

Norse-Icelandic Culture as a Means of Liberation from Industrial Victorian England in William Morris's Works

Cultura Nórdico-Islandesa como um meio de libertação da Inglaterra Vitoriana Industrial na obra de William Morris

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to outline the relationship between the English writer William Morris (1834-1896) and the medieval culture, particularly the Norse culture from Icelandic tradition. Morris witnessed the acceleration of the Industrial Revolution in his country and lamented the destruction of British natural landscapes and the impoverishment of human interactions with their own environment. By revisiting and reorganizing stories and motifs from the Middle Ages, a period he admired, Morris sought to critique the modernity of his time. Therefore, this article will delineate Morris's connections to medieval culture, especially Norse-Icelandic culture, highlighting how this relationship is reflected in his literary works.

KEYWORDS: William Morris; Old Norse; Industrial Victorian England.

RESUMO: Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar as relações do escritor inglês William Morris (1834-1896) com a cultura medieval, especialmente a nórdica proveniente da cultura islandesa. Morris testemunhou a aceleração da Revolução Industrial de seu país e lamentou pela destruição das paisagens naturais britânicas e pelo empobrecimento das relações do ser humano com o seu meio ambiente. Ao retomar e reorganizar histórias e temáticas da Idade Média, período que admirava, Morris buscou deixar sua crítica à modernidade de

seu tempo. Portanto, este artigo irá delinear as relações de Morris com a cultura medieval, especialmente com a cultura nórdico-islandesa, pontuando como esse relacionamento se reverbera em suas obras literárias.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: William Morris; Nórdico Antigo; Inglaterra Vitoriana e Industrial.

Introduction

William Morris was a prominent figure in 19th-century England known for his multifaceted contributions to various fields, including art, design, literature, and social activism. He was born in 1834 in Walthamstow, United Kingdom, and died in 1896 in Hammersmith, London. He came from a wealthy middle-class family and was under the strong influence of medievalism at Marlborough College in his childhood and when studying classics at Oxford University (Harvey, Press & Maclean, 2020). Then, he got involved with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood – a group of artists and writers who aimed to revive the aesthetics and themes of medieval art and literature and that sought a return to intense colors, complex compositions and abundant details, rejecting mechanistic art approaches (Bruchard, 2015; Sayre & Löwy, 2020).

As an artist, William Morris is often considered one of the key figures of the Arts and Crafts Movement, a movement that sought to revive traditional craftsmanship with the use of natural materials and promote the integration of art and design into everyday life. This movement sought to reconnect people with the beauty of the natural world through artistic and functional objects that were well-crafted. Such artworks often feature nature-inspired designs such as floral and foliage arrangements. Specifically, regarding textile crafts, while other Victorian manufacturers used chemical products to dye the material, William Morris opted for dyes extracted from English plants and vegetables (Bruchard, 2015; Mason, 2017; Sayre & Löwy, 2020; Harvey, Press & Maclean, 2020).

Morris founded the design firm Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in 1861, which later in 1875 became Morris & Co. This firm produced a wide range of decorative arts, including wallpaper, textiles, furniture, stained glass, and ceramics. His designs were characterized by intricate patterns, nature-inspired motifs, and a commitment to high-quality craftsmanship. The prominent element in his art is vegetal life, since leaves, branches, stems, fruits, and flowers are almost omnipresent in the drawings of his designs (Sayre & Löwy, 2020; Boos, 2020; Harvey, Press & Maclean, 2020). Some of his most famous patterns, such as “Strawberry Thief” and “Willow Bough”, remain popular and influential to this day. “Strawberry

Thief” is a good example of Morris’s connection with his surrounding English wildlife, since it was inspired by the birds who used to visit his personal garden to “steal” his strawberries to eat (Mason, 2017).

Besides being an inspiration for his designs, Morris’s admiration and defense of nature contributed to him becoming an early advocate for environmental conservation. His concerns about the impact of industrialization and urbanization on the environment led him to become involved in preservation efforts. Moreover, he was also involved in the preservation of historic buildings that were destroyed by the modernization of the world, piling apartments with no room for gardens and yards (Bruchard, 2015). As a socialist, his political views were intertwined with his environmental concerns as well as with labor movements, leading some scholars to consider him one of the first “ecosocialists” (Macdonald, 2004).

