

# William Morris's Green Cosmopolitanism

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What is the relationship between Nowhere and everywhere? At the end of William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, the protagonist finds himself imagining a resolution to just this predicament. It is quite easy to classify *News from Nowhere* as a hopeful text. It begins with a despondent Victorian socialist trapped in a toxic metropolis desperate to catch a glimpse of actually-existing communism. After whisking him one hundred and fifty years into the future, and treating him to a tour of that ideal society, the novel ends with the traveller hoping that others could share his vision. Having just seen—or at least dreamed—the ‘new day of fellowship, and rest, and happiness’ which will follow the socialist revolution, he falls back into the nineteenth century pondering the significance of it all: ‘indeed *was* it a dream? ... [I]f others can see it as I have seen it then it may be called a vision rather than a dream’.<sup>1</sup> William Guest's salutary wish consciously calls attention to the role of text, the ‘news’ in *News from Nowhere*. It discloses the role of literature in the dissemination of hope and the activation of social reform energies through the shared experience of reading.

This essay takes William Guest's conditional ‘if’ in order to consider the ethical, political, and aesthetic challenges Morris faced when attempting to scale up from the personal to the universal, from the dream to the vision. How might others see as Guest has seen? And, for that matter, who might those others be? The answer to the latter question opens onto the former. In the first chapter, the anonymous framing narrator is told that Guest intends the tale to ‘be told to our comrades, and indeed the public in general’.<sup>2</sup> Morris clearly wished this novel to extend beyond the small community of English socialists who subscribed to *Commonweal*, where it was first serialised. But the precise identity of broader ‘public in general’, the ‘others’, is another matter.

In order to obtain a rough approximation, recall that the inaugural issue of *Commonweal* not only contained ‘The Manifesto of the Socialist League’, whose declared aim was to ‘destroy the distinctions of classes and nationalities’,<sup>3</sup> but

also an article by E. Belfort Bax which asserted internationalism even more forcefully:

For the socialist, the word frontier does not exist; for him, love of country, as such, is no nobler sentiment than love of class. Race-pride and class-pride are, from the standpoint of socialism, involved in the same condemnation. The establishment of socialism, therefore, on any national or race basis is out of the question.<sup>4</sup>

Given Morris's ongoing commitment to the principle of internationalism, the 'others' could very well mean the world entirely.

For these reasons scholars such as Regenia Gagnier have sought to understand William Morris in terms of cosmopolitanism. In explaining the ways in which Morris reached out to the world, Gagnier identifies the latter decades of the nineteenth century as a historical juncture, when 'there was less perceived conflict between individualism and the social state'. She then proposes that one of the ethical stances emerging out of this milieu is cosmopolitanism. For Gagnier, Morris is an exemplary representative of such an ethic, since his literary protagonists seem always to be animated by the question, 'what do we share, if anything, as human beings distinctly embedded in thick but always interdependent environments'?<sup>5</sup> This nuanced approach to cosmopolitanism, with interdependence balanced finely against local feeling and the virtues of particular spaces, refutes cruder interpretations which would associate the concept with an abstract 'rootlessness' or a homogeneous world citizenship.

Gagnier's expansive reading of cosmopolitanism requires some qualification, however. Lauren Goodlad notes that Victorian understandings of the term *cosmopolitan* tended toward the pejorative, and more particularly were associated with non-imperial forms of international capitalism. Its usage in nineteenth-century literature, according to Goodlad, 'stands for the social impact of capitalist mobility and, by extension, for the shadowy attributes of Jews and other perceived arrivistes'.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, the word cannot simply be reconciled with the terms socialist or internationalist; terms which Morris used publically to describe himself. None of this detracts from the way Gagnier's rubric illuminates the ways in which a writer such as Morris tried to mediate between the part and the whole.

