

*News From Nowhere*  
and Victorian Socialist-Feminism

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Florence S. Boos and William Boos

The 1880's, a decade of explosive growth and organization for British socialism, also witnessed the birth of socialist feminism; a confluence of radical visions which troubled as well as excited contemporary socialists, and inspired a new array of analyses of contemporary evils, and projections of an ideal family and personal life. It is difficult, however, to find a fully socialist-feminist nineteenth century English-language utopia; neither *Mizora*, Mary Bradley Lane's 1881 American radical separatist utopia, nor the 1888 *Margaret Dunmore: Or, A Socialist Home*, Jane Clapperton's English celebration of shared labour within voluntary "family" units, directly confronted the issues of capitalism or economic inequality.

William Morris' *News from Nowhere* contained a self-conscious response to socialist-feminist debates of its period, and in conjunction with his other narratives of the late 1880's (*The Pilgrims of Hope*, *The House of the Wolfings*, and *The Roots of the Mountains*) offered one of the period's more sustained attempts to conceive a mutually-satisfying socialist erotic ideal. Though socialist-feminist in only some respects, *News from Nowhere* was also distinctive for its sympathetic and extensive consideration of topics unexplored in earlier utopian works. Morris' reconstructions of the historically specific early-medieval warrior societies of *Wolfings* and *Roots* imposed greater restrictions on their ranges of male and female social roles, so that *News from Nowhere* represented a high-point of Morris' projections of sexual equality.

Morris would have been interested in socialist debates during the 1880's about women's roles and sexual relations for several reasons. His writings had always manifested a sympathetic view of the constraints on women's lives; a belief that (hetero)sexual *eros* was basic to morality as well as aesthetics and the affective life; and—as a persistent counter-current—an equally persistent preoccupation with radical *alienation* of the sexes, and tendency to create plots in which 'heroic' men search for

absent or rejecting women, or are unable to satisfy the wishes of those they desire.

Socialist-feminism thus addressed some of Morris' deepest anxieties—his fears, for example, that inherent splits might underlie nature, and separate human beings from their desires—as well as his deepest and most idealistic aspirations, expressed at the end of *News from Nowhere*, that those who have seen a vision of egalitarian harmony might be able to recreate it, in their own psychic and material worlds. As an artist and theorist of the arts, Morris' concerns encompassed those of many contemporary anarchist and feminist socialists—childrearing, design and preservation of the environment, the need for creative expression through work—and like them he was drawn to contemplate less obviously 'political' aspects of socialist and communal organizations. As others have also pointed out, the tensions of his marriage actually reinforced his youthful belief in women's right to sexual choice, and the companionship of two socialist daughters suggested to him the possibility of women's contribution to political causes. As an activist, he had occasion to work beside striking and energetic socialist and anarchist women such as Annie Besant, Eleanor Marx, and Charlotte Wilson; and as Linda Richardson has recently observed, he had also read of the heroism of Louise Michel and other women fighters of the Paris Commune.<sup>1</sup>

Morris' attitudes thus prompted him toward partial accord with contemporary socialist feminist positions; but countervailing considerations of political expediency and personal acquaintance also intervened. The most prominent British exponents of socialist-feminist positions in the 1880's were Friedrich Engels, Eleanor Marx, and Edward Aveling, and the most vitriolic opponent of their views was the militantly anti-feminist Ernest Belfort Bax, author of *The Fraud of Feminism* and many bigoted attacks on women's alleged domination over men. As tenacious supporters of parliamentary socialism, Engels, Eleanor Marx, and Aveling were Morris' chief opponents in the Socialist League before the schism of 1887; Bax, on the other hand, was a consistent anti-parliamentarian, co-editor of *Commonweal*, co-drafter of the Socialist League's Manifesto, and coauthor with Morris of an influential series of *Commonweal* articles, "Socialism from the Root Up."<sup>2</sup> We have argued elsewhere that Morris' relation to Bax prompted him to temporize on the "woman question" more than he might otherwise have done; mute League debates on the issue of marriage and

women's equality; slight these topics in the jointly-authored League Manifesto and *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* (an expanded version of the earlier *Commonweal* articles); and, most painfully, try to deflect at one point other League members' objections to one of Bax's most odious outbursts (against legal restraints on wife- and child-battering).<sup>3</sup>

Bruce Glasier was the author of one of these objections, presumably to Bax's violent *Commonweal* attack on a bill which permitted women with young children to separate from violent spouses; his letter is not preserved. Whatever the occasion, Morris responded on April 24th, 1886 that ". . . it seems to me that there is more to be said on Bax's side than you suppose. For my part being a male-man I naturally think more of the female-man than I do of my own sex: but you must not forget that child-bearing makes women inferior to men, since a certain time of their lives they must be dependent on them. Of course we must claim absolute equality of condition between women and men, as between other groups, but it would be poor economy setting women to do men's work (as unluckily they often do now) or vice versa."<sup>4</sup>

This is one of the most unfortunate letters Morris ever wrote. It is disingenuous to claim to "think more of" women in order to define them as "inferior." The protectionism of Morris' response may indeed have reflected a degree of un-Baxian benevolence (and as such, could not really have served as a defense of Bax's *Commonweal* position); but its masculinist bias and assumption of some inherent distinction between "women's" and "men's" work are obvious. Not all women were married; not all married women were mothers; not all mothers bore many children; and not all children would need to be raised primarily by their mothers. In other contexts, moreover, Morris would surely have opposed such a blatant alienation of wage-earning from socially useful human labor. Rather than assert that women are (regrettably) "inferior to men, since a certain time of their lives they must be dependent on them," therefore, he might have observed that society *literally* "depends" on women to ensure "social reproduction," and that mothers and child-rearers should thus be entitled no less than artisans and farmers to a just recompense for their work.

It is instructive to compare the ambivalent sexism Morris expressed in this letter with the positions argued by contemporary socialist-feminists such as Friedrich Engels, August Bebel, Eleanor Marx, and Edward Aveling. Their views later seemed to have had some effect on him, I believe, when he was freed of the need to shield Bax, and turned

to the task of developing the more affirmative aspects of his view of women's social role(s). His later socialist writings still reflected the prejudices which emerged in his remarks to Glasier, but they also manifested the sincerity of his ideal of heterosexual unions based on mutual respect; celebrated (some forms of) creative activity for both sexes; and presented a few marked counterexamples to his own stereotypes, women who are not "dependent on [men] . . . a certain time of their lives."

One admirable feature of late *twentieth*-century socialist feminism has been its aspiration to trace out the many disguises and interrelations between various forms of oppression, among them imperialism, nationalism, racism, heedless trust in markets, sexual discrimination, compulsory heterosexuality, ageism, child abuse, pervasive violence, and the rape of the environment.<sup>5</sup> Nineteenth century Marxists worked with more simplistic notions of "class," but they too struggled to relate different forms of oppression.

Karl Marx himself was both a villain and a hero of early feminism in this regard. He modified an obscure and rather extravagant early remark in *The German Ideology*, that the division of labor was "originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act," to a tendentious observation in the first volume of *Capital* that "Within a family . . . there springs up naturally a division of labour, caused by differences of sex and age, a division that is consequently based on a purely physiological foundation."<sup>6</sup> This remark would seem at first to suggest that powerful parallels might exist between different modes of alienation, but then close off further debate over whether one could (also) eliminate those forms which were (allegedly) "based on a purely physiological foundation."

