

LECTURES D'UNE ŒUVRE
NEWS FROM NOWHERE
WILLIAM MORRIS

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EDITIONS

DU TEMPS

Personal and Political *lieux d'anticipation* in *News from Nowhere*

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According to an oft-repeated political slogan of the 1960s, "the personal is political." A principal aim of this essay will be to throw into clear relief the extent to which William Morris strove to realize the spirit of this slogan in new and enduring ways.

In his 1887 lecture on "The Society of the Future," Morris distinguished "two groups of mind, [...] the analytical and the constructive," and counted himself among the "visionaries or practical people" who preferred to act, rather than contemplate "the perfection of some favourite theory¹." He probably used the word "practical" in the ancient (and Kantian) sense of devotion to "praxis" or action, and was well aware of senses in which analytic thinkers could be "visionary." But the dichotomy aptly expressed his aspiration to *show* a counterfactual society in *News from Nowhere*, rather than *theorize* about it².

Morris also crafted his "demonstration" to please and persuade his readers at many allusive levels, and enjoyment of the interrelations

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1. "The Society of the Future," *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, May Morris (ed.), vol. 2, Oxford, Blackwell, 1936, p. 454.
 2. I have written on *News from Nowhere* elsewhere, including "News from Nowhere and Garden Cities, Morris's Utopia and Nineteenth-Century Town Planning," *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, n°7, new series, 1998, p. 4-27; "Victorian Socialist-Feminism and William Morris's *News from Nowhere*," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* n°14, vol. 1, 1990, p. 3-32, with William Boos; and "An (Almost) Egalitarian /Sage: William Morris's Later Writings and 'The Woman Question,'" in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, Thais Morgan (ed.), Rutgers University Press, 1990, p. 187-206, 296-301.

between these personal and political planes was central to his intentions, as was a sense of ease, variety and displaced familiarity in his literary configuration of an ideal home. Few present-day readers will have extensive knowledge of Morris's own nineteenth-century England, and fewer still a familiarity with his characters' trajectory from his riverbank house in Hammersmith to central London, then upriver to the small village of Kelmscott in rural Oxfordshire. With a number of collaborators, I have developed an illustrated on-line version of *News from Nowhere* (<http://www.uiowa.edu/~wmorris/news>) to help readers interpret such allusions, and provide roman-numeraled chapter references to links on this site, as well as ordinary arabic page references to Clive Wilmer's edition of *News from Nowhere*¹.

"The Personal"

News from Nowhere abounds in allusions to Morris's family, friends, work and socialist activities, as well as the social conditions he experienced in nineteenth-century England (he would have been appalled to learn how extensively these conditions have been replicated in twenty-first century "third world" conurbations). In this section I will comment on these allusions, the radicality of the perspective shifts his narrator suffers, and the disconcerting aspects of his many conversations with his guide Dick, the historian Old Hammond and others.

News from Nowhere's many allusions to the narrator's tenuous identity are also designed to remind readers that "Nowhere" is a receding ideal, and that ideal societies are not *other* places but reconfigurations of our own present worlds. "Guest," for example, Morris's narrator, is transparently Morris himself when he returns from a contentious meeting of the Socialist League and pleads to "see a day of it [...] if I could but see it!" (p. 44). Guest also shares his author's age (fifty-six) and preference for plain work-clothes, and he feels a special kinship with the older men he encounters, among them "Old Hammond" (whom one editor has suggested may be a phantom grandson²), and Henry Morsom (whose surname means "amusing" in all three modern Scandinavian languages).

1. The William Morris Society site, <http://www.morrissociety.org>, also offers a wide range of information about Morris's life, socialism, and writings; and study materials on many of Morris's writings, including *News from Nowhere*, can also be found at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~english/faculty/boos/links.html/newsweb.htm>. Virtual galleries of Morris's designs and other artistic works can also be accessed via the "links" page of the same site. Excellent supplements to Clive Wilmer's substantive notes, finally, appear in other recent editions of *News from Nowhere* edited by David Leopold, Oxford UP, 2003, and Stephen Arata, Broadview Press, 2003. Arata also includes an informative collection of background texts and further readings.
2. *News from Nowhere*, David Leopold (ed.), p. 46.

as central to his intended familiarity in his present-day readers will nineteenth-century Engineers' trajectory from London, then upriver Wiltshire. With a number of on-line versions of Morris/news) to help Roman-numeraled chapters ordinary arabic page numbers in *Nowhere*¹.

