. Art historical discussions of Morris’s architectural work settle into readings of Morris’s lofty aesthetic and social aims and his lack of success in achieving them, such as Linda Dowling’s study of Morris’s views of craftsmanship in terms of the development of aestheticism.⁵ Similarly, scholars such as Marcus Waithe⁶ and Vita Fortunati read Kelmscott Manor and Red House as the embodied expression of Morris’s “utopian thought [...and socialist

³ Frankel, Nicholas. “The Ecology of Decoration: Design and Environment in the Writings of William Morris.” *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 12 (Fall 2003): 58-85. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 Jan. 2018.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵ Dowling, Linda. *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996. Print.

⁶ Waithe, Marcus. “The Stranger at the Gate: Privacy, Property, and the Structures of Welcome at William Morris’s Red House.” *Victorian Studies* 46.4 (Summer 2004): 567-595. *JSTOR*. Web. 14 Feb. 2017.

ideals],”⁷ while Imogen Hart’s *Arts and Crafts Objects* takes a similar approach in her discussion of the works produced by Morris & Co. and the later utopian and socialist Arts and Crafts organizations he would inspire.⁸ Additionally, Ruth Kinna discusses Morris’s inability to resolve his theory of pleasurable labor with the amount of menial, thoughtless, or otherwise basic work individuals in his communist society would be called upon to perform,⁹ while Ruth Livesey discusses Morris’s “manly aesthetics,” which reframed artistic production in terms of gendered labor and “foregrounds the gendered politics of style at the turn of the last century and reminds us that modernism itself emerged from the dialectic of effeminate consumption and virile aesthetic production at the fin de siècle.”¹⁰

Finally, a few scholars attempt to situate Morris’s aesthetic, with all of its ethical and socioeconomic implications, in terms of vision and visual theory. Katjog Lindskog reads “The Defense of Guenevere” analogically in terms of Morris’s decorative pattern-work for his textiles and wallpapers. For Lindskog, Morris’s patterns, with their egalitarian lack of traditional linear perspective, function like the highly decorative, even lapidary style of Morris’s early poetry, and this style creates a “sense of historical distance, which paradoxically serves as a way for the reader to connect with the past; [...] for Morris, the perspectiveless medieval images evoked in the text function to encourage a particular kind of nonindividuated collaborative engagement

⁷ Fortunati, Vita. “William Morris’s Houses and the Shaping of Aesthetic Socialism.” *Writer’s Houses and the Making of Memory*. Ed. Harald Hendrix. London: Routledge, 2008. Print. 163.

⁸ Hart, Imogen. *Arts and Crafts Objects*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010. Print.

⁹ Kinna, Ruth. “William Morris: Art, Work, and Leisure.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61. 3 (July 2000): 493-512. JSTOR. Web. 14 Feb. 2107.

¹⁰ Livesey, Ruth. *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880-1914*. Oxford: OUP, 2007. Print. 4, 40.

between the reader and the text.”¹¹ Owen Holland takes a slightly different approach and attempts to “clarify the political and ideological stakes of Morris’s embeddedness in that [post-Romantic] tradition [of subjective and individual vision], particularly as it pertains to his visual rhetoric.”¹² Holland’s analysis often conflates symbolic and metaphorical descriptions of seeing, with all of their Biblical overtones and only goes as far as noting instances in which Morris uses visual language when describing his utopian philosophy. I extend this kind of analysis and instead examine how Morris wants users of his objects to see, and through the active employment of their physical sight, to then extend the ethical implications of that action by virtue of their position as a member of society. Although Morris never set out to produce any aesthetic or interpretive model as such, he was concerned throughout his life with the development of a coherent livable philosophy that matched his understanding of the relationships among society, economics, labor, and art. Morris, as much as he can be considered a theorist, is thus responding to the practice of art in his time and to his own hard-won experience of artistic and creative activity, and only rarely does he respond to or even remark on scholarly philosophical study.

¹¹ Lindskog, Katja. “‘Well-Known Things’: Experience, Distance, and Perspective in William Morris’s ‘The Defense of Guenevere.’” *Victorian Poetry* 53.4 (Winter 2015): 455-474. *JSTOR*. Web. 14 Feb. 2017. 456.

¹² Holland, Owen. “William Morris’s Utopian Optics.” *Victorian Network* 5.1 (2013): 44-61. *JSTOR*. Web. 14 Feb. 2017.

Pleasurable Labor and Non-Fetishized Commodities

Without risk of overstatement, Morris's ideal work of handicraft is entirely defined by his wholesale adoption of Ruskin's definition of craftsman-based means of production. In his preface introducing the 1892 Kelmscott Press edition of "The Nature of Gothic," Morris states

the lesson which Ruskin here teaches us is that art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour; that it is possible for man to rejoice in his work, for, strange as it may seem to us to-day, there have been times when he did rejoice in it; and lastly, that unless man's work once again becomes a pleasure to him, the token of which change will be that beauty is once again a natural and necessary accompaniment of productive labour, all but the worthless must toil in pain, and therefore live in pain.¹³

For Ruskin and Morris, this creative, pleasurable work is the hallmark of Gothic architecture and applied design, from which Ruskin then extrapolates the process of craftsmanship as both an ethical solution and an antidote to the socioeconomic fragmentation caused by industrial modes of production. Throughout *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin interprets the varied forms and emphasis on natural motifs that characterize Gothic architecture as "the signs of life and liberty of every workman that struck the stone; a freedom of thought, and rank in scale of being, such as no laws, no charters, no charities can secure; but which it must be the first aim of all Europe at this day to regain for her children."¹⁴ In contrast to his idealized and romanticized conception of medieval craftsmen whose collaboration resulted in a composite work of architecture in the Gothic style, Ruskin eloquently maintains that under this industrialized factory system, the worker is divided from the exercise of his creative potential, since

¹³ Ruskin, John. *The Nature of Gothic*. Ed. William Morris. Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1892. Print.

¹⁴ Ruskin, John. "The Nature of Gothic." *The Stones of Venice*, Vol. 2. *The Works of John Ruskin*. Vol. 10. Ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1904. Print. 193-4.

it is not, truly speaking, the labour that is divided; but the men:—Divided into mere segments of men [...] 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. [...] And the great cry which rises from all our manufacturing cities, louder than a furnace blast, is all in very deed for this,—that we manufacture everything there except men.¹⁵

Ruskin's distinction between the creative license afforded the medieval craftsman and the fragmented condition of the industrial factory worker is thus the foundation of his characterization of the wider social consequences of the efficient division of labor.

The separation of the workman from his creative agency is only the first division caused by industrial production, since the division of labor also fragments social relationships, and both social divisions have implications for the nature of the work of art. By separating the workman from collaboration with his fellow craftsmen and from any direct relationship with the consumer who purchases the object, industrialized society is inherently fragmented and stratified, so that “we want one man to be always thinking, and the other to be always working [...], whereas the workman ought often to be thinking, and the thinker often to be working, and both should be gentlemen, in the best sense. As it is, we make both ungentle, the one envying and the other despising, his brother; and the mass of society is made up of morbid thinkers, and miserable workers.”¹⁶ For Ruskin, this social fragmentation creates an artificial class system that stands in contrast to what he regards as the more just framework of traditional class structures, so much so that he describes industrial workers as toiling in conditions of effectively slave labor, since “every young lady who buys glass beads is engaged in the slave-trade, and in a much more cruel

¹⁵ Ibid., 196.

¹⁶ Ibid., 201.

one than that which we have so long been endeavouring to put down.”¹⁷ What is more, by likening the working conditions of this system to slavery, which produces perfectly formed finishes and identical objects, Ruskin condemns all industrial production, and with it all architectural styles and periods that preclude the independent expression of the workmen, the Neoclassical prominent among them. In an effort to restore the individual’s direct relationship to the work of art, and with it, to the craftsman, Ruskin puts the solution squarely in the purview of the reader as consumer, whom he addresses directly: “You are put to a stern choice in this matter. You must either make a tool out of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot have both. [...] If you will have that [machine-like] precision out of them, and make their fingers measure degrees like cog-wheels, and their arms strike curves like compasses, you must unhumanize them.”¹⁸

Morris’s aesthetic expands on Ruskin’s critique of industrialized labor to develop the idea that the handcrafted work of art avoids the fetishization of commodities by virtue of its identity as the creative product of an independent craftsman. Through his reading of Ruskin, Morris independently arrived at Marx’s conclusion, and Morris’s description of the handcrafted object aligns with Marx’s own understanding of commodity relationships. Morris’s own relationship to Marxism was more social than literary or intellectual, and he openly confesses to having “thoroughly enjoyed the historical part of *Capital*, [while he...] suffered agonies of confusion of the brain over reading the pure economics of that great work.”¹⁹ However, through his

¹⁷ Ibid., 197.

¹⁸ Ibid., 192.

¹⁹ Morris, William. “How I Became a Socialist.” *The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 23. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 278.

involvement in the Socialist League, Morris became personally acquainted with Engels and Eleanor and Edward Aveling, and as E.P. Thompson notes, “both men always spoke of each other with respect, and Engels regarded Morris’s medievalism ‘with good-humoured toleration.’”²⁰ Morris adopted Marx’s history of capitalism and its relation to the Romantic story of industrialization-linked decline,²¹ but Morris’s aesthetic retains its theoretical and philosophical independence, and together with Ruskin’s aesthetic economics represents an alternative road to socialism which is more directly related to the twentieth-century English political left than to Marx’s European intellectual and political legacy.

Despite his familiarity with Marxism, Morris, like Ruskin, does not directly address fetishization of commodities in his own critiques of industrialized production, but his lectures reveal his intuitive grasp of the concept, its causes, and its consequences for society and for the material object. Building on Ruskin’s contention that industrialized labor is inherently deterministic of the nature of the goods produced and detrimental to the society that produces them, Morris maintains that

the perfection of the division of labour system [...was] the end of all art worth considering: all goods now were made primarily for the market, and all so-called ornamental art had become a mere incident of these market wares, something which was to help force people to buy them, a thing which would be bestowed or withheld according to the exigencies of profit: whereas once the beauty which went with all men's handiwork was bestowed as ungrudgingly as nature bestows her beauty.²²

²⁰ Thompson, E.P. *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*. London: Merlin Press, 2011. 371.

²¹ Bacon, Alan K. “Morris’s View of the History of Industrialism.” *Journal of the William Morris Society* 5:1 (Summer 1982): 2-8. Web.

²² Morris, William. “Art and Labour.” *Marxists Internet Archive*. Web. 13 February 2017.

For Morris then, the separation of decoration from the formal elements of the work of art is the hallmark of the commodity and the death of true craftsmanship.

Morris's conclusions about the nature of mass-produced goods approach the traditional Marxist characterization of the fetishized nature of industrial commodities, which operate within a virtual network of relationships among objects, rather than being subject to and a product of the interpersonal relationship between the craftsman and the user. For Marx,

a commodity is [...] a mysterious thing, simply because [...] the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. [...] There is a physical relation between physical things. But it is different with commodities. There, the existence of things *quâ* commodities, and the value-relation between the products of labour which stamps on them as commodities, have absolutely no connexion with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom.²³

Within a capitalist economy, the work of craftsmanship is defined by its use-value and not its exchange-value, and for Morris, the handcrafted object's authentic use-value is determined by the nature of that relationship between the craftsman and the user, since "the integrity [...] of] real architectural art depends on the wares of which it forms a part being produced by craftsmanship, for the use of persons who understand craftsmanship."²⁴ Consequently, "the user, the consumer, must chose his wares to be so and so, and the maker of them must agree with his choice [...]; the two must be of one mind, and be capable under easily conceivable circumstances of exchanging their parts of user and maker [...since throughout the process] each is conscious [...] of making a

²³ Marx, Karl. *Capital. The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. W.W. Norton & Co., 1972. Print. 216-217.

²⁴ Morris, William. "Art and Its Producers." *The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 22. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 344

thing to be used by a man of like needs to himself.”²⁵ The full integration of any decoration or ornament as part of the overall design of the object thus arises from the relationship between craftsman and user, which together with Ruskin’s ethical economics of production and consumption and interpretation becomes for Morris the hallmark of the handcrafted work of art. By Morris’s reckoning the restoration of these social relationships through the non-industrial means of production is worth “the [higher] price that must be paid for it [the handcrafted object]. That price is, in short, the providing of a handicraftsman who shall put his own individual intelligence and enthusiasm into the goods he fashions. So far from his labour being 'divided,' [...] he must know all about the ware he is making and its relation to similar wares; [...] he must have a voice, and a voice worth listening to in the whole affair.”²⁶ Thus, according to Morris’s definition of the work of art, the handcrafted object generates its own socioeconomic network of relationships among people in opposition to the virtual network of relationships among commodities, thereby offsetting the social fragmentation caused by industrial labor.

The Expansion of Right Seeing in the Handcrafted Object

Building on the ethical economics of Ruskinian craftsmanship, Morris’s aesthetic reframes the interpretive model of right seeing presented in Chapter 1, in terms of the user, the craftsman, and the handcrafted object, and in the process radically redefines the work of art as the source of the revolutionary architectural power of the Arts and Crafts. Morris maintains the interpretive use of handicraft as a means of socioeconomic improvement, but his aesthetic

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Morris, William. “Making the Best of It.” *Hopes and Fears for Art. The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 22. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 115-16.

locates the mimetic transformational capacity of the work of art within the material object itself by rejecting the traditional limitations of interpretive space within the constraints of linear perspective. Lindsay Smith notes as much in her study of Victorian photography and painting when she maintains that “Both Ruskin and Morris after him undermine the authority of geometrical perspective [...]. Anticipating Merleau-Ponty, they believe that a system constructed upon the relationship of a vantage-point determined by a monocular eye fails to address [...]: light itself.”²⁷ While Smith confines her analysis of Morris to “what is essential to the visual,” I maintain that Morris’s interpretive model is predicated on the user’s extension of the interpretive field beyond the material object.²⁸

The viewer of a traditional painting is bound by the triangular orientation of viewer, work of art, and artist’s vision; however, Morris’s aesthetic expands this interpretive, mimetic space by moving the handcrafted work of art off the wall and putting it directly in the hands of the user. Rosalind Krauss describes this kind of reorientation of the material art object with reference to Jackson Pollock’s adaptation of the linear perspectival model as a contribution to twentieth-century postmodern media, which “was to rotate his work out of the dimension of the pictorial object altogether and, by placing his canvases on the floor, to transform the whole project of art from making objects, in their increasingly reified form, to articulating the vectors that connect objects to subjects.”²⁹ By orienting the user in an interpretive space that is both analogous to that

²⁷ Smith, Lindsay. *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry: The Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Print. 3.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Krauss, Rosalind. *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992. Print. 26.

mimetic space generated by the painted canvas on the wall and is inseparable from the “real world” of the viewer, Morris’s emphasis on the applied arts and crafts removes the work of art from its exhibition-based limitations. Instead, Morris’s aesthetic locates the work of art squarely within the realm of everyday use, so that the interpretive space is only limited by the range of that object’s utility. Hence Morris defines the work of art as bound up with architecture and the household interior with his injunction “Have nothing in your house which you do not find to be useful or believe to be beautiful.”³⁰ By removing the traditional mimetic categories imposed by the perspectival model, Morris’s handcrafted object also rejects the definition of mimetic representation as a visual, geometric, and spatial expression and instead generates its own mimetic space through the user’s extension of the interpretive field. While Morris’s aesthetic eliminates the spatial component of perspectival interpretation established by the Renaissance model and with it, the emphasis on the individual observer, Morris’s model does not entirely reject the artist/craftsman’s contribution to the work of art as part of the user’s useful interpretation. Instead, Morris’s interpretive model is less concerned with the visual alignment of the individual artist and user and more concerned with the restoration and recognition of the wider social relationships that ethical modes of production can bring about. Although Krauss’s postmodern media analysis of Pollock’s decidedly un-useful canvases may seem light-years removed from Morris’s intervention in Victorian aesthetics, Morris’s determined adherence to the craftsman model of production and to the applied arts and crafts as the primary mechanism for socioeconomic transformation is in line with the structure of Krauss’s theoretical move. While

³⁰ Morris, William. “The Beauty of Life.” *Hopes and Fears for Art. The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 22. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 76.

Morris remains better remembered as a craftsman than as a theoretician or philosopher, Morris's craftsman aesthetic nonetheless arguably both prefigures and creates the conditions necessary for this later artistic exploration of the possibilities and potentialities of the artistic medium.

Whereas Dante Gabriel Rossetti posits that the work of art expresses a Romantic mimetic truthfulness of the individual artist's internal emotional landscape, rather than an external physical reality, Morris challenges the notion that the handcrafted work of art is representational at all. Rossetti's middle and late period portraits of Jane Morris, Alexa Wilding, and Lizzie Siddal remain as much an expression of his ideal self as they are portraits of the women in question. Morris follows Rossetti's turn away from early Pre-Raphaelite realism, but Morris replaces the representational work of art with an object that is indivisible from the user's lived reality. Morris also expands upon Rossetti's contribution to *ut pictura poesis* and the sister arts tradition, since, following Rossetti's interpretive model, the user's physical engagement with both the decoration and form of the handcrafted object blurs any interpretive distinction between these two media. As exemplified by his double works, Rossetti's interpretive model does not present painting as superior to poetry, or even analogous to it; rather, his aesthetic presents poem and painting as equal, and then goes further and maintains that the two elements are inseparable equivalent parts of a composite whole. By the same logic, Morris treats the form of the work of art as inseparable from its function, and contends that ornament is an equally inseparable component of the overall design.

Through its reliance on handicraft, Morris's aesthetic also replaces the mimetic pursuit of the artist's visual field with the craftsman's participation within traditional forms and decorative

motifs, so that Morris's handcrafted art object is interpreted, not with reference to any culturally coded visual models of mimesis, as in E.H. Gombrich's reading of John Constable's realism in *Wivenhoe Park* or Norman Bryson's *Natural Attitude*, but with reference to styles and decorative patterns directly drawn from nature and received cultural tradition.³¹ In contrast to Gombrich's treatment of traditional modes of seeing and representation, Morris's realistic designs are predicated on the Neo-Gothic and Arts and Crafts eclectic recombination of non-realist, non-perspectival patterns from a variety of cultures and traditions, many of which were popularized by works such as Owen Jones's 1856 *Grammar of Ornament*. Correspondingly, Morris's works of art incorporate decorative patterns from the natural world in a bid to create a Romantic-style encounter with nature as well as an eclectic decorative tradition, since

one of the chief uses of decoration, the chief part of its alliance with nature, [is] that it has to sharpen our dulled senses in this matter: for this end are those wonders of intricate patterns interwoven, those strange forms invented, which men have so long delighted in [...] in which the hand of the craftsman is guided to work in the way that she does, till the web, the cup, or the knife, look as natural, nay as lovely, as the green field, the river bank, or the mountain flint.³²

Morris's insistence on the participation in and the revival of traditional styles is not just derived from his idealization of the Neo-Gothic and medieval art forms, but is rooted in his heavily Romantic recognition of the importance of cultural tradition and memory. As much as Morris's handcrafted object is mimetic of anything, it reflects and reveals his idealized English cultural tradition as a means of maintaining and reviving past standards of ethical craftsmanship in

³¹ Gombrich, E.H. *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1960. Print. 292.

³² Morris, William. "The Lesser Arts." *Hopes and Fears for Art. The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 22. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 5.

keeping with his medievalizing socioeconomic ideal. Therefore, in Morris's model, the work of art is simultaneously representative of the idealized real world as it used to be and as it has the utopian potential to become. Handcrafted works of art thus have the ability to eliminate, or at least elide the distinction between representation and reality and in the process ensure that these traditional and natural motifs inform the lived experience of the user.

This expansion of mimetic space and its corresponding painterly geometric alignments of vision is also a rejection of perspectival authority. Not only does Morris's artistic practice circumvent the post-Renaissance historical dominance of the perspectival mode of interpretation through its reliance on his medieval craftsman ideal, but he similarly rejects any incorporation of perspectival decorative motifs in designs. All of Morris's patterns are predicated on their flat, densely woven combinations of leaves, flowers, fruit, and even animals which Morris never abstracted, unlike contemporaries such as C.F. Voysey. This rejection of perspectival forms was also a hallmark of the Victorian design reform movement, of which Morris's Arts and Crafts later became a leading light. Champions of traditional design motifs such as Owen Jones and A.W.N. Pugin castigated Victorian experimental patterns for fabrics, carpets, and wallpapers as hopelessly gauche for their incorporation of small perspectival vignettes of landscapes, flowers, or even portraits of Queen Victoria into visually distracting patterns that repeated across the wall or along the carpet. While members of Victorian avant-garde resisted the sweeping popularity of these somewhat dizzying and even disorienting interior design motifs, the bright colors and patterns were affordable for the middle classes and their popularity only waned as tastes shifted

towards the less cluttered late Victorian interior championed by proponents of the Arts and Crafts and aesthetes.

True to his socialist, craftsman principles, Morris's rejection of perspectival design motifs reinforces his belief that ornament and decoration are a primary means by which the work of art functions architecturally, since its design is what enables the work of art to participate as part of a harmoniously decorated interior. Since the incorporation of perspective is historically a marker of artistic, hermeneutic, and social authority, Morris's designs participate in artistic modes that traditionally avoid perspectival forms, in keeping with his socialist ideals. Despite his preference for applied craftsmanship, Morris did not utterly reject the fine arts, and he even initially pursued a career as a painter on Rossetti's sweeping recommendation "that I ought to paint."³³

Throughout his lectures, Morris reinforces the distinctive social contribution of the fine arts as well as applied craftsmanship to an architectural interior. However, Morris believes that the applied arts and crafts, through their integration into daily, household use, provide the greatest opportunity for revolutionary socioeconomic and political improvement.

Finally, this nearly complete rejection of the spatial model posited by linear perspective also reimposes the necessity of accounting for the physical object itself as part of the interpretive process, and this emphasis on the physicality of the work of art is the source of Morris's architectural aesthetic. Whereas Bryson posits that traditional interpretive modes codified by centuries of Western perspectival painting efface the material object and present to the viewer the representational image as perfectly mimetic, Morris's ideal of handcraftsmanship restores the

³³ Morris qtd. in Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995. Print. 115.

material object to its position within the interpretive spatial model.³⁴ Further, by replacing the viewer/reader's geometric, predetermined visual axis with the user's non-linear, physical interpretive engagement with the material object, Morris's interpretive model collapses the traditional geometric framework of linear perspective, thereby making any representational ideal posited by the work of art indistinguishable from the user's lived experience. Morris's concept of the use of the handcrafted object also remains indistinguishable from the object's consumption, since form and function are linked components of a design agreed upon by the craftsman and the user. Consequently, form and function must also be interpreted together by the user, "for [...] the decoration, or some pretence of it [...] has, or ought to have, a use and a meaning. For, and this is at the root of the whole matter, everything made by man's hands has a form, which must be either beautiful or ugly; [...] To give people pleasure in the things they must perform *use*, that is one great office of decoration; to give people pleasure in the things they must perform *make*, that is the other use of it."³⁵ Any attempt to separate decorative form from function fails as an act of handicraft in Ruskinian terms, since the work of art must be both beautiful and useful to succeed as a work of craftsmanship. The process of interpretive use is thus characterized by the user's physical, visual, and tactile implementation of the object, since, more than visual or verbal interpretation, Morris's interpretive use integrates the user with the object and in the process offers an ethical mode of consumption without the social fragmentation caused by industrialized production.

³⁴ Bryson, Norman. *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983. Print. 12.

³⁵ Morris, "The Lesser Arts," 4-5.

The Revolutionary Potential of the Work of Art

Finally, Morris's aesthetic reorients the revolutionary potential of the material object within the domestic or decorated interior in keeping with the architectural emphases of Victorian design and aesthetics. Morris was far from the first Victorian artist or social reformer to settle on architecture as the primary expression of a given cultural identity; indeed, this argument formed the core of the Neo-Gothic movement from almost its earliest iterations. From the eighteenth-century antiquarian movement on, ancient buildings and prehistoric sites were increasingly recognized as more than neighborhood curiosities and instead were regarded as representatives of a resilient, uniquely British cultural heritage. Medieval works of architecture thus became ubiquitous reminders of national identity, and this reinterpreted medieval heritage became a cultural touchstone that appealed to personal ethics through chivalric codes of virtue, inspired a religious revival with the Oxford Movement, and bolstered Britain's growing imperial dominance. In the process Neo-Gothic art and architecture enjoyed a rise in popularity, which, as Debra Mancoff notes, was not entirely a departure from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British architectural practice. Rather,

the readiness of British culture to accept the shift from classical rationality to the [...] expressive aesthetic of medievalism was rooted in this persistence of the British medieval tradition. In architecture, more than any other art form, there was virtually no hiatus between the Gothic and its reincarnation in the Gothic Revival. [...] It is possible to find edifices constructed in the medieval style throughout the period from 1600 to 1800, many of which sprang from the fertile imaginations of [...] rational architects" such as "Inigo Jones, Sir Christopher Wren, and Sir John Vanbrugh."³⁶

³⁶ Mancoff, Debra N. *The Arthurian Revival in Victorian Art*. New York: Garland, 1990. Print. 10.

Although this market demand for medieval architectural styles undoubtedly consisted of as many restoration projects as new builds, medieval architecture nonetheless persisted alongside and even against the prevailing popular dominance of neoclassical and Palladian architecture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. What changed in the nineteenth century was the popular interpretation of these medievalizing works of architecture as more traditional, patriotic, and ethical expressions of British culture. Building on this argument, the Neo-Gothic movement, with all of its many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century iterations, remained united behind its pursuit of the Gothic architectural style as a means of restoring British society to a medieval ideal.

