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Editorial – Nobody’s business

Patrick O’Sullivan

Is money to be gathered? cut down the pleasant trees among the houses, pull down ancient and venerable buildings for the money that a few square yards of London dirt will fetch; blacken rivers, hide the sun and poison the air with smoke and worse, and it’s nobody’s business to see to it or mend it: that is all that modern commerce, the counting-house forgetful of the workshop, will do for us here-in.1

Nearly forty years ago, the pioneer environmental economist E.F. Schumacher published the key text which led to the idea of an ‘alternative technology’.2 Schumacher argued that an ecological society would develop –indeed would need to develop – a new and different kind of technology; inexpensive, ecologically benign, economically decentralising, and subject to local, democratic political control. But even as I write, here in Cornwall something very different – a ‘solar-voltaic klondike’ – is currently taking place, with farmers and developers scrambling to install solar photovoltaic arrays (SPVs) and wind turbines all across the county. Many of these developments portray themselves as ‘green’, but in fact represent a travesty of the term ‘alternative technology’, in that they are neither ‘small’, or in any sense ‘beautiful’, and produce electricity on an industrial scale, which is then fed into a national, not a local grid. They also exert severe adverse social and psychological effects on local people and local communities, a tendency which Schumacher, who believed deeply in the possibility of a ‘benign’ and controllable technology, would surely have rejected.

Many members of our local community feel disempowered and disillusioned with the planning process, and with local democracy. What we are experiencing are the combined effects of global economic forces and misguided UK government policy, operating on a local scale. So far, we have identified about two hun-
dred screening applications for SPVs for the whole of Cornwall, most of them located in officially designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or of Great Landscape Value, with a cluster (about eighty) in East Cornwall, where there are also at least forty applications for wind farms. Many of these are also located on the best agricultural land, in what is essentially a process of industrialisation of the countryside, in pursuit of a ‘green’ energy which is not really green at all. A recent fall in the price of solar voltaic cells – manufactured mostly in China – means that despite last year’s government reduction of the Feed-in Tariff for solar electricity to the National Grid, many schemes formerly abandoned or shelved are now viable again. And as the Tariff is calculated on national basis, using climate data for the English Midlands, they are also now particularly profitable in the much sunnier environment of Cornwall. The new National Planning Policy Framework, with its ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ (defined as ‘positive growth … for this and future generations’), and ‘ensuring that the planning system does … not act as an impediment to sustainable growth’, has clearly been taken by some as a signal for unbridled development.

Opponents of these applications are not against solar power or wind energy per se, but to the piecemeal approval of wind farms and SPVs on an industrial scale, with no real strategy for renewable energy provision in the county. Instead, they suggest that solar power should not be generated on agricultural land, but on all public and other large buildings – not just those belonging to Cornwall Council, as is already happening – but on all factories, barns, livestock housings, schools, colleges, shops and especially supermarkets. In future, this should be a condition of planning approval of all such buildings, especially the last. Wind turbines and SPVs should only be sited on ‘brown field’ sites (of which Cornwall has a great many), and not on good agricultural land. Some people are also opposed to installation of SPVs and turbines by commercial developers, and would prefer them to be built by local communities, as at Gorran Lanes near Mevagissey, Mid-Cornwall, where two community wind turbines have now been operating successfully for a year. That way, revenues are fed back into the local economy, and not into the pockets of developers, many of whom have at best only a passing interest in the local community, and the local environment.

There are also widespread reservations about the potential impact of wholesale installation of SPVs across the landscape on tourism, which provides 25% of Cornwall’s income, and 20% of its jobs. Many people are bewildered by the pace and extent of proposed change. Some also fear the effects of potentially divisive planning applications on community consciousness and morale. Experience of past local planning controversies suggests that community morale will suffer: our own village has not really recovered from the last such episode, some fifteen years ago. At the same time, and despite the formal existence of local democracy, there are no real avenues via which to express opposition. Parish Councillors’
objections are ignored, and there is no local forum in which issues which cut across parishes can be discussed. Consequently, we are considering establishing our own network for this part of Cornwall (the East Looe Valley), and reaching out to groups in other parts of the county to press for a moratorium on all new approvals of wind farms and SPVs until a more rational policy, under more direct local democratic control, is introduced.

It is really the commitment of successive UK Secretaries of State for Energy to ‘keeping the lights on’8 – i.e. to maintaining supply – which is driving current industrialisation of the Cornish countryside. In contrast, and until very recently, little attention ever seems to have been paid in Britain to reducing demand (e.g. via a national scheme of building insulation).9 But at a time of increasing climatic uncertainty, and warnings from such diverse organisations as Oxfam, The Stockholm International Water Institute and the World Bank10 that world food prices are about to experience another ‘spike’ like that of 2008, it surely makes no sense at all that good agricultural land be used to produce electricity, and not to grow food. Indeed, having believed for most of the 2000s that Britain did not need to feed itself, but could rely on imports, in 2010 (and in direct response to the 2008 ‘spike’) the UK Department for Food and Rural Affairs reversed its policy, and committed the nation to producing as much food as possible, a policy the coalition government has more or less maintained.11 Approving energy generation on farmland, however ‘green’, is not consistent with this new policy.

There are no SPVs in News from Nowhere, although there are, of course, the mysterious ‘force barges’, which some think must be powered by electricity, which, in Morris’s time, was just being introduced. We are told however, that ‘... all along the Thames there were abundance of mills used for various purposes; none of which were in any degree unsightly, and many strikingly beautiful ...’, at least one of them ‘as beautiful in its way as a Gothic cathedral’.12 From the context, it seems that these are water mills – not really a profound deduction for a tale set by a river – but that does not preclude the existence of windmills (probably introduced to Britain during the twelfth century CE) in other parts of the country not visited by William Guest. But like all technology in Nowhere, such machines are the tools of humanity, not its master.

... labour-saving machines? Yes, they were meant to ‘save labour’ (or, to speak more plainly, the lives of men) on one piece of work in order that it might be expended – I will say wasted – on another, probably useless, piece of work. Friend, all their devices for cheapening labour simply resulted in increasing the burden of labour.13

Some years earlier, in an uncanny flash of prescience, Morris had made an almost exact prediction of ‘alternative technology’
... I believe ... that a state of social order would probably lead at first to a great
development of machinery for really useful purposes, because people will still be
anxious about getting through the work necessary to holding society together;
but that after a while they will find that there is not so much work to do as they
expected, and that then they will have leisure to reconsider the whole subject; and
if it seems to them that a certain industry would be carried on more pleasantly as
regards the worker, and more effectually as regards the goods, by using hand-
work rather than machinery, they will certainly get rid of their machinery,
because it will be possible for them to do so. It isn't possible now; we are not at
liberty to do so; we are slaves to the monsters which we have created. And I have a
kind of hope that the very elaboration of machinery in a society whose purpose is
not the multiplication of labour, as it now is, but the carrying on of a pleasant
life, as it would be under social order—that the elaboration of machinery, I say,
will lead the simplification of life, and so once more to the limitation of machin-
ery.14

As to disempowerment, in the polity of Nowhere, autonomy is devolved to the
local community

‘... let us take one of our units of management, a commune, or a ward, or a par-
ish ... In such a district, as you would call it, some neighbours think that some-
thing ought to be done or undone: a new town-hall built; a clearance of incon-
venient houses; or say a stone bridge substituted for some ugly old iron one, –
there you have undoing and doing in one. Well, at the next ordinary meeting of
the neighbours, or Mote, as we call it, according to the ancient tongue of the
times before bureaucracy, a neighbour proposes the change and of course, if eve-
rybody agrees, there is an end of discussion except about details. Equally, if no
one backs the proposer ... the matter drops for the time being; a thing not likely
to happen amongst reasonable (people) however, as the proposer is sure to have
talked it over with others before the Mote. But supposing the affair proposed and
seconded, if a few of the neighbours disagree to it, if they think that the beastly
iron bridge will serve a little longer and they don't want to be bothered with
building a new one just then, they don't count heads that time, but put off the
formal discussion to the next Mote; and meantime arguments pro and con are
flying about, and some get printed, so that everybody knows what is going on;
and when the Mote comes together again there is a regular discussion and at last a
vote by show of hands. If the division is a close one, the question is again put off
for further discussion; if the division is a wide one, the minority are asked if they
will yield to the more general opinion, which they often, nay, most commonly
do. If they refuse, the question is debated a third time, when, if the minority has
not perceptibly grown, they always give way; though I believe there is some
half-forgotten rule by which they might still carry it on further; but I say, what always happens is that they are convinced not perhaps that their view is the wrong one, but they cannot persuade or force the community to adopt it.’

‘Very good,’ said I; ‘but what happens if the divisions are still narrow?’

Said he: ‘As a matter of principle and according to the rule of such cases, the question must then lapse, and the majority, if so narrow, has to submit to sitting down under the status quo. But I must tell you that in point of fact the minority very seldom enforces this rule, but generally yields in a friendly manner.’

The Cornish landscape is indeed a place of great inherent worth – its capacity to provide pleasure and inspiration to human beings – and intrinsic value; that which it derives from such properties as its diversity and its ‘ancientness’. But if this landscape is not soon to be covered by grey, ugly ‘solar farms’, there will indeed need to be a great revival of local democracy, perhaps not on the scale of Nowhere, or Aragón in 1936, but certainly of current events in Spain, Portugal and Greece. Nothing can be preserved for ever, as change is inherent in Nature, but perhaps a mosaic of different ways of generating alternative energy, some semi-industrial (on the poorest land!) and others individual and local, as appears at least partly to have been achieved in Orkney, may be possible, if communities can win back democratic control of their surroundings.

Daphne du Maurier described Cornwall as a magical place, full of sudden surprises. I hope it is not too prosaic of me to point out that this romantic potential is largely a function of its geomorphology; the spine of granite moors surrounded by an almost flat slate plateau, and a set of river valleys deeply incised in their lower courses by Plio-Pleistocene downcutting. It is these ‘hidden’ valleys near the coast, and their narrow, winding access roads, which afford many of the surprises. At the edges of the moors, as du Maurier also indicates, the ruins of a previous episode of industrialisation – eighteenth and nineteenth century copper and tin mining – now provide a large part of Cornwall’s scenic appeal. But I doubt somehow that SPVs will become the engine houses of the twenty second century.

Meanwhile, the Arctic ice is melting …

In this rather more slender issue than usual, we print an account by Martin Stott of yet another of Morris’s unpublished letters recently come to light. It is interesting to speculate how many of these there may be, as well as those already identified but not yet published. This one describes part of the process of the production of The Story of the Glittering Plain, the first book Morris printed at his own Kelmscott Press (1891). Dustin Geeraert then discusses Morris’s synthesis of design and content in that very same book. As indicated in previous editorials, interest among scholars in Morris’s late romances is something which appears
to be on the increase. Third, Tony Pinkney provides an interesting commentary on Edward Bellamy's review of *News from Nowhere*; a review whose reciprocal is much better known. We also carry reviews of books on the *Collected Letters* of Jane Morris, on women in Old Norse literature and mythology, on Arts and Crafts book covers, of Robert Llewellyn's homage to Nowhere, *News from Gardenia*, and of what may well be Peter Preston's final book, *Working with Lawrence*.

NOTES

8. There are too many lights!


12. James Redmond, ed, *News from Nowhere or an epoch of rest*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, Chapter XXX, ‘The Journey’s End’, p. 169 (italics added; afterwards NfN). Mills in Nowhere are not just used for grinding corn, then, but for several purposes, one of which might be to generate electricity. But this does not seem to have been used for lighting.


The production of *The Story of the Glittering Plain*: a newly re-discovered exchange of letters

Martin Stott

A hitherto unrecorded exchange of letters between William Morris and George Campfield, in private hands, has come to light. The letter was purchased by the current owner from the Stroud-based dealers Ian Hodgkins & Co., who in turn bought it at auction from the estate of Barbara Morris, in 2010. The letter (with Campfield’s reply) is not included in Norman Kelvin’s *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 4 vols in 5, 1984–1996. (Subsequently Kelvin)

The letter and response (Figures 1–2) are written on two sides of a single folded sheet of Morris’s Kelmscott House writing paper. The letter is dated 16 Feb. Campfield in his reply on 18 February supplies the year – 1891. The exchange is short. It is interesting to compare the ways in which the two men address each other.