For Marx then, one form of division was 'natural,' and the other 'unnatural': division of labour within families by sex and age was entirely biological and inevitable, but division of labor in industrial production was the source of all oppression. In a way, this slogan of the Peasant's War, which reappears in Edward Burne-Jones' frontispiece to Morris' *A Dream of John Ball*: "When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman?" (The answer, evidently, was: "Adam.")

Marx's unquestioning presupposition of universal heterosexuality was also shared, moreover, by later nineteenth century socialist feminists such as Engels, Bebel, and Eleanor Marx (of which more later).<sup>7</sup> His shotgun identification of heterosexual activity with

"divided labor, moreover, seems oddly reductive of both, and strangely hostile in its redefinition of an act of union as the origin and natural site of oppressive division.

The two male midwives of late-nineteenth-century socialist feminism, in any case, were Friedrich Engels and August Bebel, who published their important feminist works in German. Friedrich Engels' *Der Ursprung Der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats* (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*), appeared in 1884. Although it was not translated into English until 1902, its contents were well-known in English socialist circles.<sup>8</sup> Engels based an "explanation" for the origins of capitalism on Lewis Morgan's descriptions of North American Indian kinship systems, and concluded that accumulation of private capital became feasible only when enforced subjection of women under a regime of (one-sided) "monogamy" enabled men to control transmission of property to their common offspring.

In Engels' view, the extended family of the earlier tribal "gens" had shared equally the means of tribal production, transmitted property through the line of female descent, and permitted unrepressed communal sexuality to women and men alike. Contemporary society, by contrast, was structured by male theft of women's freedom and labor: "The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male" (58). Capitalism was made possible, in short, by the enforced slavery of women in bourgeois marriage, and liberation of women from this form of chattel prostitution would be indispensable in the proletarian future; indeed, it might even be the greatest single gain that future could offer to human beings.

Engels' derived his contempt for "monogamous" bourgeois marriage in good part from his rigoristic view of "monogamy," as "... not in any way the fruit of individual sex-love, with which it had nothing whatever to do; marriages remained as before marriages of convenience" (57); and from sincere cynicism about the double standards of Victorian sexual codes: "... hetaerism is as much a social institution as any other; it continues the old sexual freedom—to the advantage of the men. Actually not merely tolerated, but gaily practiced, by the ruling classes particularly, it is condemned in words. But in reality this condemnation never falls on the men concerned, but only on the women; they are despised and outcast, in order that the unconditional

supremacy of men over the female sex may be once more proclaimed as a fundamental law of society" (59). These were explosive ideas. Whatever the historical idiosyncracies and distortions of Engels' glosses on words such as "monogamy" and "marriage," his exposure of the institutions of "bourgeois marriage" as simple guarantors of property rights was a significant advance for feminist socialism and its analysis of human relations.

One reason for this is that Engels' view of marriage was also motivated, in part at least, by compassion for the unpaid drudgery which oppressed nineteenth century women's lives: "The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules . . . . Within the family, [the husband] is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat" (65-66). In contrast to this master-slave relation, Engels offered a more emancipated form of heterosexual love: ". . . a generation of men who never in their lives have known what it is to buy a woman's surrender with money or any other social instrument of power; a generation of women who have never known what it is to give themselves to a man from any other considerations than real love, or to refuse to give themselves to their lover from fear of the economic consequences. When these people are in the world, they will care precious little what anybody today thinks they ought to do" (73). This ideal of financially untrammelled ("free") love was emphatically shared by Bebel, Marx, Aveling, and Morris, and it clearly underlies statements by several speakers in Morris' *The Pilgrims of Hope and News from Nowhere*.

Engels was also blunt about the practical means which would further the genuine emancipation of women from their drudgery. To enable them to perform the range of tasks from which they are now excluded, society would have to assume collective responsibility for household services and for childcare: ". . . the first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry, . . . . Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of the children becomes a public affair; society looks after all children alike, whether they are legitimate or not" (66-67). In his advocacy of social responsibility for "women's" work, Engels passed, in effect, a kind of sincerity test, which many more exploitive revolutionaries (e. g., Lenin) later failed.<sup>9</sup> Engels based some of his arguments on a pseudohistorical reading of contemporary

anthropology, but he also tried quite genuinely to ask himself, not, "What can women do for a proletarian revolution," but, "What might such a revolution do for women?"

Two aspects of Engels' praiseful accounts of Germanic tribes may also have prompted incidents in Morris' prose romance plots: Engels' description of tribal efforts to recover females taken hostage by enemies suggests Hallblithe's journey to regain the Hostage in *The Story of the Glittering Plain*; and his citation of alleged Germanic respect for female prophets anticipates Morris' characterization of the inspired Hall-Sun in *The House of the Wolfings*: "[T]hey saw in a woman something holy and prophetic, and listened to her advice even in the most important matters" (126).

Simplistic aspects of Engels' analyses, unfortunately, remained to haunt the history of feminism and socialist theory. His factually incorrect assumption that male domination occurred only in capitalist and bourgeois civil societies suggested that abolition of certain narrowly-defined industrial hierarchies would liberate women from sexist subordination, in itself and as a matter of course; and that no causes more complex than industrial exploitation needed to be sought for contemporary men's legal and physical domination over women. Such assumptions obscured or simply ignored the manifold complexity of social situations in which men and women have real opposing interests—hidden patterns of persistent violence against women, for example; domestic abuse; rape; and other patterns of behavior which lack simple economic motivation, whatever their underlying causes. With the exception of virulent misogynists like Bax, socialist men and women agreed that prostitution and marriage-for-support were patently offensive forms of female sexual barter for money, and they also agreed that love and sexual partnership should be voluntary. What analysis of economic exploitation, however, could possibly explain why men of all classes attacked their wives and children, but not conversely? Was *this* Marx's "division of labour"? Why, moreover, on Engels' account, were industrial working women paid half or less the wages of their male counterparts? Why did male *workers* often justify these inequities?<sup>10</sup>

In effect, Engels simply denied that the inequities of bourgeois "monogamy" are present in the relations between poor working men and women, and his description of working-class unions was almost as heedless of oppression as his analysis of bourgeois marriage was harsh: "And now that large-scale industry has taken the wife out of the home

onto the labor market and into the factory, and made her often the bread-winner of the family, no basis for any kind of male supremacy is left in the proletarian household—except, perhaps, for something of the brutality towards women that has spread since the introduction of monogamy. The proletarian family is therefore no longer monogamous in the strict sense, even where there is passionate love and firmest loyalty on both sides, and maybe all the blessings of religious and civil authority . . . . The wife has in fact regained the right to dissolve the marriage, and if two people cannot get on with one another, they prefer to separate” (64).