The strength of this Neo-Gothic interpretation of architecture as the both the source and the product of the society that produces it persisted across the Victorian period, so much so that Morris's later adoption of this argument as a hallmark of his Arts and Crafts aesthetic is merely the last, fullest expression of a longstanding Victorian cultural project. In *Past and Present*, Carlyle uses this argument to support the organization of space in medieval Bury St. Edmunds, since the town's successful moral, social, and economic standing under Abbot Samson's leadership leads to a reordering of the built environment, and as "the culminating moment of Abbot Samson's life," his restoration of the chapel and the tomb of St. Edmund.³⁷ A.W.N. Pugin bases his entire argument in *Contrasts* on the idea that architecture both shapes and is shaped by its culture. Beginning with the principle that "the great test of Architectural beauty is the fitness of the design to the purpose for which it was intended," Pugin argues that "different nations have

³⁷ Carlyle, Thomas. *Past and Present*. Ed. Richard D. Altick. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965. Print. 122.

given birth to so many various styles [...] there can be little doubt that the religious ideas and ceremonies of these different people had by far the greatest influence in the formation of their various styles of Architecture.”³⁸ In keeping with his Neo-Gothic principles, Pugin then argues that the converse is also true, and that the architecture similarly has both moral and spiritual import on the basis of its powerful role in society, and drawing from Pugin, Ruskin, and even G.E. Street, Morris later picks up this argument in support of the ethical ramifications of architecture.

Ruskin’s passionate defense of the social power of the Neo-Gothic remains the best and fullest Victorian articulation. Ruskin adapts this idea in two ways that Morris subsequently incorporates into his Arts and Crafts aesthetic: first, that architecture’s social function can be best understood in terms of its economic relationship to society, and secondly, that architecture, in its pursuit of a built environment, also forms part of the landscape itself. Ruskin’s own career was defined by his passionate support of the Neo-Gothic style, and in addressing the audience in his lecture *Traffic*, he maintains that his seminal work “‘The Stones of Venice’ had, from beginning to end, no other aim than to show that the Gothic architecture of Venice had arisen out of, and indicated in all its features, a state of pure national faith, and of domestic virtue; and that [...] Renaissance architecture had arisen out of, and in all its features indicated, a state of concealed national infidelity, and of domestic corruption.”³⁹ Although his Bradford audience assumed that the Neo-Gothic design of their Exchange was sufficient to earn Ruskin’s praise, Ruskin instead

³⁸ Pugin, Augustus Welby Northmore. *Contrasts: or A Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages, and the Similar Buildings of the Present Day*. New York: Humanities Press, 1969. Print. 1-2.

³⁹ Ruskin, John. “Traffic.” *The Crown of Wild Olive. The Works of John Ruskin*. Vol. 28. Ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1904. Print. 443.

roundly castigates their failure to hire builders who would have the freedom of expression that he believes marks Gothic architecture as both morally and ethically superior. Ruskin's entire critique of their design, which was Neo-Gothic in appearance but not in practice, is rooted in this dialogic relationship between architecture and society, which he says is either a mechanism for socioeconomic improvement or for its further corruption. The Bradford planning committee thus failed to grasp the economic significance of Gothic's composite architectural style and its relationship to the craftsman means of production, which Ruskin passionately believed to be key to the restoration of society and return to more ethical, healthier, and more natural social relationships. Therefore, the construction of works of Gothic architecture becomes another mechanism by which society is reciprocally improved, as well as through its interaction with a non-industrial built environment.

Ruskin also understands architecture to be part of the landscape, and this understanding of the work of art extends the larger Romantic sociopolitical interest in preserving the traditional natural world. In contrast to the Wordsworthian personal encounter with nature and the sublime, Ruskin acknowledges the individual's relationship with the natural landscape to be an extension of her relationship to society more generally. For Ruskin, Gothic architecture is thus an indigenous, traditional component of Northern European geography and culture, and in the first section of "The Nature of Gothic" he contends that "we should err grievously in refusing either to recognize as an essential character of the existing architecture of the North, or to admit [that...] the savageness of Gothic architecture, merely as an expression of its origin among Northern nations, may be considered, in some sort, a noble character, [and] it possesses a higher

nobility still when considered as an index, not of climate, but of religious principle.”⁴⁰

Additionally, the Gothic reliance on natural forms and varied and asymmetrical patterns is not only “the [sign] of life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone,” but realigns the relationship between the observer/user of the building and nature in Romantic terms, framing both the architectural environment and its setting within nature as twin components of the surrounding landscape.⁴¹

By the 1880s, Morris had a lifetime of practical artistic experience as a designer, and he had come to regard applied craftsmanship as an architectural “union of the arts, mutually helpful and harmoniously subordinated one to another.” In his 1880 lecture series *Hopes and Fears for Art*, Morris declares the medium of architecture to be the fullest embodiment of all artistic practice, and he echoes Ruskin and other Neo-Gothic influences who recognized architecture’s central role as a reciprocal societal influence, for good or ill. He condemns shoddy Victorian homes which were “built for a people not lacking in honesty, in independence of life, in elevation of thought, and consideration for others; [...and only express] [...] hypocrisy, flunkeyism, and careless selfishness. The fact is, they are no longer part of our lives. We have given it up as a bad job. We are heedless if our houses express nothing of us but the very worst side of our character both national and personal.”⁴² He asserts that thoughtless building design causes social fragmentation and a corresponding moral crisis, and recognizes that this decline in infrastructure

⁴⁰ Ruskin, “The Stones of Venice,” 188.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 193-4.

⁴² Morris, William. “Making the Best of It.” *Hopes and Fears for Art. The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 22. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 85.

is thus as much an assault on British culture as it is destructive of the natural world. By urging his audience to adopt a truly expansive definition of architecture, which “embraces the consideration of the whole external surroundings of the life of man [...and pursues] the moulding and altering to human needs of the very face of the earth itself,” Morris concludes by “entreat[ing his audience...] to turn your minds to thinking of what is to come of Architecture, that is to say, the fairness of the earth amidst the habitations of men.”⁴³ And to achieve that fairness, Morris was proposing nothing less than a political revolution fueled largely by the domestic interior.

Morris was not alone in his sociopolitical characterization of the decoration of interior space, as Morris & Co. was part of a larger movement of nineteenth-century architects and designers that understood the interior of a building, whether domestic, ecclesiastical, or even commercial, to be an opportunity for artistic and creative expression and with it, individual, social, and national improvement. The widespread penchant for church renovation and restoration was fueled by the Victorian pursuit of an ostensibly more authentic spirituality held by their medieval forebears which they believed could be made accessible through the fabric of the church itself. While Morris would decry what he called the “scraping” of medieval churches in an effort to restore the buildings to their medieval appearance, Victorian church restoration, for all of its flaws, was thus a direct expansion of the Neo-Gothic understanding relationship between the built environment and the society that produces it. At the same time, Victorians

⁴³ Morris, William. “The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization,” *Hopes and Fears for Art. The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 22. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 120.

increasingly understood the furnishings of their homes and drawing rooms as a kind of individual expression, which was made possible by the rising middle class with their disposable incomes. Victorian designers also increasingly linked the domestic space to the national interest, and the physical and even moral improvement of the home took on an increasingly patriotic tone as public architecture and private decorated interiors were seen as expressions of national culture and British artistic dominance. In the process, architects, artists, and industrial designers attempted to close the gap between the applied design and the fine arts as a means of improving the quality of industrial production, innovation, and creative and cultural expression concurrent with British imperialism. This desire to produce increasingly high-quality goods was a patriotic one, but it was also an artistic question that became a predominant theme of the Great Exhibition of 1851, “a theme that did not follow the accepted division between the dignity of intellectual artistic creativity and the lower value of labour.”⁴⁴ In addition, “the relationship between the arts was given a further fluidity by the display of” fine and applied and industrial designs side by side and the partnership between Prince Albert and South Kensington Museum founder Henry Cole made the exhibition a watershed moment in nineteenth-century design.⁴⁵ This idea informed the entire educational movement, of which Ruskin was a leading light, to train working-class craftsmen in the arts.

In keeping with this national interest in applied design and decoration, Morris recognized interior design as an opportunity for individual, social, and economic improvement, and it was

⁴⁴ Waterfield, Giles. *The People's Galleries: Art Museums and Exhibitions in Britain, 1800-1914*. Yale University Press, 2015. Print. 98.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

Morris & Co.'s popularization of a composite, eclectic style that came to characterize the Victorian aesthetic interior. Earlier Victorian interiors relied on heavy curtains, large ferns, clusters of heavily upholstered furniture, multiple tables bristling with photographs, knick-knacks, and carefully placed lamps to close off the room from the street outside, with its urban industrial pollution, and thus from the natural world itself. In contrast to this cloistered, padded, and protective environment, Morris & Co. participated in the mid-Victorian development of open-plan, lighter-colored, light-filled spaces, and used Morris's swirling foliage to tie Queen Anne and early Georgian architecture to interiors filled with traditional English country furniture. Despite Morris and Burne-Jones's personal inclinations towards authentic medieval design, the firm's eclectic style, largely designed by Webb, Rossetti, and Ford Madox Brown, moved beyond the ideological baggage of the Neo-Gothic and instead brought *japanoiserie* and eighteenth-century design to the forefront of Victorian style. Interestingly enough, Morris himself remained ambivalent towards the Victorian trend for eclectic design, simply because he regarded the architecture as the quintessential product of the society that produced it, and "all we have that approaches architecture is the result of a quite self-conscious and very laborious eclecticism, and is avowedly imitative of the work of past times."⁴⁶ In Morris's view, the wider Victorian unwillingness to develop a unique architectural style was thus a failure of cultural expression as well as a check on the progress of his own artistic revolutionary aims. Nonetheless, Morris & Co.'s composite aesthetic is representative of Morris's own aesthetic aims and of the means by which he attempted to further them.

⁴⁶ Morris, William. "The Revival of Architecture." *Hopes and Fears for Art. The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 22. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 329.

Morris's aesthetic locates architecture in general, and the material object as part of that architectural fabric, as the primary source of the transformational capacity of the Arts and Crafts. More than any of his other writings, Morris's series of lectures entitled "Hopes and Fears for Art" voices his belief that the craftsman-created built environment functions as a means of socioeconomic improvement, a principle that lends moral and political urgency to Morris's injunction to "have nothing in your houses which you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful."⁴⁷ Correspondingly, Morris describes the domestic interior as entirely defined by its engagement with people who live in it: "the dwellings of all our people, which are built without any hope of beauty or care for it--without any thought that there can be any pleasure in the look of an ordinary dwelling-house, and also (in consequence of this neglect of manliness) with scarce any heed to real convenience."⁴⁸ Throughout his address "Making the Best of It," Morris makes no formal distinction between the fabric of the building, the garden, and the building's interior; rather, these spaces are only distinct in terms of their use and function. For Morris, ornament is the defining feature of both the inside and outside of the building, since the purely decorative characteristics of a handcrafted object also support the overall design and integration of elements that make up an interior space. Additionally, Morris contends that this integration of decoration and design is not confined to household goods, but extends to fine art as well. Morris argues that the conscious integration of frame, text, and image that defines much Pre-Raphaelite painting is a direct expression of this commitment to ornament, stating that "no picture it seems to me is

⁴⁷ Morris, "The Beauty of Life," 76.

⁴⁸ Morris, "Making the Best of It," 85.

complete unless it is something more than a representation of nature and the teller of a tale. It ought also to have a definite, harmonious, conscious beauty. It ought to be ornamental. It ought to be possible for it to be part of a beautiful whole in a room or church or hall.”⁴⁹ Therefore, ornament, as much as the object’s practical integration of form and function, serves as a way in for the user’s hermeneutic engagement with the object, and by extension, to the entire interior space.

In this way, Morris offers a radical redefinition of the nature of the work of art itself as an actor with the ability to transform, shape, and participate in socioeconomic structures. In his discussion of teardowns in a neighborhood, Morris discusses the consequences of these infrastructural changes on that community and the individuals that live in them. His description of removing the garden, flowers, and trees that enhance the property directly appeals to a neighbor’s sense of impending and inevitable loss, maintaining that when “you see the boys dragging about the streets great boughs of the flowering may-trees covered with blossom, and you know what is going to happen. Next morning when you get up you look towards that great plane-tree which has been such a friend to you so long through sun and rain and wind, which was a world in itself of incident and beauty: but now there is a gap and no plane-tree.”⁵⁰ While “you may have a faint hope left that the thick bank of lilac next your house may be spared, since the newcomers may like lilac; but 'tis gone in the afternoon, and the next day when you look in with a sore heart, you see that once fair great garden turned into a petty miserable clay-trampled yard,

⁴⁹ Morris, William. “Address on the Collection of Paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite School.” *Marxists Internet Archive*. Web. 13 February 2017.

⁵⁰ Morris, “The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization,” 129.

and everything is ready for the latest development of Victorian architecture--which in due time (two months) arises from the wreck.”⁵¹ In his passionate delineation of this loss of the built environment, of which the trees and vegetation are an intrinsic part, Morris calls into question his audience’s assumption of the efficacy of these so-called improvements when he demands “Do you like it? You I mean, who have not studied art and do not think you care about it?”⁵² Morris’s question brings to the forefront not just the loss and replacement of an old building but the loss of trees, lilac bushes, and the quality of the landscape itself, with its concomitant sense of loss and deterioration caused by non-ethical, non-craftsmanlike architectural ideals.

Space, Time, and Socioeconomic Revolution

Morris’s lament over the destruction of neighborhood buildings and greenery sets up his further contention that both living things and inanimate objects have relationships among themselves in addition to their relationships to their makers and users. This belief lies at the heart of Morris’s sociopolitical aims for architecture. For Morris, the handcrafted work of art functions independently by circumventing or cutting through the fetishization of commodities by virtue of its means of production, and it does so in terms perhaps best expressed by the later theoretical framework established by Walter Benjamin’s dialectical images. While Morris clearly predates Benjamin’s career by many decades, the parallels in their theoretical models are worth consideration because of their pursuit of a non-fetishized interpretive experience. Benjamin uses this theoretical framework as the underpinning of the visual philosophy in his Arcades project,

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

which in its completed form was to have as its core a series of two juxtaposed images of the Parisian Arcades, one of the decayed remnants of the nineteenth century and one from the twentieth, as a means of exposing the nature of capitalist society out of the ruins it has left behind. Susan Buck-Morss comes closest to describing Benjamin's theoretical move surrounding this juxtaposition in her seminal reinterpretation of Walter Benjamin's dialectical images out of the surviving fragments of his *Passagen-Werk*. In describing Benjamin's methodology as messianic and therefore theological, Buck-Morss concedes that "the very charged term 'theological' is perhaps less misleading if it is understood as having a precise philosophical function within Benjamin's theory. Important elements of the Kabbalist paradigm provided Benjamin with a metaphysical base for revolutionary pedagogy vital to Marxian politics, but it is expressed in the fully secular, historically specific discourse of women's fashions and street traffic, in which every trace of positive theology has been extinguished."⁵³ For Buck-Morss, Benjamin's juxtaposition of past and present together forces the collision of ideas which break through the fetishized network of commodities and shock the viewer out of commodified complacency into a revelatory, Marxist understanding of the nature of history and the material object. In this way, "Benjamin's 'dialectical images' resemble [...] 'theological symbols,' in which even the most 'insignificant' phenomena are 'understood and explained in reference to redemption.' [...] But the code in which they are redeemed (and this begins to be recognized by social dreamers when the objects first appear in the nineteenth century) is the ur-old, theological

⁵³ Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Dialectics of Seeing*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989. Print. 232.

myth of worldly utopia as the origin and goal of history.”⁵⁴ Thus “when past text and present image come together in a way that suddenly both are illuminated in the Messianic light of redemption, [...] the historical present becomes visible as pregnant with the potential for a worldly utopia, [...] and in] the clarity of the theological symbol, ‘reality becomes transparent. The infinite shines through the finite and makes it more and not less real.’”⁵⁵

Morris’s handcrafted architectural objects use a similar juxtaposition of time and place as a means of breaking through the fetishized network of commodities. Not only do Morris’s works of art circumvent the commodity system through their identity as non-fetishized objects, but also through their incorporation of form and function, text and image, and past and present into a single unified design. Therefore, works of handicraft are doubly juxtaposed; first, through their own dual identity as composite works of art deliberately participating in both craft and fine art simultaneously, and second by their implicit comparison with other everyday household commodities. Morris’s handcrafted objects thus further subvert traditional mimetic goals of fine art, since they do not pursue the mimetic representation of the real world as it appears to be, but rather approach the generation, or regeneration of the world as it used to be according to Morris’s medieval ideal, as well as modeling what it has the potential to become.

In order to bring about the future through the revolutionary potential of the present, Morris’s handcrafted works of art, like Benjamin’s dialectical image, also generate their own space/time. Expanding on Benjamin’s use of Kabbalistic interpretive methods, Buck-Morss

⁵⁴ Ibid., 241-42.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 237.

maintains that “once the Messianic promise is not a myth but historically ‘actual,’ in the sense that it is realizable, from this point on, time can be said to exist in two registers: as secular history, the sequence of (catastrophic) events that mark human time without fulfilling it; and as revolutionary ‘now-time,’ every moment of which is irradiated with the real anticipation of redemption.”⁵⁶ The dialectical image itself thus creates its own time, launching the object into a time that is perpetually accessible and yet entirely out of reach, “the one given, the other, continuously, a rational possibility. They remain disconnected until the act of political revolution cuts across history's secular continuum and blasts humanity out of it, a ‘leap under the open skies of history [. . .] which is how Marx conceived the revolution.’”⁵⁷ In keeping with Benjamin’s Marxist optimism, the dialectical image’s revolutionary potential is both inherently political, since “political action is the link between the two registers of historical time,” as well as being utopian, since that “revolution is understood as a Messianic break from history's course and not its culmination. The Messianic Age as ‘actual,’ that is, as potentially present, is the temporal dimension that charges images in the collective unconscious with explosive power in the political sense.”⁵⁸ Thus the dialectical image moves the reader/viewer into its own millenarian, revolutionary time, and simultaneously creates a new kind of space which stands as an ethical counterweight to the fetishized, and thus virtual world created by industrialized capital.

Morris’s aesthetic model therefore supports the contention that the very identity of the handcrafted work of art is sufficient on its own, as a non-fetishized object, to create this kind of

⁵⁶ Ibid., 242-43.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 244-45.

new space. In a capitalist economy, the network of fetishized commodities, as a series of relationships among objects, concurrently redefines social relationships and shapes landscapes and cityscapes alike through the commodities' physical existence. In contrast, Morris's handcrafted objects, by means of their identity as non-commodified goods, independently exist apart from the capitalist landscape generated by the economics of fetishization and instead create a non-capitalist, Arts and Crafts space within an authentic network of social relationships. Building on the Neo-Gothic recognition that society is reciprocally shaped by the built environment, Morris's handcrafted objects reframe physical space and form the locus of an authentic space and can therefore alter the nature of its subsequent relationships to the individuals that interact with them. Morris's reliance on traditional architectural styles and forms is thus a return to a pre-industrial landscape that helps restore the individual's relationship to the natural world by removing the distance put between him and them by the commodity system and industrial modes of production. Therefore, Morris's model of architectural craftsmanship results in the creation of a more ethical built environment.

In addition to generating its own space, the framework of Morris's aesthetic points to the possible potential of the work of art to respond to, push back against, and participate in the process of interpretive use. In Chapter 3 I address the ramifications and potential limitations of this operation of the handcrafted work of art in greater detail, but it is worth recognizing here that while Morris himself did not directly discuss the agential potential of the handcrafted object, implicit in the logic of of interpretive use stands a recognition of the significance of our own dialogic interactions with the material objects. Morris himself rightly demonstrates the extent to

which the material object is at once dependent on the user and the craftsman; however, his aesthetic model also posits that the handcrafted work of art possesses an independent non-fetishized identity. By this logic, the handcrafted object therefore holds the potential for agency and action outside the virtual, social network of commodities by its ability to generate a new, authentic network of relationships among handcrafted objects, as well as among the individuals that engage with them. This idea that the work of art and its design has such consequences for its use is gaining more traction as contemporary theorists are beginning to explore the ways in which digital technologies in turn interact with us. James Bridle's lecture "Waving at the Machines" explores the implications of the intelligence and intentionality that is increasingly defining contemporary technologies. In describing this technological evolution, he states that with the development of ebooks and the process of "making [...books] essentially machine-readable [we are] teaching machines how to read, how to understand our world, [...as we] present our culture to it."⁵⁹ As a consequence, "we are training [...machines] to see in certain ways similar to the ways that we see. And as with all these things, there's strange results to that."⁶⁰ Using the example of facial-recognition software for digital cameras and airport security scanners, license-plate reading cameras on highway systems, and the gesture-recognition software that enables gaming platforms like Microsoft Kinect, Bridle maintains that as technology evolves, we are training machines to interact with us in an increasingly sophisticated way. Bridle additionally contends that as technology is increasingly able to interact with us,

⁵⁹ Bridle, James. "Waving at the Machines." Web Directions. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 January 2018. www.webdirections.org/resources/james-bridle-waving-at-the-machines/#transcript.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

“these technologies that we’re creating increasingly resemble us, and it’s sort of possible to talk to them.”⁶¹ He states that “technology wants to be like us, and we kind of want to be more like it [...and] to a huge extent [technology] is also shaping the way we behave [...because] we want to live together with these new beings, this new form, this new culture.”⁶² While Bridle’s argument is confined to contemporary technological developments which may seem far removed from Morris’s medievalizing arts and crafts, Bridle’s statements highlight the fact that the technology mediates our relationship with the world and with each other, and his recognition that the object has agency by virtue of its relationality is analogous to Morris’s own insistence that the non-fetishized, handcrafted work of art operates uniquely within society by virtue of its means of production. In the same way, the logic of Morris’s aesthetic supports the contention that the material object always has consequences and agency of its own as a relational actor within the socioeconomic relational system and within the built environment, hence Morris’s own emphasis on the domestic interior and the household space.

Not only does the handcrafted work of art open up a new kind of space by virtue of its identity as a handcrafted object, but it simultaneously opens up a new kind of time. Because of his reliance on the ethical principles of Victorian medievalism, Morris’s Arts and Crafts movement sought to create a new future inspired by the means of production of the past. Not only do Morris & Co. goods participate in traditional forms, motifs, styles, and modes of craftsmanship, from their medievalizing furniture, stained glass and tilework of the 1850s and

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

60s to the lighter, self-conscious eclecticism of 1870s and 80s, but in the process Morris & Co. products posit a dialectical relationship between the past and present that functions in Benjaminian terms. Through their craftsman means of production and the later process of interpretive use, Morris's handcrafted goods launch the craftsman and the user into an alternate, utopian present. In addition, Morris's craftsman time not only exists in a series of discrete revolutionary moments of the user's interpretive engagement with the work of art, but it also posits an inherently futurist model of continuous social revolution through the steady transformation of the built environment. This Benjaminian-style concept of the future as bound up in the revolutionary potential of the present not only informs Morris's own craftsmanship, but it also forms the basis of the social revolution in Morris's utopia *News from Nowhere*. In the chapter "The Beginning of the New Life," Old Hammond is careful to distinguish between the tragic destruction caused by the initial violent revolution and civil war, and the slower, more powerful revolutionary social transformation wrought by years of useful and enjoyable labor. Speaking in what remains of the British Museum, Hammond cautions William Guest that he

must not suppose that the new form of art was founded chiefly on the memory of the art of the past [since ...] the art or work-pleasure, as one ought to call it, of which I am now speaking, sprung up almost spontaneously [...] from a kind of instinct amongst people [... so that] a craving for beauty seemed to awaken in men's minds, and they began rudely and awkwardly to ornament the wares which they made; and when they had once set to work at that, it soon began to grow.⁶³

This organic transformation has also completely transformed England's built environment so that, to William Guest, the country resembles nothing so much as a carefully tended garden, and

⁶³ Morris, William. *News from Nowhere. The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 16. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 134.

Young Dick Hammond concedes that “ugly old building[s]” like the neoclassical British Museum survive only because the new labor economy has not yet swept aside the physical remnants of the past.⁶⁴ Morris thus sees the revolution continuing and prospering, if not fully arising from the work of art’s capacity to transform space as well as time.

Morris’s reinterpretation of medieval society is bound up in his desire for a new kind of present, and therefore mitigates Luddite misinterpretations of Morris’s social goals. The popular misconception of Morris’s medievalism is that he remains hopelessly rooted in an idealistic vision of medieval culture, something Morris himself is at pains to repeatedly address. In “Art and Its Producers,” he attempts “to meet possible objections once more, I do not mean by this that we should aim at abolishing all machinery [...]: in short, [...] it is not this or that tangible steel and brass machine which we want to get rid of, but the great intangible machine of commercial tyranny, which oppresses the lives of all of us.”⁶⁵ Morris’s concept of time as it relates to his medievalism is bound up in the same argument; Morris wants to re-interpret the past and bring the past to bear on the present in order to produce a fairer, more ethical, more truly prosperous alternative present. He implores his audience to “not misunderstand me; I am not a mere praiser of past times. I know that in those days of which I speak life was often rough & evil enough, beset by violence, superstition, ignorance, slavery; yet I cannot help thinking that sorely as poor folk needed a solace, they did not altogether lack one, and that solace was pleasure in

⁶⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁵ Morris, “Art and its Producers,” 352.

their work.”⁶⁶ Morris is a futurist, certainly, but that future is always rooted in the current moment, with all of its revolutionary potential, a point his interpretive aesthetic makes clear. Morris thereby views the present as the link to the future, since it is the user’s act of interpretation that brings craftsman time into the present moment, while the act of interpretation, like the process of craftsmanship itself and the handcrafted work of art, all bring this revolutionary now-time to bear on the present.

Additionally, Morris’s passionate commitment to preserving ancient buildings and architectural space directly relates to this concept of craftsman time and what Morris’s interpretive model posits that the non-fetishized material object can accomplish. In the founding manifesto of his Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, Morris declares

it is for all these buildings, therefore, of all times and styles, that we plead, and call upon those who have to deal with them to put Protection in the place of Restoration, to stave off decay by daily care, [...] and otherwise to resist all tampering with either the fabric or ornament of the building as it stands; [...] in fine to treat our ancient buildings as monuments of a bygone art, created by bygone manners, that modern art cannot meddle with without destroying.⁶⁷

Morris’s awareness that buildings move through time and space together directly supports his contention that medieval buildings be preserved not just as monuments but as living exemplars of architecture that was both produced by and shapes a more ethical society. Morris’s architectural aesthetic therefore attempts to leverage directly the architecture of the past as a means of activating the revolutionary potential of the present. Philip Webb admits as much in his

⁶⁶ Morris, William. “Art and the Beauty of the Earth.” *The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 22. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 163.

