

Editorial

Patrick O'Sullivan

It is my greatest pleasure to be able to introduce a special issue on the 'green' ideas of William Morris – an idea I have long nurtured. And it seems to me entirely appropriate that the fiftieth anniversary issue of the *Journal* should be the first devoted almost exclusively to the greener aspects of Morris's thought, especially as next year marks the same anniversary of the publication of *Silent Spring*, the book most widely credited with triggering the modern environmental movement.¹ It has been said many times, and by better Morris scholars than me, that it is impossible to categorise Morris, as he was such a many-sided figure. At a time when green ideas scarcely existed, May Morris described her father as 'Artist, writer, socialist', but much more recently, Fiona MacCarthy still chose to portray him as 'designer, poet, businessman', 'appropriated' by greens. But it may be that, in the long run, it is the green aspects of Morris's thought which prove to be the most important, still 'beckoning us forward'.²

In this issue we also commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the *Journal* by printing, as explained by Jan Marsh, a previously unpublished image of Morris by D.G. Rossetti recently come to light. Martin Crick provides a fascinating history of the *Journal* – an article kindly compiled at a time when he was also very busy with the late stages of production of his history of the Society.³ I then give a partial review, in more than one sense, of the development of ideas of 'Morris the Green'. Bradley MacDonald next examines the parallelisms between Morris's aesthetic and his 'green' ideas and those of Herbert Marcuse, a man, like Ruskin before him, whose star has now fallen very low, but whose name was on all our lips back in 1968. (How many of us had actually read him, I wonder?).

Tony Pinkney then discusses the 'Nowherian dialectic of Nature' – first as liberation, second as late Morrisian romance, third as romance landscape, but fourth in an entirely new concept of Nature, 'disastrously troubling', and Eddy Kent considers the possibilities of *News from Nowhere* enabling us to incorporate the natural world into the political arena; to achieve 'a green cosmopolitanism'. Jed Mayer then compares *News from Nowhere* with much darker contemporary accounts such as *After London*, which he intriguingly labels 'ecogothic'. Finally, I offer my own comparison of *News from Nowhere* with a concrete if short-lived

utopia; the collectives which briefly flourished in several parts of the Republican zone during the Spanish Civil War. Articles culminate in the fifteenth instalment of David and Sheila Latham's invaluable annotated bibliography of Morris.

We also carry reviews of books on Morris in Iceland, and on Morris and the idea of community, something in which his Icelandic experience surely played a part. Publications on Morris's contemporaries reviewed consist of volumes on the late poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne, and on the bookplates and badges of C.F.A. Voysey. Morris's craft legacy is once more considered in reviews of books on Arts and Crafts rugs, and on 'Craftsmanship', but we follow these with examination of a much more recent phenomenon – the blog. Finally, as part of 'Morris the Green', Martin Stott reviews books on the recent degeneration of Britain's urban environment: on the concurrent decline of the rural England Morris lovingly included in *News from Nowhere*, and on the 'edgelands' – those neglected corridors – railway embankments and cuttings, canal towpaths, motorway verges – which connect the urban and the rural, sometimes containing highly valuable habitats, also discussed some years ago by Richard Mabey as *The Unofficial Countryside*.

Over the next decades, we are faced with a stark choice – between continued exponential growth and 'progress' on a finite planet, or true sustainability: or as Morris put it, 'So what shall we have, art or dirt?'⁴ I see this issue as one contribution, however small, to our making the correct choice.

NOTES

1. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1962, 304 pp.
2. May Morris, *William Morris. Artist, Writer, Socialist*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936, 2 vols; Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris. A life for our time*. London: Faber & Faber, 2003, page viii; E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, New York: Pantheon, 1976, p. 730.
3. Martin Crick, *The History of the William Morris Society 1955-2005*, London: William Morris Society (forthcoming).
4. 'Art and the Beauty of the Earth', 1881, *The Architect*, October (pp. 282-284), November (pp. 297-298); <http://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1881/earth.htm> (as accessed 23 June 2011).