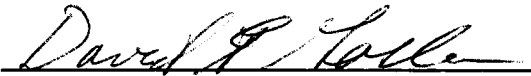
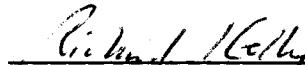
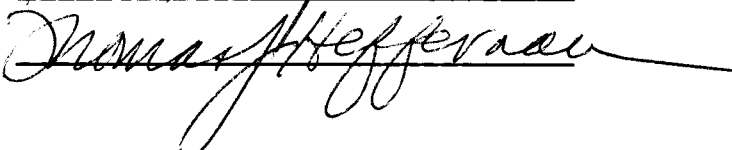


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Kelvin Lee Massey entitled "The Morris Saga: Humor as an Agent of Self-Transformation in William Morris's Icelandic Journals." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.


David F. Goslee, Major
Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate
School

**THE MORRIS SAGA:
HUMOR AS AN AGENT OF SELF-TRANSFORMATION
IN WILLIAM MORRIS'S ICELANDIC JOURNALS**

**A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

Kelvin Lee Massey

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ABSTRACT

William Morris made extended trips to Iceland in the years 1871 and 1873, leaving a unique account of his observations there in the form of his journals. These journals, infused with humor and the spirit of the sagas, record the self-transformation of the author as he symbolically creates his own saga, the Morris Saga, within their pages. As a result of this self-transformation, which can be seen as a rite of passage to manhood for Morris, the author finds within himself the courage to take charge of his own life. The journals reveal a Morris who is in the process of moving away from a passive dependence upon passionate love toward an active involvement in causes that are becoming important to him. Humor and irony are important elements not only of Morris's personality but also of the saga form, and Morris uses them to effect and mark this process of self-transformation.

My argument that the journals embody a saga develops over the course of the introduction and five chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the background to Morris's Icelandic visits and journals. Chapter 2 discusses the question of who represents the real audience for those journals. Chapter 3 discusses the saga traits, including humor and irony, which appear in the journals and details Morris's use of satire toward societal institutions and more

sympathetic humor toward the Icelanders themselves.

Chapter 4 discusses patterns of self-transformation in the sagas and the role of both self-directed and collective humor in Morris's own self-transformation. Chapter 5 relates the Morris Saga to changes in his ideas and actions during his later life.

This study compares the texts of the original journals reproduced on microfilm and the final printed versions, relating the substantial differences found to Morris's use of humor and the sagas. Some of Morris's surviving letters are also analyzed according to the same criteria.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
Introduction.....	1
1 The Background to the Journals.....	8
2 Storyteller and Audience.....	24
3 The Sagas and Humor.....	36
4 Morris's Self-Transformation.....	57
5 Conclusion: The Morris Saga in the Context of His Later Life.....	89
Bibliography.....	102
Vita.....	108

Introduction

William Morris made extended trips to Iceland in the years 1871 and 1873, leaving a unique account of his observations there in the form of his journals. These journals, infused with humor and the spirit of the sagas, record the self-transformation of the author as he symbolically creates his own saga, the Morris Saga, within their pages. As a result of this self-transformation, which can be seen as a rite of passage to manhood for Morris, the author finds within himself the courage to take charge of his own life. The journals reveal a Morris who is in the process of moving away from a passive dependence upon passionate love toward an active involvement in causes that are becoming important to him. Humor and irony are important elements not only of Morris's personality but also of the saga form, and Morris uses them to effect and mark this process of self-transformation.

Morris literally comes alive with humor as soon as he steps ashore on Iceland. The entry for his very first day on the island is dominated by a lengthy and carefully told humorous anecdote:

And now wait and consider if it isn't lucky
that a good joke should not lack its sacred
poet--Evans [a traveling companion] and I bought
some stores the other day at the co-operative

society in the Haymarket: they were to pack them . . . and send them to us, as they did; but the day after came a message to say they had made a mistake, and put a parcel not ours in one of the cases, instead of some bologna sausage we had ordered, and which they then delivered. . . . [T]hey said they would send the next day [after] it; I . . . told them that if they didn't come that day, to Iceland their case would go . . . and that there we would eat their parcel if it was good to eat, or otherwise treat it as it deserved. Well, they never came, and . . . many were the speculations as to what it was . . . I suggested (as the wildest possible idea) fragrant Floriline ["A commercial breath freshener" according to Kelvin 143 n.] and hair-brushes--now . . . off came the lid: there was the side of bacon . . . and here IT is--four (was it) boxes of FRAGRANT FLORILINE, and two dozen bottles of . . . scents . . . stowed in little boxes that had hair-brushes printed on them.

We looked at each other to see if we were drunk or dreaming, and then--to say we laughed--how does that describe the row we made; we were on the edge of the hayfield at the back of the house; the haymakers ran up and leaned on

their rakes and looked at us amazed and half-frightened; man, woman and child ran out from their houses, to see what was toward; but all shame or care had left us and there we rolled about and roared, till nature refused to help us any longer. . . . (25-26)

The description Morris gives us, as he rolls around in laughter in the hayfield, is that of a quite-remarkable emotional outburst for a man thirty-seven years of age. Previously he has set the tone for the humor in days to come by positing the question: "I am principally of use as a mocking-stock, an abusing-block, how shall I call it?"

(25). The rhetorical question interests us because it is Morris himself who puts it forth. Although he creates a negative picture by setting himself up as a humorous target for his companions, he is actually forming the basis for the positive progression I am going to trace. He will answer his own question in the days that follow by documenting this process of self-transformation through the pages of his journal.

Several critics have commented in passing upon the humor present in Morris's Icelandic journals, but they often have misunderstood or belittled its significance. James Morris, for example, remarks that Morris traveled to Iceland "in a spirit of whimsical self-amusement" (xvii), while he and his companions

sometimes seem ominously on the brink of practical jokes. There is much hearty and not always attractive laughter in this book: laughter at the lesser misfortunes of others, like nearly falling into a chasm, or losing a fork; giggly adolescent laughter about nothing in particular, or at japes which will strike many men nowadays, and most women, as singularly unfunny. (xix)

Fiona MacCarthy, in her recent biography of Morris, claims that in Iceland "he is consciously buffoonish" and "thinks of himself in terms of a Burne-Jones cartoon" (293). She also writes that he engages in a "pattern of male foolery that Morris found so necessary" (281), but she does not seek to analyze the humor to any greater extent. Frederick Kirchhoff is perhaps the most insightful of these critics, observing that "Morris writes about himself with a keen sense of self-parody, creating an autobiographical persona that exorcises his insecurity by reducing it to comic triviality" (William Morris 87). Kirchhoff, however, does not develop his discussion of humor along any further lines. Thus, in most cases, the substantial amount of humor present in the journals has been either ignored, trivialized, or even seen as embarrassing by critics who have failed to recognize its true significance.

In contrast, the fact that some type of monumental change within Morris happened as a result of his Icelandic

experiences has been widely recognized. In his seminal biography of Morris, J.W. Mackail remarks that the 1871 trip has "an importance in Morris's life which can hardly be over-estimated" (240). Carole Silver observes that "Morris's Icelandic journeys were clearly important to the process of personal recovery which he experienced after 1873 . . . marking the beginning of his new attitudes toward fate and chance" (108). John Purkis has, perhaps more than anyone else, correlated this change with Morris's love of Icelandic literature:

[Morris] emerges at the end of this physical and emotional purgatory a bigger man, having taken to himself as carapace the craggy unyielding landscape of Iceland, and forming his character thereafter on the model of its courageous and active heroes. The journals, a few letters, and some poems are our record of this transformation.

(5)

These critics recognize that some type of transformation occurs to Morris as a result of his Icelandic experiences, but they fail to recognize the role of humor in the process.

I contend that the humor in Morris's journals is not incidental, unimportant, or embarrassing, but rather the catalyst for the self-transformation that Morris consciously desires to undergo. Its pervasive presence in the journals indicates that Morris wants it to be seen as a crucial part

of his process of change. Furthermore, the journals, in which Morris hopes to record his self-transformation, have very strong affinities with the Icelandic sagas. I believe that Morris sees himself in Iceland as writing his own saga, the Morris Saga.

This term previously has been used by Hartley S. Spatt in his article "Morrissaga: Sigurd the Volsung," in which he claims that Sigurd "provides an embodiment for the self-sustaining myth of the individual artist of the self" (141). My usage of the term "Morris Saga," however, differs entirely from Spatt's, being applied to the physical record, the Icelandic journals, of Morris's successful attempt to break free from the straitjacket of emotions and types of thinking he finds oppressive: sexual, national, and religious. I do not claim this process was fully completed in Iceland; but it certainly had reached an advanced stage by the time of his second visit in 1873, as that journal clearly indicates. This personal process of self-transformation and renewal was a prerequisite for the emotional and artistic equilibrium necessary to write what he considered his greatest work, Sigurd the Volsung.

My argument that the journals embody a saga develops over the course of the following five chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the background to Morris's Icelandic visits and journals. Chapter 2 discusses the question of who represents the real audience for those journals. Chapter 3

discusses the saga traits, including humor and irony, which appear in the journals and details Morris's use of satire toward societal institutions and more sympathetic humor toward the Icelanders themselves. Chapter 4 discusses patterns of self-transformation in the sagas and the role of both self-directed and collective humor in Morris's own self-transformation. Chapter 5 relates the Morris Saga to changes in his ideas and actions during his later life. These subsequent chapters show that the answer to the rhetorical question asked by Morris--"I am principally of use as a mocking-stock, an abusing-block, how shall I call it?"--reveals him to be searching for a whole process that is more global than his immediate intent.

Chapter 1

The Background to the Journals

The Journals in the Context of Morris's Work

It is necessary to understand something of the background to the journals in order to realize their full significance among Morris's vast body of work. His observations there were influenced by his previously successful literary career, his marital problems, the physical conditions he encountered in Iceland, his obsessive fascination with the sagas, and the daily life of the contemporary Icelanders he saw. In subtly interconnected ways, all these combined to produce the exact form and nature of the journals as they are now preserved.

Unique among Morris's work, these journals reveal certain elements of his personality to a much greater degree than any of his other published writings, and do so at a critical point in his life. As Silver has remarked, this was a period of "most intense distress" for Morris (80). Not only did he suffer from an unhappy marriage, a situation to be discussed later in this chapter, he also underwent an intellectual and artistic crisis as well. He reveals his concerns to a close friend, Aglaia Ionides Coronio, in a letter dated February 11, 1873:

My translations go on apace, but I am doing nothing original . . . sometimes I begin to fear I am losing my invention. You know I very much wish not to fall off in imagination and enthusiasm as I grow older: there have been men who once upon a time have done things good or noteworthy who have got worse with time and outlived their power: I don't like that at all. (Kelvin 178)

The two works of fiction he attempted during this time period demonstrate the trouble he had in replicating the success of his highly popular The Earthly Paradise. Love Is Enough, a lengthy poem written in 1871 but not published until 1873, has been regarded by many critics as "an unfathomable mystery" (Silver 80). A novel begun in 1872 was never finished; its subject, a love triangle involving two brothers, was awkwardly close to Morris's own personal situation. An examination of that fragmentary novel, published in 1982 as The Novel on Blue Paper, reveals he was having problems working within that genre, stylistically as well as in developing the plot. Mackail notes that Morris had finished the poems for The Earthly Paradise by the end of 1869 (204), and did not begin writing Sigurd the Volsung until late 1874 or early 1875 (311, 330). Morris thus seems to have suffered a fairly acute case of writer's block, insofar as original work is concerned, for a five-year period. The journals therefore are arguably his most

significant work from those years.

Humor only rarely surfaces in the works he had published during his lifetime. Arthur Compton-Rickett writes that Morris

kept his ideal of Art on a plane by itself, suffering nothing to interfere with it [He] rigorously excluded the quality of humour from his Art expression. . . . It may be questioned whether this deliberate exclusion of humour did not give a certain monotony to Morris's work at times. . . . (55)

Given the attitudes toward humor prevalent in Victorian England, to be discussed in chapter 3, Morris justifiably may have felt he would not be taken seriously if he injected large amounts of humor into the works he thought most important. Nevertheless, humor does appear sporadically: for example, his 1887 play, The Tables Turned, or Nupkins Awakened, is a quite-humorous political satire, and his 1891 romance, The Story of the Glittering Plain, contains flashes of humor and irony very similar to the Icelandic sagas.

The only other lengthy journal kept by Morris was his 1887 Socialist Diary. The latter, not published in full until 1982, seems, just as the Icelandic journals do, "to concretise and analyse the activities of a period of transition," according to Florence Boos in the introduction (2-3). Morris writes that "the chief purpose of this diary

is to record my impressions on the Socialist movement" (26), but although the tone is often serious, there are sudden insights of humor and irony that flash intermittently throughout the entries.

The Icelandic journals, coming after Morris's success with several volumes of poetry, collectively represent his first extended piece of prose writing, as well as the only extended piece of such writing before he became politically active as a socialist. It can be argued, as MacCarthy does, that they "must rate amongst the best prose Morris ever wrote" (281). Significantly, they also represent his first substantial work not concerned with the theme of passionate love.

The Physical Journals

The 1871 journal was originally "in the form of octavo ruled note-books and all written in pencil"; there are two of these, as the index to the microfilm of the manuscripts indicates. MacCarthy describes them as "black limp leather notebooks"; they now reside in the British Library (709). Morris's daughter May, in her 1911 introduction to the journals in volume 8 of the Collected Works, describes them as "battered and in places rubbed and illegible, whose appearance is eloquent enough and tells of long journeyings and soakings in that precious little haversack" (xxii). The

haversack containing the notebooks was actually lost at one point by the guide Eyvindr; Morris indicates in the entry for that day that he responded by losing his temper and threatening, rather humorlessly, to kill the guide. The latter underwent a three hour ride back to their previous campsite to retrieve it (87-89).