William Morris was also a prolific writer. His most famous work is *The Earthly Paradise*, an epic poem published in several volumes between 1868 and 1870. It draws on medieval culture, especially on Norse mythology sources, and consists of a series of narrative poems and stories told by a group of wanderers, exploring themes of love, adventure, and the human condition (Ashurst, 2007). He was also a translator and played a significant role in the revival of medieval and Old Norse-Icelandic literature:

When Morris began working on *The Earthly Paradise* he still had to rely on secondhand accounts for his northern stories. It seems likely, for example, that he planned and possibly wrote what became the December tale entitled ‘The Fostering of Aslaug’ in which the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr is brought up as the thrall of peasants but eventually marries Ragnarr loðbrók – at a time when he was not directly acquainted with either *Völsunga saga* or *Ragnars saga*, and that he adapted the story from the account in Thorpe’s *Northern Mythology* (Hodgson 1987, 85, and May Morris’s comment in *Works*, VII xxxii). In the autumn of 1868, however, Morris seized the opportunity to improve the state of his knowledge when he was put in touch with the Icelandic Eiríkr Magnússon (Ashurst, 2007, p. 45).

Morris and his Icelandic friend Eiríkr Magnússon (1833-1913), whom he met in 1868, sustained a collaborative effort that resulted in more than thirty English translations of Icelandic sagas. This partnership began with the translation of *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* (Saga of Gunnlaug the Worm-tongue), first published in 1869 as *The Story of Gunnlaug the Worm-tongue* (Acker, 2021). Their translation of the *Völsunga Saga* (The Saga of the Volsungs) into English language, entitled *The Story of the Volsungs* and published for the first time in 1870, brought Norse mythology and heroic legends to a broader English-speaking audience.

Therefore, Morris contributed to the ongoing fascination with Norse mythology in literature and the arts, even though he is not as famous as J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, whom he influenced (Fouto, 2020; Stott, 2021). Also, we can tell that “Morrisian themes and concerns, such as the nature and exercise of power and the way societies are or might be organised, emerge in books such as the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series and spin-off programmes such as *Game of Thrones*” (Stott, 2021, p. 163).

Industrial Victorian England and William Morris

England was at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution, which began in the late 18th century and continued into the 19th century when Morris lived and Queen Victoria ruled. This period saw the transition from rural and craft-based economies to industrial and manufacturing economies, profoundly impacting society and the economy, being a transformative and pivotal period in history. It brought about profound changes in various aspects of English society, the economy, and daily life (Shea & Whitla, 2015; Sayre & Löwy, 2020).

Factories were rapidly expanded in this period, particularly in textile manufacturing, iron and steel production, and coal mining. Factories introduced new machinery and production methods. This way, traditional manual labor was replaced by machines powered by steam engines. As a result, this mechanization revolutionized industries such as textile production, coal mining, and iron manufacturing, leading to increased productivity. In this context, workers, including children, who faced exploitation, began organizing movements and trade unions to demand better working conditions, fair wages, and workers’ rights, in which Morris was involved. As industrialization advanced in England, people flocked to urban centers in search of employment opportunities. This led to a massive population shift from rural areas to cities, resulting in rapid urbanization. Major cities like London, Manchester, and Birmingham experienced tremendous growth. By the end of the 19th century, close to William Morris’s death, the population of England and Wales had increased from approximately 27 million in 1841 to over 41 million (Sussman, 2014; Shea & Whitla, 2015).

This urbanization caused by industrialization can be seen as having both positive and negative sides. While it could have contributed to multiculturalism, economic opportunities, and increased access to education and technology, it could also pose challenges to traditional cultures, leading to a gradual erosion of traditional customs, languages, and ways of life. That is when people from rural or culturally distinct areas migrate to urban centers, they often face pressure to conform to the dominant culture, which may lead to the loss of their traditional

customs and values (Thomas, 1984; Shea & Whitla, 2015). Moreover, urbanization disrupted traditional economic activities such as subsistence farming or artisanal crafts, a consequence also brought about by the Industrial Revolution which Morris opposed (Sayre & Löwy, 2020).