My intention is to suggest that Morris's cosmopolitanism includes an even wider sense of the cosmos which has not yet been engaged. In an early review of *News from Nowhere*, Maurice Hewlett complained that Morris had 'exaggerated the dependence of human nature upon its environment ... The result is not an earthly, but an earthy, Paradise'.<sup>7</sup> And the idea of an earthy paradise is the point of departure for my argument. For while *News from Nowhere* might indeed imagine a cosmopolitical utopia where, as Gagnier suggests, hospitality and fellowship are

the governing rules, I would add that this cosmopolitan view includes the possibility of the natural world being fully incorporated into the political arena.

The relationship negotiated cosmopolitically is hence not merely between individual humans, but also simultaneously, and more fundamentally, between humans and nature. Morris's interest in nature and its reciprocal relationship with human welfare are well known, and scholars such as Patrick O'Sullivan have previously argued that the political ideas contained in *News from Nowhere* 'if put into practice, would bring about [change], first of all in human society, but also, and no less important, in the surrounding nature'. Similarly, Florence Boos notes that Morris was a 'green' very much *avant la lettre*, and has catalogued the ways in which his 'convictions and ideals anticipated several strands of "western" and "first-world" ecological theory and practice'.<sup>8</sup> My paper tests the limit of this union between nature and politics, situating William Morris as a writer who witnesses not only the awful effects of industrial capitalism, but also is keenly aware of the emergence of new regimes of population control within the liberal state. In imagining a state-less society, where human actors are fully conscious of the impact of their activities, *News from Nowhere* provides the only ethical response: a subsumption of politics into the natural world; a green cosmopolitanism.

To call Morris a cosmopolitan is to cause nearly as much trouble as naming him a green. In both cases, scholars must position him as a prophet or, at best, among the vanguard of our more recent understandings of either term. However, my intention is not to show Morris as a man ahead of his time, but as one absolutely bound to his day. In order to explain what I mean by green cosmopolitanism, the first part of the paper will contrast the term against other ways in which Victorian writers imagined the relation of nature and politics. By discussing Walter Besant's dystopian novel *The Inner House*,<sup>9</sup> published two years before *News from Nowhere* in 1888, I mean to situate Morris's social vision within a wider context of the Victorian response to the emergence of biopolitics. Next, in order to position his views more precisely within that biopolitical discourse, I will consider some of Morris's lectures. My final section turns to *News from Nowhere* in order to find a discrete articulation of Morris's green cosmopolitan position. I identify the ways in which Morris works in order to replace modern consciousness with what I call an ecological consciousness, one which is further reflected by his use of the utopian genre in order to bypass the generic limitations of the conventional Victorian novel. I read Morris as seeking to move away from a literary style which develops an individual, sovereign subject (a concept produced by and inextricable from capitalism), and toward a 'systems' approach, where the relations of parts to the whole can be fully understood.

## II BIOPOLITICS

As conceptualised by Michel Foucault, 'biopower' describes a tactic for the political management of life. In his famous lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault explained how, during the nineteenth century, there was 'an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations'.<sup>10</sup> Among these were the myriad forms of overseas colonial policy (including the catastrophic mismanagement of the 1876-78 drought in British India related to *El Niño*), but also domestic proposals on matters of nutrition, housing, or urban design. In fact, the opening scene of *News from Nowhere* can be read biopolitically, as Morris introduces his reader to the disaggregating effects of London's 'public' transit system. Immediately upon the conclusion of a meeting of the Socialist League, a place of communion and potential revolutionary activity, Guest, like the rest of his colleagues:

... took his way home by himself to a western suburb, using the means of travelling which civilisation has forced upon us like a habit. As he sat in that vapour-bath of hurried and discontented humanity, a carriage of the underground railway, he, like others, stewed discontentedly.<sup>11</sup>

In this scene of commuter hell, we see late-Victorian Londoners literally oppressed by the atmosphere produced by advanced industrial capital. Here Morris displays the ways in which the technology of urban transit overcomes William Guest's ideological commitment to solidarity and brotherhood. Even during the Victorian period, London's underground has already successfully retarded the possibility of community. Not only has the city sprawl disaggregated people of common interests, forcing Guest to commute home by himself, but the underground's hot and malodorous environment stifles the conversations which might lead to new social formations. Here, alienation is amplified by the incredible proximity of the cramped commuters. The juxtaposition of socialist ideals and social failures could not more stark.