⁶⁷ Morris, William. “Manifesto for the Founding of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.” *The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings*. Web. 13 February 2017.

description of his first visit to a medieval barn Morris would come to idolize throughout his career as the epitome of architectural design. Webb states

there it was, dominating the farmhouse adjoining, and with nothing but the simple fields of Berkshire about them. Its magnitude, nice precision of building and dainty parts of pure architecture, all done in handsome freestone, made it as beautiful as a cathedral, but with no ostentation of building whatever: a perfectly suitable barn and nothing else. The workmen who set it up did well once and for all time [...and] I saw what it all meant in the quiet Berkshire landscape and its clear history of its builders and their craft.⁶⁸

Webb here captures Morris' belief that his nineteenth-century experience of that barn brings him into direct communion with the medieval farmers and builders that designed and constructed the building. Consequently, Morris does not just idealize the barn as it once existed, but he also champions the barn as an actor in the present capable of bringing us into contact with the past and with the craftsmen who built it, and thereby generating a future directly connected to past infrastructure.

Thus for Morris the built environment becomes an actor capable of transforming and disrupting the network of socioeconomic relationships by virtue of its identity as a non-commodified, craftsman-created work of art. Morris's aesthetic is predicated on the idea that the work of art generates mimetic space through the process of interpretive use, but also, as a work of art, the built environment has the ability to respond to the user by means of its architectural unification of form and function. Morris thereby offers a radical redefinition of the nature of the work of art itself as an actor with the ability to transform, shape, and participate in socioeconomic structures. As architecture moves through time and adapts over time, the built environment participates within society, so that a "new house [...]" would have a piece of history

⁶⁸ Philip Webb qtd. in Thompson 231.

for the time to come, and its dear and dainty cream-white walls would have been a genuine link among the numberless links of that long chain, whose beginnings we know not of.”⁶⁹ Finally, the work of art transforms time by launching the individual work of art, and the user along with it, into a craftsman time full of actualized revolutionary potential which is great enough that Morris encourages his audience to “try to conceive, if you can, the mass of pleasure which the production of such a work of art would give to all concerned in making it, though years and years it may be (for such work cannot be hurried); and when made there it is for a perennial pleasure to the citizens, to look at, to use, to care for, from day to day and year to year.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Morris, “The Prospects of Architecture in Civilization,” 126.

⁷⁰ Morris, William. “The Arts and Crafts of Today.” *The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 22. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 361.

CHAPTER THREE

THE USER AND THE READER: MORRIS'S ARTS AND CRAFTS AESTHETIC AND THE DECORATED BOOK

Upon opening the 1892 Kelmscott Press edition of *News from Nowhere*, the reader discovers two of William Morris's signature decorated pages complete with illustrations, decorated capitals, and tiny floral paragraph markers, all of which are united by two borders filled with Morris's swirling foliage. The borders, however, do not bring together the two facing pages into a unified design; instead, the pages's visually distinct borders separate the illustration from the text which it obliquely illustrates. This thematic disruption extends to the illustration, which does not feature attenuated, Byzantine figures by Edward Burne-Jones, but rather confronts the reader with Charles M. Gere's surprisingly modern image of an English house. This now-iconic illustration of Morris's own Kelmscott Manor depicts a view of the house's front walk, lined with topiaried roses, while the movement of its vines and leafy trees harmonizes with the swirling pattern of Morris's signature acanthus leaf border. This combination of the medieval, the traditional, and the modern demonstrates the extent to which Morris's decorated books participate in his user-oriented aesthetic model, with its determined unification of form and function, decoration and design, and the useful and beautiful.

As discussed in the introduction, Jerome McGann's "A Thing to Mind" stands as one of the first major recognitions of a hermeneutic relationship between Morris's material decoration

and the texts of Kelmscott books, a relationship which McGann declares “helps us to understand Morris’s peculiar and highly innovative understanding of poetry and poetical form.”¹



Figure 18. “Frontispiece to 'News from Nowhere' (London: 1890, Kelmscott Press).” *British Museum*.

This recognition has marked Morris scholarship ever since, although subsequent examinations of Morris’s texts have largely confined themselves to following McGann’s analysis, and critics such as Elizabeth Carolyn Miller note that the frontispiece to *News from Nowhere* “demands attention

¹ McGann, Jerome. “‘A Thing to Mind’: The Materialist Aesthetic of William Morris.” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 55.1 (Winter 1992): 55-74. *JSTOR*. Web. Accessed 25 November 2017. 58.

to its material presence [...and] forces the reader to pay attention to the object at hand.”² Jeffrey Skowblow offers a similar argument, albeit in a more innovative materialist form, since he reproduces the Kelmscott Press edition of *The Earthly Paradise* as a verso reading text to his deconstructionist analysis of Morris’s poetry.³

Recently, however, some scholars have also begun to touch on the interpretive ramifications of the relationship between text and decoration in Kelmscott books. Michelle Weinroth recognizes an analogous relationship between the organic motifs of Kelmscott Press decoration and what she views as Morris’s pastoral treatment of his utopian landscapes in *News from Nowhere*.⁴ John Plotz also gestures towards an extension of this analysis to the reader’s role in interpretation in *News from Nowhere* with the declaration that “all such visual vividness, such erection and overcoming of difference (between border and text, between letter and leaf), helps the reader conceive of a future in which an illuminated manuscript of a Kelmscott book will bring the same pleasure Nowhereians get from [...] gazing at a beautiful pipe.”⁵ Nicholas Frankel orients this argument towards the utopian and even revolutionary possibilities of the novel with his declaration that the floral borders of Kelmscott books “embody and enact”

² Miller, Elizabeth Carolyn. *Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013. Print. 63.

³ Skowblow, Jeffrey. *Paradise Dislocated: Morris, Politics, Art*. Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1993. Print.

⁴ Weinroth, Michelle. “Morris’s Road to *Nowhere*: New Pathways in Political Persuasion.” *To Build A Shadowy Isle of Bliss: William Morris’s Radicalism and the Embodiment of Dreams*. Ed. Michelle Weinroth and Paul Leduc Browne. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015. 172-194. Print. 177.

⁵ Plotz, John. *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008. Print. 162.

Morris's ecological utopian ideal and in the process demonstrate how "literary texts can change our relation to the world we thought we knew."⁶ In this chapter, I directly explore the line of reasoning established by McGann, namely, that Morris's decorated pages are characterized by a direct hermeneutic relationship between the text and its material presentation. In contrast to McGann, who uses an analysis of Morris's decorated pages to argue for the presence of a verbal-visual interpretive dynamic, I use my articulation of Morris's aesthetic model between the user and the work of art from Chapter 2 as a means of understanding the precise nature of the dynamic between the text and its decorative presentation, and I extend that analysis to describe the relationship between the craftsman, the decorated book, and the reader.

In this chapter, I maintain that Morris's unfinished edition of *The Earthly Paradise* and the Kelmscott Press edition of *News from Nowhere* demonstrate how Morris's book designs expand his interpretive aesthetic through their incorporation of the distinct, yet linked interpretive roles occupied by both the user and the reader of the material book. I contend that Morris's utopia in *News from Nowhere* is a direct product of both political revolution and socioeconomic change generated by handicraft production, and I conclude with the contradictions and even dialectical contradictions that this reasoning reveals which in turn point to the structure of Morris's aesthetic model. At the same time, I argue that the treatment of the past and present in Morris's decorated books demonstrates the essential and unresolved tension at the heart of Morris's entire Arts and Crafts project between the unattainability of any

⁶ Frankel, Nicholas. *Masking the Text: Essays on Literature and Mediation in the 1890s*. High Wycombe: The Rivendale Press, 2009. Print. 273.

craftsman-created utopian paradise and the necessary pursuit of the handcrafted object's revolutionary potential.

Morris's Architectural Book Designs and *The Earthly Paradise* (1865-1870)

Morris's book designs participate in and expand his user-oriented craftsman aesthetic through their inclusion of the reader as part of the interpretive process. In keeping with his interpretive model, Morris understood successful book designs, like all of his works of applied craftsmanship, to be predicated on the integration of decoration and design, or form and function, or text, image, and decoration into a unified work of art. Morris's lectures from the 1890s demonstrate his later success and facility in creating craftsman-produced books that are unified works of art and applied design. In keeping with the broader arc of his entire Arts and Crafts aesthetic, Morris tellingly describes the process of creating a book design in architectural terms. For Morris, the relationship between a book's component parts should be understood as an "architectural arrangement," since "if we think the ornament is ornamentally a part of the book merely because it is printed with it, and bound up with it, we shall be much mistaken. The ornament must form as much a part of the page as the type itself, or it will miss its mark, and in order to succeed, and to be ornament, it must submit to certain limitations, and become architectural."⁷ Through the harmonious composition of page layouts, fonts, and spacing, Morris maintains that even "a book quite un-ornamented can look actually and positively beautiful, and not merely un-ugly, if it be, so to say, architecturally good," while "a book ornamented with

⁷ Morris, William. "The Ideal Book." *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson. University of California Press, 1982. Print. 72-3.

pictures [...] a work of art second to none, save a fine building duly decorated, or a fine piece of literature.”⁸

Morris’s understanding of the three primary elements of a well-designed book correspond to this architectural analogy, and he maintains that paper, typeface, and layout are the primary building blocks of a decorated book. In his landmark lecture “The Ideal Book,” Morris enjoins his listeners to “see what this architectural arrangement claims of us. First, the pages must be clear and easy to read; which they can hardly be unless, Secondly, the type is well designed; and Thirdly, whether the margins be small or big, they must be in due proportion to the page of letter.”⁹ In his “Note on his Aims in Founding the Kelmscott Press,” Morris lays out these the fundamental elements of good book design as primary considerations for his career as a printer, since he maintains that “it was the essence of my undertaking to produce books which it would be a pleasure to look upon as pieces of printing and arrangement of type, [...] I found I had to consider chiefly the following things: the paper, the form of the type, the relative spacing of the letters, the words, and the lines; and lastly the position of the printed matter on the page.”¹⁰

Morris’s lectures reveal his concern for the importance of good paper, since he characteristically maintains that “we are at a great disadvantage compared with past times [since...] at present there is very little good paper made, and most of it is very bad.”¹¹ However,

⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Morris, William. “A Note by William Morris on His Aims in Founding the Kelmscott Press.” *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson. University of California Press, 1982. Print. 75.

¹¹ “The Ideal Book,” 70.

he is similarly concerned with the integrity of font design, and even goes so far as to maintain that Gothic types are superior because of their tendency to create dense blocks of text that are inherently easier to read, in an inversion of the arguments of Renaissance printers in favor of Roman types. Over and above typefaces, however, Morris regarded layout as central to the decorated book as a work of art, and his insistence on “the position of the page of print on the paper [...] is a most important point, and one that till quite lately has been wholly misunderstood by modern, and seldom done wrong by ancient printers, or indeed by producers of books of any kind.”¹² Morris is careful to remind his listeners

that we only occasionally see one page of a book at a time; the two pages making an opening are really the unit of the book, and this was thoroughly understood by the old book producers. I think you will seldom find a book, produced before the eighteenth century, [...] in which this rule is not adhered to: that 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 larger still, and the tail largest of all.¹³

Finally, Morris understood illustration, decoration, or other ornamentation to be inseparable from the text in keeping with his architectural aesthetic. In a direct reference to Ruskin’s characterization of Gothic design in medieval architecture, Morris maintains that “all organic art, all art that is genuinely growing, opposed to rhetorical, retrospective, or academical art, art which has no real growth in it, has two qualities in common: the epical and the ornamental; its two functions are the telling of a story and the adornment of a space or tangible object.”¹⁴ For Morris then, the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 71.

¹⁴ Morris, William. “The Woodcuts of Gothic Books.” *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson. University of California Press, 1982. Print. 26.

special art [of the decorated book is] obviously and simply beautiful as ornament, but its ornament also is vivified with forcible meaning, so that neither in one or the other does the life ever flag, or the sensuous pleasure of the eye ever lack. You have not got to say, Now you have your story, how are you going to embellish it? Nor, Now you have made your beauty, what are you going to do with it? For here are the two together, inseparably a part of each other.¹⁵

Morris's characterization of the integration of decoration and illustration with the text and the material instantiation of that text goes far beyond conventional or surface ideas of a unified design; instead, Morris is careful to delineate the depth of integration that his ideal book design is calling for. In "The Woodcuts of Gothic Books," he contrasts the more conventional style of book illustration, in which any "beautiful and inventive illustrations are to be looked on as separate pictures embedded into a piece of utilitarianism, which they cannot decorate because it cannot help them to do so" with his own more holistic definition of an integrated book design.¹⁶ Morris argues forcefully that "the illustrations should not have a mere accidental connection with the other ornament and the type, but an essential and artistic connection. They should be designed as a part of the whole, so that they would seem obviously imperfect without their surroundings."¹⁷ While Morris is careful to qualify this definition of illustration or decoration, by stating that various types of books would need more or less ornamentation depending on their purpose, since

a work on Art, I think, bears less of ornament than any other kind of book (*non bis in idem* is a good motto); again, a book that must have illustrations, more or less utilitarian, should, I think, have no actual ornament at all, because the ornament and the illustration must almost certainly fight. Still, whatever the subject-matter of the book may be, and

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 36.

¹⁷ Ibid., 40.

however bare it may be of decoration, it can still be a work of art, if the type be good and attention be paid to its general arrangement.¹⁸

Morris's characterization of the function of book illustrations reinforces his idea of the architectural relationship among the primary components of the decorated book, since once the illustrated "book is full of pictures, which tell the written tale again with the most conscientious directness of design, and as to execution with great purity of outline and extreme delicacy of colour, we can say [...] little more than that the only work of art which surpasses a complete Medieval book is a complete Medieval building."¹⁹ However, his interest in a return to an earlier mode of book production with truly hybrid or composite forms would not have been possible without the wider nineteenth-century interest in the potential hermeneutic equivalence between text and image, which, as I discuss in Chapter 1, informs both nineteenth-century book design and visual art. Morris's ideal iteration of book design is thus in line with his Arts and Crafts conception of the unification of decoration and ornamentation with the formal elements of the work of art.

In addition, Morris's decorated book is a handcrafted work of art that operates independently as a non-fetishized, non-commodified object, and thus disrupts the virtual network of relationships among things. Just like his other works of applied craftsmanship, Morris posits that the best book designs should be and bear evidence of having been created in community and in collaboration between the user and the maker fit for purpose. Since for Morris, "at any rate, [...] illustrated books should always be beautiful [...]. Well, how is this beauty to be obtained? It

¹⁸ Morris, "The Ideal Book," 67.

¹⁹ Morris, "The Woodcuts of Gothic Books," 27.

must be by the harmonious co-operation of the craftsmen and artists who produce the book.”²⁰

Here Morris gains traction by reinforcing the relationship of book design to his overall craftsman aesthetic of interpretation, and he acknowledges the reader and the user’s active participation with the book when he maintains that “as things to be looked at [by the reader] they are beautiful taken as a whole; they are alive all over, and not merely in a corner here and there. The illustrator has to share the success and the failure not only of the wood cutter, who has translated his drawing, but also of the printer and the mere ornamentalist, and the result is that you have a book which is a visible work of art.”²¹ Moreover, Morris acknowledges the limitations and constraints of working within an inherently reproductive medium such as printing. In contrast to his characterization of the unique work of craftsmanship, which is the product of the craftsman’s individual creative expression in keeping with Ruskin’s ideal of Gothic workmanship, Morris notes that “the designs must be suitable to the material and method of reproduction, and not offer to the executant artist a mere thicket of unnatural difficulties [...]. This means, in other words, the designer of the picture-blocks, the designer of the ornamental blocks, the wood-engraver, and the printer, all of them thoughtful, painstaking artists, and all working in harmonious co-operation for the production of a work of art.”²² Thus for Morris, the handcrafted work of art is not only defined by its unification of form and function but by its unification with the broader architectural environment of which it is a part in keeping with Morris’s own aesthetic model and craftsman ideal.

²⁰ Ibid., 37.

²¹ Ibid., 36-37.

²² Ibid., 40.

The decorated book also operates as a component of a larger built environment by means of its decoration. In keeping with Rossetti's own characterization of the relationship between decoration and ornamentation and interior design, Morris's handcrafted book is not only defined by its unification of form and function but by its unification with the broader architectural environment of which it is a part. Morris predicated his entire career on the transformation of the decorated interior as a means of wider socioeconomic as well as individual improvement, and tellingly, Morris regarded books as an inseparable and indispensable part of the domestic interior. In "Hopes and Fears for Art," Morris declares

perhaps it will not try your patience too much if I lay before you my idea of the fittings necessary to the sitting-room of a healthy person [...]. First a book-case with a great many books in it: next a table that will keep steady when you write or work at it: then several chairs that you can move, and a bench that you can sit or lie upon [...]. Then there will be the fireplace of course, which in our climate is bound to be the chief object in the room. That is all we shall want, especially if the floor be good.²³

While Morris is clearly attempting to revise his listener's conception of what is useful and beautiful in the home by offering an idealized, pared-down domestic interior, Morris is directly positing that books, and illustrated and decorated books in particular, are part of the domestic space. While he is at pains to clarify that "the picture-book is not, perhaps, absolutely necessary to man's life, [...] it gives us such endless pleasure, and is so intimately connected with the other absolutely necessary art of imaginative literature that it must remain one of the very worthiest things towards the production of which reasonable men should strive."²⁴ Books therefore can be

²³ Morris, William. "The Beauty of Life." *Hopes and Fears for Art. The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 22. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 76-77.

²⁴ Morris, "The Ideal Book," 73.

accounted for as part of the home and their physical form can accord with an overall interior design. Thus as works of craftsmanship, Morris's book designs follow his user-oriented model of interpretation.

The Earthly Paradise gives us the clearest example of Morris's initial inability to produce a material book predicated on the integration of text and material instantiation of that text in keeping with his developing model of artistic practice. *The Earthly Paradise* was Morris's first attempt to produce a decorated book, and although it predates the design principles Morris lays out in his lectures with the benefit of years of experience in book design, *The Earthly Paradise* marks his first major attempt to create a material book that was as much a work of art as the literary text it presents. By 1862, Morris was at work on *The Earthly Paradise*, and by then he "had planned *The Earthly Paradise* in outline—including its alternations of 'classical' [10] and 'medieval' tales—and written drafts for a prologue tale about medieval mariners [...]. By 1867, he had filled six notebooks with drafts."²⁵ However, Morris's long poem was not to be a standalone text; rather, Morris envisioned *The Earthly Paradise* as being as much material as textual, and he set about developing the work into a big book of pictures and stories together, formally organized and inspired by Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. True to Morris's inclinations and aesthetic beliefs, *The Earthly Paradise* was a collaborative enterprise, with himself and Burne-Jones, as well as Philip Webb, and later others, including George Wardle, the Firm's later manager, and Elizabeth Burden, Jane Morris's sister, all collaborating on woodblock engraving,

²⁵ Boos, Florence. Introduction. *The Earthly Paradise*, by Morris, New York: Routledge, 2002. Print. 9-10.

designing, and overall collaborative input on what was to be a monumental project.²⁶ Because *The Earthly Paradise* as a decorated book remained unfinished and was conceived of at the same time as Morris was composing and planning the scope of the poetic text, Joseph R. Dunlap maintains that “it is next to impossible to estimate the thickness of the proposed volume. Morris had not yet finished writing his tales when the trial pages were set up. Some narratives were projected but never written; some were partially or wholly written but not included in the final selection; the tale of Jason and the Argonauts grew to be longer than he first expected and had to be published separately, as we have seen.”²⁷ Florence Boos notes that “Morris’s poem was enthusiastically, even effusively received, in any case, and Morris swiftly completed and published parts I and II of *The Earthly Paradise* in 1868, and parts III and IV in 1870,” and I would argue that Morris’s dizzying poetic output was matched by the massive creative and collaborative undertaking to make a material book that would effectively embody the scope of Morris's vision.²⁸

The Earthly Paradise was initially conceived in terms of a layout that would combine text, image, and decoration in a manner that would correspond to Morris’s later conception of an architectural book design. While Morris and Burne-Jones initially attempted a layout that they would later use for the Kelmscott *Chaucer*, with a two-column layout of text topped with a large illustration that extended over both columns, for *The Earthly Paradise* Morris favored an offset style of embedding smaller illustrations in the two columns of text in keeping with medieval

²⁶ Dunlap, Joseph R. *The Book That Never Was*. New York: Oriole Editions, 1971. Print. 24.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁸ Boos, 10.

models, a layout which would also accommodate the vast number of small illustrations Morris wanted to include. Morris was determined to visually and physically integrate text and image into a harmonious design, and he conceived of the illustrations and decorations as inseparable. In describing the project, May Morris maintains that “Morris saw the stories in brilliantly defined pictures, and desired that other people should do so, too. ‘There is nobody but Burne-Jones who can do them,’ he often said.”²⁹ Only Morris and Burne-Jones’s notes remain as testament to their ambitions for the scope of the project, and they indicate that the single episode “The Story of Cupid and Psyche” would have been accompanied by no fewer than fifty-three illustrations, while the entire volume would have included as many as three hundred and twenty illustrations.³⁰ Such a heavily visual style would directly approach the kind of medieval integration of text and image that Morris would later champion in his Kelmscott Press designs. This conscious attempt to integrate text, image, and design for *The Earthly Paradise* thus would have created a kind of worlds-within-worlds of layered textual and visual narrative.

However, Morris’s commitment to creating a unified visual style within the book largely led to the failure of the decorated edition of *The Earthly Paradise*. By 1868, Morris and Burne-Jones had been working on the project for “close to three years,” but their efforts to produce such a massive illustrated edition were ultimately thwarted by the constraints of their publisher.³¹

Morris wanted the typeface to be central to the visual unity of the entire enterprise, but his

²⁹ Morris, May. *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*. Vol.1. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1936. Print. 402.

³⁰ Dunlap, 13.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

publisher, F.S. Ellis, only had a limited number of types at his disposal. As a result, the initial proof sheets relied on Caslon and Basel typefaces, which “were conscious revivals from the past [in keeping with Morris’s principles], but their weight and appearance did not give the desired result even though the Basel font was based on a type that was used even in the days of Aldus. ‘The effect was very disappointing,’ reports Mackail, Morris’s biographer. ‘The page, while not without a certain quality of distinction, suffers from technical defects, in both typography and wood-cuts, which are all the more emphasized by the high mark aimed at.’”³² Morris’s layouts and heavier borders would only be successful when combined with even heavier Gothic fonts, rather than the thinner, more attenuated Roman font that he would have had to work with, while the quality of woodcuts for Burne-Jones illustrations were still not up to Morris’s exacting standards, even though he had attempted to cut a few blocks personally. Despite Morris’s inexperience in creating an integrated book design, “Morris had a keen enough eye to reject any inharmonious typography,” and so *The Earthly Paradise* was abandoned as a project by 1869. Instead the poem was published serially in three unillustrated volumes, with only one small title page engraving of the Three Graces left as a reminder of the heavily visual nature of the work of art Morris had intended the *Earthly Paradise* to be.³³ As an additional point of contrast, Morris also attempted to publish a decorated edition of *Love is Enough*, which was his heavily personal follow-up to the success of *The Earthly Paradise*, and which would have included borders and capitals by Burne-Jones. *Love is Enough’s* visual design further demonstrates the tension that

³² Ibid., 28.

³³ Ibid., 42.

existed between pre-existing printing and typography styles and what Morris hoped to achieve with *The Earthly Paradise*. Dunlap himself maintains that the few existing trial pages

demonstrate clearly the different worlds occupied by Morris and his friends on the one hand, and Victorian type and book designers on the other. [...] The thin types of the latter cannot support the strength and vitality of the decorative initials and borders [...]. If Morris realized that the lines in the decorations should approximate the same weight and color as the letters in the type face of the text, he could do nothing to remedy the situation of the time. As it is, the trial pages stand as a vivid representation of the battle waged by Morris and his companions against what they detested in the nineteenth century.³⁴

Although Morris would revive and complete the designs for an edition of *The Earthly Paradise* at the Kelmscott Press shortly before his death, “Morris [...] did not live to see the actual completion of his great work.”³⁵ This eight-volume edition featured Morris’s signature Kelmscott Press decorated title pages, but the stories remained unillustrated and were simply decorated for Kelmscott books, and therefore bear little resemblance to his plans from the 1860s for a lavishly illustrated book of stories. Instead, the Kelmscott *Chaucer* would assume the place of this culminating project, which I discuss more fully in Chapter 4. Nonetheless, Morris’s attempted use of illustrations for *The Earthly Paradise* is in keeping with the nineteenth-century recognition of decorated books as a hybrid verbal-visual art form, and participates in the wider Victorian integration of text and image in illustrated books. Thus *The Earthly Paradise* designs and their multiple illustrations embedded across the page are a clear reference to the integration of medieval illuminations, marginalia, and illustrations within the page of text.

³⁴ Ibid., 47.

³⁵ McGann, 71.

Architecture and Utopia in *The Earthly Paradise* and *News from Nowhere*

Although Morris failed to produce his ideal book designs for *The Earthly Paradise*, his later founding of the Kelmscott Press marks his determination to produce typefaces that met his design specifications for printed books, and his pursuit of a unified visual style for *The Earthly Paradise* was both the source and the inspiration for his later declaration of the primary principles that should govern the book design as a craft. In his 1896 “Note on his Aims in Founding the Kelmscott Press,” Morris himself admits as much, maintaining “I began printing books with the hope of producing some which would have a definite claim to beauty, while at the same time they should be easy to read and should not dazzle the eye, or trouble the intellect of the reader by eccentricity of form in the letters.”³⁶ This emphasis on typeface as a central component was arguably only made feasible by Morris’s friendship and later close collaboration with Emery Walker, who was a successful printer and type designer in his own right, and who pioneered the process of incorporating photographic reproduction as part of the type design process.