Before migrating to English urban areas, people were part of more traditional cultures that often had a deep connection to the land and the natural world. The urbanization enhanced by industrialization in English big cities led to a disconnection from nature and a shift in values away from environmental sustainability (Thomas, 1984). It also ended up prioritizing modern development over the preservation of historical and traditional cultural sites, since it was also necessary to accommodate the population growth in London, Manchester, and Birmingham, for example. In these cities, there was limited space available for housing, so it contributed to the construction of multi-story buildings. After the advances in construction techniques and materials, such as the increased use of iron and steel for structural support, those new buildings could also be taller than before, maintaining land in densely populated urban areas. However, the rapid growth of cities and towns in England often occurred without proper urban planning. This led to issues such as overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, and the spread of disease, negatively impacting both human health and the environment (Sussman, 2014; Shea & Whitla, 2015; Sayre & Löwy, 2020). Also, this urban sprawl and industrialization led to the loss of green spaces and natural landscapes, making way for factories, roads, and buildings. This resulted in the displacement and loss of various plant and animal species too (Thomas, 1984).

There were more significant negative impacts that the Industrial Revolution in England had on the environment since the rapid industrialization and urbanization led to various forms of environmental degradation. The widespread use of coal as a primary source of energy for factories, homes, and transportation led to extensive air pollution. Coal burning released pollutants into the atmosphere, resulting in smog and poor air quality. Furthermore, industrial processes and sewage from growing urban populations often contaminate rivers and water bodies with toxic chemicals, heavy metals, and waste. This pollution harmed aquatic life and disrupted ecosystems. Also, demand for timber for construction and fuel for industrial processes led to extensive deforestation and the loss of forests had numerous negative consequences, including soil erosion, habitat destruction, and loss of biodiversity. Plus, mining activities, in particular, caused significant disruption to landscapes and ecosystems. Furthermore, urban expansion and industrial development encroached on agricultural land, leading to soil degradation. Moreover, pollution from industrial sites often contaminates soil, rendering it

unfit for agriculture. All of those consequences soon had an impact on British lifestyle and mentality. Both the middle and upper classes, as well as the proletariat in the industrial nation, were expressing fondness for rural life. With the proliferation of factories, urban residents' longing for the past became evident through activities such as cultivating small gardens, keeping pets, spending holidays in Scotland or the Lake District, and nurturing a fondness for wildflowers and bird watching, for example (Thomas, 1984; Shea & Whitla, 2015).

No wonder the rise of industrialization influenced literature, art, and philosophy depicting the impact on people's lives and showing harsh realities in industrial cities, workers' exploitation, and social injustices: "Victorian literature and culture was engaged with questions of environmental degradation, atmospheric pollution, resource depletion, and changing species relations" (Parkins & Adkins, 2018, p. 2). Artworks such as *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens (1854), with a scathing critique of the dehumanizing effects of industrialization; *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell (1848), which explores the social and economic issues arising from industrialization; and *Shirley* by Charlotte Brontë (1849), showing the social and economic changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution in the textile industry are some examples of fiction works. Then, in 1845, came the non-fiction work *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* by Friedrich Engels, which is a seminal study of the harsh living and working conditions of the working class in Victorian England, a direct result of industrialization (Sussman, 2014; Shea & Whitla, 2015).

Furthermore, using art as a response to the challenges and changes brought about by industrialization, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood sought a return to the values of craftsmanship and nature in their art. William Morris is included in this context. In response to the mass-produced, factory-made goods, they celebrated the importance of creating art that was meticulously crafted and personal, reflecting their opposition to the mechanization of artistic production and the dehumanizing impact of industrialization. Morris, along with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood believed that factory work and mass production led to the degradation of labor and the loss of individual creativity and fulfillment. In their view, traditional craftsmanship allowed artisans to create meaningful and satisfying work, promoting a sense of human dignity. He also believed that handmade objects and artworks were more beautiful and had a deeper connection to the natural world (Sayre & Löwy, 2020). Also, he saw craftsmanship as a means to restore artistry and creativity to everyday life, and all these issues were harmed by the Industrial Revolution (Borges, 2002).

Morris was committed to preserving and promoting traditional skills and techniques that were at risk of being lost due to industrialization and urbanization,

which made people from rural areas stop being in contact with their traditions and customs. Since he advocated for local and sustainable production, Morris also believed that traditional craftsmanship, rooted in local communities and using locally sourced materials, was a more sustainable and socially responsible way of producing goods, in contrast to the long supply chains and environmental consequences of industrial production (Sayre & Löwy, 2020).