Page 11: Figure 1 – Morris’s letter to George Campfield (Images Figures 1 and 2 copyright the author)

Page 12: Figure 2 – Campfield’s reply, on the reverse of Morris’s letter
My dear Camfield,

I should be obliged if you would cut the N & B on this block in place of others as I need them for the work as soon as I can get them - no need of pressure though. Of course.

Yours truly,

W. Morris
Merton Abbey Notes
18th Feb. 1891

My dear Sir,

The design & block to hand. I have commenced the cutting, and expect to have both letters & proofs ready to be seen, the early part of next week.

Faithfully yours,

[Signature]
Morris to Campfield:

KELMSCOTT HOUSE,
UPPER MALL,
HAMMERSMITH.
Feb 16th

My dear Campfield,

I should be obliged if you would cut the N & B on this block in place of others as I need them for the work as soon as I can get them – no need of pressure though of course.

Yrs truly
W Morris

Campfield to Morris:

Reply
MERTON ABBEY WORKS
18th Feb: 1891

My dear Sir,

The designs & Block to hand
I have commenced the cutting, and expect to have both letters N & B cut, and proofs ready to be seen, the early part of next week

faithfully yours
G.J. Campfield

The exchange of letters occurred during an important phase in the establishment of the Kelmscott Press. According to Halliday Sparling, Morris had intended the Golden Legend to be the first book produced by the Press, but the paper delivery on 12 February 1891 – ‘10 reams Antique Pott, 16 x 11, 12 lb 480 sheets “Flower”’ – ‘proved to be unsuitable to the Golden Legend which was intended to have been the first book produced’. Sparling continues: ‘Only two pages, out of over a thousand, could be printed at a time, and Morris, impatiently desirous of handling a finished book from his own press, resolved to put a smaller book
This is not the Land!" No more than that they said, but turned about their horses & rode out through the garth gate, and went clattering up the road that led to the pass of the mountains. But Hallblithe hearkened wondering, till the sound of their horse-hoofs died away, and then turned back to his work: and it was then two hours after high noon.

CHAPTER II. EVIL TIDINGS COME TO HAND AT CLEVELAND.

Not long had he worked ere he heard the sound of horse-hoofs once more, & he looked not up, but said to himself, "It is but the lads bringing back the teams from the acres, and riding fast & driving hard for joy of heart and in wantonness of youth."

But the sound grew nearer and he looked up and saw over the turf wall of the garth the flutter of white raiment; and he said: "Nay, it is the maidens coming back from the sea-shore and the gathering of wrack." So he set himself the harder to his work, and laughed, all alone as he was, and said: "She is with them: now I will not look up again till they have ridden into the garth, and she has come from among them, &
CHAPTER XIII. HALLBLITHE BEHOLDETH THE WOMAN WHO LOVETH HIM.

UT on the morrow the men arose, and the Sea-eagle & his damsel came to Hallblithe; for the other two damsels were departed, and the Sea-eagle said to him: “Here am I well honoured and measurelessly happy; & I have a message for thee from the King.” “What is it?” said Hallblithe; but he deemed that he knew what it would be, and he reddened for the joy of his assured hope. “Yes, shipmate! I am to take thee to the place where thy beloved abideth, and there shalt thou see her, but not so as she can see thee; and thereafter shalt thou go to the King, that thou mayst tell him if she shall accomplish thy desire.” Then was Hallblithe glad beyond measure, and his heart danced within him, and he deemed it but meet that the others should be so joyous and blithe with him, for they led him along without any delay, and were glad at his rejoicing; and words failed him to tell of his gladness. But as he went, the thoughts of his coming converse with his beloved curled sweetly.

Figure 4 – ‘B’ as printed on p. 86 of the Kelmscott Press 1891 edition of ‘The Story of the Glittering Plain’
in hand to go on with’. This book was *The Story of the Glittering Plain*. How-
however, having made the decision on the basis of the paper size, Morris was uneasy
about the size of the decorated initials which he had designed for the *Golden Legend* being reused for the *Glittering Plain*. ‘I would be obliged if you would cut
the N & B on this block in place of others…’ (Figures 3–4).

Sparling informs us that ‘Some decorated initials had already been designed
for the *Golden Legend* by Morris and had been engraved by George F. Camp-
field,3 an old friend of his, a pupil of Ruskin at the Working Men’s College and
the first employé [sic] to enter the service of Morris Faulkner, Marshall and Co.
[sic]. These, though large for the page of the smaller book, would do to go on
with …’.4

A trial-page was pulled on 31 January. Printing commenced on 2 March, was
completed on 2 April, and the book was issued on 8 May 1891. Two hundred
copies were printed, 180 for sale through Reeves & Turner, with Morris retaining
twenty for personal friends.5 This exchange of letters therefore occurred right at
the point where Morris was trying to complete the new border, and to get some
of the decorative letters re-cut for the small, quarto-sized book.

In a note on a letter from Morris to F.S. Ellis, Kelvin remarks that: ‘Mor-
ris’s *The Story of the Glittering Plain* was in fact the first book to be issued by the
Kelmscott Press and it was the only one to be issued from the Press twice. Morris
had originally planned it with illustrations by Walter Crane, but was, according
to Crane “so eager to get his first book out that he could not wait for the pictures,
and so *The Glittering Plain* first appeared only with his own initials and orna-
ments”.6

The re-cutting of some of the decorative letters for the *The Story of the Glit-
tering Plain* ‘in place of others’ was therefore something of a priority for Morris
by 16 February, and it is unsurprising that the letter to Campfield half-jokingly
refers to ‘no need of pressure’. Campfield, who had been working for Morris for
almost thirty years by then, clearly recognised that there was some urgency, and
responded on 18 February by promising that the proofs would be ‘ready to be
seen, the early part of next week’. Nicholas Salmon records that this is the same
day on which Sydney Cockerell recorded in his diary that ‘a good supply of type’
was delivered to the Kelmscott Press.7 It is easy to imagine Morris’s combination
of enthusiasm and impatience when he wrote to George Campfield about letters
N & B on that day in February 1891.
NOTES


3. George Campfield (1829–1910) was originally a glass-painter, but, according to Kelvin in a footnote to a letter from Morris to Emery Walker on 8 April 1891, ‘had assisted in some of Morris’s early experiments with wood-engraving, including the 1860’s plan to illustrate *The Earthly Paradise*. He had also designed and cut the wood-engraved title of *Commonweal*. In 1891, he engraved some early initials for two Kelmscott Press volumes, *The Glittering Plain* and *The Golden Legend*. Kelvin, Vol. III, p. 287.

4. Sparling, pp. 74–75

5. Sparling pp. 75–76


*I am grateful to Florence Boos and Peter Faulkner for helpful comments on an early draft of this article.*
'The land which ye seek is the land which I seek to flee from'. *The Story of the Glittering Plain* and Teutonic Democracy

*Dustin Geeraert*

I

William Morris’s romance *The Story of the Glittering Plain* tells of Hallblithe, a warrior from Cleveland (an alternative England), who undertakes a quest to recover his bride from the Viking-like raiders of the Isle of Ransom (a parallel Iceland). Morris was well aware of the physical nature all forms of art, including literature. Under the influence of cultural critics of capitalism such as Carlyle and Ruskin, Morris’s interest in medieval literature and manuscripts, and early modern printed books, symbolised for him a time before culture was treated as a consumer product. His work with the Kelmscott Press represents in large part a reaction against the late Victorian commodification of literature: since in his view the physical book and its informational contents were inseparable, shoddy commercial mass-production of books inherently cheapened literature itself. Thus, just as Hallblithe builds a ship in order to flee the dystopian Glittering Plain, so did Morris engage in a book design conservative both in process and product in order to reject mass-production. Morris’s emphasis on traditional methods and styles in book design reflects his desire for an authentic medievalism, one which
would reflect the best of both English and Icelandic cultural traditions. While he ultimately felt that in its two Kelmscott editions (1891 and 1894, the latter including woodcuts by Walter Crane) *The Story of the Glittering Plain* was a failure, it is indicative in both its physical design and contents of a ‘lost’ English tradition Morris was trying to envision. In its medievalist aesthetic, its choice of Germanic type, and the Icelandic influence on story, style and vocabulary, Morris’s design for *The Glittering Plain* illustrates the ideals of Teutonic Democracy.

Morris’s contention that the book and its contents are inseparable meshes well with modern bibliographical concerns. As Jerome McGann observes, ‘Every literary work that descends to us operates through the deployment of a double helix of perpetual codes: the linguistic codes, on the one hand, and the bibliographical codes on the other’. The material form of a given book is an important component of its meaning. However, such form is often neglected, owing to the modern assumption that a book is merely a window into abstract information, which should be as transparent as possible so that readers can process its content as efficiently as possible. This is all the more true as informational content sheds its physical bindings and migrates to electronic media such as web sites and ebooks (although some electronic versions of Morris’s works at least preserve part of their aesthetic dimension by including images of his designs). Morris sought to resist exactly those kinds of reading habits which have become standard in the modern world. Specifically, printing for cheapness and reading for speed impose a kind of factory mentality, the opposite of the aesthetic experience of reading which he valued.

Morris’s perspective began with the influence of cultural critics whom Phillip Chase has labelled ‘conservative radicals’, including John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle. ‘The Victorian fascination with the Middle Ages … represented a reaction against the ascendant industrial middle classes … The “conservative radicals” of nineteenth-century England rallied around an anti-industrial and anti-bourgeois philosophy’. Chase’s term may be misleading, since the word ‘radical’ is often taken to imply a progressive or even revolutionary political perspective, as opposed to its more technical meaning, which simply denotes distance from the mainstream. While the term ‘conservative radical’ would apply in both senses of the latter word to Morris himself (whose political perspective was indeed progressive and revolutionary), the word radical in ‘conservative radical’ should be understood here only in its second sense; the thrust of the term is cultural rather than political. It implies conservative or alternative views on culture, including rejection of nineteenth-century ‘progress’ (particularly industrialism), a love of historical aesthetic achievements, and a distaste for philosophical positivism and aesthetic realism.

At exactly the time when the social sciences were beginning to explain history in terms of impersonal forces, Thomas Carlyle insisted that ‘Great Men’,...
not social forces, drive history.⁵ His thesis was part of a broader assessment that changes in nineteenth-century British society were destroying human dignity.⁶ Much of his criticism is aesthetic: heroic figures are dramatic and inspiring, whereas social forces are abstract and, in his view, ‘melancholy’,⁷ factories are ugly, whereas traditional architecture is beautiful, and so forth. Carlyle even extends his aesthetic criticism to worldviews; for example adversely comparing the mechanistic Cartesian-Newtonian view of the universe to the Old Norse concept of Yggdrasill the World Tree: ‘I find no similitude so true as this of a Tree. Beautiful; altogether beautiful and great. The “Machine of the Universe” – alas, do but think of that in contrast!’⁸ He further contrasts the power of Loke, a most swift subtle Demon’ as a mythic metaphor for fire, ‘which we designate by some trivial chemical name, thereby hiding from ourselves the essential character of wonder’.⁹ Thus, Carlyle influenced Morris not just in his reaction against nineteenth-century aesthetics and culture, but also in looking to Iceland as a source of wonder. Indeed, Phillippa Bennett describes The Story of the Glittering Plain as ‘a tale that celebrates the very act and art of wonder, placing it at the centre of human existence’.¹⁰

Morris, who printed Ruskin’s famous architectural study ‘The Nature of Gothic’ (from The Stones of Venice, 1853) at the Kelmscott Press, and who co-founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in order to attempt halt their unsympathetic ‘restoration’, certainly agreed with the ‘conservative radical’ aesthetic perspective, explaining with characteristic vigour: ‘Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization’.¹¹ Indeed, when Morris comments early on in The Early Literature of the North – Iceland, ‘It is a country of no account whatever commercially’ before going on to praise its culture, literature and history and calling it a ‘Holy Land’,¹² one sees the same opposition between beauty on the one hand and ‘modern civilization’ (as defined by capitalism and industrialism) on the other. As Chase explains, this view was influenced by Ruskin:

From conservative radicalism, and particularly from Ruskin, Morris acquired his life-long conviction that art reflects the conditions of society. The division of labour that forced workers to put out shoddy, mass-produced goods made impossible the creation of art with any sort of connection to the people.¹³