Morris's family, friends, and conditions he experienced have been appalled to be replicated in twenty-first-century section I will comment on five shifts his narrator makes in his conversations with others.

Morris's narrator's tenuous identification with "Nowhere" is a receding but reconfigurations of Morris's narrator, is seen from a contentious "see a day of it [...] if the author's age (fifty-six) feels a special kinship with the "Old Hammond" (the atom grandson²), and "3" in all three modern

Other concrete points of personal reference in Morris's narrative include:

1. Kelmscott House, Morris's dwelling in Hammersmith (renamed "Guest House" in *Nowhere* [images, II, III]), and an adjacent "Coach House" used in the 1880s for local meetings of the Socialist League (image, I);

2. Kelmscott Manor, Morris's stone retreat on the banks of the upper Thames, which becomes the "old house amongst new folk" in *Nowhere*, and the final bourne at journey's end (images, XXX, XXXI); and

3. Kelmscott Church, accurately described as a "simple little building with [...] no modern architectural decoration in it" (p. 398), and the setting for the tale's valedictory feast before Guest's dreams dissolve.

All three of these sites still exist, and Morris's friends and family buried him in the tiny chapel's weed-grown cemetery less than a decade after he described it. In the 1880s, the family had often travelled upriver from Kelmscott House to Kelmscott Manor, and Morris clearly drew on this familial tradition.

Nowhere's women also shared traits with Morris's wife Jane, his two daughters, Jenny and May, and his close lifelong friend Georgiana Burne-Jones (pictures, IV, XXII, XXX). Nineteenth-century photographs show Morris – born to mid-century industrial wealth – in his plain work-smock [image, XXI]), and there are clear parallels between a literarily-minded weaver who prints books in *Nowhere* and Morris the tapestry-designer and founder of the Kelmscott press [images, XV, XIX, XXXI]). Even a wry allusion to "a queer antiquarian society" (p. 69) which had argued for the preservation of St. Paul's Cathedral refers obliquely to the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (otherwise known as "Anti-Scrape"), an organization Morris helped found in 1877 (image, V).

Even Guest's moments of bemused disorientation in the narrative create a pensive self-consciousness which was unusual in the works of Morris's utopian predecessors, for Morris was well aware that happiness and creative freedom, once achieved, may be problematic to sustain. Conversations with otherwise polite people Guest encounters make it clear that he seems to them much older than he is, and this aura of elderly displacement deepens his metaphorical solidarity with those he has left behind, who will never experience the new life he has "seen."

As a *revenant* – after all, a kind of ghost – Guest also lacks a social identity. Nowhereians who meet him wonder not only about his real age, but also about his temporal and geographical origins, and the preternatural detail of his descriptions of a life long past. When the weaver remarks that "we don't know what to call you [...]" Morris's

¹ also offers a wide range of materials on many of Morris's designs and other artistic works. Excellent supplements to Clive Roper's *News from Nowhere* edited by Clive Roper and Arata also includes...

narrator amiably acknowledges that "I have some doubts about it myself; so suppose you call me Guest, which is a family name, you know, and add William to it if you please" (p. 55). When Old Hammond later asks him directly whether he "comes from some place where the very foundations of life are different from ours," he suggests that Hammond consider him "a being from another planet" (p. 89). And when his fleeting stay draws to its end, no one but Ellen recognizes him as he tries to join in a festive celebration, and "[a] pang shot through me, as of some disaster long expected and suddenly realised" (p. 227). In a few brief moments, he has vanished forever from the interstices of a time and world that are not his.

In the work's larger context, Guest's tenuous identity, therefore, reflects the complexities of Morris's prodigiously active life as a poet, artist, friend, family member, and founding manager of a middle-sized artistic "Firm." More deeply, it becomes a metaphor for the marginality of all sentient life, poised between unjust realities and counterfactual hopes, devoid of certainties but endowed with the intermittent ability to "think well," as Pascal put it.