Besant's *The Inner House* takes a dimmer view of socialism, and places the dread of biopolitically-managed life into the future. The novel opens with a brief prologue set in the London of the near future (1890), where a German researcher announces that he has discovered an elixir which extends human life indefinitely. Designed to forestall 'Decay', the elixir promises to perfect humanity by allowing everyone to enjoy fully whatever activities or experiences provide them pleasure. The professor explains his hopes for the discovery to his London audience, suggesting that when 'you have enjoyed all that you desire in full measure and running over; when not two or three years have passed, but perhaps two or three centuries, you would then, of your own accord, put aside the aid of Science and suffer your body to fall into the decay which awaits all living matter'. Tinged

with eugenicist ideology, the professor explains how elixir should be gifted only to those who ‘help make life beautiful and happy’ and forbidden to ‘those whose lives could never become anything but a burden to themselves and to the rest of the world—the crippled, the criminal, the poor, the imbecile, the incompetent, the stupid, the frivolous’.<sup>12</sup>

The novel then jumps forward some centuries, and away from London to Canterbury. A new narrator, Samuel Grout, the chief bureaucrat in what he calls a socialist paradise, picks up the tale. In order to orientate the reader, he first explains the changes which have taken place to the land. Canterbury is now arranged around a huge, central common, which centre contains a massive greenhouse producing all kinds of fruits and vegetables (from tropical oranges to humble potatoes); a communal dining hall where citizens gather together every evening; a library, a museum and, of course, the famous cathedral. It is a world without factories or even machinery, the People having decided that ‘machinery requires steam, explosives, electricity, and other uncontrolled and dangerous forces’ which can only be maintained at the cost of ‘thousands of lives’.<sup>13</sup>

It is also profoundly sterile. The buildings of the future are all redbrick; Canterbury cathedral still stands, although Grout admits that it ‘could not possibly be built in these times; first because we have no artificers capable of rearing such a pile, and next because we have not among us anyone capable of conceiving it, or drawing the design of it; nay we have no one who could execute the carved stone work’. The society described in *The Inner House* reeks of equality. Men and women all wear uniforms of flannel and Grout boasts that:

We have reduced life to its simplest form. Here is true happiness ... Food plentiful and varied: gardens for repose and recreation, both in summer and winter: warmth: shelter: and the entire absence of all emotions. Why the very faces of the People are all growing alike: one face for the men, and another for the women: perhaps in the far-off future, the face of the man will approach nearer and nearer to that of the woman, and so all at last will be exactly alike, and the individual will exist no more.

Since people now can only die through accident, their chief motivation has become the preservation of life itself. Overseeing that task is a self-appointed class of scientific experts who operate out of the cathedral, which has been renamed the House of Life. Grout, who in 1890 was a working-class East Ender, explains how he and his fellow administrators are now ‘a Caste apart: we keep mankind alive and free from pain’.<sup>14</sup> The remainder of the novel relates a heroic rebellion against this bleak regime, telling the story of how competition, chance, risk, and speculation ultimately produce a better existence.

I bring up Besant’s novel not because of any intrinsic literary merit, but

because it represents the prevailing view of the relation between socialism and the state. For many late-Victorians, the prospect of being ruled by an emancipated and unrefined proletariat entailed just such horrors. Besant's world of redbrick buildings, infinite routine, and cheap monochrome flannel clothes, would have outraged Morris, but the German professor's initial hope that scientific advancement should serve to increase opportunities for those capable of making life 'beautiful and happy', seems not so heretical.