While Morris’s views on industrialism differed radically from those of the many socialists whose outlook was more ‘modernist’, his focus on tradition and craftsmanship overlaps with ideas of worker control of production. Thus, Morris’s conversion to a form of socialism so revolutionary that he found it necessary to take trouble to distinguish it from anarchism, complemented rather than contradicted his conservative views on culture. Indeed, given the ways in which various aspects of Morris’s worldview fit together, for him socialism was only a
restoration of traditional values found in England’s oldest literature: the medieval quest-romance. As Anna Vaninskaya writes, ‘in his romances Morris managed to add another dimension to this quest by demonstrating the potential of the “old-est” literary form to give expression to the most cutting-edge political ideology. Socialism was uncovered not only in the proprietary and legislative practices of primitive tribes … but in the literary practices inherited from them as well’.14

II

The assumption that books are merely a mass-market product to be carelessly consumed is utterly at odds with Morris’s view of books as a gateway to a realm separate from the ugliness and oppression of the England of his own time – a place made ugly and oppressive, in his view, by commercialism. In News From Nowhere (1890), he famously depicted a utopia which transcended industrialism and capitalism in favour of craftsmanship and democracy, while in The House of the Wolfings (1889), and The Roots of the Mountains (1889), he envisioned a similar kind of society among the European ancestors of the English – depicting their culture in terms directly inspired by medieval Iceland. As Anna Vaninskaya again notes, ‘What made the Icelanders such perfect stand-ins for the hypothetical Goths … was their retention of prehistoric memories of Teutonic mythology and customary law that had nearly disappeared in the rest of Europe’.15

Thus, Morris saw his own ideals in terms of England’s direct inheritance from its Germanic ancestors (a legacy to which England should return). These ideals, in summary, incorporate ‘conservative radical’ aesthetic views, pro-Germanic cultural views inspired by Iceland, and pro-democratic and socialist political views. Such an overall perspective is closely aligned with the political idealisation of the ‘Old North’, and England’s connection to it via Teutonic Democracy, a specific form of Victorian Medievalism which focused on England’s Germanic heritage. Chase explains,

The central belief of the cult of Teutonic Democracy in England was that the Anglo-Saxons originally belonged to a Germanic social system that was more representative than the feudalism brought by the Normans from the Latin South. … Most of the nineteenth-century translators and popularisers of Icelandic sagas … shared the conviction that England’s Germanic past linked it with an ‘Old North’ in which important political decision were made not by powerful nobles but by common consensus during the ‘Thing’, the earliest form of parliament.16

Citing the frequency of the terms ‘Teuton’ and ‘Teutonic’ in the titles of books on a wide variety of subjects from the last third of the nineteenth century, Anna Vaninskaya observes that ‘The national myth of Teutonism had a long history …
but around the time that Morris was discovering Iceland and casting about for a political solution to his dissatisfaction with modern civilisation it was undergoing a remarkable renaissance’. 17 Her description of ‘Teutonic Democracy’ complements and confirms that of Chase:

The recurring motifs of nationalistic writing included the ‘free forests’ of Tacitus’s Germany, the communal basis of Teutonic society, the democratic nature of Teutonic institutions, especially as contrasted with decadent and despotic Rome, the narrative of the revivification of Europe by vigorous, liberty-loving Germanic invaders, the purity of English blood, the superiority of the Germanic element in the English tongue, and the Saxon origins of Parliament. 18

Morris sets *The Story of the Glittering Plain* at a time when northern raiders plague the shores of Cleveland (his alternative England), a setting highly reminiscent of the epoch of the strongest impact of Scandinavian culture and language on England: the Viking Age.

Yet despite the narrative conflict between the cultures representing the English and the Norse, the real enemy is the seductive but soulless Glittering Plain; a dystopia of mindless pleasure and eternal youth which lacks history, tradition, goals and relationships. Removal of these elements leads to the loss of meaning and identity, so much so that Hallblithe decides to flee back to his own land in order to live a normal, mortal life. The connection between this empty, pleasure-driven dystopia and the views of the ‘conservative radicals’ as to what England was becoming is clear when one considers that Ruskin, for example, contemptuously termed the Crystal Palace the ‘Giant Greenhouse’, a phrase which Morris quoted on his own refusal to enter it aged seventeen.19 Both Ruskin and Morris intended this phrase to condemn the technological utopianism of the Great Exhibition, which they regarded as emptying life of meaning. Graham Seaman explains how the contrary position of meaningful (i.e. ‘useful’) work is manifested in Morris’s story: ‘once Hallblithe’s struggle to escape from the Glittering Plain has become his work – much to the astonishment of the other inhabitants – meaning is restored to him, and he is free’. 20 Hallblithe’s building of a ship in order to escape this false utopia (and return to his own people), even at the cost of giving up immortality, effectively symbolises Morris’s own views on craft, work, and community loyalty.

As *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains* demonstrate, Morris took medieval Icelandic (Old Norse) literature to be representative of a broader Germanic culture widely distributed across Northwest Europe (Scandinavia, Germany, Britain, Ireland) and the North Atlantic, and which lasted temporally from conflict the between the Romans and the Gothic tribes documented by Tacitus to the end of the Viking Age in 1066. Indeed, Morris lamented the lack of sagas in Old English, which he thought might have been written had the
Norman Conquest not succeeded.21 Beowulf, however, is enough to show that a thematic obsession with bravery in the face of certain defeat was indeed shared in Old Norse and Old English literature,22 and it is this warrior ethic which the Glittering Plain contradicts the most.

For the deathlessness of the Glittering Plain renders impossible the source of meaning in much of Old Norse literature: facing adversity with only one’s courage and a code of honour. Adherence to such a code in the face of danger is one of the major themes of the Icelandic sagas; without challenges, the strength of the hero or family is never tested. Hallblithe’s name, and his unyielding allegiance to his people and his bride, should be read in the context of Morris’s particular understanding of the notion of heroism in Old Norse literature. In the sagas, the hero’s death is a display of bravery, prowess, and honour which creates a reputation which will live on, as the following famous statement attributed to the Norse god Odin attests: ‘Cattle die, kinsmen die/ the self must also die;/ but glory never dies,/ for the man who is able to achieve it’.23 Morris adds another dimension based on his socialist political views: the hero’s death is also a display of self-sacrifice and loyalty to a community.

This point is most clear in The House of the Wolfsings, and the death of its hero Thiodolf. Anna Vaninskaya explains that Thiodolf is concerned with ‘the collective survival of his people’, and that his immortality can only come through the reputation he leaves behind among them: ‘he will die his appointed death precisely so as not to be forgotten’.24 Similarly, at the beginning of The Story of the Glittering Plain, Hallblithe tells the travellers who seek immortality and the Plain,

> We do not call this the Glittering Plain, but Cleveland by the Sea. Here men die when their hour comes, nor know I if the days of their life be long enough for the forgetting of sorrow; for I am young and not yet a yokefellow of sorrow; but this I know, that they are long enough for the doing of deeds that shall not die.25

For Morris, the goal of ‘doing deeds’ which contribute to a community (in his case, mainly political, cultural and artistic) and outlast one’s own death, is the motivational basis of both Viking heroism and cultural tradition. Such motivation is clearly impossible if death itself has been eradicated: art has been reduced to a passionless pastime, and life holds no challenges – exactly those conditions of the Glittering Plain which Hallblithe rejects so vehemently. Hallblithe idealises meaning in work, art and society, reflecting values Morris developed in rejection of industrialism and capitalism. Indeed, as Phillippa Bennett has noted, there is a metatextual element to some of the Kelmscott romances, including The Story of the Glittering Plain.26
The Story of the Glittering Plain was written immediately after the two Germanic historical romances The House of the Wolfings and The Roots of the Mountains (both 1889), and while serialised during 1890, it was also the first book produced by the Kelmscott Press (1891). Thus the ideals manifested in prose in the Teutonic historical romances were now exemplified in book design as well as prose. While Morris had been interested for decades in both calligraphy and printing, he now took complete control of every aspect of book design, and the results are striking. Opening the final Kelmscott (1894) edition of The Story of the Glittering Plain, it is obvious that speed has been set aside in favour of aesthetics. Encouraging readers to focus on the book as physical object and to read for aesthetic experience rather than efficiency questions late Victorian (and modern) reading habits as well as book styles and production methods. Jerome McGann again argues that examining historical book design allows modern readers to sidestep their own cultural assumptions regarding literary consumption:

"Looking at a medieval literary manuscript—or at any of William Blake's equivalent illuminated texts produced in (the teeth of) the age of mechanical reproduction … [we see that] the 'document' has been forced to play an aesthetic function, has been made part of the 'literary work' … the distinction between physical medium and conceptual message breaks down completely … [as in] the ornamental texts produced … [by] William Morris."

This is an important point at a time when (to obvious benefit) every form of literature, including transcripts of medieval texts, and many of the works of William Morris, are being made available online. McGann adds that literary works 'are committed to work via the dimension of aethesis … via the materiality of experience that Blake called “the doors of perception” and that Morris named “resistance”'. His use of the term resistance fits with Christine Bolus-Reichert's assessment of Morris's prose romances. She writes, 'Both Morris's founding of the Kelmscott Press and the writing of romances can be seen as efforts to resist the easy and careless consumption of books'.

Morris sought to return to the physical, visual aspect of medieval reading. McGann has termed the ink, type-face and paper in The Story of Glittering Plain an 'allusion to fifteenth-century styles of typography and book production'. This is all part of Morris's attempt to simulate the late medieval experience of reading and thus give the reader a physical sense of the early printing culture from which the romance genre came. Via the Kelmscott Press, Morris aspired to address his complaint that 'the engineer replaced the calligrapher'. D.C. Greetham notes that the centralisation of the printing business under commercialism meant that printers lost creative control:
There are no families of printer-publishers in the later period to compare to Estienne, Elzevir, Manutius, or Caxton. The small private presses of … William Blake, and William Morris are anomalies, not the rule. Once printers no longer typically exercised their original function, once they became essentially hired artisans … then the role of printer becomes a purely technical one, with very little influence over … cultural issues.\textsuperscript{33}

Morris wished to return not just to the style of an earlier form of printing, but also its methods. This change involved hand-cut custom typefaces: Morris fought against what Greetham calls ‘the long hegemony of English copperplate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’.\textsuperscript{34} William Peterson adds, ‘Old-face designs convey a mellow charm, like that of an ancient building; modern-face types suggest the smooth regularity of a well-made machine. It is not difficult to understand why Morris repudiated modern face’.\textsuperscript{35} Instead, he promoted pre-copperplate, gothic styles, and engaged in ‘medieval-inspired typographical experiments’.\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{The Story of the Glittering Plain} was first printed (1891) in Golden. Morris had previously used Caslon, an archaic typeface revived in 1841 by the Chiswick Press which had become associated with ‘Englishness’ during the 1880s.\textsuperscript{37} But given his hatred of types like Bodoni, Didot and Baskerville,\textsuperscript{38} it is only logical for a meticulous polymath such as Morris in response to design his own type. Thus, the 1894 edition was printed in Morris’s own semi-gothic typeface Troy,\textsuperscript{39} which imitated German models and was designed more for aesthetic appeal than for quick readability.\textsuperscript{40} This thick, archaic-looking typeface created a powerful contrast between black and white, which Morris further emphasised with wide margins. Greetham explains,

\begin{quote}
Morris despised the thin ‘new’ faces descending out of Bodoni … [he] therefore used a very black ink and a gothic type emphasizing this blackness against the wide margins of the page. He believed that it was the ‘opening’ (the double facing pages of a book, now called a spread in the commercial book trade) rather than the individual page which should be the basic unit of design and thus reduced the inner margins significantly so that together they would balance the effect of the outer. Considering the ‘opening’ as a unit he was in fact doing no more than medieval book-makers had done, when they made sure that when a book was opened, the reader was always confronted by two facing ‘hair’ or ‘flesh’ sides of vellum, but never with combinations of the two.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

In a note which confirms Greetham’s view, and in a manner which emphasises Morris’s famously short temper, William Peterson adds, ‘Nothing infuriated him more than the popular practice of placing the text virtually in the centre of the page’.\textsuperscript{42} The paper, of course, was hand-made.
The 1894 Kelmscott edition of *The Story of the Glittering Plain* begins (Figure 1) with a simple title page, a table of contents, and then a fully illustrated opening with a visually elaborate version of the title. The title of each chapter is printed in red ink, and each begins with a decorated capital, a woodcut, and a custom border. Each paragraph of the subsequent story is marked by a decorated capital (there is no indentation). Chapter subdivisions are marked by an extra large decorated capital. The chapter titles and illustrations help to indicate transitions and encourage reading by visual reminder, a style familiar from medieval illuminated manuscripts. When poetry appears in the text, it is offset, and each stanza begins with a decorated capital. All of these formal markers emphasise that *The Story of the Glittering Plain* is not just a long wall of text with the occasional chapter break, but an artefact whose purpose is storytelling, with various types of attention invited at different points during the reader’s progress.