It seems to be a consensus that William Morris was influenced by Romanticism and shared some of its ideals and values. Along with being against the degradation of the environment caused by industrialization, he also had a deep appreciation for the beauty of the natural world and sought to incorporate nature into his designs and artworks as mentioned. He believed in the importance of aesthetics and the creation of beautiful, meaningful objects (Boos, 2020). William Morris is the perfect example of the “‘elective affinity’ between romanticism and ecological awareness” (Sayre & Löwy, 2020, p. 63). In other words, in his prolific career Morris’s perspective remained romantic in the sense of the definition of romanticism by Sayre and Löwy (2020, p. 63): “a worldview centered on protest against the capitalist present in the name of values drawn from the pre-capitalist past”.

Moreover, romantically inspired, he also looked to the past for inspiration, which was the pre-industrialization context. He valued the rural and agrarian life before the urbanization in big cities, along with the manual work with natural sources, resembling tradition. That is why he was also worried that practices “including hunting, gardening, painting, dyeing, medicine, and cookery” were becoming extinct (Boos, 2020, p. 19). Such practices also resembled medieval times, a period that Morris admired and studied for years of his life (Parry, 1983). According to Marsh (2020, p. 508), like so many Victorians, Morris “first encountered medievalism through the romances of Sir Walter Scott, which he ‘devoured’ as a child and continued to read. ‘I yield to no one, not even Ruskin, in my love and admiration for Scott’, he wrote at the age of 52”. Later in life, an important event led Morris to delve deeper into nostalgia and value pre-industrialized medieval times, which was his journey to a Nordic territory: Iceland.

Morris and Norse Culture

It is remarkable how great the Victorian interest in Old Norse culture was. A good reason for that was the valorization of a national identity, since British territory, people, and culture had a Scandinavian heritage from the Viking Age. In other words, as Phepstead (2020, p. 273) points out “the genetic, cultural, and linguistic inheritance that Britain owed to Scandinavia was a major stimulus to scholarly and other interest in Viking and medieval Scandinavia and Iceland in

the Victorian period”. Medieval Iceland and its rich and unique literature were the main Nordic target of those Victorians, holding as much interest for them as Classical Literature from France and Italy.

Iceland is a Nordic island country between North America and Europe, which offers a great variety of landscapes. In such a small country, it is possible to find glaciers, volcanoes, lava fields, mountains, fjords, geothermal hot spots, black sand beaches, geysers, waterfalls, plant life, wildlife, and more. Besides, it is a country that makes an effort toward the preservation of its natural environment and biological variety. The culture of this country has its roots in Norse traditions, because Iceland was colonized by Scandinavian settlers, who came mainly from Norway.

According to Ari Thorgilsson (1067-1149) – probably the first Icelandic historian –, the first settlers arrived in Iceland in 870. In his *Íslendingabók* (The Book of Icelanders) (Benediktsson, 1986), written between 1122-1133, he recorded the colonial history of Iceland from 870 to 1118, through the memorial account of descendants of the first settlers. In line with this, archaeological and tephrochronological studies (analyses from volcanic lava) confirm that the first traces of significant human presence in Iceland occurred, in fact, around 870 (Hartman, Ogilvie & Hennig, 2016). Until the arrival of Scandinavian settlers in the 9th century, Iceland had not been inhabited by any human race. Despite this, before the arrival of Scandinavians on the island, a few Irish monks had settled there to live in isolation at the beginning of the 9th century (O’Donoghue, 2004).

The Norse language and culture were preserved in Iceland from external influence for years because of the isolation of the territory. As an example, the Icelandic language is the only language among all the Scandinavian ones that remains close to Old Norse due to the lack of foreign influence. Along with its background in Norse traditions, Norse mythology in Iceland still retained some remnants even after the Christianization of the country in the 11th century. Such mythology has numerous gods and goddesses, the most popular being Odin, Thor and Freyja (Borges, 2002; O’Donoghue, 2004).

The British interest in Icelandic mythological and legendary texts was stronger in the eighteenth century than in the Victorian period, when sagas became more influential, as Phelpstead (2020) points out:

[...] sagas [...] engaged ‘a reading public for whom the realistic novel had become the dominant literary genre’. The first complete Icelandic saga to be published in English translation appeared two years after Victoria’s accession: an eccentric, Scandinavia-based English scholar, George Stephens (1813–95), was the first of several Victorian translators to publish an English version of *Friðþjófs saga hins frækna*, a romantic saga of the legendary past that was ex-

traordinarily popular throughout the nineteenth century [...]. It is now very marginal to the study of Old Norse literature, but it was a central text in the canon of medieval Icelandic literature as received in Victorian Britain. It appealed no doubt to a sentimental streak in Victorian sensibility, but the saga is partly set in Orkney, so that, like other sagas popular in the nineteenth century, it has an obvious British connection (Phelpstead, 2020, p. 274-275).