Whereas Besant represents the Victorian working class as incapable of ever thinking beyond their stomachs, Morris takes a more holistic view. For him, the souls and bodies of working people have been mutually impoverished by the current mode of social organisation. Restore workers to the world from which they have been alienated, Morris maintains, and art will follow. In an early contribution to *Commonweal*, he explains this idea:

It is the lack of this pleasure in daily work which has made our towns and habitations sordid and hideous, insults to the beauty of the earth which they disfigure, and all the accessories of life mean, trivial, ugly — in a word, vulgar. Terrible as this is to endure in the present, there is a hope in it for the future; for surely it is but just that outward ugliness and disgrace should be the result of the slavery and misery of the people; and that slavery and misery once changed, it is but reasonable to expect that external ugliness will give place to beauty, the sign of free and happy work.<sup>15</sup>

As Elizabeth Carolyn Miller has argued, the only way towards that change for Morris lay not via gradual reform, but a fundamental transformation of the entire basis of society. Morris, in Miller's view, was writing amidst 'a debate over evolutionary versus revolutionary socialism, over reformist versus revolutionary approaches to political change, and over progressive versus dialectical theories of history'.<sup>16</sup> The fundamental transformation in mind is what Morris repeatedly termed in his lectures the substitution of competition by fellowship.

### III MORRIS'S COSMOPOLITIANISM

In 'How We Live and How We Might Live', Morris sketches an ideal fellowship, and in doing so outlines what might be called a provisional cosmopolitan vision. It is a world where:

any citizen of one community could fall to work and live without disturbance of his life when he was in a foreign country, and would fit into his place quite naturally; so that all civilized nations would form one great community, agreeing

together as to the kind and amount of production and distribution needed; working at such and such production where it could be best produced; avoiding waste by all means.<sup>17</sup>

Distinctions are important here, since Morris is not suggesting that the world be flattened in a single political order, or that individual differences be repressed in order to further the cause of human progress. Instead, he suggests that difference is essential. Elsewhere, as in 'What Socialists Want', Morris defies the association of socialism with uniformity with the declaration that 'Socialists no more than other people believe that persons are naturally equal'. The vision presented in 'How We Live and How We Might Live' includes multiple communities, and retains a sense of the foreigner as something always unknowable. What might change, Morris suggests, is our collective attitude toward that difference. He explains that various European nineteenth-century nationalisms are really just a reflection of commercial competition, a system 'which always must include national rivalry, [and] is pushing us into a desperate scramble for the markets on more or less equal terms with other nations'. The resultant waste and suffering of such pursuits, Morris explains, are not well understood by everyone but, at the same time, he maintains that the solution is not to dismiss the nation conceptually. If it is currently the case that capitalism underwrites contemporary ideas about national belonging, Morris holds out hope that there are still other ways of thinking and feeling about the nation. He makes an appeal to Nature, suggesting that 'it is best for those who feel that they naturally form a community under one name to govern themselves'.<sup>18</sup>

Natural feeling is a slippery concept. Indeed, entire disciplines of aesthetic and affect theories are based on the conviction that there is no such thing. Feelings, like tastes, are both acquired and mutable, a point which Gagnier captured when she named Morris 'the educator of the emotions in his literature'. When Morris writes of a group of humans who naturally feel affiliated with each other, he is uncomfortably close to other, less palatable, late-century ideas about the division of humanity. Martin Delveaux's study of *fin de siècle* environmental literature similarly warns of Nature's political ambivalence. Delveaux rejects any understanding of environmentalism as essentially radical, progressive, or humanitarian. Insisting on environmentalism as a discourse, he argues that it is just as often easily adopted by any number of interests. Attachments to 'the local', Gagnier & Delveaux subsequently note, are well suited to support nationalist or even fascist ideologies.<sup>19</sup>