Among other things, Engels here forgot his own remarks on the effects of female domestic drudgery, which were (and often are) a backbreaking addition to the wife’s industrial labor. Faced with women who suffered lower wages, multiple births, responsibility for all housework and childcare under impoverished conditions, lack of access to birth control, and vulnerability to random forms of domestic violence, Engels would have been hard-pressed to make a convincing argument that “no basis for any kind of male supremacy is left in the proletarian household.” Studies of working class eating patterns indicate that wives and children routinely ate less than husbands, for example; it was they, not the men, who suffered malnourishment when supplies ran low.<sup>11</sup> The principal grievances in lower-class women’s fiction and autobiographies of this period involved cycles of marital and paternal violence (often alcohol-related), and the excruciatingly low wages in all-female sweated industries.<sup>12</sup>

Against the background of Bax’s later attacks on the rights of women to leave violent spouses, Engels does at least deserve credit as the only prominent male socialist of this early period who *alluded* to this central issue, despite his conclusion that the real villain was “monogamy” (“brutality towards women . . . has spread since the introduction of monogamy”). Nothing in Engels’ modes of analysis encouraged him to consider the *psychological* effects of a rigid social and domestic hierarchy, however, or the extent to which men and women might internalize and accommodate oppressive roles.

Despite recent campaigns for birth control by Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, Engels also failed to understand why women and their partners might wish to limit their offspring. Public childcare and education, he believed, would remove “all the anxiety about the ‘consequences,’ which today is the most essential social—moral as well



as economic—factor that prevents a girl from giving herself completely to the man she loves. Will not that suffice to bring about the gradual growth of unconstrained sexual intercourse and with it a more tolerant public opinion in regard to a maiden's honor and a woman's shame?" (67) In effect, Engels' preoccupation with sexual repression may simply have blinded him to the non-sexual issues involved in birth, childrearing, and population growth; remarkably unprudish in other matters, he may have been of a generation unprepared to adapt to the notion of birth control, and heedless of some of the implications and limitations of a program to make "care and education of children . . . a public affair."

Assuming the application to all human development of Morgan's study of North American Indian tribes, Engels also failed to concern himself even in the most peripheral ways with the possible compounding effects of racism or colonial subordination on the circumstances he describes, and clearly shared Marx's, Bebel's, and Marx-Aveling's pervasive homophobia (Athenian men had fallen "into the abominable practice of sodomy and degraded alike their gods and themselves with the myth of Ganymede," 57).

Despite Engels' understanding of the pains of working-class life and of the disadvantages faced by women, finally, the author of *The Condition of the Working Class in England* never recognized that women might have to organize *themselves* to redress their grievances. If, indeed, the "first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male" (58), why should female workers be subordinates in the struggle for a feminist as well as socialist revolution? Engels clearly hoped that contemporary male socialists would act on the views he advocated, a hope that looks suspiciously like an expectation of individual bourgeois charity. His own analogies between sexual, political, and economic oppression should surely have suggested to Engels that women would have to lead and define their own wing of the revolution for which he called.

August Bebel's 1879 *Die Frau und der Socialismus*, translated into English in 1885 as *Woman and Socialism*,<sup>13</sup> was a highly influential work in its time, and embodied "progressive" socialist orthodoxy on the position of women for the next several decades. *Woman and Socialism* shared *Origin of the Family's* theoretical feminism and comparative disregard of concrete obstructions to female emancipation, and resembled Bax and Morris' *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* in its focus

on the ultimate goals of a socialist society, rather than means for their accomplishment. Many of its other statements of desirable goals were later echoed in Morris and Bax's treatise,<sup>14</sup> but as one might expect, its eloquent identification of social happiness with women's economic and occupational emancipation is fuller and more convincing than Morris' and Bax's guarded joint remarks on the same topic.<sup>15</sup>

Eleanor Marx reviewed Bebel's book in an essay which later evolved into her joint booklet (with Edward Aveling) on "The Woman Question," and her enthusiasm for the work is understandable.<sup>16</sup> Bebel's vision of a woman's life was broader and more affirmative than that offered by Engels' historical polemic, and he assumed his socialist woman would engage in a much wider and more clearly-defined variety of active and creative social roles.

*Woman and Socialism* begins with an attack on "Philistines" who referred to woman's alleged "natural calling," and ignored the fact that women were already in the industrial workplace, and were entitled in it to equality and independence: "Are they told that woman must also be economically, in order to be physically and intellectually free, to the end that she no longer depend upon the 'good-will' and the 'mercy' of the other sex?—forthwith their patience is at end; their anger is kindled, and there follows a torrent of violent charges against the 'craziness of the times,' and the 'insane emancipational efforts'. These are the Philistines of male and female sex, incapable of finding their way out of the narrow circle of their prejudices"(2).<sup>17</sup> Bebel's allusion to "torrent[s] of violent charges" precisely characterizes the rabid sexism of Bax's rhetoric. Like Engels, however, Bebel elided the extent and persistence of woman's *de facto* inequality *within* the industrial workforce: "[I]n so far as the unrestricted admission of woman to the industrial occupations is concerned, the object [full social equality of man and woman] has already been actually attained" [3].

Also like Engels, Bebel assimilated prostitution to bourgeois marriage as alternative forms of sexual slavery, designed principally to preserve unjust patterns of property ownership. Strangely, he also considered enforced chastity and sexual frustration the chief forms of female oppression—a remarkable view in an age of untreatable venereal disease, persistent gynecological illness, and frequent death in childbirth of infant as well as mother, but a view which regularly recurs in all the end-of-century socialist feminists, Marx and Aveling included.

Like Engels and most other socialists of the 1880's (and Morris in *News from Nowhere*), Bebel likewise saw no need for birth control (it seems to have been almost obligatory for socialists to be anti-Malthusians with a vengeance): "there is no danger of over-population within sight" (362). Better distribution of resources, not "harmful abstinence and . . . unnatural preventives" would entirely suffice to ensure natural plenitude for the future. He was more openminded, however, about forms of individual contraception which might seem desirable to members of a future society. Socialist women, for example, might in fact wish to have fewer children: "leaving exceptions aside, intelligent and energetic women are not as a rule inclined to give life to a large number of children as 'the gift of God,' and to spend the best years of their own lives in pregnancy, or with a child at their breasts. This disinclination for numerous children, which even now is entertained by most women, may—all the solicitude notwithstanding that a Socialist society will bestow upon pregnant women and mothers—be rather strengthened than weakened. In our opinion, there lies in this the great probability that the increase of population will proceed slower than in bourgeois society" (370). (Bebel's anticipation of a natural check on population increase may contrast mildly with Morris' lingering ideals ten years later: Ellen of *Nowhere* desires "a good many" children, and Sun-Beam, the Bride, and Bow-may bear five children, four sons and one daughter, in the first three years of their respective marriages.)

Bebel followed his discussions of "woman in the past" and "woman in the present" with an evocation of an ideal for the future: "The woman of future society is socially and economically independent; she is no longer subject to even a vestige of dominion and exploitation; she is free, the peer of man, mistress of her lot. Her education is the same as that of man, with such exceptions as the difference of sex and sexual functions demand [whatever these might be; Bebel does not elaborate]. Living under natural conditions, she is able to unfold and exercise her mental powers and faculties. She chooses her occupation [in accord] . . . with her wishes, inclination and natural abilities, and she works under conditions identical with man's. Even if engaged as a practical working-woman on some field or other, at other times of the day she may be educator, teacher or nurse, at yet others she may exercise herself in art, or cultivate some branch of science, and at yet others may be filling some administrative function.

She joins in studies, enjoyments or social intercourse with either her sisters or with men,—as she may please or occasion may serve” (344).