The diary contains entries from July 6, when Morris left London, until September 7, when he returned to England. An examination of the notebooks on microfilm reveals that, although some portions appear to be illegible, others can be read and allow a comparison with the revised version, which often contains substantial differences and additions. Morris made the revision from the original notebooks as he prepared for his 1873 trip to Iceland. This revision was completed, as the final version states, on June 30 of that year (185). He then gave it to Georgiana Burne-Jones, with the inscription "Georgie from WM, July 8, 1873"; this copy is presently located in the Library of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (MacCarthy 709). It represents the version that May Morris had printed in volume 8 of the Collected Works, as she states in the introduction (xxxiv).

The 1873 journal also resides in the British Library. This journal, set entirely within Iceland, contains entries for only approximately the first three-fifths of the land expedition: from July 19 until August 19, when it abruptly

and inexplicably breaks off. The last six entries are in abbreviated form and obviously hastily written. The 1873 text, unlike that of the earlier journal, gives clear indications that the entries were not actually written on a daily basis; rather Morris caught up on them periodically. He observes that July 24 "was a day of rest which I spent in writing up diary" (198). Under the August 5 entry, another day in which the party remained in camp, he records "So the day goes on in writing journal . . ." (218). This no doubt accounts for the several mistakes that Eiríkr Magnússon remarks upon in the notes to the 1873 journal (244-51).

Morris apparently had great difficulty in writing the second journal because he and Faulkner were now having to do all the work that had been shared among four men on the previous trip. He cogently observes that "four make easier work than two" (189). While this could have been a factor causing the abrupt ending to the journal, Richard L. Harris may have discovered another reason. He relates that an Icelandic source claims that "Morris became ill during the 1873 trip and . . . Jón Jónsson [one of the guides] had saved his life, for which Morris in gratitude sent him $\pm$ 5 every year" ("William Morris and Jón Jónsson" 61). Illness thus may have incapacitated Morris and precipitated his abandonment of the 1873 journal.

May Morris, as she states in her introduction, had the latter journal printed "almost as it stands" in volume 8

(xxxii). This 1911 printing, coming fifteen years after Morris's death, represented the first time either journal had appeared in print, with the exception of selected passages used by Mackail in chapter 8 of his biography of Morris. Notes to both journals were supplied by Magnússon in the 1911 printing.

The Travels

Each of Morris's Icelandic expeditions lasted for around six weeks, and in both cases his party made the voyage on a vessel named the Diana. The 1871 journal indicates they briefly stopped at the Faroes en route to Iceland, where they stayed from July 14 until September 1. In 1871 Morris had as traveling companions Charles Faulkner, who had been close friends with Morris since their days at Oxford; Eiríkr Magnússon, an Icelandic living in England who had taught Morris the Icelandic language and collaborated with him on several saga translations; and W.H. Evans, a British officer who helped share the expenses. Eyvindr and Gisli were their two primary guides.

May Morris observes that "They were received kindly and hospitably everywhere. . . . [A]t the prosperous homesteads and at the poorer ones, the same idea of hospitality prevailed" (xxii). The journals contain no indication of hostility or resentment toward Morris and his party from the

Icelanders; they were rather the center of good-willed attention, and Morris notes several occasions where crowds of Icelanders would gather around the party and regard them with curiosity. Probably the presence of Magnússon, as well as Morris's command of the language, enabled him and his companions to integrate themselves among the populace to a much greater degree than other English travelers had been able to do. As May Morris remarks, "That one of them was a native of the island and used to the methods of travel made things easy--I might even say possible--for the three Englishmen . . ." (xx).

The party traveled to the Geysir as well as to many sites mentioned in the sagas; although they rode through the interior, much of their journey lay on or near the seacoast. The 1873 journey would take them more through the unpopulated interior of the island. Morris's only companions on the latter trip were Faulkner and two Icelandic guides: Jón Jónsson, whom they had met in 1871, and Haldor. Morris and Faulkner were on the island from July 18 until sometime around September 5 (Kelvin 197).

Both journeys were physically challenging. Although Henry James describes Morris as "burly" in an 1869 letter, he also characterizes him as "corpulent" (Lubbock 18). Both Morris and Faulkner were used to living comfortable middle-class lives. Neither was adept at riding horseback; consequently, they had to practice before leaving England:

"'Don't forget to practise riding,' he wrote to Faulkner in May [1871]. 'I began this morning. By Gum the great we shall have plenty of it there according to our program'" (Mackail 241).

Both trips involved weeks spent camping out (only occasionally spending nights in Icelandic homes) as well as grueling rides on horseback over an often-rugged terrain. These were often quite lengthy; Morris observes that he reached the Geysir after a thirteen-hour ride (68). They traveled over a varied terrain that included lava rocks, sand, and bogs, and endured various weather conditions, including rain, sleet, snow, and sometime even excessive heat. The daily routine of setting up camp, as well as the procurement and preparation of food, required a vast amount of work.

In the Icelandic countryside, Morris and his companions were totally cut off from contact with England: they could neither send nor receive letters. Before leaving Reykjavík, on July 16, 1871, Morris sent letters to his wife, mother, daughters, and Georgiana's sister, Louisa, along with several others which have not survived (Kelvin 141-45). He was unable to post letters afterwards until August 11, when his party encountered a Danish vessel that agreed to carry letters for them; Morris dispatched a second one to his wife on that date (Kelvin 145-47). After leaving Reykjavík on July 17, the party received no news from England until their

return on August 28, "six weeks to the minute," as Morris remarks. He describes how he galloped into the town, searching for letters with fear and anticipation; the eleven he found awaiting him "at first glance did somewhat cure my terror, for there was no one dead at least" (178). During the 1873 expedition, he wrote some letters on July 18, the day of his arrival, and apparently was unable to post any others afterwards (Kelvin 195-97).

Reasons for Going to Iceland

Morris had become fascinated with the sagas and wanted to see the land that had inspired them. His journeys took on the characteristics of a pilgrimage, as he indicates in his first journal (67, 123). Even sixteen years later he would describe the land of the Icelanders in these terms: "their country is to me a Holy Land" ("Early Literature" 181)

According to Mackail, Morris's interest in the sagas began while he attended Oxford (39), and by the time he met Magnússon in 1868 he had read G. W. Dasent's translations of Njáls saga and Gísli saga (201). Morris and Magnússon immediately became friends; the latter began teaching Morris the Icelandic language and they began a series of translations of sagas. Some of the fruits of their labor appeared in The Earthly Paradise: "The Lovers of Gudrun" is

Morris's rather free rendition of a complete translation of the Laxdoela saga he made with Magnússon (Henderson 109). Others were published separately; their version of Grettis saga, The Story of Grettir the Strong, appeared in 1869, and their translation of the Völsunga saga was published in 1870. By the time Morris and Magnússon left for Iceland in 1871, they had also made translations of Gunnlaugs saga ormsstunga ("The Story of Gunnlaug the Worm-tongue"), Friðjófs saga fraekna (The Story of Frithiof the Bold), Eyrbyggja saga ("The Story of the Ere-dwellers"), probably Víglundar saga (Story of Viqlund the Fair), and possibly Kormáks saga (The Story of Kormak the Son of Ogmund) as well (Calder 1; Harris, "William Morris, Eiríkur Magnússon" 120; Kelvin 126 and n., 132 and n.; Mackail 201, 208-09, 262).

After having collaborated with Magnússon on up to eight recent translations, it is not surprising that Morris would include numerous references to the sagas in his journals. He alludes to at least twelve in the 1871 journal: Bandamanna saga, Egils saga, Eyrbyggja saga, Finnboga saga hins ramma, Grettis saga, Gunnlaugs saga ormsstungu, Haensa-bóris saga, Heiðarvíga saga, Laxdoela saga, Njáls saga, Vatnsdæla saga, and Víglundar saga. In the 1873 journal he alludes to three: Grettis saga, Njáls saga, and Víga-Glúms saga. These include several of the sagas he and Magnússon had already translated as well as others they would do in future years.

Morris was also suffering from a stressful marital situation. His wife, Jane, admitted in later years that "she had never loved" him (MacCarthy 141). She began an affair with Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1867 or 1868 (Kelvin xxx). By the latter year many people in London society had become aware of the relationship, as the two were frequently seen together in public at dinner parties and séances. Morris seems to have been aware of the affair by December of 1868 (MacCarthy 224-25, 253-54, 347).

For many years Jane was plagued by a mysterious illness. MacCarthy suggests that, while it may have been "gynaecological in origin" (xiii), it was perhaps also an "illness of convenience" (201). It seemed to improve whenever she was away from Morris and with Rossetti, and according to Philip Henderson, "she only seems to have been well in her husband's absence" (143). During this time period she only sporadically lived with Morris (Henderson 117-18, 133). They seem to have reached an understanding "having as its main article that Jane could do as she pleased" (Kelvin xxxi). In fact, Morris seems to have leased Kelmscott Manor in order "to find a civilized modus vivendi" for himself, his wife, and Rossetti. The latter and Morris jointly took up the lease in June of 1871; the following month, Jane and the children moved into the manor with Rossetti while Morris left for Iceland (MacCarthy 275-76).

His ostensible equanimity in the face of the affair mystified his friends (Henderson 218-19), and Edward Burne-Jones apparently had an angry confrontation with Rossetti during Morris's absence (MacCarthy 276-77). Despite his outward show of equanimity, however, the affair took a serious emotional toll upon him. It caused him to question the very desirability of the institution of marriage (MacCarthy 227), and, as we shall later see, he underwent a severe crisis regarding his own sense of manhood.

Morris may have been hoping, consciously or not, that the land of the sagas would inspire him with some sorely needed courage. He also seems to have been searching for a new ideal upon which he could center his life. As Purkis has remarked, "there was a definite quest, a desire to find something in the wilderness of Iceland" (7). Morris describes his sense of anticipation under the entry for July 8, 1871, as the party sails from Scotland: "I felt happy and adventurous, as if all kinds of things were going to happen, and very glad to be going" (8).

He could not have been unaware that his visits, which in both cases begin in the month of July, coincide with the celebration of the New Year in the Icelandic sagas. He and Magnússon already had dealt with the ancient Icelandic calendar in their 1869 translation of Grettis Saga: The Story of Grettir the Strong (92 and n.), and in volume 1 of

their Saga Library, published in 1891, they signify the importance of the ancient calendar by writing "the legal year . . . began on the Icelandic midsummer's Sunday, which fell on July 22nd to 28th" and proceed to list the order of the months in the old Icelandic calendar (189-90 n.). It would not be surprising if Morris made the connection between the renewal which the beginning of a New Year always symbolizes and the renewal he sought for his own life.

Iceland in the 1870s

Iceland during this time period was recovering from centuries of disastrous Danish rule and a series of natural catastrophes that had wiped out much of the population prior to the nineteenth century. As Magnus Stephensen observes, during the eighteenth century

Iceland experienced forty-three years of distress due to cold winters, ice-floes, failures of fisheries, shipwrecks, inundations, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, epidemics and contagious diseases among men and animals . . . often in connection with and as a result of one another.

(qtd. in Gjerset 322)

These disasters had a cataclysmic effect upon the population, and the island had fewer inhabitants in 1800 than it did a century earlier (47,000 versus 50,000). Their

livestock was decimated as well; the sheep population, for example, dropped from 280,000 in 1703 to 49,000 by 1784 (Gjerset 322-23).

Danish misrule had also crippled the island economically. The Danish government enforced a monopoly which prevented the Icelanders from trading with other countries. This resulted in a shortage of goods on the island, causing a great hardship on the natives. The Danish government mirrored their trade monopoly with a political absolutism; the Icelandic assembly, the Althing, which had met for over 800 years, was abolished in 1800 (Gjerset 329-46).

Conditions greatly improved in the nineteenth century: the Althing was reestablished in 1843, and Denmark lifted its ban on Icelandic trade with foreign nations in 1854. Nevertheless the Icelanders came to greatly resent Danish rule. The revival of political activity fueled the rise of an independence movement led by Jón Sigurdsson that was in full swing as Morris arrived in 1871 (Gjerset 375-77, 398-99, 407-09). The day after his arrival Morris met Sigurdsson and described him as "noteworthy . . . the President of the Althing, a literary man whose editions of sagas I know very well: he seemed a shy, kind, scholar-like man, and I talked (Icelandic) all I might to him" (26).

Although Iceland's population had reached around 70,000 by the time of Morris's visit, an emigration movement to

Canada and the United States had begun, fueled by the economic conditions. Although there were few class distinctions, and no native nobility on the island, living conditions were rugged (Gjerset 333, 409, 416). Morris became very much aware of this emigration during the 1873 visit; he describes the inhabitants of one stead thus: "the people I thought seemed depressed and poor, the last tenant has emigrated to Am[erica]--perhaps this cast an air of gloom on the place" (223). Later that day, he writes that an Icelfander told them

that two hundred folk had been minded for America by the "Queen" which could take only half of them; and again I confess it saddened me to hear of it; but it seems the people here have had many bad years together and it has sickened them of it.

(224)

Here Morris demonstrates that he is no fanciful romantic but rather a person acutely aware of the realities of daily life in Iceland and extremely sympathetic toward the people with all their hardships. The situation of the Icelandic people in the 1870s forces Morris to react. As we shall see, his response is one of humor that reveals his pathos and deepening respect for the Icelanders. His mental reinforcement of their connections with the heroic past becomes an essential compliment to his own quest for a heroic self-transformation in the present.