In "How I Became A Socialist" (1894), Morris commented as follows on the interrelations between his restless endeavors and artistic and social imaginings:

Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization [...] But the consciousness of revolution stirring amidst our hateful modern society prevented me, luckier than many others of artistic perceptions, from crystallizing into a mere railer against 'progress' [...] and thus I became a practical Socialist. (p. 381-382)

In the next section, we will see what the "practicality" of his socialism meant to him.

"The Political"

In *Nowhere*, of course, Morris interwove this personal engagement with a running indictment of the noisome conditions considered normal in nineteenth-century England, at the time the richest and most "advanced" country on the planet – its harsh prison system, its squalid and crowded slums, its waste of human effort, and its heedless destruction of natural beauty. Each encounter throws into relief before Guest's eyes some new aspect of immiseration wrought by nineteenth-century capitalist exploitation.

When he sees happy, well-dressed passers-by in the Hammersmith Broadway market, for example, Guest recalls their oppressed and physically stunted ancestors (images, chap. IV, X). When he views contented, healthy women in fields along the Thames, he contrasts them with rows of

[...] gaunt figures, [...] ugly without a grace of form or face about them; dressed in wretched skimpy print gowns, and hideous flapping sun-bonnets, moving their rakes in a listless mechanical way. How often had that marred the loveliness of the June day to me; how often had I longed to see the hay-fields peopled with men and women worthy of the sweet abundance of midsummer. [...] (p. 169)

Immediately after his reversion to the nineteenth century, he is "shocked" and disturbed to encounter the once-unremarkable sight of a poor and obsequious man:

I came upon a figure strangely contrasting with the joyous, beautiful people I had left behind in the church. It was a man who looked old, but whom I knew from habit, now half-forgotten, was really not much more than fifty. His face was rugged, and grimed rather than dirty; his eyes dull and bleared; his body bent, his calves thin and spindly, his feet dragging and limping. His clothing was a mixture of dirt and rags long over-familiar to me. As I passed him he touched his hat with some real goodwill and courtesy, and much servility. Inexpressibly shocked, I hurried past him [...] (p. 227-228)

Morris absorbed and anticipated the ideas of contemporary reformist planners – Ebenezer Howard, for example, whose *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* proposed towns similar in certain respects to those Guest encounters in *Nowhere*¹. Somewhat more dramatically, Piccadilly Circus and "the City" (London's financial district) have become sites in *Nowhere* for houses, gardens and small shops. The Nowhereians' May Day celebration also commemorates "The Clearing of Misery" which obliterated the slums Old Hammond accurately describes as "places of torture for innocent men and women; or worse, stews for rearing and breeding men and women in such degradation that torture should seem to them mere ordinary and natural life" (p. 99).

In another conversational exchange, *Nowhere* also strongly condemns the society's punitive response to crime (image, VII). Dick, for example, Guest's guide and principal companion throughout *Nowhere*, is offended at the very mention of nineteenth-century sentencing

1. See "News from Nowhere and Garden Cities," *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, n°7, new series, 1998, p. 4-27.

practices, for he considers prisons a "disgrace [...] to the Commonwealth at the best," and exclaims that Nowhereians would protest "if they knew that their neighbors were shut up in prison, while they bore such things quietly [...] Prisons, indeed! O no, no!" (p. 80).

In "How I Became a Socialist," Morris later indicted nineteenth-century European civilization's "mastery of and its waste of mechanical power, its commonwealth so poor, its enemies of the commonwealth so rich, its stupendous organization – for the misery of life!" In keeping with this impassioned view, Hammond characterizes nineteenth-century England in almost Biblical terms as "a country of huge and foul workshops and fouler gambling-dens, surrounded by an ill-kept poverty-stricken farm, pillaged by the masters of the workshops," which has now become "a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt..." (p. 105). Dick's recollections of the upper-orders are more droll:

It is said that in the early days of our epoch there were a good many people who were hereditarily afflicted with a disease called idleness, because they were the direct descendants of those who in the bad times used to force other people to work for them [...] however, I am happy to say that all that is gone by now; the disease is either extinct, or exists in such a mild form that a short course of aperient medicine carries it off. (p. 75)

And finally, capitalism had brought, not true "wealth," but tasteless surfeit. At one point on his journey through what is left of "downtown London," Guest also observes that a meal he eats in the Bloomsbury market hall has been prepared "with no excess of quality or of gourmandise" (p. 130-131), in contrast to what he remembers of the tastes of nineteenth-century upper-class clubs, and he responds to Ellen's inquiry about the excesses of nineteenth-century wealth with the remark that, "We used to say [...] that the ugliness and vulgarity of the rich men's dwellings was a necessary reflection from the sordidness and bareness of life which they forced upon the poor people" (p. 212).

