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*Special Issue: Morris and revolution*

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‘The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and darkness by the wanton feat of those two infamous autocrats is a thing that so gives away the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be, with whatever abatement, gradually bettering, that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and meaning is too tragic for any words’.¹ So wrote Henry James in a letter addressed to Howard Sturgis the day after British forces entered the First World War on 4 August 1914. Different autocrats, dressed in a little brief authority, now stalk the world’s stage as the centenaries come and go, but the passing years are no less treacherous, and the wanton feats of power no less tragic.

Although he had been dead some eighteen years, the outbreak of the First World War grimly realised Morris’s darkest predictions about the likely outcome of inter-imperialist competition between the great powers of Britain, Germany, France and Russia. This rivalry, Morris augured in his Commonweal ‘Words of Forecast for 1887’, could well eventuate in a devastating ‘war which will embrace all the nations of Europe’.² Such a war, Morris wrote, ‘would seem to be the most disastrous event that could cross the path of progress’, yet he also commented that ‘it may be hoped that it would stir up a fresh force of resistance from all the elements which tend towards liberty, and that the struggle would develop [sic] in the proletariat a more definite consciousness of what real liberty means, so that the onrush of a mere reactionary current might be met with the rising flood of revolution’.³ One of the more concrete meanings, in the Jamesian sense, to arise out of the First World War was the October revolution of 1917, the legacy of which, one hundred years after the event, remains both complicated and hotly contested.

2017 has seen a spate of interventions on this topic – about which much ink has certainly been spilt over the years – not the least of which comes from the science fiction author China Miéville. His book, October: The Story of the Russian Revolution (2017), retells these events with at least half an eye on their contemporary resonance. As Miéville comments, ‘[i]t is not for nostalgia’s sake that the strange story of the first socialist revolution in history deserves celebration. The standard of October declares that things changed once, and they might do so again.’⁴ Much as Morris looked back to the symbol and example of the Paris Commune of 1871, Miéville argues that ‘October is still the ground zero for arguments about fundamental, radical social change’ in the contemporary moment, and adds that ‘[i]ts degradation was not a given, was not written in any stars’.⁵

James’s comment about the superfluity of words in the face of world-historical tragedy might also put one in mind of Raymond Williams’s judicious observation that revolution
itself is also marked by tragedy, particularly because of the way in which ‘revolution – the long revolution against human alienation – produces, in real historical circumstances, its own new kinds of alienation, which it must struggle to understand and which it must overcome, if it is to remain revolutionary’. Williams offers a timely reminder, here, that revolution must be both a process of radical social transformation and painstaking self-transformation if it is to be even partially successful.

The prospect of revolution similarly occupied the horizon of Morris’s political imagination, even if he did not live to see such hopes come to pass. Yet insofar as he imagined what such a revolution might be like, Morris seems to have been keenly aware of what Williams would come to recognise as the tragic dimension of revolutionary activity. On the evidence of News from Nowhere, at least, it is clear that Old Hammond, the narrator of Nowhere’s fictional revolution, in no way diminishes the suffering and sacrifice that the revolution involved. As he retrospectively comments to the utopian visitor William Guest, shortly before going on to describe the outbreak of a bloody civil war, ‘terrible tragedy lay hidden behind this grinning through a horse-collar of the reactionary party’.

This issue of the Journal takes the centenary of the October revolution as a suitable occasion on which to reassess Morris’s thinking about revolution, and his relationship to the communist tradition, broadly conceived. Tariq Ali, like Miéville, has also revisited the Russian revolution, pointing out that ‘the 1917 October Revolution transformed world politics and, in the process, remade the twentieth century with a frontal assault on capitalism and its empires, accelerating decolonization’. Although Morris did not live to see the Bolsheviks’ revolution unfold, some of his erstwhile comrades and contemporaries looked eastward with varying degrees of hope and trepidation once it had become clear that the events in Russia were no mere hiatus or historical parenthesis.

After the February revolution which deposed Tsar Nicholas II, Peter Kropotkin wrote a hurried note to May Morris, proclaiming how ‘happy [he was] for Russia, and also for our friends who must now be on their way from the […] jails of Siberia to Russia! And – freed not by a Tsar’s “clemency”, but by the will of the people.’ Kropotkin himself returned to Russia after forty years of exile shortly thereafter. Some years later, Henry Mayers Hyndman expounded a distinctly anti-Bolshevik position in The Evolution of Revolution (1920), dismissing the Bolsheviks’ alleged attempt to ‘skip several steps in the slow advance of social evolution’ as ‘autocratic, cruel, and butcherly to the last degree’, whilst denouncing Lenin as ‘a Communist Ivan the Terrible’. Ernest Belfort Bax, by contrast, hoped that a ‘new Internationalism’ might emerge out of the wreckage of the war, and welcomed the ‘advent of the first Russian Revolutionary Government and the forces behind it to power’, adding that it was an ‘epoch-making event in human history when a great modern nation like the Russian, dared, in the midst of a still bourgeois world, to proclaim the Socialist principle of international ethics, rather than national interest, as the basis of its foreign policy’. ‘So far as it goes’, Bax went on, ‘this is a significant symptom of the beginning of the change from the supremacy, material and ideal, of the Nation-State to that of the universal Commonwealth of Nations’. Of the later generation of communist militants in Britain, Sylvia Pankhurst stands out as a figure who attested to Morris’s influence on her political outlook at the same time as she offered a critical defence of ‘the Lenin Revolution’.
For Tariq Ali, it remains important to revisit such historical episodes because ‘today’s dominant ideology and the power structures it defends are so hostile to the social and liberation struggles of the last century that a recovery of as much historical and political memory as is feasible becomes an act of resistance’. This work of recovery and resistance can take many shapes and forms. In this spirit, I am delighted to welcome Terry Eagleton into the pages of this Journal, who offers a wise and witty set of reflections on what the idea of revolution meant to Morris, and what it might still for us mean today. In particular, Eagleton draws attention to the striking plausibility of the revolutionary scenario that Morris envisaged in News from Nowhere. John Bellamy Foster offers an excellent exegesis of the importance of nature, labour and gender in News from Nowhere, integrating his discussion into a wider account of Morris’s revolutionary commitment, while Tony Pinkney polemically engages with Morris’s communist politics, offering some concrete suggestions as to how an understanding of this politics might shape the activities of The William Morris Society. John Stirling’s deftly researched article on Morris’s trip to Tynemouth during 1884, where he delivered his lecture on ‘Art and Labour’, contains an intriguing account of Morris’s meeting with Elijah Copland over breakfast at Bensham Grove, where their conversation turned to that familiar topic: revolution. Peter Faulkner also marks the passing of one of the Society’s founding members, and the first editor of this Journal, Ronald Charles Hawkswell Briggs.

There are also some more localised, but certainly significant, matters to which I should like to draw readers’ attention. Firstly, Peter Faulkner has decided to step down as Reviews Editor, and he has handed on this important role to Rosie Miles. For many years, Peter has been tireless in his efforts to serve the Society, and particularly this Journal, for which he has acted as both Editor and Reviews Editor. For my own part, I would like to affirm that it has been a pleasure to work with Peter on putting together the last few issues of the Journal, and I am sure all readers will join me in wishing him well for the future. Many readers will also remember that Rosie edited the Journal from Winter 2001 to Summer 2007, and it is fitting that she has now followed in Peter’s footsteps in taking on the Reviews Editorship.

Secondly, I am very pleased to welcome Elizabeth Carolyn Miller to the Editorial Advisory Board, and I have no doubt that the Journal will benefit from her expertise and input over the coming years. Finally, a major exhibition entitled May Morris: Art & Life will open at the William Morris Gallery on 7 October 2017, promising ‘the most comprehensive survey of May’s work to date’. This exhibition, which has been made possible through a successful crowd-funding campaign, will doubtless appeal widely to Morrisians within striking distance of Walthamstow.

Owen Holland
Editor

NOTES
3. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 307.
7. Ibid., p. 81.
13. Ibid.
Ronald Charles Hawkswell Briggs was born in West Yorkshire, and graduated from New College, Oxford. (I am impressed by his triple initials, which remind me of distinguished amateur cricketers of the post-war period). He served in the Royal Armoured Corps from 1943 to 1947, reaching the rank of Captain. He then completed a Master of Jurisprudence degree and an advanced degree in French. He became a Barrister at Law, and, following a period of practice at the Common Law Bar, he was appointed in 1972 as Legal Secretary for the independent legal watchdog organisation ‘Justice’, the UK section of the International Commission of Jurists. The declared mission of ‘Justice’ is to promote human rights and improve the system of justice.

We can see how these concerns would integrate well with enthusiasm for William Morris. Briggs had gone on a cycling tour prior to joining the army in 1943, during which he saw a signpost to Kelmscott, and so went to the Manor: ‘The whole place was magical, I was hooked’, he told Martin Crick in 2006.1 (In writing this obituary I am greatly indebted to Crick’s The History of the William Morris Society 1955-2005, published by the Society in 2011). The Society came into existence in 1955 as a result of a letter in The Times inviting those interested to become members by sending a 10 shilling subscription. Briggs was the first to do so, and so became member no. 1. The first AGM was in April 1956, when a committee was elected, with Graeme Shankland as its Honorary Secretary and Briggs as one of its twelve members. Shankland resigned in October 1956, and invited Briggs to take over, which he eventually agreed to do.
Apart from his extensive secretarial work, in which he was helped by his wife Joan, the enormously energetic Briggs undertook many other activities associated with Morris. He was largely responsible for the Society’s first exhibition, ‘The Typographical Adventure of William Morris’, with John Kay as designer. Printing was one of Briggs’s great areas of expertise and enthusiasm. The exhibition was shown first at the St. Bride’s Foundation Institution in July 1957, and then at Leighton House. It toured widely on the continent with the support of the British Council, and gained much publicity for Morris and the Society. Its Catalogue, edited by Briggs, was of an appropriately high quality.

Two events occurred during the late 1950s in which Briggs was active on behalf of the Society. When in 1958 the Air Ministry announced that it planned to erect a radio marker beacon in Kelmscott, not far from the Manor, Briggs led the opposition. The matter went to a Public Enquiry, which decided on a compromise. Then in the winter of 1959 the British Council organised an exhibition of British books at the Lenin State Library. The Soviet authorities were given a veto, which they applied to G.D.H. Cole’s edition of Morris’s works. Briggs protested to the USSR-Great Britain Society, and the book was returned to the exhibition shortly before it closed.

Moving with equal energy into the 1960s, Briggs completed a significant ‘Handlist of the Public Addresses of William Morris’ (1960), which called attention to Morris’s speeches as a central and neglected part of his achievement. Early in the same year the scholar Peter Floud of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) died suddenly; Briggs launched a memorial fund, and a Peter Floud Memorial Prize Competition was initiated, running for four years. In April 1961 Briggs and the Society supported an exhibition at the V&A to celebrate the centenary of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. In 1962 Briggs worked on an exhibition of ‘The Work of William Morris’ for the Times Bookshop. The exhibition fell rather flat, but a fine Catalogue was produced. In 1962 The Journal of the William Morris Society was inaugurated; a subcommittee was appointed to run it, but Briggs characteristically insisted on taking editorial control. He contributed a short piece on ‘Morris and Trafalgar Square’ to the first issue, and in the Summer 1964 issue, in ‘Letters to Janey’, gave a full and valuable account of those sent to her by Rossetti, which had been placed in the British Library with the restriction that they should not be open to the public until fifty years after Jane’s death. How did he find the time and energy to do all this?

In July 1969 the owner of Kelmscott House and Society member Helen Stephenson told Briggs that she planned to bequeath Kelmscott House to the Society. The committee was delighted, and Briggs used his legal skills so that the Society could be registered as a charity. On advice from the Charity Commissioners, in October 1969 the Society set up the Kelmscott House Trust to manage the house, little realising the problems that this would create. Briggs was naturally one of the twelve trustees appointed. Mrs. Stephenson died during October 1971, and although the house was in poor condition, the Society moved into its first headquarters there, with Briggs working hard both administratively and practically.

The Society now aimed, with American support, to create ‘an informal community of scholars’ to be called the William Morris Centre, and the first Visiting Research Fellow arrived in January 1975. The house was untidy and uncomfortable, but the young scholars who came during the next four years enjoyed its bohemian atmosphere. A real community
was achieved there, with academic colloquia on Saturday mornings, mostly chaired by Briggs and ending with lunch, “‘frenziedly put together’” by Ronald Briggs’ as one participant remarked. I remember some of these colloquia with pleasure, with Briggs presiding in a spirit of generous hospitality. He was at his best on such occasions, dark-suited, lively, energetic, with long sideburns and twinkling eyes, presiding from what seemed to be an elevated social position. There were also enjoyable Sunday dinners at the Centre, which all those living there took turns to cook. The many visitors often including Ronald and Joan Briggs. Those who lived at the Centre remembered Briggs as a practical man, always ready to undertake tasks about the house, no matter how lowly, as well as a lively and entertaining presence. But the Society’s financial position worsened during the mid-seventies, and in November 1979 the Fellowship was suspended owing to lack of funds, and the Centre had to close down. It would seem that Briggs and the committee, misled by the optimism that ownership of the House gave rise to, paid too little attention to the Society’s finances and those of the House.

The committee was refreshed by the arrival of new, younger members during the late 1970s, and questions began to be asked about the House, which seemed somehow to have become separated from the Society. The Kelmscott House Trustees still hoped for the establishment of a William Morris Centre there, but the committee was worried about its possible financing. The result was that Briggs was criticised, resigned as Hon. Sec., and did not seek re-election to the committee. Even those who resented what they saw as Briggs’s authoritarian manner admitted that the Society survived its first twenty-five years because of his dedication. The AGM for 1980 saw the replacement of Briggs and his friends by a younger generation, and Richard Smith from Nottingham became Hon. Sec.

Briggs’s enthusiasm for Morris never declined, but he now put his energies into the Kelmscott House Trust, which he came to see as an alternative method of serving the Morris cause. However, tensions developed between the Society and the Trust as to how to proceed — would the house have to be sold? and on what terms? In 1984 Briggs argued strongly for the proposal to turn the House into a Morris Centre, and was greatly disappointed when an official Inquiry turned the proposal down. A change in the law in 1993 brought about further tensions between the Society and the Trust over the House, which were to result, despite Briggs’s best efforts, in the dissolution of the Trust in 2002.

After his retirement, Briggs lived at Coombe Bissett in Wiltshire, and it is no surprise to find that he became a founding member of the committee of the Salisbury Cathedral Close Preservation Society, played an active role in promoting its early campaigns, served for a period as the Society’s Chairman, and continued thereafter as an active contributor. He died on 28 December 2016, at the age of ninety-two. He is survived by his wife, Joan; his children, Julian, Roland, and Jeni; and his grandchildren, Sylvie and Sasha, to all of whom the Society offers its condolences and good wishes.

When in 2000 the committee of the Society put forward the suggestion of commissioning a history of the Society, Briggs, then still leading the Kelmscott House Trust, opposed the idea, on the grounds that it would draw attention to unhappy controversies that were better left to fade from memory, soon after writing to the Hon. Sec.: “[I]t seems self-centred for the Society to indulge in this sort of thing. It’s not really what the Society is, or should be, about.” As with all Briggs’s arguments, this has some validity. But my view is
that it is important for members of our Society to be mindful of those who contributed vitally to its existence, among the most remarkable of whom was Ronald Briggs. In his own words, he helped ‘to keep the Morris flame alive’.

NOTES
2. Ibid., p. 69.
3. Ibid., p. 74.
William Morris and the Idea of Revolution

Terry Eagleton

At first glance, the English literary canon does not strike one as stuffed with revolutionaries. Once one has mentioned the names of Milton, Blake, Godwin, Shelley, Morris and O’Casey (an honorary Irish member of the English canon), there would seem few other obvious apologists for insurrection. Milton and Morris are alike in that both men were revolutionary activists as well as theorists – Milton during the prologue to the Cromwellian seizure of power and later as an official of the Commonwealth, Morris in the early stages of a socialist revolution which has yet to materialise. More precisely, Morris was both a political and intellectual activist, while Milton’s political activism consisted mainly of his intellectual work. Both writers’ positions were at first glance incongruous: Milton was a Neo-Platonist who clamoured for the king’s head, while Morris was a medievalist who was also a Marxist. His detailed portrayal of utopia, however, is far from Marx’s own style of thought. Marx was impatient with utopian projects, regarding them as an intellectualist distraction from the political struggle. Yet Morris was both visionary and agitator.

Milton and Morris differ in that the former was a political revolutionary, whereas the latter was a social and economic one as well. Milton drew the line at abolishing
private property. He was a radical bourgeois, not a communist. Marxism distinguishes between two kinds of revolution: those which involve the overthrow of a political regime by the militant action of the masses, and those which go further and transform property relations, toppling one dominant social class and installing another. The revolt against apartheid in South Africa was of the former kind, as were the so-called Arab springs, while the dismantling of the neo-Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe some decades ago involved a decisive change in the relations of production.

Other people’s revolutions, however, are sometimes more appealing than one’s own; so that if one extends the list to those who championed political uprisings elsewhere, it begins to expand considerably. Samuel Johnson proposed a toast to the next uprising of slaves in the West Indies; Burke, Paine, Hazlitt, Byron, Wollstonecraft, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey and Clough all fellow-travelled with insurrections abroad; and so did the sizeable number of writers during the 1930s who threw their weight behind the Soviet Union. The same goes for writers (Graham Greene springs to mind) who defended the various anti-colonial insurgencies of the twentieth century. In mildly mischievous spirit, one might even count Evelyn Waugh as pro-revolutionary, along with a galaxy of other rightist authors who supported the Falangist victory in Spain. Strictly speaking, those who flocked to the banner of the Spanish Republican cause were anti-revolutionists, out to defeat a fascist insurrection, though many of them also supported the cause of socialism. Since a great many Western writers greeted the downfall of Communism with acclaim, and since the event involved a radical shift in property relations, they could be said to hold pro-revolutionary views, much as they might indignantly refuse the label. Not all revolutions are of the left. Martin Heidegger, Ezra Pound and D.H. Lawrence might be characterised as revolutionists of the right. There are also those from Daniel Defoe onward who were, so to speak, retrospective revolutionaries, profoundly indebted to the seventeenth-century Parliamentarian cause. Most people, looking back, would now approve of the overthrow of British imperial power in, say, India, and certainly in America.

Revolutionaries or pro-revolutionaries, then, are far more common in the annals of English writing, and among the public in general, than may at first appear. It is simply that many of them are not aware of it. They seem unaware, for example, of the fact that their own way of life is the product of massive social and political upheavals in the past. Not many people actually call themselves revolutionists, as not many people call themselves Spotty or Fatso. This is largely because they associate the idea of revolution with bloodshed and barricades. It is true that most revolutions involve episodes of violent confrontation, but this is not what is definitive about them. So-called race riots, or skirmishes between soldiers and refugees, may involve such
showdowns too. What is definitive of revolution is firstly the fact that it involves the mobilisation of large numbers (perhaps millions) of men and women, as a putsch, mutiny, or coup d’état typically does not; and secondly, at least in the classical Marxist sense, that it culminates in more than the overthrow of a government, or even of a state. As a consequence of the bringing low of a political regime, a new social class comes to power, along with a widespread transformation of social and economic life.

The point about mass mobilisation is worth elaborating. Marx, as is well known, focuses on the proletariat as the chief agent of revolutionary change; and when commentators speak of the demise of the working class, it is usually the diminished role of the proletariat within it in advanced capitalist conditions that they have in mind. Proletariat and working class are by no means synonymous. The reasons for the attention Marx pays to the former, however, are not always well understood. It is not that the proletariat, in the sense of the blue-collar, manual, industrial working class, is necessarily the most wretched, intensively exploited group in society as a whole. Others (poor peasants, for example, or the so-called lumpen-proletariat) may be in far worse shape. Nor does Marx see it as the instrument of a socialist future because it constitutes the largest sector of the working class. He was well aware that the great majority of working people in his own society were domestic servants, and that an overwhelming number of these were women. If the proletariat matters so much, it is because of its capacity for self-organisation, given that it is physically and socially brought together by the very system it serves. Because of their less collective condition, domestic servants and peasants are harder to organise – though as far as the latter group goes, Marx might have recalled the great O’Connellite movements in the Ireland of his day. Raymond Williams’s well-known insistence in the Conclusion to *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958) that masses are simply other people, while salutary in some senses, overlooks this point.

It is sometimes imagined that revolutions are punctual events, whereas programmes of reform are gradual processes. This, however, is not necessarily so. Revolutions evolve in time, while reform can involve full frontal engagement. The social revolution portrayed in *News from Nowhere* (1890) actually begins with reform, or with what Morris himself scathingly calls State Socialism. The upshot of this state-administered modification of capitalism is simply to disrupt commercial activity without replacing it with an effective alternative, so that the suffering and disaffection of the masses is intensified. In fact, such social democracy leads eventually to a condition of so-called dual power, a development that would no doubt have come as a surprise to Clement Atlee or Harold Wilson. The power of the ruling class is diminished and its grip over the nation’s wealth weakened; but at the same time the workers, despite forcing some genuine concessions from their masters, remain ill-
organised and impoverished.