Most striking about this passage is its evocation of social variety and freedom. Bebel’s ideal woman resembles a somewhat more active and clearly-focused version of Morris’ Ellen—free to choose as she wills, with perceived and concrete motives for the choice. Bebel was also aware that these choices would naturally include companionship “with either her sisters or with men.” Female friendships do occur in Morris’ later prose romances, but women usually appear in them in the company of male companions, lovers, and family members.<sup>18</sup>

Like all the socialist-feminists, of course, Bebel championed complete freedom of sexual choice: “In the choice of love, [the woman of the future] is, like man, free and unhampered . . . The satisfaction of the sexual instinct is as much a private concern as the satisfaction of any other natural instinct” (346). No public contract can legitimate a private union, and separation will be at will; in cases of “incompatibility, disenchantment, or repulsion,” in fact, “morality *commands* that the unnatural, and therefore immoral, bond be dissolved” [*italics mine*] (344).<sup>19</sup> Marx and Aveling later quoted with approval Bebel’s remarks that: “Woman is, accordingly, free, and her children, where she has any, do not impair her freedom: they can only fill all the fuller the cup of her enjoyments and her pleasure in life. Nurses, teachers, female friends, the rising female generations—all these are ready at hand to help the mother when she needs help” (347). As usual, however, no male nurses or teachers, male friends, or rising male generations appeared in this list of “helpers,” though Bebel freely projected a wider range of roles for women, and declared that “woman again fills the active role that once was hers in primitive society. She does not become the mistress, she is the equal of man” (343). Morris’ most active women—Ellen, Birdalone, Bow-May, the Maid in *Wood Beyond the World*—remain single throughout the romances in which they appear. Even sturdy exceptions such as *Nowhere’s* carver Phillipa, mother of an adolescent daughter, seem to lack a current partner, and the Maid in *The Wood Beyond the World* explains to Walter that marriage will deprive her of the girdle of secret and independent wisdom.<sup>20</sup> Bebel’s socialist woman makes decisions (almost) at will, and raises children amid a host of other occupations, but expects little responsibility for this socially essential activity from her male companion. With these now-thoroughly familiar qualifications, she is (projected to be) more autonomous than

the love-centered women who continued to predominate in Morris' narrative imagination.

*Commonweal* for April, 1885 carried a review by Eleanor Marx of Bebel's work, which she later expanded and co-published with Edward Aveling as *The Woman Question*,<sup>21</sup> the sole female-(co)authored socialist-feminist treatise of the period. Like other non-Fabian socialists, Marx and Aveling were quick to criticize the limitations of bourgeois reformism, but they also showed a considerable knowledge of contemporary literature by and about women. They cite favorably Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, for example; Henrik Ibsen's *The Doll's House*; some of Shakespeare's more favorable portrayals of women; and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication*, the latter pointedly without censure for alleged 'bourgeois reformism': "She demanded that women should have equal educational advantages, should be educated in the same schools and colleges with men; that from infancy to adult age the two should be trained side by side" (23). Correlatively, the author(s) of the booklet also show marked interest in at least two concrete efforts at social reform: repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act, and extension of wider educational opportunities to women. Like Bebel, however, Marx and Aveling are dismissive of relative gains in "the actual position of women with respect to men": "We will support all women, not only those having property, enabled to vote; the Contagious Diseases Act repealed; every calling thrown open to both sexes. The actual position of women in respect to men would not be very vitally touched. . . . Nor should we deny that, with the gain of each or all of these points, the tremendous change that is to come would be more easy of attainment" (14). Morris would have agreed with their dismissal of reformism, of course, but a tone of facile contempt which runs through some of their more "radical" claims suggests that they shared Engels' and Bebel's inability really to conceive the changes which would have to follow a *true* end of wage discrimination and segregation of occupations by gender.

Marx and Aveling also endorsed in the strongest terms Engels' and Bebel's aversion to departures from conventional gender norms ("the effeminate man and masculine woman . . . are two types from which even the average person recoils with a perfectly natural horror of the unnatural," 23), departures which they ascribed in passing to sexual repression; they also decried in melodramatic language "the terrible proportion of women that are unmarried," who "bear on their brows

this stamp of lost instincts, stifled affections, a nature in part murdered" (16). In terms which suggest an inversion of nineteenth-century denunciations of "self-abuse," they insist that (hetero)sexual activity is not only *desirable* in most cases, but actually *necessary* for physical health: "[The slaying of sex is always followed by disaster": for abstention leads directly to lunacy and suicide ("compulsory heterosexuality" indeed!). As 'proof' of this, they cite Bebel's statistics on the relative higher incidence of lunacy among the unmarried, oblivious to any other possible interpretations which might be placed on such data. In such an intellectual climate, the unique views of Olive Schreiner, Havelock Ellis, Elizabeth Wolstoneholme-Elmy, and other sexual radicals of the period stand out in bold retrospective relief.<sup>22</sup>

Marx and Aveling also observed the degree to which women are psychologically oppressed by their confinement to passivity in courting and sexual roles: "[W]e suggest as another wrong to women the rigorous social rule that from man only must come the first proffer of affection, the proposal for marriage" (18). This is an insight Morris would definitely have liked. Several heroines of the later prose romances—Sun-Beam of *Roots*, and the Maid of *The Wood Beyond the World*, among them—initiate courtship with their partners. *The Woman Question* also suggests, correctly, that it is women who must organize for their own future: "Both the oppressed classes, women and the immediate producers, must understand that their emancipation will come from themselves. Women will find allies in the better sort of men, as the labourers are finding allies among the philosophers, artists, and poets. But the one has nothing to hope from man as a whole, and the other has nothing to hope from the middle class as a whole" (15).

As some of these quotations may suggest, *The Woman Question* is also more consistently acerbic in tone than either *The Origin* or *Woman and Socialism*. Condescension towards women's "dependence," for instance, is dispatched as follows: "The majority still lays stress upon the occasional sex-helplessness of woman as a bar to her even consideration with man. It still descants upon the 'natural calling' of the female . . . . [P]eople forget that sex-helplessness at certain times is largely exaggerated by the unhealthy conditions of our modern life . . . there is no more a 'natural calling' of women than there is a 'natural' law of capitalistic production, or a 'natural' limit to the amount of the labourer's product that goes to him for means of subsistence" (15). Nor do Marx and Aveling fail to denounce the more pervasive—and, history

has shown, persistent—effects of most women's double drudgery: "the old promise of the legend, 'in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children,' is not only realised, but extended. . . . The man, worn out as he may be by labour, has the evening in which to do nothing. The woman is occupied until bedtime comes. Often with young children her toil goes far into, or all through, the night" (19).

Equally impassioned are the authors' otherwise predictable attacks on prudery, and their unusually pointed demands for sexual education. There must be free discussion of "the sexual question in all its bearing," by men and women "looking frankly into each other's faces" (23). "There can never be a time when falsehood should be taught about any function of the body" (21), for "[w]ith the false shame and false secrecy, against which we protest, goes the unhealthy separation of the sexes that begins as children quit the nursery, and only ends when the dead men and women are laid in the common earth" (22). Such remarks have the sting of felt observation and immediate response, and go beyond the generalities set forth by Engels or Bebel.

