"A MOMENT WHERE THE PATH GREW SUNLIGHTED": FRANCIS SHERMAN AND THE VOICE OF CANADIAN PRE-RAPHAELITISM

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In a letter written during the autumn of 1870, William Morris consoles his wife Jane with a reflection on a shortcoming of the contemporary human temperament: "people like you speak about dont [sic] know either what life or death means, except for one or two supreme moments of their lives, when something pierces through the crust of dullness and ignorance, and they act for the time as if they were sensitive people" (*Letters* 1: 128). For Morris, all of art was a means by which such "supreme moments" could be created, contained, and re-created; however, this potentially endless cycle moved upon three assumptions: the presence of the moment itself, the presence of an artist's hand and eye, and the presence of a sympathetic recipient of art. Each of these assumptions depends upon perception or, to use Morris's term, the capability to "see" rightly; that is, to "read" the moment and its embodiment with discerning eyes appreciative of beauty and uniqueness. In addition, the observer should recognize the cultural and social significance of the moment in history.

Morris's two visits to Iceland (1871 and 1873) were, in part, the result of his need to experience the intensity and clarity of such "supreme moments."[1] Writing from Reykjavík in 1871, Morris observes that "the town itself might be in Canada"; although Morris's impressions of Canada were vicarious, within the decade Canada's impressions of Morris were to become a direct and considerable influence on this country's developing poetic tradition. As a first-time visitor to Iceland, Morris sees with the eyes of an explorer receptive to novel experience, yet speaks from within the context of familiar and communicable analogy. His generalized (and wrong-headed) equation of Iceland with Canada, suggests that unfamiliar landscape requires a type of Adamic renaming. In Iceland, Morris's moments of perceptual clarity, recorded in his *Journals* and letters, occur when encounters with unfamiliar experience generate a corresponding need for innovative expression. Because Morris's quest charts both the terrain and the literary tradition of saga and myth evoked by this landscape, he shares – with a difference – the task of Canada's second and third generation explorer-poets who, like Morris in Iceland, map their