The illustrations are another matter, since they were the only aspect of physical book design outside Morris’s direct control. He was so eager to publish the first edition that Walter Crane’s woodcuts could not be included, and though he did praise them, as Phillippa Bennett puts it, ‘he was in truth far less pleased with them than he cared to reveal to his friend’. Bennett has speculated that there was a mismatch between Crane’s art style and Morris’s design, but the main noteworthy aspect of Crane’s woodcuts is that he seems to have used late medieval and even classical points of reference, rather than early medieval and Icelandic, when depicting costumes, artefacts and buildings. This inconsistency undermined Morris’s attempts to describe the minute details of Icelandic physical culture, as for example in Chapter VI, entitled ‘Of a Dwelling of Man on the Isle of Ransom’. The armour Hallblithe wears appears Greek or Roman, whereas the character is meant to represent the common Germanic background of medieval English and Icelandic cultures. The mismatch is illustrated in Figure 2, which depicts Hallblithe in a mountainous scene inspired by Iceland: Crane seems to have the landscape approximately correct, with many rocks strewn about the high hills barren of trees, but Hallblithe himself stands out: a southern Greek youth lost in a northern Icelandic landscape.

Such contradiction would have undermined the atmosphere of authentic native Germanic culture Morris was trying to achieve. However problematic it may seem now, portraying Germanic tradition as wholly separate from the Classical was important to Morris (to whom the Romans, as depicted in *The House of the Wolfings*, were bureaucratic authoritarians), and to many nineteenth-century Icelandophiles. As Andrew Wawn notes, the suggestion that Norse mythology was ultimately derived from manuscripts containing fragments of Greek mythology ‘set the cat among the old northern pigeons’. G.W. Dasent, an influential
‘The Glittering Plain’ and Teutonic Democracy

Figure 1– Frontispiece of the 1894 Kelmscott edition of *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (All illustrations copyright the author)
Figure 2 (Left) – Hallblithe in a mountainous scene inspired by Iceland; from the 1894 Kelmscott edition of "The Story of the Glittering Plain"
translator of Icelandic literature into English, termed Greek and Latin ‘the twin tyrants’ which had long unfairly dominated western literature and, arguing for the merits of Old English and Old Icelandic, concluded ‘Let our philology, therefore, be rather homeborn than foreign’. Thus, any trace of classical influence carried political implications which undermined the ideals of Teutonic Democracy, which may explain Morris’s disappointment with the woodcuts. However, Crane did depict the ships – the most iconic physical product of the Viking culture which enthusiasts for Teutonic Democracy wished to associate with their own nation of England – in a much more accurate manner (Figure 3).

The desire for homeborn rather than foreign philology is certainly reflected in the vocabulary and style of *The Story of the Glittering Plain*. Morris uses features characteristic of Old Norse poetry such as kennings (metaphorical references; e.g. ‘Horse of the Brine’ for ship). He also employs a great deal of alliteration, another characteristic of Old Norse poetry, for example ‘Fast flew the boat before the wind as though it would never stop, and the day was waning, and the wind still rising’. Norman Talbot notes Morris’s preference for words of Germanic origin: ‘almost no words from Latin or French appear, except when they are the right technical labels, for instance with armour, heraldry, architecture or religious matters’. This is almost to say that Morris uses Germanic words except when there is no other choice to indicate a specific meaning. Chase explains the Germanic style which Morris developed in his translations of Icelandic sagas: ‘[he used] obsolete English cognates such as “fare,” “hight,” and “rede” to translate the Icelandic words fara, heita, and rad, which mean “to go,” “to call,” and “counsel” respectively, clearly favouring the Germanic (rede) over the Latinate (counsel)’. Talbot notes that the obsolete nature of these words creates a sense of historical distance: ‘“Hight” is more distancing than “was called”, and the archaic word implies that either the name, or the town, or the whole civilisation of which it was outpost, is long vanished.’

The issue of archaic vocabulary and syntax has drawn criticism, and has to a certain degree proved a barrier to wider readership of Morris’s romances, but the fact that this prose cannot be quickly processed is as deliberate as every other aspect of *The Story of the Glittering Plain*. As Talbot points out, the archaisms of Morris’s prose romances ‘are not only decorative – to some readers at least – but also highly functional’. He provides the example of ‘as tells the tale’ which, as he notes, ‘implies that the individuality of the teller is unimportant, that such a story is common property’. Similarly, *The Story of the Glittering Plain* begins in the saga style, naming the protagonist and his family while invoking an oral tradition: ‘It has been told that there was once a young man of free kindred and whose name was Hallblithe: he was fair, strong, and not untried in battle: he was of the House of the Raven of old time’. While Morris’s Icelandic-inspired romance style and Germanic vocabulary in *The Story of the Glittering Plain* can seem strange...
Figure 3 – Walter Crane’s depiction of a Viking ship; from the 1894 Kelmscott edition of The Story of the Glittering Plain
to modern readers, it matches his use of a Germanic typeface, emphasising the meticulous level of detail in his attempt to create an authentically Germanic vision of the past. Indeed, Graham Seaman has called *The Story of the Glittering Plain* ‘the most Icelandic of all Morris’s novels’. 52 Given the presence of Icelandic elements in *The House of the Wolfings*, *The Roots of the Mountains*, and in Morris’s final romance, the posthumously published *The Sundering Flood*, this is a strong claim, but the book’s design reflects its truth as much as does its content.

The character most influenced by Icelandic literature in *The Story of the Glittering Plain* is the bearded Viking raider who calls himself ‘Puny Fox’. This large and overbearing man mocks Hallblithe (of the House of the Raven) as ‘Little Carrion-Biter’, and says that he has ‘heard that the House of the Raven’s bards think they have tales to tell’.53 This is a meta-textual mockery straight out of Norse myth, in which the giants ask Thor ‘which of his accomplishments it was that he would be willing to display before them, such great stories as people had made of his exploits’.54 However, despite the mockery and conflict, both the English and the Norse are depicted as living in a cooperative society based on loyalty and honour, and in the end Puny Fox allies with Hallblithe and enters his house. The common elements between their two cultures are very much what Morris and others wished to portray through both fiction and nonfiction, in order to establish a historical basis for Teutonic Democracy. In contrast, the Glittering Plain is ruled over by a monarch who never has to fight for himself or take into account others’ needs, and instead uses manipulation to obtain what he wants. He refers to his subjects as children and they, sated by pleasure, take no part in society. As in the story this land is Hallblithe’s bane, so was Morris’s declared foe the industrial consumer society in which he was living. The Norseman (Puny Fox) helps the ‘Englishman’ (Hallblithe of Cleveland by the Sea) in his quest to escape a meaningless modern dystopia: this, in short, is Teutonic Democracy symbolised.

Morris’s approach may appear quaint and eccentric, and in its own time, the Kelmscott Press never reached a mass audience. It did, however, significantly influence typographic design, and as Greetham notes, ‘There was even some direct effect on the commercial book industry, when J.M. Dent adopted Morris’s principles for the title-pages and page layout of its Everyman reprint series’.55 It also spawned a small but persistent movement of private printing which lasts to this day. 56 Scholarly interest in Morris’s printing ventures has been considerable: as William Peterson dramatically explains, ‘One suspects that Morris has been written about more extensively than any other printer except Gutenberg’.57

Moreover, while Morris’s prose romances never approached the popularity of earlier works such as *The Earthly Paradise*, it is arguably with these romances that Morris achieved his largest literary influence: Anna Vaninskaya notes that ‘the Germanic and fairytale romances … were still being discovered (with momen-
tous effects for the later development of popular literature) by the likes of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis in the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{58} Morris is often credited with creating ‘high fantasy’, a genre of modern simulations of medieval romance with a market built on neo-romantic and anti-modern sentiments among the book-buying public. Chase writes, ‘Morris’s fantasy worlds express a rejection of the predominant bourgeois culture around him, much as J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle-earth would in a later generation’.\textsuperscript{59} Certainly Morris influenced Tolkien, who popularised ‘high fantasy’ almost inadvertently after the Second World War. The contradictions are interesting: high fantasy, as a hugely popular style of genre fiction, is a commercial juggernaut which certainly does rely on mass production, both in the sense of cheap printing and in the sense of by-the-numbers writers, and yet it also demonstrates the timeless appeal of the romance genre, which during the 1880s and 1890s Morris and others were so keen to legitimise. One wonders what Morris would have thought if he could have seen the explosion of ‘high fantasy’ genre fiction which began in large part after Tolkien’s own death in 1973.

Despite the now shoddy and commercial nature of the genre Morris invented, and Tolkien popularised, the latter’s work was much closer in spirit to Morris’s goal of historical authenticity than to the commercial aspirations of most ‘high fantasy’. Tolkien was also impressed by Morris’s physical approach to literature, and found it especially relevant to the project of simulating that of past ages. Bolus-Reichert explains,

> The feel of the book in the hand, if something extraordinary, will make the reader wake up from the habitual, passive attitude induced by reading … Just as the physical book is something outside of everyday experience, so too is the language within the book something alien and unfamiliar, [the whole effect] characterized by what J.R.R. Tolkien would call its ‘arresting strangeness’.\textsuperscript{60}

Morris’ anti-industrialism, conservative aesthetic views, linguistic archaism, fascination with Iceland, and focus on England’s Germanic heritage, can all be found in Tolkien’s work. With both semi-historical (Cleveland as England and the Isle of Ransom as Iceland) and magical settings (the Glittering Plain), \textit{The Story of the Glittering Plain} contains characteristics of both Germanic and fairy-tale romances; and as the first book from the Kelmscott Press, it stands at the intersection of scholarly interest in book design, printing and publishing, and the popular culture influence of fantasy literature. It is thus one of the most important products of Morris’s later years.

Morris’s legacy is an important reminder of the authenticity which much of our modern interest in all things medieval now lacks. At a time when printing was becoming cheaper and increasingly unmoored from its traditional roots, he criticised the abuse of outdoor advertising, the overuse of stylised fonts in order
to grab attention, a quantity over quality approach to printing, and false indicators of age and handcrafting\(^6\) meant to cloak the new and (in his view) undesirable aspects of printing. He demonstrated a meticulously crafted, written and produced counter-ideal in accordance with his cultural-political perspective of Teutonic Democracy. As manifested in *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, the book tries to reconnect English readers with what Morris saw as their rightful political and cultural legacy.

Morris’s later literary work raises important questions in broader culture about simulations of past products, especially but not only the various physical forms of the printed word throughout history. Morris’s perspective, as manifested in the romances of the Kelmscott Press, has only gained relevance as the physical book is increasingly transformed into an abstract idea to be stored and accessed electronically. Paul Duguid criticises the view that information technologies ‘progressively remove[e] material encumbrances from the “true” information assumed to lie beneath them … [and] the printed codex can be no more than a material burden on the information “inside”, which technology now permits us to remove’.\(^6\) The legacy of William Morris remains an important site for questioning such views, especially as a ‘pure information’ approach places an insurmountable barrier between us and the past ages we seek to understand, whether through scholarship or fiction.