Chapter 2

Storyteller and Audience

Morris as Storyteller

Connecting phrases within the original manuscript confirm that Morris is writing for an audience larger than himself; they also demonstrate that from the beginning he sees his role as that of storyteller. These phrases, such as "well on we go," "so," and "I forgot to say," are sometimes excised from the final revision. Others, such as "down we go," appear in both versions (51). The presence of phrases such as these bring an immediacy to the relationship of storyteller and audience.

Morris also heightens this sense of immediacy in his journals by addressing the reader in the second person. Some examples include: "And now wait and consider if it isn't lucky that a good joke should not lack its sacred poet . . ." (25), "may I mention that I had a stomach-ache" (87), "Just think, though, what a mournful place this is . . ." (108), "louse-powder, so please you" (122), "by which you may see" (134), "You must suppose" (171), "Excuse this stupid story . . ." (177), "I assure you" (179). These intermittent addresses, which are also prominent in the original manuscript, are frequent enough to be significant.

They are further evidence that Morris sees himself in the role of storyteller in the journals.

They also play a role very similar to what A. Margaret Arent describes as "teller-to-audience directive[s]" within the sagas. Because the dim origins of the sagas lie within the oral tradition, and because they were intended to be read out loud, sagas contain phrases and sentences that illustrate these directives. Arent gives as an example the following from the end of a chapter in the Laxdoela: "Now let us return to Iceland and see what has been going on there since Thorkel went away" (xxiv). Another example can be found in the Grettis saga: when the cowardly braggart Gisli flees the area of Grettir's outlawry, the phrase "and now he is out of the story" occurs (Magnússon and Morris 178). This phrase commonly appears in the sagas when characters are to be mentioned no more. These "teller-to-audience directives" help create an active relationship between the storyteller and his audience.

Morris not only performs the role of storyteller: he is also, during the process of revision, viewing his manuscript from the perspective of a two-year hindsight. During the process of revision he is simultaneously engaged in a reevaluation of the meaning of his quest. Thus, many of the humorous passages in the revised manuscript, such as the anecdote about the Floriline, as well as others to be discussed later, such as Magnusson's near-manslaughter of a

bonder, the more Islandico incident, and Faulkner's ironic near-brush with death, are primarily or entirely written from the later perspective.

The substantial amount of humor expressed in the original manuscript nevertheless demonstrates that Morris intended it to play a central role in his account. The fact, for example, that Morris makes the note "(joke about Floriline[...])" proves he does intend to expand upon this incident in a later version. The presence in the original manuscript of the anecdote about Faulkner egging on the hairdresser, as well as that of Evan's and the Cambridge man's hunting expedition (to be discussed in subsequent chapters), clearly show that banter played an all-important role in the day-to-day reality of the expedition.

The Intended Audience for the Journals

MacCarthy believes that Morris wrote the journals primarily for a "sympathetic female reader," namely Georgiana, or "Georgie," the wife of his best friend, Edward Burne-Jones (281). Morris gave the revised copy of his first journal to her shortly before setting out on his second journey to Iceland. He apparently did so because she sympathized with his obsession with the sagas much more than Jane. Since he had previously dedicated his highly successful Earthly Paradise to his wife, his gift of the

journal, coming soon after that of the illuminated A Book of Verse, seems to mark a decided shift in attention. This book was a one-of-a-kind volume of verse by Morris, done by hand with the aid of Edward Burne-Jones, George Wardle, and Charles Fairfax Murray (Mackail 277-78). Henderson claims that Morris was in love with Georgiana and that "It seems likely that a number of the poems he had illuminated in A Book of Verse in 1870, which bears Georgie's initials on the cover, were actually addressed to her" (142).

Regardless of whether or not Morris was in love with Georgiana, however, I do not believe he addresses the journals exclusively to her. Almost none of Morris's letters to her during this time period have survived, but the self-deprecating humor alternating with depression that characterizes the journals also figures prominently in the series of letters to his friend Aglaia. In letters to Aglaia, which Norman Kelvin dates to 1872 and 1874, Morris confesses to feelings of unmanliness (171-73, 215-16). In another, dated February 11, 1873, he progresses from a discussion of his feelings of inadequacy as a writer to a humorous comparison of his housekeeper with a "troll-wife in an Icelandic story: with a deep base [sic] voice, big and O So ugly!" He then switches back to a tone of self-abuse, referring to himself as a "stupid" linguist (Kelvin 177-79). His letters to Jane from Iceland have the same humorous tone and describe some of the same humorous events

as the journals (Kelvin 141-42, 145-47). Morris also wrote a letter to Georgiana's sister, Louisa Macdonald Baldwin, encouraging her to read the revision of the first journal he was preparing to send Georgie (Kelvin 149-50).

There is also intriguing evidence, in the form of a second-person address, in the original manuscript under the entry for July 8. As Morris describes his impatience at delays in getting to Reykjavík, he writes "allow me to say that my temper was angelic under th[e?]se afflictions--though you will think them small enough." This has the immediacy and the feel of being addressed to a specific individual who is familiar with Morris's bad temper, probably Georgiana. Nevertheless, it is excised from the revision that was given to her. Second-person addresses in the later version are still common but often seem more impersonal, as if intended for a general reader. I think the deletion of this passage provides evidence that Morris, at least from the time of the revision, intended his journals for a wider audience.

Morris also began organizing the entries in the revised manuscript into chapter divisions but abandoned this activity after the fifth chapter. Perhaps this is why Mackail wrote that Morris was actually considering publishing the first journal even as he was revising it, publication being "considered and deferred more than once" (242). While MacCarthy claims that Morris had private

reasons for withholding publication (310), it is more likely that publication became indefinitely delayed as Morris progressed into newer activities he thought more immediate and interesting.

Morris's Shift in Audience and Style

Morris, hearing of Edmund Gosse's interest in northern European literature, apparently read the entire journal to him one evening in January, 1872; Gosse described it as "very vivid and amusing." (Thwaite 110). In fact, the journals actually seem to represent the beginning of a shift in audience for Morris. Silver observes that "Prior to the summer of 1871, Morris's preoccupation with failure in love was almost obsessive" (81). In his previous writings, concerned primarily with themes of romantic love and rejection, women play a significant if not predominant role. Presumably these works were written for and appealed to a primarily female audience.

However, travel writing, especially the type concerning Iceland, represented a predominantly masculine activity in Victorian England. Because of Iceland's isolation and ruggedness, almost all English travelers to the island in Morris's time were men. Frederick Kirchhoff notes that between 1850 and 1880 thirteen books about Iceland were written by English travel writers (including Morris), all of

whom were male ("Victorian Travel Writers" 99, 113-14 n.). It seems that Morris's potential audience would have been primarily men because they would have been more likely than women to be interested in reading about Iceland.

The same holds true for the audience for the sagas: because the latter are male-oriented and primarily concerned with the heroic exploits of males, they presumably would have had less of an appeal to a female Victorian audience than works concerned with romance between the sexes. Because most women during that time period were brought up to seek personal fulfillment through a happy marriage, literary works describing such an attainment were generally popular among female readers. The Victorians were socialized from childhood to a perceived dichotomy between male and female-oriented literature, and the former generally was recognized as being more action-oriented (Salmon 515-16).

Georgiana's interest in the sagas may have been genuine, given the remarks Morris made to her in an 1877 letter in which he discusses his re-reading of Njáls saga in Icelandic (Kelvin 344). However, the surviving letters to Georgiana seem to indicate that Morris felt comfortable in discussing his activities in general with her: for example, he details his dyeing and weaving activities, as well as his architectural and political interests, in other letters to her (Kelvin 292, 345, 370, 504). The surviving letters

therefore do not reveal any special or unusual interest in the sagas on Georgiana's part.

An examination of the surviving letters collected by Kelvin provides some insights into whom Morris thought to be the primary audience for the sagas. For the years 1869-1875 Kelvin includes 261 letters, including fragmentary ones, written by Morris. Of these, 66% were written to men, 33% were written to women, and in 1% of the cases, the recipient is unknown. I have determined that 18% of these letters contain clear references or allusions to individual sagas, characters in sagas, Morris's translations of sagas, or other Icelandic literature. In letters where these references occur, men are the correspondents in 71% of the cases (representing 20% of the total correspondence to men) and women in 29% of the cases (representing 16% of the total correspondence to women).

When individual correspondents are considered, the numbers become significant. In every case, only a minority of the surviving letters to the female correspondents he frequently wrote contain references to sagas. For example, only 17% of the letters to Louisa Macdonald Baldwin and 24% of the letters to Jane contain references; Aglaia is the female correspondent with the highest percentage: 29%. However, the percentages reach much higher numbers with certain male correspondents. Not surprisingly, letters to Eiríkr Magnússon contain a high percentage of references

(38%), but other male correspondents have high percentages as well: 29% for Charles Fairfax Murray, 57% for Charles Eliot Norton, and 60% for Henry Buxton Forman.

The quantity and quality of these references tend to be quite different for male and female correspondents. The allusions to sagas in letters to women are almost never lengthy; in most cases, Morris seems to be dutifully informing them about his current work, without any evidence that he expects real interest. For example, he tells Aglaia in an 1872 letter, "I am working hard at the Icelandic translations," but gives no further details (Kelvin 164). In his second letter to Jane from Iceland in 1871, he gives a perfunctory mention of seven sites prominent in the sagas which he has visited, but quickly moves on to other topics (146).

When Morris later writes Charles Eliot Norton and describes his Icelandic journey, the difference is startling. He alludes to at least five sagas, mentions six characters as well as the historian Snorri Sturluson, names at least sixteen different saga sites, refers to his poem "The Lovers of Gudrun," alludes to the "Furor Norsmanorum," and mentions the names of his guides (which he fails to do to Jane) (Kelvin 151-54). In another letter to Henry Buxton Foreman, he describes in detail the specific stories he plans to include in a volume that would appear over a year later as Three Northern Love Stories and Other Tales (Kelvin

205-06 and n.). Morris's perception that his male correspondents are interested in more details when he discusses Icelandic themes seems to bolster my contention that he was moving toward an objectively male audience. The journals, which are the direct product of his obsessive interest in the sagas, actually mark a symbolic shift, in audience as well as content, from the female realm to the male. He may need Georgiana for an immediate audience, but, as we will see in chapters 4 and 5, he is in the process of moving away from a psychological dependence upon women.

This process seems to be reflected in the style of the journals as well. E.P. Thompson notes the prominence of "strong active verbs" in the 1873 journal (180). Purkis mentions Thompson's observation and goes even further, claiming the journals have "great literary merit" (5) because they demonstrate

clarity and the dislike of the ornate--the return to simplicity in furniture design mirrored in the drive to simplicity and virility in words and syntax. . . . [T]he desire to avoid Latin words gives us instead conversational idioms and clear, bright English monosyllables. (6; emphasis added)

It is hardly coincidental that, as Morris seeks to reaffirm his manhood by means of his Icelandic travels, he parallels this affirmation with a literary style that can be perceived as evidencing his "virility." As will be shown in chapter

5, this question of stylistic virility takes on an overwhelming importance in the context of Morris's subsequent literary history.

Morris's Self-Consciousness

In the journals, Morris "Sometimes . . . sounds a very archetype of the self-conscious literary man . . ." (James Morris xvii). Familiar with the long history of English travel writing concerned with Iceland, he is cognizant of the fact that his creation is another example of that subgenre. He ridicules the earlier efforts of others, referring to them as "silly travellers' tales" (44). He obviously wants his work to stand out from previous attempts by other writers.

He concludes the first journal with a quotation in Icelandic (185). In the notes, Magnússon identifies the lines as from Snorri Sturluson's Háttatal and translates them as follows:

Ever will live
 Unless mankind perish
 The praise of men
 Or the worlds give way (244 n.)

This is hardly a love epigraph, which might be expected if the journal were an amorous gift to Georgiana; rather, it embodies a pervasive saga concept that has become an

important part of Morris's thinking. In the sagas, characters seem to have little hope of life after death; even most of the gods are doomed to die at Ragnarök. The only real immortality possible is the fame one obtains by doing heroic deeds that will be remembered.

As we shall see in chapter 5, Morris, who questions the reality of life after death, decides to try to achieve his own immortality through his heroic efforts at building socialism. The lines ending his first journal thus herald the beginning of the driving force that will motivate the remainder of his life's work. As his use of Icelandic, and not English, words indicates, it will be a work that challenges the ethnocentrism of his own nation as he moves from the international setting of the sagas into the internationalist perspective of Marxism.

Chapter 3

The Sagas and Humor

Morris's Journey as a Saga

The sagas seem to pervade Morris's thinking wherever he travels in Iceland. He primarily relates the sites he visits to events in the sagas, and he alludes to at least thirteen of the latter during the course of the journals. Magnússon even claims Morris on one occasion during the first journey recited an entire saga, "the Saga of Biorn, the Champion of the men of Hitdale," narrating it "in abridgement with remarkably few slips" (Journals 239 n.). It is therefore only natural that the saga form would have a substantial influence upon the nature and form of his observations and manner of recording them. In many ways the journals comprise The Morris Saga.