Morris did not of course live to observe a fully evolved social democracy, so that his implausible notion of the dramatic stand-offs it might lead to is perhaps understandable. Even so, the customary opposition between reform and revolution is open to challenge. It is a familiar fact of political history that at one point in the run-up to the Bolshevik revolution, Lenin led his party into the Russian parliament. Besides, programmes of political reform can be bloodier than some revolutions, which may be of the velvet rather than violent kind. The civil rights movement in the United States is a case in point. In fact, many of the reforms we now take for granted – freedom of the press, universal suffrage, trade unionism and so on – were won in the face of ferocious resistance from the governing class of their day. In the colonial-dominated Latin America of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, every effort at liberal reform sparked off violent conflict. Surprisingly little blood, by contrast, was shed during the Bolshevik uprising, and much the same is true of the final collapse of the system it established. In any case, violence is not to be condemned tout court. The United Nations Charter permits armed resistance to an occupying power. Almost everyone believes that violence can be justified if it is used as a last resort, with a reasonable chance of success and hedged round with certain safeguards, in the cause of legitimate self-defence.

The contrast between reform and revolution, however, runs deeper than the question of armed force. To be revolutionary is to hold that, given the world we have created, the kind of justice, comradeship and material well-being one sees as desirable could only feasibly be achieved by a change that was fundamental rather than piecemeal. The fact that this is true is itself a tragedy. It would be far preferable if we could attain those ends without such turmoil. Revolutionism is in this sense a form of realism. The true fantasists are those who maintain that we could repair a world of hunger, war, poverty and forced mass migration by a sprinkling of judicious reforms. A good many people, if the question were put to them in this way, might well find themselves in agreement. It is just that they would probably doubt the feasibility of such a project, a doubt which leftists ignore at their peril. Revolution must be a rational enterprise, not least in the sense that it must be more than a leap in the dark. People who are prepared to stake everything on a future which is uncertain and obscure are probably in a state of desperation, and desperate individuals do not make the most effective revolutionary subjects. The bad news for the political left is that as long as men and women are provided by the current system with some meagre gratification, it is highly unlikely that they will trade this in for some indeterminate alternative – or even, given the perils of transition, for a determinate one. If class society can throw its minions a few scraps and leavings, it is
probably safe for the time being. The good news for the left is that when it becomes incapable of doing so, it is very likely to be challenged on a mass scale. Once the future, for all its perils and ambiguities, is perceived to be an undeniable improvement on what we have now; it is rational to commit oneself to it. The revolt against apartheid may serve as an example.

Old Hammond remarks in *News from Nowhere* that what drove the revolution was a longing for freedom and equality, along with a rejection of the drone-like lives of the prosperous classes. This may have been true of the more politically conscious vanguard, but it is hardly in general what inspires social revolution. Political revolutions, to be sure, are generally provoked by a revolt against oppression, and hence a desire for freedom; but it is not exactly a dream of liberty and equality which motivates the mass of men and women to engage in specifically socialist activity. They do so, by and large, for far more mundane, material motives. Revolution must have a smack of material necessity about it. It is not just a good idea. Nor is it for the most part an altruistic affair, which is one reason why socialism is not about members of the well-heeled intelligentsia selflessly proposing changes for which they themselves have no pressing need on behalf of the common people. There must be something in it for you, as there is something in it for some people to be subjugated. We may invest in our own unhappiness.

It is when there is mass hunger or unemployment, along with the authoritarian or even despotic exercise of power, that one is likely to see the seeds of revolution sown. If there seems a real prospect of a decline into barbarism, then the idea of socialism may begin to look attractive to large masses of people. So, too, however, may the road to fascism. One must recall, however, that men and women afflicted by hardship and deprivation are unlikely to have much energy for anything but meeting their short-term material needs. It is what Hammond astutely calls ‘the selfishness of misery’. Revolutionary subjects need a degree of self-assurance and self-affirmation, as well as a passionate sense of injustice and feeling of victimisation, and this is a rare enough combination. Those who are content feel no need for radical change, while those who are despondent may not be capable of it. One of the ways in which they can typically achieve a certain buoyancy and self-belief is by being witness to a major crisis in the power of those who subjugate them – one which is enough to alert them to the underlying fragility of a sovereign class they had taken to be impregnable.

After a dual power situation is achieved in Morris’s imaginary revolution, the workers learn how to organise themselves into a single federation spanning almost all trades and occupations. Morris is acutely aware of the distinction between popular self-activity and some more Fabian-like paternalism on the part of a social democratic state. The workers are able through their confederacy to force significant concessions
from the bosses, including a minimum wage and the shortening of the working day. In their turn, the capitalists look to the state for support, only to find it engaged in measures hostile to its own interests, as it steps in to establish its own factories to provide material necessities at a time when the destruction of commerce seems to be looming. Not long afterwards, a large part of the impoverished population finds itself dependent on charity, with groups of men roaming the streets begging for bread, and the workers’ federation declares outright war on the governing class. The state responds by unleashing its armed forces against a mass protest of workers. Riots break out across the country, while some of the wealthy flee from London or are enrolled as a special body of police. A Committee of Public Safety is set up, which forcibly expropriates essential provisions from privately run stores.

The government then proclaims a state of siege in London, with the clamorous support of the press, and there is a temporary stand-off between the state and the workers. This is brought to an abrupt end by the army’s massacre of protesters in Trafalgar Square, which results in one or two thousand deaths. In the wake of this catastrophe, the government lurches into a concessionary mood, despite calls for a coup d’état from the more bellicose of the ruling elite, and passes some moderately reformist measures. A new network of workers’ associations now emerges, devoted to the cause of overthrowing the state in the name of communism; and their masters, abandoned by a government that refuses to embark upon the slaughter of large numbers of its citizens, find themselves effectively powerless in the face of plebeian demands. Even so, the government arrests a number of leading members of the Committee of Public Safety, and a General Strike breaks out. Had the government deployed its full armed might at this point, it could well have scored a decisive victory; but since the loyalties of its troops are uncertain, it enters instead into negotiations with the Committee of Public Safety, all of whose demands are granted. Later on, most of the army join the cause of the people. A sizeable sector of the ruling class then sets on foot a counter-revolution, conducts a spasmodic war with the workers’ associations and finally elicits the support of the government itself. There is a full-scale showdown or civil war between both sides, in which the workers’ cause is finally triumphant.

This is a strikingly plausible scenario. Revolutions, to be sure, follow very different paths; but it is as though Morris has assembled together a number of the most typical features of such events to compose a kind of Weberian ideal type. It is especially notable that he by no means romanticises the revolution, as some claim that he romanticises the future that emerges from it. On the contrary, the whole event is brutal, bitter and desperate. What he brilliantly shows is how revolutions are complex, multilayered, internally conflictive processes, moving at different paces and rhythms.
at different times, varying wildly in intensity, subject to a sudden lull or abrupt acceleration, with set-backs and schisms on both sides. There are moments of illusory conciliation and episodes of full-blooded antagonism, as the ruling class is pitched from barefaced duplicity to outright panic.

Ironically, Morris's matchless portrait of the British revolution is bloodier than Marx's conception of it. In his own adopted nation, Marx considered, as in a handful of other countries such as Holland and the United States, there was a reasonable chance of a relatively peaceful transition to socialism. Indeed, that such revolutions may be peaceful is built into the very idea of them, despite popular visions of Piccadilly running thick with blood. Revolutions, by definition, require the active participation of great masses of men and women, and that this is so is also one of their most vital safeguards against excessive violence. Governments confronted with universal disaffection and an unreliable army are well-advised to back down, and many have done so. It is true that the state has more tanks than the left does, but whether it brings them out on the streets is a political matter, not a question of brute strength.

David Hume held rather surprisingly that when it comes to the question of power, the governed always have the upper hand in the end. He meant that no political regime can survive very long without securing at least a modicum of consent to be ruled from its underlings, who may always withhold that favour. In the long run, as Edmund Burke superbly demonstrates with regard to India, America and Ireland, authority must temper an essential coerciveness with a generous amount of consensualism. The ruling class cannot lord it indefinitely over a sullen, disaffected, uncooperative populace, a situation which will demand from the rulers just the kind of force which is then likely to alienate the populace even further. You can imprison some of the people some or even all of the time, but not all of the people all of the time. Co-optation is a condition of cooperation. The problem is that the long run is a long time coming, and there are times when we simply cannot wait that long.

NOTES

William Morris’s Romantic Revolutionary Ideal: Nature, Labour and Gender in *News from Nowhere*

John Bellamy Foster

William Morris’s celebrated utopian romance *News from Nowhere or An Epoch of Rest* (1890) constituted his most singular attempt to present a revolutionary ideal aimed at inspiring a ‘movement towards Socialism’ in his day. Centering on the overcoming of human alienation in relation to the three primary forms of the division of labour – social production, town and country and gender relations – it provided a holistic, ecological outlook extending far beyond most nineteenth-century socialist views. Although *News from Nowhere* was subtitled *Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance*, it followed a pattern that left it free from the criticisms that Marxian thinkers, including Morris himself, had levelled at utopian socialism, since its role was didactic rather than prophetic. The object was not to forecast the victory of socialism as a superior way of organising the mechanism of production, but rather one of radically refashioning the movement toward socialism in the present by widening the whole conception of the revolutionary project, building on the romantic tradition.

Set in England during the early twenty-second century, but with its most vivid historical treatment, ‘How the Change Came’, referring to a mid-twentieth century revolution, the text presented a society of equality which was geographically and historically connected to Morris’s own life environment. *News from Nowhere* was a ‘Romance’ in the double sense that it took from the past to re-imagine the future, while inscribing within it a relationship of love and recognition between William Guest, the protagonist, and Ellen, the text’s most fully developed character, the embodiment of the complex dialectic of labour, ecology and gender.

Morris’s utopian romance was structured as a vivid dream, with William Guest (representing a fictionalised Morris) awakening at the end to the new needs of the struggle, and the importance of imparting the glimpse of the utopian future to others. It ends with the words: ‘if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a
vision rather than a dream’.3

I. A Revolutionary Utopia

The chief inducement to write News from Nowhere was Morris’s dissatisfaction with Edward Bellamy’s extremely popular 1888 utopian novel Looking Backward in which Bellamy’s hero, Julian West, wakes up in the year 2000 to discover society entirely transformed along socialist lines.4 ‘The only safe way of reading a utopia’, Morris observed in his review of Bellamy’s book, ‘is to consider it as the expression of the temperament of its author’.5 And it was Bellamy’s temperament as revealed in his book that Morris objected to, since it projected an altogether too mechanical version of socialism. Looking Backward focused almost exclusively on the mechanism of change. The great monopolies were transformed peacefully into a new realm of centralised state-organised production. Technological improvements allowed for enhanced production and increased leisure. The historical, human or aesthetic elements of a completed socialist (or communist) society were downplayed or missing. Hence, Bellamy’s ‘temperament’, Morris wrote, ‘may be called the unmixed modern one, unhistorical and unartistic; it makes its owner (if a Socialist) perfectly satisfied with modern civilization, if only the injustice, misery and waste of class society could be got rid of; which half-change seems possible to him’. The book was a good example of ‘the economical semi-fatalism of some Socialists’, which was ‘deadening and discouraging’.

All individuals in Bellamy’s utopian Boston were required to begin work at twenty-one, spend three years as a labourer, and then move on to some skilled occupation, retiring at forty-five. Work was a pain, not a pleasure. The point was to enjoy a life of leisure beginning in one’s mid-forties. Bellamy’s novel, Morris argued, gave the ‘impression’ of ‘a huge standing army, tightly drilled’. Bellamy had ‘no idea beyond existence in a great city’. The future Boston that formed the background to Looking Backward was ‘beautified’ in a purely utilitarian fashion, with huge aggregations of population. Yet, from Morris’s perspective, such a mechanical socialism was an iron cage.6

News from Nowhere, which first began to appear in serial form in Commonwealth in January 1890, was thus an attempt to provide a utopian romance reflecting Morris’s own very different, artistic temperament. Nevertheless, in writing it, Morris was responding not simply to Bellamy’s Looking Backward but also to the two factions of the Socialist League with which he had been struggling: the parliamentarians, who like Bellamy tended to focus on the mechanism of change and not the substance, and the anarchists, who, in Morris’s interpretation, saw the change as requiring the actual dissolution of society.7 Significantly, News from Nowhere opened with the reference to a meeting of the Socialist League in which four anarchists were disputing with two
others, one of whom was clearly meant to represent Morris himself, ‘as to what would happen on the Morrow of the Revolution’. 

Seen in this way, Morris’s utopian romance sought to provide a wider cultural description of the revolutionary ideal of a communist society, and in that way to address what he perceived as the narrowness and deficiencies in the visions currently being projected within the socialist movement. For this reason, he concentrated on those aspects distinguishing his views from others, putting most of the emphasis in his utopian romance on: town and country (the ecological problem), work and art (social labour) and men and women (gender relations). Much less attention was given to the socialisation of production, beyond the withering away of state and the demise of the world market. His famous chapter on ‘How the Change Came’ was meant to counter Bellamy’s notion of a purely mechanical change via monopolies, and to substitute a realistic historical conception of revolution, without which the larger transformations that Morris perceived would not have been possible.

II. Two Journeys

The structure of News from Nowhere is fairly simple, and takes the form of two journeys. William Guest, representing Morris himself, wakes up in the early twenty-second century in what is now a Guest House but which is on the spot once occupied by Morris’s home, Kelmscott House in Hammersmith. He soon learns to his surprise that there are salmon in the Thames, and that he is in a dreamlike future. On his first day in Nowhere, Guest travels by carriage through London with his friend Dick, a young boatman. They more or less follow the line of the Thames from Hammersmith to Bloomsbury, ending up at the British Museum, where he is to have a long discussion with old Hammond, Dick’s 105-year-old great grandfather, a former custodian of books. This journey involves travelling through urban London, and seeing the many changes that have taken place: the decrease in congestion and the freeing up of parts of the city to greenery; the open markets divorced from selling; the conversion of the Parliamentary buildings to a dung warehouse; the new architecture resurrecting fourteenth-century forms, blending this with new forms of decorative art; the more artistic nature of work in general; the happy, attractively clad populace; and the absence of the former London poor. Nevertheless, the city remains populous, with ‘the ghost of London still asserting itself as a centre’.

After returning to the Guest House at the end of the day, he journeys, beginning on the second day, up the Thames toward the source of the river and Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire (Morris’s summer home). If the first journey is a one-day journey through the city, the second occupies several days in a leisurely, 137-mile expedition in the countryside via the Thames. The first journey, as Krishan Kumar
has pointed out, can be seen as urban-intellectual, the second as rural-emotional. It is only during the second journey – following the route of a boat-trip that Morris made with a number of friends in the summers of 1880 and 1881 – that some of the deeper truths of Nowhere are revealed, with respect to the relationships between town and country, art and labour; as well as gender and earthly love. Travelling up the river Guest is introduced to the haymaking festival in the country; the new age of handicraft; a countryside no longer sacrificed to railroads and factories; the new women of the new age; and sensuous and earthly love. It is a romantic journey, but one tinged with the new socialism of substantive equality.

Although old Hammond is the pivotal character in the first journey through London, the young woman, Ellen, Morris’s love interest, is the central figure in the second journey, in the countryside. The second journey ends with William Guest’s departure: that is, the end of the dream, and, as Morris indicates in the final lines, the hopeful vision of complete socialism that his readers will share – and thus not merely a dream.

III. Revolution in Nowhere

The long, remarkable treatment of ‘How the Change Came’ in which the venerable Hammond, during the stop at the British Museum, tells the story of the mid-twentieth century revolution, plays a key role in the utopian romance. Here Morris imparts a sense of historical realism, and a connection to the nineteenth century. He borrows concrete elements from the main revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, primarily in France: the revolutions of 1789, 1830, 1848 and 1871. Aspects of the English Civil War can also be perceived; and the chronicle of events is rendered more vivid through Morris’s inclusion of his experience of Bloody Sunday on 13 November 1887 in Trafalgar Square.

The English Revolution of the 1950s depicted in vivid colours in News from Nowhere is a complex, spiralling dialectical process of change in which reforms, economic crisis, repression, struggles of the press, dual-power relations, massacres, organised resistance, right-wing vigilantes, guerrilla warfare and the final triumph of socialism all form a part. As Perry Anderson wrote: ‘[t]he care and depth of thought that Morris devoted to the nature of a computable revolutionary process in Britain – with its dialectic of social reforms and economic crisis, political moves and counter-moves by capitalist and popular centres of sovereignty, brusque pauses and accelerations in mass mobilization, oscillations by intermediate forces, military actions unleashed within and outside the State apparatus – represents an extraordinary theoretical feat, in historical retrospect. There is nothing like it in any other national literature of the time or since.’
Despite old Hammond’s vivid historical account of the tempestuous revolutionary struggle of the 1950s, William Guest is told that all of this is now distant, having occurred around a century and a half before. The bulk of Morris’s utopian romance is thus free to focus on describing the world of the twenty-second century, now long removed from that struggle. Moreover, the romance centres not on the mechanisms of this new society of equality so much as its effects in healing the main nineteenth-century estrangements of town and country, art and labour, men and women. It is through the transcendence of these various alienations that the main rewards of complete socialism, or ‘pure Communism’, as he called it in News from Nowhere, are to be found.16

Morris’s utopian romance thus extends well beyond a socialist political-economic critique, borne of the revolt against capitalism. Its focus is rather on the next stage of post-revolutionary society (the morrow of the revolution), and the making of complete socialism or communism. The object is to provide an extended, but still open-ended vision of an ideal, humanistic world: the structure of feeling in a long revolution.17 In Morris’s two-stage view, the socialist insurrection, the Great Change or civil war in News from Nowhere, brings into being a transitory society full of possibility; but one that will abort if it does not continue on the journey to full communism, eradicating first and foremost capitalist labour relations, along with all of its other alienations.18 News from Nowhere is thus mainly concerned with the change beyond the Great Change, or, in other words, the long-term effects of revolution, a century and a half further down the road, with the advent of pure communism.

Writing in Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome Morris and his co-thinker and comrade Ernest Belfort Bax explain: “[i]t is essential that the ideal of the new society should be always kept before the eyes of the mass of the working classes, lest the continuity of the demands of the people should be broken, or lest they should be misdirected”.19 Complete socialism is thus not envisioned in Morris’s utopian romance simply in terms of the mechanisms of the state, economy, science and technology. All of these are present but are pushed into the background in order to focus on life itself.

News from Nowhere is also about an Epoch of Rest. Morris depicts a ‘life of repose amidst energy’, using the word ‘repose’ in the sense of tranquillity and harmony – or the ataraxia of Epicurus.20 He creates in the twenty-year-old Ellen the very embodiment of Nowhere as an earthly society: ‘[s]he smiled with pleasure, and her lazy enjoyment of the new scene seemed to bring out her beauty doubly as she leaned back amidst the cushions, though she was far from languid; her idleness being the idleness of a person, strong and well-knit both in body and mind, deliberately resting’.21 This emphasis on a pause in the material development of society, a moment of peace and repose within a longer historical process, is crucial to the description of
Nowhere. It is an age in which invention of new productive machinery is less emphasised, as compared with the quality of human existence. Nevertheless, the society rests in part on ‘immensely improved machinery’ that reduces irksome labour. The real age of revolution and reconstruction, as Henry Morsom (an antiquarian working at a museum of relics dating back to the age of machines) informs Guest during the journey up the river, occurred only after the civil war. The machine-determined age was at its worst immediately following the Great Change. It was only gradually, after the workers had triumphed, that a new handicraft movement was to emerge. This constituted the central element in the long revolutionary transformation that followed, changing work into art and art into work — to the point that they could practically no longer be separated. And it was here, through the passion for unalienated, creative, artistic work, as Hammond had earlier intimated in the discussion in the British Museum, that the incentive for labour in the new society arose.

Morris stresses the importance of the utopian socialist Charles Fourier in *News from Nowhere*, rather than the historical materialist Karl Marx, despite Morris’s deeper overall reliance on the latter. (Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Programme* had not yet been published, and he had left few clues otherwise about the morrow of the revolution). Fourier was to be commended since he recognised the necessity of making work pleasurable. In Morris’s modified Fourierist vision, what drives people in their everyday creative activities is the maximisation of pleasure and the fulfilment of genuine human needs, together with the approbation of the society regarding work well done. This is the argument Morris had outlined two years before in his lecture ‘The Revival of Handicraft’. In the new society machinery exists, but it is utilised exclusively to eliminate the worst kinds of work. On his journeys, Guest encounters at a distance a revolutionary form of energy, replacing steam power, which propels ‘force vehicles’, used on both land and water, and presumably within production itself. The result is that the smoke from burning coal that so dominated Victorian London is gone.

The role of technology has thus been altered in the century and a half since the Great Change. The machine is now viewed as an appendage to human labour, not human labour an appendage to the machine. It is this central transformation of labour, as the historian Hammond explains, that forms the basis of the society of equality itself. A community of associated producers nurtures the creativity of each individual, while dull, utilitarian individualism and capitalist exploitation have vanished.

In Nowhere, science, which under capitalism had been commercialised and made a mere instrument of the industrial system, is now turned to the benefit of human beings. People are free to choose old ways where they are deemed better, such as an
old-fashioned lock for going upriver rather than a new mechanical lock, which ‘would have been ugly and would have spoiled the look of the river’. Mere economic productivity and the resulting technological determinism no longer rule all. Yet science, now that it has been put in the service of humanity, is clearly respected. Old Hammond characterises art and science as the two ‘inexhaustible’ forms of human endeavour. What is no longer in evidence is the alienated science of Victorian England, which Morris associated with the utilitarianism and dualism/agnosticism of Thomas Huxley. In his 1890 essay, ‘Capital – The Mother of Labour’, Huxley had sought to reintegrate materialist science with the bourgeois order, legitimising the latter. For this Morris exhibited nothing but scorn. The socialist society of Nowhere, in contrast, celebrates science for science’s sake, and science standing on the same side as art, unsullied by the ends of profit-grinding.25

Labour in Nowhere is free to be artistic due to an abundance that comes from historical gains in productivity and a transformation of both use and want. There is no longer useless labour devoted to useless and destructive commodities, driven by pure pecuniary gain. As Hammond explains: ‘[i]t would be mere insanity to make goods on the chance of their being wanted; for there is no longer any one who can be compelled to buy them […]. All work which would be irksome to do by hand is done by immensely improved machinery; and in all work which it is a pleasure to do by hand machinery is done without’.26 Where actual want is not the chief concern, art triumphs.