**NOTES**


8. *Heroes*, p. 21
9. *Heroes*, p. 17. The interpretation of Loki as a symbol of fire is outdated.
10. Bennett, part i.
12. William Morris, ‘The Early Literature of the North – Iceland,’ paragraph
15. Vaninskaya, p. 96.
18. Vaninskaya, p. 89.
19. Chase, p. 11.
26. Bennett, part i.
28. McGann, p. 70.
29. McGann, p. 72.
31. McGann, p. 70.
33. Greetham, p. 112.
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34. Greetham, p. 226.
35. Peterson, p. 16.
37. Peterson, p. 25.
40. Discovering Print, p. 262.
41. Discovering Print, p. 262.
42. Peterson, p. 20.
43. Bennett, part iv.
45. Wawn, p. 146.
46. Glittering Plain, Chapter 5.
48. Chase, p. 44.
49. Talbot p. 17, see also Bolus-Reichert p. 82.
50. Talbot, p. 17.
51. Glittering Plain, Chapter 1.
52. Seaman, paragraph six.
53. Glittering Plain, Chapter 6.
57. Peterson, p. 7.
58. Vaninskaya, p. 43.
59. Chase, p. 57.
60. Bolus-Reichert, p. 82.
61. Peterson, pp. 34, 14., 14.
Many readers of this journal will be familiar with William Morris’s review of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward: 2000–1887*, that spectacularly successful American socialist utopia which spawned the political movement of Nationalism on its publication in Boston in 1888. Morris’s review first appeared in *Commonweal* on 22 June 1889, and was reprinted by May Morris in 1934.¹ It appears in full in some recent collections of Morris’s writings (for example, Clive Wilmer’s volume in the Penguin Classics series) and is regularly discussed in essays and books devoted to *News from Nowhere*.

The case Morris makes against Bellamy’s utopia in his review is an important intellectual and political staging post on the way to *News from Nowhere*, which began to be serialised in *Commonweal* on 11 January 1890. Many critics have asserted that Morris’s utopia is a riposte to *Looking Backward*, a book which it in fact never mentions. Though we have no direct statement to that effect in Morris’s own writings, his close political comrade Andreas Scheu in a letter of 1909 recalled Morris as saying: ‘I must surely write something as a counterblast to this’.² Whether that twenty-year-old memory can be fully trusted I am not sure. Did Scheu actually hear this, or is it something he would have wanted Morris to say and then began to believe that he actually had said? Either way, Morris’s critical review of Bellamy’s book, which he sees as too urban, too modern, too centralist, too technological, clearly does lay the groundwork for his own venture into utopian writing, which is famously the very reverse of all these things.

All this is relatively well-known. What is less familiar is the fact that Edward Bellamy himself wrote a brief review of *News from Nowhere* when it appeared in book form in 1890 in an unauthorised edition by the American publisher Robert Brothers of Boston. Believing that this text ought to be better known to Morris enthusiasts than it currently is, we reprint it below, from *The New Nation*, 14.
February 1891, p. 47. Robert Brothers had reproduced the text of Morris’s utopia directly from Commonweal, without the emendations which the author would make for the Reeves & Turner book version of 1891; and this fact accounts for Bellamy’s assertion that it is ‘the England of the 20th century’ that William Guest wakes up to in News from Nowhere. For in the Commonweal text, the socialist revolution takes place in the early twentieth century, whereas in the Reeves & Turner version the civil war is pushed back to 1952–54, and Guest’s arrival in Nowhere is a good deal later even than that.

The great political issue between Bellamy and Morris comes out in the latter’s statement at the beginning of his second paragraph that ‘Mr Morris appears to belong to the school of anarchistic rather than to the state socialists’, a claim which anticipates Peter Kropotkin’s more flamboyant assertion of 1896 that News from Nowhere is ‘perhaps the most thoroughly and deeply Anarchistic conception of future society that has ever been written’.3 For Bellamy, the sheer lack of system or administration in Morris’s utopia renders it implausible from the very start: no society, he contends, could possibly function purely on neighbourly or communistic good will alone, as Nowhere appears to. Various defences of Morris on this point have been offered over the years. We might say that he protects his back in advance against such accusations by describing his book (in its subtitle) as merely ‘Some Chapters’ from a utopian romance, which implies that additional sections describing other aspects of Nowhere, including its administrative dimensions, are in principle possible, though not here provided. Alternatively, one could emphasise, as Paul Meier has notably done, the crucial distinction News from Nowhere makes in its very first sentence between the immediate Morrow of the Revolution and the latter’s fully-developed long-term future, a temporal distinction which can be politically reformulated as one between socialism and communism.4 In the first phase, a strong centralised Bellamyan state might still be necessary in order to push through key socialist reforms, and to deal with residual political opposition, with any ‘old grumblers’ or ‘Obstinate Refusers’ who might still prove a significant problem; but in the latter phase, one hundred and fifty or two hundred years later, communist patterns of behaviour will have bedded down so deeply into the collective psyche that such institutions will indeed, in the famous Marxist formulation, have simply withered away. Or third, we could argue, as Miguel Abensour has done, that Morris is writing an entirely new kind of utopia, in which the kind of ‘politico-juridical model-building’ beloved of Bellamy has given way to an exploratory ‘education of desire’.5 From this viewpoint, Bellamy’s criticism of the institutional vagueness of Morris’s utopian arrangements is not so much politically wrong as generically misguided, a matter of applying an old set of reading expectations (which might do perfectly well for Thomas More’s Utopia or Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis) to a radically new kind of utopian text.
In one aspect at least, however, Bellamy approves of Nowhere’s lack of institutions, since he accepts the case that, in a society of equals, police and courts will no longer be necessary in order to deal with such rare crimes of passion as may still take place: public disapproval and the operation of conscience in the offender will do all that needs doing by way of punishment and atonement. I find Bellamy’s formulations about the Nowherian men ‘losing their wits’ over the distractingly lovely women of the new age to be rather cavalier, but this perhaps indicates a problem in News from Nowhere itself, not just in its reviewer. That homicide or manslaughter arising from sexual jealousy takes place in Nowhere has often been taken as a sign of Morris’s mature acknowledgement of human complexity: perhaps we can socially engineer a good economy, but we cannot rationalise away the illogic of sexual desire. But not only does this contradict old Hammond’s early assertions to Guest about the stoical manner in which the Nowherians successfully overcome romantic and sexual disappointment, but it also contradicts the book’s general emphasis on the radical reshaping of ‘human nature’ in a collective future. If communistic habits of thought and behaviour have now gone so deep that no economic institutions are necessary, why should the single area of male sexual possessiveness escape this transformation?

Bellamy’s utopia, by way of reaction or ‘counterblast’, deeply shaped News from Nowhere, perhaps excessively so, arguably driving it to over-compensate for Bellamy’s own industrialism and centralism. But it may also be the case that News from Nowhere in turn affected Bellamy’s utopian thinking. For in 1897 he published a sequel to Looking Backward entitled Equality, which in part simply extends the social thinking of the earlier book, but in other ways reacts significantly against it. The focus of Looking Backward is indeed relentlessly urban, but in its successor the population is spread more evenly around the countryside – the undoing of the city-country opposition having been a key goal of News from Nowhere itself. In 1888 Bellamy’s utopian transition to socialism was entirely peaceful, the gentlest of evolutions rather than revolution; but in Equality it is allowed that there had been considerable violence, even if that was presumably nowhere near the scale of Morris’s bloody civil war of 1952–54. And while in Looking Backward the organisation of the industrial army is rigid indeed, there are certain limited moves towards more participatory democracy in its sequel, with officials subject to recall.

In these various ways, then, as Darko Suvin and Alex Macdonald have suggested, Equality has perhaps learned some lessons from Bellamy’s attentive reading of News from Nowhere; and indeed we might even suggest that Bellamy’s sequel actually makes a place for William Morris himself within it. Morris famously declared that, if he were dragooned into Bellamy’s industrial army, he would just lie upon his back and kick, and in Equality there is a place where you can in effect go and do just that. For the book contains a Thoreau-like reservation
where, furnished with a collection of seeds and tools, Morrisian objectors to the regimentation of an industrial army can work out their own salvation.

Edward Bellamy’s review of *News from Nowhere* is thus not just a necessary part of the reception history of Morris’s own text, but may have had as significant an impact on its author’s own subsequent utopian thinking as Morris’s 1889 review of *Looking Backward* had earlier had upon his.

The review now follows.

**NOTES**


**NEWS FROM NOWHERE**

William Morris’ idea of the good time coming

Perhaps the most distinguished of the many converts which socialism in England has made from among the cultured class is William Morris, author of *The Earthly Paradise*, and one of the greatest of living poets. His *News from Nowhere*, just published in this country by Roberts Brothers, is a setting forth in the form of a clever fiction of his ideal of the good time coming, and is exceedingly
well worth reading. The tale is on this wise: After a heated discussion with his friends at the socialist league, the narrator goes home and to bed. When he wakes he is surprised to find it summer, whereas it was winter when he went to bed. On going forth he discovers that everything else is changed, and in fine that it is the England of the 20th century that he has awakened to. Then follows the story of a week’s wanderings among the friendly people by whom he finds himself surrounded, his experience naturally consisting largely of questions and answers born of his surprise at what he sees about him and the surprise of those about him at his surprise. All the while he has a vague idea, just as one so often has in dreams, that he is dreaming, and it finally turns out that he was dreaming, and he awakes again much disgusted in this musty 19th century. This dream business is very cleverly managed, though of course it is merely the contrivance for getting the author’s social ideas in objective form.

Mr. Morris appears to belong to the school of anarchistic rather than to the state socialists. That is to say, he believes that the present system of private capitalism once destroyed, voluntary co-operation, with little or no governmental administration, will be necessary to bring about the ideal social system. This is in strong contrast with the theory of nationalism, which holds that no amount of moral excellence or good feeling on the part of the community will enable them to dispense with a great deal of system in order so to co-ordinate their efforts as to obtain the best economic results. In the sense of a force to restrain and punish, governmental administration may no doubt be dispensed with in proportion as a better social system shall be introduced; but in no degree will any degree of moral improvement lessen the necessity of a strictly economic administration for the directing of the productive and distributive machinery. This is a distinction which anarchists too commonly overlook, when they argue against the necessity of government.

In Mr. Morris's ideal England there appears to be no central government, but merely an aggregation of communes or towns, each of which regulates its own aVairs on a strictly democratic basis. We are given no suggestions as to how any form of administration extending beyond town limits is conducted, as, for instance, the railroad system. We are told that manufacturing has been so much improved that the greatest fear of the people is that presently there will be no more work to do; but as to the industrial system, by which this result has been effected, Mr. Morris is provokingly silent, although nothing is more certain than that a great deal of system must have been required to produce the effect described.

Such glimpses as we are given of the business methods of the people pique our curiosity still further as to how they manage to make the ends meet. In
the stores and markets everybody takes what he wants and as much of it as he wishes, and that is all there is about it. This is delightful, and we are not to be understood as saying that the plan under given conditions would be any more impossible than it is now for the community to maintain public roads and bridges for everybody to use at pleasure. We simply wish very much that Mr. Morris had told us more about the system. In Mr. Morris’s England there appears to be no punishment for crime, not even homicide. It is found that society, being justly organized and artificial temptations to crime being absent, there is very little of it, and that the force of an absolutely united sentiment of public reprobation, together with his own conscience, is quite sufficient punishment for an offender. We believe that Mr. Morris is right in describing this order of things as a characteristic of the coming era of social improvement.

There is one sort of crime which Mr. Morris gives us slight hopes of ever getting rid of, – homicide growing out of love quarrels. If, indeed, the women are going to be so distractingly lovely in the new age as Mr. Morris describes them, the men are scarcely to be blamed for losing their wits over them. Upon this theme he dwells with all a poet’s enthusiasm. Upon the subject of education he has some very pregnant suggestions, though here too, as in the matter of economics, we wish he had been a little more definite. In one respect we regret to be obliged to make an issue with Mr. Morris. It is quite excusable for an Englishman to select England as the locality of his 20th century Eden; but we object to his describing America as being at that time so far behindhand in social progress as to be an object of pity.
Reviews

Edited by Peter Faulkner


This is a book to be welcomed and enjoyed. The editors and publishers between them have produced one which will give pleasure and instruction to all those interested in that remarkable woman Jane Morris. It will strengthen the view that she was not only strikingly beautiful, but also sociable, intelligent and courageous.

The book is very well planned, consisting of a Bibliography, a Chronology of Jane’s life, an Editorial Statement, a general Introduction, and then the letters in five parts, ‘Jane Burden becomes Jane Morris’, ‘The Political Years’, ‘William Morris’s Last Years’, ‘The Morris Legacy’ and ‘The Last decade’, each with its own brief Introduction. This is followed by the positive and well-informed *Times* obituary, and two indices, one of correspondents and one general. The illustrations are well chosen and representative. The lay-out and typography, employing the ITC Golden Type and Adobe Jenson Pro, is most attractive, and the use of Kelmscott Press ornaments to introduce each letter helps to create a truly Morrisian atmosphere. The use on the jacket cover of Rossetti’s *Study for the Donna della Finestra*, with its predominantly yellow-brown background, gives an undeniable and appropriate gravitas.