*The Woman Question* also gives fervent support to Bebel's demands for female independence, a full range of creative occupations, and an ideal of intellectual companionship in heterosexual unions: "[T]he highest ideal seems to be the complete, harmonious, lasting blending of two human lives. Such an ideal . . . needs at least four things. These are love, respect, intellectual likeness, and command of the necessities of life. . . . Intellectual likeness. The same education for men and women; the bringing up of these twain side by side, until they join hands at last, will ensure a greater degree of this. That objectionable product of capitalism, Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' young woman, with her 'I cannot understand, I love,' will be a myth. Every one will have learnt that there can be no love without understanding" (27-28).

Above all, then, the period's only socialist-feminist treatise partly or entirely written by a woman pointedly idealized mental and sexual companionship, rather than children, as the principal goal of marriage. Only John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor among eminent Victorians had invoked such ideals of mental fellowship between the sexes in print. In the sad light of Aveling's many infidelities and Marx's subsequent suicide, there is also something wistfully counterfactual in the pamphlet's hopeful concluding anticipation, of a society in which there would be less to resent and forgive: "the love and respect that are . . . lost today, because of sins and shortcomings, the product of the com-

mercial system of society, will be more easily forthcoming, and vanish almost never" (28).

*The Woman Question*, in conclusion, extended the now-familiar socialist-feminist analogy between the conditions of women and of workers, and was unique in its genre for its impassioned advocacy, and brief but pointed assertion of the necessity of women's *leadership* (not partnership) in effecting autonomous, feminist-centered goals. This pamphlet of less than twenty pages offered a remarkable aggregation of psychological insights, grievances, and practical suggestions for change. It is a great sadness that Eleanor Marx did not live to extend and apply her views.

Despite (and perhaps because of) Morris' incongruent collaboration with Bax during the years in which Bax and Eleanor Marx contributed sharply opposed articles on "the woman question" to the journal Morris edited, he seems to have thought seriously about women's freedom in an ideal society. Part of the implicitly anti-Baxian evolution of his views appears in "The Pilgrims of Hope," for example, Morris' tribute to the Paris Commune which appeared in *Commonweal* from April 1885 to June 1886.<sup>23</sup> The heroine of "Pilgrims" quietly transfers her affections from her husband to their best friend, a fellow revolutionary, and leaves her beloved son to work with husband and (presumed) lover in the Commune. The values embedded in this plot clearly reveal a consistent pattern to Morris' response: he firmly supported the rights of all women to personal and sexual autonomy, not excluding mothers of young children, and he was eager to enlist women in the revolutionary cause; but he was less imaginative about the details of the self-initiated endeavors they might wish to pursue.

The principal narrator of "The Pilgrims of Hope" is a young English revolutionary, Richard, who marries a woman who shares both his conversion and his growing commitment to revolutionary politics. Their son is still an infant when the couple leaves with Richard's comrade Arthur for Paris, where the two men fight on the barricades, and the wife climbs the same barricades with the stretcher-bearers and ambulance-women. At the poem's climactic moment, both rush to aid the wounded Arthur. The wife is killed, and Richard, who is gravely wounded, later escapes and returns to England, where he quietly raises their son and continues to work for the cause. What is unusual about this narrative is that *before* their common departure, Richard has come to believe that his wife loves Arthur, and he accepts the apparent



implications of her choice. This acceptance is for Richard a difficult and conscious act, which later paradoxically enables him to honor their memories, maintain his own sense of integrity, and preserve a sense of their shared ideals. A genuine socialist revolutionary, Morris seems to be saying, must fully accept the emotional freedom of his/her fellow human beings without malice and possessiveness, and adopt in private life, perhaps at great emotional cost, forms of love which he/she can reconcile with genuine communitarian ideals. Socialist-feminist doctrines about "love"—*eros* as well as *agape*—are also expressed elsewhere in the poem. In an extended monologue before the three friends depart for France, for example, the wife wistfully addresses the infant son who she fears will never know her, and expresses happiness that his conception has at least been the result of love, not barter.

Linda Richardson has correctly pointed out that the wife's actions as a stretcher-bearer are less militant than those reported in accounts of the exemplary Louise Michel and other Commune ambulance women,<sup>24</sup> but it is also true that one of Morris' principal concerns in this poem is to identify an emotional test which the new socialist ethic will present to *men*. Richard never "owned" his wife's primary affection or sexual loyalty. He can never justly resent, therefore, a failure to possess what was never his. However unreally noble Richard's emotions may seem, they make "The Pilgrims of Hope" a more moving poem; Richard's prior renunciation later deepens both his sincerely felt bereavement, and his wistful isolation with his memories. The courage the poem celebrates is a confrontation with personal as well as collective loss, and its plot remains essentially unique in nineteenth century literature: Morris' intensely personal attempt to apply the ethical imperatives of socialist feminism to the grieving reveries of a determined male revolutionary.

During 1888 and 1889, Morris published two "socialist" German romances, prompted in part of course by his lifelong interest in the early middle ages, but almost certainly also by Engels' and others' reconstructions of the allegedly more communal and egalitarian life of German tribes. *The House of the Wolfings*, the first of these two narratives, reflects Morris' attempts to recreate the daily economic life of such an agrarian society, and record productive tasks of some of its men and women: the latter, for example, not only weave, but also hoe and herd sheep. As Linda Richardson has remarked, the presence of warrior women in the German romances may indicate that Morris has tried to

absorb some of the lessons of Michel's role in the Commune.<sup>25</sup> He is careful to present a cadre of Wolfing women fighters, for example—in this case a group of 21 female spies, led by the valiant Hrosshild, and trained to commit suicide when captured; several are in fact taken, and die as planned. In the final battle against the Romans, the stronger women also join directly in the fighting, but there is never any doubt that these are remarkable and exceptional figures. Most of the narrative's descriptions of the Wolfings clearly separate the activities of women, children, thralls, and the aged from those of men, who must always be prepared to fight.

*The House of the Wolfings* does however contain one of Morris' most striking revolutionary heroines: Hall-Sun, the Wolfings' dedicated priestess, in part an idealization of one or both of Morris' daughters. Like Ellen in *News*, Hall-Sun is the inspired interpretant of the values and history of her people, but she is also a priestess, consigned to lifelong celibacy as the price and sign of her prophetic gift, and one of several displaced and allegorical, almost supra-earthly figures whom Morris presents through the filter of heroic poetry and saxonized prose. *The House of the Wolfings* is a hauntingly beautiful evocation of the purported virtues of a heroic warrior tribe, but its tragic fatalism and celebration of the virtues of an embattled society are left-Wagnerian (if this phrase makes sense), rather than socialist, and they reinforce as much as they undermine a fundamental duality of sexual roles.

*The Roots of the Mountains* is a fuller and perhaps more plausible depiction of the daily pursuits and social life of an idealized German tribe. It also features two prominent and striking young women fighters, the skillful archer, Bow-may, who saves the hero Gold-mane's life in battle; and his kinswoman and former fiancée, The Bride. Gold-mane is ultimately attracted to neither of these valiant women, however, but to Sun-Beam, a woman who is completely disinclined toward armed exploits, but *dresses* from time to time in armour—a sign of identification, perhaps, with the men who defend her. Sun-Beam predictably is more notable for her unusual and exotic beauty, her skill in dress, her dignity and self-possession of manner, and her forthrightness and sincerity in courtship (a trait of good socialist-feminist women, as we have seen). Like any proper dynast, she also chooses her partner primarily on the basis of his perceived ability to unite her fragment of the Wolf tribe with others of its scattered remnants. No Joan of Arc, she never considers that she might take a more active part in this reconcilia-

tion, and she is untroubled that service to the "higher" aims allegedly embodied in her union with Gold-mane will cause considerable pain to his former betrothed, the more assertive Bride. These reasons of tribal state are not questioned within the narrative, and Sun-Beam's desire to marry "for the tribe" is in fact presented as a high order of political virtue. The Bride's service as a warrior also becomes a kind of outward enactment and abreaction of her romantic disappointment; after recovery from her physical and emotional wounds, she symbolically accepts a new partner in Folk-might, Sun-Beam's brother and Gold-mane's comrade in arms. The reformed Folk-might had earlier committed a couple of murders, and his union with the sensitive Bride looks suspiciously like another marriage of convenience for the tribe.