Among the traits Peter Hallberg mentions that characterize the Icelandic family sagas are the following: they are episodic in nature, as is exemplified by Njáls saga (168 n.); they tend to be written in a realistic style (72-73, 141); they contain "a profusion of authentic place names and concrete topographical details" (124); and they often involve the transformation of a protagonist (139-40). They are also works of adventure and

exploration: the settlement of Iceland and Greenland as well as the discovery of Vinland (America) are dealt with in various sagas. Thus they are international in scope and tone. Important sections of the Njála, the Laxdoela, and the Grettis saga, for example, occur outside Iceland: in Norway, the Scottish Isles, and even Constantinople. Characters are always traveling, and even within Iceland there is a constant journeying back and forth: to make friendly visits, to wreak vengeance, or simply to attend the yearly Althing.

Because both saga literature and travel writing are ultimately derived from oral forms, they share many traits. As Morris produces travel literature, therefore, he also produces a work which resembles a saga in several respects. These journals, however, show several other affinities with the saga style even more clearly. The storyteller-to-audience relationship has already been mentioned in chapter 2. Another parallel would be their refusal to describe the psychological motivations of characters, in this case, the contemporary Icelanders. As in the sagas, the significance of an individual lies in what he does, and not in what he thinks or feels:

In comparison with the psychological fiction of a later period, the portrayal of the characters' deeper motives, thoughts, and feelings in the sagas may impress one as meager. On the whole,

the saga people are depicted from without, in their demeanor, actions, and words, or in the judgment of others. (Hallberg 76)

In the Laxdoela, for example, Óláf Feilan is described as "a big man and strong, good-looking and of many accomplishments" (Arent 13). Gudrun's first husband, Thorvald, is characterized as "a wealthy man, but scarcely what one would call courageous" (Arent 84). Her fourth husband, Thorkel, is simply described as "a well-known man, of high birth, and a great friend of Snorri Godi" (Arent 147). Arent's observation about the Laxdoela holds true for the other sagas as well:

The characters are introduced by perfunctory adjectives; later in the action they act out in word and deed these traits assigned to them. . . . Since character and plot are so mutually dependent, the characters are apt to appear as types. (xxxiv)

This is also strikingly true of Morris's characterization of the Icelanders he meets. He describes them as "a grave black-bearded intelligent-looking carle of about fifty" (57), or "a good-looking gentle mannered woman" (58), or "a very queer, stuffy old carle" (62), or "a jolly-looking fat old man" (89). Of course, an economy in characterization is found in most ancient and medieval writing, not just in the sagas. Because Morris was steeped

in classical learning at Oxford and fascinated by medieval literature, his earlier writings may reflect their economy in characterization. Nevertheless, it seems likely that this tendency within the journals is being reinforced by the same awareness of sagas that pervades everything he does and feels in Iceland.

Another affinity with the sagas lies in the fatalistic atmosphere depicted in the journals. Hallberg notes that "fatalism is one of the essential elements in the world of the Icelandic saga" (87). He gives as an example the remark of a farmer to a shepherd boy in the Laxdoela, when the latter desires to warn Kjartan of an ambush: "Do you think, you simpleton, that you can lengthen a man's life if he is fated to die!" (91). While a much more pleasant fate befalls Morris in Iceland, his narrative passages often do have an unmistakably fatalistic tone, evincing a passivity, as if their author is waiting for things to happen. While he and his companions do plan their route and itinerary, their plans are subject to many variables totally out of their control, such as sudden changes in weather, the whims of guides, and bouts with illness. In various places Morris leaves evidence that he has the workings of fate in mind. When a sudden illness strikes Faulkner and delays their ride to the Geysir, Morris stoically writes that "fate otherwise willed it" (59). In the original manuscript, reproduced as an note in the printed version,

he laments the future awaiting Icelandic horses bought by a Scotchman for work in the coal mines: "it seems rather too hard a fate for the spirited courageous little beasts" (61 n.).

A final and most important saga affinity is Morris's use of humor, irony, and understatement in the journals. Hallberg observes that, while the only primarily humorous saga is the Bandamanna saga (which significantly is one of those eventually translated by Magnússon and Morris), "almost every saga yields examples of one form or another of humor and irony" (114-15). He also notes that "various forms of humor, irony, and sarcasm" are often "skillfully . . . fitted into the structural pattern of the saga, and can twine about the main action of the story in such a way as to accompany and to intensify it" (119). This interlacing of humor with tragedy finds reflection in the journals, where the presence of humor counterbalances the tragedy of marital failure and its accompanying anxiety that haunts Morris throughout Iceland.

Functions of Humor in the Journals

Humor always plays an important role within Morris's personality, being the manner by which he links himself socially with other individuals, even as he uses it to subvert the institutions of society. His friends perceived

him as a humorous person: he loved to play pranks and jokes upon others and was equally delighted when the joke was upon him (Compton-Rickett 12, 29, 148). His affinity for humor also extended to literature: Dickens and Surtees were among his favorite authors (Mackail 220-21), and he was also quite fond of Mark Twain (Compton-Rickett 47). In Iceland he exemplifies his role as jokester for the party by leaving a humorous message for later travelers at the landmark known as the Carline and thus participating in a custom of foreign sojourners to the island (80).

The Victorians in general had an ambivalent attitude toward laughter because of the Puritanism that helped shape the attitudes of the age. Laughter was often thought to be threatening to religion and thus potentially subversive to Victorian society (Martin 5, 9-11). During this era, according to Martin, laughter fell under two broad categories: a "comedy of character," often evoking pathos, called "humour"; and a "comedy of intellect and idea," involving punning and clever turns of language, called "wit" (3). George Meredith's 1877 An Essay on Comedy provides a key to further categorizing this type of comedy. In the essay Meredith attempts to refine Victorian ideas of comedy and continues the basic juxtaposition of wit versus humor. While Meredith equates what he calls "the comic spirit" with wit (91-97; Martin 91) and privileges it over humor, his classification of what he

sees as the lower forms of laughter has a relevancy to classifying Morris's comedy:

If you detect the ridicule, and your kindness is chilled by it, you are slipping into the grasp of Satire.

If, instead of falling foul of the ridiculous person with a satiric rod, to make him writhe and shriek aloud, you prefer to sting him under a semi-caress, by which he shall in his anguish be rendered dubious whether indeed anything has hurt him, you are an engine of Irony.

If you laugh all round him, tumble him, roll him about, deal him a smack, and drop a tear on him, own his likeness to you, and yours to your neighbor, spare him as little as you shun, pity him as much as you expose, it is a spirit of Humor that is moving you. (133-34)

Here Meredith clearly distinguishes between laughter that evokes pathos or sympathy and laughter that does not.

In the journals Morris uses both forms of "lower" comedy in ways that are often distinctive. I believe Morris also realizes its subversive potential but, rather than finding the prospect frightening, sees it as a liberating process that can free him, both emotionally and socially, from ways of thinking he finds oppressive and

nonviable. As we will see in this chapter, he uses satire in outwardly directed humor as he attacks and subverts societal institutions: it characterizes his treatment of religion and tourism. On the other hand, what Meredith categorizes as sympathetic humor creeps into Morris's portraits of the Icelanders, tending to evoke pathos toward the latter. As we will see in the next chapter, he uses both self-directed humor as well as banter exchanged between him and his traveling companions to evoke pathos toward himself as he engages in the process of self-transformation. Sarcasm, irony, and understatement, the types of humor most frequently found in the sagas, all appear in the journals and are there adapted, along with other forms of humor, to the saga motif of transformation.

Outwardly Directed Humor

This type of humor has two primary functions. On the one hand it becomes a means through which societal institutions with which Morris is dissatisfied are ridiculed and subverted, resulting in his seeing objects even more negatively. On the other hand it becomes a means through which Morris works out his anomalous relationships with the contemporary Icelanders, resulting in the objects of his humor being seen in a more positive light as he evokes pathos toward them.

Humor Directed toward Societal Institutions

Morris subverts social institutions he perceives in a negative light by directing satire and irony toward them. An important institution thus subverted in the journals is religion. Compton-Rickett has noted that Morris rarely discussed religious matters and seemed indifferent to them (132-33). His reluctance to attack religion openly probably arose out of deference to his family's feelings: at least one of his sisters, Isabella, was intensely religious, and when he visited his devout mother, he often had the duty of reading family prayers (MacCarthy 215, 558-59). In the journals, however, he does use humor on several occasions to take subtle swipes.

In one instance he describes an Icelandic parson as wearing a "stupendously bad hat, riding . . . at the devil's pace; his reverend ragbagged legs going whack, whack, whack, to make you die . . ." (24). Here the comparison of the parson to the devil is both ironic and irreverent. On another occasion he wryly observes: "I am told they [the Icelanders] really do like sermons if they are flowery enough in style" (154), thereby humorously suggesting that sermons are not normally enjoyable.

Morris's interest in the Icelanders apparently does not extend to their religious practices, and he writes of dodging two church services while on the island. In one

instance he goes to the church door, sees Magnússon near the altar, and comically retreats, "not wanting to be caught and set down there" (154). When, after the service, a large crowd of Icelanders comes out to stare at the English party, Morris jokingly alludes to the Bible: if the worshippers "'came out for to see men clothed in fine raiment,' they must have been sadly disappointed, for dirty and worn we were by that time" (154-55). Jesus's reference to John the Baptist in Luke 7:25 in the King James Version reads, in part, "But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?" The verse refers to John being the forerunner of Christ, and Morris's allusion to it reveals his irreverence as he humorously compares himself to John.

In a later incident an Anglican parson actually assists Morris and Faulkner in escaping his service before it begins by ferrying them across a river. Morris reports the parson afterwards "straightway led the whiter sheep of his flock off to the little church where the ceremony ran its course" (174). By using irony and understatement in his humor, Morris is able to attack and subvert religion without being too obtrusive.

On another occasion the Oxford-Cambridge rivalry seems to engender some banter as he takes a swipe at religion. When he describes a Sunday incident involving Evans and an English gentleman who is accompanying the Anglican parson,

he sarcastically ridicules sabbatarianism:

So at last I turned to go home remembering that I had to cook the dinner, and just by the garth wall I found the Anglican parson, Evans, and one of the Cambridge men: the two latter were handling their guns and fidgetting about, so I asked them if they had taken them out to clean. Whereon they nodded and winked at me most mysteriously, and presently the parson turned his back and walked away, whereon my two fools ran like skirmishers down by the wall, trying to hide themselves and guns, pursued I must say by my indignant scorn, which was not voiceless. So they crossed the river and presently rose up a noise like the bombardment of a town, for of course a very pop-gun fired off among these huge cliffs sounds tremendous: still however they seemed to think that the parson would not be the wiser if they came back quietly, which they did in about an hour, hiding their guns under their coat-flaps, and pulled out from their pockets three or four brace of ptarmigan. Excuse this stupid story but the undying respectability that these gentlemen had carried out to Iceland really did strike me at the time. (176-77)

Here Morris portrays as ridiculous the fact that these

grown men sneak around like mischievous children so they can hunt on Sunday without raising the ire of the priest.

The crisis Morris is undergoing at this point in his life does not cause him to revert to the faith of his childhood (Evangelical Anglicanism), as might have been expected; rather it seems to move him even farther from Christianity. In spite of the Christian elements found in many of the sagas, such as the Njála, he identifies the heroic aspects of the sagas with paganism, and apparently blames the introduction of Christianity into Iceland as being responsible for the demise of the heroic age of the sagas as well as for the physical and cultural condition of the contemporary Icelanders.

Morris also directs humor toward the British educational system and the type of narrow-minded thinking it engendered. While visiting the Geysir, he expresses his resentment of the fact that the location is the main tourist spot in Iceland for English visitors because few of them know anything else about the island. He attributes the fact that the Geyser is famous in England to "Mangnall's Questions," Morris's name for a series of textbooks written by Richmal Mangnall around the turn of the nineteenth century. Her Historical and Miscellaneous Questions for the Use of Young People was widely used in schools; it is a rather tedious compendium primarily concerned with historical facts in a question-and-answer

format. Since Iceland is not mentioned in this book, Morris is probably referring to its companion volume, Mangnall's Geography, which is presumably similar in format to the former. These works were highly popular throughout the nineteenth century; they went through many editions, including pirated and expanded ones, and inspired sequels by at least one other author (Sutton). Morris probably became familiar with these works (perhaps more than he liked) during his school days, and thereby associates them with the British educational system and the popular culture it has helped shape.

He continually expresses dissatisfaction at being at "this place sacred principally to Mangnall" (74). When he and his company arrive at the Geysir, he complains about their prospective campsite in a mock-heroic style:

[T]he place seemed all too near to that possible column of scalding water I had heard so much of: understand I was quite ready to break my neck in my quality of pilgrim to the holy places of Iceland: to be drowned in Markfleet, or squelched in climbing up Drangey seemed to come quite in the day's work; but to wake up boiled while one was acting the part of accomplice to Mangnall's Questions was too disgusting. . . . "Let's go home to Haukadal," quoth I, "we can't camp in this beastly place." (67)

When told by his guide that they must camp there, because "all Englishmen do," Morris responds by swearing "Blast all Englishmen!" in Icelandic (68). Morris's mock-heroism not only provides a release of tension for his fear but also expresses his annoyance that this phenomenon is the main attraction to the island for the English. He expresses his repugnance at the mind-set which causes British tourists to litter the landscape and travel in ignorance of what he considers to be Iceland's true treasure, the legacy of the sagas. He complains that this mentality has been cultivated by textbook writers "who have never heard the names of Sigurd and Brynhild, of Njal or Gunnar or Grettir or Gisli or Gudrun" (66), and whose books are therefore much the poorer for their authors' lack of knowledge.