Morris’s Kelmscott Press was also a self-conscious project to improve the quality of nineteenth-century book design and printing quality through a direct revival of medieval and Renaissance motifs and techniques, in the same way that Morris revived weaving, dyeing, and stained glass techniques to improve the quality of English craftsmanship. In Morris’s view the

³⁶ Morris, William. “A Note by William Morris on his Aims in Founding the Kelmscott Press.” *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson. University of California Press, 1982. Print. 75.

great innovations in book design across the nineteenth century had eroded contemporary printing standards and in a lecture on printing, Morris enjoined his audience to

Take as an example of the latter, Mr Fred Walker's illustrations to Philip in the Cornhill Magazine, of the days when some of us were young, since I am inclined to think that they are about the best of such illustrations. Now they are part of Thackeray's story, and I don't want them to be in any way less a part of it, but they are in no respect a part of the tangible printed book, and I do want them to be that. As it is, the mass of utilitarian matter in which they are embedded is absolutely helpless and dead. Why it is not even ugly, at least not vitally ugly.³⁷

Morris's complaint is not with Thackeray's text, but rather with fact that the larger illustrations are not integrated into the pages of text, thereby removing the potential vitality of a decorated page hinted at by the illustrated capitals. In addition to the integrity of typefaces and their unification with the entire work of art, Morris was determined to use high quality materials for each element of his Kelmscott Books, and, as his lectures on good printing and design methods suggest, using high-quality paper and vellum remained a high priority. Above all, however, Morris was concerned that the illustrations and decorations similarly participate and contribute to the architectural, harmonious design of the book as a whole. William S. Peterson gives some hints as to Morris's persistent reliance on Burne-Jones's style for book illustration, maintaining that Burne-Jones's

distrust of deep perspective, in the paintings as well as these designs, has often been commented on, and of course the comparative flatness of Burne-Jones's drawings goes well with the markedly shallow depth of Morris's ornaments. What is perhaps less commonly noticed about the Kelmscott illustrations is that Burne-Jones, in accordance with the theories that he and Morris had evolved, made certain that his pictures were above all ornamental. Whether they told a story or not was beside the point; he confessed that he always evaluated his illustrations by looking at them upside down. The real tests,

³⁷ Morris, "The Woodcuts of Gothic Books," 36.

in the end, were the decorative quality of the pictures and the extent to which they contributed to the *mise-en-scène* of the printed page.³⁸

This ornamental nature of the illustrations remains one of the defining features of Kelmscott Press books and perfectly aligns with Morris's own statements about the function of decoration and ornament as unifying elements within the domestic interior.

Through their unification of form and function within a work of craftsmanship, Kelmscott Press books uphold and participate in Morris's idea of a user-oriented aesthetic, and the Kelmscott edition of *News from Nowhere* stands as a prime example of this unified verbal-visual work of art. While Gere's frontispiece is a heavily visual testament to Morris's commitment to collaborative craftsmanship, the entire volume stands as evidence that Morris regards reading as an embodied, physical, and even social practice, not merely a visual or even a disembodied, solitary intellectual activity. *News from Nowhere*, like most Kelmscott Press books, is notable for its large frontispiece illustration and decorated capitals, which dominate the first two-page spread of the book. Each page is surrounded by its own border decorations in due proportion to the page margins Morris advocated, and the first page of text is surrounded by swirling vines and foliage in Morris's characteristic style. Each chapter continues this floriated motif with decorated capitals that employ visual references from the natural world, in keeping with Morris's preference for anti-industrial, traditional patterns and designs. This ornamentation is also not without practical function, since each capital falls at either the beginning of a chapter or a subsection within the chapter to indicate the reader's progression through the pages. Despite

³⁸ Peterson, William. *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. Print. 163.

this emphasis on visual ornamentation, *News from Nowhere*, like most Kelmscott Books, follows what is essentially a very simple format and visual style, and the majority of its pages are remarkable for their plainness and legibility. The book's two-page opening and perfectly proportioned margins ensure the reader is able to hold the book by the bottom or sides of the pages and still have clear, unsmudged access to the dense blocks of text. Each page is also topped with a rubricated heading by way of summary of the page's events so that the reader can easily find his way through and back into the text at any point. Morris himself, in "The Ideal Book," advocates for legibility and tactile engagement with the decorated volume, and size and ease of handling as an aid to reading. Morris's user-oriented design even extends to the size and weight of the book itself, since

the fact is, a small book seldom does lie quiet, and you have either to cramp your hand by holding it, or else to put it on the table with a paraphernalia of matters to keep it down, a table-spoon on one side, a knife on another, and so on, which things always tumble off at a critical moment, and fidget you out of the repose which is absolutely necessary to reading. Whereas, a big folio lies quiet and majestic on the table, [...] giving you no trouble of body, so that your mind is free to enjoy the literature which its beauty enshrines.³⁹

The structure of the entire book indicates its conception as a unified work of art, which fully participates in Morris's user-oriented craftsman aesthetic through its identity as a handcrafted object defined by its unification of the useful and the beautiful.

While Morris's designs fully align with his user-oriented aesthetic, they also expand upon this interpretive model through their self-conscious attention to the reader's interpretive activity. For all of the technical failures of the unfinished decorated edition of *The Earthly Paradise*, the

³⁹ Morris, "The Woodcuts of Gothic Books," 72.

frame structure of its poetic text demonstrates Morris's acknowledgment of the reader's activity as central to the process of interpretation, over and above that of the user's physical engagement with the material book itself. First and foremost, the frame structure of the text directly and openly acknowledges the reader as an active and necessary interpretive participant in the text. The Prologue to *The Earthly Paradise* sets up the first frame in the frame story in nearly epic terms, but rather than directly addressing a muse, the poet in "An Apology" speaks directly to the reader, whose interpretive agency is the direct inspiration, in the classical sense, of the entire literary work. The poet declares

Of Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing,
I cannot ease the burden of your fears,
Or make quick-coming death a little thing,
Or bring again the pleasure of past years,
Nor for my words shall ye forget your tears,
Or hope again for aught that I can say,
The idle singer of an empty day.⁴⁰

While the poet's self-presentation as an "idle singer" dominates much of the reviews and criticism of the entire work, the poet's address to the reader sets up the thematic content of the entire poem, which stands in direct contrast to the grander content of a traditional epic. In keeping with this epical address, the first lines of the Prologue are structured in a series of imperative statements to the reader himself who is enjoined to "Forget six counties overhung with smoke, / Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke, / Forget the spreading of the hideous town," but is told to

Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,

⁴⁰ Morris, William. "An Apology." *The Earthly Paradise*. Ed. Florence S. Boos. Vol. 1. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print. 52.

And dream of London, small, and white, and clean,
 The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green;
 Think, that below bridge the green lapping waves
 Smite some few keels that bear Levantine staves.⁴¹

In this way, the reader's own actions bring about the mimetic pleasure in the story and drive the poem's narrative, so that the poet is able to claim

So with this Earthly Paradise it is,
 If ye will read aright, and pardon me,
 Who strive to build a shadowy isle of bliss [...]
 Not the poor singer of an empty day."⁴²

What is more, the reader is told to move through this idealized Chaucer's London and

Pass now between them, push the brazen door,
 And standing on the polished marble floor
 Leave all the noises of the square behind;
 Most calm that reverent chamber shall ye find,
 Silent at first, but for the noise you made
 When on the brazen door your hand you laid
 To shut it after you—but now behold
 The city rulers on their thrones of gold,⁴³

and in this way the reader is made to become as much a part of the story as the characters themselves. The Prologue deliberately thus subverts the conventions of an epic by positioning the reader as muse and interpretive participant and thus invites and acknowledges the reader's individual imaginative and interpretive participation to fuel and even create the work of art.

In addition, the text of *The Earthly Paradise* generates a particular kind of temporal, communal experience for the reader and therefore fully and self-consciously attempts to involve

⁴¹ Morris, William. "Prologue." *The Earthly Paradise*. Ed. Florence S. Boos. Vol. 1. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print. 69.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 70.

the reader in the creation of utopia. The frame structure of *The Earthly Paradise* is predicated on three main frames in the style of Chaucer or Boccaccio, as follows: the first frame is the short introductory Apology to the reader; the second continues this direct address to the reader in the Prologue, and requests the reader's imaginative participation in its telling of the Wanderers' failed search for an earthly paradise and their arrival in the Byzantine-style island community of the Elders; and the third frame consists of the many stories themselves, which are ostensibly told by the Wanderers and Elders to one another over the course of a year, with the Northern European Wanderers telling one story from Norse or European legend per month, and the Greek or Byzantine Elders reciprocating with a tale from classical myth. The entire text of *The Earthly Paradise* is therefore structured according to a calendrical cycle, with two stories for each month, each introduced and concluded with a brief discussion between and description of the Wanderers and Elders in keeping with the month and season in which the stories are being told. Thus each of the tales itself participates in both the second and third frames, since the Wanderers' relationship with the Elders is further developed in the introduction and conclusion of each story, thereby developing and reinforcing *The Earthly Paradise's* thematic emphasis on reading and the shared experience of narrative as a consolation for the fleeting nature of life and the practical unattainability of immortality.

This frame structure further centers *The Earthly Paradise* on the reader's active participation. Florence Boos, in her introduction to her edition of the text, argues that *The Earthly Paradise* is predicated on the generation of communities as a solace for the inevitability of death and the frame structure of *The Earthly Paradise* directly promotes those communities. I

maintain that the reader's involvement in the story extends these reading communities outward away from the text, as well as being responsible for their generation within the frames of the stories themselves. Boos states that

The Earthly Paradise [...] reflect[s] the work's larger belief in healing cycles of shared labor and historical memory, and self-consciously restrained responses to complex views of fate. [...] This imbrication of audience-within-audience also extends outward to include the poem's readers, who are enjoined to grant sympathy, receive consolation, and return with (the original of) the singer to face the outer world. [...] By implication, the reader is expected to recognize the singer's emotional significance, and feel impelled to identify with and rework each cycle in its turn. [...] This tripartite view of the past is not antiquarian or narrowly historical. In some non-traditional and utopian sense, it is communitarian.⁴⁴

Boos's interpretation perfectly describes the way in which the poetic text self-consciously involves the reader in the work of art, but her reading does not address the extent of the reader's interpretive involvement or its implications. The reader's interpretation drives the calendrical cycles of the text itself, but in the process, the reader is made a part of the communities within the text. By participating and indeed enabling the friendship between the Wanderers and Elders, the reader is a part of their community, which is predicated on the shared experience of narrative. By extension, then, the reader is able to participate in the solace brought about by their interpretive communities, and find a kind of consolation for mortality and the inevitability of decline, death, lack of achievement, and personal loss.

The heavily Romantic interpretations of *The Earthly Paradise* demonstrate the extent to which the poem revitalizes the reader's relationship with tradition and cultural memory through the generation of reading communities. Morris himself would often read out loud to groups of

⁴⁴ Boos, 14-16.

friends, and his habits of enthusiastically regaling his friends with stories from Chaucer and Froissart as a young man persisted throughout his life, in spite of his friends's mixed response to these readings.



Figure 19. “Mr. Morris Reading Poems to Mr. Burne Jones,” Edward Burne-Jones, 1865-80, pen and black ink, British Museum, London. *British Museum*.

Morris's lighthearted enjoyment of reading is demonstrated by Burne-Jones's comic illustration “Mr. Morris reading poems to Mr. Burne-Jones,” as well as Rossetti's “The M's at Ems,” which depicts Morris regaling Jane with volume after volume of *The Earthly Paradise* while she downs tonic after tonic in Bad Ems, Germany. This sense of a newly created community structure in *The Earthly Paradise* directly arises from these reading practices dictated and encouraged by the narrative and structural constraints of the work.



Figure 20. “The M’s at Ems,” Dante Gabriel Rossetti. 1865-80, pen and brown ink, British Museum, London. *The British Museum*.

May Morris addresses this side of Victorian criticism of *The Earthly Paradise* when she maintains:

I do not see in this melancholy that all the critics of the poems dwelt on, in writing of the verse of those mid-Victorian days, a mere acceptance of the swift ending of earthly joys. It was surely the outward and visible sign of something deeper and graver at work in his nature. [...] His sense of the continuity of human life, an idea, which in all its majesty and its weight finds full utterance in the later years of anxious work, is present through the writings of earlier days, though but dimly felt and often manifested only by the restlessness and dissatisfaction with the swift passing of beauty that has given rise, as suggested above, to the contemporary criticisms on the philosophy of pleasure in his verse of this period.⁴⁵

Morris’s multi-faceted frame story, built on the skilled retelling of myths and legends, positions the reader as not only a member of the community of characters in the frame stories, but also as part of the community of storytellers, authors, and readers, past and present, and in the process provides consolation as well as a firm and positive fellowship that reaches across the limitations

⁴⁵ Morris, May. *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*. Vol. 1. New York: Russell and Russell, 1966. Print. 399.

of generational memory through the pages of the decorated book. For *The Earthly Paradise* then, the act of interpretation is thus as inherently creative and constructive as the process of interpretive use.

Additionally, the frame structure of the stories themselves presupposes a certain kind of shared reading practice, which remained popular in the oral reading culture of the nineteenth century, that extends that renewed community structure beyond the text and into the real world. In the same way that Morris's handcrafted objects expand the mimetic space of interpretation away from the strict geometric alignment of viewer and the work of art through the process of interpretive use, and thereby restores the user to right relations with the built environment, the natural world, and society more generally, the reader of *The Earthly Paradise* shares the stories within groups of friends and family in multiple sessions, thereby extending the community-building nature of the poems beyond the world of the text and into real world of the reader's lived experience. The massive success of its initial serial publication indicates the extent to which *The Earthly Paradise* is defined by reading as a social practice, but what is more, its corresponding glowing reviews are predicated on the idea that reading the text will restore the reader's relationship not only to self and others, but to the natural world. Alfred Austin, in an unsigned article first published in *Temple Bar*, declares that "under a blossoming thorn, stretched 'neath some umbrageous beech, or sheltered from the glare of noon by some ferncrested Devonshire cliff, with lazy summer sea-waves breaking at one's feet--such were the fitting hour and mood in which--criticism all forgot--to drink in the honeyed rhythm of this melodious

storer.”⁴⁶ The reviewer for *The Spectator* also offers a similar understanding of the text, and complains that

one quarrel, however, we are inclined to have with Mr. Morris; why will he bring out his poems in winter? So many independent observers have found that they ought to be read in summer, and out of doors if possible, that their combined experience must have sufficient truth in it to deserve the regard of all persons concerned. It may be answered that the second reading of poetry is the best, and that it is, therefore, fit and proper to use the winter for a first reading, and reserve the pleasures of summer and open air for the second. To which argument we have not at present any satisfactory reply.⁴⁷

By the same token, Walter Pater’s unsigned review, which was later expanded into the dramatic final passages of *The Renaissance*, declares “Not the fruit of experience but experience itself is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life.”⁴⁸ This idea is rooted in an interpretation of *The Earthly Paradise* as a finely tuned vehicle for the reader’s heavily Romantic sensory experience of poems as a work of art, which has implications for the reader’s appreciation of and relationship to the natural world. In this way, *The Earthly Paradise* demonstrates its reader-oriented Arts and Crafts effectiveness in restoring the reader’s relationship to nature and to his community.

While the book design of the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* is reader-friendly in its carefully constructed layouts and formatting, all of which guide the reader through the chapters, the entire text of the novel is similarly overtly reader-oriented. The reader of *The Earthly Paradise* is presented with his role as both muse and participant, and in the same way, the reader

⁴⁶ Austin, Alfred. *The Poetry of the Period*. London: Richard Bentley, 1870. Print. 141.

⁴⁷ Pater, Walter. Unsigned review of *The Earthly Paradise*. *The Spectator* xliii (12 March 1870): 332-4. *William Morris Archive*. Ed. Florence S. Boos. Web. 6 Jan. 2018.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 334.

of *News from Nowhere* is invited to be part of the frame narrative of William Guest's journey through Morris's utopian London. The reader is aware from the first few pages that William Guest is actually William Morris's own fictional avatar who has been miraculously conveyed into the London of the future, but the reader's access to this specialized information comes in the form of a frame structure that directly parallels that of the Prologue of *The Earthly Paradise*. The novel opens with the statement "Up at the League, says a friend, there had been one night a brisk conversational discussion, as to what would happen on the Morrow of the Revolution, finally shading off into a vigorous statement by various friends of their views on the future of the fully-developed new society," and here the narrator of the text introduces the novel in terms of reported conversation by a "friend."⁴⁹ Thus the first frame establishes the relationship between the narrator and the reader, and gives the reader to understand that the narration of the novel will come out of the experiences of the "friend," who after the Socialist League meeting "went through such surprising adventures that he thinks that they should be told to our comrades, and indeed the public in general, and therefore proposes to tell them now."⁵⁰ The narrator then describes the friend's determination to speak for himself in the novel, since, "says he, I think it would be better if I told them in the first person, as if it were myself who had gone through them; which, indeed, will be the easier and more natural to me, since I understand the feelings and desires of the comrade of whom I am telling better than any one else in the world does."⁵¹ The reader is also given to understand in nearly explicit terms that the protagonist "friend" is no one

⁴⁹ Morris, William. *News from Nowhere*. Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1892. Print. 1-2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

less than William Morris himself, since the narrator reveals that he is a member of the Socialist League, and gives such details of the internal political turmoil of that particular meeting that scholars have identified the date of the meeting that the novel references. In addition, the “friend’s” home is located so particularly within a “London suburb” as to be unmistakably Morris’s own house in Hammersmith.⁵² The text therefore directly conflates William Morris the author with his fictional self and thereby invites and requires the reader’s understanding and participation within the text of the novel.

On the basis of this information, the novel relies on the reader as, at least initially, the sole guarantor of William Guest’s true identity as William Morris. Dick’s and Old Hammond’s knowledge that Morris is from the past is limited in that those characters are not able to hold past and present together in the same way as the reader. Dick Hammond’s comments about Morris’s clothes reveal that he is figuring out Morris/Guest’s displaced temporal status even before Morris does, if not the full extent of it. When Morris/Guest expresses an interest in changing his clothes to be less conspicuous among the idealized 14th-century costumes of this utopian future, Dick Hammond says,

quite gravely: ‘O don’t get new clothes yet. You see, my great-grandfather is an antiquarian, and he will want to see you just as you are. And, [...] surely it wouldn’t be right for you to take away people’s pleasure of studying your attire, by just going and making yourself like everybody else. You feel that, don’t you?’ said he, earnestly. I did NOT feel it my duty to set myself up for a scarecrow amidst this beauty-loving people, but I saw I had got across some ineradicable prejudice, and that it wouldn’t do to quarrel with my new friend.’⁵³

⁵² Ibid., 3-4.

⁵³ Ibid., 48-49.

By extension, Old Hammond's friendship with Guest is predicated on the fact that Hammond understands he is from the past and is able to identify with Morris's own experiences.

Throughout the first section of the novel, Morris's affinity and friendship with Hammond is, for him, a means of retaining a link to the past that he feels is currently forgotten and unattainable.

Morris/Guest describes this relationship at the point when he receives an invitation to leave Old Hammond and hear a concert, since "in point of fact, I did not by any means want to be 'amused' just then; and also I rather felt as if the old man, with his knowledge of past times, and even a kind of inverted sympathy for them caused by his active hatred of them, was as it were a blanket for me against the cold of this very new world, where I was, so to say, stripped bare of every habitual thought and way of acting; and I did not want to leave him too soon."⁵⁴ Old Hammond's determination to detail the history of their utopian society and its revolutionary development out of nineteenth-century capitalism is addressed as much to the reader as to Guest, since throughout the text the novel does not indicate that Guest is necessarily supposed to or even fated to go back to his present and tell everyone what he knows as a means of bringing about the revolution that Hammond describes. There is no evangelical impulse in the novel, despite the conventions of the utopian genre. The reader serves that function, as far as it is indicated, since the reader's own experience of utopia and his alignment with and identification of Morris/Guest is enough to bring him into community with both Morris/Guest and the narrator and thereby establish a kind of idealized community like that of utopian England.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 148.

Ellen's similar awareness that William Guest is displaced from his own time effectively aligns her character closer to the reader's own interpretive position. Her relationship with Guest is predicated on her ability to divine the truth of his identity as a visitor displaced from his own time, and their instant affinity and comradeship is cemented by her eventual confession to knowing what the reader has been aware of for the duration of the novel. When Morris/Guest finally confronts Ellen about her knowledge, he declares

‘Dear neighbour, I may as well tell you at once that I find it easier to imagine all that ugly past than you do, because I myself have been part of it. I see both that you have divined something of this in me; and also I think you will believe me when I tell you of it, so that I am going to hide nothing from you at all.’ She was silent a little, and then she said: “My friend, you have guessed right about me; and to tell you the truth I have followed you up from Runnymede in order that I might ask you many questions, and because I saw that you were not one of us; and that interested and pleased me, and I wanted to make you as happy as you could be. [...] She looked down upon me kindly, and said, ‘How well we get on now you are no longer on your guard against me!’⁵⁵

Guest's relationship to the reader as a participant in the journey functions in the same way as the reader of *London: A Pilgrimage* and other readers of Victorian illustrated books, who are similarly identified and invited to experience the journey within the story in an open acknowledgement of the reader's own narrative experience of the text. As I discuss in Chapter 1, in *London: A Pilgrimage* the reader follows Jerrold and Doré and their journey through the city, and the reader is overtly invited and included in the journey of the text by being addressed as part of the “we” embarking on the series of pilgrimages. Here in *News from Nowhere*, Morris/Guest, as the narrator, is writing for that reader, in the full knowledge that the reader is participating in

⁵⁵ Ibid., 272-74.

the narrative, and Morris/Guest invites the reader to come alongside as a tacit partner in the action of the story.

Morris's reader-focused aesthetic therefore requires the reader to bring together text and material instantiation of that text, as well as decoration and design of the material work of art, to form a complete interpretation. The reader/user's act of interpretation positions the reader at the intersection of text and image, decoration and design, through the reader's creation of mimetic space. The interpretive process therefore is the engine by which socioeconomic change can be brought about, and with it the creation of an Arts and Crafts built environment that operates according to Morris's conception of a socioeconomic revolution. This characterization of Morris's aesthetic model as architectural thus directly maps onto his literary pursuit of utopias. *The Earthly Paradise* and *News from Nowhere* stand as two distinct kinds of utopian fictions. The reader's participation in the work of art is thus directly linked to the ability of the work of art to generate utopias both within the world of the text and in the reader's own lived experience.

Morris, Benjamin, and the Revolutionary Potential of the Arts and Crafts

In the process, Morris's book designs reveal his understanding of the relationship between the past, present, and the future. By participating in and reviving medieval and Renaissance book designs, Morris's decorated books juxtapose past and present in Benjaminian terms, resulting in the creation of craftsman time. Morris's book designs for *The Earthly Paradise* create craftsman space according to Morris's arts and crafts aesthetic, since the decorated *Earthly Paradise* works independently as a work of architecture through its identity as a non-fetishized, non-commodified art object. As hybrid verbal-visual works of art, Morris's

book designs also take into account the temporal/spatial elements of the act of reading to open up the revolutionary potential of the present. *The Earthly Paradise* itself directly invites the reader's involvement within this craftsman time as reading time, which is both distinct from and linked to the revolutionary craftsman time of interpretive use because of the text's structural participation in the calendar year.

John Keble's landmark *The Christian Year* functions in parallel theoretical terms because of its alignment of the church calendar with the calendar year. One of the bestselling books of the Victorian period, Keble's Tractarian cycle of poems is overtly liturgical in its idea that repeated, longterm participation is key to spiritual practice, and the text effectively rewrites the church calendar by offering poems that correspond to the seasons of the church year. *The Christian Year* thus revitalizes the link between the church calendar and the secular year through the reader's liturgical experience of and interaction with the text. In the same way, *The Earthly Paradise's* structure corresponds to months and is supposed to happen over the duration of an entire year. This organizational pattern is somewhat belied by its serial publication, as well as the fact that the reader is at perfect liberty to read multiple stories at once, or read the text out of order, or as quickly or slowly as he pleases. Nonetheless, the poems effectively layer the calendrical experience of the reader over the experience of the year in the real world through their overt acknowledgement that the act of reading, however it is engaged in, is an inherently temporal practice, which requires the reader's investment of time and participation in the temporal structures indicated by the constraints of the text. Therefore the calendrical nature of *The Earthly Paradise* presupposes a certain kind of temporal structure or orientation that the reader must both

recognize and participate in, and the entire work can be understood as a kind of medievalizing, secularizing response to this cultural moment of religious reform and reconsideration.

By involving the reader in a different, alternative kind of reading time, *The Earthly Paradise* restores the reader's relationship to community, tradition, and cultural memory. While the reader is unlikely to read, even in the earlier serialized version, each story during its designated month, the conscious placement of the reader in the alternative time of *The Earthly Paradise* enables the reader to have a transformative experience of that time which is indistinguishable from his interpretation of the poetry. In addition, the reader brings together text and material instantiation of that text since form and function, or decoration and design, are inseparable elements. The material form of the work of art therefore accesses and leverages the past to create change in the present. Morris's reliance on and adaptation of medieval and early modern book designs ensures that the unfinished book design of *The Earthly Paradise* would have been as quintessentially Victorian as it was ostensibly medieval. The text thus uses reading practices to generate community and, with it, socioeconomic change in the present.

The Earthly Paradise also revitalizes classical stories by bringing them to bear on the reader's immediate present, since each cycle of the poem features Morris's retellings of classical myth and one translation or adaptation of Norse myth for each month of the year. Morris's translations and updates followed a very particular and idiosyncratic method of translation and adaptation that is perfectly in keeping with both Morris's character and his craftsman principles. May Morris's introductions to the *Collected Works* twice reference Morris's own advice about translation and adaptation, thereby indicating its importance to both of them. According to May,

Morris himself declares that when adapting or translating or “retelling an old story, shut the book, and tell it again in your own way.”⁵⁶ Throughout his work translating the Icelandic Eddas, Morris collaborated with Icelandic Cambridge professor Eiríkr Magnússon, which Magnússon himself describes as follows: “Our Method of work was this: We went together over the day’s task as carefully as the eager-mindedness of the pupil to acquire the story would allow. I afterwards wrote out at home a literal translation of it and handed it to him at our next lesson. With this before him Morris wrote down at his leisure his own version in his own style, which ultimately did service as printer’s copy when the Saga was published.”⁵⁷ Morris’s translations are thus collaborative in keeping with his craftsman ethic, which is as much a social imperative as well as a philosophy of art. Morris’s innovative and highly individual style and thematic emphases heavily inform his retellings of these stories and become touchstones for the reader throughout the text, thereby enabling him to bring these stories to bear on the present. *The Earthly Paradise* brings together north and south, east and west, and past and present in a new idealized community entirely at a remove from the idealized London of Chaucer’s day celebrated in the Prologue.