Linda Richardson has also noted that Morris presents the Children of the Wolf as a patriarchal kinship group, thus rejecting the most striking postulate of contemporary socialist anthropology, the allegedly matriarchal nature of Engels' tribal gens.<sup>26</sup> There is no doubt whatsoever that the society of the confederated Wolf tribes is indeed a patriarchy: the warrior women, for example, are excluded from participation in its Folk-Mote, though Sun-Beam does attend in her capacity as mate of the tribe's principal leader. Gold-mane expects to assume the chieftainship from his aged father Stone-face (the narrative makes no detailed mention of any older *women*), and his wife Sun-Beam becomes a member of *his* tribe. When The Bride learns that Gold-mane now plans to marry Sun-beam, moreover, she makes an astounding demand: that he give her for adoption his second son (not his second child), which he eventually does. Neither The Bride nor Gold-mane ever seems to consider that Gold-mane and his wife may be childless, or bear daughters; that Sun-beam may object to the loss of her child (so much for shared parental custody); or that The Bride's husband may not wish to serve as the boy's substitute father. Three years pass between the *Root's* climactic battle and the end of the tale. In the interim, Bow-may has retired from her life as archer, married Hall of Highcliff, and borne a son; The Bride and Folk-might are now the parents of a son and daughter; and, as we have seen, Sun-Beam and Gold-mane are the parents of two sons. All three women thus seem to have assumed familial and familiar roles. All this is pleasant enough perhaps, but it does not seem to represent great effort on Morris' part to envision wider sharing of sexual as well as political roles in the tribe's allegedly communal society. The German romances, in short, reflect some of

Morris' more self-consciously socialist views on love, but other aspects of his reconstructions simply idealize obvious limitations of a conjectured "tribal" past.

Against this background, it is not surprising, perhaps, that Morris' most serious and sustained examination of a feminist-socialist vision after "The Pilgrims of Hope" appears in his account of *future* social relations in *News From Nowhere*, serialized in *Commonweal* from January to October 1890. Motifs of marital disunity in *Nowhere*, for example, can be subjected to tests less severe than estrangement and death (as in "Pilgrims"); indeed, the mutually gratifying reconciliation of Dick and Clara forms a subplot of Guest's central journey downstream toward a fuller understanding of the new society.

The reunion of Dick and Clara also enables Morris to elaborate more fully his views of sexual equity and autonomy, and contrast *Nowhereians'* behavior with one of the grosser inequities in the divorce laws of his time: their heavy penalties for female adultery, notoriously dictated by what Marx and Aveling had called "one law for the woman and one for the man."<sup>27</sup> In chapter 9, "Concerning Love," Guest learns from Old Hammond that his guide Dick hopes to be reunited with his former wife Clara, who had deserted him for another man, and now seeks reconciliation. When the unreconstructed Guest is somewhat surprised that Clara has suffered no legal or social penalties, Hammond patiently explains the need to distinguish "natural passion" from "friendship," and both from possessiveness: "We know that we must face the unhappiness that comes of man and woman confusing the relations between natural passion, and sentiment, and the friendship which, when things go well, softens the awakening from passing illusions: but we are not so mad as to pile up degradation on that unhappiness by engaging in sordid squabbles about livelihood and position, and the power of tyrannising over the children who have been the result of love or lust" (57). We know of no analogues to Clara's more-or-less accepted departure and return in any British novel or poem before this period, so this turn in Morris' plot is genuinely striking.

The portrait of Clara in *Nowhere* also suggests a displaced representation of Jane Morris, and Clara is in fact also the book's only woman who responds nostalgically to a Pre-Raphaelite view of women as proper objects of romance. She is treated sympathetically, but she clearly possesses restless impulses which recall the egocentric

pleasures of the hated nineteenth century. When Ellen's grandfather suspects that the society of the nineteenth century may in some respects have been preferable in some respects, Dick looks uncomfortable and Ellen vehemently disagrees, but Guest notes that "Clara listened to him with restless eyes, as if she were excited and pleased" (150). In her partial reversion to bourgeois values, then, this woman who has deserted her husband is only a subordinate heroine within the unfolding narrative of the new society.

Guest also learns that the couple's children have remained with one of Hammond's daughters, "where, indeed, Clara has mostly been."<sup>28</sup> Clara (like Morris' own wife Jane) seems to have been a partially-absent parent, but no one, apparently, has assumed that Dick will raise the children in her absence. Still, Morris's narration seems to accommodate at least part of Engels' and Bebel's perception that an egalitarian society should separate marriage and childrearing, and their assumption that the larger society should assume some responsibility for individual childcare. It is also noticeable, however, that women, more than men, are once again expected to raise their common offspring: women 'naturally' gather round to offer hospitality and care—when Clara and her daughter move in with old Hammond's daughter, for example. Morris' conception of socialized childcare essentially looks like a communal variant of the extended family, broadened to include friends and distant (female) relatives.<sup>29</sup> Morris, in short, has not faced the issue of male responsibility for childrearing; nor does Clara seem to have had any other occupation or social duties. Nevertheless, *Nowhere's* descriptions of children's education do embody Morris' assumption that some attention to childrearing at least will have become an activity of natural interest to all adults.

Morris also makes clear his view that male egoism and impulses toward revenge, not female disloyalty or maternal irresponsibility, create the greatest threats to domestic social harmony. In chapter 24, for example, Dick and Walter recount the story of a man who has attacked a more successful rival in love, and been killed himself in the ensuing struggle; both slayer and woman involved are deeply depressed after the event, but no legal punishment has been imposed on them. (It is also characteristic of Morris' writings throughout his life that both these stories from *Nowhere* involve a woman who is sought by two men; there are only a few instances in all of Morris's poetry and

prose writings of love-conflicts or triangles in which men desert women, or two women love the same man).<sup>30</sup>

More generally, the social structure of *Nowhere* also exemplifies the essentially universal Victorian nature of Morris assumptions about (hetero)sexual ties. No more than the essays of Bebel and Marx-Aveling does *Nowhere* offer any instances of homosexual unions, casually promiscuous or multiply-married persons, communal households, or group marriages. Morris clearly assumes a pattern of male attachment to female partners, for example, when he anticipates that an extended social family will cooperate in childrearing, when disintegration of an individual family becomes inevitable. Only death, moreover, seems to confer the responsibility (and privilege) of childrearing on men, as it did with the hero of "The Pilgrims of Hope." As we have seen, virtually all Victorian socialist-feminists essentially shared these tacit assumptions. None—not even Eleanor Marx—really envisioned a world in which fathers participated equally in child care, or even one in which deserted fathers patiently raised infant children. None developed a serious model for what might be entailed by communal households and childcare, or women's full participation in social and occupational life.<sup>31</sup> Morris does, however, lack Bebel and Marx-Aveling's enthusiasm for women's potential literary and scientific roles (as he sometimes seemed to do for scientific roles in general). His basic conception of Nowhereian communalism seems to have been based on affiliation and an aggregation of quasi-traditional family units, rather than any systematic replacement for them.