Between the general Introduction and the smaller introductions to the periods from which the letters are taken, the reader is given a clear idea of Jane’s developing life. The editors do not avoid controversial areas. In relation to the leasing of Kelmscott Manor, they observe that it ‘testifies to her desire to pursue a love affair while also retaining her relationship with Morris’. They do not attribute the affair to an irresistible Rossetti, but suggest that ‘Jane encouraged and perhaps initiated the affair’, since it can be inferred that Jane was or felt herself to be somewhat neglected emotionally. (p. 11) Rossetti, they suggest, was probably surprised
to find his feelings for Jane becoming ‘overwhelming’. At this stage, the editors state, ‘the affair ran its course, and Jane returned to her husband’. I was surprised that no reference is made to Jane’s affair with Scawen Blunt until six pages later. When Blunt is discussed, the editors again show their awareness of the complexity of human relations. After all, the affair lasted seven years, ‘during which Jane’s affections were fully engaged, and reciprocated, and endured in terms of mutual affection’ until Jane’s death. (p. 18) The editors’ conclusions about the marriage of the Morrises deserve quoting in full:

... the Morris marriage should not be described as a failure, or even as broken, but as a relationship of true affection that weathered and withstood serious stress without decisive rupture, maturing into tender lovingness. It is evident that after Morris’s death Jane wished to be remembered primarily as his widow. How typical that was of the Victorian age it is impossible to say, but its success may be measured against the conventional condemnation of their society. (p. 12)

This strikes me as the most positive account of the marriage that I have encountered.

The editors argue for a more positive view of Jane than they believe to have been previously accepted, producing convincing evidence that she was ‘a warm and caring mother’ (p. 7), ‘a notable housekeeper’ (p. 102), ‘a warm person with a good sense of humour’ (p. 13), and ‘an accomplished needlewoman’ (p. 6) who consistently showed an interest in her husband’s business: they publish a letter of 28 March 1880 to the American Sara Sedgwick Darwin about problems with the American market – ‘At last my husband’s patience is worn out’ – and telling her of George Wardle’s impending visit to deal with the situation. They also draw attention to the wide range of Jane’s reading and her interest in music, as well as showing that, although she was never drawn to Socialism, her views were consistently those of a radical Liberal. (It has always seemed to me surprising that Jane, a member of one of the most overtly socialist families in Britain at the time, never showed any interest in Socialism, although her daughter May did).

Previously, publication of Jane’s letters was restricted mainly to those written to Dante Gabriel Rossetti (edited by John Bryson in 1956 – although the most intimate of these have not apparently survived), and the 145 letters to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, which I edited in 1986. After ten years’ strenuous and valuable research, the editors have raised the number of letters to 570. The three main additions here are letters to ‘Crom’ Price, Sydney Cockerell, and Theodore Watts-Dunton – though it is pleasing to observe that, when asking Cockerell to send copies of a recent Kelmscott Press publication to Swinburne and to Watts Dunton in July 1897, she adds, ‘though the latter scarcely deserves anything of literary merit after his Jubilee Ode’, identified in the note as his ‘Jubilee Greeting at Spithead to the Men of Great Britain’, which may be left to speak for itself.
But, as the Editorial Statement points out, the impression that Jane’s correspondence was mainly with men is misleading; in fact, that with her women friends was probably equally abundant, but women’s letters of the period have survived markedly less than those received by men. Moreover, libraries have not been as scrupulous in cataloguing women’s letters: one librarian (gender unspecified) told one of the editors, who had drawn attention to a letter by Jane in the collection, that we ‘can’t be expected to catalogue every artist’s girlfriend’. One hopes this was some time ago. However, there are lively letters to two important women friends, Georgiana Burne-Jones and Rosalind Howard, as well as to other women such as Aglaia Coronio, Marie Stillman, and Katherine Adams.

Some of the previously unpublished letters deserve quotation, sometimes for their unexpectedness. For instance, it is difficult to know quite what to make of her letter to Price from Kelmscott Manor on 2 September 1886:

My dear Crom,

When shall we see you here? Don’t quite forget your poor old, bald, toothless, broken backed friend. I can assure you that if I am not all that at this moment, I shall be very soon, so please come. I have a new disease called “Socialism on the brain.” I forget if I acquainted you with the fact before – if so, pray forgive me, as loss of memory is but another symptom of the same malady.

Always yr. affec. friend
Janey

The editors offer no comment on this, and it bears no relation to any other letter of the time; the next one to Price, dated 6 March, is from Rome and quite different in tone, although it does open dramatically with the question ‘I wonder if you have heard of my sudden elopement (not with Scheu) from London. Jenny and a maid and myself came a month ago’. The note gives an account of the Austrian socialist Scheu – ‘a frequent visitor to Kelmscott House’ – but concludes that ‘The allusion to his eloping is not clear’. Was Scheu known to be an admirer of Jane? It would seem that she felt able to indulge her sense of humour – a characteristic that the editors are keen to emphasise – in particular when writing to Price.

Letters to Cockerell tend to be more businesslike, but often contain thoughtful observations. Thus on 11 June 1904 she wrote to him about the suggestion by Longmans that a special edition of Morris’s poems might be produced with introductions directed to schools. Jane’s response was direct:

About the Earthly Paradise, I fully share your views, as a rule I know that school girls and boys hate the poems they have been made to read and analyse; if they care for poetry, they should read it for pleasure only I believe.

Cockerell replied negatively to the proposal. On 4 March 1912 a letter to Cockerell shows that Jane continued to be politically radical; it was written at the time
of a national miners’ strike:

There is nothing cheering in public matters just now. It is a ghastly state of things. I think miners ought to be paid at least twice as much as they seem to get, and all the owners & Jews & financiers & idle rich people generally ought to work in the mines at least one day a week, perhaps by that means a little sympathy might be produced between the different classes – and those poor ponies! I see in one pit 400 have been left to their fate.

We may regret the casual reference to Jews in this context, but there is no evidence of serious anti-semitism in these letters, and abundant evidence of concern for the poor and exploited.

The letters confirm the sense of how demanding for Jane was the role of guardian to her daughter Jenny after her breakdown, despite William’s solicitous and supportive attitude towards Jenny, which displayed a sensitivity unusual among Victorian fathers. Numerous letters contain statements like that in a letter to Price of 3 January 1909 from Lyme Regis: ‘Jenny keeps us in a continual state of anxiety, attacks every day or night, I am worn out, but can’t make up my mind to any change at present; she likes this place and can walk about as usual enjoying it’. Jane could very seldom relax in her concern, and had to be advised by doctors not to sacrifice her own health to that of her daughter. With May her relationship was fortunately less taxing, and it seems to have blossomed in later years. In view of the two titles given to Morris’s well-known painting of Jane, it is helpful to find her telling May in July 1901, ‘“La belle Iseult” is what the dear father always called his picture, and I think we ought to keep to that’. A letter to Price of 12 December 1906 shows Jane’s concern over the minor role given to May by Mackail in his life of her father: ‘May is hardly mentioned, I think she ought to be brought into notice. I know she was vexed at the omission before’. However, Mackail did not revise his biography. Jane responded at some length when May sought information from her mother as she worked on her edition of her father’s works, published from 1910 to 1915. The fragment of a letter probably written in 1909 tells May:

I think you have not given quite enough prominence to the revival of old embroidery. This was entirely due to him. It is not easy to imagine now the great difficulty we had then in hunting up material for starting anything. There were no lessons to be had, everything had to be laboured at for a time often successful, often not but failures were amusing too ... He taught me the first principle of laying the stitches together closely so as to cover the ground smoothly and radiating them properly afterwards. We studied old pieces by unpicking &; we learnt much but it was uphill work fascinating but only carried through by his enormous energy and perseverance.
A passage like this shows Jane thoroughly engaged within memory in the craft activities of fifty years earlier, and supports the editors’ contention that in her later years Jane saw herself less as Rossetti’s model than as William’s supporter.

The editorial work is of the highest quality, the notes to the letters being succinct, accurate and informative. Nevertheless, reviewers must be allowed their measure of censure, if only to show that they have read thoroughly. Warrington Taylor here reassumes his extra ‘r’, and Scawen Blunt – on one occasion only – is given an ‘e’ in his first name, while I did not recognise the spelling of Magnusson’s first name as Erikur. When, in June or early July 1871, Jane asks Webb, ‘Is the spire [of Lechlade church] as old as the church?’, the note stating that St. Lawrence was ‘rebuilt in the 1870s’ does not coincide with the information given in the latest Pevsner, that the church was ‘restored 1881–2 by F.S. Waller & Son’ – and is anyway irrelevant, as Webb answers the question in letter on the next page: ‘it was built late in the 14th Century’. I was interested to learn that a memorial window to ‘Crom’ Price was put into the chapel at Westward Ho! in 1914, but I can find no supporting reference to it in Sewter or Pevsner. Finally, I am not sure why the memorial window to Basil, the son of the Morrises’ friends the Birchalls, is said to be ‘in a local church’ rather than at St. Mary’s, Buscot. Basil’s is one of several sad examples of children whose early deaths, such a pervasive feature of Victorian life, are recorded in the notes.

Enough! Let us conclude with another flourish of welcome for this splendid volume. The editors claim that ‘Here in her words we can hear the voice of the “silent woman” of Pre-Raphaelite legend, and enter directly into her world’. (p. 28) They are entirely justified in making this claim.

Peter Faulkner


The fifteen essays in this book include six originally published elsewhere. Two deserve the wider audience this book will give them: Clover’s ‘Hildigunnr’s Lament’, and Jochens’s ‘Vikings. Westward to Vinland: The Problem of Women’. The other four previously published – we are never told exactly where – are: Kress’s ‘Taming the Shrew: The Rise of Patriarchy and the Subordination of the Feminine’, Kalinke’s ‘ Fathers, Mothers, and Daughters’, Louis-Jensen’s ‘A Good Day’s Work: Laxdæla saga, Ch. 49’, and Scott’s ‘The Woman Who Knows: Female Characters of Eyrbyggja saga’. The nine additional essays grew out of

In her introduction, Anderson asserts that she and her colleagues plan to use the proverb, ‘cold are the counsels of women’, to ‘launch discussion’, and to ask ‘compelling questions’ about the roles of women in medieval Norse societies; of women as both creators and characters in its literature. The essay which does so most convincingly is Clover’s. She begins by parsing the memorable encounter in Ñjól’s saga between the grieving widow Hildigunn and the warrior Flosi, a relative of her late husband and thus the one who she assumes should revenge his killing. But Flosi prefers mediation. And thus the great encounter, the most notorious incitement/whetting/‘hvöt’ scene (there are more than fifty in the canon) in Old Norse literature. Hildigunn places over Flosi’s shoulders the cloak her husband was wearing when he was murdered. His clotted blood ‘dunði’ (thundered) down on Flosi. This shocking act is followed by words equally harsh: ‘You gave this cloak to Hoskuld and now I return it … I charge you by all the powers of your Christ, and by your manhood and courage to avenge his death’. And thus his famed response: ‘Cold are the counsels of women’. Clover points out that previous critical discussions of this scene have centered on Hildigunn’s speech and ‘the motif of the bloody token, both of which are richly paralleled in the wider literature’. She argues that ‘the key to the passage as a whole lies in understanding it not only as an angry woman’s desire for revenge but as a grieving widow’s lamentations over her dead husband’. She goes on to discuss, in detailed and convincing exposition, ‘hvöt’ scenes in two other sagas and in three poetic texts, before moving into examples drawn from anthropology and history, concluding that ‘there lies a social reality behind the motif of the whetting woman in Edda and saga, and this social reality is rather more complicated than either literary or social historians have appreciated’. Her essay is capped with ninety-eight packed and excellent end-notes, several of them in themselves authoritative summaries of scholarship, or cool appraisals of controversies.