William Morris held the Old Norse-Icelandic literary *corpus* in high regard, appreciating and encompassing both poetry and prose, and both mythological or legendary and realistic or historical narratives. His art was profoundly influenced by these traditions. No wonder Morris “has justly been called ‘late Victorian Britain’s most celebrated Icelandophile’” (Phelpstead, 2020, p. 277-278).

Morris had a journey to Iceland, where he visited and explored for the first time in the summer of 1871 when the country was in a period of cultural and political awakening. In this period, there was a growing sense of Icelandic nationalism and a revival of interest in the country’s history, language, and culture. This was partly in response to centuries of Danish rule and a desire for greater cultural and political autonomy. As part of this, there was the literary revival with the sagas and *Eddas* including the *Völsunga Saga*, which was being rediscovered and appreciated as a source of national identity and pride. Plus, the Icelandic language, which had remained remarkably close to Old Norse, was a focal point of cultural preservation. Efforts were made to revive and promote the language, reinforcing its role as a symbol of Icelandic heritage. In this context, Morris made efforts to learn the Icelandic language during his stay (Ashurst, 2007). Also, since he had always been a voracious reader from a young age, from which he got interested in Norse Mythology, his trip to Iceland made this interest grow and provided inspiration for his later writings. Morris believed that in Iceland it was possible to find the heyday of the Germanic culture (Borges, 2002).

Norse folklore and its mythology have a rich and complex history in Iceland, where they have been preserved and celebrated for centuries. The mythology of the Norse peoples, which includes the gods, goddesses, and heroic tales, found a significant place in Icelandic culture and literature. It began as an oral tradition, with stories and myths passed down through generations by word of mouth. These stories were originally told in the form of poetry and epic sagas. In the 13th century, the Icelandic scholar and historian Snorri Sturluson played a crucial role in preserving Norse mythology in written form. He compiled many of the myths and stories in his work *Prose Edda*, which remains a primary source for our understanding of Norse mythology. In addition to Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda* (also known as *Prose Edda*), there is also *Eddukvæði* (Poetic Edda), a collection

of Old Norse poems that contain mythological and legendary themes and tales. This collection includes poems like the *Völuspá*, which narrates the creation of the world and the eventual apocalypse, and the *Hávamál*, which offers wisdom and guidance. In prose, the most famous sagas include the legendary saga *Völsunga Saga* which tells the story of the hero Sigurd, and the family saga *Brennu-Njáls Saga*, which focuses on the complex relationships and feuds among a group of Icelandic settlers (O'Donoghue, 2004).

Furthermore, William Morris had a strong interest and connection to the works of Snorri Sturluson and other Old Norse-Icelandic texts that were mostly anonymous, which inspired him to a rewriting of *Völsunga Saga*: the epic poem named *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*, published in 1876, which is an example of how he not only incorporated Norse legendary and mythological themes into his work, but also recreated them with his Victorian, romantic and revolutionary point of view (Phelpstead, 2020). His works inspired by Old Norse-Icelandic culture contributed to the broader cultural fascination with all “Viking” and Norse things during the long 19th century, helping to popularize Norse mythology, legends, and history in the 20th century (Ashurst, 2007).

Morris traveled twice to Iceland, first in 1871 and later in 1873. His trips to Iceland left a lasting impact on him and influenced his later work. There, he explored landscapes and historical sites that reminded him of pre-industrial times which he valued, and the medieval world which he was fascinated by (Parry, 1983; Zironi, 2016). The dramatic landscapes, natural beauty, and historical sites he encountered in Iceland found their way into his literary creations, such as *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*, published for the first time in 1876 and which “is an important transitional work in William Morris’ literary career, a major Victorian experiment in epic form, and the most significant attempt in English to render ‘the Great Story of the North, which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks’” (Cumming, 1983, p. 403).