Morris does sometimes imagine women at work at complex crafts he respected, such as weaving, and at what he calls "administration": "there are many, like the housekeepers I was speaking of, whose delight is in administration and organisation, to use long-tailed words; I mean people who like keeping things together, avoiding waste, seeing that nothing sticks fast uselessly" (84). These traits might indeed seem useful for thoughtful statespersons and economic planners, but *Nowhere* is devoid of political rulers and economic planners, and his "administration" may simply be a "long-tailed" placeholder for household chores. Despite assurances within the text that "[t]he women do what they can do best, and what they like best, and the men are neither jealous of it or injured by it" (59), other critics have also noted some of the ways in which Nowhereians continue the role-segregation of Morris' own century: men serve as guides and row the women

downstream; at guesthouses women wait on men, who sit at tables; sundry novelists and historians, encountered along the way, are all male; men mow hay in the fields during harvest, while the women gather to watch (in contrast to his German romances, in which women tend sheep, and perform farm labour).<sup>32</sup>

As a perceptive contemporary of George Eliot, Olive Schreiner, and Isabella Bird, Morris was obviously aware that not all women preferred cleaning and serving food to writing or travelling, and that it is not the case that all women and no men are preternaturally gifted at waiting on tables. Praise of men for a lack of "jealousy" of the task of serving themselves, of course, would be sheer obfuscation. Morris is better remembered here by his admonition in "The Society of the Future": that in an egalitarian society, "since others will be free, you will have to do your own work."<sup>33</sup>

There is, at any rate, one fortunate and rather striking exception to these occupational stereotypes. Philippa—chief carver (sculptor) among "the obstinate refusers" who prefer house-building to haymaking—is quite possibly an allusion to Philippa Fawcett, who earlier in the year of *Nowhere's* publication placed above the Senior Wrangler in the Cambridge mathematics tripos.<sup>34</sup> The Nowhereian Philippa is a forty-year old mother of a sixteen-year old apprentice-carver, and the only female single parent and working mother in the entire book. Since "Socialism Triumphant" clearly identifies decoration of public buildings as a primary concern of the new society, Philippa's occupation is highly honorific in Nowhereian terms.

Another, more familiar (near)-counterexample to the prevailing patterns of gender stereotyping also appears in *Nowhere*, and her contribution is both significant to the narrative and highly valued. Two of the utopia's more astute inhabitants mediate for Guest the nature of the utopian future with special care. Conventionally enough, one of these "wisdom figures" is an old man, but the other is a young woman. Half-way through the book, the historian Old Hammond recounts to Guest the changes which led to the "Change," and sketches the beginnings of the new order which followed. Later, when Ellen travels downriver with Guest, she comes to represent for him more fully the transformed life in its most self-consciously reflective form. Learned sages and handsome women are stock literary figures, of course; but it is Ellen's "sagacity"—her ability to relive and interpret history—which

is most valuable to Guest in his search for a way to express the new society's wisdom to himself, and to the members of his own.

It is Ellen, in fact, (the Helen of the new world), who anticipates Santayana's best known epigram when she formulates the narrative's most eloquent praise of history: "I think sometimes people are too careless of the history of the past—too apt to leave it in the hands of old learned men like Hammond. Who knows? Happy as we are, times may alter; we may be bitten with some impulse towards change, and many things may seem too wonderful for us to resist, too exciting not to catch at, if we do not know that they are but phases of what has been before; and withal ruinous, deceitful, and sordid" (194).

Like the wife of "The Pilgrims of Hope," Ellen also understands what her daily life might have become as a "woman of the past," under capitalism at its 'best' as well as worst, and her indictment of this role is a set-piece of late nineteenth-century socialist critique of bourgeois marriage: ". . . my beauty and cleverness and brightness... would have been sold to rich men, and my life would have been wasted indeed; ... I should have had no choice, no power of will over my life... I should never have bought pleasure from the rich men, and even opportunity of action, whereby I might have won some true excitement. I should have been wrecked and wasted in one way or another, either by penury or by luxury" (204). Notice here too that Morris clearly identifies, for the first time in his writings, "opportunity of action" as a natural female goal.

As we have seen, the ideal projections of Eleanor Marx and other late nineteenth-century socialist feminists only resembled the women of Morris' writings in some respects. In contrast to the characterizations of Sun-Beam, the Bride, Bow-may, Hall-Sun, Wood-Sun, the Maid, and even Ellen, Marx-Aveling's new socialist woman would be more concerned with education and less aware of her appearance; less self-sacrificial and more militant; less eager to bear children and more desirous of mental companionship; less a craftsperson and more a teacher or author; less an inspired seer, but a more active participant in public life.

Inevitably, Ellen thus bears witness to some of the residually conventional features of Morris' ideals for women. She is the symbolic goal of Guest's journey, but has herself little impulse to travel — unlike Guest, and the youthful Morris himself: "I must say that I don't like moving about from one home to another; one gets so pleasantly used



to all the detail of the life about one. . . ." (190). As an embodiment of Morris' socialist-feminist opposition to nineteenth-century prudery, false modesty, and sexual repression, Ellen also wants an indefinite number of children ("I shall have children; perhaps before the end a good many—I hope so" (194). She also *thinks* through her hopes for these children, however (as does the wife in "The Pilgrims of Hope"), and yearns to transmit to them something of her own modes of understanding: "[T]hough of course I cannot force any special kind of knowledge upon them, yet, my friend, I cannot help thinking that just as they might be like me in body, so I might impress upon them some part of my ways of thinking; that is, indeed, some of the essential part of myself . . ." (194).

Not since his creation of the Guenevere of *The Defence*, moreover, had Morris taken such care to imagine a woman's consciousness from within; by comparison, even Oenone and Gudrun of *The Earthly Paradise* are embodiments of passionate intensity externally observed. A much more convincing prophet than Hall-Sun, and *News from Nowhere's* truest wisdom figure, Ellen becomes the work's most perceptive interpretant of the new society, and an active, unrepressed woman who desires to transmit her physical and cultural identity to succeeding generations. She is also the embodiment of Morris' self-conscious hope for future generations, and the work's closest approach to the socialist-feminists' collective ideal. She alone in *Nowhere* fully practices Morris' deeply-held ethic of popular, living history, and she is the ultimate spokeswoman of the book's finest insights into the spirit of the new society.

Ellen in *News from Nowhere* thus fails to represent many of the *outer* aspects of Marx-Aveling's socialist-feminist ideal. But she *does* embody something of its *inner* consciousness, that sense of harmony with nature and the cycles of life which evokes humankind's deepest sense of recurrence and rebirth. Such experiences are near-religious and deeply private, and metaphors of home and organic life remain thoroughly appropriate for them. At the end of *News*, the journey to the church at the upper waters represents a kind of secular passage to Jerusalem, with Ellen as a Christ-figure who leads Guest "home", and leaves him tenderly with a final consolation—one of Morris' most heartfelt declarations of the beauty of the "feminine" and universal earth: "She led me up close to the house, and cried out, "O me! O me! How I love the earth,

and the seasons, and the weather, and all things that deal with it, and all that grows out of it—as this has done!” (201).