The challenge is to explain how such a world where humans who 'naturally' feel in community with each other can self-organise, and yet remain so open that a foreign guest can arrive unannounced and 'fit into his place quite naturally'

might operate. Gagnier cites Jacques Derrida's notion of unlimited hospitality as one possible solution, but it is important at this stage to observe how often Morris makes appeal to metaphors of Nature. In 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil', Morris writes of the law of nature which compels humans to work for their survival, in order to extract the necessities they need for an abundant life. In 'What Socialists Want', he enumerates that abundance, claiming that 'everybody should have full enough food, clothes, and housing, and full enough leisure, pleasure, and education'. Taking cue from Thomas Carlyle, Morris cites the presence of poverty and ugliness within a country of bountiful natural and human resources as proof that the current social order has spectacularly failed.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike Carlyle, Morris did not appeal to some lost or mistaken Christian morality. Morris took from his readings of Marx the knowledge that the primary schism of Victorian society was not between Modern 'Man' and 'his' Natural Self, but between Modern 'Man' and Nature. His call for a revolution in the basis of society amounts to replacing modern consciousness with an ecological consciousness. By ecology, I refer to the move towards systems theory emerging in the green discourse of the *fin de siècle*. Led by the ideas of Eugenius Warming and Alfred Russell Wallace, European naturalists began to think less about specific organisms, and more about whole environments. Ecology studies worlds or regions as compositions of interdependent organisms. Relevant to my analysis of Morris is the point that ecology undoes anthropocentric worldviews—that is, it perceives humans as creatures embedded in systems which they might influence, but cannot control. In some ways, it is the biological complement to Marx's declaration in the *Brumaire* that 'men make their own history, but they do not make it out of self-selected circumstances'.<sup>21</sup>

Morris imagines the struggle between humans and their natural world to be productive rather than destructive. In 'Attractive Labour,' he writes of moving beyond competition between individuals and nations and commencing 'the nobler contest' between humans and Nature. Conceiving this contest dialectically, he speculates that humans would find that 'when conquered, [Nature] would be our friend, and not our enemy'. In 'Useless Work versus Useless Toil' he argues that the victory will be realised when 'our work becomes a part of the pleasure of our lives'.<sup>22</sup>

It is clear, then, that Morris's idea of work-pleasure is what would form the grounds for his ideal community: to the degree that they recognise each other as workers labouring under the same conditions, humans will 'naturally' feel attached to each other. Solidarity, in more orthodox Marxist terms, emerges out of class consciousness. With this in mind, recall the hypothetical citizen outlined in the cosmopolitan vision of 'How we Live and How We Might Live', who can 'fall to *work* and live without disturbance of his life when he was in a foreign country, and would fit into his place quite naturally'. By working under

the same conditions, he shall grow to fit into the foreign territory. Morris's green cosmopolitanism asserts that it is not specific kinds of work or specific products, but work-pleasure which will structure our affinities to each other.

#### IV NEWS FROM NOWHERE

Consider how Clara, an otherwise happy citizen of Nowhere, reacts upon being told how life was lived in the Victorian age of modernity:

Was not their mistake once more bred of the life of slavery that they had been living?—a life which was always looking upon everything, except mankind, animate and inanimate—'nature', as people used to call it—as one thing, and mankind as another, it was natural to people thinking in this way, that they should try to make 'nature' their slave, since they thought 'nature' was something outside them'.<sup>23</sup>

To imagine the reunion of humanity with nature is the central project of Morris's novel. It represents a future where humans have forsaken the role of slavemaster; have relinquished their sovereignty over nature, along with the ideology of private property. Instead, they have become a community of caretakers—managing and tending the natural world for the increase of the common wealth.

When William Guest wakes, he finds England completely altered; two things characterise his early impressions of the utopia. The first is that he sees the entire country transformed into an idyllic garden, a communist paradise where all are healthy and happy, where all work is virtuous and a source of pleasure, and where the environmentally and morally corrupting influences of industrial capitalism have been eliminated. The second remarkable thing is that nobody—with the exception of Old Hammond—really remembers how that transformation took place.