If the pivotal change in Morris’s revolutionary utopia is the transformation of alienated mechanical labour into unalienated artistic labour, its overarching manifestation is the metamorphosis of town and country, standing for the new relation to the earth, no longer the object of mere conquest. In the beginning of the new epoch townspeople had dispersed into the countryside, causing much disruption, but eventually a new equilibrium was created. Population too had stabilised, though partly through emigration to aid people in other parts of the world. As old Hammond said to Guest: ‘[t]he town invaded the country; but the invaders, like the warlike invaders of early days, yielded to the influence of their surroundings, and became country people; and in their turn, as they became more numerous than the townsmen, influenced them also; so that the difference between town and country grew less and less; and it was indeed this world of the country vivified by the thought and briskness of town-bred folk which has produced that happy and leisurely but eager life of which you have had a first taste’. The slums of the East End of London had been demolished in what was called the Clearing of Misery and replaced with more and ample housing, better spaced, surrounded by gardens. Predominantly industrial cities like Manchester had largely disappeared as industrial work was dispersed.27 The factories or mills, in which people still laboured, were less machine-dominated,
organised around collective labour, located in communities, and made attractive – surrounded by gardens, as Morris had written in ‘The Factory as It Might Be’.28

Towns in Nowhere were dominated by their ‘streets and squares and market-places’. Life in the country villages, in particular, was centred in the mote or assembly house. But in the city, too, the mote was preeminent, since the most important form of public management of daily life – though not the only one – was the commune, in which ‘the Mote’ loomed large, with decisions being made by democratic, majoritarian means. Just as Kensington Gardens had been turned into a wood, so had ‘wild nature’, in addition to gardens and farms, been encouraged in the countryside. Urban suburbs were no more having vanished in the blending together of town and country.29

IV. For Love of the Earth

In the socialist civilisation of Nowhere the country has been repopulated as the city has been depopulated, marking a return of nature in the society as a whole. The second journey up the Thames, by boat to Oxfordshire, in which William Guest travels together with the two rejoined lovers Dick and Clara, highlighted the changed relations in the countryside in minute detail. Much of the journey is a celebration of nature’s beauty all along the river. But it is also a story of recovery, reconstruction and ecological revolution. Old iron bridges are torn down, and stone ones put in their place. All signs of the railroad vanish. The mills that remain are beautified. The oldest architecture remains. The ugly nineteenth-century brick is mostly gone, while a new modern architecture more reminiscent of the fourteenth century emerges. The river in the upper waters, as in London itself, is all a bright blue, rather than a muddy brown. Beauty had replaced the Victorian age of coal and soot.

In the chapter on ‘The Upper Waters’ the Baconian metaphors of the conquest of nature, and the making of nature into a slave, viewed as constituting the governing mores of the former capitalist civilisation, come in for sharp criticism:

Clara broke in [on the discussion] here, flushing a little as she spoke: ‘Was not their mistake [of seeing work as onerous] once more bred of the life of slavery that they had been living? – a life which was always looking upon everything, except mankind, animate and inanimate – “nature”, as people used to call it – as one thing, and mankind as another. It was natural to people thinking in this way, that they should try to make “nature” their slave, since they thought “nature” was something outside them.’30

Near Runnymede, during the haymaking festival, Guest and his two companions
become acquainted with Ellen, a ‘slim girl’, ‘grey-eyed’, the new woman of the novel, with her intelligence, vivaciousness and ‘wild beauty’.

Soon she joins them on their river journey, and a strong attachment between Ellen and Guest arises based on a common attraction.

Ellen, we learn, comes from ‘the once-poor’, her father a tiller of the earth, which in nineteenth-century England would have meant a life of drudgery, exploitation and early death. In her first appearance in the romance she enters into a dispute with her grandfather who idealised the capitalist Victorian age and disliked the new revolutionary communal order:

‘But in those past days, you, grandfather, would have had to work hard after you were old; and would have been always afraid of having to be shut up in a kind of prison along with other old men, half-starved and without amusement. And as for me, I am twenty years old. In those days my middle age would be beginning now; and in a few years I should be pinched, thin, and haggard, beset with troubles and miseries, so that no one could have guessed that I was once a beautiful girl.’

Later, near the end of the romance, she declares to Guest:

‘My friend, you were saying that you wondered what I should have been if I had lived in those past days of turmoil and oppression. Well, I think I have studied the history of them to know pretty well. I should have been one of the poor, for my father when he was working was a mere tiller of the soil. Well, I could not have borne that; therefore my beauty and cleverness and brightness’ (she spoke with no blush or simper of false shame) ‘would have been sold to rich men, and my life would have been wasted indeed; for I know enough of that to know that I should have had no choice, no power of will over my life; and that I should never have bought pleasure from the rich men, or even opportunity of action, whereby I might have won some true excitement. I should have wrecked and wasted in one way or another, either by penury or luxury. Is it not so?’

In the sensuous trip up the Thames, Guest’s attraction to this irrepressible young woman and his love for the earth merge together, and become one. When Kelmscott Manor is at last reached, Ellen is ecstatic: ‘[s]he led me up close to the house, and laid her shapely sun-browned hand and arm on the lichened wall as if to embrace it, and cried out, “O me! O me! How I love the earth, and the seasons, and the weather,'
and all things that deal with it, and all that grows out of it, – as this has done!’ Morris’s finest creation in the novel, then, who represented the highest level of human development in Nowhere, in terms of intelligence, revolutionary commitment, beauty of body and soul and the organic connection of humanity to the earth.

V. Toward the Substantive Equality of Women

Morris’s views on women, however, were complex, and at times contradictory. It is clear that his utopian romance was meant primarily to extend the revolutionary ideal of socialism to the artistic conception of labour, the substantive equality of women and the ecology of the earth itself. In all of this the transformation of gender relations occupied a central place. If the society of Nowhere had solved some of the problems, the issue of gender equality still in some respects remained, and was the measure of not only how emancipated the society had become, but also of its limitations and the need for future emancipation. In his Theory of the Four Movements Fourier had declared: ‘[t]he extension of the privileges of women is the basic principle of all social progress’. As Frederick Engels put it in Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, Fourier ‘was the first to declare that in any given society the degree of women’s emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation’. Throughout his writings, and particularly News from Nowhere, Morris sought to give concrete meaning to this principle, initiated by Fourier. In 1885 he told George Bernard Shaw that he did not ‘consider a man a socialist at all who is not prepared to admit the equality of women as far as condition goes’, and added that ‘as long as women are compelled to marry for a livelihood real marriage is a rare exception and prostitution or a kind of legalized rape the rule’.

Complete socialism or communism was only possible by means of equality of condition of the sexes. Like Marx and Engels, Morris insisted that this would require the complete dissolution of bourgeois marriage, based as it was on relations of property and patriarchy. He argued that ‘genuine unions of passion and affection’ were denied women (and men also) due to women’s lack of economic security and the double standard, which supported a whole patriarchal system of adultery and female prostitution. Marriage itself under such a system was little more than ‘legal prostitution’, and thus a mechanism for the enslavement of women. What was needed in place of such a ‘venal’ marital system, he raged, was a more natural set of relations, consisting of ‘decent animalism […] plus human kindness’.

Marriage continues to exist in Nowhere, but there are no divorce courts, and Dick and Clara, who had divorced in the past, due to Clara’s attraction to someone else — an indication of greater sexual freedom for women — are driven by their renewed love to remarry. This sequence of events is seen as perfectly natural and easy, in the
sense of being free from legal obstacles. The absence of property, and of hopeless marriages from which parties cannot escape, along with the general equality of condition of men and women, has eradicated the fundamental basis of bourgeois patriarchy, and with it much of the conflict between the genders. But Morris nonetheless emphasises throughout his utopian romance that many of the trials and tribulations of love between men and women (he does not consider relations other than heterosexual ones), associated with uncontrolled passions remain – and continue to generate conflicts. ‘Love’, Dick tells us, ‘is not a very reasonable thing’.38

The position of the children in such marital breakups is unclear, but it is specified that neither parent has the right to tyrannise over them. Children are generally brought up collectively, and the education of the genders is the same. They are free of the rigid forms of schooling that characterised the life of boys in the Victorian upper classes. They are able to move around with considerable freedom, following their interests, within the context of a more communal upbringing.39

The strict, forced division of labour between the sexes (genders) has disappeared in twenty-second century Nowhere. But Hammond tells Guest that if women turn out to be especially good at and disposed toward managing the household, and wish to do so, then they should be allowed to follow that path like any other. In the third chapter, we find the women in the Guest House serving the meal to Guest and the men he was visiting with – yet in a joyous and playful way that tends to dispel the sense that they are engaging in mere servile work based on rigid distinctions in status.40

A number of feminist critics have understandably centred on this chapter in his book, suggesting that the condition of women in Morris’s utopia remained fundamentally unchanged from the Victorian reality of his day. But much of the rest of the book raises challenges for such an interpretation. Indeed, Morris not only showed women serving the men in the Guest House in an early scene, but then went on to question that directly, and to pose several different – not altogether consistent – answers with respect to women and labour in the course of the text, thus highlighting it as an issue that is not fully resolved in the society, and subject to change.41

There is no doubt that Morris here was struggling within himself, caught in seemingly contradictory sentiments, the tangled product of his Victorian patriarchal upbringing and his revolutionary socialist values. In his weaker moments he suggested that women were especially suited by innate gifts or inclinations, to work as household managers – but even then should be free to choose their occupations.42 At the same time he contended that childbearing generally made women more dependent on men and even ‘inferior’ to men from the standpoint of the material-work world of a capitalist society.43 Such positions were close to those of Laurence Gronlund in The Cooperative Commonwealth, a work that Morris recommended as the best introduction to
historical materialism in English, prior to the translation of Marx’s *Capital* in 1886. In alluding on a number of occasions in interviews and correspondence to some kind of natural sexual division of labour – though impacted by an alienated capitalist society – Morris appears to have fallen somewhat short of the more advanced views propounded in his day by Engels, August Bebel and other contemporary socialists, including Clara Zetkin and Eleanor Marx. For Bebel ‘the argument that it is a woman’s natural vocation to be housekeeper and nurse’ had no basis in science or history, and was the result of a patriarchal view equivalent to the divine right of kings. Nevertheless, Morris made it clear that he believed in ‘absolute equality of condition’ of men and women, and that he did not think that women should be restricted to any particular role. Women as well as men should be allowed to develop their talents fully. There were ‘many things’, he argued, ‘which women can do equally as well as men, and some a great deal better’. Women, he suggested in an 1894 interview with the *Woman’s Signal*, were especially gifted in such areas as the ‘medical profession’ and ‘business affairs’. Indeed, women, he contended, have ‘a born faculty for business’. ‘They can hold their own, too’, he stressed, ‘in the intellectual field’ – if not in ‘the arts or in inventive power’. Morris pointed to Philippa Fawcett as definitive proof that women could excel in mathematics, going beyond men. Morris was a strong advocate of women’s trade unions and the demand for equal pay for equal work, as well as for universal suffrage. If not ‘a thoroughgoing feminist’, by today’s measure, he ranks, according to Fiona MacCarthy, as a kind of ‘semi-feminist’. And in his art and his most advanced ideas he arguably even surpassed that.

Indeed, Morris’s position on gender was considerably more nuanced, progressive and dialectical than may appear at first glance, since his model was ultimately one of revolutionary transformation, requiring a changed society, a changed relation to labour and the earth and a changed humanity. Thus, while adhering, as we have seen, to the view that women were especially suited for (but should not by any means be confined to) domestic work, Morris gave to such work a much more central importance and a larger scope in the unalienated society of the future – hearkening back to a time when the household was the centre of production. He argued that men could not altogether refrain from such work in a society of equality without being mal-developed, and contributing to the ‘enslavement of women’. In his March 1889 lecture ‘How Shall We Live Then?’, delivered at a meeting of the Fabian Society, he stated emphatically, with regard to the future socialist society, that ‘the domestic arts’ consisted of ‘the arrangement of a house in all its details, marketing, cleaning, cooking, baking, and so on: sewing with its necessary concomitant of embroidery and so forth […]’. Whoever [among the population] was incapable of taking interest and a share in some parts of such work would have to be considered diseased; and the
existence of many such diseased persons would tend to the enslavement of the weaker sex.’ As Paul Meier noted, ‘[i]n no other of his writings is Morris so positive and practical in his advocacy of sex-equality.

Still, a direct statement on the need for men as well as women to engage in the domestic arts is missing from News from Nowhere itself, written only a year later. As Ady Mineo has pointed out, Morris’s failure to ‘translate these propositions’ on gender equality directly ‘into fiction can be imputed to two main reasons’ related both to his own time and readership and to the complex structure of his text itself, which represents an incomplete ideal:

Firstly, his disagreement with some of his comrades, especially Belfort Bax, who held very traditional views about women’s role, and secondly his concern about the response of his reading public, who might be shocked by the depiction of men engaged in household tasks and thus be diverted from the core of his message: the radical dismantling of the patriarchal order. As is well known, the uprooting of deep-seated cultural habits, which challenges one’s own interiorized identity, creates a feeling of dislocation both in women and in men.

However, since News from Nowhere is not a detailed blueprint of a future society, its open-endedness and dialogism suggest further developments in every arrangement of human life […]. The reader can therefore envision a further stage when the young man laying the table in Chapter XXVI will not be an isolated figure but a common sight.

Indeed, it was precisely in Chapter Twenty-Six of News from Nowhere, ‘The Obstinate Refusers’, and in his depiction of Ellen as the embodiment of the highest values of his utopian romance, that the artist Morris most clearly triumphed over his own inner hesitations with respect to gender. If the first journey, by carriage along the Thames, focuses on the coming to be of twenty-second century London, and on the sociology of Nowhere, it is only in the journey up the Thames that Guest’s observations take on an active, living form, raising the question of a long, continuing revolution, extending to more earthly concerns.

Here it is significant that it is in the addition of the important Chapter Twenty-Six, ‘The Obstinate Refusers’, representing a key passage in that upriver journey, that the published book version of News from Nowhere differs most from the version serialised in Commonweal. This was the one new chapter added by Morris when his serialised 1890 utopian romance was released in book form in 1891. Here he upends almost completely the division of labour between the genders. The ‘Obstinate Refusers’
chapter introduces the only instance of a master craftsperson seen at work in his story—representing the most esteemed role in Morris’s utopia, and the one corresponding most closely to his own role in nineteenth-century society. When we are introduced for the first and only time in the text to an example of higher craftsmanship, and of the most strenuous kind, it is an occupation filled by a woman.

Mistress Philippa, the stonemason, is engaged in carving with mallet and chisel, indicating strength and dexterity as well as artistic sense. She is sculpting ‘a kind of wreath of flowers and figures all round it’. So singly dedicated is she to her work that she, along with her fellow workers, are good-humouredly jeered at by others, as the ‘Obstinate Refusers’ of the chapter’s title, since not joining in on the communal haymaking work festival. Philippa just as obstinately refuses to interrupt her work with a meal. Previously the work on finishing and decorating the new house had had to wait, affecting the whole work crew, since Philippa was ill, and they were not able to continue without her—so great was their dependence on her craft. Her gruffness and obstinacy is clearly a parody of Morris himself. The other, apprentice stonemason is a young woman, Philippa’s daughter. In contrast, a young man sets the table for the meal. The foreman, as if in concession to the male ego, is a man, but clearly has a secondary role to Philippa as the master mason.51

Here Morris dramatically reverses the dominant gender roles of his time. There is little doubt that the sculptor Philippa is named after the mathematician Philippa Fawcett, who achieved the highest marks in mathematics at Newnham College, Cambridge, and whom Morris, as we have noted, strongly praised, leading Morris to conclude that women might be better than men in innate mathematical ability.52 Morris admired Clara Zetkin’s speech at the International Socialist Congress in Paris in 1889, where she declared: ‘[w]hile women fight side by side with the Socialist workers, they are ready to share all sacrifices and hardships, but they are also firmly resolved to take as their due after victory [in the struggle with bourgeois society] all the rights that belong to them’. The ‘Obstinate Refusers’ chapter in News from Nowhere seems to reflect this view of a transformation of gender relations developing out of revolutionary struggle, playing out over a long period of time.53

Women in News from Nowhere are not depicted as the languid, idle ladies, or as the gaunt, working-class drudges, so familiar in the Victorian novels of Morris’s day. Instead they are physically, intellectually and artistically vibrant. They no longer wear massive layers of clothing characteristic of Victorian women’s fashions—as if they were ‘upholstered’ furniture rather than human beings—but lighter clothes that allow them to move. Ellen is tanned on her face, arms and feet. She dresses in a way so as to emphasise freedom of movement, while walking barefoot in the fields. The free women of Nowhere engage in labour like men, participating in the haymaking
festival. Ellen takes part in the work in the fields, as well as being an excellent sculler, able to row much more efficiently in terms of strength and skill than Guest – none of which takes away from the fact that she is the most powerful critical-intellectual voice in the text as she argues with her grandfather on literature and history (a fact highlighted by her close connection to the British Museum historian Hammond).54 Indeed, Ellen’s considerable charm derives from her independence, spontaneity, confidence, intelligence and a clear sense of her own value, combined with a love for the world of nature all around her. It is she who, in a departure from Victorian mores, takes the sexual initiative, overwhelming Guest, who is unaccustomed to this from women.55

This is in line with Morris’s historical romances, set in primitive communist societies and among Germanic peoples, in which women are presented as taking on the role of warriors, wearing armour and fighting side by side with the men. In *The Roots of the Mountains*, Bow-may, whose archery is unrivalled, and Bride are at the forefront of the battle for Silverdale – while the former was a leader in the guerrilla war that preceded it. Morris’s clear intention here was to strike directly at Victorian notions of ‘the weaker sex’.56

In *News from Nowhere* and Morris’s other romances, women (and also men) express their emotions and sensuousness in direct, relatively uninhibited ways that break radically with the frozen mores of the Victorian age. Women are relatively free to express open physical affection for men. Men are allowed to weep in public, to blush and to wear gaudy clothes. As Mineo has argued in ‘Beyond the Law of the Father’, Morris ‘prefigured the changes envisaged by post-feminism’ in which both femininity and masculinity are opened up, allowing for more expansive, overlapping gender roles: ‘[i]n syntony with the destructuring of the traditional male identity, Morris [...] also deconstructed the female model as it was inscribed in Victorian collective imagery. In depicting the new woman, Morris erases every form of discrimination based on the criterion of the double standard’.57

Morris’s goal – though not in all respects successful – was to portray an equality of condition between men and women, as a reflection of the ideal of substantive equality.58 In this respect his greatest, most generous literary creation, Ellen, stands out as a ‘new woman’, giving credence to the notion that ‘The Emancipation of Women’, as stated by Hammond, is no longer the central question that it once was – and that society in the century and a half since the Great Change has moved substantially forward. Ellen’s role as William Guest’s love interest is secondary to her larger role as the embodiment of all that is most healthy and revolutionary in the new society. It is Ellen who recognises the vital importance of the recovery of a historical perspective that has been largely lost in Nowhere, in order to ensure the future
development of the new society.59 As a prospective mother – in a world where motherhood has lost much of its burden with society collectively caring for children – she insists that she intends to pass on her critical knowledge and her whole essential being to her children. As someone close to the sages of her time (she has embraced the knowledge obtained directly through dialogue with old Hammond and others – preferring that to mere book learning); as the only person in the book said to have travelled abroad (she had been on the Rhine); and as the embodiment of love and beauty and the love of the earth itself, Ellen symbolises the romantic-socialist utopia that is Nowhere. She personifies, for Morris, the whole movement toward complete socialism, the struggle for which extends to future ages beyond the epoch of repose, when ‘times may alter’.60 Mere emancipation of labour is not sufficient, it must embrace substantive equality, including full gender equality, the flourishing of art and beauty at all levels of society and the sustaining of the earth itself.

Indeed, in a relatively few, brief pages, in the last third of the novel, centred on this twenty-year-old woman, Morris seems to have embodied his full revolutionary vision of communism, the earth and love, challenging the predominantly mechanistic views of socialist thought in his age. For Morris, only such an ideal can animate the necessary revolution and carry it forward.

Guest’s dream ends with Ellen’s last words floating in his mind as he fades away from Nowhere, challenging him to go back and continue the struggle:

‘No, it will not do; you cannot be of us; you belong so entirely to the unhappiness of the past that our happiness even would weary you. Go back again, now you have seen us, and your outward eyes have learned that in spite of all the infallible maxims of your day there is yet a time of rest in store for the world, when mastery has changed into fellowship – but not before. Go back again, then, and while you live you will see all round you 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. Go back and be the happier for having seen us, for having added a little hope to your struggle. Go on living while you may, striving with whatsoever pain and labour needs must be, to build up little by little the new day of fellowship, and rest, and happiness.’61

It is this expansion of the idea of revolution to encompass the reconstitution not only of society but of the human relation to the earth and the substantive equality of all individuals, that Morris hoped to convey in News from Nowhere – and to give to the movement toward socialism in his time and ours.
NOTES


2. The dates provided in the text leave matters somewhat uncertain. Morris changed some of the dates in the serialised version in Commonweal, pushing events further into the future. For example, the bridge mentioned in Chapter 2, is said to have been built in 1971 in the Commonweal version, while in the book edition this is changed to 2003. Following the dates in the 1891 book edition, the Great Change occurs during the early 1950s. The civil war begins in 1952, and appears to be over by the time of the ‘clearing of houses’ in 1955. William Guest is informed early in the text that the bridge built in 2003 was ‘not very old’. Hammond later refers to the new epoch as having lasted for around 150 years, which would presumably place it in the early 2100s. A more oblique reference to two hundred years would appear to have referred to the time since the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century. William Morris, News from Nowhere or an Epoch of Rest, ed. by David Leopold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 8, 14, 46, 69, 94, 184. (Afterwards Morris, News from Nowhere).