Ellen’s brief epiphany is not only a startlingly direct and beautiful expression of one of Morris’ most authentically “feminine” ideals; it is also a fitting culmination, therefore, of his most sustained effort to imagine how an egalitarian society might free the inner consciousness of its (men and) women.

*University of Iowa*

## NOTES

1 “Louise Michel and William Morris,” *The Journal of the William Morris Society* 8:2 (1989): 26-29.

2 The was later published as *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome*, London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1893.

3 “An (Almost-) Egalitarian Sage: William Morris’ Later Writings and the Woman Question,” in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, edited Thais Morgan, Rutgers University Press, 1990, 187-206, 296-301.

4 Norman Kelvin, ed., *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, 2.

5 Good discussions of the issues of contemporary feminist socialism may be found in Alison Jagger, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1983; Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman, Resistance and Revolution: A History of Women and Revolution in the Modern World*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1972; and Michele Barrett, *Women’s Oppression Today: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter*, London and New York: Verso, 1988.

6 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, New York: International Publishers, 1967, 351.

7 Alison Jagger, 67-69, has already examined some now-conspicuous limitations of Marx’s and Engels’ views, and suggested that the gender-“blindness” of the

traditional Marxist account of human nature "is not a conception of humans as genderless but rather a conception of humans as male—and, one might add, as permanently adult . . . Marxists in fact have interpreted "labor" to mean primarily the production and exchange of objects—the kind of work that they associate with men . . . they exclude much women's work, and especially procreative work, from the category of labor and construe it more as biological processes. So women are excluded from history and even from full humanity" (78-79). She also notes Marxists' heedlessness of the sex-segregated nature of the industrial workplace, their unexamined acceptance of the fact that women rather than men almost invariably provide housework, and their failure to address issues of sexual harassment and violence against women: "For instance, there seems to be no specifically Marxist way of raising the question why it is men who routinely beat and rape women, rather than vice versa . . . the biologicistic assumption of heterosexuality, together with the view that men's sex drive is biologically determined to be stronger than that of women, legitimates sexual harassment and rape." (78)

We would add that no monocausal "analysis" (including a belief that "capitalism" and its attendant legal infrastructures are the precipitating sources of *all* injustice) is likely to comprehend the manifold effects on human behavior of race, colonial status, physical differences, age, national prejudice, and so on . . . Moreover, heedlessness of the real range of human sexual preference and personal tastes can only reinforce rigid views of what is "natural."

8 *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*, translated by Alex West. New York: International Publishers, 1942. Citations in parentheses after quotations are to this edition.

9 See Mullaney, Marie Marmo, *Revolutionary Women: Gender and the Socialist Revolutionary Role*, New York: Praeger, 1983.

10 Wanda Neff, *Victorian Working Women*, New York, 1929.

11 Laura Oren, "The Welfare of Women in Laboring Families in England, 1860-1950," *Feminist Studies* 1.3-4 (1973): 108-109.

12 For example, Gertrude Renton Weaver, *The Angel and the Outcast*, New York: Brentano's, 1907, and Ethel Carnie, *Miss Nobody*, London: Methuen, 1913.

13 Nineteenth Century Press, 1885, reviewed by Eleanor Marx in the July, 1885 issue of *Commonweal*.

14 Indeed, the resemblances suggest that Bax and Morris were influenced by Bebel's treatise, especially in its final chapter, "Women in the Future," where they advocate more even distribution of population and communal rearing of children, greater creativity and variety in work, and a new form of religion based on social ethics.

15 Morris had bought Bebel's *Women and Socialism* in July, 1885 (Linda Richardson, *William Morris and Women: Experience and Representation*, Unpublished dissertation, Oxford University, 1989), 293.

16 The review consists chiefly of long quotations; the arguments which frame them are new to the pamphlet.

17 *Women Under Socialism*, trans. Daniel de Leon, New York: New York Labor Press, 1904, 2.

18 In *The Roots of the Mountains*, for example, Bow-may and Sun-Beam are companions, but the former performs some of the roles of a servant; in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, Viridis, Aurea, Atra, and Birdalone are friends, but the objects of their deepest affections are all male.

19 Prostitution and marriage alike will vanish under socialism, according to Bebel, and be replaced by voluntary partnerships.

20 "[M]y wisdom both has been, and now is, the wisdom of a wise maid, and not of a woman, and all the might thereof shall I lose with my maidenhead." *The Collected Works of William Morris*, edited May Morris, 24 vols. (London: Longmans, 1910-15) 17: 89.

21 London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1987. Citations in this article are from *Thoughts on Women and Society*, ed. Joachim Muller and Edith Schotte (New York: International Publishers, 1987).

22 A discussion of the views of "social purity" advocates such as Elizabeth Wolstoneholme-Elmy and Frances Swiney appears in Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930*, London: Pandora, 1985.

- 23 A longer discussion of the socialist implications of Morris' plot appears in Florence Boos, "Narrative Design in *The Pilgrims of Hope*," *Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris*, ed. Florence Boos and Carole Silver, Columbia: University of Missouri, 1990, 147-66.
- 24 "Louise Michel and William Morris," *The Journal of the William Morris Society* 8.2 (1989): 26-29.
- 25 *Ibid*, 28.
- 26 *Morris and Women*, 292, 294.
- 27 *Thoughts on Women and Society*, ed. Joachim Muller and Edith Schotte, 28.
- 28 *The Collected Works of William Morris*, edited May Morris, London: Longmans, 1910-1915, 24 vols., 16:56. References to this volume are hereafter cited in parentheses after the quotation.
- 29 This also suggests both the actual practice in Victorian extended families (in which women often cared for relatively distant family members), and the idealized behavior Engels praised in the tribal *gens*.
- 30 In *Roots of the Mountains*, by contrast, Bow-may, Sun-beam, and The Bride are all attracted to Gold-mane; indeed, he seems favored by every young woman he meets.
- 31 Bebel comes closest perhaps in his final chapters, "Women in the Future," "Population and Over-Population," and "Conclusion." A separate socialist-feminist discussion appears in Edward Bellamy's *Equality*, New York: 1987, in which Bellamy denounces the effects of woman's economic dependence, and advocates their intellectual and occupational emancipation. Bellamy believes that women will determine the appropriate future rate of population growth, but shares the general assumption that women will continue to do virtually all the childcare as they seek equal access to all the occupations. In Bellamy's treatise, moreover, two *men* discuss women's ideal future, and consult no spokeswomen about their conclusions. Male socialists generally tended to think of marital equality in terms of sexual freedom and (possible) population control, rather than mental companionship and equitably shared childcare.

32 Florence Boos, "Morris' German Romances as Socialist History," *Victorian Studies* 27.3 (1984): 321-42.

33 *William Morris: Artist Writer Socialist*, edited by May Morris, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936) 2:459.

34 Ray Strachey, *"The Cause": A Short History of the Women's Movement* (1928; rpt. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat, 1969), 260. The examination-results were announced in June, and Morris' *Nowhere*-episode appeared in the *Commonweal* for September.