The coincidence of natural improvement and historical amnesia is, through an ecological lens, entirely sensible, because it sutures the rift between humanity and nature created when Enlightenment philosophy and capitalist economics combined in order to invent modern subjectivity. In a modern worldview, Nature serves as a theatre for History. In order to stage the Hegelian pageantry of historical progress, it is necessary to presuppose a stable, natural backstage. But in Nowhere the theatre play and the backdrop are one. Irresponsibility regarding the backstage of nature has been taken away. Instead, its citizens patiently and deliberately tend to the other organisms in their spheres. Or, to invoke Old Hammond: '[England] is now a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt, with the necessary dwellings, sheds, and workshops scattered up and down the country, all trim and neat and pretty'.<sup>24</sup>

Significantly, though the citizens of Nowhere have abandoned delusions of owning and claiming independence from Nature; they have not ceased their noble contest. Old Hammond explains that they retain their 'sense of architectural power ... [T]hey know that they can have what they want, and they won't stand any nonsense from Nature in their dealings with her'. Production in Nowhere incorporates not only handicraft and manual labour, but also depends on 'an abundance of mills', as well as those mysterious 'force-barges' seen shuttling commodities and people along the Thames, and whose means of propulsion is never explained.<sup>25</sup>

So it is that humans continue to shape the world in powerful ways. But now that their actions are governed by an ecological consciousness, the natural world begins in turn to shape them. Old Hammond tells Guest about the nearly disastrous flight from city to the country which followed the overthrow of the old order. People 'flung themselves upon the freed land like a wild beast upon his prey', and (were the old modern consciousness still in place), 'would have created much misery'. Now, however, the invaders 'yielded to the influence of their surroundings'.<sup>26</sup> Awareness of this kind of reciprocity, where work on the land affects both worker and the world, is what I am calling an ecological consciousness.

And the effect of this consciousness is that England and its inhabitants appear much improved. Unlike Besant's dystopian future, where science has calculated precisely how many humans the land can sustain, and strictly manages both the daily activities and the reproductive capacity of its citizens, Morris presents a world where all humans seems aware of their full impact upon the world. Actions which would harm a fellow citizen, or impair the ecosystem, are rarely pursued. Provision is even made for unborn generations, as indicated in one scene where Hammond explains to Guest that the 'wastes and the forests' are preserved with a view to the needs of 'our sons and sons' sons'.<sup>27</sup>

If modernity ushers in the pageantry of History, a narrative of humanity's internecine struggle to first extricate itself from, and so to control, dominate, and own the land, then an ecological consciousness requires another approach. As already noted, with the exception of Old Hammond, nobody in Nowhere recalls how they arrived at this social order, and this happy amnesia indicates the way that even time itself has been revolutionised. In *History and Class Consciousness*, the Marxist thinker Georg Lukács argued that the wage system embedded in industrial capitalism worked in order to regiment time in precise units which were both arbitrary and interchangeable, with the effect that

... (the) finished article ceases to be the object of the work-process. The latter turns into the objective synthesis of rationalised special systems whose unity is

determined by pure calculation and which must therefore seem to be arbitrarily connected with each other. This destroys the organic necessity with which inter-related special operations are unified in the end-product.<sup>28</sup>

For Lukács, the economic unit of the hourly wage served to alienate labour from its object, a form of what Morris would call 'Useless Toil'. In *News from Nowhere*, Clara suggests the effect of such alienation by asking her companions

... don't you find it difficult to imagine the times when this little pretty country treated by its folk as if it had been an ugly characterless waste, with no delicate beauty to be guarded, with no heed taken of the ever fresh pleasure of the recurring seasons, and changeful weather, and diverse quality of the soil, and so forth?<sup>29</sup>

Instead of the artificial clock, people now measure time according to the seasons, the transition between them composing a 'beautiful and interesting drama'.<sup>30</sup> Both work and dress now adjust harmoniously to seasonal, rather than artificial dictates.