3. Ibid., p. 182.


5. Morris, Political Writings, p. 420.

6. Ibid., pp. 419-25.

7. Morris provides a scornful assessment of anarchism as he understood it in News from Nowhere, making it clear that he did not see it as a viable way forward. Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 77.

8. Ibid., p. 3.


11. Ibid., pp. 29, 56.

12. Kumar, pp. 96, 98.


22. Ibid., pp. 84, 153.

42. Pinkney, pp. 91-93.
43. Kelvin, II, p. 545.
50. Mineo, p. 206.


57. Mineo, pp. 201-05.


61. Ibid., pp. 181-82.
This article is going to be an exercise in what one might term political philology; and I feel that this is appropriate to this Journal because philology, apart from being one of the great nineteenth-century human sciences, mattered a lot to William Morris and his circle. One book that made quite an impact on them in their younger years was Richard Chevenix Trench’s *On the Study of Words*, which was published in 1851. The book is a series of lectures with such titles as ‘On the Morality in Words’, ‘On the History in Words’, ‘On the Rise of New Words’, ‘On the Distinction of Words’, and, rather oddly, ‘The Schoolmaster’s Use of Words’. It still makes a lively read, and one learns a lot from it, so if you happen across the old Everyman reprint in a second-hand bookshop, I recommend that you shell out a couple of pounds and buy it. I am going to adopt something like Trench’s philological methodology here, and say a good deal about the morality, history and distinction of words, or at least of one or two key political words. I will not focus on ‘The Rise of New Words’, as Trench does, but shall ask instead whether we can make old words do radically new work.

Professionally, I am a teacher of literature, so I am speaking here initially as a literary critic, and it certainly seems to be the case that nearly all my favourite critics at one point or another in their careers have felt themselves obliged to trespass on the terrain of philology, and look very closely not at whole novels or plays or poems but at individual words. William Empson in 1951 gave us what is still a very brilliant and challenging book called *The Structure of Complex Words*, looking at such terms as ‘wit’, ‘all’, ‘fool’, ‘dog’, ‘honest’ and ‘sense’ across the range of English literature. C.S. Lewis, in his *Studies in Words* of 1961, examines such terms as ‘nature’, ‘sad’, ‘free’, ‘simple’, ‘life’, ‘world’ and, less predictably, the phrase ‘I dare say’; and finally Raymond Williams, in his brilliant and compact semantic dictionary *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* of 1976, takes us closer to the kind of sociological and political
terrain that will be of interest to Morrisians, with his trenchant analyses of such terms as ‘aesthetic’, ‘capitalism’, ‘culture’, ‘intellectual’, ‘nature’, ‘romantic’ and many others. Williams’s volume has indeed proved to be more than just a book; it has instead become a collective project to which many people are contributing. Tony Bennett and others brought out a volume entitled New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society in 2005, and there is now a website devoted to this project too.2 ‘Culture’ was Williams’s own most famous single word, from his first great intervention Culture and Society 1780–1950 (1958) onwards. Keywords, meanwhile, contains the term that I want to focus on in this article, the word ‘communism’, which is certainly also a ‘complex’ word, though not perhaps in the sense that William Empson means in his book of that title.

My more local, Morrisian starting point is a remark that Phillippa Bennett made in this Journal in her Summer 2012 review of the American scholar Robert Boenig’s edition of The Wood beyond the World. As an enthusiast for the late romances, she was of course delighted to see a new edition of one of these works, but she also offers an important political caveat about the editorial material that Boenig has draped around the core text. She writes: ‘[t]he word Communism appears to be studiously avoided in relation to Morris, with the more palatable Socialism being the sole term of choice, although Boenig is by no means alone in the world of Morris scholarship in demonstrating that preference’.3 The format of a brief review does not give Bennett space to go into this matter further, so we do not get what we might well have wished: a list of the other offenders that she may have had in mind here.

Is it, one wonders, because Boenig is American that ‘communist’ is such a difficult term for him, since out there, as we know, it is a term of rabid right-wing political abuse? Even ‘liberal’ can be used pretty venomously in the United States, so ‘communist’ is, even today, long after the collapse of the Soviet Union, way off the spectrum; and as an American academic it might therefore be a term you would not be keen to associate with your favourite author, for whose unfamiliar works you were trying to get a friendly hearing. I know that when I lecture on News from Nowhere in the second-year undergraduate Victorian Literature course at my university, the visiting American students in the audience look decidedly uncomfortable and shuffle in their seats when I declare to them that its author was a communist. Perhaps they feel that the National Security Agency is at that very moment hacking their smartphones to track their presence at a subversive lecture.

However, the problem that Phillippa Bennett identifies — whereby a more palatable term replaces the word Communism — is not specific to the United States; and I can offer you an instance from my own experience, from the run-up to The William Morris Society’s Symposium on William Morris in the 21st Century, which took
place in Birmingham during September 2015. I had therefore better name no names here – not just out of diplomacy and the milk of human kindness, but because it is a general linguistic phenomenon, an almost anonymous process, rather than the acts of individuals, on which I want to focus. When invited to contribute to the symposium, I replied that I would like to talk about ‘William Morris and the Return of Communism’. So imagine my bemusement when some weeks later I saw the Symposium advertised on the Society website, and it there said: ‘Tony Pinkney will reassess Morris’s Marxism’. The same wording is used in the printed Society programme for July to December. Well, ‘Morris’s Marxism’? That wasn’t the word I had used; no one had checked with me that I was happy with that change or offered any reasons for making it; it just seemed to happen of itself somehow – as Robert Boenig, presumably without even thinking about it, had just repeatedly self-censored and put ‘Socialism’ in his text every time that ‘Communism’ might have served.

Now I would obviously agree that, in my case, Marxism and Communism are not unrelated terms, particularly for Morris himself. Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* made a powerful impact upon him, along with various other writings by Marx, and the *Manifesto* is indeed quoted in the 1885 Socialist League manifesto which Morris and Ernest Belfort Bax drafted together. Nonetheless, I think that, on the whole, the word Marxism names an intellectual system, about which you can have intellectual opinions about its correctness or otherwise; whereas Communism is the name of a worldwide transformative political movement that, during the twentieth century, was indelibly associated with the achievements but also with the massive crimes of Stalin and Mao. So when my proposed paper on Morris and the Return of Communism metamorphosed into ‘re-assessing Morris’s Marxism’, I think that, as with Robert Boenig, we have another case where a more palatable term has substituted itself for an uncomfortable one. I say ‘substituted itself’, thus removing conscious human agency from the process, because I do not suppose that the Morris Society Committee sat down collectively and said: ‘Oh dear, “communism”, we can’t have that term on the website, let’s find an alternative’. I imagine that the substitution just somehow happened of itself, because it is a general linguistic or ideological phenomenon that we are talking about here.

So it seems difficult now to talk about Morris as a communist, and, in fact, you almost cannot do it, as I hope my two examples have suggested. I think that it is therefore worth recollecting that, once upon a time, it was not at all difficult to describe Morris as a communist. Indeed it was almost taken as a matter of course to do so. Robert Blatchford declared in the *Clarion* newspaper in 1899: ‘I am, and always have been, a communist of the William Morris type’.

George Bernard Shaw, who had been very close to Morris in the 1880s, announced in 1934 that ‘Morris, when he had to define
himself politically, called himself a Communist [...]. He knew that the essential term, etymologically, historically, and artistically, was Communist; and it was the only word he was comfortable with.\(^5\) In his 1959 lecture on ‘The Communism of William Morris’, E.P. Thompson describes Morris as ‘the greatest moral initiator of Communism within our tradition’; and even in the 1976 Postscript to his great Morris biography, written when Thompson himself had left the British Communist Party, he still unembarrassedly declares that ‘William Morris was an outstanding member of the first generation of European Communist intellectuals, the friend of Engels’.\(^6\) From within a more literary-critical tradition, Norman Talbot as late as 1990 celebrates Morris as ‘the first great English man of letters to declare himself a Communist’.\(^7\)

But never mind the words that other people have used to describe Morris and his politics; we need of course to ask: how did he describe himself? It is not, obviously enough, simply wrong to refer to Morris as a socialist. After all, his own political organisation, set up during December 1884, was called the Socialist League, and he gave many lectures with titles such as ‘Art and Socialism’ or ‘What Socialists Want’. He also published a celebrated account of ‘How I Became a Socialist’ in *Justice* during June 1884. He certainly did all that; but he also declared in *Commonweal* on 18 May 1889: ‘I will begin by saying that I call myself a Communist, and have no wish to qualify that word by joining any other to it’.\(^8\) Moreover, he published an article entitled ‘Why I am a Communist’ in *Liberty*, which was issued in 1894 as a penny pamphlet; and he gave a lecture on ‘Communism’ to the Hammersmith Socialist Society in March 1893. I would very much like to see both of these texts brought out as a pamphlet by the Morris Society, by the way.

Or let us look at the evidence of his politically inspired literary works. In *The Pilgrims of Hope* one of the hero Richard’s workmates invites him to come to a political meeting at which the speaker ‘is one of those Communist chaps, and ’tis like that you two may agree’. That is only a minor character speaking, and perhaps he is using terms loosely, so maybe it is unwise to give too much weight to that one use of the adjective. But just a few pages later, after Richard has been politically energised by a speaker who looks remarkably like Morris himself, he tells us that: ‘When I joined the Communist folk, I did what in me lay/ To learn the grounds of the faith. I read day after day’. So he certainly regards himself as committed to communism, and I suspect the word here has a rather scary edge to it, and that his use of the more homely term ‘folk’, which he attaches to it, is an attempt to domesticate those dangerous connotations. As developments in Europe become more politically fraught but also promising, the same formulation comes up again in the poem: ‘For Paris drew near to its fall, and wild hopes’ gan to flit/ Amidst us Communist folk’.\(^9\) The three main characters in the poem, Richard, his wife and her lover Arthur do indeed end up
fighting for the Paris Commune in that city, after which, as Raymond Williams reminds us in *Keywords*, the terms ‘Communist’ and ‘Communard’ were virtually interchangeable.\(^\text{10}\)

Or let us extract the uses of ‘communist’ and ‘communism’ in *News from Nowhere* to get a sense of just how active they are in Morris’s utopia. In the transfigured London and Thames valley of the book, William Guest finds himself amidst ‘the present rest and happiness of complete Communism’.\(^\text{11}\) Enlightened men in the late Victorian period, old Hammond tells him, concluded that ‘the only reasonable condition of Society was that of pure Communism (such as you now see around you)’.\(^\text{12}\) Narrating the revolution, he then speaks of ‘the spread of communistic theories […] a simple condition of Communism […] the Communism which now loomed […] a system of life founded on equality and Communism’.\(^\text{13}\) Chapter Fifteen is entitled ‘On the Lack of Incentive to Labour in a Communist Society’, and as Hammond describes the operation of local democracy in Nowhere he asks Guest ironically: ‘a terrible tyranny our Communism, is it not?’.\(^\text{14}\) This final question points us precisely towards the difficulties that twentieth-century political history would pose around this term. But even so, you can see how pervasive the term communist is for describing the fully utopian world presented to us in the book, and this is why I have elsewhere criticised David Leopold, editor of the Oxford World’s Classics edition of *News from Nowhere*, which is in most respects far and away the best contemporary version.\(^\text{15}\) In his introduction to that edition Leopold consistently uses the word socialist to describe Morris’s political views, rather than ‘communist’, which is the book’s own term for its offered world, and this is in my view another symptomatic moment in which the troubling term communist is silently erased whilst a more palatable one is put in its place.

Did Morris want *News from Nowhere* to be thought of as a socialist utopia? Did he want that particular adjective applied to it? Well, if so, he surely missed a great opportunity to enforce that identification in the opening lines of the book, which, as you will recall, run as follows: ‘[u]p at the League, says a friend, there had been one night a brisk conversational discussion, as to what would happen on the Morrow of the Revolution’.\(^\text{16}\) Up at the League, okay, but which League? Why does Morris choose not to say ‘Socialist League’ here? One answer might be that, given that the first publication of *News from Nowhere* was in serial form in *Commonweal* across 1890, he simply did not need to specify the particular League to which he referred. *Commonweal* was the journal of the Socialist League, and many of those initial readers would have been members of it, so Morris could take it totally for granted that everyone would know he had the Socialist League in mind here.

Okay, I will concede that; but what happens when the serialised text is published
in book form the following year, by Reeves and Turner? At that point Morris’s utopia is out there in the wider literary world, and most of its purchasers will not be members of the Socialist League, and may indeed never have heard of that numerically very small organisation. What will those readers, and then subsequent readers up to our own time, make of the opening phrase ‘Up at the League’? I imagine they will suspend judgement as to which League this might be, and read on a bit. As they do so they will encounter these lines in the second paragraph: ‘there were six persons present, and consequently six sections of the party were represented, four of which had strong but divergent Anarchist opinions’. Ah, the middle-class reader might well think at this point, ‘if four out of the six people present, i.e., sixty-six per cent of them, are Anarchists, then presumably this is an Anarchist League that we are talking about’; and I do think that, on the textual evidence given, this is a plausible hypothesis. A more learned reader, who was well up in his or her mid-nineteenth-century radical history, might, however, fleetingly wonder whether this is not, in fact, a Communist League being described (with, admittedly, a great deal of anarchist infiltration); for there had after all been a Communist League during the 1840s, and it was indeed for that very organisation that Marx and Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848.

My point here is that, at this crucial initial moment in his utopia, Morris leaves matters open; he had the chance to firmly specify the Socialist League, and he chose not to do so. He leaves the political nomenclature of this meeting open, indeterminate, undecidable; all we get is that phrase ‘Up at the League’, which politically can go in several directions. So if Morris is not keen to impose ‘Socialist’ as a governing global label for this text right from the start, then I think critics, scholars and editors should also be more cautious with that term, and more open to other possibilities of political naming. We are treading on delicate semantic ground here, and we have to be aware that our own sense of the terms ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ may not be what these terms pointed towards, or how they felt, during the nineteenth century. I certainly found it both surprising and salutary to turn to Raymond Williams’s entry on ‘communism’ in *Keyw ords*. For we find this: ‘communist was still quite widely understood, in English, in association with community and thus with experiments in common property. In English, in the 1880s, socialism was almost certainly the harder word, since it was unambiguously linked, for all its varying tendencies, to reorganization of the society as a whole’.

Williams offers no documentary evidence here, since *Keywords* is just a compact semantic dictionary, but obviously the author of *Culture and Society 1780-1950* is a weighty commentator in these matters. How, I wonder, would we invent a methodology that might test Williams’s philological claim, that socialism was indeed the harder word in the England of the 1880s? What exactly does ‘harder’ mean here, after all – politically frightening, intellectually systemic, both? To be sure, we should not project
twentieth-century meanings of communism and socialism back onto the debates of the 1880s, but even so, for Morris socialism is clearly a transitional stage on the way to full communism, so for him, at least, I am still inclined to think that communism is the ‘harder’, i.e. the more thorough-going, word. As I have shown already, in looking at *The Pilgrims of Hope*, its disturbing force has to be consciously tempered in that poem by having the homely, genial term ‘folk’ attached to two of its three uses.

If, then, as a matter of historical accuracy, communism and communist are the terms we should be using for Morris’s political vision, the terms that he himself uses in his finest literary works, then why are we no longer doing so? The answer is not far to seek. The term communism has been thoroughly demonised by its political enemies, and the Left has internalised this judgement. The crimes of Stalin and Mao are, in the eyes of our political opponents, not just contingent, not a matter of a historical deformation of the initial project, but, rather, built into the very idea of communism from the start – part of its DNA, as it were. The notion of a Leninist vanguard Party which has to import or inject communism into a working class which is only capable under its own resources of ‘trade-union consciousness’ has, it is argued, the seeds of domination and violence built into it from the very beginning.

At which point the Left, demoralised by both the bloody history of Soviet and Chinese Communism, and by these counter-revolutionary arguments about such violence being inherent in Communism, has switched to the term ‘socialism’, and redefined its project as social democracy, aiming to contain, rather than overthrow, capitalism. The highlight of social democracy for us in this country, I suppose, was the Labour election victory of 1945 with the nationalisation of key industries and the institution of the welfare state. What we have seen more recently, however, in the epoch of postmodern or post-Fordist or globalised or neo-liberal capitalism, is that these social-democratic parties have moved further and further, not just to the centre, but even to the right, to the point where the term ‘socialism’ today is, I submit, almost vacuous – just take a look at François Hollande and his so-called Parti Socialiste in France. Far from challenging post-2008 neo-liberal austerity, these parties are, when they can, actively imposing and managing it, albeit in a slightly more humane form than their conservative opponents. So I suggest that if communism has been demonised by its opponents, socialism has simultaneously emptied itself out as a political term, and is in some danger of becoming the most non-meaning of political signifiers; and at such a moment, in such a predicament, opposition necessarily comes from unexpected, non-systemic sources, such as the Occupy movement for that brief moment of its glory during autumn 2011.

But with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, and with the great Western financial crisis of 2008 finally putting paid to notions of the ‘end of history’,
we can perhaps return to the term ‘communism’ without having our thinking frozen by Leninist versions of its meaning, or Stalinist and Maoist nightmares of its practical effects. Can this key term, we need to ask ourselves, be de-demonised, in and for our time? For without the invention of a new idea of communism, we may be confined indefinitely to the bloody struggle between an aggressive but very unstable Western neo-liberalism and a global movement of Islamic fanaticism and terror. We very desperately need a new third term to take us beyond that frozen and murderous antithesis.

Now we are, in my view, not only in a new political epoch where the term communism might conceivably become usable again, and is certainly urgently needed; rather, it is, in fact, already being newly employed, put to work in new, post-Leninist ways. The French philosopher Alain Badiou, with his announcement of the ‘communist hypothesis’, and the Slovenian theorist Slavoj Žižek are perhaps the best-known spokespeople for this trend, though Jodi Dean’s book The Communist Horizon is a very trenchant exposition of it too. At a conference on ‘The Idea of Communism’ held at the Institute of Education in London during March 2009 some nine hundred people joined Žižek and others in this joint political and theoretical endeavour; its proceedings were published by Verso in 2010. There were successful follow-up conferences on the same topic in Berlin during 2010, and in New York during 2011.

I do not have time or space to go into the detail of this work in this context. Nor am I saying that these various contemporary communist thinkers are easily compatible with each other, that some comfortably shared new collective paradigm has emerged. Badiou’s communist hypothesis, for example, is just part of a much broader and highly complex philosophical system which he has elaborated, on a challenging mathematical basis, over many decades; and even I, despite being both a non-mathematician and a non-philosopher, can see some rather substantial problems with it. But I do just want to evoke this field of work in these very general terms, in order to suggest that if we start thinking again about William Morris as a communist, as a pre-Leninist communist, then we might find ways of making his thought politically active again in our present as part of this early twenty-first-century effort to define what a post-Leninist communism might look like, what its values would be, in what kind of political vehicle it might embody itself, how it might relate to such recent oppositional moments as the Occupy movement or the Arab Spring, or Podemos or Syriza in Europe, and so on. To think of Morris as a communist is not simply a matter of historical accuracy, it is much more a way of looking forward, of trying to insert him into our contemporary political and cultural discourse; and when you look at how powerful neo-liberalism still is, despite its great crisis of 2008, and when you see how disorientated much of the Left still seems to be – consider the political fate of Syriza in Greece, after all – then heaven knows, we need Morris and
his utopianism in refurbished form to keep us going.

Having reflected on the political and intellectual consequences of beginning to think seriously of Morris as a communist again, I want to end with some thoughts about the more local institutional consequences of doing so, about what it might mean for The William Morris Society itself. There are two dimensions to this issue, I think, one historical and one contemporary, with the former – the historical investigation – giving us our bearings for possible implications in the present. I would hope that many people here will have read Martin Crick’s splendid History of the William Morris Society, published for the Society’s fiftieth anniversary during 2005. In that very rich survey of so many aspects of the Society’s activities since 1955, there are a few key pages on – to use Crick’s own heading – ‘The William Morris Society and the Communist Party’. He argues that ‘[c]learly the initial impetus for the formation of a Morris Society had come from the CP and although this organised attempt did not bear fruit the key figures in the eventual establishment of the Society were Party members. Membership of the early committees was dominated by Communists or Communist sympathisers, most of whom knew each other. Members such as Barbara Morris, Godfrey Rubens and Ray Watkinson sold the Daily Worker together’.20

However, this powerful Communist presence in the early Society did not have the kind of political impact one might have expected; for as Crick notes just a few lines later: ‘there is nothing to suggest that there was an organised attempt to control the Society […]. It is noticeable that Morris’s political beliefs did not dominate the Society’s activities in its early years, and they were far from prominent in the pages of the Journal or the Newsletter. Those who tried to argue for the Society’s involvement in political issues were largely unsuccessful’.21 So one has to conclude, I think, either that these early Morrisian Communists were a half-hearted and disorganised bunch, unable to sustain what Lenin used to call the ‘iron discipline of the Party’ in their dealings with the Society, or – which seems to me rather more likely – that they had decided to ‘go easy’ on Morris’s Communism, and the political direction of the Society, in order to sustain good relations with its socialist or liberal members, and build it up in a more politically neutral manner; they would also, of course, necessarily have been unsettlingly caught up in the internal Party crisis after Nikita Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin in February 1956 and the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising later that year.