In the nineteenth century, Old Hammond remarks, "there was so little art and so much talk about it," and he expresses bafflement that artists had shunned themes and motives of ordinary contemporary life. Nowhereian artisans, by contrast, have joined beauty and labour to effect a renaissance of what Morris in one of his essays called "the lesser arts" of daily life, receptive both to older forms of art as well as to their modern variants². In Hammond's reconstruction, "a craving for beauty seemed to awaken in men's minds, and they began rudely and

1. *Political Writings of William Morris*, A.L. Morton (ed.), p. 243.

2. See "The Lesser Arts," in William Morris, *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, Clive Wilmer (ed.), p. 231-253.

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awkwardly to ornament the wares which they made; and when they had once set to work at that, it soon began to grow" (p. 160). After this happened, art gradually began to take the place of competition as an incentive and encouragement, and has since "become a necessary part of the labour of every man who produces" (p. 160).

Closely interleaved in *Nowhere's* criticism of nineteenth-century and capitalist institutions is its image of a freer, kinder and more pastoral society. Woods and gardens have sprouted in place of concrete. Parliament has become a repository for (organic) fertilizer and the surrounding area an orchard. The royal gardens have reverted to forest, and England's countryside has become a place of willing work and autonomous labor. After "the revolution," Hammond tells his guest, "people [...] flung themselves upon the freed land like a wild beast upon his prey" (p. 104), and the "Clearing of Misery" and the end of sweated labor have wrought a gradual improvement in public health.

Most important – and least readily definable – has been a change in spirit; people are well-informed, self-confident and free to take an interest in the details of their surroundings and the larger life which informs them:

The spirit of the new days, of our days, was to be delight in the life of the world; intense and overweening love of the very skin and surface of the earth on which man dwells, such as a lover has in the fair flesh of the woman he loves; this, I say, was to be the spirit of the time. (p. 158)

A pervasive and radical change has also occurred in the condition of women. Influenced by the socialist-feminism of his time, Morris sought to describe a society in which women have been liberated from manual and sexual slavery and make equal choices about family life (image, IX), and in which the education of children is willingly shared by all¹. Nineteenth-century British marriage law had permitted divorce to women only under the most extraordinary circumstances, and automatically gave fathers sole custody of children². The Nowhereian

1. In addition to my examinations of Morris's sexual politics, cited in footnotes 2, p. 93 and 1, p. 101, other treatments of the topic may be found in: Jan Marsh, "News from Nowhere and Gender," in *William Morris and News from Nowhere: A Vision for our Time*, Stephen Coleman and Paddy O'Sullivan (eds.), Bidford, Devon, Green Books, 1990, p. 107-125; Ruth Kinna, *William Morris: The Art of Socialism*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000; and Fiona McCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*, Faber & Faber, 1994, p. 635-638 and passim.
2. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 permitted divorce to men on grounds of adultery, but not women. Divorce on equal grounds of cruelty, bigamy, desertion or adultery only came with passage the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923. Mothers who left violent spouses also lost all rights to their children before 1886. After this, they were permitted only to retain care of their children up to the age of 10, and could apply to obtain custody upon the father's death. Other telling details of nineteenth century conditions for women may be found in Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women*, New York, New York University Press, 1993.

Clara, by contrast, has been free both to leave her former husband and reconcile with him again, without losing access to her children¹. Guest's surprise at such usages evokes from Old Hammond one of the book's most heartfelt speeches and a direct expression of Morris's own views:

You must understand once for all that we have changed these matters; or rather, that our way of looking at them has changed [...] We do not deceive ourselves, indeed, or believe that we can get rid of all the trouble that besets the dealings between the sexes [...] 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 tyrannizing over the children who have been the result of love or lust. (p. 91)

In *Nowhere*, women also share in some of the society's most honored professions. A sculptor named Philippa, for example, who works as the "head carver" on a construction site along Guest's route, may embody an allusion to Philippa Fawcett, daughter of the suffragist leader Millicent Fawcett, who was permitted, on sufferance, to write the Cambridge Tripos (the university's final examination in mathematics), and to the surprise of the examiners obtained the highest result. Since she could not be considered for a degree her success forced the institution to honor the second-highest scorer as "head wrangler²."