His immersion in the rich literary tradition of Iceland, including the Icelandic sagas, which brought ancient tales of legendary heroes and historical events, also shaped his writing and the themes he explored in his poems. The Icelandic sagas that inspired him often depicted a simpler, more communal way of life with the rejection of the excesses of industrialization and capitalism (Zironi, 2016). His travels to Iceland also contributed to link his (eco)socialist perspective to the Icelandic culture:

There, budding from the unlikely stalk of tough Norse heroic legend, is the social dream which was to define itself into a Socialist programme and become

the vision of all the political writing of Morris's last twenty years. [...] Morris was using Old Norse literature (and changing it in the process) to communicate his ideas and to extol his ideals to his fellow Victorians" (Magnusson, 1996, p. xxii).

Since William Morris emphasized the beauty, majesty, and spiritual qualities of nature and was a nostalgic figure who looked back to a simpler and more harmonious era, the sagas impressed him since they brought a more harmonious relationship with nature and resembled traditional customs preserved from generation to generation, awakening the instinct he needed (Clutton-Brock, 2007).

Furthermore, Icelandic landscapes were also very influential in Morris's literature (Stott, 2021). Morris wrote his experiences in his diaries, which were published fifteen years after his death¹. Comparing the detailed descriptions of the Icelandic environment he provided with the landscapes described in his romances, it is possible to confirm such influences:

Bennett [...] identifies significant Icelandic influence in the landscapes of *The Story of the Glittering Plain* and *The Sundering Flood*, concluding that 'Iceland thus provides the uncompromising terrains which simultaneously test and intensify the protagonists' wondering engagement with the natural world in these final narratives, and in his letters and journals there is a distinct sense that the country functioned in a similar way for Morris during his own extensive travels across its landscape' (Bennett, 72) (Stott, 2021, p. 151).

Having declared himself a socialist in 1883 (Sayre & Löwy, 2020), William Morris delivered, on October 9, 1887, a lecture at a meeting organized by the Hammersmith branch of the Socialist League, held at Kelmscott House in Hammersmith, England. In his speech, he talked about Iceland, focusing on the distinctive features of its literature by mentioning and summarizing some Norse myths and many Icelandic sagas. His purpose was to introduce Icelandic society, which he deeply admired, to his fellow socialists, emphasizing the potential of its culture and literary heritage to inspire English cultural and socio-political renewal. In the lecture, later published under the title "*The Early Literature of the North – Iceland*".

Morris was very interested in medieval history and culture, and in Iceland, which has a rich history dating back to the Viking Age, he found a real-world connection with medieval times. His explorations of historical sites and connections with local people deepened his understanding of the past, enhanced his interest

¹ The edition consulted for this article is: Morris, W. *Icelandic Journals*. London: Mare's Nest, 1996.

in Norse mythology, and brought Norse folklore to his writings, which symbolized a wonderful scenario and released the tension he carried from industrial Victorian England.

Final Considerations

The context in which William Morris lived went against his principles, ideas, and feelings. Influenced by Romanticism, he became a great admirer of natural landscapes and developed a profound sense of nostalgia. In the context in which he lived, what had passed and was distant from his present days were the traditional practices carried out in rural areas before industrialization, and such practices were also reminiscent of medieval times. Cooking, dealing with natural medicine, taking care of the soil for cultivation, paying more attention to nature, consciously using water, having a sense of community in small villages, making objects, artifacts, and tools by hand, using natural products and ingredients and having a simpler life, away from urbanization and industrialization, were increasingly scarce activities. In addition to the medieval past, which he believed was a more dignified world for humans, Morris was a defender of the environment and saw the impact that the Industrial Revolution had on nature. As a nostalgic man inspired by Romanticism, he was also against the impact of industrialization in destroying old buildings and altering natural landscapes (Bruchard, 2015; Sayre & Löwy, 2020). His trips to Iceland reorganized his thoughts, where, coming across landscapes reminiscent of medieval times and remaining in contact with society in a time of valuing traditions, Morris gave a direction to his future works, that ended up influencing the fantastic literature (Fouto, 2020; Stott, 2021).

He found in Norse culture a place of comfort that allowed him to purge his indignation towards industrial Victorian England, pacifying him from the events that the contemporary world was beginning to bring. The combination of the natural world resembling the pre-industrialization, the sensation of timelessness in the Icelandic areas, and the Norse mythology and legends that he found in the sagas which brought tradition and nostalgia, got Morris connected to Old Norse-Icelandic culture leading him to incorporate it into his works as a consolation for his unhappiness in an industrialized Victorian English context.

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