Humor Directed at the Icelanders

Humor becomes a vehicle of sympathy, however, when it is directed toward the contemporary Icelanders. Their presence represents a real dilemma for Morris: he must reconcile the differences he sees between the heroic Icelanders of the sagas and the contemporary Icelanders he meets, an impoverished people who seem to have degenerated culturally. Morris responds to this problem by constantly relating the present-day Icelanders to the saga conditions of the past. He does this on two levels: on the one hand,

he sometimes directly compares the contemporary Icelanders to characters from the sagas. For example, he describes his first impressions upon meeting the party's guide to the Geysir in this manner:

[H]e was a fierce-looking man, so much so that I was fain to call him Wolf the Unwashed, but he turned out to be the mildest of dirty fellows: with him our strayings were over, for he guided us right to within sight of our camping ground: he leads us . . . into a little narrow valley that touched me strangely. . . . (66)

In this case the allusion to a warrior mentioned in the Njála involves several layers of irony. After encountering Morris's description of the guide as "a fierce-looking man," the reader is probably not surprised to discover that Morris wants to nickname him "Wolf." However, the term "the Unwashed" is totally unexpected, and therefore the humor is heightened. Immediately the reader recognizes that the previously read phrase "fierce-looking" is being used by Morris in an ironic sense and not as an equivalent to "warlike" but to "dirty": he is actually "the mildest of dirty fellows." An even subtler layer of irony lies in the fact that Wolf the Unwashed in the Njála, despite what the name might suggest, is actually a man of high status: the leader of the king of Norway's elite bodyguard (Bayerschmidt and Hollander 24, 366 n.). Thus

the name is used ironically in the saga to begin with.

Morris's initial impression of the guide centers upon his dirtiness; however, he is clearly uncomfortable about viewing him simply as a dirty man, and thus uses irony and humor as an active process to enhance the Icелander's positive qualities. For Morris, the guide's only noticeable negative quality is his overwhelming dirtiness; so he emphasizes other, overwhelmingly positive, qualities in the latter: he associates him with a saga hero of high status; he symbolically transforms him from "dirty" to "warlike," a positive saga value; he emphasizes that he is an excellent guide; and he associates him with the exotic nature of the Icelandic landscape. The result of the process is that the Icелander's dirt matters little in light of all these positives.

Later in the journals, Morris refers to another (and this time drunken) Icелander as "Wolf the Unwashed"; this individual comically and repeatedly acquires whiskey from Morris in the middle of a moonlit and windy night and then "seemed to go, but got no further than the roof of an out-building on which he sat astride (like Glám) and presently began to howl out a dismal song" (104). Glám is a malevolent spirit in Grettis saga who walks upon the roofs of houses during his wanderings. By ironically comparing the drunken Icелander to Glám, Morris imbues him with a preternatural aura that makes him seem to transcend

and rise above the condition of his mere drunkenness. Again, by comparing him to a saga hero, Morris negates his dirtiness. He also significantly analyzes and classifies the Icelander's song and relates it to traditional Icelandic culture. Finally, by humorously relating how he has been cajoled into giving the Icelander whiskey, which the latter proceeds to measure by the moonlight, Morris emphasizes "Glám's" cleverness at his own expense. The significance of the humor and irony in this passage is that Morris constantly attempts to negate or downplay negative qualities he sees in an Icelander by directly comparing him to the sagas.

Morris also responds to the dilemma the contemporary Icelanders pose by imbuing them (and even their animals) with saga-like behavior. Very early in the journal he relates a humorous incident which emphasizes the lack of fear shown by a "bushy-bearded" contemporary Icelander (43) who laughs at danger and therefore evokes images of the viking past; the detachment and understatement of the narrative is extremely saga-like as well:

[W]e sat . . . drinking our coffee, which was very good: presently Magnússon in unloading his gun managed to pull the trigger, and off it went, sending the charge some six inches from the bonder's head through the beam above the door: Magnússon turned as white as a sheet, and I

daresay I did too; but nobody was killed, and the bonder laughed uproariously, and so we made the best of it. . . . (44)

Morris also uses saga techniques in another humorous incident. The party engage the services of the bonder of Keldur, hiring him as a guide to Stóruvellir. Morris at first only tells the reader that he is "a very queer, stuffy old carle" (62). Somewhat later he mentions that the country through which they are riding "was much overgrown . . . and was full of treacherous breakneck holes" (63). After a twenty-five mile ride the party reaches Stóruvellir around midnight; the bonder drinks a glass of brandy with the party and then starts his twenty-five mile ride back home in the dark. The reader encounters this postscript to the entry for that day:

On the way the old fellow hung back a good bit (we were riding very fast) and the guides had the bad manners to laugh consumedly at him, till at last his horse stumbled, and over his head he went to their great amusement: afterwards the old gentleman sidled up to me and said: "I'm seventy-seven, and can't ride as fast as I used." (63)

The irony and indirect pathos, of course, lie in the fact that the old man, who actually rides exceedingly well for his age, feels a need to apologize for his abilities during

such a grueling ride. Here the Icelanders come across to the reader as being so tough a throw from a horse will not harm them, even at the extraordinary age of seventy-seven.

Morris even portrays the horses of the Icelanders as being larger than life:

The fifth horse we never saw again by the way: he was an old white pack-horse and was dead lame when we started from Reykjavík: he made off it seems to the stead he came from and reached it safely: it was near the Geysirs and about fifty miles off, with some half-dozen of the biggest rivers in Iceland to be crossed between it and Vollr. (61 n.)

The humor in this instance lies in the fact that an ostensibly lame horse has escaped Morris's party and traveled home over fifty miles of rugged terrain. This presentation of the horse, which is ironic because of the unexpected nature of the latter's strength, gives it a dimension of almost-mythical proportions.

His treatment of Icelandic horses in the original manuscript provides more interesting evidence of his tendency to privilege in general the Icelandic over the English. His remark that Icelandic horses "swim manfully" in the July 18 entry of the original shows he associates virility with things Icelandic. On July 22 he claims that Icelandic horses go "over loose stones that no English

horse could stand on" (emphasis added).

In the original manuscript the few occasions where Morris makes negative statements, however slight, about Iceland or the Icelanders tend to be excised in the revision. On July 16, for example, he writes "I am heartily sick of Reykjavik air"; this is absent from the second version. Jón Jónsson, who is called "a queer chap" on July 21 (which Morris mistakenly dates July 20) becomes "very shy but seemed a very good fellow" (48). A parson's "funny little house," mentioned on July 24, becomes a "little parsonage" in the later version (63). His July 25 observation that Wolf the Unwashed "wanted scraping with hoop iron" does not make it into the revised journal. These examples illustrate the fact that Morris's privileging of things Icelandic is a real and ongoing process.

Humor and irony form a central part of this process; they help Morris to exorcise the negative qualities he sees in the present-day Icelanders and view them positively as a hardy, brave, and dignified people. This perspective makes his journal decidedly different in tone from that found in journals of other English travelers to Iceland, such as Sabine Baring-Gould and Richard Burton. The following passage, for example, is typical of the ridicule and sarcasm Burton aims toward the Icelanders:

The traveller never sees man or woman in sea,

river, or brook, though even the lower animals bathe in hot weather. It is a race abominantes aquam frigidam, and, even as pagans, their chief objection to Christianity was the necessity of baptism. . . . Washing is confined to the face and hands; and the tooth-brush is unknown like the nail-brush. . . . Children are allowed to contract hideous habits. . . . Those who venture upon an Icelandic bed may perhaps find clean sheets, but they had better not look under them.

(136)

When comparing Burton's rather ethnocentric journal with Morris's, it is sometimes difficult for the reader to believe the two are writing about the same country. Morris's journal differs from Burton's precisely because the author of the former is able to transcend his own ethnocentrism through humor. As we shall see in the next chapter, Morris's evocation of pathos toward the Icelanders, emphasizing the positive and de-emphasizing the negative, is paralleled by a similar process, and with a similar result, as he directs humor toward himself.

Chapter 4

Morris's Self-Transformation

Patterns of Self-Transformation in the Sagas

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, self-transformation is an important theme found in the sagas. Morris clearly reveals his cognizance of the fact in an 1887 lecture upon Icelandic literature:

The tales of heroes very often begin with the young man coming to a strange place and being apparently loutish, stupid, and slothful, lying raking in the ashes, the butt of everybody's scorn and especially of some loud-mouthed braggart, till at last the time for action comes, the cinder-raker rises like a God, the braggart's head spins off, and the hero is made manifest by his deeds. 'Many a man lies hid within himself,' says their proverb. ("Early Literature" 186; emphasis added)

Here self-transformation almost seems to symbolize an apotheosis to Morris.

An striking example of a self-transformation involving humor occurs in the Njála, a saga to which Morris repeatedly alludes in the journals. Humor plays a pivotal

role in the plot of the Njála, in the guise of a blowhard named Biorn of Mark. Kári, who escapes the burning where Njála and his family are killed, has upon him the burden of exacting vengeance upon the perpetrators. Needing aid, he visits Biorn and flatters him by pretending he actually believes the latter is a brave and fierce fighter, all the while Biorn's wife ridicules her husband's boasts. Kári convinces Biorn to accompany him as his weapon-bearer. As the two travel Kári discusses tactics with Biorn, and the latter constantly changes his advice, much to the amusement of the former. When the fighting occurs, Biorn actually does quite well. He asks Kári to relate this to his wife, because she will never believe her husband, and Kári complies. In gratitude for his aid, Kári arranges for Biorn and his wife to be moved out of range of Kári's enemies, to prevent them from wreaking vengeance upon Biorn (Bayerschmidt and Hollander 337-47). Thus Biorn is a character who successfully effects a self-transformation from being cowardly to becoming courageous.

Morris visits many sites of the Njála during his travels and it is significant that he mentions the character of Biorn. During a grueling and dangerous ride at Thorsmark, he confronts the possibility he will die and never see home again:

[F]eeling tired and a little downhearted with the savagery of the place, I sat down . . . and

turned to the mountain . . . I could see its whole dismal length now, crowned with overhanging glaciers from which the water dripped in numberless falls that seemed to go nowhere . . . below was the flat black plain space of the valley, and all about it every kind of distortion and disruption, and the labyrinth of the furious brimstone-laden Markfleet winding amidst it lay between us and anything like smoothness: surely it was what I "came out for to see," yet for the moment I felt cowed, and as if I should never get back again: yet with that came a feeling of exaltation too, and I seemed to understand how people under all disadvantages should find their imaginations kindle amid such scenes. (54)

In this passage, after describing the landscape in terms of hell as well as nothingness, Morris concludes he can accept the possibility of death and subsequently seems to lose much of his fear of it.

After the ride Morris mentions that he believes "Biorn the boaster" lived in that valley (56). The mention of the character at that point is significant because there are parallels between the situations in which Biorn and Morris find themselves. The description of Biorn's marriage closely resembles Morris's own situation: "Valgerd was

married to Bjorn because of his money and did not love him much, but they did have children together" (Bayerschmidt and Hollander 337). Both men are in a marital situation where the manhood of the husband has been called into question, both are searching for courage, both have just confronted the possibility of death, and both rise to the occasion and do well in a dangerous situation. It is highly likely that Morris, consciously or unconsciously, is identifying himself at that point with the humorous Biorn.

The character in fact remains in Morris's thoughts two days later. In the original manuscript, under the entry for July 24, he remarks that, while traveling through a waste at Knafa Knolls, they find "the same wild oats that Kari [&] Biorn cut here." This observation refers to an incident in the Njála where the two, while hiding from pursuers, cut oats for their horses to prevent their starvation (346). Morris's entry provides further evidence that he is intrigued by the character of Biorn and the whole issue of cowardice versus bravery embodied in his companionship with Kári.

Much later, at the site of Grettir's-lair, Morris notes that "it was down this slip he [Grettir] rattled after the braggart Gisli" (149). Gisli is a cowardly character in the Grettla who brags that he will kill Grettir but remains well behind his two companions when the three ambush the outlaw. His companions are slain and

Grettir subsequently pursues Gisli:

Gisli cast away his weapons, and took to his heels out along the mountain. Grettir gave him time to cast off whatso he would, and every time Gisli saw a chance for it he threw off somewhat of his clothes; and Grettir never followed him so close but that there was still some space betwixt them. (Magnússon and Morris 176)

After comically chasing the coward until the latter has thrown off most of his clothes, Grettir soundly thrashes him with a bush. Unable to effect a self-transformation similar to that of Biorn, he remains too contemptible, and too comical, for Grettir to kill.

Morris (with Magnússon) calls special attention to Gisli in the preface to his translation of Grettis saga: "the braggart--that inevitable foil to the hero in a saga--was never better represented than in the Gisli of our tale" (xiv). I believe that Morris's mention of somewhat marginal characters who happen to be humorous signifies the importance he attaches to humor in the sagas, as well as to the question of cowardice versus bravery.

The fact that this issue had an overriding importance to him during this time period finds confirmation in an 1872 letter he writes to his close friend Aglaia: his depression, he fears, "comes from some cowardice or unmanliness in me" (172). Kelvin claims that "This is the

first acknowledgment by Morris, in his surviving letters, that his acceptance of the relationship between Jane Morris and Rossetti might have been the result of something other than stoical realism" (173 n.). In the sagas, as Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has remarked, cowardice is associated with effeminacy and sexual inadequacy (19-20). Because of the saga influence, Morris also may be making this association and may be sensitive to the implications of these negative feelings due to his unsatisfactory marriage. If his own impotence lies behind the failure of that marriage, he is symbolically reestablishing his sense of manhood as he ridicules his feelings of inadequacy and attempts to find courage.