Another significant event for the fledgling Morris Society is noted by Martin Crick a page or two earlier in his History: ‘[i]n November 1958 the Inland Revenue agreed to recognise the Society as a charity, which allowed members to covenant their fees’.22 I am not an expert on the history of charity law, but I cannot imagine that an explicitly political, actively campaigning Communist William Morris Society would have
succeeded in gaining charitable status back then. So my hunch is that the Communist committee members, caught up anyway in a difficult Party crisis, were probably going easy on their politics in order at least in part to facilitate the application for charity status; and once you gain that status, with all its financial benefits, you are then bound by charity law with its legal restrictions on political activity, so the more liberal wing of the Society will then have a formidable weapon to invoke against you if you do try to assert your Communism more actively thereafter. What one might have thought was just a neutral financial matter or manoeuvre actually turns out to have a conservative political momentum of its own.

Now what I want to argue is that the early Communist figures in the Morris Society made a mistake in adopting this policy of – what shall we call it? – political neutrality and disarmament, or ‘abstention’ even, to borrow one of Morris’s own terms. In my view, they should have taken over the Society fully, and operated it under a guiding vision of Morris-as-Communist (which is not necessarily the same as operating it as a Communist Party cultural sub-group). That particular historical moment has long since gone, and the original British Communist party itself no longer exists. But charitable status, for all its undoubted financial benefits to the Morris Society over the decades, continues to hamper its political profile. When discussions about a new editor for the Journal were under way during 2015 I put forward a radical proposal for reforming the Journal, and I gather that one of the objections from the Morris Society Committee which eventually scuppered this plan was that we would no longer be meeting the educational purposes which our charitable status enjoined upon us.23 My own sense is that charity law basically rules out narrowly party-political activity, not political and campaigning activity as such (although this may be about to change).24 However, I would accept that there is probably little appetite among the existing membership and the officers of the Society for returning to what might have been briefly possible during the 1950s, i.e., a Communist Morris Society.

However, I do not think that those of us who believe 1. that Morris himself was a communist, and 2. that communism is a vitally important contemporary term and project can just remain content with the status quo. Therefore I would like to test the waters by making a proposal: that we launch a new Morris Society, or something very like it, which would be dedicated to these two propositions – Morris as Communist and a new Communism for the twenty-first century – and to exploring the relationship between them. And in making such a proposal I believe that I am operating in a very Morrisian spirit; after all, for him, too, when one organisation no longer works for your chosen purposes, you form a new one. When the Social-Democratic Federation under H.M. Hyndman ceased to be doing what Morris and his closest allies believed a party of the Left should be doing, they upped sticks and
left, forming the Socialist League at the end of 1884; and when some years later the League had been taken over by anarchists, then, once again, Morris decided that it was time to move on, and he set up the Hammersmith Socialist Society. I am not suggesting that we communist Morrisians necessarily have to leave the existing Society, but I definitely do believe that we need an additional network devoted to explicitly political concerns and activities.

So I propose that we explore the possibility of a new grouping to be called something like the William Morris Communism Network or perhaps the William Morris Communism Project. It might have a membership fee of its own, it would run a modest number of events both nationally and internationally, and it would perhaps start its own newsletter which might hopefully, in the fullness of time, metamorphose into a journal. And it would crucially not seek charity status, not ever. One starting point for these events might be a reinvention of that annual celebration of the Paris Commune which Morris and his comrades regularly attended year in year out through the 1880s; for a powerful historical and theoretical reflection on the Paris Commune would be an important learning experience for the various protest movements of today – and a stern reminder, like Chapter Seventeen of News from Nowhere, of just how savage ruling classes can be when they feel their dominance is genuinely challenged. Never mind Boris Johnson’s water cannon for London; in the case of the Paris Commune, we are talking about some 25,000 workers murdered in the streets of the city as reaction unleashed its full brutality.

So I rest my case, comrades. I hope that I have persuaded you that the term communism has largely vanished from Morris studies today, and that it needs to be brought back. This is because, firstly, as a matter of historical and philological accuracy, Morris was a Communist, although of a pre-Leninist variety, naturally. Secondly, it is because in thinking of him as a communist again we may be able to find fruitful ways to bring his artistic and political activity, and above all his utopian thinking, into relation to some of the most productive communist thinking of our own time – and if you are not a communist, then I believe, as Alain Badiou argues, that you always sooner or later make your peace with capitalism, in one complex form or another. And, thirdly, I suggest that in order to achieve this transformation in our sense of Morris and his current political value, we need a new vehicle for that vision. A moment was missed during the 1950s when we might have had a Communist Morris Society, albeit in a restricted, Leninist understanding of the term, but that should not constrain us now from exploring the possibility of creating a new group, an international William Morris Communism Network, to take forward the kind of vision and work I have been recommending to you here.
NOTES

1. This article was first delivered as a paper at The William Morris Society Symposium on William Morris in the Twenty-First Century, held in Birmingham on 5 September 2015. It has been slightly revised for publication, but it is worth noting that the political background to this event – not really registered in my text itself – was Jeremy Corbyn’s very lively and (as we could not know on the day itself) ultimately successful campaign for the leadership of the Labour Party. Given the topic of this paper, I dedicate it to the memory of my grandfather Henry Smith Pinkney (1894-1968), miner and Communist.

2. The website for the Keywords Project is available online: <http://keywords.pitt.edu/williams_keywords.html> (accessed 11 July 2017).


12. Ibid., p. 90.

13. Ibid., pp. 94, 103, 110.


16. Morris, News from Nowhere, p. 3.

17. Williams, Keywords, p. 74.


22. Ibid., p. 36.


24. One might, for example, look to the kinds of deeply political and campaigning activity undertaken by charitable organisations such as War on Want or Greenpeace.
On 15 November 1884 William Morris caught the morning express to Newcastle upon Tyne that would deliver him there by four o’clock. As he wrote in a previously unpublished letter (see Figure 1) to the local solicitor, Quaker and liberal, Robert Spence Watson (1837-1911):

Dear Sir,
I propose to take the morning express on Saturday, which reaches Newcastle at 4 pm. I have had a kind note from the Bewick Society inviting me to meet its members during my stay at Newcastle: although, as you know, I am coming here for political matters. I should not like to seem churlish to members of what may be called my own fraternity; but I did not like to make arrangements with them without referring to you, as you kindly offered to put me up. I must leave Newcastle on Monday to Edinburgh (where I am engaged to lecture) I suppose by the noon train.
I am, Dear Sir, Yours Faithfully,
William Morris.1

On this November Saturday, Morris was probably glad to leave behind 1884’s ‘unsually magnificent’ London Lord Mayor’s show and head north.2 According to his daughter May, Morris was usually attentive to the passing scenery when travelling and, she notes, ‘my father always had his eyes fixed at the window when journeying by train’.3 Judging from an earlier description of a stopping off point at Newcastle in 1871, he was unlikely to be enjoying the view:

North of Darlington the country gets hilly, and is soon full of character, with sharp valleys cleft by streams everywhere; but it is most haplessly blotched by
coal, which gets worse and worse as you get towards Newcastle, so wretched and dispirited that one wants to get out and back again. Newcastle itself has been a fine old town and beautifully situated, but it is now simply horrible: there is a huge waste of station there, quite worthy of it.4

John Dobson’s station remains today and was unlikely to have enamoured Morris in its classicism; the Victorian town itself was further disfigured by the alkali works and shipbuilding industries on the polluted River Tyne, alongside the slum dwellings of the working class. Morris seems to have rarely stopped long in the city, with his only other recorded stay appearing to have been in 1887 when he met the local Radical MP and publisher of the Newcastle Chronicle, Joseph Cowen, at the station again during a march in support of striking Northumberland miners.5 His most local connections were with the Howards, and he stayed at least once at the family home of Naworth Castle, forty-seven miles along the Tyne valley, and there is outstanding stained glass by Morris and Co. in Philip Webb’s nearby church at Brampton. Webb was also influential in securing the firm’s commission for Rounton Grange, built for Isaac Lowthian Bell in North Yorkshire, where Morris painted two room ceilings himself and which was the site of his famous outburst about ‘ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich’.6

However, it was Morris’s socialism that brought him to Newcastle (and Gateshead) in this bleak November, at the invitation of Spence Watson, with whom he was due to stay. He was to deliver his lecture, ‘Art and Labour’, to a large, mixed audience at the city’s Tyne Theatre, set on the edge of the working-class community of Newcastle’s West End that is, like Dobson’s station, a present-day survivor.

I. Tub-Thumping Victorians

Public speaking and the printed word were the main media of communication during the Victorian era, and leading politicians such as Gladstone and Disraeli set the benchmark for the former. Socialist activists had to be skilled in both and, whilst journalism may not have been a natural occupation for Morris, at least it could grow from his poetry and prose writing. However, speaking in public was clearly something that Morris did not take to naturally, with May Morris simply noting that ‘my father was not a born orator’.7 Nevertheless, given the significance of public speaking for the socialist movement of the time, and for the focus of this article on Morris’s appearance at the Tyne Theatre, it is worth pursuing this particular point a little further.

In an age of political rhetoric, Eduard Bernstein’s recollection of Morris remains apposite:
Figure 1: Unpublished letter from Morris to Robert Spence Watson, held by Robinson Library Special Collections, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, SW 1/12/35
not like to seem cross to members of what may be called my own fraternity; but I did not like to make any arrangements with them without referring to you, as you have so kindly offered to put me up. I must leave Newcastle on Monday for Edinburgh (when I am engaged to lecture) I suppose by the noon train.

Dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

William Morris
He could express his ideas in a very arresting manner, but this was speaking to a comparatively small circle in an unrestrained gossiping tone. Rhetoric was not natural to him; his whole nature was anti-rhetorical.\(^8\)

Good public speaking entails making a connection with your audience, and Morris did not find this easy. He was faced with a variety of audiences and a mixture of locations, from heckling street corner crowds to mass demonstrations in Hyde Park; from scattered audiences in club-rooms more interested in their drink to attentive workers in small socialist meetings, and from the literary and artistic middle class at Oxford to a mixed and unpredictable audience at a public lecture. Each audience naturally brought its own expectations of the public Morris that they knew.

There was also a difficulty for Morris in making a connection with his working-class audiences, given his own privileged background. Taylor, for example, is clear in discussing his East End of London meetings that Morris’s ‘wealthy middle class background’ meant that: ‘[i]t would be true to say he did not really understand the people he most wanted to reach’.\(^9\) Morris was aware of this lack of connection himself, and his social background, as well as his role as a businessman and relationships with wealthy clients, cannot be put to one side. However, his connections with the working class take him well beyond that of ordinary middle-class Victorians and their relationship with their working-class servants. Morris did not marry a conventional middle-class woman; he ran a workshop and then a factory that brought him into regular contact with his workers, along with workers at other factories producing his products. Most of all, his socialist activities brought him into regular and sometimes frequent contact both with working-class activists and leaders as well as those who just came to hear him speak. There can be little doubt that his understanding of the condition of the working class came, like that of Engels, from first-hand knowledge rather than the library.

Recollections and commentaries on Morris as a speaker commonly reflect May Morris’s view of his skills as an orator.\(^10\) This view was endorsed by John Bruce Glasier, when he recalled: ‘Morris is not what is called an orator or eloquent speaker. He was not reckoned among the front rank speakers of the movement’.\(^11\) Another obvious admirer was equally critical. Writing less than a month before his address at the Tyneside Theatre, Sophie Sharman recalled this earlier appearance:

> As a public speaker he does not do well, stammering and stumbling […]. On coming home after his lecture [Morris] asked me how he had done. I told him I was puzzled; something had gone wrong. He laughed and said: ‘I am trying to become popular’. But it would not do. The Oxford scholar, the purist in
English, could never learn the quick, nimble wit of the stump orator.\textsuperscript{12}

James Leatham, a printer and socialist activist also recalls:

Morris was not exactly popular as a public lecturer. He was too self-conscious and too susceptible to the influence of his surroundings to be that [.\.]. His method of handling a subject was that of the desk rather than that of the platform.\textsuperscript{13}

Leatham also records that Morris's one Aberdeen lecture was delivered from manuscript: ‘[h]e sometimes did that, although he was ready and hearty in extempore speech too’.\textsuperscript{14} Others, such as Glasier, also note how Morris might read from his notes: ‘[h]e read his lecture, or rather recited it, keeping his eye on the written page, which he turned over without concealment’.\textsuperscript{15}

Nevertheless, it is clear that Morris himself took his speaking duties seriously as May Morris suggests in quoting her father about his first lecture:

I went with Wardle to the place [I was to speak] and read Robinson Crusoe to him to see if I could make myself heard; which I found easy to be done: yet I can’t help feeling a little nervous at having to face my fellow beings in public.\textsuperscript{16}

She added:

It is not the least significant trait that when the public expression of his thoughts was demanded of him, he should doggedly teach himself to speak, somewhat against the grain.\textsuperscript{17}

By contrast, Tony Pinkney’s detailed account of a meeting in Oxford shows Morris giving his lecture ‘without book’, amid ‘great uproar’ and heckling, but accounting for himself well with ‘quick retorts’ to his audience.\textsuperscript{18}

Both Morris’s class relationship with many of his audiences and his reluctance as a public speaker, did, on his own admission, detract from his ability to communicate as a public speaker. He clearly regularly relied on delivering his more formal public lectures from carefully prepared notes, and was a little uneasy with a working-class audience. However, there is an obvious need to counterbalance this account with what is also clear: that Morris was interested in the content of his speeches as much as in their saying, and he will certainly have delivered that content with commitment,
enthusiasm and ‘the impress of sincerity’. A speaker with such a passion is as likely, or probably more likely, to carry his audience as one with a flair for empty rhetoric. This appears to have been just the case at the Tyne Theatre as we will see below.

II. The Message not the Messenger

So what was the message that Morris was planning to deliver to Tynesiders? Morris says of his audience, in a letter presumed to be to May, that ‘I am afraid they might be rather astonished though ’tis one of my mildest’. There would have been, perhaps, less astonishment among the socialists in the audience for, by now, the lecture’s title and content had become a familiar theme in Morris’s writing and speaking. Morris’s particular interpretation of socialism has long been discussed, and is not the central focus here, but it is clear that the nature of work and the conditions of its expression in a capitalist and post-capitalist society are at the heart of Morris’s analysis and argument. It is not surprising, therefore, to find it central to a speaking tour.

Morris first delivered ‘Art and Labour’ on 1 April 1884, and the Tyne Theatre presentation was its sixth appearance. He was delivering ‘Useful Work versus Useless Toil’ at the same time, and had written ‘Work in a Factory as it might be’ for the May and June editions of Justice during the same year. He was clearly addressing a theme that was important to him, both as a socialist and as a practical man who was able to enjoy the work he did in a way that was beyond the exploitative conditions imposed on the working class. It was also the early days of the socialist movement. Morris was less comfortable with Marxist economics, and no doubt felt the importance of stressing the relationship he saw between ‘art’ and labour.

As to the ‘mildness’ of the lecture there has been some discussion as two versions exist alongside that which later appeared as an essay. Alan Bacon’s detailed analysis argues for a much more ‘revolutionary’ content reworked for a more working-class Glasgow audience in contrast to Morris’s first delivery to the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society. The date of the Newcastle lecture falls between both, but is only a month before the Glasgow meeting in December 1884, and shortly before he left the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). Bacon is surely right to suggest that Morris accounted for his audience in more than polite passing references to the locality of the speech but it is impossible to guess the exact delivery in Newcastle. What is clear is that the substantive content remains the same if not the exact language, and I use the version finally published in Eugene LeMire’s The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris (1969).

We can see that his audience was treated to a lengthy disquisition on the historical development of working lives beginning with the Greeks, continuing through slavery, serfdom and the Middle Ages, and on through the centuries before ending with a
discussion on the ‘present and the future’. It is here that his audience might have found him more provocative and less ‘mild’ as he takes on the exploitation of workers and their lack of any pleasure in their work under capitalism. The answer to this exploitation is not simply a redistribution of rewards from profit to wages which would leave the worker ‘to live all his days in a toiling hell’. Rather, the solution under socialism is threefold for the worker: ‘to live in a pleasant house and a pleasant place’; to be ‘educated according to their capacity’, and to have ‘due leisure’. He adds: ‘no useless work being done and all irksome labour saved as much as possible by machines’.

Morris’s socialist message could be delivered directly to his working class listeners and with resonance to the already committed socialists, but he also addressed the middle class in his mixed audience. They would have to make a choice in the class struggle:

To join the camp of the masters is to brand yourself as an oppressor and a thief [alternatively,] when you know what socialism is, and what it asks of you […] throw in your lot with the workers at every stage of the struggle.

The message was clear but who exactly was Morris addressing, and what had brought him to Tyneside at this early stage of his socialist activity?

III. Preaching to the Unconverted

In 1884, Morris was a member of the SDF. He was writing for *Justice* as well as speaking around the country to a range of audiences both to engage with the unconverted, and to build a socialist organisation. He delivered ‘Art and Labour’ six times before his arrival in Newcastle, on two occasions to SDF meetings but on the other four to the more mixed audiences that might have been generated by, for example, the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society (1 April 1884). In Newcastle the lecture was delivered under the auspices of the Tyneside Sunday Lecture Society (see Figure 2).

LeMire has the meeting sponsored by the Newcastle SDF branch although it was clearly delivered to a much more mixed audience. The Sunday Lecture Society had been founded in the year before Morris's contribution, and was one of a number across the country. It delivered an eclectic range of lectures as can be seen from that preceding Morris’s: E. S. Beesly on ‘Empire and Patriotism in Ancient and Modern Times’, and that which followed: W. B. Carpenter on ‘The Gulf Stream: What It Does and What It Does Not’. The Society had a varied list of speakers over its existence such as Oscar Wilde (but speaking on dress not socialism), Sergius Stepniak
Figure 2: Programme handbill of the Tyneside Sunday Lecture Society showing Morris’s talk on ‘Art and Labour’; ephemera of the Tyneside Sunday Lecture Society held by Newcastle upon Tyne City Library
on Russian democracy and Peter Kropotkin. Annie Besant and Mrs Sidney Webb (as she was described) were two rare women speakers on socialism and the trade unions respectively. Whilst these contributors over the years might have had more in common with Morris, the Society’s overall thrust was more in line with the Victorian attitudes towards ‘improving’ education and broadening knowledge.\(^{30}\)

This variety indicates a much more mixed audience than a solely SDF-sponsored event would have provided Morris. The Sunday Lecture Society also sought to encourage subscriptions to the whole set of lectures so at least a part of the audience would have been attending whoever the speaker was. Any description of the audience can only be speculation at this historical distance but it is likely that men will have predominated over women, and that the middle class, who could afford the sixpence admission, might well have filled more seats than the workers to whom Morris was reaching out. Nevertheless, there will certainly have been enough skilled workers and union members from the local pits, shipyards and Armstrong’s engineering factories to have made their presence felt.

The Sunday Society report for the period covering his lecture records an average attendance of 1,523.\(^{31}\) In a letter to May, Morris records ‘I am likely to have a big meeting tonight’.\(^{32}\) Afterwards, in a letter to John Mahon, he concludes: ‘I think Scheu was well pleased with the meeting on Monday in Newcastle: I had a very large audience; some 3000’, a figure double the average audience.\(^{33}\) Even allowing for some optimistic exaggeration (and the venue’s capacity), the Tyne Theatre would have been packed. The local press was more appreciative than they were of Kropotkin. *The Newcastle Daily Chronicle* – a supporter of liberal causes – devoted five column inches to a report:

> The title gives little idea of the vigorous and brilliant disquisition to which the audience was treated […] as his powerful pleading fell on the ears of his large and deeply interested audience, it recalled the gorgeous vision of Sir Thomas More’s Utopia […]. It is rarely that so much matter is compressed into a popular discourse. There was literally no padding.\(^{34}\)

While Morris’s audience might have the price of a seat to hear him, his ‘utopia’ was far distant from the suffering of Newcastle’s working class. This was recorded in the same newspaper with reports of ‘local distress’ and donations to the unemployed, such as ‘a large tin of soup […] half a sheep (second instalment) […] a parcel of groceries and a parcel of clothing’. An alternative Sunday entertainment to Morris in nearby Blyth was the ‘Tomahawk Minstrel Group’, also raising money for impoverished miners.
IV. Breakfast at Bensham

Before the meeting Morris had stayed at Spence Watson’s home in Bensham Grove in Gateshead, across the Tyne river from the theatre. Norman Kelvin refers to Spence Watson as a member of the SDF, although this seems most unlikely as he was a Liberal supporter and a Quaker. He chaired the meeting, and was clearly instrumental in bringing Morris to the Tyne Theatre as an active member of the Sunday Lecture Society.