Jochens’s essay opens with a discussion of Vinland and the failure of the Norse to remain there, which she blames on ‘factors of sexuality and women which have not yet been fully examined’. She discusses Leif the Lucky’s discovery of America as set forth in Eiríks saga rauða and Graenlendinga saga, often called the Vinland
sagas, as well as the discovery of an actual settlement site at the tip of Newfoundland, at L’Anse-aux-Meadows, where Norse voyagers remained for a few seasons around the year 1000 CE. Offering new insights at every step, Jochens then discusses the roles which women played in later settlement efforts (by the Spanish, French and British), comparing them to their roles in the four phases of the Nordic migrations: to the North Sea islands, to Iceland, to Greenland, and, finally, to Vinland.

The subject matter and aims of the remaining essays are indicated in their titles. Kress’s short essay is replete with contentious and provocative claims, ones which assume a readership very familiar with the Eddic poems, and all the varied types of sagas. She concludes that the strong and memorable women in these works, like Hildigunn in the Njála, ‘refuse to be oppressed. They do not succeed, but their protest is everywhere in the text. That is what Old Norse literature is primarily about’. Kalinke’s extensive discussion and summary of the rarely read Víglundar saga supports her claim that it is unique in medieval Icelandic literature because of the realistic questions it raises about female autonomy in marriage. It is more than just another ‘bridal-quest romance’, for it includes large doses of Family Saga realism. William Morris would have appreciated this article both for its careful research and because Víglundar saga was among the earliest works which he and Magnusson translated. It appeared in Three Northern Love Stories in 1875. That book was republished in 1996, as a volume in the Thoemmes Press William Morris Library series.

Louis-Jensen, in an impressive presentation of orthographic and paleographic evidence, argues that ‘hermdarverk’ (a compound found only in Laxdæla saga, within a laconic retort by Guðrún, another famed and cold heroine) should be emended to ‘hér nú dagsverkin’; the puzzling ‘harmful work’ would thus become ‘a good day’s work’. This reading of the passage adds clarity and an ironic bite to Guðrún’s well-known response, and it also recalls scenes in Eddic poems, thus provoking us to see the Laxdæla as a ‘reworking of the Brynhild legend’. Scott discusses the roles of women in Eyrbyggja saga, offering lengthy paraphrases and discussions of key scenes and encounters, providing sometimes provocative comparisons to females in ancient Norse law books such as Grágás, and in Chaucer, and even in Ibsen.

And now, in their order of appearance, those essays appearing in print for the first time: Barovsky discusses the etymology of ‘blanda’ (to blend, mix), and its use in previous contexts, where it is associated, especially in the poetry, with vile insults. So, its use in the Njála, in a description of Hallgerðr, another cold woman, perhaps the coldest in the corpus, serves to link her to ‘mythic giantesses’. Barovsky argues that Gunnar’s wife thus becomes a ‘screen upon which cultural anxieties [re sexual roles] are played out’. Eldevik, in a more straightforward and scholarly study, considers the ways women speak out in letters and in
‘oral settings’ in three redactions of Trójumanna saga, the Norse translation of the Matter of Troy. She suggests, for instance, that ‘the voices of Helen and Polyxena [in these verses] owe more to Scandinavian cultural traditions than to Ovid’.

Hughes, in yet another thorough and exemplary effort, discusses women writers whose works survive only in paper manuscripts, or fragments, in pieces never before examined, let alone published. She brings to light scores of texts, ranging from poems to tales based on folklore, such as ‘wicked step-mother’ stories, and the like. The ‘Notes’ section of her essay runs to twenty-six pages and includes several weighty expositions, as well as descriptions of fifty-one women writers, most of whom lived during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Helgason presents a concise analysis of Þrymskviða, the Elder Edda poem about Þórr’s retrieval of Mjöllnir, his wonderful hammer, from the thieving giants. And then he asserts that the poem means, or signifies, Þórr’s ‘encounter with the feminine side of himself’.

Psaki discusses differences between Chrétien’s story of Perceval in Li contes del Graal and the thirteenth-century Norse translation. The native translators condensed or eliminated romance profusions, so that ‘for the modern reader it is like going from Cervantes to Hemingway’. Psaki’s full commentary on paired passages raises interesting questions, e.g. ‘Why should the ideology of service be so explicitly linked to female proponents?’ And she suggests that ‘the answers lie in a careful gender-oriented rereading of both indigenous and translated sagas’.

Shea’s essay also deals with differences between a French original, a lai of Marie de France, and its thirteenth-century Norse translation. Her arguments are interesting, but couched in diction which is often opaque; e.g. ‘The force of language cannot adequately address the gender division which haunts the subtext of the tale; thus the text turns to the dominance of the visible in order to reassert the appropriate sexual hierarchy’: since she uses examples from French film criticism and from Freud on sexuality, her comments on Icelandic women are certainly original. Straubhaar, to counter the widely-held notion ‘that skaldic poetry is a man’s game, couched in masculine diction, produced for a male audience’, discusses three tenth-century Norwegian women who engaged in this intricate art. Her discussions of their verses and the saga contexts in which they appear are uniformly clear and enlightening, and we can thus readily accept her conclusion ‘that the question as to whether the realm of poetic creation in the North had always been a male space remains open’.

Swenson, taking on one of the more difficult poems in the Elder Edda, argues that the Hávamál is perhaps not as much a pastiche as most critics have asserted, but instead a ‘ritual utterance’. And that embedded narratives in the poem and ‘the perspective from which they are told encourage a reading of them as symbolic discourse constructing a social definition of women’. Sigurðardóttir reminds us that while the sagas celebrated strong women – those who offer proverbial cold
counsels – medieval Norse law stressed their relative weakness and their lack of rights. She argues that an ‘emphasis on women’s subjugation points to an underlying tension in society between male dominance and female power’. The memorable and formidable women of the sagas are fictional, yes, but there were also, she argues, medieval Icelandic women who wielded actual power, ‘who took on typical male roles as farmers and heads of households’. She discusses three such women in the Sturlunga saga and two from the Family Sagas, and then she jumps to several exemplars from the nineteenth century, one of whom was an administrator in Akureyri during the 1860s, when Morris visited this northern village.

The book’s cover is particularly striking. Against a glacial white background appears a photographic reproduction of a manuscript leaf from Möðruvallabók, a fourteenth century ‘book’, whose scribes had copied out the several of the Family Sagas, among them the best in the corpus, the incomparable Njála. The leaf the editors chose includes the confrontation between Hildigunn and Flosi which Clover used to begin her fine essay, and within that memorable encounter is the proverb which provides the book’s title: Cold Counsel. Those two words are here repeated in stylised blue script, the letters bent over, as if by a cold wind. The full title is burned across the manuscript; and from top to bottom are the lines of script, standing out against the cold white. This cover suggests the chill mysteries of the island which gave birth to the sagas, and to the monastic establishments where the ancient narratives were carefully copied down and bound into codices such as the Möðruvallabók. Unfortunately, within the frontispiece copy and also on the title page, this name appears as ‘Möðruvallábólc’. There are other typos, in both old Norse and English, of course less prominent than this, but they all suggest, as do changes in typescript and format in a few of the essays, that the volume was put together with undue haste.

Gary L. Abo


This is a fascinating companion volume to an exhibition named ‘From Rossetti to Voysey: Arts & Crafts Stamped Book Cover Design’, previously on show at Blackwell in the Lake District (until 12 July 2012). One therefore hopes that someone else will display this highly original exhibition before it is dispersed. The books come from Malcolm Haslam’s own collection.

In fact, if you collect printed materials from the late nineteenth or early twen-
tieth century you will probably find you have books with stamped covers. The cloth was often green or blue and the design may be picked out in black ink or gold leaf. Stamped covers continued to be produced until the book-jacket was invented. Book-jackets came into general use after 1914.

This book contains three essays, notes on publishers and artists, and a full catalogue. Haslam explains that early in the nineteenth century, books were either unbound, or supplied in boards, which were usually covered in blue paper; at the bookbinders they could be bound in leather, but this was an expensive process. Casing, which means that the cloth-covered boards and spine could be glued to the book as a single unit, began during the eighteen-thirties; also, a special lever-action press with a heater was used to stamp a design on the cloth. By mid-century there were a variety of elaborate covers with clashing colours which we used to think of as hideous. Ruari McLean studied these in *Victorian Book Design and Colour Printing* (1963), and they are now thought of, more generously, as typically Victorian. But during the 1860s, even in the heyday of this fashion, Rossetti was designing simple bindings for his sister’s poems, and Morris issued a special cover for *Love is Enough* in 1872. These were ahead of their time. Other important covers illustrated in this volume include Philip Webb’s *The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs* 1870, Walter Crane’s *Grandmother Dear* 1878, Selwyn Image’s *The Tragic Mary* 1890, and Morris’s own design for *The Earthly Paradise*, 1891.

Though Morris only produced two covers, Haslam concedes that his influence on book design was enormous. He taught people to admire the appearance of a ‘beautiful Book’. Haslam tells of a meeting which showed the world that the stamped book cover had overcome the initial prejudice against it. The Society of Arts mounted an exhibition of ‘historical and modern bookbindings’ in 1888; the assistant secretary of the society, Henry B. Wheatley, gave a paper on ‘The Principles of Design as Applied to Bookbinding’. He stated that ‘some of the finest specimens of modern cloth binding are due to Mr William Morris, to whom art owes so much’.

Haslam mentions that some Arts and Crafts designers were unhappy with the processes of production. Only the design was hand made and the rest was performed by machine. Against this one might say that the finished works seem to solve the problem which plagued Morris when he said he was ‘ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich’. Books could be produced by an industrial process in quite large numbers and therefore more cheaply, so that ordinary folk could own a beautiful cover. As Aymer Valance put it in the *Art Journal* (1892):

> The shapely fashioning and the decoration of the most ordinary objects is the art which will penetrate to the East-End dwelling of Lazarus … Thus the talent that else had been fruitlessly perverted can be employed in an apostolate of culture.

Haslam reminds us that ‘cloth-covered volumes were being issued in their mil-
lions each year, and, even if only a small fraction of the total had well-designed covers . . . there should have been at least some impact on the public at large’. Considering the selection on display all together, we can see how many of them are quite amazingly well designed, and that the taste for these covers had spread widely. The catalogue includes designs from Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden and of course the USA.

It is difficult to say more about these art-objects without the use of illustration so I propose to describe one book in detail. Catalogue no. 49 is The Works of Tennyson, vol. VI, published by Macmillan & Co in 1884. The colour of the cover is an Arts and Crafts dark blue which also broader green; spread across the cover are tiny pairs of golden acorns arranged diagonally in a ‘net design’. This is clearly influenced by Morris’s work. The cover is unsigned but it is by Lucy Orrinsmith (i.e. Lucy Faulkner), who had worked with Morris before her marriage. For information about this somewhat neglected artist, see JWMS XIX No. 2, Summer 2011. There, Emma Ferry writes about ‘The other Miss Faulkner’ and mentions this cover on p. 54. Though this is the only stamped book cover by Kate Faulkner which is known, the entry says that it is likely that she designed many more because her husband was Art Director for a firm of bookbinders. We are told that such firms offered clients the right to a stamped cover when they asked for their books to be bound. The same cover design was used for a reprint of the Moxon Tennyson in 1893 (information from Peter Faulkner).

I found that this catalogue opened my eyes to a neglected area of Morris’s influence, and I think that the William Morris Society might consider placing some of these books in our library. Look out in your attic for fairytale collections from your great-grandmother’s childhood. I hope you will be pleasantly surprised by what you find.

John Purkis


Didcot power station is a mysterious place. Viewed from the river, whether the Thames Path or the water, it does not dominate the landscape, but rather floats in it, materialising to right or left, ahead, behind. The sinuous bends of the river allow the land somehow to refuse it. The sense of dislocation this produces is comparable to that which opens of News from Nowhere, when Morris (or ‘Guest’) returns home to Hammersmith at night, half notices the absence of the lights on the bridge downstream, and wakes in the morning in a transformed world.
Robert Llewellyn’s *News from Gardenia* is a homage to Morris, inspired by reading *News from Nowhere* in 1978 when in his twenties. By my calculation, that makes him now in his late fifties, the same age that Morris was when he wrote his utopia. The homage is explicit in both the novel and the book design. The body text is set in LTC Cloister, designed by Morris Fuller Benton during the early twentieth century and based on the work of the fifteenth-century type designer Nicholas Jenson. The chapter headings are in Troy, and the initial letters of each are adapted from Morris’s designs for the Kelmscott Press. The book was typeset by Bracketpress – whom we have come across before as the producers of the wonderful 2012 poster quoting Morris’s response to Queen Victoria’s Jubilee in 1887: ‘Hideous, revolting and vulgar tomfoolery. One’s indignation swells almost to bursting point’. Morris perhaps would have preferred a more intensely black ink, but care has been taken with the design. The publishers too are unconventional. Unbound has revived publication by subscription, with the names of the supporters printed in the last pages of the book. This one is fully subscribed (although people can still add their names), which is testimony to some combination of faith in the author and interest in the genre of utopia itself.