As a hybrid verbal-visual work of art, Morris’s decorated edition of *News from Nowhere* leverages the role of the reader/user to generate craftsman space/time in keeping with Morris’s craftsman aesthetic. The work of art generates craftsman space through the expansion of the mimetic space of linear perspective, and Morris’s handcrafted drapes, upholstery fabrics, rugs,

⁵⁶ *The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 3. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. xxii.

⁵⁷ Magnússon, Eiríkr qtd. in *The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 7. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. xvii.

and tiles all employ the process of interpretive use, and Morris's book designs for *News from Nowhere* are simultaneously reliant on the non-perspectival patterns of flowers, leaves, and animals for the generation of that mimetic space. Morris' reliance on non-perspectival decorative motifs is rooted in his insistence that decoration is not merely a kind of surface ornamentation but rather central to full integration of the individual work of art with the built or decorated space in which it operates. Consciously, this non-mimetic aesthetic directly supports the expansion of right seeing by Morris's aesthetic as well as its relationship to the viewer.

At the same time, many of the formal, material elements of Morris's Arts and Crafts books are inherently non-representative, a-perspectival, and non-mimetic, and therefore challenge the notion that art is or can be mimetic of anything at all. Morris's attention to paper, inks, and layout as primary design elements of a decorated book prioritizes structural elements that do not, by their very nature, represent anything; they are what they are, and can be regarded as works of craftsmanship in their own right. The viewer must interpret form and function and decoration and design together as part of the interpretive process. Morris's aesthetic also challenges the notion that a textual work can be separated or distinguished in any way from its material instantiation. Morris's preference for a completely decorated book form of *The Earthly Paradise* and his lack of satisfaction with other iterations also foregrounds this idea that the text can and must be physical, non-mimetic, and ethically craftsmanlike.

In keeping with this model, *News from Nowhere* is a profoundly non-mimetic work of art that grounds the act of interpretation in the lived reading experience of the user as much as the reader's mimetic experience of Morris's utopian adventure. As much as *News from Nowhere*

wants the reader to follow Morris/Guest's meanderings around London and the Thames Valley, the novel simultaneously checks that impulse by drawing attention to its inability to create a fictional world in which the reader can immerse himself. At the conclusion of the novel, when the frames should resolve themselves and Morris/Guest returns to his home in Victorian Hammersmith, the reader is forced to reckon with the uncertain knowledge of the reality or even import of his own readerly experience of the world of the text. Not only does Guest question whether his experience was real, a dream, or some third experiential option, stating "I lay in my bed in my house at dingy Hammersmith [...] trying to consider if I was overwhelmed with despair at finding I had been dreaming a dream [...] Or indeed was it a dream? If so, why was I so conscious all along that I was really seeing all that new life from the outside, still wrapped up in [...] the distrust of this time of doubt and struggle?"⁵⁸ Additionally,

Ellen's last mournful look seemed to say, 'No, it will not do; you cannot be of us; you belong so entirely to the unhappiness of the past that our happiness even would weary you. Go back again, now you have seen us, and your outward eyes have learned that in spite of all the infallible maxims of your day there is yet a time of rest in store for the world, when mastery has changed into fellowship—but not before. [...] Go back and be the happier for having seen us, for having added a little hope to your struggle. Go on living while you may, striving, with whatsoever pain and labour needs must be, to build up little by little the new day of fellowship, and rest, and happiness.'⁵⁹

The text of *News from Nowhere* therefore sets itself up as an escapist ideal world that is unattainable in any lasting way for both the reader and for Guest and thus only has utopian potential with reference to the reader's immediate experience of reading the text. This same

⁵⁸ Morris, *News from Nowhere*, 304-05.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 305.

temporal logic drives *The Earthly Paradise*, which relies on the reader's experience within the calendrical work to arrive at a complete interpretation. Both *News from Nowhere* and *The Earthly Paradise* therefore leverage the interpretive experience of the user/reader to achieve the consolation of the present through the fellowship found in reading communities.

Morris's decorated books also reinforce the idea that the reader's interpretive activity remains distinct from and yet linked with that of the user of the material book. The reader's presence is indicated by Morris's attention to the reader within the text itself, as well as to the integration of the text with the reader-oriented verbal-visual elements of the decorated book, such as the font and layout. However, these two interpretive positions remain distinct and yet indistinguishable. Morris himself concedes that this results in heavily visual and physically oriented texts ill-suited to the tastes of the modern reader who "may say that you don't care for this result, that you wish to read literature and to look at pictures; and that so long as the modern book gives you these pleasures you ask no more of it; well, I can understand that, but you must pardon me if I say that your interest in books in that case is literary only, and not artistic, and that implies, I think, a partial crippling of the faculties; a misfortune which no one should be proud of."⁶⁰ The multimedia or multi-modal interpretation is an additional layer onto Morris's interpretive model, since as McGann notes, Morris's book designs are extraordinarily modern in their characterization of the text both as visual and verbal. Morris goes so far as to actively champion the inclusion of the "moral qualities" of order and meaning in the creation of applied

⁶⁰ Morris, "The Woodcuts of Gothic Books," 37.

arts.⁶¹ In his discussion of pattern-designing in his lecture “Hopes and Fears for Art,” Morris states that meaning is ‘the invention and imagination which forms the soul of art, [...] and which, when submitted to the bonds of order [or form], has a body and a visible existence.’⁶²

Prefiguring T.S. Eliot, Morris maintains that while this type of meaning “may have come down to us traditionally” through the larger artistic tradition in which the artist is participating, the artist must “at heart understand it [the traditional meaning of the pattern], or we can neither receive it, nor hand it down to our successors.”⁶³ For Morris, “it is no longer tradition if it is servilely copied, without change, the token of life.”⁶⁴ Additionally, Morris argues that as the artist, you “must not only mean something in your patterns, but must also be able to make others understand that meaning,” citing the ancient artists who, “in their own way [...] meant to tell us how the flowers grew in the gardens of Damascus, or how the hunt was up on the plains of Kirman, or how the tulips shone among the grass in the Mid-Persian valley, and how their souls delighted in it all, and what joy they had in life; nor did they fail to make their meaning clear to some of us.”⁶⁵ Thus Morris’s writings demonstrate his belief in the necessity of inherent, textual meaning within the work of art such as is traditionally discussed and interpreted, as well as his primary focus on the necessity of contextual meaning in the artistic process and the social power that this meaning can potentially exercise.

⁶¹ Morris, William. “Making the Best of It.” *Hopes and Fears for Art. The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 22. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 106.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 111.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 111-12.

The reader interprets both the verbal and visual elements of decorated book simultaneously, thereby emphasizing the book's hybrid generic form. The visual, printed instantiation of the text works in the same way as Morris's visual patternwork. The typeface and/or text itself functions as a kind of image because of its identity as a visual and physical element within the decorated book. The reader must therefore understand the text itself two ways, as both a symbolic form indicating the intangible text itself and as a material component of the work of art, with its own tradition, history, and craftsmanship behind it. This inseparable duality informs Morris's understanding of the distinction between reading and interpretation. For Morris, reading the text and the process of Arts and Crafts interpretive use are at the same time distinct and indistinguishable, or at least function as twin components of the interpretive process. While Wolfgang Iser intimates that the relationship between the reader and the text is analogous to musical composition, in which the text serves as a kind of score for the reader to play, expand upon, and participate in, Morris's utopias posit a much closer imaginative relationship between text and reader.⁶⁶ If reading the text is inseparable from visual art interpretation, then both text and image function in the same way; both are equivalent representational forms that require the user's integration and invite the reader's participation in the interpretive process. Morris's Kelmscott Press books are thus entirely predicated on this equivalent, reader/user-oriented hermeneutic presentation of text and image.

Finally, Morris's texts foreground the theoretical and practical import of Morris's relationship to the past, present, and future. Both *The Earthly Paradise* and *News from Nowhere*

⁶⁶ Iser, Wolfgang. *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1987. Print. 21.

thoroughly reveal that Morris's relationship to the past is not the idealized stereotype of much Morris scholarship. When Morris idealizes the medieval past, he does so only in as much as it enables him to demonstrate the socioeconomic flaws in the present. In his condemnation of Victorian architecture as a "self-conscious and very laborious eclecticism," which I noted in Chapter 2, Morris maintains that the composite nature of nineteenth-century design prevents Victorian architecture from being the truly organic expression of the society that produces it, in the way that both he and Ruskin interpret Gothic to function as an architectural style.⁶⁷ As much as Morris idealizes Gothic design as the embodiment and expression of the craftsman that produces it, Morris's idealization is rooted in his determination to use the example of what he regards as the more ethical past to produce an authentic, distinctive, and ethical Victorian architectural and artistic style. In "The Revival of Architecture," Morris maintains that just as

History taught us the evolution of architecture, it is now teaching us the evolution of society; and it is clear to us, and even to many who refuse to acknowledge it, that the society which is developing out of ours will not need or endure mechanical drudgery as the lot of the general population; that the new society will not be hag-ridden as we are by the necessity for producing ever more and more market-wares for a profit, whether any one needs them or not [...]. Under such conditions architecture, as part of the life of people in general, will again become possible, [...] and add so much to the pleasure of life that we shall wonder how people were able to live without it.⁶⁸

Following this argument, Morris's book designs rely on medieval models for the creation and generation of a truly authentic Victorian style of decorated books, and the extent of Morris's theoretical reliance on Gothic design is demonstrated by his persistent characterization of

⁶⁷ Morris, William. "The Revival of Architecture." *The Collected Works of William Morris*. Ed. May Morris. Vol. 22. New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1912. Print. 329.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 330.

Renaissance early printed texts as medieval or Gothic. In “The Woodcuts of Gothic Books,”

Morris introduces his magic lantern slides with precisely this argument, when he declares

I shall presently have the pleasure of showing you in some kind of sequence a number of illustrations taken from books of the fifteenth and first years of the sixteenth centuries. [...] Since the earliest of those I have to show is probably not earlier in date than about 1420, and almost all are more than fifty years later than that, it is clear that they belong to the latest period of Medieval art, and one or two must formally be referred to the earliest days of the Renaissance, though in spirit that [they] are still Gothic.⁶⁹

Morris is fudging his historical periods to make a broader argument about political economy. He continues by saying

the work, then, which I am about to show you has first the disadvantage of the rudeness likely to disfigure cheap forms of art in a time that lacked the resource of slippery plausibility which helps out cheap art at the present day, and secondly, the disadvantage of belonging to the old age rather than youth or vigorous manhood of the Middle Ages. On the other hand, it is art, and not a mere trade ‘article’ [...] so that it yet retains much of the qualities of the more hopeful period.⁷⁰

Therefore Morris wants his own book designs to be Gothic inasmuch as that style, by virtue of its means of production, gives him access to the more ethical socioeconomic system. Hence Morris’s Kelmscott Press is always discussed in terms of Morris’s attempt to create a lasting creative legacy in printing through his books’ reliance on Morris’s Gothic and medieval models for both the formal elements of their design as well as their means of production.

Morris wants a better, fairer, more ethical society in the future but openly demonstrates the inability to access the future. Morris’s aesthetic thus sets up the primacy of the individual user/reader’s relationship to the present. In terms of Morris’s aesthetic, craftsman space and time

⁶⁹ Morris, “The Woodcuts of Gothic Books,” 25.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

are only accessible through the revolutionary power of the juxtaposition of past and present, and the current flawed present is thus the key to true revolutionary change. Similarly, the interpretive act of reading is only possible in the present moment, and that experience of the present has immediate import for Morris's craftsman model of interpretation. Reading in Kelmscott terms is the actual act of juxtaposing text composed, printed, and decorated in the past, however immediate that past may be, as experienced by the reader's engagement in the moment. Reading thus also actualizes past and present in Benjaminian terms, and Morris states as much when he argues that

an opening of Schoeffer's 1462 Bible [may be] beautiful, even when it has neither been illuminated nor rubricated; the same may be said of [...] Jenson, or, in short, of any of the *good* old printers; their works, without any further ornament than they derived from the design and arrangement of the letters were definite works of art. In fact a book, printed or written, has a tendency to be a beautiful object, and that we of this age should generally produce ugly books, shows, I fear, something like malice prepense - a determination to put our eyes in our pockets wherever we can.⁷¹

Morris is less concerned with replicating medieval or Renaissance models and more concerned with creating his own style that is rooted in the present, while looking to the past to bring hope for the future. Morris's later unfinished Kelmscott designs, and the planned edition of Froissart in particular, demonstrate the extent to which he is pushing against those medieval models in a heavily sophisticated extension of the style developed for the *Chaucer*. While the Kelmscott Press decorations are defined by the clear delineation of the proportional margin, these later designs feature decorative patterns that break through the borders of the frames and margins. In addition, Morris intended to increase the number of colors used from two to three, although "the

⁷¹ Morris, "The Ideal Book," 67.

project of two-color letters printed from double blocks was never carried out by him in these or any of the other Kelmscott Press books, though several designs in red and blue were made by him for that purpose.”⁷²

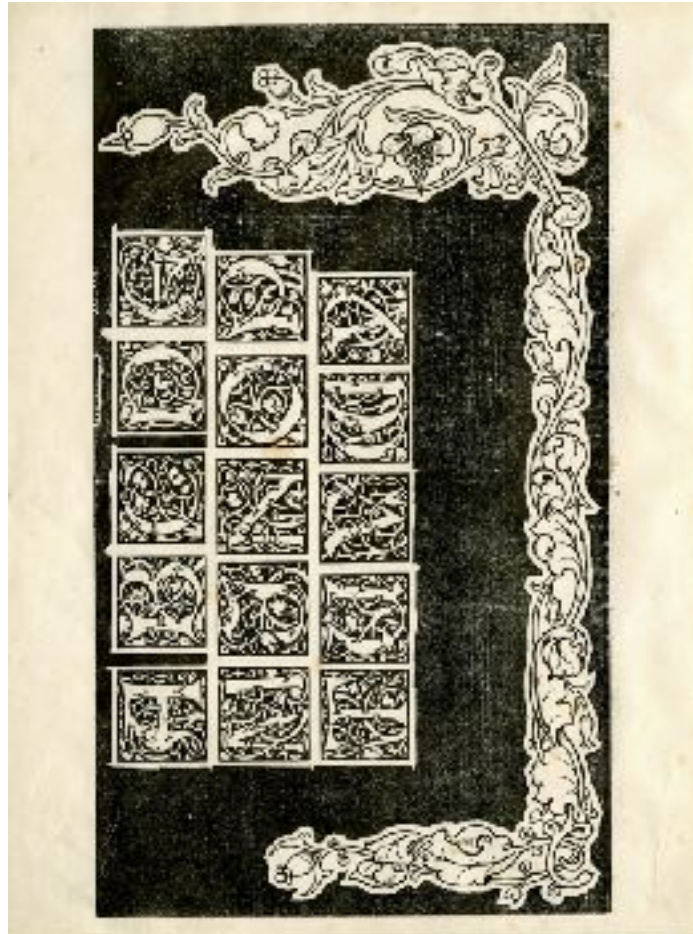


Figure 21. Print from bound volume of forty-six proofs of woodcuts, printed from blocks designed by William Morris for the Kelmscott Press. 1897-98, British Museum, London. *British Museum*.

This expansion of his style effectively further conflates the distinctive functions and positions of illustration and decoration and text. Reading time and craftsman time together thus both involve the reader/user of the material book.

⁷² Mackail, J. W. *The Life of William Morris*. Vol. 2. London: Longmans Green & Co., 1899. Print. 284.

The Paradoxical Consolation of Failed Utopias

Through their integration of the reader, Morris's decorated books both embody and enact the unresolved tension at the heart of both Morris's works and his aesthetic model between the necessary pursuit of an architectural socioeconomic utopia and the impossibility of attaining it. On the one hand, Morris's aesthetic presents the reading process as a means of building community and reconciling the reader to the flawed world of the present; this position is at odds with the optimistic activity of the user and the work of art also posited by Morris's interpretive model. *The Earthly Paradise* embodies this tension through its material form, as well as its serial publication and its distinct identity as unfinished decorated book. Moreover, the content of the material book is predicated on the pursuit of utopia in the present moment as a consolation for the lived experience of a flawed socioeconomic system. Simultaneously, the form of the material book actualizes its revolutionary capacity by means of its identity as a non-fetishized handcrafted object, and these two positions are arguably irreconcilable. In the same paradoxical way, Morris's interpretive aesthetic does not clearly indicate that the work of art, conceived of in architectural terms, has any independent agency at all. Rather, Morris's insistence on the user's integration with the material object approaches and prefigures the kinds of arguments posited by contemporary interface theorists and digital humanists. Just as the work of theorists such as Branden Hookway⁷³ and Kimon Keramidas⁷⁴ acknowledges the role of the material object as a relational one that serves to frame the user's interpretation, Morris's aesthetic is as predicated on

⁷³ Hookway, Branden. *Interface*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014. Print.

⁷⁴ Keramidas, Kimon. *The Interface Experience: A User's Guide*. Bard Graduate Center, 2015. Print.

the necessary engagement of the user/reader with the material object as it is dependent on the individual operation of that material object as a force for socioeconomic change. By this reasoning, the interface, the interpretation, and indeed the work of art itself only arises out of the material and mimetic space in which the work of art is used.

The Earthly Paradise enacts this tension through the reader's engagement with the material text. The reader cannot engage with Morris's 1860s decorated edition of *The Earthly Paradise* because it does not exist. In fact, Morris would pursue that particular decorated book, as well as his craftsman ideal, in spite of its unfinished nature and eventual unattainability. However, in its completed form, Morris's initial decorated edition would have functioned much like the later Kelmscott edition of *News from Nowhere*. In both books, the material text operates independently and functions in a revolutionary manner by disrupting the commodity system, while at the same time, the reader reads the material text. Additionally, Morris's individual frame stories are in no small part characterized by their escapist quality, and it is this escapism that defines Pater's review of *The Earthly Paradise*, while it later informed modernist criticism of "Morris's dream visions as facile escapism."⁷⁵ The message of *The Earthly Paradise* to the reader is conveyed through the frame story as well as through the experience of the Wanderers and Elders, and in the process, the reader's activity thus creates a real-world parallel to the Wanderers and Elders's communal experience of narrative. The reader's engagement with the text therefore sets up this tension: the reader cannot attain the earthly paradise, but through the

⁷⁵ Weinroth, Michelle. *To Build a Shadowy Isle of Bliss: William Morris's Radicalism and the Embodiment of Dreams*. Ed. Michelle Weinroth and Paul Leduc Browne. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015. Print. 4.

act of reading, the reader can attempt to create a paradise of consolation, fellowship, and community. Therefore, the reader must reconcile or at least hold these two positions in tension as part of interpretation. *The Earthly Paradise* is thus predicated on the necessary pursuit of both goals in spite of the difficulty and unresolvable nature of this interpretive tension.

The frontispiece for the Kelmscott Press *News from Nowhere* demonstrates this tension by juxtaposing Morris's house in the Victorian present with the idealized medieval-inspired book design and thematic content of the textual utopia. *News from Nowhere* overtly presents this tension, since throughout the text, Morris/Guest articulates the relationship between past, present, and future for the reader. As he is being pulled back from utopian Oxfordshire into the nineteenth-century present, Guest leaves what he acknowledges to be an unattainable future and exhorts the reader to work for change in the present in spite of, as much as in light of, their shared experience. The act of reading is thus an act of consolation, an act that attempts to mitigate the impossibility of attaining utopia through either revolutionary politics or art. The book, as a heavily personal, more intimate reading experience locates that flawed revolutionary potential in the reader's hands and in the reader's responsibility. *News from Nowhere* is designed to make the reader see, but not to have the reader become. The reader, like Guest, only has a limited experience of utopia, and that experience, rather surprisingly, carries with it no implicit understanding of how one might then live. When Guest finds himself transported back to his own house in Hammersmith, he questions whether or not his experience "indeed was [...] a dream?" and, via Ellen, acknowledges the limitations of the reading experience of utopia.⁷⁶ For all of

⁷⁶ *News from Nowhere*, 305.

News from Nowhere's detailed historical specificity and determination to map out a historical timeline of how the revolution would eventually resolve into a just, socialist, anti-capitalist society, there is no expectation of that revolution actually occurring.

At the same time, that experience of utopia brought about by reading is similarly limited to what the text itself provides. *News from Nowhere* is predicated on bridging that experiential gap through narration, and the reader's own somewhat hampered personal experience with the utopian world reflects the structural limitations of the reader apart from the decorated book to operate in and to change capitalist society. This lack of transformative experience in *News from Nowhere* distances the reader from the utopia of the text. In terms of art interpretation, linear perspective separates the reader from the work of art, since the perspectival model holds the viewer at a distance at the same time as the viewer is involved in the interpretive space of the work of art. Therefore, the reader can neither experience nor replicate the utopia of the future in the present through either the act of reading or through his physical engagement with the material book.

This juxtaposition of the impossible and entirely attainable stands at the heart of Morris's entire *oeuvre* as well as his interpretive model. Morris's body of craftsmanship attempts to disrupt commodity structures to create socioeconomic improvement, and at the same time, Morris openly acknowledges the failure of craftsmanship to accomplish this goal. While the theoretical framing of Morris's aesthetic model posits that the independent handcrafted work of art has the capacity to disrupt the virtual network of fetishized commodities as a means of creating craftsman space, and at the same time open up a new kind of craftsman time, Morris's

book designs demonstrate the extent to which his aesthetic simultaneously acknowledges the inevitable failure of that handcrafted object to accomplish any wider revolutionary socioeconomic change. The reader of *News from Nowhere* will inevitably fail to achieve a utopian society, since the reader is unable to access the utopia the text presents, yet at the same time the reader remains immersed in the utopia of the text through the reading process. The material text itself, as a handcrafted work of art, similarly fails to attain any craftsman utopian goal, and yet it nonetheless effectively disrupts commodity networks to create revolutionary built environments through juxtaposition of past and present. At the same time it cannot sufficiently disrupt commodity structures to generate wider socioeconomic change. Morris's book designs therefore expand Morris's aesthetic to incorporate the reader and the text into his material, craftsman aesthetic, and in the process reveal the underlying tension and even paradox at the heart of Morris's craftsman model of interpretation.

This paradox of the effectual and ultimately ineffective directly illuminates the relationship between Morris's utopia and space and time as it relates to *News from Nowhere*. The reader/user remains unable to access anything but the immediate present, and the fact that the reader is caught by this tension refocuses Morris's entire craftsman aesthetic on the present moment. For Morris, the utopian present is not necessarily the transformative, revolutionary present of the craftsman-created work of art, but it reveals Morris's own emphasis on the necessary involvement of the individual. Nor does Morris's utopian ideal exist in an idealized past; as I discussed in Chapter 2, Morris is uninterested in the past as a country to revisit or to replicate. Similarly, Morris's theory and practice stand apart from an idealized future that may

never come to pass; rather, Morris wants to set up an alternative future as an inspiration and a model for the individual's activity in the present. Morris is therefore preoccupied with the past as a way of remaking the present in the image of the present, with inspiration from both past and future. In this way, utopia is for Morris something that can be made and experienced in the present through craftsmanship and interpretation of material and textual works of art, but never perfectly achieved or captured.

Therefore, a central message of Morris's materialist aesthetic is the pursuit of utopia in communities of consolation and friendship in spite of the failed utopia of the moment. These communities also function paradoxically, and even dialectically, the same way that the Kelmscott Press failed. The press would inevitably both fail and succeed in line with this inherent tension, and Morris knew it would. Given Morris's open frustration in "ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich," and his corresponding recognition that his life's work would never achieve the socialist utopia he had once hoped to see in his own lifetime, there is little evidence to suggest that Morris believed the Kelmscott Press would be a departure from this pattern.⁷⁷ That said, the Kelmscott Press did succeed in achieving craftsman utopias on two levels: it made pocket cathedrals that independently disrupted commodity systems and also generated creative communities through the process of reading. At the same time, the Kelmscott Press failed to catalyze the generation of a utopian society on the basis of ethical craftsmanship, and yet it simultaneously generated interpretive reading communities that function as utopias through the reader's juxtaposition of past and present. However, it was Morris's own acceptance of that

⁷⁷ Morris qtd. in MacCarthy, Fiona. *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994. Print. 210.

inevitable failure that made the Kelmscott Press a roaring success. Thus for Morris, the act of reading is situated at the intersection of failed utopias and is also the generative source of a true utopia through the community-building of the reading process.

***News from Nowhere* and Morris's Materialist Aesthetic**

The frontispiece illustration to *News from Nowhere* therefore stands as a recognition of this nearly paradoxical nature of Morris's materialist aesthetic and as an exemplar and a testament to the necessary pursuit of interpretive craftsman utopias. First and foremost, the illustration is a testament to the paradox at the heart of Morris's interpretive model since its idealized portrayal of Morris's beloved real-life Kelmscott Manor directly participates in Morris's concept of a utopian landscape and built environment. The image presents the house and its grounds in heavily idealized visual terms, and the house itself appears as inviting as it is cosy, an idea which is conveyed as much by the beauty and tranquility of the setting as by the tight, even compressed verticality of the image. The illustration is also defined by strong vertical lines, from the tall corners of the right hand wing of the house to the peaked roof, which are complemented by roses and vines which stretch toward the sky with a vibrancy matched only by the energy of Morris's swirling acanthus border. As much as the reader's eye is drawn upward it is also drawn inward along the path to the small front door, the shading of which brings to mind the contrast between brilliant, warm sunshine and tranquil, shaded rest. The text does not fill the entire opening underneath the illustration; instead, the dark leaf, as textual ornament, pushes the first letter of the text "This" to align with the left side of the path, while the angle of the leaf itself points down the edge of the pathway, acting as a visual guide for the reader into the image

above and into the text below. The lines of text are as much a visual pathway for the reader as the path in the illustration itself, while the decorative elements emphasize the extent to which text and image work together both architecturally and aesthetically to create a harmonious composite work of art. This idealized portrayal of the building and its grounds ensures that the door becomes as much the low door in the garden wall as the modest entryway to a fine country house, and reinforces Morris's utopian architectural ideal for the built, domestic environment.