More significantly in relation to the lecture, Spence Watson’s biographer, his nephew, Percy Corder, describes Morris’s stay at Bensham Grove in a rarely quoted piece which is worth recording in full. Corder describes a discussion ‘one Sunday evening’ at his uncle’s house between Morris, Canon Moore Ede and Dean Kitchen. He describes the Canon as ‘well versed in ideas of social reform and in the conditions of the workers’ life’. He goes on:

If the Sunday evening conversation was spirited, still more so was that which reigned at breakfast the following morning when William Morris found himself fairly matched in controversy by Elijah Copland, the local leader of the Democratic Federation. Both men held advanced views on the all-engrossing question of the best form of government of the State, but they differed widely as to the means to be employed to bring about a change. Morris ‘so attractive, so fiery, so unpractical’, as Spence Watson wrote, a pronounced Socialist out for social revolution, with a lack of system to back his theories, Copland a working wood-carver, ready and willing to work towards social reform, using every existing form of popular government which lay ready to his hand. As the argument developed Spence Watson sat as umpire, with Morris on his left hand, pacing up and down the dining room, looking for all the world like some Norse rover tanned with ‘the freshness of the open sea’ declaiming ‘it’s a Revolution we must have, a bloody revolution if need be’; whilst on the right sat the calm and collected little wood-carver, quietly rejoining in the intervals of the storm: ‘Yes, but it’s a moral revolution we want’.

The dining room of Morris’s pacing is currently owned by the local authority, and is now the location of a set of The Firm’s window glass as well as, appropriately, the home of various craft classes.

V. Conclusion

The early years of Morris’s socialist engagement were both a major commitment to
spreading ‘the cause’ and, consequently, a severe imposition on his personal life. Morris’s arrival in Newcastle was just one of many visits to the industrial towns of the North and Scotland where he was working to build the SDF, and then the Socialist League. His public profile for his poetry and design work made him an attractive speaker for both socialist activists and an ‘interested’ middle class alike. In responding to these demands, Morris set out on activities which were clearly, in May’s words, ‘against the grain’, and ultimately damaging to his health.

His visit to the Tyne Theatre is just one typical example of the demands made on him by these competing audiences (not to forget the Bewick Society). He matched these demands in his own way and, whilst not being the great orator to inspire, for example, a massed audience of striking trade unionists, his impact may have been just as great and longer lived. For socialists at the end of the nineteenth century, and now into the twenty-first, Morris remains an inspiration, and who knows who left the Tyne Theatre lecture to go on to make their own contributions to ‘the cause’?

NOTES
1. Morris to Spence Watson. Letter held by Robinson Library Special Collections, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, SW 1/12/35.
2. The Spectator, 15 November 1884, p. 2. Morris does, in fact, write about the show in Justice, 15 November 1882, p. 2. Not begrudging anybody their enjoyment of the Show he uses it as a vehicle to discuss John Ball and the Peasants’ Revolt.
10. See note 7, above.
11. J. Bruce Glasier, William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1921), p. 153. (Afterwards Glasier). Glasier’s reflections on Morris have been treated as unreliable given that they were written some time after the events, and at a time of illness, but it is unlikely that such overall impressions as this are misleading.
17. Ibid., p. 449.
19. Quoted from the Oxford Review. Ibid., p. 93.
21. See my argument in John Stirling, ‘William Morris and Work as it is and it might be’, Capital & Class, 76 (Spring 2002), 127-45, amongst a host of more distinguished commentators.
24. This section comprises around three quarters of the lecture.
25. LeMire, p. 113.
26. Ibid., pp. 113-14.
27. Ibid., p. 116.
28. Ibid., p. 118. The accusation of thievery was turned against Morris by the local press on a later visit to Tyneside. See Stirling, ‘Striking Miners’., p. 109.
29. Ephemera of the Tyneside Sunday Lecture Society held by Newcastle upon Tyne city libraries. The handwritten amendment is in the original.
30. For a full list see: E. Anderson, ed., Record of the Tyneside Sunday Lecture Society from its Commencement (Newcastle upon Tyne: Andrew Reid, 1907).
31. Ibid., p. 18.
33. Ibid., p. 338. Morris must have simply misremembered Monday for Sunday.
37. Ibid., p. 54.

William Morris greatly admired Middle Eastern textiles, but, within the context of his own manufacture, this book appears to have limited relevance based as it is on one specific group of textiles brought together many years after his death. The ‘Al Lulwa’ collection of textiles includes items from the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East, North Africa, Iran and India, and was started just over thirty years ago by Altaf S. Al Sabah. The name Al Lulwa (which means ‘pearl’ in Arabic) was the name of the founder’s grandmother to whom the collection is dedicated. Although including a few early examples, most of the collection is of comparative late date, largely comprising examples produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Despite this, the book has far more interest to followers of Morris’s work than is initially apparent. The text provides an authoritative survey of the history, traditions and techniques of Arabian and Islamic textiles, one of the main sources of inspiration for nineteenth-century British artists, designers and manufacturers, not just for their...
work but as decoration for their own ‘exotic’ interiors and occasionally for dressing up when attending fashionable themed parties. A Julia Margaret Cameron photograph of Holman Hunt, whose collection of Palestinian clothing is now in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, shows him posed in a very fetching silk kaftan, sash and skullcap. Apart from Hunt, G. F. Lewis and other artists whose work goes under the ambiguous title of ‘Orientalism’, others took a more academic interest in the textiles, with William Morris becoming one of the most knowledgeable experts in the field. He analysed why the patterns work so well, and recommended in many of his lectures that the tried and tested traditions of ancient production provided an important model for contemporary design. Furthermore, throughout the 1870s and 1880s Morris advised the South Kensington Museum (the present day Victoria and Albert Museum) on purchases, and was responsible for the museum’s acquisition of some of the finest early examples of Persian and Turkish carpets and woven silks.

The two contributors to this book are both acknowledged specialists in this field. The Introduction, which provides a short but precise history of Arab and Islamic textile manufacture, is written by Jennifer Scarce, previously Principal Curator of Middle Eastern Culture at the National Museum of Scotland, and an expert on Middle Eastern culture. Jennifer Wearden, retired Senior Curator of the V&A’s exceptional collections of Near Eastern textiles and carpets, has written the detailed catalogue entries for each of the seventy items she selected from the collection.

The collection includes textiles from a wide geographical area but each depicts what the authors claim is ‘a shared vocabulary of ornament’, and design is the overarching theme of the book. Traditional motifs and patterns can be seen throughout the various branches of the arts of the Middle East, whether calligraphy, architecture, painting, glass, ceramics, carpets or woven and embroidered textiles. Owen Jones in his groundbreaking design manual *A Grammar of Ornament*, published in 1856, separated these into four distinct groups: Turkish, Persian, Arabian and Moresque. All of these types are recognisable in the textiles of the ‘Al Lulwa’ collection. However, it is interesting to see how diluted many of the original forms and pattern structures became in order to appeal to western tastes during a period of mass tourism during the second half of the nineteenth century. Ironically, at the same time, British manufacturers were adopting traditional Middle Eastern patterns for the British market. The most western-looking example featured in the book is a late-nineteenth-century Ottoman bedcover sparsely embroidered in metal thread over a delicately-shaded pink weighted silk (a form of treated silk favoured by western dressmakers as it gave weight and lustre to the cloth). Decorated with ears of wheat, swags and bows in the French style, it would have graced many a lady’s boudoir. It was almost certainly produced in one of the hundreds of professional workshops set
up in Istanbul, and chiefly patronised by European exporters.

Liberty is now credited as the main British retailer of such goods, whereas it was once just one of many businesses listed in London street directories as ‘Oriental Warehouses’. Far more important in influencing the market were George Baker and three of his sons. By the early 1860s, within fifteen years of moving to Constantinople to become head gardener at the British Embassy, Baker took advantage of the widening of trade with the west by becoming an importer of a wide range of items such as bedsteads and pianos, as well as military waterproofs and galoshes. He also exported textiles such as Persian vestings, Turkish towels and Broussa velvets for sale in British shops. By the late 1870s three of his five sons had begun travelling around the Middle East commissioning textiles and carpets for export to London. Eventually, they settled in England, although they continued their trade importing carpets, their main outlet being the Oriental Carpet Manufacturers, an association of carpet dealers. Two of them founded the firm of G.P. & J. Baker, which survives to this day. Although this company produced British furnishing textiles many of their early patterns are heavily influenced by the patterns of the countries with which they had originally traded.

The book is divided into chapters according to pattern type: Floral, Geometric, Calligraphic (which includes most of the earliest and finest examples surviving in the collection), with a final section devoted to applied decoration. Pleasingly this includes twentieth-century ceremonial clothing from specific tribal areas of Yemen, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. From this we are able to identify a number of fascinating types of garment such as a Tegeira (a Tunisian headpiece), a Thobe (a long, flowing woman’s net garment from the Arabian Peninsula) and a Havlu (a type of Turkish towel which, having fascinated Europeans since the seventh century, experienced a revival in production during 1851 when exhibited at the Great Exhibition).

The book is visually stunning. Textile photography is a specialist art, and it is a pity that the publisher has not given Stephanie McGehee greater acknowledgement for her work. Each textile or item of dress illustrated has a double page spread with some enlarged images included to show specific techniques or details highlighted in the adjoining text. The captions are both instructive and interesting, a balance not always achieved in such a serious monograph. Included is a useful glossary of textile and embroidery terms but no bibliography. As someone whose interest in the subject is coloured by its relationship to contemporary British production this is all for which I have could asked.

Linda Parry

In her previous book, *Architecture and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Boston: Harvard’s H. Langford Warren* (1993), Maureen Meister provided a detailed and illuminating account of one significant figure. In this book she has expanded her range, and, as her publishers fairly claim on the cover, has produced ‘the first full-scale examination of the architecture associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement that spread throughout New England at the turn of the twentieth century’. With the support of the University of New England Press, she has done this with impressive authority and in a very attractive visual form.

The book starts with a brief Preface, and an Introduction entitled ‘Grappling with Modernity’, followed by seven substantial chapters. In the space of this review it will not be possible to discuss every chapter in detail, and so I will begin by looking carefully at two chapters that establish the author’s concerns and subject-matter. The first, ‘Dramatis Personae: Twelve Architect-Leaders’, gives an introductory account of the eleven men and one woman who formed the backbone of the movement in Boston, emphasising the importance of what Meister calls its ‘Architect-Leaders’. On the political side, Meister remarks that ‘American labourers never saw a counterpart to William Morris to champion their cause’ (p. 4), since socialism made little progress in the United States; but the moderate Progressive Movement developed rapidly during the 1890s, aiming to bring about social progress through governmental intervention. While some intellectuals like Henry Adams argued that industrial society was innately soulless, the Progressive Era was confidently optimistic about the future. A highly significant event, during the spring of 1897, was an exhibition of the Arts and Crafts organised by the craftsman printer Henry Lewis Johnson. When the prospectus for the exhibition was circulated, it attracted thirty-seven supporting signatures, of which nine were those of architects, while another exhibition, on architecture, was arranged at the same time. We are shown that this was ‘made possible by the widespread interest in Arts and Crafts ideas that had taken hold in Boston by the later 1890s’ (p. 11). The Harvard lecturer Charles Eliot Norton and the distinguished architect Henry Hobson Richardson were among those helping the spread of the new outlook. Thus it was that the exhibition opened in Boston rather than in New York.

Meister provides full accounts of the twelve leaders of the movement, showing them all to have been people of energy and idealism. The best known to me were Ralph Adams Cram, Charles Donagh Maginnis (who worked mostly for Roman
Catholic clients) and Richard Clighton Sturgis, but we are shown that all twelve, including the remarkable woman Lois Lilley Howe, made substantial contributions. In her discussion of George Edward Barton, Meister reveals that while in England Barton became friendly with Sydney Cockerell, and on returning to America helped to put Boston Public Library in touch with him. After Morris's death, Cockerell acted as an agent for the library, purchasing for it several medieval manuscripts, two of which had belonged to Morris (p. 17). The second chapter, 'Arts and Crafts Advocates, Arts and Crafts Architects', gives a succinct account of the development of the movement in Britain, paying due respect to Ruskin and Morris, and drawing attention to buildings by Pugin, Webb, Butterfield, Norman Shaw, Bodley, Lethaby and Voysey. We then hear of the movement's crossing the Atlantic, and attention is drawn to buildings by Bryant and Gilman, Peter Bonnet Wight, H.H. Richardson, Gustav Stickley, Frank Lloyd Wright, Greene & Greene and Irving Gill, whose 1914-16 Dodge House in West Hollywood, with its emphatic 'simplicity' of style, seems in the illustration to bring us surprisingly near to Modernism (pp. 62-63).

The third chapter, with the inelegant title 'An Intellectual Stew: Emerson, Norton, Brandeis', considers three of the principal intellectual influences on the movement. The transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82) was of an older generation, but his ideas continued to be respected, and the editors of the Arts and Crafts magazine *Handicraft* several times quoted his views as authoritative in the early twentieth century. One from his essay 'Art' offers a succinct version of an idea we would associate with Ruskin and Morris: '[b]eauty must come back to the useful arts, and the distinction between the fine and the useful arts be forgotten' (p. 67). But Emerson was far more optimistic than they were about contemporary civilisation, asking the question in his 'Progress of Culture': '[w]ho does not prefer the age of steel, of gold, of coal, petroleum, cotton, steam, electricity, and the spectroscope? All this activity has added to the value of life, and to the scope of the intellect' (p. 71). This confident American spirit evidently appealed to the editors of *Handicraft*, as did his suggestion that those living in New England should build from 'the climate, the soil, the length of the day, the wants of the people' (p. 69).

The second figure considered is Charles Eliot Norton, the educationalist and correspondent of Ruskin and Morris. His recorded remarks about Morris will interest readers. In an 1868 letter to Ruskin, he called Morris a 'man of practical affairs, with the fine perceptions and quick fancy of the poet [...] so little of a prig'. But writing in 1899, after Morris's death, Norton was more critical, remarking – not unreasonably – that Morris was a man of Northern Europe, who failed to appreciate 'all Italy affords' (p. 75). Norton, a Dante scholar and enthusiast for Italian architecture, called on Boston architects to take inspiration from the Renaissance (*ibid.*). One learns that
by 1898 Norton had refined his idea of simplicity in a way that led him to criticise the books produced by Morris at the Kelmscott Press, for what Meister calls ‘their heavy, dark typeface and borders based on medieval manuscripts’. Far preferable were the books of fifteenth-century Venice, described by Norton as ‘simple, easy to read, and adorned with initial letters elegant in design’. Apparently the printer Daniel Berkeley Updike, with whom Norton co-operated, unsuccessfully, in trying to persuade Harvard to establish a university press, had adopted a lighter typographical manner, which appealed to Norton (p. 82).

The range of Meister’s thinking is shown in her choice of the third important figure, the corporate lawyer and prominent citizen of Boston, Louis Dembitz Brandeis. Brandeis was a practical man, deeply committed to the Law School at Harvard, who assisted the Boston Society of Architects when it needed legal advice. He supported many good causes, particularly in the educational sphere, and was appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States in 1916. In this context, Meister remarks that ‘Boston’s professionals’, like Brandeis, were concerned for the workers, but that ‘their sympathies were tempered by their inclinations as businessmen’. In 1903 the matter came to a head when Arthur Astor Carey, the second president of the Society of Arts and Crafts, attempted to get the Society to take a Morrisian position, but was thwarted, and resigned; his successor, Warren, believed that the strength of the Society lay in ‘keeping those questions entirely out of our midst’ and concentrating on the training of craftsmen (pp. 89-90).

The later chapters are organised chronologically, and offer a detailed account of the events of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Under the heading ‘An Arts and Crafts Movement Emerges in New England’ we are told, about Richardson’s friendship with Morris, that he ‘decorated his office with Morris textiles and promoted the use of Morris’s fabrics and wallpapers in many of his projects’, while in 1882 Catharine Lorillard Wolfe commissioned Peabody and Stearns to build her huge Newport seaside ‘cottage’, Vinland, with its decoration including stained-glass windows by Burne-Jones and Walter Crane: ‘Vinland’s decoration was widely publicised and presented compelling possibilities for the Arts and Crafts movement in New England’ (p. 99). We also learn that in his lectures at Harvard, H. Langford Warren referred his students to the windows by Morris and Burne-Jones installed in 1882 in Boston’s Trinity Church. The next two chapters, ‘Looking Backward: From Romanesque to Gothic Revival’ and ‘Looking Backward: Colonial Revival as Arts and Crafts’, survey the historical traditions which inspired the movement. The latter includes a section on ‘Preserving Architectural Monuments’, which draws attention to the devotion of the movement to ‘the cause of preservation’ (p. 177); reference is made to C.R. Ashbee, who had visited America in 1900 to draw attention to the
National Trust, founded in Britain in 1895, but, surprisingly, not to the SPAB. SPAB is mentioned favourably elsewhere, in relation to Morris (p. 41), to the Boston Society of Architects (p. 113), and to its ‘galvanizing’ influence in the Boston area from the 1880s (p. 170). The ‘Looking Backwards’ that appears in these chapter titles does not refer to Edward Bellamy’s 1888 book of that name that so exasperated Morris.

In the substantial Chapter Seven, ‘Looking Forward: Building for the Twentieth Century’, Meister draws attention to the achievement of the movement in the first part of the twentieth century, bringing out the contrast between Boston, consolidating its claims to be the intellectual capital of the country, with those of New York to be its commercial capital, and the effects of this contrast on architecture. She argues that, while the work of the Arts and Crafts architects differed markedly from that of the Prairie School architects like Frank Lloyd Wright, and the Californians like the Greene brothers and Irving Gill, they shared a desire for simplicity; in ‘reducing their designs to fundamental shapes’ (p. 189) – though to term this ‘A Reductive Approach’ seems to me too negative. Attention is drawn to the flourishing of the Shingle Style in New England during the 1880s, and to the fact that the architects, while committed to quality craftsmanship, were happy to employ new building materials like stucco, concrete and steel (p. 193). Meister produces examples of varied work using all these materials, including the cast stone produced by the Economy Manufacturing Company of New Haven, Connecticut. In the section ‘Modern Demands, Modern Solutions’, we are made aware of the architects’ concern to respond to modern needs, including those of churches now needing uninterrupted views of both altar and pulpit (p. 199). As far as housing was concerned, practicality was valued; Lois Lilley Howe is mentioned here as being particularly concerned about kitchens and pantries. At the same time, town halls and public schools proliferated, while several new building types emerged in the new century: apartments, private clubs for both men and women, garages, subways, gymasia, public libraries, hospitals and veterinary buildings, bathhouses and social centres for the urban poor, wartime housing for workers and, at the other end of the social scale, places where altruistic individuals could meet and plan their philanthropic activities. The method was reform through legal processes, with cases argued in the courts over such issues as the height of city buildings. Meister concludes positively that ‘[w]ith an Arts and Crafts orientation, infused by the spirit of Progressive Era New England, the architects were crusaders’ (p. 220).

The book ends with a short ‘Epilogue: Confronting Modernism’. Meister tells us that she finds it difficult to establish an accurate measure of the architects’ influence in New England, but is certain that it was pervasive and extended beyond the state. By the late 1920s the impact of Modernism had become increasingly felt. In 1929
Ralph Adams Cram wrote an article for *House Beautiful* entitled ‘Will This Modernism Last?’ in which he drew attention to what he saw as the distortions and artificiality of Modernism, though finding some positive qualities in it. In his autobiography in 1936 he devoted a chapter to the topic, taking exception to the ‘horrid forms’ he found in it, and particularly criticising the apartment houses of Le Corbusier (p. 223). The situation was such that in the autumn of 1930 the Boston Society of Architects organised a conference on ‘The Influence of Modern Architecture on the Position of the Historic Craftsman’, at which several of the older architects defended the Arts and Crafts tradition, but others declared it to be no longer relevant. By the 1940s only Howe, Maginnis, Putnam and Sturgis were alive to see the triumph of the International Style. In 1945 Maginnis – whose 1920 house at Brookline, Massachusetts, appears attractively both as Plate 8 and on the book’s cover – spoke out against the lack of beauty in modernist architecture, while in 1950 and 1951 Sturgis wrote letters condemning the new buildings at Harvard, including Gropius’s Graduate Centre. By this time the movement was over, but its accomplishment had been remarkable. Meister concludes her book with an enthusiastic account and full-page illustration of the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts, 1909-12 by R. Clipston Sturgis, aptly chosen to represent the best qualities of the architecture she has been discussing: ‘[s]imple and sincere: the buildings at the Perkins School assert the optimism of the Arts and Crafts architects, their craftsmen collaborators, and their fellow advocates who lived and labored in New England in the Progressive Era’ (p. 229). The building is also shown as one of the Colour Plates (Plate 5), where we also see vivid evidence of the high quality of the craftsmanship of the stained-glass artists Charles Cormick, Donald MacDonald and Harry Goodhue, the wood carving of Johannes Kirchmayer and Hugh Cairns, and the ironwork of Samuel Yellin.

In her Preface, Meister shows the breadth of her interests, when she mentions that she has long been ‘awed by New England’s factories and their histories’. These buildings, ‘places of misery’, represent one of the ‘many topics I have not pursued in providing a context for this study’ (p. xiii). One wonders what area Meister may now be investigating, confident, in the light of the book reviewed here, that whatever it may be, it will be thoroughly and intelligently explored.

Peter Faulkner

Kropotkin was born a Russian prince, but in 1871, not yet thirty, he broke with the established order and joined the revolutionary movement. By that time service in the Tsarist army and ensuing exploratory journeys in Siberia had led to his becoming a geographical thinker with an international reputation for hypotheses concerning Asian glaciation, desiccation and orography. His gravestone in Moscow’s Novodevichiy cemetery, making no mention of his politics, describes him solely as a ‘Distinguished Scientific Traveller’.

Kropotkin’s membership of the Tchaikovsky Circle resulted in imprisonment in the Peter and Paul Fortress, followed by escape from a lesser St Petersburg prison in 1876 to Western Europe. Already a confirmed anarchist he spent a decade as an agitator in Switzerland and France, yet after release from a lengthy French sentence he sought sanctuary in liberal Britain, where he remained until his return to Russia on the outbreak of the February Revolution.