Morris's Self-Directed Humor

Self-directed humor performs several important functions within the context of the Morris Saga. By asking the reader to laugh at Morris's expense, the author makes a bid for sympathy in the manner implied in Meredith's definition of humor and at the same time promotes his own self-acceptance. By laughing at his own fears, Morris follows the saga pattern of ridiculing cowardice, albeit in a modified form: instead of aiming ridicule at someone else's cowardice, he redirects it toward what he perceives as his own. In the sagas, the threat of ridicule and

jeering banter from other males is a form of social control that provides a powerful incentive for a man to subdue his own fears and demonstrate bravery. Any male who fails to act bravely may suffer shame as did the braggart Biorn of the Grettis saga, who falls asleep while trying to ambush a bear, takes to his heels to escape it, and subsequently faces humiliation when his companions "made the greatest jeering at all this" (Magnússon and Morris 64). In the journals Morris transforms this function of social control by placing himself in the dual role of the ridiculer and the ridiculed, thus turning it into a form of personal control in which he bolsters his own courage and subverts negative qualities within himself that he desires to change. In addition, humor not only allows him to release tension but also enables him to safeguard himself from the possibility of becoming disappointed if his high expectations are not met.

Morris directs humor toward himself on several occasions when he perceives himself or his party in uncomfortable or even dangerous situations. At the Geysir, for example, he is extremely nervous and agitated. After he and his companions set up camp, Morris "confess[es] I went back to my dinner with my heart beating rather; for indeed my imagination must have been sluggish if it couldn't suggest a new Geysir bursting out just under our tent in honour of my arrival" (68-69). An anecdote related

to Mackail by Evans reveals that Morris was actually even more distraught at the Geysir than he indicates in his revised journal:

"Near our camp," he tells me, "there were several deep holes of beautiful still, blue, boiling water: it was in these holes we boiled our fish and fetched our hot water: but after we had each been several times, Morris on returning from one of these expeditions said it was so uncanny he could not go again." (258)

The site apparently inspires a fear in him that could almost be described as a supernatural terror.

Morris reveals his uneasiness much more clearly in the original manuscript. On July 25 he describes the pool he translates as "the Sigher" in this manner: "I can see a horrible abyss steaming over the water . . . wh[ich] is so clear that it looks as if there were nothing there. I heat a kettle full of hot water for the grog & go back trembling. . . ." This description is reminiscent of the coupling of hell and nothingness that occurred at Thorsmark. The next day he remarks that "it is a horrible place" and observes "the white brimstony rocks [that] gleam horribly through" the waters of the Sigher. When he and Eyvindr leave the site to go fishing, Morris remarks that "it is a great blessing to be out of all the horror a little while." The fact that the feelings of fear are

toned down, and the humorous element is augmented, during the revision shows that Morris sees the humor as a necessary and symbolic corrective to the feelings of fear for which he is ashamed.

The reader of the journals often gets the impression that the first journey was an extremely fearful and anxiety-ridden experience for Morris. Certainly traveling by horseback over the rugged terrain and wilderness areas of Iceland was fairly dangerous; several members of his party in fact had close calls during their expedition. Being thrown from a horse or falling from a height could potentially be crippling or even fatal, and the isolation of many of the areas visited meant that help was not always readily available if a mishap were to occur. The fact that Morris and Faulkner were not used to the rugged living conditions necessitated by their sojourn in Iceland probably made the island seem even more formidable. Morris was certainly justified in feeling anxiety and fear. However, by directing humor toward himself and ridiculing his own fear, he can use the saga pattern of ridiculing cowardice and cowards to bring his own fear under control. By writing about his fear in an ironic, sarcastic, and sometimes detached manner, he is also following another saga example. As Hallberg notes, in the sagas it is desirable to meet danger and even death with an ironic statement (or understatement). He gives this example from

the Njála:

During the attack against Gunnarr at Hlíðarendi one of the attackers climbs up on top of the house in order to learn whether Gunnarr is at home. Through an opening in the roof he receives a halberd-thrust through the abdomen. He tumbles down from the roof and staggers back to his companions, who are sitting on the ground waiting for him. "Is Gunnarr at home?" someone asks. "That you will have to find out yourself," replies Þorgrímr, "but one thing I do know: his halberd was at home." Thereupon he falls down dead. (115)

In the journals Morris quite often accompanies his self-deprecating humor with an abrupt change in tone. For instance, on the way to Grimstunga, during a ride through heavy wind, rain, and sleet, Morris refers to himself as a "milk sop" and confesses he brought up the rear of the company because of his "milk sopishness" (87). As the day wears on, his spirits improve and his entry changes dramatically in tone. He describes the beauty of the countryside in glowing terms and, upon reaching shelter, writes about the comfort of his lodgings. He ends the entry for the day by abruptly switching tone again as he describes his thoughts upon going to bed: "I wondering, I must allow, whether we should all be cripples with

rheumatism for the rest of our lives" (89).

Abrupt shifts in tone also occur as Morris draws near to Búlandshöfði, a dangerous mountain pass which he has been anticipating with dread for some time. The evening before they engage the pass, Morris describes the peaceful atmosphere and records that "I felt very happy with our warm ride and the pleasant time, though true it is that I really thought it an even chance that I should tumble over Búlandshöfði to-morrow. So to bed" (132). Although everyone in the party makes it through the pass safely the following day, Morris sarcastically notes about the passage that "C.J.F. [Faulkner] didn't improve my nerves though by kicking a loose stone or two over the path for the pleasure of seeing it shoot down the steep and over the cliff . . ." (134). After they traverse the pass, the entry changes abruptly in tone, Morris admitting the experience was not as bad as he had expected and confessing, "I ought not to have spoken of it as a perilous pass at all" (134). He proceeds to describe their relatively peaceful ride to Olafsvík, where he anticipates riding on the sands of the beach. He discovers, however, that the beach is not exactly what he has expected, and abruptly switches tone again as he describes it:

[U]gh! the smallest grain of these sands was as big as the bowl of a wine-glass and the biggest was a huge boulder as big as a big four-post bed:

as big as an arm-chair was a favourite size.
 Over these precious sands we toiled most
 painfully, principally on foot. . . . Eyvindr
 got quite a bad fall, his horse and all tumbling
 head over heels into a crevice among the rocks,
 and all their legs being up in the air together.
 There were steep high cliffs above us made of
 earth and boulders mixed together. . . .
 Magnússon was kind enough to tell me (halfway)
 that this beach was looked upon as a dangerous
 place because of the stones falling continually
 from these cliffs. (137-138)

As these examples demonstrate, Morris's humor often takes the form of deadpan remarks that lie embedded within otherwise-humorless passages. This narrative structure has the effect of causing sudden shifts in tone that focus attention upon the humor because of its unobtrusiveness. This characteristic of his humor has close parallels in the sagas as well. The following passage from the Laxdoela, describing the feud between the brothers Hrút and Hoskuld, represents a typical example of the characteristic. Hrút has just rustled some of Hoskuld's cattle, and the housecarls of the latter have engaged the smaller forces of the former in battle:

Both sides fought well for a while, but soon the Laxdalers found they were no match for Hrút, for

he killed two men in one onslaught. The Laxdalers then called for quarter, and Hrút said they certainly could have it. Of Hoskuld's housecarls who were still on their feet all were wounded, and four lay dead. Hrút too went home with some wounds, but his companions with few or none at all. . . . Hrút then had the cattle slaughtered.

But to return to Hoskuld. He had quickly gathered together some men as soon as he heard about the cattle raid and rode home, arriving just at the time when his housecarls got back home. They said their errand had gone off rather badly. Hoskuld flew into a rage at this and said he was not going to put up with any more robbery and manslaughter from Hrút. He gathered men together that whole day.

Then his wife Jórunn went to have a talk with him and asked him what he was planning to do. "I'm not planning much," he answered, "but I would certainly like to give people something else to talk about other than the slaying of my housecarls." Jórunn answered: "It's a monstrous deed you have in mind if you are thinking of killing such a man as your brother.["] (Arent 42-43; emphasis added)

The humor, of course, lies in the understatement, which is a common trait found in saga literature (Hallberg 71). When Hoskuld's housecarls tell him that "their errand had gone off rather badly," the understatement is so extreme in the context of the narrative that it becomes quite comical. This holds true as well when Hoskuld responds with an understatement of his own, and declares, "I'm not planning much," when it is obvious that he is preparing to exact a terrible retribution. His subsequent utterance, "I would certainly like to give people something else to talk about other than the slaying of my housecarls," is an understatement so extreme it is humorous, as it would not be if he were to spell out in gruesome detail what he actually does want to do. As Jórunn's subsequent remark indicates, however, the passage returns to an atmosphere of total seriousness, and she succeeds in bringing about a reconciliation between the two brothers. Morris's narratives similarly and frequently depend upon understatement as he pokes fun at his own fears.

By abruptly switching moods, Morris also follows the saga pattern of taking into account the vicissitudes of fate. Fate rules the lives of men in the sagas, and it is always dangerous to become complacent about one's own good fortune and capabilities because the situation can quickly change. MacCarthy notes that "Morris expects so much from

Iceland he risks an anti-climax" (294), and Morris is aware of the real possibility that he will meet with a certain amount of disappointment. The self-deprecating humor he engages in is one way to help prevent such an outcome by providing him with an escape mechanism if his high expectations are not met. Humor is thus a means by which he achieves a suitable emotional equilibrium.

Morris also receives pleasure from the attention given to him by the Icelanders and feels a genuine pride in his accomplishments there, becoming adept at the language and adapting to the rugged conditions of the island. However, he is often reluctant to openly brag upon himself and express his pride. While he sometimes does so in his letters, he much more commonly speaks of himself in a self-deprecating manner. This reluctance seems to be a characteristic of his personality. It may be a result of his Evangelical background; Morris almost certainly was familiar with biblical passages warning of the consequences of pride, such as Proverbs 16:18: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." However, if this personality trait originated with his religious background, it almost certainly was reinforced by his preoccupation with the sagas, which are full of accounts of boastful men who soon meet bad ends. While bragging comes across as a positive trait in some sagas (Toorn 94-95), others, including the ones Morris seems to

have read carefully, implicitly criticize bragging. Morris certainly sees this as an important lesson to be learned from the sagas: in his 1887 lecture he categorically states that "The Northman considered it disgraceful to brag. . . ." ("Early Literature" 188).

Humor, however, allows him to draw attention to his accomplishments without openly bragging upon himself or becoming too proud or complacent about his newly acquired skills. A perfect example occurs after the party's grueling ride to Thorsmark. After a harrowing journey that includes several stream crossings and involves Morris being thrown off his pony, the travelers arrive at Eyvindarmúli; Morris describes their visit thus:

[I]t seems the bonder [householder], who was very deep in oldlore [sic], was flatteringly anxious to see me. He was a grave black-bearded intelligent-looking carle of about fifty, and soon he got discussing with Magnússon and Jón minute probabilities of time and place in the Njala, pretty much as if the thing had happened twenty years ago . . . as we departed I made a bad shot at the saddle trying to mount more Islandico on the wrong side, and measured my length on the turf. The bonder without the ghost of a smile on his face hoped I wasn't hurt, and only expressed his feelings by saying to

Magnússon, "The skald is not quite used to riding then." (57)

The humor in this passage is significant because not only does it represent a release of tension after Morris's anxiety-filled trip to Thorsmark, it also represents a precautionary moderation of his extreme pleasure in becoming adept at riding as well as being known as a "skald," or "poet," to the Icelanders. MacCarthy observes that Morris had been greeted to the island as "the English Skald" by an Icelandic newspaper (298).

In another humorous passage Morris's proficiency in the Icelandic language is deflated:

[A] grey-head big carle, not very right in his wits, a sort of Barnaby Rudge, blows the bellows for us; we talk to him, I taking some share in the conversation, till apropos of something or other Magnússon says:

"This man (meaning me) can talk Icelandic, you see."

"Does he," says the carle, "I have heard him talk a great deal, and I don't know what he has been saying."

"Don't you understand this?" say I.

"Yes," says he.

"Isn't it Icelandic then?"

"Well, I don't know," says he; "in all

tongues there must be some words like other
tongues, and perhaps these are some of those."

(103)

After having spent three years in intensive study of Icelandic, Morris is actually very proud of what he perceives as his ability to speak the language, but he is reluctant to openly brag upon himself. He thus draws attention to his proficiency by relating a humorous anecdote that makes fun of it.

Morris sometimes is able to express pride in his accomplishments and circumvent the appearance of bragging by engaging in mock-heroism, especially when concerning his role as camp cook. It was a role especially important to him; Mackail states that Morris practiced cooking on an outdoor barbecue before leaving England (241-42). He refers to his cooking activities on many occasions in his journals. For example, on July 18, the first morning the travelers wake up in camp, he describes how he cooks two plovers as breakfast for the company: "I did the frying (with the help of the fire) and I confess it was with pride that I brought the pan into the tent and sat down to breakfast" (31; emphasis added). By humorously exaggerating his own actions over that of the fire, Morris engages in a type of mock-heroism, a theme that is continued when the party reaches the Njála country:

Coffee over, we go back to our cooking: and if I

may mention such subjects at Lithend, I was cook, as I may say for the first time [sic]; I dealt summarily with all attempts at interference, I was patient, I was bold, and the results were surprising even to me who suspected my own hidden talents in the matter: a stew was this trial piece; a stew, four plovers or curlews, a piece of lean bacon and a tin of carrots: I must say for my companions that they were not captious: the pot was scraped, and I tasted the sweets of enthusiastic praise. (48)

The mock-heroism is significant because Morris is in the Njála country, which he regards as being practically a holy land, and the landscape constantly brings to his mind the heroic exploits of the saga. However, even though he and his companions are traveling over difficult and even dangerous terrain, they are not really engaging in heroic exploits: no battles are being waged with either human or supernatural beings. Morris nevertheless feels an overwhelming desire to make the heroic legacy a part of his self-transformation. Because he cannot fully realize the saga ideal to which he aspires, mock-heroism becomes the solution to his dilemma.