The reader's welcome into the utopia of the novel and of the decorated book is firmly established by the illustration's striking reliance on linear perspective. This use of perspectival forms is arguably unique among Kelmscott Press designs, since, as I discuss in Chapter 2, Morris largely eschewed linear perspective as being incompatible with his Arts and Crafts principles. Here, Gere's illustration appears to rely on the geometric alignment of reader, image, and artist's visual perspective for its success, and it draws the viewer along the path, both literally and interpretively. The layering of text and image within the decorated page also functions as much in terms of traditional illustration as it does in terms of right seeing as an interpretive model. The reader is thus invited to participate through the visual alignment of text, image, and decoration, all of which which structurally, aesthetically, and interpretively rely on the reader/viewer/user to handle and visually interpret the composite image within the illustrated book.

For as much as the decorated page depends on perspectival realism to make the utopia of the illustration accessible to the reader, in keeping with the paradoxical nature of Morris's aesthetic model, this utopia is ultimately unattainable either within the confines of the text or through its interpretive extension into the real world of the reader's lived experience. The

dramatic use of linear perspective that at first appears to draw the viewer into the world of the image is not actually aligned with the center of the viewer's visual field, since the doorway recedes along a vanishing point to the left of the picture. Like the oscillating viewer in Foucault's reading of *Las Meninas*, the viewer of Gere's illustration must tilt his head to see along the pathway towards the door of the house and thus only arrive at moments of the unified visual alignment that generates the mimetic interpretive experience.⁷⁸ Paradoxically then, in keeping with Morris's aesthetic model, the reader both can and cannot employ the geometric interpretive model. In addition, Morris's decorative borders and inclusion of text control and constrain the perspectival image within a decidedly non-perspectival field of decoration and text on the page, thereby further moving the image outside the perspectival field.

Since the reader of *News from Nowhere* cannot achieve the utopian ideal posited by the idealized world of the illustration, the viewer/reader finds consolation through interpretive communities, and in keeping with Morris's reliance on frame stories, the illustration also functions on three narrative levels. On one level, the house is in fact an image of Morris's own Kelmscott Manor, which he shared for a time with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and after which he named both the Kelmscott Press and his home in Hammersmith, Kelmscott House. However, the text that accompanies the illustration declares it to be "the picture of the old house by the Thames to which the people of this story went."⁷⁹ The picture illustrates the setting of the novel's final scenes and of the house that lies at the very heart of *News from Nowhere*, and yet the text which

⁷⁸ Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. Print.

⁷⁹ Morris, *News from Nowhere*, 1.

accompanies it points to a third narrative of sorts, that of the direct address of the volume to the reader. In addition to the frame structure of the novel itself, the illustration works on three narrative levels: that of the reader's engagement with the text, Morris's real-world pursuit of his architectural aesthetic ideals, and the novel itself. At the same time, the image lies at both the beginning and the end of the narrative, allowing access to the world of the novel while prefiguring the climactic treatment of domesticity, creative and pleasurable labor, and community in the novel's final scenes. This complex series of interlocking frame structures effectively focuses the reader's interpretive reading time and enables the reader to participate in the communities afforded through the structure of the text, being at turns a part of the utopian society of Guest's dream vision, the contemporary fictional world of Morris's Victorian London, and the real-life experience of Morris's Kelmscott Manor.

In keeping with Morris's aesthetic model, Gere's illustration is thus a recognition of and testament to the necessary pursuit of utopia, since it both invites and requires the reader's participation to generate a utopian ideal. The viewer must and can follow its perspectival form to access the utopian world of the novel, but is thwarted at the outset by its visually and thematically offset nature. Further, the illustration's position as part of the decorated edition of *News from Nowhere* extends that hermeneutic, utopian potential by means of Morris's aesthetic model of interpretive use. In this way, the utopia of Kelmscott House remains as inaccessible for the reader as it is for William Guest at the end of the novel, who visits the house only to have it slip away as his dream vision ends.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE POCKET CATHEDRAL: THE KELMSCOTT *CHAUCER* AND MORRIS'S ARTS AND CRAFTS AESTHETIC

This dissertation began as an effort to define what Jerome McGann calls William Morris's materialist aesthetic, and in the process, to unite or reframe the often-disparate threads of Morris scholarship in terms of Morris's own understanding of the nature and function of the work of art.¹ The previous three chapters have contextualized Morris's contribution to the development of Victorian interpretation, isolated his views of the economic and social potential of Arts and Crafts production, discussed his characterization of architecture as the fullest expression of applied design and craftsmanship, and evaluated his aesthetic model in terms of his designs for decorated books. In the Kelmscott *Chaucer* all of these aspects of Morris's materialist aesthetic come together.

Given the *Chaucer's* reputation as the culmination of Morris's skills as a craftsman and designer, *Chaucer* criticism remains somewhat less diffuse than other aspects of Morris scholarship in its focus on the economics of its striking designs and on their implications for the reader. Diana Archibald's study maintains that Morris's *Chaucer* designs fail to achieve his own ideals on nearly every front: namely, by not matching the designs to the text that the decoration presents, by not doing justice to the multiplicity of voices that defines Geoffrey

¹ McGann, Jerome. "A Thing to Mind": The Materialist Aesthetic of William Morris." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 55.1 (Winter 1992): 55-74. *JSTOR*. Accessed 25 November 2017.

Chaucer's body of work, and by creating a book that is as unreadable as it is economically inaccessible to most readers.² Jessica DeSpain directly counters Archibald's critique by arguing that the *Chaucer's* rarity and inaccessibility effectively pulls the reader into an Arts and Crafts world that critiques nineteenth-century "commercial systems."³ Richard Pearson responds to DeSpain's emphasis on the *Chaucer's* Arts and Crafts production with a detailed reading of its frames and borders as sites of interruption, which for Pearson allow for the "simultaneous recognition of difference and desire for unification" of the imaginative reader with Chaucer's medieval world.⁴ Intriguingly, Pearson concludes his discussion with the statement that by reading the *Chaucer*, "We, as reader, are like the workman for whom interruption is a key element in creativity and personal betterment."⁵ Pearson's analogy of the reader as workman directly supports my own contention that the *Chaucer's* hermeneutic complexity can best be understood in terms of Morris's materialist, craftsman aesthetic. To that end, this chapter offers a reading of the Kelmscott *Chaucer* as an interpretive interface for the reader with the potential to benefit the reader, the society in which it operates, and the architectural environment of which it is a part, and this chapter concludes by drawing on Morris's aesthetic of creative craftsmanship as a means of theorizing the relationship between text, image, and reader.

² Archibald, Diana. "Beauty, Unity and the Ideal: Wholeness and Heterogeneity in the Kelmscott *Chaucer*." *Studies in Medievalism* VII (1995): 169-180. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 Jan. 2018.

³ DeSpain, Jessica. "A Book Arts Pilgrimage: Arts and Crafts Socialism and the Kelmscott *Chaucer*." *Journal of the William Morris Society* 15.4 (2004): 74-90. *JSTOR*. 25 November 2017. 82-84.

⁴ Pearson, Richard. "William Morris Interrupted Interrupting Chaucer." *Chaucer's Poetry: Words, Authority and Ethics*. Ed. Clíodhna Carney and Frances McCormack. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013. Print. 159.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

The Kelmscott Chaucer as a Work of Craftsmanship

The design of the Kelmscott *Chaucer* stands as one of the most complete expressions of Morris's Arts and Crafts aesthetic and epitomizes Morris's hopes and aims for the artistic potential of book designs. As such, the Kelmscott *Chaucer* is first and foremost a work of collaborative craftsmanship. Perhaps the most influential relationship on the production of the Kelmscott *Chaucer* was Morris's and Burne-Jones's lifelong affection for Geoffrey Chaucer's works. Morris's own interest in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century romance literature saw him draw on Chaucer's own continental sources for his early *Defense of Guenevere*, while *The Canterbury Tales* itself also informed the structure of Morris's monumental *The Earthly Paradise*. Similarly, Burne-Jones called on many of Chaucer's stories for early designs for stained glass windows, embroideries, and furniture for Morris & Co., from *The Prioress's Tale* to *The Legend of Good Women*.⁶ Consequently, William S. Peterson credibly claims that for both men, "*The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* represents the culmination of [...their] lifelong search for the Ideal Book; it is the kind of book that he and Burne-Jones dreamed of creating when they were undergraduates and that they attempted unsuccessfully to produce during the 1860s and 1870s: 'it should have come out when Morris and I were at Oxford during our first term,' Burne-Jones wrote, 'and we should have lost our senses with bliss.'"⁷ For Morris and Burne-Jones, this affection for Chaucer's poetry self-consciously informed their determination to produce a decorated folio edition. Both men were at the zenith of their careers in the 1890s, and despite

⁶ Ellis, Steve. *Chaucer at Large: The Poet in the Modern Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. Print. 5.

⁷ Peterson, William. *The Kelmscott Press: A History of William Morris's Typographical Adventure*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. Print. 257.

changing artistic tastes concomitant with the rise of aestheticism, impressionism, and Art Nouveau, their work remained in high demand. While Morris's health was beginning to fail, he reduced his commitments with Morris & Co to ensure that his many other creative outlets did not detract from what he considered to be his primary interest at the Kelmscott Press, so much so that "the last few years of his life were occupied almost constantly with the Kelmscott *Chaucer*" from its inception in 1891 to its completion in May 1896.⁸

The *Chaucer*'s collaborative production history is subject to the same Ruskinian critique of Morris's businesses as Morris & Co. before it. The *Chaucer*, like all Kelmscott Press books, demonstrates the creative influences of all Morris's collaborators at the press, and Fiona McCarthy rightly notes that "Morris did not work in solitary grandeur. The masterpieces of his last decade in fact are collaborative work, the logical development of the ideas of communal art that began with Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, & Co."⁹ In addition to a small number of printers, the Kelmscott Press was staffed by many of Morris's longtime colleagues, including John Henry Dearle and Emery Walker, whose influence on and collaboration with Morris is addressed in Chapter 3. Despite Morris's failure to give the workmen the same kind of creative liberty that Morris and Ruskin lauded, Morris nonetheless attempted to achieve his ideals as much as was possible

within the limits of what Morris considered commercial feasibility [...]. The workmen were [...] conscious of Morris's ideal that a man 'should be a workman in the best sense of the word; that he should take a high interest in his work [..., use] the very best

⁸ MacCarthy, Fiona. *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994. Print. 647.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 646.

materials; and should not be harried in his work by the everlasting thought of how the job was to pay him'. Morris had the generosity to give his workmen *time* to do the job to the best of their abilities.¹⁰

Although the *Chaucer* bears all the evidence of Morris's community of craftsmen, the volume's iconic illustrations demonstrate the extent to which Burne-Jones served as Morris's primary collaborative influence. From the Press's initial founding, Morris had difficulty finding illustrators capable of achieving a style that would harmonize with his distinctive decorations, and while he did draw on artists such as Charles M. Gere and Arthur Gaskin from the Birmingham school for other Kelmscott Press books, his dissatisfaction with their styles, however successful their images were as Arts and Crafts illustrations, led to his collaboration with Burne-Jones for the *Chaucer* illustrations.¹¹ Burne-Jones's own enthusiasm for the project was such that

Emery Walker claimed, in a later lecture on Morris, that the number of illustrations continued to grow as long as the volume was in production: 'When the book was printed, no one, not even Burne-Jones, knew how many pictures there were in it. He had gone on putting in as many as he liked, knowing that the more he drew the better Morris would be pleased. If the artist liked the story particularly, then he did more pictures.'¹²

In the end, Burne-Jones confined himself to eighty-seven illustrations, many of which draw from his previous body of work. The most notable of these borrowings is Burne-Jones's dramatic illustrations to *The Prioress's Tale*, a subject he would return to in a watercolor in 1898, and which directly expanded on his 1859 depiction of the climactic scene on a painted

¹⁰ Ibid., 622.

¹¹ Peterson, 157-58.

¹² Ibid., 247.

wardrobe.¹³ The wardrobe, which not incidentally was a wedding present for Morris, shows Mary placing the grain upon the young boy's tongue. In the later Kelmscott illustration, she is surrounded not merely by a traditional golden halo, but also by a massive aura, the shape of which owes as much to the Art Nouveau whiplash shape pioneered by "Arthur H. Mackmurdo's cover of his book on *Wren's City Churches*" as it does to stalks of grain, which is perhaps a nod to the miraculous vehicle by which she restores the boy's voice.¹⁴ In addition to illustrating subjects and scenes that were creative touchstones for his wider career, from *The Canterbury Tales* illustrations through to the cityscapes of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Burne-Jones also relied on various motifs and stylistic echoes of his earlier work, borrowing groupings of flowers, thorns, gardens, figures, and even entire cityscapes from his work in tapestry, tile, and painting. Burne-Jones's unique style permeates every illustration, so much so that the combined lapidary, Venetian, Byzantine, Romanesque, and Renaissance influences on the illustrations to Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophie* and *The Hous of Fame* Books I and II can be understood as an entrenchment, rather than an expansion, of his earlier work. The *Chaucer* illustrations can therefore rightly be regarded as a culmination of Burne-Jones's entire career in the same way that Morris's decorated pages have come to be understood as the zenith of his design work.

Despite his dramatically successful incorporation of tradition and innovation within the illustrations, Burne-Jones expressed reservations about his style's effect upon Chaucer's texts. In letters and recorded conversations Burne-Jones "[wondered] if Chaucer were alive now, or is

¹³ Ibid., 248.

¹⁴ Pevsner, Nikolaus. *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius*. Penguin Books, 1936. Print. 90.

aware of what is going on, whether he'd be satisfied with my pictures to his book or whether he'd prefer impressionist ones I don't trust him. And if he and Morris were to meet in heaven, I wonder if they'd quarrel."¹⁵ Burne-Jones's mention of impressionism reveals his own anxiety about wider changes in artistic taste towards the end of his career, but these comments also demonstrate his recognition of the distance that exists between Chaucer's complex depiction of medieval culture and Burne-Jones's own deployment of Renaissance ideals of beauty within a Byzantine decorative mode. Moreover, there appears to have been some stylistic differences between Morris and Burne-Jones over the stories Burne-Jones chose to illustrate, which manifested itself in Morris's apparent desire, however playfully expressed, for "Ned to provide graphic equivalents of Chaucer's bawdy: 'especially', Ned wrote to Swinburne, 'he had hopes of my treatment of the Miller's Tale'. But Burne-Jones was adamant in resisting these entreaties, maintaining that Morris 'ever had more robust and daring parts' than he did."¹⁶ Burne-Jones's decision to not illustrate any of the more colorful stories was also recorded in a conversation with his studio assistant Thomas Rooke: "[Rooke:] It's so good that you've ignored the base stories in Chaucer and done no pictures to them. [...] [Burne-Jones:] I'd like to pretend Chaucer didn't do them. Besides, pictures to them would have spoiled the book. You don't want funny pictures either. Pictures are too good to be funny. Literature's good enough for that."¹⁷ Critical opinion remains somewhat divided as to whether there remained any disagreement or artistic tension

¹⁵ MacCarthy, 648.

¹⁶ MacCarthy, 648.

¹⁷ Burne-Jones, Sir Edward Coley. *Burne-Jones Talking: His Conversations: 1895-1898, preserved by his studio assistant Thomas Rooke*. Ed. Mary Lago. London: John Murray, 1982. Print. 68-69.

between Morris and Burne-Jones regarding these stylistic differences, and recent studies have attempted to take a more nuanced reading of Morris's enthusiasm for *The Miller's Tale*. Steve Ellis rightly claims that "there is very little evidence that Morris went to Chaucer's poetry for things other than those emphasized by Burne-Jones, however tempting it might be to link the robustness and 'sturdiness' of his own person with similar Chaucerian features."¹⁸ Either way, these scholarly distinctions likely originate in Morris's longstanding resistance to Burne-Jones's overt classicism, which was a tension that marked their collaboration long before the *Chaucer* and indeed which informed their entire careers. In the *Chaucer*, however, Morris's northern style and Burne-Jones's adaptation of southern European traditions meld together in the best way since Morris's analogous unification of myth and legend in *The Earthly Paradise*, thereby providing a uniquely Arts and Crafts perspective on Chaucer's poetry and prose.

While Morris's collaborative ethic defines the design of the Kelmscott *Chaucer*, Chaucer's own text functions as a significant and complementary influence on the volume, albeit one that is not often thoroughly discussed in reference to the Kelmscott edition, outside of editorial and textual studies of Chaucer's work. However, textual accuracy and quality was of particular interest to Morris and his collaborators, and Morris exerted great effort to secure permission to use the best available edition at the time, which was W.W. Skeat's then-forthcoming edition of Chaucer's collected works. Despite the fact that *The Canterbury Tales* has not been out of print since Caxton, only in the mid-nineteenth century with the rise of scholarly editing was there any

¹⁸ Ellis, 4.

serious attempt to use manuscript evidence as a basis for establishing texts [...]. Thus when Skeat undertook the preparation, for the first time in the history of Chaucer's text, of a complete works, he began a task of daunting complexity, a task for which the past afforded little practical help and much accumulated error. His achievement was to provide a series of authoritative texts and supporting apparatus that have become the foundations of most of the subsequent editorial work on Chaucer.¹⁹

The influence which Skeat's edition has upon the *Chaucer* itself is largely due to the reputation that the edition very quickly enjoyed. As Charles LaPorte notes, Morris's editorial decision to present Skeat's text without Skeat's apparatus and commentary had the effect of unintentionally eliding much of the complex textual history of Chaucer's many works.²⁰ While I discuss the effects of this decision on the Chaucer's design later in this chapter, it is worth noting here that the absence of Skeat's commentary, coupled with the edition's textual authority and sense of canonical completeness, went a long way towards establishing the authoritative effect of the Kelmscott edition and Chaucer's twentieth-century reputation.

In the hopes of making well-designed books the norm, Morris intended that craftsman-created Kelmscott Press books stand as an exemplar for the publishing industry. Despite the wider textual legacy of the Kelmscott *Chaucer*, its subsequent influence on book design and printing standards has been limited because of its identity as a costly, limited-run work of art, created under working conditions that fell short of Ruskin's ideal of creative labor. The *Chaucer* remains problematic for Morris's socialism, in the same way that Morris & Co. goods were priced out of the range of the working class. While the volume remains beloved by bibliophiles

¹⁹ Edwards, A.S.G. "Walter Skeat (1835-1912)." *Editing Chaucer: The Great Tradition*. Ed. Paul G. Ruggiers. Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1984. Print. 171.

²⁰ LaPorte, Charles. "Morris's Compromises: On Victorian Editorial Theory and the Kelmscott Chaucer." *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris*. Ed. David Latham. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. Print. 210.

and art historians alike, so much so that Peterson notes that “even in the second half of the twentieth century there is still a tendency to abandon all rhetorical restraint when discussing the Kelmscott *Chaucer*,” this outsize enthusiasm for and against the *Chaucer* is rooted in its correspondingly outsize design.²¹ Even in 1896, the folio *Chaucer* was a prohibitively expensive art object for most book lovers, much less ordinary readers, since the 425 paper copies of the *Chaucer* sold for £20 each, and as Peterson states, “that price was rising among the dealers and booksellers before it was published; the thirteen vellum copies went for 120 guineas each.”²² Morris’s pigskin binding cost an additional £13.²³ Although the price and therefore class distinction indicated by charging guineas instead of pounds for vellum copies was perhaps not lost on Morris’s sense of economic justice, there is little evidence that Morris hesitated to charge his customers as much as he did for this elaborate work of art. Morris increased the print run from 325 to 425 in a failed effort to support the *Chaucer*’s rising cost to print, but the price of the *Chaucer* remained high enough that J.M. Dent quickly moved to publish a low-cost edition of *Le Morte D’Arthur*, and Beardsley’s illustrations were commissioned to meet the existing popular demand for accessibly priced yet lavishly illustrated art books of medieval texts created by Kelmscott books. As is the case with all Morris & Co. goods, the *Chaucer*’s adherence to Morris’s Arts and Crafts design principles is not necessarily enough to remove it from the virtual network of fetishized commodities that Morris’s aesthetic model implicitly critiques or to circumvent the ethical pitfalls and fractured relationships caused by a capitalist society.

²¹ Peterson, 229.

²² *Ibid.*, 253.

²³ *Ibid.*

This tension between the possible and the unattainable is definitive of every aspect of Morris's aesthetic model. In the case of the *Chaucer*, the economy of luxury printing reveals yet another means by which Morris hoped to generate socioeconomic change, if only by example. Peterson notes that Morris's publishers functioned more as distributors than publishers in the traditional sense of the term, since they distributed and coordinated sales of the books that the Kelmscott Press was publishing. Throughout the entire Kelmscott Press venture, Morris repeatedly ran into conflict with his publishers because they were undercutting the press's own sales by selling the books for what the market would bear rather than Morris's asking prices and even speculated in Kelmscott books before they were published. Morris quickly became "eager to replace, as much as possible, the middlemen between the craftsman and his customers."²⁴ While Morris's desire to deal directly with readers is to a certain extent prefigured by Ruskin's own conflict with his publishers over *Fors Clavigera*,²⁵ Morris's move to restore the relationship between printer and reader is consistent with his desire to reestablish the social relationships among individuals and not only among craftsman-created objects, which I discussed in Chapter 2. By enabling his customers to purchase directly from the craftsman at the Kelmscott Press, Morris used a business model that was "not just a matter of a new approach to the meaning of the making of the book. More importantly this was a new concept of a press as a community with a life and a creative volition of its own."²⁶ Although Morris is rightly considered a pioneer for the

²⁴ Ibid., 190.

²⁵ Stoddart, Judith. *Ruskin's Culture Wars: Fors Clavigera and the Crisis of Victorian Liberalism*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998. Print. 17.

²⁶ MacCarthy, 624.

private press movement, Kelmscott was not a private press by any definition of the term. The Kelmscott Press was a publishing house in its own right, since Morris willingly took commissions to print books, most notably a book of poetry by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, and unsurprisingly, given Morris's business acumen, the Kelmscott Press was a highly profitable enterprise, so much so that Morris subsidized the massive *Chaucer* with profits from other Kelmscott books.²⁷ For Morris and his collaborators, the Kelmscott *Chaucer* was an extremely personal work of art, but it was not meant for private consumption and was sold, as intended, directly to the wider public, even if that public was inevitably a moneyed one.

The Kelmscott *Chaucer* as an Architectural Decorated Book

For all of its lavish decoration, the *Chaucer* is, however paradoxically, the apotheosis of Morris's insistence on quality, clarity, and legibility as the hallmark of the well-designed book. In keeping with Morris's principles, the *Chaucer*'s legibility and clarity is rooted in its primary elements of type, papers, and layout. Morris's inks were of particular interest, since he had considerable difficulty sourcing a pure black color of sufficient darkness and richness to support the bold visual density of his planned decorations, but he had to cast an even wider net to find a handmade, high-quality paper, free of chemical bleaching and additives. More dramatically, for a long time Morris could not find a vellum supplier in Europe apart from "one Italian maker" whose "entire output [had...] been firmly bespoken by the Vatican [...]. He had almost concluded upon a direct appeal to the Pope, begging him to release a supply," when Morris heard of a tannery in Middlesex which was interested in attempting to manufacture vellum for Morris,

²⁷ Peterson, 253.

and whose samples proved of sufficient quality for Morris to use on the planned vellum copies of the Chaucer volume.²⁸ As William S. Peterson notes, despite the particular limitations and contemporary critiques of Morris's typefaces, the success of the 12-point Gothic Chaucer type comes from its ability to easily harmonize with Kelmscott decorations and margin sizes without compromising the size, legibility, and usability of the completed volume.²⁹

This is the Golden type.
This is the Troy type.
This is the Chaucer type.

Figure 22. Golden type/Troy type/Chaucer type:
 Specimens of Fonts Developed for the Kelmscott Press.
 1888-96. *Artstor*.

In keeping with Morris's preference for Gothic typefaces, he had initially planned to use his Troy type for the Chaucer, but "Morris had reached the conclusion, early in 1892, that the Troy type was too large for the projected" volume and created the Chaucer type, which is a reduction from the 18-point Troy.³⁰ In spite of its successful execution, "Morris was never happy with the reduced" size, because in his view, the 12-point Chaucer type severely reduced the legibility of the entire volume.³¹ However, an 18-point typeface would have resulted in a completed volume so physically large as to be nearly impossible for readers to handle with any ease whatever, and

²⁸ Sparling, H. Halliday. *The Kelmscott Press and William Morris Master-Craftsman*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1924. Print. 64.

²⁹ Peterson, 90.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 240.

³¹ *Ibid.*

“only with the greatest reluctance did he accept [...] the reduction in size] as an economic necessity in the enormous Kelmscott edition of Chaucer.”³² The Chaucer type is therefore a deliberate attempt to increase the *Chaucer*’s usability in keeping with Morris’s belief in the fundamental necessity of a suitable type for a successful book design. Morris’s Gothic type choice was also a marker of his determined support of Gothic typefaces’ inherent legibility, and goes a long way towards the formation of the visual density which is the hallmark of the *Chaucer*’s architectural design.

The Chaucer’s legibility and clarity are also supported by Morris’s proportional layouts and distinctive margins, which he kept free of any editorial apparatus or commentary. Deliberately, Morris chose not to “design an italic alphabet or certain other characters that other printers would find indispensable (e.g. brackets, dashes, small capitals, bold face). This decision produced a grand simplicity and uniformity of texture in the Kelmscott Press pages.”³³ Instead of typographical and punctuation marks, the *Chaucer*, like other Kelmscott Press books, uses paragraph headings and floral paragraph endings as a structural aid to the reader, which fit into the overall page design without the physical and authorial detachment that defines more traditional editorial intrusions. Burne-Jones himself remarked on the success of Morris’s marginal white space and the textual and visual unity that his choice achieves in the completed volume. “And I want particularly to draw your exceptionally sweet attention to the fact that there is no preface to Chaucer, and no introduction, and no essay on his position as a poet, and no

³² Ibid., 89.