It was Switzerland which launched his voluminous political journalism and his first book, assembled in 1885 during his French imprisonment by a fellow anarchist geographer Elisée Reclus, was actually a selection of articles written for *Le Révolté* of Geneva. *Paroles d’un Révolté* was, remarkably, not translated into English until as recently as 1992, and one of the many revelations of Ruth Kinna’s study is the quality of these early anarchist articles from which she quotes extensively.

In Britain, living in or around London – Harrow, Acton, Bromley, Brighton – Kropotkin conducted a dual career for forty years as an anarchist, participating in the founding of the long-running monthly *Freedom* on his arrival in 1886, and as a man of science. He continued to write profusely for the press of the international anarchist movement: as the principal exponent of anarchist communism, it was a politics associated with his name which supplanted both the mutualism of Proudhon and the French trade-union movement and the collectivism of Bakunin and the First International federalists. By the turn of the century, though, anarchist communism was being pushed aside with the emergence of syndicalism in France.

Alongside his agitational journalism and many pamphlets, Kropotkin wrote books admired outside the anarchist world. In his great *Mutual Aid* of 1902 he expanded Darwinian theory – contra Thomas Henry Huxley and Herbert Spencer – to demonstrate that the struggle for survival did not take place so much within species as between species. Those species which exhibited the most cooperation and mutual aid were the most successful, and the same, he showed, applied equally to human groups and societies.
Rejecting the division of labour, he was a forceful advocate of integral economics: the combination of manual and mental labour – which he practised in his own life as not only a writer and thinker but a carpenter and gardener – and, while not eschewing trade, regional self-sufficiency. He argued that the agglomeration of small units of production in ever larger factories co-existed with the continuance of workshops, which he presciently anticipated would flourish with displacement of steam-power by electricity. This early vision of ‘small is beautiful’ was completed by his conviction that market gardens were fundamental to agricultural productivity. These are the themes of *Fields, Factories and Workshops* (1898), another major work.

The interest in Kropotkin’s life and originality of his thought are obvious, and it is baffling that so little has been written about him. Perhaps what daunts is his prodigious polymathy, ranging across politics, philosophy, geography, biology, zoology, history and literature. There are only two fully researched biographies: George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince* (1950), and Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin* (1976). It is an oddity of Kinna’s book that, although she very frequently cites *The Anarchist Prince* in the notes, usually it is Woodcock alone she mentions in the text. This is unfair. Avakumović was certainly the junior partner, fourteen years younger than Woodcock – the two men had met in the bookshop of Freedom Press – but as a Serbian émigré it was he who was the reader of Russian and, studying at Rugby School and the Universities of Cambridge, London and Oxford, the trained historian. He was later to collaborate again with Woodcock on *The Doukhobors*, but became a respected academic at the University of British Columbia, producing single-authored histories of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and both Canadian communism and Canadian socialism. He died as recently as 2013.

Morris and Kropotkin admired and liked one another and their families were on visiting terms. Kinna probably goes too far in describing Morris as ‘anarchist-friendly’ (p. 128) since the anarchists of the Socialist League caused him much grievance, and – despite the proximity of his anti-parliamentary, libertarian socialism to anarchism – he was never any anarchist. Kinna’s first book was the fine *William Morris: The Art of Socialism*, and she is of course a member of the advisory board of this *Journal*; yet there are no more than half-a-dozen references, all slight, to Morris in her *Kropotkin*, and it is definitely not for those readers only interested in Morris.

The competition is admittedly limited, but Kinna’s new book is one of the best things written about Kropotkin, based on a deeply impressive mastery of the full range of his œuvre, including numerous articles as well as manuscript sources in English and French (although not Russian). I regret that she has confined this within a straitjacket of academicism, aiming to refute his appropriation by ‘classical anarchism’, ‘new anarchism’ (of the 1960s) and the murky theorising of the
pretentious ‘post-anarchism’ (which is still anarchist in spite of its self-description). She quotes Kropotkin’s approbation of Bakunin because his work contained ‘for the thinking reader, more political thought, and more philosophical comprehension of history, than heaps of university and state socialist treatises, in which the absence of deep thought is concealed under foggy dialectics’ (p. 109). It is regrettable that she did not apply this insight to her own work.

These reservations apply principally to the introductory Part 1. The excellent Part 2, ‘Coming Out of Russia’, explores Kropotkin’s Russian origins by examining first his intellectual formation by Populism (which she resolutely names ‘nihilism’ throughout) and then the centrality to his thinking of his conception of and work within the discipline of geography. This latter seems an obvious approach yet has been neglected by previous writers. He knew and got on well with Oxford’s influential Halford Mackinder, but whereas Mackinder’s geography was statist and nationalistic – a geography attuned to the New Imperialism of the 1880s and 1890s – Kropotkin approached the issues quite differently. The premise of his ‘anti-statecraft’, Kinna explains, was that ‘the tendency towards the development of large political units was detrimental to human well-being […]’. He outlined a history of domination that, by means of conquest, targeted assassination and trickery […] drew groups of people into the orbit of controlling factions’ (p. 93).

The concluding Part 3, ‘Revolution and Evolution’, stitches in the French Revolution (of which Kropotkin wrote a history), utopian thinking, anarchist communism, Darwinism, anarchist ethics, syndicalism and finally World War One. In 1914 anarchists were astonished when Kropotkin came out in support of the Entente powers, Britain, France and Russia, in opposition to Germany and Austria-Hungary. In tracing the long-standing causes of this apparently paradoxical stance, Kinna is less original than she seems to think – Woodcock and Avakumović also provide a subtle treatment – but is indubitably stimulating and learned. Kropotkin esteemed the legacy of ‘the Great French Revolution’, as he called it, and had come to believe that the Third Republic (despite its imprisonment of him in 1883) was an exceptionally advanced state which it was necessary to defend against German barbarism. No advocate of ‘revolutionary defeatism’, he dreaded the prospect of Russia losing the conflict with Germany. But Kinna argues that ‘the key factor’ in explaining his stance was the manner in which German social democracy had diverted proletarian energies into reformism and statism (p. 177).

In Parts 2 and 3 Kropotkin is stripped of his reputation as a conventional and fairly dusty theorist, and revealed as much more various and relevant than one had lazily thought. He emerges as fresh, poetic, challenging and responsive to change. For example, in *Wars and Capitalism*, a Freedom Press pamphlet of 1914, he astonishes in
foreseeing the brute realities of contemporary warfare. Wars ‘no longer consist of a mere massacre of hundreds and thousands of men in a few great battles’. Instead they are ‘fought on a front […] of thirty-five to forty miles’, with soldiers being fired on by ‘several hundred pieces of ordnance’ that would obliterate the landscape and drive them ‘to madness’. In trench warfare they would hurl ‘hand-grenades’ and guncotton at each other, and then confront successive waves of ‘attacking columns’, compelling them to engage in hand-to-hand combat (p. 181).

Ruth Kinna has written an invigorating study, persuasive in its establishment of Kropotkin as a multi-faceted and original thinker, remarkably like Morris himself in not being limited to the nineteenth century but with a great deal to offer the twenty-first.

David Goodway


With Rebel Crossings, Sheila Rowbotham, a celebrated historian of feminism and socialism, has produced a sort of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century radicalism in Great Britain and the United States. Just as in Tom Stoppard’s play, in which hitherto minor characters occupy centre stage while more familiar dramatis personae briefly pass through, Rebel Crossings focuses on the complicated lives and multifarious political activities of six little-known figures who read, discussed and occasionally interacted with the radical luminaries of their era, including Edward Carpenter, Eleanor Marx, Emma Goldman and William Morris. Like an optical illusionist, Rowbotham reverses field and figure; the result is illuminating even for experts in the historiography of British and American radicalism.

The Rebel in Rowbotham’s title is obvious enough; Crossings signals her transatlantic approach. Five of the book’s six central figures are Britons who emigrated to the United States. Among its many accomplishments, Rebel Crossings powerfully demonstrates the value of transnational approaches to the history of this era. Helena Born (1860-1901), raised in Bristol, was radicalised by reading American poet Walt Whitman. When she, along with Bristol friend Miriam Daniell (1861-1894) and Miriam’s lover Robert Allan Nicol (1868-1956), emigrated to the United States in 1890, they settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts in large part because of its proximity to Concord, home of Emerson and Thoreau. William Bailie (1866-1957), an Irishman living in Manchester, also emigrated to the United States, where he gained
attention as biographer of the American anarchist Josiah Warren. Gertrude Dix (1867-1950), who gained prominence in England as author of the New Woman novel *The Image Breakers* (1900), won even more readers after she moved to California, married the afore-mentioned Robert Nicol, and began publishing short stories about the American West. The youngest of Rowbotham’s central characters, Boston native Helen Tufts (1874-1962), was shaped by her friendship with British radical Helena Born. After her friend’s early death, Tufts married Born’s lover William Bailie, an acquaintance and admirer of William Morris; in the evenings, the two would read aloud from Morris’s *Sigurd the Volsung*.

*Crossings* signifies transatlanticism, but it also suggests Rowbotham’s other major theme, the mixed nature of her protagonists’ politics. As she notes, all six came of political age before the split between socialism and anarchism was complete. Their careers reveal the era’s creative tensions between collectivism and solidarity on the one hand and individualism on the other. Moreover, in their personal lives they ‘struggled […] to balance altruistic service and egoism, union and personal desire’ (p. 6), and strove awkwardly to unite ‘liberty, love and solidarity’ (p. 7). Rowbotham’s emphasis on the era’s political crossings complements Anna Vaninskaya’s analysis in *William Morris and the Idea of Community* (2010) of the socialist ‘hybridity’ of this period, as well as Terry Eagleton’s witty observation that fin-de-siècle intellectuals ‘blend[ed] belief systems with staggering nonchalance, blithely confident of some invisible omega point at which […] Emerson lies down with Engels’. Rowbotham’s analysis builds, most of all, on her magisterial 2008 biography of Edward Carpenter, promoter of the ‘Larger Socialism’ – a fluid, eclectic combination of politics, culture and spirituality. Even William Morris, a far more orthodox Marxist than Carpenter, combined economic and religious perspectives, insisting that ‘the foundation of Socialism […] is economical […] But this economical aim […] must be accompanied by an ethical or religious sense of the responsibility of each man to each and all of his fellows’.

One of the pleasures of Rowbotham’s study is her demonstration of her subjects’ easy crossings between political, cultural and spiritual movements. Helena Born, for example, worked with socialists and anarchists, attended rallies for both Eugene Debs and William Jennings Bryan, and was active in the anti-imperialist and women’s suffrage movements. She published essays in a Social Democratic Federation journal and in the Whitmanite *Conservator*, where she argued that Walt Whitman’s ideal democracy embraced ‘Socialism, Individualism, Communism, Anarchism, Mysticism, Universal Brotherhood, Idealism, Sex Reform, Evolution, Revolution, etc.’ (pp. 247-48). Rowbotham notes that the causes embraced by her figures included ‘feminism, secularism, socialism, anarchism, mysticism, mycology, free love, health
foods, sex psychology and rational dress’ (p. 5).

*Rebel Crossings* begins in Bristol, where Helena Born and Miriam Daniell lived in middle-class comfort. The two young women met in 1888 through the Bristol Women’s Liberal Association, and quickly discovered their shared interests in advanced writers: Thoreau, Whitman, Ruskin, Carpenter and Morris. The next year Miriam visited Edinburgh, where she met Robert Nicol, seven years her junior, who was active in the Edinburgh University Socialist Society. The two became lovers. Daniell, who at nineteen had married a Bristol solicitor, somehow convinced her husband to allow Nicol to move into their home. Rowbotham speculates on his consternation at finding his house ‘unpleasantly cluttered by an arrogant and beautiful boy’ (p. 50).

Daniell soon separated from her husband, and she and Nicol set up housekeeping with Born. The three young people became trade union activists and members of the Bristol Socialist Society. They combined their defence of workers’ rights with advocacy for women, seeing the two causes as inextricable. Daniell and Nicol wrote a pamphlet, *The New Trade Unionism*, that attempted to marry political and personal transformation, celebrating ‘the greatest Union of all – the union of the Souls of Mankind in a perfect Love, out of which will emanate perfect and eternal Peace’ (p. 80).

All the while they dreamed of a pilgrimage to the land of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, and emigrated to Cambridge, Massachusetts during 1890. They soon discovered that the streets of greater Boston were not paved with Transcendentalist gold. They struggled to make a living in Cambridge, fled to New York for a period, then returned to Boston. Less than three years after their arrival in the United States, the Financial Panic of 1893 occurred, plunging the nation into its worst economic crisis prior to the Great Depression. One friend characterised their life in the United States as a romantic bohemian adventure: ‘[t]hey had all turned their backs upon conventional society and conventional living […]. There was much enthusiasm for ideas, much storm and stress, much material hardship, but it was all very beautiful’ (p. 138). Another friend, however, took a more jaundiced view: ‘[t]heir coming to America was a reckless thing. They burned their bridges behind them; unused to poverty and hardship, they passed through the extremest kind of each. They always seemed to me like birds, flitting from one place to another’ (p. 137).

In 1893 they abandoned the East Coast for a ranch in remote Placer County, California. The area had originally been settled by ranchers and miners, but during the 1890s it began to collect ‘clusters of experimental lifers, seers, healers, mystics and bohemian misfits’ (p. 145). In this atmosphere of ‘rugged simplicity’ (p. 144), Nicol corresponded with Edward Carpenter, asking him for copies of pamphlets by
Morris and Kropotkin to sell to the locals as well as patterns for the sandals popular in Carpenter’s bohemian circle. Tragically, less than a year after their arrival, Miriam Daniell died at thirty-three, leaving behind the three-year-old daughter whom she and Nicol had named Sunrise.

Nicol remained in California after Daniell’s death, but Helena Born returned to Boston, where she soon met William Bailie who, like Born, was associated with the Boston Anarchist Club led by Benjamin Tucker. The quietly remarkable Bailie, born into a working-class Belfast family, was apprenticed to a wicker workshop at age eleven. As a teenager, he discovered William Morris’s socialist writings through the agency of a friendly Unitarian minister. Upon finishing his apprenticeship at eighteen, he moved to Manchester and quickly became immersed in the city’s rich socialist culture as an activist in the SDF, the Socialist League and the Ancoats Brotherhood. Bailie helped arrange an 1889 Morris lecture in Manchester, and he treasured all his life the two brief but friendly letters Morris sent him on that occasion. Bailie also worked closely with John Trevor, the renegade Unitarian pastor who founded the Labour Church, a new religious movement uniting socialism and spirituality. Bailie fully embraced the millennial strain of socialism that was widespread in England’s industrial North during the late 1880s. His principal fear was that the revolution would arrive before he and his colleagues had time to prepare the people for it.

Bailie enjoyed the heady atmosphere of socialist Manchester, but he found it difficult to support a family of five on his earnings as a basketmaker. Soon after his arrival in Manchester, the teenage Bailie had married another Irish immigrant and fathered three children in quick succession. In 1891 the Bailie family emigrated to Boston, where he established his own basket-making workshop while penning articles for Benjamin Tucker’s anarchist Liberty magazine. Bailie met Helena Born after her return from California, and the two became lovers. Born gave him Edward Carpenter’s radical, pro-feminist marriage manual Love’s Coming-of-Age as a conduct book for their relationship, and her correspondence reveals that she considered Morris, Emerson and Whitman to be tutelary spirits of their love affair. The portraits of all three, she wrote to him from her temporary residence on a New Hampshire farm, were on her wall.

On her return to Boston, Born and Bailie decided to open the Pure Food Kitchen, an avant la lettre farm-to-table restaurant. The two idealists were certain they could do well by doing good, but the endeavour soon folded. Both the staff and the ovens donated by a local political reformer and inventor proved unreliable, and the clientele stole the crockery. A solace for both of them was the friendship of Helen Tufts, offspring of a family of Boston Brahmins fallen on hard times. Tufts, a decade younger than Born and Bailie, idolised her two friends. After Born’s death in 1901,
when she was forty-one, Tufts collected her periodical writings, added an adulatory biographical introduction, and published the result as *Whitman’s Ideal Democracy and Other Writings*. Born’s essays reveal her hybrid political commitments and her complex union of socialism, individualism, spirituality, utopianism and feminism. Tufts shared her friend’s radical beliefs, and she celebrated Born’s life not only by gathering her essays for publication but by scattering her ashes at Walden Pond. Bailie came with her; their informal funeral ceremony involved readings from Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. Born’s death drew the two closer, and they soon became lovers, then husband and wife.

The ‘Free Lovers’ in Rowbotham’s subtitle include not only Daniell and Nicol, Born and Bailie, and Bailie and Tufts but also Nicol and Gertrude Dix, the New Woman novelist. The two struck up an epistolary romance during the 1890s; in 1902 Dix abandoned her literary and socialist London milieu to join Nicol at his remote California ranch. Once there, she began writing Western-themed stories for mass-market magazines. As Rowbotham describes her transformation, ‘[s]he abandoned Hegel and psychological novel writing to join the ranks of writers churning out dramatic stories for a burgeoning popular market’ (p. 320).

Rowbotham’s detailed, comprehensive study follows the longest-lived of her subjects into their old age during the 1950s. However, her political narrative effectively ends with World War One, which disrupted many of the visionary radical movements that originated during the 1880s. The three decades covered in this study, when radicals in Great Britain and the United States re-imagined not only politics but daily life, would not be matched until the 1960s. In its close examination of previously obscure figures, *Rebel Crossings* offers an important new perspective on a crucial period.

**Michael Robertson**

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*Art versus Industry* is a collection of essays that grew out of a conference held at Leeds City Museum in 2012. The book engages with a range of media and discusses many of the central figures within the historiography of nineteenth-century design. Ruskin appears frequently, Owen Jones is discussed from a number of perspectives and William Morris and other Art and Crafts practitioners are discussed in several chapters. The introduction questions any facile opposition between art and industry,
and contests the idea that art is fundamentally in conflict with commerce and consumption. The collection gives the sense of aiming to contest the standard historiography of Victorian design that has its roots in ‘design reform’, the set of debates that are usually understood to have emerged from the Great Exhibition, the South Kensington Museum and the Government Schools of Design.

Lara Kriegel discusses how the history and practice of lace making can be seen as a counter-cultural discourse and a critique of industrial production. She explains how lace was used as a means of creating income for women in the late nineteenth century (‘lace rescue’) and how writings about lace and its history comprised a gendered historical narrative: ‘narratives about the English and Irish crafts of lace reveal a distinctly feminine world of rescue and revival, agency and alienation, and labour and loss’ (p. 24). By focusing on a specific craft and case studies in rural contexts she successfully redirects the story of politicised making towards women reformers and rural handicraft.

Gabriel Williams discusses the anaglyptograph – an obscure graphic technology that created engravings from low relief sculpture through a mechanical process. This subject stimulates a fascinating discussion of the differences between hand engraving and mechanical engraving, and how the relative merits of mechanical reproduction were presented in debates that anticipate commentary on photography in the following decades. The anaglyptograph was mechanical and so could not ‘lie’, unlike hand engravers who often operated with considerable artistic licence. Ultimately this chapter demonstrates that what constituted an ‘accurate’ reproduction was both highly subjective and hotly contested. Jasmine Allen discusses how the classificatory systems at Expositions Universelles raised a series of contradictions. Stained glass (the subject of the chapter) was normally classed as manufacture but often displayed as art, and thus highlighted a series of conflicts about distinctions between labour, art and various kinds of production. Allen provides some really interesting descriptions of the iconography of windows in the Paris 1855 Exhibition – a refreshing change from the normal focus on ecclesiastical iconography. Colin Trodd’s chapter adopts a history-of-ideas approach to a discussion of how the Arts and Crafts movement both popularised and appropriated the art and writing of William Blake. An intriguing drawing of William Morris as Blake’s allegorical figure ‘Los’ encapsulates this strange cultural mixture. Trodd focuses on Ruskin’s idea of the grotesque (art rooted in physical labour) and argues that this shaped the reception of Blake for the next generation. The grotesque acknowledged and embodied human imperfection, and was powerful because it articulated the struggle within this contradiction. For the Arts and Crafts Movement Blake ‘connects Romantic critique of industrialism and the socialist critique of capitalism’ (p. 96) and Blake’s illuminated books somehow
humanised manufacture by making it more personal and less mechanical. Nicole Garrod Bush considers the Kaleidoscope as a serious technology rather than the toy it became in an informative account of how Brewster’s device was originally intended to be a visual research tool. In a reading of D.G. Rossetti’s painting *The Blue Bower*, she argues that the artist used the kaleidoscope to create the unusual background to this image, an original and convincing idea.

Technical drawing and illustrations in the *Illustrated London News* and *The Graphic* form the subject of two chapters by Frances Robertson and Tom Gretton. The former proposes another way of decentring the discourse of design reform by considering draughtsmen as active agents that affected the ‘invisible workings of the visual economy’ (p. 121). She demonstrates convincingly how a wide range of stylistic influences fed into supposedly ‘technical’ drawing, and how reformers’ complaints about the lack of drawing were actually a critique of the manner in which draughtsmen worked. Gretton provides a pertinent overview of the complex mediations between an original image and its publication in a periodical. Before the widespread adoption of the ‘half tone’ process in about 1890, periodical illustrations were often drawings made from photographs that were subsequently engraved. In working through the complex process of producing an illustrated periodical, he demonstrates how industry was not ‘the other’ of art but a key partner. Graeme Gooday and Abigail Marrison-Moore contrast two attitudes to the aesthetics of electric lighting: J.E.H. (Alice) Gordon’s popular book *Decorative Electricity* of 1892 and the work of the Arts and Crafts practitioner W.A.S. Benson. Gordon’s book discussed how to deflect, absorb and disguise electric light while Benson’s designs for Philip Webb at Standen are notable for their lack of ornament. Benson emerges as a key link figure, an Arts and Crafts designer who embraced the machine.