The first problem for a utopia is always how to get the visitor, the observer from this world, in. In *News from Gardenia*, Didcot power station is the point of transition, although it is more Wellsian than Morrisian, and does not exploit the sense of dislocation produced by the landscape. Gavin Meckler is an emotionally challenged engineer who flies his electrically-powered light aircraft into a mysterious cloud which casts no shadow located over the power station. When he emerges, the power station has transmuted into an intense blue line of electric power fed by a solar kite several miles up, giving the new society free energy. Gavin lands in a field of oil seed rape, and is met by the people of the new world who even recognise the model of the plane, to be told he has come through a fold into the year 2211: both the cloud, and he, are an anomaly. Homage to Morris is immediate. The old man called in to explain matters to Gavin is called William; and Gavin, who at this point is wondering whether he has died and gone to heaven, says ‘Maybe this William bloke was actually God’.

In this future, most people spend most of their time in decentralised communities growing food; they are vegan gardeners, and I was reminded of the rebel God’s Gardeners in Margaret Atwood’s dystopian *The Year of the Flood*. As Morris notes how healthy the inhabitants of Nowhere are, so Llewellyn stresses the absence of obesity. No-one is fat. There is no organised government, no banking system, no military forces, no police or judiciary and no civil service. The population of Britain has fallen to 20 million. Lots of houses have been pulled down, much land is reforested (though it’s not clear why since the solar energy must limit carbon emissions). People mainly live collectively in large houses, which are all retrofitted with insulation and roofed with solar materials. Metals and plastics
are recycled from the waste of our own society: there is plenty of them. This apparently low-tech society does however have both an energy and an information grid. Information is accessed through a flexible sheet much like a piece of paper which everyone carries. The Book will provide a map, a recipe and historical information on demand, although it is not at all clear how the information gets there.

In the story, much space is devoted discussion of technology, partly because Gavin is more interested in how things work than in people. There is a system of underground communication tunnels, pods which transport people and goods around the world at miraculous speeds, and above all, the grid. All of this is more Bellamy or Wells than Morris. But if this is, as Llewellyn claims, a future where we get everything right, I would be distinctly uneasy about this impersonal grid named GAIA (Global Artificial Intelligence Arrangements) which not only allows instant access via the Book to huge amounts of information, but which knows where everyone is at any moment (cue Wells’s *A Modern Utopia*). It also knows when you run out of your favourite shampoo, and automatically delivers it: useful, but creepy. Presumably that is how census counts are possible without any centralised organisation. We are given a quick trip round the world, not all of which is part of the new nonecon; China, India and the Mid-West of America still use money and formal economies, although India is in transition to the new way of being. There has not been a revolution, but a proliferation of small conflicts. Rather, governments handed power to corporations, which were then unable to sustain social organisation; perhaps the process of local resilience resembles most that aspired to by the Transition Towns movement.

I read Llewellyn’s novel at a single four-hour sitting, and enjoyed it. There is a certain grim humour in Gavin’s failure to understand social relationships, either in 2011 or 2211. But this bafflement makes it difficult to distinguish here between the authorial view and that of the central protagonist (just as in Huxley’s *Island* you are always looking over the shoulder of Will Farnaby). Gavin’s response to women is concerned only with whether they are beautiful, so the text reproduces rather than challenging this. We meet historian Paula quite early on, when her mother refers to her as ‘a lovely girl’ but not ‘overly blessed in the looks department’. (p. 35) Gavin observes: ‘She was big-boned – I think that’s the kindest way of putting describing her. She wasn’t fat by any means, but she was a solid looking lass’. (p. 42) She is ‘heavyset’. ‘Her hand was not only enormous, it was clearly very strong. … Her voice was deep, not quite like a man’s but very deep for a woman’. (p. 54) William may defend Paula as ‘a perfectly delightful woman’, (p. 35) but this is also a society where he can address a pretty young woman in these terms: ‘Hallo Grace, you wanton hussy. You’re looking even more extraordinarily attractive today’. (p. 25) I found this annoying rather than amusing. Grace seems to be Llewellyn’s equivalent of Morris’s Ellen. If both are projected male fantasies, at least in Ellen’s case the attraction is a primal energy and passionate love of the
world and of life; and this may indeed be true of Grace, although we do not see that: either she is merely desperate for Gavin’s body, or that is the fantasy of a man incapable of human empathy.

Utopias tend to provoke the reader to argue about the nature of the good society. I was slightly distracted by finding myself arguing over small details and errors. The Book tells Gavin his wife was born on 19 September 1979 and died in December 2073, and he responds ‘Blimey, she made it to 98 years old’. No, actually, that’s 94. London has become a lake, with its tall buildings drowned, because of a rise in sea levels. I mused on the topography here. Surely it would be sea? And if sea levels rise sufficiently to drown London, would Kew, Richmond and Chelsea still be above water? Since the fall on the whole navigable length of the river is just 234 feet (ca 71 m) and it is tidal below Teddington, would not most of the Thames valley be flooded and the whole topography of southern England change?

And then there is the ending, which, as in most utopias, is ambiguous. Extracting the visitor is as tricky as getting him in. When the anomalous cloud reappears over Didcot, Gavin feels compelled to take off, in an ending more like Wells’s *The Time Machine* than the fade-out from *Nowhere*. But I wondered why. Gavin has read the historical account of his disappearance, in which he is presumed to have ditched at sea. His wife remarried and had children whose descendants are still living; he already knows that he did not get back. Other ‘anomalies’ have stayed and made their lives in the future, notwithstanding their sense of dislocation: why not Gavin?

All utopias, including *News from Nowhere*, can be criticised for their inconsistences, omissions and implausibilities and many for their dubious gender politics. But one of the strongest claims for Morris’s utopia is that it fosters the ‘education of desire’ rather than (or as well as) operating in purely literal terms. It fractures the taken-for-granted nature of the given world, and produces not just a cognitive depiction of an alternative social structure, but the experiential sense of inhabiting another world with its differing set of accompanying needs, wants and satisfactions. That is one of the reasons why Morris is so often commended for writing that very rare thing, a utopia in which we might want to live. Gavin’s character, I felt, did not help here.

But as Llewellyn says, it is much more difficult to write a utopia than a dystopia, much harder to form a positive image than to exaggerate the evils of the present into a terrible warning. It is harder to do this now than when Morris was writing, for there is less real optimism about the future. All credit must be given to Llewellyn for trying. It is essential that we do, individually and collectively, imagine the alternative futures we might make and debate them – even if, in the end, I felt that the book underlined Morris’s extraordinary achievement, and how challenging it is to try follow in his footsteps. The importance of *News from
Gardenia, like any utopia, lies not the response of this reader to the society outlined, but in whether or not it helps us to continue imagining and arguing over the better future we need to build.

Ruth Levitas


It is surely no accident that Morris enthusiasts often involve themselves in D.H. Lawrence studies (and vice versa). In a passing comment in The English Utopia (1952), the Communist historian A.L. Morton drew an important parallelism between the two figures, remarking of Morris that ‘it was in Marxism that he found the road, thereby escaping the heartbreak and frustration which D.H. Lawrence suffered in our own time in attempting the same quest without the essential clue’. A few years later, in that seminal book Culture and Society (1958), Raymond Williams wrote that ‘Lawrence is very close to the socialism of a man like Morris ... In his basic attitudes he [Lawrence] is so much within the tradition we have been following, has indeed so much in common with a socialist like Morris, that it is at first difficult to understand why his influence should have appeared to lead in other directions’. Ever since I first read the closing lines of News from Nowhere about ‘people engaged in making others live lives which are not their own, while they themselves care nothing for their own real lives – men who hate life though they fear death’, I have felt that this is a perfect analysis of the Industrial Magnate, Gerald Crich, in Lawrence’s masterpiece Women in Love some thirty years later. So it is surely not just the biographical fact that he lived and worked in Nottingham which made Peter Preston, former chair of the Morris Society who died last year at the age of 67, a committed student of both Morris and Lawrence.

Just how vigorous a scholar of Lawrence Peter Preston was is made clear in this collection of his essays, as is his admirable institutional role in developing Lawrence studies at Nottingham University and elsewhere. Here he tells the story here of his own early, sixth-form encounters with Lawrence’s work, and he seems to have escaped the Leavisite framework which for many of us dominated our first reading of Lawrence. F.R. Leavis only receives one mention in this collection, whereas I recall being taught at university by a charismatic Leavis clone, Roy Littlewood, who drummed Women in Love into us so deeply as the Bible of English Studies that my fellow male students and I desperately wanted to be
Rupert Birkin from that novel, while all the female students no less passionately wanted to be Ursula Brangwen. Escaping Leavisite dogmatism is certainly a boon for Preston, since he is able to give proper weight to *Sons and Lovers*, a novel Leavis undervalued, and more generally to the whole question of Lawrence as our first great working-class writer who however — so perplexingly from a Morrisian-socialist viewpoint — turned in his later works against the social class from which he himself came.

The book opens with two fine essays on violence and on silence in *Women in Love*, and that is surely the kind of centrality this great work deserves. If one wanted to stress continuities between Ruskin and Morris and Lawrence, then *The Rainbow* (with the commanding image of Lincoln Cathedral at its heart) might be a better bet, but to stake a claim for Lawrence as supreme modernist innovator in the novel, then, yes, *Women in Love* is the necessary text. We are still struggling to find a succinct description which encapsulates the extraordinary achievement of that book: Terry Eagleton’s ‘the most philosophically avant-garde fiction of English modernism’ is a strong contender; and Preston’s two essays certainly extend our sense of this novel’s paradoxically destructive vitality. They are followed by two pieces which set out the case for a high valuation of that late-comer to the Lawrence canon, *Mr Noon* (first published in 1984), and a shrewd study of Lawrence’s essays on the theory of the novel. Beyond this literary-critical core of the collection, there is a good deal of lively analysis of Lawrence’s travel writing and of his own cultural reference points (Bunyan, *Hamlet*).

Preston points out in the Introduction that re-reading his essays for publication has made him aware ‘of the extent to which I have read Lawrence with the grain, seeking always to follow the direction of his thinking, his language’; and this, certainly, is where I feel a real generational difference from this book, much as I admire it. For the literary theory revolution in English studies during the 1980s has prompted many of us to read ‘against the grain’ (to borrow the title of Eagleton’s 1986 essay collection). In the wake of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and others, it is not the conscious intentions of authors which preoccupy us, but rather the textual unconscious, the ways in which literary works undermine their official thematic logic in discrepant imagery or subversive narrative detail. That literary theory revolution makes itself felt around the edges of Preston’s book (a couple of references to Mikhail Bakhtin, for instance), but does not impinge on it in a formative manner.

At the end of his Introduction to this collection Peter Preston announces that he is working on a book to be entitled *Lawrence after Lawrence: the Author in British Culture 1930–2010*, a volume which will now sadly not see the light of day, though some of its chapters-to-be have appeared in various other Lawrence collections. I wonder, though, whether we might not expand his announced focus here and develop it to include his passion for William Morris too. We might then
envisage a book on romantic anti-capitalism, the cultural tradition to which both Morris and Lawrence belong, in our own postmodern world, in the age of digital communications and economic globalisation. We would then be asking not just about local references to those two writers in subsequent authors or other media, but, in more political vein, about the adequacy or otherwise in our own time of the romantic anti-capitalism they both so powerfully represent. Can a romanticism which so forcefully assails capitalism in the name of organicist values from the past really match up to the cultural, technological and political complexities of today? Or does it necessarily generate an ecological politics wedded to models of social simplicity which, for us in the early twenty-first century, seem utopian in the bad sense rather than good? On the evidence of Working with Lawrence, Peter Preston's would have been a wise and steady voice for us in that necessary debate, a voice of which we are now, alas, deprived.

Tony Pinkney
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