³³ Ibid., 90.

notes, and *no* glossary,” Burne-Jones announced to one of his female correspondents when the book was published. ‘So that all is prepared for you to thoroughly enjoy him—unvexed by the impertinence of the intruder.’”³⁴

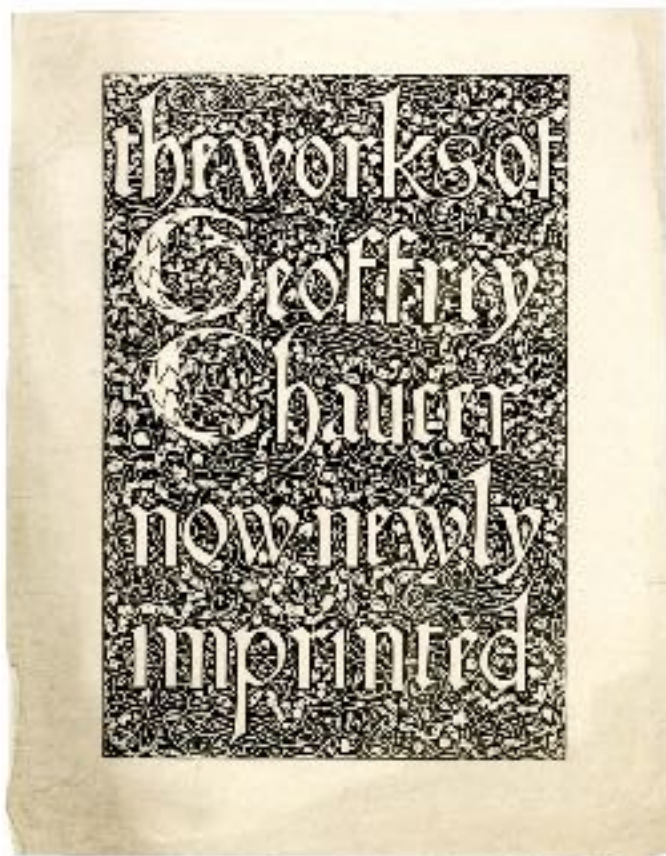


Figure 23. Proof of a design after William Morris, title-page to 'The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer' (London: 1896, Kelmscott Press). 1896, wood-engraving on paper, British Museum, London. *British Museum*.

In the place of marginal editorial commentary, Morris filled the *Chaucer's* distinctive proportional margins with decoration, and in the process created a usable interface for the reader's physical, mental, and imaginative engagement with the *Chaucer's* embodied text. For Morris, decoration is the product of the craftsman's creative expression and the hallmark of

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 239.

ethical craftsmanship, and serves as the link between form and function in the handcrafted object. By this reasoning, the *Chaucer's* proportional layout, frames, and borders are the key to beauty and utility in the book's design, and to paraphrase Morris, the book's decorative elements form as much a part of the page as the text itself. This unification flies in the face of traditional definitional distinctions of text and image, distinctions that had already begun to be elided throughout the nineteenth century. As I discussed in Chapter 1, over the course of the nineteenth century Victorian aesthetics became less constrained by the traditional generic distinctions between literature and the visual arts offered by *ut pictura poesis*, and in the process shifted the interpretive model towards the viewer's dyadic relationship with the work of art. Morris's handling of these decorative elements in the *Chaucer* expands upon even the more revolutionary treatment of word and image in *fin-de-siècle* book designs from Whistler's *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* to Beardsley's later edition of Wilde's *Salome*, since Chaucer's texts and their physical instantiation are inseparable in the Kelmscott edition.

Morris's book designs do not allow the reader access to a form of the work of literature considered as an ideal thing; rather, his materialist aesthetic ensures that the book as a holistic work of craftsmanship is its only necessary iteration. Morris's erstwhile son-in-law H. Haliday Sparling makes this very point when he declares that the twentieth-century printer or designer who wished to "follow Morris's example [must] centre his thought upon the *book* as an organic entity, take the *book* as pivot of inquiry and research, of practice and experiment, subordinating all other considerations to the welfare of the BOOK."³⁵ Even Burne-Jones himself conceded as

³⁵ Sparling, 120.

much when he first held the completed *Chaucer*, for “he kept on turning the pages and gloating over them, the grandeurs and the subtleties: ‘It doesn’t matter whether it’s the picture of a page or print, they’re equally beautiful.’”³⁶

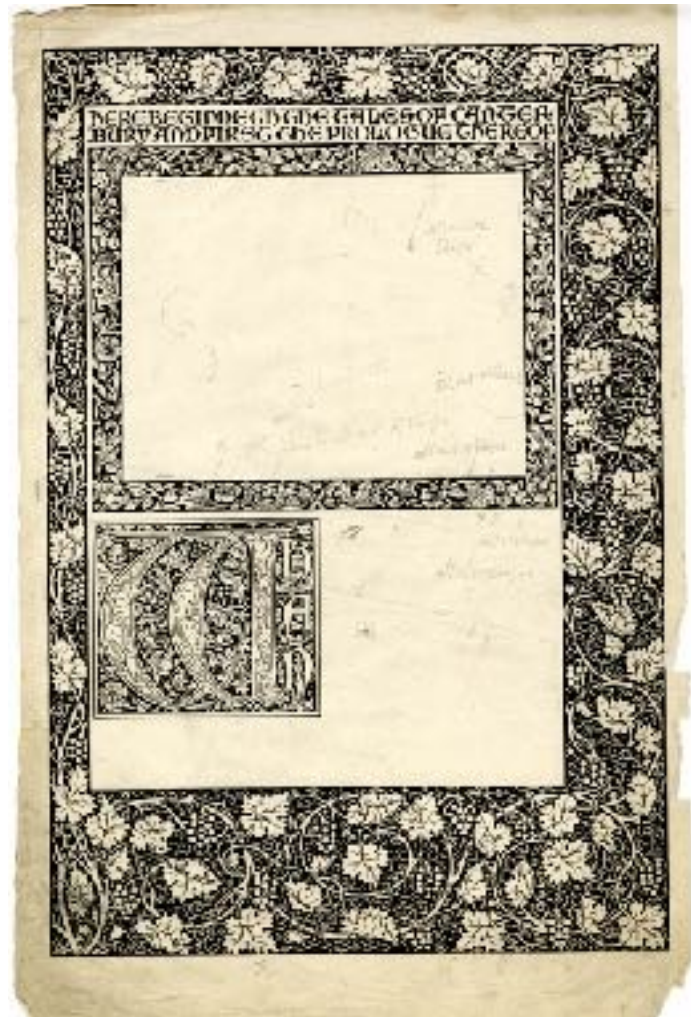


Figure 24. Proof of a design after William Morris, illustration to 'The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer' (London: 1896, Kelmscott Press, page 1). Wood-engraving on paper, British Museum, London. *British Museum*.

Morris’s understanding of the nature of the piece of literature is therefore removed from that of the work, as understood in terms of editorial theory, and instead is much closer to Paul Eggert’s

³⁶ MacCarthy, Fiona. *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Burne-Jones and the Romantic Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001. Print. 466.

idea of the document as an individual iteration of a text.³⁷ For Morris, the work of literature is inseparable from its material documentary instantiation, and its interpretation is entirely predicated on its material form. The *Chaucer's* type, papers, and floriated decorative borders therefore effectively blur the distinctions among the structural, textual, and decorative and create an interface by which the reader accesses the embodied text in keeping with Morris's Arts and Crafts design principles.

The *Chaucer's* bold attention to the equivalent hermeneutic presentation of text and image also directly correlates to the nearly complete lack of perspectival forms in the book's illustrations. Throughout the illustrations Burne-Jones references Byzantine and Venetian iconography, and this use of a decorative style conventionally employed in mosaic, tile, and architecture directly supports the need for decorative illustrations in keeping with Morris's aesthetic model. Burne-Jones's illustrations are defined by a flatness which provokes the reader to look within the complex patterns of vines, flowers, and leaves for possible depth. However, this lack of perspectival form defies the reader's inevitable search, and in the process reinforces the non-perspectival nature of the *Chaucer's* decoration and page layouts. As discussed in Chapter 2, Morris's rejection of perspectival forms stands as a rejection of traditional authoritative structures and institutions in keeping with his belief in the need for revolutionary change by means of creative craftsmanship. The decorative flatness of the *Chaucer's* decorations therefore also reinforce the extent to which Morris resists the traditional generic limitations of text and image and instead treats them as equivalent functional forms: a unitary interface for the

³⁷ Eggert, Paul. *Securing the Past: Conservation in Art, Architecture and Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Print. 233, 235-37.

reader. Morris's treatment of text and image thus transitions away from the work of art in space and the work of art in time, as I discuss in Chapter 3, in an implicit recognition of the narrative capacity of visual images and the sculptural and architectural quality of text and its material form: in other words, image as text and text as material form.

As an expansion of Morris's architectural page layouts, the *Chaucer's* visual frames and borders work together with the narrative frame structure of many of the works in Chaucer's *oeuvre*, from *The Canterbury Tales*, *The House of Fame*, and *The Legend of Good Women* to *Troilus and Cressyde* as the primary unifying design feature of the volume. Throughout the *Chaucer*, these frame stories are all illustrated at the beginning of each major work, and Burne-Jones's portraits and illustrations rely on Chaucer's insertion of himself as a poet/speaker into the beginning of the frame stories. Thus all of Chaucer's works are bound together by a series of illustrations, all of which feature a portrait of the poet himself. Burne-Jones's Chaucer represents a striking visual departure from the tradition of Chaucer portraiture established by early manuscript illustrations from early editions of the poetry. In her landmark study of the Chaucer portraits, Velma Bourgeois Richmond maintains that "even though these images of Chaucer had been frequently engraved and were familiar to Victorian readers, Burne-Jones scarcely alludes to them in his illustrations for the Kelmscott *Chaucer*. His portrait of Chaucer does show a general indebtedness to the Hoccleve and the Ellesmere likenesses; there are broad similarities in pose and costume, the outstretched hand, even the forked beard."³⁸

³⁸ Peterson, 232.

Although Richmond notes that “one can see much of Burne-Jones in the slender figure of his Chaucer,”³⁹ Burne-Jones’s depiction of Chaucer is largely indebted to his earlier work as well as to the broader Pre-Raphaelite tradition in which he and Morris operated.



Figure 25. Proof of an illustration designed by Burne-Jones for the Kelmscott ‘Chaucer’: p. 1, Prologue. 1896, wood-engraving on India paper, British Museum, London. *British Museum*.

Consequently, his Chaucer owes as much to Rossetti’s depictions of Dante as to Burne-Jones’s own painting *Merlin and Nimue*. While Morris’s floral borders and frames and capitals stand as

³⁹ Richmond, Velma Bourgeois. “Edward Burne-Jones’s Chaucer Portraits in the Kelmscott ‘Chaucer.’” *The Chaucer Review* 40.1 (2005): 1-38. *JSTOR*. Web. 16 July 2017. 30.

repeating motifs throughout the volume, the Chaucer portraits also serve as the primary theme uniting all the illustrations.

Additionally, the Chaucer portraits support the narrative form of the frame stories. While the portraits do not necessarily tell a story as such, they do have two points that unify them in a kind of narrative arc, namely, Chaucer's aging and the increasing thickness of his book, which grows in size as the reader moves through the book. The frame stories are all illustrated at the beginning, and although the Chaucer character as a pilgrim in *The Canterbury Tales* runs somewhat oblique to Burne-Jones's depiction of the Canterbury Chaucer, the portraits and illustrations correspond to Chaucer's insertion of himself as a poet/speaker into the beginning of each framed narrative. Rather than showing Chaucer the character who participates in the storytelling competition within the second frame of the narrative, in the Kelmscott edition Burne-Jones's Chaucer is the author of the Prologue, and in keeping with this narrative distance, is shown standing in a medieval fenced-in enclosure that is filled to the brim with flowers. He holds a very small book in one hand and a quill in the other, and his attention is absorbed in an apparent act of composition.⁴⁰ The Chaucer portraits bookend the entire *Canterbury Tales*, and Chaucer appears at the end of *The Tales* as an illustration to Chaucer the poet's concluding prayer as a means of supporting the narrative progression of the volume. The prayer implores "hem alle that herkne this litel tretys or rede, that if ther be anythyng in it that liketh hem, that thereof they thanken oure Lord Jhesu Crist, of whom procedeth al wit and goodnesse" and while the reader reads the "litel tretys," Chaucer the illustrated figure is shown addressing the figure of

⁴⁰ Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales. The Collected Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Now Newly Imprinted*. Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1896. Print. 1.

Poesie, and now he holds a much larger book with a heavy binding.⁴¹ Burne-Jones's illustrations therefore expand Chaucer from his fictional and textual articulation as Chaucer the poetic speaker and Chaucer the character in the outer frames of the stories.

Together with the illustrations, the *Chaucer's* frames and borders serve as effective points of entry for the reader because of Chaucer-the-poet's insertion of himself into the text within the outer narrative frame of his story collections. Therefore, these elements serve as effective paratextual thresholds, in Genette's sense of the term. For Genette,

the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*, or [...] a 'vestibule' that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an 'undefined zone' between the inside and the outside [...] which is] always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, [and which] constitutes a zone [...] not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public.⁴²

For the *Chaucer*, Morris's frames structure the built environment of the work of art while simultaneously serving as thresholds for the reader's imaginative, physical participation in the work of art by holding the book and turning through the leaves. The frames themselves, which have no better example than in the opening title page to the *Chaucer*, which I evaluate more closely at the end of this chapter, therefore invite the reader to enter and, through the process of interpretive use, guide the reader's participation in the world-making of the decorated book. As Steve Ellis notes, "the classical, elegant decorum of the Kelmscott Chaucer [...] with its ordering and repetitive design, tends to remove Chaucer's works from the bustling social world they are

⁴¹ Ibid., 222.

⁴² Genette, Gerard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge UP: 1987. Print. 1-2.

grounded in.”⁴³ I maintain that the ordered nature of the frames enable this separation from the reader’s experience of the real world so that the reader can enter the interpretive space offered by the world of the *Chaucer* as a work of art.

At the same time, however, Morris’s illustrated and decorated book designs also challenge and elide Genette’s definitional distinctions, since Morris’s frames, like thresholds, are constitutive and indistinguishable elements of the book as a work of architecture. Not only do the frames visually support the text and decorations in keeping with Morris’s proportional and architectural layouts, but on every page of the *Chaucer*, they are hermeneutically and visually inseparable from the text of Chaucer’s poetry and prose. Burne-Jones’s Chaucer portraits function in exactly the same manner. On a narrative level, the portraits simultaneously indicate the authorial presence within Chaucer’s frame stories and create their own kind of narrative structure independent of the texts it illuminates. On the level of the book’s physical, printed form, the Chaucer portraits remain an essential component of Morris’s designs and cannot be easily removed or interpreted without reference to their structural function within the layout of the volume. In both instances, Morris’s preference against Genette-style paratext is clear; Morris uses the decorated layout to invite the reader to have direct, and thus more enjoyable, access to the material book as text. Intriguingly, Morris’s refusal of Skeat’s landmark apparatus, and the *Chaucer*’s lack of indices and minimalist table of contents all indicate an even greater resistance to Genette-style paratext, which is the more telling since all of these elements typically indicate some sort of authoritative structure that would inform the reader’s progress through the volume.

⁴³ Ellis, 12.

The *Chaucer* is therefore supremely unconcerned with the addition of paratextual elements in the strictest definition of the term. Morris's architectural framed layouts participate in the liminal identity of Genette's paratexts inasmuch as they invite the reader's further involvement in the textual, visual, and physical work of art, as is demonstrated by any of the *Chaucer's* illustrated pages, wherein each of the textual and visual elements is encased in a frame that visually supports and presents the text, image, and decoration to the reader. However, Morris's design simultaneously removes any of the distinction between the text that Genette's paratextual elements envelops, and his elimination of any scholarly apparatus foregrounds those textual elements that Genette considers to be by their very nature not the primary text. What is more, the textual frame of Chaucer's introduction to *The Canterbury Tales* functions in a similar manner, as Morris's complementary visual and structural layout makes evident. Therefore, because of their equivalent treatment in Morris's designs, everything is text in the sense of meaning-making. There is no middle ground.

The *Chaucer* also leverages its decoration and illustration as markers of time within the book in terms of Morris's aesthetic model, and the Chaucer portraits are perhaps the most distinctive means by which the volume establishes the revolutionary potential of time and space for the reader. In a clear demonstration of Morris's reliance on reading and interpretive time, Burne-Jones's illustrated Chaucer ages across the progression of the volume from front to back. While the poet's features remain unlined in the initial illustrations, by the time the reader has progressed to *The House of Fame*, any softness in Chaucer's face has been replaced with a drawn

and pensive air of experience.⁴⁴ Chaucer's aging serves as a marker for the reader of his progress through the volume, regardless of the order in which the various stories are read. The Chaucer portraits therefore function as an indicator of time in time in a way that is analogous to *The Earthly Paradise's* calendrical orientation of the reader within the book. As discussed in Chapter 3, the reader is thus given access to the utopian time of the work of art, which runs differently from the actual reading time elapsed, and the reading process results in the generation of utopian space and utopian time in keeping with Morris's belief in the revolutionary potential of Arts and Crafts.

In the process, Morris's decorated *Chaucer* reveals a conception of space/time that effectively challenges Lessing's traditional generic distinctions in keeping with the trend of Victorian hybrid media and their modes of interpretation. In his landmark 1766 *Laocoön*, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing asserts that literature, as linguistic representation, operates through time, while the plastic arts, sculpture and painting prominent among them, work by capturing a moment in space.⁴⁵ Therefore, "painting [...] can use but a single moment of an action, and must therefore choose the most pregnant one, the one most suggestive of what has gone before and what is to follow. Poetry, in its progressive imitations, can choose but a single attribute of bodies, and must choose that one which gives the most vivid picture of the body as exercised in this particular action."⁴⁶ In contrast, Morris's *Chaucer* elides this space-time distinction through its

⁴⁴ Chaucer, 450, 459.

⁴⁵ Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. Trans. Ellen Frothingham. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1887. Print. 91.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

equivalent treatment of text and image, or text and decorated, material instantiation of that text.

By virtue of its architectural design, the *Chaucer* is as much a sculptural work of art that captures a moment in space as it is the temporal expression of a narrative form. Instead of operating in terms of these traditional distinctions, the volume refocuses the reader's attention on how the decorated book, as a hybrid-verbal visual work of art, must and can do both simultaneously as part of the interpretive process. The work of art therefore opens up a new kind of transformative reading time, in which the reader is transformed by his participation in the reading space and time of the decorated book, as well as by the generation of mimetic space through the non-perspectival interpretation of the decorated book, as I discuss in Chapter 2. As I mention in Chapter 3, the reader's interpretive engagement with the decorated book also opens up Benjaminian revolutionary craftsman space and time and radically transforms the individual reader and the wider built environment in which the *Chaucer* operates.

The *Chaucer* defies the necessity of the reader's separate engagement with multiple generic forms; instead, the *Chaucer* merges any representational distinctions by refocusing the reader's attention on the work of art as a whole. However, critics have often noted that this conflation of text and image can occlude meaning for the reader. While Morris directly employs calligraphic and decorated letters in a way that is simultaneously textual and visual, James Elkins characterizes such non-legible and non-traditional letterforms as biological parasites, which he maintains sap meaning away from the ideal, standardized forms of text and image. In an expansion of Nelson Goodman's allographic and autographic distinctions, Elkins maintains that

calligraphy puts the writing into question by threatening to turn it into something resembling a picture. It creates visual artifacts in which there are uneasy relationships between ostensive and graphical meaning. [...] Allographic changes are neither writing nor pictures, and the trinity of writing-picture-notation is insufficient to describe them. If pictures and writing are two organisms, then allography might not be a cross or a hybrid—it might be a parasite.⁴⁷

Elkins argues that any kind of generic complexity between visual images and text is therefore a degraded form that is less legible and less capable of transmitting meaning to the reader. Aaron Donachuk also addresses this occlusion of meaning in his study of Morris's typefaces, which he claims are the result of a deliberate effort, on the part of Morris and Walker, to avoid the typographical fault of dazzle, which is a term used to describe "the typeface's readability [...] which is judged by] its tendency to produce [...] visual] parallel patterns: the greater the number of vertical parallel lines that show up between and within the letters, the more dazzling and unreadable that type is judged to be."⁴⁸

While the *Chaucer's* design is predicated on Morris's philosophical and practical insistence on the equivalent hermeneutic status of text and image, the *Chaucer* has also historically and critically been regarded in terms of the cultural, stylistic, and thematic distance between its design and Chaucer's poetry and prose. Much of the discussion of Burne-Jones's highly individual illustrative style centers on the degree to which they adhere to the medieval texts, and discussions of Burne-Jones's decisions regarding which stories to illustrate are similarly based in an acknowledgment of their clear departure at points from Chaucer's own

⁴⁷ Elkins, James. *The Domain of Images*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1999. Print. 98.

⁴⁸ Donachuk, Aaron. "After the Letter: Typographical Distraction and the Surface of Morris's Kelmscott Romances." *Victorian Studies* 59.2 (2017): 260-287. Print.

content. What is more, there is little evidence that Morris was dissatisfied with any thematic distance or even dissonance between the Kelmscott *Chaucer* and Chaucer's works. Quite the contrary, given his persistent pursuit of that floriated proportional style as a defining feature of the press, regardless of which works were being printed. Nonetheless, the *Chaucer's* design is defined by this stylistic distinction between Chaucer's texts and their material form, so much so that H. Haliday Sparling defends Kelmscott books against the "silly complaint [...] that the decorations did not 'fit the text,' or in other words, were not symbolic of its meaning," maintaining that to this [...] Morris] would have retorted, as he did when one of his romances was taken for an allegory, that when he had anything to say, he said it in so many words and plainly; that his decorations were not intended to be illustrative or emblematic, but exactly decorations and no more."⁴⁹ While Sparling rightly acknowledges Morris's structural use of decoration, his comments point to Morris's theoretical and practical determination to orient the visual, textual, and physical elements of the *Chaucer* as equally significant elements of the overall design. Morris's designs demonstrate an awareness of the stylistic distance between text and image that the reader must overcome. Morris's aesthetic does not regard this distance as a barrier to interpretation but rather as an invitation which is itself a hallmark of all Morris's illustrated books.

Despite any thematic distinctions between the decoration and the text, the *Chaucer's* text cannot be understood without reference to its material form. Therefore, the volume relies on Geoffrey Chaucer's poetry and prose as inseparable components of the work of art. Morris's

⁴⁹ Sparling, 68.

Kelmscott *Chaucer* is thus not merely an edition of collected texts, like Skeat's OUP edition, but rather a unique work of art that radically transforms the experience of Chaucer's poetry and prose in a nineteenth-century iteration. Morris's own Ruskinian statements about the ability of the work of art to stand as a product of the culture that created it run counter to the common idea that a new edition will be a new creative expression of its time. Rather than an authoritative edited text constructed for a generation, the *Chaucer* forces the reader to reckon with the fact that the *Chaucer* is nothing less than a work of architecture that, in terms of Morris's aesthetic, operates in Benjaminian revolutionary space as well as time. Burne-Jones's contention that the *Chaucer* is a "pocket cathedral" thoroughly supports this architectural understanding of Morris's work of art, which is informed by its textual, visual, and physical identity as a work of collaborative craftsmanship.⁵⁰ In addition to his description of the *Chaucer* as "'something like a cathedral to stroll through and linger, a kind of pocket Chartres in fact,' [...Burne-Jones] referred to Morris as the architect or 'Magister Lapidida' while his own role was that of the carver of the images in the cathedral at Amiens."⁵¹ Burne-Jones even regretfully addressed the concerns of a friend about the *Chaucer*'s design in architectural terms, declaring:

And so you don't like the Chaucer—that is very sad—for I am beside myself with delight over it. I am making the designs as much to fit the ornament and printing as they are made to fit the pictures—and I love to be snugly cased in the borders and buttressed up by the vast initials—and once or twice when I have no letter under me, I feel tottery and weak; if you drag me out of my encasings it will be like tearing a statue out of its niche and putting it into a museum—indeed, when the book is done, if we live to finish it, it will be like a pocket cathedral.⁵²

⁵⁰ Burne-Jones qtd. in Peterson, 164.

⁵¹ MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite*, 431-32.

⁵² Burne-Jones, 164.

While Burne-Jones rather colorfully identifies himself here with his illustrations, his playful use of metaphor demonstrates the extent to which Morris and Burne-Jones conceived of the *Chaucer* designs in Morris's architectural terms. To borrow terms from Paul Eggert's comparative study of editorial theory and architectural maintenance, Morris is not merely maintaining the building, he is constructing a new one by which Chaucer's texts can be made accessible in a new form and which functions as a new textual document, which I contend functions as an interface for the reader's interpretive engagement with the volume.⁵³

Morris's designs therefore elide verbal and visual generic constraints and stand as a particularly nineteenth-century solution to this hermeneutic question of the primacy of either text or image. The *Chaucer's* interpretation relies on the relationship between the reader and the embodied text instead of the more conventional interpretive model between text, image, and the reader, or even between the reader, the text, and the text's material form. Morris wants us to read the *book*, and in the process establishes the dyadic relationship between the handcrafted, decorated book and its reader, and this innovative hermeneutic position reframes Morris's entire legacy. While Morris's lectures clarify his understanding of the distinctive functions of text and image, the *Chaucer's* architectural designs also request that the reader treat them as equivalent hermeneutic forms and tie text and image together into a user-friendly interface for the reader's physical, mental, and imaginative experience. Morris's insistence that beautiful books can be cheaply constructed from a few well-designed elements does not subvert the *Chaucer's* hermeneutic intervention. Over and above the conventional understanding of the *Chaucer* as a

⁵³ Eggert, 234.

luxury volume, the design of which is a barrier to actual reading, the Kelmscott Press establishes the fundamental nature of reader-oriented designs as constituting the key to the interpretive process, and secondarily as expressing the triangular relationship between the beautiful and the decorative and the useful.