Given these nineteenth-century "socialist-feminist" sympathies, it is no coincidence that one of the most insightful representatives of the new society is Ellen, who pointedly remarks that her life as the daughter of an unemployed farmhand in another time would have been very different:

I should have been one of the poor [...] my beauty and cleverness and brightness [...] would have been sold to rich men, and my life would have been wasted indeed [...] I should have been wrecked and wasted in one way or another, either by penury or by luxury. (p. 223)

Morris had written to George Bernard Shaw in 1885 that, "as long as women are compelled to marry for a livelihood real marriage is a rare exception and prostitution or a kind of legalized rape the rule³," and the Socialist League Manifesto of 1885, largely written by Morris, noted that "Under a Socialist system [...] the marriage contract [...]"

1. The children have been living with Hammond's daughter, "where, indeed, Clara has mostly been" (p. 90).
2. Ray Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain*, London, G. Bell and Sons, 1928, p. 260.
3. William Morris, 18 March, 1885, *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, Norman Kelvin (ed.), vol. 2, p. 404.

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would become a matter of simple inclination. Women also would share in the certainty of livelihood which would be the lot of all¹."

By contrast, Old Hammond explains that the circumstances of parenting have altogether changed:

[...] the artificial burdens of motherhood are now done away with. A mother has no longer any mere sordid anxieties for the future of her children [...] at least she is spared the fear (it was most commonly the certainty) that artificial disabilities would make her children something less than men and women [...] (p. 95)

It is also telling that when Ellen expresses her desire to bear and raise children, she makes no mention of the institution of marriage:

I shall have children [...] And though of course I cannot force any special kind of knowledge upon them, yet, my friend, I cannot help thinking that [...] I might impress upon them some part of my ways of thinking; that is, indeed, some of the essential part of myself [...] (p. 214)

Despite its relatively small size and geographical specificity, Morris intended *Nowhere* to represent an unobtrusively cultured and vital part of a wider world, and he crafted various allusions to accomplishments in the "lesser arts" – a pipe which resembles "the best Japanese work" sold by the children in Piccadilly Circus (image, VI), for example; a coin from the reign of Edward III which has survived into another age (image, II) – to evoke the clear cultural air the inhabitants of the new society are free to breathe. *Nowhere's* inhabitants also quote Chaucer, laugh at allusions to Dickens (image, III), and recount German and Scandinavian fairy tales².

Guest himself also makes a fairly wide range of allusions to nineteenth-century landmarks, some agreeable (Queen Elizabeth's Lodge, Crosby Hall, Hampton Court, St. Albans, the nunnery at Godstow, the

1. More nuanced examinations of Morris's views on sexual equality may be found in my essays: "The Socialist New Woman in William Morris's *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* n°23 (1995), p. 159-175; Gender Division and Political Allegory in *The Sundering Flood*, *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 1.2 (1992), p. 12-23; "Justice and Vindication in 'The Defence of Guenevere,'" *King Arthur Through the Ages*, Valerie Lagorio and Mildred Day (eds.), Boston, Garland Publishing Inc., 1990, p. 83-104; and "Socialist Feminism and William Morris's *News From Nowhere*", and "An Almost Egalitarian Sage: William Morris's Later Writings and the Woman Question," cited above. Morris muffled his views on sexual equality during the late 1880s in reluctant deference to the virulently anti-feminist marxist scholar Ernest Belfort Bax, who co-authored "Socialism From the Root Up" for serial publication in *Commonweal* with him from 1886 to 1888. Morris articulated more overtly "socialist-feminist" views in the prose romances he published in the 1890s.
2. The narrator frequently compares what he sees with the architecture of the past (e.g., to the Ponte Vecchio and Baptistry of Florence), and makes and scholarly references in passing to the "Persian poet" who wrote the epic *Shahnama* (image, XXXII) and Niels Horrebrow's 1758 *Natural History of Iceland* (image, XIII).