The mock-heroic jokes about his pride in cooking are also significant because he previously had told an American acquaintance, Charles Eliot Norton, that the use of

servants is corrupting. He alludes to this discussion as he describes his first Icelandic journey in a letter to Norton dated October 19, 1871:

I acquired a competent knowledge of the useful art of cooking--under difficulties too, I can tell you--for I was master-cook to the company. --don't [sic] you remember our argument about servants, at the Grange one night, & how I thought them immoral? (the use of them, I mean)--well here we were without them: for though our guides Gisti [sic] and Eyrvidr [sic] were engaged to serve us by the day yet they worked no harder than we, except where their knowledge was special, and they paid us no sort of deference [sic] except that of good-fellowship, for they were very good-tempered agreeable [sic] men--now wasn't that delightful? (Kelvin 151-52)

By becoming adept at cooking for the party, he is thus symbolically asserting his desire for independence from servants and attacking the class system.

Also, because women traditionally cook, Morris symbolically asserts his desire for freedom from dependence upon them. I think it is significant that he does brag about his capabilities as a cook in his second letter to Jane from Iceland, where he declares that "You've no idea what a good stew I can make, or how well I can fry bacon

under difficulties" (Kelvin 146). In fact, the tone of this letter implies that things could not be better in Iceland for Morris, and seems to indicate that he is asserting a degree of independence from Jane. He had previously ended his last letter to Jane before leaving England with the words "Live well & happy" (Kelvin 139). MacCarthy implies that Morris's wording in that letter indicates his acceptance of Jane's relationship with Rossetti (276). In his second letter to Jane from Iceland, Morris seems to reaffirm this acceptance and reinforce its finality when he writes: "Goodbye, my dear, I have so often thought of the sweet fresh garden at Kelmscott and you and the little ones in it, and wished you happy" (Kelvin 147). Because this acceptance takes an emotional toll upon Morris, it provokes a need for psychological independence from Jane. His pride in his newfound skill at cooking can be seen as a symbolic declaration of independence, and the humor which surrounds cooking in the journal effects this part of Morris's self-transformation.

Humor Exchanged between Morris and His Companions

As Henri Bergson has noted, humor is a social phenomenon: "Our laughter is always the laughter of a group. . . . [It] always implies a kind of secret freemasonry, or even complicity, with other laughers, real

or imaginary" (6). Nowhere does this hold more true than in Morris's Icelandic journals. He and his companions keep up a constant patter along the way: this collective humor links the episodic narratives and often takes the form of banter and horseplay. Collective laughter promotes a social control that, along with the self-control Morris adapts from the sagas, enables him to transcend his own fears. It also serves as a release mechanism for intergroup tensions and thus promotes a group solidarity which can substitute for his family ties.

Banter Involving Morris's Inner Tensions

Within the journal several running jokes provoke horseplay and banter between the companions. One involves Morris's fear of getting lice. His concerns have been sparked by reading accounts of earlier English travelers to Iceland, especially that of Sabine Baring-Gould, who writes:

Man forms but an insignificant item among the countless tenants of a byre [bower or dwelling]. If these same tenants were simply those whom kindly nature has endowed with such remarkable springing capabilities, or even those which infest a seaside lodging and a Welsh inn,--well; but other and more loathsome forms of life teem

in the unwholesome recesses of the bathstófa [main living quarters of an Icelandic home], and it is quite hopeless for the traveller to think of avoiding them if once he enters a farm. Unlike the Icelanders of the genus homo, these horrible parasites are endowed with a predilection for novelty, and in a moment scent out the blood of an Englishman, and come in eager hordes, from which he finds no escape till he reaches a boiling spring in which he can plunge his clothes and annihilate his tormentors wholesale. (61-62)

It is bloodcurdling passages such as these which have given Morris cause for concern. Because he comes from an upper middle-class background and has had relatively little experience with lower-class living conditions, the possibility of getting lice seems a real cause for fear.

He first broaches the subject in the entry for July 7, when he and his companions have not yet left Edinburgh. He notes then that "I had my hair cut in terror of the dreaded animal, Faulkner all the while egging on the hair-dresser to cut it shorter . . ." (4; emphasis added). The next allusion to lice occurs in the entry for July 20, when he and his party are at Bergthorsknoll, the site of Njáls's homestead. As he enters the house Morris claims his "flesh quaked for fear of--the obnoxious animal--I being moved by

silly travellers' tales"; he declines to explore the house in detail because "(in those early days) fear extinguished curiosity" (44).

It is only during a heavy rain at Kalmanstunga, on July 30, that he overcomes his fear and sleeps in an rural Icelander's home. In the entry for that date he admits "I had yet to shake off my dread of--, inspired principally by Baring-Gould's piece of book-making about Iceland . . ."

(81). He observes the following morning that

In spite of the rain I was in good spirits since I had slept in a bonder-house without getting lousy, though Evans complained sorely of the fleas; later on I should have been surprised at the presence of a louse, but as aforesaid I had been stuffed full of travellers' stories on this point and was troubled thereon. (82)

On August 11, as the members of the party are examining their supplies and "roaring with laughter from time to time as various messes turned up," Morris mentions they had been carrying along "red precipitate (louse-powder, so please you)" (122; emphasis added). Finally, on August 31, the next-to-last day he spends in Iceland, Morris finally encounters the object of his fears:

Also this morning, as I lay in a very clean bed in a very clean room, I saw a Louse crawl just below my chin across the bed-clothes: the place

was so clean that the inference was that I myself was lousy, which probability was plentifully rubbed in by my fellows, I assure you. (179; emphasis added)

This last incident is even more humorous and ironic when viewed in the context of his second letter to Jane from Iceland, dated August 11, in which he categorically states "there are no lice in Iceland" (Kelvin 146).

There are several interesting things to note about the running joke concerning lice. Three of the entries, including both the first and last ones, involve banter with his companions. Morris from the very beginning makes certain they know of his fear so they can tease him about it, and when he finally discovers a louse, he makes certain his companions are aware of his find as well. From the beginning Morris sets himself up as a humorous bait for his friends: as he shares his fears with them, and laughs with them at himself, his fear is ridiculed and thus made to seem less threatening.

Also there is a continuum from ambiguous to specific information throughout the allusions: from "the dreaded animal" to "the obnoxious animal" to "--" to "lousy" and "louse" to "louse-powder" to finally "Louse." Until the fourth allusion the reader is not sure as to what Morris is referring. The increments not only contribute to the humor but characterize the sagas as well. As Arent has observed,

it is common for small pieces of information to be given for reasons that are not always apparent until later in the text (xxxiii). Information that seems to be given almost as an afterthought can take on extreme importance after a story develops. For example, in chapter 48 of Njáls saga, Gunnar slaps his wife Hallgerd after finding out she has had some food stolen during a famine. She warns her husband she will keep his action in mind. The reader perhaps has forgotten the incident by chapter 77 [76 in Dasent], when suddenly it takes on an overwhelming importance in the narrative: when their homestead is attacked, Hallgerd refuses to aid Gunnar when he asks for two strands of her hair for his bow, reminding him of the slap. Gunnar is subsequently killed, and only at that point does the reader realize the full import of the earlier incident.

Morris consciously and humorously exaggerates the object of his fear during the course of the journal. The "dreaded animal" is after all only a tiny insect, and not something ferocious like the polar bears which occasionally make their way onto the shores of Iceland. When Morris refuses to name the creature, but refers to it as "--," he comically implies that it is too horrible even to mention and suggests the name is comparable to an oath not polite to print. When he finally encounters a louse, he capitalizes the word in his description of the event. By

exaggerating the magnitude of the threat of this tiny creature, Morris makes his own fear seem ridiculous and is thus able to conquer it.

Even more importantly, the louse jokes mark an actual transformation within Morris, as he is able to conquer his inordinate fear of them. Even though he finally discovers a louse upon himself, he chooses to spend his last night in Iceland back in his lodgings, instead of sleeping in a tent or on board ship. Through humor he is able to conquer a real fear that has dogged his travels on the island, as well as demonstrate that he is moving away from seeing things from an exclusively middle-class viewpoint.

Morris also finds himself at the mercy of his companions' banter because of his propensity for losing things. On July 18 he notes:

About this time began the first series of losses that I suffered, to the great joy of my fellow-travellers: for, lunch over, I missed the strap that fastened my tin pannikin . . . to my saddle-bow: I applied to Faulkner for another, and of course he refused me with many reproaches: then afterwards, hunting about, he found the strap, but pride prevented me asking for it, so I tied my pannikin on with a piece of string . . . 10 after I have ridden a furlong or so . . . my pannikin is gone. (33; emphasis added)

The pannikin is fortuitously found by another English traveler and his Icelandic guide and returned to Morris later that day. In no time he loses something else:

[N]ow a misgiving coming over me, I put my hand into my pocket, and draw out only one slipper--well there is no help for it, so on I trudge, till I come up with the others, and tell them of my loss with some hesitation on my part and much jubilation on theirs. . . . (35; latter emphasis added)

The next day it is returned to him by an Icclander:

Evans . . . shouting with laughter . . . says I am wanted: so out I go; and lo, my missing slipper carefully laid on the gate post . . . and beside it a little black-bearded carle on his poney . . . who has found it on the other side of the river, and ridden across to bring it to me: I am deeply grateful and the gift of three marks . . . makes him so also, and therewith I retire, escorted by laughter, in to breakfast. . . .

(36-37; emphasis added)

As Morris and his companions laugh together about his loss of material objects, the tensions built up due to the emotional loss of his wife are released. To a degree he does feel lost in Iceland. However, the fact that Icelanders tend to find and return the objects Morris loses

seems to symbolize the aura of healing and restitution the island holds for him.

This aura becomes so overwhelming as he nears the site of Njál's burning that it necessitates a release of tension. As the bonder at Bergthorsknoll welcomes the party Morris observes that "a little horseplay between Faulkner and me seemed quite to the goodman's taste" (43). Morris immediately afterwards becomes subdued and almost reverent at the site. The horseplay is necessary to delimit and control the strong feelings of awe that Morris has for the place.

Collective Laughter and Group Solidarity

In these instances and others, including the comical verbal battle between Morris and Faulkner occasioned by the latter's snoring (156-57), the humor serves to allay tensions within the group and thus promote group solidarity. Sometimes the solidarity is needed in the face of hostile weather. On one occasion, when it is necessary for the party to strike camp on a windy and rainy morning, Morris describes how they eat a cold breakfast in the rain, "chaffing each other the while to keep up our spirits" (86). At other times, the solidarity of the group is important in the face of actual danger; Morris describes one occasion where the near-sighted Faulkner narrowly and

ironically escapes death:

I found them [Morris's companions] . . . laughing preposterously, on these grounds: you must know that the Icelandic ponies don't jump much, rather running down and up a ditch or up and down a wall: well, as they galloped down into the plain there lay before C.J.F.'s horse a deepish rift, unseen by C.J.F., whose little dun ambler saved him from losing all chance of laughing again by suddenly making up his mind to a good jump, so that there they were safe on the other side, and we all looking at it as the best of good jokes.

(167)

Such humor allows the travelers to confirm their humanity in the face of a hostile and impersonal nature.

At times it can also vent latent sexual tension. Morris's party exploited the potential for jokes about sex, as is evidenced by one tantalizing anecdote about Faulkner at Hnausar:

I may mention here that a legend sprang up about this bedroom, to wit that C.J.F. was found in it when we were just come, having his boots and breeches pulled off by a female Icelfander, after their ancient custom, he being resigned, owing to want of knowledge of the tongue: take said legend for what it may be worth. (93)

Regardless of how this "legend" originated, the emphasis Morris puts on it suggests that Faulkner must have suffered endless ribbing from his companions.

Solidarity is also important for another reason. At this point Morris's companions are forming a surrogate family. His own wife and daughters are living in his new home at Kelmscott with Rossetti; he seems to have accepted this relationship with a sense of finality and does not mention his wife or daughters in the journals. The exclusively male makeup of his Icelandic party causes Morris to revert to the schoolboy humor from his Oxford days when he relied upon male companionship (James Morris xix). The presence of his Oxford schoolmate, Faulkner, in the expedition probably strengthens this tendency to revert to the banter and horseplay associated with such companionship.

In the sagas a "brotherhood of men" is often depicted as being an emotionally powerful institution that can rival or even exceed the importance of marriage in the lives of individual men. It thus represents an alternative to marriage as an emotional outlet. As banter and horseplay strengthen the male solidarity of the group that symbolically replaces his unhappy marriage, they foreshadow his future criticism of the institution of marriage as a socialist. Although he continues to love his wife and does return to live with her after both journeys, a marriage

based upon passionate love is no longer the overriding obsession in his life. The "brotherhood of men" he finds in Iceland foreshadows the communalism that will characterize Morris's devotion to socialism. The collective humor of the brotherhood thus forms an essential part of the Morris Saga.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: The Morris Saga in the Context of His Later Life

The Deepening of His Self-Transformation

Morris apparently undertook the second journey to Iceland to reinforce and deepen the process of self-transformation he had begun. In the second journal he makes repeated comments that the rugged traveling conditions no longer spark fear and anxiety within him. During this journey Morris shoulders more responsibility because he and Faulkner have to do the work that was shared by four men on the first expedition.