The Kelmscott *Chaucer*, Morris's Materialist Aesthetic, and Interpretive Use

The Kelmscott *Chaucer* is not only the epitome of a reader-oriented physical text as interface, but it draws attention to the fact that the embodied reader interprets visual and physical signs simultaneously. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological analysis of painting and artistic production provides perhaps the clearest articulation of the embodied nature of the work of art and the creative process. In his essay "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty maintains that the hands of the painter are inseparable from the work of art, stating that "the enigma derives from the fact that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the 'other side' of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself."⁵⁴ Merleau-Ponty therefore uses the hands of the artist as evidence that human vision is never disembodied, since the artist's body is always caught within his visual field, and the work of art therefore is as much embodied as it is material. In his articulation of mimesis and perspectival representation, Merleau-Ponty also maintains that

this extraordinary overlapping, which we never give enough thought to, forbids us to conceive of vision as an operation of thought which would set up before the mind a picture or a representation of the world, a world of immanence and of ideality. Immersed

⁵⁴ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Eye and Mind." *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*. Ed. Michael B. Smith. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993. Print. 124.

in the visible by his body, itself visible, the see-er does not appropriate what he sees; he merely approaches it by looking, he opens onto the world. [...] My movement is not a decision made by the mind [...] It is the natural sequel to, and maturation of, vision.⁵⁵

This phenomenological emphasis on embodiment as an essential component of creative practice also reinforces the extent to which nineteenth-century aesthetics foregrounds the role of the embodied viewer, reader, or user and supports the *Chaucer's* interpretive alignment towards the reader of the book as user of the decorated object. Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the artist's hands provides a useful corollary to Morris's observation, discussed in Chapter 3, that larger books lying open by their own weight provide a more restful reading experience. In addition, Morris's proportional margin sizes and careful attention to type and layouts in the *Chaucer* further underscores his belief in the decorated book as physical interface with and for the reader. The *Chaucer*, too large to be held easily in two hands, does not subvert this contention, and the *Chaucer* layout's emphasis on readability effectively demonstrates the extent to which the book anticipates the interpretive activity of an embodied reader.

In contrast to traditional perspectival modes of interpretation, the *Chaucer* resists all efforts to occlude its physicality. In his *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, Norman Bryson maintains that the viewer of a Western perspectival painting effaces the material object in favor of a dematerialized interpretive experience. The perspectival painting therefore mediates the viewer's interpretive activity while at the same time eliminating its own physical presence. Thus the physical picture is necessary for interpretation only in as much as it effectively disappears, and Bryson refers to this interpretive consequence, which originates in Renaissance

⁵⁵ Ibid.

perspectival realism, as “the Gaze.”⁵⁶ In contrast, Bryson maintains that the tradition of Japanese flung-art painting, particularly the work of Sesshu, is a medium in which “the work of production is constantly displayed in the wake of its traces; in this tradition the body of labour is on constant display, just as it is judged in terms which, in the West, would apply only to *performing* art.”⁵⁷ In this way, Bryson argues that visual art in the style of flung-art painting “addresses vision in the durational temporality of the viewing subject; it does not seek to bracket out the process of viewing, nor in its own techniques does it exclude traces of the body of labour” and results in an interpretive relationship to the work of art that Bryson refers to as “the Glance.”⁵⁸ The product of a given moment, the flung-art painting is defined by the way that the material basis of the art form, the ink and paper, manifest and draw the viewer into that particular moment. Instead of presenting the viewer with a timeless record of a perfectly recorded and eternally real moment, the work of art impresses the viewer with the fleeting nature of time relative to the act of interpretation.

The Kelmscott *Chaucer* similarly draws attention to its physical nature as part of the reading process, since the reader is made aware of that physicality, not only by virtue of its size and visual impressiveness, but also by the fact that the *Chaucer* bears the evidence of the printing process on its pages. Morris's Albion press, like all handpresses, leaves an impression in the page where the type has pushed into the paper; however, the extent to which the *Chaucer's*

⁵⁶ Bryson, Norman. *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983. Print. 92.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

textured pages were a fault or a feature was debated by contemporary critics, who referred to the *Chaucer*'s "embossing" as proof of its supposed amateurish quality. H. Haliday Sparling defends the press from these charges, maintaining that Morris's hand presses inevitably "[left] an impression on the surface of the paper but no depression in the paper, and this has come to be taken as an added beauty, while a favourable word of condemnation for the older method is to speak of its 'embossing the page.'"⁵⁹ Sparling also roots these supposed imperfections in Morris's Ruskinian claims to ethical craftsmanship, maintaining "as Morris so often pointed out in other connexions, [that] trying for the utmost perfection in handwork results in something very different indeed from attaining mathematical precision by means of a machine; in the one, there is human effort, life; in the other, there is long distance calculation and the interposition of a feelingless metallic efficiency between the hand and its work, which in matters of art means death."⁶⁰ These variations are thus "the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone" as much as the variations in Morris's borders and the linguistic and even regional uniquenesses of Chaucer's poetry and prose.⁶¹ At the same time, the dented texture of Kelmscott pages supports Bryson's interpretive categories of the Gaze and the Glance, since the *Chaucer* prompts the viewer to participate in both interpretive modes at the same time. Burne-Jones's illustrations, however decorative and non-perspectival, anticipate the viewer's adoption of the longevity of the interpretive Gaze, which creates the effect of realism and authority, and Morris's physical printed

⁵⁹ Sparling, 69.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶¹ Ruskin, John. "The Stones of Venice." *The Nature of Gothic. The Works of John Ruskin*. Vol. 10. Ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1904. Print. 193.

book anticipates the transient nature of the Glance, which reveals and participates in the immediacy and presentness of the handcrafted object. These two positions therefore support the *Chaucer's* insistence on embodiment as the hallmark of interpretive use, and, by extension, the idea that the act of reading, through Morris's aesthetic model, avoids, circumvents, and restores virtual relationships created by industrialized capitalism.

For Morris's *oeuvre* then, the reader's involvement in the work of art is by necessity confined to the process of interpretive use. Morris's aesthetic model is based equally in the independent functioning of the work of art and its practical interpretation by the user; by contrast, the phenomenologist Roman Ingarden maintains that the work of architecture is to a certain degree the construct of the interpretive action of the user or viewer. Using the example of the cathedral of Notre Dame, he argues that

in order to apprehend a work of architecture, in immediate commerce with it, as a work of art, and in particular as an aesthetic object, one must adopt a special attitude toward the building [...]. This special attitude has as its intentional correlate a new object, which, in the manner similar to a picture, has its ontic foundation in an apparently real thing, but is not identical with that thing.⁶²

Thus Ingarden makes "a distinction between the building and the work of architecture," since for him, the work of architecture exists somewhat apart from and "cannot be identified with the building" on the Seine.⁶³ Instead, the work of art possesses and/or generates a virtual identity that is generated and accessed by the individuals who use and view the building. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Morris's materialist aesthetic is predicated on the interpretive engagement of the user/

⁶² Ingarden, Roman. *The Ontology of the Work of Art*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989. Print. 261-62.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 264.

reader with the material object, which results in the creation of a mimetic space that gives rise to the interface, the interpretation, and the work of art itself. The material, decorated *Chaucer* similarly functions as the hermeneutic basis of the reader's creative engagement. *The Collected Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* is itself the highly sophisticated product of collaborative craftsmanship, but its identity as a work of handicraft remains conceptually distinct from the reader's unique enjoyment and interpretation of reading Chaucer's poetry and prose. While I maintain that Morris's interpretive model participates in Ingarden's hermeneutic distinction between the material object and the work of art as the product of the viewer's aesthetic experience, Morris's Arts and Crafts aesthetic is simultaneously a socialist, proto-Marxist attempt to resist any virtual operation of the work of art within society apart from its material form. Morris's model is grounded in the necessity of aesthetic, mimetic, interpretive space as the necessary prerequisite for individual ethical improvement and socioeconomic change. At the same time, his socialist philosophical grounding resists the concept that interpretive space alone is equivalent or equal to the material form of the work of art, which is itself the unique creative product of the craftsman. The user's generation of interpretive space alone would be insufficient to generate revolutionary change in keeping with Morris's Arts and Crafts ideals. This disconnect of the virtual and the commodified from the aesthetic and transformative corresponds with another tension in Morris's aesthetic model between the inevitability and capacity of the work of art to generate socioeconomic change. Ingarden wants the interpretive process to generate a third thing phenomenologically, and Morris shares this instinct towards the generative potential of interpretation. However, Morris's aesthetic is also rooted in the effects of that interpretive,

mimetic space that arise from the user's engagement with the material form of the built environment.

In Morris's model, the hermeneutic relationship between the reader and the moment in time directly correlates to the reader's narrative experience of the text. Not only are the reader and the work of art embodied, but the reader is locked into the experience of the present, a present which exists irrespective of the narrative construction of the work of art. In his *Laocoön*, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing describes the temporality of Achilles's shield in the *Iliad* as follows:

Homer does not paint the shield finished, but in the process of creation. Here again he has made use of the happy device of substituting progression for coexistence, and thus converted the tiresome description of an object into a graphic picture of an action. We see not the shield, but the divine master-workman employed upon it; [...]. Not till the whole is finished do we lose sight of him. At last it is done; and we wonder at the work, but with the believing wonder of an eyewitness who has seen it a-making.⁶⁴

Perspectival interpretation also locks down interpretive time into the viewer's experience in the present. In terms of the Kelmscott *Chaucer*, the reader's narrative experience of the text at first glance runs counter to this perspectival experience of time, since Burne-Jones's portraits show Chaucer the poet as aging across the durational span of the decorated book. The implication of this duration at first appears to be the inexorable nature of time with the reader hooked into a narrative construct both past, present, and future. Although Morris structures his book designs and literary works around a lengthy passage of time, those frames and structures only activate and reveal the reader's experience of the text in each successive present moment in keeping with the perspectival model. Like the reader's experience of *The Earthly Paradise*, reading and

⁶⁴ Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Laocoön: An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. Trans. Ellen Frothingham. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1884. Print. 114.

interpretation in the *Chaucer* therefore function as consolation for the passage of time, rooting the reader in the present, albeit a present that is a series of present moments. This insistence on the present as the only available and only accessible interpretive moment is analogous to the way time functions in Morris's aesthetic model, which is also situated in the experience of the present, however much Morris looks to his idealized medieval past and utopian future. As the reader's experience can only influence the present in terms of Benjaminian messianic time, the act of reading thus unlocks the revolutionary potential of the present with all of its corresponding redemptive possibilities for the individual, society more generally, and the built environment.

In contrast to the perspectival model of interpretation described by Bryson's *Natural Attitude*, I contend that Morris's *Chaucer* actively prevents the reader from effacing the material presence of the work of art as part of the interpretive process. In his conclusion to *Vision and Painting*, Bryson describes the necessity of recognizing the material form of the work of art in defiance of traditional interpretive norms, maintaining that

painter and viewer are neither the transmitter and receiver of a founding perception, nor the bearers of an imprint stamped upon them [...] by the social base; they are *agents* operating *through labour* on the *materiality* of the visual sign; what must be recognized is that crucial term labor, work of the body on matter, transformation of matter through work, the minimal definition of the practice as what the body *does*: the alternation of the semiotic field in the *durée* of the painting, in the mobility of trace and of the Glance.⁶⁵

Decades before Bryson, Morris's interpretive aesthetic posits a similar claim with its implicit insistence that all works of handicraft are defined by their material form and that form is necessary for interpretation, since the user must be aware of the interface to be successful in maximizing its utility. This is part of the reason why the *Chaucer* design is so remarkable,

⁶⁵ Bryson, 150.

memorable, and surprising; the massiveness of the *Chaucer* impresses itself upon the reader through the act of reading and insists upon its own materiality by making its material form central to the act of interpretive use. That material form is simultaneously an indicator of time, rooting the reader in the reading present as well as indicating the social and cultural moment in which the work of art was produced. By contrast, the geometric interpretive structure of interpretive perspective is a kind of eternal present, since non-perspectival forms position the user in the moment of the experience of the material object.

Reading as Creative Craftsmanship

Reading is therefore a creative act, with Morris's aesthetic model making very little distinction, if any, between the act of reading and the act of craftsmanship. This theoretical orientation, coming at the end of the nineteenth century, directly recalls Oscar Wilde's own theoretical statements from *The Critic as Artist*, which I discuss in Chapter 1. While Morris's Arts and Crafts insistence on the ethical ramifications of craftsmanship and interpretation were out of fashion in the 1880s and 90s, the interpretive model expressed in his book designs is entirely in keeping with the development of Victorian aesthetics and *fin-de-siècle* right seeing. In terms of the Kelmscott *Chaucer* and Morris's craftsman ideal, reading and interpretation are the creative expressions of the individual workman and the reader who reads. Additionally, reading is an act of handicraft as much as an act of the imagination, which happens in community, and is the creative expression of that reader and of the society that produces the interpretation. Although the act of reading does not directly result in any material object in the way that craftsmanship does, like Gothic works of architecture, reading produces a work of art that exists

in mimetic, interpretive space and in the real world. Reading is therefore based in the material relation between the reader and the work of art and cannot be easily distinguished from material and immaterial. In addition, the act of reading and interpretation can cut through the fetishized noise of commodities in Benjaminian terms. Just as creativity produces a work of art, by the same function, the reader interprets the work of literature and produces consolation, community, and the utopian potential of the moment. Reading therefore creates something that cuts through other distractions and intervenes within and without the reader to actualize something new. Here we have the inverse of the messianic function of the non-fetishized object. Like creative craftsmanship for the consumer and the craftsman, reading is also an inherently productive ethical act with ramifications beyond the reader's physical, mental, and imaginative engagement with the decorated book. This ethics informs any post-reading interpretive decisions, since the reading, as an act of interpretive use, changes the reader through his or her encounter with the mimetic space in which the work of craftsmanship operates. Morris's interpretive model establishes a reciprocal relationship between psychological and imaginative engagement with the work of art and the sensory physical actions necessary for Arts and Crafts interpretation. Reading is therefore an effective agent of change with concrete implications for the reader's relationship to the material world, the material work of art, and the built environment.

The design of the *Chaucer* therefore stands as an invitation and as a prerequisite for imaginative engagement with the work of art, and the Kelmscott *Chaucer's* presentation of

Chaucer's *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* ably demonstrates this engagement.⁶⁶ Chaucer's *Treatise* is, rather surprisingly, a technical manual, perhaps the first such manual written in English.



Figure 27. Proof of an illustration designed by Burne-Jones for the Kelmscott 'Chaucer': p. 397, 'A Treatise on the Astrolabe. 1896, wood-engraving on India paper, British Museum, London. *British Museum*.

Dated from about 1391, the unfinished *Treatise* draws heavily on Arabic and Latin translations from other astrolabe treatises of the time, which Chaucer acknowledges in his introduction.

However, the text also shows evidence of his own expertise through significant departures from

⁶⁶ Chaucer, Geoffrey. *A Treatise on the Astrolabe. The Collected Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Now Newly Imprinted*. Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1896. Print. 397.

and expansions on his source material.⁶⁷ The *Treatise* opens with one of Morris and Burne-Jones's decorated pages, containing proportional marginal frames and borders filled with Morris's favorite swirling acanthus leaves, a motif echoed in the structural and decorated first word "Little." Burne-Jones's illustration, one of the most poignant of all the illustrations in the Kelmscott *Chaucer*, remains in keeping with the pattern of introductory illustrations. This illustration features a portrait, this time of two members of the Chaucer family. On the top of a crenelated tower overlooking the night sky stands a decidedly middle-aged Chaucer accompanied by small boy, whom the reader very quickly understands to be the poet's son, the aforementioned "little Lewis," to whom the entire *Treatise* is addressed. The illustration clearly establishes Chaucer's own relationship with Lewis, which Chaucer discusses in great detail in his introductory remarks. In describing his intentions in writing the *Treatise*, Chaucer maintains

I have percieved wel by certeyne evidences thyn ability to lern sciencez touchinge noumbres and proporciouns; & as wel considere I thy bisy preyere in speical to lerne the Tretis of the Astrolabie. [...] Therefor have I geven thee a sufficaunt Astrolabie as for oure orizonte, compowned after the latitude of Oxenford; upon which, by mediacion of this litel tretis, I purpose to teche thee a certein nombre of conclusons apertening to the same instrument.⁶⁸

Chaucer goes to great lengths to explain his use of the vernacular to accommodate Lewis's educational attainment, since "Latin ne canstow yit but smal, my lyte sone," and he even anticipates Lewis's youthful anxiety about potential objections to the suitability and legitimacy of the treatise as a proper manual because of its use of Middle English vernacular instead of the

⁶⁷ M.C. Seymour qtd. in Laird, Edgar. "A Previously Unnoticed Manuscript of Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe*." *The Chaucer Review* 34.4 (2000): 410-415. *JSTOR*. endnote, 414.

⁶⁸ Chaucer, 397.

standard Latin.⁶⁹ While Burne-Jones's choice to illustrate a technical manual may seem surprising, the image demonstrates the extent to which reading and the act of interpretation are informed by the reader's engagement with the text and the astrolabe as physical objects. Not only does the illustration situate the scientific object as a component of the relationship between father and son, since Chaucer holds the astrolabe while Lewis holds Chaucer's robe, but Morris's illustrated edition also foregrounds the extent to which Chaucer's text also functions in much the same way. Chaucer's treatise is the physical and textual object that informs, guides, and supplements the physical interpretive actions of the reader and the user, whether that reader be Lewis Chaucer himself or a modern reader.

Chaucer's text also demonstrates the extent to which Morris's aesthetic establishes reading and interpretation to be a creative act, since throughout the treatise, reading is linked with making. The two extant sections of the treatise are predicated on the reader's participation in the reading process with physical astrolabe in hand. The first section is a description of the components of the astrolabe, and "shal reherse the figures and the membres of thyn Astrolabie, bicause that thou shalt than the grette knowing of thyne own instrument."⁷⁰ The second part then walks the novice user through a series of calculations to familiarize him with the kind of astronomical, chronological, and navigational problems the astrolabe can help solve. While Chaucer's treatise presupposes that the reader has an actual astrolabe present throughout the reading process, the clarity of the writing effectively conveys the meaning and functionality of

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 398.

each component to the reader. It remains a matter of conjecture whether Morris and Burne-Jones had any facility with astrolabes or if they would have supposed that readers of the Kelmscott *Chaucer* would have one ready to hand, but the *Treatise* nonetheless demonstrates the extent to which Morris, like Chaucer, is comfortable with the elision of reading and creative activity.

Nonetheless, it is the reader who unifies form and function, decoration and design, and verbal and visual media to arrive at an interpretation. This logic applies to the Kelmscott *Chaucer* and to the reader's astrolabe. In terms of the *Treatise*, the reader's reading practice is entirely embodied. The reader's interface with that decorated handcrafted object results in the creation of mimetic space, and this collision of mimetic or aesthetic space and the reader's lived experience opens up the Benjaminian messianic space and time and transforms the reader and the real world in which the reader operates. As the reader actively interprets the decorated pages of the *Treatise*, the reader is operating on two levels: the imaginative space and time of the astrolabe treatise, and the space and time of the reader's lived experience. The astrolabe itself functions as a bridge between these lived experiences, whether the reader has an actual astrolabe or imaginatively constructs one as he moves through the *Treatise*, since it nonetheless operates within the mimetic space created by the reader and in the real world. The mimetic space of the *Treatise* is thus key to the wider revolutionary socioeconomic change and individual improvement posited by Morris's interpretive aesthetic.

This ontological ambivalence of the reader's astrolabe therefore points to the unresolved tension in Morris's interpretive model. Morris's aesthetic is defined by the inevitability of the independent operation of work of art to disrupt fetishized commodities and generate

socioeconomic change and the reader's failure to achieve ethical or social improvement through his interpretive engagement with the work of art. In the same way, the astrolabe exists inside and outside these categories of interpretive activity and consequence. For the reader, the astrolabe functions in his lived and in his imaginative, aesthetic experiences. Since Morris's craftsman aesthetic establishes reading as a choice with ethical consequences, the reader's interpretive decisions during and after the reading process govern the facility with which the work of art transforms and prompts the reader towards greater ethical action. For the astrolabe itself, reading establishes ethical relationships among individuals and creates communities of consolation while simultaneously restoring right relationships among objects, principles that Burne-Jones's illustration of father and son perfectly and poignantly exemplifies.

Conclusion

The *Chaucer's* iconic title pages establish the visual and textual framework of the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* and serve as an effective test case for how Morris's book designs inform our understanding of the interpretive relationship between image, text, and reader. The title pages, first and foremost, ground the reader as soon as he opens the volume, in the idea that the entire design is predicated on the equivalent hermeneutic treatment of image, decoration, and text. The verso page, which bears the title *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, establishes this necessity through its nearly complete elision of the distinction between visual and textual forms. Filled to every corner with densely woven leaves, flowers, and vines in a complex pattern, this motif brings to bear the full sophistication of Morris's lifetime as a pattern-designer. The leaves, flowers, and vines that form the title's ostensible background support and

conceal the textual elements they present to the reader. The letters themselves, in a striking expansion of Morris's typefaces, are nearly indistinguishable and visually inseparable from the vines that surround them, with the tails of the letters extending out from the vines in a seamless unification of text and image, thereby contributing to the absence of perspectival art that defines the entire volume. What is more, the distinctive capital G and C of *Geoffrey Chaucer*, which are unique among the Kelmscott letterforms, take on an organic and almost animalistic treatment since their shape is formed out of what may be flowers, leaves, or perhaps even scales. Although the entire design may appear chaotic on first inspection, its striking vitality is instead defined by an ordered rhythm and harmony that unifies text and image in one inseparable whole.

The series of frames and borders that defines the entire two-page opening visually and thematically reinforce the *Chaucer's* unification of text and image. While this proportional layout first and foremost exemplifies Morris's commitment to the embodied reader, the frames also function as a kind of textual threshold for the reader's further engagement with the text. In contrast to Genette-style paratext which functionally divides text from not-text, the opening pages of the *Chaucer* instead rely on the nesting, proportional visual frames to subdivide decoration and type with reference only to their functional legibility within the overall design. In this way, Morris's layouts further collapse the traditional boundaries between text and image and therefore enable the reader to participate fully in the non-perspectival, verbal-visual book. The decreasing size of their proportional borders and space divisions also focuses the reader's dive into the opening lines of Chaucer's poetry. From the initial full-page unit on the verso page, the reader's eye is drawn across the gutter to the decorated frames on the recto page, with its large

bordered illustration at the top of the page, that sits in turn above the large decorated first word “Whan,” all the way down to the initial lines of the Prologue below that are carefully stacked at the bottom of the first column of text. In addition to this visual and textual unity, the organic content of the Kelmscott designs carries through to the thematic content and subject-matter of the General Prologue itself. The springtime depicted in the lines “Whan that April with his shoures soote / The drought of March hath perced to the roote,” while the “smale fowles maken melodye” is echoed in the overtly floral decorations as well as in the foliage that defines the accompanying illustration.⁷¹ This illustration, the first of the Chaucer portraits, depicts Chaucer the poet, pen in hand, in an enclosed garden experiencing a pensive moment of composition. While the mountain landscape that rises behind him is forbidding in the best Romantic sense, the fenced-in garden is as brimming over with leaves and flowers as the borders that surround the printed text. In this way, the decorative harmony of the illustration effectively transports the reader from the decorated world of the frames, through the enclosed space of the illustration, and thence into the text itself, since each element is defined by a continuity of visual decoration and visual style. This proportional division of structural and textual elements, along with the conflation of text and design, therefore stands as an invitation and a functional pathway into the *Chaucer’s* decorated text.

Extended and echoed in the illustrations themselves, this structural component of the poetry demonstrates the relationship between the unified textual and visual work of art and the reader that drives the process of interpretation. Simultaneously, Chaucer appears in the moment

⁷¹ Ibid., 1.

of creative activity with his pen and the reader creatively engages in the process of interpretive use. The visual and textual treatment of the General Prologue extends and deepens the frame experience once the reader finishes the Prologue and turns the pages to enter the second literary frame, that of the storytelling competition in Southwark. At this point in the *Chaucer*, decoration has been firmly established as the mechanism by which the reader accesses the interface of the volume, and this unification of the practical and the decorative is also the means by which the completed volume fits into an architectural interior. The *Chaucer*, as a pocket cathedral, is at once its own supreme work of art as well as a component of the larger whole in which it operates on the reader/user's own bookshelf and, by extension, the reader's decorated interior space. The *Chaucer's* decorative interface is the means by which the reader accesses its unified beauty and utility, as well as being a practical object that has the capacity to be used for further creative and interpretive work.

The *Chaucer's* equivalent treatment of text and image has theoretical ramifications for our understanding of reading as a form of interpretation. While drawing together text and the material presentation of that text, the reader of the *Chaucer* generates a third thing that is at once the collaborative creation of Morris and the Kelmscott Press designers, Chaucer's texts themselves, and the reader. The reader's interpretation launches the reader and the work of art into utopian space and time through his participation in the frame structure that transports the reader into the world of the text. Additionally, the *Chaucer's* non-perspectival decorative motifs locate that mimetic, interpretive space in the reader's lived reality. This new space and time of the reader's collaboration is the extension of the real world in which the reader operates as well

as the new space and time of Morris's utopian craftsman ideal. The book therefore operates messianically in terms of Morris's aesthetic with the reader's creative and hermeneutic intervention, consoling the reader for the fact that the work of art and his interpretation is paradoxically sufficient to create change and powerless to effect wider socioeconomic improvement. The reader's creative engagement with the work of art is thus beautiful and productive while at the same time effective only for the individual aesthetic experience of the work of art and the consolation that comes from community. While this reading may fly in the face of Boethius's own *Consolation*, which castigates creative literary activity in favor of the rational solace brought by philosophical dialogue, Morris's aesthetic, rather more Romantic in its inclinations, favors the creative activity of the reader and the craftsman as the nexus for personal, ethical, and social improvement. Like the astrolabe, the *Chaucer* itself is simultaneously a practical object, a luxurious means of escaping a quotidian routine, an intervention in a profound literary and artistic heritage, an inspiration for the user, and an invitation to engage in creative craftsmanship as a healthy, healing, and vital means of restoring the relationship between the maker and the user.

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