White Horse in Uffington, Berkshire, and other places in the British countryside), and others less so (the mental asylum at Colney Hatch). Alert readers may also recognize literary references to the Bible, the Odyssey, the Norse Sagas (Guest – “Gestr” was a character in the *Laxdaelasaga*), Dante, Chaucer, William Langland, Thomas More, Walter Scott, John Keats, Charles Dickens, William Thackeray and John Ruskin. Morris assures us that science and mathematics have also thriven in Nowhere's praxis-oriented culture, but these are less present to view.

Another recurrent motif records – often as matters of “historical” record – the efforts of “earlier” socialists (Morris's contemporaries) to achieve limited prototypes of Nowhereian ends. Morris's frustration in the opening scene, for example, evokes the intense struggles between late-nineteenth century marxists and anarchists, parliamentarians and anti-parliamentarians – many of them continental refugees – in the microcosm of the Socialist League, an organization Morris desperately tried to hold together¹ in the late 1880's (image, XVII). Later, on Guest's first visit to the Guest House, he encounters a plaque on the Coach House wall (image, I) which reads: “Guests and Neighbours, on the site of this Guest-Hall once stood the Lecture-Room of the Hammersmith Socialists. Drink a Glass to the Memory! May 1962” (p. 54).

Morris also evokes aspects of “ancient” socialist activities in other ways as Guest listens to Old Hammond's detailed account of “the social revolution” in chapter XVII, “How the Change Came.” These “archival” details include the active role of alternative newspapers (Morris tirelessly edited *The Commonweal*, the League's newspaper, from 1885 to 1890 [image, XVII]); mass protests by trade-unionists, socialists and radical organizations; a general strike of the sort dear to the heart of Morris's anarchist contemporaries; and an account of efforts of hastily assembled “Committees of Public Safety,” modelled after comparable organizations of the French Revolution and Paris Commune.

A specific reference to the “Bloody Sunday” of November 13th 1887, an event Morris himself witnessed, also appears in a sudden flashback in chapter seven². Morris had spoken to a meeting of radicals and socialists in Trafalgar Square to protest the recent Irish Coercion acts, then watched in horror as armed mounted policemen charged into an unarmed crowd without warning, wounding several hundred and

1. See my discussion of Morris's relations with these factions in the introduction to William Morris, *The Socialist Diary*, London, Journeyman Press, 1985.
2. “Bloody Sunday” occurred more than three years before the appearance of *News from Nowhere*, which was issued in installments in *Commonweal* from January 11th through October 4th, 1890. This original version contained only 30 chapters, and Robert Brothers of Boston printed a pirated text of it in the winter of 1890. Morris himself published a revised and expanded 32 chapter hard cover version with Reeves and Turner in 1891.

other places in the British asylum at Colney Hatch). References to the Bible, the " was a character in the Langland, Thomas More, William Thackeray and science and mathematics have been mentioned, but these are less

as matters of "historical" interest (Morris's contemporaries) to Morris. Morris's frustration in the intense struggles between anarchists, parliamentarians and continental refugees – in the organization Morris describes in *News from Nowhere* (image, XVII). Later, on the counters a plaque on the walls of the Neighbours, on the Lecture-Room of the Hamletory! May 1962" (p. 54). Morris's account of "the social movement that came." These "archival" materials in newspapers (Morris tireless newspaper, from 1885 to 1890) and unionists, socialists and anarchists sort dear to the heart of Morris. Morris's account of the efforts of hastily organized after comparable Morris Commune.

of November 13th 1887, Morris in a sudden flashback meeting of radicals and the recent Irish Coercion acts, policemen charged into an area with several hundred and

killing three, including a well-known radical leader¹. In *Nowhere*, Guest recalls this "Trafalgar Square Massacre" when he, Dick and Old Hammond pass through Trafalgar Square (image, VII), and he is overpowered by memories of a "barbarous half-hatched body of fools, [who] fell upon these citizens [...] with the armed hand," and answers with shame and bitterness Dick's query why "they put up with that?": "We had to put up with it; we couldn't help it" (p. 78).