An examination of the original manuscript of Morris's 1871 diary reveals that, during the revision, his extreme fear at the site of the Geysir was toned down and the humor heightened. However, the 1873 journal, which was never revised, shows that Morris has found a new self-confidence. River crossings were particular occasions for anxiety in the 1871 journal, but the 1873 one proves that Morris has conquered his fears. On July 23 he writes: "I note here that I am nothing like so anxious about our journey as last time" (196). Three days later, as he crosses a river, he finds he has "little of my old nervousness left about this

river work" (201). Two days later he confidently states, "I have quite lost all nervousness in the rivers now" (206). On August 9, when they cross "the deepest river we have forded in Iceland," he remarks: "Nevertheless the whole thing had got unfrightful to me now and I crossed it pipe in mouth, not troubling myself at all . . ." (225). His surprise and pleasure at this newfound sense of courage is reflected by a relative dearth of humor in the 1873 journal. Infused by a new spirit of self-confidence, he no longer feels the need to constantly belittle himself and his accomplishments. His self-transformation is well underway.

After he returns home from the second journey, Morris immediately begins acting in a more decisive and purposeful manner. MacCarthy notes that "in the spring of 1874 he put his foot down with an assertiveness one senses he would not have found possible in his pre-Iceland days." This showdown with Rossetti results in the end of their friendship and the abandonment of Kelmscott to Morris (MacCarthy 335-36). Perhaps as a result of this, Jane ends her affair with Rossetti in 1875 (Kelvin xxxix).

Morris also begins the process of dissolving his business partnership early in 1874. He felt that his income from the company was not commensurate with the time and effort he had been putting into it. By March of 1875 Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. became Morris & Co., and Rossetti was out of the firm (MacCarthy 341-44). The

business went on to become highly successful, and Morris's yearly income from it would skyrocket to £1,800 by the 1880s (MacCarthy 394-95).

His Later Views on Marriage

In Iceland Morris found the courage to accept the reality of his unhappy marriage. The power of his self-transformation, manifested by his take-charge attitude, did not lead to improved relations with his wife, but it did enable him to transcend his own marital situation. He was propelled on a political trajectory toward Marxism, and by early 1883 he had declared himself a socialist, joined the Democratic Federation, and begun to read Marx. He apparently found Marx's beliefs about the abolition of the family conducive to his own. By 1885 he was writing in The Manifesto of the Socialist League that under socialism, "Our modern bourgeois property-marriage, maintained as it is by its necessary complement, universal venal prostitution, would give place to kindly and human relations between the sexes" (Thompson 735). That same year he also proclaimed, in a letter to George Bernard Shaw, "that as long as women are compelled to marry for a livelihood, real marriage is a rare exception and prostitution or a kind of legalized rape the rule" (Thompson 709).

Morris sets forth most clearly his vision of how sexual

relationships should be in News from Nowhere. In that 1891 utopian romance, the character of Hammond explains how these relationships work in the new society:

[T]he artificial perversion of the sexual passions . . . caused overweening jealousy and the like miseries. Now, when you look carefully into these, you will find that what lay at the bottom of them was mostly the idea (a law-made idea) of the woman being the property of the man. . . . That idea has of course vanished with private property, as well as certain follies about the 'ruin' of women for following their natural desires in an illegal way, which of course was a convention caused by the laws of private property.

[F]amily tyranny . . . was the result of private property. Of course that is all ended, since families are held together by no bond of coercion, legal or social, but by mutual liking and affection, and everybody is free to come or go as he or she pleases. (81)

Morris's views about marriage were almost certainly colored by his continued estrangement from his wife. For although he and Jane lived (mostly) together during the remainder of his life, she began another affair, this time with Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, around 1884 (Kelvin xxx).

Although Morris was perhaps fated never to enjoy a happy and sexually fulfilling marriage, during his Icelandic travels he "seems to have abnegated passion in the sense of sexual passion, though not his feeling for humanity" (MacCarthy 303). After Iceland he began channeling his sexual drive into political activities which he felt were for the good of humankind. In doing so he became a renowned champion of women's equality. However, the lack of passion he had toward women in his later life was considered remarkable. Blunt, seemingly puzzled over Morris's behavior, wrote:

He was the only man I ever came in contact with who seemed absolutely independent of sex considerations. He would talk in precisely the same tone to a pretty woman as to a journeyman carpenter--that is to say, he would be interested if she had anything interesting to tell him, but not for a minute longer" (qtd. in Thompson 713).

Luke Ionides seconded this opinion about Morris when he declared that "Women did not seem to count with him" (qtd. in Henderson 151). Rather than indicating any homosexual leanings, Morris's lack of passion toward women seems to point to asexuality. The humor and banter Morris engages in with his companions in Iceland, strengthening the bonds of nonsexual male relationships, mark his future dependence upon those types of relationships for emotional

support.

The Transformation of His Literary Style

The "strong active verbs" Thompson notices in the 1873 journal foreshadow a momentous change in Morris's literary style. An examination of contemporary criticism of Morris that Peter Faulkner has anthologized reveals a significant change in references to his style after his Icelandic journeys. Prior to those his style was frequently characterized in terms of weakness: "feebleness" (96), "drowsiness" (128), and "languor" (186) are some of the words critics associated with The Earthly Paradise. Gerard Manley Hopkins suggested in 1879 that Morris's language, as well as that of Tennyson and Swinburne, lacked "manliness" (200). It seems that during the Victorian era certain types of literary style were associated with femininity, while others were associated with masculinity.

After Sigurd the Volsung appeared in 1876, critics suddenly began discussing the new masculinity of his style. Theodore Watts wrote that "It is more masculine than Jason--more vigorous and more dramatic than the best of the stories in the Earthly Paradise" (231). Edmund Gosse claimed that it was "more spirited and more virile than that of any of his earlier works" (233). Another reviewer remarked that it was "the manliest and the loveliest work of

Mr. Morris's genius" (243). Still another claimed that "In the very vocabulary there is a Saxon muscularity and strength" and that Sigurd contained a "manly directness" (265). The work which Morris felt to be his highest literary accomplishment was therefore widely perceived as representing a new masculinity on the part of the author.

This hardly seems coincidental, given that the trend continued in reviews of his later works. One reviewer noted that in A Dream of John Ball (1888) the prose was "strong" (319). Henry Hewlett wrote of The House of the Wolfings (1889) that "The verse is simple and strong. . . . Single lines occur of striking vigour . . ." (330). Lionel Johnson thought News from Nowhere (1891) had "virile and pleasant pages" (343). Oliver Elton remarked that Poems by the Way (1892) was infused by the "manly life of the Sagas" (360). H.G. Wells observed that The Well at the World's End (1896) had "clean strong sentences" that had been written by "one of the stoutest, cleanest lives that has been lived in these latter days" (413). The widespread recognition and approbation of Morris's style, associated with masculinity and virility by reviewers, indicate that, either consciously or unconsciously, Morris is reasserting his manhood through the pages of his works. This process begins in the Morris Saga of his Icelandic journals.

His Transformation toward Male-Oriented Relationships

A survey of Morris's surviving correspondence from 1869-1875 in Kelvin's collection reveals more letters and letter fragments to Magnússon than to any other correspondent--34 in all. The significance of this fact becomes even clearer when one realizes that the two were frequently together during this time period--reading Icelandic and translating three times a week, according to Magnússon's account printed in May Morris's introduction to volume 7 of the Collected Works (xvi-xvii), as well as traveling together for two months during the 1871 trip--and therefore often had no need to communicate by letters. Caution must be used in interpreting this plurality of correspondence to Magnússon, since Kelvin implies that not all of Morris's letters have been found, and the surviving, often fragmentary, ones may not be exactly representative of his correspondence. In particular, many letters to Edward and Georgiana Burne-Jones were apparently destroyed (xi, xiii, xxxv-xxxvii; MacCarthy 249). Nevertheless, it still seems significant that more letters to Magnússon survive from this time period than do to Morris's wife, mother, daughters, sisters, or the other woman with whom some biographers have implied he was infatuated (Aglaia).

Surviving letters evidence a close relationship between the two men. Morris wrote a letter of recommendation in

1871 that helped land Magnússon a job in the University Library at Cambridge, a post he would hold for nearly forty years (Kelvin 138-39 n.). Their correspondence indicates that they made periodic visits to each other's homes. One letter reveals that Morris sent Magnússon wine from his cellar (158-59); another that he loaned Magnússon £70 at a time when Morris himself was having financial difficulties (180, 182). Morris frequently makes inquiries about Magnússon's family members, and he in fact attended Magnússon's sister-in-law's wedding during the 1873 journey (163 n.). Their relationship was so strong that they were even mistaken as brothers while in Iceland during 1871 (MacCarthy 279).

Morris's biographers, focused upon his relationships with women, have given his friendship with Magnússon short shrift. Nevertheless, it seems to have been one that was particularly important to him. Unable, apparently, to have a sexually and emotionally fulfilling relationship with his wife, and unable, or unwilling, to have an extramarital affair, Morris turned for emotional support to the only other socially acceptable relationship available to him in Victorian England: a nonsexual friendship with another male. Because of Jane's long absences, Morris probably spent as much or more time with Magnússon as he did with his own wife during much of this time period. The juxtaposition of Jane's absence and Magnússon's presence is neatly

evidenced in an 1873 letter in which Morris invites Magnússon to stay in his home: "I shall be very glad to see you up here if you can get away: next week my wife will be away: so we could give you rather more roomy quarters than we were able last time" (188). In another letter he candidly tells Magnússon he has not seen his wife in three weeks (166). Their friendship became a lifelong one; they collaborated on the translations for the Saga Library during the 1890s, until shortly before Morris's death.

In the sagas, male comradeship can be a powerful institution that rivals marriage in importance in the lives of individual men. The formulaic expression "one fate should befall us" can indicate either the bonds of matrimonial faithfulness, as it does in the case of Bergthóra, the wife of Njál in Njáls saga (Bayerschmidt and Hollander 265), or those of male friendship, as it does in Magnússon's and Morris's translation of the Grettis saga (10, 74). This latter image of male bonding infuses much of the collective humor of Morris's first journal.

As MacCarthy notes, the idea of a brotherhood is certainly familiar to Morris from his days at Oxford, and when he begins "to study the Icelandic Sagas, with their extreme male bondings, he [is] not on such strange ground" (170-71). Nevertheless, the desire for this type of bonding certainly lessens after his marriage, at least while he has hopes of fulfillment through it. It is only when Morris has

to accept the reality of his unhappy marriage that he returns to this type of male-oriented communalism. His Icelandic travels, embodied in the *Morris Saga*, represent a reinforcement of male bonding and mark the end of his emotional dependence upon women.

This pattern is repeated in his political work, where he spends an inordinate amount of time and energy working within organizations overwhelmingly composed of males, as even the socialist groups were during that period. His Socialist Diary clearly indicates that the audiences at his lectures were primarily male. For example, he describes the composition of one as "all working men except a parson . . . and perhaps a clerk or two" (41). He characterizes the members of a Socialist League branch as "very nice fellows" (50).

The pattern finds replication in his literary work after Iceland. In another 1891 romance, The Story of the Glittering Plain, he depicts a brotherhood ritual (319) that is heavily reminiscent of one in the Gísla saga, as Stephen Hunt has pointed out (172). What seems to have remained unnoticed is the fact that the brotherhood between the protagonist, Hallblithe, and his companion the Puny Fox, completely overshadows the marriage of the former to his beloved, the Hostage (321-24).

The Transformation toward Communalism

Thompson observes that "From Iceland . . . Morris gained a draught of courage and hope, which was the prelude for his entry into active political life in the later 1870s" (186). Only a month after his second return from Iceland, Morris agreed to join The Trades Guild of Learning, thus showing he was beginning to orient himself toward the working class (Kelvin 201 and n.). By 1876 he was, in MacCarthy's words, "embarking on his long succession of chairmanships, secretaryships, treasurerships, enduring and even inviting the repetitive detail of committee work that went on until the last weeks before his death" (375). He became a joiner, joining or founding a plethora of organizations, including the Eastern Question Association in 1876, the Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877, the National Liberal League in 1879, the Radical Union in 1881, the Mansion House Relief Committee in 1882, the Democratic Federation in 1883, the Socialist League in 1884, the Art Workers' Guild in 1888, and the Hammersmith Socialist Society in 1890. He also embarked upon a whirlwind series of speaking engagements: in 1887 alone, the year he gave the speech "The Early Literature of the North--Iceland," he gave, or was scheduled to give, over one hundred speeches and lectures, which Eugene D. LeMire lists in his appendix to Morris's unpublished lectures (260-69).

Morris and Immortality

As we have seen, immediately after his final excursion to Iceland Morris also begins showing an interest in social and political questions in his letters. He embarks upon a path that directly leads him to socialism, and he wholeheartedly throws himself into that endeavor. He thus chooses the direction he wants his life to go and follows that path, accepting all of its consequences. As Silver observes, Morris comes to believe "the only immortality is through the group. . . . [M]an's concern must be with life, with aiding in the struggle against those who wish to impose the death in life of injustice on others" (126). Morris is thus able to affirm the saga-derived belief that immortality can be achieved by doing deeds (in this case, building socialism) that will cause one's name to live on in the collective memory of humankind. This is the same claim that Morris uses in the epilogue ending the account of his first journey to Iceland:

Ever will live
Unless mankind perish
The praise of men
Or the worlds give way[.]

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