The simultaneity of pre-modern craftwork, modern mills, and futuristic force-machines also signals way in which Morris deployed the utopian genre in search of a deeper revolution, one which entails the overthrow not just of a particularly depressing stage of history, but of History as such. The utopian genre plays into this move away from history, but such a recourse is not without risk. By the time he became a socialist, the use value of utopia was in serious doubt. The grand projects of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen had failed and in 1880, Engels published *Socialisme utopique et Socialisme scientifique* (not translated into English until 1892), which devastated utopianism on the grounds of its idealism. For Engels, the trouble with utopian thought was that it repeated the fanciful thinking of the Young Hegelians, who believed that if good ideas could replace bad ones, the world would change. They believed that socialism 'is the expression of absolute truth, reason, and justice, and has only to be discovered to conquer all the world by virtue of its own power'; but because utopians appeal to universal truth, 'independent of time and space', they cannot represent the class interests of the proletariat.<sup>31</sup>

In his final contribution to *Commonweal*, from whose editorship he had been ousted a year earlier, Morris surveyed the history of socialism in Britain and made the following pronouncement:

I say for us to make Socialists is the business at present, and at present I do not think we can have any other useful business. Those who are not really Socialists — who are Trades' Unionists, disturbance breeders, or what not — will do what they are impelled to do, and we cannot help it. At the worst there will be some

good in what they do; but we need not and cannot heartily work with them, when we know that their methods are beside the right way. [...]

Our business, I repeat, is the making of Socialists, i.e., convincing people that Socialism is good for them and is possible. When we have enough people of that way of thinking, *they* will find out what action is necessary for putting their principles in practice. Until we have that mass of opinion, action for a general change that will benefit the whole people is impossible. [...]

Therefore, I say, make Socialists. We Socialists can do nothing else that is useful, and preaching and teaching is not out of date for that purpose; but rather for those who, like myself, do not believe in State Socialism, it is the only rational means of attaining to the New Order of Things.<sup>32</sup>

*News from Nowhere* assumes this challenge, self-consciously working to translate a dream into a vision via its tactical adoption of the utopian form. Guest hopes not that readers will see the details of the future, but rather will acquire the ability to 'see it *as I have seen it*'. The task is not to map the future but to revolutionise hermeneutics, to educate readers into a new way of seeing.

I wish to close by suggesting that Morris's emphasis on natural cultivation carries with it an attempt to extract prose fiction from its reification by capitalism. We note that while Shakespeare is well-remembered in the utopian future, Victorian novelists are not: Dickens is poorly understood and poor Thackeray has a readership of one—and that same man seems to be the only curmudgeon left in England. The passionate Ellen explains that this rejection occurred because the novel is a technology of bourgeois individualism, overdetermined by its fidelity to a liberal capitalist worldview. Even well-meaning novelists, she says, who 'here and there show some feeling for those whom the history-books call "poor," and of the misery of whose lives we have some inkling' invariably

... give it up, and towards the end of the story we must be contented to see the hero and heroine living happily in an island of bliss on other people's troubles; and that after a long series of sham troubles (or mostly sham) of their own making, illustrated by dreary introspective nonsense about their feelings and aspirations, and all the rest of it; while the world must even then have gone on its way, and dug and sewed and baked and built and carpentered round about these useless—animals.<sup>33</sup>

Well in advance of literary critics such as Ian Watt or Nancy Armstrong, Morris's Ellen realises that novels privilege the interior space of the individual.<sup>34</sup> The emphasis on interiority—that hallmark of the novelistic genre—appears to the communist reader in the future as 'dreary introspective nonsense'.

This view is what led Patrick Brantlinger to call *News from Nowhere* a socialist anti-novel,<sup>35</sup> but the paradigm change carried by Morris's revolutionary ecologi-

cal insight makes me suspect that it is closer to a post-novel. It could be argued that whereas a Dickensian commitment to progressive reform binds his agitated readership in the shackles of temporal progress, Morris's utopia short-circuits time and puts emphasis instead on space and systems. *News from Nowhere* teaches its readers not what the future will look like, only that that they are currently ignorant of the full impact of their activities. Capitalism and anthropocentrism are shown to be logics which externalise costs into a place or time for which they claim no responsibility. Natural community, or green cosmopolitanism, is predicated on each part feeling conscious of its relation to the whole. Reach this and politics as we know it, including the State, will vanish.

## NOTES

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  13. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
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