This memory also prefigures Old Hammond's account, ostensibly narrated to him many years earlier by "an eye-witness," of a larger military assault on unarmed demonstrators during the "Change":

It was as if the earth had opened, and hell had come up bodily amidst us. It was no use trying to describe the scene that followed. Deep lanes were mowed amidst the thick crowd; the dead and dying covered the ground, and the shrieks and wails and cries of horror filled all the air, till it seemed as if there was nothing else in the world but murder and death. (p. 144)

In the issue of *Commonweal* which followed "Bloody Sunday," Morris had recalled that during the attack "[t]he police struck right and left like what they were, soldiers attacking an enemy² [...]" He had later spoken at the interment of Alfred Linnell, an innocent bystander in Trafalgar Square whom the police killed the following week, and sung with thousands of demonstrators at the burial service a commemorative "Death Song" he composed for the occasion:

We asked them for a life of toilsome earning,
They bade us bide their leisure for our bread;
We craved to speak to tell our woeful learning:
We come back speechless, bearing back our dead.
Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all if they would dusk the day³.

Socialism's primary imperative has always been radical egalitarianism, and Morris set out his interpretation of this ideal as follows, in "The Society of the Future":

It is a society which does not know the meaning of the words rich and poor, or the rights of property, or law or legality, or nationality: a society which has no consciousness of being governed; in which equality of condition is a matter of course, and in which

¹ See the introduction to William Morris,

appearance of *News from Nowhere*, p. 11th through October 4th, 1890. Others of Boston printed a pirated and expanded 32 chapter hard

1. See Edward Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1977, p. 488-503.

2. *Commonweal*, cited in Thompson, p. 489.

3. "A Death Song," pamphlet, London, Office of the Commonweal, 1886.

anticipation...

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in Florence S. Boos, "Dystopian
Raphaelite Studies for 2005. For an
n Association," see E.P. Thompson,

an Morris, Detroit, Wayne State

[...] while itself it would have nothing to do with foreign nations
except for their ruin and ours: its great office is for ever to cry out
for war without knowing what war means¹.

[U]nder the Commercial system constant war is necessary to keep
the machine going: a war in which even quakers are compelled
to take a part. But in a condition of things where all produce as
all consume peace is possible, and war would at least be the ex-
ception and not the rule [...] [O]nly in a condition of peace can
we make the most of the gifts of nature, instead of wasting them
as we do now².

In *News from Nowhere*, Morris penned an even bolder (and bitterly
prescient) analysis of the greed and rapacity that have always under-
lain imperial domination:

The appetite of the World-Market grew with what it fed on: the
countries within the ring of 'civilisation' (that is, organised mis-
ery) were glutted with the abortions of the market, and force and
fraud were used unsparingly to 'open up' countries *outside* that
pale [...] Then some bold, unprincipled adventurer was found [...]
to 'create a market' by breaking up whatever traditional society
there might be in the doomed country, and by destroying what-
ever leisure or pleasure he found there. He forced wares on the
natives which they did not want, and took their natural products
in 'exchange,' as this form of robbery was called, and thereby he
'created new wants', to supply which (that is, to be allowed to
live by their new master), the hapless, helpless people had to sell
themselves into the slavery of hopeless toil [...] (p. 125)

Here and elsewhere in *Nowhere*, Old Hammond expresses some of
Morris's most cogent critiques of global capitalism and imperialism
– their violence, their harm to native cultures and crafts, and their
associations with religious intolerance and economic slavery. Many
Victorian reformers had decried the *excesses* of imperialism, but Morris
found it an *intrinsic* evil, marked by "the great vice of the nineteenth
century, the use of hypocrisy and cant to evade the responsibility of
vicarious ferocity" (p. 125). Morris's views about imperial war directly
influenced Keir Hardie and other radical parliamentarians, and
through them the course of British left-wing thought before an inexpli-
cable political and moral debacle led to socialist acquiescence in the
First World War.

1. Lecture in British Library Manuscript 45, 334, reprinted *Artist Writer Socialist*, 2, p. 53-62.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

no man is rewarded for having served the community by having the power given him injure it¹.

It will no longer be the hierarchical position, the office of the man, that will be considered, as in the Middle Ages, nor his property as now, but his person².

In Nowhere, Guest is bemused when he inquires about what has happened to the "poor people [...] I don't mean sick people. I mean poor people [...] rough people," and his guide Dick (who is no historian) answers, "No [...] I really do not know [what you mean]" (p. 63). At a somewhat different level of class-analysis, Nowhere also lacks flashy rank- or class-linked markers of appearance and dress. Mindful perhaps of the childish status of gold and fine array in Thomas More's *Utopia*, Morris also cast Boffin, a dustman with a taste for gaudy elegance, as the most spiffily turned-out Nowhereian.