Ann Compton demonstrates how those working within the building trades operated within ‘a web of interconnected production practices shading between the handcrafted and the machine made’ (p. 181). She then provides some fascinating details about the scale and structure of the construction industry in the Victorian period: it employed far more people than coal mining but was dominated by four major firms. She goes on to discuss the legislation and educational structures that supported collaboration and concludes that architect-craftsmen were a privileged group who had advantages over those with more limited training.

British attitudes to non-European art dominate the final chapters. Renate Dohmen argues that although the Calcutta International Exhibition of 1883-84 was eventually celebrated for the way that it engaged with Indian audiences, this was actually a rhetorical device that functioned to cover up the disappointing numbers of international visitors. Local British residents boycotted the exhibition in response
to the ‘Ilbert Bill’ that allowed senior Indian magistrates to rule on cases involving British nationals and the failure of the exhibition to compete with European events eventually led to the cancellation of the Bombay International exhibition, which had been planned as the successive event. Natasha Eaton explores how the category of colour could disrupt distinctions between art and industry. Design reformers showed concern that British art lacked an intuitive sense of colour but the idea that this could be remedied by studying Indian art provoked concern. She goes on to examine a range of attitudes to colour in Britain and India, and suggests that ‘ultimately colour was ungovernable’ a symptom of wider colonial tensions. Lara Eggleton discusses Ruskin’s opposition to the ornamentation of the Alhambra, the subject of Owen Jones’s famous publication from the 1840s. She suggests that Ruskin’s belief that great art originated in natural forms led him to see abstraction as unhealthy and misguided, an attitude rooted in a ‘distrust of industrial processes and the dangers these presented to manual craft and individual expression’ (p. 251).

The editors have done a good job: there is a convincing coherence to the collection and those interested in technology, architecture, design and art will all find something of interest. All the illustrations are black and white but most well enough reproduced to support the written analysis. This book is a welcome and thoughtful contribution to one of the central debates of the nineteenth century and an account that moves beyond the traditional focus on a handful of individuals and their careers. Art versus Industry has a lot to say about the Arts and Crafts movement and often from oblique angles, which at times produces striking and original analysis. Although positioned ostensibly as a revisionist account of Victorian design discourse, it is perhaps surprising how much time the collection spends discussing canonical figures within this movement. John Ruskin and Owen Jones are discussed at some length in several chapters, and even if authors are sometimes critical of their attitudes, they seem to have an uncanny ability to retain their centrality within this discourse.

Jim Cheshire


Whereas the Pre-Raphaelites had praised and preferred the early Italian painters, in the second half of the nineteenth century there was a conscious swing towards the traditional view of the high point of Italian art. Walter Pater’s The Renaissance (1873) took a wider view than simply discussing painting, and included a chapter on Luca
della Robbia, who began as a sculptor in marble, and progressed to the manufacture of blue and white earthenware plaques:

The life of Luca, a life of labour and frugality, with no adventure and no excitement except what belongs to the trial of new artistic processes, the struggle with new artistic difficulties, the solution of purely artistic problems, fills the first seventy years of the fifteenth century.

Luca’s new work was in plain white earthenware […] He added the further invention of giving them [his figures of baked earth] colour […]. But in his nobler terra-cotta work he never introduces colour into the flesh, keeping mostly to blue and white, the colours of the Virgin Mary.

(1904 edition, pp. 70-71)

The works of the della Robbia family became well-known, as travellers returned from Italy and remembered the blue and white plaques. Ruskin tells us that he never ‘passed near the market at Florence without looking at Luca della Robbia’s Madonna’ (John Ruskin, Mornings in Florence, 1875, quoted on p. 59). The new South Kensington Museum had made a number of purchases of della Robbia pieces; over thirty were believed to be genuine, and many others were described as ‘School of Della Robbia’. Copies were made available and were proudly displayed by Walter Pater, William Holman Hunt and G.F. Watts. After this Luca became the most popular sculptor of the Renaissance in the eyes of the nineteenth-century public.

During the 1880s a young art student called Harold Rathbone, born in 1858, began to travel widely in Northern Italy. He came from a wealthy Liverpool family, and had studied at the Slade from 1878. In 1883 he became a pupil of Ford Madox Brown, and assisted him in the painting of frescoes for Manchester Town Hall. This led to a wider acquaintance. In 1884 he heard William Morris speak at Islington Hall, and visited him at Kelmscott Manor. Unfortunately Rathbone did not keep a record of these meetings, nor indeed of his travels, and some of the essays in this book speculate on what he found in Italy. But these experiences, and the absorption of Morris’s ideas, led him to open a pottery in 1893. It was situated in Birkenhead, and called the Della Robbia Pottery.

There had been various ceramic factories in Liverpool before this time but the siting of this enterprise in Birkenhead might be considered unexpected. It was in the centre of the town at 2A Pride Street, and there were a number of advantages. The buildings were cheap to rent, there was red clay nearby in the Wirral, and there was a partly trained labour force available, as the local Art schools were producing students with no other prospect of local employment. Apprentices could easily be recruited.
But what is meant by a pottery? As Colin Simpson says:

> The conventional history of the pottery industry saw a seamless line from the increasing industrialisation of the eighteenth century and the domination of Staffordshire as the source of most production through to the modern world of factory production. The line of ‘craft’ pottery has been perceived to bypass the industry altogether and be a fresh, between-the-wars invention of Bernard Leach, with his Oriental-inspired hand production, and then Michael Cardew with African inspiration.

(p. 17)

Rathbone must therefore be seen as somewhere between the two. He was operating a conventional factory, but one based upon Arts and Crafts principles and the educational ideals of John Ruskin and William Morris. He divided the business into two areas: 1.) The production of architectural decoration in earthenware, i.e. blue and white plaques and larger size for the outside of buildings. (Look up when you are next in the South Court of the Victoria and Albert Museum to see the effect of this, though this example predates the Della Robbia Pottery). 2.) Domestic pottery, using the local red clay. The pots were thrown upon the wheel, then dipped in white slip; the design was scratched through the white, using the technique called ‘sgraffito’. The next step was to paint on coloured slips which would produce striking results after firing. Individual potters, including the apprentices, could mark pieces with their own initials. The principle, ‘inspired by Morris, was the elevation of the hand over the machine’ (p. 13). As Julie Sheldon says, ‘he wanted his workshops to consist of guild workers engaged in handicraft, seeing the finished product through the stages of production without undue division of labour’ (p. 67).

The products of the pottery were well received and seen at exhibitions. There were forty-five pieces shown at the Pottery and Porcelain Exhibition in Glasgow during 1904, and there was in fact a distant link to the work of the Mackintoshes. See figure 11 of Sheldon's book, where the elongated designs on the tall jugs are by Cassandra Walker and Alice Jones. Cassandra had been trained by Herbert MacNair, who was Charles Rennie Mackintosh's brother-in-law.

The Della Robbia pottery finally closed in 1906, partly because of a cash-flow crisis, and as Colin Simpson says, ‘[t]he styles had often been adapted by manufacturers who could turn out similar products much more cheaply. The self-evidently handmade products produced in Birkenhead had become too clunky to sell’ (p. 16). Nevertheless, this was a magnificent example of the experience of putting Morris’s ideals into practice. In the book under review there are seven essays, two of
which explore the Italian sources of Rathbone’s designs. There is a valuable discussion of ‘The Arts and Crafts Movement and the Crafting of Culture’ by Colin Trodd which compares other experiments of the time. The last essay, by Juliet Carroll and Julie Sheldon, gives an account of the distribution of the pottery in London stores; Della Robbia was on sale at Liberty and at William Morris and Company in Oxford Street. Finally, visitors to car-boot and similar outlets should read the paragraphs on collecting by Colin Simpson (pp. 18-23). Unfortunately the very few illustrations provided in this book do not give us enough visual information to go by.

John Purkis


In the Introduction to this challenging book, produced to the very high standards of Yale University Press, Elizabeth Prettejohn explains that her focus will be on ‘how artists and viewers create relationships with other artists and viewers, both near and distant in time and space’ (p. 4). She will draw her examples from nineteenth-century Britain, when the question first came into prominence, but argues that the approach is of the widest application. Using such terms as ‘allusion’ and ‘intertextuality’, this approach has become prominent in the study of literature. As long ago as 1973, the American critic Harold Bloom argued in his influential book The Anxiety of Influence that poets are always aware of their predecessors, and the major poets emerge by asserting their visions against those that precede them. This attention to predecessors has not been so prominent in the study of art. Prettejohn propounds no fewer than fourteen questions relating to ‘imitation’ with which she wants her book to engage, and then offers as a preliminary example the ways in which Ford Madox Brown’s well-known The Last of England (1855) can be seen to engage with the history of art. This combination of the general and the specific is typical of this fascinating book.

The first of its five substantial chapters is ‘The Victorians and the Masters’. In it, Prettejohn invites us to ‘forget, for a while, the prejudice in favour of originality’ (p. 16), and to consider Turner’s Regulus of 1828 as a response to Claude’s much earlier Seaport with the Villa Medici. Both paintings show lines of buildings and shipping receding towards a blazing sun, but Turner translates ‘the visual armature of the scene into his own brushwork, pulsating with light’, and introduces the story of the Roman general captured by the Carthaginians, who cut off his eyelids to make him look straight at the sun. Turner thus creates an ‘imitation’ more powerful, if less
elegant, than the original. In his art, Turner also produced paintings that ‘outshone’
works by Cuyp, Vandervelde and Ruysdael, operating in a mode that is here described
as having ‘a distinct flavour of masculine aggression about it. This is about antler-
locking’ (p. 19). Another term for this is ‘competitive imitation’. However, Prettejohn
wants to concentrate on a different kind of imitation that developed later during the
nineteenth century. She terms this ‘generous imitation’, and argues that it is a mode
to be welcomed, and to which twentieth-century art criticism has been unduly hostile,
confusing it too easily with plagiarism. She offers as an example Dante Gabriel
Rossetti’s La Donna della Finestra of 1879, in which Rossetti produces a version of a
painting by Botticelli that Rossetti owned at the time, with Jane Morris serving as
model in place of the model seen in many of Botticelli’s works. Rossetti is not trying
to outshine Botticelli but to explore sympathetically what kind of artist Botticelli was.
Rossetti is a key figure, whose subtle theory of translation is worked convincingly into
the argument.

Prettejohn draws attention to Frederick Leighton’s important presidential Addresses
to the students at the Royal Academy, published in 1896. This was the great period
of the growth of museums: the British Museum was founded in 1753, the Dulwich
Picture Gallery in 1811, the National Gallery in 1824 and the South Kensington
Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum) in 1852. Those interested in art no
longer depended on being able to travel widely; all these institutions were in England.
Thus Leighton addresses his students as the ‘fortunate but bewildered heir[s] to a
boundless inheritance of artistic treasure’ (p. 29); the bewilderment was due to the
numerous and extraordinarily diverse works known to the students. How in these
circumstances can they choose an appropriate approach for themselves? The main
Victorian painting discussed in this chapter is Frederick Sandys’s powerful Medea
(1866-68), which is said to be convincingly realistic as well as ‘imitating’ the half-length
female portrait mode favoured by Rossetti. The chapter ends with the convincing
claim that, by the end of the nineteenth century, there is no longer ‘a single standard
of taste, and the field is open for all manner of innovation’ (p. 57), a situation that
clearly pleases Prettejohn, if it worried Leighton. It is one that must continue to
challenge artists today.

There is clearly no possibility of reviewing the rest of the book in such detail, and
as we have already encountered discussion of Rossetti and his ‘generous imitations’,
I will conclude by concentrating on the parts of the book that focus on Burne-Jones
and William Morris. Burne-Jones is of course a pervasive presence. His name appears
frequently in the index, along with references to some twenty of his paintings.
Moreover, The Fifth Day, from The Days of Creation (1875-76), provides the powerful
front-jacket illustration. Prettejohn tells us that Frederick Burton had bought The
Nativity by Piero della Francesca for the National Gallery in 1874, and that Burne-Jones had responded very quickly to it in his series of watercolours called The Days of Creation, exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877. ‘The bare feet and solid stance, so unlike the willowy figures in other works by Burne-Jones, as well as their impassive faces, immediately recall Piero’s music-making angels’ (p. 173). Piero’s Nativity is illustrated on p. 174, opposite the Burne-Jones painting, and a detail from it appears on the back cover. Another work by Burne-Jones, The Wedding of Psyche of 1895, features in both endpapers and in a smaller but complete form on p. 176. A late work, it shows how the artist ‘expanded the range of precursors from whom his own age could learn’, and ‘passed that learning on to numerous students and more distant disciples, in England and abroad, as his work appeared to great éclat in the international exhibitions of the late nineteenth century’ (pp. 174-76).

Morris appears most distinctly in the account given of ‘the massive Victorian programme of church restoration and church building’ which made possible the establishment of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. in 1861 (p. 120). Although the decoration of churches remained mainly in the hands of commercial firms (whose work was often of high quality), some creative artists began to offer their services, particularly in relation to the creation of altarpieces. One striking example given by Prettejohn is the altarpiece at Llandaff Cathedral, a commission obtained by the young Rossetti in 1856, and completed in 1864, consisting of three substantial panels of the Nativity. Prettejohn argues interestingly that there is a democratic spirit about the work, which is to be seen in the presence, on equal terms, of one king and one shepherd in the central panel; moreover, while the left side panel shows David as a king, the right side panel shows him as a shepherd. She points out that this important work has attracted little attention from scholars, and wonders whether this is because it is in ‘a difficult-to-find church just north of Cardiff rather than in a major public gallery’ (p. 121). At all events she considers it to be a major work, showing ‘a thoughtful new exploration of the traditional subject-matter’ (p. 124). Overlapping with Rossetti’s work at Llandaff, Burne-Jones was commissioned during 1860 to paint an altarpiece for St. Paul’s, Brighton. The central scene is also the Nativity, this time with both shepherds and kings; Jane Morris was the model for the Virgin, William Morris for the first king, and Swinburne for one of the shepherds; Burne-Jones himself appears at the back. The altarpiece, now in a private collection, is shown on pp. 126-27. During his long career, Burne-Jones is said to have shown a wider range of influences than did Rossetti, including Fra Angelico, Tintoretto and Jacopo Bassano, and in this to be representative of later generations.

Prettejohn moves to her conclusion with a statement to the effect that we live in a period which privileges ‘the present, and its way of seeing, over the past, and its
ways of seeing’, and that this hierarchy has become tyrannical in its insistence on ‘relevance’ (p. 236). ‘Alternatively, it might be argued that old works of art can show us the way to a better politics or a better morality. William Morris believed something of the kind, and it is a noble ideal’ (p. 237). But she does not accept Morris’s view entirely, because what art offers, for her, is not to be reduced to the political or the moral; it is aesthetic, a matter of beauty. The value to us now of the art of the past is that it can ‘jolt us out of’ what Pater – a critical hero of the book – ‘called the “stereotyped world”’. This is of the greatest importance as ‘in today’s global art market the contemporary arts are increasingly homogenized’ (p. 237). Modern Painters, Old Masters is a timely and important book. I hope it will be widely read and debated.

Peter Faulkner


This is a revised edition of the excellent book first published in 2000. When Malcolm Sinclair reviewed the first edition in the Summer 2002 issue of this Journal, he recommended it strongly ‘to anyone interested in this short-lived, restricted, but vitally important link in the history of buildings of the Arts and Crafts movement’. His only criticism was that ‘confusion is sometimes caused because the same size of print has been used for the extensive number of quotations in the text and for the many notes to virtually every page’, and this remains true of the new edition. However, the use of a smaller size of type for the inset quotations in the new edition makes for greater clarity.

The text remains largely the same, with additions where further information has come to light about the seven featured architects – Detmar Blow, Alfred Powell, Herbert North, Basil Stallybrass, Randall Wells, Harold Falkner, Philip Tilden and William Weir. In his 2015 Preface Drury notes that since 2000 monographs have appeared on Falkner by Sam Osmond and on North by Adam Voelcker, but that ‘the central character, Detmar Blow still remains in relative obscurity […]’. This revised edition makes no attempt to redress the balance, concentrating as it does on his early career’ (p. ix). Blow was to ‘die in disgrace at the hand of the richest man in England’, the second Duke of Westminster (p. ix). Drury wonders whether the fact that Blow has not received the attention he deserves may be related to ‘there still being a reluctance to upset the sensitivities of the family and/or the Grosvenor Estate’ (p.xi). It would be good news if Drury himself would undertake the task.
The titles and general content of the eleven chapters remain the same, although the subtitle of the final chapter, ‘The End of the Road’, changes from ‘Detmar Blow’s Career, 1906-39, Conclusions’ to ‘The Cult of Authenticity: Detmar Blow and the Devil’s Buttons’. This allows the author to strengthen his account of the commitment to authenticity shown by Blow and the man who for a period before the Great War became his partner, the Beaux Arts architect Fernand Belleroy, and to add to his account of the difficult relationship that developed between Blow and his employer the Duke. As an example of Blow’s casual handling of money, Drury quotes an unpublished letter to Philip Webb concerning a small debt that Blow owed to Webb in 1892: ‘[y]ou will at length have received the thirty shillings! The laxity and ill temper of my memory with such affairs seems beyond control, as though He wouldn’t have me play with devils [sic] buttons’ (p. 278). Drury adds that ‘[t]he Duke’s money became the devil’s buttons for Blow and when they came undone, so did he’ (p. 279).

The main change in the new edition is an increase in the number, and particularly the quality, of the numerous photographs. Apart from the cover, where the colour of the stone at Blow’s Hilles House changes quite dramatically from brownish to grey, all the illustrations are in black-and-white. Many appeared also in the first edition, but they are clearer here, although that of Blow, dressed in a wagoner’s smock, standing by the farm cart he decorated with willows and vine leaves as a hearse for William Morris’s funeral, remains less than sharp. The number of full-page photographs is roughly doubled, with several showing teams of workers employed by the architects. Striking double pages show some twenty workers at Wilsford Manor in 1905 (pp. 142-43) and thirteen at Heale House in 1910 (pp. 268-69). The frontispiece is changed from a 1910 portrait of Blow by Neville Lytton to a group at Stonehenge in 1901, showing Blow with Sir Edmond Antrobus and his son Edmund, and the archaeologist Dr. William Gowland. The Lytton portrait appears later (p. 146), opposite a surprisingly different-looking portrait by Augustus John in 1913. The most striking improvement is in the quality of the reproduction of John Singer Sargent’s painting of ‘The Wyndham Sisters’, now given a full page; the painting by G.F. Watts of their mother, Mrs. Percy Wyndham, hard to see in the earlier edition, now emerges from the darkness of the background. The final – now full-page – illustration is appropriately of the gravestone and the small roofed building (built from a design by Oliver Hill) that marks the burial place of the Blows near Hilles House, on a hill overlooking Gloucester. Drury tells us that the building, ‘[p]art memorial, part lychgate, part wayside shrine and part belvedere’ (p. 286), was erected by Winifred in memory of her husband. It sounds well worth visiting.

It is good to have Drury’s illuminating book, which consistently emphasises the influence of Ruskin, Morris and Webb on this remarkable group of architect-builders,
back in print in this attractive form. Their contribution to the Arts and Crafts movement deserves to be acknowledged and admired. Our thanks must go to Michael Drury and to Shaun Tyas for making this possible.

Peter Faulkner
Notes on Contributors

JIM CHESHIRE is Reader in Cultural History at the University of Lincoln. His research examines the literary and visual culture of the nineteenth century and thematically is centred on Victorian medievalism. He has recently been working on the relationship between the literary and material culture during the career of Alfred Tennyson, and recently published a monograph *Tennyson and Mid-Victorian Publishing: Maxon, Poetry, Commerce* (Palgrave, 2016). He works closely with colleagues in the Conservation subject area on object analysis and interpretation, and acts as Historical Consultant to Crick Smith Conservation.


PETER FAULKNER taught English at the University of Exeter until his retirement in 1998; he is a former editor of this *Journal* and Honorary Secretary of the Society.


DAVID GOODWAY is a historian whose first book was *London Chartism 1838-1848* (1982); but for thirty years has written principally on anarchism and libertarian socialism, including *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (2007), reissued in a second edition in 2012.

LINDA PARRY has studied British nineteenth-century decorative arts for many years. She retired from the Victoria and Albert Museum, where she specialised in William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement, in 2005, and has published widely on these subjects. She is a past President of The William Morris Society, and published a revised edition of her *William Morris Textiles* in 2013.

JOHN PURKIS joined The William Morris Society in 1960, and is a former Honorary Secretary. He was with the Open University from 1970, and is currently writing a memoir of his time in Finland during the 1950s.

MICHAEL ROBERTSON is a Professor of English at The College of New Jersey. His book *The Last Utopians*, a group biography of William Morris and three contemporaries, is forthcoming from Princeton University Press. His current book project is a Morris biography, *William Morris: The Journey towards Utopia*.

JOHN STIRLING is the former Head of Social Sciences at Northumbria University and has a long-standing interest in teaching and writing about trade unions. He is currently membership secretary of the North East Labour History Society, and works with other volunteers to put on an education programme each year before the Durham Miners’ Gala.
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