Nowhere departs more conspicuously from More's *Utopia* in its interesting blend of unconscious anglocentricism and unwavering rejection of nationalism, as well as its passionate denunciations of the market-driven imperial wars that have characterized nineteenth-century British and twenty-first century Anglo-American *Realpolitik*. "The Change" is also predominantly non-violent, in that Nowhere's insurgents endure prison patiently, and fight only in personal self-defense. Nowhere, apparently, has never gone to war.

Morris was personally "radicalized" by his participation an English anti-war movement of the late 1870s (largely forgotten now, ironically, because it was partially successful³). He quickly learned from these experiences to look for complex hidden interrelations between capitalism, imperialism and war, and analyzed these lines of influence and coercion in his lectures and essays of the 1880's.

He asserted, for example, that "the very essence of competitive commerce is waste; the waste that comes of the anarchy of war" in "Art Under Plutocracy⁴," and he warned his readers that "all wars now waged have at bottom a commercial cause" in "The Depression of Trade⁵." In "My Country Right or Wrong," he also observed that

[...] when stripped of its borrowed gear, false patriotism becomes National Vain-glory, [...] it prates of the interests of our country,

1. May Morris (ed.), *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, Oxford, Blackwell, vol. 2, p. 466.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 460.

3. More details about Morris's antiwar activism will appear in Florence S. Boos, "Dystopian Violence: William Morris and Pacifism," in the *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* for 2005. For an account of Morris's activities on behalf of the "Eastern Question Association," see E.P. Thompson, p. 202-225.

4. "Art Under Plutocracy," Morton, p. 79.

5. Eugene D. LeMire (ed.), *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1969, p. 126.

A Convergent Conclusion: "The Personal" is Indeed "The Political"

Some of *News from Nowhere's* deepest innovations are to be found in its fusion of shifting levels of reality and dream, and Morris systematically threw the work's counterfactuality into sharp relief.

Guest himself often questions his identity, as I remarked earlier, and he becomes a wraith to the friends he has so lovingly imagined in the work's poignant final scene:

Clara's face was turned full upon me now, but she also did not seem to see me [...] I turned to Ellen, and she *did* seem to recognize me for an instant; but her bright face turned sad directly, and she shook her head with a mournful look, and the next moment all consciousness of my presence had faded from her face. I felt lonely and sick at heart past the power of words to describe.
(p. 227)

It is a part of a tradition of dream-visions which extends back through *Piers Plowman* and beyond, that neither "dream" nor "reality" suffices in itself, but convergence of the two brings redemption. Morris found a counterpart of religious "redemption" in his secular ideal of "fellowship," but *News from Nowhere's* disappearing frames and reflexive *abymes* continue to explore the limits of "reality," and "Guest's" experiences are more poignant because he cannot fully control or understand them. His desire to "see it" can only create a liminal presence for him in the last years of his creative life, and for one fleeting journey upriver.

Time, age and the toils of identity have therefore displaced him from his secular Eden, and neither he nor we can resolve the problems of an ill-ordered and beleaguered humanity. But the forms of "reality" Morris condemned have not deprived us of our Kantian "dignity" and identity as "reasonable beings" who sometimes struggle to "see" better modes of life, and reach out to counterfactual forms of higher-order existence. Neither *Nowhere's* "dreams" nor the "realities" of hopelessly marred social orders are "true" in themselves, but conscious efforts to make them converge can create the deepest forms of "dialectical" reality we may ever experience.

Morris's pastoral utopia, in short, *enacts* non-violent transformation as an expression of complex life lived "in truth," as the Quakers put it. And this "truth" can be guided by awareness of a counterreality in which "mastery has changed into fellowship."

It is fitting therefore that *Nowhere's* last paragraphs merge Guest's thoughts with the suggestion he reads in Ellen's last mournful look:

Go back and be the happier for having seen us, for having added a little hope to your struggle. Go on living while you may, striving, with whatsoever pain and labour needs must be, to build up little by little the new day of fellowship, and rest, and happiness. (p. 227)

This final separation from his numinous realm of secular ends has therefore left him with an affirmation and a consoling hope:

Yes, surely! and if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream. (p. 227)

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